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Steven J. Mithen

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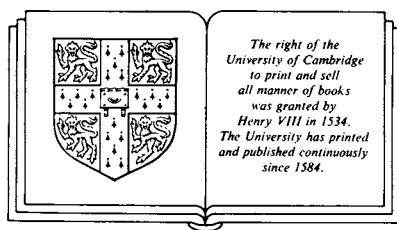
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STEVEN J. MITHEN *Trinity Hall, Cambridge*

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>List of tables</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1 Introduction	1
PART ONE LEARNING FROM THE PRESENT	19
2 The eco-psychology of decision making	21
3 The ethnography of hunter-gatherer decision making	52
PART TWO MESOLITHIC FORAGING AND SOCIETY	89
4 Broken bones and buried bodies: patterns in the archaeological record	91
5 Gearing up with methodological tools: building a simulation model	109
6 Decision making in the Mesolithic: multiple action replays	152
PART THREE UPPER PALAEOOLITHIC ART AND ECONOMY	195
7 Seeking the decision maker: faunal assemblages and hunting behaviour	197
8 Through a hunter's eyes . . . and into his mind?	226
9 Conclusion	256
<i>Bibliography</i>	266
<i>Index</i>	286

FIGURES

	<i>page</i>
2.1 A model for decision making in foraging strategies	23
3.1 Hunter-gatherers referred to in Chapter 3	54
3.2 An Iglulik Eskimo searching for seal	57
3.3 A Valley Bisa hunter searching for game	59
3.4 A Gidjingali woman collecting shellfish	62
3.5 Information exchange among the !Kung	67
3.6 Scapulimancy among the Cree	78
4.1 Hypothesised flora and fauna around Ageröd I at the transition from the Late Boreal to the Early Atlantic	95
4.2 The dispersal of agriculture across Europe	96
4.3 Chronological change in microliths in Eastern Denmark	98
4.4 Fragment of a wicker cage, probably a fish trap, from Ageröd V	100
4.5 The distribution of Mesolithic cemeteries in Europe	101
4.6 A Mesolithic burial from Vedbaek	103
5.1 Activity states and transitions for simulated Mesolithic hunters	110
5.2 (a) Increase of stalk probabilities with time owing to risk-reducing goal and (b) increase and decrease of stalk probabilities with time owing to interaction between risk-reducing goal and satisficing	131
5.3 Flow chart for MESO-SIM	132
6.1 Settlement area against household population for the !Kung and Alyawara	155
6.2 Settlement area against occupation duration for the !Kung and Alyawara	155
6.3 Mesolithic sites in Scania referred to in Chapter 6	156
6.4 Ageröd I:D	158
6.5 Ageröd I:B	160
6.6 Ageröd I:HC	161
6.7 Ageröd V	163
6.8 Bredasten	164
6.9 Mesolithic sites of the Upper Danube valley referred to in Chapter 6	170
6.10 MESO-SIM test runs: A	172
6.11 MESO-SIM test runs: B	174
6.12 Example frequency distribution for ungulate frequencies in simulated assemblages	175
6.13 NULL decision goal signature with data from Scania and the Upper Danube valley imposed	177
6.14 UISR decision goal signature with data from Scania and the Upper Danube valley imposed	179
6.15 UIS decision goal signature with data from Scania and the Upper Danube valley imposed	180
6.16 Frequency distributions for (a) percentages of successful hunters in the group, NULL, UISR and UIS goals, and (b) the foraging efficiency of successful hunters in the group, NULL, UISR and UIS goals	183

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978-0-521-10288-9 - Thoughtful Foragers: A Study of Prehistoric Decision Making

Steven J. Mithen

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

6.17	Change in hunters' influence within the group during a visit to the site	185
7.1	Painting of a red deer stag from Niaux	199
7.2	Catastrophic reindeer profiles from (a) Mas d'Azil and (b) Pincevent	203
7.3	Catastrophic red deer profiles from (a) La Riera and (b) El Juyo	206
7.4	Comparison between simulated and real reindeer populations	210
7.5	Reindeer simulation flow chart	212
7.6	Sustainable human population, reindeer population return time, and coefficient of variation in yields against hunting intensity for reindeer exploitation	214
7.7	Mean sustainable yields and coefficient of variation in yields against hunting intensity for red deer exploitation	219
7.8	Yields against time for red deer exploitation in a fluctuating environment and with a random killing strategy	220
7.9	Red deer age structure in simulated assemblages and in real assemblages from La Riera	221
7.10	Yields against time for red deer exploitation in a fluctuating environment and with a selective killing strategy	223
8.1	Track and hoofprint imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art: animal depictions	228
8.2	Track and hoofprint imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art: 'abstract' signs	229
8.3	Defecation imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art	231
8.4	Terrain cues imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art	232
8.5	Vegetation cues imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art	234
8.6	Audible cues imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art	235
8.7	Panorama on the ceiling of Altamira	236
8.8	Body cues imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art: antler imagery	237
8.9	Body cues imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art: body shape	239
8.10	Direct animal cues imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art: predator-prey imagery	240
8.11	Direct animal cues imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art: bird-herbivore imagery	241
8.12	Indirect animal cues imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art: seasonal imagery	242
8.13	Indirect animal cues imagery in Upper Palaeolithic art: waterfowl imagery	243
8.14	Three 'bison' and a horse from the réseau René Clastres, Niaux	253

