

Headscarf and Veiling

Glimpses from Sumer to Islam

edited by Roswitha Del Fabbro, Frederick Mario Fales, Hannes D. Galter

The Veil in Ancient Near Eastern Religions and Cultures Some Remarks

Maria Giovanna Biga

Sapienza Università di Roma, Italia

Abstract In the texts from Syrian cities like Ebla, Mari, Emar and Ugarit there are several words indicating textiles destined to cover the head and sometimes also the shoulders of women. In the Ebla texts PAD (-TÚG2) (Sumerian), *gú-du-mu/ma-ga-da-ma-tum/ma-da-ma-tum* (Semitic) is a textile, often of linen, used to cover the body, the shoulders and the head. During the great ritual of royalty at Ebla the queen received the veil only after several days of trip. The veil at Ebla is destined mostly, but not only, for brides. Married women in Syria did not always wear the veil.

Keywords Veil. Linen textile. Ebla texts. Married women. Eblaite ritual of royalty.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Covering the Head in Mesopotamia and Syria. – 3 Covering the Head in the Texts from Syria. The Ebla Texts (III Millennium BC). – 3.1 The Veil, a Textile to Cover. – 3.2 The Veil, PAD(-TÚG), Given to Girls as Dowry on Their Marriage. – 3.3 The Veil for the Queen in the Great Ritual. – 3.4 The Veil among the Textiles Given to Women to Bring into the Tomb. – 4 Iconographic Evidence. – 5 The Veil in the Texts from Syria of the Second Millennium BC. – 6 Conclusions.

1 Introduction

In modern European languages, the word ‘veil’ (voile, Schleier, velo, etc.) can mean a simple object, one of the temporary forms of body covering, a piece of textile, a headdress, a robe, an accessory, an object of protection, a type of fab-

I would like to thank Hannes Galter and the organisers of this conference very much for their kind invitation and wonderful hospitality in Graz. Some years ago, H. Galter wrote a book on the veil (Galter 2001) and he is a great expert on this topic.



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

Antichistica 30 | Studi orientali 12

e-ISSN 2610-9336 | ISSN 2610-881X

ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-521-6 | ISBN [print] 978-88-6969-522-3

Peer review | Open access

Submitted 2021-07-01 | Accepted 2021-08-03 | Published 2021-08-30

© 2021 | Creative Commons 4.0 Attribution alone

DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-521-6/005

73

ric or a garment connected with female social and religious life (for example the veil of the bride, or of nuns or that used during mourning).

The veil covers, hides, obscures and reveals, or distinguishes. Sometimes it is gender-oriented, has a religious value, a normative function, or signifies identity. The veil is a symbol of oriental exoticism and, of course, also of the Islamic world and is considered an emblem of (real or supposed) oppression of Muslim women.

The veil has been studied by semiologists, historians of religion, historians of art and anthropologists. In the field of historical sciences and historical-religious studies, reflection on the veil and the veiled body starts from the assumption that there is no veil used to cover the body or a part thereof in an innocuous way, nor is there an act of revealing that it is completely innocent. The intentions and implications of veiling and unveiling are part of the codes established in cultural and social contexts. The possibility, and sometimes the obligation, to show the body and/or face, freeing oneself of the covering or covering veil, as well as the need to escape the gaze of others, may depend on normative factors and take on ideological meanings.

The meanings and values are essentially determined by the triple function connecting the visual, spatial and ethical dimensions that condition the use of the veil as a “garment” on the one hand and the product of an ideology on the other. The dynamics of visibility and invisibility of the body (or of some of its parts) regulate the public and private spheres of social life not only with words and the force of law, but also with images.

We use the word ‘veil’ to indicate something light and often transparent usually to put on the head. However, in the Greek world and also in the ancient Near Eastern pre-classical world, different types of textiles have been used to cover the head and ‘veil’ is represented by different realities.

Sometimes, it is a true veil in our acceptance of the word, although it seems to cover only the head and not the whole face. Various cases of veils are known in the classical world, which instead cover the whole face and not just the head. The girls, especially when they marry, go to meet the groom with their face covered and the groom will uncover their face by lifting the veil. This act seems to allude to the fact that only the husband will then be able to have a sexual relationship with the married girl. The veil would then be a metaphor for defloration, represented by the veil being raised.¹

In the classical world the veil is a garment used in case of mourning (Penelope), for a bride (Andromache) or a symbol of virginity and purity (Nausicaa).²

¹ Ferrara, Viscardi 2017; Giammellaro 2017.

² Viscardi 2017, 69.

2 Covering the Head in Mesopotamia and Syria

Even if there are many texts from the Near East regarding textiles, and textiles destined for women, veils are not often mentioned, and there is no data to understand whether they are a complete garment or simply a veil on the head. The matter of the veil is probably one of the most complex to analyse.

