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Online exhibition available May 10, 2002 at www.sil.si.edu/exhibitions/odyssey

Rare Books Exhibition Offers Rich Survey of Smithsonian Libraries' Collection

"An Odyssey in Print: Adventures in the Smithsonian Libraries" turns the visitor into an explorer by opening the doors to the extraordinary collections of the Smithsonian Institution Libraries. "Odyssey" debuted under the title "Voyages: A Smithsonian Libraries Exhibition" at Manhattan's Grolier Club in spring 2001. It opens in the Smithsonian Libraries Gallery on the first floor of the National Museum of American History, Behring Center on May 16.

So extensive is this survey of the Libraries' collection that it is divided into three parts, to be shown over a period of 18 months, and will close in December 2003. In total, more than 100 examples of the Libraries' most visually alluring and historically valuable works from its over 1.5 million-volume collection will be on display. Works representing 500 years of printing are included in the exhibition. They range from seminal texts published before 1500, to contemporary artists' books produced at the end of the 20th century. To learn when particular objects will be on view over the 18 months, the public is invited to visit the Libraries' virtual exhibition at www.sil.si.edu/exhibitions/odyssey, which will be available beginning May 10.

Each of the three segments of the exhibition is organized according to three major themes:

"Journeys Over Land and Sea" contains reports of people, animals, plants and unknown lands.

"Journeys of the Mind" deals with scientists, whose intellectual journeys organized information on the subjects of botany, zoology, chemistry and physics.

"Journeys of the Imagination" features the works of architects, designers and artists.

Regarding the exhibition's theme of travel and exploration, Odyssey curator Mary Augusta Thomas says, "Entering a library is always a voyage of discovery. Any researcher who embarks on a project enters into the unknown. From these studies, a sort of map is constructed, which others may follow. This exhibition is an invitation to travel through lesser-known Smithsonian collections, to share important books in the Smithsonian Libraries, and to learn about the working life of the Smithsonian Institution."

"Odyssey" illustrates the ways in which books and other writings are used every day by scientists and curators, and why they form a vital part of the research and exhibition enterprises of the Smithsonian.

Nancy E. Gwinn, director of the Smithsonian Libraries, states, "This exhibition shows the critical role the Libraries plays in the Smithsonian museum community. Our collections correspond to and serve the many, far-reaching fields of study conducted within the Institution. We are very glad to be able to present a sampling of the Libraries' distinctive volumes to Smithsonian visitors, so that they have the



opportunity to see a portion of the nation's collection and understand the knowledge that helps to drive research done at the Smithsonian."

Exhibition highlights over the 18 months include:

Bernhard von Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam* (1486), an account of the author's 1483 pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Albrecht Dürer's *Institutionum geometricarum* (1535), dedicated to art and its relation to geometry

Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* (1582), the most thorough geographical, biological, and cultural treatise known from the ancient world

Robert Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665), a captivating and influential collection of plates by Hooke made during his studies with early microscopes

Giuseppe Bibiena's *Architettura, e prospettive* (1740), a work containing engravings of the artist's spectacular theatrical designs

Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), which sets out his theory of evolution by natural selection

Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (1874), which speculated on what the first space voyage would be like

Neil Armstrong's *First On the Moon* (1970), a book about the author's landmark lunar stroll; this edition is autographed by Armstrong, Michael Collins and Buzz Aldrin

Qauqaua: a San folk story from Botswana told by Coex'ae Qgam (1996), a collaboration between The Artists' Press and nine Bushmen artists to preserve traditional stories and culture in a time of rapid change in South Africa

An accompanying book, also titled *An Odyssey in Print: Adventures in the Smithsonian Libraries*, will be available for purchase from the Smithsonian Institution Press (www.sipress.si.edu) in May. It contains a foreword by Gwinn and an essay on the history of the Smithsonian Libraries' collections Thomas, Smithsonian Libraries' assistant director for reader services and strategic planning. Also featured is an essay, titled "Realms of Wonder," by Michael Dirda, senior editor for *Washington Post Book World*, and an essay, "The Curator and the Book," by Storrs Olson, senior zoologist at Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

The "Odyssey in Print" exhibition and its publications and programs were made possible by the generous support of UBS Warburg UBS PaineWebber. Additional contributions were made by Credit Suisse First Boston, The Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation, The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, Morgan Stanley, and the 1999-2000 Smithsonian Institution Libraries Board (Rosemary Livingston Ripley, Chair).

The Smithsonian Libraries is a 22-branch system with online exhibitions, rare books, and information services online at www.sil.si.edu. The library catalog is at www.siris.si.edu. The Libraries serves the Smithsonian and the public with information and reference support. Its collections include 40,000 rare books, 2,000 manuscript groups, 180,000 microfilm and microfiche, and nearly 300,000 commercial trade catalogs dating back to the 1850s and representing over 30,000 companies.



Smithsonian Institution Libraries

Smithsonian museums on the National Mall are open 10:00 am to 5:30 pm daily (except December 25). Admission is free.

Note to editors: Downloadable images are available on the SI News Desk, located at <http://newsdesk.si.edu> or by calling Savannah Schroll at (202)357-2240.

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