

# Some Preliminary Thoughts on the Tablet Collection in Building XVI from Tell Tayinat

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## Abstract

*This article provides a first report on the collection of 11 cuneiform tablets found in 2009, at Tell Tayinat in Building XVI, a Neo-Assyrian temple. It offers: a description of work conducted on the tablets through October 2010 on the collection; an overview of the individual tablets that comprise the collection; a discussion of the historical background to one of the more significant finds, a new manuscript of the so-called Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon; and a concluding argument that this particular tablet and at least one other in the collection were set up on display in the temple's inner sanctum in antiquity.*

## Résumé

*Cet article offre un rapport préliminaire sur les onze tablettes cunéiformes découvertes en 2009 à Tell Tayinat dans le Complexe XVI, un temple néo-assyrien. On y retrouve un compte-rendu du travail effectué sur les tablettes jusqu'en octobre 2010, une description sommaire de chaque tablette, ainsi qu'une discussion du contexte historique qui éclaire la trouvaille la plus importante, celle d'un nouveau manuscrit des soi-disant Traités de Vassalité d'Esarhaddon. En guise de conclusion, l'auteur avance l'hypothèse que ce manuscrit ainsi qu'au moins une autre tablette du même lot auraient été exposées dans le sanctuaire du temple dans l'antiquité.*

## Introduction

One of the more exciting finds from the Tayinat Archaeological Project's 2009 season was a small collection of cuneiform tablets from Building XVI, an Iron Age II temple on the site, which I refer to in this article simply as "the temple."<sup>1</sup> The primary aim of this article is to present some preliminary thoughts on this collection. I begin with an overview of the tablets, after which I examine the collection as a whole and discuss the season's single most important epigraphic find, a new manuscript of the so-called "Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon," best known from eight tablets discovered at the Assyrian city of Nimrud (Wiseman 1958, see Parpola and Watanabe 1988: No. 6). Although the tablets are commonly known as "vassal treaties" following the designation of their initial editor, criticism of this term began shortly after publication (e.g. Gelb 1962 and recently Altman 2010: 29 n. 71, but see Parpola and Watanabe 1988: xxx–xxxii for the suggestion that the Nimrud tablets functioned as both oath tablets and vassal treaties). Given the particularities of the new manuscript, both the terms "vassal" and "treaty" do seem to be a bit misleading. As the tablets are inscribed with an oath of loyalty (Akkadian *adê*) pertaining to the succession of Esarhaddon's heir, Aššurbanipal, I refer to the text of these tablets as a "loyalty oath," and I refer to the tablets as "oath tablets."

A secondary aim of this article is to provide a published record of the progress of work on the Tayinat tablets. Accordingly, before presenting the overview of the epigraphic finds, I will briefly outline the nature of that work. As mentioned

above, the tablets were excavated during the 2009 season while I, the project epigrapher, was not present at the site. At that time, the conservator did an initial cleaning of all of the tablets save the oath tablet, which required extensive conservation, and the photographer sent me photographs of all of the cleaned tablets except for the docket (see below). From the photographs, I identified many of the tablets as manuscripts of the Mesopotamian scholarly series *iqqur ipuš*. In February 2010, the conservator and I travelled to the Hatay Archeological Museum to work on the tablets. Unfortunately, our visit met with some visa difficulties, with the result that, in the end, we had three and a half days to work in the museum. During that time, I copied and photographed the tablets that had already been cleaned, and the conservator, following my direction, proceeded first to clean the leftmost column then a horizontal strip across all four columns at the top of the up-turned face of what we would discover was the oath tablet. My aim was to ascertain whether the up-turned face was the obverse or reverse and to try to get as much information as possible from a limited amount of cleaned text. The left-most column would, I surmised, provide the opening lines of the text if on the obverse or a colophon if on the reverse. The horizontal strip across the top hopefully would provide a varied sample of the text's contents. After these areas were cleaned, our time in the museum was up, and I photographed what had been cleaned of the oath tablet so far.

Working from these photos upon my return from Turkey, I identified the tablet as a new manuscript of the so-called "Vassal Treaties" of Esarhaddon, and this identification provided the

direction for the cleaning efforts that resumed during the 2010 excavation season at Tayinat. First, the conservator cleaned the bottom of the rightmost column, where we now expected to find a colophon, and, happily, the colophon cooperated by being there. Next, she cleaned the remainder of what we now knew to be the reverse of the tablet. I was not at the site during this process, but I remained in frequent contact with both the conservator and also the photographer, guiding them via photographs to those areas that needed additional cleaning. After the reverse was cleaned, the tablet was flipped and the conservator began to clean the obverse. At this point, the season was reaching its end, and so I asked the conservator to focus on two points: First, to establish whether or not the tablet was, like the Nimrud manuscripts, sealed; and second, to clean especially the third line of the tablet where, on the basis of the parallels from Nimrud, I hoped to learn the identity of the individual taking the oath. As is presented in more detail below, the conservator was successful on both these points: The tablet was sealed like the Nimrud manuscripts; and the oath was taken by the governor of the province and perhaps others.

