



McDONALD INSTITUTE MONOGRAPHS

The provincial archaeology of the Assyrian empire

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ZIYARET TEPE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Published by:

McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research
University of Cambridge
Downing Street
Cambridge, UK
CB2 3ER
(0)(1223) 333538
(0)(1223) 339336 (Production Office)
(0)(1223) 333536 (FAX)
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www.mcdonald.cam.ac.uk

Distributed by Oxbow Books

United Kingdom: Oxbow Books, 10 Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford, OX1 2EW, UK.
Tel: (0)(1865) 241249; Fax: (0)(1865) 794449; www.oxbowbooks.com
USA: Casemate Academic, P.O. Box 511, Oakville, CT 06779, USA.
Tel: 860-945-9329; Fax: 860-945-9468

ISBN: 978-1-902937-74-8
ISSN: 1363-1349 (McDonald Institute)

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Cover design by Dora Kemp and Ben Plumridge.

Cover image: *The pebble mosaic pavement from Tille in southeastern Turkey*
(photograph by Tuğrul Çakar, courtesy British Institute at Ankara).

Edited for the Institute by Simon Stoddart (*Series Acting Editor*)

Printed and bound by Short Run Press, Bittern Rd, Sowton Industrial Estate, Exeter, EX2 7LW, UK.

Chapter 23

The Neo-Assyrian provincial administration at Tayinat (ancient Kunalia)

Timothy Harrison

Excavations at Tell Tayinat, located on the Plain of Antioch in southeast Turkey, have uncovered the remains of a late Neo-Assyrian settlement (c. late eighth–seventh centuries BC), including an Assyrian governor’s residence and, most recently, a temple and a collection of cuneiform tablets dating to this period. Historical sources attest that Tayinat (ancient Kunulua) was destroyed by Tiglath-pileser III in 738 BC, and then transformed into an Assyrian provincial capital, renamed Kinalia, or Kunalia, as indicated in the recently discovered Esarhaddon Oath Tablet, and supplied with its own governor and provincial administration. The archaeology of the Late Iron Age settlement at Tayinat therefore offers an opportunity to examine both the physical dimensions of a Neo-Assyrian provincial centre, but also the bureaucratic organization that was established to administer it.

This paper will review the results of the Syrian-Hittite Expedition’s excavations at Tell Tayinat in the 1930s, together with the results of the ongoing Tayinat Archaeological Project investigations from this period. They reveal a carefully planned provincial capital that incorporated Assyrian architectural elements and imperial ideology skillfully interwoven with indigenous social and cultural institutions.

Neo-Assyrian imperial administration

The historical development of the Neo-Assyrian empire has been the focus of considerable study. Less well-documented has been the imperial bureaucracy that evolved to administer it, and in particular the provincial administrations established in the peripheral regions annexed to the empire as it expanded. This is in part because Assyrian royal inscriptions, though voluminous, were not concerned primarily with conveying such information (Postgate 2007, 331). It is clear, nevertheless, that the rapid expansion of the Assyrian empire in the latter decades of the eighth

century prompted key changes to its organizational structure. These included a significant reorganization of the Assyrian provincial system, although this reorganization appears to have been initiated prior to Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC), and the considerable expansion Assyria experienced during his rule, possibly as early as the reign of Adad-nerari III (810–783 BC) (Postgate 1995, 2–5; Radner 2006, 43; Kühne 2013, 483, 488–9; contra Harrison 2005, 24, and others). Provinces within the Assyrian core (the ‘Land of Aššur’) were reduced in size, while the system as a whole expanded considerably, as conquered lands were annexed to the heartland. These changes, not surprisingly, precipitated a shift in the balance of power away from the leading political families of Assyria, whose power was based in the home provinces, to an increasingly centralized government administration, controlled directly by the king (Grayson 1991a, 203–4; Postgate 1979, 193–4; 1992; 2007, 338–43).

Although very little documentary evidence of this provincial administrative system exists, an ‘invisible’ hierarchical structure can be gleaned from disparate sources, such as the occasional letters and administrative documents that were a by-product of the machinery of government itself (Postgate 2007, 332). Together, these documents convey the ethos of a formally regulated administration, with a clear chain of command and delegated authority descending from the king, but they rarely provide actual descriptions of any particular office or its administrative duties and responsibilities (Postgate 2007, 334–8). Indeed, as Postgate concludes (2007, 358), the evidence indicates that the Neo-Assyrian imperial administration was fundamentally non-bureaucratic, and depended on a sense of institutional loyalty and personal interaction throughout the system, both at the royal court and in the provinces, for it to function effectively.

