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Historiography: Comparing in History of Mathematics

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Comparisons around Egyptian mathematics in Otto Neugebauer and Kurt Vogel's dissertations

Abstract – In 1926, then in 1929, that is, after an interval of only two years, Otto Neugebauer and Kurt Vogel (respectively) publish a dissertation about the history of mathematics in ancient Egypt. Both works rely widely on an analysis of the Rhind mathematical papyrus, especially on the so-called $2/n$ table. The proximity of both texts, in time, themes, in the situation of their author, makes them ideal sources for an inquiry on the historiographical trends in Germany at the end of the twenties. We propose here to contrast the ways in which the authors use comparison. What is compared? What for? Is it possible to deduce from that some differences between the approach of the Munich group, to which Vogel belongs, and these of the Göttingen group, to which Neugebauer belongs? Such are the questions we aim to explore.