

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?”**

08-10 May 2014

Abstract

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Colophons in mathematical cuneiform texts as indicators of the pragmatic status of texts

In the first millennium BCE in Mesopotamia, scribes used to inscribe colophons at the end of their works, for example on medicine, mathematics or astral sciences. These colophons provided information relative to the scribe who copied the text, the place where he composed it, the content of the composition, the original document copied, the owner of the tablet and his genealogy. These practices reflected a very specific context of that time: that of the creation, enrichment, management and maintenance of large libraries. In the Old Babylonian period (circa 2000–1600), colophons were not widespread. However, they are attested in some specific mathematical texts, and their content is limited to very terse information on the content of the texts. In this presentation, I analyze such colophons in order to understand the context in which the documents were created. How colophons inform us on the purpose of the texts? Do they reflect teaching activities, or the management of libraries, or other type of classification project? In addressing such questions, this presentation intends to link the content of colophons to the pragmatic status of the texts.