



NEWS! From the NAVAL OBSERVATORY

U.S. NAVAL OBSERVATORY

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U.S. Naval Observatory Press Release

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U.S. Naval Observatory Donates Rare Book to Library of Congress

WASHINGTON, DC -- On Friday, January 20, 2012 the USNO's James M. Gilliss Library donated a copy of a rare book to the Thomas Jefferson collection at the Library of Congress.

Rear Admiral Jonathan White, USN, Commander, Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command (CNMOC), presented a Latin version of *Sur la Figure de la Terre*, written by the 18th Century French mathematician and philosopher Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, to Dr. James H. Billington, the Librarian of Congress, in order to help the Library recreate its collection of books that were once owned by Thomas Jefferson.

While serving as the American ambassador in Paris in 1789, Jefferson ordered a copy of Maupertuis' Latin version, *Figura Telluris de Maupertuis*, which was published in Leipzig, Germany in 1742. It was one of a number of books he selected from a catalogue issued by a book seller in Strasburg, Armand Koenig.

The book was ordered on June 29, 1789. It was sent to Jefferson and was included in a bill from Koenig dated July 17, with a price of £ 2.0.0. It was entered without price by Jefferson in his undated manuscript library catalogue.

In 1815, Jefferson sold his books to the Library of Congress to re-start its collection after the burning of the original library in the War of 1812. His library - now on display in the Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress - was considered one of the finest in the United States at the time.

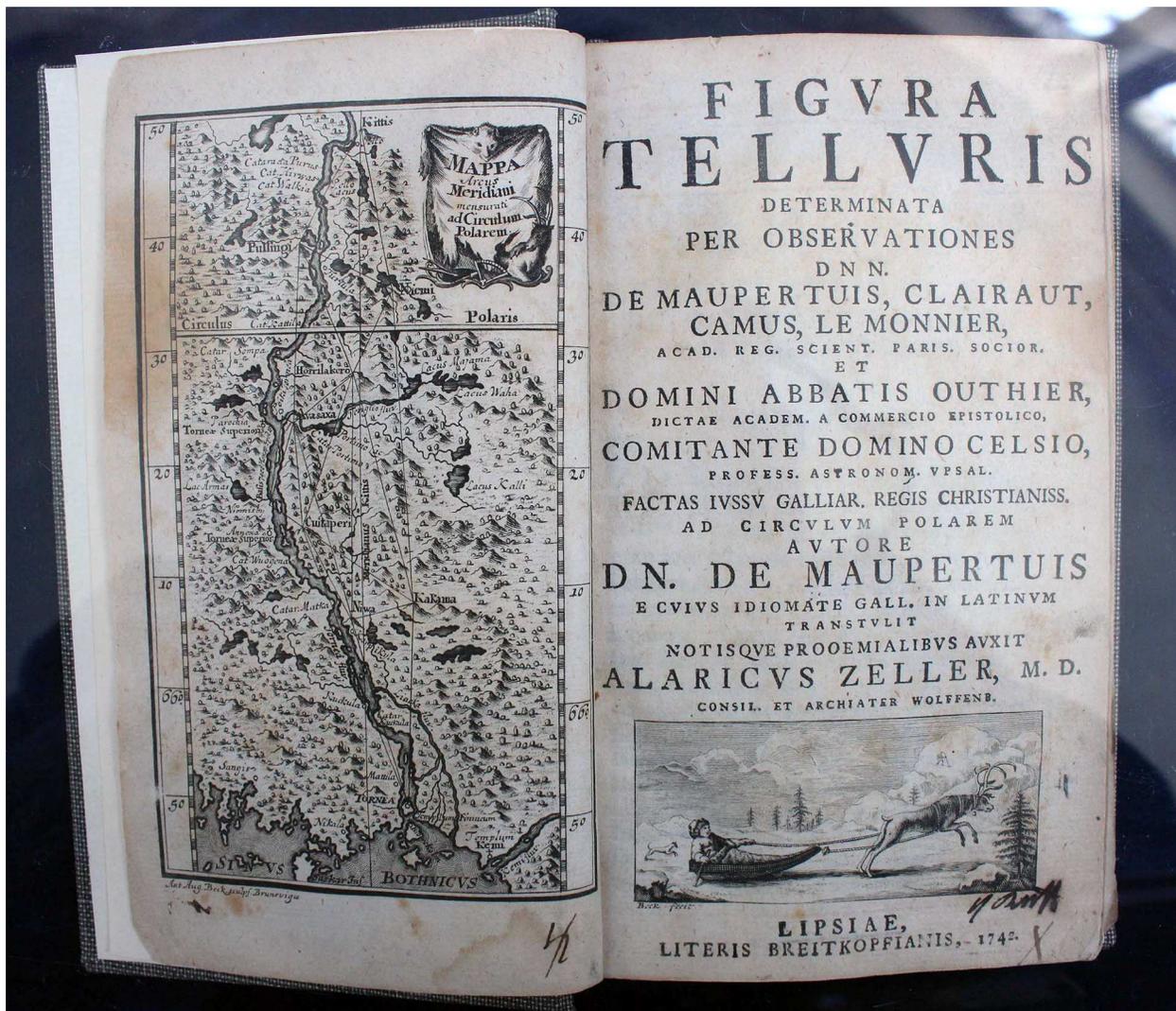
Over the years the Library of Congress' copy of *Figura Telluris de Maupertuis* was lost. The USNO library has two copies of the work, the original French edition printed in 1738, and the Latin version from 1742. LT James M. Gilliss purchased the French version and a copy of Maupertuis' *Astronomie Nautique* in 1843 in Paris. We have no record of when the Latin version was purchased.

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RARE BOOK 2-2-2

The USNO's James M. Gilliss Library was established in 1842 with an \$800 allotment from the \$25,000 appropriation which funded the Observatory's first permanent home in Washington's Foggy Bottom district. Today it holds over 80,000 titles and is considered to be one of the world's premier astronomical libraries.

With origins over 181 years ago, the U.S. Naval Observatory continues to perform an essential operational role for the United States, the Navy, and the Department of Defense. Its mission includes determining the positions and motions of the Earth, Sun, Moon, planets, stars and other celestial objects, providing astronomical data; determining precise time; measuring the Earth's rotation; and maintaining the Master Clock for the United States.



Frontispiece of the 1742 Latin edition (U.S. Naval Observatory Library)