



PHILOLOGY

Ancient Society and Economy

I. J. Gelb

Work in the course of the academic year 1981–82 was concentrated almost entirely on a most urgent task in the field of the social and economic history of ancient times, the preparation for publication of the two-volume manuscript of *The Earliest Systems of Land Tenure in the Near East (Ancient Kudurrus)*. Volume I, Sources, is primarily devoted to transliterations and annotated translations of ancient

kudurrus. These are stone documents that date from the beginning of writing in Mesopotamia to the Sargonic period and deal with the transfer (purchase) of family-owned real estate. The volume also will contain photographs and hand copies of ancient kudurrus, together with synoptic charts that show the structure of ancient kudurrus, and sale contracts on clay.

The work of editing the manuscript and plates was done with the part-time as-

sistance of Maureen Gallery, one-time assistant professor of Assyriology and associate on the Assyrian Dictionary Project. We have not quite completed final correcting and editing of the manuscript at this writing, but probably will have done so by the time the *Annual Report* appears. In the meantime, Peter Steinkeller, now on the faculty of Harvard University, and I are continuing to work on the smaller second volume, which should be completed before the end of 1982.

The Earliest Systems of Land Tenure has been abrewing for more than ten years. I hope and believe the work will be of fundamental importance for the correct understanding of the systems

of land tenure that existed at the dawn of written history. It testifies to the existence of private-familial (not private-individual) ownership of land and thus furnishes the strongest possible evidence against the commonly held theories of the so-called "temple economy" and "state economy," according to which all land was owned either by the temples or the state.

Originally, the work on the project was financed by the National Endowment for the Humanities. At the present time, the project is partially supported by an anonymous benefactor, whose help is gratefully acknowledged.