

SIC AGM

SIC Symposium - 26th International Congress of History of Science and Technology Held via Zoom on 29 July 2021

1. Attendance & opening remarks

This AGM was held virtually and had a peak attendance of 67 pp. The outgoing President of SIC, Richard Kremer, welcomed everyone. A minute of silence was observed for all the losses inflicted to SIC by the COVID-19 pandemic, namely to colleagues who were not able to attend the last two symposia, and all those in the SIC community who suffered the direct effects of the public health crisis.

Kremer proceeded to announce a transfer of leadership. In his opening remarks, he reminded the audience that SIC is an open group, and that participation in the SIC AGM suffices to grant the right to vote. Kremer mentioned the conversations between the outgoing and incoming boards as regards hosting this AGM in virtual format, and that the Local Organizing Committee of the 26th International Congress suggested the platform being used for the whole conference, (Zoom). As to the possibility of adopting a hybrid approach for future symposia and their respective AGMs, the outgoing board leaves that to the incoming leadership.

Kremer expressed his gratitude to outgoing SIC Treasurer Janet Laidla for the extra amount of work she undertook in the organization of the 2021 SIC symposium, remarking that this symposium was organized twice: first as an in-person meeting, then as a virtual conference. Kremer also thanked the outgoing SIC Secretary Sofia Talas for all the work she did for SIC in that capacity. Kremer further thanked Martin Weiss, Michael Korey, and Alison Boyle for serving as abstract referees for this symposium; the chair of the International Scientific Committee of the 26th International Congress of History of Science and Technology, Juliane Mikoletzky, and the conference webmaster.

Kremer remarked that it was wonderful to work closely with the incoming board. He proceeded to mention this symposium's buzzword, "Polka". As part of a longstanding tradition, every symposium SIC picks up a buzzword connected to the place where the symposium is being hosted, and speakers are invited to incorporate the buzzword in their presentations, with gifts being awarded at the end of the symposium to the most creative users of the buzzword. By the time of this AGM, 20 uses of the buzzword "Polka", in verbal and non-verbal forms, had been recorded, with Kremer remarking that a winner would be announced after the end of the symposium.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence from Christian Forstner, Jane Weisse, Martin Weiss, and Mara Miniati were presented to the AGM.

3. Approval of the minutes from the previous AGM

The minutes of the previous AGM were approved.

4. SIC finances

Janet Laidla reported on the SIC finances. Laidla informed that expenditure had been lower in 2020 compared to previous years since no travel grants were awarded, and that by the time of this AGM, the annual grant from the DHST in the amount of US\$360 was yet to be transferred, noting that the existing SIC bank account is in EUR. The expense with the website amounted to \$100. The most significant expense to report relates to grants awarded to emerging scholars, to cover their registration fees. Overall, the net balance is lower compared to previous years, but expenditure has also decreased.

Tacye Phillipson spoke on behalf of the two designated SIC auditors, Phillipson herself and David Pantalony, who was absent. Phillipson attested to the rigor of the financial report presented by Laidla and remarked that Laidla's work in the capacity of the SIC's treasurer has been exemplary.

Michael Korey intervened to thank Laidla for the clarity in presenting this year's financial report, and stated that the SIC's parent organization is becoming less generous in the funding that it provides to its commissions. Korey further remarked that the LOC formerly awarded \$600 to the Local Organizing Committee of the SIC annual symposium, and raised the following question: will the parent organization continue to provide this kind of support when we go back to in-person symposia?

Laidla responded that it has been a concern of this outgoing board that moving forward the parent organization might cancel the support to the LOC and provide funding solely for the website, organization expenses, and emerging scholars, even though, as Laidla further remarked, the SIC is one of the DHST's largest and most active committees. Laidla further informed that grants from the parent organization have been reduced all across the organization.

Kremer mentioned that legal restrictions are actually behind the suppression of funding for the LOCs. Claude Labine noted that changes in the board of the parent organization also bring about changes in its modus operandi.

Roland Wittje raised the following point: should this AGM ask Tacye Phillipson and David Pantalony to act as auditors for the next year as well? Kremer remarked that the SIC board simply picks up the auditors, without the need to ask for the AGM's approval.

