

41. COMMISSION D'HISTOIRE DE L'ASTRONOMIE

Report of First Meeting, 25 August 1967

PRESIDENT: E. Rybka.

SECRETARY: Z. Horský.

Before the beginning of this session the President distributed among the members and guests copies of the Information Circular concerning the General History of Astronomy, vol. III, and Prof. Kulikovsky distributed copies of the Bibliography of books and papers, published in 1966, on the history of astronomy.

Present were more than 35 members and guests.

Members and guests standing, the President announced that Commission 41 suffered a loss by the death of the members of our Commission Yu. Perel and E.F. Dijksterhuis and consulting member L. Thorndike.

The Agenda of this meeting was:

1. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT REPORT AND DISCUSSION OF THE POLICY OF COMMISSION 41

The Draft Report was adopted without changements. Professor Kulikovsky remarked that the Bibliography published in the Draft Report is only a supplementary one, the complete Bibliography being published by him and distributed among the members of the Commission.

2. DISCUSSION OF THE NEED OF ANNUAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

A lengthy discussion showed that all members felt the need of an Annual Bibliography of books and papers on the history of astronomy. Mrs Whitrow (Editor, Isis Bibliography Project) asked whether there existed any co-operation between the editors of the Isis Critical Bibliography and the Bulletin Signalétique on the one hand and the editor of the Bibliography on the History of Astronomy published by Commission 41 of the IAU, on the other hand.

3. DISCUSSION OF THE NEED OF INFORMATION CIRCULAR

In the discussion, the members found the Information Circular issued by the President of the Commission very helpful and suggested that it should be published.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE GENERAL HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY

The President of Commission 41, *Professor E. Rybka* outlined to the members of the Commission the tentative plan of Volume III of the General History of Astronomy. This volume shall, in principle, be devoted to the astronomy of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. This tentative plan should also be discussed during the International Congress of the History of Science in Paris, 1968. Many members of Commission 41 requested the co-operation of the national committees of history of astronomy in countries, where they exist; such co-operation is desirable. The meeting proposed a resolution on this subject for adoption.

5. DISCUSSION ON INSTRUMENTS OF HISTORICAL INTEREST

It was unanimously agreed that instruments and manuscripts of historical interest require

protection from damage. After a discussion, a resolution concerning this subject was prepared for adoption.

6. MICROFILMING OF DOCUMENTS ON THE HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY

In the discussion, *Dr Forbes* drew attention to the importance of securing permission and providing the means for copying the Royal Greenwich Observatory's records of the Astronomers Royal of the past three centuries mentioned in the Draft Report of this Commission, and asked the members to discuss the following questions:

(a) whether it was agreed, in principle, that a formal request should be made to the Astronomer Royal for permission to microfilm these valuable and unique documents and

(b) if so, to discuss in the meanwhile which steps might also be taken to secure support for such a project.

Professor Kulikovsky strongly supported this suggestion and proposed that a sub-committee from Commission 41 should be set up to investigate this particular matter and also the general question of making more manuscript material readily accessible to scientists all over the world. *Dr Sykes* said that Commission 5 was interested in this project because of the possibility that the collection of some 50000 slips relating to the Bibliography of Astronomy 1881–1898, now held at the *Observatoire Royal de Belgique*, would be made available on microfilms. He asked that Commission 5 should be kept informed of any progress by Commission 41 in this matter.

Mrs Helen Wright spoke of the programme of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia to have some of the papers at the Royal Society in London microfilmed. With the sponsorship of an organisation like the American Philosophical Society, she suggested that it might be possible to obtain funds to carry out this programme. The papers would thus become available to historians of science not only in England, but also in the United States, and in other countries the world over. The Institute for History and Philosophy of Science of the American Institute of Physics in New York worked on a joint programme with the American Philosophical Society for the recording of the history of quantum physics; it is now starting a similar programme for the recording of the history of astronomy. The programme includes the tape-recording of leading figures in the history of contemporary astronomy and the organisation and deposition of their papers in suitable quarters. Thus, in the summer of 1966, several tape-recording sessions were held with *Dr Harlow Shapley*, and afterwards the tapes were transcribed and indexed, and are now available to qualified historians at the American Institute of Physics. It is hoped that this programme can be extended not only in the United States, but also in many other countries. Tape-recording of the leading figures in astronomy is an invaluable record to future historians, and every effort should be made to encourage the members of the Commission to aid this programme. *Professor Rybka* read a letter from *Professor Zagar*. *Professor Zagar* writes:

L'Observatoire de Brera à Milan a accompli la rédaction du second volume de la 'Correspondance sur Mars' de G.V. Schiaparelli; il s'agit d'un volume qui contient à peu près 300 lettres échangées de 1890 à 1910 entre Schiaparelli et les plus importants aérogaphes contemporains. Le troisième volume, qui sera aussi le dernier, sera publié ensuite.

