

The Scribe's Imprint: Ištar-šumu-ēreš and the Formation of Ashurbanipal's Library

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Abstract This study sheds new light on Ištar-šumu-ēreš, the chief scribe of Ashurbanipal, through an examination of his colophons. A systematic analysis of the Nineveh colophons has provided new insights into Ištar-šumu-ēreš's work beyond what is known from the royal letters. His tablets, which derive from two different periods of his life, reveal some of his activities in different contexts, including the so-called 'Ashurbanipal's Library'. This research therefore helps us to understand how an important but hitherto largely anonymous corpus came into being.

Keywords Ashurbanipal's library. Ištar-šumu-ēreš. Colophons. Chief scribe. Nineveh.

Summary 1 Ištar-šumu-ēreš's Early Colophons. – 1.1 *Enūma sippū kunnū ellūti taramuk saḥḥû tultabbaš*. – 1.2 A Celestial Mythical Commentary. – 2 Ištar-šumu-ēreš's Later Colophons. – 2.1 Medical Prescriptions. – 2.2 *Sakkikû*. – 2.3 The Series *Udug-ḫul*. – 2.4 *Šu'ila* Prayer to Sîn. – 2.5 Babylonian Tablet. – 3 Conclusion.

Ištar-šumu-ēreš is the most prominent scholar in the correspondence of Ashurbanipal and Esarhaddon. As many as 80 letters and reports¹ bear his name. Most of these documents are concerned with astrological matters, although his competence in other subjects, such as medicine or religious topics, is also evident. He wrote some of these letters alone and composed several with colleagues, while others only mention him by name. Some of the letters and reports are attributed to him only by his title, while his name is broken or omitted.² Ištar-šumu-ēreš held the title of chief scribe of Ashurbanipal and was

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1 These are the known letters of Ištar-šumu-ēreš, either written by him or mentioning him: SAA 6 329 (K.317), SAA 7 1 (K.1276), SAA 8 (Bu.1891,0509.14), SAA 8 1 (1881,0727.19), SAA 8 4 (K.750), SAA 8 5 (K.731), SAA 8 6 (1880,0719.57), SAA 8 8 (1883,0118.287), SAA 8 9 (K.788), SAA 8 10 (K.696), SAA 8 15 (K.697), SAA 8 16 (DT.148), SAA 8 17 (K.773), SAA 8 18 (Rm.212), SAA 8 20 (BM.99236), SAA 8 23 (Rm.200), SAA 8 25 (K.733), SAA 8 26 (K.966), SAA 8 27 (1882,0522.55), SAA 8 28 (1883,0118.224), SAA 8 29 (K.3504), SAA 8 30 (K.728), SAA 8 32 (K.765), SAA 8 34 (K.1321), SAA 8 36 (K.124), SAA 8 38 (K.115), SAA 8 83 (K.1335), SAA 10 1 (K.13000 together with Nabû-zēru-līšir, Adad-šumu-ušur, Nabû-šumu-iddina, and Urdu-Ea), SAA 10 4 (K.1918), SAA 10 5 (Rm.73), SAA 10 6 (1883,0118.9), SAA 10 7 (K.572), SAA 10 8 (1883,0118.10), SAA 10 9 (K.12), SAA 10 10 (K.981), SAA 10 11 (K.14964), SAA 10 12 (1883,0118.250), SAA 10 13 (K.1032), SAA 10 14 (1881,0727.29), SAA 10 15 (K.522), SAA 10 16 (1883,0118.271), SAA 10 18 (K.983), SAA 10 21 (BM.98998), SAA 10 22 (1883,0118.120), SAA 10 23 (K.1039), SAA 10 24 (K.527 together with Adad-šumu-ušur and Marduk-šākin-šumi), SAA 10 25 (1883,0118.88 together with Urdu-Ea), SAA 10 26 (K.1049), SAA 10 27 (BM.98995), SAA 10 28 (K.2909), SAA 10 31 (BM.99003), SAA 10 32 (K.13121), SAA 10 33 (Rm-II.6), SAA 10 34 (K.1082), SAA 10 35 (K.1540), SAA 10 38 (1883,0118.713), SAA 10 232 (K.1428), SAA 16 79 (K.671 letter from Kannunāiu and Mannu-kī-Libbali), *State Archives of Assyria online*, <http://oracc.org/saao/>; for an overview see also Pearce 2000, in PNA 2, s.v. "Issār-šumu-ēreš".

2 SAA 8 35 (Rm.211), SAA 8 2 (1881,0204.144), SAA 8 3 (K.810), SAA 8 11 (Rm.203), SAA 8 12 (1904,1009.38), SAA 8 13 (1880,0719.56), SAA 8 14 (K.693), SAA 8 21 (1882,0522.81), SAA 8 19 (1883,0118.223), SAA 8 22 (BM.99201), SAA 8 33 (K.715), SAA 8 37 (K.779), *State Archives of Assyria online*, <http://oracc.org/saao/>.



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the *ummānu* 'highest scholar' of kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal.³ Despite his prolific letter writing, only few tablets and fragments bearing his colophon have been discovered.⁴ This seems to contrast his scribal activity in letters and his position as part of the king's inner circle.⁵ One would expect to find more tablets from the highest and most important scribe in Ashurbanipal's library. For clarity, the colophons discussed in this paper are compiled in the following table:⁶

Table 1 Tablets of Ištar-šumu-ēreš

| Museum Number | Text |
|-----------------|---|
| 1. K.3810 | <i>Enūma sippū kunnū ellūti taramuk saḥḥā tultabbaš</i> |
| 2. K.3384 | A celestial mythical commentary |
| 3. 1881,0727.69 | <i>Bronchia</i> II (?) |
| 4. K.3957 | <i>Sakikkū V</i> |
| 5. K.20101+ | <i>Udug-ḥul</i> IV |
| 6. K.3054+ | <i>Udug-ḥul</i> XII |
| 7. K.2861+ | <i>Šu'ila</i> prayer to Sîn |
| 8. K.3877 | Extispicy (Babylonian script) |

1 Ištar-šumu-ēreš's Early Colophons

The few known colophons of Ištar-šumu-ēreš can be divided into two types, representing two phases of his life:⁷ the first type is known from only two tablets in which Ištar-šumu-ēreš is identified with a genealogy, but without a specific title. While these early colophons are somewhat fragmentary, it is noteworthy that there is no mention of his father Nabû-zēru-līšir. Instead, Nabû-zuqup-kēnu is given as his father. This suggests that these colophons likely originate from the earlier educational phase in Ištar-šumu-ēreš's life, during which he may have been trained by Nabû-zuqup-kēnu.⁸ A colophon of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu dated 684 BC further supports this hypothesis by stating: "For the reading(-lesson) of Ištar-šumu-ēreš, my son, for one and a half years I *strained my eyes*. I quickly *copied* and checked it" (see below).

³ This is documented in the *Synchronistic King List* KAV 216 (Ist-A.117) iv 12-13, e.g., Chen 2020, 25-6, 34.

⁴ Most of the individual scholars whose colophons are found, however, do not appear on more than one or a few colophons. The only exception is the collection of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, which currently contains 125 known colophons, although many more anonymous or broken tablets are expected to be added to this total. Furthermore, the house of Ištar-šumu-ēreš has not yet been excavated. Therefore, it is possible that many more personal tablets of this scribe have not yet been found, and one might expect a mixture of personal and professional contexts, Jon Taylor (personal communication). After all, the number of Ištar-šumu-ēreš tablets with colophons is rather high compared to other individuals, see also Schnitzlein, Cohen 2024, 556.

