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## FROM VERSAILLES (1919) TO BREXIT (2019) — A CENTURY OF CHALLENGE FOR THE UNION ACADÉMIQUE INTERNATIONALE

**Abstract:** Founded within the context of the Versailles Treaty in 1919, the Union Académique Internationale (International Union of Academies) has grown from a league of European academies (plus Japan and United States) into a genuine global institution. The lecture will examine the aims and methods of this early international body to build an alliance of academies through collaborative research projects and how it developed over the years to include academies representing non-European cultures and languages. Finally the lecture will briefly outline the challenges posed by the events surrounding Brexit — a potential catalyst of global disintegration.

**Key words:** *Union Académique Internationale, International Union of Academies, Academic collaboration, Treaty of Versailles, Brexit*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

To talk about Brexit — an event which was due to have taken place on 29th March 2019 but which has still not yet happened — is indeed hostage to fortune. However, there is little doubt that Brexit is the most important international political event yet in 2019 — the centenary year of another landmark in international history, the Treaty of Versailles. The organization of which I am the current president, the Union Académique Internationale (UAI — International Union of Academies), was a direct product of the Treaty of Versailles and is one of the older, if not the oldest academic union, which is still active with an expanding international membership.

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## 2. INTER-ACADEMY COLLABORATION BEFORE VERSAILLES

Although the term academy harks back to that of Plato, the major academies of Europe and the Americas were established in the 19th Century in order to represent the highest achievements in humanistic learning. Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, the major academies of the Western World had already been meeting to discuss research collaboration. The idea of forming a league of academies was not new by 1919. An international association of academies was formed in Wiesbaden in 1899 for both the humanities and the natural sciences but it was short-lived because of the outbreak of the First World War. At Versailles, scholars and academicians from a dozen or so nations either advising on the peace process or within easy reach of Paris came to the view that a new international association was needed to promote the cause of peace after so much bloodshed by means of close academic collaboration, this they hoped would help to extinguish the tide of ultra-nationalism which had run so high during the conflict. The French Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres together with the Académie des Sciences morales et politiques de l'Institut de France were particularly active in promoting the idea that a new organization needed to be formed from the academies representing the victorious and victimized nations of Europe (especially Belgium) and the USA and Japan. Despite the fact that Germany was host to the International Association of Academies formed in Wiesbaden, she and Austria were perceived as the perpetrators of the most devastating conflict to date and were not invited to participate in the establishment of the proposed successor body to the International Association formed in Wiesbaden.

At Versailles, a number of distinguished archaeologists were invited by the Entente powers to advise on the state of Classical antiquities in what was then the Ottoman Empire; their knowledge of the Near East from years of archaeological work was also invaluable in helping to draw 'Lines in the Sand' such as the one which eventually demarcated the boundaries of Syria with Iraq and with the Republic of Turkey. Prominent among these scholar-advisors was the émigré Russian scholar Michael Rostovtzeff (1870–1952), the first major scholar to apply sociological theories to the study of Roman history. Rostovtzeff had fled from his native Russia in 1918, first to Sweden and then to London. His presence in Paris during the negotiations at Versailles was very much that of a homeless émigré as it was not until 1920 that he took a professorship in the USA at the University of Wisconsin. Another major scholar who would play a leading role in international

scholarship in this period was Franz Cumont (1868–1947), a Belgian Classical scholar distinguished for his pioneering work on Mithraism and who would later become a fellow of both the Royal Belgian Academy and of the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres as well as of most European academies. The two scholars, Cumont and Rostovtzeff, would later direct in succession the excavations at Dura Europos, a frontier Roman city in Syria with spectacular results although the site is now sadly much ravaged by illegal digging for saleable ancient artefacts by protagonists in the current civil war.

