

Report of the Annual Meeting

Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada

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Report of the Assembly of the International Committee of Historical Sciences

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Volume 8, numéro 1, 1929

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300552ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300552ar>

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Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (imprimé)

1712-9095 (numérique)

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Citer ce document

Eastman, D. M. (1929). Report of the Assembly of the International Committee of Historical Sciences. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, 8(1), 17–19. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300552ar>

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REPORT OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF HISTORICAL SCIENCES

BY D. MACK EASTMAN

Over sixty delegates from thirty-four nations attended the third general assembly of the International Committee of Historical Sciences held in Venice during the second week of May. The romantic charm of the city of the Doges combined with the cordial hospitality of the municipal authorities to make this assembly as pleasant as it was profitable.

The public meeting on May 6 in the historic Palazzo Ducale was addressed by the podestat of Venice, the well-known historian, Pietro Orsi, as well as by other dignitaries of state or city, and by Professor Koht, of the University of Oslo, whose facility in several languages has constituted one element in his notable success as president of the International Committee since his election in August, 1928.

The Committee and its sub-committees carried on their work in the Reale Istituto Veneto. At the first plenary meeting the applications for membership of the Canadian and Ukrainian Historical Associations were unanimously accepted. Canada is the fifth country from the western hemisphere to offer her collaboration, the others being Argentina, Brazil, Chili, United States and Uruguay. No other Dominion has as yet asked for admission, although Australia and Ireland have the matter under consideration.

The Oslo congress had authorized the executive to set up several special committees, a few of which are already at work upon such matters as a bibliography concerning the international rôle of the papacy, the "Enlightened Despotism" of the eighteenth century, the causes and origins of the "Great Discoveries," the grain trade in the eighteenth century, banking, credit and exchange problems from the fifteenth century to 1815, historical geography and demography, the history of the sciences and of modern literature.

Eight standing committees, responsible directly to the central executive, have now been regularly constituted:—

(1) On *Publications*.—This committee is contemplating the foundation of an official International Historical Review as soon as circumstances permit.

(2) On *the Teaching of History*.—The meetings of this sub-committee were quite stirring. While no one would deny that text-books and programs were defective in most countries, yet there was a sharp conflict of opinion as to whether or not the International Committee should occupy itself with questions of pedagogy, which are apt to be closely related to philosophical and political concepts. While the delegates from Chili and Holland earnestly pleaded for sympathy and help from this council of savants in the work of eliminating from the text-books used in primary and secondary schools the false and bellicose patriotism which poisons the minds of the rising generation, the Italian representative derided the notion of "world history," and decried any attempt to influence the trend of teaching in the various national systems; for him the International Committee existed solely for the promotion of the higher research and the

improvement of the instruments and methods of historical science; as for this sub-committee—it might well adjourn *sine die*. The Bolshevik delegate, on the other hand, upheld the sub-committee as a possible and desirable battle ground for opposing doctrines. He maintained that objectivity was impossible, or, rather, that there were “two truths and two objectivities, the bourgeois and the proletarian.” Among these extreme points of view, a central position was taken up by Professor Glotz, the French chairman, who proposed to ask for factual studies of the present state of history teaching in the primary and secondary schools of the various nations upon the pattern of the thoroughly objective reports which had already been received from France and Hungary; it would then be time enough to consider whether further action was expedient. The members rallied to the chairman’s support, and as eleven national reports on the primary schools had already been received, it was agreed that these and the others that would follow, should be synthesized into a general statement for examination at a future meeting. In approving the chairman’s report the Committee took care to go on record as considering that the basis and end of its labours are scientific in character. In this spirit a suggestion from the Bellinzona Congress of the International Federation of Teachers relative to the preparation of a single manual of world history designed for use in all countries was generally regarded as impracticable; children must proceed from the known to the unknown; world history must be interpreted to them in terms of their national experience. Yet an anthology of readings from the great historians of various peoples would be practicable and beneficial; indeed the late Professor Aulard had such a reader under way before his death. With reference to an inquiry from the Cinematographic Institute of Rome, the sub-committee expressed the opinion that the cinematograph cannot truly reconstitute the past, but that, under competent supervision, it may record certain events of our own day in such manner as to render real service to the historians of the future.

