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Explain how the insights regarding science and knowledge gained by Evans-Pritchard in his anthropological fieldwork among the Azande can assist us in our study of divination and religion in the ancient Greco-Roman world

Introduction

Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard was a British anthropologist in the twentieth century. He studied at the University of Oxford and the London School of Economics and Political Science. Educated in the methods of Levy-Bruhl, Durkheim and Marx¹, and intellectually engaged in the methods of Bronislaw Malinowski² and Robert Lowie³, Evans-Pritchard's intellectual curiosity led him to find a post in Africa where he was the first anthropologist to do extensive work among an African culture.⁴ It was in 1926 that he met the Azande, a small society based in Southern Sudan. He lived with the Azande people for 20 months, and sought to learn the customs and beliefs of their society.

An important context to acknowledge for the period of Evans-Pritchard's study is that it took place in 1920s Sudan, a country impacted by the colonisation of Africa by the British since 1890, who would not leave until 1953.⁵ British intervention had thoroughly interfered with African ways of life despite the British assertion of 'indirect rule'; new cultures overwrote the indigenous cultures as British colonial officers controlled the actions and decisions of the African people they placed in charge.⁶ So with this in mind we must be aware that what we know of the Azandes' lifestyles has been moulded to exist within the limitations of what the Anglo-Egyptian directive would allow to continue.⁷

What is meant by 'science and knowledge' and 'divination and religion'?

In regards to the insights of Evans-Pritchard, we must establish what is meant by 'science and knowledge' amongst the Azande. In Evans-Pritchard's written account of what he learned in his 20 month study, titled "Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande"⁸, the anthropologist established a collection of regular beliefs and practices occurring in Azande life in the 1920s. The terminology of 'science' from a

¹ Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, p.xx.

² Burton, John W. "The Ghost of Malinowski in the Southern Sudan: Evans-Pritchard and Ethnographic Fieldwork." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 127, no. 4, 1983, p.278.

³Matthey, Piero. 'A glimpse of Evans-Pritchard through his correspondence with Lowie and Kroeber'. *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 27:21-45. 1996, pp.23.

⁴ Collins, D. Anthropological Perspectives on Divination and Magic [PowerPoint presentation] Available at: <https://moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1640> [accessed 19 April 2022].

⁵Zirulnick, A. South Sudan: a timeline to independence (2011) The Christian Science Monitor.

⁶ "Africa: British Colonies ." *Encyclopedia.com*. 25 Apr. 2022.

⁷ Burton, John W. "The Ghost of Malinowski in the Southern Sudan: Evans-Pritchard and Ethnographic Fieldwork.", pp.279.

⁸Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*.

modern western context may be ill-suited for the methods of gaining knowledge amongst the Zande people during this time; not only because of the difference in technology used but also due to the difference in beliefs about the universe and human existence. For the sake of this essay, 'science' shall be defined as the purposeful implementation of certain supplies and behaviours in order to create a desired result. Knowledge, henceforth, shall be regarded as both a common belief of the workings of the universe as well as, on a smaller scale, a comprehension of the methods used amongst a society to implement and manipulate results.

A brief summary of the science and knowledge of the Azande in the 1920s will help establish the socio-historical context of Evans-Pritchard's approach to their worldview. Their world was supernaturally affected by what Evans-Pritchard called witchcraft. At any moment in time witches used dark magic to throw misfortune over others. These witches could be any member of their society and cursed others, whether unknowingly, or due to ill-intent. Various sciences were used by the Azande to combat these misfortunes, referred to by Evans-Pritchard as oracles. This enabled individuals to learn the wider context of any possible action they might want to take, and whether witchcraft would thwart their desires, allowing them to go forward in an informed way and make the best decision. Oracles used were stick balancing⁹, rubbing boards¹⁰, termite mounds¹¹, and poison oracles¹². Individual practitioners called witch-doctors also utilised seances to ward off witches and the effects of witchcraft.¹³

For this essay we must also establish divination and religion in the eyes of the ancient Greco-Roman world; similarly to the Azande, a different knowledge of the universe existed in comparison to modern contexts, as well as the sciences used to manipulate the world. The terminology of religion must be addressed: the nature of spirituality in the ancient world was more akin to a *knowledge* of how the world worked and inseparable from the operations of all human engagements; as such we will view religion as reference to supernatural beings (i.e. gods) which had influence over human lives and fate. Divination, defined by Cicero as the "foresight and knowledge of future events"¹⁴, is here regarded as the implementation of methods to obtain knowledge of the present and future in order to learn information that will enable individuals to act with the most personal benefit.

