

“Weaving Together Loose Threads” On the Serialisation of the Therapeutic Corpus at Nineveh

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Abstract This article provides an overview of the development of the therapeutic text corpus in the Ashurbanipal Library. It explores the editorial steps taken to produce new standard editions of the therapeutic texts for the Library through a systematic investigation of the layout and format of tablets with pharmaceutical remedies as well as the colophon types used in the corpus. To facilitate the study of the available source material, the texts are divided into four groups. The classification is based on ductus and the different colophons used in the Ashurbanipal Library, yielding four groups: the ‘Babylonian group’, ‘mixed group’, ‘q-group’, and ‘dedicatory group’. As argued here, the tablets in these four groups represent different stages of the editing process.

Keywords Cuneiform medicine. Pharmaceutical remedies. Ashurbanipal Library. Tablet layout and format. Library colophons. Scribal remarks on editing process.

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1 Introduction

The therapeutic texts from the Ashurbanipal Library at Nineveh constitute a rich and varied corpus, with tablets which are distinguishable in terms of format, script, and the type of colophon written at the end of the text to describe the circumstances of its production. Significantly and perhaps in line with the fact that the therapeutic knowledge constituted a more fluid tradition than, for instance, the majority of the omen literature, where the colophons usually designate the place and function of a manuscript within the overall corpus, no therapeutic text from Nineveh seems to qualify as being either extraneous (*aḫû*) to or an excerpt (*nishû*, *pirsu*) from a well-established series.¹ This feature of the Nineveh

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¹ On the different divinatory texts, see Koch 2015, 30-66 and, with a focus on the final chapter of the extispicy series, *Multābiltu*, Koch 2005, 39-45. Freedman (1998, 5-8) provides an overview of the different types of *Ālu* manuscripts, whereas a discussion of the *Izbu* manuscripts, including excerpt tablets and *aḫû*-omens, is found in Leichty 1970, 20-2 and De Zorzi 2014, 10-13. For the *aḫû* literature, see also Schnitzlein 2023, 255-8.



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therapeutic corpus may very well reflect an approach to the pharmaceutically oriented field of the Mesopotamian healing disciplines (*asûtu*), where the extant textual material as a whole qualified as part of the mainstream tradition and could be revised to produce a legitimate foundation for the discipline.²

The idea that pharmaceutical treatments had a relatively fluid tradition in first-millennium Mesopotamia finds support in a set of administrative documents from Nineveh registering the arrival of scholarly literature at the Ashurbanipal Library.³ These library records provide lists of texts that had been acquired from various Babylonian and Assyrian private tablet collections, either by giving the name of the pertinent composition or by referring to the scholarly discipline in which the texts had originated, such as the lore of the exorcist (*āšipūtu*).⁴ However, when it comes to the therapeutic literature, the records use the generic term *bultū* ‘medical recipes’ and never once refer to pharmaceutical remedies as part of a serialised composition, even if such compositions did exist in the field of pharmaceutical medicine.

Evidence for a compendial framework in the form of a technical series comes from the Assur Medical Catalogue, which provides information about two therapeutic compositions, each made up of a series of multi-tablet treatises.⁵ This one-column tablet, written in a portrait orientation, contains a structured list of incipits corresponding to the opening lines of the tablets that make up the individual treatises. Each treatise occupies a ruled-off section, and after each section, the catalogue includes a rubric summing up the number of constituent tablets, along with the section title, viz. the opening line of the first tablet, which served as the designation of the entire treatise. The text then proceeds with a list of medical topics introduced with the preposition *adi* ‘together with, including’, quite possibly to provide an overview of the conditions addressed in the treatise. From a structural point of view, the treatises in the two compositions follow different organising principles: the treatises in the first half of the catalogue follow a well-defined anatomical arrangement. The second composition recorded in the second half of the catalogue is not so well understood, but the treatises here are thematically linked, collecting treatments for various conditions like skin ailments, gynaecological problems, mental illness, and veterinary medicine. The Assur Medical Catalogue also designates these two compositions differently: it applies the descriptive title ‘remedies (organised) from the top of the head to the (toe)nails’ to the anatomically ordered first series, whereas the second composition is named after its incipit, viz. the opening line of its first tablet concerned with skin ailments.

Anatomically ordered first series (Assur Medical Catalogue I. 58 = Steinert 2018a, 213, 243-4)

[NIGIN₂ 50 DUB.MEŠ (. . .) *bul-ṭi?* T]A UGU EN *šu-up-ri sa-di-ru ša₂* SUR.GIBIL *šab-tu*

A total of fifty tablets (. . .) with remedies (organised) from the top of the head to the (toe)nails. Sections, which have been edited.

Thematically ordered second series (Assur Medical Catalogue II. 123-4 = Steinert 2018a, 218, 277-8)

‘NIGIN₂ x+38’ DUB.MEŠ DIŠ GIG [*ina* SU NA E₃ ḪAD₂.DA’ *la-ku-ta-šu₂ um-mu-r[a-at] / [sa-di-ru] ‘ša₂’* [SUR.GIBIL] *šab-tu*

A total of 38+ tablets (of the composition called) ‘If a lesion breaks out on a man’s skin, it is dry’, (and) its . . . is reddened’. Sections, which have been edited.

That the two compositions in the catalogue are the end products of an editing process aimed at bringing together loosely connected therapeutic prescriptions into newly standardised texts is evident from the final statement in both summary rubrics. The key formulation here is the idiomatic phrase SUR.GIBIL *šab-tu*, which describes the production of new authoritative editions of scholarly texts through the process of serialisation.⁶ As first demonstrated by Stol, the phrase employs a textile metaphor for describing this process, conceptualising the extant textual material, before serialisation, as loose and tangled threads that need to be woven into a well-organised textual fabric.⁷

² Compare Geller 2018, 50.

³ Parpola 1983, republished in SAA 7, 49-56. The library records are discussed in more detail below.

⁴ Note that the library records refer to some exorcistic compositions by name, such as the *ušburruda* texts or the ‘Seal of the *haltu* stone’, concerned with the making of chain amulets (Schuster-Brandis 2008, 192-7).

⁵ A partial first edition of the catalogue is found in Scurlock 2014, 295-306. For a more complete edition of the text with exhaustive apparatus and detailed discussions, see Steinert 2018a.

⁶ Kinnier Wilson 1956, 138, and Finkel 1988, 150. On this elusive term, see also Steinert 2018a, 278-9.

⁷ Stol 2007, 241-2. The best example of this imagery is Esagil-kin-apli’s editorial note in the catalogue of diagnostic and physiognomic omens, where the formulation SUR.GIBIL *la šab-tu* is followed by another reference from the realm of textile making, name-

The Assur Medical Catalogue thus informs our understanding of the transmission of the therapeutic literature in first-millennium Mesopotamia on two levels. Firstly, it illustrates that despite its more fluid tradition, the corpus did reach a similar degree of serialisation as other corpora of cuneiform scholarship no later than the seventh century BC.⁸ Secondly, it provides us with a framework – the anatomical and thematic principles respectively applied in the two compositions – as well as the individual incipits that serve as anchor points for bringing order to a mass of loosely connected therapeutic prescriptions.

We should bear in mind that no medical tablet from Assur mirrors the structure and content of the serialised compositions outlined in the Assur Medical Catalogue. The closest parallels to these standard editions of therapeutic texts come from the Ashurbanipal Library. The exact relationship between the catalogue and the Library editions remains opaque, and we will have to leave this question aside until further evidence from Assur comes to light.⁹ In this article, I will explore, instead, the corpus of therapeutic texts from Nineveh and how individual tablets within this corpus might reflect stages of an editing process leading up to the creation of standard textual products of the type recorded in the Assur Medical Catalogue. As mentioned above, in terms of their format, script, and colophon type, the Nineveh tablets with pharmaceutical remedies constitute a varied corpus, but we can divide them into four main categories:

1. The ‘*q*-group’, named after the colophon exclusively applied to tablets in this group,¹⁰ represents higher-level textual products, including but not limited to the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia. A significant feature of these texts is, as we will see, that they never provide an editorial note that would qualify them as being copies of older originals. Moreover, these tablets usually have a two-column format, but recent research has yielded evidence which suggests that scribes also made use of the one- and three-column tablet formats.
2. The ‘Babylonian group’ are tablets written in Babylonian script, mostly of small dimensions in both one- and multi-column formats. These tablets belong to a larger corpus of mixed scholarly texts that either represent direct acquisitions from Babylonia or are the products of Babylonian scribes at Nineveh in the service of the Assyrian court.
3. The ‘mixed group’ mainly consists of tablets in a one-column format, with the default library colophons *c* or *d*, often in combination with an editorial note giving information about the scribal process. This group further includes texts furnished with colophon types *b* and *r/s*.
4. The ‘dedicatory group’ only contains one fragment with traces of a colophon, which may correspond to colophon *n* used in the Nabû temple library.

ly, GIM SA.MEŠ GIL.MEŠ, yielding the metaphoric description of the inherited text corpus as being ‘entangled like threads’ because they have never received an edition. As Wee (2019, 33) puts it, the editing process is portrayed here ‘as the unravelment of ‘tangled’ textual threads from older compositions, in order to combine the material in new ways as a fresh edition’. For further discussions of Esagil-kīn-apli’s editorial note, see Heeßel 2000, 104-10 and 2010; Frahm 2011, 326-8 and 2018, 24-6; Jiménez 2016a, 197-9; Schmidtchen 2018, 147-50; Geller 2018, 46-8.

⁸ No precise dating of the catalogue is possible at this stage, except that, based on the appearance of the script, it was most likely written sometime during the eighth or seventh century BC: see Panayotov 2018, 89, and Steinert 2018a, 203.

