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Agriculture in Pilansberg area
AGRICULTURE.

- 1 During the time of chief Moetlo, when ploughing was about to commence, he sent out regiments of men and women who had not yet married or were not yet married. They were given medicinal charms to go round and round his territory with them to prevent his enemies who would come and destroy the country during the ploughing season. These people dare not speak until they get back home. It was then that they would begin to speak. From the beginning of this season, no woman is allowed to carry earth in the daytime. She must carry it in the morning and in the evening at sunrise and at sunset. When the cattle go out of the kraal, she is not allowed to carry it. As far as mixing it with water is concerned she may do so at any time. It is the same with the men, they are not allowed to drag the cut thorn bushes home during the day. They are allowed to do so in the morning and in the evening because the land has been doctored. If a person was found breaking this law, he was fined a beast by chief Moetlo. The people are also not allowed to cut down these trees:- The acacia tree, wild plum tree and the wait-a-bit thorn tree. They are not allowed to break the soil. If they do that, at the time of ploughing, rain which is accompanied by hail will fall and destroy the kaffir corn in the lands. When the day comes for the people to commence ploughing, the chief makes a public announcement that the people may start ploughing and pulling up the roots with their hands. Before he makes this announcement, no one may go to the lands.
- 2 The penalty for that is a beast. People do not begin ploughing with the chief's land. That will best done in course of time. People first plough strips in their own fields, so that when they go to plough for the chief, they will have ploughed strips in their own. It is after this that the chief's announcement is made for the ploughing of his field.

RM/

When the people began to plough, chief Mootle goes round all the lands that a being cultivated on horseback in order to see those who have commenced to plough and those who have not, so that when the day comes for summoning the people to come out to plough his fields, he must be in a position to know that they have already cultivated strips in their fields, and there is no harm in their coming to cultivate his. To-day in these times of chief Molepyane, this practice is not in use any longer, it has been abandoned. Each and every one does as he feels capable. Whether he pulls thorn bushes home during the day or not it is just as he pleases. No one will remonstrate with him. As far as ploughing is concerned also, one starts when one likes. No law is there to prevent him. One does as one pleases. Chief Molepyane does not go round the lands also to see how the people work. He ploughs most of his lands himself. There is only one field which is cultivated by the Magodiele section of the tribe and even then, he does not take the trouble to go and see how they plough.

3

During Mootle's time, there was a law, to the effect that each and every person whose field has pumpkins, he should first take them to the chief before he ate them. The chief would then call up the men from the various sections of the tribe to distribute the pumpkins to them, so that they in turn should go and distribute them to their people, that means each hut. If the pumpkins are few, they must be split in such a way that they are sufficient for all. No one may eat the first crops of the summer season before the chief has distributed them to the people to eat the first fruits. You could never see a person, even if his field had pumpkins, eat the first fruits before the chief's order. Nowadays, people eat the first fruits just as they please, even then, when people eat the first fruits, the first born child must eat first and the next in their order of succession. When they have eaten the first fruits, then all the people are free to start eating them also. One may now eat anything one desires of the crops of the summer season. No matter where a person is, when he has eaten the first fruit, he is free to eat everything.

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Although the chief has taken steps to have the land doctored, he has not taken steps to have the fields doctored. Each person has a medicine with which he doctors his kaffir corn. He has his own witchdoctor to help his kaffir corn to thrive. He is the only one who knows his witchdoctor, it is not the chief's. The chief has nothing to do with him. Each one protects his lands for himself with medicinal charms. That is to say he must get a witchdoctor for himself to protect his fields with medicinal charms. If a person did not like to effect this protection or to help his kaffir corn to thrive, the people who are his neighbours objected and said he caused their preventative charms to be ineffective. This means that if the witch doctor has placed protective medicines in the fields, he makes a law for the people and if they break this law then it means they have rendered the protective medicines ineffective. Sometimes the witch doctor says that they must not, whilst they are in the lands, eat sweet reed while walking. They must sit down when they eat sweet reed, or when they have gone out of the field, then they can eat sweet reed. When a person has not placed protective medicines for his field, he takes no notice of these conditions. That is why people do not like to be neighbours with one who does not want to place protective medicines or to help kaffir corn to thrive.

