01 History and Biography

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Friberg, Jöran: 01002
A survey of publications on Sumero-Akkadian mathematics, metrology
and related matters (1854-1982).
Dep. Math., Chalmers Univ. Technol., Univ. Göteborg 1982-17,
XV+155 p. (1982).

This annotated bibliography discusses some 500 publications on cuneiform mathema-
tics and its precursors, i.e. mathematics as known from proto-Sumerian, proto-
Elamite, Sumerian and Akkadian sources, ordered chronologically from 1854 to
1982. The time-span covered ranges from the fourth millenium to the late first
millenium B.C., and the delimitation of the concept of "mathematics" is liberal,
including numeration, mathematical vocabulary, and the mathematical structure of
metrological systems. No complete coverage of comparative metrology or of
publications on the absolute magnitude of metrological units is attempted. Publica-
tions dealing with mathematical astronomy are almost completely left out, as are
all but the most important popular or semi-popular secondary expositions of
"Babylonian" mathematics. On the other hand, many publications dealing mainly
with other matters are included when they contain information of importance for
the history of mathematics (still, publications of cuneiform sources where mathe-
matics is applied, like field plans or accounts, are not included systematically).
The annotation for each item describes the mathematically important aspects of its
contents - when necessary at great length. Besides, connections to other publica-
tions discussed in the bibliography are drawn up, e.g. when later work has revised
an interpretation, or when an older publication can be placed in a new perspective.
In many cases, finally, the author indicates briefly his own objections, alterna-
tive interpretations or further thoughts.
The 154 pages bibliography are preceded by a 15 pages' essay sketching the devel-
opment of the study of cuneiform mathematics, from the early investigations of
metrology through the discovery of "higher" Babylonian mathematics in the 1930s,
to the recent breakthroughs concerning third-millenium and earlier mathematics.
The bibliography is by far the most complete existing on the subject. Neither the
ISIS bibliographies nor Borger's Handbuch der Keilschriftliteratur I-III (Berlin
1967-75) attain anything similar (disregarding the different aim and organization
of the latter). I noticed a certain but restricted number of omissions concerning
the genuine history of mathematics, but none of great importance; at the fringe
of the field covered, a larger number of items which might have been but are not
included can (of course) be found. According to a rather large number of spot
checks, the bibliographical data given are fairly reliable. Few of those errors
which I found will prevent a library from getting hold of the publication de-
scribed. Partly thanks to the assistance of the author, the following supplements
and corrections to the "List of journals..." shall be given: MVN Materiali per il
vocabulario neosumerico (Rome), SBAW [should be] Sitzungsberichte der Bayer. Akad.
der Wiss., Math.-nat. Abt., MEE [may also in library catalogues be listed as]
Istituto universitario orientali di Napoli, Seminario di studi asiatici. Series
maior, 3. Materiali epigrafici di Ebla, VIFMN Voprosy istorii fiziičeskih-matema-
tičeskih nauk (Moscow), VL Visible Language.   J. Høyrup.