History of Allergy
History of Allergy

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Contents

XII Contributors
XVIII Preface

1 Allergy through 20 Centuries

2 History of Allergy in Antiquity
   Ring, J. (Munich)

2 Abstract
2 Mesopotamia
3 Egypt
4 Indigenous Populations in America
5 China
6 Ancient India
6 Allergy in the Bible
6 Greek-Roman Tradition
7 Hay Fever/Rhinitis
8 Herodotus
8 Marcus Terentius Varro
8 Asthma
9 Aretaeus from Cappadocia
9 Urticaria
10 Food Allergy
10 Eczema
11 Famous Allergic Individuals in Antiquity
11 Pharaoh Menes from Egypt
12 Emperor Augustus, Emperor Claudius and Britannicus: The First Family History of Atopy in the Julio-Claudian Emperor Family
12 Octavianus Augustus
12 Emperor Claudius
12 Britannicus
13 Seneca
14 Conclusion
14 Acknowledgements
14 References

15 History of Allergy in the Middle Ages and Renaissance
   Ring, J. (Munich)

15 Abstract
15 History of Medicine in the Middle Ages in the Middle East
15 Al Rhazes
15 Ibn Sina (Avicenna)
16 Moses Maimonides
17 The Period from 1300 to 1700 BC
17 The 15th and 16th Centuries
18 Rose Fever
20 Conclusion
20 References

21 Landmarks in Allergy during the 19th Century
   Kay, A.B. (London)

21 Abstract
22 Hay Fever and Ragweed Pollinosis
23 Anaphylaxis
23 Asthma
24 Eosinophils and Mast Cells
26 References

27 Milestones in the 20th Century
   Bergmann, K.-C. (Berlin)

27 Abstract
28 Patients First – The First Patient’s Organization for Allergy Sufferers
30 Immunotherapy against Pollen and Other Allergens – The ‘Backbone of Allergology’
31 Anaphylaxis – The Discovery of a New Field in 1902
32 The Determining Word Is Born in 1906
33 Serum Sickness and the ‘Case Langerhans’
34 The Idea of Anaphylaxis Received Growing Interest …
35 Local Anaphylaxis
35 Anaphylactic Shock and ‘Local Immunity’
36 Alimentary Anaphylaxis
2 Most Common Allergic Diseases: Historical Reflections in Understanding

54 Anaphylaxis
Ring, J.; Grosber, M.; Brockow, K. (Munich); Bergmann, K.-C. (Berlin)

54 Abstract
55 The Voyage on the Yacht Princesse Alice II
59 Pathophysiology
61 References

62 Allergic Rhinitis
Mygind, N. (Copenhagen)

62 Abstract
62 An Allergy Giant in 1873
63 Terminology and Definition
63 Epidemiology and Natural History
64 Allergens
64 Histopathology and Pathogenesis
64 The Epithelial Lining
64 The Mast Cell

64 Histamine
65 The Eosinophil
65 Nasal Polyps
65 Symptoms
65 Treatment
65 Antihistamines
66 Cromoglycate
66 Topical Steroids
66 Systemic Steroids
66 Allergic Rhinitis
67 Nasal Polyposis
67 Oral Treatment or a Depot Injection
67 Vasoconstrictors
67 Ipratropium Bromide
67 Immunotherapy
67 References

69 Asthma
Bergmann, K.-C. (Berlin)

69 Abstract
69 The Beginning in the East
70 The Beginning in the West
72 The Middle Ages
72 Modern Times
79 Acknowledgements
79 References

81 Atopic Dermatitis/Atopic Eczema
Wallach, D. (Paris); Taïeb, A. (Bordeaux)

81 Abstract
82 Chronological Agenda
82 Atopic Dermatitis before 1800
84 Atopic Dermatitis in Willanist Dermatology
85 Atopic Dermatitis as a Diathetic Prurigo
87 Birth of Atopic Dermatitis
89 Criteria and Scores in the Contemporary Era
90 Will Semantic Discussions End?
90 Pathogenic Theories and Their Therapeutic Consequences
91 Humoralistic Theories and Reluctance to Treat
91 Digestive Theories and Diet
92 Parasitic/Bacteriological Dimension of Eczema
92 Allergological Theories, Hyposensitization and Allergen Eviction
93 Fear of Treatment Side Effects
93 Neuropsychological Considerations
94 Other Hypotheses
94 Dermatological Approach and Topical Therapy
94 Conclusion
95 References
Contents

Allergic Contact Dermatitis
Alikhan, A. (Rochester, Minn.);
Maibach H.I. (San Francisco, Calif.)

