

## **June 8, 2004 - when Venus meets the Sun**

**Martin J. Neumann**

**Editor, Sterne und Weltraum**

Max-Planck-Institut für Astronomie  
Königstuhl 17, D-69117 Heidelberg Germany  
E-Mail: [neumann@mpia.de](mailto:neumann@mpia.de)

On June 8, 2004 we will witness a rare astronomical event that no living person today has ever seen: A transit of Venus across the Sun. The first detailed observation of a transit has been accomplished by the English clergyman and amateur astronomer Jeremy Horrocks in 1639. During the following decades many scientists set sails for dangerous expeditions to watch simultaneously transits from different parts of the world. By this method, they were hoping to determine the astronomical unit - the mean distance of the earth to the sun. However, they never succeeded to derive a very precise value from their observations.

In my talk, I discuss some historic events and offer instructions for practical observations of the upcoming transit. By briefly reviewing the current search for exoplanets I will show that the earlier generations of courageous astronomers have left an important message to us: that it is possible to significantly extend our modern picture of the universe by observing planetary transits.