

France and the History of Measurement Revisited, Vol. H-France Salon

Deadline: Jan 10, 2025

Shana Cooperstein, McGill University

"France and the History of Measurement Revisited" will examine how the metric system became one of the most powerful instruments of French soft power. Global metrification began in earnest in 1875, when France hosted a pivotal yet understudied event in the history of metrology known as the Convention du mètre. Representatives from 17 nations gathered in Paris to sign a treaty which established a framework for standardizing measurements worldwide. In hosting this meeting, French politicians responded to a growing reality: international trade and the rigor of scientific research intensified the need to adopt a measuring system that transcended national borders. But the early Third Republic's enthusiasm to champion this cooperative measure cannot be easily disentangled from the nation's even greater thirst for global dominance. Still reeling from the losses of the Franco-Prussian War, Third Republican officials saw in this event an opportunity to re-solidify its status as a diplomatic, industrial, and scientific leader. Their efforts were not in vain. The treaty laid the foundation for international standards in science and industry, and the construction of regulatory bodies including the International Bureau of Weights and Measures, the General Conference on Weights and Measures, and the International Committee for Weights and Measures.

To mark the upcoming 150th anniversary of this treaty, we issue an open Call for Papers for an online panel followed by a special issue which exceeds the limited scope of this historical episode, and which prioritizes research on France's long-standing role in metrology. Themes may include, but are not limited to:

- The material practices of metrification and instrument design
- Measurement as a tool of political unification and control
- Metrification and French colonization
- Efforts to embrace and/or resist France's efforts to distribute the metric system
- The impact of metrification on the arts and industry
- Literary and cinematic portrayals of metrification
- The Convention du mètre as a "living" document
- Global infrastructures

Call for Papers for an online panel and special issue of H-France Salon (subject to approval by the editorial board)

Interested participants should submit abstracts of no more than 500 words and brief bios to Shana Cooperstein (Assistant Professor of Art History at IE University) and Patrick De Oliveira (Assistant Professor of History at IE University) at shana.cooperstein@ie.edu and

ArtHist.net

patrick.deoliveira@ie.edu by January 10th.

A date for the online panel will be scheduled with the participants.

Reference:

CFP: France and the History of Measurement Revisited, Vol. H-France Salon. In: ArtHist.net, Dec 19, 2024
(accessed Apr 13, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/43565>>.