

Immunology: A Short Course (2nd Edition); By E. Benjamini and S. Leskowitz; Wiley-Liss; New York, 1991; xxvi + 459 pages; \$ 29.95 (paperback)

This book provides an excellent starting point for those wishing to acquire a clear and firm foundation in the basic features of the genetics, structural, functional and cellular aspects, of immunology. A wide variety of topics are covered within the 21 chapters: chapters 1 to 7 provide an introduction to antibody diversity, structure, and biological function; chapters 8 to 11 cover complement, ontogeny, triggering of the immune response and the role of the MHC in the immune response; clinical aspects are addressed in chapters 12 to 21 and include the discussion of immune disorders (with special reference to AIDS), hypersensitivity reactions, control of the immune response, autoimmunity, transfusion and transplantation, tumour immunology and immunotherapy. My own research interests lie in the area of the complement system and I considered that even though the chapter on this topic was quite short (~15 pages) the authors had successfully highlighted the major points, which one would hope would be readily grasped by students new to this complex cascade system, my only quibble being the lack of mention of the important array of cell-surface regulatory molecules concerned with control of the system.

Each chapter adopts the same format of 15 to 30 pages of text, a page of up-to-date review-type references (up to 1989, or 1990 in some cases) followed by a useful section of revision questions (plus answers). The figures, photographs and tables are clear and uncluttered and make effective use of colour where necessary. The Glossary provides an excellent collection of definitions for key words used in immunology, and those new to the topic should find this section very useful.

The authors quote the dictum 'less is more' as part of their overall aim in producing a book providing the 'bare essentials of immunology in a palatable form'. They have achieved this aim and the dictum is clearly not applicable to the price which seems reasonable for a paperback of manageable size (19 x 23 cm). In summary, an excellent introductory text especially for medical students having an interest in hypersensitivity reactions, tumor immunology/immunotherapy and the generation of vaccines.

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(Laboratory Techniques in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Vol. 6, part II) An Introduction to Radioimmunoassay and Related Techniques (4th Edition); By T. Chard; Elsevier Science Publishers; Amsterdam, 1990; xvi + 290 pages; Dfl 89.00 (paperback)

This book represents the third revision of a popular text on radioimmunoassays and related techniques first published in 1978. During the mid-1980's the second edition was much in demand because it provided an excellent description of the basic concepts of immunoassays, but by the time I reviewed its second reprinting (FEBS Lett. 224 (1987) 233) this version had become dated through advances in alternatives to radioimmunoassays and the availability of monoclonal antibodies. Thus, the third edition in 1987 attempted to make amends through expanding the coverage of non-isotopically based assays and the production of monoclonal antibodies, and describing labelled antibody assays. As I find the current fourth edition to be an update of the third, this review is as much of the one as it is of the other.

The new information gathered between 1987 and 1990 largely deals with non-isotopically based assays yet the book still gives the impression of being orientated towards radioimmunoassays. As I reported in 1987, there is sufficient information in these editions to establish a radioimmunoassay. In contrast, it would not be possible to perform, say, the increasingly popular ELISA technique since the descriptions given in the third and fourth editions deal with little other than the coating of microtitre plates with antigen. Perhaps the reason for this continued bias is that at

the time of the publication of the third edition in 1987 radioimmunoassays probably still held sway over their competitors. In the current edition the author does anticipate the reversal of this situation by the early 1990's, but curiously in the main text he retains his statement on their numerical supremacy from the previous edition. A second inadequacy also retained from the third edition is the description that the rules governing quantitative antibody labelled assays 'are somewhat different' from those of other ligand binding assays 'mainly' because the standard curves are linear; this approach leaves the reader in mid-air and additional information should have been provided.

Such criticisms do not detract from the fact that the core of the original book is still intact so that Prof. Chard's comprehensive treatment of the numerous facets of immunoassays remains a highly recommended reference work. It is simply a pity that for today the immunoassays chosen for detailed description do not extend beyond radio- and fluoroimmunoassays. Hence Prof. Chard's revisions of his book have to be seen in the light of competing publications on the expanding range of immunoassays, e.g. 'Principles and Practice of Immunoassay', edited by Price and Newman (Macmillan, 1991).

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