WHAT CAN 4,000-YEAR-OLD TABLETS TELL US ABOUT A SUMERIAN PRINCESS?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Researchers have published a study of 15 clay tablets kept in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. The tablets were written around 4,000 years ago, during the Ur III period in ancient Mesopotamia. They record practical details such as grain, farming, workers, animals, canals and the movement of food. Some of the writing is unusual and does not follow the normal style used by government officials. This has led researchers to suggest that several tablets came from a royal estate rather than from an ordinary government office. Some may have belonged to Princess Šat-Eštar, the daughter of a king. Her estate appears to have had its own workers, administrators, craftsmen, guards, kitchen staff and entertainers. The tablets also show that royal households could manage large farming and food-production businesses outside the usual provincial system.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

The tablets make ancient Mesopotamia feel less like a world ruled only from palaces and temples. They reveal the work needed to feed, organise and support a powerful household. They also show how tiny details in writing, including unusual spellings and lists of grain, can help historians reconstruct the lives of people who lived thousands of years ago.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“What do the tablets reveal about running a royal household?”

Source: Cambridge University Press

https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/iraq/article/from-the-collections-of-the-iraq-museum-new-ur-iii-tablets-primarily-from-the-umma-region/845AB618325AEE73