



The Sarton Collection in the History of Science

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ingly so distributed, with a small portion going to the Houghton Library. The bookplates of course continue to indicate the source of the volumes. Room H, still known as the Lowell Memorial Room, now houses reserved books for seminar courses in the Romance field. It is hoped that with the

passage of time the two rooms, Potter and Lowell, may receive further development toward a fully rounded center and library for graduate work, thus serving truly as memorials of the two notable figures whose names they perpetuate.

FRANCIS M. ROGERS

The Sarton Collection in the History of Science

THE collection of works in the history and philosophy of science assembled by Dr George Sarton, and bequeathed by him to Harvard University, was presented outright during 1949. Now an integral part of the Harvard College Library, the collection continues to occupy rooms 185 and 189 in Widener, serving as a focal point for research, and open, as in the past, to all serious students in the field.

Until the collection has been fully catalogued, an estimate of the scope of its contents must serve. There are approximately 4,000 books, 15,000 pamphlets, and 100,000 cards, together with a large collection of portraits and prints, a small collection of medals, and very extensive archives. Of the books, some 2,285 had been bought over the years by the Carnegie Institution of Washington for Dr Sarton's use. At its meeting of 20 October 1949, the Executive Committee of the Carnegie Institution voted to give these volumes to Harvard University. The announcement of this generous gift was made to President Conant by Dr Vannevar Bush, President of the Carnegie Institution, in a letter of October 24 which contained the following

statement: 'In making the gift to the Harvard Library, the Executive Committee felt that acceptance by Harvard would be assurance of preserving the integrity of the collection.'

As an assemblage primarily of reference books rather than of rare books or curiosities, the collection constitutes a carefully constructed apparatus for the study of the history of science in all periods and in all countries. Dr Sarton, for example, has found that he can solve most of his problems — and especially those concerning ancient, oriental, and mediaeval science — without leaving the two rooms. For his purposes, these rooms have been the center, and Widener Library the annex — albeit a very large annex, and one that he has been happy to find closing him in.

The collection was begun in 1912 in Wondelgem near Ghent, East Flanders, Belgium, soon after Dr Sarton had obtained his doctorate in mathematics at the University of Ghent and had begun the editing of *Isis*, the international quarterly devoted to the history of science. The subsequent development of the field and the concomitant growth of the collection may be traced in the many

prefaces to *Isis* (volumes 1 to 40), in the prefaces and introductory chapters of Dr Sarton's *Introduction to the History of Science* (three volumes, 1927-48), and in *Studies and Essays in the History of Science and Learning*, edited by M. F. Ashley Montagu, a *Festschrift* presented to Dr Sarton on his sixtieth birthday (1944), but not published until 1946.

The array of pamphlets, reprints, etc., is probably now unrivaled in the field, since the destruction or dispersal of the collection in Berlin which alone exceeded it in scope. The richness of the Harvard collection may be attributed to Dr Sarton's editorship of *Isis* for thirty-eight years, and the resultant influx of publications from historians of science, east and west, who wished to have their works listed in the Critical Bibliographies of *Isis* and if possible reviewed.

The pamphlets are preserved in a set of some six hundred large boxes, and are classified in the same way as the items in the Critical Bibliographies.¹ The fundamental classification is by centuries from the ninth through the fifth centuries B.C. and by half-centuries from the fourth century B.C. on. Items which cannot be classified in the centurial way are placed, if possible, in another series of boxes, corresponding to Part II of the Critical Bibliographies, under such headings as Egypt, Babylonia, Greece, Byzantium, Asia, India, China, Japan, Israel, Iran, Islam, etc. Items which are not adapted to either of the first two series are placed in a third series,

¹ There are one or two Critical Bibliographies in each volume of *Isis*. The general plan was last explained in Vol. XXXVI (1946), 22-23.

either under Science in general, or under such separate branches as Logic, Mathematics, Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Medicine, etc. Each of these three methods of classification is subordinated to the preceding one: for example, a study of physiology in the seventeenth century is classified under XVII-1,² not under Physiology; a memoir on Arabic astronomy is classified under Islam, not under Astronomy.

Dr Sarton's position as pioneer in the scientific study of the history of science and in what has been called the New Humanism (the study of mankind focused upon the development of science)³ has brought to his files a voluminous correspondence, including letters from nearly every scholar working in the general field. Most of the letters are in English, French, German, Italian, or Spanish, but many other languages are represented. The Arabic correspondence fills a separate box. The mounting value of these archives, as the years pass, for the tracing of the development of this important new discipline, and for numerous collateral investigations, need not be stressed.

Thus, through the generosity of Dr Sarton and of the Carnegie Institution, Harvard has acquired a unique collection which, while serving admirably the special needs of scholarship in a particular field, also strengthens very significantly its general library resources.

² The boxes devoted to the first half of each century include also items concerning the whole of that century.

³ Cf. Sarton, *The History of Science and the New Humanism* (New York, 1931; 2nd ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1937).

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