

## Séminaires « Pratiques » 2013

**May 22, 2013 : Etats et savoirs/State and knowledge  
13h30-17h30**

### *Weight and Measures system and its regional diversification in Vietnam during the Colonial Period.*

**Sekimoto Noriko** (Doctoral candidate, Graduate School of Global Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies)

In French Indochina, despite that the metric weights and measures system was introduced by the French colonial administration and provided by law, local indigenous systems were maintained in various regions even into the latter half of the colonial period.

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the regional diversification through analyzing the weights and measures system.

The following points are the largest problems in the history of research in the Vietnamese weights and measures: The systems that were used in each period and area are so diverse that the actual operation can only be assumed from fragmentary descriptions; there are not enough methodologies and historical material to be systematically weighed against each other. In addition, Vietnamese translations of weights and measures terms in classic Chinese historical materials are not standardized, and weights and measures terms in studies conducted in European languages and Vietnamese are not standardized, and furthermore, the conversion of the amounts equivalent to each unit differ depending on the point of view of the researcher or investigation. That is, no standardized point of view has been established yet as to weights and measures.

The first step of the methodology is to study by using not fragmentary, local cases but a homogeneous, and systematic historical materials that allow for objective and rational comparisons. I worked on this issue by using the units for measuring rice in the monthly commercial statistics of each province in Vietnam. This paper focused on more than 2100 examples on rice measurement units of 63 provinces at the period from 1898 to 1927 and analysed its differences and distribution chronologically.

The main conclusions of this paper are as follows: Firstly, we found that there are 3 cultural blocs in Vietnam, the dividing cultural lines of these cultural blocs are on Ha Tinh province and Cho Lon province. The 2 dividing lines are different from the administration division: protectorate Tonkin (northern area) and Annam (central area), and Direct territory Cochinchine (southward area).

Secondly, it has become clear that the regional characteristic of the metrological system was still strongly based on of historical background (before French Colonial period) in each area such as agricultural custom, community relationships of villages, immigrants, economic and trade relationships...

As a result, this paper's methodology works effectively to further clarify diversification and characteristics of the region in weights and measures throughout Vietnam.

**June 12, 2013 : Reproducing practices  
9h30-17h30**

***Calculer avec un instrument en Mésopotamie au début du II<sup>e</sup> millénaire: Quelques indices dans les textes mathématiques et tentatives de reconstitution d'un abaque à calcul sexagésimal / Computing with a device in early second millenium Mesopotamia: evidences in mathematical texts and attempts to reconstruct a sexagesimal abacus***

**Cécile Michel** (CNRS ArScAn-HAROC & ERC Project SAW) & **Christine Proust**  
(CNRS—SPHERE & ERC Project SAW)

### **Résumé**

Les pratiques de calcul en Mésopotamie ont atteint, dans certains milieux et à certaines époques, un haut niveau de technicité. Des indices textuels et archéologiques laissent penser que des instruments de calcul matériels ont pu être utilisés par les praticiens anciens pour effectuer ces calculs. Dans la première partie de cette présentation, nous résumerons ce qui est connu à ce jour concernant les traces de tels instruments (notations des nombres dans les textes cunéiformes, vocabulaire du calcul, erreurs de calcul, objets évoquant des plateaux de jeu...). Les sources étudiées sont datées essentiellement du début du deuxième millénaire avant notre ère. Dans un deuxième temps, nous présenterons des tentatives de reconstitution d'instruments qui auraient pu être utilisés d'une part dans le milieu des marchands, d'autre part dans le milieu des écoles de scribes. Des jetons de calcul seront mis à la disposition des auditeurs de façon à ce que chacun puisse participer à l'expérimentation.

### **Abstract**

Calculation practices in some Mesopotamian milieus, during certain periods, reached a high technical level. Textual and archaeological evidences suggest that devices have been used to perform these calculations. We will first summarize what is known today about traces of such instruments in the cuneiform documentation dating mainly to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE (notations of numbers in cuneiform texts, calculation, terminology, mistakes, some objects evoking game boards, etc). Then, we will present attempts for reconstructing devices that could have been used on the one hand in the milieu of the merchants, on the other in the milieu of scribal schools. Tokens will be provided to listeners in ways that everyone can participate in the experiment.

***Speaking Volumes:  
A Critical Look at the History of Alchemy and its Manuscript Sources***

**Anke Timmermann** (Medical University of Vienna)

How is it possible to write the history of a craft practice from written records? Alchemical manuscripts are rather complex historical objects. Extant manuscripts represent only a fraction of the body of written documents originally composed. Moreover, they include carefully produced volumes and scruffy notebooks; extensive texts as well as cryptic, short recipes; plain writing and illustrated materials; Latin and vernacular writings; texts with a title and author and, overwhelmingly, anonymous materials; and works that travelled across

Europe in a large number of manuscript copies as well as notes that may occur in a single manuscript only. Alchemical recipes comprise not only transmutatory experiments, but also intersect with instructions in medicine, metallurgy, scholarly-clerical and other subject matters. Their specific, customary yet evolving terminology, used to translate skills and knowledge into written language, provides an additional aspect in need of deciphering by the modern historian.

Common narratives in the history of alchemy frequently focus on tangible subjects within this heterogeneous mass of writings. They trace the lives of famous people, the history of institutions or the impact of works by actual or pseudonymously famed authors: Paracelsus and John Dee, the court of Rudolph II at Prague and that of Maurice, Landgrave of Hesse-Kassel, and the oeuvres attributed to Arnold of Villanova and Raymond Llull are all firmly established landmarks in alchemy as we understand it to date. But the picture that emerges from the greater body of alchemical manuscripts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance is more complex and, at the same time, more elusive. Much of the history of alchemy, the way it was understood, applied and altered by a wide variety of practitioners and writers, and its ubiquity in late medieval and early modern life lies hidden in a vast number of anonymous recipes which have hitherto escaped historians' attention.

This presentation considers the nature of alchemical manuscripts and the tools of historical investigation to develop a consciously manuscript-based approach to the history of alchemy. It will focus on anonymous *alchemica* to investigate how the history of alchemy can capture the practice of unnamed individuals in the scriptorium and in the alchemical workshop.

### ***Reconstructing recipes between technical art history and the history of science and technology***

**Sven Dupré** (Max Planck Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Berlin)

As part of a research project on written transmission in and beyond the artist's workshop at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, a database of artists' recipes written and collected between the thirteenth and seventeenth century is developed. The emerging field of technical art history, bringing together art history, conservation science and art technological source research, has studied these recipes for decades. However, they are an almost untapped resource in the history of science and technology. What is involved in making these recipes a useful source in the history of science and technology? My paper discussed three aspects of this disciplinary shift of focus. First, while in technical art history, recipes are primarily used in support of technical analysis of the art objects in conservation labs in order to settle issues of attribution, the history of science and technology would benefit from treating these texts as paper technologies, or tools of reading and writing practices. The second part of my paper compares the historiography of material reconstructions in technical art history and history of science and technology. In the third and final part of the paper, methodological issues are foregrounded. Recent work on the recipes of the 'Secretum philosophorum' functions as a case to discuss the opportunities, challenges and constraints of digital reconstructions on a computer screen.