

ADVANCES IN  
BIOLOGY OF SKIN

Vol. IV

*Edited by*

WILLIAM MONTAGNA

RICHARD A. ELLIS

*and*

ALENE F. SILVER

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BIOLOGY OF SKIN

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The Sebaceous Glands

*Proceedings of the Brown University Symposium  
on the Biology of Skin, 1962*

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BIOLOGY OF SKIN  
Vol. IV*

THE SEBACEOUS GLANDS

## INTRODUCTION

MOST of the material contained in this book was presented in a symposium held at Brown University on 27 and 28 January 1962. The contributions by Miles (Chapter IV) and Hyman and Guiducci (Chapter V), though not presented in the symposium, are nonetheless essential for the continuity of the subject matter. The plan of this book is similar to that of the previous volumes. It begins with a consideration of the developmental sequences of sebaceous glands in man; progresses to structural and functional attributes, and then devotes considerable space to the newer findings in the analysis of skin surface lipids and their synthesis. A great many half-truths have been published on the control of sebaceous glands by hormones, and it is gratifying to be able at last to sift out truth from fiction. The last two chapters of the book, by Ebling (Chapter XIII), and Strauss and Pochi (Chapter XIV), give us, for the first time, a completely up-to-date analysis of our knowledge of the hormonal control of sebaceous glands in experimental animals and in man.

Many of the observations presented here have not been published before. For the sake of orientation, balance and completeness, however, much material, even when well known, has had to be included. The succinct summary by Ellis and Henrikson (Chapter VI) on the ultrastructure of the sebaceous glands of man is completely new, whereas the general review of the structure (Chapters II and III) contains mostly older material.

For those who must find significance in organ systems, whether this is apparent or not, the book may seem somewhat disappointing. Surely, sebum must have a function, perhaps one that is even indispensable to the well-being of the organism. There are broad hints of its function in almost every chapter of this book. It has been suggested that sebum acts as an emulsifier, emolient, lubricant, and as a protective substance against the growth of microorganisms. Kligman (Chapter VII), however, dismisses sebum as a relatively inconsequential substance, and perhaps he is right. Who knows, however, if sebum may not have some other, more important functions? Thus, we must hold in abeyance our verdict as to the ultimate value of sebum to the total organism.

Enormous changes take place in sebaceous glands from their inception in the fetus to the early postnatal periods, late childhood, prepuberal, and postpuberal; the long, normal adult period, the declining sexual years, climacterium and senescence. No one doubts that changes must characterize

each of these epochs, but neither morphological, physical, nor chemical data are available.

The omission of a discussion of *acne* is deliberate. The literature that pertains to the management of this widespread contributor to man's afflictions is vast and largely trivial. It is discouraging to contemplate that even the most advanced progress made on the biology of sebaceous glands makes little direct contribution to our understanding of *acne*. This is not to say that such practical knowledge will not spring from this and other work, but for the present we are at a loss. Thus, we have not ignored the problems of *acne*; we have omitted them in order not to confuse the major aims of this volume.

To prove that much of this work is still in progress, we have had to revise some manuscripts several times, as their authors discovered new things. We predict that during the brief time that it takes to publish the book there will be a substantial amount of additional information. This, however, reflects the vigor with which some of these problems are being investigated.

As do the previous volumes in this series, this book probably asks more questions than it answers. Gaps in details, however, are being filled rapidly and we anticipate that soon the biology of the sebaceous glands of man will be understood and that the clinical problems that result from their dysfunction may become controllable.

The symposium, "Sebaceous Glands", was aided by financial contributions from: Burroughs-Wellcome & Co., Inc.; Chesebrough-Pond's, Inc.; Colgate-Palmolive Company; Desitin Chemical Company; Dome Chemicals, Inc.; E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co.; The Gillette Co.; Johnson & Johnson; Lever Brothers Company; Procter & Gamble Co.; Revlon, Inc.; Schering Foundation; The Squibb Institute for Medical Research; The Upjohn Company; Warner-Lambert Research Institute; and Westwood Pharmaceuticals. We thank all of the companies for their support of this and other symposia. Our students at Brown University have been very helpful, and Mrs. Elaine T. Grenier has contributed much energy, imagination, and skill to the organization of the symposium and to the preparation of the manuscripts.

