

COMMISSION 16

PHYSICAL STUDY OF PLANETS AND SATELLITES

ÉTUDE PHYSIQUE

DES PLANÈTES ET DES SATELLITES

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VICE-PRESIDENT
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Dale P. Cruikshank
Carlo Blanco, Dale P. Cruikshank,
Leonid V. Ksanfomality,
Melissa A. McGrath, David Morrison,
David Morrison, Keith S. Noll,
Tobias C. Owen,
Maarten C. Roos-Serote,
John R. Spencer, Victor G. Tejfel

PROCEEDINGS BUSINESS MEETING on 23 August 2006

1. Introduction

Commission 16 held its business meeting during the General Assembly in Prague, on Wednesday August 23, 2006, with nine members present. The meeting was called to order at 14:00 hr by president Guy Consolmagno. A moment of silence was observed in memory of those Commission (or Division) members deceased since the last General Assembly. They are Joseph W. Chamberlain, Michel Festou, Thomas Gold, Cornell H. Mayer, Vasilij I. Moroz, William M. Sinton, Willem Wamsteker, James A. Westphal, and Fred L. Whipple.

2. Report from the president

In introducing his report, Guy Consolmagno explained that the president of Commission 16 sits *ex officio* on several committees and working groups (e.g., WG-SPN, the Working Group on Planetary System Nomenclature), essentially representing the users, i.e., astronomers or other scientists who make use of the nomenclature and/or coordinates produced by these committees. The WG-SPN has been quite active in naming surface features on Venus, the Moon, Mars, Itokawa, Io, Europa, Ganymede, Callisto, Titan, and Phoebe. Commission 16, through its president and several Organizing Committee members, also contributed to the efforts aiming at a definition of a planet, which will hopefully come to fruition at the end of the present General Assembly. Guy Consolmagno expressed his personal view that, although the task is difficult, a definition is sorely needed, and the IAU should rapidly come to terms with this issue.

Among the various objectives put forward at the Commission meeting in Sydney for the 2003-06 triennium, most were met with reasonable success:

- convening a scientific meeting in Prague: Guy Consolmagno thanks the Organizing Committee for supporting and helping to organize the Joint Discussion 10 “Progress in Planetary Exploration Missions” held during the present General Assembly, and which was very well attended;
- defining a continued role for the Commission: on the basis of the activity report and set of objectives presented for the next triennium, Division III has approved the continuation of Commission 16;

- updating the membership list: the roster has been updated, but there are still numerous e-mail addresses missing, and correcting for errors is a frustrating process;
- meeting regularly with OC members: this has been only partly successful since about half of the members are usually present at the same time at major planetary science meetings (particularly, the AAS/DPS meeting);
- setting up a regular news bulletin or “blog”: this has been held back mostly because of the difficulty of completing the e-mail address list;
- managing the Commission web site: this has been successful with some help provided by Maarten Roos-Serote, who unfortunately has announced his intention to resign from the position of Secretary. Many thanks are expressed for his work.

3. New membership

The list of 29 new IAU members who expressed their wish to join Commission 16 was presented. The large diversity of the countries of origin (Australia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Russian Federation, South Korea, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Ukraine, United Kingdom, USA) is a gratifying reflection on the constant development and vitality of planetary sciences throughout the world. The list of new Commission members was unanimously approved. This brings the membership to a total of 271. It is interesting to note that 52% of the members are also members of the AAS/DPS.

4. New officers

The next president and vice-president of the Commission will be Régis Courtin (Observatoire de Paris, France), and Melissa A. McGrath (NASA-Marshall Space Flight Center, USA). No candidate could be definitely proposed for the position of Secretary during the Commission meeting, but a search conducted by Régis Courtin among the membership subsequently led to the designation of Luisa M. Lara (Instituto de Astrofísica de Andalucía-CSIC, Granada, Spain).

Several members of the Organizing Committee have asked or agreed to rotate out: Dale Cruikshank, Keith Noll, Tobias Owen, Maarten Roos-Serote. New members were proposed by the assembly to replace the outgoing ones. However, the IAU bye-laws now limit the number of OC members to eight (excluding the Commission president). With the addition of Luisa M. Lara as Secretary, and Guy Consolmagno as immediate past President, the new OC membership matches this requirement; therefore and regrettably, it was not deemed possible to include the suggested individuals. Thus, the composition of the Organizing Committee for the triennium 2006-09 is the following: Carlo Blanco (Italy), Guy Consolmagno (Vatican City State), Leonid Ksanfomality (Russia), Luisa Lara (Spain), Melissa McGrath (USA), David Morrison (USA), John Spencer (USA), and Victor Tejfel (Kazakhstan).

5. Additional matters

Although it is not directly under the purview of Commission 16, Guy Consolmagno mentioned the proposal – by the Working Group on Cartographic Coordinates and Rotational Elements – of a new coordinate system for Mars and of a new rotation period for Saturn. On the latter topic, Dennis Matson (*Cassini* Mission Scientist) remarked that no firm conclusion has been drawn so far from the relevant *Cassini* investigations.

A discussion was held on the content and format of the scientific session to be proposed and organized by the Commission at the next General Assembly. In retrospect, it was found that in the case of Joint Discussion 10, restricting the topic to space missions posed some problems, since the invited speakers (the Mission Scientists) were not necessarily the most knowledgeable experts in the discipline. Also, the organization of the Poster Sessions left much to be desired: the exhibit room was far from the meeting room and there were no brief presentations of the posters. The next General Assembly (Rio de Janeiro) will pose problems of its own because of probable travel limitations. David Morrison suggested finding “hot topics” that would attract a large audience. Dennis Matson remarked that in the case of *Cassini*, it is more appropriate to regroup instrument talks by discipline (atmosphere, fields and particles, surfaces, etc.). Finally,

other suggestions were to hold a Joint Discussion with Commission 51 (Bioastronomy) or to organize a Symposium.

Because of the likelihood of the adoption of the Scientific Resolution defining a new class of solar system objects, namely “dwarf planets”, the question arises as to which Commission will “own” this new category of objects. Guy Consolmagno proposed that Commission 16 be the one Commission in charge. The assembly agreed unanimously; the proposal was passed on to the new Division III president, Ted Bowell.

Leonid Ksanfomality raised the issue of scientific communication with the new Commission “Extrasolar planets”. The assembly agreed that it would be very useful to set up formal links for the benefit of both Commissions. The new Organizing Committee will be taking up this matter.

The meeting was adjourned at 15:30 hr.

Guy J. Consolmagno
president of the Commission