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052181572X - Forager-Traders in South and Southeast Asia: Long-Term Histories

Edited by Kathleen D. Morrison and Laura L. Junker

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Forager-Traders in South and Southeast Asia

In both South and Southeast Asia, many upland groups make a living, in whole or part, through gathering and hunting, producing not only subsistence goods but commodities destined for regional and even world markets. These forager-traders have had an ambiguous position in ethnographic analysis, variously represented as relics, degraded hunter-gatherers, or recent upstarts.

Forager-Traders in South and Southeast Asia adopts a multidisciplinary approach to these groups, presenting a series of comparative case-studies that analyze the long-term histories of hunting; gathering; trading; power relations; and regional, social, and biological interactions in this critical region.

This book is a fascinating and important addition to the current “revisionist” debate, and a unique attempt to reconceptualize our knowledge of forager-traders within the context of complex polities, populations, and economies in South and Southeast Asia.

Kathleen D. Morrison is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago. She is the author of *Fields of Victory: Vijayanagara and the Course of Intensification* (1995, reprinted 2000) and the editor, together with S.E. Alcock, T.N. D’Altroy, and C.M. Sinopoli, of *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History* (Cambridge, 2001).

Laura L. Junker is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is the author of *Raiding, Trading and Feasting: The Political Economy of Philippine Chiefdoms* (1999).

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Long-Term Histories

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TO MARK AND JOHN

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PREFACE

In both South and Southeast Asia, many upland groups make a living, in whole or part, through some combination of gathering and hunting, activities which produce not only subsistence goods, but, critically, commodities destined for regional or even world markets. The emergence of such specialized foraging and trading has been responsive to many factors, including local environmental contexts, regional political economies, and contingent historical circumstances; processes and conditions which are complex and interconnected but which still admit the construction of more generalized understandings of cultural, biological, and ecological processes. In this volume we present perspectives on South and Southeast Asian forager-traders which are both comparative and historical, which work toward integrating functional/organizational perspectives on hunting, gathering, trading, regional interaction, politics, biology, and social and power relations with nuanced views of the long-term histories of such strategies.

What are the stakes of such an analysis? If, as we argue they should, gathering and hunting in the Holocene are seen as viable, persistent, and widespread strategies – strategies variably interpretable in terms of continuity of historical lifeways, responses to economic and political pressure, resistance to sedentarization or peasantization, encapsulation, specialization, or simply efficient and agreeable modes of survival – then we need to integrate the analysis of foraging, including foraging for exchange, into more general analyses of the recent past, recognizing the importance of both long-term historical experience and immediate environmental and sociopolitical contexts in shaping human action.

Beyond this, however, the reintegration of foragers into both history and process has even more profound implications for both scholarly practice and substantive understandings of the past. Put simply, if people who gather and hunt in the post-Pleistocene have always been integral parts of complex political economies, if they have always been a part of the larger issues of complexity that interest us as anthropologists (regional power dynamics, biological exchanges, state formation, world markets, etc.), then perhaps we need to reconceptualize these research problems rather than simply reinvent the foragers. The scholarly analysis of foragers has tended

to be a specialized field, but perhaps foraging and its flexible deployment by people across most of the earth and through all of human history is too important to be left to a small subfield. Certainly, the study of forager-traders pushes the boundaries of our systematics, prompting reconsideration of categories such as food-producer, trader, hunter-gatherer, agriculturalist (see chapter 1), but more than this we see in the long-term integration of forager-traders in South and Southeast Asian regional polities, populations, and economies a powerful argument for reconceptualizing those polities, populations, and economies themselves.

This reconceptualization again is both substantive and conceptual. We need to examine the extent to which these institutions and entities were predicated on or built in conjunction with integration with foraging peoples. Did Harappan craftspeople and thus the larger Harappan society *need* mobile hunter-gatherers and pastoralists? Was the structure of the precolonial and Early Modern spice trade in both South and Southeast Asia *predicated on* the creation and maintenance of specialized forager-traders? Were state formation and political practice of the lowland polities of the Philippines critically *dependent on* both upland foragers and swidden farmers? Has the continued importance of foraging strategies *significantly shaped* aspects of the biology of Malay populations? In all cases, the affirmative requires us then not only to reject perceptions of foragers as isolated, outside “civilization,” or non-complex, but also, perhaps more radically, to reconsider these larger worlds themselves. Integrating foragers into actual historical trajectories – a core issue of the so-called revisionist debate – results in much more than simply a need to reconceptualize the archaeology and anthropology of hunter-gatherers. If strategies of foraging, and the people who practice them, must now be admitted into complex societies, world systems, and political economies, then clearly our understanding of these networks will be depauperate without a concomitant understanding of foraging strategies, including their ecological and organizational possibilities. Too much is at stake to have separate camps of hunter-gatherer specialists and to have hunting and gathering lie outside the purview of those who study complex societies.

