

LIBRARY OR ARCHIVE IN QUMRAN?

The View From Mesopotamia

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The purpose of this note is to point to some major differences between libraries and archives within an Assyriological context, and the results of this brief survey may have ramifications for colleagues who work on Qumran texts, since some of the same criteria can be applied.

Olaf Pedersén has produced the standard work on cuneiform libraries and archives, and he admits to some difficulty in distinguishing between the two.¹ He describes archives as a collection of administrative, legal, economic, and epistolary texts in which one normally finds just one copy of a text, while a library is a collection of texts in multiple copies ‘for use in different places at different times’.² As one follows Pedersén’s work, however, it becomes clear that this definition becomes blurred and any collections of literary texts are considered to be a ‘library’, while a collection of tablets containing administrative records, contracts, or letters is usually termed an ‘archive’.

We should clearly distinguish between libraries and archives, but not according to whether they contain literary or non-literary manuscripts. The essential question is whether the collections contain *duplicate* copies of the same works, whether literary or non-literary, and why this might be the case. One obvious reason for the presence of duplicate copies, for instance, would be that the tablet collection originates from several different sources, often containing texts in different languages and even scripts; such a collection may have no easily definable function or purpose, beyond representing a resource or aggregation of cuneiform manuscripts.

An archive, on the other hand, tends to be a pragmatic collection of texts for a more singular or defined purpose. This means that while a library can potentially consist of several archives, an archive does not constitute a library. For instance, we encounter archives of legal documents, family documents, letters, medical prescriptions, incantations, astronomical diaries and observations, and even prayers and omens, depending upon the contexts in which they are found. These might be associated with various professions and scribal activities, such as notaries or scribes, exorcists, physicians, liturgical-priests, or diviners, often reflecting professions which run in the same families over many generations with their working texts. One of the characteristics of such archives is that redundant texts are intentionally destroyed;

¹ O. Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries in the Ancient Near East 1500-300 B.C.* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 1998), p. 3.

² *Ibidem.*

this is a commonplace practice with contracts.³ Although we often refer to such documentary collections as ‘libraries’, this confuses the issue: if such professional collections of cuneiform tablets contain no significant numbers of duplicate works, it is preferable to label them as ‘archives’.

There is one additional category to consider, namely schools. Sumerian and Akkadian tablet collections attest to the presence of scribal schools, and in such environments duplicates are bound to appear. Are these libraries or archives? We would argue for a separate category of manuscripts under the heading of school texts, which are often distinguished by being short extracts from different genres of texts or in other cases longer extracts with many errors, betraying the work of an apprentice scribe.⁴

A brief survey of some major collections of cuneiform tablets will determine whether they can be divided between libraries and archives. We begin with Nippur tablets, which extend over three millennia if we include everything from Sumerian texts down to Aramaic incantation bowls. Nippur tablets supply the largest part of our Sumerian literary heritage, with duplicate copies of texts being commonplace, and part of this duplication may reflect the role of Nippur as an important scribal school.⁵ There are rival centres where Sumerian literature has been found, such as Ur, but the collections from Ur appear to be much inferior in accurately rendering the texts, and in fact the sources from Ur probably reflect a scribal school rather than a library containing standard reference works, since most tablets from later periods were found in private houses.⁶

The 25,000 tablets from the Palace of Mari in Syria is always known as the Mari Archives, never as a library. Here we find an abundance of letters but no real collections of *belles lettres*, which were perhaps stored elsewhere in the city; the Mari archives appear to represent the official chancery.⁷ Collections from other cities in this period are predominantly administrative and even tablets from Babylon during the Hammurabi-dynasty probably do not come from a major palace or temple library as such. The discovery of tablets

³ See K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt* (SAAS 6; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), pp. 74-78.

⁴ For a discussion and edition of Late Babylonian school texts, see P. Gesche, *Schulunterricht in Babylonien im ersten Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001); for Old Babylonian school texts from Nippur dealing with mathematics, see Ch. Proust, *Tablettes mathématiques de Nippur* (Paris: Éditions de Boccard, 2007); for lexical texts from Nippur schools, see N. Veldhuis, *Elementary Education at Nippur* (dissertation, Groningen, 1997).

⁵ See S. Tinney, “On the Curricular Setting of Sumerian Literature,” *Iraq* 61 (1999), pp. 159-172; E. Robson, “The tablet house: a scribal school in Old Babylonian Nippur,” *RA* 95 (2001), pp. 39-67; Veldhuis, *Elementary Education*.

⁶ Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries*, pp. 116-118, 201-204 and see also P. Michalowski, *The Correspondence of the Kings of Ur, an Epistolary History of an Ancient Mesopotamian Kingdom* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), p. 27.

⁷ For the convenience of a selection of Mari letters in a single volume, see W. Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), although more detailed work requires consulting the numerous publications of the Mari Archives in French translation from Jean-Marie Durand and Dominique Charpin.

at Babylon's huge site was haphazard, despite the large numbers of tablets found, and certainly the majority of tablets from this period come from private houses, hence archives.⁸ It is almost certain that Babylon in the Old Babylonian period actually housed a significant library, but we have not actually located it.