I hope that this description of the epigraphic work up to this point emphasizes the early stage of its progress so far. The majority of my work on the Tayinat tablets has focused on the oath tablet in particular, and a majority of that work has been devoted to guiding the conservator in cleaning the text. So I must emphasize the title of this article: The thoughts published here are presented with the intention of keeping the scholarly community informed about the method, progress, and results of our work on the tablets to this point. But these thoughts are very much preliminary and need to be understood as such.

### Overview of the Epigraphic Material

In total, 11 epigraphic finds were recovered from the temple in the 2009 season, although this figure does not include fragments that were later found to join (one of these fragments, T1920a, was not recognized until 2010 when it was identified in the course of processing soil and artifact debris). The finds are presented here in order of field number:

1. T1701 – *iqqur ipuṣ*
2. T1801 – the oath tablet
3. T1899 – a docket
4. T1920 + T1920a – an unidentified hemerology
5. T1921 – a lexical text
6. T1922 – *iqqur ipuṣ*
7. T1923 – *iqqur ipuṣ*
8. T1927 – *iqqur ipuṣ*
9. T1928 – *iqqur ipuṣ*
10. T1930 – *iqqur ipuṣ*
11. T1931 – *iqqur ipuṣ*

As is apparent from this list, every tablet but one is scholarly or historical in nature. The one exception is a docket, with which this overview begins.

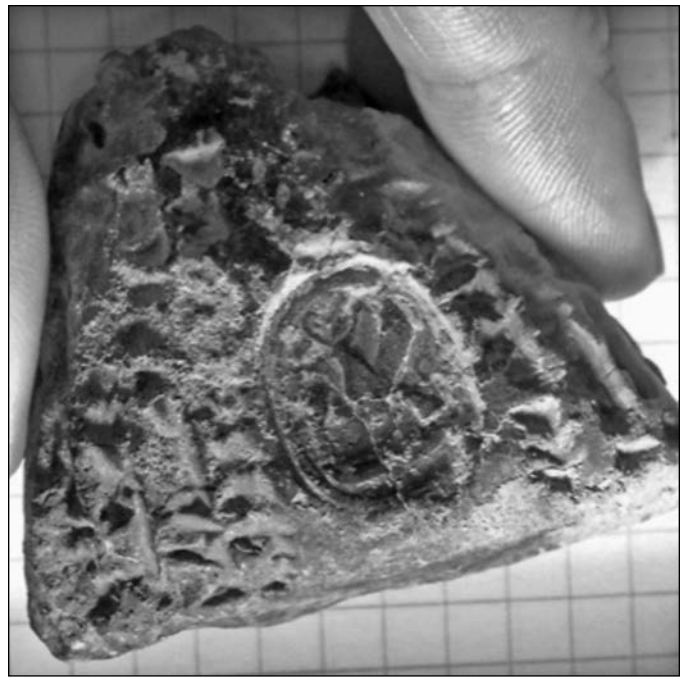


Figure 1: T1899, showing seal impression

### A Docket: T1899

T1899 (figure 1) is a triangular clay docket similar to others known from Nineveh and Nimrud (Herbordt 1992: 68–69, Radner 2008: 484). The docket carries 11 lines of text and is inscribed with a stamp seal. Unfortunately, the docket has been badly burnt to the point of illegibility, and it will require a good deal more conservation and thorough study before we are able to learn more from it. The seal impression, which is clear, depicts an Egyptianizing falcon wearing the double crown of Egypt. This impression probably indicates the administrative office responsible for the commodity to which the docket was attached (Radner 2008: 486), although as of yet I have not found a parallel for this impression (for other seal impressions with Egyptianizing representations, see Herbordt 1992: 120–21 and pl. 18).

