

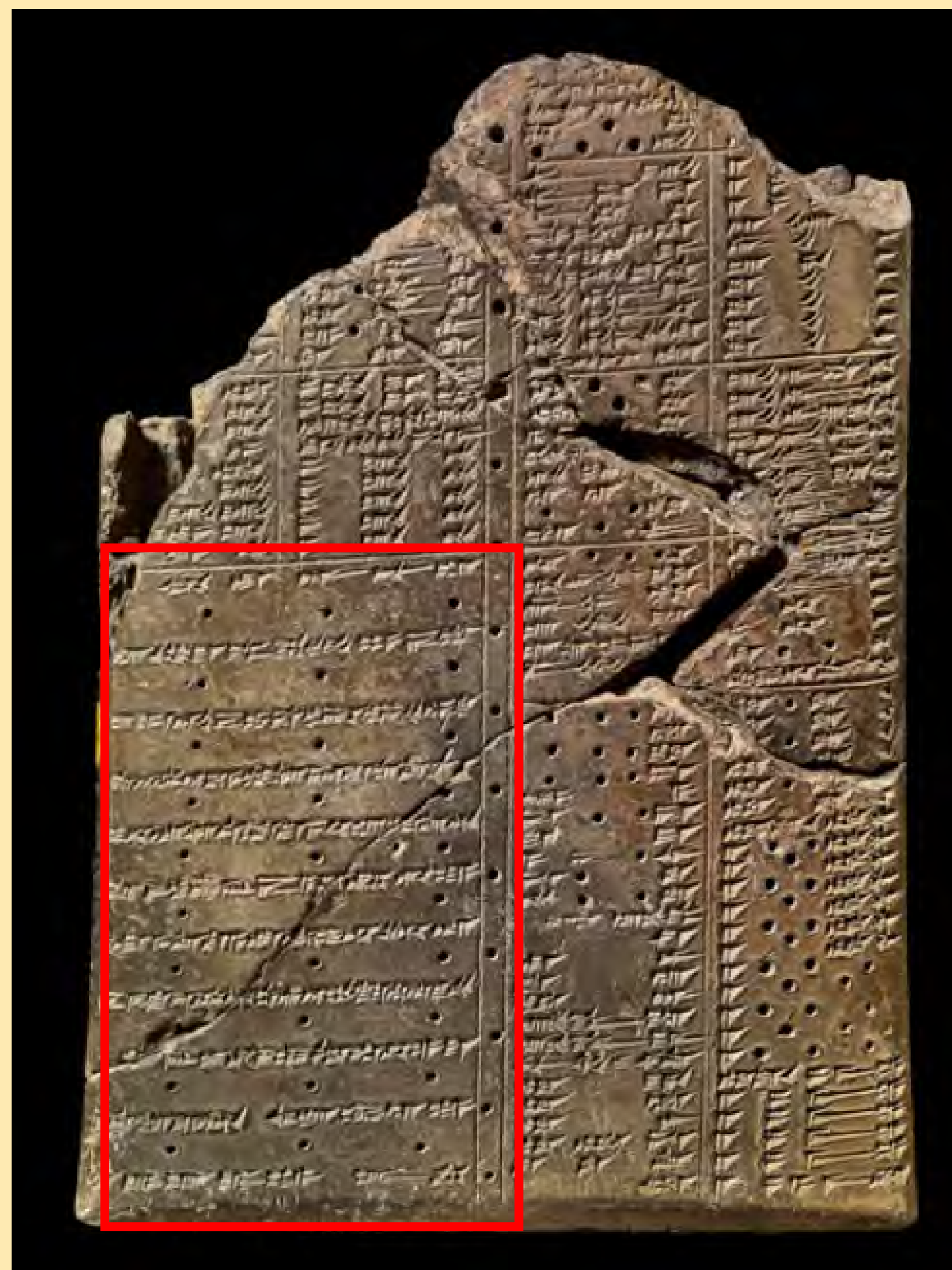
A Multi-sectional Analysis of Assyriology's Foundational Corpus

