

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

Report of Activities 1987 July 1 to 1990 June 30

PRESIDENT: J.D. North

VICE-PRESIDENT: S. Débarbat

During the XXth General Assembly the Commission agreed to support a motion by Commissions 19 and 31 that a history be prepared of the Bureau Internationale de l'Heure and the International Polar Motion Service; the rider was added that the two authors proposed (B. Guinot and S. Yumi) obtain the services of a professional historian of astronomy, to advise and assist where possible.

Four historians were named as new members of the Union at the closing Assembly: D. King, M. Yano, E.S. Kennedy and J.L. Lankford.

Reference

J.D. North : 1989, "Commission 41 at the Baltimore General Assembly of the I.A.U.", *Journal of the History of Astronomy* 20, PP. 74-5.

Other Historical Meetings

Various meetings have been held in Paris. The archives and instruments of the Observatory were exploited for historical purposes by S. Débarbat, S. Grillot and J. Lévy. Not previously recorded here were two exhibitions held there in 1987: "La Mesure du ciel" and "Newton 87: La Publication des Principia, ses conséquences en France". Inventories have been established of instruments now dispersed, and of old photographs over and above the Carte du Ciel. In connection with the bicentenary of the French Revolution (1989), an exhibition was mounted devoted to the metre and the metric system. In May 1990 the Observatoire de Paris held a colloquium on systems of spatiotemporal reference in celebration of the centenary of the birth of Danjon. This included a small historical component.

Colloquia held at the Archenhold-Ternwachte (Berlin-Treptow) included "Contributions for the History of Astronomy in Berlin" (1987 November 26) and "Contributions to the History of Astronomy in Germany" (1988 November).

Active historical groups in Italy have held meetings on post-Newtonian astronomy, cosmology and astrophysics to the 19th century (Cagliari, November 1988; Pisa, November 1989; a meeting is planned for Torino, November 1990). They have also held seminars on the preservation of archival and instrumental materials (*ex info*. E. Proverbio).

A first National Symposium on Archaeoastronomy was held towards the end of 1988 in Tolbukhin, Bulgaria.

A group at the Astronomical Institute of the University of Vienna, in collaboration with Commission 41, is currently organising a meeting (Vienna 4-7 September 1990) on the theme "The Interaction of European and Asian Astronomy". Plans are also being made for a conference to be held in the Soviet Union in 1992 on the theme *European Astronomy in the 17th and 18th Centuries*.

Although they are not far advanced, the Royal Society of South Africa has plans to commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of Sir John Hershel in 1992 with an international Colloquium or Symposium.

Publications

Vol. 2A of *The General History of Astronomy* ("Planetary Astronomy from the Renaissance to the Rise of Astrophysics, Part A: Tycho Brahe to Newton"), sponsored jointly by the IUHPS and the IAU, was published in 1989. Four of the Armagh Observatory's bicentenary celebrations, J.A. Bennett is completing a history for publication in September 1990: *Church, State and Astronomy in Ireland: 200 years of Armagh Observatory*. In the Soviet Union, under the supervision of A.A. Gurshtein, a series of yearbooks (*Studies in the History of Astronomy*) appeared in 1988, 1989, 1990, evidence of much activity on the part of the History of Astronomy section of the Soviet National Committee for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology. A series of biographical monographs is being prepared there (Ptolemy, F.W. Bessel, J. Jeans and others), and translations into Russian of works by D. Laser and B. van der Waerden are in hand. A series of historical articles have appeared in recent years from the W. Struve Tartu Astrophysical Observatory in Estonia. These include *Archivalia Astronomica* (1988) and *Archivalia Uranographia* (1989).

A series of Publications from the Archenhold-Sternwarte (Berlin-Treptow) deal in particular with 19th and 20th century astronomy and astrophysics in Berlin (Johann Carion, Alfred Wegener, etc.). Other Berlin projects concern mathematical and statistical research to support the history of astronomy, a new German translation of Copernicus, *De Revolutionibus*, and scientific biographies of E. Hertzsprung and F.W. Bessel. Among several publications of relevance to astronomy in earlier periods we note the valuable reference work by J. Hamel, *Zentralkatalog alter astronomischer Drucke in den Bibliotheken der DDR (Bis 1700)*, vols. 1-5 (including about 5200 items).