⁵ Parpola 1983, XV-XXI; 1993, XXV-XXVI. Parpola divides the scholars of the kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal into an inner circle and an outer circle. The inner circle thus consisted of the seventeen scholars closest to the king, while the outer circle consisted of 'lesser' scholars whose correspondence was more sporadic. Brown 2000 criticizes Parpola's taxonomy for excluding scholars whose participation in the closest circle should also have been a given and suggests replacing the terms 'inner' and 'outer circle' with the term 'larger circle', which encompasses both circles and all the king's scholars. Thus, in addition to the education of the scholars, the dominant hierarchy within the circle consisted of their family affiliation and age. Brown also refers to a list of experts SAA 7 1 (K.1276) as a directory of royal scholars and criticizes Parpola for not mentioning all the names on this list, which he calls the 'best guide to the inner circle at this time' (Brown 2000, 49-50 fn. 154). As noted by Radner 2009, 222-3, the experts named in the list SAA 7 1 included not only Mesopotamians, but also scholars from Egypt (i.e. *ḥartibē, ṭupšarru Mušurāyu*) and the Syro-Anatolian region (i.e. *dāgil iššūri*). Hardly any traces of these scholars are preserved in the correspondence written on clay tablets, probably because they used perishable materials to write their texts. The same is likely to have been true of many Mesopotamian scribes. As can be seen from the list of experts alone, one should be cautious when drawing conclusions from the clay tablets alone about the actual circles of experts at the royal court. Furthermore, as Robson 2019, 100-12 notes, some scholars were not permanently present at the palace, but led an itinerant life within Assyria, which may explain why some of their tablets were not found in Nineveh.

⁶ There are two other possible colophons of Ištar-šumu-ēreš, but the tablets are in a very fragmentary state. Only the name and a few signs on the obverse in monumental Babylonian script are preserved on K.19732. K.23053 has only preserved rev. 2'. [... *ša3'-ṭir'-ma'*] *sa-ni[q ba'-ri/ri3'...*], notes on the writing process that may point to Ištar-šumu-ēreš (see the following discussion).

⁷ Since none of Ištar-šumu-ēreš's colophons are dated, the phases were determined on the basis of other criteria (see discussion).

⁸ The idea that Nabû-zuqup-kēnu was a scholarly father (*sc.* a teacher) rather than a biological father to Ištar-šumu-ēreš and Adad-šumu-ušur is based on the mention of other fathers by these two individuals and will be discussed in the author's forthcoming dissertation.

1.1 *Enūma sippū kunnū ellūti taramuk saḥḥâ tultabbaš*

The first tablet contains the building ritual *Enūma sippū kunnū ellūti taramuk saḥḥâ tultabbaš* ‘When the doorjamb is fixed, you wash yourself with pure water and put on a linen garment’. This text was part of a sequence⁹ of ritual actions used to lay the foundation of a temple.¹⁰ Its colophon reads:

K.3810(+) ¹¹ *Enūma sippū kunnū*¹²

1'. *tup-pi* m^dš-tar-MU-KAM-^reš¹ [DUMU m^dAG-zu-qup-GI.NA]

2'. ŠA₃.BAL.BAL m^gGab-bi-DINGIR-MEŠ-^rni¹-[KAM-eš^{lu}GAL DUB.SAR-MEŠ]

3'. MU ^dAG u ^dNISABA MU šaṭ-ru l[a ta-pa-šit]

End of side

1'. Tablet of Ištar-šumu-ēreš, [son of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu],

2'. descendant of Gabbi-ilāni-[ēreš the chief scribe].

3'. By Nabû and Nisaba, you shall not [remove] the inscription!

As highlighted by Ambos,¹³ Ištar-šumu-ēreš is known to have had a role in temple construction projects according to the royal correspondence. One such case was the cella of Nusku. Advised by King Esarhaddon, Ištar-šumu-ēreš was charged with determining an auspicious day to begin construction.¹⁴ Another letter from Ištar-šumu-ēreš to the king dealt with the collapsed Amurru temple in Aššur. After the cult image had been temporarily moved to the Anu temple and the sanctuary restored, Ištar-šumu-ēreš sought further guidance from the ruler.¹⁵ Ambos also mentions a letter to Esarhaddon that refers to the anonymous chief scribe in connection with the construction of *sippū* ‘doorjambs’.¹⁶ The king was asked to instruct the chief scribe to inscribe the king’s name on a *narû* ‘stele’ and to determine auspicious days for placing foundational objects in the doorjambs of the house.¹⁷

In view of the connection between the building ritual tablet and the letters of Ištar-šumu-ēreš to Esarhaddon, it is curious that he still identifies himself as the son of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu in the colophon of this tablet. During Esarhaddon’s reign, the *Synchronistic King List* indicates that Ištar-šumu-ēreš already held the position of *ummānu* ‘highest scholar’ for the king, and was mentioned next to the name of Nabû-zēru-līšir, whom he later refers to as his father.¹⁸ In letters from Esarhaddon’s reign, he is referred to as the ‘chief scribe’. In any case, in his preserved later colophons, his affiliation with Nabû-zuqup-kēnu is no longer mentioned.¹⁹

The attested activities of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, on the other hand, ended during the reign of Sennacherib. Interestingly, one of his tablets mentions the building ritual in its catchline. Surprisingly, the following rubric in this tablet shows that it belonged to the terrestrial series *Šumma Ālu*:

K.5285²⁰ *Šumma Ālu*; colophon of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu

1'. [...] x x [...] (Single ruling)

2'. [e-nu-ma sip-pu k]u-un-nu A KU₃ ta-r[a-muk^{tu}ŠA₃.HA MU₄.MU₄-aš]

3'. [DUB².x².KAM².MA² DIŠ U]RU ina SUKUD-e [GAR-in]

4'. [ki-i p]i-i tup-pi ša lGI.KAR₂-š_u2 la šaṭ-ru [ušaštir²]

⁹ The title appears as catchline in two further building rituals “Tonmännchen und Puppen” (K.2000+) and *enūma usšê bīt ili tanamdū* (O.174), Ambos 2004, 167.

¹⁰ Ambos 2004, 267.

¹¹ Borger (1971a, 73 fn. 2) suggested an indirect join to K.2331, which contains a compilation of rituals. See Ambos 2004, 225-6.

¹² Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.3810>; Ambos 2004, 167-9: “Wenn der Türrahmen befestigt ist”.

¹³ Ambos 2004, 15.

¹⁴ SAA 10 14 (1881,0727.29), <http://oracc.org/saao/P334471>.

¹⁵ SAA 10 21 (BM.98998), <http://oracc.org/saao/P334874/>.

¹⁶ SAA 16 135 (K.1103), <http://oracc.org/saao/P313440/>.

¹⁷ The fact that the king asked the chief scribe to inscribe a stele highlights another component of his many responsibilities.

¹⁸ KAV 216 (Ist-A.117) iv 12-13. See Chen 2020, 25-6, 34.

¹⁹ They all date from the reign of Esarhaddon’s successor Ashurbanipal. In them, Ištar-šumu-ēreš appears with his title as ^{lu}GAL DUB.SAR-MEŠ ša₂ m^gAš-šur-DU₃-A LUGAL ŠU₂ LUGAL^{kur}aš-šur^{ki} ‘chief scribe of Ashurbanipal, king of the world, king of Assyria’.

²⁰ Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.5285>; BAK 306.

5'. [tup-pi^{m.d}AG-zu]-qup-GI.NA DUMU^{m.d}AMAR.UTU-M[U-BA-ša₂^{lu₂}DUB.SAR]

6'. [ša₃.BAL.BAL^mGab-bi-DINGIR]-MEŠ-ni-KAM-[eš^{lu₂}GAL DUB.SAR-MEŠ]

Broken

2'. [When the doorjamb is fixed, you wash yourself] with pure water [(and) put on a linen garment].

3'. [Tablet no. 1 ... If a city] [is located] on a hill.

4'. [He had it written according to the wording] of a tablet, the collation of which is not written.

5'. [Tablet of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu son of Marduk-šumu-iq[īša the scribe],

6'. descendant of Gabbi-ilā]ni-ēr[eš the chief scribe].

i See fn. 23.

It is possible that the tablet once belonged to one of the *Šumma Ālu* chapters relating to the building of a house.²¹ Moreover, it is not uncommon for a tablet of this terrestrial omen series to end with a ritual,²² thus, the combination of the ritual and the omen series itself is not unexpected. What is surprising, however, is that the catchline identifies the building ritual as the next chapter of this tablet.

It is conceivable that the ritual tablet of Ištar-šumu-ēreš was in fact the following chapter, and that educational purposes may have played a role in establishing the sequence of these tablets.²³ Moreover, its colophon distinguishes this tablet from Nabû-zuqup-kēnu's other *Šumma Ālu* colophons written in 708-707 BC. While Nabû-zuqup-kēnu's colophons are all very similar – that is, the genealogy is mostly present – they can be easily differentiated by their notes relating to the scribal process. Sets can be established on the basis of the wording of these notes, and the sets match the clusters that can be created by the dates preserved in the colophons. The same is true for his *Šumma Ālu* tablets of 708-707 BC, which share the note LIBIR.RA.BI-GIM AB.SAR.AM₃ BA.AN.E₃ 'Written according to its original and then checked'. Therefore, K.5285 does not belong to this *Šumma Ālu* set of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu.

