

SAW Conference on Writing histories of ancient mathematics – Reflecting on past practices and opening the future, 18th-21st centuries

24-28 Octobre, 2016

organized by Karine Chemla, Agathe Keller, Christine Proust and the SAW group
Université Paris Diderot, Condorcet Building room 366A Klimt- 9:30 am to 5:30 pm

Cultural histories of mathematics

Friday October 28th, 2016

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*Lévy-Bruhl's theory on 'prelogical mentality' and its influence on the field of history
and philosophy of science*

Abstract – Over the first decades of the 20th century, French philosopher and sociologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl developed the theory of a "prelogical mentality", which he attributed to members of "inferior/primitive" societies. In particular, he argued that these peoples had a lesser ability to abstract and generalize, and that their way of thinking was not governed by the same logical principles than ours. In this paper, we shall evaluate to what extent this theory of a "primitive mind" has significantly influenced scholarly discussions/studies in the field of history and philosophy of science (Léon Brunschvicg 1912, Abel Rey 1937...), when comparing – between "civilizations"– the emergence and the development of "science" (and of mathematics in particular).