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*SCIENTIFIC COSMOPOLITANISM
AND LOCAL CULTURES:
RELIGIONS, IDEOLOGIES, SOCIETIES*

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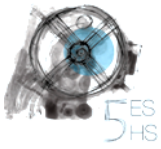


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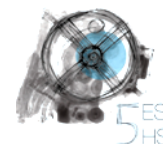
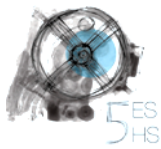
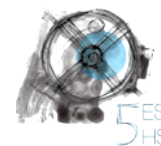


Table of Contents

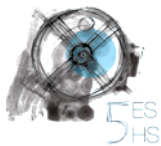
Committees.....	7
Introduction	
Efthymios Nicolaidis, Constantine Skordoulis, Welcome to the 5th International Conference of the European Society for the History of Science "Scientific cosmopolitanism and local cultures: religions, ideologies, societies".....	9
Plenary lecture	
Costas B. Krimbas, The Reception of Darwin in Greece.....	11
Symposia	
<i>Ancient Astronomy and its Later Reception</i>.....	22
Seyyed Mohammad-Mozaffari, Ptolemaic Eccentricity of the Superior Planets in the Medieval Islamic Period.....	23
Radim Kocandrl, On the Sphere of Anaximander.....	31
Anna Santoni, A Map for Aratus.....	36
Alena Hadravova, Petr Hadrava, Reflection of Ancient Greek Tradition in the 13th c. Premyslid Celestial Globe Saved in Bernkastel-Kues.....	45
Petr Hadrava, Alena Hadravova, Mathematical Investigation of the Premyslid Celestial Globe Saved in Bernkastel-Kues.....	51
Johannes Thomann, An Arabic Ephemeris for the Year 1026/1027 CE. in the Vienna Papyrus Collection.....	54
Oksana Yu. Koltachykhina, Religion in the Cosmological Ideas in Ukraine (from XI to XVII century).....	61
Daniel Spelda, The reception of ancient astronomy in the early histories of astronomy.....	68
<i>Around Henri Poincaré's Centenary: physics, mathematics and philosophy</i>.....	74
Christian Bracco, Poincaré's 1905 Palermo Memoir: analysis of its logic and comparison with secondary texts.....	75
Jean-Pierre Provost, Poincaré's Space and Time Conference and his Attitude towards Relativity	80
<i>Byzantine and post-Byzantine Alchemy: Principles, Influences and Effects</i>.....	84
Sandy Sakorrafou, Gerasimos Merianos, John Kanaboutzes' Commentary on Dionysios of Halikarnassos: A Perception of Alchemy in a Fifteenth-Century Greek text	86
Remi Franckowiak, Athanasius Rhetor: a Greek in Paris, a Priest in Alchemy.....	95
Vangelis Koutalis, Cosmopoiesis as a Chymical Process: Jean d'Espagnet's <i>Enchiridion Physicae Restitutae</i> and its Translation in Greek by Anastasios Papavassilopoulos.....	101
Georgios Papadopoulos, Chemical Medicine in 16th and 17th c. Europe: Remarks on Local, Religious and Ideological Connections.....	108
Gianna Katsiampoura, Byzantine and post-Byzantine Alchemy: a Research Project in Progress...	115
<i>Cartesian Physics and its Reception: between Local and Universal</i>.....	125
Mihnea Dobre, Mixing Cartesianism and Newtonianism: the Reception of Cartesian Physics in England.....	126
<i>Cultural Identity and Trans-Nationality in the History of Science</i>.....	132
Amilcar Baiardi, Wellington Gil Rodrigues, Alex Vieira dos Santos, Fabihana Souza Mendes, Januzia Souza Mendes de Araújo, Scientific Cosmopolitanism and Local Cultures: Reactions to Symbols, Icons and Advancements of Science in the the Reconcavo Territory, Bahia, Brazil.....	133
<i>Engineers, Circulation of Knowledge, and the Construction of Imperial and Post-Imperial Spaces (18th-20th c.)</i>.....	147
Felicitas Seebacher, "Science - for the Glory of the German People". Construction and Destruction of Scientific Cosmopolitanism by National Ideologies at the Academy of Sciences in Vienna.....	



