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Micrographia
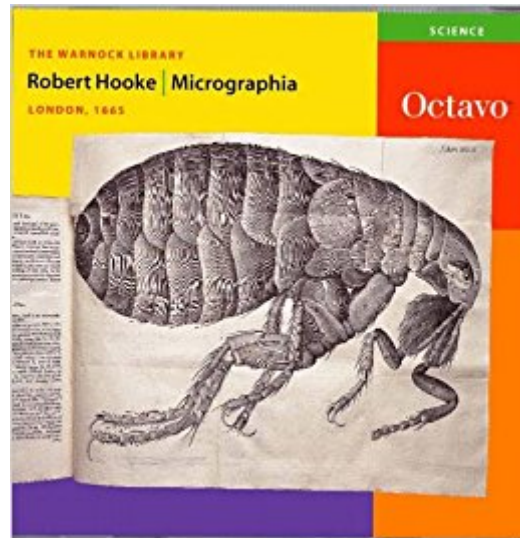
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Robert Hooke | Micrographia

LONDON, 1665

SCIENCE

Octavo

Synopsis

You are about to open a book that revolutionized the art of scientific investigation. Robert Hooke was still in his twenties when he wrote Micrographia, yet in this single volume revealed the immense potential of a single instrument, the microscope, and the many brilliant speculations of a multifaceted mind. Micrographia introduces us to the living cell; to microscopic fungi and the life story of the mosquito; we encounter the two contrasting theories about the origin of the lunar craters posed for the very first time. We read the first sensible proposal for the origin of fossils, and an uncanny prediction of the artificial fiber industry in Hooke’s discussion of the spinning of silk by the spider. Elsewhere in his great book, gigantic insects populate the pages, and controversy and scientific argument mark out the text. Micrographia is a large book, measuring almost twelve inches tall and weighing three pounds. It was printed in October 1664, and when bound copies appeared on sale the following year it became an instant bestseller. Most people cannot relish the crisp printing and the fine paper of an original issue, and this digital edition brings the look of the first edition truly into the public domain. We can marvel at the clarity of the prose, and the vividness of the pictures. Many of the plates (like that of the stinging nettle, for example, and the louse) have a clarity not regained until the era of the electron microscope. It is hard to believe these are the images from a pioneer who flourished three and a half centuries ago. Commentary by Brian J. Ford, searchable live text.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The scientific revolution was in full swing in 1665. The Royal Society was making its stamp on

England. This scholarly tome, by Robert Hooke, was the first to use the new microscope to investigate the previously invisible. The large (more than two feet square) drawings are staggering. The detail, the meticulous effort, the hundreds of pages of text, amaze to this day.My interest lies in the new mental world of these virtuosos (scientists) as they were known. The dedication to King Charles, the additional dedication to the Royal society and the twenty-seven page preface provide insight into the changing intellectual outlook.The dedication to Charles: "It is none the least considerable, that Philosophy (science) and Experimental Learning have prospered under your Royal Patronage." (12) Charles was a member of the Royal Society. Hooke believes Charles' support, in contrast to the university which taught only Aristotle, has helped the new learning. He offers the benefits to England: "The improvement of Manufactures and Agriculture, the Increase of Commerce, the Avantage of Navigation." This is a new reason for research, human benefit in the physical, external. The old focus was on spiritual, internal benefits.The following page is a dedication to the Royal society. He promises to avoid "the espousal of any Hypothesis not sufficiently grounded and confirmed by experiment." (15) This is conventional wisdom today. It was revolutionary in 1665. It was assumed the human mind, if trained and careful, could and should apprehend the mind of God by reason, this is called 'rationalism'. Mathematics is founded on this belief. Decarte and the French enlightenment were a result of the trust in such an ability.

Micrographia