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This book offers a detailed description and valuable analysis of Lazzaro Spallanzani’s research on animal regeneration and of the rhetoric and strategies he adopted to promote his ideas in the Republic of Letters. It is based on Spallanzani’s publications, correspondence and particularly on his laboratory notebooks which the author has recently edited (Edizione nazionale delle opere di L. S., Parte VI, T. I–II, Modena 2002/03).

Monti first sets out some “external” circumstances in which the master conducted his research and – most useful, as this is only rarely known in such detail – delivers a precise account of how he organised the work in his laboratory and especially of how he took his notes. She then proceeds to analyse these notes and to follow Spallanzani’s investigations in chronological order. Spallanzani continuously varied and refined his experiments, stimulated by his own results but also by reading or suggestions of others (notably Bonnet). As such, he did not differ greatly from other experimental naturalists. It is remarkable, however, to what degree he persisted in his aim to reveal the secrets of regeneration and still refused to accept experimental results as unequivocal proofs or refutations of a specific model of explanation. In his publications he showed much less restraint. He published, however, only an essay-like “Prodromo” (1768) which announced a more thorough and systematic treatise on regeneration. With this strategy he could make his most astonishing results known and proclaim his ideals of experimental research without having to disclose the disturbing complexity and variety of his results. In his aim to spread his ideas and to put himself on the map of the Republic of Letters, Spallanzani succeeded in establishing a net of international supporters who themselves lacked the rhetorical skills of the master and therefore remained in the shadow although they often made contri-
butions of great value. Monti stresses that these minor figures and similar nets of cooperation should be studied as important elements of the development of science.

The author argues that history of science should not be written merely as a history of ideas but rather as an archaeology of practices, actions and events. We should therefore not only focus on the publications but even more on the notes, protocols and letters of scientists in order to see and understand the development of thoughts and actions. This is especially true for the case of Spallanzani who published only a small and well-chosen part of his results and reflections. Monti marvellously succeeds in unfolding the order of events and enables the reader to follow the master through his struggles in the laboratory and the Republic of Letters.

Monti is unwilling to leave out any detail and therefore might tire readers who are not specialists of Spallanzani’s work or of the history of regeneration. This seems to be due to her notion that only a detailed account allows us to understand the process of research and that general explanations of how science works rather obscure than explain a specific case. Although Monti certainly is right that all cases are different and that Spallanzani is a case which is worth to be studied on its own, one would have appreciated some more general reflections about experimentation and scientific networking. This would also have helped to locate the master from Scandiano within 18th-century science and the history of experiment in general. Being an expert not only of Spallanzani but also of other scientists like Haller and Vallisneri, Monti would be qualified as few others to draw such comparisons. This would make the book interesting for a wider readership, which might be particularly welcome because Italian books only rarely are taken notice of by the scientific community north of the Alps.

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