

*What This Awl Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village*, by Janet D. Spector. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1993. viii, 161. Illustrations, maps, tables, references, bibliography, appendix, index. \$32.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY GRETCHEN GREEN, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-KANSAS CITY

In many ways this book is a breath of fresh air for the field of archeology, as well as for the interdisciplinary study of Native Americans and Native American gender relations. On several grounds, Spector should be applauded for her willingness to question old assumptions and explore new methods and approaches. *What This Awl Means* is a study of Dakota life and particularly of Dakota women using archeology supplemented by historical documents, ethnographic evidence, oral history, and tribal tradition.

Spector begins with an honest and semiautobiographical discourse about the problems with academic (and particularly archeological) approaches to learning about Native Americans. She recounts her own struggle with the academic prohibition against using modern Indian language, religion, culture, and worldview to learn about Indians in the past. Another important insight is her claim that referring to Indians before 1492 as "prehistoric" is "a troubling notion implying the existence of a time before history begins" (5). Spector also departs from archeological orthodoxy in her avoidance and even criticism of the use of jargon, for archeologists usually render site reports inaccessible to the nonspecialist through the heavy use of technical jargon. In her feminist critique of the way archeology is practiced, she reminds readers of the often faulty assumptions taken for granted by (mostly male) archeologists, such as the notion that the male-headed nuclear family has been a universal norm. Perhaps the most sensitive issue, however, is the concern that Indians regard archeology as irrelevant or deeply offensive. Spector ruminates on the horrors of grave digging and the moral dilemmas posed by her craft. She attempted to bring Dakota people into her field school and to make it a project that would value and honor their history, but she all but admits near the end of the book that she failed in this endeavor. These methodological and moral/political preoccupations, while refreshing in their honesty and overdue in their criticism of prevailing approaches, are a bit distracting in the text of this monograph. Interspersing them with factual material, a story inspired by this material, and narratives of the summer field schools is creative, but detracts from the continuity of the book as a whole and limits her ability—in a work of just 130 pages—to contribute new knowledge about or analysis of Dakota culture or history.

To illustrate her feminist interpretation of life at the Wahpeton Dakota village of Little Rapids, Spector uses one artifact she found—a decorated awl handle—to create a story featuring an actual person whose descendants are known. This innovative approach breathes life into the work and helps to show how European materials were integrated into Dakota culture and used in a Dakota context. Spector's critiques of missionaries' and other non-Indian observers' accounts of the Little Rapids villagers from the early to mid-nineteenth century are also important. But she could have explored more fully the changes in Dakota material culture with the advent of traders such as Jean Baptiste Faribault in their midst. And more comparison of the written documents and archeological findings would have added substance to a lean work. In spite of the author's stated desire to highlight the centrality of gender as a significant and dynamic factor shaping the encounter between Dakotas and Euro-Americans, more work needs to be done to make this connection apparent.

Perhaps Spector's greatest contribution to the feminist argument for a new approach is the analysis of terms used by Dakotas and non-Indians in the nineteenth century for the Little Rapids village. The Dakotas used the term *planting village*, but only one Euro-American used that term, the rest ignoring or denying women's central role in the Dakota economy through their farming. Spector exposes this persistent labeling of the Dakota people as "hunters" for what it was—an attempt to justify American Manifest Destiny as well as to ignore the integral roles of women in the society so as to uphold the ideal of patriarchy.

The use of drawings, paintings, engravings, and photographs is extensive and informative. The Seth Eastman engravings in particular are striking. This generous use of illustrations makes the scarcity of maps all the more curious and disappointing. Only one map is used, and a number of place names mentioned in the text do not appear on it. Anyone not familiar with Minnesota history and geography would be at a loss.

Spector's work raises more questions than it answers. However, it offers an adventurous and refreshing approach to studying Native American culture, history, and gender relations. The multidisciplinary approach taken at the summer field schools is a model for future researchers; there is some hope that the disciplinary and academic/nonacademic/tribal boundaries can be eroded if not completely erased in the coming decades. However, the problematic track record, and to some extent the underlying premise, of archeology presents what may be an insurmountable obstacle to achieving this goal.

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