

Preface by the Series Editor

The 16th volume of the OREA series ‘Old Excavation Data. What Can We Do?’ represents the outcome of a workshop organised by Edeltraud Aspöck, Seta Štuhec, Karin Kopetzky and Matthias Kucera, held on 25th of April 2016 at the International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE). The 10th anniversary conference of the ICAANE took place from 25th to 29th of April in Vienna and was hosted and organised by the Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology (OREA) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Altogether 800 participants from 38 different countries found their way to Vienna to celebrate the 10th anniversary of ICAANE with eight scientific sections, 28 workshops, round tables, a huge poster exhibition and a special section about ‘Cultural Heritage under Threat’.

The editors of this volume used the opportunity to gather experts in Near Eastern field archaeology to raise the question many of us are currently confronted with: What can we do with old excavated data? Edeltraud Aspöck, Seta Štuhec, Karin Kopetzky and Matthias Kucera initiated and organised a workshop focusing on our current challenges in dealing with long-term excavations and the heterogeneous nature of their documentation data. After about two centuries of producing all kinds of archaeological data in analogue and digital formats, the current problems in their long-term storage, archiving and their future accessibility are indisputable. The organisers drew on their own experience working on our project ‘A Puzzle in 4D’, developed to create a repository for the Tell el’Daba excavations started in 1966. The archive materials of these important long-term excavations in the Nile delta hosted at the OREA institute, represent a characteristic assemblage by means of heterogeneity, quantity and changing practices in documenting archaeological fieldwork. The editors own contribution in this volume demonstrate ways for handling some of the problems, as well as in using the old data to create new and innovative approaches. Finally, Edeltraud Aspöck, Karin Kopetzky, Gerald Hiebel and Matej Ďurčo managed to establish a new framework and workflow procedure for integrating the old Tell el’Daba data into a state-of-the-art repository at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. It remains as the host institution’s task to secure the future funding for continuing the long-term digitalisation and data integration into the new Tell el’Daba digital archive.

The editors successfully managed to bring together five different case studies from various Near Eastern regions through six different contributions. They perfectly demonstrate the high degree of variation in dealing with old excavation data by showing different ways in structuring and archiving them, as well as in making them available for the community. However, the very productive discussions during the workshop and the collected papers illustrate the spectrum of potential systems and concepts on the one hand, and the already established standards in data management on the other. Therefore, the present volume does not only offer archaeologists already established and useful data management systems for old excavated data, but also some essential advice for future expeditions in the field. I warmly thank the authors for sharing their expertise and perspectives about the current challenges in dealing with these important sources of cultural heritage, and to Edeltraud Aspöck, Seta Štuhec, Karin Kopetzky and Matthias Kucera for editing the 16th OREA volume.

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