

of roads and seas filled with purposeful travelers and their goods works well for establishing the continuous existence of long distance movement: indeed, as McCormick notes, the constant opening of new routes to replace those shut down by adverse political conditions itself argues for continuing pressure from travelers. This aspect of McCormick's work is wholly successful, and it, along with his collection of sources and data, will be valuable for years to come. McCormick is less successful, however, in his attempt to establish the full economic import of that movement and its commercial sector in particular: the links between movement and commerce, plausible though they may be, are not conclusively demonstrated. Much work remains to be done here, in a field now enriched by the scope and liveliness of McCormick's book.

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Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation. By Thomas W. Laqueur. New York: Zone Books, 2003. 501 pp. \$34.00 (cloth).

With his newest book *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*, Thomas Laqueur has once again undertaken a massive research project relating to the human body and the changing ways people relate to it. As with his earlier work, *Making Sex: The Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1990), this book is bound to stimulate a great deal of discussion in academic circles. While focusing upon the modern era, it nonetheless does attempt to provide an overview of Western attitudes toward masturbation during the past two-and-a-half thousand years. In order to do so, Laqueur has consulted a vast array of sources, from philosophical writings to medical treatises, from religious texts to bawdy epigrams, from personal correspondence to sites on the worldwide web. However, impressive as Laqueur's research is, it is to be expected that such a vast undertaking can do little more than scratch the surface of the subject, and this makes the author's argument susceptible to criticism.

In this book, Lacquer puts forward the thesis that the notion of masturbation-as-vice, a western European phenomenon, was invented in or around the year 1712 with the publication of a booklet entitled "Onania." According to Lacquer, masturbation was designated an evil activity because it showed the dangerous extremes to which the qualities and characteristics of modern life espoused by Enlightenment thinkers could be taken. In the case of masturbation, privacy was used for self-gratification and not for the public good. Imagination, as well, was employed for self-gain, rather than being used to promote social cohesion and proper conduct. Silent reading also began to flourish at about this time as well, and concern with this practice arose for some

of the same reasons – it was private and thus difficult to control, and it relied on fantasy in many cases. It was also believed that it could lead to masturbation

Before this time, little attention was paid to autoeroticism in the prescriptive literature of any culture, from the ancient Hebrews and Greeks to post-Reformation Europeans. The writings of the ancient Hebrews rarely mention masturbation, and when it is mentioned, it is seen as idolatrous since one fantasizes about someone other than God. The ancient Greeks and Romans viewed masturbation as an option only for people who had no partner with whom to copulate. Since for male citizens, at least, many people were available as possible sexual partners - slaves, prostitutes, concubines, spouses, young men - one wonders how widely masturbation was practiced by men past puberty. Early Christians tended to ignore masturbation, perhaps because mention of it might have given people unhealthy ideas. When mentioned, masturbation was seen as an unnatural sin and grouped with homosexual behaviour and bestiality, since it involved non-reproductive sexual behavior with an inappropriate partner (i.e. someone other than a person of the opposite sex). In Chapter Three, Laqueur lumps together thousands of years of history on masturbation, and thus does not do justice to the changes in the attitudes towards this practice that occurred prior to 1712: such fluctuations would likely have been revealing. Also, he does not make much mention of actual instances of masturbation before 1712, even though such information is available, both directly through mentions in court documents and indirectly through marginalia. Did people accept the church's teachings on masturbation?

As Michel Foucault demonstrates, the new Enlightenment society relied upon inner self-discipline of the soul as opposed to the earlier external state-control of the body. Masturbation was seen as a key example of both the loss of this inner self-discipline and society's inability to control the individual. Also, because masturbation was a private affair fuelled by one's imagination and requiring no external objects (though they might be used), there was the distinct risk that it would be practiced excessively, taking the individual out of society, and thus harming the economy and republican government. Masturbation was pathologized in order to gain control of individuals within society.

Laqueur rejects many other theories that have been put forward by scholars to explain the sudden fixation with masturbation that occurred during this period. C. F. Lallemand and Edward Shorter have suggested that interest in the subject increased in direct proportion to the rate at which it was practiced. Laqueur points out the futility of this argument, which simply cannot be proven one way or the other, since few people left any record of whether or not they masturbated. He goes on to refute the notion that Protestantism and its promotion of marital sex was at the root of the masturbation phobia. Likewise, he rejects economic explanations for the masturbation-as-vice phenomenon. Concerns about credit, he notes, are similar to those regarding autoeroticism, but are not the same: credit is subject to social control, while masturbation was seen as not being

so. According to Laqueur, no new medical discoveries can account for the new emphasis on masturbation as a primary cause of many physical and mental ailments, while concern with female masturbation undercuts the argument that loss of semen was an important factor in this new concern over masturbation. Laqueur does suggest that the growing concern with masturbation may be linked in part to new ideas about masculinity and friendship, but he makes no attempt to connect the new notions about femininity and women as asexual beings with the concern over female masturbation.

When the falsity of the health risks posed by masturbation became clear to doctors, the old thinking of masturbation-as-vice remained. Freud was the person who translated this core 'truth' from the realm of bodily disorders to that of the psyche. However, Freud's characterization of masturbation as both a normal activity (at least for adolescents) and as a necessary sacrifice for the maintenance and continuance of civilization provided the basis for a rehabilitation of masturbation beginning in the 1960s and 1970s. Many people now promote masturbation as self-love, a liberating and pleasurable experience. Nonetheless, many of the old ideas remain.

As with his earlier book *Making Sex*, Laqueur has chosen to tackle a difficult topic and has done so well; and as with the former work, *Solitary Sex* is likely to become a standard text in history courses on the Enlightenment. The book contains a number of pictures, though it is not always clear why Laqueur chose the ones he did at the expense of others which he discusses but does not show. The notes are extensive and packed full of additional information. It is clear from both his acknowledgment and his notes that what he claims is true: "Books—or, at least my books—are intimately connected to great blocks of life, to conversation, collaboration, and thinking with friends, teachers, colleagues, and students over the decades" (p. 7).

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Urban Life in the Middle Ages 1000-1450. By Keith Lilley. Houndsmill, NY: Plgrave, 2002. xvi, 295 pp.; maps, plates and tables. \$75.00 (cloth).

To write a book about urban life in the Middle Ages covering nearly five hundred years is an ambitious project; to do so in under three hundred pages and in a way that appeals to a multidisciplinary readership is harder still. Keith Lilley succeeds in this task by approaching his topic from an angle thus far not widely considered, namely, from the perspective of anthropo-geography, i.e. the study of how human beings interact with their surroundings. He does this by placing the town as a physical at the core of his study. Other books on urban history, like