4. The writing-board was at my house: Scholarly and textual mobility in seventh-century Assyria

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The writing-board was at my house: Scholarly and textual mobility in seventh-century Assyria

Where Chapter 3 focused on the people, deities and places involved in scholarship in and around the Assyrian court from the late second millennium to the end of empire in the late seventh century, this chapter takes in a wider geographical horizon over a shorter timeframe (Fig. 4.1). In the second millennium scholars with their tablets and writing-boards were already travelling long distances between royal courts, whether as war booty, diplomatic gifts or self-motivated entrepreneurs seeking patronage. How did scholarly knowledge travel across the Assyrian empire in the seventh century BC? Who had access to it, who controlled that access and to whom was access denied? Letters, legal documents and colophons as well as architectural remains enable us to trace the movements of scholars between various sites of activity and contemplation, and to begin to identify what they did there. We will also look at the movements of scholarly works: both the compositions in the abstract and tablets on which they were written. How did they end up in courtly collections, and what happened to them subsequently? How were they used and why were they eventually abandoned?

Babylonia remained the intellectual centre of the region, despite Assyria’s political and military dominance. A particular focus will therefore be how Babylonian scholarship was used in the Assyrian court, and the extent to which indigenous traditions were also developed and exploited. Finally, we look at Assyrian scholarship outside the royal heartland, both in the ancestral city of Assur and in the provincial west. However, this is necessarily no more than a preliminary sketch: in future years, systematic analysis of compositional change and manuscript variance within the major works of cuneiform scholarship will certainly nuance and correct the schema of geographical relationships outlined here.
Figure 4.1: Map of the major cities mentioned in this chapter. Source: Martin Brown.
Geographies of royal scholarship under Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal

A well-known roster of forty-five court scholars, written in Nineveh shortly after Esarhaddon’s conquest of Egypt in 671 BC, is often used as evidence for the size and professional composition of the ‘inner circle’ of Assyrian royal advisors. It names, in order, seven šupšar Enāma Anu Ellil (observers of celestial omens), headed by chief scribe Issar-šumu-ereš, nine ašipu-healers, five barā-diviners, nine asû-healers, six kalû-lamenters, three dāgil īṣṣūrī-augurs, three Egyptian harṭibu-scholars and three Egyptian scribes. Another lists just two ašipus, neither of whom also appears in the first document, and four asûs, who do all recur. Only a dozen of these men are unambiguously identifiable elsewhere in the voluminous royal correspondence of the period, perhaps a further four if we allow for them to hold different professional titles. None of the nine members of the three non-Babylonian scholarly professions at the end of the long roster is ever mentioned elsewhere.

What should we make of this mismatch? It is of course possible that the king’s court scholars stuck so closely to him that they rarely needed to write; but even so we might expect them to be mentioned in others’ correspondence. Or could it be that, rather than being in the king’s permanent employ, these men were summoned as needed, and supported through informal payment and patronage? There is copious evidence that in the early seventh century BC royal scholars were not confined to the palace at Nineveh. Indeed, if they had been it is unlikely that the 1,500 scholarly letters, divinatory queries and celestial observation reports found at Kouyunjik would have been written in the first place. Although royal protocol dictated that even those most intimate with the king had on occasion to communicate with him in writing, we must not mistake the presence of tablets in Nineveh for the permanent presence of their authors.

Peripheral figures and outcasts wrote wistfully of being ‘summoned’ (našû) by the king, while the more secure threatened to get rivals banished (nasāhu). Even the most trusted scholars came and went from court. One of Nabu-zuqup-kenu’s sons, the chief ašipu-healer Adad-šumu-ūṣur, spent at least some of his time in the Ezida temple at Kalhu. His nephew, the crown prince’s ašipu Šumaya, worked in his royal patron’s residence city Tarbišu before petitioning for a move to Kalhu after his father’s death. Likewise, Akkullanu, who advised king Esarhaddon on celestial portents, is likely to have spent more time in Assur, where he was šangû-priest of the god Aššur, than at court in Nineveh (Table 4a). Banquet records regularly
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<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Assur</th>
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<th>Harran</th>
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<td>King</td>
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<td>Extispicy query concerning Esarhaddon leaving Kalhu safely (SAA 4: 148)</td>
<td>Nabu-naṣir writes from Nineveh to king about royal baby (SAA 10: 305)</td>
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<td>Esarhaddon regularly performs <em>akitū</em> festival in Ezida (or has it performed on his behalf) (Matsushima 1987)</td>
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<td>ašipu</td>
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<td>Adad-šumu-ūṣur performs ritual measures against fungus in Ezida (SAA 13: 71)</td>
<td>Royal ablution ritual (SAA 10: 93)</td>
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<td>Adad-šumu-ūṣur and his nephew (perhaps Šumaya) copy scholarly works for Ezida (CTN 4: 45, 59, 74?, 78?, 89?)</td>
<td>Šumaya reminds the crown prince of his work for him in Tarbiṣu (SAA 16: 34)</td>
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<td>Banūnu copies scholarly works for Ezida (CTN 4: 61, 116, 185?, 188, 192)</td>
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<td>At least some of Adad-šumu-ūṣur’s letters and reports sent from here? (SAA 8: 160–3; 10: 185–232)</td>
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<td>Šumaya requests he continue his father (Nabu-šumu-šēṣir)’s work in Kalhu (SAA 16: 34)</td>
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<td>Marduk-šakīn-šumi consults tablets in preparation for a ritual with the queen mother (SAA 10: 245–6); apotropaic ritual to be performed in Kalhu as well as Nineveh (SAA 10: 240, 271)</td>
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<td>Nabu-nadin-šumi uncontactable in Kalhu (SAA 10: 228)</td>
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<td>Extispicy reports for Ashurbanipal (SAA 4: 300, 324)</td>
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<td>kalû</td>
<td>Nabu-epuš robs the temple (SAA 13: 138)</td>
<td>Nabu-eriba steals from Ninurta’s temple (SAA 13: 128)</td>
<td>Nabu-le’i (professional title unknown) copies scholarly tablet for Ezida (CTN 4, 187)</td>
<td>Pulu reports abnormal entrails in sacrifices; is accused of misbehaving in Ezida (SAA 10: 131–4)</td>
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<th>Profession</th>
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<td>ūṭupšar Enūma Anu Ellil</td>
<td>Nabu’a of Assur’s reports (SAA 8: 126–38; SAA 10: 122–7)</td>
<td>Issar-nadin-apli’s reports (SAA 10: 136–42)</td>
<td>Observations made elsewhere to be checked here (SAA 8: 255; SAA 10: 151)</td>
<td>Observations made in Kalhu to be checked elsewhere to be checked here (SAA 10: 134–5)</td>
<td>Observations made in Kalhu to be checked in Assur and Arba’il (SAA 10: 151)</td>
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<td>Issar-šumu-ereš advises on erection of royal statues in temple of moon god to ensure lunar regularity (SAA 10: 13)</td>
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<td>Babu-šumu-iddina’s reports (SAA 10: 134–5)</td>
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<td>Chief scribe Issar-šumu-ereš inspects temples (SAA 10: 21)</td>
<td>Observations made elsewhere to be checked here and in Assur (SAA 10: 151)</td>
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<td>Ominous event observed here (SAA 10: 127)</td>
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<td>At least some of Akkullanu’s letters and reports sent from here (SAA 8: 110–2; 10: 84–108; SAA 13: 16)</td>
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### Table: Oracles and Literary Works

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<td>raggim(t)u prophets</td>
<td>Oracles by Ilussa-amur and Nabu-hussanni (SAA 9: 1.5, 2.1; SAA 13: 37)</td>
<td>Oracles of Ištar of Arba’îl by Ahat-abiša, Baya, Dunnaša-amur, Issar-beli-da”ini, Issar-la-tašiyat, Ladagil, Sinqiša-amur and Tašmetu-ereš (SAA 9: 1.1–2, 1.4, 1.7–8, 1.10, 2.2–3, 2.5 3.1–5, 6, 9–10; SAA 13: 139, 144, 148?)</td>
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<td>Oracal by Urkittu-šarrat (SAA 9: 2.4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literary works</td>
<td>Blessing for the city of Assur (SAA 3: 10)</td>
<td>Hymns to Arba’îl and to Ištar of Arba’îl (SAA 3: 3, 8)</td>
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attest to the presence at court of scholars from Assur, Arba’īl, Harran, Kalhu and the city of Nineveh, as well as those qat šarrī ‘in the king’s service’ (Fig. 4.2). Likewise, scholars from Nineveh, Kalhu, Kilizi and Arba’īl were naturally amongst the many thousands of Assyrian citizens who convened in the capital in early 672 to swear to uphold Esarhaddon’s succession treaty, which appointed his sons Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin as crown princes of Assyria and Babylonia respectively. The king had learned correspondents in cities across Babylonia as well as Assyria, while the court scholars themselves were also relatively mobile, both because the king himself moved around and also because they were sent all over the region on royal business. The geography of scholarship, however, was different for different scholarly professions (Fig. 4.3). We will start with the bārû-diviners, who spent most time in the king’s presence, then move to the more independently mobile asû- and ašipu-healers, before considering the largely absent kalû-lamenters and the ūtuš Enûma Anu Ellil.

Whether or not Esarhaddon fully acceded to The Sin of Sargon’s demand that he trust only in diviners (see Chapter 3), it is apparent that wherever the king went, his most senior bārûs were expected to accompany him, and diviners simply took over suitable public spaces for their performance. This was not solely a matter of expediency but an important aspect of divination’s function. Members of the royal entourage who saw it in action were reassured that both gods and king were taking time to consider matters of grave import, whether or not the exact questions put to the gods Šamaš and Adad were publicly known. Within Nineveh, divinations were performed in the New (Southwest) Palace and in the crown prince’s Succession (North) Palace on Kouyunjik, as well as the Review Palace on Nebi Younis. Extispicy could take place in the sacred qersu enclosure by the river too – and even on the roof of a temple, where an ominous hoopoe had been spotted. Royal diviners also performed in the cities of Kalhu, Tarbiṣu, Adian and Arba’īl as needed. However, although the king seems always to have had diviners at hand, just in case, divination did not simply happen at his whim. A fragmentary hemerology, or ominous calendar, specifies at least fifteen days of a particular month which are ‘auspicious days for performing extispicy’.

Mobile divination-on-demand entailed a reliable supply of sacrificial animals as well as peripatetic scholars. However, this aspect of the practice is much harder to trace: there is just one very fragmentary letter to the king mentioning a bārû and some sheep. Senior temple staff, such as Dadi in Assur, report major problems with corrupt shepherds and failure of the offerings supply chain. We do not know whether the royal diviners were similarly occupied – but somebody must have been

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Figure 4.2: Cities from which scholars travelled for royal banquets and treaty ceremonies in Nineveh in the seventh century BC. Source: Martin Brown.
Figure 4.3: Geographies of the scholarly professions at the Assyrian royal court in the seventh century BC. Source: Martin Brown.
responsible for maintaining a regular source of high-quality animals. The courtly *barûs* were not part of the clean-shaven temple priesthood, however, or the diviner Šulaya could not have *ziqišu ibaqqa* ‘torn at his beard’ in frustration.\(^\text{18}\)

Letters from *asû*-healers to the king are infrequent, suggesting that there was much personal contact instead. Yet while the chief *asû* Urad-Nanaya twice reminds Esarhaddon of what he said and did *ina pañ šarri* ‘in the king’s presence’, he also formally requests permission to enter the palace: court security was so tight that even he could not simply wander in.\(^\text{19}\) More often than not he writes in order to send medications, usually with instructions on how the king’s personal servants should administer them.\(^\text{20}\) Mostly this is because he is attending royal patients elsewhere but once it seems that he is *buralli attiši ussabiš* ‘too busy cooking beryl stones’ to attend to the king himself.\(^\text{21}\) No wonder the king grumbles that his own staff don’t give him the care and attention enjoyed by sick kings in former times.\(^\text{22}\)

But in fact Urad-Nanaya is usually at the king’s beck and call: he notes that *[ina bit šarri] išpuranni attalak*, ‘I have gone [where the king] sent me’, and asks to be excused from *ilku*-duty so that he can continue to serve the king.\(^\text{23}\) We do not know if his exhausted request for a month’s leave was ever granted.\(^\text{24}\) Urad-Nanaya’s colleague Ikkaru, who had formerly served crown prince Esarhaddon, paints a similar picture: he sends the king medications, reports on the health of the prince(s) in his charge, requests a response and – interestingly – announces that he will come and see the king unless he hears otherwise.\(^\text{25}\) Royal *asûs*, it seems, were always on duty: if not attending the king himself they were at the bedside of an ailing royal child or two, in the private quarters of another royal palace, or close at hand (at home in Nineveh?) preparing medications for the royal family. As for the *barûs*, there is no hint that these men were priestly personnel.

Like the chief *asû*, the chief *ašipu*-healer Adad-šumu-uṣur took care of other members of the royal family as well as the king and occasionally sent him medicines, as did his successor Marduk-šakin-šumi.\(^\text{26}\) However, as the sheer volume of surviving correspondence also suggests, he was not always at the king’s disposal:

Concerning what the king, my lord, wrote to me: ‘Why haven’t you sent an answer to (my) letter?’ – I had to drive to the palace those rams that the chief cook had brought out for me, and the writing-board was at my house. Now then, I can look at the writing-board and extract the relevant interpretation. Concerning the ritual against earthquake […].\(^\text{27}\)
Where was Adad-šumu-uṣur’s house? It could well have been in Nineveh of course, but is just as likely to have been in Kalhu, where he kept scholarly tablets in Nabu’s temple and performed exorcistic rituals (Table 4a). Given that Sargon II endowed Nabu’s new temple in Dur-Šarruken with the means to support an ʾāšipu (Chapter 3), it is likely that the Kalhu Ezida also provided Adad-šumu-uṣur and his family with an independent income. Although there is no explicit statement on the matter, on the balance of evidence it is highly likely that the ʾāšipu was a priestly office, held by the Gabbu-ilani-ereš family for many generations.