Around 2000, the Centre for Textile Research (CTR) in Copenhagen launched its research programme to investigate textile production from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age from the archaeological, experimental and linguistic points of view. The CTR together with the textile research programme launched in Paris-Nanterre by CNRS organised several conferences on different topics regarding textiles, which produced several volumes.³

Despite many books that have studied garments for women, the veil appears in only a few cases. Furthermore it is difficult to integrate or to support our written evidence with the little iconographic evidence.⁴

Studying the terminology of textiles, it is evident that in all the cultures of the ancient Near East a woman could cover her head with different types of fabrics. In Sumerian, the term 'gada', which indicates linen, is also used to indicate veil, or a linen textile used to cover. It is sometimes translated as 'veil'.

From the texts, especially those from the Syrian region and from centres like Ebla, Mari, Emar and Ugarit, it is possible to conclude that women covered their heads on some occasions but not regularly even if they were married. However, it is not possible to infer that the veil was the typical garment given to women for their marriage; in many cases of weddings there is no mention of the veil.

The Mesopotamian goddesses do not have a veil. Either they have the distinctive horned cap, as a mark of their divinity or, as in the case of the goddess Gula, they have a high headdress or elaborate headdresses.

The statue of the goddess Nanaya and statues of other female deities⁵ were covered by *kusitu*-garment, a ceremonial garment used in religious ceremonies with particularly rich and brilliant decoration, but it is impossible to know if it covered also the heads of other statues.

Few statues of goddesses have survived but the other iconographic evidence documents the presence of different headdresses.

³ For example Michel, Nosch 2010; Breniquet, Michel 2014; Lion, Michel 2016; Harlow, Michel, Quillien 2020.

⁴ See Nadali in this volume; Otto 2016 with previous bibliography; Couturaud 2020.

⁵ Joannès 2020, 31-41.

In the first tablet of the Maqlû exorcism for the gods of the night⁶ there are spells used in the magic rite to dissolve witchcraft. It is said:

Spell. I call upon you, gods of the night,
with you I invoke the night, veiled bride,...

kal-la-tum kut-tùm-tum is normally translated 'veiled bride'; *kuttum-tum* from the Semitic verb **ktn*, Akk. *katāmu* 'to cover' (with a veil). From this text it appears that the bride could be veiled.

The goddess Inanna does not wear a veil. When she descends into the underworld, the doorman opens the first door for her and strips her of the large crown on her head. Then, eventually, life is returned to Inanna. He lets her out from the seventh door and returns the large crown to her head. Inanna, and also Ishtar, never have a veil. In some cases, the goddess has a crown.

In texts with myths regarding marriages of deities such as the marriage of Martu, there is no mention of the veil. The princess who is ready to marry the young Martu prepares her dowry but the veil is not mentioned.

In two myths with the marriages of deities, the marriage of the god Enlil with the goddess Sud and that of the god Enlil with the goddess Ninlil there is no mention of a veil on the heads of the goddesses, also because we do not have a description of the marriage itself.

3 Covering the Head in the Texts from Syria. The Ebla Texts (III Millennium BC)

The Ebla archives of third millennium BC Syria are very rich written sources on textiles. The texts found in 1975 in the large archive L. 2769 and its vestibule L. 2875 include more than 14,000 tablets and fragments, and their largest corpus is that of the monthly accounts of textile deliveries. These are more than 600 large tablets on which the Eblaite scribes registered the deliveries of textiles on different occasions, starting from the period of the penultimate king of Ebla, Irkab-damu.

Despite the presence of so many texts related to textiles, it is difficult to know the wardrobe of ancient Eblaite for several reasons. First of all, the texts mention mainly fabrics and not garments. It is hard to identify the types of textiles, also because we do not have examples of them from the archaeological finds of the time; the iconography does not help very much either.⁷

⁶ For a similar ritual at Ebla see *infra*.

⁷ For the iconography on textiles and veil see the article of Nadali in this volume, with previous bibliography.

However, even Egyptologists, who have so many textiles preserved in the tombs, have some difficulty attributing their name despite several very precise texts with lists of many different types of textiles.⁸

The most common textiles quoted in the Ebla texts have already been studied.⁹

3.1 The Veil, a Textile to Cover

Considering the data from all the Ebla texts, it is evident that some textiles are given mostly to men, while others such as the zara₆-TÚG are given mostly to women, and especially to the important ladies of the court. When we have a number of zara-textiles, it is almost certain that it is followed by a list of the most important ladies of the court. Other less important female courtiers are quoted in hierarchical order after the most important, and normally receive textiles-NI. NI¹⁰ that are sometimes also given to men.

Zara-textiles are attributed to men, although rarely, but it is not possible to say whether they were given to them on some particularly important occasions or if they were for their wives. Therefore, even if it is probable that they were particularly precious because they are attributed to the important women on some special occasions such as marriages, rituals etc., we cannot be sure which type of textile we are dealing with.

