

The Tablets from Tell Abū Salābikh

IN CHARGE: ROBERT D. BIGGS, ASSOCIATE
PROFESSOR OF ASSYRIOLOGY

Among the finds from two brief Oriental Institute soundings directed by Dr. Donald P. Hansen in 1963 and 1965 at Tell Abū Salābikh, a site near Nippur in southern Iraq, were several hundred cuneiform tablets of the Early Dynastic III period (about 2600 B.C.). 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.

These texts are of great importance for the early history of Sumerian literature. It should be stressed that there were Semitic scribes at this site as early as 2600 B.C., and that, far from being simply nomads fresh from the desert, some of these Akkadians not only lived urban lives but were leaders within the centers of Sumerian learning, apparently sharing with Sumerians the work of the scholar-scribes.

Nearly all the tablets have now been copied in ink for publication. Prolonged study of the texts has suggested that many of the fragments can be rejoined, a project which would require several weeks' work in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. It is thus expected that these important early texts will soon be made available to scholars.

Vase cut from bituminous stone showing a kneeling goat with inlaid shell eyes, from Ishchali, Iraq, Ur III period(?).

