


history of Sino-Western interactions and the world of the British and Chinese empires and would be a good read for historians and general readers alike.

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KATHERINE HARVEY. *The Fires of Lust: Sex in the Middle Ages*. London: Reaktion Books, 2021. Pp. 320. \$27.50 (cloth).  
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In her provocatively titled book, *The Fires of Lust: Sex in the Middle Ages*, Katherine Harvey sets out to challenge stereotypes and explode myths about sex and sexuality in the Middle Ages. She does this admirably, conveying the richness, complexity, and diversity of medieval ideas and medieval people's sexual behaviors. She focuses on western Europe from 1150 to 1500, a period considered quintessentially medieval, a time when many beliefs, values, and ideas coalesced, especially those of the church. While Christian morality pervaded most of medieval Europe, the beliefs and experiences of others—Jews, Muslims, and heretics—add richness to the discussion. Harvey utilizes a wide body of legal, theological, and medical sources contextualized by a prodigious array of case studies that bring medieval people to life and demonstrate how theory worked (or did not) in practice.

Harvey begins by establishing the regulations and values that governed courtship and marriage. These might involve mutual attraction between a man and woman but were just as likely to require parental consent and adherence to a variety of ecclesiastical and secular requirements. Examples of courtship gone wrong, the consequences of premarital sex, and discussions of love magic bring immediacy to proscriptive texts.

In chapter 2, "Sex in Marriage," Harvey focuses on the centrality of consummation and conjugal sex. Harvey disentangles the thorny debates about whether an indissoluble marriage was formed by a couple's consent or sexual consummation of the union. This opens the way for attention to impediments such as impotence and frigidity, which might lead to the annulment of a marriage. The doctrine of the conjugal debt, which admonished both husband and wife to grant sexual access to their spouse whenever it was requested, reinforced the centrality of marital sex. While theoretically reciprocal, this doctrine weighed more heavily on wives given the gendered power relationships in marriage. Consequently, wives were vulnerable to coercion and sexual violence and unwanted or dangerous pregnancies. Thus, while sex in marriage was the only licit form of sexual activity, it was not without its challenges.

The normal and expected outcome of marriage was procreation, the topic of chapter 3. Harvey organizes her discussion under four major themes: conception, infertility, contraception, and abortion. Ecclesiastical and medical authorities considered the sexual pleasure of both partners to be essential for conception. Treatments to enhance sexual pleasure, to address infertility, contraception, and abortion all tended to rely on folk remedies and potions. While contraception and abortion were unlawful and considered immoral, some writers recognized it might also be the only recourse of those too poor to support additional children. Hence, punishments were generally lenient, except when physical assaults, such as hitting a woman's stomach, deliberately aimed to induce a miscarriage. While all these situations were inherently private to a couple's relationship, Harvey provides evidence to demonstrate how these issues were treated in daily life. Other topics such as prostitution (chapter 9) and sexual violence (chapter 10) receive similar deft and empathetic analysis.

Chastity, the suppression of sexual desire and abjuring of intercourse, was another important aspect of medieval sexuality. A component of the religious vows of monks and nuns from the earliest centuries of Christianity, chastity was one means to make explicit the boundaries separating the clergy from the laity, although it was not easily enforced or affirmed. Tales of immorality involving monks, nuns, and priests abound from the Middle Ages, yet Harvey also suggests that such stories may exaggerate the behavior of religious men and women.

Given the burden of constraints placed on appropriate marital sexuality, it is not surprising that myriad other activities were censured (chapter 6). Fornication, adultery, and bestiality were serious transgressions, punished by both ecclesiastical and secular authorities. The condemnation of incest was not so much about sex between intimate family members but rather was concerned about sex and marriage between cousins and other more distant relatives, including relatives of one's godparents. This prohibition was much abused by medieval elites who strategically used the sudden discovery of an incestuous relationship to dissolve a marriage no longer desirable or politically useful.

Other forms of prohibited sexuality revolved around "unnatural acts" such as sexual positions beyond the "missionary position" even within marriage (chapter 7). Other unnatural acts included masturbation and anal sex, whether between men or between a man and a woman. While same-sex sodomy was frequently considered a mortal sin and a capital crime, Harvey finds that in practice penalties tended to be more lenient than legal or prescriptive texts suggest.

Harvey addresses a variety of sexual transgressions that involved difference and deviance (chapter 8). Christians were forbidden to have sex with Jews or Muslims. Heretics were accused of engaging in orgies or condemning outright marriage and procreation. Heresy and sexual transgression, especially sodomy, were linked as in the case of the Templars who were accused of both crimes. Worst of all, however, was sex with demons who were believed to assume human bodies to have sex with both men and women. Such extreme beliefs led to the notions of devil worship and witchcraft, which in turn led directly to the witch trials of the fifteenth century. This is an excellent analysis of how minor unnatural acts were conceptually linked to heresy and demonic activity.

Harvey concludes her survey by recognizing the challenges inherent in the study of a topic that the primary sources present as a problem, real or anticipated. Prohibitions and transgressions figure largely in the medieval evidence; happy couples or contented celibates rarely appear. Nevertheless, medieval sexuality forms the ideological foundation for modern Western values concerning sex and sexuality, even as those values are being rejected or rendered anachronistic. Katherine Harvey has provided an excellent introduction into the beliefs and the lived experience of sex in the Middle Ages. Her book is rigorous, empathetic, and deeply engaging. *Fires of Lust* is an excellent overview, especially for nonspecialists, students, and general interest readers.

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FRANCIS KELLY. *Captain Francisco de Cuéllar: The Armada, Ireland, and the Wars of the Spanish Monarchy, 1578–1606*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2020. Pp. 312. \$55.00 (cloth).  
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Even after centuries of study, stories about the Spanish Armada of 1588 still capture the imagination. Among these we can count the fates of ships wrecked off the coast of Ireland on their way back to Spain and the men who were on them. Perhaps most famously, Francisco de