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# ARCHAEOLOGIES OF TEXT

ARCHAEOLOGY, TECHNOLOGY, AND ETHICS

edited by

Matthew T. Rutz and Morag M. Kersel

Oxbow Books  
Oxford and Philadelphia

Joukowski Institute Publication 6

General series editor: Prof. John F. Cherry  
Joukowski Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World  
Brown University, Box 1837/60 George Street, Providence, RI 02912, USA

Published in the United Kingdom in 2014 by  
OXBOW BOOKS  
10 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford OX1 2EW

and in the United States by  
OXBOW BOOKS  
908 Darby Road, Havertown, PA 19083

Published by Oxbow Books on behalf of the Joukowski Institute

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Paperback Edition: ISBN 978-1-78297-766-7

Digital Edition: ISBN 978-1-78297-767-4

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

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Printed in the United Kingdom by Hobbs the Printers Ltd, Totton, Hampshire

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*Front cover:* Cuneiform tablet PF 0694 (see p. 17, Figure 2.3) with Elamite text on the obverse (top left) and on the reverse (top right) an impression of seal PFS 0093\*, inscribed with name of Cyrus of Anzan, son of Teispes (images courtesy of Persepolis Fortification Archive Project, University of Chicago); detail (bottom) from the Greek inscription on the Rosetta Stone (EA24, © Trustees of the British Museum).

*Back cover:* Excerpt from Mayan hieroglyphic inscriptions on Copan Stela 10 (see p. 37, Figure 3.2a); drawing by Nicholas P. Carter after field sketches by David Stuart (images courtesy of Nicholas P. Carter).

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## Acknowledgments

This volume grew out of a symposium hosted at Brown University on December 3–5, 2010, the purpose of which was to explore different perspectives on the interplay of archaeological and textual material from the ancient world – hence *archaeologies* of text. For the symposium we invited scholars who routinely engage with the archaeology of texts – archaeologists, classicists, epigraphers, papyrologists, philologists, Assyriologists, Egyptologists, Mayanists, ancient historians – to discuss current theoretical and practical problems that have grown out of their work on early inscriptions and archaeology, and we warmly thank all contributors and participants for their interest, energy, and thoughtful engagement with this perennially relevant, promising, and vexing topic. Our hope was that the variety and specificity of perspectives and methods under discussion would catalyze cross-disciplinary exchange as well as underscore the importance of reevaluating the well-established disciplinary practices and assumptions within our respective fields. We leave it to the reader to decide if we succeeded in our approach, even if only asymptotically.

The symposium was generously supported by several institutional sponsors that we are only too happy to thank: the Department of Egyptology and Assyriology (James P. Allen, then Chair), the Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World (Susan E. Alcock, Director), the Program in Early Cultures, and The Colver Lectureship Fund at Brown University, and the Department of Anthropology at DePaul University. Additional funding for publishing this volume was provided by the Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World and the Humanities Research Fund of Brown University's Office of the Vice President for Research.

Institutional support is essential, but it is people who give vitality and meaning to symposia such as ours. Over and above the authors of the individual chapters included herein and the many people who came to Brown to participate in the symposium, we gladly acknowledge a number of others by name. Bruce Zuckerman of the University of Southern California gave a stimulating presentation at the symposium, but due to personal reasons he was unable to contribute a chapter to this book. Sue Alcock and Jim Allen were pivotal in making the symposium a success. Claire Benson,

Diana Richardson, and Sarah Sharpe provided enthusiastic and capable administrative and logistical support. Doctoral students from a number of programs at Brown University served as session chairs: Bryan Brinkman, Kathryn Howley, Jessica Nowlin, Timothy Sandiford, Julia Troche, and Zackary Wainer. Subsequently a number of Brown graduate students (some of whom were also chairs) took a graduate seminar that grew out of the symposium: Emanuela Bocancea, Müge Durusu-Tanrıöver, Katherine Harrington, Ian Randall, Timothy Sandiford, and Alexander Smith (Archaeology and the Ancient World); Scott DiGiulio and Christopher Geggie (Classics); Christian Casey, Kathryn Howley, and Julia Troche (Egyptology); M. Willis Monroe and Zackary Wainer (Assyriology). Clive Vella, Ian Randall, and Magdelyne Christakis assisted with editing some of the individual chapters. John Cherry must also be singled out for a final word of thanks. He was a supporter of this enterprise from its inception and later took on a number of roles: as participant in the symposium, as thoughtful contributor to the volume, and as attentive series editor.

