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Review of Gowan Dawson, Bernard Lightman,  
Sally Shuttleworth, and Jonathan R. Topham, eds,  
*Science Periodicals in Nineteenth-Century Britain:  
Constructing Scientific Communities*

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# Reviews

**Gowan Dawson, Bernard Lightman, Sally Shuttleworth, and Jonathan R. Topham, eds, *Science Periodicals in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Constructing Scientific Communities* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020). 424 pp. ISBN 9780226-676517 (cloth), 9780226683461 (e-book)**

In recent years, historians of science and knowledge have turned their attention to learned journals as a versatile source and a unique link between nineteenth-century European science and today's research culture. Numerous papers and books on British periodicals helped to understand better the roles of the editor, publisher, contributor, and reviewer within the scientific community. Furthermore, significant research on the development of journals established by learned societies and entrepreneurs alike has shown how periodicals answered the rapidly growing interest in science during the Victorian era and helped create the modern image of the scientist.

However, research on periodicals has mainly focused on the editorial side of journals and the periodical as a vessel for communicating content. This volume, edited by Gowan Dawson, Bernard Lightman, Sally Shuttleworth, and Jonathan R. Topham, offers a perspective on scientific periodicals and their role in nineteenth-century British society beyond the research efforts of idealizing elites. Through case studies of various journals, the ten chapters of the book demonstrate how periodicals shaped scientific communities. Furthermore, the authors also show how magazines built and helped maintain communities based on interest groups that did not participate in classic elitist scientific debates. Focusing on the financial aspects, the development of industrialized printing, and the tension between professionals and laypeople as contributors and readers, they also show how deeply anchored these periodicals were in the everyday and intellectual life of all social classes.

The volume adds to the research on periodicals and connects to various recent and ongoing projects, such as the investigation of the Royal Society's publications by Aileen Fyfe and others, as well as the understanding of Victorian printing related to the distribution of scientific knowledge and education. At the same time, it offers new connections between the history of periodical printing and the respective research fields and topics the chapters focus on, such as entomology, natural history, medicine, and health movements. In doing so, it reaches across numerous areas and topics, whose researchers, until now, might not have been aware of the significant role scientific periodicals played for their communities.

*Science Periodicals in Nineteenth-Century Britain* is separated into three sections: 1) 'New Formats for New Readers', 2) 'Defining the Communities of Science', and 3) 'Managing the Boundaries of Medicine'. The second section, containing six chapters, makes up the larger part of the book — sections one and three offer two chapters each. The first two sections explore the role and development of various commercial and specialized journals for specific communities and research fields. The red line we can find throughout the chapters is the connection between the challenge to find a niche within the highly competitive market, the development and influence of industrialized printing, and the intercommunication between contributors and readers, which all are factors for creating specialized communities. Chapter one by Dawson and Topham introduces the development of scientific, medical, and technical

periodicals in nineteenth-century Britain. It places the focus of the volume on the industrialization of printing and how this helped develop a market for commercial journals apart from, in competition with, and inspiring, elite specialized periodicals published by established learned societies. The chapter offers a solid base for the entire volume as well as an overview of the development of scientific periodicals over the course of the century in general.

Other reoccurring topics are the boundary work and conflicts between social classes and within scholarly hierarchies, and how these played out in the conceptualization and set up of commercial journals and periodicals of learned societies. In chapter four, Gowan Dawson shows, for example, the struggle of the Geological Society with the newly emerging commercial geological journals of the 1840s, such as the *Geologist*, arguing that the commercial journals challenged privately subsidized elitist periodicals. The chapter, like various others, also illustrates how societies had to face the fact that their tradition of slow publications, their subscription model, and their favouring of elongated manuscripts missed the expectation of readers who wanted to be informed quickly and about practical questions.

While the tension between learned societies' publication organs and newly emerging commercial journals is a reoccurring topic in part two of this volume, chapter three on the development of proceedings as a genre and their role as an in-between stands out in its contextualizing approach. The author, Alex Csiszar, introduces proceedings as a subgenre of the learned periodical and an experimental attempt of societies to adapt to the changing business of scientific printing. Csiszar defines proceedings as a genre and offers an excellent contextualization, showing how proceedings acted as a hybrid between a society's transactions and their answer to the changing market for periodicals.

Matthew Wale's chapter on entomological periodicals offers a different

perspective on the role of scientific journals in class conflicts. Journals such as the *Intelligencer* informed their readers of the newest discoveries of insects and reports on preparation techniques, publishing the findings of entomologists all over Britain seemingly indiscriminately of social class. The author discusses the development of this extraordinary research field, which gives participants from various social backgrounds and interests the opportunity to take part through its journals, such as the razor grinder and enthusiastic entomologist James Batty from nearby Sheffield. This mingling of amateur collectors who, in their day-to-day lives as carpenters or gentlemen, would never have conversed with each other is one of many examples of the role of periodicals in building scientific communities.

Section three offers two chapters on medical journals, demonstrating how these magazines interacted with specific communities. While the previous chapters mainly focussed on the construction of communities and illustrated how specific research fields developed, Sally Frampton's and Sally Shuttleworth's chapters follow a different approach by discussing how journal editors aimed to influence the communities they addressed. Frampton shows in chapter nine how the *Lancet* established itself as a critical journal against the London medical elite but eventually also influenced said elite to act against the more popularizing journals *Hospital* and *Baby*. She illustrates how these journals aimed to educate their readers as well as offer practitioners and other practically oriented interest groups an opportunity to reach out to the public.

In chapter ten, Shuttleworth adds to this discussion by looking at influential public health journals and how they became an essential part of the sanitary movement between 1850 and 1890. Shuttleworth argues that these journals shift our view on the health movement and its communities from well-known figures and narratives to a new understanding of community activities and a merging of scientific, professional,

and practical approaches to public and private health questions.

Both chapters reach further than the journals they use as case studies. Additionally, Frampton observes that journals are not only often overlooked in the histories of science and knowledge but also that a relatively small number of journals, often those readily available through digitization or a specific reputation, tints our view on learned journals and their influence on nineteenth-century science and health.

The volume's wide variety of case studies on British periodicals opens a new chapter on the interconnections between elitist societies and amateur scholars, which gives us a better insight into the creation, distribution, and accumulation of knowledge in the age of science. The chapters also contribute to debates in the history of their respective research fields by demonstrating how communities were often formed by specialized journals and how such journals actively created these communities to gain a readership and remain financially competitive.

It is only a pity that the chapters in sections one and two often seem redundant in their explanations and

arguments concerning the importance of commercial aspects and the challenges of the learned societies and editors of commercial journals. Given the rich sources and aspects specific to the cases, I would have wished for a wider variety of argumentative perspectives, telling us more about what made these journals and their communities unique in their respective research fields.

*Science Periodicals in Nineteenth-Century Britain* offers an excellent, extraordinarily varied insight into the role and development of scientific periodicals. Following Frampton's lead, it offers historians of scientific periodicals numerous opportunities to focus more on lesser-known journals and to ask how these journals act as sources to better understand the socio-cultural aspects of knowledge-gaining and distribution. With its profound and innovative perspective, I have no doubt that it will lay the ground to enter the second stage of, and offer an invaluable foundation for, future research on scientific periodicals and their scientific communities.

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