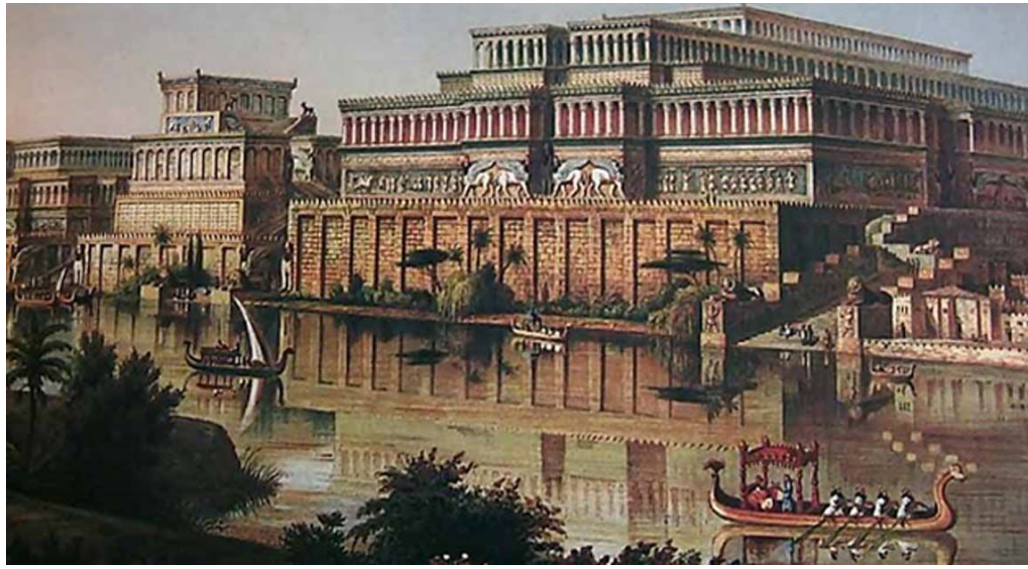


The Library at Nineveh

M. Laffey

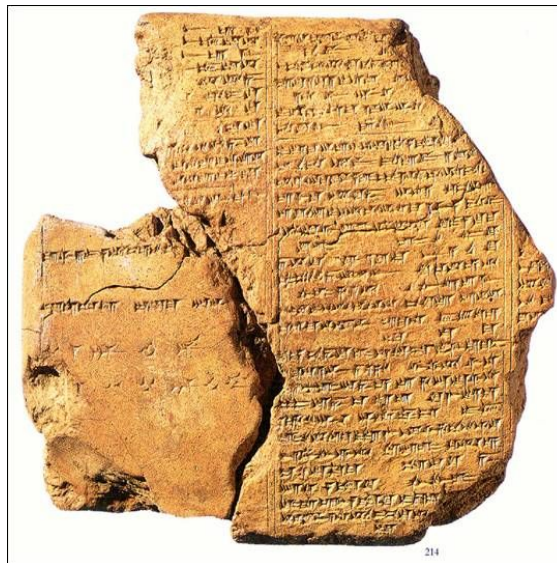
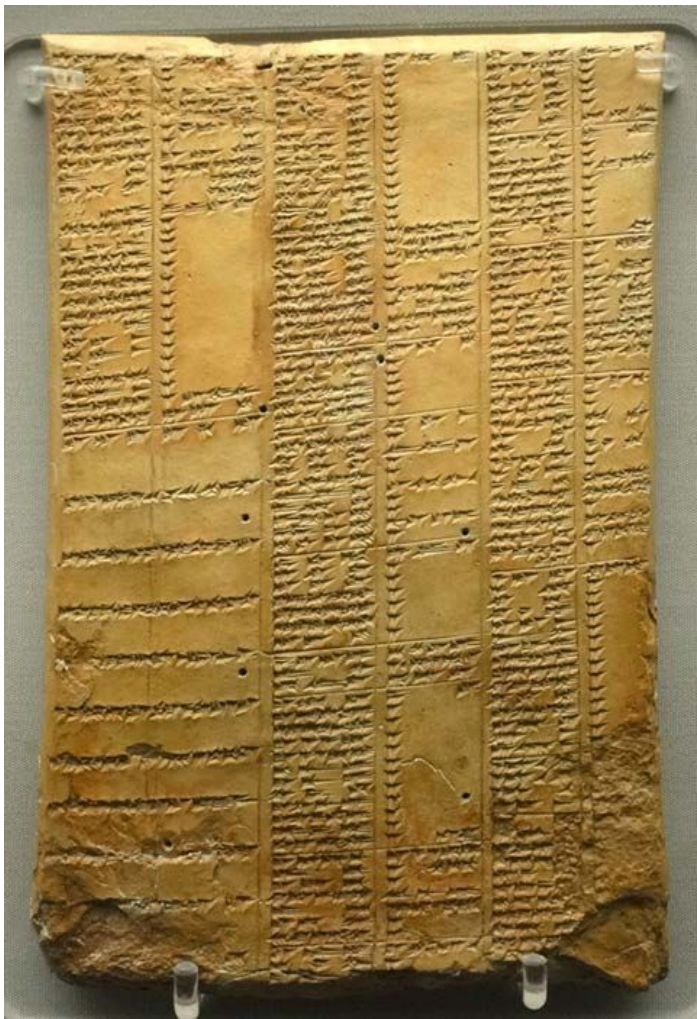
What is it? Where and how long did it stand for?

