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Sexuality Studies in Archaeology

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Abstract

Does sexuality have a past? A growing body of archaeological research on sexuality demonstrates that the sexual politics of the past were as richly varied and complex as those of the present. Furthermore, investigations of past sexualities have much to say about conventional archaeological topics such as state formation, subsistence and settlement systems, and the emergence and elaboration of symbolic systems, and they have made methodological and theoretical contributions to the archaeology of social identities and visual representations. To date, most research has clustered into five groupings: reproduction management, sexual representations, sexual identities, prostitution, and the sexual politics of institutions. The most intriguing new development is the growing application of queer theory as an archaeological methodology for investigating nonsexual as well as sexual matters. In particular, queer theory provides a methodological bridge between archaeological research on sexuality and research on other aspects of social identity.

INTRODUCTION

Less than 15 years ago, a review of sexuality studies in archaeology would have merited little more than a substantial footnote. With the exception of a few pioneering studies, discussion of sexuality was generally subsumed under “fertility” and associated “cults” of phallic or goddess worship. More commonly, archaeological interpretations relied on latent sexual narratives that portrayed people in the past as monogamous heterosexual couples whose sex lives were oriented entirely toward reproduction. This view was supported by a legacy of sex negativity in archaeology, which has suppressed evidence of sexual diversity in the past. In many parts of the world, sexually explicit artifacts, especially those portraying same-sex sexual acts, have been destroyed because of their illicit content. Others have been sequestered in private collections or in restricted-access museum assemblages (such as the famous Cabinet of Obscene Objects in the Naples Archaeological Museum) and censored from archaeological publications (Clarke 1998, p. 148; Davis 2001; Taylor 2006, pp. 73–74).

It is not yet clear whether this situation has significantly changed. Most archaeological texts still read as if they were written to be approved by a morals committee for the promotion of family values. When sex is mentioned, it is still largely discussed in terms of reproduction. These archaeological narratives reify the mistaken notion that the complex sexual politics of the present are a uniquely modern phenomenon, divorced from the rich cultural traditions of the past. Fortunately, the trope of universal, reproductive heterosexuality is no longer the only perspective available. In the past two decades, a broad corpus of archaeological scholarship has emerged that takes sexuality seriously. This work is not only transforming our archaeological interpretations of past societies but also challenging conventional understandings of sexuality itself.

ARCHAEOLOGY REDISCOVERS SEXUALITY

The current wave of scholarship represents both a continuation of and a break from archaeology's long entanglement with sexuality studies. The formulation of modern concepts of sexuality has deep roots in the archaeological past. For example, the term pornography (literally, whore-writing) was coined in 1850 by German archaeologist C. O. Müller to classify a diverse set of objects and images found at Pompeii; this archaeological term rapidly migrated into nineteenth-century law through edicts such as the British Obscene Publications Act of 1857 (Clarke 2003, pp. 11–12). J. J. Winckelmann's eighteenth-century studies of ancient art and John Symonds's *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1901) were instrumental points of reference for sexologists who formulated current medico-psychological theories of sexual orientation (Davis 1996, Verstraete & Provencal 2006). Other nineteenth-century Europeans turned to Egyptology for counter-cultural models of sexual potency, bisexuality, gender ambiguity, and homoeroticism (Meskell 1998a). Sigmund Freud, whose psychological theories located human subject formation in the struggle to resolve conflicting sexual drives, was an avid antiquities collector and made extensive use of archaeological terminology and metaphors (Ucko 2001). North America's most prominent twentieth-century sexologist, Alfred Kinsey, also collected erotic artifacts and collaborated in Larco Hoyle's (1965) analysis of prehistoric Peruvian ceramics. Today, both advocates and opponents of homosexual and transgendered human rights cite historic precedents as justification for their positions. As a result of these entanglements, there is no clear boundary between “our” (modern) sexualities and “their” (ancient) sexualities because current understandings of our sexual selves have been formed in no small part through engagement with the archaeological record.

What distinguishes the recent florescence of sexuality research in archaeology is a sincere

effort to attend to the cultural and historical specificity of sexuality rather than to interpret archaeological finds as evidence of universal principles of human sexual behavior. In this vein, some have cogently argued that “sexuality” is perhaps the wrong starting point for this enterprise (e.g., Halperin et al. 1990; Joyce 2004; Meskell 1999, p. 88, 2002; Voss 2005). Ethnographic studies have long demonstrated that what is considered “sexual” varies radically across and within cultural groups (Boellstorff 2007). Foucault’s (1978) now-familiar argument locates the formation of a cultural field of sexuality in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century shift from religious to medico-juridical regulation of sexual practices. Thus alongside considerations of cultural difference, most archaeological contexts are also chronologically “before sexuality” in that the cultural poetics of desire in many past societies were not categorized into a unitary field labeled “sexuality” (Halperin et al. 1990, pp. 4–6). For example, Meskell (1999) demonstrates that scholars of ancient Egypt might better approach the subject through a study of the “libidinal economy” of bodily fluids and boundaries, including but not limited to those considered sexual in our own culture. Archaeological research increasingly defamiliarizes modern sexuality and reveals the particularity of present-day assumptions about human sexuality.

