

## Journals of the History of Science in the Netherlands (1998)

BERT THEUNISSEN\*

At present, there is only one journal of the history of science in the Netherlands. This is *Gewina*, a Dutch-language periodical issued by the Dutch History of Science Society. Until 1989, there was also an international journal, *Janus*, which, for as long as it appeared, was the oldest international journal in existence in the field. An initiative to establish a new medium for international publication was undertaken in 1989, resulting in the establishment of the yearbook *Tractrix*. Five issues of this yearbook were published, after which this undertaking came to an end. Several other more or less specialised periodicals have been launched over the years,<sup>1</sup> yet in this paper I shall restrict my attention to a sketch of the historical backgrounds and context of the establishment of the three most important ones just mentioned. I shall try to relate their aims and scope, as well as their fates, to the development of the history of science discipline in the Netherlands.

### *Janus - Archives internationales pour l'histoire de la médecine et la géographie médicale*

The first issue of *Janus* appeared on January 1, 1896.<sup>2</sup> The journal was to appear without interruption on a bimonthly basis until 1941, when the occupying Germans stopped its

\* Bert Theunissen, Utrecht University. Email: l.t.g.theunissen@uu.nl. This contribution was written in 1998 as a history of journals for the history of science in the Netherlands up to that date.\* We reproduce it in its original form (albeit edited to fit *Studium's* formatting) as an illustration of the history of science publication landscape around the turn of the century, just as Stokvis' article reveals much of the situation roughly one century earlier. The text has not been updated save for a few minor corrections and a few notes. Original citation: B. Theunissen, 'Journals of the history of science in the Netherlands', in: M. Beretta, C. Pogliani & P. Redondi (Eds.), *Journals and History of Science* (Florence 1998) 197–210.

1 Among those still in existence the following need to be mentioned. The most important journal for the history of technology is the yearbook *NEHA-Jaarboek voor Economische-, Bedrijfs- en Techniekgeschiedenis. Erfgoed van Industrie en Techniek*, a journal for industrial archeology and the history of technology. The Dutch veterinary historical society publishes *Argos*. In Belgium the Dutch-language *Scientiarum Historia*, a quarterly devoted to the history of medicine, mathematics and science, appeared between 1959 and 1973. It was revived in 1990 as the official journal of the history of science society of the 'Southern Netherlands'.

2 The journal was introduced by its editors ('Janus redivivus', *Janus* 1: 1–6 (1896)) as an attempt to revive an earlier, German *Janus*, a periodical for the history of medicine established by A. W. E. Th. Henschel in Breslau in 1846. Three volumes appeared until 1848; a new series was started in 1851, of which only two volumes appeared.

publication. After a sixteen-year break, publication was resumed in 1957 and continued until 1989. At first, as its subtitle indicates, *Janus* covered the fields of medical history and of medical geography. After the Second World War, the scope was broadened to include the history of science, pharmacy and technology.

The initiative for *Janus*' establishment was taken by a practising physician, H. F. A. Peypers (1853–1904), who was also to become its first 'director'. In the editorial board he was joined by another physician and amateur historian of medicine, C. E. Daniels (1839–1921), and two medical professors of the University of Amsterdam, B. J. Stokvis (1834–1902) and J. W. R. Tilanus (1823–1914). The board further consisted of an international group of medical men representing most Western European countries, Russia, the United States and Japan.

The foundation of *Janus* in this particular period can best be understood against the background of a widely supported cultural and political movement in Dutch society that reached its peak in the decades around the turn of the century. The movement can be characterised as nationalistic and internationalistic at the same time, and it had a strong historical awareness as one of its typical features.<sup>3</sup>

The nationalistic aspect of the movement had a long history and dated back to the late 1830s and 1840s, after the separation of the northern Netherlands from Belgium. At that time, the Dutch were in search of a foundation for the modern Dutch nation state that was in the process of being constructed in this period. This was a phase full of uncertainties, economically, socially and politically. As an antidote to the feelings of crisis, it became customary to invoke the glorious Dutch past as a model for what being Dutch was about and as a stimulus for the Dutch to recover their former position and status in the world at large. Understandably, the seventeenth century, the Dutch 'golden age', featured most prominently among the past periods that were supposed to illustrate the national potential for greatness and uniqueness.

