



Essay

Scientific Publishing: Agents, Genres, Technique and the Making of Knowledge

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Abstract: The history of scientific publishing has been one of the most topical research subjects in the history of science during the last few decades. It has furthered scholarly communication with other disciplines, such as book history, the history of education and communication studies. It has contributed to the development of new conceptual and methodological tools for the study of the material culture of print, the replication of scientific knowledge in various media and the social appropriation of knowledge through reading. This field of research offers exemplary results on sources such as journals, encyclopedias and textbooks, and on configurations such as disciplines, specialization and the practices associated with our contemporary knowledge system and communication environment, which cut across academic departments.

Keywords: history of science; history of scientific disciplines; history of scientific practices; book history; history of education; history of technology; historiography



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If there is a practice central to the making of science across the centuries, it is publishing; a lasting and ubiquitous object in its creed, the scientific treatise; a major cutting-edge instrument, the scientific journal. As a research field, scientific publishing is as broad as the etymology of “publishing”, which, in most languages, means *tout court*, the act of making public. What makes publishing scientific is not only its subject matter, but also the closely related histories of publishing and science. Through the centuries, their entanglement has become increasingly complex, including an enlarged number of historical actors, changing practices and new meanings for the products of printing, their conception, circulation and appropriation. It has also attracted the attention of a wide range of historical specialisms, interested, in one way or another, in science and publishing: the history of science, technology and medicine, but also, book history, history of writing, history of reading, history of education, bibliography, art history, media studies, science communication and the sociology of science.

Scientific publishing has produced innovation within the broad field of publishing. Its analysis has contributed to understanding the book, the periodical and other publication genres as places for the social construction of authorship and procedures of knowledge legitimation and standardization. It has also highlighted the epistemologically active role of readers, the commercial but also intellectual importance of booksellers and publishers, the fruitful relationship between textual and visual representation and the agency of the material culture of print and science in the shaping of knowledge. With the growth of this field of research and the intellectual (and publishing) fragmentation characteristic of academic specialization, it now covers a large terrain divided by periods and disciplines. It presents two major focuses on books and journals and deals with topics, such as the making of scientific disciplines, education and popular science, respectively (Pardo Tomás 1997a; Johns 1998b, 2013; Topham 2000a; Leitão 2004; Lightman 2004; Fyfe 2020; Simon 2016).

In many ways, the product of interdisciplinary and international communication, our historical understanding of scientific publishing remains though afflicted by academic and cultural niches. With the goal of counteracting these problems of communication, this

paper offers a concise *vademecum* for historians aiming to gain a better knowledge of the global role of publishing science for the making of knowledge in general. Moreover, it uses an interdisciplinary, international and intercultural approach in order to highlight the importance of this field for new historical research challenges.

The history of science, technology and medicine started to depart half a century ago from its original focus on ideas, bio-bibliography and institutions, to a new focus on practices. Historical episodes, such as the scientific revolution(s)—which were central to their historiography—had since then, been reinterpreted with new perspectives on the role of experiments, performance and the tools and spaces through which legitimate scientific knowledge was made (Golinski 2005). Treatises, journals and textbooks were classic sources in the research routine for historians of science. With few exceptions, their ubiquity made them, for decades, immune to thorough methodological scrutiny (Drake 1970). The practical turn, however, favored new outlooks that permeated the discipline across periods and subject areas and relocated textual and visual knowledge as fundamental practices in the making of science.

Historians of the book recognized, early on, the central role of scientific knowledge and its practitioners in the making of the Renaissance through the printing press and they contributed, thus, decisively to the emergence of the history of science as a discipline. Moreover, book history started to emerge as a modern discipline through a creative integration of intellectual debates across social, economic and cultural history, the history of science and technology, literature studies, linguistics and anthropology, among others (Febvre and Martin 1958; Eisenstein 1979; Wilding 2016; Tesnière 2014a). Print and the making of trust through print were essential for the mathematician and (natural) philosopher alike, together with observation and experimentation developed at the laboratory, astronomical observatory and cabinet of curiosities. Historians of science recognized the power of books and the agency of the printing press in the decay of Ptolemaic astronomy, Galenic medicine and Aristotelian natural philosophy. However, they did not endorse axiomatic formulations on the fixity of printed matter and its leverage in the making of trust through circulation. In contrast, they have advocated for a multi-causal investigation of these historical objects and phenomena and their appropriation (Westman 1980; Grafton 1980; Johns 1998a; Leitão 2004).¹ In this new historiographical framework, it is no longer possible to assume that a treatise, such as Nicolaus Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, was a path-breaking work that we can consider as a *classic*, without actually investigating how many people read it, who they are and how they read it (Gingerich 2004; Grafton 1991). Moreover, the pantheon of scientists might also be opened to authors of hitherto doubtful historiographical status, when proof exists of the large circulation and significant appropriation of their work. Understanding the historical value of highly abstruse treatises, such as Copernicus', could be as relevant as focusing on much simpler but widely read (and commented) introductory textbooks, such as Johannes de Sacrobosco's *Tractatus de Sphaera* (Valleriani and Ottone 2022; Simon 2016).