The archaeological turn toward questions of sexual difference began in classical archaeology. In 1970, Brendel (1970) contrasted erotic representations from classical Greece and Rome with those from pre-Columbian Peru and medieval India. Next, Dover’s landmark *Greek Homosexuality* (1978) analyzed painted ceramics and classical texts to argue that male-male sexual relationships in ancient Greece were not equivalent to twentieth-century homosexuality; instead, Greek male-male sexuality was an expression of broader sexual hierarchies between insertive adult male citizens and their subordinate receptive partners (youths, slaves, foreigners, and women). Praise and criticism of Dover’s conclusions launched a veritable explosion of classical scholarship on sexual-

ity (e.g., Clarke 1998, Halperin et al. 1990, Kampen 1996, Richlin 1992, Winkler 1989). Although most research in classical archaeology has focused on male sexuality, two texts—*Naked Truths* (Koloski-Ostrow & Lyons 1997) and *Among Women* (Rabinowitz & Auanger 2002)—have brought greater attention to female sexuality in the classical world. Today, the study of classical sexualities has become sufficiently incorporated into the mainstream to warrant an undergraduate textbook on the subject (Skinner 2005).

Despite anthropology’s long tradition of frank engagement with questions of sexuality, anthropological archaeologists have been much slower to investigate sexuality. Studies of sexuality in anthropological archaeology initially developed through applications of feminist theory to archaeological research (Voss 2000b). Early research in this tradition framed sexuality as a product of gender relations. The first text to break from this mold was Taylor’s *The Prehistory of Sex* (1996). Three edited collections soon followed: *Archaeologies of Sexuality* (Schmidt & Voss 2000); *Indecent Exposure* (Bevan 2001a); and “Queer Archaeologies,” a special issue of the journal *World Archaeology* (Dowson 2000). Additionally, several recent monographs provide in-depth studies of sexuality in a variety of archaeological contexts (e.g., Bourget 2006, Gilchrist 1994, Joyce 2000b, Meskell 1999, Meskell & Joyce 2003, Strassburg 2000, Voss 2008a). In 2004, the University of Calgary hosted the first conference dedicated to the subject, “Que(e)rying Archaeology,” the proceedings of which are currently in press. Over time, queer theory has become increasingly prominent in archaeological studies of sexual matters. As a result, gender, sexuality, the body, and personhood have become increasingly intertwined in archaeological interpretations (Joyce 2005).

REPRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

Archaeological studies of reproduction foreground the complicated relationship between biology and culture in sexuality research.

Biological reproduction, necessary to the survival of the species, is commonly understood to be one of the most universal and “natural” aspects of human sexuality. Yet for most primates, including hominids, reproduction constitutes a relatively small aspect of sexual activities and relationships. “As extreme K-strategists, with heavy parental investment in very few offspring . . . the amount of reproductive sex required for a person to pass on their genes effectively is minimal” (Taylor 2006, p. 97). Because primate and hominid sexual activities include a wide suite of nonreproductive behaviors, sexuality is more appropriately viewed as a learned source for the exploration of pleasure, power, and sociality alongside its reproductive aspects (Abramson & Pinkerton 1995, Vasey 1998).

The mistaken assumption that all sexual acts are, or should be, oriented toward reproduction has been exemplified by the archaeological tendency to interpret representations of the unclothed body and of sexual acts as evidence of fertility rites. Recent critiques of this widespread practice (e.g., Bailey 2005, Clark 2003, Hays-Gilpin 2004, Meskell 2007) are careful not to discount human concerns with reproduction. Rather, the concept of “reproduction management” is more inclusive, including both the prevention and the promotion of conception as well as measures taken to interrupt or support the development of the embryo or fetus and to care for the birthing mother and infant before, during, and after delivery. Reproduction management thus provides a means by which the reproductive consequences of some sexual activities can be either enhanced or suppressed within a broader cultural context.

There is good archaeological evidence that from ~5000 BP onward, communities in many parts of the world produced various material devices for enhancing or repressing sexual reproduction, including plant-based medicines and suppositories, caustic and blocking vaginal pessaries, and tools used in abortions (Taylor 1996, pp. 85–96). This corresponds with what some archaeologists have argued is an increase in sexual images and artifacts during the onset of agriculture and herding, as people be-

came more directly involved in the reproductive cycles of plants and animals (Bolger 1996, Ellis 2001, Kauffman Doig 2001, Kokkinidou & Nikolaidou 1997, Taylor 2006). More speculatively, some researchers have argued that cultural management of reproduction began during early hominid bipedalism, about four million years ago, because corresponding morphological changes to the pelvis required social involvement in birthing to ensure the survival of the mother and child (Adovasio et al. 2007); plant-based fertility medicines, abortion, barrier contraception, and infanticide are argued to have been a consistent feature of human reproductive management since 40,000 BP (Bentley 1996, Taylor 1996).

In historical archaeology, discoveries of preserved condoms, pessaries, diaphragms, and prophylactic medicines have garnered new information about the standardization and commercialization of reproduction management technologies from the seventeenth century to the present (e.g., Gaimster et al. 1996, Karskens 1999, Meyer et al. 2005). Wilkie’s (2000, 2003) research on nineteenth-century African American sexual magic and midwifery makes a distinctive contribution by investigating the ways that women made decisions “to mother or not to mother” (Wilkie 2003, p. 147) in a climate of racial oppression. Wilkie found that spiritual and medicinal practices were seamlessly integrated in an “ethnomedical tool kit” (Wilkie 2000, p. 138) that women and men employed to prevent and promote childbearing and to mediate tensions between the sexes. “The contents of a single jar of Vaseline could have been bought for use as a hair pomade, used to help cure a bout of impotence, and then used to treat a diaper rash . . . All of these magical-medical cures indicated from the midwifery site incorporated symbols that were strongly connected with regulating sexual activity or treating the consequences of such activity” (Wilkie 2000, pp. 133, 139). Wilkie’s study illustrates that the conceptual shift from fertility to reproduction management has not decoupled sexuality from its reproductive aspects, but rather created new possibilities to investigate the complex

and culturally contingent relationships between sex and reproduction.

