2017

Ordinary People’s Garments in Neo- and Late-Babylonian Sources

Luigi Malatacca
University of Naples “L’Orientale”

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/texterm

Part of the Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons, Art and Materials Conservation Commons, Classical Archaeology and Art History Commons, Classical Literature and Philology Commons, Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts Commons, Indo-European Linguistics and Philology Commons, Jewish Studies Commons, Museum Studies Commons, Near Eastern Languages and Societies Commons, and the Other History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons

Malatacca, Luigi, "Ordinary People's Garments in Neo- and Late-Babylonian Sources" (2017). Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe, 1000 BC to 1000 AD. 1.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/texterm/1

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Centre for Textile Research at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe, 1000 BC to 1000 AD by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
Ordinary People’s Garments in Neo- and Late-Babylonian Sources

Luigi Malatacca, University of Naples
“L’Orientale”

In Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe, 1000 BC to 1000 AD, ed. Salvatore Gaspa, Cécile Michel, & Marie-Louise Nosch (Lincoln, NE: Zea Books, 2017), pp. 107-121.
doi:10.13014/K20863GM

Copyright © 2017 Salvatore Gaspa, Cécile Michel, & Marie-Louise Nosch.
Photographs copyright as noted.
Ordinary People’s Garments in Neo- and Late-Babylonian Sources

Luigi Malatacca

The investigation of textiles and clothes in ancient Mesopotamia has been anything but neglected in Assyriological studies. For the Neo- and Late Babylonian periods, in particular, two fundamental monographs have shed light on the clothes worn by the deities worshiped in lower Mesopotamia. Scholars, however, have focused almost exclusively on clothing in the cultic context. This is due to a prevalence of textual sources – mostly economic or administrative documents – recording clothing items worn by divine images during festivals and rituals. Sources on the clothes worn by common people, instead, are close to non-existent. Still, we cannot overlook the fact that Mesopotamian towns were crowded by people rather than by gods. These people were workers, slaves and soldiers, and each one of them – man or woman – wore clothes in his or her everyday life. The objective of the present paper is to examine the three main clothing items worn by common people, using textual sources of the Neo- and Late Babylonian periods. These items were túg-kurra (a blanket of a sort used as garment), muṣiptu (a generic garment), and šīr’am (a jerkin).

Methodology

Two essays in the book Textile Terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the Third to the First Millennia BC (2010) focus on textiles and clothing in the Neo-Babylonian period. In his article, Stefan Zawadzki investigates clothing in non-cultic contexts. As a guideline for the study of non-cultic attire, I list below the different types of documents singled out by Zawadzki as being most likely to include references to clothing items not destined for the statues of gods.

- dowries;
- quittances for rations;
- payments for wet nurses;
- text concerning military uniforms;
- texts concerning workmen’s clothes.

My focus and Zawadzki’s, however, are different. Zawadzki, in his article, deals with clothing in non-cultic contexts, whereas here I discuss clothing for common people. The non-divine clothing items mentioned in text usually belong to the fine apparel

1. This essay is drawn from a poster I presented at the conference cycle Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe 1000 BC – AD 1000. I would like to thank Professors Stefan Zawadzki and Michael Jursa for their valuable advice and Professor Federico Poole for the English version of this article.

2. In his study of the pantheon of Uruk, Beaulieu 2003 discusses at length the clothing destined for the divine statues of the Eanna, the temple complex of the city. Zawadzki 2006, instead, focuses entirely on the apparel of the gods of the Ebabbar, the main temple of the town of Sippar.


of the privileged classes of Mesopotamian society. These fall outside of the scope of the present study, which concentrates exclusively on inexpensive clothing items worn by the middle-low classes in Babylon. But who exactly were these ‘common people’? Neo- and Late Babylonian society was roughly divided into two classes. The first was that of the mār banē, the free citizens, while the second gathered individuals legally depending from the central administration (the temple or the palace) or in a condition of slavery. The mār banē enjoyed full rights in front of the law and could own one or more slaves. They included temple officials, merchants, bankers, craftsmen, farmers, and also individuals living in poverty. The second class, instead, included both free individuals deprived of civil rights, such as the ‘royal soldier’ (bēl qašīṭi), the ‘partially free dependents’ (šusānū), and totally unfree individuals such as the slaves (ardū or qallū) or the servants of the temple (širkū). Evidently, when we speak of common people we are mainly referring to people belonging to this second class, although we cannot overlook the mār banē class, insofar as it also included non-wealthy individuals. To sum up, by ‘common people’ I mean here all the members of Babylonian society, whether free or not, who did not hold prestigious positions, such as dependent workers (workmen, craftsmen, etc.), apprentices, or slaves.

The existence in Babylonian society of a clear-cut distinction between higher and lower social classes can also be deduced from the diversity of the clothing worn by the two classes. Obviously, a rich individual had the means to buy fine clothes, while this possibility was denied to economically disadvantaged persons. It even appears that the lower social classes were forbidden from wearing the garments worn by the elites. Text Camb. 321 is especially illuminating in this regard. In this legal document, Nabû-ēṭir, a rich man of the Ēṭiru family, strikes the slave Madānu-bēl-uṣur, reproaching him for wearing a šībtu dress. Other than this document, there is indeed no evidence of the šībtu dress being worn by slaves, workmen, or soldiers. It was often used, instead, in religious ceremonies, and there is also evidence of its secular use.