## Articulating Neo-Assyrian Imperialism at Tell Tayinat

TIMOTHY P. HARRISON

The interplay of ancient textual sources and material culture, and their propensity to produce contradictory or contested histories of the past, is well-worn intellectual ground in the study of ancient Near Eastern history. The list of examples is long and the battle lines well-defined, indeed in too many cases entrenched to the point of intransigence, and it is not uncommon to hear the view that examining them in tandem is an unproductive, even misguided, intellectual exercise. In this paper, I will attempt to counter this claim with an example that illustrates how texts and material culture, when examined together in context, can produce unexpected insight, and indeed need to be studied together, if we are to achieve more than a superficial understanding of the complex social and historical experiences of the cultures we study. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate that archaeological and epigraphic research can be complementary and can lead to more richly textured understandings of the past than the fragmented, often skewed, knowledge that typically results when they are conducted as independent scholarly enterprises.

Excavations at Tell Tayinat, located in the North Orontes Valley in southeast Turkey, have uncovered the remains of a Late Assyrian settlement, including an Assyrian governor's residence and, most recently, a temple and cache, or "collection", of cuneiform tablets dating to the late eighth–seventh centuries B.C. Historical sources attest that Tayinat (ancient Kunulua) was destroyed by the Neo-Assyrian empire-builder Tiglath-pileser III in 738 B.C. and then transformed into an Assyrian provincial capital equipped with its own governor and administration. The Tayinat excavations thus offer an opportunity to examine archaeological and epigraphic evidence from a cultural and historical context that coincided with the rise and fall of the Assyrian Empire, a pivotal period in the political history of the ancient Near East. They reveal a carefully crafted ritual landscape that both manifested and reinforced the ideology of the Assyrian imperial project.

### Neo-Assyrian Imperialism

Studies of the Late Assyrian Period (ca. 911–612 B.C.) have begun to explore the material dimensions of Neo-Assyrian imperialism, particularly the physical and visual expressions of Neo-Assyrian imperial power, and to trace its articulation in the archaeological record (see Parker 2001, 2003). The genius of Assyrian imperial ideology is reflected in its manipulation of the material form, ranging from the standardization of architectural styles to the production of large-scale representational art forms such as wall reliefs and sculpture, and elite craft industries such as ceramic fineware production. Art historical studies in particular have emphasized the programmatic nature of Neo-Assyrian royal art and the remarkably sophisticated use of the written word to construct composite visual narratives that communicated ideological messages carefully tailored to each targeted audience, often representing very different constituencies (see, for example, Lumsden 2004; Porter 2000, 2001; Russell 1998, 1999; Winter 1981, 1997). The result was a visual symbolic landscape that projected the ideology of the imperial program in which the Assyrian king was portrayed as supreme ruler of the civilized world, imbued with divinely sanctioned authority as the earthly representative of the god Ashur.

The Assyrian empire achieved its mature form and organization in the latter decades of the eighth century B.C. (Postgate 1979, 1992). Over the course of the eighth century, Assyria's political institutions gradually were consolidated into more professionalized bureaucracies controlled directly by the king, marginalizing the traditional influence of the leading political families of Assyria. In 744 B.C., Tiglath-pileser III exploited this shifting power balance and seized control of an Assyria weakened by internal turmoil, precipitated in part by the growing independence of powerful provincial governors. Upon securing the throne, Tiglath-pileser resumed Assyrian territorial expansion to the west. In contrast to the practice of his predecessors, however, which had involved a combination of periodic military campaigns, the extraction of tribute, and the formation of local pro-Assyrian alliances, Tiglath-pileser embarked on a strategy of total conquest. The rulers of subjugated regions were deposed, their populations subjected to mass deportations, and their conquered lands reorganized as provinces administered directly by Assyria (Grayson 1991a; Hawkins 1982: 409).

Each province within the growing empire was administered by a governor (*bēl pihāti*), who was responsible for its civil administration, and in some instances also by a military officer (*šaknu*), who handled its military affairs. The governor's primary duties included the maintenance of the province's road networks and public infrastructure, the levying and collection of taxes,

the distribution of land, and the preservation of law and order. He was also responsible for maintaining local supply bases to support the movement and campaigning of the Assyrian imperial army. Village inspectors (*rab ālāni*) formed a secondary administrative tier, monitoring the various districts (*qannu*) that made up the provincial hinterland and reporting on their activities to the governor. To ensure that the provincial administration functioned efficiently, and in keeping with the dictates of the central government, provincial governors were expected to submit regular reports to the king, and their administrations were audited by officials who answered directly to the royal court. The governor's residence or palace thus formed the operational hub of each province's administration, functionally replicating the role of the royal palace at the regional level (for further description of the Assyrian provincial system and administration, see Forrer 1920; Harrison 2005; Pečirková 1977, 1987; Radner 2006).

