

lier) proponents of women's spirituality but that diverges sharply from views that stress the historically and culturally differential, socially constructed character of gender (see Mirsky in Krondorfer, 1996).

The mythopoetic men's movement possesses a mixed agenda that is, by turns, conservative and progressive. For example, the desire to regain "lost" male power is to some extent counterbalanced by the recognition that men's experiences are inevitably perspectival and nongeneric. Similarly, a genuine openness to other cultural patterns must be set against a tendency—which the men's movement has shared with other New Age movements—to "exoticize" and coopt non-Western spiritual traditions. The mythopoetic men's movement has thus earned both condemnation and a smattering of (partial and highly tentative) approval from feminist observers (see Hagan, 1992). But the "men's responsibility" movements of the mid-1990s, including the October 1995 Million Man March on Washington, D.C., organized by Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, and the Promise Keepers, who organized their own march on the capital in the fall of 1997, are much more unambiguously reactionary in temper, reasserting the man's "natural, God-given" status as head of family, community, and society.

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The men's movement and the related academic discipline of men's studies have spawned a vast literature, which ranges from pop-psychological self-help books to an academic quarterly, *The Journal of Men's Studies*, which commenced publication in 1992. For the uninitiated (pun intended) reader, a good place to begin is the men's movement's best-selling manifestos, Robert Bly's *Iron John: A Book About Men* (1990) and Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man* (1991). (Both Bly and Keen were the subjects of Public Broadcasting System programs hosted by the mytho-poetaster journalist Bill Moyers.) Of the scores (hundreds?) of books produced by men's movement gurus and wannabe-gurus, one of the most affecting is Malidoma Patrice Somé's memoir of his life as a shaman of the Dangara people of Burkina Faso, *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman* (1994).

One of the deepest intellectual taproots of the contemporary men's movement is the work of Joseph Campbell, especially *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949 and many subsequent editions). An updated version of the Campbellian quest for spiritually restorative mythic models is William G. Doty's *Myths of Masculinity* (1993), worthwhile especially for Doty's critical questioning of essentializing tendencies in the men's movement. The impact of the men's movement on liberal Christianity in the United States may be assessed

by glancing at Stephen B. Boyd's *The Men We Long to Be: Beyond Domination to a New Christian Understanding of Manhood* (1995).

The diversity of feminist viewpoints on the men's movement is well represented by *Women Respond to the Men's Movement: A Feminist Collection* (1992), edited by Kay Leigh Hagan. The increasingly self-critical and theoretically sophisticated stances of at least some (male) men's studies scholars is exhibited in the excellent collection *Men's Bodies, Men's Gods: Male Identities in a (Post-) Christian Culture* (1996), edited by Björn Krondorfer and containing, among many others, essays by Robin Gorsline, Tom Driver, and Seth Mirsky. The men's studies subdiscipline of religious studies has, thus far, produced one masterpiece, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz's *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (1993), which uncovers the inherent anxieties attending male identity and sexuality in ancient Israelite religion and modern Judaism—that is, in monotheistic religious systems that are male-dominated and heterosexually structured.

The burgeoning literature on gay men's spirituality includes spiritual autobiography and confession. *Wrestling with the Angel: Faith and Religion in the Lives of Gay Men* (1995), edited by Brian Bouldrey, is a superb anthology as is feminist-influenced, gay-male theological reflection such as Gary David Comstock's *Gay Theology without Apology* (1993) and Richard Cleaver's *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (1995). Randy P. Conner's ambitious study of "gender-variant" men's roles in world religious traditions, *Blossom of Bone: Reclaiming the Connections Between Homoeroticism and the Sacred* (1993), is marred by a New Age approach that facilely equates widely divergent cultural phenomena.

See also *Queer Theory*.

JAMES C. WALLER

Menstruation

Early anthropological accounts of menstruation presupposed the existence of a universal menstrual taboo. But later studies from the 1970s to 1990s indicate that the ritual proscriptions that surround menstruation vary greatly among religious traditions. And even some previously perceived menstrual taboos have been reappraised as menstrual celebrations (Buckley and Gottlieb, 1988). In many cultures, however, an ambivalent attitude greets menstruation, with ceremonial rites simultaneously regulating and endorsing the power of the menstruating woman.

