

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

August 5, 1968

AIR MAIL

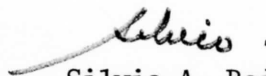
Monsieur Henri Michel
54 Rue de Tenbosch
Bruxelles, Belgium

Dear Monsieur Michel:

I am taking the liberty of enclosing photographs of a Persian pocket astrolabe which I recently acquired. There is some doubt as to whether it is (a) legitimate astronomical, (b) legitimate astrological, or (c) a fake. If it does indeed prove to be a fake, I will not be upset at all because I was not convinced that it was indeed legitimate when I acquired it. It is a small instrument, measuring approximately 2 1/2 inches in diameter.

I will be most grateful indeed for your comments. With warm regards,

Sincerely,



Silvio A. Bedini
Assistant Director
Museum of History and Technology

Enclosures
(6) photographs

17 august 1968

Mr. Silvio A. Bedini
Museum of History & Technology
The Smithsonian Institution
Washington D.C. 20560

My dear Mr. Bedini,

I found your letter of aug. 5 upon my return from holidays in France, and shall try to answer immediately your questions.

I consider your astrolabe as legitimate, and believe it to be syrian and of the end of the XVIIIth or beginning of the XIXth cent. Since I published my book on astrolabes, twenty years ago, I have somewhat lost my practice in deciphering arabian instruments, and besides, it would take a long time to study the riddles on the plates. But nothing leads me to think that it is a fake.

One thing seems awkward: you write that the diameter is $2 \frac{1}{2}$ inch. This is very small. I never saw an astrolabe of this size. Don't you mean $2 \frac{1}{2}$ inch radius? An astrolabe about half the size of your photographs would be difficult to handle.

Of course there are a few astrological diagrams on the plates, but not many and they appear frequently on egyptian or syrian astrolabes. Your instrument is far from being specifically an astrological astrolabe. On the back of the mater, the square seems to be a "magical square" but this ought to be controlled at ease. The engraving is not bad at all, and purely astrological plates, especially the magical squares, are generally very badly written.

As soon as I have an occasion to meet our friend Maddison, I shall show him your photographs, and hope that he might be of the same opinion as I am. Unfortunately I shall not be in Paris next week, for the meeting of the Union, but I hope to see him afterwards.

yours very truly

H. Michel