

COMMISSION 41: HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY (HISTOIRE DE L'ASTRONOMIE)

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Commission 41 is one of the largest specialist components of the IAU. At the General Assembly in 1982 at Patras the number of ordinary members was increased from 79 to 86 as a testimony to the growing interest among astronomers in the history of their subject. At the same time the number of consulting members rose from 32 to 40, which shows that an increasing number of highly competent historians of science is engaged in research in the history of astronomy without being professional astronomers. However, many valuable contributions to the subject come from historians who are not members. In consequence, the principal purpose of Commission 41 is to serve as a link between all historians of astronomy whether they be members or not, by initiating research into particular areas, by disseminating new results, or simply by creating possibilities of personal contacts between scholars from different parts of the world. This is mainly achieved by meetings of various kinds.

The Commission as such usually meets on two days during the General Assembly of the IAU, in a number of sessions devoted to general papers, to specific questions of importance to historians, and to a session or joint meeting with another commission. Thus at the General Assembly in 1982 at Patras there was a highly successful joint meeting with Commission 40 on The Early History of Radio Astronomy. A similar session at the forthcoming General Assembly in New Delhi on The History of Cometary Astronomy belongs to the same category. Other subjects discussed at Patras were The Use of Historical Records in Astronomical Research, and The Tools of the Historian of Astronomy. A particular feature of the Patras meeting was the Invited Discourse given in the old amphitheatre by the then president of the Commission, Dr. M.A. Hoskin.

Since many of the consulting members, and other historians of astronomy, are unable to attend the General Assemblies of the IAU a number of other meetings is usually arranged by our Commission in between General Assemblies, often in collaboration with other international or national bodies.

Since Patras several such meetings have taken place. Among these was a very well attended symposium on 1984 July 8-13 at Greenwich called "Longitude Zero" and commemorating the centenary of the international adoption of the Greenwich meridian. No less than sixty papers on astronomy, time keeping, cartography and navigation were presented. The meeting was sponsored by the IAU, the International Union of History and Philosophy of Science, and the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics, and recognized as the IAU Colloquium N^o 84. The organisation of the meeting was superbly handled by professor S. Malin and the staff of the Old Greenwich Observatory. A volume containing the proceedings of the Colloquium is in the press.

Among other international meetings involving either the Commission or a number of its members together with other historians of astronomy we can mention the following, without pretending to provide an exhaustive list.

A conference 1982 August 30 - September 1 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Gregorian Calendar was arranged by the Vatican Observatory, the Pontifical Academy of Science, and several members of Commission 41.

The IAU Symposium N° 106 on "The Milky Way Galaxy" on 1983 May 30 - June 3 at Groningen which was the first of its kind to include a historical session.

A colloquium on the history of astronomy held 1983 June 4 in Aarhus, sponsored by the Institute of History of Science, Aarhus University, and the Arnold Willer Foundation, was arranged by the president of the Commission.

The III International Reunion of History of Nautic and Hydrography which took place on 1983 July 3-8 in Lisboa and Sagres.

The First International Ethnoastronomy Conference took place on 1983 September 5-9 at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

The III Scientific Instrument Symposium was held 1983 September 26-30 at the Deutsches Museum, München.

Our Commission has noticed with satisfaction a number of historical sections set up by such national bodies as the Royal Astronomical Society of London, The American Astronomical Society, and the Astronomical Society of the Pacific.

The only regular publication of the Commission is a series of informal Information Circulars of which N° 32 (containing names and addresses of all our members) was published in July 1983, and N° 33 in February 1985.

It is a great pleasure to be able to announce that the *General History of Astronomy*, jointly sponsored by the IAU and the IUHPS, has now begun to appear from the Cambridge University Press under the general editorship of Dr. M.A.Hoskin; vol. 4A on *Astrophysics and 20th Century Astronomy to 1950* (ed. by O. Gingerich) was published in the summer of 1984 as a handsomely printed quarto of more than 200 pages.

This is not the place to attempt anything like a bibliography of the works of the members of the Commission, but one cannot help noticing that since the last general assembly a rather impressive array of major works has come to light, among which are *Ptolemy's Almagest*, translated and annotated by G.J. Toomer (London 1984); N.M. Swerdlow and O. Neugebauer, *Mathematical Astronomy in Copernicus's De Revolutionibus, Part 1-2* (New York, Heidelberg 1984); O. Gingerich and Barbara L. Welther, *Plantetary, Lunar, and Solar Positions, New and Full Moons, A.D. 1650-1805* (Philadelphia 1983); W. Hartner, *Oriens-Occidens II* (Hildesheim 1984); D.G. Heggie (ed.), *Archaeoastronomy in the Old World* (Cambridge 1982); A.F. Aveni (ed.) *Archaeoastronomy in the New World* (Cambridge 1982); G.V. Coyne, M.A. Hoskin, O.Pedersen (eds.), *Gregorian Reform of the Calendar* (Città del Vaticano 1983).

O. PEDERSEN
President of the Commission