Paolo Brenni, who has served both as Vice-President of the DHST and as President of the SIC, stated that not all member countries pay the same fees, and that some countries lag behind with their payments, thus contributing to the lower availability of funds.

5. SIC-Brill book series

Giorgio Strano, the general editor of the series, noted that Brill is supportive of continuing the book series, and thanked Rosanna Woensdreg and Stefan Einarson for their support.

A new volume, which according to Strano took longer than expected to be assembled, is slated to be published in September or October. The editors of the volume, which was presented during this year's symposium in a special book presentation, are Peter Heering and Elizabeth Cavicchi. The volume is dedicated to the theme of instruments and education, and comprises 14 contributions.

Strano noted that, as previously announced, Brill concedes a discount of 25% during the conference. By the request of AGM attendees, details were shared again via the Zoom chat.

The next volume, addressing the theme of "Instruments and Failures", is being edited by Sara Schechner and Sofia Talas. It is slated to be published in 2022. Strano informed that there are a couple of proposals for other volumes on the table, but did not go into details.

Changes in the editorial team of the Brill-SIC series were also announced. Strano informed that he plans to step down from the role of general editor and take on the simpler role of editor. He further informed the AGM of the following: Alison Morrison-Low will be the general editor for a period of two to three years; Mara Miniati intends to leave the editorial board; Josh Nall and Sara Sechchner will join the editorial board. Morrison-Low praised Strano's performance as general editor, which she described as "stellar work", and stated that book proposals from SIC members are welcome.

6. Endangered collections and instruments

Pedro Raposo informed the AGM of his contacts with the new leadership of Yerkes Observatory, highlighting the ongoing refurbishment works in the Observatory's building and the intentions to restore the great 40-inch refractor.

Sara Schechner expressed concern with the fact that the new Yerkes director is still quite new in the job, and that decisions are being made by others. Schechner expressed a particular concern with regard to the Observatory's library, which, according to a source known to Schechner, was being dismantled. Schechner remarked the importance of preserving the historical library of the Observatory, not only because of its contents, but also because it was an integral part of the Observatory's activity.

Michael Korey praised Kremer, Raposo, and Schechner for their contacts with the Yerkes Observatory leadership and their efforts to keep track of what is happening to its historical premises and equipment.

Kremer informed the AGM of letters of support sent by the SIC board to the Armagh Observatory and the Navipendulum at La Spezia Arsenale, a naval museum in Italy. Kremer further requested AGM attendees to inform the SIC community and leadership of any scientific collections in danger that might come to their knowledge.

7. SIC social media channels

Taha Yasin Arslan presented the SIC social media report. Arslan explained that since March 2021 content has been posted to the SIC social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter in a monthly cycle of regular features: “Instrument of the Month”, “Mystery Object”, “Instrumental People, and “Instrumental Explorations”. Arslan informed that, as of 29 July 2021, the SIC account on Facebook counted on 353 followers from over 40 countries, and the SIC Twitter account with 440 followers. Arslan proceeded to unveil the new SIC account on Instagram, and launched a call for volunteers to help with the creation of content for the regular posts.

Sara Schechner asked if the same content is shared in all platforms, to which Arslan responded positively.

8. SIC Virtual Tours and other activities

Richard Kremer informed the AGM of the ongoing SIC Virtual Tour series. So far, SIC has hosted virtual tours of the Yale Peabody Collection of Yale University, the Palermo Observatory Museum, and the Electronic Science and Technology Museum, Chengdu.

Roland Wittje informed the AGM of an upcoming conference titled ‘Objects of Understanding. Historical Perspectives on Material Artefacts And Practices in Science Education’, to take place in Europa-Universität Flensburg. Peter Heering, who is co-organizer of this workshop, remarked that it has been postponed twice during the pandemic, and that confirmed speakers have accepted to have their presentations carried over to the new dates, thus there will not be another CfP. Heering stated that those who would like to participate in the workshop and haven’t submitted an abstract can contact him directly.

Brenni asked for SIC support for a conference to be jointly hosted by the University of Neuchatel and the International Horological Society on the history of astronomical time, to be held in early December. Brenni will contact the new board in this regard. In the Zoom chat, Schechner suggested that Brenni reach out to the IAU Commission C3.

