

Early Tales of Library: Assyrian Library

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Abstract: *Although the history of libraries begins with the history of the oldest library in the world, the Library of Alexandria, according to historical evidence, it is possible to say today that the oldest library in the world is the Assyrian library (Library of King Assurbanipal). It is amazing to think that all the modern techniques of library science can be traced back to the Assyrian library like accession register, catalogue, classification. The Assyrian Library began originally as a royal library. Therefore, only royal family and friends can have used this library. But later it was opened to all. This library of clay plates is now reserved by its British Museum. Also this library preserved World's first poetry. The Assyrian library is not only the library of the past; it is a familiar form of the modern library. Assyrian library history is only history of the past; it is the actual form of present or future libraries.*

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Introduction

There has been a lot of work on the progress of education in world history. But in that sense there has been no work in that way about the library in the past. In most cases, the history of libraries in the world begins with the Library of Alexandria. It is true that the Library of Alexandria was a rich library in the past. But if we look further back, even before this, a library was built in the world following modern and scientific methods. Yes, we are talking about the Assyrian Library.

The Assyrian civilization began on the banks of the Tigris, about two hundred miles north of Babylon. In the past, it was a prosperous maritime trade center. In the pages of history, the Ashur Empire was known as a military state, but it was highly advanced in education and culture. They divide the circle into 360 degrees. They divided the world into latitude and longitude¹.

Purpose of Study

Rumination has an important impact on the progress of culture and civilization. Due to lack of rumination we forgot many historical events. Similarly, we lost many events like this. Sometimes we found them as new, but sometimes we lost them forever also.

History of Assyrian library is also a part of our oblivion. Just like the name of Alexandrer come to mind when we speak of history of library, but probably we do not get the name of Assyrian library that much. It was made to convey the tale of development of world's first library. So that people don't forget about the Assyrian library and about its history.

History of Assyrian Society

A glorious chapter in Mesopotamian civilization was introduced by Assyrian society. Approximately within 1300 BC, they captured the whole north Mesopotamia. They were very powerful soldiers, as well as they gained excellence in medicine, literature, mathematics with many other subjects. Excellent business capacity made them rich. They collected raw material in every aspect of literature and culture. One of the results of this was making this library.

Formation of Library

Assyrian library was built in the time of Sargon I, founder of Babylon Semitic Society, in Akkad city. Probably the time was 1700 BC. Akkad city was the capital of this state at that time². There was very little information about Sargon. There was doubt about his name among people before the decade of 1870. The famous archaeologist Sirhenriraullinson, first revealed the name of Sargon. The whole world came to know that emperor Sargon was the first to build a library³. Later when emperor Assyria was in the throne, he moved the library to Nineveh, which was his capital⁴. In the reign of emperor Assyria, the library was much developed.

Approximately in 672 BC emperor Assurbanipal became the ruler of the state⁵. It was a golden era for this library. He was also a scholar. Combination of a good ruler, excellent scholar and brave warrior, was his main characteristic traits.

Components of the Library

There were nearly 30,000 soil-plates in that library which were actually archetypes of books or manuscripts⁶. In the past human beings identified soil-plates and rock as a medium of writing. This library was full of collected soil-plates. At the same time there was wooden plates also⁷. Though it was not found in archeology, probably it was extinct due to fatal course of time. Mainly government records and official documents were kept in the library, in the reign of Sargon. So at the very first it was government achieve. But later documents related to literature, math, science were being collected gradually. Anoma Alish composed an epic in Babylon language. It was built with seven quini form tablet. It was also in library's collection. Currently it is preserved in British Museum. Apart from this, the then many Mesopotamian and Babylonian literatures and epics were collected in this library. Emperor Assurbanipal, collected many books and information from different places in Babylon, which enriched this library's collection. Relevantly, it was to say that 320 thousand burned soil-plates, which were found in archaeological sites of Assyrian library, now preserved in British library.

Emperor Assurbanipal appointed Babylon and Assyrian scholars in his court to collect information. For his royal library, he collected almost 1469 soil-plates and 137 written wooden plates⁸. He also collected soil and wooden plates from many temples in Babylon.

It is said that emperor Assurbanipal did not want to sell his country's intellect to another state (specially Babylon). That's why he encouraged the intellects of his country in different ways and cherished them. Books or soil-plates made by them were placed in a noted library.

Comparison of Action Method between Assyrian Library and Modern Library One Session's Work

An advanced working system was practiced in this library. It has already been said that Emperor Assurbanipal used to collect soil-plates from various places and bring them to this library. The emperor's name was written on them⁹.

Even today, in the core of library work, this approach can be seen directly. Any library in its inventory, records its name. From this the object is authenticated. The reverse of the title page of the book, known to us as the title of verso, is written as serial no or Acc no. At the time of this writing, the custom of stamping the name of particular library is still followed today, for the same purpose. So, it can be said that this custom of the library of Assyrian, thousands of years ago, is still followed today by the staff of the

world's libraries. This custom or rule is still unchanged and alive today.

