

# Centaurus Report for the ESHS

**On the period July 2018 - July 2020**

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27/08/2020

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## **Executive Summary**

I started as Editor-in-Chief of Centaurus, the Official journal of the ESHS, in July 2018 and I report on the 2-year period July 2018 – July 2020.

It was our ambition to integrate Centaurus more closely with the ESHS and, with the help of the ESHS, to become the best and most attractive journal in the field. While we did not yet fully achieve this ambition, we made a lot of progress towards our goals.

To **integrate Centaurus more closely with the ESHS**, we developed a close working relationship with the ESHS presidents, council and board, and we developed a vision to better involve and represent the diversity of European research in the History of Science. We are involving ESHS members at all levels of the management of the journal, including the full Editorial Board and the selection committee for the special issues. Centaurus also published an ESHS 15-year anniversary issues with contributions from past ESHS presidents (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/16000498/2018/60/1-2>), we continued to publish the ESHS presidential lectures, the Gustav Neuenschwander Prize lecture, and the young scholar lectures and we published an ESHS contribution on *Centaurus*' 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

To become a more attractive journal, we needed to improve the processing times of the journal as well as its quality. I am happy to report that **all key metrics improved considerably**.

- We made the journal more efficient and the **time from submission to decision for articles was more than halved**, from 70 to 30 days. This includes the time for peer review and editorial review. This means that on average, you will know whether your article is accepted or needs more revisions 1 month after submitting your article.
- Our book review editors process **book reviews 7x faster** than before. We are now streamlining the production process so that they can be published as soon as possible, giving very timely reviews of the latest literature.
- The **number of submitted original articles to Centaurus has tripled** compared to the average over the previous 10 years, which means that we have many more good manuscripts to choose from.
- We received a **7-fold increase in Special Issue proposals** compared to the 2017 call which allowed us to make a fantastic selection for the coming years.
- The **quality of submissions has increased considerably** because of a careful vetting process of special issues, which involves detailed feedback to the guest editors and requests to improve the proposals, as well as a mentoring program for early career scholars.
- We caught up with a long-standing one-year delay and we are now **publishing on time**.
- We are also building more visibility for Centaurus, which now has an **official Twitter account**. Please follow us [@Centaurus\\_ESHS](https://twitter.com/Centaurus_ESHS).
- We published a very **timely Spotlight Issue** on the history of epidemics in the time of COVID-19
- Other metrics, like impact factor and citation counts, are lagging indicators and although already slightly improved, they are expected to show major improvement very soon.

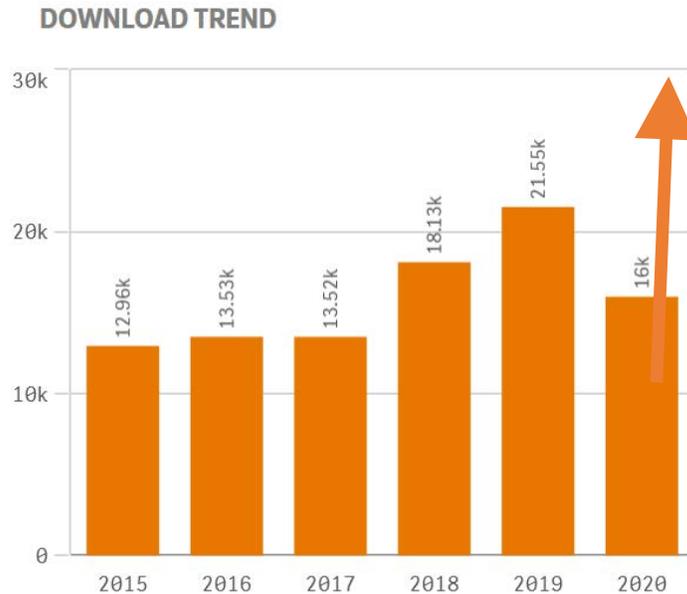
We managed to do all this **despite the major challenges faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic** and its effects on authors, reviewers as well as on Wiley, the publisher of Centaurus, whose production procedures have been disrupted.

## **Reforming the journal**

I started my term as Editor by reforming the journal, which was needed to improve its attractiveness, quality and timeliness. Our proposed reforms have worked very well for the journal and have already had clear results.

