Consuming Ivory: Mercantile Legacies of East Africa and New England. Alexandra Celia Kelly. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021. xx + 258 pp. $99. Hardcover ISBN-13: 9780295748771.

Alexandra Kelly began researching *Consuming Ivory* by participating in archeological projects in East Africa, intending to study the "indigenous appropriation of capitalist commodities." But, while visiting her hometown in Connecticut, she traveled to nearby Ivoryton, where the symbols and signs "trumpeting down" at her from multiple angles started her down a different path (xv). What has emerged is an interdisciplinary and multifaceted study that spans more than two hundred years and three continents as Kelly traces ivory commodity flows in the nineteenth century from East Africa to England and New England. Throughout, Kelly considers the malleable cultural resonance of ivory and the ways in which the legacies of the ivory trade continue through local heritage projects in Ivoryton and Deep River, Connecticut, two centers of ivory manufacturing from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century.

Kelly had three central aims in this work: to produce a material biography of ivory, to use that biography to reconsider the way Western narratives of Africa are constructed, and to contribute to the body of interdisciplinary scholarship that melds anthropology, archaeology, and history. Kelly is most successful in her study of the materiality of ivory and its "oscillations" between commodity, gift, commodity spectacle, totem, fetish, and potlatch as it "circulates through time and space" (15-16). Drawing on her research in Connecticut, England, and Tanzania, Kelly describes the historical actors and networks involved in the ivory trade and their diverse commercial and affective valuations of this much-coveted organic material. The resulting narrative links the social constructions of ivory to the histories of slavery, imperialism, capitalism, social memory, and globalization.

For all this complexity, *Consuming Ivory* is relatively short and is organized around thematic chapters that advance roughly chronologically. The introduction offers histories of materiality theory and heritage studies to orient scholars who are not familiar with developments in those fields. In these opening pages Kelly also argues that ivory is particularly effective for studying the interconnections between "exchange, consumption, and heritage" because "ivory is an important location at which Africa consistently encountered the outside world, from ancient times to now" (20). The first chapter then details that long history, concluding with a more focused history of New England trade with the Omani Empire in Zanzibar and the rise of the Connecticut River Valley ivory industries.

The second chapter is central to Kelly's arguments concerning the dynamic valuations of ivory and its role in drawing "Africans and the Anglo-Victorian world…into industrial capitalism" (69). Kelly begins by considering the symbolic and social meanings of ivory within African cultures as well as its commodity status. She argues that its symbolic and commercial valuations inflected each other, shaping and often increasing its regard in both registers. Kelly then turns to the role of ivory in Victorian culture, where it continued to have symbolic as well as commercial

values and, she argues, contributed to the formation of industrial class, gender, and imperial sensibilities.

Kelly points to the simultaneous ubiquity of ivory and the status of so many of the objects manufactured with it. Ivory, she notes, was fashioned into a range of decorative and functional objects, from grooming implements to cutlery, that were used to display one's taste and status. It was also used for piano keys and billiard balls, two quintessentially gendered leisure pursuits of the era. Further, ivory and elephants were ubiquitous in advertising in this era, and it is here that Kelly explores how ivory as commodity spectacle helped shape imperial conceptions of Africa and its relations to the West.

Given that one of Kelly's central aims is to reconsider Western imaginings of Africa, this section is underdeveloped. As Kelly notes, elephants were also closely associated with British rule in India and "products made from ivory designated as East African were frequently advertised using images of Asian elephants" (93). This helps show how ivory and elephants were part of imperial imaginings and the multilayered meanings encapsulated in ivory commodities but leaves the reader unclear as to how the consumption of ivory shaped Anglo-Victorian images of Africa in particular.

Kelly continues to expand on the colonial valuation of ivory in the third chapter, which considers the moral and affective dimensions of ivory as a hunting trophy. Using the Tanzanian archives, Kelly demonstrates that the tensions historians have described in other colonies between sport, conservation, and development played out in Tanganyika as well. As seen elsewhere, colonial officials found themselves struggling to balance their mandate to conserve wildlife against the need to protect people's crops from that wildlife and the desires of trophy hunters who were willing to pay enormous fees to the colony for the privilege of hunting elephants.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, Kelly turns to the popular memories of the ivory trade in Connecticut and East Africa. She shows that in the local heritage efforts in Connecticut, ivory was associated with industrial development, ingenuity, and community. As public concern for elephant extinction increased, however, ivory objects could no longer be disassociated from elephant suffering and became problematic artifacts. While there is still a sense of nostalgia for the heyday of manufacturing in this region, the signs of that heritage shifted in the 1990s from ivory to elephant iconography.

The turn away from ivory in the West was also due to the connections drawn between the ivory and slave trades in East Africa. There was a correlation in the rise of these two trades, but conflating them, Kelly argues in the fifth chapter, erases "a rich history of active engagement with capitalism on the part of East African individuals" including those living in the interior (158). Kelly contends that more nuanced narratives are needed in both Western conceptions of the ivory trade and East African slave heritage projects. She also links Western conservation and heritage efforts, arguing that both can "unexpectedly perpetuate asymmetrical, neoliberal relationships of power between the West and East Africa," and contends that the government destruction of ivory, which is meant to deter poaching, "functions as a modern day potlatch" adding further significance

to ivory (183). She then closes by expanding on the need for those in the Global North to be more cognizant of how humanitarian endeavors can perpetuate colonial-era exploitations and narratives.

As the above summation suggests, and Kelly acknowledges, *Consuming Ivory* is a little "unwieldy" but as a material biography, that works (185). This book highlights the multilayered meanings and multiscalar functions of ivory and the way those roles can be both contradictory and mutually constructive. The connections Kelly traces between two Connecticut towns, Zanzibar, global commerce, the Anglo-Victorian "ivory crazy," and contemporary heritage industries are illuminating and speak in useful ways to the interconnections between imperialism, American industry, culture, and public memory.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach to such a wide-ranging study was an added challenge that came with costs and benefits. *Consuming Ivory* bridges fields of scholarship in commendable ways, but the results are uneven. Kelly is at her strongest when considering commodity flows, heritage, and the materiality of ivory. It is less clear what this work adds to our understanding of Africans' agency in global trade, colonial conservation efforts, or Western narratives about Africa. *Consuming Ivory* contains rich material on each of these topics, but Kelly primarily situates that evidence against colonial narratives or older scholarship rather than recent research, making it difficult to decipher her intervention in these fields.

Nonetheless, *Consuming Ivory* is one of those books that makes a reader wonder how we have gone so long without a comparable study. Ivory was a desirable commodity for millennia and by tracing its routes between East Africa and New England in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as the meanings ivory acquired and the functions for which it was used, Kelly has contributed to several fields of scholarship. This book will be of interest to a wide range of scholars working in material culture, histories of capitalism, and heritage studies.

Angela Thompsell, SUNY Brockport