

# The Babylonian Texts of Nineveh

## Report on the British Museum's *Ashurbanipal Library Project*\*

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"<sup>13</sup>I learned the craft of Adapa, the sage, (which is) the secret knowledge, everything pertaining to the scribal art, <sup>14</sup>I am well acquainted with the signs of heaven and earth, I was deliberating in the assembly of the scribal experts, <sup>15</sup>I was calculating the liver (which is) an image of heaven together with the (most) competent oil (divination) experts, <sup>16</sup>I solved complicated *mathematical problems* that have not (even) been understood before, <sup>17</sup>I read the artfully written texts in which the Sumerian version was obscure and the Akkadian version for clarifying (too) difficult, <sup>18</sup>I am enjoying the cuneiform wedges (sc. writing) on stone(s) from before the flood."

(Ashurbanipal, inscription L<sup>4</sup>)

This article is the final report on the *Ashurbanipal Library Project* of the British Museum that I carried out at the Museum's Department of the Ancient Near East over six months in 2003.<sup>1</sup>

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### I. The British Museum's *Ashurbanipal Library Project*

— This part of the British Museum's *Ashurbanipal Library Project* sets out to investigate what kind of

\*) My sincere thanks go to Christopher B. F. Walker and Dr. Irving L. Finkel of the British Museum, who supervised the *Ashurbanipal Library Project*, for giving me the honour to carry out this survey at the British Museum. I owe very much to Christopher Walker for his friendship, encouragement, support, and tireless readiness to discuss manifold aspects of the Kouyunjik Collection, the Ashurbanipal Library and Nineveh with me; I gained a lot from my conversations with him. Irving Finkel constantly followed the process of my research and discussed various issues with me. My cordial thanks go to the staff of the Ancient Near East Department of the British Museum for their kindness and support. Dr. John Curtis of the British Museum has always shown sincere concern for my research, read the manuscript, and provided me with additional information for which I am most grateful. I am indebted to the Trustees of the British Museum for granting me permission to work on the Tablet Collection and

texts the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal ordered to be included in his famous royal library. Ashurbanipal (668 - ca. 627 BC) was the sixth Neo-Assyrian king who ruled over Assyria as well as over Babylonia – about 60 years after Tiglath-pileser III had conquered

to publish the results of my research in this way. My gratitude goes to the Townley Group of the Friends of the British Museum for funding this project. Dr. Marie-Christine Ludwig kindly offered me hospitality during my first days in London, and her friendship, both was and is of much value to me. I would like to thank Dr. Nils P. Heeßel, Heidelberg, who carefully read the first draft of this article and suggested many improvements; this manuscript has benefited from his critical reading. My thanks are due to Dr. St John Simpson and, again, to Dr. Irving L. Finkel of the British Museum, who kindly undertook the very important task of correcting my English where appropriate. My final thanks go to Dr. Michaela Weszeli for her attention to this manuscript.

<sup>1</sup>) A preliminary report was given during the 49e *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, London, 7-11 July 2003. This paper will be published together with the other *Rencontre* papers on the subject "Nineveh" in volume 66 of *Iraq*.

Babylonia (729 BC). During the first 20 years of Ashurbanipal's reign, his brother Šamaš-šum-ukīn was appointed king of Babylonia, but later revolted against his brother. In 648 BC, Ashurbanipal was victorious in the civil war and took over the kingship of Babylonia. This situation gave him direct access to all the Babylonian temple archives. When Ashurbanipal created his extensive royal library in the citadel of his Assyrian capital city Nineveh (Kouyunjik) he incorporated Assyrian and Babylonian tablets into the collection. The tablets written in Babylonian characters may have been imported from Babylonian libraries, whereas others could have been written by Babylonian scribes in the service of the Assyrian king.<sup>2</sup>

