

---

# Ancient Society and Economy

---

I. J. Gelb

---

In the past few years I have been fortunate in being able to procure two substantial grants in support of my long-range plans for studying the structure of ancient society and economy. The first grant of \$80,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities supported the project "Earliest Land Tenure Systems in the Near East" from October, 1974 to September, 1976; the current \$100,000 from the NEH and \$39,900 from the National Science Foundation support the project "Source Book for the Social and Economic History of the Ancient Near East" for the next two years.

This academic year was devoted to the completion of the final manuscript of the first project as well as the collection and analysis of materials for the second project.

The first project, completed with the assistance of Robert M. Whiting and Piotr Steinkeller, deals with the reconstruction of the earliest known systems of land tenure and of the related social and economic institutions. Owing to its size and complexity, the preparation of the final manuscript of the Land Tenure book involved much more time and effort than expected. After the introductory chapter on Sources, the manuscript includes large chapters on Family, Household, Cooperative Economy, and Land Tenure; Legal Commentary, with chapters on Typology of Transactions, Legal Clauses, etc.; Full Transliteration with commentary of 47 stone documents, the so-called ancient kudurrus, pertaining to land transfer; Synopsis of the 47 ancient kudurrus and of all 270 3rd-millennium sale transactions on clay tablets; Plates of Drawings

and Photographs; Appendices on Prices, Commodities, and Measures; and Indices.

The aim of the second project is the preparation of a "Source Book for the Social and Economic History of the Ancient Near East" which will contain a rich selection of documents illustrating various aspects of social and economic developments in this area and will include an extensive socio-economic commentary placing these documents in their proper contexts. The result of the project will be a one-volume publication which will serve both as an introductory manual for scholars who are acquainted with ancient languages but not with the special character of economic and administrative texts, and as a badly needed research tool for social scientists and historians who are not acquainted with ancient languages but are interested in the social and economic history of the Ancient Near East and the earliest historical stages of civilization.

Work on the Source-Book Project progresses satisfactorily with the full-time assistance of Mr. Steinkeller and part-time assistance of Lawrence Smith and Howard Farber, both candidates for the Ph.D. degree at the University of Chicago. To date, work on seventeen texts has been completed. Hopefully, I shall be able to write more on this project at the conclusion of the next academic year.