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# CONTENTS

*Page*

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

x

INTRODUCTION

xi

## CHAPTER I

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF SEBACEOUS GLANDS IN MAN

*Ferdinando Serri and William M. Huber*

I. Introduction	1
II. Development of the Epidermis	1
III. Development of the Hair Follicle	3
IV. Development of the Sebaceous Glands	7
V. Enzymes of the Fetal Sebaceous Glands	13
VI. Summary and Conclusions	17
VII. References	18

## CHAPTER II

### THE SEBACEOUS GLANDS IN MAN

*William Montagna*

I. Introduction	19
II. The Microscopic Anatomy of Sebaceous Cells	22
III. Histochemistry	23
IV. Mechanism of Growth	29
V. References	30

## CHAPTER III

### COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF SEBACEOUS GLANDS

*William Montagna*

I. Introduction	32
II. Histochemistry	38
III. The Problems of Growth and Differentiation	42
IV. References	45

## CHAPTER IV

### SEBACEOUS GLANDS IN ORAL AND LIP MUCOSA

*A. E. W. Miles*

I. Introduction	46
II. Sex Prevalence	50
III. Familial Prevalence	52
IV. Morphology and Histology	52
V. Development	58
VI. Properties and Composition of Buccal Sebum	61
VII. Function	66
VIII. Comparative Anatomy	66
IX. Increase with Advancing Age	68
X. References	76

## CHAPTER V

## ECTOPIC SEBACEOUS GLANDS

*Arthur B. Hyman and Alvo A. Guiducci*

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	78
II. Female Genitalia	78
III. Male Genitalia	80
IV. The Nipples and Areolae	80
V. Ocular Structures	81
VI. The Palms and Soles	82
VII. The Parotid Glands	84
VIII. The Tongue	85
IX. Miscellaneous Sites	89
X. General Comment	89
XI. Summary and Conclusions	90
XII. References	91

## CHAPTER VI

## THE ULTRASTRUCTURE OF THE SEBACEOUS GLANDS OF MAN

*Richard A. Ellis and Ray C. Henrikson*

I. Introduction	94
II. Materials and Methods	94
III. Observations	95
A. The peripheral undifferentiated sebaceous cells	97
B. The partially differentiated cells	100
C. The fully differentiated cells	106
IV. Conclusions	108
V. References	109

## CHAPTER VII

## THE USES OF SEBUM?

*Albert M. Kligman*

I. Introduction	110
II. Phylogenetic Considerations	110
III. The Lipid Film	111
IV. Comparative Physiology	112
V. Vitamin D	113
VI. Surface Lipids as Adjuncts to the Barrier Function of Skin	113
VII. Sebum as an Emulsifier: Its Role in Moisture Regulation	115
A. <i>In Vitro</i> Studies	116
B. <i>In Vivo</i> Studies	117
C. Sebum as an Emulsifier	118
VIII. The Antifungal Properties of Sebum	118
IX. Antibacterial Effect of Sebum	120
X. Harmful Effect of Sebum	123
XI. Nice Properties of Sebum	123
XII. Summary	123
XIII. References	123

## CHAPTER VIII

THE EFFECT OF AGE AND SEX ON THE METABOLISM OF THE  
PREPUTIAL GLAND OF THE RAT*Ruth K. Freinkel.**Page*

I. Introduction	125
II. Observations	126
A. Effects of Age and Sex on the Preputial Gland	126
1. Weight and morphology	126
2. Metabolic activity	129
3. Oxygen consumption	129
4. Lipogenesis	129
III. Discussion	130
IV. Summary and Conclusions	133
V. References	133

## CHAPTER IX

## PROBLEMS IN THE ANALYSIS OF SEBUM

*Victor R. Wheatley*

I. Introduction	135
II. Collection of Sebum	135
III. Physical and Chemical Constants	137
A. Melting point	137
B. Specific gravity	137
C. Viscosity	137
D. Surface tension	137
E. Acid number or neutralization equivalent	137
F. Iodine number	137
G. Saponification number	137
H. Acetyl number	137
I. Total nitrogen	137
J. Lipid phosphorus	137
IV. Single Components	137
A. Glycerol	137
B. Sterols and steroids	138
C. Squalene	138
V. Fraction Methods	139
A. Whole sebum	139
B. Non-saponifiable material	140
C. Urea adduct formation	140
VI. Miscellaneous Physical Methods	140
A. Fractional distillation	140
B. Ultraviolet and infrared spectrometry	141
C. Mass spectrometry	141
D. Counter-current distribution	141
VII. Applications of Gas Chromatography	141
A. Fatty acids	141
B. Wax alcohols	142
C. Sterols	142
D. Waxes	142
E. Non-saponifiable material and whole sebum	143
VIII. Conclusions	144
IX. References	145

