

Social and Economic History of Early Mesopotamia

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For the next two years the efforts of the project will be centered on a study of land tenure and related subjects in early Mesopotamia. This concentration is made possible by the receipt of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities in the amount of \$80,000 to fund a research project titled Earliest Land Tenure Systems in the Near East. The grant will be administered by the University, and the project will be under my direction. The grant provides for two assistants, Robert Whiting and Peter Steinkeller, to aid me in the work.

The purpose of the project is the reconstruction of the earliest attested systems of land tenure and of the related social and economic institutions of Mesopotamia, specifically, and of the Near East, generally. In civilizations as firmly rooted in agriculture as the Mesopotamian and Near Eastern were, a thorough understanding of land tenure is of primary importance for the correct interpretation of a whole gamut of social and economic developments.

The project is based on an intensive study primarily of the early Mesopotamian sources pertaining to land tenure and related topics and, secondarily, of parallel developments outside the Mesopotamian area. The early Mesopotamian sources are dated to the third millennium B.C., extending in time from the beginnings of cuneiform writing shortly before 3000 B.C. to the end of the Third Dynasty of Ur around 2000 B.C.

The project is divided into two parts, the first dealing with primary sources, the second with general discussion and interpretation. The two parts will ultimately correspond to two published volumes.

The primary sources dealt with in the first part include the so-called

"ancient *kudurru's*," that is, stone inscriptions pertaining to the acquisition of land property by one individual from other individuals and their families. There are about 55 such inscriptions, now scattered in the museums of Europe, Asia, and America. Of this number, about one-third will be published for the first time. In size and state of preservation, these inscriptions vary from insignificant fragments to the beautifully preserved obelisk of the king Manishtushu, which is about five feet high and contains hundreds of lines of writing. The stone inscriptions will be fully published, with transliterations, translations, photographs, charts, and philological commentary. Also included in the primary sources are contracts on clay tablets. These will be presented in charts and fully treated in the commentary. There are about 290 tablet transactions, including about 70 that have not been previously published. The preparation of the primary sources will be carried out under my supervision by my two assistants.

The second part, dealing with secondary interpretation, will be devoted to the description of the early land tenure systems that can be reconstructed from the sources presented in the first part, as well as from pertinent information gathered from contemporary public administrative texts. Together with land tenure, related topics, such as the structure of the household (public and private), clan and family, social stratification (with special reference to the main labor classes), agriculture and animal husbandry, will be thoroughly studied and discussed. The writing of the manuscript will be done by me with editorial assistance from Messrs. Steinkeller and Whiting.

The project will take two years, commencing October 1, 1974, and ending September 30, 1976. The results will be the publication of the original cuneiform documents dealing with the earliest forms of land tenure in Mesopotamia in a format that will make them available to scholars who are not cuneiformists and a thorough description of the earliest land tenure systems and related topics. This promises to be both a far-reaching advance over the current state of early socio-economic history and a sorely needed starting point for more detailed studies in this area in the future.

This year has seen the completion of another article entitled "*Homo Ludens* in Early Mesopotamia," devoted to a discussion of singers and musicians and their place in early Mesopotamian society. The article complements my previous nine articles on *Homo Faber*. It will be published in Finland.