REPRESENTATIONS

Representations of the body in general, and of sexual organs and sexual activity in particular, constitute the most prominent source of evidence through which archaeologists have studied past sexualities. However, identifying what is “sexual” is itself a challenge. On one hand, archaeologists have tended to downplay the sexual content of the archaeological record. Paradoxically, at other times it seems that archaeologists see sex everywhere, interpreting every carved baton or incised line as phallic and every triangle, curved groove, or oval as vulvaform. Fortunately, a consensus is slowly emerging around a set of best practices in analysis of bodily representations and sexual imagery (Bahn 1986, Bailey 2005, Clarke 1998, Frontisi-Ducroux & Lissarrague 1990, Hays-Gilpin 2004, Joyce 2005, Kampen 1996, Meskell 2007, Yates 1993). The first principle is that what is viewed as sexual in our society may not be so in other cultures, and vice versa. Display of the clothed or unclothed body, or of particular body parts, may or may not be sexualized. Not all sexual representations are erotic, that is, designed to stimulate a sexual response in the viewer; sexual images may also be apotropaic, political, comical, or religious. It follows that attention to context is critical: Clarke (1998, p. 11) enjoins archaeologists studying sexual images and objects to establish who made it (artist), who sponsored it (patronage), when it was created (temporal context), who looked at it (intended and unintended audience), where people looked at it (physical context), under what circumstances (social and functional context), and what else it looks like (iconographic models).

The second widely shared principle is to avoid the fallacy of representation: the trap of assuming that sexual representations are snapshots of real bodies and lived sexual practices rather than creative interpretations and ideological presentations. “The job of representation, if we can call it that, is to reconfigure the

world; in the process it may help to challenge or to reproduce social arrangements” (Kampen 1997, p. 267). Furthermore, the “polysemantic nature of symbols” (Hays-Gilpin 2004, p. 19) means that sexual images are inherently ambiguous. Thus viewing is an active process in which the viewer participates in constructing the sexual narrative of representations. Some of the most interesting archaeological research on sexual representations considers how desire influences the relationship between representations and social practice, for example, how the seductive allure of a representation might foster conditions in which the viewer, “oblivious to the membrane of the medium, engages in a quasi-corporeal relationship with the image” (Winter 1996, p. 21; see also Bailey 2005, Joyce 2000a, Kampen 1997).

In prehistoric archaeology, both figurines and rock art have functioned as “Rorschach” tests with regard to sexuality. The ambiguity of many anthropomorphic painted and pecked images and carved or molded figures creates interpretive dilemmas about even the most basic aspects of sexuality: “With surprising frequency, one encounters figures with something fancy between the legs that can’t readily be assigned to one of two categories, neither penis nor vagina” (Hays-Gilpin 2004, pp. 15–16). When two or more figures are entwined, sexual relationships become even more difficult to decipher.

Anthropomorphic prehistoric figurines, such as the so-called goddess figurines of prehistoric Europe and the Middle East, exemplify the tangled relationship between reproduction and sexuality. Longstanding interpretations of these objects as fertility charms used in worship of the Mother Goddess have been widely challenged (Bailey 2005, pp. 12–24; Conkey & Tringham 1995; Meskell 1998b; Talalay 1994), with alternative interpretations emphasizing themes of embodiment, sexual pleasure, and sexual control. In an analysis of figurines from the Balkan Neolithic, Bailey (2005, p. 180) argues that whether these objects were perceived in terms of reproduction or pleasure, female figurines with exaggerated genitalia and breasts “made Neolithic people think about their

bodies and about the bodies of others in especially sexual ways.” Similarly Meskell (2007, p. 147) is studying figurines found in Çatalhöyük, Turkey, to investigate “whether the Neolithic was a sexual revolution, a period of ‘self’ exploration at a level not experienced before.” In North America, recent studies of prehistoric rock art have turned away from facile accounts of “fertility magic” to explore how the act of creating rock art is involved in creating and renegotiating gender and sexual identities (Hays-Gilpin 2004, Sundstrom 2004).

Peruvian “sex pots,” recovered from Moche and other Andean early states, provide another example of the changing approach to sexual representations. These functional ceramic vessels depict “lively little figures engaged in a startling variety of acts involving the hands, nipples, genitals, anus, mouth, and tongue” (Weismantel 2004, p. 495). Most Moche pots depict masturbation, fellatio, and anal sex. The scarcity of representations of heterosexual intercourse puzzled researchers, who initially interpreted the pots as portrayals of birth control techniques, admonitions against taboo sexual practices, or representations of funerary sex rituals [see Kauffman-Doig (2001, pp. 18–22) and Bourget (2006, pp. 66–73) for syntheses of earlier research]. More recent studies have drawn attention to the sex pots’ archaeological context as funerary offerings in high-ranking tombs. Weismantel (2004, p. 502) argues that the vessels “alter the definition of the reproductive act” by depicting intergenerational transfers of reproductive fluids outside of penile-vaginal intercourse. For example, ceramics depicting belly-to-back anal sex often include a tiny third figure breastfeeding on the woman’s chest; through this position, one reproductive fluid (semen) is transformed into breast milk and transferred through the woman to the infant. Vessels shaped like masturbating skeletons facilitated the transfer of reproductive bodily fluids from ancestors to the living. These and other sexual images may have worked to consolidate powerful elite lineages by emphasizing continuity of substance from one generation to the

next. Gero (2004) provides an alternative reading of the Moche vessels by comparing them with contemporary “copulation pots” found in Andean Recuay mortuary contexts. The Recuay pots depict heterosexual pairs copulating belly to belly, often in public buildings with an attending audience. This difference between the Moche and Recuay ceramics suggests that sexual politics were very different in the two adjacent polities: The Recuay emphasized complementary male-female sexuality, and the Moche celebrated the solitary male orgasm as a powerful political act. Finally, Bourget’s (2006) analysis of the Moche sex pots draws attention to the performative dimensions of sexual and nonsexual acts depicted on the ceramic vessels. Bourget concludes that the sex pots represent elite funerary rituals involving sexual congress with sacrificial victims. These victims become physically connected to ruling elite through sexual and violent acts and serve as transitional individuals who facilitate ancestral involvement in human, plant, and animal fertility.