### *Iqqur ipuṣ*: T1701, T1922, T1923, T1927–1931

The vast majority of the other tablets from the temple – 7 out of the 10 – are manuscripts of the Mesopotamian scholarly series known in ancient times as *iqqur ipuṣ*. The Tayinat manuscripts of *iqqur ipuṣ* all follow the “tabular format,” the least-attested of the various organizing schemes in which the series was written in antiquity (Labat 1965: 11–12). In the tabular format, the tablet is arranged as a table in which the x-axis provides the sequence of months and the y-axis lists various activities and eventualities. The complete sequence of months is listed across the top of the tablet. If a month is auspicious for a particular activity or eventuality, the month name is repeated in the proper position in the table below. This meaning is communicated by the sign ŠE, which is repeated to form the entire final column.

T1923 is the best preserved of these tablets: The obverse (figure 2), mostly preserved, is inscribed with the introductory line and then 37 lines of protases. Only about one-third of the

reverse is preserved (figure 3), which is divided into three sections. The majority of the reverse preserves six columns that list auspicious days within each month vertically in increasing order and terminating again in the sign ŠE (the headings for these columns are not preserved and it is unclear how many columns were originally written on the tablet). Below these columns and separated from them by a horizontal ruling are three lines, written horizontally, that list auspicious days for months *Nisannu*, *Ulūlu*, and intercalary *Addaru*. The leftmost column forms the third section of the reverse. It contains a fragmentary colophon stating that the tablet was copied and collated from the original by a scribe whose name should probably be restored to *Sîn-šumu-ibni*, but who, to my knowledge, is not known from other contemporary cuneiform texts.

Finally, the top of T1923 has a broad rectangular projection. This projection is incised with double-crosses and decorated with *Winkelhaken* on both the obverse and the reverse. Furthermore, the projection is pierced through its horizontal axis. I return to this decorated projection and its piercing towards the end of this article, as these features are quite important for understanding not just how this tablet was used in antiquity but also how we characterize the entire collection of tablets to which it belonged.

The same decoration is also present on the left side of T1927 (figure 4). T1927 is another manuscript of *iqqur ipuš*, preserving the left side of the tablet, but unfortunately neither the tablet's top nor bottom edges remain. Only one face is preserved. Fourteen lines of protases remain on this face, as well columns for the first four months of the year.

T1701 is a relatively large fragment that consists of the middle part of a tablet face. Part of the upper edge remains, but the lower edge, right side, and left side are no longer preserved. In what remains, the face is inscribed with the table for months IV–XII with the final column of repeated ŠE signs, as in T1923. The table occupies the upper half of the tablet. The lower half lists favorable days for each month in the month column, presented in descending order again as in T1923. For this reason, the preserved face is most likely the reverse.

The identity of the remaining three fragments is clear from the tabular format they present. T1930 is the largest, being the top of a tablet inscribed with the table for months IV–XII (though most likely originally part of a different tablet than T1701) and preserving eight lines of text. Only one face is preserved. T1931 is a small fragment from the center of a tablet preserving only one face that shows 13 lines of the table for months V–VIII. And the smallest fragment, T1928, presents six lines for two months on its only preserved face. The sign for only one month is fully preserved, with the traces of four more present at the broken edges. Because of the fragment's abraded surface it is unclear at present which month is indicated.

Finally, T1922 is also *iqqur ipuš* even if it does not preserve the tabular format. Rather, the fragment comes from the center of a tablet's leftmost column, that is, from the protases. Fourteen whole or partial signs preserve parts of six protases on six ruled lines. The majority of signs are abraded and difficult to read,



Figure 2: T1923, obverse

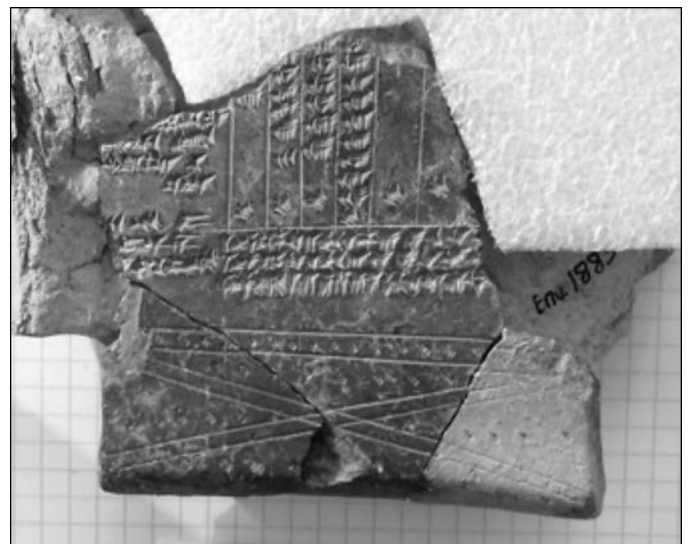


Figure 3: T1923, reverse



Figure 4: T1927

but two signs, written in lines 3' and 4', can be read *iz-qup*, “he planted.” Similar protases are preserved in the *série générale* recension of *iqqur ipuš* (§45-47, see Labat 1965: 112-14):

