

On the foundation of *Acta Mathematica*

by

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In the proceedings of the congress of the Scandinavian mathematicians in 1925, the 79-year-old *Gösta Mittag-Leffler* gives Hermite and Weierstrass the credit for proposing an international journal edited from Sweden. Even if Mittag-Leffler's two foremost teachers had perhaps realized his talents as a potential journal editor and hinted to him something in that direction, we know, however, that the concrete proposal which led to the foundation of *Acta Mathematica* came from *Sophus Lie*. This is confirmed by many contemporary documents and also by Mittag-Leffler's brief obituary of Lie in volume 22 of this journal. Mittag-Leffler and Lie met in Stockholm in late spring 1881. Lie came up with the idea and suggested that Mittag-Leffler should be the editor. Mittag-Leffler was captivated by the project and took over the initiative from then on.

It can be seen from their correspondence in the following months that at least Lie meant that the greater part of the scientific material in the journal should be Scandinavian but at the same time of the highest international standard. To secure this, he and Mittag-Leffler found it best to have an editorial board formed of the leading Scandinavian mathematicians, who were supposed to give regular scientific contributions of their own. Mittag-Leffler emphasized in fact that board members should undertake to send all their best manuscripts to the new journal. Moreover, they should assist as referees for submitted manuscripts, Scandinavian or foreign. In order to be read abroad, the articles in the journal should be written in French or German, exceptionally English or Latin.

No journal specializing in advanced mathematical research existed at that time in the Scandinavian countries (Denmark and Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden) and except for the brief but spectacular period of Abel in the twenties, it was not until the preceding decade that Scandinavia had reached a respectable standing in international mathematical research. By 1881, however, a considerable number of distinguished scientists had appeared, a circumstance that suggested possibilities for a quality journal