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The 15th volume of the *Acta Historica Astronomiae* is at the same time the fifth collection of essays on the history of astronomy (*Beiträge zur Astronomiegeschichte, Band 5*), edited by the historians of astronomy W.R. Dick (Potsdam) and J. Hamel (Berlin). Besides a few short notices and book reviews, the book contains 11 major articles, which deal with astronomical topics covering the time from the 16th to the 20th centuries.

The first article, on the analysis and interpretation of historical horoscopes as a source of the history of science, is based on the inaugural lecture of its author, Günther Oestmann. After a general introduction, which deals with the principles of horoscope making, the author discusses the horoscope of Count Heinrich Ranzau (1526–1598), the Danish governor of Schleswig-Holstein, who was a friend of Tycho Brahe. Oestmann shows that the astronomical-mathematical basis of such a horoscope can be reconstructed and interpreted. However, it is hardly possible to gain an insight in the process how the interpretation of a horoscope was done in detail.

The second and third articles, by Franz Daxecker, deal with Athanasius Kircher and Christoph Scheiner, two catholic astronomers of the 17th century. Kircher's Organum Mathematicum is a calculating device that can be used in the fields of arithmetic, geometry, chronology, astronomy, astrology and others. The author provides extracts of the description of the Organum taken from a book by Caspar Schott, which deal with chronology and astronomy. A photograph of the Organum indicates that this tool consists of a set of tables glued on wooden or cardboard, but details of its contents and applications remain pretty obscure for the reader – a few elaborated examples would have been helpful. The second paper deals with the life of Christoph Scheiner SJ, the co-discoverer of sunspots (next to Galileo), after leaving Rome in 1633 – the year of the Galileo trial. Scheiner spent his later years in the Austrian and Bohemian (Jesuit) provinces, mainly in Vienna and Neisse (the present Nysa in Silesia, Poland), but no traces of further astronomical activity have survived, if they ever existed.

The fourth article, by Hans Gaab, is a very thoroughly researched biography of Johann Philipp von Wurzelbau (1651–1725), an merchant turned astronomer from Nuremberg. Wurzelbau started his activities at Christoph Eimmart's (the director of the painters' academy in Nuremberg) private observatory, and his first published work deals with observations of the great comet of 1680. Furthermore, he observed solar eclipses, Mercury transits, and determined the geographical latitude of Nuremberg. The article also contains a detailed description of Wurzelbau's observatory and its instruments.

The fifth paper, by Klaus-Dieter Herbst, deals with Gottfried Kirch's idea of founding an astronomical society – being a vehicle to publishing astronomical observations. Kirch (1639–1710) was a well-known astronomer and calendar manufacturer. Around 1700, Kirch was appointed first astronomer at the Brandenburg society of sciences, and director of the observatory that was to be established with the new Berlin Academy. Herbst shows that Kirch's religious attitude that converged on pietism was a driving force to establish a scientific society. However, the final failure of such a project is due to the emergence of the scientific journal *Acta Eruditorum*, issued since 1682 in Leipzig, which could serve as an outlet for the publication of astronomical data by Kirch and others, thus fulfilling an essential task of the projected academy. Kirch's occupation with the composition of calendars, which took most of his time, was another reason.

The following three shorter articles deal with 19th century astronomy. Peter Brosche describes an early visual photometer employed by Johann Gottfried Köhler (1745–1801) in Dresden, Alberto Meschiari edits and comments letters by Franz Xaver von Zach (1754–1832) to the physicist Gerbi in Pisa and the librarian Pozzetti at Bologna, and Karin Reich describes and edits Bessel's book critique of Gauss' Theoria Motus.

How many one-time astronomers have to earn their living in other ways, become distracted from astronomical research, and vanish from the horizon of astronomical history? In the ninth paper, Hans-Joachim Ilgauds has traced the life of Georg Koch (1851–1905), who started his career as an astronomer at Leipzig Observatory in 1874. Later Koch worked at Hamburg Observatory, and then became an employee at the statistical office in Kiel, and finally director of the statistical office of the Hamburg revenue service. He was a collaborator for the statistical yearbook of German cities, and also contributed to a book investigating the causes and the impact of the cholera epidemic of 1892 in Hamburg.

The last two papers deal with the circumstances of the discovery of the first Near-Earth asteroid (433) Eros. It was recorded on photographic plates taken at the Urania-Sternwarte Berlin and at Nice Observatory. The Berlin observer Witt announced the discovery, and only later, the Nice observer Charlois published a position of Eros. While all plates have disappeared, the authors Hans Scholl and Lutz D. Schmadel could prove that the Nice plate was poorly guided and Charlois would have been unable to discover the object. From a copy of the Berlin plate, published 50 years after the discovery by Witt's co-observer F. Linke, the exact position was determined, and the time of observation (which had not been published) was derived. The second article, by Lutz D. Schmadel, deals with the life of the Eros co-discoverer Felix Linke (1879–1959), who later worked in statistic offices, was a frequent writer of popular scientific articles, and later the editor of a journal, "Technik im Hotel", and author of a book of the same title.

As can be seen from the summaries given above, this collection of essays deals mainly with historical events that occurred in Germany and neighboring countries, and is focussed mainly on events in the 17th to 19th centuries. Except for the Eros article by Scholl and Schmadel, which is written in English, all contributions are written in German. The editors have taken care that generally a high standard was kept. The series appears to be a complement to the Journal for the History of Astronomy, in spite of the fact that its scope is somewhat narrower and somewhat less international. Of course, the use of the German language and the Germany-based small publishing company hampers a wide distribution of this series (but an all-English edition would turn away potential German readers). Nevertheless, it should be noted that English is not necessarily the "lingua franca" in all cultural fields, and students of the history of science should have at least a cursory knowledge of several languages at their command.

It would be nice to see that such a history of astronomy series would also be published in other countries, focussing on the historical events in these regions (French, Italian, Spanish – it should be mentioned that a series Istoriko-astronomicheskie issledovaniia has appeared since 1955 in Moscow). In any case, the editors should be congratulated in having established (with a lot of personal engagement) a flourishing book series. I hope that their venture may serve as an example for others.

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