

Introductory remarks

The year 2015 abounds with anniversaries and initiatives which are very relevant for the history and public perception of science, physics and astronomy.

The SISFA annual Congress keeps a special eye on the “History of Light” and on “Science and World War I” in connection with, respectively, the International Year of Light and Light-based Technologies (IYL 2015) and the centenary of Italy’s intervention in the first world conflict. No less important, the centenary of general relativity and the 70th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are also considered, although not on the same scale and from particular perspectives such as the complex relation between light and gravitation in the period from Newton to Einstein and the new implications of nuclear energy.

General aim of the session “History of Light” is to stimulate reflection on important steps and aspects of the scientific approach to light as well as on some of its spectacular uses and social outcomes. The programme includes a physical replication of Foucault’s experiments on the velocity of light and an exhibition on the history of diorama offering direct projection of rare original images. The history of light is also investigated as a fruitful resource for new ways of dealing with light and light-related subjects in science education.

The session “Science and World War I” focuses mainly on the positions of Italian scientists examining important issues such as their attitude towards the war, their interaction with foreign contexts and the effects on scientific research up to the post-war period. Attached to this session, a small exhibition prepared with original objects and instruments illustrates military applications of science in connection especially with the manifold communication technologies that were exploited during the war.

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