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Cathy McClive, *Menstruation and Procreation in Early Modern France*. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015. 280 pp. \$124.95 U.S. (hb) Table, notes, bibliography, and index. ISBN 978-0-7546-6603-5.

Review by Pam Lieske, Kent State University at Trumbull.

Part of Ashgate's series *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World*, this ambitious and well researched book closely examines early modern perceptions about embodiment, menstruation, and to a lesser extent, procreation in three main areas--medicine, theology, and law. Its primary aim is to prove that "the myth of 'menstrual misogyny'" is just that, a myth, and that previously accepted claims by feminist historians that women and the menses they evacuate were universally seen as dirty and polluted are not always valid. Using insights from post-structuralist third-wave feminism, McClive wants readers to "consider the categories of sex and gender to be both co-constituted and fluid, in order to best appreciate the embodied experience of menstruation and the cultural norms through which that experience was refracted" (p. 8). Helpful examples such as the fact that not all women menstruate, pre-operative transgender men do menstruate yet may self-identify as male, as well as early modern European accounts of male menstruators collectively work to support her contention that sex, gender, and menstruation are more fluid and open-ended than one may think.

Severing binaries such as *sex/gender* and *nature/nurture*, McClive uses the concept of "queer menstruation" to highlight how menstruation can be gender neutral and not just linked to the female reproductive body (p. 10). She also asks readers to reconsider the idea that menstruation is taboo since at its core, the word "taboo" is more nuanced and ambivalent than it is misogynistic and overtly negative (p. 12). Emphasizing that menstruation and female bodies are not irrevocably linked, McClive is also intent on overturning the idea that historical and contemporary ideas of menstruation are radically different; thus, she suggests that previous scholarship on menstruation is largely misguided since it links women to menstruation in a rigid and essentialist way (p. 9).

In addition to a solid theoretical framework, McClive's introduction discusses her sources and methodology. Sources include case studies, including letters and correspondence about menstruation, over 100 medical texts, French translations of the Bible, legal texts, dictionaries, and records on moral theology. Her methodology is simultaneously top down and bottom up as she seeks to uncover attitudes toward menstruation by male elites in France during the early modern period, while also using elite sources in tandem with case histories, letters, and even diaries. Her introduction ends with sections on why French sources are used and brief, yet detailed, discussions of her three main categories of texts--medicine, moral theology, and law--each of which are linked to menstruation, sexuality, and/or motherhood. An outline of the book's chapters and a conclusion, which is declarative and dry in tone, ends the introduction.

This book contains one hundred and thirty-three endnotes for just over 230 pages of discussion. Many of these notes are lengthy and fill a substantial part of many pages of discussion. Lists of nine manuscript sources, printed primary and secondary sources, unpublished dissertations and papers, and

electronic sources make up another twenty-six pages of text. The breadth and depth of research used to write this book is astounding; that is why an index of only six pages, though seemingly complete, appears thin as if the extensive notes and bibliography consumed too many of the book's allotted pages. McClive, it should be noted, is the kind of author who clearly states the scope of discussion and her main points in each chapter as well as the conclusions reached; she does this, one might argue, even a bit too much. The introduction, for instance, ends with remarks labelled in bold "Conclusions." Key points made here are echoed at the end of the book in another section labelled "Conclusions," and indeed each chapter ends with a section called "Conclusions" that largely restate key points outlined in each chapter's opening.

This is not to say that McClive merely states and restates assertions and does not support or prove them. She does, and at great length. In fact, the book's content is so dense that content from one chapter often spills over into the next. Chapter one, for instance, examines "shifts in the vocabulary used to express Levitic prohibitions on sex with a menstruating woman in thirty-five French translations of the Bible printed between 1530 and 1789" and reads these linguistic shifts "alongside relevant entries in twenty-four dictionaries published between 1539 and 1798" (p. 34). Levitic restrictions on sexual intercourse during menstruation are also discussed in chapter two which focuses on this topic through debates between moral theologians and medical theorists and concludes that male authorities from various factions were less concerned about the possibly polluting effects of menstrual blood on male sexual organs than on the need to optimize conditions for healthy conception and birth.