Weeding.

During the time of chief Mootle, no public announcement was made for people to commence weeding as it is done today. But there was a time after which each person could start weeding. It was after the month of January. It is then that they know that the weeds have grown and again if they start weeding when the weeds are well grown, they do not grow up again quickly. The kaffir corn will have outgrown them. Now people weed at any time they wish. Even before the time if a person wishes, he goes on with weeding. In the older times this was the work of the women. The men did the ploughing and when they had finished, they then looked forward to the women to do the weeding. The women would

begin weeding until the summer season commences. If they had not finished weeding by the time the summer season begins, they would stop in order to have a rest, so that when the time for guarding birds from the corn came, they would already have had their rest, that is to say, from all their duties. When the summer season approaches its end, the women begin to smear the floors of their yards where they will do the threshing. When they finish smearing the floors, they go to guard the corn from the birds.

To guard corn from the birds.

When the women smoothen the floors of the yards, the men dig in pole platforms on which the women stand when they guard the birds. When the women go on guard, they get up very early in the morning so that when the birds get to the fields, they are also there together with them. They collect little stones and put them into tins which they rattle. You will hear a lot of noise in the field. You will find some of them with little whips which they cause to crack to frighten away sparrows. If protective medicines have been placed, they stay at home. They just go to inspect the corn to see if the sparrows did not eat them.

6 Nowadays pole platforms are no longer made for the women, they have to see for themselves what is best for them. No man feels like going to cut down poles to make a platform for his wife to stand upon when watching the birds. No matter how much the wife may suffer, he is not concerned. When he has done the ploughing, he just sits at home. In the olden days the men were very keen to do this job. After he had finished ploughing, each man had to go to find poles for the platform.

Reaping.

During Mootlo's reign, reaping had its time. No one would reap when he liked, before reaping commenced, the chief would go on horseback to inspect all the lands to find out those who tried to cheat. If he caught them they were fined each a beast. There will be a day when he shall make an announcement that the people should start to reap. Today a person reaps at his own time.

If the other people's corn is not yet ripe when his is ripe, he reaps, he has no time to waste waiting for the others. But before, there was no such thing. People were in the habit of waiting, so as to commence at the same time. Before the women begin to reap, they first of all smear the floors prepared in the field, where they will put their corn. Sometimes they make the floor with the stalks to put their corn on it. Reaping is the work of the women, the men have nothing to do with it. The wife reaps the field alone until she finishes it, then the husband comes along to cart the kaffir corn with the aid of oxen. Before the people possessed wagons, they used to cart the corn with sledges to their homes where it was threshed. They carted it all from the corn lands. When the corn was at home, they then began to thresh it. When they off-load the corn in the yard, they must doctor it there also, because in the night time a person may come and bewitch it. When you thresh and find that you are getting nothing, it means that other people are the cause of your getting only a few bags, no matter how much you had, how big they were. So you are compelled to doctor your corn so that if a person comes with his medicine he may find that you have already doctored it. It is then that you will get many bags of kaffir corn.

Threshing.

Even in the older times, threshing was the work of women, it is the work of the women to this day. But there are other men nowadays who help their wives to thresh. The women of today invite other people to come and help in the threshing. They brew beer in order to attract many people to the threshing of their corn. At these invitations threshing is done by men and women. They thresh the whole day. When they have finished, they are served with beer. That is to say, each one takes his share and goes to his home. If he wishes to drink it on the spot, he does so. Sometimes they are given meat at these invitations. There also the men are together with the women. This invitation meant mutual help in doing a job in order to finish it quickly. There

was no compulsion if one did not like to go to this mutual help. People always like an invitation for mutual help where there is beer and meat. It is then that you will find many people.

