

GOVERNING THE NUER

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DOCUMENTS BY PERCY CORIAT ON  
NUER HISTORY AND ETHNOGRAPHY  
1922–1931



DOUGLAS H. JOHNSON



Percy Coriat, 1928 (Coriat collection)

JASO OCCASIONAL PAPERS No. 9

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# GOVERNING THE NUER

DOCUMENTS IN NUER HISTORY  
AND ETHNOGRAPHY, 1922–1931

BY

PERCY CORIAT

Edited with Introductions and Notes by

DOUGLAS H. JOHNSON



JASO

Oxford 1993

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9. PERCY CORIAT  
*Governing the Nuer: Documents in Nuer History and Ethnography, 1922-1931*  
Edited by Douglas H. Johnson

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## PREFACE

I FIRST came across Percy Coriat's neglected writings on the Nuer in 1972 when beginning research on the history of the Nuer prophets. They appeared to me then, even in the early stages of my research, to be of a quality quite different from other contemporary administrative reports. I came to appreciate his work all the more after doing fieldwork among the Gaawar and Lou Nuer in 1975-6, when I met many persons who had known Coriat well. My research on Nuer history then brought me in touch with persons in Britain who knew either Coriat or his work, and I was particularly pleased to meet his widow, Mrs Kay Coriat, in 1977. She allowed me full access to her husband's few remaining papers and photograph collection before donating these papers, and some of her own, to Rhodes House, Oxford.

This volume presents all of Coriat's known major writings on the Nuer, with the exception of his 1939 article on Guek (Coriat 1939). A preliminary list of his reports was published in *JASO* in 1981 (Johnson 1981*b*). I later discovered a number of his other papers in the Sudan, some in Khartoum, but most were in Malakal and Bor before I transferred them to the Southern Records Office in Juba. It is possible that more documents may be found, but the prospect is not hopeful. His reports on the Lou were transferred from Abwong to Akobo in 1937 but were destroyed when the Akobo office burned down in 1939. Some of his writings on the Gaawar may still be in Fangak. None had been transported to New Fangak when I visited the office there in my capacity as Assistant Director for Archives in the Regional Ministry of Culture and Information in 1981. I was told that some of the oldest district reports had been left in a storeroom in old Fangak when the administrative headquarters was moved in 1976. I subsequently learned that many of those papers were damaged or destroyed when old Fangak was attacked and looted by 'Anyanya II' guerrillas late in 1981. I have not been able to visit the offices in Bentiu, but record-keeping in the early days of Western Nuer District was haphazard at best. However hopeful we may be that a more complete corpus of writings might one day be compiled, that hope should not delay the publication of the substantial body which has already been gathered together.

This volume is not a complete collection of all of Coriat's papers; it is not an attempt to document an entire life. Most of Coriat's official correspondence consists of shorter letters addressing specific administrative questions. His personal letters sometimes do contain information not found in his official



reports. I have thought it best to make reference to these shorter letters in the notes and introduction, to illuminate and enhance his substantial reports. I have indicated to the reader where the shorter correspondence can be found as an aid to further research. The papers which have been included in this collection have been chosen because of the contribution they make as sources of information on Nuer history and on the administrative history of the Southern Sudan. They demonstrate Coriat's value to us as a reporter at the same time that they serve to document his own work among the Nuer.

Quite apart from the specific value these reports may have to anthropologists as early descriptions of the Nuer, they have a more general interest for historians and others concerned with the study of the colonial period in Africa. There is still a need for the detailed examination of the local work of district officers in colonial administration. Personal memoirs and reminiscences of colonial officials are frequently anecdotal, retelling the series of old dining-out stories which have become ingrained in the memory through repetition, and leaving out the practical details of administration. Academic studies of the Sudan Political Service have tended to offer character sketches or generalized evaluations, analysing the members of the SPS in the context of their own kind, and according to their own values (see, for instance, Collins 1983, Collins and Deng 1984, Kirk-Greene 1982, Daly 1986). With one exception (Deng and Daly 1989) they have ignored, for the most part, that fundamental question of the administrator's relations with the people he ruled. This volume, by focusing on Coriat *and* the Nuer, tries to redress the balance.

Many persons have helped me in compiling information about the Nuer and the government during the period covered by these reports, and others have contributed directly to my knowledge of Coriat's life. In the Sudan I must make special acknowledgement of my friends the late Kulang Majok (former Native Authority policeman among the Gaawar), Ruot Diu (Diu's half-brother), John Wicjaal Buom Diu, Philip Diu Deng (whose grandfather, Akuei Biel, was appointed chief of the Luac Dinka by Coriat), the late Stephen Ciec Lam, and the commissioners of Upper Nile Province when I was first there, their Excellencies Peter Gatkuoth Gual and Philip Obang. In Britain I would like to acknowledge the help of Professor Richard Gray and Dr Paul Howell, CMG, OBE (for reading and commenting on the manuscript), Dr Gabriel Giet Jal, Mr Stephen Abraham Yar (who has been most helpful in providing information for notes to the Western Nuer documents), Mr Adrian Struvé, Mr Christopher Tracey, the late John Winder, the late K. D. D. Henderson, CMG, the late Lt.-Col. J. H. R. Orlebar, OBE, Major L. E. Humphreys, MC (retired to Canada), Mr B. J. Chatterton, Mr Edward Aglen, Mr E. G. Coryton, Mrs Patricia Vicars-Miles, Mrs Jean Eastwood, the late Mrs Kay Coriat, Mrs Honor Baines, Mr Gordon Leith (Assistant Librarian, RAF Museum, London), Flight Sergeant Brian Birkin (Squadron Historian, no. 47 Squadron, RAF), the Sudan Archive at the University of Durham, and Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

Permission to publish Coriat's official reports has been very kindly granted

by Dr Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim (Secretary-General, National Records Office, Khartoum), and the late Mark Loro (Deputy Director for Archives, Southern Records Office, Juba). Mrs Honor Baines has given permission to reproduce some of her father's private papers and photographs from his albums; and Mrs Jean Eastwood has kindly allowed me to reproduce photographs taken by her late husband, Brigadier Gerald Arthur Eastwood, DSO, OBE. I am also grateful to Miss Terese Svoboda for permission to quote her translation of the song given in n. 26 to document 3.3.

Jonathan Webber steered the book through the press, sometimes by fax from Poland and elsewhere. He also helped me tread the difficult path between strict accuracy to Coriat's texts and sensitively editing them in a way that would help readers to understand them. Connie Wilsack performed a similar role with regard to the editing of maps and tables. Nick Clarke redrew the maps, designed the plate section, and harnessed his own creative abilities to those of the Mac to capture the spirit of the period in his cover design. But thanks are due most of all to Stephen Ashworth, who laboured to produce a handsome book despite having to learn a new typesetting system while the book was in production.

Publication has been made possible by a subvention from the British Academy, which is gratefully acknowledged here. The Coriat family has also generously contributed towards the cover illustration and the reproduction of the photographs in this volume.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the help of my wife, Wendy James, who asked the type of questions anthropologists would like answered about Coriat's contribution to the ethnography of the Nuer.

D.H.J.

*Oxford*  
*April 1992*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADC	Assistant District Commissioner
AMC	Archivio Storico della Congregazione dei Missionari Comboniani, Rome
AMO	Assistant Medical Officer
BD	Bor District (notation used on district files now in the SRO)
Civsec	Civil Secretary's files (in the NRO)
CMS	The Church Missionary Society
Coriat MSS	Coriat papers (Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS Afr. s.1684)
Dakhliā	Dakhliā (Arab., Department of the Interior) files (in the NRO)
DC	District Commissioner
EA	Egyptian army
EHJP	Ecology and History of Jonglei Province (tapes and transcripts of interviews undertaken in Jonglei Province, 1981-2, now deposited in the SRO)
END	Eastern Nuer District files (in Nasir and the SRO)
GGR	Governor-general's annual report: Reports on the Finance, Administration, and Condition of the Sudan
Intel	Intelligence Department files (in the NRO)
<i>JAH</i>	<i>Journal of African History</i>
£E.	Egyptian pound, the currency of the Sudan until 1956, roughly equivalent at this time to £1. os. 6d
LND	Lou Nuer District files (in the SRO)
MA	(Arab.), <i>mulaẓīm awal</i> , rank of first lieutenant in the Egyptian army and Sudan Defence Force
m/ms	Milleme: one-thousandth of an Egyptian pound; one-tenth of a piastre
MO	Medical Officer
MP	Mounted Police
MPMIR	Mongalla Province Monthly Intelligence Report
MT	(Arab.), <i>mulaẓīm tani</i> , rank of second lieutenant in the Egyptian army and Sudan Defence Force
NRO	National Records Office, Khartoum
OC	Officer commanding
pt.	Piastre: one-hundredth of an Egyptian pound
SAD	Sudan Archive, Oriental Library, University of Durham

SCR	Strictly Confidential Report (notation on files in the confidential section of district and province offices)
SDF	Sudan Defence Force (separated from the Egyptian army in 1925)
SGS	Sudan Government Steamer
<i>SIR</i>	<i>Sudan Intelligence Report</i>
<i>SMIR</i>	<i>Sudan Monthly Intelligence Report</i>
<i>SMR</i>	<i>Sudan Monthly Record</i>
<i>SNR</i>	<i>Sudan Notes and Records</i>
SRO	Southern Records Office, Juba
TD	Torit District files (in the SRO)
UNP	Upper Nile Province (notation used on province files in the NRO and SRO)
UNPMD	Upper Nile Province Monthly Diary
Willis MSS	C. A. Willis papers (in the SAD)
ZD, ZVD	Zeraf District and Zeraf Valley District files (in the SRO and New Fangak)

## GLOSSARY

*Note:* Words are given as they appear in the original manuscripts, with standard transcriptions provided in parentheses.

- ardeb* (Arab., *ardabb*), measure of capacity, about 200 litres
- bimbashi* (Turk.), the rank of major in the Egyptian Army and Sudan Defence Force, the lowest rank allowed a British officer
- buluk amin* (Turk.), the rank of company quartermaster sergeant in the Egyptian army and Sudan Defence Force
- durra* (Arab.), sorghum
- felucca* (Arab.), a type of sailboat used on the Nile
- fulab* (Arab., *fula*), pool of water
- bish* (Arab.), to weed; used in the sense of clearing and repairing roads
- jallaba* (Arab.), merchant
- jallabia* (Arab.), long cotton garment worn in the Sudan, associated in the south with Northern Sudanese merchants
- kaid el 'amm* (Arab.), commander-in-chief of the Sudan Defence Force
- kantar* (Arab.), measure of weight, about 100 lb.
- kebor* (Arab.), watercourse, dry throughout part of the year
- kujur* (colloq. Arab.), used indiscriminately by Muslim Sudanese to describe pagan spiritual figures, roughly equivalent in derogatory meaning to the English 'witchdoctor'
- mabr* (Arab.), bridewealth
- mamur* (Arab., *ma'mur*), junior Egyptian or Sudanese administrative official, subordinate to the British DC
- marab*, see *murab*
- markaz / marakez* (Arab.), district headquarters
- merisa* (Arab., *marissa*), beer brewed from sorghum
- meshra* (Arab., *mashra'*), landing place on a river
- mudiria* (Arab.), province headquarters
- murab* (colloq. Arab.), cattle camp
- namlia* (Arab.), mosquito-proof house
- nas* (Arab.), 'people'; used by DCs, even in the Southern Sudan, when referring to 'their people'
- onbashi* (Turk.), rank of corporal in EA, SDF, and police
- rotl / rtl* (Arab.), measurement of weight, roughly one pound

*serraf* (Arab.), government store-keeper

*shawish* (Arab.), rank of sergeant in the EA, SDF, and police

*shen* / *shieng* (Nuer, *cieng*), a territorial or social unit of indeterminate size; applied to the family homestead, segment of a lineage, clan or tribal territory

*sudd* (Arab., *sadd*), blocks of matted vegetation obstructing river channels

*temargi* / *temargia* (Arab.), local medical orderlies

*toich* (Western Nilotic, *toe* or *toic*), riverain pastures, used during dry season

*wakeel* (Arab., *wakil*), assistant, agent

*zariba* (Arab.), thorn hedge, or a fortified camp in the Southern Sudan

## NOTE ON DOCUMENTS

MOST of the documents reproduced in this volume are taken from carbon copies, which are very often the only copies extant in the files. This has posed some problems in transcription, for, quite apart from the lack of clarity in some places, it is not always possible to know which errors in the text were corrected in the final report. This is particularly true of tables; some entries seem erroneous but there was no way of knowing how to correct them. Most reports were typed by Coriat himself; only documents 2.2 and 3.4 bore the initials of a clerk, and 5.1 was apparently typed in Khartoum for general circulation. I have not felt that any great purpose would be served by an exact transcription of errors in the text. I have therefore corrected obvious typographical mistakes (such as transposed characters) and have inserted missing letters where needed. However, a minimalist approach has been used in the editing of the documents so as to reproduce as far as possible the character and appearance of the originals, and I have therefore retained certain idiosyncracies in grammar and spelling, particularly of non-English words. No significant changes have been made to punctuation and capitalization, other than in section and sub-section headings and to make consistency within individual texts; or to paragraphing, except in the case of document 3.2, where the original paragraph divisions were not always clear.

Where the original documents had titles, these titles have been retained and are reproduced on the Contents page within quotation marks. Documents 1.4, 3.1 and 3.4 were untitled and have therefore been given descriptive titles.

Each section of the book has an introduction by the editor, and each document is preceded by a short introduction by the editor, set in italics. All editorial insertions within the text of the documents are contained within square brackets and have been confined to material which either identifies names or clarifies points in the text. Botanical names for plants mentioned in the documents are taken from Broun and Massey 1929. Some Nuer words are given more modern spellings the first time they appear in each document. Coriat's spelling of Nuer words is not consistent, but the spelling in the later documents conforms more closely with the standard phonetic system proposed in the 1928 Rejaf conference on linguistics. In general, Coriat uses 'sh' where 'c' is now normally used, and a 'w' instead of 'u'. Where only minor alterations are involved I have not felt it necessary to provide a variant. It did not seem necessary to use the full range of phonetic symbols for Nilotic vowels; in general, I have tried to follow



a broad transcription for proper nouns similar to that used in Evans-Pritchard's monographs. The names of the two main Nuer tribes that Coriat dealt with, the Lou and Gaawar, appear consistently in the documents as 'Lau' and 'Gaweir', and no alteration has been made to this. The commonest form of certain geographical names, such as Bahr el-Jebel and Bahr el-Zeraf, is also retained, even when such spellings may not be the most accurate modern transcription. I have employed a simplified transcription for Arabic names, titles, and ranks, as the retention of diacritical marks is not crucial in this context.

Wherever possible, individuals mentioned in the texts have been identified in the notes. In many Nuer and Dinka cases, as well as with some Sudanese and British officials, I have been unable to find additional identifying material in either the oral or archival sources available to me.

The documents reproduced here were found in the following locations:

Doc. 1.1 'Easy but Uncertain', Coriat MSS; also appeared in *Heritage; A Journal of Southern Sudanese Cultures* (Regional Council for Arts and Letters, Juba), Vol. I, no. 1, 1982, pp. 43-6.

Doc. 1.2 'The Gaweir Nuers', published as an addendum to H. C. Jackson's 'The Nuers of the Upper Nile Province' (*SNR*, 1923) when the latter was reprinted as a pamphlet in 1924 by the Intelligence Department in Khartoum.

