



**Wolf Feuerhahn, Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn.** *La Fabrique Internationale de la Science: Les Congrès Scientifiques de 1865 à 1945.* Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2010. 258 S. (paper), ISBN 978-2-271-07096-8.



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## W. Feuerhahn (Hrsg.): La Fabrique Internationale de la Science

That Internationalism did not have to wait for the end of World War II to occupy the centre stage of politics and culture is a prevalent insight among historians. Yet precisely when, and more particularly how, international practices and the expansion of nongovernmental international organizations and transnational networks took shape is still widely debated. Accordingly, scientific congresses, especially before and after the Great War, would seem to be an obvious topic worthy of closer examination. Indeed, they can be identified as key fora of international activities, partly mirroring and partly shaping processes of modernisation, especially around the turn of the early 20th century, when global interconnections accelerated and professional actors multiplied around the world.

Of the thirteen contributions in this volume, ten deal primarily with the pre-World War I era, while the remaining three address the interwar years. Marc-Antoine Kaeser's essay starts off by describing how internationalisation at the Congrès international d'archéologie et d'anthropologie préhistorique in 1865 helped to enforce a modern evolutionary paradigm, while the dis-

cipline professionalised along decidedly national lines. Marie-Claire Robic shows that the international geographical conferences in the roughly hundred years following 1871 hardly proved to be places of paradigmatic transfers, but were instead repeatedly hampered by misunderstandings and opposing national interests. Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn illustrates how international ambitions at the international congresses of Orientalists between 1871 and 1912 were inflamed under the banner of traditional European visions of Orientalism and thus failed to include academics outside Europe. Leaving all national differences and varying political agendas aside, Christine Laurière shows how International Congresses of Americanists between 1875 and 1947 helped their propagators to get American Studies institutionalised even before the subject was accredited at the university level. Arie L. Molendijk identifies international efforts to emancipate the discipline from traditional theology in response to the first International Congresses on the History of Religion in the late 19th century. Two subsequent chapters focus more closely on the importance of individual scholars on the stages of international congresses. Heinrich Dilly points to instances of cross-

national intellectual transfers on the occasion of International Congresses of the History of Art. In stressing the prevalence of the collective transfer contexts, he eventually succeeds in deconstructing the myth of the allegedly genius single scholar. Anne-Marie D'caillot follows up with a study on the German mathematician Georg Cantor, whose internationalism around the 1890s was instrumental in obtaining recognition for theories that had been widely marginalized in his own national scientific community. Wolf Feuerhahn identifies the Congress of Arts and Science of Saint Louis in 1904 as a forum for close German-American transfers. If the chief congressional aim, however, was to prevent academic knowledge from becoming fragmented, it largely failed. Franklin J. Lambert identifies internationalisation as the prime driving force behind the development of quantum physics. Gangolf H binger, Barbara Picht and Ewa Dabrowska demonstrate how participants of the international congresses of Historians between the turn of the century and 1913 engaged in international knowledge transfers. They did so not necessarily by agreeing with each other, but rather by intensely discussing whether their discipline should either legitimize national regimes or instead refine its methodology in order to stand apart from nationalist historiography. The final three essays look beyond the divide of the Great War. Roswitha Reinbothe highlights a key moment of failed internationalism when German scientists were excluded from international scientific cooperation in the aftermath of the war. Agnes Bl nsdorf shows how the Comit  International des Sciences Historiques founded in 1926 tried to come to terms with interwar efforts towards nationalization. Finally, Sandrine Maufroy outlines how the strong interwar tensions in the Balkans and in Russia made the Congresses of Byzantine Studies in Bucarest, Belgrade, Athens and Sofia during the 1920s and 1930s places of heated debate, which greatly interfered with the internationalist claims of the discipline.

Although individual chapters of the collection cover quite distinct ground, three major themes clearly emerge. First, political contexts mattered significantly. Scientific internationalism was far from being a mere exercise in mutual cooperation, as it was continually threatened by competitive nationalism, both before and after the Great War. The full effect of this trend unsettled the internationalist credo and practice of its participants. This was especially the case during the interwar period, when scientific internationalism tended to conceal anti-Russian and more particularly Germanophobic attitudes, which generally stemmed from Germany's disagreeable political power. Second, scientific congresses in this pe-

riod appear as highly complex institutional infrastructures with an enormous bureaucratic apparatus, increasingly professionalised methods of written and oral communication and rather nuanced modes of exchange and discussion. Moreover, in the age of mass culture, public appeal was a crucial element of congressional self-presentation, which was aimed at ensuring that policy makers would listen to the academic crowd. Scientists often hoped to occupy strategic positions when it came to defining contemporary political agendas. Third, scientific congresses were epistemological endeavours in their own right, with academics fighting to establish so-called respectable scholarly disciplines. As in the case of politics, institutionalisation and standardisation processes at times proved to be competitive endeavours between rivalling individuals and schools in search of strategic dominance in their respective disciplinary field or chosen methodology.

While the volume covers a broad range of issues, some aspects are unavoidably ignored. Pointing these out does not discount the volume's merits, but instead helps to illuminate some blind spots in the current research agenda. When and why, for example, would any one of the three crucial aspects of international scientific congresses mentioned above (politics, infrastructures, discipline formation) prove more vital than others during specific time periods in the era investigated from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century (and in fact beyond)? Did scientific internationalism even exist, so that there was an identifiable set of (a)political and (non)ideological components irrespective of the relevant discipline and actors involved? Apart from such systematic *longue dur e* accounts, we need to connect congressional scientific internationalism to parallel and comparable signs of internationalism, most visibly expressed in the plethora of highly diverse nongovernmental organisations that have been founded since the late 19th century. Where and how did these phenomena overlap, and would this, finally, prove there were remnants of civil society even in the wake of the war or rather point to the fact that scientific internationalism was politically indifferent?

Even though this collected volume, quite legitimately, is not meant to exhaust the topic, it provides a panorama of the intricacies of scientific internationalism. It conveys the impression that congressional activities since around the turn of the century were simultaneously instances of transnational hyperactivism and nationalistic partition. In a way, scientific congresses seem to have kept internationalism in ironic suspense.

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