But Adad-šumu-uṣur also took private clients. Later in the same letter, he reports on the health of the scholar Urad-Daguna’s ailing child and signs off, ‘If it pleases the king, my lord, I will go and see him (the child) tomorrow. I will return for the (earthquake) ritual.’ On another occasion he is prevented from attending promptly to ailing princes because he is performing a ritual at the scribe Dan(n)i’s house for the latter’s sick son. One gets the sense that he has a degree of autonomy. Nevertheless, when summoned by crown prince Ashurbanipal he announces, [ša] šaprākuni annāriq [attalka] ‘[because] I was sent for, [I have come] now’. And he responds likewise to the king’s instructions: ina muhhi ša beli išpuranni assamme; aššar ... allak ‘I always listen to what (the king) my lord has written to me; tomorrow I shall go ... […].’ Conversely, to some extent he controlled the royal family’s movements too, in advising the king on auspicious dates for particular activities.

On one occasion Adad-šumu-uṣur and the kalû-lamenter Urad-Ea attend the sacred qersu-enclosure on the banks of the Tigris near Nineveh in order to perform vital purification rituals to protect the king from the evil of the eclipse. But they do not intend to stay for the duration, offering substitutes in their place:

I have appointed an ʾāšipu for the kalû who is here, and gave him the following orders: ‘For 6 days do likewise, performing the purification ritual like this’.

On a similar occasion the ʾāšipu Marduk-šakin-šumi performs twenty-one prayers and incantations against the evil of an eclipse on the river bank, with Urad-Ea performing another set ina nubatti ina ʾiri ekalli ‘this evening on the roof of the palace’. Marduk-šakin-šumi also encourages the king to have similar rituals performed in Kalhu to protect princes Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin. Adad-šumu-uṣur travels further afield, to ‘Akkad’ (probably Babylon) to oversee the Babylonian end of the Substitute King Ritual. On another occasion he accompanies the god
Marduk’s statue back to Babylon with Issar-šumu-ereš and Marduk-šak-in-sumi. But although he advises on the timings of akītu-festivals in the cities of Der and Babylon he does not need to attend them himself.

Perhaps the most interesting insight into the geography of court āšipūtu, however, comes from this comment of Adad-šumu-ušur’s on the unreliability of foreign medicines:

And concerning the string of (amulet) stones, what the king, my lord, said is quite correct. Did I not tell the king, my lord, (already) in enemy country that they are unsuited to Assyria? Now we shall stick to the methods transmitted to the king, my lord by the gods (themselves).

The king, it seems, has tried out a healing necklace, acquired on a military campaign, which has failed to live up to expectations. In reminding the king that he should have heeded the warning given at the time, Adad-šumu-ušur is not so much decrying the quality of foreign therapies – for both asûs and ašipus sourced amuletic semi-precious stones from far beyond Assyria’s borders – as attempting to re-establish his, and his deities’, own authority and control over the king’s wellbeing. It also tells us that the king travelled with a senior ašipu in his retinue.

Much less can be gleaned about the movements of the king’s kalû-lamenters, although it is clear that they too had independent lives, as priests of the moon-god Sin in faraway Harran. Two different scholarly tablets describe Urad-Ea and his son Nabu-zeru-iddina as kalamaḥ/ kalē Sin u šarri ‘(chief) kalû of Sin and the king’. We have already seen Urad-Ea perform eclipse rituals at the qersu and ‘on the roof of the palace’ for Adad-šumu-ušur. Indeed most of his performances took place at night, in the open air, in the presence of the heavenly bodies which represented the deities he was placating. He also travelled to Assur for sacrifices; to Arba’il with the ašipu Nabu-nadin-šumi; to Kurba’il; and home to Harran with a bodyguard, to perform royal rituals, at which the king was represented by his garments. Other kalûs, who like Urad-Ea were all temple personnel, came to the king’s attention only when they were misbehaving (Table 4a).

The most widely dispersed of the royal scholarly networks was that of the tupšar Enûma Anu Ellil, ‘scribes of (the omen series) “When the gods Anu, Ellil (and Ea)”’ (Fig. 4.3). As I have argued elsewhere, this title did not represent a primary professional calling but instead was adopted as secondary identity by a range of ašipus, kalûs and other temple personnel who had appropriate expertise. The king received reports of ominous
celestial events from the Assyrian cities of Assur, Arba’il, Kilizi and Kalhu and from at least the cities of Babylon, Borsippa, Dilbat, Kutha and Uruk in Babylonia (online Table A9). But the scholars in these further-flung places did not necessarily communicate with one another; instead they sent independent reports and interpretations of the same events, in order to help the king measure the consistency of his own court scholars’ observations and analyses. Babylonian observers (and diviners) who failed to report to the king were themselves reported.

Despite the wide reach of this network, its members appear to have been less mobile than other court scholars, although the rab ṯupšarrī travelled on other business for the king. Generally speaking celestial omen reports were read to the king by scribes rather than presented in person but the king also welcomed face-to-face discussions with senior scholars.

The ṯupšar Enūma Anu Ellīl were perhaps more concerned than any other scholarly profession with the geography of knowledge: with the ways in which portents observed in the skies and on earth mapped onto real-world events. As the crown prince’s ummānu Balasi explains, terrestrial omens had only local effects:

As to what the king, my [lord], wrote [to me]: ‘[In] the city of Harihumba lightning struck and ravaged the fields of the Assyrians’ – why does the king look for (trouble) and why does he look (for it) [in] a peasant’s house? There is no evil inside the palace, and when has the king ever visited Harihumba?

What mattered instead were celestial events – in other words events that the scholars themselves could observe and corroborate for themselves without reliance on eyewitness reports from untrustworthy non-experts. The more trusted experts used both celestial and hemerological means to manage the king and crown prince’s movements. For instance, Nabu-ahhe-eriba advised Ashurbanipal in 667:

Mars has turned around, started moving, and is going forward in the Scorpion constellation; that is a bad sign.

Let them finish the muster quickly. The (public) appearances of the king, my lord, should be rare until we see how (Mars) moves and stands.
As is well known, however, more frequently celestial events portended good or bad for whole regions. To take a simple example, here is Nabu-ahhe-eriba again, quoting an omen from *Enūma Anu Ellil*:

[If the moon becomes visible in] Nisannu (Month I) on the 30th day: Subartu [will devour] the Ahlamu; a foreigner will rule the Westland.

We are Subartu.  

The first half of the omen is in effect an observation statement: Nabu-ahhe-eriba has observed the new moon at sunset on the final day of the month. The prediction, drawn from the omen series, is couched in arcane and archaic language: geographical terms such as ‘Subartu’ and ‘Ahlamu’ were rarely used in everyday communication. Nabu-ahhe-eriba thus explains the equation Subartu = Assyria. He does not bother to clarify the other terms (although Ahlamu = the Arameans who inhabited the western Middle East) as it is enough that the omen portends well for Assyria.

Finally, we should consider an alternative conduit of divine communications to the king: the mostly female, mostly uneducated ragg-im(t)u, literally ‘shouters’, ecstatic prophets. Both the king and his scholars had a high regard for the importance of visionary dreams and ominous utterances. But, unlike the other revelatory disciplines discussed here, they were not the exclusive preserve of the literate, male elite. Reports of ecstatic revelations concerning king and country came to Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal from both male and female prophets, speaking more often than not in the name of the goddess Ištar of Arbaʾil. Naturally, most prophets were residents of Arbaʾil but reports also came occasionally from Assur, Kalhu and the mountain town of Dara-ahuya (Table 4a). Ninevite prophecies are conspicuously absent.

**The uses of scholarly tablets and compositions in Neo-Assyrian court scholarship**

Although there were significant practical and performative aspects to the court scholars’ work, it was primarily their literate erudition, as well as their family connections, that earned them their place at court. Although the bulk of the tablets found at Nineveh bear colophons of Ashurbanipal
(as discussed further below) or have no surviving colophon at all, they also include manuscripts written by or for scholarly members of the Gabbu-ilani-ereš family – Adad-šumu-ušur, Issar-šumu-ereš, Urad-Gula and perhaps Marduk-šakin-šumi – as well as the kalû Nabu-zeru-iddina. The tablets from the Ezida temple in Kalhu were also particularly closely associated with the Gabbu-ilani-ereš men, as we saw in Chapter 3, along with their close associate, the āšipu Banunu who never names his family. We can thus make a preliminary exploration of the relationship between scholarly literacy and scholarly activity at Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal’s court.

Unfortunately, though, it is still difficult to get a clear picture of the number and contents of the scholarly tablets found on the royal citadel at Nineveh, over a century and a half since their first discovery. The vast quantity, often fragmentary state and complex post-excavation history of the Kouyunjik tablets mean that there is still no comprehensive overview of them. However, two overlapping subsets of the corpus have been analysed (Table 4b; Fig. 4.4). According to Eckart Frahm about 800 learned commentaries survive from Kouyunjik, of which nearly half concern the omen series Bārûtu (divination from the entrails of sacrificed animals, used by bārûs) and just under one-third deal with the celestial omen series Enûma Anu Ellîl (used, of course, by the tûpšar Enûma Anu Ellîl). In all, over five-sixths of the commentaries are related to omens of some sort or another, a further one-seventh treat word-lists, and just one in thirty concern other topics. Similarly, Jeannette Fincke identified nearly 3,600 Kouyunjik tablets written in Babylonian (rather than Assyrian) script. Some 1,880 of these are, or are likely to be, scholarly tablets. Two-fifths of them belong to omen series, or commentaries on them, with Enûma Anu Ellîl representing the highest proportion and Bārûtu the second. Hymns and prayers, incantations and rituals – the domains of the kalû and the āšipu – each account for about an additional one-sixth of the Babylonian corpus at Kouyunjik, while medical recipes and related texts are the fourth-largest group, at just less than a twentieth of the corpus. Other genres, such literary myths and epics, Babylonian-style observational astronomy, hemerologies, royal inscriptions and chronicles, barely feature at all in either data set.

Although these are both small subsets of the Kouyunjik collection – the commentaries represent perhaps 5 per cent of the whole, the Babylonian tablets just over 12 per cent – they present an impressively consistent picture. The best-represented scholarly works, and those most frequently subjected to critical analysis through commentary, relate to the activities of the rab tûpšarrî and his tûpšar Enûma Anu Ellîl colleagues, along with the equally high-status bārûs. This is exactly to be expected.
given the importance of both types of omens in royal decision-making. The corpora of the *ašipus, kalûs* and *asûs* are present in smaller but still significant numbers, but are rarely subject to commentary as these scholars’ courtly roles primarily involved performance and remedy rather than giving advice.

However, we can further nuance this picture (Table 4b; Fig. 4.4). A useful comparandum are the 280 surviving scholarly tablets from Nabu’s temple Ezida in Kalhu which, as we have seen, was the long-term base of

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**Figure 4.4:** Percentages of scholarly genres at Kouyunjik and Kalhu, with further detail of the omen series. NC = Nineveh commentaries; NB = Nineveh Babylonian tablets; NBL = scholarly works in Nineveh booty lists and inventories; KE = tablets from the Kalhu Ezida. Source: author.
Table 4b: Percentages of scholarly genres at Kouyunjik and Kalhu.

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<td>Total number of tablets</td>
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<td>1880</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>284</td>
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</table>

* These genre descriptions are admittedly crude and anachronistic but help to give a rough overview of the compositional make-up of collections and corpora. Using observers’, rather than actors’, categories consistently across time and place also enables approximate diachronic and regional comparison (see also Tables 4c, 6b and 6c). Some comments on genre designations: ‘Astrological’ is shorthand for works using zodiacal methodology and thus only applies to writings of the fifth century BC or later (see Chapter 5). ‘Astronomical’ is reserved for observational and calculational works, plus Mut–Apin; it does not include the omen series Enûma Anu Ellil (under ‘omens’). ‘Historical’ consists of king lists, eponym lists, royal inscriptions and the like. ‘Literary’ mostly comprises narrative compositions but also proverbs. ‘Mathematical’ comprises arithmetical tables, metrological lists, calculations and word problems. ‘Medical’ consists of recipes, ingredient lists and similar, but not omen series such as Sakkikû, Alandimmû, etc. The ‘School’ category consists of elementary pedagogical exercises, extracts and compilations as defined by Gesche (2001). Commentaries are not counted as a separate genre but are included with the works they pertain to.
the Gabbu-ilani-ereš family of Assyrian court āšipus. Once again omens make up the largest single group but only represent one-quarter of the total. Enûma Anu Ellil is the most frequently attested, at 10 per cent. These manuscripts may have formed the reference material for the celestial omen reports written by Esarhaddon’s chief Āšipu Adad-šumu-ušur. There are also significant numbers of Šumma Ālu and Šumma Izbu manuscripts but Barûtu is entirely absent. Given that Assyrian court protocol kept āšipu quite separate from the other scholarly professions, and that they were not temple personnel, it is not surprising to see none of their works in the Ezida. On the other hand, incantations and rituals – āšipūtu in other words – comprise over one-fifth of the Kalhu corpus, the largest proportion after the omens. Lexical works, historical inscriptions, hymns and prayers, and medical recipes are also well represented but – as in Nineveh – there are very few myths, epics or astronomical texts, and almost no commentaries.