9. Emerging scholars meeting

Taha Arslan reported on the meeting of emerging scholars, informing that it brought together 20 persons and resulted in good discussions about the impact of COVID-19, completing a PhD and what to do after that, and augmented reality in museums.

10. SIC Bibliography

Richard Kremer informed that due to the pandemic, not much work has been done with the SIC bibliography, adding that it can be searched as part of the more encompassing *Isis* bibliography.

11. Special conference session on Scientific Instruments and Literature

George Vlahakis informed the AGM that a session on scientific instruments and literature was held during the 26th International Congress of History of Science and Technology. It comprised four papers. Some speakers had declined to participate when the conference switched to fully digital. Vlahakis further noted the web offers more possibilities to connect people, and that he hopes to continue this kind of collaboration.

12. SIC 40th anniversary

Jim Bennett remarked that the SIC as a commission is actually older than 40 years. The very discipline of the history of science shows us that foundational dates are typically uncertain and chosen out of convenience. SIC has picked up 1981 on the grounds of the first SIC symposium having been held in that year in Bucharest.

Bennett accepted to take on the role of coordinator of the anniversary celebrations, and called for proposals for the anniversary celebrations. Bennett stated that the 2021 symposium should contain a few sessions related to the anniversary, possibly forming a full-day program, with reflections and reviews of SIC and the wider discipline. Bennett further remarked that these sessions, which should consist not just of individual papers but of consistent reflections on practices and historiography, would provide material for an edited volume of the Brill-SIC series, if the series editors agree. These contributions might entail reflections on key events such as the material turn, catalogs, the publication of *Leviathan and the Air Pump*, history of technology, the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK), and historiographic changes including a greater focus on traditionally overlooked historical actors, missing links, and materials, which, Bennett stated, we seldom talk about. The overall aim is to show that we are an active organization, and the aforementioned book should be of interest for scholars from other fields as well. Bennett informed that he has invited Richard Kremer and Sara Schechner to join him as editors, and that they have accepted the invitation.

Other ideas for the 40th anniversary celebrations already on the table include a brochure with images from SIC symposia over the years, and a commemorative dinner. Bennett asked for more ideas.

Silke Ackermann asked who this celebration was aimed at - the SIC community, or new audiences as well? Bennett responded that he is solely a coordinator and that he would like to hear what other people think about that. Kremer interjected that the new board should address this issue.

13. New SIC board

The conduction of the meeting was handed over to the new board, formed by Roland Wittje (President), Pedro Raposo (Secretary), and Louise Devoy (Treasurer). Wittje remarked that the new board benefited immensely from the experience of the outgoing board and thanked the SIC community, adding that a statement from the new board will be posted to the Rete mailing list.

14. Updates from the SIC community

Taha Arslan informed the AGM about his contacts with municipalities in Turkey to promote the preservation and musealization of historical houses of timekeepers, adding that there is a good chance of some of them effectively becoming museums.

Johannes-Geert Hagmann mentioned a conference on the material culture of physics, namely on how to read instruments, to take place in 2022 in a hybrid format, adding that further information will be posted to Rete.

Marco Storni made himself available to provide more information about the above-mentioned conference in Neuchatel, sharing his contact information via the Zoom chat.

15. Next SIC symposia

The only standing bid for the 2022 symposium was put forward by George Vlahakis from Athens (with Efthymios Nicolaidis as a co-organizer). The provisional dates are September 19-23, 2022. Vlahakis remarked that they would like to keep registration fees as low as possible.

Roland Wittje opened the virtual floor to questions and comments, namely with regard to the aforementioned dates. George added that the weather is not too hot in Greece at that time of the year. David Coffeen remarked that Rosh Hashanah begins in the week after. Yola Coffeen further remarked that this is a Jewish holiday and that SIC has traditionally tried to be sensitive to holidays when picking dates for its symposia. Overall, these dates are fine. No objections were presented.

Ileana Chinnici invited SIC to consider Palermo as a prospective host for the 2023 conference. Wittje pointed out the excellent virtual tour of Palermo Observatory hosted as part of the SIC Virtual Tour series, and that there are no other proposals for the 2023 symposium so far.

Michael Korey noted that other prospective places had been brought up in the previous year, to which Wittje replied that there are no other proposals proper besides those mentioned above.

Paolo Brenni noted that it is remarkable that SIC has never hosted a symposium in Austria.

