

From:

Michaelis AJ, *The Scientific Temper : An Anthology of Stories on Matters of Science*, Universitätsverlag C., Heidelberg, Winter 2001. p.1-598

ISR 21/1 *Derek de S. Price-Historian of Science* Title 403

I was Derek Price's "oldest friend", as the three authors, all Professors of the History of Science, pointed out in their review of his scientific life's work. The leading author was Professor Eri Yagi of Toyo University, together with Lawrence Badash of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Donald Beaver, Williams College, Massachusetts-all three having been students of Derek Price. After his fourth heart attack and death in 1983 in my London flat during a brief visit, there were numerous obituaries [see reference 7 of the ISR article, published in January 1991 but I considered none of them adequate for his pioneering contribution to the history of science and to scientometry. When in 1992 during an exchange programme, Eri Yagi delivered a lecture on Derek Price at the University of Strasbourg, I invited her and her colleagues to write a paper for ISR.

I got to know Derek in the early 1950s, and when I was Editor of *Discovery* [Title 621 he published in 1956 "The Prehistory of the Clock". He described the Greek gear movements of what became known as the 'Antikythera mechanism', of about 2000 years ago. It revolutionised our thoughts about the technical achievements of ancient Greece [See *Discovery* Vol. XVII (4), p. 1531.

Derek moved from London University where he obtained his B.Sc. and his first doctorate, to the University of Singapore as lecturer in applied mathematics at the age of 28 and there developed his idea of the 'exponential growth of science'. Returning to England, he devoted himself to the study of scientific instruments at the University of Cambridge, and obtained his second Ph.D. in the History of Science. In 1957, aged 35 he went to the USA, first as Consultant to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, then as a Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton and in 1960, aged 38, to Yale University, being appointed the first Avalon Professor of the History of Science. He remained there until his death, when he was 61 years old.

Among Derek's many contributions to science was his discovery of Chaucer's *The Equatorie of the Planetis*, his *Chinese Astronomical Clockwork* in collaboration

with Joseph Needham, an *International Checklist of Astrolabes* in 1956, which is still today unequalled. In *Discovery* [1956, XVII, 2401 appeared “The exponential Curve of Science”, and in the same volume [unsigned, p. 1591 “The Science of Science” which began his great contributions to scientometrics, of which the three authors called him rightly ‘the Herald’ in the title of their article. The 240 references to his articles have to be read to appreciate Derek Price’s erudition and scholarship in the History of Science. I published this memorial note in January 1996; see also the next Title 404.