

## Tycho Brahe's Nose and Pet Moose

The 10th of December 1566 there was a dance at Lucas Bacmeisters house in the connection to a wedding. Lucas Bacmeister was a professor of theology at the university of Rostock where Tycho studied. Among the guests were Tycho Brahe and another Danish nobleman, Manderup Parsberg. They started an argument and they separated in anger. The 27th of December this argument started again, and in the evening of the 29th of December a duel was held. It was around 7 in the evening and in darkness. Parsberg gave Tycho a cut over his nose that took away almost the front part of his nose. Tycho had an artificial nose made, not from wax, but from an alloy of gold and silver\* and put it on so skillfully, that it looked like a real nose. Wilhelm Janszoon Blaeu, who spent time with Tycho for nearly two years, also said that Tycho used to carry a small box with a paste or glue, with which he often would put on the nose."

Gassendi also writes that Laurus (a professor in Perugia, and later protonotarius for the pope) gives the reason for the argument between Tycho and Parsberg in one of his letters. The reason should have been an argument about who was most skilled in mathematics. However, Norlind points out that Gassendi has either received a wrong account of this letter, or misinterpreted it, because Laurus only writes that "Not so long ago, Tycho Brahe and a Danish nobleman had competed in studying mathematics and other higher sciences". There is nothing mentioned however that this should have been the reason for the argument and later the duel. Gassendis statement that it was an argument about who was the most skilled mathematician has however been cited many times in later biographies.

The hostility between Tycho and Parsberg was however not lasting, and Parsberg was one of Tychos supporters under the Danish king Christian IV.

[\*] Per Sörbom adds in "Tycho Brahe - a passionate astronomer" that when Tycho Brahe's grave was opened June 24 1901, there were clear green marks at the front of his cranium, so the metal piece of his artificial nose must have had a significant amount of copper also.

Another famous story about Tycho Brahe is about his tame moose. Gassendi (see links) is one of the biographers who wrote about this. The following is an edited translation from Gassendi.

Lantgrave Wilhelm of Kassel in Germany, with whom Tycho Brahe had an extensive mail correspondence and astronomical discussions, asked Tycho in a letter 1591 about an animal he had heard about called "Rix", which was faster than a deer, but with smaller horns. Tycho replied that such an animal did not exist, but maybe he meant the Norwegian animal called reindeer. Tycho wrote that he would check further details about such animals and if he could perhaps send one. He wrote that he had a young moose, which he could send if the Lantgrave would like. The Lantgrave replied that he had owned reindeers before but they had died of the heat, he also had a moose, which was tame and followed him like a dog. He would gladly accept a tame moose from Tycho, and would in such case reward Tycho with a riding horse for the trouble.

Tycho replied that he would order an additional moose, and he would have sent his tame one, had it not died shortly before. It had been transported to the castle of Landskrona, a city close to Hven, to entertain a nobleman there. But it had happened that during the dinner, the moose had ascended the castle stairs and drunk of the beer in such amounts, that it had fallen down the stairs, and broken a leg. Despite the best care, the moose had died shortly thereafter.