The historical problematization of scientific publishing has required a connected questioning of science communication, bringing together conceptual frameworks, such as Robert Darnton's *communication circuit*, Roger Chartier's *cultural appropriation*, media theory and classic history of science concepts by epistemologists Ludwik Fleck and Thomas S. Kuhn, within the theoretical framework of the social construction of scientific knowledge (Westman 1980; Topham 2000a; Johns 1998b; Secord 2004; Blair et al. 2021). Darnton emphasized the diversity of agents (printers, publishers, booksellers, readers), their multi-directional relationships and the role of the technical and economic practices of the book trade in the making of knowledge. Chartier remarked that defining popular culture by the distribution of texts in society was misleading since there were, in fact, no *popular* objects per se. Historians should focus on studying the ways in which texts were appropriated, to understand their meanings—which were often different to those assigned by authors (Topham 2000a, 1992; Darnton 1979; Chartier 1984; Simon 2009).

In the 1930s, Ludwik Fleck had already noted the blurry boundaries between the communication and the making of scientific knowledge. He conceptualized scientific practice through *thought collectives* configuring and constrained by a *thought style*, being the common stock of knowledge and culture binding the latter. A *thought collective* is structured by a small *esoteric circle* (formed by those who have expertise in the questions defining its activity) and a large *exoteric circle* (comprehending those who have not). The relationship between *esoteric circles* and *exoteric circles* stressed the transformative and multidirectional role of communication in the making of science. The *thought style* of a collective was configured, firstly, by communicative action within the *esoteric circle* and secondly, by communication with the *exoteric circle*. Nevertheless, *exoteric* or non-expert knowledge of science—commonly called popular science—being the largest part of everyone’s knowledge, acted, in turn, decisively on the work of the expert. Thus, communication between *esoteric* and *exoteric* circles had an essential role in the configuration of *thought styles*. In addition, Fleck offered a useful characterization of the genres and agents of scientific knowledge: a *thought style* was represented by *vademecum science*, as the carrier of common expert knowledge and the tool binding a *thought collective*. It was opposed to *journal science* in being comprehensive and consensus based. It differed from *popular science* in being critical and organized. In spite of being the repository of consensual expert knowledge, the *vademecum* was also shaped by the fact that every communicative action made knowledge more exoteric. Communication always transformed knowledge and it acted towards the constitution of *thought styles* based on social and intellectual consensus (Fleck 1935; Simon 2009).

In the 1960s, Thomas S. Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* opened a new chapter in the history of science and had a major role in popularizing this discipline across the social sciences (Brush 2000; Richards and Daston 2016; Devlin and Bokulich 2012). For Kuhn, a special characteristic of science was that training was conducted through textbooks to an extent unknown in other fields of knowledge. University science students were rarely encouraged to start experimental investigations or to read the most contemporary articles in their field. Moreover, in contrast to other disciplines in the social and medical sciences, all science textbooks presented a surprising uniformity in conceptual structure and differed only in subject matter or pedagogical detail. Furthermore, according to Kuhn, textbook narratives falsified the actual logic of scientific research in favor of instructional coherence. Textbook science was the driving agent in the making of scientific knowledge through education and it involved indoctrination. Although this level of systematization was not present before the nineteenth century, works commonly characterized as *classics*, such as the treatises by Aristotle, Ptolemy, Newton, Franklin, Lavoisier or Lyell, could play a similar role to textbooks in representing consensual *paradigms*. Overall, for Kuhn, textbooks were a powerful agent in the making of scientific knowledge in spite of their contested status and low appreciation (Kuhn 1962; Simon 2016). Counteracting the latter, subsequent research on science textbooks has provided robust perspectives on their value to address questions that are central to scientific practice and the making of knowledge. This new historiography of science highlights the immense potential of textbooks for interdisciplinary research and the writing of national, international and transnational history, through studies of production, distribution and appropriation. Science education has had a major role in the rise of major publishing firms and, thus, it constitutes an exceptional playground for historical specialisms with distinct but analogous developments, such as the histories of science, education and the book, respectively (Simon 2011, 2015, 2016).

Paradigms or *thought styles* configured through scientific publishing were not restricted to the “utilitarian” agency of textbooks. In a classic paper linking a highly esoteric field of knowledge (quantum mechanics) with the cultural and socio-political thrust of the Weimar Republic, Paul Forman analyzed the changing thoughts of physicists, through a wide range of literature genres that accounted for what physicists heard, read, talked and believed. These included written accounts of public lectures, academic addresses, correspondence, handbook articles, general science periodicals, newspapers, specialized scientific journals

and popular philosophy books. In spite of not explicitly professing this approach, in many ways, Forman's article could be seen as a history of science publishing and reading at the service of a highly ambitious investigation of the social roots of scientific change (Forman 1971; Simon 2022).

