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Book Reviews



THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF COLONIALISM. INTIMATE ENCOUNTERS AND SEXUAL EFFECTS. By Barbara Voss and Eleanor Conlin Casella. Pp. xviii and 350, Illus 69. Cambridge University Press, 2012. Price: £21.99. ISBN 978 2 107401 26 6.

The origins of this interesting and thought-provoking book stem from a World Archaeological Congress symposium in 2008. This session identified the challenges of approaching sexuality in colonial and post-colonial environments resulting in the editors' desire to foster a cross disciplinary approach through gender and colonial studies. They convened a research project and the result is a book that addresses a number of identified themes in a well-edited framework.

The title appears deliberately provocative. However, the parameters of sexuality are defined on the first page as 'a broad assemblage of socialities and affects — a constellation of embodied and expressive human intimacies — that range from the seductive, pleasurable, and erotic, through to the familial, parental, non-normative and homosocial and into the involuntary, strategic and exploitative' (Voss and Casella 2011, 1–2). The editors have thus defined the almost impossible range of human relationships — explained and theorized in two introductory chapters — and interpreted four themes through sixteen diverse papers: 'Pleasures and Prohibitions'; 'Engaged Bodies'; 'Commemorations' and 'Showing and Telling'. The majority of papers address archaeological and historical data simultaneously, as to be expected, though there are prehistoric submissions. The results are impressive, in particular Casella's continuing work on the Ross Factory (Chapter 3) in examining the children held incarcerated with their mothers. A particular focus is that of sexual relations between differing sets of power relationships in colonial contexts that, read alongside each other, provide a powerful narrative of decisive necessity, compulsion, practicality and resistance.

The geographical and chronological range of the submissions makes the work of relevance to many scholars. Hall's conclusion (Chapter 19) provides a good summary of the themes emerging from papers and suggests a methodology uniting sexual encounters with archaeological and historical evidence. As a prehistorian, a particular paper that gave me pause for thought was Weismantel's 'Obstinate Things' (Chapter 18). The author examines pre-Columbian Peruvian Moche 'sex pots', ceramics that have attracted notoriety in suggesting sexual behaviours for this time and even explored by the sexologist Kinsey (1948, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*). Weismantel takes a narrative approach to her examination and personal engagement of these pots to produce new insights. Instead of using a textual approach to artefacts, a reading, she advocates an approach of play; that the somatic nature of handling these ceramics can aid interpretation as they are physical things made by human hands. Hence she draws an

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interpretation of the 'Mama Cocha' pot as a drinking vessel, perhaps devised by a society whose focus was on water and fluids. Weismantel's phenomenological approach has reaped rewards and challenges a debate on how best to approach non-normative or non-functional artefacts.

On the whole, questioning the parameters of these types of human encounter in the past are more fruitfully answered with historical research that allows an intimate temporal knowledge of the minutiae of past lives, which in these cases is supplemented and challenged in equal measure by archaeological data. This is a good book, successfully drawing out common themes from disparate global evidence that is of merit to the editors.

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