Jürgen G. H. Hoppmann (ed.)

MELANCHTHON'S ASTROLOGY

ArsAstrologica. Görlitz

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The path of stellar science at the time of humanism and the Reformation

Catalogue for the exhibition
from 15 September to 15 December 1997
in the Reformation History Museum Lutherhalle Wittenberg
text edition revised and revised according to current spelling rules

ARSASTROLOGICA

dedicated to Hans Hoppmann

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MARTIN TREU

Introduction

On the occasion of his 500th birthday, recent Melanchthon research has placed considerable emphasis on the fact that the "Praeceptor Germaniae" was far more than the systematiser of Lutheran theology. His field of work extended to Latin, Greek and Hebrew philology, to historiography and poetry. Melanchthon's efforts in mathematics and astronomy also gained increasing attention in science. At the intersection of these two fields of science lay another field of activity for the Wittenberg professor, which today, however, can by no means be considered undisputed: Astrology.

It was already controversial in Melanchthon's time. Martin Luther in particular did not think much of the interpretation of the stars and expressed this drastically. Nevertheless, he at least tolerated Melanchthon's efforts. Conversely, Melanchthon in turn focused on astrology as a Christian science. For even if new impulses flowed to astrology in the times of Renaissance humanism, there had been a theological tradition since High Scholasticism at the latest, which understood astrology to be perfectly compatible with the Christian faith.

According to the biblical understanding of the world, the starry sky formed part of God's good creation, which was oriented towards man. Man, in turn, as the image of God, could certainly be understood as a "small world" that stood in connection with the "big" one of the cosmos. The only thing that had to be warded off was the danger of a blindly ruling fate, which offered man no room for manoeuvre and at the same time limited the theological insight of God's omnipotence. Within this framework, Melanchthon tried to go his own way when he thought that the stars conveyed an inclination, but not a compulsion.

The influence of astrology in German Protestantism is a complex and little explored topic. Since the Enlightenment at the latest, it has been condemned as charlatanry or, at best, self-deception. It is hardly fitting that even serious daily newspapers still print horoscopes today. According to a recent survey, only 4 per cent of the population believe in the accuracy of horoscopes, but only 40 per cent of those questioned can claim with absolute certainty that astrology has nothing to do with anything (study by the BAT Institute 1997).

The exhibition "Melanchthon's Astrology" cannot and does not want to comment on these contemporary figures. Rather, its task is to document the conditions in the time of the Reformation and confessionalisation. This accompanying volume is also committed to this task. However, the difficulties that arose in terms of content and methodology were so considerable that one should actually point out the provisional nature of the undertaking in the subtitle. The exhibition and accompanying volume represent a first attempt to approach the subject in a variety of ways. Figuratively speaking, it is not possible to offer a fully worked-out topography, but only a first outline, which must be followed by further detailed work. Nevertheless, the topic seems to be important enough and the associated material of such considerable significance that this first exploratory drilling had to be dared. In a hitherto unique way, it required outside help.

Without Jürgen G. H. Hoppmann, neither the exhibition nor the accompanying volume would have come about. As curator of the project, the Berlin

astrologer and physiotherapist has worked tirelessly for "Melanchthon's Astrology" and overcome many an obstacle. His name therefore rightly appears on the accompanying volume as editor. Thanks are also due to Edeltraud Wießner, the long-time director of the Melanchthon House in Wittenberg, who established the contacts to Berlin and laid the foundation for a fruitful collaboration. The abundance of lenders required a separate section (cf. Acknowledgements p.108ff.). Without them, as well as the sponsors, the exhibition would not have been possible. The 28 contributors to the present volume deserve special thanks. In their diversity, even disparity, they ideally embody the challenges and problems of the topic. It is no coincidence that both advocates and opponents of astrology have their say in the accompanying volume, as do renowned experts and amateurs. This corresponds to the state of affairs of "star science" in the 16th century and its effects. The controversies within the anthology will undoubtedly be followed by controversies among the readers. This is quite intentional, as long as it remains clear what is to be read in the following: an interim report, a snapshot on the way to better understanding and final judgement. Nothing more, but nothing less either.

