

Minutes of the XXX International Scientific Instrument Symposium

Kassel, Germany

19 – 24 September 2011

President: Paolo Brenni

Secretary: Sara Schechner

Treasurer: Hans Hooijmaijers

The Scientific Instrument Commission held its thirtieth annual symposium on 19 – 24 September 2011 in Kassel at the Cabinet of Astronomy and Physics, Museumslandschaft Hessen-Kassel. The plenary business meeting was held on Tuesday, September 20, at the Orangerie. About sixty people were present.

1) Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Richard Kremer, Alison Boyle, Jos Uyttenhove, Marta Lourenço, Dana Freiburger, Robert Hicks, and George Brock-Nannestad.

2) Review of Minutes from Last Meeting in Florence, Italy, 2010

The minutes of the plenary business meeting held during the twenty-ninth Scientific Instrument Symposium, held in Florence in October, 2010 were circulated, reviewed, and accepted.

3) SIC Finances

The SIC Treasurer, Hans Hooijmaijers, reported on the Commission's finances from September 2010 until September 2011.

Receipts:

€ 1400,- (\$ 1900,-) Grant from IUHPS

€ 75,- interest

Expenses:

€ 750,- (\$ 1000,-) support for annual meeting (Florence)

€ 100,- Bank fees

Balances:

Current account: € 1340,-

Savings deposit: € 5675,-

Note: We still have expenses to cover for the Kassel meeting.

Paolo Brenni added that the IUHPS/DHST could increase its grant to the commissions for support of

student travel to meetings. Karsten Gaulke and Michael Korey reported that the organizers of the Kassel meeting were pleased to be able to support two students attending the current meeting.

4) Report of Ongoing Commission Activities

Paolo Brenni is a vice president of the IUHPS/ DHST and said that a topic at the council meetings has been how to establish common rules and requirements for all of the commissions. Since the SIC is one of the most active commissions, we serve as a model for others. He does not expect our commission to be asked to change much if anything.

A. Online Resources and Initiatives

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

New links to digitized trade catalogues and videos of experiments performed with historical instruments 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.

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

Harry Leechburch will retire next spring, and is able to continue compiling the bibliography for another six months. We will need to find a replacement. But with so many resources and tools on the Internet, Paolo asked, do members still find the SIC bibliography useful? Gloria Clifton answered that it is useful because it is pre-sorted for our needs. Jim Bennett said he would be hesitant to lose it. He turns to it for ideas or references he wants to check. It is a safety net. He would be uneasy to stop it suddenly at this meeting. Silke Ackermann wondered what the implications would be for continuation. Who will be the one to do it? Paolo wondered whether the librarian of the Museo Galileo might help, and Giorgio Strano volunteered to ask the director there about this. Perhaps we might put a tool on the website where members could add bibliographic items directly rather than sending them in email to the editor? Dana, our webmaster, would know.

The consensus was that we should continue the bibliography if we can do it without a lot of exertion.

B. SIC Publications

The second volume of the Commission's new publication, *SIC: Scientific Instruments and Collections*, is to be published by Brill later this year. Giorgio Strano, the editor-in-chief, noted that the volume will be dedicated to Inge Keill and is devoted to telescopes, one of her passions. He and the SIC formally thanked the editors of the second volume—Alison Morrison-Low, Stephen Johnston, Giorgio Strano, and guest editor, Sven Dupré.

The topic of the third volume has not yet been decided. Silvio Bedini's manuscript on Campani, which needs a lot of editorial work, is still thought worthy of publication. Unfortunately due to the current financial situation, it cannot be published as a *SIC* volume in the near future.

Sara Schechner reported that the SIC officers and editors had looked into the possibility of purchasing 100 advance copies of the forthcoming *SIC* volume from the publisher, Brill, at a substantial discount and passing along the savings to SIC members. We had arranged to split the order with the Scientific Instrument Society and Tesseract in order to share the outlay of cash and reduce our risk of unsold volumes. But here at the meeting, we were surprised to find order forms in our conference packets for buying each volume from Brill at a discount of 25% plus shipping. If we go ahead with the advance purchase, our sale price to members would be only about €10 less, and we would have a big nuisance factor of mailing books and a risk of unsold inventory. Is this worth it? Discussion ensued, with remarks offered by David Coffeen, who sells books through his Tesseract business. Those present agreed that it was not worth it. SIC members should be encouraged to buy directly from Brill at the conference rate. The SIC Secretary will post the discount code on RETE. Alison Morrison-Low will relay the decision to the SIS, as she is on the Board.

5) Future Activities and Meetings

Scientific Instrument Commission Symposia

2012 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Prior to the Kassel meeting, Paolo Brenni had received an invitation from the Director of the Museu de Astronomia e Ciências Afins (MAST), Maria Margaret Lopes, to hold the 2012 SIC symposium in Rio de Janeiro. Following up at the business meeting, Marcus Granato presented a PowerPoint inviting the SIC to Brazil. It showed many collections of instruments that have recently come to light there.