The *Ashurbanipal Library Project* was initiated by Dr. Ali Yaseen of the University of Mosul who described the project to a group of British Museum curators during the Nimrūd conference in March 2002. It was explained that the University of Mosul was intending to establish a new Institute of Cuneiform Studies, specifically for the study of Ashurbanipal's Library. A specially designed building would contain an exhibition of casts of tablets, computer facilities and a library. Dr. Yaseen asked whether the British Museum would agree in principle to supply casts of tablets, and he was assured that the British Museum would make every effort to co-operate. Shortly afterwards this was confirmed by Dr. John Curtis, Keeper of the British Museum's Ancient Near East Department, in an interview in Baghdad with the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Dr. Hummam Abdul Khalik. This was followed by some press coverage of the subject.<sup>3</sup>

As well as agreeing to supply casts of tablets from Ashurbanipal's Library, it was decided in the British Museum that the opportunity should be taken to reappraise the Library. As the first stage of this process, an application was made to the British Museum Friends to fund a six-month post for this purpose. The present writer was appointed to this position for the period from the 10th of March until the 9th of September, 2003. In the British Museum the work was supervised by the curators Christopher B. F. Walker and Irving L. Finkel.

This initial part of the *Ashurbanipal Library Project* is focused exclusively on the Babylonian tablets of the so-called library of Ashurbanipal<sup>4</sup>. The intention of this research is to establish the compositions involved, and their relation both to the rest of the Kouyunjik

Collection and to the collecting activities of Ashurbanipal. This task has been limited by various facts. Firstly, the survey on the tablets of Ashurbanipal's library is inevitably based on the material which has been excavated so far. We do not know how many tablets are either still waiting in Nineveh to be discovered<sup>5</sup> or have already perished and been lost forever. Moreover, the invaders who conquered Nineveh in 612 BC might have destroyed or even carried off an unknown number of cuneiform tablets. There might also have been looters who ransacked the ruins of Nineveh later, or casual visitors and travellers who entered or re-opened earlier excavations and whose finds have since appeared in private collections or on the antiquities market.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore obvious that the material in the British Museum's Kouyunjik Collection does not represent the complete number of tablets that were included in the libraries and archives in Ashurbanipal's time<sup>7</sup>. However, the number and variety of texts unearthed so far is large enough to outline the focus of Ashurbanipal's libraries. The number of tablets is also large enough for a statistical survey.

Secondly, the task of relating the Babylonian texts to the rest of the Kouyunjik Collection has to be postponed until the carrying out of a similar project on the Ninevite Assyrian tablets. Within the limited time of this initial project it was impossible also to examine the Assyrian texts, the number of which is several times higher than the number of the Babylonian texts (see below). Therefore, the basic task of this research has been to record the Babylonian written tablets and fragments of the Kouyunjik Collection, to identify the compositions<sup>8</sup> or classify the tablets and fragments

<sup>5</sup>) The relatively small number of Ninevite letters written to Sennacherib leads to the assumption that this king's archive has not yet been found; see below section X.4.

<sup>6</sup>) See e. g. the tablet with a historical epic of the Lord Binning Collection published by C. B. F. Walker - S. N. Kramer in their article "Cuneiform Tablets in the Collection of Lord Binning," *Iraq* 44 (1982) 70-86 as no. 2 (pp. 76-78). Another example is the tablet fragment of the École pratique des Hautes Études that is joined to a tablet of the British Museum's Kouyunjik collection and published by S. Parpola, "A Letter to Sennacherib Referring to the Conquest of Bīt-Ha'iri and Other Events of the Year 693," *AOAT* 281, Münster 2002, 559-580. The British Museum also purchased tablets unearthed in Kouyunjik, e. g. the numbers or collections 1901-10-12, 89. 1909-2-13, 1. 1909-3-13, 1. 1919-10-8, 142-148. 1912-5-13, 2. 1913-4-16, 147-160E and 1930-5-8, 47-90 or tablets from private collectors, see e. g. S. Parpola, "A Letter from Šamaš-šum-ukīn to Esarhaddon," *Iraq* 34 (1972) 21-34.

<sup>7</sup>) Apart from clay tablets, Ashurbanipal's libraries also included many wooden writing-boards that have not survived; see below sections VIII and IX.

