



Nippur

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International conditions often alter plans for an archaeological project. Such alterations, if they occur when a project staff is ready for a time of reflection, analysis, and writing up of results, are not as distressing as they would be otherwise.

Although we would have liked to have been in the field during the past year, the war on the Iraqi border makes it advisable to spend the time at home working on our backlog of reports. We have used this time to great advantage.

Right after our return from Nippur in February of 1982, John Sanders, the architect who has been on the Nippur staff since 1972, bought his own microcomputer and began to learn to use it. His first efforts were aimed at putting into the machine all the records from the last Nippur season. By May, I was receiving from him lists of finds, findspots, and details of architecture. It was apparent that we could and should use the same method of dealing with the records from the previous two seasons that we have not yet published. It was also clear that we should use the pause here at home to develop a system of recording our excavations by computer. Others in the U.S., and even in Egypt, have found computers to be a great aid in the field. Since Sanders has done considerable work in architecture and geography with the help of large computers, it seemed more than logical to adapt

our operations to microcomputers. Although it might break our stride in publishing, since we had worked out a fairly successful, efficient method for reporting results already, I knew that in the long run the time taken to use the computer would be compensated for by time and effort in future. Once entered into the computer, information can be "called up," sorted, printed, re-sorted and used in a variety of ways that would not be possible with traditional aids such as file cards. If we could learn to use the machines efficiently, we could, theoretically, enter the information in the field, re-work it during analysis, write up the report and edit it with the same machine, make a number of lists that are the keys to easy use of a site report, index the volume and even have the book printed from the small disks that form the essential record.

Having decided that we should computerize, we then went through a detailed comparison of the dozen or so small computers that we could conceive of taking to the field. We needed a machine that was small, lightweight, capable of doing the variety of tasks we would assign to it, designed with enough "memory" to allow John to enter his surveying data into it, and capable of producing maps and plans of the buildings excavated. The computer that John had bought for himself was portable, but was unable to do the graphic work necessary for mapping. We knew that if we waited a year or two, there would probably be more sophisticated, smaller, lighter and cheaper machines on the market. The computer industry is now in the competitive condition that automobiles were in before 1912, with many new types coming out all the time. We wanted to buy a computer that would survive the shake-out and not leave us with a cybernetic Stanley Steamer. We made a choice and think that we have the right machine, the Otrona.

What we bought was not one machine, but two. Knowing that one computer would surely go wrong in the field, we decided to buy one extra. You have probably never heard of the Otrona, since it is relatively new and has only recently been featured in major papers and magazines. The Otrona is about 12 x 12 x 5.5 inches in size. It weighs 18 pounds. It will work with batteries as well as regular electricity. It has much more "memory" than its closest competitor and will do graphics. John Sanders has one of the machines and I have the other. Since we got them in March of 1983, we have already transferred all the information from John's other computer to these and have added much more data from other seasons.

Up to now, I have used my Otrona mostly as a word processor, that is, as a machine to write reports, letters, and so forth. In effect, I have been replacing my typewriter with it. I am, however, starting to go through the information from the excavations and have begun sorting and organizing the material a number of ways. By the end of summer 1983, I will have the material well enough organized to allow me to write a major report on the 13th, 14th and 15th seasons. I will also be editing and incorporating specific chapters by Judith Franke, Richard Zettler, James Armstrong and others. I have in my files three detailed reports on animal bones by Professor Joachim Boessneck and his colleagues at Munich. I also have reports on soil samples, botanical samples, and so forth.

The monograph we are preparing will include material on Area WA, where we exposed a series of temples, Area WB, where we have Old Babylonian houses (ca. 1750 B.C.) under a Kassite palace (ca. 1250 B.C.), and Area WC, where we traced parts of the Ur III (ca. 2300 B.C.) city wall and houses of the Kassite period and the time when the Assyrians dominated Babylonia (7th Century B.C.). This volume will erase the backlog for Nippur proper. There is left to publish only a season's work at Umm al-Hafriyat, an extraordinary site out in the desert east of Nippur, and Tepe al-Atiqeh, one of the Hamrin sites. That's no backlog at all in terms of archaeological publishing.

Our plans for a return to Iraq, either to continue at Nippur or to take part in further salvage operations at various sites threatened by dam and road construction, are at this time still uncertain. Much depends on the priorities of the Iraqi State Organization of Antiquities and upon our own funding. In this last regard, I should like to thank once again those faithful and generous supporters who are Friends of Nippur. I must also note the sad fact that one of the founding members of the organization, Mr. Solomon Byron Smith, passed away recently. Nippur was privileged to have a place among his many interests and I greatly appreciated his help.