significance of mesoderm formation in ctenophores, and on comparison of the origin of coelomic spaces would have been of value. Reconsideration of all aspects of development in relation to evolution is now required in light of recent advances in genetics.

In spite of these deficiencies, this book is the best available general introduction to the descriptive aspects of development in the major invertebrate groups. It should serve well as a major reference source, particularly to Japanese work.

JAMES N. CATHER
Department of Zoology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Antibiotic

Actinomycin. Nature, Formation, and Activities. SELMAN A. WAKSMAN, Ed. Interscience (Wiley), New York, 1968. x + 231 pp., illus. $8.95.

It is well known that more than a thousand compounds and preparations with antimicrobial activity have been isolated from various species and strains of *Actinomyces*. Actinomycin was the first of these to be isolated, and no antibiotic isolated subsequently has proved to be of greater biologic interest. Among more than 50 chemical forms of the agent, actinomycin C and actinomycin D probably are the most important, according to Selman A. Waksman, editor of this stimulating book.

Interest in the antimicrobial agents has centered largely on their chemotherapeutic properties, and the highly toxic nature of actinomycin, in the form in which it was first isolated, should have led one to believe that it had no potential in this respect. Detailed and long-range study, however, clearly and concisely reviewed by Waksman and his collaborators in this book, has proved this not to be so.

The present book encompasses a vast amount of information. More than 700 references are cited. Initially, Waksman himself reviews the original detection of actinomycin, its isolation, early studies of its toxicity and its activity in experimental animals, and the initial demonstration of its antineoplastic effects. Subsequently, Boyd Woodruff and Waksman review technics for its production and isolation. More detailed reviews of the chemistry of the actinomycins have been presented elsewhere, but the brief chapters here on the chemistry and biogenesis of these compounds will be of special interest to those desiring general information only. Of prime interest, perhaps, are those portions of the book that are concerned with the effects of actinomycin on virus replication, in the treatment of neoplastic disease, and as a biochemical tool.

Actinomycin acts as a selective inhibitor of DNA-dependent synthesis of RNA, and has the capacity to bind DNA but not RNA and to suppress RNA and protein synthesis but not DNA synthesis. It has the capacity to inhibit RNA synthesis but not cellular DNA synthesis or the multiplication of RNA viruses, knowledge of which has aided the differentiation between viral RNA and messenger RNA. Actinomycin thus has become a useful tool for the study of many biological phenomena, including the development of viruses and bacteria, antibody synthesis, immunologic memory, delayed hypersensitivity, and the rejection of transplanted tissues.

Few compounds have been studied so extensively and with such imagination. Certainly no other antimicrobial agent has been so important to cellular biology. Waksman and his collaborators have brought together in one compact book a vast amount of information on actinomycin and have given perspective to the many studies pertaining to this agent. *Actinomycin* should be read by all interested in antimicrobial effects, in antiviral or antineoplastic agents, or in cellular biology.

GLADYS L. HOBBY
Special Research Laboratory for the Study of Chronic Infectious Disease, Veterans Administration Hospital, East Orange, New Jersey

Biochemical Endocrinology

Functions of the Adrenal Cortex. KENNETH W. MCKERNS, Ed. Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York, 1968. 2 vols. Vol. 1, xvi + 643 pp., illus.; vol. 2, xx + 533 pp., illus. $21 each. Biochemical Endocrinology series.

These two volumes comprise the first of a projected series on biochemical endocrinology. Upon first consideration, the appearance of a thorough treatment of adrenocortical physiology and biochemistry against the background of three recent volumes of the *Handbuch der experimentellen Pharmakologie* on the same subject may seem redundant. Furthermore, the guiding principle expressed in editor McKerns' preface, "to present a critical review of the development of ideas leading up to the latest interpretations and concepts . . . ," may appear to be difficult to realize in such a narrow area of research. In both cases, the initial doubts become quickly resolved: these volumes represent a collection of important and original essays of interest to an audience much broader than students of the adrenal cortex alone.

The decision to leave the style of presentation to individual contributors has certain drawbacks. In some instances, the treatment is excessively heavy; other chapters are admirably succinct. Some authors end with a critical summary or a statement of perspectives (as in McKern's own contribution on ACTH regulation), whereas others choose to end merely with the last sentence of a detailed narrative. Editors of future volumes in this series could well consider requesting some uniformity of presentation, without, however, sacrificing the individualistic character of the papers. Essays such as those of Koritz on the regulation of pregnenolone synthesis and of Edelman on aldosterone and sodium transport hold the reader's attention with all their thoroughness of treatment. On the other hand, the paper by Bartter and his colleagues on the biogenesis of aldosterone is valuable for its succinctness —the kind of presentation that allows an instructor to extract quickly the information he needs to bring his lecture up to date. Throughout, recent discoveries are discussed in detail, including the occurrence of potentially important "new" corticosteroids such as 18-hydroxycorticosterone and 18-hydroxydeoxycorticosterone.

The major section in volume 1 (Mechanism of Action of ACTH on Steroidogenesis . . .) and the major section in volume 2 (Biosynthesis at the Molecular Level . . .) are hardly separable in terms of the total picture they cover, despite the emphasis on electron-transport mechanisms and mitochondrial biochemical "architecture" in the latter. The reader will find himself surprised at the absence of any major impression of repetition, despite the close relationships among several of the subtopics; in fact, the overlap expected from the titles is largely absent from the text. All of this is to underline the value of these two volumes and the skill of the editor in choosing his contributors.