DIYALA PROJECT

Clemens D. Reichel

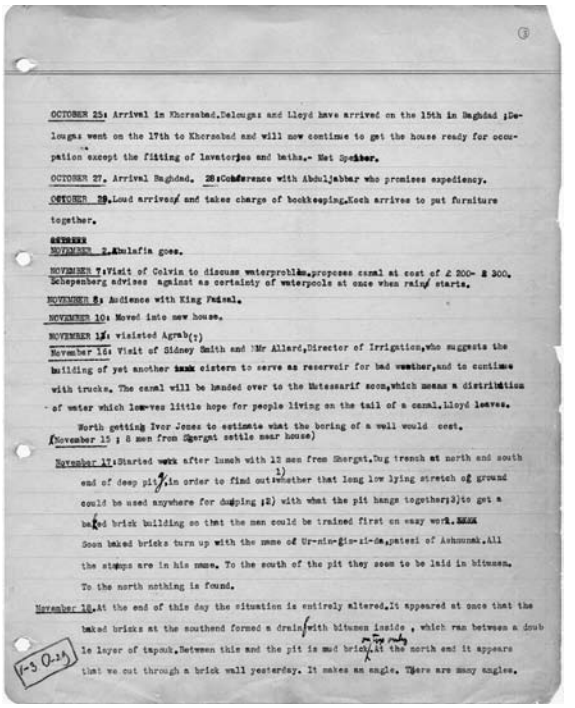
> Started work after lunch with 12 men from Shergat [=Assur, modern Qala'at Shergat]. Dug trench at north and south end of deeper pit (g), in order to find out: 1) whether that long low lying stretch of ground could be used anywhere for dumping; 2) with what the pit hangs together; 3) to get a baked brick building so that the men could be trained first on easy work. Soon baked bricks turn up with the name of Ur-nin-giš-zi-da, patesi [= governor, modern reading: ensí] of Ashnunnak [= Ešnnunna]. All the stamps are in his name. To the south of the pit they seem to be laid in bitumen. To the north nothing is found.

Thus, on a cloudy Sunday morning on November 17, 1930, began work at the site of Tell Asmar some 50 km northeast of Baghdad (fig. 1). The events were noted by Henri Frankfort, Director of the Oriental Institute's Diyala Expedition in his field diary (fig. 2). On that day no one could have foreseen the impact that these excavations were going to have for the field of Mesopotamian archaeology. A field photograph (fig. 3) indicates that, by the end of day two, things indeed did not yet look too promising, a fact also recorded by Frankfort in an entry dating to November 18:

> At the end of this day the situation is entirely altered. It appeared at once that the baked bricks at the southend formed a drain with bitumen inside, which ran between a double layer of tapouk [baked brick]. Between this and the pit is mud brick. At the north end it appears that we cut through a brick wall yesterday. It makes an angle. There are many angles.

More "angles" and further complications showed up — the workmen were untrained, there were strikes among them, and sandstorms, rainfalls, and the occasional holdup took their toll on excavators and excavations likewise. Things, however, gradually improved, and by the end of the first season it had long become

Figure 1. Tell Asmar: first day of excavation (November 17, 1930; described by Henri Frankfort in field diary, see figure 2)



OCTOBER 25: Arrival in Khorsabad.Delougaz and Lloyd have arrived on the 19th in Baghdad ;Delougaz went on the 17th to Khorsabad and will now continue to get the house ready for occupation except the fitting of lavatories and baths.- Met Speiser.

OCTOBER 27. Arrival Baghdad. 28:Conference with Abduljabber who promises expediency.

OCTOBER 29.Lloyd arrives and takes charge of bookkeeping.Koch arrives to put furniture together.

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER 2.Abulafia goes.

NOVEMBER 7:Visit of Colvin to discuss waterproblem,proposes canal at cost of £ 200- ± 300. Schepenberg advises against as certainty of waterpools at once when rains starts.

NOVEMBER 8: Audience with King Faisal.

NOVEMBER 10: Moved into new house.

NOVEMBER 13: visisted Agrab(t)

November 14: Visit of Sidney Smith and Mr Allard,Director of Irrigation,who suggests the building of yet another tank cistern to serve as reservoir for bad weather,and to continue with trucks. The canal will be handed over to the Mutessarif soon,which means a distribution of water which leaves little hope for people living on the tail of a canal.Lloyd leaves.

North getting Ivor Jones to estimate what the boring of a well would cost.

