

Seleucid Tablets from Uruk in the British Museum

Text Editions and Commentary

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1 The Collection

The Babylonian Collection of Cuneiform Tablets housed in the British Museum includes 120 tablets (and a few fragments) consisting mainly of contracts and (a few) administrative documents from Uruk (modern Warka), dating to the Seleucid period.¹ The tablets were accessioned by the British Museum between 1849 and 1924. Most of them were acquired through the antiquities market; only a few were unearthed in Warka during regular excavations.

1.1 The ‘Loftus tablets’ and the Fragments from Kuyunjik

The core of the collection are eight tablets excavated by Sir W.K. Loftus in Warka during his work “in connection with the Turco-Persian frontier Commission in 1849-1852, under the orders of Colonel (then Major-General) Sir W.F. Williams of Kasr”; they represent the first examples of Hellenistic contracts from Uruk accessioned by the Museum.²

The tablets officially entered the Museum in 1856 and are registered as part of the 56-9-3 collection, where they represent a small discrete group bearing numbers from 1513 to 1520. In the general process of re-numbering of the collections ordered by Budge between 1897 and 1905, they were also assigned ‘BM numbers’ 30117 to 30120, 93002 to 93004 and 139437 respectively; some of them bear a W. prefix, too.³

Oppert and Ménant published five of these tablets in 1877 (namely, BM 30117, 30120, and 93002-93004).⁴ BM 30119 was transliterated and translated by the present author in 2005; a photograph of BM 30118 was included by Krückmann in his original dissertation (but not appended to its typed

1 They are studied here thanks to the kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum. I wish to thank Dr. Jonathan Taylor, Assistant Keeper of the Dept. of the Middle East, for his kind assistance during my visits to the Museum. I came across the first tablet of this group by chance in 1998, when on my first year of my PhD at the Università degli Studi di Firenze I spent a semester as an affiliated research student at the Dept. of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, UCL, under the guidance of Prof. Markham J. Geller. On first practising to copy tablets at the (then) WAA Department of the British Museum, I identified the one tablet catalogued in the Sippar collection under BM 78967 (= **No. 25-P**) as a Seleucid prebend contract from Uruk; the whole group was then kindly brought to my attention by Christopher Walker, to whom is owed my deepest debt of gratitude for the help he offered me over the years.

2 Loftus 1857, p. v. His discovery was officially announced at the Annual Meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society in May 1854, as recorded in its 16th Annual Report. Colonel Rawlinson was expected to attend the Meeting and submit an “account of the progress of his discoveries” of the preceding 12 months of activities; however - as the Report goes - ‘political events’ did not permit him to be in London when planned, so that a brief summary of his personal communication was offered on his behalf by Mr. Norris. On the occasion, he refers to the Royal Asiatic Society of a “further curious discovery made by Colonel Rawlinson”, i.e. “that the employment of the Babylonian cuneiform writing was continued down at least so low as the time of the Macedonian domination in Asia, the commencement of the third century, B.C.”. He continues: “This appears to be ascertained from a hasty examination of some tablets found at Warka by Mr. Loftus, which reached Colonel Rawlinson a couple of days before he sent off his last letter. These are merely notices of benefactions to the temples of Warka, but the royal names upon the tablets, which Colonel Rawlinson incloses, are unmistakeably those of Seleucus and Antiochus”. (Rawlinson 1856, p. xv). The find of the tablets is enthusiastically described by Loftus in the report of the excavations he carried out in Warka between 1849 and 1854 (Loftus 1857, pp. 229-233).

3 On the reasons for the attribution of BM numbers to the tablet collections in general and on the specific range of numbers attributed to those of the ‘Loftus group’, see the Introduction to Leichty 1986 by J. Reade, esp. on pp. xxviii-xxix. Also, Mitchell, Searight 2008, p. 18. On the system regulating the attribution of serial (or ‘five or six figures’) numbers (also known as ‘BM numbers’) and date numbers (also known as ‘registration’ or ‘collection’ numbers), see e.g. Mitchell, Searight 2008, p. 3). Loftus tablets marked W. include 93002=W.111 (= **No. 44-P**); 30119=W.68 (= **No. 47-P**); 93003=W.112 (= **No. 55-P**); 93004=W.114 (= **No. 106-P**); 30120, marked W. but no number following (= **No. 67-P**).