Also unclear is the use of the expression *ša IGI.KAR₂-šu₂ la šaṭ-ru*, "The collation of which is not written" in the notes on the scribal process of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu's colophon, referring to the original from which it was copied. The original therefore probably did not explicitly state that it was collated, or it emphasized that this process was missing.²⁴ The same expression is used in another colophon of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu with sheep omen:

K.4125 *Šumma Immeru*;²⁵ colophon of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu

1. [A]L.TIL ki-i^rKA¹ tup-pi ša IGI.KAR₂-šu₂ la <šaṭ>-ru u₂-[ša₂[?]-aš₂[?]-tir[?]]

2. tup-pi^{m.d}AG-zu-qu-up-GI.NA DUMU^{m.d}AMAR.UTU-M[U-BA-ša₂^{lu₂}DUB.SAR]

3. [ša₃.BAL.BAL^mGab-[bi-DINGIR-MEŠ-KAM-eš^{lu₂}GAL DUB.SAR-MEŠ]

Broken

1. Finished. [He had it written] according to the wording of a tablet, the collation of which is not written.

2. Tablet of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu son of Marduk-šum[u-iqīša the scribe],

3. [des]cendant of Gab[bi-ilāni-ēreš the chief scribe].

There is no clear connection between these two colophons of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu other than the formulation of the notes on the writing process. This possible connection could indicate, however, that this tablet may also have played a role in the education of Ištar-šumu-ēreš.²⁶ Interestingly, the emphasis

²¹ Chapters 3-9, see Guinan 1996, 62. Nabû-zuqup-kēnu's tablets, however, differ from the later canonical version, see II.1 *Šumma Ālu* Nabû-zuqup-kēnu (Project Ālu Geneva) at www.ebl.lmu.de/corpus/D/2/1.

²² Maul 1994, 11; Freedman 1998, 12-13.

²³ On the other hand, it would be exceptional to establish an artificial order of tablets from a canonical series for educational purposes (Jon Taylor, personal communication). Perhaps the expected rubric formulation DUB.X.KAM.MA was actually different, e.g., *nishu* 'excerpt'.

²⁴ See Hunger 1968, 3.

²⁵ Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.4125>; Cohen 2020, 132-40; BAK 306.

²⁶ Cohen (2020, 138) considers that this tablet might have been written around the time when Nabû-zuqup-kēnu studied extispicy tablets. Currently, extispicy texts with dated colophons are known from 712-711 BC and from 704 BC (May 2018, 122, 126-9). Of these, the tablets from 711 BC were written by an individual named Amēl-urāšliya (?) (^mLU₂-^dIB-li-a) son of Esaḡil-iddina the diviner. The patronymic suggests that they may have been Babylonians (Cohen 2020, 140). In this context, Cohen also points to three signs on the *Šumma Immeru* tablet, which he considers to be written in Babylonian script, namely l. 7'. -i]l, KUR, KU. A Babylonian writing of these signs, however, cannot be confirmed from the photograph. The preserved -i]l may rather be part of H]IR/Š]AR (Enrique

on uncollated originals in the scribal process is found also on some Babylonian copies of *Šumma Ālu* from Nineveh.²⁷ This gives us an idea of the knowledge transfer of this text composition, since it was apparently possible to copy it without collation, and these uncollated copies were then transmitted.

Returning to Ištar-šumu-ēreš's ritual tablet, its mention of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu's genealogy and the discovery that it was a catchline in one of his teacher's tablets suggest, that the tablet was written during the time of his education. Nevertheless, this by no means rules out Ambos's previously mentioned idea of connecting the tablet with Ištar-šumu-ēreš's letters on temple-building projects during Esarhaddon's reign. His expertise on the process probably was the reason to consult him in the first place.

1.2 A Celestial Mythical Commentary

The second tablet associated with Ištar-šumu-ēreš's early scribal activities, still under the presumed supervision of his teacher Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, is a commentary text concerned with celestial and mythical matters. Its colophon reads:

K.3384 Celestial Commentary²⁸

26'. [LIBIR.RA]-BI-GIM AB.SAR.AM₃ BA.AN.[E₃]
27'. [DUB²/ŠU² m.d/Š]-tar- MU- URU₄-eš^{lu}A.[BA]
28'. [DUMU² m.d/AG-z]u-qup-GI.NA^{lu}A¹. [BA]
End of side

26'. Written according to its [original] and check[ed].
27'. [Tablet²/Hand² of I]štar-šumu-ēreš, the scribe,
28'. [son² of Nabû-z]uqup-kēnu, the sc[ribe].

The obverse of the tablet opens with the words “[...] of the secrets of the gods/heaven”.²⁹ The commentary focuses on names of Jupiter associated with Marduk, and also references several of Marduk's names as they appear in the *Enūma Eliš*.³⁰ The reverse is a Venus/Ištar section connecting the goddess with several stars and goddesses in her role as the morning star in the east and the evening star in the west.³¹ Interestingly, Ištar-šumu-ēreš's commentary tablet shares some features with a tablet of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu that contains the mythical explanation work *i-NAM-ĝeš-ḥur-an-ki-a*.³² Its colophon reads:

Jiménez, personal communication) and neither KUR nor KI seem to point to a specific Babylonian script. If the composition of the tablet does indeed fall within the same period as the 711 BC extispicy tablets, it would be tempting to speculate that this tablet was written by the same person (Amēl-urāšliya (?)), especially if a reconstruction *u₂-[ša₂²-aš₂²-ṭir²]* ‘he had it written’ in the notes on the scribal process is correct. This idea would either negate a connection between the *Šumma Immeru* and the previously mentioned *Šumma Ālu* tablet, despite the shared phrase *ša IGI.KAR₂-šu₂ la šaṭ-ru*, if the latter is indeed associated with the ritual tablet of Ištar-šumu-ēreš. Alternatively, a connection between Nabû-zuqup-kēnu's *Šumma Immeru* tablet and Ištar-šumu-ēreš's training would be rejected because if it was written around 711 BC, it would be too old for Ištar-šumu-ēreš's period of apprenticeship.

²⁷ See K.2285, 1881,0204.202, K.2307, K.190. See also a group of Babylonian *Namburbi* rituals copied from uncollated originals (K.2777, 1881,0204.233, K.3664, K.2773, K.6117, K.151 and in broken condition DT.90, K.3853, K.3472, K.157, Sm.1118, K.12556). Already Fincke (2014, 270) acknowledged such a peculiar scribal note on one of these Babylonian *Namburbi* tablets (K.2773), which can now be included in this group. From these groups it can be assumed that uncollated *Šumma Ālu* and *Namburbi* tablets were in circulation more frequently. This issue will be discussed in the author's forthcoming dissertation.

²⁸ Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.3384>; Reiner, Pingree 1998, 262-3.

²⁹ [...]MEŠ AD.ĤAL DINGIR-[MEŠ]/AN-[e], Lenzi 2008, 171.

³⁰ Obv. 13.: [iš²]-ten₂ MU-ŠU⁴ŠA₃.ZU mu-de-e lib₃-bi DINGIR-MEŠ 14. [x x] MU-ŠU⁴tu-tu ša₂ ina IGI LUGAL GU₃.DE₂-u₂ ‘His first name (is) ŠA₃.ZU (meaning) “The one who knows the heart of the god”; His [second] name (is) Tutu who shouts in the presence of the king’.

³¹ E.g., Renzi-Sepe 2023, 20, 50.

³² Edited and discussed by Livingstone 1986; see also K.2670+ and K.170. For a suggested reading of the phrase see Geller 2018b, 308 commentary on l. 31 of KAR 44; Compare Heefsel 2024, 297 on l. 31.

