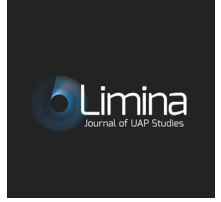




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Polymath Prof. Wilhelm Schickard (1592-1635): Inventor of the mechanical calculating machine and the world's first academic UFO-witness and investigator

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Dear Editor,

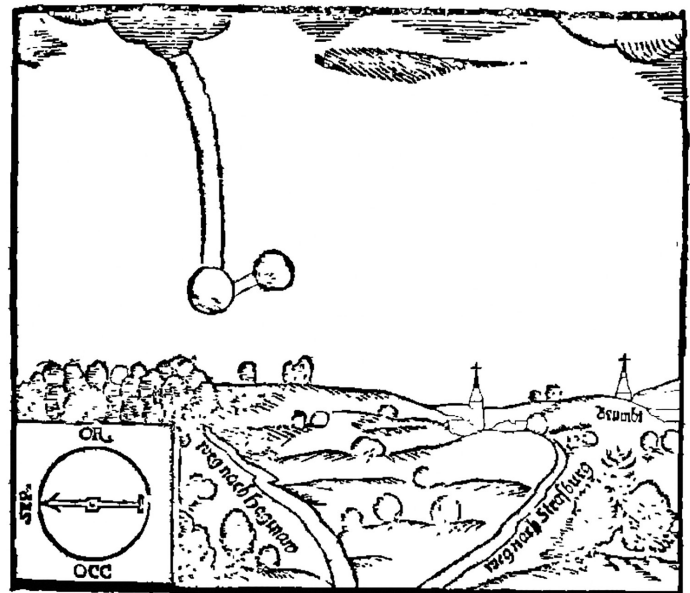
with this letter I would like to point out the early results of my research into the so far little known UFO/UAP-sighting of one of the most famous German polymaths, contemporary and befriended astronomy-colleague of Johannes Kepler, Wilhelm Schickard (1592–1635). This sighting was so far undescribed even in most of UFO research literature. Not only does the sighting itself hold many fascinating parallels to modern days UFO encounters; being almost 400 years old, the account most likely represents the world's first and earliest form of a detailed description and discussion of a UAP-sighting by a full and respected academic. The German government just honored Schickard with a special 20-Euro collector's coin that celebrates the 400th anniversary of his invention of the first mechanical counting machine. Less known, if known at all, is the fact that Professor Schickard could be rightfully considered the first academic UFO/UAP researcher in history. The observation he encountered and described also set himself up for vehement criticism and outrage from his colleagues through his advocacy for the most precise description of the “miraculous sign” he observed and described in 1630.



Figure 1. Portrait of Prof. Wilhelm Schickard, holding his *hand planetarium* (orrery), painted by Conrad Melperger in 1632. Source: Tübingen University (via WikimediaCommons), Public Domain

About Wilhelm Schickard

In addition to his teaching of Hebrew at the University of Tübingen, Schickard was also involved in astronomy. In 1623, he invented an “Astroscopium” (a paper cone representing the night sky), and in his work “Ephemeris Lunaris,” he developed a theory of the moon’s path, enabling the most accurate ephemerides of his time, which are position values for moving astronomical objects. Furthermore, he was the first person to determine meteor paths from simultaneous observations from different locations (Figure 2). He also introduced graphical methods for calculating eclipses and for making calculations within the Copernican system. He was not only an accomplished scholar but also a skilled mechanic, constructing many of his instruments himself. Johannes Kepler even called him the “ambidextrous philosopher.” In 1623, he built the first calculating machine, referred to as the “computing clock,” which could add and subtract up to six-digit numbers. To perform more complex calculations like multiplication and division, he attached cylindrical Napier’s bones to it, which contained the multiplication table.



