

3 The Collection's Content

3.1 Tablet Type and Content

As is typical of the textual records from Uruk dating to the Hellenistic period, also the tablets making up the BM collection consist mainly of title deeds for prebends and real estate; arable land is the object of only four contracts. No document dealing with slaves is preserved, with the exception of **No. 111-M//112-M** (both poorly preserved), where a slave is mentioned as the object of a quitclaim, in addition to a house and furniture (and perhaps **No. 114-?**)

Silver appears as the object of the single business document preserved that is part of the BM collection, i.e., the promissory note **No. 1-S**, while the four extant administrative texts have miscellaneous contents (**No. 116-ADM** and **117-ADM** are lists of personnel, **No. 118-ADM** is a list of prebendary duties and the individuals who are responsible for them, and **No. 119-ADM** records an inventory of documents).¹

A list of the tablets in the collection according to their content is offered in Table 9, below.

Table 9. BM tablets by content

Content	Text Nos.	Tot.
Prebends (P)	2-P; 4-P; 5-P; 7-P; 8-P; 9-P; 10-P; 11-P; 13-P; 18-P; 19-P; 20-P; 22-P; 23-P; 24-P; 25-P; 26-P; 28-P; 29-P; 30-P; 31-P; 34-P; 35-P; 38-P; 39-P; 40-P; 41-P; 43-P; 44-P; 47-P; 48-P; 49-P; 50-P; 51-P; 52-P; 53-P; 54-P; 55-P; 56-P; 61-P; 62-P; 64-P; 66-P; 67-P; 68-P; 69-P; 70-P; 71-P; 72-P; 73-P; 76-P; 77-P; 78-P; 82-P; 83-P; 84-P; 85-P; 87-P; 88-P; 89-P; 90-P; 91-P; 94-P; 98-P; 106-P; 110-P; 109-P; 114-P; 115-P	68
Real estate (RE)	3-RE; 6-RE; 14-RE; 21-RE; 27-RE; 32-RE; 33-RE; 36-RE; 37-RE; 42-RE; 45-RE; 46-RE; 57-RE; 58-RE; 59-RE; 60-RE; 63-RE; 65-RE; 74-RE; 75-RE; 79-RE; 80-RE; 81-RE; 86-RE; 92-RE; 93-RE; 95-RE; 96-RE; 97-RE; 99-RE; 100-RE//101-RE; 102-RE; 103-RE; 104-RE; 105-RE; 108-RE; 113-RE	40
Arable land (AL)	15-AL; 16-AL; 17-AL	3
Administrative (ADM)	116-ADM; 117-ADM; 118-ADM; 119-ADM	4
Business (S)	1-S	1
Miscellaneous (M and ALP)	111-M//112-M; 12-ALP	3
Undetermined	107-?	1

As Table 10 shows, by far the most common type of contract are sales, to which a handful of leases and quitclaims can be added; two tablets in dialogue form record the allocation *ana bit rittutu* of empty plots of land (**Nos. 96-RE** and **97-RE**), while a group of seven documents record the conditional sale of property *ana bit rittutu*.

No. 108-RE is a gift; **No. 6-RE** is a division of property. The fragment edited as **No. 107-?** is too poorly preserved to decide on the type of transaction it recorded.

¹ For a comprehensive description of the Babylonian legal and administrative documents in the Neo-Babylonian period see Jursa 2005, with relevant bibliographic references. A recent survey of those dated to the Hellenistic period is now included in Monerie 2018, pp. 5-17.

