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Discrepancies as clues on practices

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Errors, Mistakes, and Evidence for a Counting Device

Abstract – A discrepancy in a figure encountered in a text is a deviation between what is expected and what is stated. When it is observed in an economic text, it yields clues about a practice that produced the figure. Here we ask, can discrepancies in texts provide evidence that a counting device was used in the production of some economic texts? In pursuit of this question, a distinction is offered between errors in which the actor is aware of the discrepancy or potential for a discrepancy, and mistakes in which the actor is not aware of the discrepancy. Discussion will be limited to texts dating to the early Old Babylonian Period (roughly the first quarter of the second millennium BCE) from within the Kingdom of Larsa (southern Mesopotamia). The ultimate goal of this presentation is to explore how discrepancies, that is, errors and mistakes, can be used to illuminate practices employed by an actor to produce a text.