What is particularly striking about Weismantel, Gero, and Bourget’s divergent interpretations of the Moche sex pots is that all three turn to the ways that sexuality participates in political projects, such as state formation and the consolidation of power among ruling lineages. Similarly, several archaeologists have concluded that flourishing representations of the body in prehistoric Mesoamerica, especially of the sexualized male body and of the disembodied phallus, were implicated in state ideologies that linked virility and self-sacrifice to political power and imposed idealized ideologies of masculinity on young men (Ardren & Hixson 2006; Joyce 2000a,b; Perry & Joyce 2001).

As in the prehistoric examples given above, new attention to context, ambiguity, and desire is challenging conventional interpretations of sexual representations from ancient Greece and Rome. For example, scholars long assumed that black- and red-figured Greek ceramics, dating to ~570–470 BCE, were made for use in the male homosocial environment of the Greek symposium. However, most extant vases with

sexual content were actually recovered from Etruscan tombs in central and southern Italy, raising questions about whether the vessels can be used to study Athenian sexuality (Skinner 2005, pp. 80–81). Common themes in erotic Greek pottery scenes are abduction, the sexual practices of satyrs, heterosexual sex between citizens and courtesans, and homoerotic and homosexual scenes between adult citizens and youths. New scholarship on these painted vessels is notable for its attention to the contextual analysis of posture, gesture, and gaze, both among the figures depicted on the pots and the postures and gazes of the vessels' users (e.g., Elsner 1996, Frontisi-Ducroux 1996). Rabinowitz's (2002) attention to gaze and gesture has been particularly instrumental in identifying overlooked depictions of female homosocial and homoerotic imagery.

Research on sexuality in ancient Rome has focused heavily on the frescos, mosaics, and artifacts uncovered in Pompeii and Herculaneum, two Roman cities destroyed by volcanic eruption in AD 79. Continuing the theme of gaze and gesture, Clarke's *Looking at Lovemaking* (1998, pp. 1–4) presents a core thesis shared by many scholars that Roman sexuality was "a sexual culture that operated under rules completely different from our own . . . where sexual pleasure and its representation stood for positive social and cultural values." Clarke convincingly argues that many Roman sexual representations, although widespread, were not erotic: For example, recurring macrophallic imagery in mosaics, jewelry, and everyday household objects used the comedy of the grotesque to guard against the evil eye. Other sexual representations, such as small paintings of lovemaking, were likely acquired to signal the wealth and sophistication of the owner. Clark is inclined to view Roman sexuality as liberated and free of guilt, a stance that focuses on the sexual pleasures of citizen men. A contrasting view of Roman sexual imagery is provided by Richlin (1992), whose attention to noncitizens (women, slaves, foreigners, and prostitutes) reveals stark power differentials. Roman representations often portrayed sexuality as an act that involved

the degradation of the weaker by the stronger and conflated the violent and the sexual. The contrast between Clarke and Richlin's interpretations of similar imagery exemplifies a pervasive question in classical archaeology, namely, the degree to which the ancient Greeks and Romans were like "us" in sexual matters. Overall, those studying male sexuality tend to argue for radical difference, whereas studies of female sexuality trace historical continuities in patterns of sexual violence and objectification of the female body (Brown 1997, Richlin 1992, Salomon 1997).

IDENTITIES

The relationship between past and present sexualities is especially fraught in the question of identities. On one hand, there has been a persistent interest in "finding" homosexuals and transsexuals in the past to counter political charges that same-sex sexuality and gender bending are uniquely modern phenomena. However, present-day sexual taxonomies, e.g., the categorizing of all those who have sex with members of the same gender as "homosexual," can be traced to the formation of the medico-juridical field of sexology in the late nineteenth century. Some have argued that before the nineteenth century, there were no sexual identities, only sexual acts. Others distinguish the concept of sexual orientation as a universalizing theory of innate physical/psychological drives from sexual identities and subjectivities that form in particular cultural and historical contexts (Boellstorff 2007, Halperin 2002, Rabinowitz 2002, Voss 2005). A second core issue is the relationship between gender and sexuality. The current emphasis on sexuality as a determinant of social identity appears to be a relatively modern and Western phenomenon, with many present and past cultures emphasizing gendered difference more than sexual partner choice. Queer theory, which foregrounds the interdependence of gendered and sexual identities, facilitates an integrated approach to this question (Boellstorff 2007, Halperin 2002, Joyce 2000c, Voss 2006a).

