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Review of *Island Queens and Mission Wives: How Gender and Empire Remade Hawai'i's Pacific World*, by Jennifer Thigpen

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superior "American" notions and U.S.-style grid-lined mapping techniques onto Indian and Spanish worlds in the West and thus "Americanize" and "open" the West to the United States. Consequently, the author missed an opportunity to craft a nuanced interpretation of Pike's two-way educational and cultural "encounters" with Spanish soldiers, elites, and priests, who felt equally patriotic about their nation. Ironically, Pike's survival and acquisition of valuable information were the happy results of his serendipitous rescue from almost certain death by "Spaniards" whom he and his fellow Americans denigrated because they were Catholics. Evidence suggests that Pike's unit integrity (and his chances of survival) had all but vanished by the time his rescuers appeared.

In 1813, Pike's nationalistic death-wish was fulfilled when a mined powder magazine exploded, killing him and other British and American soldiers during an assault on York, Canada. Jared Orsi's running commentary on Pike's self-sacrificial ideology and deeply rooted sense of honor left insufficient space to unveil the subtle, clashing intricacies of Pike's ego-driven self-interest in contention with his notions of duty and national interest. When all was said and done after his return from Mexico, Pike "delivered" only himself into "the bosom of a grateful nation," which, like Pike evidently, promptly and permanently forgot the much-lamented "frozen lads" who had suffered with him in the Colorado Rockies and who received nothing for their sacrifices.

This book does not materially alter what historians have long considered the main issues concerning Pike's leadership qualities, or the results of his journeys. Similarly, Jared Orsi recounts well-known tales, with some additional information, regarding Pike, Burr, and Wilkinson, but the lack of new documentary information leaves these matters unresolved.

In Island Queens and Mission Wives, Jennifer Thigpen argues persuasively for the centrality of women and gender to the encounter between missionaries and Native Hawaiians in the nineteenth century. Contextualizing the missionary enterprise within the Second
Great Awakening, she shows that new democratizing ideals offered white American women a greater sphere of religious influence than they had previously experienced. At the same time, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions still envisioned women as helpmeets to their husbands. In exploring this tension, Thigpen builds on the work of other scholars of missionaries, gender, and colonialism.

Thigpen extends her argument beyond previous scholarship in several important ways. First, in concert with a number of Hawaiian scholars, she “re-centers Hawaiians” in her narrative. She takes us back to the 1780s when Hawaiians first encountered explorers, whalers, traders, and other travelers from around the world. She points out that by 1819, the year of King Kamehameha’s death, the islands “had taken on an increasingly global and cosmopolitan character” (p. 12). When missionaries arrived on the scene, Thigpen asserts, the Hawaiian elite enjoyed the upper hand. Accustomed to male authority, missionaries had to accommodate to a Hawaiian hierarchy in which elite women exerted considerable power and authority.

Moreover, Thigpen offers new contributions to scholarship on missionary enterprises and colonialism by offering close readings of on-the-ground relationships between missionary and Hawaiian women. She successfully shows how women’s cross-cultural relationships within intimate settings became significant sites for the building of diplomatic and political alliances. Following Ann Laura Stoler, Thigpen’s work provides ample evidence of how intimate domains constituted the very basis for colonial regimes and hierarchies as well as resistance to them.

Thigpen’s most effective chapter is Chapter 4. Here she shows us that Hawai‘i’s royal women pulled mission wives into a cycle of reciprocity and exchange. Thigpen illustrates how gifts and exchanges of clothing brought women into intimate contact with one another. The provision of clothes to royal women offered a point of entrée to the missionaries, but ultimately Hawaiian women made their own uses of the garments the missionaries fashioned. For them, European clothes could become markers of status and objects of adornment, not signs of their submission to “civilization.” This chapter is powerful because it convincingly supports Thigpen’s contention that relations between women were key to the missionary enterprise, and it effectively demonstrates the agency of Hawaiian women.

Thigpen could do more to analyze the broader implications of her findings, to “help us rethink colonial interactions around the globe,” as she mentions in her introduction (p. 6). This lack of a broader analysis does not detract from the overall strength of the
book, however. Through its engagement with and extension of scholarship on gender and colonial encounters, Thigpen’s manuscript is a solid and engaging piece of historical scholarship.

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