When they finish threshing, they remove the ears and after that they begin to gather it up with their hands. That is to say, they put it together so as to be able to remove the chaff. We call that winnowing. After that the corn is put into corn bins or bags. In most cases we put our kaffir corn in the corn bins. It is where we store our kaffir corn.

8

Corn bins and kaffir corn.

When we had finished winnowing the corn, we swept up every bit of it. We then threw ashes over it and put it in the corn bin. When we had finished throwing ashes we gathered it up and put it into the granaries. It means that when we have thrown ashes into the corn, it will remain a long time before the weevil enters it. If it happens to enter in the corn, we take it out of the granaries so that the sun must kill the weevil. In the evening we put it back into the corn bin. The next day we take it out again and throw ashes over it so that it may last a long time. It is the women who gather up the corn and put it in the granaries, it is they too who throw ashes over it. The men help them when they put the corn into the bags and to place them on the raised platform. Otherwise the whole work is done by women. In order to satisfy themselves that the corn bin is full, they had to thrust the corn into the bin with a stamping staff.

A corn bin

A corn bin is overlaid with mud. It is made almost like a water clay pot. The work of over laying is done by women; there are experts in the job. It is not everybody who can do the over-laying.

RM/

9 These corn bins are also of different kinds. Some of them are like huts, they are overlaid just like the Setswana huts, they are thatched with grass like huts. They are overlaid by women also. They call them 'boramōš'. They are placed on top of flat stones to protect them from water and white ants. Kaffir corn is put into them by women, not by men, it is the work of women. These corn bins are placed on the verandahs of houses and the granaries are overlaid in the back yard of the huts, so that the cattle should not cause trouble. The granary resists rain water because it is thatched with grass. The corn bin is not thatched and that is why it must be placed on the verandahs of houses so that rain should not cause damage. If the granary were not placed upon flat stones, running water would damage it underneath. The kaffir corn would also get wet and rotten.

Ashes and Kaffir corn.

10 The women begin to winnow the corn. They take goat manure and burn it so that when they finish winnowing the manure must have burned out. They shake it up to separate the dung from the dust and this dust, they mix with kaffir corn. Besides manure I don't know anything else that they can use for the corn to last a long time. They depend upon it to help the corn to last long and to prevent the weevil from entering it. If the people have plenty of kaffir corn, they try their best to put ashes in it so that it may remain a long time. If the corn is not plentiful, they do not worry themselves about the ashes, because the kaffir corn will be quickly used up before the weevil enters into it. If you have kaffir corn that has the weevil in it, people do not often buy it. It is not nice to eat. Its porridge smells. People do not like such things.

Kaffir corn and the weevil.

RM/ If kaffir corn is reaped before it is quite dry, after it has

been threshed, it does not remain long before the weevil enters it. Even if ashes are thrown into it, it does not remain long, that is if it is reaped before it is quite dry. After threshing, the corn must be spread out in the yard in the sun for a few days so as to be completely dry. It is then that the ashes can be thrown over it and then it can be gathered up. In this way it can remain a long time before the weevil enters it, a period of about two or three years before it gives trouble. Once the weevil goes into the corn, the corn is no longer wanted. The weevil bores small holes in the corn and it eats its core. When it has bored the holes in it, it becomes useless. You cannot make seed out of it and you cannot make sprouted corn. That is to say even if you soak it in water it cannot germinate. It can only be ground coarsely to prepare beer. In porridge it is not nice if pounded. Its mealie meal becomes very fine as if ground with a millstone. That is why people do all that is in their power to prevent the weevil entering their kaffir corn. Furthermore if the weevil gets into the corn, its price becomes low. People do not like it and so it is a loss to the owner. In a period of six months or a year after the corn has been stored away it must be examined for the weevil and if it is not there, it must not be disturbed. After another year, it must be inspected to see if the weevil is there. If a person thinks that the corn has been stored for a long time, although the weevil has not entered it, he must take it out and spread it in the sun. When he stores it away again he will have the satisfaction that it will remain a long time before being examined. It is a serious thing for the weevil to get into the corn. The owner will get mad. The porridge made from it makes people thin. They become poor in flesh because of eating porridge made of kaffir corn that has been eaten by the weevil. People say that its porridge is like that of mealie ground with the whiteman's mill. It becomes too fine. They also say that it does not satisfy the appetite after eating it. If a person is working, he gets very hungry although he has eaten a lot.