Jürgen G. H. Hoppmann will make his experiences from the exhibition project useful for contemporary astrology in a book to be published at the end of 1997 under the title "Astrologie der Reformationzeit", Clemens-Zerling-Verlag, Berlin. We expressly recommend reading it here, not least because the contrast clarifies the aim of our project.

In a letter to Veit Dietrich in Nuremberg of October 1543, dealing with the Last Supper controversy between Luther and the Swiss, Melanchthon concluded that the ultimate cause of the controversy was the ominous conjunction between Mars and Saturn. But this was precisely why pious and learned people had to try to mitigate the influence of the stars so as not to let the conversation break down (CR5, 209). Even if one may have doubts about the analysis with Luther, the goal might still be worth striving for today.

Wittenberg, July 1997

MARTIN TREU Director of the Luther Hall and Melanchthon House

EDELTRAUD WIEßNER

Foreword

"What would it be like if knowledge of the movement of celestial bodies were, say, unknown throughout Europe? ... The access to perfection in science was opened by many intellectual and studious men like Purbach, ... Cusanus, ... Regiomontanus, Copernicus. By their spiritual acumen and resourcefulness ... they illuminated the whole field of science."

Words of an outstanding spirit, a man who worked as a reformer, universal scholar and "Praeceptor Germaniae" at the Wittenberg "Leucorea" from 1518 to 1560 and whose 500th birthday we celebrate this year.

Philipp Melanchthon, born in Bretten on 16 February 1497 and died in Wittenberg on 19 April 1560, is the subject of this catalogue for the special exhibition "Melanchthon's Astrology - The Way of the Star Sciences at the Time of Humanism and Reformation".

When Melanchthon left Heidelberg University in 1512 to continue his studies in Tübingen, he came into close contact with Johannes Stoeffler, the professor of mathematics and astronomy there, and was significantly influenced by him. Melanchthon gained his mathematical and astronomical knowledge through this man. This also applies to his belief in astrology, which is reflected not only in his letters but also in some of his works. For example, in his "Initia doctrinae physicae", which appeared in 1549, he dealt with the universe and the heavenly bodies. For him, astrology was not only a prophetic part of astronomical science, it was also a part of physics, as this work by Melanchthon shows.

During his time in Wittenberg, Melanchthon studied Ptolemy's "Tetrabiblos" (Four Books on the Star Sciences) in depth and gave lectures on it between

1535 and 1545. He argued that astrology brought great benefits to life and was a true science. Thus the mathematicians and astrologers Georg Joachim Rheticus and Erasmus Reinhold found full support and encouragement at Melanchthon's Wittenberg University. Erasmus Reinhold even wrote the birthday horoscopes of Melanchthon's children. Such "nativitates", as they were called at the time, were also drawn up by Melanchthon for his friends, students and relatives. His intensive study of astrology enabled him to judge the constellation of the stars and make appropriate deductions. Thus Melanchthon himself never set out on a journey without first consulting the stars. Since his birth horoscope stated "avoid the water", he never accepted an invitation or a calling (e.g. to Denmark or England) that required him to cross large waters.

The author of the exhibition, Mr. Jürgen G. H. Hoppmann, through his international connections with astrologers and scientists, has been able to attract authors for his catalogue and to procure exhibits for the exhibition.

May the special exhibition and the catalogue contribute to bringing the aspect of astrology in Melanchthon's life more to the fore for once, and thus bring the visitor and reader closer to us not only the person, but also the time in which he lived, in purely human terms.