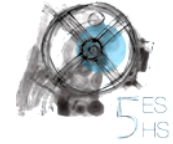
	149
<i>Exact Sciences in Habsburg Monarchy in 18th century (on 300th Anniversary of Boscovich's Birthday)</i>	159
Stanislav Juznic , Boscovich's North Italian Predecessors and his Followers in Ljubljana	161
Marco Martin , "Ruggero Giuseppe Boscovich and his Giornale di un viaggio da Costantinopoli in Polonia". A travel diary through Eastern Europe with original scientific observations.....	171
<i>From Cameralism and Natural Philosophy to Applied Biology: Agriculture and Science in the 19th-20th c.</i>	179
Jiří Sekerák , Gregor Mendel between Naturphilosophie and Positivism.....	180
<i>Historical Narratives of Cold War Science</i>	185
Stefano Salvia , The Pontecorvo Affaire Reappraised. Five Decades of Cold War Spy Stories (1950-1998).....	187
<i>History and Historical Epistemology of Science. Conceptual Streams and Mathematical Physical Objects in the Emergency of Newton's Science</i>	197
Steffen Ducheyne , 's Gravesande's not so Newtonian Methodological Views.....	198
Ladislav Kvasz , Newton as a Cartesian.....	203
Hylarie Kochiras , Newton, Gravity, and the Mechanical Philosophy.....	208
Raffaele Pisano , On the historical epistemology of the Newtonian principle of inertia and Lazare Carnot's Première Hypothèse.....	214
<i>History and Philosophy of Science in EU Secondary Curricula? New Proposals Wanted</i>	221
Laurence Maurines, Magali Gallezot, Daniel Beaufils, Marie-Joëlle Ramage , A Proposal to Analyse the Representation of the Nature of Science Conveyed by Science Teaching and to Elaborate New Pedagogical Proposals.....	222
Christopher Bissell , The Role of the History and Philosophy of Technology in Secondary Education.....	234
Vincenzo Cioci , A teaching proposal on 20 th century Physics.....	241
M^a Rosa Massa Esteve, Iolanda Guevara-Casanova, Fátima Romero Vallhonestá, Carles Puig-Pla , Implementation of the History of Mathematics in Catalan Secondary Schools.....	247
Iolanda Guevara-Casanova , Pythagoras' Theorem and the Resolution of the Second Degree Equation in the Nine Chapters on the Mathematical Art.....	255
<i>History of Slavic Science – Cultural Interferences, Historical Perspectives and Personal Contributions</i>	263
Dragoljub Aleksandar Cucic, Aleksandar S. Nikolić, Bratislav Stojiljkov , Friendship between Nikola Tesla & Mark Twain.....	265
Aleksandar Petrović , Last Heliocentric Revolution.....	272
<i>Humanities, Mathematics and Technics at Renaissance Courts</i>	283
Martin Frank , Mechanics, Mathematics and Architecture: Guidobaldo dal Monte at Urbino and Giovanni Battista Benedetti at Turin.....	284
Veronica Gavagna , The Euclidean Tradition at the Renaissance Courts: the Case of Federico Commandino.....	291
Pietro Daniel Omodeo , Between Germany and Great Britain: Renaissance "Scientists" at Reformed Universities and Courts.....	298
Paolo Cavigneró , Leonardo on hydrostatic force: a research engineering approach towards the idea of hydrostatic pressure?.....	304
Michal Novotny , The Way of the Schlick Family towards Silver Mining in Joachimsthal.....	313
<i>Mathematical Courses in Engineering Education in the 17th and 18th c. in the Iberian Peninsula</i>	320
Antónia Fialho Conde , The Art of Fortifying and the Mathematical Instruments: Tradition and Innovation in the Training of Military Engineers in the 17 th c. in Portugal.....	322
M^a Rosa Massa Esteve, Antoni Roca-Rosell , Contents and Sources of Practical Geometry in Pedro Lucuce's Course at the Barcelona Royal Military Academy of Mathematics.....	329