In the absence of further evidence, it could be argued that these survival patterns are not truly reflective of usage patterns. Accidents of destruction and survival over the millennia and the haphazard nature of excavation, not to mention the almost complete absence of writing-boards in the archaeological record, all distort the evidence base. However, as we shall see, remarks made in the early seventh-century court correspondence strongly suggest that the surviving tablets in the three subcorpora we have just examined – commentaries, texts in Babylonian script and tablets from the Kalhu Ezida – are largely representative of the writings that the scholars actually used.

As is well known, both the ṭupšar Enûma Anu Ellil’s reports to Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal and the barûs’ reports to Ashurbanipal are full of citations from the celestial and sacrificial omen series. But, in a form of Latourian metrology (see Chapter 2), neither set of scholars used the full range of omens available to them. Barûs were really only concerned about the unfavourable portents they observed. Reports predicting an unfavourable answer to the king’s request to the gods typically included four or five omens, but the entire extant repertoire comprises just sixty-four different omens out of the many thousands given in the ninety-nine-tablet omen series Barûtu. Perhaps more tellingly, Barûtu describes, and gives portents for, thirteen ominous zones of the liver but only six of those zones are mentioned regularly in the corpus of surviving reports; two more appear just once, while the remaining five are never mentioned. It seems that, even on a generous estimate, Ashurbanipal’s barûs used no more than about one in ten sacrificial omens in practice. But there were good reasons for this parsimony. As Ulla Koch-Westenholz
has explained, one function of the mukallimtu-commentaries to Barûtu was to group together all the omens about individual observed phenomena from across the omen series and beyond.\textsuperscript{70} There were often six or seven equivalent omens for the same phenomenon; only one needed to be chosen in practice. In a similar way, the writers of celestial omen reports tended to rely on a reduced set of celestial omens, especially those used in the mukallimtu-commentary to Enûma Anu Ellil known as Sin ina tamartišu.\textsuperscript{71}

While one role of mukallimtu-commentary series was to organise and reduce a mass of chaotic observational data and their meanings into a manageable dataset, they and other types of commentary also helped to interpret what had been observed. For instance, many commentaries on the celestial omen series provided strategies for interpreting one phenomenon as the analogue or equivalent of another, such as one that took place at a different time of the month or concerned a different heavenly body.\textsuperscript{72} Similarly, the final chapter of Barûtu, whose title is Multābitu, ‘Interpretation’, summarises the principles by which predictions are drawn from observations, while there were also mechanisms for calculating the period for which omens were valid.\textsuperscript{73} It is no wonder, then, that these compositions, designed to aid the scholarly aspects of royal decision-making, existed in such quantities at Nineveh.\textsuperscript{74}

However, it is difficult to determine whether scholars consulted such texts routinely or only when memory failed.\textsuperscript{75} The barûs’ reports were written in large, crude script on rough clay, strongly suggesting that they were made by the divinatory team’s bēl tēmi ‘reporter’ as the examination of the animal progressed – and therefore that the omens were quoted from memory rather than from consultation with the Barûtu series.\textsuperscript{76} Reporters of celestial omens, by contrast, do sometimes explicitly mention that they have consulted Enûma Anu Ellil.\textsuperscript{77} For instance, Mar-Issar writes to Esarhaddon from Babylonia about a recently observed lunar eclipse in 671 bc, ‘I have extracted the [relevant] interpretation written on the tablet and sent it, together with this letter, to the king, my lord’.\textsuperscript{78} Likewise, Balasi and Nabu-ahhe-eriba quote astronomical descriptions from Mul-Apin to the king, although they may be doing so from memory.\textsuperscript{79} Scholars also occasionally refer to looking up omens in the compendia Šumma Ālu and Šumma Išbu.\textsuperscript{80} In one instance – the lightning strike in rural Harihumba discussed above – Balasi uses direct quotation to head off the king’s concerns (though again he may know this passage by heart):

If the king, my lord, says: ‘How is it said (in the tablets)?’ (the relevant omen is): ‘If the god Adad devastates a field inside or outside a
city, or if he puts down a … of (his) chariot, or if fire burns anything, the said man will live in utter misery for 3 years.’ This applies (only) to the one who was cultivating the field.\footnote{81}

By stark contrast, never once in nearly 130 extant letters do the \textit{ašipu}ś cite the prognostic omen series \textit{Sakikkû} ‘Symptoms’ in support of their diagnoses, recommendations or instructions.\footnote{82} Rather, their prognoses tended to be based on careful observation, long experience and a large dose of no-nonsense pragmatism.\footnote{83} Marduk-šakin-šumi, for instance, reassures Ashurbanipal:

> Concerning the chills about which the king, my lord, wrote to me, there is nothing to be worried about. The king’s (personal) gods will quickly cure it, and we shall do whatever is relevant to the matter. [It is] a seasonal illness; the king, my lord, should not worry.\footnote{84}

However, when it came to ritual activity, court \textit{ašipu}ś liked to do things by the book.\footnote{85} In a now very fragmentary letter the \textit{rab ūpšarrī} Issar-šumu-ereš quotes instructions for performing an apotropaic ritual against earthquake in the Review Palace.\footnote{86} In 670 BC the \textit{rab ašipī} Marduk-šakin-šumi paints a very detailed picture of the preparations for an eclipse ritual, somewhere outside Nineveh, which Esarhaddon is trying to hurry along:

> Concerning the ritual about which the king said yesterday: ‘Get it done by the 24th day’ – we cannot make it; the tablets are too numerous, (god only knows) when they will be written. Even the preparation of the figurines which the king saw (yesterday) took us 5 to 6 days …. And concerning the Sumerian texts of the counter-spells about which the king said: ‘Send (word)! They should be brought from Nineveh!’ – I shall send Nadin-ahhe; he will go and bring them. He will also bring with him the other tablets of the ‘refrain series’. Let the king perform (his part) on the 2nd of Ṭebetu (month X), the crown prince on the 4th and the people on the 6th.\footnote{87}

This letter reminds us too that tablets could be written anew and sent where needed. We have already seen Marduk-šakin-šumi and Urad-Ea performing from tablets on the riverbank and the palace roof. On another occasion Adad-šumu-uṣur dashes home to consult a writing-board.\footnote{88} He also sends tablets of incantations to the king, while the \textit{rab asī} Urad-Nanaya sends medical recipes.\footnote{89} In another revealing
letter to Esarhaddon, probably written a few months before the one just quoted, Marduk-šakin-šumi writes from Kalhu about preparing a ritual for the Queen Mother:

Now, if she – as the king, my lord, says – comes to Kalhu, let them send Ahuni to pick up and bring (the tablets), so she can establish(?) the interpretations. As for myself, I am presently collecting the 30 to 40 best tablets that are relevant to the matter, as well as (all) the existing extraneous ones that are ever performed (in this connection). 90

Was Marduk-šakin-šumi in Kalhu in order to consult the tablets there – at the Ezida or elsewhere? – or did he just happen to be there? Were the tablets he was looking at only in Kalhu or in Nineveh too? These passages raise the difficult questions of where, if anywhere, scholarly tablets and writing-boards belonged, who had access to them, and who – if anyone – had the authority to allow ‘royal’ tablets to circulate. We can start by noting that protective formulae in colophons, invoking one or more scholarly deities to protect the tablet, are extremely rare at both seventh-century Nineveh and Kalhu, although relatively common elsewhere. (We have already seen examples from twelfth-century Assur, eighth-century Nineveh and seventh-century Huzirina in Chapters 2 and 3.) Indeed, at Kalhu it is only the āšipu Banunu – who is conspicuously without ancestry – who protects his tablets, urging, gerginakku lā tupar-rar; ikkīb Ea ša Apsi ‘Do not disperse the gerginakku (‘collection(?’)); taboo of Ea, king of the Apsu’. 91 It seems as though the king and his scholars were in general supremely confident that their tablets would not fall into outsiders’ hands. However, in order to address such issues fully we need to think more carefully about the acquisition and management of scholarly writings at the Assyrian royal court. In other words, in what senses, if any, did they constitute a ‘library’?

Collection, acquisition and edition at the royal court

As Chapter 2 showed, the scholarly tablets found on the royal citadel at Nineveh have popularly been called ‘Ashurbanipal’s Library’ since at least 1871. But, as implied by the evidence presented here and in Chapter 3, scholars in the Assyrian king’s employ had been collecting learned writings for centuries before Ashurbanipal came to the throne. That much is
well known already (though we shall briefly review the evidence again below). What has not really been considered before is the chronology of Ashurbanipal’s own endeavours, which seem to post-date all the documentary evidence of others’ scholarly activity. That is, his concerted ‘library’-building effort (if such it was) seems to have taken place as Assyrian court scholarship was collapsing, in the mid-seventh century BC.

As we saw in Chapter 3, tablets entered royal collections by copying and capture, by local production and by long-distance acquisition. In the early fourteenth century Aššur-uballit appointed the Babylonian scholar Marduk-nadin-ahhe as his ṭupšar šarri, ‘royal scribe’. In the late thirteenth century Tukulti-Ninurta I claimed to have captured scholarly tablets as Babylonian booty. The late twelfth-century royal ăšipu-healer Ribatu copied incantations from a wooden writing-board from Babylon and left his tablets in the Old Palace at Assur. It is not clear whether Sargon II also systematically collected scholarship from Babylonian temples in the aftermath of his defeat of the usurper Marduk-apal-iddina in 710. Either way, he may well have recruited Babylonian scholars for his court circle while in residence there. Indeed, the only surviving manuscripts of new compositions from Sargon’s reign – now called the Nanaya Hymn of Sargon II and the Epic of Sargon II – are both in Babylonian script despite having been found in Nineveh (though they may be later copies in a Babylonian hand). They also remind us that Assyrian court scholarship was not simply a matter of reproducing Babylonian originals. Apart from the royal annals and other official inscriptions, which must have been produced by court literati, the Letter to Aššur reporting the highly profitable sack of Mušašir was written by Nabu-ušallim in 714 (in Neo-Assyrian script). Several historians have suggested that Nabu-zuqup-kenu was composing new works at this period too. Be that as it may, he certainly copied many chapters of Enūma Anu Ellil from Babylonian writing-boards onto tablets that eventually made their way from Kalhu to Nineveh. Donald Wiseman even suggested that Nabu-zuqup-kenu was the scribe responsible for producing the abandoned writing-board of Enūma Anu Ellil destined for Sargon’s new capital. Whether or not this hypothesis can ever be proven, the inscription on the cover gives incontrovertible evidence of plans for a scholarly tablet collection in the palace at Dur-Šarruken as well as in the temple:

Palace of Sargon, king of the world, king of Assyria. He had the series Enūma Anu Ellil written on a writing-board of elephant-ivory and deposited it in his palace at Dur-Šarruken.
Figure 4.5: Sources of scholarly tablets for the royal palaces at Nineveh, according to booty lists, inventories and colophons; at least two captive scholars from Nippur and the Borsippa region were also put to work making copies. Source: Martin Brown.
Even under Sennacherib, courtly production of scholarly works continued, a particular aim being to undermine Babylonian intellectual hegemony through appropriation of the epic *Enūma Eliš* and the denigration of Marduk in the so-called *Marduk Ordeal* (see Chapter 3). However, Sennacherib does not seem to have taken tablets or writing-boards from Babylonia during his campaigns against the region: his aim was total annihilation of its traditions and prestige, not preservation of its culture.

For Esarhaddon’s reign (680–669) there is particularly clear and copious evidence for the accumulation of tablets through indigenous copying and recall, editing and composing, and inheritance. Courtly works written at this period include, of course, *The Sin of Sargon*, as well as a hymn of praise to the city of Assur. It is possible that the scholarly tablets copied by Sargon’s ṭūpšar ēkallī ‘palace scribe’, Nabu-kaβti-ahhešu (Chapter 3), were moved to Nineveh from Kalhu or Dur-Šarruken in the early seventh century (if they were not written in Nineveh in the first place). We have seen that the scholar Nabu-uzuq-p-kenu’s tablets were moved from Kalhu to Nineveh, presumably by one of his descendants. His son Adad-šumu-usur’s name certainly features, with others, in a now very fragmentary inventory of scholarly works, mostly omen series, lexical lists and literary compositions, which seems to have been drawn up for the palace.

Various court scholars writing to king Esarhaddon report on – or complain about – the complexities of collecting, collating and editing old tablets. Not surprisingly, it is his rab ṭūpšarrī Issar-šumu-ereš who has most to say about this. In the context of an otherwise routine report on a full moon, he suggests:

> Let them bring in that writing-board of *Enūma Anu Ellīl* which we wrote, (and) let the king, my lord, have a look. Also, let them give us the Babylonian (lit. ‘Akkadian’) writing-board of the king; (the star map) *Three Stars Each* should accordingly be drawn on it. A eunuch should be appointed to open the seal (and) to supervise the drawing.

From this we learn that there were tablets and writing-boards ša šarrī ‘of the king’, which were kept in a particular location that it seems even Issar-šumu-ereš could not access without royal permission. Some manuscripts in the king’s collection were made by Issar-šumu-ereš himself, while others came from (or were copies of material from) Babylonia. Copying and compilation did not have to be directly supervised by
a scholar, as long as another trusted official, such as a eunuch, was on hand.\textsuperscript{106} The implication that royal permission was needed for editorial work is confirmed by a letter from the chief barû-diviner Marduk-šumu-uṣur and his colleagues Naṣiru and Tabni. They notify a king, almost certainly Esarhaddon:

The series should be revised. Let the king command: two ‘long’ tablets of šatu-commentary should be removed, and two tablets of Barûtu should be put (instead).\textsuperscript{107}

Simo Parpola understood the barûs to be requesting permission to revise what they teach their apprentices.\textsuperscript{108} But whether this was an educational or an editorial matter, it is clear that the diviners could not simply change the textual basis of their interpretative framework without consultation, as the king was so heavily dependent on it for decision-making on matters of state.

