

Vorwort/Preface

Viennese Astronomy has a long standing tradition. When Vienna University was founded in 1365 astronomy as one of the medieval fine arts was considered in the very first curricular. The history of Viennese astronomy lectures can be traced back to 1385, when the campus was situated down town. In 1755 the Institute of Astronomy was formally founded and 1756 the University Observatory surmounting the building of the the "new" university hall was opened by Maria Theresia. Astronomers worked and lived in this place producing the scientific materials. Due to the growth of the city in the following decades professional sky observations were moved to the village of Währing to avoid the streetlights of Vienna. In 1892 Währing became a district of Vienna. Between 1874 and 1880 the present University Observatory was built by the architects Fellner and Helmer and the main instrument, the Great Refractor (aperture: 68 cm, focal length: 10.5 m) constructed by Howard Grubb was the largest optical telescope of the world. Even today it is still the 9th largest refracting telescope. But times have changed, and so have the important topics in astronomy and the methods to study them. An 80 cm telescope equipped with a CCD detector was installed in 2000 and a satellite communication station is part of the networks of the Canadian MOST, European CoRoT and BRITe space missions giving students access to modern techniques.

It was the aim of editors of this volume to pass the torch of knowledge how all this came about during the last 250 years to the young generation. To rescue from the depths of history how men and material have fought and evolved to become what it is nowadays: the Vienna Institute of Astronomy. The editors are grateful that the Austrian Academy of Sciences has provided the opportunity to commemorate the 250year anniversary in this place, which before belonging to the Academy was the University's main building, housing the first observatory. The editors are thankful to the members of the scientific community, who on the 2nd day of the commemoration event presented their scientific research during a meeting on historical perspectives which are printed here. The editors are indebted to Gudrun Wolfschmidt for the prosperous cooperation in the organization of the meeting and are grateful to the Austrian Academy of Sciences for financial support.

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