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Reflections on Sargonic Arithmetic

The mathematical corpus from the Sargonic period of Mesopotamia (ca. 2350–2200 BC) is modest and limited, comprising some dozen problem texts involving sides and areas of rectangular fields. However, this period is situated between the earlier phases of metrological computation and the development of the abstract sexagesimal system in the subsequent Ur III period, and is thus of great interest to historians of mathematics attempting to trace the development of abstraction in arithmetic. Recently, two contrasting theories of Sargonic mathematics have been proposed. We review these theories and analyze the remaining difficulties in interpreting these texts.