

Report 12th ICHC

Between July 29 and August 2, around 120 historians of chemistry met in Maastricht on the occasion of the 12th International Conference on the History of Chemistry (12ICHC). The meeting was organized by the EuChemS Working Party on the History of Chemistry and hosted by the Maastricht University under the auspices of the Royal Netherlands Chemical Society (KNCV), the Maastricht University, and with the support of the Science History Institute, the Solvay company, the Polymer Research Platform (DPI), the Society of the History of Alchemy and Chemistry (SHAC), the Holland Chemistry, the ACSeBooks and the Linda Hall Library. The local organizing committee was chaired by Ernst Homburg; Christoph Meinel and Ignacio Suay-Matallana served as chairs of the programme committee.

The conference was opened by Ernst Homburg, who presented on the Dutch contributions to the history of chemistry, followed by the invited speaker Lissa Roberts, who talked about the relations between history of chemistry and global history, who gave the second opening key lecture. Roberts pointed to the importance of decentred history of chemistry. She also highlighted the role of material biographies in order to put this challenge into context. One of the questions Roberts asked to the participants was: What is the History of Chemistry? During the 12ICHC, historians of chemistry around the world answered this question by sharing the results of several ongoing research projects.

Marco Beretta and Carsten Reinhardt gave the other two key lectures. Beretta invited the audience to explore Lavoisier and contemporaries' labs including the lesser-known apparatuses or instruments. Reinhardt's lecture provided participants with an insider's look into the global chemical industry in the 20th century and discussed the changing role of chemistry for science, technology and society at large. But there was also time at the 12ICHC to go beyond the European and American context: The history of chemistry in Japan was the central issue of the lecture of the 2018 Morris Award winner Yasu Furukawa.

The 12ICHC program offered a wide range of research topics and historiographical perspectives on the history of alchemy and chemistry, chemical analyses, sites of

chemical knowledge, material and visual culture of chemistry, women in STEM and chemical industries, among many others. The program shows both the variety and thematic richness of the meeting and the quality of the lines of research in progress. It should be noticed that the 12ICHC has coincided with two important anniversaries in the history of chemistry: the 150th anniversary of the periodic system and the 100th anniversary of the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC). Both anniversaries were part of the 12ICHC program with two special panels: *150 years of the Periodic System* organized by Gisela Boeck, Annette Lykknes, Isabel Malaquias and Luis Moreno-Martínez and *IUPAC and the other international scientific organizations: competition or synergy?* organized by Brigitte Van Tiggelen and Danielle Fauque. Both panels show how the international conferences on history of chemistry can contribute to facilitating communication between chemists, chemistry teachers and historians of chemistry. These are just some of the main topics widely addressed by the participants. Also, *Substantia*, an international journal on the history of chemistry, was presented at the 12ICHC. The Working Party of the History of Chemistry business meeting was held on the last day of the conference. Annette Lykknes was nominated chair-elected, and Ignacio Suay-Matallana was re-elected as secretary of the Working party. In addition, Isabel Malaquias was elected as vice-chair, and Yoanna Alexiou was appointed as communication officer.

The conference was closed after two roundtables. The first one was focused on an upcoming six-volume Cultural History of Chemistry: ancient, medieval, early modern, 18th, 19th and 20th chemistry. Alan Rocke (chair), Ernst Homburg, Peter Ramberg, Marco Beretta and Marcus Carrier discussed on the importance of engaging history of chemistry with cultural topics, like art, genre or pedagogy. The second roundtable was chaired by Brigitte van Tiggelen with John Christie, Jeff Johnson, Annette Lykknes, Cyrus Mody and Peter Morris as discussants. It was devoted to the challenge of writing the 20th history of chemistry. Issues like the (negative) impact of chemistry on society or the increasing massive and technological nature of contemporary chemistry were some of the themes discussed during the last session of the 12ICHC.

The social program included a visit to the Bosch brewery in Maastricht as well as an amazing full-day excursion to Liège, Kelmis and Stolberg (three sites that are all related to the history of zinc). The cherished coffee breaks were also valuable opportunities to

meet and make effective contacts, which was especially fruitful for young scholars. The organizers did a wonderful job in putting together such a great program at such a beautiful site and facilitating meeting points even outdoors – helped by the nice summer weather. The 2019 conference is now part of our current history of the history of chemistry. For the 13ICHC we still have to wait until 2021 to meet again, this time in Vilnius.

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Group picture, August 1 2019. By Robinn Thimister