

TIME: FROM EARTH ROTATION TO ATOMIC PHYSICS

In the 21st century, we take the means to measure time for granted, without contemplating the sophisticated concepts on which our timescales are based. This volume presents the evolution of concepts of time and methods of timekeeping up to the present day. It outlines the progression of time based on sundials, water clocks, and the Earth's rotation, to time measurement using pendulum clocks, quartz crystal clocks, and atomic frequency standards. Timescales created as a result of these improvements in technology and the development of general and special relativity are explained. This second edition has been updated throughout to describe 20th- and 21st-century advances and discusses the redefinition of SI units and the future of Coordinated Universal Time (UTC). A new chapter on time and cosmology has been added. This broad-ranging reference benefits a diverse readership, including historians, scientists, engineers, and educators, and it is accessible to general readers.

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Dennis D. McCarthy , P. Kenneth Seidelmann
Frontmatter
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SECOND EDITION

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In honor of our wives, Diane McCarthy and Bobbie Seidelmann, and our families.
Dedicated to the scientists who preceded us and taught, mentored,
and inspired us.

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Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page xv</i>
1 Time Before the 20th Century	1
1.1 In the Beginning	1
1.2 Characterizing Time	1
1.3 Calendars	2
1.4 Astronomical Observations	3
1.5 Timekeeping	4
1.6 Time Epochs	5
1.7 Time Transfer	6
1.8 Rotation of the Earth	7
1.9 Beginning the 20th Century	8
2 Time from the Earth’s Rotation	10
2.1 Apparent Solar Time	10
2.2 Mean Solar Time	10
2.3 Sidereal Time	13
2.4 Washington Conference of 1884	15
2.5 Universal Time	15
2.6 UT1 as Mean Solar Time	18
2.7 Coordinated Universal Time	20
2.8 Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)	21
2.9 Time Zones	22
2.10 Daylight Savings Time	22
3 Ephemerides	25
3.1 Ephemerides and Time	25
3.2 Before Kepler and Newton	26
3.3 Kepler and Newton	28
3.4 Tables, General Theories, and Ephemerides	29
	vii

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
	3.5 Lunar Theories	32
	3.6 The Advent of Computers	35
	3.7 Numerical Integrations	35
	3.8 Observational Data	36
	3.8.1 Radar Observations	36
	3.8.2 Lunar Laser Ranging	37
	3.8.3 Spacecraft Observations	37
	3.9 Modern Ephemerides	37
	3.10 Reference System	38
	3.11 Besselian Year	39
	3.12 Time Arguments	40
	3.13 Astronomical Constants	40
	3.14 Redefinition of the Astronomical Unit (au)	41
	3.15 Artificial Satellite Theories	42
	3.16 Theory of Relativity	42
4	Variable Earth Rotation	47
	4.1 Pre 19th Century	47
	4.2 Secular Variation	48
	4.3 Irregular Variations in the Earth’s Rotation	50
	4.4 Early Explanations for the Variable Rotation	58
	4.5 Current Understanding of the Earth’s Variable Rotation	59
	4.6 Consequences	62
5	Earth Orientation	68
	5.1 Reference Systems	68
	5.1.1 Celestial Reference Frame	69
	5.1.2 Terrestrial Reference Frame	70
	5.1.3 Intermediate Reference System	72
	5.2 Variations in Earth Orientation	73
	5.2.1 Precession/Nutation	74
	5.2.2 Polar Motion	76
	5.2.3 UT1	79
	5.3 Variations in Earth Orientation	80
	5.4 Transforming between Reference Frames	81
	5.5 Determination of Earth Orientation	84
	5.6 Earth Orientation Data	85
6	Ephemeris Time	88
	6.1 Need for a Uniform Timescale	88
	6.2 Danjon Proposal	89

