

THE SOUNDINGS AT TELL ABU SALABIKH

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In the spring of 1963, Dr. Donald P. Hansen conducted the first investigation of the low-lying mounds of Abu Salabikh, some ten miles north of Nippur. In one of the many soundings he made he uncovered, just below the surface, the substantial walls of a large private house or palace of the Early Dynastic III period (2775–2675 B.C.). Among the objects found in the rooms were a number of cuneiform tablets. Both the architecture and the tablets warranted a further investigation of the site.

In January, 1965, Dr. Hansen returned to continue the excavation of the building he had partially cleared two years before. He was assisted by Dr. Robert Biggs as epigrapher and Miss Diane Taylor as archeologist and the Iraqi government representative, Miss Selma al-Radi. Although the digging was limited to three weeks, owing to Dr. Hansen's commitments as a professor at New York University, it was found that the building was an extensive one, seemingly composed of several units, each with its court yard and surrounding rooms. The use of the building is still unknown. Its plan already extends beyond the ordinary limits of a private house, and, since no room contained objects or installations of a recognizably religious nature, no part of the building can be considered a temple. When the area is enlarged and excavated to its original foundations, it is hoped some clue to its use will be found.

The major find of this season was a group of tablets similar to tablets already known from Fara, which seem to have been dumped in one of the rooms. This is the second largest collection of tablets of the Early Dynastic periods and particularly important because of the large number of literary texts. A number of the tablets are lexical and a few economic. The tablet catalogue now has more than four hundred items, three hundred of which are from this season.

