



Barbara L. Voss, Eleanor Conlin Casella. *The Archaeology of Colonialism: Intimate Encounters and Sexual Effects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. ISBN 978-1-107-00863-2; ISBN 978-1-107-40126-6.

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B. L. Voss u.a. (Hrsg.): *The Archaeology of Colonialism*

A decade after the publication of “Archaeologies of Sexuality” Robert A. Schmidt / Barbara L. Voss (eds.), *Archaeologies of Sexuality*, London/New York 2000. Barbara Voss, together with Eleanor Casella, has come out with a new edited volume which now focuses on the materiality of intimate encounters in colonial worlds. The plural form is intentional, as the contributions enable a comparative diachronic analysis of the “sexual effects” of colonialism and empire through a vast time-scale, ranging from antiquity to the heyday of European expansionism in the Nineteenth Century, which is discussed in the majority of chapters. The geographic scale of the volume is also extensive, with contributions on Australia, North America, South and Latin America as well as Africa. These chapters are framed by a general introduction by the editors as well as an excellent theoretical chapter by Barbara Voss, in which she discusses “Post-colonial and Queer Perspectives on the Archaeology of Sexuality and Empire”. The volume is concluded by a very helpful comment on “Sexuality, Materiality and the Challenge of Method” by Martin Hall.

An edited volume of such vast scope is a daring enterprise. What holds it together in the first place is the fact that all contributions attempt to connect two fields of scholarship: on the one hand, archaeology with its strong emphasis on materiality, and, on the other hand, post-colonial studies of gender and sexuality with their critical look at the production of power relations and categories of difference. But, so the authors ask, how is it possible to take an archaeological account of intimacy and sexuality, given their elusive qualities and non-material dimensions? Moreover, how can one open up to interpretations of colonial sexualities that would go beyond simple dichotomies, allowing for the recognition of the “tense relationship between the oppressive sexual regimes generated by colonial projects and the newer exotic pleasures, creative subjectivities and affective relationships that are forged within and alongside ambivalent and coerced sex-

ual transactions” (p. 4)?

The carefully selected articles tackle these challenges by two main strategies, namely through the choice of objects of analysis and through their (re-)interpretation. In most contributions, the focus on marginalized spaces (such as prisons, brothels, labor camps etc.) and mundane objects (such as clothes, housing, engravings, opium pipes or pottery) shifts the perspective of the archaeological narrative to subordinated groups and their agency. As the contributions show, colonialism has had profound sexual and imperial effects. It changed birth ratios and ritual practices connected to sexuality; it forged new social worlds where people built new forms of intimacy and affect (for example in the all-female Australian prisons analyzed by Casella or in the all-male labor camps of South African diamond miners, analyzed by Weiss); and it also produced very powerful notions of self and other that influenced colonial societies but also go to the heart of disciplinary knowledge regimes (in archaeology and elsewhere).

It is a great merit of this volume that it addresses this problem of knowledge production itself. What are the factors that determine the relationship between artifact and interpretation? In what ways is the disciplinary practice of archaeologists themselves implicated in the dynamics of (post/colonial) power relations? What new silences are produced alongside narratives about the past? These questions about the intimacy of archaeological practice are mainly raised towards the end of the volume in the contributions by Pedro Paulo A. Funari and Aline Vieira de Carvalho, Nick Shepherd and Mary Weismantel in particular. Whereas Weismantel argues that archaeology’s very focus on material objects may help to decolonize archaeological scholarship by “decentering logocentric forms of analysis” (p. 306), Shepherd scrutinizes the archaeological gaze and the very construction of those objects, taking a radical, anti-disciplinary stance, especially with regard to archaeology’s relationship with

colonial bodies and human remains.

Most other contributors have not given up on archaeology but rather see it as a way to draw attention to the “on-the-ground’ consequences and negotiations of empire” and “the ways in which imperial objectives were enacted in practice” (p. 2). Furthermore, archaeology may “[reveal] variability of empire that belies overt, structural conditions” (p. 2). Thirdly, it can show “that indigenous and subaltern responses to colonialism are equally variable” (p. 2). With regard to the intimacy of death that so often forms a material base for archaeology, Diana DiPaolo Loren, for example, argues that her use of material from burial contexts should not contribute to “further a colonial vision of the past”, but would rather be “intended to provide a sense of how individuals were lovingly cared for by their families and communities at the time of death” (p. 114; cf. Garraffoni’s contribution on the Gladiator’s epitaphs for a similar analytical objective). This is a very delicate balance and the volume provides space for controversial debates about power/knowledge/intimacy in the past as well as the presence.

In his concluding remarks, Martin Hall identifies four strands that I would also like to emphasize. First, the volume challenges assumptions about heterosexual normativity (also in the interpretation of archaeological evidence). Here, the contributions by Weiss, López-Betran

and Weissmantel stand out as particularly striking. Second, there is the widening of perspective with regard to the scale of the intimate - it is not only to be located in the domestic sphere (vis-à-vis the public domain), as contributions by Voss, Croucher and Dawdy convincingly show. Third, the volume places “the valency of sexuality and gender [...] closer to the heart of colonialism and empire” (p. 327) and, as Kathleen L. Hull’s contribution on shifting patterns of procreation in the wake of fatal epidemics shows, this is not only a matter of direct interactions. Lastly, the volume pays attention to the persistence of violence, coercion and persecution. This aspect does not at all lose its relevance by the editors’ and contributors’ insistence on differentiation and the articulation of sexual subjectivities and intimacies. On the contrary, this attention to detail and concrete practices enhances our understanding of violence on a structural as well as experiential level.

In general, the objective of the editors of “The Archaeology of Colonialism” to enable a fruitful conversation between archaeology, postcolonial studies and queer / gender theory has worked out well. While the technical detail of some contributions can be a bit tedious for non-archaeologists, the insights to be gained from the scrupulous analysis of intimate encounters and their tangible as well as intangible effects are definitely worth the effort.

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