(November 15 : 8 men from Shergat settle near house)

November 17:Started work after lunch with 12 men from Shergat.Dug trench at north and south end of deep pit (1), in order to find out whether that long low lying stretch of ground could be used anywhere for dumping ;2) with what the pit hangs together;3)to get a baked brick building so that the men could be trained first on easy work. Soon baked bricks turn up with the name of Ur-nin-gis-zi-da,patesi of Ashnunnak.All the stamps are in his name. To the south of the pit they seem to be laid in bitumen. To the north nothing is found.

November 18.At the end of this day the situation is entirely altered.It appeared at once that the baked bricks at the southend formed a drain with bitumen inside , which ran between a double layer of tapouk.Between this and the pit is mud brick.At the north end it appears that we cut through a brick wall yesterday. It makes an angle. There are many angles.

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Figure 2. Page from Henri Frankfort's field diary (1930). Oriental Institute Museum Archives

clear that the walls discovered (or missed) on the first day of the excavation were part of the Palace of the Rulers, a large complex that housed Ešnunna's governor for over 300 years (between 2070 and 1750 B.C.). Over the next few years excavations expanded. Between 1930 and 1938 palaces, temples, domestic quarters, and industrial/manufacturing installations were excavated systematically layer by layer at Tell Asmar, Khafaje, Tell Agrab, and Ishchali — four major sites in the Diyala region — covering a time period of 3000-1750 B.C. This was a crucial time in Mesopotamian history, covering the end of the Uruk period, the time of competing Early Dynastic city states, the empires of Akkade and Ur III, and Ešnunna's time as a powerful independent state.

What Frankfort probably would not have imagined in his wildest dreams is that, seventy-seven years after the first shovel of dirt was moved in the first controlled excavation in this area of Iraq, the publication of his work would still be the main focus of a large number of scholars. After all, following the end of the excavations the Diyala excavators initiated an ambitious publication project in which most of the architecture and many of the key artifacts — including major pieces of sculpture, seals, and pottery — were published in nine volumes of the Oriental Institute Publication series. The last of them, called *Old Babylonian Public Buildings in the Diyala Region*, was published in 1988. Much of the work, however, remained undone. Most of the "miscellaneous findspots" (buildings located in search trenches) remain unpublished. More significantly, over 12,000 items recovered during excavations have remained unpublished. This is unfortunate, since to the present day the Diyala cultural and chronological sequence has remained the backbone of early Mesopotamian chronology and history.

The current Diyala Project, begun by McGuire Gibson in 1994 and aimed at completing the Oriental Institute's mandate to fully publish this vital excavation, has been described in detail in previous *Annual Reports* (comprehensive summaries are found in the 2002, 2003, and 2005 reports), and I will abstain from repeating the various challenges and shifts that transformed our final objective from a book publication to an online searchable database. I am pleased to report that our initial objective, the creation of an online database of all

Figure 3. Tell Asmar: second day of excavation (November 18, 1930; described by Henri Frankfort in field diary, see figure 2)

objects found during excavation, is nearing completion. Our efforts have been helped greatly by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), which in 2004 gave us a $100,000 grant in their Iraq Initiative and which made it possible for us to process our data systematically and efficiently with the help of new computers, data storage devices, and new software. George Sundell, who joined us in 2000 as a data architect for the Oracle-based back-end database, has been instrumental in the project's success.

In this report, let me focus on some of the new challenges that we have been facing and our responses to them. As I indicated before, the Diyala excavations ended some seventy years ago. With the death of Mary Chubb, the object registrar of the Diyala Expedition in 2003, the last eye witness of this work disappeared. What was left for us to consult was their archival records — notebooks, plans, locus and object cards, field registers, and letters from the field. During my own Ph.D. research on the Palace of the Rulers between 1996 and 2001, I realized the great "filter" imposed by final publication on the comprehensive dissemination of information. Book publications are expensive — every word published has to be weighted for its significance. Dissenting viewpoints and ongoing discussion among the excavators — a common phenomenon on excavations — are barely reflected and often left aside. Information deemed "insignificant" is left away, making a re-evaluation of the excavators' own interpretations difficult if not impossible. Publishing photographs in a volumes drives up the cost of publication even further, reducing the number of photographs eventually published to a fraction of what had been taken in the field.