It is clear, therefore, that the history of scientific publishing is deeply interwoven into the historiographical fabric of science. Naturally, the interest for print, publication genres and reading was long ago in the toolkit of historians of modern science, partly because of the cross-disciplinary nature of their historiographical practice and historical research objects (Drake 1970; Rose 1975; Darnton 1979; Eamon 1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1994; Grafton 1991; Pardo Tomás 1991, 2004; Siraisi 1997; Carlino 1999; Gorman 2002). According to Robert Darnton (1979, pp. 2–3), French scholars had the merit of transforming book history into a standard branch of professional history, but their focus was rather quantitative and sociological ("macroscopic surveys of book production or microscopic analysis of individual libraries"). In contrast, British scholars paid more attention to the processes of book production and distribution. He expected that "By mixing British empiricism with the French concern for broad-gauged social history it might be possible to develop an original blend of the history of books in America".

An excellent example of these trends is illustrated by the efforts of a team directed by José M. López Piñero with the ambition of establishing history of science as a professional discipline in Spain. López Piñero (1979) presented a powerful research agenda in the mold of (French) *histoire totale*, equally attentive to social history, quantitative bibliography, prosopography and information theory. He aspired to tear apart the historiographical myth of modern Spain as a wasteland for science due to inquisitorial repression and reclaim its part in the scientific revolution—then foundational for the historiography of science. He substantiated his historical analysis on the collaborative preparation of a series of specialized historical bibliographies of science, medicine and technology works (manuscript and print) (López Piñero et al. 1973, 1981, 1984, 1986, 1987). Its analysis demonstrated at least that there was a significant scientific production—similar to that of other European nations—which had not been considered by previous scholars. It clearly unmasked the rationale of the Black Legend², while developing a cultural and human capital for the history of science in Spain. It was less successful in explaining the causes of Spanish scientific decay in the seventeenth century, in spite of proposing various relevant sociopolitical factors. The analysis was indeed statistical and social, although not merely erudite.

Subsequently, the team refined this approach in producing big pictures on book production, circulation and consumption in modern Spain through monographs (Pardo Tomás 1991, 2004) and chapters in panoramic reference works on the history of science, medicine and technology in the crowns of Castille and Aragon (García Ballester et al. 2002; García Ballester 2002; Arrizabalaga 2002; Pardo Tomás 1997b, 2002; González Bueno and Nozal 2002). Their perspectives were both quantitative and qualitative and well informed both on European scholarship in book history and debates among American historians of science about radical contributions, such as those by Eisenstein (1979) (Martínez Vidal 1992; Pardo Tomás 1997a). The international relevance of these historical investigations would become ever clearer through the historiographical evidence of the impact across Europe and the Atlantic of the empirical practices gathered in sixteenth-century Portuguese and Spanish science books (Cañizares-Esguerra 2006a, 2006b; Barrera-Osorio 2006).

The historiography of (scientific) publishing obviously stems from particular traditions in each country and region of the world. Furthermore, as a counterpoint, the major historiographical agency given to print (over other forms of communication) is clearly biased by the Western project of world colonization (Mignolo 1995; McKenzie 1984; Cañizares-Esguerra 2001; Calvo 2003; Cherniack 1994; Chow 2004; Brokaw and Chow 2005; Mun 2013). Complementarily, this historiographical bias is also shaped by the outdated (but still common) question of why there might have been a "scientific revolution" in Europe and not elsewhere (e.g., China, Japan, Korea, India, Islam). This obsolete question

is particularly compromised by considering that a printing culture developed in China much earlier than in Europe (Graham 1973; Twitchett 1983; Tsien 1985; Kim 1998, 2004; Barrett 2008; O'Brien 2009; Blair 2011; Elman 2007, 2017). The civilization of the (science, technology and medicine) book in China and other Asian countries (e.g., Korea, Japan and India) has had its own special developments in all areas, including printing techniques, writing traditions and genres, practices of manuscript and book collecting, circulation and reading and bibliographical scholarship (McDermott 2006; Elman and Minkowski 2018; Marcon 2015; Pollock 2006; Minkowski 2010; Raina 2010; Preisendanz 2018). The exposition of Asia to “Western” print culture in the early modern period through the Jesuit missions was undoubtedly of major relevance for the transformation of science, technology and medicine in the region (Pingyi 2010; Raina 2010; Jami 2012; Golvers 2012, 2013). However, the scholarship on this topic has gone much beyond, with major contributions to topical historiographical issues, such as the production and use of popular encyclopedias, medical books and journals, and the integration of science and religion (Rawski (1979); Furth (1999); Elman (2005, 2015); Bretelle-Establet and Chemla (2007); Bréard (2010); Jami (2012); Burke and McDermott (2015); Chemla (2020); Lean (2014); Nappi (2009); Hinrichs (2011); Trambailo (2014); Bretelle-Establet (2015, 2022), Kurtz (2010); Fan (2014); and Tsien (1962); Brokaw (2007); Barrett (2008); Chemla and Zou (2018); Furth (2007); Pingyi (2010)). Overall, this literature displays an extremely rich circuit of (oral, manuscript and printed) communications across the socio-cultural strata of East Asian societies, plus intercultural comparisons and regional circulations that differ from the common geopolitical stances of Eurocentric historiography of science (Burke and McDermott 2015; Blair 2011; Amelung 2014; Berry 2006; Marcon 2015, 2020; McDermott 2016; Elman and Minkowski 2018).

