



## Reviews of books

Malebogo Mvimi, *Past Environments and Plant Use in Holocene Southern Africa: A Study of Charcoal and Seed Remains from the Late Stone Age Sites of Toteng (Botswana), Leopard Cave and Geduld (Namibia)*. Oxford: BAR Publishing (pb £50 – 978 1 407 35717 1). 2022, 214 pp.

In her book, *Past Environments and Plant Use in Holocene Southern Africa*, Malebogo Mvimi presents the findings of a macrobotanical analysis – using charcoal, seeds and grains from Later Stone Age sites in Botswana and Namibia – to contribute to our understanding of past climatic and environmental conditions in Southern Africa during the Holocene period (around 2,000 years before the present). The book is based on research conducted at three sites in Southern Africa – Toteng in present-day Botswana and Leopard Cave and Geruld in present-day Namibia – with a focus on investigating the relationship between Later Stone Age populations and plants.

The book is structured around seven chapters, sharing Mvimi's collected data in considerable detail. After a brief introductory chapter – which functions as an extended abstract – the first two main chapters (Chapters 1 and 2) detail the environmental and archaeological contexts for the broader study. Chapter 1 focuses on the environmental background of Southern Africa, detailing historical climatic, vegetation and faunal geographies of the region under study. Chapter 2 contextualizes the Later Stone Age for the reader, with a particular focus on the Southern Africa region, including the main study sites. Both chapters provide extensive reviews of existing academic work. Chapter 3 outlines the archaeobotanical methodology and methods adopted in the study. Chapter 4 is somewhat tangential to the core study, offering a contemporary ethnobotanical study of San populations in the Erongo region of Namibia. This chapter is based on ethnographic research in two villages near Leopard Cave, with a focus on recording knowledge relating to local plants and their uses. Chapter 5 presents the results of the project's macrobotanical analysis, derived from the three study sites. Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the project's overall findings. The book has extensive appendices, detailing all the collected data.

I read this book through the lens of an environmental historian, and thus as someone with no existing disciplinary knowledge (or detailed understanding) of archaeobotanical research. As such, my interest was in themes and potential intersections between archaeobotanical and environmental history. I found the overall structure of the book particularly valuable in this regard, and I appreciated the considerable care that Mvimi took in carefully contextualizing the research across multiple chapters, including detailed background knowledge and extensive reviews of existing literature. Thanks to this approach, the book is not only valuable due to Mvimi's specific macrobotanical study, but also provides a powerful synthesis of existing academic knowledge of Southern Africa's (deep) environmental history.

The inclusion of an ethnographic chapter (Chapter 4) is a striking characteristic of the book. I appreciated the ethical considerations that Mvimi acknowledges with the inclusion of this chapter, including the observation that there is a need for

'populations under study to participate actively in . . . investigation[s]' (p. 55). I would have liked the book to have gone deeper in this regard. Ethnographic research was conducted near only one of the three sites (Leopard Cave); as a result, it somehow felt incomplete. Why was this research method not used at the other two research sites, especially the one in Botswana?

It also would have been salient to return to the 'populations under study' in the conclusion/discussion chapter of the book. How are the results of the research relevant for these populations? As Lodwick and Rowan have recently noted, 'as climate and environmental history come to the fore, archaeobotany's ability to track shifts in human relationships between landscapes and environments means that it is ideally situated to provide vital information regarding climatic sustainability and resilience'.<sup>1</sup> A deeper reflection on the findings and their social relevance outside the archaeobotanical discipline would have offered an opportunity for a more powerful conclusion. This is perhaps something that could be considered in future research and analysis relating to the book.

Overall, *Past Environments and Plant Use in Holocene Southern Africa* provides an important contribution to the burgeoning fields of archaeobotany and environmental history in Africa. The book was drawn from Mvimi's PhD research and is a formidable contribution from an early career scholar setting a strong foundation for future scholarship.

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Cheikh Anta Babou, *The Muridiyya on the Move: Islam, Migration, and Place Making*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press (hb US\$80 – 978 0 8214 2437 7; pb US\$36.95 – 978 0 8214 2467 4). 2021, xvii + 318 pp.

Two-thirds of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa go to another African country, and whether travelling inside or outside the continent, a significant proportion are from Senegal. Until recently, most of these Senegalese migrants were disciples of the Muslim Sufi order, the Muridiyya. Cheikh Anta Babou presents a history of Murid migrations – first to Côte d'Ivoire, then to Gabon, and then to France and New York City, providing unique access to the actors' worldviews and internal arguments. Religious attitudes lie behind economic survival and struggles for social betterment, although young Murid tend to become more pious and observant after they leave Senegal. In their countries of immigration, the Murid have innovated in religious and economic practice. This book contributes to the scholarly literature on the Murid Sufi order and the thriving literature on migration studies.

As Babou recapitulates, the Murid order became a distinct Sufi way (*tariqa*) and a recognizable community in the final decade of the nineteenth century, as the saintly

<sup>1</sup> L. Lodwick and E. Rowan (2022) 'Archaeobotanical research in classical archaeology', *American Journal of Archaeology* 126 (4): 593–623, here p. 594.