At the provincial level, each province appears to have been governed by an administration that mir-

rored the organizational structure of the royal court at the imperial centre. In the newer provinces, these were typically established at the former capitals of vanquished states, which often lent the new provinces their names. Each province was administered by a governor (*bēl pāhiti*), who in turn was assisted by a deputy (*šaknu*, or *šaniu*, literally ‘the second one’), or deputies (*šaknūte*), and a major domo (*rab bēti*). The governor’s primary duties included maintenance of the province’s road networks and infrastructure, the levying and collection of taxes, the distribution of land, the preservation of law and order, and command of the locally stationed military garrison (generally, the *šāb šarri*, or ‘king’s troops’, and comprised of both Assyrians and auxiliaries). The governor, in other words, held overall authority and responsibility for both the civilian and military affairs of the province. Under him, however, the delegation of authority became more specialized, and responsibilities were organized according to their civilian or military jurisdictions, although it is not always clear from the title of an office to which jurisdiction it was assigned (Postgate 2007, 333–34, 352–8). The *šaknu* was typically a military rank, though not exclusively so, and there is evidence that civilian authority had a hierarchical structure similar to the military administration. The provincial military command appears to have been organized according to a simple four-tiered hierarchy: the governor as overall commander, followed by the *šaknu*, the cohort commander, or ‘commander of 50’ (*rab kišri*), and then the ordinary soldier (Postgate 2007, 343–7).

Within the civilian administration, a secondary administrative tier was occupied by ‘village inspectors’ (*rab ālāni*), who monitored the various districts (*qannu*) that made up the provincial hinterland, and reported 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 (Postgate 1979, 216; Pečirková 1977, 213–15; 1987, 169–74; Grayson 1991a, 203–4).

The governor’s residence, or palace, thus formed the operational hub of each province’s administration, functionally and structurally replicating the royal palace at the regional level. By concentrating administrative decision-making, and authority, in the hands of the governor, and localizing this activity within his residence, the Neo-Assyrian provincial system effectively consolidated power, and by extension the economic wealth of a province, in its capital. In time, this may have had the unintended consequence of

draining production and investment away from the agricultural hinterland (Postgate 1979, 216–17).

Neo-Assyrian Kinalia

The earliest Neo-Assyrian references to the North Orontes Valley region date to the reign of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC), and coincide with expanding Assyrian interest in the region. Patina (^{kur}*pa-ti-na-a-a*) is first mentioned in the Banquet Stele (c. 879 BC) (Grayson 1991b, 290, 293, A.0.101.30, lines 35, 144). More revealing is Ashurnasirpal’s account of his campaign to northwest Syria (c. 870 BC), in which he describes receiving tribute from Lubarna, king of Patina, at his royal city Kunulua (^{uru}*ku-nu-lu-a*), before crossing the Orontes River and continuing to the south (Grayson 1991b, 216–19, A.0.101.1, col. iii, lines 71–80). The account places Patina in the Amuq Plain, and its capital Kunulua north of the Orontes River, leaving Tell Tayinat the only viable candidate (Fig. 23.1). This identification has now been confirmed by the Esarhaddon Oath Tablet found at the site (Lauinger 2011; 2012, 112, specifically line T i 3; see further below).

Over the next century, Patina was an active participant in a succession of anti-Assyrian coalitions that attempted to thwart their westward expansion (for a more thorough review of this political history, see Hawkins 1982; Harrison 2001, 116–22; Osborne 2011, 18–29). The Assyrians occasionally also became embroiled in local conflicts. The most notable occurred in 829 BC, and is recorded on the Black Obelisk. We are told that Lubarna (II?), king of Patina, was assassinated by ‘the people of the land’ and a commoner inserted on the throne in his place, prompting Shalmaneser III to intercede and replace the usurper with his own ally (Grayson 1996, 69, A.0.102.14, lines 146b–56). For reasons that remain unclear, the name of the kingdom shifted from Patina to Unqi (^{kur}*un-qi*) during this period as well.

Finally, in 743 BC, Tiglath-pileser III launched his assault on the Syro-Hittite states of northwest Syria (Hawkins 1982, 410–11; Grayson 1991a, 74–6). This led, in 738 BC, to a campaign against the kingdom of Unqi, justified by Tiglath-pileser on the grounds that Tutammu, king of Unqi, had broken his loyalty oath with Assyria. The result, Tiglath-pileser reports, was that Tutammu ‘disregarded his life’, his royal city Kunulua (specifically, ‘Kinalia’ [^{uru}*Ki-na-li-a*]) was captured, and many of its citizens were deported. Tiglath-pileser then established Kunulua as the capital of a new Assyrian province called Kinalia, and installed a eunuch (*ša rēši*) as governor (*bēl pāhiti*) (Tadmor & Yamada 2011, 39–40 [Tiglath-pileser III 12], 115 [Tiglath-pileser III 46], 131 [Tiglath-pileser III

