

Some remarks about the history of the Women's Commission - Commission on Women and Gender Studies in the DHST/IUHPST

Annette B. Vogt (Berlin, Brussels, 9.9.2022, at the 10th ESHS Conference)

In addition to the talks Sally Gregory Kohlstedt and Margaret W. Rossiter have given to us - and thanks again for their participation with us via zoom - I would like to make some remarks about our Women's Commission from the perspective of one who served for it approximately 20 years. As Sally Kohlstedt and Margeret Rossiter remembered, the Women's Commission was established in 1981 during the International Congress for History of Science which took place in this year in Bucharest. Thanks to Pnina Abir-Am we have a nice photo of a meeting of the group who made this initiative becoming reality.

(1) How I came in contact with the Women's Commission?

I came across and in contact with members of the Commission in Liège in 1997 where the International Congress for History of Science took place this year. During these years I was working on my long-durée investigation about women scientists in the Kaiser Wilhelm Society (the forerunner of the Max Planck Society) from 1910 to 1945. I was happy to give my presentation to an audience which was interested in my research results - my male colleagues were very skeptically at that time whether I'm doing "real, good science" on a topic so unfamiliar to them. And I was happy to get interesting questions and comments, and a warm feedback and support by my female colleagues. Most of them I met personally the first time in 1997, thus I was highly engaged to do my further research on women scientists in Germany and in Europe from a comparative perspective.

After the session I was asked whether I will be actively involved in the work of the Women's Commission between the International Congresses, and the late Eva Vamos (1950-2015) whom I knew already before the Congress from conferences about the history of science suggested in the meeting of the Commission that I should be elected as secretary of the President, and Ida H. Stamhuis was elected as President. Ida served two terms, from 1997 to 2001 and from 2001 to 2005, and so I served two terms too as the secretary of the Commission. Together with Ida and the late Joan Mason (1923-2004) we then organized our first in-between conference in 1999 in Cambridge (UK) which was held in the famous Newnham College. Meanwhile it is a well-established tradition to organize these in-between conferences, i.e. these conferences between the International Congresses. And thanks to our colleagues who were the local organizers - which more or less no financial help due to the low budget of our Commission one has to add - we were able to held until now six in-between conferences continuously over the last 20 years. I hope very much that we can keep going this tradition.

From 2005 on I served as the President of the Commission two terms, from 2005 to 2009 and from 2009 to 2013, and Maria Rentetzi served as secretary. And from 2013 to 2021 I served as treasurer - but we have only a very small budget to control, I have to add.

The in-between conferences took place and were organized by our colleagues and their teams:
 1999 Cambridge (UK), thanks to Joan Mason
 2003 Prague (Czech Republic) thanks to Sona Strbanova
 2007 Syros (Greece) thanks to Maria Rentetzi
 2011 Paris (France) thanks to Anne-Sophie Godfroy
 2015 Prague (Czech Republic) thanks to Milada Sekyrkova
 2019 Tel Aviv (Israel) thanks to Nurit Kirsh

I hope we will all meet again in 2023 on the next in-between conference.

(2) Looking back and looking forward

From the perspective as an officer of the Women's Commission from 1997 to 2013 who served all in all more than 20 years for our Commission, let me make some remarks about the past, and about the advantage of having our Commission, and I would like to give some suggestions for the near future.

As a researcher I learned a lot in all these years, and the work for the Commission was always a pleasure. Thus, I'm grateful for all these years, and I would like to thank all my colleagues for their kindness, the support, and their friendship.

What was and is still the aim of our Commission, and what was and is important?

- From the beginning our Women's Commission is open for colleagues - female and male - from all over the world, from different countries as well as from different scientific fields and disciplines. We want to bring together colleagues who are working on history of science, technology, and medicine, as well as in philosophy, in the humanities and social sciences. Our common interest is to investigate open research questions on women scientists and women scholars from the gender perspective, and applying gender studies. We are open minded and cosmopolitan in our research as well as in our activities as a Commission under the umbrella of the DHST of the IUHPST (Division for History of Science and Technology in the International Union for History and Philosophy of Science and Technology).

