



Four record holders of life expectancy of recent astronomical history – impressive but not typical. From left to right: J.J. Baeyer (1794–1885, 90.8 years); G.B. Airy (1801–1892, 90.4 years); J.G. Galle (1812–1910, 98.1 years); W. Huggins (1824–1910, 86.3 years).

careers at the age of 25 years. I calculated for them an average life span of 71.6 years. Comparative data for the general population (according to Imhof (6), page 462) indicate a life span of 60.74 years for 25-year-old males. In other words, astronomers seem to reach noticeably higher ages. Even if the criteria for the choice of data are sharpened and only German astronomers are surveyed, out of 33 cases, we get an average life span for astronomers of 69.6 years.

Some Additional Notes are Needed

(1) The use of data on astronomers published in personal registers or biographies implies that only the more famous and successful astronomers are counted. It is much more difficult to say something about all astronomers since the data of the less successful ones are not published anywhere.

(2) The difference in the corresponding life spans and life styles between social stratas of society and indeed between that of astronomers and the rest of the population was surely more pronounced in earlier centuries than it is today. Present-day astronomers are more or less integrated into the community of stress-plagued normal citizens. Thus they probably have the same high life expectancy (FRG 1984/86; 71.5 years for males; 78.1 for females) rates as in other developed countries such as the USA, Australia and other European states (7).

(3) The apparently special role played by astronomers in earlier times is relative. Life expectancies then showed constant high rates of dispersion and social criteria were very decisive factors. Even if the general life expectancy remained on a low level, surely there were

other professions and social groups (apart from astronomers) whose life cycles remained generally higher than that of the average person.

100 years ago an astronomer could count on becoming fairly old, but today it is perhaps not quite as worthwhile to choose this arduous profession just to attain this goal. Still, there are exceptions which confirm the rule.

(Translated by R. Guha)

References

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greatful to D. Fürst for drawing my attention to this source.

2. D. Wattenberg, Das Lebensalter der Astronomen. In: *Die Himmelswelt* 55 (1948), 68–69.
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4. Estate of J.H. Mädler. Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen.
5. D.B. Herrmann, *History of Astronomy from Herschel to Hertzprung*. Cambridge/England 1984.
6. A.E. Imhof, *Lebenserwartungen in Deutschland vom 17. bis 19. Jahrhundert*, Weinheim 1990.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 28.



Pluto and Charon

This drawing of Pluto and Charon was made by Hermann-Michael Hahn, science journalist and physicist in Cologne, Germany, on the basis of the description of the system in the December 1991 issue of the *Messenger*.

It shows the smaller Charon to the right behind Pluto, exiting the planet's shadow. The brighter area near Pluto's south pole is to the left and the darker north pole to the right.