

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20560

August 16, 1966

Monsieur Henri Michel
54 Rue de Tenbosch
Bruxelles, Belgium

Dear Monsieur Michel:

I have not had an opportunity to correspond with you in some time, and it occurred to me that you might be interested in looking over photographs of two astrolabes in my collection.

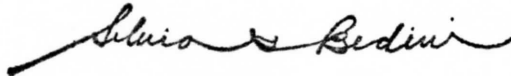
As you will see, one of these is Indian, and the date has been translated as 1810, from which 78 is presumably to be subtracted, making its date 1732. This astrolabe has 9 stars or constellations inlaid in silver on the "mater" or plate. It has a sighting tube, and I have been collecting photographs of other similar astrolabes. I believe that this instrument now makes the total of 6 of this type presently known. Is this correct?

The other astrolabe is Persian and appears to be dated 1230 A.D. It is of brass of a yellow gold color which does not appear to tarnish and which you noted in your work on the astrolabe. There are several errors in the kufic inscription of the instrument and I wonder whether these may have any significance. On the central base of the rete is inscribed the place-name "Sawah" in Persia. Is the appearance of a place name on a rete customary or unusual? Your comments on these instruments would be most useful to me.

I have ordered a copy of the new edition of your work on the sundials of the Elskamp collection and I am looking forward to receiving this with considerable interest.

With very best wishes for a pleasant summer.

Sincerely,



Silvio A. Bedini
Assistant Director
Museum of History and Technology

29 november 1966

Dear Mr. Bedini,

Please excuse me if I did not answer your letter of Aug.26, with which you sent me your excellent photographs of two astrolabes. I was abroad when that letter arrived, and it was left somewhere up to now. I am ashamed and apologize.

Indian astrolabe. The 9 small silver inlays in the water are quaint. I do not believe that they mean stars, because there is no reason for marking the position of stars on the plate. Anyhow, the silver marks correspond exactly to the star-pointers on the rete. Their meaning could be that the rete should be placed with its pointers in correspondence with them for some calculations; but this is purely imaginative, and quite unnecessary, since the meridian line on the water is much more convenient.

The use of a sighting tube instead of an alidade is also unusual, and may be a later addition to an existing astrolabe. The metal of the tube should be compared with the metal of the alidade.

Persian astrolabe. The date 1230 AD seems to me somewhat early. Nor the character of the instrument, nor its details correspond to that date. I do not see what the name "Sawah" means. There is a big difference in the quality of the engraving on the back, and on the other parts. The instrument might have been reworked for astrological purposes.

Unfortunately, I cannot compare your astrolabes with my former documents, since I gave all my photographs of such instruments to the Oxford Museum. I believe that the opinion of Mr. Maddison would be more interesting; shall I send him your photos, or have you already corresponded with him?

I take the occasion to send my best compliments and wishes for the season, and hope to have an occasion to meet you next year.

yours very truly