

LAUDATIO MAURICE DORIKENS

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Today, one of the Sarton medals is handed over to Prof. M. Dorikens, physicist and present director of the museum on the history of physics. He gets the credit of not only having given new life to the former museum, which was located at the Korte Meer in town, but of having enlarged its scope and having brought it into a high national and international level through his many initiatives. The new museum has become a point of reference for many other musea devoted to the history of sciences.

Prof. Dorikens was born on October 7, 1936 in Antwerp. After studies at the 'Koninklijk Atheneum' in Antwerp, he started physics studies at the « Rijksuniversiteit van Gent » where he also took the degree of 'licentiaat' in physics in 1959. He started his research in the field of nuclear physics at the 'Laboratorium Verschaffelt' under the guidance of the late Prof. Verhaeghe. His experimental research led, in 1964, to the Ph.D. degree in physics. With the move from the early research laboratory at the Rozier, in town, to the domain of the INW, outside of town, new research possibilities at the electron accelerator developed quickly. I remember very well, as a young physicist then entering research, the fine experimental skills of Prof. Dorikens in reaching the technical limits with the available experimental apparatus. In the period between 1960 and 1970, he pursued research in nuclear structure mainly at the electron accelerator facility. From 1972 onwards, his interests were gradually shifting towards applications of experimental methods then used and he was at the origin of the positron annihilation work that started in Gent around that period. Prof. Dorikens was also a productive scientist : he was author and/or co-author of about 100 papers that appeared in the international literature on nuclear physics and instrumentation. Around that time, he also started interesting initiatives as the promotor of an Erasmus project, a project that combined the efforts of 10 universities from 9 different countries.

Until the end of 1993, Prof. Dorikens was active within the 'Vakgroep Subatomaire en Stralingsfysica', also the moment he was appointed to the post of deputy-director of the museum on sciences and techniques: an essential and turning point in this further career. Within a short time span, on march,1 1994 he was appointed director of the museum on the history of sciences at the University of Gent. Here, his sense of detail, organisational capacities and insight in the existing and historical physics instruments appeared in full 'light' and exposition – a set of capacities he developed when carrying out basis research. In a very short time span, he modified the museum, taking care of putting up the new 'home basis' at the building of S30 at the 'Sterre' complex. On June,28 1995 the museum, re-born in some way, could open its doors. Within a period of just a couple of years, Prof. Dorikens gave fame to this relatively small but high-quality museum. Besides a lot of inventory work, in 1996, a photographic archive of all existing pieces in the museum has been built up. In that work, the museum owed a lot to the photographic talents of Prof. Dorikens, an amateur photographer of recognition far beyond Gent an even Belgian borders. By this undertaking, the museum at the University of Gent has become the owner of a technical well-equipped photopgraphic studio, one of the only smaller musea to have one. Since 1994, the fragile technique of restoring old scientific apparatus has been improved and put to state-of-the-art work. In short, it is remarkable what Prof. Dorikens has accomplished within such a short time of not more than 5 years, with the support of a small but very enthusiastic team of collaborators only, quite often contributing on a voluntary basis.

Prof. Dorikens has written a number of papers on the history of the historical scientific instrument in the period 1993-1998. He is a well appreciated speaker and has been receiving a large number of invitations to talk on the issue of the history of scientific instrumentation and measuring devices from the 19th century, an issue on which he is considered to be one of the world-authorities. He has set up an intensive exchange program and developed a net of connections with important musea active in this field too e.g. the Museum Boerhave in Leiden, the 'Musée Curie' in Paris, the 'Centre National des Arts et Métiers' in Paris. He was also at the origin of a series of noteworthy exhibitions on e.g. the work of the eminent physicist J. Plateau, on the late Prof. Verschaffelt, L. Baekeland and contributed to

exhibitions presenting the history of sciences in Flanders and the Netherlands.

Prof. Dorikens, dear Maurice,

All the work performed in the past, your great love for the history of the scientific instrumentation in physics, the essential starting point in creating new knowledge, has been 'crystallized' in 'your' museum on the history of sciences. You have gone literal and also figurative a 'long' road. Quite difficult in the early attempts. Today, your work is fully recognized within but also far outside of our own university of Gent. Your dedication and the one from the group surrounding you in your work have resulted into a fine and important collection of most interesting scientific instruments, many of them originating from former research work at the university of Gent itself. Your many efforts to bridge the gap between the more technical use of various instruments in the early scientific community and the larger public and make the latter group appreciate the many efforts needed in order to enable experiments to be carried out successfully in the old days, is put into full 'spotlight' today. With your work, you have built the perfect 'bridge' into the past of sciences and illustrated how, in the 19th. century, physicists tried to unravel the mysteries of sciences quite often with hand-made and rudimentary instruments. It is good to show these elements: it helps us bringing into the correct perspective, the big drive and fast evolutions in present-day research and experimental work.

Today, this large involvement and work is fully put in the spotlight and recognized through the Sarton Medal.