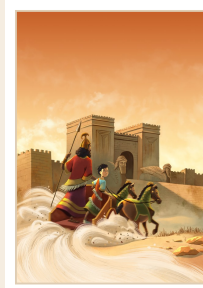


THE SECRET OF THE ROYAL LIBRARY

Book One of The Mesopotamian Adventures of Iskander Wood



Jamie Watt · Between the Rivers Press · iskanderwood.com

This book was written to be read out loud, a chapter at a time. Everything in here is for doing that well.

WHAT IS IN HERE

- 2 Words from the book** Twenty-five of them, defined the way the book uses them.
- 3 Questions for the table** Nine, for when the book is finished.
- 4-5 Both maps** Bailey Vidler's Iraq and Nineveh maps, sized to print at home.
- 6 Assyrian numbers** The key to the cuneiform chapter numbers in the book.
- 7-8 Write your name in cuneiform** The way an Assyrian scribe would have written it, which is not the same as spelling it.
- 9 More history in the book** Seven smaller things in the story that really happened.
- 10 Notes for the grown-up** A little more about cuneiform, for whoever is running the table.



MEMENTO VIVERE

Remember to live. The words on Iskander's medallion.

Printing. Prints in colour or in black and white, whichever you have. Sized for US Letter. Print it one-sided, because pages 6 and 8 get written on.

Permission. Print and photocopy this freely for your own family, classroom or co-op. Please link to iskanderwood.com rather than posting the file elsewhere.

WORDS FROM THE BOOK

Twenty-five words your reader may be meeting for the first time, each one defined the way the book uses it.

alcove A small recess set back from a room. The one at Mar Mattai says Monks Only.

aqueduct A bridge that carries water instead of people.

bazaar A market of many small stalls, covered over. Erbil has one and so does Nineveh.

calligraphy Distinctive handwriting. Nigel calls the obelisk script a strange calligraphy.

campaign A season of war. Esarhaddon dies on campaign, on the road to Egypt.

catacomb An underground passage or chamber, often used for burial.

conical Cone-shaped. Iskander is handed a small conical hat to wear.

conquest Taking land by force. Ashurbanipal says his heart is not in it.

cuneiform The oldest known writing, pressed into soft clay with a cut reed.

emissary Someone sent to speak or act on a ruler's behalf.

inscription Words cut into stone or pressed into clay so they last.

lamassu A winged bull or lion with a human head, set at a gate to guard it.

limestone A pale stone soft enough to carve. The obelisk is black limestone.

magistrate An official who hears disputes and decides them. Hinno and Hanna face them.

obelisk A tall four-sided stone pillar narrowing to a point.

pilgrimage A journey made to a holy place. Schmoni's family goes every year.

procession A formal line of people moving together, usually so everyone can watch.

quay A landing place along a river where boats tie up. Say it "key".

rebellion Rising against a ruler. Ashurbanipal's own brother leads one.

relief A carving cut so figures stand out from a flat wall. Watch for the other relief in the book, the one that means a weight lifting off you.

scribe Someone whose work is writing. In Assyria that made you powerful.

siege Surrounding a city and waiting, to force it to give in.

stylus The cut reed a scribe pressed into clay to make the wedges.

tribute Goods a conquered people sent their ruler every year.

tunic A loose garment like a long shirt, usually belted.

There is a fuller glossary of people, places and gods in the back of the book, on page 197.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TABLE

For when the book is finished. Not a worksheet: nobody has to answer all nine, and there is no answer key because there are no answers. Pick the two that suit the kid in front of you.

- 1 At the very beginning, Iskander imagines a crowd chanting his name. What does he want most when the book opens?

- 2 Iskander doesn't like history at first. What changes his mind? Was there one exact moment, or did it happen slowly?

- 3 Is Ashurbanipal a villain, a hero, or something in between?

- 4 Naqia, the grandmother, wants Ashurbanipal to focus on strength and spectacle instead of his library. Do you understand why? Is she wrong?