### The Late Assyrian Settlement at Tell Tayinat

Tiglath-pileser III launched his assault on the Syro-Hittite states of northwest Syria in 743 B.C. (for a detailed account of the campaign, see Grayson 1991a: 74–76; Hawkins 1982: 410–411; Weippert 1982: 395–396). This was followed, in 738 B.C., by a second western campaign. As a pretext, Tiglath-pileser accused Tutammu, king of Unqi (<sup>kur</sup>*un-qi*), of breaking his loyalty oath with Assyria. The consequences of this breach, we are told, were that Tutammu “disregarded his life,” Kinalia (<sup>uru</sup>*Ki-na-li-a*), his royal city, was captured, and many of its citizens deported (Tadmor 1994: Ann. 25: 3–12, Summ. Insc. 6: 20–21, 9: 26–27; Tadmor and Yamada 2011: 39–40 [Tiglath-pileser III 12], 115 [Tiglath-pileser III 46], 131 [Tiglath-pileser III 49]; see also Kessler 1975). Tiglath-pileser then reconstituted Kinalia as the capital of a new Assyrian province by the same name and installed a eunuch (*ša rēši*) as governor (*bēl pihāti*). Kinalia remained an Assyrian province until at least the mid-seventh century B.C. (Hawkins 1982: 425, 1983; Millard 1994: 51).

The earliest Assyrian references to the North Orontes Valley region date to the reign of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.) and include a description of a campaign conducted ca. 870 B.C. to subdue a series of kingdoms in northwest Syria, including the Kingdom of Patina (<sup>kur</sup>*pa-ti-na-a-a*) and its capital Kunulua (<sup>uru</sup>*ku-nu-lu-a*) (see Grayson 1991b: 216–219, A.O.101.1 iii 55–92a; Harrison 2001). The account provides a detailed itinerary of the campaign route that clearly situates Patina in the Amuq Plain and its capital on the southern edge of the plain, just north of the Orontes River, leaving little doubt that Kunulua should be associated with the large Iron Age mound of Tell Tayinat (Figure 5.1). Later Assyrian sources, culminating with

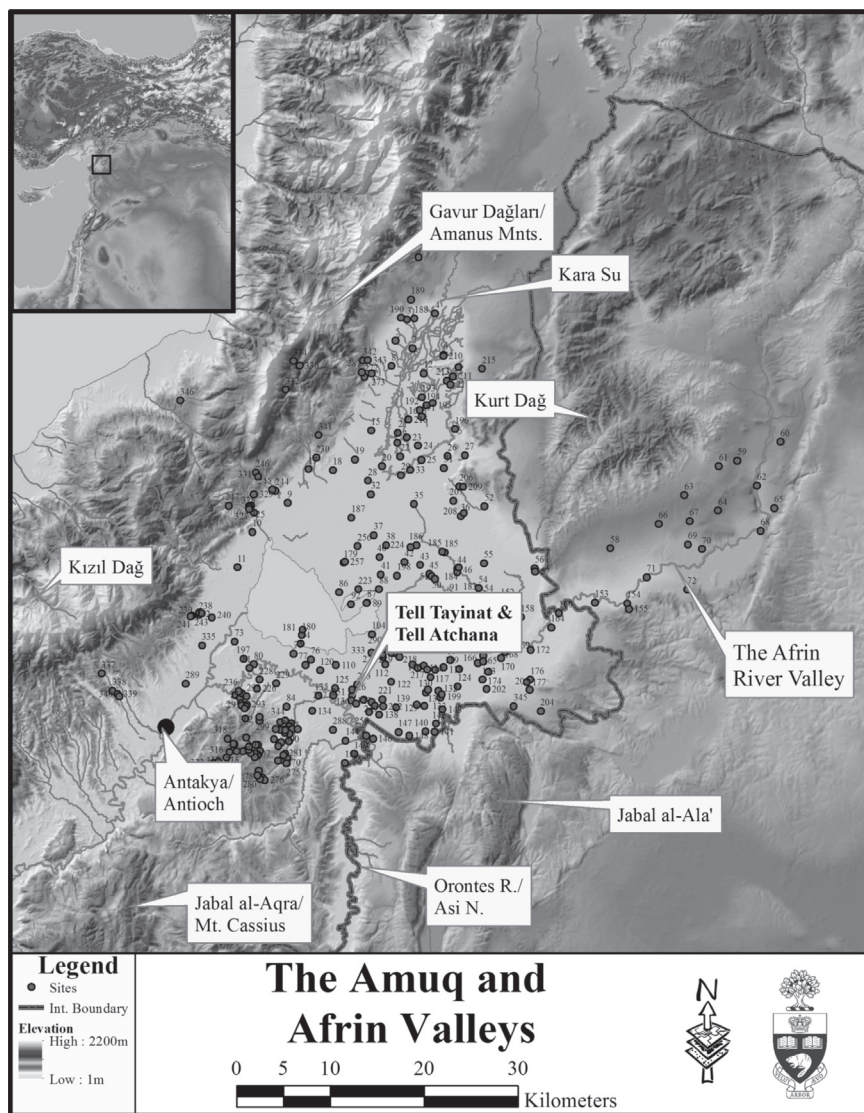


Figure 5.1. Map of the Amuq Plain showing the location of Tell Tayinat and other principal settlements (created by S. Batiuk).

