Archives: New Horizons in Astronomy

Laurence Bobis, Amelia Laurenceau

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Laurence Bobis and Amelia Laurenceau
Observatoire de Paris, UMS 2201, CNRS/INSU; 61 avenue de l'Observatoire, 75014 Paris, France

Abstract. The scientific archives in the Paris Observatory's library date back to the XVIIth century. In addition to the preservation and the valorisation of these historic archives, the library is also responsible for the efficient and timely management of contemporary documents to ensure their optimum conservation and identification once they become historical. Oral, iconographic and electronic documents complement these paper archives.

1. The Paris Observatory Library

The Paris Observatory is still active at its original site, which is exceptional given the current trend of observatories abandoning their historical locations. Incidentally, the Meudon Observatory, founded in the XIXth century, and the radio astronomy station in Nançay, were annexed to the Paris Observatory during the XXth century.

The Observatory has three missions: research, education, and dissemination of scientific and technical information. The library, which is responsible for the acquisition, description and communication of scholarly documentation, has another mission, the preservation and enhancement of the establishment's patrimony. The library is in charge of both the Observatory's archives and its non-textual collections.

2. Archives: Mission and History

It is a mission as old as the Observatory. When the library was officially created in 1785, the archives went back to its foundation in 1667; the *Journal des observations faites á l'Observatoire royal de Paris*, which commenced in 1671, is a noteworthy example.

At the start of the French Revolution, Jean-Dominique Cassini IV, who was wary of the new governmental authorities, drew up a meticulous inventory of instruments and manuscripts at the Observatory. Despite the tumultuous climate, this was nevertheless a period when the Observatory acquired important documents and objects, such as the collection of manuscripts from the astronomer Joseph-Nicolas Delisle. During the next century, the collections continued to grow with the integration of new Observatory archives, as well as gifts and some acquisitions.

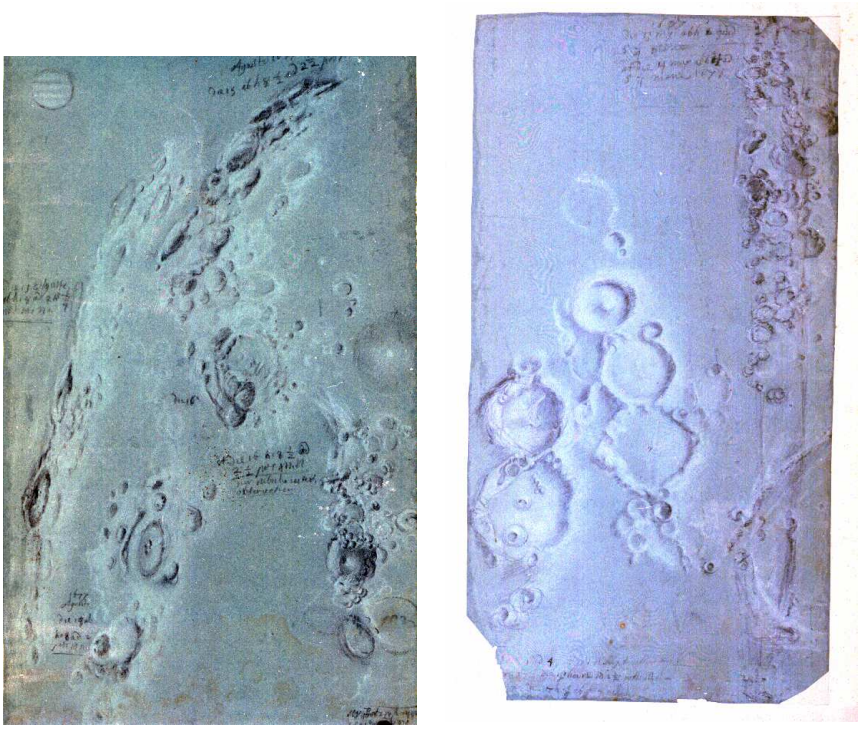


Figure 1. Original drawings of moon spots, based on Jean-Dominique Cassini's observations, by Sébastien Leclerc and Jean Patigny.

3. Decompartmentalisation: Archives, Instruments and Iconography

Alidade (Online access to instruments, documents and archives in astronomy)[1] is the database of patrimonial collections, online since 2008.

The platform allows access to archives, instruments, objects and iconography. While there are obvious reasons for distinct catalogues by document type, the grouping of diverse documents on one platform facilitates research. For example, one search will access information about an instrument, photographic or iconographic documents created using it, relevant observation notebooks, as well as images of the instrument and its uses.

4. Oral Archives

The evolution in new technologies has enabled the collection of more vast and complete documentation, such as interviews with astronomers and other scientists. Hence, in

[1] http://alidade.obspm.fr/sdx/alidade

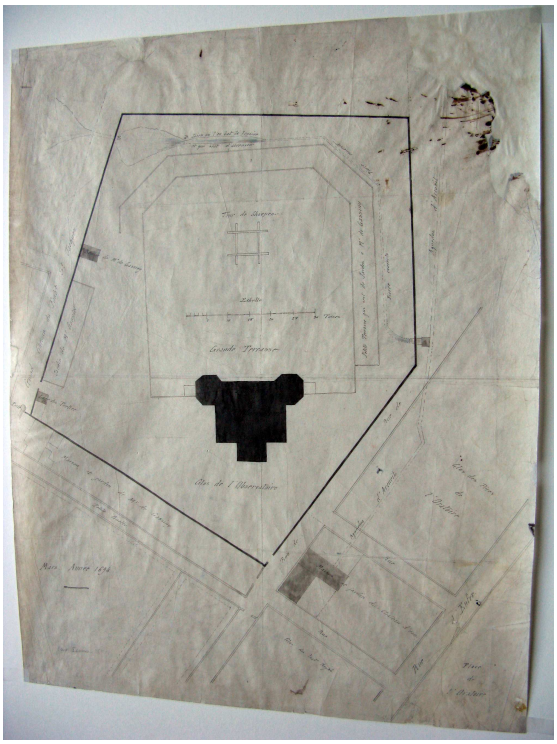


Figure 2. Royal Observatory plan, drawing on tracing paper, 1694.