There was, therefore, a long-standing experience in book history early on, within the study of modern science, East and West. However, this research focus only became a popular research agenda for historians of science at large, at the beginning of this century—through the more assertive and methodologically explicit contributions of scholars, such as Adrian Johns, James Secord and Jonathan Topham. The extension of foundational early modern historical wisdom, together with a fruitful cross-national breeding of European historical schools, gave rise to new approaches within the history of science, at the same time that research on the nineteenth century was gaining momentum (Frasca-Spada and Jardine 2000; Hunter 2000).

From Eamon (1985a) to James Secord (2000), historians of science would overcome the old historiographical antagonism between textual and experimental/practical knowledge (Rossi 1962; Kuhn 1975; Carlino 1999). They embraced the new enthusiasm for an integrated analysis of “material, literary and social technology” (Shapin and Schaffer 1985) to investigate the products of printing and their role in the making of scientific knowledge. Secord’s monograph analysis of the book *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* constituted a canonical example for scholarship to come. It paid equal attention to the material culture of print, socio-political debates and cultural fashion, authorship, the intellectual and practical business of publishing and, most importantly, readers. In this context, he unfolded the tools of science studies, together with those of bibliography and Victorian studies, to produce a colossal analysis of “literary replication”, that is, the multiple forms, places and people in which *Vestiges* was projected (and reshaped), acquiring, thus, meaning through its various circulations and readings. Furthermore, this was book history at the service of a strong historiographical thesis, characterizing the cosmological ethos of Victorian science and reconsidering the origins of evolutionary ideas (Secord 2000).

The publication in France of arguably the first modern reference work on book history in a national context, including some articles on science publishing (Martin and Chartier 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986; Eisenstein 1983; Zemon-Davis 1983; Jammes 1984; Fierro 1985; Tesnière 1985; Lecoq 1986), contributed to promote a new engagement with book research among French and multinational teams of historians of science interested in science popularization and education (Béguet 1990; Bensaude-Vincent and Rasmussen 1997; Lundgren and Bensaude-Vincent 2000). Analogously, the work of British scholars, such as William

Brock and Jack Meadows (see bibliography), [Topham \(1992\)](#) and James [Secord \(2000\)](#), stimulated a new international impulse for the study of science popularization through a focus on book culture. In the ensuing decades, the publication of book history reference works in Great Britain would now commonly include chapters on science publishing ([Jones 1999](#); [Johns 2002](#); [Burnett and Jones 2008](#); [Secord 2009](#); [Fyfe 2009](#); [Topham 2009](#); [Walters 2009](#); [Fyfe 2020](#)). The same applies to the ongoing (so far, ten volumes) history of the book in Germany and other German reference works, which include relevant chapters on scientific and medical publishing ([Jäger 2001, 2003](#); [Schneider 2007, 2015](#); [Estermann 2010](#); [Fischer 2021](#)). In contrast, for instance, the most recent history of the book in the United States of America, provides, across its five volumes, only two chapters on science, and scattered references within chapters on “learned knowledge” and education ([Amory and Hall 2000](#); [Casper et al. 2007](#); [Gross and Kelley 2010](#); [Kaestle and Radway 2009](#); [Nord et al. 2009](#); [LaFollette 2009](#); [Lewenstein 2009](#); [Zimmerman 2009](#)).³

Correspondingly, history of science reference works would start to provide some space for matters of book history. In 1990, the (Leeds) *Companion to the History of Modern Science* provided only a few references to the role of printing and procedures of publication in its chapters on the “scientific revolution” and on “science and the public”. Steven Shapin considered then, that “there has not yet been a concerted response by historians of science to the programme of research on the culture of publishing and reading associated with the work of Robert Darnton on the *Encyclopédie* and Elizabeth Eisenstein on print culture and Copernicanism” ([Olby et al. 1990](#); [Shapin 1990](#), p. 1000). The *Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science* ([Heilbron 2003](#)) included a good amount of entries on scientific publishing and its genres (e.g., “printing house”, “library”, “encyclopedias”, “journal”, “textbook”, “peer-review”, “institute for scientific information”). The eight-volume *Cambridge History of Science* proposed specific essays on print in its volumes devoted to early modern and eighteenth-century science, respectively ([Johns 2006, 2003a](#)). Reference to print culture as a major historical argument is also present across most of the chapters in both volumes, but especially in the latter ([Porter 2003](#)). However, the remaining six volumes (covering ancient, medieval, physical and mathematical sciences, social sciences, biological and earth sciences and national, transnational and global science) scarcely deal with this topic, with the exception of two chapters on science popularization ([Knight 2002](#); [Bowler 2009](#)). Conversely, the most recent *Companion to the History of Science* ([Lightman 2016](#)) gives wide coverage with a special section composed of eight chapters on the main forms of science communication. In spite of the Anglo-American bias of these international reference works, they provide a pattern of the great potential for further interactions and intersections of history of science and book history in many national contexts. For instance, a recent collective showcase of research on late modern science and technology in China includes a strong focus on print culture in more than half of its chapters, with cutting-edge contributions relevant to any historian of science ([Elman 2014](#); [Amelung 2014](#); [Shen 2014a](#); [Tsu 2014](#); [Mullaney 2014](#); [Lean 2014](#); [Fan 2014](#)).