DIŠ ina MN <sup>giš</sup>KIRI<sub>6</sub> *iz-qup*

DIŠ ina MN <sup>giš</sup>KIRI<sub>6</sub> <sup>giš</sup>GIŠIMMAR *iz-qup*

DIŠ ina MN <sup>giš</sup>KIRI<sub>6</sub> ina ŠĀ URU *iz-qup*

Mostly likely 3' and 4' of T1922 correspond to *iqqur ipuš* §46 and 47, as, two lines later, the preserved signs in lines 5' and 6' of T1922 are IŠ and *ud-diš*, “he renewed,” and in the *série générale* recension, the following two sections read:

§48 DIŠ ina MN GIBIL-*eš/iš*

§49 DIŠ ina MN <sup>giš</sup>KIRI<sub>6</sub> *ud-diš*

(see Labat 1965: 114–116).<sup>2</sup>

#### An Unidentified Hemerology: T1920+T1920a

Both of these fragments were excavated during the 2009 season. However, T1920a was not identified until the soil and artifact debris with which it had been collected was processed during the 2010 season. At that time, the conservator joined the two fragments. The joined fragment constitutes the right side of a tablet with only one face preserved. That face is inscribed with fifteen lines. Lines two through fifteen list auspicious days for the twelve months of the year plus the two possible intercalary months. The first line should help to identify the tablet. Unfortunately, the top of the line has been sheared off, and I have not yet made sense of the traces that remain.

#### A Lexical Text: T1921

The fragment is the lower right corner of a bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian lexical list inscribed on both faces. The surface of the tablet is somewhat eroded and the lines seem to preserve a number of variant writings, but the text follows closely that of tablet III of the famous Mesopotamian lexical series *ur<sub>5</sub>-ra = hubullu* (section *giš-šim*).

#### The Oath Tablet: T1801

The final epigraphic find of the 2009 season is T1801, the oath tablet concerning the succession of Aššurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn imposed by Esarhaddon (figure 5). This tablet records an oath imposed on the governor of the province of Kunalia on or around the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the second month of the year 672 BC. The text is, of course, not new: It is another example of the so-called “Vassal Treaties” of Esarhaddon excavated from the Nabû temple at Nimrud in 1955 and published by Donald Wiseman (Wiseman 1958, see Watanabe 1987 and Parpola and Watanabe 1988). Wiseman was able to establish that the more than 350 fragments found at Nimrud belonged to eight different oath tablets. The oaths recorded on these tablets were sworn by eight different city-rulers (Akkadian *bēl āli*), who governed areas in Assyria’s eastern periphery, from the region of modern Suleimaniya in north-eastern Iraq to Elam (Wiseman 1958: 9–13, cf. Parpola and Watanabe 1988: xxx). In addition to these eight oath tablets from Nimrud, there are also three small fragments from Assur (Weidner 1939–1941: 215 and pl. 14, see Grayson 1987: 134, and now Frahm 2009: 135–36). I describe briefly here five important features of the new oath tablet before stepping back to consider its larger historical significance.

First, the tablet was written most likely on or around the same day as the tablets from Nimrud. The colophons of two Nimrud manuscripts are dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the second month of the



Figure 5: T1801 during conservation

year – another tablet has a variant, the 16<sup>th</sup> day – in the *limu* of Nabû-bêlu-ušur, the governor of Dūr-Šarrukku, that is, 672 BC. The Tayinat tablet’s colophon has the same date, although, unfortunately, the top wedges of the number indicating the day are damaged. From what is preserved, the day could be from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup>.

Second, the text of the oath tablet largely parallels that of the texts from Nimrud. Even amongst themselves, the Nimrud texts show orthographic or linguistic variation, and the Tayinat exemplar continues that trend. One of the most significant variations is the repetition in the Tayinat manuscript of an entire section, although with different line breaks and some variant orthography the second time around. Sections are also occasionally divided differently in the Tayinat manuscript than at Nimrud, so that what is one section at Nimrud may appear as two at Tayinat, or, in contrast, what is two sections at Nimrud may be only one at Tayinat.

Third, like the Nimrud tablets, the Tayinat tablet was sealed with the divine seals of the god Aššur. Unfortunately, the seal impressions are not preserved, but the edge remains on the left and right sides of the obverse, and at the very top of column i, one reads NA<sub>4</sub>.KIŠIB <sup>a</sup>*a-šur*<sub>4</sub> LUGAL DINGIR.MEŠ, “Seal of Aššur, king of the gods,” part of a caption that the Nimrud tablets have fully preserved.

