



Shocking Frogs: Galvani, Volta, and the Electric Origins of Neuroscience

Marco Piccolino, Marco Bresadola

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"... and still we could never suppose that fortune were to be so friendly to us, such as to allow us to be perhaps the first in handling, as it were, the electricity concealed in nerves, in extracting it from nerves, and, in some way, in putting it under everyone's eyes."

With these words, Luigi Galvani announced to the world in 1791 his discovery that nervous conduction and muscle excitation are electrical phenomena. The result of more than years of intense experimental work, Galvani's milestone achievement concluded a thousand-year scientific search, in a field long dominated by the antiquated beliefs of classical science. Besides laying the grounds for the development of the modern neurosciences, Galvani's discovery also brought to light an invention that would forever change humankind's everyday life: the electric battery of Alessandro Volta.

In an accessible style, written for specialists and general readers alike, *Shocking Frogs* retraces the steps of both scientific discoveries, starting with the initial hypotheses of the Enlightenment on the involvement of electricity in life processes. So doing, it also reveals the inconsistency of the many stereotypes that an uncritical cultural tradition has imparted to the legacies of Galvani and Volta, and proposes a decidedly new image of these monumental figures.

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