

6th International Conference of the European Society for the History of Science,  
symposium "Rethinking modes of teaching and transmitting knowledge: a  
historical perspective in east and west", Lisbon, Portugal

*Some false evidence on the relationship between masters and disciples in  
cuneiform mathematical texts*

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**Abstract** - Most of the known mathematical cuneiform texts were produced within the scribal schools that flourished in Ancient Near East in the early second millennium BCE (Old Babylonian period). This school context is documented by thousands of tablets containing elementary lexical and mathematical exercises. The very style of advanced mathematical texts evokes a didactic intention: for example, the first person is used in the statements and the second person in the procedures for solving problems. From these observations, historians generally deduce that the cuneiform mathematical texts are essentially "textbooks". This paper will rely on some examples to argue that this portrait is simplistic, and that complex motivations, which are not only (or even not at all) based on teaching, can be detected. This diversity of goals and uses of mathematical texts in Old Babylonian period will be illustrated through several examples. Some elementary mathematical exercises will be analyzed, in order to capture aspects of the relationship between young pupils and masters. Lists of problems organized as compilations, catalogues or collections, will be used to illustrate that the task of masters was also conservation of knowledge. And finally, it will be shown that some sophisticated texts, demanding a high mastering of mathematics and textual knowledge, were certainly not composed by masters for education purpose, but rather by erudite scholars for their peers. These diverse examples suggest that scribal schools were not only centers of teaching, but also conservatories of past tradition and intellectual centers for creation of new knowledge.

**Biography** - Christine Proust is Senior Researcher (*Directrice de Recherche*) at the *Laboratoire SPHERE (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* and University Paris Diderot). She is an historian of mathematics, and her work focuses mainly on Old Babylonian mathematical texts, with a particular interest for the context of scribal schools. She published two books on this topic: *Tablettes mathématiques de Nippur* (De Boccard, 2007), and *Tablettes mathématiques de la collection Hilprecht* (Harrassowitz, 2008). She just published, with Alain Bernard, an edited book on *Scientific Sources and Teaching Contexts throughout History: Problems and Perspectives* (Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Springer, 2014). She is member of the European Project "Mathematical Sciences in the Ancient world", lead by Karine Chemla, where she is responsible of the part of the program dealing with the Ancient Near East.