

Mariacarla Gadebusch Bondio (ed.), *Blood in history and blood histories*, Micrologus' Library, no. 13, Florence, Sismel, Edizione del Galluzzo, 2005, pp. 388, illus., €49.00 (paperback, 88-8450-162-8).

In the late nineteenth century the German homeopathic physician Wilhelm Ameke criticized the sanguinary methods used by "regular" doctors in treating life-threatening diseases. He alluded to a famous phrase in Shakespeare's *King Henry V*: "To meet the cholera, the allopaths 'nothing do but meditate on blood' ". Instead of meditating, medical historians have written many erudite studies, not only on the history of bloodletting, but also on other historical aspects of a bodily fluid we know as blood in a metaphorical or scientific context. So why another book on the history of blood?

The editor of this collection of essays claims that it is the "disciplinary and historical broadness" which makes it innovative. This often sounds like an excuse for producing another book on a well known subject, but in this case there is some truth in it. The contributions to this multi-lingual volume are based on the papers given during an international symposium at the University of Greifswald in 2003, in which established scholars and young researchers came together for a fruitful discussion of an array of different problems, perspectives, and approaches regarding the history of blood. The editor chose to arrange the essays in a chronological order, but it would also have made sense to structure them in contextual categories: medical/natural sciences, religion, magic and symbolism.

The essays dealing with the medical and scientific aspects cover a whole range of topics: Aristotle's concept of blood (Alberto Jori); the theory of the movement of blood in Arabic Galenism (Gotthard Strohmaier); blood in the *materia medica* of the Middle Ages (Hartmut Bettin); medieval haematology (Ortrun Riha); the sixteenth-century debate on the primacy of the veins or the liver in producing blood (Maria Gadebusch Bondio); the rediscovery of blood transfusion in German

speaking-countries at the beginning of the twentieth century (Stefan Schulz); scientific research on the poisonous character of blood (Myriam Spörri); the medical discourse on young males and females supposedly suffering from a "lack of blood" in the early twentieth century (Karin Stukenbrock); blood group research in Nazi Germany (Gerhard Baader).

Blood plays a pivotal role in many religions. Gil Anidjar claims the *limpieza de sangre*, the Spanish "purity of blood" theory, can be understood only as part of a theologico-political discourse which is not typical of the Iberian peninsula, but rather shared by western Europe as a whole in the later Middle Ages. Isabella van Elferen studies the theme of blood and tears in devotional literature and music of the German baroque. Thomas Schauerte gives us a rather uninspiring view of the religious blood cult in a German place of pilgrimage (Walldürn). Alessandro Barberi investigates the discourse-analytical aspects of blood in three different fields around 1900: theology, history, and economics. Dominique de Courcelles deals with the blood mystics at Port-Royal in the seventeenth century.

The prominence of blood can also be seen in the world of magic and literature: Anja Lauper studies five cases of a violent vampire "epidemic" in eighteenth-century Austria; Roberto Poma discusses the spiritual quality of blood in Paracelsian thought; the symbolic use of blood is demonstrated by Thomas Ricklin who shows how blood changes its meaning in the course of Dante's *Divina Commedia*.

Reading these different "blood histories" one gets the impression that the whole is in general better than some of its parts, for example, the contributions by Jori, Bettin, Poma, and Schauerte, which lack the innovative approach promised in the introduction to this otherwise highly readable volume.

Robert Jütte,

Institut für Geschichte der Medizin der Robert
Bosch Stiftung, Stuttgart