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## **Adjectives, footnotes and captions: Historiographic biases against preformation in mid-war accounts of embryology**

ALTHOUGH IMPARTIALITY SHOULD BE their outmost distinction, historians in general are often biased. So are historians of biology in particular. In this case, we chose a simple case study — the doctrine of preformation such as it was presented by seventeenth and eighteenth century microscopists — to shed new light on an old strategy: how an apparently meticulous and respectable scholar can mistake himself for a judge while writing about the past and poison the reader's opinion due to his own aprioristic prejudice. Some authors from the period under scrutiny, such as the distinguished Lamarckist E. S. Russell, wrote in their chapters long and fierce head-on rejections of preformation altogether. However, such rejections seemed to have worked better and sunk deeper when they were subtler. This has been masterly done not by falsifying data or delivering speeches but simply by choosing derogatory adjectives, keeping important information to just about unreadable footnotes and resorting to captions to tell a story different from the text. This trend was quite evident in the large corpus of histories of biology published from the 1930s to the 1950s. For this study we shall focus on the books by the two authors who are, incidentally, considered up to our days the major authorities on histories of embryology, Joseph Needham and Francis Joseph Cole.

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