



# The Fabric of Life: Microscopy in the Seventeenth Century

*Ms. Marian Fournier*

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In the life sciences, precision and empirical sophistication began to arrive with the microscope. The instrument enjoyed a period of novelty and influence in seventeenth-century England, Holland, Italy, and France, only later to fall into disuse. Among historians of science, the reasons for the microscope's appearance and then eclipse have long been a subject of debate.

Based on extensive research in Dutch sources, *The Fabric of Life* examines the work of five leading microscopists of the period -- Robert Hooke, Marcello Malpighi, Jan Swammerdam, Nehemiah Grew, and Antoni van Leeuwenhoek -- and locates answers in the mentalities they took to their work. Marian Fournier finds that these early scientists initially used microscopical observations as arguments in favor of mechanical philosophy. With the aid of the microscope, their work led to unexpected discoveries, making the microscope all the rage in some circles but also raising new issues that eventually discouraged use of the new device.

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