As for Issar-šumu-ereš’s ‘Akkadian writing-boards of the king’, these could be acquired in a number of ways. For instance, the Babylonian scholar Ašaredu the Younger notifies Esarhaddon that:

The tablet which the king is using is defective and not whole. Now then, I have written and fetched from Babylon an ancient tablet made by king Hammurabi and an inscription from before king Hammurabi. [Let] the king [perform] the ritual according to [these tablets (instead)].\textsuperscript{109}

But writings were not always offered voluntarily. A well-known administrative record documents eighteen Babylonian men under the supervision of Assyrian scholars, reciting from liginu-tablets and writing out ‘the Series’ (that is, Enûma Anu Ellil), ‘Sick Man’s House’ (the omen series Sakikkû) and the incantation series Utukku Lemniitu ‘Evil Demons’.\textsuperscript{110} As Parpola points out, two of these men can almost certainly be identified as the offspring of Babylonian governors: Ninurta-gimilli, son of the šandabakku of Nippur, who sipparrī parzilli šakin ‘has been put into iron fetters’; and Kudurru, son of Šamaš-ibni, sheikh of the Bit-Dakkuri tribe near Borsippa, who was deported to Assyria in 675 BC.\textsuperscript{111} Two others, Bel-epuš and Naṣiru, are probably identical with two of the āšipu-healers listed in the roster of court scholars from 670 BC with which this chapter opens. One of these men’s overseers, Banunu, may be the ancestor-less āšipu we have seen protecting the gerginakku of the Kalhu Ezida, above.
Esarhaddon’s son and successor Ashurbanipal began amassing a private tablet collection well before he took the throne. While he was still crown prince, for instance, his scribe Keni’s son Aplaya wrote a section of the word-list *Ura = Hubullu* for his *tamrītu* ‘checking’.\(^{112}\) As we saw in Chapter 3, Ashurbanipal dedicated at least a dozen tablets of *kalūtu* to Nabu and Tašmetu *ana balāt napšatišu* ‘for the preservation of his life’ and deposited them *ina gerginakki Ezida* ‘amongst the collection (?) of Ezida’, Nabu’s temple in Nineveh. Their colophons refer to him only as *rubû* ‘prince’, in contrast to his father and grandfather, who are both designated *šar kiššati šar māt Assur* ‘king of the world, king of the land of Assur’.\(^{113}\) A further three tablets dedicated to Nabu in a similar way are probably in the king’s own hand, an unusually large and idiosyncratic script. As Alasdair Livingstone notes, their colophons uniquely contain the phrase *anāku Ashurbanipal ‘I, Ashurbanipal’, but any royal titles that may have followed the name are now missing.\(^{114}\) It is possible that these too pre-date Ashurbanipal’s coronation, although he continued to offer votive scholarly tablets to Nabu’s temple once he became king.\(^{115}\)

However, the vast bulk of the colophons in Ashurbanipal’s name, which unambiguously refer to him as the king, were clearly written by expert chancery scribes on his behalf. Stephen Lieberman identified three distinct categories of the king’s scholarly tablets.\(^{116}\) We have just discussed the few dozen tablets that were votive offerings to Nabu in the Nineveh Ezida. The largest number of Kouyunjik tablets were simply stamped, painted or inscribed with the property mark ‘Palace of Ashurbanipal, king of the world, king of the land of Aššur’ (see Chapter 2). A smaller number, with more elaborate colophons, claimed that the king himself wrote, checked and deposited the tablet in the palace *ana tāmartišu* ‘for his reading’ and similar phrases.\(^{117}\) None of them is dated.

Thus, apart from the minority destined for Nabu’s temple – which, like its counterparts in Kalhu and Dur-Šarruken, was presumably the *āšipus*’ domain – the majority of Ashurbanipal’s tablets constituted ‘his personal collection, gathered in his palace for *his own study*, not to form any official, centralised collection for the use of his scholarly retinue or others.\(^{118}\) Indeed, this fits with Eckart Frahm’s observation, discussed above, that the large majority of Ashurbanipal’s commentary texts concerned the omen series *Barūtu* and *Enāma Anu Ellī*, precisely those works on which royal scholars based their recommendations for royal decision-making.\(^{119}\) Gianni Lanfranchi objected to Lieberman’s interpretation, on the grounds that it must have been ‘clear both to the king and to the scholars that even if the king had (had) rigidly uniform editions of scholarly texts at hand, the problem of correct interpretation would
have been left almost totally unsolved’. But in fact the interpretation of omens was routinely and necessarily a matter for discussion between king and scholars and never, so far as we can tell, simply a matter of filing a report.

Ashurbanipal’s wish to know the evidential basis for scholarly recommendations is particularly visible in the barûs’ communications with the king. During Esarhaddon’s reign and for the first decade or so of Ashurbanipal’s rule, the diviners did not, as far as we know, record their observations; only the queries they posed to the gods survive. However, sometime between 657 BC – the latest extant date on these divinatory queries – and 652 BC, Ashurbanipal started to make his scholars write summary reports of the ominous features they had identified in the entrails of the sacrificed animal, the omens that they chose to associate with those observations, and a brief overall verdict of ‘favourable’ or ‘unfavourable’. By this means the king was presented with the raw material for discussion ina puḫur ummânt, ‘in a gathering of scholars’, as he famously boasts of doing in the official inscription often cited as L4.

Historians usually assign to Ashurbanipal’s reign all letters to the king that discuss the copying, collecting and editing of scholarly tablets, on the assumption that he was the only Assyrian king interested in such matters. Yet at least some could equally well have been addressed to Esarhaddon. Neither king’s annals ever mention the confiscation of tablets or deportation of scholars to Nineveh, so we have no official chronology. However, Late Babylonian copies of three Neo-Assyrian letters give some insights into the means by which he acquired tablets from Babylonia – if we are to believe every detail of their historicity given that the extant manuscripts date to around 100 BC. One, purportedly from the scholars of Borsippa, promises to fulfil Ashurbanipal’s command to ‘Write out all the scribal learning (tuššarrītu) in the property of Nabu and send it to me’. Another, to Ashurbanipal from the scholars of Marduk’s temple Esangila in Babylon (or possibly vice versa), specifies more precisely a request for:

the entire corpus of scribal learning, the craft of Ea and Asalluhi: [Enûma Anû Ellil (?), Šumma] izbu, Šumma Ašlu ina melē šakin, ašipūtu, kalūtu, barūtu, and all the scribal [learning, as much as there is, that is in the possession] of the great lord Marduk, my lord.

The letter goes on to describe the manufacture of writing-boards in order to carry out this royal mandate, sent in ‘the fifth year’ of Ashurbanipal’s
reign, 664 BC, and the payment of a large sum of silver as recompense. Third, a letter-order from an unnamed king, presumed to be Ashurbanipal, commissions the otherwise unattested official Šadunu to ‘seize the scholars of Borsippa whom you know, and collect whatever tablets are in their houses and whatever tablets are kept in the Ezida temple (in Borsippa)’. There follows a long list of incantations and ritual series, with the reminder that ‘if, further, you see any tablet or ritual which I myself have not written to you about and it is good for my palace, take it too and send it to me’. The temple steward and city governor are instructed to enforce full compliance.

If we accept this very late testimony, the full-scale commissioning and confiscation of Babylonian scholarship was underway by the mid-660s. It was apparently far enough advanced by the 650s for Ashurbanipal to order his diviners to change their reporting practices. Another chronological clue is given by eight, now very fragmentary, inventories of the scholarly contents of some confiscated tablets and writing-boards that arrived in Nineveh in late 648 BC (Fig. 4.5). Most or all of these writings were the former property of named individuals, mostly Babylonians but also a few men in the crown prince’s retinue. Parpola estimated that these inventories originally listed the contents of some 2,000 tablets and 300 multi-leaved writing-boards, around 1,440 and 70 of which respectively are attested on the surviving fragments. Fincke’s more recent calculations for those surviving fragments are lower, coming to about 1,470 tablets and 140 writing-boards, plus a further 190 or so inscribed objects which could be either tablets or boards (Table 4b; Fig. 4.4). In any case, both agree that omen series represent by far the highest proportion of the extant inventories, perhaps three-quarters of the total. Notably, however, Bārūtu is only on writing-boards, while Enūma Anu Ellīl is mostly on tablets. Most surprising, though, are the 161 tablets of the terrestrial omen series Šumma Ālu, representing nearly one-third of the extant total. The Assyrian court scholars did not hold this form of divination in particularly high regard and in fact Fincke counts just seventy-three such pieces amongst the surviving Babylonian tablets. This makes Šumma Ālu the only inventoried composition or series which is attested in fewer numbers in extant tablets than in the contemporary records. Were the rest simply thrown away?

Whatever the case, the preponderance of omen series is striking, but perhaps by now unsurprising. In other words, whether or not these records document a routine addition to the palace tablet collection or an exceptional one, they are not witnesses to the development
of a ‘universal library’, as so many historians have claimed. Rather, this large-scale acquisition was closely targeted to the king’s particular needs. In particular Lanfranchi has suggested that ‘it was probably aimed at obtaining as many Babylonian texts as possible in order to achieve maximum thoroughness in the work of scholarly comparison’. Drawing on Parpola’s observation that ‘the texts listed for [the tablets’ and writing-boards’ erstwhile owners] do not represent their entire private libraries but rather only that part of it [sic] which they did not need in their professional work’, both Lanfranchi and, more recently, Jacqueline Du Toit have deduced a benevolent sort of despotism from these patterns. Lanfranchi argues that ‘royal patronage and the king’s personal cooperation in this work favoured and enhanced, at least ideologically, a process of cultural fusion between the two lands’, while Du Toit states that by only taking what he needed, ‘without damaging the fabric of the colonized society [Ashurbanipal] leaves the private citizenry able to fulfil their societal obligations’. Frame and George even suggest, least plausibly, that ‘the tablets were not so much confiscated as requisitioned temporarily for copying and then returned to their owners’. All of these proposed scenarios seem ideistically benign. Julian Reade, on the other hand, has perceptively situated the acquisition of tablets within the more general Assyrian royal propensity for hoarding war booty. Drawing a comparison with the vast quantities of ninth-century Phoenician ivory furniture abandoned for centuries in Kalhu’s Fort Shalmaneser, he notes:

   The perennial problem was that prestigious collections of imported goods, constantly accumulating in buildings that must in any event have been adequately furnished in Assyrian style may once have demonstrated Assyrian supremacy but became with the passage of time not merely old-fashioned but largely superfluous junk …. It is doubtful whether even Ashurbanipal’s tablet collections at Nineveh were properly maintained after his death, and there is no indication that either of his sons added to them.

Indeed, as we have seen from the chronology of decline outlined towards the end of Chapter 3, this process of abandonment may have even begun as early as the mid-640s BC, just a few years after these tablets entered the palace. We are left with the surprising conclusion that the heyday of Ashurbanipal’s library – his own personal tablet collection, that is – may not have lasted much more than a decade or two.
Beyond the royal scholarly network: Assur and Huzirina

Even though we have now seen abundant evidence for the primacy of Babylon and Babylonia as the ultimate source of scholarly writings, practitioners and even deities in Assyria, it is striking that the colophons on Ashurbanipal’s own tablets never give precise information on the origins of their sources. Instead one finds general statements such as ‘according to the wording of original tablets (and writing-boards) from the land of Assur and the land of (Sumer and) Akkad’ instead of the more usual convention of naming a city, temple or individual as the source. Thus the king’s personal collection erases all traces of its intellectual ancestry: it is as if its predecessors are both everywhere and nowhere. If information about knowledge elsewhere was erased on entry to Nineveh, was information about, and access to, royal scholarship similarly restricted? In other words, did the Assyrian court network connect back into the outside world, or did it just draw knowledge inwards? There are two places we can look: the ancestral city of Assur and the western provincial city of Huzirina.

Assur may have been the cultural heart of the empire, home of the Assyrian elite, burial place of kings and dwelling of the god Assur, but it had not been a centre of power since Ashurnasirpal II had moved the court to Kalhu in the early ninth century. As Eckart Frahm has discussed, this liminal position on the edges of political influence may well have been a factor in the revolts and coups that broke out sporadically in the city in the ninth to seventh centuries BC. Intellectually, as we have already seen, there was certainly some contact between Assur and the royal cities. Most fundamentally, the scholars of Assur likewise acknowledged Nabu as their primary divine mentor. Many of them took names containing the element Nabu and referred to themselves in colophons as ša Nabu tuklātsu ‘he whose trust is in Nabu’. Although, as we saw in Chapter 3, Nabu did not have his own temple in Assur until the reign of Sin-Sarru-iskun, there was a shrine to him in the goddess Ištar’s temple. It is not yet clear when that shrine was installed but the so-called Götteradressbuch of Assur tells us that one of its names was E-nig gidru-kalama after Nabu’s temple in Babylon, which was restored by Esarhaddon (Chapter 5). It is therefore possible that the Assur equivalent also dates to that time. During the reign of Ashurbanipal we know of at least one priest of Nabu-Horus in Assur.