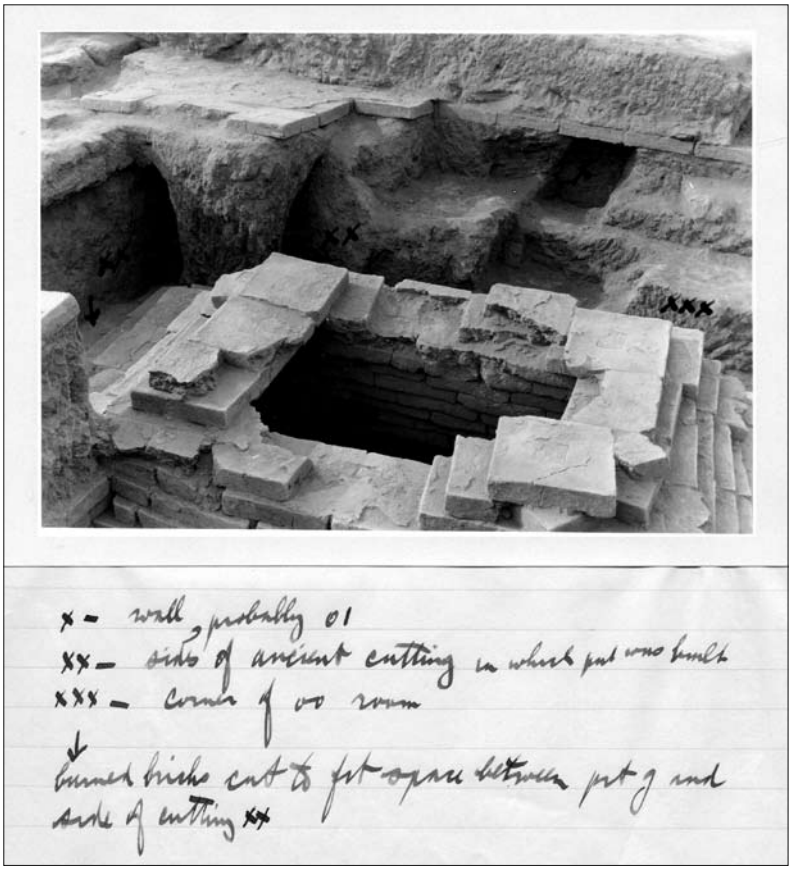

Figure 4. Tell Asmar: page from Henri Frankfort's field diary, showing photograph of "Urningishzida Pit" with handwritten annotations to photograph below

This, however, leaves the end user with much less of an impression of how an excavated context looked like or how an object might have appeared when photographed from a different angle. This situation is in stark contrast to the wealth of data contained in the excavation's archive, now housed at the Oriental Institute's Museum Archive. The information contained in it is more subjective, repetitive, than the published accounts and quite often ambiguous; moreover, gathering it from various sources such as notebook pages, catalog cards, sketches, negatives, and plane table sheets can be laborious and cumbersome. It is this "undigested" state of affairs, however, that gives a scholar an unbiased look at the data as it was retrieved without the filter of what the excavators themselves had deemed "significant" or "insignificant." Seventy years after the end of the excavations and following numerous other post-World War II excavations at Mesopotamian sites such as Nippur, Uruk, Abu Salabikh, and the sites in the Hamrin basin, many of the Diyala excavators' conclusions on the archaeological history and cultural sequence of early Mesopotamia are in need of revision. Only full access to the excavated data, however, will allow a researcher to fully re-evaluate their interpretations.

To illustrate my point, let me return to the example quoted at the outset of this summary. As mentioned earlier, the area in which excavations at Tell Asmar began was part of the so-called Palace of the Rulers. More precisely, it turned out to be part of a large baked brick structure (fig. 4). As indicated earlier, these bricks were stamped with the name of Urningišzida, a governor (ensí) of Eshnunna around 1920 B.C. In the final publication this structure was published as "Urningišzida Pit." Three more of these "pits" were found in roughly the same area, all built of baked bricks and all of them stamped with the names of different rulers (Azuzum, Urninmarki, Ipiqadad I). Their function, however, remained unexplained in the final publication. None of them had contained any finds that were published. When I went through the field notebooks, however, I noted that the excavators recorded the retrieval of buttons, garment pins, and, most significantly, fragments of bones that had been scattered all over the floor — clear indications of robbed tombs. What these "pits" appear to be, therefore, are the burial grounds of several of Ešnunna's rulers. Since the information crucial to this interpretation had not been published, however, this interpretation would have been impossible to achieve without access to the field notes.