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In the Sioux tradition, menarche (first menstruation) is celebrated with ritual seclusion, ceremonial instruction, and a special feast and gift-giving ceremony (Black Elk, [Joseph Epes Brown, ed.] in *The Sacred Pipe*, pp. 116–126). The young girl is treated as sacred and powerful and is honored by her community. The Yurok of California believe that a woman has supernatural or extraspiritual abilities during her menses. The menstruating woman takes part in ritual seclusion in a number of different traditions, such as the natives of Momog Island (Pacific), the Djuka (Guiana), the Warao (Venezuela), the Kaska (western Canada), and the Yurok (California), among others. Though some view this segregation from daily life as restrictive, others see it as an opportunity for the menstruating woman to be free from traditional domestic chores, to socialize with other women, to cook special meals, to weave, to meditate and worship, to participate in women-only rituals, songs, myths, and prayers, or even to take part in extramarital affairs (Buckley and Gottlieb, "A Critical Appraisal of Theories of Menstrual Symbolism" in *Blood Magic*, pp. 1–50).

The belief in the life-affirming powers of menstrual blood is widespread. Many traditions including the Kwakiutl (Pacific Northwest) and the Asante (Ghana) use menstrual blood in fertility and planting rituals, or in protective ceremonies to ward off evil forces. The powerful life-giving properties of menstrual blood are likely responsible for the prohibitions in most hunting cultures against menstruating women touching the hunting equipment or taking part in the hunt itself.

In Hinduism menstruation is thought to purify a woman's body, ridding her of the dangers caused by excess blood; yet the process of menstruation itself is said to be polluting. Menarche is treated as an auspicious event, marked by ritual seclusion, special dietary restrictions, and a ceremonial bath at the end of the menses (on the seventh day). The *Law of Manu* state that menstrual blood is unclean (*ashaucha*), and that a menstruating woman should be treated, for a total of four days, as if she were an "untouchable." Theoretically there are many restrictions that must be observed during a woman's menses: a menstruating woman is not permitted to perform religious worship or devotion; she must remain secluded from other members of her family during this time, in a special corner or section of the household, and is not to communicate with others; touch or play with children; cook; bathe or change her clothing; or wear jewelry, or oil or brush her hair. A man who touches a menstruating woman is defiled by her polluted state, and a man who has sex with a menstruating woman will lose his health, wisdom, and energy. On the fourth day of her menses, a woman must perform an ablution that will allow her to interact nor-



Young Kalash women perform a purification dance after going through menstruation, part of rites that must be performed after menstruation or childbirth. According to Kalash belief, women must live separately when "impure," Bumburet Valley, North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan (Earl Kowall/Corbis).

mally with others once again. Yet, there are festivals such as Raja Samkranti (eastern India) that celebrate the menstruation of the goddess whose stained menstrual cloths are said to be highly valued by her devotees. During this festival, women undergo the same ceremonial restrictions as if they were menstruating.

In the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 15 and 18) a menstruating woman is described as impure and unclean, and for a period of seven days must follow a number of prohibitions, including a ban on sexual relations. The Talmud extended the period of impurity to an additional seven days after the cessation of menstrual flow, followed by immersion in a pool of water (*mikveh*). This applies only to married women and does not affect any other aspects of religious practice, such as attending a synagogue. Sexual relations may resume after the ablution has been completed. The ritual separation (*niddah*) of the menstruating woman is today upheld by Orthodox Jews as part of the family purity laws. Most non-Orthodox Jews have rejected *niddah* although some Jewish feminists have revived immersion in the *mikveh* as an empowering women's ritual.

Early rabbinic and Christian commentaries extended the statement in Genesis (3:16) to include menstruation along with the pangs of childbirth as women's punishment for the sins of Eve, hence the common Western name for menstruation as "the curse" (Delaney, pp. 33–48; Buckley, p. 32; Shuttle, p. 138, 306). Christian patristic writers, such as Augustine, maintained the Levitical prohibitions regarding menstruation as literal and not figurative prescriptions (*Forgiveness*, 21, XII). Extreme negative views of menstruation put forth in Pliny's *Natural History* and Aristotle's *The Generation*