Doc. 1.3 'Transfer of Barr Gaweir to Zeraf Valley District', SRO UNP 66.B.10.

Doc. 1.4 Bloodwealth Payments (Coriat to governor, Upper Nile Province, 30.06.26), SRO BD 66.B.3.

Doc. 1.5 'Southern (Abwong) District: Handing-over Notes', Coriat MSS.

Doc. 2.1 'Settlement of Ol Dinka-Gaweir Nuer Boundary Dispute', SRO UNP 66.B.11.

Doc. 2.2 'Nuer-Dinka re Settlement-Intertribal Boundary', SRO BD 66.B.3.

Doc. 3.1 Gwek Diary, Coriat MSS.

Doc. 3.2 'General Report: Patrol S8. (Lau Nuer) 1928', NRO Civsec 5/2/11.

Doc. 3.3 'Nuer Settlement—Gun Lau (Guncol) Area', NRO Civsec 1/3/8; also Coriat MSS.

Doc. 3.4 Notes on Political Prisoners in Malakal (Coriat to governor, Upper Nile Province, 27.11.31), NRO Dakhliat I 1/2/6.

Doc. 4.1 'Western Nuer District', NRO Civsec 5/2/8; also Willis MSS, SAD 212/14/224-51.

Doc. 4.2 'Administration—Western Nuer', Coriat MSS.

Doc. 5.1 'Notes on Paper on the Nuer Read by Mr. E. Evans-Pritchard

at a Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, September 1931', NRO Dakhliā I 112/12/87.

Two other significant notes by Coriat, which are not reprinted here because they contain information already included in the above, are:

'Barr or Southern Gawair—Précis of Note by Coriat 19.1.1923', NRO Dakhliā I 112/13/87.

'Note by P. Coriat Esq.', 02.08.28, NRO Civsec 5/3/12 [on the 'Gawair March'].

## LIST OF PLATES AND MAPS

### PLATES

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*Frontispiece* Percy Coriat, 1928 (Coriat collection)

1. Manyel Deng, 1928 (Eastwood)
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13. Nuer 'hishing' the road, 1928 (Romilly)
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15. Major Wyld in Dual Diu's cattle camp, Gaweir March, 1928 (Coriat)
16. Coriat climbing the Mound, 1928 (Coriat collection)
17. Guek, with ruins of the Mound in background, 1929 (Eastwood)
18. Mayan Lam, Wyld, Coriat and Tunnicliffe with Guek's trophies, 1929 (Eastwood)
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#### EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### PERCY CORIAT'S LIFE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS WORK

THE Nuer have fascinated anthropologists and Africanists ever since the publication of the first volume of Evans-Pritchard's Nuer trilogy in 1940. This fascination has been as much due to the innate qualities of *The Nuer* as to the Nuer themselves. The quality of Evans-Pritchard's ethnography has inspired generations of anthropologists and there has now grown up a small industry of secondary commentaries on *The Nuer*, and to a lesser extent on the Nuer, an industry which has sought to use Nuer ethnography as a vehicle for propounding new theories in social anthropology. Evans-Pritchard has remained the main source of information, but other sources produced by administrators, missionaries and even early explorers have been brought in to confirm or refute his analysis. Very little attempt has been made to assess the quality of these other sources, nor has there been much attempt to supplement published with manuscript material.

In all this activity the writings of Percy Coriat have been largely ignored, and because ignored they have been underrated. He published only two pieces in his lifetime: 'The Gaweir Nuers' (reprinted here as document 1.2) and 'Gwek the Witch-doctor and the Pyramid of Dengkur', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1939. Yet Coriat is our first authoritative European source on the Nuer. He was one of the first British administrators to become fully conversant in the language in the 1920s; his nine years' administrative experience brought him into contact with a broader territorial range of Nuer than any of his successors; and he left behind a scattered but substantial body of writings which have never been systematically used by scholars and which are presented to the wider public for the first time in this volume.

Before the 1920s all that was written and published on the Nuer was based on

information extracted through other languages, usually Arabic and Dinka. All the main nineteenth-century European explorers, such as the Poncet brothers, John Petherick and Ernst Marno, communicated to the Nuer through Arabic. Marno did learn some Nuer from a Lou slave-girl, but she seems to have been the only Nuer he tried to converse with in her own language (Poncet 1937, Petherick 1869, Marno 1874). The early British administrators, such as H. H. Wilson (1902-5), K. C. P. Struvé (1905-10), and C. H. Stigand (1916-18),<sup>1</sup> also used Arabic or Dinka. Stigand had a wider experience in African linguistics than most of his colleagues and produced the first Nuer-English vocabulary (Stigand 1923), but it was compiled with the aid of a Dinka government interpreter. H. C. Jackson (1921-2)<sup>2</sup> used the same interpreter (Bilal Said, or Tut Deng)<sup>3</sup> as his main source of information for his lengthy but somewhat miscellaneous notes (*SNR*, 1923). Captain V. H. Fergusson<sup>4</sup> who, because of his dramatic murder in 1927, is probably the best remembered of all Nuer administrators, also communicated solely through Dinka and Atuot interpreters, using a mixture of Dinka and Arabic. Many of the men listed above published brief articles or reports on the Nuer, and these have been cited more widely than Coriat's own. Few scholars have taken into consideration the manner in which they collected their information. Even Evans-Pritchard, in his lengthy critique of sources on the Southern Sudan (1971), excluded administrative writings from his survey, though his own work indicates that he was well aware of both their value and limitations.

It was only in 1921-2 that two British administrators learned to speak Nuer. The first was John Lee, who served at Nasir among the Eastern Jikany from 1921 to 1929. Unfortunately he committed very little to paper, and not much of his official correspondence survives today. He is still remembered with respect by the Eastern Jikany because of his efforts to establish peaceful contacts with them after the 1920 punitive campaign, and his role in the early history of Nuer administration should not be underestimated merely because it is unrecorded on paper. From the point of view of scholarship, however, he is not an early

1. Bimbashi H. H. Wilson, inspector Upper Nile Province 1902-4, senior inspector 1905; K. C. P. Struvé, OBE, junior inspector Upper Nile Province 1906-9, senior inspector 1909-10, governor 1919-26; Major C. H. Stigand, inspector Nasir 1915-16, governor Upper Nile Province 1916-19. Details of the service of British officials in the Sudan are taken from Bell and Dee n.d., Daly 1984, the *Sudan Government Gazette*, and other official sources.

2. H. C. Jackson, deputy governor Upper Nile Province 1920-2.

3. Bilal Said (Tut Deng): Jackson (1923: 59) claimed Tut Deng was a Dinka adopted into the Nuer. He came from the Eastern Jikany area and was initiated into the Maiker age-set before being captured by a Mahdist raiding expedition in c.1888. He was interpreter to the governor of Upper Nile Province as early as 1906 (*SIR* 148 (Nov. 1906), 3), then became a merchant trading on the Sobat (*SIR* 207 (Oct. 1911), 5), returned to government service as interpreter in Nasir, and ended his service as chief government interpreter in Malakal in c.1920-3.

4. Captain V. H. Fergusson, OBE, seconded from EA in 1919, DC Eastern District Bahr el-Ghazal 1921-7.

major historical or ethnographic source.

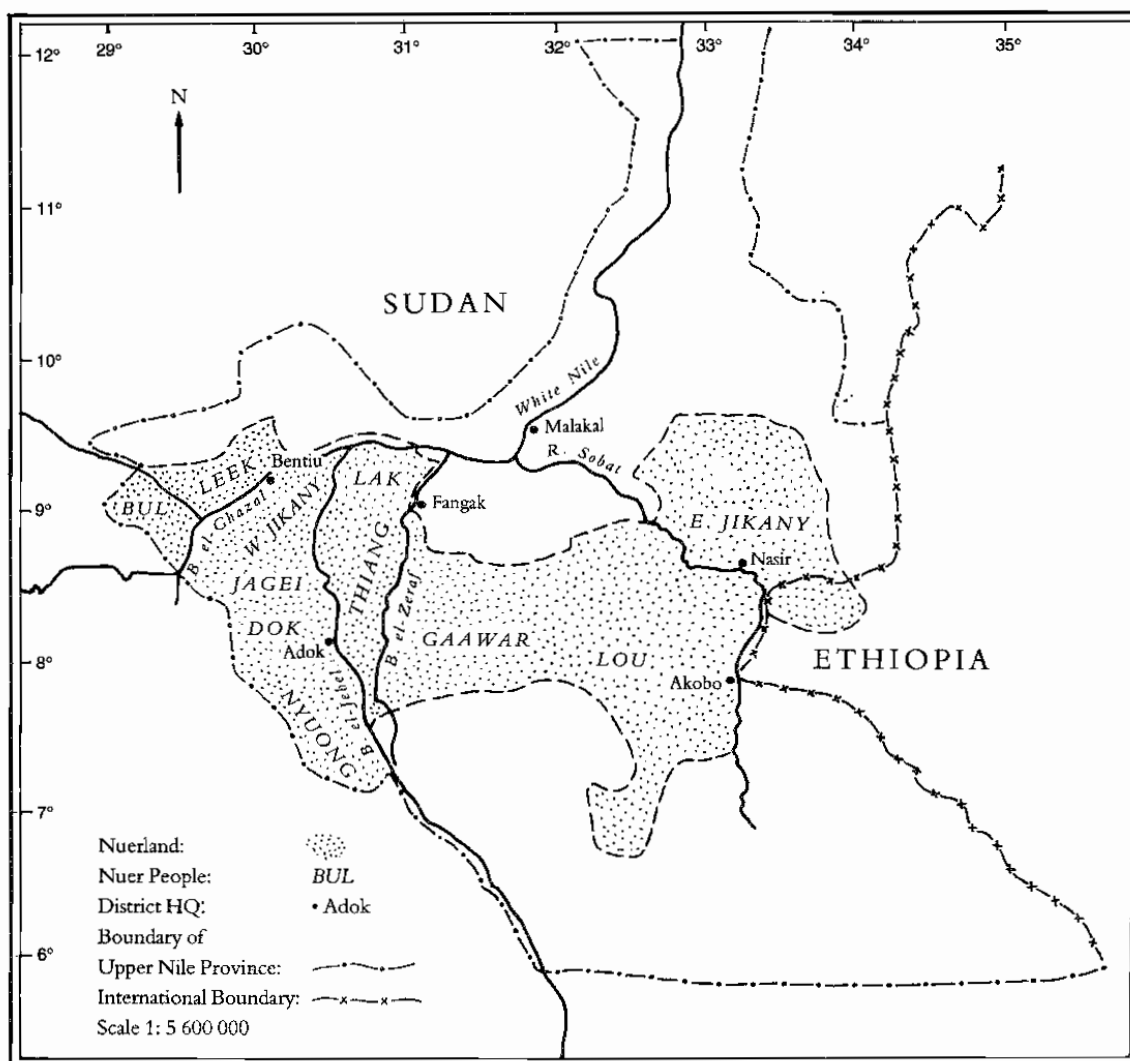
Coriat soon followed Lee, spending the rainy season among the Gaawar at Ayod in 1922, and obtaining a working knowledge of the language. As the documents in this collection show, his understanding of both the language and the people grew over the next eight years. We are fortunate that though Coriat, like so many district commissioners, disliked paperwork, he did not make a fetish of an aversion to 'bumf'. He did his office work well and produced a series of highly detailed and informative reports on major issues and events in Nuer administration. It is these reports which make the core of this book. What makes these unique reports even more special is that all of Coriat's immediate successors among the Lou, Gaawar and Western Nuer—Pletts, Sherratt, Wedderburn-Maxwell, Alban and Romilly<sup>5</sup>—continued the older, mainly non-literate tradition of administrative reporting (see Thesiger 1987: 261). We have very few official records immediately following on Coriat's reports.

Coriat's writings are those of the archetypical district commissioner, being concerned with the local details of the district rather than with amateur ethnography or administrative theory. Unlike H. C. Jackson before him, he was not inspired by Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and did not try to fit his own writing on the Nuer into the outline of topics presented in that massive work. Intellectualism of any sort amused him, and he was equally indifferent to professional administrative theory as to scholarship. He was energetic in setting up the structure of 'native administration' in his districts, but he wasted no time analysing it. Again, this distinguishes his reports from those of many of his successors. Administrative writing on the Nuer in the two decades after Coriat left Upper Nile Province was very much dominated by theories of native political structures and administrative devolution. This theoretical concern was in many ways encouraged and facilitated by Evans-Pritchard's writings, which began to be published in *SNR* in 1933. It is perhaps significant that those who wrote most about the theory of devolution as applied to the Nuer political structure—Armstrong, Corfield, Lewis and Winder<sup>6</sup>—all eventually rose high in the provincial administrative hierarchy, most becoming governors. Coriat remained a district officer throughout his career in the Sudan Political Service.

5. G. S. Pletts, ADC Zeraf 1923–7; W. G. N. Sherratt, ADC Zeraf 1930–4, DC Zeraf 1935–6; H. G. Wedderburn-Maxwell, ADC Frontier District 1926–7, ADC Zeraf 1927–31, DC Zeraf 1931–2, DC Western Nuer 1937–46; Captain A. H. Alban, DFC, ADC Abwong 1929–35, ADC Akobo 1935–7, DC Pibor District 1937–41, HBM consul Gore, Western Abyssinia 1942–50; Captain H. A. Romilly, SDF 1924–8, joined Sudan Political Service 1929, ADC Western Nuer 1930–1, DC Western Nuer 1931–6, DC Eastern Nuer 1937–46.

6. C. L. Armstrong, DSO, MC, DC Nasir 1930–1, governor Upper Nile Province 1939–40; F. D. Corfield, MBE, ADC Nasir 1931–2, DC Nasir 1932–6, governor Upper Nile Province 1948–50 (author of the Corfield report on Mau Mau); B. A. Lewis, ADC Zeraf 1935–8, DC Pibor District 1942–4, deputy governor Equatoria Province 1952–3; J. Winder, ADC Pibor District 1936–7, DC Zeraf 1938–42, deputy governor Upper Nile Province 1948–51, governor 1953–5.





MAP 1 Nuerland within Upper Nile Province, 1954

Coriat thus stands at a pivotal point in our knowledge about the Nuer. He came to know the Nuer before they were fully integrated into the administrative structure of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and before they became grist for several theoretical mills. He was a source of information for Evans-Pritchard and a friendly critic of his earliest writings. At the same time Coriat was an influential participant in a number of events during a crucial period in Nuer history; he was not an independent and neutral observer of Nuer society. His reports can be understood only in the context of the time they were written, his personal relations with the Nuer, and his career in the administrative service. I will thus first summarize his career before analysing the impact of his work and the significance of his writings.

#### *Coriat's Career in the Sudan*

Much has been written about the educational qualifications, intellectual achievements and social respectability of the members of the Sudan Political Service (Collins 1972, Collins and Deng 1984, Kirk-Greene 1982, Mangan 1982). Coriat was considered by his contemporaries to be in many ways a model DC, a man whose style was to be emulated. Sir James Robertson, a former civil secretary of the Sudan and governor-general of Nigeria, later wrote, 'In the Sudan Service, where I knew him, Corry had a splendid reputation. . . . We, who served in other Sudan provinces, heard fabulous accounts of his work in the difficult Nuer country. . . . I met him first in Kordofan, and was most relieved in 1936, when due for transfer, to hear that I was to hand over my district of Western Kordofan to him. I could not have asked for a better successor' (Robertson n.d.: 3-4). Western Kordofan was one of the most prestigious districts in the Sudan; it was the training ground of a number of civil secretaries, and Coriat was the only contract officer ever to serve there. Despite this, he does not fit the collective stereotype of the service which was so carefully created by its members and by the handful of scholars who have studied it since.

