Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers

Mayr, Simon

Born Ansbach, (Bavaria, Germany), 26 December 1624

Died Gunzenhausen, (Bavaria, Germany), 20 January 1573

As court mathematician, Simon Mayr was in charge of the Ansbach calendar, made the first telescopic observations of the Andromeda Galaxy, and computed tables of the mean periods of Jupiter's satellites more accurately than Galileo Galilei. Some sources state that his father, Reichart Mayr, was the mayor of Gunzenhausen, but most evidently Simon was from a poor family, as in 1586 he went to the Margrave's school for talented poor boys. This school was established to train poor young men for the ministry. He stayed there until 1601 when he was appointed mathematician to the Margrave of Ansbach and was sent to Prague to study with Tycho Brahe. After Brahe's death, he went to Padua to study medicine. Mayr returned to Germany in 1605 and was appointed mathematician and physician to the Margraves, Christian and Joachim Ernst, serving in that position for the rest of his life

An observatory was built for Mayr, but little is known about his instruments. According to Mayr's own account, he learned in 1609 from an artillery officer, Baron Hans Philip Fuchs, that a Dutchman had tried to sell him a telescope at the Frankfurt fair. Mayr grasped the concept and reproduced a telescope, which he used mainly to observe Jupiter. He claimed in a book printed in 1614, *Mundus Iovialis Anno M.DC.IX Detectus Ope Perspicilly Belgici* (The Jovian World, discovered in 1609 by means of the Dutch Telescope), that he had first observed Jupiter's moons in December 1609, a month before Galileo. Galileo fiercely accused Mayr of plagiarism. Disputes about the plagiarism case continued for centuries In a long treatise by J. Klug, Mayr was accused of plagiarism, while support for Mayr was presented by J. H. C. Oudemans and J. Bosscha. As a compromise, it was suggested by J. H. Johnson that Mayr probably saw the satellites of Jupiter before Galileo; however, he evidently did not comprehend their true nature until Galileo had published his account of their discovery and the explanation of their connection with the planet. Mayr discovered the variability in the magnitudes of Jupiter's satellites and gave them names Europa, Io, Ganymede, and Callisto—names that are still in use.

Mayr was an independent discoverer of M31, the Andromeda nebula. *Mundus Iovialis* contains his telescopic observations of our neighboring galaxy. Mayr also published on the comet in 1596 (C/1596 N1) and was among the first to observe the "new star" in 1604.

Mihkel Joeveer

Alternate name

Marius

Selected References

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Oudemans, J. A. C. and J. Bosscha (1903). "Galilée et Marius." *Archives néerlandaises des sciences exactes et naturelles*, 2nd ser., 8: 115-189