<i>Contents</i>		ix
6.3	Clemence Proposal	90
6.4	Adoption and Definition	91
6.5	Observational Determination	92
6.6	The Ephemeris Second and Atomic Time	95
6.7	Historical ΔT	97
6.8	Problems with Ephemeris Time	97
6.9	Relativity	100
6.10	Dynamical Timescales	101
7	Relativity and Time	104
7.1	Newtonian Reference Systems	104
7.2	Special Relativity	104
7.3	Lorentz Transformations	106
7.4	Coordinate and Proper Time	107
7.5	Minkowski Diagrams	109
7.6	Time in Special Relativity	111
7.7	General Relativity	112
7.7.1	Metrics in General Relativity	112
7.7.2	The Equivalence Principle	113
7.8	IAU Resolutions	114
7.9	Timescales	121
7.9.1	International Atomic Time	121
7.9.2	Dynamical Timescales	121
7.10	Relativistic Effects in Time Transfer	122
8	Time and Cosmology	123
8.1	Introduction	123
8.2	Space-Time Metric	123
8.3	The Expanding Universe	124
8.4	Age of the Universe	125
8.5	Evolution of the Universe	126
8.6	Cosmic Time	126
8.7	Time’s Arrow	128
8.8	Future of the Universe	128
9	Dynamical and Coordinate Timescales	131
9.1	Replacing Ephemeris Time	131
9.2	Terrestrial Dynamical Time (TDT) and Barycentric Dynamical Time (TDB)	132
9.3	Problems with TDT and TDB	135
9.4	New Reference System	136

x	<i>Contents</i>	
9.5	New Timescales	137
9.5.1	Terrestrial Time (TT)	138
9.5.2	Geocentric Coordinate Time (TCG)	139
9.5.3	Barycentric Coordinate Time (TCB)	139
9.5.4	TDB Redefined	141
9.5.5	Barycentric Ephemeris Time (T_{eph})	142
9.6	ΔT and Ephemeris Time Revised	142
9.7	Relationships among Coordinate Timescales	143
10	Clock Developments	148
10.1	Introduction	148
10.2	Keeping Time in Antiquity	148
10.2.1	Clepsydrae and Water “Clocks”	149
10.2.2	Other Timekeeping Devices	150
10.3	The First Mechanical Clocks	150
10.4	Pendulum Clocks	151
10.4.1	Galileo	152
10.4.2	Huygens	152
10.4.3	Pendulum Clock Developments	155
10.4.4	Chronometers	156
10.5	Quartz Crystal Clocks	157
10.6	Clock Performance	160
10.6.1	Quality (Q) Factor	161
10.6.2	Precision	162
10.6.3	Accuracy	163
10.6.4	Stability	163
11	Microwave Atomic Clocks	171
11.1	Beyond Quartz-Crystal Oscillators	171
11.2	Physics of Atomic Clocks	172
11.3	General Structure of Atomic Clocks	174
11.4	Development of Atomic Clocks	177
11.4.1	Caesium	177
11.4.2	Hydrogen	189
11.4.3	Rubidium	191
11.5	Trapped Ion Clocks	194
11.5.1	Mercury	196
11.5.2	Other Ions	197
11.6	PHARAO Laser-Cooled Microgravity Atomic Clock	197
11.7	Characterizing Atomic Clocks	198

<i>Contents</i>	xi
12 Optical Atomic Standards	203
12.1 Optical Transition Frequencies	203
12.2 Optical Ion Clocks	207
12.3 Optical Neutral Atom Clocks	208
12.4 Quantum Logic Clock	210
12.5 Stabilized Lasers	210
12.6 Characterizing Optical Standards	211
13 Definition and Role of a Second	215
13.1 The Historical Second	215
13.2 The “Ephemeris Second”	217
13.3 The SI Second	218
13.4 Adopting the SI Second	221
13.5 Toward the Redefinition of the Second	223
14 International Atomic Time (TAI)	225
14.1 Constructing an Atomic Timescale	225
14.2 History of TAI	227
14.3 Formation of TAI	232
14.3.1 EAL	233
14.3.2 Steering EAL with Primary and Secondary Frequency Standards	240
14.4 Stability of TAI	242
14.5 Distribution of TAI	242
14.6 Relationship of TAI to Terrestrial Time	243
15 Coordinated Universal Time (UTC)	249
15.1 Universal Time before 1972	249
15.2 Coordinated Universal Time after 1972	254
15.3 Leap Seconds	255
15.4 DUT1	256
15.5 UTC Worldwide	257
15.6 Time Distribution	257
15.7 The Future of UTC: Leap Seconds or Not?	257
16 Time in the Solar System	262
16.1 The Solar System	262
16.2 Pursuit of Uniformity	263
16.3 Pursuit of Accuracy	263
16.4 Time and Phenomena	264
16.4.1 Eclipses, Occultations, Transits	264
16.4.2 Sunrises and Sunsets	266

