

ṢUBĀT BĀŠTI: A ROBE OF SPLENDOR

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Most scholars seem to have accepted the etymological relationship of Akkadian *bāštu* and Hebrew *bōšet*.¹ As a result, *ṣubāt bāšti* is usually translated 'loincloth'² or the like.³ However, the *Assyrian Dictionary* of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (=CAD), after an incisive study of *bāštu*,⁴ uses the translation 'gorgeous, festive garment' for *ṣubāt bāšti*.⁵ Since the CAD and W. von Soden's *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (=AHw.) use almost contradictory translations (AHw. uses 'Schamtuch'), further study is merited.

We ought to note that the translation 'loincloth' should never have been suggested by Hebrew *bōšet*, for *bōšet* is not used of the private parts. The word used is 'erwāh, and once *mebušim*.⁶ Moreover, Hebrew *bōšet* is almost exactly opposite in meaning from *bāštu*, as the idiom 'be covered with *bōšet/bāštu*' shows. Thus *ksh/'ḥ/lbš/ bšt*⁷ is negative and means 'to be embarrassed, chagrined' and the like; whereas Akkadian *bāšta za'in/ḫitlup* is positive and refers to the aura of distinction enveloping crowns⁸ and gods and their images.⁹ Since the alleged etymological relationship fails to stand, our investigation of *ṣubāt bāšti* should turn to the use of the phrase in Akkadian itself.

There are three occurrences of *ṣubāt bāšti* in Akkadian literature: Descent of Ishtar: 60-62 (cf. Rev. 39); Gilgamesh XI:243 (cf. 252); and Lambert, *BWL*, 228, iii:13. When we examine the first of these in context, we find that Ishtar, entering the Netherworld, is stripped of one item of jewelry at each of six gates; and then:

*sebā ḫāba ušeribšīma umtašši ittabal ṣubāt bālti [for bāšti] ša zumrīša
ammīni ātū tatbal ṣubāt bālti ša zumrīya
erbi bēlti ša Bēlet-eršetim kī am paršūsa*

When he [the gatekeeper of the Netherworld] led her through the seventh gate, he took hold of and took away the robe of splendor from her body.

"Why, O gatekeeper, did you take away the robe of splendor from my body?"

"Enter, my mistress. As for the Mistress of the Netherworld [Ereshkigal], such are her customs."

¹For a critique of the methodology that relies on face-value etymologies and its abuse in biblical studies, see Kopf, "Arabische Etymologien und Parallelen zum Bibelwörterbuch," VT 8 (1958), 161-215.

²E.g., Heidel, *Gilgamesh Epic*, 124; Speiser, *ANET* 3, 108a; Meissner, "Studien zu den assyrischen Sprichwörtern," MAOG III/3, 42; Lambert, *BWL*, 232:13; von Soden, *AHw.*, 186b, 112a.

³As usual, Jensen demonstrated his acumen by translating *ṣubāt bālti* (for *bāšti*) 'Schamtuch' (*KB* 6/1, 85). In a long note on pp. 397-98, Jensen points out the difficulty in translating *ṣubāt bāšti* as 'Schamtuch'. The observations made by him there seem to underlie the translations of the CAD, *B*, 144; *E*, 29, 314; *S*, 225.

⁴*B*, 142-44.

⁵*B*, 144; *E*, 29, 314; *S*, 225.

⁶Deut. 25:11.

⁷Pss. 35:26; 44:16; 109:29; 132:18; Job 8:22.

⁸Borger, *Esarḫ.*, 83, Rev. 34

⁹Luckenbill, *Senn.*, 107:34; Borger, *Esarḫ.*, 91, 61:9, and note de Genouillac, *TCL* 15, pl. 48, 16:37 (with *edēqu*).

If Ishtar is indeed being stripped of a loincloth, as most scholars assume, one would expect the poet to employ a substantive such as *karu*¹⁰ or *bašāmu*.¹¹ However, the list of jewelry stripped off at the first six gates leads us to conclude that some kind of sumptuous garment was being removed here.

