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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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*Island Queens and Mission Wives: How Gender and Empire Remade Hawai'i's Pacific World.* By Jennifer Thigpen. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2014. Xiii+ 165 pp. \$37.50 cloth, \$37.99 digital)

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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