

## COMMISSION ON THE HISTORY OF GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT

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### Commission symposium «Around the World : The circulation of Ideas in the History of Geographical Thought», Lisbon, Portugal, 27-29 August 1998

The interim regional meeting of the IGU was accompanied this year as usual by a series of specialised commission-organised symposia, which this year — again as usual — significantly outshone the meeting itself in terms of enthusiasm and quality. The meeting of the Commission on the History of Geographic Thought was a particularly successful event, attracting over 50 participants and over 30 papers, thanks to the scientific organisation led by J. Gómez-Mendoza and the local coordination provided by M.F. Alegria and J.C. Garcia. Undaunted by the sweltering late-summer temperatures of Lisbon and the lack of ventilation in the conference hall, participants met over two and a half days to share analyses and insights. A pleasant half day field trip took the participants to the historic towns of Mafra and Ericeira

The themes engaged in the individual papers were broad-ranging, and can be grouped roughly into five categories. A series of papers dealt broadly with various aspects of the problem of the perception and signification of nature, ranging

**T**he four-years programme of the Commission is now well under way, and its broad international approach was very apparent in Lisbon. The symposium was well attended and the quality of the papers overall was very high. Evidently, the chosen theme — the circulation of geographic ideas in the world — made things easier! But it should be underlined that all this was also made possible thanks to a very flexible use of the two official languages and of a few others (mostly Spanish and Portuguese). Good will and open-mindedness promoted new areas of intellectual exchanges. In short, an experience to be sustained and enhanced.

**T**he Commission has also launched two experiments. The first one seeks to innovate by creating a discussion and training forum within the framework of a workshop focussed on the use of archives (in Leipzig). The second takes up a previous experiment of holding a meeting in a country of the «South», but it will locate in an economically less developed country (in «Black Africa») and it will try to be more open to training and diffusion issues in those places (meeting planned in Yaounde). All other proposals with similar objectives are welcomed. Plans for joint sessions during the Seoul Congress are presently being discussed.

**A** web site for the Commission has now been created. Recent issues of the Newsletter are available on this site. And clearly, announcements for upcoming symposia can be included in it.

**T**he originality of the Commission has favorably been noted by the Executive Committee of the IGU, which made it clear at the Lisbon Regional Congress that the Commission would not be directly affected by the constraints which would be put on other commissions if the idea of «clustering» them were to be pursued. The Commission should thus continue along its four-years programme, while remaining sensitive to international expectations for dealing with major concerns of the day.

Vincent Berdoulay

from the connections between the Romantic movement and conservation (J. Gómez-Mendoza) to concepts of forestry in early-modern France and Germany (J. Puyo) and ideas of the natural world in Zionist geography (I. Schnell). Many participants considered various issues in the history of academic geography, including Orientalism and the Vidal school (G. Mercier), the complementarity of art and science (V. Berdoulay and H. Saule-Sorbé), the role of individuals (D. Hooson, L. Muscará, C. Delfosse, T. Vicente Mosquete), reciprocal influences (J.-F. Staszak, J.A. Rodríguez Esteban), and national syntheses (L. Machado, H. Nozawa, N. Devy-Vareta). A paper on Richard Hartshorne (U. Wardenga and F. Harvey) occasioned some rather impassioned commentary from those who had known the American geographer personally. A large number of papers dealt with the themes of exploration and travel. These included perceptions on the part of visitors and foreign societies (C. Gil de Arriba, K. Takeuchi, L. Martins, A. Bopda, F. Relano), the «scientific» practice of the explorer (H. Goren, F. Driver, I. Surun), and the writing of the exploration and travel experience (D. Laplace, G. Luna Rodrigo, N. Ortega Cantero). The problem of the credibility of unverifiable travellers' accounts — the so-called «geography of trust» — was addressed (C. Withers), with an effort of integrate work done on this question in the philosophy of science. A fourth theme was the perennial problem of the region, with contributions on the regional concept in geography (S. Lencioni) and the region and the city (M.-C. Robic). Finally, a small number of papers addressed geographical dimensions of the problem of identity, looking variously at the role of geographical science in the construction of substate nationalism in Galicia (J. García Álvarez) and the articulation of a feminist identity in the writings of women travellers (D. Garcia Ramón and A. Albet).

Mark Bassin

**Symposium on “Europe between Political Geography and Geopolitics: the Centenary of Ratzel’s Politische Geographie”, Trieste, Italy, 10-13 Dec. 1997**

This conference was held to commemorate the centenary of the original publication of Ratzel’s *Politische Geographie* in 1897. While most of the presentations dealt with problems of contemporary geopolitics, a number of presentations on the first day were devoted to Ratzel himself. Most of the focus was on the connections between Ratzel and the later emergence of Geopolitics, with papers by M. Bassin, W. Natter, F. Farinelli, M. Pagnini, G. Parker, and others. Conclusions varied, but there was a clear consensus that the issue was complex and clearly needed further research. Of particular interest was a presentation on the extensive holdings of the Ratzel archive in Leipzig by I. Hontsch.

**Upcoming meetings of the Commission :**

**Specialist workshop on «The use of archival material for research in the history of geographical thought», Leipzig, 15-18 January 1999**

This specialised workshop, organised in January 1999 thanks to the initiative of Patrick Armstrong and Ute Wardenga, will give the opportunity to more than twenty participants to work together, in order to improve the methodologies of using and presenting archival material. A detailed report will come out in the next issue of the Newsletter.

**Symposium on «Myth in the history of geographical thought», Yaounde, Cameroon, June-July 1999**

See details below.

**Upcoming meetings in preparation :**

**Pre-Congress Symposium in Chongju, Korea, and special sessions within the main Congress in Seoul, 14-18 August 2000**

**International Congress of the IUHPS, Mexico, 8-14 July 2001**

**Publications 1998-99**

In addition to the various articles which are offsprings of the activities of the Commission, the following publications directly result from these activities :

*Geographers : Bibliographical Studies*, volume 18, edited by Geoffrey Martin (USA) and Patrick Armstrong (Australia). As with previous volumes, it contains essays on authors who have influenced the history of the subject from many countries in the world.

Anne Buttimer and L. Wallin have significantly reworked the special issue of *Geojournal* (26:2, 1992), which was an outgrowth of the Commission activities, in order to produce a volume to be published by Kluwer.

Anne Buttimer, Stanley Brunn and Ute Wardenga (edited by), *Text and Image. Social Construction of Regional Knowledges*, Leipzig, 1998, *Beitraege zur Regionalen Geographie*, 48. (details below. Payments by Eurocard or American Express card accepted.)

Vincent Berdoulay and Olivier Soubeyran (edited by), *Milieu, colonisation et développement durable. Perspectives géographiques sur l'aménagement*, Paris, L'Harmattan, in press.