TABLES

	<i>page</i>
3.1 Calendar plants used by the Groote Eylandt islanders	65
4.1 Ungulate frequencies in Mesolithic assemblages from Scania and the Upper Danube valley	93
5.1 Ecological characteristics of ungulates exploited by the Valley Bisa	113
5.2 Exploitation of ungulates by the Valley Bisa	113
5.3 Bone availability and waste at Ageröd I:HC	115
5.4 Utility estimates for post-glacial ungulates	116
5.5 Probabilities of encountering post-glacial ungulates	118
5.6 Risk, pursuit and processing values for post-glacial ungulates	120
5.7 Parameters for MESO-SIM	133
5.8 Samples day's foraging for hunters with NULL goals	135
5.9 Samples day's foraging for hunters with UIS goals	140
5.10 Samples day's foraging for hunters with UISR goals	146
6.1 Radiocarbon dates from Mesolithic sites in Scania	157
6.2 Bone fragments from Skateholm I and II	168
6.3 Spatial area and population estimates for Mesolithic sites in the Upper Danube valley	171
6.4 Parameter values for MESO-SIM test runs	173
6.5 Classification of microliths from Ageröd I:D,B and HC	189
6.6 Microlithic diversity in Ageröd I assemblages	190
7.1 Leslie matrix for Norwegian wild reindeer	208
7.2 Utility of reindeer carcasses	209
7.3 Density-dependent and constant values for red deer Leslie matrix	216
7.4 Density-independent increments to red deer population parameters	217
8.1 Percentage of species prevalence in cave art minus percentage prevalence in fauna	249

PREFACE

This book has been developed from my Ph.D. thesis which I completed in December 1987. Yet its roots lie earlier and can be pinpointed to two not unrelated events. The first was on a hot and sticky day during the summer of 1978. I sat with my brother in a shady spot near Les Eyzies and pondered the paintings of Font de Gaume after the first of many visits to that cave. How mysterious the prehistoric past appeared. What beauty the hunters must have found in their icy world, and within themselves, to make such art. The second occurred a couple of years later in the midst of a Yorkshire winter – the ice age had returned with a vengeance! Now an undergraduate at Sheffield University, I sat reading in my damp bedsit and was transfixed by *Transformations*, Renfrew and Cooke's book on mathematical approaches to culture change. I understood as little of the mathematics as I did of the French guide's descriptions of the cave paintings. But what an intriguing idea! Can the coldness of equations and computer programmes really help in studying the complexities of culture and the warmth of the human spirit as so perfectly expressed in the smudge of ochre and mark from a burnt stick on the walls of Font de Gaume? Now sitting in my positively post-glacial Cambridge study and with this book before me, I can still confess to ignorance, but also to a continuing fascination with the idea.

For having the chance to explore this idea I must first thank those who taught me archaeology at Sheffield, particularly Robin Dennell, Andrew Fleming, Robin Torrence and Richard Hodges. Similarly to those who taught me a little biology, mathematics and computing at York University, especially Michael Usher and John Lawton. The Ph.D. thesis on which this book is based was written in Cambridge and I must thank the members of the archaeology department for creating such a stimulating atmosphere, notably Colin Renfrew, Todd Whitelaw, Sander Van de Leeuw, Geoff Bailey, Paul Mellars, Ian Hodder and Jamie McGlade. I was also lucky to discuss my work with the American scholars who pass through Cambridge. I particularly thank Jim Bell and Ezra Zubrow. Great encouragement was also gained from Clive Gamble and Rob Foley through the example of their own work and the comments they passed on mine. Others have helped with particular parts of this work. Sander Van de Leeuw, Jamie McGlade and Montserrat Gomendio made useful criticisms of an earlier version of the introductory chapter. S. H. Anderson, H.P. Blankholm, Lars Larsson and Peter Rowley-Conwy have been kind enough to listen to my approach to the Mesolithic and comment upon it. Tony Sinclair made some useful comments on my thoughts

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

about technology. Paul Bahn and Jean Clottes provided me with a series of remarks on my cave art studies which have been particularly useful. When building my red deer simulation model I had the advice of Steve Albon, who kindly allowed me access to the Rhum data. Similarly Nick Tyler helped with my reindeer simulations.

Once the thesis was produced Geoff Bailey and Stephen Shennan made a series of perceptive criticisms, which I hope have now been attended to, and provided great encouragement to develop the work. This book was written while I was a Research Fellow at Trinity Hall, Cambridge. I thank the Master and Fellows for the intellectually stimulating and pleasant atmosphere at Trinity Hall, which enabled me to hit the wordprocessor again so soon after finishing the thesis. I thank Colin Renfrew for inviting me to write this book, and Frances Brown and the editors at Cambridge University Press for their invaluable advice.

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Finally I have three thankyou's of a different kind. First to my brother Richard, for sitting and talking with me near Les Eyzies (and all the other places). Secondly to my daughter Hannah, for constantly reminding me, as I was trying to write, that the present is in fact much more interesting than the past! Lastly to my wife Susan, for all her support and interest in my work. I dedicate this book to her.