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The Birth of the Cell

Henry Harris

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The Birth of the Cell

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The Birth of the Cell Henry Harris
This vivid book tells a story that spans three centuries and crosses many national boundaries-a story of scientific discovery that fundamentally changed the way we understand the basis of life. Henry Harris, one of the world's leading cell biologists, here provides a strikingly original account of how scientists came to understand that the bodies of all living things are composed of microscopic units that we now call cells. Harris turns to the primary literature-the original texts, scientific papers, and correspondence of medical researchers involved in the formulation of the cell doctrine-to reconstruct the events that enabled researchers to comprehend the nature and purpose of cells. Translating many of these documents into English for the first time, Harris uncovers an authentic version of events quite different from that described in conventional science textbooks. Focusing on the scientific history of the genesis of the cell doctrine, the author also considers contemporary social and political contexts and shows how these influenced what experiments were undertaken and how the results were represented. He describes the intellectual struggles of pioneers across Europe, including Czech, Polish, and Russian scientists whose contributions have been largely overlooked, and explores their false starts, blind alleys, and detours as well as triumphant verifiable discoveries. The book includes a fascinating collection of photographs-many previously unpublished-that portray those involved in the scientific quest and their observations. This book will not only be a valuable addition to the libraries of science historians and practicing scientists, it will also appeal to general readers interested in the adventure of scientific discovery.

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