

Seleucid Tablets from Uruk in the British Museum

Text Editions and Commentary

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4 Arable Land

Three contracts in the BM collection have arable land as an object: **No. 15-AL**,¹ **No. 16-AL** and **No. 17-AL**. All of them record members of the Ekur-zākir family either purchasing fields or owning arable land adjoining the one that is the object of the transaction, showing that besides prebends the Ekur-zākirs conducted business in this sector as well. The dossier is small but consistent and by means of its connections to other contracts it adds substantially to our poor knowledge of the status and management of arable land at this time, a topic that is in general underrepresented in the documents from Hellenistic Uruk.²

4.1 Arable land on ‘the bank of the moat and the wall of Uruk’

The best preserved of the three tablets, **No. 17-AL**, may be taken as a point of departure. It records the purchase by Lâbâši/AZI//EZ of a share in the field belonging to Anu-balâssu-iqbi/Mukîn-apli (whose family name is not preserved). The document (whose exact date is lost) is ascribed to the co-regency of Antiochus I and Seleucus (32-45 SE) but it is possible to set a *terminus ante quem* for it of SE 38, on contextual grounds.³

The arable land sold in the document is located ‘on the bank of the moat and the wall of Uruk’: it adjoins the bank of the Nâr-Damqat canal to the south, and to its east and west the arable land of Rabi-Anu/Anu-zêru-ibni and Anu-iksur/Anu-ahu-ittannu, respectively; its border to the north is identified as ‘the wall of Uruk’.

During his career, Lâbâši bought at least two further shares in arable land, as shown by the two previously published tablets YOS 20 18 and YOS 20 19.

A comparison between the three documents is offered in Table 11:

Table 11. Comparison between **No. 17-AL**, YOS 20 18 and YOS 20 19

	No. 17-AL	YOS 20 18	YOS 20 19
Description	NSWE 1/2 of 1/12 še.[numun zaq-pi] [u ka šul-pu	NSWE [1/2 of 1]/12 še.numun zaq-pi u ka šul-pu [é rit-ti] níg.ga ^d 60	NSWE [1/2 of 1/12 še.numun zaq-pi u ka] šul-[pu] ‘é rit-ti’ níg.ga ^d 60
Location	[gú ^{id} h]a-ri-ši ù bàd šá unug ^{ki}	gú ^{id} h a-ri-šu ù bàd šá unug ^{ki}	[gú ^{id} h a-ri-šu ù bàd šá unug ^{ki}
Co-owners	—	Lâbâši/AZI, the buyer Anu-uballit/Kidin Anu-uballit and Nidinti-Anu/Anu-balassu-iqbi/Anu-uballit//EZ	Lâbâši/AZI, the buyer
S	bank of the <i>Dam-qát-tu_a</i> canal	bank of the <i>Dam-an-qat</i> canal	bank of the <i>Dam-an-qat</i> canal
N	wall of Uruk	bank of the moat and wall of Uruk	bank of the moat and wall of Uruk
W	arable land of Anu-ikšur/Anu-ahu-ittannu	arable land of Anu-ikšur/Anu-ahu-ittannu (now assigned to Theodoros)	arable land of Anu-ikšur/Anu-ahu-ittannu

1 On arable land qualified as *bīt ritti* and the significance of **No. 15-AL** in this context, see Corò 2012, esp. p. 156; see also the commentary to the text, below.

2 As already underlined by Doty 1977, pp. 143-145.

3 See commentary to **No. 17-AL**, below.

	No. 17-AL	YOS 20 18	YOS 20 19
E	arable land of Rabi-Anu/[Anu-zēru-ibni]	arable land of Rabi-Anu/Anu-zēru-ibni	arable land of Rabi-Anu/Anu-zēru-ibni
Seller/s	Anu-balāssu-iqbi/Mukīn-apli	Anu-ahhē-iddin/Balāṭu/Tattannu//EZ also waiver (against the objections of Tattannu, his brother)	Anu-uballiṭ and Nidinti-Anu/Anu-balāssu-iqbi/Anu-uballiṭ//EZ
Price	3 š qalû	5 š qalû	(lost)

All three shares (each corresponding to a 1/24 of an entire field) are located in the same area, namely ‘the bank of the moat and the city wall of Uruk’; their eastern and western borders correspond perfectly to one another (and are identified as the arable land of Rabi-Anu/Anu-zēru-ibni and Anu-ikṣur/Anu-ahu-ittannu respectively); indeed, the description of the borders to the north and south differs slightly between the tablets in Yale and the one in London: the name of the canal that lays to the south of the arable land is spelled *Dam-an-qat* in YOS 20 18 and 19 while it appears as *Dam-qât-tu*₄ in **No. 17-AL**; moreover, the border to the north is described as the “wall of Uruk” only in the BM tablet and as “the bank of the moat and the wall of Uruk” in the Yale texts.

