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Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas. By Richard C. Trexler. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995. 292 pages. \$29.95 cloth.

American Indian males who perform a variety of female roles and, in some cases, cross-dress have been the object of Western fascination and vilification since colonial times. Since then, they have been commonly grouped under the European label *berdache*. As Kath Weston points out in an excellent review of the recent efflorescence of gay and lesbian studies in anthropology (*Annu. Rev. Anthropol.* 22 (1993): 339–67), berdaches have been represented as homosexuals who are fully integrated into their communities and even revered for their special skills as craftspeople, shamans, or counselors. Richard Trexler, a European Renaissance historian, challenges these romantic anthropological analyses of berdaches by viewing them from a historical perspective that begins with the earliest Iberian explorers' first encounters with American natives. (It should be noted that transvested American Indian women performing traditional male roles have also been reported but have received much less scholarly attention than the male berdache and are only fleetingly mentioned in the present work.)

Since the bulk of the historical documentation on berdaches comes from the Iberians, Trexler starts by analyzing the sex and power relations of the Mediterranean cultures themselves, particularly the matter of "penetrative penalty" (p. 7): the uses of sodomy and penetration as a means of punishment and subjugation to define inferiors—be they women, children, slaves, or the vanquished. His broad historical approach demonstrates how the ideology of penetrative penalty and the construction of the sexually "passive" or "effeminate" subject was well developed in Mediterranean antiquity, evolved through the Renaissance, and was imported to the Americas by the conquistadores. Trexler's numerous sources demonstrate that the Iberians were so obsessed by the "unmentionable sin" that they reported on it everywhere in the Americas. In their gaze upon the immoral "savages," the Iberians projected deeply entrenched practices of sexual violence against women and children as means of social and political control. As far as the Europeans themselves are concerned, Trexler amply supports his central Foucaultian thesis: Sex (or at least sodomy) is politics by other means.

For Trexler, sodomy, or the "passive role," is central to the identity of the berdache. This leads to one of my major problems with this fascinating book, for I have never been convinced that, despite the diverse manifestations of the berdache in hundreds of American cultures, sodomy is their unifying, significant feature. Even if berdaches in many American societies did perform as the so-called passive agents in homosexual sex, this does not mean that all references to sodomy among American Indians are descriptions of berdache activity, as Trexler often implies. A fundamental question then is whether berdaches constitute a single, transhistoric and transcultural phenomenon any more than homosexuality is a consistent, continuous phenomenon from ancient Greece to present-day Greenwich Village. Interestingly, Trexler is clear about the historic specificity of European homosexuality (p. 6), yet he does not accord the same historicity to American Indians. As Will Roscoe points out in a recent critique of the berdache scholarship (*GLQ* 2 [1995]: 193–235), both the term *berdache* and its associated roles are evolving products of intercultural exchanges and conflicts.

Although there are some indications that sodomitic deployments of sex/power were indigenous to the Americas, these accounts come down to us from European sources. The Iberians' descriptions of "nefarious sin" among the natives are particularly suspect when, as Trexler and even sixteenth-century writers recognized, such accusations served to legitimize the conquistadores' conversion, emasculation, and slaughter of the indigenous Americans. Although Trexler never mentions it, a similar political analysis of the colonizers' descriptions of American sodomy has been advanced by Jonathan Goldberg in *Sodometries* (1992), albeit without the same wealth of historical documentation. Given the highly problematic nature of the early Iberian ethnographies, and even those by later mestizo elites, I remain unconvinced that a Foucaultian, European analytics of sex/power can be erected as a universal or transcultural principle. Trexler, nevertheless, provides us with an engaging and richly documented account of the Iberian conquest of the Americas and an impassioned critique of socialized sexual violence against "effeminate" and young boys.

Vernon A. Rosario