



## FILM: SIDON 5000 YEARS

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I have been living a dream for the past two years and it has been a bit of a roller coaster ride. Who would have imagined that from some pictures, scraps of video and lots of hard work with interviews, a film could be made about Sidon over the past 5000 years?

Going back four years I had the pleasure of guiding Claude Doumet-Serhal around a video camera. We spent a couple of hours in Hyde Park, London ensuring Claude understood how the camera worked and how to capture material for her archives. We are talking about competent material that can be used at a later stage for internal use and as a record of the activities on site.

On returning from Sidon that first year, I was stunned, as a professional videographer, to find just how good the material was. A short lesson in Hyde Park was at best the minimum instruction that was given and yet here we had some really compelling video footage which showed exactly what was occurring in Sidon.

Claude managed to film another years' work and then hit me with a bomb shell. I don't remember her exact words but it went something like "I want to make a film about Sidon – what do you think"? Now for those that know Claude, they will know that this little seed of an idea would soon grow into a major exercise. Thinking back to that day, I did not realise the amount of work we would be putting in to what was to become a massive project. As we both now realise, accuracy in the material we were using and also the amount of work in scanning and capturing the video onto the computer, would take up many hours.

Planning was a bit haphazard and we had to keep the number of staff to a minimum because resources were very short. One major requirement stood out and that was the need for a well-written script well narrated. To this end, we managed to put together a coherent and well-informed script. This had to be simple enough for a lay-person to follow but accurate enough to satisfy the professional.

Looking for a narrator was a challenge. I wanted a male with a strong informative and possibly authoritative voice which was not going to be easy due to my budget restrictions. It was whilst talking to a colleague that I remembered Geoffrey Annis, who had given a lecture on voice-overs and narration at the Institute of Videography. He has both the voice and the management skills to provide us with a brilliant voice-over, which when

produced, was very easy to use. As we were not doing a live voice-over, Geoff explained that he would record several versions for pronunciation and tone. A thirty-minute film accounted for over three hours of material, which had to be edited into the film. I have to say here how good it was to work with Geoff. He is a gentleman and his involvement has ensured that the film became a success. 157

We needed pictures to enhance the story and fill in the gaps and these had to be authentic and add interest to the film. Because of the lack of video cameras all those years ago we had no photographic material to go with the story, so it was off to the British Museum to see if we could fill some holes. With the slides and pictures the British Museum very kindly lent us along with those obtained from Lebanon, we were ready to put the film together.

This film has since evolved and is now in its' second version. As we progressed last year, we were compelled to add new material that came to hand during the excavations thus making it a work in progress for just over a year now.

We were very grateful to get the help of key members at the British Museum and Bradford University when we needed some interviews and items for the film. One of the challenges was to make this film relevant to as many as possible and we therefore needed to have some special clips to enhance the pictures and archival filming.

I was extremely pleased to have the opportunity to interview Dr. Irving Finkle who is not only an expert in cuneiform tablets but also has the ability to get the subject across to an audience. We filmed in his office and put the piece together for the first version but have since re-interviewed him with regard to the actual reading of a cuneiform tablet recently uncovered in Sidon. Whilst filming on location at Dr. Finkles' residence, we were given the added surprise of him demonstrating how cuneiform was written. To say this adds to the film is an understatement. It undoubtedly makes it more appealing to a far greater audience.

Thus with the tablet explained I went up North to see a man about some very old bones. At Bradford University, I spent the day with Dr Alan Ogden and his bones. We managed to overcome some technical issues, like a light source with a mind of its own and went on to study a skeleton from Sidon. Dr Ogden explained how certain facts were obtained and gave an insight into the investigative side of his work. It was a fascinating day for me and allowed me to enhance our film.

In the film, we used some 3D graphics (designed by Guy Hopkinson) to replicate a building that is thought to have been a temple. Using this method to show how the building was constructed as well as a walk-through gives viewers a graphical impression that pictures alone can not convey.

Putting the film together was a technical nightmare – using state of the art Apple computers and editing software the painstaking task of capturing the material and laying it down on a timeline began. Then the voice over was cut into the timeline and everything fine-tuned. Then came the rendering. This took up to four hours in order to render four minutes of video. One thing we learnt in the early stages was that time was something that we could not estimate. For instance, just putting Arabic sub-titles onto the film took nine hours for sixteen minutes and then another nine hours to add backgrounds so that the sub-titles could easily be read. We will have to finish this part of the film once this years' excavations are complete

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Videography is the art of producing the whole thing, this means camera-work, lighting, sound, editing and presentation of the finished item. Since DVD has been available, we have had to add the ability to encode video and design titles. To make a compelling DVD also requires some ability to organise the material so that the finished article looks professional and is easy to navigate. Sidon 5000 Years has provided me with a project to get my teeth into. I have learnt about archaeology and the terms used and about Sidon – even though I have not visited the site I feel that I know it very well.

We are now in the closing stages of producing a forty-minute film about the excavations in Sidon, however I am sure that this will remain an open project because you can never tell what will be uncovered next and the Sidon excavation has certainly proved this to be true.

In ending this short article, I would like to thank all those that have helped in this project for their cheerful encouragement and outstanding support and the answering of the never ending questions.