⁹ Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, pp.167

¹⁰ Ibid. pp.168

¹¹ Ibid. pp.165.

¹² Ibid. pp.121.

¹³ Ibid. pp.75-76

¹⁴ Cicero. *On Old Age. On Friendship. On Divination*. Translated by W. A. Falconer. Loeb Classical Library 154. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923, p.223

The Methods of Evans-Pritchard's anthropological fieldwork with the Azande and their effectiveness, and their suitability when applied to the ancient Greco-Roman world

In spite of the fascinating and beneficial information that can be gleaned of other peoples, anthropological studies can only see a society short term, creating a snap-shot of a culture in a particular context.¹⁵ In comparing the religious and social lives of the Azande and ancient Greco-Rome, Evans-Pritchard's anthropological account, consisting of such a shorter period, is more or less static, whereas in studying the ancient world, with the emergence of the philosophers, we see the society evaluate itself and evolve over time, making any historical observations more complicated. As such the context of a study must be established in order to properly engage with the people being observed. Evans-Pritchard was aware of the context established by the presence of the British in Africa, and so, to an extent, we can consider his reports of the Azande reliable.

The overall method of Evans-Pritchard's anthropological study is what is known in the field today as 'participant observation'. What this means is that, in order for an anthropologist to make as conclusive an observation of a culture as possible, they insert themselves amongst the lives of the people of interest, participating in their day-to-day goings on along with the more significant events.¹⁶ When being a participant observer, Evans-Pritchard employed a number of tactics to enable him to understand what he witnessed. All of the methods mentioned do come with limitations on how effective they are for establishing a true account of the way of life of other cultures, which shall be analysed in their effectiveness, both for the Azande and ancient Greco-Roman worlds.

Language

Arguably the most important method to learn about other people, regardless of geography and time, is to learn the language. Evans-Pritchard learned "enough Zande to start his interrogation"¹⁷ of the Azande people themselves, and to listen to what they said to each other. With this the voice of authority shifts away from the anthropologist, making it so that a society can be an "authority on itself, with the anthropologist as an interpreter".¹⁸

However, learning the language has limitations, as the anthropologist admits in his book - the short time Evans-Pritchard was capable of speaking Azande, it not being

¹⁵ Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, pp.xxv

¹⁶ Collins, D. *Anthropological Perspectives on Divination and Magic* [PowerPoint presentation] Available at: <https://moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1640> [accessed 19 April 2022]

¹⁷ Larken, P. M. 1955. "Notes on the Azande of Tambura and Yambio, 1911-1932" in T. Leitch (ed.) *Zande Background*. Mimeo, Nzara, Sudan. Quoted in: Burton, John W. "The Ghost of Malinowski in the Southern Sudan: Evans-Pritchard and Ethnographic Fieldwork." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 127, no. 4, 1983, pp. 280

¹⁸ 'Episode 6: Strange Beliefs', *Strangers Abroad*, BBC, 1985.

his first-language, meant that he was not able to fully comprehend the speech of others¹⁹. With this short-coming, the accuracy of any participant observation is called into question. There is also the issue of translating important words into other languages to explain the original culture's beliefs. Evans-Pritchard was faced with a series of decisions on how to translate Azande concepts²⁰, which, in what he has decided is the closest English equivalent, can severely misinterpret a belief-structure based on the biases of the investigating party.

The fundamental difference between learning the languages to understand the Azande and the ancient Greco-Roman world, is that Azande can be communicated with in person, whereas the ancients can only be heard in one way communication through their surviving written records. Indeed, in Evans-Pritchard's case, the context of colonialism made it more likely for his intended subjects to speak his native language.²¹ For an anthropologist's "successful translation and account of another people's beliefs" the ability to fully communicate and reason with another society is the ideal circumstance.²² Body language, too, can help with understanding nuances and techniques in another society's actions. When left with only text, writing can limit the true nature of the accounts given, as both the writer and translator may be swayed by personal interests, knowledge and biases, which convolute a true account.

