The Astronomer Wilhelm Tempel

In the second half of the 19th century Wilhelm Tempel ranked among the most popular research scientists because of his many discoveries in astronomy. (Prof. Dr. Dieter B. Herrmann, astronomy historian, Berlin)

Milestones of Tempel’s Life

1821 Born, grew up, went to school in Niedercunnersdorf (Saxony, Germany)
1837 Began apprenticeship as a lithographer in Meißen
1840 Began work as a lithographer in North Europe
1858 Purchased a telescope in Venice (Italy) and made first discoveries
1860 Worked as a lithographer and astronomer in Marseille (France)
1871 Teamed up with Schiaparelli, also an astronomer, in Milan (Italy)
1875 Became Director of the Royal Observatory Arcetri (Italy) until his death in 1889

Tempel’s Discoveries

Twelve comets, of which the following four are short period comets:
- 9P/Tempel 1, destination of Deep Impact
- 10P/Tempel 2
- 11P/Tempel-Swift-LINEAR
- 55P/Tempel-Tuttle, comet of the Leonids

Five minor planets:
- (64) Angelina
- (65) Cybele
- (74) Galatea
- (81) Terpsichore
- (97) Clotho

Many nebulae. His surveys of these laid the groundwork for future explanation. They are now known to be gaseous nebulae (made of gas and dust), star clusters and distant galaxies. His most spectacular discovery was the Merope Nebula (today NGC 1435) in the star cluster of the Pleiades.

Honors

1861 Paris Academy of the Sciences, Lalande Prize
1870 Two comet prizes from the Vienna Academy
1872 Knighted by Emperor Auguste Souverain of the Imperial Rose Order of Brazil
1879 Humbertus Prize from the Academy in Rome
1881 Paris Academy of the sciences Valz Prize
1881 Received commendation as an Associate of the Royal Astronomical Society of London
1898 Moon crater “Tempel” named by J. N. Krieger
1871 Commemorative Tempel Monument erected in Niedercunnersdorf
1898 Planet (3808) “Tempel” named by F. Boerngen
1990 “Wilhelm Tempel School” in Niedercunnersdorf

From his Observing Logs

The total eclipse on 18 July 1860
A lithography of the Orion Nebula
Comet Donati 1858 V
Coggia: The great comet of 1874
Moon eclipse on 1 June 1863