Monica Blanco, Carles Puig-Pla, Pedro Padilla and his Mathematical Course (1753-1756): Views on Mixed Mathematics in eighteenth-century Spain.....	336
Joaquim Berenguer, The Mathematical Courses of Tomàs Cerdà in eighteenth-century Spain.....	343
Juan Navarro-Loidi, Mathematical Course for the Education of the Gentlemen Cadets of the Royal Military College of Artillery of Segovia.....	353
<i>Physical Sciences between Europe and the USA before WWII</i>.....	359
Roberto Lalli, The Revival of the Larmor-Lorentz ether Theories: Herbert E. Ives' Opposition to Relativity between 1937 and 1953.....	360
<i>Scientific archives, unpublished manuscripts in private or public corpuses: historiographical</i> <i>and methodological approaches</i>.....	367
Fatima Romero Vallhonesta, Manuscript 2294 from the Library of Salamanca University.....	369
Evelyne Barbin, René Guitart, The Correspondance of Emile Clapeyron to Gabriel Lamé (1833- 1835), to Analyze of Social Networks.....	379
Christian Gerini , W.H.F. Talbot (1800-1877) Mathematician: the Handwritten Notebooks, the Drafts and the Correspondence with the French Mathematician J.D. Gergonne (1771-1859).....	387
<i>Scientific Cosmopolitanism</i>.....	394
Gerhard F. Strasser, Athanasius Kircher S.I.: A German Jesuit's Almost Involuntary Expatriation to Rome.....	395
Erwin Neuenschwander, Scientific Cosmopolitanism from a Swiss Perspective: Migration from and to Switzerland before and after World War II.....	404
<i>Scientific Expeditions: Local Practices and Cosmopolitan Discourses</i>.....	408
Marie Dupond, The Triangular Relationship between Science, Politics and Culture Expressed by the Idea of Progress and Implemented through the Expedition to Egypt.....	409
<i>The Exact Sciences in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Modern and Contemporary Ages</i>.....	418
Alessandra Fiocca, Francesco Patrizi, Humanist and Scientist in the Late Renaissance.....	419
Luigi Pepe, Boscovich as Mathematician and his Italian Pupils.....	425
Maria Giulia Lugaresi, Applied Mathematics in Boscovich's Papers.....	431
Maria Teresa Borgato, River Hydraulics in the Napoleonic Period: the Role of Simone Stratico...	437
Elena Granuzzo, Simone Stratico and Naval Science in Padua and Venice.....	444
Iolanda Nagliati, Ottaviano Fabrizio Mossotti from Corfu to Pisa.....	451
George N. Vlahakis, Meteorology and Climatology in 19th century Greece.....	457
<i>The Origins of Experimental Philosophy: Experimental Procedures and Empirical Methods in</i> <i>early modern Europe</i>.....	464
Markos Ioannis Polakis, Exploring Galileo's Method: the Day Earth Stopped Standing Still.....	465
<i>The Scientific Cosmopolitanism as Traced by Astronomical Instruments</i>.....	472
Michael A. Rappenglück, Stone Age People Controlling Time and Space: Evidences for Measuring Instruments and Methods in Earlier Prehistory and the Roots of Mathematics, Astronomy, and Metrology.....	473
Vance R. Tiede, New Light on Stonehenge from Ancient Greeks.....	482
Panagiotis Papaspirou, Xenophon Moussas, Kostas Karamanos, Comparison of Astronomical Instruments through the Ages.....	492
<i>The Tools of Research and the Craft of History: On the Interaction between Historians, Their</i> <i>Tools, and the Creators of Those Tools</i>.....	500
Birute Railiene, Institutionalisation of an Open Access – a New Possibility for Research. A Survey of Perception and Demand.....	501
Ana M. Alfonso-Goldfarb, Márcia H. M. Ferraz, Silvia Waisse, New Perspectives on Classification and Methodology in History of Sciences: Theoretical and Technological Bases for the Construction of Adequate Search Instruments.....	505
Stephen P. Weldon, The Culture of Research in History of Science as Seen through the Transformations of the Isis Bibliography in the 20th and 21st c.....	511
<i>Women in the Laboratory from the early Modern Times to the 20th c</i>.....	517
Josep M. Fernández-Novell, Carme Zaragoza Domènech, Chemistry at Home: Rosa Sensat and	



