

# *Memories of Paul Kunitzsch*

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I first met Paul Kunitzsch when I was a Humboldt Fellow based in Munich in the late 1970s. He was my betreuer, the supervisor of my research project. I was working on an Arabic text, Al-Khāzinī's «sphere that rotates by itself» and he would check both my transcription and editing. My knowledge of Arabic never approached his standard and I remain indebted to him not only for the correction of my Arabic but also for the direction of my career. Thus began a long association and friendship. In later years, when I was a salaried researcher in the Deutsches Museum in Munich, we would work collaboratively in my room. He would say, “You sit this side and I will sit here with the manuscript between us” and we then got to work, allowing ourselves breaks in our study sessions—he to drink white wine, I to sip vodka. Those were happy days.

Many historians of science talk and write about the importance of the Greek-Arabic and Arabic-Latin translations of mathematical texts during the medieval period in the transmission of European scientific knowledge to the West, but few scholars have the knowledge, commitment and staying power to produce accurate, well-edited editions of those texts and translations. Paul Kunitzsch was one of the very few to take on this task. In a lifetime dedicated to scholarship he published numerous editions.

Some of these he edited on his own, others in collaboration. Kunitzsch was a scholar who liked to collaborate, to share his knowledge, and I was lucky enough to join him in editing several texts. Over the years, between 1985 and 2019 we made six contributions to learned journals and prepared four editions, including two of works of Theodosius. One of the more memorable collaborations was on what came to be called «the melon-shaped astrolabe». I had started on this and had invited Edward Kennedy to join me. When we realised that we needed an Arabic specialist, who else to ask but «The Master», Paul Kunitzsch? One problem concerned a dot: was there, or was there not, a dot over the word for the instrument? If there were, then the astrolabe was «melon-shaped», if not, its shape was more like «stretched over». Kunitzsch began by solving the issue for us by referring to

a work by al-Bīrūnī which had a dot over the word for the instrument and became the third editor of *The Melon-shaped Astrolabe in Arabic Astronomy* (Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1999), described by a reviewer as a «beautifully presented and learned contribution» to scholarship.



Paul Kunitzsch (left) with Richard Lorch in their office in the Deutsches Museum.

Paul Kunitzsch was Professor in the Department of Semitic Languages at the University of Munich, a member of the Bavarian Academy and an associate of the prestigious group of historians of science located in the Deutsches Museum in Munich. His standards and expectations were very high; I remember him once saying to a young man wanting to learn Arabic, «I presume you have Greek and Latin, and can read French, German and English».

Paul Kunitzsch was born on 14th July 1930 in Neu-Krüssow, Ost-Prignitz (100 km northwest of Berlin) and died on 7th May 2020 in Munich, where he spent much of his academic career. He never married and had no children. He used to say, «My books are my children».