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# Internationalism and lake-dwelling research after the Second World War

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**Abstract**

*After the Second World War some Swiss prehistorians tried to reposition their discipline in the field of science, using lake-dwelling research as a showcase. This paper examines how this research subject developed at the turn of the 1950s, when internationalism in science emerged as a new virtue in post-war Europe.*

**Key-words**: *Internationalism, lake-dwelling research, history of science, Switzerland*

**Résumé**

*Après la Seconde guerre mondiale, quelques préhistoriens suisses ont cherché à repositionner leur discipline dans le champ scientifique suisse en utilisant la recherche lacustre comme une vitrine. Cet article examine comment ces recherches se sont développées autour des années 1950, un moment charnière où l'internationalisme scientifique émerge comme une nouvelle vertu dans l'Europe d'après-guerre.*

**Mots-clés**: *Internationalisme, recherches lacustres, histoire des sciences, Suisse*

## 1. Introduction

Lake-dwelling research contributed to redefining the line of Swiss prehistoric research in the immediate post-war period. This paper examines the place of internationalism in this process. We will focus on three events: the organisation of the International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences (CISPP) in Zurich (1950), the commemoration in 1955 of the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the lake-dwellings, and the inauguration of the Swiss National Science Foundation in 1952. These three examples reveal the intertwining of internationalism with other determining values such as objectivity, neutrality and interdisciplinarity that Swiss prehistorians were keen to support during this period.

## 2. Scientific internationalism and prehistory

Scientific internationalism in prehistory was not an invention of the 1950s. During the second half of the 19th century internationalism had been part of the institutionalisation of prehistoric archaeology as a scientific discipline. The first specifically prehistoric association dedicated to archaeology was the International Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology (CIAAP after its French name) founded in 1865 (Kaeser 2002, 173). However, the power of this internationalist institution was in decline at the turn of the 20th century. The institutionalisation of prehistoric archaeology was completed and the discipline had acquired its scientific credibility. It was then necessary to develop new research structures on a national level (Kaeser 2002, 174). In addition to this disciplinary motive, there is an ideological explanation, as the International Congress of Prehistory (CIAAP) had been founded in the 1860s with 'a cosmopolitan ideal of a global republic of scholars', an idea that was no longer compatible with the European frame of mind at the 19th century (Kaeser 2002, 176). The CIAAP did not do well in a context of strengthening of nationalism.

The ideal of the universality of science was profoundly affected by the First World War and the crisis of values resulting from this conflict was accompanied in the 1920s by a tentative of renewal of international cooperation between scholars. During the inter-war period, the CIAAP was incorporated

into the International Institute of Anthropology (IIA), although with limited success. In 1931 the International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences (CISPP) was founded at a small meeting held in Berne (Díaz-Andreu 2009, 93, 95).

Scientific internationalism was again weakened by the Second World War. In 1945 the general desire was to establish non-governmental institutions. These were aimed at founding the bases of international cooperation in the political and military spheres, as well as in the domains of culture, education and science. This was the basis on which UNESCO was founded (Joye-Cagnard 2010, 242). In this context, interdisciplinarity, alongside internationalism, was considered to be a new model of scientific research (see Belloc 2007) in which each discipline contributed in a positive interaction to the global production of knowledge. The functioning of science could be compared to the civilising project undertaken by the United Nations and UNESCO (ibid.; see also Petitjean *et al.* 2006).

Historians of science have shown that scientific internationalism was also on the agenda during the Cold War. The discourse of scientific internationalism referred to a depoliticised and demilitarised practice of science, as well as to the categories of neutrality, objectivity and universality in science (Strasser 2009). However, the *modi operandi* of such an internationalist science were at the same time closely linked to the pursuit of national interests and scientists were well aware of this duality (Joye-Cagnard 2010, 199). The most eloquent example is probably the leadership of American Big Science in the Atoms for Peace project, when *Pax Atomica* did in fact depend on the United States (ibid.). Presented and conceived as knowledge shared among scientists on an international level, scientific internationalism was at the same time a tool for American foreign policy and this also came to be emulated by European states.

The new concept of science in the 1950s, whether it concerned internationalism or interdisciplinarity, was decisive for the development of research in the second half of the 20th century. Actually, its achievement was facilitated by the creation of institutions such as the Swiss National Science Foundation in 1952, which contributed to supporting scientific projects in all the basic research domains. Conceived as an observatory of the development of scientific research, this institution also had the mission of disseminating a model of scientific practice which took into account the expectations of the Swiss government regarding the question of science.