Thus, starting from Zawadzki’s list of documents to determine what garments the majority of the population wore, we need to exclude both the fine, expensive clothes worn by the upper classes, which also appear in Neo- and Late Babylonian documents, and the clothes worn by divine statues. We can thus narrow down our examination to the three garments I will be looking at in detail in the following sections.

**tūg-kur-ra**

The tūg-kur-ra is frequently mentioned in Neo- and Late Babylonian documents. Many scholars have dealt with this garment and the various questions concerning it. The main issue is the actual Akkadian reading of the logograms tūg-kur-ra. We owe one of the first hypotheses about tūg-kur-ra and its Akkadian equivalent to Dougherty. On the basis of the kur-ra = šadū equivalence, this scholar proposed translating the word as ‘mountain garment.’ A later reading...
is found in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (CAD), where *kur-ra* is regarded as syllabic rather than logographic writing, and is hence read *sad-ra*\(^\text{17}\) and translated as ‘ordinary garment’. Later on, the CAD itself, following the indications of R. Borger, no longer accepted the reading of *kur-ra* as *sad-ra*.\(^\text{18}\) Once the logographic value of *kur-ra* was firmly established, several Akkadian readings were proposed over the years, viz., *musiptu*,\(^\text{19}\) *suḫattu* and *kanzu*.

As regards the reading *suḫattu*, S. Zawadzki leans towards the reading proposed in CAD S, 346,\(^\text{20}\) on the basis of the parallelism between two texts, UCP 9, 271 and Dar. 253, where the word *suḫattu* is evidently used instead of *túg-kur-ra*, and *vice versa*. This leads the scholar to tentatively suggest that *túg-kur-ra* be read as *suḫattu*.\(^\text{21}\) Evidence from other sources, however, speaks against this hypothesis. In at least two loci, the terms *suḫattu* and *túg-kur-ra* appear side-by-side, viz., in CTMMA 4, 13\(^\text{22}\) and TU 44.\(^\text{23}\) This enables us to rule out their equivalence. Furthermore, in the apprenticeship contract BM 54558,\(^\text{24}\) from the Hellenistic period, a certain Libluṭ, the son of the woman slave Guzasigu, has to learn how to make a *suḫattu* birmi, ‘a multicolor *suḫattu*’.\(^\text{25}\) Now, multicolor *túg-kur-ra* never occurs in the documentation, probably because the *túg-kur-ra* is not a fancy and, hence, prestigious garment.\(^\text{26}\) Finally, in CT 4, 29d *suḫattu* occurs as a royal gift,\(^\text{27}\) whereas, again, *túg-kur-ra* does not seem to be a luxury commodity.

Basing himself on text CTMMA 4, 38, Michael Jursa has recently proposed the Akkadian reading *kanzu* for *túg-kur-ra*:

**CTMMA 4, 38**

Obverse
1. 2 gun 1\(^\text{m}^\text{ugka-an-zu}\)
2. šá ul-tu ūḫi\(^\text{ki}\)
3. na-šâ-\(^\text{ma-} a\) u m\(\text{dutu-gi}\)
4. îh-î-i tti.kin ut.8.kâm
5. mu.sag.nam.lugal.e m\(\text{ag-nig.du-pab}\)

Lower edge
6. lugal tin.\(\text{tir}^\text{ki}\)

Reverse
7. ina gub\(\text{m}^\text{in}^\text{da}\)
8. \(\text{m}^\text{erib-dama}r.u\text{tu m}\(\text{zi-ka-ri}\)
9. \(\text{m}^\text{a-a} u \text{m}\(\text{dutu-pab}\)
10. túg-kur-ra ina ē.\(\text{gur}^\text{mei}\)

“For two talents (of wool?) and one packing cloth that where brought from Opis: Aplāya and Šamaš-uṣailim weighed (it). Month of Ulûlu, day 8 accession year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. In the presence of Bēl-lē’i, Eriba-Marduk, Zikaru, Aplāya, and Šamaš-nāṣir the blanket (was put) in the storehouse.”\(^\text{28}\)

In the above-quoted text, it is evident, as Jursa remarked, that the term *túg-kur-ra* is used as a synonym for *kanzu*.\(^\text{29}\) As for *\(\text{m}^\text{ug}^\text{kanzu*}, the term is never attested

\(^{17}\) CAD Š, 225e. *Sad* and *kur* are written with the same sign, so either reading is possible.


\(^{19}\) The clearest proof that *túg-kur-ra* and *musiptu* are not identical is that *musiptu* is a feminine noun, while *túg-kur-ra* is certainly masculine, being regularly followed by masculine adjectives. See Oppenheim 1950, 188-189, and Zawadzki 2010, 413.

\(^{20}\) Zawadzki 2010, 413-414.

\(^{21}\) “The parallelism between both texts is striking, and the probability that *túg-kur-ra* should be read *suḫattu* or *supātu* is high, though some doubt still exist,” Zawadzki 2010, 413.

\(^{22}\) *suḫattu* in obv. l.1; *túg-kur-ra* in rev. l.18.

\(^{23}\) *túg-kur-ra* in col. IV l.14; *suḫattu* in col. IV, l.28; on this text, see Limson 2004, 252-262.

\(^{24}\) Published in Jursa 2006, 216.

\(^{25}\) ġu-za-si-\(\text{gu gé}[\text{me x x x x}] \text{ina ūu-ud lib-bi-šū} \text{m}^\text{lib-lu} \text{šu-hat-tu} \text{bir-[ml]}; BM 54558 obv. ll. 1-3. A multicolored *suḫattu* (suḫattu ša birmi) also appears in NBC 6164, where it is used as payment for a weaver, Jursa 2006, 207.

