

Necrologio

Dr. phil. Joachim Otto FLECKENSTEIN

On 21st February, Prof. Dr. Joachim Otto Fleckenstein died unexpectedly and prematurely in Munich. He had returned from Basel the night before to the Institute of the History of the Exact Sciences and Technology of the TU of Munich, which he had founded and directed up to 1979, and nothing foreshadowed such a tragic event.

He was born in Dusseldorf on 7th July 1914, where he received his education before beginning his university studies under the guidance of this master Theodor Nie^uthammer, professor of Astronomy and director of the Astronomical Observatory of Basel. It was here that the solid basis of his knowledge of geodetic and fundamen-

tal Astronomy was formed, as can be seen from his first works on latitude determination in the prime vertical. After obtaining his Ph.D. in 1939, his philosophical and epistemological vocation came to the fore and characterized his successive scientific production. His unique versatility together with his knowledge of languages and his profound scientific and philosophical culture contributed to making J.O. Fleckenstein perhaps one of the last enlightened scientists of this century. It was not by chance he had a special liking for R.G. Boscovich. His excellent preparation in the field of the History of the Sciences is witnessed by the edition he directed of the works of great mathematicians such as Bernoulli and later the works of Euler. Besides this, starting from 1977, he took charge of the complete edition of the works of Copernicus after the death of Bernhard Sticker, president of the Copernican editions. Less difficult but not less significant was the publication of the fascinating volume "G.W. Leibnz, Barock und Universalismus" (1958). During this period of intense activity, his passion for classical astronomy never left him and, starting from 1954, he began a systematic collaboration with the Milan-Brera and Merate Observatories where, during the Geophysical Year and even afterwards, he carried out latitude observations with the Talcott method and double star observations.

After a period of teaching charge at the Universii

ty of Basel starting from 1948 and some teaching experiences at the Free University of Berlin (1959-60) and the University of Izmir in Turkey in 1963, in that same year he was given the Chair of the History of the Exact Sciences and Technology at the Technical University of Munich. In this institute, which in 1964 became part of the famous Deutsches Museum of Munich, J.O. Fleckenstein developed an intense activity on the scientific and organizational levels which led to his receiving important recognition for his work. He was a member of several international scientific associations such as the International Academy of the History of Science (Paris), the Kepler Commission of the International Union of the History and Philosophy of Science, of which he was president, the International Astronomical Union (of which he was a member of Comm. 19), and the Royal Astronomical Society of London. For his many merits he received, among other honours, the Mérite National Français and the Euler Medal of the Academy of the Sciences of the USSR.

These recognitions and his academic function, however, never even slightly undermined his great freedom of thought and his political ideals to which he remained faithful all his life, as is witnessed by his long activity as municipal councillor of the city of Basel and the publication of the volume "Science and Politics" (1965). Also for these fine qualities, as well as his

great contribution to the history of scientific thought he is mourned today by his beloved students and his many devoted friends together with his family.

EDOARDO PROVERBIO

Cagliari, 1 maggio 1980