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Another Akkadianism in Ezekiel (and Daniel): לְבַשׁ בָּדִים = *labiš kitê* ‘clothed in linen’

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Ezekiel 9 and 10 feature a supernatural figure described as a man “clothed in linen (לְבַשׁ בָּדִים)” (Ezek. 9:2). This article identifies this and related expressions (including those in Daniel) as calques of Akkadian *labiš kitê*, used to describe certain classes of priests or perhaps as a term for a class of priests itself.

Scholars have long noted features of Mesopotamian culture and Akkadian linguistic influence in the book of Ezekiel, set in Babylonia during the Judahite exile of the sixth century.¹ At least one calque of an Akkadian term, however, has gone unnoticed. Ezekiel 9 and 10 feature a supernatural figure described as a man “clothed in linen (לְבַשׁ בָּדִים), with a writer’s palette at his waist” (Ezek. 9:2).² The phrase “the man/the one clothed in linen” recurs in Ezek. 9 vv. 3 (as הָאִישׁ הַלְבָּשׁ הַבָּדִים) and 11 (as הָאִישׁ לְבַשׁ הַבָּדִים) as well as Ezek. 10:2,6 (הָאִישׁ לְבַשׁ הַבָּדִים) and 7 (לְבַשׁ הַבָּדִים). No doubt based on these chapters, the same expression is used to describe the angel appearing in Dan. 10:5 (אִישׁ אֲחָד לְבוּשׁ בָּדִים), who is again referenced under that description in Dan. 12:6–7 (הָאִישׁ לְבוּשׁ הַבָּדִים).³ From this context in Daniel, the figure went on to exert great influence over Jewish and Christian angelology, although often losing his linen garments in the process.⁴

I suggest that לְבַשׁ בָּדִים and the related phrases are calques of Akkadian *labiš kitê*, similarly meaning ‘clothed in linen’. Various commentators have noted the likelihood that the “man clothed in linen” is depicted as a priest,⁵ in line with the use of linen clothing for priests prescribed in Exodus and Leviticus.⁶ This is borne out by the use of Akkadian *labiš*

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1. Daniel Bodi, “The Mesopotamian Context of Ezekiel,” in *Ezekiel*, ed. Corrine Carvalho (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2020). Online prepublication.

2. Interestingly, given the Babylonian setting, the word קֶסֶת ‘(writer’s) palette’ is a loanword from Ancient Egyptian *gstj*; Benjamin J. Noonan, *Non-Semitic Loanwords in the Hebrew Bible: A Lexicon of Language Contact* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2019), s.v.; Philip Zhakevich, *Scribal Tools in Ancient Israel: A Study of Biblical Hebrew Terms for Writing Materials and Implements* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2020), 139–43.

3. The figure in Daniel does not wear a writer’s palette at his waist, but rather “his loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz.” This could reflect the same kind of reinterpretation of the obscure word קֶסֶת in MT Ezek. 9 (see n. 2 above) as LXX Ezek, which writes that there was a ζώνη σαπφείρου ‘belt of sapphire’ on the man’s loins (taking סֹפֶר ‘writer’ as סַפִּיר ‘sapphire’).

4. E.g., Christopher Rowland, “A Man Clothed in Linen: Daniel 10.6ff. and Jewish Angelology,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 24 (1985): 99–110. A late use that preserves the linen clothing occurs in the ninth (ט) stanza of the medieval Ashkenazi piyyut *’elle ’ezkrā*, part of the modern Ashkenazi liturgy for the Day of Atonement and the Sephardi liturgy for the Ninth of Av: וְעָלָה לְמִרְוֵה. וְשָׂאֵל מֵאֵת הָאִישׁ לְבוּשׁ הַבָּדִים “Rabbi Ishmael purified himself and in trembling uttered the Name. And he ascended to heaven and inquired of the man clothed in linen (הָאִישׁ לְבוּשׁ הַבָּדִים)”. Cited from Avraham Davis, *The Metsudah Machzor: Yom Kippur. A New Linear machzor with English translation and anthology of the classic commentaries*, 2nd rev. ed. (Far Rockaway, NY: Metsudah, 1983), accessed through sefaria.org.

5. E.g., G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936); Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983).

6. Exod. 28:42, 39:28; Lev. 6:10 (twice), 16:4 (four times), 23, 32.

kitê either to describe certain classes of priests or perhaps as a term for a class of priests itself.⁷

The five occurrences of the phrase in Ezekiel are notably consistent in the defective spelling of לָבַשׁ/לְבַשׁ ‘clothed’, especially when contrasted with the consistent plene spelling as לְבוּשׁ/לְבוּשׁ in Daniel. Defective spelling of a long *ū* vowel as found in *lābūš* is not, of course, unheard of, but the consistency seen in Ezek. 9–10 leaves open the possibility that the word was originally meant to be read differently.