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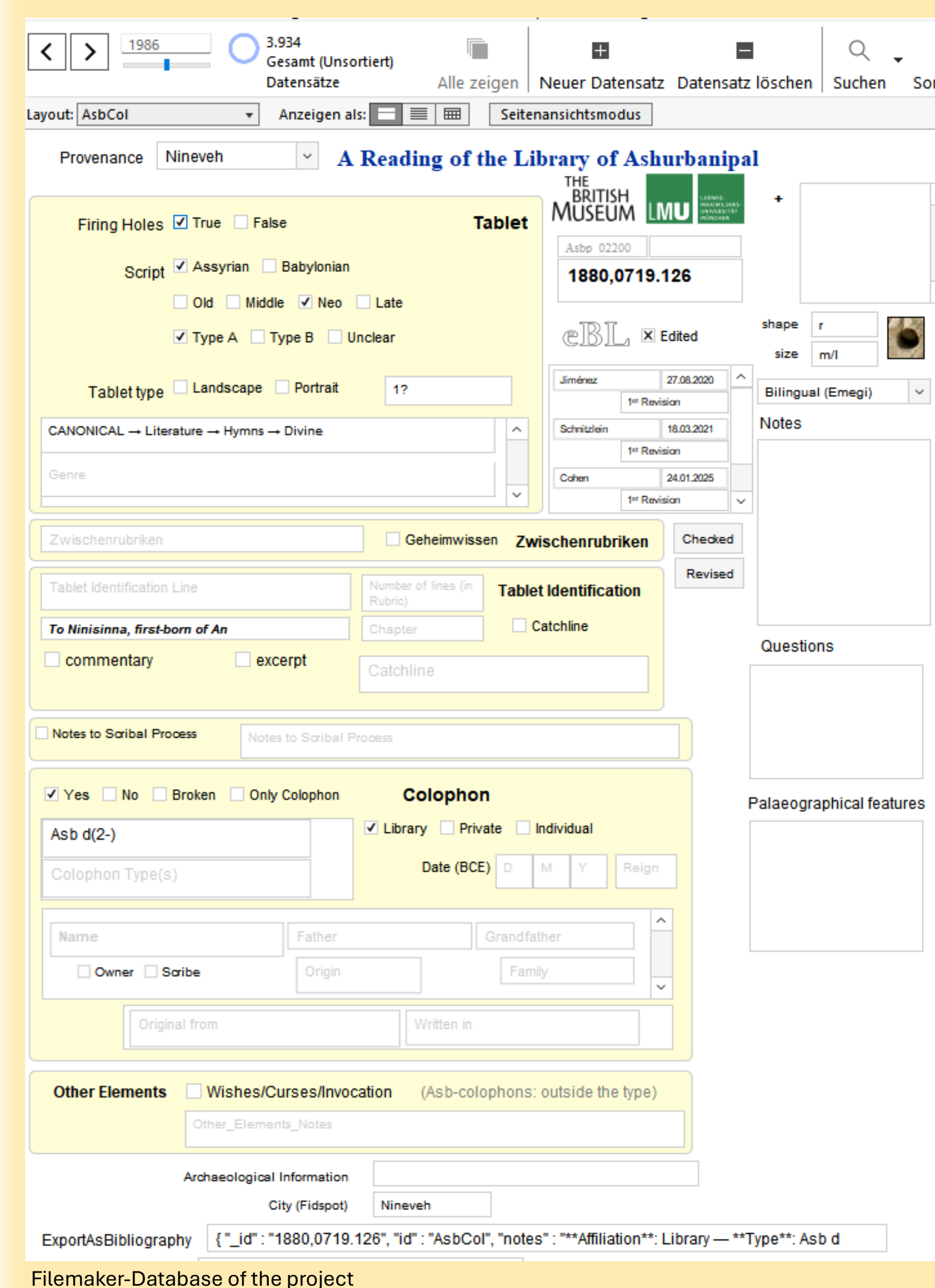
Tablets from Nineveh

The study of the approximately 30,000 tablets and fragments from 7th century BC Kuyunjik, the acropolis of ancient Nineveh, remains one of the most significant and central topics in Assyriology today. This corpus became known as the **Library of Ashurbanipal**, since many of the tablets contain scribal notes—colophons—that mention his name. These colophons have never been studied systematically, however. Our project identified and analyzed all fragments bearing colophons to better understand how the Library was assembled and how its texts were classified.

Colophons are scribal notes added to the end of cuneiform tablets, typically recording details such as the scribe's name, the date, and the source text. Ashurbanipal's colophons are standardized and anonymous, identifying the tablet as the property of the king. Around 30 types of these royal colophons are known, though they have not been systematically studied—until now. To these can be added many other colophons that mention different individuals or omit names entirely. Some originate from different locations and earlier periods.



A tablet with one of Ashurbanipal's library colophons (bottom left corner). K 39. Copyright Trustees of the British Museum. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0



Database

The colophons were compiled into a comprehensive database that now includes 2,371 colophon records from Nineveh. It contains a rich set of fields detailing the physical and textual features of each fragment associated with the Library. Our long-term resource is continually evolving, not only through the addition and correction of data, but also by increasing its level of granularity. This enables more sophisticated data manipulation and allows us to address increasingly complex research questions.

Outcome

Eight articles were written, and a dissertation titled “*Tafeln nach Ninive*” was completed within the framework of the project. These new studies shed light on the transmission and patterns of texts within the Library, as well as on the individuals involved, tablet formats, and other aspects of its organization. The database has been published on the “electronic Babylonian Library” (eBL) platform (www.ebl.lmu.de) and will continue to be updated.



