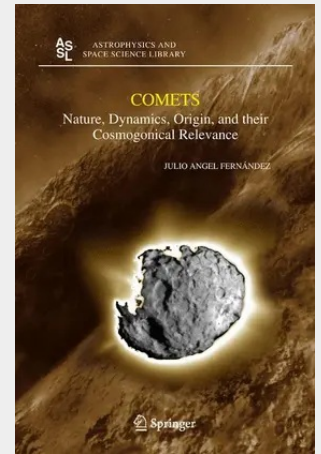


Comets

Nature, Dynamics, Origin, and their Cosmogonical Relevance

Comets are small bodies, but of great cosmic relevance. Given its pristine nature, they may preserve valuable and unique information on the chemical and physical processes that took place in the early solar system, and that may be occurring in the formation of other planetary systems. They might have even played a very important role in the origin of life on Earth. Beyond that, since ancient times comets have inspired awe, superstition, and also curiosity and debate. Their sudden apparitions challenged the long-held view of the immutability of the heavens, which triggered a long debate on whether comets had a heavenly or terrestrial nature. Therefore, comets have a prominent role in the history of scientific thought, that goes back to the most ancient civilizations. The last apparition of comet Halley in 1986 was a landmark since it aroused a great expectation in the scientific community and in the public at large. For the first time, a flotilla of spacecrafts visited a comet. A great number of popular and technical books were written on Halley, and comets in general, around the mid-eighties. The interest in comets never subsided after Halley's passage which is reflected in the large volume of printed material on these bodies. I have taken the challenge to write a new book on comets that summarizes most of the recent advances on the subject, including my own work developed during the last 25 years.

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