

The ICHRPI: Toward a Community of Historians and Political Scientists (1936-2017)

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This Commission was founded 80 years ago in 1936, as a “*comission exterieur*” of the CISH-ICHS (*Comité International des Sciences Historiques*-International Committee of Historical Sciences), a transnational organisation of historians. The origin and birth of this Commission can be traced to the comparative research project presented in Warsaw during the 7th International Conference of Historians in 1933 by Emile Lousse (1905-86) and François Olivier-Martin (1897-1952). This was a research project to analyse in comparative perspective the origin and development of the *Assamblées d'États* prior to later liberal parliaments. At the 8th International Conference of Historians (CISH-ICHS) in Bucharest the project was accepted and a “*commission exterieur*” was founded: the *Commission Internationale pour l'Histoire des Assemblées d'États*. The nineteenth century saw the publication of a classical definition of the *États generaux, États provinciaux, États de bailliage*: ‘*On peut définir les états provinciaux comme une réunion des trois ordres d'une province en assemblée régulièrement constituée, périodiquement convoquée et possédant certaines attributions politiques et administratives dont la principale était le vote de l'impôt*’.¹ But in the comparative perspective of European countries the question about their origin and interpretation of their long term political significance became the most controversial issue. The first meeting was held in Laussane in 1936. In fact, the first aim was very narrow, limited to the *Assemblées d'États* but in comparative perspective.

In Lausanne in 1928, the Inter-parliamentary Union published a book ‘to refute the attacks directed against the very existence of the parliamentary system’. In 1929 the History of Parliament project was founded in London: the brainchild of Josiah Wedgwood, an independent Labour MP, and Professor Lewis Namier. Yet in 1936 a coup d'état was organised in Spain against its democratic parliament. This coup d'état directed against the parliamentary system and freedoms failed initially and, from the 1936 to 1939, the Spanish war also became a European war and at its conclusion a new totalitarian state was founded.

¹ L. Cadier, *Les États de Bearn depuis leurs origines jusqu'au commencement du XVI siecle. Etude sur l'histoire et administration d'un Pays d'etats* (Paris, 1888)

The organisation of states under single parties, with antiparliamentarian proposals and limits placed on the rights of association and personal liberties, was increasing.

At the same time the programme of the First Conference of the Commission in Lausanne in 1936 was very interesting: Helen Cam presented a paper on 'Recent books in England on the parliamentary institutions of the British Isles in the Middle Ages'. Other papers included: George de Lagarde: '*L'idée de représentation dans les oeuvres de Guillaume d'Ockham*'; Emile Lousse: '*Les caractères essentiels de l'Etat corporatif médiéval*'; W.A. Liebeskind: '*Le souverain des anciennes républiques suisses*'; and Pier Silvero Leicht: '*L'introduction des villes dans les assemblées d'Etats en Italie*'. Leicht quoted the excellent work of a young scholar, Antonio Marongiu, in *I parlamenti di Spagna nella storia en el diritto comparato* (Rome, 1932). The Frenchman Alfred Coville (1860-1942) was made the first president with P.S. Leicht of the University of Rome as vice-president, and Emile Lousse as secretary. In his opening speech Coville said: *L'oeuvre à réaliser est certes considérable et multiple: mais par les recherches qu'elle doit provoquer, par l'ample profit qu'en résultera, pour la compréhension des institutions du passé et même du présent, la "Commission pour l'histoire des assemblées d'état" a mérité de naître, et rien dans le domaine historique n'est plus désirable que son succès*'. On the eve of the Second World War sections were organised in France, Italy, Hungary, the U.K, Ireland and the United States.

Reflections and exhibition on the ICHRPI

We can see that Commission presidents have referred to methodological and theoretical problems: Helen Cam (1885-1968), E. Lousse, A. Marongiu (1902-89), H. Koegnisberger (1966-85) and also Salvo Mastellone (1920-2012), are seen to in the text about the 50th anniversary of the ICHRPI in 1986. In 2003 the Museum of Catalonia organised the first exhibition on the history of the Commission in which the Director of the Museum, Dr. Jaume Sobrequés, collaborated with members of the Commission. The catalogue of the exhibition was prepared by John Rogister and the person responsible for the exhibition was Dr. Mercé Morales. Later in 2007 Rogister published an article on 70 years of the Commission and Maria Sofia Corciulo, in her contribution to the workshop organised in