Photo credit:

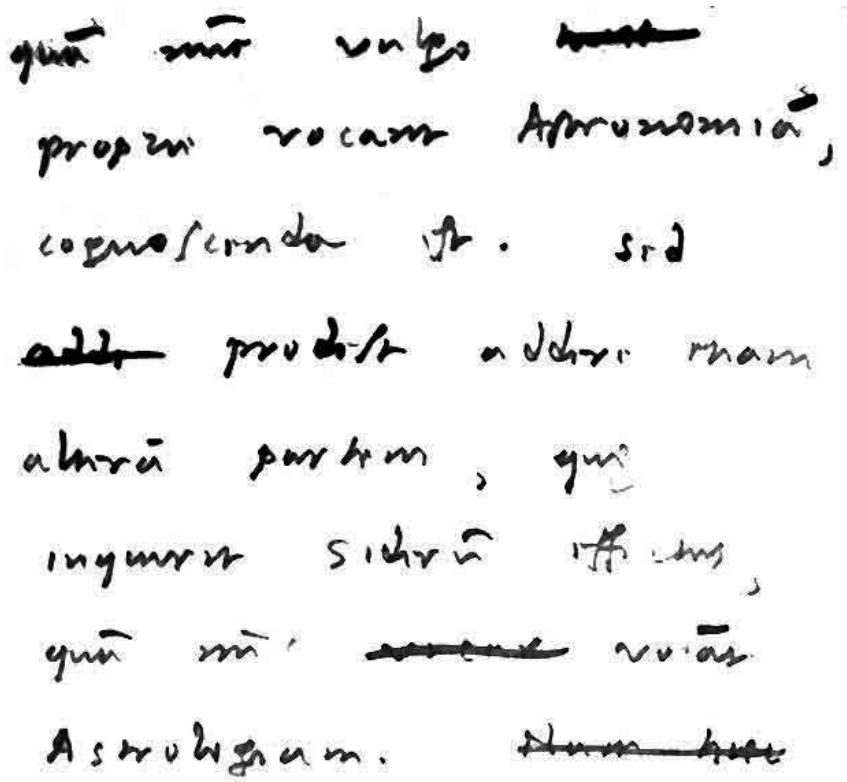
Lucas. Cranach d. J.: Portrait of Philipp Melanchthon, Woodcut, made 1550 (Melanchthonhaus Bretten)

Editor's note:

Edeltraud Wießner, a graduate historian, was museum director for over two decades, first of the Stadtgeschichtliches Museum and from 1978 until the end of 1993 of the Melanchthonhaus Wittenberg. She was then curator of this institution until the end of 1996. She edited parts 1 to 5 of the series of publications of the Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Wittenberg. In relation to the exhibition theme, the second volume is particularly interesting: Die weisse Frau im Wittenberger Schloss - Sagen und Geschichten aus dem Kreis Wittenberg, Wittenberg 1970.

WOLF-DIETER MÜLLER-JAHNCKE

Magister Philippus and Astrology a small collection of quotations



The first is [astronomy], from which we learn, as it were, the time of the orbits of the sun and moon and the other stars, their position among themselves and how they look at the earth. But the other [astrology], by which we learn the changes that arise in bodies from the positions of the heavenly bodies, we learn through the natural qualities of the heavenly bodies. (Unum, quod primum ordine est, et potestate, quo deprehendimus quodlibet tempore motus Solis et Lunae et aliorum siderum, eorumque positus inter sese, aut spectantes terram. Alterum vero, quo mutationes, quae efficiuntur in corporibus, quae congruunt ad illos positus, consideramus per naturales qualitates siderum. (1)

... since I admire this wonderful harmony of the heavenly bodies with the lower, this order and harmony reminds me that the world was not created by chance, but according to divine will. (... cum hunc mirificum consensum corporum coelestium et inferiorum contemplor, ipse me ordo et harmonia admonet, mundum non casu ferri, sed regi divinitus.) (2)

And so I believe that it is an ancient truth that the signs of the changes in the lower matter often depend on the position of the star. This some believe more, others less. (Et arbitror vetustissimam hanc fuisse Sapientiam, insignes materiae inferioris mutationes multas referra ad Siderum positus, qua in re alii plura, alii pauciora scrutati sunt.) (3)