More compelling evidence comes from the Sumerian forerunner to the Descent of Ishtar. There, Inanna (Ishtar) dons the seven *mes* to go to the Great Below, and none of the seven *mes* is as banal as a loincloth. What is removed at the seventh gate is 'the *pala*-garment, the garment of ladyship'.¹² So we should expect that *bāštu* had its usual positive connotations, and *šubāt bāšti* means 'a robe of splendor'.

Translating the phrase thus in Gilgamesh XI:243 yields better sense than the usual translation, and is more in accord with the context in which it appears (lines 239-46):

liqēšūma Uršanābi ana namsē bilšūma
malīšu ina mē kīma elli limsi
liddi maškīšūma libil tāmtum: šābu lū šapū zumuršu
lū udduš parsigu ša qaqqadišu
tēdega lū labiṣ šubāt bālīšu
adi illaku ana ālīšu [var., mātišu]
adi ikāššadu ana urhīšu
tēdequ šipa ay iddīma¹³ edēšu līdīš

Therefore, take him, Urshanabi, and bring him to the washing place, and
 Let him wash his filthy hair in water like a cultically clean person [i.e., a priest];
 Let him cast off his skins¹⁴ and let the sea carry [them] away.
 Let his fair body be smooth.
 Let his headband be renewed;
 Let him be clad in a luxurious garment, his robe of splendor.
 Until he gets to his city [var., his country],
 Until he arrives at his destination,
 May his garment not be discolored, but always stay new.

The use here of *šubāt bāšti* in apposition to *tēdequ* 'luxurious garment',¹⁵ is much more telling than any etymology.

The most interesting occurrence of *šubāt bāšti* is in a bilingual proverb which has been the object of surprisingly little investigation:¹⁶

[*lū.gal.(an.)zu*¹⁷ *tūg.tēš.ša*¹⁸ *n*] *a ŠITA.ah ŠĀM. IM*
 [*tug.nig.da*] *ra*₄. *BAD an.mu*₄

¹⁰E.g., Descent of Ishtar, Rev. 2: *karu labiṣ malī naṣi*.

¹¹E.g., Borger, *Esarh.*, 102, II i:3: *bašāmu šubāt bēl arni ēdiqa zumuršu*.

¹²Translation of Kramer, *ANET*³, 55:157. Note also *MSL* 10, 131, note to 138. The employment of *šubāt bāšti* in the Akkadian Descent of Ishtar where we would expect to find *tēdequ* (*Malku* VI:58) argues strongly for a correspondence of the two terms.

¹³We expect *ittaddi* here. Cf. *BE* 17, 31:17; *Gilg.* XI:217, 227; *Erra* I:91.

¹⁴Cf. *Gilg.* VIII, ii:21-22; iii:7.

¹⁵For *tēdequ* as 'luxurious garment', c.f., e.g., *MSL* 10, 131:138-40; *VAB* 4, 276, iv:26-27; Reisner, *SBH.* 145, ii:3, 15; Rev. ii:19; 4R. 9a:18; Ebeling, *Handerhebung.* 116:6, 118:5.

¹⁶Meissner, *MAOG* III/3, 42; Lambert, *BWL*, 228, iii:13-14; and the *CAD* as cited in note 5.

¹⁷The restoration *kū.zu* (*CAD.* E. 29, 314) is the usual equivalent for *emqu*. For *gal.(an.)zu=eršu*, cf. *MSL* 12, 100:148a-b (compare 35:68-71), *A VII/2:81*, *Igituh* I:275, *Erimhuš* II:16.

¹⁸Cf. *MSL* 12, 179:29: *lū tēš.šu.KA.ra=ša bu-uš-tam* (for *bāštam*!; cf. line 25) *ha-al-pu*. The rest of the restorations are from *CAD.* E, 314.

nandūq eršū šubāt baltī
nu ū ulāp¹⁹ dame²⁰ labīš²¹

The wise [man] is clad in a splendid garment.
The fool is dressed in a bloodstained²² cloak.

