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Die Universitäts-Sternwarte München im Wandel ihrer Geschichte

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This concise history of Munich Observatory, written by a staff member, is actually the second, enlarged and updated edition of a brochure that was based on a pair of articles in the now defunct journal *Die Sterne* (Vol. 68, 263 and 340, 1992).

First attempts to establish an observatory in Munich date back to 1759, when the Bavarian Academy of Sciences was founded and a topographic survey was begun; but these private attempts did not lead to a permanent installation. A more official interest arose when a topographic bureau was opened under French direction in 1801, and when the prince-elect Max IV Joseph planned a new land tax which required precise mapping. The collapse of the French rule also meant a collapse of the plans for the new observatory.

In 1816, however, things began to develop with an unprecedented speed. The astronomer and surveyor Johann Georg von Soldner was appointed to become observatory director, and king Max I Joseph gave the order to erect the new observatory, which was completed near the end of 1817. The location was chosen near the the village of Bogenhausen (now a suburb of Munich). It took a little longer to install the instrumentation; first observations started in early 1819.

Soldner's circle of friends comprised local instrument makers, including Fraunhofer and Reichenbach. With the former, he completed a *new apparatus for experiments on the nature of the light of the fixed stars*, a refractor of 10 cm aperture equipped with an objective prism. The study of sunlight, began by Fraunhofer, was now extended to the light of planets and fixed stars. Soldner also started a continuous meteorological record. But his name will always be remembered in the annals of science because of a short note, published in 1801 when he was still a student of Bode in Berlin, his *On the deviation of a light ray from its rectilinear motion by the attraction of a celestial body which it passes at short distance*. Soldner's last years were darkened by illness and enmities. Unfortunately the book does not tell anything about the notorious lunar observer Franz von Paula Gruithuisen, who was appointed professor of astronomy at Munich University in 1826.

Soldner died in 1833, and his position was taken by Johann von Lamont, who did pioneering astrometric measurements of Halley's comet, took up again Fraunhofer's and Soldners studies of stellar spectra, but then felt that he should concentrate on only a few studies (stellar positions, magnetic and meteorological measurements). In addition he installed a mechanical workshop in the observatory, where many of the instruments were built, and which exists till the present day.

After his death, a three-year vacancy of the director's chair was filled by the mathematician Ludwig Seidel. This was followed by the long reign of Hugo von Seeliger, beginning in 1882 and only ending in 1924. He is most famous for his studies in stellar statistics and other theoretical fields, but he was also active in observational work, including the time service.

The following 25 years saw two less known directors, Alexander Wilkens and Wilhelm Rabe. After the latter's dismissal, Erich Schoenberg, a theoretician from Breslau, took over in 1949. Numerous changes had happened since Seeliger's time: the integration of a private solar observatory in Herrsching in 1932, which was dissolved in 1946, the transformation into a "University

Observatory" in 1937/8, major damages through air raids in 1944, and finally, in 1949, the integration of the Wendelstein Solar Observatory, founded by the *Deutsche Versuchsanstalt für Luftfahrt* in 1941, as one of a series of stations to monitor solar activity.

Schoenberg's retirement in 1955 was followed by an interim time of six years. In the following 21 years, Peter Wellmann re-shaped the observatory by building a research group on stellar atmospheres, one of the fields in which the observatory still excels.

In the era of Rolf Kudritzki (1982 – 1998), these studies were further pursued and extended. An overview of the Observatory's actual research fields, research installations, its development of modern instrumentation, as well as its activities in public outreach (dating back to TV programmes by R. Kühn in the 1950s which the reviewer still vividly recalls) conclude this historic overview. The appendix lists the Observatory's publication series, statistics of recent publications and their impact, as well as post statistics of the institute – the booklet may also have been written to serve as a lobbying tool for governmental and private sponsorship.

Häfner has succeeded in writing a concise sketch of the history of a an important German astronomical institution. It contains a lot of citations from original sources, printed in italics (without indicating their exact locations – this is understandable since Häfner did not want to write an "academic" article full of references and footnotes), as well as a useful bibliography.

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