- As Women's Commission we have organized several conferences and multiple sessions in other conferences and Congresses to offer the possibility for scholars and scientists to discuss their research projects and the results of their investigations, to discuss future projects and work in progress. We offer the opportunity to exchange our knowledge and to come in contact, to learn from each other, and to open new fields and perspectives in our research fields. We support especially young scholars, to help them in early career stages to get international contacts and to exchange their knowledge.

- The Women's Commission helps to come in contact, to build networks, and to give support, although mostly emotionally support due to the lack of financial resources outside of the DHST. The budget of the Commission, thanks to the DHST, is only a small one - like for the other Commissions -, but it helps us to offer some travel support for young scholars (i. e. early career scholars) to attend conferences.

Thanks to the initiative of Maria Rentetzi, who served as President from 2013 to 2021, we have established in 2014 a special fellowship - the Agnodike Travel Research Fellowship - to support PhD students to do archival research. This Fellowship should help to travel abroad to be able to work in Archives which are relevant for dissertation projects. Due to the Corona Pandemic since 2020 this offer was interrupted, but now we have new scholarship holder for the academic year 2022-23.

Thanks to the website of the Commission - <https://agnodike.org> - our colleagues are able to follow our work as well as to come in contact.

And finally, thanks to the CWGS-mailing list the exchange of information, knowledge, announcements and statements are possible, independent of the local place we are situated.

Looking in the future - what are the aims of the Commission, and what we should do

- On every International Congress for History of Science and Technology, organized by the IUHPST, the Women's Commission has to organize one symposium. We did this successfully in the last 40 years, and we should also be successful in the prospective time.

The next 27th International Congress will be in New Zealand, from June 29 to July 5 in 2025 the Congress will be held in Dunedin at the University of Otago.

- To carry on our tradition, we should organize the next in-between conference in 2023, and I'm looking forward meeting you there.

- From the beginning of the ESHS (European Society for History of Science) in 2003, members of the Women's Commission took part in these conferences, and the Commission organized on each conference in minimum one or two sessions. This helped us to build bridges and networks, to come in contact and to exchange our knowledge, and last but not least becoming visible for our beloved male colleagues. As we have seen this year in 2022 in Brussels, our colleagues are very active and there were some sessions which were organized under the support of the Commission.

We should follow this tradition, and the next ESHS conference will be held in 2024.

- The ESHS was established to bring together scholars in Europe and to offer the possibility of contacts and exchange. But colleagues from other parts are always welcomed, and we have close connections especially with the HSS (History of Science Society). There was always the possibility to organize sessions on the Annual Meetings of the HSS, and we should continue these relations after the break due to the pandemic.

Similar we should come in regular contact with colleagues in the organization SHOT (Society for History of Technology), with groups of historians of science and technology in the Americas (Latin and South America), and we should develop more contacts and make the contacts more intensive with colleagues from different parts outside of Europe.

- Finally, thanks to Anne-Sophie Godfroy and Donald Opitz the Women's Commission has a website - <https://agnodike.org> - and the CWGS-mailing list.

We should use this technical help in an efficient way, and it gives us the opportunity being in contact as close as possible, even during a pandemic.

One may think about other technical tools to introduce, but as least for me, old-fashioned as I am, the mailing list and the website are enough tools to get in contact, to be informed what is going on, to ask for help or for support. But we should be open minded as we are in daily life of our Commission to get new ideas how to use the technical tools even better and more effective.

Looking back, I'm happy that I was able to be part of a team which made our Commission a successful agent to promote history of science and technology and gender studies, to become acknowledged in the DHST and IUHPST, and to support young scholars in our disciplines.

Looking in the future, I will be happy meeting our colleagues soon in 2023 on the seventh in-between conference of our Commission, to meet each other again in 2024 on the 11th ESHS Conference, and in 2025 on the next International Congress.