One instance where learning multiple languages has helped to understand ancient religion and divination is the work known as the Greek Magical Papyri. In conjunction with other surviving materials, it allows us to observe religious and magical acts performed in "the daily life of the people" who believed in ancient Greco-Rome.²³ The Greek Magical Papyri is a "diverse"²⁴ collection of primary source documents that were kept hidden from conventional society as the practitioners that used them were increasingly persecuted. As Betz says "such literature is extremely important for the understanding of what people are really thinking and doing in a particular time, geographical area, or cultural context"; this can be true for most standard extant texts, but again Betz makes an excellent point in saying that "Modern views of Greek and Roman religions have long suffered ... because they were unconsciously shaped by the only remaining sources: the literature of the cultural elite, and the archeological remains of the official cults of the states and cities".²⁵ With such a large population

¹⁹ Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, pp.84-85.

²⁰ *Ibid.* pp.65, 146, 151.

²¹ 'Episode 6: Strange Beliefs', *Strangers Abroad*, BBC, 1985.

²² Tambiah, S., *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp.121.

²³ Betz, Hans Dieter (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992, pp.xli

²⁴ *Ibid.* pp.xlv.

²⁵ Betz, Hans Dieter (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992, pp.xli.

apparently practising these unconventional rites, we do not have a full understanding of ancient Greco-Rome if we only focus on the evidence of elite and commonplace religious activities. And this is why the Greek Magical Papyri is such an important piece to properly engage with the religious atmosphere of the ancient world. A significant point in an analysis of this collection of ancient texts is that they are written in both Greek and Egyptian (Demotic), sometimes in the same document.²⁶ This bilingual presence in the text implies that in ancient times the collector of the texts themselves was utilising their skill of other cultures' languages to translate concepts for the education of others.²⁷

As fascinating it is to see that such an important method of Evans-Pritchard in studying the Azande is present in the ancient world, it also comes with its own issues - the same questions of reliability can be applied to the translations between the greek and egyptian languages: was the ancient scholar accurate in their word equivalency? Has anything been lost? Johnson has noted some inconsistencies in the scholar's method, which reminds us of the room for human error in all scholarly works, ancient or modern.²⁸ Johnson also refers to the presence of "'abracadabra' names, and what appear to the modern reader as gibberish".²⁹ For example PGM III.263-75, a "Foreknowledge charm"³⁰, gives instructions on how to access supernatural knowledge via a combination of formulaic actions and words. This includes using what is known as 'voces magicae', magical voices which invoke the aid of supernatural beings.³¹ The incantation is "make me know in advance the things in each person's mind, today, [because] I am TOM . . . IAO SABAOTH IAO THEASETH. . . M ADOUNAI BATHIAO . . . EATHOE IABRABA ARBATHRAS[IAO] BATHIAOOIA ZAGOURE BARBATHLAO AEI AAAAAAA EEEEEEE . . . OE . . . SOESGSISIETH . . . SABAOTH IAEO". Without a thorough understanding of the language this is indecipherable. As it is, scholars today are still unclear exactly what is meant by this, and we are forced to make insinuations as we hope for more ancient texts to be discovered that can shine light on their meaning.³²

This highlights the particular difficulties in translating divination, which can often feature unintelligible communication with or from a supernatural being. How do you translate the divine voice in such a way that maintains the integrity of the original actors and activity? When faced with an unrecognisable form of communication, there

²⁶ Ibid. pp.lv.

²⁷ Ibid. pp. xlii, xlii.

²⁸ Ibid. pp.lvi.

²⁹ Ibid. pp.lvii.

³⁰ Ibid. pp.26, l:265-270.

³¹ Greenbaum, D and Addey, C. *Divination Magic and Religion in Antiquity* [PowerPoint presentation] Available at:<https://moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1640> [accessed 8 May 2022].