<sup>8</sup>) The identification of the compositions is based on the seven volumes of the *Catalogue of the Cuneiform Tablets in the Kouyunjik Collection* (Volumes I-IV by C. Bezold, 1889-

<sup>2</sup>) It is unlikely that Assyrian scribes used Babylonian cuneiform signs to write their tablets, although it is conceivable that they did. In this research, tablets with Babylonian characters are assumed to have been written by Babylonians.

<sup>3</sup>) See e. g. *The Times*, 09. 05. 2002; *The Independent*, 09. 05. 2002; *The Art Newspaper*, 08. 05. 2002.

<sup>4</sup>) See below section III.

according to the text genre,<sup>9</sup> to analyse these data, and to give an overview of the Babylonian material.

During the first three months, I surveyed approximately 26,000 tablets and fragments of the Nineveh tablet-collection for the script. The last three months were occupied in examining Babylonian texts by content, grouped together to rejoin fragments,<sup>10</sup> and by trying to identify previously unclassified fragments. While researching the Kouyunjik tablet-collection I entered the content of the Babylonian texts into a database<sup>11</sup>, also adding a short description of the fragments including shape, colour, number of columns, lines, and dividing lines. This database<sup>12</sup> includes information on 4252 tablets and fragments of which, so far, 658 have already been rejoined to other fragments. Until today, the total number of Babylonian texts and fragments unearthed in Nineveh is 3594,<sup>13</sup> or less than 1/7 of the complete British Museum's Nineveh tablet-collection.

96, Supplementary Volume by L. W. King, 1914, Second Supplement by W. Lambert - A. R. Millard, 1968, Third Supplement by W. Lambert, 1992) and innumerable text editions that I surveyed before starting research at the British Museum and after I returned to Heidelberg. I am aware of the fact that, most probably, various publications might have escaped my attention and that the bibliography I compiled is not complete.

<sup>9</sup>) The classification of unpublished texts given in the seven volumes of the *Catalogue of the Cuneiform Tablets in the Kouyunjik Collection* (see previous note) had to be verified and corrected.

<sup>10</sup>) Many Assyriologists who did their research on certain groups of texts or even special literary compositions proved the usefulness of this method to find joins. Nevertheless, this method is described in great detail by R. Borger, "Ein Brief Sin-idinnams von Larsa an den Sonnengott sowie Bemerkungen über "Joins" und das "Joinen", NAWG 1991.2 (= *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse, Jahrgang 1991 Nr. 2*), Göttingen 1991, 37-58 (or: [1]-[22]).

<sup>11</sup>) A first draft of the database was made by C. B. F. Walker and handed over to me and other scholars. The first draft included the Museum numbers of the Babylonian texts, the genre according to the seven volumes of the *Catalogue of the Cuneiform Tablets in the Kouyunjik Collection*, and a few publications.

<sup>12</sup>) Part of this database is now available on the World Wide Web: <http://fincke.uni-hd.de/nineveh/>.

<sup>13</sup>) This number refers to December 2003 and will be reduced in the future by rejoining more fragments; during six-months' research on the Kouyunjik Collection I was able to make 86 joins and there are many more to be found. Another possibility to reduce the number of Babylonian tablets is to identify Babylonian tablets, which originate from ancient sites other than Kouyunjik (for this see below note 22). This is most probably the case for 31 text numbers of the original database, which have already been deducted in the above-mentioned calculation.

## II. The British Museum's excavations at Kouyunjik

Most of the famous sculptures of the Ninevite palaces and nearly all the cuneiform tablets of the so-called Ashurbanipal's Library are housed in the British Museum, London.<sup>14</sup> The fact that they did not enter the collection of the Louvre, Paris, is due to the peculiar circumstances at the time and the diplomacy of Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1810-1895). When Paul-Émile Botta (1802-1870), French Consul in Mosul, started excavating Tell Kouyunjik in December 1842 he did not find anything. Disappointed, he moved on to Khorsabad (ancient Dūr-Šarrukīn) in March 1843 where he unearthed some figures and inscriptions within three days of excavation. Understandably enough, he continued to excavate Khorsabad and did not return to Kouyunjik. The British excavator Austin Henry Layard (1817-1894) took up excavations there again in May 1846 and May to July 1947 during his campaign in Nimrūd (ancient Kalḫu). Within a few months, Layard found a terrace and some adjacent rooms, which led the British Museum to entrust him with another excavation campaign at that site. During his campaign from October 1849 to April 1851 he excavated Nimrūd and Kouyunjik at the same time. At Kouyunjik, he unearthed another 72 rooms of a large palace (the South-West palace), found ten winged bull-colossi and a countless number of cuneiform tablets and fragments. In his book *Discoveries in the ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, London 1853, Layard described the finding of the cuneiform tablets (p. 345):