However, the USA did not have a national representative academy like the British Academy or the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences in 1919. Although the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences was founded as early as 1780, and one of its members attended the initial meeting of the proposed new body in Paris in May, 1918, it was felt a new body more representative of the mainstream natural sciences and humanities as taught and researched upon in the leading American universities should be formed, which would also be the nation's sole participant in this new international body. An association of thirteen American learned societies was quickly formed to represent the USA at the new international body being formed in Paris which explains why the American Council of Learned Societies and the Union Académique Internationale are both in their centenary year in 2019.

Representatives from a total of eleven nations attended a series of meetings between 15th and 18th October, 1919 in Paris that gave birth to the new international body.

The eleven nations were: Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Italy, Japan, Poland, Russia, United Kingdom and the United States of America. With the notable exception of the Netherlands, all the other signatory-academies have remained active members of the Union Académique Internationale. The reasons for the departure of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences from the Union in the last decade are trenchant and present a major challenge to the Union in the 21st century and these I will address later in my talk. The national academies of Norway, Rumania and Spain also joined the Union soon afterwards. The Royal Academy of Belgium became host to the organisation and its Secretary General was and still is *ex officio* Secretary General of the Union. French was adopted as the official language of communication and administration of the Union and English did not gain the same official status until the end of the 20th Century. Although the professed purpose of the union was to promote peace through intellectual collaboration, Germany and Austria were not admitted

to membership till almost a decade later, not long before the tide of ultranationalism would plunge the world into an even bigger and more devastating conflagration. [1]

### 3. BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

The UAI saw the promotion of collaborative research through inter-academy projects as its central role from the outset. One area of research which readily lent itself to international collaboration and was in great need of it was the study of ancient, and in particular Greek, vases as almost all major European and North American museums had by then acquired significant collections and there was an urgent call for them to be photographed systematically and studied collaboratively and for the results to be published in a uniform format. The outbreak of the hostilities put an end to the preliminary discussions but they were not forgotten. The choice of *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* to be the Union's first major collaborative project at its first General Assembly in Brussels in 1920 was an obvious one. In the ensuing century, CVA as the project is known, has published over 1000 volumes in nearly a dozen national series and has proved to be an indispensable, authoritative and comprehensive reference work for museum curators and art historians the world over. Even a distant country like Australia has joined the project in recent years because it too has world class collections of Greek vases in university museums in Sydney and La Trobe (Melbourne) and the University of Sydney has a complete set of the 1000 + volumes of CVA housed in a research centre dedicated to research in Classical Archaeology.

The choice of a corpus of Greek Alchimic Texts to be the second project to be adopted by the Union was probably due to the research interest of the polymath Belgian scholar Franz Cumont who was in the process of moving his career base from Belgium to France. The project was built upon the pioneering work of two 19th Century scholars and it may surprise many in the audience that despite its *fin de siècle* appeal the project is still a flourishing concern after a century with the publication of more than a dozen volumes in the highly regarded Series Budé / Les Belles Lettres. However, the editing of such texts requiring very high degree of philological precision and esoteric learning is inevitably a slow and pains-taking process. The third project to be adopted was the editing of the complete works of the Hugo Grotius (1553–1645), the Dutch humanist who wrote most of his works on natural and international law in France — a suitable choice for an inter-academy project at a time when the world was desperately trying to lay the foundations of permanent peace.