- 5 Ashurbanipal built an amazing library but also burned other people's cities and books. Can someone do great things and terrible things at the same time?

- 6 Iskander meets people who were taken from their homes and brought to Nineveh. What do you think their lives were like in the city?

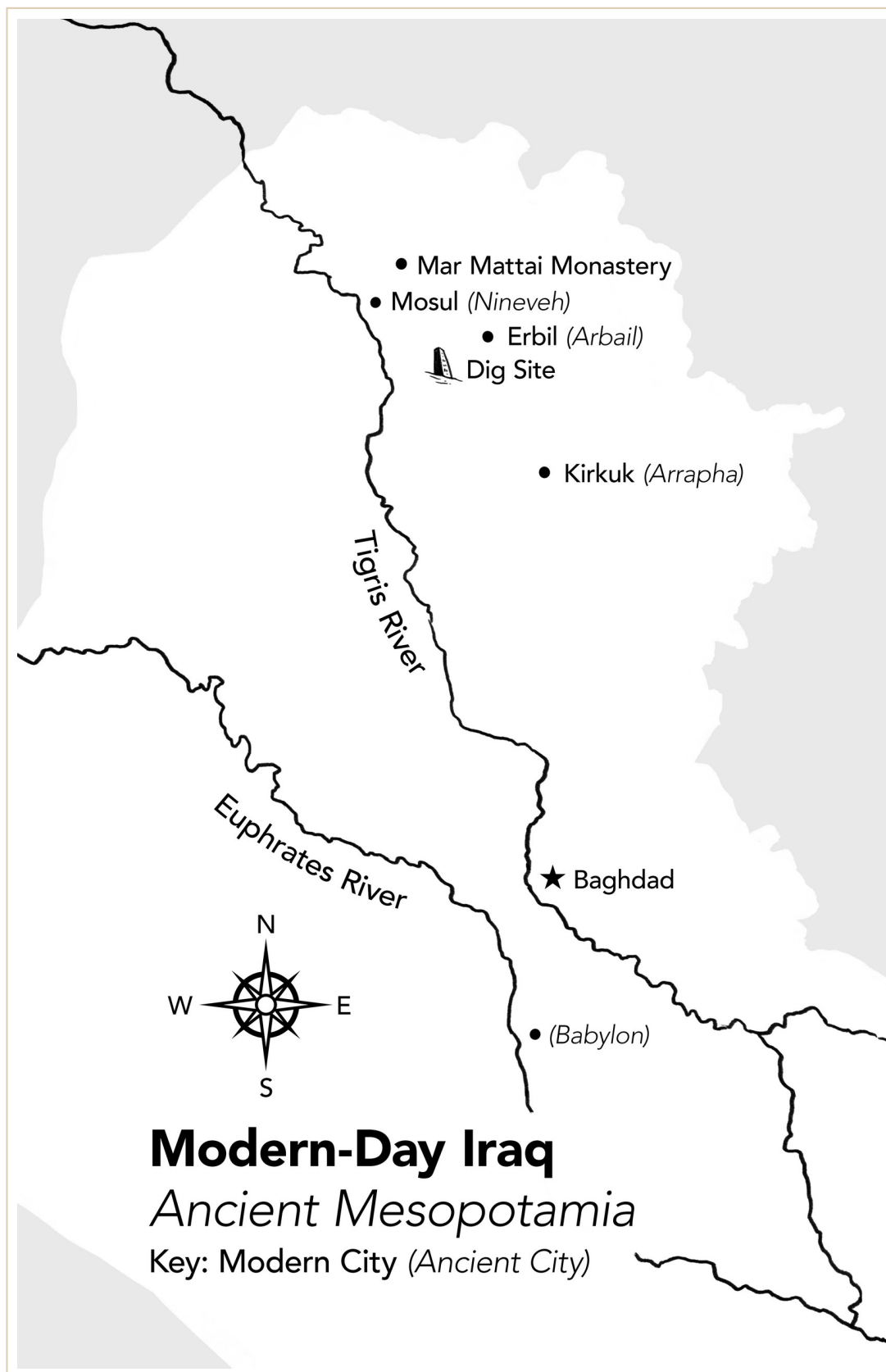
- 7 The medallion reads "Memento Vivere," remember to live. By the end, what does Iskander decide it means?

