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Fungal Pathogenesis: Principles and Clinical Applications R. Calderone and R.L. Cihlar; Marcel Dekker, New York, Basel, 2002, 762 pp., $195, ISBN 0-8247-0568-8

Fungal pathogenesis is a collection of (32) chapters on various aspects of biology, pathology, prophylaxis and diagnosis of human diseases caused by fungi. The emphasis, as would be expected by a collection in the "Mycology Series" published by Marcel Dekker Inc, is on fungi. The first point I noted was the attempt at near-universal coverage of the subject matter and the result is a comprehensive, encyclopaedic, treatise with contributions from some of the best known laboratories world-wide. The sheer volume of cited works run into thousands and is reasonably up-to-date. The information in the individual chapters varies somewhat in depth, but in most cases can cater for an advanced readership. The multi-authored approach guarantees that each chapter can be read individually and makes this rather massive tome quite accessible, even to an outsider. One feature that struck me as particularly positive is the combination, in one place, of the fundamental biology of fungal pathogens with more applied and clinical aspects.

The usual gripe about multi-authored texts applies here too: there is a heterogeneity in style and depth, although we have probably become accustomed to this and do not mind it too much. Although I am sure specialists will find individual bones to pick with the authors of the chapters, one fault that is very striking and consistently bad is the very poor quality of the illustrations. In part this is a responsibility of the authors (some figures are redundant and a waste of space); but most of the blame probably lies with the publishers: too many of the images, which might have been interesting and illustrative, are rendered completely useless by the abysmal quality of the reproductions. This is particularly the case with micrographs and figures of biological samples. In addition to this, two general areas are not really covered adequately: fungal genomics and diseases caused by fungi on organisms other than humans. As far as genomics is concerned, there are a number of filamentous fungi whose genomes have been or are being sequenced and this includes some pathogens too (and comparative genomics is likely to be a particularly fruitful avenue of research). The absence of any section devoted to non-human animal (e.g. insect) and plant pathogens is a serious lacuna: an awareness of the concepts elaborated and data uncovered in different but related fields is likely to reveal some interesting, and perhaps helpful, parallels.

In essence: a useful reference volume for fungal biologists and human pathologists with an interest in diseases caused by fungi.

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