K.2164 i-NAM-ĝeš-ĥur a n-k i-a;³³ colophon of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu

(Single ruling)

19'. *e-nu-ma*^aŠEŠ.KI-ri E₂.AN.NA ina DIB-ⁱ-BI

20'. 2-u₂pir-su i-NAM-ĝeš-ĥur a n-k i-a TAB.BA-a-ti AN-e KI-ti₃ šu-ut ABZU ma-la ba-aš-mu

21'. ^mGID₂.DA A.RA₂-e tup-pi^{m,d}AG-zu-qup-GI.NA DUMU^{m,d}AMAR.UTU-MU-BA-Ša₂^{lu}DUB.SAR

(bottom)

22'. ŠA₃.BAL.BAL^mGab-bi-DINGIR-MEŠ-ni-KAM-eš^{lu}GAL DUB.SAR-MEŠ

End of side

19'. When Nanna passes the Eanna.

20'. Second division of i-NAM-ĝeš-ĥur a n-k i-a, TAB.BA-a-tiⁱ of heaven and earth, that (what is) from the *Apsû*, as much as exist.

21'. Oblong tablet with mathematical tables. Tablet of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, son of Marduk-šumu-iqiša the scribe,

22'. descendant of Gabbi-ilāni-ēreš, the chief scribe.

i For an interpretation of TAB.BA-a-ti, see Brown 2010, 22 fn. 39; compare Livingstone 1986, 34-5.

One similarity is the use of the phrase *ki-i DU₁₁.GA-U₂* 'as if it (is) said'.³⁴ While common in commentaries, this specific logographic spelling is rare.³⁵ Further, the tablets have similarities in layout and ductus. For example, the colophons lack spacing, and the shape of certain signs³⁶ is very similar:



Figure 1 K.3384 next to K.2164. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence

³³ Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.2164>; Livingstone 1986, 22-9; BAK 304.

³⁴ K.3384 obv. 17; rev. 5, 13 and K.2164 rev. 18'. See Gabbay 2016, 252-3 on this expression and translation.

³⁵ There are only three examples from Nineveh: The tablet under discussion (K.3384), Nabû-zuqup-kēnu's tablet (K.2164+), and K.4657+ (a commentary on *Enūma Eliš*). A Late Babylonian text offers another example (Gabbay 2016, 252-3).

³⁶ E.g., KI, LU₂, KAM, BU.

This raises the intriguing possibility that Ištar-šumu-ēreš, who studied under the supervision of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, might be the anonymous scribe behind K.2164+.³⁷ One of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu's colophons³⁸ supports the hypothesis, since it explicitly states that Ištar-šumu-ēreš learned i-NAM-ĝeš-ḫur a n-k i-a from Nabû-zuqup-kēnu:

K.2670+ i-NAM-ĝeš-ḫur a n-k i-a;³⁹ colophon of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu (684 BC)

4'. 3-šū₂pir-su i-NAM-ĝeš-ḫur a [n-k i-a TAB.BA-a-ti AN-e u KI-ti]
 5'. šu-ut ap-si-i ma-la ba-aš₂-mu [mGID₂.DA A.RA₂-e tup-pi]
 6'. m.dAG-zu-qup-GI.NA DUMU m.dAMAR.UTU-MU-BA-ša₂ lu₂DUB.SAR š[A₃? .BAL.BAL mGab-bi-DINGIR-MEŠ-ni-KAM-eš]
 7'. lu₂G[AL DUB.SAR-MEŠ]
 8'. a-na ta-mar-ti m.dMUŠ₃-MU-KAM-eš DUMU-ia ul-tu 1½ MU.AN.NA-MEŠ
 9'. di-ig-la u₂-kab-bir-ma za-mar u₂-ba-aḫ-ḫi-iš-ma ab-r[i]
 10'. a-mi-ru la i-ṭa-ap-pil [iAB U₄.30.KAM₂ li-mu mMa-za-a[r-ne-e]
 11'. lu₂GAR.KUR um₂kul-la-ḡni¹-a
 12'. MU.22.KAM₂ iv m.dSUEN-ŠEŠ-MEŠ-eri-ba LUGAL kur.d aš-šur^{ki}
 End of side

4'. Third division of i-NAM-ĝeš-ḫur a [n-k i-a, TAB.BA-a-ti^f of heaven and earth],
 5'. that (what is) from the *Apsû*, as much as exist. [Oblong tablet with mathematical tables].
 6'. [Tablet] of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu son of Marduk-šumu-iqīša the scribe,
 7'. [descendant of Gabbi-ilāni-ēreš the chief scribe].
 8'. For the reading(-lesson) of Ištar-šumu-ēreš my son, for one and a half years
 9'. I strained my eyes.ⁱⁱ I quickly copiedⁱⁱⁱ and checked it.
 10'. The reader must not damage it. 30th of Ṭebēt, Eponymy of Mazarnê,
 11'. governor of Kullaniya.
 12'. Year 22 of Sennacherib, king of Assyria.

ⁱ May (2018, 132) assumes an error in the date, as it should be Sennacherib's twenty-first year. According to the colophon, his first year would be 705 BC.

ⁱⁱ See fn. 34.

ⁱⁱⁱ See, e.g., Lieberman 1987, 214-17; Fincke 2000, 238.

^{iv} For the word *buhḫušū*, see Jiménez 2013, 152. Jiménez discusses a Babylonian colophon (K.6075) where the same expression *zamar buhḫušū* appears in the scribal notes and equals it with *nasāḫū* 'to copy'. As *zamar* generally qualifies *nasāḫū* this aligns best with its expected usage. The scribal notes read: 14'. [... TA ŠA₃] ⁶¹⁵le₉-e ša₂ ki-i KA tup-pi₂ 15'. [... AB².SAR² za]-mar bu-uḫ-ḫuš-ma ba-ri₃. Interestingly, several Babylonian extispicy commentaries and colophon fragments from Nineveh also use this phrase or a variation of it, in their notes to the scribal process. Examples are K.9872 (bottom): 1'. TA ŠA₃ ⁶¹⁵le₉-e GABA.RI KUR aš-šur na-siḫ-ma E₃; K.3786 (rev.): 8. 3-šū₂ nis-ḫu TA ŠA₃ DUB.GAL-li₃ GABA.RI K[UR a]š-šur^{ki} 9. an IGI.DU₈ zi-ḫa-ma ba-a-ḡri-im¹; K.1315 (rev.): 5. 4-u₂ nis-ḫu AL.TIL TA ŠA₃ DUB.GAL-li₃ GABA.RI KUR aš-šur^{ki} 6. a-na IGI.DU₈ za-mar¹ zi¹-ḫa-ḡma ba₃¹-a₇-ri-ḡim¹; s. also K.19012 (rev.): 1'. [...] x GABA.[RI...] 2'. [...KUR aš]-šur^{ki} ḡza¹-[mar²...]. The similarity between these colophons in word and phraseology is striking. They all mention an original from Assyria, even though they are written in Babylonian script. One further Babylonian colophon with a similar note mentions an individual: Rm-II.127 (rev.): 12. TA lib₃-bi ⁶¹⁵le-ḡu₆¹-[um GABA.RI] 13. KUR a-šur^{ki} AN x [x x x x x] 14. AMAR m.dE₂-a-pat-ta-[ni x x x]. This individual, the son of Ea-pattāni, is connected to Nabû-zuqup-kēnu in K.75 (BAK 305), the only Babylonian tablet undoubtedly linked to Nabû-zuqup-kēnu. It states: 1'. ki-i p[ī-i (...)]GABA.RI TIN.T]IR^{ki} ša₂ m.dAG-UR₁₃-ir DUMU m.dE₂-a-pat-ta-ni^{lu}TIN.TIR^{ki}-i 2'. a-na ta-mar-ti-šū₂ is-su-ḫa AB.SAR.AM₃ BA.AN.E₃ (edited by Frazer 2016). These colophons seem to confirm both of Jiménez's ideas: that there is an equivalence between *buhḫušū* and *nasāḫū*, and that K.6075, and now other Babylonian colophons can be classified within the circle of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu. In addition, the mention of an original from Assyria, and in the case of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu from Babylon, seems to be important, possibly referring to the transfer of knowledge between these locations. This matter will be further discussed in the author's dissertation.