On one side and the other of the science/book history disciplinary divide, a number of countries have panoramic book histories, which include attention to the scientific, medical and technological, methodologically sophisticated book and journal biographies and professional histories of major publishing firms, specialized in this type of production. Examples of this are France ([Mollier 1988, 2015](#); [Fouché 1998](#); [Tesnière 2001, 2014b](#); [Parinet 1992, 2004](#); [Marpeau 2002, 2010](#); [Gourevitch and Vincent 2006](#); [Sorel and Leblanc 2008](#); [Simon 2011](#); [Verdier 2013, 2017](#)), Great Britain ([Brock 1978, 1996](#); [Brock and Meadows 1984](#); [Frasca-Spada and Jardine 2000](#); [Lightman 2007](#); [Richardson 2008](#); [Fyfe 2004, 2012](#); [Simon 2011](#); [Gadd et al. 2014](#); [Secord 2000, 2015](#); [Frost 2014](#); [Topham 2022](#)), Germany ([Wille 1986](#); [Schmeck 1990](#); [Jäger 1990](#); [Sarkowski 1992](#); [Götze 1994](#); [Holl 1996](#); [Meinel 1997a](#); [Reimer 1999](#); [Daum 2002](#); [Müller 2004](#); [Estermann and Schneider 2007](#); [Lembrecht 2007](#); [Remmert and Schneider 2008a, 2008b, 2010](#); [Wesolowski 2010](#); [Rebenich 2013](#)) and, to a certain extent, the Netherlands ([Berkvens-Stevelinck et al. 1992](#); [Daling 2006](#); [Delft et al. 2006](#); [Andriess 2008](#); [Edelman 2010](#); [Veen 2008](#); [Pettegree and Weduwen 2019](#)) and China⁴. In countries,

such as Italy (Montecchi 2001; Borelli 1998; Galuzzi et al. 1998; Govoni 2002, 2010; Mazzotti 2004; Braid 2014; Turi 1997) and Spain (Botrel 1993; Pardo Tomás 1991, 2004, 2010; Jalón 1997; García Hurtado 2002; Garza Merino 2004; Llanas 2004, 2005, 2006; García Naharro 2015, 2019; Guía Moruno 2021), the historical literature on the culture of science in print is still irregular and insufficient and it displays lack of communication and cooperation between historians of science and historians of the book. In a large cultural territory, such as Latin America, the field is still in need of a clearer direction; however, it has recently experienced a major boost in publications dealing with this subject and approach. Take, for instance, Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, three large national states with a major historical role in the field of publishing, large international publishing houses past and present, important communities of researchers in science, technology and medicine and distinct national and continental traditions in book history⁵. There are a number of big pictures of publishing in these countries.⁶ Historians noted long ago the relevance of printing, the periodical press and libraries in the making of scientific elites and the independent Latin American Republics,⁷ and there is a new wave of scholarly work promoting a convergence of interests between the history of science and the history of the book (Dorta 2019; Valdez Garza 2014, 2016; Minor García 2016; Johns 2016; Ramírez Martín and Ramírez Ortega 2020; Gutiérrez-Maya et al. 2020; Vega y Ortega Baez 2018, 2020; Azuela 2018; Azuela and Serrano Juárez 2021; Constantino 2018; Constantino Ortiz and Morales Sarabia 2021; Hernández Socha 2018, 2020; Vergara 2020; Weltman 2002; Ferreira 2004; Venancio 2013; Sá and Silva 2010; Rolim and Sá 2013; Sávio 2013; Vessuri 1987, 1989; Labarca 2020). So far, the results are uneven: on the one hand, a number of works, such as Vessuri (1989), Minor García (2016), Atique (2018) and Hernández Socha (2018, 2020), contribute with major historical claims on the production and communication of knowledge through investigations on the actual processes of translation, journal publication and circulation and the making of hegemonic cultures in science across the Americas. Others, such as Ferreira (2004), Constantino (2018), Sá and Silva (2010) and Rolim and Sá (2013), mobilize the processes of periodical publishing to dissect the political business of scientific knowledge in national and international perspective. On the other hand, other works are still too bibliographically descriptive and historiographically ineffective, in spite of having the merit of promoting interdisciplinarity (Martínez Baracs (2014); Valdez Garza (2014, 2016); Ramírez Martín and Ramírez Ortega (2020); Gutiérrez-Maya et al. (2020); Vega y Ortega Baez (2018, 2020); Weltman (2002); Sávio (2013); Labarca (2020)).

So far, this review has followed the logic of (historical and historiographical) national blocks, which—to be fair—still characterize both the history of science and book history. However, an occasional number of works have overcome the nationalistic exceptionalism of *normal* history, by engaging in several ways with scientific publishing in international and comparative perspectives or by investigating translation practices (e.g., MacLeod 1980; Vessuri 1989; Reardon-Anderson 1991; Blondel-Mégrelis 2000; Howsam 2000; Barrow-Green 2002; Lützen 2002; Despeaux 2002; Lloyd and Sivin 2002; Roldán Vera 2003; Hu 2005; Edelman 1994, 2010; Nappi 2009; Connor 2009; Sá and Silva 2010; Simon 2010, 2011; Wulf 2013; Elshakry 2014; Shen 2014b; Minor García 2016; El Shakry 2017).

