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Ancient Society and Economy

With a reduced staff, the research project on ancient society and economy has proceeded this year in two main areas.

First, preparation has continued of the final copy of "Earliest Systems of Land Tenure in the Near East," containing the publication of ancient kudurrus on stone and other sale documents on clay, with their socio-economic and legal evaluations. The completion of this long-standing undertaking has been delayed by the sheer bulk of collected materials and the unexpected additions that had to be incorporated. In the past two years, several new kudurrus have been made available to us. These pieces, though all fragmentary, have important bearing on the temporal and geographical distribution of the ancient kudurrus. In addition, numerous related texts have recently been published that further illuminate various matters pertaining to the formulary and legal content of the kudurrus. The two-volume publication should prove of basic importance for the understanding of the structure of ancient land tenure and therefore of the development of early society and economy. Now that the 657-page volume "Computer-Aided Analysis of Amorite" has finally made its appearance, the ancient kudurrus project has first priority in our planning.

Second, we have continued writing and polishing various sections of the "Source Book for the Social and Economic History of the Ancient Near East." The projected two-volume publication is aimed at two types of readers: anthropologists, sociologists, and historians who do not read ancient scripts and languages but are interested in the socio-economic and legal content of cuneiform texts; and cuneiformists who can read the scripts and languages but are not familiar with the format and technical terms of early administrative texts or their implications for socio-economic history. The quality of the individual sections of the "Source Book" has benefited greatly from several long articles that both Piotr Steinkeller and I have written or published this year. Among them are my 97-page "Household and Family in Early Mesopotamia," and Steinkeller's 45-page manuscript "The Renting of Fields in Early Mesopotamia and the Development of the Concept of 'Interest' in Sumerian," to mention just the

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most important. These studies provide background information and treat in detail problems that could only be touched on in the "Source Book."

After Lawrence Smith, our mainstay in the preparation of the "Source Book," left the project last summer to devote time to his doctoral dissertation, the work on the "Source Book" slowed down. This situation was aggravated by the subsequent losses from the project of Elizabeth Bailey and Howard Farber, both part-time assistants. At present, the work on the "Source Book" is carried out by Mr. Steinkeller and me, both working full-time.

The financial backing of the project was provided this year by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Thanks to matching funds that were most generously provided to us by an anonymous donor, the project will be able to continue through March 1981.