Etienne Louis Malus Encyclopedia Article

Etienne Louis Malus

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Etienne Louis Malus

1775-1812

French physicist who spent his brief career as an engineer in the French Army. While investigating the phenomenon of double refraction, the splitting of a light beam into two by certain crystals, he discovered that a beam with similar characteristics to each refracted beam is produced by reflection of sunlight from any smooth surface at a unique angle. He described the beams thus produced as "polarized," initiating a period of intense investigation of the properties of polarized light.