Workshop

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM JACQUES ROHAULT'S LESSONS IN MATHEMATICS AND PHYSICS?

Frédéric Metin & Patrick Guyot

University of Nantes, University of Dijon

Jacques Rohault (1618-1672) was often referred to as 'the famous Monsieur Rohault' in contemporary English books about natural philosophy. He was regarded as the most important Cartesian philosopher, and his posthumous works were published several times in London, in Latin as well as in English, even after his own homeland had forgotten him.

Rohault was also a famous teacher: his public lessons in Paris were attended by a variety of persons, as Malebranche witnesses. The lessons on physics were especially appreciated, for they were spectacular and based on experimentation; but we must not forget that Rohault was also a teacher of mathematics for the Dauphin of France, and as such he taught Euclid's Elements (the first six books), trigonometry, practical geometry, fortifications etc. The course for the Dauphin has been taught in other private lessons, the manuscripts of which still exist in public libraries.

The reading of Rohault's writings, pointing out the differences between printed and manuscript versions, offers a view on a great mind of his century, inventor of pedagogical choices based on the personal implication of the one who teaches, on debate and controversy.

Suggested texts (to be studied during the workshop; the text in French will be "made English"):

Œuvres posthumes de Jacques Rohault. Paris, 1680.

Course on trigonometry and fortification (manuscripts), ca 1670.

Rohault's System of Natural Philosphy, illustrated with Dr Samuel Clarke's notes, taken mostly out of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy. London, 1723.