

# From the Archive

**The British  
Academy, and one  
hundred years of the  
Union Académique  
Internationale**

The Union Académique Internationale was founded in 1919, to foster co-operation between national academies working in the fields of the humanities and social sciences, in particular through major long-term collaborative research projects.

### 1899: the founding of the International Association of Academies

But this wasn't the first time that such a body had been established. Twenty years earlier, in October 1899, representatives of the principal academies of the world met at Wiesbaden to discuss the formation of an International Association of Academies, covering all areas of academic enquiry. Indeed, it was at that meeting that it was realised that, while Britain was appropriately represented in 'Natural Science' by the Royal Society, there was no British academy that could represent 'Literary Science'. And that realisation ultimately led to the establishment of the British Academy by Royal Charter in 1902, so that British scholarship in the humanities and social sciences could be represented at an international level.

Alas, the cataclysm of the First World War effectively swept away the International Association of Academies.

### 1919: the founding of the Union Académique Internationale

In the aftermath of war, the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres in Paris produced proposals for setting up a 'Union Académique Interalliée pour les Recherches d'Archéologie, de Philologie et d'Histoire'. These proposals were discussed by the British Academy's Council at its meeting in April 1919. The minutes of that meeting record the Council's recognition that the International Association was 'no longer in a state to fulfil most of the functions for which it was called into existence'. The minutes go on to affirm that

the Academy wished to continue the fullest co-operation with France and the other civilized countries of the world, yet doubts were expressed as to the expediency of founding at the present time a new permanent organization based in the first instance upon the alliances founded for the purposes of war.

And in the letter sent by the British Academy as a response to the French proposals, it was explained that

We are particularly anxious to avoid

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The British Academy, 1919.

the possibility of Europe being divided into two intellectual leagues, in which the Allied countries would stand on the one side and Germany and the neutrals on the other.

In spite of these British reservations, the idea of setting up a new 'Union Académique' was gathering momentum. At its meeting in July 1919, the British Academy's Council had before it the draft statutes of the proposed federation, arising from a preliminary conference that had been held in Paris in May. In its response to these developments, the British Academy still expressed its hope for a happier, less divided future:

We look forward to a time, and we hope it may not be a distant time, when all those who are concerned in the pursuit of human studies whatever their nationality, will be able to work in concord and mutual respect. We cannot contemplate a Europe divided for all time into hostile camps and unable to co-operate in the pursuits of scholarship, yet we recognise that time is necessary to heal the wounds that have been inflicted.

But, seeming to bow to the more immediately inevitable, it continued:

Pending the time when it may be possible to re-admit Germany and Austria into the fellowship of civilised nations, the British Academy is prepared to enter into a Union for the cultivation of international scholar-

ship such as is proposed by the Académie des Inscriptions.

In October 1919, the President of the British Academy, Sir Frederic Kenyon, attended a meeting in Paris at which the Union's statutes were revised and adopted. And when the British Academy's Council received an account of that meeting in January 1920, it formally confirmed its adhesion to the new Union Académique Internationale.

### 1939: hosting the Union Académique Internationale

Twenty years after its foundation, the annual meeting of the Union Académique Internationale was hosted by the British Academy in London. This would be only the second time the annual meeting had been held outside Brussels (in 1935 it had been held in Copenhagen).

The following account of the occasion, held on 8–11 May 1939, was subsequently published in the British Academy's Annual Report for 1938–9:

The following countries were represented: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, Japan, Norway, U.S.A., Yugoslavia. The Polish delegates were prevented at the last moment from coming by the disturbed political situation. ... After the opening session on Monday, 8 May, the rest of the day and the whole of Tuesday were occupied by the meetings of the

separate committees concerned with the several projects of the Union. On the evening of 8 May an informal reunion of delegates and the ladies accompanying them was held in the Athenaeum Club Annex at 6 Carlton House Gardens. On Wednesday most of the delegates and their ladies visited Oxford, where arrangements had been made by the President for them to be guided to various places of interest. The Vice-Chancellor entertained the whole party, together with a number of Oxford Fellows of the Academy, to luncheon at Magdalen, and the President received them for tea in the Provost's Lodgings at Oriel. In the evening H.M. Government entertained the delegates and a large number of Fellows of the Academy, with their ladies, at dinner at Claridge's Hotel. The Earl De la Warr, President of the Board of Education, presided and proposed the toast of the Union, to which Mr. Leland [UAI President] and M. Bidez replied, and Sir D. Ross wound up on behalf of the Academy. The final plenary meeting was held on the morning of Thursday, 11 May.

