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NEUROLOGICAL STAMP

Allesandro Volta (1745–87)

Lulgi Galvani (1738–98) thought that muscles contained animal electricity secreted by the brain and distributed by the nerves. Volta, a friend of Galvani, had difficulty with this concept of animal electricity. Volta showed that production of electric current did not need the presence of animal tissue, as Galvani and others had supposed. He also showed that muscles would contract with electrical stimulation but Galvani had also shown that the muscles of a frog twitched when touched by a spark from an electric machine or condenser such as a Leyden jar. Volta produced the famous voltaic pile consisting of alternating columns of zinc and silver discs separated by porous cardboard soaked in brine. This was essentially the first electrical battery and it revolutionised the study of electricity by producing a steady available source of current. This led almost immediately to William Nicholson's decomposition of water by electrolysis, and later the discovery by Humphrey Davy of potassium and other metals by the same process.

Volta was philatelically honoured in 1927 (Stanley Gibbons 209, Scott 189). It is in his honour that the unit of electrical potential or potential difference is called the volt.

L F HAAS

STAMP 1