

Czech and German Astronomers at the Prague University

I. German Part of the Prague Universitas Carolino-Ferdinanda (1882–1920)

II. Deutsche Universität in Prag (1920–1939) and

III. Deutsche Karls-Universität in Prag (1939–1945)

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In 1882, the Prague University was split into two parts – Czech and German. The Clementinum Observatory became Astronomical Institute of the German part of the university. Karl Hornstein (1824–1882), director of the observatory, deceased at the end of 1882 and the position remained vacant. Ladislaus Weinek (1848–1913), his successor, arrived at Prague after studies in Vienna and praxis at Berlin and Leipzig. He spent also some time at the photographic laboratories in Schwerin. He took part at the German expedition to Kerguelen Islands to observe the Venus transit in 1874. His results published in *Nova Acta Leopoldina* opened him the possibility to collaborate with American and French institutes and to enter the professorship in Prague (1883). Together with Karl Friedrich Küstner (1856–1936) measured the polar motion in 1889–1891. Weinek is author of the first photographic lunar atlas, based on the pictures taken at the Lick Observatory and the Meudon Observatory. Other astronomical and meteorological measurements were carried out by Rudolf Spitaler, discoverer of comets, and Adalbert Prey.

They maintained contacts with the Czech Astronomical institute that has been founded in 1886 by professor August Seydler (1849–1891) and lead after his death by Gustav Gruss (1854–1922), spectroscopist and observer of variable stars.

Albert Einstein spent one and half year (1911–1912) in Prague where he obtained his first professorship of theoretical physics. He started to develop the fundamentals of general relativity theory here and among 11 papers he wrote during his stay in Prague, one paper deals with the light deflection in the gravitational field of Sun. Less is known that he visited in 1912 Erwin Finlay-Freundlich in Berlin and discussed with him the probability of alignment of three stars in Galaxy into one line, so that the effect of light deflection could be observed as a phenomenon, called now gravitational lensing. Thinking about other astronomical problems brought him also in contacts with Vladimír Heinrich, later director of the Astronomical Institute of the Czech part of the Prague University.

After the World War I, Clementinum observatory as a state institution was associated with the Czech Charles University, because František Nušl became director of the observatory and professor of astronomy at the university at the same time. The former Czech astronomical institute with its building and small observatory at the south slope of the Petřía Hill in Prague 5 was completely independent of the Clementinum observatory, even if both directors were in contact. The continuity of observations at the German institute was transferred to the Deutsche Universität in Prag with its observatory in Nakléřov in Erzgebirge.

One particular and interesting point in the history of astronomy in Prague represent the political refugees from their countries – Ivan Puluj, Erwin Finlay-Freundlich and Vsevolod Viktorovich Stratonov.

The last astronomical chapter of the Deutsche Karls-Universität in Prague is connected with the building activities and development of the Ondřejov Observatory during the WWII and with its director, professor Werner Schaub. The distance of more than half century will help, we hope, to see this period without any bias.