Material from chapters three and four likewise spill over into each other. Chapter three focuses on the topic of variability and uncertainty in relation to the length of time women menstruate and the interval of time between menstruations. Subtopics in this chapter include empirical emphasis on observing menstruation, the mutability of time, time-keeping instruments and calendars, problematic theories of menstruation (humoral, iatromechanical), menstrual regularity, quantity of menses, self-monitoring of menses, and the start and termination of menstruation. References to male medical practitioners, such as Samuel Tissot and Jacques Duval, as well as the French midwives Louis Bourgeois and Madame du Coudray are included in this chapter as are details of individual women, including Catherine de Médici's discussion of her daughter's menstrual cycles which are said to echo Marie-Antoinette's communications with her mother in the eighteenth-century as well as Mme de Graffigny's letters about her fears concerning impending menopause.

Chapter four, entitled "Detecting and Proving Pregnancy" extends this discussion of menstruation. It examines the link between menstrual regularity and procreation largely within the arena of medical opinion but also the law. It opens by comparing the menstrual experiences of two women mentioned earlier--Angélique de MacKau and Marie-Antoinette--and the differing ideas each woman had about the connection between menstruation and conception. This twenty-eight page chapter has three headings in bold, the last of which is the regularly repeated "Conclusions." The first heading of "Irregular Menstruation and the Detection of Pregnancy" contains five subheadings: *Bleeding during Pregnancy; The Place of Menses: Vicarious Menstruation or a Dual Physiology?; Menstruation or 'Perte' during Pregnancy; Pregnancy Without Ever Having Menstruated; and Increasing Experience of Menstrual Habits and the Signs of Pregnancy*. The length of discussion following each of these five subheadings is around one to two pages in length. The second heading in this same chapter--"Going Public: Proving Pregnancy and the Status of Menstrual Evidence"--is followed by a five page discussion before the subheading *Dating Gestation* appears followed by six pages of discussion. The second subheading is *Menstrual Calendars and Legitimising Birth: Demoiselle de Saint-Cyr*--an interesting discussion of an attempt to prove legitimacy using medical records about cessation of menstruation of the mother. This discussion is just over two pages long, and it is followed by the "Conclusions" heading and another page and a half of discourse. I mention the way this chapter is arranged, with all of its headings and subheadings and adjacent discussions of varying lengths, to give a sense how the book's chapters are internally organized. There is no doubt that McClive meticulously examines menstruation from multiples perspectives, and her

research is impeccable; still, it is difficult to settle down into a book's ideas when discussions are abrupt and there is shifting from one, albeit related, topic to another.

Like chapter four, chapter five looks at menstrual time, but in this case the situation of late gestational births and how they impact or influence inheritance and the transfer of property. We are told that irregular duration and cycles of menstruation made reading late births more problematic for these women than for those whose menses occurred at regular intervals and lasted the same length of time for each cycle. Chapter six stands somewhat alone in that it examines male menstruation and the case of hermaphrodites or intersexed individuals and their link to menstruation. It does so by examining ideas about male menstruation by early modern male medical practitioners such as Jean Fernel and John Friend, and "the [complex] relationship between male periodic bleeding and female menstruation (pp. 200-201, 205). Discussion of the causes and types of male periodic bleeding, Ambroise Paré's "four types of hermaphrodite[s] taken from ancient medicine," and individual case studies that connect male periodic bleeding and hermaphrodites are included in this chapter (p. 210). As in previous chapters, the overriding conclusion is that the link between menstrual bleeding and female sex and gender is more ambiguous and unstable than previously thought.

The breadth and depth of research used and referenced in this book are the work's primary strength. The author's dogged and successful attempt to overturn Thomas Laqueur's one-sex model is another strength though some readers may find the work overly dense and deterministic, and as mentioned earlier, a bit too fragmented in organization.[1] Portions of the introductory chapter that discuss the history of feminist thought and scholarship, particularly in relation to evolving ideas about the analytical categories of sex and gender are quite strong and should be mandatory reading for contemporary feminist historians. Lexicographers and Biblical scholars will be most interested in the book's first two chapters while the work's final chapter, which extends and links early modern histories of hermaphrodites to menstruation in men, will appeal to early modern scholars interested in the histories of intersex or transgendered individuals and accounts of reproductive disorders and monstrous births. All told, McClive's book is a model of meticulous scholarship and a useful addition to discussions of the various ways that menstruation is viewed, discussed, and lived both in the early modern period and today.

NOTE

[1] Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

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