

Analog Devices

A brief discussion of continuous state computational devices spanning the centuries

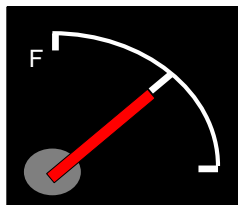
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Digital Vs. Analog

- In this context (from Williams)
 - Digital devices are classified with discrete devices (finite number of states).



- This is in contrast with analog devices (a continuum of possible states)



Images: James Tam

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Astrolabe

- An old computing device used to solve problems related to time and navigation.
- It's a projection of the map of the sky (a dome) on a 2D surface.
- It was clearly used in the Arab empire (~600 AD) but earlier uses are unclear (Williams) up to ~1600 AD.



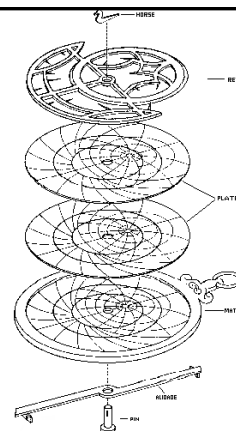
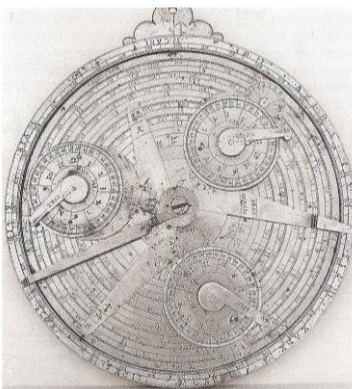
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Astrolabe: Parts

Images: copyright unknown

- Outer backing: mater/“mother”
- Metal: plates/ “climate” or “tympanum”
- Cut-away disk: rete/“net/network?”



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Astrolabe: Some Common Uses



www.astrolabes.org ← - - -

- Time keeping (given the sun's position when at the following latitude it is the XYZ time of day).
- Determining the current latitude (navigation)

For more specific details of the astrolabe (based on positions of stars) see the references

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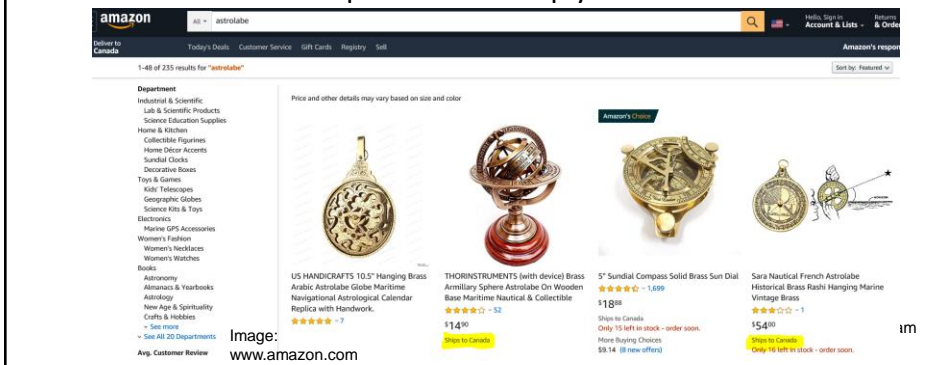
Astrolabe: Video

- Ted talk: Tom Wujec
- http://www.ted.com/talks/tom_wujec_demos_the_13th_century_astrolabe.html

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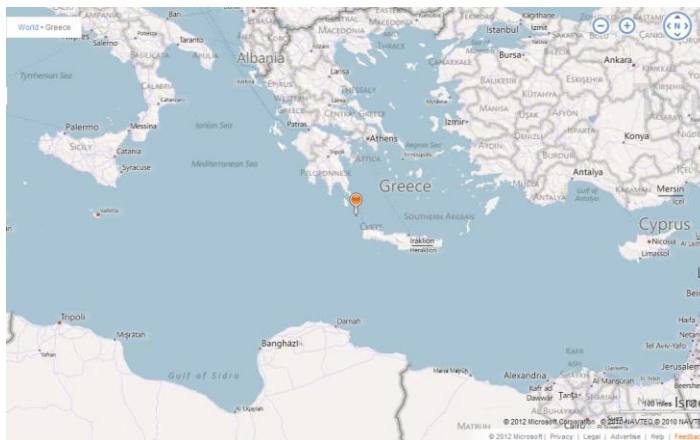
Astrolabe: Today

- The development of more accurate mechanical clocks (such as Galileo's conceived pendulum clock ~1600's) reduced the need for the astrolabe.
- Mostly it's viewed as a historical curiosity but souvenir versions can still be purchased cheaply.



The Antikythera Device: Discovery

- Discovered in 1900 by Greek sponge fisherman who found a shipwreck near the island of Antikythera.



