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Book review

Drugs of Natural Origin. A Treatise of Pharmacognosy, 6th ed., G. Samuelson, L. Bohlin. Apotekarsocieteten: Swedish Academy of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Stockholm, Sweden (2009). Bibliographies, glossary index \$149.95 (list price), 776 pp., numerous chemical line drawings, some colour plates, ISBN: 978 91 976510 5 9 (hardcover)

Teaching in the area of pharmacognosy and natural product sciences may be based more on a therapeutically oriented approach or on one which uses a phytochemical-biosynthetic approach. G. Samuelson and L. Bohlin have used the latter. After two editions in Swedish (1980, 1982), this book has so far had three editions in English (1991, 1998, 2004) this sixth edition is the first with L. Bohlin as a co-author. Both authors are very well known experts in the field and L. Bohlin succeeded G. Samuelson as the Chair in Pharmacognosy at Uppsala University.

The book is mainly intended for undergraduate and postgraduate students in the area of natural product research, but also for students in such fields like medicinal chemistry, biochemistry and pharmacology. The core of the book is formed by eight chapters discussing natural products on the basis of their biosynthesis. Three introductory chapters address basic aspects and also some more specialised topics (incl. biotechnological drug production and herbal remedies). Of note, the authors have systematically incorporated state-of-the art concepts and methods like systems biology. Compared to the previous edition, several chapters have been reorganised and a range of new topics has been added. The pharmacognostic and phytochemical information is very accurate and one can appreciate the many years of experience in the field the two authors have. Clearly the strength lies in phytochemical-biosynthetic aspects of the field. This allows a detailed understanding of the chemical complexity of natural prod-

ucts and how this is achieved. Also, the authors are very successful in linking this information with the medical uses these drugs of natural origin have. Numerous chemical line drawings and some colour plates illustrate the book.

This being a revised edition, one would have hoped for a systematic update of the relevant literature and most importantly the inclusion of some recent reviews on the topics. This, however, has not been done consistently and varies from chapter to chapter.

The book will mostly be used as part of a course in one of the key disciplines like chemistry or biology. I personally doubt that lots of undergraduate students in the relevant disciplines will want to use this very detailed book (even though they should), but it is very useful at a postgraduate level and also it is really a handbook which offers everyone with an interest in natural products and medicinal plants a very detailed overview on our current knowledge about these products and their medical usage. It is of interest researchers and (postgraduate) students in these fields, but also serves as a very useful handbook about the key classes of biologically active natural products. The great care taken in its preparation (and editing) makes it a joy to use and we can all learn a lot from these two experts.

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