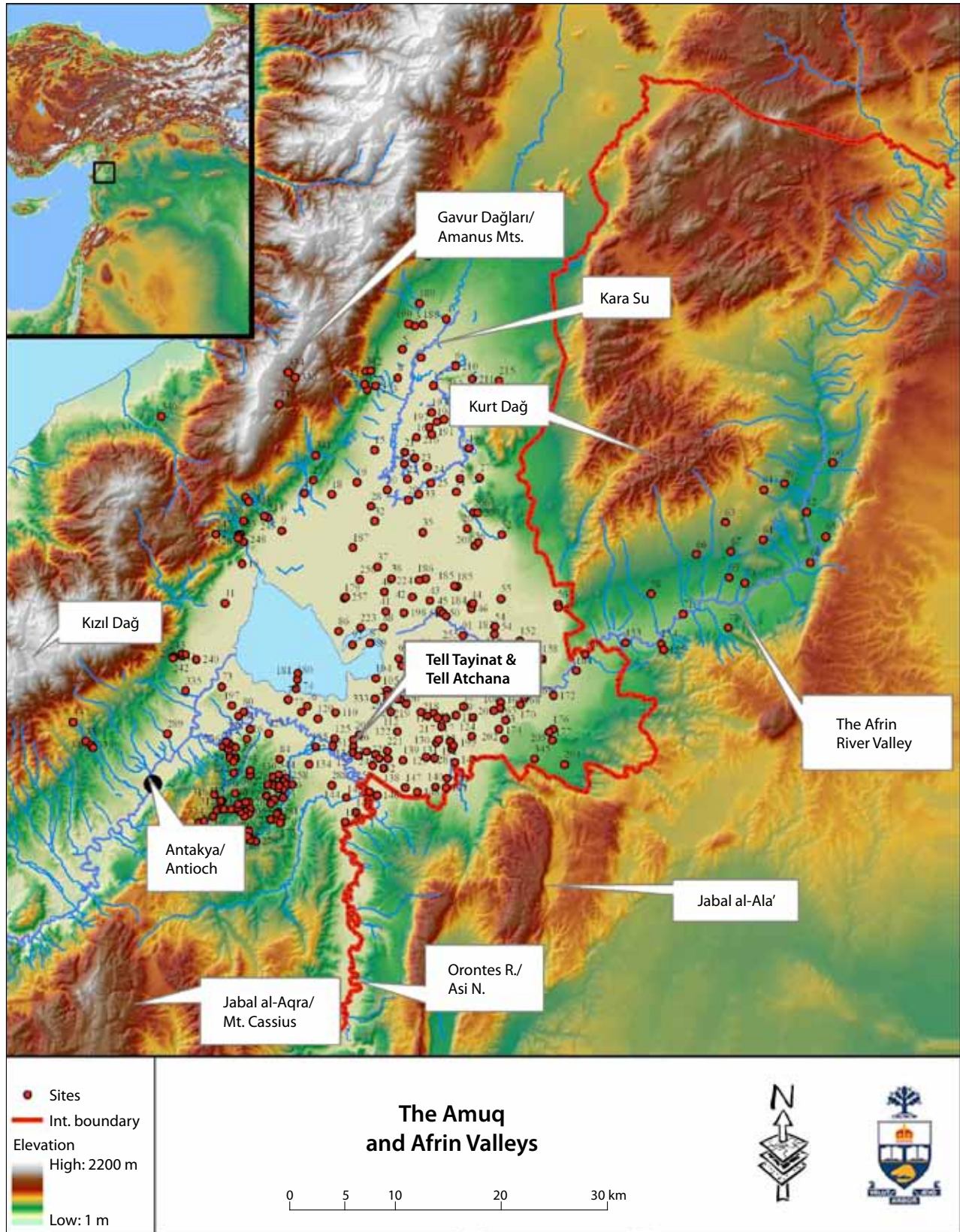


Figure 23.1. Regional map showing the North Orontes Valley and the location of Tell Tayinat (created by S. Batiuk).

49]; see also Kessler 1975). Kinalia, or Kullania, as it appears alternatively in a number of administrative records (but see now the Tayinat Esarhaddon Oath Tablet, where it is called Kunalia), remained an Assyrian province until at least the mid-seventh century BC and the reign of Assurbanipal (Hawkins 1982, 425; 1983; Millard 1994, 51; Radner 2006, 61).

The Syrian-Hittite Expedition excavations

The University of Chicago's Syrian-Hittite Expedition conducted excavations at Tell Tayinat over four field seasons between 1935 and 1938. Their investigations of the late Neo-Assyrian settlement have been described in detail elsewhere (Haines 1971, 65–6; Harrison 2005; 2011; and Harrison & Osborne 2012). Consequently, I will summarize them only briefly here. The Chicago excavations focused primarily on the West Central Area of the upper mound, or citadel (see Fig. 23.2), although excavation areas were also opened on the eastern and southern edges of the upper mound and in the lower settlement. In all, their excavations achieved large horizontal exposures of five distinct architectural phases, or Building Periods, dating to the Iron II and III periods (Amuq Phase O, c. 950–550 BC) (Haines 1971, 64–6).

