

Seleucid Tablets from Uruk in the British Museum

Text Editions and Commentary

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Introduction

Between the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century the British Museum acquired as part of its cuneiform collections 120 economic tablets from Uruk dating to the Seleucid period. With the exception of eight contracts that had been excavated by Loftus in Warka, the tablets were acquired through the antiquities market (see below, chapter 1).

Five of the Loftus tablets were published in 1877 by Oppert and Ménant (Oppert, Ménant 1877), and re-edited and collated by Doty in 1977 with the addition of BM 30118, whose photograph had already been appended to Krückmann's dissertation (but not included in the printed version of 1931).

In 2005, as part of my study of the prebend system of Uruk in the Seleucid period (Corò 2005a), I re-transliterated and translated the six Loftus tablets plus a seventh one, also belonging to the Loftus group, and twenty-nine more of those from the antiquities market, all of which had prebends as their subject.¹ BM 114408 (published here as **No. 96-RE**) was then transliterated and translated in my study of the *bit ritti*-system in 2012. The rest of the tablets remain previously unpublished and form the object of this book.²

I first came across one of the Seleucid tablets by chance many years ago. In fact, when copying tablets at the (then) Western Asiatic Department of the British Museum, I identified BM 78967 (= **No. 25-P**), catalogued in the Sippar collection, as a prebend contract from Seleucid Uruk: the whole group was then kindly brought to my attention by the then curator of the Tablet collections Christopher Walker, to whom is owed my deepest debt of gratitude.

As will be amply elucidated below, these tablets do not form a proper collection. However, for the sake of convenience, I will refer to them in the following as 'the Seleucid collection from Uruk in the BM' or simply as 'the BM collection'. This group consists largely of private documents (only title deeds for prebends and real estate and one receipt for silver are attested amongst the BM collection), to which four administrative tablets can be added. The tablets in the BM collection, with about 600 more, scattered through the collections of museums and institutions all over the world,³ form the corpus of the economic documents from Hellenistic Uruk.

As is true for the contracts originating in clandestine excavations in other collections, it is likely that also the contracts in the BM collection, though private documents in origin, were stored in the Rēš temple for safekeeping, presumably near the gate room at the north-east entrance.⁴ The administrative documents, however, might stem from the Rēš temple archive proper (see below, chapter 5).

The aim of this book is to offer an analysis of the collection (Part I), accompanied by an edition of the tablets (Part II). After examining the collection's acquisition history by the British Museum (chapter 1), I explore the physical characteristics of the tablets (chapter 2) which belong to what Oelsner described as the 'most spectacular Hellenistic archives available today', and I offer an overview of the collection's content (chapter 3). The particular nature of the corpus from Hellenistic Uruk indicates that it did not form true archives: the discussion in the following chapters is therefore arranged thematically, covering the four main topics dealt with in the contracts: arable land (chapter 4), urban properties (chapter 5), and temple prebends (chapter 6), with the administrative tablets being treated in chapter 7. Particular attention is paid to the role played by specific families, individuals or groups in each area of interest, as well as to the ownership patterns and business strategies that characterised

1 Note that only lines 1-16 of BM 116692 (= **No. 98-P**) were included in Corò 2005a.

2 Note that it was not possible to include here the edition of BM 105180, one of the 120 tablets that form the collection, since the tablet was apparently sent to conservation at a given point after which it disappeared from its box.

3 Oelsner 1986, pp. 138-239; for an updated survey of this material see Jursa 2005, pp. 138-140 and more recently Monerie 2014, pp. 25-29 and Monerie 2018, pp. 12-15.

4 According to Baker (2013a, pp. 39-40) this perhaps happened at the time of the Parthian invasion. See below, § 1.4.

the activities of the parties to the documents. The discussion of the scribes occurring in the collection (chapter 8) is conceived as a case-study to test the significance of cultural and family background as well as the network of professionals charged with compiling the documents.

The editions of the tablets (Part II) are arranged in chronological order. Tablets whose dates are not preserved but which can be assigned to an approximate date range are placed among the dated tablets before those whose date is later than the given range.

Each text is identified with a number, followed by an indication of its type (RE for real estate; AL for arable land; S for silver; P for prebend; ADM for administrative tablets) or types (e.g. ALP for arable land and prebend); the tablet's format is recorded according to the classification suggested in Corò forthcoming a. The bibliographical section refers to the previous edition of a tablet in the few applicable cases; it also includes reference to recent works that may quote from tablets in the collection.

In the translations, witnesses (W) are listed according to their order of appearance (e.g. W2 for the second witness in the list) on the reverse of the tablet, followed by the reference to the location of their seal impression on the edges (when available), and to the seal impression's drawings published in Mitchell, Searight 2008, when available. Systematic discussion of the identification of their images as proposed by Mitchell, Searight 2008 and about their correspondence with those on tablets belonging to different collections in the corpus from Hellenistic Uruk is beyond the scope of the present work, and has been developed here only occasionally. When the names of the witnesses can only be established on the basis of the captions of the seal impressions, these are listed after the witness list (and labelled 'witnesses from the edges').

The translation of the date formula is followed by a summary section listing the parties to the contracts (sellers, buyers, lessees, lessors etc) and the owners of neighbouring properties (where applicable; note that also topographical features bordering the main property are listed in these sections). When a property is subdivided into different contiguous blocks a -I or -II following the name of the owner indicates which block is being taken into consideration. The names of all the individuals mentioned in the texts are usually schematised in the form $PN_1/PN_2/(PN_3)//FN$, where PN_1 stands for the name of the individual; the following PNs after the patronym indicate the various degree of filiation (no distinction is made in the translations between the use of *dumu šá* or a *šá* for the filiation), which usually does not extend beyond four tiers; the family name or clan name is usually preceded by //. Sometimes scribes list all the individuals with the same patronym and/or family name in a sequence before the patronym or family name: this is usually reflected in the translation by the use of a + between their names (e.g. W1+W2 or seller1+seller2).⁵ Tablets are classified according to the dossiers (either family-related or thematic) relevant for their discussion; a commentary follows.

Already published tablets are included in the text editions section: the transliteration and translation of these texts is not re-published here (reference is made to the original publication); however, witnesses, scribes and parties to the contract are usually listed, as well as any information on collations or corrections that appeared since their publication. A short commentary to the text is usually provided. Since neither photographs nor hand-copies of the already edited tablets were included in Corò 2005a and Corò 2012, they are presented here in the Plates section, where also new photographs of the tablets belonging to the Loftus group are provided.

Photographs of eighteen tablets were acquired through the British Museum Photographic Service in 2001,⁶ thanks to the financial support of the research grant 'Progetto Giovani Ricercatori - anno 2000', of the then MIUR.⁷ Jon Taylor kindly photographed for me the tablets edited below as Nos. 9-P, 13-P and the edges of Nos. 15-AL and 46-RE; all remaining photographs are my own. A list of the photographs made by the British Museum Photographic Service is provided at the end of this book. All are published here by the kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

⁵ This is in general avoided when more than three individuals are listed together, in order to make the translation more easily readable.

⁶ Apparently upon D. Kennedy's request. Before he died, Kennedy was originally planning to work on the collection but he never brought the project to an end (Christopher Walker, personal communication).

⁷ The list of the photographs made by the British Museum Photographic Service is provided at the end of this book.

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