Health and the Hunter-Gatherer

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Health and
the Hunter-Gatherer

Biomedical Studies on the Hunting and
Gathering Populations of Southern Africa

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Preface

This monograph has grown out of the work done over a number of years by a number of workers. It represents a considerable amplification of a paper entitled Biomedical Studies on Southern African Desert-Dwelling Hunter-Gatherers, which at the time of writing is due to appear in Progress in Medical Genetics, vol. I n.s. (edited by A.G. Steinberg, A.G. Bearn, B. Childs and A. Motulsky, and published by W.K. Saunders of Philadelphia). It is not a complete, final and definitive study of the health of the hunting and gathering populations of Southern Africa, but rather an interim report at a critical period in their history. Change is proceeding faster today in Southern Africa than at any time since the Mfecane of the early years of the last century when the rise of the Zulu power rippled out in a series of dislodgements of peoples over most of the sub-continent; the process can really only be understood in an historical context broader than we have the scope to give here. What we have tried to do is to describe the biological status of these populations during a particular period, and to present it in a form susceptible to analysis by any interested persons; we have given our own opinions, based on present data, but we make no extravagant claims for their immutability. Most of these data either have appeared, or will appear, in publications whose subjects are more particular than general, though one or two of the more recently investigated populations are described biologically for the first time here. Southern African history includes the history of three of the major races of mankind. When the first Negroes arrived in the area it was already inhabited by Khoisan ('Capoids', 'Bushmen and Hottentots'); when the first Caucasoids arrived they made contact with Khoisan before they encountered the Negroes. Since then, many of the Khoisan have been absorbed into the Negro and Coloured (mixed) populations, and the unmixed survivors are found mainly in areas where they continue, or continued until recently, to hunt and gather. Their biological individuality is associated with a highly unusual linguistic trait which calls for some explanation, since otherwise the printed forms of their names may appear very strange to the unprepared reader. Khoisan phonology includes a set of consonants known as the 'click sounds', which occur in other languages almost exclusively either as borrowings or as non-verbal exclamations. They are all brief implosive sounds formed at different positions of the tongue: /, the dental click, 𝑡, the alveolar,
the palatal and //, the lateral are all found in the names of populations described here. Fortunately for the printer, the bilabial or 'kiss' click, in which the tongue plays no part, does not, so there is no need to give its symbol. Click sounds may be modified by nasalization or voicing, and each modification constitutes a separate phoneme. There are further peculiarities of Khoisan phonology, but it is not necessary to detail them in the present context. Similar sounds occur in two East African languages, Hadza and Sandawe, which may or may not be Khoisan. As we demonstrate in this monograph, not all the speakers of Khoisan languages are necessarily members of the Khoisan race.

Throughout the work which has gone into the preparation of the monograph, we have been sustained by the groundwork carried out by earlier investigators, and by the support of The South African Institute for Medical Research and the Medical Research Council of South Africa, as well as by the interest and cooperation of the peoples who we were investigating and of our staff. Besides our illustrious Dedicatee, we must acknowledge the friendly help of the late Prof. Israel Bersohn, Prof. Jack Metz, Prof. J.F. Murray, Prof. J.H.S. Gear, Dr. A. Zoutendyk, Prof. Henry Harpending, Prof. Pat Draper, Dr. M.C. Botha, Mr. W.J. Chasko jr., Miss Elizabeth Cashdan, Dr. Alfred Merriweather, Mr. Tony Traill, Prof. A.G. Steinberg, Prof. Hermann Lehmann, the staffs of the hospitals and missions of the Kavango Valley, especially those at Andara and Nyangana, the late Dr. Johann Gil-denuys, Dr. Stephen Grove, Mr. and Mrs. T. Coetzee and the Rev. and Mrs. F. Weich of Tsumkwe, Dr. and Mrs. Jiro Tanaka, and the priests and sisters at Aminuis Mission. Without the consistent interest and assistance of Miss Cynthia McIntyre, Mr. J.L. Cohen and Mr. F. Lubbe of J.L. Cohen Motors, Windhoek, much of our work in South West Africa would have remained undone. The Administration and Hospital Services of South West Africa, and their staff at Tsumkwe, Oshakati, Okombahe, Rundu and Aminuis must also be thanked. We are most grateful to the Botswana Government, and in particular Miss E. Wily, Bushmen Development Officer, for the facilities it has offered us for working in remote parts of that country. Especial thanks are due to the Typing Pool and Mrs. C. Marschall, to the Map Unit and Miss J.R. Harding, and the Photographic Unit and Mr. and Mrs. M. Ulrich and Mrs. Y. Descy.

Epistle Dedicatory to Prof. P.V. Tobias

Dear Phillip,

It would not be too much to claim that these pages are as much the outcome of nearly three decades of your work as they are of any process of
compilation by us. Without the guiding hand of Tobias, the biological study of the hunter-gatherers of Southern Africa would have been a much more diffuse and formless thing; but you have laboured to bring order and strict observation into a field previously much bedevilled by mythology, and in the process have been able to contribute not only to a geographically limited subject but to the entire study of man. We hope that you will consent to do us the honour of allowing us to dedicate to you this intimation that although much has already been done in this area there remains, as you often remind us, still very much that needs to be done.

We remain.

Your friends and admirers,

George T. Nurse and Trefor Jenkins