

CUNEIFORM ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES

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ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE KUYUNJIK ARCHIVES

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This is a provisional report on research into the archaeological provenance of the tablets and other inscribed objects listed in the catalogues of Bezold (1889-99), King (1914), and Lambert and Millard (1968). The sources I have used are not primarily the ancient texts themselves, but modern archival records of various kinds; some of these are unpublished. Ultimately the content of the different Nineveh archives will be established, as far as possible, by systematic philological publication and analysis. In the mean time some progress is possible¹.

It is well known that, although the K of the "K Collection" has to stand for Kuyunjik, name of the main mound at Nineveh (fig. 1), many tablets bearing K numbers were not in fact found there. There are several explanations for this. Sometimes tablets from different Assyrian sites may have been mixed together before reaching London. Sometimes K numbers were applied to inscribed objects regardless of provenance. And sometimes, it seems, pieces of inscribed clay acquired by the British Museum before about 1860 were stored and confused with the numerous Assyrian tablets which, though excavated in the 1850s, remained unnumbered until the 1870s or later; then they all got K numbers together, regardless of provenance. Only the numbers K 1-278 (with a few exceptions caused by subsequent renumbering) were allocated in the 1850s; we can be sure that the great majority of tablets bearing these low numbers were found during Layard's 1851 excavations in the South-West Palace at Kuyunjik, notably in the area of Rooms XL and XLI². Items with higher K numbers may derive from the South-West Palace, or the North Palace, or elsewhere. Occasionally, with Assyrian tablets numbered in other ways, we have better information. For instance, the group numbered 48-11-4 (which signifies official receipt into the British Museum collections on 4 November 1848) includes one Middle Assyrian piece (280) whose provenance is given by Layard as Nimrud (*JCC*, 79); the letters 48-11-4, 282-3, together with 48-7-20, 116-9, which seem to include some of the latest Assyrian state letters to survive, evidently correspond to the "several small oblong tablets of dark unbaked clay" which were found in 1847 in or close to the throneroom area of the South-West Palace at Kuyunjik³. An unpublished report from H. Rassam suggests that most of the 83-1-

¹ I am indebted to Messrs I. L. Finkel and C. B. F. Walker for advice on various points.

² A. H. Layard, *Nineveh and Babylon* (London, 1853) 344-7.

³ A. H. Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains II* (London, 1849) 124.

18 Niveveh tablets were found in the area of Room LIV in the South-West Palace. Similarly, most of G. Smith's DT group, apart from those bought in Babylonia, came from the North Palace at Nineveh, but most of the S or Sm group from the South-West Palace; yet we can seldom specify, at present, in which of the two palaces a particular piece was found. There is more information of this nature, to be given in a fuller publication elsewhere. The present paper reviews, in general terms, some of the major Nineveh archives.

Our earliest archives, in a sense, come from the late Ubeid, Uruk, and Early Dynastic periods, in the form of seal-impressions and one numerical tablet⁴. As the amount of early deposit excavated at Nineveh is relatively small, these finds suggest that the site was an important one, with administrative structures and archives of some complexity, at various times before the Agade period. It is from the Agade period itself, however, that we have our first inscribed sealing⁵. There are also scraps of commemorative Agade inscriptions on stone (*EAK*, 2), possibly foundation records from the Ishtar Temple complex. A copy of one of these texts will have been available to Shamshi-Adad I who, after an Old Assyrian hiatus, refers in his own foundation record to Manishtushu's work at the site (*EAK*, 9-12). The Ishtar Temple foundations excavated by Thompson, and ascribed by him to Ashur-resh-ishi I⁶, probably belonged to Shamshi-Adad I's building. On or close to one of its original pavements were the remains of an Old Babylonian archive (BM 134533, 134535-9, and possibly BM 134534, 134825); it concerns agricultural matters, and one letter (134536) mentions the important city of Nurrugum.

