

SOME EUROPEAN VARIABLE STAR OBSERVERS ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT. A subjective description and comparison of four groups of variable stars observers.

Key words: amateur astronomy, variable stars

This is the written version of a short talk held at the conference in Odessa in begin of September 1996 and it presents and compares organizations where I am member. The description is subjective, activities of minor interest to me are omitted, even if they may be important to others. In the following I shall mention four organizations (in alphabetical order)

BAV = Bundesdeutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft fuer
Veraenderliche Sterne e.V.

BBSAG = Bedeckungs-veraenderlichen Beobachter
(der) Schweizerischen Astronomischen Gesellschaft

BRNO = Brno Regional Network (of) Observers

GEOS = Groupe Europeane d'Observation Stellaire

AFOEV, the Association Francessse d'Observation d'Etoiles Variables is different from GEOS, mainly interested in Mira type stars, and shall not be described here.

This four organizations are very different from each other. BBSAG is the smallest, has 6 active observers and the editor of the BBSAG bulletin. The other groups are large, have more then 100 members, but many of them are inactive. BRNO was long time specialized on eclipsing binaries too, just in the last years there was founded a subgroup (called Medusa) of people observing semiregular variables. BAV has several subgroups, according the types of variable stars (eclipsing, pulsating, Mira, novae). But in fact the work is concentrated on eclipsing and Mira stars. GEOS is mainly interested in short period variables, but semiregular stars are observed too.

BAV was originally a small organization of citizens from West Berlin, but it expanded and about 1990 it included the AKV organized in the German Democratic Republic around the Hartha observatory by Helmuth Busch. Several foreign members join BAV for many years, from all countries around. Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy and others. BB-

SAG contains only Swiss and amateurs, but many others use to publish results here. Some of them did, as long as they have been students, some still do even as professional astronomers. BRNO was initiated by prof Oburka and Kordylewski from Krakow in 1964. It did contain only Czechoslovakians and became international by the division of the Republic. By now there are a few foreign members, German, Austrian and Italian (and me!). GEOS was from the begin on international, at present the most active observers are Belgians (observing in Switzerland), people interested in computation are grouped around Dr Gaspani in Milano (Italy), the center of the organization is Paris and the current president, Juan Fabregat, lives in Spain. People from western or southern Switzerland, Geneva, Ticino speaking french or italian join GEOS and even do not know BBSAG.

BAV and BRNO do have a headquarter, GEOS only formally (in Paris), BBSAG does not. Most of BRNO observers used to be young people, the central takes some responsibility on data quality. Similar, but less surveillance is done in Berlin. BBSAG assumes, that every observer is responsible for himself. In GEOS usually one member suggest a certain star and all others do observe to help him. The "owner" of the star is responsible about the results.

All the groups try to attract young people. Most systematically it was done in BRNO, more individually in BBSAG (most BBSAG members are teachers by profession). Unknown to me is this aspect in GEOS. Indeed, we are all becoming older and the small BBSAG suffers from this aspect more then others. One member, Robert Germann, died and left a gap. We have never more observed so many minima as before. All organizations are presently in some crisis - a few members did buy ccd cameras and got into closer cooperation to professional astronomers while the majority of visual observers got the feeling of being obsolete. Under this circumstance it is more difficult to tell young people, that some work with their cheap equipment will be useful. The international contacts increased in the last years with the consequence that even small, "national" meetings are held at least partially in english. People not speaking english fluently feel themselves excluded.

Older Germans, young Czechs and Italians generally.

Even if most of the organization have professional astronomers as members in financial respect we are amateurs, everybody paying his activities from his own pocket. Cases where people use existing instruments of a university or public observatory are abundant. But the possibility to obtain some funds to organize conferences or to buy new instruments are exceptions.

BAV issues several periodical publications, but only two of them are of interest outside: BAV Mitteilungen with results of observations (in the last years often identical with one number of IBVS) and BAV Rundbrief with internal matter of the organization, general discussion, but often also identification of stars, O-C diagrams, new elements and similar. Most of the text is still written in German, parts (summaries) in english. Old editions, back to 1950 (BAV = Berliner ...) are difficult to obtain. The current number of BAV Mitteilungen is about 80, BAV Rundbrief is issued four times a year. Mira observations are send to AFOEV and AAVSO.

BBSAG publishes the BBSAG bulletin, but 32 lists of observed minima times have been published in Orion, the journal of the Swiss Astronomical Society. The current number of the bulletin is 112, it contains almost numbers, only a few words, all in english. Years ago there did exist a BBSAG circular, but the last number (11) appeared several years ago. A few RR-Lyr observations made by BBSAG members use to be published in BAV Mitteilungen, one member observes Mira stars and sends the results to AAVSO.

BRNO publishes the results in "Contributions of the Nicolas Copernicus Observatory and Planetarium in Brno", called Contributions... or in Czech language Prace... There are 31 numbers published so far, but not all deal with variable stars. There was also an irregular publication without a title containing general matters, after about 30 numbers it was reorganized to the Perseus journal and now it is published four times a year. In contents and size it is similar to BAV Rundbrief, but in Czech, sometimes in English. The last numbers use to have an english translation of the titles, sometime english summaries. Older numbers of Prace... used to have russian summaries.

GEOS publishes several periodica for internal use. Mostly in french, but some times italian or spanish may be used. Results are published only irregularly, minima timings of eclipsing variables are often send to BBSAG for publication.

BAV owns a large collection of eclipsing star minima and a small collection of maxima of RR Lyr-

type stars. The former is known as Lichtenknecker's database. Dieter Lichtenknecker was a manufacturer of telescopes. He did collect minima from the literature, all eclipsing stars brighter the magnitude 13 at normal light, north of -23 degrees, having an amplitude larger the 0.3 mag. Unfortunately he died before his collection was finished. Franz Agerer included the stars from the last constellations (Virgo, Vulpecula) and maintains the database since. He has now more then 110'000 minima stored. Edgar Wunder did begin to collect RR-Lyr maxima only a few years ago, he has covered about 100 well observed stars. BBSAG has published by now about 33'000 minima, the writer has (had) all of them on diskettes on the conference in Odessa, for anybody interested. Many BBSAG observed stars are not included in Lichtenknecker's database, they are to faint or southern.

BRNO has about 11'000 minima, all available on computer media. GEOS has had so far no own data storage, but Massimiliano Martignoni has started to collect maxima of RR Lyr-type stars. At present there is a certain cooperation between BRNO and GEOS (and the writer) directed to common data formats and periodical exchange of data. Cooperation between BAV and the Jagellonian Observatory in Krakow and between BRNO and Krakow is being discussed too. One goal of my journey to Odessa was to investigate similar possibilities here, as already mentioned I have several datafiles here with me and offer them to anybody interested.

One more point I would like to make public: the international conference planed in Brno in 1997, forms are available in Russian or English.

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WEB-homepages

BAV = <http://www.mailbox.de/thecat/bav.html>

BRNO = <http://www.astro.cz/astro/cas/variable>