

Lexical Notes*

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I discuss below three loanwords in Neo- and Late-Babylonian. The first one occurs in a dowry list enumerating fabrics and utensils. Such lists often contain realia which are not originally Akkadian (foreign words occurring in inventories is a universal phenomenon in multilingual environments¹ which are exposed to interregional and international trade). The second one is recorded in a letter. Each of them has just a single occurrence in the rich NB/LB corpus, while the third one, which likewise is contained in economic documents, has multiple occurrences, orthographic variation and impressive geographical diffusion. Regarding origin, the first one is Old Iranian, whereas the remaining two are Aramaic. The identification of the first two loanwords with their foreign source is straightforward, i.e. does not cause any serious morphophonological and semantic problems, while the third one needs a semantic clarification which is attempted below.

1. *a-mur-šak-ku*: one piece of this fabric which was made of linen (*I+en^{gada}a.*) is contained in a dowry list from Borsippa (108 Seleucid era = 203 BC, Roth, *Marriage Agreements* 42, 11, cf. Roth 1989: 30). It is the same word as JBA *wršk'*, OSyr. *wršk'* (= CA *ḥizām* “belt”, Bar Bahlul 925, 21). The JBA word was compared with New Pers. *baršak* “belt” by B. Geiger (in Krauss 1937: 166b), who aptly suggested that the forerunner of the New Persian form was **varšak* (written **waršak* in keeping with the conventions of Middle Persian transcription, cf. Sokoloff 2002: 396, where –like Bar Bahlul– a Geonic commentary equates the JBA word with CA *ḥizām*). The same dowry list has another textile item, *u^{gu}gu-nak-ku*, which is borrowed from Iranian (see CAD G: 134) and is extant as a loanword in Aramaic (OSyr. *gwnk'*) as well (see Ciancaglini 2008: 137-138). It denotes “thick cloak” (cf. Gk. *γ/καυνάκις*). The Old Iranian form can be reconstructed as **varša-ka-* (not *<*vrša-ka-* because *vr-* would result in New Pers. *gur-* according to Hübschmann 1895: 154-155). The occurrence of this Iranian loanword is from the Seleucid period, but it is likely that it entered Akkadian as early as the Achaemenid period, like most Iranian loanwords in the NB/LB record.

2. *qé-ši-šú* (PN₁ *q.* of PN₂ the herd supervisor, GCCI 2, 395 = Levavi 2018, 28, cf. 308 *ad loc.*, NB) may render on the face of it Aram. *qšyš* (a *qatīl*-formation with attenuation of a short unstressed *a*) “old, veteran, alderman” (for this title in pre-Christian sources cf., e.g., *qšyš'* from Hatra, Zehnder 2010: 327:202 with n. 634).

3. *si-ir-pi/pu*, *sír-pu* “shears, clippers for shearing” is recorded in NB/LB between *c.* 600 and 520 BC and has a broad geographical diffusion in Babylonia, where Aramaic was widely spoken (for Sippar cf. Bongenaar, NB *Ebabbar*: 362, 554b, *s.v.*; and for Kish *Camb.* 331). The variant *si-ra-pi/pu* is not necessarily a plural form, seeing that quantities of shears are followed by both forms, e.g. 17 *si-ir-pu*, 40 *si-ir-pi* (also one *si-ir-pu*) and three *si-ra-pu* (refs. in CAD S: 316a). This tool was made of iron and was used mainly for shearing sheep, but was large enough for making a breach in a prison according to YOS 7, 97 (Uruk, 19.IX.0 *Camb.* = 529 BC). It is recorded once in

*Abbreviations follow those of *AHW* and *CAD*, except for those in the bibliographical list. CA = Classical Arabic; JBA = Jewish Babylonian Aramaic.

1. Cf., e.g., the various loanwords for items listed in marriage contracts from the Cairo Geniza (Goitein 1966 and Friedman 1981: 21, 23, 25, 77, 189, 205, 426, 445).

a dowry list (two iron *si-ra-pu*, Babylon, 549 BC, *Nbn.* 258, 15, cf. *Nbn.* 967 from Bīt šar-Bābili, i.e. the royal palace complex in Babylon). The word looks phonologically identical with the base of JBA *syryy* (pl.), i.e. **syryp* > **syryp'* which denotes “fangs” according to Müller-Kessler 2011: 242 *ad* Sokoloff 2002: 809 (where the word is left unexplained; she compares OSyr. *srp* “to close”). The Aramaic word is recorded on an incantation bowl where it refers to the fangs of a leopard. If *sir(a)pu* and **syryp'* are not mere homonyms, then one has to think of a semantic explanation in order to find a common denominator of the words which have entirely different denotations. I would suggest –with all due reservation– that the only way of bridging between both terms is to assume a figurative sense: the tool, which was larger than regular scissors, was compared by the shepherds, who used it, to the predators’ fangs. Shepherds were acquainted with wild animals and exposed to their external anatomy and habits. The shears are opened widely and then closed, thereby cutting and shearing the sheep’s wool, just as the predator’s fangs are widely opened and closed several times in the process of catching and cutting his prey. It should not be forgotten that the word is not recorded in Akkadian before c. 600 BC and that Arameo-Chaldean tribesmen were amply represented among the shepherds in Babylonia, including those employed by the urban temples. Historically it can be envisaged that the word for “fangs” as a common predator’s salient feature existed in the earliest phase of Aramaic whereas the iron shears were developed and introduced to the herdsmen’s use only in the course of the Iron Age (in the early Iron Age bronze utensils were still more common). Therefore, there is good reason for thinking that “fangs” is the primary meaning and “shears” is the outcome of imitation. A semantic parallel can be Bibl. Heb. *'qrb* “scorpion” > “scourge, sting” (a whip with a thorn for beating slaves). Cogan (2001: 349 *ad* 1Kings 12, 11) draws attention to the Akkadian parallels listed in CAD Z: 132-133, s.v. *ziqtu*, b and 165-166, s.v. *zuqaqīpu*, 4, where also a late Latin usage is compared (cf. Garfinkel 1987: 429-437 and the device with the same function described by Ephrem Syrus quoted by Würthwein 1977: 155, n. 7). As Semantic parallels one may compare other tools and devices which are named after creatures and animals. Such are Old Syriac *'qrb* “scorpion” which renders also σκορπίδιον “an engine of war for discharging arrows” (Greek has also σκορπίος). CA *kalb* “dog” denotes also “iron hook, peg, iron on the axis of a mill” and JBA *klbt'* “bitch” means also a type of stitch (Sokoloff 2002: 581a). In view of the aforesaid it is likely that *sir(a)pu* is an Aramaic loanword in NB/LB.

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