Now it was perfectly clear to the nineteenth-century revivers of the national *elan* that the Dutch had lost their former position as an economic and military power and that they would never recover it. They were also well aware that the Dutch would not even be able to defend their right to an independent existence as a nation by force. Yet the seventeenth century had not only been a period of unique Dutch economic and military prowess. The Dutch had also excelled in the arts and sciences. Here, prospects for a complete recovery seemed better. It should be possible, it was believed, to recapture the spirit of Dutch self-confidence that had inspired the works of Rembrandt and Frans Hals on the one hand, and of Huygens and Leeuwenhoek on the other. This would reinstate the Netherlands in its prominent position among the leading centres of Western culture and affirm its identity and right to an independent existence. The nationalism that expressed itself in this way can best be characterised as *cultural* nationalism.<sup>4</sup>

Where the natural sciences are concerned, the movement came to a climax in 1887, with the establishment of the Nederlandsch Natuur en Geneeskundig Congres, an association for the advancement of science and medicine that can be seen as the Dutch equivalent of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Naturforscher und Ärzte or the British Association for

3 For an overview focusing on the role of the sciences in this movement, see W. Otterspeer and J. Schuller tot Peursum-Meijer, *Wetenschap en wereldvrede. De Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen en het herstel van de internationale wetenschap tijdens het Interbellum* (Amsterdam 1997), chapter 1.

4 J.Th.M. Bank, *Het roemrijk vaderland. Cultureel nationalisme in Nederland in de negentiende eeuw* ('s-Gravenhage 1990).

the Advancement of Science.<sup>5</sup> Within a few years, the vast majority of Dutch scientists had become a member of this organisation. Its aim, as one of its originators expressed it, was: 'to [spur on] our national scientists and medical men to still more independent research, but especially [to revive], time and again, the notion that mutual stimulation and cooperation in scientific matters must lead: *ad majorem patriae gloriam*.'<sup>6</sup> To achieve this aim, it was stated repeatedly, seventeenth-century Dutch science and its heroes could serve as examples worth following. In this way, the nationalistic motives underlying the establishment of this society also contributed to a rise in interest in the history of Dutch science.<sup>7</sup>

Towards the end of the century, this nationalism was complemented by what, on the face of it, is its opposite, namely internationalism. In this case however, there was no contradiction. The Franco-Prussian war and other international conflicts had by then made it abundantly clear how precarious the position of small nations like the Netherlands would be in case of a military conflict between the great powers. It was one thing to claim respect and independence on the basis of a national culture and identity, it was quite another whether such distinctive cultural features would prevent the Netherlands from being overrun by more powerful aggressors. Dutch intellectuals therefore stressed the necessity of active involvement in international cooperation and peacekeeping. Small countries like the Netherlands, they felt, were particularly suited for this task, since they presented no threat to the major powers. They could steer a neutral course and act as a go-between. Expressing an idea that tends to resurface in Dutch politics to the present day, they even felt that the Dutch, given their long experience in international affairs, their international outlook and their polyglot capabilities, should take the lead in such initiatives and act as guides in international relations.

An example of the fervour of the Dutch in this sphere is provided by their activity in international law, resulting in the building of the Peace Palace and the establishment of the permanent International Court of Justice in the Hague. Science provides an equally convincing example. With men like Lorentz, Kamerlingh Onnes, Zeeman, Van der Waals and de Vries, the Dutch natural sciences could by then be said to have indeed succeeded in recapturing the spirit of the golden age in the seventeenth century. Several representatives of this second golden age were to take an important part in the promotion of international cooperation and the establishment of international scientific organisations. Lorentz' role as president of the International Commission on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations in the interwar period is the best-known example, but many more could be given.<sup>8</sup>

In the publication of *Janus* in 1896 all these elements can be seen to come together. Firstly, it was an international project with the Netherlands as its home base. Secondly, *Janus*' internationalistic aims, far from being at odds with them, were an extension of the nationalistic motives that had given rise to its founders' interest in history. *Janus*' most prominent Dutch

5 On the history of this society and its nationalistic background, see R.P.W. Visser, 'Het "Nederlandsch Natuur- en Geneeskundig Congres" over de relatie natuurwetenschap en samenleving, 1887-1900', in: J. J. Kloek & W. W. Mijnhardt (eds.), *Balans en perspectief van de Nederlandse cultuurgeschiedenis. De productie, distributie en consumptie van cultuur* (Amsterdam, 1990) 37-48.

