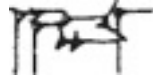


Babylonian Maths



Multiplying - the Babylonian way

Babylonian children learning to be scribes had to learn their tables by heart - just the same as we do now. They had a sign for 'times' (below) but nothing for 'equals'.

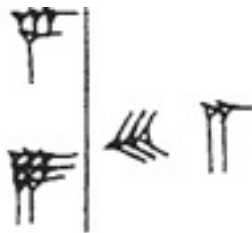


Can you work out what this says? It is a line from a multiplication table:



What is the answer?

Babylonian scribes did not use the 'times' symbol every time they did a calculation. Instead, they just drew a vertical line on their clay tablet, putting numbers to be multiplied on the left of the line and the answers on the right. What is this calculation? Did the scribe get it right?



In decimal notation, we show Babylonian numbers like this: 1 15. Since Babylonian numbers are in base 60, this means 1 lot of 60 and 15 units, or 75. For numbers less than 60, there is no difference from decimal notation, of course.

Which multiplication table could these numbers come from (they are not in order)?

1 45 3 00 1 30 2 30 1 15 3 15

What multiples of that number are they?

Write down the 12 times table in base 60.

Are there any multiplication tables you could not do in base 60?

Babylonian Maths: Multiplication

<http://motivate.maths.org/content/BabylonianMaths>

Produced by Motivate, part of the Millennium Mathematics Project at the University of Cambridge, with grant funding from the Higher Education Innovation Fund 4 - Knowledge Transfer Project (c) University of Cambridge 2011.

Permission is granted to reproduce this sheet for non-commercial educational uses only;
for any other use please contact us: mmp@maths.cam.ac.uk www.mmp.maths.org