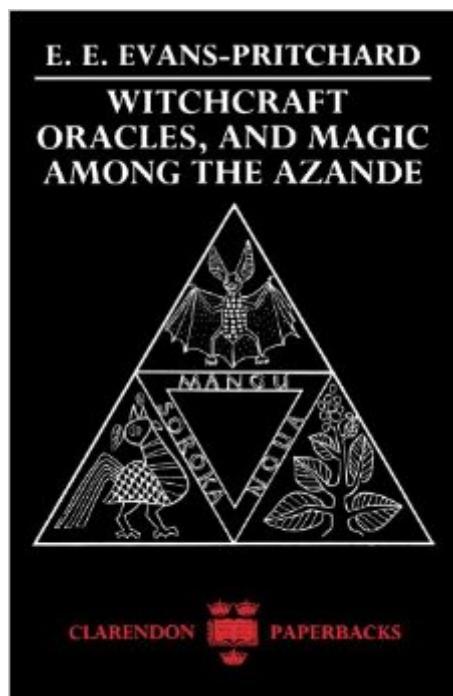


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Witchcraft, Oracles And Magic Among The Azande



Synopsis

This acknowledged masterpiece has been abridged to make it more accessible to students. In her introduction, Eva Gillies presents the case for the relevance of the book to modern anthropologists.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an abridged reprint of a book originally published in 1937. This book by anthropologist Evans-Pritchard is best understood as a reaction against the work of the earlier anthropologist Levy-Bruhl. Levy-Bruhl had argued that "primitive" people have a "pre-logical" mentality, in that they are willing to accept worldviews that include contradictions. Evans-Pritchard disagrees, and uses the case study of the Azande, an African tribe, to make his point. The Azande routinely appealed to "witchcraft" in their daily lives. (I cannot say how accurate Evans-Pritchard's account was of the Azande during his stay, or how much they have changed since the 30's.) For example, the Azande would explain at least some bad events as the result of witchcraft being practiced against them, and would use a "poison oracle" to determine who the witch was. ("Azande" is the noun, "Zande" is the adjective, like "Britons" vs. "British.") At first glance, this all seems irrational. However, Evans-Pritchard sets out the Azande beliefs in a way that shows that they form a fairly coherent system. He also notes that it was possible for him to live according to these beliefs during his stay with the Azande. This book (and some of Evans-Pritchard's essays) have stimulated an immense amount of secondary literature. Peter Winch (see his articles in Bryan R. Wilson, ed., *Rationality*) argues that Evans-Pritchard did not go far enough, because Evans-Pritchard claims that the Zande beliefs (while not "pre-logical"), are nonetheless unscientific, and mistaken. Winch argues that the

test of whether something (e.g., electrons or witchcraft) is real depends on the language and culture within which the judgment is being made.

E. E. Evans-Pritchard is regarded as one of the "founding fathers" of anthropology. *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande* is the result of his first fieldwork experience. Western cultures tend to consider other cultures inferior or primitive in comparison to their own and this unfortunately shows in Evans-Pritchard's writing. There are many points in the book where one must seriously consider the possibility that Evans-Pritchard had misunderstood a part of Azande culture due to the tint of his own cultural lens and misreported it as a result of misunderstanding. Evans-Pritchard discusses many parts of Azande culture as if they are something primitive and inferior. An example of this is a discussion between Evans-Pritchard and a friend of his among the Azande who believed that he had been the victim of a jealous neighbor's witchcraft. The man was a woodcarver of note in the area who's wood had suddenly split during carving. In the man's belief, the sudden split was due to witchcraft. Evans-Pritchard's treatment of the subject had an air of annoyance with the man's inability to consider other possible causes of the split that would have made more sense to a European mind. Despite what might be seen as an occasional and mild sense of cultural superiority over the Azande on part of Evans-Pritchard, the book is well worth the read. As previously stated, Evans-Pritchard is one of the first prominent figures in anthropology and *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande* is considered a classical anthropological text. Aside from the importance of the piece as a record of the evolution and form of such cultural studies, there is quite a bit to learn from the text.

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