



Ripples in the Cosmos: A view behind the scenes of the new cosmology

Michael Rowan-Robinson

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On April 23, 1992 a major science story appeared in newspaper headlines around the world. The announcement of the discovery of small-scale fluctuations in the cosmic microwave radiation, ripples in the cosmos, was a bolt from the blue, taking most of the world's cosmologists by surprise. Then came the first reactions: 'the discovery of the century, perhaps of all time' (Stephen Hawking), 'the Holy Grail of cosmology', 'English does not have enough superlatives', and 'a certain Nobel Prize.' What *are* the ripples? Why are they of such fundamental importance? What do they tell us about the beginning of the universe? And was the hype reported in the media justified? In this immensely readable book, distinguished cosmologist Michael Rowan-Robinson sets the discovery in its wider context, that of the search for an explanation of how galaxies, clusters of galaxies and even larger structures formed in a universe which was initially of almost perfect uniformity. This puzzle has been at the heart of the cosmological debate for the past decade. Using telescopes in orbit around the earth, working at wavelengths invisible to the human eye, astronomers have recently taken two enormous steps forward in their search for an explanation of the evolution of structure, their discoveries making front-page news. The first was the mapping of the distribution of galaxies by the Infrared Astronomical Satellite (IRAS); the second, the detection of the ripples by the Cosmic Background Explorers (COBE). Here is an insider's account of these momentous discoveries: Michael Rowan-Robinson was a leading participant with IRAS, one of the most successful space astronomy missions of all time. It is a story packed with anecdote and drama, culminating in a series of spectacular cosmological discoveries. These include the explanation of the rapid motion of our galaxy through space; the demise of the hypothetical 'Great Attractor'; the demonstration that the universe is filled with an exotic form of dark matter, and the detection--by the author and his colleagues--of the most luminous galaxy in the universe. Professor Rowan-Robinson goes on to describe how the IRAS discoveries and the COBE ripples are connected, and how this has helped to solve the problem of how structure, and hence we ourselves, evolved in the universe. *Ripples in the Cosmos* is far more than an exciting--and personal-- story of modern cosmology. Michael Rowan-Robinson asks fundamental questions about the very nature of science, and how it works. His surprising answers will intrigue general readers and scientists alike.

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