

Le Févre (or Le F | Encyclopedia.com

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(*b.* Lisieux, France, 9 April 1652[?]; *d.* Paris, France, 1706),

astronomy.

Le Févre's origins remain uncertain, although tradition has it that he started life as a weaver. Scholars have confused him with an instrument maker having the same surname. Not until the age of thirty did he appear in the French scientific community as the friend of a certain Father Pierre, an amateur astronomer slightly older than Le Févre who had studied humanities in Lisieux and was professor of rhetoric at the Collège de Lisieux in Paris. Father Pierre, an associate of Picard and of P. de La Hire, recommended his friend to Picard, who, after testing Le Févre's ability to calculate astronomical tables, assigned him the task of doing the calculations for the *Connaissances des temps*. Through Picard's influence and probably that of La Hire, Le Févre became a member of the Académie des Sciences a few months later. After Picard's death he continued the more pedestrian aspects of Picard's work by calculating astronomical tables, by publishing the *Connaissances des temps*, by making a few astronomical observations, and by assisting La Hire in surveying.

Soon after La Hire published his *Tabulae astronomicae...* (Paris, 1687), Le Févre accused him of stealing his astronomical tables and publishing them as his own. Le Févre's ill feeling toward his colleague and mentor smoldered until 1700, when it erupted again after La Hire's son, Gabriel-Philippe, had published *Ephemerides ad annum 1701* (Paris, 1700). In the original preface to the *Connaissances des temps* for 1701, Le Févre, who probably resented not having been named the Academy's official publisher of ephemerides, let his anger flame and treated the La Hires rudely. The French government, which took offense at this, had the original preface replaced by one praising the *Connaissances des temps* from Le Févre to the Académie des Sciences. In 1701 the government succeeded in having Le Févre excluded from the Academy for having failed to attend meetings regularly, as required by the rules. During the remaining few years of his life Le Févre seems to have continued publishing ephemerides under the pseudonym of J. de Beaulieu.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Original Works. Le Févre published the *Connaissances des temps* from 1685 to 1701 and may also have published it during 1682-1684. J.-J. Le Français de Lalande, *Bibliographie astronomique* (Paris, 1803), pp. 341-343, gives the preface to the *Connaissances des temps* that Le Févre was obliged to delete. Le Févre also published *Ephémérides pour les années 1684 et 1685, calculees pour le meridien de paris...* (Paris, 1684). The following, published under the pseudonym J. de Beaulieu, may be by Le Févre: *Ephemerides des mouvements célestes depuis l'an de grace 1702...* (Paris, 1702); *Ephemerides des mouvements célestes depuis l'an 1702 jusqu'à 1715...* (Paris, 1703), republished with the title *Eph....1703...1714...*; and *état du ciel pendant l'année 1706...* (Paris, 1706). Lalande, *op. cit.*, p. 349 identifies Beaulieu as being Charles Desforges; yet it seems reasonable to identify Beaulieu as Le Févre if a remark of the *Journal des sçavans* for 1703, p.274, is interpreted in the context of the confrontation between Le Févre and the La Hires. Le Févre's MSS are at the Académie des Sciences.

II. Secondary Literature. Amédée Tissot, *Étude biographique sur Jean Le Févre...* (Paris, 1872), gives the most complete biographical survey; M. J. Delacourtié, "L'astronome Jean Le Févre," in *Bulletin de la Société historique de Lisieux* (1951-1952), 43-48, accurately summarizes Tissot's study. Both studies fail to give scholarly references, although Tissot states that he used Le Févre's MSS, which he had found in the archives of the Académie des Sciences. They confuse a certain Le Févre, "Ingénieur pour les instruments de mathématique," who appeared in the Paris scientific community around 1702 and whose activity continued well after Le Févre's death, with Le févre—Lalande and the *Journal des sçavans* (see its indexed table of contents) do not make this error. The *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences* for 1700, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1761), pp. 109-111, reports on the accuracy of Le Févre's tables—Tissot, *op. cit.*, p. 63, erroneously states that this occurred in 1703; the same work for 1686-1699 (Paris, 1733), p.74, gives an account of a fireball observed by Le Févre. Lalande, *op.cit.*, pp. 312-314, details Le Févre's activities during the period 1682-1685. Michaud, *Biographie universelle...*, XXIII (Paris, 1819), 546, gives a good account of Le Févre's life. Bonaventure d'Argonne's gossipy *Mélanges d'histoire et de littérature*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1725), I, 145, refers to Le Févre's humble origins. C. Wolf, *Histoire de l'observatoire de Paris...* (Paris, 1902), pp.221-222, mentions Le Févre in connection with the surveying of France. Lalande, *op. cit.*, pp. 341-344; J. Bertrand, *L'Académie des sciences et les académiciens* (Paris, 1869), pp. 55-58, 297-298; and *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences* for 1701 2nd ed. (Paris, 1743), pp. 113-114, document Le Févre's quarrel with the La Hires. *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences* for 1700, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1761), pp. 129-130, recounts that the Academy commissioned G.-p. de La Hire to draw up new astronomical tables. *Journal des scavanes* for 1702, pp.211-216, and for 1703, pp. 270-274 discusses ephemerides.

