

**Seminar SAW**  
**History of Science, History of Text, 2011-2016**  
April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015

**Meeting on the "Collections used in The History of Science Scholarly value,  
market value, patrimonial value"**

**Magali Dessagnes** (SPHERE, CNRS & Université Paris Diderot, SAW Project)

*Gejou Elias, example of the antiquarian profession in the nineteenth century and main supplier tablets collections cuneiform of his time*

**Abstract** – As part of my researchs, I try to study the circulation of cuneiform tablets (more especially tablets with mathematics content) and the constitution of the collections from the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. I'm particularly interested in a specific aspect in this context of history of collections, which is the market of antiques. This market is difficult to study, because even at this period it is not completely legal, so we have few informations. However, it is also one of the main reasons for the dispersion of antiques coming from the same site in different collections. For the antiquarian, scientific and historical values of the object seems not to be a priority, he is a merchant so he give them other values, sometimes very different, depending on the case. We naturally think first to the market value.

About Mesopotamian antiquities, starting with the mathematical tablets, it is a name that we can not ignore because he is everywhere. I will try to present him today : Elias Gejou, Parisian antiques dealer. My purpose is to understand through a portrait of Gejou and his activities which values may be attributed to antique objects circulating on the market. This different kind of values of the objects could justify their entry into a collection more than another.

There is no doubt about the participation of Elias Gejou in the formation of major European collections (and even American) during his period of activity. This is what we can find him in the archives of these collections. The case of Elias Gejou is important because he is in the same time present everywhere and poorly documented. He provided almost all major public and private collections of his time, and yet he did not leave many traces, just a few allusions in archives. And more important, for now, I didn't find any personal archives. However, with the documentation we have about this merchant, we can reconstruct some of its methods. And we can try to better understand the character. It seems that it was not, as we shall see, a simple trader on the antiques market, but he has a much more complex profile.