6 M. Treub, 'Eene feest-vergadering', *De Gids* 43 (1879) 128-156, in particular 134.

7 Examples of what this historical interest amounted to can be found in K. van Berkel, 'Natuurwetenschap en cultureel-nationalisme in negentiende-eeuws Nederland', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 104 (1991) 574-589, and K. van Berkel, 'De beoefening van de wetenschapsgeschiedenis in Nederland', *Gewin* 18 (1995) 181-191.

8 Lorentz' role is extensively discussed in Otterspeer and Schuller, 'Wetenschap en wereldvrede' (n. 3).

editor, Barend Stokvis, was one of the ideologues and first president of the Dutch Association for the Advancement of Science and Medicine mentioned above, the hot-bed of Dutch scientific nationalism. Stokvis wrote the opening editorial for the first issue, and he concluded his introductory remarks by expressing the hope that, 'those who shall contribute to the success of the new *Janus*, shall contribute at the same time to the real progress of medicine, to the progress of welfare, of peace and of the concord of peoples.'<sup>9</sup>

Thirdly, as can be gleaned from this quote, the first editors did not propagandize the history of science and medicine as an end in itself. For them, history was the handmaiden of science. They explained the two-faced Janus head emblem from which the journal derived its name as illustrating their conviction that in order to make progress in the present and future, one had to keep a constant eye on the past. This was why *Janus* looked forward and backward, they claimed. There were, for instance, important methodological lessons to be learnt from how scientists had conducted their research in the past. Further, in order to guarantee the steady growth of knowledge, every scientist should not only be aware of the discoveries made by his forerunners, but also of their errors. Science was a progressive and cumulative activity, and its history constituted the foundation on which to build its future.

This also explains why *Janus* was not only an historical journal, but also covered the field of medical geography.<sup>10</sup> For the editors, there was no essential difference between the history of science and medical geography in as far as their importance for medicine was concerned. Both fields provided resources of data - archives as it were - that were less accessible, yet indispensable for the physician and medical researcher. History could be mined for important insights and to avoid errors. In a similar manner, data on medicine and on diseases in different, especially far-away countries should be taken stock of and explored for new methods of healing, new pharmaceutical substances, or important epidemiological information. It must have been for reasons such as these that *Janus'* founders received grants from the Dutch Ministry of the Colonies and from the Deli Maatschappij, an important colonial commercial company, to help them to establish the journal.

The medical geography section did indeed develop into a thriving part of the journal, especially in the early years. To give an indication of this: in the first ten volumes of *Janus*, articles on medical geography constituted, on average, 44% of the total number of articles. The section was continued until the first break in *Janus'* publication in 1941; it would not reappear after the war. Already by 1941, however, medical geography had become more specialised and independent, and *Janus* had by then developed into a predominantly historical journal. In the last five years before the war, for instance, medical geography accounted for a mere 6% of the papers.

Finally, the Dutch contributions to *Janus* in the first period of its existence underline the fact that *Janus'* establishment was not due to a sudden rise in interest in the history of science for its own sake in the Netherlands. For only a small number of Dutch authors, the editors prominent among them, wrote articles for *Janus*. Over the first ten years, for instance, Dutch authors accounted for an average of 15% of the articles, including those on medical geography. German authors contributed 33%, the French 24%, the English 8%, authors from some fifteen other countries accounting for the remaining 20%. These figures also indicate that *Janus* was, in this period, a truly international journal.

