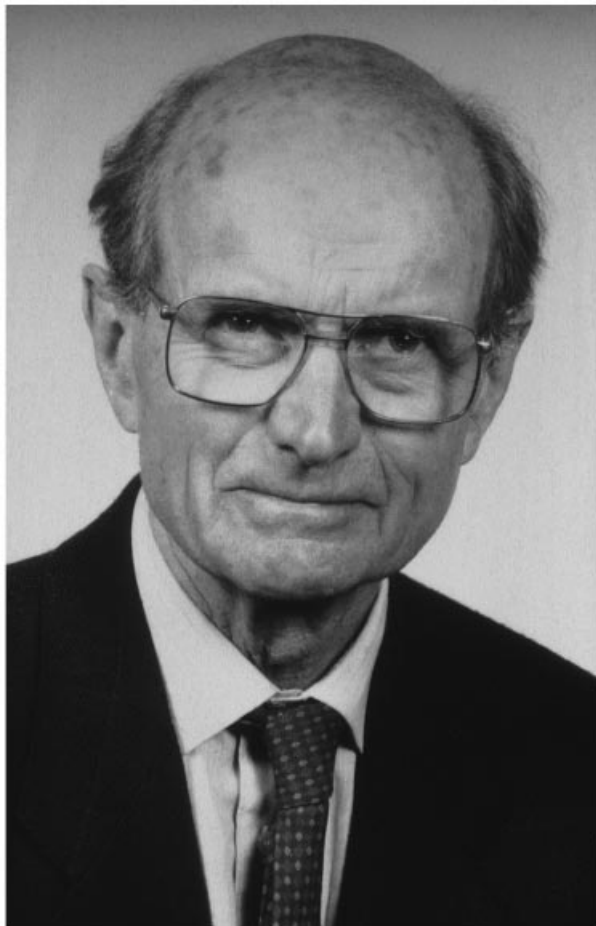


Obituary

Professor J. M. F. Landsmeer

(1919–1999)



Johan Matthijs Frederik (Hans) Landsmeer, Professor Emeritus of Anatomy and Embryology at the University of Leiden, died on 12 June 1999, at the age of 80. He was a gifted scientist who had devoted his professional life to research in Anatomy and Embryology. During his career he was successful in blazing new trails in the relation of morphology to function. This resulted in an impressive list of publications frequently cited in the literature. His sharp analytical approach to problems was a striking feature and illustrated his aversion to superficiality. In this way he collected a profound and inspiring knowledge of human and comparative anatomy and embryology and he knew exactly how to pass on this knowledge to others. Therefore it is not surprising that he guided a substantial number of disciples to the completion of a PhD thesis, thus forming a school. His ability to translate his concepts in a way to have

them accepted in the solution of clinical problems is also generally recognised. He was a skilful dissector. The results of his work were brought together in *Landsmeer's Atlas of Anatomy of the Hand*, published in 1976. This volume represents his meticulous morphological analysis of structures and his ability to intermingle the gross and fine structure of the hand to its function. This has opened perspectives for the surgeon engaged in the treatment of this most difficult area.

Hans Landsmeer had a strong affiliation to the University of Leiden. Born on 14 January 1919 in Rotterdam, where he spent his youth, he started his medical studies at the Leiden University in 1935. In 1939, before graduating he entered the Department of Anatomy and Embryology, and he stayed there until his retirement. This continuity was only interrupted during World War II. In November 1940 the University of Leiden was closed by the Nazis in connection with a rectorial address on 26 November protesting against the exclusion of the Jewish professors. Without any doubt this major event made a deep impression on him. During his career he consistently refused any invitation from countries where democracy was violated.

He passed his MD in 1943 at the University of Utrecht and returned to the Department of Anatomy and Embryology in Leiden after the liberation of the country. In 1947 he defended successfully his PhD thesis on the vascularisation of the hypophysis. When he received a full professorship in Anatomy and Embryology in 1960, Hans Landsmeer had developed extensive expertise in this speciality and was recognised as a gifted teacher and researcher. However, as an anatomist Hans Landsmeer will be remembered as one devoted to the anatomy and function of the hand. In the 1950s he developed a new research line with emphasis upon the analysis of form-function relations in the musculoskeletal system. He started to explore and unravel the fine structure and the function of the hand, the most complex part of the human body. In these studies he included data from comparative morphological analyses. The products of his analytical and creative mind served as a basis for numerous clinical projects.

He was honoured many times for his work. As an outstanding member of the Dutch Association of Anatomists he received an honorary membership. The Anatomical Society of Great Britain and Ireland gave

him Life Membership after being an overseas member of the counsel for many years. When he became Professor Emeritus, the Charles University in Prague honoured him with the medal of the University not only for his anatomical and embryological work but also for the support he gave the Department of Anatomy of that University during difficult years.

The clinical relevance of his work was widely acknowledged. He was an honorary member of the American, British and Dutch Societies for Surgery of the Hand. He was cofounder of the Dutch Society and served as the chairman from the outset for many years. At the meeting of the Third Congress of the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand in 1986 he received an acknowledgement as a pioneer of hand surgery. He was appointed Consultant in Hand Anatomy on the Research Project of the Ampersand Research Group in Cleveland, Ohio and also at the Hospital for Joint Diseases in New York. In 1965 he presented the Founder's Lecture at the annual meeting of the American Society for Surgery of the Hand. Professor Landsmeer was

chairman of the International Committee of the International Conference on Biomechanics and Clinical Kinesiology of Hand and Foot in Madras, India in 1985. In 1986 he was the Guest Professor of Anatomy at the Kasturba Medical College in Manipal, India. This illustrates his interest and involvement in problems associated with leprosy, even after his retirement in 1984.

But, above all, Hans Landsmeer was an extremely sociable man. He showed an ever-present interest in his coworkers at the department and in those who had left the department for a career elsewhere. He loved to receive people in his house in Oegstgeest, with its wild garden, and to show his collection of contemporary art, very often serving a good meal as well.

We will miss this kind and inspiring man as a good friend, always ready to discuss matters of mutual interest in science and in the social scene. He is survived by his 4 children. They deserve our greatest sympathy.

JOHN M. G. KAUER
ANTHONY HUSON