All three projects reflect the undoubted Classicism of European intelligentsia. The literary legacy of Greece and Rome was a shared culture among most European nations. Not surprisingly then, research projects in Classical, Medieval, and Byzantine Studies featured strongly among the twenty or so projects adopted by the Union in the next two decades. There were two notable exceptions. The fourth oldest project of the UAI is on Customary Law in Indonesia. The project published one single volume and the project was clearly the solo effort of the author who was also the delegate to the UAI of the Royal Academy of the Netherlands. [2] The other non-European project enjoying considerable success in terms of a steady output is Project 7: 'Unpublished historical documents relating to Japan'. Given the low level of knowledge of Japanese language, history and culture among European scholars before the Second World War, effective collaboration with the Japan Academy on this project was practically impossible and the project has thus remained a sole academy project even though it was a cardinal principle of the UAI that more than one academy should be involved in any major project. [3] Similarly when in 2010 the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Korea applied for sponsorship for a long-term project to translate the *Annals* of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1863), there was no academy which could collaborate effectively with the Korean Academy because of the paucity of senior scholars in Korean studies world wide. Fortunately the *Annals* were written in Classical Chinese and the UAI was able to invite a number of Sinologists to act as advisors to the project and their involvement has had very positive results as shown in the quality of the English translation in the volumes of the *Annals* published so far. [4] The sponsorship of the UAI helped the project to secure substantial funding from the Government of the Republic of Korea and there is little doubt that the project which also publishes a hyper-texted version of the *Annals* on-line [5] as well as in print will be a beacon for future research in Korean history and especially in Korea's pre-modern relations with, Japan, China and the vestigial Mongol Empire and will set a very high standard of scholarship for similar major translation projects.

Research on the Graeco-Roman world took a new turn at the end of the 19th Century with scholars paying serious attention to the value of inscriptions, papyri and coins as historical evidence. In fact several European academies carried the epithet of 'letters and inscriptions' in their full titles. The most celebrated and impressive project in Greek and Latin epigraphy are undoubtedly *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* and *Inscriptiones Graecae*. Neither of these projects, because they were already well established by 1919, felt the need to be patronized by the UAI and the *Supplementum*

Epigraphicum Graecum — another academic side-product of Versailles — was launched to act as a register by region of all newly discovered or re-edited Greek inscriptions. The project, which is supported by research centres in Germany and the USA and has recently moved base to the Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton, has published 64 volumes [6] since 1923 and enjoys a considerable on-line presence. [7]

An epigraphic project of the UAI deserving of special mention is the Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum (UAI Proj. 27). European nations, especially Germany, Sweden, France and Britain had achieved a high standard of research in the languages of Ancient Iran by the end of the 19th Century and this was brought to a climax in the Weimar Republic with the publication of Middle Iranian material from Central Asia and the continuing decipherment of rock-inscriptions in Iran. *CII* was founded in response to a resolution of the 22nd International Congress of Orientalists at Istanbul (1951) and by the time it was adopted by the UAI in 1973 it had already published a number of pilot volumes. Since 1960 the project has published over fifty volumes — the work of scholars from almost a dozen countries including UK, Germany, France, Belgium, USA, Russia, Japan and Israel, and some of these distinguished contributors are also fellows of major academies. The volumes contain editions and translations of texts in Old and Middle Persian, Greek, Aramaic, Khotanese and Bactrian. The project has given focus to research for a whole new generation of scholars in Europe and the USA in the last forty years. However, because the number of qualified scholars to contribute at the highest level in each country is relatively small, the project allows them to collaborate and publish their findings on a systematic and regular basis. The consistently high quality of the published volumes of *CII* is ample attestation to the value of well-organized international collaboration helping to make *CII* the most significant epigraphic corpus of pre-Islamic Iran and of Central Asia.

#### 4. AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

As one would expect, the annual General Assembly of the UAI did not meet for almost a decade (1937–47) because of the Second World War. After the restoration of peace, the UAI was invited by UNESCO to become the lead international organization in philosophical studies and social sciences. This was declined but the UAI played an active role in the establishment of CIPSH (Conseil International de la Philosophie et des Sciences Humaines) and the UAI still holds three votes on the council which is almost unique among the founding members of CIPSH. The second half of the 20th Century saw a major expansion of UAI membership and a significant

