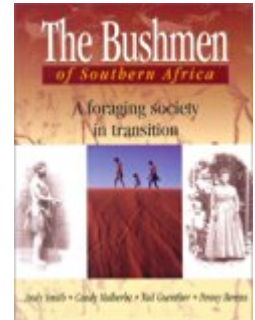


Andy Smith, Candy Malherbe, Mat Guenther, Penny Berens. *The Bushmen of Southern Africa: A Foraging Society in Transition*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000. viii + 112 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8214-1341-8.



Reviewed by Robert Ross

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This is a valuable popularisation of the current state of knowledge on the Bushmen of Southern Africa. It has been written by an archaeologist, Andy Smith, a historian of the Cape, Candy Malherbe, and an anthropologist with long experience among the Bushmen groups in the Kalahari, Mat Guenther. Penny Berens, "a freelance writer and editor", has presumably been brought in for her editorial and layout skills.

Each of the main authors has provided a valuable overview of the current state of play in their respective disciplines. Andy Smith provides a rather summary account of the late Stone Age in the region, indeed taking it back to Australopithecus—which seems rather strange as the Bushmen are surely no more, and no less, the descendants of the australopithecines than anyone else, and a cursory discussion of, for instance, the British does not begin with Cro-Magnon, let alone the precursors of the modern species. There are useful discussions of technology and economy, but the section on rock-art is unfortunately compressed, even in a book of this type.

Candy Malherbe, whose knowledge of the history of the Khoesan in the nineteenth-century Cape is unrivalled, gives a valuable set of accounts, both of European opinions about the Bushmen and, so far as it is possible, of the Bushmen history in that region. In this she quite rightly shows not just the colonial genocide but also the ways in which Bushmen survived this, and were incorporated into the rural labour force of the Cape to a degree which is often not appreciated. She also gives an account of Bushmen chiefs suggesting, surely rightly, that there were far more political leaders of the admittedly small-scale communities than is often appreciated. At other moments, particularly with regard to the controversy on the relationships between Bushmen and the Cape's pastoralists, the Khoekhoen, she rather annoyingly hedges her bets, recounting the various points of view held in the academic world at the moment without coming to any firm conclusion of her own.

Mat Guenther, finally, gives a summary description of the modern Bushmen of Botswana and, to a lesser extent, Namibia, concentrating on

matters of social organisation and religion, as evidenced in, for instance, the trance dance, and wisely eschewing an account of the complications of Bushman kinship practices. He then describes the ways in which the modern Bushmen relate to the nation-states in which they find themselves and in which they always form small minorities, which might not always be apparent to those who only consider the concentration on the Bushmen in modern ethnographies. The book ends with a discussion of Bushman cultural revivalism, and the ways in which they are able to form transnational alliances with other so-called indigenous peoples.

In this review, I have assigned authors to the various chapters. This is probably illegitimate, as the book appears under four names, and I assume that each of them would accept full responsibility for everything that appears under their names. Nevertheless, this illustrates the greatest problem which this book evidences. While it is gratifying to have the various disciplines of archaeology, history and anthropology working together, as they do here, the book is rather too much a compilation of separate studies, and rather too little a single whole. The themes which are discussed in one section do not come back in the successive ones, even when, as is the case with rock art, the current interpretations of prehistoric material are largely based on the myths of the historic Bushmen of the Cape Colony, collected in the nineteenth century from the victims of colonial conquest, to a lesser extent, on the twentieth century ethnography of the Kalahari. Moreover, the question is not addressed why the Kalahari Bushmen of the recent past and the present should be seen as in some way the modern manifestations of cultural groups which go deep into the past of an area more than a thousand kilometres away--and of course this statement could be read the other way round. The fact that modern Bushmen and other Khoisan revivalists might claim that proves nothing, of course. They use the classifications of the academics to their own best advantage, as

they have every right to do. All the same, this is a clear weakness in the conception of this book.

It would, however, be wrong to end by carping. This is a well-written, well laid out, well illustrated introduction to its subject, and should be treated as such by those who may need one, either for themselves or for their students.

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