...I do not dislike travels. But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in...I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars and pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all— it is very tiresome; and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention. (Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Chapter 14)

It was impossible to conjecture their origin, as they had neither tradition nor ideas of their past history.

(Samuel Baker writing about the people of Obbo, *The Albert N’yanza: great basin of the Nile*, 1866, i, 316-17)

...mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted;...

(Oscar Wilde, *The importance of being Earnest*, Act 2)

It was in September 1980 that I first thought about going to Sudan. I saw an advertisement in *The Guardian* for secondary school English language teachers to be employed by the Sudanese Ministry of Education. I had an interview at the embassy in London, together with a group of other hopefuls, and was asked a question, which at the time struck me as distinctly peculiar: ‘Oscar Wilde tells us that beautiful people find it more difficult to suffer adversity than ugly people. What do you think?’ I cannot remember my reply but, one month later, I arrived in Khartoum.

I was appointed to teach at a remote rural secondary school called Atar, located on an island at the edge of the Sudd marshes. The majority of my students were Shilluk, Nuer and Dinka men. I say men since, although the school was supposedly mixed, there was only a handful of girls and some three hundred ‘boys’, most of whom were older than me. In the event I found that there was less need to teach the English language than history and literature, for there was already a language teacher at the school. My history lessons initially amounted to little more than copying out on the blackboard a locally-made translation of the only copy of an Arabic text book about the Arab world. This was then learned by rote. Students would use coloured chalk to try to rewrite it from memory on the patches of whitewash remaining on some of the nearby destroyed buildings, the legacy of the
long war which had followed independence. It all had to be done for the final examinations, but the subject matter was of little interest to them. Many had spent their early life as refugees, their families having fled from fighting which was widely believed to have been provoked by state-supported attempts at 'Arabization'. Literature classes were much more lively, in part because there was no need to copy out everything on the blackboard as multiple copies of literature books were available. There were two sets of these books. Presumably they had formed part of a British aid package, since they were published in London, and were available at all Sudanese secondary schools. They were collections of plays, one by Bernard Shaw, the other by Oscar Wilde. For the Secondary School Certificate examinations students had to be prepared for a multiple choice paper on a set text. For several years it had been Oscar Wilde's *The importance of being Earnest*.
I would like to pause for a moment for the reader to speculate on the difficulties of explaining the joke 'the piano is not my forte' in these circumstances, or what 'divorces are made in heaven' means, or why acts of violence in Grosvenor Square are avoided by the fact that in England education has no effect whatsoever? Yet, notwithstanding these difficulties, the play was always a great success, primarily because it revolves around various confusions about engagements. The English verb 'to engage' had been appropriated into the jargon of young educated town dwellers to mean physical engagement, and as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. The play therefore read more like a script for a 'Carry on' film rather than the sophisticated comedy of manners Wilde intended. By extension, the term 'to Bunbury' (you will remember that Bunbury was Algernon's invaluable, fictitious friend who enjoyed extraordinary bad health, and regularly had a relapse whenever Algernon was supposed to spend an evening with his appalling Aunt Augusta) was used by my students to describe the general business of flirtation at night spots in Malakal, the nearest urban centre. According to the provincial director of education, it was precisely to stop 300 young men persistently 'bunburying' in Malakal, that it had been decided to locate the school on the inaccessible island. There was thus a considerable amount of affection for the piece, and many felt disappointed when the syllabus was finally changed for the 1984 examinations. The new text was Shaw's Arms and the man. I never taught it, although I did once hear students who had left school to join the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army being castigated as 'chocolate-box soldiers'.

Here then was a case of texts in action. A somewhat baroque case perhaps, but not, I think, particularly unusual. There was a lesson here about the ways in which texts can assume local meanings, particularly when they are printed, reified in some way (such as when they are connected with missionary activity, or, as in this case, with education), and where few other texts are available. Two further examples will amplify the point. Before leaving England I had looked for something to read about Sudan. I found what looked like an out-of-date paperback by E.E. Evans-Pritchard called The Nuer. I bought it partly because it had a map with Malakal marked on it. To my surprise I discovered that several educated local people had read it, and on numerous occasions I was referred to it, or to one of its sequels, when my questions about segmentary opposition became too irritating. Two years later, having passed a spell at Juba University teaching the history of the medieval papacy, I started to work at another secondary school called Palotaka, hundreds of miles to the south of Atar on the Uganda border. I again taught the history of the Arab world, but now I was less dependent on the Arabic text book since I had done some reading in the meantime. However, during one of the first lessons a student stood up in the class and took me to task for what I had said, correcting me in phrases that seemed familiar. It transpired
that he had obtained a copy of the notes I had reproduced on a duplicating machine at my former school, and had succeeded in learning them by heart. He found it hard to accept that something that had been printed in this way might be wrong. In retrospect, that this lesson about the currency of texts made so little impact on me seems quite remarkable. The rest of this paper relates to the business of learning it.

**MAKING HISTORICAL TEXTS**

Palotaka, the second school at which I taught, was located in an Acholi-speaking area. There are something like 30,000 people who call themselves Acholi in Sudan, and perhaps 300,000 in Uganda. By now, frustrated with what seemed to be the irrelevance of the history syllabus, I began to use my spare time to interview old people, and make historical texts out of what they told me. I must stress my own ignorance at this point. I had studied no African history before leaving Britain, and had the vaguest conception of what anthropology was all about. I was labouring under the misconception that nothing had been written about the Acholi before, and I thought it would be a good idea to try to write an account of the Acholi past to be reproduced and used in primary schools. I found that some of those I talked to had thought along similar lines, and had written down short accounts of their clan or chieftdom, and they would read these out when called upon to do so. Invariably these accounts included genealogies, and occasionally even dates. The following is part of the second text I collected. It was obtained from Mateo Lolori, the government sub-chief of Obbo, in April 1983. He was born in 1919, and was the great-grandson of Kaciba, the rwot (traditional chief), who had met the Victorian explorers Samuel and Florence Baker.

The royal clan of Obbo is Abong. Some of the other clans can make rain [i.e. they have their own rainmakers], but Abong is the most important. The other clans of the chieftdom are: Ketaka, Padiri, Logolo, Oposokomere, Lowodo, Oyeri, Pajombo, Pokongo, Lokide, Koyo, Ngabara, Tingli, Iyeri, Karamorok. The Abong came to this place in about 1524 under the leadership of Kitang. He was made chief (rwot) because he was so generous. He came from Boya, and first settled at Tilangore [in neighbouring Lotuko area], and fought the people there at the Field of Dance (Dibong Myel). Later he moved to Mt Kaf, and from there to Lobeca, three miles from the present Obbo market. The following are the descendants of Kitang who inherited the position of chief (rwot): Loperete, Tokboye, Malikiteng, Imay, Kabeke. Katula, Ogwee, Lobitak, Lili, Lolori, Agwinya, Kaciba, Abarayi (Ibrahim) who was killed on the 5th July 1905, and Aburi who retired in 1940 and died in 1969 while a refugee in Uganda. When Aburi retired, Vido became chief, but was removed by the British and imprisoned for trying to hang someone. He is now the rainmaker at Obbo. I [Mateo] then became sub-chief, but I do not make rain, I am a Christian. While I was a refugee in Uganda, Amon acted as chief, but now I have returned to take over. Obbo is much older than Pajok [a neighbouring chieftdom]. Anyoda, the founder of Pajok, only came in about 1890. In 1909 Obbo and Pajok fought a war against each other. Samuel Baker had come in 1863, and had met Kaciba at Lobeca. Baker had been staying at Tirangole, and Kaciba called him to come to visit. He was well
recieved with a Bwola dance, a special royal dance only performed in Sudan by the Obbo and Pajok chiefdoms [i.e. not by the other Acholi chiefdoms located north of the Sudan/Uganda border]. Baker stayed for seven months. He was called Lopurunda (hairy man), and his wife was called Anya Dwee ['Daughter of the Moon', because she was as white as the Moon]. . . .