Tiglath-pileser's conquest and annexation in 738 B.C., confirm the existence of a small kingdom, alternatively referred to as Patina or Unqi, its royal city, Kunulua, and its control of the North Orontes Valley and the surrounding region in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.



*The Syrian-Hittite Expedition Excavations*

Large-scale excavations were conducted at Tell Tayinat by the University of Chicago over four field seasons between 1935 and 1938 as part of the Syrian-Hittite Expedition. Since the results of these excavations have been described in detail elsewhere (Batiuk et al. 2005; Haines 1971; Harrison 2001, 2005), I will only summarize them briefly here. The excavations focused primarily on the West Central Area of the upper mound (Figure 5.2), although excavation areas were also opened on the eastern and southern edges of the upper mound and in the lower settlement. In all, the Chicago excavations achieved large horizontal exposures of five distinct architectural phases, or Building Periods, dating to the Iron II and III periods (Amuq Phase O, ca. 950–550 B.C.), with the Third through Fifth Building Periods corresponding to the Late Assyrian settlement (Haines 1971: 64–66).

Renovations to a series of large palatial buildings in the West Central Area, part of the citadel of the Syro-Hittite capital, accounted for most of the activity assigned to the Third Building Period, which the excavators dated to the late eighth–early seventh century (ca. 720–680 B.C.; Haines 1971: 65–66). These renovations included the construction of an elevated rectangular structure (Platform XV) along the east side of the West Central Area complex (Haines 1971: 43–44). The Fourth Building Period witnessed further renovations to the buildings in this area but also significant new construction activity, in particular the construction of a sprawling palatial complex, Building IX, which was erected within a large raised enclosure, identified as Building X by the Chicago team (Haines 1971: 61, plates 88 and 110), in the southeast quadrant of the upper mound (Figure 5.2). Together, this enclosure and the buildings of the adjacent West Central Area formed what must have been a visually imposing citadel. To further enhance its grandeur and reinforce the message of Assyrian military strength, the citadel was approached from the east through a monumental gateway (Gateway VII; Haines 1971: 60, plates 87 and 110), flanked by carved stone orthostats depicting Assyrian assault troops carrying decapitated heads and treading on vanquished foes (see Harrison 2005: 26, figure 1). The Fifth Building Period comprised a series of isolated features confined to the highest parts of the upper mound and marked the terminal Iron Age occupational phase at Tayinat (Haines 1971: 66).

Despite its poor preservation, the design and layout of Building IX identify it as an Assyrian governor's palace (Haines 1971: 61–63, plates 84–85, 109; Harrison 2005: 26–29). Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, the Chicago excavations running concurrently at the contemporary Assyrian capital of Khorsabad (ancient Dūr-Sharrukin) prompted their excavator,

