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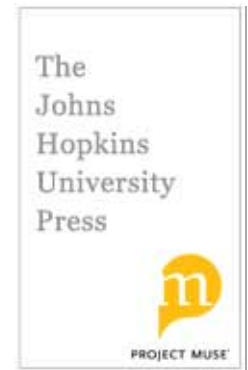
"Par la science, pour la patrie": L'association française pour l'avancement des sciences (1872-1914) (review)

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**“Par la science, pour la patrie”: L’association française pour l’avancement des sciences (1872–1914).**

Edited by Hélène Gispert. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002.  
Pp. 372. €23.

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Hélène Gispert characterizes the subject of “*Par la science, pour la patrie*” as science in all its states, and this is an apt description of the challenge that the twenty-three contributors to this volume accepted in proposing to revivify the history of an organization whose numerous activities were inseparable from the scientific and political landscape of the Third Republic. The chronological framework is significant: the Franco-Prussian War and the First World War delimit a singular space-time, marked by France’s frustration at its defeat and by the French hope of restoring the nation’s diminished military power, a hope which the First World War harshly called into question.

From the patriotic impulse nourished by these feelings there sprang, in 1872, L’association française pour l’avancement des sciences (AFAS), the French Association for the Advancement of Science, a great collective project with strong national ambitions. “*Par la science, pour la patrie*” was its motto, “by science for the fatherland,” a phrase that both asserted a claim of achievement and signaled a program to renew the country. This motto, writes Gispert, is to be taken very seriously, because it encapsulates a history “in which the sciences are an active part of society, acting on it as much as modified by it” (p. 16). Collectively the essays in Gispert’s volume describe the hopes, the claims, and the controversies of a society in search of new ideals likely to transcend social divisions and mobilize the entire nation around a project of national reconstruction and social peace.

The account of this complicated story offered here is not only deep and detailed but also original. The AFAS has never been the subject of specific historical enquiry in France, though Robert Fox and Elena Ausejo have touched on it (see *The Organization of Science and Technology in France, 1808–1914* [1980], which Fox coedited with George Weisz, and Elena Ausejo, “The Window Case of Science: The Associations for Advancement of Science and the Birth of Scientific Congresses in Western Europe,” *Archives internationales d’histoire des sciences* 44 [1994]). Fox’s and Ausejo’s work placed the AFAS among many other public and private organizations devoted to the promotion and diffusion of science that flourished in France during the eighteenth century and after. Both underlined the peripatetic, itinerant character of the AFAS, functioning as it did through annual congresses of scientists from both France and its overseas possessions. Both also stressed the association’s quasi-universal ambition, exemplified by the fact that the AFAS willed itself to become the instigator of academic and industrial research in such fundamental fields as mathematics, physics, chemistry, the natural sciences, economics, and engineering. Lastly, both

note the dramatic divergence between the association's self-declared decentralization and "the usurpation of central ideology" that the provinces perceived as a symbol of "Parisian arrogance" (Fox, p. 273).

All these issues, among a crowd of others, find further illumination in "*Par la science, pour la patrie*". The variety of problematics, as well as the very logic of collective work, determine the book's structure, which sacrifices chronology in favor of several transverse topics. Besides a detailed bibliography and alphabetical index of names, the book has seven parts. Six of these, comprising thirty-one essays, are devoted to various facets of the history of the AFAS, while the seventh gathers documents and tools for research. One finds information concerning many aspects of the association, such as principles of operation, with details relating to administrative and financial management and to the holding of congresses, as well as individual and collective portraits of its founders, managers, and members. Two parts are dedicated to the analysis of such tensions as the complicated relations between Paris and the provinces, or between amateur and professional scientists and engineers. Another is devoted to the relations with the world of enterprise; the AFAS attached great importance "to the development of practical applications" (p. 225). Strong political commitment "under a declared political neutrality" is the focus of the last part.

"*Par la science, pour la patrie*" offers an intelligent and realistic portrait of the advancement of science "*à la française*," and this is an important achievement. To quote Gispert again, "The AFAS can, in constant tension between the register of the speeches and that of the various and contradictory realities of its works and its practices, become a privileged tool to revisit with profit a whole structuring series of questions relative to the history of sciences in France during this period" (p. 17). Good reading!

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### **Des barrages, des usines, et des hommes: L'industrialisation des Alpes du Nord entre ressources locales et apports extérieurs.**

Edited by Hervé Joly et al. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2002.  
Pp. 386.

This book is dedicated to Henri Morsel of the University of Lyon, the eminent author and editor of the three-volume *Histoire générale de l'électricité en France* (1994–96). World War II changed Morsel's life because he was a Jew. During the summer of 1943, he was hidden from the Nazis and French collaborators by the people of a small city that had a long tradition of protecting refugees (often Protestant), le Chambon sur Lignon. At the end of