- 8 Raban Gorgis tells Iskander that the person who changed wasn't the king, it was Iskander. Were you expecting that? Why do you think the story doesn't let Iskander fix the past?

- 9 Iskander keeps a medallion that takes him "to the moment that needs him." If yours could take you to any moment in history, where would you go, and why?

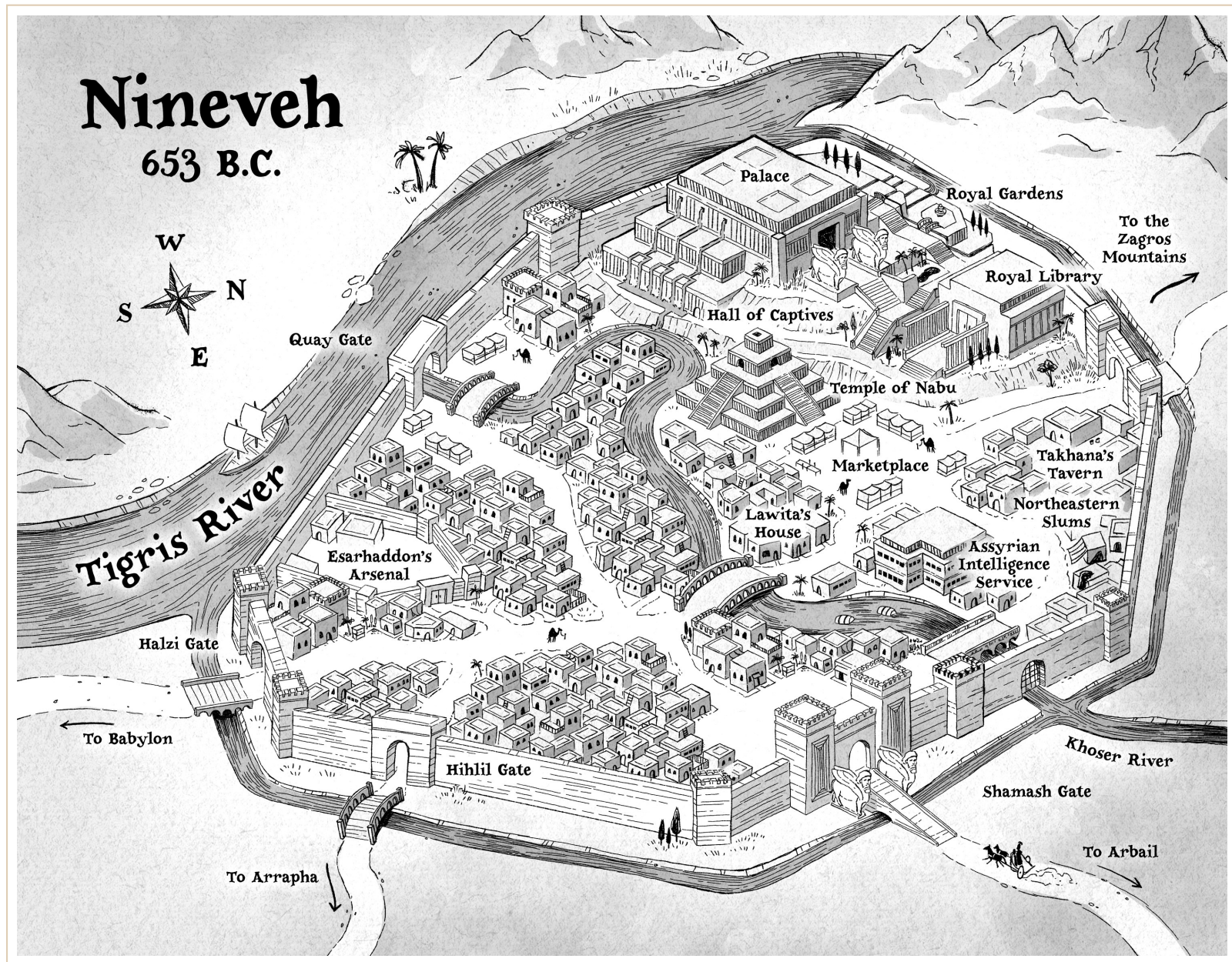
MODERN IRAQ, ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