Corn lands.

12

During the time of chief Mootle, a person owned one corn land. The corn lands were not far from home. They were near the home. Today many corn lands are far away and have been moved from where they were originally. Now there are just reaped lands where cattle graze. Today a person owns three or four corn lands. The reason is that the land has been added to by the purchase of adjoining farms. If another farm is bought, all the people who shared in the buying of it are given corn lands. Those who have not shared in the purchase get nothing. But people who have been driven by famine from their homes and come there, are given. They were not there when the buying took place and that is why they are given corn lands.

The seed for corn lands.

Corn lands are allotted by petty chiefs to the people of the tribe as well as headmen of the various sections. The petty chiefs allot land to the headmen of the sections, and these in turn allot fields to their people. Corn lands are given to married men. Young men and young women who are not yet married are not given any allotments for cultivation. They are given to their mothers and to widows. If a man dies the allotments belong to his children. Those can have allotments even if they are not married. Otherwise, they do not get them.

Ploughing.

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In the olden times, men and women did the cultivating. The women did it with their hands. It was a big job that they did sometimes a woman would sow the land with her hands until she finished it all by herself. Nowadays women do not always sow with their hands. They expect the men to inspan oxen and go to plough. Yet in former days women cultivated with their hands. To cultivate in this manner was called go kgotha, or go byala tihakwana'. The men plough with oxen and if a man has no oxen, he goes to help others who have them so that they may go to plough his lands.

PA/

By going to hire his hands to others or by helping them we mean that he becomes the leader of the oxen. When a man cultivates his lands, he also helps to cultivate those of his sisters who are widows and those whose husbands have no cattle. It is not our custom to get a man to assist you in ploughing in order to pay him. When he has helped you, you must go and plough for him. Many people who have no cattle are helped by others to plough. Others pay money when they do not wish to help with their hands. Those who have no money work with their hands for those who have cattle so that they may also go and plough for them.

Here in our district there are no irrigation schemes for our lands. We depend on the rain. Otherwise we have no way out, we must just depend on the rain.

Names of the Months.

Perikgong	-	January
Tlhakole	-	February
Mepitlwe	-	March
Moranang	-	April
Matsbeganang	-	May
Seeteboisigo	-	June
Phukwi	-	July
Phatwe	-	August
Lwetse	-	September
Diphaleane	-	October
Ngwanaitsele	-	November
Bedimonthole	-	December

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1. Perikgong is the month during which the people ate the first fruits of the season.
2. Tlhakole means that it is the month during which famine disappears from the people. At this time they are eating pumpkins, and they say that famine has disappeared from us.
3. Mepitlwe means that the year is drawing to an end. The year according to the Batswana ended in May. May was the month that ended the year.

4. Moranang is the month during which the people pluck beans.
The moranang of the bean.
5. Metsbeganong, means that the kaffir corn is ripe and it laughs at the birds and they are unable to eat it. This is to say that the birds eat kaffir corn whilst it is green. When it is ripe, they cannot manage to eat it.
6. Seetebosigo, means that the year is beginning and the land must be doctored, and people must only travel in the daytime and not at night.
7. Phukwi means that the trees, the grass and other bushes are dead and they are in the grave. There is nothing attractive.
8. Phatwe means that the trees, the grass and bushes and the land itself are cracking so that new ones must begin. The roots of things begin to sprout out and that is why they crack the ground.
9. Lwetse is the month during which people begin to get sick. The cattle as well as the people get ill.
10. Diphaleana is the month during which optical illusions begin.
"Diphaleana" are things which you see shinning, as they are dancing if you look at the slopes of the mountains. In English they call them 'mirage'. They look like water. As you approach them, they move some distance away.
11. Ngwanatsale is the month during which children eat brown berries of various species. That is why they say cild take for yourself and eat!
12. Sedimonthole is to say 'God relieve me from hunger' that means, the summer season is nigh and that is why they say God take me to be Thine so that I may be freed from hunger.