Changing the form of the editorial team has been very beneficial. Before, the Editor worked with 3 associate editors and 1 book review editor. We now have 2 book review editors; a deputy editor, several assistant editors, a communications editor and a large editorial board. We created new author guidelines, a new journal style and style guide (to make the style consistent with APA) and we changed the internal systems (e.g. the ScholarOne system) to allow for more efficient processing of articles. We redefined the types of publication and added new types, increasing transparency of the journal's processes, defined a conflict of interest policy and established procedures to avoid conflict of interest. We created new procedures for selecting special issue proposals to make sure we focus on the most promising proposals that make a difference in the field. We are also advertising Centaurus at conferences and on different media, e.g. starting our own Twitter account. We have better explained the publication procedure (see e.g. the interview here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/pb-assets/assets/16000498/EiC%20interview-1549903909957.pdf>) and we are reaching out to young scholars (e.g. by creating a mentoring program and organizing a special session for early career researchers at the ESHS conference).

These and many more actions that are detailed below have made Centaurus into a better, more visible and more attractive journal. This can, for instance, be seen in the recent download trend, which shows that we already double and may soon triple earlier download numbers.



*Note that 2020 data are only for the first 6 months (until end of June 2020). The download trend for the full year will therefore be significantly higher (around 32.000?). Furthermore, the full impact of our reforms will be only visible in the download trends and other key metrics in the coming two years.*

### **Vision: representing the diversity of European research**

We widened the scope of Centaurus, encompassing “History of Science understood in the broadest sense” as defined in the mission of the ESHS. In addition to the more traditional submissions to Centaurus, especially in the physical sciences, we have tried to attract more submissions from the history of social sciences, humanities, technology and medicine and we are making clear headway, with a significant amount of submissions in the history of technology and medicine, including special issues in these areas. *Centaurus* is open to all kinds of approaches and methodologies practiced in the field, and this is clearly appreciated by the authors. We have seen a remarkable boost in interdisciplinary submissions that connect history of science to other disciplines. We created an Editorial Board that reflects the European research landscape, and we see also a more diverse set of submissions, much better representing the European geography. We received submissions from 35 different countries, considerably increasing the diversity of our authorship. We also attract a diversity of book reviewers and we ask them to review books

from smaller presses written in different languages, making Centaurus into a unique journal that gives access to the diversity of European research in the history of science.

### **Centaurus team and editorial board**

When I started, we needed to start from scratch as all members of the previous team, including the copy-editor, resigned. I appointed a new core Editorial Team: Jonathan Regier became our first Assistant Editor and Noemí Pizarroso López and Mihnea Dobre became the new Book Review Editors. They have all been doing an absolutely amazing job.

In the fall of 2018 we created a new editorial board. An important goal was to represent European research in the History of Science. I think our board gives a great disciplinary, methodological as well as geographical coverage and is diverse in gender and age.

I would like to thank the editorial board members for their contributions so far. Some have given invaluable advice, others have prompted authors to submit to Centaurus, yet others have helped with evaluating many special issue proposals, and some have been excellent mentors for some of our early career authors. Thanks to all of you!

Due to the increasing number of submissions, we have expanded our core Editorial Team. From the spring of 2019, Kim Hajek joined the team as our second Assistant Editor, boosting the journal's profile and expertise in the history of social sciences and humanities. From the fall of 2019, Sietske Fransen, Jérôme Baudry and Daniela Helbig also joined our team as Assistant Editors, adding new expertise in the history of the life sciences and technology, different historical periods as well as new geographical representation to the mix. We were able to realize our great results thanks to them!

Recently, Barnaby Hutchins also joined the team as Communications Editor. His task is to communicate more about Centaurus and make the journal more visible for authors and readers. I believe that this reinforced team will take Centaurus to the next level.