Iskander lives in Erbil, which the Assyrians called Arbail. Nineveh is under modern Mosul. Mar Mattai is the monastery in chapter 2. Map by Bailey Vidler.



NINEVEH, 653 BC

Bailey Vidler drew this city from the book. Lawita's house, the Royal Library, the Hall of the Captives and Takhana's tavern are all places Iskander ends up.



ASSYRIAN NUMBERS

The mark at the start of every chapter in the book is not decoration. It is that chapter’s number, written the way a scribe in Nineveh wrote numbers. Up to fifty-nine, the whole system is two marks.



ONE

A thin vertical wedge, pressed straight down.



TEN

A wide corner wedge, pressed in from the side.

One to nine • stack them in rows of three



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9

Tens • keep stacking corner wedges



10



20



30

A scribe just kept going. Fifty is five corner wedges.

Together • tens first, then ones



12



25



33

Turn to chapter 25 in the book and compare. It is the same mark, because it is the same number.

Your turn • anything from 1 to 59

your age

the chapter you stopped at

people in your house

Past fifty-nine the Assyrians counted in sixties rather than tens, which is why an hour still has sixty minutes and a circle three hundred and sixty degrees.

WRITE YOUR NAME IN CUNEIFORM

Cuneiform is not an alphabet. A sign does not stand for a letter; it stands for a whole syllable, like ba or ki. So there is no way to spell an English name across letter by letter. What Assyrian scribes did instead is more interesting.

Their records are full of foreign names, and the method was always the same: listen to the name, find the closest syllables Assyrian had, and write those down. The name came out sounding a little Assyrian. That is not a mistake in the method, that is the method, and it is what you are about to do.

FOUR STEPS

1 Say your name out loud and break it into chunks that each end in a vowel.

Emma is e-ma. Sophia is su-pi-a. Every sign on the chart ends in a vowel, so your name will too.

2 Swap any sound Assyrian did not have for the nearest one it did.

See the box below.

3 Find each chunk on the chart on the next page and copy its wedges.

Left to right, in the order you say them.

4 Put the person-mark in front.

One wedge for a man's name, the other for a woman's. Scribes did this so a reader would know a name was coming.

Sounds Assyrian did not have

o	use u
f	use p
v	use b
th	use t
ch	use sh
w	use u
j	use i plus a vowel, so Jay is i-a
e	five e signs exist; if yours is not one, use i

Worked out

Emma	e-ma
Noah	nu-ha
Grace	ga-ra-si
Levi	li-bi
Sophia	su-pi-a
Daniel	da-ni-lu
Jacob	i-a-ku-bu

Longer, and a bit more Assyrian. That is the right answer, not a wrong one. There is more than one right answer, too: scribes spelled the same name several different ways.

The person-mark · goes first, before the syllables



before a man's name



before a woman's name

Finished · what you are aiming at



Emma woman's mark, then e-ma



Levi man's mark, then li-bi

THE CHART, AND A TABLET TO WRITE ON

	a	i	u		a	i	u
–							
b				n			
d				p			–
g				r			
h				s			
k				sh		–	
l				t			
m				z			

e sounds					
	e	me	ne	she	te

Those five only. For any other e, use the i sign.

Two squares are empty. When the chunk you need is not here, use the nearest sound that is. An Assyrian scribe writing down a foreign name did exactly that.

This is a starter set of the simplest signs. A scribe in the Royal Library also had signs for syllables that end in a consonant, and several hundred more that stand for a whole word. Balasi ran the Royal Library. You are getting the first hour.

