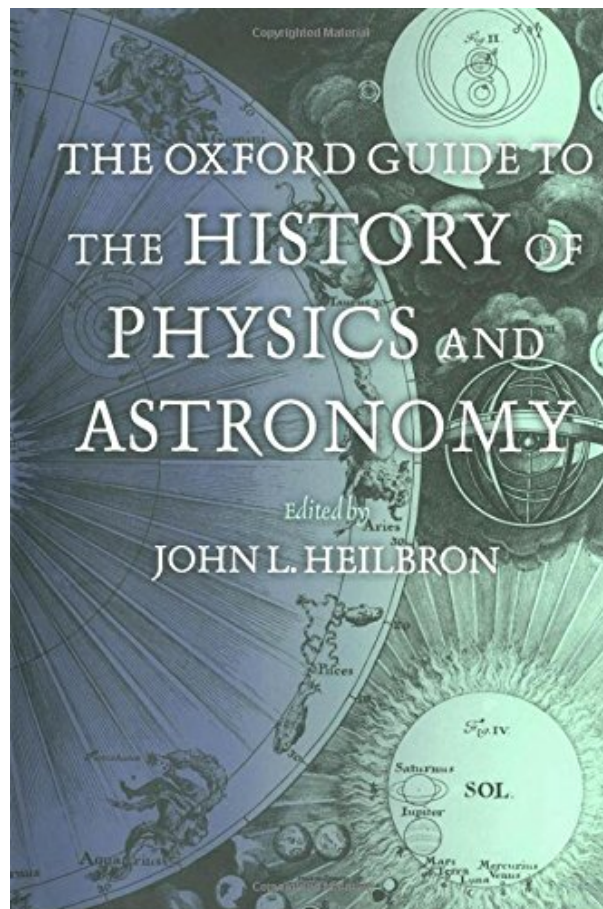
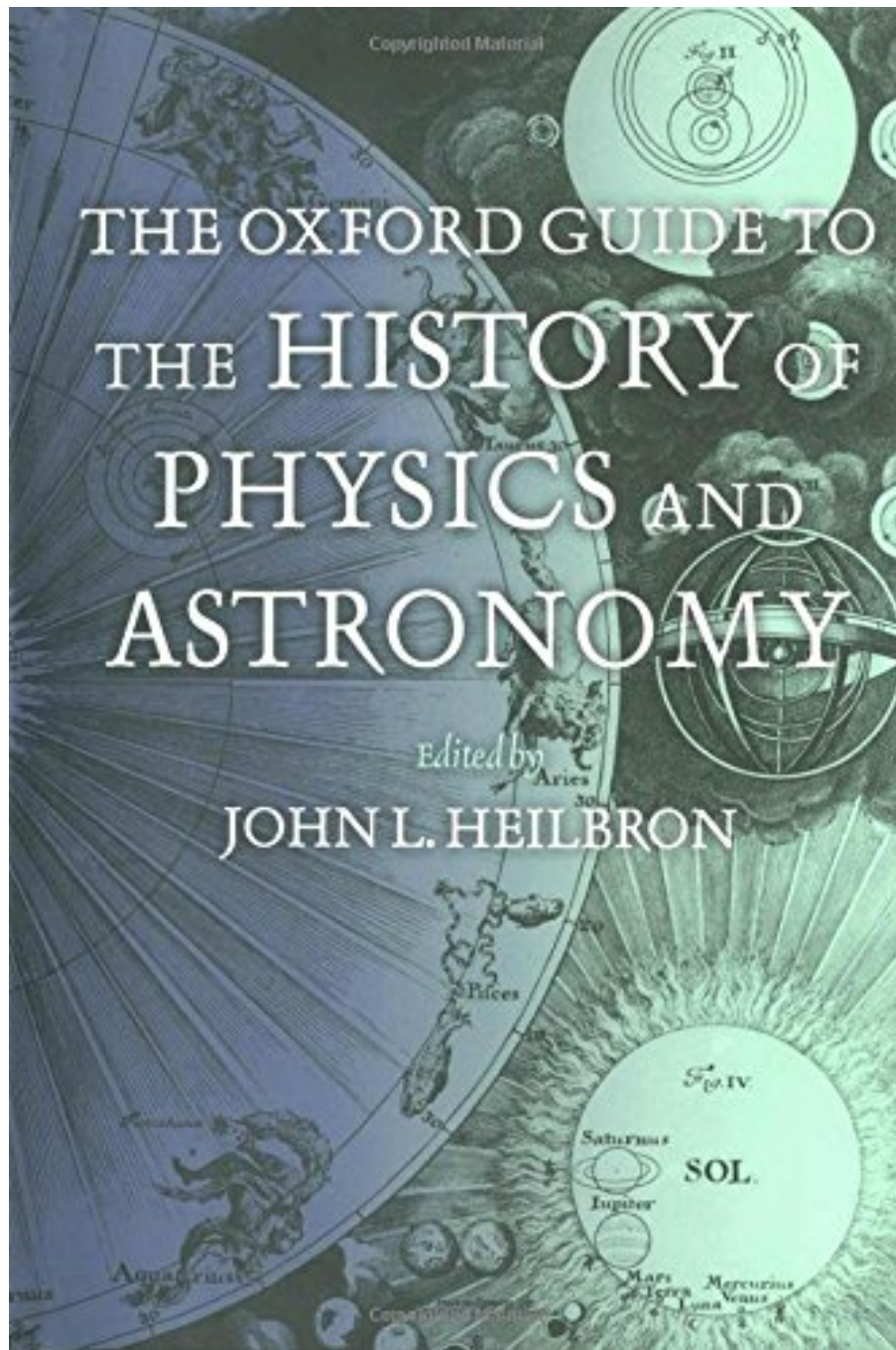


