
David W. Sabean has already published three volumes on kinship together with some of the aforementioned historians, usually spanning the time from the late Middle Ages to 1900 and with a focus on Europe. This most recent collection, usefully structured chronologically, starts off in Ancient Rome and ends in the 21st century. It emerged out of continued discussions about kinship, now turning to what might seem the substance of kinship: blood. However, as the subtly nuanced introduction by Sabean and Teuscher argues, blood and kinship – contrary to what one might suppose – did not all the time move in parallel but “sometimes in divergent directions” (p. 4). Blood was thus not always the substance that tied kin together, even if the Latin term “consanguinitas” suggests just this. This argument is elaborated upon and mentioned in the chapters by Ann-Cathrin Arders, Philippe Moreau, Anita Guerreau-Jalabert, David W. Sabean, as well as in Simon Teuscher’s chapter on the kinship diagram “arbor consanguinitas” (literally tree of consanguinity). According to Teuscher, only in the late Middle Ages did “consanguinitas” move away from notions of flesh („caro“) and became associated with blood („sanguis“). Whereas comments on canon law from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had focussed on the union of man and woman in terms of flesh, authors of fifteenth century commentaries increasingly equated semen with blood, thus relying on Aristotle’s hematogenic conception theory. This move towards a more literal understanding of the „arbor consanguinitas“ can also be observed in the diagrams depicting an actual tree, whereas previously the „arbor consanguinitas“ did not resemble a tree at all.

Teuscher explains this intriguing shift by pointing out that blood had far more spiritual resonances than flesh, as was apparent in the Eucharist with its dichotomy of flesh and blood. „Sanguis“ furthermore specifically re-
ferred to the running blood, while there was a different term for clotted or dried blood („cruor”), thus tying „sanguis” tightly to „life”. Furthermore blood, as opposed to the decaying flesh, could be considered pure, even if this purity could become tainted.

Another important shift in the perception of blood around 1500 was that the „sacrificial and redemptive blood” of Jesus Christ was „being challenged or supplanted by internal blood, the blood that classified kin, that defined and separated races, the blood that transmitted and in its most extreme representations denied the very notion of redemption”, as Gérard Delille concludes in his chapter on the „Shed Blood of Christ” (p. 140).

This change in the perception of blood was inextricably linked to the dichotomy of pure and impure mentioned above and it proved to be crucial in the statutes of the „limpieza de sangre” of late medieval Spain, which distinguished between Christians, Jews and Muslims, thus making conversion null and void. A carefully argued chapter is provided by Teofilo F. Ruiz on this matter of much historical debate. The statutes of „limpieza de sangre” can be seen as manifestations of a shift from what Michel Foucault called the system of alliances – in which blood had a unique real and symbolic function and was primarily tied to the nobility – to a new regime of power labelled the „analytics of sexuality”, in which blood emerged once again, but now coupled with race. While the „system of alliances” was dominant until the nineteenth century, there was a certain overlap between the two regimes of power and the emergence of a link of blood and race well before the nineteenth century, of which not only the statutes of the „limpieza de sangre” are evidence – sometimes classified as „proto-racist” – but also categorizations from the colonial world, as the insightful contribution by Guillaume Aubert about the French Atlantic World shows. Christopher H. Johnson’s instructive chapter on France itself, particularly Brittany, also bolsters the claim that blood as a term or metaphor for kin was being transferred to „peoples united by language and culture but defined by one blood” (p. 200).

The most infamous example in the story of blood impurity clearly is the case of National Socialism. In her chapter on the question of „Jewish Blood”, Cornelia Essner distinguishes between two different strands of antisemitism virulent in the Nazi party. The contagionist branch held that sexual intercourse (the alleged mixing of blood) between a „Jewish” man and an „Aryan” woman forever contaminated the female blood, thus rendering the woman unable to bear „Aryan” children, even if conceived by an „Aryan”. However, this contagionist way of thinking soon conflicted with the modern knowledge of heredity and thus a tug-of-war commenced between the two different kinds of anti-Semitism, the contagionist and the hereditary camp. This had repercussions in the definition of who counted as Jewish and who did not – a discussion that began in earnest with the Nuremberg laws in 1935 but that remained unresolved well into World War II, as Essner shows in her remarkable contribution.

One might think that with the end of World War II and the atrocious impact of the blood metaphor, blood might have been severed from its associations of kin and purity. Yet as the last three articles written by scholars from the New Kinship Studies show, this is hardly the case. Blood cannot shed its traditional meanings, not even in modern medicine, as Janet Carsten demonstrates in her vignettes from her anthropological fieldwork in Penang (2008), focusing on medical lab technologists working with blood. The quest for synthetic blood might tame kinship, as Kath Weston puts it, however, the quest has not been completed and we still need to rely on donors, be they from our family or from outside this circle.

The last chapter by Sarah Franklin summarizes the recent trends in the New Kinship Studies and thus serves as an apt closing chapter to this volume. It traces the transition from blood to genes and the „blooding” of the gene by showing the ways in which speaking about genes and DNA is modeled on older ways of talking about blood.

The subtitle of the book – „Matter for Metaphor from Ancient Rome to the Present” – is not entirely accurate and maybe promises too much. First of all, the chapters do not trace a history in which blood was always „matter for metaphor”, but rather show that blood at times was used in a rather metaphorical sense whilst around 1500, blood did become more visible, as for instance in the „arbor consanguinitas”. Moreover, no article approaches the subject of blood from a strictly metaphorological point of view, which could at times have helped sharpen the focus on questions of matter and metaphor (even if at the expense of too rigid a framework for an edited volume). The question remains why blood became such an important substance for perceiving kin relations and how or whether this was connected to medical and popular ideas about blood and the different degrees of in/visibility of blood in society.

To be fair, the editors are well aware of the fact that their publication raises more questions than can be an-
swered and is it to their great credit that they recognize there is much more to be done (p. 4). It would be no small achievement of this highly recommended volume if it did trigger more research in a hitherto understudied field.

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