xii	<i>Contents</i>	
	16.4.3 Moonrises and Moonsets	266
16.5	Tropical Year	267
16.6	Time and Distance	268
	16.6.1 Meter Definition	268
	16.6.2 Radar Ranging	269
	16.6.3 Laser Ranging	269
	16.6.4 Navigation Systems	269
16.7	Space Mission Times	274
	16.7.1 Doppler Effect	274
16.8	Proper Times at Planets	274
16.9	Pulsars: An Independent Source of Time	275
16.10	White Dwarfs: An Independent Source of Time	276
17	Time and Frequency Transfer	278
	17.1 Historical Transfer Techniques	278
	17.2 Time and Frequency Dissemination Modeling	279
	17.2.1 Propagation Effects	279
	17.2.2 Calibration	280
	17.2.3 Relativistic Effects	280
	17.3 Time and Frequency Dissemination Systems	283
	17.3.1 Coaxial Cable	283
	17.3.2 Telephone	283
	17.3.3 Optical Fiber	283
	17.3.4 Microwave Links	284
	17.3.5 Television Broadcast	285
	17.3.6 Internet	285
	17.3.7 High-Frequency Radio Signals	285
	17.3.8 Low-Frequency Broadcast Radio Signals	286
	17.3.9 Low-Frequency Navigation Signals	287
	17.3.10 Navigation Satellite Broadcast Signals	288
	17.3.11 Two-Way Satellite Time and Frequency Transfer (TWSTFT)	290
	17.3.12 Optical Two-Way Time and Frequency Transfer (TWTFT)	291
	17.4 Atomic Clock Ensemble in Space (ACES)	292
18	Modern Earth Orientation	294
	18.1 Terrestrial to Celestial Reference Systems	294
	18.2 Determination of Earth Orientation Parameters	295
	18.2.1 Very Long Baseline Interferometry (VLBI)	296
	18.2.2 Global Positioning System (GPS)	302

<i>Contents</i>	xiii
18.2.3 Satellite Laser Ranging (SLR)	304
18.2.4 Doppler Orbit Determination and Radio Positioning Integrated on Satellite (DORIS)	308
18.2.5 Geophysical Modeling	308
18.2.6 Geomagnetic Field	312
18.3 Earth Orientation Data	312
19 International Activities	316
19.1 Time and International Activities	316
19.2 Treaty of the Meter	316
19.2.1 General Conference on Weights and Measures (CGPM)	317
19.2.2 International Committee on Weights and Measures (CIPM)	317
19.2.3 Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM)	318
19.3 Scientific Unions	318
19.3.1 International Astronomical Union (IAU)	319
19.3.2 International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics (IUGG)	321
19.3.3 International Telecommunications Union (ITU)	322
19.4 Service Organizations	325
19.4.1 International Earth rotation and Reference systems Service (IERS)	326
19.4.2 International VLBI Service for Geodesy and Astrometry (IVS)	329
19.4.3 International Laser Ranging Service (ILRS)	329
19.4.4 International GNSS (Global Navigational Satellite Service) Service (IGS)	330
19.4.5 International DORIS Service (IDS)	331
20 Time Applications	334
20.1 Time Enables the Infrastructure	334
20.2 Positioning and Navigation Services	334
20.3 Time Domain Astronomy (TDA)	335
20.4 Intelligent Transportation Systems	335
20.5 Communications	336
20.6 Power Grid	338
20.7 Banking and Finance	339
20.8 Emergency Services	339
20.9 Water Flow	339