Abstract
Patch Testing – Jadassohn and Bloch
Important Early Basic Science Discoveries
Standard Series – Bonnevie
Contact Dermatitis and Public Health – Ramazzini and Prosser White
Contact Dermatitis Societies
Improving Convenience – The TRUE Test
Moving into the Computer Age – The CARD Database
The Future of Allergic Contact Dermatitis
Conclusion
References

Urticaria and Angioedema
Maurer, M. (Berlin)

Abstract
Urticaria
Angioedema
References

Allergy and the Eye
Bonini, S. (Rome)

Abstract
The Contribution of Ocular Allergy to a Better Understanding of Mechanisms of the Immune Reaction
The Contribution of Ocular Allergy to Clinical Practice in Allergy and Clinical Immunology
How Ocular Allergy Can Contribute to a Continuing Progress of Allergy and Clinical Immunology
Conclusion
References

History of Food Allergy
Wüthrich, B. (Zurich)

Abstract
Food Allergy in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Myth or Reality?
First Documentation of Food Allergy – Skin Test as Diagnostic Routine Method
Other Test Methods for Food Allergy Prior to the Discovery of Immunoglobulin E
Radioallergosorbent Test – Significant Progress in the Diagnosis of Immunoglobulin E-Mediated Food Allergies
Component-Resolved Diagnostic Techniques
Double-Blind Placebo-Controlled Food Challenge – The Gold Standard and the Diagnosis of Food Allergy
Fatal Food Allergies
Pollen-Associated Food Allergies and the ‘Oral Allergy Syndrome’
‘Derivative Allergy’ – A Rare Pathway of Elicitation of Food Allergy
Food-Induced/Food-Dependent Exercise-Induced Anaphylaxis
Oral Desensitization – Long Controversial, but Now Established
Acknowledgement
References

Drug Hypersensitivity
Bircher, A.J. (Basel)

Abstract
Drug Hypersensitivity – The Emergence of New Disorders
Terminology – An Ongoing Controversy
Early History – Poisons and Placebos
19th Century – The Dawn of Drug Hypersensitivity
Drug-Induced Syndromes – The Bad and the Ugly
Stevens-Johnson Syndrome and Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis
Ampicillin Rash
Drug Hypersensitivity Syndrome
Acute Generalized Exanthematous Pustulosis
Hoigné Syndrome
Selected Drugs
Halogenated Drugs – Iodine and Bromides
Analgesics
Salvarsan
Anticonvulsants
Sulfonamides
Penicillin
p-Amino Benzoic Acid
Acetylsalicylic Acid
Outlook
References

Aspirin Hypersensitivity
Sánchez-Borges, M. (Caracas)

