Judit Kis-Halas

*Boszorkányok, gyógyítók és a Gyűdi Szűz Mária. Az orvoslás piaca az újkori Dél-Dunántúlon* [Witches, Healers and the Virgin Mary of Gyűd: Medical pluralism in 18th century South Western Hungary].

Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2020.

336p., 24 ill.

ISBN 978-903-456-071-5

ISSN 2416-0318

The volume presents the medical landscape of the south Transdanubian region of Hungary in the 18th century and it focuses on the catchment area of a contemporary regional Marian shrine (Gyűd). The author adopts the patients’ and the healers’ perspectives and combines the approaches of medical anthropology, historical folkloristics and the history of mentalities.

The vivid spectrum of contemporary medical universe is illustrated by the metaphor of the marketplace, as an imaginary, yet often absolutely real site, where the various therapies and remedies appeared and the different healers of diverse origins and knowledge contested each other. Apart from the elaborate description of practitioners ranging from lay people to clerics, from legitimate physicians to charlatans, from folk healers to learned medical generalists and specialists, a systemic classification of symptoms and illnesses, as well as a typology of causation and the cures of the diseases are provided.

The analysis brings the patients’ and the healers’ experiences on the fore, which can be best seen through the illness narratives. Therefore it draws on the parallel examination of the bewitchment-narratives extracted from the testimonies of the 18th century witch-trials and contemporary miracle stories from the recently explored miracle books of the Gyűd shrine. In this respect the author follows not only the directions of Hungarian witchcraft historiography, but she relies on the achievements of both the Hungarian and the international research of medieval miracle accounts and considers the latest outcomes of Hungarian research of baroque Marian devotion.

An introduction discussing the theoretical frames, methodology and describing the extended source material is followed by two similarly patterned sections each giving a systematic overview on the fields of lay, ecclesiastic and learned healing.

However, in both sections the dynamic co-existence of these medicinal fields are put in the focus, as their interferences within the local communities are highlighted by case studies based on the trial records and the miracle collections. These “thick descriptions” shed light on the changing attitudes towards healing and medicine in macrosocial crisis situations, such as plague epidemics, witch-hunts and witch-panics, or the miraculous events surrounding the birth of Mary’s new cult site at Gyűd, furthermore, in the times of individual or microsocial crises, such as serious accidents and disasters threatening human life.