

HISTOPATHOLOGY
OF THE SKIN

THIRD EDITION

HISTOPATHOLOGY OF THE SKIN

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In Memory of My Father
DR. ALEXANDER LEVER
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My First Teacher in Dermatology

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Preface to the Third Edition

Numerous new observations have been made in the field of dermatopathology in the 7 years that have passed since the publication of the second edition of this book. This has necessitated a thorough rewriting. In the rewriting, histochemical findings have been given more space than previously because of their importance in understanding the histogenesis of many diseases.

The description of numerous diseases—for instance, of the deep fungal infections—has been rewritten almost completely because of important changes in the concept of their pathogenesis. Since publication of the last edition 10 new dermatologic entities with characteristic clinical and histologic manifestations have found general recognition and, consequently, have been included. They are subcorneal pustular dermatosis, alopecia mucinosa, elastosis perforans serpiginosa, lymphocytic infiltration of the skin, papulosis atrophicans maligna and the following types of tumors: warty dyskeratoma, keratoacanthoma, premalignant fibro-epithelial tumor, eccrine spiradenoma and eccrine poroma. Several previously known diseases have been incorporated because of their increased interest to dermatologists. Among them are erythema toxicum neonatorum, thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura, lethal mid-line granuloma, South American blastomycosis and erythremic myelosis.

The bibliography following each chapter has been brought up to date. Forty-seven photomicrographs have been added, and 5 of the old photomicrographs have been replaced by better ones.

I am most grateful to Mr. Richard W. St. Clair for having produced the photomicrographs with his usual great skill. I also wish to thank Mr. Brooks Stewart, Medical Editor of J. B. Lippincott Company, for his help and co-operation.

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Preface to the First Edition

This book is based on the courses of dermatopathology which I have been giving in recent years to graduate students of dermatology enrolled at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital. The book is written primarily for dermatologists; I hope, however, that it may be useful also to pathologists, since dermatopathology is given little consideration in most textbooks of pathology.

I have attempted to keep this book short. Emphasis has been placed on the essential histologic features. Minor details and rare aberrations from the typical histologic picture have been omitted. I have allotted more space to the cutaneous diseases in which histologic examination is of diagnostic value than to those in which the histologic picture is not characteristic. In spite of my striving for brevity I have discussed the histogenesis of several dermatoses, because knowledge of the histogenesis often is of great value for the understanding of the pathologic process.

Primarily for the benefit of pathologists who usually are not too familiar with dermatologic diseases, I have preceded the histologic discussion of each disease with a short description of the clinical features.

A fairly extensive bibliography has been supplied for readers who are interested in obtaining additional information. In the selection of articles for the bibliography preference has been given, whenever possible, to those written in English.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Tracy B. Mallory and Dr. Benjamin Castleman of the Pathology Laboratory at the Massachusetts General Hospital for the training in pathology they have given me. It has been invaluable to me. Their teaching is reflected in this book. Furthermore, I wish to thank Mr. Richard W. St. Clair, who with great skill and patience produced all the photomicrographs in this book.

WALTER F. LEVER

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
Technic for Biopsy	1
Limitations of Histologic Diagnosis	2
2. EMBRYOLOGY OF THE SKIN	3
The Epidermis	3
The Dermis	5
3. HISTOLOGY OF THE SKIN	8
The Epidermis	8
The Epidermal Appendages	16
The Dermis	23
4. LABORATORY METHODS	34
Fixation, Processing and Staining	34
Histochemical Staining	36
Polariscopic Examination	37
5. MORPHOLOGY OF THE MESODERMAL CELLS	39
Myeloid Group	39
Lymphoid Group	40
Reticulohistiocytic Group	41
Plasma Cells	43
Mast Cells	44
6. CONGENITAL DISEASES (GENODERMATOSES)	48
Ichthyosis	48
Ichthyosis Vulgaris	48
Ichthyosis Congenita	48
Congenital Ichthyosiform Erythroderma	49
Keratosis Palmaris et Plantaris	51
Keratosis Punctata Palmaris et Plantaris	51
Pachyonychia Congenita	51
Dyskeratosis Congenita	52
Porokeratosis Mibelli	52
Xeroderma Pigmentosum	53
Congenital Ectodermal Defect	54
Rothmund's Syndrome (Poikiloderma Congenitale), Werner's Syndrome (Progeria of Adults) and Progeria of Children	55
Epidermolysis Bullosa	56
Darier's Disease (Keratosis Follicularis)	58
Familial Benign Chronic Pemphigus	61
Acrokeratosis Verruciformis	63
Pseudoxanthoma Elasticum	64
Juvenile Elastoma (Nevus Elasticus)	66

