

years before the Christian æra. It was greatly improved by Thales, the Milesian, whose reputation for astronomical knowledge was raised to the highest pitch, by foretelling an eclipse, the arrival of which was attended with memorable circumstances. Especially was the astronomy of the Greeks improved and enriched by the discoveries of Pythagoras. This celebrated astronomer and mathematician, is believed to have been born in the island of Samos, and to have flourished about five hundred years before Christ. In search of knowledge, he, it is said, travelled into Egypt, then celebrated for the study of the sciences, where he became acquainted with geography, and the true solar system, and made himself master of the several branches of learning, for which that country was so famous among the nations of antiquity. Incited by an insatiable thirst for knowledge, he, we are told, afterwards visited Persia, Chaldea, and other parts of Asia, as far as India, where he conversed with the Gymnosophists, and, from them, acquired the knowledge of the philosophy and literature of the east. This great philosopher taught that the earth was of a spherical or round figure; that the moon reflected the rays of the sun; and that the comets are wandering stars, disappearing in the superior part of their orbits, and becoming visible only in the lower. He is said also to have exhibited the oblique course of the sun in the ecliptic; and to have first taught that the planet Venus is both the evening and the morning star. But, rational and philosophical, as the theory of Pythagoras was, it was universally reprobated, and speedily consigned to a state of oblivion.

Concerning the structure of the universe, the ancients, in general, entertained the most erroneous ideas. The Ptolemaic system almost universally prevailed. That the earth is an extended plain, surrounded by the ocean; that the sun, the moon, and the stars, are small luminous bodies, at no great distance from the earth, and created solely for the purpose of illuminating