Our full editorial board is very diverse in terms of age, geography, methodology and sub-disciplines covered. They have provided indispensable help with selecting Special Issues, mentoring young scholars, and giving advice more generally. For the full editorial board, see: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/16000498/homepage/editorialboard.html>

## Special Issues

Because Centaurus had hardly anything in the pipeline when we started, the first thing we did was to revive some older special issue ideas that had been promised to Centaurus several years ago but were all but abandoned. I contacted and pressed the guest editors to rekindle the idea of their special issues and submit it as soon as possible. We also looked at the results of the 2017 call for Special Issues, which had not yet been processed. To avoid further delays, I created a small evaluation committee to judge the quality of the proposals. The selected issues have now all been published.

In the fall of 2018, we organized a new Call for Special Issues. We are pleased to announce that the 2018-2019 Centaurus Call was a great success. Thank you again for your help in promoting and distributing it! The evaluation committee, this time consisting of a team of eight colleagues (ESHS nominated members and Centaurus board members), reviewed the proposals and gave detailed feedback and recommendations on each of the proposals. This was a major effort for all involved but it was also extremely helpful for the guest editors, as this process allowed them to considerably improve their proposals! Many thanks to you all!

Four excellent special issues have been accepted by now. Some of the other proposals are still in various stages of revision and may be accepted at a later time. The feedback by the Editorial Board is also a kind of mentoring that has proven to be a major factor in increasing the quality of the submissions for Centaurus.

The currently accepted proposals are:

- Global Perspectives on Science Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century: Actors, Organizations, States. (Guest editors: Matthew Adamson and Roberto Lalli)
- Verticality in the history of science (Guest editors: Wilko Graf von Hardenberg and Martin Mahony)
- The material culture and politics of artifacts in nuclear diplomacy (Guest editors: Maria Rentetzi and Kenji Ito)
- Latent, Present Energy. Devices, Infrastructures, and Discourses of (In-)Visibility (Guest Editors Felix Frey and Jonas Schädler)

A new call for Special Issues has been sent in July 2020, with a deadline in October 2020, after the ESHS conference in Bologna. We hope for a similarly enthusiastic response from the ESHS community.

### **Spotlight Sections**

Centaurus also publishes special sections, called *Spotlight Sections* or *Spotlight Issues*. A Spotlight section is a collection of short articles focusing on a specific theme, which can be a new subject, a neglected area, a theme of particular topicality, or a topic of specific relevance to the profession. Its aim is to jump-start new discussion and debate. The style of such an article is more concise and faster paced than individually submitted articles. Spotlight sections can either be commissioned by the Centaurus' Editorial team or they can be proposed by scholars in writing to the Editor-in-Chief. We have received a number of interesting enquiries for Spotlight Sections so far. They will be accepted by the Editor based on academic merit and on the current and projected state of other submissions (including the estimated progress of special issues), which gives the Editor a useful tool for managing the timeline of the publication of Centaurus issues.

The latest Centaurus issue, Volume 62, Issue 2 (May 2020) is a Spotlight Issue: Histories of epidemics in the time of COVID-19 (Access to the articles in this issue is free). <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/16000498/2020/62/2>. Creating this issue at breakneck speed helped us to deal with the challenges COVID-19 raised for the journal (delaying all our other issues because authors, reviewers and editors experienced serious disruptions) and allowed to still manage to catch up with the delays in publishing. We also turned around COVID-19 from a challenge into an opportunity for the journal by devoting a thematic issue to this subject that was (and still is) consuming our societies, showing the relevance of history for current concerns. In the future, we will try to make it a distinctive characteristic of spotlight issues that they address very timely topics that are important for society. We will also try to publish them with a very quick turnaround, so that Centaurus can participate in and provide a historical perspective

on current societal debates and challenges. This will be very beneficial to the visibility and reputation of the journal.

### **Virtual Issues**

Centaurus, the official journal of the ESHS, will be 70 years old this year. This is something that we wanted to celebrate by a journey into the archives of the journal. In that context, I am pleased to announce that Centaurus recently published its first Virtual Issue. The theme of this issue, the History of Early Astronomy, was selected because of the long-standing strength of Centaurus in this subject, having published hundreds of important articles in this area since 1950. Please visit (all articles are free access): [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1600-0498.history\\_of\\_early\\_astronomy](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/(ISSN)1600-0498.history_of_early_astronomy)

A Virtual Issue is an online collection of articles selected from content previously published and currently forthcoming in Centaurus. Such an issue can be used to focus attention on key topics or geographic regions, to show new emergent themes, or to showcase relevant articles to researchers in related disciplines and sub-disciplines. Indeed, articles that were published separately can assume new significance if they are brought together in the context of a Virtual Issue, as this allows for new links and connections to be made. Furthermore, Virtual Issues can be used to show the historical development of the field when introduced by an insightful historiographical introduction. Virtual Issue articles will be made freely available online, generating a broader readership for classic articles.

