



Globes in the Collection

Celestial Table Globe, by Johannes Schöner, Nuremberg, Germany, 1535 Inventory No. 13311

Celestial table globe, with stand and accompanying plumb bob and compass, by Johannes Schöner of Nuremberg, 430mm in height. It is one of two known examples of the earliest surviving printed celestial globe.

Johannes Schöner (1477-1547) was a well-respected German polymath who lived and worked in Nuremberg. He was attracted to many different fields although he frequently referred to himself by the term “mathematicus”. He was one of the leading astronomers of Europe in the early decades of the 16th century, but was also a priest, astrologer, cosmographer, cartographer, mathematician, scientific instrument maker and publisher. He enjoyed a significant reputation as a globe maker and cosmographer, and as a leading astrologer, and he played an influential role in the events that led up to the publishing of Copernicus’ ‘De Revolutionibus’ in 1543.



He made his first pair of globes – terrestrial and celestial – in 1515, and Schöner was the first person to issue globes of the same size as pairs. The globe shows the constellations as described by Ptolemy, illustrated in colour against a black background, with star names are in Arabic. The body of the globe is supported by a tripod stand of cast bronze, which incorporates a plumb bob and compass. The north end of the globe axis carries a brass dial with pointer to set the geographic direction. Compass directions are given on the central brass ring.

Larger than the pair of 1515, there is also a terrestrial companion to this celestial globe. The woodcuts for both the larger globes had been completed by 1533, when Schöner published a tract on each of them.

A celestial globe by Schöner is included in the famous painting ‘The Ambassadors’, 1533, by Hans Holbein the Younger in the National Gallery.