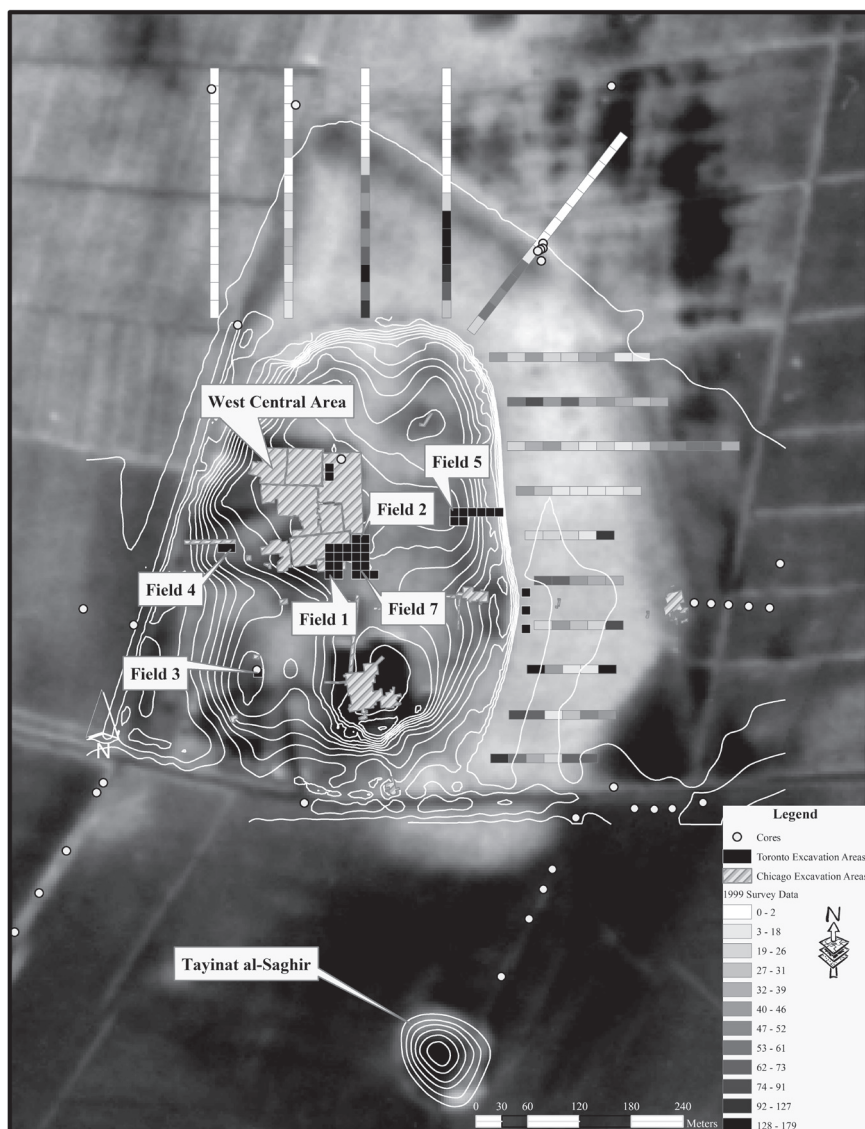


Figure 5.2. Topographic map of Tell Tayinat overlaid on a CORONA satellite image of the site, showing the principal excavation areas and a density distribution (number of sherds per 40m<sup>2</sup>) of surface pottery in the lower settlement (created by S.

Gordon Loud (1936), to generalize about the formulaic nature of Assyrian architectural planning during this period. Loud's preliminary observations were amplified in a subsequent typological study (Turner 1970), which



also emphasized the highly standardized character of Late Assyrian palatial construction. In typical Mesopotamian fashion, the general layout of these palaces consisted of a series of central courtyards which neatly segregated the various functional units of the complex, including their administrative and residential areas. The Late Assyrian palace, however, was further distinguished by the liberal application of the “reception suite,” which was used to delineate the principal audience hall or throne room, additional ceremonial areas, and the residential apartments of the palace. The modular replication of the reception suite is perhaps best exemplified in the royal palace and administrative buildings at Khorsabad. However, the pattern is repeated throughout the royal cities of Assyria and also occurs at numerous other Late Assyrian provincial centers (see further in Harrison 2005: 28–29).

The Syrian-Hittite Expedition also recovered a number of isolated finds, unfortunately almost all from poorly preserved contexts, which further hint at the Neo-Assyrian presence at Tell Tayinat. These included several Late Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions, both inscribed stone monument fragments and clay tablets, a number of cylinder seals, a variety of metal objects, including a composite metal roundel inscribed with the royal name of Tiglath-pileser III, and small quantities of the distinctive Assyrian Glazed and Palace Wares.

### *The Tayinat Archaeological Project Excavations*

Targeted excavations were resumed at Tell Tayinat in 2004, following topographic and surface surveys of the site (see Batiuk et al. 2005), as part of the University of Toronto’s Tayinat Archaeological Project (TAP), and they have since continued on an annual basis (for yearly reports, see Harrison 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). The Late Assyrian settlement has been encountered in virtually every excavation area investigated to date. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will focus primarily on the results of the investigations in Field 2, located in the center of the upper mound, bordering the southeast corner of the Syrian-Hittite Expedition’s West Central Area (Figure 5.2).

Excavations were initiated in Field 2 in 2005. The primary objective was to determine whether anything remained of Building I, the principal palatial building of the Syro-Hittite citadel (part of the Second Building Period complex), and then to excavate earlier levels associated with a large structure identified by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition as Building XIV, which they had assigned to their First Building Period, and thereby better establish the stratigraphic relationships between these two cultural phases. Excavations proceeded to uncover the foundations of a large monumental structure, very

probably the southeast corner of Building XIV, but unfortunately no floors or occupational surfaces survived. Consequently, in 2008 the excavations were extended laterally to the east in the hopes that disturbance would be minimal in this area and the stratigraphic sequence therefore more intact. Subsequent excavation in 2008 and 2009 quite unexpectedly revealed the well-preserved remains of an Iron Age temple (Figure 5.3), which has been designated Building (or Temple) XVI (for a more thorough description, see Harrison and Osborne 2012).

