

**A *Sammelband* including Tycho Brahe's work on his instruments, a commentary on Horace, and an early Christian argument against paganism.**

Brahe, Tycho. *Tychonis Brahe Astronomiæ instauratæ mechanica*. Nuremberg : Apud Leuinum Hulsium, 1602. 13 inches (330 mm), [108] pp.

Marcile, Théodore. *Theodori Marcilii professoris eloquentiæ Regii, Ad Q. Horatii Flacci opera omnia, quotidiana & emendatæ lectiones*. Paris: Bartholomæum Macæum, 1604. 13 inches (330 mm), 170 pp.

Minucius Felix, Marcus. *Marci Minutii Felicis Octavius: Geverhartus Elmenhorstius recensuit et librum commentarium adiecit*. [Hamburg?]: [s.n.], 1612. 13 inches (330 mm), [138] pp.

The chief work of the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), edited by Kepler, was published posthumously, but many of its component observations had been available earlier. The *Astronomiæ Instauratæ Progymnasmata*, or *Introduction to the New Astronomy* (1602–03), gives the locations of stars with an accuracy not previously attained, with estimates of the diameters of the various planets, and theoretical propositions regarding solar and lunar motion, as well as an account of the “Stella Nova,” or New Star, the first supernova to be recorded in the West. It was owing to Brahe’s chance observation of the star in November of 1572 that he is now remembered as an astronomer rather than as an alchemist.

The *Astronomicae Instauratae Mechanica*, originally published privately in 1598 (and here represented in its first published edition) shows how it was all done, revealing the nuts and bolts of astronomical technique. The book describes and illustrates Brahe’s various instruments, and his two observatories on the island of Hveen: Uraniborg, or Heavenly Castle (depicted on **Spreads 209–210**) and Stjerneborg, or Castle of the Stars (illustrated on **Spread 211**). Here a partially subterranean complex housed a *Globus Magnus Orichalcicus* (or Great Brass Globe) almost five feet in diameter, on which Brahe marked the positions of the stars (**Spread 199**) and the *Quadrans Muralis sive Tichonicus*, a mural quadrant for measuring the altitude at which celestial bodies crossed

the meridian. On **Spread 171** is the famous illustration of the quadrant, with the great astronomer dictating his observations to a secretary. (The globe, incidentally, still survives, along with some of the instruments).

Only so extensive a collection of large and precise instruments could have enabled Brahe to attempt to reconcile observations made with different instruments on the same occasion, and on different occasions with the same instrument, thereby educating the concept of observational error. A portrait of Brahe appears on the title-page (**Spread 161**). The book also contains a brief autobiography and summary of results (**Spreads 200–203**). An English translation, *Tycho Brahe's Description of his Instruments and Scientific Work* was published in Copenhagen in 1946.

“Pride of place,” however, is not a notion that applies to the works of Tycho Brahe in this particular copy: his book begins at **Spread 161**, bound (in contemporary vellum) behind some random observations on a Latin poet by a forgotten scholar. It was the fashion in the Renaissance to bind several titles together, especially if insubstantial. There is no English term for such assemblages: librarians and bibliographers use the German word *Sammelband*, or “collective volume.” Books of this kind obey a logic of their own: often the contents are linked by subject, imprint, or chronology, but sometimes it is difficult for a later reader to understand the rationale behind the choice. It does seem to be a law of nature that no subsequent owner of a *Sammelband* will find the contents bound up in the order that most appeals to him. In the case of Brahe’s *Mechanica*, it is not so much that the cart precedes the horse, as that the dogsled is put ahead of the elephant.

Théodore Marcile (1548–1617) was nonetheless an eminent scholar in his time; this collection of remarks on Horace is simply one of his minor works. Marcile was a native of the Low Countries who, after education at Louvain, sought his fortune in France, eventually becoming Professeur de Belles-Lettres at the royal foundation of the Collège de France in Paris, a position that (then as now) represents the acme of a French scholar’s aspiration. Like almost everyone else, Marcile attracted the venom of the irascible J. J. Scaliger: the standard nineteenth-century history of the period captures its essence in its

title: *The Literary Gladiators*.

As was usual in that time, Marcile's books were largely editions and commentaries—on Pythagoras, Martial, Persius, Aulus Gellius, Tertullian, Lucian, Catullus, Propertius, and Tibullus, although he did also publish an unusual *Historia strenarum* on New Year's greetings (Paris, 1596). This little work on Horace (**Spreads 4–91**) is not an edition or a running commentary, but rather a collection of discursive observations on the text, forming a sort of emendatory table-talk.

One last little work (**Spreads 91–160**) has insinuated itself between Théodore and Tycho: *Octavius* by the Christian convert Marcus Minucius Felix. This ironic fictional dialogue from the third century A.D. was addressed to the educated pagan public that he had known so well in his youth. The plot in a nutshell is this: the Christian Octavius Januarius believes that Christians have found the truth that pagan philosophy has long sought in vain, while his pagan interlocutor Caecilius Natalis insists on the superiority of a revitalized skepticism. The text was first printed in Rome in 1543 as Book 8 of an edition of Arnobius. The lawyer and humanist François Baudouin (1520–73) recognized the true author of the text, publishing the first separate edition in Heidelberg in 1560. The 1612 edition (present here) was furnished with a commentary (**Spreads 114–160**) by the Hamburg classicist Geverhart Elmenhorst (ca. 1580–1621). It reprints Baudouin's preface on **Spreads 107–113**.

This volume is now in the Cecil H. Green Library, which comprises roughly a third of the Stanford University Libraries' 8.5 million volumes. The Green Library houses special collections amounting to a quarter million rare volumes; among the rarities are an extensive collection of Aldine editions and numerous incunables.