Coriat's family background was cosmopolitan. There was a distant connection to Thomas Coryate, the seventeenth-century traveller of 'Coryats Crudites', who introduced the fork to English tables. Coriat himself was born in London on 29 August 1898; his father served for some time as British consul in Morocco, and the family lived in London, Morocco and Spain. Coriat received a standard pre-war education first at Warrington Private School in London, and then at the Perse School in Cambridge. Perse, a school with a sound academic reputation, did not normally produce men for either the Sudan or the Colonial service. Coriat was its only son to find his way to the Sudan, and that by an unusual channel.

Coriat was sixteen and still at school when the First World War broke out.

Though under age for military service he was extraordinarily tall (6 ft 4 in) and was able to enlist as a trooper in the Bucks Hussars Yeomanry in October 1914. All of his war service was spent in the Near East, first on garrison duty in Egypt, then at Suvla Bay at Gallipoli, in the Sanussi campaign of 1915-16, and finally in Palestine in 1916-17. He lost an eye at Suvla Bay but was still considered fit cannon-fodder. In 1916 he was promoted to corporal and then to lance-sergeant. At Nablus Hill, in Palestine, he was again wounded in 1917 and won the French Croix de Guerre. Before being discharged from the army in April 1918 he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM), a rare and coveted decoration awarded only to other ranks, not to officers. His military service with the ranks was thus in many ways more distinguished and valorous than some of his later Sudan colleagues who emerged with commissions, and his experience in the mounted infantry was to stand him in good stead during his service among the Nuer.

Back in England Coriat was at something of a loose end, farming in Berkshire for a time until the family suddenly lost most of its money. He was then forced to look for employment and joined the Sudan Cotton, Fuel and Industrial Development Company as an agricultural assistant. The company, with John Wells as its technical director, planned a vast scheme for turning the *sudd* of the Upper Nile into blocks of fuel (Collins 1983: 296-7). It became known colloquially as the 'John Wellington Wells Company', partly because of the name of its director and partly because, like Gilbert and Sullivan's sorcerer, it went up in smoke. Coriat was stranded at his site on Lake No, refusing to abandon the local workers until they were paid. There is an improbable story of how he and his co-worker, Captain Vicars-Miles,<sup>7</sup> eventually escaped by canoe and camel to Khartoum, only to find the company's office closed and the safe empty. There is also a more likely tale that he and Vicars-Miles were washed away by a flood and were found floating in Lake No on the wreckage of their camp. What is certain is that Coriat became very ill and was brought by steamer to Malakal to recover. The governor, K. C. P. Struvé, was apparently annoyed at the prospect of having to oversee the embalming of Coriat's body for shipment back to England in the event of his death (Ben Assher 1928: 222), but Coriat recovered and was recruited locally into the Sudan Political Service, staying on in Upper Nile Province.

Coriat's employment in the province was due entirely to Struvé. There was an affinity between the two men which lasted until Struvé's death. Both were tall and both came into Sudan administration through unusual channels. Struvé had the more orthodox background, having obtained a modest geology degree at Oxford in 1899. From there he went to Egypt, employed first as Inspector for Rotations in the First Circle of Irrigation and then in an agricultural land company which, like the John Wellington Wells company of later fame, went bust, leaving Struvé stranded in Egypt. After interviews with Lord Cromer and

7. Captain A. L. W. Vicars-Miles, MC, Sudan Political Service 1922-45.

General Wingate<sup>8</sup> he joined the Sudan civil service. Like Coriat, Struvé had suffered and recovered from severe illnesses early in his career, and because of this was considered robust enough for an appointment in Upper Nile Province.<sup>9</sup>

This similarity in their lives would have been enough to establish a rapport between them, but there were other reasons for their friendship. Struvé had been one of the first civilians to join the Sudan service after the Reconquest (1898), and he was the first civilian to be sent to Upper Nile Province before the First World War. He was the province's first civilian governor after the war, but in 1920 most of his staff were still professional soldiers. Coriat, who had had a distinguished war career, was neither an officer nor a part of that class of administrator whose military approach to administration Struvé so deprecated and was trying to replace. In a difficult province Coriat, with his robust sense of humour, was a good companion. Struvé, who became a father at the advanced age of fifty—a year before he retired from the Sudan—came to treat Coriat virtually as a son. Coriat was one of only two Sudan colleagues with whom Struvé remained in touch after leaving the country in 1926.

The Sudan government placed a strong emphasis on 'character' in selecting recruits for administrative service, and character was produced by the right social background and training in the officer corps or at university. Coriat was neither an officer nor a graduate, but his social background, while unusual, was acceptable. As his former house-master from Perse was at pains to emphasise in a formal letter of recommendation, Coriat was 'a gentleman in the best sense of the word'. He was not an Oxbridge 'blue'—that varsity proof of hardiness which was considered essential for the hard life in the Sudan—but he had demonstrated his robustness in other ways. He had survived Gallipoli, Palestine, the loss of an eye, and flood and fever on Lake No. His war decorations proved his valour; his yeomanry experience proved he could ride and shoot; and he was on the spot. Despite occasional hinted reservations about his 'Latin' paternity, he was a satisfactory recruit. Thus it was that he was sent almost immediately to Ayod as a temporary contract probationer.

Ayod is a beautiful spot. Situated on a sandy knoll within the Duk ridge, it is amply covered with large shady trees. Its wells produce clear, fresh water. The Gaawar Nuer found it a welcome refuge from floods at the end of the nineteenth century, and it was chosen as the site for a government police post in 1918. Being far from the rivers it was difficult of access and only two inspectors had previously paid it intermittent visits. A track had been cut through the bush from the Sobat to Ayod in 1921, and it was Struvé's intention to bring the Gaawar under closer administrative control by placing Coriat there throughout the rains of 1922. This was an unprecedented experiment in rural

8. Lord Cromer, British agent and consul-general in Egypt 1883–1907; Sir Reginald Wingate, governor-general of the Sudan 1899–1916.

9. I am indebted to Mr Adrian Struvé for this account of his father's early career. Collins (1983: 127) mistakenly describes Struvé as a short man.

administration, since all other government posts in the province at the time were established on the rivers.

The accommodation of the post was less than adequate. Arab slavers had established their *zariba* there in the 1860s and the outline of their trench was (and is) still visible. Within this rectangle a previous inspector had constructed a mud, mosquito-proof house, which Coriat found to be full of holes and with only half of its floor cemented (the cement slab can still be seen and is occasionally incorporated into huts built on the site). Coriat's stint during the rains (which he describes in doc. 1.1 below) was difficult, cut off as he was from any other government post or mail from home for three months.

This enforced isolation imposed hardships, but it also forced him to seek company with the Nuer in a way that no other previous DC had done. He learned the Nuer language (though speaking it, as some now are still able to recall, in the clipped tones of a regimental sergeant-major); he was given the honorific name Kulang-Girkuac (usually shortened to Girkuai); and formed many strong personal friendships among the Nuer men with whom he had to work. This is evident in his personal comments in his handing-over notes of 1926 (doc. 1.3). Nyang Macar, a veteran of Deng Laka's rise to power in the nineteenth century (see doc. 1.1), was one of his earliest friends. So was the chief Guer Wiu<sup>10</sup> and—what was more important politically—so was Dual Diu, the prophet Deng Laka's son and successor.

Dual Diu had never before been on completely easy terms with government representatives. His father had been courted by government and had even received a visit from the governor in 1906. After his death in 1907 the government dealt only with Deng Laka's elder sons, Wol and Macar Diu. Macar was prodded into rebellion in 1913 and both he and Wol died on a cattle raid against the Twic Dinka in 1914.<sup>11</sup> Dual had by that time inherited the divinity Diu, which had also inspired his father, and led the Gaawar on a series of retaliatory raids against the Dinka. From 1914 to 1918 there was intermittent warfare between the government and Dual, but the government did not have the resources to press a conclusion.

In 1918 Dual made his formal submission to an inspector from neighbouring Mongalla Province and publicly welcomed the building of the government post at Ayod, near his own home at Buk. But the inspectors who visited Ayod had little real contact with Dual. Coriat's predecessor, Borradaile,<sup>12</sup> decided that Dual was 'conceited' and showed him little public respect. Coriat, however, came to regard Dual as a 'great friend', and it was on the strength of this friendship

10. See below, doc. 1.2, note f to table entitled 'Gaweir Shens'.

11. For accounts of government dealings with Deng Laka and his sons Wol and Macar Diu, see Matthews 1907, Struvé 1909, Wauhope 1910 and 1913, Owen 1910, O'Sullivan 1910, and Kulang Majok, text 2.5, in Johnson, in preparation.

12. C. Borradaile, Sudan Political Service 1920–2, who wrote about his experiences in Ayod in Ben Assher 1928.

that Dual was drawn progressively into the administrative orbit, shedding his reluctance to meet directly with government officials, and eventually agreeing to leave his home and visit Malakal not once, but twice, in 1923 and 1924.<sup>13</sup> Coriat exchanged visits with Dual, first in the company of his interpreter, Manyel Deng,<sup>14</sup> and then on his own. Coriat and Dual are still remembered during this period as *maath ti ca kayndien reet*, 'friends who cannot be separated'.<sup>15</sup> This was to make Dual's subsequent treatment by the government all the more bitter, as it was felt that Coriat had in some way betrayed him.

Coriat's sense of humour and affability stood him in good stead in his contacts with the Gaawar. He found the list of criminals he was bequeathed intensely amusing, and 'long did he laugh, and loud, in his appreciation of the Ayod casebook' (Ben Assher 1928: 223). He is still remembered as a man who could be approached by anyone, and that if he liked a man he would walk along, hand in hand, conversing, just as any Nuer did. His sociability is commemorated in his 'ox-name'. Nuer honorific names usually describe the colour pattern of an ox presented as a 'name-ox', but Coriat's name describes a special type of leopard-skin (*kuac*) with bells sewn on it and worn at dances. He appears, then, to have been a stylish dancer. The impression he created at dances is recalled in the following song, recorded by Fr. Crazzolara in 1931, and still well known in Western Nuer:<sup>16</sup>

<i>Kulang Gierkwai cako peen ne nyaal</i>	Kulang Girkwai we met over a girl
<i>Kwiy ne gate</i>	He does not know his son
<i>Ci Kulaang ben</i>	Kulang has come
<i>Ci Gierkwai ben</i>	Girkwai has come
<i>Ci maanke dhwoony dhwoonydien</i>	And the women are dancing rhythmically
<i>Ci wuuti tang gaar late</i>	And the men are jumping in order
<i>Ci wuuti yiaadmaan kan</i>	And men have taken the skins of women

13. *SMIR* 348 (July 1923), 5; 363 (Oct. 1924), 4.

14. See below, doc. 1.1 n. 6.

15. SRO EHJP8, Kulang Majok, 24 May 1982, transcribed and translated by Stephen Tut Puol. Other parts of Kulang Majok's testimony concerning Gaawar-government relations are to appear as texts 2.5 and 4.8 in Johnson, in preparation, where it is compared with and frequently corroborated by contemporary records.

16. John Winder (personal communication) recorded Coriat's ox-name as 'Kolong-Kerkwac', explaining that 'a "ker" was a beast with a stripe down its back and "kwac" was, of course, a leopard marking'. Crazzolara transcribes it as 'Gierkwai' (the diphthong replacing the final 'c'), and in all the interviews I have recorded the name has been pronounced either 'Girkwac' or 'Girkwai'. Stephen Abraham Yar (Nyuong Nuer) has given me the explanation of the name used here, though he has also suggested that it might refer to a *kuac* (spotted) ox with a special *gier*, or bell. The song, of which these are only the opening lines, is found in Crazzolara, 'Nuer Customs', AMC A/112/4. The translation is by Stephen Yar, who explained that it describes the effect Coriat had on a dance, where the girls danced their best to attract his attention, and the men redoubled their efforts to regain the attention of the girls. Though Crazzolara implies that the song is a Gaawar composition, it is still sung in Western Nuer, usually as a lullaby to calm crying children.



After his first year in Ayod he exchanged full bridewealth in cattle for Nyanliedh Ruac, a woman from a respectable family. When Coriat finally left the Lou and Gaawar in 1929, he placed Nyanliedh in the care of his old friend, Guer Wiu, with cattle for her maintenance. Though she had no children by Coriat, she later had some by her chosen consort and, because of the original exchange of bridewealth, they are considered Coriat's family (see Coriat's own explanation of this custom in doc. 1.2, under 'Marriage Rights'). A proportion of the bridewealth of each of the daughters has been reserved for him, and as recently as 1975 Gaawar in Ayod acknowledged that a small herd had accumulated for his use, should he ever return to claim it.

Coriat's friendships were highlighted, in a way, by his very toughness. It is still recalled that once, while mounted, he picked a man up by the hair of his head, trotted some distance, and then dropped him. Coriat and his horse are remembered as a fierce pair, especially during the Nuer Settlement of 1929, when Coriat 'tamed the Nuer'. There is even a story that his eye was plucked out by a thorn branch as he pursued the Nuer on horseback through a forest.

The way in which Coriat could take a liking to a person for his own qualities, whatever the circumstances, and the way in which he could also pursue his duties with a sternness which bordered on cruelty are contrasted in two stories told by Kulang Majok, a Bar Gaawar who served Coriat as a Native Authority Policeman ('Chiefs' Police'), and who was close enough to Coriat to help collect his bridewealth cattle. The first concerns Kulang's recruitment into the Chiefs' Police, the second a manhunt for the murderer of an Arab merchant in 1924.

Kulang had just been initiated into the 'Pilual' age-set shortly before Coriat first arrived at Ayod. One of Kulang's sisters had recently divorced her husband, even before he had completed the marriage payments. The ex-husband came around to Kulang's father's homestead with a policeman to reclaim the cattle he had paid, but Kulang speared and wounded the policeman rather than let him take the animals. Coriat later came searching for Kulang and arrived at the homestead preceded by his interpreter, Manyel Deng, and the Gaawar chief, Guer Wiu. When they arrived Kulang and his brothers fled. But then Kulang thought to himself,

'I better come back or Girkuai will kill father'. So I returned. . . . I went to the barn and brought out a big ram, like that. I went and took the tail of a giraffe recently killed which was hanging up in the barn. I went to meet him. He asked Guer, 'Who is that person?' Guer told him, 'He is Kulang, the son of a man called Majok Juc'. [Coriat] asked me, 'Are you the person who speared the policeman?' I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'We go home.' When we arrived home he got off the back of his horse. The police took the horse and tied it to a post. The police walked with horses [i.e. they rode] because it was the rainy season. He took his chair and put it there on the ground. My father came and sat on the ground with his head bowed. He thought we were all going to be killed. When I brought the ram and the tail [Coriat] said, 'You, are you the one who speared the police?' I said

yes. He said, 'Why didn't you run away?' I said, 'No. There is no place I can run to'. He told me to take the ram back to the barn because it had a *kujur* [Arab., spirit]. He then said, 'You will even be given a chief's cloth'. I said no. He said, 'No, I must give it to you. If you fear the government because you are young, you will walk together with Guer Wiu.'<sup>17</sup>

Kulang Majok returned with Coriat to Ayod the next day. Instead of being arrested he had been offered the appointment of government chief, which the conferring of the cloth implied. Having stabbed a policeman, he now found himself enrolled in Guer Wiu's police.

