PRIVATE ARCHIVES IN ASSUR

compared with some other sites

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The available textual material, as far as it stems from regular archaeological excavations, often depends on the interests of the archaeologists. Since archaeologists working in Mesopotamia have concentrated their efforts particularly on palaces, temples and other monumental buildings, the areas with private houses have only occasionally been the object of more extensive excavations. Therefore private or family archives, which were placed in private houses, do not seem to be so frequently documented in available material as they probably were in antiquity.

For Assyria and Babylonia available evidence from large scale excavations of private houses stems particularly from two sites: Assur and Ur. The material from Assur\(^1\) will serve as a starting-point for my presentation, but there will be some preliminary comparisons with other sites, especially Ur. Only archives containing documents in a broad sense of the word including also letters in private houses will be considered; therefore libraries, consisting of literary texts in a broad sense of the word, are excluded\(^3\). Administrative archives in temples, palaces and other official buildings

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1) This paper was read at the 33rd RAI in Paris 1986.
2) For all matters of detail the reader is referred to my ALA I and II (Archives and Libraries in the City of Assur, A Survey of the Material from the German Excavations, Part I and II, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Semitica Upsaliensia 6 and 8, 1985 and 1986), where detailed bibliographical references are given to the individual texts. References to the Middle Assyrian archives M 1-14 and to the Neo-Assyrian ones N 1-35 are according to the principle used in ALA. I am deeply indebted to E. Strommenger-Nagel (Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft), L. Jakob-Rost (Vorderasiatisches Museum) and V. Donbaz (Istanbul Archaeological Museum) for their cooperation, which made the arrangement of the Assur texts in their original archives possible.
3) For a general short introduction to the libraries in Assur see my paper “The Libraries in the City of Assur” presented at the 32nd RAI in Münster 1985, published in Keilschriftliche Literaturen, Ausgewählte Vorträge der XXXII. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Münster, 8-12.7.1985, 1986, pp. 143-147. For all matters of detail the relevant parts of ALA I and II (M 1-3 and N 1-8 respectively) should be consulted.
are of course also excluded from this treatment of private houses with family archives.

I shall first consider where such family archives were kept, and then continue with an examination of the content of some of these family archives.

In the Middle Assyrian period (Figure 1), when Assur was the capital of Assyria, official buildings like temples and palaces were concentrated in the northern part of the city and the private houses in the southern part. The 3 libraries (M 1-3) and the 5 official archives (M 4-8) were found in the north and, as is to be expected, the 6 family archives (M 9-14) which concern us here were found in private houses in the south.

In the Neo-Assyrian period (Figure 2), when other cities were the capitals of Assyria, Assur was still an important city with the main Assyrian sanctuary, the Assur temple. Official libraries with archives were excavated in the Assur temple (N 1) and perhaps in the palace in the southeast (N 5). It has not been possible to reconstruct an archive in the Old Palace. Private libraries (N 2-4, 6-8) sometimes also contained archives (especially N 2, 3, 4). The 27 private archives (N 9-35) stem from the area with private houses in the southern part of the city and in the northwest above and around the destroyed Middle Assyrian New Palace.

The period just before the destruction of Assur by the Medes (614 B.C.) has left quite a number of archives with well established findspots. I shall therefore start with the Neo-Assyrian period for our consideration of where the family archive was kept in a private house.

In the area above the ruined New Palace private houses were situated (Figure 3) containing the archives N 14-22. In the southern part of this area the houses with archives N 16, 17, 18, 20 and 21 may serve as examples. Archive N 16 was found in an inner room of House 5 without many specifications. The other archives, however, show an interesting trend.

I shall start with the house containing archive N 21. This is House 20 situated at a small alley-way coming from "West Gasse". After the entrance room and a small courtyard we have the large main room. Inside this room is the inner courtyard with another room. This room has in a corner under the floor the grave of the family. On the floor above the grave the family archive was placed, but since the grave was robbed the archive had partly fallen into the grave.

