
Seasonal abundance and resource management: A view from the northern forests

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Abstract

In the temperate and subarctic forest zone of the northern hemisphere, most Post-Glacial hunter-gatherer economies are associated with delayed return strategies, exploiting various seasonally abundant resources over the course of the year. Pillars of this "taiga economy" are hunting, fishing, and collecting of plant and other food stuffs. Storage plays a role in such economies both as "natural storage" of reliably recurring seasonal resources that just have to be harvested every year, and as storage in the sense of preserving the accumulated seasonal resources over longer periods of by various means such as drying, freezing and smoking. While some of these harvesting and storage practices can leave clear traces in the archaeological record, e.g. as shell middens, remains of fish traps, and hazelnut shell layers, others might be much less well detectible. Ethnographic information and ethnohistorical accounts from contemporary Siberian communities provide valuable insights here, showing that a certain bias on the role of fishing in archaeological interpretations is notable and that other species such as migratory birds might have played a more prominent role also in past hunter-gatherer societies than often presumed.

In the talk, information from Western Siberian communities will be evaluated on various active resource management and niche construction strategies such as the burning of forests to boost the abundance of berries and game, the temporary keeping of fish in artificial ponds or cages, and landscape shaping connected to bird hunting. Within a framework of social zooarchaeology it becomes clear that the underlying human-nonhuman interaction systems are by no means mere instances of economic exploitation but that complex multi-species ontologies and inter-species engagements can influence the acquisition, interaction and use, and also disposal or deposition of resources and their remains.

Keywords: Seasonal resources, resource management, niche construction, Siberian ethnoarchaeology

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