Archaeological research on past sexual identities has focused on the classical Greek/Roman *kinaidos/cinaedus* and the Native American two-spirit. In classical Athens, the *kinaidos* was an Athenian citizen who had prostituted himself; in the Roman Empire, *cinaedii* were men who liked to be penetrated by other men, whether or not for pay. The Greek/Roman *kinaidos/cinaedus* presents a particular paradox to modern theories of sexual identity: In societies where nearly all men participated in same-sex sexual activities, how did some men come to be categorized and stigmatized by their sexual involvement with other men? Furthermore, did *kinaidos/cinaedus* constitute a shared identity, or did the terms refer to only to the stigmatized sexual act itself? Archaeological research on *kinaidos/cinaedus* identities relies heavily on painted ceramics and preserved classical texts. The most prominent interpretation is the penetrative hypothesis, which argues that ancient Greeks and Romans viewed sex as a zero-sum game in which shame accrued to the penetrated (Dover 1978, Halperin 1990). Citizen adult men who allowed or even enjoyed penetration were stigmatized because they had failed to hold up the distinction between honorable citizens and those who were routinely penetrated because of their social status (youths, women, slaves, foreigners, prostitutes). However, representations depicting *kinaidoi/cinaedii* penetrating women and other men have been interpreted as indications that the *kinaidos/cinaedus* was defined not through sexual acts but through gender liminality, as persons who straddled the boundary between masculinity and femininity (Gleason 1990, Skinner 2005, Winkler 1990). A third argument particular to ancient Greece argues that the regulation of sexuality was not oriented toward partner choice, active/passive roles, or gender conformity but toward the management of appetites, whether for money, food, drink, or sex; a citizen who prostituted himself displayed an inability to restrain his own desires (Davidson 1997). Regardless, substantial evidence indicates that *kinaidoi/cinaedii* participated in distinct subcultures if not a shared identity (Clarke 2006,

Richlin 2006). Additionally, new studies of sculpture and architecture emphasize other pervasive aspects of Greek and Roman male homoeroticism, such as idealization of the male body and reciprocal male-male sexuality (Clarke 2006, Davidson 2001, Eger 2007).

In North America, studies of Native American two-spirits (also *berdache* and third- and fourth-gender) figure prominently in archaeological studies of sexual identity. The term two-spirit encompasses a wide range of tribally specific identities associated with transgendered dress and occupations, same-sex sexual practices, hermaphroditism, and specialized spiritual roles (Jacobs et al. 1997). Archaeologists first studied two-spirit identities through mortuary analyses that identified individuals whose cultural gender (as identified by grave goods and musculoskeletal stress markers) differed from their physical sex (Hollimon 1997, Perry 2004, Whelan 1991), an approach that emphasizes transsexuality as the determining characteristic of two-spirit identity. Research has recently broadened to incorporate architecture, rock art, occupation, craft, and ritual. For example, the Chumash 'Aqi were members of an undertaking guild that included transsexual biological men, men who have sex with men, men without children, celibates, and postmenopausal women. Becoming a Chumash 'Aqi required abstention from procreative sex acts rather than a specific sexual or gender identity. The antiquity of the 'Aqi undertaker guild is suggested by the long history of well-defined cemeteries and systematic treatment of the dead in the Chumash region since ~7500 BP (Hollimon 2000, 2001). Perry's (2004, Perry & Joyce 2001) research on Pueblo prehistory links the development of large plaza settlements ~1100 CE to the cultural codification of the two-spirit *Lhamana* identity. The large central plazas of new Pueblo settlements were used for both repetitive everyday activities and ceremonial ritual acts, including the public ritual performance of the transgendered Katsina, Kolhamana. Prine (2000) has similarly examined architecture to investigate two-spirit Hidatsa *miati*, who were identified as male at birth

but later adopted aspects of women's gender roles, assumed particular spiritual responsibilities, and created households through relationships with men. Hidatsa *miati* played a key role in earth lodge-building ceremonies, mediating the tension between feminine earth and masculine sky. Also in the Northern Plains, Sundstrom (2004) has studied Lakota and Dakota rock art to reconstruct the practices involved in Double Woman dream rituals, in which some male dreamers are instructed to live as women. Finally, gender ambiguity among images of gods, rulers, and warriors is well-documented in prehistoric Mesoamerica (Looper 2002, McCafferty & McCafferty 1994, Stockett 2005). What is striking about these recent studies is the degree to which many two-spirit identities appear to be formed predominantly in reference to spiritual roles and occupational specialties. These identities reference, but are not entirely defined through, sexuality. Nor do they appear to be transgressive or abject because although two-spirits cross and link gender dualism, these roles are sanctioned by dual-gendered deities and institutionalized roles that can be filled only by two-spirits.

In Europe, several mortuary studies have investigated gender and sexual diversity within prehistoric cemetery populations [e.g., Halsall 2001, Lucy 1997, Rega 1997; see Arnold (2002) and Schmidt (2002, 2005) for discussions of methodology]. Schmidt (2000, 2002) and Strassburg (2000) have emphasized the relationship between shamanism and gender and sexual variability in prehistoric northern Europe, where shamans harnessed both male and female sexual potentials. Paradoxically, although shamanistic identities may have crossed gender and sexual norms, such ritual practitioners likely contributed to the stability of sexual norms (Strassburg 2000, p. 110), perhaps similar to the way that celibate Catholic priests enact marriage rites today. Other researchers in Europe and India have reanalyzed rock art, figurines, and other imagery to identify representations of same-sex couplings and transgendered and ambiguously gendered persons (Clark 2003, Danielsson 2002, Vasey

1998, Yates 1993). More than anything, the wide range of gendered and sexual expressions of identity found in the archaeological record demonstrates the limitations of modern sexual identity theories. If gender and sexual variability in the past did not fit neatly within the modern categories of homosexual and transsexual, then cross-sex sexualities were also likely configured quite differently from what we consider heterosexuality.