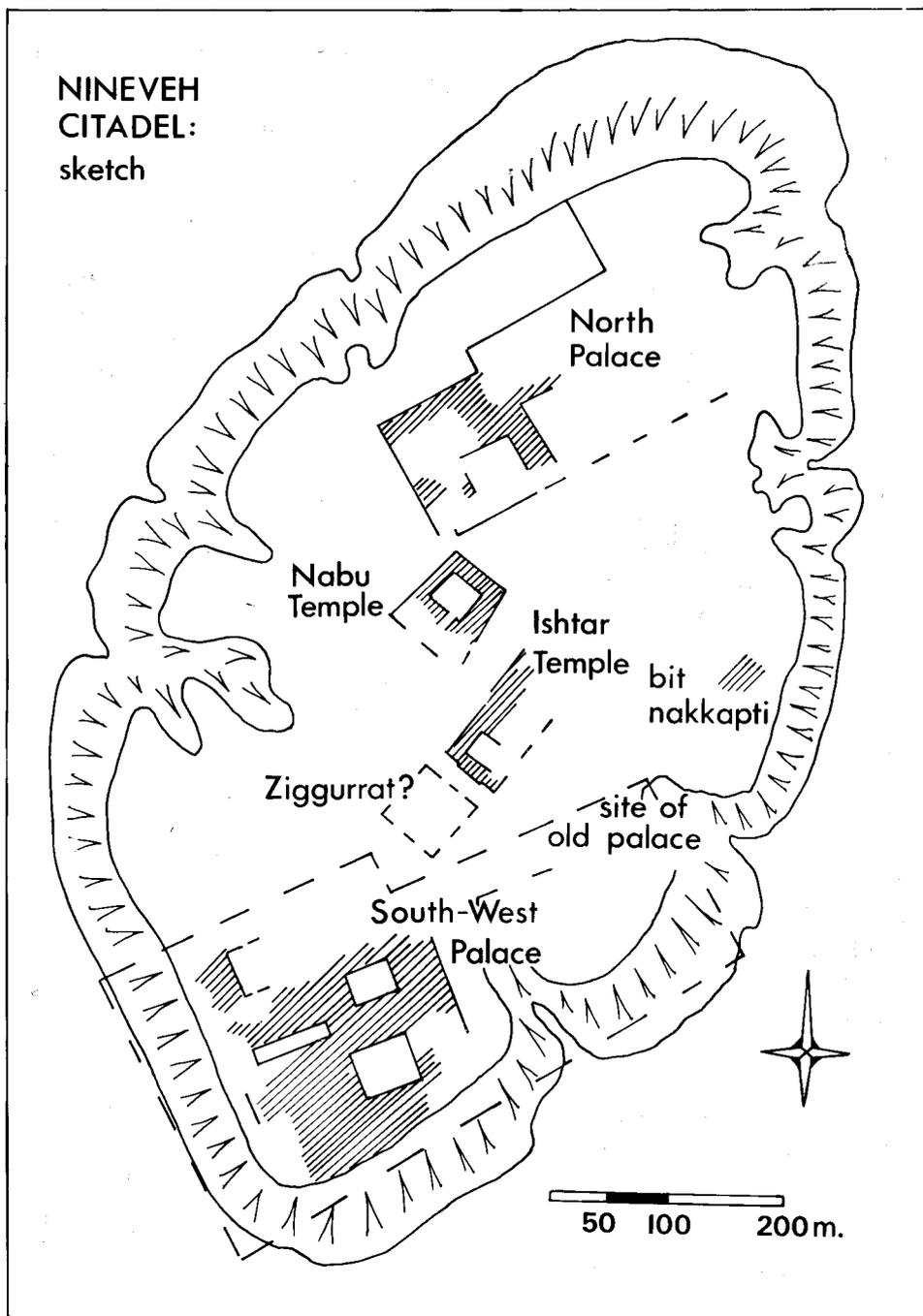
By the reign of Ashur-uballit I (1363-28 BC), if not earlier, Nineveh was in the hands of the kings of Ashur and remained so, in principle, until the fall of the Assyrian empire in 612 BC. This is a period of over seven centuries during which there was, so far as we know, continuous occupation. Public buildings were not infrequently built or restored, and there are therefore many inscribed bricks, foundation documents — notably terracotta tablets, cylinders, and prisms — and architectural fittings of which the wall-knobs and rosettes from the Ishtar Temple, some catalogued as vase or dish fragments (e.g. 56-9-9, 128-199), deserve a mention. Normally these will have been found in the ruins of the buildings for which they were originally designed, and are not really archives.

There are at least two exceptions, however. One is the Nineveh prism of Sargon II, put together from many fragments, some of which were certainly found in the South-West Palace at Nineveh. Tadmor argued that this prism, the text of which refers to a

⁴ D. Collon and J. E. Reade, 'Archaic Nineveh', *BagM* 14 (1983) 33-4.

⁵ R. C. Thompson and M. E. L. Mallowan, 'The British Museum excavations at Nineveh, 1931-32', *AAA* 20 (1933) pl. LXVI, no. 1.

⁶ R. C. Thompson and R. W. Hamilton, 'The British Museum excavations on the Temple of Ishtar at Nineveh, 1930-31', *AAA* 19 (1932) 64-5, pl. XC.



