

ATRIUM TOUR

ARMILLARY SPHERE

An armillary sphere (variations are known as spherical astrolabe, armilla, or armil) is a model of objects in the sky (on the celestial sphere), consisting of a spherical framework of rings, centered on Earth or the Sun, that represent lines of celestial longitude and latitude and other astronomically important features, such as the ecliptic. With the Earth as center, an armillary sphere is known as Ptolemaic. With the Sun as center, it is known as Copernican.

It was invented separately, in ancient China possibly as early as the 4th century BC and ancient Greece during the 3rd century BC, with later uses in the Islamic world and Medieval Europe.

Armillary spheres were among the first complex mechanical devices. Their development led to many improvements in techniques and design of all mechanical devices.

Renaissance scientists and public figures often had their portraits painted showing them with one hand on an armillary sphere.



Statue of Roger Bacon carrying an armillary sphere in the Oxford University Museum of Natural Science