Not all Nuer who came up against the law got off so lightly. The second story, about Pathot Cakuen (mentioned in doc. 1.3), illustrates the harsher side of Nuer administration at this time. Early in 1924 Pathot, a Gaawar from Rupciengdol, and another man murdered an Arab merchant. Kulang Majok was out hunting elephants when Coriat arrived at Rupciengdol and sent for him. On arrival Kulang found that Coriat had rounded up all of *cieng* Dol's cattle and promised their return only if the section produced Pathot and his father Cakuen Jok. Coriat then offered Kulang a reward of a captured cow if he personally brought Cakuen in. Kulang refused.

I told him, 'No! He is my maternal uncle. If he sees it is me [taking a cow from his section], and if you kill him, he will curse me. He will say, "My sister's son, you kill me!"' [Coriat] said, 'You *must* go!' I told him, 'I will not go!' He went to Guer Wiu, Guer who was his big chief. He said, 'Guer!' Guer said, 'Yes'. I told Kulang to go find Cakuen. He said he cannot go because Cakuen is his maternal uncle.' Guer told him, 'He is right. He cannot go'. [Coriat] said, 'Ah! Is he right?' Guer said, 'Yes'.<sup>18</sup>

There is a special relationship which exists between a mother's brother and a sister's son, a relationship of affection and security which is often absent between a Nuer man and his paternal kin, with whom he is frequently in competition (Evans-Pritchard 1951: 157-8, 162-7). It prevented Kulang from doing his duty as a policeman, at least as Coriat understood that duty. Yet Coriat accepted Guer Wiu's judgment and avoided placing Kulang in an impossible position. However, others within *cieng* Dol, Cakuen's agnatic kin, were less reticent. A man named Wei Joak caught Cakuen and beat him brutally with an iron bar. Cakuen was then taken to Rupciengdol while Coriat was absent in another village. Kulang found his uncle in the morning.

I found him sitting on the ground with his head bowed. . . . I cried, my tears were running down my cheeks. He said, 'My sister's son do not cry, the Turuk will kill you. As for me, *cieng* Dol has killed me'. At about this time Girkuai arrived along with two *ma'murs* and the rest of the horsemen. As soon as he arrived he was told that Cakuen was caught. He came on his horse and slowly he circled round, and circled round, and circled round Cakuen. He said, 'Cakuen!' Cakuen said,

17. SRO EHJP8.

18. Ibid.

'Yes'. He said, 'Why did you bring up your son so badly? Your son, who killed an Arab, he is like someone who kills a woman. Is not an Arab like a woman? Would you say that he has killed a man?'

He then dismounted and his horse was taken away while he sat down. When he finished drinking his tea he sent for Cakuen. He asked Cakuen, 'Where is your son?' Cakuen said, 'My son has run away'. 'You don't know where he is?' He said, 'I don't know his place'. [Coriat] then said, 'All right'.

Cakuen was then taken away. He was just sitting listlessly, doing nothing, because he was an old man. The sun reached the late afternoon. We then heard that Cakuen's son who killed the Arab had been found and he was shot. [Coriat] then said, 'Right. It is finished. Tomorrow we will go to Guer's cattle camp'...

The next morning when people left, the old man was tied [with a rope around his neck] to a horse's back. A Turuk on horseback was pulling him. When the people had gone a short distance, he died. The Turuk dismounted and untied the rope that was holding him. He died at once. They went and informed the villagers that 'the old man named Cakuen is there under the thorn tree. He is dead. You go and bury him there'. The villagers, those from his own section, went and buried him. . . . [Pathot] was also caught when he was found in Guer's territory. The DC said that he would take him by canoe to Tithbel for treatment. He also went and died there. Cakuen and his son, they both died together, they both died.<sup>19</sup>

Kulang Majok was a witness to all or part of these events. Coriat gives a more restrained account of this incident in his 1926 handing-over note (doc. 1.3), saying merely that Cakuen died in prison (by which, perhaps, he meant 'in custody'). It is clear even from his report that the pursuit and death of both Pathot and his father created considerable tension within *cieng* Dol.

The year 1924 continued to be one of tension in the province, mainly because of nationalist agitation in Khartoum and other towns of the Sudan. Coriat was on leave in England during August when the White Flag League began its demonstrations in Atbara, Khartoum and Omdurman. All leave was cancelled as absent administrators were recalled to their stations. The provinces remained quiet throughout that month and Coriat had an uneventful journey to Malakal. He was in his district on the Bahr el-Zeraf in late September when there was a demonstration of loyalty to the king of Egypt among the Sudanese troops in Malakal. Coriat returned to the province headquarters in time to take part in a police sweep through the native quarter. Nothing more happened until November, when Sir Lee Stack, governor-general of the Sudan and Sirdar (commander-in-chief) of the Egyptian army, was assassinated in Cairo. This was followed by mutinies in Khartoum and Talodi, in the Nuba Mountains neighbouring Upper Nile Province. Struvé sent Coriat with nearly fifty policemen to Talodi to arrest the Egyptian officers of the mutinous battalion, and the story of how he did so has become part of the folklore of the Sudan Political

19. Ibid. Kulang Majok indicated with a gesture that the rope was tied around Cakuen's neck. This was the usual way prisoners were tied at that time (see Plate 11).

Service. The officers are said to have set off overland for Malakal:

On arrival at the only waterhole en route they found it occupied by a piratical figure with a revolver and a black patch over one eye, who informed them that they were under arrest. Having no idea of whether their government had repudiated them they thought it best to comply and were marched down to Tonga under escort of Coriat and a couple of Upper Nile policemen.<sup>20</sup>

Other, less dramatic changes also occurred in 1924. In that year Coriat completed a brick house at Ayod but was transferred to Abwong when the Lou Nuer were included in his district. He was also taken on in the permanent and pensionable service, losing the contract officer's bonus and taking a drop of pay from £600 a year to £480.

Coriat had begun visiting the Lou as early as 1923. His transfer to Abwong, however, did not bring him into as close contact with the Lou as his stay in Ayod had done with the Gaawar. Abwong, founded in 1904, had several brick buildings. As it was on the river Sobat it was in easy communication with Malakal, but it was set in Dinka country, far from the heart of the Lou. The geographical and political centre of the Lou Nuer at that time was Weideang ('Dengkurs' on government maps), a good fifty miles from Abwong. Coriat was not able to engage in the type of reciprocal visits with Lou chiefs which had been common with the Gaawar. He was much more dependent on those Nuer who were willing to journey to see him at Abwong. The greater personal distance this imposed between Coriat and the Lou is demonstrated in his assessment of chiefs in his 1929 handing-over notes (doc. 1.5). Out of forty-three chiefs and prominent men listed, eight are dismissed as 'useless', 'untrustworthy', or in some other way unreliable. By contrast only one of the twenty-three Bar Gaawar chiefs listed in his 1926 Bar Gaawar handing-over notes (doc. 1.3) is described as 'useless', while others have personal virtues mentioned to mitigate their administrative failings. It is clear that Coriat had more friendships among the Gaawar than among the Lou, and this may have had some bearing in the way events later developed in 1927-8.

Four Lou whom Coriat did come to know, like, and rely on were Dhiew Dieng, Guet Thie, Lam Tutthiang, and his son Mayan Lam, the government interpreter at Abwong. Dhiew tried to mediate between Guek and Coriat in 1927, but having failed, absented himself entirely from the conflict, thus earning himself a reputation for double-dealing on both sides.<sup>21</sup> Guet Thie and Lam Tutthiang were long-standing opponents of the prophet Ngundeng and

20. Henderson 1987: 102. The Malakal demonstration took place on 22-27 Sept. 1924, and the Talodi mutiny on 27 Nov. (*SMIR* 362 (Sept. 1924), 7; 364 (Nov. 1924), 5). Coriat was not so single-handed in his arrest of the Egyptian officers as Henderson suggests. He was accompanied by forty-seven Mounted Police led by a Shilluk police captain who, like Coriat, had won a DCM in the war (K. C. P. Struvé, 'Annual Report. Upper Nile Province, 1925', *Reports of Governors of Provinces for the Year 1925* (Khartoum: McCorquedale, 1926), p. 411).

21. See below, doc. 1.5, doc. 3.1 n. 32, doc. 3.2.

his son Guek and were later to provide Coriat with anti-Guek information.<sup>22</sup> Mayan Lam (see Plates 9 and 18) was required by his position to be more unambiguously in the government camp than the chiefs, but his long-term residence in Abwong virtually removed him from everyday Lou political life.

One man with whom Coriat never got on was Guek Ngundeng. He was one of the younger sons of the prophet Ngundeng, but he did not become possessed by his father's divinity, Deng, until some ten years after Ngundeng died. Guek was a young man of no great position during the Lou patrol of 1917. Following the combined events of the Lou defeat and the coming of the great flood of 1918, Guek fled to the home of his maternal relatives in the Jikany area, and it was there that he first became possessed by Deng. He returned to his own home shortly after the flood subsided and in the early 1920s began repairing his father's Mound (which Coriat calls a 'pyramid') at Weideang.

When it became known that Guek was possessed by Deng, people from as far away as Nasir began to come to him to have their disputes settled, with the aid of his divinity. This brought him into competition with the government, who claimed the ultimate right to hear legal cases. H. C. Jackson, then senior inspector (deputy governor) of Upper Nile Province, went to visit Guek in 1921 and established some form of diplomatic relations between the government and the prophet, with Guek's brother Bol acting as intermediary (Jackson 1954: 162–8; Coriat 1939: 228).

In 1923 Coriat received alarming reports while in Ayod that Guek was planning to raid the Dinka of neighbouring Mongalla Province. Coriat thereupon made an unannounced visit to Guek, some three days' march away, only to be told by Bol Ngundeng that Guek was unable to see him. Coriat nevertheless camped near the Mound. Early in the morning after his arrival, Coriat was awoken by loud shouts coming from the direction of the Mound. As the sun rose he could see Guek 'standing erect on the top and still shouting raucously'. Guek remained on top of the Mound all that day and disappeared during the night. A few days later he visited Coriat's camp, and 'by the evening we were almost affable'. Some form of a workable arrangement was established, Coriat dealing directly with Guek on the level of 'sub-chief' in the hierarchy of chiefs he was then trying to create. In two subsequent visits Coriat again found that Guek would ascend the Mound at night and spend the day on top of it, but in 1925 Guek returned Coriat's visits and came to Abwong (Coriat 1939: 227, 229).

Guek's behaviour was in stark contrast to that of Dual Diu's. Dual seems to have had a shrewder appreciation of government officials than Guek, and there is no record of him ever appearing before Coriat in a state of possession. The easy, friendly visits between the two men had no parallel with Guek. Guek's appearance also went against him. While Dual was close to seven feet tall

22. For Guet Thie, see below doc. 1.5 n. 17; for Lam Tutthiang see below, doc. 3.3 n. 27; for Mayan Lam see below, doc. 1.5 n. 65.

and powerfully built, Guek was squat with stumpy limbs (Jackson 1954: 164; Coriat 1939: 226). He also tended to drool in Coriat's presence, which did not improve the impression he made. It is no wonder that Coriat thought of Dual and Guek in completely different terms. Dual was scarcely a *kujur* at all, while Guek became 'the witchdoctor'. Throughout Coriat's reports Dual appears a reasonable and capable head chief of the Bar division of the Gaawar. As for Guek, 'the more I became acquainted the less did I consider him fitted as a Chieftain...' (doc. 3.2).<sup>23</sup> Guek took very little active part in the new administrative system Coriat was creating for Nuer leaders, but from 1923 to 1926 the two men were on reasonably good terms, and Coriat had no cause for complaint or alarm. It was only after 1926, with a change in province personnel, that things began to go wrong.

The Lou only gradually became Coriat's main concern. Even after his transfer to Abwong, the Gaawar and their southern Dinka neighbours occupied a good deal of his attention. As early as 1909 a province boundary had been fixed to coincide with a 'tribal' boundary between the Gaawar and Lou Nuer on the Upper Nile Province side, and the Ghol and Nyareweng Dinka on the Mongalla Province side. This increased rather than diminished inter-tribal tensions, as the opposing province administrations tended to side with their own people (Johnson 1982a). Coriat gave his own, informal assessment of the border in 1925:

That southern boundary between our two districts [is] a tricky one and it requires both D.C.'s to pull together. . . . The trouble there is that my Nuers on my side are deadly enemies of the Dinkas on the other side and require constant watching to stop them knocking blazes and the fear of both places into the Dinkas. The Dinkas on the other hand being a mean crowd are deadly jealous and scared of the Nuers and go prancing in to the D.C. at Duk with hair-raising tales of Nuer attacks, forays, alarms and gory massacres. If the D.C. there is inclined to believe them without referring to this side a certain amount of unnecessary wind and confusion is raised. On the other hand if he and I work together he takes no notice of the artful Dinka unless there is good reason to do so. Even if nothing happens and any credit is put on the Dinka yarns without hearing our side of the case, the Nuers get to know there is wind up and think 'Government believes we are going to slosh the Dinka and we'll get it in the neck. Let's have a run for our money' and thereupon proceed to do so.<sup>24</sup>

During the period Coriat was assigned to the Gaawar three different DCs were appointed to the neighbouring district in rapid succession. Not all had learned the complexities of their district before they were transferred, and not

23. Collins (1983: 123-4) misrepresents Coriat's views on the prophets when he states that Coriat tried to convey to Willis the prophets' peaceful role in Nuer society. Coriat always thought of Dual as a warrior leader and blamed Guek for the attack and annihilation of an army patrol in 1916.

24. Coriat to Kathleen, 12.10.25, Coriat MSS.



all got on with Coriat. But in 1925 Major J. W. G. Wyld, DSO, MC<sup>25</sup> was appointed to Bor, and in 1926 both he and the northern half of his district (Duk Fayuil) were transferred to Upper Nile Province (see Map 2).

Coriat and Wyld hit it off immediately. Wyld was the son of H. C. Wyld, the Merton Professor of English Language and Literature at Oxford who once declared that 'no gentleman goes on a bus'. Though clearly a gentleman, the younger Wyld was not himself a university man. He had, instead, 'a fine record and some rather bad luck' (as Coriat put it), being a regular officer who served in Mesopotamia, France, north Russia and Iraq before marrying a White Russian refugee and leaving the army to farm in South Africa. There he was swindled and had to return to England, where he joined the Sudan Political Service and was sent to Bor, bringing his wife with him (the only European woman below the rank of governor's wife to be allowed south). Struvé thought Wyld 'rather brilliant' but a bit of a fire-eater who needed reining in. Coriat thought him 'a most excellent fellow'.<sup>26</sup> In a still snobbish service, with its subtle distinctions of social background and character, Wyld and Coriat shared a non-varsity background and similar war experiences. They toured the border together in the dry season and trained the mounted police in Kodok during the rains. It was to be a lifelong friendship. Like Coriat's friendship with Dual Diu, it undoubtedly facilitated administration. It was not, however, without its difficulties, as the events of the Gaawar march in 1928 were to show.