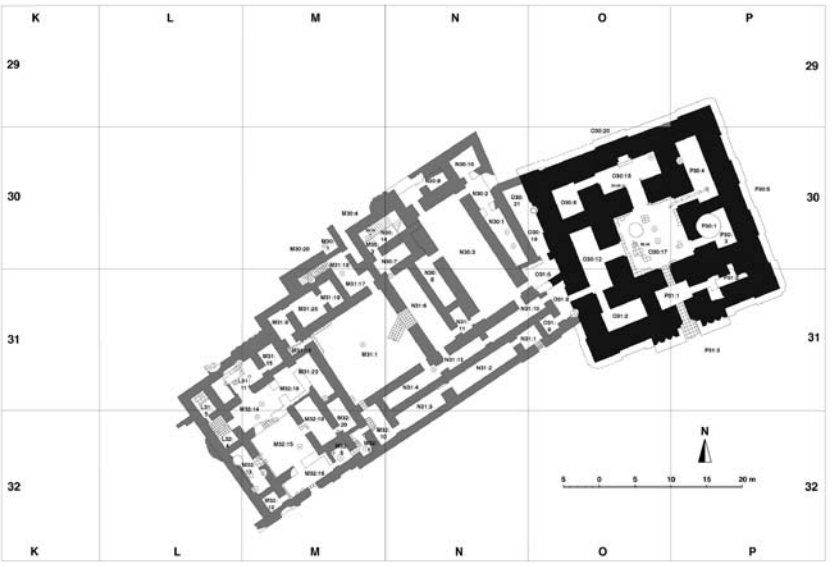

Figure 5. Tell Asmar: plan of Shusin Temple (black) and Palace of the Rulers (gray)

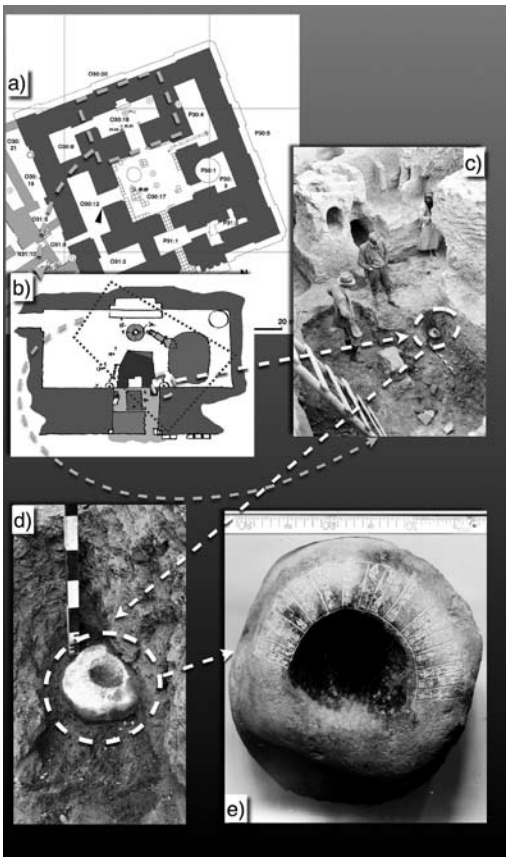

Figure 6. Cella of Shusin Temple (ca. 2030 B.C.): a) Plan; b) sketch of cella from Seton Lloyd's field notebook; c) photograph of cella (from northwest) during excavation; d) door socket with inscription of Ituria, governor of Eshnunna, in situ; e) door socket after excavation

In many cases consulting the original field notes allows a data resolution that is remarkable for a seventy year-old excavation, occasionally allowing archaeological contexts to be dated to a narrow range of absolute year dates. An example for that can be found in a temple dedicated to king Shusin, the divine overlord of the Ur III state between 2037 and 2028 B.C., of which Eshnunna was part (fig. 5). This temple, which had been attached to the Palace of the Rulers, only served its original owner for a few years. With Eshnunna's independence from Ur after 2026 B.C. the temple soon was put to a different use. The entrance to its cella was blocked off and soon afterwards two kilns installed in it, making it abundantly clear that the cult to the divine overlord had been terminated. While the desecration of the temple was mentioned in the final publication, its description did not match the archaeological evidence as presented, and numerous details remained unexplained. A combined re-examination of plans, excavation photographs, and field notes allowed me to refine and redate the archaeological sequence and to come to a somewhat different reconstruction:

Figure 6 shows the plan of the cella (a), a sketch plan from the excavator's notebook (b), and a photograph of the ongoing excavations (c), taken from the northwest of the cella. As the sketch plan indicates two door sockets associated with the earliest floor were found next to the cella's entrance, of which one (e) is visible in the photographs (c and d). An inscription on the door socket relates that the temple was built by a governor named Ituria to his divine overlord Shusin. Shusin's reign lasted from 2037 to 2028 B.C.; the door socket and the earliest floor of the temple therefore probably date to the middle of his reign, i.e., somewhere between 2035 and 2030 B.C.

