

P H I L O L O G Y

Ancient Society and Economy

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The past academic year was devoted almost exclusively to the completion of the manuscript entitled *Earliest Systems of Land Tenure in the Near East* and subtitled *Ancient Kudurrus* and readying it for publication in the Oriental Institute Publication series. The subtitle indicates what had been considered the gist of the project, namely the publication of all Sumerian and Akkadian ancient kudurrus, that is, stone documents bearing on the sale of landed property. These ancient kudurrus, which are attested from the beginning to almost the end of the 3rd millennium B.C., should be sharply distinguished from the Kassite and post-Kassite kudurrus, almost 2,000 years later. The main title refers to the studies of the land tenure systems which are based on the ancient kudurrus as well as on different kinds of legal, economic, and administrative documents, all written on clay tablets. This sequence of the title and subtitle reflects my original aim to make the project more palatable when I presented it for consideration to potential supporters. Ultimately, the title of the publication may very well be revised to a more realistic *Ancient Kudurrus and Land Tenure Systems in the Ancient Near East*.

The project was financed for several years by the National Endowment for the Humanities and, partly, the National Science Foundation. With the support gone, we are now relying partially on an unnamed benefactor, whom we here gratefully acknowledge.

Originally, I was the sole worker on the project and the sole projected author of its publication. Some years ago, in describing the ancient kudurrus project in *Studi in Onore di Edoardo Volterra VI* (Rome, 1969, p. 141), I stated that "my work . . . is almost completed and will go to press in the course of this academic year." *Habent sua fata libelli*. Little did I realize then how the publication would expand in subsequent years from the publication of the ancient kudurrus to a thorough legal and socio-economic evaluation and from a limited time to almost the entire third millennium B.C. All this was accomplished

with the co-operation of my past two assistants, Robert M. Whiting and Peter Steinkeller.

As I have stressed in the past and will never get tired of repeating, the most important results of our investigations are:

1) Private family-owned land existed from the dawn of history throughout the 3rd millennium B.C. and was replaced by private individual-owned land from the 2nd millennium B.C. on.

2) In contrast to the past prevailing theories claiming that land was owned exclusively by the temple (the alleged "Tempelwirtschaft," or "temple economy") or the state (the alleged "Staatsozialismus," or "state economy"), private family-owned land co-existed throughout the 3rd millennium B.C. with the temple-owned and state-owned land property with various degrees of emphasis that changed from period to period.

3) Private family-owned land, like individual-owned land in later periods, could be freely alienated, in contrast to the temple-owned and state-owned landed property which could not. The fact that our documentation shows that land owned either by the state or temple was sold does not contradict the rule. It simply indicates what I have dubbed "the process of grabbing" or "squatter's right," which manifests itself in the appropriation of sections of land by officials who held them on temporary prebend from either the temple or state and sold them tacitly and illegally.