2009 the library commenced a programme of collecting oral archives on the scientific activity of key researchers at the Observatory in order to ensure that such information would be preserved, and as a complement to paper and electronic documentation. The programme is managed by a steering committee and relies on a methodology which defines survey and interview conditions.

5. Records Management

The necessity of a global policy for information and archival management is increasingly important to the efficient organisation and stewardship of establishments. Archival management ameliorates governance. Information acquisition, whether physical or electronic, should be considered as a continuous process by managing it from its creation or reception until its definitive filing or elimination (current, intermediate and historical archives). Because of its long mission in the management of the "historical" archives of the Observatory, the library will be given the new responsibility for organising records management through the elaboration of a classification scheme and a charter.

Acknowledgments. We thank Susan Keyes for the translation.

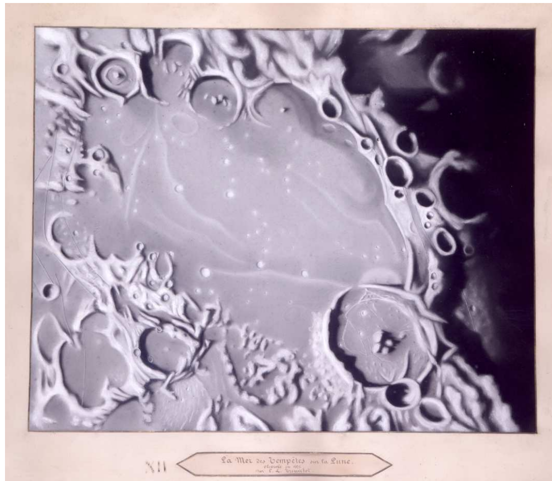
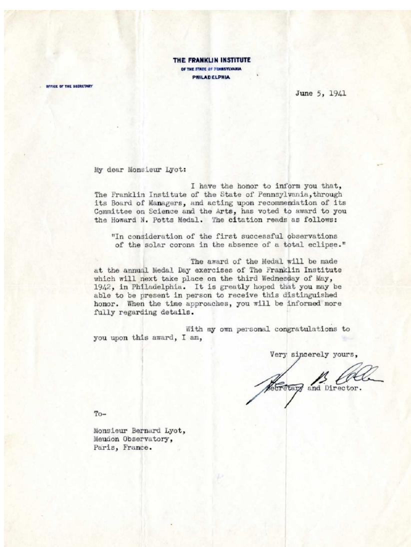


Figure 3. Oceanus Procellarum, observed in 1875, pastel by Étienne-Léopold Trouvelot, ca. 1880. © Observatoire de Paris



THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA
PHILADELPHIA

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

June 5, 1941

My dear Monsieur Lyot:

I have the honor to inform you that, The Franklin Institute of the State of Pennsylvania, through its Board of Managers, and acting upon recommendation of its Committee on Science and the Arts, has voted to award to you the Howard N. Potts Medal. The citation reads as follows:

"In consideration of the first successful observations of the solar corona in the absence of a total eclipse."

The award of the Medal will be made at the annual Medal Day exercises of The Franklin Institute which will next take place on the third Wednesday of May, 1942, in Philadelphia. It is greatly hoped that you may be able to be present in person to receive this distinguished honor. When the time approaches, you will be informed more fully regarding details.

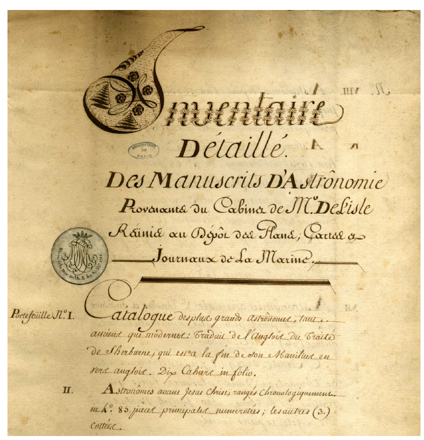
With my own personal congratulations to you upon this award, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

Secretary and Director.

To-

Monsieur Bernard Lyot,
Meudon Observatory,
Paris, France.



Inventaire
Détaillé.
Des Manuscrits D'Astrônomie
Provenants du Cabinet de Mr. DeLisle
Réünis au Dépôt des Plans, Cartes et
Journaux de La Marine.

Portefeüille N.° I. Catalogue des plus grands Astrônomes, tant anciens que modernes: Traduit de l'Anglois du Traité de Sherburne, qui est a la fin de son Manilius en vers anglois. Dix Cahiers in folio.

II. Astrônomes avant Jesus Christ, rangés Chronologiquement. in 4°. 85 pieces principales numerotées; les autres (3.) cottées.

Figure 4. Left: Letter from Henry B. Allen, Director of The Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Bernard Lyot, dated June 5, 1941. Right: Detailed inventory of manuscripts in Joseph-Nicolas Delisle's collection. © Observatoire de Paris

Figure 5. Mirrors and supports used by Léon Foucault for comparing the speed of light in water and air, 1862.

Figure 6. Hipparcos satellite instruments. On the left, the refocus mechanism; on the right, the main grid. The archives related to this European mission were given to the Paris Observatory by ESA in 2008. © Observatoire de Paris