Seed.

Seed is picked out when people are busy reaping. The ears of the seeds which they pick out are kept separately so that they should not get mixed with the others. In threshing also, they are threshed separately. Seed is stored in leather bottles and ashes are put thrown in it to keep it in good condition. The woman will take great care of it so that when the ploughing season

comes she should have it ready. When the ploughing season approaches the women wash the seed with sulphur, they say they are cleaning the ashes out of it and they then mix it with medicines.

Agriculture.

Kaffir corn

Mealies

Beans.

1. Millet

white mealies

Manjakane

yellow mealies

Earth nuts

Segaolane

botomane

Species of small beans

Ronekape

Kibikibi

Mararatshane

Lethejane

Mediborothe

Jaremane

2. (a) We have had millet since our creation, it has been our means of livelihood. If you have millet famine will not come near you and your children.

(b) We also had this variety (Manjakane), we had it when we came from the Bakwena territory. The only trouble with this variety is that it cannot stand heat of the sun. When there is a drought, you will reap nothing.

16

Segaolane and Lethejane are varieties of kaffir corn obtained from people living in the South after the Anglo-Boer War (1914). It was then that our people began to plant them and they became plentiful. The stalks are short and they ripen very early.

(d) Ronekape is corn that was obtained not so long ago from the Dutch people. This variety also comes from the South (1930). It takes three months to ripen.

Mealies.

Mealies came with the Europeans. The first kind that we saw is white mealies. We began to plant it, we liked it very much more than mealies. We eat kaffir corn in summer when mealies is scarce. After the Anglo-Boer War, we began to see many different kinds of mealies which we did not know before. We know mealies today, we like it, we plant it, we live on it, it is ours today. We forget where it came from, we say it is ours, yet it is not.

RM/

We have known earth nuts and the small species of beans since our creation. They are the beans we were planting although we have not seen any others after the Anglo-Boer War. It is the beans they call Jeremane and meraratchane that we saw after the wars. They are very nice beans. But mealies and beans are the food for women. They live on them. We men want beer. If you cook beans you are starving the men.

17

Beer.

Kaffir corn which makes nice beer is Manjakane. If a woman knows how to brew beer, and brew it from Manjakane, you will feel how it works. A man who has had it crawls on his knees, and sweeps the ground without knowing it and without feeling that he is doing so. Before beer is made, kaffir corn is soaked in water. After that it is taken out of the water and it is put into small clay pots which the women cover. When it has sprouted out, it is taken out and spread out. When it is dry they grind it on a milling stone. They grind kaffir corn which has not been soaked in water also, which they call 'phate'. They use this for fermenting. The sprouted corn is used for allaying purposes. The next day they cook the porridge and mix it with the meal of the sprouted corn to ferment the beer. The next day, they strain it by means of a strainer and then pour it into different pots. Each member of the family gets his pot, only those who drink of course. Other as people of the village will come to ask for beer and they will be given in small drinking vessels, until it is finished.

18

To break the soil for the cultivation of

kaffir corn.

The breaking of the soil commences in the month of April. They continue until the month of August and then wait for the rain. During that month, the fear is that there may be great hail storms. It is also the time when these things make the soil, the bushes, to break the soil. People are stopped from doing it at any time.

RM/

They must do it at the proper time. But no one knows the soil which is good for kaffir corn. People notice when they plough at a certain place, that there is plenty of kaffir corn there, then they know that the soil is good for kaffir corn. It is not every soil that has little stones, that gives a good harvest of kaffir corn. If a field does not produce much kaffir corn, we do not do anything. We just continue to plough it. If the soil is broken for cultivation during April, in October we go on with sowing. We do not wait a long time before sowing. We just go on with sowing when the time to do so approaches during the same year that the breaking of the soil took place.

RM/

