

Scientific Instruments, 1500–1900: An Introduction



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Synopsis

The impulse to collect is an almost universal one, satisfying the hunting and acquisitive instincts, the love of beauty, and intellectual curiosity. The wealthy have collected rare and beautiful things from the earliest days of civilization, but the collection, or "cabinet," containing natural curiosities dates from the sixteenth century, and it was this type of collection in which scientific instruments found a home. In the twentieth century, we have come to accept a vast range of technical, often complex, equipment for everyday use. Science has become the very substance of our life style. But the appeal of historic scientific instruments remains, and from them much can be learned of the practice and development of science over four centuries. This book traces the historical origins and development of instruments as they spread across the globe, explaining their manufacture, use, and adaptations. This must-have book for the active collector gives practical advice on dealing with instruments and checking their authenticity. It features a comprehensive international list of major museums and instrument collections. Over 100 superb illustrations show the instruments to their full advantage.

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Customer Reviews

The development of modern science, beginning in the late Middle Ages, required the development of accurate tools for measuring such things as distance, weight, luminosity, temperature, and time. The earliest such instruments, writes University of London historian Gerard L'E Turner, were

multifaceted: "An astrolabe which incorporates a means for measuring the elevation angles of stars or the Sun, as well as a stereographic representation of the Earth, can be used equally well for telling the time, for finding the latitude, and for collecting data to cast a horoscope." With the passage of time, they became more specialized, yielding such fine devices as binocular telescopes and stereoscopic viewers. (The latter, Turner writes, became internationally popular in the mid-19th century after Queen Victoria expressed amusement at one displayed at a London fair.) Turner's well-illustrated catalog of scientific instruments is organized along the old instrument-makers' categories of mathematical, optical, and philosophical tools. Accompanying the photographs are thoughtful essays on the growth of science in the second half of the second millennium, along with notes on how owners can take care of pieces in their collections as well as determine the authenticity and origins of those pieces. The book makes for a pleasing introduction to the history of modern science, and it is an especially useful reference for collectors of clocks, stereopticons, and other antique scientific instruments. --Gregory McNamee

"This is a magisterial yet compact survey of the entire field of scientific instruments, the best such treatment that I know."#151;Bruce Stephenson, Adler Planetarium
"This book provides a very useful and informative overview of the history of scientific instruments. Turner is recognized as one of the founders of this specialized area of historical research."#151;William Andrews, Curator of the Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments, Harvard University

The book describes in an interesting and clear way the history of the scientific instruments from 1500 till the 20th century. There are explanation of the principle of operation of the instruments their history their manufacturers and more. From the astrolabes via philosophical instruments to microscopes, weights and scales etc. No doubt that the author is a first class expert with access to museum pieces, that is beyond the reach of most collectors. Many pictures of artifacts are presented with a list of museums that exhibit worth noting collections. A must book for any serious collector.

The book was in great condition. As good as new. The page quality was good too. It was gift for my boy friend and he loved it.

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