As tempting as this idea is, more evidence would be needed to conclude definitively that Ištar-šumu-ēreš was indeed the scribe of K.2164+. If this idea turns out to be correct, Ištar-šumu-ēreš's early tablets could be dated to around 684 BC, the time at which his scribal career must have started, to judge from the fact that he calls himself lu₂A.BA 'scribe', in his colophon. If he was already a scribe in Sennacherib's time, we would also gain an approximate idea of his age when he served as Ashurbanipal's chief scribe, beginning 15 years later – perhaps in his 30s or early 40s.⁴⁰

³⁷ While the tablet is attributed to Nabû-zuqup-kēnu as owner, he is not explicitly named as the scribe. This is the case for many of the tablets attributed to him. According to a forensic handwriting analysis carried out by Washizu 2007, different hands are attested among his tablets which suggests he ran a scribal workshop.

³⁸ K.2670.

³⁹ Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.2670>; Livingstone 1986, 28-9; BAK 299.

⁴⁰ See Luukko 2007, 254 Appendix for the probable different stages of Ištar-šumu-ēreš's career.

2 Ištar-šumu-ēreš's Later Colophons

At some point in his career, Ištar-šumu-ēreš ascended to the position of chief scribe of Ashurbanipal. Subsequently, he adopted this title in his colophons. Notably, Ištar-šumu-ēreš did not refer to himself as the son of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu anymore, but as the son of Esarhaddon's other *ummānu*, Nabû-zēru-lišir. This Nabû-zēru-lišir is entirely absent from the corpus of Nineveh colophons; moreover, the number of his letters is remarkably low for a scribe holding such a prestigious position.⁴¹ One may assume that either his tablets remain undiscovered or, considering his role as scribe of the Ištar temple in Arbela,⁴² that they are located at a different site.⁴³

Ištar-šumu-ēreš's ductus as a chief scribe is very different from that known in his early days. While his early colophons resemble an older script that can also be found on tablets from Kalḫu, his later tablets show the clear, neat ductus commonly associated with the library of Ashurbanipal, described as 'Type A' by George⁴⁴ in his study on the *Gilgamesh Epic*. This suggests a deliberate writing reform of the king's scriptoria.⁴⁵ The development of Ištar-šumu-ēreš's handwriting in comparison with tablets from Kalḫu and from Ashurbanipal's library is illustrated in the following table using three exemplary signs (KI, RA, SU):⁴⁶






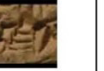















| | Ištar-šumu-ēreš's early tablets | Tablets from Kalḫu | Ištar-šumu-ēreš's later tablets | Ashurbanipal's library tablets |
|----|--|---|--|--|
| KI |  K.3810 o 3  K.3384 o 16 |  IM.67559 i o  ND.6200 i 16 |  K.3054 i r 7  K.2861 r 8 |  K.3118 r 8  K.4030 o 14 |
| RA |  K.3810 o 1 |  IM.67571 o 13  ND.6200 i 10 |  K.3054 ii r 20  K.2861 r 25 |  K.3118 o 22  BM.141781 o 6 |
| SU |  K.3810 o 5  K.3384 r 6 |  ND.6200 ii 7 |  K.2861 r 4 |  K.3118 r 1  BM.141781 o 26 |

Figure 2 A change in the handwriting of Ištar-šumu-ēreš's tablets

2.1 Medical Prescriptions

Based on the correspondence, it appears that Ištar-šumu-ēreš primarily focused on celestial matters. However, the tablets he copied reveal that he was equally skilled in other fields, including medicine. One of his colophons mentions 'medical prescriptions' and 'selections':

1881,0727.69 *Bronchia II* (?)⁴⁷

3'. [DIŠ NA GABA-SU SAG ŠA₃-ŠU₂ U] MAŠ¹.SILA₃-MEŠ-[ŠU₂ GU₇-MEŠ-ŠU₂]

4'. [X x (x) bu]I₃-ti liq-ti ki-i pi-^rI¹ [BIS²le²-u₅²-um² (/) GABA.RI]

5'. [KA₂².DINGIR².R]A^{2ki} ša₃-tir-ma ba₃-ri₃ ḥa-tu-^rU₂¹ [GIM² SUMUN²-ma²]ⁱⁱ

⁴¹ SAA 10 1 (K.13000 together with Nabû-šumu-iddina, Adad-šumu-ušur, Urdu-Ea and Ištar-šumu-ēreš), SAA 10 2 (K.112), SAA 10 3 (BM.96686 together with Adad-šumu-ušur), SAA 16 5 (K.858).

⁴² This position is mentioned in some of Ištar-šumu-ēreš's colophons (see below).

⁴³ On the other hand, an early death of Nabû-zēru-lišir, see Verderame 2004, 32, might have been the reason for his lack of visibility in the documentation. Our picture may be narrowed by the chronological distribution of the corpus, Babette Schnitzlein (personal communication).

⁴⁴ George 2003, 383.

⁴⁵ See Schnitzlein 2023, 293.

⁴⁶ The signs were retrieved from the eBL sign list at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/signs>.

⁴⁷ Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/1881,0727.69>; Parpola 1983, 450 n. 5; Borger 1971b, 83.

6'. [DUB²/ŠU² m.d.15-M]U-KAM-eš^{lu}GAL.DUB.SAR-MEŠ ša² m.Aš-šur-DU₃-A¹ [LUGAL ŠU₂ LUGAL^{kur} aš-šur]

7'. [DUMU m.d. AG-NUMU]N-SI.SA₂^{lu}GAL DUB.[SAR-MEŠ]

8'. [u₃^{lu}DUB.SA]R E₂^d+INNIN¹ ša² qe₂-reb ur^{[u}arba-il₃]

9'. [x x x x x x x x]DUMU-MEŠ¹x¹[x x]

Broken

3'. [If a man's chest, epigastrium and] shoulder blades [cause him pain].

4'. [...] medical prescriptions, selections.⁴⁸ Written and checked according to the wording [of a writing board, copy from]

5'. [Babylon]. Faulty (entries) [like the original].

6'. [Tablet/Hand of Ištar-šumu-ēreš, the chief scribe of Ashurbanipal, [king of the world, king of Assyria].

7'. [Son of Nabû-zē]ru-lišir the chief scribe]

8'. [and scrib]e of the Ištar temple in [Arbela].

9'. [...] sons [...].

i Comparable statements occur on further colophons; see Hunger 1968, 8; Arbøll 2021, 209 fn. 94.

ii For the translation 'selection', see Geller 2018a, 49 with fn. 41, following Koch 2015, 184.

Concluding from the unfortunately fragmentary catchline, this tablet was part of a series. If reconstructed correctly, the catchline matches the first line of chapter 7.3 (*Bronchia*) of the *Nineveh Medical Encyclopedia*.⁴⁸ In addition, the colophon mentions the words *bulṭu* 'medical prescription' and *liqtu* 'selection', which are reminiscent of the formulation of the colophon borne by the library's copies of the *Nineveh Medical Encyclopedia*, Asb type q:⁴⁹ *bulṭi ištu muḥḥi adi šupri liqtī aḥūti tāḥāzu naklu* 'medical prescriptions from head to the (toe-)nail, extraneous selections, elaborate teaching'. Given the position of Ištar-šumu-ēreš to Ashurbanipal and the *Nineveh* royal court, his choice of the words *bulṭi liqtī* in the colophon of a tablet that follows the *Nineveh Medical Encyclopedia's* sequence is not likely to have been a coincidence. These words represent an abbreviated version of the formulation that also appears in the library colophon, perhaps a preliminary form of the formulation re-elaborated later for the library colophon.⁵⁰

Another indication of Ištar-šumu-ēreš's possible involvement in the editorial work of the *Nineveh Medical Encyclopedia* can also be approached from different perspective. According to Panayotov, the *Assyrian Medical Catalogue* mirrors, albeit with variations, the serialized *Nineveh Medical Encyclopedia* and could be attributed to the Babylonian scholar Esaḡil-kīn-apli, *ummānu* of Adad-apla-iddina (1068-47 BC).⁵¹ Therefore, it may be following a Babylonian tradition.⁵² In addition, Panayotov notes the similarity between the *Nineveh* medical treatise *Cranium I* and therapeutic fragments from Kalḫu, as well as the inclusion of Esaḡil-kīn-apli's editorial work in the Kalḫu catalog CTN 4.71.⁵³ Interestingly, Ištar-šumu-ēreš states in his colophon – although the passage is very broken – that he copied the tablet from a Babylonian original.⁵⁴ Since Ištar-šumu-ēreš learned his craft from Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, he represents a link between Kalḫu, *Nineveh*, and the knowledge of Esaḡil-kīn-apli's work.⁵⁵

Moreover, according to an observation by Krisztián Simkó,⁵⁶ not only were there additional tablets of the *Nineveh Medical Encyclopedia* with a colophon of Asb type b,⁵⁷ but, a tablet of the chapter *Bronchia* were found among them.⁵⁸ Since this type of colophon explicitly emphasizes the writing, control, and

48 Panayotov 2018, 101.

49 BAK 329.

50 K. Simkó provides a detailed discussion on the serialization of the therapeutic corpus in another contribution in this issue.