In the course of the following eighteen months I collected scores of texts of this type, and also acquainted myself with the literature on the Acholi, which turned out to be copious. More recently, between 1987 and 1989, I have been doing field-work just south of the border among the Madi, the Acholi’s western neighbours, and in the course of this research I have visited the Acholi-speaking part of Uganda. Inevitably I now think very differently about what sub-chief Mateo told me than I did at the time, and it is perhaps only now, having worked among the Madi, that I have an idea of the broader ramifications of what he said.2

In the following paragraphs I want to comment on Mateo’s text from three perspectives. First, I shall look at what can be teased out of his version of the past by placing it in a local context, and comparing it with other testimonies collected in the neighbourhood; secondly, I shall comment on what Samuel Baker and other outsiders have written about Obbo in the light of the foregoing discussion of oral texts; and thirdly, I shall say something about how the perceptions of locals and outsiders have interrelated, and an Acholi history has been formulated.

Placed in a local setting, Mateo’s testimony is interesting both for what it includes and for what it leaves out. A few general observations will help contextualize it. Almost the whole population of this part of Sudan had fled during the war which followed Sudanese independence, either taking refuge in the Imatong Mountains to the north-east, or becoming refugees in Uganda. Virtually all those with education chose the latter option, and Mateo, who speaks good English, had been employed there as a court clerk. After the Addis Ababa agreement of 1972 people gradually returned, a process accelerated by the persecution of Acholi-speakers in Uganda under President Amin. Many returned reluctantly since they had spent most of their lives in Uganda, and had enjoyed a better standard of living there than they could expect in Sudan. During the colonial era, southern Sudan had been administered through a system of indirect rule which was more vigorously and consistently enforced than elsewhere in Africa.3 The consequence was that what was thought of as

1 Oral testimony of Mateo Lolori, April 1893.
2 Research in Sudan was partly funded by Norwegian Church Aid. Research in Uganda was funded by the University of Manchester, and by the European Economic Community, with logistical support provided by the Lutheran World Federation.
3 For a discussion of the ‘southern policy’ of the Anglo-Egyptian administration see R.O. Collins, The southern Sudan, (The Shiloh Centre, Tel Aviv University, 1975).
traditional chiefly authority was reinforced by the Anglo-Egyptian
government, and what were thought of as tribal cultural values became
fossilized. It seems that to some extent the flight to Uganda offered
Acholi from commoner clans (lokāl) a means of escape, and on
returning home they resisted any attempt at the reassertion of
authority associated with the royal/chiefly clans (lokāl). For their part,
members of chiefly clans tended to emphasize their ritual powers, and
their special relationship with the land. There was little privately- or
publicly-owned land in the area, and rights to land use were linked to
its use in the past, and to spirit (jok) shrines looked after by holders of
ritual office usually drawn from the chiefly clan. Fertility of the soil
was ensured by a rainmaker (rwot kot) a figure also closely connected
with the chiefly clan. Mateo, like most of the other government
sub-chiefs (jago), was from such a clan, in his case Abong, the chiefly
clan of Obbo, and he did what he could to promote that which, he
maintained, was by tradition his inherited authority.

One option for those unwilling to accept Abong claims was to
move away from parts of the chiefdom which had been cultivated at
the time of Anglo-Egyptian rule, into country which had been closed
to settlement as a consequence of sleeping-sickness and border control
measures. These places also attracted migrants from the neighbouring
Madi area, who would dig together with Acholi from Obbo in rotating
farm work groups, would speak the Acholi language, and even claim
to be Acholi. Mateo was unhappy about this in-migration. Compared with other parts of southern Sudan
Obbo and its environs are exceptionally fertile, and large sections were
uncultivated. It was a common fear that foreigners were coming to
steal the land, and this was automatically confirmed if they started to
cultivate. Mateo therefore made life as difficult as possible for Madis
living within his area of influence, particularly for the educated ones at
the secondary school and the nearby experimental farm run by
Norwegian Church Aid. He was alleged to have been instrumental in a
campaign of intimidation against the conscientious Madi deputy
headmaster at the school, destroying the crops he had planted and
eventually threatening his life.

Turning to Mateo's text, the following observations may be made
by comparing what he said with information from other informants. In
addition to my own inquiries, I make use of testimonies collected by
Crazzolara in the 1930s and Okeny in the 1970s. Mateo includes in
his list of Obbo clans all those incorporated into the government
sub-chieftainship, but several of these were in fact never part of the old

4 Tim Allen, 'Kwete and Kweri: Acholi farm work groups in southern Sudan', Manchester
Papers on Development, iii (1987), 78.
5 J.P. Crazzolara, The Lwoo (Verona: Missionari Comboniani, 1950/51 54); Kenneth Okeny,
'State formation in Acholi: the emergence of Obbo, Pajok and Panyikwara states, c. 1679–1914'
(University of Nairobi M.A. thesis, 1982).
chiefdom, and four of them, namely Pajombo, Pokongo, Koya and Tingli, at one time formed separate, independent polities of their own.

On the other hand, he omits any mention of the Lokomini, who, it seems, were the original chiefly clan. The following testimonies collected from three different informants give an idea of what might have happened. The first accords with Mateo’s statement about Abong generosity:

The Lokomini *rwot* (chief) was selfish. He did not take care of his people. Instead, he used to eat his meals on top of a tall ant-hill. His wives used a ladder to take the meals there. Then a new *rwot* came from Lotuko. This new *rwot* shared his meals with the people. He arrived well off (*obino pek*), so people began to follow him. . . One day rain fell very heavily. People caught plenty of white ants. They decided to take some to the new *rwot* from Lotuko. They also began to cultivate for him [i.e. they began to pay tribute to him in recognition of his authority].

The other two suggest a violent inception to Abong rule:

The Lokomini were an aggressive people (*joo kolo*). . . But the Abong were many and defeated them.7

When Abong came, they fought our people [i.e. Lokomini] and took away our rainstones. They also took charge of our *Jok Jikiloti* [the chiefdom spirit of Obbo]. . . We became *bong* [commoners].

Whatever actually occurred the Lokomini clan was broken up, with some families migrating, and others absorbed into commoner clans. There is even some indication that the Abong lineage responsible for looking after *Jok Jikiloti*, the chiefdom spirit, was adopted from the Lokomini. Incorporating the defeated in this way appears to have been quite common throughout the area.

Another interesting point that emerges from the first of these texts, as well as from many others, including Mateo’s, is that on arrival the Abong were not speaking a language of Lwo type. Lwo is the sub-section of the Western Nilotic languages of which modern Acholi forms a part (together with Shilluk, Anuak, Pari, Luo, Langi, Palwo etc.). Oral testimonies state that the Abong were originally from Lotuko or Boya,9 and it is clear that they spoke a Plains Nilotic (or proto-Plains Nilotic) tongue. Palotaka, the school at which I worked, was located close to Mateo’s home. The meaning of the name is ‘the place of Lotuko’. Furthermore, the origins of the Lokomini were also sometimes linked to Plains Nilotic groups. One of their ancestors, whose name was Obbo, is said to have become involved in a violent conflict

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6 Oral testimony of Saverio Olaa, quoted in Okeny, ‘State formation in Acholi’.
7 Oral testimony of Demensya Abwoyo, quoted in Okeny, ‘State formation in Acholi’.
8 Oral testimony of Abong-Tur Okende, quoted in Okeny, ‘State formation in Acholi’.
over succession to the office of rainmaker at Salamini in Lotokoland. Obbo was apparently killed in the dispute, but three of his sons (or brothers) led his followers to the environs of modern Obbo.

