

The most beautiful book ever published on the constellations

Andreas Cellarius. *Harmonia macrocosmica, seu Atlas universalis et novus*. Amsterdam: Jan Jansson, 1661. 20 7/8 inches x 13 inches (530 x 330 mm), 364 pages, engraved and colored title page, 29 hand-colored plates.

The seventeenth century was the Golden Age of Dutch cartography, in which the availability of large copperplates, superb draftsmanship, and immaculate coloring were combined with a period exuberance of detail—for winds, anchors, and a compass rose were more important to a map's effect than many a minor inland town. The earth and sea in that nautical era were the chief subjects of attention; the celestial atlas remained a rarity. Cellarius' *Harmonia macrocosmica*, however, has claims to be the most beautiful book ever published on the constellations, with delineations not only of the zodiac but the different cosmological systems of Ptolemy, Copernicus, and Tycho Brahe.

Cellarius himself remains a shadowy figure, but he was most likely a German or a Pole as his name suggests — it is a Latinization of Keller or Kellner. Cellarius produced an atlas of Poland and Lithuania in 1652, and at the time of publication of *Harmonia macrocosmica* was rector of the Latin School at Hoorn, roughly twenty miles north of Amsterdam. The plates are brilliantly colored, highlighted in gold, with all the baroque trimmings. What space remains after a celestial hemisphere has been imposed on a huge rectangular sheet is filled to overflowing with banners, clouds, diagrams, mythological figures, portraits of astronomers and their observatories, or cherubs playing with sextants and telescopes. This is the first of three issues of the plates; the others were issued in 1666 and 1708.

This copy of Cellarius' lavishly beautiful book is from The Warnock Library, and it is bound in contemporary vellum with ornamental gilt stamping.

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