The chambers I am describing [i. e. rooms 40 and 41 of the South-West palace] appear to have been a depository in the palace of Nineveh for such documents. To the height of a foot or more from the floor they were entirely filled with them; some entire, but the greater part broken into many fragments, probably by the falling in of the upper part of the building. They were of different sizes; the largest tablets were flat, and measured about 9 inches by 6 inches; the smaller were slightly convex, and some were not more

<sup>14</sup>) For the discovery of Kouyunjik and the different excavators at this site see M. T. Larsen, *The Conquest of Assyria. Excavations in an Antique Land*, (English edition) London 1996, P. Matthiae, *Ninive. Glanzvolle Hauptstadt Assyriens*, translated from Italian by Eva Ambros, München 1999 (the Italian edition was published in Milano 1998), 12-18, J. E. Curtis - J. E. Reade, *Art and Empire. Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum*, British Museum 1995, 9-16, and N. Chevalier, *La recherche archéologique française au Moyen-Orient 1842-1947*, Paris 2002, 21-29 (esp. note 26, 28-29, note 51), 46-58. For the different campaigns and excavators in combination with the excavated areas see J. E. Reade, "Ninive (Nineveh)," *RIA* 9, 392-394. Those tablets excavated since 1932 are in Baghdad and other Iraqi museums.

than an inch long, with but one or two lines of writing. The cuneiform characters on most of them were singularly sharp and well defined, but so minute in some instances as to be almost illegible without magnifying glass. These documents appear to be of various kinds ...

In the following years, the British Museum continued to dig at Kouyunjik. Henry Creswicke Rawlinson undertook the next rather productive campaign in December 1852 - April 1854.

In 1851, Victor Place (1818-1875) was made French Consul in Mosul and he asserted his right to continue Botta's excavations in Kouyunjik. Rawlinson and Place agreed that the British were to excavate the southern part of Kouyunjik, and the French the northern part, which they did very sporadically and without any remarkable results. Then Hormuzd Rassam (1826-1910), Rawlinson's assistant, started to dig the northern part of the tell by night. On the 20th of December 1853, they uncovered the first reliefs of Ashurbanipal's North Palace and later on several thousands further cuneiform tablets. Rawlinson was able to appease the angry Place by offering him some of the reliefs from the North Palace for the Louvre. The French accepted the offer and withdrew from Kouyunjik. In general, the British Museum continued to excavate Kouyunjik until 1932. Since that time, Iraqi and American excavators have undertaken excavations at Nineveh on several occasions.<sup>15</sup>

### III. The so-called Ashurbanipal Library

In principle, the tablets excavated in Nineveh had originally been stored in four or more different buildings (see figure 1)<sup>16</sup>: the South-West Palace, the North Palace, the areas of the Ištar- and Nabû-temples, with

<sup>15</sup> See J. E. Reade, "Ninive (Nineveh)," *RIA* 9, 390-394.

<sup>16</sup> See J. E. Reade, "Ninive (Nineveh)," *RIA* 9, 421-422.