Chemistry Dissemination between Housewives in the early 20 th c.....	518
Scientific Sessions	
Vasiliki Papari , Color in ancient Philosophy.....	526
Elena Ausejo , Mathematics Education for Merchants: the Choice of Contents in Juan de Iciar's Practical Arithmetic (1549).....	533
Montse Diaz-Fajardo , Notes on the King Alfonso the Tenth's Scientific Translator Team.....	540
Pere Grapí , Berthollet's Revolutionary Course of Chemistry at the Ecole Normale of the year III. Pedagogical Experience and Scientific Innovation.....	548
Ioanna G. Stavrou, Efthymios P. Bokaris , The Importance of the Introduction of L.V. Brugnatelli' s <i>Pharmacopea Generale</i> by Dionyssios Pyrros to the Greek-speaking Regions in the beginning of the 19th c.....	556
Georgios Baralis , The Mathematical Work of Dimitrios Govdelas and its Influence on the Education of the Greek-speaking Regions in the meta-Byzantine Era.....	566
Vahur Mägi , University as Technological Knowledge Disseminator in Estonia.....	576
Alice Reininger , Two Hydraulic Machines for Schönbrunn Palace 1780-1782.....	583
Gregg De Young , 19th century Translations of European Mathematical Textbooks into eastern Mediterranean Vernaculars: Cosmopolitanism versus Colonialism.....	590
Thomas Robert , Wallace and Darwin on Man: a Limitation of Natural Selection?.....	597
Blanche El Gammal , L'Orient Express, vecteur du cosmopolitisme technologique et culturel européen.....	604
Gustaaf Cornelis , Global Pressure, Local Opposition. Tendencies toward a Human Academic Environment.....	613
Evangelia Mavrikaki, Nausica Kapsala , Teaching Biology by Storytelling.....	619
Rea Kakampoura, George Katsadoros , Social Representations of Folk Healers in Mass Media: the Case of Father Gymnasius.....	625
Constantina Stefanidou, Constantine Skordoulis , Book Review: Lewis Wolpert, <i>The Unnatural Nature of Science - Thales's Leap: West and East</i> , Harvard University Press, 1992.....	639
Ángel Garrido, Piedad Yuste , History of Fuzzy Modeling.....	644
Martin Vondrášek, Libor Benda, Marek Havlík , Confronting the Unexpected: The Treatment of Anomalous Phenomena in Scientific Research.....	650
Helge Kragh , Anomalies and the Crisis of the Bohr-Sommerfeld Atomic Theory.....	659
Yulia Petrovna Chukova , New Phase in History of the Weber - Fechner Law.....	665
Shulamith Kreitler , The Past and the Future of Psychology: Students' Conceptions.....	673
Elena Yu. Koltachykhina , The History of Ideas "the optical disc as a "unique" carrier of information in the systems management".....	679
Yakov Fet , History of Russian Computer Science.....	684
Demetra Christopoulou , Two German Philosophers of Mathematics, two Epistemological Traditions: Frege and Weyl on the Method of Abstraction.....	690
Emmanouil Stylianos Skoufoglou , D. Pikionis and A. Konstandinidis: the Introduction of Modern Architecture and Modern Building Technology in Greece and the Criterion of "Greekness".....	695
Libor Benda , To Bridge the Gap between the Two Cultures: a Social Pre-History of the Strong Program in the Sociology of Knowledge.....	704
Poster	
Anna Santoni, Fabio Guidetti , Certissima Signa.....	712
List of Authors – Index.....	715



Cosmopoiesis as a Chymical Process: Jean d'Espagnet's *Enchiridion Physicae Restitutae* and its Translation in Greek by Anastasios Papavassilopoulos