The study of the scientific journal has been a major impulse for the analysis of publishing within the history of science. Attention to the scientific journal stemmed from the bookseller and library professional practice and the work of scientific academies, entrepreneurial scientists and journalism researchers, in the form of organizational schemes and specialized catalogues on periodical and scientific literature. This practice was not merely descriptive but provided some major analytical contributions in the first half of the 20th century, even before the advent of information theory and scientometrics.⁸ The earliest contributions from historians of science to the study of journals focused on some of the foundational cases in journal production; they established the basic historical facts of their foundation and development and explored their contents and subject matter (Hollmann 1937; Harff 1941; Neave 1950, 1951a, 1951b, 1951c, 1951d, 1952; Geus 1971; Engelhardt 1974; Wimmel and Geus 1981). They also suggested a wide range of research lines, such as their

role as communication tools for scientific academies and networks, their importance for scientific advance and disciplinary specialization, the practices of editorship and readership, the relevance of commercial interests and the profile of their authors, subscribers and readers (Sergescu 1936; Hollmann 1937; Harff 1941; Roller 1946; Lilley 1948; McKie 1957; Smeaton 1957; Hall 1965, 1975; Phillips 1966; Court 1972; McClellan 1979).

By the early 1990s, several decades of research on scientific and medical periodicals converged in major big pictures and case studies (Meadows 1980; Brock and Meadows 1984; Jungnickel and McCormmach 1986; Bynum et al. 1992; Meinel 1993, 1997a; Crosland 1994; Ausejo and Hormigón 1993; CHST-Nantes 1994; Reiber 1999; Johns 2000; McClellan 2003; Peiffer et al. 2013). Two main perspectives prevailed: on the one hand, the journal as a controlling agent of the making of disciplinary knowledge; on the other, the periodical as a driving agent in the making of scientific knowledge through popularization.

In his work on the making of physics as a discipline in Germany, Stichweh (1984, 2003) presented specialized journals as a major agent in the making of scientific disciplines. At first, science journals covered a wide range of subjects; they were addressed to an elite of science practitioners in regional and international contexts and often had short lives as publication ventures. Subsequently, after the late 18th century, a range of more specialized journals appeared in France, Germany and Britain, which persisted for longer periods and were fed by a sustained effort of publication and reading, which continuously reshaped the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge. Furthermore, journal publishing increasingly became a fundamental normative practice in the production process of science and the form of the scientific article was progressively defined by particular cultural protocols. Journal science became, thus, a major agent in the production of scientific disciplines as social systems and overall in the making of scientific knowledge (Tobies 1986, 1987; Ausejo and Hormigón 1993; Gierl 1997; Bazerman 1998; Barrow-Green 2002; Remmert and Schneider 2010; Lembrecht 2007; Verdier 2009; Gerini and Verdier 2014; Peiffer et al. 2018).

In parallel, there was an emerging interest in periodicals and popularization, pioneered by scholars, such as Susan Sheets-Pyenson (1981a, 1981b, 1981c, 1985). Research on science popularization received a major international impulse since the 1990s, which included a major focus on journals. This movement promoted novel online tools for the study of science in periodicals, such as the *Science in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical Index* developed at the University of Leeds (Cantor et al. 2005) and research on science periodicals across Europe (Topham 1992, 2000a; Bensaude-Vincent and Rasmussen 1997; Barton 1998; Secord 2000; Matos 2000; Nunes 2001; Govoni 2002; Daum 2002; Cantor and Shuttleworth 2004; Reis 2005, 2007; Perdiguero Enrique and Martínez-Vidal 2009; Martínez Vidal and Zarzoso 2002; Papanelopoulou and Kjærgaard 2009; Schirmacher 2012; Zilhão 2014, 2021; Dahn 2019) and Latin America (Mendoza and Busala 2002; Venancio 2013; Vergara 2020; Azuela Bernal and Vega Ortega 2015; Vega y Ortega Baez 2020; Becerra and Saldivia 2010; Ramírez 2019; Ramírez-Errázuriz and Leyton-Alvarado 2020; Valderrama and Ramírez Errázuriz 2020). Results in this field are still irregular: A number of scholars have taken the challenge of analyzing, in depth, the process of journal publication as a fundamental practice in the making of scientific knowledge, through the conceptual and methodological tools of the study of the material culture of writing, printing, bookselling and reading. Others still take the science periodical as just an attractive medium in which to check the course of scientific culture⁹. Concurrently, historians of Chinese science have produced a consistent corpus of research around popular science, technology and medicine encyclopedias and other types of instructional textbooks, with a much wider temporal scope, connecting contemporary science with writing and bookselling traditions of several thousand years and delivering profound insights on the epistemological practice of scientific knowledge compilation (Rawski 1979; Lean 2014; Elman 2000, 2005; Bretelle-Establet and Chemla 2007; Furth 1999, 2007; Schneider 2003; Nappi 2009; Bréard 2010; Jami 2012; Burke and McDermott 2015; Marcon 2015; Bretelle-Establet 2018; Pacey and Bray 2021).¹⁰