When informants were pressed on these matters, particularly when asked why they were now Acholis when they used to be Lotuko, a common response was to assert a prior Lwo identity. People would say something like: ‘Yes it is true that the Lokomini came from Lotuko, but they were not from there. They were only staying there for a time. Before they came from further north, from among the (Lwo-speaking) Anuak (or Shilluk, or Pari)’. This, however, is not really an option available to the Abong, since the traditions are more explicit about their ‘Lotuko’ ancestry. Mateo stresses his clan’s Acholi-ness in another way. He makes reference to a special royal dance called the *Bwola*, which is performed by the Acholi chiefdoms in Uganda, and also by the neighbouring chiefdom of Pajok. The reference to Pajok is significant, since it is one of the few northern Acholi chiefdoms with a clear tradition of Lwo origin. The Ywaya, the ruling lineage of Pajok, migrated from Anuak via Lafon Hill, the home of the Lwo-speaking Pari, and a close relationship remains between the people of Pajok and the Pari. The *Bwola* dance was presumably introduced later from the south, but that is irrelevant to Mateo’s intent. Both the Ywaya and the *Bwola* dance are unquestionably linked to Lwo-ness (and therefore Acholi-ness), as well as to chiefly status and, therefore, to ritual authority and rights over land.

Mateo’s attitude to Pajok is, however, ambiguous. By the late nineteenth century Obbo and Pajok were the two most powerful chiefdoms in the area, and relations between them became strained. It seems that in 1899 the chief of Obbo to whom Mateo refers, Abarayi, pledged loyalty to Delmé-Radcliffe of the Uganda Rifles, who had recently taken over what was then Uganda’s Nile Province. Delmé-Radcliffe, incidentally, like Samuel Baker, is a legendary figure in Acholiland. He is known as *Langa-Langa*, meaning ghostly lion, because of his capacity to move rapidly from place to place at night, and is the subject of a revealing children’s song:

The guns of Langalanga
Who fires them?
We fire them, we fire them, we fire them... 
Bang, bang, bang, bang,
Bang, bang:
Bang, bang, bang, bang,
Big bang.

Following this agreement with Abarayi at Obbo, *Langa-Langa* attacked Pajok in ‘punishment’ for a raid on a Madi village. A handful

10 Okeny, ‘State formation in Acholi’. 
of people were killed, and Onek, the chief of Pajok, was taken prisoner. It is likely that warriors from Obbo helped in the attack. However, Langa-Langa's exploits were not followed up immediately, and it was not until the eve of the First World War, and the 'rectification' of the Sudan/Uganda boundary, that a serious attempt was made to set up effective colonial administration. In the meantime raid and counter-raid continued. Mateo mentions a war which took place in 1909. Some people still remembered it. The first interview I ever made was with a wonderful old man named Sabastiano Obok, but always referred to as Yellowcorn after the variety of maize he cultivated at the Catholic mission farm. He tried to tell me what he could about it, but he began to weep uncontrollably when he remembered his brothers and sisters who had been killed in the fighting. The following account is drawn from the interviews with two old men, living at Pageo, near Pajok:

The chiefly families of Obbo and Pajok used to be in-laws. The Pajok went to help the Obbo fight against the Imurok [a Lotoko group]. In the fighting a man named Pep found some rain stones [white, conical-shaped stones used in rain making]. . . . Aburi, who was then chief at Obbo, demanded them, but Pep refused. He said that he was from the Paiboro clan of Pajok, and would take the stones to his own chief, Oceng [the successor of Onek]. Aburi responded by beating him to death. Oceng sent some people to find out who killed Pep. When they found out that it was Aburi, they asked for compensation (culokor) in the form of a girl. Instead Aburi tied up some pala (red ochre) and gave it to those people as an insult to Oceng. Aburi said to them, 'Take this pala to Oceng. It is red like the vagina of his mother'. Oceng sent some more people to try to obtain compensation, but Aburi did a similar thing again [the second time sending a red army beret]. Oceng then said, 'In that case I am going to fight him'. . . . The next day, at noon, they attacked Obbo. They killed many people and burned the houses. The people of Obbo ran into the bush. After they had fought, Aburi went to Nimule [the British headquarters on the River Nile] to complain that the Pajok had attacked him. The British came and captured many people from Pajok and took many cattle to pay compensation to the relatives of those people who had been killed in Obbo. 11

It seems to be widely accepted in the area that this British intervention was unjust, and that Aburi had received what he deserved from the Pajok. I once heard a very old woman from a commoner clan of Obbo mocking the Abong men. She told me gleefully how Aburi had been crushed and his people had been forced to hide in the forest. She sang a song of which the chorus went 'The Abong fled over eight hills' (Abong oringo tudi aboro). It is therefore small wonder that Mateo was evasive when I tried to question him about this conflict. It also explains why he claimed that the chiefdom of Pajok was only founded

by Anyoda in the 1890s. It was a way of saying that Pajok was relatively unimportant compared with the long history of Obbo.

According to Father Crazzolara, it is true that Anyoda lived in the late nineteenth century. He was killed by slave traders in about 1890. However, he was not the founder of his chiefdom. Oral traditions in Pajok indicate that the founder of the chiefdom was Keny, the son of Ocaak, who had led his people from Pari. Keny is said to have violently imposed the hegemony of his clan in the area eight generations before the death of Anyoda.\(^\text{12}\) Whatever the truth of these traditions, Mateo must have known about them and chosen to ignore them. At the same time he was eager to emphasize the ancient status of his own chiefdom. Fortunately, in 1937, Crazzolara met Mateo’s father Chief Aburi, and interviewed Lodango, one of Aburi’s brothers. He collected a chief-list and an account of the history of the Abong clan which is far more complicated than that provided by Mateo.

Although they are almost the same length, several names are different in Crazzolara’s chief-list from that in Mateo’s testimony. One name, Malakiteng, appears much later (as successor to Iliri), and no mention is made of Kitang, the ancestor who, Mateo claims, brought his people to Obbo. There are also breaks in Crazzolara’s list, where a chief died without issue and was succeeded by a brother instead of a son. With the deaths of Ogwe and then his uncle, Tokboye (not mentioned in Mateo’s genealogy), it appears that there was no obvious heir at all, and the relationship of these two with the next chief, Iliri, is not known. More interestingly Crazzolara’s informants told him that it was only under Iliri that the Abong began to migrate south of the Imatong Mountains, and it was under his grandson, Agwinya (the father of Kaciba who met the Bakers), that they arrived near present Obbo. In other words, the Abong chiefdom of Obbo may only have been established in the mid-nineteenth century and, by implication, the Acholi-ization of the clan was even more recent. Crazzolara additionally mentions that virtually all the people living in the chiefdom in the 1930s spoke their mother tongue, in most cases Lotuko, as well as Acholi.

Mateo, and other elders at Obbo, appear to have grafted the names of patrilineal ancestors invoked in ancestor veneration rituals into the history of the chiefdom. Mateo himself was frequently involved in these ceremonies, seeing no contradiction with his very public Christian faith. He regularly attended mass in a white robe which looked remarkably like that of the priest. In fact both his roles, as ancestor-invoker and as a leading figure in the Catholic community, were equally important components in his claims to represent local people. They showed that he both espoused progress and tradition.

There was, however, a further factor at work here. It was well known that Mateo had not been his father’s choice for heir. That had been Vido, the present rainmaker, who had been removed from the position as government chief when he tried to execute someone. Mateo owed his original appointment to the Anglo-Egyptian, colonial administration. Strictly speaking he was therefore a jago, a sub-chief within the civil service, rather than a rwot, a traditional chief. In fact, if the old ways were really to be followed, his brother would still be the rwot as well as being the rainmaker. Among the Acholi chiefdoms in Uganda it is common for a distinction to be drawn between these positions. Often the rainmaker came from a closely related lineage to that of the rwot, and it was the rwot that held what might loosely be termed ‘political’ authority. Mateo had recently been a refugee in Uganda, and was co-opting this Ugandan Acholi model to his own devices. It enabled him to claim to be a traditional chief (rwot), and at the same time claim to be a good Christian and dismiss his brother as a pagan. In this way he explained away his lack of access to the chiefdom’s rain stones.

Finally, at the end of his testimony, Mateo plays his trump card. He produces Samuel Baker as witness to what he had told me. He says that the Bakers enjoyed the hospitality of Mateo’s great-grandfather, Kaciba, for seven months, and saw the Bwola dance performed. However, by calling Mateo’s bluff, and going to Baker’s journals, as well as to the observations of other outsiders, we end up with a rather different view of Obbo than he might have anticipated.

