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COMPUTER AIDED RESEARCH IN NEAR EASTERN STUDIES:

AN INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this new journal is the dissemination of tools for the use of electronic data processing in the various disciplines which deal with the Near East. It is natural, of course, that many of the results obtained in this area would also be of interest for other areas of the humanities and the social sciences.

General and methodological considerations will preferably be accompanied by practical implementations. There are many reasons for this orientation of CARNES. First, our disciplines have a real need for the development of tools that might free the scholar from laborious clerical tasks: these tend sometimes to acquire greater primacy than analysis and to emerge as an end in itself. Second, we wish to serve a paedagogical end, in helping all interested scholars in developing a higher degree of computer literacy. Third - and lest the other two points may seem too modest - we hope that the effect of the quantitative progress more clearly in evidence in computer related work will in the end provoke profound changes in the quality itself of the research, in the sense proposed by J. C. Gardin ("La logique du plausible," Paris 1981).

In this spirit, it is necessary that the scholar be in a position to access the new tools and to adapt them to specific needs without necessarily having to pass through the intermediary of technical personnel or specialized institutions. This is why a good part of the material covered in CARNES will be especially geared to micro-computers, which are more and more within reach of everyone - economically, technically, and ... psychologically.

In the same spirit, the programs which we will publish will be presented in a style which is totally transparent, with commentaries which are conceived for readers whose knowledge of the "exact" sciences may be somewhat tenuous. This approach is an expansion of the concept, traditional in data processing, of program documentation. While such a documentation is often the last step taken (if ever!) by programmers, it will become a first priority in the case of CARNES. Thus any user with a modicum of expertise in programming will be able not only to understand the logic of the programs presented, but also to modify, adapt and hopefully improve them.

For all the emphasis on data processing, there will be an equivalent stress on the nature and quality of the substantive issues addressed. CARNES is not just a data processing journal, it is just as much a journal in the service of the various disciplines dealing with the Near East. Data processing systems and applications must be presented with a view toward this orientation: the pertinent substantive issues must be described, and the relevance of the particular system or application must be

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shown. This is not only a conceptual presupposition of an editorial nature, it is also a reflection of the paedagogical orientation of CARNES: users are more likely to appreciate a technique and to learn it if the substantive relevance is clearly documented.

In line with our concerns for accessibility of data processing to the field of Near Eastern studies, we plan to start in the near future a special service for a more individualized follow-up of certain topics and areas of interest. This service will deal with both systems and applications and will provide some degree of personal feedback for readers who have implemented on their own equipment the programs published in CARNES.

The hardware utilized in support of any particular software application will always be identified in detail, where necessary even with information on costs, supply sources and support facilities. This is in order to make it as easy as possible for a potential user to adopt some of the systems described. In order to minimize problems of compatibility, we encourage the use of languages easily accessible on standard equipment, especially Pascal and BASIC. Whenever possible, it may prove useful to give alternative instructions for utilization of the same program on different versions of the same languages.

The distribution of pertinent materials in magnetic media is of course acceptable as part of CARNES. Modalities and specifications will be defined in the measure in which the various articles warrant it. We will also give bibliographical information, a bulletin on available hardware, a bulletin on current research, etc. The format of the system of Monographic Journals of the Near East seems especially suited for a flexible style of presentation, a rapid rhythm of publication and a ready adaptation to the diverse needs of the many disciplines dealing with the Near East.

G. B. and O. R.