

THE DIYALA OBJECTS PROJECT

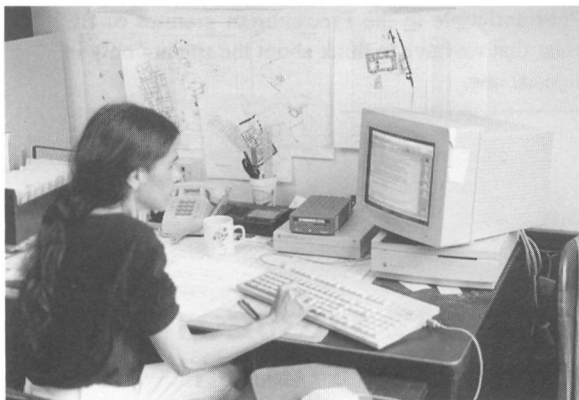
Claudia Suter and McGuire Gibson

The goal of the Diyala Objects Project, as described in the last report, is to complete the publication of the Oriental Institute's Iraq Expedition in the Diyala River Valley, which lasted from 1929 to 1936. Still missing and long-awaited is the publication of the so-called miscellaneous objects, including everything but sculpture, cylinder seals, and pottery. Most of the miscellaneous objects are utilitarian in nature, including such items as axes, hoes, arrowheads, knives, and metallurgical equipment, but there are also dozens of items of high artistic quality. Stamp seals, shell inlay, and terra-cotta plaques often have representations on them that are unique in art history. Some of the items we think of as utilitarian, such as stone bowls, can be instances of striking design, or might have carved-in motifs of great importance. Having been found in temples, palaces, and houses of the rich as well as the poor, these objects carry with them information not only for themselves as representatives of a type but also as parts of an assemblage of



Drawings of stone vessels from Tell Agrab, one of the sites excavated by the Oriental Institute in the Diyala region

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Diyala Objects Project Coordinator Claudia Suter edits data on the project's computer

ful ways. Thus, in a pioneering effort, we plan to publish on the one hand a full catalog of not only the miscellaneous objects but also of all artifacts from the Diyala region, totaling approximately twelve thousand, in one or more compact discs (CD), which will include electronic images of them. On the other, we will provide analytical and concluding articles on the various groups of miscellaneous objects in traditional book form.

The staff of the project, under the general directorship of Professor McGuire Gibson, consists of Dr. Claudia Suter supervising, as coordinator, the practical execution of the project, and two student assistants: Clemens Reichel, who at the same time is writing a Ph.D. dissertation on political continuity and change in ancient Eshnunna, the main site of the Diyala River Valley; and Jason Ur, who has used his considerable skills with computers to customize and correct the database and make it more efficient, as well as to check the information against earlier Diyala publications. In addition, a number of scholars have agreed to participate as consultants.

The Iraq Expedition under Henri Frankfort's directorship is synonymous with the beginning of modern excavation techniques in the Near East. For the first time several sites were excavated with the primary goal of producing a stratigraphy that would provide a detailed chronological sequence into which the excavated objects as well as his-

torical facts known through written records could be tied. The recording system was innovative and well thought-out, and extensive documentation has survived. We have a great mass of records, including a large number of plans and sketches, field diaries, locus cards describing each findspot with its sequence and finds, field registers and object cards in which all objects were carefully recorded, numerous field negatives with their photographic prints of architectural remains as



Student Assistant Jason Ur entering data on Diyala objects

objects from a particular context. It is just such information that archaeologists use to help define the function of a room, a building, or an institution. Our project will, therefore, bring the material found in the Diyala in the 1930s once again into the mainstream of current Near Eastern research.