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John L. Heilbron is Professor of History and Vice Chancellor, Emeritus, University of California, Berkeley. His most recent books include *The Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science*, *The Sun in the Church: Cathedrals as Solar Observatories*, and *Geometry Civilized: History, Culture, Technique*.

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- Sales Rank: #316399 in Books
- Published on: 2005-06-03
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.30" h x 1.30" w x 9.30" l, 1.46 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 384 pages

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'The Oxford Guide to the History of Physics and Astronomy', edited by John Heilbron, is a wonderful reference resource, but also an interesting book to read. It is organised as an encyclopedic dictionary, with

over 200 entries that range in size from half a page to several pages in length. This covers history from the a little past the Renaissance to the present (with occasional references to earlier discoveries and events), including entries in other sciences such as geography and oceanography and how they relate to the issues in physics and astronomy.

Entries include topics, biographies, short essays, inventions and concepts. The biographical entries are generally paired - figures such as Einstein and Newton warrant their own entries (as does Benjamin Franklin for some inexplicable reason), but sometimes the pairings don't quite seem to fit (Carl Sagan and Stephen Hawking, for example, are both popularisers of physics and astronomy, but perhaps deserve somewhat better pairings). For the concept of the pairings, inspiration seems drawn from Plutarch, whose magnum opus 'Lives' paired biographies of notable figures.

The overall organisation is alphabetical, but there is also a complex hierarchy of entries as well that includes primary articles for comprehensive disciplines, principle subdivisions within the disciplines, and third level entries on specific items within the subdivisions (including biographies). There are extensive cross-references as well, in addition to supplemental reading lists.

In some ways, this book is a subset of the greater work, 'The Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science' - there is a complete listing of entries for that work included in this text, to show how this area of science fits within the greater whole (for one thing).

One thing I found about this book, however, is that it is a compelling read. When I first received the book, I stopped to look up a few items, and found myself still reading through articles and following the cross-references more than an hour later. Despite being a reference book, it is an accessible and inviting text to for the reader, which is the mark of a good history text. For anyone interested in physics, astronomy, or the history of science, this is a text to be prized.

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