⁹ For the question of the transmission of therapeutic knowledge in first-millennium Mesopotamia, see Steinert 2018b, 172-8. We may mention an unpublished fragment registered under the inventory number 1924,194 in the collections of the Museum für Kunst und Gewebe, Hamburg, which Ebeling dates to the eighth century BC and considers having possibly originated from the excavations of the German Oriental Society at Assur. Preliminary investigations, based on photographs and a provisional transliteration kindly put at my disposal by Zsombor Földi, suggest that the Hamburg fragment duplicates the Nineveh manuscript K.2477+ (BAM 471+). It contains two sets of therapeutic prescriptions (one on the obverse and another one on the reverse) that recur in the same sequence in the second and third columns of K. 2477+. The fragment is currently being prepared for publication by Földi.

¹⁰ On the Ashurbanipal colophons, see Hunger 1968, 97-108, along with a detailed discussion of the history of research in Schnitzlein, Cohen 2024. A new edition of the library colophons is found on the website of the *Reading the Library of Ashurbanipal* project: see <https://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/asbp/rLasb/>.

2 The Centrepiece of Ashurbanipal’s Medical Library: The Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia

Although we do not yet possess a catalogue of therapeutic texts from Nineveh, the therapeutic text corpus that has come down to us from the Neo-Assyrian capital includes manuscripts of a serialised composition, which is similar in structure and content to the anatomically ordered series laid out in the first part of the Assur Medical Catalogue. This composition – now called the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia – appears to have been the centrepiece of Ashurbanipal’s medical library. That it constitutes a single continuous text with twelve interconnected treatises of various lengths is evident from the catchlines and tablet designation lines that appear immediately before the colophon proper on each tablet. Combined with the evidence gleaned from the Assur Medical Catalogue,¹¹ it becomes clear that the focus of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia was on treating the head and the neck. Its first six treatises collect remedies for diseases that affect the head, in general, and different parts of the head area, including the eyes, ears, nose, and teeth. After treatments for the oral cavity, the text moves on to the rest of the body, where the individual treatises proceed systematically from the respiratory and gastrointestinal tracts, through the renal and rectal areas of the body, to the legs, feet, and toes.

Each treatise consists of a number of tablets (henceforth called chapters); some are of considerable length, with as many as eight chapters, whereas others only contain one or two chapters. The Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia had a total of fifty individual chapters corresponding to neatly written library tablets in a standard two-column format, which could contain somewhere between 250–80 lines of text.¹² The quality of the script and the outward appearance of the tablets that form this serialised therapeutic composition are of the highest standards. A thin layer of carefully levigated clay forms the outer surface, with hardly any inclusions that could interrupt the flow of the script. The extant manuscripts are large tablets with an approximate width-to-length ratio of 2 to 3; they usually measure between 15.5 to 18.3 cm in width and 25.5 to 31.2 cm in height, providing enough space for longer texts.¹³ As a good indication of the scribe’s expertise in assessing the size of the necessary space, the writing never runs over the edge of these tablets.

The two-column format of the manuscripts is a noteworthy feature since it allows us to estimate the original length of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia. Looking at the most intact part of the composition, the second chapter of the treatise on gastrointestinal ailments [fig. 1], we find that the number of lines in a column can vary from around sixty to as high as seventy-five – the sum total of lines in this chapter is 269.¹⁴ In light of further evidence provided by other parts of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia, which are more fragmentary but still allow for a sound reconstruction of the original length (see below), we might take a somewhat lower number as the average line count of a chapter.

The table below summarises a survey of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia, as currently reconstructed: Where a chapter is missing, or we could not determine its length due to the fragmentary state of the available manuscripts, we took 265 lines as the average line count. The figures presented here include likely manuscripts of the composition, without catchlines and colophons but with just enough text to allow us to establish the part of the Encyclopaedia that they most likely represent. For instance, the first three chapters of the treatise on head ailments are known from relatively well-preserved manuscripts, with catchlines and tablet designation lines that indicate their place in the series. Here, we can base our assessment on the extant manuscripts of the first three chapters, with 257, 253, and 250 lines, respectively.¹⁵ The main manuscript representing the fourth chapter of the same treatise is only a corner piece fragment but, based on commonalities in thematic content and vocabulary, seems to correlate with another tablet in a much better state, which does not have a preserved colophon.¹⁶ Our

¹¹ Panayotov 2018.

¹² Compare Panayotov 2018, 110, as well as Taylor, Schnitzlein in this volume.

¹³ Taylor, Schnitzlein (in this volume) provide a detailed discussion of the outward appearance of tablets in the Ashurbanipal Library. On the nature of clay used to make tablets and the technological aspect of tablet making, see Taylor 2011.

¹⁴ The pertinent manuscript here is K.71B+ (BAM 575), which has preserved text in almost every line, amounting to a total line count of 69 in the first, 65 in the second, 73 in the third, and 62 in the fourth columns. For an edition of the text, see Johnson, Simkó 2024, 105–58.

¹⁵ The line counts have been reconstructed based on the following manuscripts: K.2354+ (BAM 480+) for the first chapter edited in Worthington 2005, and Scurlock 2014; K.2392+ (BAM 482) and K.6066+ (AMT 19/1 etc.) for the second chapter edited in Attia, Buisson 2003; and AMT 102/1+ etc. incorporating several manuscripts into a single hand-copy for the third chapter.

¹⁶ Sm 950 (CT 23, 50) is a manuscript with preserved colophon indicating that it was the fourth chapter of the treatise on head ailments. This chapter can further be reconstructed with the help of K.6224+ (BAM 494), edited in Bácskay, Simkó 2017.



Figure 1 The best-preserved part of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia, a manuscript of the second chapter of the gastrointestinal treatise *Stomach*. Nineveh, Iraq. K.71B.
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reconstruction here suggests 294 as the total number of lines.¹⁷ Finally, the fifth chapter of the treatise has no known manuscripts, and therefore, it has been assigned the average line count of 265.¹⁸

Table 1 The overall length of the treatise on head ailments

Chapter 1	MS with colophon	257 lines	9 missing	248 extant
Chapter 2	MS with colophon	253 lines	31 missing	222 extant
Chapter 3	MS with colophon	250 lines	43 missing	207 extant
Chapter 4	MS fragment, reconstructed with the help of further texts	294 lines	78 missing	216 extant
Chapter 5	MS missing	265 lines	265 missing	0 extant
Total		1319 lines	426 missing	893 extant

Table 2 An overview of the length of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia

Name of the treatise	Number of chapters	Original line count	Number of preserved lines	Percentage of preserved text
I. Cranium	5	1319	893	68%
II. Eyes	4	1076	513	48%
III. Ears	1	283	214	76%
IV. Neck	6	1596	738	46%
V. Nosebleed	1	265	67	25%
VI. Teeth	2	554	400	72%
VII. Bronchia	6	1582	505	32%
VIII. Stomach	5	1294	986	76%
IXa. Epigastrium	8	2127	388	18%
IXb. Abdomen				
X. Kidney	3	795	238	30%
XI. Anus	5	1325	356	27%
XII. Hamstring	4	1067	459	43%
Total	50	13,253	5,757	43%

With more than 13,000 lines, the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia represents a substantial piece of scholarly literature, pulled together from disparate sources over the course of many years. The notion that this impressive work was assembled and edited in the Ashurbanipal Library finds support, above all, in the absence of any scribal remark that would qualify the extant manuscripts as being copies of older texts. Instead, a specific scribal notation known as colophon *q* is consistently applied to manuscripts of this serialised composition, thus setting it apart from the rest of the tablets in the Nineveh therapeutic corpus.

From a structural point of view, colophon *q* is similar to other colophon types, especially *c* and *d*. All three of these colophons include the same property mark alongside a description of Ashurbanipal's divinely endowed abilities, while at the same time highlighting the king as the most accomplished scholar from among his predecessors. They differ considerably, however, in their description of the scholarly works in the Library. Types *c* and *d* seem to have functioned as default library colophons with a wide range of applicability through their use of the phrases ‘wisdom of Nabû’ (*nēmeq Nabû*) and ‘whatever pertains to cuneiform signs’ (*tikip santakki mala bašmu*), which cover the whole spectrum of cunei-

¹⁷ Although this number seems to be somewhat higher than the total number of lines in other chapters of the treatise, the reconstruction is based on the tablet K.6224+ (BAM 494), which contains well above seventy lines in its two almost intact columns: 76 lines in the second and 78 lines in the third column. Even if we take the conservative number of 65 as the average line count in the other two columns of the tablet, the total number of lines amounts to 284.

¹⁸ Since it would go considerably beyond the limits of the present article, we cannot give further details about the reconstruction of the individual treatises here. An edition of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia, with all the manuscripts used to reconstruct the text as completely as possible, is available in the Fragmentarium of the *electronic Babylonian Library* (<https://www.ebl.lmu.de>), as well as on the website of the *Introducing Assyrian Medicine: Healthcare Fit for a King* (NinMed) project: see <https://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/asbp/ninmed/>.

form scholarship.¹⁹ Colophon *q* replaces these terms with content-specific clauses pointing out that the works in question qualify as the greatest medical expertise of Ninurta and Gula and then singles out the anatomically ordered series, the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia, with the descriptive title ‘remedies (organised) from the top of the head to the (toe)nails’.