Fourth, the Tayinat tablet displays a similar format as the Nimrud tablets, in which the columns proceed from left to right on the reverse and not from right to left as is typical with cuneiform tablets. This format means that the Tayinat tablet, like the Nimrud tablets, needs to be rotated along its vertical, and not its horizontal, axis in order for a reader to move from the obverse to the reverse (Watanabe 1988: 265).

And fifth, the person swearing the oath is specified as <sup>10</sup>EN.NAM KUR *ku-na-li-a*, “the provincial governor of the land of Kunalia” (i 3). This corroborates the identification of Tell Tayinat with Kunalia, the older name for the capital city of the Neo-Hittite state, and later Assyrian province, Pattina/Unqi (see Bagg 2007 s.v. Kunulua citing previous literature). Interestingly, the text uses this older name for the city and not the name known from contemporary cuneiform sources, Kullania (see Bagg 2007 s.v. Kullania citing previous literature). Yet, like some of those later sources, it prefaces the name with the logogram or determinative KUR “land,” and not the sign URU, “city” with which the earlier attestations of Kunalia and its alternate form Kunulua are found.

The governor is not named in the text but is referred to only by his title, and this manner of reference may have been intentionally employed in order to ensure that the oath would remain valid for successive governors of the province. Furthermore, the governor may not be the only person named in the text as swearing the oath. Unfortunately, the remainder of the section has a substantial mineral accretion on it so that only a few signs are legible at present. Even accounting for different line breaks, though, it is difficult to see how these signs could fit the text of the oath tablet as preserved in the parallel manuscripts from Nimrud. Furthermore, while the opening

section is fully preserved, if at the moment illegible, a loose fragment from elsewhere on the oath tablet preserves text that parallels lines i 5–9 of the Nimrud manuscripts. In other words, the opening lines of the Tayinat text simply cannot continue on as in the Nimrud manuscripts. Therefore it seems possible that lines i 4–12 of the Tayinat tablet name other members of the provincial administration in addition to the governor who swore the oath.<sup>3</sup>

### The Historical Background to T1801

As this last point makes clear, work on the Tayinat oath tablet is still at an early stage. Yet already we can safely advance some preliminary thoughts on the oath tablet’s larger historical background, in part because its very existence helps to answer some historical questions. For example, Wiseman’s publication of the Nimrud tablets marks the beginning of a scholarly debate focused on the fact that the persons named in those tablets come in all cases from Assyria’s eastern periphery.<sup>4</sup> Is this specificity meaningful or is it just an accident of history? That is, do we have only these texts because only the Median vassals, as they are conventionally termed, swore this oath or had their oaths preserved in written form? Or were similar tablets written for the other subjects of the Assyrian king so that it is just chance that our preserved tablets record those taken by only Median vassals?

In support of the latter position, Aššurbanipal’s own inscriptions state that his father Esarhaddon “gathered the people of Assyria, great and small, from the Upper to the Lower Sea” to swear it (Streck 1916: 4 lines 18–19). Letters of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, too, demonstrate that a wide variety of officials in the Assyrian administration swore loyalty oaths to the Assyrian king (see Radner 2006: 360–63 for a number of examples). For some scholars, this evidence is enough to suggest that many other examples of the Nimrud oath tablets existed in antiquity but now are lost or remain to be excavated (Watanabe 1987: 4, Grayson 1991: 129).

However, other scholars have sought to find meaning in the Median focus of the Nimrud texts. For example, Diakonoff (1985: 109) assumed that “written documents were evidently only composed for semi-independent rulers” because “the number of those taking the oath in the Assyrian empire was too large for all the oaths being set out in writing.” Parpola and Watanabe (1988: xxxi) pointed out that some and perhaps all of these rulers became Assyrian vassals within a period of three years before 672 BC and suggested that in addition to “the texts’ obvious character as loyalty oaths,” they possessed a secondary function as “instruments relegating the oath-taking rulers to a status of permanent vassalage.” And, in perhaps the most extreme argument of this type, Liverani argued that “the Medes who submitted to the oath were living in the Assyrian palace(s) and performing the service of a guard corps for the Assyrian king, specifically as bodyguards of the crown prince,” (1995: 60) so that “the fact that we have recovered only the Mede oaths can now be explained in the simplest terms: There were no similar oaths with other ‘vassals’” (1995: 62).

