



The Man Called Deng Majok: A Biography of Power, Polygyny, and Change

Francis Mading Deng

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Deng Majok succeeded his father Kwol Arob, as Paramount Chief of the Ngok Dinka of Abyei in 1943 and reigned until his death in 1969. He is widely recognized as one of the most prominent tribal leaders who contributed effectively to the maintenance of peace, security and stability in Sudan's volatile North-South border area, where warrior African and Arab tribes come in contact, interact, and often clash in competition over scarce natural resources. Working in close partnership with his Arab counterpart, Babo Nimir, Paramount Chief of the Missiriya Arab tribes, Deng Majok succeeded remarkably in ensuring peaceful coexistence and cooperation between the two communities. Deng Majok was also an innovator who brought to his area the benefits of the market economy, health care, veterinary services, modern education, and a credible administration of justice. But perhaps the most unique aspect of Deng Majok's life was his profile as a family man. He married over two hundred wives from all sections of his tribe and from the neighboring Southern tribes. With an estimated average of four children per wife, and with his widows continuing to bear children to his name after his death through the custom of levitate, Deng Majok has close to a thousand children. Even more striking is the strict code of conduct he imposed on his vast family based on idealized principles of unity, harmony, solidarity and absolute intolerance of jealousy among family members. Deng Majok was however deeply tormented by an agonizing power struggle against his father who favored as his successor a younger half-brother, Deng Makuei (also known as Deng Abot), from another wife whom he considered senior to Deng Majok's mother despite the ambiguities in the order of their marriages. The struggle ended with Deng Majok plotting with his Arab friends and the British administrators to force his father into retirement and install him as the Paramount Chief. Throughout his life, Deng Majok strove painstakingly to prove beyond any doubt that he was the most qualified for the leadership. The biography of Deng Majok is written by his scholar-diplomat-statesman son who has been highly commended for successfully maintaining a precarious balance between devotion to his father and remarkable objectivity. This is the story of a truly outstanding man, whose varied life experiences make for intriguing, painful and engaging reading. As the author convincingly substantiates, *The Man Called Deng Majok*, is indeed a tale of glory and tragedy.

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