Other texts that Ashurbanipal had consulted, according to colophon *q*, are the extraneous *ahû*-literature and all technical lore that had something to do with healthcare and the application of healing drugs. As a designation of extraneous or ‘non-canonical’ text material, the use of the term *ahû* in this colophon is unique. The lack of any other evidence for texts technically designated as *ahû* in the extant therapeutic literature was, in fact, our basis above for postulating a more fluid tradition in the field of Mesopotamian pharmaceutical medicine. The reason for adding this unique reference remains opaque but might reflect Ashurbanipal’s claim that he was familiar with the entire written body of therapeutic knowledge and had not limited himself to reproducing a single composition.²⁰ To emphasise his aim of being all-inclusive, he might have drawn an analogy between the corpus of pharmaceutical remedies, where *ahû* as a designation does not seem to have applied, and other scholarly literature transmitted as standard editions and also in the form of extraneous texts. Previous scholars have tried to make sense of the occurrence of the term *ahû* in colophon *q* differently. Panayotov raises the possibility that this term describes the material introduced with the preposition *adi* in the Assur Medical Catalogue.²¹ As mentioned above, this so-called *adi*-section always follows a summary rubric giving the total number of tablets that make up a treatise. The evidence presented by Panayotov in support of this argument does not seem sufficient to replace the older and more likely notion, namely that the *adi*-section was added after the summary rubric to provide an overview of the medical conditions discussed in the corresponding treatise.²² This function of the section becomes immediately apparent if we look at the medical conditions listed in connection with Stomach, the treatise dealing with the ailments of the gastrointestinal tract:

The *adi*-section of Stomach (Assur Medical Catalogue ll. 31-5 = Steinert 2018a, 211-12, 231-2)

[NIGIN₂ 5 DUB.MEŠ DIŠ NA *su-a-lam* GIG *ana ki-is š*]_{A₃} GUR-šU₂ EN TU₁₅ *iš-biṭ-su-‘ma’*
[] U₂ NAG-*ma ‘la’ i-ar₂-‘ru’*
[*še-me-eṛ’* DIŠ NA KA]Š NAG-*ma* SUḪUŠ.MEŠ-šU₂ *pa-al-qa*
[*di-ig-la ma-a-ti’* GI]G *ki-šir šA₃* GIG *ki-is šA₃*
[GIG DIR]I U₃ *nik-mat* TU₁₅ U UD.ĐA

Total of five tablets (of the treatise) ‘If a man suffers from phlegm, which has turned into gastric constriction’, including (prescriptions for the case that) (1) flatulence (lit. ‘wind’) has bloated him [. . .] (2) he took (lit. drank) a drug, and subsequently, he does not throw up, (and) he is distended [. . .] (3) if a man drinks beer, and then his lower extremities are impaired (lit. shattered), (and his) vision is diminished [. . .] he suffers from [. . .], (4) he suffers from a knotted-up belly, (5) he suffers from a gastric constriction [. . .] he is full of [. . .] and he (6) has an accumulation of flatulence (lit. ‘wind’) and heat.

The conditions here point to different parts of the gastrointestinal treatise but with a focus on the second chapter, where we find nos 2, 3, and 4 in the same order.²³ The rationale behind bringing together these particular symptoms in the *adi*-section is unclear, although the rather exceptional nature of some of the pharmaceutical practices might have played a role in the selection process. The second chapter of the treatise includes remedies for cases in which someone has taken an emetic drug but nonetheless cannot vomit (K.71B = BAM 575 iii 42). Another condition involving drunkenness from overconsumption of beer occurs only a few lines later in the same chapter (K.71B+ iii 49), after which the text turns to a more conventional problem called ‘knotted-up belly’ (K.71B+ iv 37 and 43). At the same time, the *adi*-section also refers to medical problems treated in other parts of the gastrointestinal treatise, such as gastric constriction (no. 5) and a feverish state called ‘heat’ (no. 6), constituting the main topics in the first and fourth chapters.

¹⁹ Although they function as default library colophons, types *c* and *d* never occur on texts about extispicy and only rarely on tablets which contain other forms of divination: see Taylor et al. 2023, 29. On the correlation between library colophons and textual genres, see Schnitzlein, Cohen 2024.

²⁰ A parallel to this editorial effort is found in colophon *g*, which exclusively occurs on manuscripts of the pharmacological series Uruana: see Taylor et al. 2023, 31.

²¹ Panayotov 2018, 112-13.

²² For the *adi*-section as a content inventory, see already Scurlock 2014, 295-6.

²³ Compare Johnson, Simkó 2024, 15-16.

Steinert adopts a different approach to the question of whether extraneous texts played a role in the formation of the therapeutic corpus, focusing on the thematically ordered series in the second part of Assur Medical Catalogue. In my view, she rightly sees this second composition as incorporating a more varied material, including both core texts from the field of pharmaceutical medicine but also several intrusions from the sphere of activity of the other healing professional, the incantation priest (*āšipu*). Based on a survey of incipits in the Assur Medical Catalogue, which yielded more textual parallels to the thematically ordered series from Assur and Babylonia than from the Ashurbanipal Library at Nineveh, Steinert suggests that the reference to extraneous material in colophon *q* probably describes medical texts in the Library, “which were not organised in a series corresponding to A[ssur] M[edical] C[atalogue] Part 2”.²⁴ This notion can now be revised in light of new evidence shedding light on a second serialised composition in the Ashurbanipal Library, which may very well correlate with the thematically ordered series outlined in the second part of the Assur Medical Catalogue.

3 Further Texts in the ‘*q*-group’: The Nineveh Medical Compendium

Evidence for the existence of another serialised composition alongside the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia comes from a corner piece fragment published by Campbell Thompson as K.10530 (AMT 9/3) and described a few years later as possibly dealing with ulcers.²⁵ The fragment has recently been joined to K.3993 (AMT 61/7) + K.4611 + K.15743, a three-column tablet with an extensive collection of treatments for dermatological problems [fig. 2]. This newly identified join is significant because it contains traces of an incipit, which is reminiscent of the opening line of the thematically ordered series in the second part of the Assur Medical Catalogue. The text reads as follows:²⁶

K.3993+i 1 [*ina* SU NA E₃ H[AD₂.DA[?]]
Assur Med. Cat. l. 59[*la-k*]u-ta-šu₂ um-mu-rat
Assur Med. Cat. l. 123 DIŠ GIG [*ina* *la-ku*]-ta-šu₂ um-mu-r[at]
IM 67572 rev. 34’ [] E₃ HAD₂.[?]DA[?] *la*’-ku-ta-šu um-mu-ra-at’(TA) *la-din-nu* MU.NI
If a lesion breaks out on a man’s skin, it is dry’, (and) its . . . is reddened: its name is *ladinnu*.²⁷

While the catchline and tablet designation line are broken, the three-column tablet K.3993+ carries colophon *q*, which indicates that the text on this tablet was a higher-level textual product created for the Ashurbanipal Library. Its thematic arrangement, as opposed to the anatomical order used throughout the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia, is apparent from the opening line, where the text remains silent about the affected body part. Its focus is on a group of dermatological problems, which convincingly anchors our tablet in a standard edition of remedies from Nineveh, which groups medical conditions according to a thematic rather than an anatomical principle. This tablet most likely represents a manuscript of what the Assur Medical Catalogue records in its second part as the first chapter of the treatise called Skin.²⁸

²⁴ Steinert 2018b, 174.

²⁵ Campbell Thompson 1931, 55.

²⁶ In addition to K.3993+ and the corresponding lines of the Assur Medical Catalogue (viz. ll. 59 and 123), the same incipit occurs in the medical tablet IM 67572 (CTN 4, 116) from Nimrud, which collects treatments for dermatological problems (Geller 2000, 337-9 and 2021, 18-20). In line with Steinert 2018a, 244, a somewhat identical incipit also seems to have found its way in the Diagnostic Handbook Sagig 33, 43, as part of an extensive collection of symptoms affecting the skin. This line is, however, in a fragmentary state of preservation and does not allow a more complete reconstruction: see von Weiher 1993, 82 and Heeßel 2000, 355.

²⁷ The line is difficult to understand due to its use of rare expressions, such as the disease name *lad(d)innu*, which is otherwise only found in Sagig 33, 43, with the spelling *lad*[?].*din*[?]-*nu*: see Steinert 2018a, 244 and, as a likely scribal mistake for Akk. *murdinnu* ‘bramble, (an eye disease)’ (CAD A/2, 90-1), Schmidtchen 2021, 119 and 185. According to CAD L, 36a, *ladinnu* is the name of an aromatic, so perhaps the word is used here in this medical context to designate a skin ailment that had a similar appearance to the plant under this name. The spelling *la-ku-ta-šu*₂ is not well understood, but again, a similar form recurs several times in the same context in Sagig 33 (see especially ll. 36-7, 44-7, and 51-3; Heeßel 2000, 355-6), which provides a basis for the suggested reading here. Von Weiher (1993, 88) translates the corresponding form in Sagig, viz. *ina la-ku-ti-šu*₂, as ‘in seiner Schwäche’. We tentatively suggest that it is used both in our text and the Diagnostic Handbook as a designation for a certain part of the lesion. The verb at the end of the line is *emēru* in the D-stem which, according to AHW 214a, has the meaning ‘to be reddened’. On this verb, see also Steinert 2018a, 244, and Schmidtchen 2021, 425.

²⁸ The tablet is in a fragmentary state of preservations, but it is clear that it contained treatments for the condition *sāmānu*: see Finkel 1998, 85-93, text no. 7 ms. F.



Figure 2 Three-column tablet, which most likely represents a manuscript of the Nineveh Medical Compendium, with colophon *q* and an extensive collection of treatments for skin ailments. Nineveh, Iraq, K.3993+. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence

The title chosen here to refer to this hitherto unknown composition, viz. Nineveh Medical Compendium,²⁹ reflects the rather varied nature of remedies that make up the series. Based on what we can infer from the Assur Medical Catalogue, the text proceeds from the first treatise on skin ailments to treatments for battle wounds and injuries caused by animal attacks or falling off a chariot or a boat. Then come two further treatises, where incantations and apotropaic rituals – healing practices more commonly associated with the exorcist – seem to play a prominent role; they probably contained treatments to defend against witchcraft and demonic attacks and to soothe divine anger. Divination in relation to healthcare-related problems is the subject of the following short treatise, after which the text turns to treatments for mental health problems. Sexuality and reproduction take up most of the latter half of the text before it turns to the last treatise, consisting of a single chapter, with a collection of treatments for domestic animals.

