

## **A Festschrift for Hans Mislin**



Hans Mislin, 1907–1993

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## Introduction

This issue of our journal is a Festschrift in memory of Hans Mislin, who was largely instrumental in founding EXPERIENTIA. Sadly, he died in the spring of 1993, and so did not live to see the journal he edited for 41 years complete its first half-century. EXPERIENTIA first appeared in April 1945, so we felt that it would be fitting to publish a memorial to Hans Mislin in the issue of April 1994, which marks the true beginning of the 50th year of publication.

In the first part of this special issue we present a series of biographical essays, written by people who knew Hans Mislin at different stages of his life. These are followed by essays on subjects that reflect his wide interest not only in his own speciality, experimental physiology, but also in broader aspects of the history and philosophy of science. One of these essays is on the 16th century philosopher and scientist Paracelsus - a particularly appropriate topic for EXPERIENTIA, since it is from Paracelsus that Hans Mislin took the motto on the journal's cover, 'Scientia est experientia'.

In the final section, we reproduce a selection of articles published in EXPERIENTIA during its early years, to convey something of the scope of the journal. We cannot, of course, even attempt to give a complete cross-section, so we have concentrated in the first place on papers which the present Section Editors suggested to us as 'landmark' papers in the development of their subjects. In addition, we have included several of the substantial reviews which were an important feature of the early issues of the journal. In the days after the Second World War, when scientific contact, and even scientific publication, had been limited for so long, these 'surveys' were very valuable in helping scientists to find out what had been going on in their fields.

EXPERIENTIA was born in troubled times. The first issue appeared a few weeks before the Allies accepted the capitulation of Germany. Switzerland, a peaceful island that had been spared the devastation that surrounded it, still had functioning universities and active publishing houses. A strong conviction that an organ was needed to bring together the scientists who had for too long been separated by the war was one of the reasons that led Hans Mislin to persuade the Basel publisher Albert Birkhäuser to found a new journal. The venture succeeded, and the new journal was given the title EXPERIENTIA.

Hans Mislin was a man of wide interests, and his ambition was to found a journal that would cover the whole range of

scientific disciplines. This ambition was never completely realised; even in the first volume, two-thirds of the contributions were in the fields of biology and basic medical research, and as time went on, the dominance of the life sciences increased at the expense of mathematics, physics and the earth sciences. In 1985 a decision was taken to restrict publication to the life sciences. However, within this broad category, the range has always been truly interdisciplinary, and it remains so to this day – from the chemistry of natural products to the safe disposal of atomic waste, or from the migration of birds to laboratory experiments in electrophysiology.

Another aim of the founders of EXPERIENTIA was to provide a forum for communication between scientists from different countries. The journal began to take on its hoped-for international character very early. The first paper from outside Switzerland (from the University of Utrecht) appeared in September 1945. In Volume 10 there were papers from 25 countries, and this trend has continued. It was always a concern of Hans Mislin's that scientists working in places where they were somewhat isolated should have a fair hearing. It was also a matter of editorial policy that competent science should not fail to be published because of inadequacies of English that could be sorted out by an editorial pencil. These traditions remain. In 1993 the papers published came from 37 countries, and the list is always increasing; in 1994 we have already had a first manuscript from Latvia and one from the Republic of Belarus. And the pencils of the editorial staff are still being worn to stubs in the effort to ensure that what EXPERIENTIA publishes is not only scientifically reliable but also grammatical and comprehensible.

One aspect of the international character of the journal in its early years was that it was prepared to publish papers in any of the 'principal scientific languages'. These were not actually defined, but they included French, German, English, Italian, Spanish and Russian. In early issues the languages were indeed varied, though French and German predominated. One of the changes that the editors of the first issues could not have predicted was the advance of English to a position of virtual monopoly in scientific publishing. In EXPERIENTIA, one can see this change occurring. In Volume 10, most of the papers from Germany, France and Switzerland were in German or French, but 15 years later, in 1969, two-thirds of the papers from these countries were in

English. Italian authors started writing in English even sooner; even in 1954, only 5 of the 25 papers from Italy were in Italian. By 1981, when an editorial decision was taken to publish only in English, the number of papers in other languages had already dropped almost to zero.

Not only did EXPERIENTIA publish in a variety of living languages; in 1965, Latin was resurrected for the Table of Contents - which included a large number of rubrics, reflecting the wide field covered by the journal. Some, like *Cogitationes* - short discussions of theories and new ideas - or *Disputandum*, are no longer part of the table of contents. Perhaps it would be interesting to revive them in the form of 'Letters to the Editor'. Other headings, like *Pro experimentis*, for papers on methodology, or *Generalia* and *Specialia*, for reviews and research articles, describe the publications that have always formed the backbone of the journal. There have, however, been changes in emphasis. At the beginning, short reports of experimental results appeared under the heading 'Vorläufige Mitteilungen / Communications provisoires / Communicati provvisori / Brief reports', with a firm, multilingual note that the editors did not hold themselves responsible for the contents. The title for the research reports underwent various changes, but they did remain extremely

brief until the early 1980s, when the editorial policy changed radically, with a new concentration on full-length papers on completed work, rather than preliminary communications.

There has been less change in the publication of *Generalia*. Reviews were an important feature of the first issues of EXPERIENTIA, and though in the journal's middle years, reviews were somewhat overwhelmed by the vast numbers of short papers, the wheel has now come full circle, and reviews again fill about half of EXPERIENTIA's pages. There has been a change, however; as well as single reviews there are 'Multi-author Reviews' with papers on a number of different aspects of a topic. The first, edited by M. Földi, on 'New trends in lymphology', was published in 1976. The last that Mislin himself initiated, 'Human biometeorology', was published in September 1993, a few months after his death. But the Founding Editor would certainly feel, if he could see the list of recent and forthcoming reviews, which include 'Ancient DNA' (50/6), 'Proteoglycans' (49/5), 'Melatonin and the light-dark Zeitgeber' (49/8), and 'Gene technology and biodiversity' (49/3), that the subject-matter of EXPERIENTIA remains as interdisciplinary as ever.

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