

BOOK REVIEWS

Handbook of Plant Virus Infections; Comparative Diagnosis

E. Kurstak (editor)

Elsevier/North-Holland Biomedical Press, Amsterdam–New York–Oxford, 1981

944 pp. including figures and tables; clothbound. Price: U.S. \$192.75

In this handbook all groups of plant viruses, as defined by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses, are treated extensively. Ample attention is paid to the physicochemical properties of the viruses, as well as to their biological characteristics and, wherever possible, to their control. Part I deals with plant virus taxonomy, its history and current status. Part II is dedicated to the non-enveloped RNA plant viruses. This part consists of 14 chapters, each dealing with the respective taxonomically accepted groups of viruses with isometric or bacilliform particles. Enveloped RNA plant viruses are the subject of Part III. The seven chapters of Part IV deal with elongated RNA plant viruses. Part V comprises two chapters on DNA plant viruses. In Part VI, extensive information is given on viroids. Each of the chapters is written by different authors who are experts in their respective fields. They provide the reader with a wealth of useful information which could not be drawn from already existing books on plant viruses. If the chapters had appeared as review articles, they would have been very valuable contributions too. Once they have been bundled in a book, one would have expected from the editor a certain uniformity in presentation. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Therefore, it is not easy for the reader to compare the characteristics of the viruses or virus groups. For instance, in the Rhabdovirus group, biology, pathology and epidemiology are clubbed together in subchapter III with cytopathology given separately in subchapter V, whereas in the Potyvirus group subchapter II deals with host range, symptoms and cytopathic effects, and the subchapter III with epidemiology and ecology. In some of the chapters purification of the viruses is given, whereas this important information is lacking in others. The book would have gained in value if the editor had given uniform and detailed directives to all authors with respect to the contents and the titles of the respective subchapters, as has been done in case of the 'Descriptions of Plant Viruses', a series of CMI/AAB publications edited by B.D. Harrison and A.F. Murant.

In his preface the editor is using the word 'comparative' a number of times, and even the subtitle on the cover of the book is 'comparative diagnosis'. Besides the fact that one may argue whether this subtitle covers the contents of the book, the word comparative in itself is superfluous, as diagnosis already implies that a comparison is being made between the unidentified disease and other known diseases. Similarly, when serology is

used in diagnosis there is no need to mention 'serological comparative diagnosis' as in serological tests the identity of the unidentified virus is invariably compared with that of known viruses.

Most of the illustrations in the book are carefully selected and are of good quality. However, the printing errors are too numerous, even for a handbook of 944 pages. The price of the book is not within the means of all those people for whom this handbook, according to the editor, has been written, viz. actively working virologists and phytopathologists both in the field and the laboratory and students in virology especially in developing countries.

J. Dijkstra

The Human Herpesviruses: An interdisciplinary perspective

A.J. Nahmias, W.R. Dowdle, R.F. Schinaz (editors)

Elsevier, New York, 1981, 721 pp.

Proceedings of the International Conference on Human Herpesviruses,
Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A., March 17–21, 1980

The *herpesvirus* family is the most intriguing in medical virology. Latency and recurrence are phenomena which challenge the adventurous virologist. The best candidates for human tumor viruses are to be found in this virus family, but their oncogenic action is still poorly understood. For the molecular biologically oriented virologists, the genomic complexity of this kind of virus is quite interesting. By the use of bacterial restriction enzymes, the various isolates can be easily distinguished and interesting detective stories can be produced in this way (Roizman). By use of this technique, it has become established that individuals carrying one variant of herpes simplex virus type 2 can be superinfected with another variant.

It was certainly a good idea to organize a meeting on the many aspects of human herpesviruses. Despite the very poor editorial organization, the proceedings of that conference will be a gem in a medical virologists' library. Objections are, among others, that there are several superficial papers such as that by Baringer, who in 1973 demonstrated the presence of herpes simplex virus type 1 in trigeminal ganglia, but who has not much to say in his paper included here. On the other hand, the book contains a 30-page highly technical paper by Niza Frenkel on the molecular biological characterization of defective viruses. That paper could have been considerably condensed. The summaries of 15 workshops are not of much value to the non-specialist reader. Also the addition of 200 short abstracts to the book does not contribute much to the readability. It was quite