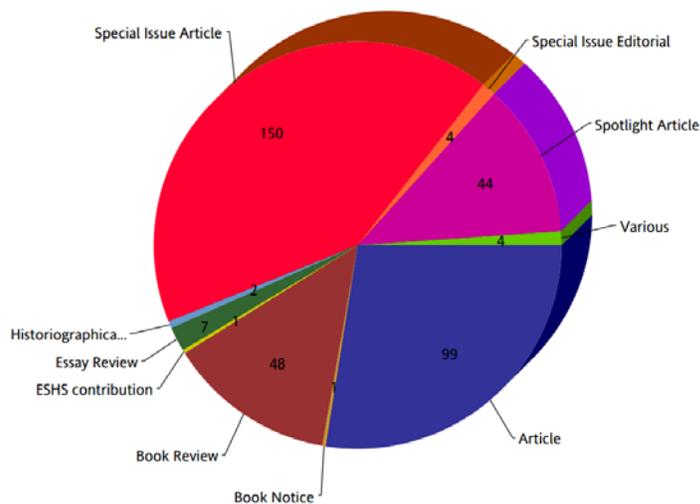
Even a quick glance through the Centaurus archives reveals an incredible richness and variety of research. We hope that the first Virtual Issue will inspire our readers to conduct their own impromptu journeys through the other articles in the Centaurus archives.

We also **called upon ESHS members to propose Virtual Issues**. The proposal should contain a balanced selection of 10 to 14 articles from the Centaurus archives, an abstract explaining the theme of the Virtual Issue and a short description of how the selected articles fit into the Virtual Issue theme. If the proposal is selected, the guest editors will be asked to write a substantial introduction. This is an open call, with no specific deadline, but proposals will be discussed by the Editorial Team on a first come first serve basis.

## Submissions

In the two year period, July 2018 – July 2020 I read and made **decisions on 326 manuscripts (i.e. an average of more than 13 manuscripts to read each month)**. This number includes original versions as well as different versions of revised submissions.

The image below is a breakdown of the different kinds of submissions:

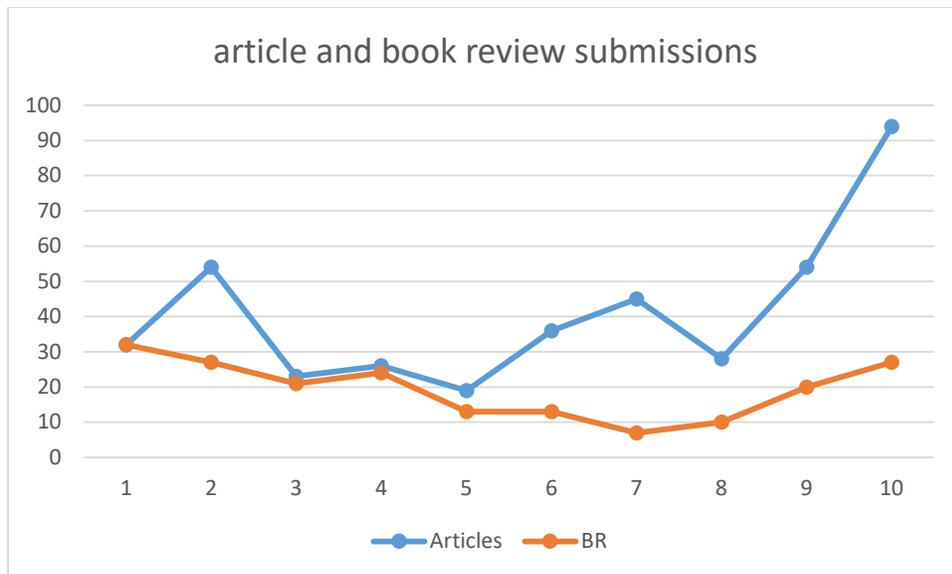


### Total number of manuscripts submitted

In this 2-year period, a total of **147** original articles were submitted (of which 78 were Special Issue or Spotlight Issue Articles).

