Boekbesprekings/Book Reviews

Megan Biesele, Women like meat: the folklore and foraging ideology of the Kalahari Ju'hoan. Johannesburg and Indianapolis: University of Witwatersrand Press and University of Indiana Press (1993), pp. xxi + 225, 1 map, 8 half-tones, 4 lines drawings. no price given

It is good to have this long delayed book by Megan Biesele before us. Many of its readers will, I am sure, share my feeling that it would have been good to have had it when most of it was apparently first written some 15 years ago at the time when the modern Bushman canon was being institutionalised. Biesele's work would have added a much needed broadening dimension to the then prevalent view that Khoisan-speaking peoples in Botswana and Namibia - at least those living in what were thought of as the 'remote' areas of those countries - had managed to maintain an ancient, aboriginal way of life largely unaffected by outside influences. Nevertheless, Women like meat arrives at another opportune moment, one at which the adequacy of that Bushman canon has been effectively challenged. Biesele's work now offers substantial material with which to help fill out the emerging dynamic history of northern Khoisan peoples.

It is not that Biesele is concerned to address that history directly. Rather, it is more that the anecdotal evolutionism that was the guiding motif of the canon is not a central organising axis of her work; this is one of its major strengths. Indeed, the most obvious substantive flaws of the book occur in its first and last chapters, which are (along with a half-dozen), far the weakest of the seven chapters. These flaws stem from Biesele's uncritical acceptance of inferences made by others in the 1960s-70s on the basis of culture-stage development hypotheses that are no longer accepted. Examples are Yellen's notions that Ju'hoan (Zhu and Kung in other publications) have lived in the same area for thousands of years, that in that area stone tools were replaced by metal only in very recent time, and that Tsodillo rock paintings all predate Bantu settlement there; Tobias's proposal that Bushmen developed tracking ability superior to that of other peoples; Marshall's conjecture that Ju'hoan do not understand fertility cycles, the widespread misconception that weather, carnivores, and in-laws are more limiting factors on the lives of foragers than on those of other peoples. All these essentialist conjectures have been rejected or cast into serious doubt by new empirical evidence, better historiography, and refined theory - sometimes by the authors cited by Biesele themselves. More surprising is Biesele's reliance on Lee's 1979 denial of the dual facets of single allegorical-religious figure. She moves to appropriate kin behaviour in the present; the ideals of kinship reciprocity and proper marriage ties are delineated.

Biesele has adopted Patrick Dicken's new orthography of the Zhu 'hōa language; I find this unnecessarily cumbersome, but use his spelling - Ju 'hoan - in this review to avoid confusing readers.
the conceptual content of Ju/'hoan mythology represent beliefs from two different historical strata. Subsequent work has since added considerable weight to this insightful suggestion. Indeed, a significant strength of Women like meat is that Biesele - despite the lapses noted - not only recognised but at the beginning of the 1980s was willing to address 'surprising similarities' among 'Bushman' throughout southern Africa as well as 'substantial contact with economies other than hunting and gathering', even in the Dobe-NyaeNyae area thought by her Harvard colleagues to have remained relatively isolated. Biesele assumed a rather more shallow history for those contacts than is now documented and did not give adequate consideration to the possibility that the central place of cattle and iron in some of the tales parallels the known presence of these non-forager elements in archaeological sites in the Ju/'hoan area beginning about 2000 years ago. Nevertheless, she concludes that '[w]hile the Ju/'hoansi seem isolated to us in time when isolation was a watchword of 'Bushman' studies to other times and places'. That was a noteworthy insight at a time when isolation was a watchword of 'Bushman' studies and remains a salutary recognition regarding any culture too often forgotten by anthropologists to this day.

In closing, I must point out two annoying editorial oversights. The first is the printing of = for the alveolar click 0, the second is the non-correspondence between chapter numbers in the text and the notes; both, especially the second, detract from the ease of reading. Beyond this, I miss the many other texts on the origin of death, the division of the social world, and other topics that are the meat of the materials collected by Biesele and look forward to their promised publication. I am sure Biesele's analysis of their contents will be as insightful as those she presents here.