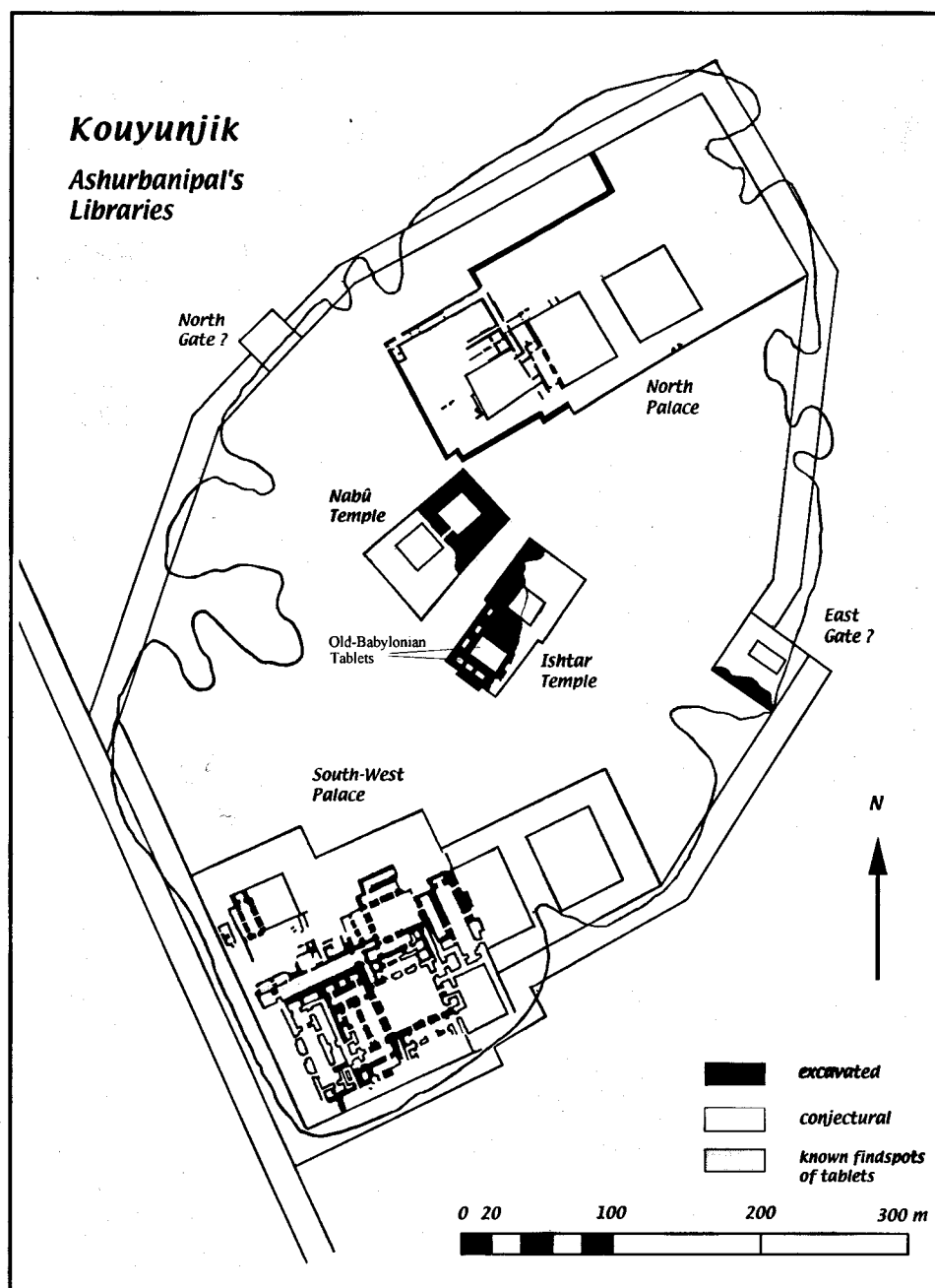


Figure 1. Kouyunjik - Ashurbanipal's Libraries: sketch with restorations after J. E. Reade, *RIA* 9, 391, 407-418, 421-427 (article "Ninive (Nineveh)") (drawn by J. C. Fincke).

some additional findspots on and off the mound of Kouyunjik. It is the tablet collection of the South-West Palace that formed the Ashurbanipal library, but tablets from the North Palace are also considered to belong to this library.<sup>17</sup>

When the combined force of Babylonians and Medes conquered Nineveh in 612 BC, the looters did not spare the libraries. In addition to the looting of the