9 B.J. Stokvis, 'Janus redivivus', *Janus* 1 (1896) 1–6, on p. 6. [The article is reproduced in this issue, IN&GS].

10 The German *Janus* (see n. 2) also included medical geography.

The nature of the Dutch contributions also confirms that there was not much research being done with purely historical objectives in these years. This kind of interest only came to play a more prominent part somewhat later, in 1913, for instance, when the Dutch Society for the History of Medicine, Science and Mathematics was established. *Janus* became the official journal of this society in 1915. Another example dates from 1921, when the leading Dutch medical journal, the *Nederlandsch Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde*, opened an historical section.<sup>11</sup> Yet again: its editor felt compelled to defend himself beforehand against the criticism that the section might amass much historical detail the relevance of which for medicine was unclear. It was impossible, he explained, to draw a sharp line, and one could never know in advance which historical details would turn out to be relevant or not.<sup>12</sup>

After the war, as already indicated, *Janus*' subtitle was changed into *Revue internationale de l'histoire des sciences, de la médecine, de la pharmacie et de la technique*. The funds needed for its continuation were only brought together in 1957, when a grant from the Dutch Organisation for Pure Research (ZWO) was obtained - a telling difference with the situation at the beginning of *Janus*' existence, when a commercial company supported it. However, the motives underlying the establishment of *Janus* in 1896 did not disappear without a trace. Particularly the idea that history of science is useful for the working scientist lingered on for quite some time - in 1957 the editors once again underscored the importance of looking both backward and forward, as illustrated by the *Janus* emblem. Yet the objective of studying history for its own sake gained more and more ground, and ultimately replaced all others. This was a silent process. The editors never commented upon *Janus*' gradual change of course after the war.

Different from the prewar period, Dutch contributors from now on had a more substantial share in the total output of *Janus*. In the first decade after publication was resumed, articles by Dutch authors made up some 35% of the total number. Amateurs of the history of science and medicine still made a substantial contribution to this production. In the 1970s, the average even rose to 50%, even though the share of amateurs decreased rapidly in these years. There is a positive and a negative side to this development. On the one hand, the percentages reflect the fact that, in the sixties and seventies, a professional community of historians of science, medicine and technology came into existence in the Netherlands. The community consisted of only a handful of professorships, yet especially in the sixties and early seventies some of these first generation professionals were enabled to build up institutes and appoint staff members, with an increase in output as a result. On the other hand, a percentage of up to 50% of Dutch contributions is obviously too much for a purportedly international journal.

Another indication that something went wrong with *Janus* is provided by the following statistics. Between 1957, when publication was resumed, and 1985, when the last complete volume appeared, German authors contributed an average of 14% of the articles, French authors 4%, English 2.6%, and authors from the U.S.A. 9%. The number of contributions from the European continent amounted to 87% of the total. *Janus* had thus become

11 The historical sections were collected and published separately as *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis der Geneeskunde*. The series continued until 1965.

12 G. Van Rijnberg, 'De betekenis van de geschiedenis der geneeskunde. Een woord ter inleiding', *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis der Geneeskunde* 1 (1921) 1-3.

predominantly continental. Moreover, if we take into consideration that much of the renewal that the history of science and medicine underwent from the late sixties onward was instigated by developments in the Anglo-Saxon countries, these figures also suggest that *Janus* had become a conservative journal. A perusal of any volume from these years can only lead to the same conclusion.

I would suggest that this was partly due to the fact that the new impulses coming from the social history of science and medicine and from what is now called science and technology studies, took a rather long time - until well into the eighties - to affect the work of Dutch historians. Some of the new fields developed rapidly in the Netherlands, yet there was little communication with the history of science and medicine communities. This situation has begun to change only recently. (I think it is fair to say that the Netherlands are not much different from other continental countries in this respect.)

A more detailed analysis than I have been able to undertake would be needed to assess if and how this separation of the communities was reflected by the editorial policy of *Janus'* Dutch editors. On the other hand, it may safely be assumed that *Janus* was never an obvious, let alone an attractive target for authors in the social history and STS fields.