## CHAPTER X

STUDIES ON THE REGULATION OF CHOLESTEROL SYNTHESIS IN  
THE SKIN AND PREPUTIAL GLAND OF THE RAT*Jean D. Wilson*

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	148
II. Methods	151
III. Results	153
A. Demonstration of two pathways in skin	153
1. The Bloch Pathway	153
2. The Kandutsch-Russell Pathway	154
B. Effects of sex hormones on sterol synthesis	156
C. Effect of essential fatty acid deficiency on sebaceous gland sterols	161
IV. Discussion	164
V. Conclusions	165
VI. References	165

## CHAPTER XI

HUMAN SKIN SURFACE LIPIDS—ORIGIN, COMPOSITION AND  
POSSIBLE FUNCTION*Nicholas Nicolaides*

I. Introduction	167
II. Sources of Human Skin Surface Lipids	167
III. Chemical Composition of Human Surface Fat	168
A. The sample	168
B. The analytical scheme	169
1. Method I	170
2. Method II	170
C. The composition	171
IV. The Free Fatty Acids and Glycerides of Human Skin Surface Fat	171
V. The Wax Esters and Wax Alcohols of Human Skin Surface Fat	175
A. The wax alcohols	175
B. The wax esters	179
VI. Squalene, Sterol Esters and Free Sterols in Human Skin Surface Fat	182
VII. Paraffin Hydrocarbons	184
VIII. Summary	184
A. Biogenesis of sebum and its contribution to human skin surface fat	185
B. Epidermal lipids and their contribution to human skin surface fat	186
IX. References	186

## CHAPTER XII

THE EFFECTS OF PROGESTERONE AND A PITUITARY PREPARATION  
WITH SEBOTROPIC ACTIVITY ON SEBACEOUS GLANDS*Allan L. Lorincz*

CHAPTER XIII  
HORMONAL CONTROL OF SEBACEOUS GLANDS IN  
EXPERIMENTAL ANIMALS

*F. John Ebling*

*Page*

I. Introduction	200
II. Methods	202
A. Preparation of whole mounts and sections	202
B. Estimation of alveolar volume	202
C. Estimation of mean alveolar number	203
D. Cell number and cell volume	203
E. Cell proliferation and turnover time	204
III. Action of Androgens	205
IV. Action of Estrogens	206
A. Time of response in immature female rats	206
B. Effect of estradiol on mitosis in immature rats	208
C. Changes during the estrous cycle	208
D. Effect of estradiol in hypophysectomized and adrenalectomized rats	210
E. Concomitant implantation of estradiol and testosterone	211
V. Progestogens	212
A. Conflicting results with progesterone	212
B. Progesterone in spayed and intact adult rats	213
C. Progesterone in intact immature rats treated with estradiol	214
D. Progesterone in spayed immature rats	214
E. Large doses of progesterone	214
VI. Synthetic Steroids	215
VII. Discussion	216
VIII. References	218

CHAPTER XIV

THE HORMONAL CONTROL OF HUMAN SEBACEOUS GLANDS

*John S. Strauss and Peter E. Pochi*

I. Introduction	220
II. Structure and Development of the Sebaceous Glands of the Face	221
III. Methods of Investigating the Effects of Hormones on Sebaceous Glands	223
A. Biopsy	223
B. Gravimetric assay of sebum production	224
IV. The Role of Androgens in the Development of the Sebaceous Glands	225
A. The responses in sexes and different age groups	227
B. The rate of response of the sebaceous glands to methyl testosterone	229
C. The sensitivity of the sebaceous glands to methyl testosterone	229
D. The site of action of testosterone	232
V. The Effect of Adrenal Hormones on the Human Sebaceous Glands	232
VI. The Effect of Progesterone on the Sebaceous Glands	234
VII. The Effects of Estrogen on the Sebaceous Glands	238
A. Systemic administration of estrogens	238
B. Local application of estrogens	241
VIII. The Effect of Simultaneous Methyl Testosterone and Ethynyl Estradiol Administration	243
IX. Effect of Gonadotropins on the Sebaceous Glands	247
X. Effect of Sebotropin	247
XI. Discussion and Conclusions	247
XII. References	252