Despite these minor differences in the description of the borders,⁴ the tract of land referred to in the contracts is clearly the same. The two documents show that Lâbâši’s interest was not confined to arable land located in a specific area (that of “the bank of the moat and the wall of Uruk”), but more precisely in a specific field that was originally subdivided into smaller sub-plots, but which he is now trying to reassemble in its entirety. The co-ownership pattern that emerges from Table 11 makes it also plausible that first Lâbâši purchased the share described in **No. 17-AL**, followed by those recorded in YOS 20 18 and 19.⁵

4.2 Size and Status of Arable Land

A second more substantial difference may be noticed between the properties: the arable land recorded in YOS 20 18 and 19 is qualified as “tenured land, property of Anu”, as (also) the transfer of ownership clause specifies: “one-half of one-twelfth in that arable land, the *bīt ritti*, property of Anu, belongs to Lâbâši/AZI//EZ, in perpetuity” while that in **No. 17-AL** is not said to be tenured. It is not clear if this is again a minor variant in the description, as usual in this period, or if the reason for it must be sought elsewhere.⁶

Unfortunately, we have no idea how large were the plots purchased by Lâbâši, since no dimensions are given in the texts. We only know that each of them represented a 1/24 share of a plot of unspecified size (having the same borders) and that for the two of them, for which the relevant section is preserved,⁷ Lâbâši paid different prices. If we exclude that this is due to price fluctuation (since the first transaction plausibly antedates the second no longer than 6 years), one might be tempted to see the reason for the different amount of silver disbursed (3 š vs. 5 š) in the quality of the plots sold and to further suggest that this might have been somehow related to the status of the arable land.

The idea would be that the tenured status of the field sold in YOS 20 18 has some bearing on its value, reflected in the different prices paid by Lâbâši for two (otherwise) identical shares. Now, whatever its actual size, the price of the entire plot of land, a 1/24 share of which is bought by Lâbâši

4 In this case it seems also plausible that the differences that may be noticed between **No. 17-AL** and the Yale tablets in the description of the southern and northern borders of the field are due to the identity of the scribes who wrote the documents. For more details, see the commentary to **No. 17-AL**, below and Corò forthcoming b.

5 For YOS 20 18 and 19 see Doty 1977, pp. 144; 166-167; 195; 202-205; Doty 2012, pp. 18-20, with plates XXXV-XXXVIII. For a detailed study of these documents, their connections and their significance for the family business see Corò forthcoming b.

6 Much has been written on the *bīt ritti*, especially in the NB period: see Janković 2013, pp. 285-289, with reference to earlier bibliography. On *bīt ritti* as applied to urban properties in the Hellenistic period see recently Baker 2005, 30-37 and Corò 2012.

7 The section is preserved in YOS 20 18 and **No. 17-AL**; it is unfortunately missing from YOS 20 19.

for 5 š, would total 2 minas of silver. One wonders whether this represented the current price for a standard plot of tenured arable land.⁸

What remains of another contract in the group (**No. 15-AL**), i.e. the lower part of a fragmentary tablet, records the purchase of a 1/6 share of arable land by another member of the Ekur-zâkir family, Anu-zêru-iddin/Nanâya-iddin//EZ. Among the Ekur-zâkirs we know of two individuals going by this name: one in generation 3 (i.e. Lâbâši's father); the other in generation 5 (i.e. the son of one of Lâbâši's brothers). Despite the tablet's poor state of preservation, a number of elements – and especially its prosopographic connections to YOS 20 18 – permit us to safely assign it to the third generation of the family and to identify Anu-zêru-iddin with Lâbâši's father; in addition, it is likely that the tablet was drawn up earlier than **No. 17-AL**.⁹ **No. 15-AL** would thus represent, on the present state of our knowledge, the first preserved document mentioning the purchase of a plot of arable land by a member of the family. We do not know where the plot was located, since its description is lost, but the transfer of ownership clause makes it clear that the field is the tenured property of the buyer, who bought it for 20 š of silver. The amount of silver disbursed by Anu-zêru-iddin for this share of tenured land (whose actual size remains undetermined) is four times the price paid by his son (in YOS 20 18) for his own share of tenured land. Since, however, the actual size of the arable land remains undetermined in both tablets, despite the tempting correlations between price and fractions, it is not possible to verify if this represented the current price for standard plots of tenured arable land.

4.3 Arable Land and the Prebendary Gardeners

A third tablet in the collection has arable land as an object (**No. 16-AL**): it records the purchase of a share of arable land located, again, on the “bank of the moat and the wall of Uruk”. We have no evidence concerning the status of this tract of land. The buyer is probably again Anu-zêru-iddin/Nanâya-iddin//EZ, and one wonders if the Kidin-Anu/Lâbâši//EZ who features as the seller is an – otherwise unattested – relative of Lâbâši.¹⁰ The document may be assigned to the dossier also by means of the description of the property south of the main field, i.e. ‘the arable land of Lâbâši and his brothers’. Though the date is lost due to its poor state of preservation,¹¹ prosopographical connections to **No. 15-AL** confirm that it belongs to the same generation of the family as that one, thus describing the condition of the area of the moat of the wall of Uruk at the time of Lâbâši's father. The field sold is a 1/6 share of a plot that lay, to the north, next to the wall of Uruk (no reference is made to the moat, exactly as in **No. 17-AL**; and the spelling of the name of the moat in the description of the area is also the same as in **No. 17-AL**). The southern, eastern and western borders are completely different from those adjoining the properties sold in the other documents of the dossier. To the south, instead of the Nâr-Damqat canal, is the “arable land of Lâbâši and his brothers”; to the west the arable land of Mukîn-apli/Anu-bêlšunu, and to the east is the arable land of the “estate of the *rab banûtu*”.

