Report on the ICMS summer school in the history of maths (Edinburgh, July 2024)

The ICMS Summer School in the history of mathematics took place over two weeks in Edinburgh between 15 and 26 July 2024. The participants included both lecturers (Karine Chemla, Serafina Cuomo, Jan Hogendijk (together with two assistants for practical work: Wilfred de Graaf and Tom Reijngoudt), Agathe Keller, Eunsoo Lee, Adeline Reynaud, Fanglei Zheng) and 24 Ph D students as well as post-doctoral fellows from many different parts of the world (India, Turkey, Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, China, the USA, Canada, Australia, Iran, Ireland). Unfortunately, not all the students who applied and were offered a place obtained a visa from the UK authorities - the option was then given for them to participate online via Zoom, which three of them did.

The programme of classes included an equal number of sessions devoted to different pre-modern mathematical traditions: Chinese, Sanskrit, cuneiform, Arabic, Greek, medieval Latin. The idea was that each session should illustrate general issues about the sources or historiographic issues of general interest. The mail goal was to enable the attendees to teach the history of mathematics in the pre-modern world more broadly in the future.

All the students attended all the classes, with an intensive schedule that was organised along broadly chronological lines, and staggered topics so that each day comprised the study of different mathematical traditions, rather than having successive blocks all devoted to one tradition. Most of the sessions were interactive, with hand-outs, in-class mathematical and translation exercises, and in some cases the production and use of paper instruments, and with abundant use made of the whiteboards.

In the second week every student chose two topics on which to give a presentation, with the condition that neither topic be the student's own area of research. Many of the presentations were given as groups, and lecturers offered tailored supervision and help to the groups on the presentation topics, which had been pre-selected. The last two days consisted of the students' presentations, followed by questions.

In our view, the ICMS Summer School in the history of mathematics was a success. Despite the rather intensive schedule, the students were invariably engaged and enthusiastic. The feedback we received both formally and informally strongly indicated that being given the chance to study topics in the history of pre-modern mathematics, but not necessarily in their own area of research, was mind-expanding and intellectually stimulating. Moreover, they greatly enjoyed the company of each other, and there were many comments to the effect that it was fantastic to be with other historians of mathematics. The group gelled extremely well, aided by the many shared meals and evening/weekend excursions.

We are extremely grateful for the support given, which we think has greatly enhanced the profile of the history of pre-modern mathematics not only with the individual students who attended the summer school, but also more generally as a shared experience of exchanging ideas and approaches across different parts of the world.