

# Die Buschmanner des Okavango and Sambesigebietes der Nord-Kalahari\*

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## Part 1 June 16, 1910

The core area inhabited by the Bushmen is the middle Kalahari and adjacent areas of the northern Kalahari. There are fewer Bushmen to be found in the southern Kalahari. In addition, there are Bushmen in Greater Namaland, in southern Namibia, in the area of the Otawi river, and in the south-western and south-eastern portion of the Northern Kalahari. A few Bushmen are to be found in the lands occupied by the Herero, the Kaokoveld and in the northern parts of Namibia. In South Africa, as in Bamangwatoland, only occasional remnants of the Bushmen population survive. According to my observations and research, the Bushmen are not found north of the 17th latitude in the south-eastern north Kalahari (i.e. in the area of the Okavango and the Zambesi rivers). The same appears to be true also for the south-western portion of the north Kalahari, on the scanty information supplied by Baum. Thus it appears that the 17th parallel may be the northern limit of distribution of the Bushman (race).

Passage distinguished between two linguistic groups: the 'Kaukau-speaking' Bushmen in the western area and the "Ngami-speaking" in the eastern area. He said that the boundary between these two peoples runs from Rietfontein at the southern corner of the Omaheke directly to Ghanzi and from there to the North-west, reaches the southern end of the Kaukau area at the halfway point between !koe and !gabba and then travels northward to the west of the Tschorilo mountains (which belong to the Ngamiland peoples). As a result of my linguistic tests, it appears that the Bushmen of the Okavango delta and the sand desert zone of the eastern Kalahari belong unquestionably to the Ngami-speakers, therefore the dividing line between the two major language groups may be continued northwards from the Tschorilo mountains to the forde at Mahango on the Okavango. It could probably even be extended even further northwards from Okavango and Kuito. We are still uncertain about the affinities of the Bushmen of the south-western north Kalahari. The !Kung who are the masters of the !Kungveld between the rapids of the Libebe, and the !Kaudum and the Omuramba Omatako and also live in the area of sandveld towards Jotka (between Grootfontein and the Kubango) are Kaukau-speakers. So are the Hei //kum (or Hei //umga) who live to the west and south-east of them. According to our staff physician, Werner, these last are very closely related to the !kung. On the other hand, very little is known about the Bushmen of the Oschimpoloveld and the sandveld between Kubango and Kuito. According to my correspondence with the ethnographer Dr Rudolf Poch, it appears that the language of the Ngami-Bushmen is more closely related to the Hottentot language family than any other Bushmen language.

In the northern Kalahari the circumstances are changing so rapidly that reconstruction of the former lifeways of the people is very difficult. It will take much research before a separation of the indigenous features from the intrusive features of the society may be achieved. Whereas in the middle Kalahari the Bushmen seem to be more mixed with the Hottentots, it appears that the Northern Bushmen are losing their racial character through a long-standing process of

\*Title may read in translation: The Bushmen of the lands in the vicinity of the Okavango and the Zambesi rivers of the Northern Kalahari.

\*\*Franz Seiner was an administrator in the German SW African Government. He did a journey to the Kalahari in 1905/1906 and his articles on Bushman first appeared in 1913.

intermixture with surrounding Negro peoples. This is more pronounced in those in the area of the Kuito and the Oschimpoloveld.

The actual physical type is in many cases almost erased. In physique they resemble the Negro more than the Bushmen. There are many transitional types from the yellow-brown Bushmen colour to the reddish-brown colour of the Negro, similarly there is a continuum from the angular Bushmen head form to the rounded skull and broad face of the Negro. According to Livingstone, the Bushmen to the north of the Makarikari salt pan were stronger and heavier and darker than those of the southern regions. Men of over 170 cm in height are not uncommon in the north, although they often exhibit the fine bone structure characteristic of the Bushmen. In the north Kalahari I was able to hire Bushmen as carriers who could carry weights normally considered to be within the range of the Negroes (22-25 kg) but in the German area of Reitfontein at the south-western portion of the Ghanziveld in the middle Kalahari none of the 40 Bushmen who volunteered to serve as carriers was able to handle such a load.