In the Ebla texts, several words are used to indicate something to protect the head:

- níq-lá-sag: a textile to tie around the head, given to men on different occasions, to messengers who must travel on long trips.
- aktum-TÚG ti-TÚG sag en: a textile destined for the head of the king; turban.
- PAD(TÚG) (Sumerian) = *gú-du-mu/ma-ga-da-ma-tum/ma-da-ma-tum* translated as 'veil', but in fact a textile, often of linen, of different colours (white, black, yellow-green, embroidered), used to cover (the body, the shoulders and eventually also the head).¹¹
- J. Pasquali, in a first paper (1997), studied the Semitic word *ma-ga-da-ma-tum* and its variants,¹² without a possible translation of the word. Several years later, thanks to the use of both the

⁸ See Roccati 1970, 1-10; Herslund 2010, 68-80; Jones 2010, 81-109.

⁹ See Pasquali 1997, 2010 with previous bibliography; Biga 2010.

¹⁰ For a long list of zara-textiles given to important ladies of the court on occasion of the ritual of royalty, see the text TM.75.G.2417 quoted in Biga, Capomacchia 2012, 27-30.

¹¹ Pasquali 2010, 175-9.

¹² Pasquali 1997, 246-8.

words *gú-du-mu* and *ma-ga-da-ma-tum* and of their Sumerian translation (PAD(-TÚG)) in the texts of the great ritual of royalty, he was able to conclude that these words indicate the veil.¹³

- *gú-du-mu*, Semitic reading of the Sumerian PAD(-TÚG), is a noun from Semitic **ktm*, Akkadian *katāmu* and can be compared with Akkadian *kutummu* used in Syrian Mari texts to indicate the veil.
- *ma-ga-da-ma-tum* with the graphic variant *ma-da-ma-tum* is a noun (scheme *ma12a-3*) of the Semitic **ktm*; probably is the Eblaite writing of the word PAD(-TÚG).
- PAD(-TÚG) in the Ebla texts often has the meaning 'something used to cover', 'to cover' and it is translated also as 'to cover with a veil', 'to veil'. This textile is mostly of linen.

To quote some examples:

TM.75.G.1794+ARET III 469 (TM.75.G.3534) obv. III 18-23: 12 aktum-TÚG ti-TÚG 1 gada-TÚG šu-DAG 1 gada-TÚG PAD-sù en *si-in 'Á-za-an*^{ki}. To the king the aktum-ti-textiles are given, as usual, in large number and 1 linen textile is destined for cover of the textiles during the trip to the palace of the king of Ebla in 'Azan.

TM.75.G.2625 (king Ishar-damu, vizier Ibbi-zikir, month *i-rí-sa*) rev. I 11-14: 1 gada-TÚG/PAD/ 1 giš-gigir-II/ *I-bí-zi-kir*/; 1 linen textile to cover a chariot with two wheels of Ibbi-zikir.

TM.75.G.10152 (king Ishar-damu, vizier Ibrium, month *i-ba-sa*) rev. II 4'-6': 1 gada-TÚG PAD/ giš-alam/^d*Ba-ra-ma*/; 1 linen textile to cover a statue of the goddess Barama.

TM.75.G.10165 (king Ishar-damu, vizier Ibbi-zikir, month lost) obv. IV 2'-4': 1 gada-TÚG PAD/1 *a-gi-šum*/en; 1 linen textile to cover 1 agishum? of the king.

TM.75.G.10187 (king Ishar-damu, vizier Ibbi-zikir, month *ig-za*) rev. III 9-15: 20 aktum-TÚG ti-TÚG 1 dùl-TÚG *Ma-rí*^{ki} 1 gada-TÚG mu₄ (TÚG)-mu en 1 gada-TÚG/ PAD/ ti-TÚG/en; again 1 linen textile is used to cover/to protect the ti-textiles of the king.

In TM.75.G.10196 (king Ishar-damu, vizier Ibbi-zikir, month lost) rev. IV 2-15: 2 textiles and some objects of gold and 1 gada-TÚG PAD-sù níg-ba en *'Á-du*^{ki} *En-ḫar-Ar-mi*^{ki} šu-mu-tak₄; 2 textiles and some objects of gold and 1 linen textile to cover them, gifts destined for the king of the city of Adu, Enar-Armi delivered.

¹³ Pasquali 2009, 2010. For the ritual of royalty see § 3.3.

It must be noted that according to Archi 2002, 182 and fn. 27:

the main garment for a woman was the zara-textile, a cloak reaching to the ground [...]. The head was covered by a long shawl, gu-dùl textile. A statuette from Ebla and some from Mari show women in their ceremonial clothes with the cloak and shawl.

In fact, in a ritual for the gods of the night from archive L 2712 of Ebla,¹⁴ seven black-cloaked women take part. In the text (rev I 1-5) is written: 7 dam *ga-du-ma-tum* gu-dùl-TÚG gi₆ gaba ^dGi₆-an: 'seven women covered in a black cloak stand in front of the gods of the night'. *ga-du-ma-tum* can be interpreted as /*kattum-ā t-um*/, verbal adjective of **ktm* (to cover). Here the women are covered with a black textile-gu-dùl, which covers the body and possibly also the head. I prefer to translate 'covered' and not 'veiled'. The women are covered with gu-dùl textiles.

