

BOOK REVIEW

Susan Ballou,¹ M.S.

Review of: *Encyclopedia of Forensic Science*

REFERENCE: Bell S. *Encyclopedia of forensic science*. Facts on File, Inc., New York, New York, 2003, 376 pp.

The *Encyclopedia of Forensic Science* is a condensed version of facts and trivia that should be at the forensic examiner's fingertips when testifying in court. I thoroughly enjoyed the random insertion of case histories that pulls the reader out of the analytical depths and into reality. The case histories are peppered with speculation adding to the intrigue; photographs and diagrams are nicely inserted allowing visual explanation of a process or technique. Although if this document is targeted to the novice forensic science student as both the forward and preface allude to, then the text should have undergone a more thorough review.

When I dissected the document I found discrepancies and statement errors. For example, under the heading of "ABO blood group system," (on page 2) there is an erroneous description of the Lattes crust test methodology. However under "Lattes, Leone" (on page 199) the depiction is correct. On page 42 under "Body Fluids," there is the claim that saliva is identified by the presence of amylase. Yet, under Saliva, there appears the correct text that experienced serologists know to be true, "The most common PRESUMPTIVE TEST for saliva involves the detection of the enzyme amylase, . . .". A discrepancy in the use of the term "presumptive" appears under "Kastel Meyer color test" (page 193). The first sentence mentions "presumptive test used to identify" but then rectifies itself at the end of the paragraph by stating the presumptive test is not specific for blood.

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I also felt the text did an injustice to the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) as ASCLD strongly advocates the line of distinction between ASCLD and the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors /Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB). The short paragraph on ASCLD mingles the two. Independent explanation on ASCLD/LAB is finally found but it is embedded under quality assurance/quality control. Following this same thread, the heading "certification" co-mingles certification and accreditation, two distinct processes. This mis-representation is reiterated further by the author stating "see certification" after the term "accreditation".

In addition to the discrepancies I found the format not to be user friendly. The format inflicts annoyances to the harried examiner in subtle ways such as when anachronisms are freely used without ready explanation. The reader must flip to an appendix to determine what the anachronism is referring to. Not all listed terms are followed by an explanation or definition. In these cases, the reader is instructed to "see" another term to find the applicable information. The result is an exercise in patience as extraneous material must be waded through until locating the sought after term.

In light of my concerns, I commend the author for taking on such an arduous task. The text is filled with wonderful bits of information. However, my apprehension lies with the prospect of an inexperienced reader taking as fact the skewed information provided. In light of this, there are other resources that provide a much better offering of factual information for the aspiring forensic scientist. This resource should be saved for those individuals with some experience under their belt.