It should be said here that technology has improved today. Application of barcode and tag system has undoubtedly improved the library working method. But between the two mentioned elements, the library name and address are also written. Its purpose is the same. Therefore, this working method will probably continue for a lifetime.

It should be said here that most of the information medium in the Assyrian library was clay tablets. By combining several clay tablets, the practice of writing books had begun at that time. Such books were kept in Assyrian libraries. In that case, there was a Nobel method of writing serial numbers. In these cases, along with the serial number, the first line written on the tablet was recorded. This made it easier to mark the book¹⁰.

Classification

The most important method of organizing library information is classification. Simply put, organizing the information or the subject of the book also follows, organizing the information. The origin of this method is also very old. According to time and demand, the working method of this method has changed. But the purpose and form remain the same. Even in the Assyrian Ogra libar, the presence of this method can be observed.

It has already been said that this library used to collect information on various subjects. Archeological excavations have shown that Granger classified the plates thematically¹¹. More interestingly, these tablets were serially numbered. Not much is known about this system of classification in the past. Evidence is available.

It is surprising to think that the subject is being thought of in various ways at the present time, the librarian of Assyrian and his colleagues started working on it at that time. The evidence also shows that they thought the matter seriously. There was definitely a scientific method to their procedure. Perhaps later it will be known more deeply.

Catalogue

In librarianship, the catalog is described as the bridge between the reader and the information. Earlier catalogues were in book form or in card form in the library. Currently it is available in OPAC form or online. But in any library, the catalog is an important thing.

Assyrian libraries also had catalog systems. Here the subject was also used to categorize the material, creating a descriptive thematic catalog. This library was originally a royal library. It was later opened to the public in 685 BC¹².

Nebo-Zuqub-Yubin had a substantial role in this work¹³. He was the librarian of

this library. He made a special contribution to the creation of the library's classification catalog.

Colophon

Assyrian library used colophon to describe the circumstances in which the tablet was produced. Usually, this includes information like the name of the scribe, the date, the nature of the original tablet being copied, and maybe a protective formula. Ashurbanipal's colophons differ from those found elsewhere in the Mesopotamian tradition. Firstly, they are standardized; each appears word-for-word in multiple examples. There are 30 different library colophons used¹⁴. Ashurbanipal colophons usually contain references to the originals from which the Nineveh copy was produced.

Consequence

To understand the fate of this empire, a tablet from Babylon is very helpful. It is known as the fall of Nineva chronical. It is currently housed in the British Museum¹⁵.

What is known from these clay-plates can be summarized that after the death of king Ashur, the empire began to be in turmoil. Ashur's brother Shamash-sham-Ukin rebelled. Meanwhile, new powers began to appear in Babylon. As a result, this kingdom began to weaken.

In 612 BC, the Median king Cyacares, joined by many others, besieged the city of Nineveh. After a siege of about three months, the city was taken by them. Looting and destruction begun. They set fire to Assyrian palaces and libraries. Destroyed the world's first library.

Discovery of this Library

The Assyrian library is the oldest discovered library in the history so far. The ruins of the library were discovered in present day day Mosul, Iraq. Sir Austin Henry Layard and Non Herkawinzik are named after the discovery of this archeological site. Austen Henry was an Englishman by birth. And Austin Henry Lord was an archeologist.

In 1849, Austin Henry lord discovered the palace and library of the Assyrian kings in the city of Mosul, on the east bank of Tigris river. Sir Austin Henry was an archeologist, traveler and scholar¹⁶. His discovery provided new information not only to library history but also to world history.

The collection of this library is now housed in a British museum. About 30,000 clay-plates were stored in this library, most of which are preserved in the British museum today. Many of them are terracotta clay-plates, the prototypes of the world's earliest multi-page collective books. In the library of Assyria, wax was also used to write on wooden sheets. However, it has disappeared today.

Conclusion

The history of the library is somewhat neglected. Although some libraries of the ancient world are mentioned, they don't seem to be mentioned in library science education.

Libraries are modernized according to the needs of today's society. Today, libraries have come to the age of digitized books from the books of pilgrims. There is a continuation of this path. The result of centuries of effort is the modern libraries today. Its beginnings began in the Assyrian libraries.

Thousands of years ago, the library was built on the banks of the river Tigris. It was the world's first library (so far discovered, don't know the river holds how many more secrets. Maybe later, even older libraries will be discovered) and house library science. Because archeological evidence shows that information was not only stored here in warehouses. In the Assyrian library, the very way librarians used to categorize information and create catalogs to make the information available to the reader is the same as in recent times. And it had a scientific method. Even here, information was recognized as libraries' own properties. An example of a very advanced library is the Assyrian library, which is a milestone not only in the history of libraries, but also in the history of civilization.

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