

Minutes of the XXVII International Scientific Instrument Symposium
University of Lisbon, Portugal
15-21 September 2008

President: Paolo Brenni
Secretary: Sara Schechner
Treasurer: Hans [Hooijmaijers](#)

The Scientific Instrument Commission held its twenty-seventh annual symposium on 15-21 September 2008. The conference lasted six days and involved 148 participants from seventeen countries, of which twenty-seven were post-graduate students. Eighty-six papers were presented, twenty-six from Portuguese authors. The conference also included visits to fourteen museums and collections of scientific instruments, the majority of which were inaccessible to the general public. Seventy-five members attended the plenary business meeting of the SIC, which was held in the Chemical Amphitheatre of the University of Lisbon.

1) Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Robert Andersen and Peter de Clercq.

2) Review of Minutes from Last Meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007.

The Minutes of the 26th Plenary Session, held at Harvard University in September 2007 were not circulated and reviewed, because they had been lost in a computer crash and needed to be reconstructed. The Secretary apologized for the situation, and said that the minutes would be posted on the Commission's website.

3) SIC Finances

Last year, the Treasurer, Marian Fournier, reported by mail that the Commission had €4150 on 1 September 2007 in its bank account. (This figure did not include the expenses to be deducted for the Harvard Conference). The new Treasurer, Hans [Hooijmaijers](#), reported that the current balance is €4300 on 1 September 2008 (again before paying the costs of the Lisbon conference).

Receipts:

€1000 from IUHPS in February 2008 (\$1600).

This grant from IUHPS breaks down as \$1000 for the annual meeting, \$300 (of the 600 we asked for) for the website, and \$300 for running costs.

Expenses:

€700 (\$1000) for the symposium in Cambridge, Massachusetts; September 2007.

€150 running costs of the bank account

4) Report of Ongoing Commission Activities

A. Online Resources and Initiatives

SIC website, <http://www.sic.iuhps.org/>

There have been additions to the reference section. New links to digitized trade catalogues continue to be added to the Commission's website. We continue to place the SIC Bibliography online as well.

The Commission formally thanks Dana Freiburger for his work as webmaster of the SIC site and the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford for its support.

The SIC Bibliography this past year was compiled by Harry Leechburch, the librarian of the Boerhaave Museum. He will continue next year. The Commission formally thanks him as well.

Stephen Johnston reported on **ISIN**, the collective online database of instrument holdings in different collections

around the world. ISIN is becoming of limited use. It takes extra work for curators to enter the data of their collections, and many institutions have made the creation of their own, more complete databases a priority over ISIN. Moreover, web searching technologies are being developed that can crawl out to diverse databases on different institutional websites and bring back to a common site the results of a given search. The Commission, therefore, has decided to maintain ISIN for just two more years, and explore the new web scraping technologies.

B. SIC Publications

As reported last year, the Commission would be establishing a new publication, called *SIC: Scientific Instruments and Collections*. Giorgio Strano, the editor-in-chief, reported the bad news that the intended publisher could not maintain his financial engagements. Luckily, a new and perhaps better option had presented itself—publication of the journal as one or more hard bound volumes per year by Brill Academic Publisher. The volumes might include papers from meetings or special monographs, such as Silvio Bedini's manuscript on Campani.

5) Future Activities and Meetings

A. Scientific Instrument Commission Symposia

2009 Budapest

The XXVIII SIC Symposium will be part of the XXIII International Congress of History of Science and Technology, which will be held in Budapest from July 28 until August 2, 2009. Sara Schechner and Alison Morrison-Low have organized a thematic symposium, "How Instruments Change Hands," on behalf of the Commission. We will also have sessions of contributed papers on other topics and trips to see instrument collections. For details and registration, please visit <http://www.conferences.hu/ichs09/>.

For 2010 we have an invitation from the Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza to meet in Florence.

Other possible future venues were discussed, including Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Cambridge, UK, and Hamburg.

B. Other Future Meetings

The temporary exhibition and workshop, *Astrum 2009: Astronomia e strumenti: il patrimonio storico astronomico*, will take place between the 15 October 2009 and the 15 January at the Musei Vaticani in Rome. The exhibition, which is organized by the INAF (Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica), will present a selection of instruments, books and artifacts from the historical collections of the most important Italian astronomical observatories.

The symposium "Learning by Doing: Experiments and Instruments in the History of Science Teaching" will take place in Regensburg, Germany, 4-5 April 2009. The symposium is organized by the Physics Education/History and Philosophy of Science Group of the University of Oldenburg and the History of Science Unit of the University of Regensburg. All the related information will be soon available on the SIC website.

The conference "Astronomy and Its Instruments - Before and After Galileo" will take place in Venice, Italy on September 28-October 3, 2009. This international conference is devoted to the history of astronomical instrumentation and is held in the context of the International Year of Astronomy (IYA 2009). For details, please visit <http://web.oapd.inaf.it/venice2009/index.php>

In Autumn 2009 the National Museum of Scotland (Edinburgh) is organizing a workshop, "Reconstructions," which will bring together key protagonists of recently completed reconstruction projects. The workshop will cover subject areas as diverse as physics, computing, horology, communication, transportation, and military items.

6) Commission News

Paolo Brenni mentioned a letter that he wrote in his capacity as SIC President to the Swedish Academy of Sciences in support of the Observatory Museum remaining open in Stockholm. He also planned to write a letter to the director of

the museum of the palace in Sintra in support of the preservation of and further research on a celestial globe by Christoph Schissler

Sara Schechner, as SIC Secretary, maintains our liaison with the IAU and the American Astronomical Society's Working Group on the Preservation of Astronomical Heritage.

7) News from Members

Hans [Hooijmaijers](#) described a new exhibition, *The telescope*, at the Boerhaave from 15 September 2008 until 19 April 2009. It celebrates the 400th birthday of the telescope (25 September 1608). The exhibition is joined by two publications:

Dirk van Delft, Albert van Helden, Hans Hooijmaijers, Huib J. Zuidervaart, *De Telescoop*.

Huib J. Zuidervaart, *Telescopes from Leiden Observatory and other collections 1656-1859* (at the Boerhaave).

Silke Ackermann reported that the Dresden Mathematical and Physical Salon is currently closed while it is being refurbished.

8) New Business

Sara Schechner remarked that the growth of the Commission in recent years has led to a “good problem”—namely a large quantity of high quality papers being offered for the annual symposium. This has forced organizers of the meetings to schedule many parallel sessions in order to fit them all in. Some people complained about the loss of the plenary sessions that characterized earlier SIC meetings. Others did not like having to choose between one, two, or three sessions at a time. Sara suggested that the members deliberate about this matter on Rete in order for the Commission to make an informed and democratic choice about how to go forward. Some possible options are (1) to continue with many parallel sessions; or (2) to increase the number of plenary sessions by accepting fewer papers per year, restricting how often a member may deliver a paper in a given number of years, or shortening paper length. It was agreed that Sara would take the discussion to Rete and report back.

9) Thanks

Formal thanks were expressed to the local organizing committee for the present symposium, including Marta Lourenço, Samuel Gessner, Ana Maria Eiró, and other staff members of the Museum of Science and Centre for the History of Science at the University of Lisbon for organizing the wonderful symposium in Portugal.

Respectfully submitted by
Sara J. Schechner
SIC Secretary