

Archaeologists find cache of tablets in 2,700-year old Turkish temple

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Archaeologists from the University of Toronto prepare a tablet for removal from a 2,700-year old temple in southeastern Turkey. Credit: Photo: J. Jackson

(PhysOrg.com) -- Excavations led by a University of Toronto archaeologist at the site of a recently discovered temple in southeastern Turkey have uncovered a cache of cuneiform tablets dating back to the Iron Age period between 1200 and 600 BCE. Found in the temple's cella, or 'holy of holies', the tablets are part of a possible archive that may provide insights into Assyrian imperial aspirations.

"The assemblage appears to represent a Neo-Assyrian renovation of an older Neo-Hittite temple complex, providing a rare glimpse into the

religious dimension of Assyrian imperial ideology," says Timothy Harrison, professor of near eastern [archaeology](#) in the Department of Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations and director of U of T's Tayinat Archaeological Project (TAP). "The tablets, and the information they contain, may possibly highlight the imperial ambitions of one of the great powers of the ancient world, and its lasting influence on the political culture of the Middle East." The cella also contained gold, bronze and iron implements, libation vessels and ornately decorated ritual objects.

Partially uncovered in 2008 at Tell Tayinat, capital of the Neo-Hittite Kingdom of Palastin, the structure of the building where the tablets were found preserves the classic plan of a Neo-Hittite temple. It formed part of a sacred precinct that once included monumental stelae carved in Luwian (an extinct Anatolian language once spoken in Turkey) hieroglyphic script, but which were found by the expedition smashed into tiny shard-like fragments.

"Tayinat was destroyed by the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III in 738 BCE, and then transformed into an Assyrian provincial capital, equipped with its own governor and imperial administration," says Harrison. "Scholars have long speculated that the reference to Calneh in Isaiah's oracle against Assyria alludes to Tiglath-pileser's devastation of Kunulua - ie, Tayinat. The destruction of the Luwian monuments and conversion of the sacred precinct into an Assyrian religious complex may represent the physical manifestation of this historic event."

The temple was later burned in an intense fire and found filled with heavily charred brick and wood which, ironically, contributed to the preservation of the finds recovered from its inner chambers. "While those responsible for this later destruction are not yet known, the remarkable discoveries preserved in the Tayinat temple clearly record a pivotal moment in its history," says Harrison. "They promise a richly

textured view of the cultural and ethnic contest that has long characterized the turbulent history of this region."

TAP is an international project, involving researchers from a dozen countries, and more than 20 universities and research institutes. It operates in close collaboration with the Ministry of Culture of Turkey, and provides research opportunities and training for both graduate and undergraduate students. The project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP), and receives support from the University of Toronto

Source: University of Toronto ([news](#) : [web](#))

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