But it is true that through the position of the stars the temperaments are guided and changed. (Verum est autem, stellarum positu gubernari et variari temperamenta.) (4)

... 60 years ago my father had my horoscope done. He got it from the Palatine mathematician and highly gifted man Hassfurt, his friend. In this prediction it was described that my way north would be dangerous and that I would be shipwrecked in the Baltic Sea. I often wondered why I, born near the hills of the Rhine, should fear danger in the Arctic Ocean. But I would not go there if called to Britain or Denmark, for I feared fate, even though I am not a stoic. (..., Ante sexaginta annus meus pater describit Genethliam; curavit a Palatini Mathematico viro ingenioso Hasfurto, amico suo. In ea praedictione scriptum est, intinera me ad Boream periculosa habiturum esse, et me in mare Baltico naufragium facturum esse. Saepe miratus sum, cur mihi ratio in collibus Rheno vicinis praedixerit pericula in Arcto Oceano. Nec volui eo accedere vocatus in Britanniam et in Daniam.

Metuo tamen fata, etiamsi non sum Stoicus.) (5)

Philip to Schöner. The hour of Luther's birth, which Philo investigated, Carion transforms to the ninth hour. The mother, however, said that Luther was born in the middle of the night (but I think she was mistaken). I myself prefer another nativity and this one also prefers Carion, although it is unpleasant, because of the place of Mars and the conjunction in the houses [at] 5°, which is a great conjunction with the Ascendant. By the way, in whatever hour he is born, this miraculous position in Scorpio cannot produce a contentious man. (Philippus ad Schonerum Genesim Lutheri quam Philo inquisiuit transtulit Carion in horam 9. Mater enim dicit Lutherum natum esse ante dimidium noctis {sed puto eam fefelli}. Ego alteram figuram praefero et praefert ipse Carion Etsi quoque haec est mirrifica propter locum Mars et Saturn in domos 5° quae habet coniunctionem magnam cum ascendente Caeterum quacunque hora natus est hac mira Saturn in Scorpio non potuit non efficere uirum acerrimum.) (6)

Photo credit:

Manuscript of the Initia doctrinae physicae: (Translation of the editor): »... the part through which he transmits the movements of the stars, which is now generally called... astronomy, must be learned. But it is useful to add another part through which he examines the effects of the stars, which is now called astrology.« (Leipzig University Library, manuscript 0358X, 52v)

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1 CR (Corpus Reformatoricum), Bretschneider, C.G. (Hrsg.), Schleswig 1852, S. 10-11 2 CR 10 (1842), S. 263 3 Initia doctrinae physicae, Philipp Melanchthon, Wittenberg 1578, S. 9 4 Melanchthon (wie Anm. 3), S. 82 5 CR 9 (1842), Sp. 188-189 6 Cod. Monac. lat. 27003, Bayerische Staatsbiliothek

Editor's note:

Prof. Dr. Wolf-Dieter Müller-Jahncke, long-time curator of the German Pharmacy Museum in Heidelberg, has headed a private research institute on the history of pharmacy since July 1997. The following of his publications should be mentioned: Magie als Wissenschaft im frühen 16. Jahrhundert, Marburg 1973; Astrologisch-magische Theorie und Praxis in der Heilkunde, Wiesbaden 1984; Kostbarkeiten aus dem Deutschen Apotheken-Museum, Berlin 1993; Philipp Melanchthon und die Astrologie -Theoretisches und Mantisches. In: Melanchthon Prize Melanchthon's Initia Manuscript 3, Stefan Rhein (ed.), Bretten 1997.

