

## Martin Mulsow (Hg.): Das Haar als Argument

This fun anthology resulted from informal conversations in 2014 and then a formal conference in 2017 at the Forschungszentrum Gotha. A reader might wonder how a "history of knowledge" (*Wissensgeschichte*) about hair might distinguish itself from the various handbooks and in-depth studies of the cultural history of hair. In his cursory introduction (<8 pages), Martin Mulsow very briefly explains the history of knowledge (as compared to that of art, science, scholarship, ideas, etc.), and that this collection is focused on what people (thought they) knew about hair.

The thirteen disparate case studies are organized into four sections: medicine; art and antiquarianism; religion and decorum; and rulership and foreignness. The three essays about the knowledge of hair and medicine begin with Carine van Rhijn's digression about a recipe based on lizard ashes to fight baldness that was written in the margin of a medieval manual for pastors. Van Rhijn uses this tidbit to explore the phenomenon of random useful knowledge as marginalia, and how such knowledge - seemingly out of context - traveled with books. Natalia Bachour explores the meaning of hair in the early modern Islamic world. Bachour not only points to hair as an obvious cultural sign of power and wealth (or lack thereof) or as a declaration of mourning, but also the complex medical knowledge that regarded hair as part of the body (even when cut), as a diagnostic indicator, or as a medicine in itself, to be rendered into a love potion or a cure for rabies, forgetfulness, toothaches, etc. Finally, she points to the use of hair in alchemy, as an ingredient - along with other organic matter - in the philosopher's stone. Stefan Hanß connects early modern medical knowledge of the four humors with hair growth and color, and shows how bodily moisture and temperature (as well as temperament) were indicated by one's hair. As in van Rhijn's piece, Hanß catalogs oddball hair care products and their uses: lizard oil, bat brains, ant eggs, etc.

Dirk Jacob Jansen's analysis of the meaning of red hair in the art of the Renaissance begins the section on art history and antiquarianism. Jansen points to unique ways of painting hair as a "tell" useful for identifying artists' work. Martin Mulsow's own contribution focuses on the early modern speculation about hair in the Bible and ancient world, usually as a polemic for/against current hair styles. Julia Saviello's contribution is not about hair at all, but rather about "bearded grapes", a natural wonder, and their portrayal in early modern illustrations. She shows here not only how the meanings of human hair were applied to plants, but also how monstrous growths on grapevines were interpreted as judgements of drinking and drunkenness.


Irene van Renswoude's essay about the cultural significance of male baldness begins the section on religion, decorum, and politics. She explores the supposed correlations (intelligence, immoderate drinking, excessive sex) and direct physiological causes (cooling of the head). Dirk van Miert explores the "Hairy War" in the Netherlands in the 1640s, an argument about the merits (or virtue) of men wearing long vs. short hair. Van Miert's piece dovetails nicely with that of Kai Merten, on the politicization of hair in the English Civil War, against the backdrop of knowledge about hair regarding health, foreigners, gender, etc. Lucinda Martin explores the meaning of hair for different branches of Pietism, against the backdrop of the history and theology of Pietism. Specifically, the wearing of a beard was a sign of extreme inflexibility, radicalism, and separatism, and the wearing of a wig was a sign of a willingness to bend to worldly social norms.

The last section, on rulership and foreignness, begins with Alexander Schunka's discussion of hair and travel. Schunka discusses hair as an "intersectional object" that was important for identity, fashion, the body, power, and material culture in the context of early modern foreign travel. Ines Eben v. Racknitz examines the political history of the topknot in China, where it was imposed by the imperial government in the seventeenth century, against much popular resistance, but was embraced by 1912, when it was banned (along with foot-binding) by the republican government. Kristina Kandler analyzes a fashion and moral periodical, the Gothaer Hofkalender, and its ambivalence regarding hair fashion in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century: Extravagant hair styles and wigs were condemned as frivolous and impractical, but at the same time hair fashions were promoted as necessary to distinguish oneself from the lower classes and among one's peers.

On the balance, this is a well-executed and enjoyable book. Five of the contributions are in English, the introduction and the other eight contributions are in German, and there are both English and German abstracts for each chapter. There is no bibliography, but there are comprehensive footnotes (which this reviewer prefers). Some of the chapters (Hanß, Mulsow, Jansen) are richly endowed with color illustrations, but others not at all. Pictures of the subject matter would have made it much easier to understand some of the aesthetic issues involved (van Rhijn, Kandler). Given how cursory Mulsow's introduction is, this book does not work well as an easily accessible quick-reference guide to the history of the knowledge of hair, though altogether the contributions ultimately provide a comprehensive (if sometimes redundant) review of the secondary literature.

The book is light-hearted and repeatedly references contemporary popular culture, presumably due to its origins at an informal coffee break. Van Renswoude begins and ends her piece referencing a BBC report on the stigma attached to male baldness. Jansen explicitly rejects "densely footnoted [...] flatfooted prose" and asks that his essay be considered a "decorative tress, plaiting various and different strands of hair together." On his way to analyzing the significance of "Titian red" hair in the Renaissance, he then tells us about his siblings' attempts to dye their hair with henna, references an internet guide to hair color (with an illustration), and uses a Barbie doll (again with an illustration) as evidence. Schunka kicks off his contribution with a reference to Lorient. Mulsow begins his piece with a seventeenth-century academic prank and then glibly ends it with a pun (two authors, both named "Barth", writing about facial hair), and then concludes "und am Ende sind alle tot." Indeed!

### Rezension über:

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