In this volume we make an argument for attending to the terms of the revisionist debate in hunter-gatherer studies while at the same time transcending the terms of the debate – viewing foraging, trading, agriculture, and other activities not as markers of essential identities but as strategies knowingly and flexibly deployed by people living in complex circumstances. Both “putting history in” and retaining process helps us to resist seeing gatherer-hunters in various temporally distorted ways – in

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typological time (stages in an evolutionary classification), out of time (ahistorical), or ancient (representatives of a primeval substratum of humanity) – as well as continuing to build on the very real insights gained by anthropologists and others about the organization of gathering and hunting, about the ways in which people can and do structure aspects of their lives around wild resources in the contexts of what are often (though not always) mobile, small-scale groups. At the same time, the contributors to this volume come from and contribute to debates outside the usual scope of hunter-gatherer studies, consonant with our argument that foraging, as a strategy that is, among many others, integral to the history and operation of complex political economies, needs to be understood in light of more general processes including specialization, marginalization, resistance, cooperation, the maintenance of cultural identities, marriage and kinship patterns, exchange, and many others.

The organization of the chapters in this volume reflects our dual aims of engaging in this broader anthropological discourse on hunter-gatherers, while at the same time bringing together the relevant work of scholars in a part of the world that has received relatively limited attention in revisionist debates. Chapter 1, written by Morrison, expands on many of the general issues raised in this preface and provides the wider theoretical context for the chapters to follow. The remaining chapters of the book are divided into two parts, focused on South Asian and Southeast Asian forager-traders. We integrated research on South Asian and Southeast Asian foragers in this volume because we see notable parallels in the long-term social and economic dynamics of forager-traders in the two regions. These parallels broadly relate to similar ecological parameters of foraging (e.g. upland–lowland contrasts, heterogeneous tropical environments with diverse resources and ecological niches), the apparently long-term co-existence of foragers in the two regions within a heterogeneous regional cultural matrix with widely differing social and economic modes, and historical circumstances connecting the two regions over the past two millennia as participants in the vast Indian Ocean–South China Sea trade. The congruities between the two regions are emphasized in the general introduction to the volume (chapter 1), in later theoretical chapters (chapters 2 and 7), and in many of the empirical studies (most notably Morrison’s in chapter 6). At the same time, we chose to group chapters by their regional focus because we wish to emphasize unique aspects of the cultural matrices and historical trajectories of South Asia and Southeast Asia foraging populations, as well as highlight the integration of work by archaeologists, ethnographers, ethnohistorians, and biological anthropologists in each of the regions.

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Preface

Because many of the volume's readers will lack in-depth knowledge of the history of empirical studies and theoretical debates on foragers in one or both of these regions, the lead chapter in each of the two parts of the book is synthetic in nature. In addition to providing an overview of geography, environments, and empirical work on foragers in each region relevant to the volume theme, chapters 2 and 7 also serve to integrate the diverse approaches and research foci of the chapters in each part and to place them in broader theoretical and empirical contexts. As emphasized throughout this preface, we believe that anthropological analysis of long-term foraging strategies requires diverse avenues of inquiry, and we have sought to include in this volume scholars who integrate ethnographic, historical, archaeological, and biological approaches in their research and who address the theme of this volume from varying theoretical perspectives.

In part I on South Asian forager-traders, John Lukacs (chapter 3) presents a strong argument for an integrated biocultural approach to develop more dynamic models of how foragers and agriculturalists interacted in Indian prehistory. Drawing on bioarchaeological analysis of Mesolithic and Harappan skeletal material, archaeological work at sites of these periods, and ethnographic and historic observations on recent foragers of India, Lukacs concludes that the nature and intensity of forager–farmer contacts have varied considerably from the Mesolithic Period to the present and over different regions of India, and that models which incorporate the idea of opportunistic versatility may describe past forager strategies better than either isolate or interactive models. Gregory Possehl (chapter 4) focuses more narrowly on archaeological evidence for Harappan Period and earlier trade in Gujarat, demonstrating that, for this region of India, trade interactions between foragers and the agriculturalist-herder populations of developing complex societies were ancient, continuous, and integral to the regional political economy of the mature Harappan state. Moving to another region of South Asia and to a primarily ideational rather than materialist analysis of exchange, Allen Zagarell (chapter 5) combines oral histories, historic sources, and the textual analysis of scenes on “hero-stones” at archaeological sites in the Nilgiri Hills of southwestern India to illustrate how upland “tribal” peoples (both foragers and swiddening populations) mimic status concepts of the state-level lowland societies with whom they come into trade contact (in this case in the form of erecting commemorative “hero-stones”). However, Zagarell also shows that the Nilgiri uplanders often subtly alter the meaning of emulated material symbols to fit indigenous notions of social valuation and social relations (particularly gender relations). The South Asia section ends with a chapter

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by Morrison (chapter 6) which illustrates the historically constructed nature of forager-trader relations in South Asia through an ethnohistoric analysis of changes in the organization of forager-trader groups in southwest India with the expansion of the coastal spice trade between AD 1400 and 1700. Comparisons with the response of Malay hunter-gatherers to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Melakan spice trade suggest that forager-traders in both regions can be viewed as strategic agents of change as they negotiate dynamic and complex political worlds.