Table 10. BM tablets by type

Type	Text Nos.	Tot.
Sales	2-P; 3-RE; 4-P; 5-P (price tablet); 7-P; 8-P; 9-P; 10-P//11-P; 12-ALP (price tablet); 13-P; 14-RE; 15-AL; 16-AL; 17-AL; 18-P; 20-P; 21-RE; 22-P; 23-P; 24-P; 25-P; 26-P; 27-RE; 28-P; 29-P; 30-P; 31-P; 33-RE; 34-P; 35-P; 36-RE; 37-RE; 38-P; 39-P; 40-P; 41-P; 42-RE; 43-P; 44-P; 45-RE; 46-RE; 47-P; 48-P; 49-P; 50-RE?; 52-P; 53-P; 54-P; 55-P; 56-P; 58-RE//59-RE; 60-RE; 61-P; 62-P; 63-RE; 64-P; 65-RE; 66-P; 68-P; 69-P; 70-P; 71-P; 72-P; 73-P; 74-RE; 75-RE; 76-P; 77-P; 78-P; 79-RE; 80-RE; 81-RE; 82-P; 83-P; 84-P; 85-P; 86-RE; 87-P; 88-P; 89-P; 90-P; 91-P; 93-RE; 94-P; 95-RE; 102-RE; 106-P; 109-P; 113-RE; 114-P; 115-P	94
Sales ana bīt rittūtu	92-RE; 99-RE; 100-RE//101-RE; 103-RE; 104-RE; 105-RE	7
Quitclaims	57-RE; 32-RE; 111-M//112-M	4
Leases	19-P; 51-P; 67-P; 98-P; 110-P;	5
Lists/admin.	116-ADM; 117-ADM; 118-ADM; 119-ADM	4
Promissory notes	1-S	1
Divisions	6-RE;	1
Gifts	108-RE	1
Allocations ana bīt rittūtu	96-RE; 97-RE	2
Unassigned	107-?;	1

Formularies are those in use in the Hellenistic period: sale contracts are formulated *ex latere venditoris*;² leases follow the dialogue form; quitclaims and divisions of property are phrased according to the standard formulary in use in this period.³

A new formulary, similar to that used for leases, is introduced in tablets from the latest years of the Seleucid period to record the allocation of empty plots of land under special circumstances (*ana bīt rittūtu*: **Nos. 96-RE** and **97-RE**). As I have shown elsewhere,⁴ the temple handed over a substantial area of undeveloped land in its ownership to private individuals in exchange for their improving it and settling there forever. In return, the assignee was permanently linked to the temple, performing service for it on request in the *karê* of the houses which are the property of Anu. The assignee still retained the right to dispose of the property, but limitations applied to the sale of *bīt rittis*, as shown by the appearance in the standard contracts of the qualification of the property as “the *bīt ritti* of so and and so” in the confirmation clause, or the statement that the property was “sold *ana bīt rittūtu*”.

On the other hand, the Neo-Babylonian formulary is used in a couple of cases, as shown by **Nos. 14-RE** and **42-RE**, both dated to the beginning of the Seleucid period. These are phrased according to the older formulary and make use of the introductory formula *ina kanāk* ^{im}dub mu.meš ... *igi* instead of the more common heading *mukinnū* to introduce the witness list.⁵

Women that witness a transaction in which they retained some interest are recorded in the contracts using the common *ina ašābi*-formula. This signifies the woman’s consent to the transaction, as attested by **No. 7-P**: unfortunately the tablet’s obverse is destroyed and it is difficult to reconstruct the complete family scenario for the transaction that required the woman’s presence.⁶

Seven prebend sales (plus the duplicates of two of them) include the ‘registration clause’ (**Nos. 61//62-P; 43-P; 35-P; 64-P; 49-P; 54//55-P; 56-P**), either framed within rulings or not.

2 See most recently the overview by Jursa 2005, pp. 28-29 and 30-34, with reference to earlier bibliography.

3 On the introduction in this period of quitclaim contracts see Lewenton 1970, pp. 33-38.

4 Corò 2012.

5 On the introduction of witnesses in the Neo-Babylonian documents, see Von Dassow 1999; on the use of this formula also Jursa 2005, p. 11 (with fn. 54).

6 On the *ina ašābi* formula see Lewenton 1970, pp. 87-89 and the synthesis by Oelsner, Wells, Wunsch 2003, p. 928, § 4.3.1.

3.2 Date-groups and Content

Overall no specific pattern may be observed as for the distribution of the tablets' content among the different acquisition date groups that make up the BM collection. None of them, in fact, deals with a single topic. However, some trends may be noticed.⁷

The two larger date-groups (those acquired in 1913 and 1914) frequently include tablets whose parties are individuals belonging to one of the most prominent families of Seleucid Uruk, that of Labaši/Anu-zēru-iddin//Ekur-zākir. As was already noticed since Loftus excavated the first tablets of the collection, he is himself involved in a substantial number of contracts, alongside a number of individuals belonging to either the earlier or the later generations of his family.

