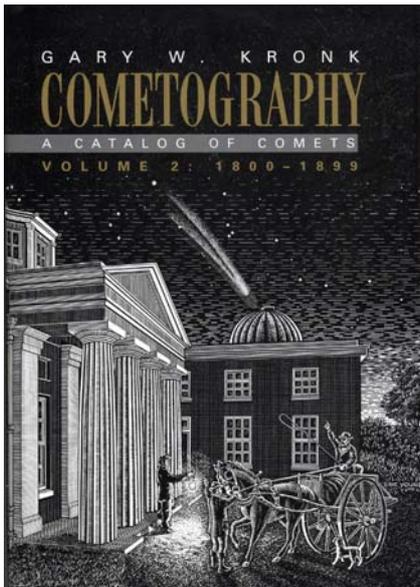




Cometography: A catalog of comets Volume 2: 1800–1899

by Gary W. Kronk

Cambridge University Press, 2004.
ISBN 0-521-58505-8. Pp xiii + 837,
£120.00 (hbk).



The latest volume of *Cometography* continues the theme of Gary Kronk's first book, which covered the period 'Ancient to 1799'. Although the newly released volume covers only the period from 1800 to 1899, it is a much larger work, signifying the greater amount of information known about comets seen in the 19th century when compared with the sometimes obscure records of ancient comets.

The aim of the book is to provide the most complete and comprehensive collection of data on comets available. In this mission the book succeeds, giving the discovery details, when the object was last seen, its closest passage to the Earth and the calculated path as well as the designation and name.

Although the sections for each comet do include a certain amount of technical detail such as the orbital elements and absolute magnitudes, the appeal for many

readers of this book, as in the case of volume 1, may rest with the fascinating descriptions which Gary has unearthed from records kept in nations throughout the world. Examples of fascinating background detail are spread throughout the book, starting with the very first entry relating to Comet C/1801 N1 (Pons). J. J. de Lalande offered a prize of 600 francs to the first person to discover a comet in the new century. J. L. Pons of France, considered by many to be the greatest visual comet observer of all time, was the first to detect it, a stirring opening for any book on observational astronomy.

Apart from great observers, famous comets inevitably feature, such as Comet 1P/1835 P1 (Halley). Interestingly, the author comments that the number of predictions for the 1835 apparition is unparalleled in cometary astronomy. Later, the Great September Comet of 1882, ranking as one of the most spectacular comets of the nineteenth century, is discussed over no less than 14 pages. One can only marvel at the extraordinary amount of research which Gary must have undertaken to assemble so much detail on so many comets.

The book is clearly aimed at the comet specialist, especially those with an interest in historical aspects of observational astronomy. The book has ample references to allow the specialised reader to explore the subject further. The author has demonstrated an immense knowledge not only of comets but also the practical side of securing observations of these fascinating objects.

I would recommend this second volume as a means of placing the most complete history of comets seen in the 19th century, in one book, on the bookshelves of both private individuals and libraries.

Guy M. Hurst

Guy Hurst is a Vice-President of the Association and Editor of The Astronomer. He gives regular lectures to schools, societies and at adult education sessions. He is Assistant Director of the BAA Comet Section and an active observer of comets and novae.

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