Turning to the later mid-second millennium BCE, major tablet collections have been found at Boghazköi, Ugarit, and Emar, although these collections are very different. Boghazköi has a great variety of tablets in Hittite and Akkadian, as well as Hurrian and Luwian, and even some literary texts in phonetic Sumerian, and the varied nature of the collections certainly attests to official libraries within the city, with duplication of literary genres.⁹ Ugarit, on the other hand, shares multilingualism features with Boghazköi, and one might conclude that the presence of literary texts in various scripts and languages probably implies a library. Nevertheless, the distribution of tablets at Ugarit indicates a series of numerous archives, mostly containing administrative documents with some literary texts, and otherwise literary tablets in Ugaritic, Akkadian, and even Sumerian appear to be found in private houses, and hence represent archives rather than libraries.¹⁰ Emar is roughly contemporary but quite different. Although we find many cultic texts and incantations, it is far from certain that we have a library here, but rather large professional archives of priests and exorcists.¹¹

Finally, there is the question of the famous Tiglath-Pileser Library at Assur, dating from the end of the 2nd millennium. We only have relatively few tablets remaining, since some were plundered and brought to Nineveh while others were found in different places within the ruins of Assur, but it is possible to suppose that this was originally an official library founded by the king.¹² On the other hand, if the Tiglathpileser Library was indeed a library, it may have been created from the private archives of known scribal families which could still allow it to be qualified as a library.¹³

When we come to the first millennium BCE, distinctions between a library and archive become more clear. First of all, Iraqi excavations unearthed a major eighth century BCE library belonging to the Šamaš-Temple in Sippar,¹⁴ but since being excavated only a small number of the 800 tablets – found in situ on shelves – have been published. We assume this to be a prime example of a temple library, but we are unlikely to ever see a complete publication of

⁸ O. Pedersén, *Archive und Bibliotheken in Babylon: Die Tontafeln der Grabung Robert Koldeweys 1899-1917* (ADOG 25; Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 2005), pp. 58ff. refers to "Reste eines Archivs und einer Bibliothek", but there is no duplication among non-administrative tablets found there and no evidence for an actual library.

⁹ Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries*, pp. 44ff.

¹⁰ See Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries*, pp. 68-80.

¹¹ *Ibi*, pp. 61-63.

¹² O. Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries in the City of Assur* (Vol. II; Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1986), pp. 31-42.

¹³ *Ibi*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁴ Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries*, pp. 194ff.

these texts, since their physical condition has suffered major deterioration since being excavated.

The most famous example of a cuneiform library is that of king Assurbanipal, for which we have actual archival records in which he instructs his scribes to go out around the country and bring back tablets for his library. The results are easy to see: the majority of literary tablets found in Nineveh appear in multiple copies, mostly re-written in several standard types of Assyrian cuneiform handwriting or ductus, many containing standardised colophons attesting to coming from Assurbanipal's palace Library. The tablets often look like standard reference works in the way they are neatly divided into columns, often in large A-4 formats. We also find tablets in a standard type of Babylonian script in Nineveh, the origin of which is mysterious but just as standardised as the Assyrian script tablets.¹⁵

In fact, nothing else compares with Nineveh tablets from Assurbanipal's library. We know from extensive and explicit records that the Nineveh Library incorporated archives from Babylonia and elsewhere.¹⁶ It is clear, for instance, that Assurbanipal scribes collected tablets from archives, such as a Gilgamesh manuscript from a *renomé* Nimrud scholar, Nabû-zuqup-kēna, whose own extensive private tablet archive was co-opted into Assurbanipal's Library.¹⁷ Nabû-zuqup-kēna resided in Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), where the Nabû-Temple housed a collection of literary tablets, but the lack of duplication among these manuscripts makes one doubt whether this was an actual library. The site of Sultantepe, for instance, in Eastern Turkey, produced an important collection of literary tablets in a relatively handsome Assyrian script, and there is just enough duplication and variety there to argue for a library rather than archive, although the very existence of a library in such a provincial location is questionable.

The first-millennium tablet collections from Assur, however, are problematic, since it is likely that the many tablets from this site come from various archives rather than from a major central library belonging to a palace or temple. The script is not quite as neat or handsome as that used by Nineveh scribes, and we know that many of the magical and medical compositions from Assur come from the so-called Haus des Beschwörungspriesters, where several generations of exorcists lived and worked.¹⁸ There is a certain amount

¹⁵ See M.J. Geller, *Healing Magic and Evil Demons: Canonical Uduḡ-hul Incantations* (Babylonisch-assyrische Medizin vol. 8; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), pp. 17-18.

¹⁶ S. Parpola, "Assyrian Library Records," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 42 (1983), pp. 1-29.

