

Preface

Hunter-gatherers are quintessentially anthropological, the subject matter that separates anthropology from its sister social science disciplines: psychology, sociology, economics, and political science. Though perhaps less so today than a quarter century ago when *Hunter-Gatherers: Archaeological and Evolutionary Theory* was first published, success in dealing with hunter-gatherers has historically been a key requirement for any theory aspiring to broad anthropological applicability. As did the first, this second edition of *Hunter-Gatherers* measures several such theories—some narrow, some broad—with respect to their performance on this count—their relevance to, and implications for, hunter-gatherers and hunter-gatherer research. The aim here, as with the first edition, is to review ideas rather than literature, of which there are much more detailed treatments (e.g., Kelly 1995, 2013). We survey only a fraction of what has been written about hunter-gatherers, ignoring many interesting works, to present those that best illustrate the relevance of hunter-gatherers to the development and evaluation of important bodies of anthropological theory.

There are important differences between this and the first edition of *Hunter-Gatherers*, published in 1991. A good deal of the original remains highly relevant but, as in other fields of active, high profile work, the last two decades of hunter-gatherer, ecological, and evolutionary research has seen important empirical and theoretical advances. This second edition has been revised to reflect these developments, most notably the chapters dealing with foraging models (Chaps. 4, 5) and neo-Darwinian theory (Chaps. 7, 8). The general tone of the volume, too, has changed to reflect the broader anthropological acceptance of neo-Darwinian models and theories than was true in 1991, when neo-Darwinian theory was a new approach to hunter-gatherers, particularly among archaeologists. The first edition correctly anticipated skepticism and resistance to these ideas, and noted the many underdeveloped aspects of the approach, issues that have since been largely remedied. This edition approaches those same topics with the confidence born of over 20 years of fruitful application.

The book begins with two chapters that deal with the history of anthropological research and theory in relation to hunter-gatherers. The point is not to present a comprehensive or evenhanded accounting of developments. Rather, we sketch a history of selected ideas that have determined the manner in which social scientists

have viewed, and thus studied, hunter-gatherers. This lays the groundwork for subjects subsequently addressed and establishes two fundamental points. First, hunter-gatherer research has always been a theoretical enterprise; the social sciences have always portrayed hunter-gatherers in ways that serve their theories. Second, these theoretical treatments have generally been either evolutionary or materialist—or both—in perspective. The remainder of the book explores evolutionary and materialist perspectives in relation to contemporary theoretical contributions to hunter-gatherer studies at two levels.

The first level consists of hunter-gatherer research that is governed by theories of limited sets, that is, those that speak to limited sets of behaviors. By definition it is the job of limited theories to reconcile general principles to particular cases by showing how such cases result from the general principle in the presence of special conditions. The presence of such conditions is both necessary and sufficient to identify a case as belonging to the set for which the theory is intended—such classifications being, thus, theory based. It is, further, the interaction between the general principle and the salient properties of the special, set-defining conditions that accounts for what is observed. Theories of limited sets can serve as either interim steps in the construction of general theories or means of articulating extant general theory (Kuhn 1962, pp 24–34). Either way it is clear that limited theories are no less “theoretical” than theories of general sets—they are simply less general.

By design, limited theories are practical and meant for application in the real world: They are theories that have, in archaeological parlance, direct test implications. We attend particularly to research guided by two limited theories that have dominated hunter-gatherer archaeology and ethnography over the last decade: middle-range theory research (the subject of Chap. 3) and optimal foraging theory (the subject of Chaps. 4–5). The sections of these chapters dealing with diet breadth, patch choice, the marginal value theorem, central place foraging, and linear programming have been expanded and revised. Two new models—one related to front-versus back-loaded resource storage and another to technological investment—have been added. Applications have been revised to include alternative currencies and constraints, discussion of body size as a proxy for resource ranking, resource intensification, and the ideal free distribution.

The second, and higher, level of hunter-gatherer research addressed here is governed by theories of general sets, or general theories. Such theories are constructed of fundamental principles that are meant to apply to widely divergent phenomena and for that reason are often highly abstract and their meaning difficult to grasp. The general theories in question here attempt to account for the elementary logic that underlies human behaviors of all kinds; our interest in them relates to their potential application to hunter-gatherers. Of special importance here are theoretical constructions grounded in two fundamentally different schools of thought: neo-Marxism, including especially structural/French Marxism (the subject of Chap. 6) and neo-Darwinism, within which we distinguish and treat separately evolutionary ecology (Chap. 7) and more recent theories of cultural transmission (Chap. 8). All three chapters have been substantially revised.

Chapter 6 of this edition includes a fresh perspective on Marxist thought in hunter-gatherer studies. Chapter 7 (*Neo-Darwinian Theory*) has been expanded to include discussion of evolutionary archaeology, “showoff hunting,” and costly signaling, which has become a popular explanation of foraging behavior, particularly when archaeological or ethnographic data do not conform to modeled expectations of diet breadth based on caloric returns. Many such explanations misapply the biological concept of a costly signal and we address this here. Chapter 8 (*Neo-Darwinian Cultural Transmission*) has likewise been substantially revised. On page 202 of the original edition, Bettinger noted that, “it is presently difficult to mount a convincing argument in support of cultural inheritance theory on the basis of the empirical evidence, partly because these theories have only recently been developed and partly because the data available are insufficiently detailed.” This is no longer true. Significant work has since been done in this realm, with both ethnographic and archaeological data sets. The new edition clarifies terminology and provides extended discussions of costs associated with the common types of transmission, the evolution of ethnic markers, and the role of coordinated punishment in cultural evolution. Applications include a revised approach to the Upper Paleolithic Transition and cultural transmission evident in a large sample of projectile points from the Great Basin.

Divvying of revisions between coauthors was organic and responsibilities were shared. Tushingham and Bettinger revised and updated Chaps. 1, 3, 5, and 6; Garvey and Bettinger revised and updated Chaps. 2, 4, 7, 8, and 9. Tushingham added the front-back loading section to Chap. 4.

In closing, we note that we seem at times to be addressing two rather different audiences, one archaeological, and the other anthropological. This is intentional, for as we hope to make clear, hunter-gatherers are today—and have been historically—a common ground upon which converge many disparate subdisciplines within anthropology and, within those subdisciplines, many different points of view. As we hope to make clear further, the development and current state of hunter-gatherer research is such that there is no clear distinction between archaeology and ethnology as regards either theory or subject matter. Indeed, the time has long since past when hunter-gatherer archaeologists could afford to ignore anthropological theory and theorists and the ethnographic record, just as the time is also long past when anthropologists and ethnographers interested in hunter-gatherers could afford to ignore archaeological theory and theorists and the archaeological record.

References

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Hunter-Gatherers

Archaeological and Evolutionary Theory

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2015, XV, 304 p. 25 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4899-7580-5