



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>

13 juin 2019

Topic: Handling writings

Alexis Trouillot (SPHERE, CNRS et Université Paris Diderot, France)

What does 'hisab' mean? The perspective of the catalogues of West African Manuscripts

Abstract: The Arabic term 'hisab' is generally translated as 'arithmetics'.

In this talk, I propose to explore what this term meant in a West African context in a period starting from the 17th century and ending in the 20th century, by using an array of regional catalogs covering a region, a period, and a volume rather original for the history of mathematics in Arabic.

I will first summarise what is known of the beginning of manuscript culture in the region before detailing the numerous catalogues pertaining to Arabic manuscripts. As will quickly become apparent from this description, the different cataloguing actors, ranging from the French colonial government to Unesco to an informal association of American researchers, had different ideas on how to catalog manuscripts, and in particular on how to divide them into genres and subjects, forcing us to radically shift methodology from one catalog to the other and to ask the question of what kind of access to the text a catalog can offer.

Lastly, I will show that the catalogs hint at a curriculum for the study of 'hisab' in West Africa. Beyond the translation as 'arithmetics', 'hisab' seems to articulate itself around, and at times to be merging with, two other disciplines: astronomy ('falak') and inheritance ('fara'id').

Kevin Baker (Oxford University Press)

Practices of Reading the Principia

Abstract: Given its status as a foundational text of modern science, remarkably little is known about how the Principia was read when it was published in 1687. Which individuals worked through its notoriously difficult proofs, in what order, to what ends, and when, have never been systematically established. The dissemination of Newton's philosophy has been debated for over three hundred years, but how contemporaries engaged with his book at the time of publication – what the act of reading the Principia involved – has received surprisingly little scholarly attention.

My doctoral project explores these questions, and this talk will outline its findings. Concrete evidence of reading in the years immediately after publication exists for no more than a dozen individuals, yet even within this small group practices were diverse. Readers were generally selective, working through isolated sections rather than the whole book. Many approached the Principia as if it were a manuscript, treating the printed text as provisional and freely suggesting alterations to the author. The validity of Newton's mathematical methods was disputed. And there are only two readers who appear to have conducted a complete study of the entire work: the primary sources reveal heterogeneous responses to a sui generis text.
