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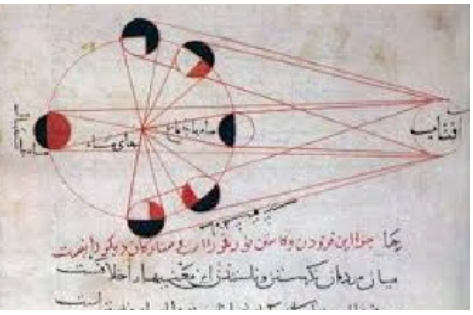

INTERVIEW CONCERNING THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE 23RD INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF HISTORICAL SCIENCES

Impacted by the lockdown, we sit in our home offices and have to discuss the decision made – with a heavy heart – by the organizing committee in Poznań and the CISH board: to postpone the congress that was planned for August 2020 by one year. We have interviewed Karolina Filipowska and Krzysztof A. Makowski from the organizing committee in Poznań.

Question: My first question concerns you personally. How are you and how much affects the current crisis your way of life?

Krzysztof A. Makowski (KAM): Thank you, it is good for now. Well, Poland was like a beleaguered fortress. Almost everything was closed. People were leading a home life because generally we were not allowed to go outside for a certain period. The situation has since improved gradually.

Q: A question comes to mind that concerns the historical experience with congresses that have not happened in the past. Are you aware of a similar case where CISH congresses had to be rescheduled or had to be called off for one or the other reason? And what can we learn from history in this regard?

KAM: Until now, congresses were postponed only two times in history – as a result of World War I and World War II.

Q: CISH is not the only organization that had to postpone its gathering for this year due to the Corona crisis. What do you understand by postponement and is that really possible in such a dynamic sector like the sciences?

Krzysztof A. Makowski

KAM: By postponement we understand the implementation of the same assumptions, just a year later. But, of course, we have to be humble and nobody really knows what the future will bring.

Q: Historical experiences tell us that such a severe crisis has not only an impact on contemporary society but also on historians and historiography. What are your expectations in this regard and do you see already trends of such effects?

KAM: Historians have probably the same problems as other people. Fear, uncertainty, isolation from others, disorganization of life. We also face research and teaching limitations. All conferences have been canceled. On the other hand, we have the opportunity to continue (finish) projects for which we usually did not have enough time. Certainly some interesting books will be written. Of course, historians see a little more than others. And today we can see that a pandemic will affect almost everything – demography, because it mainly affects old people, the economy, culture, education. The world will change again.

The CISH board at the reception with the mayor of Poznań

Q: In one year's time many more historians will probably have reacted intellectually to the crisis. Will you give them space for presenting their results in the postponed congress?

KAM: Personally, I would be in favour of this. I think the reflection on this topic could be included in our planned debate *Quo vadis historiae?* during the opening ceremony. We invite scholars to submit new ideas provoked by the experience of the last months and the board will meet with the organizing committee by the end of summer to decide to what extent we can accommodate such innovative proposals into the overall programme. We will contact all member organizations of CISH for submission over the summer and hope to get interesting suggestions covering at least part of the fruitful historical scholarship that came to attention of the public in the discussions held nationally as well as transnationally over the last period of time.

Karolina Filipowska

Q: If someone plans a new panel proposal, how many slots are available for such initiatives and what would be the deadline (if at all it is possible) for applications?

Karolina Filipowska (KF)/KAM: The programme of the congress generally remains unchanged. We have sent to all organizers a request to confirm the organization of their panels next year. If someone wishes to give up or update the structure of her/his panel, please let us know. Some reshuffling will be of course possible. We will see to what extent people have to decline their original plans. But it is clear the final decision will be with the CISH board.

Q: Covid-19 has caused a pandemic with strong social implications and is by its very nature a case for interdisciplinary approaches. Is the congress open for a dialogue with other disciplines and how do you foresee the concrete organization of such a dialogue?

KAM: Such a dialogue is a good direction. Actually, implemented by historians since the appearance of the Annales school. CISH could inspire a renewal of such a type of initiative, but appearances to the contrary, we do not have too much time.

Q: Do applications for new panels or roundtables also have to supported by national committees and or affiliated organizations/internal committees?

Exploring the treasures in the library of Poznań University

KAM: I think so. But the question of possible new applications is the responsibility of the CISH Board.

In one of Poznań's many parks

Q: To come to more technical questions. The announcement of the postponement came exactly at the moment when the early bird registration for the now impossible 2020 edition expired. What happens to the registered people, does their registration remain active? Do they have to do something actively or will that be managed by the organizing committee?

KF: All registrations and already paid fees remain valid. If someone upholds the decision to participate in the congress on a new date, they do not have to do anything. If, unfortunately, someone would not be able to attend the Congress in August 2021, he/she can cancel the registration under the general conditions. The early bird registration is now extended to March 31, 2021.

Q: What if someone would like to claim his/her money back?

KF: If someone who registered before March 31, 2020 would like to resign from participation in the congress until June 30, 2021, he/she will receive 100% refund of the congress fee. We have already informed all participants about these possibilities.

Q: Is there anything participants have to do with open hotel registrations or is that also managed by the organizing committee?

KF: The organizers informed recommended hotels about the postponement of the congress. Thus, there should be no problems with postponing or cancelling the booking. Please contact the person responsible for this matter. All the details can be found at here.

Q: Part of the planned congress was and (I assume) still is a poster session. Posters give insights into currently ongoing research. It might be difficult to simply postpone them. What is your advice in this regard and what are the procedures?

KAM: The applicants have already been informed that their applications are not expiring. However, they would have to meet the regulatory criteria next year.

Q: The new congress will be held from 22 to 28 August 2021. What is the timetable until then? What is the new deadline for registration, what are the agreements with the hotels that people can book for next year? Will there be a regular update of all these details on the conference website?

KF/KAM: There was not and will not be a deadline for registration. It will last until the beginning of the congress. Now, I would not like to comment on hotels, because in this respect it is difficult to predict anything. We could hope that there will be no problems with booking. Yes, all important announcements concerning the congress, especially the new timetable, will appear successively on our website and on Facebook.

Q: CISH is not the first organization that had to postpone a major congress this year. What do you have learned from others and what is your advice to other organizations how to handle such a crisis?

KAM: Our decision from the beginning was made collectively. First, we consulted all members of the organizing committee, our partners, and sponsors. Then there were consultations inside the CISH board. I would like to emphasize that everyone approached the problem with understanding and kindness. Although we do not know yet how everything will go, a large dose of solidarity has been seen. After all, we are all in the same boat. And I hope that we will help each other coming out of this crisis.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to communicate to the community of historians?

KAM: I wish all of us, especially historians, to get out of this crisis wiser. But, observing the present world establishment, can we expect it? Unfortunately, I am sceptical.

Many thanks for your time and all the answers that will be, I am sure, very interesting to our readers.

Questions were asked by Matthias Middell (Leipzig University).

Content

Interview concerning the postponement of the 23rd International Congress of Historical Sciences

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