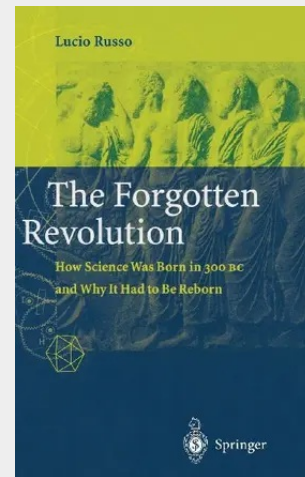


The Forgotten Revolution

How Science Was Born in 300 BC and Why it Had to Be Reborn

The third and second centuries BC witnessed, in the Greek world, a scientific and technological explosion. In the age of Archimedes and Euclid, science as we know it was born, and gave rise to sophisticated technology that would not be seen again until the 18th century. What were the landmarks in the meteoric rise of science 2300 years ago? Why are they so little known today, even among scientists, classicists and historians? How do they relate to the post-1500 science that we are familiar with from school? These are the questions that this book discusses, in the belief that the answers bear on choices we face today.

The period from the late fourth to the late second century B. C. witnessed, in Greek-speaking countries, an explosion of objective knowledge about the external world. While Greek culture had reached great heights in art, literature and philosophy already in the earlier classical era, it is in the so-called Hellenistic period that we see for the first time anywhere in the world the appearance of science as we understand it now: not an accumulation of facts or philosophically based speculations, but an organized effort to model nature and apply such models, or scientific theories in a sense we will make precise, to the solution of practical problems and to a growing understanding of nature. We owe this new approach to scientists such as Archimedes, Euclid, Eratosthenes and many others less familiar today but no less remarkable. Yet, not long after this golden period, much of this extraordinary development had been reversed. Rome borrowed what it was capable of from the Greeks and kept it for a little while yet, but created very little science of its own. Europe was soon smothered in the obscurantism and stasis that blocked most avenues of intellectual development for a thousand years until, as is well known, the rediscovery of ancient culture in its fullness paved the way to the modern age.



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