The same description, with minor modifications, can be used for the houses containing the archives N 17, 18 and 20. The archive is kept in the same inner room, which under the floor had the graves of the family. Often the place of the archive is just above the grave.

If we now consider all private archives from the Neo-Assyrian period (Figure 2) excavated in Assur from similar lines of consideration we get the following picture. We have 27 private archives (N 9-35) and 3 additional archives combined with libraries (N 2, 3, 4). Among all these, 9 or 10 archives in the first group (N 12, 13?, 14, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25, 28) and 1 or 2 of the ones combined with libraries (N 4, cf. N 3), were excavated in private houses in those inner rooms, which under the floor had the graves of the family.
Figure 1 — Archives and libraries during the Middle Assyrian period. The private archives, M 9-14, were excavated in the southern half of the city. From ALA I, Figure 1.
Figure 2 — Archives and libraries during the Neo-Assyrian period. The private archives, N 9-35, were excavated in the west and the south areas of the city. Private archives combined with libraries, N 2-4, stem from the eastern part of the city. From *ALA II*, Figure 7.
Sometimes the grave had been robbed or had collapsed and part of, or even the complete, archive may have fallen down into the grave; sometimes the house had completely disintegrated and we are left with only a grave chamber with an archive above it. In all these cases the natural reconstruction of the original situation should be a private house with an inner room. Under the floor of this room were the graves, and on the floor above the graves the archive was preserved. In some other cases the records are not sufficient to establish with certainty the correct room with the archive, but much would indicate that it was the inner room with the graves (N 31, 33) or at least an inner room (N 26, 27).

Only for 2 of all the other Neo-Assyrian private archives (N 9, 16) is it possible to establish the room which originally contained the texts. These were inner rooms probably without graves under the floor.

To summarize this we may state that for the Neo-Assyrian period in Assur there is a clear trend, when the material allows any certain findspot, that the family archive was placed in an inner room of the house; mostly that inner room, which had the graves of the family under the floor.

If we now compare the situation in the Middle-Assyrian period (Figure 1) the absence of any clear destruction layer and a deeper and not so extensively excavated level makes it more difficult to consider the same questions.

One private (M 14) and, if correctly assigned, one official archive (M 8) were found above graves, probably originally in inner rooms. Other archives may also be from such findspots but the records or the small area excavated cannot prove it. Sometimes the evidence points in other directions. We have, for example, one house with a small chamber filled with clay pots next to the entrance room. The archive partly concerned with delivery of milk probably in these pots was kept in the same room (M 12).

For comparison let us look at the only excavated private house in Kalhu, which contained an archive. The texts were found in inner Room 19, which together with Room 16 served as a magazine. The excavators assumed Room 18 to be a grave room because it was vaulted.4

In order to get more extensive comparative material we have to leave Assyria for Babylonia. In Ur, especially from the Old Babylonian period, large areas with private houses were excavated. In the extensively excavated area with private houses southeast of the temple area the quite frequent family archives in the houses were found in inner rooms, often in the inner room which had the grave of the family under the floor, or rather more frequently in a small chamber beside that room.

4) For a presentation with plans of the private houses in Kalhu see M. Mallowan, Nimrud and its Remains, vol. I, 1966, pp. 184-197. The nearly 50 texts were listed and quoted in the catalogue by D.J. Wiseman, Iraq 15, 1953, 139-147; the seal impressions with photos of some of the tablets were published by B. Parker, Iraq 17, 1955, 115-124, pls. XXIII-XXIX.
In the smaller area with private houses southwest of the temple area we can also see that the archives, once including a library, were placed in the room, which had the grave of the family under the floor, or more in line with the Ur pattern in a small chamber beside that room.

In fact Woolley in his publications made the following a typical feature of the Old Babylonian house: a room in the innermost part of the house he called a chapel. It was reconstructed as only half covered with a roof. It contained an altar and other religious features. The main graves of the family were situated under the floor of that room. Inside this room there was a small chamber in a number of the houses, which contained the archive of the family. However, other inner rooms could also be used for the preservation of the archive.