4 Oppert, Ménant 1877 (see also Corò 2005a, pp. 154-158; pp. 160-162; pp. 199-201; pp. 375-376; pp. 378-380). Photographs of these tablets are included below as Plates XXV, LXVII, XLIV, LIV and CVI.

copy): the first transliteration of this text appeared in Doty's dissertation.⁵

The fragments registered as BM 139437, still unpublished, are edited below (see **No. 115-P**); they are 'presumed to belong' to the 56-9-3 collection.⁶

Two small fragments (K. 11800 and K. 4790) registered within the Kuyunjik collection may be added to this group. Due to the particular nature of the materials included in this collection (the so-called 'Layard materials'), the information on their provenance is not reliable;⁷ however, both are undoubtedly fragments of Hellenistic tablets from Uruk. One of them, K. 11800, joins BM 30118: a new edition of the now complete tablet will be found below (see **No. 8-P**).⁸

K. 4790 (**No. 107-?**) is an unassociated fragment, preserving part of the witness list and the date formula of a document dating to the reign of Demetrius.⁹ Its description is included here for no other reason except its belonging to the same collection as K. 11800.

All the extant tablets come from the antiquities market. They are variously distributed among the Bu 89-4-26 collection (1 tablet); the 1913-4-16 (43 tablets); the 1914-4-4 (39 tablets); the 1920-6-15 (20 tablets) and the 1924-12-13 (7 tablets) collections.

1.2 Tablets in the Bu 89-4-26 Collection

BM 78967 (Bu 89-4-26, 252; = **No. 25-P**) arrived at the British Museum on April 1889 as part of Budge's purchases during his third mission to Iraq on behalf of the British Museum.¹⁰ Apparently the tablets in this collection included texts from Kuyunjik, Abu Habbah (Sippar), Tell ed-Der and Borsippa (Birs Nimrud) and other sites in the Diyala region: the recorded provenance of the subgroup including BM 78967 (= **No. 25-P**) is 'Babylonia'. It is likely one of those later tablets included in the Sippar collection that Walker describes as 'from Babylon or its vicinity'.¹¹

1.3 Tablets Bought from the Antiquities Dealer Gejou

The tablets appertaining to the 1912-7-6, 1913-4-16; 1914-4-4, 1920-6-15 and 1924-12-13 collections were all purchased by the British Museum from the French antiquities dealer J.E. Gejou between 1912 and 1924.¹²

⁵ Oelsner 1986, pp. 148-149. Krückmann 1931; Doty 1977, p. 416-418; see also Corò 2005a, pp. 199-201. The correspondence between BM numbers, Oppert and Ménant's edition and Loftus' numbers is recorded as follows by Oelsner (1986, p. 149): Oppert I = BM 30117 = Loftus 2; Oppert II = BM 93002 = Loftus 3; Oppert III = BM 93003 = Loftus 4; Oppert IV = BM 30120 (no Loftus number); Oppert V = BM 93004 = Loftus 1. Mitchell and Searight, on the basis of the description of the tablets in Loftus' report, convincingly suggest to identify Oppert III = BM 93003 (= **No. 55-P**) with Loftus 3; Oppert II = BM 93002 (**No. 44-P**) with Loftus 4; BM 30118+ (= **No. 8-P**) is tentatively identified with Loftus 5. Moreover, BM 30120 (= **No. 67-P**), BM 30119 (= **No. 47-P**) and the fragments registered as 139437 (= **No. 107-?**) might correspond to the 'three remaining tablets' mentioned by Loftus in his report: Mitchell, Searight 2008, p. 205 (#671); p. 213 (#695); p. 214 (#698); p. 216 (#704); p. 218 (#708); p. 222 (#717); p. 232 (#746); see Loftus 1857, p. 231. The same correspondences were suggested to me by C.B.F. Walker (personal communication, July 2000).