<sup>17</sup> See e. g. L. W. King, *Catalogue ... Supplement*, XII note 2, XIV; R. C. Thompson - M. E. L. Mallowan, "The British Museum Excavations at Nineveh 1931-32," *AAA* 20 (1933) 110; J. E. Curtis - J. E. Reade, *Art and Empire*, 12-13.

city, the invaders destroyed most of the buildings, especially the royal palaces and temples. However, most of the libraries had been housed on the second floor of these buildings on the citadel of Nineveh. When the buildings collapsed, all the tablets crashed through the ceiling into the rooms of the ground floor beneath. The tablet fragments were widely scattered.<sup>18</sup> The difficulty we have today in finding those fragments that belong to the same tablet and to rejoin them is partly due to this situation. Apart from this the excavation reports of Nineveh very seldomly refer to the places where the tablets were found – the excavators were much more interested in the finds themselves than in their findspots. In some cases, we know the year in which the different buildings of Nineveh had been excavated and we can connect the finds of tablets with those buildings.<sup>19</sup> This is the case, for example, for most of the Old Babylonian tablets from Nineveh, which came from the room in square TT and the part of the court covering square OO of the Istar Temple.<sup>20</sup>

In most cases, different places were excavated at the same time and there is no evidence to enable us find out where the tablets originally came from. Even the Museum's numbering system of the Kouyunjik tablets does not always help in tracing the possible findspot:<sup>21</sup> The tablets excavated by Layard and Rassam in July 1849 - April 1854, for example, were given a registration number referring to the excavation site "K", Kouyunjik. Sometimes, the excavated tablets remained unregistered in their consignment boxes for

<sup>18</sup>) L. W. King, *Catalogue ... Supplement*, XX note 2, described that "Some, evidently kicked by the feet of fugitives when the palace was in flames, were found scattered around the main exit on the west, and they extended for some distance on to the paved terrace which overlooked the Tigris beyond the palace-façade on this side."

<sup>19</sup>) The complexity of this situation is illustrated by G. Turner with regard to the South-West Palace in his article "Sennacherib's Palace at Nineveh: The Primary Sources from Layard's Second Campaign," *Iraq* 65 (2003) 175-220.

<sup>20</sup>) See J. E. Reade, "Ninive (Nineveh)," *RIA* 9, 407, and St. Dalley, "Old Babylonian Tablets from Nineveh; and Possible Pieces of Early Gilgamesh Epic," *Iraq* 63 (2001) 155.

<sup>21</sup>) See the *Catalogue ... of the Kouyunjik Collection* (see above note 8), and E. Leichty, *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum Volume VI: Tablets from Sippar 1*, London 1986 (with an introduction by J. E. Reade). See further e. g. G. Smith, *Assyrian Discoveries*, London 1875; H. Rassam, *Asshur and the Land of Nimrod*, New York - Cincinnati 1897; S. Parpola, "The Royal Archives of Nineveh," in: K. R. Veenhof (ed.), *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries*, CRRAI 30 (PIHANS 57), Leiden 1986, 223-236; J. E. Reade, "Ninive (Nineveh)," *RIA* 9, 388b-433b. For an on-line overview of the registration numbers of the Babylonian Nineveh texts see <http://fincke.uni-hd.de/nineveh/> following the "description and explanation" of the database.

several years before being given a K-number. During the years, the sequence of their arrival at the British Museum was disturbed and therefore the numbers no longer allow assigning tablets to individual excavation campaigns. Sometimes it is even evident that tablets from other excavations slipped into the K-registration system.<sup>22</sup> This fact has important consequences for research on the Babylonian tablets of the so-called Ashurbanipal Library: in many cases, there is no proof that a Babylonian or an Old Babylonian tablet was excavated at Kouyunjik; some might have been unearthed in Babylon, Borsippa, Sippar, or another Babylonian site altogether.<sup>23</sup>

To reconstruct the different libraries<sup>24</sup> and archives<sup>25</sup> is a very time-consuming task and beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, for the time being, all Babylonian literary tablets and all official or legal documents from Kouyunjik written during or before Ashurbanipal's reign are considered as coming from one place, namely the Ashurbanipal Library (or libraries) in Nineveh<sup>26</sup>.