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Present were more than 30 members and guests.

7. COMMUNICATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDIES ON THE HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY

Professor František Link read a paper concerning the astronomical observations recorded in the

twelfth-century chronicle written by a Czech anonymous author, known as the Canon of Vyšehrad. This author recorded many observations of planets and an observation of a sunspot in 1139. The existence of this sunspot is confirmed by Chinese observations. This observation of a sunspot is the first made in Bohemia.

Dr Tadeusz Przytkowski described, in his paper, a very original pendulum clock dating from 1654 and built by Gohier in Paris for the King of Poland Jan Casimir (The clock being signed: Gohier à Paris 1654 Pour le roi de Pologne Jean Casimir). This clock, still in very good repair, is now in the collections of the Museum Przytkowski in Jędrzejów (Poland). It is undoubtedly the oldest pendulum clock surviving in perfect state of preservation.

Mrs. E.S. Parsamjan read a paper written jointly with K.A. Mkztchjan concerning a possible ancient 'observatory' on the territory of Armenia.

Dr Winfried Petri informed the meeting of his new studies concerning the history of Tibetan astronomy and the history of astronomy in Asian countries.

Dr Carlos Juan Lavagnino discussed in his paper "The qualitative development of astronomy and the scientific place of cosmonautics" the problems concerning the periodisation of the history of astronomy and the influence of cosmonautics on the development of astronomy. He supposes that the periods of the evolution of human society may be linked in parallel to the periods of development of astronomy.

8. RESOLUTIONS

The resolutions adopted are as follows:

1. *For the General Assembly*

(See resolution No. 4, p. 38–9.)

2. *For the General Assembly*

(See resolution No. 3, p. 38–9.)

3.

Commission 41 considère comme très utile la composition et l'édition de la Bibliographie annuelle sur l'histoire de l'astronomie qui mérite tout le secours.

Commission 41 voulant assurer la totalité de la Bibliographie demande à leurs membres et membres-consultants de bien vouloir prendre la tâche et la responsabilité d'envoyer aux compilateurs de la Bibliographie ses résultats de dépouillement des éditions du caractère générale et celles des académies et des universités de leurs pays.

Commission 41 s'adresse aux Comités Nationaux de l'UAI des pays qui ne sont pas présentés à la Commission 41 de choisir une personne qui pourra être responsable pour le même sujet.

Commission 41 prie le Président de la Commission 41 de s'adresser aux institutions astronomiques des pays qui ne sont pas présentés à l'UAI, en les demandant le même secours.

Commission 41 rappelle à tous auteurs la nécessité d'envoyer aux compilateurs de la Bibliographie les tirages-à-part ou les données bibliographiques précises.

9. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION

Prof. E. Rybka was asked by the Executive Committee to continue as President of Commission 41 during the coming three years, with O.J. Gingerich as Vice-President.

The following Organizing Committee was elected: V. L. Čenakal, J.-O. Fleckenstein, C. D. Hellman, Z. Horský, P. G. Kulikovskiy, W. Petri.

New members of Commission 41: J. G. Argyrakos, J. Dobrzycki, D. Kotsakis, J. R. Lévy.

Died: Yu. Perel, E. F. Dijksterhuis.

Consulting members of Commission 41: Aaboe, Burke-Gaffney, Daumas, Fischer, Forbes, Freiesleben, Hartner, Horský, Hoskin, Kennedy, Labat, Maddison, Millas-Vallicrosa, Musto, Needham, Nevskaja, Pedersen, Price, Przyrkowski, Ronan, Ronchi, Santillana, Schove, Taton, Thoren, Tumanjan, Veselovsky, van den Waerden, Wattenberg, Woolf, Wright.

Working group for the description and microfilming of astronomical manuscripts: **President:** O.J. Gingerich. **Members:** V. L. Čenakal, E. Forbes, O. Pedersen.