

Derek J Oddy, Peter J Atkins and Virginia Amilien (eds), *The rise of obesity in Europe: a twentieth century food history*, Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2009, pp. xv, 246, £60.00 (hardback 978-0-7546-7696-6).

This book celebrates the twentieth birthday of the International Commission for Research into European Food History, an organization which operates on a membership-by-invitation-only basis, no doubt to keep out food cranks, and perhaps other dubious persons, such as historians of medicine. It holds biennial colloquia and publishes the proceedings, this volume, the tenth, being based on a conference in Oslo in 2007. In their introduction, Oddy and Atkins explain that their aim is to identify the chronology of body weight change and the “obesogenic factors” in Europe, and they claim to have provided a “major step towards a road map of the nutritional transition of Europe” (p. 3).

Divided into three sections, the book starts with food consumption and consumer choice. The first chapter addressing this theme shows that hunger was common in the Austrian Tyrol during the first half of the century, but the problem was alleviated by the development of transport and the tourist industry, obesity becoming common later. A brief chapter on Russia follows, which ignores the Tsarist period, describes intermittent famines during the Soviet era, and refers to an increase in obesity after the fall of communism. The next chapter characterizes dietary change in Slovenia as a transition, in the final decades of the twentieth century, from a restricted self-sufficient diet to greater affluence and hypermarket shopping—but makes no mention of obesity. The section ends with a more substantial piece about the UK after the Second World War by Oddy. Jam-packed with food and nutrient consumption data, Oddy notes that the observation of the wartime adviser Jack Drummond that with increasing affluence

people eat less bread and flour and more sugar and meat, was broadly accurate in the post-war period. For data on obesity, he refers readers to his book *From plain fare to fusion food* (2003).

A section on industrial and commercial influences comes next, consisting of five chapters in which obesity is mentioned only twice. Two chapters, on food trademarks in Germany, and food regulation in Spain, hardly belong in a book about obesity, while one, on food labelling for health in Norway, is more relevant but lacking in focus. A chapter on sugar in France outlines the contrasting positions of the sugar industry association, which defends sugar as benign, and a government nutrition programme which advocates a 25 per cent reduction in added sugar consumption. But the most satisfying chapter in this section is by Unni Kjærnes and Runar Døving—on fat, sugar, and the Norwegian welfare state. They describe the regulation of fat consumption in Norway as a matter of “social discipline”—linked with long-standing social and political problems, connected to dominant national meal patterns in schools, the workplace, and the home. The control of sugar consumption, in contrast, is linked with leisure and snacking, and is a matter of self-discipline. Although uncommon, obesity is increasing in Norway, but this chapter suggests that the analysis of Norwegian food culture could usefully inform a policy response.

In the final section, on social and medical influences, some chapters provide introductions to topics and useful references, rather than profound analyses and conclusions. A chapter on popular discourses on body type and “proper nutrition” in Germany, ends with the remark that it is unlikely that modern obesity will be solved by “suggestions from state initiatives alone” (p. 157). A chapter on the medical discourse of obesity in France during 1850–1930 is full of excellent material, but does not really have a conclusion. The final papers, however, do offer new angles and insights. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, writing on slimming

during the interwar Britain, casts new light upon the history of nutrition during the “hungry thirties”. Martin Franc shows that in Czechoslovakia the state was concerned about the rising incidence of obesity from the end of rationing in 1953. Finally, Ulrike Thoms presents an interesting comparison of obesity in East and West Germany, 1945–89.

In the last chapter, Oddy and Atkins discuss the problem of defining historical trends in obesity and comparing countries. But despite the Kjærnes and Døving chapter they conclude the book with the pessimistic assertion that because of vested interests such as food industries, policy makers have little to offer the modern obesity problem.

In conclusion, the quality of the papers in this book is uneven, but it remains a useful volume for anyone interested in the history of obesity, or European food history in the twentieth century.

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Alun Roberts, *The Welsh National School of Medicine 1893–1931: the Cardiff years*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2008, pp. xxiv, 389, illus., £55.00 (hardback 978-0-7083-2174-4).

Welsh medical education has been poorly served by historians, something which was partly rectified in the three volumes on the history of Welsh universities published by Williams and Morgan in the 1990s. While Alun Roberts claims that these gave proper treatment to the history of the medical school, Williams suggested that the Welsh School of Medicine deserved a separate history. Roberts, a former registrar of the school and a trained historian, took up the challenge.

The Cardiff Medical School, as it was originally known, was established in 1893, ten years after the creation of the University College

of South Wales and Monmouthshire. Arguments put forward in support of this included the economic, linguistic and moral advantages of providing medical education for Welsh students at home. In the early years the school offered pre-clinical training only. It was shaped by advice from Sir Donald MacAlister, principal of Glasgow University and chairman of the GMC, and Sir William Osler, with the latter advocating a clinical unit structure modelled on that adopted at Johns Hopkins. While this led to Rockefeller Foundation support in the 1920s, it also exacerbated tensions within the medical and university communities.

One of the strengths of the book is the way in which it analyses these clashes. As the *Western Mail* observed in 1927, “Complication follows complication in the efforts to lift the Welsh National School of Medicine from the arena of controversy.” As happened elsewhere, there were bitter disputes over the threat to private practice posed by part-time academic appointments, and the struggle for clinical control between professors and hospital clinicians. The 1920s were also marked by constitutional wrangles between the school and local hospital managers. A further complication came with the territorial disputes between Cardiff and North Wales, and the debates as to what constituted a national school. Roberts tackles all of these issues with clarity and balance.

At the same time, he never loses sight of the individuals for whom the school was established. Chapter 9 examines the family, educational and social backgrounds of the students and outlines the subsequent careers of sixty of the sixty-four who graduated between 1916 and 1931. One of the most interesting statistics is the fact that only 3 per cent of the students were domiciled in North Wales; rather than journey to Cardiff, it seems that they preferred to study in Liverpool.

Alun Roberts has written an unashamedly old-fashioned narrative history, a “biography of