The role given to communication and media in the sociological theories of scholars, such as Ludwik Fleck (1935), Merton (1938, 1949), Jürgen Habermas (1962) and Niklas

Luhmann (1975), also fed the configuration of new approaches to journals from the field of history of science and science studies.¹¹ Merton (1938) saw journals as “indices of interest in the sciences” and claimed their centrality in the “reward system of science”. Putting together his research experience on mass communication and the new work of “heralds of scientometrics”, such as Derek de Solla Price (1963), and sociologists of science, such as Harriet Zuckerman (1967), a sociological analysis of the practices of journal article refereeing and their role in the making of scientific knowledge started to develop (Zuckerman and Merton 1971). This furthered quantitative approaches in history of science with the use of research citation measurements for historical cases of journal and science publication in general (Kronick 1962, 1991; Garfield 1964; Ziman 1969; Court 1972; Eccarius 1976; Houghton 1975; López Piñero 1979; Meinel 1993). The increasingly hegemonic role of the measurement of science journal publication in the neoliberal business of scientific knowledge has, since then, been a major focus of attention for historians and sociologists of science alike (Verdoorn 1948; Zuckerman and Merton 1971; Merton and Storer 1973; Zuckerman 1977; Gilbert 1977; Schwartzman 1984; Vessuri 1989; Gibbs 1995; Westwick 2003; Martín Frechilla et al. 2005). More recent work on the scientific journal has especially sought to illuminate the present framework of journal science through exemplary historical cases and a profound analysis of practices, such as editorship and peer review, shaping the political economy of the journal and its role in the system of science (LaFollette 1992; Biagioli 2002; Remmert and Schneider 2008b; Tesnière 2014b, 2021; Shen 2014a; Fyfe et al. 2015; Clarke 2015; Baldwin 2015; Shuttleworth and Charnley 2016; Lalli 2016; Fyfe et al. 2017; Csiszar 2018; Gielas and Fyfe 2020; Wale 2022).

The scientific article has been particularly scrutinized by scholars interested in the analysis of writing as the ultimate tool in the making of scientific knowledge (Bazerman 1998; Gross et al. 2002). Early on, scientists, such as Arber (1954) and Medawar (1963), and historians of science, such as Holmes (1987), warned us of the fundamental difference between scientific writing and scientific discovery. The commonly accepted difference between “literature” and “scientific literature” or between “fiction” and “science” was not as clear as expected. Scientific writing involved a good amount of creativity and was far from describing accurately the research path followed by the scientist in a quest for truth. Contemporarily, Greg Myers (1990) singled out the elaborate rhetorical practices of scientists by comparing the writing strategies of biologists in two different communication genres, the scientific journal paper and the grant application. Analogously, the analysis of the practices of writing and filing patents revealed the fundamental role that scientific and technological writing had in promoting or restraining invention and the tight relationship between writing, publishing, creativity and the commercial economy of science and technology (Bazerman 1999; Pettitt 2004; Biagioli 2006; Johns 2003b; Biagioli and Galison 2003). Starting with an interest on the rhetoric of science texts promoted by science studies (Gross 2006; Gilbert 1976; Latour and Fabbri 1977; Knorr and Knorr 1978; Dear 1991), together with a philological tradition still prevailing in the study of ancient and early modern science (Lloyd and Sivin (2002); Bretelle-Establet and Schmitt (2018)), the field has developed progressively towards a social and material history of science writing practices, through contributions from a diverse range of disciplines (Bazerman 1983; Elsky 1989; Topham 2000b; Gitelman 2000; Warwick 2003; Blair 2004, 2010; Daston 2004; Cahn 2004; Olson 1994, 2004; Kruse 2006; Furth 2007; Gardey 2008; Pardo Tomás 2010; Simon 2011; Hess and Mendelsohn 2013; Waquet 2003, 2015; Ogborn 2007; Knight 2009; Tsu 2014; Mullaney 2014; Watts 2015; Dietz 2016; Leong 2019; Husson and Kremer 2016; Oosterhoff 2018).

Materiality, readings, print technique and knowledge management are currently fundamental drivers for a history of scientific publishing. Their sociologies and anthropologies have helped historians of science deepen their understanding. Nonetheless, they connect with real sources, archives and historical practices, which postmodern scholars will hardly graze (Topham 2000a; Barad 2003; Lenoir 1998). The field has been especially successful through those works that cut across disciplines, time periods and geopolitical contexts, both in their subject matter and conceptualization. Its timeliness convenes recurrently new

scholars to discuss its captivating allure in the field of scholarly publication (Dietz 2022; Leong et al. 2020; Jovanovic et al. 2018; Haddad 2015; Bustamante 2015; Hochadel et al. 2016; Apple et al. 2012). In his classic *Victorian Sensation*, James Secord proclaimed having produced “the most comprehensive analysis of the reading of any book other than the Bible ever undertaken”. Overstated or not, it persuasively expresses why the history of scientific publishing should be of interest to any academic or non-academic reader.