6. CONGENITAL DISEASES (<i>Continued</i>)	
Cutis Hyperelastica (Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome)	67
Urticaria Pigmentosa	68
Incontinentia Pigmenti	71
7. NONINFECTIOUS VESICULAR AND BULLOUS DISEASES	79
Dermatitis—Eczema	81
Dermatopathic Lymphadenitis	90
Miliaria	91
Pompholyx (Dyshidrotic Eruption)	92
Erythema Toxicum Neonatorum	93
Pemphigus	94
Pemphigus Vulgaris	94
Pemphigus Vegetans	97
Pemphigus Foliaceus	99
Pemphigus Erythematosus	101
Bullous Pemphigoid	102
Benign Mucous-Membrane Pemphigoid (Cicatricial Pemphigoid, Pemphigus Conjunctivae)	105
Erythema Multiforme	105
Dermatitis Herpetiformis	106
Subcorneal Pustular Dermatitis	107
Burn	109
8. NONINFECTIOUS INFLAMMATORY DISEASES	114
Urticaria	114
Erythema Annulare Centrifugum	114
Prurigo Nodularis	115
Erythema Nodosum	116
Nodular Vasculitis	119
Psoriasis	119
Pustular Psoriasis, Acrodermatitis Continua, Impetigo Herpetiformis	122
Reiter's Disease	125
Pustulosis Palmaris et Plantaris (Pustular Bacterid)	127
Parapsoriasis	128
Pityriasis Varioliformis Acuta	129
Pityriasis Rosea	130
Lichen Planus	131
Lichen Nitidus	135
Lichen Striatus	136
Pityriasis Rubra Pilaris	137
Granuloma Faciale	137
Erythema Elevatum Diutinum	140
Granuloma Annulare	140
Subcutaneous Nodules of Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatoid Arthritis	143
Acrodermatitis Chronica Atrophicans	145

8. NONINFECTIOUS INFLAMMATORY DISEASES (<i>Continued</i>)	
Radiodermatitis	146
Polymorphous Light Eruption (Solar Dermatitis)	149
Acne Vulgaris	152
Acne Varioliformis (Acne Necrotica Miliaris)	152
Acne Rosacea	153
Fox-Fordyce Disease	154
Hidrocystoma	155
Alopecia Areata	156
Alopecia Cicatrisata (Pseudopelade Brocq)	156
Alopecia Mucinosata	157
Purpura	159
Noninflammatory Purpura	159
Inflammatory Purpura (Vasculitis)	160
Purpura Pigmentosa Chronica (Majocchi-Schamberg)	164
Relapsing Febrile Nodular Nonsuppurative Panniculitis (Weber-Christian Disease)	166
Sclerema Neonatorum	168
Hereditary Edema of the Legs (Milroy's Disease)	170
Chondrodermatitis Helicis and Anthelicis	170
Scabies	172
Arthropod Bites	174
Lichen Urticatus (Papular Urticaria)	174
Foreign-Body Granulomas	175
Lipid Granuloma (Paraffinoma)	176
Tattoo Granuloma	177
Silica Granuloma	177
Zirconium Granuloma	178
Beryllium Granuloma	179
Swimming-Pool Granuloma	180
9. ERUPTIONS DUE TO DRUGS	192
Fixed Drug Eruption	192
Quinacrine Hydrochloride (Atabrine) Dermatitis	192
Exfoliative Dermatitis Due to Drugs	193
Hydralazine (Apresoline) Eruption	193
Bromoderma	193
Iododerma	195
Argyria	195
Chrysiasis	197
Arsenical Keratosis and Carcinoma	197
10. DEGENERATIVE DISEASES	200
Senile Degeneration	200
Elastosis Perforans Serpiginosa (Miescher)	202
Hyperkeratosis Follicularis in Cutem Penetrans (Kyrle)	205
Lichen Sclerosus et Atrophicus	205
Kraurosis Vulvae	207