## 3. Lake-dwelling research and the 'new internationalism' in the post-war period

As Christopher Evans explained in the case of the United Kingdom, the Second World War signified a turning point for internationalism in prehistoric research. It became a central topic in the discussions British archaeologists were having about their own practice and the future of their discipline (Evans 1995). However, while the renewal of internationalism in British archaeology was part of a programme (cf. the *Proceedings on the Future of Archaeology* in 1943; CFA 1943), this was not the case in Switzerland. If Swiss archaeologists were influenced by this new trend, they did not expound it as part of a clear and settled programme for the development of the discipline. Internationalism was not directly assumed, but rather intertwined with other values defended in the immediate post-war period, as we will show.

### *3.1. A popular research topic scientifically* à l'avant-garde

In the 1950s lake-dwelling research was placed at the centre of the renewal discourse in prehistoric research. Actually, this field had two values: it was both popular and methodologically innovative.

The popularity of the lake-dwelling civilisation first defined by Ferdinand Keller in 1854 can be explained by the strong potential identification of the Swiss population with these imagined ancestors, within the context of nation-building (Kaeser 2004). The mundane dimension of the archaeological remains, which illustrated the ordinary life of prehistoric farmers and stockbreeders living in small

wooden houses built on the lake shore, contributed to this phenomenon. Following the discovery of the first lake-dwelling settlements in the mid-19th century, reconstruction attempts emerging from scholarly circles inspired many artists and contributed to the dissemination and popularisation of this research subject (Kaeser 2008).

This popularity also included the scientific milieu. If prehistoric archaeology benefited from the marked visibility of the lake-dwellers, they, as well as being the imaginary ancestors who took part in building the Swiss nation, also provided prehistorians with a highly interesting field of scientific research. Indeed, the wide diversity of well-preserved archaeological remains – wooden building structures and pottery, metal and stone objects – revealed a concrete picture of the day-to-day life of prehistoric communities. In particular, the spectacular conservation of organic remains such as wood, seeds and plants, contributed from the end of the 19th century onwards to the development of naturalist methods such as palaeobotany, palynology and later dendrochronology, in close cooperation with archaeologists who were investigating wetland settlements along with naturalists (Delley & Kaeser 2013). The popularity and considerable scientific potential of these prehistoric settlements had placed the lake-dwellings *à l'avant-garde* of prehistoric research, a place it still occupied in the 1950s.

### *3.2. The renewal of lake-dwelling research in the 1950s*

The reconstruction of lake-dwelling villages had largely contributed to the nationalist dimension of the topic. During the interwar period, questions of reconstruction had launched an important debate with Swiss and German prehistorians in opposition to each other. This gave birth to what in German would be called *Das Pfahlbauproblem* ('the lake dwellings problem'). After the Second World War however, although the popularity of lake-dwelling research remained intact, its nationalist dimension was no longer conceivable with the new internationalist trend in science. At that time certain influential Swiss archaeologists considered that lake-dwelling research needed to develop within a more scientific perspective (Vogt 1951, 215; Guyan 1955, 7). To them 'scientific' meant different things, including 'neutrality' and 'objectivity'. By these words they meant re-evaluating the lake-dwelling question, insisting less on interpretations and more on field observations, data recording and sampling. They also expanded the role of natural science in lake-dwelling research. These prehistorians considered that the cooperation between the natural sciences and archaeology could offer a novel, sounder perspective to the old *Pfahlbauproblem*. This relationship with the natural scientists allowed prehistorians to distinguish their own savoir faire from that of their predecessors.

By expanding the methodological aspects, these prehistorians, with Emil Vogt and Hans-Georg Bandi at their head, intended to transform lake-dwelling research into a modern, innovative field of research, in contrast to its traditionalist and nationalist origins. If internationalism was a necessary condition to attain this, we will see that interdisciplinarity, another component of post-war rhetoric (Belloc 2007, 54), occupied a central place in the discourse and practice of these scholars.

This renewal actually coincided with three important events: the CISPP congress in Zurich (1950), the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the lake-dwellings (1955) and the inauguration of the Swiss National Science Foundation (1952).

## 4. The CISPP Congress of Zurich in 1950

I have already mentioned the place internationalism occupied in the *Proceedings on the Future of Archaeology*, an important conference held in London in 1943 (see Evans 1995). We should add here the expectations Christopher Hawkes formulated to his Spanish colleague Luis Pericot as regards internationalism at the CISPP which would take place in Zurich in 1950:

> *Our task at Zürich must be – as I see it – to get the Congress organization to set up 'Comisiones', to work through the 4 years until the next Congress; Each Commission to work at some subject of international value, and each one international in its personnel. For, now, it is not enough to be*

> *international only at the stage of conferring about results of work already done inside national compartments! It is necessary also to be international at the stage of the *the work itself*. (...)*
> (Hawkes to Pericot 28.12.1949 cited by Díaz-Andreu 2009, 108).