HEINRICH KÜHNE

Wittenberg and Astronomy

In contrast to Martin Luther, Philipp Melanchthon occupied himself with astronomy and astrology throughout his life. His father had a horoscope drawn up when he was born, and the humanist did the same when his children were born. He tried to interpret the course of the planets, comets, solar and lunar eclipses. It is truly astonishing how, under the traffic conditions of the time, the first information about the research results of Nicolaus Copernicus reached the small town of Wittenberg.

The numerous students from all the countries of Europe certainly demanded information and their opinion from their famous teachers. It is well known what a dismissive attitude Luther took to this and expressed himself solely as a 'theologian.

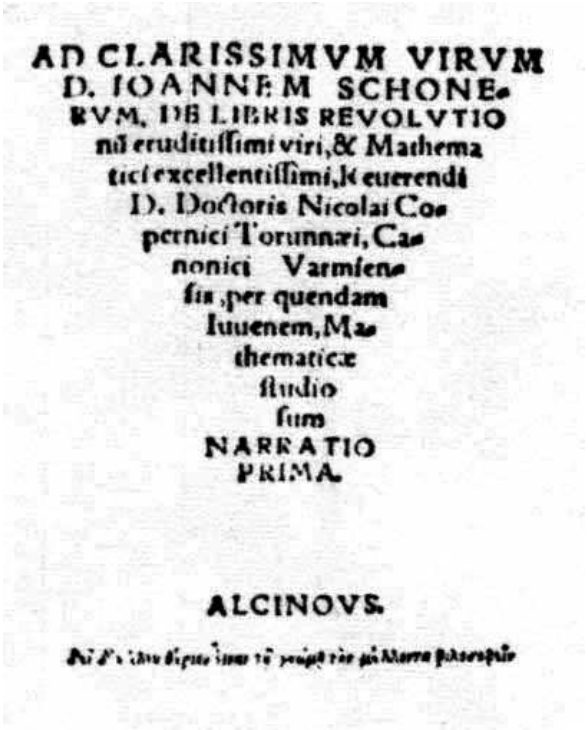
Melanchthon adopted Ptolemy's astrological opinion and his geocentric 'world view'. In doing so, he also initially opposed the new findings of the canon in Frombork (Frauenburg). Melanchthon wrote the preface to several mathematical and astronomical books, here we may only recall editions of Ptolemy, Purbach (Peuerbach), Schöner, Stifel, Regiomontanus and others. In his inaugural address "Praefation in arithmeticen" from 1536, Georg Joachim von Lauchen, who called himself Rheticus after his native Rhaeticon (Vorarlberg), modestly says that he would only lecture at the repeated suggestion of his teachers and that he had accepted the second professorship of mathematics at the alma mater. (1)

Rheticus (1514-1576) had studied here and in Zurich before finally coming to Wittenberg. He then stayed in Nuremberg, where he found a knowledgeable astronomer and teacher in Johann Schöner (1477-1547). For him, Melanchthon had pushed through an additional second professorship for mathematics at the Senate; he was 23 years old when he took over this position. Melanchthon had obtained a longer leave of absence for his favourite pupil so that he could make the journey to Copernicus in Frombork. Somehow, the great humanist was certainly tempted to learn more about the canon's new teachings, and no one was better suited to do so than the young mathematician.

Rheticus made a diversion via Nuremberg and paid a brief visit to his former teacher Johann Schöner. In Frombork, the young scholar was warmly welcomed by Copernicus: Here he now stayed for almost two years, apart from a short stopover in Wittenberg in 1540. The scientific collaboration eventually developed into a close friendship and a close relationship of trust. Thus, after consultation with Copernicus, it came about that Rheticus, through his writing "De libris revolutionum ... Nicolai Copernici ... Narratio prima" (First Report ... on the Books of the Revolutions ... of Copernicus), which was published in Danzig in 1540 and printed in Basel one year later, Rheticus reported to the scientific world for the first time on the research results of the canon. Copernicus had

studied trigonometry in detail and his work on plane and spherical trigonometry "DE LATERIBUS ET ANGVLIS TRIANGULORUM" was printed in 1542 by the famous Bible printer Hans Lufft in Wittenberg. The original before me understandably has neither the name of the publisher nor a signet of the same.

