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Jesper Lützen* (lutzen@math.ku.dk), Department of Mathematical Sciences,
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Century? The Changing Importance of an Impossibility Result.*

The duplication of a cube and the trisection of an angle are two of the most famous geometric construction problems formulated in ancient Greece. In 1837 Pierre Wantzel (1814-1848) proved that the problems cannot be constructed by ruler and compass. Today he is credited for this contribution in all general treatises of the history of mathematics. However, his proof was hardly noticed by his contemporaries and during the following century his name was almost completely forgotten. In this talk I shall analyze the reasons for this neglect and argue that it was primarily due to the lack of importance attributed to such impossibility results at the time. (Received September 17, 2009)