The gods mentioned in this Eblaite rite recall the gods of the first tablet of the Maqlû ritual in a surprising way: the bride of the god of the night is indicated by the same term, *kallatum*.

3.2 The Veil, PAD(-TÚG), Given to Girls as Dowry on Their Marriage

The veil PAD(-TÚG), *gú-du-mu* / *ma-ga-da-ma-tum* / *ma-da-ma-tum* in Semitic,¹⁵ is destined mostly, but not only, for brides.

It is mentioned in the dowry of princesses of the Eblaite court or of other girls of important Eblaite families on their marriage; in the texts there are lists of textiles given with jewels¹⁶ as part of the dowry.¹⁷ I would like to quote some examples.

In the text with deliveries of textiles of the principal archive L.2769, TM.75.G.2329, the dowry that Damurdashein received on her marriage to the son of the king or the king of DULu (Byblos) himself is listed:¹⁸ dozens of colored and white textiles, of wool and of linen. Among them there is 1 linen textile..., 1 linen textile for a veil? (1 gada-TÚG mu₄ PAD ti-TÚG), 1 linen textile. The veil is made of linen.¹⁹

¹⁴ For this ritual see Biga 2003; Fronzaroli 2012.

¹⁵ Pasquali 2009.

¹⁶ For the jewels see Archi 2002.

¹⁷ For examples of dowries see Biga 1996, 63-72; 2014, 77-8; 2018; Archi 2002.

¹⁸ For this marriage see Biga 2014. For the identification of DULu with Byblos see recently Biga 2012; 2016; 2017 with previous bibliography. For a different opinion, see Archi 2016. See now Biga, Steinkeller 2021.

¹⁹ gada-TÚG PAD ti-TÚG, translated as 'veil', still needs to be studied in more detail.

The text TM.75.G.1679²⁰ with the dowry for Tiabazru, a girl of the family of the vizier Ibrium, registers a long list of precious gold objects and several textiles destined for this girl and some textiles destined for male and female personages who participated in the ceremony.

It should be noted that the veil, which is normally given to the bride, is not mentioned here. It is difficult to suppose that the complete dowry for the girl was written on another tablet. We can conclude that the veil was not always given among the textiles of the dowries.

Another example of a dowry (and of textiles distributed to people involved in the marriage ceremony) is in the text TM.75.G.1776 (king Ishar-damu, vizier Ibrium, month lost), obv. I 1-III 11.²¹ Among the textiles given to the princess Zanehi-Mari, who married the son of Ibara of the city of Ashu, one gada-textile is quoted. In this text, there is no veil (PAD-TÚG); probably the textile gada here indicates the veil.

The deliveries of textiles on the marriage of princess Tagrish-damu, daughter of the last king of Ebla Ishar-damu, to the king of Nagar are registered in two monthly accounts of textiles TM.75.G.1249+ and TM.75.G.1250+. In the second text TM.75.G.1250+, there is a long list of many precious objects and different types of textiles destined for the princess as dowry to bring to her new house. Among these textiles, there is no veil.²² The beginning of the text TM.75.G.1250+ quotes the textiles given to Ultum-HU.HU, the son of the king of Nagar, who poured oil on the head of the Eblaite princess.

In conclusion, the veil is sometimes given to brides but not always, and it is not the most important ritual act during the Eblaite marriage ritual which is pouring oil on the head of the bride.

20 For the edition of the text see Biga 2018.

21 For the complete transcription of the dowry see Biga 2020.

22 For these texts see also Archi 2002, 172-3 with different translations of names of textiles.

3.3 The Veil for the Queen in the Great Ritual

A great ritual for the Ebla royalty performed by the royal couple,²³ refers, at the beginning, to the marriage of the queen with the king of Ebla which took place possibly some time before. It was necessary to have a royal couple to perform this ritual. Because of the presence of the veil given to the queen during ceremonies in honour of some royal ancestors in the city of Binash, some scholars consider this to be a marriage ritual.

In my opinion, and also in the opinion of A.M.G. Capomacchia, historian of religions, who studied the texts with me, too many funerary elements are present in these rituals to be able to propose that we are dealing with a marriage ritual. Marriage and funerary rituals are both rites of passage but one is festive, while the other is sombre. The fact that the same objects and textiles are given to girls on their marriage and for funerary ceremonies is not proof that the two occasions are similar. In fact, it is obvious that the same objects are given to the girls in both cases not because they are similar but because the objects necessary for girls on both occasions are, of course, the same.

In both texts, the marriage of the king and queen is quoted at the very beginning of the texts. Then, after many ceremonies, and when they are already in the Mausoleum of Binash, a veil is placed on the face and hands of the queen seven times.