\(^{26}\) In the Neo-Babylonian period, the adjective *birmu* often refers to clothing items used in the context of cult, cf. CAD B, 258i.

\(^{27}\) McEwan 1985.

\(^{28}\) Transliteration and translation by Jursa in the volume CTMMA 4, 66-67; the copy of the tablet is on Plate 33.

\(^{29}\) See commentary in CTMMA 4, 38 l. 10.
in Akkadian documents. It could well be a loanword from the Aramaic root *knz* ‘to deposit’ or it could be interpreted as a Persian loanword, based on the Old-Persian word *kanz* ‘treasure’. The túg-kur-ra = *kanzu* equivalence is possible for two reasons. The first we have already seen, namely, that in CTMMA 4, 38 *kanzu* and túg-kur-ra are two different terms used to describe the same object. The second is that the use of túg-kur-ra as packing material is also attested in other documents. In the Uruk letter YOS 3, 11, a given quantity of wool is placed inside some túg-kur-ra. This is an analogous situation to the one we have seen in CTMMA 4, 38. In ritual text TU 44, of the Hellenistic period, a túg-kur-ra is used to wrap the carcase of a bull. It is thus clear that, in the present state of the evidence, the term *kanzu* is the best candidate for the Akkadian reading of túg-kur-ra. Still, some problems remain unsolved, namely:

1. CTMMA 4, 38 is the only occurrence of *kanzu* where it is qualified as a textile;
2. túg-kur-ra in CTMMA 4, 38 could be a generic term used to qualify the textile *kanzu* as a ‘blanket’;
3. wrapping objects is not the main use of túg-kur-ra, while the term *kanzu* seems to refer exclusively to a textile used for that purpose.

Although the correct Akkadian reading of túg-kur-ra is still not defined, the use of this textile is documented by a wide range of evidence.

In the letter YOS 21, 98, from Uruk, the túg-kur-ra is clearly indicated as a garment worn by the workmen: “send 20 túg-kur-ra-garments. Here there are many naked workmen.”

Another document where túg-kur-ra are given to workers is BM 63343:

**BM 63343**

Reverse
1. 10 gú.un 20 ma.na s[i.g.хи.a]
2. a-na 49 túg-kur-ra*[m]c[a]
3. šá 5[er]m[е]l e-peš dul-lu
4. šá qi-i-pi a-na m[u]tu-šē[s]m[е]s-su

Ten talents and 20 minas of wool for 49 túg-kur-ras of the workers of the qīpu to Šamaš-ah[ḥē-erība]

In this text, the 49 túg-kur-ras appear to be used as a medium for payment. The use of these textiles as rations of sorts is well attested in Neo- and Late Babylonian sources. Thanks to BM 63343, we know how much wool was required to buy a túg-kur-ra at Sippar (during the reign of Nabonidus – 556-539 BC). A túg-kur-ra costs 12.65 mine of wool, about six kilograms. Other textual sources give different quantities of wool for one túg-kur-ra, indicating that this price fluctuated. Unfortunately, these texts only tell us how much a túg-kur-ra was worth in wool, not how much wool was needed to make one. This information seems to be found, instead, in CT 55, 783, from Sippar:

**CT 55, 783**

Obverse
1. [12’ ma.na sig.]хи.a a-na 2
túg-kur-ra*[м]е

30. CAD K, 148 s.v. *kanzu*. Kunzu also repeatedly occurs as a leather bag in CAD K, 549 s.v. *kanzu*. See, again, the commentary in CTMMA 4, 38 l. 1.
31. See CDA, 145. I am grateful to C. Michel for this suggestion.
32. 10 gú sig.хи.а ina túg-kur-ra*[м]е-šu ḫu-ṭī-ma (YOS 3, 11: 13-15); see commentary in CTMMA 4, 38 l. 10.
33. ašu šá-a-šú ina 1ʷ túg-kur-ra sa, ta-qeb-bir “you will bury the carcase of that bull in a red túg-kur-ra” (TU 44, col. II, l. 19); Linssen 2004, 253.
35. Published in Zawadzki 2002, 156-157.
36. See Jursa 2010, 619-623. In particular, see the table of prices on pp. 620-622, showing all the prices of túg-kur-ra attested between the reign of Assurbanipal (668-628 BC) and that of Darius (521-486 BC). The average price of a túg-kur-ra was thus roughly 5 shekels of silver in Uruk, roughly 6 shekels of silver in Sippar.
37. One shekel = 8.3 grams; one mina = 500 grams; one talent = 30 kilograms. One mina = 60 shekels; one talent = 60 minas.
38. GC 1, 161, from Uruk (Nabucodonosor II – 605-559 BC) has eight minas for one túg-kur-ra (four kilograms); NCBT 641 (Uruk – Nabucodonosor II) has eight minas and ten shekels for one túg-kur-ra (3.5 kilograms); PTS 2370 (Uruk - Nabonedus) has ten minas for one túg-kur-ra (five kilograms).
In this text, each woman is given a standard quantity of wool (six minas) to make túg-kur-ra. In all likelihood, these women are weavers in the service of an išparu (chief weaver). Woman weavers are not uncommon in Near Eastern sources, whether epigraphic or iconographic. It is likely that in this geographical area, as well as elsewhere, weaving was an exclusively female occupation. Other women, probably engaged in spinning, are recorded on some clay docket dated to the reign of Merodach-baldan II (722-703 BC). Each docket gives the name of the spinner and her supervisor, and was presumably tied with a string to the wool to be spun. Another textual source, Camb. 398, adds some useful information about the characteristics of túg-kur-ra:

Camb. 398

1. 2 túg-kur-raššiš-šu-tu šá 8 kùš
2. gid-da-‘8’ [kùš dagal]-‘ù
3. 12 ma-na ki.lá-šú-nu

“Two new túg-kur-ra, 8 cubits long each, 8’ [cubits wide] each and their weight (being together) 12 minas”.

