

Joint CSMC & SAW Workshop

**“What Can the History of Science Contribute to Manuscript Studies  
or  
What Can Manuscript Studies Contribute to the History of Science?”**

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**Abstract**

**Robert Middeke-Conlin,**

***Estimation and Observation: A study of two Old Babylonian tabular administrative documents***

NBC 11509 and NBC 06763 are two unprovenanced documents which, on outward appearance are very similar: they are both tabular administrative texts which seem to estimate volume for canal excavations. Though vocabulary differs slightly, both are divided into five columns: a column for a length, width, depth, volume, and a label for each canal section. Both have a total excavation as well as a statement of who is in charge of these excavations. However, NBC 11509 and NBC 06763 are very different. NBC 11509 clearly derives volume from a multiplication of length by width and then height while NBC 06763 offers values for volume that are not related to this simple calculation. Nor does the total volume in NBC 06763 appear to be derived from these values. Indeed, while the tabular layout in NBC 11509 seems to organize data in a way reflecting the manipulation of data, length, width, and then depth produces volume, this organization, on first inspection, seems secondary to NBC 06763.

This workshop will examine these two texts and the tablets they were written on, emphasizing the tabular format exhibited by these documents. Through this we will see that both texts were produced in the same kingdom around the same time but by different, expert scribes in different environments. It will suggest that NBC 11509 was an estimation of volume before an excavation while NBC 06763 records excavated volume from a completed canal maintenance project.