

Editorial

Jean-Louis Steinberg (1922–2016)

Jean-Louis Steinberg passed away in Paris on 21 January 2016, at the age of 93. He was one of the founders of radioastronomy in France and a pioneer of astronomy from space at the Paris Observatory. Last, but not least, he also played a leading role in the creation of the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics*.

Jean-Louis was born on 7 June 1922, in Paris, and as a young man he began his studies to be a scientist and became a Doctor of Engineering in 1943. However, in June 1944, he was arrested and deported with his parents and one of his two brothers. He was the only survivor of the four when the US Army liberated the camp. Conscious that he was one of the last direct witnesses of the Holocaust, after his retirement he devoted much of his time to keeping the memory of the deportees alive. Right up until the last days of his life, he was providing testimonials of the horror of the concentration camps to schools and conferences.

After the WWII, he completed his studies and entered the physics laboratory of the École Normale Supérieure. This was just the start of a very successful scientific career. He also liked writing and was interested in scientific publications. In 1962, he was offered the job of Editor-in-Chief of the French journal, *Annales d'Astrophysique*, one of three professional journals in astronomy that were published in France at the time. He ran the journal with his wife Madeleine, who was fluent in English and Russian. In 1968, they decided to evaluate the usefulness of the work that had been carried out over the previous six years. However, when they looked up citations of the papers published in their journal in the *Science citation index* they were horrified to find that their journal had not even been mentioned. They concluded that English-speaking scientists were probably not reading it since it was clear, when they looked at the citations in American and English journals, that it was mostly being quoted by its own authors.

Jean-Louis shared his dismay with Stuart Pottasch, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Bulletin of the Astronomical Institutes of the Netherlands*, who was having a similar experience, and they began talking about merging their publications in a new international journal. They found initial support from Jan Hendrik Oort, director of the Leiden Observatory, and from Anders Reiz, director of the Copenhagen Observatory, with whom they discussed the possibility of also merging the Scandinavian journals into a new publication. Together with Jean-François Denisse, director of the Paris Observatory, Jean-Louis then called a meeting of French astronomers during the turmoil of the 1968 events. He managed to convince them to merge the three French astronomy journals into one new publication.

Meanwhile, the idea of a new international astronomical journal had also been gaining ground in Germany and Belgium, as well as in all Scandinavian countries. At a subsequent meeting of key actors, held in Leiden on March 27, 1968, the general principles for the operation of the new journal, with the proposed name, "*Astronomy & Astrophysics: A European Journal*", were also discussed. ESO was then asked to provide a legal framework

for the new journal and its Council responded favourably in July 1968. As a result, *Astronomy & Astrophysics* saw the light of day and the first issue was published in January 1969. Naturally, Jean-Louis Steinberg and Stuart Pottasch were the two first Editors-in-Chief. Jean-Louis remained in this position for five years, ensuring the huge success of the new journal.

Jean-Louis and Madeleine ran the Meudon A&A editorial office during those five years with the help of a secretary and a part-time draughtswoman. There were only four issues of the journal in 1969, but it soon became a monthly publication and one of the four major generalist astronomical journals in the world. Initially, papers were submitted in English, French or German, but it soon became clear that, for a given author, the papers in English were cited twice as often as those in other languages. As a consequence, the vast majority of papers were soon written in English and corrected, when needed, by Madeleine.

Clearly, Jean-Louis was a pioneer in European scientific publishing: astronomers were the first to succeed in merging their journals into a single publication, and the refereeing system he set up was run very smoothly. Since then, his successors have attempted to maintain the high standards he defined as best as they could.

Those of us who were privileged to know Jean-Louis Steinberg as an Editor-in-Chief will remember him as always being accessible and attentive to authors. He was a man of exceptional moral integrity, a hard worker, a visionary and a bright and charismatic scientist and editor.

James Lequeux, Claude Bertout,
Nabila Aghanim, Thierry Forveille

N.B. Jean-Louis Steinberg published a detailed account of his life and activities in an article entitled "The scientific career of a team leader", *Planetary and Space Science* 49 (2001) 511–522.



Fig. 1. Jean-Louis Steinberg at a scientific meeting in Kiev in 1974 (© Gérard Epstein, 1974).