According to Camb 398, a regular túg-kur-ra weighing 6 minas (like the túg-kur-ra mentioned in CT 55, 783) should be 8 cubits (about four meters) long, and probably 7 or 8 cubits wide. This is the only Neo-Babylonian record of the measurements of this kind of garment, although in the text TC 3, 17, of the Old Assyrian period (2000-1740 BC), the measurements of a finished cloth roughly coincide with those of the túg-kur-ra of Camb. 398, and the same is true of ITT V, 1921, pl. 63, no. 9996, (Ur III period – 2112-2004 BC), where a cloth measures 8 by 7 cubits.

The large size of the túg-kur-ra induced A. L. Oppenheim to propose translating the term generically as ‘blanket’. His intuition seems to have hit the mark, having been adopted in many later studies. The final test – as Oppenheim himself regards it to be – of whether túg-kur-ra was a blanket is possibly found in text Nbn. 662, where two individuals each receive one half (mišil) of the same túg-kur-ra. Túg-kur-ra could be, therefore, a blanket wrapped around the body as a garment, and it was not used only by workers. The garment is also mentioned as being worn by priests (during particular ritual acts?), slaves, wet nurses, travelers, and soldiers.

Concerning priests, clearly these must be regarded as part of the elite, which, as I specified above, I will not be dealing with in the present study. However, I think it is important to mention, if only in passing, the role of the túg-kur-ra worn by a galamahḫu-priest in a ritual of the Hellenistic period:

UVB 15, 40

13. la-galamahu tušlu-bar kitī ḫa-lip u tugšūna ša sapal rêši qaqqad-su rakis
14. [ina] [i-l]i-[i]s sipārri ina a-sā-bi-šū tuglu-bar du₄-ma
15. [t₆x x x] u tug-kur-ra il-lab-biš

“The galamahḫu-priest will wear a linen lubāru-garment and he will tie a sūnu-hat for the lower head, but if he wants to

39. Like CT 55, 783, another document, NBC 4920, mentions a zakītu weaving túg-kur-ra; see Jursa 2010, 596.
41. Joannès 2010, 401-402.
42. See also Oppenheim 1950, 189.
43. ga-am-ra-am ša-ba-ta-am ša te-pi-ši-ni ti-šē i-na-mi-tim lu ú-ru-uk-šu ša-ma-né ina a-mi-tim lu ru-pu-šu “a finished textile that you make must be nine cubits long and eight cubits wide” (ll. 33-36). See Michel & Veenhof 2010, 250-251.
44. Veenhof 1972, 91-92.
45. Oppenheim 1950, 189.
In this text, it is evident that túg-kur-ra is somehow distinct from the other prestige clothing items mentioned in the text, as it is used by the priest in replacement of a lubāru-dress made of linen, a garment frequently used to clothe divine images. This change of clothes occurs at a specific point in the ritual, that is, when the priest is about to sit on the lilissu-tympanum. It is not clear why it is required, since the tympanum is usually not viewed negatively or regarded as impure.\(^48\) Linen was not regarded as an impure fiber either; the opposite, if anything, is true. Probably some actions the priest was called upon to perform were regarded as being somehow impure, and this is why he needed to change his dress into an ordinary garment.\(^49\) Túg-kur-ra are rarely mentioned as being worn by slaves or servants. The text GC 1, 161 records the giving of the garment to a slave, more specifically to a širku:

**GC 1, 161**

1. 1 túg-kur-ra
2. šá a-na 8 ma-na šig.ḫi.α
3. ana-šá-
4. a-na \(\text{md}\	ext{en-e-ṭè-ru}
5. \(\text{nušim-ki na-din}

“One túg-kur-ra, which for 8 minas of wool is brought, to Bēl-ēṭeru, the oblate, is given”.

The širku or ‘oblate’ is a particular kind of slave enjoying a rather privileged position, as he is consecrated to the temple and a specific deity. As for mere slaves (\(\text{qallū} \) or \(\text{ardū} \)), instead, they are more frequently mentioned as wearing širʾam or muṣiptu.\(^50\)

I mentioned above that the túg-kur-ra was part of the attire of travelers and soldiers. When clothes are mentioned in connection with travelers or soldiers, these are almost certain to be túg-kur-ra and širʾam; in most cases, the two clothes are recorded together as the constituent elements of a uniform of sorts.\(^51\) Finally, BM 33978\(^52\) shows that the túg-kur-ra could be one of the items that wet nurses were paid with:

**BM 33978**

Obverse
1. ʾ\(\text{nu-up-ta-a dumu.sal šá mdag-šē}-\(\text{t-tan-nu} \)
2. a-na um.me.ga.lá-ú-tu ’a-’di 2-ʾ\(\text{ta}’ \)mu.an.\(\text{na} \)
3. dumu.sal šá i gemé-ia dumu.sal šá \(\text{mk}i-\)
4. ’ag’-tin dumu \(\text{md}\	ext{en-e-ṭè-ru}
5. tu-še-šab ina mu.an.na 1\(\text{m} \) túg-kur-ra
6. 3 gin kù.babbar iti 1 qa ’mun’.ḫi.α 1 qa sah-le-e
7. 1\(\text{m} \) ’su’-um-mu-nu šá ‘i.ḫi.α’ \(\text{u} \)\(\text{mu} \)\(\text{mu} \) 2 qa qí-me
8. 4’ ninda.ḫi.α 1 qa kaš.sag gemé-ia
9. [… ]’x x’ […]

Reverse
10. [1\(\text{m} \) túg].kur.ra gemé-ia a-na ʾ\(\text{nu-up-ta-a ta-nam-din}
11. [ta-\(\text{n} \)am-din

(witnesses and date)

“Nūptāya, daughter of Nabû-aḫa-it[tannu …], receives the daughter of Amtiya, the daughter of Itti-Nabû-balāṭu, of the Egibi family, for a breastfeeding lasting two years. Amtiya will give [to] Nūptāya: annually 1 túg-kur-ra (and) 3 shekels of silver; monthly 1 litre of salt, 1 litre of cress, 1 summunu-vessel (full) of oil; daily 2 litres of flour, 4’ loaves (and) 1 litre of first

---

49. See Zawadzki 2006, 91.
50. For these garments, see below.
51. I will discuss túg-kur-ra and širʾam for travelers and soldiers below, in my section on širʾam.
5. Ordinary People’s Garments in Neo- and Late-Babylonian Sources

The text, written in Babylon and dated to the reign of Xerxes (485-465 BC), is a contract for the payment of the wet nurse Nūptāya. She is charged with breastfeeding Amtiya’s daughter, in exchange for which she will be paid with silver, staple foods, and a túg-kur-ra.53

Interestingly, in at least two such wet-nurse contracts the term túg-kur-ra is replaced by the term kabru.54 For example, in BM 74330 a wet nurse is paid four silver shekels and a kabru-garment.55 This does not enable us to conclude that kabru is the Akkadian reading of túg-kur-ra. However, if the kabru-garment is actually made of heavy cloth, the very fact that it takes the place of túg-kur-ra in the same type of document suggests that the túg-kur-ra was also made of heavy cloth, at least in this case.

mušiptu

In 1953, in the like-titled entry in his Glossar zu den neubabylonischen Briefe, Erich Ebeling explains the word mušéptu as follows: “mušéptu (D Part. von ṣêpu) “Hülle”, eine Art Burnus, Idgr. túg-kur-ra.”56 Although Ebeling’s work remains to this day one of the most important studies ever carried out on Neo-Babylonian correspondence, since then some progress has been made in the understanding of the term. In 1950, A.L. Oppenheim had already solved the problem of the incorrect identification of túg-kur-ra with mušiptu by proving that the latter has no ideographic equivalent.57 The name mušiptu is very likely to derive from suppu ‘to rub’, attested in the Middle Assyrian period (1350-1100 BC) in the context of horse husbandry with the specific meaning ‘to groom’.58 Its nominal form mušiptu possibly designates the dressing of wool.59 According to the authors of the Concise Dictionary of Akkadian (CDA), the verb suppu may also have the meaning of ‘decorating,’ which however is not applicable to mušiptu, because evidence for decorated mušiptu is just about nonexistent.60 In Neo-Babylonian documents, the term mušiptu often occurs with the generic meaning of ‘garment.’61 The Akkadisches Handwörterbuch (AHw) and the CDA hence translate it, respectively, as ‘Gewand’ and ‘garment,’62 while the Assyrian Dictionary of Chicago (CAD) attempts a more detailed translation ‘(standard size) piece of cloth.’63 By placing ’standard size’ between parentheses, the authors admit to doubts regarding the actual standardization of the measurements of a mušiptu garment, and indeed no text indicating these measurements is known so far. Some sources provide other kinds of information:

YOS 6, 91

1. 5 gín kû. babbar š[ām] 4 mu-šipt- ti
   “5 shekels of silver, the price of 4 mušiptus”

53. In rev. 1, it appears that Amtiya gives another túg-kur-ra to Nūptāya. It is likely that this túg-kur-ra is actually part of an annual payment given immediately to Nūptāya together with 3 silver shekels, which were possibly mentioned in the damaged portion of the tablet (obv. 9).
56. Ebeling 1953, 140-141.
57. Oppenheim 1950, 188-189; see also the section on túg-kur-ra in the present essay, and Zawadzki 2010, 413.
58. CAD Ṣ, 250; on this term see also Gaspa in the present volume.
59. CAD Ṣ, 249 s.v. *suppu C “strip of carded wool.”
61. This is true, for example, of texts relative to dowries, where different types of garments are listed under the term mušiptu; cf. Roth 1989-1990, 29.
62. AHw, 679; CDA, 220.
63. CAD M2, 242.
YOS 3, 104

10. 5 tugmu-ṣip-‘tu₄
11. šu-bi-lam
12. udu.nita
13. lu-bu-uk-kam-ma
14. lu-uš-pur-ka

“Send me 5 musiptus and I will take and send you a ram.”

YOS 3, 104

64. CAD M2, 243, has this differently: ina 33 gin kaspi šá ana musiptu nadin. According to this reading, the cost of a musiptu is of 33 silver shekels.