Swiss prehistorians in contrast did not clearly affirm their intentions of renewing this scientific internationalism. The organisation of the first post-war CISPP in Zurich chaired by Emil Vogt, one of the main Swiss prehistorians *en vue* in the 1950s (Delley 2015, 77-78), is a good illustration of this phenomenon. Vogt's involvement in the project to reorganise internationalist prehistoric research appears to have been rather limited and his vision of internationalism did not appear to be compatible with the position of some of his foreign colleagues.

Actually, the organisation of the CISPP in Zurich in 1950 was a last minute decision, as it was initially due to have been held in Budapest (Díaz-Andreu 2009, 107). However, the fact that Vogt agreed to organise it certainly confirms his interest in such an internationalist institution. However, Vogt did not make a good impression on his colleagues as chairman of the congress. The main criticism levelled at him concerned his reluctance to fulfil his duties regarding the dissemination of the minutes of the council meetings held in Zurich (Díaz-Andreu 2009, 108, 111). Moreover, he was accused, along with his Norwegian colleague Johannes Bøe, of sabotaging the attempt to affiliate the CISPP with UNESCO. This was a project submitted by Pedro Bosch-Gimpera that would have ensured funding for international programmes through the International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences[1] (Díaz-Andreu 2009, 111). In fact, rather than an opportunity for renewing modes of cooperation between scholars and the place of prehistoric archaeology in the existing international structures such as UNESCO, Vogt perceived the organisation of the CISPP in Zurich primarily as a good occasion making Swiss prehistoric research more visible (precisely what Hawkes had criticised; see quotation above), as his keynote speech revealed:

> *The long interruption of international teamwork did not bring archaeological research to a complete standstill in Switzerland, so foreign prehistorians have found it difficult to keep up with our progress. All the more so because we have important new finds, as yet unpublished, and some new theories. We have taken a step forward, not only as regards our own little country, but also concerning the prehistory of Central Europe. So we Swiss are delighted to have this opportunity to put some aspects of our prehistory before such a numerous body of eminent foreign workers.*
> (Vogt 1953, 31).

The organisation of an international congress in Zurich was seen by Vogt as an occasion for summing up the state-of-the-art of prehistoric research in Switzerland. Vogt suggested in his discourse that Switzerland had been preserved from the interruption of the war, but despite this, the situation of prehistoric research was far from satisfying. In fact, between the end of the 19th century, the golden age of Swiss prehistory, and the 1950s, the activity in this domain had progressively lost its dynamism. In 1939 Rudolph Laur-Belart had already underlined the almost complete absence of academic professorships in prehistory (Laur-Belart 1939). After the war, another problem, which would be exacerbated in the early 1960s, was the lack of trained archaeologists.

The organisation of the CISPP must have been perceived by Vogt and his Swiss colleagues as a signal to encourage prehistoric research, a task Vogt and Bandi would undertake focusing especially on wetland archaeology.

## 5. Fieldwork observations as a new epistemic virtue[2]

As mentioned above, the beginning of the 1950s saw a major change of perspective in lake-dwelling research. This shift would consist of tackling the old *Pfahlbauproblem*, leaving aside the debate that

[1] This affiliation, which necessitated changing the name of the CISPP to the UISPP (Union of the Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences), took place in 1954.

[2] As required qualities necessary to demonstrate verity in science.

had been going on since the 1920s between Swiss and German archaeologists on the question of the position of the lake-dwelling villages. During this long period, the tense political atmosphere had led both parties to stick doggedly to their positions and in the 1950s the result of the discussion was far from conclusive.

### *5.1. The commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the discovery of lake dwelling*

As a second important event, the commemoration in the mid-1950s of the discovery of the lake dwellings offered an opportunity to redefine the principal orientations of lake-dwelling research. Moreover, this event and the related publication (Guyan *et al.* 1955) served as a showcase for demonstrating a 'modern', 'more scientific' archaeology in the lake-dwelling context. These two terms – modernity and scientificity – are not self-evident. While they clearly referred to the use of new methods, especially those developed in the field of the natural sciences, they also referred to an ideal of impartiality and objectivity within the scientific approach. Such epistemic virtues were associated with an important activity in the field and a decisive place given to empirical observations. Globally, the interpretative aspects of the archaeological approach would be minimised in favour of methodological aspects and observation protocols.