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The Antikythera Device: Discovery (2)

- They took shelter from a storm and divers were sent after it blew over.
- Instead of finding sponges a shipwreck was found.
- It contained Greek statues and artifacts from the time of Christ.
- Included in those artifacts was a lump of encrusted bronze.



<http://historicismysteries.com>

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The Antikythera Device: Uses

- Due to the deteriorated condition (years in salt water) the exact use is unknown.
- It's speculated to be the device reported by the Roman philosopher Cicero (~1st century BC) and used to reproduce the positions of the sun, the moon and some of the planets. (Williams)

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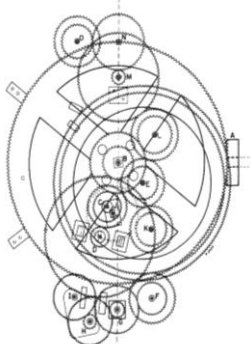
The Antikythera Device: Videos

- History and background
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eUibFQKJqI>
- Working model: built out of everyday material (Lego)!
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLPVCJjTNgk>

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Antikythera Device: Significance

- The Antikythera device originated from Roman times yet contained gearing mechanism that did not reappear in Europe until much later in ~1500 years. (Similar to an automobile: Williams).



"A History of Computing Technology" by Williams



Encyclopedia Wikipedia

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Differential Analyzer

- Manually determining the area under a curve is cumbersome and inaccurate (“Using cutouts”: Williams).
 - This has many applications:
 - <http://www.intmath.com/applications-integration/applications-integrals-intro.php>
- Early attempts to devise mechanical mechanisms (e.g., Lord Kelvin) for solving these problems were hindered by the limited ability to obtain accurately machined parts.
- Vannevar Bush (MIT) was the first to actually produce a working machine (Late 1920s, early 1930s: publication 1931).

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Differential Analyzer: Videos

- <http://web.mit.edu/klund/www/analyzer/>

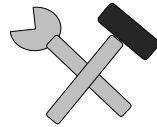
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Differential Analyzer: Programming

- Because it relied heavily on mechanical movement to generate results, 'programming' and debugging the computational device was challenging.



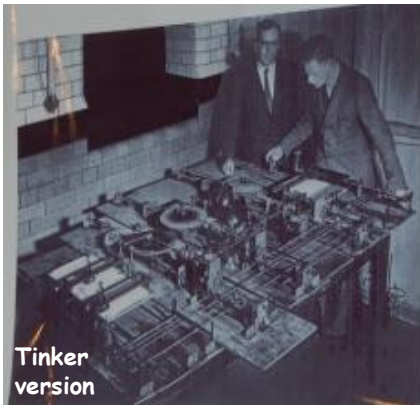
"A History of Computing Technology" by Williams



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Other Differential Analyzers

- The mechanical method of solving differential equations was so successful that at least 5 copies were made.
- Example: Manchester university

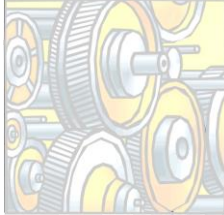


Hartree and Porter: From <http://www.marshall.edu>

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Differential Analyzer: A Military Application

- Ballistics research (artillery and rocket trajectories)
- World War II Norway: Shortly after the successful German invasion
 - Oslo University

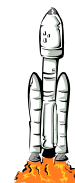
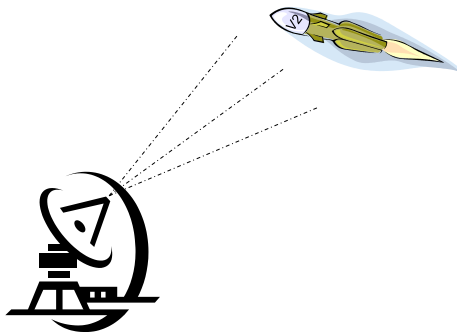


Colourbox.com

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Differential Analyzer: A Military Application (2)

- World War II MIT:
 - Differential Analyzer was used to solve ballistic trajectories
 - (Yet the range of the 'shell' by far exceeded any artillery piece at the time).



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After This Section You Should Now Know

- The time period during which the astrolabe was used
- Some of the common uses of the astrolabe
- The general appearance and major parts of the astrolabe
- The date and circumstances under which the Antikythera device was found
- The appearance and general condition of the Antikythera device
- The date of creation and the significance of the Antikythera device
- The approximate creation date and use of the Differential Analyzer

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After This Section You Should Know (2)

- Some of the key people and events behind the original difference engine and its copies
 - MIT
 - Manchester
 - Oslo

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References

- “A history of computing technology”, Williams M.R., IEEE Computer Society.
- “Time and the astrolabe in the Canterbury tales”, Osborn M., OU Press.
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 - <http://www.astrolabes.org>
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