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Notes

- ¹ On the relative impact of early printing, see also Neddermeyer (1998).
- ² The (Spanish) Black Legend or *Leyenda Negra* has been defined as a political campaign of discredit fueled since the 16th century by the Spanish Empire rival powers. It discredited Spanish cultural and scientific contributions by stressing the cruelty of the Spanish conquest of the American indigenous nations, considering it essential to Spanish and Catholic nature and comparatively minimizing the colonizing actions of other (Protestant) European nations. See Campbell (2003); Pardo Tomás (1991); Navarro Brotóns and Eamon (2007).
- ³ The history of science literature dealing with science publishing in the USA does not seem to be abundant either (see, for instance, Karpinski 1940; Burdick 2009; Servos 1982; Baatz 1991; Lalli 2014, 2016). There are also few examples of histories of US publishing firms dealing with science (see, for instance, Wolfe 1981). The major science book historians working in the USA and Canada have focused their work especially on British and European cases.
- ⁴ The literature on publishing and science, technology and medicine in China is abundant, but arguably still insufficient in relation to the historical richness of this subject for the case of China and East Asia in general. The subject is commonly addressed, both in the history of science and book history literature. See Tsien (1962, 1985); Rawski (1979); Twitchett (1983); Reardon-Anderson (1991); Chemla et al. (2001); Chia (2002); Elman (2005, 2015); Bretelle-Establet and Chemla (2007); Brokaw (2007); Barrett (2008); Brokaw and Reed (2010); Chia and De Weerd (2011); Jami (2012); Tsu and Elman (2014); Shen (2014b); Trambailo (2014); McDermott and Burke (2015); McDermott (2006, 2016); Chemla (2020); Bretelle-Establet (2022).
- ⁵ While, in the following, I focus—for reasons of space—on those three major national cases, I also make brief reference to other cases, such as Colombia, Chile and Peru.
- ⁶ For Mexico, see Martínez (1984); Meyer (1992); Castañeda (2002); Gutiérrez Lorenzo (2007); Granados Salinas (2017); Fernández de Zamora (2009); Suárez de la Torre and Castro (2001); Suárez de la Torre (2003); Burdick (2009); Ayala Ochoa (2016). For Argentina, see Sorá (2011); Diego (2006); de Sagastizábal (1995); Giuliani (2018); Weinberg (2020). For Brazil see Halleswell (1982); Bragança and Galison (2011); Barbosa (2010); Martins (2001). For Chile see Subercaseaux (2000). For inter-American and cross-Atlantic perspectives see Cobo Borda (2000); Sorá (2021); Dutra and Mollier (2006) and Fernández (2016).
- ⁷ See Prelat (1960); Saladino García (1996); Wegner (2004); Barbosa (2010); Nieto Olarte (2007); Silva (1988, 2002); Roldán Vera (2003); Alzate Echeverri (2005); Guibovich Pérez (2002); Labarca (2020). Analogously, for science publishing during the Enlightenment in France, Germany, Scotland, England and Portugal, see Ehrard and Roger (1965); Darnton (1979); Vittu (2002); Reiber (1999); Stöltzner (2008); Sher (2006); Spary (2020); Lisboa (1991); and across the Republic of Letters: Broman (2013).
- ⁸ See Ostwald (1919); Sparks (1919); Kirchner (1928, 1931, 1958, 1962); Morgan (1929); Garrison (1934); Barnes (1936); Hollmann (1937); Lefanu (1937a, 1937b, 1938); Bernal (1939); Harff (1941); Roller (1946); Verdoorn (1948); Kronick (1962, 1991); Hall (1965, 1975); Ziman (1969); Geus (1971); Engelhardt (1974); Wimmel and Geus (1981); Houghton (1975); Manzer (1977). An overview of some of this literature can be found in Meinel (1997b); Behrends (1995); Hapke (1997, 2005). In contrast to the analytical quality of bibliographical work such as that of Kirchner (1928, 1931, 1958, 1962); Kronick (1962, 1991), stands for instance the laconism of the Royal Society’s *Catalogue of Scientific Papers* introductory pages (which barely present, contextualize or analyze the list of compiled papers). On its production, see Csiszar (2018), pp. 232–39.
- ⁹ Of course, the study of “science periodicals” and “science in the periodical” also owes to the history of newspapers and journalism and to the central role that periodicals and newspapers have played as sources for history at large. This is a scholarly field I have scarcely covered in this article. See, for instance Kalifa et al. (2011); Bellanger (1969); Birkner (2012); Conboy (2020).

- ¹⁰ The study of science's encyclopedic knowledge in Europe has, of course, gravitated towards a mid-18th century foundational moment. It has, nonetheless, had a major methodological role in the development of the history of scientific publishing. See, for instance, [Darnton \(1979\)](#); [Yeo \(2001, 2007\)](#); [Falconer \(2021\)](#).
- ¹¹ Communication has been periodically hailed as a driving concept for the history of science. See, for instance, [Hall \(1965, 1975\)](#); [Ziman \(1969\)](#); [Meadows \(1974\)](#); [Meinel \(1993\)](#); [Dooley \(1995\)](#); [Lux and Cook \(1998\)](#); [Secord \(2004\)](#).

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