³² Greenbaum, D and Addey, C. *Divination Magic and Religion in Antiquity* [PowerPoint presentation].

is a risk for scholars and anthropologists to shape their interpretation via personal biases, as shall be seen when analysing the Delphic oracle below.

Observation and Participation

When studying the Azande, Evans-Pritchard sought to immerse himself as much as possible among the people. Participating in daily activities such as hunting, farming and divination allowed him to be in a position where he could observe the society in their natural environment, as well as gain a better understanding about the mentality involved in their lifestyle.³³³⁴ By simply observing people, Evans-Pritchard was able to witness actions that the individuals concerned may not have been aware of, or else denied.³⁵ It also enabled him to see how people behaved towards each other without encroachment, for example at communal meals and public seances.³⁶

Participation, however, can be at times a flawed method, as Evans-Pritchard establishes in his book³⁷. The interaction of an outsider by default affects the nature and context of any participating event, with locals having to adapt their behaviour to include those not accustomed to their ways. This can also, in some circumstances, affect observation and interviews- the locals may be intently aware of the scrutiny of an outsider, which may influence them to act in a way they would not ordinarily, such as the reticence of the witchdoctors to allow their esoteric knowledge to be passed on to an outsider.³⁸ It can be argued, however, that it is the purpose of long term participation to side-step this issue: the longer an anthropologist stays with the society, the more accustomed they are to their presence, making it easier for them to act as they usually would.

Observation of and participation in the ancient world is a method that needs adaption from the way it was conducted with the Azande. It is not something that can be carried out by simply sitting nearby and listening. In order to observe the ancient world, we must first have access to surviving materials - whether they be objects, architecture or texts. In the case of the oracle at Delphi, there are no surviving accounts from the divinationary source itself,³⁹ and so we are forced to rely on ancient sources made by people who may have either observed or participated in the proceedings. Herodotus, a scholar born 490 BC, used many of the methods mentioned in this essay to create his work *The Histories*. This primary source gives both first hand accounts of past events,

³³ Burton, John W. "The Ghost of Malinowski in the Southern Sudan: Evans-Pritchard and Ethnographic Fieldwork.", pp. 280.

³⁴ Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, pp. 45.

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 29, 180.

³⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 91, 141, 153.

³⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 67.

³⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 68.

³⁹ Maurizio, L. "Anthropology and Spirit Possession: A Reconsideration of the Pythia's Role at Delphi." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 115, 1995, pp. 79

as well as collected knowledge from others concerning war, geography, and day-to-day lives of people in societies other than his own.⁴⁰ On multiple occasions he cites the use of the Delphic oracle by people looking for divine advice, and through these accounts we can learn the importance of the oracle for those of the ancient Greco-Roman world. Early on in the work we are given an account of Croesus who decided to test several oracles for their veracity; after receiving a collection of answers to his question he proclaimed “with profound reverence” that the “oracle at Delphi was the only genuine one in the world”.⁴¹ Other accounts show the level of value and trust placed on the oracular skill of the Priestess at Delphi. The Cyrenaeans are said to have asked the Priestess for advice on how to construct the best government⁴²; the people of Argos asked about the safety of their city⁴³; and again the Argives ask for advice relating to actions of war and are advised by the Priestess: “Guard the head well, and the head will save the body”.⁴⁴

As scholars have studied the remnants of interactions of the Delphic oracle over the years, the lack of primary texts straight from the temple itself has meant that translations and interpretations have been made as to the true proceedings of the divination. Maurizio shows us how this can give a highly detrimental portrayal of the reality of ancient lives in her study.⁴⁵ Due to the biases of male scholars⁴⁶, who underestimate the level of agency of women in the ancient world, a view has been formed that the Priestess at Delphi was not in charge of her senses and unable to give forth these important divine messages; it is supposed instead that the oracle was reliant on male, “rational” attendants that interpreted and issued the proclamations of Apollo.⁴⁷ As Maurizio says: “Although *every ancient source without exception or modification presents the Pythia* [Priestess] *as issuing oracular responses*, this possibility is universally dismissed”.⁴⁸ Herodotus’ reports coincide with this as seen in her direct communication with Arcesilaus; though the oracle answer is riddle-like in nature and must be considered carefully by the listener the Priestess is fully capable of speaking for herself.⁴⁹ It is possible some instances (such as when the Athenians asked the oracle for advice and began to debate what the correct interpretation was) gave the impression to some that the Priestess herself is unreliable, but even in this case Herodotus says that “the Priestess Aristonice uttered the following prophecy”.⁵⁰

⁴⁰ Herodotus. *The Histories*. (transl. de Sélincourt. A) London, England; New York Published by: Penguin Books, 2003. Pp. xiv-xxii

⁴¹ Ibid. pp. 21; I:48-49.

