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Title: Mathematics as an observational science: the case of Charles Hermite

Abstract:

During the nineteenth century, the study and the classification of quadratic forms and their generalizations blossomed. An important participant of this trend is the mathematician Charles Hermite: although his name has been attributed to several objects and results in mathematics, he often appears as an anti-hero. I shall try and explain his point of view which is linked to a vision of mathematics as a natural, observational science, and show how this perspective shaped his work on forms, equations, rational approximation, etc., up to the creation of new objects.