
Exploring the History of the Cell from a Transnational and Local Perspective

Marion Thomas*¹ and Florence Vienne*^{†2}

¹Université de Strasbourg – université de Strasbourg – Faculté de médecine/DHVS 4, rue Kirschleger
67085 Strasbourg Cedex, France

²Technische Universität Braunschweig – TU Braunschweig 38092 Braunschweig Allemagne, Germany

Abstract

Organized Session:

”A Longue Durée History of the Cell. Old Questions and New Perspectives”

(Marion Thomas, Florence Vienne, Susanne Lettow, Stéphane Tirard, Christina Brandt)

In 1936 and 1959, the Strasbourg physician and researcher Marc Klein (1905-1975) published two studies on the history of the cell theory. They have been largely remained unnoticed by historians of biology, although they contain fascinating aspects and questions. Taking Klein as a starting point, we aim at exploring further the work of early nineteenth century French and German naturalists on ”cells”, ”globules” or other elementary units, and show how central notions of the cell theory like that of individuality, autonomy, universality as well the analogy between organism and the state emerged before respectively Schwann’s and Virchow’s late 1830s and early 1850s cell theories. Secondly, by looking at medical textbooks and examining the research work of nineteenth century century Strasbourg and Parisian physicians, we want to investigate further Klein’s statement of a different reception of the cell theory in Strasbourg and Paris, and retrieve not only epistemological but also political factors to explain it. This contribution is part of an upcoming joint research project, which aims at shedding a new light on the development of the cell theory in the nineteenth century century in France and Germany. Last but not least, by combining a transnational and local perspective, this project intends to provide new insights into the intertwined links between cell-theory and politics.

*Speaker

†Corresponding author: vienne.florence@berlin.de