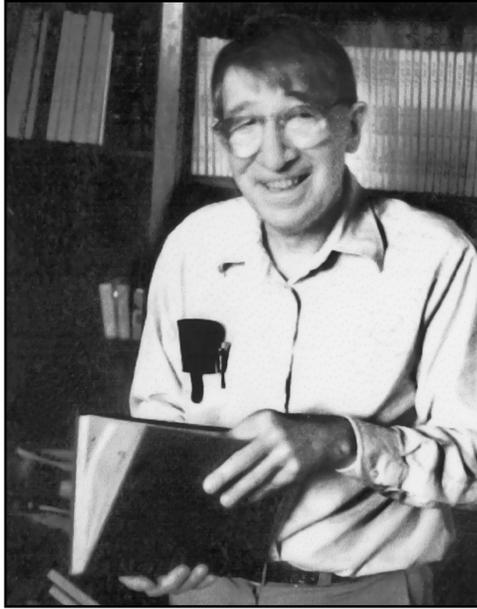

DAVID EDWIN PINGREE



COURTESY OF ISABELLE PINGREE

2 JANUARY 1933 · 11 NOVEMBER 2005

DAVID EDWIN PINGREE, university professor, professor of the history of mathematics, and chair of the Department of the History of Mathematics at Brown University, died on 11 November 2005, from complications of the diabetes he had been suffering from throughout his life.¹ He died when he was at the height of his productivity, with many projects on the go, and is sorely missed by his colleagues and students, and by the whole scientific community. A mark of the width of his interests, and the international spread of his renown, is the festschrift that was presented to him in January 2004, which includes, in its nine hundred-odd pages, sections on ancient Mesopotamia, India, the Arabic world, and the West, from antiquity until the Renaissance, and has contributions from scholars from the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, Austria, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, India, and Japan.² It is impossible to classify him as a Sanskritist, a scholar of the culture of the Near East, or a Greek or Latin specialist. He was all of these, and much more. His merit was to see the whole canvas of the history of the science of the stars, spread out from the Western shores of Europe to the Eastern shores of India, and extending from the very beginnings of man's interest in the stars to the early modern era. The story consisted of many episodes, and featured many characters, who spoke in several different languages, but in the end it was one story, and only David was able to tell it.

David was born in New Haven on 2 January 1933, the son of Daniel Pingree, who was at the time in the economics department at Yale University. He had two brothers, and one sister eighteen years younger than he was. He had no vision in one eye and only partial vision in the other, so he had problems seeing more than two feet in front of him. Consequently, instead of participating in sports at school he read assiduously, supplementing the Latin and Greek he learnt at school with Sanskrit, which he taught himself. After graduating from Phillips Academy, Andover, he entered Harvard, where he successively took a B.A. *magna cum laude* in Classics and Sanskrit (1954), and completed a Ph.D. with the title "Materials for the Study of the Transmission of Greek Astrology to India" (1960). His fellow students remember him fondly under the nickname of "Marble Head," whose connotations embrace more than the village near Andover from which he came. A Fulbright scholarship enabled him to study Greek manuscripts at the Vatican Library

¹I am grateful for information supplied by Isabelle Pingree, Masaaki Kubo, Wolfgang Hübner, Stephan Heilen, and Michio Yano.

²*Studies in the History of the Exact Sciences in Honour of David Pingree*, ed. C. Burnett, J. P. Hogendijk, K. Plofker, and M. Yano (Leiden: Brill, 2004). This book includes a list of publications up to July 2003.

(1954–55), and a Ford Fellowship allowed him to spend a year doing the same in India (1957–58); these were sandwiched between fellowships at Dumbarton Oaks (1956–57 and 1959–60). His manuscript studies laid the foundations for his subsequent research, based on his own editions of the material, much of which he had uncovered himself. In 1963 he married Isabelle Sanchirico, who became his lifelong companion and helpmate, as well as establishing a reputation as a specialist in early bookbindings; their only child, Amanda, was born in October 1965. In 1963 he was appointed assistant professor at the Oriental Institute in Chicago, where he established his firm links with Noel Swerdlow and Erica Reiner. He spent the academic year 1964–65 at the American University in Beirut, working with the indefatigable investigator of Arabic astronomy, Edward Kennedy. Then, in 1971, he joined the powerhouse of studies in the history of pre-modern astronomy: the Department of the History of Mathematics at Brown University in Providence. Here, brought together in the old and dusty building of Wilbour Hall under the shadow of the University Library, were Otto Neugebauer (the founder of the whole enterprise) and Aby Sachs, soon to be joined by Gerald Toomer, who knew each affectionately by names such as the Elephant, the Owl, and the Home-Ox (*homo oxoniensis*). Pingree, in turn, was known as “Abu Kayd” (the father of the comet), since his name resembled that of the pioneer in research on cometology, Alexandre Guy Pingré (1711–1796). In 1981, in recognition of his contribution to scholarship, he was awarded a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship, and from 1981 to 1986 he was the A. D. White Professor at Large at Cornell University. But Brown University remained his base for the rest of his life. He was attended by a succession of dogs, who accompanied him on his constitutional walk between his home and his office. This department acted as a beacon, attracting students and visiting scholars from throughout the world, who established links with London, Kyoto, Barcelona, Utrecht, and many other places. David built up his own library of books (some beautifully bound by Isabelle), microfilms, and copies of Sanskrit manuscripts written out by hand by Indian pundits. As the department gradually shrank due to the death or departure of its members, David was welcomed into the Classics department of the university, where he continued to teach until the year of his death, and where, fortunately, a post in the history of ancient sciences and one in Sanskrit will continue to be occupied.

