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What This Awl Means

Janet Specter

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"An eloquent restoration of women's voices: the voice of the female archaeologist and that of the woman who used the awl. Together they tell an important story."-- Janet Catherine Berlo, American Indian Culture and Research Journal"Frustrated by traditional approaches to interpreting archeological remains, Spector, an anthropologist at the University of Minnesota, attempts a more culturally sensitive reading of a site in Minnesota occupied by the Wahpeton (a division of the Sioux) until the 1850s. Working closely with modern descendants of those earlier inhabitants, Spector examined various tasks of daily life to try to reconstruct gender roles in the culture. In this endeavor, the awl of the title, uncovered in the dig, becomes important both for what it is able to tell us about gender roles and as a metaphor for what Spector believes should be the methodology of anthropologists. The history and daily life of the Wahpetons is imaginatively reconstructed by the author from the bits and pieces discovered in the earth. She writes with an energy and enthusiasm that make interesting what could be academic and dull. Despite her sensitivity to Natives, or perhaps because of it, one cannot help but wonder if she, in the same way as her predecessors, has not looked into the mirror of the past and seen only a reflection of herself. Still this fascinating account should interest both scholar and lay reader alike."--Publishers Weekly"What is perhaps most significant about this book is the lesson that good archaeology can reflect feminist scholarship and can involve native descendants of the people who lived at what is today an archaeological site in a mutually beneficial partnership. And this is good historical archaeology."--Michigan Historical Review

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