In this context, it is worth recalling the university professor Titius, who said in a commemorative speech on Melanchthon's 2ooth anniversary in 1760: "No book was printed in Wittenberg without Melanchthon's advice or assistance. Todestag 1760 said: "No book was printed in Wittenberg without Melanchthon's advice or aid." (2)
So it is not surprising that Copernicus' famous work: "De revolutionibus orbium coelestium", which he had begun in 1515 and finished around 1530, did not appear in Wittenberg. It was only through the efforts of his friends and not least Rheticus that the canon agreed to hand over the work to the public. Rheticus had made a copy and wanted to have it published in the famous printing workshop in Wittenberg, but the Senate is said to have rejected it, so that it was then published in Nuremberg by Johann Petrejus (Petreins) in 1543. The preface and the change of title by the Nuremberg theologian Andreas Osiander (1498-1552) angered the Fromborker's friends and not least Rheticus. A narrative account gives the following situation: "With joy the canon Jerzy Donner noticed this, he bent over the sick man (Copernicus) and said in a strong voice: 'I bring you, beloved doctor, a joyful message. A messenger scame from Georg Joachim Rheticus and brought the first copy of your printed work De revolutionibus orbium coelestium, still almost moist and redolent of printer's ink. At the same time your work was sent to eminent scholars all over the world.'" (3)


AD CLARISSIMVM VIRVM
D. IOANNEM SCHONE-
RVM, DE LIBRIS REVOLVTIO
nū eruditiſſimi viri,& Mathema
tici excellentiſſimi,Reuerendi
D. Doctoris Nicolai Co-
pernici Torunnæi, Ca-
nonici Varmienſis, per quendam
Iuuenem, Ma-
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NARRATIO
PRIMA.

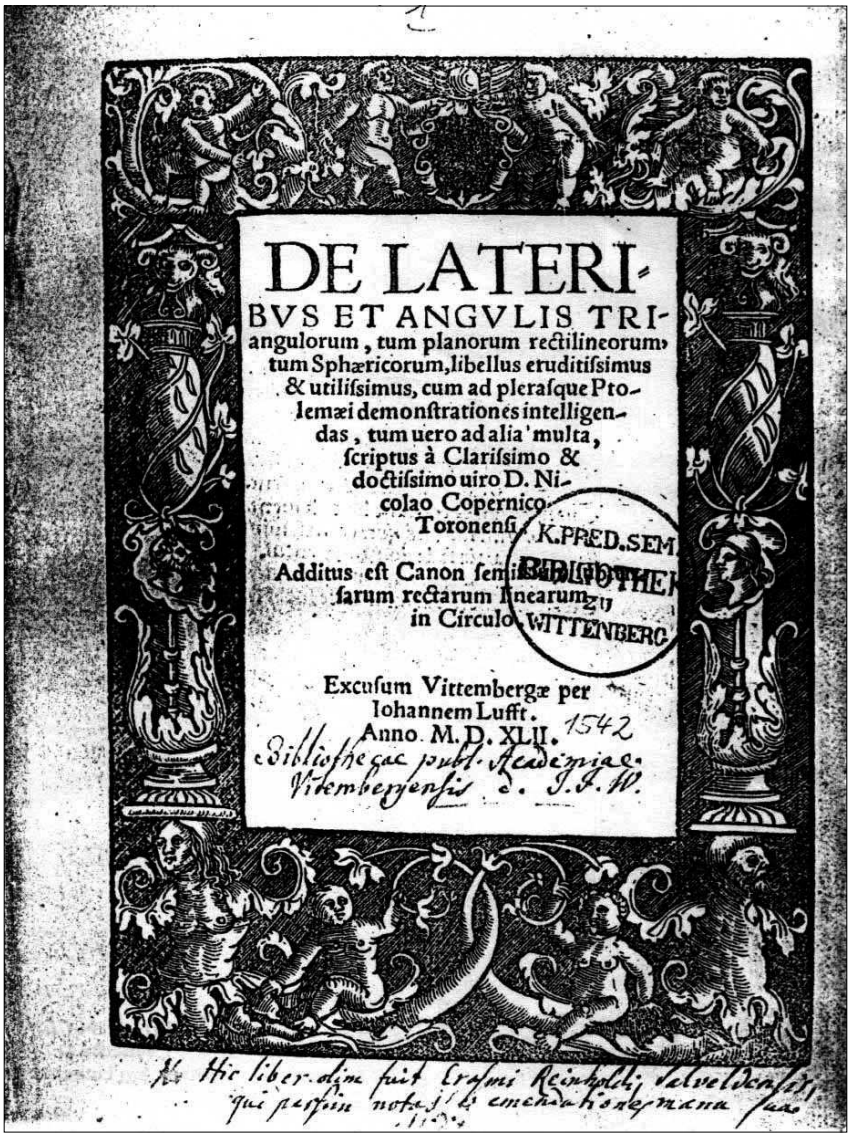
ALCINOVS.