Remains of a slightly higher floor in the cella with heavy traces of burning, shown in figure 7, are visible in a photograph taken after the removal of the door socket (c, marked in photograph). Embedded in this floor right before the cult niche were two drains (c) — most likely to receive libations for the deity worshipped in the temple. Within the fill below the floor, right up against the neck of one of the larger drain (marked in d), was a clay sealing (e) impressed with the seal of a cupbearer of Nurahum, a later city ruler of Eshnunna dating to approximately 2010 B.C. The drains suggest that the cella was actually refurbished, not destroyed. The sealing dates this refurbishment to about 2010 B.C. — more than fifteen years after the end of the Ur III overlordship over Eshnunna. This is surprising, for wouldn't one have assumed that the desecration of a temple to the foreign (and presumably now reviled) overlord took place immediately or at least soon after the city gained independence?

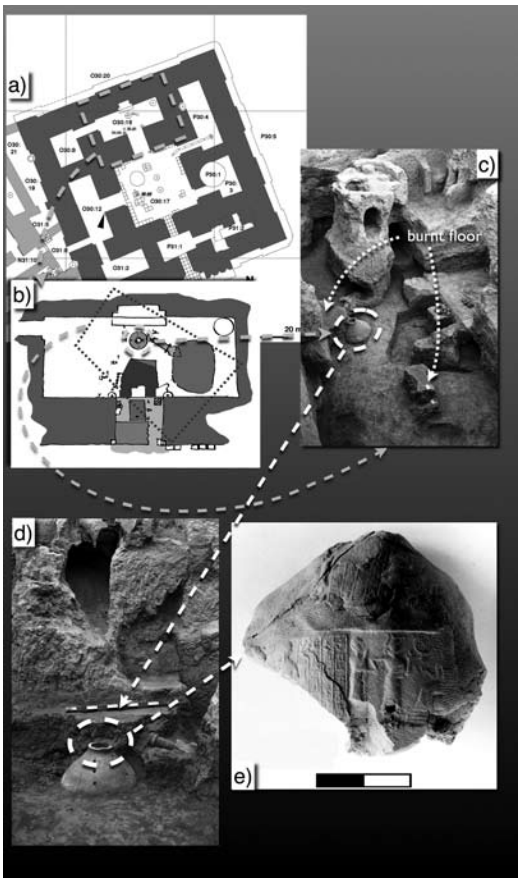

Figure 7. Cella of Shusin Temple (ca. 2010 B.C.): a) Plan; b) sketch of cella from Seton Lloyd's field notebook; c) photograph of cella (from northwest) during excavation, showing location of burnt floor and of drains; d) close-up of larger drain, showing findspot of clay sealing, e) clay sealing with impression of seal of cup-bearer of Nurahum, city ruler of Eshnunna

