

HEINRICH HANSEN

1821–1890

130. *Tycho Brahe's Uraniborg*, 1882

(*Uranienborg*)

Oil, 23½ x 22⅘ in. (60 x 58 cm)

Signed: H.H. 82.

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 743, 2005, lot 1076, ill.

EXHIBITED: Charlottenborg, Foreningen for National Kunst, Kunstforeningen, *Mindeudstilling for Heinrich Hansen*, 1944, no. 44.

LITERATURE: Birgit Jenvold, *Heinrich Hansen, kunstner i tid og rum*, Haderslev, 1992 (the finished painting is reproduced p. 26); Poul Grønder-Hansen (ed.): *Tycho Brahes verden. Danmark i Europa 1500–1650*, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen, 2006.

The name of Heinrich Hansen is linked to Frederiksborg Castle in several ways. This painting presents part of the decorations that were started after the decision was made to rebuild the castle after the 1859 fire and turn it into a museum of national history. The room where the motif was to be painted was intended to tell the story of the world-famous Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe (1546–1601).

An undated letter from Heinrich Hansen to his friend Ferdinand Meldahl (1827–1908), professor of architecture, director of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, and the man responsible for the rebuilding of Frederiksborg, reads: *As agreed I herewith send the 2 sketches or preliminary works for the 2 paintings that it is intended should be placed above the fireplace and above the door in the Tycho Brahe Room, representing Uranienborg (the figures are those of Tycho introducing Queen Sophie to Anders Sørensen Vedel, who is handing the queen a collection of medieval ballads) and Stjerneborg with some of the nocturnal life there in the service of astronomy. The buildings are represented according to Tycho's drawings and plans. I offer to paint these pictures ...*

The painting in the Loeb collection must be identical to one of the submitted pictures to which Hansen refers in his letter, which is presumably from 1881 or 1882. In any event, it is a completely finished work in itself and thus more than a preliminary study. The board of the Frederiksborg Museum approved it and its companion piece. The works for the actual decoration, which are rather larger—the painting of Uraniborg measures 5⅔ ft. x 5⅜ ft. (165 x 173 cm)—were signed by Heinrich Hansen that same year, 1882, and exhibited in Charlottenborg in 1883. They still hang in the Frederiksborg Museum.

This example is typical of Hansen's architectural painting. The big, idiosyncratic building no longer existed in his day, so he painted a visualization. We see Uraniborg, or Uranienborg, the original name of which was Uraniburgum, created by the astronomer Tycho Brahe. His fame and dramatic life story were never forgotten, and still awoke keen interest in later ages, especially in the historians, poets, composers, and painters of the 19th century, and not only those in Denmark.

As was customary for young noblemen, Tycho Brahe had had a lengthy training, especially in Germany, when he discovered a supernova in 1572 and published a description of his observations the following year. From 1576 he was given generous financial support by the Danish king Frederik II, who also awarded him an "enfeoff——"1 (a freehold property). It was the small island of Hven, situated in the sound between Denmark, Sweden, and Danish territory, until ceded in 1660 to Sweden as part of the peace process between the two. Between 1576 and 1580, Uraniborg was built according to Brahe's designs, square with a semicir-



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cular outbuilding at either end. It stood cornerwise at the center of another square, an enclosed garden with gates and service buildings, including a printing press and a paper mill. A short distance from this, Brahe built the partly subterranean observatory Stjerneborg (Stellaeburgum) for his many instruments. In this research center he worked with his pupils and assistants in constant contact with foreign scientists. On several occasions he received visits from royalty. In 1590 James VI of Scotland (later painted by Wilhelm Marstrand among others) came there, and in 1596 the new young king, Christian IV.

Meanwhile, Brahe fell into disgrace, allegedly for mistreating his peasants and for disrespecting the new king, and he left Denmark in 1597. The buildings on Hven started to disintegrate and by about 1650 had virtually disappeared. Brahe went to Prague, where Emperor Rudolf II supported his activities from 1599 until Brahe's death in 1601. In Prague, he collaborated with the astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), who preserved Brahe's instruments and written observations, materials that represented a crucial contribution to the younger scientist's epoch-making scientific discoveries. Brahe died when he was only 54, and it was demonstrated a few years ago that his death was caused by mercury poisoning. On the basis of this, in 2004 two authors put forward the theory that he was murdered by Kepler.

Although Brahe still believed that Earth was the center of the universe, his observations and publications had lasting value and ensured him a prominent place in the history of science, so there was every reason to memorialize him in Denmark's new museum of national history. This Heinrich Hansen did with the painting of Brahe's splendid house, where we see Frederik II's queen, Sophie, visiting him in 1586 in the company of the historian Anders Sørensen Vedel. Tycho Brahe's buildings on Hven are today marked out on the ground, and part of the garden has been reconstructed.

E.F.

¹Brahe was given a freehold estate in land.