Abstract
The Discovery of Aspirin
Ancient Times
From Willow Bark to Salicin to Salicylic Acid
From Natural to Synthetic Acetylsalicylic Acid
Mechanisms of Action
Cyclooxygenase Isoenzymes
Antithrombotic Effects of Aspirin
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>135</td>
<td>Hypersensitivity Reactions to ASA and NSAIDs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>135</td>
<td>Early Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>Samter's Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>Classification of Hypersensitivity Reactions to ASA and NSAIDs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>Pathogenesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137</td>
<td>Genetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137</td>
<td>Developments in Diagnostic Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>Advances in Patient Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>Bradykinin-Mediated Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>Kaplan, A.P. (Charleston, S.C.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>141</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>141</td>
<td>Inhibition of Bradykinin Degradation by Angiotensin-Converting Enzyme Inhibitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>142</td>
<td>Hereditary Angioedema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143</td>
<td>C1 Inhibitor as Inhibitor of the Bradykinin-Forming Cascade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143</td>
<td>The Myth of C2-Kinin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143</td>
<td>Bradykinin Is the Mediator of Hereditary Angioedema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>145</td>
<td>Treatment of Hereditary Angioedema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146</td>
<td>Future Considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>The Discovery of Immunoglobulin E and Its Role in Allergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>Johansson, S.G.O. (Stockholm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>The Search for the Elusive Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>IgE and the Allergic Inflammation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>Allergy Diagnosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>The Beneficial Function of IgE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>T Cell Subpopulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>Romagnani, S. (Florence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156</td>
<td>Effector CD4+ T Cells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156</td>
<td>The Th1/Th2 Paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td>Beyond the Th1/Th2 Paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td>Regulatory CD4+ T Cells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>Foxp3+ Regulatory T Cells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>Type 1 Regulatory T Cells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>Role of T Cell Subsets in Allergic Disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>Th2 Cells in Allergic Disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>Regulation of the Th2 Response in Allergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>Immune Deviation or Redirection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160</td>
<td>Immune Suppression or Regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161</td>
<td>Impaired Immune Deviation and Reduced Immune Suppression Account for Reduced Prevalence of Allergy, but the Role of Impaired Immune Deviation Is Prevalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161</td>
<td>Possible Pathogenic Role in Allergy of CD4+ Effectors other than Th2 Cells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161</td>
<td>Possible Pathogenic Role of Natural Killer T Cells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162</td>
<td>Role of Innate Immunity in Allergic Disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>Concluding Remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>165</td>
<td>Mast Cell Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>165</td>
<td>Saito, H. (Tokyo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>165</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>166</td>
<td>Discovery of Histamine in Mast Cells/Basophils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167</td>
<td>Discovery of IgE Receptors on Mast Cells/Basophils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167</td>
<td>Discovery of Mast Cell Origin and the Culture Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>Mast Cell Phenotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td>Discovery of Cytokine Production by Mast Cells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td>Future Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td>Basophils: Historical Reflections and Perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td>Marone, G.; Borriello, F.; Varicchi, G.; Genovese, A.; Granata, F. (Naples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>The Different Eras of Basophil Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>174</td>
<td>Activating Receptors on Human Basophils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177</td>
<td>Inhibitory Receptors on Human Basophils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177</td>
<td>Mediators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178</td>
<td>Histamine-Releasing Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179</td>
<td>Basophils as Potential Inducers of Type 2 Immunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179</td>
<td>Basophils as Antigen-Presenting Cells: An Unsettled Controversy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181</td>
<td>Human Basophils and Angiogenesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181</td>
<td>Basophils in Immunity against Parasites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182</td>
<td>Bidirectional Interactions between Bacteria and Basophils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184</td>
<td>Basophils and Viral Infections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184</td>
<td>Basophils and Autoimmune Disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185</td>
<td>Basophils in Allergic Disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185</td>
<td>Conclusions and Perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

193 Eosinophils
Radonjic-Hösli, S.; Simon, H.-U. (Bern)

193 Abstract
193 The Discovery
194 The Origin of the Eosinophil and Its Granules:
Differenct Views over Time
194 The Eosinophil Granule: Extrinsic Origin
195 The Eosinophil Granule: Metamorphosis –
Transformation from the Neutrophil Granule
196 The Eosinophil Granule: Intrinsic Origin
196 Eosinopoiesis: Precursors and Transcription
Factors
197 Eosinopoiesis: Cytokines and Their Receptors
198 Eosinophil-Mediated Diseases
198 Mechanisms of Eosinophilia
198 Development of Therapeutic Strategies
199 The Functions of the Eosinophil: Different Views
over Time
199 The Anti-Inflammatory Role of Eosinophils
200 The Effector Role of Eosinophils
201 The Immunoregulatory Role of Eosinophils
202 The Role of Eosinophils in Tissue Remodeling
202 Conclusions
202 References

205 The Bradykinin-Forming Cascade: A Historical
Perspective
Kaplan, A.P. (Charleston, S.C.)

205 Abstract
206 Factor XII
208 Prekallikrein
208 Kininogen
209 Binding to Endothelial Cells
212 A Surprise: Prekallikrein Is an Enzyme
212 Concluding Remarks
213 References

214 Histamine Receptors and Antihistamines: From
Discovery to Clinical Applications
Cataldi, M.; Borriello, F.; Granata, F.; Annunziato, L.;
Marone, G. (Naples)

214 Abstract
215 The Discovery of Histamine
215 The Synthesis of the First Antihistamines and the
Identification of H1R
216 The Identification of H2R and the Synthesis of the
First H2 Blockers
216 Histamine in the Brain
217 Cloning of H1R, H2R and H3R, and Generation of
Histamine Receptor Knockout Mice
219 Identification and Cloning of H2R
222 Closing Thoughts
222 Acknowledgements
222 References

