



Edmond Halley: Charting the Heavens and the Seas

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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