

**Seminar SAW:
History of Science, History of text**

Abstract

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Bamboo, Wood, Silk, and Paper: The Writing Materials of Early China

Why do we find so many ancient Chinese documents written with brush and ink on wooden boards and strips, if according to traditional sources the usual writing material was "bamboo and silk"? Was the well-known form of a multi-strip document (*cè* 冊) really responsible for the building-block-nature of early Chinese literature or rather the form of a wooden rod with multiple writing surfaces that Michael Loewe once suggested as the possible origin of the literary component of "pericope" (Shaughnessy) (*zhang* 章)? And how does that relate to the "chapter" (*jié* 節) that seems to clearly originate in the physical properties of bamboo? How far do the physical properties of the writing materials influence the forms of Chinese writing culture at all? Does the shift from "fascicle" (*pian* 篇) to "scroll" (*juàn* 卷) as a counting unit in the library catalogues from antiquity to medieval ages really just reflect the shift from bamboo to paper? What, if any, part did silk scrolls play? Was silk rolled up at all? These and similar questions concerning ancient Chinese writing materials will be dealt with in this paper so as to arrive at a more critical appraisal of manuscript culture in early China.