⁴² Ibid. pp.296; I:161.

⁴³ Ibid. pp.366; I:19.

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp.466; I:148-149.

⁴⁵ Maurizio, L. “Anthropology and Spirit Possession”, pp. 69–86.

⁴⁶ Ibid. pp. 71

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 70

⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 72

⁴⁹ Herodotus. *The Histories*. pp. 297-8; I:163-165.

⁵⁰ Herodotus. *The Histories*. pp. 461-3; I:140-143.

This all goes to show that Evans-Pritchard's methods of observation and participation are much more difficult to apply to the ancient world.

Interviews

Once having learned the language, Evans-Pritchard went on to interview numerous members of the Azande culture, asking them prying questions into their actions and beliefs behind supernatural practices. These first hand accounts allowed him to learn that not everyone in the society held the same strict regimen of beliefs in regards to what could be seen as the Zande knowledge of the universe.⁵¹ It also helped him to learn the meaning behind behaviours he did not recognise⁵², and gain access to events he was not personally allowed to take part in.⁵³ These interviews achieved varying levels of success. Some lines of questioning could be subdued due to social delicacies, or due to a lack of knowledge from the subject; such as in the case where Evans-Pritchard asked an individuals to define the nature of witchcraft in their culture and they felt "out of their depth" when trying to do so, as no Azande believes they are themselves a witch.⁵⁴

Other circumstances of questioning were impacted by Evans-Pritchard himself: when encountering a visiting witchdoctor, and faced with distrust, the anthropologist decided to manipulate his hosts' emotions and toy with their methods.⁵⁵ While it may have been frustrating to be denied knowledge about such an important part of Azande culture, any information Evans-Pritchard could have gained through such methods would be tainted by his actions. Such instances of personal, emotional acts in an anthropological study are less likely to happen in this form when dealing with ancient accounts, though there is still a risk of scholarly biases and agendas.

Evans-Pritchard's study was also limited by its interviews not accounting for all of Azande society. Women, due in most part to the structure of Azande society, were not included in his interviews, making us reliant on the male population's perceived reality of their lives. Again this is an issue faced when analysing reports of the ancient Greco-Roman female population, who were also barred from giving personal accounts.⁵⁶

Without being able to question people of the ancient world directly, the best we can do to learn of their personal experiences is to translate extant texts they wrote of their lives. Inevitably this limits the sources available of the ancient peoples, as it was for the most part the privilege of elite men to be able to have their thoughts written down,

⁵¹ Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, pp.178.

⁵² *Ibid.* pp.89.

⁵³ *Ibid.* pp. 104, 127.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* pp.31.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* pp.68-70, 103

⁵⁶ Maurizio, L. "Anthropology and Spirit Possession", pp. 71, 85.

and then be preserved over the centuries. We are fortunate to have survive a unique and valuable personal diary of a Roman elite male who's health and beliefs gave us an account of greco-roman religion and divination, as well as some representation of medical science.

