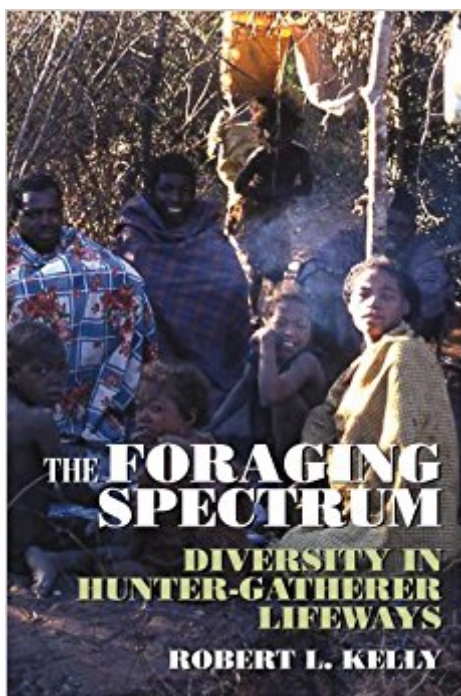


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The Foraging Spectrum: Diversity In Hunter-Gatherer Lifeways



Synopsis

The author wrote this book primarily for his archaeology students, to show them how dangerous anthropological analogy is and how variable the actual practices of foragers of the recent past and today are. His survey of anthropological literature points to differences in foraging societies' patterns of diet, mobility, sharing, land tenure, exchange, gender relations, division of labour, marriage, descent and political organisation. By considering the actual, not imagined, reasons behind diverse behaviour this book argues for a revision of many archaeological models of prehistory.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

[A]n excellent overview of key issues in hunter-gatherer studies.' (Alan Barnard, American Ethnologist) 'Not since Man the Hunter has there been such a synthesis and such a mix of stimulating ideas. This will be the authoritative work on hunter/gatherers for a good number of years.' (Brian Hayden, Canadian Journal of Archaeology) '[A]uthoritative, comprehensive, and highly readable... A well-worn and heavily annotated copy should be the companion of anyone claiming an interest or expertise in present or past hunter-gatherers.' (Bruce Winterhalder, American Antiquity) Prepublication praise ... 'The Foraging Spectrum [is] a well-written, scrupulously researched synthesis of modern approaches to foraging behavior, both past and present.' (David Hurst Thomas, American Museum of Natural History) 'A tour de force of scholarship in behavioral ecology.' (Mathias Guenther, Wilfred Laurier University)

Robert L. Kelly, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming

Compared with many anthropology books investigating ethnographic material, this work is somewhat dry, but the results reward the effort many times over. Kelly evinces bountiful data drawn from hundreds of ethnographies and explanatory cultural models to explore the actual nature of foraging communities. The data are not only dazzling in their plenitude but also daunting in how, despite its plenitude, it is so hard to draw conclusions. Kelly investigates the relations of forage quality to settlement patterns, of kinship and marriage customs with foraging activity and production, the roles of abundance and scarcity and patchiness of foraging territory on cultural activities and structure, and many other issues. Most important, the investigation culminates in an attempt to explain why some foraging societies are egalitarian and others inequalitarian, why in some men and women are veritably on social par, and why in others women experience lower prestige. There is a strong correlation between inequality and ranked or hierarchical societies and the lowered status of women, and a high correlation between egalitarian social practices and the parity or near-parity of men and women in social status. It appears that long-term-storage societies, which settle for long periods due to the nature of their food resources, have a strong tendency to become ranked and hierarchical and (not a term Kelly uses here) what many now would call "patriarchal." Societies that remain highly nomadic tend to remain egalitarian. Also, patterns of violence differ between these types: The former type tend to develop formal warfare, and the latter tend to escape violent conflict by fleeing, although they may also exhibit bouts of homicide as their methods of conflict-deterrence by fleeing leaves them with few methods for coping directly with interpersonal conflict. However, the lesson from the research and review of all the data, which Kelly returns to again and again, is that there is also a wide range of cultural practices among different foraging societies; a great amount of variability is seen. It would even be a mistake to say there are solidly egalitarian vs. inequalitarian foraging societies, as the theoretical boundaries between them are not at all clean. The most important lesson may be that trying to fit human cultural behavior into a scheme in which humans are evolving along a line, as if the species were trying to reach a certain point or all its members were headed in the same forever-vanishing point, cannot account for the variety of data in the archaeological record. Human evolution, whether physical or cultural, does not exhibit such linearity. This artifact of theoretical linearity from outmoded nineteenth-century thinking still pervades much anthropology (as well as biology). It is not helpful scientifically and does not account for the data. This work helps exemplify how the ongoing Hobbes vs. Rousseau debate in cultural anthropology is overly simplified and--since the false and misleading concept of evolutionary linearity is debunked--is to be replaced by a more complex, if less manipulable and

facile, understanding of human culture.

This book is an invaluable companion to the archaeology of the transition from foraging societies to settled civilizations. That it integrates the historical development of the archetypes and model architecture of with the data render it even more valuable than a mere treatise, in that it helps one put other works written at various times into proper context. This one of those few books I have read that changes the way I see the world, of immense value to me as I write my own. It is an essential reference in any bibliography dealing with human development, environmental management, or simply understanding the choices we make as peoples.

This book provides a useful historical overview of the hunter-gather literature as well as on the shifts within the anthropological discipline in terms of perspective -- from cataloging foraging groups to the revisionist literature emerging from the post-modern turn in the discipline. It's a great introduction to evolutionary anthropology and diet studies.

If you need to read a classic in Anthropology, give this book a try. Good book for an incredible price.

nice condition

A fairly easy read, but dense. Not for a undergraduate student class. A lazy professor who wants to stimulate discussion with their graduate students would like this book.

This book was written a decade ago, but nothing has come along yet to replace it. If you were to read a single book on the way that foragers live and have lived, this synthesis of the vast ethnographic literature would be an excellent choice. Kelly is keen to show that foraging peoples are quite diverse, a useful perspective for those of us who tend unconsciously to focus on the traits common to all foragers. By the end of the book, one has some sense of the range of possibilities for foraging societies, and a more sophisticated appreciation of the ways in which our paleolithic ancestors lived.

are examined very succinctly in this text. Beginning students of hunting and foraging behaviors will realize that the answer to the question "what do we eat?" is not an arbitrary cultural choice, but is instead both measurable and predictable. According to The Foraging Spectrum, such predictions

are based on geographical area, climatology, and primary production, to name a few.

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