

THE TABLETS FROM TELL ABŪ ṢALĀBĪKH

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Among the finds from two brief Oriental Institute soundings at Tell Abū Ṣalābīkh in 1963 and 1965, directed by Dr. Donald P. Hansen, were numerous cuneiform tablets dating from the early part of the Early Dynastic III period, about 2600 B.C.



A Sumerian literary text from Tell Abū Šalābikh

Included among the more than four hundred tablets and fragments is the largest collection of Early Dynastic Sumerian literary texts so far found in Mesopotamia. The literary texts are all the more important because of their similarity to texts from Fara, the significance of which was virtually unrecognized even by specialists in Sumerian literature for forty years. It is now clear from these texts that there was already by the middle of the third millennium B.C. a standardized corpus of texts known to the scribes throughout Sumer and even as far away as present-day northern Iraq. Among the new texts are proverbs and other wisdom compositions, some parts of which are represented in Mesopotamian scribal tradition for a period of two thousand years. There are also myths about various gods and a collection of hymns. Besides the literary texts, there are many lexical texts, that is, lists of words arranged in categories such as gods, places, professions, metals, garments, and domestic animals.

Only a few scattered tablets from the administrative archive have been found so far, and these contribute little to our knowledge of the town itself, whose ancient name is still unknown.

A rather startling feature of the Abū Ṣalābīkh literary and lexical texts is that, although they date from several centuries before the Dynasty of Akkad, a large number of the scribes who copied them bore Semitic names, raising anew the problem of the Semites in early Mesopotamia and their relationship to the Sumerians.

A few of the texts have already been published, and a full publication is in preparation.