Additionally, **53** Book Reviews were submitted.

Compared with previous years, we see a remarkable increase in submissions, especially of original articles:



From the first year, the period July 2018 – July 2019 (n°9 on the graph) we started working on the recovery of the journal, and we immediately equaled the highest submission number from 10 years ago.

In the second year (n°10 on the graph), the **number of submitted original articles to Centaurus has tripled** compared to the average over the last 10 years

#### Acceptance ratio:

Estimates for the acceptance ratio of articles are:

Individual Articles: 63% rejected; 23% major revisions; 14% minor revisions.

Special Issue articles: 10% rejected; 30% major revisions; 60% minor revisions.

Note: The relatively low rejection rate for Special Issues is explained by the fact that Special Issue articles are curated: there is a strict selection process *before* submission (1) by the guest editors and (2) by the evaluation committee (we recommend to drop or add specific articles that are part of the proposals). Furthermore, they have already been through a round of major revisions before being submitted to the journal. It is important that usually not all of the proposed articles are even submitted because of quality concerns or delays, and these articles do not show up in the statistics.

Note also that, sometimes, Special Issue articles receive extensive mentoring by the guest editors and may go through up to 4 or 5 rounds of major revisions. This increases the chances of acceptance because it gives the authors confidence to continue to improve their work.

#### Submissions from a diversity of countries:

We have done very well to reach a very diverse base of submissions in the last 24 months. Some of the European countries that were conspicuously missing in the last decade are now in the list with recent submissions. Thank you all very much for your efforts!

In the 24 month period after 01/07/2018, we received submissions from 35 different countries. This means that we considerably increased the diversity of our authorship. I am particularly happy that we received submissions the following European countries, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, that were missing out in the previous period. I think this is particularly significant for the European Society of the History of Science.

The most important European countries from which no author submitted a manuscript in the last 24 months are: Belarus, Bulgaria, Ireland, Ukraine. So we need some extra efforts here. If you know colleagues in this area, please encourage them to submit!

(For that matter: *please encourage ALL your colleagues, no matter where they are based, to send their manuscripts to Centaurus!*)

#### Reviewing and decision times:

Because the new editorial team started in July 2018, when the journal publication was one year delayed and we had only very few articles in the pipeline, we tried to get quality submissions as soon as possible and we did major efforts to reduce the reviewing and decision times (July 2018 – July 2019). We were able to drastically lower the average reviewing time, sometimes even going as low as 3 weeks, by contacting many possible reviewers and working closely with them to ensure a timely response. We did this without any compromises in regard to quality. Fantastic efforts were delivered by our reviewers as well as our authors, who made revisions with very

tight deadlines. Equally extraordinary efforts were required of the editorial team, being vigilant all the time, reacting to emails and reading versions of manuscripts within a time-frame of a few hours, and supporting the reviewers and authors as much as possible. We wanted to do this in order to get the journal back on schedule, and also to make the journal more attractive to younger researchers who need fast turnaround times (for job applications etc.).

After 10 months of continuous time-pressure, we were able to catch up with a full year of delayed publishing (i.e. we finished the double of the normal number of issues). Although the editorial team was back on schedule by May 2019, unfortunately, the copy-editors and the Wiley production department could not keep up with processing the increased number of finished articles, and as a result, the delay in publishing Centaurus took longer than anticipated. Furthermore, because we started attracting and publishing more manuscripts than ever before (from 3 articles in an issue to 10 articles per issue), the copy-editors and the Wiley production team were delayed even more.

