

Heinrich Christian Schumacher – from lawyer to astronomer

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Heinrich Christian Schumacher together with Friedrich Georg Wilhelm Struve and Thomas Clausen are astronomers who were born in Schleswig-Holstein and who were connected with Tartu University in the XIX century.

We have tried to explain why, after having graduated from Christianeum – the gymnasium in Altona where Struve's father was the principal – and after having studied law in Kiel and Göttingen, of all universities in Europe he chose Tartu, where he became interested in astronomy. Back in Altona he could start his work neither in the Rentenammer nor as an extraordinary professor of astronomy in Copenhagen university, for old professor Thomas Bugge refused to leave the post. Schumacher spent some time observing the circumpolar stars in Repsold's observatory in Hamburg since Repsold had become his close friend. After that he received a certain sum of money from Danish government with the requirement that he use it for studying astronomy during a year. So he spent the next year visiting the European observatories together with Gauss and getting acquainted with leading astronomers of that time.

His next task consisted in helping the Mannheim observatory to a new life. In 1815 he was informed that Thomas Bugge had died, and the post of professor of astronomy in Copenhagen University was at last free for him.

At the same time he became interested in geodesy, perhaps under the influence of Carl Friedrich Gauss. The king accepted his plan, and the project *Den Danske Gradmaaling* got under way.

As if this task were not enough, Schumacher wrote to Gauss that the Danish minister of finances, Mösting, demanded that Schumacher found a weekly astronomical journal. This journal, "Astronomische Nachrichten", the oldest astronomical journal in the world, is being published even today.

In addition, Schumacher compiled a map of the Holstein dukedom and a map of the Hamburg region. The exact topographical map of Altona was also compiled by him.

In 1835 Schumacher started the measurements of the second pendulum in Guldstein castle with the objective to build the Danish metrological system.

His activities did not go unappreciated since the king raised him to the rank of a commander of the Dannebrog order. He was selected a member of more than 20 scientific societies, and in 1830 he was given the gold medal of the Royal Astronomical Society.

His last years were eclipsed by the political turmoil concerning the possession of Holstein and Schleswig. In addition, his benefactor king Frederick VI died in 1839 and though the new king showed some benevolence toward Schumacher, he still cut the sum for geodetical measurements by half.

All that influenced Schumacher's already weak health, and he died peacefully in 1850.

For us Estonians the importance of Schumacher is accentuated by the fact that he helped Thomas Clausen, the future director of the Tartu Observatory, to become an astronomer.