



Edmond Halley: Charting the Heavens and the Seas

By Alan Cook

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Best remembered today for the comet that bears his name, Edmond Halley was one of the great scientists of all time. He discovered the proper motion of stars, made important studies of the moon's motion, and his investigations of the Earth's magnetic field and of tides were unrivalled for centuries. Now, in this superb full-length biography, Alan Cook paints an unsurpassed portrait of this preeminent figure.

Halley played a crucial role in the Newtonian revolution in the natural sciences. Indeed, Cook reveals that it was Halley who set the question that led Newton to write the Principia, and who edited, paid for, and reviewed it. The author also describes how Halley's prediction of the transit of Venus led to Captain Cook's voyage to Tahiti and to an accurate calculation of the distance between the Earth and Sun. Perhaps as important, the book examines Halley's personal life, revealing a man who was far from a lab-bound thinker. As a young man, he sailed to St. Helena to chart the unmapped stars of the Southern Hemisphere. Moreover, Halley knew the leading artists of his age--Wren, Pepys, Handel, Purcell, and Dryden--and he travelled widely throughout Europe, meeting numerous fellow scientists and serving on a variety of diplomatic missions. He even spent a number of adventurous years as commander of a Royal Naval warship.

Much material about Halley's career has only come to light in recent years. Alan Cook has used this new material to write an illuminating account of the life and times of one of the key scientists of the Enlightenment.

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Editorial Review

Review

`This new biography of Halley puts the record straight, Alan Cook is particularly well qualified to write it. ... The book is a mine of information and the extensive references and notes ensure that the serious student will find it invaluable, but it is also so clearly written that it will also appeal to the more casual reader. Nothing important has been left out. ... Halley lived in fascinating times, and Cook gives a vivid account of them ... As a study of Halley's life, times and accomplishments this book could hardly be bettered and it is certain to remain the standard work for many years to come. It is moreover well produced and printed and the illustrations match the quality of the text.'

The Times Higher Education Supplement

`This assiduously researched biography now rounds out the cometary discoverer's life and work.'

Financial Times weekend section

`Since very little can be gleaned about Halley's personal life, such an intellectual biography focused on his scientific work is even more appropriate.'

Financial Times weekend section

`he has devoted his life to the same sorts of precision project that structured Halley's career, and this sprawling biography is evidently the culmination of a long-standing of wholly justified scientific admiration.'

London Review of Books

About the Author

Alan Cook was Master of Selwyn College, Cambridge, and head of the Physics Department in Cambridge University.

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From reader reviews:

Gail Kennedy:

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Michael Joslyn:

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