Due to its mixed content, it is more difficult to identify text witnesses for the Nineveh Medical Compendium in the Ashurbanipal Library. This second serialised composition is also in a much more fragmentary state of preservation than the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia, so there have only been a few texts, among the numerous unassigned fragments in the corpus, that can be assigned to different parts of the series.³⁰ I would tentatively suggest, nevertheless, that these two compositions formed a twin series at Nineveh. In this regard, the three-column format of K.3993+ is a significant feature. It was presumably chosen as the standard format of the Nineveh Medical Compendium to distinguish it from the other serialised therapeutic composition in the Ashurbanipal Library, the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia. A systematic survey of tablets in a three-column format incorporating both pharmaceutical remedies and the healing procedures of the exorcist may thus yield further textual evidence for the Nineveh Medical Compendium. A case in point is K.7815+ (BAM 580), a large fragment of a three-column tablet, which presents another extensive collection of treatments for skin ailments [fig. 3]. Although this fragment does not have a preserved colophon, we can reasonably assume that, as a manuscript of the dermatological treatise, it formed part of the same thematically grouped series.

Turning now to the colophon proper, we must point out the difference in how colophon *q* makes mention of the two serialised compositions. In contrast to the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia, which *q* singles out with the descriptive title ‘remedies from the top of the head to the (toe)nails’, the Nineveh Medical Compendium does not seem to feature in any shape or form in this colophon – unless this series was meant by the rather vague term ‘technical lore’ (*tāhizu naklu*). The lack of reference may have to do with the fact that, based on the Assur Medical Catalogue, our composition was named after its opening line and did not have a descriptive title. Without a descriptive title, there was no way of including a more specific reference to it in the colophon. If it was also the case that a consecutive chapter numbering applied throughout the Nineveh Medical Compendium, then the opening line of the composition must have occurred directly before the colophon proper to serve as the overall designation of the composition. With the series title positioned this way, there may have been no need to repeatedly refer to it in the colophon proper.

²⁹ Note that we limit the title Nineveh Medical Compendium to the thematically ordered series and continue to refer to the anatomically arranged one, in line with the most recent literature on the subject, as the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia. The designation Nineveh Medical Compendium was used earlier by Steinert (2018a; 2018b) to refer to the anatomical composition, viz. what we call the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia.

³⁰ For a provisional list of tablets, some of which simply present parallels to the Nineveh Medical Compendium, see Steinert 2018a, 289–91.



Figure 3 Three-column tablet with an extensive collection of treatments for skin ailments. The tablet may represent another manuscript of the Nineveh Medical Compendium. Nineveh, Iraq, K.7815. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence)

4 Fragment of a One-column Tablet with Colophon q

The fragment K.7842 from the bottom of a one-column tablet measuring, in its current state, 8.5 cm in width and 6.6 cm in height, carries colophon *q* and thus demonstrates that scribes in the Ashurbanipal Library also used this smaller tablet format for their standard editions of therapeutic texts [fig. 4]. Since it has preserved text only from the colophon proper, it is impossible to determine the content of the composition at this stage. We can only conjecture that it was a model or practice tablet for the colophon itself³¹ or, alternatively, the manuscript of a low-profile serialised composition not yet known from any other source.

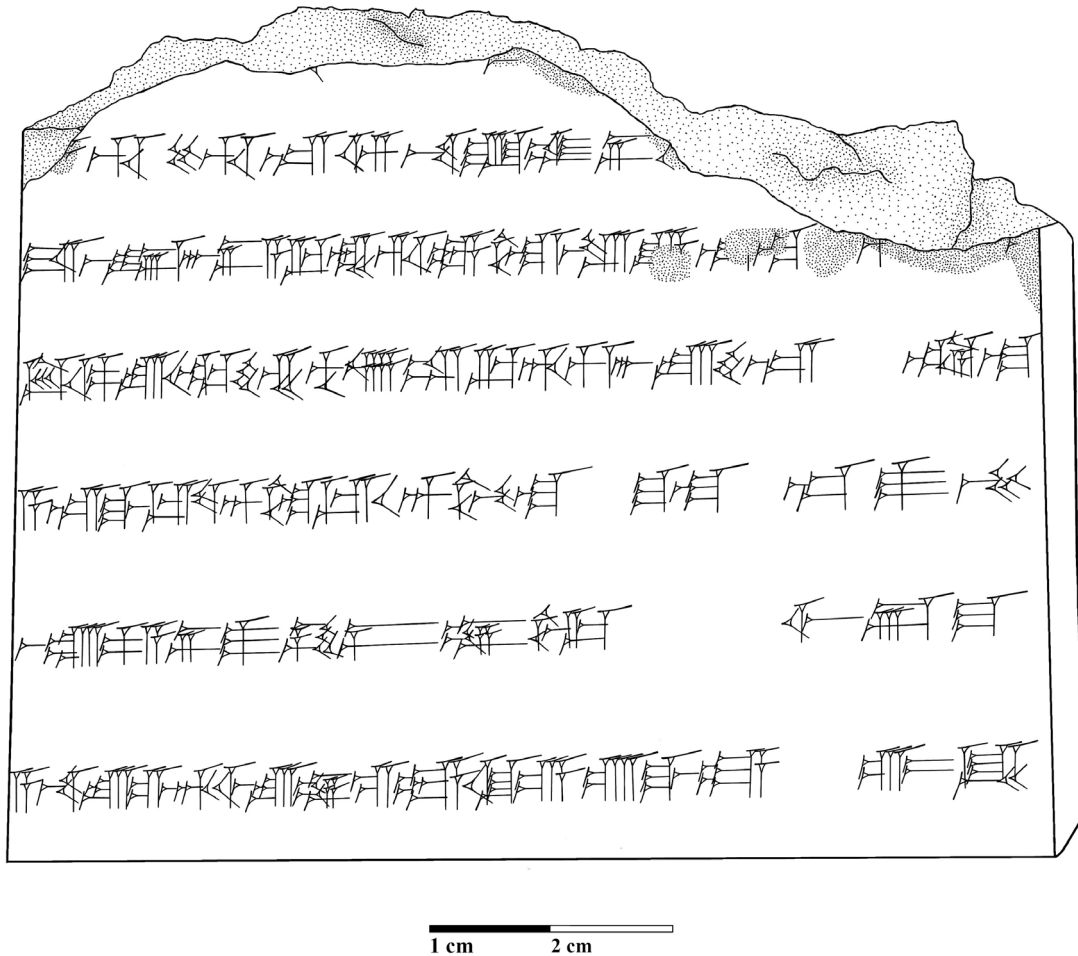


Figure 4 Fragment of a one-column tablet with colophon *q*. Nineveh, Iraq. K.7842. Copy by the Author

As mentioned above, the texts discussed so far most likely qualified as higher-level textual products put together in the Ashurbanipal Library to form new standard editions of the therapeutic literature. To some extent, they were modelled after earlier and more localised attempts at serialising the corpus, especially in terms of tablet incipits, which anchored individual sets of treatments in the overall therapeutic tradition.³² In the case of the Nineveh material, however, royal sponsorship meant that

³¹ Personal communication, C. Johnson.

³² Compare the one-column tablet VAT 13756+ (BAM 209) from Assur, which presents the incipit of the third chapter of the treatise Neck in line 18' of its reverse, followed by further prescriptions against ghosts. A set of twelve prescriptions ending with the rubric 12 *bulū ša* [. . .] from this tablet recurs in the same sequence at the beginning of the corresponding Nineveh manuscript

scribes in the Assyrian capital had access to a much more substantial amount of medical information, including remedies, which had been previously available only to small circles of medical practitioners. Combining this data into structured and systematised textual products representing new authoritative editions could not have happened overnight. This must have involved a series of editorial steps from the initial assessment of incoming texts to the thorough revision of their contents and eventual reduction into their constituent parts. The scribes must have sorted through the material to identify related treatments and bring them together into interim editions, which they then used to build their final textual products.³³ From this perspective, we may consider colophon *q* as a kind of ‘quality mark’ devised by the scribes in the Ashurbanipal Library to indicate that the text has reached the status of a new authoritative source.

One of the scholars in charge of this complex project seems to have been Ashurbanipal’s chief scribe, Ištar-šumu-ēreš, whose career is explored by Sophie Cohen in another part of this volume. In the remainder of this paper, we will direct our attention to the other three groups of texts in the Nineveh therapeutic corpus, the ‘Babylonian group’, the ‘mixed group’, and the ‘dedicatory group’ in order to see how these tablets mirror the stages of the editing process that led to the creation of the serialised compositions in the ‘*q*-group’.

5 The ‘Babylonian Group’ of Therapeutic Texts at Nineveh

The therapeutic tablets in the Babylonian script constitute a varied group in terms of layout and format. Some are small and rectangular, with only a few treatments written in a portrait or a landscape orientation, whereas others contain several remedies arranged in multiple columns. Compared to tablets in the other groups of the Nineveh therapeutic corpus, however, even the multi-column tablets are of a relatively small size. Another distinguishing feature of the ‘Babylonian group’ is that the writing quite often runs over the edge, which may highlight some level of indifference as to a precise assessment of the space needed for a given text. The ‘Babylonian group’ of therapeutic texts can be enumerated as follows:³⁴

Table 3 Babylonian tablets in the Nineveh Therapeutic Corpus

Tablet	Format and layout	Content	Corresponding treatise in the serialised compositions
K.10212+ (BAM 481+)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	treatments for the head	Cranium
K.10535 (AMT 18/3)	small frg.	treatments for the head	Cranium
K.18667	small frg.	treatments for the head	Cranium
K.13242	small frg.	treatments for the temples	Cranium
K.8685 (AMT 77/8 etc.)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	prescriptions against stroke	Neck
K.13289	small frg.	prescriptions against stroke	Neck
K.20137	small frg.	prescriptions against stroke	Neck
K.9579 (AMT 58/7)	frg. of a multi-col. tablet	incantation, and healing rituals against the feverish condition ‘gnawing fire’ and muscle problems	Neck? ² Hamstring ²

of the third chapter of Neck, viz. K.2448+ (BAM 473+) i 1-26. For an edition of the text, see Abusch, Schwemer 2016, 356-68, no. 10.6.1. For the existence of older versions of the therapeutic series, see also Heeßel 2009.

