Preface

Since the early 1980s peroxisomes have been a central point of interest at the University of Amsterdam. This interest was inspired by the presentation of three patients at the Department of Pediatrics, within a short period of time. The patients showed a typical combination of clinical abnormalities which were recognized by the late Prof. W.H.H. Tegelaers, head of the Department of Pediatrics, as being indicative for Zellweger syndrome. A literature search identified the hallmark paper by Goldfischer and coworkers (1973) Science 182, 62-64 reporting the absence of morphologically recognizable peroxisomes in Zellweger patients. The full significance of this finding was not immediately clear since at that point in time the unique functional role of peroxisomes in man was yet to be discovered. Because of his interest in glycosomes, Prof. P. Borst attended the New York Academy of Science Symposium in 1981 and heard Dr. A.K. Hajra speak about the role of peroxisomes in ether-phospholipid biosynthesis. He immediately recognized the importance of these findings in relation to the Zellweger syndrome which soon led to the discovery that plasmalogens were deficient in Zellweger syndrome. At the same time Moser and coworkers discovered the elevated levels of very-long-chain fatty acids in Zellweger patients.

These findings led to a renewed interest in peroxisomes and much has been learned about these organelles since then. It was therefore decided to bring together leading experts in the field of peroxisomes and peroxisomal disorders in order to gain new insights and ideas. A scientific committee consisting of Prof. P.G. Barth, Prof. P. Borst, Prof. H.S.A. Heymans, Dr. R.B.H. Schutgens, Prof. H.F. Tabak, Prof. J.M. Tager, Dr. R.J.A. Wanders and Prof. A. Westerveld took care of the scientific programme. The meeting was held in Amsterdam (17-19 october 1993) under the Auspices of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences at the 17th century Trippenhuis, Kloveniersburgwal 29, which is the Residence of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and of Sciences. Participation was restricted to 86 invited scientists from 18 different countries. The meeting was a great success which led us to try and bring the information presented at this symposium together in a book entitled: Functions and biogenesis of peroxisomes in relation to human disease.

We are grateful to all people involved in making this meeting a success. We especially acknowledge Mrs. Kooy from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Art

and Sciences for expert support in organising the scientific meeting. Furthermore, we thank Mrs. Baert, Manuel, Van der Gracht, Van Tongeren and Zwaal for help in preparing the manuscript and Mr. Ketelaar from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences for making this book a reality. We hope that the contents of this book will stimulate further research in this fascinating field.

The editors