As for individual contacts, Aššur-mudammiq of the Bel-kundi-ilaʾi family, scribes of Aššur’s temple in Assur, wrote out two chapters of the celestial omen series Enūma Anu Ellil that ended up in Nineveh. A man
named Nabu-mušeši reported on celestial omens for both Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal and may also have been a colleague of the chief scribe Issar-šumu-ereš. One Nabu’a of Assur sent routine reports of full moons, new moons and equinoxes to the palace in Nineveh over several years in the early seventh century BC. He may well have been a subordinate of Akkullanu, šangû-priest of Aššur’s temple, who was also a regular correspondent of kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. As well as reporting on non-routine celestial events, he sent them regular missives about cultic and ritual matters. It has even been argued that Akkullanu was involved in the creation of Ashurbanipal’s tablet collection, although his letters about such matters are just as likely to have been addressed to Esarhaddon. Equally, they may well concern textual production for the temple Akkullanu managed, which had a substantial tablet collection of its own, not for the palace in Nineveh.

Assur, then, contributed to the inward flow of royal scholarship; did any of that scholarship flow back out? A series of extensive archaeological excavations across the city in the early twentieth century yielded an informative and sizeable sample of domestic dwellings and potentially provided a unique insight into the degree of high-level literacy in major urban centres. Reconstruction of the archaeological record of Assur, however, has been badly hampered by the post-excavation loss of records, photographs and tablets through the vicissitudes of two world wars. The assemblage of perhaps several hundred scholarly tablets in Aššur’s temple, overseen by Akkullanu, needs much further study before meaningful conclusions can be drawn from it, as does the rather smaller one from (or near) the so-called Prince’s Palace, built by Sennacherib for one of his sons. The six domestic collections of scholarly tablets that were excavated from trenches all over the city range in size from a small cache of elementary school exercises to a large holding of at least 800 learned writings, assembled over several generations by a family of āšipus descended from one Baba-šumu-ibni (online Table A13). These men shared the same profession as the descendants of Gabbu-ilani-ereš in the Kalhu Ezida just 70 kilometres to the north, and were their almost exact contemporaries. If there had been free exchange of scholarly ideas, compositions and personnel between palace and city then we might expect to find evidence of it here.

The Baba-šumu-ibni family’s scholarly tablets were found, apparently in situ, in a single room of a substantial courtyard house, about 350 metres due south of Aššur’s temple. The tablets were clustered into groups which perhaps reflect their original disposition on shelves or in storage baskets. The family’s domestic archive was in the room next door,
above a vaulted tomb, with a few further tablets scattered elsewhere throughout the house. Little else by way of domestic furnishings or equipment was recovered. However, another room off the central courtyard had a dozen or more deposits of figurines and other objects buried at strategic points around it and red-plastered walls. It might have served as some sort of ritual performance space for the āšipus and their clients. Dates on the tablets show that the house was occupied until the fall of Assur in 614, when it was suddenly abandoned, presumably because its owners had fled or been killed.\footnote{157}

It is difficult to quantify and categorise the compositions in this tablet collection, not only because the room in which they were found was only partly excavated in 1908, but also because – for a variety of political and intellectual reasons – systematic work on them began only in recent decades and is still ongoing.\footnote{158} However, according to Olof Pedersén, incantations and rituals, hymns and medical texts make up over three-quarters of the assemblage, with only a handful each of literary works, lexical texts, ominous calendars and omens (Table 4c; Fig. 4.6).\footnote{159} Eckart Frahm identifies nine commentaries in the collection,

| Table 4c: Provisional percentages of scholarly genres in Assur and Huzirina |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Genres**                  | **Assur, Kišir-Aššur’s house**  | **Huzirina, Qurdi-Nergal’s house (after CAMS/GKAB)**                      |
|                             | (after Pedersén 1985–6: II 48–58)|                                                                        |
| Astrological                | —                               | —                                                                        |
| Astronomical                | 0.2                             | 1.8                                                                      |
| Hemerological               | 0.8                             | 1.3                                                                      |
| Historical                  | 1.5                             | 1.3                                                                      |
| Hymns and Prayers           | 4.8                             | 9.7                                                                      |
| Incantations and Rituals    | 36.7                            | 36.1                                                                     |
| Lexical                     | 2.2                             | 7.6                                                                      |
| Literary                    | 1.2                             | 14.7                                                                     |
| Mathematical                | 0.3                             | 0.3                                                                      |
| Medical                     | 35.3                            | 11.3                                                                     |
| Omens                       | 0.7                             | 6.5                                                                      |
| School                      | 0.7                             | 0.3                                                                      |
| Miscellaneous               | 1.8                             | 2.9                                                                      |
| Uncertain                   | 13.3                            | 6.3                                                                      |
| **Total number of tablets** | c. 600                          | 382                                                                      |

\* See note to Table 4b.
mostly dealing with incantations and rituals.\textsuperscript{160} He argues that specific details of their internal structure, along with occasional hints of local Assyrian dialect amid the erudite Standard Babylonian, show that they were composed for pedagogical purposes. The archival tablets from the house concern cultic activities in Aššur’s temple as well as apparently more mundane matters.

As Stefan Maul has brilliantly shown, the collection accrued over the course of the seventh century BC, as three generations of men wrote, copied and stored scholarly tablets as part of their training and professional business as āšipuš of Aššur’s temple in Assur (online Table A13).\textsuperscript{161} In the second generation, for instance, Kišir-Aššur’s titles evolved from šamallū šehru ‘junior apprentice’, through šamallū ‘apprentice’, šamallū āšipu šehru ‘junior apprentice āšipu’, āšipu šehru ‘junior āšipu’ and āšipu to āšip bet Aššur ‘āšipu of Aššur’s temple’;\textsuperscript{162} Kišir-Aššur apparently had no sons able to inherit his profession, for it was his nephew Kišir-Nabu whom he took on as an apprentice once the younger man had reached āšipu šehru status, most likely under his own father Šamaš-ibni.\textsuperscript{163} Other male members of the family are not well attested even though they too were āšipus. They presumably set up their own households and professional practices elsewhere, taking with them most of the tablets they had produced. However, the collection also included thirteen tablets with

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure_4_6.png}
\caption{Provisional percentages of scholarly genres in Assur and Huzirina. ABŠI = Assur, Baba-šumu-ibni family; HNŠ = Huzirina, Nur-Šamaš family. Source: author.}
\end{figure}
colophons of šamallû or šamallû šehru who apparently did not belong to Kišir-Aššur’s family, but who seem to have done part of their training with him and left behind some of their works when they moved on.\textsuperscript{164}

The family copied tablets and writing-boards from other collections in Assur, including Gula’s temple Esabad, and a man named Aššur-šarrani. One tablet was copied off an original from Nineveh.\textsuperscript{165} Other compositions came from Babylonian cities: Babylon itself, (Bit-)Dakkuri, Borsippa, Nippur and Uruk (Fig. 4.7).\textsuperscript{166} Recipes annotated with phrases such as hantšiš nasha ‘hurriedly excerpted’, along with protective curse formulæ against stealing or damaging tablets, hint at a lively flow of textual exchange within the Baba-šumu-ibni men’s scholarly community, however that might have been defined.\textsuperscript{167}

Through their positions at Aššur’s temple, the ašipus of the Baba-šumu-ibni family had professional contact with the institution of Assyrian kingship. Their tablet collection included prayers for kings Sargon, Ashurbanipal and Sin-šarru-škun, as well as several royal rituals to be performed in the temple.\textsuperscript{168} They also owned the only known manuscript of Sargon II’s Letter to Aššur, written in 714 bc (see Chapter 3), a copy of the Synchronistic King List, compiled during the reign of Ashurbanipal’s ephemeral successor Aššur-etel-ilani, and a short extract from a treaty of Sin-šarru-škun.\textsuperscript{169} Eckart Frahm further points out they also possessed tablets produced by members of the Bel-kundi-ila’i family, scribes of Aššur’s temple, possibly including a few by Aššur-mudammiq, some of whose other tablets made their way into the royal collections in Nineveh.\textsuperscript{170}

However, only two tablets hint at direct involvement with royal scholars. One is an exact duplicate – even down to the colophon – of the ominous calendar copied by Issaran-mudammiq, Ashurnasirpal II’s chief ašipu in the early ninth century bc.\textsuperscript{171} The Kalhu manuscript is the oldest dated tablet to have been found in the Ezida, and is likely to have been stored there since the temple’s earliest days (see Chapter 3). The Assur manuscript, on the other hand, could have found its way to the ašipus’ house from anywhere; at most it shows a long-ago relationship – perhaps even a blood relationship – to a former line of royal scholars which had vanished long before Baba-šumu-ibni’s descendants were active in the seventh century.

There is also a single tablet bearing two incantations, the first of which is said to be ‘a copy from the palace of Hammurabi, king of the world’ and the second ‘a copy from the palace of Esarhaddon, king of […]’.\textsuperscript{172} This juxtaposition of names recalls Ašaredu the Younger’s promise to Esarhaddon, discussed above, to send him tablets from Hammurabi’s
Figure 4.7: The scholarly networks of the Baba-šumu-ibni family of āšipus from seventh-century Assur. Source: Martin Brown.
time, a millennium before. The tablet’s colophon names the otherwise unattested šangû-priest Ninurta-šumu-lešir as its owner, with no mention of Kišir-Aššur or his relatives. It is not obvious, therefore, how it came to be in the house. Further, as Franz Köcher showed, both compositions are also known from other duplicates – including a copy of the first text by Kišir-Aššur himself – which do not mention any royal provenance. In any case, the incantation attributed to Hammurabi’s palace, in Neo-Assyrian script and Standard Babylonian dialect, can hardly be a 1,000-year-old direct survival from Babylonia. The names of prominent ancient kings became attached to a variety of therapeutic recipes, rituals and materials in the first millennium, thereby endowing them with both antiquity and authority. All in all, we should doubt the provenance claims made for these particular recipes.

Overall, the Baba-šumu-ibni family’s tablet collection is structurally very similar to that of the Kalhu Ezida, perhaps even more tightly focused on ašpilltu than its royal counterpart (Figs 4.4, 4.6). Yet it gives no strong evidence for relationships with Assyrian court scholarship – beyond professional roles within Aššur’s temple – but rather looks to its local community and to Babylonia instead. And as we shall see, the further we move from the imperial heartland the more inaccessible royal circles seem to have been.

A long-lived merchant city and cult centre of the moon god Sin, the city of Harran (Akkadian ‘Road’ or ‘Journey’) was located at the crossroads of two vital overland trade routes: east–west from the Assyrian heartland to Aleppo and the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean; and north–south down the Balikh river from Anatolia to the Euphrates and Babylonia. The Harran region, some 400 kilometres west of Nineveh, had been under Assyrian administration since the mid-ninth century BC but – for reasons that are not yet entirely clear – became particularly important to the state under Sargon II in the late eighth century. Despite being the epicentre of a major coup against Esarhaddon in 670 BC it remained in royal favour. Simo Parpola has even suggested that Ashurbanipal may have moved his residence there in 645 BC (see Chapter 3). Certainly, it briefly became the Assyrian capital after the fall of Nineveh in 612, as the empire regrouped and tried to fight back against the invading Medes and Babylonians.

We have already seen above that Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal’s chief kalûš, Urad-Ea and his son Nabu-zeru-iddina, held parallel appointments as kalûš of Sin in Harran. However, they were not native westerners but descendants of the illustrious Babylonian Šumu-libši, also a chief kalû. Two of Nabu-zeru-iddina’s three known scholarly tablets
were copies of original writing-boards from the Šumu-libši kin-group’s paternal house in Babylon.\textsuperscript{181} But these men were not the only scholarly incomers to the area, as witnessed by the finds from Huzirina (modern Sultantepe), a small town about 20 kilometres north of Harran.\textsuperscript{182}

Close to a large institutional building – almost certainly a temple, perhaps to the moon-god Sin of Harran or to the goddess Ištar – was a courtyard house with a small domestic altar made of rubble and plaster built against its outer wall, close to the front entrance. On top of the altar, the excavators found a pile of nearly 400 scholarly tablets, surrounded and protected by a semi-circle of empty storage jars and covered with a heap of stone and pottery vessels.\textsuperscript{183} The whole of the surrounding area was covered in smashed household goods and even a decapitated skull, suggesting that the tablets had been hurriedly deposited over the shrine for protection as the Babylonians and Medes threatened Harran and its environs in 610 BC.

The composition of the cached tablet hoard differs markedly in some respects from that of the contemporary Assyrian royal libraries (Table 4c; Fig. 4.6; cf. Table 4b; Fig. 4.4).\textsuperscript{184} Most noticeably, omens – which dominate court scholarship – account for less than one-fifteenth of the extant tablets from Huzirina. As in the Kalhu Ezida, hymns, incantations and rituals predominate (almost half the corpus). Medical recipes (one-tenth) and word-lists (one-fifteenth) survive in somewhat similar proportions to Kalhu, but the most conspicuous difference is the relatively large number of literary works, representing nearly one-sixth of the assemblage. More than fifty manuscripts of many of the great Standard Babylonian classics – including the *Epic of Creation*, *Gilgamesh*, *Anzu*, *Nergal and Ereškigal*, and the *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* – were found here, compared to just a handful in Kalhu. However, where the tablets from the royal cities are generally, as one might expect, elegantly executed in a clear hand and good orthography, the Huzirina tablets tend to poor spelling and sometimes incomprehensible script.\textsuperscript{185}

The scribes attested in the Huzirina colophons are particularly revealing of the collection’s function (online Tables A14–A15). The oldest scholarly tablets in the cache date to the first few years of Sargon II’s reign, including one copied by a Šum-tabni-ušûr, son of the crown prince’s *asû*-healer Nabu-tukulti.\textsuperscript{186} Greta Van Buylaere has suggested that they represent the first generation of cuneiform-literate Assyrians in Huzirina, sent to settle the area by the king himself.\textsuperscript{187} A generation later, the corpus starts to be dominated by members of the Nur-Šamaš family, who – it is reasonable to assume – probably lived in the immediately adjacent house. The paterfamilias was one Qurdi-Nergal, who is named
as a šamallû agašgû ‘novice apprentice’ in a tablet dating to 701 BC and later became šangû-priest of the gods Zababa and Baba of Arba’il, Harran and Huzirina. His son Mušallim-Baba also appears in colophons as a šamallû (agašgû), while in 619 BC Inurta-[…], a šamallû sehru ‘junior apprentice’ and son of the šamallû sehru Nabu-zer-kitti-lešir, is perhaps Qurdi-Nergal’s great-grandson.

