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HANDBOOK OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF BIOLOGY.

Eds. Michael R. Dietrich, Mark E. Borrello, and Oren Harman. Cham (Switzerland):

Springer. £299.99. xiv + 538 p.; index. ISBN: 978-3-319-90118-3. 2021.

How did we ever manage without this superb volume? Here are twenty-one essays by scholarly experts who, in accessible prose, and with full bibliographies appended, introduce the interpretive trends and debates that have shaped the secondary literature on an impressive array of biological topics historically considered. Genetics and molecular biology are especially well served (five chapters), with biomedicine and physiology close behind (four), followed by evolution (three) and experimentation (two). Developmental biology, scientific biography, women in biology, race and physical anthropology, biology in international context, marine biology, and agriculture receive a chapter each. At the start is an introduction valuably outlining the history of the field of the history of biology, shown as responding in part to changes in science and the wider world, and in part to changing approaches within professional history of science.

For graduate students working in or around the history of biology, this is a must-have volume. But it will benefit anyone, from advanced undergraduates on up, who wants to get knowledgeable and get serious about the topics covered. Even readers who reckon they know their way around a historiography will come away instructed and inspired by seeing it through the eyes of commentators as thoughtful and well informed as the likes of Janet Browne (“Charles Darwin and the Darwinian Tradition”), Staffan Müller-Wille (“Gregor Mendel and the History of Heredity”), Paul Weindling (“The History and Historiography of Eugenics”), Rachel Ankeny and Sabina Leonelli (“Organisms in Experimental Research”), and Marsha Richmond (“Women in the Historiography of Biology”). A number of chapters are pioneering, in introducing emerging approaches (such as Ana Barahona’s “Local, Global, and Transnational Perspectives on the History of Biology”), in identifying hitherto missed

opportunities (as in Nicolas Rasmussen’s vigorously critical “Biomedicine and its Historiography: A Systematic Review”), or in mapping historiographies that had seemed ungraspably diffuse and diverse (notably Dominic Berry’s “Historiography of Plant Breeding and Agriculture”).

Given such plenty, it would, ordinarily, be churlish to dwell on omissions. But editors Michael Dietrich, Mark Borrello, and Oren Harman generously invite suggestions, explaining in the introduction that the volume is intended as a living document, to be expanded periodically in dialogue with their readership. For the editorial team, the wish-list includes chapters on pre-nineteenth-century developments, on botany, and on natural history. For me, however, the most striking absences concern ecology and related topics. To be sure, they come up here and there; in Samantha Muka’s “Historiography of Marine Biology,” for example, she predicts that this currently under-populated branch of the history of biology is bound to get more attention as people come to terms with our rising, polluted oceans. At present, though, “ecology” doesn’t even merit an index entry; “extinction” ditto. Before reading this outstanding *Handbook*, I had never realized how much I – and everybody else – was missing for lack of a survey that unveils the historiographic lives and times of biology and the climate-change crisis. It’s a tribute to all involved in this lengthy volume that, on reaching the end, one wishes it were longer.

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