



# SPHERE

Laboratoire de Philosophie et d'Histoire des Sciences  
UMR 7219



## Séminaire histoire des sciences, histoire du texte

organisé par Karine Chemla et l'ensemble du groupe HSHT

Université Paris Diderot - bâtiment Condorcet - Salle 647A - 9h30 à 17h30

<https://sawerc.hypotheses.org/hsht-2018-2019>

**25<sup>th</sup> of October 2018**

### Working and reworking textual elements

**Strahil Panayotov** (Freie Universität Berlin, BabMed – Babylonian Medicine)  
*The Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia and similar Compendia*

**Abstract:** What was the structure of cuneiform medical texts? When and in what form was cuneiform medicine recorded and systematized? Can we recognize synchronic and diachronic Mesopotamian medical traditions as well as different editorial workshops?

Although multiple medical cuneiform manuscripts from Kuyunjik, Iraq (ancient Nineveh, buried under devastated Mosul) were long known to the Assyriological community, only recently has the structure of these manuscripts been revealed. We know now that there was an important compendium of medical knowledge: the so-called Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia (henceforth NME), which is a highly systematized collection of diagnoses, therapies (physical and verbal), and herbal based remedies for healing body parts. NME is the best-preserved ancient body of medical lore, predating by several centuries the Hippocratic Corpus. NME was carefully edited during the 7th century BCE by cuneiform scholars, who had access to medical manuscripts from all over Mesopotamia. The Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal had this work be personally created for his Royal Library in Nineveh. Large parts of NME are still not edited, nor translated, therefore NME is largely unknown to historians of ancient medicine and science.

The present talk, divided in two parts, will address the questions from above on the basis of the NME, ancient catalogues, and other medical compendia. In the first part, it will discuss the structure and the content of the NME in comparison with ancient catalogues. In the second part, it will present additional evidence of similar earlier and later cuneiform editorial works, some of which are not yet edited.

**Pan Shuyuan** (Institute for History of Natural Sciences, CAS, Beijing & SPHERE, Université Paris Diderot)

*Reading Blanks in Chinese Woodblock-printed Books through Mathematics—Studying Deletions in the Ming Edition(s) of Jihe Yuanben, the Chinese Translation of the Elements*

**Abstract:** The first Chinese translation of the Elements (Books I-VI), titled *Jihe Yuanben*, was published in 1607. All of its copies printed in the late Ming (i.e., 1607 - 1644) that we have examined can be essentially viewed as deriving from a single edition, although there are a few additions and replacements. However, we can note some blank spaces in all these copies of the Ming edition due to revision. What were the original words in the uncorrected state? Why were they deleted? What mathematical understanding did the original translation and the deletions reflect? Furthermore, when some readers and philologists in the Qing dynasty saw those blanks, what actions did they take for collation and criticism, and what were the considerations behind? Thanks to mathematics, we are able to read the blanks and discuss these questions above.

**Ion Mihailescu** (Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Berlin)

*Hands, Lines and Arrows: the diagrammatic representation of force*

**Abstract:** Until the beginning of the 19th century one can encounter only two representations of force: a physical representation that depicted the source of force such as a hand or a weight pulling a rope, and a geometrical representation that depicted the direction and quantity of force as a line. No arrows were ever used to indicate the orientation of force until the early 1800s.

The use of an arrow in the representation of force might seem to be a convenient, natural or unsurprising notation that would not justify a significant pause. However, it is puzzling that this notation appeared so late in the development of mechanics considering that early-modern publications were nothing short of detailed and innovative diagrams. If for more than two centuries there was no stringent need for depicting the orientation of forces, what changed now?

I will aim to show how by following the use of a minor graphical sign one can reveal larger patterns which have meaningful pedagogical and conceptual interpretations.