

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR A FULL-TIME POST-DOCTORAL SCHOLARSHIP

on

The Historiography of ancient mathematics, past and present

EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL (ERC) PROJECT

MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES IN THE ANCIENT WORLD (SAW):
NEW THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Karine Chemla (Principal Investigator)
Agathe Keller & Christine Proust (co-Directors)

The European Research Council Project “Mathematical Sciences in the Ancient World (SAW): New Theoretical Approaches” is calling for applications for a full-time post-doctoral scholarship.

General aims of the project. The SAW project is dedicated to sources that have come down to us from the ancient world and attest to mathematical activities, specifically, though not exclusively, to sources produced in **Mesopotamia, China, and the Indian sub-continent**. The ambition of SAW is to develop **new theoretical approaches to the history of ancient mathematics** in order to highlight a motley of practices within what at the present day too often are presented as homogeneous wholes, as shown by the frequent use of terms such as “Mesopotamian mathematics”, “Chinese mathematics”, and “Indian mathematics”. To this end, SAW concentrates systematically on the sources produced in relation to two core sectors of activity in the ancient world: the practice of the astral sciences and the administrations in charge of managerial and financial matters. One of the goals of the project is to shape methods that ground our approach to ancient sources in the critical awareness that a history of mathematical practices as well as a material and social history of the archives, libraries, and collections of sources provide. SAW also intends to carry out a reflection on the history of historiography of mathematics. **The main focus of SAW in that direction is on the key general operations which are at play in the making of the historiography of ancient sciences**, such as the shaping of critical editions.

Description of the topic attached to the present scholarship. The primary aim of this post-doctoral scholarship will be to do research on aspects of the historiography of ancient mathematics that would be most relevant for the SAW project. The project might address the history of the historiography of mathematics and include its contemporary uses, in particular outside the sphere of academic activities. We illustrate below some directions of research of interest to us.

In the 19th century, the institution of nation-states played a key part in the formation of the discipline of history of science, that of history of mathematics in particular. In correlation with this fact, history of science has provided cultural artifacts that entered in the shaping of nations. This phenomenon has not yet been studied and could be a topic for a project. More generally, we are interested in post-doctoral projects aiming at providing a detailed analysis of how the connection between the making of communities and the historiography of science was shaped and how the process is still at work in the modern world. Two directions of research appear fruitful in this respect. First, one might analyze how mathematics has been—or is—portrayed as having been practiced in a specific way, depending on the nation or the “civilization” considered (“the West,” China, India, Mesopotamia, and so on). Such assumptions have given rise to the homogenized categories of “Western mathematics” or “Chinese” or “Indian” mathematics, often used in the historiography of science. Secondly, one might study how, mathematics itself being described as universal and the subject of a uniform and an-historical scientific practice, the value of a community has been “measured”—to borrow Michael Adas’s metaphor—by its “firsts.”

In this perspective, the history of the shaping of the texts and corpuses by which such discourses were popularized is an encouraged perspective of investigation. How have scholarly translations and critical editions of ancient mathematical texts been informed by these conceptions of mathematics? In which way have they contributed to shape them? What were the contexts in which, and reasons for which, editions of scientific texts, for instance Chinese, Mesopotamian, or Indian sources, were carried out from the 18th or 19th century onwards? What texts were chosen to be critically edited? What were the intentions of those who decided to work on source materials of the past? Which parts and features of their sources did authors of critical editions take into account? Which parts and features did they disregard? How much did the way critical editions were crafted in the past influence the reception of texts?

The grids and values by which such sources were analyzed and popularized could also be a venue of investigation: How, for instance, was crafted the idea that arithmetical knowledge of the “Orient” derived from empirical explorations, whereas geometry was a priori a sign of theoretical reflection?

Nationalist scholars, orientalist administrators, mathematicians in love with old manuscripts and/or artifacts: the various types of actors and their discourses could also be an angle of study.

The project could also deal with themes related to today's world: what are the sources and who are the people promoting exhibits such as the "sultan's of science", or books like "vedic mathematics"? On what historiographies of science are web cultures of alternative science striving?

Projects should be on specific and well delimited topics.

Applicants for the post-doctoral scholarship must have obtained a PhD degree in one of the disciplines related to the aforementioned topic before the beginning of the scholarship. It is strongly recommended that applicants possess relevant knowledge in either mathematics, history, philosophy, anthropology or philology (Ancient Near Eastern, Chinese or Indic languages). They must be fluent in English. Researchers of all nationalities are welcome to apply.

Applications should include the following:

- a full CV (including a list of publications where appropriate);
- an outline (2 pages maximum) of the research project showing clearly its relevance for SAW objectives;
- one or more recent samples of academic writings (publications, master or PhD thesis) ;
- a copy of the most recent diploma ;
- transcript of the PhD thesis defence;
- name and email address of two referees who could assess the application.

The **deadline** for applications is: **May 25, 2014** (for the position to be taken up as of September 1, 2014 or as early as possible thereafter). Short-listed candidates will be informed in June 2014 and phone or Skype interviews are expected to take place at the end of June 2014.

The scholarship is granted for one year. Pending positive evaluation, the doctoral scholarship is renewable for two additional years and the post-doctoral scholarship is renewable for one additional year. The monthly stipend amounts to roughly 2050 euros for the post-doctoral scholarship (amounts to be updated at the contract signing). It includes social security benefits and retirement provisions.

Applications should be sent to the SAW Project Director **Karine Chemla** by **email only**:
chemla@univ-paris-diderot.fr.

It is recommended to request an email acknowledgement of receipt.

Information on the SAW project is available online at:
<http://www.sphere.univ-paris-diderot.fr/?-ERC-Project-SAW-&lang=en>

For any questions on the scholarship please contact Agathe Keller:
(kellera@univ-paris-diderot.fr).