In his Presidential Address to the British Academy's Annual General Meeting, in July 1939, Sir David Ross reported that

There is ample evidence that the visitors enjoyed and appreciated their entertainment both in London and Oxford; and the dinner given by the Government to the members of the Union and the Fellows of the Academy supplied the Academy with some of the publicity which many of the Fellows have for some time desired that it should have.

The Union would not meet again until after the Second World War – but, unlike its predecessor, it did survive.

### 2019: the British Academy and the Union Académique Internationale now

One hundred years after the Union was founded, the British Academy continues to contribute to its long-running collaborative research projects. These projects typically tackle large bodies of primary source materials – whether texts or artefacts – and make them accessible to scholars through editions or illustrated catalogues.

Endeavours to which the British Academy continues to contribute a British dimension include projects to catalogue ancient Greek vases and ancient Greek coins in museum and other collections, and to catalogue all the surviving examples of medieval stained glass.

The British Academy's most recent publication in a series that comes under the overall umbrella of the Union Académique Internationale is *Writing the New Nation in a West African Borderland*, edited by Kate Skinner and Wilson Yayoh, published as part of the *Fontes Historiae Africanae* (Sources of African History) project. This innovative book prints facsimiles and English translations of a small independent newspaper issued in the Ghana-Togo border area around the early 1960s – throwing new light on the story of decolonisation and the era of new nationhood.

Text by James Rivington

### Image right

The first page of the 2 May 1960 issue of *Ablɔɔɛ Safui* ('The Key to Freedom'), published in the *Ewe* language by Holiday Komedja. The first article, headed 'The new Togo government', starts: 'The whole of Togo is in the hands of the new government. Children of freedom! This April 27, 1960, Togo will become ours completely; do not be afraid!' Facsimiles and English translations of issues of this newspaper are published in the British Academy's latest addition to the *Fontes Historiae Africanae* (Sources of African History) project – one of the long-term undertakings that the Union Académique Internationale helps co-ordinate internationally.

# ABLODE SAFUI

N° 26

du 2/5/60.

Efe asi 10 frs

TEFE LI NA GBFADEDEWO

dawawo, kugbefa, nudzadzra le  
goawo ken fomevi me

GOMEDOLA

KPLE KPLOLA

Holiday V, K, KOMEDJA

Avenue de Klouto

Palime

Nyatefe nye xexeamo fe kekeli, simadze amedekui bua amegbeto fe nyenye le nudesiade me



*M. K. K. K.*

## TOGO DEIDUDU

YEYE LA

(Togo blibo la katãa nye kem le dzidudu yeye la sime : Ebe : Ablo-deviwo ! april 27, 1960 sia la, Togo la zu miato keŋkeŋ, vovo deke mele o! Ebe : dekawowo blibo nano anyigba la me; futifafa, dowowo na denyigba la. Dè siwo le dukowo dome nade da keŋ. Do le figo na mi elabona awa mevo o ! Mia ŋli hena dekawowo sia, be mia vo akpo dzidzeme, awo do na mia dèdu la hena efe figoyi. Oo ! nye denyigba lolãa ma buo eye nye maŋlo wo be gbeŋe o!)

Mayi edzi na mi be : april 27, 1960, si fe aseye tsotso le nyanyame na mi xoxo la, mawu eme na mi be : Dudola gãa ŋu agbo la tso ŋedzeŋe yi ŋetodoŋe, dzie he yi anyiehe esi woe be Togo fe kakee go há ma bu o, maga teŋ buo eye mava bu há o! Dzoŋbenyue na Togo, Dudola gã nano agbe tegbee.

TOGO XO EEE DOKUISINONO BLIBO

LOME : KPOKPLOYI DE EME.

Enye Mawu fe amehuveve gãa de nam be : mewo deka kple Lomé dukowo april 23 1960.

(dziyiyi axa 2)