#### IV. The historical background regarding Babylonian scholars in Assyria

The relation of the Neo-Assyrian kings to Babylonia, Babylonian scribes, or Babylonian tablets can be

<sup>22</sup>) Some of the Babylonian texts have already been identified as deriving from Babylonia and not from Kouyunjik; this information entered the different volumes of the *Catalogue ... of the Kouyunjik Collection* and the *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum Volume VI: Tablets from Sippar 1*, by E. Leichty. However, even tablets from other Assyrian sites entered the Kouyunjik Collection, see J. E. Reade, "Archaeology and the Kouyunjik Archives," CRRAI 30, 213.

<sup>23</sup>) It is possible that some of the Old Babylonian tablets that are thought to have been excavated at Kouyunjik will be identified as coming from other sites, which will further reduce the total number of Babylonian tablets from Nineveh.

<sup>24</sup>) Not all of the so-called library texts (for this see below) that were unearthed in Nineveh necessarily came from the royal library, e. g. the Ninevite tablets of Nabû-zuqup-kēna might have never been part of Ashurbanipal's libraries but were only used to produce copies for the palace; see St. J. Lieberman, "A Mesopotamian Background for the So-Called Aggadic 'Measures' of Biblical Hermeneutics?," HUCA 58 (1987) 217.

<sup>25</sup>) For the different archives of Nineveh, see e. g. J. E. Reade, CRRAI 30, 213-222, and S. Parpola, in the same volume, 223-236.

<sup>26</sup>) L. W. King, *Catalogue ... Supplement*, XIV-XV, considered the tablets from the Nineveh temple libraries to form "a very inconsiderable proportion of the total number recovered at Kouyunjik, so that for all practical purposes the bulk of the literary, religious and explanatory texts in the Kouyunjik Collection may be regarded as coming from the Palace Library."

traced with the help of letters and reports unearthed in Nineveh. Evidently, the earliest Ninevite records date from the reign of Sargon II (721-705 BC). It was his son and successor, Sennacherib (704-681 BC), who made Nineveh – the residential city of his crown principality (which he held, at least, since 715 BC) – the new Assyrian capital<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, because Sennacherib had already taken over Assyrian government business during the time of the king's absence while he was crown prince,<sup>28</sup> there are many letters and documents from Sargon's II reign archived in Nineveh.<sup>29</sup>

The earliest records concerning Babylonians and Babylonian scribes belong to the period after the Babylonian king Marduk-apla-iddina II (721-710 BC) went into exile to Elam in 710 BC, and Sargon II ascended the Babylonian throne. In those days, the Assyrian palace was – apart from the temples – the only institution that was able to support a large number of scribes on a long-term basis,<sup>30</sup> and many Babylonian scholars sought employment by the Assyrian king. This situation did not change substantially over the following 43 years,<sup>31</sup> until Ashurbanipal ascended the Assyrian throne (668 BC) and his brother Šamaš-šum-ukīn the Babylonian throne (667 BC). Many Babylonians had been acting as agents for the Assyrian kings since 710 BC, writing letters and reports about events

<sup>27</sup> In the 9th century BC, Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) extended the Middle Assyrian provincial capital Kalḫu (Nimrūd) into his royal capital. Kalḫu remained Assyrian capital until Sargon II (721-705 BC) moved into his own choice, on the site of the small village Magganubba, and founded royal capital Dūr-Šarrukīn (Khorsabad).

<sup>28</sup> See E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, *AfO Beih.* 26, Wien 1997, 2-3, and S. Parpola, *CRAI* 30, 233.

<sup>29</sup> See e. g. S. Parpola, *CRAI* 30, 229 and note 31: almost 50 % of the letters from the Kouyunjik collection date from the reign of Sargon II. It is rather unlikely that later these letters and other important documents were transferred from the archives of the former capital to Nineveh, during the reign of Sennacherib (see Parpola, *op. cit.*, p. 233 note 52).

<sup>30</sup> A royal library in the palace of Babylon cannot be traced (see below section XI). Therefore, if the scholars were not associated with a temple or a school, they had either to work independently as scribes or to be employed by officials. However, there are hints at Assyrian scribes employed by high Babylonian officials; these scribes might have been assigned by the Assyrian king as loyal agents, see G. Frame, "The Correspondence of Nabû-ušabši, Governor of Uruk," *CRAI* 30, 267.

