

Meeting: 1002, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, SS 3A, Special Session on The History of Mathematics

1002-01-76 **Glen R. Van Brummelen*** (gvanbrum@bennington.edu), Bennington College, Bennington, VT
05201. *When did Trigonometry Begin?*

Few would question that trigonometry existed as a handmaid to mathematical astronomy in the works of Hipparchus and Ptolemy. Writers on the history of the subject, however, are presented with fragments of earlier works that appear to have trigonometric content in, for instance, Eratosthenes and Euclid. Some authors even include ancient Egyptian texts on the pyramids or tablets from ancient Babylon. The question of where to begin a history of trigonometry, then, raises important historiographic issues: How does one demarcate a subject as interdisciplinary as this one? Should the history of a subject be written according to mathematical content, or by continuous historical narrative? I shall present a few relevant historical episodes and propose some answers, then open the floor for discussion. (Received August 30, 2004)