PROSTITUTION

Archaeological studies of prostitution concentrate on brothels in only two contexts: first-century Pompeii, and nineteenth-century North America. In Pompeii, McGinn (2002) investigated the extent to which Pompeii (and by extension, other Roman cities) practiced moral zoning. He found that brothels were located throughout the city, in both elite and impoverished residential and commercial neighborhoods. However, one cluster of buildings, including the largest brothel in the town (the Lupenar at VII), was a hub of commercial sexual activity, with a large hotel, a sizeable tavern, and a bathhouse adjacent to the brothel. Clarke's study of the famous wall paintings in the Lupenar at VII argues that these visual representations of sexual activity contributed to an environment of fantasy in an atmosphere of "rough-and-ready sexual commerce" (Clarke 1998, p. 206).

The study of prostitution in North America has been driven largely by the discovery of nineteenth-century brothel sites during modern urban redevelopment projects. The rise of commercial sex generally, and brothel prostitution specifically, has long been noted as a characteristic of the post-1800 North American industrial city. Red-light districts in rapidly growing cities provided a precedent for modern urban planning and zoning ordinances. As in Pompeii, excavations of North American brothels are contributing new perspectives on the sexual politics of urbanism (Hardesty 1994; Seifert 1991, 2005). Initial research focused on identifying the material characteristics that

distinguished brothel sites: elevated frequencies of artifacts associated with women's fancy dress, grooming, and hygiene; large numbers of men's buttons, presumably lost during the rapid removal of clothing; and, frequently, expensive household goods and imported foods. However, although brothel assemblages are generally different from neighboring kin-based households, no single brothel pattern has been identified because "brothels of different periods and statuses are different from each other" (Seifert & Balicki 2005, p. 65). Distinct regional differences exist: For example, brothel and saloon deposits in western North America overlap considerably, as both were places where male sociality was fostered by drinking, gambling, and sexual entertainment, whereas eastern brothels are more distinct (Dixon 2005, Spude 2005). Crib prostitution, in which small rooms were rented by the shift to prostitutes who lived elsewhere, was also more common in western cities (Meyer et al. 2005).

One core research topic has been the economic status of brothel prostitutes relative to their nonbrothel neighbors. A widely used methodology developed by Seifert (1991) uses pattern analysis to compare artifacts and food remains recovered at brothel sites with those recovered from nonbrothel households and boarding houses (Meyer et al. 2005, Seifert 1994, Seifert & Balicki 2005, Spude 2005, Yamin 2005). These studies have consistently found that brothels display higher levels of conspicuous consumption and more abundant, diverse, and high-quality food remains than their neighbors. This finding was initially interpreted as evidence that prostitutes enjoyed a higher standard of living than did nonprostitute working-class women, but recent studies have questioned this conclusion. In St. Paul, Minnesota, archaeologists excavated trash deposits from the front entryway of a brothel site, where patrons would have gathered, and general refuse deposits from the rear yard. They found a sharp bifurcation in artifact distribution, with expensive dishes and exotic meats clearly consumed by patrons, whereas the brothel residents consumed inexpensive foods

served on plain dishes [Ketz et al. 2005; see also Meyer et al. (2005) and Yamin (2005) for similar cases in Los Angeles and New York]. These findings challenge the assumption that brothel residents enjoyed the trappings of middle- and upper-class life: "When the women were not working they lived no better than their sisters in the tenements . . . The duality reveals exploitation as well as economic well-being and pain as well as pleasure" (Yamin 2005, p. 4).

The occupational hazards of prostitution are also attested to by the high frequency of health-related personal items found in brothel deposits, such as douching paraphernalia, female urinals, pessaries, improvised barrier contraception devices, bulk quantities of prophylactic fluids, and an abundance of opium- and alcohol-rich patent and prescription medicines, all suggesting "the relative seriousness of ailments suffered by the women" (Ketz et al. 2005, p. 80). Nursing shields, baby bottles, marbles, dolls, and other toys document the presence of children in brothel life. Whereas most research on brothels has focused somewhat narrowly on the economic aspects of the commercial sex trade, two studies (Costello 2000, Dawdy & Weyhing 2008) have used self-reflexive and narrative methodologies to explore the complicated webs of desire involved in the archaeological study of prostitution. Additionally, brothel research has focused rather narrowly on female prostitutes and madams, ignoring male patrons and men and boys who worked in the sex trade as prostitutes, pimps, procurers, entertainers, and servants. Despite these limitations, the rich body of archaeological evidence gathered on nineteenth-century North American brothels demonstrates that the "world's oldest profession" was also historically and culturally contingent, participating in the industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization of life in North American cities.

INSTITUTIONS

Institutions of religion, conversion, and reform have been the focus of archaeological investigations of institutional sexuality. This work has

been deeply influenced by Foucault's (1978) histories of the formation and regulation of sexual subjectivities in institutional contexts. Like Foucault, archaeologists have emphasized the importance of architecture in fostering patterns of movement and constraint. Gilchrist's (1994, 2000) research on British medieval nunneries is a case in point: She demonstrates that the celibate sexuality of medieval religious women was conditioned through the materiality of physical enclosure and visual imagery, both of which elevated the senses and fostered ecstatic states of consciousness involving contemplation of union with Christ. Celibacy, although shared between male and female religious, was not a uniform practice: Nuns were more tightly cloistered and had poorer sanitation and less contact with nonreligious, indicating a greater abnegation of the body among female religious.