³³ For producing new editions in the Ashurbanipal Library, see also Schnitzlein 2023, 307-16.

³⁴ Editions of tablets in the ‘Babylonian group’ are available in the Fragmentarium of the electronic Babylonian Library: see <https://www.ebl.lmu.de>.

Tablet	Format and layout	Content	Corresponding treatise in the serialised compositions
K.6572+ (BAM 536+)	frg. of a multi-col. tablet	pharmaceutical recipes, incantations, and healing rituals for ailments of the mouth, respiratory tract, and against ghosts	Teeth Bronchia
K.18980	frg. possibly from the tablet represented by K.6572+		
Sm 1283+ (BAM 7, 30)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	treatments for the rectum, and the respiratory tract	Bronchia Anus
Sm 666+	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	healing incantation for gastrointestinal problems	Stomach
K.13405+ (BAM 7, 14)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	treatments for the urogenital tract	Kidney
K.11295 (AMT 17/8)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	rectal suppositories	Anus
K.8248 (BAM 7, 32)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	treatments for rectal ailments, as well as the hip and groin	Anus
K.19131	small frg.	treatments for rectal ailments	Anus
K.8678+ (BAM 7, 44+)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	suppositories for rectal and gynaecological problems	Anus Gynaecological treatise in the Nineveh Medical Compendium
K.18773	small frg.	prescriptions against scorpion bite	Treatise on animal attacks in the Nineveh Medical Compendium
Sm 708 (BAM 478)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	treatments against epilepsy	Treatise on evil powers in the Nineveh Medical Compendium
BM 98613 (BAM 463)	small frg.	treatments against witchcraft	Treatise on evil powers in the Nineveh Medical Compendium
Sm 460 (Stadhouders 2016)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	treatments against <i>ḥip libbi</i>	Treatise on mental health problems in the Nineveh Medical Compendium
K.3350+ (AMT 62/3+)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	treatments for increasing male potency, followed by a catchline ² mentioning skin ² ailment	Treatise on sex or potency in the Nineveh Medical Compendium
K.263+ (Steinert 2013)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	treatments for gynaecological problems	Gynaecological treatise in the Nineveh Medical Compendium
K.20254	small frg.	treatments for gynaecological problems	Gynaecological treatise in the Nineveh Medical Compendium
K.1930+ (AMT 65/2)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	incantations and therapies for pregnant women and babies	Birth-related treatises in the Nineveh Medical Compendium

Tablet	Format and layout	Content	Corresponding treatise in the serialised compositions
Sm 1991 (AMT 66/5)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	treatments for easing difficult childbirth	Birth-related treatise in the Nineveh Medical Compendium
Sm 123 Sm 1138 K.19506 K.3550 (BAM 7, 50)	frgs possibly from the tablet represented by Sm 1991		
K.2581 (Stadhouders 2018)	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	pharmaceutical recipes, including a healing bath of 75 ingredients for all possible diseases	?
K.16433 (AMT 52/2)	frg. of a multi-col. tablet	treatments for different forms of fever	?
K.1893	frg. of a tablet in a landscape orientation	pharmaceutical recipes	?
K.7306	frg. of a 1-col. tablet in a portrait orientation	pharmaceutical recipes	?
K.19355	frg. of a multi-column tablet	pharmaceutical recipes	?
K.10500 (AMT 50/1)	small frg.	pharmaceutical recipes	?
Sm 1442 (AMT 77/9)	small frg.	pharmaceutical recipes	?
K.18918+	small frg.	pharmaceutical recipes	?
BM 98616	small frg.	healing incantation	?
K.11513 (BAM 537)	small frg.	healing incantation	?
BM 128080	frg. of a tablet in a landscape orientation	pharmaceutical recipes [?]	?
K.5843	small. frg.	pharmaceutical recipes [?]	?
K.16132 (CT 54, no. 363)	small frg.	pharmaceutical recipes [?]	?

In terms of content, these Babylonian tablets are sometimes consistent in collecting treatments for a specific body part or medical problem. The relatively high number of texts dealing with conditions that frequently occur in the Nineveh Medical Compendium is an interesting but not entirely unexpected feature of the corpus, given the wide range of topics incorporated in this composition. We also find the expected anatomical principle of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia in texts, which exclusively collect remedies for diseases affecting, for instance, the head, the rectal-intestinal tract, or the neck. This is not to say that all Babylonian tablets adhere entirely to the structure of the two serialised compositions under discussion here. They also combine treatments from different treatises: oral illnesses with respiratory, respiratory with rectal-intestinal, or rectal-intestinal with gynaecological. Nonetheless, these tablets show clear thematic links to the serialised texts, often even at the level of textual parallels, which suggests an overall pattern of movement for the individual textual blocks within the corpus of the Nineveh therapeutic texts.

A key source closely tied to the question of Babylonian texts at Nineveh are the library records, a set of administrative documents registering the acquisition of scholarly literature for the Ashurbanipal Library.³⁵ These records show that therapeutic prescriptions were among the texts which arrived at Nineveh in late 648 BC. With at least six tablets and twenty-four writing boards, the medical recipe literature is a textual category represented by a higher number of copies in these acquisition records.³⁶ The texts came from private libraries of mostly Babylonian individuals, such as the haruspeš Nabû-nâdin-apli, whose contribution comprised six tablets.³⁷ While it is tempting, on this basis, to draw a connection between the acquisition lists and the medical tablets in the Nineveh therapeutic corpus

³⁵ The library records are cited here according to their publication numbers in SAA 7, 49-56. For the first edition of the texts, see Parpola 1983.

³⁶ Parpola 1983, 6; Fincke 2003-04, 124-5.

³⁷ SAA 7, 50 i 16'.

written in the Babylonian script, such a comparison may not necessarily be correct for three reasons.

Firstly, it is difficult to determine whether these Babylonian tablets at Nineveh were direct imports from Babylonia or the products of Babylonian scribes employed in the Neo-Assyrian royal court. Of the 177 tablets with colophons, only 59 include the name of the person who prepared the tablet, and only 26 mention the place of origin for the *Vorlage* – there seems to be only one medical tablet among these texts with a fragmentary colophon containing a reference, perhaps a catchline, to a skin ailment.³⁸ In the absence of reliable textual evidence, future studies focusing on the scientific analysis of the composition of clay used to produce the Babylonian tablets may bring us closer to understanding the question of provenance, perhaps to the point where we can start differentiating between imported texts and the ones written at Nineveh.³⁹

Secondly, it seems unlikely that the texts in the Library Records are, without exception, in the Babylonian script. Some must have been written in the Assyrian ductus,⁴⁰ such as the ones in the personal tablet collection of the Assyrian prince Aššur-mukīn-palē’a, who held the position of *šešgallu*-priest of Assur.⁴¹ The records register the receipt of eighteen tablets from this prince, most likely written in the Assyrian script, including the lexical series *Ura*, the menology *Iqqu ipuš*, unspecified works belonging to the lore of exorcism, as well as the obscure compositions *Šarrat šamē* (‘Rope of Heaven’), and *Maštila*.⁴²

Thirdly, the acquisition of scholarly literature in 648 BC most likely represents a single and relatively late episode in Ashurbanipal’s tablet collecting activity, presumably brought about by Ashurbanipal’s defeat of his brother on the Babylonian throne, Šamaš-šum-ukīn, which gave him renewed access to the private libraries in Babylonia.⁴³ While the tablets and writing boards listed in the records were a substantial addition to the royal tablet collections, the process of putting together the deluxe Ashurbanipal editions of scholarly texts like the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia and the Nineveh Medical Compendium must have been well underway in 648 BC. With little dated evidence, it is impossible to establish a detailed internal chronology for the tablet collections at Nineveh (see below). Based on a Late Babylonian copy of a letter that Ashurbanipal sent to Babylonian scholars requesting tablets in the possession of the Esagil temple library, it seems that the king’s library-building project started early in his reign. At one point, this letter speaks about the citizens of Babylon who gathered at the Esagil to learn about the king’s message upon its arrival in the fifth year (MU.5.KAM’).⁴⁴ With Frahm, we can take this statement as a “chronological note that must refer to the fifth regnal year of either Ashurbanipal or his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, the king of Babylon, i.e., 664/663 BCE”.⁴⁵

Without further evidence, the ‘Babylonian group’ of the Nineveh therapeutic texts remains poorly understood. While it seems a reasonable assumption that this group represents, on the whole, the textual material acquired for the Ashurbanipal Library, where it served as the foundation for the formation of the serialised compositions, some tablets may have originated from other contexts. We can only determine the role of the ‘Babylonian group’ in the editing process through an in-depth analysis of the individual tablets.

³⁸ These numbers, kindly provided to me by Sophie Cohen, reflect the current state of research conducted within the framework of the *Reading the Library of Ashurbanipal* project. For an earlier discussion of the Babylonian texts with colophons, see Fincke 2014, 272-5. The medical tablet in question is K.3350+ (AMT 62/3+), edited without the joining piece BM 98571 in Zisa 2021, 465-72. The colophon is still poorly understood but perhaps contained, in its last line, the editorial remark [IGI].KAR₂ ‘collated’. If so, we would expect any details about the individual associated with this tablet in the preceding line. Note as well the repeated occurrence of the sign MAŠ at the end, perhaps to be rendered as *mašmaššu* ‘incantation priest’.

