

First published as a special issue of the journal *Medieval Encounters* (vol. 23, 2017), this volume, edited by Josefina Rodríguez-Arribas, Charles Burnett, Silke Ackermann, and Ryan Szpiech, brings together fourteen studies on various aspects of the astrolabe in medieval cultures. The astrolabe, developed in antiquity and elaborated throughout the Middle Ages, had a variety of uses, amongst which timekeeping, surveying, and astrological applications were the most common. It was also associated with power and luxury in many Muslim and Christian courts, where astrologers (frequently Jews) used it to forecast the future of the kingdom. By considering sources and instruments from Muslim, Christian, and Jewish contexts, this volume provides state-of-the-art research on the history and use of the astrolabe throughout the Middle Ages.

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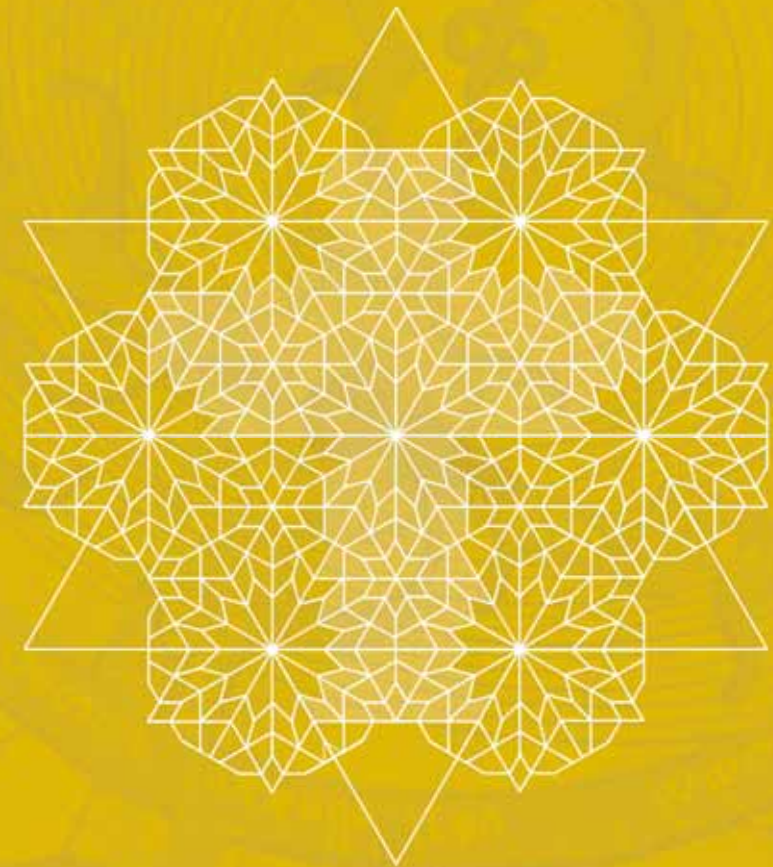
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Astrolabes in Medieval Cultures

Josefina Rodríguez-Arribas, Charles Burnett,
Silke Ackermann, and Ryan Szpiech (Eds.)

Astrolabes in Medieval Cultures



EDITED BY

*Josefina Rodríguez-Arribas, Charles Burnett,
Silke Ackermann, and Ryan Szpiech*

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Preface to the New Edition

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This volume was first published in *Medieval Encounters* 23.1–5 (2017) and was guest edited by Josefina Rodríguez-Arribas, Charles Burnett, and Silke Ackermann. It is now my pleasure as Editor-in-Chief of the journal to publish that special issue in updated form as a book. The contents of this volume are mostly identical with those of the journal issue, but this book also includes a number of corrections and a few important additions.

Among the additions are brief postscripts added by John Davis and Günther Oestmann to their articles that discuss new findings and clarifications of their original points. In addition, images and diagrams in some articles have been resized and improved, a few passages rewritten and updated, and some errata corrected. Most significantly, a new article by Flora Vafea (whose own original contribution also reappears here) has been appended to the original issue as an epilogue. Vafea's epilogue provides a response to the article by Johannes Thomann, "Astrolabes as Eclipse Computers," included in the original publication and reproduced here. Vafea proposes that two of the texts considered by Thomann as independent sources about the plate of eclipses, according to 'Alī ibn 'Īsā's description, should be considered instead as two parts of the same work. Vafea provides a text and translation of the proposed single text and attempts a reconstruction of the instrument described therein.

With this new edition of the *Medieval Encounters* issue "Astrolabes in Medieval Culture," we four editors aim to disseminate this important research to a wider body of readers and scholars and to offer them a corrected and up-to-date version of the research it contains. I am confident that this volume will provide a touchstone for ongoing research in medieval astronomy and serve as a foundation for future studies.

Preface to the First Edition



Astrolabes in Medieval Cultures

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This book, first published as a Special Issue of *Medieval Encounters*, is based on the papers of the conference on “Astrolabes in Medieval Cultures” held at the Warburg Institute, University of London, on 24–25 April 2014, under the aegis of a three-year research project on “Astrolabes in Jewish Culture.” This project was supported by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/I003800) and based at the Warburg Institute (Josefina Rodríguez-Arribas and Charles Burnett) with the participation of the British Museum (in its initial stages, Silke Ackermann) and the Museum of the History of Science, Oxford University (Stephen Johnston). The aims of the project were to produce a monograph on the place of the astrolabe in medieval Jewish culture, to draw up an illustrated catalogue of the instruments, and to edit and translate at least one of the Hebrew treatises on the use and construction of astrolabes. All three aims are nearing completion. In this context it seemed opportune to bring together scholars and students interested in the instrument, its history, and its literature, in which experienced and new scholars could update the knowledge so far available in this field. We were interested in all periods and cultures, and in all kinds of approaches, but especially those that have received less attention. This meeting was an occasion for scholarly and friendly exchanges, and a source of inspiration for future research. Several participants brought

instruments they possessed or had made themselves, which were admired, displayed, discussed—and used! The general feeling was that astrolabe is still very much alive and there is still much to learn about its subtleties. After the conference, further articles were commissioned to fill out the subject matter of the book and it was decided to include David King’s list of European astrolabes (to ca. 1500 arranged by category) as a useful tool to place the astrolabes referred to in this volume in context.

The editors would like to express their gratitude to the Warburg Institute, their staff and fellows, and to the British Museum and the Oxford Museum of the History of Science and their staffs, for supporting this research project and this conference in different ways. We would particularly like to thank Stephen Johnston for his part in preparing the conference and for the unstinted help and advice that he has always given us. We would like to extend our gratitude to Ryan Szpiech, the editor of *Medieval Encounters*, for accepting the proceedings of this conference into the journal. Last but not least we also thank all the participants in the conference “Astrolabes in Medieval Cultures” for sharing their knowledge and their enthusiasm for this intelligent, beautiful, and emblematic object and making this scholarly event a very special occasion.

The Editors

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