

Almagest

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR THE HISTORY OF SCIENTIFIC IDEAS

VOLUME **8**
ISSUE **2**
NOV **2017**

BREPOLS

Science and Orthodox Christianity

Foreword

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Following the expansion during the last three decades of "Science-Religion" studies, the last ten years have seen an effort to develop this field as far as it concerns Orthodox Christianity, an area which was neglected and even ignored by the community of historians of science.

In order to not repeat clichés or preconceived ideas about the relationships between science and Orthodox Christianity, access to the sources is needed. To implement part of this goal, an interdisciplinary team was organised in 2012 at the Institute of Historical Research / National Hellenic Research Foundation, Athens, Greece. The aim of the team was to gather Greek language sources about the subject and offer relevant metadata in English.

As in the case of Western Christianity, much of the contemporary literature about the relationships between Eastern Christianity and science is produced by writers belonging to the religious and/or political sphere. Therefore, in these works apologetic and polemical views prevail. Historiographical notions about complexity and reading the texts in context are not the rule for most of the writers. Offering the sources to researchers and to the interested public is but one step. To situate these sources in their historical context and relate them to their philological and philosophical tradition is the next one.

The Narses (Nature and Religion in Southeastern European Space) project (<http://narses.hpdst.gr/>, funded by the Greek National Strategic Reference Framework Programme), tried to fulfil part of these two steps by developing a database of the Greek sources and by commenting on them in relevant articles, books, conferences and workshops. The SOW (Science and Orthodoxy around the World) project (<http://project-sow.org/>, funded by the Templeton World Charity Foundation) is expanding the research by developing a database of all languages used by Orthodox Christianity, by encouraging relevant publications, by organising conferences and other events in order to discuss the attitudes of Orthodox Christianity towards science today, and by promoting an interdisciplinary approach to the subject. Science and religion studies is a field where historians of science, philosophers, theologians, scientists and thinkers can and must meet.

The present thematic issue of *Almagest* presents some historical aspects of the relations between science and religion focusing on Orthodox Christianity. An introductory article by John Hedley Brooke and Ronald L. Numbers is exploring what happens when we try to incorporate the disparate religious traditions of the world into some kind of coherent narrative about science and religion. Anne-Laurence Caudano's article presents an intriguing anonymous cosmographical work that appears in a range of Byzantine and Slavic manuscripts dating from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. This brief text departs from other Byzantine scholarly works published at the time by upholding, rather curiously, that the earth has the shape of an egg. Michael H. Shank presents unknown aspects of the conflict between Cardinal Bessarion, a former Greek Orthodox metropolitan, and George of Trebizond. This conflict involved Ptolemy's *Almagest* and shaped the history of astronomy through the writings and career of Regiomontanus. M. Shank argues that these conflicts mixed powerfully with geopolitics and religion. Flora Vafea deals with art, science and religion by presenting the astronomical instruments in Saint Catherine's iconography at the Holy Monastery of Sinai. Tomislav Petković presents the role that the notion and epistemological interpretation of *God* played in Roger Joseph Bošković's work and thinking on natural philosophy. Due to his origin, Bošković is a pretty rare example of a Jesuit having been influenced by Eastern Christianity. This thematic issue concludes with an article by Kostas Tampakis dealing with the seminal influence of the Orthodox Church and the Orthodox tradition on the Greek State, from its foundation to the beginning of World War II.

These articles are the reworked versions of papers presented at the International Conference "Science and Religion" organised September 3-5, 2015 in Athens, Greece. The other papers of the Conference are open access publications on the web available at the following page: http://narses.hpdst.gr/sites/narses.hpdst.gr/files/Proceedings%20NARSES_1.pdf.

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DESIGN 

The journal is supported by E.U. FP7/2007-2013

04010361

ISSN 17922593

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