

## **Sarton Medal Lectures**

## LAUDATIO THOMAS FRANSEN

*W. Wieme*

Thomas Fransen graduated as a civil engineer at the University of Ghent in 1947. His career turned towards the textile industry, at that time still the main industry of the region. However, antiquated technology and lack of modern management would soon send this industry into near oblivion. Thomas Fransen has been working hard to prevent this happening. As Professor of the University of Ghent, teaching textile engineers, and as Director of the Laboratory for Textile Engineering we can say that he has succeeded. Now officially retired he continues teaching a number of specialized textile subjects, giving the engineering students the benefit of his extensive international experience.

The Sarton Chair is of course concerned with the history of science, so today we want to emphasize the merits of Professor Fransen in this respect. Although his professional interests have always been with the latest technological innovations, as it should be for an engineer, Professor Fransen was very much aware of the historical importance of the development of the textile industry. His personal interest was not limited to modern times and its technological and social problems, but he showed great appreciation for the art and craftsmanship of antique textiles. He became a member of the Centre d'Études des Textiles Anciens and Chairman of the Society for Industrial Archeology and Textile of Ghent. He was actively involved in rescuing some unique 19<sup>th</sup> century textile machinery from total oblivion or even destruction. Some ancient textile looms have been painstakingly restored to working order. The famous Mule Jenny, smuggled out of England to the town of Ghent in 1789 to become the first continental loom, should one day become a show-piece in a Museum for Textile Products, a project to which Professor Fransen is giving all his support. If this project were to be realized, the town of Ghent, centre of world renown since the Middle Ages, will have a textile museum worthy of its reputation.

As a token of appreciation for his efforts in the field of textile archeology, and upon unanimous recommendation of the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Ghent, the Sarton Medal for 1988 has been awarded to Professor Fransen.

Ghent, March 24, 1988