David saw no sharp distinction between astronomy and astrology (or, for that matter, magic, in which astrology often played a significant part), and preferred to consider them together as part of the exact science of the ancients. He did not pursue a whiggish course of documenting “discoveries” and the earliest instances of doctrines that became

part of modern universal science. Rather, he viewed each aspect of the science of the stars in respect to the community in which it arose, and paid equal attention to the “important” and the run-of-the-mill doctrines in each context. He amassed shoe-boxes full of horoscopes, and transcribed texts at a rate that far outran the pace at which they could be published, just in order to get as full a picture as possible of the subject. His vast knowledge of detail was condensed—sometimes too drastically for readers used to a slower pace—in publications such as the biobibliographies of astrologers included in his edition of the *Yavanaajātaka* of Sphujidhvaja (1978), his history of mathematical astronomy in India in the supplement volume of the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (1978), astrology and astronomy in Iran in the *Encyclopædia Iranica*, and his account of astrology in *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (1973–74). A masterpiece of succinctness and comprehensiveness is his history of astrology in *From Astral Omens to Astrology, from Babylon to Bikānēr* (1997), originally delivered as a series of lectures in Rome, Bologna, and Venice. He wrote innumerable encyclopedia entries on astronomers of the past, many of which are little monographs in themselves.

His editions ranged from the Babylonian MUL.APIN (with Hermann Hunger, 1989), and *Babylonian Planetary Omens* (with Erica Reiner, 1975–2005), through the Greek astrological texts of Dorotheus (Greek fragments, and an Arabic version of the full text, 1976), Hephæstion (1973–74), Vettius Valens (1986), Gregory Chioniadēs (1985–86), and Arabic texts on astronomical tables (al-Hashimi, with Edward Kennedy, 1981), to Latin texts translated from Greek (Pseudo-Ptolemy, *Praeceptum Canonis*, 1997) and from Arabic (*Picatrix*, 1986, and *Liber Aristotilis* of Hugo of Santalla, with Charles Burnett, 1997). He conceded to Western scholars by providing English translations for Sanskrit and Arabic texts, but assumed that Greek and Latin were still part of an educated person’s accomplishments. In all cases his primary aim was to establish texts from all the manuscripts, and to provide complete word-indexes (the writer of this obituary remembers that he spent several weeks at the Warburg Institute, checking the index of his edition of Vettius Valens, which required altering every single page and line number to accommodate the Teubner page layout; no academic task was too menial for him).

His edition of *Picatrix* was his major contribution to the history of magic (sadly, his work on the related *k. al-nawāmis* of Plato, known as the *Liber vaccae* in Latin, never reached completion). Even here, the Indian element is present, for he recognized the Sanskrit words for the planets among the garbled lists of planetary names. This Latin text was compared word-for-word with the Arabic text, and included, in typical fashion, the extra or aberrant passages in all the extant manuscripts in

a series of sixty-five appendixes. It completed the aim of Aby Warburg in 1914 to make available the Arabic and Latin versions of the text, with a translation in a modern European vernacular. Pingree's connection with the Warburg Institute was close: he held a Saxl Visiting Professorship there, and contributed several articles to the Institute's journal, including one in which he ventured into the field of art history, making some acute observations about the interpretation of Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1981).

David was unstinting in the help that he provided to other scholars. Not only did he collaborate fruitfully with many of them (as the joint editions mentioned above attest), but he also carefully read typescripts before they were sent to the press, and made invaluable comments in his economic, but minuscule, handwriting. Above all, he wished to preserve for posterity the scientific products of the past, by making known the contents of Sanskrit manuscripts (*Census of the Exact Sciences in Sanskrit*, [1970–94], the Jyotisa MSS in the Library of the Wellcome Institute [London, 2004], and the establishment of the American Committee for South Asian Manuscripts, dedicated to cataloguing the manuscripts and texts in North American collections), and by ensuring that copies of these manuscripts were made.

David's papers (which include several editions of texts in many languages) and his reproductions of manuscripts will become available for future scholars by being deposited with the American Philosophical Society. His teaching and inspiration will live on in a legacy that encompasses several continents.

Elected 1975; Councillor 1980–83; Committee on Lewis Award 1980–88

CHARLES BURNETT

Professor of the History of Islamic Influences in Europe
The Warburg Institute