Your tablet · person-mark first, then your syllables, left to right

Write your name in pencil first. Scribes worked in soft clay for the same reason.

MORE HISTORY IN THE BOOK

The twelve Fun Facts at the back of the book are the big ones. These are smaller things, easy to read straight past, that really happened.

1 **A feast for 69,574** CHAPTER 19

Ashurbanipal boasts that one of his ancestors fed nearly 70,000 people. He did. A carved stone found at Nimrud in 1951 records King Ashurnasirpal II feeding 69,574 guests for ten days to celebrate his new palace.

2 **A king who could read** CHAPTER 7

The young Ashurbanipal says he is learning Sumerian, Akkadian and texts from before the Flood. The real king boasted of the same thing in his own inscription: that he had studied difficult Sumerian and Akkadian, and inspected writing on stones from before the flood.

3 **King of the Universe** CHAPTERS 7, 12 AND 18

It sounds like bragging, and it was, but it was also his official title. Tablets in his library were stamped: palace of Ashurbanipal, king of the universe, king of Assyria.

4 **The queen in the garden** CHAPTER 20

The carved garden feast Iskander sees shows a queen raising a cup beside the king. Historians think she is probably Libbali-sharrat, the same queen who sits beside Ashurbanipal in the book.

5 **Lachish** CHAPTER 17

When a soldier sneers about Lachish, he means a real city. Sennacherib's army besieged it in 701 BC and carved the whole siege across the walls of his palace at Nineveh. Those carvings are now in the British Museum, and the siege appears in the Bible too, in 2 Kings 18.

6 **Esarhaddon's arsenal** CHAPTER 29

The arsenal where Hadi's partner sold their goods was a real building. The hill it stood on in Mosul is still called Nebi Yunus, which means the prophet Jonah, after a shrine to Jonah built on top. Nigel jokes about Jonah in chapter 1.

7 **Two real gates** CHAPTERS 13, 14 AND 24

The Halzi Gate and the Shamash Gate were real gates in Nineveh's wall. The Shamash Gate faced east, onto the road to Arbela, the old name of Erbil, where Iskander lives.

The twelve Fun Facts are on page 205 of the book.

NOTES FOR THE GROWN-UP

Already in the book

The book has a Glossary on page 197, a Timeline on page 203, and twelve Fun Facts on page 205. Nothing from them is repeated in here, so keep the book to hand.

Why the cuneiform pages work the way they do

Cuneiform is not an alphabet. A sign stands for a whole syllable, like ba or ki, not for a letter. So a name cannot be swapped across from English one letter at a time, however much a child would like it to.

Assyrian scribes ran into this constantly, because their records are full of foreign names. Their method was to listen to the name, find the nearest syllables Assyrian had, and write those. The name came out sounding a little Assyrian. That is what page 7 asks a child to do, and it is the same thing that happens to Iskander in the book when Ashurbanipal renames him Iskand-ki-Ashur.

Three things to say when a child asks

There is more than one right answer, because scribes spelled the same name several different ways. The signs spell how a name sounds, not what it means. And the chart holds only the simplest signs, so when a syllable is not on it, reaching for the nearest sound is the correct move rather than a failure. That is the whole lesson in one move.

Which parts really happened

Ashurbanipal, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Naqia, Balasi and Te-umman were real people. So are the Royal Library, the lion hunts, the aqueduct at Jerwan and the carved garden scene, and much of it can still be seen, in the British Museum or in Iraq. Iskander is invented, and so are Schmoni, Lawita, Shabo, Takhana and Hadi. The glossary in the book marks which is which.

Reading the chapter numbers

Fun Fact 1 in the back of the book points a reader at the cuneiform number on each chapter opening and invites them to work it out. Page 6 here is the key. It is worth letting a child do a few from the book before handing it over.



BOOK TWO

Iskander's story continues. News of the next book, and anything else made for families reading this one, goes up at iskanderwood.com.