ARET XI 1 (78-80): *wa-a/ti-ig-da-ra-ab/dam/mu-a-bí-iš-tum/wa-a/PAD/ma-lik-tum/ba-na-sa/ <šū>-sa/wa-a/du-a-ba- áš/gú-du-mu/ma-lik-tum/7/dam/Bí-na-áš^{ki}/en/ù/ma-lik-tum/tuš*; and the woman who provides the clothes recites the blessing. And she covers the queen with a veil, her face and her hands. And she covers (with the veil) the queen seven times, the woman of Binash, (when) the king and the queen sit.

The word for veil is PAD; in rev. IX 15 is written *gú-du-mu*. *gú-du-mu* is interpreted as a noun from Sem **ktm*, “cover (with a veil)”. This word is the Semitic writing of PAD(-TÚG) and corresponds to Akkadian *kutummu*, which was also used in Mari to indicate the veil of the bride.

The text ARET XI 1 is the oldest and contains more phonetic writings like all the oldest texts of Ebla.

²³ For the last edition of the ritual, see ARET XI. For different opinions on the interpretation of the ritual, see Biga, Capomacchia 2012; Bonechi 2016 with previous bibliography. The ritual is not for a marriage; marriages were celebrated with music and a banquet that could continue for several days. Afterwards, there was no honeymoon trip! We normally think of the *voyage de noces* but this is a practice born in the Belle Époque period. After the wedding a royal couple such as that of Ebla had to perform a ritual to take on their royal role and they were protected by the divine couple KÚra and Barama. Of course, during the ritual they also performed some acts for the fertility of the queen.

In ARET XI 2 (82-84) the same ritual action is described, but the veil is quoted as PAD(-TÚG), with the use of the logogram.²⁴

Apparently the queen is veiled only at this point, after a trip of several days with the king and not when she left her father's house.

The significance of the veil here is probably not that of a veil for a bride. We are dealing with another ritual connected with the cult of ancestors, purification etc.

Some scholars have used the quotation of veil in this ritual as proof that we are dealing with a marriage ritual.²⁵ However, from all the texts quoting marriages it is evident that in the marriage at Ebla, the defining act was the pouring of oil on the head of the bride.

It should be noted that the two administrative texts related to the ritual from the monthly accounts of textile deliveries also describe the textiles received by the king and the queen but no veil given to the queen is mentioned.²⁶

The veil has been interpreted²⁷ as having great symbolic value during Eblaite marriage, but, in my opinion, this is not very evident from the texts.

3.4 The Veil among the Textiles Given to Women to Bring into the Tomb

In some texts in which the funerary gifts for women are registered, the veil is quoted among the textiles but sometimes not. The veil is never given as a funerary gift to men and this is the most important difference between gifts for men and women.

In TM.75.G.2632 (king Ishar-damu, vizier Ibrium, month *gi-ni*) obv. IV 6-V 3:

1 zara-textile coloured red, 1 veil, 1 dururu-band... 2 brooches of silver weighing x sekels of silver with head of gold, 1 and half sekels of gold for 1 object-kùsal for Dati-tu queen of the reign of Lumnan, for her funerary service [i.e. for her tomb], Ishar delivered.

In the text TM.75.G.2334, written on the death of princess Daribdamu, there is a long list of the many funerary gifts she received.

²⁴ In the text ARET XI 2 (115) of the ritual is written that the head of the god KURa is not veiled (nu PAD); in the text ARET XI 3 (24) is written that the heads of the gods KURa and Barama are not veiled (nu PAD-TÚG) (see Fronzaroli 2020).

²⁵ Pasquali 2010, 175-9.

²⁶ Biga, Capomacchia 2012.

²⁷ Pasquali 2010.

TM.75.G.2334 obv. I 1-III 17: “15 aktum-ti-textiles, 2 zara-textiles dark red, 2 long textiles dark red, 6 zara-textiles, 6 gudul-textiles, 2 brooches...” then many jewels.

It should be noted that the textiles given as funerary gifts are the same as the ones girls are given for their dowry²⁸ but in this case, the veil is not mentioned.

The veil is not included among the textiles given to six already dead women of the royal family (and possibly buried in the same tomb).

In the text TM.75.G.2337 + 4269, the death of a woman of the king is quoted. There is no veil among the textiles given to this woman.

TM.75.G.2337 + 4269 (king Ishar-damu, vizier Ibbi-zikir, month lost) obv. VII 16-VIII 6:

1 zara-textile to Magaradu woman of the king for her funeral ceremony, 2 textiles dul, 2 embroidered and of good quality waistbands to Irkab-damu and Igrish-Halab, 1 zara-textile for Dusigu (on the occasion of the death of) Magaradu delivered.

Women never receive a veil for a purification ceremony after a death.