Nevertheless, I think *Janus* might have survived, either as a predominantly continental journal, even an 'old-fashioned' one, or under a new banner. For the substantial publication grant from the Dutch NSF was never discontinued. *Janus'* gradual deterioration and its final discontinuance in 1989, I am sorry to say, was mainly due to a single person: its executive editor E. M. Bruins. This is a sad story; there is no point telling it in detail here. I shall restrict myself to a few essentials.<sup>13</sup> To begin with, Bruins was *Janus* and *Janus* was Bruins, especially in the later period. He controlled the foundation that sponsored *Janus*, he controlled all administrative and financial matters, and even, to a considerable extent, the editorial board. In this position of almost complete power, Bruins happened to be of the opinion that the discipline was doomed and rapidly going to the dogs. He was convinced that nothing good could come from the Anglo-Saxon countries. America, for instance, counted not a single historian of merit in his view. He also believed that he was the only person in the Netherlands capable of managing *Janus*, and he refused to give others a say in any aspect of its publication. Finally, Bruins was a controversial figure in his own field, the history of mathematics. In his function as editor, he fought many battles with eminent colleagues, sooner or later offending many of them deeply. His most destructive public weapon were his scathing, venomous book reviews, his comments obviously intended to take his victims to task as if they were school children. Small wonder that not much of what was new in the history of science had a chance to transpire to *Janus*. Bruins chased away many reputable colleagues, even alienated the profession as a whole and brought *Janus* into irreparable disrepute. What tops it all is that Bruins was of the opinion that *Janus* would be better off with less subscribers than more, since a subscriber cost the foundation more than he or she brought in. Therefore Bruins made no bones about refusing subscriptions from colleagues whose work he did not like. In short, with Bruins in charge, *Janus* was doomed. In the late eighties, the other editors resigned, feeling that the journal had lost all credibility within the profession. Bruins died in 1990, taking *Janus* with him in his grave - as he had planned, one is inclined to speculate.

13 The following is based on interviews with former editors of *Janus* and on the correspondence some of them kindly put at my disposal.

*Tractrix*

This was not quite the end of the Dutch involvement in international publication, however. The executive committee of the Dutch Society for the History of Science, Medicine, Technology and Mathematics had at an earlier date investigated the possibility of a merger between *Janus* and the Society's Dutch-language journal, entitled *Tijdschrift voor de Geschiedenis der Geneeskunde, Natuurwetenschappen, Wiskunde en Techniek*. (Fortunately it was renamed in 1992 and is now entitled *Gewina*). Financial considerations and opposition from Bruins prevented this merger, but then the Society decided to sponsor a new international journal, to be published under the society's auspices. It was already clear by then that *Janus* would not last much longer, and the executive committee decided to try to continue the tradition, albeit on a different basis.

The result of this initiative was the establishment of *Tractrix*, *Yearbook for the History of Science, Medicine, Technology and Mathematics*, the first issue of which appeared in 1989. It was issued free to members of the Society. For financial and practical reasons *Tractrix* appeared once a year. It was further agreed that the journal would be sponsored by the Society for five years, after which period its board and publisher (Rodopi B.V., in Amsterdam) should have succeeded in bringing in enough subscribers to guarantee an independent commercial existence.

*Tractrix* was to be more than a history of science journal that happened to be based in the Netherlands. The Society and the journal's editorial board wanted it to have a recognisable Dutch imprint. *Tractrix* was to focus in particular, though not exclusively, on the history of Dutch science and on Dutch contributions to the history of science. Where the history of Dutch science is concerned, it was believed that 'there still are rich goldmines to be detected here that have remained underexploited owing at least in part to the language barrier.'<sup>14</sup>

Further, *Tractrix* aimed to provide a forum for Dutch scholars, since it was felt that 'the Dutch community of historians of science, and its junior members in particular, might benefit from the existence of an international yearbook radiating from a centre in the Netherlands.'<sup>15</sup> Finally *Tractrix* was to contain reviews of selected books covering aspects of Dutch history of science and a yearly 'Dutch classic', that is a translation of classic papers that had appeared only in Dutch.

As the former executive editor of *Tractrix*, I am not quite the right person to assess whether or not we succeeded in living up to the aims we set ourselves. But I shall give you my view of the matter, for what it is worth. In terms of matters of fact, I think we did fulfil our promises. What was published in *Tractrix* was in accord with the guidelines set out in the first issue. In reviews in other journals, *Tractrix* was welcomed as a useful and valuable addition to the existing range of history of science journals. We conducted an enquiry among the members of the Dutch History of Science Society, and again, we received a favourable response on this score.