- The Library at Nineveh, a.k.a the Library of Ashurbanipal, is the oldest surviving royal library.
- It was found in the ancient city Nineveh, which is surrounded by Mosul, Iraq.
- It was built sometime during Ashurbanipal's reign, which was 668 to 630 BCE.
- Some of the ruins from the library are still standing but much of it has been worn away by natural causes.



What was contained in it?

- This library was the closest to modern day libraries of all the ancient ones, in terms of organization. It was categorized by subject.
- 30,000 cuneiform tablets of historical accounts letters, administrative/legal texts, and those related to divinatory, magical, medical, literary, and dictionary writings. You may be familiar with the “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” a famous old legend, which was also held within this library.
- In rooms deep underground, objects retrieved by spies and extremely important documents were stored.
- The clay tablets allowed information to survive longer, allowing current historians to have an insight into that era. Many clay tablets had such small writing that a magnifying glass was needed to read the cuneiform.



When were the ruins discovered?

- The remains were originally lost and rediscovered in the 19th century.
- The British Museum was in charge of the excavations at the site at Nineveh, during the 1850's.
- The discovery is credited to Sir Austen Henry Layard, a British archeologist.
- Excavations continued until the 1930's, but currently there is an organization called Ashurbanipal Library Project. At the University of Mosul in Iraq, a team of archeologists are working to restore and recreate the writings and objects contained in the ancient library.



^ The reconstructed library
< The ruins of the library



What were the famous works housed here?

- As mentioned on the first slide, The Epic of Gilgamesh was contained in this library. It was said to be the main work of literature that influenced the writings in the bible.
- It was written anonymously and dates back to 2100 BCE, and was in the Sumerian language. It was a collection of poems and legends all surrounding the hero Gilgamesh.
- Hammurabi's code was also stored in the Library of Ashurbanipal. It was composed in the 18th century, and was a set of 282 laws. It favored many forms of brutal punishment for offenses such as if a father hit a son, the son must have his hand "hewn off."
- These laws also differed from each social class and gender. An example is that men were allowed to have multiple relationships with multiple women, but women were forbidden to have any other relationship with a man other than her husband.

The original text of the Epic of Gilgamesh; and engravings of it.

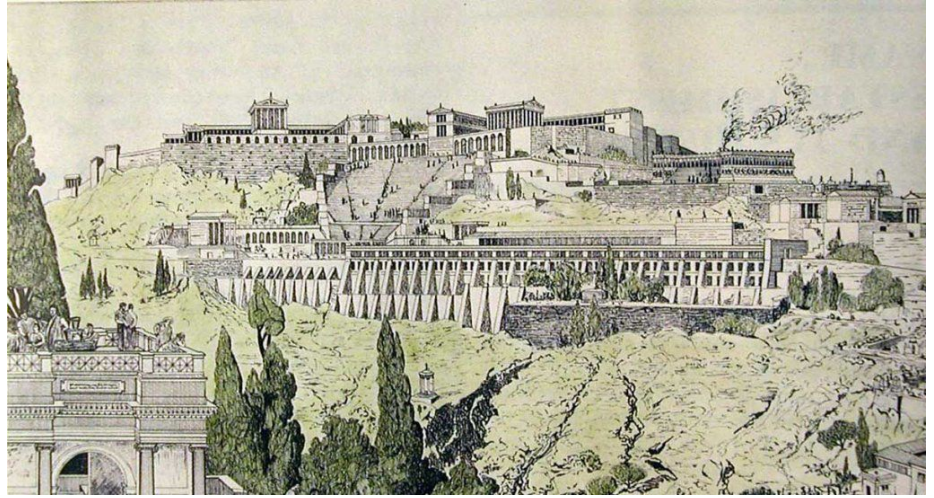


What were some other ancient libraries?

- **The Library of Alexandria:** Following Alexander the Great's death in 323 BCE, Ptolemy I Soter became new leader and constructed the library. It may have contained over 500,000 papyrus scrolls. It was burned in 48 BCE by Julius Caesar.
- **The Library of Pergamum:** Constructed where present day Turkey is in the 3rd century BCE, it held over 200,000 scrolls and was considered competition for the Library of Alexandria. A legend says that leaders in ancient Egypt stopped papyrus shipments to Pergamum in efforts to stop its library's growth.
- **The Libraries of Trajan's Forum:** Emperor Trajan built this library in the center of Rome. There were two separate buildings, one for Greek works and the other for Latin works. It most likely stood for at least 300 years, but only ruins are left now.
- **The House of Wisdom:** Located in Baghdad and established in the 9th century AD, it was the center for many texts from Persia, India, and Greece. When it was ransacked in 1258 by the Mongols, the Tigris River supposedly turned black from the ink of the books thrown into the river.



The Library of Alexandria burning



Library of Pergamum



The Libraries of Trojan's Forum



House of Wisdom

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