

Conference for Patrick Petitjean  
Constructions et institutions internationales des sciences : de l'histoire à l'historiographie  
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Eléments d'une histoire d'une historiographie internationale des sciences  
Elements of a history of an international historiography of science

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The talk was devoted to outlining an analysis of the use of such terms as "culture" and "science" —to a least extent, "civilization"—in the first years of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Moreover, it attempted to elucidate how the relationships between "science" and "culture" were understood, discussed and promoted in this framework. Finally, it sought to describe the various versions of "world history" that were discussed in this context. To address these topics, the talk relied in particular on Patrick Petitjean's publications on the history of UNESCO and his archival work, carried out with Heloisa Domingues, on the history of the project "Scientific and Cultural History of Mankind."

About the term "culture", I showed how, among the three definitions of culture offered by Julian Huxley, the first General Director of UNESCO in 1946, in his *UNESCO, its purpose and its philosophy*, 1946, one clearly betrayed the influence of the "history of mentalities" promoted by the Annales school, and more specifically, the kind of understanding of the "history of mentalities" that Lucien Febvre had developed. Given the part played by Lucien Febvre in the post-war establishment of UNESCO, this does not come as a surprise. However, one may not have expected that this concept of culture be active in how UNESCO envisioned its action. In addition, clearly for Huxley, in the project of "constructing a unified pool of tradition for the human species as a whole," the cultures could be joined into a "unity-in-variety" whereas one could create "one single pool of scientific knowledge" before the "unified pool" "eventually include a unified common outlook and set of purposes." The part devoted to science was thus central, in that it was the means through which "the world mind" would eventually be "unified."

In relation to these concerns, the second session of the General Conference of UNESCO decided to examine the possibility of publishing a "scientific and cultural history of mankind." Several features of the project also betray the influence of the Annales school and in particular of Lucien Febvre. The "Scientific and Cultural History of Mankind" embodied the ideas that, on the one hand, history should not be limited to political history and that, on the other hand, in contrast to a political history in which the treatment of wars was unavoidable, the other chapters of history were essential tools to promote peace. Between the project as drafted by Lucien Febvre at the beginning of 1949 and the project summarized by Needham at the beginning of 1950, we can see important transformations of conceptions with respect to the question of approaching world history. Key to these debates was the issue of articulating the treatment of the various civilizations and that of the circulation of knowledge between them. These debates are quite interesting at the present-day, since after fifty years, the need to at last write a world history is felt as something urgent among historians.