Let us now add another aspect of the preservation of family archives. The clay tablets were found on the floor in most archives in Assur. If they had been stored on shelves or in boxes these must have been of perishable materials and were not preserved.

Only a few of the Assur archives (and no library ones) were found in clay pots. Most of the pots with tablets were from the Middle Assyrian official archives (M 4, 6, 8), one of them with 10 pots (M 4), the others with one each. Only one Middle Assyrian private archive was kept in a pot (M 12) and that was in a room full of other clay pots (Figure 1).

In the Neo-Assyrian period only 3 small archives (N 2, 12, 29) were placed in clay pots. One of them (N 2) contained archival documents found next to a library (Figure 2).

The situation in Ur seems to have been the same as in Assur. A private archive may occasionally be preserved in a pot, but far more frequently attested are those private archives which were not preserved in clay pots.

In short we may conclude that the family archive was kept in an inner room of a private house, mostly not in any clay pot. In Assur, especially during the Neo-Assyrian period, it was in most cases placed in the room which had graves under the floor. In Old Babylonian Ur it was more common to keep the archive in a chamber beside the room with the grave. Only more detailed research can reveal to what extent other periods and places show similar lines.

5) These short remarks are only based on my own quite preliminary examination of the Ur material, and the matter should be studied in more detail. Cf. the information given in the series Ur Excavations (especially Vol. VII, The Old Babylonian Period, 1976, by L. Woolley and M. Mallowan) and Ur Excavations Texts (especially Vol. V, Letters and Documents of the Old Babylonian Period, 1953, by H.H. Figulla and W.J. Martin). The recent publication by D. Charpin, Le clergé d'Urausiecle d'Hammurabi (XIXe-XVIIIe siècle av. J.-C.), Ecole pratique des hautes études II: Hautes études orientales 22, 1986, should contain among other things a study of related questions for the Old Babylonian period; unfortunately I was not able to consult this work before delivering the manuscript of the present paper.


7) The findspots of clay tablets have often not been given full attention by the philologist, nor by the archaeologist, and the relevant information has often not been sufficiently treated in the publications of the
If we now consider the content of such family archives it may also be possible to find some general guidelines, but they are far more divergent than the archaeological data just discussed. In quite a general sense, it is possible to say something about size, lifetime and text types of private archives — and I will quickly do so — but the most important element seems to be the individual owners' need of documentation in their special situations. Situations in which their neighbours perhaps never came or in which, more probably, they did not need any documentation.

Let us shortly consider the size of private archives in Assur (Figures 1 and 2). Among the 6 Middle Assyrian private archives the largest one (M 9) consists of 143 tablets. The other 5 (M 10-14) have between some 85 and 40 tablets. Among the 27 Neo-Assyrian private archives 7 have approximately the size of the Middle Assyrian ones with between 95 and almost 40 (N 9, 10, 20, 25, 28, 31, 33). The remaining 20 archives are smaller with between 30 and 3 texts. The main difference in size between the two periods is the large number of small Neo-Assyrian archives.

One generation, often two or three, perhaps even four or more, can be represented in a family archive. This means that a private archive may contain texts from anything between 1 year and up to something like 150 years. A large three-generation archive may cover some 60 to perhaps 100 years. However, beside a concentrated group of documents for the owners of the archive there are sometimes individual texts, which may be much older than the majority.

In Assur like in Ur and elsewhere some typical types of texts make up private archives. The main types of texts are: loan documents concerning loans or investments given by the owners of the archive, purchase documents concerning acquisitions of houses (especially the one where the archive was found), fields, male and female slaves, and receipts from payment and accounts related to these types of documents. Not so frequently attested are documents on juridical settlements, adoption, marriage and division of inheritance. Furthermore in some archives there are letters or private notes, lists, etc., made out to keep order in the private possessions. Persons having official positions have sometimes documents related to that service in their homes.

As I have already indicated perhaps the most interesting aspect of the private archives are the individual needs of their owners, which resulted in the writing and preservation of these texts. This can only be seen by looking at the individual archives and I will end with a short survey of a selected number of Assur archives.