THE OUTSIDER’S VIEW OF OBBO
Samuel Baker was an extraordinary figure, a bear of a man, larger than life in every way. He was the only Nile explorer to be knighted, probably as much for his popularity with some members of the English royal family as for his achievements in Africa. In 1858, he is known to have entertained the aristocracy at the Duke of Atholl’s estate near Balmoral by running down a stag in front of the house, and stabbing it to death with a knife. As he put it, ‘in my opinion ten times better sport than shooting a deer at bay’. His wife, Florence, was equally remarkable in her own way, but she remains distinctly two-dimensional in his books. Most of the time she is little more than a peg on which to hang Victorian platitudes about marital bliss. It has only recently come to light that Baker had in fact purchased her at a slave auction at Widden, a Turkish garrison town in the Balkans, and married her in secret on returning to London after their first expedition to the upper Nile. Unfortunately she seems to have been as concerned as her husband to disguise her origins, and never wrote her memoirs.

14 Ibid., 26–9.
The Bakers left a deep impression in the Sudan/Uganda border area, entering the folklore of British imperialism as well as that of the local population. In 1951 Sir John Milner Gray could still quote with approval the words of Sir Harry Johnston half a century earlier: ‘Baker Pasha’ is, in the remembrance of the old people, the one heroic white man they have known: terrible in battle, scrupulously just, at all times kind and jovial in demeanour amongst friends; a born ruler over a savage people’.\(^\text{15}\) F.K. Girling, the author of an anthropological monograph on the Acholi and not as enamoured with colonialism as Gray, was scarcely less impressed: ‘His [Baker’s] filibustering methods did not bring the slave trade to an end; but they did more than seems possible, considering the limited time and means at his disposal’.\(^\text{16}\)

Talking to local people in the 1980s, it did indeed seem to be the case that Baker is remembered, while his successors as Turkio-Egyptian representatives in Equatoria, Charles Gordon and Emin Pasha, were forgotten, even by people living in the vicinity of their ruined forts. In part this seems to have been due to the impression made by Florence’s blonde hair, for she is invariably remembered as Anya Dwee, ‘daughter of the Moon’, while the names for Baker vary. In Alurland Aidan Southall found he was called Mulenju, a term with supernatural connotations.\(^\text{17}\) In Acholi he is referred to as Baca, presumably from ‘pasha’, or as Lopurunda, ‘the hairy one’ the term Mateo used. Baker himself tells us that Arabs were called ‘white men’, while he was referred to as ‘a very white man’, adding that he was frequently obliged to take off his shirt to exhibit the difference; the implication being that often local people did not make a distinction between him and the rapacious ivory traders he accompanied during his first expedition.\(^\text{18}\)

Given the Bakers’ romantic and unorthodox way of life, it is a bit of a shock to turn to Samuel’s best-selling accounts of their journeys. What comes across is a man pumped up with self-conceit, reveling in the bigotry of his age. The following passage is typical of his reflective moments:

The negro has been, and still is, thoroughly misunderstood. However severely we may condemn the horrible system of slavery, the results of emancipation have proved that the negro does not appreciate the blessings of freedom, nor does he show the slightest feeling of gratitude to the hand that broke the rivets of his fetters. His narrow mind cannot embrace that feeling of pure philanthropy that first prompted England to declare herself against slavery, and he only regards the anti-slavery movement as a proof of his own importance.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., i, 294.
Clearly it is necessary to take these views into account when assessing Baker's observations. A considerable portion of the personal wealth which enabled him to finance his initial expedition to the sources of the Nile was derived from the revenue of his family's plantations in Jamaica. That he should subsequently have been employed to lead a campaign against slavery in Africa seems ironic, to say the least. Nevertheless, he has a great deal to say about Obbo, some of which amplifies what has already been teased out of Mateo's testimony and which is worth looking at in some detail.

Baker spent several months in Obbo in 1863. It was in fact out of his way, since he had hoped to follow the Nile, but had been prevented from doing so by the mutiny of his men. He found himself completely dependant on Ibrahim, the agent of one of the Khartoum-based ivory trading companies. In theory Ibrahim was supposed to be engaged in the purchase of ivory. In practice, like the agents of other trading companies operating in the upper Nile region, he headed a force of well-armed men, mostly Arabs from northern Sudan (Baker calls them Turks), who raided locals for cattle and slaves. Some of the cattle were then exchanged for ivory, and most of the slaves were kept as payment by the company militia (a few slaves were sent with the ivory to Khartoum, but the number of slaves reaching northern Sudan via the Nile route was relatively low). Much to his frustration, the insecurity engendered by these activities left Baker no option other than to move around as part of Ibrahim's entourage. In spite of his claims to the contrary, it seems unlikely that local people thought of him as an innocent bystander, particularly since, at his own admission, he looked so much like his Arab allies.

On arrival in Gondokoro, Ibrahim's force, and the Bakers, marched southeast into Lotuko area (Baker writes Latooka). Here they established a camp at Tirangola (Baker writes Tarrangolle), where the chief collaborated with the traders in raiding his enemies. After they had been there for some time:

some natives suddenly arrived from a place called Obbo with presents from their chief for the Turks and also for me. Ibrahim received several tusks, while I received an iron hoe (molote), as the news had already extended to that country, 'that a white man was in Latooka, who wanted neither slaves nor ivory'. The natives reported that a quantity of ivory existed in their country, and Ibrahim determined to take a few men and pay it a visit, as the people were said to be extremely friendly.

Having nothing else to do, the Bakers accompanied Ibrahim's men the forty miles to Obbo. Baker describes their arrival: 'The chief of Obbo came to meet us with several of his head men. He was an

extraordinary-looking man, about fifty-eight or sixty years of age; but, far from possessing the dignity usually belonging to a grey head, he acted the buffoon for our amusement, and might have been a clown in a pantomime...'. Baker then goes on to describe the entertainment laid on for them. Accompanied by a huge drum, a vigorous dance was performed at the chief's order. It ended with 'a "grand galop" in double circles, at a tremendous pace, the inner ring revolving in a contrary direction to the outer'. 22 This must have been a Bwola dance.

In the months that the Bakers stayed at Obbo they seem to have developed a more sympathetic relationship with the old chief, whom Baker calls Katchiba (Kaciba), than any other African. Samuel explains that, 'Notwithstanding his magic, Katchiba was not a bad man: he was remarkably civil, and very proud at my having paid him a visit... He was really a very good fellow — by far the best I have seen in Africa'. 23 Baker describes one touching scene when the 'delightful old sorcerer' determined to entertain his guests with a song, which he sang while accompanying himself on the harp. It was, writes Baker, 'a most plaintive and remarkably wild, but pleasing air... the best music that I have ever heard among savages'. 24

Baker has much to say about the way Kaciba held sway over his people. He argues that, 'Savages can be ruled by two powers — "force", and "humbug",... Katchiba having no physical force, adopted cunning, and the black art controlled the savage minds of his subjects'. 25 According to Baker, Kaciba's power rested exclusively in his ritual capacities.

Although the old chief, Katchiba, behaved more like a clown than a king, he was much respected by his people. He holds his authority over his subjects as general rain-maker and sorcerer... There are no specific taxes, but he occasionally makes a call upon the country for a certain number of goats and supplies. These are generally given, as Katchiba is a knowing old diplomatist, and he times his demands with great judgement. Thus, should there be a lack of rain, or too much, at the season for sowing crops, he takes the opportunity of calling his subjects together and explaining to them 'how much he regrets that their conduct has compelled him to afflict them with unfavourable weather, but that it is their own fault. If they are so greedy and so stingy that they will not supply him properly, how can they expect him to think of their interests?...'

