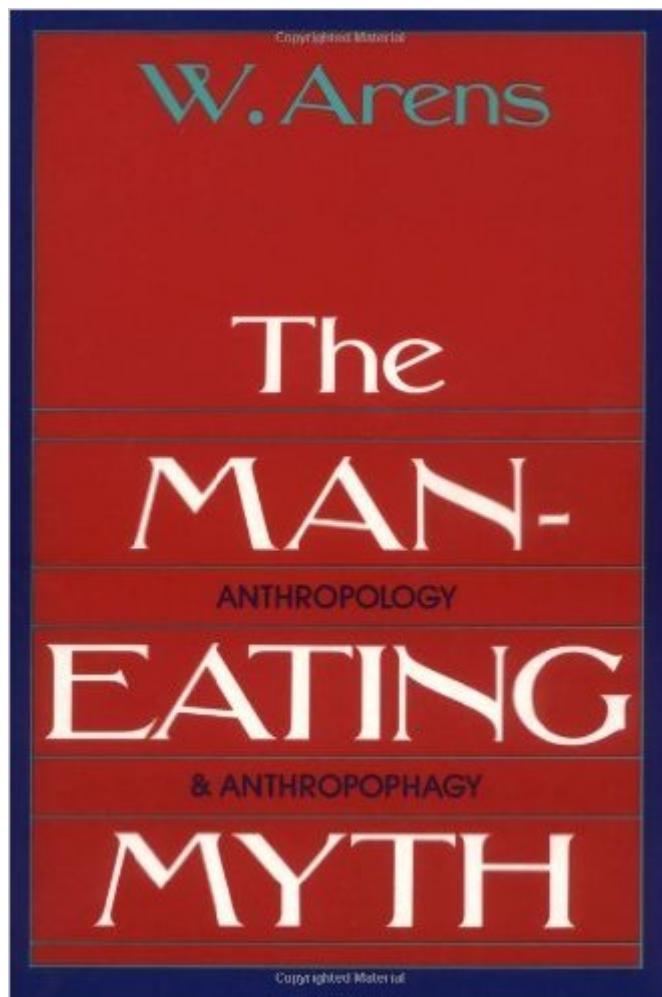


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The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology And Anthropophagy (Oxford University Press Paperback Galaxy Book)



Synopsis

A fascinating and well-researched look into what we really know about cannibalism.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It is a common argument of politically correct rationalists to reduce real cultural difference to ethnocentric Othering by the West. While I cannot speak for Obeyesekere's attempt debunk cannibalism in the Pacific, I will say that Arens argument against widespread cannibalism among the ancient Tupi-Guarani is completely illegitimate. Arens argues that the only real historical source for Tupi-Guarani cannibalism is Hans Staden (1928), a German seaman allegedly captured by the Tupinamba and kept as a captive to be killed and eaten. Staden escaped his captors, and subsequently published an account of his experiences. Arens argues that Staden's account is bogus, and then argues that other remaining accounts--he lists Andre Thevet, Casas, and Jean de Lery--were simply copied from Staden's original. To argue such a thing is to willfully overlook numerous other sources. Just to give an idea of the sources that Arens did not address, I'll list the bibliography that Forsyth published in The Journal of Anthropological Research. There are

eyewitness accounts from Jesuit on the following:(1) cannibalism (Anchieta 1933:216; Navarro 1956:182-83, 282)(2) the confiscation of cooked (and preserved) human flesh from the Indians, so that they would not eat it (Anchieta 1957:200; Lourenço 1958:468);(3) the confiscation of bodies from Indians who were about to eat them, or persuading them to bury the bodies rather than eating them (Anchieta 1933:154; Nobrega 1931:92; Blasquez 1957:388; Navarro 1956:282), in one case after the body was already roasted (V.

'The Man-eating Myth' was very much a book of its time when it was published in 1979, starting with the faux-common man authorship by 'W. Arens,' as if the professor was just another anonymous cog in the machine. The agenda was to whitewash 'savages' from the charge -- implicitly, the western colonialist charge -- of cannibalism. This was the era when Iron Eyes Cody was the symbol of the idea that Indians lived a life in balance with nature before the evil Europeans arrived with their deadly indoor plumbing. Even in 1979, this approach required a lot of overlooking. The very first book of reportage, the 'Histories' of Herodotus, included a relation (second-hand, to be sure) of ritual funerary cannibalism. Subsequently, there were plenty of other reports, of varying reliability, of cannibalism. Arens contended these were all made up, that 'cannibal' was a term every group applied to the people 'on the other side of the hill' the way bloggers label everyone they dislike a 'fascist' or a 'racist.' There was a grain of truth, a small one, in this assertion. People do unfairly label outgroups cannibals. But it was a logical error to assert, as Arens did, that because some claims of cannibalism were fake, all were. To support his argument, he set a bizarre standard of proof: to be believed, such a charge would have to be validated by a professional anthropologist. The arrogance of this standard was amusing in 1979, embarrassing by the 1990s. Science marches on. Tim White, in 'Prehistoric Cannibalism,' used bones from the Mancos site to develop a rigorous set of standards for assessing whether bones had been processed for food. As it turns out, they have been, throughout the Four Corners area of the American Southwest.

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