increase in sponsored projects. The availability of major research grants in the Humanities awarded by bodies such as UNESCO and later the European Research Council and various national bodies such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK), the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Germany) and the Australian Research Council has heightened the role of the UAI in its role as a guarantor of high standards. By now the UAI has developed a formidable reputation for its strict but expert-driven system of project evaluation. For a project to be adopted by the UAI, the project directors will have to submit the project first to at least one national academy for approval and once this has been given, they will need to find partner academies to co-sponsor the project. The project is then submitted to the New Projects Committee of the UAI. The latter will appoint expert assessors to scrutinize every aspect of the application. Given the fact that all delegates to the UAI are academicians in the countries they represent, experts in most fields of the Humanities are not difficult to find. The projects have to meet very strict criteria in methodology, technical competence, innovation and long-term viability before they can be recommended for adoption. It is not unusual for a project to be subjected to a period of probation of up to two years before formal adoption. Once adopted the project is entitled to apply to the UAI for publication subsidies or small grants to enable national or international editorial meetings to be convened. It is a requirement for projects to submit to the UAI Secretariat all works published under the aegis of the UAI. Project-directors have to submit an annual (now biannual) report on progress and once every five years (now six years) the project is subjected to a major review. The Quinquennial (now Sexennial) Evaluation is a serious process involving distinguished external reviewers who are encouraged to read the publications of the project and to submit lengthy reports based on their thorough examination of the output of the project. The project directors are normally required to be present at the General Assembly when the Quinquennial / Sexennial reports on their projects are discussed by the assembled delegates in order to be available for questions raised by the reports — each project would usually receive a minimum of three reports. The delegates to the General Assembly would then recommend a grade based on the reports and discussions. The highest grade ‘Felicitations / Congratulations’ is a major desideratum as it is often regarded by grant-giving bodies as a ‘kite mark of excellence’. National academies that are grant-giving bodies as well as active centres of advanced research are often highly appreciative of this independent and highly critical system of evaluation and approbation of their in-house projects.

By the end of the last century, the UAI had established itself as a impartial and independent guarantor of excellence for research projects in the following areas of the traditional Humanities:

- (1) Classical and Medieval philology and Lexicography
- (2) Greek and Roman Archaeology, Art History and Cartography
- (3) Epigraphy and Papyrology
- (4) Numismatics
- (5) Medieval Philosophy
- (6) Humanist writings (esp. collected works of scholars like Dantesticus, Voltaire and Hevelius)
- (7) History of Art
- (8) Asian Studies involving the study of older languages such as Babylonian, Assyrian, Punic, Classical Arabic, Old and Middle Persian and Sanskrit
- (9) Comparative literature and translation studies

The post-War period also witnessed the extension of UAI projects to the Pacific Region. The distinguished Hungarian linguist Professor Stephen Wurm (1922–2001) emigrated from Europe to Australia in 1954 and soon became the doyen of Pacific linguistics as well as remaining active in European *academia*. Wurm was from 1986 to 1989 President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and concurrently President of the UAI as well as being President of CIPSH from 1988 to 1997. His boundless energy led directly to the adoption by the UAI of four major projects on linguistic atlases of which the best known is the (UAI Proj. 36A and 39) Language Atlas of the Pacific. The atlas which resulted from this well-funded and superbly organized project has remained a standard work of reference since its publication in book form in 1996. [8] However, the cost of updating such a work against the ever changing cultural linguistic scene in the Asia-Pacific region, is astronomical and well beyond the financial support which the UAI could give to any project, no matter how important or worthwhile.

The need to incorporate the history of Africa after the Second World War into mainstream scholarly research led to the creation of an international project to collect and compile sources in all relevant languages from the period of modern European contact with the Continent. The project *Fontes Historiae Africanae* (FHA), proposed by the Czechoslovak Academy in 1962 and adopted by the UAI two years later (UAI Proj. 22) on the recommendation of CIPSH/UNESCO, aims to collect material both written and oral that will help to reassess and rewrite African History from the African perspective. Currently supported in theory at least by almost half a dozen nations, the project has overseen the publication (esp. by the British Academy) of a distinguished series of edited documents on African history.