In part II on Southeast Asian forager-traders, Sandra Bowdler (chapter 8) attacks the stereotyped myth of Australia as a continent of isolated Aboriginal foragers, combining historic sources, oral traditions, and archaeological evidence to argue that Aboriginal foragers along the northern Australian coast were engaged in regular contacts with Southeast Asian maritime traders over several millennia, with significant cultural consequences. Chapter 9 by Alan Fix focuses primarily on biological evidence to demonstrate the disjunction between cultural notions of ethnicity and biological measures of relatedness between Semang “Negrito” foragers and agricultural populations on the Malay Peninsula. Fix’s chapter reminds us of the importance of caution in our interpretations, since different conjectural “histories” of forager pasts can be empirically supported by biological patterning, archaeological distributions, and cultural categorizations. In the final chapter on Southeast Asian foragers, Junker (chapter 10) integrates archaeological, ethnographic, and historic data to argue that, in the Philippines archipelago, forager trade contacts with agriculturalists who were part of ranked and even stratified societies were relatively ancient and core to forager survival strategies, but varied significantly over time and space. In the Philippines, situationally shifting strategies of interaction with non-foragers created very dynamic patterns of economic and social flux in Philippine hunter-gatherers, echoing the views of many of the volume authors that flexibility may have been the most enduring long-term strategy for Southeast Asian foraging populations.

This volume had its distant beginnings in a session organized by Morrison at the World Archaeology Congress (WAC) in New Delhi in 1994. Only the chapters by Morrison and Possehl, as well as parts of the general introduction (chapter 1), remain from that original session. All of the other chapters were commissioned and we extend our thanks to all the authors for their patience in the long evolution of the volume. Several scholars who wished to contribute were, in the end, unable to, and we thank them as well for their contributions to the project which, while less obvious, are still substantial. Laura Junker signed on as co-editor partway

through the process, contributing to both the regional and intellectual balance and depth of the work. The final product is very much a joint editorial effort. Despite the clear differences in our approaches, we have found broad areas of agreement that could be developed, along with both the unity and disagreement among our contributors, to try and define a new path for the analysis of forager-traders in the two regions. More generally, we have attempted to transcend some entrenched divisions between, on the one hand, ecological vs. historical accounts of hunter-gatherers and, on the other, between hunter-gatherer studies and the analysis of complex political economies. As noted, there is much to be gained by stepping outside the existing bounds of these divisions, though there is also a great challenge to such research inasmuch as it requires expertise and information beyond the scope of any single scholar. Chapters in this volume incorporate data from such diverse sources as material culture, art, texts, human biology, ecology, and climate history; all of the chapters would be enriched by additional research and perhaps collaboration integrating the insights of these various fields.

A book with such a complex long-term history inevitably creates a field of obligation. Among the many people who have contributed in one way or another to this work, we mention Greg Possehl, who suggested the WAC as a venue for the original session, Teresa Raczek, who compiled the bibliography and conducted the initial technical editing, Peter Johansen, who drafted several of the figures, and Lauretta Eisenbach, who assisted with the logistics of compiling the revised manuscript. We also thank Jessica Kuper at Cambridge University Press for her support of the volume and assistance in moving it through the publication process.

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Laura Junker would like to express appreciation for the always sage advice of Karl Hutterer on this manuscript, and for stimulating discussions

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and correspondence over a great number of years with Peter Brosius, Rowe Cadelina, Bion Griffin, Tom Headland, Karl Hutterer, Willie Ronquillo, and Rasmi Shoocondej (and more recently Sandra Bowdler, John Krigbaum, Michael Nassaney, and Allen Zagarell) who shaped her views on the archaeology, ethnography, and history of Southeast Asian foragers. The bulk of the volume editing and the preparation of chapter 7's overview of work on forager–farmer relations in Southeast Asia were completed while in residence as a visiting scholar at the Department of Anthropology at University of Oklahoma in the 1999–2000 academic year. Patricia Gilman kindly provided the facilities and resources on campus to complete this project and she, along with Paul Minnis, Lesley Rankin-Hill, Ross Hassig and others at Oklahoma offered helpful comments on this research when it was presented in a department lecture series. Junker would also like to express her gratitude for the warm reception granted by new colleagues at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Field Museum when she presented portions of her book chapters in a lecture at the Department of Anthropology in 2001.