Oxford, addressed the methodological and theoretical debates in the Commission between 1936 and 1980. These debates referred to the medieval origins and the corporative or more political character of assemblies and parliaments. In the anthology entitled *Le istituzioni parlamentari nell'Ancien Régime*, a big volume published in Naples by Guido D'Agostino, those debates are systematised.²

The debates and the main questions and issues for members of the Commission

During the period of Coville's presidency, (1936-1939), the main set of issues addressed by the *Commission pour l'histoire des assemblées d'état* were concerned with analysing the medieval origins of the representative assemblies and their evolution through successive monarchies. The theories of Emile Lousse on the corporative character of assemblies according to the system of privileges of medieval society were dominant interpretations. However, the system of assemblies of the British Isles or those developed in the Kingdom of Aragon, studied by A. Marongiu in 1932, pointed towards other arguments and perspectives with a more institutional and political character as opposed to the corporative interpretation.

At the 1950 Congress of the CISH-ICHHS in Paris, the new president Helen Maud Cam was in favour of the 'The extension of our researches to periods later than the end of the ancien régime, originally indicated as our *terminus ad quem*'.³ She proposed a new name in English, The International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions, and this was adopted in order to emphasize the history of parliamentarianism. The two official names suggest different interpretations of the significance of the representative assemblies in European political culture. In 1948, Helen M. Cam became the first female Professor in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University, a post she held for 6 years, and she was very active in the Commission. She founded the *Studies Collection of the ICHRPI*.

In 1955, Helen M. Cam, Antonio Marongiu and Günter Stöckl presented a report on the

² G. D'Agostino, *Le istituzioni parlamentari nell'Ancien Régime* (Napoli, 1980)

³ H. M. CAM, *The International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions: its work at the Ninth International Congress of Historical Sciences, and its past and future activities*, pp. 11-18 in *IXe Congrès international des Sciences historiques*, (Paris, 1950); *IXth International Congress for Historical Sciences, dans Université de Louvain. Recueil de Travaux d'Histoire et de Philologie*, 3e série, 45e fasc. (Louvain, 1952), XII-280 p. 1.

scientific activity of the International Commission: 'Recent works and present views on the origins and development of representative assemblies', which analysed the general trend of the transition from "order" to "state" or the corporative view as opposed to the institutional-parliamentarian view. In 1950, J. Dhodt, a member of the Belgium section, argued that instead of "order" it would be better to explain "power" as the socio-economic basis of society.⁴

From 1960 to 1970, Emile Lousse was the new president of the Commission. This period saw the development of research studies on the Low Countries with the publication of reference books and comparative proposals. He was involved in connecting Taxation and Representation, '*nous devrions nous menager de nouvelles ouvertures et des collaborations plus amples encore, du côté de l'histoire des impôts, des techniques de fiscalité*'. The journal published in Belgium, *Anciens Pays et Assemblées d'Etats*, became a significant reference point, as did the Studies Collection of the ICHRPI. In 1966 at Louvain, also in this period, there appeared the 'Communications presented at the Twelfth Congress of Historical Sciences' which had taken place in Vienna in 1965, with a preface by H.M. Cam and an afterword by H.G. Koenigsberger.

During the next decade, 1970-1980, Antonio Marongiu was president and in the opinion of H.G.Koenigsberger, 'Marongiu's commitment to the work of the Commission was total and his energy was prodigious (...) the most dynamic member'. He was a pioneer of the comparative approach with a legal perspective in parliamentary history as seen in his *Medieval Parliaments: a comparative study* (London, 1968). The 23rd conference of the Commission in Székesfehérvár (Hungary) in 1972 represented a new dynamic.⁵ The main issues were concerned with representative institutions prior to liberal parliaments, but involving new perspectives on the path to the rise of states in Europe. There was a search for theories and models of the early modern state and creativity. 'The problem of power or, rather, the distribution of power' in early modern Europe, the 'necessary conditions' for a

⁴ *Xe Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, Rome, 1955, Xth International Congress for Historical Sciences*, avec une préface de H.M. CAM. Publication subsidiée par l'UNESCO. (Louvain, 1958), 258 p.

