

The torquetum or turquet is a complex and sophisticated instrument characteristic of Medieval astronomy and the Ptolemaic tradition. It was a product of Christian Europe in the late 13th century. It could be used to make measurements in the three sets of astronomical coordinates: horizon (alt-azimuthal), equatorial, and ecliptic. It also provided a mechanical means to interconvert between these sets of coordinates without the use of calculations (it served as an analog computer), and to demonstrate the relationships of these coordinate sets.

Modern scholars attribute the torquetum's use largely for demonstration purposes and "conspicuous intellectual consumption," which was probably true for the majority of the surviving examples: two late Medieval instruments from the 15th century<sup>1</sup>, and eight known from the 16th century.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the demands of 16th century astronomy were beyond the precision attainable with so complex an instrument given the technology available at that time - the best observations required stable instruments of large radius.