Entries in the personal journal of Ea-nasir, a scribe in the court of Ashurbanipal

Tomorrow is an auspicious day. A new moon will appear, and I will begin the task of sorting and organizing the tablets and scrolls captured by General Belshunu in his war with the lands to the East. Mattaki has asked me to pay close attention to any writings on the subject of the magic arts, and to set them aside for his review. The king’s sorcerers work tirelessly to learn new magic, that they may divine the future, change the nature of things, strike at our enemies, and win favor among rulers of other lands by their knowledge.

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Today I and the other scribes assigned to the task finished counting the new tablets and scrolls. We have 157 new texts to add to the house of the rolls. Honoring Mattaki’s request, I will concentrate first on the works devoted to magic. Science and medicine will come next, then legends and history.

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This morning I devoted to creating a new tablet that will serve as a record of the newest texts in the house of rolls. I first sent a slave for the clay, and then directed him to roll out a tablet one cubit long, half a cubit wide, and half again as thick as his finger. Then, with a wooden stylus I recorded each tablet or scroll on my list, and added to the back of each the standard warnings regarding theft or mistreatment of materials before sending a younger scribe in training to place it in the appropriate room and location in the house of rolls. Mattaki, true to form, was hovering eagerly in the nook devoted to books on magic, eagerly reviewing each new scroll as it was delivered to its new resting place. At the end of the day, the new records tablet was sent to the kiln to be fired before being placed with the other catalog tablets and scrolls next to the statues of Dagon that guard the entrance to the house of rolls.

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This morning all cataloguing work was ceased. Abi-simti, a favorite concubine of Ashurbanipal, has fallen ill with a fever. All learned men and practitioners of medicine have been ordered to assist in finding a cure. I spent the day guiding doctors to records on medicine as they researched ways to help the sick woman. By evening her fever had broken, and many doctors are now claiming credit for the cure.

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Today I resumed my work in cataloguing the new additions to the house of rolls. I filled another tablet with lists of works related to legends and history. Ammi-ditana, the chief scribe in charge of the house of rolls, has promised a day without work tomorrow owing to the task of organizing the new additions to the collection being finished.

On my day of rest I was back in the house of rolls, reading the legends that are my favorite things to read, and chatting with students on a variety of topics. I read again in the Enuma Elish. I love to think about the ancient times when humans were first created. I don’t know if I believe in the stories in the tablets, but they are entertaining. When I think about the old people I wonder if they had written stories, and if any of them were scribes like me. Tomorrow I must go to the market to buy papyrus, ingredients for ink, and food, but today is a day for relaxing and thinking.