From this perspective, a group of scholars – Hans-Georg Bandi, Walter Guyan, Josef Speck and Emil Vogt – were conspicuous in their approach to introducing a wide range of analytical tools coming from the natural sciences. Following these procedures, prehistorians expected to gather the maximum amount of information so that they could understand lake-dwelling settlements. Two important scientific media illustrated the diversity of these approaches: *Das Pfahlbauproblem* (Guyan *et al.* 1955), an important volume published for the anniversary, and a one-hour documentary entitled *Pfahlbau-Forschung in der Schweiz*, filmed by Bandi between 1952 and 1960 (Bandi 1960). While the impact of the film is difficult to evaluate, although we know it was presented to a wide audience (schools, archaeological circles, delegates to the congress), the publication considerably influenced the future development of lake-dwelling research in Switzerland. Conceived as a model of modernity in the 1950s, these experiences would be recalled by the new generation of prehistorians who undertook the first preventive excavations in the lakes of Zurich and Neuchâtel in the 1960s and 70s (Delley 2015, 155-157).

### *5.2. When specialism requires internationalism*

In the 1950s, the diversity of approaches envisaged required the cooperation of foreign specialists competent in the use of specialised methods such as $^{14}C$, dendrochronology, palynology, sedimentology and malacology. In other words, this specialism required internationalism. Regarding $^{14}C$ dating and dendrochronology, before 1957 Switzerland had no $^{14}C$ laboratory and the first tree-ring dating laboratory would only be set up at the end of the 1960s. To obtain $^{14}C$ dates, samples were sent to Denmark, the Netherlands, England or the United States, whereas the dating of prehistoric wood by means of dendrochronology was mainly undertaken by the Forest Botany Institute of Munich (Delley 2015).

Foreign laboratories were also interested in wood samples taken at lake-dwelling settlements. In 1950, a few months before the opening of the Zurich Congress, Gordon Childe wrote to Vogt saying that he had met Libby, the inventor of the $^{14}C$ method, and that he was anxious to get 'good wooden material' for developing the process. Talking about the forthcoming organisation of the CISPP Congress in Zurich, he added: 'perhaps the Congress might do something towards collecting samples. This is a subject, after all, that ought somehow to be mentioned in the course of our deliberations'.[3]

Cooperating with foreign scholars became necessary even in domains where Swiss archaeologists were used to cooperating with naturalists on, for instance, palaeoenvironmental questions. This

[3] Childe, G. – [letter] 15.2.1950, [to] Emil Vogt. 1950. National Museum Zurich. Correspondence Emil Vogt.

was the case of palynology and sedimentology, where significant progress had been made abroad. Compared to these, the approaches of Swiss scholars would be seen as outmoded. Vogt did not hide his enthusiasm for the work of the Danish palynologist Jens Troels-Smith at the Moorlaboratorium in the National Museum of Copenhagen. Troels-Smith came to Switzerland several times between 1949 and the early 1950s and took part in the excavation of Egolzwil 3 with Vogt.[4] He also worked with other Swiss prehistorians involved in lake-dwelling research and his observations and records led him to compare the beginning of agriculture in Denmark with that of Switzerland, whose results he published in the journal *Science* in 1956 under the title *Neolithic period in Switzerland and Denmark.* At the Zurich Congress his colleague Therkel Mathiassen presented a paper on the new research into the early Neolithic culture in Denmark. In 1952 Vogt went to Copenhagen to visit Troels-Smith's laboratory. In a letter to his colleague Walter Guyan he expressed his admiration for the new approach developed by the Danish naturalist. Vogt said he was quick to publish these new results,[5] which would be presented in his important contribution to *Das Pfahlbauproblem* (Vogt 1955).

The technological aspects of prehistoric constructions also encouraged the comparison of distant case studies. During the excavation of the settlement of Egolzwil 3, Vogt wrote to Grahame Clark. Clark had also taken part in the Zurich Congress, where he had presented the results of the excavations of the Mesolithic bog settlement of Star Carr. The discussion had concerned the details of the technique used by prehistoric populations in bogs and on lakeshores to insulate the floors of their houses from damp. Four years later, Vogt included the conclusions reached by Grahame Clark at Star Carr in his contribution to the commemorative volume of *Das Pfahlbauproblem* (Vogt 1955, 156).