51 Panayotov 2018, 114, connects the catalogue with two further catalogues on *Sakkikû* and *Alamdimmû* (CTN 4, 71) and *The Exorcist's Handbook* (KAR 44), which mention Esaḡil-kīn-apli as their editor. *Sakkikû* as well as the exorcistic lore fell among the many competences of Ištar-šumu-ēreš. See also Schmidtchen 2021, 8.

52 Panayotov 2018, 115.

53 On this catalogue, see especially Finkel 1988, 142-59; Heeßel 2000, 104-10; Schmidtchen 2018a; 2018b.

54 Only [... RJA^{7ki7} remains visible. Panayotov (2018, 102) also mentions local Babylonian traditions for parts of the *Bronchia* treatise of the series, but these stem either from Middle Babylonian times (IM.202652) or from Late Babylonian Uruk (IM.74413 = SPTU 1, 44). For a discussion of the Babylonian Material in the *Nineveh Medical Encyclopedia*, see also K. Simkó (in this volume).

55 Frahm 2011, 158-9 fn. 758 notes that Nabû-zuqup-kēnu, who writes his name as^{as.d}Is.ZU.ZU-zu-qup-GIN in the cryptographic colophon on K.6670+, might have known the work of Esaḡil-kīn-apli, who uses the same writing for the name of Nabû. He speculates that Nabû-zuqup-kēnu regarded this master's work even as a model for his own work. New joins make it likely that Nabû-zuqup-kēnu mentioned Esaḡil-kīn-apli in the same colophon (rev.) 15': GABA.RI^{9is}le-u₅-um^mE₂-s[ag²-il₂²/gil₂²]-G[ī¹.IN-A²] 'According to a waxtablet of E[saḡil-kīn-apli]'. Unfortunately this part of the tablet is fragmentary.

56 Personal communication.

57 BAK 318.

58 K.3516+. See the editions at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.3516>.

collation within an assembly of scholars,⁵⁹ it is plausible that Ištar-šumu-ēreš himself may have been one of the participating scholars in this assembly, possibly even discussing and compiling the encyclopedia.

Nevertheless, the exact relationship between Ištar-šumu-ēreš's tablet and the *Nineveh Medical Encyclopedia* can hardly be determined with certainty. Currently, it remains uncertain whether the tablet had the typical two-column layout of encyclopedia tablets or whether it was an excerpt tablet.⁶⁰ This tablet, however, was not the only tablet of Ištar-šumu-ēreš that linked him to the fields of expertise of Esaġil-kīn-apli.

2.2 Sakkikû

One tablet containing the series *Sakikkû* chapter V also has a colophon of Ištar-šumu-ēreš:

K.3957 *Sakikkû* V⁶¹

1'. [DIŠ GIG KIR₄-šU₂ SA₅] TIN
2'. [... GABA.RI^{kur}]ak^l-ka-de-e
3'. [... DUB²-MEŠ²/ZU²-MEŠ² ma]-a^l-du-u₂-ti
4'. [...] ša₂-tir-^lma^l sa-niq^l ba-rī^l
5'. [tup-pi^{m.d} 15-MU-KAM-eš^l] GAL A.BA-MEŠ^l
6'. [ša^m AN.ŠAR₂-DU₃-A LUGAL ŠU₂ LUGAL^{kur}] aš-šur^{ki}
Broken

- 1'. [If the nose of a patient is red:] he will live.
2'. [... copy of] the land of Akkad,
3'. [...] numerous [tablets/writing boards].ⁱ
4'. [...] written and controlled (and) checked.
5'. [Tablet of Ištar-šumu-ēreš] the chief scribe
6'. [of Ashurbanipal, king of the world, king of] Assyria.

ⁱ Another notable feature of this tablet's scribal process notes is the mention of 'numerous' [tablets/writing boards]² and the reference to the land of Akkad '(North) Babylonia' as localisation of the [copy]².

It is possible to reconstruct this colophon on the basis of the preserved parts of his title as well as of the expression *šaṭirma bari saniq* 'written and controlled (and) checked', typical of Ištar-šumu-ēreš's colophons. This phrase is never attested in other private colophons from Nineveh (i.e., those not from Ashurbanipal). It is, however, a very common phrase in library colophons, occurring in the types Asb types b, c, d, o, l, n and q.⁶² In those colophons, it is often formulated in the first or third person and presented as the work of the king himself.

It is reasonable to assume that the chief scribe of Ashurbanipal was involved in the copying of tablets in the Nineveh library. Since the royal colophons do not mention the scribes of the tablets, or present Ashurbanipal himself as the scribe, it has not been possible before to establish who was responsible for copying the royal tablets. The medical colophons of Ištar-šumu-ēreš mentioned above and their similarity with the library colophons suggest that Ištar-šumu-ēreš, the chief scribe of Ashurbanipal, was deeply involved in the process. His involvement would also explain the surprising low number of tablets signed by him in Ashurbanipal's library.

2.3 The Series *Udug-ḫul*

Two colophons associated with Ištar-šumu-ēreš are part of the incantation series *Udug-ḫul*. The first one is a small colophon fragment which includes some few signs of chapter IV l. 168'-169'. The colophon reads:

⁵⁹ See Taylor et al. 2023, 38-9.

⁶⁰ The rather short length of the colophon lines could fit the shape of a two-column tablet.

⁶¹ Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.3957>; Geller, Panayotov 2020, 229-44, 308; Schmidtchen 2021, 350-6; Labat 1951, 44-55; BAK 525.

⁶² See Schnitzlein 2023, 308. It should be noted that Asb types c and d were the predominant colophons for the series *Sakikkû*.

K.20101+ *Udug-ḫul* IV⁶³

1'. [tup-pi^{m.d}15-MU-KAM-eš^{lu}GAL tup-šar-ri ša^mAN.ŠAR₂-DU₃-A LUGAL ŠU₂ LUGAL K]UR^raš-šur^{ki}1

2'. [DUMU^{m.d}AG-NUMUN-SI.SA₂^{lu}GAL DU]B.SAR-MEŠ

3'. [u₃ DUB.SAR E₂^dINNIN[?] ša qe₂-reb^{ur}u^uarba-il₃

4'. [...]X AN[?]1

End of side

1'. [Tablet of Ištar-šumu-ēreš, chief scribe of Ashurbanipal, king of the world, king of] Assyria.

2'. [son of Nabû-zēru-lišir the chief scribe

3'. [and scribe of the Ištar temple in] Arbela.

4'. [...]

The second colophon has already been discussed elsewhere,⁶⁴ but was not attributed to Ištar-šumu-ēreš at the time. It can now be reconstructed as follows:

K.3054+ *Udug-ḫul* XII⁶⁵

(Double ruling)

17'. [e n₂ i m i n - b i a n - n] a ḫ a - l a b a - a n - u s₂ g [u₃ d u₁₁ - g a] - b i n u - s a₆

18'. [DUB.12.KAM UD]UG ḪUL-A-KAM₂^rki-i¹ [pi-i^{bi}7/e-u₅-um] URI^{ki} GABA.RI KA₂.DIŠ.DIŠ^{ki}

19'. [ša₂^{m.d}x-x-(x)-N]A/U]D DUMU^mMU-lib₂-[š^uš^uGA[L]A^rd AMAR.UTU

20'. [m^rŠul-ma-n]u-MAŠ LUGAL^{kur}aš-šur^{ki} u^{m.d}AG-A-[MU] LUGAL KA₂.DINGIR.RA^{ki}

21'. [ša₂ (x x x) i]š-ṭu-ru ša₃-ṭir-ma sa-ni[q ba]-ri₃ GU₃^{bu}.ŠUM₂ up-pu-uš

22'. [tup-pi^{m.d}15-MU-KAM-eš^{lu}GAL DUB.SAR-MEŠ ša₂^mAš-šur-[D]U₃-A LUGAL^{kur}aš-šur

23'. [DUMU^dAG-NUMUN-SI.SA₂^{lu}G]AL DUB.SAR-[MEŠ u₃[?] DUB.SAR E₂[?]1^dINNIN[?]] ša₂^r qe₂-reb^{uru}arba-il₃

24'. [...] -x

End of side[?]

