

# **AFRICAN POLITICAL SYSTEMS**

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African Political Systems by M. Fortes & E. E. Evans-Pritchard

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**M. FORTES & E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD**

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*Edited by*

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and

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To

C. G. SELIGMAN, M.D., F.R.S.

In token of respect and admiration  
for his great contributions to the  
study of African ethnology

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## EDITORS' NOTE

THIS book is both an experiment in collaborative research and an attempt to bring into focus one of the major problems of African sociology. Many dogmatic opinions are held on the subject of African political organization and are even made use of in administrative practice; but no one has yet examined this aspect of African society on a broad, comparative basis. This book will, we hope, prove the need for and indicate some of the possibilities of such an investigation. Many of the problems it brings into the foreground can only be solved by further research; but the opportunity for such research is rapidly passing and if it is not grasped now may be lost for ever.

We regard this book as the first stage of a wider inquiry into the nature and development of African political systems. In addition to further research into native political systems, such an inquiry would include the study of the development of these systems under the influence of European rule. This problem is not only sociologically important, it is of pressing importance to the peoples of Africa and to those who are responsible for governing them.

We hope this book will be of interest and of use to those who have the task of administering African peoples. The anthropologist's duty is to present the facts and theory of native social organization as he sees them. It is no light duty; for a thorough training and laborious field investigations are indispensable to its proper performance. Whether or not an anthropologist's findings can be utilized in the practical tasks of administration must be left to the decision of administrators themselves.

We are grateful to the International African Institute for sponsoring the publication of this book. Though several of the contributors carried out their field research as Fellows of the Institute, it is in no way responsible for any points of view or opinions expressed in the book. We have to thank Professor Radcliffe-Brown for much help and advice, as well as for the Preface which he has kindly contributed. Our greatest debt is to



our fellow workers. Without their collaboration the book would have been impossible. They will agree, we are sure, that it is an apposite contribution to social science at the present time.

M. F.

E. E. E.-P.

OXFORD,  
*March, 1940.*

#### NOTE TO THIRD IMPRESSION

No changes have been made in any of the papers included in this book for the third impression. The Table of Contents has, however, been brought up to date so as to enable students who may wish to do so to get into touch with the contributors. Since the original publication of this book in 1940 several of the contributors have published more detailed studies of some of the topics they have dealt with here. These studies are listed at the end of the present edition for convenience of reference.

M. F.

E. E. E.-P.

*September, 1947.*

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