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Review

M.C. JEDREJ, *Ingessana. The Religious Institutions of a People of the Sudan-Ethiopia Borderland*

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Reviews

contributions to the field of Ethiopian studies. I hope to develop the knowledge of this region through an accurate edition of ELLERO's unpublished notes I am trying to put together and publish this year¹. In the meantime, this publication reminds us of the importance of ELLERO's work which has been undervalued so far in the field of Ethiopian studies. This volume is therefore very welcome and it preludes to further investigation.

Irma Taddia

JĒDREJ, M.C., *Ingessana. The Religious Institutions of a People of the Sudan-Ethiopia Borderland. = Studies of Religion in Africa. Supplements to the Journal of Religion in Africa, XIII.* Leiden, New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995. 136 pp. Price: Nlg 80,00 / US\$ 51.75.

M.C. JĒDREJ's monograph on the religion of the Ingessana in southern Funj (Blue Nile Province of the Sudan) is based on field research carried out during the time of his lectureship at Khartoum University from 1969 to 1973 and another sojourn in 1985. There was thus a considerable gap between the collection of data and their publication due to further stays in Ethiopia and West African countries, which have, however, widened the author's horizon for his analysis of socio-religious phenomena in the Sudan-Ethiopia borderland.

Linguistically, the Ingessana belong to the Eastern Sudanic group of the Chari-Nile branch of the Nilo-Saharan family. In former ethnological classifications (e.g. by VINIGI GROTTANELLI) they were listed among the so-called pre-Nilotes, a cluster of ethnic groups along the north-western escarpment of the Ethiopian highlands which were characterised by a variety of 'archaic' cultural features (the raising of pigs, etc.). It has to be pointed out that this particular classification has been questioned for a number of reasons which are outside the focus of this study and have therefore not been considered here. The diffusionist concept of a belt of culturally more or less related "paleo-nigrific" peoples in the Sudanic zone between the upper Niger region and the Ethiopian highlands is even more to be doubted in the light of the

¹ In the meantime, the first volume of ELLERO's notes has appeared in print: UOLDELUL CHELATI DIRAR, ALESSANDRO GORI and IRMA TADDIA, *Lettere Tigrine. I documenti etiopici del Fondo Ellero.* Torino 1997. See also a review of the monograph on page 242.

present state of research. There are, however, striking cultural similarities between the ethnic groups in southern Funj, including the Ingessana, and the indigenous people of the Nuba mountains. (When I was confronted with the necessity of developing a system of “culture areas” for the exhibitions of the Sudan National Museum of Ethnography I decided to join these two ethnic clusters in an area labeled ‘Central-Southern Sudan’.)

It is of interest for *Aethiopia* that cultural and historical links were not restricted to the west. There have also been continuous and intensive relations between the Ingessana and peoples of Ethiopia such as the Gumuz and Majangir of the escarpment and the Oromo and Amhara of the highlands. The Ingessana rank among those groups labelled pejoratively *Shankilla* (“niggers”, potential slaves) by the Ethiopian highlanders and were often raided by them as well as by Sudanese Muslims of the Funj kingdom, the Turko-Egyptian and the Mahdist states and by their southern neighbours, the Nuer. Because of this intercessant persecution they offered stubborn resistance to any kind of alien influence still during the period of Anglo-Egyptian dominion and have hitherto been very reluctant to move down from their mountainous domiciles and settle in the surrounding plains. Since 1986 during the ongoing Sudanese civil war their territory has repeatedly been struck by the disastrous effects of fighting between the armed forces of the Khartoum government and the Sudan People’s Revolutionary Army (SPLA). At present, the traditional patterns of Ingessana culture are seriously threatened by the aggressive impact of fundamentalist Islamic policy. JEDREJ’s book can therefore be regarded as a documentation of a vanishing culture in the context of urgent anthropological research.

The historical outline is followed by nine chapters focusing on relevant socio-religious aspects. The description of the modes of livelihood and everyday life starts with an account of the structure and function of the Ingessana homestead. In this chapter some more details concerning the construction, the inventory and also the basic economic activities would have been desirable, although ethnographic facts of this type were explicitly not intended to constitute an essential part of the study. Each of the major subgroups of the Ingessana has an economic specialization: the Jok Kulelek own great herds of livestock, the Jok Bulek are renowned for their farming capacities, the Jok Gor are skilled weavers and the Jok Tau claim to be unmatched as blacksmiths and iron workers. All of these activities are intensively interconnected with a variety of ritual concepts and ceremonial actions.