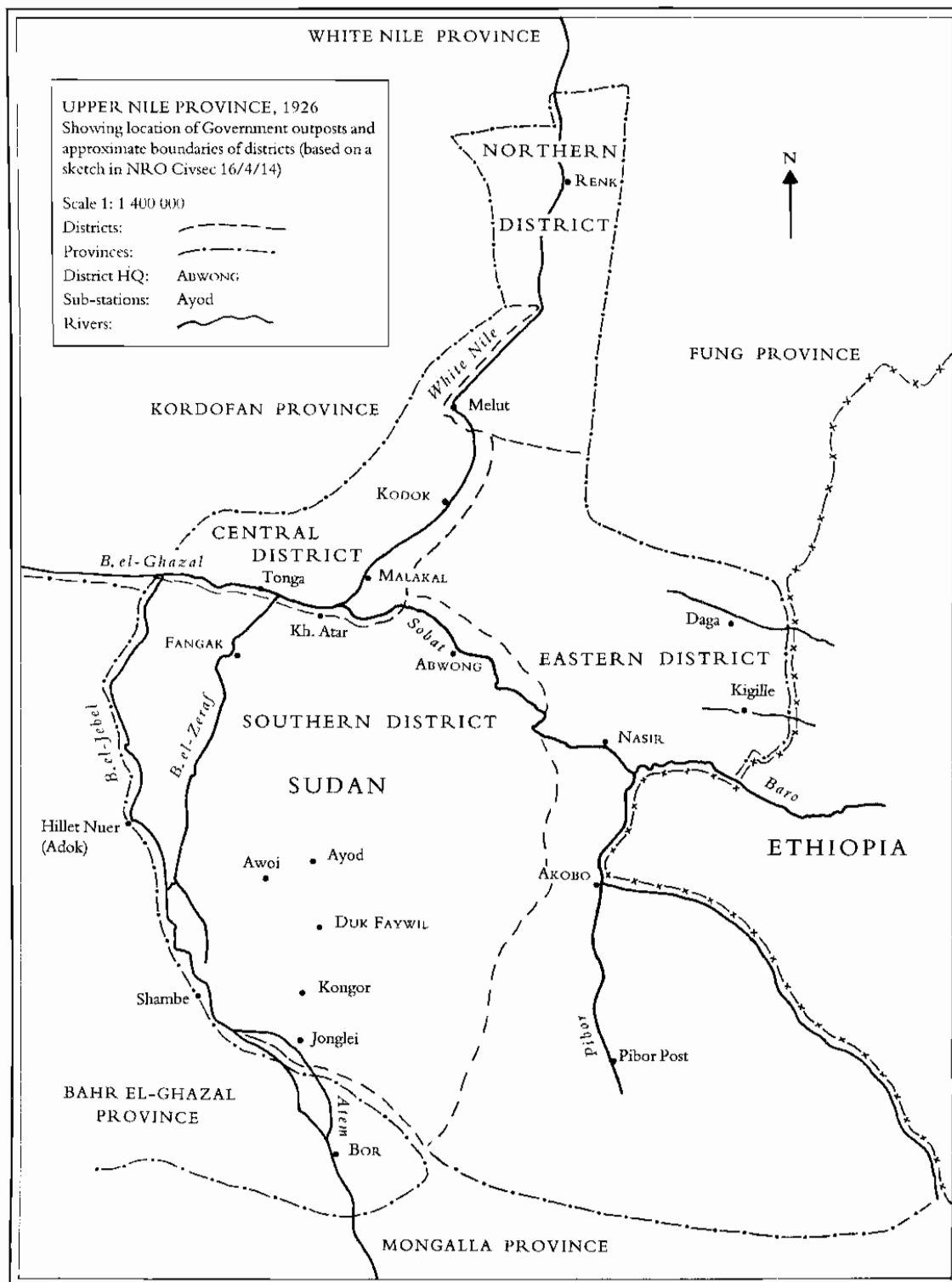
The year 1926 was one of many changes for Coriat and the province. In the dry season he handed the Bar Gaawar over to Fangak, headquarters of the Zeraf Valley inspectorate. During the rains, while on leave in England, he married Kathleen (Kay) King, his fiancée of some years, who had to stay behind in England when he returned to the Sudan. It was also the year that Struvé retired as governor. Coriat had hoped that Angus Gillan,<sup>27</sup> the deputy governor of neighbouring Nuba Mountains Province, would replace him, but instead the province got C. A. Willis, the former director of intelligence in Khartoum.

Willis was a controversial appointment. He was undoubtedly an energetic man, but his handling of many sensitive issues connected with his department had made him highly unpopular with his colleagues (Daly 1980: 34–6; Hasan 1979: 468–9). Struvé in particular was appalled by the idea that Willis was to succeed him, seeing the choice as a repudiation of his own cautious and gradual approach to administration. Coriat at first welcomed the new governor and his infusion of new energy into the province. He was 'a thruster', he had 'pluck and imagination', and he could get Khartoum to listen to him (or so Coriat hoped). But this favourable first impression did not last long. Coriat and Willis

25. Major J. W. G. Wyld, DSO, MC, ADC Bor-Duk District 1925–31. See Plates 15 and 18.

26. K. C. P. Struvé, 'Handing-over Notes July–Aug., 1926', SAD 212/9; and Coriat to Kathleen, 12.10.25, Coriat MSS.

27. Sir Angus Gillan, KBE, CMG, deputy and acting governor Nuba Mountains Province 1921–8, governor Kordofan Province 1928–32, assistant civil secretary 1932–4, civil secretary 1934–9.



MAP 2 Upper Nile Province, 1926

were to fall out for both professional and personal reasons.

Willis had the reputation of being one of the best classical Arabic scholars in the service, and as director of intelligence seemed to have prided himself in knowing the 'native mind'. But Upper Nile Province was not the north; a knowledge of classical Arabic was of no use there. He knew next to nothing of the province's Nilotic peoples and, as one of his subordinates later recalled, 'he blundered about in the unfamiliar world of the Upper Nile', never really coming to grips with the complexities of his new situation. It is perhaps for this reason that he often gave the impression of being resentful and jealous of his subordinates' greater knowledge of the province. He frequently treated them tactlessly, acknowledging his own mistakes gracelessly. There were times when Willis seemed to resent his dependence on Coriat in Nuer administration.

Coriat was already one of the most experienced DCs in the province and had demonstrated a versatility which Struvé warmly recommended:

Fiery youthful energy, tempered by an admirable sense of discipline and deference to his chief's views. Has an amazing driving force, which carries everything along with it, till his tribesmen have become a sort of special tribe (?Coriatids), like Nicholson's devotees.<sup>28</sup> Is absolutely tireless at work and should be ordered on leave when his keenness carries him away. I have rather inclined to use him as a sort of knight-errant, and to divert him to anywhere there is serious trouble, always with complete satisfaction to myself. Is a delightful cheery companion, a perfect blend of Latin and Saxon. I hope my glowing opinion of him will find an echo in you.<sup>29</sup>

Willis did have to rely on Coriat almost as much as Struvé had, especially after 1929 when the Nuer Settlement was put into effect and the Western Nuer District was transferred to the Upper Nile. It was just at this time that Coriat, for personal and financial reasons, was trying to transfer to another province. Upper Nile, as a southern province, was still considered unsuitable for European women. Without an independent income Coriat found it too expensive to maintain his wife in England on the lower salary of a pensionable officer. As early as 1927 he tried to transfer to a province where he could bring his wife, but Willis, faced with reorganizing Nuer administration with insufficient staff, refused to let him go. 'Having become more or less a Nuer expert has its disadvantages', Coriat wrote Kay, 'as they don't seem to want to transfer me at all.'<sup>30</sup>

To have any future in the permanent service Coriat had to pass an Arabic exam, both written and oral parts being set in classical rather than colloquial Arabic, which Coriat had little chance to practise. When he failed his first attempt in 1927 he felt his prospects were limited. Coriat then asked to revert

28. John Nicholson (1821–57), Indian administrator, after whom a Kashmiri sect, the 'Nikkulseyrites', was named.

29. K. C. P. Struvé, 'Handing-over Notes July–Aug. 1926'.

30. Coriat to Kathleen, 02.07.27, Coriat MSS.

to a temporary contract. As a 'contract officer' Coriat was no longer eligible for promotion above DC, but he received a bonus to compensate for not having a pension, and his salary went up to £720 a year. This helped his financial position somewhat, but he was still separated from his wife. It was only with the permission of the governor-general that Kay was allowed to come out late in 1928 to stay with the Wylds in Bor, as no suitable accommodation was then available in Malakal. When Coriat was transferred to Western Nuer District in 1929 the problem of Kay's accommodation came up once more. There was no district headquarters in Western Nuer, only the Sudan Government Steamer *Kerreni*<sup>31</sup> with its leaking, rotting woodwork. Again Coriat put in an application for transfer, again Willis refused it. The *Kerreni* was patched up, and Kay joined her husband on board as he steamed up and down the rivers, visiting the Nuer on the banks. It was only in 1931, with the Nuer settled under a new generation of Nuer-speaking DCs, that Coriat successfully transferred to a more comfortable post, this time Juba, the capital of Mongalla Province. But Willis delayed even this transfer, preferring to keep Coriat among the Nuer until he himself had retired earlier that same year.<sup>32</sup>

These disappointments might have been more bearable had Willis been more tactful. Unfortunately he took an instant dislike to Kay Coriat which he never attempted to hide. It is a remarkable feature of Willis's exile in Malakal that, as the small town began to fill with young DCs' wives, he penned a running commentary of his disapproval to his sister at home.<sup>33</sup> Kay was a country parson's daughter who had lived for a while in Chelsea and established a reputation of her own as a painter and theatre-set designer. Willis doubted that she would survive the rigours of the province, but in this he underestimated her. She was as determined as her husband and was frequently on trek with him in Upper Nile, Mongalla, and later in Kordofan. Her endurance and vigour were admired by other DCs, not all of whom were blessed with such companions. Willis's attitude towards Kay helped to poison his relations with Coriat. Shortly after Willis left the Sudan in 1931 Coriat wrote to Kay, 'I wonder what Chunky doodle is doing. I heard a rumour that he was trying to get the job of Times special correspondent at Cairo. Daily Mail lies would be more his line.'<sup>34</sup> Willis showed an unfortunate capacity to alienate his colleagues and subordinates, and his governorship of Upper Nile was no exception. This was to have a detrimental impact on the direction of Nuer administration.

Two projects which Willis began to implement soon after he came to the province were the organization of Chiefs' Police (to help enforce the decisions of the Chiefs' Courts) and the building of a motor road south through Lou Nuer

31. SGS *Kerreni*, a stern-wheel steamer built at Khartoum North in 1903 (Hill 1970: 142).

32. Coriat to governor, UNP, 11.05.29; Coriat to Kathleen, 11.06.31, Coriat MSS.

33. See Willis MSS, SAD 209/12-13.

34. Coriat to Kathleen, 02.07.31, Coriat MSS.

country and Bor district. Both were projects Coriat enthusiastically endorsed and began to implement. The dry season of 1927 was spent recruiting young men into the Chiefs' Police and organizing road gangs for the next dry season's work on road construction. The Chiefs' Police proved popular work among both the Dinka and the Nuer of Coriat's district; road work was less so. Lou dissatisfaction with the road project was articulated by Guek Ngundeng, who up till then had taken little active involvement in local administration.

It was Willis's explanation later that Guek's opposition to the road was based on a realization that the government's plans for progress among the Lou would inevitably reduce his scope for trickery and extortion.<sup>35</sup> Modern Lou, including some of Guek's contemporaries, see the conflict in a different light. Guek, as a spokesman of the Lou, was obliged to represent their objections to being required to provide uncompensated labour on the road. Having done so, he was identified by the government as a ringleader of subversion, and when government preparations for war were reported to Guek, he too had to prepare to fight.<sup>36</sup>

There were, of course, other factors which contributed to Guek's opposition, such as the long-standing rivalry between the families of Guek and Guet Thie (who was supported by, and supported, Coriat). But the Lou version does get some confirmation from the contemporary record, including Coriat's reports in this volume (see Section 3). It is clear from document 3.2 that Guek, while not one of Coriat's favourites, had given little trouble and had not interfered with the creation of the Chiefs' Courts in 1926. It is also clear from documents 3.1 and 3.2 that, while there were some reports of Guek's disaffection in mid-1927 before Coriat went on leave, most rumours circulated after Coriat left the province. Some of these rumours came from doubtful sources, but it was on the strength of such reports that the province government sought, and received, permission to prepare for a military campaign against Guek as early as August. It was only as late as November, shortly before Coriat was due back, that the governor-general insisted that no aggressive action be taken until Coriat had had a chance to assess the situation.

Coriat was met by a pile of telegrams in Khartoum reporting a variety of rumours, including one that Guek was plotting to murder him. On arrival at Abwong he seems to have found some difficulty sifting rumour from fact. He became convinced that the official government interpreter, Mayan Lam (who was no friend of Guek's), was withholding information from him.<sup>37</sup> He also found his new deputy at Abwong, Captain A. H. A. Alban, busy clearing a landing-ground for the RAF. This had been witnessed by a deputation from Guek who had come before Coriat's arrival and whom Alban had received

35. Governor, Upper Nile Province, to civil secretary, 06.08.27, NRO Civsec 57/2/8.

36. See Johnson, forthcoming, and Lou text 4.2, in Johnson, in preparation.

37. See Madhir Lam Tutthiang, text 4.2, in Johnson, in preparation.

coolly. A second deputation arriving after Coriat's return, this time including Guek's brother Bol, were received even more coldly. There was, after all, the rumour that Guek planned to entice Coriat to the Mound, where he would be killed. Coriat detained Bol and then toured his district. It is perhaps not surprising that by this time there was evidence that the Lou were preparing for war. Following Coriat's report of what he had observed the government committed itself to a pre-emptive air strike.<sup>38</sup>

The origin of Guek's rebellion can be found, in part, in two contrasting attitudes towards the Nuer prophets: Coriat's and Willis's. Coriat took a pragmatic view towards *kujurs*. He liked Dual and he disliked Guek for purely personal reasons. *Kujurs* in general might be treated with caution, but he was willing to work with them, especially if they demonstrated that they could command authority and respect. Even after Guek's rebellion and death, he would advise his successor, 'don't down all *Kujurs*'. Willis took the more orthodox government line against inspired religious figures in the Sudan, an attitude based on experience with militant Islam in the north and transferred to the south (Johnson 1981*a*). He equated the Nuer prophets with the charm-selling 'hedge fikis' of Kordofan.<sup>39</sup> It was an inaccurate comparison. Because he expected rebellion he prepared for it, and by preparing for it, guaranteed that it would break out. Willis seemed temperamentally unable to trust Coriat's judgement of his own district and later placed part of the blame for Guek's rising on Coriat for underestimating the seriousness of Guek's potential threat.<sup>40</sup> Coriat was unable to contest his superior's accusation. It was axiomatic that the true test of a DC's work came when he was out of his district. He had done his work well if there was no real trouble in his absence. Guek and the government became set on a collision course while Coriat was on leave. 'Kujurs when they crop up will require to be watched very closely,' he later advised Captain Alban, 'and I think I failed in this, otherwise the 1928 Patrol would not have happened.' Yet he could not disregard all his previous experience. Still a qualification: watch 'kujurs' closely, but 'don't down all *Kujurs*' (doc. 1.5). Willis's suspicion that Coriat had been too lenient with Guek made it more difficult for Coriat to insist on a more sympathetic approach to Dual Diu later.