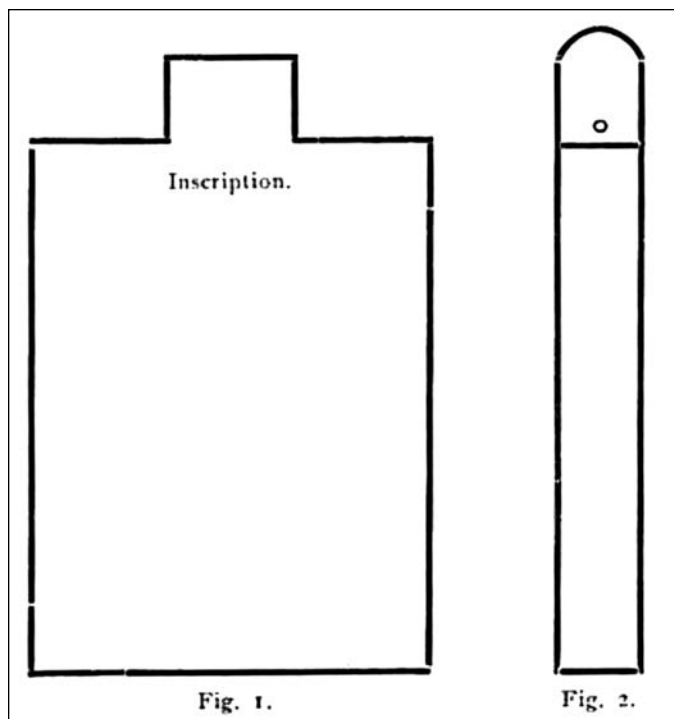


Figure 6: King 1896: 50

While Parpola and Watanabe's idea of multi-functionality certainly remains valid, the very presence of the oath tablet in the Tayinat temple drastically alters this line of reasoning. The Medes who are named in the Nimrud tablets possessed no special status in the Assyrian empire – whether as a royal bodyguard or as newly-minted vassals – that required that they and they alone swear this loyalty oath, for most likely on the same day on which they did, the governor of Kunalia, an Assyrian official in charge of a province on the other side of the empire, swore the same oath.

Perhaps, rather than focusing solely on the identity of the oath-takers in the Nimrud tablets, it is more profitable to consider that identity within the context of where the tablets were stored. Radner (2006: 371–73) emphasized the significance of the single small fragment of the oath tablet from the city of Assur known at the time, and that significance is increased by the recent publication of two more such fragments (Frahm 2009: 135–36). Their place of discovery demonstrates that not all of these particular oath tablets were stored at Nimrud. There must, then, be some reason that the Median tablets *were* stored there. In the same volume as Radner's article, Steymans (2006: 343) offered a suggestion in this regard:

in Kalhu gab es — wei auch in Ninive und Dur-Šarrukin — ein *pirru*, also ein Arbeitskommando, das mit der Tributablieferung zu tun hatte und in das Menschen kamen. Viele Briefe aus Kalhu erwähnen die Lieferung von Pferden und geben als deren Herkunftsgebiet den Zagros an. War die Stadt der Ort, wo Tribut aus der Zagrosregion abgeliefert werden mußte, der auch aus Pferden bestand, kommt dem Fundort der VTE, dem Nabû Tempel, besondere Bedeutung zu.

This provocative suggestion implies that the Nimrud tablets were stored at Kalhu because it was expected that the Median

vassals or their representatives would visit the city.

And of course we can go into still greater detail about the storage place of the Nimrud tablets. The tablets were found in the Ezida, Nabû's temple at the city, and George has elucidated the connection. As the Nimrud tablets were sealed with the three divine seals of the god Aššur, one of which describes itself in its own seal inscription as the Seal of Destinies, the sealed Nimrud tablets became, “on the mythological plane,” Tablets of Destinies themselves (George 1986: 141). In the text of the Nimrud tablets, as elsewhere, Nabû bears the epithet *nāši tuppi šimāt ilāni*, “bearer of the tablet of destinies of the gods.” Accordingly, the Nimrud tablets needed to be stored by their proper custodian in the Ezida (George 1986: 141–42, cf. Radner 2006: 369). That Nabû, the son of Marduk and thus the crown-prince of the gods, was safeguarding oaths of loyalty to the crown-prince of Assyria could only have made this choice of repository all the more appropriate (Fales 2001: 232).

Putting George's and Steymans's arguments together, we can propose a scenario pregnant with implication: The Nimrud tablets were, in some sense, divine tablets that were deliberately stored in a location which it was anticipated the oath-takers would visit at a later date. But what is that implication? What was anticipated would occur when the Median vassals visited? Can the Tayinat oath tablet, and in particular, the place and method of *its* storage, help us answer these questions?

