

Karl Wilhelm Dassdorf, *Description of the Exquisite Curiosities in the Electoral Seat of Dresden and Some of the Surrounding Regions* (1782)

Abstract

In his account of Dresden and its surroundings, Karl Wilhelm Dassdorf reports on one distinguished local resident: the farmer-astronomer [*Bauernastronom*] Johann Georg Palitzsch (1723–1788) who lived near Prohlis, today a district of Dresden. Palitzsch became famous for his 1758 sighting of Halley's Comet.

Dassdorf notes that Palitzsch had acquired his knowledge of astronomy through empirical observation, reading, and discourse [*Umgang*]. According to Dassdorf, he had a small botanical garden with exotic plants, which he named according to the Linnaean system of classification. Furthermore, the farmer possessed many useful mathematical instruments, a nice library, and a good natural history collection. Palitzsch was known by Prince Heinrich of Prussia and Prince Leopold of Brunswick, both of whom gave him gifts, and he also enjoyed the esteem of Augustus, Elector of Saxony (1526–1586). Dassdorf emphasizes that, despite his broad knowledge, wisdom, and reputation, Palitzsch remained an industrious and modest farmer who never neglected his duties.

Source

[...]

Not far from this knightly manor, somewhat closer to Dresden, there is a small village, Prohlis, which deserves a brief mention because of the famous farmer [Johann Georg] Palitzsch, who has a farm there. This worthy farmer combines a great deal of useful knowledge about astronomy and physics, which he has acquired through many years of observation, reading, and discourse, with the noble simplicity of his ways and the natural charm of his social manner. In addition to his orchards and meadows, he has a small botanical garden full of foreign plants whose names, according to the Linnaean classification system, are very familiar to him. He also possesses many useful mathematical instruments, a nice library, and a good natural history collection. During the last war, His Royal Highness Prince Heinrich of Prussia presented him with an excellent optical tube and the great work by [Carl] Linnaeus, and His Serene Highness Prince Leopold of Brunswick presented him with a superb [John] Dolland telescope and the great natural history by [Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de] Buffon. Both gracious princes, who deserve general veneration as enlightened heroes and philanthropists and whose favor, proven to me and still enduring, I will never forget, have shown him a great deal of benevolence as patrons. He also enjoys the inestimable good fortune to be personally known by our Best and Most Serene Elector and to be honored with His gracious praise. But one of the greatest merits of this man is in any case that, despite his manifold knowledge, which he seeks to increase daily, he never forgets the obligations of the sphere of activity in which Providence has placed him, and he is in fact one of the most industrious and active farmers, who cheers up his neighbors with his economic zeal and dedicates his sons entirely to the activities of rural life, whose blissfulness he completely and

ferently embraces. At the same time, he has an honest, very confiding heart that is open to all feelings of religion, friendship, and human kindness. He is one of my most worthy and trusted friends, whom I sincerely love and cherish for his unspoiled character and his noble intellectual curiosity. Only this prevents me from saying more in praise of a man who always deserves to be known by those observant travelers who seek not only beautiful paintings and delightful regions, but also good and estimable people.

[...]

Source: Karl Wilhelm Dassdorf, *Beschreibung der vorzüglichsten Merkwürdigkeiten der Churfürstlichen Residenzstadt Dresden und einiger umliegenden Gegenden*. Dresden: Walther, 1782, pp. 779–81. Available online at: <http://data.onb.ac.at/rep/103132E9>

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