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An eighteenth-century manuscript now kept in the National Library of Greece in Athens (no. 1331, ff. 1r-93v, see Sakellion 1892, 241) preserves a copy of an anonymous Latin treatise on natural philosophy translated into Greek by Anastasios Papavassilopoulos of Ioannina (c. 1670-c. 1750). Its full title reads: *Ἀνωνύμου Ἐγχειρίδιον τῆς ἀναζησάσης φυσικῆς φιλοσοφίας, ἐν ἧ ἡ ἀληθῆς τῆς φύσεως ἀρμονία ἀναπτύσσεται καὶ πλεῖστα τῆς ἀρχαίας σοφίας ἀμαρτήματα διὰ κανόνων καὶ ἄλλων τινῶν ἀποδείξεων λαμπρῶς φανεροῦνται· ὅπερ μετεστρώθη ἀπὸ τῆς λατινίδος ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλληνίδα διάλεκτον σπουδῆ καὶ πόνῳ τοῦ λογιωτάτου καὶ σοφωτάτου Ἀναστασίου πατρὸς Βασιλόπουλου τοῦ ἐξ Ἰωαννίνων, ἐν τῇ κωμοπόλει Τυρνάβῳ τῆς Θεσσαλίας διατρίβοντος κατὰ τὸ αἴψα ἔτος σωτήριον [=1701], Μαυμακτηριῶνος ζ' ἰσταμένου μηνός [=November 29]. Two other copies of the same Greek translation have survived to our day: the one is part of the manuscript collection of the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece, now held in the National Historical Museum of Athens (no. 34, pp. 216-360, see Lampros 1909-1913, VI: 348), and the other can be found among the Greek manuscripts preserved in the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest (no. 485, see Litzica 1909, 61-62 [no. 106]; Karas 1992-1994, II: 343-344). Neither of these copies bears the exact date of its production, but according to the catalogue descriptions both were scribed sometime in the 18th century.*

The headings in two of the three manuscript copies of the work (cod. Atheniensis Bibl. Nat. 1331 and cod. Atheniensis Coll. Societ. Hist. & Ethnol. 34) attest that Papavassilopoulos' translation was completed at the end of November 1701 in the small town of Tyrnavos (Thessaly). At this period, its author worked as a teacher of philosophy and rhetorics at Tyrnavos school, a post he held from the end of 1699, or early in 1700, until 1705 or 1706 (Chatzes 2002, 38-41). The *Ἐγχειρίδιον* was not the only attempt he made to test his translation skills. During his residence in the same town, Papavassilopoulos prepared yet another translation of a work originally published in Latin. It was François Pomey's *Candidatus rhetoricae, seu Aphthonii Progymnasmata in meliorem formam usumque redacta*, whose first edition was published in Lyon by Antoine Molin in 1659¹. Earlier, Papavassilopoulos had been in the town of Serres, and from 1705 to 1723 he was in Ioannina, where he worked, together with Georgios Sougdoures (1645/7-1725) at the school of Emmanouel Gionma. Then, he passed from Kastoria, where he succeeded Methodios Anthrakites (c. 1660-1748) as a teacher at the ecclesiastical school of Georgios Kyritses, and his final stop was the town of Trikala, in which he stayed from 1728 to 1750 (Chatzes 2002,

¹ For the Latin editions of this book see de Backer and Sommervogel 1890-1900, VI: 981-983. The surviving copies of Papavassilopoulos' translation contain no explicit reference to the name of the original author. Chatzes (2002, 75) was the first to notice that *Λευχειμονοῦσα ῥητορικὴ* was actually a translation.



37-38, 41-48). He was both a priest and a teacher, and during his career, he composed also works on rhetoric and logic. Given the current state of our knowledge, it seems that he was the first to render Descartes' credo "cogito ergo sum" into Greek (as *ἐγὼ ἐννοῶ, ἐγὼ εἶμι*), in his manuscript treatise on logic (see Petsios 1999, 55-56).

