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BILAD AL-SUDAN I PASTORI DEL NILO BIANCO

Jean-Baptiste Sevette

Preface by Jean Paul Barbier-Müller

Historic Sudan, before South Sudan broke away in 2011, was the largest country in Africa and is still the third largest. In spite of this, it remains one of the most unknown. Relatively untouched by the great civilizations of the past and the modern world, the inhabitants of the Upper Nile have retained their ways and customs almost intact. Brave and pugnacious, fiercely jealous of their independence, inured to hunger and suffering, and with only their clubs and spears with which to uphold their rights, they have adapted to the rigours that nature has imposed on them and, proud of their adaptability, they are sufficient unto themselves. However, military surveillance has taught these peoples, who have no government, legal institutions, or political structures, that they are ruled by Khartoum.

Jean-Baptiste Sevette made many happy and enriching journeys to Sudan, during which he attempted to grasp the essential features and qualities of these people. He learned to value the upright character, candidness, and pride of these herders, whose ingenuousness seems to belong to a bygone age.

And this is why he was anxious to fix their characteristic simplicity, naivety, and resoluteness in pictures and words, the way one seeks to hold fast to values that suddenly seem to be threatened. And the way of life of these herders is indeed teetering after thousands of years, intimately and exclusively dependent as it is on their livestock.

It would appear that the nobility of these sons of nature is destined to survive only in the memory of men who had the good fortune to know and love them.

Jean-Baptiste Sevette was employed as a photographer by the Swiss Mission to Sudan from 1967 to 1982 and worked for nine years under Professor Bonnet. It is thanks to this human as well as professional experience that he was given unique access to the daily life of the various ethnic groups in the region. This photographic survey is certain to be one of the very last records of these peoples who have been locked out by history.