(3) *On Bibliography*.—It was announced that the first International Yearbook of Historical Bibliography would probably appear in the autumn and would be devoted to the year 1926.

(4) *For a List of Diplomats*.—All countries are being asked to prepare national lists. By a “diplomat” is to be understood anyone, with or without titles, who has been entrusted with a diplomatic mission of a permanent character. The lists of representatives of States at important political congresses will be published in an annex to the principal volume.

(5) *For the Collection of Constitutions*.—This committee, exemplifying the special interest taken by the Italians of to-day in the subject of constitutional forms and changes, was set up on the initiative of Professor Volpe. Its original aim was a “vast publication of all the texts of the different European and extra European constitutions from the beginning of the development of modern constitutional life, i.e., generally speaking, from the beginning of the eighteenth century,—except in England where constitutional life is older”. However, the evident difficulties, financial and other, in the way of such a stupendous enterprise, constrained the committee to postpone its decision, and to turn in the meantime to the publication of a series of brief monographs, never exceeding 50 pages, on the constitutional growth of each country. The monographs should include summaries and bibliographies of the constitutions as well as of the most important constitutional acts, laws and amendments. The present plan is to produce

these sketches in the following order: Europe, the United States and Canada, Latin America, and so forth, and to publish them in several annual volumes of 300 pages each.

(6) *For a retrospective Bibliography of the Press.*—This bibliography, beginning with the appearance of printed periodicals, is to be as complete as possible up to the commencement of the cheap daily press. For more recent periods a careful selection will be obviously necessary. The work will end with 1914. For the future the task will be to standardize the yearbooks of the press of all nations.

(7) *For the Revision of Chronological Tables.*—For the present this committee will concentrate its attention upon the tables concerned with the Middle Ages in the western world.

(8) *On Iconography.*—Reports were received on the methods of classification practised in various great museums. The committee expressed the wish that, as iconographic documentation is essential to historical writing, iconography should henceforth be regularly studied as an auxiliary science to history. Turning to a contemporary aspect of their subject, the experts thought it desirable that in every country a committee should be set up to form a collection of films giving "an idea as complete as possible of the national life in all its manifestations in order that the future historian may dip into it as into a pure and living fountain."

The special committee that had been set up at the suggestion of the British delegation with a view to the co-ordination of research in the Archives in the Vatican, decided to entrust the *Instituto Storico Italiano* with the organization of a meeting in Rome toward the close of 1929 in which the representatives of the foreign historical institutes working in the Papal City should participate. The period especially envisaged for co-operative effort stretches from the close of the "Babylonish Captivity" to the beginning of the 16th century. The committee seized the opportunity of congratulating the *Ecole Française de Rome* upon the admirable manner in which it is bringing to completion its immense task of publishing integrally the registers of the Popes of Avignon.

Of particular interest to overseas historians was the resolution of the Oslo Congress in favour of the establishment somewhere of a central office to facilitate individual research in distant libraries or archives with the help of sufficiently qualified assistants. The International Committee is asking for suggestions from the various national groups.

It is the conviction of the writer of this report that the foundation and work of the International Committee of Historical Sciences will ultimately redound to the advantage both of scientific history and of mutual comprehension among peoples. In this task of prime importance though of long duration the Canadian Historical Association can play a rôle if it will. Already it has nominated its delegates to the various committees to whose duties I have alluded, and the international executive is counting upon steady and hearty Canadian collaboration.

The next three meetings of the General Assembly will be held in London and Cambridge in the spring of 1930, and in Hungary and Holland in 1931 and 1932 respectively.

The budget of the International Committee amounts to only \$12,616; and the national associations are badly in need of more generous contributions from their national governments.