In the Caprivi Strip between the Okavango river and the Zambesi, there are two kinds of Bushmen; the swamp and the steppe Bushmen. The swamp Bushmen live in the river valley and in the delta of the Okavango and, like the Mambukushu who live around them, they have winter and summer villages, boats, dogs and goats and they carry on hunting and fishing as well as slash-and-burn agriculture. They are relatively sedentary. Among the Swamp Bushmen the hybridisation with the Negroes is very pronounced. This may be partly a result of the theft of Mambukushu children by the Bushmen to make up for the relatively low fertility of the pure Bushmen. The Swamp Bushmen call themselves /tannekwe. The Mambukushu also distinguish between the swamp and the steppe Bushmen, calling the first Ma/tannekwe and the latter Makwengo. The Batawana and the Majei (BaYei?) also distinguish between the two, calling them Ma/tannekwe and Masarwa respectively, while Marutse, Masubia, Mafe and Bamangwato know only the steppe Bushmen and call them Masarwa.

Passarge thought that the /tannekwe were a closed genepool (local race) and that although some of them live in Ngami and in the steppe to the south and west of the former inland sea (the Makarikari pan?) most of them live in the Okavango Delta. It seems more likely however that the swamp Bushmen are really a mixture of the remains of various refugee groups who were driven to the swamps from the surrounding steppes.

Along the river banks of the Okavango, and in the delta, there are three major groups settled, all of whom refer to themselves and their neighbours as /tannekwe but distinguish themselves from these neighbours with a clan or tribal name. These are the Bugakwe, the !garikwe and the Goëkwe. The Bugakwe live on the western banks of the river from the Mahangoforde to the beginning of the delta. Along this ten mile stretch of land there are five villages: Tschukuru, Makuya, Gambututu, Kaututu and Schagabata, with a total population of 220 persons. This small population is dependent upon (belongs to) the chief of the Mambukushu, Libebe. Separated from the Bugakwe by the lands belonging to the town of Kaubakare (which includes villages of the Mambukushu and the Makalahari), are the Goëkwe. I noticed a winter village of these people, containing some 90 persons, on an island in the Okavango Delta just north-east of the place where the Namassere river branches from the Okavango. These people seem to be identical with Passarge's *Gokwe*, who according to him, lived from the western edge of the flood plain and Ngami deep into the Kaukaveld, and to whom the Tschorilo highlands also belonged. In the north-eastern delta live the Garikwe, in close association with the Mambukushu. They are settled in eight villages, the most important of which are Matsetse, Pomungen and Genti, which stretch from the beginning of the delta at Klein-Njangori to the banks of the Paliba at Motsu. The southern delta is only inhabited by the Mambukushu. The Bugakwe and the Garikwe are tied to a life of dependency on the handouts and employment offered by the Batawana, yet appear to be independent of the Mambukushu.

There is little to distinguish between these three groups of swamp Bushmen. All speak similar dialects of the same language and few have retained much of their original Bushmen culture. If we saw Bushmen artifacts, they were so influenced by the styles of the Batawana and the

Mambukushu that someone seeing them a few decades from now would hesitate to attribute them to Bushmen at all. Yet other distinctively Bushmen features are very much in evidence. For instance, in physical character, the population retains the small stature, fine bone structure, slender limbs, yellow-brown leather-like skin,\* sparse body hair, flat skulls, broad and low forehead, level eyes, wide and prominent cheekbones, deeplying and flat nose, wide jaw, pointed chin, protuberant lips, and, very often, a very swollen belly which in most cases may be traced back to a long background of sitting in moist sand and mud. I personally saw no one who did not show some evidence of hybridisation with the Negro. This was most pronounced among the Goǀkwe. There was an absence of steatopygia among the women; this is also said to be the case among other northern Kalahari people, the Hei//kum and the !kung, according to our staff physician Werner. In view of the absence of this feature among the Bushmen peoples of the north Kalahari, it is possible that it is only found among the southern groups where it may be traced back to intermarriage with the Hottentots. Among the women of the /tannekwe I observed that the dominant nipple form was that characteristic of Bushmen (according to Passarge) – similar to that of white women – in which the areola is flat and the papilla rises above it. The form of nipple found so commonly among the Negro women, with a pear-shaped, distended areola, is seldom seen. Circumcision is unknown.

