

## PREFACE

Before each General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union (IAU), a book is published containing reports on the scientific developments within the different fields of astronomy during the preceding three years. These are the Volumes A of the IAU Transactions, and the present one is Vol. XXVA, to appear before the XXVth General Assembly in Sydney, July 2003. The period covered by the reports is 1 July 1999 through 30 June 2002.

The aim is to provide a comprehensive and authoritative review of what has recently been achieved in our science, and since the work of the IAU is organised within different Divisions, Commissions and Working Groups focussing on different subject matters, the Transactions A (“Reports on Astronomy”) are compilations of triennial reports written by the Presidents and Chairpersons of these groups. The editing of these contributions is of limited scope, mainly in order to ensure a certain homogeneity in appearance and correct as many typographical errors as possible. It is our hope that these compilations will be of great use in several ways: as reference material for learning about the current state of research, as guides to the current literature and web sites where further information can be found, and finally as documentation of our current science for future use in judging the history of astronomy that is presently being shaped.

As will be evident at first glance, there is a great deal of variety between the styles of the different reports. This reflects the fact that different possibilities have been made available to the contributors: from writing extensive, comprehensive summaries of all the important, recent work including full reference lists, to compiling lists of references to web sites or books where all the relevant information can be sought, without quoting individual research papers. Different groups within the IAU have made different choices in this respect. Particular mention should be made of the fact that Working Groups appear in a non-uniform manner. Some have prepared their own reports, even though sometimes very short, while others are reported upon within the chapters of their hosting Divisions or Commissions. It is also worth mentioning that the web pages of the Divisions, Commissions and Working Groups have been further developed and, in many cases, serve the purpose of continually updated reports on current research very well. It is to be expected that this trend will continue in the coming years.

I am grateful for the dedication and care shown by the contributors to this Volume in preparing their manuscripts, which has made my job as editor rather easy. My special thanks are due to Dr Terry Mahoney who, as consultant to the ASP, prepared the Latex style file which was used, and to Monique Orine at the IAU Secretariat who offered invaluable and devoted assistance in collecting the contributions. I thank them for their efforts both personally and on behalf of the Union.

Hans Rickman  
General Secretary

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