

Two « Missing » Documents from the British Museum Collection 83-1-18 Rediscovered – In the *Catalogue of Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*, vol.VIII : Tablets from Sippar 3, ed. by E. Leichty, J. J. Finkelstein and C.B.F. Walker, London 1988 in two entries in the series 83-1-18, i.e. 32 and 1311, there is the note « missing » and no BM number is quoted. Such a note « missing » should be distinguished from the note « temporarily missing » which means that a tablet was not accessible for study at the time of writing. The situation in this case is for some reason especially strange because both tablets really existed, and their copies were published by J. N. Strassmaier in 1898 as Nbk 2 and Nbn 979, respectively.

Accidentally, while studying some texts in the British Museum in autumn 1994, I was able to find an answer to the question as what happened to both these tablets. One of the tablets which I studied was the text BM 60009 (82-9-18, 32B). To my surprise the content of this tablet was fully identical with the first of the « missing » tablets, i.e. 83-1-18, 32 = Nbk 2. The original text and Strassmaier's copy have the same number of lines with the same content and signs used by the scribe. In both (the copy and the original tablet) lines 6 and 7 are broken in the same place, and both lack the sign -ri- in the king's name. The only difference is the reading of the day date, now illegible while Strassmaier was able to read the number 5. There is no doubt that the text 83-1-18, 32 copied by Strassmaier as Nbk 2 is the same text stored now under the collection number 82-9-18, 32B = BM 60009. The most probable reason for the change of the signature is the small size of the tablet (4,7 × 3,7 cm) and the bad ink used for writing the collection number. As we know Strassmaier studied simultaneously the texts from both collections 82-9-18 and 83-1-18. The assistant who put the tablets back on the shelf read the illegible number 83-1-18 as 82-9-18 and placed the tablet among the tablets of this collection. The registrar who later added the BM number to this tablet found it among this collection and re-wrote the illegible number as 82-9-18. At the same time he noted, however, that the tablet with number 32 already existed ; he added to the second one the letter B and wrote the successive number BM. When he (or his colleague) started to write the BM number on the tablets from the 83-1-18 collection he noted the lack of the tablet

with number 32, but apparently just ignored this fact. We can suppose the registrar did not know that the tablet with this number had already been published, and thought that his predecessor had omitted the number 32 completely ; for this reason he wrote the successive BM number, not reserving any number for the « missing » tablet.

The same situation concerns the tablet 83-1-18, 1311. It was published by Strassmaier, Nbn 979, and dated 8.6.Nbn 161. Leichty described the context of Nbn 979 and 82-9-18, 1311B = BM 61337 with the same words : « receipt for wool », and read the damaged year on the original as 10+, which reflects the present state of preservation of the damaged place.

Because both tablets belonged originally to the collection 83-1-18 it would perhaps be better to renumber them, and return them to the 83-1-18 collection to which they really belong, leaving however their actual BM number.

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