Publius Aelius Aristides (117–after 181 AD)⁵⁷ in his diaries translated as *The Sacred Tales* teaches us about the level of faith ancient peoples could have in dream divination.⁵⁸ Through his diaries we can learn about incubation: "the receiving of dreams in which the god prescribes the healing"⁵⁹; we can also learn about contemporary medical science and general knowledge and belief systems. Aristides suffered from chronic illness most of his life, and his unique interpretation of his fate was that he has been chosen by the god of healing Asclepius as his favourite.⁶⁰ In one of his entries we are shown various representations of ancient perception of divine healing and religious faith. Between October and January in 148 AD, Aristides believed that "it had seemed best" to Asclepius to afflict him with a tumour on his groin which caused him terrible pain.⁶¹ Doctors instructed him to undergo surgery or cauterise the tumour or else risk death, but Asclepius told him to endure the growth. As far as Aristides was concerned "clearly there was no choice between listening to the doctors or to the god".⁶² That Aristides then faced heavy criticism from his friend shows us how faith in divination (or at least incubation) was not a blanket belief in ancient Greco-Rome; severity of illness could force some to seek methods with visible results rather than rely on the unknown. Eventually, Asclepius "the Saviour" gave simultaneous divine dreams to both Aristides and his step father on how to treat his tumour with a certain drug containing salt, and goes on later to instruct him on how to heal the scar tissue with an egg.⁶³ With this we see that the realms of religion and science are not necessarily separate in the ancient world, as Aristides will readily use practical medicines as long as it is what he believes his god intends for him. Aristides' friend are once again incredulous to see the healing results, and it is interesting to learn that the doctors themselves are willing to believe that the god did aid in the medical treatment of the afflicted - though they insist it must have been "some other greater disease, which he secretly cured".⁶⁴

Though Aristides' writings are not an interview in the modern sense, we are given a clear window into the beliefs and actions of those in the ancient world. Of course

⁵⁷ Dodds, E.R. and Trapp, M. B. "Aristides, Publius Aelius" *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Published 22/12/2015. Oxford University Press.

⁵⁸ Behr, Charles A, and Aelius Aristides. *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales*. Chicago: Argonaut, 1969.

⁵⁹ Hornblower, S. and Spawforth, A. *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization*. : Oxford University Press, pp.86

⁶⁰ Brockmann, Christian, et al. "A God and Two Humans on Matters of Medicine: Asclepius, Galen and Aelius Aristides." *In Praise of Asclepius: Aelius Aristides, Selected Prose Hymns*, edited by Heinz-Günther Nesselrath et al., Mohr Siebeck GmbH and Co. KG, 2016, pp. 123.

⁶¹ Behr, C. A. and Aelius Aristides. *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales*, pp.219; l:62.

⁶² Ibid. pp.219; l:63.

⁶³ Ibid. pp.219-220; l:66-68.

⁶⁴ Ibid. pp. 219; l:67.

when dealing with diaries the quality of writing is essential to what is revealed and to what extent we can engage with what is described; in this instance we are fortunate that Aristides was an enthusiastic writer and lecturer throughout his ordeals.⁶⁵

Cross referencing accounts & Noticing patterns

After the above methods have been utilised, they can be taken further to garner more understanding of a society. After gathering accounts of customs and beliefs from multiple individuals, and experiencing and observing activities held in that society, cross-referencing of these accounts enables the mapping out of the belief structure at large and the recognition of patterns of behaviour. This may reveal ways of life it may not have occurred to individuals to divulge, and insights to the overall context of the lifestyle. We can see Evans-Pritchard practising this when he analyses the contradicting reports on oracles “side by side in the pages of an ethnographic treatise”⁶⁶; and as well when comparing Azande beliefs of the poison oracle to other people in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and English use of chemical analysis.⁶⁷ Analysis by cross-references can be limited by the sources available to the anthropologist. In Azande culture, for example, very little was taken from women, giving a skewed representation of the culture.

Waterfield used surviving texts to cross reference information about the scientific divination of ancient astrology, finding that the “cumulative effect”⁶⁸ of their evidence gathered allowed them to ascertain a clearer view of ancient Greek astrology and its influences from other ancient cultures. They conclude that their analysis revealed an ancient Greek knowledge of various astrological techniques, for which there were many applicable uses. They also show an awareness of the limitations in using written records to create a history of past cultures as key pieces of evidence can be lost, preventing us from being able to establish a true representation of the ancient world.⁶⁹; or scholarly biases may intervene.⁷⁰ Again we see issues in the translator's choice of word equivalency and possible biases where the addition of a ‘not’ can drastically distort Plato’s opinion on the use of astrology from commendable to superstitious.⁷¹ Another interesting primary example of astrology is Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos*, which uses the divinatory practice in combination with ancient science to determine, amongst other things “the character of the earth's inhabitants, eclipse effects, and the

⁶⁵ Dodds, E.R. and Trapp, M. B. "Aristides, Publius Aelius" Oxford Classical Dictionary. Published 22/12/2015. Oxford University Press.