⁶ C.B.F. Walker, personal communication.

⁷ K. 4790 (= **No. 107-?**) is described in Bezold 1891, p. 662. On the Kuyunjik collection see Reade 1986.

⁸ BM 30119 (= **No. 47-P**): see Corò 2005a, pp. 424-425. BM 30118+ (**No. 8-P**): Doty 1977, pp. 416-418.

⁹ See Oelsner 1986, p. 162.

¹⁰ See Walker's detailed description in Leicthy, Finkelstein, Walker 1988, p. xix. See also Mitchell, Searight 2008, p. 20. It is the fortuitous recognition of BM 78976 as a text from Seleucid Uruk, that originally gave rise to my engagement in the edition of this 'collection'. The tablet is described in Mitchell, Searight 2008, p. 208 but erroneously labelled as BM 105195 (I wish to thank C.B.F. Walker for drawing my attention to the correct identification of this tablet).

¹¹ Leicthy, Finkelstein, Walker 1988, p. xii; see also Walker's remarks on the Hellenistic tablets belonging to the Bu-5-12 collection, on p. xvii.

¹² The same dealer in 1913 sold the Harvard Semitic Museum in 1913 a lot of 305 tablets, among which are two contracts from Uruk dating to the Seleucid period: Wallenfels 1998, p. xi. He also offered tablets to the Louvre (as stated by Borowski in the Introduction to Westenholz 2003; more recently see Frame 2013, pp. 10-13) and between 1900 and 1914 did business with the Russian historian and collector N. Likhachev, selling him most of the tablets, that later entered the collections of

With the exception of nos. 1-44 in the 1913-4-16 collection and of nos. 1-35 in the 1920-6-15 collection, which are explicitly said to come from Warka, there is no indication of the exact provenance of these tablets, that are generally considered to come from 'Babylonia'.¹³

1.3.1 Tablets in the 1912-7-6 Collection

BM 104805 (= **No. 7-P**) is the only tablet in the 1912-7-6 collection dating to the Hellenistic period. Other items registered within the same date-number group are mainly tablets of the Ur III or OB / OAkk. periods.

1.3.2 Tablets in the 1913-4-16 Collection

Tablets from Hellenistic Uruk belonging to the date-number group 1913-4-16 number 43 in total. They include 40 tablets with running numbers between 1 and 41 (i.e. BM 105169 to 105209, except for BM 105195 that is not from Uruk);¹⁴ no. 45 (BM 105213 = **No. 116-ADM**) and nos. 63 and 64 (BM 105231 = **No. 117-ADM** and BM 105232 = **No. 118-ADM**).

Nos. 42-44 and 46 in the sequence (i.e., BM 105210-105212 and 105214), dating to Alexander IV, are already published texts from Larsa that will not be dealt with here.¹⁵

Nos. 45, 63 and 64 are atypical texts, of administrative nature that can, however, be assigned to Seleucid Uruk on the basis of the onomastics of the individuals mentioned in them (see details under **No. 116-ADM**; **No. 117-ADM** and **No. 118-ADM**, below).¹⁶

The extant running numbers in this group, including more than three thousand items, date mainly to the Old Babylonian and Ur III periods.

1.3.3 Tablets in the 1914-4-4 Collection

Three main different groups of tablets from Seleucid Uruk are registered within the 1914-4-4 date-number collection.

