

Theatre of science. Solving mathematical problems in early modern jesuit colleges

Monday, July 14, 2025 2:05 PM (30 minutes)

My lecture will focus on practices of dissemination of scientific literacy by Jesuit educators of the 17th century. The Jesuits were prominent carriers of the pre-modern scientific tradition that crystallized in medieval universities around Aristotle's books of nature. These, they taught as introduction to metaphysics, theology and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. The Jesuits, however, took upon themselves to update that tradition with contemporary innovations. Among those innovations was the institutionalization of the mathematical disciplines as a separate field that was necessary for teaching natural philosophy. Thus, they taught arithmetics, geometry and algebra, astronomy, optics and mechanics. Within this framework, they included many of the scientific innovations of that time, including the results of Galilean and Keplerian science, wrapped in a Jesuit interpretation.

As an example of the kind of science, between the old and the new, purporting to reshape the tradition while still adhering to it, I shall present a peculiar Baroque cultural form of solving scientific problems in front of mixed audiences of students, professors, Church functionaries and members of the highest political echelons.

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