Institutions of religious and governmental reform often built on the monastic model of sexual control. Eighteenth-century religious missions in Spanish-colonial California used architecture to monitor and regulate Native Californian sexuality, for example, by sequestering unmarried women and girls in locked wards (Voss 2000a). The nineteenth-century Magdalen Society home for "fallen women" in Philadelphia used the spatial grammar of the middle-class home to effect sexual reform: A succession of entryways, passages, and enclosed stairs "physically and symbolically marked the Magdalen's progressive ritual passage from a fallen state to one of moral rectitude" (De Cunzo 2001, p. 26). Casella's (2000a, 2000b) research on the Ross Female Factory in convict-era Australia reveals that similar architectural patterns were used to reform female convicts. The Ross Female Factory is significant because it is the only archaeological study to date that has investigated the materiality of female same-sex sexual relationships and desire. Excavation of the prison revealed evidence of a rich black market economy. Spatial analysis of contraband items and buttons used as currency showed that the apex of the underground prison economy was the solitary cells, which had been built particularly to reform women involved in same-

sex relationships. "Within the Van Diemen's Land penal colony, female sexual activity transformed into a mode of exchange, as it was inextricably intertwined with dynamics of access, allocation, and distribution of resources" (Casella 2000b, p. 215). Casella's findings highlight the paradoxical nature of sexual relationships in institutional contexts: sometimes predatory, sometimes strategic, sometimes economic, and sometimes affectionate.

A very different kind of sexual reform was institutionalized in the Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow, constructed by Bolshevik elite in 1929. Intending to ease the residents' transition toward fully socialized life, the building's designers drew on archaeological studies of Paleolithic dwellings to envision new architectural forms that would disarticulate heterosexual relations from the relations of production. Buchli's (2000a,b) diachronic study of the occupation of the Narkomfin Communal House shows that as the Communist party's vision of the relationship between architecture and household changed, so too did expectations for heterosexual relationships. Rather than transforming heterosexualities, the building itself became transformed as its inhabitants adapted the structure to meet new expectations. Buchli's study hints at the contribution archaeology can make to better understanding the sexual politics of a wider range of institutions, from military fortifications (Voss 2008a) to college fraternities (Wilkie 2001).

OTHER TOPICS

Archaeologists studying European colonization of the Americas have a long history of investigating interracial sexual relationships, especially heterosexual marriage, as a central mechanism of cultural exchange between colonizing and indigenous populations (e.g., Deagan 1983). More recent work has broadened the question of colonial encounters to include same-sex relationships (Byrne 2007) and concubinage, slavery, and sexual violence (Lightfoot 2005; Rothschild 2003; Voss 2000a, 2008a,b). Archaeological studies of sexual

violence have also addressed representations of abduction in classical Greece (Cohen 1996), slave plantations in the Americas (Delle 2000), and mortuary analysis in Europe (Scott 2001). Other notable topics include puberty (Bevan 2001b, Hays-Gilpin 2004, Joyce 2000c, Sundstrom 2004) and polygamy (Chase 1991). Finally, at least two ethnoarchaeological studies (Buchli & Lucas 2001b, Hohmann 1975) of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century urban contexts have demonstrated that explicit material references to sexual activity and desire comprise a significant part of the presently forming archaeological record.

QUEER ARCHAEOLOGIES

Queer archaeology is not always about sexuality, and sexuality research in archaeology is not always queer, yet the queer focus on retheorizing sexual politics and sexual identities draws the two together. Queer theory emerged from work by activists and scholars to address the particular sexual and gender politics of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As a body of scholarship, queer theory is perhaps best described as a poststructuralist intervention into feminist theories of gender and sexuality, most famously associated with Butler (1990). One core project in queer theory has been a critique of the conventional divisions among physical sex, cultural gender, and sexuality, instead exploring the ways that sex, gender, and sexuality are mutually constituted.

A widely shared tenet in queer theory is that gendered and sexual categories are inherently unstable and that normative genders and sexualities are constituted by what they exclude (for example, that heterosexuality is constituted by the abjection of homosexuality and transsexuality). Sexes, genders, and sexualities are thus negotiated through an ongoing dance of identification and misidentification. These iterations are often conceptualized as “performances” that mimic, reproduce, or trouble gendered and sexual norms (Morris 1995). Archaeologists have turned to performance theory as a methodology for the diachronic study of iden-

tify formation: “Since gender performance is by definition a repetition or citation of a precedent [...], the kinds of material regularities that archaeologists document in the media of performance can be profitably viewed as mechanisms for the regulation of gender” (Perry & Joyce 2001, pp. 65–66). Joyce’s (2000b,c) analyses of life cycle rituals and representations of the body in prehistoric Mesoamerica have powerfully demonstrated that archaeological materials and settings were the media and stages for gendered and sexual performances. Alberti (2001) has argued that similarities among Bronze Age figurines in Knossos can be explained as a result of performative citation of prior practices, rather than sexual universals. Voss (2008a) has used performance theory to show how Spanish-colonial labor regimes fostered repetitive social interactions that heightened gendered differences among colonial and indigenous men.

Other archaeologists have turned to queer heritage as a way to commemorate the ways that people with marginalized gender and sexual identities were able to inhabit landscapes dominated by normative heterosexuality. Rubin (2000) draws on settlement pattern analysis and central place theory to reconstruct the landscapes occupied by gay male leathermen in twentieth-century San Francisco. Byrne (2005) documents places in the Asia-Pacific region where “the gay community has a long history of using them and a quite strong sense of ownership of them” (Byrne 2005, p. 3), such as gay beaches, drag clubs, cruising areas in public parks, and rural retreats. Archaeologists excavating the peace camps surrounding Greenham Common Airbase have argued that these sites are queer not only because they were occupied by feminists, lesbians, and pacifists, but also because the transient and illicit occupation of the site by protesters poses unconventional challenges to heritage management (Schofield & Anderton 2000). Matthews (1999) suggests that the Roman city walls of Chester, England, may have great antiquity as a site of gay male cruising, perhaps back to medieval or even Roman periods, whereas Eger (2007) uses

an ethnographic analogy from present-day gay male bathhouses to argue for a queering of ancient Roman bathhouses as places where male intimacy and reciprocity could occur.