With this, Rheticus had done his most important work. He had no interest in teaching in Wittenberg under these circumstances and went to Leipzig and then to Krakow. While the Catholic camp remained quiet at first, the Wittenbergers attacked the famous work, and in 1541 Melanchthon even demanded

state intervention. Only in the last years of his life did he change his mind and declare: "What would it be like if the knowledge of the motion of the heavenly bodies, for example, were unknown throughout Europe?... The access to perfection in science was opened by many intellectual and studious men, such as Peurbach, Cusanus, Regiomontanus, Copernicus. They enlightened the whole field of science by their intellectual acumen and resourcefulness."

Melanchthon's son-in-law, the university professor Caspar Peucer (1525-1602), also flatly rejected the new doctrine in his textbook on astronomy published in 1551. But within the scholars at the alma mater, there was a different opinion. Mathias Lauterbach, for example, once wrote to Rheticus in Leipzig: "We will love Copernicus and defend him against the attacks and ill-will of the ill-willed." (4)

Erasmus Reinhold (1511-1553), a student of Rheticus,



calculated new planetary tables as a mathematics professor at Wittenberg University, which were based on the Copernican foundation. They appeared in 1551 under the name "Prutenicae tabulae coelestium motuum" ("Prussian Tables of Celestial Movements"). They were so called because Duke Albrecht of Prussia (1490 - 1568) financed their publication and printing. Further publications came out in 1571 and 1584; they dominated computational astronomy until Kepler.

Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) came to Wittenberg to continue his studies here, which he began in Leipzig and continued in Rostock after leaving Wittenberg. In 1599 he came here once more and lived in the Melanchthon House in Collegienstraße until he set off on his journey to Prague to visit Emperor Rudolf II. It would be too much to go into detail here about his scientific work in Prague and that of his colleague

Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), the famous discoverer of the primordial laws of planetary motion. It should be mentioned here that the famous astronomer was shortlisted for a position as mathematics professor here. In 1611, a report said: "If then Johannes Keplerus, who is otherwise famous to us for his skill, cannot be obtained" 5. Presumably, the upper consistory in Dresden, which had the right of co-determination, rejected Kepler.

Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) had escaped from the monastery in Naples in 1575 and, after being thrown into prison in Geneva, came to Wittenberg via Marburg. From 1586 to 1588 he lectured at the University of Wittenberg, presenting himself as a convinced follower of the Copernican doctrine. On his departure from the city on the Elbe, he wrote a long poem in which he praised the high standard of education at the alma mater and mentioned the students from all the countries of Europe that he found here. In his books, he put forward a number of theses that were ahead of his time and were only confirmed by later astronomical discoveries. With him, the heliocentric system became the starting point of a new natural philosophy from an initially isolated astronomical doctrine.