Evetts Lab. 6

1. i-na maš ma.na 3 gin kù.babar
2. šá a-na mu-ṣip-tu₄ sum₄

“Out of a half mina (of silver), 3 shekels of silver were given for a musiptu”

VAS 6, 58

5. ‘2’ gin 4-ut šá mu-ṣip-tu₄

“2 shekels (and) ¼ for a musiptu”

According to the indications of these four texts, a musiptu was not especially valuable. YOS 6, 91 indicates a price of 1.25 shekels of silver, and the Uruk letter YOS 3, 104 clearly states that five musiptus were worth the same price as a sheep. Assuming the average price of a sheep to be around three shekels of silver, this musiptu would be worth about half a shekel. These are of course approximate figures, but they clearly suggest that the musiptu was an inexpensive clothing item. The other two documents record, respectively 3, and 2.25 shekels per item. These prices match those attested for a tūg-kur-ra.

Not only is the cost of a musiptu about the same, in some cases, as that of a tūg-kur-ra, but the two garments are also used in the same ways. GC 2, 349, where some workers are given large quantities of clothing items, is the best evidence of the fact that the musiptu was not only inexpensive, but also used by common people:

GC 2, 349:

Obverse:
1. ’40 tugmu-ṣip-ti md₁₅-mu-mu a-šú šá md₄ag-[x x]
2. 30 tug₄₄ a-di qí-it

Reverse:
11. ina ú-il-tim šá ē.an.na ina ugu
12. hūgal₄₄ 5₀₄₄ a-di qí-it
13. šá iti.kin a-na ē.an.na i-nam-di-nu

“40 musiptus (for) Ištar-šum-iddin son of Nabû? x-x
30 (for) Nabû-nadin-šumi son of Rimût-Gula
10 (for) Šākin-šumi son of Iblî-Istar
10 (for) Bēl-uṣallim son of Šamaš-iddin
10 (for) Iblî-Istar son of Ša-Nabû-šu-û
10 (for) Innina-šum-uṣur son of Iddîn-Nabû
10 (for) Innina-zēr-ušabši son of Mukîn-zēri
10 (for) Innina-zēr-līšir son of Bēl-šum-iškun
5 (for) x-x-epuš son of Bēl-uballiṭ
Total 135 musiptus
the debit of the Eanna temple over the rab ḫanše. Up to the end of the month of Elûlu they will give (back) to Eanna temple.”
Actually, the text records a total of 135 clothing items to be distributed, in lots of 40, 30, 10, 5, among nine supervisors of working units of 40, 30, 10, and 5 workers. In the final part of the text, these supervisors are identified as rab ḫanše.67 One of the tasks of these supervisors was to return some of the muṣiptu within the month of Elūlu, probably the date established for completion of the work. The returning of the clothes to the temple – in this particular case, the Eanna – is undisputable proof that institutions possessed clothes, presumably kept in their storerooms,68 which they would distribute among dependents when work was to be done.

A particular feature of muṣiptu, probably shared with the guzuzu clothing item,69 was that they could be rolled up.70 In the text Nbk. 369, we read: 1<sup>en</sup> ʾšīná ki-ʾir-ka ʾši-guš-guṣ ʾši-mu-ši-pe-tí “a bed (with) rolled up guzuzu and muṣiptu.” Dar. 530 reads: ʾšī-a-ra-an-mu ʾši-pe-e-tú, ki-iš-ki, where it is evident that rolled up (kišku) muṣiptu were gathered in a basket (arannu).

As to how muṣiptu were used, the information found in letter BIN 1, 6 is particularly surprising:

**BIN 1, 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obverse</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>im ʾšīl-la-a a-na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>ʾur-a nin-šú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>ʾen ʾag šu-lum šá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>nin-šú liq-bu-ú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>ʾen ša-bab-bat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>bab-ba-ní-tí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>ina ʾši-mu-ši-pí-tí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>eb-bé-tí</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67. The rab ḫanšū (CAD H, 81) is the head of a team of 50 workmen or soldiers. A typical team was composed of ten men under the supervision of a rab eširi; cf. CAD E, 365.

68. As was the case for tūg-kur-ra, cf. Nbn. 290: 9 tūg-kur-ra ta ʾšú “nine tūg-kur-ra in the storeroom (bīt qāṭī)”. For bīt qāṭī, see CAD Q, 199 and Joannès 2010, 401.

69. Quillien 2013, 22.


71. The garment called šabbatu, mentioned in earlier periods as a luxury clothing item, is never mentioned in Neo-Babylonian documents, except in this case: cf. CAD Š1, 8 s.v. šabbatu.

72. In the Neo-Babylonian period, the verb for “sewing” is kubbû; cf. CAD K, 482-483.

73. CAD T, 68.

74. Veenhof 1972, 41-44.

75. šir-ʾam rak-su-ʾá u ka-an-gu-ʾá “a širʾam packaged and sealed” (YOS 21, 31:1.9).
on the evidence of BIN 1, 6 and on the basis of other considerations, it is reasonable to affirm that musiptu is a length of an inexpensive textile used as a garment, but also to wrap things up (possibly by sewing it) and protect fine clothes during transportation.

