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Título: Life-Giving Stone. Ethnoarchaeology Of Maya Metates

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Precio: \$435.00

Editorial:

Año: 2011

Tema:

Edición: 1ª

Sinopsis

ISBN: 9780816529094

In *The Life-Giving Stone*, Michael Searcy provides a thought-provoking ethnoarchaeological account of metate and mano manufacture, marketing, and use among Guatemalan Maya for whom these stone implements are still essential equipment in everyday life and diet.

Although many archaeologists have regarded these artifacts simply as common everyday tools and therefore unremarkable, Searcy's methodology reveals how, for the ancient Maya, the manufacture and use of grinding stones significantly impacted their physical and economic welfare. In tracing the life cycle of these tools from production to discard for the modern Maya, Searcy discovers rich customs and traditions that indicate how metates and manos have continued to sustain life—not just literally, in terms of food, but also in terms of culture. His research is based on two years of fieldwork among three Mayan groups, in which he documented behaviors associated with these tools during their procurement, production, acquisition, use, discard, and re-use.

Searcy's investigation documents traditional practices that are rapidly being lost or dramatically modified. In few instances will it be possible in the future to observe metates and manos as central elements in household provisioning or follow their path from hand-manufacture to market distribution and to intergenerational transmission. In this careful inquiry into the cultural significance of a simple tool, Searcy's ethnographic observations are guided both by an interest in how grinding stone traditions have persisted and how they are changing today, and by the goal of enhancing the archaeological interpretation of these stones, which were so fundamental to pre-Hispanic agriculturalists with corn-based cuisines.