⁵ M. S. Corciulo "Il XXIII Congresso della Commissione Internazionale pour l'Histoire des Assemblées d'Etats" *Nuova Antologia*, 1972. The members of the Commission were then from 32 countries.

parliament to be successful, and parliaments and rulers, were the most important historical topics of research in relation to liberty or the composite monarchy. But on the other hand, one prominent member W.S Blockmans said that this approach was ‘to lack central direction’.⁶

From 1980 to 1985 Helmut Georg Koenigsberger was the next president. Since 1952 he had been a member of the Commission. He decided to focus on comparative parliamentary history, encouraged by John Roskell, one of his colleagues at Manchester University, and the work of Helen Cam. He wrote that, ‘one cannot arrive at a rigorous theory of the internal struggles for power. Typological research referring to the history of parliaments and representative institutions is always useful, but one must realise that schemes cannot represent models which are always valid for a whole historical period’.⁷ In 1981, during this period, John Rogister founded the journal *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* and he was the first editor. *PER* became the most important contribution for improving communication amongst members and for publishing new contributions, promoting a new community of scholars that linked different generations of researchers in different countries. The activity of the Commission was improving and in 1985 the new president Salvo Mastellone was more connected with historical political thinking. At the 36th conference in Florence, the 50th anniversary (1936-1986), the main focus were the social aspects of representative institutions in medieval and modern times. Importantly the newsletter now stated that the Commission was for ‘historians and political scientists’. The issues of contemporary liberal parliaments were receiving increasing consideration.

In 1990 John Rogister was elected as the new president, a post he held until 1999. At the 47th conference, held in Bilbao in 1997, he presented a ‘Scientific balance-sheet of the work of the ICHRPI’ and he wrote that the Commission ‘is concerned with the political theory and institutional practice of representation as well as with the internal organization and the social and political background to parliaments and assemblies of estates’. On the other

⁶ W.P. Blockmans, ‘A typology of representative institutions in late medieval Europe’, in *The Journal of Medieval History* (1978), 189-215

⁷ M.J. Rodriguez-Salgado: “Biography” in *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy* (2015) pp.301-333; V. Cromwell, *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, vol, 28 (2008), pp1-3

hand, he noted that ‘The growing emphasis on regions and federalism in Europe were catalysts in the Commission’s activities’.⁸

During the presidency of Wilhelm Brauner, 1999-2007, a plan was elaborated for extending the Commission to include academics from Eastern Europe. Subsequently, Maria Sofia Corciulo was elected in Edinburgh in 2007, and held the post until 2015. In her Presidential Report of 2015, published in vol. 35 of the Journal, she gave an overview of the brilliant results of this phase in the Commission’s existence: the issues of the contemporary period achieving greater importance, and the liberal and democratic parliament and the system of multilevel parliaments in the contemporary period becoming two of the main issues. She analysed the classical debate about the origin and interpretation of the representative assemblies. The scientific quality of the Journal had also improved: the new contract with Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group) was established; and engagement achieved with the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH) and the Scopus index.⁹ The creation of the web site: www.ichrpi.com by the new publisher contributed to the spread of the contents of the Journal. In addition in this period we see created a programme for young scholars in order to increase their participation at ICHRPI conferences.¹⁰

Global and Local research for the future

Global reflection is the great challenge facing the historians of the twenty-first century, but activities are always developed on a local scale. Think globally but act locally. It is therefore a task that falls to each of us to ensure that our community of scholars meeting in this Commission should be more global with a comparative view in its debates and proposals. This Commission should be an opportunity for the intellectual development of

⁸ J. Rogister, “Scientific balance-sheet of the work of the International Commission for the History of Parliamentary and Representative Institutions”, in *Contributions to European Parliamentary History. Studies presented to the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions*. Volume LXXIX. (Bilbao 1999), pp.311-332

⁹ We have to highlight the work of Henry Cohn and Alastair Mann (Directors of Publications) and Alex Cowan and John Young (Editors).

¹⁰ Papers of the workshop at the St. Antony’s College. University of Oxford, 2007. M.S. Corciulo, “Contributions of the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions (ICHRPI) to the Debate on Methodology” in Agirreazkuenaga J.(ed.) *The Making of Parliaments: 19th and 20th Century, Europe and America*. (San Sebastián, 2010), pp.13-20.

young historians and political scientists.

The origins and development of the representative assemblies in Europe is a characteristic and main element of European political culture. These were representative assemblies that aspired to develop a public power within their setting. The belief or myth concerning the community as the subject of political power is a specific characteristic of European political culture. It is a differential European element in the global context.

Parliament and political resilience

Associations or assemblies are held throughout the world, but in Europe they attained a projection in the field of the exercise of public power. In the composite monarchy, it was precisely the consolidation of the representative assembly of the different territories that contributed to the formation of complex unions. Complexity and parliamentarianism are complementary. Political Europe is an example of parliamentary resilience. Nowadays there is much to celebrate and explore over multilevel system of parliaments: national parliaments, the European supra-national parliament and regional parliaments with legislative powers.