After an internet connection breakdown, Chinnici intervened again to reinforce the invitation to Palermo, proposing that the 2023 workshop be also hosted in September. Chinnici made herself available to give a presentation in the next AGM with more details.

Alison Boyle thanked the two bidders who came forward as we move into the post-pandemic world. Boyle was seconded by Michael Korey.

Kremer added that contacts have been made with colleagues in Vienna, but that it takes time to develop solid liaisons. Korey cited Cuba as an example of a liaison that was built over a period of time.

Peter Heering stated that we should not focus solely on Europe, and advocated for hosting the 2024 symposium somewhere outside Europe. Wittje noted that he is based in India, but that there is not a community large enough there to successfully support a SIC symposium, although smaller events such as themed workshops might be hosted as a way of building up liaisons. Wittje further invited AGM attendees to share any relevant contacts with the new SIC board, stressing that help from the community will be essential in this regard. Heering encouraged the new board to indulge in “creative fantasies”, clarifying that he was referring to the 2023 symposium and that it was not his intention to contest the existing bids.

Timmo Mappes stated that after 2024, when the Deutsches Optisches Museum opens to the public, they would be happy to host the SIC symposium there.

Emma Angelini mentioned that there will be a large conference in China in 2024 and that a special session sponsored by SIC could be submitted to that conference.

16. DHST General Assembly

This was to take place on the day after the AGM. Roland Wittje informed the AGM of the two options on the table for the 2025 conference: China and New Zealand. Janet Laidla shared a link to a Google form for voting via the Zoom chat.

Wittje made the three following remarks: i) SIC and DHST have never been to New Zealand; ii) New Zealand had already been proposed the year before, and the SIC community was

generally accepting of that proposal; iii) both proposals entail high fees, but those will be higher for China.

Paolo Brenni stated that there is no point in going to New Zealand; flights are very expensive, and there are no museums of particular interest there. Brenni asked if SIC had a weight in the decision, to which Wittje responded that SIC has one vote. Janet Laidla seconded Brenni, stressing that there are not that many collections of scientific instruments in New Zealand. Laidla added that Auckland could be a more interesting destination, but that would require extra flights; besides, the conference would take place during winter, and road blockages could be expected.

Wittje also informed the AGM of a Respectful Behavior Policy to be discussed and voted on by the DHST.

17. SIC bank account

Louise Devoy informed the AGM that she is looking for banking options more suitable for international transfers. Devoy remarked that the best option might be a community account hosted by a UK bank. The account has to be opened in GBP but it can also have a branch in EUR, which would reduce costs with international transfers. Devoy added that a second signatory would likely be necessary. Alison Boyle agreed to be the second signatory.

SIC finances 2021

The SIC receives its main income from the IUHPST/DHST. In recent years they have begun to set more restrictions on the grant, such as restricting conference grants only to travel grants for young scholars and capping the different types of expenses. They have also for various reasons cut our grant, most recently 10% "so as to ensure that DHST can meet its expenses in both 2020 and 2021".

The grant is in USD, so there is a lot of double accounting. During my first year as treasurer they just transferred the grant without inquiring about the currency and therefore the grant is in USD on my bank account, hence the 1770 USD below. In the next years they have actually asked, so the more recent grants are in EUR.

For 2021 we asked 1500 USD and they approved only 300 USD as we did not spend most of the grant for 2020. This has not been transferred, I sent an e-mail to inquire about this but no reply so far.

We have had three expenses, two connected to the webpage and the participation fee grants for the Prague meeting. The first is 331.51 EUR (400 USD) for the web page maintenance and the server cost 82.48 EUR. This is paid with a credit card account and I transfer the money from my one account to another.

We were able to give 11 fee grants this year as these were smaller than the grants we give for travel, and the total for these was 1150 EUR.

No bank costs this year as well.

Short summary:

1.10.2020	5335.22 EUR	1770 USD
Income pending	300 USD	DHST grant
Expense	82.48 EUR	Server costs
Expense	331.51 EUR	Grant for the webmaster
Expense	1150 EUR	Fee grants
Expenses total	1563.99 EUR	
23.07.2021	3771.23 EUR	1770 USD

Please ask if you have any questions.

Thank you!

Janet Laidla

SIC Treasurer