

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

May 20th, 2016

**Historiography of comparison and Historiography of circulation, with a particular
reference to the ancient mathematical sciences**

Francesca Rochberg (University of California, Berkeley)

*The Ancient Astral Sciences of Babylonia and the Greco-Latin World: Highways and Byways
of Comparison*

Abstract – The discoveries of cuneiform Babylonian astronomy and astrology on one hand and Hellenistic Greek scientific texts dealing in astrology and alchemy on the other both had an impact on the historiography of science, necessitating a thorough re-evaluation of the nature of ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean science. First, Babylonian mathematical astronomy challenged probably the most entrenched idea about the history of science for much of the Twentieth Century, namely, the idea that science originated with the Greeks. Second, in light of Greek astrology the post-positivist turn in the history and philosophy of science abandoned the idea that ‘magic’ and ‘science’ were mutually exclusive universal ahistorical categories and that Greek science could no longer be seen in wholesale contrast to Babylonian as exemplifying rationality and progress. This lecture addresses the comparative rationality of the ancient Near Eastern versus Greek and Greco-Latin traditions of astronomical science in terms of the historiography of comparison and its pitfalls.