10. DEGENERATIVE DISEASES (<i>Continued</i>)	
Balanitis Xerotica Obliterans	209
Striae Distensae	210
Macular Atrophy (Anetoderma)	210
Atrophia Alba (Milian)	210
Atrophoderma Reticulatum (Folliculitis Ulerythematosae Reticulata)	211
Colloid Miliium (Colloid Degeneration of the Skin)	211
11. BACTERIAL DISEASES	217
Impetigo	217
Erysipelas	218
Folliculitis (Impetigo Bockhart, Furuncle, Folliculitis Barbae)	218
Folliculitis Keloidalis (Dermatitis Papillaris Capillitii)	219
Hidradenitis Suppurativa	219
Pyoderma Gangrenosum (Chronic Undermining Burrowing Ulcer)	220
Aphthosis	221
Meningococcemia (Waterhouse-Friderichsen Syndrome)	221
Tuberculosis	222
Primary Tuberculosis	224
Reinfection Tuberculosis	225
Sarcoidosis	234
Cheilitis Granulomatosa	240
Leprosy	241
Diphtheria of the Skin	245
Anthrax	246
Tularemia	246
Chancroid	247
Granuloma Inguinale	248
Rhinoscleroma	250
12. SPIROCHETAL DISEASES	257
Syphilis	257
Yaws (Frambesia Tropica)	265
Pinta	266
13. FUNGAL DISEASES	269
Dermatophytosis (Tinea)	269
Moniliasis	273
North American Blastomycosis (Gilchrist's Disease)	275
South American Blastomycosis (Paracoccidioidomycosis)	278
Chromoblastomycosis	279
Cryptococcosis (Torulosis)	281
Coccidioidomycosis (San Joaquin Valley Fever)	282
Actinomycosis, Nocardiosis	285
Sporotrichosis	287
Histoplasmosis	289

14. DISEASES CAUSED BY PROTOZOA	294
Cutaneous Leishmaniasis	294
Mucocutaneous Leishmaniasis	296
15. DISEASES CAUSED BY VIRUSES	298
Variola, Varicella, Herpes Zoster, Herpes Simplex	298
Eczema Vaccinatum and Eczema Herpeticum (Kaposi's Vari- celliform Eruption)	304
Molluscum Contagiosum	305
Verruca	308
Verruca Vulgaris	308
Verruca Plana	311
Verruca Plantaris	312
Condyloma Acuminatum	312
Lymphogranuloma Venereum (Lymphogranuloma Inguinale, Lymphopathia Venerea)	314
Milkers' Nodules	315
Ecthyma Contagiosum (Orf)	316
16. METABOLIC DISEASES	320
Lipoidoses	320
Systemic Lipoidoses with Increased Serum Lipids	320
Systemic Lipoidoses with Normal Serum Lipids	326
Purely Cutaneous Lipoidoses with Normal Blood Lipids	336
Amyloidosis	343
Primary Systemic Amyloidosis	344
Lichen Amyloidosis	347
Localized Nodular Amyloidosis	347
Calcinosis Cutis	348
Metastatic Calcification	348
Dystrophic Calcification	349
Gout	350
Porphyria	351
Myxedema	352
Generalized Myxedema	353
Circumscribed Myxedema	353
Lichen Myxedematosus	354
Scleredema Adultorum (Buschke)	355
Addison's Disease	356
Acanthosis Nigricans	357
Riehl's Melanosis, Melanodermatitis Toxica	358
Vitiligo	360
Hemochromatosis (Bronze Diabetes)	360
Ochronosis	361
Vitamin A Deficiency (Phrynoderma)	362
Pellagra	362
Vitamin C Deficiency (Scurvy)	363

