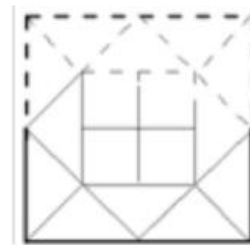


BM 15285: an Old Babylonian ‘textbook’

BM 15285, in Eleanor Robson, *Mesopotamian Mathematics 2100–1600 BC* (Clarendon Press, 1999), 208ff



The length of the squares is 60 rods. Inside it I drew 12 triangles and 4 squares. What are their areas?

BM 15285 is a clay tablet with several geometry problems on it. It isn't known what its exact date is, or even exactly where it was found, although the style of writing means it must be from early second-millennium southern Mesopotamia, so between 2000 and 1500 BCE.

The fragments that we have were found at different times in the British Museum's collections - maybe more of it will be found one day! We think that the original tablet must have measured about 28 x 35 x 5 cm.

The columns should be read from left to right on the front, but from right to left on the back.

There must have been 41 illustrated problems of which 30 remain, in whole or in part. Each consists of a description of the figures in the accompanying diagram, and the question, 'What are their areas?'

The text allows the figures to be restored, while the pictures enable technical terms to be identified. The diagrams are skew: Eleanor Robson says "Don't blame my drawing skills!"