According to the Chicago excavators, the Second Building Period complex, noted for its *bīt hilāni* palaces (in particular Building I) and temple (Building II), was the most extensive and best preserved architectural phase in the Iron Age sequence uncovered in the West Central Area. They dated its foundation to the late ninth century BC, based largely on the presence of Hieroglyphic Luwian fragments found on or below the floors of the central complex, most notably Buildings I and II (Haines 1971, 66). Recent analysis of the pottery associated with the floors of this complex has confirmed its late ninth–eighth century BC date (Osborne 2011, chapter. 2), with the Tiglath-pileser III campaign in 738 BC the most logical historical event and date for its destruction. The Second Building Period complex exhibits clear stratigraphic separation from the earlier, more fragmentary architectural remains of the First Building Period (specifically Buildings XIII and XIV), but less so in the transition to the subsequent Third Building Period, which coincides with the Neo-Assyrian resettlement of the site (Haines 1971, 65–6).

Renovations to the West Central Area complex accounted for most of the activity assigned to the Third Building Period. However, the period also saw the construction of several important new structures. Platform XV, a large elevated rectangular edifice, approximately 46 m (E-W) × 87 m (N-S) in size, erected along the east side of the West Central Area complex,

was one of the more significant additions to the citadel during this period (Haines 1971, 43–4). The subsequent Fourth Building Period witnessed additional new construction, but also the continued occupation of the *bīt hilāni* palaces in the West Central Area, though apparently not the temple (Building II) (Haines 1971, 65). The most notable new construction was Building IX, which was uncovered during the 1936 and 1937 seasons on a knoll in the southeastern quadrant of the upper mound (Fig. 23.2).

The architectural elements and layout of Building IX identify it as a proto-typical Neo-Assyrian governor's residence (see Haines 1971, 61–3; and Harrison 2005, 26–9, for a more thorough description). The complex appears to have been built on an artificially raised platform, and was approached from the east via a processional gateway (Gateway VII) flanked by limestone orthostats depicting Assyrian shock troops carved in an Assyrian provincial style (Haines 1971, 60–1; McEwan 1937, fig. 10; Gerlach 2000, Taf. 5; see also Harrison 2005, 26, fig. 1). The rooms of the building were arranged around at least two large courtyards paved with baked bricks. The building's principal room, Room C, was located on the southern edge of the excavated area (Haines 1971, 62, pl. 84), and betrays the typical layout and installations of an Assyrian reception suite, or audience hall. The walls of the room were made of unbaked brick, and appear to have once been decorated with blue-painted plaster. The room also produced two intriguing installations: a rectangular limestone slab found partially recessed into the south wall of the room, likely part of a basin for ritual ablutions, and two parallel rows of grooved stones embedded in pebble pavement toward the west end of the room, clearly tracking for a mobile brazier (Haines 1971, pl. 84:B). The one preserved doorway to the room had a stone threshold and two pivot stones.

The Fifth Building Period, the final architectural phase delineated by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition, consisted of a series of isolated, fragmentary features confined to the highest parts of the upper mound, which they attributed to the terminal Iron Age occupational phase at Tell Tayinat (Haines 1971, 66).

The Syrian-Hittite Expedition also recovered a number of miscellaneous finds, unfortunately largely from poorly preserved contexts, which hint of the Neo-Assyrian presence at Tayinat. These included several late Neo-Assyrian inscribed stone monument pieces and fragmentary clay tablets, a number of cylinder seals, several metal objects, one notably a composite metal roundel inscribed with the royal name of Tiglath-pileser III, and small quantities of the highly distinctive Assyrian Glazed and Palace Wares (for a more detailed summary, see Harrison 2005, 29).