³⁹ The research project *Reading Beneath the Texts: Technological Aspects of Cuneiform ‘Tablet’ Production*, headed by Mathilde Jean in collaboration with Jonathan Taylor and Michela Spataro at the British Museum, is currently investigating the sourcing and processing of tablet clay used at Nineveh. As part of this project, the following Babylonian tablets with therapeutic prescriptions have been selected for analyses combining invasive and non-invasive techniques, such as polarised and digital microscopy, X-ray CT, RTI, SEM-EDX, and XRF: K.1930+, K.2581, K.8685, K.10500, and K.11295. On the methodology utilised by the project, see Spataro, Taylor, O’Flynn 2023.

⁴⁰ Parpola 1983, 7.

⁴¹ On Aššur-mukīn-palē’a, who was presumably born around the time when Esarhaddon became king, see Radner 1998, as well as Novotny, Singletary 2009, 170-2.

⁴² SAA 7, 51 b.e. ii 4’-r. 1; see Parpola 1983, 7; Villard 1997, 139.

⁴³ Parpola 1983, 11-12.

⁴⁴ BM 28825, 36-8. The text was edited by Frame, George 2005, 270-7, who saw it as a “Late Babylonian copy of a transcript of a letter written on behalf of the scholars of Babylon in response to the king’s request for scholarly cuneiform texts”. For a different understanding of the text, viz. as a letter sent by Ashurbanipal to the scholars in Babylon, see Frahm 2005. On the historicity of the document, see Goldstein 2010.

⁴⁵ Frahm 2011, 274. For a recent discussion of the various learned activities in and around the Ashurbanipal Library, see also Schnitzlein 2023, 294-316.

6 The ‘Mixed Group’ of Therapeutic Texts at Nineveh

We are on more solid ground with the ‘mixed group’ of therapeutic tablets, which mainly have a one-column format and are furnished with a library colophon other than type *q*. Due to the more varied nature of the colophons in this group, we use the designation ‘mixed group’ to underline the fact that these tablets do not constitute a uniform corpus. They must have belonged to different stages of the above-outlined editing process. In this regard, recent research has yielded significant results, postulating a likely chronology for the internal development of the Ashurbanipal Library such as the following.⁴⁶

1. The first colophon used for texts of all kinds may possibly have been *a*, the most concise colophon type, which essentially functioned as an ownership label and was usually added after the clay of the tablet had dried.
2. Colophon *b* may signal the next stage of Ashurbanipal’s library building project. This colophon describes the source of the text and then goes into detail about the editorial work that had taken place to produce it. A significant feature of this colophon is that it gives Ashurbanipal as the writer of the tablet but then points out that the king did this in the company of his scholars. It also refers to the diversity of the originals, saying that the tablet was written ‘according to tablets and writing boards, copies from the land of Assur, Sumer, and Akkad’.
3. Types *c* and *d* may have replaced *b* as more sophisticated colophons meant to serve as the default library colophons in the Ashurbanipal Library. The difference between these two colophons is a four-line protective formula, which only occurs in *c*. This might indicate that *d* was an abbreviated form of the default colophon, written on tablets without enough space for the longer version. In contrast to *b*, these two colophons only mention Ashurbanipal as being involved in the production of the text.

The use of different colophons highlights the nature of the Ashurbanipal Library as a living collection, which evolved over time in line with the exponential growth of the incoming text material and the editorial choices made by the scribes turning the received material into structured textual products. The choices to create new library editions of the inherited texts must have been dependent, to some extent, on the particularities of the scholarly corpus at hand, such as the fluidity of the transmission, which affected some texts more than others.⁴⁷ It is thus necessary to point out, without disagreeing with the overall validity of the above-described diachronic aspect, that the colophons most likely served more than one purpose, and we can perhaps glean a more nuanced understanding if we engage with them on the level of individual scholarly text corpora, as well as representatives of the Ashurbanipal Library as a whole.⁴⁸

The therapeutic texts serve as an ideal example thanks to the variety of colophons that occur in this corpus, allowing us to formulate, however tentatively, some ideas about the internal development of the corpus. Our point of departure is the notion that tablets in the ‘mixed group’ are interim editions; they represent the first attempts to build the mass of acquired medical prescriptions into structured textual blocks. These structured textual blocks were then positioned under the appropriate tablet incipits in compliance with the anatomical and thematically oriented organising principles. Here, we can only outline the general operating principles of this assumed editorial project, based on information we have gleaned from the colophons themselves. A more detailed study would require thorough text critical analyses, which lie beyond the scope of the present paper.

Although the available data does not allow us to reconstruct each individual step of the editing process, it is clear that this process involved a great deal of copying work. Upon their arrival, the texts would, most likely, have been recopied on one-column tablets in the clean and tidy script commonly used in the Ashurbanipal Library.⁴⁹ Compared to manuscripts of the serialised compositions, these one-column tablets usually employ a somewhat larger script and more generous spacing, making in-

⁴⁶ Taylor et al. 2023, 36–8.

⁴⁷ A case in point is the hemerological text tradition which, unlike other divinatory texts, had never been brought together into a major series: see Jiménez 2016a.

⁴⁸ We may illustrate this point by drawing attention to K.4329+, a three-column tablet with colophon *a*, which contains a list of Assyrian eponymates between the years 910 and 659 BC (Millard 1994, MS A₁). Since it could not be added to this tablet earlier than the last entry in the list, we may suggest that colophon *a* – the first colophon type introduced in the Ashurbanipal Library – was still in use later in the king’s reign. It may have been retained until the end of the king’s reign as a property mark signalling non-scholarly tablets in the library.

⁴⁹ On the standardisation of the script in the Ashurbanipal Library, see Schnitzlein 2023, 293.

dividual components of the prescriptions (e.g., names of drugs) appear as separate units within the main body of the text [fig 5]. The reason why scribes, whose abilities undoubtedly qualified them to practice their craft in the Ashurbanipal Library, chose to produce copies of such nature seems to be twofold. Firstly, they were trying to reproduce their *Vorlage* as closely and truthfully as possible. Secondly, these features point to a deliberate effort to make the new copies as clear and easy to read as possible, presumably to avoid misreading the text at a later stage of the editing process. This may especially have been the case with the Babylonian tablets, which they needed to render, as one of the first steps, in the Assyrian script.

These first copies usually bear one of the default library colophons (c or d), with a note on the editing process pointing out that the text has been written, checked, and collated according to the wording of an older tablet. Significantly, this note always refers to a single original. Some one-column tablets also present a catchline but never a tablet designation line, which is a clear indication that they were not part of more extensive serialised compositions at this stage. These catchlines quite possibly provided points of orientation for the scribes as they started to arrange the prescriptions into larger textual blocks. To give an example, K.7845+ (AMT 29/2+) anchors the recorded remedies in the first chapter of Hamstring, the anatomical treatise on leg ailments, because it presents a catchline that corresponds to the opening line of the second chapter of the same treatise. The prescriptions from K.7845+ reoccur in K.2497+ (AMT 37/5+), a tablet in a two-column format that may thus be a manuscript of the first chapter of Hamstring, even if it does not have a preserved colophon.⁵⁰ The standard two-column edition in K.2497+ mirrors the underlying process of collecting material from more than one source. While it presents the remedies in the same sequence as they occur in K.7845+, it does not keep them together as a single block within the body of the text.⁵¹ The way the prescriptions are rearranged highlights the fact that, before reaching the status of an authoritative source, the text had undergone a series of editorial steps, in which the scribes amalgamated the contents of individual sources to form larger thematically-related blocks of text.

Tablets with a scribal remark, saying that they were written according to more than one source, were likely produced at a more advanced stage of the editing process. For example, K.2262+ (BAM 533+), including several newly joined fragments and still in the one-column format, contains a variant form of the lesser-known colophon *r/s*; this colophon is otherwise attached to manuscripts of *bīt rimki*. In this colophon, the scribal note says that the tablet is a copy from Assyria, followed by a more fragmentary reference to what appears to be the land of Akkad (viz. Babylonia). This tablet may thus represent a stage of the editing process, in which the overall outline of the standard text edition first started to take shape through the amalgamation of multiple exemplars. Since it presents an exclusive collection of treatments for oral ailments, we can regard K.2262+ as an interim edition feeding into the corresponding chapters of the serialised compositions with a focus on diseased mouth.⁵²

The production of interim editions of therapeutic texts through the collation and amalgamation of multiple exemplars is even more evident in those few cases, where the therapeutic tablet bears colophon *b*. This colophon presents an elaborate description of the pertinent process, making use of the plural forms *ṭuppānu* ('tablets') and *lē'ānu* ('writing boards') to emphasise that the manuscript at hand is the result of an editorial work based on multiple texts of diverse origins. The originals used in the production of these new texts came from Assyria and Babylonia, as well as the southernmost part of the land, Sumer.⁵³ Colophon *b* also highlights the king's role by pointing out that he had produced the text in the assembly of his scholars – a remark which we can correlate with epistolary evidence, such as the following letter sent by the scholar Ninurta-aḥ-iddin⁵⁴ to Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal about tablets worth preserving:

⁵⁰ Steinert 2018a, 240.

⁵¹ The prescriptions in K.7845+ obv. 22'-rev. 3 reoccur in K.2497+ ii 55'-ii 58', whereas those recorded in K.7845+ rev. 4-13 are found in K.2497+ iii 10-13. The two blocks are separated from one another by a set of pharmaceutical remedies dealing with paralysed flesh and tendons.

⁵² In terms of contents, K.2262+ has links to two separate chapters of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia: treatments for the mouth condition *būšānu* reappear in the second chapter of the oral treatise Teeth, whereas those dealing with 'seised mouth' (*kadabbedū*) found their way into the fifth chapter of the treatise Neck.