Some unrelated men also wrote tablets ana tāmarti Qurdi-Nergal ‘for Qurdi-Nergal’s viewing’, including the eunuch and šamallû Nabu-ahu-iddin and his pupil Nabu-rehtu-us.ur. Using identical wording to the āšipu Banunu in Kalhu, the latter warns against the dispersal of the gerginaku as a taboo of the god Ea, in the colophon to a literary work copied in 701 BC. A further thirty or so writers, including twenty šamallû (šeरtu) ‘(junior) apprentice scribes’ are also named in the Huzirina cache (online Tables A15–A16). Apart from Šum-tabni-us.ur’s father, the crown prince’s asû, their parents include a bārû-diviner, two šangû-priests, eight scribes and two scribes of the turtānu. The turtānu was the most senior of Assyria’s military officials who, not coincidentally, also governed the province immediately to the north of Harran. A further tablet was even written by an otherwise unattested turtānu, Aplaya.

Conspicuously, none of these young men claimed to hail from the royal cities of Kalhu, Dur-Šarruken or Nineveh (Fig. 4.8). Instead their family backgrounds, where mentioned, are Huzirina, Assur and the Babylonian city of Kutha, also via Assur. A šangû-priest of Aššur’s temple in Assur and an āšipu from Babylon also appear in broken colophons, most likely as fathers, ancestors or owners of tablets that have been copied. And it was not only the human actors in the Huzirina network who were excluded from contemporary Assyrian royal scholarship. While three Huzirina tablets are said to be copies from Babylon, or from the goddess Gula’s temple Esabad, either there or in Assur, none claims to be from any other city of the Assyrian imperial heartland. And while Nabu was clearly central to the royal scholarly network, as we saw in Chapter 3, in Huzirina it was the divine couple Zababa and Baba of Arba’il, Harran and Huzirina who were the deities served by Qurdi-Nergal and his family.

While it is of course possible that Qurdi-Nergal and his descendants acquired some or all of these other men’s tablets through purchase, inheritance or exchange, their social homogeneity and mediocre scribal ability together suggest an alternative explanation. It is tempting to see the Huzirina tablet collection as the remains of a scribal school, run by Qurdi-Nergal and his descendants, perhaps to supplement their temple income. The parallels with the āšipu Kiṣir-Aššur’s household in Assur are compelling. Both houses, it appears, were centres of scholarly
Figure 4.8: The scholarly networks of the Nur-Šamaš family from seventh-century Huzirina. Source: Martin Brown.
apprenticeship that attracted advanced (but not always entirely competent) learners from outside the resident family. But the Huzirina students were not generally drawn from the local population who, as Van Buylaere has pointed out, were mostly Aramaic speakers. Rather, they were predominantly the sons of provincial officials, priests and scholars who – with the possible exception of Šum-tabni-usur in the first generation – had no direct connection to the Assyrian royal family or the inner circle of court scholars, although some belonged to well-to-do families from the city of Assur. The tablets were produced, as was traditional, by copying or dictation, by youths in their late teens or early twenties in the final stages of training, for their older teachers. The quality of the manuscripts, the rather isolated location and the social status of the apprentices collectively suggest that this was not an establishment of the highest educational standing – those would have been in the royal cities of the heartland – but certainly had aspirations and pretensions to cultural roundedness. As its students were not preparing to access the inner circle of the royal court they had no great need for omens in order to advise on imperial affairs. But as they were probably destined for positions in the middle ranks of imperial governance, they were given a thorough grounding in the literary classics of their culture as well as in standard works of healing, prayer and penitence. The presence of Assyrian scholarly tablets in Kullania (modern Tell Tayinat), 250 kilometres southwest of Harran, hints that the school at Huzirina may not have been entirely exceptional.

Conclusions

Not surprisingly, as the primary locus of royal power moved from city to city, so did its scholarly entourage. But what is perhaps more surprising is the degree of movement between cities in the Nineveh–Assur–Arba’il triangle and almost nowhere else, at least in the late eighth and early seventh centuries when the evidence is densest. This looks like a tiny area on the map, and it certainly is in comparison with the distances the Assyrian army travelled, but it is some 80–105 kilometres between each of the three cities as the crow flies. The Nineveh–Assur route is easily made by river but the journey to Arba’il was across hilly, often mountainous terrain. We might estimate that it took at least three days to get there from Nineveh or Assur, the other two corners of the triangle. Nevertheless scholars, especially ašipu-healers, regularly shuttled between Kalhu and Dur-Šarruken (c. 50 kilometres, mostly by river), later Kalhu and Nineveh (just
c. 35 kilometres by river), often independently of the whereabouts of the king. Indeed, to risk an anachronistic and over-topical analogy, we could say that the royal scholars were members of the Assyrian academic precariat, on zero-hours contracts. The king's kalû-lamenters were equally at home in the palace and in the temple, while his āšipus were affiliated with the various temples of Nabu. Indeed, we may even see these buildings as branches of the same institution, the particular domains of the leading scholarly family of the time. Bārû-diviners and asû-healers, who had no temple affiliations, so far as we know, were in much closer attendance on the person of the king, though asûs were just as likely to be assigned to other ailing members of the royal family, often in quite separate locations. With the exception of the rab ṭupšarrī, 'chief scribe', who was often out and about on royal business, reporters of celestial omens appear to have been more static, although as a group much more widely dispersed throughout the heartland of the empire and in northern Babylonia. Most of the men making celestial observations for the king primarily served him – and, we presume, their local communities – in other scholarly or priestly capacities, however. The title ṭupšar Enāma Anu Ellîl did not designate a primary profession but a secondary specialism. Interestingly, the non-literate, non-scholarly raggam(t)u prophets appear mostly where the scholars are not: namely in Arba’il, the one central Assyrian city which royal scholarship apparently barely penetrated.

Within the royal network, there seems to have been relatively free movement of tablets and texts. Scholars made copies of works for their own personal use, which also made their way into temple and palace collections. They also copied, compiled, composed and commented on scholarly works for the king and palace. The lack of protective formulae in their colophons, and in Ashurbanipal's, is suggestive. It cannot be that they openly shared the textual foundations of their learning with all comers. Rather, we must conclude that they were so confident of their ability to maintain their exclusivity that there was no need to guard against the possibility of outsiders gaining access to their network, while insiders need not be admonished to return what was, in effect, their common intellectual property.

If Stephen Lieberman is correct, access to Ashurbanipal’s palace collection for consultation was restricted to – or perhaps just by – the king himself.199 And while most Assyrians were willing to acknowledge their intellectual debts to Babylonia in colophons, Ashurbanipal treated the sources of his manuscripts as an imperial inheritance or denied their origins altogether. Given the demonstrated mobility of tablets between the
various palaces and Nabu’s temples, we should probably not be worrying about how many ‘libraries’ Ashurbanipal maintained. On this view, the fact that his tablets were divided between the Succession (North) Palace and the New (Southwest) Palace matters less than has recently been argued. It is only the lamentations he offered to Nabu’s Ezida in Nineveh – and which he thereby put at the disposal of the scholars attached to that temple – that should be treated as conceptually distinct.

Meanwhile in Assur, the ašīpus Kišir-Aššur, Kišir-Nabu and their associates belonged to a thriving urban network of scholars who looked to the temples of Aššur and Gula rather than to the palace for institutional support. As Stefan Maul has shown, there was controlled movement of apprentices and tablets between households, and copyists were careful to acknowledge their sources, whether city, temple or private individual. Intellectual interests were tightly focused on professional healing and ritual. Out west in Huzirina, the Šangā-priest Qurdi-Nergal and his descendants attracted apprentices from across the middle echelons of the imperial governing classes who were looking for a broad cultural education as well as a degree of professional literacy. The notable lack of commentaries here, compared to the collections of the Assur ašīpus and the royal court, suggest that they were primarily consumers of knowledge rather than creative thinkers. While we can imagine that many of these young men aspired to gain access to the inner circles of the royal court, it is unlikely that they ever did.

Notes

1. SAA 7: 1; e.g. Parpola (1993: XIV); Brown (2000: 49–50 n154) describes this list as ‘perhaps the best guide to the inner circle at this time’ (i.e. the reign of Ashurbanipal by Brown’s reckoning); on the dating to shortly after 671 bc see Radner (2009: 222), who also discusses the ‘foreign’ experts. For the concept of the ‘inner circle’ see Parpola (1993: XXV–XXVII).

2. SAA 7: 2.

3. Unambiguously attested elsewhere in the Assyrian royal correspondence: ṭupšar Ennāma Anu Ellīl Issar-Šumu-ereš, Balassu, Bel-ēṭir and Nadin-ahhe; ašīpus Nabu-gamil, Nabu-nadin-šumi, Remuttu; barūs Aqaraya, Bani and Zizi; kalū Nabu-zeru-iddina; homonymous senders of celestial omen reports: Bel-ušezib, Nabu’a and Zakiru; and the Assur ašīpu Kišir-Nabu is probably too young to be the man with that name listed on SAA 7: 1. For more details see online Tables A5–9.

4. On scholarly patronage at the Assyrian court, see Westbrook (2005); Robson (2011a).

5. Mostly published in SAA 4; 8; and 10 with reviews, additions and corrections at http://oracc.org/saao/knpp/lettersqueriesandreports/, last accessed November 2016.


7. Akkullanu also served as a judge, entailing yet more time away from advising royalty (Jas 1996: nos. 21, 46; Villard 1998a).

8. SAA 7: 149–53; ŠU-MIN MAN, e.g. SAA 7: 150, obv. iii 11’.

10. We know little about the movements of non-cuneiform scholars in the seventh century: the dagil isara augurs from the western lands who, for most of the eighth century, appear to have enjoyed much higher status at court than their local colleagues, as well as the Egyptian scholars. Of course, their presence in Assyria may well have been on diplomatic grounds rather than scholarly ones but – as the case of the Middle Assyrian asû Raba-ša-Marduk in Chapter 3 reminds us – they need not have been mutually exclusive, and initially brief visits could end up lasting a lifetime.

11. According to SAA 10: 182 Esarhaddon said of Marduk-šumu-us.ur(?), a-di ina KUR aš-šur kištu-ni | ūlu [qur]-ba-an-ni, 'As long as [he is] in Assyria, let him stay close to me'. The following paragraphs are based on the much more extensive Robson (2011a).


14. SAA 4: 122, 155, 196, 300, 324.

15. [PAB 15 U₄]-MEŠ DÙG.GA-MEŠ DÙ-u\H\ (SAA 8: 235, obv. 12; restored from parallel formulation in obv. 2); cf. SAA 10: 183.

16. SAA 16: 236.

17. SAA 13: 19.

18. *šu-la-a\HAL i-qab-a\HTI \ù ziq-ni-šú i-ba-qa-an (SAA 17: 105 rev. 10–11).

19. ina pa-an LUGAL aq-t·i-bi: SAA 10: 315 obv. 11, 324 obv. 14; Radner (2010a).


21. [ina É LUGAL iš-pur-an-ni-ni | a-ttal-ka (SAA 10: 318, l.e. 1–2); SAA 10: 324.

22. SAA 10: 320.

23. SAA 10: 328.


25. sha LUGAL be-li | jis-pur-an-ni ma-a a-ta-a | GABA.RI e-gir-ti la taš-pur-ra | ina ŠÂ É.GAL a-na udULÎÎTA'-MEŠ šú-nu | sha \GAL-MUHALDIM ū-sê-ša-an-ni | ū-se-li \šUZ\ ina É ŠÎU- \ù-ma-a an-nu-rig \šUZ | a-mar pi-sîr-a-na-sa-ha | ina UGU dul-li ša ri-i-bi | [...] (SAA 10: 202, obv. 5–13).

26. 2 ŠILA NINDA-MEŠ 2 ŠILA KAŠ-MEŠ ša za\MAS.MAŠ '2 litres of bread, 2 litres of beer for the šipu' (SAA 1: 128 rev. 16).


28. SAA 10: 222.


34. SAA 10: 240, cf. 271.

35. SAA 10: 24, 314; cf. 377.


38. \ARAD-žé-a ŠÎ.U.MAH 30 u LUGAL (Sm 80 l. 2', only colophon extant; Hunger 1968: no. 524); *NÁ-\NUMUN-\SUM = ŠÎ U₄30 u LUGAL (K 3238, rev. 8, a lament to Nabu; Hunger 1968: no. 500); cf. Parpola (1970–83: II 452); Gabbay (2014a: 120).


