

Geo-heliocentric controversies: The Jesuit network and the reception of Tycho Brahe in early Modern Portugal

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This paper explores the reception of Tycho Brahe's astronomical and cosmological theories in early Modern Portugal through focusing on a specific community of Jesuit scholars, a group of foreign mathematicians trained in different academic traditions from across Europe, who taught astronomy at the College of Saint Antão, Lisbon, during the first half of the seventeenth century. Recent scholarship has emphasized the role that the Jesuit polyvalent information network played in the circulation of knowledge in the early modern period. Analysis of the appropriation of Tycho Brahe's astronomical theories by the international community of Jesuit mathematicians active in Lisbon may also offer an appropriate occasion to analyze how the Jesuit network affected the production of knowledge process itself. I argue that, despite supporting the Tychonic geo-heliocentric system, which they explicitly conceived of as a 'compromise' between the ancient Ptolemy and the modern Copernicus, and making recourse to some of the cosmological ideas produced in Tycho's Protestant milieu, the Jesuits active in Lisbon strove to confine the authority of the Lutheran astronomer to the domain of mathematics. Philosophy was expected to remain the realm of Catholic orthodoxy. Accordingly, although accepting cosmological ideas put forward by Tycho Brahe and his associate Christoph Rothmann, the professors of the College of Santo Antão explicitly avoided recognizing the authorship of those ideas. This case shows that the cultural politics of the Counter-Reformation, embodied here in this network of international Jesuits, curbed the reception of Tycho Brahe within a Catholic environment, such as Portugal.

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