The first group includes running numbers from 1 to 31 (also registered as BM 109935 to 109965):¹⁷ both a tablet registered as 1914-4-04 23 and one registered as 23A (BM 109957 = **No. 38-P** and BM 109957A = **No. 15-AL**, respectively) belong in this group; moreover, 1914-4-04 31 is followed by a 31A (i.e. BM 109965 = **No. 41-P** and BM 109965A): this last figure was attributed in 1976 to fragments that were later joined (in 1983) to BM 109964 (= **No. 81-RE**). Thus, the total number of complete tablets adds up to 32. A second group in this collection consists of nos. 34-36 and no. 39 (corresponding to BM 109968-109970 and 109973 = **Nos. 39-P; 46-RE; 72-P and 70-P**); a third

the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg (Damerow, Koslova 2003, § 3; Frame 2013, p. 11). Some of the tablets housed at Yale also came via the antiquities market: for a connection between the antiquities dealer Gejou and the activities of J.P. Morgan, J.B. Nies and A.T. Clay as collectors of cuneiform tablets between 1910 and 1920, see Kuklick 1996, pp. 107-108 and more recently Frame 2013, p. 11. It is clear that Gejou was one of the major suppliers of cuneiform tablets to the European and American collections until 1939. For a detailed profile of his activities see Frame 2013, § 2.2.

13 Mitchell, Searight 2008, p. 21.

14 These are identified here as **Nos. 60-RE; 28-P; 113-RE; 45-RE; 79-RE; 83-P; 108-RE; 42-RE; 58-RE; 40-P; 5-P; 24-P; 90-P; 93-RE; 14-RE; 62-P; 77-P; 89-P; 85-P; 18-P; 13-P; 51-P; 84-P; 17-AL; 52-P; 78-P; 29-P; 53-P; 6-RE; 20-P; 3-RE; 69-P; 23-P; 19-P; 56-P; 68-P; 76-P; 73-P; 64-P**.

15 They are published in Joannès 2001, pp. 249-264.

16 BM 105232, originally believed to be a fake, is part of the small group of tablets that form the administrative file from Hellenistic Uruk. I wish to thank J. Monerie for drawing this tablet to my attention. According to the online catalogue of the British Museum the tablet comes from Senkereh (Larsa): onomastics, however, clearly point to Uruk.

17 These are **Nos. 61-P; 22-P; 36-RE; 32-RE; 49-P; 54-P; 4-P; 48-P; 71-P; 94-P; 63-RE; 31-P; 80-RE; 59-RE; 82-P; 33-RE; 12-ALP; 16-AL; 114-P; 10-P; 87-P; 9-P; 38-P; 15-AL; 88-P; 34-P; 30-P; 21-RE; 65-RE; 2-P; 81-RE; 41-P**.

includes nos. 41, 42 and 51 (i.e., BM 109975, 109976 and 109985 = **Nos. 1-S; 91-P and 11-P**).¹⁸

In total, the tablets from Uruk dating to the Hellenistic period that entered the British Museum in April 1914 are 39.

1.3.4 Tablets in the 1920-3-13 Collection

Only one of our tablets belongs to this collection, registered as no. 17 (1920-3-13, 17, corresponding to BM 114361 = **No. 117-ADM**). It came to the British Museum through Gejou and was apparently bought in Kayseri. Its atypical format makes it difficult to ascribe it to the collection from Hellenistic Uruk; however, prosopography clearly speaks in favour of such an attribution (see below for the details).

1.3.5 Tablets in the 1920-6-15 Collection

Twenty tablets in the 1920-6-15 collection, with numbers 2-20 (corresponding to BM numbers from 114406 to 114424),¹⁹ belong to the Hellenistic Uruk file. Following numbers in the collection date to different periods.

1.3.6 Tablets in the 1924-12-13 Collection

This is the latest date-number group acquired by the British Museum that includes tablets from Hellenistic Uruk: they bear registration numbers from 1 to 8 (i.e., 1924-12-13, 1-8, corresponding to BM numbers from 116687 to 116694).²⁰ BM 116688 (no. 2 in the date-number sequence), while written in Uruk, dates to the Achaemenid period and is thus not treated here.

