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Book Review

**EDWIN HUBBLE.
MARINER OF THE NEBULAE**

by Gale E. Christianson

Institute of Physics Publishing, Bristol and Philadelphia, 1995, 420 pp.

The year 1989 was the 100th anniversary of Edwin Hubble's birth. His achievements in science are enormously important. He was that astronomer who discovered Cepheid variables in the Andromeda and Triangulum nebulae and determined the distances of those spiral nebulae. He showed that distant nebulae are huge stellar systems similar to our Milky Way. He developed the classification of galaxies, a system that is still in use today.

But the greatest of Hubble's achievements was the discovery of the red shift in the spectra of galaxies – evidence the expansion of the universe, now termed the Big Bang.

It is natural that Hubble is often compared with the greatest astronomers of the past. The American astronomer N. U. Mayall wrote: "... it is tempting to think that Hubble may have been to the observable region of the universe what the Herschels (father and son) were to the Milky Way system and what Galileo was to the Solar system". Another well-known astronomer, A. Sandage, who started his scientific career working with Hubble, said: "... there is no question that he was the greatest observational astronomer since Copernicus".

One would think that everything concerning the life and activity of such an outstanding person is well known. The scientific works of Hubble have indeed been published and are readily accessible to readers. Nevertheless, many details of Hubble's life were unknown until recent times. Some information on his life could be found in the comparatively brief biographical essay written by Mayall in 1970. However it was not until 1990 that D. E. Osterbrock and his colleagues published an essay on Hubble's youth based on a serious analysis of archive material. Up to Hubble's jubilee I. D. Novikov and the author of this review published a more detailed biography of the scientist, but regrettably of course it was not complete.

The task of writing a full biography of Hubble was finally undertaken by a professor of history at the Indiana State University, USA: Gale E. Christianson in the book reviewed.

There is no opportunity to relate even briefly the contents of the book but it is not necessary to do so.

It is enough to say that the author has used not only Hubble's own works but also dozens of publications mentioning him and his colleagues and depicting that time. The author has thoroughly searched for documents concerning Hubble not only in the Huntington library where they are mainly kept but also in archives of the Mount Wilson Observatory, the American Institute of Physics, the Harvard Observatory and numerous other scientific institutions. He has looked through a number of newspapers where it was possible to find any references to Hubble such as The New York Times, Los Angeles Times and others. The author has talked with Hubble's relations and astronomers who knew him.

As a result the book covers every episode of Hubble's life supported by documentary evidence. But it is not a dull collection of facts. The book is remarkably well written and reads as a fascinating novel.

Hubble possessed a high sense of civil duty, and readers will learn much that interesting about Hubble's military service during World War I, will see the elderly Hubble as he left the Mount Wilson Observatory and devoted all his powers to the work at the Ballistic Research Laboratory of the Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, during World War II.

The book is also interesting for its description of Hubble's contemporaries – an astronomers of the Mount Wilson and other observatories.

In addition the book is illustrated with many photographs never published before.

It is certain that not only professional astronomers but a wide readership will also find much of interest in it.

A. S. Sharov