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Dr. Jane Camlthers is verbonde aan die departement Geskiedenis van die Universiteit van Suid-Afrika. Sy spesialiseer in stedelike en omgewingsgeskiedenis. Etlike publikasies in hierdie rigting het al uit haar pen verskyn, onder meer Sandton, Randburg, Kaapstad en die Kruger Nasionale Wildtuin. Die hoofstuk drie toegespits bet om te yerduidelik hoe Sandton dorpstatus aan die 25-jarige feeuwinge oor die wordings- en ontwikkelingsgeskiedenis van Sandton.

Met die oogopslag is die versorging van die publikasie treffend en voorsien van 'n keurig-gelukkigge voorblad en teks. 'n Interesseantheid van die teks is dat geen oorspronklike foto's benut is nie, maar slegs illustrasies soos die pen van mnr. Duncan Butchart. 'n Paar netjies kaarte is ook toegevoeg om die leser tot die ligging van die Johannesburg-omgewing te oriënteer.

Die inhuud van die publikasie is duidelijk chronologies georganiseer en voorsien van etlike bylaes wat handel oor die geskiedenis en herkoms van die dorpswag, die naam Sandton, die eerste burgemeester en stadsklerk, 'n lys van burgemeesters van Sandton sowel as die bestuursstruktue van die Gesondheidsraad vir Buitestedelike gebiede.

In die loop van vyf hoofstukke bespreek die skrywer die inwoners van prekoloniale Sandton, gevolg deur die boere en kleinboere tot en met die stryd om munisipale status van die Gesondheidsraad vir Buitestedelike gebiede en die verkryging daarvan in 1969. In die bespreking is dit die toestandkonting van plaslike bestuur in die besonder, gekoppel aan prominente persone en komitees, wat uitgeldig word. Die skrywer stel daarom op 'n gemaklike verteltrant die leser toe te lig.

Heelwat interessanteende word uitgewys. Hieronder tel die bydrae van die Steentyd-inwoners te Lone Hill en Norscot Koppies waar yster-wapens en landbou implemente vervaardig is sowel as die vestiging van die Eerste Voortrekkers. Opvallend egter is dat die skrywer heelwat gebruik maak van bykomstige inhoudes om middel om die teek. Dit kan plek-plek als pluspunt vir die publikasie gesien word. Dog werk die nodigheid van sommige inhoudes en bykomstigse vrae:

Is die illustrasies soos op p. 33 gepas en uniek aan Sandton?

Is die omvattendheid waarmee die Gesondheidsraad vir Buitestedelike Gebiede (in hoofstuk drie) asook Randburg (in hoofstuk vier) bespreek en toegeldig word nie oordrewes borduurwerk nie?

As't ware word die reeds beknopte publikasie ontneem van ander tersaaklikeheid waarop dieper toeligting verwees word, maar grotendees ontbreek. Hieronder tel die infrastrukturele gesteldheid van die Sandtongebied van 1899 en kort daarna (bv. onderwys voor 1899, die wet- en ordestruktue na 1899, godsdienstebouw en kort na 1899 en die ekonomiese gesteldheid en afhanklikheid van die omgewing na 1902).

Alhoewel die skrywer in die teks haar oorwegend daarop toegespits het om te verduidelik hoe Sandton dorpstatus verkry het, het die inhuud dalk te veel van 'n plaslike History from above - kleur. Meer diepte oor ontwikkeling op alle lewensterreine, oftewel 'n plaslike History from below mag die leser 'n beter beeld van Sandton en al sy mense gee as wat tans die geval is.

Ongeag die vooraanstaande vrae is die publikasie 'n nuttige en 'n waardevolle toevoeging tot die bestaande streekstudie van Suid-Afrika, en waarin die bydrae daarvan veral tot die geskiedenis van plaslike bestuursoewikkeling strek.

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