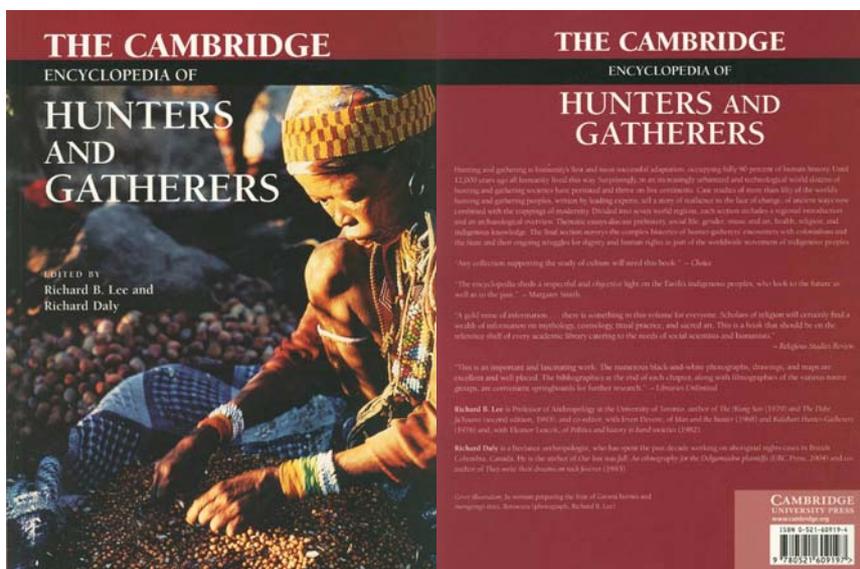


Lee, R.B. & R. Daly. Eds. 2004. *The Cambridge encyclopedia of hunters and gatherers*. – Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Book review by P. Storm



The way human's function, physically and mentally, has essentially been shaped in the time that our subsistence was based on gathering and hunting. It is worthy of note that we became fully bipedal and as intelligent as we are with all our cultural flexibility amid grasses, trees, herbivores and carnivores, not by sitting behind a computer. As the two editors, Lee & Daly remark in the introduction of this encyclopedia (p. 1): “The world's hunting and gathering peoples – the Arctic Inuit, Aboriginal Australians, Kalahari San, and similar groups – represent the oldest and perhaps most successful human adaptation. Until 12,000 years ago virtually all humanity lived as hunters and gatherers”. Taking *Homo sapiens idaltu* from Ethiopia, dated between 160 000 en 154 000 BP, as our oldest fossil representative, our species lived more than 90 % of its time as hunters and gatherers. Good change that our ancestors started to live as hunters and gatherers, with a shift to more meat in their diet, about 1.7 myr ago, which would mean that the genus *Homo* has survived by this mode of life about 99 % of its evolutionary history. Considering the fact that also chimpanzees hunt (Goodall, 1986) it is even reasonable to suggest, as is done Smith (p. 384), that: “The idea of hunting and foraging was probably already embedded in the social life of our non-human primate ancestors before they walked on two legs”.

The urban lifestyle, of which I am a part, is so recent that it is questionable if there has been enough time to adapt genetically to this modern way of life. Eaton & Eaton III remark (p. 449): “Our bodies are adapted for foraging ways of life, yet they must contend with psychological, nutritional, and physical stresses of “Space Age” existence.” And there is something important to learn for us all: “In relation to problems of human health, recent gatherers and hunters can serve roughly as models of how men and women lived when their lifeways and their genetic endowment were more nearly in harmony”.

‘The Cambridge encyclopedia of hunters and gatherers’ gives a wealth of information on this important, basic way of life, divided in two main parts. Part I (p. 23–371) deals with the ethnographies of over fifty of hunters and gatherer groups, of seven geographical regions: North America, South America, North Eurasia, Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Australia. A range of experts has written the case studies. Frequently occurring subjects (set themes) within the ethnographies are: history, ecology, economy, settlement patterns, domestic organisation, politic organisation, religion, current situation and resistance. Less attention is paid to topics like for instance: mobility, land tenure and kinship. Every geographical region has its own introduction with a map showing the hunters and gatherers of the region, and within the ethnographies one finds regularly black and white photographs of the peoples. At the end of the case studies a reading list is given and in about half of the cases also one or more films. The second part, which is smaller (p. 375–492), contains thematic essays grouped in three main parts: I. Hunter–gatherers, history, and social theory; II. Facets of hunter–gatherer life in cross-cultural perspective; III. Hunter–gatherers in a global world.

Lévi–Strauss remarked in the well known book ‘Man the hunter’, edited by Lee & Devore (1968, p. 350): “Certainly we should not try to use these recent hunter–gatherers to reconstruct events and conditions in the prehistory of mankind”. As long as we are dealing with for instance a species like *Homo erectus*, with an endocranial volume of about 2/3 of our own, we have to be very careful with the reconstruction of past events by

looking at recent hunters and gatherers. Although, I am not sure if I agree that we should not try. But as soon as we are talking about *Homo sapiens*, this is another matter. Probably, many palaeontologists would knit their brows seriously if one would say that we might not use recent studies of wolves as a model or inspiration to try to say something about the behaviour of Pleistocene wolves. If palaeo-anthropologists and archaeologists are interested in reconstructing the life of for instance Cro-Magnons in Pleistocene Europe, looking at recent hunters and gatherers is the best option they have. However, this does not mean that we do not need to be cautious. When I visited the Okiek in 1991, in the Mau Escarpment in Southwest Kenya, one of the things that struck me were the western clothes a number of people wore and the presence of a car. It helps to realise that hunters and gatherers have contact with other groups. And this must have been also the case (long) before the arrival of Europeans. Like any group of people, they adopt all kind of habits. In other words, their way of life is and was not static but dynamic. Turning over the pages of this encyclopedia the impression is that one deals with a heterogeneous group.

For every geographical region there is a chapter about archaeology and in the second part a chapter is included 'Archaeology and evolution of hunters and gatherers'. The encyclopedia takes the earlier periods of hunter and gatherers seriously, *i.e.* more than forty pages are dedicated to it. But this is less than in 'Man the Hunter'. For people fascinated by the past this encyclopedia touches interesting topics but it offers no depth for those involved in prehistoric hunters and gatherers. Especially for people interested in ethnographies of hunters and gatherers this is a handy and clearly arranged work that gives a lot of information and references. What strikes is that this encyclopedia is not just a dry work to search for information but it is also well written and really enjoyable to read.

Lee, R.B. & R. Daly. Eds. 2004. The Cambridge encyclopedia of hunters and gatherers. – Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 511 pp. ISBN 0-521-60919-4. Price £ 24.99/\$ 34.99 (paperback).

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