4 Detection of Environmental Influences
and Allergens

228 Pollen and Pollinosis
Smith, M.; Berger, U. (Vienna); Behrendt, H. (Munich);
Bergmann, K.-C. (Berlin)

228 Abstract
229 Analysis of Airborne Pollen and Pollen Allergens
231 First Descriptions of the Disease
232 Monitoring and Monitoring Networks
232 Acknowledgements
233 References

234 Mites and Allergy
Fernández-Caldas, E. (Madrid/Tampa, Fla.); Puerta, L.;
Caraballo, L. (Cartagena)

234 Abstract
237 Allergens from House Dust Mites
238 Allergens from Storage Mites
239 Cross-Reactivity of Mite Allergens
240 Effect of Parasitic Infections on Mite Allergy
240 Environmental Control
241 Mite Immunotherapy
241 References

243 Mammalian Airborne Allergens
Aalberse, R.C. (Amsterdam)

243 Abstract
244 Mammalian Allergens and the Identification of
‘the House Dust Allergen’
244 The Postulated Role of Maillard Reaction Products
244 Developments in Technologies for the
Characterization of Allergens
245 Persistent Contaminants and Mind-Boggling
Complexities
245 The Lipocalin Family
246 The Secretoglobin Family
246 Perspective: From Dust Back to Dust
246 References

248 The Latex Story
Raulf, M. (Bochum)

248 Abstract
248 Latex as a Rubber and Protein Source
249 History of Latex Allergy – When Did the Problems
Start?
251 Who Were at Risk? Risk Factors and Epidemiology
Aspects
251 Characterization of Relevant Allergens
252 Latex-Fruit/Plant Syndrome – Problems with
Cross-Reactivity
Contents

252 Latex as a Model for Molecular Allergology – How to Improve the Diagnosis?
253 Preventive Measures – Successful Avoidance Strategy
254 References

256 Peanut Allergens
Becker, W.-M. (Borstel); Jappe, U. (Borstel/Lübeck)
256 Abstract
257 Prevalence of Peanut Allergy
257 Geographical Origin of Peanuts
258 Class I Food Allergy
259 Class II Food Allergy
260 Allergens of Peanut
260 Ara h 1 and Ara h 3
262 Ara h 2, Ara h 6 and Ara h 7
263 Ara h 9
264 Ara h 5 and Ara h 8
264 Peanut oleosin, Ara h 10 and Ara h 11
264 Ara h 12 and Ara h 13
264 Peanut Agglutinin and Cross-Reactive Carbohydrate Determinants
265 Conclusion
265 Acknowledgements
265 References

268 Environmental Pollution and Allergy: Historical Aspects
Behrendt, H.; Alessandrini, F.; Buters, J. (Munich); Krämer, U. (Düsseldorf); Koren, H. (Durham, N.C.); Ring, J. (Munich)
268 Abstract
270 Epidemiology Studies
270 Early Studies in Japan
270 Early Studies in Germany
272 East/West Comparison Studies in Germany and Europe
274 Aerobiological Studies
275 In vitro Studies
275 Animal Experiments
275 Clinical Studies
275 The Concept of 'Allergotoxicology'
276 References

278 Farmers and Their Environment: Protective Influences of the Farming Environment against the Development of Allergies
Gassner, M. (Zurich)
278 Abstract
278 Farmers and Their Environment
278 Agriculture, the Art of Adaptation
280 Drying
280 Wrapping

281 Mechanical Technology
281 Allergology
281 The Paradox of Dose Effect
282 The Paradox of Toxic Interactions
282 The Paradox of Tolerance or Adaption
283 The Paradox of Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease
283 The Paradox of Endotoxins
284 The Paradox of Organ Distribution
284 The Paradox of Gnotobiotics
285 The Paradox of Genetics
285 The Paradox of Migration
286 The Paradox of Slums
286 References