Monerie¹² suggests that this formula refers to land reserved (by the temple) for the *rab banê* that had not yet been allocated when the transaction took place.¹³ We do not know whether this was the case or not, but what is interesting is that if the Lâbâši mentioned here is ‘our’ Lâbâši (or at least an earlier member of his family), we would have evidence that the family owned arable land located next to the city wall of Uruk (which does not sound new) in the same area where the prebendary gardeners of the temple (“the estate of the *rab banûtu*”) had their fields. Members of the Ekur-zâkir

8 On the price of tenured arable land see Van der Spek 1995, 190-192; van Driel 2002, p. 305. On arable land in Uruk, during the Neo-Babylonian period, Jursa 2010, esp. pp. 418-462.

9 A comprehensive new study of the Ekur-zâkir family is the subject of a forthcoming article by the present author: see Corò forthcoming b.

10 This possibility is explored elsewhere, see Corò forthcoming b.

11 Since the relevant section of the document is lost, see the edition of the text **No. 16-AL**, below.

12 Monerie 2018, p. 301, with fn. 45.

13 The arable fields of the gardeners are also mentioned in **No. 12-ALP**, a receipt for arable land and prebends; see below for the edition.

family (in particular, Lâbâši, his father and one of his grandsons) appear, over the generations, among the owners of shares in both the *rab banûtu* prebend and the prebend of the temple of the *hallatu*-orchard of Bêlet-šêri;¹⁴ it is therefore not unlikely that their interest in the arable land located in this particular area is in some way connected to their prebendary activities as gardeners.¹⁵

The arable land “of the *hallatu*-orchard which is in the charge of the *rab banê*” is mentioned also in Montserrat 1, a cadastral text from Uruk dated to reign of Nebuchadnezzar (or maybe of Cyrus¹⁶); here it represents the southern border of a field whose northern side adjoined the Nâr-Damqat canal: the field came into the possession of Eanna as a compensation for the arrears that its owner owed to the temple.¹⁷ The area where the prebendary gardeners of the temple had their properties in the Seleucid period seems thus to be the same as it was in earlier periods; this would not just show the continuity of the institution in general¹⁸ but more specifically that of the occupation pattern of the area, strengthening the hypothesis that the acquisitions of arable land located in this area by members of the Ekur-zâkir family and their ownership of prebends in the *hallatu*-orchard represent two sides of the same coin.

14 Lâbâši is the owner of the only *rab banûtu* prebend in the corpus (BRM 2 13); he also buys a share of a prebend in the Egal edin of the *hallatu*-orchard with BRM 2 12, year 29 SE, a share connected to the temple of Bêlet-šêri in **No. 47-P//48-P** and another one with **No. 53-P**; his father buys a share of the prebend in the *hallatu*-orchard (BRM 2 4, year 29 SE) and Anu-zêru-iddin/Anu-uballit/Anu-zêru-iddin/EZ, one of Lâbâši’s nephews, buys a share in the temple of the *hallatu*-orchard called Edusaggarai in TCL 13 244//**No. 94-P**.

15 Pace Cocquerillat 1973/1974, p. 116, who concludes, referring to the documents having the *hallatu*-orchard and the *rab banûtu* prebends as an object: “Cette palmerais semble être devenue propriété de personnes qui n’ont rien a voir avec l’une ou l’autre de ces prébendes”. On the *hallatu*-orchard in Uruk in the Neo-Babylonian period see now Janković 2013, pp. 289-292; in Sippar: Da Riva 2002, pp. 136-140 (and especially on the *hallatu*-orchard and its localisation pp. 139-140) and Jursa 1995, pp. 57-75 (esp. pp. 59-60 for the localisation of their fields). In Borsippa: Waerzeggers 2010, pp. 39, 63, 48, 92, 94, 302, 352. One should note that arable land was frequently turned into date gardens and might therefore have represented a form of investment on the part of the family (Jursa 2004). For the limited extent to which Uruk witnessed this shift in the Neo-Babylonian period, in comparison to other cities, see Jursa 2010, p. 186. On the prebends related to the *hallatu*-orchard see Corò 2005a, pp. 407-426.

16 On the date of this document see Janković 2013, p. 346, fn. 1245.

17 The text is published in Wunsch 1997 as No. 1. See Janković, in Jursa 2010, pp. 418-337 and Janković 2013, pp. 346-347 and pp. 355-356, for a recent reinterpretation.

18 As noticed by Monerie 2018, p. 300. On the *rab banê* in the Neo-Babylonian period, see Cocquerillat 1973/1974; Jursa 1995, pp. 57-59; Joannès 2000, pp. 27-29. More recently Janković 2013, pp. 289-292.