

Time and Change. Archaeological and Anthropological Perspectives on the Long-Term in Hunter-Gatherer Studies

Dimitra Papagianni, Robert Layton, and Herbert Maschner (eds.)

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Combining papers derived from two conferences held in the early 2000's, this volume seeks to address the thorny question of how to relate observations from ethnographic case studies to interpretations of the archaeological record, focusing specifically on hunter-gatherers. The contributions achieve unequally that stated and laudable goal, but all chapters provide worthwhile reflections that highlight how, some forty years after the publication of *Man the Hunter* (Lee and DeVore 1968), anthropologists are currently approaching this fundamental question.

Layton leads the charge with a stimulating introductory chapter in which, beyond presenting and commenting on the other papers in the volume, he aptly emphasizes the importance of accounting for the scale at which different observations are made and, accordingly, which kinds of questions—social, ecological, historical—can be asked with different levels of resolution for behavioral data. His is one of the few papers in the volume that manages to create a functional conceptual bridge between ethnographic observations and the archaeological record, and his argument that there can be no 'one size fits all' approach to integrating the two bodies of observation and that efforts to do so are by necessity context-dependent is a point well taken for anyone interested in looking at the record of prehistoric hunter-gatherer behavior. In a refreshing twist, Layton also makes a case for trying to use 'evolutionary scale' insights in order to refine our understanding of the record of ethnographic groups, something that various other contributors—notably Muñoz and Mandini—put into application in other chapters.

Following this introduction, the chapters are organized in rough chronological order, starting with Hosfield's case study on what (un)changing handaxe morphology can tell archaeologists about early hominin behavior in England. He uses the handaxe as a common thread to link assemblages as distinct as Boxgrove—with its single handaxe manufacture episodes captured in the sediment—with assemblages collected in secondary context from river gravel accumulations. This device allows him to show that the variable resolution afforded by these different contexts can provide complementary sets of information about how a given technology (bifacial handaxes) can help illuminate a breadth of behaviors when articulated at a landscape level.

In a like manner, Papagianni uses the notion of stability—conceptualized at different scales and in different data

sets—as her device to integrate various scales of observation about Middle Paleolithic foragers in Greece. She makes the case that the broad generalities that can be derived from the coarse-grained archaeological record of that period are useful in highlighting what were long-term stable behavioral patterns, in other words, what seems to have worked best under the conditions that typify the Middle Paleolithic of that region. Focusing on general adaptive strategies as opposed to the details of how a given group lived at a specific moment of the past is what, ultimately, allows for the contextualization of human behavior using various paleoecological datasets whose resolution also transcends the scale of the specific human action. Since the recurrent human behaviors attested by the record were the result of several real-life constraints, she discusses how one of these, mobility, can be used to link observations in the Paleolithic record to those made in ethnographic contexts. While this is a position I have a great deal of sympathy for, because the discussion of the links between prehistoric and ethnographic mobility remains largely qualitative, I was left wanting for a deeper development of that argument. However, the notion that a monotonous archaeological record can reflect adaptation to fundamentally unstable conditions is likely to prompt interesting revisions of current interpretations of Neanderthal behavioral capacities.

Jumping to the 'Southern Cone' of South America and forward in time several tens of millennia, Muñoz and Mondini adopt a long-term perspective on what some of that continent's distinctive ecological parameters must have meant for hunter-gatherer societies in that part of the world. Their study is a convincing demonstration of how an awareness of long-term ecological dynamics in that part of the world is a necessary prerequisite to fully understand what they term the 'proximate' expressions of human interactions with their natural world, especially as shown by prey-predator relationships. An especially innovative aspect of this discussion that allows them to integrate hunter-gatherer behavior at different temporal scales is that they emphasize that this is true both for extant and prehistoric foragers.

The chapter by Taçon and Chippindale is, in my opinion, the standout study of the book and it presents a wealth of diachronic data on rock art traditions over ten millennia in northern Australia. The quantitative information (and extensive color illustrations) they provide allows the reader to independently evaluate the arguments which the

authors develop about long-term trends in the iconography and artistic techniques used in the 'Old Dynamic' and 'Recent Figurative' periods. This is an especially stimulating possibility given that the authors are among the few contributors to propose a socially-grounded interpretation of forager behavioral change in an effort to "see different historical depths to different aspects of knowledge" (p. 82). The methods applied in this chapter should be appealing to any researcher interested in the social prehistory of other regions rich in rock art. It is no coincidence that this case study and that of Etnier and Sepez (see below), presenting as they do the data on which they base their inferences, come across as the strongest contributions in the volume.