The term musiptu also occurs as a designation for garments worn by various members of Babylonian society. In several textual sources we learn of musiptus used as female garments. For example, in Dar. 575, a slave woman called Mušezibtum receives a musiptu,76 and the legal text BM 10345277 refers to the stealing of a musiptu belonging to a woman named Rišāya, possibly a widow:

BM 103452

6. m”ki-4utu-tin a-sù m”la-ba-ši a-na da-na-na a-na ē
7. a-na muḫ-ḫi-ia ki-i i-ru-ub
i-ti-ra-an-ni
8. u m”su-ip-ti-ia it-ta-ši

“Itti-Šamaš-balāṭu, the son of Lābāši had broken into my house by force, he beat me, took away my musiptu.”

A garment of the musiptu type is mentioned in connection with animal husbandry in BE 8, 106. Here a slave, charged with pasturing cows, receives food rations and a musiptu from the rē’û (herdsman) Nabû-mukīn-zēri for carrying out the task.

Finally, musiptu are prominently featured in apprenticeship contracts, for example Cyr. 64:

Cyr. 64

1. ʻnu-up-ta-a dumu.sal-su šá m”mu-4amar. utu a m”zālag-30
2. m”at-kal-a-na-4amar.utu lu qal-la šá m”ki-"amar.utu-tin
3. a-šù šá m”ag-šešmek-mu a m”e-gr-ib a-na lu iš-pa-ru-tu
4. a-di 5 mu.an.na"mē a-na m”en-kar" a-šù

Apprenticeship contracts are typical of the Late Babylonian period.78 They consist of a contract between a free citizen and a master craftsman. The citizen entrusts his or her son, daughter or slave to the master for a given period of time for training in a specific craft. Once taken in charge, the practitioner’s keep is paid for by the parent or owner, not the tutor, who in some cases also receives additional payment. The musiptu-garment is one of the most frequently mentioned items among the provisions given to the apprentice, whereas túg-kur-ra or uzāru-garments79 are mentioned, albeit rarely, among the goods given to the teacher in payment, but never musiptu.

šir’am

The šir’am-garment occurs quite frequently in Mesopotamian documents. It originally was exclusively an item of military apparel, a cuirass of sorts. It is mentioned as such, for example, in EA 22, a text from the El-Amarna period (ca. 1350 BC):

EA 22, col. III

37. 1 šu sa-ri-am zabar 1 gur-si-ib zabar ša ē

76. mu-sip-tu, m”iš-ir-ki a-na “mu-su-zib-tum ū-kār-[tam] (Dar. 575 ll. 10-11)
78. J. Hackl has dealt extensively with this theme in Jursa 2010, 700-725.
79. uzāru appears in apprenticeship contract BOR 1, 83, túg-kur-ra in Cyr. 313.
38. 1 šu sa-ri-am ša kuš 1 gur-si-ib zabar 39. ša lú za-ar-gu-ti …

“1 bronze cuirass set, 1 bronze helmet for a man, 1 leather cuirass set, 1 bronze helmet for the sarku-soldiers”

In the Neo-Babylonian period, the šir’am is still part of the military uniform, but also occurs among the garments worn by civilians. Neo-Babylonian cuneiform sources quite commonly mention šir’am as military apparel:

Dar. 253

6. 12 túg-kur-ra 12-ta тисэшір-а-am
7. 12-ta kar-bal-la-tu, 12 кеся-ну-ту
8. 24 кеся-е-ну …

“12 túg-kur-ras, 12 šir’am, 12 karballatus, 12 нітus, 24 šенus”

Dar. 253 enumerates the items making up the equipment of 12 soldiers, and is thus a valuable example of the composition of a military uniform. The specific function of each item is well known, not only thanks to abundant data in epigraphic sources, both coeval and from other periods, but also and especially thanks to the availability of iconographic sources that one can compare with textual ones. The persistent depiction of fully armed and clad soldiers in Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs is certainly the most informative source for a comparison between the Akkadian term and the actual garment it designated.

In military uniforms, the túg-kur-ra is a used as underwear and placed under the šir’am. The best translation for šir’am seems to be the one proposed by J. MacGinnis,80 who renders the Akkadian term as ‘jerkin.’81 Soldiers wore it either as a simple wool garment or as a cuirass reinforced with pieces of metal. As regards the šir’am as a cuirass, one text more than any other, UCP 9, 271, adds important information, as it mentions a šir’am = šir’amu (parzillu). A šir’am of cloth could be a jerkin, but also a tunic of sorts.82 This is borne out by Neo-Assyrian reliefs where archers, in particular, wear a long dress reinforced with plates.83 The karballatu, made of wool or linen, is the most frequently mentioned headwear in Neo- and Late Babylonian documents.84 The above-cited text UCP 9, 271 mentions a karballatu ša šir’amu. This suggests that there was a connection between karballatu and the iron šir’am. It is possible that the headwear was somehow connected to the jerkin, or that the expression karballatu ša šir’amu alludes to the fact that the karballatu is of metal, just like the šir’am. The two remaining elements – which were made of leather, since the term is preceded by the determinative kuš – are нітus and šенu. The former term designates a bag used to carry goods, while the latter was normally employed for footwear.

