

Kęstutis Daugirdas, Christian Volkmar Witt (Hg.), Gegeneinander glauben – miteinander forschen? Paradigmenwechsel frühneuzeitlicher Wissenschaftskulturen, Göttingen (V&R) 2022, 296 S., 11 Abb. (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte, 134), ISBN 978-3-525-56859-0, EUR 70,00.

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This volume contains the proceedings of a conference that took place in Emden (Germany) in 2019 under the same title. It presents preliminary results of the collaborative research project »Konfessionskultur des Reformiertentums im Nord- und Ostseeraum« (»Reformed Confessional Culture in the North Sea and Baltic Sea Regions«), based at the Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek (Emden) and the Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte (Mainz) and directed by the two editors. The collection proposes to trace the changing relationship between early modern astronomy and physics (i.e. natural philosophy) on the one hand, and Christian religion and its denominations on the other. According to the working hypothesis formulated by the editors in the brief foreword, early modern scientific culture underwent a paradigm shift, yet not in the classical sense of a »scientific revolution«. Rather, this shift took place as a gradual establishment of the transconfessional character of scientific knowledge of nature that grew increasingly independent from theological concerns (p. 7–8). Eleven contributions (nine in German and two in English) are brought together to test this hypothesis by means of case studies. It is one of the great merits of the collection that these chapters paint a significantly more complex and variegated picture than that suggested by the secularization tenor of the initial hypothesis. (The term »secularization« is indeed introduced in the very last chapter, authored by Michael Weichenhan, p. 265).

Since it is impossible to do justice to each and every contribution within the restricted space at my disposal, I have decided to focus on a few selected ones, which, in my opinion, neatly illustrate the divergent trends informing the collection.

A discussion of the opening piece, authored by one of the two editors, Kęstutis Daugirdas (p. 11–59), is almost mandatory, inasmuch as the chapter claims to offer a detailed introduction to the topic of the volume (cf. p. 8) and makes a strong case for the abovementioned general hypothesis. In what is an extremely diligent, thoughtful, and clearly structured study, Daugirdas examines the physical and astronomical textbooks of five authors (Girolamo Zanchi, Lambert Danaeus, Clemens Timpler, Bartholomäus Keckermann, and Marcus Friedrich Wendelin), representative of two key generations of Reformed scholars from



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the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Daugirdas asks whether these works testify to a specifically Reformed approach to physics and astronomy (p. 16) and concludes that, essentially, they do not (p. 59). This is because, as the author tries to show, neither their methodology nor their basic contents are informed by specifically Reformed tenets. Rather, Daugirdas detects in his sources an »increasing differentiation between a physical and a theological work field« (»zunehmende Ausdifferenzierung einer physikalischen und einer theologischen Arbeitssphäre«, p. 59 and similar formulations passim), closely related to the near absence of confessionally characteristic elements.

Despite Daugirdas's careful analysis, some of his conclusions may appear less convincing if one questions the (often implicit) assumptions that guide his study. In line with the general hypothesis of the volume, the author seems to posit a kind of large-scale process (secularization?) in the course of which physics and astronomy gradually obtained their »modern« independence from contemporary theological discourse. (Cf., e.g., the evaluation of Keckermann's work as »Janus-faced«, i.e. »modern« in terms of methodology, because of its separation of physical from theological enquiry, and »conservative« in terms of content, which remained largely Aristotelian, p. 46–47, 58.) Apart from general reservations with regard to such ultimately "Whiggish" master narratives of the history of science and the air of inevitability (cf. p. 55–56) that they tend to cast on contingent historical events, it seems appropriate to recall, in this context, the results of numerous studies on medieval and Renaissance intellectual history which, despite very different approaches to the topic, document the existence of consistent methodological distinctions between the spheres of (natural) philosophy and theology in academic writings from the 13th century onwards (it should suffice to mention here the names of Edward Grant and Luca Bianchi). In view of this, the presence of confessionally specific elements in Daugirdas's sources can be evaluated, perhaps, somewhat differently. Three of the five Reformed authors discuss the so-called *coelum empyraeum* as the abode of God, the resurrected Christ, and the blessed, qualifying it as a real place and arguing explicitly against the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity. Daugirdas conscientiously reports these passages but tends to downplay their importance as evidence of a specifically Reformed take on physics and astronomy. Yet one can argue that against the background of the long-standing tradition of methodological separation between the physical and theological spheres of enquiry, such confessionally charged passages acquire even stronger significance.

That such a switch of perspective can be productive is shown, for example, by Klaus-Dieter Herbst's chapter on the 16th-century practice of making calendars (p. 61–77). Herbst shows that these yearly astrological prognostications based on astronomical data were, above all, a Lutheran enterprise and that their authors (mostly Wittenberg alumni) often preferred the Copernican to the Ptolemaic model as a starting point for more accurate calculations



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and previsions. Herbst links these findings to the influence of Philipp Melancthon's manual of natural philosophy, the »Initia doctrinae physicae« (1549), and its valorization of astrology as conducive to the knowledge of God. In this case, confessional allegiance and a »scientific« striving towards greater observational accuracy go hand in hand.

Yet another take on the complex relationship between natural philosophical and theological discourse is offered by Bernd Roling, who examines theories of thunder and lightning put forth by Reformed and Lutheran authors of the 18th century (p. 237–259). While detecting no specifically confessional elements, Roling highlights the continuous and insistent presence, in his sources, of considerations of the power of God and thus of a distinctively theological dimension.

Finally, a good example of the transconfessional character that natural philosophical enterprises could assume in the early modern period is put forward by Maïke Sach's discussion of the Socinian nobleman Stanisław Lubieniecki (1623–1675) (p. 147–175). Sach draws a fascinating parallel between the apparently different roles played by Lubieniecki, living as an exile in Altona and Hamburg because of his religious convictions, as both an (underpaid) informant of the Swedish government and the manager of a (relatively modest and short-lived) transconfessional scholarly network that exchanged data and hypotheses on comets. Lubieniecki's network may appear as a near-perfect embodiment of the early modern ideal of *res publica litteraria*, aimed at fostering scholarly communication across confessional and political boundaries. Yet it is worth noting the close connection between Lubieniecki's central position within this network and his religiously marginal status, itself the product of the social dynamic of 17th-century confessional culture.

In sum, while contemporary research can of course continue working along the lines of various master narratives, this should not lead to the neglect of microhistorical studies attentive to the cultural context of theories and practices that we gladly term »scientific«. Little by little, such studies can and do change our preconceived opinions of the relationship between »science« and »religion« in the early modern period. Thus, in the introduction to a recent collection that favours this approach, edited by Pietro Daniel Omodeo and Volkhard Wels under the title »Natural Knowledge and Aristotelianism at Early Modern Protestant Universities« (Wiesbaden 2019), one reads how »[t]he confessional element of early modern philosophy and science continuously emerges as a significant epistemic drive« (p. 4). Similar efforts should be directed at the Catholic cultural sphere, barely covered by the volume of Daugirdas and Witt (with the single exception of Rita Widmaier's chapter on the correspondence between Leibniz and the Jesuit missionaries over Chinese culture and religion, p. 203–236). That such efforts are well worth making is suggested, for example, by the re-evaluation of the traditional historiographical image of Rome as the centre of a scientifically retrograde Catholic



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culture in the collected volume »Rome et la science moderne entre Renaissance et Lumières«, edited by Antonella Romano (Rome 2008).

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Seite | page 4



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