

## **Sarton Medal Lectures**

## LAUDATIO OTTO GEKELER

*Frans LOX\*, Director*

Today it is a special day for you, I know, but be sure we also are very proud and feel honoured with your selection as G. Sarton medal holder and with your presence in this Institute of Science and Technology where we try to discover the thread of Ariadne in the labyrinth of pathways which mankind settled up in the past.

Looking back to your very extended and extra-ordinary curriculum vitae, I have the truly conviction that your sixth sense has helped you to overcome a lot of difficulties, but has guided you into a direction where the pathways of great men from the past as Johann Beckmann, and so many others, emerge by extrapolation to one big cross-point you just reached at the moment you went retiring some years ago. At that moment you really discovered the beauty of synergetic effects of multidisciplinary; and even yesterday you told me that the most enjoyable moments of your life were those when you achieved to bring together people, representing the most different disciplines.

Your way-life, running likely as a Brownian movement all over the surface of the earth, from Germany, to Brasil, again to Germany, to Russia, France and the United States, made your mind full of experiences, and since I met you in 1971, I discovered — and I may stress this before this audience — one of your greatest and unexhaustible qualities : you were and still are very generous with your richness of thoughts. Indeed, dealing and speaking about your experiences, you forget yourself and at the same time you are enlightening and encouraging others. It is known that you speak a lot of languages as Portugese, English, French and Spanish, so you are surrounded now by a lot of friends, how can it be otherwise, and

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this is proved by the presence of those who made efforts for traveling hundreds of kilometers to be here as a grateful duty.

Our Rector will make efforts to come at the end of the ceremony to hand over your Sarton. Many others as the Governor of east flanders, the vice-rector, the representative of the Government and faculty members from our University, Prof. Quintyn, the foregoing director, and different members of the University of Brussels, really apologize to be maintained by professional duties. I also received these last weeks a lot of letters sent from the most extreme corners of Germany, Japan, China, Denmark, Seoul, Poland, Italy and Austria : all are congratulating you and send you their best regards.

Dear friend Gekeler, I know that your happiness of today should be much more intensive by the presence of your wife : be sure that we also deeply regret her unvoluntary absence at this ceremony.

Dear audience. Mr. Gekeler graduated in economic sciences at the University of Tübingen, and made his way in the well-known firm AEG-Telefunken. He worked in the field of statistics, organisatory systems and methods for classifying goods and their numbering for electronic handling of information. A lot of high-level scientific publications came from his hand. This work lay on the base of the "real" work he started nearly at the moment he retired from AEG.

So he was founding member of the DGWT "German Association of Commodity Science and Technology", became president, and was one of the leading figures in establishing and editing the international journal "Forum Ware".

In 1976 he was the most encouraging member for founding the IGWI, "International Association of Commodity Sciences and Technology", and since, five two-yearly high standard symposia have yet been succesfully organised in Europe and in Japan. During the past ten years, Mr. Gekeler went more directly to the roots of the knowledge of Commodity Science and Technology and discovered the figure of Johann Beckmann. In 1987 he founded the "Johann Beckmann Gesellschaft" and due to his unexhaustible enthusiasm, festivities were organized in Göttingen and at the birth-place Hoya,

commemorating Johann Beckmann. This name was also dedicated to a street; exhibitions have been organized and so on. Especially for this historical work we are here together.

Before giving the floor to you, I would like to try to walk into your way of thinking : don't look at one aspect but try the "gesamtbild", a word which can't be translated. So I would like to hang up the following picture of the Beckmann period nearly 200 years ago : Beethoven playing one of his beautiful piano sonates, probably the pathetic; the stresses of the period of the French Revolution; the period of 1780, when the steam-engine was built, which forms the starting point of the industrial revolution, twenty years before the discovery of the voltaic cell. At that time Lavoisier also opened the area of modern chemistry. It seems that at any moment science, technique, arts, phylosophy and politics are fertilizing. George Sarton and Johann Beckmann do have treated the matters of science and technology from different view-points — historical and technological — but with that common objective of "Ganz heitlichkeit" from ressources of goods-production to the social implications. Due to your work much attention has been paid in our institute to the founder of technology, Professor Dr. Johann Beckmann.

Dear Mr. Gekeler, you were born on the first day of Spring and I'm sure that your health and youth will produce still many Springs in the future, and today we feel excited to hear the voice from the bottom of your heart.