



# Flat Earth: The History of an Infamous Idea

*Christine Garwood*

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Contrary to popular belief fostered in countless school classrooms the world over, Christopher Columbus did not discover that the earth was round. The idea of a spherical world had been widely accepted in educated circles from as early as the fourth century b.c. Yet, bizarrely, it was not until the supposedly more rational nineteenth century that the notion of a flat earth really took hold. Even more bizarrely, it persists to this day, despite Apollo missions and widely publicized pictures of the decidedly spherical Earth from space.

Based on a range of original sources, Garwood's history of flat-Earth beliefs---from the Babylonians to the present day---raises issues central to the history and philosophy of science, its relationship to religion and the making of human knowledge about the natural world. *Flat Earth* is the first definitive study of one of history's most notorious and persistent ideas, and it evokes all the intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual turmoil of the modern age. Ranging from ancient Greece, through Victorian England, to modern-day America, this is a story that encompasses religion, science, and pseudoscience, as well as a spectacular array of people and places. Where else could eccentric aristocrats, fundamentalist preachers, and conspiracy theorists appear alongside Copernicus, Newton, and NASA, except in an account of such a legendary misconception?

Thoroughly enjoyable and illuminating, *Flat Earth* is social and intellectual history at its best.

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