Discussion ensued. Paolo observed that Rio is far away and expensive to get to, but we have never been to South America. In recent years, South America in general and Brazil in particular have had more activities with instruments. If SIC goes to Brazil, the meeting will attract other scholars from South America. No doubt a meeting there will have fewer European SIC members, but it seems appropriate for our Commission to support the activity there. Roland Wittje strongly endorsed the idea. Marv Bolt asked what time of year the meeting would be. The answer was October or possibly November. September conflicts with too many other meetings, and October is a "low season" for travel, thereby reducing costs. November begins to get too hot. Tacye Phillipson asked if there might be travel support or help in finding cheaper accommodations. Marcos said that the organizers plan to ask the Brazilian government for meeting support and funds for scholarly exchanges. A vote was held. All hands went up for "yes" and none for "no." How many will go? That's another matter.

2013 Manchester, England

The 2013 SIC symposium will be held in Manchester, England as part of the International Congress of History of Science, Technology, and Medicine (<https://www.meeting.co.uk/confercare/ichst2013/>).

The SIC Secretary will check on the early deadlines for proposing sessions for the meeting, and post this news on RETE.

2014

Paolo asked if anyone had a proposal for 2014. He recommended Tartu in Estonia. The University of Tartu is oldest and most important university in the Baltic area. The people there are also quite active in the protection of their scientific heritage. The historical observatory was just reopened, and people are now refurbishing the instrument collections and anatomical theater. Tallinn might also be visited. There was general support for a future meeting in Estonia. Paolo Brenni volunteered to contact the Estonians to see if they would be willing to host the 2014 conference.

6) Commission News

Paolo Brenni described letters written by the SIC in support of various instrument collections and activities. One letter was written on behalf of the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford, the Museum Boerhaave in Leiden, the university observatory in Lisbon, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, Yale University, the Ministry of Agriculture in Rome, and the Astronomical Observatory of Marseille.

Hans Hooijmaijers commented on the situation at the Boerhaave. He explained that the Dutch government had asked for the museum to raise some external funds to meet a proportion of their expenses by 2012. The Boerhaave was working toward this when the newly elected government moved the deadline up to 2010. At this time, the museum has raised about a third of their goal, and they are hopeful. Hans urged SIC members to support the museum by buying books or a replica Leeuwenhoek microscope.

Jim Bennett explained the situation at the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford. The museum is facing financial difficulties due to a change in the criteria for eligibility for a recurrent grant received from the British government, which has led to a 50% reduction in income from that source. To cut expenses, the museum has suspended its library service. A new threat comes from a recent proposal that MHS should become a department of the Ashmolean Museum. This will not solve the financial problem and is being resisted by the MHS staff and its governing body, so as to preserve the museum's identity and independence. What will be the outcome of this proposal is not yet determined.

Paolo Brenni reminded Commission members that there will be an election of SIC officers before the IUHPS Congress in Manchester in 2013, because the President has to be formally ratified during the Congress. He and Sara Schechner will step down as President and Secretary respectively. Hans Hooijmaijers said that he would like to continue as Treasurer, which would avoid fees for moving the bank account. Sara recommended that the election be done in 2012 in order to have an overlap of new and old officers for a smoother transition. She also noted that the 2012 meeting in Rio de Janeiro may not have as many participants as usual. Therefore, a way should be contrived to have participants in recent SIC meetings vote by email.

7) News from Members

Silke Ackermann announced that she and a colleague from the Warburg Institute of Advanced Studies (London) are co-directing a research project on the transfer of knowledge in Medieval Jewish communities. To exemplify this exchange, they will be focusing on the astrolabe and will examine texts as well as instruments.

The British Museum is acting as consultant on the development of the new National Museum in Abu Dhabi. Silke is a member of that team and as such is leading on the development of the Science & Learning gallery.

Roland Wittje remarked that the new association, Universeum, is well represented in the SIC. Sofia Talas is the current President. Details about upcoming meetings will be posted on RETE.

Roland is putting together a film collection on scientific instruments. If people have suggestions for the filmography or the use of historical films, please contact him.

Michael Korey and Jürgen Hamel put out a call for papers for a book in memory of Inge Keil. Many nice papers were submitted along with reminiscences, and a volume will be published soon.

Marv Bolt announced that Marjorie (Madge) Webster had passed away earlier in the year. He and others are putting together a volume in honor of Roderick and Marjorie Webster. It will include essays on their favorite instruments (e.g. astrolabes) and the role of volunteers in museums, along with reminiscences, and so forth.

8) New Business

No new business was raised.

9) Thanks

Formal thanks were given to Karsten Gaulke, Bjoern Schirmeier, and the staff of the Museumslandschaft Hessen-Kassel, Cabinet of Astronomy and Physics, for organizing a splendid meeting in Kassel.

Respectfully submitted by
Sara J. Schechner
SIC Secretary