

## COMPTEs RENDUS / BOOK REVIEWS

BERCO, Cristian – *From Body to Community: Venereal Disease and Society in Baroque Spain*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. Pp. 64.

The history of venereal disease, referred to by several names (*mal de bubas*, *mal francés*, *morbus gallicus*, *Great Pox*, etc.) in Early Modern Europe, has been of continuous interest to the history of medicine since its appearance as a discipline in the mid-nineteenth century. But it wasn't until the 1970s that medical historians, habitually inflicted with presentism and teleological explanations, reoriented themselves according to social history and later the cultural history of medicine. It is now twenty years since the publication of *The Great Pox: The French Disease in Renaissance Europe*, by Jon Arrizabalaga, John Henderson, and Roger French, perhaps the definitive turning point between an old and renovated historiography of *mal francés*; and within a few months it will be a decade since the publication of Claudia Stein's *Negotiating the French Pox in Early Modern Germany*. Without doubt, Berco's study, centred this time in Baroque Spain, represents another important moment in the social and cultural history of venereal disease.

Berco's research has as its starting point the analysis of a privileged historical source: the patient admissions book from the Hospital de Santiago, in the Castilian city of Toledo, during the twelve years between 1654 and 1665. That book contains the names of around four thousand patients—mostly listed by name, age, place of origin, occupation, and providing descriptions of the clothing and personal effects they had with them at the time of admission. All of those entered were suffering from *mal francés*, an illness conceptualized as “new” towards the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, and which gave rise to the appearance of hospitals dedicated exclusively to the care of those afflicted; such was the case at the Hospital de Santiago around 1500. It's not just the source that makes Berco's study impressive; Berco confronts complex methodological challenges, for instance, by supplementing the admissions book with additional sources—some as “oceanic” as notarial archives—in order to find traces left by those individuals before and after they had been admitted to the Hospital de Santiago as “poxed people.”

Although more than one reader will certainly want more, the succinctness of the book is one of its virtues. Berco has been able to avoid the temptation of elaborating a never-ending discussion led by the fertile potential of his materials. His choice of economic expression does not detract from his brilliant analysis. This brevity is striking in a work with such an ambitious and overarching structure, beginning with the introduction (pp. 3-20) during which he defends his methodological choices and the theoretical standpoint that he assumes in his book. For Berco, illness is a concept subject to constant changes not only in time, but in space; it always depends on a local context, where the sick and the healthy, the

transmitters and the healers, elaborate on the illness, the expectations of its cure, and even the social morality of those afflicted.

The first chapter focuses on the cultural context from which emerged the construct of the new venereal disease and the social imaginary of those afflicted with *mal de bubas* (one of the other names given to the illness in Castilian). Berco explores a select group of texts found in the riches of Spanish literature of the early modern era, from *Celestina* at the end of the fifteenth century to *Los desahuciados* by Torres Villarroel at the beginning of the eighteenth—passing through Cervantes' novels, Quevedo's poems, and many lesser known, but important authors (Pantaleón de Ribera, Cristóbal Mosquera de Figueroa or Sebastián de Horozco,) who contributed to the cultural construction of venereal disease during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These texts become important reference points throughout *From Body to Community*.

The second chapter, by contrast, focuses on a different type of historical literature, medical treatises, and their contribution to the cultural construction of the illness and the sick individual. In my view, this is the weakest chapter in the whole book, as it seems that Berco did not subject these treatises to the same amount of rigorous scrutiny that he applied to literary texts, and of course to the nominally "arid" archival documents. These sources are the foundation on which Berco constructs the last six chapters of his book, and upon which he erects a refined analysis to meaningfully explore all the potential those archival sources provide. The documentation from the Hospital de Santiago is the great protagonist of chapters 3, 4 and 5, where Berco offers the reader a social and geographic map that delineates the clientele of the Toledan hospital. The notarial documentation produced by or associated with that clientele, which Berco discusses in chapters 6, 7 and 8, is where we find the ill before and after their hospital admission: details of their social, economic, and family life; their marital and family strategies; their labor history and economic transactions; and, in general, their places within their communities.

Without wishing to spoil the pleasure readers will take in discovering the details for themselves, here is a succinct enunciation of some of Berco's conclusions. It seems clear, for example, that the Hospital de Santiago opened its doors to people from all social ranks, thus treating more than just those previously thought to be typically admitted (male, poor, working class, foreigner). Those sick who were cared for at the Toledan institution came from the entire Iberian peninsula, and not only the city of Toledo or its immediate surroundings. The treatment of *bubas* continued to be basic, mercurial unctions, accompanied by diverse remedies which tended to provoke sweating. Treatments were administered seasonally (in the fall and spring), and thus some of the ill exited and reentered the hospital several times, and, as such working, family, and social life was marked by a condition closer to that of the chronically ill, with very clear gender delineations. The horizon of expectations of those afflicted with *mal francés* (as well as that of their family members and their communities and social groups) and the care provided by nurses, doctors, and surgeons conferred solid prestige on the treatment received at the Hospital de Santiago during the period considered.

This short and delightful book by Cristian Berco is destined to remain for a very long time a model in the social and cultural history of medicine, a historiographic practice that has definitively consolidated during the last decades thanks to a handful of authors armed with powerful conceptual tools as well as exquisite writing and a careful narrative style.

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CARDINAL, Linda and Selma K. SONNTAG, eds. – *State Traditions and Language Regimes*. Montreal & Kingston-London-Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015. Pp. 282.

The good news proclaimed in this thought-provoking collection of articles is that political scientists have, at long last, discovered language as a serious category of analysis. Seizing on the concept of “language regime,” first fashioned by scholars like Jonathan Pool and Michele Gazzola—that is, “language practices and language use as projected through state policies and acted upon by language users” (p. 6)—the contributors to the work under review explore the relationship between linguistic cultures and usage, on the one hand, and state practices and political ideologies, on the other. Though the chapters range widely, from Europe and North America to Asia, shared methodological and thematic concerns make this an unusually coherent volume.

The result is a particularly exciting ensemble of reflections that perform a great service by helping to move scholarly discussion of language politics beyond reductive considerations of language as purely symbolic badges of cultural identity, or as homogenizing instruments of state power. They start from the necessary premise that multilingualism is the norm, and that the dynamics between state and language tend to be dense and multidimensional.

The studies assembled here succeed in communicating the sheer range of possibilities for state intervention in matters linguistic (as William Safran remarks in his thoughtful postface): how Belgium and Canada's governments manage nominally bilingual societies differently, by both enforcing parity amongst members of the nationally recognized linguistic communities within the civil service, and mandating minimum competency levels for functionaries (Luc Turgeon and Alain-G. Gagnon, chap. 6, pp. 119-136); how the complex play of coalition politics shape language regimes in southeast Asia (Amy Liu, chap. 7, pp. 137-153); or how an absence of a formal state language policy in places like the United States opens space for action in fights for voting rights, anti-immigrant “English-only” movements, and government and employer instrumentalization of polyglots' linguistic skills (Selma Sonntag, chap. 2, pp. 44-61). Peter Ives' analysis of how Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony can shed light on global