Druckt zu Straßburg bey Marx von der Heyden/ am Kornmarkt 1623

Figure 2. Illustration of the meteor Schickard observed himself on November 7, 1623, and recounted its height and path. Source: Habrecht I. 1623 (Strassburg) „Von einer wunderbaren grossen vom Himmel gefallenen Feuerkugel“ (Max v.d. Heyden).

In 1631, Schickard succeeded the astronomy professor Michael Mästlin at Tübingen University. As a strong proponent of the heliocentric system, he maintained a collegial and likely friendly exchange with Kepler and invented the first hand-held planetarium, as depicted in his 1631 portrait (Figure 1).

The Sighting

After years of experience in astronomical observations and calculations, during which he was among the first to determine the height and path of a meteor through simultaneous observations from different locations, Wilhelm Schickard became an eyewitness to a celestial phenomenon on January 27, 1630. This event could be described today as a classic UFO sighting. However, during the course of the observation that spanned several hours, it became increasingly peculiar, evolving into one of those “miraculous signs” known as an “air battle” that were already questioned by his academic colleagues. Nevertheless, Schickard, being an eyewitness to the phenomenon, was determined to describe it as precisely and scientifically as possible.

In his 33-paged manuscript, titled **“Beschreibung Des Wunder Zeichens [...] Abends von 7. biß zu 10. Uhr Vormittag / am haiteren Himmel / gegen Nord gesehen worden [...]”** (Engl.: “Description of the Miracle Sign [...] seen in the evening from 7 o’clock on the evening

to 10 in the morning / in the clear sky / towards the north,") which was printed just two days later (!) on January 27, 1630, Schickard described the event as follows:

„Als ich eben meiner Gewohnheit nach/ an dem damals klaren Himmel / die Sternen contemplirt, unnd nach langer Sudostischer Beschawung / das Gesicht endlich zum andern Laden underm Dach / gegen Nord West hinau. gewandt / da erzeugete sich ohnversehens / ein Schneeweisse materi, welche ich nicht wohl ein Wolcken nennen kan / dieweil sie nicht so geflocket / noch am Rand herumb zersetzet war / wie das Natürliche Gewölck / sonder hüpsch glatt / und polit, (so villeicht zu dem Widerschein etwas geholffen) kans auch nicht füglich einen Dampff heissen / weil es sein gewisse beständige / und zwar zierliche oval figur oder Ay Gestalt gehabt / die Dünst aber sonsten unbest.ndiger Form hin und wider fladern: Zuge= schweigen / da. es an Helle unnd Schein all gewöhnliche Wolcken weit ubertroffen / auch gar lauter und homogenischer Art war.“ (Schickard 1630)



Figure 3. Frontpage of Schickard's 33-page manuscript, titled „Beschreibung Des Wunder Zeichens [...] Abends von 7. bi. zu 10. Uhr Vormittachs. / am haireren Himmel / gegen Nord gesehen worden [...]“

Source: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek

“As I, in accordance with my habit, contemplated the stars in the then clear sky and, after a long southern observation, finally turned my gaze to the northern sky, an unexpected phenomenon presented itself: a snow-white material, which I cannot well call a cloud, because it was not so fleecy or fringed at the edges as natural clouds usually are. Instead, it was quite smooth and polished (perhaps somewhat brightened by reflection). It also cannot be easily called vapor because it had a specific, constant, and elegant oval shape, whereas vapors otherwise flutter around in an unstable form. Not to mention, it far surpassed the ordinary clouds in brightness and radiance, being completely pure and homogeneous in nature.”

In summary, Schickard described the sighting of a bright, white, oval or “egg-shaped” (tick-tack-shaped?) object in the northern sky, which differed significantly from known clouds due to its smooth and polished appearance. After additional astronomical observations, Schickard returned to the description of the object’s development. He reported that after 7 o’clock, two more white objects, though now in three different shades, appeared next to the “oval shape”. He described one as “resembling an overturned kettle” and the other as “resembling a long sharpening stone [a “Wetzstein”] with both sides already heavily worn off” (see for comp. Figure 4) to make the description understandable with common objects of the daily use of his time.