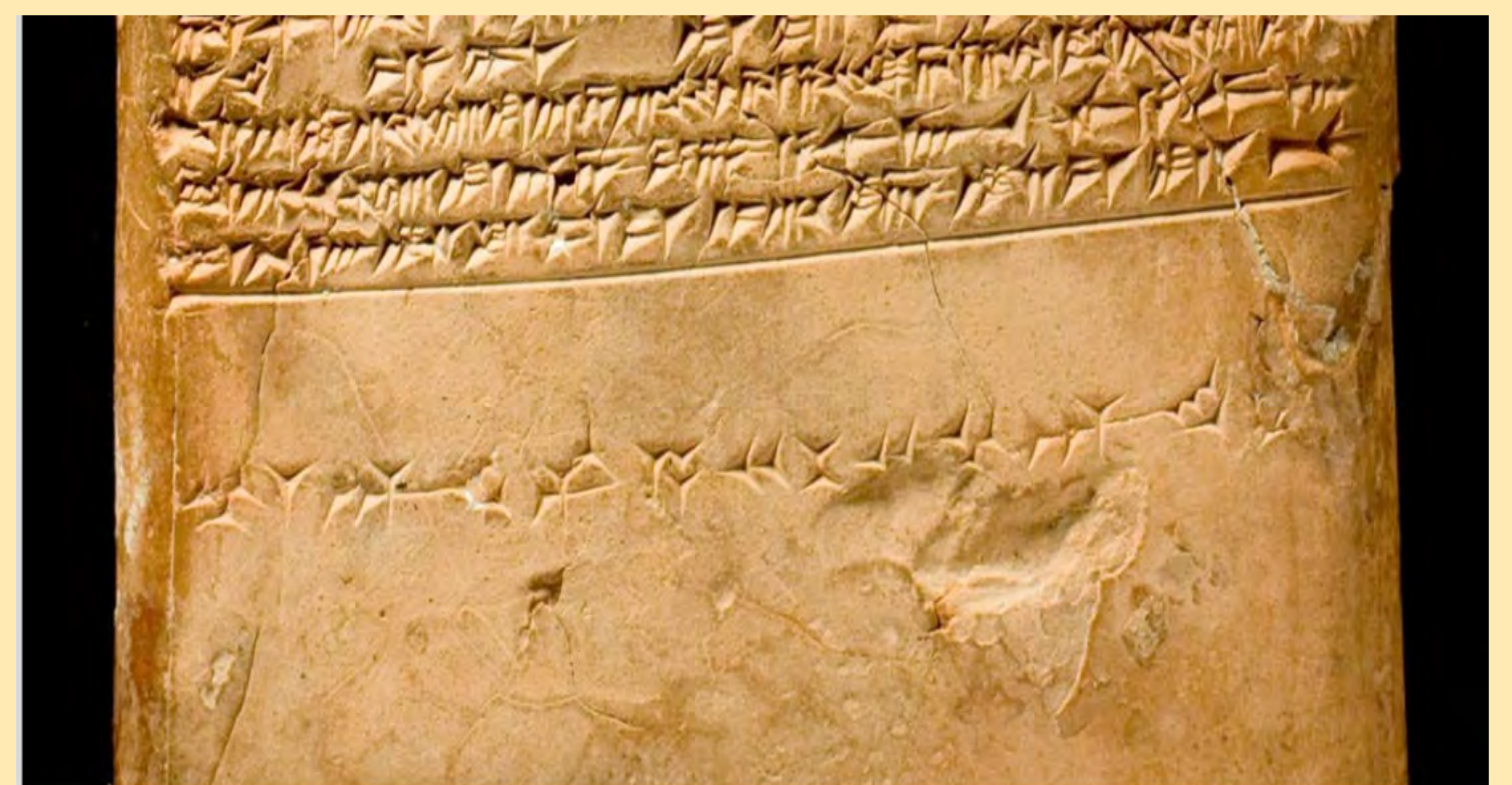
Ashurbanipal Library display at the British Museum's Ashurbanipal exhibition, 2018/2019. Copyright Trustees of the British Museum. CC BY-NC-SA 4.

Patterns

Certain colophon types appear on specific genres, like astrology, medicine, or lamentations. Others reflect stages in the Library's development or distinguish a royal donation to the nearby temple.

Transmission

Colophons help trace the origins of texts. While many tablets were long believed to be copied from Babylonian originals, new research reveals that a significant portion originated from Assyrian sources. Some tablets bear the personal names of earlier scribes—most notably Nabû-zukup-kēnu, who was active before Ashurbanipal's reign. Others were written during the Middle Assyrian period and only reached Nineveh centuries after their scribes had passed. These insights challenge long-standing assumptions and offer a clearer understanding of knowledge transmission and library formation within ancient Assyria.



An example of colophon Asb a added when the tablet was already dry. Detail of K 162. Copyright Trustees of the British Museum. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Further Reading:

<https://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/asbp/rlasb/index.html>