5 Progress in Allergy Management

288 History of Catecholamine Research
Starke, K. (Freiburg im Breisgau)
288 Abstract
288 Adrenaline in the Adrenal Medulla: Preludes
289 Adrenaline in the Adrenal Medulla: Oliver and Schäfer, 1893/1894
290 Adrenaline in the Adrenal Medulla: Independent Discoverers
291 Chemistry
291 Catecholamine Neurotransmitters: Adrenaline
292 Formation and Destruction
293 Catecholamine Neurotransmitters: Noradrenaline
294 Catecholamine Neurotransmitters: Dopamine
295 Membrane Passage
296 Receptors
299 References

302 Antihistamines
Church, M.K.; Maurer, M. (Berlin)
302 Abstract
302 The Discovery of Antihistamines
303 The Discovery of H₂, H₃, and H₄ Antihistamines
304 First- and Second-Generation H₁ Antihistamines
305 H₁ Antihistamines and the Central Nervous System
306 H₁ Antihistamines and Cardiotoxicity
307 The Anti-Inflammatory Properties of H₁ Antihistamines
307 Receptor-Independent Mechanisms
307 Receptor-Dependent Mechanisms
308 H₁ Antihistamines Are Not Receptor Antagonist but Are Inverse Agonists
308 Conclusions
308 References
Contributors

Editors

K.-C. Bergmann
Berlin
pp. XVIII, 27, 54, 69, 228, 410

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pp. XVIII, 2, 15, 46, 54, 268, 411

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R.C. Aalberse
Amsterdam
p. 243

F. Alessandrini
Munich
p. 268

A. Alikhan
Rochester, Minn.
p. 97

L. Annunziato
Naples
p. 214
L. Caraballo
Cartagena (Colombia)
p. 234

M. Cataldi
Naples
p. 214

M.K. Church
Berlin
p. 302

A. de Weck†
Fribourg
p. 346

A.M. Edwards
Newport
p. 317

E. Fernández-Caldas
Madrid/Tampa, Fla.
p. 234

A.W. Frankland
London
p. 350

O.L. Frick
San Francisco, Calif.
p. 353

M. Gassner
Zurich
p. 278

A. Genovese
Naples
p. 172

F. Granata
Naples
pp. 172, 214

M. Grosber
Munich
p. 54

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Allergies are not new diseases; they have been around for probably 1,000 years or more. However, they have increased in prevalence in a dramatic way over recent decades, leading them to be called by some ‘the epidemics of the 21st century’. The questions of how they looked in clinical manifestations, what they were called and how they were treated becomes more and more difficult to answer the farther back in history we go. This is a common challenge in the history of medicine; yet there is an unusual dimension in the case of allergic diseases because they have only been understood in their pathophysiological entity since the beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, terminology may be more difficult in this field than in other disciplines of medicine.

The number of sufferers and the number of allergies is rising all over the world. Additionally, the field of allergology, although relatively young in comparison to others, such as surgery or internal medicine, is growing rapidly. It unites thousands of doctors at world congresses, who devote themselves to the recognition and treatment of allergic illnesses.

It follows a good tradition when a publisher selects a special topic for the 100th volume of a series. Therefore, what could be more appropriate than this book, History of Allergy, for the 100th volume of the proud series ‘Chemical Immunology and Allergy’?

There are different ways to approach the history of a medical discipline. The purely historical approach deals with the facts, the characters, the lives of ‘heroes’, the great discoveries and the famous patients. The philosophic approach digs deep into the understanding of diseases and symptoms at different times in the past, often connected with general philosophical attitudes and sometimes also religious beliefs. In this context, terminology also becomes very important since it illustrates the philosophical attitudes of certain times and of great thinkers. At the center of the natural-scientific approach are the great discoveries and progress made in the understanding of natural phenomena, be they physiologic or pathologic in nature. It is in essence the pathophysiological approach trying to find causes for and mechanisms of diseases – progress which only occurred in the field of allergy in the 20th century (with limited exceptions in the 19th century). Finally, the clinical-medical approach refers to the description of symptoms, the hard work of classification, and the art of diagnosis and therapy.

This book represents a mixture of all these approaches. The editors did not want to limit the dialogue to merely the famous stories of great researchers and physicians in this field, and some of their great discoveries. The further we go back in time, the more important the historical approach becomes, in which we have to rely totally upon old scriptures. The philosophical approach is also important in order to understand the thinking of our ancestors. The more recent the period in history we are covering, the more natural science oriented and medical-clinical the text will be. Historical reflection is also given to recent decades, such as in review articles focused on the state of the art in a certain field.
In such a multi-authored book that deals with facts and events and lives that passed many years or centuries ago, it is natural that there are discrepancies with regard to certain events – personal recollections may differ from historical reality even in the life of a Nobel laureate. Great discoveries will also be remembered differently by different researchers, considering that they might be made in different parts of the world using quite different approaches and methods.