The material culture of these relatively sedentary swamp /tannekwe is naturally much richer than that of the more nomadic savannah Bushmen, although much of it is borrowed from the neighbouring Bantu. The three-cornered loincloth worn by Bushmen and Botswana people of the middle Kalahari is also worn here; one corner is pulled between the legs and the others are tied to form a belt around the hips. Also common is the form of loincloth borrowed from the Bantu, which is pulled through the legs and folded over a waist-band in front and back. The women, in a similar fashion, wear a leather apron with the hair turned to the outside. Another item of clothing of ancient origin that they wear is a large kaross of leather or hide (with the hair turned inwards) which serves as a blanket at night and is tied with a cord knotted over the right shoulder or at the back of the neck, so that the back is covered, and depending on the size of the kaross, the breasts are also covered, while the arms remain free. In carrying their infants and small children, women normally tie the kaross over the left shoulder or over the breasts in such a way as to form a pouch over the waist, this being achieved by knotting the loose end of the cape at the belly or folding it through the waistband. Close to trading posts operated by whites or native persons such karosses are often replaced by large pieces of cloth, blankets or European rags. Heads are uncovered. Men often decorate themselves by tying hide rosettes in their hair, and the women wear woven beadwork and headbands decorated with white porcelain buttons. Sometimes cotton cloth is wrapped, turban-fashion, around the head. Occasionally heads are shaved completely or in part, also now and again someone will weave patches of animal hair into their own hair, Bantu-fashion, so that from a distance the head appears covered with chainmail. On the arms and legs, rings and bands of leather, strips of hide, and more rarely, strips of woven grass or gnu-tail hair may be worn. Plentiful are the broad armbands and thin rings of fine iron and copper, which are acquired through trade with the wandering Matebele or Shangani in exchange for gnu-tail hair and hides. Ostrich-eggshell necklaces such as are described by Passarge for the Bushmen of the central Kalahari are not in evidence, although I did note necklaces of small white, blue and red glass beads. Earrings of wire, in the form described by Passarge as “little riders” or rings (like those used in chemists scales) are also traded from the Shangani. Small pouches filled with medicinal herbs, amulets and small oracle bones are worn around the neck.

The purer Bushmen people engage in hunting and fishing, while it appears that the adopted Mambukushu who have grown up among the Bushmen and the hybrids descended from them) are more inclined to practice slash-and-burn agriculture and other alternative subsistence activities. The hunting grounds stretch from the swamp some 30 to 35 kilometres into the savannah. These hunting grounds are gone over systematically every year in the first months following the rains. The hunting equipment, as far as I was able to observe, is identical to that of

the central Kalahari as described by Passarge. At least the poison-tipped bone arrowheads are of the same construction, although I am uncertain of the origin of the poison or of the manner in which the shaft end is feathered.

In fishing, nets, fishtraps, hooks and dams are all used, as is also the case with the Mambukushu. The boats are usually crudely constructed hollowed-out tree trunks, which ride very deeply in the water, with only a few centimetres (four or five finger widths) above the surface of the water. Thus, on broad stretches of open water where the current is strong the Bushmen crouch precariously as they row their tipply craft, (whereas the Negroes always stand when they row these same waters) and only occasionally rise when navigating through the weedy back-water channels to push their boats along with staffs. The oars are often simply branches or poles without real paddles, and they are gripped overhanded by the right hand and underhanded by the left hand.

Ironware comes from the Barutse through trade with the Mambukushu middlemen, although some simpler iron objects are made by the Bushmen themselves. Wooden household objects are in part manufactured by the Bushmen, in part traded from the Mambukushu. Mambukushu wooden wares are traded as far as Tsau, and even, according to Oberleutenant Gentz (a careful and trusted observer) as far away as Gobabis. Beehive shaped huts, woven-reed matting used as fences and primitive shifting cultivation are all borrowings from the Mambukushu.

Since the greater part of the swampland is only habitable in the dry season, it is the custom to alternate between summer villages on the edge of the savannah and winter villages in the swamp. The ownership of small numbers of goats is restricted to a few families. It appears that the communalism which is a cultural characteristic restricting economic advancement among the Bushmen of the central Kalahari is weakest among those swamp Bushmen who have inter-mixed with the Negro to the greatest degree.

Among the Mambukushu, the /tannekwe have a reputation for being secretive ruffians and incorrigible thieves. In June of 1905 a Mambukushu who was collecting taxes among the Bugakwe was shot with an arrow and killed as a result of an argument with them. In addition, in August of the same year a party of my carriers several times were threatened by a bold group of Garikwe several times with drawn bows.

/tannekwe children are often sold to Mambukushu and then into the hands of Portuguese traders, most of whom are Mambari.

