Book Review

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The stated aim of this book is to provide a succinct descriptive and illustrated account of the pathological changes seen in the skin, nerves and other organs in leprosy. It also gives brief illustrated descriptions of the main differential diagnoses that should be considered. The book is intended to be of benefit to dermatologists and pathologists as an aid to the recognition and differentiation of leprosy from other diseases that mimic leprosy clinically.

There is a brief introduction summarizing the principal microbiological, epidemiological and clinical features of *Mycobacterium leprae*, after which the book is divided into 10 chapters. The first chapter gives an overview of how leprosy can be classified and the subsequent chapters consider the essential clinical and histopathological features of each individual stage of the lepromatous process, following the Ridley–Joplin classification system. Separate chapters deal with indeterminate leprosy, tuberculoid and borderline leprosy, lepromatous leprosy, lepromatous neuritis, and systemic involvement in leprosy. Each of these is followed by a chapter, which describes the principal differential diagnoses that should be considered at each stage of the disease process. There is a brief description of the lesions seen clinically, an outline of the main features seen on microscopy, and guidelines on how to differentiate between leprosy and its mimics.

Finally, there are appendices covering key points. The first appendix describes how to take a skin and nerve biopsy, which part of the lesion should be sampled, how to fix the biopsy and the recipe for the relevant fixatives. The second appendix deals with the staining method for *Mycobacterium leprae* in tissue sections and includes details on how to make up the individual reagents. The third appendix concludes with a section on the technique involved in slit skin smears.

In general, the authors’ histological descriptions are concise and adequately cover the pattern of inflammation, the cells/structures involved in the inflammatory process, and a description of the number and site of any acid fast bacilli which may be present. Useful adjunctive techniques that can assist in reaching a diagnosis are also included.

Both the clinical and histological photographs are large, plentiful, in colour and thoughtfully captioned, illustrating each point beautifully. The text is clear and succinct, with a box summarizing the most important facts at the end of each chapter.

Overall, this book is comprehensive in its description of the differential diagnosis of leprosy and thus fulfills the aim set out by its title. The book emphasizes the importance of correlating the biopsy findings with the clinical picture and is an excellent basic guide for those histopathologists and clinicians who, in attempting to make a definitive diagnosis of leprosy, need to be aware of its important mimics.

This book is, however, clearly directed at clinicians and histopathologists with limited experience in the diagnosis of leprosy, rather than at experienced leprologists. The book does not cover the histological features in as much depth as other texts. It is therefore lacking the finer histopathological points that are necessary to enable one to come to an accurate diagnosis of the disease stage. Likewise,
this book is not very useful in helping to tease out more difficult borderline cases or reversal reactions.

As the number of leprosy patients worldwide reduces and as the disease is no longer limited to developing countries as a result of increasing ease of travel, this book is likely to prove useful to pathologists and dermatologists alike, especially those who may encounter leprosy infrequently and who may be unfamiliar with the differential diagnosis of this disease. This book can then be used as an adjunct to other more detailed clinical and/or pathological texts.

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