Still, the yearbook did not survive; the end of the five-year mandate period turned out to be the end of *Tractrix* as well. In order to survive on a commercial basis, we would have needed some 200 subscribers. Although we did a lot of advertising, we managed to get only 80. Nevertheless, several publishers seriously considered adding *Tractrix* to their list, but in the end they all came to a negative conclusion. Brill in Leiden almost took us on board,

14 H.F. Cohen, 'What *Tractrix* is about, and why', *Tractrix* 1 (1989) 1–2.

15 Cohen, 'What *Tractrix* is about, and why' (n. 14).

but in the end they also pulled out, since, at exactly that time, they decided to add *Early Science and Medicine* to their list, a new international journal started in 1996. The Dutch History of Science Society then considered the possibility of continuing their sponsorship for a new five year period. They decided against it, however. Firstly, they doubted if the situation would be much different after a new five year period. Secondly, they did not want to continue to burden the Society's finances with a project that, in their opinion, was too peripheral to the Society's main objectives and of real importance to only a minority of its members. For *Tractrix* was intended for professionals, and these represent at best some 10% of the Society's 450 members.

Then there was a final point which we, the editors, admitted to ourselves only afterward, namely that the number of articles submitted for publication was disappointing. We had no great difficulty in filling the yearbook with articles that met our standards of quality, but every time there were just enough of them. Moreover, the articles we published could without exception have been published elsewhere; for the Dutch authors this was no less the case than for the authors from abroad. One cannot but conclude that there was no burning need for a journal of this nature. There is a simple explanation for this, I think. The Dutch history of science community is very internationally oriented - the nineteenth-century tradition is clearly being continued and our members of the profession experience little difficulty in finding their way abroad, whether it comes to publishing in international journals or in taking part in activities and developments elsewhere. As an example I might point to the annual HSS conferences, where the Dutch often constitute the largest delegation from abroad. Finally, it seems that *Tractrix'* focus on Dutch science was, for whatever reasons, not appealing enough to foreign scholars to induce them to subscribe.

### *Gewina*

Now that *Janus* and *Tractrix* are gone, we are left with only a single history of science journal in the Netherlands, the already mentioned *Gewina*, the official quarterly of the Dutch Society for the History of Science, Medicine, Technology and Mathematics. Fortunately, the history and present state of this journal enable me to conclude this paper on a happier note. *Gewina* was established in 1978, when the Society's finances allowed it to upgrade its newsletter into a genuine journal. It is expressly intended for the members of the Society, that is for those with a more than passing interest in the history of the fields covered by the Society, as well as for (amateur) historians who actively engage in research. There are no restrictions with regard to the scope of the contributions, yet publication in languages other than Dutch is only allowed under special circumstances. Besides two or three research papers per issue, *Gewina* in its present format contains a section in which new Dutch research projects are announced, a book review section that comes close to covering the entire Dutch production in the field, and a calendar of events. Finally the journal still serves as the History of Science Society's newsletter. Thus *Gewina* offers a fairly complete overview of what's going on in the profession in the Netherlands.

In the almost twenty years of its existence, *Gewina* has developed into a mature journal that lives up to its aims. For amateurs, it offers a reasonably low-threshold medium to communicate the results of their research. The same is true for the younger members of the profession, many of whom begin their publication careers by submitting parts of their PhD thesis to *Gewina*. Professionals also contribute to the journal, for instance to the thematic issues that are published once a year.

Inevitably, one has the feeling that some of the papers published by *Gewina* deserve a wider audience, but this drawback is inevitable for a journal written in a minor language. There is also a constant tension – just as inevitable, I think – between the members of the editorial board, who are all professionals, and the Society’s executive committee. The professionals have a tendency to want to upgrade the journal’s standards. They are counteracted by the executive committee’s policy to look after the amateurs’ interests and to keep the journal attractive for the Society’s members. This was also one of the reasons why the committee decided not to continue to furnish the funds required for the publication of *Tractrix*. Apart from the inevitable drawbacks, however, *Gewina* is doing fine and is financially sound. Although plans for an international medium of publication tend to resurface among the Society’s professional members every once in a while, at the moment there are no concrete prospects on this score.

*Acknowledgments*

I would like to thank Mart van Lieburg, Harry Snelders and Rob Visser, former editors of *Janus*, for their help in reconstructing the history of the journal, and my colleagues at the Utrecht Institute for the History of Science for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.