In the USA, scholars shunned the Old World Latinized title of the project and preferred to participate under the title of Sources for African History. Not many librarians, however, are aware that the two series stem from the same international project and do not give them proximate shelf-marks. As a result most researchers are unaware of the fact that there is an American sub-series to FHA. The UAI has given financial support towards the digitization of endangered manuscripts held in African collections some of which, like those housed in libraries in Timbuktu, later suffered damage and near total loss in the hands of political extremists. The FHA project will feature strongly in the centenary celebrations of the UAI in Paris in November 2019 as a number of leading scholars of African origin will be invited to participate in a satellite conference on African History and Culture with all their main expenses paid for by the UAI.

The 1980s also saw the admission of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) as a full member of the UAI. Conscious of the fact that the only UAI project then existing was on a Buddhist Sanskrit-Chinese Dictionary, the UAI immediately created a special project: (UAI Proj. 67) China and the (Ancient) Mediterranean World. Concentrating in the first instance on sources in Classical and Central languages and Chinese on the so-called Silk Road, the project has become UAI's main contact with CASS and has initiated a series of monographs dedicated to East–West contacts in the pre-modern era as well as an on-line corpus of inscriptions on commercial and religious exchange. [9] In 2018, scholars from China, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan as well as those from a dozen European countries and Australia were able to take part in a major symposium in Stockholm — ‘The Silk Road and Cultural Exchange between China and Europe (3–5 October 2018)’ — jointly sponsored by The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters and Antiquities and the UAI with generous financial support from the former.

In the 1960s, the American Council of Learned Societies became a major advocacy body for the Humanities and Social Sciences in the USA. Although she was able to give moral support to a number of UAI-sponsored international projects in which US scholars have a major role to play, virtually no new UAI project has originated from the USA. One project which was successfully imported from Europe, thanks to the energy of Emerita Professor Madeline Cavinese (a former president of the UAI), is the creation of a corpus of stained-glass windows (*Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevii*). Despite its medieval sounding title, the corpus now records windows of major US churches that are modeled on earlier European designs. CVMA, as the project is best known to scholars, has given birth to a whole new and vibrant discipline within Art History and the UAI takes considerable pride

in being one of its initiators. The recent fire which wrought such damage to the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and which nearly destroyed the famous 'rose window' is a painful and timely reminder of the need to systematically record such priceless works of art including stained glass in detail. [10]

## 5. RESURGENCE OF NATIONALISM AND ITS CHALLENGE

I have been a delegate of the Australian Academy of the Humanities to the UAI since 1998. In 2013 I was elected to the Bureau (Council) of the UAI and along with the other Bureau members was made aware by the UAI Secretariat of the impending withdrawal from the Union of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, abbreviated: KNAW, founded 1808) and the Royal Society of Canada. Upon being elected President of the UAI in 2017, I immediately tried to find out the reasons for their departure. The KNAW was a founding member of the UAI and has co-sponsored a number of important international projects of the UAI. Netherlandic scholars are also active as co-directors of a number of projects sponsored by other academies. Among the small handful of reasons given was that the KNAW wished to maintain fewer alliances and to concentrate on Europe-focused bodies such ALLEA (All European Academies) and Academia Europea. The fact that the UAI is not an advocacy body like ALLEA clearly makes it less attractive to national academies who believe that they need to have a strong voice, nationally and internationally, on policy issues. Moreover, because the UAI only represents the humanities and not the natural and social sciences, it does not seem to be good value financially to academies which represent both Arts and Sciences compared to associations which represent all branches of learning. Furthermore, since some of the projects sponsored by the KNAW for the UAI were well established internationally, it was hoped by the KNAW that these projects could still benefit indirectly from publication subsidies that are awarded by the UAI to projects and not to academies. As a founding member, however, KNAW will certainly be missed at the centenary celebration of the UAI in Paris in November 2019. The KNAW is a powerhouse in research and its withdrawal from the UAI will deprive the Union of project leaders of high calibre and international standing as well as the help they could give to academy-based researchers in developing countries will also be lamented.

