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From numbers to q-numbers to elliptic numbers: the elliptic gamma function

The elliptic gamma function is a two-parameter deformation of Euler's gamma function and a one-parameter deformation of Jackson's q-gamma function. It arises in the theory of quantum integrable models and in the theory of quantum groups. Some of the phenomena appearing in those theories, such as duality between equations and monodromy, and the appearance of $SL(3,\mathbf{Z})$ as a modular group, can already be seen in the simplest case of the elliptic gamma function.

The talk will be completely elementary, and will start with a letter that a lieutenant of the Russian navy wrote to the tutor of the tsar in 1729.