⁶⁶ Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, pp.149.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* pp.120-121.

⁶⁸ Waterfield, Robin, ‘The Evidence for Astrology in Classical Greece’, *Culture and Cosmos* Vol. 3 no 2, Autumn/Winter 1999, pp.11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* pp.11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* pp.3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* pp.7.

weather”.⁷² In this work Ptolemy cross references what he has learned about the world and recognises patterns of which he is able to create an mathematical analysis combining beliefs and sciences concerning the supernatural and natural universe.⁷³

On the subject of comparative accounts of divination in the ancient Greco-Roman world it seems necessary to briefly cite the philosopher Cicero, who, in his treatise *De Divinatione*, written approximately in 45 BC⁷⁴ to investigate the value of divination, gives a contemporary analysis of divination practices used by the population. He is both an observer and a participant, as he held the title of Augur in Rome, wherein it was constitutional to read prophecies from birds to determine the most beneficial acts for the people. Cicero admits his scepticism of the veracity of the act, but observed them “out of respect for the opinion of the masses and because of the great service to the State”, showing us that the contemporary population, for the most part, held faith in the ability to contact the supernatural world.⁷⁵ Cicero’s work is one of an elite male and so we must read his statements carefully as he treats various divination practices with scorn (and wins an argument of his own making)⁷⁶, but as he systematically goes through the different methods he compares collected accounts of first and secondhand occurrences of divination, and then uses the latest philosophical sciences to make conclusions about the people who live in both his and other societies. This is just what Evans-Pritchard did in his study of the Azande people and their series of oracles, but with significantly less personal interjections.

Conclusion

This essay has evaluated the use of language, observation and participation, interviews, and comparison as methods to learn about other cultures, as used by Evans-Pritchard with the Azande in 1926, and investigated its effectiveness in the investigation of the ancient Greco-Roman world. It has been found that they are not without their issues in reliability and practicality, needing to be adapted in many ways in order to best investigate evidence from the ancient world.

There are still other methods that are useful in studying ancient cultures that Evans-Pritchard did not need to make use of in his contemporary study, two being archaeology and experimental archaeology. In place of being able to observe or interview ancient people in their experiences, we can look at the archaeological remains that survive. To learn about ancient Greco-Roman religious and divinationary

⁷² Riley, Mark. “Science and Tradition in the ‘Tetrabiblos.’” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 132, no. 1, 1988, pp. 74.

⁷³ Ibid. pp.79.

⁷⁴ Cicero. *On Old Age. On Friendship. On Divination*. pp.214.

⁷⁵ Ibid. II. xxxiii, pp.449-451.

⁷⁶ Ibid.II.xlviii , pp.483.

acts we can examine the remains of temples and sanctuaries used and the extant objects associated with them. In place of participation, experimental archaeology can enable us to recreate actions of the past such as reproduction of tools to manufacture the same goods⁷⁷, or perhaps following the spells instructed in the Greek Magical Papyri, so that we can engage in the activities valued by people in the ancient world. Inevitably, any methods employed in the anthropological and ethnographic study of cultures other than our own are subject to the difficult balance between the etic vs emic, that is to say study of behaviour from outside a society vs from inside a society.⁷⁸ To get the best result from a study both perspectives must work together⁷⁹, and this severely challenges the anthropological approach to learn the lives of ancient cultures.

Regardless of its overall applicability to ancient studies, Evans-Pritchard's work amongst the Azande, and his prioritisation in letting the people he studied express their own beliefs on their own terms, has made a significant impact in the field of anthropology.

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⁷⁷ Darvill, Timothy. "experimental archaeology." The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology. : Oxford University Press, . Oxford Reference.

⁷⁸ Olive, James L. (2014). Reflecting on the Tensions Between Emic and Etic Perspectives in Life History Research: Lessons Learned [35 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 15(2), Art. 6, pp. 3.

⁷⁹ Ibid. pp.5.

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