

# Preface

It is quite an enterprise to write about a scientist who made fundamental contributions to so many fields. After working for several years on this biography, I remarked to a German colleague and friend, “I have to stop this; Poincaré is too great for me.” It seemed to me that it was impossible for one mathematician to give a complete account of everything that Poincaré had accomplished. My friend replied, “That is not a good reason to give it up. Poincaré is too great for all of us.” The feeling of impossibility did not disappear, but my friend’s words were a kind of support, and I continued.

There was another obstruction. Poincaré was an explorer and adventurer, but of the jungles, deserts, and mountains of the spirit. He made fantastic journeys, but all those adventures took place in his mind. How can one describe such an exciting life that from the outside looks so dull? During the time I was immersed in his work, there were days that left me in such a state of excitement that I could hardly sleep. It is my hope that the reader will be equally enthralled by some of these adventures of the mind.

A number of chapters of this book have been read and criticized in manuscript. I would like to acknowledge the comments of Jan Aarts, Henk Broer, Roelof Bruggeman, Dirk van Dalen, Antonio Degasperis, Giuseppe Gaeta, Jean-Marc Ginoux, Kim Plovker, Giuseppe Pucacco, Theo Ruijgrok, and Arjen Sevenster.

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Henri Poincaré

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