

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

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Historiography of ancient mathematics and astral sciences in China before its professionalization

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The reception of Alexander Wylie's *Jottings on the science of the Chinese. Arithmetic* in Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries

Abstract - Protestant missionary Alexander Wylie's *Jottings on the science of the Chinese. Arithmetic*, published in 1852, was a major contribution to a history of mathematics and astral sciences in ancient China, which made brand new knowledge on the topic available for the first time in the West. The text was mainly known in Europe through a German translation that Biernatzki published (1856) in the *Journal für die reine und angewandte Mathematik*, and two French adaptations of the latter, published respectively in 1862 and 1869, by Olry Terquem (in two parts, in *Bulletin de bibliographie, d'histoire et de biographie mathématiques*, and *Nouvelles annales de mathématiques*) and Joseph Bertrand (in *Journal des Savants*). As Ulrich Libbrecht already emphasized in his 1973 book, these translations were adaptations, and contained mistakes, which affected the reception of Wylie's work in Europe, and consequently the image of mathematics in ancient China. This talk aims at studying the transformations brought about by the translations, and interpreting how they changed Wylie's original intention. It also aims to examine the reception of these various publications.