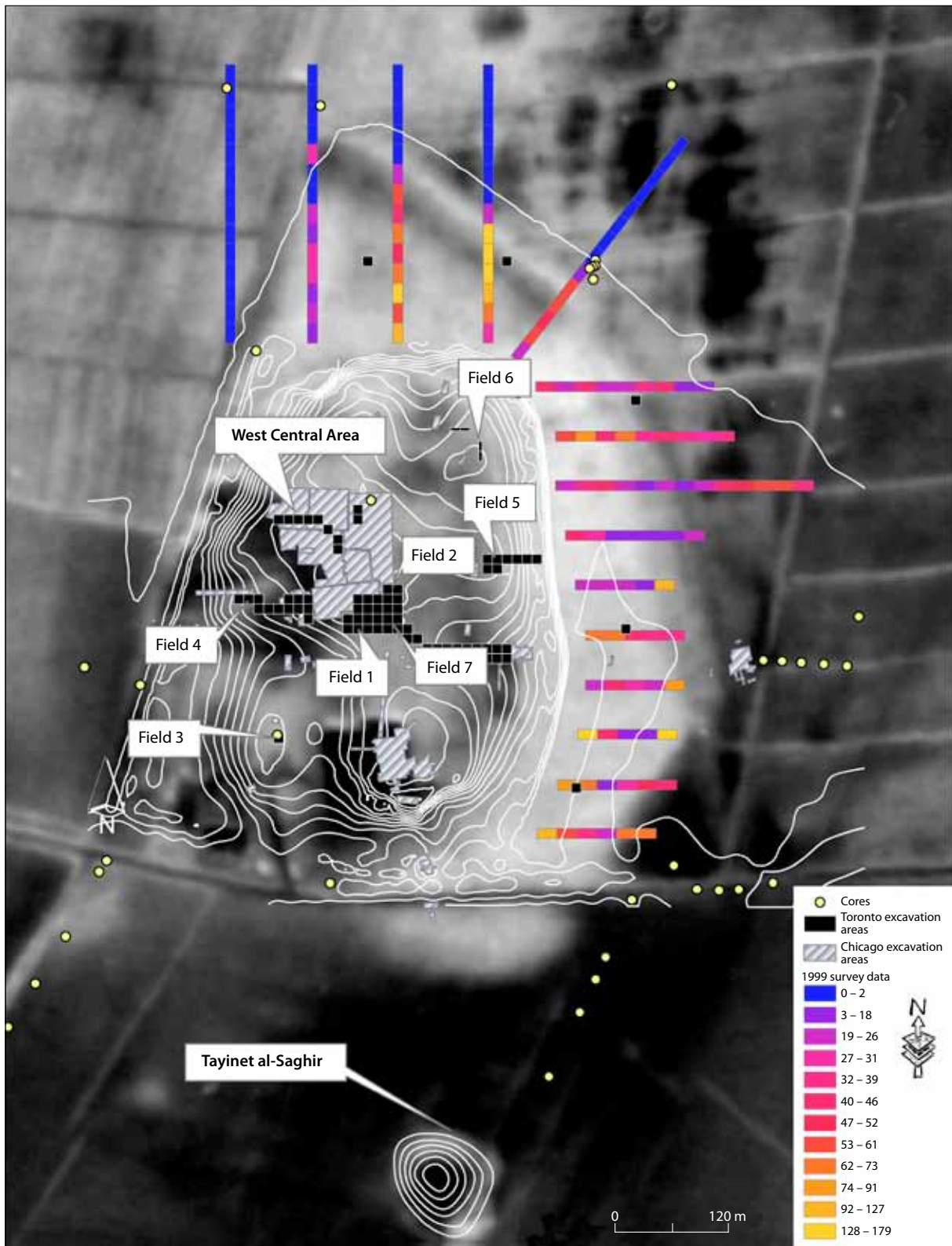


Figure 23.2. Topographic map of Tell Tayinat overlaid on a CORONA satellite image of the site, showing the upper mound and principal excavation areas, and a density distribution of surface pottery in the lower settlement (created by S. Batiuk).

The Tayinat Archaeological Project investigations

The Tayinat Archaeological Project (TAP) reinitiated excavations at Tell Tayinat in 2004, following preliminary survey and mapping seasons in 1999, 2001 and 2002 (see further in Batiuk *et al.* 2005). The TAP investigations expanded to full-scale excavations in 2005, and have continued on an annual basis since. The late Neo-Assyrian settlement is represented by the Iron III horizon (c. 738–625 BC), and has been encountered in each of the excavation areas on the upper mound, with the most extensive exposures to date achieved in four areas: Fields 1, 2 5 and 6 (see Fig. 23.2). The preliminary results of these excavations have been presented more thoroughly elsewhere (in particular, see Harrison 2011; Harrison & Osborne 2012), and thus will be summarized only briefly here.

The TAP excavations indicate an extensive Assyrian presence that encompassed Tayinat's entire upper mound, or citadel. The layout of the citadel appears to have followed a well-organized plan comprised of large public buildings. Although excavations are ongoing, and the interpretation of their results therefore necessarily preliminary, they nevertheless have consistently revealed the remains of large – indeed monumental – building complexes, constructed using remarkably standardized building methods and materials. These include a newly excavated temple (Building XVI) in Field 2, part of a larger sacred precinct (see further below), a sprawling courtyard-style building along the eastern edge of the upper mound (Field 5), and an enormous structure built of similarly constructed mud brick walls to the north (Field 6). Together with the palatial buildings uncovered by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition, in particular the renovated *bīt hilāni* (Building I) of the West Central Area and the governor's residence (Building IX) in the southeast sector, they portray a carefully planned Neo-Assyrian administrative complex, replicating the principal functional components of royal citadels in the Assyrian heartland, albeit on a smaller scale.