It is significant in the assessment of the strength of Guek's rebellion that even after his tour Coriat believed a full-scale campaign could be avoided. At the meeting with the governor and the commander-in-chief at Abwong on 7 December, 'I told them I thought I could avoid a Patrol by being given a Squadron of Mounted Police, but Willis said they couldn't be spared from other District duties, so the General had to decide on the Army being brought in.'<sup>41</sup>

38. See Johnson 1979, Jackson 1927, and Lou text 4.2, in Johnson, in preparation.

39. Governor, Upper Nile Province, to civil secretary, 06.08.27, NRO Civsec 57/2/8.

40. Willis to civil secretary, 27.03.28, NRO Civsec 5/2/11.

41. Coriat to Kathleen, n.d. [c. March 1928], Coriat MSS.

It was Willis who was forcing the pace, Coriat who was holding back. Perhaps he was trying to justify his earlier leniency towards Guek, but he was not a foolhardy man and had already been warned of a plot to murder him. For all the rebellion in the air, very few Lou actually tried to fight the government. Coriat's subsequent reports, presented in Section 3, provide very little evidence of widespread hostility to the government or active support for a rising among the Lou. Though troops traversed the country in the dry season of 1928, there were no major confrontations until February 1929, when Guek and a very small number of close followers were cornered at the Mound. Military operations continued for over a year because Guek remained at liberty, not because the Lou were carrying on the struggle. By March 1928 most of the Lou had submitted to government troops, and Coriat noted:

I believe they are really sorry and realize that the Witchdoctor is not more powerful than the Government. In that way as I have always known, they are like children. Unless there is a rod in the background and it is occasionally shown, they are ready to break discipline, however [much] they like one personally and however much they may see the good of Government.<sup>42</sup>

In the end it was not the Lou who posed the greatest threat, but the Gaawar. Following the RAF's bombing of Guek's village the Lou scattered and many sought refuge with their Gaawar relatives. Coriat's friend, Dual Diu, was then facing a challenge from a new prophet among the Bar Gaawar, Kerbiel Wal,<sup>43</sup> who was reported to be trying to organize a raid on the Dinka. With the completion of the S8 Patrol in Lou in early February, Coriat accompanied the mounted troops to Gaawar country where he met H. G. Wedderburn-Maxwell, the new DC of Zeraf District, and Major Wyld, who had come from Duk Fayuil with a number of Dinka 'friendlies'. An attempt had been made to capture Kerbiel Wal, but he eluded his would-be captors. The Gaawar march was, as Coriat commented, 'quite a peaceable show'<sup>44</sup> except for one incident which was scarcely mentioned in the contemporary reports, but which was to weigh heavily on Coriat's conscience for some time afterwards.

On 27 February 1928 Coriat went to meet Dual Diu at his cattle camp at Fajilil (see Plate 14). Most of the rest of the troops, along with Major Wyld and his Dinka auxiliaries, arrived the following day. Coriat and Dual had a friendly meeting, assuring each other of their good intentions, and Dual's camp was left in peace. This did not satisfy Wyld, who argued fiercely with Coriat that the Gaawar must be disarmed. Had Coriat and Wyld not been such close friends, Coriat might have resisted this imposition. In the end he 'allowed himself to be

42. Ibid.

43. Kerbiel Wal: born Gaabuogh Wal of *cieng* Gaakuar of Bar Gaawar, came to prominence in 1927 when he announced he was possessed by a divinity with the ox-name *kerbiel*. He was arrested and exiled to Wau in 1931 and pronounced an epileptic ('Upper Nile Province. Personality Sheet no. 20', SRO ZD 66.K.1). He died in exile.

44. Coriat to Kathleen, n.d. [c. March 1928], Coriat MSS.

overpersuaded', and the next morning at dawn the troops surrounded Dual's camp and closed in. A few Lou refugees were picked up, a few rifles were found in the grass, and these were confiscated (see Plate 15).<sup>45</sup>

Dual was furious, not only at the confiscation of his people's rifles and Coriat's apparent bad faith, but at the behaviour of Wyld's Dinka auxiliaries, who mutilated some Gaawar cattle. When Dual complained to both Coriat and Wyld no action was taken, Wyld insisting that his Dinka were incapable of such an act. It was not Wyld but Coriat who got the blame. As one of Dual Diu's half-brothers later recalled:

One ox, its tail was cut and the other one, its hump was cut by the Dinka. He [Dual] said, 'Children, we have to go to the Turuk'. He came to a Turuk named Girkuai, in his own language Kurieth [Coriat], and told him, 'Now an oxen's tail and hump has been cut by the Dinka. Why? Now, solve our differences. . . If you do not solve it we will have to fight the Dinka. . . ' Girkuai ignored it. He did not take it under consideration. Then we were bitter about Girkuai's attitude towards us.<sup>46</sup>

None of the British officials involved in the march—Coriat, Wyld, Wedderburn-Maxwell or Romilly (officer in charge of troops)—mentioned Dual's complaint until many months later. Coriat stressed Dual's 'loyalty under trying circumstances' and justified the confiscation of his rifles as only a 'precautionary measure'. Willis was able to report to Khartoum that Dual had remained loyal and the march had helped to discredit the *kujur* who had challenged his authority.<sup>47</sup> But the opposite was the case. Dual, who had remained loyal, had been discredited by the government's treatment of him. In retaliation for both government and Dinka actions he invaded Ghol and Nyareweng Dinka country in August (during the rains), and even attacked the government police post at Duk Fadiat. Throughout the rest of 1928 and 1929 the Gaawar put up a stiffer fight against the government than had the Lou. Guek was killed in February 1929 (see Plate 17). It was not until the end of January 1930 that Dual was captured on the Sobat in Jikany territory. He was to spend the next twenty-three years in exile.

Coriat was fully occupied in the campaign against Guek and took no part in the patrols against Dual. Dual's rising clearly bothered him. 'I'm awfully sorry about Dwal Diu', he wrote at the end of 1928, 'as he was a great friend of mine when I ran that District but I'm afraid he has gone beyond the limits

45. See Wedderburn-Maxwell 1928; Wyld 1928; Dual Diu 1930; Gaawar texts 4.8 in Johnson, in preparation; Romilly diaries (1928), SAD G/S 833; B. A. Lewis to B. V. Marwood, 10.06.36, SRO UNP 66.B.11; also doc. 3.4 below. Collins (1983: 136) claims that Romilly and Wedderburn-Maxwell, as well as Coriat, opposed Wyld's insistence on ransacking Dual's camp. There is no evidence of any objections at the time other than Coriat's.

46. See Gaawar texts 4.8, in Johnson, in preparation.

47. 'Note by P. Coriat Esq.', 02.08.28, NRO Civsec 5/3/12. Governor, Upper Nile Province, to civil secretary, 27.03.28, NRO UNP 1/6/31.



of forgiveness from a Government point of view.<sup>48</sup> When Dual was finally captured and gave the mutilation of his cattle as the reason for attacking the Dinka, Coriat expressed himself in stronger terms:

I am aware that Dwal was incensed over injuries said to have been caused by Dinkas to one of his Dance bulls during the visit of the Troops on the Gaweir march to his camp near Fasheir. In my opinion Dwal had material cause for grievance at the action taken on the Gaweir march but there can be little doubt he was responsible for the attack on Duk Fayuil.<sup>49</sup>

The dilemma of alien administration of the Nuer is exemplified by this incident. For nearly thirty years the government had insisted to the Nuer that it was the ultimate authority in law and in justice, and that with the coming of government the right of 'self-help' in disputes no longer applied. But there were times when, out of ignorance, or stupidity, or on principle, the government took action which denied the Nuer justice and left them no real alternative to self-help. Yet if they took restitutive action they placed themselves in the wrong with the government which had wronged them. This was clearly as unacceptable to the administrator, who believed the government represented and maintained justice, as it was to the Nuer. It is in this light that we must read Coriat's final document on Dual (doc. 3.4) below. It was written after Willis and Wyld—both of whom were convinced that Dual was a thorough menace—had left the province. While Coriat does not excuse Dual's raid on the Dinka or his taking up arms against the government, he gives a clear indication of the government's (and his own) culpability in provoking Dual's action.

By the end of 1931 Coriat had very little time left in Upper Nile Province. After the death of Guek in 1929 he was transferred to Western Nuer District and was promoted to full district commissioner in 1930. This was a posting which came to him only because the previous DC, Captain Fergusson, had been murdered at the end of 1927.

Fergusson's district was then part of Bahr el-Ghazal Province and was scheduled for transfer to Upper Nile in 1928 as part of the rationalization of Nuer administration. Fergusson had his own methods of administration: he left Nuer courts largely unsupervised and did not impose a cattle tax, but he did enforce cotton cultivation to bring in the necessary money to pay tax in cash. Coriat and Fergusson approved of each other, but however progressive Fergusson's administration was in some respects, he generated antagonisms which eventually led to his own death early in December 1927. 'I had a letter from him', Coriat wrote,

written two days before his death, in which he was full of his plans and ideas and congratulating himself on his District being peaceable in spite of attempts by various bad hats to cause trouble. He said he was sorry to hear about my troubles (which by that time had started) and hoped all would be well soon. It

48. Coriat to Kathleen, 23.12.28, Coriat MSS.

49. Coriat to governor, Upper Nile Province, 10.02.30, SRO UNP 5.A.3/43.

seems that his intelligence from the natives must have been scanty as evidence seems to show that it was an organised effort but it is awfully difficult to tell.<sup>50</sup>

The transfer of the district was delayed until after Bahr el-Ghazal Province completed its own punitive patrol. One of Coriat's first tasks on taking over the new district in May 1929 was to bring the murderers to book and uncover the causes of the conspiracy. One murderer had already surrendered in April. Coriat, who had a far better grasp of the Nuer language than Fergusson, was able to establish, partly through interrogation and partly through the use of a network of secret agents, that Fergusson had not been killed at the instigation of a 'witchdoctor' but through the ambitions of one of his supposedly loyal chiefs. The trial of the second murderer, Gatkek Jiek, caught in June 1930, brought the case to a close.<sup>51</sup>

The murder of a British DC, however, had to be punished, and both murderers were returned to their homes to be publicly hanged. Kay Coriat was with her husband when the second murderer was executed. A large portable gallows was brought by steamer and then by lorry to his inland village. 'The prisoner won our reluctant admiration with his complete look of indifference as he marched on in front or beside us', she later recalled:

After several days we found the village and camped down. About 500 (?) natives assembled and we had a handful of police. The portable was hoisted, certain measurements taken, a talk to the dependants and we felt rather miserable. . . . The night was quite moonless and the smoke fires glowed as we turned in under our mosquito nets. I am ashamed to own that I took my husband's revolver and slipped it under my pillow, and lay wide awake. Some one walked near our beds, but my 62 lbs bull terrier seemed wide awake too, and when I heard his deep growl and deeper bark, I felt we were well guarded and I might as well sleep and forget the eeriness of it. Long before dawn we were awake and could hear the continuous sound of flat bare feet moving over to the portable. The dawn had not broken as my husband went over. A long silence, a most dismal howl from Bully, and then an awe inspiring cry rang out. A cry from the avenged to be again revenged. My husband returned and did not speak much and breakfast seemed out of the question so we tried to appear busy over nothing until it was time to move off. Packed up I glanced to where the portable had been and before hastily turning away I saw a slight black body suspended to a tree.<sup>52</sup>

Coriat had one other duty to perform on behalf of Fergusson's memory. In England on leave, he and his wife visited Fergusson's bereaved mother. Mrs Fergusson had hired a ghost-writer to turn her son's journal and letters into

50. Coriat to Kathleen, n.d. [c. March 1928], Coriat MSS.

51. See NRO Civsec 5/3/13, 5/4/14-15.

52. Kay Coriat, 'Headlines', Rhodes House, MSS Afr. s 1684 (1). See also her account in Kenrick 1987: 19. The execution of Gatkek Jiek had a disturbing effect on all those involved. 'Hang Gatkek 8 a.m. Extremely unpleasant. He behaves wonderfully', Romilly recorded tersely (Romilly diaries, 28 December 1930, SAD G/S 833). Kay Coriat was even more vivid when, many years later, she recalled that 'Corry was just green' when he returned from the execution.

a book, a book which was a eulogy to 'Fergie's' valour, intuition, competence and sacrifice; a book in which, incidentally, Mrs Fergusson herself figured as the object of her son's greatest love (Fergusson 1930: 171). She also turned her house into a shrine to her son's memory, renaming it 'Kerreri', after her son's steamer, and naming each of its rooms after one of his Sudan colleagues (the initials of the WC were transposed, it is said, to make it the 'C. A. Willis Room'). Before dinner Mrs Fergusson led her two guests into her son's own room, kept just as he had left it, to have a drink in front of his portrait. 'Corry was just livid,' his wife recalled many years later, remembering her own embarrassment, 'it wasn't his style at all.' But he masked his astonishment and is paid the compliment in Mrs Fergusson's book of having a 'fine, generous mind' (ibid.: 285).

Back in the Sudan, conditions of service were quite different in Western Nuer than they had been in either Ayod or Abwong. There were no large administrative centres in Western Nuer District, only a series of landing places which the DC visited on his floating headquarters. From these *mesbras* the DC would trek inland to visit various chiefs and court centres. Coriat shared this trekking with an ADC, but administrative supervision of the Western Nuer chiefs continued to be somewhat loose, as it had been in Fergusson's time. Coriat made a virtue of necessity and argued for the increased autonomy of the chiefs (see docs. 4.1 and 4.2 below), a policy which was discontinued after he left.

As with the Gaawar and the Lou, Coriat came to rely closely on a few chiefs. Buom Diu, the Dok Nuer prophet of the divinity Teny, became one of his favourites, despite being a *kujur*. Buom was an autocrat and imposed a discipline of which Coriat thoroughly approved. They frequently trekked together. In February 1930 they were travelling in Jagei country when they received news of an inter-sectional fight brewing over a murder back in Dok country. Coriat and Buom returned in time to prevent the fight. Coriat lectured the Dok chiefs for not keeping their people in line. 'Chief Buom went a step further by divesting every Headman and Sub-Chief of their shirts and shorts and the group marched out of Adok dressed like ordinary Tribesmen!'<sup>53</sup> Coriat's successors did not share his enthusiasm for Buom, who was later deposed for becoming 'an unconstitutional autocrat'.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps what Coriat admired in Buom was not so much his efficiency as his personality. Buom's son, John Wicjaal, later recalled, 'What I know is that my father was a hard man. Coriat was a hard man. They got on well together.'

All was not austerity during the three years Coriat served in Western Nuer. His wife remembered the nights he would spend sitting on the deck of the steamer swapping stories—usually ribald—with the chiefs gathered there, and how the boat would literally rock with laughter late into the night. We get a

53. P. Coriat to governor, Upper Nile Province, 12.02.30, NRO Civsec 1/4/9.

54. *SMR* 85 (Jan.–Feb. 1936), 6.

glimpse of just what sort of jokes were told on these occasions, and at whose expense, from Coriat's account of one session just before his final departure from the district:

I had a very amusing chat with Nuel [Juel]<sup>55</sup> & Co. last night. . . . They wanted to know why I was born like them with a tall figure and why I walked like they did. They said all the English were stumpy and walked like an ostrich trotting! One of them put his hand on his hip and imitated Dub [Romilly]. Shrieks of laughter. I took it all in good part and told them most of the English were really tall. It does seem a pity that here, they have only seen Chunky, Pink eye, Dub, Kidd etc. Pawson too is small. We might have had people of Beavan's size easily and it's rather bad luck that the short a—s are here. Nuel said the women liked my figure!<sup>56</sup>

Coriat usually had company during his tours on the *Kerreri* and treks into the interior. Kay was with him much of the time until a determined amoeba hospitalized her in Khartoum. Throughout much of 1929 Captain J. Masterman was Coriat's ADC, and in November 1930 Captain H. A. Romilly, recently transferred from the army to the civil administration, took up that appointment. Romilly had commanded the infantry company from Akobo during the S8 patrol and the Gaawar march. Throughout the early part of 1930 he served with Captain Alban at Abwong and learned Nuer. Coriat was very pleased to get Romilly, especially as he had never much liked Masterman (whom he privately called 'Pink eye') as a subordinate. Coriat also had frequent guests on his steamer, Evans-Pritchard being one. But his favourites were the Italian Catholic missionaries at Yoinyang (Fr. J. P. Crazzolaro among them), who 'would sit down with you and have a good stiff drink and didn't bother about putting Mother Hubbards on the natives'. English Protestant missionaries, on the other hand, tended to want to hold prayer meetings on board ship.

