http://www.geology.19thcenturyscience.org/books/1858-Humboldt-Cosmos/README.htm

the consideration of phenomena which are so complicated, and have, up to the present time, been found so little susceptible of the application of rigorous method, that the physical science of the earth can not boast of the same certainty and simplicity in the exposition of facts and their mutual connection which characterize the celestial portion of the Cosmos. It is not improbable that the difference to which we allude may furnish an explanation of the cause which, in the earliest ages of intellectual culture among the Greeks, directed the natural philosophy of the Pythagoreans with more ardor to the heavenly bodies and the regions of space than to the earth and its productions, and how through Philolaüs, and subsequently through the analogous views of Aristarchus of Samos, and of Seleucus of Erythrea, this science has been made more conducive to the attainment of a knowledge of the true system of the world than the natural philosophy of the Ionian school could ever be to the physical history of the earth. Giving but little attention to the properties and specific differences of matter filling space, the great Italian school, in its Doric gravity, turned by preference toward all that relates to measure, to the form of bodies, and to the number and distances of the planets,* while the Ionian physicists directed their attention to the qualities of matter, its true or supposed metamorphoses, and to relations of origin. It was reserved for the powerful genius of Aristotle, alike profoundly speculative and practical, to sound with equal success the depths of abstraction and the inexhaustible resources of vital activity pervading the material world.

Several highly distinguished treatises on physical geography are prefaced by an introduction, whose purely astronomical sections are directed to the consideration of the earth in its planetary dependence, and as constituting a part of that great system which is animated by one central body, the sun. This course is diametrically opposed to the one which I propose following. In order adequately to estimate the dignity of the Cosmos, it is requisite that the sidereal portion, termed by Kant the *natural history of the heavens*, should not be made subordinate to the terrestrial. In the science of the Cosmos, according to the expression of Aristarchus of Samos, the pioneer of the Copernican system, the sun, with its satellites, was nothing more than one of the innumerable stars by which space is occupied. The physical history of the world must, therefore, begin with the description of the heavenly bodies,

* Compare Otfried Müller's *Dorier*, bd. i., s. 365.