

## 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, with a focus of China, and the Indian subcontinent: The beginnings of professionalization**

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*The Cold War Antiquities: Histories of Mathematics in the Postwar United States*

**Abstract** - The twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of historical writings about mathematics for both popular and professional audiences. Morris Kline, Edna Kramer, Dirk Jan Struik, and Carl Boyer sought to provide a grand narrative connecting ancient mathematics to its contemporary manifestations. As I will demonstrate in this talk, two main features characterized these works. First, they were concerned with the applicability of mathematics and the way mathematical ideas were crucial to what they conceived of as the progress of humanity. Second, they were marked by an interest in the ways in which mathematical ideas and tools were transmitted and transformed across cultures and time periods. As such, they reflected the anxieties that characterized the authors' own experiences – concerns, namely, about the uses of mathematical ideas for political and social purposes, and about the transmission of scientific knowledge across the Iron Curtain. These midcentury historical forays into the world of ancient mathematicians are therefore examples of what some scholars have termed “usable pasts.” They tell more about the status of American mathematics during the Cold War than they do about the past.