During a prolonged dry spell Kaciba came to see Samuel, seeking assistance in making rain, since his people had threatened to kill him if he did not produce it. 27

22 Ibid., i, 314.
23 Ibid., i, 322, 377.
24 Ibid., i, 390–1.
25 Ibid., i, 321.
26 Ibid., i, 317–18.
27 Ibid., ii, 4–7.
According to Baker the people of Obbo were entirely different to the Lotukos he had seen at Tirangole, both in language and appearance. It is difficult to know what to make of this remark, since Baker relied entirely on Ibrahim's interpreters as well as his porters. To make matters more complicated, he provides us with a short word-list of the Obbo language, which he confusingly calls ‘Madi’. Three of the words are Acholi/Lwo, and of the other four, one seems to be Fur, one could be Bantu and the other two might be Madi compound nouns. Later he calls the area near Pajok ‘Shoggo country’, a term I cannot place, and in another instance he says that the people of Obbo and Pajok (Baker writes Farajoke) were the same in appearance and language to the people immediately to the south, whom he calls Shooa. Shooa is probably his version of Cua (Chua), one of the chiefdoms which would later be thought of as being Acholi in what became northern Uganda. In addition he twice refers to the people of Pajok as Sooli, a term which he uses in his account of his later 1870–73 expedition (this time spelt Shooli) for a much larger area, vaguely corresponding to the territory which was to become the Acholiland of the colonial era.

The origin of the term Sooli is not clear. It may be derived from Shilluk, since Shilluk is a Lwo language, and the ivory traders, coming from the north, may have noticed the connection and possibly used a Shilluk as an interpreter in the area. However, Shilluk and Acholi/Lwo are not as close as is sometimes suggested, and a more likely explanation is that Sooli/Shooli is a corruption of col, meaning ‘black’, or lacoo, meaning ‘man’. In any case, it seems to have been the original version of the tribal label ‘Acholi’, and indicates that Acholi/Lwo was widely spoken. In his later book, Baker provides us with another word-list which he now calls ‘Shulli’, and which he must have collected in what is now Ugandan Acholiland. With a few exceptions, all the words are clearly Acholi/Lwo. At Obbo, however, we know Acholi/Lwo was not the only language used. Crazzolara noted that several clans were speaking Lotuko as well as Acholi in the 1930s, and he also mentions that a couple of clans spoke Madi. Moreover, we know from oral testimonies that the Abong, the clan of Kaciba, came from the area of Tirangole. Kaciba himself, and the emissaries he sent to call Ibrahim and Baker to visit him, must have spoken Lotuko. Baker seems to have been unaware of this multilingualism. Like the British administrators (and anthropologists) who followed him in the present century, he assumed the existence of tribal boundaries where

28 Ibid., i, 309.
29 Ibid., i, 373.
30 Ibid., ii, 21–2.
in fact he invented them, and was persistently frustrated when his informants failed to answer his enquiries about their traditions in a manner that accorded with his preconceptions. He concluded that they were ignorant of their history. Paradoxically, it is in his inconsistencies with respect to ethnic categorization that he probably comes closest to accuracy.

The Bakers had arrived in Obbo in May 1863, by which time it was, according to Kaciba, impossible to advance south until the rains stopped in December. This was an exaggeration, reflecting the old chief's eagerness to keep his guests for as long as possible, but in any case the Bakers' dependence on Ibrahim meant that they had to wait until the traders were ready to move in that direction. Consequently, after residing in Obbo for some weeks, the Bakers returned to Tirangola, hoping to persuade Ibrahim that this would be in his commercial interest. They found the traders involved in raids, and Baker records a particularly vicious one in which sixty-five villagers were killed. By this time Ibrahim's welcome in Lotuko was wearing thin, and he probably needed little persuading that a move south was sensible. He decided to collect as many cattle as possible, then drive them to Obbo for safe keeping.

On 4 June, Ibrahim and eight-five of his men set off with 400 cows and 1,000 goats. He returned on 16 June having satisfied himself that Obbo was more secure than his present base, and ordered the transfer of his main camp. The Bakers thus went back to Obbo, and found that it had changed dramatically since their departure a month earlier. Old Katchiba came to meet them, 'but brought nothing, as he said the Turks had eaten up the country'. Ibrahim's men appear to have begun stealing cattle as soon as they arrived, and were intending to raid Pajok.

However, following 'a great consultation', at which Kaciba gave a long and vehement speech, and which ended in a war dance, it was decided instead to attack 'Madi country', by which Baker probably means the region to the southwest. Ibrahim immediately set off with 120 armed men and a mass of Obbo people on the marauding expedition. On the following day Kaciba came to see the Bakers, and complained that 'the Turks... would ultimately ruin him, as, by attacking the Madi tribe, they would become his enemies, and invade Obbo when the Turks should leave'. Unfortunately Baker does not tell us what Kaciba had said at the meeting on the previous day.

During the following months Baker did all he could to keep on good terms with Ibrahim and exert his influence to dissuade the traders from raiding to the south, since he knew that his few remaining

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34 Ibid., i, 373.
men would not be prepared to advance through disturbed country. He seems to have been successful, since towards the end of 1863, Ibrahim's force, with the Bakers in tow, headed south on their way into 'unknown' territory. Baker comments on their arrival at Pajok:

At 4.30 we arrived at one of the villages of Farajoke. . . Vast herds of cattle belonged to the different villages, but these had all been driven to concealment, as the report had been received that the Turks were approaching. The country was thickly populated, but the natives appeared very distrustful; the Turks immediately entered the villages and ransacked the granaries for corn, digging up yams and helping themselves to everything as though quite at home.'

Moving on into the territory which Baker calls Shooa he found, on waking up one morning, that Ibrahim's group had disappeared during the night. It was explained that some of the people who had accompanied them from Pajok were guiding the traders in another raid into Madi territory. They returned next day with about 300 head of cattle. Further south they passed through an area which was considered to be the preserve of a rival trading company and saw several villages that had been burnt and plundered. The entire country appeared to have been laid waste. Baker informs us that: 'There was no great chief at Shooa; each village had a separate headman; formerly the population had occupied the lower ground, but since the Turks had been established at Faloro and had plundered the neighbourhood tribes, the natives had forsaken their villages and had located themselves among the mountains for security'.

The Bakers subsequently moved on south into Bunyoro, only returning to the area a year later on their way back to Gondokoro. They never went to Obbo again, but Samuel describes how the rival companies had allied themselves with contending 'tribes'.

For many miles circuit from Shooa, the blackened ruins of villages and deserted fields bore witness to the devastation committed; cattle that were formerly in thousands, had been driven off, and the beautiful district that had formerly been most fertile was reduced to a wilderness. By the wholesale acts of robbery and destruction the Turks had damaged their own interests, as the greatest number of natives had fled to other countries; thus it was most difficult to obtain porters to convey the ivory to Gondokoro. The people of the country had been so spoiled by the payment in cows instead of beads for the most trifling services, that they now refused to serve as porters to Gondokoro under payment of four cows each; thus, as 1,000 men were required, 4,000 cows were necessary as payment. Accordingly razzias [raids] must be made.

Ibrahim's men set about obtaining the required number of cattle, but found it difficult to capture more than 2,000 head. Nevertheless, over 600 porters were eventually persuaded to carry the ivory which had

36 Ibid., ii, 13-14.
37 Ibid., ii, 21.
38 Ibid., ii, 263-4.
been collected in the previous twelve months. Each carried a load upwards of 50lbs.

The Bakers’ return to Khartoum, and then England, caused a great stir, not least because of their tales of slavery. Like his Victorian contemporaries, Samuel Baker was convinced that the slave trade lay at the root of all the ills he had witnessed. He argued that the slave trade could be replaced with ‘legitimate commerce’, and failed to recognize that the slavery he witnessed was, for the most part, bound up with the ivory trade, which in turn was responding to an insatiable demand for piano keys and billiard balls in Europe. To be cynical, one might conclude that the reasons for Baker’s argument had more to do with the popularity of the slavery cause in Victorian England. He certainly took pains to promote his image and to ingratiate himself with the royal family. But whatever his real motivation, his public stand on the issue made him an obvious choice to lead Egyptian government forces to stamp out the slave trade and annex the sources of the Nile for Egypt.