Taking as their starting point that cultural change follows trajectories more similar to punctuated equilibrium than gradual evolution, Maschner and Jordan propose an investigation of human reactions to catastrophic environmental change in the Lower Alaska Peninsula. They argue that patterns of social and technological change documented in the regional record can be tied to various catastrophic events including volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and global climate change. However, they go on to situate these changes in larger, hemispheric social and ecological contexts to show that the local pattern is best understood as the interface of local reactions to changes that, in some cases, originate abroad and exacerbate the ultimate impact of given instances of ecological change, thus emphasizing the need also to look at regional patterns at a global scale.

The chapter by Marciniak is the only one to explicitly incorporate observations on early agriculturalists to help shed light on some dimensions of change in hunter-gatherer societies. He proposes that the traditional perspective that looks at such interactions primarily in terms of subsistence economy and power disparities need to be discarded in favor of approaches that help identify the *habitus* of recurrent, day-to-day interactions between the two groups. By looking at the spatial organization and distribution of various artifacts and structures, he argues that aspects of these interactions can be monitored archaeologically, provided that researchers are willing to adopt non-normative perspectives that allow for processes other than colonization and acculturation to underpin our interpretations of forager-farmer interactions. Much of this chapter is an effort to develop this conceptual approach and a more direct integration of archaeological evidence would have helped make the case stronger. Still, it is a refreshing perspective that should certainly encourage researchers interested in untangling the dynamics of such interactions to think about this old problem in new ways.

Burke also proposes that archaeologists adopt a new manner of framing their interpretations, namely by adopting what she terms a humanist (i.e., post-modern) perspective on hunter-gatherer lifeways and relying less on 'group-based' observations more typical of ethnographic work predating 1980. For her, the humanist perspective yields a

"different, more intimate perspective on society" (p. 137) that is explicitly focused on the individual as opposed to the group. While I do not dispute the potential utility of such an approach, this chapter could have benefitted from an actual case study showing the humanist insights in action. As it is, it is unclear how this focus on the individual experience, no matter how laudable, can effectively be operationalized in archaeological context, especially for the 90%+ of human history which predates the symbolic production that seems to be critical for this perspective to be applicable.

The volume closes with a contribution by Etnier and Sepez who look at changes in sea mammal exploitation by the Makah of the Northwest Coast of North America from proto-historic times to the present. By first examining at the number of pinniped and cetacean taxa exploited by human groups from AD 1500 to the present, they show that the contemporary Makah exploit a disproportionately small range of animals compared to groups of foragers that occupied the region previously and that the proportion of various animal taxa in archaeological and recent assemblages suggest dramatic reorganization of the ecological structure on which they depend. They postulate that climate change can only account for a small part of this shift, and that the changes in marine mammal exploitation patterns across time can only be understood fully if human reactions to climate change are put in the broader context of how they were conditioning and conditioned by the intersection of a variety of cultural, economic, and political influences leading to the overharvesting of certain animal communities over time.

Overall, the volume presents an interesting range of perspectives on how to integrate observations made at different scales and drawn from a breadth of sources to make sense of the long-term trajectories of various hunter-gatherer societies across time and space. As mentioned above, the papers are uneven in their ability to show how to do so convincingly, with those presenting actual data and case studies coming across as the strongest. While I do not wish to trivialize the need for a robust and conceptually sound body of middle range theory to guide contemporary archaeological (and anthropological) work on foragers, ultimately the usefulness of any theory can only be truly assessed by using empirical evidence. If anything, this volume provides a tantalizing glance at some of the many perspectives that are currently being employed in hunter-gatherer studies, and thus will serve as a good gateway to a growing theoretical and methodological arsenal that can profitably be used to make sense of the polymorphic record of foragers past and present.

REFERENCE

Lee, Richard B., and I. DeVore. 1968. *Man the Hunter*. Chicago, Aldine Publishing Co.