Coriat's last year among the Nuer was mainly spent saying goodbye. In February Coriat took Willis and his wife through the district prior to Willis's departure from the Sudan. Then in June and July he accompanied A. G. Pawson, the new governor, on a tour introducing him to his new subjects. Coriat himself then went on leave from the end of July to November, returning to Malakal before Christmas for one final district commissioners' meeting. After Christmas he paid a last visit to Abwong in the company of Romilly. In January 1932 they returned to Malakal to pick up Kay, and then made a leisurely procession by steamer to Juba, stopping at various landing places in Western Nuer District on the way. They finally arrived in Juba on 13 January, where Coriat was to take up a new posting. After the flat plains and swamps of the Upper Nile, Juba

55. See below, doc. 4.1 n. 39.

56. Coriat to Kathleen, 02.07.31, Coriat MSS. 'Dub': Capt. H. A. Romilly; 'Chunky': C. A. Willis; 'Pink eye': Capt. J. Masterman, ADC Western Nuer 1929, assistant commander of police Yirrol 1930; Kidd: Captain H. F. Kidd, MBE, ADC Yirrol 1922–6, ADC Eastern District Bahr el-Ghazal 1927–8, DC Western Nuer District 1928–9; Pawson: A. G. Pawson, CMG, governor Upper Nile Province 1931–4; Beavan: J. Beavan, ADC Renk 1928–31.

presented a completely different prospect. 'Pretty country hills etc.', Romilly noted in his diary, '& Coriat's pleased'.<sup>57</sup> The hardships of nearly ten years among the Nuer were finally over.

Coriat's service after the Nuer was varied. He served in Juba between 1932 and 1934 until he was struck by black-water fever (induced by a well-intentioned overdose of quinine administered by archdeacon Shaw). He was then sent to Malakal to recover his health before going to El Obeid in 1935 and serving in Western Kordofan from 1936 until the war. In En Nahud town he became a legend for his direct methods in town planning: he simply burned down buildings erected without planning approval (Henderson 1987: 102-3). With Italy's entrance into the Second World War in 1941 he transferred to the army as a *bimbashi* (major) in the Sudan Defence Force and served in Eritrea, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, ending the war as lieutenant-colonel in command of the 1/7 Nuba battalion in the SDF. He was then appointed to the British Military Administration of Tripolitania in 1946 and continued in a variety of capacities in the administration of Libya until 1953. His last important position was commander of the Muscat and Oman Field Force, protecting the new oil wells from desert brigands, in 1953-4 (Coriat n.d.). He was then on the Foreign Office list from 1954 to 1959 and died of cancer in July 1960.

Coriat was able to inspire respect and even affection throughout his career in the Sudan, despite the harshness he often displayed. The expressions of admiration from both Sudanese and British colleagues were genuine. When he left the Zeraf District he reported that 'the Chiefs also were I think sorry to lose me and one simply had to spit in my hand as a farewell compliment, though he knew I disliked the practice!' (spitting is a form of blessing; the more energetic the spitting, the stronger the blessing). When he left Malakal in 1931 the deputy governor, E. G. Coryton, wrote in a personal note, 'there is no need really for me to repeat what is common knowledge, but there is not the slightest doubt that you & Wyld laid the foundation stones of the Southern districts in this Province & found out the difficulties & the remedies necessary. Others coming after have copied or builded [*sic*] on your foundations. . . . I think you have done magnificently.' Another colleague, Major L. E. Humphreys, MC, recalled some forty years after leaving the Sudan: 'Speaking with Coriat or, even walking with him in the street, you could sense the staunchness and strength of his character and strength of his personality, and he mostly had a short or tight smile on his lips. Dark brown eyes. Bright. Alive. Again I mention his long "frontiersman's" stride, not exactly a prowl but he sure planted each foot strongly on the ground. I would have gone anywhere with him, i.e. into any danger, for you'd know he'd be at your elbow, or, as in the Indian mutiny days, back to back.' A colleague from his Kordofan days, K. D. D. Henderson wrote, 'we all liked and admired him very much. And that goes for the Sudanese too.' To another Kordofan companion, E. A. Aglen, who later served among the Nuer, 'Corry'

57. Romilly diaries (1932), SAD G/S 833.

was always 'one of my heroes'. Perhaps the most remarkable compliment came from a northern Sudanese education officer in Kordofan in the late 1940s who recollected that Coriat was tough, *walakin gelbu dabab* (but his heart was gold) (Henderson 1987: 103). John Winder, recalling his own experiences in Coriat's former district, remembers that when he was faced with 'an old and tiresome cattle case' among the Baliet Dinka on the Sobat, 'I started off by getting my mounted police to round up all the cattle in the neighbourhood and then suggested we all got down to the business. . . . The Dinka did not seem to object to my preliminary actions but admiringly muttered "chap Kerkwac" [Girkuai].' Even today among the Gaawar, his harshest critics are those who were born after he left the province; those elders who knew and worked with him are inclined to be more charitable.<sup>58</sup>

### *Coriat's Work and Writings*

The value of Coriat's writings on the Nuer can be assessed by evaluating his quality as an administrator first, before comparing him with other ethnographers. One must understand his place in the development of Nuer administration, the problems which confronted him, and the administrative constraints on his writing. It is only then that one can discuss the contribution his papers make to understanding administrative history, the history of the Nuer, and Nuer ethnography.

Coriat was a new type of administrator among the Nuer, spending more time with his subjects than had the itinerant inspectors of the past. His attitude towards the Nuer contrasts markedly with the attitudes of most of his predecessors. The immediate comparison is with H. C. Jackson, who was the first official to attempt a lengthy and systematic ethnography. Jackson felt no affection for the Nuer. 'Lazy to a degree, indifferent to the outer world and any suggestion of progress,' he wrote, 'they are a heart-breaking race with which to have to deal. . . . Indeed it is difficult to see how, in the near future any real moral, material or spiritual progress or development can be expected of them.' He wished 'to depict them now as they really are, in all their barbarism and degradation, before the mists of time have enfolded their past in a romance that was never theirs, and assigned to them an attractiveness that they have never possessed' (Jackson 1923: 60). Coriat's surviving writings, including his private correspondence, are free of such remote and hostile judgements. He may have compared the Nuer to children (a common imperial sentiment of

58. Coriat to Kathleen, 02.03.27 and E. G. Coryton to 'Coriato', 29.12.31, Coriat MSS; personal communications from Major L. E. Humphreys, K. D. D. Henderson, E. A. Aglen, John Winder and Paul Howell.

superiority); he may have disliked individual Nuer with whom he had to deal; but he spoke Nuer; he had Nuer friends; he had Nuer relatives. As far as the Nuer were concerned he looked and acted more like one of them than any previous British official.

Coriat had both the opportunity and the ability to learn more about the Nuer than anyone before him, but his reports are part of the official record of government. They deal with administrative matters, are written for administrators, and focus on topics of immediate use to administration. Though Coriat knew Nuer, there is little of value for the linguist in his writings. Though it was also important for him to know something about Nuer spiritual and social life, these were not suitable topics for explicit and detailed analysis in the official correspondence of the 1920s. Religious figures, social and political organization, are all discussed and judged according to their relevance to administrative problems. We will find in Coriat's papers more local detail than is often found in ethnographic writings, but less subtlety of analysis. The detail, however, is rich. There are explicit discussions of local politics, rivalries between leaders, problems of environment and economics, matters of law, and relations with other peoples (particularly the Dinka). There is also much which can be inferred about religion and social life. Taken all together, Coriat's writings can add considerably to an appreciation of the theoretical arguments in Evans-Pritchard's ethnography. It is futile to discuss the theory of Nuer politics, for instance, without reference to some examples. Coriat gives us many examples to discuss.

One must not lose sight of the fact, however, that Coriat was reporting about his own time; he was not attempting to define enduring principles of Nuer life. The main historical value of Coriat's reports lies in what he reveals about Nuer-government relations in the 1920s. Even after two decades of contact government activities and policies had not yet begun to dominate Nuer life. The Nuer, both collectively and individually, were trying to work out a *modus vivendi* with an alien power which remained distant, but which made increasing demands and would not go away. That *modus vivendi* could only be made through personal negotiation with individual government representatives. In over twenty years of British attempts to administer the Nuer, Coriat was the first person with whom satisfactory negotiations could take place. The government insisted on the right to collect taxes, to appoint (or at least confirm) leaders, and to settle disputes. These were the three major issues which preoccupied both Coriat and the Nuer for nearly a decade.

Taxation (or the collection of tribute) implied the recognition of subordination to the government, but it was further justified as payment for the services government supplied. In the 1920s about the only service the government did supply (and that erratically) was the maintenance of public order through the settlement of disputes. The Nuer, however, did not see the payment of tribute as a return for a service. Tribute was the necessary price to keep government troops at bay; it was quite literally 'protection money'. Since tribute was collected in items the Nuer needed for their own physical survival—grain and

cattle—they had to make a fine calculation in sacrificing present needs for future security. Government health measures, veterinary services and reserve stores against famine were still underdeveloped (if not absent) at this time. In giving up their food to the government, the Nuer got very little in return.

This presented a problem to any thoughtful administrator. Tribute imposed an economic hardship on the Nuer, and the burden was correspondingly increased when tribute was paid in grain (as in the early 1920s), which paradoxically the Nuer were more willing to give up. Not all administrators realized this, many assuming that the Nuer could achieve regular grain surpluses. Certainly Jackson, who never visited the Nuer in the cultivation season, attributed seasonal hunger entirely to Nuer laziness (Jackson 1923: 60). There is nothing easy or assured about crop production in the Upper Nile plains (see Jonglei Investigation Team 1954, Johnson 1988), where abundant crops are produced in only about one year in seven. Coriat had some appreciation that grain was important during the hungry months of the dry season, the time when most taxes were collected (doc. 1.2), though he continued to underestimate the value Nuer placed on cultivation, an inevitable by-product, perhaps, of listening to endless cattle cases (doc. 4.1). By 1931 he saw clearly that the economic development of the Nuer would be very difficult if it was based solely on traditional methods of agriculture and herding (doc. 4.2). But he could only raise the question; he offered no solutions. In this he was no different from his successors. From the 1930s until independence British administrators in Upper Nile Province wrestled with the problem of how the Nilotic pastoralists could first pay for even part of the simple services which were gradually extended to them, and later develop beyond the subsistence economy. The introduction of cash payment for tax in the late 1930s only forced the Nuer to sell their cattle and grain at regular intervals in order to obtain money; it did not by itself stimulate production.

Coriat's comment in 1931, 'that one is uncertain, even were there a latent wealth in the Nuer country, whether economic development can be made to fit into an entirely Tribal system of control', proved partially prophetic. Since the early 1950s it has been assumed that local development can come about only through heavy investment in non-traditional means of production. Most of the money that now circulates in Nuer hands has been earned through migrant wage-labour. The discovery of oil in the very districts where Coriat once served has raised other development prospects. But for all that, the development future of the Nuer and other inhabitants of the Upper Nile remains highly problematic.

Given the Anglo-Egyptian government's inability to offer any prospect of lasting economic security, it is, perhaps, surprising that the Nuer seemed so willing to allow the government to interfere in their internal life to the extent of adjudicating disputes over cattle ownership, marriage, inheritance and compensation. Coriat's reports on the Bar Gaawat, the Lou and the Western Nuer indicate that they did show a willingness to let the government do just that. This was in keeping with a tradition of bringing in outsiders to act as arbitrators



between communities (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 173–4; 1956: 292–3). Peace is important to the Nuer precisely because the pattern of feuding makes it so difficult to attain. The most effective peacemakers, Evans-Pritchard tells us, are those who exist between major political segments. Coriat records (doc. 1.2) how the Kerpeil lineage were unable to merge their neutral role as earth-masters with their politically central position as original settlers in the Gaawar migration. Some of the most famous earth-masters and peacemakers among the Lou and the Gaawar in the late nineteenth century—Yuot Nyakong, Ngundeng Bong and Deng Laka—were all foreigners to the communities which they served. Yuot and Deng Laka were Dinka. The government, and particularly Coriat and his successors, became part of that pattern.

The tradition of bringing in strangers to keep the peace, which the government unwittingly continued, affected the development of customary law. For over twenty years Coriat's administrative predecessors had operated in almost complete ignorance of the custom they were trying to enforce (Johnson 1986*a*). Coriat, through his knowledge of the language, was able to participate directly in disputes and gradually learn the principles by which they were settled. Though Jackson produced a sketchy version of 'elements of judicial life', based on conversations with and through his interpreter (Jackson 1923: 100–6), Coriat's outline (doc. 1.2) was the first written by a Nuer-speaking official. It was written as an addendum to Jackson and gave a fuller account of rates of compensation for various acts of injury and infringements of rights. Given the absence of any examples cited, and the very great potential for misunderstanding, none of Coriat's descriptions of customary law can be accepted as completely authoritative. Still, he continued to learn, and he paid the prophet Dual Diu the supreme complement of imitation in proposing to reduce compensatory payments in long-standing feuds throughout his district (doc. 1.4), as Dual had earlier proposed for the Gaawar.

If the Nuer placed Coriat firmly in an existing tradition of incorporating foreigners into the very centre of Nuer life, the government's involvement in the selection of Nuer leaders was still a matter of negotiation. In theory, and largely in practice, appointment of chiefs was supposed to be a matter of conferring recognition on leaders selected by the people themselves. But the government did set constraints by which those leaders might be selected, and gave clear indications of what sort of person might be an appropriate 'traditional' leader. The government also structured the hierarchy by which chiefs were ordered, and deposed chiefs it found unsuitable.

Coriat had a very pragmatic approach towards chiefs. Anyone who could command a following he recognized as a leader. He then encouraged those who showed themselves capable of implementing government decisions. Among the Lou and Western Nuer, Coriat advocated developing chiefly authority and autonomy, even to the point of allowing successful chiefs some leeway in the matter of collecting fines (docs. 1.5, 4.1, 4.2). Thus there were material rewards for those who co-operated with the government, and with the creation

of the Chiefs' Police there were other ways of supplementing an ambitious leader's power. Competition between leaders of opposing groups was thus frequently intensified. This is more clearly documented in Coriat's reports on the Western Nuer and Lou than among the Gaawar, where government support for Dual Diu helped to control competition. But in the other two districts the government embarked on a policy of circumventing the prophets who were then the most influential leaders. This encouraged internal rivalries and led to the murder of a British DC (Captain Fergusson) in the one instance, and the death of a prophet (Guek Ngundeng) in the other.

