Recent Discoveries at Tayinat (Ancient Kunulu/a/Calno) and Their Biblical Implications

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1 Introduction

Recent archaeological discoveries at the site of Tell Tayinat, located on the northern bend of the Orontes River, approximately 35 km east of modern Antakya (ancient Antioch) in southeastern Turkey, offer new and important insights into biblical history and interpretation. The University of Toronto's Tayinat Archaeological Project (TAP) has begun to uncover the remains of an extensive Iron Age settlement that was founded in the late thirteenth or early twelfth centuries B.C.E., and flourished until its abandonment in the late seventh century B.C.E. The emerging archaeological and epigraphic evidence point to the rise of a powerful regional kingdom during the Early Iron Age associated with 'the Land of Palistin', comprised of an intriguing amalgam of Aegean, Anatolian (Luwian) and Bronze Age West Syrian cultural traditions, which eventually coalesced as the royal city of Kunulu/a, capital of the Neo-Hittite Kingdom of Patina/Unqi, as attested in Neo-Assyrian sources in the early ninth century B.C.E. Tayinat, or Kunulu/a, was subsequently destroyed by Tiglath-pileser III in 738 B.C.E. during his second western campaign, and then transformed into the Assyrian provincial capital of Kunalia.

As the capital of a succession of regional kingdoms and provincial districts, Tayinat preserves an important cultural and historical record. Situated at a strategic intersection linking highland Anatolia with the Levantine littoral and lowland Syro-Mesopotamian interior, it also serves as a sensitive bellwether of social and cultural change. The results of investigations at Tayinat therefore can be expected to provide broader insight regarding the cultural history of the region. This paper will review Tayinat’s archaeological history, including the results of the ongoing Tayinat Archaeological Project’s investigations, and the historical and biblical insights they have provided to date. The presentation will be grouped into three general time periods: the Early Iron Age, or Iron I (ca. 1200–900 B.C.E.), which coincides with the emergence of the Land of Palistin, the Iron II (ca. 900–738 B.C.E.), which witnessed the maturation of the Neo-Hittite Kingdom of Patina, and the Iron III (ca. 738–600 B.C.E.), the period of Neo-Assyrian hegemony, which saw Tayinat transformed into a provincial capital.
2 History of Exploration

Tell Tayinat forms a large low-lying mound approximately one kilometer north of the current course of the Orontes River, and some 700 m northwest of Tell Atchana (ancient Alalakh), its Bronze Age sister settlement. Tayinat sits within the flood plain of the Orontes River, at the point where the river enters the Amuq Plain before working its way westward toward Antakya and the Mediterranean coast (Fig. 1). A topographic survey, conducted as part of the Tayinat Archaeological Project, has revealed a settlement morphology comprised of an upper mound, or citadel (ca. 20 ha in size), and a sprawling lower mound, now hidden by the alluvium of the Orontes floodplain, which extends from the upper mound to the north, east and southeast. Satellite imagery and sherd density distributions indicate that this lower settlement extended north from the upper mound for approximately 200 m, and to the east for approximately 100 m, resulting in a composite settlement size of 500 × 700 m, or an area encompassing approximately 35–40 ha (Fig. 2).

2.1 The Syrian-Hittite Expedition

Large-scale excavations were conducted by the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute over the course of four field seasons between 1935 and 1938 as part of its Syrian-Hittite expedition. These excavations focused primarily on the West Central Area of the upper mound, although excavation areas were also opened on the eastern and southern edges of the upper mound and in the lower settlement (Fig. 2). In all, the Chicago expedition achieved large horizontal exposures of five distinct architectural phases or Building Periods, which they assigned to the Iron II and III periods (Amuq Phase O, in their periodization, ca. 900–550 B.C.E.). A series of isolated soundings below the earliest Phase O floors encountered remains that dated primarily to the third millennium B.C.E. (specifically Amuq Phases H, I and J), suggesting a lengthy

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3 Haines, Excavations in the Plain of Antioch 11, 64–66.