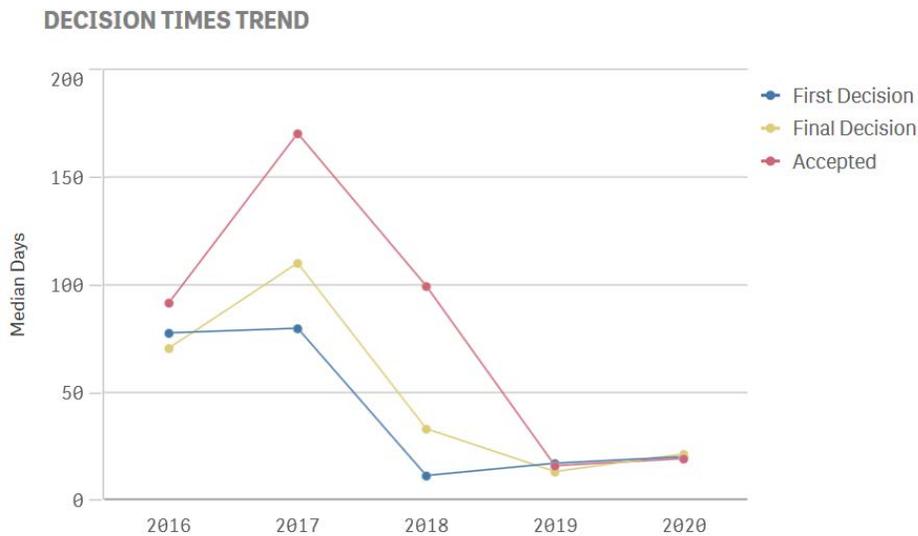
Finally, by the end of 2019, I got personally involved in reforming the Wiley production processes to ensure timely processing of the manuscripts. Several months of difficult negotiations followed, with some setbacks along the way (e.g. when Wiley's proofing system broke down and authors could not submit proofs anymore for a while), but we finally managed to make the production process significantly more efficient than what it was before even with an increased volume of manuscripts that needed to be typeset and proofed.



*2018 and 2019 represent significant improvements in reviewing and decision times but major problems at Wiley's production department. We have been solving some of these issues in 2020 even though there are still some areas of possible improvement.*

The ongoing delays in production also meant that we could go to a somewhat slower pace of reviewing and evaluating until the summer of 2020, when the production department was finally able to catch up with us.

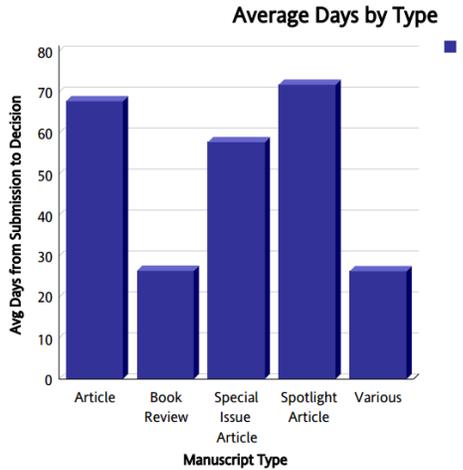
For the whole period, the time from submission to decision for articles was more than halved, from 70 (before 2018) to 30 days. In looking at these numbers, one should also take into account the much higher volume of submissions. Taken together, this shows a major improvement in the management of the journal.



From the following two charts you can comparing average reviewing times (on the Y axis, in days) between the two periods, for each manuscript type (on the X axis):

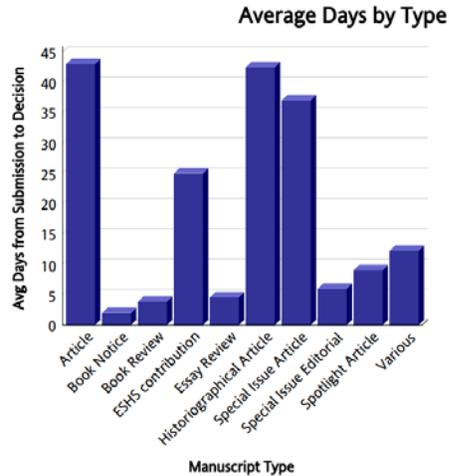
Previous period

July 2016- July 2018



latest period

July 2018 – July 2020



Timing of publication:

As mentioned before, in July 2018, the journal was one year delayed with publishing its issues. This has detrimental effects for the attractiveness of the journal and also has a strongly negative impact on key metrics like impact factors.