Despite the fact that several recent historical studies have delved into, or touched on in passing, the content of the *Ἐγχειρίδιον* (Chatzes 2002, 97-118; Petsios 2002, 220-230; Vlahakis 2010, 130), neither the Latin original nor its author have been identified. Papavassilopoulos himself did not mention the name of the author, and this was not a deliberate omission. As a matter of fact, the book he translated had been published anonymously. Its first edition was printed in Paris by the French bookseller Nicholas Buon, in the Rue St. Jacques "sub signo D. Claudii & Hominis Sylvestris"², in 1623, and its full title goes as follows: *Enchiridion Physicae Restitutae. In quo verus Naturae concentus exponitur, plurimique antiquae Philosophiae errores per canones & certas demonstrationes dilucidè aperiuntur*. It was bound together with a second treatise entitled *Arcanum Hermeticae Philosophiae Opus: in quo occulta Naturae & Artis circa lapidis Philosophorum materiam & operandi modum canonicè & ordinatè fiunt manifesta. Utrumque opus eiusdem Authoris anonymi*. The motto at the bottom of the frontispiece (Spes mea est in Agno, or 'my hope is in the lamb'), as well as that in the title-page of the *Arcanum* (Penes nos unda Tagi, or 'the waters of the Tagus, in our power'), were presumably intended to function as imperfect anagrams of the name of the author³, and they actually did so, since, in 1651, Jean Bachou, in his introductory 'Discours' to the French translation of the *Enchiridion*, claimed that he had solved the riddle: Ioannis d'Espagnet, this was the name of the author who was identical with "Monsieur d'Espagnet Président au Parlement de Bourdeau" (Bachou 2007, 16). Parliamentarian (president of the parliament of Bordeaux), state counsellor, and associate of the witch-hunter jurist and demonologist Pierre de Lancre in the repressive campaign of 1609 against the women living in the province of Labourd (see Pearl 1999, 127-147; Duché-Gavet 2012), Jean d'Espagnet (1564 - post 1638 ?)⁴ was also a man of letters⁵. After his retirement from public life, in 1616 or 1617, it seems that he devoted most of his time to the study of natural philosophy and alchemy. Diderot, in his manuscript introduction to the lectures on chemistry of Guillaume-François Rouelle, called him the "Cicero of chemistry", extolling thus his rhetorical artistry, and had him ranked among the few remaining adepts or seekers after the philosopher's stone, on the side of Morienus, George Ripley, and Nicolas Flamel. Pierre Bayle, in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, described him as one of the 17th century savants⁶. He was an intimate friend of prominent literary figures such as Michel

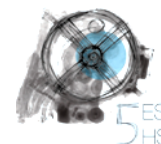
² 'At the sign of St. Claude and of the Woodsman'. The first was the sign of the printing establishment of Nicholas' father, Gabriel Buon, whose shop was on the Rue du Mont-St-Hilaire. The second was the sign of Regnault Chaudière, who was also a bookseller and father of Nicholas' first wife, Blanche (Renouard 1898, 53-54). Nicholas Buon was the printer of Barclay's *Argenis* and of several books of Grotius (see Reeves 1925).

³ If we put these two anagrams together and pick out from each of them the letters forming the name 'Espagnet', the remaining letters are forming the phrase "Deus omnia in nos" (God, everything in us). See Raimon Arola 2008, 86; D. L. 1815, 317.

⁴ On the possible date of Jean d'Espagnet's death see Kahn 2001, 256; 2007a, 529-530 (n. 103).

⁵ For d'Espagnet's life see Kahn 2007b, xi-xii, where relevant bibliography is provided.

⁶ Henry 1887, 53; Bayle 1715, II: 1117-1118. Didier Kahn (2001, 256; 2007a, 529) first brought to public attention these two references to the name of d'Espagnet.



de Montaigne and Marie de Gournay, who, from 1598 onwards, was pursuing her own experimental path in alchemy, perhaps having been initiated by d'Espagnet, but eventually sharing with him an experience of mutual encouragement and inspiration, as one might guess taking into account her creative thought and her sense of independence (see Secret 1973; Devincenzo 2002; Heitsch 2010).

However forgotten he may be today, the author of the *Enchiridion* was not a minor character in the historical evolution of Renaissance 'chymistry', and, even more broadly, in that of post-scholastic natural philosophy. The book itself enjoyed wide circulation and interest: within a period of just 50 years, it had passed through seven re-editions (1638 – 'secunda editio emendata et aucta'⁷, 1642, 1647, 1650, 1653, 1657, 1673), of which the first four were issued jointly with the *Arcanum*. Moreover, it had been included in the two Genevan editions of Nathan d'Aubigné's *Bibliotheca Chemica Contracta* (1653, and 1673). John Everard, an amateur alchemist himself, had translated it into English, and Jean Bachout into French. Both translations had been printed in the same year, 1651. And this was not the end point of its trajectory.

The Christian Kabbalist polymath and religious poet Christian Knorr von Rosenroth published, in 1680, under the pen name 'Christian Peganius' (or in German, 'Rautner'), his own translation into German (see Achermann 2008). At the dawn of the 18th century, d'Espagnet's book was anthologised in the second volume of J. J. Manget's *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa* (1702). Finally, in 1718, Johann Ludwig Hannemann, Professor of Medicine at Kiel University, published his own *Commentarius in Physicae Restitutae Enchiridion*, which was reprinted twice, in 1728 and in 1773.