# CHAPTER I

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF SEBACEOUS GLANDS IN MAN

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### I. INTRODUCTION

SINCE the differentiation of sebaceous glands is intimately related to the differentiation of hair follicles and epidermis, the development of these structures will be briefly described.

Horstmann (1957), Pinkus (1958), and Montagna (1962) have already given satisfactory and adequate accounts of the embryology and the anatomy of the hair follicle and the sebaceous gland. Therefore, these details and others found elsewhere will not be repeated (Serri *et al.*, 1961, 1962; Serri, 1962). The descriptions in this paper are based on skin from a large number of fetuses of all ages from various sites of the body. These specimens were treated with well-established histochemical methods as well as with the stains routinely used in our laboratory.

### II. DEVELOPMENT OF THE EPIDERMIS

On about the third week of fetal life the epidermis consists of a single layer of undifferentiated cells which are filled with glycogen (Fig. 1). On the fourth week the epidermis is composed of an outer layer of cells, the *periderm* or *epitrichial layer*, and a basal layer or *stratum germinativum*. All cutaneous structures subsequently develop from the stratum germinativum. At the beginning of the tenth to twelfth week of fetal life the basal layer proliferates a *stratum intermedium* (Fig. 2). At approximately the thirteenth to sixteenth week the stratum intermedium becomes stratified and forms a spinous layer. The cells of the outer layer, the *periderm*, which also become stratified, are often globular in shape, later becoming flattened, polygonal and polymorphic with oval nuclei and vacuoles in the cytoplasm. The vernix caseosa which appears on the skin surface toward the fourth to fifth month is composed

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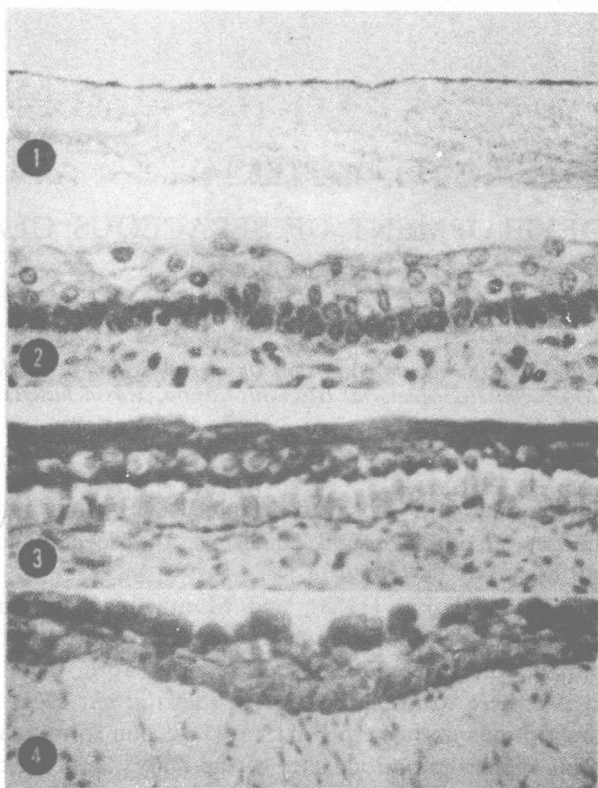


FIG. 1

Skin of the thorax in a 4-week-old fetus. The periderm alone is well visualized. In occasional areas the germinative layer appears to be developing. The presence of glycogen is illustrated throughout the epidermis. (Periodic acid Schiff.  $\times 100$ .)

FIG. 2

Skin of the hand in an 11-week-old fetus. The epidermis is made up of basal cells, cuboidal in shape, and of a periderm 2 to 3 layers thick. Cells of the stratum intermedium are appearing above the basal layer. (Toluidin blue.  $\times 800$ .)

