

A SAW Workshop at the

Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale 61, Geneva and Bern, 2015

Math & Realia

Workshop on Mathematical Practices in Various Sectors of Mesopotamian Society

Organised by Cécile Michel and Christine Proust

June 26th, 2015

Christine Proust (SPHERE, CNRS & Université Paris Diderot, SAW project, France)

Making equivalent volume, brickage and capacity in Old Babylonian mathematical texts

Abstract - How to quantify three-dimensional entities? Ur III and Old Babylonian cuneiform texts reflect various approaches this issue. Different metrologies, for capacity, volume or brickage, were adopted in different fields of activity for different purposes. Then, the idea of converting one into another, for example, capacity into brickage, was of little practical interest. In Old Babylonian mathematical texts too, one finds these different ways of quantifying tri-dimensional entities. However, these approaches to spatial extension are not completely independent from each other. In a way, the idea of converting capacity into volume, or volume into brickage, appeared to be meaningful from a mathematical point of view. How are the capacity, volume and brickage metrologies articulated in mathematical texts? This issue is examined through some mathematical texts from Southern Mesopotamia.