

A.I.M.A.

International Association of Agricultural
Museums

Internationale Vereinigung der Agrarmuseen

Международная Ассоциация
сельскохозяйственных музеев

Association internationale des musées
d'agriculture

Asociación Internacional de Museos Agrícolas

(ICOM Affiliated Organisation)



Visit Our Website: <http://www.AgricultureMuseums.org>

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AIMA:
**A rich European
Past, a Future
opened on the
World**



François SIGAUT,
AIMA President

AIMA was founded in 1966, that is nearly half a century ago, by a group of archaeologists, ethnologists and historians from several countries of Central and Northern Europe, among which Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East and West Germany, Denmark, etc., were the most active. Most European countries and a few others (Canada, USA, Mexico, Japan) joined in the following years. The main perspective was to develop links between agricultural museums throughout the world, especially within Europe itself, which was then separated in two parts by the so-called Berlin wall. To achieve this goal, it was decided that an International Congress (CIMA) should be held every three years, each time in a different country. The first CIMA was held in Liblice (Czechoslovakia) in 1966, the 16th one in Slobozia (Romania) in 2011. Initially, the Proceedings of the congresses were published by the National Agricultural Museum of Czechoslovakia, in a series entitled *Acta Museorum Agriculturae (AMA)*. The complete collection of *AMA* makes up 22 volumes, of which the last one contains the Proceedings of CIMA 9 (Randers, Denmark, 1989; this 22nd and last volume of *AMA* was published in 2001). After Randers, the Proceedings of each CIMA were published by the Museum which had taken the responsibility for its organization.

It should be recalled that another important institution was created in parallel with AIMA: the International Secretariat for Research on the History of Agricultural Implements, which was

located at Lyngby (Denmark). Beginning in 1968, the Secretariat published an annual review, *Tools and Tillage*, of which the last issue (Vol. VII: 4) came out in 1995. A few years later, the Secretariat itself ceased to exist.

This parallelism of dates is not without some significance. Until the early 1990s, the history of agriculture was alive and well in most European countries. In the following years, it went more and more out of fashion, at least in the academic world, even though the number of museums, private collections, harvest festivals, etc., continued to increase. Of course, the nature and chronology of events were not the same in every country. But from the point of view of AIMA, the consequences have been more or less the same, with for example a pretty general decrease in the number of participants in congresses. Something had to be done. New problems meant that new solutions should be looked for. The decision to face the new situation was made by the General Assembly meeting in Slobozia in September 2011.

This decision did not mean that the tradition of a CIMA every three years in a different country should be changed. Quite the contrary since, as a matter of fact, this tradition has worked so successfully for 45 years. But it should be enlarged and diversified. Until now, for instance, all CIMAs have taken place in Europe. But agriculture is present and important on all continents, so that this European prominence is less and less justified. From another perspective, "agriculture" represents a very large number of different activities. AIMA should offer specialists working on this or that activity opportunities to develop international exchanges, etc. To put it shortly, AIMA must open itself to all initiatives aiming at a better knowledge of agricultural practices throughout the world.

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Of course, this opening will imply a lot of innovations. First, AIMA has to reform its statutes and its working methods, including a much more systematic use of Internet. Those are most obvious needs, too obvious to be further discussed here.

AIMA has also to reinforce its links with ICOM and to establish new ones with FAO. AIMA has been "affiliated" to ICOM from its very beginnings,

but had no links with FAO, which may seem something of a paradox. The reason was probably that its founding fathers were archaeologists and ethnologists: agricultural scientists were not interested. Or if they were, it was in a quite different way. There are in fact many museums and collections in agricultural academies and universities, which have never had any links with AIMA. But fortunately, this situation is changing. It is now more and more admitted that a proper knowledge of their past is useful to understand the agricultures of today and to find relevant means to improve their future. Now, museums of agriculture are a privileged place for gathering and transmitting that knowledge. A first contact has been taken with FAO; it is to be understood in that perspective.

AIMA must also make every effort to open itself to new countries. This task has three aspects. First, to establish or re-establish contacts with museums of agriculture in countries where they already exist, like India, China, Egypt, etc. Second, to help countries which have no such museums as yet, but where there are projects to create them, as in some African countries. And third, explore museums which have important collections of agricultural implements coming from exotic countries. This is of course chiefly the case in countries with strong colonial traditions, like Britain, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, etc. But many such collections have also been gathered by ethnographers and travellers in countries without such traditions. In both cases, these collections may be important for a better understanding of the agricultures of the countries where they came from. In order to mark this opening of AIMA to non-European countries, it has been proposed that the next congress (CIMA 17, 2014) should be held in India. And we know that our friends in New Delhi are eager to welcome us.

Museums of agriculture have a rich future, provided that all possible ways and means for their development are explored. As an institution, AIMA should be used as a meeting place, where all kinds of initiatives and exchanges are encouraged and helped, on the sole condition that they contribute to a better knowledge of the agricultures of the world.

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