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Navigation: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)

Jim Bennett

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From the Bronze Age mariners of the Mediterranean to contemporary sailors using satellite-based technologies, the history of navigation at sea, the art of finding a position and setting a course, is fascinating. The scientific and technological developments that have enabled accurate measurements of position were central to exploration, trade, and the opening up of new continents, and the resulting journeys taken under their influence have had a profound influence on world history.

In this *Very Short Introduction* Jim Bennett looks at the history of navigation, starting with the distinctive cultures of navigation that are defined geographically - the Mediterranean Sea, and the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic Oceans. He shows how the adoption of mathematical methods, the use of instruments, the writing of textbooks and the publication of charts all combined to create a more standardized practice. Methods such as longitude-finding by chronometer and lunar distance were complemented by the routine business of recording courses and reckoning position 'by account'. Bennett also introduces the incredible array of instruments relied on by sailors, from astrolabes, sextants, and chronometers, to our more modern radio receivers, electronic equipment, and charts, and highlights the crucial role played by the individual qualities of endeavor and resourcefulness from mathematicians, scientists, and seamen in finding their way at sea. The story of navigation combines the societal, the technical, and the human, and it was vital for shaping the modern world.

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