Meissner—using a different translation—takes the proverb to show that “wie zu allen Zeiten und Orten hat also auch in Babylonien der Weise sein Herz nicht an schone Kleider gehängt, sondern hat diese Leidenschaft den Toren überlassen;”²³ but the true meaning of the proverb is almost exactly the opposite of Meissner’s suggestion, as the analogues to this proverb in the cognate languages would seem to indicate.

To assist in making comparisons, a partial interdialectal distribution for ‘robe of splendor’ may be obtained. Hebrew,²⁴ Aramaic,²⁵ and Syriac²⁶ all would employ *lbš’(’)* *hdr’(’)* as an equivalent of *šubāt bāšti* (= *bālti*). An association in any of these languages of *lbš’(’)* *hdr’(’)* with a wise man or, conversely, of a bloodstained garment with a fool, would constitute a remarkable parallel to this Akkadian proverb.

Such parallels are to be found in the Syriac *Aḥiqar*²⁷ (and thence to the Arabic version),²⁸ in the Hebrew Bible,²⁹ and in the Babylonian Talmud.³⁰ The Syriac seems to preserve the whole proverb:

ברי דהדיר בלבושה הדיר אף במלתה
ודשיט בלבושה שיט אף במלתה

My “son,” he who is splendid in his dress is splendid also in his speech; but he who is despicable in his dress is despicable also in his speech.

¹⁹For *ulāpu*, cf. Thureau-Dangin, “Fragment d’un Poème Relatif à Anuṣat,” *RA* 11 (1914), 87, n. 2 (but cf. Meissner, *MAOG* III/3, 34). The derivation by Halévy (*Mélanges de Critique et d’Histoire* [Paris, 1883], 331) from Arabic *ulfat* is to be rejected with Pereman (*The Book of Assyro-Babylonian Proverbs* [Tel Aviv, 1947], 67 [in Hebrew]). But Pereman’s assertion that *ulāpu* denotes a fine or decorative garment stretches the evidence, particularly in light of *ulāp dame* in our proverb and in *MSL* 10, 136:302. The word appears in Lambert, *BWL* 242:17-18; Landsberger and Gurney, “Practical Vocabulary of Aššur,” *A/O* 18 (1958), 331:297; An VII:268; *MSL* 7, 104:490; *MSL* 10, 136:301-4; 142:78-79 (cf. 146:53); Myrhrman, “Die Labartu [= Lamastu]-Texte,” *ZA* 16 (1902), 168:13; 170:30; 188:52.

²⁰Note *MSL* 10, 136:302 *TUG nig.dāra.bad=ulāp dami*.

²¹It is significant that the verb used with *šubāt bālti* is *edēqu*, while the one used with *ulāp dame* is *labāšu*. The inverted order of the verbs, with the poetic (B) word preceding the common (A) word, indicates very clearly that *šubāt bāšti* is some kind of special garment. *Edēqu* is similarly used to distinguish a higher class of garment in Lambert, “The Gula Hymn of Bulluṣa-rabi,” *Or* NS 36 (1967), 128:194: *lišhuṣu(karri linnadiq šubātīš)*.

²²That ‘bloodstained’ is the correct translation is proved by the Sumerian *BAD*, the writing *da-me* (which is reserved for *damu* ‘blood’; it should be noted that *da’mu* ‘dark-colored, dark red’ is almost always written with an *aleph* or with a lengthening), and that *da’matu* denoting ‘dark red earth used as a dye’ is always employed in the feminine plural (cf. *CAD*, *D*, 75).

²³Meissner, *MAOG* III/3, 42.

²⁴Cf. Prov. 31:25; Isa. 63:1; Ps. 104:1; Job 40:10.

²⁵Targum to Prov. 31:25. Note that the Targum uses *hdr’* only here. In other cases *šbhwr’* (zyw’) renders *hdr’*.

²⁶Cf. Peshitta to Prov. 31:25 and to Ps. 104:1 and Job 40:10.

²⁷Conybeare, Harris and Lewis, *The Story of Aḥiqar* (Cambridge, 1913), 47 (Syriac numbering), #69.

