

**Seminar SAW:
History of Science, History of text**

Abstract

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Exploring the social worlds of the medieval Latin astronomical code

Most large European libraries with rich manuscript collections hold codices often simply described in catalogs as "astronomical tables." Dating usually from the 14th to 16th centuries, these codices may contain widely varying texts—medical, astrological, calendrical, and computational. They may also include paper instruments with moving parts or describe how to make and use instruments in brass. In this seminar, I shall examine several examples of such compilations and ask what they tell us, if considered not as individual texts but as physical codices, about their early social worlds. Produced by scribes and authors, owners and bookbinders, libraries and collectors, these codices contain hints about the early social worlds they inhabited, hints ranging from colophons, ex libris inscriptions, other users' marks or signs of wear to the structure of the texts brought together. Who wanted such astronomical compilations? How were these books used? Did their users consider themselves to be 'astronomers' or 'astrologers'? Can we find common patterns that might enable us to define a genre of the 'astronomical compilation'? Until recently, most historians of medieval Latin astronomy tended to focus on the content of texts. Can we tell different stories if we focus on codices?