

1999

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Recommended Citation

Baker, Emerson W. (1999) "Book Review: An Archaeology of Manners: The Polite World of the Merchant Elite of Colonial Massachusetts, by Lorinda B. R. Goodwin," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 28 28, Article 8.
<https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol28/iss1/8> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol28/iss1/8>

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Book Reviews

AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF MANNERS: THE POLITE WORLD OF THE MERCHANT ELITE OF COLONIAL MASSACHUSETTS, by **Lorinda B. R. Goodwin** 1999, **Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers**, New York, 233 pages.

Reviewed by Emerson W. Baker

This monograph is another reassuring sign of the maturity of the discipline of historical archaeology. Traditionalists in the field might consider manners to be an unlikely topic for investigation, however, Lorinda Goodwin capably demonstrates the value of exploring such a subject. The study of manners lies at the intersection of fields ranging from cultural anthropology to social history and material culture. As such it is the perfect topic to showcase the interdisciplinary strength of historical archaeology.

The focus of Goodwin's study is the mannerly behavior of colonial Massachusetts merchants from roughly 1660 to 1760. The key players in this drama are several generations of the Turner family, leaders of the Salem merchant community. Goodwin carried out extensive historical research on the Turners, as well as field excavations on the grounds of their residence, now known as the House of Seven Gables. The data from the Turners are supplemented by the documents from the Mascarene family of Salem and Cambridge and the Earle family of Liverpool and Italy. The Mascarene papers include many letters written by John Mascarene to his wife Margaret Holyoke Mascarene during his 1761–1764 stay in London. As such they provide a glimpse of a Massachusetts merchant's mannerly life in London. Mary Earle's exchange of letters with Joseph Denham, a business associate of her husband in Italy, gives an international perspective as well as insights on manners between the sexes.

The book begins with an overview of manners. The courtly behavior of the Renaissance evolved into polite or civil behavior of the 17th century. Once steeped in morality, by the late 18th century it had been formalized as etiquette, a behavior for social situations. Goodwin makes good use of the extensive

courtesy literature of the time, from Erasmus and Castiglione to Peacham and Chesterfield. She then goes on to examine the merchant community in England and Massachusetts. The 17th and 18th centuries were a time of rising economic power of the merchant class. At the same time, this group desired social status commensurate with that power. A principal way merchant families could distance themselves from the middle classes was through polite behavior, and their wealth allowed them to purchase the possessions associated with gentility. This behavior was particularly important in Massachusetts, where merchants wanted to distinguish themselves in a society that was largely drawn from the middle ranks of English society.

The discussion of polite behavior is woven with documents from the three families as well as artifacts to highlight the connections among material culture, social status, and gentility. Despite the author's acknowledgement that "no one ever excavated a curtsy" (p. 4), this work has insights for archaeologists, for many artifacts were objects of polite society. Also, like artifacts, manners are important non-verbal forms of communication. The book is particularly relevant to archaeologists studying the evolution of consumer culture or the world of colonial women. Limited in their participation in business activities, wives and daughters of merchants were very much a part of the polite social events of the merchant community—events that played an important role in business and political alliances, as well as marriage alliances between families.

An Archaeology of Manners is partially a reflection on James Deetz's famous model of Anglo-American society. Indeed, the 1660–1760 time period is the same era Deetz equates with growing regionalization but ultimately the reanglicization of New England culture. It was the merchant class with its manners as well as its matching sets of dinnerware and symmetrical houses that led the evolution from a medieval to a Georgian mindset. In their conspicuous consumption they tried to mimic the English ruling class. It is fortunate

that the House of Seven Gables survived this process. It was an impressive 17th-century home but it lacked the order, symmetry, and elegance the Turner family required in the 18th century. Indeed, in the 1740s John Turner III built a new mansion house and the old homestead was relegated to a summer home and center of family business activity. Ironically, the high cost of the house, its grand furnishings and lavish entertainments would help precipitate the family's financial ruin.

While this is a well written and serious work, Goodwin's sense of humor occasionally shines through to keep a potentially dull topic lively and enjoyable. This can be seen when she is talking about the "crudest hicks from the provincial sticks" or quoting Erasmus's advice that "it is boorish to plunge your hands into sauced dishes." I have few complaints with this work. A couple of the sources seem dated, particularly Thomas Wertenbaker and Carl Bridenbaugh, prominent scholars of the 1930s and 1940s whose work has been largely superceded by recent social and cultural historians. Yet, these authorities are not extensively relied on, and overall the citations demonstrate a thorough grasp of the literature. A more significant concern is that like so many recent archaeological monographs, it is only available in an expensive hardcover format. As such, it is inaccessible to students, and it is just the sort of work they should read. It shows the potential of the field to take overlooked aspects of the past and to synthesize many lines of research into valuable new interpretations.

Emerson W. Baker is an Associate Professor of History at Salem State College and the Chair of the Maine Cultural Affairs Council. Most recently he is the co-author of the *New England Knight*, an award-winning biography of Sir William Phips. He is currently working on a material culture history of northern New England in the 17th century.

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HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGIES OF CAPITALISM,
edited by Mark P. Leone and Parker B.
Potter, Jr. 1999, Kluwer Academic/ Plenum
Publishers, New York, 262 pages, illus.,
\$85.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by LouAnn Wurst

Mark Leone and Parker Potter, the editors of *Historical Archaeologies of Capitalism* and their contributors, do not mince words about their vision of the nature of historical archaeology; for them, historical archaeology is about capitalism. Period.

For me, this volume is refreshing since I have been disturbed by the general lack of theory—particularly that confronting capitalism—in current historical archaeological literature. A historical archaeologist told me that we have become the "Nike Generation;" we have already done the theory, now all that is left is to "just do it"—the archaeology. This comment is both amusing and disturbing. How quickly one rushes for an advertising jingle from a global capitalist company which is notorious in their exploitation of their labor force. And, pretending that we have worked out our theoretical problems, and that we simply have to "do it" is naive. Recent statements that define historical archaeology as the benign intersection of material culture and textual evidence, or as rooted in the role of individual agency lose sight of the political nature of our work.

The historical archaeology of capitalism, as described in this book, is gloriously political and is exactly why I became a historical archaeologist. Since, as the authors acknowledge, our questions as scholars come from our own social setting within American society, it should come as no surprise that my reaction to this book arises from my own experience and social context. My father was a construction worker who dropped out of school in the seventh grade to go to work. He started out driving a dump truck and ultimately ended his career as a crane operator. My father was a staunch union man and today I find it delicious irony that the union that he belonged to for over 30 years, the International Union of Operating Engineers, is the same union that represents the Archaeological Field Technicians. My mother was a registered nurse who