Preface

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These Essays are the result of the “Symposium on Nomadic Societies” held at the 1969 Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. The symposium was chaired by Philip Salzman, Brian Spooner, and myself, with Neville Dyson-Hudson serving as discussant. The purpose of the symposium was to bring together a number of anthropologists who are currently engaged in writing up the results of field research among nomads so that they might benefit from mutual discussion of common issues arising in the study of nomadic societies. Most of the participants had only recently completed the field research on which their papers were based, and in fact one participant, Daniel Bates, interrupted his field research in order to return to the United States for the symposium. After the symposium the participants reached the conclusion that the papers presented indicated that anthropologists currently studying nomads are asking very different questions and focusing on very different issues than those that have traditionally been thought crucial to an understanding of nomadic groups. It was further concluded that publication of the symposium papers in a single volume would be the most effective way of communicating this theoretical reorientation to other scholars interested in nomadic societies. The papers in this volume by Rada Dyson-Hudson, Nina Swidler, and Warren Swidler are basically the papers presented in the original symposium; the paper by Paine is an entirely new paper, and those by the remaining authors have undergone extensive revision. As the organizer of the symposium I would like to thank all of the participants for their contribution to its success. To Gus Thaiss of York University, Toronto, who has devoted the necessary time to the preparation of this volume, my appreciation is also gratefully expressed.