At first glance, it might seem that such an approach risks comparing dissimilar objects, for the Nimrud tablets were stored in the Assyrian heartland, that is, with the recipient of the oath, while the Tayinat tablet was stored in a province, that is, with oath-taker. On the other hand, besides the obvious parallel that both the Tayinat and Nimrud tablets were found in a temple, we must remember that provincial subjects had their payments to Assyria mediated by the governor. The Median vassals brought their tribute directly to the Assyrian central administration. And, as the Median vassals swore the loyalty oath not only on their own behalf but also on behalf of their subjects, it seems likely that the provincial governor swore the oath also on behalf of his subjects, although this must remain open until the first section of the tablet is fully legible. In other words, there is good reason to believe that the relationship of the provincial subjects to the Tayinat tablet replicated on a smaller scale the relationship of the Median vassals to the Nimrud tablets. Therefore, conclusions we reach as to the social context of the Tayinat tablet may be broadly applicable to the Nimrud tablets as well.

So how do we define this social context? It seems best to begin not with the oath tablet but with other tablets from the temple, because as a guiding principle, we first want to examine the relationship of the oath tablet to the other tablets with which it was kept.

### The Tablet Collection

In this regard, we should recall the double crosses incised on two of the better-preserved tablets of *iqqur ipuš* from the temple. To my knowledge, the first substantive discussion of similar double crosses is Reiner 1960, in which is published a small amulet in the British Museum inscribed with an extract of the



Figure 7: T1923, showing piercing

Erra Epic (cf. also the more recent discussion of Maul 1994: 175–90, which largely agrees with Reiner’s conclusions concerning the functional origin of the decoration and shape of amulet tablets as is discussed below). Reiner connected the amulet to clay tablets of the Erra Epic that share the same shape. In his publication of two such tablets, King (1896: 51; see figure 6) characterized the shape as having “a rectangular projection at the top which is pierced through horizontally, and by which it was evidently intended that the tablet should be hung up.” Both the tablets and Reiner’s amulet were house blessings intended to protect the residents of the house in which they were hung from the plague, as the epilogue of the Erra epic promises will be the case (King 1896: 53, cf. Reiner 1960: 150–51).

The tablets published by King are also incised with double crosses, and Reiner connected their form and decoration to a number of *namburbî* that are similarly shaped and marked with double crosses (for example, LKA 128). For Reiner, the origins of these double crosses lay in a desire to prevent a later inscription from being added to blank clay that might alter or invalidate a tablet’s message: She pointed to other tablets of a normal tablet shape whose blank reverses are crossed out in this same fashion. Eventually, some of the triangles and squares that the double crosses formed came to be seen as magical and could be inscribed with a formulaic invocation to Marduk (Reiner 1960: 151–52).

The so-called “amulet shape” of the tablets seems also to have developed from what was a purely functional form that

allowed a tablet to be suspended, perhaps as a votive object. A wide variety of texts, some already collected in Weidner 1941–44: 363 n. 7, possess this shape, including the Khorsabad King List, and, most significantly for the matter at hand, hemerologies from Assur (KAR 147), Nimrud (CTN 458, see Hulin 1959), and Sultantepe (STT 300 – note in particular that the projection on the Sultantepe tablet is not located on the tablet’s top but on its side). As Reiner (1960: 155) noted, “it does not seem impossible that what was at first a purely functional device ... became associated with the beneficent value originally inherent only in the content, not in the shape, of the tablet, and extended to other uses.”

The better-preserved tablets of *iqqur ipuš* from the Tayinat temple are specimens of this class of tablet. Both T1923 and T1927 possess the “amulet shape”: T1923 has a projection on its top, and T1927 has a projection on its side (cf. STT 300). Both of these projections are incised with double crosses. In the case of T1923, the double crosses occur on both faces of the tablet; only one face of T1927 is preserved.<sup>5</sup> Finally, and most significantly, T1923 is also pierced horizontally through the top of the projection (figure 7). In other words, this manuscript of *iqqur ipuš* was deliberately designed for display.

And so was the oath tablet, T1801. Watanabe (1988) suggested as much for the Nimrud tablets in a discussion of their atypical rotation on the vertical axis. A consequence of this design, she noted, is that the text of the tablet’s reverse is legible if the tablet is positioned upright on its lower edge and supported.<sup>6</sup> As figure 8 shows, the Tayinat tablet confirms Watanabe’s suggestion, having a piercing through its horizontal axis that would have allowed the tablet to be supported upright.