Building XVI and the Neo-Assyrian Sacred Precinct

Building XVI was excavated over two field seasons in 2008 and 2009. The excavations revealed the destroyed remains of a rectangular structure, approximately 9 x 21 m in size, oriented to the south, and perpendicular to the similarly built temple (Building II) excavated by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition to the southwest. Both temples faced on to a paved central courtyard (Fig. 23.3). The Building XVI excavations indicate at least two distinct phases of construction

and use, with the terminal phase dating to the seventh century BC (for a more thorough description of Building XVI, see Harrison 2011, 32–4; 2012; Harrison & Osborne 2012). Although both temples exhibit the characteristics of the temple *in antis* religious architectural tradition indigenous to West Syria and the Levant, in their terminal phase they were renovated and transformed into proto-typical Neo-Assyrian *Langraum* temples (Harrison 2012, 17–19; Harrison & Osborne 2012, 133, 139).

In this final phase, Building XVI was approached from the paved central courtyard to the south by means of a wide limestone staircase, which led to a brick-paved porch that supported an ornately carved basalt column base. The porch, in turn, led to a central room largely devoid of material culture, except small fragments of scrap metal, including bronze rivets, gold and silver foil, a carved eye inlay, and several pieces of carved ivory inlay. Though heavily burned and damaged, these remains suggest the central room had been equipped with furniture, and perhaps a statue.

A set of piers separated the central room from a small back room, the inner sanctum of the temple, which contained a rectangular platform, or podium, made of fired brick, similar in shape to the bricks that paved the building's entrance. The podium was mounted by steps set in each of its two southern corners, and a free-standing mud brick installation, possibly an altar, stood on its eastern side. The room had also been burned intensely by fire, preserving a wealth of cultic paraphernalia, including gold, bronze and iron implements, libation vessels, a large Assyrian Glazed Ware jar and other ornately decorated ritual objects (Harrison & Osborne 2012, 134–7). The assembled pottery included several oil lamps, a pot stand and a small jug, all dated comfortably to the seventh century BC. A concentration of metal objects, including damaged pieces of bronze sheet metal similar to fragments found in the central room, large and small nails, bosses, and four cotter pins littered the surface of the podium immediately to the west of the altar-like installation, apparently part of wall fixtures or fittings for wooden furniture.

The architectural renovations introduced to Buildings II and XVI during their terminal use-phases, in particular their fired brick floors and elevated podiums, and the artifacts associated with this final phase, most notably the late Neo-Assyrian cuneiform tablets found in Building XVI (see further below), document their conversion into an Assyrian religious complex, or sacred precinct, in the late eighth or early seventh century BC. This transformation replicated a well-established Assyrian double temple tradition



Figure 23.3. Plan of the Neo-Assyrian Sacred Precinct at Tayinat, including the perpendicularly oriented langraum temples, Buildings II and XVI (created by S. Batiuk).

best exemplified by the perpendicularly oriented twin temples in the Ziggurat Temple complex on the royal citadel at Khorsabad (Loud 1936, frontispiece). Furthermore, excavations in 2011 revealed that Platform XV, assigned by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition to this period, was linked directly to Building XVI by a mud brick paved courtyard, confirming that it formed an integral part of the larger religious complex. In light of the similarities with the structural layout of the royal citadel at Khorsabad, it seems reasonable to suggest that Platform XV might have served as an elevated platform for a cultic monument, perhaps even a small ziggurat-like structure. Although a full understanding of the architectural relationships of the various structures and installations that comprised the Tayinat sacred precinct must await further investigation, they would appear to have belonged to a single sprawling complex erected by the Assyrians during their transformation of Tayinat into a provincial administrative centre in the late eighth century BC.

The Esarhaddon oath tablet (T-1801)

The surface debris on the podium in Building XVI also included a fragmented assemblage of cuneiform tablets comprising at least eleven discrete texts, all but one preserving literary or historical documents. Eight of the documents were hemerological texts, seven of which belong to the Mesopotamian scholarly series known as *iqqur ipuš*. The assemblage also included a lexical text, a docket, and a lengthy oath tablet (T-1801) dating to the reign of Esarhaddon (Lauinger 2011, 6–7) (Fig. 23.4). As detailed elsewhere (Lauinger 2011, 9–12; Harrison & Osborne 2012, 137), the Building XVI discovery closely parallels evidence from religious contexts in the Neo-Assyrian heartland, most notably in the Ezida, or Temple of Nabu complex, at Nimrud, which produced a similar collection of tablets in a room directly opposite the entrance to the Nabu shrine (Postgate & Reade 1980, 309, fig. 2), but also the famous Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon (VTE), found in



Figure 23.4. *Photograph of the restored Esarhaddon oath tablet (T-1801) (photograph by J. Unruh).*

a throne room adjacent to the primary temple complex (Wiseman 1958, 1–3). Similar tablet collections have also been found in the environs of the Nabu temples at Khorsabad (Loud & Altman 1938, 46, 60, 62, pls. 19C, 24D) and Nineveh (Fincke 2004, 55).