of *Animals* (Book II, 3+4; Book IV, 1+2) in addition to other Hebrew Bible references to menstruation as polluting (Esther 14:16; Isaiah 30:22; Ezekiel 36:17; Lamentations 1:17), often informed theologians and philosophers on the topic of female sexuality generally. While a number of contemporary Christian traditions no longer accept Levitical prohibitions and menstrual taboos, there are still many denominations that maintain a negative view of menstruation. Views of menstruation from the Hebrew Bible have been used as an argument against the ordination of women in the Catholic faith. The Greek Orthodox Church continues to restrict the religious practices of menstruating women, such as communion. In some areas of Greece today (particularly in the rural regions), menstruating women are not permitted to touch religious icons or light votive candles. However, a New Testament passage (Mark 5; Matthew 9; Luke 8) tells of a woman with a menstrual disorder who was cured by Jesus; for some commentators this has suggested a positive valence for menstrual health in the Christian tradition (Buckley and Gottlieb, p. 258; Delaney, p. 36).

The Qur'an of the Islamic faith states that a menstruating woman is polluted and should be ritually secluded from her husband until the cessation of her menses. She should then undergo a cleansing to be free from impurities, after which sexual relations may resume (Qur'an 2:223). Hadith literature further states that a menstruating woman is not permitted to fast, recite her daily prayers, take part in religious ritual, enter a mosque or touch the Qur'an. (These prohibitions do not apply during the Hajj.) The Islamic creation story, however, states that menstrual blood was the material from which humankind was formed.

In Buddhist tradition menstrual blood is considered to be highly polluting and a menarcheal girl is said to be a danger to those around her, particularly to men. Buddhist women of menstruating age are restricted from a number of religious ceremonies and duties, and a menstruating woman is prohibited from entering a temple or undertaking a religious pilgrimage. Yet Buddhists in Sri Lanka perform complex menarcheal rituals that indicate that menstruation is an important and sacred event for both a young woman and her community (Winslow, 1980).

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Sources on menstruation are few in number. Probably the most important anthropological work to date that discusses the menstrual practices, rites, and beliefs of a wide selection of cultures, and the first to reject the assumption of a universal menstrual taboo, is Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, eds., *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (1988). Equally important

to an anthropological investigation of menstruation is Chris Knight, *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture* (1991), which argues that menstruation was the event from which all cultural constructions, including religious rituals, were originally established. Unfortunately this work is flawed by its vast scope (the origin of culture itself) and its often intrusive Marxist bias and dense theoretical language.

Some of the most important work on menstruation comes from those sources that focus on specific cultural and religious traditions. Yewoubdar Beyene's *From Menarche to Menopause: Reproductive Lives of Peasant Women in Two Cultures* (1989) is a succinct examination of the menstrual beliefs and practices of Maya and Greek rural women. Beyene's ethnographic approach is markedly different from other anthropological studies of menstruation, since she gives equal consideration to biological information (dietary habits, fertility cycles, aging patterns) and psychological and cultural responses to menstruation. Deborah Winslow's "Rituals of First Menstruation in Sri Lanka" (*Man* 15 [1980]: 603-625) details the surprising similarities found between the menstrual ceremonies of Buddhists, Catholics, and Muslims living in Sri Lanka. In "Menstruation and Reproduction: An Oglala Case" (*Signs* 6, no. 1 [1980]: 54-65) Marla N. Powers offers a positive interpretation of the menstrual practices of the Oglala Sioux, while at the same time providing a critical analysis of the methodology employed in previous anthropological interpretations of menstruation. In "Purity and Piety: The Separation of Menstruants from the Sancta," Shaye J. D. Cohen (pp. 103-115 in Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut, eds., *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue*, 1992) offers a clear and concise historical survey of the prohibitions surrounding menstruation in the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish traditions, concluding that the exclusion of menstruating women from the synagogue is not to be found in Jewish law but solely from isolated historic and geographic customs.

On a more general and accessible level, *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation*, by Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth (1976; 2d ed., rev. and enl., 1988) provides interpretations of menstrual taboos as they have existed in a number of different religious traditions and historical periods. Two other important crosscultural studies of menstruation are Deana Dorman Logan, "The Menarche Experience in Twenty-Three Foreign Countries" (*Adolescence* 15, no. 57 [1980]: 247-256) and Rita E. Montgomery, "A Cross-Cultural Study of Menstruation, Menstrual Taboos, and Related Social Variables" (*Ethos* 2, no. 1 [1974]: 137-170). Logan concentrates on the emotional reception of menarche by young girls in relation to their respective cultural views of menstruation; Mont-

gometry establishes a complex relationship between men's roles in creation stories or childbirth with existing menstrual restrictions and taboos.