⁵³ Compare Schnitzlein 2023, 308-9. A different view on the meaning of colophon *b* is offered in Taylor et al. 2023, 29-30.

⁵⁴ On Ninurta-aḥ-iddin, see Baker, Fischer 2000.

Let me read the tablets in the presence of the king, my lord, and let me put down on them whatever is agreeable to the king; whatever is not acceptable to the king, I shall remove from them. The tablets I am speaking about are worth preserving until far-off days.⁵⁵

This letter is instructive on more than one level. It highlights the approach Mesopotamian scholars had adopted as part of their tablet collecting activity, seeing tablets as worthy of future safekeeping even after they fulfilled their purpose. When it comes to the therapeutic literature, this approach to the textual material suggests that they did not dispose of tablets from the interim phase of the editing process, but rather preserved them in the Ashurbanipal Library alongside the finalised textual products. Moreover, the letter ties in well with what we can glean from colophon *b*, namely that producing library editions of texts was an interactive enterprise between the king and his scholars.

We are aware of four therapeutic tablets furnished with colophon *b*:⁵⁶

1. K.3486 (AMT 97/6): corner fragment possibly of a two-column tablet, with a catchline and tablet designation line that anchor this tablet as a textual witness for the second chapter of the treatise Neck.
2. K.6545+ (BAM 7, 23): large fragment of a two-column tablet, with a catchline and tablet designation line that anchor this tablet as a textual witness for the third chapter of the rectal treatise Anus.
3. K.3516 (BAM 548): fragment possibly of a two-column tablet, with only a catchline referring to the sixth chapter of the respiratory treatise Bronchia. This catchline thus suggests that K.3516 is a textual witness for the fifth chapter of Bronchia.
4. K.8187 (BAM 551): fragment of a two-column tablet, with only a few traces left of the colophon. These traces most likely correspond to the last two lines of colophon *b*, where curses against anyone who might replace the king's name with their own occur.

These tablets have features in common with the standardised manuscripts representing the serialised therapeutic compositions in the Ashurbanipal Library. One such feature is the two-column format, which is most evident in the case of K.6545+ and K.8187 due to the presence of a pair of vertical dividing lines separating the two columns. The other two examples, K.3486 and K.3516, have the right dimensions for a two-column format but are broken in such a way that we have preserved text from only the left-hand side of these tablets. Another significant feature of this group of texts is that, in two cases, they include a tablet designation line referring to the second chapter of the treatise Neck (K.3486), and the third chapter of the rectal treatise Anus (K.6545+).

Because of the fragmentary state of the available sources, it is difficult to determine what distinguishes tablets with colophon *b* from those with colophon *q*. The second chapter of Neck and the third chapter of Anus, represented by K.3486 and K.6545+, respectively, are not known from standardised manuscripts of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia bearing colophon *q*. The only tablet allowing for a comparative analysis is K.3516, which collects treatments for respiratory ailments. K.3516 does not have a tablet designation line but does include a catchline, anchoring the text on this tablet as a textual witness for the fifth chapter of the respiratory treatise Bronchia. The same chapter is known from K.2414+ (AMT 80/1 etc.), a fragment of a two-column tablet, which bears colophon *q* and thus qualifies as an actual manuscript of the serialised text. As far as we can judge based on textual overlaps in the first and fourth columns of the tablets, it seems that K.3516 and K.2414+ are duplicates.

We may thus reasonably assume that tablets with colophon *b* belonged to a very advanced stage of the editing process, perhaps just before the text reached the status of an authoritative source, at which point it received a quality mark in the form of colophon *q*.

⁵⁵ SAA 10, 373 rev. 4-13. The translation here follows Frame, George 2005, 278. For a different understanding of the passage, viz. as referring to the addition or removal of a tablet to or from a library rather than to the addition or deletion of text to or from a tablet, see Jiménez 2016b, 233.

⁵⁶ A further example might be K.13390 (AMT 44/7), but the colophon is in a very fragmentary state of preservation and does not allow for a more complete restoration.



Figure 5 Treatments against ghost-induced ailments, recorded on tablets in two different formats. Nineveh, Iraq. K.3243+ (left) and K.2477+ (right). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence

7 Fragment of a Therapeutic Text with Colophon *n*

The small corner fragment BM 98740 (AMT 42/6) differs from the previously mentioned tablets in that it includes traces of a scribal remark that most likely corresponds to the Nabû temple library colophon *n* [fig. 6]. The preserved signs correlate with the last two lines of the colophon, where Ashurbanipal recounts how he had written (l. 1: *'iš¹-[t_{ur}]*), checked, and collated the tablet and then deposited it in the library of Nabû (l. 2: *ina im.[GU₂.LA₂]*) to secure his well-being for future days. This enterprise – also detailed in the more common temple library colophon *o* – has been described previously as serving the ideological purpose of promoting the king’s claim of scholarly proficiency.⁵⁷ We may also take it as a form of offering on the king’s behalf meant to show appreciation and gratitude to the divine scribe, whose support enabled the large-scale editorial works in his royal library.

The opening line of BM 98740 matches the incipit of the second chapter of the anatomical treatise that deals with illnesses of the legs and feet. This incipit, along with the remains of a short passage with treatments for the leg condition *sagallu*, anchors our fragment as a manuscript representing the final treatise of the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia,⁵⁸ except that it did not form part of the main text series in the Ashurbanipal Library. It was a manuscript for the Nabû temple library, presumably donated by the king as an act of worship and devotion for the completion of his project on producing standard editions of therapeutic texts. We should bear in mind that the Nineveh Medical Encyclopaedia and the Nineveh Medical Compendium were authoritative editions created anew from a mass of loosely connected therapeutic prescriptions and, as such, must have qualified as textual products worthy of the attention of the scribal god.

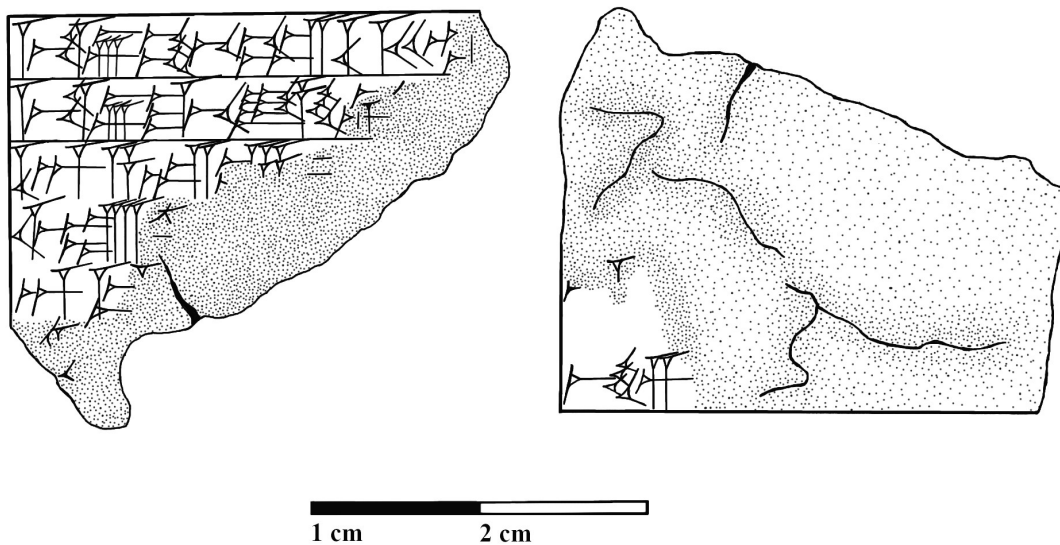


Figure 6 Fragment of a tablet with colophon *n*. Nineveh, Iraq. BM 98740. Copy by the author

⁵⁷ Taylor et al. 2023, 35.

⁵⁸ Panayotov 2018, 105-6; Steinert 2018a, 240. For an edition of the incantation in l. 3-5, with parallels, see Collins 1999, 243-9.

Appendix: Colophons and Editorial Notes in the Nineveh Therapeutic Corpus⁵⁹

Colophon b

*Aššur-bān-apli šarru rabû šarru dannu šar kiššati šar māt
Aššur mār Aššur-aḫa-iddina šar māt Aššur mār Sîn-aḫḫē-erība
šar māt Aššur-ma*

*kī pī ṭuppāni lē’āni gabarī māt Aššur māt Šumeri u Akkade
ṭuppu šuātu ina tapḫurti ummāni aštur asniq abrē-ma ana
tāmarti šarrūtiya qereb ekalliya ukīn*

*ša šumi šatru ipaššītu šumšu išaṭṭaru Nabû ṭupšar gimri šumšu
lipšit*

Ashurbanipal, great king, mighty king, king of the Universe, king of the land of Assur, son of Esarhaddon, king of the land of Assur, son of Sennacherib, king of the land of Assur.

I have written, checked, (and) collated this tablet in the assembly of my scholars according to tablets and writing boards, copies from the land of Assur, Sumer, and Akkad, and deposited in my palace for my royal (consultation).

Whoever erases my name and writes his own, may Nabû, the scribe of everything, erase his name!

Colophons c and d

*ekal Aššur-bān-apli šar kiššati šar māt Aššur ša ana Aššur u
Ninlil taklu ša Nabû u Tašmētu uznu rapaštu išrukūš iḫuzu inu
namirtu*

*nisiq ṭupšarrūti ša ina šarrāni ālik maḫriya mamma šipru
šuātu lā iḫuzū*

*nēmeq Nabû tikip santakki mala bašmu ina ṭuppāni aštur
asniq abrē-ma ana tāmarti šitassiya qereb ekalliya ukīn*

(end of colophon d)

*tākilka ul ibāš šar ilāni Aššur mannu ša itabbalu u lu šumšu itti
šumiya išaṭṭaru Aššur u Ninlil aggiš ezziš liskipūšū-ma šumšu
zēršu ina māti liḫalliḳū*

Palace of Ashurbanipal, king of the Universe, king of the land of Assur, who trusts in Assur and Ninlil, on whom Nabû and Tašmētu have bestowed wisdom (and) who acquired for himself shining eyes.