The family's interests lay mainly in the prebendary sector:⁸ approximately 82% of the tablets that belong to the family deal with prebends; the remaining 18% sheds new light on their business in the context of arable land (three contracts) and real estate (seven documents); also the only promissory note of the collection involves a family member.⁹

No particular trend may be detected within the group of texts that belong to the 1924 collection, with the exception of the fact that it mainly (though not exclusively) deals with prebends.

A very interesting date-group is represented by tablets accessioned by the BM in the 1920 collection (BM numbers beginning with 114-); it consists of twenty tablets; many among them, dated to the reign of Demetrius I, may be organised into three coherent subgroups:

1. the first includes **Nos. 74//75-RE, 86-RE and 102-RE**, all written by Anu-iqīšanni/Nanāya-iddin//SLU, who defines himself as a *kalamāh Anu*: the scribal peculiarities of this scribe and his career have been discussed elsewhere¹⁰ (see below, chapter on scribes, with relevant bibliography);
2. the second includes four tablets (**Nos. 109-P, 110-P, and 111//112-P**), all dated to SE 162, in the reign of Alexander Balas: these are the only prebend texts in the 1920 group;
3. the third group includes **Nos. 96-RE and 97-RE, 99-RE, 100//101-RE, 103-RE, 104-RE and 105-RE**, all dealing with properties either transferred or allocated under conditional circumstances, as discussed in the previous paragraph.

An interesting feature of most of the documents making up the 1920 date group is that they often involve as parties people bearing either Greek or other non-Babylonian names, alongside *sepīrus* and a new profession that I suggest might be a technician of parchment making, i.e. a 'parchment roller' (*magallāya*).¹¹

3.3 Chronological Distribution

The collection spans the time from the beginning of the Seleucid Era (13 or 14 SE, **No. 2-P**) to the reign of king Alexander Balas (162 SE), with tablets distributed through the reigns of the various Seleucid kings; a gap in the documentation may be observed only between SE 90 (**No. 67-P**) and SE 99 (**No. 68-P**), in the reign of Antiochus III.

Some patterns may be detected looking at the chronological distribution of the tablets among the different acquisition groups. Tablets acquired as part of the 1913 and the 1914 groups span in general the time from the beginning of the Seleucid era to the reign of Seleucus IV: no document in those two groups is later than 132 SE.

⁷ A comprehensive study of the museum archaeology of the Hellenistic tablets from Uruk is the object of a forthcoming study by the present author.

⁸ See Doty 1977, pp. 189-230; McEwan 1981, 116-117 and more recently Corò 2005a and 2005b. A new study of the family and their business is currently in preparation: see Corò forthcoming b.

⁹ Fifty-seven documents may be securely attributed to members of this family; two more may be added, depending on the identification of the Anu-zēru-iddin/Anu-māru-ittannu//Ekur-zākir acting in **Nos. 26-P** and **43-P** as a member of the family.

¹⁰ Corò 2015; see also below, ch. 8.

¹¹ CAD M/1, s.v. *magallatu*; also on the parchment-roll makers ¹⁶*magallatu(a)karrānu*: see Stolper 1985, pp. 74-75, with fn. 20.

The dated tablets that may be securely ascribed to the reigning years of the kings after Seleucus IV up to Alexander Balas, albeit with a few exceptions (**Nos. 106-P, 107-?** and perhaps **108-RE**), belong to the 1920 and 1924 groups; only the 1920 group includes tablets dated to the reign of Demetrius I or Alexander Balas.

In general, tablets acquired by the British Museum in 1920 and 1924 represent also the latest datable documents in the BM collection: four tablets only belonging to these two groups date earlier, to years SE 53 (**No. 27-RE**), SE 82 (**No. 57-RE**), SE 109 (**No. 74//75-RE**) and SE 120 (**No. 86-RE**), respectively.

The two latest dated tablets from the 1924 group do not reach beyond 146 SE: it must be stressed however that the remaining five examples from this group are variously distributed in time earlier than 90 SE.

It is interesting that the documents that cover the reign of Demetrius I are all part of the 1920 date group, with the exception of **No. 106-P**, that was excavated by Loftus, and of the fragment **No. 107-?**.

Particular chronological patterns emerge from the analysis of the distribution of tablets by types and/or specific family dossiers: these will be taken into consideration below, where the documents are analysed on the basis of their content, in order to better understand the significance of the BM collection in the context of the Hellenistic corpus.