

Science in Different Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Cultures and Contexts

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The principal early scientific traditions have each left substantial textual evidence. Some of these traditions are also represented by other kinds of evidence: archaeological, visual, and material. Nevertheless, our understanding of these traditions is grounded primarily in texts. Not only are written texts a primary source of knowledge of these traditions, these traditions were themselves functions and products of literate scholarly cultures. The traditions of the Old World eventually became part of the interconnected intellectual world of the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, via the wide circulation of knowledge, primarily through manuscripts.

This symposium will examine textual evidence relevant to astronomy, astrology, mechanics, cosmology, geography and mathematics in different ancient, medieval and early modern cultures and contexts, including Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Byzantium, the Arab world, and Europe. Close studies of texts—including their tables and diagrams—will be presented by seven junior scholars and advanced graduate students from a range of countries and disciplinary backgrounds; a senior scholar in the field will consider issues related to understanding the transmission of manuscripts. The range of topics is testimony to the work that is currently being done on early technical texts. This symposium offers a special opportunity to bring together scholars from around the world, who are working on technical texts produced in different linguistic traditions and cultural contexts. We anticipate that the symposium will highlight current approaches to working on early scientific traditions, and also inspire useful questions for further research.