During the 1870–73 expedition Baker spent most of his time caught up in logistical problems and establishing some semblance of an administration. He was drawn into a confrontation with Kabarega, the omukama of Bunyoro, and did not return to Obbo. But a few passages are relevant. First, Baker at one point gives a detailed breakdown of the number of cattle necessary to run a trading station, of which there were by this time several in the Sudan/Uganda border area. He comes up with a figure of 5,555 oxen per year for 350 men, but adds that there were more than a thousand slaves and prisoners in each station who also had to be fed. 39 Baker may have been prone to inflate numbers, but, in conjunction with figures he gives us for cattle captured in raids during his first expedition to the area, it is apparent that the devastation had been considerable and the effect on the local economy fundamental. Secondly, in contrast to the observation in his earlier book that there were no big chiefs in ‘Shooa’ country, he tells us that Rwotcamo, the chief of Payira, claimed to be the ruler of the whole of ‘Shooli’. 40 It seems reasonable to speculate that Rwotcamo was one of a number of chiefs that had benefited from the traders’ activities. It is worth bearing in mind that in 1899 it was reported that Rwotcamo’s successor, Awic, possessed 400–500 guns, and the total number of guns called in by the Uganda government in 1913, in what was by then thought of as Acholi country, was 5,000. 41 I will return to this issue in a moment. It is linked to a third point: Baker’s failure to stop the raiding. His men simply took over from the traders, enforcing payment of a ‘corn-tax’ in alliance with certain chiefs. Baker’s successor, Gordon, recognized that his soldiers were ‘nothing but a set

39 Baker, Ismailia, ii, 100–1.
40 Ibid., ii, 70, 94, 126, 528.
of pillagers, and about as likely to civilize these parts as they are to
civilize the moon'.

From these observations we can see what Mateo's ancestor was up
to. An account of the Baker's arrival at Obbo, collected by Crazzolara
in 1937, suggests that the chieftdom may have already been raided by
another group of traders, since Kaciba is said to have hidden in a
granary until his visitors' intentions became clear. Certainly the old
chief was well aware of the traders' activities in Lotuko, and probably
also of the devastation caused by the rival company to the south. He
doubtless knew that resistance would have been futile and, like the
Pajok, collaborated in order to deflect the deprivations to his enemies.
But, there was surely more to it than that. Baker tells us that Kaciba
had few cattle, so he may have felt that he had everything to gain,
and little to lose, by inviting Ibrahim's group to visit him and offering
himself as an ally. His hospitality to the Bakers was doubtless due to
their association with the traders and not in spite of it, as Baker
maintains. It is hard to imagine how Kaciba could have been
persuaded that the Bakers were involved in mere geographical explora-
tion, since Baker did nothing without Ibrahim's agreement, and even
went elephant hunting himself while staying at Obbo.

Baker makes it plain that Kaciba was a rainmaker, not an
autocratic ruler, and had no means of imposing his will on his people.
This seems to be confirmed by those oral testimonies which indicate
that the Abong chiefs had influence because they could afford to be
generous. Like other rainmakers Kaciba was likely to be blamed if the
rains failed, and as we have seen Kaciba's people even threatened to
kill him in 1863. Similar threats were made against rainmakers in the
region at the time I was doing research in the 1980s, and I came across
a few instances in which they were actually beaten, as well as a couple
of reported incidents of killing among groups living to the north of
Obbo. It is apparent that Kaciba and his successors were seeking to
use the traders to transform their position in relation to their own
people. Hosting the traders could be dangerous for the reasons Kaciba
confided to Baker, but it also had benefits in the form of gifts, which
included firearms. Kaciba, like Rwotcamo on a larger scale, did
everything he could to establish himself as a go-between by making
himself indispensable. For their part, the traders, like the colonial
administrators who followed them, were always looking for agents to
work through. The British were as obsessive about royal lineages and
chiefs as they were about tribes, and Kaciba's family was able to tap
into these beliefs for their own purposes.

Drawing from the testimony collected in 1937 by Crazzolara, it is

42 Charles Gordon in a letter to his sister, dated 31 October 1875, quoted in Gray, 'Acholi
history', Uganda Journal 15 (1951), 129.
43 Crazzolara, Lwoo, 170-1.
44 Baker, Albert N'yanza, i, 37, 43.
possible to piece together what happened following Baker's departure. 

Kaciba had a son whose name was Otto, but who was usually called Abarayi (Ibrahim). It is as Abarayi that he appears in Mateo's chief list. He seems to have been the favourite of his father, and presumably derived his Moslem name from his father's ally, the Ibrahim whom Baker accompanied. He was an unpleasant character, loathed by the people of Obbo, and on his father's death he was rejected as chief in favour of Adot, the son of one of Kaciba's brothers. Abarayi responded by shooting Adot dead. He is said to have been arrested for this by some Arabs, who must have either been traders or representatives of the Turco-Egyptian regime (Crazzolara calls them slave-dealers). The people of Obbo were then forced to pay a large ransom of elephant tusks for his release. He returned to Obbo as chief (rwot), bringing with him ten guns and a personal bodyguard provided by the Arabs. His rule was marked by arbitrary violence and cruelty. He put many of his subjects to death, and retained a gruesome notoriety when I lived in the area for having maimed anyone who irritated him. He is said to have sown his victims lips together. In 1899 he may have met Delmé-Radciffe and pledged allegiance to Britain. But at the time the colonial administration was much too over-extended to support him fully, and soon afterwards Abarayi overstepped the mark with his Arab friends when he tortured a group of them at a dance. This prompted a ferocious retaliatory raid on the chiefdom in which numerous people died. Abarayi's bodyguard deserted him and he fled into exile. He was eventually killed by a son of Adot around 1900. Mateo's date of 1905 may well be correct. Crazzolara's informant says that Abarayi's choice of successor had also fled, which is how Aburi, the father of Mateo, became chief.

With the aid of oral sources, I have already discussed the violent clash between Aburi and Ocheng of Pajok which occurred during the 1900s, and the British intervention on Aburi's behalf. A good idea of the dependency of these rival chiefs on outside support, and the rather pathetic lengths they would go to in order to obtain it, can be illustrated from the trek diary of Captain H.H. Kelly. Kelly was the Sudanese government's representative on the boundary rectification team which surveyed the area in early 1913, with the object of recommending where the Sudan/Uganda border should run with respect to 'tribal' boundaries. At the time he was writing Pajok and Obbo fell within the Uganda Protectorate, hence his reference to 'their chiefs'. Following the recommendations of the team, the two chiefdoms were incorporated into the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

We went in the afternoon to Ocheng's village [Pajok] and found it about 4 miles distant. One of the most comical sights I have ever seen was the drum and bugle

45 Crazzolara, Lwoo, 170–1.
46 MS, Sudan Archive, Durham University.
band which met us with the general salute and afterwards played us into the camp. . . . One could not laugh as the whole thing was . . . so deeply serious to them and to Ocheng. The latter was a very old man. . . . He had met us on the road in his everyday attire – a blanket and tarbush, he disappeared after we got in to change into his Sunday clothes of Khaki with solar topee. Many of his people were well dressed too. . . .

(Next day) We got off about 6 am. . . . Soon after crossing the Ateipi . . . we were met by Burri [Aburi] the chief of Obbo district, resplendently attired in white drill with a white sun helmet, French boots etc. He also had his band with him which preceded us as far as his village, they were not quite so striking as Ocheng’s as none of them were clothed, and they certainly had less idea of tune . . . Burri had only just got news of our visit and had about 100 of his men hard at work clearing a camping ground. . . . I must confess that all their chiefs seem to be imbued much more with the idea of what is due of them to the government than the majority of ours in Sudan. . . .

Kelly became convinced that the Obbo and the Pajok were ‘true Acholi’, and therefore should really belong to Uganda. He commented that: ‘It will be a pity for the Sudan not to get the progressive people of Farajok and Obbo who with their fondness for clothes and such marks of civilization as brass bands would be worth having, but I fail to see at present how we can cut them off from the remaining Acholi. . . .’ However, the Ugandan government representative on the team would not accept that there were any Acholis north of the proposed line, and Kelly resolved to let him have his way, observing that ‘the people of Farajok and Obbo will be very useful to us if we ever come to build the railway from Gondokoro to Nimule’.