T-1801 records a loyalty oath (*adê*) imposed by Esarhaddon on the governor (*bēl pāhiti*) of Kunalia in 672 BC (Lauinger 2011, 8–12; 2012), binding him to Ashurbanipal, Esarhaddon’s chosen successor. The text of the Tayinat ‘oath tablet’ (*tuppi adê*) closely parallels the 674 lines of the Nimrud Vassal Treaties. The similarities extend to the size and shape of the tablet (40 x 28 cm), its general format (four columns on each side, proceeding from left to right), and the names and dates with which it was sealed (Lauinger 2011, 8–9). The sealing of the Tayinat oath tablet, moreover, appears to have coincided with important ceremonies that took place in Assyria in 672 BC, at which the vassals, officials and representatives of ‘all over whom Esarhaddon exercises rule and dominion’ were assembled and swore loyalty to the Assyrian king and his son Ashurbanipal (Wiseman 1958, 3–4; see now also Fales 2012).

Despite the formulaic nature of the Tayinat oath tablet, and its close correspondence to the Nimrud *adê* texts, subtle but significant differences do occur. These include orthographic and linguistic variations, occasionally diverging divisions within some sections

(Lauinger 2011, 9), and two curses not present in the Nimrud versions, the first invoking the divine couple Adad and Šāla of Kurba’il (T vi 45), and the second the goddess Šarrat-Ekron (T vi 47), possibly a reference to the same Lady of Ekron named in a temple inscription found at Tel Miqne (ancient Ekron) (Lauinger 2012, 90–1, 113, 119).

The Neo-Assyrian provincial administration at Tayinat

The most striking departure, however, concerns the identity of the oath taker on the Tayinat tablet. In contrast to the Nimrud exemplars, where a named individual is identified, believed to have been a Median vassal in each case, the Tayinat tablet (lines T i 1-12; for transliteration and translation see Lauinger 2012, 91–92, 112) provides only the office of the oath taker, specifically the *bēl pāhiti*, or governor, of Kunalia, and sixteen unnamed officials and/or administrative units, all part of the local provincial administration. The Tayinat tablet follows the tripartite hierarchical presentation of the individuals who take the oath in the Nimrud versions, including use of the preposition ‘with’ (*issi*) to mark each level of the hierarchy, but introduces its own unique list of participants at each level (Fig. 23.5). The office of the governor,