Túg-kur-ra and šir’am (often mentioned together with karballatu, нітus and шену) were not merely elements of military apparel; they were also worn by individuals undertaking long journeys (ṣidītu) at the behest of the temple or the palace.85 A good example of this is BM 78828,86 where some carpenters (наггару) receive túg-kur-ra and šir’am garments that they may travel to a military camp (madāktu).87 As F. Joannès had already noted, there existed a broad range of šir’am:88 for men (šir’am ša zikāri in Evetts Ner. 28) and for women (šir’am ša kitī amilī in Evetts Ner. 28); of linen (šir’am ša kitī in TCL 9, 117); red-dyed (šir’am ša tabārī in Nbn. 661), blue-dyed (šir’am ša inzahrēti in YOS 7, 7), or of purple-dyed wool (šir’am ša ше-hе-me.da in GC 1, 299); fine šir’am worn as undergarments (šir’am šupālītu ešētu babbanītu in Nbk. 12); and luxury šir’am

81. The same translation is used by Zawadzki 2010, 414.
82. Janković 2008, 453, gives the same translation.
83. See for example Paterson 1915, Plate 14.
84. CAD K, 215.
85. See Janković 2008, esp. 452–454.
86. MacGinnis 2012, no. 35.
87. The carpenters were probably headed to a military camp to repair wooden objects, such as boats; cf. Zawadzki 2008, 334–335.
worn as outer garments (šīr’ām elēnītu murruqītu babbanītu in AJSL 16, 73 no. 16). This piece of evidence enables us to conclude that the šīr’ām was used in Babylonian society both as an ordinary garment – there are quite a few testimonies of šīr’ām worn by slave men or women89 – and as a fine one.90 Šīr’ām may have had different values depending on how they were manufactured. This is suggested by some documents indicating their prices:

**YOS 19, 242**

1. 1/3 1/2 gin kū.babbar 4 túg-kur-ra
2. ú 1 šišir’-a-am a-na 10 gin kū.babbar
3. pap 1/2 ma-na 1/2 gin kū.babbar šám ē

“1/3 (mina) half shekel, 4 túg-kur-ras and 1 šīr’ām for 10 shekels. The house price is in total half 1/2 and 1/2 a shekel”

In YOS 19, 242, the price of the šīr’ām can be interpreted in two different ways: the ten silver shekels may be the price of the šīr’ām alone,91 or the overall price of the šīr’ām and the túg-kur-ra. Both interpretations pose problems, of a different order. If we assume the ten shekels to be the price of the two items together, we are unable to determine the exact price of either.92 If, instead, we assume the ten shekels to be the price of the šīr’ām alone, it appears to be too high compared to the other recorded prices for a šīr’ām.93

**Conclusions**

The aim of this article was to investigate a field fraught with insurmountable hurdles. The main difficulty besetting a study of clothing worn by ordinary people is that epigraphic documents provide little information about the lives of those who do not belong to the upper echelons of Babylonian society. In the rare cases when Babylonian common people are mentioned, their role is merely accessory, their actions only being noted down because they are correlated to individuals or events worthy of being recorded.

Another extremely complicated question is that of terminology. The clothes of common people are often generically described as ‘dress’ or ‘garment.’ Túg-kur-ra and muṣiptu, in particular, are used in this generic way. It is thus hard to understand, in the lack of a clear textual context, whether a muṣiptu in a given document is just any clothing item or the clothing item thus designated.

The best sources on the wearing of túg-kur-ra, muṣiptu and šīr’ām by common people are texts recording their donation to groups of people, such as workmen or soldiers.94 In exceptional cases, some particular categories of workers to whom specific clothing items were assigned can be discerned. As we have seen, túg-kur-ra, besides being a garment donned by workmen and soldiers was also donated to wet nurses as part of their sustenance. The muṣiptu was worn by workmen, but above I have indicated one case where it was used in an animal husbandry
context. More importantly, as we have seen, *muṣiptu* are regularly featured in apprenticeship contracts. Finally, *širʾam*, like tug-kur-ra, were worn by workmen and soldiers, and it appears it was not unusual for them to be worn by slaves, on the evidence of a number of textual sources.

The present essay, following in the wake of S. Zawadzki’s study on clothes in non-cultic contexts,95 is a first attempt to investigate clothes worn by common people in Babylonian society. I hope it will provide a stimulus for further research, confirming or contradicting what I have stated in the previous pages.

### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADOG</td>
<td>Abhandlungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJSL</td>
<td>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AO</td>
<td>tablets in the collections of the Musée du Louvre, Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AoO</td>
<td>Archiv für Orientforschung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOAT</td>
<td>Alter Orient und Altes Testament. Neukirchen-Vluyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series A: Cuneiform Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM</td>
<td>Tablets in the collections of the British Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRM</td>
<td>Babylonian Records in the Library of J. Pierpont Morgan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAD</td>
<td>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Chicago 1956-2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>Cuneiform Monographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT MMA</td>
<td>Cuneiform Texts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITT</td>
<td>Inventaire des tablettes de Tello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCS</td>
<td>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td>Journal of Semitic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KASKAL</td>
<td>Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Oriente Antico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.A.B.U.</td>
<td>Nouvelles assyrologiques brèves et utiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>Tablets in the Nies Babylonian Collection, Yale University Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBT</td>
<td>Tablets in the Newell Collection of Babylonian Tablets, Yale University Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIP</td>
<td>Oriental Institute Publications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| OIP 122      | D. B. Weisberg, *Neo-Babylonian Texts in..."
the Oriental Institute Collection. Chicago 2003

PIHANS Publications de l’Institut historique et archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul

RA Revue d’assyriologie et archéologie orientale

TC Textes cappadiennes du Louvre (Paris)

TCL Textes cunéiformes du Louvre


UCP University of California Publications in Semitic Philology


YOS Yale Oriental Series – Babylonian Texts


UVB Vorläufige Bericht über ... Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka

Bibliography