17'. [Incantation: The seven of them] shared out the [heave]ns, their [clam]our is not good.

18'. [Tablet 12 of Ud]ug-Ḫul. According to the [wording of a writing board] from Akkad, a copy from Babylon

19'. [of P]N son of Šumu-libši the *kalû* of Marduk (during the reign of)

20'. [Shalman]eser, king of Assyria and Nabû-apla-[iddina], king of Babylon,

21'. [that ...]ⁱⁱⁱ had written. Written and controlled (and) checked; concluded in (its) inscription/wedges.ⁱⁱⁱ

22'. [Tablet of Ištar-šumu-ēreš,] chief scribe of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria.

23'. [Son of Nabû-zēru-lišir,] chief scribe and scribe of the [Ištar temple] in Arbela.

24'. [...]

ⁱ See Gabbay 2014, 254.

ⁱⁱ This is an unfortunate break. Was the original written by this descendant of Šumu-libši?

ⁱⁱⁱ This expression is not entirely clear, see e.g., Hunger 1968, 5. GU₃.ŠUM₂ is referenced in CAD M/2 s.v. *miḫiṣtu* 2'. The expression is also found in Ashurbanipal 220 (obv. i 18') *ḫi-ṭa-ku* GU₃.ŠUM₂ *ab-ni ša₂ la-am a-bu-bi ša₂ kak-ku sa-ak-ku bal-lu* 'I have carefully examined inscriptions on stone from before the Deluge who (se meanings are) hidden (lit. 'sealed'), muddled (lit. 'stopped up'), (and) confusing': <http://oracc.org/r/inap/Q007628>. See also the discussion of Ashurbanipal's literacy in Livingstone 2007, 100-1, where this GU₃.ŠUM₂ *abni* is translated as 'stone inscriptions'.

Hunger connected this tablet with the famous *kalû* ancestor Šumu-libši.⁶⁶ Subsequently, Gabbay discussed the tablet together with other tablets of the Šumu-libši family, written in Assyrian script.⁶⁷ There are altogether six tablets, bearing a colophon of Nabû-zēru-iddina, son of Urdu-Ea descendant of Šumu-libši. Nabû-zēru-iddina and his father are also known from the correspondence as *kalûs* at the royal court.⁶⁸ The correspondence shows that Ištar-šumu-ēreš worked together with these experts. Nabû-

⁶³ Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.20101>; Geller 2016, 133-73; BAK 502.

⁶⁴ E.g., Lambert 1957, 5 with fn. 21; Gabbay 2014, 254-5.

⁶⁵ Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.3054>; Geller 2016, 399-498; BAK 502.

⁶⁶ BAK 502.

⁶⁷ Gabbay 2014, 254.

⁶⁸ Letters of/with Urdu-Ea: SAA 8 181 (K.1405), SAA 8 182 (K.853), SAA 8 183 (K.1383), SAA 10 1 (K.13000 together with Nabû-zēru-lišir, Adad-šumu-ušur, Nabû-šumu-iddina and Ištar-šumu-ēreš), SAA 10 212 (1881,0204.58 together with Adad-šumu-ušur), SAA 10 338 (1881,0727.30), SAA 10 339 (K.1204), SAA 10 340 (K.1148), SAA 10 341 (K.1222), SAA 10 342 (1883,0118.270), SAA 10 343 (K.1024), SAA 10 344 (K.1022).

zēru-iddina even mentions that he copied tablets from originals from the house of Šumu-libši. Therefore, it must be assumed that he had such originals in his possession or at hand. Such personal belongings could have also been the source in the case of the *Udug-hul* copies. A collaboration between scholars and a Babylonian tradition is clearly present.⁶⁹

2.4 Šu'ila Prayer to Sîn

The next colophon of Ištar-šumu-ēreš, belonging to a *šu'ila* prayer to Sîn, may also be the result of a collaboration with Nabû-zēru-iddina and Urdu-Ea, who held the double title as 'kalû of Sîn and the king':⁷⁰

K.2861+ Šu'ila prayer to Sîn⁷¹

(single ruling)

41'. šu-il₂-la₂ 4[8-a m₃ mu-bi-im^d Su]en-na -ka m^{var} (single ruling)

42'. alim-ma umun ġir₃-r[a (...)]-na -r^x

43'. ^rGIM¹-ma SUMUN-š₂ ša₃-tir-^rma¹ [ša-ni]q IGI.KAR₂

44'. *tup-pi*^{m.d} 15-MU-KAM-eš^{lu} GAL *tup-šar*-^rri¹

45'. ša^mAN.ŠAR₂-DU₃-A LUGAL ŠU₂ LUGAL^{kur} aš-šur^{ki}

46'. DUMU^dAG-NUMUN-SI.SA₂^{lu}-GAL GI.BUR₃

End of side

41'. Šu'ila with 48 [lines of S]în.

42'. Important one, strong lord, [...]

43'. Written according to its original, controlled and checked.

44'. Tablet of Ištar-šumu-ēreš the chief scribe

45'. of Ashurbanipal, king of the world, king of Assyria.

46'. Son of Nabû-zēru-līšir the chief scribe.

This tablet, which is complete, may be regarded as the ultimate example of the work of Ištar-šumu-ēreš. It uses the clear script that is traditionally associated with Ashurbanipal's library, and which can be found in numerous tablets furnished with a library colophon. This tablet shows what one would expect from the highest scholar of the royal court.⁷²

2.5 Babylonian Tablet

Another tablet of Ištar-šumu-ēreš was written in Babylonian script. It contains omens of extispicy, some of which refer to the lungs. The surface of the two-column tablet is thinly chipped on the obverse and on parts of the reverse. The underlying layer still shows some traces of cuneiform text, albeit illegibly. Therefore, it is currently impossible to restore these parts of the tablet. At least the scribe's colophon is partially preserved and partially restorable:

Letters of/with Nabû-zēr-iddina: SAA 10 345 (K.10373+K.12947), SAA 10 346 (1883,0118.193), *State Archives of Assyria online*, <http://oracc.org/saao/>. Nabû-zēr-iddina also appears as first named *kalû* in a list of experts at the royal court: SAA 7 1 (K.1276) rev. i 1, <http://oracc.org/saao/P335693/>. His father Urdu-Ea is also mentioned in a list of court personnel: SAA 7 5 (K.1359) obv. i 51, <http://oracc.org/saao/P335699/>.

⁶⁹ On the collaboration among scholars from different cities and the transfer and networks of knowledge, Frahm 2012; Robson 2019.

⁷⁰ K.4240, K.20627, 1881,0204.306, K.3238, K.14576.

⁷¹ Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.2861>. Langdon 1927, 6-11; Sjöberg 1960, 167-79; Shibata 2021, 106-25 n. 6; BAK 344. For a photograph see Schnitzlein, Taylor in this volume.

⁷² On this tablet see also the discussion of Babette Schnitzlein and Jon Taylor in this volume, and Schnitzlein 2023, 354-5.

K.3877 Extispicy⁷³

16'. 1 ME 24 MU.Š[^{ID}.BI...]
 17'. *a-na a-ma-ru na-^rsiḫ*¹ [...]
 18'. *tup-pi^{m,d} /š-tar-MU-KAM* ^[^{lu₂}][^{GAL DUB.SAR}]
 19'. *ša₂^{m,d} AN.ŠAR₂-DU₃-IBILA* ^[^{kur} aš-šur^{ki}]
 20'. DUMU ^{m,d}AG-NUMUN-SI-SA₂ ^[^{lu₂} GAL DUB.SAR ...]
 Broken

16'. 124 lin[es ...].
 17'. Excerpted for reading [...].
 18'. Tablet of Ištar-šumu-ēreš, [chief scribe]
 19'. of Ashurbanipal, king of [Assyria].
 20'. Son of Nabû-zēru-līširs [the chief scribe...].

