

Conference Shaping the sciences of the ancient world

Text criticism, Critical editions and Translations of ancient and medieval
scholarly texts (18th-20th centuries) - June 17—21, 2013

Practices of editing: Numbers & Diagrams

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Transliterating and translating numbers and quantities in editions of cuneiform texts

Abstract - Numbers and quantities are omnipresent in administrative, economic and mathematical cuneiform texts. Conventions used by assyriologists since the first major editions (late 19th century) for transliterating and translating these notations are extremely varied. They change according to the period, genre, author, editor, and publisher of the text. This "Babel" of transliterations and translations built by assyriologists, since the decipherment of cuneiform writing some 150 years ago, is a serious obstacle for a full understanding of cuneiform texts. Little attention has been paid to this problem up to now. The only systematic effort for elaborating uniform standards for the representation of cuneiform numbers and quantities was undertaken by the CDLI, in the framework of development of large international databases.

We will first describe different practices of cuneiform text editors to transliterate and translate numerical and metrological systems. Then we will show the effects of these practices on the interpretation of texts, and suggest some solutions for a renewed approach to these problems.

Cécile Michel will focus on editions of economic and administrative texts, while Christine Proust will focus on editions of mathematical texts.