The building was approached from the south by means of a wide stone staircase. The staircase led to a porch, which supported an ornately carved basalt column base set deeply into its floor. The column base is virtually identical in size, shape and design to column bases found in the entrance of the nearby Building I. However, its lowest carved register was largely hidden from view, obscured by a ceramic tile-paved surface, suggesting that an earlier floor, or phase, to the building still lies unexcavated below. The porch was separated from the central room of the building by two brick piers. A thick deposit of burnt brick, apparently collapse, covered much of the floor between the two piers. This material, in turn, sealed three heavily charred wooden beams, at least one of which appeared to have been set directly into the floor, and therefore probably served as a threshold for a doorway.

The floor of the central room, though badly burned, appeared to have been plastered. The room was largely devoid of pottery or organic remains, but it did produce a substantial quantity of bronze metal, including riveted pieces and several fragments of carved ivory inlay. Though heavily burned and damaged, these remains suggest the central room had been equipped with furniture or fixtures, perhaps for a door. The room also produced fragments of gold and silver foil, and the carved eye inlay from a human figure. A thick layer of collapsed burnt brick sealed the entire room, and in some places had fused with the brickwork of the temple's outer walls, vivid evidence of the intense conflagration that had consumed the structure.

A second set of piers separated the central room from a small back room, the inner sanctum or cella of the temple. This northern-most room contained an elevated, rectangular platform, or podium, that filled almost the entire room, and clearly represented a renovation to the original design and intended function of the room. The surface of the podium was paved with ceramic tiles, and accessed by steps in its two southern corners. A rectangular, free-standing structure, possibly an altar, stood on the eastern side of the platform. The room had also been burned intensely by fire, preserving a wealth of cultic paraphernalia found strewn across the podium and around its base, including gold, bronze and iron implements, libation vessels, and other ornately decorated ritual objects.



Figure 5.3. Plan of Building XVI (created by S. Batiuk and J. Osborne).

The surface debris also contained a concentration of fragmented cuneiform tablets written in Late Assyrian script. The analysis completed to date by the project epigrapher has identified 11 discrete tablets (Lauinger 2011). All except one (a docket impressed with a stamp seal) are literary or historical

documents. The majority (seven, or possibly eight, out of the 10) appear to be *iqqur ipuṣ* texts, a Mesopotamian hemerological scholarly series that lists the favorable months for undertaking various activities, such as agricultural activities, the construction or demolition of a house, family events such as birth or marriage, medical procedures, and religious ceremonies (Labat 1965). The Tayinat *iqqur ipuṣ* tablets are arranged in tabular format, the least common of the various attested organizational schemes, with the x-axis listing a sequence of months, and the y-axis the relevant activities.

Of the two remaining tablets, one is a bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian lexical text (T-1921), and the other (T-1801), by far the largest tablet found in the room at 28 × 43 cm, records an oath imposed by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon on the governor of the province of Kinalia, most likely on the 18th day of the second month of the year 672 B.C., binding the governor in loyalty to Esarhaddon's chosen successor, Ashurbanipal (for a full transliteration, see Lauinger 2012). The text of the Tayinat "Oath Tablet" closely parallels the 674 lines of the so-called Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon, eight copies of which were found in the throne room of a building adjacent to the Temple of Nabu in the Assyrian royal city of Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) during British excavations at the site in 1955 (Wiseman 1958).

The Building XVI discovery context fits well with evidence from the Assyrian heartland. At Nimrud, in addition to the vassal treaties, a collection of tablets was discovered in the Ezida (or Temple of Nabu) itself, in a room directly opposite Nabu's shrine (Postgate and Reade 1980: 309, figure 2). The Nabu Temple at Khorsabad, located adjacent to the Ziggurat Temple complex, contained a room with pigeonholes very likely for storing texts, which probably had been removed when the city was abandoned (Loud and Altman 1938: 46, 60–62, plates 19C, 24D). Tablets were also kept in the vicinity of the Temple of Nabu at Nineveh (Fincke 2004: 55). As the patron god of scribes and writing, the association of these tablet collections with Nabu is not surprising.

More intriguing, however, is the possibility that the vassal, or oath, treaties were deliberately kept in places which their oath-takers were expected to visit on a regular basis (Steymans 2006: 343). As Lauinger (2011: 10–12) has noted, the other tablets found with the Tayinat Oath Tablet help to establish the broader social context for this remarkable collection of cuneiform documents. In particular, two tablets (T-1923 and T-1927) preserve markings that suggest they belonged to a class of amulet-shaped tablets that primarily served a votive function (Reiner 1959). In addition, one of these tablets (T-1923) was pierced horizontally, as was also the Oath Tablet, indicating that both – and possibly the others – were intended to be suspended or mounted. In other words, the tablets recovered from the inner sanctum of Building XVI were intentionally designed for exhibition and display and,