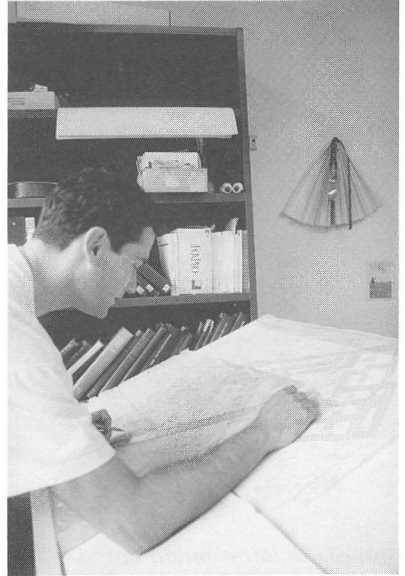
Our work involves computerization in all its phases. Progress in the compilation of electronic databases makes it possible to present a catalog of objects so that information about them can be retrieved quickly in meaningful ways. Thus, in a pioneering effort, we plan to publish on the one hand a full catalog of not only the miscellaneous objects but also of all artifacts from the Diyala region, totaling approximately twelve thousand, in one or more compact discs (CD), which will include electronic images of them. On the other, we will provide analytical and concluding articles on the various groups of miscellaneous objects in traditional book form.

well as objects, and lists that record the division of objects between the Oriental Institute and the Iraq Museum.

The organization of the excavation records in a usable form, started by others several times in the past fifty years but not completed, is now on a firm footing. A systematic inventory of all plans, many of which are unpublished, and the sorting and listing of all available prints of thousands of photographs and field negatives are in progress. In the spring of 1996, Dr. Suter visited the Warburg Institute in London, where the papers of Henri Frankfort are kept, and the University Museum in Philadelphia, which has the documentation and finds of two additional seasons in the Diyala region, dug under the auspices of the Joint Babylonian Expedition in 1937/38. It should be mentioned that the Iraq Museum in Baghdad has copies of some basic records and holds half of the objects found by the expedition. If conditions permit, one or more of the project staff will spend time in Baghdad in the future to check those actual objects against our records.

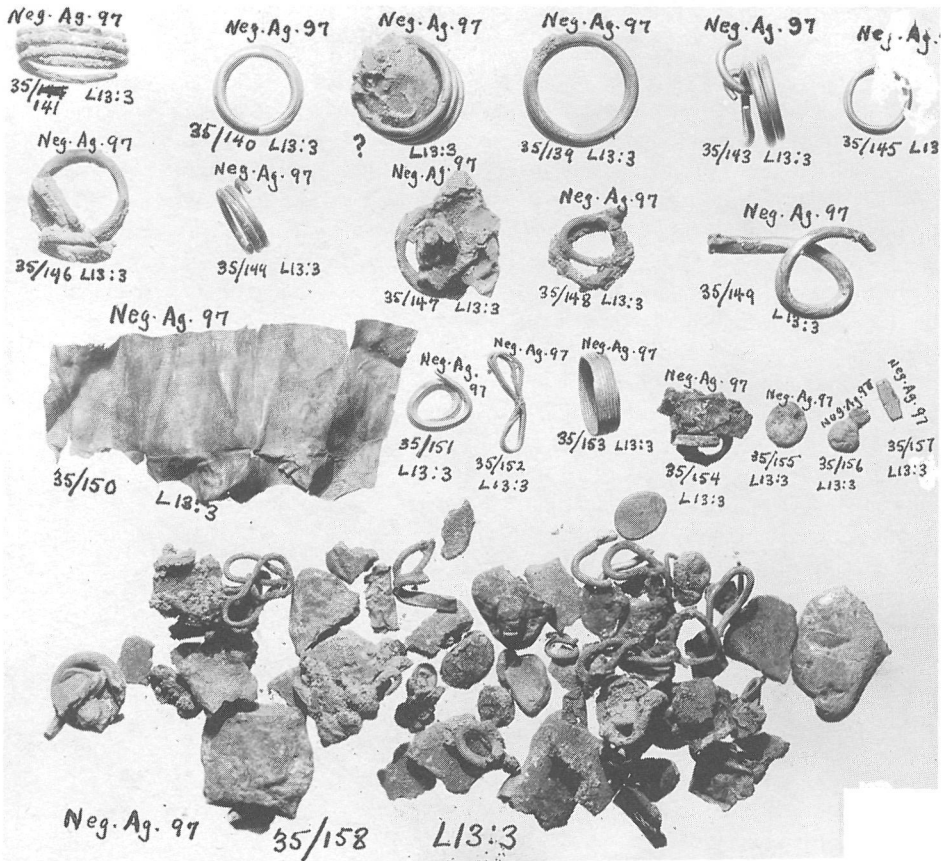
The student assistants have continued to enter data from the field registers and object cards on our computer database. We presently have a record for practically every object. Since the excavators, when describing objects in the field or giving names to findspots during the process of the excavation, did not anticipate the computer age, their terminology and designations are not always as precise and consistent as computerized databases require. A human, for example, will easily consider Northern Palace and N. Palace as the same entity, while the computer will require two different searches to find both terms. We have thus begun systematizing and making consistent the terminology in our database, which enables us at the same time to identify objects that were not clearly identified by the excavators from the very beginning, but the nature of which became clear retrospectively after several similar objects had been found. The importance of uniformity and consistency in labeling cannot be stressed enough.