²⁸Ibid., 9 (Arabic numbering), #64.

²⁹Prov. 31:24-25. The attempt of the New English Bible to interpret Prov. 3:35 as a parallel to this Akkadian proverb, following a suggestion by Driver, “Problems in the Hebrew Text of Proverbs,” *Biblica* 32 (1951), 177, is unconvincing. Suffice it to say that the result exhibits defective parallelism, has to rely on an unattested verb, and is shown to be questionable by the very passage (Prov. 14:18) cited as alleged

The Hebrew Bible preserves the first half of the proverb in the beginnings of two successive verses of an acrostic:

וְתִשְׁחַק לַיּוֹם אַחֲרוֹן וְתוֹרַת חֶסֶד עַל שׁוֹנָה	עַז וְהִדָּר לְבוּשָׁה פִּיהָ פֶתַחַּה בַּחֲכָמָה
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Dignity and splendor are her cloak,
and she is unafraid of the future.
She speaks wisely,
and kindness is on her lips.

The easy adaptation of 'z *whdr lbwšh* and *pyh pthh bhkmh* to the acrostic led the poet to break up an A//B sequence that under normal circumstances would have constituted one verse; while the second half of the Akkadian proverb, out of place in this context, was disregarded.

The force of the second half of this proverb seems to be preserved³¹ in the Babylonian Talmud:

ואמר ר' חייא בר אבא א"ר יוחנן כל ת"ח שנמצא רבב
על בגדו חייב מיתה שנאמר כל משנאי אהבו מות אל
תקרי משנאי אלא משניאי רבינא אמר רבד איתמר ולא
פליגי הא בגלימא הא בלבושא

Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba used to quote Rabbi Yohanan as follows: "Any scholar who is discovered with grease on his clothing deserves to die,"³² as it is written (Prov. 8:36): 'All who hate me (*mešane'ay*) love death'—understand the text to mean³³ 'All those who cause others to hate me (*mašni'ay*), etc.' " Rabina said, "Rabbi Yoḥanan said 'blood' (*rbd*), not 'grease' (*rbb*). " There is no contradiction [between R. Hiyya and Rabina]; the former speaks of an outer garment, whereas the latter speaks of [even] an undergarment.

support for Driver's interpretation. Moreover, the MT is quite intelligible as it stands if we derive *mrym* not from *rwm/rym* (contrast Scott, *Proverbs* [Garden City, New York, 1965], 46) but from *mwr/myr* (cf., the Targum and Rashi). Note also Isa. 38:17 (and Ibn Ezra ad loc.); Job 15:31 (and Rashi ad loc.); Ruth 4:7 (cf. Babylonian Talmud, Baba Meš'a 47a, near the bottom). Much of this material is based on an oral communication from Prof. Held.

³⁰Shabbat 114a, near the top.

³¹The variant in the Munich MS (c.f. Rabinowicz, *Variae Lectiones*, Shabbat, 254, *lamed*) is to be corrected with Maharshal (Solomon Luria, 16th Century) and Rabinowicz ad loc. The Tosafot (Avodah Zarah 33a, s.v. "akum rivevan" record a variant to our text which reads:

כל ת"ח שנמצא רבב על בגדו חייב מיתה [...] (?) ואמרי
לה רבד

It seems as though the reconciliation between the readings *rbb* and *rbd* may not be in their text.

³²That this is to be considered an exaggeration is demonstrated by the context (where all the offences have to do with *genai*) and by Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, De'ot 5:9.

³³*al tiqrē* regularly introduces a play on words for exegetical purposes, not necessarily an emendation of the text.

Rabina's statement should be interpreted in the light of our Akkadian proverb to mean: a scholar clad in bloodstained clothes may discourage potential students, for his clothes may provoke the conclusion that anyone who studies the Torah is a fool!

Considered together, these cognate proverbs appear to confirm our interpretation of the Akkadian proverb as a whole, particularly the two most controversial parts of it: that *dame* denotes 'bloodstained' and that *ṣubāt bāšī* is 'a robe of splendour'.