Figure 8: T1801, showing piercing

Because of the features displayed by T1801, T1923, and, to a lesser extent, T1927, I believe that we can already advance a conclusion as to the nature of the assemblage that at least these tablets formed. I would characterize this assemblage not as an archive or a library but as a display collection. The other epigraphic finds are too fragmentary to determine whether they too were originally pierced or were supported in some other manner, and some, like the docket and the lexical list, likely had other reasons for being in the temple. But T1801 and T1923, the two best-preserved tablets from the temple, were clearly manufactured with the intent that they be put on display.

And, thanks to the careful work of the field archeologists, we





Figure 9: T1801 in situ

even have some sense of where and how these tablets were displayed in the temple. All of the epigraphic finds from the temple were excavated in its inner sanctum. Most of the inner sanctum's floor is filled by a plaster-lined mud-brick podium reached by a short series of steps in its southwest and southeast corners. In the northeast quadrant of the podium was found a large mud-brick installation, undoubtedly an altar. The tablets were found directly opposite this installation in the podium's northwest quadrant. (For a photograph of the excavation of the oath tablet and an aerial view and plan of the temple, see Harrison 2009: 185–86.)

The position and condition of the oath tablet suggest that it was discovered where it fell when the temple was destroyed. The tablet was found face down on the podium with its reverse facing up (figure 9). It was aligned with the temple's north and west walls, only a short distance from the north wall. These circumstances suggest a scenario in which the oath tablet was originally displayed in an upright position on its lower edge in front of the temple's northern wall only to topple forward during the temple's destruction. Seemingly, T1923 was displayed together with the oath tablet in the northwestern portion of the sanctum, that is, directly across from the altar.<sup>7</sup>

Was the oath tablet displayed here simply as a votive offering or to put it under the protection of the gods? Or, if we remember Steymans's suggestion that the Nimrud tablets were stored at a location the Median vassals were expected to visit, was the tablet perhaps used in rituals renewing the loyalty oath of the governor of Kunalia and his subjects? Or could it even have been an object of veneration in its own right? Our answers to these questions promise not only to illuminate new aspects of the Assyrian imperial project and its mechanisms of control, but, just as importantly, to enrich our understanding of religious practices and beliefs in the Iron Age Near East.

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## NOTES

1. It is gratifying to acknowledge the many people involved with the excavation of these tablets. These include Amanda Lahman, the square supervisor, her assistant, and their workers who brought the tablet to light; James Osborne, the area supervisor, who has informed my understanding of the tablets' archaeological context through email exchanges and his season report; Jennifer Jackson, the photographer, who kept me supplied with excellent images of the tablet through its cleaning; and Julie Unruh, the conservator, thanks to whose tireless efforts, there is any text to read at all. The work on these tablets is an ongoing collaboration that is a real pleasure to be part of, and I am grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their financial support. The initial work on this paper was done while I held the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Research Fellowship at Corpus Christi, University of Cambridge, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge also the generous support of the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation. I am further grateful to Nicholas Postgate and Eleanor Robson for discussing aspects of the tablets with me; and to Paul Delnero and Tim Harrison for their comments on drafts of this article. Of course, any and all errors are entirely my own responsibility. The siglum T is prefixed to the field numbers of objects excavated by the Tayinat Archaeological Project.
2. Cf. K.2809 iv 15–17, see Labat 1965 pl. xlv, protases for Ṭebētu from the closely-related series *enbu bēl arḫi*.
3. (The obverse was fully cleaned in the 2010 season, and this suggestion, written before that season, has now been confirmed.)
4. "It may be significant, and no mere archaeological accident, that the only extant copies of the treaty made by Esarhaddon with his subjects and vassals in support of Ashurbanipal's succession are those with his eastern neighbours" (Wiseman 1958: 9).
5. The projection of T1923 is decorated with *Winkelhaken* instead of the invocation to Marduk identified by Reiner (1960). The projection of T1927 appears to be decorated only with the double crosses.

6. “Um den ganzen Inhalt lesen zu können, mußte man folglich die auf ihrer Unterkante aufgestellte Tafel umschreiten. Die Tafel müßte fixiert und vor dem Umfallen geschützt gewesen sein” (Watanabe 1988: 265, cf. Radner 2006: 367).
  7. Fragments of T1923 were found in the same quadrant as T1801, although some of the fragments seemingly shifted off of the podium during or after the temple’s destruction. The other tablets and fragments were found in a layer of mud-brick detritus directly on top of the podium.
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