...texts or in the archaeological publications. The same lack of attention to connections between graves found inside private houses and the houses themselves can sometimes be found in the published material. Without the generous possibility to examine these questions in the original notes from the Assur excavation (cf. note 2) these typical relations of the Assur material would have been unknown, since it was not possible to recognize them in the published material. To what extent other excavations may show similar connections can sometimes be gained from the publications, as for the Old Babylonian Ur material, but in most cases it would probably require time-consuming reworking of the notes from the excavations.
From the Middle Assyrian period (Figure 1) we have the largest family archive (M 9) covering 3 generations of a family: Riš-Nabû, Iddin-Kube and Kidin-Adad. The largest group of texts were loan documents, probably unpaid and kept because of the stipulated security, mostly a field. The second best attested group of texts are purchase documents concerning fields, sometimes formulated as purchase of documents concerning fields. As a result the family acquired immovable property by means of different ways.

The 3 (or perhaps even 4) generation archive (M 10) of Aššur-aha-iddina, Meli-Sah and Urad-Šeru’a contained various documents from their duties as leaders of provinces in the north in addition to private documents. Characteristic for the archive of Baba-aha-iddina (M 11) is the group of letters with orders to his servants. The archive of Uṣur-Bel-šarra and Riš-Aššur (M 12) from the room with a large number of clay pots contained, among other texts, documents concerning the obligation to provide the palace with milk in skins or in clay pots, perhaps those excavated.

Let us make a selection of some archives for the Neo-Assyrian period (Figure 2). In the northwest we have two houses with archives (N 9, 10) for two families of hunduraja. The larger one (N 9) contained 86 documents from three generations: Dada-ahhe, Mudammiq-Assur and Sar-illi. There are more than 20 loans or investments given, quite a number of purchase documents concerning acquisitions of female and male slaves, houses and building plots, some receipts, work-contracts, as well as a few documents on juridical settlements, adoptions and divisions of inheritance.

Two of the smaller archives (N 17, 18) (Figure 3), of which we already discussed the findspots, had a majority of loan documents. Among them were the clay dockets with Aramaic texts. In the same area we have the archive (N 21) of Mutaqqin-Aššur, a door keeper (atû) perhaps of the Assur temple.

The largest private archive (N 31) (Figure 2) with 95 texts belonged to some Egyptians, a few of them with good Assyrian names. They had a large number of loan documents, but also documents concerning acquisitions of female slaves and houses, as well as individual texts on marriage, divisions of inheritance and a letter.

A quite small archive (N 32) for two generations of a family of tanners (šāripi dušē) contains only 7 texts. From a period of some 45 years all that was important for this family was recorded: purchase of slave, a slave girl and a vacant lot, as well as a division of inheritance.

The neighbours were a wealthy family of goldsmiths living in a house with the walls in the rooms nicely red-painted. Their archive (N 33) covered slightly fewer years than the last mentioned archive (N 32), but contained 84 texts. In addition to the documents concerning loans and purchase and the letters, the characteristic texts were a group of lists probably for the internal administration of precious metals belonging to the family.
Figure 3 — The southern, best preserved, area with private houses above the ruined New Palace. The findspots of archives N 16, 17, 18, 20 and 21 are marked in Houses Nos. 5, 9, 12, 15 and 20, respectively. From ALA II, Figure 12.
It seems possible, at least for some periods and places, to establish a typical area for the preservation of a family archive, namely in or next to the inner room, which had the graves under the floor. However, any typical content of such a family archive does not seem to be so simple to establish. Some types of texts like documents on loans or purchase are common, but the individual needs of the owners of the archives are decisive for making up the family archive. Sometimes the family had capital and could give loans or make investments — sometimes this was not the case; only in the first case we find loan documents. In some families it was necessary to write documents on division of inheritance — in other families such divisions could be done without documentation. We should not forget that even if in some periods and in some places perhaps one-third of the private houses contained family archives, the individual archives often deal with different matters. Transactions documented in one family archive were not documented in another, and of course not in the remaining two-thirds of the houses.