The editors gave the authors absolute freedom in the way they wanted to approach the subject. They did not interfere – as they maybe would have done in a textbook of clinical medicine – when they found discrepancies between different chapters. It is left to the reader to decide and form his or her own opinion on the events of the past.

There have been several treatises and essays about the history of allergology, why then one more? The reason for this is that we, the authors and the publisher, were inspired by the task ‘not only to protect the cinder but to fan the glow’, as was so appropriately expressed by Benjamin Franklin, following the belief of St. Thomas More (1477/78–1535) that ‘tradition is not the holds of the cinder, but transmitting the flame’. With this book we weave together hope not only to transmit the flame of enthusiasm for allergology, but also to fan the glow. We all have a passion for the field of allergology, we treat our patients with real enthusiasm, and we look with admiration and pride at the achievements of our medical predecessors, the early allergists. In ancient times they diagnosed and treated based on sense and feeling, and certainly sometimes on need. Even in the Middle Ages, cause and effect was recognized in isolated cases. Since then, new diagnostic and therapeutic methods have been developed with ever greater frequency and rapidity up to present, modern times. In this book we intend to show this development of allergologic science over time, and to remind of its successes as well as its failures.

This is not a pantheon of allergology with biographic representation of all essential allergists and scientists, but we have asked the still living ‘pioneers’ in the field to participate in a personal reflection. Our special thanks and recognition go to them. The editors are aware that there are many additional dignified personalities worthy of inclusion in the ‘pioneers of allergy’ section! One criterion was that they should be retired from ordinary daily work in their profession in order to express their view with a certain distance to past events. Unfortunately, one of the pioneers recently passed away before the book was finished: Alain de Weck sent us his reflections as always with his typical precise descriptions and a sharp sense of humor. He also fostered the history of our specialty by producing the marvelous book, *Ancestors of Allergy*, edited by E. Simons, as well as the movie on the history and many facets of allergy presented at the World Allergy Congress (then International Congress of Allergology and Clinical Immunology; IAACI) in Stockholm in 1994 [see www.karger.com/chial100_movie2 and this vol., pp. 411–412].

In Germany, no one did more to promote the history of allergy than Hans Schadewaldt (1923–2009), to whom the editors are greatly thankful. His book *Geschichte der Allergie* in 4 volumes is an infinite treasure box.

This book is dedicated to all allergists all over the world, and to their patients. Together, they form the basis for this work. There can be no history without researchers and their pioneering inventions, nor without patients, who have served to understand this illness together with their doctors, enabling case reports and participating in studies to determine the effects of new drugs. To all of you, and for all your help with this book, we thank you.

The editors want to thank several individuals, without whom this work would not have been finished. First of all we want to mention Thomas Karger the publisher, who generously supported this project from the beginning. In the publishing house – without the enthusiasm and help of Thomas Nold, Miriam Schulz and Ruedi Jappert – we could not have handled such a large volume of manuscripts of so different character. We also want to thank Dr. Antonia Todorova and Dr. Tanja Müller for their help in providing literature, references and permission to reprint figures.

Two personalities in particular have influenced, motivated and helped both of us over the past decades in the strive to look back on our history in or-
der to better understand what is going on right now, and what will possibly occur in the future. They are Prof. Dr. Dr. Hans Schadewaldt (Düsseldorf), as a historian dedicated to allergy, and Prof. Dr. Alain de Weck (Bern), as the number one allergist and such a formative character over so many decades!

Finally, we ask our readers for constructive criticism if mistakes should have crept into the book. All authors and the publishing company have tried to appreciate the international rules of copyright. We would therefore like to apologize if any errors have been made.

With this book we hope to encourage not only allergists and allergic patients to reflect upon these diseases, but also young scientists and physicians to become enthusiastic for this exciting field, with its interdisciplinary character and its interface between genetics and the environment. May this book help to increase the understanding of so many cumbersome diseases and, thereby, be helpful to millions of patients suffering from allergies!

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