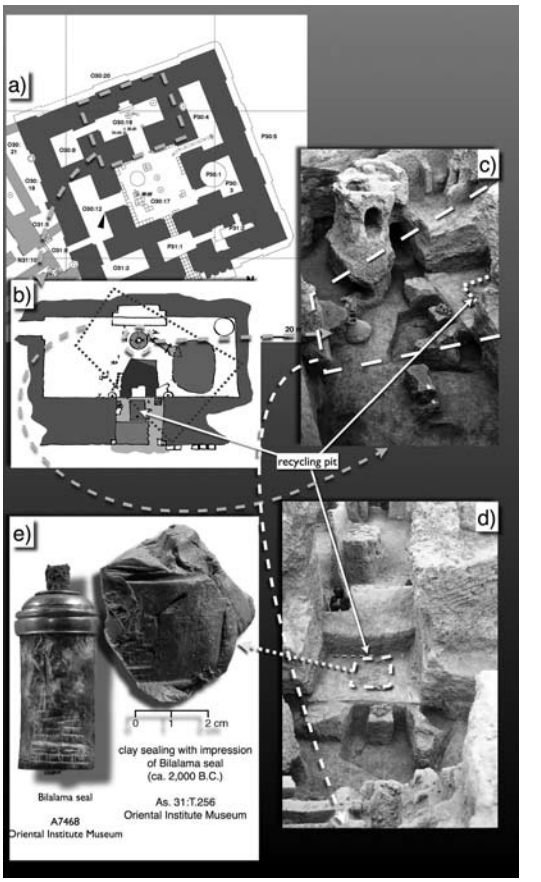

Figure 8. Cella of Shusin Temple (ca. 2005 B.C.): a) Plan; b) sketch of cella from Seton Lloyd's field notebook; c) photograph of cella (from northwest) during excavation, showing location of recycling pit; d) view of blocked cella doorway and recycling pit, e) clay sealing with impression of Bilalama seal, Bilalama seal (Oriental Institute Museum)

The desecration, which included the blocking of the cella's doorway, in fact, was associated with yet a higher floor (fig. 8). The blocking of the doorway (visible in photo 8d) left a niche, in which a rectangular clay slab was found embedded (fig. 8b, c, d). What the excavators took as a "foundation deposit" is actually a pit that contained sealing clay. Within this clay a sealing impressed with the deal of Bilalama, crown prince and son of the ruler Kirikiri, was recovered (fig. 8e). Visitors familiar with the Mesopotamian gallery will easily recognize the seal — made of lapis lazuli and with one gold cap still in place — it is one of the Oriental Institute's most beautiful seals, exhibited in a separate case. Finding an ancient impression of a seal is a rare coincidence, so the fact that no less than three impressions of the Bilalama seal have been found in the cella and its adjacent rooms is indeed remarkable. Kirikiri, whose name denoted foreign (Elamite?) origin, succeeded Nurahum as a ruler around 2005 B.C. under less than smooth terms, most likely in a coup d'état.

It would go too far to fully discuss the implication of this reanalysis in this context — notably who was actually worshipped in this temple after the end of the Ur III period. The potential for a refined archaeological chronology, however, should be apparent from this example. With the help

of the excavators' notes and field photographs we are able to date floors (and hence their pottery and artifact assemblage) within the range of a few years. The earliest floor of the temple hence dates somewhere between 2035 and 2010 B.C., the second one (the refurbishment floor with the drains embedded in it) to about 2010–2005 B.C., and the third one (the one associated with the desecration of the temple) to about 2005 B.C. This kind of chronological resolution — in a context that is over 4,000 years old — is remarkable especially in an excavation that happened over seventy years ago. It is to the credit of the excavators and their meticulous record-keeping that this kind of reanalysis is possible.

But how does one make this data available to the scholarly community? A scholar at the Oriental Institute can visit the Museum Archives and study it, but an outside scholar might not even be aware of the existence of these records. As elaborated in previous years we had hoped to publish all Diyala archival records in an online "Virtual Archive," but this is a time-consuming, laborious, and ultimately expensive procedure. Scanning all the plans, cards, and notebooks requires enormous amounts of storage capabilities, which we could not meet under the previous circumstances. This March, however, we received excellent news: the National Endowment of the Humanities awarded us a grant over $337,000 for 2007–2009 to complete our work on the virtual archive. Once our work is accomplished, the Diyala Expedition will be one of the few truly comprehensively published excavations, providing equal access to all data to any scholar (or interested lay person) anywhere on the globe.

Plenty of work remains to be done, but with our well-trained student assistants and volunteers we hope to accomplish this final step in the publication of all Diyala data in the next two years. Alexandra (Ali) Witsell, who joined our team in 2005 as a student assistant and since 2006 has been working on a dissertation on the Temple Oval at Khafaje, recently was joined by Michael Fisher. So far Ali and Michael have been editing literally thousands of object photographs scanned between 2004 and 2005, but soon they will take upon the challenge of indexing the archival materials for keywords, a vital step to make the vast amount of data searchable. I also want to thank Robert Wagner for his tireless efforts in getting the Diyala field negatives scanned — with some 4,000 scans (each at about 150 megabytes) a truly monumental undertaking that was successfully accomplished. I am delighted that Karen Terras, who continued to work on an index of the Diyala archival material off-site and who already has started to transcribe several of the excavators' notebooks, has agreed to rejoin the Diyala Project — her enthusiasm and organization skills have been a key in making this project a success. We are confident that, more than seventy years after its humble beginnings described at the outset of this summary, the Diyala excavators' magnificent work finally will get the full and well-deserved recognition in the world of Near Eastern archaeology.