17. SYSTEMIC DISEASES OF UNKNOWN CAUSE	372
Lupus Erythematosus	372
Chronic Discoid Lupus Erythematosus	373
Subacute Disseminated Lupus Erythematosus	376
Acute Systemic Lupus Erythematosus	377
Lupus Erythematosus Profundus	383
Lymphocytic Infiltration of the Skin (Jessner)	384
Dermatomyositis	385
Poikiloderma Atrophicans Vasculare	388
Scleroderma	390
Circumscribed Scleroderma (Morphea)	390
Systemic Scleroderma	392
Periarteritis Nodosa	394
Wegener's Respiratory Granulomatosis	397
Lethal Mid-line Granuloma of the Face	398
Malignant Atrophic Papulosis (Degos)	399
18. EPIDERMAL TUMORS	406
Histogenesis and Classification of Epidermal Tumors	406
1. Tumors of the Surface Epidermis	410
Nevus Verrucosus	410
Seborrheic Keratosis (Verruca Senilis, Basal Cell Papiloma)	412
Epidermal Cyst, Sebaceous Cyst, Miliun, Dermoid Cyst	415
Keratosis Senilis	419
Leukoplakia	423
Squamous Cell Carcinoma (Epidermoid Carcinoma)	425
Keratoacanthoma	433
Bowen's Disease	436
Erythroplasia of Queyrat	439
Paget's Disease	439
2. Tumors of the Epidermal Appendages	444
Nevus Sebaceus (Jadassohn)	444
Adenoma Sebaceum (Pringle) (Tuberous Sclerosis)	446
Senile Sebaceous Nevus (Senile Sebaceous Hyperplasia)	447
Fordyce's Disease	448
Apocrine-Gland Nevus	448
Hair Nevus	449
Sebaceous Adenoma	449
Syringocystadenoma Papilliferum (Nevus Syringocystadenomatosus Papilliferus)	450
Hidradenoma Papilliferum	454
Folliculoma (Hair-Follicle Tumor)	456

18. EPIDERMAL TUMORS (<i>Continued</i>)	
2. Tumors of Epidermal Appendages (<i>Continued</i>)	
Sebaceous Epithelioma	457
Syringoma	458
Cylindroma	460
Apocrine Myo-epithelioma	463
Mixed Tumor of the Skin	466
Trichoepithelioma (Epithelioma Adenoides Cysticum, Multiple Benign Cystic Epithelioma)	467
Calcifying Epithelioma	471
Basal Cell Epithelioma	474
Eccrine Spiradenoma	489
Eccrine Poroma	491
Carcinoma of Sebaceous Glands	493
Carcinoma of Eccrine Sweat Glands	494
Carcinoma of Apocrine Glands	495
3. Metastatic Carcinoma of the Skin	496
Cutaneous Metastasis from Carcinoma of the Breast	496
Cutaneous Metastasis from Carcinomas Other Than Breast Carcinoma	498
19. MESODERMAL TUMORS	514
1. Tumors of Fibrous Tissue	514
Dermatofibroma, Histiocytoma (Sclerosing Hemangioma, Nodular Subepidermal Fibrosis)	514
Giant-Cell Reticulohistiocytoma	519
Giant-Cell Epulis	521
Keloid	521
Fibrosarcoma	522
Subcutaneous Fibrosarcoma	522
Dermatofibrosarcoma Protuberans	524
2. Tumors of Mucoïd Tissue	525
Myxoma	525
Myxosarcoma	526
Mucous Cyst of the Skin	527
3. Tumors of Fatty Tissue	527
Nevus Lipomatosus Superficialis	527
Lipoma	528
Hibernoma	528
Liposarcoma	530
Malignant Hibernoma	531
4. Tumors of Nerve Tissue	532
Neuroma	532
Neurofibromatosis (von Recklinghausen's Disease)	533
Neurilemmoma	537
Cutaneous Meningioma	538

19. MESODERMAL TUMORS (<i>Continued</i>)	
5. Tumors of Vascular Tissue	539
Hemangioma	539
Granuloma Pyogenicum	542
Senile Hemangioma	543
Angiokeratoma Mibelli	544
Angiokeratoma Corporis Diffusum	544
Nevus Araneus	546
Osler's Disease (Familial Hemorrhagic Telangiectasia)	546
Lymphangioma	547
Glomus Tumor	548
Hemangiopericytoma	550
Kaposi's Sarcoma (Multiple Idiopathic Hemorrhagic Sarcoma)	551
Hemangio-endothelioma	555
Postmastectomy Lymphangiosarcoma	557
6. Tumors of Muscular Tissue	558
Leiomyoma	558
Leiomyosarcoma	560
Granular Cell Myoblastoma	561
Malignant Granular Cell Myoblastoma	564
7. Tumors of Osseus Tissue	564
Osteoma Cutis	564
20. PIGMENTED NEVI AND MALIGNANT MELANOMA	575
Pigmented Nevus	575
Malignant Melanoma	582
Juvenile Melanoma	589
Lentigo	591
Mongolian Spot	592
Blue Nevus	593
21. LYMPHOMA AND MYELOSIS	600
Lymphoma	600
Stem-Cell Lymphoma	604
Reticulum-Cell Lymphoma	605
Lymphoblastic Lymphoma	606
Lymphocytic Lymphoma	608
Follicular Lymphoma (Brill-Symmers)	611
Hodgkin's Disease	612
Mycosis Fungoides	615
Generalized Exfoliative Dermatitis in Lymphoma	621
Herpes Zoster in Lymphoma	622
Lymphocytoma Cutis (Lymphadenosis Benigna Cutis; Spiegler-Fendt Sarcoid)	622
Myelosis	625