The Royal Society of Canada (*Société royale du Canada* abbreviated *RSC*, founded 1882) withdrew because it had continuously failed to receive official status and public funding as a national academy from the Canadian

government. This greatly restricts her ability to subscribe broadly to international bodies. The RSC has sponsored only a couple of projects in comparative literature and in translation studies but the loss of her delegates who are normally bilingual in French and English will be felt in an organisation which is also bilingual in its administration and ethos.

The loss of two such major learned societies to the UAI is serious but not mortal as new academies, especially those in developing countries, are still seeking to join the UAI.

Consequent upon a referendum held on 23 June 2016 in which a narrow majority of British voters supported leaving the EU, the Government of the United Kingdom invoked Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This should have led to UK's exit on 29 March 2019. However, as we all know, thanks to total political paralysis in the UK Parliament, the deadline has now been extended to 31 October 2019. Since the creation of the European Union in 1984, UK universities and research institutes have become heavily engaged with their European partners and have also been outstandingly successful in securing funding from the European Research Council. The British Academy has issued a number of strongly worded statements on the value of European collaboration [11] and briefings on the need to remain in EU Framework Programmes. [12] As the UAI is a global and not a Europe-only organization, Brexit in theory should make little difference to Britain's position with the UAI so long as the British Academy continues to pay its annual subscription, sends delegate(s) to the bi-annual General Assembly, and supports the UAI projects it sponsors and these are mostly long-term projects. Nevertheless, the language of Brexit is generally anti-international and harks back to an era of global domination by a few superpowers. Even those who call for active re-engagement with Europe after Brexit use language and make statements that are unmistakably Britain-focused and not genuinely internalist. As Professor Ash Amin, the International Secretary of the British Academy, has thoughtfully commented in the latest issue of the Academy's *Review* [13]:

'On the one hand, the Government has coined the concept of a 'Global Britain', signaling that the UK will 'continue to be open, inclusive and outward facing', 'resist any sense that Britain will be less engaged in the world in the next few years', as well as have a 'global presence, active in every region; global interests working with our allies and partners ... and global perspectives, engaging with the world in every area, influencing and being influenced'. Fine words, which make me wonder why the concept cannot include continued deep collaboration with the EU and our European partners.

On the other hand, we have seen the rise of language of taking back control, border controls and national privileges for a historic people. This language has profound effects on choices about where and how to live, study and/or work. Divisive and inflammatory rhetoric such as ‘citizens of nowhere’, and an immigration system that is closing down opportunities through incommensurate and inappropriate burdens and barriers for international mobility and collaboration, are just a small part of a rebuttal of cosmopolitanism, liberal thought and free movement. These are staple principles for an organization such as the British Academy, committed to learning and knowing through open engagement, and we will find ourselves having to stand up for them more vociferously in the days to come.’

To off-set the negative effects of intellectual isolation, significant sums, public and private, have been set aside and allocated for scholarships and visiting fellowships for European researchers to study and work in Britain and for British academics and students to continue collaborative research with their European partners. The supreme optimist would hope that none of these precautionary measures will be necessary but the pessimist cannot but fear that the European scholar or researcher will feel unwelcome by British society at large after Brexit. The lack of direct access to European Research Council funding will not easily be made good by other collaborative funding schemes as these will simply add new and unwanted layers to research administration. My hope as president of the UAI is that the British Academy will not only continue to support the UAI projects it is currently sponsoring but also be willing to be partners of new projects initiated by other academies through the UAI and that researchers in European academies will also continue to seek British scholars as research partners and the British Academy as institutional co-sponsor. Brexit has generated so much heated debate among ‘Leavers’ and ‘Remainers’ and now ‘Pragmatists’ i. e. ‘Compromisers’ which is bound to continue even if Article 50 is revoked.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Whether internationalism and cosmopolitanism can genuinely benefit from this continuing national debate is difficult to discern from this side of the Brexit watershed. In the mean time the UAI’s mission in the hundredth year of its existence is to keep all doors open and to continue encouraging international collaborative research through national academies and to act as the guarantor of the highest standards in Arts research to justify national and international funding in the Humanities.

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