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**Report about the Middle Assyrian tablets in the Yale Babylonian Collection, New Haven, Connecticut.**

**Research conducted: 8–26 April 2018**

*With the help of a generous grant from the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, I was able to study the Middle Assyrian tablets in the Yale Babylonian Collection, many of which are still unpublished. During my stay in New Haven, I was able to discuss the tablets with international experts in cuneiform studies. In this report, I will describe the collection and also my preliminary findings. All Middle Assyrian tablets will be published together in a small monograph or a large article that will contain the text editions, copies, photographs and glossaries, as well as drawings of the seal impressions.*

## **Middle Assyrian period**

The studied text dates back to the Middle Assyrian period, which lasted from around the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This is the period in Assyrian history when the small city-state of Ashur developed into an empire that extended westwards up to the Euphrates River, which formed a natural border with the Hittite empire. The conquest even brought the Assyrian armies to Babylon, although long-term occupation did not take place until the first millennium BCE. This period differed greatly from the Old Assyrian period (19<sup>th</sup> century to 18<sup>th</sup> century BCE), which is known from the Anatolian archives of Assyrian merchants who lived in a number of trading posts there. Following the end of the trade communities, our

sources of information about the Assyrian people disappear for a period of time. During this period, Hurrian states were dominant in Upper Mesopotamia; these included Mitanni, which turned Assyria into a vassal. South of Ashur, we find the Hurrian state of Arrapha (modern Kirkuk). Extensive archives were found in Nuzi, a small city in this state. These archives ended with the destruction of Nuzi by the Assyrians under King Ashur-uballit I (14<sup>th</sup> century). Under the kings Adad-nirari I, Shalmaneser I and Tukulti-Ninurta I (13<sup>th</sup> century), the Mitanni state in Eastern Syria was destroyed and its land incorporated into the empire. Assyrian administrative centres were built in the older Mitanni cities as well as in new settlements. In addition, Tukulti-Ninurta I built a new capital south of Ashur, which he named Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta after himself. Following the murder of the king, the Assyrian empire entered a slow decline that lasted until the Neo-Assyrian empire in the first millennium.

## **Summary of the previous publications**

The Yale Babylonian Collection houses a small number of tablets that date to the Middle Assyrian period. A total of 24 tablets are included in the catalogue, however, the date of some of the texts remains uncertain. Most of the texts consist of administrative documents (no letters), numbering about 18 tablets and fragments of tablets. There are three medical texts, one royal inscription, one incantation and one fragment of the Middle Assyrian palace edicts. A number of texts are still unpublished or lack a proper text edition. Dr A. W. Lassen, Associate Curator of the collection, kindly made all texts available to me for study.

Five previously published administrative tablets contained the toponym, Kulišhinaš. This was a settlement located somewhere in modern Eastern Syria. These texts were bought in 1957 from a dealer, Mr Fahmi Ilias Hashish of Amuda. Some of his texts appear to have ended up in places such as the Louvre and in private collections. Following the information from the dealer, the tablets were originally unearthed in modern Tell ṣĀmūdā (تل عامودا) in the Hassakah governorate of Syria, which is close to the border with Turkey. There are some doubts about the origins of the tablets in Tell ṣĀmūdā as they do not fit with the itinerary of cities found in a text from the site of Tell Ṭābān. Moreover, the Middle Assyrian archaeological layers of the site are too small for a city of the importance of Kulišhinaš. Instead, the origins should be sought north of the land of Māri. Dr Lassen of the Yale Babylonian Collection informed me that none of the other tablets in the collection were

bought from this dealer. We can, therefore, reasonably exclude the possibility that any of these texts derive from Kulišhinaš.

## Description of the tablets

Most of the studied texts are administrative documents. These include loans and work contracts, which are two rather similar genres in which a commodity is provided. In our texts, these commodities are usually barley or wool. Most people in the texts have Assyrian names that can often be recognized with the Assyrian theophoric element, Aššur, which refers to the eponymous god of the city. Hurrian people also feature, with one person being called Hurrian (Subarean).

A number of tablets deal with textiles and the raw materials used for their production. One text makes reference to wool from the Phoenician city of Sidon, which was not part of the Assyrian empire at this time but is, nonetheless, mentioned in a few other texts. It occurs twice in the royal inscriptions of Tiglatpileсар I, referring to the foreign expeditions of said king. There are a few references to Milku-rāmu, a Sidonian envoy of the king of Egypt, passing through the Syrian outpost of Ḥarbe. Note that none of our references refers to Sidon as a city but rather as a country. Some of the actors in these textile texts are also known from tablets outside of the Yale Babylonian Collection. These tablets all appear to derive from the city of Ashur, making a similar origin likely for the Yale texts. An archival context is still being sought but it should eventually be possible to establish this as more related texts are found. In general, these texts are interesting as they provide us with some information about the production of textiles in the Middle Assyrian empire; various variants of coloured wool are mentioned, as well as different types of textiles. In addition to the usual professions, such as weavers, we find the ill-understood *ša abbašše* mentioned a few times. Linguistically, these textile texts are interesting for their reference to wooden tablets (Akkadian *lē'u*). Unusually, this word is sometimes realized as *lēhu*, which resembles its Arabic cognate, *lawḥ* (لوح), 'board'.

After closer scrutiny, one tablet appeared to be from Nuzi. It contains the impression of a Nuzi-style seal with a figure seated in front of a tree and drinking from a cup. The figure is flanked by figures of livestock. A seal impression such as this would have been used on a tablet to give it legal value and to identify the owner. The interesting part of this small tablet is the fact that this seal is rolled in the wrong direction: from top to bottom rather than left to

right. The owner of the seal and the tablet bear a Hurrian name, with the theophoric element, Teššob, the storm god.

A short royal inscription is found among the tablets and contains a brief mention of King Adad-nirari I as the builder of a palace. Unfortunately, no further details are given about the location of this palace but it was probably in Ashur.

## **Afterword**

A generous grant from the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft allowed me to travel to the United States of America in order to study 23 Middle Assyrian tablets and one from the Nuzi era stored at the Yale Babylonian Collection in New Haven. During my stay, I was able to make hand-drawn copies of the texts, as well as collate the previously published tablets. From conversations with the staff of the Yale Babylonian Collection, I learned that the texts were bought at various points in time from antiquity dealers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. We can, thus, exclude the possibility that they have the same origin. Most tablets originate from the city of Ashur (modern Qal'at Sherqat), with a handful of texts possibly originating in the Assyrian outpost of Kulišhinaš, which is a yet to be identified site somewhere in modern Eastern Syria. In addition, one text, which appears to be Nuzi, was originally misidentified as Middle Assyrian.