However, Galileo did not turn his attention at least one important celestial object, or if he did – as we might say today – he failed to properly publish his results. Almost exactly a year after the publication of *Sidereus Nuncius*, on 9 March 1611, the Dutch astronomer Johannes Fabricius turned his own telescope towards the Sun and noticed several dark regions. He called in his father David Fabricius, and the two of them, paying no heed to the pain caused by gazing directly at the Sun, continued their observations as the star rose ever higher above the horizon. They soon abandoned their telescope in favor of a camera obscura, and noticed that the dark spots seem to be attached to the Sun’s surface and change position as it rotated on its axis. They published the results of their observations three months later in *De Maculis in Sole Observatis, et Apparente earum cum Sole Conversione Narratio*.

They were hailed as the discoverers of sunspots, even though they certainly were not the first to have observed them. The scientific community has a tendency to proclaim the first person to describe a certain phenomenon in writing as its discoverer, but the fact is we now know that sunspots had already been observed without telescopes all around the globe for at least two thousand years. Historical observations were relatively rare, since sunspots visible to the naked eye appear infrequently. However, the record of pre-telescope observations is so extensive and covers such a long period, that we are now able to identify periods when reports of sunspots were more common.

The higher the number and the larger the size of such spots, the higher the activity of the Sun. This means that the historical observations made without telescopes provide an incredibly important insight into periods of heightened solar activity in the past. Why are they important? Because they are closely linked with conditions prevailing here on Earth at the time. But more on that later.