

CHAPTER 20

STRING GNOMON DIALS

Several String Gnomon Dials have already been described in earlier chapters such as Ivory Diptych Dials and some Augsburg Dials.

A dial utilising a string gnomon is relatively

simple, the gnomon being parallel to the Earth's axis. Such a dial is easy to fold and fit into the pocket requiring no special handling of fragile parts. The string gnomon will, in many cases, throw its shadow onto both horizontal and vertical faces.

The first dial illustrated is made of silver with a gilt case. Like most dials of this type it was made for one particular latitude. Although unsigned and undated it was probably made in the sixteenth century in Europe, possibly Southern Germany. Its string gnomon, now missing, throws its shadow onto both horizontal and vertical faces. Note that the vertical face has an attractive gilt Sun's image just below the gnomon fixing hole. The 28 mm diameter body of this dial is made from rock crystal, a particularly transparent type of quartz, resembling glass. Inside it is a simple compass with a paper scale showing only one mark; that of North. With its lid closed, the outside of the dial is gilt with a large ruby placed attractively at its apex. For carrying purposes the dial is housed in a beautifully tooled



Small early dial with rock crystal body



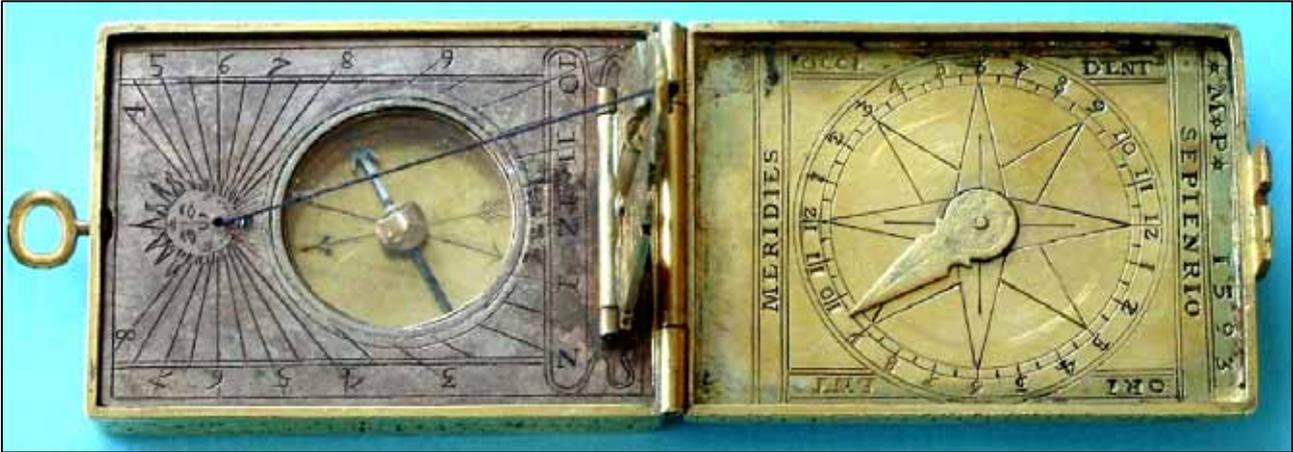
Rock crystal dial with a ruby at its apex