Since May 2019, the editorial team was on schedule with submitting the manuscripts to Wiley’s production department. Unfortunately, Wiley’s production department (copy-editing and typesetting) and the management team overseeing the journal was not only inefficient, it was also deficient for a large part of 2019. It is only after I started to get involved directly in the management of the production process (against my mandate and beyond my contractual powers), that things started to get better. By the summer of 2020, the efficiency of the production department is reasonable, but there is still room for improvement.

After two years of continuing efforts and major challenges to overcome, we are finally publishing Centaurus on time again. In the next months, our aim is to start publishing the journal slightly ahead of time.

### **Book Reviews**

In terms of books being reviewed (or under review) in the journal, in the period 1 July 2018 and 1 July 2020, we covered publications from 39 national and international publishers, from a total of 84 monographs or edited volumes. Some are from large publishing houses, but we also aimed to broaden our scope and include more local publications (e.g., active at national level, or university publishing houses). We are actively seeking to promote publications in the history of science in all European languages, and some steps were made in this direction, to include contributions in Spanish, Romanian, and Portuguese, which adds to the more common publications in English, French, and German. The same effort towards diversity is being made regarding the origin/ location of reviewers. Finally, in line with the current scope of the journal, we are including books from the history of medicine, social sciences, humanities and technology, and take the history of science in the broadest sense.

Our book review editors do a great job in managing the book reviews efficiently, in fact they process book reviews 7x faster than before. We are now also streamlining the production process so that they can be published as soon as possible. This means that very soon Centaurus will be able to publish very timely reviews of the latest literature.

### **Mentoring program**

When the new team started, we also launched a new initiative, the Centaurus' mentorship program. For more information about the program, see here:

[https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/16000498/homepage/mentoring\\_program.html](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/16000498/homepage/mentoring_program.html)

Many authors have indicated interest in Centaurus' mentorship program which gives an indication of the need for such an initiative. Not all these authors were eligible, however (Some senior authors applied, and some requested mentoring for writing a book review. In the meantime, we clarified the eligibility criteria on the submission page).

In the last 2 years, we received **20 eligible requests**. 7 of these articles were rejected directly because the quality was too low even for starting in the mentoring program. (Given our limited capacity, we can only mentor authors who have a fair chance at being published, so we need to start with a basic level of quality). In many cases, these articles were submitted by young authors working outside of any institution and not necessarily used to academic and disciplinary standards. For some of these articles, I did an effort to find appropriate colleagues that worked at a university near to the author's location, so that I could refer them to a local mentor.

8 of the articles that received mentoring were special issue articles. These have been mentored closely by me in cooperation with the special issue guest editors. After a few months, we made the decision that mentoring of young authors who have submitted invited special issue articles should be done by the guest editors in the future. It is now clarified on the website that special issue articles are no longer eligible.

5 articles were mentored by members of Centaurus' Editorial Board. I took over for one of them, because the board member had in the end not enough time to follow up, I had to take over the mentorship role myself.

It is not ideal for me to assist with the mentoring, and we will avoid this in the future (also to avoid conflict of interest and biased decision making) but because of time constraints and our tight publication schedule in the last two years, this was the only practical way forward.

Overall, I think the mentorship program has been a success: it has helped young scholars to improve their articles. Sometimes this meant many revision rounds, and a long publication process, but it meant constructive criticism and moral support instead of the disappointment of an immediate rejection, and this is often what young scholars need. In all cases, it remains crucial to have an independent reviewing process and to keep editorial independence in making decisions. (It is known that there is a bias against young scholars and especially young women in the academic publication system, and this is important to rectify).

To strengthen editorial independence, it would be best to locate the mentoring *externally* to the journal's procedures. Furthermore, when the success of the mentoring program becomes known, we may soon face the capacity limits of the Editorial Board. Maybe the ESHS Young scholar's network may have the capacity to manage a larger pool of potential mentors and I hope to discuss possibilities with them.

## **Conclusion**

Centaurus is flourishing again, and published on time, thanks to a great editorial team renewed interest from authors and guest editors, and a fantastic relationship with the ESHS and the field more generally (including great reviewers!). There is a still lot of promise for growth in the future. We aim to let the journal to grow in the next few years and make it the flagship of European history of science.