21. LYMPHOMA AND MYELOSIS (*Continued*)
 Plasmacytoma (Multiple Myeloma) 626
 Erythremic Myelosis 627
GLOSSARY 631
INDEX 635

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Introduction

TECHNIC FOR BIOPSY

It is important to select a proper site for biopsy. In most instances, histologic examination of a fully developed lesion will give more information than examination of an early or an involuting lesion. An exception to this rule represents vesicular, bullous and pustular lesions. For their histologic examination, a very early lesion is required; otherwise, secondary changes (such as regeneration, degeneration or secondary infection) may obscure essential features and make recognition of their mode of formation impossible. Generally, it is inadvisable to include normal tissue in the biopsy specimen, unless a large specimen is taken or the physician personally supervises the processing of the specimen, because improper sectioning by the technician may result in only normal skin being seen in the section. The specimen should include subcutaneous fat, because, in many dermatoses, characteristic histologic features are found in the lower dermis or in the subcutaneous fat. If several types of lesions are present and the diagnosis hinges on the histologic findings, much time may be saved by taking specimens for biopsy from more than one lesion.

In the author's experience, a specimen obtained with a 6-mm. biopsy punch nearly always has proved to be adequate for histologic study. In many instances, a specimen obtained with even a 3- or a 4-mm. punch is adequate. After use of the 3-mm. punch, usually no suturing is required, an adhesive plaster to approximate the wound edges being sufficient; after use of the 4-mm. punch, one suture is adequate to close the wound; and after use of the 6-mm. punch, two sutures are recommended.

The specimen removed for biopsy should be placed on a piece of paper and smoothed out with gentle pressure so that it will not roll up. It should be allowed to dry onto the paper for about a minute and then placed in the fixative with the piece of paper attached to it.

As fixative, 10 per cent formalin can be used in nearly all instances (see p. 34). If any special stains are desired, this should be indicated at the time that the specimen is being sent to the laboratory. If, for instance, a stain for lipids is to be carried out, the

specimen must not be sent through the Autotechnicon (see Table 1, p. 35).

LIMITATIONS OF HISTOLOGIC DIAGNOSIS

Although histologic study is one of the most valuable means of diagnosis in dermatology, it has its limitations. Often, no definitive diagnosis can be made. The reason for this is that few dermatoses, aside from the tumors, are associated regularly with a diagnostic histologic picture. Instead, the histologic features may be merely suggestive of a diagnosis or may be entirely nonspecific. Even in the case of tumors, difficulties in diagnosis may arise. For instance, distinction of squamous-cell carcinoma from pseudocarcinomatous hyperplasia or from keratoacanthoma is not always possible. In cases of infectious granulomas, such as syphilis, tuberculosis and the deep mycoses, a specific diagnosis often cannot be made unless the causative organism can be demonstrated. Great difficulties may also be encountered in the histologic study of the large group of non-infectious inflammatory dermatoses. In some diseases of this group, such as psoriasis, lichen planus and lupus erythematosus, in which the histologic picture is diagnostic as a rule, it may be merely suggestive, especially in cases in which the clinical picture is not typical. In other diseases of this group, such as the various types of dermatitis or eczema, the histologic picture is, at best, only suggestive. In still others, such as pityriasis rosea and parapsoriasis, it is always nonspecific. Nevertheless, frequently, when the histologic picture is not diagnostic, correlation of the histologic with the clinical findings will make a diagnosis possible.

In many instances, the chief value of histopathologic study lies in corroborating the clinical diagnosis or in ruling out possible diseases that are being considered on the basis of clinical appearance. It is obvious that the histopathologist can give the clinician a maximum amount of information only if every specimen submitted for histologic diagnosis is accompanied by detailed clinical information, including a differential diagnosis.