

DIYALA OBJECTS PROJECT

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During the 1930s, the Oriental Institute carried out an ambitious program of excavation in the Diyala Region, an area to the north and east of Baghdad. The project yielded an extraordinary record of architecture and stratified artifacts, including thousands of cuneiform tablets. Although much of the work was reported in a series of Oriental Institute Publications, the 12,000 or so “miscellaneous objects” have yet to be published. Although the term “miscellaneous” may make these objects seem insignificant, they include very important categories of artifacts. Among these ob-

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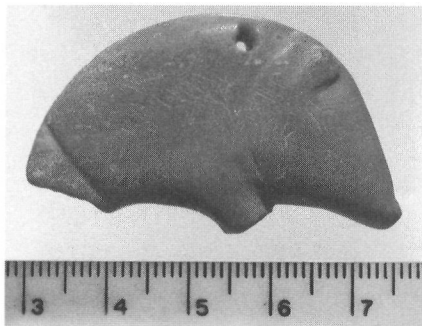
jects are metal vessels, tools, and weapons, baked clay figurines and plaques, beads and other jewelry, bone and shell objects, stone mace-heads and other stone tools, stamp seals, and clay seal impressions. By making available the information on these categories of objects, to complement the data available in the already published volumes on temples, public buildings, and houses, as well as those devoted to pottery, statuary, and cylinder seals, scholars will be able to create better syntheses of the ancient Diyala Region. Without this missing information, syntheses can only be intriguing but incomplete pictures.

The Diyala Objects Project reached a milestone during the past year. With the database finally in a reasonably correct form, we were able to delve deeply into several categories of objects and begin to analyze the material in detail. Stone vessels and inlay pieces of bone, shell, and ivory have been worked on by Claudia Suter, who has been considering the inlays from an artistic and archaeological viewpoint; meanwhile David Reese has been working up the shell inlays in terms of species from which the bits were cut. A graduate student assistant, Colleen Coyle, has analyzed the stone weights. She has had the cooperation of Andrew Davis of the Fermi Institute in using the scanning electron microscope to identify the stones of which the weights are composed.

Clemens Reichel has moved ahead on a special project that shows the potential of the databases. For more than two years, Reichel has been working on all the objects from one set of buildings, the so-called "Gimilsin" (really Shu-Sin) Temple and the Palace of the Rulers of Tell Asmar (ancient Eshnunna). This complex of buildings in the earliest stage featured a temple dedicated to the worship of Shu-Sin, the divine king of Ur, who ruled much of what is now Iraq at about 2200 BC. Over the next 150 years, this complex went through four or five major renovations, with new buildings constructed on the demolished ruins of the earlier ones. In the earliest of the Diyala reports, Henri Frankfort and his team presented a set of plans and reconstructed views, with indications of the material found in the buildings. But investigation has shown that the publication was far from complete. Most important, although some cuneiform documents were published, the vast majority of the 1,100 or so texts from the different versions of these buildings were not read, nor have they been thoroughly analyzed. Another very important set of omitted objects is a total of more than 200 clay sealings, that is, lumps of clay that had been used to seal jars, baskets, bags, and other containers as well as doors. These sealings, once they were in place, were then stamped over with cylinder seals. Often the seals were inscribed with the names and titles of the owners, and sometimes the name of their fathers. Determining exactly where a sealing had been

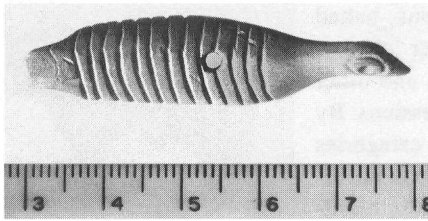


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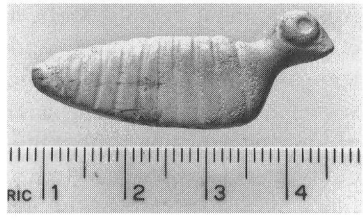


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ARCHAEOLOGY



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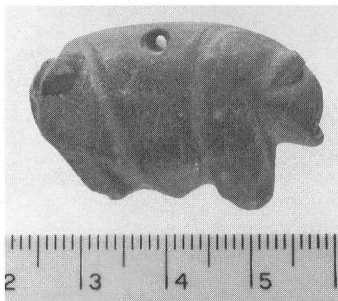
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found in the buildings may give indications of which rooms were used to store precious commodities and had to be locked and sealed. Such information could also give an indication of where specific officials worked within the complex. Tablets with names of officials and details of the movement of supplies or goods may allow one to strengthen the picture of the administration at work and may even show “paper trails” (or rather “clay trails”), as a tablet went from one office to another or to the governor or king in another part of the building.