Figure 4. A traditional natural heavy used Whetstone (bottom) compared with an artificial whetstone (top).

Source: Ulfbastel (via WikimediaCommons) / CC BY-SA 4.0

These objects shimmered in a way different from the “hurried twinkling of fixed stars,” causing the appearances to

come and go, making it difficult for Schickard to determine “whether it had indeed vanished or only concealed itself.”

The entire observation and Schickard’s detailed account of it would exceed the scope of this letter. Schickard’s manuscript on the event alone comprises 33 densely printed pages. The quality of his account is enhanced by his own astronomical and natural observation experience, which is a testament to his standing as one of the leading polymaths of his time. Readers are left to decide whether to trust Schickard’s distinction between known natural and astrophysical phenomena, like clouds etc., and his interpretation of an otherworldly “miraculous sign.” In the context of modern day UFO phenomena, there are clear parallels, including sightings of oval or egg-shaped UFOs, as frequently described in UFO literature. These parallels extend to recent observations by US Navy pilots, who detected and tracked unidentified flying objects with their onboard sensors, describing them as “Tic-Tac” shaped.

Wilhelm Schickard: Between Orthodox and Heterodox Religion and Science

During his lifetime at the University of Tübingen, Schickard faced criticism for his heterodox religious leanings, and his work, particularly the description of the celestial event mentioned above, served to solidify this criticism and was publicly exploited by his opponents, who tried to oust him from the University. This issue parallels the challenges that contemporary scientists interested in academic and scientific engagement with the unknown often face. For instance, Harvard psychiatrist Dr. John E. Mack faced severe criticism in the mid-1990s due to his research on alien abductions, which drew controversy. Similarly, Harvard astronomer Prof. Avi Loeb is currently experiencing criticism from the orthodox scientific community for suggesting that the interstellar object ‘Oumuamua might be an extraterrestrial artifact. His efforts to search for UFOs in the sky and alien probes in the solar system through the “Galileo Project” at Harvard have garnered both attention and criticism from the astronomical community and the media.

Preview on further research and publications

I am currently collaborating with a historian friend on an extensive elaboration of Schickard’s description and writing of his sighting. This will be published in the form of either

a non-fiction book or a scientific research article. I would be happy to keep you and the readers of *Limina* updated on this project’s progress.

A scan of Schickard’s booklet can be found here: https://books.google.de/books?id=jFZcAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=de&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Best Regards,
Andreas Müller

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Andreas Müller, born in 1976, studied Communication Design at the University of Fine Arts Saar at Saarbrücken, Germany. During his studies, he also began his work in science journalism, focusing on frontiers of sciences and anomalistic research. His two books on the scientific background and exploration of the crop circle phenomenon are among the standard works on the topic in the German-speaking countries. In 2014, Müller co-curated the first exhibition on this topic for a cultural-historical museum in England (Wiltshire Museum, Devizes). Since 2007, he is the editor of www.GrenzWissenschaft-aktuell.de (GreWi), the much-read German-language daily news portal on fringe science, paranormal and anomalistic topics. In 2014, he became the first journalist to gain access to the little-known UFO files of the German Federal Intelligence Service (Bundesnachrichtendienst, BND). In 2021 his book „Deutschlands UFO-Akten - Über den politischen Umgang mit dem UFO-Phänomen in Deutschland“ (Germany’s UFO-files) was published, a 450-paged full compendium on Germany’s UFO-Files. This work was followed in 2023 by his latest book „Deutschlands historische UFO-Akten“ (Germany’s historical UFO-files), that deals with UFO-sightings between 776-1889. Müller is an associated member of the Interdisciplinary Research Center for Extraterrestrial Studies (IFEX, www.uni-wuerzburg.de/ifex) at Julius Maximilian University of Würzburg and a member of the Society for UAP Studies (SUAPS). (www.SocietyForUAPstudies.org). Contact: redaktion@grenzwissenschaft-aktuell.de