Of the texts that focus on mythology and menstruation, *The Wise Wound* by Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove (1978; 2d ed., rev. and enl., 1986), is the most encompassing and informative, offering a Jungian analysis of Western mythology and religious symbology in relation to menstrual blood and providing a positive, spiritual interpretation of the powers of menstruation. An important analysis of ancient Greek medical texts, mythology, and goddess worship as they relate to menstruation is provided by Helen King, "Bound to Bleed: Artemis and Greek Women," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, edited by Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (1983). Barbara Walker's *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (1983) includes compelling though controversial readings of a number of early goddess mythologies from various regions and traditions (Babylonian, Maori, Hindu, African, and South American), which indicate that menstrual blood was the primary material used by the goddess for the creation of the world or humankind. Similarly, Judy Grahn's *Blood, Bread, and Roses: How Menstruation Created the World* (1993) offers nothing less than, in the author's own words, a "new myth of origin" (p. 7) for humankind, based on menstrual blood. Grahn demonstrates that the process of menstruation has established a kind of "logic" which constitutes the foundation for science, mathematics, temporal measurement, and by extension, all human developments. Grahn, a poet with the scope of a visionary, does not allow the burden of proof to interfere with her sweeping hypothesis, but instead weaves together anthropological, mythological, biological, and archaeological data as elements in her myth-making.

Finally, for an exhaustive bibliography of menstruation sources on the Internet see Paula Wansbrough and Kathleen O'Grady, "Menstruation: A List of Sources" (1995) at www.inform.umd.edu/EdRes/Topic/WomensStudies/Bibliographies/menstruation. Another interesting Web resource is the controversial Museum of Menstruation, run by Harry Findley, www.mum.org.

See also Blood; Menarche; Menopause; Rites of Passage.

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Mesoamerican Religions

The geographical term "Mesoamerica" has historical and cultural connotations. As such, it refers to the cultures of an area of mid-Mexico that includes some of

northern Central America. In this region, complex and sophisticated civilizations attained a peak in religion, art, architecture, agriculture, medicine, and calendaric knowledge.

Data about the earliest periods of Mesoamerican religions are basically archaeological. Iconographic studies, interpretation of hieroglyphs, and examination of mural painting and sculpture have revealed the importance of feminine presences in myth and ritual during those periods. The first written records properly speaking about Mesoamerican peoples and religion are from the contact period of the early sixteenth century. They consist mostly of transcriptions of poetry, chants, and mythic narratives belonging to the period immediately prior to the European invasion of the territory then ruled by the Aztecs. These primary sources are generally called codices and are either pictograms or alphabetical Nahuatl (Aztec language) or Spanish. Spanish chroniclers seldom displayed the sensibility of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún. With the help of indigenous assistants, the Spanish cleric interviewed the elders of three communities in the area of Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital, and composed the most reliable document—now known as the *Florentine Codex*—on the ancient Mexicans, their beliefs, rituals, gods-goddesses, and myths. Other key early Spanish sources (Olmos, Molina) provide basic references to a world decimated not only physically but also culturally.

A search of these texts for women's voices and ritual practices relies heavily on Spanish sources and translations of the sixteenth century. Consisting mainly of the work of (male) Catholic clerics and conquerors, these sources are of limited bearing to the presence and contributions of women in myth and ritual. Even Sahagún often translates pictograms, which unambiguously represent women acting as doctors, midwives, or ritual practitioners, into a Spanish generic masculine that erases women from agency and preeminence. Critical reinterpretations of pictographic codices (Berlo, 1983; Brown, 1983; Ichon, 1973; Hellbom, 1967) as well as recent Spanish retranslations from the original Nahuatl documents (for instance, those by Lopez Austin, León Portilla, or Willard Gingerich) have brought new insights into women's participation (Quezada, 1997; Marcos, 1989, 1991, 1995, 1996).

Combining records of the contact period with archaeological findings of previous periods, it is possible to elaborate on a commonality of certain Mesoamerican generative roots. Most scholars indeed assume a common cultural core, manifest in similarities of symbolic meanings, rituals and social practices, medical knowledge, architectural forms, iconographies, writing systems (hieroglyphs, pictograms), and measurement of time (calendars) among the diverse peoples of Mesoamerica (Gossen, 1986; Kirchhoff, 1968; Lopez Austin,