In the meantime, the Wittenberg scholars were eager to carry out celestial observations on the ramparts from an observation point. In 1587, this aroused the displeasure of the fortress commander, who managed to get the Saxon Elector Christian I (15861591) to order the astronomers to find another place for their observations. Ambrosius Rhode was taken instead of Kepler. He had been a pupil and collaborator of Brahe and successfully continued his teacher's thoughts at the Leucorea. An interesting scholar was the professor of mathematics, Johann Prätorius (1537 - 1616), he was a direct opponent of astrology and the belief in comets. Of some importance was the scholar Valentin Otto, who was only here for a short time, but completed the great trigonometric work of Rheticus. Mention should be made of Johann Friedrich Weidler, whose history of astronomy has been of the greatest value up to our time.

Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni (1756 - 1827), jurist and physicist, collected meteorites all over Europe and proved that

they are of cosmic origin. Johann Gottfried Galle, who was born in the Dübener Heide and lived from 1812 to 1910, came from a pitch-smouldering family. He attended the Wittenberg Gymnasium, studied in Berlin and, after receiving important documents from the French astronomer Lerrier, discovered the planet Neptune on 23 September 1846.

Finally, I would like to mention the Zeiss Small Planetarium with 44 seats, which was inaugurated in the local Rosa Luxemburg School on 1 September 1987. 6 Furthermore, the enterprising Berlin music publisher Rolf Budde, with great effort and the use of considerable financial means, has arranged for the reconstruction (from 1995 onwards, editor's note) of a tower-like observatory house, as it was once on the property of Wittenberg university professor Johann Jacob Ebert (1780-180). d. Ed.) of a tower-like observatory house, just as the Wittenberg university professor Johann Jacob Ebert (1737-1805) had once erected it on his property at Bürgermeisterstraße 16 in Wittenberg.

Figure 1: Wittenberg at the time of Rheticus, Cranach workshop around 1558
Figure 2: Frombork (Frauenburg)
Figure 3: Title page of Rheticus‹ first report on Copernicus‹ world system.
Figure 4: Title page »De lateribus et angvlis triangulorum...«, Copernicus, 1542 by Hans Lufft in Wittenberg
Figure 5: Title page of the »Prutentine Tables« by Wittenberg University Professor Erasmus Reinhold (1511-1553)
Figure 6: Tycho Brahe (1546-1601)
Figure 7: Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) was rejected as a professor of mathematics at Wittenberg University by the senior consistory in Dresden.

Photo credit:
1) Author’s archive
2) From: W. Strube: Canon and Astronomer. Berlin 1988, p. next to 273
3) From: as 2 before p. 337
4) Library of the Preacherseminar Wittenberg
5) From: Wollgast / Marx: Johannes Kepler. Leipzig/Jena/Berlin 1976, p.92
6) From: like 5, p.36
7) like 5, p. 52

Notes:

1 C.R.XI.284 2 Memoria Melanthonis. Wittenberg 1760 3 Ludvrik Hieronimus Morstin: Polnischem Boden entsprossen. In: »POLEN« Nr. 2. Warschau 1973 4 Gerhard Harig: Die Tat des Kopernikus. Leipzig/Jena/Berlin 1965, S.5o 5 J. Chr. Grohmann: Annalen der Univ. Wittenberg. Meißen 1801, S. 192 6 »Freiheit“, Kreisausgabe Wittenberg vom 25.8.1987

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Editor's note:

For decades, the historian Heinrich Kühne directed the Museum of City History in the Melanchthonhaus Wittenberg. Of his numerous publications, only the most recent are mentioned here: Die Geschichte des Hauses Bürgermeisterstraße 16 und seiner Bewohner in Wittenberg, Wittenberg 1994 - Vom Wittenberger Rechtswesen, von Scharfrichtern und ihren Tätigkeiten, Wittenberg 1995.