



# TRAMES ARBORESCENTES'



**call for papers**

## ***Sacred Science: Learning from the Tree***

**European Society for the History of Science  
Biennial Conference 2018  
September, 14-17**

We are pleased to announce that *Trames Arborescentes* is preparing a symposium for the European Society for the History of Science's conference (<http://www.eshs.org/?lang=en>) that will take place in London on September 2018.

«Unity and Disunity» has been chosen as the main theme for the aforementioned meeting. Within this framework, *Trames Arborescentes* has decided to participate by proposing a commented panel that will gather four speakers around the subject «Sacred Science: Learning from the Tree».

Proposals containing personal information (including academic affiliation), an abstract, and a short bio are welcome for this panel. The document may be submitted to our email address [tramesarborescentes@gmail.com](mailto:tramesarborescentes@gmail.com) before December 12.

Trames arborescentes:

Antoine Paris  
Orient et Méditerranée,  
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## Symposium abstract:

### Sacred Science: Learning from the Tree

This panel traces the arboreal motif through time, using it as a means to reflect on unity and disunity of interaction between science, art and the sacred. Indeed, the figure of the tree has been used as a visualization tool to structure knowledge since Antiquity. However, it turns out that the tree of the Arts and Sciences is a deciduous tree. Its holy leaves, metaphorical expressions of unseen secrets, have been shed as science gradually broke away from the sacred. The apparent unity of its branches, the Arts and the Sciences, became exposed and fractured. What was the role of the arboreal structure in this process?

Three points will stand in our proposal. Firstly, we will question how the tree-diagram was used to articulate the conjunction of the Arts, the Sciences and the Sacred. During the Middle Ages, tree diagrams were commonly used in the arts degree as tools to study arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music theory, grammar, logic and rhetoric. These frameworks of learning in the universities were infused with the sacred, they sprang from the sacred. Gradually though, the Arts and Sciences began to be distinguished, subjects changed categories. But even as Darwin was developing his theory of life, the sacred continued to play a role in scientific discovery and communication. How was this distinction nuanced in every period?

The second point will focus on the loss of the sacred and the sacralization of knowledge. In effect, step by step, the distinction between the arts and sciences gradually became a divide and the concept of sacred changed in this learning context. The sacred was given less space in the hierarchies of knowledge, it no longer penetrated every aspect of learning. At some point knowledge itself became sacred. When and how did this happen? What rapport did the sacred have in this dramatic change in our perception of knowledge? Was this new knowledge disruptive? Did it bring about unity or disunity? Is the current dissociation between the Arts and Sciences a consequence of divorcing knowledge from the sacred?

Thirdly, we will examine arboreal motifs in our contemporary era, when encyclopedic knowledge and three-dimensional mind maps, once again seek to chart the infinite, the unknown, what is not seen by the naked eye. Are these new worlds in new dimensions still shown shaped in a tree-form? If so, what knowledge does the tree convey? Why is the arboreal structure effective? How is the sacred expressed (if at all) in this structure?

The dialectic relationship between unity and disunity seems perfectly tailored to the branching of the tree-diagram, which also allows expression of a hierarchical combination *ad infinitum*. The centrality and unity - concepts in which the trunk of these diagrams was firmly rooted, has been shifted for new multifocal tree-figures, which grant us plenty of new possibilities that adapt well to current models of information visualization. This panel uses arboreal constructs as a means to look into the sacred/knowledge relationship in order to question the forthcoming cognitive patterns of unity and disunity that will shape our near future.