

# U of T archeologists find ancient tablets

BY SEAN BETTAM

**Excavations led by** a U of T archeologist 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. The cella also contained gold, bronze and iron implements, libation vessels and ornately decorated ritual objects.

"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," said **Timothy Harrison**,

professor of near eastern archeology in the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations and director of U of T's Tayinat Archaeological Project. "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."

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," said Harrison. "Scholars have long speculated that the reference to Calneh in Isaiah's oracle against Assyria alludes to Tiglath-pileser's devastation of Kunulua — i.e., 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."