

december 17, 1969

Professor Derek de Solla Price
Yale University, New Haven Conn.

My dear Professor Price,

My best thanks for your reprint from *Archaeology*, about the Tower of the Winds. I had already appreciated your paper in the *National Geographic* and congratulate you on your ingenious considerations. Since my poor wife, as you probably do not know, died quite unexpectedly six months ago, I am almost unable to continue my activities about the History of Instruments. Still, I am very interested, and take this occasion to ask your opinion about the problem of clepsydrae.

As you yourself write on page 350 of your present article, I consider as doubtful the use of the flower-pot egyptian clepsydra for marking the hours. My idea is that it was simply an instrument for marking the duration of a certain period: e.g. the length of a discourse; As regards Egypt, I would risk the hypothesis that it was used for fixing the duration of irrigation of the fields. In Belgium, where the channels allowing the water to irrigate our "polders" are controlled and their water-gates opened under supervision during a strictly limited time, one uses presently watches; but I have read somewhere (I cannot remember where) that in Algiers, or in Tunisy, the controllers still use a kind of clepsydra similar to the egyptian flower-pot. Could you, with your wonderful documentation and skill for such investigations, see if this is true.

As regards the other clepsydrae, it is quite probable that an attempt was made for marking the flow of the time; but we all know that this was more or less a demonstration and not a time-clock. Our clocks in the Middle Age were very proud when, under the supervision of an horologist, they marked something between 23 and 25 hours per day. And what with our present "astronomical clocks", which pretend to show planetary motions for 30 or 50 years, but must be revised or repaired long before that !

Very truly yours

H. Michel