45. Robson (2019).
46. Brown (2000: 39) adds the Assyrian cities of Tarbišu, Ekallate, Kar-Mullissu, Kasappa, Harran, Dur-Šarruken and Arrapha to this list. But none of the letters or reports he cites as evidence relate to astrological reports from those cities: the scholars in Tarbišu, Ekallate and Kasappa are ālīpu (SAA 10: 93, 279, 294); the king not the tuššarru is in Kar-Mullissu (SAA 8: 472); neither king nor scholar is in Harran (SAA 10: 13); and Brown gives no evidence in support of naming Arrapha or Dur-Šarruken as the locations of royal scholarly activity. To the Babylonian list Brown (2000: 40) adds Nippur, Sippar and Ur. SAA 10: 114 does indeed state that there were tuššār Enāma Anu Ellil in Nippur, but there is no evidence that they reported to the king. The tablet purportedly from Sippar (CBS 1471 = SAA 10: 295) was purchased, not excavated (http://cdli.ucla.edu/P258805, accessed July 2018) and could thus have been unearthed anywhere. Even if it were found in Sippar, that tells us nothing about the whereabouts of its sender. Finally, SAA 8: 499 mentions only that the Babylonian tuššār Enāma Anu Ellil Šumaya met the king in Ur, not that he made observations there.
47. SAA 8: 255; SAA 10: 151, 225.
49. SAA 10: 60, 68–9, 76.
50. ša LUGAL [ša LUGAL] [še LUGAL] [ma-daraš] [ma-daraš] [ša LUGAL] [ša LUGAL]
51. e.g. SAA 10: 44, 48–54.
52. E.g. Koch-Westenholz (2000: 39) adds the Assyrian cities of Tarbišu, Ekallate, Kar-Mullissu, Kasappa, Harran, Dur-Šarruken and Arrapha to this list. But none of the letters or reports he cites as evidence relate to astrological reports from those cities: the scholars in Tarbišu, Ekallate and Kasappa are ālīpu (SAA 10: 93, 279, 294); the king not the tuššarru is in Kar-Mullissu (SAA 8: 472); neither king nor scholar is in Harran (SAA 10: 13); and Brown gives no evidence in support of naming Arrapha or Dur-Šarruken as the locations of royal scholarly activity. To the Babylonian list Brown (2000: 40) adds Nippur, Sippar and Ur. SAA 10: 114 does indeed state that there were tuššār Enāma Anu Ellil in Nippur, but there is no evidence that they reported to the king. The tablet purportedly from Sippar (CBS 1471 = SAA 10: 295) was purchased, not excavated (http://cdli.ucla.edu/P258805, accessed July 2018) and could thus have been unearthed anywhere. Even if it were found in Sippar, that tells us nothing about the whereabouts of its sender. Finally, SAA 8: 499 mentions only that the Babylonian tuššār Enāma Anu Ellil Šumaya met the king in Ur, not that he made observations there.
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54. SAA 16: 21.
55. The close synonym mahhû, literally ‘raver’, does not occur in Neo-Assyrian courtly letters but is found exclusively in literary and scholarly texts at this time (SAA 2: 6, obv. 117; SAA 3: 23 obv. 30, rev. 1–4).
56. The close synonym mahhû, literally ‘raver’, does not occur in Neo-Assyrian courtly letters but is found exclusively in literary and scholarly texts at this time (SAA 2: 6, obv. 117; SAA 3: 23 obv. 5; 34; obv. 28; 35; obv. 31; 39; obv. 27; SAA 4: 317, obv. 10; 320, obv. 9).
57. SAA 10: 59, 174, 298, 305, 361, 365; Butler (1998); Nissinen (1998). The Babylonian scholar Bel-ušezib complains that, while he was out of royal favour, raggimus and raggintus were summoned to court during Esarhaddon’s period as crown prince (SAA 10: 109).
58. As we saw from Ashurbanipal’s preparations for war against the Elamites in Chapter 3, the king himself could also commission or induce revelations for himself from Ištar of Arba’īl.
60. The British Museum’s ongoing Ashurbanipal Library Project, with the aid of funding from the Andrew Mellon Foundation, has begun a systematic online catalogue and image database of the Kouyunjik Collection, with the long-term aim of providing as much documentation as possible (www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_projects/ashurbanipal_library_phase_1.aspx, accessed July 2018).
64. SAA 8: 160–3. Interestingly, Fincke (2010) identifies a draft celestial omen report amongst the tablets of the Kalhu Ezida but its author is unknown (CTN 4: 29). In very fragmentary catalogue of scholarly works the lines [*] U₄ AllowAnonymous * AN.LI.LI.EŠ.GAR BAR-MEŠ | a-di ša-a-ti ša Enāma Anu Ellil: the series and the extraneous (tablets), together with its word-commentaries may have started a listing of tablets belonging to Adad-šumu-ṣuṣur (K 11922 + i 10–11’: Lambert 1976a); see Robson (2018).
65. The putative list of Adad-šumu-ṣuṣur’s tablets continues: [*] INI INA SÜKUD | GAR *: Iqq-qur D˚u \textit{us}: a-di BAR-MEŠ | sa-a-tu mu-ka-lım-tu ‘\textit{Šumma Mu} ina Melê Sako’ (and) Iqqur \textit{Ipus}, together with extraneous tablets, word-commentaries and \textit{mukallittim-commentaries} (K 11922 + i 12–14’: Lambert 1976a); see Robson (2018). The exact findspot of CTN 4: 60 (Koch 2005: 77–82), a divider’s clay model of a sheep’s lung, is unclear. Mallowan (1956: 8) states that it ‘was found in the debris of the courtyard outside the east wall of the throne room’, namely inside
the temple; alternatively (1966: 1. 274) ‘in debris of NT6’, the corridor at the back of Nabu’s shrine. But the excavation record locates it in the street outside Ezida, near the rabatted stone wall that marks the exterior of Nabu’s shrine (C.B.F. Walker, pers. comm., 2016). The text is written in Babylonian script with a colophon attributing it to one Nabu-pa[ršer(?)] of Sapiya, a town in the territory of Bit-Amukkani, and dating to year 9 of a Babylonian king, whose name is missing. Frahm (2011a: 184, 279) suggests this could have been Marduk-apal-iddina II, a rebel king who claimed independence from Sargon in the late eighth century (r. c. 721–710 and 703–702).

67. SAA 8; SAA 4: 279–343.
76. Robson (2011a: 615).
77. The fact that the scholars consistently quoted omens in Standard Babylonian dialect rather than their vernacular Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian (Worthington 2006) tells us little about whether they were quoting from memory or not.
80. E.g. SAA 8: 237; SAA 10: 60.
81. šum-ma LUGAL be-li | i-qab-bi ma-a | a-ke-e qa-bi | A.ŠÂ liš-bi IRI lu-u | qa-an-ni IRI ‘IM ih-ri iṣ | lu ti-bi-ih ma-ga-ar-ri | iš-kun lu-u i-šá-ti | mī-im-ma ū-qa-al-ki | a-me-lu šu-u 3 MU.ÂN.
82. SAA 10: 202, 240.
85. Issar-sumu-arèr gives similar advice to Esarhaddon: ‘The king my lord need not worry about this illness. This is a seasonal disease; all the people who were sick are well (now). Further, the king my lord who is one who reveres the gods and prays day and night to the gods – can really anything happen to the king my lord and his offspring?’ ina UGU lu-ṭu-ub UZU-an-ni | LUGAL be-li TA liš-bi-ṣū la i-da-bu-ub | mu-ṣu MU.ÂN. NA šu-ū | UN-MEŠ am-mar mar-su-u-ni | gab-bu šu-la | tu-ra-ma LUGAL be-li | ša pa-lih DINGIR-MEŠ šu-tu-ur-ni | ū-ti mu ū mu-ṣu DINGIR-MEŠ šu-ṣal lu-u-ni | kit-tu-ur me-me-ni | a-na LUGAL EN-ia ‘i NUMUN-ṣū il-la-ka (SAA 8: 1, obv. 6–1 rev. 10).
86. E.g. SAA 10: 238, 263, 277, 296.
87. SAA 10: 10.
89. SAA 10: 202, 240.
90. SAA 10: 194, 321.
91. IM.GÚ.LÁ là BAR-ár NÍG.GIG dé-a LUGAL ABZU (CTN 4: 116, rev. 36'; 188, rev. ii 7'). For a much fuller version of this argument, see Robson (2018).


93. Fincke's (2004: 55–6) evidence in favour of this position consists of two letters to the king. The first, probably from his ally Ana-Nabu-taklak, sheikh of the Bit-Dakkuri tribe in the Borsippa region, reminds Sargon that 'when they removed our writing-boards [...] they brought (them) to Marduk-apal-iddina'. #*DA-MEŠ-*ni* [ki-i-... ] | [ū-še]-šu-nu a-na a-MAAR. UTU–DUMU ŠI–SUM-zi | [ul-]-bi-iu (SA 17: 201 rev. 1–3'; see SA 17: p. XXXIV for the attribution to Ana-Nabu-taklak). The second, from a certain Bel-iddina, reports on 'the writing-board (singular, not plural) of the temples' #*LE.U₅.UM šá É.KUR-MEŠ (SA 17: 43 obv. 6). It is clear from the rest of the letter that this is the writing-board that he is drawing up concerning the temples of Babylonia. What exactly is on this writing-board is never mentioned, but there is no reason to suppose that this letter, or Ana-Nabu-taklak's, concerns the confiscation of scholarly writings rather than administrative matters.

94. SAA 3: 4, 18.

95. For the ninth century, see Shanilanes's Campaign to Urartu (SA 3: 17), known in a late eighth- or seventh-century copy from Huzirina, and the Letter from Aššur to Šamši-Adad V (SA 3: 41), found in Assur, again probably in a seventh-century manuscript.


100. SAA 3: 34–35; Lambert (1997); Weissert (1997). Frymer-Kensky's (1983) re-dating of the Marduk Ordeal to Esarhaddon's restoration of Babylon and the return of Marduk's statue to Esangila has not been widely accepted (e.g. Livingstone 1986: 205–53; Porter 1993: 139–40).

101. e.g. Frame (2008: 26–8).

102. SAA 3: 10, 33.

103. K 11922+ (Lambert 1976a); Robson (2018).


105. The first, probably from his ally Ana-Nabu-taklak, sheikh of the Bit-Dakkuri tribe in the Borsippa region, reminds Sargon that 'when they removed our writing-boards [...] they brought (them) to Marduk-apal-iddina'. #*DA-MEŠ-*ni* [ki-i-... ] | [ū-še]-šu-nu a-na a-MAAR. UTU–DUMU ŠI–SUM-zi | [ul-]-bi-iu (SA 17: 201 rev. 1–3'; see SA 17: p. XXXIV for the attribution to Ana-Nabu-taklak). The second, from a certain Bel-iddina, reports on 'the writing-board (singular, not plural) of the temples' #*LE.U₅.UM šá É.KUR-MEŠ (SA 17: 43 obv. 6). It is clear from the rest of the letter that this is the writing-board that he is drawing up concerning the temples of Babylonia. What exactly is on this writing-board is never mentioned, but there is no reason to suppose that this letter, or Ana-Nabu-taklak's, concerns the confiscation of scholarly writings rather than administrative matters.

106. Another letter from Issar-šumu-erē's talks about 'new writing-boards that are being inscribed' ([#*]ZU.MEŠ eš-šù-ti ša i-šá-šur-u-ni) which the king wants to look at (SA 10: 30 obv. 8). Parpola (1970–83: II 329) dates this tablet to early in the reign of Ashurbanipal on the grounds that 'the king in question took considerable interest in literature'; but this argument seems circular to me.

107. Another letter from Issar-šumu-erē's talks about 'new writing-boards that are being inscribed' ([#*]ZU.MEŠ eš-šù-ti ša i-šá-šur-u-ni) which the king wants to look at (SA 10: 30 obv. 8). Parpola (1970–83: II 329) dates this tablet to early in the reign of Ashurbanipal on the grounds that 'the king in question took considerable interest in literature'; but this argument seems circular to me.


110. Letter from Issar-šumu-erē's talks about 'new writing-boards that are being inscribed' ([#*]ZU.MEŠ eš-šù-ti ša i-šá-šur-u-ni) which the king wants to look at (SA 10: 30 obv. 8). Parpola (1970–83: II 329) dates this tablet to early in the reign of Ashurbanipal on the grounds that 'the king in question took considerable interest in literature'; but this argument seems circular to me.

111. Another letter from Issar-šumu-erē's talks about 'new writing-boards that are being inscribed' ([#*]ZU.MEŠ eš-šù-ti ša i-šá-šur-u-ni) which the king wants to look at (SA 10: 30 obv. 8). Parpola (1970–83: II 329) dates this tablet to early in the reign of Ashurbanipal on the grounds that 'the king in question took considerable interest in literature'; but this argument seems circular to me.

112. A letter from Issar-šumu-erē's talks about 'new writing-boards that are being inscribed' ([#*]ZU.MEŠ eš-šù-ti ša i-šá-šur-u-ni) which the king wants to look at (SA 10: 30 obv. 8). Parpola (1970–83: II 329) dates this tablet to early in the reign of Ashurbanipal on the grounds that 'the king in question took considerable interest in literature'; but this argument seems circular to me.

113. Another letter from Issar-šumu-erē's talks about 'new writing-boards that are being inscribed' ([#*]ZU.MEŠ eš-šù-ti ša i-šá-šur-u-ni) which the king wants to look at (SA 10: 30 obv. 8). Parpola (1970–83: II 329) dates this tablet to early in the reign of Ashurbanipal on the grounds that 'the king in question took considerable interest in literature'; but this argument seems circular to me.

114. Another letter from Issar-šumu-erē's talks about 'new writing-boards that are being inscribed' ([#*]ZU.MEŠ eš-šù-ti ša i-šá-šur-u-ni) which the king wants to look at (SA 10: 30 obv. 8). Parpola (1970–83: II 329) dates this tablet to early in the reign of Ashurbanipal on the grounds that 'the king in question took considerable interest in literature'; but this argument seems circular to me.

