

INTRODUCTION

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The symposium held in Paris on June 1-5, 1987 honored two great achievements of our predecessors, marking two important anniversaries in astronomy. One of these is the sesquicentennial of the first trigonometric parallax, the first reliable distance to any object outside our Solar System. Three centuries earlier, a new alignment of the Sun and planets had been proposed by a timid Polish cleric. It would necessitate a stellar displacement reflecting the Earth's orbital motion and would terminate forever the concept that the stars were mere adjuncts to our own planetary system. But detection of the parallactic displacement forming the final commitment to that heliocentricity had to await many trials of technique and patience before its ultimate success which was celebrated here.

The second is the centennial of the Carte du Ciel, the first great international collaboration in astronomy organized here in Paris a century ago. The Carte du Ciel along with its successors is testimony to the fact that the people of no one nation can view the entire celestial sphere. Collaboration across national boundaries is and must be a fundamental part of our work and abandonment of it for any reason raises an unworthy limitation to our profession.

The connecting fabric of astronomy over human ranges in space and time is very evident here in the appreciation of these two past events. Mapping the sky - the whole sky - is a task for astronomers in all lands and above them as well, in order to cover the entire electromagnetic spectrum. At this gathering, the participants looked backward gratefully toward the achievements of those who came before us, and forward with a glimpse of the progress we ourselves hope to make.