The topic “marriage and affinity” has always been of central interest in British Social Anthropology and it occupies an important chapter also in

JEDREJ's study. Restrictions concerning the choice of marriage partners are numerous among the Ingessana, and so are the networks of avoidances and the joking relationships between affines and in-laws in particular. The lineage system is based on patrilineality, whereas within the households matrilineal principles and matrilocality prevail. The links between the living members of the society and their dead ancestors are pronouncedly intense, a fact which is regularly manifested by acts of veneration and sacrifices of animals. Ritual remedies particularly prominent in Ingessana religion are medical substances mainly consisting of so-called venoms. They are intentionally dedicated to promoting and sustaining an order of life by correcting or 'turning around' for the benefit of the community persons who have violated that order. Concepts of fertility are symbolically materialized when performers exhibit big wooden or stone phalluses on occasion of certain ceremonies. Hereditary ritual experts are recruited from both sexes. They are usually the persons consulted for the interpretation of dreams, which are considered as occasions when invisible beings, gods, ancestors and evil spirits erupt into the affairs of people, make demands, issue warnings, give instructions, etc. The dreams of individuals equipped with the capacity of second sight and of the custodians of the great shrines allegedly have consequences extending beyond their immediate circle of kin and affines.

The ethnographer's particular attention was attracted by a phenomenon that he describes as "the symbolism of ash". Rituals in which ash occurred to a conspicuous extent were the promotion, even sometimes the procurement, of life. This use of ash in manifold practices of purification, sacrifices, etc. is not restricted to the Ingessana, but, as the author demonstrates, it can be exemplified by parallels in numerous other African societies.

The last chapter, entitled "ultimate circumstances: centre and periphery," focuses on the relevance of shrines for the socio-religious life of the Ingessana. Their custodians are considered powerful mediating figures between spirits and humans as well as between the past and the present. The shrines which serve as the homesteads of gods do not differ much from ordinary houses, but they are strictly taboo for anybody who is not regarded as being imbued with the particular spiritual force associated with them. (The author pointed out that he himself could not manage to overcome the inherent code of restrictions and was thus hampered in his participant observation.) According to the concept of the Ingessana the gods inhabiting those shrines are imagined as more or less anthropomorphic beings, either male or female, and bearing their proper names. Moreover, the shrines are symbolic places which circumscribe a space outside profane space where the celestial and the terrestrial, the gods and mortals,

periodically come together as they did permanently before the creation of the human world. For the Ingessana they constitute metaphors of the continuity and identity of their society.

Extensive mythological traditions concerning how these phenomena came about are either lacking or were not recorded by the author. Etiological narratives, however, exist among the Ingessana. In an appendix JĘDREJ presents four fables which he analyses in a sort of structuralist approach. He, for example, concluded from their contents that a human/cultural sphere is opposed by another sphere of threatening wild beyond.

After the studies of CHRISTIAN DELMET on the Maban, of WENDY JAMES on the Uduk and of JOACHIM THEISS on the Koma, M.C. JĘDREJ's monograph on the Ingessana fills another gap in the ethnography of southern Funj, which had long been neglected in anthropological fieldwork. His approach did not aim at a holistic study, but, following his personal interests, he concentrated on a limited number of important socio-religious aspects. The author seems to have avoided "penetrative ethnography" as much as possible and instead has tried to employ to a certain extent the ideal of osmosis for his collecting of data. Emphasis was laid on the comparative method, i.e. interpreting the Ingessana materials by consulting parallels from their neighbours, mainly the Uduk and Nuer, and other African societies. The book is a valuable contribution to the advancement of anthropological knowledge in the Sudan-Ethiopia borderland. But it is also beyond question that more information on the Ingessana is needed, particularly with respect to their ecological, economic and material conditions.

Ulrich Braukämper

S. MUNRO-HAY and B. JUEL-JENSEN, *Aksumite Coinage*. London: Spink & Sons, 1995. 285 S., 75 Tf. Abb. £ 35.–

Seit seiner Dissertation *The Chronology of Aksum: A reappraisal of the history and development of the Aksumite state from numismatic and archaeological evidence*. Spink & Sons, London 1978, ist der Name des schottischen Archäologen STUART CHRISTOPHER MUNRO-HAY mit der numismatischen Forschung des axumitischen Reiches verbunden. Ursprünglich als Teilnehmer an der letzten vorrevolutionären Grabungskampagne des British Institute in Eastern Africa 1972–74 (die Grabungspublikation wurde von ihm betreut und