The railway remains unbuilt, but Obbo became part of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and cut off from easy communication with the south for a period, due to colonial sleeping sickness control measures. Aburi became the favoured agent of the colonial administration, and the Abong version of tradition was provided with a quasi-legal status as a result of the government’s rigid policy of indirect rule. Aburi had learned from his father’s fate, and refrained from public excesses. Nevertheless, several informants told me that he had his enemies killed quietly, and I met one of his sisters in 1984, by then a very old woman, who had been paid in compensation for one of his murders. However, Aburi’s successor, Vido, was not so discreet. Mateo says that he was sent to prison by the British for trying to hang someone. Other informants state that this victim was a visitor from the Bari area who had irritated him over some trifling matter. Mateo then took over. He was not a popular man. Quite apart from his alleged involvement in intimidation campaigns against Madis living in the district, there were rumours that he had been involved in ‘ritual’ murders. Whatever the truth of these rumours, they reflected a widely held view that Mateo, like his ancestors, was a dangerous man and not to be trifled with.

It is surprising, therefore, that Mateo’s version of the past was accorded credibility even by his opponents; particularly so when
alternative oral traditions were available. There were, I think, two main reasons for this: first, like many other things thought of as 'traditional', the Abong history outlined by Mateo (and formerly represented by Aburi), was associated with the colonial era which, by the 1980s, was generally thought of as a 'Golden Age' of relative stability, affluence and certainty (as indeed it was in comparison with what happened afterwards); secondly, Mateo's testimony accorded with reified notions of Acholi history. It is to this second issue that I now turn.

THE FORMULATION OF ACHOLI HISTORY

In the course of my recent fieldwork (1987-89) among Madi-speakers in Moyo District of Uganda (immediately to the west of Acholiland), I again collected oral testimonies about the past. However, I found it far more difficult to find good informants. Even senior members of chiefly lineages could not trace their patrilineal ancestry back more than five or six generations, and few had detailed stories to tell about migrations. In response to my questions people would say something like, 'We do not know where we came from, but it was probably from Sudan. We do not think about those things much any more. Only a few old people worry about them'. Yet even the very old were not very helpful. They could tell me about events that happened in their youth, and perhaps events that occurred during their parents' lives, but rarely much more. On a couple of occasions I was referred to an old man who lived in one of the mountain villages as the only real expert. I eventually sought him out and made an appointment to interview him with my tape recorder.

When I arrived for the interview I found him surrounded by a crowd of expectant, and rather drunk, younger men. He was prepared with a 'history of Madi', written in the Madi language in an exercise book, and he proceeded to read this out. He began with a list of the chiefs of Pamugo chiefdom, but several names were repeated, and the first of them was said to have been a Muganda. He was probably a Muganda sent to train chiefs in the early days of colonial rule. This list was followed by another of 'Whites', which began with an Italian missionary, and ended with the first black district commissioner. This, in turn, was followed by a date chart, which started in 1908 and ended in 1968. It included such entries as: '1910, Madi area ruled from Kajo Keji by Mr Stigand'; '1912, the road to Loka was closed because of an epidemic'; '1915, Chief Ajie reported an outbreak of sleeping sickness'; and, '1917, the Catholic mission was moved from Palaro to Moyo'. It was all very interesting, but it was not quite what I had in mind. On another occasion, I was given an almost identical date chart, typed in Italian, by one of the veteran Italian priests when I visited the Catholic mission in Moyo town. I never discovered which manuscript was the original.

It seemed to me that the Madi, rather as the Obbo had seemed to
Baker in 1863, were a people lacking 'tradition' and 'history'. It was something that worried some educated 'community leaders', and at a big meeting in Moyo town in 1989 there was much discussion about what could be done about it. It was objected that the Madi were not yet a 'proper tribe' and proposed that, as a first step, the language should be systematized. There followed a heated and inconclusive debate on which dialect was the pure Madi.

It all made a striking contrast with my experience at Obbo and in Acholiland generally. In 1988 I made a trip from Moyo to Gulu, the largest town in the Acholi-speaking part of Uganda, stopping on the way at the border village of Attiak. This is a place that was classified as 'Acholi' during colonial times, but which remains ethnically and linguistically mixed. On arrival a middle-aged man came up to me and introduced himself as the chief. I asked if he was the jago (government sub-chief), or the rwot (traditional chief). He replied that he was the seventeenth rwot, and that he could tell me the names of all his predecessors. He knew I had just come from Madi area, and in this manner proclaimed his Acholi-ness.

Yet, in so many ways, 'Madi' and 'Acholi' culture is similar. I have already mentioned how Madis in Sudan sometimes chose to become Acholis. Similarly I know of several instances where people, who at one time were Acholis in Uganda, have now become Madis. Most eastern Madis speak Acholi fluently, and many western Acholi speak Madi. In a place like Attiak both languages are used. Why then this remarkable difference in attitudes to the past?

The answer relates to the way that Acholi consciousness has been constructed. During the years of British rule, Madiland was never administered in the vernacular, and there was even an attempt to promote the use of Acholi/Lwo. The Catholic Church, which is highly influential in the area, did not produce a translation of the Bible, and even now uses a Protestant translation of the New Testament published in 1977. Apart from prayer books, and some elementary primary school texts, I think I am right in saying that there have been no publications in the Madi language. Meanwhile, in the territories of Uganda now called Gulu and Kitgum districts, Acholi was used as the language of colonial administration and religious instruction throughout the colonial era. Various grammars and dictionaries of the Acholi language were published, the most important of which was by Father Crazzolara, and from the 1930s there has been a relatively constant trickle of vernacular publications, including an Acholi language magazine. Many of these publications have been of a religious

48 Crazzolara, Study of the Acooli language.
nature, but several have been secular, and have included Okot p’ Bitek’s famous poem *Wer pa Lowino*, and a handful of works on Acholi history.

The first of the Acholi language history books, and certainly the most influential, was Father Pelligrini’s *Acoli Macon.* This little book was published in Verona in 1949 and reprinted in Gulu in 1955, 1960, 1964, 1968 and 1980. A total of 51,000 copies have been produced. In the 1950s and 1960s it was read by school students throughout the area, and hundreds of copies remain in circulation. It ranges from myths which Pelligrini links to stories in the Bible, to oral history, and Catholic and imperial folklore. We are told how the Acholis’ ancestors entered the land of Bunyoro and ruled the Bantu people; how various clans eventually ended up settling in the land of Acholi; what happened when the British came; and how the Catholic missions were established. In relevant places, the genealogies of major chiefly lineages are listed. There are even three chapters dealing with the exploits of Samuel Baker which explain that his name is famous in Acholi area for having stopped the Arabs from capturing slaves.

At the time *Acoli Macon* was published, there were already several Acholi historians collecting clan histories. Some of their work appeared in English in the *Uganda Journal,* or in Acholi in the *Acoli Magazine.* Two of the most active of them were leading Protestants, Reuben Anywar and Nikodemo Latigo. They probably thought of themselves as to some extent in competition with Pelligrini, and his colleague Crazzolara, but were doubtless also responding to the earlier vernacular publications on Baganda history. Anywar’s *Acholi ki ker Megi* was eventually published some years after his death in 1956. In addition, according to Girling, by the late 1940s it was common to find men with exercise books in which they had written accounts of their own clan taken down from the lips of their grandfathers. Girling directly linked this interest in clan histories with the formation of a ‘new Acholi consciousness’. I would add that this ‘new Acholi consciousness’ had by then already fed back into English language Acholi studies, including to some extent Girling’s own work.

The most obvious example of this feedback is in Crazzolara’s massive *The Lwoo* published between 1951 and 1954, to which I have made recourse for what he records of the oral history of Obbo. Parts of the book are more or less straightforward presentations of testimonies that the author collected, mainly in the 1930s and 1940s. But other sections link these testimonies to a conjectured general history of Lwo migrations from Sudan and on into Kenya in order to explain why there are pockets of Lwo-speakers dotted about in the Upper Nile.