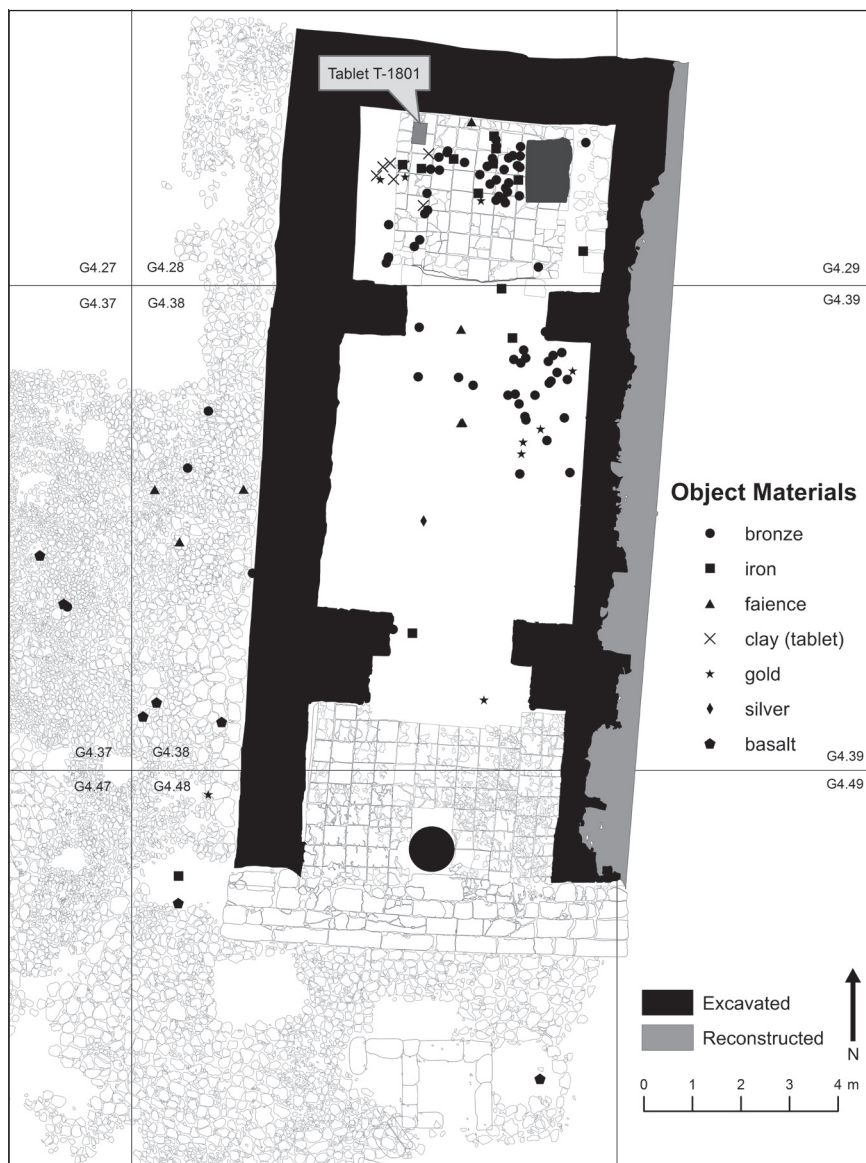


Figure 5.4. Plan of Building XVI showing the distribution of artifacts and tablets in its inner sanctum (created by S. Batiuk and J. Osborne).

therefore, were not part of an archive, a literary collection, or a library as such. Their provenance, distributed across the western part of the elevated podium, facing an altar-like installation positioned on the podium's eastern



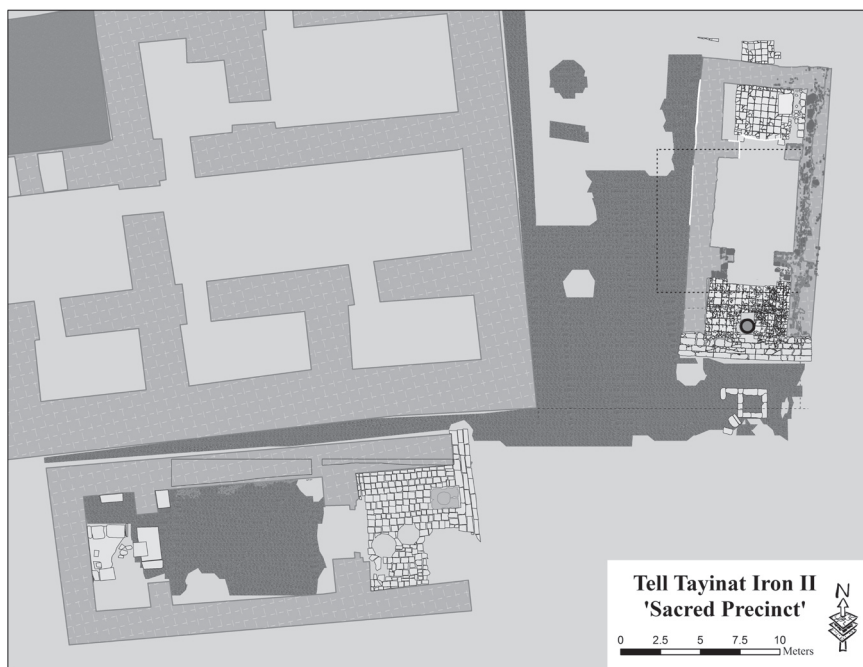


Figure 5.5. Plan of the Assyrian “Sacred Precinct” at Tayinat, showing Buildings II and XVI (created by S. Batiuk).

