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Review

Reading and writing *The Book of Nature*: Jan Swammerdam (1637–1680)

Matthew Cobb *

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Abstract

Jan Swammerdam, a 17th-century Dutch microscopist, made major discoveries in medicine and anatomy. However, his greatest contribution to biology was his understanding of insect development and his demonstration that the same organism persists through its various stages. Using meticulous dissections and careful experimentation, he showed the errors of spontaneous generation and laid the basis of the modern understanding of morphogenesis. His science was profoundly marked by his mystical religious convictions, which often entered into contradiction with his avowed “experimental philosophy” and even led him to abandon science for a period. This mystical aspect has often led to his work being misunderstood.



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* Is a behavioural geneticist who studies chemical communication in flies and ants at the Laboratoire d'Ecologie, CNRS-Universit  Paris 6, Paris, France. He is also the translator of a number of books, including *A History of Molecular Biology and Darwinism's Struggle for Survival*. He is currently working on a scientific biography of Jan Swammerdam.

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