



## ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

# A suggested counting system in the southern Levant during the Pottery NeolithicChalcolithic periods based on finds from En Esur, Israel

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## Abstract

The production and use of pottery vessels yielded a natural by-product—countless parts of broken ceramic pieces, which turned out to be a “new material” that triggered ideas of its usage. From the beginning of pottery production in the Ancient Near East, sherds were shaped, and their recycling became common in everyday life, as suggested by many hundreds of recycled sherds of various types, from the late 6th—early 5th millennium ‘En Esur, Israel. The most common form of recycled sherds is round (discoid), either perforated or unperforated. The perforated rounded sherds are usually identified as spindle whorls and the unperforated ones are often interpreted as stoppers or blanks or sometimes as game pieces. The notable assemblage of unperforated round-shaped sherds from ‘En Esur supports, together with assemblages from other sites, a less common explanation, which suggests that these objects were used for counting. The presence of these counting devices, plausibly together with other types of tokens, which are less common in the southern Levant, hints at an evolved counting system. It seems that the elaboration of an already existing counting system was required in times when storage became regular, facilitated by the invention of pottery vessels.

## Keywords

pottery, southern Levant, counting system, En Esur

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