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Basin, surrounded by non-Lwo speakers. Inevitably he tends to fall into the trap of reading some form of discrete Lwo identity into the past, and sometimes does the same with an Acholi identity. Like Pelligrini, he additionally argues that the migrations of the Lwo groups explain the emergence of the inter-lacustrine kingdoms, because the Lwo brought with them from Sudan the institution of monarchy. In this manner the individual clan histories are woven into a grand story which is resonant with the wandering of the ‘Chosen People’ in the wilderness in search for a ‘Promised Land’. 52

At the time of publication, Crazzolara’s book made little impact. However it became increasingly important following the publication of Bethwell Ogot’s seminal History of the southern Luo in 1967. 53 Ogot incorporated parts of Crazzolara’s conjectured early history of the Lwo into his thesis and, following Oliver, he allowed twenty-seven years per generation in order to work out a chronology of migrations dating back to the turn of the fifteenth century. His method and conclusions provided an inspiration for the History of Uganda Project based at Makerere University, Kampala, under the direction of J.B. Webster between 1969 and 1972. Webster and his students concentrated their attention on what they called the ‘central Lwo’, a group comprised of the Lwo-speaking groups in Uganda (Acholi, Alur, Palwo etc.). They published their findings in 1976 in The central Lwo during the Aconya. 54 Using a similar method to Ogot, the editors of this volume maintain that after 1600 it is possible to date events recorded in oral texts with confidence, and in certain instances it is possible to push the chronology back even further. They discuss some events which, they suggest, occurred before the year 1000.

Webster and his colleagues were also concerned to examine the more recent emergence of the small chiefdoms which were designated as being ‘Acholi’ during the colonial period. This was particularly the focus of Ronald Atkinson’s research in western Acholiland. Atkinson argues that, although there were Lwo-speaking groups living in the area before the 1680s, it was a migration of ‘Palwo’ Lwo-speakers from the kingdom of Bunyoro which introduced the ideas of chiefly lineages, ‘kingship’, tribute payment, and ‘royal drums’ (jami ker). Thus, refining the views of Pelligrini and Crazzolara, Atkinson asserted that the ‘central Lwo’ did not possess (or had lost) the concept of monarchy in the late seventeenth century, but adopted it (or re-adopted it) following contact with the kingdom of Bunyoro. 55

54 Onyango-ku-Odongo and J.B. Webster, eds., The central Lwo during the Aconya (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1967).
Crazzolara, Ogot, Webster, and Atkinson’s ideas subsequently influenced Kenneth Okeny when he set about writing on local level ‘state information’. Consequently his interpretation of oral texts results in different conclusions from mine. He produces a chronology linked to the chief lists of Obbo, Pajok, and Panyikwara chiefdoms dating back to the sixteenth century. In the case of Obbo, he accepts that ‘there is no evidence to show if drums coincided with the creation of the state’, but he argues that such symbols of chiefly status associated with Palwo migrants from Bunyoro were deeply rooted by the time of Kaciba because he is said to have had a large drum called *otur kal*, a term which might suggest it was an instrument of subjugation (it literally means ‘palace breaker’). It is a tenuous argument, and Okeny knew too much about the area to accept a simplistic diffusionist model. He concludes that multiple factors were involved in the emergence of Obbo and other Acholi polities, a position which Atkinson would also now accept.

Nevertheless, Okeny’s version of Obbo’s past remains at variance with the sordid tale of greed and violence which I have told. I have suggested that what really made the difference was Kaciba and his successors’ access to guns and technically superior foreign allies in the late nineteenth century. It enabled them to assert autocratic power over their own people. It is my contention that the ‘Acholi’ qualities associated with the polity evolved out of a dialogue with colonial administrations, and with the vernacular and, to a lesser extent, the English language literature on Acholi history.

To what extent this is true of the Ugandan Acholi too is an open question, but I suspect far more so than is commonly recognized. We should recall that there were unpopular Buganda administrators working in Acholiland in the early colonial period, and that the rivalry between the Acholi and the inter-lacustrine kingdom most favoured by the British, which has such tragic consequences in post-independence Uganda, has deep roots. At a conference at Makerere University in 1988, an Acholi academic presented a paper which argued, in effect, that the Acholi were just as ‘progressive’ as the Baganda, because their kingdoms were as sophisticated in the pre-colonial era and that, in any case, the inter-lacustrine states were founded by Lwo migrants. Moreover, the widespread distribution of Pelligrini’s *Acoli Macon* cannot be ignored. Atkinson states that he works with ‘unconscious, non-narrative traditions as well as the more accessible and commonly utilized narrative ones’. But is it really possible to make these distinctions in Acholiland, where mimesis of reified versions of tradition are part of the texture of thinking? A contemporary historian

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66 Okeny, ‘State formation in Acholi’.
58 Ibid., 22.
attempting to write about the pre-colonial history of Acholi might be
compared to a contemporary anthropologist trying to understand
Nuer kinship, if Evans-Pritchard had written *The Nuer* in the Nuer
language and it had been published in the 1940s in Malakal instead of
Oxford. In fact it is even more problematical, since many more Acholi
speakers than Nuer speakers can read English. *The central Levo during
the Aconya* was published in Nairobi and copies circulated in Uganda
in the late 1970s.

Like all the older literate people in the neighbourhood, Chief
Mateo of Obbo had read Pelligrini’s book. This was another reason
why it was so important that his ancestor had met Samuel Baker. It is
not unreasonable to suppose that at least some of Baker’s legendary
status may derive from imperial folklore feeding back into local
tradition via this source. But it will be recalled that Mateo additionally
provided me with a very early date. He told me that the chiefdom of
Obbo was founded when Kitang arrived in about 1524. I later asked
him where the date had come from. He gave me an incredulous look,
and replied that, following Webster, he allowed twenty-seven years for
each generation in his chief-list!

So where does this leave us? Webster’s school tends to be ignored
nowadays, and perhaps few scholars outside of East African research
ever took its conclusions seriously. The History of Uganda Project has
almost become a paradigm of what not to do. More generally,
historians of Africa have been prone to revisionism, and even to the
kind of outright deconstructionism that characterizes a fashionable
brand of social anthropology, dominated by reflexivity and epistem-
ological debate. The heady confidence of the oral historians in the
1970s has so evaporated that the whole approach appears funda-
mentally flawed. But, perhaps, historians in Africa are only confront-
ing more directly than their ‘metropolitan’ colleagues the fact that they
play a part in making history as well as recording it; and that the past is
never so dynamic as when what is alleged to have happened in it makes
a difference to contemporary political and economic realities. In
Africa, as much as in eastern Europe, history is so important precisely
because nationalism and nationality are being vigorously negotiated.

Furthermore, in spite of all the looking-between-the-lines of texts
I have been doing (or maybe because of it), it seems to me that I have
been able to illuminate the ways people responded to colonial rule; the
prejudices of the ‘whites’; the ethnic complexity of the people of the
Upper Nile Basin; local relations of power; the currency of the printed
word; the history of Acholi identity. It would have been possible to
write a great deal more about all these issues.

If I have suggested that everything was far more mixed up and
confusing before the coming of the ‘whites’ than the oral historians
have maintained, and that it is difficult to speak with much confidence
about what happened then or how people lived, that is only to confirm
something historical research has demonstrated effectively. So far as we know, this part of Africa was not a primordial 'Never Never Land' populated with happy souls living close to nature just as their great-great-grandparents had done before them. The tribal ways of life that appeared to function relatively coherently to Evans-Pritchard, Middleton and Girling, may have been as much the product of colonial rule, as the product of stable cultural values which were about to be undermined by processes of nation-state formation and commoditization.

Historians, like social scientists, have never really managed to describe the world objectively, and in these less confident times, such an enterprise is recognized as ultimately impossible. Nevertheless, trying to set things in a temporal context forces us to see in ways that otherwise we would not, and, of course, it is by framing better questions that contributions are really made.