
This book celebrates a lucky marriage, the one between classical philology and the history of science, while also contributing to the scholarship on Jesuit savants in China in the 17th century – that is, in the period when members of the order had firmly taken place as astronomers and mathematicians at the Chinese court. The cooperation between the two authors of the volume began around 1991, when Efthymios Nicolaidis realised that the MIIT 423 manuscript, in the collection from the Metochion of the Holy Sepulchre in Constantinople, was not registered in the bibliography of the works by Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688), the Jesuit missionary to China. Nicolaidis got in touch with Noël Golvers, who was publishing Verbiest’s *opus* under the aegis of the Verbiest Foundation at the University of Leuven.

The two scholars – Golvers, the philologist and historian of the Jesuit mission to China; Nicolaidis, the historian of Byzantine and Ottoman science in their common work focused on the challenge posed by the presence of an autograph manuscript by Verbiest in a collection that had no relationship whatsoever with China missions. Golvers provided the English translation of the manuscript (n. 423 in Papadopoulos Kerameus’ catalogue, Atene 1899, vol. IV), together with a rich philological commentary, while also reconstructing the Latin corrupted text. The codex has two parts, with a set of engravings in the middle: a *Compendium Historicum de Astronomia apud Sinas* (ff. 4r-16r), followed by an *Astronomia apud Sinas Restituta Mechanica* (ff. 27r-54r).

The first part helps reconstructing the complex story conducting to the presence of the work in the Metochion collection. The beginning is in a letter transmitted by Verbiest to the zar Alexei Mikhailovich (1629-1676) through his emissaire, N. G. Spathary Milescu (1636-1708), in the summer of 1676. The letter meant to bear witness to the extraordinary welcome the Russian delegate had received in Peking, and also to offer Verbiest’s own remarkable linguistic proficiency to the Russian monarch in the diplomatic negotiations between Russia and China. In exchange for this service, he hoped for a special benevolence from the zar towards the Jesuit community in Moscow – thus enabling the long wished for opening of a terrestrial route to China through the Russian territory. Unfortunately the letter never reached the zar, who had died while Spathary was still in China. A second letter followed, bearing the date of March 1st, 1680; this is also in the Metochion collection, and it was written when Philip Couplet went back to Europe as a Procurator to the Mission. This letter is chronologically posterior to the documents Verbiest had given to Spathary in 1676. Nonetheless, it was transcribed by the Moscovite copyist and kept with the set of astronomical texts, to which it had no relations. It is thus but briefly mentioned by Golvers and Nicolaidis.

The *Compendium Historicum De Astronomia apud Sinas Restituta* is the earliest version of *Astronomia Europea* (Dillingen, 1687), with variations and updates, and
it is thoroughly examined by the editors. The *Astronomiae apud Sinas Restitutae Mechanica Centum et Sex Figuris Adumbrata*, on the contrary, is a brief description of the engravings in the *Liber Organicus (Yi xiang tu)*, also included in the last printed version of the *Astronomia Europea*. The codex also comprises seven leaves of Chinese paper, bearing the originals of the engravings in the *Observationes Astronomicae*, the Latin version of the collection published in Chinese under the title *Ceyan ji lüe*. Golvers and Nicolaidis believe that Spathary possessed in fact two identical sets of engravings; one of them was given in 1693 to the Archimandrite Chrysanthos Notaras, together with a copy of the astronomical texts produced in Moscow in 1693 (the so-called “Metochion copy”). By examining recurrences and transcription errors, the editors suppose the copyist to have been a Greek amanuensis, probably a scholar in one of Moscow academies at the time. Golvers’ philological skills enable a brilliant restitution of the astronomical text by Verbiest, based on the textual tradition of manuscript codices, including the Metochion copies, preceding the printed version of the *Astronomia Europea*. The second section of the volume is an interesting contribute by Nicolaidis on Maragha Persian astronomy as a bridge between Chinese and Byzantine astronomy. As he underlines, there is a difference in the influence it had on the two traditions: in the former, it is apparent in the construction of observation and calculation instruments; in the latter, it plays a more theoretical role. The third section of the volume is also by Nicolaidis, and it is followed by the annotated and commented text of the two Metochion works: the *Compendium Historicum* and the *Astronomiae Mechanica*. Nicolaidis epitomizes the astronomical contents and topics Verbiest illustrated at the Chinese court, highlighting the epistemology of measurement as one of its main features. The next step was the construction of instruments for Peking astronomical observatory – an extraordinary synthesis of Tychonian models and Chinese style; before this, precision in calculations and ephemerides was needed in order to overwhelm the court astronomers. This was a Jesuit success, and in 1644, with the accession of the new dynasty, it entailed the appointment as directors of the court observatory, that lasted until 1775, with only a short interruption from 1644 to 1669.

The volume, giving access to yet unpublished documents, is a new and important contribution to the comprehension of the many roles played by Jesuits at the Chinese court – not only astronomers, but also political middlemen, tutors, and courtiers. It thus opens new fields for research; nonetheless, a thorough comparative study of the Latin and Chinese versions of Verbiest’s works is still needed, particularly as regards the different degree of adhesion to the Church official cosmological doctrine. In fact, the engagement in scientific research by no means meant that the Jesuits underplayed the primary aim of their missionary activities. As Verbiest himself writes at the end of his treatise, not one of the marvels and wonders of mathematics, astronomy – and of other sciences such as geometry, chronography, perspective and gnomonic – remained hidden to the view of the Emperor. But the Jesuits mainly wished to direct his eye and his mind to the Supreme Architect “cuius pulchritudinem se tamquam stellae minores lunam et