Strictly speaking, the *Enchiridion* was not an alchemical treatise. It was a treatise which utilised alchemy as the bedrock, the most epistemologically advantageous and ontologically productive, experiential terrain, for the renovation of natural philosophy. In fact, it was one of the chronologically first books challenging openly the scholastic natural philosophy as a whole, and programmatically articulating an alternative to it. But what makes it even more intriguing is the fact that the discourse deployed by its author is lodged in the border zone between philosophy and theology. As far as the knowledge of nature is concerned, the Scripture is to be considered of equal authority with the surviving texts of Aristotle or Plato. The reason why the word of God carries so much weight in matters of natural philosophy is that the knowledge of nature is the knowledge of God' activity, who permeates the world, animates the world as an evolving reality, lives in and by the world, setting off and controlling the process of 'naturing', creating and sustaining nature as an evolving whole: whoever fails to fathom God's presence as 'anima mundi' is doomed to stay ignorant of the laws of the universe (d'Espagnet 1623, 4).

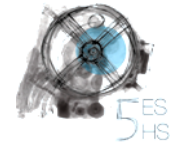
The *Enchiridion* can be seen as a good example of the Late Renaissance genre for which Daniel Georg Morhof in his post-humously published *Polyhistoris continuatio (philosophicus et practicus, 1708)* coined the designation 'Physica mosaica', and in this regard it could be read side by side with books such as Johann Sophron Kozak' *Physica mosaica* (1637), or the

⁷ This edition added nothing to the text of the *Enchiridion*. It was 'corrected' insofar as it introduced the errata changes listed at the end of the 1623 edition (e.g. the correction of the error in the numeration of the paragraph 242 which caused a discrepancy between the total number of paragraphs in the first edition and that of the second), and "augmented" insofar as it included two additional short texts, a poem introductory to the *Arcanum*, and a closing epistle, signed with the pseudonym 'I. C. Chymierastes' (see Kahn 2007b, xiii-xiv).



Physicae ad lumen divinum reformatae synopsis (1633) of Johann Amos Comenius, who actually, in the later stages of his philosophical development, consulted the book of d'Espagnet and drew on its conceptual edifice (see Blair 2000; Červenka 1970a, 1970b). And indeed, Comenius and d'Espagnet were grouped by Morhof under the same entry (Morhof 1708, 167-173), together with many other Christian thinkers of various philosophical allegiances (Aristotelians, Platonists, Cartesians, Kabbalists, Enthusiasts, Rosicrucians). Whatever the merits of such a classification, the version of 'restored physics' expounded by d'Espagnet is something more than a fascinating instantiation of a pious philosophical mentality fixated on the concept of nature.

The interweaving of causal explanations of natural phenomena and speculative inferences about the presence of God in the world becomes possible because, for d'Espagnet, the knowledge of nature amounts to the knowledge of what-can-be, of the potentiality of becoming, not to the knowledge of what-is, of the actuality of being. The empirical knowledge of the properties of natural substances is developed into the theoretical knowledge of material transformations, by means of a quest, not any longer for the philosophers' stone as an entity, but for the knowledge of the real possibilities in nature (how something can be composed, how something can be decomposed), of cosmopoiesis as a transmutational procedure. This is why philosophical atomism, in the *Enchiridion*, coexists with theosophical considerations. The word 'God' points to the creative potential inherent in nature: in d'Espagnet's discourse, God is defined as an emanative cause, tending however, more and more, to operate as an immanent one. Since the emphasis has shifted from being to becoming, and from the mind of God to the activity of God, the thematisation of the active principles in nature, the construction of the concept of 'natural elements', which seen in historical perspective seems to chart a middle course between David Gorlaeus' atomism and van Helmont's chemical philosophy (Lasswitz 1890, I: 235-239), intersects with the thematisation of the latent life of God in nature, the conception of the soul as 'anima mundi', and of man, the partaker of the cosmic soul, as 'microcosm', as a complex of real possibilities (a conception which can be traced back to the theories of the soul as a mediating element enunciated by Marsiglio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola's *Conclusiones Nongentae*). Alchemy can be posited in advance as an exceptionally prolific field of knowledge, and can thus be singled out as an exemplar for the 'restoration' of natural philosophy, because it involves the actualisation of real possibilities, through the active participation of the alchemist in the process of cosmopoiesis: knowing in alchemy is not only contemplating, representing the world-that-is, but also doing, emancipating the world-to-be. The thumbnail sketch of some of d'Espagnet's major tenets or background assumptions that we have just scratched is nevertheless helpful if we are to answer the question of what makes the story about the manuscript Greek translation of the *Enchiridion* interesting and worthy of deeper examination. The publication of a treatise providing the outline of a natural philosophy 'reformed' through the prisms of alchemy and theosophy was the culmination of persistent efforts, public debates, vehement criticisms and severe controversies the proximate origins of which could be dated to the last quarter of the 15th century: from the *Theologia platonica* of Ficino (printed in 1482), the *Conclusiones Nongentae* and the *Heptaplus* of Pico della Mirandola (1486 and 1489), to the *Libri III de philosophia occulta* of Cornelius Agrippa (1533), and the books of the Paracelsian chemical philosophers Gerhard Dorn (*Clavis totius philosophiae chymisticae*, 1567; *De naturae luce physica, ex Genesi desumpta*, 1583), Heinrich Khunrath (*Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae*,