The gilt Sun's face on the rock crystal dial



Leather case for the rock crystal dial



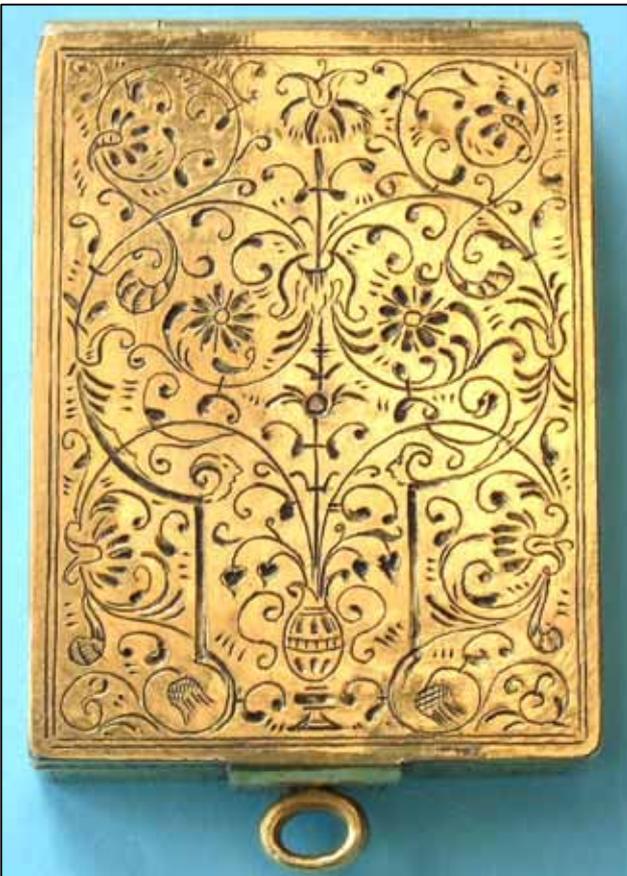
Top view of the dial by Marcus Purmann



String Gnomon Dial by Marcus Purmann

leather case lined with green velvet. Around the lip of the box is some recycled paper with signs of red and green printing.

The dial by Marcus Purmann of Munich is signed simply inside the lid with his initials and date, ***M*P* 1593**. Its string gnomon is again only intended for a single latitude. The bracket holding the top end of the gnomon includes a long slender plummet for accurate levelling. Inside its lid is a twice 1 to 12 scale set around a compass rose with a central pointer. It could be used for recording wind directions or as a reminder of times of appointments etc. The brass case is mainly gilt with a silvered dial plate for better shadow contrast. The outside of the case is particularly well engraved with flowers, leaves



Lid of the Purmann dial showing engraving of a vase with flowers



Gnomon support and plummet for the Marcus Purmann dial



German String Gnomon Dial in the form of a book



'Front cover' of the book dial with images of Venus and Cupid

and scrolls. Its lid is attractively engraved showing a vase containing flowers.

An unsigned String Gnomon Dial in the form of a book is obviously from the same region. It is dated 15 K 55, the K possibly being the maker and it has further initials GBMH (probably those of its owner) inside the lid, above a hand and, what appears to be, a winged helmet. The outside of the case is particularly attractive showing Venus with a spear in her hand and a burning apple with cupid firing an arrow. On its back cover the figure portrayed is probably Mars, the God of War.

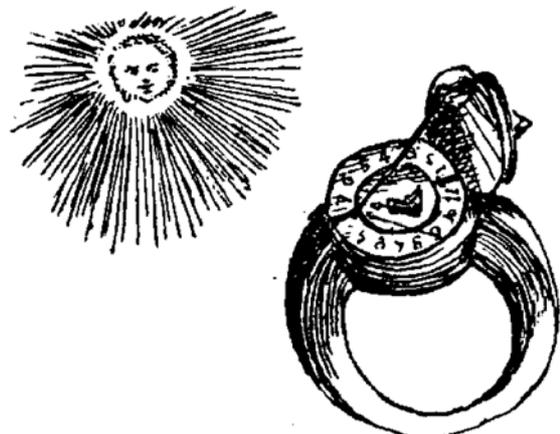
Occasionally a small String Gnomon Dial will be found on a Finger Ring. For use the lid is opened to



'Back cover' of book dial depicting Mars, the God of War

reveal a very small magnetic compass and a tiny dial. It would be very inaccurate but probably a highly prized piece of personal jewellery. It would certainly be a useful gadget for the gentleman away from home and he would be sure to show such an object to all of his friends. With its lid closed it would look like any other ring.

A German dial simply signed •S•A•V•Z• and dated Ao. 1643 KF is illustrated. It has a beautifully gilt case with just the dial plate, decorative frets and plummet box silvered. It is particularly unusual in that it has a large plummet, something like the pendulum of a clock, contained in an upstanding box on the lid of the dial. Note the grotesque face on the plummet fret; probably that of the 'Green Man'.



Finger Ring Dial