It is in seeking just this kind of information that Reichel has made tremendous progress. By using the general project’s databases and adding to them new information from the objects and tablets found within the complex, he can argue very convincingly that the original dating of specific levels of the complex must be revised. He has suggested some intriguing correlations between archaeological evidence and historical data on changes of dynasty. With the sealings alone, he has been able to work out genealogies of officials that span four generations, showing that even though the Ur III kings lost the Diyala and local kings took over, the families of officials continued in place. Dynasties come and dynasties go, but bureaucrats go on forever.

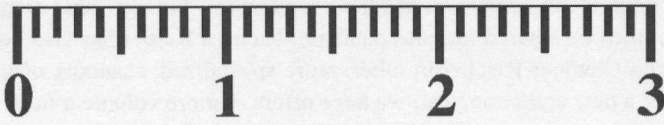
The new ways in which Reichel is using computers in his work has been recognized by his receiving a Walsh Award, given by the University to encourage innovative use of computers.

With the end of funding from a 3-year grant received in 1995 from the National Endowment for the Humanities, we have been anticipating a drastic slowing of the project. Claudia Suter, the project coordinator, has left the project to pursue her career in Europe. Her departure would have meant that only student assistants, working a few hours a week on whatever funding we might raise in-house, would have been carrying on the piecemeal analysis of individual categories of objects. But a



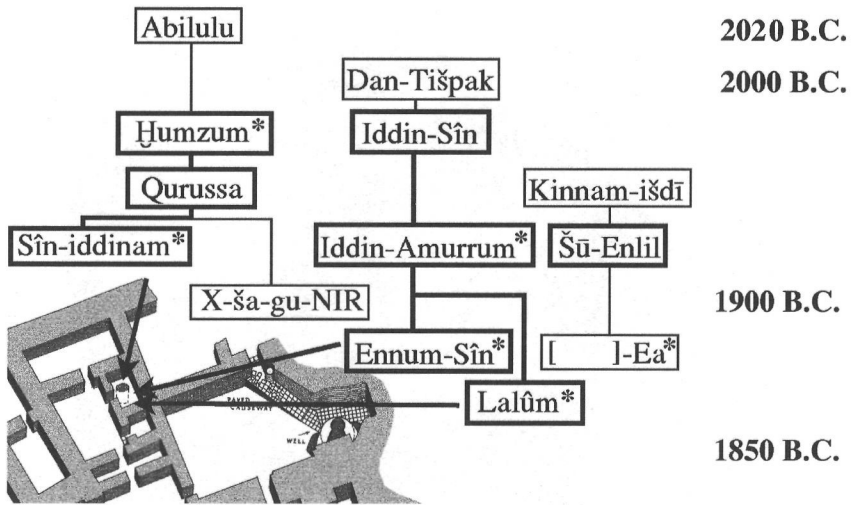
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proposal submitted to the provost’s office has resulted in a grant, coming into effect on 1 July 1999, to help complete the project. Most of the funding will go to support Clemens Reichel and Colleen Coyle, with some money allocated to upgrading equipment and programs. This grant means that we will continue to make substantial progress on the project. There is another element leading to success, however. The project has benefited in a variety of ways from an extraordinary group of volunteers. Joyce



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ARCHAEOLOGY



Genealogies of officials in complex of buildings at Tell Asmar (ancient Eshnunna)

Weil, a longtime employee of the Computer Center of the University, has been steadily scanning photographs of objects so that we can include them in the database. Helaine Staver worked alongside Claudia in the meticulous checking for accuracy of the database and now searches out information on specific problems in old records in the Institute's archives. Betsy Kremers has taken hundreds of new photographs of Diyala objects that are in the Oriental Institute collections. With her negatives, we go to Helix downtown and have the images "burned" onto computer disks, which can then be entered into our database. Richard Harder has also been working closely with Clemens Reichel in other, more specialized, scanning of images. And as we enter a new academic year, we have offers of more volunteer help. There is no way to calculate the value of such volunteers, but their work is extraordinarily important. We wish to thank them for their time, expertise, intensity, and good humor.