1.4 Synthesis

A summary of the collections and pertinent tablets is offered in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Tablets from Hellenistic Uruk in the British Museum: distribution within the collections

Date number (running numbers)	BM numbers	Tot.
1856-9-3 (1513-1520)	BM 30117-30120; BM 93002-93004; BM 139437 (frgs.)	8 (incl. frgs.)
Bu 89- 4-26 (252)	BM 78967	1
1912-7-6 (69)	BM 104805	1
1913-4-16 (1-41; 45; 63-64)	BM 105169-105194; 105196-105209; BM 105213; BM 105231-105232	43

¹⁸ BM 109966, 109971, 109972, 109977, and 109978 date to the Achaemenid period and while associated with Hellenistic texts in the numerical sequence, are not included here (among them, BM 109977 originates from Larsa, not from Uruk). BM 109974, dated to the fourth year of Antigonos, was published by Stolper (1993, p. 86). On the Late Achaemenid tablets from Uruk and Larsa see Hackl 2017.

¹⁹ These are edited below under **Nos. 109-P; 57-RE; 96-RE; 86-RE; 103-RE; 95-RE; 111-M; 74-RE; 99-RE; 97-RE; 105-RE; 75-RE; 102-RE; 100-RE; 110-P; 27-RE; 112-P; 101-RE; 104-RE**.

²⁰ The tablets correspond to **26-P; 43-P; 66-P; 50-P; 98-P; 92-RE; 37-RE**.

Date number (running numbers)	BM numbers	Tot.
1914-4-4 (1-23; 23A; 24-31; 34-36; 39; 41-42; 51; 1048?)	BM 109935-109957; 109957A; 109958-109965; BM 109968-109970; BM 109973; BM 109975-109976; BM 109985	39
1920-3-13 (17)	BM 114361	1
1920-6-15 (2-20)	BM 114406-114424	19
1924-12-13 (1; 3-8)	BM 116687; BM 116689-116694	7
K(uyunjik)	K. 4790 (frg.) K. 11800 (frg. joined to BM 30118)	frgs.
		120+frgs.

It is likely that, as with the some 350 or so additional tablets from clandestine excavations that reached the major Museums and collections in Europe and the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, also the tablets coming from the antiquities market that are part of the British Museum collection were found near the gate room at the north-east entrance of the Rēš temple in Uruk and may thus form part of the so-called Rēš A archive.²¹

The economic documents reflect the interests of the families of priests who had a stake in the temple management: they are private documents in origin that, like most of the Hellenistic corpus from Uruk, were stored in the temple, probably at the time of the Parthian invasion, for safe keeping or in connection to some administrative need.²² Unless private in origin, they do not form private archives.²³ However, also the tablets in the BM collection may be connected on the basis of content or family related dossiers to those kept in other museums.²⁴

The four administrative documents in the BM collection, on the other hand, might also have been part of the Rēš archive, forming, together with the few already published tablets that are part of the corpus, the small section of the temple archive proper that has come down to us.²⁵

²¹ Rēš A, according to Jursa 2005, 139. On the structure and composition of these Hellenistic archives from Uruk see Jursa 2005, pp. 139-140 (with fn. 1075, in particular, for earlier bibliography); for different discussion (and names) of these archives see also Monerie 2018, p. 13 (with fn. 45). Baker 2013a, pp. 39-40, underlines the significance of the distinction between two main functional zones in the spatial organisation of the areas of the Rēš where (excavated) tablets and other written materials were found and convincingly argues that the tablets were probably stored in the temple at the time of the Parthian invasion.

²² Jursa 2005, p. 140; Baker 2013a, p. 40, fn. 77 and Baker 2014.

²³ Beaulieu 1989; Pedersen 1998, pp. 206-209; Oelsner 1986; Jursa 2005, pp. 57-58 and pp. 138-140; see recently the synthesis in Monerie 2018, p. 13.

²⁴ As shown by Doty 1977. For thematic studies including the BM tablets, see Corò 2005a; Corò 2005b and below, chapters 3-9. New studies of the Urukian families, of the scribes and of the women's dossiers, incorporating the data offered by the BM collection, are currently in preparation by the present author.

²⁵ See Beaulieu 1989; Jursa 2005, p. 139; Monerie calls it 'Bit Rēš 2'.