Coriat was actively involved in the overthrow of Guek, but only because he thought Guek a dangerous and unsuitable chief. Dual Diu had been, by Coriat's account, an efficient chief, and the government bore some blame for alienating him (doc. 3.4). Among the Western Nuer, Coriat's favourite chief was Buom Diu (doc. 4.2), another prophet. But the events of the 1920s led ultimately to the exclusion of prophets and other major spiritual leaders from the hierarchy of government chiefs. Coriat's enthusiasm for strong leadership among the Nuer was not shared by his successors. Willis flatly rejected Coriat's recommendations for the Western Nuer and advocated the use of courts there to reduce the powers of individual chiefs (doc. 4.1). Throughout the 1930s the number of chiefs, representing smaller and smaller sections, increased in each of the districts where Coriat had served. As one DC among the Gaawar later put it, there were to be 'no big men—no paramount chiefs—no Dwal Dius. . .'<sup>59</sup> Rivalries were not only recognized but institutionalized, for a time, to keep the ambitions of Nuer leaders in check. It was only in the 1940s that the idea of Nuer paramount chiefs came back into administrative favour.<sup>60</sup> Coriat's reports must be read, therefore, as representing a phase in administrative thinking and practice, advocating a policy which was not continued in all respects after his departure, but which was never completely repudiated.

In addition to giving this grass-roots view of local administration, Coriat presents the only detailed contemporary account we have of many aspects of Nuer society in this period. His Nuer are recognizable in Evans-Pritchard's later studies, but at the same time Coriat's observations do suggest that a different emphasis from Evans-Pritchard's is possible. His reports also document the change in political terminology which followed the publication of Evans-Pritchard's earliest studies. Before Evans-Pritchard the units of Nuer political organization were only vaguely identified; after the publication of his 'The Nuer: Tribe and Clan' series (1933–5), administrators described Nuer political divisions with greater precision.

In common with his predecessors, Coriat used only two undefined terms to describe the political organization of a primitive people: 'tribe' and 'clan'. He saw

59. J. Winder, 'Note on the Evolution of Policy in Regard to Chiefs Sub-chiefs & Headmen', Nasir END 1.F.1 and 2 vol. 1.

60. B. A. Lewis, 'The Nuer Political Problem', December 1944, SRO UNP 66.G.3/3.

the Nuer people as a single 'tribe' which was divided into 'sub-tribes' or 'clans', corresponding to what Evans-Pritchard later termed 'tribes'. The Gaawar 'sub-tribe' was divided into two sections, and within those sections were the 'shens' (*ciengs*), units which Evans-Pritchard later called lineages, segments and sections. Coriat described the shen as a family with many branches, but he tended to apply the term more to political units with territorial identities than groups of kin. For him there was no need to make administrative differentiations further than the 'sub-shen'.

Coriat did not use these terms precisely or even consistently, but neither did he assume a rigid political structure. He describes in documents 1.2 and 1.3 the great fluidity of sectional identity and draws our attention to the way in which units can expand, decline, divide or even disappear as territorial entities. The lists of Gaawar *ciengs* he gives do not correspond exactly to the lists recorded by his successors (cf. e.g. Evans-Pritchard 1940: 141); nor are they necessarily the names modern Gaawar use to identify themselves today. Coriat's tendency to identify sections by their 'chiefs' is, perhaps, mainly an administrative convenience required by the nature of the documents, which were written for the aid of new administrators. In this respect the documents might appear to over-emphasise the role of individual leaders in initiating both secession and amalgamation. But the identification of a series of personal rivalries in documents 1.3, 1.5 and 4.1 does tend to confirm the importance of personal ambition in local politics. It is this precise history of internal disputes which is largely absent from Evans-Pritchard's presentation of his theory of segmentation.

Coriat records other reasons for groups hiving off from each other. The most important, of course, and one we have come to expect from Evans-Pritchard's writings, is the feud. Coriat pays particular attention to this in his description of the Bar Gaawar (docs. 1.2 and 1.3), where we see the Bar disturbed not only by internal feuds, but by Radh Gaawar–Thiang Nuer fights. There is also passing reference to feuds among the Western Nuer in document 4.1. But fighting is not the only impetus to movement. In documents 1.3 and 2.1 Coriat gives details of the attempt of some of the Jamogh Gaawar to move southwards along the Duk ridge, a movement precipitated by the changed environmental conditions on the ridge after the high floods of 1916–18. Had it been successful it would have meant the Nuer occupation of more Dinka territory, but it was halted by government intervention. Nuer 'expansion', Coriat shows us, did not end with the nineteenth century.

In giving the details of sectional settlement and grazing patterns (see especially docs. 1.3 and 1.5), Coriat also gives us a rather different picture of inter-ethnic relations than is contained in the standard ethnography of the Nuer. For those modern anthropologists who have taken Evans-Pritchard's description of structural opposition too literally, it may come as a shock to find Dinka settlements in Gaawar territory, Dinka communities in Gaawar villages, a Gaawar section living among the Dinka, Lou grazing with the Gaawar, Shilluk

living interspersed among the Dinka, and the Ballak mixing with the Jikany. It is no wonder than when Coriat's successors tried to sort these peoples out, they failed.

Coriat is an immensely valuable observer of contemporary life, and this is his real contribution to Nuer ethnography. Every year for nine years he visited some part of Nuerland, and the continuity of his visits lends weight to his observations. That he was not analytical in his description of the Nuer is evident in those sections where he makes an explicit contribution to ethnography (docs. 1.2 and 5.1). We have already seen that he was not a theoretical man. Whether he would have made a more systematic analysis of his ethnographic observations had his education not been interrupted by the war is an open question. But this leads us to the final assessment to be made about Coriat as a historian.

It is clear that Coriat the contemporary observer is very good. Coriat the historian is another matter. There is a peculiar inattention to dates, even when presenting the dates of events in which he took part. Thus we find in a 1931 letter (doc. 2.2) that he gives the date of the Gaawar-Ghol boundary settlement as 1926 rather than 1925; in 1929 (doc. 1.5) he gives 1927 instead of 1926 for the transfer of the Bar Gaawar to the Zeraf Valley District; in 1931 (doc. 3.4) he says Dual Diu was arrested in 1929 rather than 1930. None of these dates is far off, and in some cases it is really only a matter of weeks. When he deals with events which occurred before his own time among the Nuer he becomes progressively less reliable. The initiation of the Pilual age-set was delayed by the floods of 1916-18 and took place in 1920-1 rather than 1916, as given by Coriat (doc. 1.2); the last Gaawar fight with the Dinka before 1928 took place in 1918, not 1916 (doc. 1.2 and doc. 1.3); and slave-raiding against the Western Nuer began long before 1870 (doc. 4.1).

These inaccuracies are minor sins. Coriat was not a scholar, and in his later reports he was often writing from memory, without reference to earlier documents. But they are evidence that he was habitually weak on chronology. He was also rather casual in claiming time depths of 350 or 400 years (docs. 1.2, 4.1) without giving any basis for his calculations. We must bear this in mind when trying to use his own reconstructions of Nuer history. This is a particular problem when dealing with his account of early Gaawar history and the life of Ngundeng.

Coriat's account of the Gaawar crossing of the Nile, the rise of Nuaar Mer, Deng Laka's revolution, and the succession of Macar and Dual Diu (doc. 1.2) is the most detailed account of any aspect of Nuer history written by a British official from Nuer sources before the 1930s. Coriat in many cases got his information from participants in the events he described, old men whose memories may have become somewhat hazy. Coriat considerably telescopes events, and this would be expected if he heard the stories presented as a continuous narrative. Many older Gaawar today who, like Coriat himself, heard these stories from Deng Laka's contemporaries, still tend to relate this history in an unbroken sequence in roughly the same order and with approximately

the same emphasis as Coriat gives here (though details do vary, reflecting the different experiences of the ancestral sources). They are, however, able to supply a longer time span between events when asked direct questions concerning the chronology of related incidents such as floods, the initiation of age-sets, and the history of neighbouring peoples such as the Lou. It may be that only a historian would think of subjecting a good story to such minute dissection, but the fact remains that the Gaawar themselves are able to provide a consistent chronological framework to their narrative history. It is not embedded in the narrative, but it is embedded in historical memory. Coriat should not be faulted for having made only a shallow excavation of the historical memory by 1923 (he extracted far more than anyone before him), but there was more to be mined.

The same weakness in chronology is apparent in his account of the life of Ngundeng, which is given here in document 3.2, and also in more detail in Coriat 1939. Here he claims that Guek was born in about 1883 and that his father's 'Pyramid' was built in about 1863 (perhaps a typographical error?). Coriat's confusion seems to arise from two mistaken assertions. The first was that Guek was a member of the Dang-gonga age-set (doc. 1.5), and the second was that slave-raiding against the Nuer began around 1870 (doc. 4.1). The Dang-gonga age-set was initiated in the 1890s, and some of its members may have been born in the early 1880s, but Guek was not a Dang-gonga. He was a Luac, the age-set after Dang-gonga, and marked some time after Ngundeng's death in 1906. It was the Dang-gonga age-set which helped to build the 'Pyramid' around the time of their initiation. Soon after its completion Ngundeng was raided by a group of 'Turuk' which we now know to have been Sudanese soldiers of the Egyptian army under the command of Major Arthur Blewitt, administrator of Fashoda District in 1902 (Johnson 1982*b*). Coriat here remarks on this raid, but attributes it to Arab slavers. Since he assumed that the Arabs first began raiding the Nuer in 1870, it followed that the 'Pyramid' must have been made in the 1860s.

It is clear that Coriat knew far more about Gaawar history than about Lou, and far more about Deng Laka and Dual Diu than he did about Ngundeng and Guek. In addition to the errors discussed above, he claims that Guek was the organizer of Lou opposition to the government in 1917 (doc. 3.2 below and Coriat 1939: 227–8). Contemporary British documents make no mention of Guek, but identify another prophet, Pok Kerjiok, as the main leader of Lou warriors at that time,<sup>61</sup> and this point is confirmed by modern Lou testimony. What is particularly interesting about the errors contained in his 1928 report (doc. 3.2), however, is that his 1939 article considerably expands on Ngundeng's life, and even corrects some of his earlier statements. Though he still gives Guek's birthdate as 1883 (Coriat 1939: 226), he does not place the building of the Mound in the 1860s. It would appear that much of Coriat's

61. See SRO UNP SCR 15.10.

subsequent knowledge about Ngundeng and Guek's earlier history was gained after 1927, not before. The only Lou who were then willing to talk to him about the prophets were Guek's enemies and the government's allies, a point made in recent Lou testimony.<sup>62</sup> This would explain some of the more extraordinary claims Coriat later made about Guek, such as the report that Guek was believed to be able to turn himself into a goat (*ibid.*). This is tantamount to an accusation of sorcery and would have been made by someone wishing to deny Guek's claim to prophecy.

There are other points of Coriat's historical knowledge which should be questioned, such as his claim that the Nuer fought the Dinka and Anuak in tribal 'alliances', or that Western Nuer 'tribal organization' remained intact because, unlike the Nuer to the east, they were scarcely raided by slavers (docs. 4.1 and 5.1). It is true that there were times when sections of Lou combined with sections of Jikany to fight the Anuak, but there does not ever seem to have been an alliance between whole tribes, nor is there any evidence that the Lou and Gaawar joined together to fight the Dinka. Individual Lou did join Dual Diu in his raid on Duk Fadiat in 1928, but there was no formal grouping together of Lou and Gaawar sections, much less all of the Lou with all of the Gaawar. We also know from contemporary sources, as well as modern Western Nuer testimony, that the Western Nuer did suffer from fairly constant, if casual, raids by Arab slavers, the Egyptian government, and the Mahdists from the 1840s until the 1890s. Such raids rarely extended far inland, but the Western Nuer seem to have suffered far more continuously from raiding than either the Gaawar or the Lou. Coriat assumed that the great territorial dispersal of Nuer clans which he observed east of the Bahr el-Jebel was a result of the sort of slave-raiding which the Gaawar recalled in their stories about Nuaar Mer. It is fairly clear from Evans-Pritchard's account of Nuer political organization and kinship that this dispersal is a result of Nuer expansion itself (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 1951).

Any final assessment of Coriat's writings must include his influence on Evans-Pritchard, beyond those comments explicitly directed to him in document 5.1. We cannot be certain how many of Coriat's reports Evans-Pritchard did read. His copy of document 1.2 is in the library of the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology in Oxford, and his only annotations consist of ticks against the names of 'Gaweir shens'. Coriat may have allowed him to see his final handing-over notes on the Western Nuer (doc. 4.1), but it is highly unlikely that Evans-Pritchard saw any of the other Gaawar or Lou reports. These were confidential to the administration, dealing with the implementation of government policies. Evans-Pritchard, being a civilian, would not have had free access to them. He makes no reference to government reports in his work, beyond the old numbers of the *Sudan Intelligence Report*, a preliminary census in the early 1930s, and Coriat's critique of his own paper. Coriat's transmission of

62. Lou texts 4.2, in Johnson, in preparation.

his knowledge of the Nuer to Evans-Pritchard was almost exclusively oral.

Given the fact that Coriat was responsible for drawing up most government lists of tribes, clans and 'shens' for the Lou, Gaawar and Western Nuer in the 1920s, it is very likely that Evans-Pritchard had Coriat specifically in mind when he devised his own terminology for Nuer political and social organization. We can see from Coriat's decision to leave 'shen' untranslated throughout most of his reports, and from his discussion of tribes and clans in document 5.1, why Evans-Pritchard had to devise a new terminology to try to divine and explain the processes Coriat was content merely to describe. In the end the only term they use in the same way in their descriptions of Nuer politics is the word 'feud'. Their 'tribes' and 'clans' are quite different. Perhaps Evans-Pritchard's primary, secondary and tertiary segments were too tailored to administrative requirements, implying a more orderly and automatic process than was always the case. But we can see from Coriat's reports why later administrators welcomed Evans-Pritchard's more precise terminology.

The one area we can identify where Coriat did directly influence Evans-Pritchard's analysis is his presentation of Nuer history in documents 1.2 and 5.1. Coriat is at his weakest in his historical reconstructions, as we have seen above. Yet it is his basic outline of the Nuer past which Evans-Pritchard accepted with the fewest reservations. Coriat's description of Deng Laka in document 1.2 corresponds almost exactly to Evans-Pritchard's later interpretation of prophets as ralliers of opposition to foreign peoples. In all other aspects of Nuer life which he was able to observe directly, Evans-Pritchard had his own qualifications to add to Coriat's interpretations. The fact that he accepted Coriat's reconstruction of Nuer history is evidence, perhaps, of how little opportunity Evans-Pritchard had of pursuing his own historical enquiries among the Nuer.

The defects in Coriat's reconstructions of Nuer history would be misleading if we had no other sources—written and oral, European and Nuer—on which to draw. They do demonstrate the need to take into consideration a broad range of materials, even if only to make the most effective use of Coriat as a source. But if there are defects in Coriat's account of the Nuer, they are a product of the fact that he was not able to undertake sustained research into subjects unrelated to the main task of administration. The conditions of his work were such that he was unable to make a systematic recording of what he did learn, a problem all administrators (and even many academic fieldworkers) faced. The quality and detail of his recorded observations can only make us regret that he did not write more, and regret most profoundly that not all of his writings survived. The survival of the main body of his reports and correspondence does add measurably to our knowledge of this crucial period in Nuer history, revealing a wealth of detail about Nuer society, and about Nuer relations with the government, their neighbours, and each other.