<sup>31</sup> See e. g. the letter from an unknown Babylonian scholar, who had taught "apprentices whom the king appointed in my charge" the astrological series *enūma anu enlil*, but was ignored, when the king summoned "scribes great and small;" see ABL 954 (K. 895) = SAA X 171 (S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, Helsinki 1993). This letter had been written to either Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal.

in their hometowns.<sup>32</sup>

A letter to Sargon II reveals "[when they removed our writing-boards they [brought] (them) to Marduk-apla-iddi[n]a."<sup>33</sup> This fragmentary letter also refers to the Babylonian cities of Dēr and Dūr-ladini, and therefore might have either been written in Nippur, most probably by the governor, the *šandabakku*-official,<sup>34</sup> or rather in Borsippa.<sup>35</sup> There is no hint of the number of writing-boards that had been removed or their owners – they could have been private scholars or even the temple library of Dūr-anki. If these writing-boards were literary texts and not administrative records,<sup>36</sup> one might speculate that Marduk-apla-iddina II anticipated the Assyrian effort to obtain the written knowledge of Babylonia and he might then have tried to prevent this by collecting the writing-boards and storing them at a safe place. However, Marduk-apla-iddina could have requested the writing-boards for another reason. In any case, mentioning these writing-boards to Sargon II indicates that they were of some interest for the king.

Sargon II<sup>37</sup> or his successor Sennacherib<sup>38</sup> gave an order to a Babylonian scholar concerning a *lē'u ša ekurri*, a "writing-board of the temples."<sup>39</sup> The intention was to prepare a list of all Babylonian temples. The scholar in charge was Bēl-iddina who wrote an interim report to the king describing the regions of Babylonia he had already checked and the lists he had made and sent to the king. Bēl-iddina wrote that he was afraid to continue his inspection further to the

<sup>32</sup> Altogether, the excavators unearthed some 1046 Babylonian letters and letter fragments in Nineveh; see below section X.4.

<sup>33</sup> CT 54, 451 (79-7-8, 257) rev. 1-3: ... ù GIŠ.DA.MEŠ-n[i ki-i] (2) [ū-še-š]u-nu a-na <sup>md</sup>AMAR.UTU-IBILA SUM-[n]a (3) [ul-te-b]i-lu ...; see M. Dietrich, *The Babylonian correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib*, SAA XVII, Helsinki 2003, 165 (no. 201).

<sup>34</sup> M. Dietrich, "Neue Quellen zur Geschichte Babylonien (I)," *WdO* 4 (1967-68) 86-87 (A VI 1b).

<sup>35</sup> In SAA XVII, 2003, 165 (no. 201), M. Dietrich assumes this letter to be written by Ana-Nabû-taklāk, who was based in Borsippa (see p. XXXV).

<sup>36</sup> For the use of writing-boards in Neo-Assyrian libraries and administration, see below section IX.

<sup>37</sup> L. Waterman, *Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire Vol. 1* (RCAE I), 1930, 360-361 (no. 516); H. D. Baker in: K. Radner (ed.), *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (PNAE) Vol. 1.II: B-G, Helsinki 1999, 312 (Bēl-iddina no. 8); M. Dietrich, SAA XVII, 2003, 41-42 (no. 43), see p. XXXV.

<sup>38</sup> M. Dietrich, *WdO* 4 (1967-68) 90; F. W. Vera Chamaiza, *Die Omnipotenz Aššurs. Entwicklungen in der Aššur-Theologie unter den Sargoniden Sargon II., Sanherib und Asarhaddon*, AOAT 295, 2002, 308-309 (no. 65).

<sup>39</sup> ABL 516 (81-7-27, 31) 6: *āš-šu GIŠ.le-u<sub>5</sub>-um ša É.KUR.MEŠ*. For the use of wooden writing-boards in Assyrian administration, see below note 124. For the use of writing-boards in the Nineveh libraries, see below section IX.