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Reviews

Dutch messengers: a history of science publishing, 1930–1980. By CORNELIS D. ANDRIESSE. (Library of the written word, 7). Pp. xlv, 284. Leiden: Brill. 2008. €99.00. ISBN: 9789004170841

Any reader expecting a step-by-step history of the developments that brought the world's largest science publishing house into existence will be surprised by this book. By formulating the main thesis that successful publishing requires a highly fruitful collaboration between competent academic editors and far-sighted publishers, Andriesse exposes the world beyond the economic and financial factors that contributed to the rise of Elsevier. The time to write this work was well chosen, since some of the main protagonists were still available to contribute their life stories. Key insight and valuable experience from a series of interviews over the period from 2002 to 2006 therefore play a prominent role.

Andriesse himself studied physics and astrophysics and specialized in energy conversions. He formulated a fluctuation theory of stellar mass loss before focusing on nuclear safety and electrical network stability. This background explains the ease with which throughout the book he introduces the vast number of disciplines that make up scientific, technical, and medical research. A scientific layman may find *Dutch messengers* at times overwhelming to read. The developments in the science publishing world went ahead at a fast pace, which the author has translated into an equally fast-paced text.

The book is divided into nine chapters, starting with an introductory chapter on how scientific publishing came into being in early modern times. The main point is that science must be recognized by scientists as science. Publishing the fruits of their undertakings was the way for scientists to spread their findings beyond academy walls and claim recognition. The second chapter, on the publishing house of Martinus Nijhoff, functions as a case study: a fairly small publishing house that in the early twentieth century took it upon itself to publish the works of the internationally acclaimed Christiaan Huygens (1629–1695). This example shows that a successful venture requires an expert editor and that historical events, language issues, and the choice between books and journals among other factors determine the fate of a publishing house.

The author's choice for the next chapter is in my view debatable. An entire chapter, albeit a short one, is devoted to the causes of the occupation of the Netherlands during the Second World War, sought within Germany. Although Andriesse stipulates strongly that what happened to the east of the Dutch border, which enabled the emergence of the Dutch publishing houses Elsevier and North-Holland after the destruction of German firms such as the Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft and Springer-Verlag, is crucial for the remainder of the book, the story could have been integrated into subsequent chapters. However, his main thesis, in which personal relationships play a dominant role, fully justifies his choice.

Chapters 4 to 7 make up the core of the book. One chapter focuses completely on Elsevier's venture, one solely on the North-Holland publishing house, one on the world-renowned journals they both managed to launch, which in turn put them on the map as veritable powerhouses, and finally a chapter on the merger of the companies in 1971 into Associated Scientific Publishers and their subsequent proceedings. After this Andriesse appears to struggle with his material.

The year 1980 was chosen as the end of the period under research. The author touches upon subjects that seem to give his main story a somewhat open ending. Towards 1980 the market for scientific, technical, and medical journals seemed to become saturated, which undeniably had far-reaching consequences for publishing houses that were not at the absolute

top. Takeover after merger in the following decade led to Elsevier becoming the world's largest scientific publisher in 1991. But Andriess's thesis of personal relationships as a key to successful publishing seems to have lost its strength during that period: surely saturation of the market made for a growing number of choices based on economic and financial grounds. Even so, the author attributes the increased wave of mergers to a caesura in the leadership of publishers. The last chapter gives the book an open ending: the internet revolution, which radically changed science publishing and which might show where Andriess's thesis stops working. The ending is as open as the world of science publishing, which is continuously changing.

A review of *Dutch messengers* would not be complete without touching on the subject of prose. Andriess has published three novels, with another coming out shortly. His literary aspirations shine through clearly in his work. On a ship owned by a publisher: 'She thrusts her bows into valleys of grey water, her propeller momentarily grinding the air, and is heeled over with Archimedean force, while green water cascades across her deck; then, more calmly, she recovers her flowing cohesion in bubbles of spume as they stream behind in her foaming wake'. At times abruptly and unsuspectingly prosaic, Andriess gives us a book in which context and personal relations expose the historical and human dynamics of the apparently harsh world of science publishing.

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