

By Lisa Pillmore (MA 2006)

### Journal des sçavans

The *Journal des Sçavans* (Scholars' Journal) was Denys de Sallo's (1626-1669) response to an inquiry made by seventeenth-century scientists, who sought a reliable vehicle for disseminating knowledge of their discoveries to a broader audience. Sallo, a *conseiller du Parlement* in Paris, was among Jean-Baptiste Colbert's group of *intimes* and other intellectuals who would become the Académie des Sciences. Sallo proposed his weekly journal to Colbert (who founded the Académie in 1666) as a means of disseminating information of interest to the educated public. He received royal privilege to print in 1664.

Dated 5 January 1665, the first issue of the *Journal des Sçavans* contained a letter from Sallo, under the nom de plume of one "Sieur de Hédouville" (his footman), in which he set out his list of intentions:

- The aim of this *Journal* is to make known what is new in the Republic of Letters, which will be made up of,
- Firstly, we propose an exact Catalogue of the principal books that will be printed in Europe, which will not be content with a simple list of titles, as has been done until now by most writers: but will also say what they are about, and to what ends these books are useful.
- Secondly, when a person known for his beliefs and for his works dies, we will write his obituary, and we will give a list of his discoveries along with the highlights of his life.
- Thirdly, we will bring to light those discoveries in physical science and chemistry that could explain the forces of Nature: new discoveries in the Arts and Sciences, such as machines and useful or curious inventions that could arise from Mathematics: the observations of the Heavens, such as Meteors, and new findings in the animal world.
- Fourth, the principal decisions of the Secular and Ecclesiastic Courts, censures of the Sorbonne and other universities, in this Kingdom as well as in other countries.
- Finally, we will attempt to make known all events that occur in Europe, which are worthy of educated people's interest. That is what you can expect to learn in this *Journal*.

To this end, pages of the *Journal* were filled with an odd mix of the serious and the outlandish. Among literary reviews and *éloges*, detailed accounts of scientific discoveries (in the areas of mathematics, astronomy, cartography, botany, anatomy, and chemistry), ecclesiastical and secular court decisions, and histories, Sallo included treatises on the arts, rumor and anecdote, and tales of the bizarre. The addition of

anecdote suggests an effort to appeal to a public broader than the one to which the more serious content of the journal would appeal on its own.

The *Journal* was an ambitious undertaking. For the first 60 years the *Journal* was a weekly publication since, as Sallo believed, “news ages quickly” (MacDonell 1).<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately for Sallo, he was unable to fully realize his ambitions for the *Journal*, which was suppressed in 1665 after the 30 March issue, ostensibly because he did not submit pre-publishing proofs for official approval. Today critics agree that the royal censure was the result of Sallo’s irreverent opinions about the Catholic Church, and his critical commentaries on the work of important people and established scientific views.<sup>2</sup> Several months later the *Journal* returned with a new editor on its masthead: Abbé Jean Gallois, a man of science and letters, and co-founder of the *Journal*.

The drama surrounding the publication of the *Journal* served to fan the flames of public interest all over Europe; so much so, in fact, that unauthorized editions began to appear in Amsterdam as early as 1684. A series of Dutch editors reprinted the earliest issues of the *Journal* with new articles of local interest added, as soon as they arrived in the Netherlands. In 1710, the Dutch editor found that unreliable delivery of the French editions stalled weekly printing and commenced monthly publication. The Dutch *Journal* was printed in a scaled down, 12mo “pocket” size, not the quarto size of the French editions.<sup>3</sup> The pages available in this archive were taken from Marriott Library’s Amsterdam edition. The issues are bound in velum or smooth leather with gold tooling and are in varied conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.slais.ubc.ca/courses/libr50o/fallr999/www\\_presentations/K\\_macdonell/origin/htm](http://www.slais.ubc.ca/courses/libr50o/fallr999/www_presentations/K_macdonell/origin/htm)

<sup>2</sup> Evidence for this argument can be found notably in a 1707 eulogy of Jean Gallois by the *Histoire des Académies des Sciences*.  
<[http://www.academie\\_sciences.fr/archives/doc\\_anciens/hmvo13489\\_pdf/PI76\\_181-vob489.pdf](http://www.academie_sciences.fr/archives/doc_anciens/hmvo13489_pdf/PI76_181-vob489.pdf)>

<sup>3</sup> For a list of facsimile pages of the *Journal des Sçavans* (Paris Edition) from 1665 to 1935, see  
<<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>>. The title page, frontispiece, pagination, and some content in the Paris edition differ different from that of the Amsterdam edition.



*Établissement de l'Académie des Sciences et fondation de l'observatoire, 1666*  
Source: <[http://www.chateauversailles.fr/fr/210\\_Louis\\_XIV\\_le\\_Roi\\_Soleil.php](http://www.chateauversailles.fr/fr/210_Louis_XIV_le_Roi_Soleil.php)>

Additional information on the Academie Royale des Sciences and on its founder:

J. J. O'Connor and E. F. Robertson. "Longitude and the Académie Royale."  
<<http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/HistTopics/Longitude1.html>>

Pierre Clement. *Histoire de la vie et de l'administration de Colbert.*  
<<http://visualiseur.bnf.fr/Visualiseur?Destination=Gallica&O=NUMM-83712>>