Fincke suggested that this tablet could have been written by Ištar-šumu-ēreš himself.⁷⁴ It is easier to assume, however, that Ištar-šumu-ēreš had the tablet written for him.⁷⁵ It is clear from his letters that Babylonian scholars were part of his scholarly network.⁷⁶

3 Conclusion

Experts at the royal court have been a recurring topic of discussion. Much of what is known about them comes from their correspondence, which is now well-edited and easy to access. In contrast, colophons have rarely received enough attention, primarily due to two reasons. First, the formulaic and repetitive nature of library colophons has resulted in them being overlooked.⁷⁷ Second, the sheer volume of private colophons, coupled with the absence of a comprehensive catalogue, has made it difficult for anyone to gain a complete overview. This problem has been overcome by the availability of photographs of the Kuyunjik collection and the *eBL* project's database, which now contains thousands of searchable transliterations. On this basis, the project *Reading the Library of Ashurbanipal: A multi-Sectional Analysis of Assyriology's Foundational Corpus* was able to collect 2,296 colophons from Nineveh.

This article has shown that the few known tablets with a colophon of the chief scribe of Ashurbanipal, Ištar-šumu-ēreš, can be divided into those belonging to an earlier phase and those belonging to a later phase in his career. In his early career, Ištar-šumu-ēreš was a student of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu. Two tablets from this first phase, found in the Nineveh library, perhaps were written in Kalḫu during the reign of Sennacherib and brought to Nineveh along with the tablet collection of Nabû-zuqup-kēnu. It seems also possible that Ištar-šumu-ēreš was responsible for transferring Nabû-zuqup-kēnu's collection to Nineveh.

Ištar-šumu-ēreš's later tablets were written during his active time as chief scribe of Ashurbanipal. It should be noted that none of the tablets bearing a colophon in his name appear to date from the reign of Esarhaddon, although he was a prolific correspondent in that period. The fact that al-

⁷³ Edited at <https://www.ebl.lmu.de/fragmentarium/K.3877>. BAK 344; see Parpola 1983, 451.

⁷⁴ Fincke 2014, 272.

⁷⁵ New joins to K.10129+ have restored a Babylonian colophon which apparently mentions Ištar-šumu-ēreš's uncle Adad-šumu-ušur as the owner of the tablet, following a certain Nabû-šapik-zēri, a *šmallû* 'apprentice', who was probably responsible for writing it (see the author's forthcoming dissertation). Also, in his Babylonian colophon (K.75), Nabû-zuqup-kēnu is mentioned only as 'owner', not as 'writer' of the tablet. This should be taken into account, as he explicitly designated himself as writer of some of his tablets on which a single hand, presumably his own, was identified in a forensic handwriting analysis by Washizu (2007, 255-70, 274).

⁷⁶ For example, the letter SAA 10 9 (K.12) was probably addressed to Esarhaddon and concerned with the burial rituals maybe of a member of the royal family or a substitute king. The king had previously instructed Ištar-šumu-ēreš to ask Babylonian scholars whom he (Ištar-šumu-ēreš) knew for details of the ceremony, presumably because the deceased was himself a Babylonian; see Parpola 1983, 6-7. Thus, it is clear that Ištar-šumu-ēreš had a wide network, which included Babylonian scholars.

⁷⁷ The palace mark colophon (Asb type a) - KUR AN.ŠAR₂-DU₃-A MAN ŠU₂ MAN KUR AN.ŠAR₂^{ki} 'Palace of Ashurbanipal, king of the world, king of Assyria' - is a prime example of an underutilized resource. Despite appearing consistently across tablets, see Taylor et al. 2023, 28-9, its significance has often been overlooked. Yet, these tablets hold surprising diversity in their genres, scribal styles, and formatting. Studying these tablets alongside scribal notes reveals fascinating patterns. For instance, the phrase 'according to its original' appears as LIBIR.RA.BI₂-GIM only in tablets bearing the Asb type a colophon (K.2252, K.231) and a broken colophon (K.2774), only on tablets of *Gilgameš*. No other colophon writes the expression with -BI₂-; all others use BI₍₁₎ instead. Therefore, a colophon Asb type a for K.2774 is to be expected. Other examples include an Asb type a colophon with scribal notes that show a spelling *ba-a-ri* in, e.g., *ki-ma la-bi-ri-šu₂ ša₃-tir-ma ba-a-ri* 'written according to the wording of its original and then checked', which occurs in this type of colophon exclusively on lamentation texts. A further Asb type a tablet set (K.8974, K.3426, K.1451 and broken K.8282) has the distinctive form *ša^r-tir* and refers to a copy from a writing board from Babylon.

most no other tablet from Nineveh furnished with a colophon is dated to the reign of Esarhaddon⁷⁸ suggests that a tablet collection with royal colophons developed first and foremost for Ashurbanipal.⁷⁹

Lieberman pointed out that none of the Ištar-šumu-ēreš tablets were explicitly *designated* as part of this royal collection.⁸⁰ He argued that “if royal officials of this rank were involved in the acquisition of the king’s library, then, they did so behind the scenes, putting the tablets into his collection(s) anonymously, without intruding any reference to themselves”. In the case of Ištar-šumu-ēreš, he continued “since there is not any reason to think that these tablets were ever part of the collections of the king, they may be ignored when we consider the libraries associated with Assurbanipal”.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Lieberman acknowledges that a study of colophons was a desideratum at the time. This picture of the personal tablets in ‘Ashurbanipal’s Library’ can now be re-evaluated on the basis of a comprehensive corpus of colophons.

An analysis of colophons attributed to Ištar-šumu-ēreš, Ashurbanipal’s chief scribe, offers new insights into the construction and organization of the renowned royal library. While the anonymity of Ashurbanipal colophons was deliberate,⁸² linguistic parallels connect the chief scribe’s colophons with those bearing the king’s name. Such parallels include textual markers like ‘written and controlled (and) checked’ (*šaṭirma saniq bari*) within scribal notes. Additionally, the shared designation ‘medical prescriptions (and) selections’ (*bulṭi liqtī*) echoes formulations within Ashurbanipal’s colophons, where they might be expanded (e.g., Asb type q) to include more elaborate descriptions of content. This idea finds support also in the evolution of the ductus of Ištar-šumu-ēreš, from the more Kalḫu-like one of its first phase to the one typical of the library of Ashurbanipal on the tablets of what has been designated here as the second phase.

These findings have significant implications. They suggest that Ištar-šumu-ēreš was actively involved in the production of tablets bearing a royal colophon and may even indicate that some of his personal tablets were incorporated into the royal library. While his precise role remains a subject of inquiry, Ištar-šumu-ēreš may have engaged in editorial or compilatory activities, supervised scribes, and perhaps authored tablets directly. His distinctive library script on later works, in conjunction with his position as chief scribe, supports the latter possibility.

The presence of a Babylonian tablet among his possessions highlights Ištar-šumu-ēreš’s scholarly network – a network mirrored in his correspondence. This raises the possibility that he commissioned the acquisition of Babylonian tablets.⁸³ This potential connection extends to both anonymous Babylonian tablets and those bearing an Asb type l colophon, including a subset of some ten tablets written in Babylonian script.

In summary, our analysis yields a fresh perspective on the function of Ištar-šumu-ēreš, the chief scribe in the court of Ashurbanipal. Recent evidence substantiates what one might reasonably have expected: the chief scholar (*ummānu*) serving under Ashurbanipal was instrumental in the establishment of the most renowned library in the Ancient Near East.

⁷⁸ It must be kept in mind, as is indirectly evident from the correspondence, that tablets and writing boards were still being copied and handled for the king during this period, see Robson 2019, 122; Schnitzlein 2023, 295-303. Robson states that some of the manuscripts in Esarhaddon’s collection were even copied by Ištar-šumu-ēreš, since he is the one who has the most to say about the processing of (old) tablets.

⁷⁹ See also Taylor et al. 2023.

⁸⁰ Lieberman 1990, 314.

⁸¹ Lieberman 1990, 316.

⁸² See Robson 2019, 124 who concluded from an examination of the correspondence that 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”.

⁸³ The same applies to Nabû-zuqup-kēnu’s collection, as indicated in fn. iv. This scribe’s collection certainly included Babylonian tablets, which were later transferred to Nineveh.

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