

Seminar SAW

Exploring 19th and 20th centuries historiographies of mathematics in the ancient world, 2015-2016

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History of mathematics and the astral sciences in the ancient world in a context of professionalization. The case of Mesopotamia

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The rediscovery of Babylonian Astronomy: a historiographic narrative

Abstract – In this paper I will discuss the rediscovery of Babylonian mathematical astronomy by the Jesuits J.N. Strassmaier (1846-1920) and J. Epping (1835-1894) and the subsequent more extensive studies by their colleague F.X. Kugler S.J. (1862-1929) in the period 1880 - 1930. This early phase of the study of Babylonian astronomy took place at the Jesuit colleges in Blijenbeek, Exaeten and Valkenburg in the Netherlands. During his career Kugler pioneered virtually every aspect of Babylonian astronomy and he contributed to several disciplines in which Babylonian astronomy played a role. He also became involved in a number of personal and scientific controversies. Well-known is his crusade against Panbabylonism, a school of thought that tried to show that the most important mythologies and world religions originated from an ancient system of astral myths diffused from Babylon. When in the early 1930's Otto Neugebauer (1899-1990) entered the field of Babylonian mathematical astronomy this pioneering phase had come to an end.