The verb לָבַשׁ ‘to wear’ is originally stative and was inflected with an original **i*-vowel in the perfect. This is clear not only from cognate forms like Classical Arabic *labisa* and Classical Ethiopic (Ge‘ez) *labša* (< **labisa* or **labusa*), but also from the two occurrences of לָבַשׁ ‘he has put on’ in Ps. 93:1, occurring instead of the more frequently attested לְבַשׁ. The *a*-vowel in imperfect forms like יִלְבֹּשׁ is also what we expect of a stative verb. Unlike fientive verbs, which distinguish an active and a passive participle, stative verbs normally only have one participle, which shares the vowel of the perfect. Thus, against fientive כָּתַב ‘he wrote’ with its active participle כּוֹתֵב ‘writing’ distinct from the passive participle כְּתוּב ‘written’, stative כָּבַד ‘he was heavy’ and קָטַן ‘he was small’ only have what we could call stative participles, כָּבֵד ‘heavy’ and קָטַן ‘small’, respectively. The same should be expected of an originally stative לָבַשׁ ‘he put on’. The defective spelling of Ezekiel’s לָבַשׁ suggests that it originally represented a stative participle לְבַשׁ* ‘clothed’, making it a close formal parallel of its Akkadian cognate *labiš*. In Daniel, the plene spelling לְבוּשׁ shows that a passive participle is intended, reflecting the partial shift to a fientive verb also seen in the Masoretic vocalization of most perfect forms as fientive לָבַשׁ.⁸

Fientive inflection is also seen in Qumran and Rabbinic Hebrew, where ‘wearing’ is expressed with the active and passive participles לְבוּשׁ and לְבוּשׁ.⁹ Qumran Hebrew reflects further fientivization in the imperfect תִּלְבֹּשׁ ‘you may wear’ with an o-vowel (4Q524:14,5) citing Deut. 22:11 (MT: תִּלְבֹּשׁ). The reading tradition underlying the Masoretic Text extended this fientivization to the participles in Ezek. 9–10, resulting in the attested vocalization as לָבַשׁ.

The word בָּד ‘linen’ occurs elsewhere with reference to priestly attire, including the ephod.¹⁰ Outside Ezekiel and Daniel’s phrase “clothed in linen,” however, it always occurs in the singular; this is maintained in Qumran texts quoting phrases from Leviticus.¹¹ Identifying לבוּשׁ (ה)בָּדִים as an Akkadianism helps us understand why the plural is used here. A loanword from Sumerian *gada*, the Akkadian word for ‘linen’ has a long final case vowel resulting from vowel contraction.¹² In the nominative, **kita³-u* contracted to *kitû*, while genitive **kita³-e* contracted to *kitê* (also *kitî*).¹³ As the final case vowel merges with the stem-final vowel, the length distinction between the Akkadian singular and plural case end-

7. Richard A. Henshaw, *Female and Male: The Cultic Personnel. The Bible and the Rest of the Ancient Near East* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1994), 43.

8. Cf. the similar shifts in verb stem discussed by Aaron D. Hornkohl, *The Historical Depth of the Tiberian Reading Tradition of Biblical Hebrew*, Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures, vol. 17 (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2023).

9. Martin G. Abegg, James E. Bowley, and Edward M. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance*, vol. 3: *The Biblical Texts from the Judean Desert* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), s.v. לָבַשׁ; Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London: Luzac, 1903), s.v. לָבַשׁ.

10. Besides the references in n. 6 and the occurrences in Ezekiel and Daniel discussed above, we find the word in 1 Sam. 2:18, 22:18; 2 Sam. 6:14; 1 Chr. 15:27. These references are all to a linen ephod.

11. Abegg, Bowley, and Cook, *Concordance*, 3: s.v. בָּד.

12. CAD, s.v. *kitû*.

13. John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian*, 3rd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), §6.1. The dif-

ings is no longer visible. Except in the accusative, this gives *kitû* the appearance of a plural noun that has lost its final radical, such as nominative *purussû*, oblique *purussê* ‘decisions’ < **purussā*¹⁴-û, **purussā*¹⁴-î. Based on its meaning, the mass noun *kitû* ‘linen’ would have been especially eligible for reinterpretation as a *plurale tantum* like *šamû* ‘heaven’ and *mû* ‘water’. Such a reanalysis in the phrase *labiš kitê* explains the author of Ezek. 9–10’s choice to render ‘linen’ as a morphological plural, בָּדִים.

In conclusion, the high number of Akkadianisms previously found in Ezekiel make it likely *a priori* to identify לבש בדים as a calque of an Akkadian expression. Ezekiel’s Hebrew term then expresses more than the sum of its two parts: the seventh figure Ezekiel sees in his vision is not merely clothed in linen, he is a *labiš kitê*, a ‘Linen-wearer’. Unfortunately, what little knowledge we have of this class (or these classes) of Babylonian priests does not offer much insight into what this representation adds to the scene. The originally stative inflection of the verb לבש would have produced a greater formal similarity between the Akkadian and Hebrew phrases, while the morphology of Akkadian *kitû* ‘linen’ accounts for the otherwise unexplained plural morphology of בָּדִים. By way of Daniel, where the use of a passive participle already shows increasing distance from the Akkadian original, the character modeled after a linen-wearing Babylonian priest gained a lasting presence in the Jewish and Christian traditions.

ferent qualities of the final vowel in the genitive relate to the difference between *-i* and *-e* as the genitive ending in Babylonian and Assyrian, respectively.

14. Huehnergard, *Grammar of Akkadian*, §6.1.

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