4 Iconographic Evidence

Iconographic evidence does not help very much because very few representations of women have been found in palace G of Ebla. A plaque, TM.03.G.1150, shows a seated woman wearing a long cloth and a big shawl.²⁹

Also a statuette, TM.83.G.400, shows a seated woman wearing a long cloth and a long shawl covering the head and most of the body.³⁰

L. Colonna d’Istria compared the representations of women in Ebla and Mari in the third millennium BC, concluding that they all had a “robe-manteau” covering the head and the shoulders;³¹ women dressed in this way were involved in some ceremonies. He quotes the translation as the ‘veil’ of Pasquali. ‘Robe-manteau’ is the textile that Pasquali defines the “veil”.

In the shell inlays of Mari of the third millennium BC, women always have their hair covered by different types of headdress, a polos crown or a turban, a piece of cloth intended to cover the hair. It is depicted as interlacing thin strips covering the entire area of the hair.³²

²⁸ See Pasquali 2005.

²⁹ See Nadali in this volume, fig. 3.

³⁰ Matthiae 2008, 152-3.

³¹ Colonna d’Istria 2019, 8

³² Couturaud 2020, 164-7.

In the cylinder seals from Mari of the third millennium BC, women are represented with a long cloth and a shawl on their heads, also covering their shoulders. Sometimes under the shawl women have a polos crown.³³

There is no possibility to prove that all the married women of the Ebla court regularly used a veil to cover their head. The two small statues possibly representing the queen-mother Dusigu and the last queen Tabur-damu, do not have a veil.³⁴

Priestesses are not necessarily given the veil. Some lists of textiles given to daughters of kings of Ebla who went as priestesses to some sanctuaries of the kingdom of Ebla have already been published but the veil is not quoted.³⁵

5 The Veil in the Texts from Syria of the Second Millennium BC

The veil was considered an important garment in the Syrian wedding ritual, especially in Mari of the second millennium BC.

In the Mari texts, the veils (plural) of the bride are quoted. The textile-*mardatum* was probably a veil made with an embroidered textile.

In ARM XXVI 10: 15 of the time of king Zimri-Lim: “we put the veils on the head of the young girl” in a ritual of marriage.

According to Durand,³⁶ the textile *mardatum* was also used to cover the head. In fact, in a letter, ARM V 76 (=LAP0 16 10: 3'-8') of the time of king Yasmah-Addu, textiles-*mardatum* have been requested but (veils) *kutummum* have been received.³⁷

In a list of textiles from Mari of the second millennium there is the word *kutummum* (veil).³⁸

According to Durand the veil *kutummum* was worn on the head as is evident from the marriage ritual and is a simple veil. *Mardatum* was a more sophisticated textile, embroidered.

In the Mari texts, the constitutive act of the marriage was placing the veil on the head of the young woman. In the case of the marriage of Šibtu, the daughter of the king of Aleppo, the veil was put on the

³³ Colonna d'Istria 2019, 6-7.

³⁴ See Nadali in this volume, figs 5-6. For a description of these two statues, see Matthiae 2009 and 2010.

³⁵ See for example the gifts of Tinib-dulum when she went as a priestess to Luban, Archi 2002, 170-1.

³⁶ Durand 2009, 11, 55-6.

³⁷ Durand 1988, 99-104.

³⁸ Durand 2009, 55-6; Beaugeard 2010, 288. A veil was placed on the head of the bride also in the Old Assyrian period, according to the texts of Kültepe (Michel 1997).

head of the bride by the messengers of the king of Mari because the king was not in Aleppo. Durand supposes that the veil was normally placed on the head of the bride by her husband.

Other Mari texts document that the veil was a typical garment worn by married women.

It is possible that, also in Babylon, married women were normally veiled. In the Gilgamesh epic, quoted by Durand,³⁹ is written: "my friend covered his face as a married woman".

In Emar of the middle Babylonian period, the ritual describing the installation of a high priestess of Baal gives an indication of her apparel during the ceremony. A red *paršigu*-scarf is tied on the head of the high priestess on the day of her installation. On the last day of the installation rite, the seventh day, when she leaves her father's house, she wears "a multicoloured scarf (*ib-lá birmi*) which covers her head (*ukattamu*) like a bride".⁴⁰ Abrahami and Lion, who recently studied the textiles given to the priestess, have seen an analogy with a wedding ceremony and consider that the scarf was also worn by women during the wedding ceremony.⁴¹ But the scarf is not a veil.

In the dowry lists from the Middle Babylonian period, a veil is not quoted for the bride among the textiles and gender-marked garments.⁴²

In the texts from Ugarit,⁴³ despite a large number of terms regarding textiles and clothing, few garments, textiles or complements can be identified with any certainty as exclusively or preferentially used by women. According to W. Watson "no differentiation is made between clothes for women or men",⁴⁴ with a few possible exceptions such as *psm* 'veil'.

An incomplete ivory statuette (RS 9.283) from the "Résidence de la Reine-mère" shows a seated woman with a piece of fabric covering her hair.⁴⁵

In the Bible too, there are very few mentions of veiled women. A veil (*tsai'if*) on the head or on the face is attested in only two episodes of the Bible. One is Gen 24,65, the episode of Rebecca who puts a veil on her head when her future husband Isaac is introduced to her.