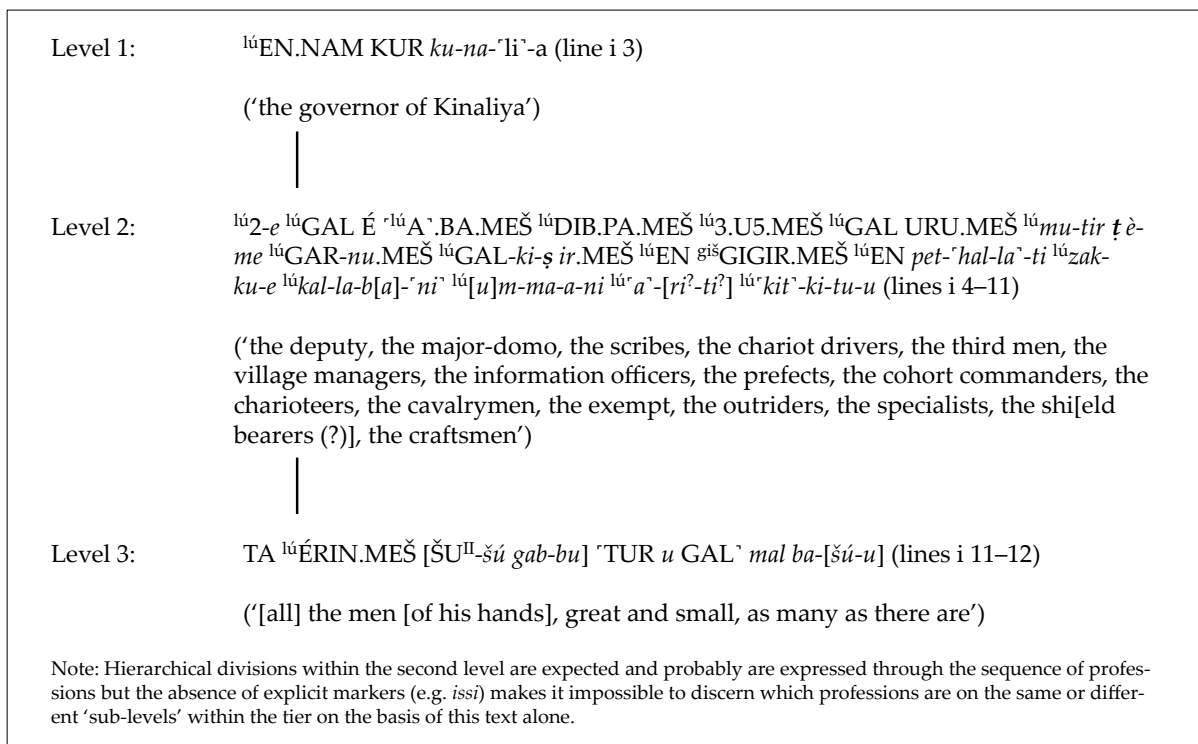


Figure 23.5. The Tripartite Hierarchy of the Kunalia Provincial Administration (after Lauinger 2012, 91–2, 112–13).

not surprisingly, heads the hierarchy, replacing the princes (*bēl āli*) named in the Nimrud documents. He is followed by the list of sixteen officials, who parallel the unnamed sons and grandsons of the *bēl āli*. The third and final tier is comprised of ‘all the men of his hands, great and small, as many as there are’, and corresponds to the residents of the city of the *bēl āli* and ‘all the men of his hands, as many as there are’ in the Nimrud texts (Lauinger 2012, 113). As Lauinger observes, the anonymity of the *bēl pāhiti* and his officials undoubtedly was intended to facilitate administrative flexibility as personnel changed, while the omission of sons and grandsons likely reflects the non-hereditary nature of the governorship, which is in keeping with Tiglath-pileser’s appointment of a eunuch (*ša rēši*) as governor of Kunalia (see above).

By contrast, it is not clear that the list of officials adheres to a strict hierarchical or administrative order. The first two listed officials, the deputy (*šaknu*) and major domo (*rab bēti*), follow the line of authority reflected in other sources, as we have seen (cf. Postgate 2007, 352, Diagram 2), but it is less evident whether the remaining officials on the list follow any particular order. The possibility that they might, however, given the basic hierarchical structure of the sequence as a whole, is an intriguing prospect that deserves further investigation. At first glance, the list also appears to be a random mix of civilian and military offices. Nevertheless, there is a discernable grouping of civilian officials (with the possible exception of the ‘chariot drivers’) that follows the major domo (the ‘scribes’, ‘third men’, ‘village managers’, and ‘information officers’), and then a second of military officers and specialists (the ‘prefects’, ‘cohort commanders’, ‘charioteers’, ‘cavalrymen’, ‘the exempt’, ‘the outriders’, ‘the specialists’, and ‘shield bearers’). A possible third administrative category may be represented by ‘the craftsmen’, who appear at the end of the list. A more systematic examination of the occurrences of these administrative personnel in Neo-Assyrian imperial records is needed to determine whether they reflect a meaningfully organized provincial administrative structure.

Summary observations

The discovery of the Esarhaddon oath tablets (*tuppi adê*) in temple contexts emphasizes their decidedly religious character. Steymans (2004; 2006, 342–4) was the first to suggest the intriguing possibility that they were intentionally kept in places their oath-takers were expected to visit on a regular basis. As we have seen, the Tayinat tablets, including the oath tablet, were found distributed atop an elevated podium and

adjacent to an altar-like installation within the inner sanctum of Building XVI. Furthermore, as Lauinger has observed (2011, 10–11), two tablets (T-1923 and T-1927) preserve markings indicative of a class of amulet-shaped votive tablets, and had perforations that suggest they might have been suspended or mounted. The Tayinat tablets, in other words, were designed intentionally for display within a religious setting. Moreover, there is good reason to believe that the rituals performed in the Tayinat temple precinct were linked specifically to covenant renewal ceremonies, conducted as part of annual *akītu* ceremonies at which the local ruling elite affirmed their continuing loyalty to the Assyrian king (Lauinger 2013, 110–12; Harrison 2014, 418–19).

The ceremonies and rituals performed within the sacred precinct also help to illuminate the broader Neo-Assyrian imperial project at Tayinat. Together with the impressive public buildings and redesigned Neo-Hittite royal citadel, they offer a revealing glimpse into the imperial ambitions of Tiglath-pileser III and his successors. They portray a sophisticated use of the material form to project visually intimidating images of Assyrian power, coupled with a rigidly hierarchical – though fundamentally non-bureaucratic – provincial administration efficiently designed to secure and integrate newly conquered lands into an ever expanding empire.

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 for each of our excavation seasons, the staff of the Antakya Archaeological Museum for their assistance over the years, and the landowners who have generously permitted us to conduct research on their land. Each season’s successful results would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of all our project staff.

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