FIG. 3

Skin of the finger in a 16-week-old fetus. The epidermis now consists of three layers. The basal cell layer in contrast to the other layers is almost entirely free of glycogen. The mucopolysaccharides of the basement membrane are well visualized. (Periodic acid Schiff.  $\times 100$ .)

FIG. 4

Skin of the hand in an 11-week-old fetus. Illustrated are the globular cells of the outer periderm and the earliest stages in the formation of a hair follicle. The cells of the basal layer are columnar, deeply staining, the orientation is downward, and there is beginning an aggregation of cells of the mesenchyme at this site. Glycogen is still present in basal cells. (Periodic acid Schiff.  $\times 440$ .)

of the residue of these periderm cells (which later will be replaced by the cells of the horny layer), shed lanugo hairs, sebum, formed in the newly differentiated sebaceous glands, and probably other debris.

The cells of the stratum intermedium, rich in glycogen, are oval and smaller than the mother cells of the germinative layer. When they begin to show stainable cytoplasmic fibrils, they are referred to as cells of the stratum spinosum.

The cells of the germinative layer in the early stages are cuboidal, large, compactly arranged and have a distinct nucleus (Fig. 2). Soon they become cylindrical and glycogen-free. The nucleus, usually located in the distal portion of the cell, stains intensely. The basal membrane is clearly evident (Fig. 3).

The development of the epidermis and that of its appendages is dyschronous in the various surfaces of the body. Differentiation takes place from the ninth to tenth week, first in the eyebrows, lips, chin and nose where the earliest hair germs appear. The process is slower on the back, abdomen, and limbs.

### III. DEVELOPMENT OF THE HAIR FOLLICLE

The earliest development of hair follicles occurs as early as 9 weeks and is manifested as a palisade of cells at various points in the basal layer. These cell aggregates are always accompanied by the alignment and concentration of the subjacent mesenchymal cells (Fig. 4), which are very rich in alkaline phosphatase (Fig. 5). Later, an accumulation of deeply basophilic nuclei in the basal layer forms a slight projection of the epidermis into the dermis (Fig. 6). This swelling is free of glycogen and is separated from the dermis by a distinct basal membrane which is PAS positive and diastase resistant. The number of mesenchymal cells and fibroblasts beneath the hair germ increases, forming the anlage of the hair papilla; this will subsequently increase in size and in its content of alkaline phosphatase (Figs. 7, 8). Meanwhile, the hair germ becomes larger by a proliferation of its own cells and no longer at the expense of the basal cells of the epidermis (Figs. 9, 10). The elongation of the presumptive follicle into the mesenchyme takes an oblique direction, its movement apparently directed by the cluster of mesenchymal cells which accumulate beneath it and around it (Fig. 11). The outermost cells of this peg are columnar and compact with a radial arrangement, the inner cells tend to be arranged longitudinally and are less regularly aligned. As the hair peg develops further, its advancing extremity becomes bulbous and gradually grows around and envelops the mass of mesodermal cells at its base establishing a true papilla (Fig. 12). When the hair follicle has attained the bulbous "hair peg" stage, two epithelial swellings of columnar cells appear on the posterior wall. The lower hemispherical, larger one, rich in glycogen, is the bulge to which the arrector pilorum