### **Part 2 June 23, 1910**

Between the Okavango and the Zambesi, as well as in Sescheke (an area bounded by the Zambesis) there live steppe Bushmen who are of the Hukwe and Galikwe tribes.

The Hukwe live in lands called the Hukweveld, named after themselves. This area lies between Kuito, Okavango, Kwando and Lujana. The Hukwe number at least 600, live in small family groups which are always in some kind of dependency relationship with the surrounding Bantu people. They may even pay tribute to the chief of the Batauana. Since the last few years of migration of the Mambukushu from the southern Hukweveld into the floodplains of the Okavango, the Hukwe are enjoying greater freedom. Summer and winter quarters are not so sharply defined as they are in the middle Kalahari, since the number of permanent water holes is greater and the Bushmen are not driven by thirst into a life of endless nomadism. I know of two permanent villages; they are Katehu and Kaschukwa, and are located along the river bed of the Ganisha.

The rest of the bands build little villages of beehive shaped huts during the rainy season, which are abandoned during the dry season when hunting and gathering takes the people further afield. Often I have come across abandoned palisaded circular little summer villages, which, according to my Mambukushu informant, were the work of the Hukwe.

The material culture of the Hukwe is very similar to that of the /tannekwe (with the exception of fishing and boats). The emphasis on hunting is more pronounced. The Hukwe appear to have more of their wealth in hides. Ironware and finery is usually aquired from the Mambu-

kushu, Marutse and the Shangani. Mussel-shell and porcelain decorated headbands were brought in by the Mambari from the Portuguese colonies in the western coast. It is interesting to note that the Hukwe in Katehu and Kaschukwa make beer-glass sized mugs (with handles) out of the soft wood of the Mogwa tree (*Kirkia glauca*, Eng. et Gilg. N. sp.) in exactly the same manner as described by Baum for the people\* at Kunene.

The women occasionally wear a hide-hat with the hair on the outside, or a leather hat, or a thin leather turban. Most of the time they go bareheaded. Occasionally the leather hats are fringed with thin braids of animal hair; more often animal hair is braided into the head hair and in order to eliminate pests in the hair it is covered with chalk (lime) or fat. The three-cornered loincloth is seldom seen, instead the people wear leather aprons (long ones in the case of women) which are pulled through the legs and folded over a belt in front and back. Leather thongs or cords dangle from the belts of women, and these are often used to hang fruit from during gathering. Women during gathering trips take with them woven straw mats which are used to sit on, and, during windy days, as a windbreak. If woven mats are not available, the women build grass lean-tos instead. These lean-tos are however quite different from the lean-tos of the Bantu, Batauanas and the southern Bushmen. It is generally assumed that the windbreaks of the latter are an imitation of the beehive huts of the Hottentots and Bantu. Passarge observed that in Ghanzi the method of construction used for Bushmen lean-tos was very different from that used in the construction of any beehive hut. If this can be extended to all areas, it may be argued that the Bushmen lean-to is an independent invention. However, in the Hukweveld the method of construction described by Passarge did not prevail. The windbreaks I saw being built more closely resembled the side of an alpine-style roof. Two poles are driven into the ground about three to seven metres apart, with a cross-beam lashed to them with leather thongs at a height of one or one and a half metres. Then a frame of large branches and poles is constructed by leaning them against the crossbeam. Over this frame, cut bunches of tall grass are placed, with one end of the bundle sunk firmly into the sand at the base. The open gaps at the front and sides of the windbreak are usually closed at night with more grass bundles. Usually a Bushman will sleep with his head and trunk under the lean-to and with his feet stretched out towards the fire nearby. I saw two of these lean-tos among the Hukwe and one among the Mambukushu. Whether this kind of lean-to is a Hukwe invention must naturally remain an open question. Among the nearby Marutse and the Masubia, lean-tos are also built. However these are constructed with vertical walls of branches and leaves, with numerous poles driven into the ground, and many cross-beams of leafy branches. In wandering about in the rainy season, beehive huts are invariably constructed by both the Hukwe and the Bantu. Their construction takes barely an hour. These picturesque little umbrella-shaped half-roofs appear to provide more cover than the werfs of the southern area.