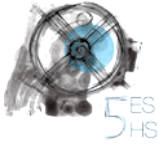


1595; *Von hylealischen, das ist, pri-materialischen catholischen oder algemeinen naturlichen Chaos, der naturgemessen Alchymae und Alchymisten*, 1597), and Oswald Croll (*Basilica chymica*, 1608), not to mention the tracts of Jacob Böhme which, until 1624, were available only through widely circulating manuscript versions, there is a proliferation of written sources interrelating the concept of nature with that of God, interpreting the narrative of Genesis as an account not of the creation, but of the constant renewal of the cosmos, and resignifying the theoretical knowledge of material transformations as pivoting on an open jurisdiction over knowing, as a duty that can be fulfilled through the experimental labour which transmutes actual human impuissance into real power, and as a right that pertains to every human being, since every human being partakes in the Anima Mundi. Modernity, in this context, corresponds to a universal restoration: it is a collective, both educational and experimental, endeavour to re-establish, here, in this world, the affinity between God and human beings, to actualise the creative cosmic potential which is latent in every human being.

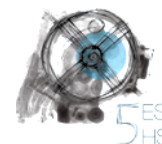
Hence a particular question may arise: how an Orthodox priest and scholar, such as Papavassilopoulos, came to translate a text exemplifying this particular notion of modernity? Was the Greek version of the *Enchiridion* a shooting star that momentarily crossed the philosophical firmament in the Greek-speaking communities or was it somehow relevant to philosophical debates which were, at that time and in that milieu, ongoing or still unsettled? By translating the *Enchiridion*, Papavassilopoulos produced the first, as far as we can tell, textbook of early modern, explicitly non-Aristotelian natural philosophy to appear before the Greek-speaking literate audience. The very fact that as early as 1701 a book of this kind was translated into Greek indicates that the process of appropriation of Western early modern literature on physics and chemical philosophy by Greek-speaking scholars was not so much delayed as it has been hitherto assumed to be. D'Espagnet's book was popular and it was possible for any Greek-speaking scholar passing from one of the major intellectual centers of Europe to come across one of its copies, visiting either a personal or a public library. Papavassilopoulos, in his youth, had travelled to Venice, and perhaps to Padua too, in order to continue his studies at a higher level (Chatzes 2002, 34-35). But the answer to the question asked above necessitates even deeper enquiry. We have to position Papavassilopoulos' translation in a nexus of possible relations between cultural developments, as yet historiographically unconnected, if not entirely unexplored, in the Greek-speaking communities during the 17th century and the first half of the 18th, which implicate the possibility of a peculiarly modern, but for all that, not less meticulous, interweaving between theology, philosophy, and science. This is a story still to be told, but perhaps by exploring the hitherto untrodden territory of chemical philosophy or Mosaic physics in the 'East' we will not merely address a gap in the existing literature. We might also be able to re-examine several implicit or explicit assumptions in current historical scholarship on the emergence of 'chymistry' itself in the 'West'.

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