

COMMISSION 41 : HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY
(HISTOIRE DE L'ASTRONOMIE) (a joint IAU-IUHPS Commission)

Report of Activities 1990 July 1 to 1993 June 30

PRESIDENT : S. Débarbat

VICE-PRESIDENT : S..M. Ansari

During the XXith General Assembly it was decided on a unanimous vote of those members present to make a formal resolution to be presented to the General Assembly in its closing session. This was done jointly by Commission 41 and Comission 5 and was

that the Union supports an initiative taken by Commission 41 and 5 (1) to establish a register of the whereabouts of all extant astronomical archives of historical interest ; (2) to impress on observatories and other institutions their responsibility for the preservation, conservation, and where possible cataloguing of such archives ; (3) to search for an institution that will allocate space and funds for maintaining such a register and publishing it.

It was not felt that the proposal should take instruments into account at this stage, since the problems presented there are of a very different character ; but if the one project makes progress, the other should certainly follow in its train. The first objective was to stop the wholesale destruction of materials of historical value ; the second was to make the whereabouts of material better known to scholars. Many instances were reported at meeting of situations where a series of directors of institutes, librarians, and others invested great care in the preservation of materials over a long period, only to be followed by others entirely without a feeling for the past, prepared to sell or destroy their inheritance. The General Assembly endorsed the resolution. The following Working Group was established to look into the possibilities mentioned in the resolution : S. Débarbat (ex officio, President), S.J. Dick, E. Proverbio, B. Hauck (comm, 5), D. Dewhirst (comm. 5).

References

J.D. North : 1991 "Commission 41 at the Buenos Aires General Assembly of the IAU", *Journal of the History of Astronomy* 22, PP. 329-30, and *Proceedings of the IAU/GA* (Vol. XXIB, PP. 315-16).

The members of the Working Group had not possibility to meet but information was circulated and President of Com. 41 had several opportunities to discuss with people engaged in Archives or Libraries the last ones having archives under their responsibility. Two main ideas have emerged from discussions. First the fact that, in view of having countries impressed about their responsibilities, a national register of archives be established and maintained in a given place. Secondly the fact that, in view of a better efficiency, a form to be given to the entries of register be studied. This would have, of course, to be made for computers and with appropriately selected indexes. B. Corbin has informed, in Cicular number 2 (February 1993), the "JWG, Astronomical Libraries" about the IAU/GA resolution.

E. Proverbio (member of WG) published (December 1990) the *Proceedings of a national meeting on the subject "Problemi del recupero e dell'ordinamento delle risorse strumentali e biblio-archivistiche negli Osservatori e Istituti/Dipartimenti di Astronomia e Astrofisica"* (Pisa/Italy, November 1989). He organized (auspices of the Commissione per la storia dell'Astronomia) another meeting (Roma/Italy, April 1993) on "I problemi del recupero e valorizzazione del patrimonio strumentale, archivistico e bibliografico di interesse storico degli

Osservatori Astronomici e Astrofisici Italiani".

A Journée d'étude ("Préservation et utilisation des archives scientifiques") was organised (Th. Charmasson, Médiathèque de La Villette, Paris/France, March 1993). Among the three chosen examples "The astronomical archives" which were presented together with their present employment by N. Daliès and S. Débarbat.

Regarding the Register, several actions exist, have or will come to existence at national level such as the American Institute of Physics for USA, Deutches Museum for Germany, the Paris Observatory for France, History of Science Departement (University of Aarhus) for Denmark, Athens Observatory for Greece,...

Meetings of astronomical interest

Various meetings have been held in different places to which members of Com. 41 have greatly participated : - The 120th Anniversary of Konkoly Observatory (Budapest/Hungary, September 1991).- Current Problems and Future of Archeoastronomy (Budapest/Hungary, October 1991).- India and other asiatic astronomies (Hyderabad-Jaipur/India, December 1991).- Historical Astronomy Division of the American Astronomical Society (Atlanta/USA, January 1992).- Time and Astronomy at the Meeting of two Worlds (Warszawa-Frombork/Poland, April 1992).- Les savants et l'épistémologie vers la fin du XIXème siècle (Genève/Switzerland, May 1993).- Le travail scientifique dans les correspondances entre savants au tournant des 17ème et 18ème siècles (Paris/France, June 1992).- History of Women in Science, Technology and Medicine (Sopron/Hungary and Wien/Austria, August 1992).- Nature and History in the German enlightenment (UCLA Center for 17th and 18th Century Studies, Los Angeles/USA, May 1993).

The year 1993 marks the 200th anniversary of F.G.W./V.Y. Struve (1793-1864), the founder of Pulkovo Observatory, previously at Dorpat (now Tartu) Observatory. The following conferences are scheduled on that occasion : - Tartu (Estonia), August 26-29.- Pulkovo/Petersburg (Russia), September 7-9 and October 4-8. An international conference on Oriental Astronomy from Guo Shonjing to King Sejong is planned (Seoul/Korea, 6-11 October 1993).

Publications

Some books appeared having been mentioned to the Commission : - Claudius Ptolemäus : Der Sternkatalog des Almagest. Die arabisch-mittelalterliche Tradition, responsibility of P. Kunitzch, 1990.- Xi'an Jiatong University West Han Dynasty Mural Tomb (1991) discovered in 1987 and which houses a two thousand year celestial map in great danger of destruction ; the book is by Hu Lin-gui and Zhong Wan-mai.- Astronomie im Deutschen Museum (1993) by G. Hartl, K.Märker, J. Teichmann and G. Wolfschmidt following the re-opening of the re-installed Astronomie Galerie.- The Encyclopedia of Islam (New Edition, Leiden 1993) which contains a long entry on the stars ("fixed" and "planets").

Newsletters to be mentioned : - Center for History of Physics (American Institute of Physics, New York/USA).- Gruppo Nazionale per il coordinamento della storia della fisica (CNR, Italy).- Mitteilungen zur Astronomiegeschichte (Arbeitskreis Astronomiegeschichte in der Astronomischen Gesellschaft, Germany).- The Achievement Project (Oxford/UK).- H.A.D News, Historical Astronomy Division of the American Astronomical Society.

Articles have been published about Ancient Chinese Astronomy, by Purple Mountain Observatory ; a series of publications by numerous members of the Commission have concerned Australian and New Zealand Astronomy, Hebraic, Indian and Canadian subjects, Globes, Instruments, Observatories, ... Other publications were relevant to astronomers from the past : Galileo, Denning, Pickering, Ross, Kaiser, Huygens, Schöner, Chandra, ...

On the occasion of the XIXth International Congress of History of Science (Zaragoza/Spain) a Report (1989-1993) has been prepared and will be presented by J. North, in August 1993, Com. 41 being a joint commission of the IAU and the IUHPS.