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## Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory

Volume 10

1987, Pages 93-210

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### 3 - Shellfish Gathering and Shell Midden Archaeology

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-003110-8.50006-2>

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#### Publisher Summary

This chapter discusses those methodological and theoretical problems that are of greatest concern to shell midden archaeologists. Archaeologists dealing with problems posed by shell middens often seem oblivious of substantial contributions made in previous work—understandably so, because the published literature of this subdiscipline is voluminous and has never been adequately synthesized. As a consequence, many archaeologists have busied themselves with reinventing the wheel, rediscovering useful methods or cogent explanations originally developed years before. While shell middens offer exceptional opportunities to study certain aspects of food gathering, they are by no means exclusively the product of hunting and gathering societies. The chapter reviews ethnographic and ethnohistoric data on shellfish gathering by members of many types of societies, whether primarily dependent on food gathering or food production, to the extent possible given the often incomplete nature of such sources. The chapter presents a comparison of the salient characteristics of different molluscan exploitative

strategies and presents some hypotheses relating to the origins, maintenance, and decline of intensive molluscan exploitation.

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