The other is Gen 38,1-26: Tamar, daughter-in-law of Judas, dresses herself as a prostitute and puts a veil on her face to deceive Judas, to have sexual relations with him and bear his child.

³⁹ Durand 1988, 103 fn. 47.

⁴⁰ Abrahami, Lion 2020, 13-14.

⁴¹ Abrahami, Lion 2020, 14.

⁴² Abrahami, Lion 2020, 22.

⁴³ See Matoian, Vita 2020, 47.

⁴⁴ Watson 2018, 382.

⁴⁵ Matoian, Vita 2020, 49.

In the Hebrew ritual of marriage there is the act of covering the bride with a veil. The veil in the Bible can characterise different types of women.⁴⁶

6 Conclusions

The veil is a textile of different types and colours destined for women, especially for brides.

From the Ebla texts, it emerges that the veil was given to women among the textiles of the dowry, but not always.

Furthermore, married women in Syria did not always wear the veil.

There are many more explicit mentions in the legal texts that have been dealt with by Mario Fales in this volume.

Abbreviations

ARET = Archivi Reali di Ebla. Testi, Roma
MEE = Materiali Epigrafici di Ebla, Napoli-Roma
ARM = Archives Royales de Mari, Paris
TM = Tell Mardikh

Bibliography

- Abrahami, P.; Lion, B. (2020). "Textiles and Gender During the Middle Babylonian Period (c. 1500-1000 BCE). Texts from Syria and Babylonia". Harlow, M.; Michel, C.; Quillien, L. (eds), *Textiles and Gender in antiquity from the Orient to the Mediterranean*. London, 13-30.
- Archi, A. (2002). "Jewels for the Ladies of Ebla". *Zeitschrift fuer Assyriologie*, 92(2), 161-99. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zava.2002.92.2.161>.
- Archi, A. (2016). "Egypt or Iran in the Ebla Texts?". *Orientalia*, 85, 1-49.
- Beaugeard, A.-C. (2010). "Les textiles du Moyen-Euphrate à l'époque paléo-babylonienne d'après un ouvrage récent". Michel, C.; Nosch, M.-L. (eds), *Textile Terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the Third to the First Millennia BC*. Oxford, 282-9.
- Biga, M.G. (1996). "Prosopographie et datation relative des textes d'Ebla". Durand, J.-M. (ed.), *Mari, Ebla et les Hourrites*. Paris, 29-72.
- Biga, M.G. (2003). "A Ritual from Archive L.2712 of Ebla". Marrassini, P. (ed.), *Semitic and Assyriological Studies Presented to Pelio Fronzaroli*. Wiesbaden, 54-69.
- Biga, M.G. (2010). "Textiles in the Administrative Texts of the Royal Archives of Ebla (Syria, 24 Century B.C.) with Particular Emphasis on Coloured Textiles". Michel, Nosch 2010, 146-72.

⁴⁶ Moro 2017, 136-9.

- Biga, M.G. (2012). "Tra Egitto e Siria nel III millennio a.C.". *Atti dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, 146, 17-36.
- Biga, M.G. (2014). "The Marriage of an Eblaite Princess with the King of DULU". Gaspa, S. et al. (eds), *From Source to History. Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Worlds and Beyond Dedicated to Giovanni Battista Lanfranchi on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday on June 23.2014*. Münster, 73-9.
- Biga, M.G. (2016). "La Syrie et l'Égypte au III millénaire av. J.-C. d'après les archives d'Ebla". *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, 691-711.
- Biga, M.G. (2017). "Voies commerciales, ports et marchands de Syrie, Anatolie et Méditerranée orientale au III millénaire av. J.-C.". *Pallas*, 104, 51-9. <https://doi.org/10.4000/pallas.7204>.
- Biga, M.G. (2018). "Gioielli per una fanciulla della corte di Ebla". Vacca, A.; Pizzimenti, S.; Micale, M.G. (a cura di), *A Oriente del Delta. Scritti sull'Egitto ed il Vicino Oriente antico in onore di Gabriella Scandone Matthiae*. Roma, 63-78.
- Biga, M.G. (2020). "Some Remarks on Textiles and Gender in the Ebla Texts of the Third Millennium BCE". Harlow, M.; Michel, C.; Quillien, L. (eds), *Textiles and Gender in Antiquity from the Orient to the Mediterranean*. London, 153-62.
- Biga, M.G.; Capomacchia, A.M.G. (2012). "I testi di Ebla di ARET XI. Una rilettura alla luce dei testi paralleli". *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archeologie Orientale*, 106(1), 19-32. <https://doi.org/10.3917/assy.106.0019>.
- Biga, M.G.; Steinkeller, P. (2021). "In Search of Dugurasu". *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, 73, 9-70.
- Bonechi, M. (2016). "A Passive and Therefore, Prized, Bride. New Proposals for the Queen's Wedding in the Ebla Royal Rituals". *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale*, 110(1), 53-78. <https://doi.org/10.3917/assy.110.0053>.
- Breniquet, C.; Michel, C. (eds) (2014). *Wool Economy in the Ancient Near East and the Aegean*. Oxford.
- Colonna d'Istria, L. (2019). Remarques iconographiques et épigraphiques concernant des empreintes de sceaux-cylindres inscrits de Mari, Ville II. Abrahami, P.; Battini, L. (eds), *Ina^dmarri u qan tuppi. Par la bêche et le stylet! Mélanges offerts à Olivier Rouault*. Oxford, 5-22.
- Couturaud, B. (2020). "A Visual Investigation of Feminine Garments at Mari during the Early Bronze Age". Harlow, M.; Michel, C.; Quillien, L. (eds), *Textiles and Gender in Antiquity from the Orient to the Mediterranean*. London, 163-77.
- Durand, J.-M. (1988). *Archives épistolaires de Mari I/1 (ARM XXVI)*. Paris.
- Durand, J.-M. (2009). *La nomenclature des habits et des textiles dans les textes de Mari (ARM XXX)*. Paris.
- Ferrara, M.; Saggiolo, A.; Viscardi, G.P. (a cura di) (2017). *Le verità del velo*. Firenze.
- Ferrara, M.; Viscardi, G.P. (2017). "Introduzione". Ferrara, Saggiolo, Viscardi 2017, 11-23.
- Fronzaroli, P. (1993). *Testi rituali della regalità (ARET XI)*. Roma.
- Fronzaroli, P. (2012). "The Eblaic Supplication to the Gods of the Night". *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale*, 106, 165-76. <https://doi.org/10.3917/assy.106.0165>.
- Fronzaroli, P. (2020). "Fragments et éclats pour ARET XI". *Studia Eblaïtica*, 6, 162-6.

