

WHAT 'TRACTRIX' IS ABOUT, AND WHY

Editorial Statement at the Commencement of the New Yearbook

As is indicated by its subtitle, this yearbook is to be devoted to the history of the natural sciences, of medicine, of technology, and of mathematics. As is suggested by its title, it is to focus in particular, though far from exclusively, on the history of Dutch science and on Dutch contributions to the history of science. How this meaning can be inferred from what may well seem a rather enigmatic title for the new yearbook is clarified in the very first article of this issue where, among other topics, H.J.M. Bos traces Christiaan Huygens' research into the peculiar mathematical curve known as the tractrix.

Since 1978 the Dutch Society for the History of Medicine, Mathematics, Science, and Technology ('GeWiNa') has sponsored a quarterly with a name that fully comes up to the reputation our language has acquired for its tough pronunciation habits – the *Tijdschrift voor de Geschiedenis der Geneeskunde, Natuurwetenschappen, Wiskunde en Techniek*. Inevitably, its readership has been confined to those who can read Dutch. Over the past years the GeWiNa board has felt an increasing need to inform the world of historians of science, medicine, and technology at large of what goes on in the Netherlands in these fields of scholarship, and also to provide a forum for studies in the history of Dutch science, medicine, and technology. This long-standing desire has now materialized in the GeWiNa board bringing together a group of editors, and entrusting to these a mandate for launching an international yearbook.

So much for our brief history. Now as to content. Contributions to *Tractrix* will fall into two distinct classes: fully-fledged research articles, and materials coming under the general label of 'Services to the reader'.

In principle, *Tractrix* is interested in any topic that is situated inside, or alongside interesting edges of, the history of the natural sciences, of medicine, of technology, and of mathematics (from here on these four distinct areas will be designated together by the shorthand term 'history of science'). Within that broad field, three domains will particularly arouse our editorial appetites.

The first is, obviously, the history of Dutch science. This, to be sure, is not a niche of history that has gone ignored by the wider world. After all, science is an international enterprise before anything else, and contributions by Dutchmen to the world stock of science have received a good measure of attention from scholars all over the world. Nevertheless, we believe that there still are rich goldmines to be detected here that have remained underexploited owing at least in part to the language barrier. For example, Dutch science grew up in the 17th and 18th centuries almost entirely without the benefit of court patronage. In a recent attempt at a national historiography of science entitled *In het voetspoor van Stevin* ('On Stevin's Heels'), K. van Berkel explored both the peculiarities of the Dutch Republic which gave rise to this exceptional institutional setting and what this meant for the fate of science in the Netherlands. Inquiries along such lines seem to hold great interest for comparative studies of institutionalization patterns in science, yet before they can

