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U of T researchers shed light on ancient Assyrian tablets

By [Christine Elias](#), posted *Thursday, April 8, 2010*

A cache of cuneiform tablets unearthed by a team led by a U of T archeologist has been found to contain a largely intact Assyrian treaty from the early 7th century BCE.

"The tablet is quite spectacular. It records a treaty -- or covenant -- between Esarhaddon, king of the Assyrian Empire and a secondary ruler who acknowledged Assyrian power. The treaty was confirmed in 672 BCE at elaborate ceremonies held in the Assyrian royal city of Nimrud (ancient Kalhu). In the text, the ruler vows to recognize the authority of Esarhaddon's successor, his son Ashurbanipal," said Professor Timothy Harrison of near eastern archaeology in the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations and director of U of T's Tayinat Archaeological Project (TAP).

"The treaties were designed to secure Ashurbanipal's accession to the throne and avoid the political crisis that transpired at the start of his father's reign. Esarhaddon came to power when his brothers assassinated their father, Sennacherib."

The ⁴³4 x 28-centimetre tablet -- known as the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon -- contains about 650 lines and is in a very fragile state. "It will take months of further work before the document will be fully legible," Harrison added. "These tablets are like a very complex puzzle, involving hundreds of pieces, some missing. It is not just a matter of pulling the tablet out, sitting down and reading. We expect to learn much more as we restore and analyze the document."

The researchers hope to glean information about Assyria's imperial relations with the west during a critical period, the early 7th century BCE. It marked the rise of the Phrygians and other rival powers in highland Anatolia -- now modern-day Turkey -- along the northwestern frontier of the Assyrian empire and coincided with the divided monarchy of Biblical Israel, as well as an era of increased contact between the Levantine peoples of the eastern Mediterranean and Egypt as well as the Greeks of the Aegean world.

The cache of tablets -- which date back to the Iron Age -- were unearthed in August 2009 during excavations at the site of an ancient temple at Tell Tayinat, located in southeastern Turkey. A wealth of religious paraphernalia -- including gold, bronze and iron implements, libation vessels and ornately decorated ritual objects -- was also uncovered.

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

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