1. Sketch plan of the Citadel of Nineveh with the main buildings.

building at Ashur, was a rough draft⁷. If so, it was probably transferred from Khorsabad to Nineveh with the remainder of Sargon's state archive. The other much more important exception comprises the seventh-century foundation cylinders and prisms listed by Lambert and Millard (1968,92) as coming from the "House of Sennacherib's Son", together with other such pieces whose provenance is not specifically recorded. The "House of Sennacherib's Son" area lies within the walls of Nineveh, a little to the north of Kuyunjik. Thompson, the excavator, refers to about three hundred pieces which were found there, scattered "usually in sporadic patches of rubble about two to three feet below surface" — possibly in fill that had been used to level ground⁸; the Chicago fragments published by Piepkorn⁹ probably derived from the same area. The texts range in date from Sennacherib to Ashurbanipal, and were written for several different buildings; it is clear that they were not originally intended to be placed where they were eventually found. This strange archive might be explained as a relic of one of Nineveh's royal scriptoria, as such foundation documents must have been produced in large numbers very fast, for burial at regular and frequent intervals in the brickwork of walls; for instance, the walls of Sennacherib's Nineveh were about 12 km. long, and there must be at least several hundred prisms buried in them. There were pitfalls between the manufacture and deposition of such a document. First, there might be scribal or other errors bad enough to invalidate it (certainly there were occasional difficulties over precise dates¹⁰: these might not all be recognized before the object was fired in the kiln. Secondly, some must have broken during firing. Thirdly, the content of texts needed periodic updating, to delete old or accommodate new information, a process which may have involved the rejection of existing stock. Furthermore, with mass production, the scribes may have sometimes produced more items than were actually required. So we should expect that, somewhere at Nineveh, there would be a dump of unwanted foundation documents, and it could be that Thompson found material from this. It may be relevant that, among the few tablets from the same area, there is one (BM 134557) which reads like the prologue to an Ashurbanipal prism¹¹; it is not a piece of Ashurbanipal "library" calligraphy, however, but looks more like a tablet made for some practical purpose such as copying or dictating from.

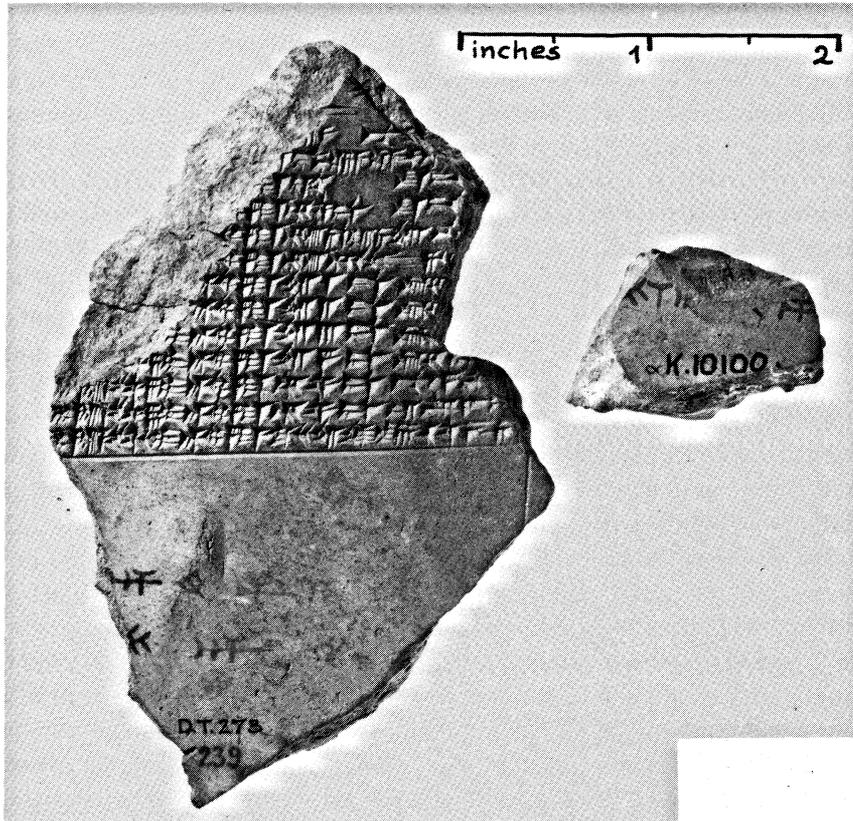
⁷ H. Tadmor, 'The campaigns of Sargon II of Assur: a chronological-historical study', *JCS* 12 (1958) 92.

⁸ *AAA* 20 (1933) 78. See also R. C. Thompson, 'A selection from the cuneiform historical texts from Nineveh (1927-32)', *Iraq* 7 (1940) 85-6.

⁹ A. C. Piepkorn, *Historical Prism Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal I* (*AS* 5; Chicago, 1933) 3, n. 12.

¹⁰ At least, some dates seem to have been partially erased.

¹¹ A. R. Millard, 'Fragments of historical texts from Nineveh: Ashurbanipal', *Iraq* 30 (1968) pl. XXV. The copy is more elegant than the original.



2. DT 273 and K 10100, with traces of an Ashurbanipal colophon in ink.

More conventional Nineveh archives, consisting mainly of cuneiform tablets, date in their final form, so far as we know, from the seventh century but may occasionally have incorporated older material. We know of about fifty Nineveh texts, in the British Museum, which may be classed either as Middle Assyrian or, at any rate, as significantly earlier than the seventh century in appearance. One of the most remarkable is the Tukulti-Ninurta epic the major pieces of which (BM 121033), and probably others, were found in the area between the Ishtar and Nabu Temples, where Thompson mistakenly thought there had been a palace of Ashurnasirpal II¹²; he based this conclusion on the large amount of Ashurnasirpal debris which he found there, mainly built into later houses, and which almost certainly derived from the

¹² R.C. Thompson and R.W. Hutchinson, 'The site of the palace of Ashurnasirpal at Nineveh, excavated in 1929-30 on behalf of the British Museum', *AAA* 18 (1931) 79-93, pl. XXXIX.