side (Figure 5.4), provides further evidence of their cultic function. Moreover, the position and condition of the Oath Tablet, which exhibits a break pattern that radiates out from an initial contact point along its base, suggests that the tablet was found precisely where it fell when the temple was destroyed. The tablet was uncovered lying face down on the podium, with its back (or reverse) facing up, and had clearly fallen forward during the conflagration that engulfed the building.

Thus far, the excavations of Building XVI have only uncovered its terminal phase; its earlier construction history and dating therefore remain unclear. Nevertheless, the distinctive architectural style and design it shares with the nearby Building II, excavated by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition (see Haines 1971: 53–55, plates 80–81, 100B, 103), including the evidence of similar renovations and associated material culture, indicate that both temples likely formed part of a larger Assyrian religious complex or “sacred precinct” (Figure 5.5), possibly dedicated to the cult of Nabu and his female partner, Tašmetu, and the scene of loyalty oath rituals as part of an annual *akitu* ceremony (Lauinger 2013: 111–113). Their perpendicular arrangement,

facing a shared central courtyard, replicates a well-established Assyrian double temple tradition best exemplified by the similarly aligned twin temples in the Ziggurat complex on the citadel at Khorsabad. In light of this similarity, it is tempting to speculate that Platform XV, assigned by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition to this period, might have served as an elevated platform for an Assyrian cultic monument, perhaps even a small ziggurat-like structure, situated immediately to the north of Building XVI, further mirroring the layout at Khorsabad.

### Landscapes of Imperial Power

The construction of royal citadels, equipped with sprawling palaces lined with elaborately carved orthostats and colossal stone figures, ornately decorated religious monuments and buildings, and vast administrative complexes, was a defining characteristic of the Late Assyrian period. As visual manifestations of Assyrian royal authority, these imposing regal centers represented “landscapes” of power that facilitated both the consolidation of royal authority and the expansion of the Assyrian Empire during this period. The standardization of Assyrian palatial construction in the eighth century, and its modular replication at provincial centers throughout the empire during the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III and his successors, should, therefore, be seen not only as evidence of Assyrian bureaucratic ingenuity and efficiency but also as the physical embodiment of Assyrian imperial ideology.

In this context, the archaeological remains preserved at Tell Tayinat offer a revealing glimpse into the imperial administrative apparatus Tiglath-pileser and his successors installed. As we have seen, this included the construction of standardized palatial and religious architecture, large-scale representational art forms such as wall reliefs and sculpture, and the consumption of elite craft industries such as ceramic fineware production. Moreover, the utilization of these media was not haphazard, but carefully calibrated to maximize their effect on their intended audiences. As Lauinger (2011) has demonstrated in his analysis of the cuneiform tablets found in Building XVI, this extended to the written form as well, with these remarkable documents clearly intended as display objects within the inner sanctum of the temple. In effect, the double temple complex or sacred precinct at Tayinat functioned as a stage for enacting the rituals and theater of divine sanction, with the Oath Tablet and its associated cultic objects serving as both written and visual reminders of the community’s sworn loyalty to the Assyrian king, the divinely appointed ruler of the world.

Building XVI, with its displayed tablets and cultic paraphernalia, also illustrates why context is so important, and why textual and material

cultural evidence need to be examined together, rather than as fragmented, disembedded sources of information about the past. Viewed in isolation, the Oath Tablet preserves the largely formulaic language of a document commemorating a previously known and recorded historical event, and as such, likely would have been identified as an archival document. When understood within its intended social context, however, the tablet and its message are transformed, physically articulating Assyrian imperial authority, cloaked in divine sanction and religious ritual.

### Acknowledgments

The Tayinat Archaeological Project has received research grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP), the Brennan Foundation, and the University of Toronto, for which we are deeply grateful. I wish also to thank the Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums of Turkey, which has graciously awarded the research permits necessary to conduct each of our excavation seasons, the landowners who have generously permitted us to work on their land, and the Reyhanlı Residential School and staff for their warm hospitality throughout our stay. Finally, each season's successful results would not have been possible without the dedicated contribution of all our project staff. This paper is a product of their collective team effort.

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