The description of objects provided by the excavators in the field also needs some updating and additions. In order to allow the future user to search for general categories of objects, we have introduced the following categories: sculpture; seals and sealings; vessels; jewelry and cosmetic utensils; tools and weapons; figurines, models and plaques; inlays; architectural elements; texts; raw material; botanical and faunal remains; miscellaneous objects; and unidentified objects. The excavators' determination of the materials of which the objects are made also can be improved today. For the stone objects, we are fortunate to count among our consultants Dr. Carol Meyer, who analyzed the stone artifacts from the Diyala region in her Ph.D. dissertation of 1981. With her help and that of John Sanders and the University Computer Center we have been able to read her old mainframe tapes and have succeeded in making her data compatible with our computer program. Having Meyer's information in our database, we will be able not only to include her stone analyses but also to update our database with



Student Assistant Clemens Reichel redrawing one of the major buildings in which objects were found

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Sample of information being used to compile the database by the Diyala Objects Project, unpublished metal objects from Tell Agrab with notes (negative and object numbers, provenience) added by the excavators

additional information such as the Iraq Museum numbers, which she was able to add in Baghdad twenty-five years ago.

Dr. Suter has already moved beyond the database compilation and is involved in the analysis and interpretation of one of the categories, stone vessels. She compiled and organized all illustrations, photographs and drawings, which had been prepared by the late Pierre Delougaz and Helene Kantor. Basing her work on the profile drawings, she started to create a typology of shapes, comparing the Diyala vessels with stone vessels from other ancient Mesopotamia sites. As soon as Dr. Meyer's stone analyses are fully available on our database, she will investigate the relation of shape and material, and that of material and ultimate origin of the vessels or their raw material, respectively. Her work will help to elucidate the trade routes and connections that the people of the Diyala Valley had with foreign lands, since there are hardly any large, useful stones, except for limestone, available in southern Mesopotamia.

Once we are satisfied that we have a complete record of all objects from the Diyala on our database, we will start to verify and compare the information from various kinds of original sources. For example, we will compare the information in the field registers with the information given in the already-published volumes on architecture. At the

same time, we will begin scanning into the database the thousands of illustrations of objects. This process will require additional manpower and, above all, more powerful computer equipment than the project presently owns, including a scanner and much more memory. Electronic images consume enormous amounts of memory and disc space, and we are dealing with approximately 12,000 objects. For this purpose we must find further financial support from foundations or individuals. The project is worthy of support, even though the original fieldwork was brought to a close almost fifty years ago. Even after all that time, there is no group of Mesopotamian objects from well-excavated contexts that compares in quality and quantity with the Diyala finds. Their publication, especially in electronic form, will give scholars a remarkable new data source for the assessment of Mesopotamia's place in the history of art and technology.