xiv	<i>Contents</i>	
20.10	Scientific	340
20.11	Religions	340
20.12	General Public	340
20.13	Summary	340
21	Future of Timekeeping	344
21.1	Future Needs for Time	344
21.2	Modeling the Earth’s Rotation	345
21.3	Clocks of the Future	346
21.4	Future Timescales	346
21.5	Future Time Distribution	348
	<i>Acronyms</i>	351
	<i>Glossary</i>	358
	<i>Index</i>	379

Preface

This second edition is an updated version of the first edition with various additions that reflect recent developments in timekeeping as specified in what follows.

Everyday use of time in one form or another is a common experience for everyone throughout their lives. The availability of a means to measure the passage of time with the required accuracy is taken for granted. However, the concepts on which timescales are based and the requirements for accuracy in many applications can be both sophisticated and complex. Time is not a simple subject.

During the 20th century the variability of the Earth's rotational speed was established. The basis for time that had served for so many centuries was no longer adequate to meet the more demanding needs for time. A search for the definition and introduction of a uniform second and timescale led to Ephemeris Time, based on the orbital motions of solar system bodies. At that time atomic clocks were being developed that offered a more convenient and accurate basis for time. Time measurement progressed from timescales based on astronomical phenomena to atomic physics. In addition, improvements in the accuracy of planetary positions required the introduction of dynamical timescales that recognized the role of general relativity in timekeeping. Over the same period of time the accuracies of timekeeping and time transfer improved significantly, and requirements for time have become even more demanding. The atomic *Système International* (SI) second quickly achieved recognition as the most accurate and fundamental unit of measure.

Although the Earth was no longer the basis for the most precise timekeeping, the demands of new technologies made it even more critical to observe, analyze, and predict the actual variations of its rotation. The motions of its rotational axis, both in space and in the Earth itself, also required a parallel effort of observations, analysis, and prediction. These activities pushed the improvement of celestial and terrestrial reference frames by orders of magnitude and encouraged new developments in the study of the dynamics of the Earth, including the core, mantle, atmosphere, oceans, etc., and the forces acting on it due to the Sun, Moon, and

planets. These studies have gone on to spur the further development of even more accurate methods of observations.

This book is intended to tell the story of the progress in timekeeping over the past century. It begins with time solely based on the rotation of the Earth, and proceeds through the discovery of the variations in Earth rotation and motions of the Earth's pole. During that time clocks progressed through improvements in mechanical clocks to the development and improvements of atomic clocks. The availability of atomic time, the routine observations of the variable Earth rotation, and the development of the theory of relativity led to the introduction of Universal Time, International Atomic Time, Coordinated Universal Time, and a family of dynamical timescales. In the process there have been a number of scientific discoveries, significant improvements in accuracy, the development of new applications of accurate time, and the growth of the scientific field of Earth dynamics.

Additions in this edition include a chapter on Time and Cosmology, developments in optical frequency standards, possible redefinition of the second, and the future of UTC and leap seconds, as well as discussions of the difference between UT1 and mean solar time, the “move” of the Greenwich prime meridian, geomagnetic jerks and their effects on Earth orientation, possible timescales constructed from pulsar and white dwarf observations, and applications of time and frequency for intelligent highways and self-driving cars.

A list of acronyms and a glossary are included to ease the use of a number of specialized terms that have developed over the years in this field.

It is our pleasure to acknowledge and thank our colleagues: Professor Chris Impey, whose presentation at the Science of Time Symposium in June 2016 provided the inspiration and outline of the chapter on Time and Cosmology; Professor Mark Whittle corrected and improved our draft of that chapter; and Paul Hughes assisted in literature searches to update this book.