By the beginning of the 1960s, Switzerland could no longer postpone a proper professionalisation of archaeology. Important excavations were programmed within the framework of construction projects, but there was a lack of qualified archaeologists. This was the case for example in 1962 at the bog settlement of Niederwil. After repeated attempts to find a competent prehistorian, Tjalling Waterbolk, a specialist in bog archaeology, finally undertook the excavation with a team from the University of Groningen. Another example was Neuchâtel, where important excavations had been launched in 1964 during the construction of the motorway. The lack of experienced local archaeologists was made up for by the involvement of those from abroad.

## 6. The establishment of the Swiss National Science Foundation

Internationalism in the 1950s was not only in the *air du temps*, it was also supported by important institutions that had been set up during the interwar period and mainly after the Second World War. These institutions contributed to the definition of the new internationalism, its dissemination and also its accomplishment. In answer to governmental expectations, some of these institutions were also a godsend for the development of disciplines on an international level. The establishment of the National Science Foundation (SNF) in Switzerland was one of these realisations.

In 1945 the promoters of the SNF, which was not inaugurated until 1952, presented their project for 'reconstructing European science' (Joye-Cagnard 2010, 243). Whereas in most countries science had been involved in military projects, in Switzerland neutrality had preserved its destiny and it had not been diverted from its initial aim. The founders of the SNF presented the neutrality of science as an advantage the Swiss government should take advantage of. Through the SNF, Switzerland would then have the mission of defending and promoting the internationalism of science in post-war Europe (Fleury & Joye 2002, 105, 118).

The model of science the SNF was defending recalled several principles we have already mentioned as regards the practice of science in the post-war period. Besides neutrality and internationalism, the SNF also encouraged exchanges between disciplines, a model of science that echoed the practice of

[4] Vogt, E. – [letter] 21.7.1950, [to] Jens Troels-Smith. National Museum Zurich. Correspondence Emil Vogt.
[5] Vogt, E. – [letter] 12.5.1952. [to] Walter Guyan. National Museum Zurich. Correspondence Emil Vogt.

prehistorians engaged in lake-dwelling excavations. Their research gained a sudden visibility thanks to major financial contributions from the SNF, which considerably exceeded the standard budgets for archaeology in those years (Delley 2013). The most ambitious research conducted in the 1950s and 60s was on the lake-dwelling settlements of Burgäschisee, Thayngen-Weier, Zug-Sumpf and Niederwil.

It appears that, compared to other actors in the humanities (known as the 'moral sciences' in those years), prehistorians, given their long tradition of cooperation with the natural sciences, were particularly well prepared to meet the expectations of the SNF. In the 1950s, however, interdisciplinarity had taken on a new meaning. Encouraged by the International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences, an offshoot of UNESCO (Belloc 2007), and the SNF, it had become a factor of modernity for prehistorians. Rather than a simple coincidence, this simultaneity should be interpreted as the result of the performative discourse disseminated by the politics of science, a discourse that Swiss prehistorians tried to adapt quickly, given the unsatisfying situation of prehistoric research in those years.

## 7. Conclusion

This article has shown how values and practices already constitutive of the development of prehistory in the mid-19th century were reinvented and renewed in the immediate post-war period. In the 1950s internationalism was particularly at stake for the politics of science and non-governmental organisations created just after the war, such as UNESCO and the International Council of Human Sciences. On the one hand internationalism referred to a depoliticised and demilitarised scientific practice that was neutral, objective and universal; on the other, its implementation was linked to the pursuit of national interests.

Focusing on three events during the 1950s, this article has indicated that the position of Swiss prehistorians regarding internationalism was rather ambivalent compared to that of their international colleagues. The organisation of the International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences in Zurich (1950) illustrates this difference in attitude. For Emil Vogt, who agreed to organise the Congress in Switzerland after the last-minute withdrawal of Hungary, this internationalist manifestation was conceived above all as an opportunity to revitalise prehistoric research in Switzerland and give it more visibility. Similarly, the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of lake-dwelling research in 1954/1955 offered an occasion to exhibit the new results of lake-dwelling research. But not just any kind of results: the natural sciences occupied a decisive place in this so-called 'modern research'.

In fact, the diversification of the approaches and the specialism some prehistorians were seeking required international collaborations. Internationalism turned out to be a necessary condition for re-evaluating 'more scientifically' the question of the lake-dwelling settlements. Finally, the inauguration of the SNF in 1952 contributed to the dissemination of two of its founding principles: internationalism and interdisciplinarity. As a source of state financial support for scientists and as an observatory of the development of science in Switzerland, the SNF contributed to guiding Swiss prehistoric research in these two perspectives, internationalism and interdisciplinarity, the former being a consequence of the latter.

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