

HERITAGE KEY ARTICLE

Tim Harrison

From: "Owen Jarus" <owenjarus@gmail.com>
To: "Tim Harrison" <tim.harrison@utoronto.ca>
Sent: October 14, 2010 11:42 AM
Subject: article published

Hi Professor, actually we just published the article on hk this morning.

<http://heritage-key.com/blogs/owenjarus/oath-platform-2700-year-old-temple-tayinat-had-royal-loyalty-oath-prominently-displa>

We were eager to publish it so we used the pics that you released last year. That's okay though - those are good shots.

Don't know for sure if it will re-appear in the Independent (i think it might), if it does i will be sure to email you a link.

Again, thank you for the presentations your team gave at the symposium, they were really informative, feel like things are really coming together on the tablet/temple discovery.

best wishes,
Owen

Tim Harrison

From: "Owen Jarus" <owenjarus@gmail.com>
To: "Tim Harrison" <tim.harrison@utoronto.ca>
Sent: October 4, 2010 1:42 AM
Subject: Photo request - oath/iqur ipus tablets

Hi Professor, thank you for the presentations that you and your team put on this weekend. It was an interesting symposium!

I'm going to be publishing a story on the tablet find. The story will be for Heritage Key and possibly The Independent (UK). I want to ask, would it be possible to release an image of the oath tablet and perhaps one or two of the iqur ipus tablets? They don't have to be really high res.

thank you and best wishes!
Owen

The oath on the platform - 2,700 year old temple at Tayinat had royal loyalty oath prominently displayed

Submitted by owenjarus on Thu, 10/14/2010 - 14:02



The 2,700 year old temple, in the back the oath tablet was mounted on a platform. Photo courtesy Tayinat Archaeological Project.

A team of researchers - excavating a 2,700 year old temple at the ancient city of Tayinat in southeastern Turkey - have discovered evidence that its inhabitants prominently displayed a tablet which bore a pledge of loyalty to the heir of an Assyrian king.

At their height the Assyrians controlled an empire that stretched from southern Iraq to the Mediterranean coast. In their art and writing, "the Assyrian king was portrayed as supreme ruler of the known world and viewed with absolute authority as the earthly representative and human embodiment of (the Assyrian god) Ashur," said Professor Tim Harrison of the University of Toronto. He leads the Tayinat excavations.

The city itself was built on the Amuq plain, on the Orontes River near the modern day Syrian border. Archaeologists say that its location made it a sort of crossroads that connected Anatolia, Mesopotamia and the Levant – allowing Tayinat to flourish. The Assyrian Empire conquered it in 738 BC, with a governor being appointed to oversee it. The temple itself is about 12 meters by six meters in size. It pre-dates the conquest and was taken over at the same time as the city.

The discovery adds new insight into how the Assyrians controlled Tayinat. Using careful field recording and textual analysis the team discovered that the tablet was elevated on a platform in the temple's cella, a part of the building also known as the "holy of holies." The platform had clay tiles on top.

"You shall protect him in country and in town, fall and die for him..."

The oath declares that the city's governor, and possibly other citizens, would recognize Ashurbanipal as the heir to the throne of the Assyrian Empire, after his father's (king Esarhaddon's) death. Nearly identical oaths have been found at the site of Nimrud in modern day Iraq.

"You shall protect him in country and in town, fall and die for him. You shall speak with him in the truth of your heart, give him sound advice loyally, and smooth his way in every respect," the oaths read.

"The presence of the oath tablet at Tayinat affirms Ashurbanipal's claim that his father caused all the people of Assyria, great and small, to take the oath," said team epigrapher Professor Jacob Lauinger of John Hopkins University.

The tablet appears to have been created on the 18th day of the 2nd month of the year 672 BC. "The (Tayinat) tablet was written most likely on the same day as the tablets from Nimrud," said Professor Lauinger.

A long list of curses is cast upon anyone who breaks the oath. "May Sin, the brightness of heaven and earth, clothe you with leprosy and forbid your entering into the presence of the gods or king. Roam the desert like the wild-ass and the gazelle!" One of the curses reads. "May Mullissu, who dwells in Nineveh, tie a flaming sword at your side," says another.



Photo by J. Jackson. Tim Harrison at left, works with the team to uncover the tablets. They were located in the temple's "cella" a room also known as its "holy of holies."

Seeing into the future

Nearby this oath were a series of eight tablets that named auspicious months and days for carrying out certain events. They likely would have been hung on the wall. These tablets are called Iqur Ipus, similar examples of which have been found throughout Mesopotamia.

The name Iqur Ipus "literally means he demolished he built" said Professor Lauinger.

"The text gives favourable months in which to construct a new house... then it gives favourable months to demolish a house or do a renovation or something like that."

But that's not all - Lauinger said that the texts name good times to conduct events related to "agriculture, matters of family life like picking a wife, having a child, birth, religious functions such as consecrating or renovating a sacred object."

It works a bit like a calendar, "the complete sequence of months is listed at the top, if the month is auspicious for a particular activity or eventuality the month name is repeated in the proper position in the table below." On the reverse side of the tablet auspicious days are listed.

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A millennium of Mesopotamia religious and scientific beliefs went into creating these documents. "They were very very detailed note takers observing the constellations, observing natural phenomena and observing events in the real world that happened all around them," said Lauinger.

It was based on a "a truly systematic approach even if it was founded on a certain operating assumption that we might not believe, that everything is interconnected - these guys were the scientists of the day."

The next puzzle for the team to crack is why the loyalty oath was placed in such a prominent position. Was it a sort of votive offering? Or was it an object of religious veneration? "The prospects are tantalizing," said Lauinger, "but of course we have a good deal of work to do first."

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[Owen Jarus is a freelance writer based in Toronto, Canada. He has written articles on archaeology for a variety of media outlets including The Canadian Press newswire \(CP\), U of T Magazine, The Mississauga](#)