

Heinrich Julius Tode (1733 – 1797)

Heinrich Julius Tode was born on 31 May 1733 in Zollenspieker, a village on the banks of the Elbe River in the Kirchwerder district of Hamburg, Germany. His father, Johann Dieterich Tode, was a customs administrator and his mother, Agnes Marie, was the daughter of a Christian preacher, Schlöpken Lauenburg. A gifted child, Heinrich was attracted to botany at an early age and explored and studied the plants in the area. After the death of his father in 1744 his mother moved to Hamburg where, supported by a widow's pension, she struggled to provide for their nine children. Heinrich's education at the Johanneum in Hamburg was interrupted, and by the time he was a teenager he was working to help support the family. He wanted to leave school completely and pursue an artistic career, but his mother's opposition led to his return. Then, in 1755, he went to the Academic Gymnasium in Hamburg, where his exceptional progress earned him a scholarship and a degree of financial independence.

From 1757 to 1761 he studied theology in Göttingen, and at the end of the period published *Elegies*, the first of his many religious works. He then took a position as tutor at the factory of Joachin Rudolph Bentschneider in Pritzier (Mecklenburg). The success of his educational work with the three Bentschneider children impressed the community, and he was invited to be their pastor. However, the incumbent first minister began a smear campaign against Tode, based on his intensive mycological studies and his marriage in 1764 to his pupil, Helene Dorothea Bentschneider. Life became so difficult for Tode that the landlord and patron of the church in Warlitz, Ferdinand

Maximilian von Schültz, offered him asylum in his farmhouse. Schültz knew of Tode's artistic and mathematical skills and appointed him to undertake the design and construction of the new Holy Trinity chapel in Warlitz. Building began in 1765 and the church was completed and inaugurated at the end of 1768. Recent conservation work has maintained its authenticity, and that of its small Baroque organ, built by Johann Georg Stein from Erfurt.

During the next fifteen years many of his religious texts, verses and prayers were published and set to music as cantatas and oratorios by composers of the Mecklenburg Court Orchestra. He also pursued his botanical interest in cryptogams – ferns, mosses, algae and especially fungi. His two volumes of *Fungi Selecti Mecklenburgenses* published in 1791 and 1792 include new principles of mycological classification, the naming of many, mostly microscopic, species, and copper engraved illustrations. However, his promotion to religious and civic administration positions, and his move to Schwerin in 1793, stifled his creativity. He became increasingly melancholic and depressed, and shortly before his death, in an episode of self-doubt, he destroyed the copper plates for his last volume on fungi. A man of many talents, and described by his contemporaries as sensitive, stubborn and unpretentious, Heinrich Julius Tode died on 30 December 1797 at Schwerin, and on 8 January 1798 he was buried in Schwerin Cathedral.

In 1802 the German physician and naturalist, Carl Ludwig von Willdenow (1765-1817) named the fern genus *Todea*, based on a plant originally described by Linnaeus in 1753.



Todea barbara

Todea is a genus of two species, widespread from southern Africa to Australia, New Guinea and New Zealand. Well-established specimens have short, massive fibrous trunks and sometimes multiple crowns. A robust fern, *Todea barbara* (Latin *barbarous* 'foreign') has a stout erect trunk up to one metre tall, covered with matted roots and broken wing stipes. Fronds are 2-pinnate, pale green or yellow-green, and leathery. Sporangia, grouped in clusters and confined to the undersides of the lower part of the frond, often cover the whole surface. Indigenous in the Far North and the Poor Knights Islands in coastal to lowland areas, it has become rare due to habitat loss and collecting for the horticultural trade. It is also found in Australia and South Africa.