

OVERVIEW

David Sanger

Anthropologists, generally lacking the means to test their theories by controlled laboratory experiments, have traditionally employed contrasting data sets. At a time when multiple society cross-cultural evaluations are possible, it is interesting to reflect on the dualistic nature of this symposium -- the Northwest Coast vs the Northeast Coast. Why were the former peoples organized into complex, strongly linear, stratified tribal segments, whilst the latter evinced relatively egalitarian, less complex, structures largely devoid of ascribed statuses and ranking? The Northeast Algonkians generally behave as hunters and gatherers should, according to Service (1979) and others interested in placing societies on an evolutionary ladder. That the Northwest Coast hunting and gathering societies did not conform has long been a source of theoretical embarrassment. What, then, are the merits of comparing apples with oranges?

A critical feature of the comparative approach is the need for comparable phenomena and comparable base-line data. If we can agree that Northwest Coast and Northeast Coast societies had a major maritime component in their lifestyle, then we have a comparable phenomenon aspect -- the adaptation of hunter/gatherer societies to marine ecosystems. Both ecosystems are rich and varied in humanly consumable resources. The base-line data that are being compared are problematic.

David Sanger, Department of Anthropology, University of Maine, Orono, Maine, 04469.

In neither area are the archaeological sequences well known. When Northwest Coast data are used they are derived largely from the Fraser Delta, although Hobler's data set (this volume) is not. In this group of papers the prehistoric data from the Northeast are derived largely from the Maine coast with some Maritimes Provinces information. Although the Fraser Delta sequence may be better developed in several important ways, there are still a great many unanswered questions pivotal to issues of developing social complexity.

Ethnographically, the contrast in base-line data is strong. Nowhere in the Northeast coastal zone do we have the wealth of documentation seen for the major groups of the Northwest Coast. Miller's novel approach (this volume) is unconvincing given the 17th century dislocations, the vagaries of the documentation, and her methodology. Unfortunately, the diverse sources used to characterize the Micmac cannot stand the burden placed on them by the developing body of mid-range theory. In short, the results of the comparative exercise are generally disappointing due to the incomparability of the data sets.

This conclusion does not imply that nothing has been gained -- quite the contrary. In a body of literature dominated by such marginal hunter/gatherers such as the Bushman, Shoshone, Inuit, etc., it is important to grapple with those societies that place higher on the evolutionary scale of social complexity. By taking the diachronic view, the otherwise anomalous Northwest Coast groups may assume an important role in theory building as we try to understand the mechanisms whereby the societies attained their ethnographic characters. The Northwest Coast ethnography, so rich in detail, affords an opportunity to generate hypotheses that can be tested with archaeological methods. For example, salmon on the Northwest Coast have always dominated the thinking of anthropologists. Did it also dominate the native peoples in pre-contact times? The answer must come from a detailed analysis of bones in the middens. Is there in fact an intensification on this single resource? Some research suggests this is not in fact the case (C. Carlson 1982).

Whitlam's (this volume) MNE model also offers the basis for an empirical examination of the evolution of societies on both coasts. Like so many good ideas it cannot be tested with our current archaeological data base. However, because of its emphasis on seasonality of scheduling the excellent preservation in east and in west coast shell middens could provide the requisite data. Demographic factors may be far more difficult to handle, unfortunately. An adequate test of this model, like the "intensification" model, requires a research design that specifically eschews the normative approach found in much

current archaeological thinking (Sanger 1982). As we move away from an emphasis on cultural-historical models we will be compelled to evolve different concepts of how culture works, and data generated under one model will have to be massaged to fit the new.

Several anthropologists have noted that the impact of European contact has been to establish marginally placed hunting and gathering societies and also to create societies that may evolve towards the lower end of the bandstate continuum. The Northeast hunter/gatherers may be such an example, but what about the Northwest Coast groups? Is there a possibility that European contact actually fostered a greater emphasis on ranking through status affirmation and hereditary rights to resources?

There are a number of archaeologists who hope to evolve a body of method and theory specifically geared to maritime adapted hunting/gathering societies. On the one side, there are those who would argue that no special body of theory is needed to explain maritime hunter/gatherers. On the other, the focus on maritime ecosystems is sufficient to warrant special examination (Osborne 1977; Perlman 1980; Yesner 1980). From these broadly-ranging reviews we can see that there may be certain features of maritime adaptations that are different from purely terrestrial adaptations.

It can be shown that the kind of maritime focus seen on the Northwest Coast and in the Northeast does not occur in all maritime zones in the world. Both of these areas share with a handful of others rich inshore ecosystems where high plankton growth sets the platform for high biomass levels. Although efficiency may be lost through the number of trophic levels, the gain comes through the trade of quantity for inefficiency. The convergence of plankton consuming animals that can convert the biomass to protein and fat provides man with a super abundance of food if he can capture these "converters" and, if necessary, store them for leaner times. The ability of the Northwest Coast peoples to store food is, as several contributors to this symposium have pointed out, the capstone to a procurement system that maximizes on high quality and high quantity resources that are relatively predictable. It must be remembered, however, that the same storage technology was applied to animals other than salmon, and it is clear from shell midden faunal analyses that extensive (diffuse) subsistence patterns existed on both coasts.

A challenge for archaeologists working with maritime hunter/gatherers is the reconstruction of the marine conditions. Here the terrestrial hunter/gatherer specialists have an edge both in the available techniques and in the comparative analogues. It is encouraging to see in this volume how the interface between

archaeology and oceanography is closing that gap. As ever, it is a matter of learning enough about the marine ecosystem to ask the right questions. Once some useful characterizations of paleo-marine conditions are ascertained we can then proceed from the particularistic through an examination of various models purporting to explain human behavior.

The varied resources available to maritime hunter/gatherers create options that purely terrestrial hunter/gatherers may not enjoy. Most of the former benefit from access to the sea at the front door and the land at the back. Whilst orienting themselves to a marine schedule, the contributions from the terrestrial ecosystems are not insignificant. Under such conditions the plethora of choices may lessen the utility of some of the ecologically founded models that make predictions based upon ideas of least risk and effort. Site catchment and related models based on walking time and effort of carrying prey have to be drastically altered to accommodate water transport. In short, although maritime hunter/gatherers are still hunter/gatherers, there may well be benefits to generating behavioral models that more accurately reflect their physical environment. Such models, of course, should ideally lead to a better understanding of their social environment.

Finally, it is the nature of our discipline to proceed from the particularistic to the general, and from the model to the hypothesis in a fashion that often appears ideosyncratic. Symposia like this one serve a useful function in that scholars who rarely communicate with each other have done so, and regional specialists have been encouraged to look beyond their estuary.