Even among the Hukwe the relatively pure-blooded Bushmen avoid any regular labour in the fields, so the crude slash-and-burn agriculture is left to those individuals who were stolen from the Mambukushu as children and to the hybrid children of these. It appears that in this area the growing segment of the population emerging from Bushmen -Negro mixture prefers slash-and-burn agriculture to livestock ownership, at least in the initial stages of social change. This also seems to be the case among the /tannekwe of the Okavango delta, although even now the rearing of goats plays a role – albeit a minor one – in the subsistence economy.

Tobacco acquired from the Bautu is snuffed, and a fermented drink which is made from the fruit of the Marula tree (*Parinarium Mobola* Oliv.) is a favorite beverage. In this group of Bushmen there were noticeably large numbers of adults and children with eye infections.

In the southern Mafeveld there are Bushmen who call themselves the Galikwe, the same name as that of the people who live around Secheke on the banks of the Zambesi. They live in dire dependency upon the Bantu, whereas the families in the Secheke area are divided up among the Marutse and the Masubia. This southern group no doubt migrated into the Secheke

\*Humbarkalfirs

area from the Madenasse veld to the south of the Linjanti-Zambesi. Holub states that Sopopo, the king of the Marutse, pointed out to him a refugee group of Bushmen in Secheke who had fled out of the lands of the Batauana overlord Khama. It was said that these were the first Bushmen to see the north banks of the Zambesi. Similarly, in 1906 I saw a group of Bushmen who had likewise fled Khama's country – this time to escape capture for livestock theft – and come to Secheke. In all, this was a bad trade, for under Khama's administration Bushmen need only occasionally serve as herdsmen and hunters, whereas in the land of the Barutse they are regularly conscripted to heavy work in clearing fields and to serve as slaves. There are roughly 200 Galikwe in the German Mafe-velde, and there are perhaps 100 living among the Barutse. In this area there are in fact so few Bushmen that the first ones I came across in the woodland savanna of the Mafe-velde my Bantu carriers viewed with the same comic and unabashed astonishment with which they would have viewed baboons. In this area I came upon very Negroid looking Bushmen, and in view of my difficulty in communicating with them, assume that they must have been speaking one of the Ngami languages:

The Galikwe who was named Sitalele, had the following measurements: height 185 cm; from the point of his shoulder to his hips, 84 cm; from his hips to his knees, 56 cm; from his knees to his soles, 53 cm; upper arms, each 34 cm; from his elbow to the end of middle finger on each arm 50 cm; circumference of upper arm with muscles flexed, 31 cm for the right side, 30 cm for the left side (these measurements were 29 and 28 respectively with unflexed muscles); breadth from shoulder to shoulder, 42 cm; chest circumference, 89 cm; length of right thigh 52 cm; left thigh 51 cm; calf length 33 cm on both sides, length of soles of the feet, each 27.5 cm; breadth of each 10 cm, breadth was 2.5 cm.

It appeared fairly certain that in the eastern part of the Caprivi Strip and in the southern part of Barutse land, a northward return migration of Bushmen was in progress. This weak rebound out of the central Kalahari appears to be limited in scope because of the dense settlement in the lands now occupied by the Barutse. Even in the Hukwe-velde there is a noticeable northward shift of the Bushmen population. The Hukwe villages of Kashukwa and Katehu arose after the free Mambukushu chief Mokoja, cousin of the famous Libebe of Andara on the Okavango in the western Caprivi strip moved all his five villages from between the Ganishe river and the Luiana to the upper Luiana. He did this to avoid being subdued by the encroaching Batauana and Marutse. This occurred between 1892 and 1893. After this the Hukwe of these two villages began to hunt northwards along the Luiana – something they had never dared before, according to my Mambukushu informant in Libebe. Judging from the many clicks in the speech of the Bantu living in the area of the Kwando (Massai-Linjanti) the Mafe, Mambukushu, and Mayei – and from the many Bushmen place-names, this river-rich landscape was probably inhabited by Bushmen in the recent past, who have lately been driven off into the southern steppe.

These observations are unfortunately superficial and hasty as a result of the rushed circumstances of my travels and as a result of the shyness of the Bushmen which has resulted from the acts of violence committed among them by the Boer outlaws who have been moving to Hum-pata in Angola. From the standpoint of the anthropologist and the ethnographer, it is of great importance that these people be properly studied. Through professional and systematically comparative study of the /tannekwe and the Hukwe it may be possible to arrive at an answer to the many questions that may be raised concerning the Bushmen of the Northern Kalahari.