115. Another letter from Issar-šumu-erē's talks about 'new writing-boards that are being inscribed' ([#*]ZU.MEŠ eš-šù-ti ša i-šá-šur-u-ni) which the king wants to look at (SA 10: 30 obv. 8). Parpola (1970–83: II 329) dates this tablet to early in the reign of Ashurbanipal on the grounds that 'the king in question took considerable interest in literature'; but this argument seems circular to me.
113. mdaš-šur–DÙ–A NUN ... | DUMU mdaš-šur–PAP–SUM-na MAN ŠÚ LUGAL KUR aš-šurû | ŠÀ.BAL.
BAL830–PAP–MEŠ–IRI MAN ŠÚ MAN KUR aš-šurû | a-na TI ZI-MEŠ ... | ... | i-na IM.GÜ.LÁ
É.ZI.LÀ É MUATI | ša qé-reb NINUA1b EN-ia ú-kin (K 2529 rev. ii 37–9, 47–8, Hunger 1968:
no. 328; Gabby 2014b: 276–89).

338–9) are essentially identical. All four known tablets bearing this Ashurbanipal colophon
are listed by Hunger (1968: 105–6) with a further join by Borger (1970).

115. Hunger (1968: no. 327). See Chapter 2 for this Ashurbanipal colophon Type n.


121. E.g. SAA 10: 276, from the ašipu Nabu-nadin-šumi to Esarhaddon.

122. SAA 4: 1–278.


124. šu-ta-du-na-ku i-na UKKIN um-ma-a-ni (K 2694 + 3050, obv. i 14‘: Novotny and Jeffers
2018: Ashurbanipal 73); see also e.g. Livingstone (2007: 100); Zamazalová (2011: 315).


126. There are three such letters from Akkullanu, chief priest of Aššur’s temple in Assur (SAA
10: 101–3). But there are no clues in the letters themselves as to when they were written,
while his dateable astrological reports and royal correspondence span the quarter-century
675–650, i.e. far back into Esarhaddon’s reign too (SAA 8: 101–4; SAA 10: 88–91, 94, 96,
100, 104–5). Given that SAA 10: 102 – assigned to Akkullanu but without an extant send-
er – mentions the copying activities of the Assur-based ašipu Kísir-Aššur, these letters may in
fact concern work for a collection in Assur, not for Nineveh (contra Villard 1998b). Likewise,
Ninurta-aha-iddin, the Babylonian author of two now very fragmentary royal letters about
reading and writing scholarly tablets (SAA 10: 373–4), is almost certainly not Ashurbanipal’s
military correspondent in Nippur (SAA 18: 56, 200) and more likely to be the father of a
scholar mentioned in a letter to Esarhaddon (SAA 10: 291; cf. Lieberman 1990: 311 n27;
PNA under ‘Inurta-ahu-iddin’ nos. 6, 7, 9).

127. The ummānûs of Ashurbanipal’s annals, captured from Elam and the Gamбу tribe of
Chaldeans in his sixth and eighth campaigns respectively (Novotny and Jeffers 2018: e.g.
Ashurbanipal 3: vi 24), are to be understood as expert craftsmen, not scholars, given the con-
text in which they appear in the midst of military personnel (CAD: U 113, sv. ummānûs
2a’ 9).

128. Frame and George (2004); cf. Frahm (2005b); Goldstein (2010); see further Chapter 6 and
Robson (2018).

129. kul-lat 1dUB.SAR-âš šà ŠÀ NÎG.GÁ ‘NÀ EN-iá šu-ṭu-ra-a’ šu-bil-an-ni (BM 45642, obv. i 14‘).

130. kul-lat 1dUB.SAR 1gab-bi né-mé-qî 24- a u 1ASAL.ÂLU 1[HI ...] 1[BE iz-]bu IRI ina Sukud 1GAR
1u-IMŠ.ÂŠ-MAS-âš 2GAL-âš 1bat(NA)-tu tu u kul-lat 1dUB. [SAR-âš] ... [šà ŠÀ NÎG]. 1GA1
1ÂMAR.UTU 1EN.GÁ-EN 1(BM 28825, obv. 8–10). Note that the parallel phrases are
spelled in exactly the same way as in BM 45642.

131. 1um-ma-nù šà BÀR.SIPA 1šà at-ta ti-du-ù ina ŠU-MÌN-ka sa-bat-ma | DUB-MES ma-la ina
É-MES-šú-nu i-ba-àš-šú-ú | ü DUB-MES ma-la ina É.ZI.LÁ šak-nu (Thompson 1906:
no. 1, ll. 6–9).

132. ki-i | mim-ma ṭup-pi u nú-ep-šà ša a-na-ku | la šù-pu-ruk-ku-nú-šú u ta-tam-ra-ma | a-na
É.GAL-ia ta-a-bu | it-ti-i-ma i-šà-nim-ma | šù-bi-la-a-ni (Thompson 1906: no. 1, ll. 34–8).

133. SAA 7: 49–56; Parpola (1983); Fincke (2004: 58).


137. Cf. e.g. Du Toit (2005).


141. Frame and George (2004: 283).


tablets of the purification ritual series Bit Rimkû were copied ‘according to the wording of
original writing-boards from Babylôn’ ki-i KA 1[LE.U₅.UM/3ZO GABA.Â.Í.KÀ.DINGIR.RÀ]
145. E.g. ki-sîr-“NÂ ša “NÂ NIR-su (Hunger 1968: no. 212a; cf. nos. 198, 200, 205, 211, 212, 214, 238, 248, 252, 504–5). This is, so far as I can tell, a formulation that is exclusive to Neo-Assyrian Assur, when expressed in relation to Nabu.
149. SAA 8: 143–59; SAA 8: 2; SAA 10: 205.
150. SAA 8: 126–42; SAA 10: 122–7.
152. Pedersén (1985–6: II 12–29, N1); and see note 126 above.
153. See e.g. Grayson (1983). The archives and libraries of Assur were very usefully surveyed by Pedersén (1985–6) and (re)publication of the scholarly tablets from Assur is the subject of a long-term project at the University of Heidelberg (https://www.ori.uni-heidelberg.de/assyriologie/forschung/keilschrift/, last accessed July 2018). The first five volumes are now online at http://digi.hadw-bw.de/view/kal (last accessed July 2018).
157. Miglus (1996: 239) discounts an earlier theory that the house had been destroyed by fire, noting that while there are traces of burning on some of the older plaster layers on the walls of the courtyard, there is no evidence of a fire in other rooms of the house.
158. Maul (2010: 192–6). According to Maul (2010: 194), 1,242 tablets and fragments from the German excavations are currently associated with this house, but this number is likely to fall as further joins are made. A brief report of Iraqi excavations on other parts of the house in the late 1970s, and some of the 150 or so further tablets and fragments found there, is given by Ismail (1982: 200–200 with figs 1–6).
159. Pedersén (1985–6: II 48–58). Frahm (2011a: 268) notes the complete absence of the diagnostic omen series Sakikkû from the Baba-šumu-ibni family's house. This confirms the impression given by the royal āšipu’ letters discussed above that – despite the impression given by the series’ incipit, inâma āšipu ana bit marši ılli, ‘When the āšipu goes to the sick man’s house’ – Neo-Assyrian āšipus did not in fact use this work in their daily healing practice (Robson 2008b). However, the family’s collection does include a few chapters of the sacrificial omen series Barûtu and related works (Heeßel 2012: nos. 19, 30, 71), suggesting that the disciplinary isolation of divination that was maintained in the Assyrian court was not so sharply observed in other contexts.
161. Maul (2010); Hunger (1968: nos. 191–220). To date the Assur project has (re)published some sixty scholarly tablets with firm provenance from the house (Heeßel 2007: nos. 19, 35, 45, 55; Schwemer 2007: nos. 8, 13, 23–6, 31, 39, 41, 46, 49, 58–9; Frahm 2009: nos. 76, 80; Maul et al. 2011: nos. 4–8, 16, 18–21, 32, 34–8, 41–4, 48, 53, 60, 62, 66, 71; Heeßel 2012: nos. 19, 30, 71; Meinhold 2017: nos. 9, 11, 14, 16, 21, 23, 25, 34, 39, 59) and undoubtedly many more that have since lost their excavation numbers.
169. Grayson (1980–3: 124–5); SAA 2: 12. Grayson (1987b: 154) describes the latter composition as ‘a schoolboy’s exercise in writing a treaty clause’, given that it ‘does not say much, and is inept in style and grammar’. However, Parpola and Watanabe (SAA 2: I) disagree with this characterisation, on the grounds that the object on which it is written is not a ‘typically clumsily shaped and round or ovoid’ school tablet but ‘has the standard format of excerpt tablets’. However, since both of those pieces were published, Gesche (2001: 174–84) has shown that excerpt tablets were routinely used in first-millennium scribal education. On balance, then, Grayson’s interpretation is probably the correct one.
170. Frahm (2011a: 270). To the tablets listed in PNA under Aššur-mudammiq (11) and Bel-kundi-ila’i (1) add IM 92995, a bilingual hymn to Nabu on behalf of Bel-kundi-ila’i (Cavigneaux and Ismail 1998). Note too SAA 13: 39, a letter from one Nabu-bessunu – possibly the same man as Kišir-Aššur’s father – to an Aššur-mudammiq concerning repairs to Aššur and Mullis-su’s thrones in the temple.

171. Hulin (1959); CTN 4: 58.


173. SAA 10: 155.


175. e.g. healing stones and necklaces of Hammurabi and of Naram-Sin: Schuster-Brandis (2008: 163–9, 346–53).

176. Lloyd and Brice (1951: 80–1); Green (1992).


180. Members of the Šumu-libši kin-group are attested in both Babylon and Uruk in the seventh century (Nielsen 2011: 186, 260 n154); the fragmentary Catalogue of Texts and Authors, also found at Kouyunjik, describes Šumu-libši as a kalû and ummânu (lú GALA UM.ME.A) of Eridu (Lambert 1962: 66–7, 75). See further Chapter 6.


182. On the archaeology of Huzirina (modern Sultantepe) see Lloyd and Göçke (1953); S. Lloyd (1954); on the tablets see Gurney (1952; 1953; 1997); Finkelstein (1957); Gurney and Finkelstein (1957); Reiner (1960; 1967); Gurney and Hulin (1964); Hunger (1968: nos. 351–408); Pedersén (1998: 178–80); http://oracc.org/cams/gkab/huzirina (last accessed July 2018).

183. Lloyd and Göçke (1953: 37).


185. Gurney (1952: 26).

186. STT 1: 21 (718 bc), an anonymous copy of the Epic of Anzu, Tablet 2; STT 36 (716 bc), an unidentified composition copied by the šamallû s.ehru Šumu-tabni-us.ur; cf. STT 108 (704 bc), a copy of Abru Škinšu also by Šumu-tabni-us.ur (Hunger 1968: nos. 355, 363–4).

187. Van Buyalere (2011); see SAA 19: 179.

188. STT 1: 64; STT 2: 179, 199, 299, 305; STT 2: 300 (619 bc).

189. STT 1: 38 (701 bc); STT 2: 161, 172, 237, 247.


191. STT 1: 56, containing prayers to Ea and Sin, dedicated to Adad for his life (Mattila 2000: 113).

192. From Babylon: STT 2: 136, 232, 323; from Esabad: STT 1: 73; cf. George (1993: 137–8). However, STT 2: 232 is said to be GABA.RI TIN.TIR šá =MU?–HÉ.GÁL =ù =MUATI–ZI-MEŠ A =narr‘iš-rî [x] ŠEŠ-AMAR.UTU, ‘a copy of Babylon, of Šumu-libšu and Naibu-eṭir-napšati, the son of Harriru, the […] of Marduk’: is this a link, however tenuous, to the royal kalû of the Šumu-libši kin-group?

193. However, the colophons do invoke a similar range of gods to curse or bless those who would steal or protect the tablets. In the very fragmentary Kalhu tablets only Ea and Šamaš are currently legible (CTN 4: 27, 116, 188). At Huzirina, Šamaš is invoked five times out of the fifteen extant instances (STT 1: 71, 84, 92; STT 2: 215, 394) and Ea three times, always in conjunction with Nabu (STT 1: 38, 40; STT 2: 192). Nabu is summoned a further three times, once together with Marduk (STT 1: 108; STT 2: 247, 256), while Iddi-Meslamtaea calls twice on Lugaliarra (STT 1: 33; STT 2: 159) and there are single occurrences of Adad – for the tur-tānu Aplaya – and Zababa (STT 1: 56; STT 2: 199). But with the exception of the last two, these deities do not seem to have particular regional or personal significance here, but rather stand for the general or specific realms of learning with which the colophon writers wished to be associated.
It has been argued that there were least two temples of Nabu within the region: at Haddatu (modern Arslan Tash) 55 kilometres due west of Harran, and at Guzana (Tell Halaf) 90 kilometres due east, both constructed in the late eighth century (Turner 1968; Heinrich and Seidl 1982: 270–71). Although they have been identified as temples of Nabu on the basis of their twin shrines, they have yielded no evidence of royal or scholarly activity there and Kertai (2015a: 101) suggests that the building at Haddatu, at least, was probably a palatial storage facility.

195. Two fragmentary records of endowments to the temples of Zababa and Baba, and of Ištar, were found at Huzirina (SAA 12: 48, 91 = STT 1: 44; STT 2: 406+407).


198. In late October 1820 (AD!) James Claudius Rich and his party took three days to travel from Erbil to east Mosul, the modern equivalents of Arbaʾil and Nineveh (Rich 1836: II 18–26).


200. Note that, as argued in Chapter 3, there was no independent temple of Nabu in Assur until very late in the seventh century.