



BOOK REVIEWS

Western Diseases: An evolutionary Perspective, Pollard, T., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (2008). 223pp., £75.00, Hardcover, ISBN:978-0-521-85180-0, £35.00, Paperback, ISBN:978-0-521-61737-6

This volume deals with the evolution and contribution of what is known as western diseases, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, reproductive cancer, allergies, asthma and mental health problems. In the 1960s and 1970s concerns developed about the rise of these diseases. As the name western diseases implicates they are linked to the “modern western civilisation” and are considered to be “man-made”. In the second chapter the reader gets an introduction about “Evolutionary history of human disease”. The focus lies here on the historical change from hunter-gatherer lifestyle to agriculturists and how this change of lifestyle effected the development of human diseases. Furthermore the author explores the concept of the epidemiologic transition after the industrial revolution and how the increasing age of the population effects the rise of non-communicable diseases.

When western diseases were first identified as a group, they were poorly understood. Nowadays it is possible to draw on a huge wealth of information to examine each group of diseases. In the following chapters the author presents the background knowledge about four major groups of diseases or health issues.

In the conclusion the author offers a summary overview of what an evolutionary perspective teaches us about human vulnerability to western diseases. Further the reader delivers an insight view to projected trends in western diseases, especially in relation to the developing world. Because of the still growing population which has more and more to deal with the problem of the older people in the population increasing, the author considers what an evolutionary perspective has to offer to the development of possible preventive strategies in the face of this growing problem.

The book throws light on one of the main problems of the western civilization. Skilfully the author shows that the solution of the problem concerning western diseases is not only to find in preventive activity, also we have to understand the past and thus the evolution of western disease. Through given examples of recent

hunter-gatherer populations it is clear that our today lifestyle is to blame for the huge increase of western diseases. Therefore it is essential to change our way of thinking and our behavioural pattern to break out of the vicious circle.

This volume is advisable to read for all researchers in the field medical anthropology, public health, reproductive ecology, biological anthropology and evolutionary medicine. And it is even an asset for every person who shows interest in this subject.

Petra Held, Mainz

Kulturgeschichte des Klimas: Von der Eiszeit bis zur globalen Erwärmung, W. Behringer, C.H. Beck, München (2007). 352pp., €22.90, ISBN:978-3-406-52866-8

Climate change is one of the most urgent and most hotly debated topics of our days. It is of no wonder, then, that also the historical sciences have turned towards this thematic field. Behringers book is one in a series which started out in the 1960ies with Lamb's classic (*The Changing Climate*, Methuen [London 1966]) and continued throughout, although climate-related historiography has always been received with much scepticism in more traditional historian circles.

Behringer starts out with a general chapter on the current state of knowledge and on how this knowledge is generated and then continues with a look into the deeper past where he discusses climate changes since the end of the last glacial. The greater part of the book is devoted to the European Middle Ages and post-Medieval period and it ends with a chapter on Modernity and the current and possible future climate-related problems. The strengths of the book undoubtedly lie in the passages on Medieval and post-Medieval culture history and European history of thought which Behringer sensibly and subtly related to the various impacts of the Little Ice Age. Here the author presents a valuable and fascinating contribution to a discussion within the historical – and archaeological – sciences which has yet to come to a full swing. Beyond the scholarly circles the book is valuable for a broad audience as each and every member of our global society is or will soon be affected by climate-related problems.

Detlef Gronenborn, Mainz

Befestigte Siedlungen auf dem Balkan, in der Ägäis und in Westanatolien, ca. 5000–2000 v. Chr., Ivanova, M., Waxmann, Münster u.a. (2008). 456pp., €49.90, ISBN:978-3-8309-1937-7

In her 450-page PhD thesis, Ivanova deals with a much broader range of subjects than one would expect from the title. Starting with the question why people settle at

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