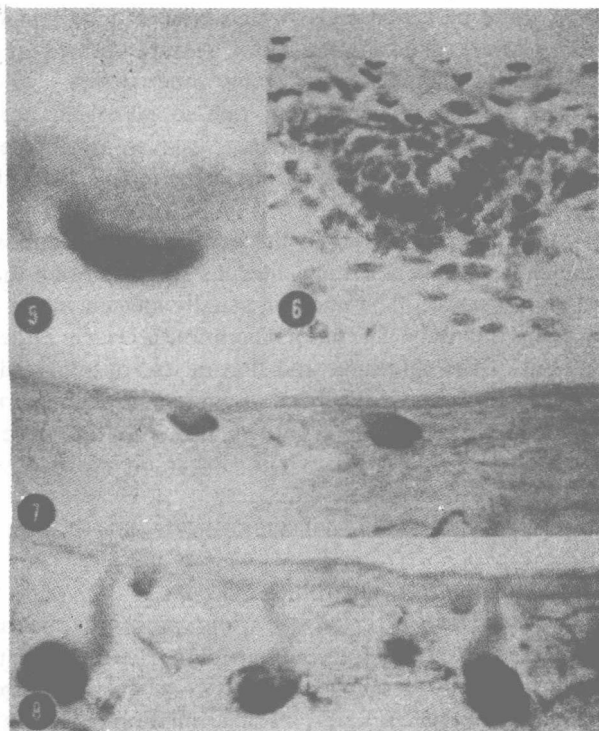


FIG. 5

Skin of the face in an 11-week-old fetus. Concentration of alkaline phosphatase in mesodermal cells beneath an early hair germ. (Alkaline phosphatase.  $\times 440$ .)

FIG. 6

Skin of the scalp in a 16-week-old fetus illustrating a further stage in the development of a hair germ. Note the aggregation of columnar hyperchromatic cells with downward orientation, and the crowding of cells in the dermis beneath the developing hair germ. (Toluidin blue.  $\times 800$ .)

FIG. 7

Skin of the back in a 13-week-old fetus. A concentration of alkaline phosphatase is noted in the anlage of the papilla of young developing hair germs which are remote from any demonstrable blood supply. (Alkaline phosphatase.  $\times 100$ .)

FIG. 8

Skin of the forehead in a 12-week-old fetus illustrating the heavy concentration of alkaline phosphatase in the papillae of the developing hair germs. (Alkaline phosphatase.  $\times 100$ .)

muscle will later become attached. During fetal life the bulge becomes even larger; at the end of fetal life, however, the bulge is very small. The upper swelling, usually smaller than the bulge, but at times more evident in the early stages of development (Figs. 13, 14), is the anlage of the sebaceous

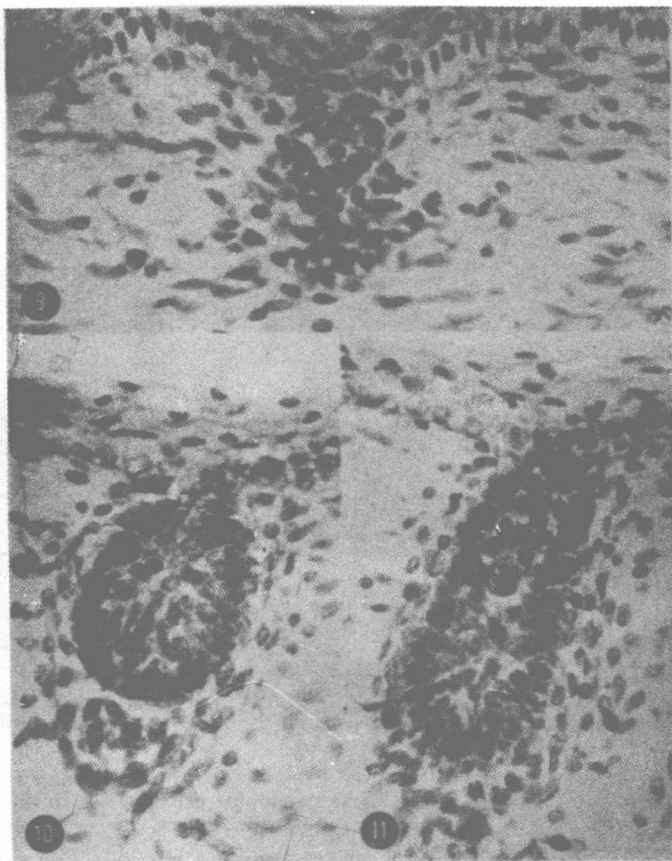


FIG. 9

Skin of the face in a 16-week-old fetus. The early development of a hair germ and the concentration of the surrounding mesenchymal cells is illustrated. (Toluidin blue.  $\times 800$ .)

FIG. 10

Skin of the scalp in a 16-week-old fetus, illustrating the further development of the hair germ. Note the beginning development of the papilla and the concentration of the surrounding mesenchymal cells. (Toluidin blue.  $\times 800$ .)

FIG. 11

Skin of the scalp in a 16-week-old fetus. Further extension downward into the dermis of the growing follicle. Note the upward growth of the inner cells of the peg into the epidermis. Mitoses are present. (Toluidin blue.  $\times 800$ .)