The pinnacle of scholarship, which work none of the kings who went before me learnt,

the wisdom of Nabû and whatever pertains to cuneiform signs, I have written on tablets, checked, collated, and deposited in my palace for my reading and recitation.

(end of colophon d)

Whoever trusts in you will not come to shame, O king of the gods, Assur! Whoever takes (this tablet) away, or writes his own name instead of mine, may Assur and Ninlil wildly and furiously reject him, and make his name and seed disappear from the land.

Colophon q

*ekal Aššur-bān-apli šar kiššati šar māt Aššur ša Nabû u
Tašmētu uznu rapaštu išrukūš iḫuzu inu namirtu*

*nisiq ṭupšarrūti ša ina šarrāni ālik maḫriya mamma šipru
šuātu lā iḫuzū*

*bulṭi ištu muḫḫi adi šupri liḳti aḫi tāḫizu nakla azugallūt
Ninurta u Gula mala bašmu ina ṭuppāni aštur asniq abrē-ma
ana tāmarti šitassiya qereb ekalliya ukīn*

Palace of Ashurbanipal, king of the universe, king of the land of Assur, on whom Nabû and Tašmētu have bestowed wisdom (and) who acquired for himself shining eyes.

The pinnacle of scholarship, which work none of the kings who went before me learnt,

remedies (organised) from the top of the head to the (toe) nails, gleanings from extraneous materials, technical lore (and) whatever pertains to the greatest medical expertise of Ninurta and Gula, I have written on tablets, checked (and) collated, and deposited in my palace for my reading and recitation.

⁵⁹ The editions here follow, with some variations, the website of the *Reading the Library of Ashurbanipal* project: see <https://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/asbp/r/asb/>.

Colophon n

Aššur-bān-apli šar kiššati šar māt Aššur šakkanakku kamšu
pāliḫ ilāni rabūti mār Aššur-aḫa-iddina šar kiššati šar māt Aššur
mār Sîn-aḫḫē-eriba šar kiššati šar māt Aššur ša Nabû u Nisaba
uballitūšū-ma iššurū šarrūssu nēmeqīšunu palkū[te . . .]

ana balāt napšātēšu urruk ūmēšu [. . .] kunnu palēšu [. . .]
šuršudu kussi šarrūti[šu . . .] bunnišu namrūti elīšu x ra x [. . .]
ana ṭūb šērē ḫūd libbi namār kabatti šalmeš itallukū maḥaršu
ištur isniq abrē-ma ina girinakki bīt Nabû bēlišu ša qereb
Ninua ukīn

Palace of Ashurbanipal, king of the universe, king of the
land of Assur, obedient governor, who fears the great gods,
son of Esarhaddon, king of the Universe, king of the land of
Assur, son of Sennacherib, king of the Universe, king of the
land of Assur, to whom Nabû and Nisaba have given life and
protected his kingship, . . . their vast wisdom.

For the life of his soul, to extend his days . . . to establish
firmly his rule, to fix securely his royal throne . . . his gleaming
features . . . to have health, happiness, and good feeling
constantly go before him in healthiness, he has written,
checked (and) collated (this tablet), and deposited it in the
library of Nabû, his lord, in Nineveh.

Colophon r/s variant (K.2262+)

ekal Aššur-bān-apli šarru dannu šar kiššati šar māt Aššur ša
Nabû u Tašmētu uznu rapaštu ušaklilūšū-ma x x urappiṣū
ḫasissu ša nēmeqī Ea urappiṣū-ma kullat ṭupšarrūti iḫsusu
karassu [(x)] x x ti tam[irrti] ištur ibri qereb ekallīšu ukīn

Palace of Ashurbanipal, mighty king, king of the
Universe, king of the land of Assur, for whom Nabû and
Tašmētu perfected broad intelligence . . . broadened his
understanding, who extended the wisdom of Ea and trained
his mind in the entirety of the scribal art . . . For checking,
he wrote, (and) collated (this tablet), and deposited it in his
palace.

K.4609B (AMT 76/1) + Sm 353 (AMT 95/1) (+)⁷ 82-5-22, 562 (AMT 81/7)

Discussion One-column tablet with prescriptions against ghost-induced ailments, including a catchline which is reminiscent of a set of symptom descriptions attested in the treatise on ear ailments. Other parts of the text seem to overlap with the treatise Neck. Both treatises present long collections of treatments against ghosts.

Colophon not preserved

[DIŠ N]A ina DAB ŠU.GIDIM.MA []
[LIBI]R.RA.‘BI’.G[IM]
(Catchline:) If a man, while seised by the ‘hand-of ghost’, . . .
According to its original. . .

K.7845 (AMT 91/1) + Rm 533 (AMT 29/2)

Discussion One-column tablet with different forms of treatments (salves and fumigation), as well as prophylactic measures (chain amulets) against paralysis, followed by a catchline which corresponds to the incipit of the second chapter of the treatise Hamstring, concerned with the ailments of the feet and legs.

Colophon only traces

[DIŠ NA SA ^{uz}UR₂-ŠU₂ DIŠ-niŠ ‘GU₇.MEŠ¹-ŠU₂ ZI-a u DU.MEŠ-ku ‘la i¹-[le-’i]
[(...)] SA.[GAL MU.NI]
[ki-ma l]a-bi-ri-ŠU₂ Ša₃-ṭir-ma ba-a-‘ri¹
(Catchline:) If the muscles in a man’s thighs cause him pain all at once, (and) he is unable to rise (and) walk: its
name is *sagallu*.
Written and checked according to its original.

K.3243+ (BAM 469) + K.21444

Discussion One-column tablet with well-preserved text on both sides. Healing incantations and pharmaceutical measures against ghosts, some of which recur in the third chapter of Cranium and the second chapter of Neck. The catchline is not known from other texts.

Colophon c

ana ḥa-a-at-ti šu.GID[IM.MA x x] x^{u2}ta[r-mu]š^{u2}IGI-lim

LIBIR.RA.BI.GIM AB.S[AR.A]M₃ BA.AN.E₃

(Catchline:) In order to . . . panic (caused by) ‘hand-of-ghost’: *tarmuš* (‘lupin’), *imḥur-lim* (‘faces a thousand’) plant. Written and checked according to its original.

K.3420 + K.8962 (BAM 470)

Discussion Fragment of a single-column tablet, with instructions for making phylacteries against ghost-induced illnesses.

Colophon c or d

[LIBIR.RA.BI.GIM AB.SAR] BA.AN.E₃

Written and checked according to its original.

K.4040 (AMT 54/2) + K.16682

Discussion Fragment of a single-column tablet including an incantation against ghosts and a catchline that ties the remedies to the treatise of the serialised composition concerned with head ailments (viz. Cranium).

Colophon not preserved

DIŠ NA MURUB₄ UGU-š^{u2} u SAG.KI.MEŠ-š^{u2} TAG.TAG-š^{u2}

[LIBIR.R]A.BI.‘GIM’ AB.SAR.‘AM₃ BA’.[AN.E₃]

(Catchline:) If the middle of a man’s cranium and his temples are affected.

Written and checked according to its original.

K.4054 (AMT 96/1)

Discussion One-column tablet that collects therapies for a patient suffering from stinging pain.

Colophon c

no preserved scribal remark on the editing process

K.6067 (AMT 98/3) + K.16439 (AMT 39/3)

Discussion One-column tablet containing pharmaceutical remedies against pulsating veins in the hands and feet. Some treatments are also recorded in the first chapter of the treatise Hamstring.

Colophon c

no preserved scribal remark on the editing process

K.3398 + K.6015 + K.7186 + K.14166 + K.16803 (AMT 97/1)

Discussion Single-column tablet that runs parallel with the second chapter of Neck, with a collection of incantations and ritual instructions against the influence of ghosts.

Colophon c?

no preserved scribal remark on the editing process

K.2432 + Sm 1899 (+) K.2473 + K.2551(CT 23, 1-4)

Discussion One-column tablet with a collection of healing incantations and rituals for the leg condition *sagallu*.

Colophon c

no preserved scribal remark on the editing process

K.5409A (BAM 468)

Discussion One-column tablet with a fragmentarily preserved ritual to cure ‘all illnesses of mankind’.

Colophon c
no preserved scribal remark on the editing process

K.11772 (AMT 94/5)

Discussion Corner fragment possibly of a one-column tablet presenting a complex set of symptoms, including ghosts, on the obverse. Based on the use of the default library colophon, the fragment does not belong to a serialised therapeutic composition but rather to an interim edition, which collects remedies for ghost-related medical conditions.

Colophon c
no preserved scribal remark on the editing process

K.13387 (AMT 94/6)

Discussion Corner fragment with a matching incipit to the second chapter of the treatise Neck and a default library colophon, which suggests that this fragment comes from a one-column tablet representing an interim edition.

Colophon c
no preserved scribal remark on the editing process

80-7-19, 349 (AMT 92/5)

Discussion Fragment possibly of a one-column tablet, which collects remedies against paralysis.

Colophon c?
no preserved scribal remark on the editing process

K.2262+ (BAM 533) + K.2429 + K.9630 + K.10269

Discussion One-column tablet with a collection of incantations and ritual instructions against ailments of the mouth, some of which recur in the second chapter of the oral treatise Teeth and the fifth chapter of the treatise Neck.

Colophon r/s variant
GABA.RI KUR aš-šur^{ki} ʾu URⁱʾ^{ki} LIBIR.ʾRA-š^u₂ SAR¹-m[a IGI].KAR₂
Copy from the land of Assur and Akkad¹, written and checked according to its originals.

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