Many texts and films written by nonarchaeologists also posit far-reaching connections between present-day queer communities and sexual variability in deep antiquity (e.g., Feinberg 1996, Schmidt 2002). This aspect of queer heritage is troublesome for archaeologists and historians who hold that sexual and gender identities are culturally constructed. For example, same-sex sexuality appears to have meant very different things in classical Rome and prehistoric Scandinavia than in the present day. Yet the impulse to turn to the past for citational precedents of queerness is understandable: "If you are a minority group, heritage visibility is often an issue of struggle. . . . So if we fail to record the heritage of homosexuality then it is that much easier for governments and empowered majorities to pretend or assert that homosexuality has not existed in the past and this makes it that much easier to deny its legitimacy in the present" (Byrne 2005, p. 6). The challenge, as Halperin (2002, p. 16) has written, is "to recruit the queerness of past historical periods not in order to justify one or another partisan model of gay life in the present but rather to acknowledge, promote, and support a heterogeneity of queer identities, past *and* present."

A third emphasis in queer archaeology is challenging heteronormativity in archaeological practice and interpretation. Several scholars have soundly critiqued the ways that dominant archaeological interpretations presume the universality of heterosexuality, marriage, and the nuclear family, falsely imposing heteronormative gender and sexual structures on past cultures (Cobb 2005, Flatman 2003, Reeder 2000, Schmidt 2002). For example, Dowson's (2007) analysis of museum dioramas shows that such displays typically serve more to promote an idea of the family unit as unchanging and constant than to present information about social relations in the past. Solli's (1999) reanalysis of white stone artifacts associated with Viking-era shamanism demonstrates that although con-

ventional archaeological interpretations have categorized such stones as either phallic or vulvaform, the artifacts actually intermix symbols of male and female power. Here, queer theory enables archaeologists to embrace gender ambiguity and sexual fluidity.

More broadly, many have turned to queer theory's focus on abjection and "the constitutive outside, premised on exclusion and otherness, [that] forms the corona of difference through which identities are enunciated" (Meskell 2002, p. 280). This shift away from sexuality, specifically, to abjection, generally, is an important move in queer archaeology because it recognizes that sexual and gendered differences were not necessarily stigmatized in all past societies. Thus queer studies of past cultures "would be focused on ways in which the normative and deviant have been defined, not specifically in sexual behavior but in all social structures" (Ardren 2008, p. 19). For example, in prehistoric Mesoamerica, "mixed performances, inter-species hybrids, and the dwarf—beings presented as incompletely human—occupy the edges of embodied abjection. . . . [T]he anxiety of the Mesoamerican tradition is engaged not with sexuality, but with humanity" (Perry & Joyce 2001, p. 73). Strassburg's (2000) analysis of burial grounds in prehistoric northwest Europe concludes that the undead—people who died a nonnormative death—were viewed as a queer force that disrupted the sexualities of the living. Communities protected themselves by disciplining the corpses posthumously through dressing and feeding the corpses in ritualized ways and postmortem "killings" through blows to the head and placement of weighty stones in graves.

Most broadly, queer theory has been cited to challenge normative archaeological research practices, whether or not such practices are directly related to sexuality. Recent polemics have charged that certain subfields (rock art research, maritime archaeology) are queer because of their marginalization and that certain research practices, such as excavation or artifact dating, enforce normative values in archaeology (Croucher 2005, Dowson 2001, Ransley

2005). Strassburg's *Shamanic Shadows* (2000) convincingly demonstrates that conventional archaeological practice tends to emphasize norms in the archaeological record and, in doing so, suppresses unique materials and evidence of social variation in the past. Resistance to normalization, Strassburg notes, is a powerful force for cultural change by constantly opening up alternative desires and social practices in any sociocultural world. Strassburg's empirically rich and methodologically innovative study of postglacial hunter-gatherer archaeology in northwest Europe offers one of the most successful examples of how queer critiques of the discipline may transform archaeological practices.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The innovative body of work that has emerged in the past 20 years has demonstrated that the archaeology of sexuality is about far more than interpersonal relationships or individual identities. Sexuality research is contributing new perspectives on topics as diverse as state formation, urban planning, economic systems, and settlement practices and is fostering broad methodological innovations in archaeological investigations of place, representations, and material culture. The scholarship reviewed above has

demonstrated that human sexuality was as richly varied in the past as it is in the present day, so much so that current theories of human sexuality may be inadequate to characterize past social relationships and sexual identities. Indeed, archaeology's most important contribution to sexuality studies may lie precisely in its ability to demonstrate that "sexuality" as it is commonly understood today may have been configured quite differently in the past.

The biggest challenge facing sexuality studies in archaeology is the lack of attention given to opposite-sex sexual relationships, the forms of which are known to have changed significantly in recent centuries and which likely varied considerably throughout prehistory as well. Scholarship on sexualities that are marginalized in our own society—homosexuality, transsexuality, prostitution, etc.—needs to be balanced with thoughtful research on heterosexuality. The most intriguing, and promising, innovation in the past decade is the growing use of queer theory as an archaeological methodology for investigating nonsexual as well as sexual matters in the past. Queer theory was developed to better understand the ways that normative social structures are promulgated and reproduced, and it may be that queer theory will provide the conceptual tools archaeologists need to investigate heterosexual institutions and other sexual norms in past cultures.

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The author is not aware of any biases that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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