¹⁷ E. Frahm, "Nabû-zuqup-kenu, das Gilgamesch-Epos und der Tod Sargons II," *JCS* 51 (1999), pp. 73-90, esp. 78-79.

¹⁸ In fact the Haus des Beschwörungspriesters from Assur is an excellent example of an archive rather than a library. The lack of duplication among the tablets found in this private house in Assur suggests an archive of texts for the personal use of the practitioners rather than an actual repository of standard sources (or library). See S.M. Maul, "Die Tontafelbibliothek aus dem sogenannten 'Haus des Beschwörungspriesters'," in S.M. Maul - N.P. Heeßel (eds.), *Assur-Forschungen, Arbeiten aus der Forschungsstelle "Edition literarische Keilschrifttexte*

of variety here but little in the way of duplication. The same can be said of the large number of literary tablets from Uruk in Persian and Seleucid periods, in which almost no duplicated sources can be found.¹⁹ It appears that these tablets belonged to various families of exorcists and cultic-priests who specialised in incantations, diagnostic omens, commentaries, liturgy, and astrology, and these probably represent professional archives rather than actual libraries.²⁰ A similar archive in a very distinctive script appears among Seleucid tablets from Babylon, all copied by a single scribe Tanittu-Bēl and no doubt represent his personal archive.²¹

So what are we to make of all this? The distinction between a library and archive is particularly interesting in reference to Qumran and to the nature of the manuscript collections found in the various caves there. A couple of observations can be offered from a non-specialist in Qumran studies.

Norman Golb first suggested that Qumran could have served as a repository for a Jerusalem library or libraries,²² while Hartmut Stegemann pointed to the odd fact that no administrative records from Qumran have been found.²³ We find duplication among biblical manuscripts and a certain amount of duplication among non-Biblical works, such as Enoch and Jubilees, but all this is complicated by questions of whether these texts are Sectarian or not. In fact, there seems to be a certain amount of circular logic at play, in that we define Sectarians by their literature and then assign literary compositions to Sectarians if they reflect the right ideas. A case in point is Jubilees: although 15 manuscripts of Jubilees were found at Qumran, the text probably dates from an earlier period and it remains an open question whether it should be classified as Sectarian.

The present suggestion is rather simplistic: if one begins to think of Qumran texts as representing both archives and libraries, some further progress might be possible.

Let us assume, for instance, that Sectarian texts belong to an archive with a distinctive purpose, pedagogic or otherwise, rather than to a library. This

aus Assur" der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), pp. 200-202, also Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries in the City of Assur*, pp. 1-76, and Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries*, pp. 132-143.

¹⁹ H. Hunger, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk. Teil 1* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann -Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 1976) and E. von Weiher, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk (II-V)*; Berlin: Gebr. Mann - Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 1983-1998); Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries*, pp. 204-214. Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries*, pp. 209-210 refers to a library belonging to the Anu-temple, although this collection also has no internal duplication.

²⁰ E. Robson, *Mathematics in Ancient Iraq: A Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 258-260

²¹ I.L. Finkel, "Muššu'u, Qutaru, the Scribe Tanittu-Bel," *Aula Orientalis* 8 (1991), pp. 91-104.

²² N. Golb, "The Problem of Origin and Identification of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 124 (1980), pp. 1-24; Id., "Who Hid the Dead Sea Scrolls?," *BA* 48 (1985), pp. 68-82.

²³ H. Stegemann, *The Library of Qumran: On the Essenes, Qumran, John the Baptist, and Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

would imply that multiple copies are not necessary within such a closed group, unless they were part of a school curriculum (e.g. the Manual of Discipline). Six copies of 4QMMT might also conceivably be a school text; it would be interesting to compare the quality of the handwriting. Otherwise, texts such as Enoch or Jubilees or Tobit in multiple copies could be considered as library copies, brought to Qumran from elsewhere, in both Aramaic and Hebrew. Such texts would not necessarily belong to the intellectual heritage of the Sectarians. Likewise, a single copy of astrological omens from Qumran (4Q318) might be chance or alternatively might come from a specialised archive within a library, which was brought to Qumran. The great variety of bible versions suggests that these come from a library, which might have been the result of a manuscript collection, probably outside of Qumran.

One further observation. Gideon Bohak and the present writer have managed to trace the journey of a single astrological text, originating in Babylonia in Akkadian, then appearing in Mandaic and Syriac from Mesopotamia and Syria, then showing up in Egypt in a Demotic translation of the Aramaic, having passed through ancient Judea, since it appears in Qumran (4Q318), and it finally crops up in the Cairo Genizah.²⁴ This genre of text originated in a much more sophisticated literary milieu than that offered by Qumran Sectarians, and it probably comes from a library where duplicate copies would have been found.

²⁴ G. Bohak - M.J. Geller, "Babylonian Astrology in the Cairo Genizah," in R.S. Boustán *et al.* (eds.), *Envisioning Judaism* (Fs. Peter Schäfer), (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), pp. 607-622.