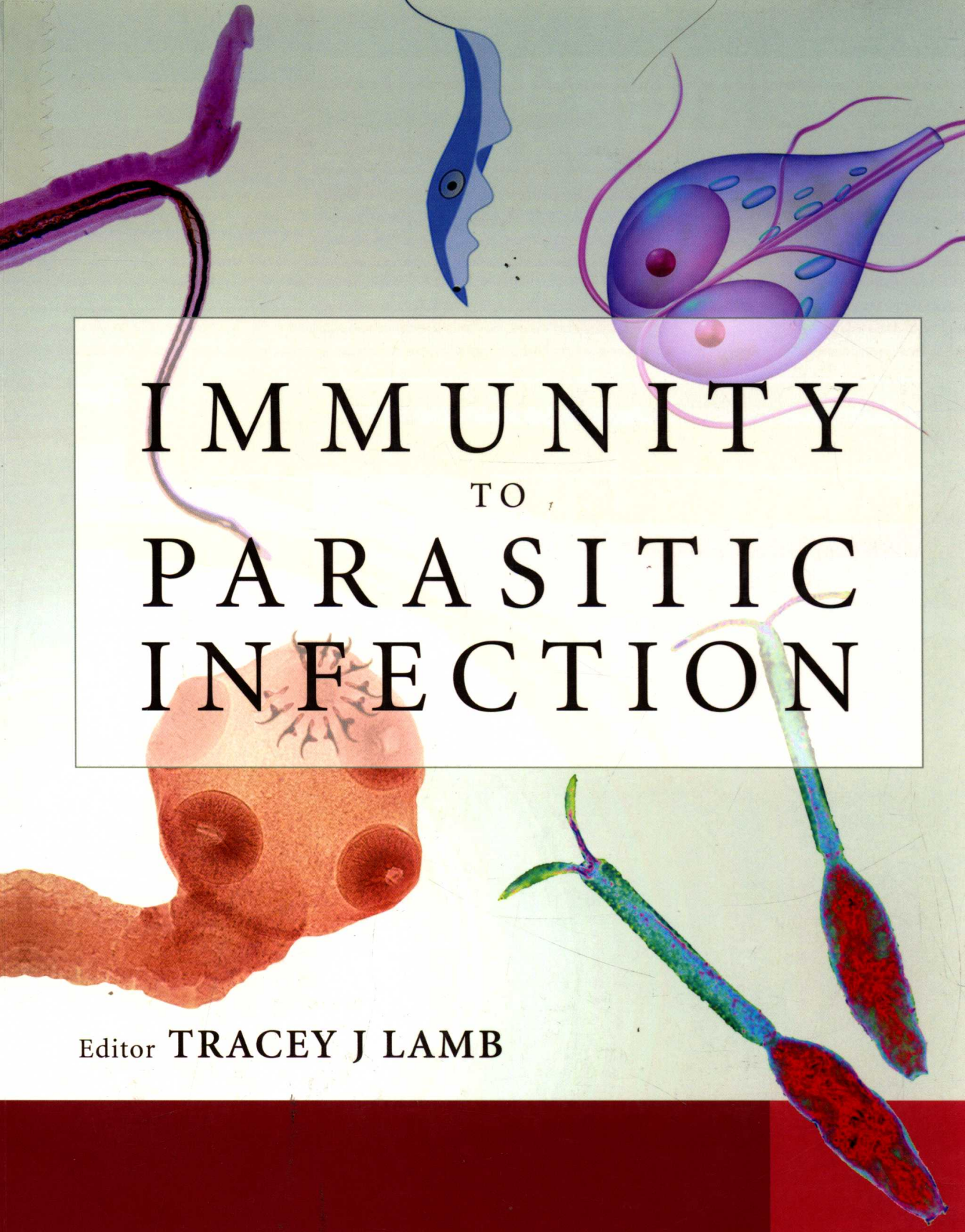

IMMUNITY TO PARASITIC INFECTION

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Immunity to Parasitic Infection

Edited by

Tracey J. Lamb
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Contents

Section 4

Introduction

Immunoparasitology: the making of a modern immunological science

Alan Sher, PhD

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The field of immunoparasitology has developed from a subspecialty of parasitology into a dynamic immunological discipline with its own unique intellectual territory and conceptual contributions. Much of this evolution has occurred in recent times. Indeed, the word 'immunoparasitology' only came into common usage in the last 40, years appearing in the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* as 'a branch of immunology that deals with animal parasites and their hosts'. It is significant that the lexicographer who provided this definition grasped that immunoparasitology was now in the realm of the immunologist and no longer a discipline practised primarily by parasitologists. In this introductory chapter, I will briefly trace the history of our field and highlight the important influence that research in immunoparasitology has had on modern immunological thought.

Origins

In considering the origins of immunoparasitology, one is immediately confronted with the issue of why the study of parasitology selectively deals with helminths, protozoa and ectoparasites. Although all of these agents were initially classified as eukaryotes, this definition now makes little taxonomic sense, as pathogenic fungi which are also eukaryotes are not referred to as parasites. Moreover, several parasitic unicellular organisms with primitive genomes (e.g. *Giardia* and microporidia) which were formerly thought to be protozoa have either been reclassified as fungi and/or been given the more general designation of 'protists' due to their unclear evolutionary status (see Chapter 2). Clearly, the original classification of protozoa and helminths as parasites was

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