- Galter, H.D. (2001). *Kopftuch und Schleier. Kulturgeschichte eines orientalischen Phänomens*. Graz.
- Giammellaro, P. (2017). "Velo si dice in molti modi. Coprirsi il capo nell'epica greca arcaica". Ferrara, Saggiario, Viscardi 2017, 49-57.
- Joannès, F. (2020). "The Goddess Nanaja's New Clothes". Harlow, M.; Michel, C.; Quillien, L. (eds), *Textiles and Gender in antiquity from the Orient to the Mediterranean*. London, 31-41.
- Jones, J. (2010). "The 'Linen List' in Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom Egypt. Text and Textile Reconciled". Michel, Nosch 2010, 81-109.
- Harlow, M.; Michel, C.; Quillien, L. (2020). *Textiles and Gender in Antiquity from the Orient to the Mediterranean*. London.
- Herslund, O. (2010). "Cloths-Garments-and Keeping Secrets. Textile Classification and Cognitive Chaining in the Ancient Egyptian Writing System". Michel, Nosch 2010, 68-80.
- Lion, B.; Michel, C. (eds) (2016). *The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East*. Boston.
- Matoian, V.; Vita, J.-P. (2020). "Textiles and Gender at Ugarit". Harlow, M.; Michel, C.; Quillien, L. (eds), *Textiles and Gender in Antiquity from the Orient to the Mediterranean*. London, 43-58.
- Matthiae, P. (2008). *Gli archivi reali di Ebla*. Milano.
- Matthiae, P. (2009). "The Standard of the *Maliktum* of Ebla in the Royal Archives Period". *Zeitschrift fuer Assyriologie*, 99, 270-312.
- Matthiae, P. (2010). *Ebla. La città del trono*. Torino.
- Michel, C. (1997). "Un témoignage paléo-assyrien en faveur du port du voile par la femme mariée". *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*, 40, 38.
- Michel, C.; Nosch M.-L. (eds) (2010). *Textile Terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the Third to the First Millennia BC*. Oxford.
- Moro, C. (2017). "Il velo nel mondo biblico e nel giudaismo". Ferrara, Saggiario, Viscardi 2017, 135-46.
- Otto, A. (2016). "Professional Women and Women at Work in Mesopotamia and Syria (3rd and Early 2nd Millennia BC): The (Rare) Information from Visual Images". Lion, B.; Michel, C. (eds), *The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East*. Boston, 112-48.
- Pasquali, J. (1996). "La 'vestizione' della statua della dea ^dTU ad Ebla". *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*, 128, 111-13.
- Pasquali, J. (1997). "La terminologia semitica dei tessili nei testi di Ebla". *Miscellanea Eblaitica*, 4, 217-70.
- Pasquali, J. (2005). "Remarques comparatives sur la symbolique du vêtement à Ebla". Kogan, L. et al. (eds), *Memoriae I.M. Diakonoff*. Winona Lake, 165-84.
- Pasquali, J. (2009). "Les équivalents sémitiques de PAD-túg, 'voile', dans les textes d'Ebla". *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*, 11, 12-15.
- Pasquali, J. (2010). "Les noms sémitiques des tissus dans les textes d'Ebla". Michel, Nosch 2010, 173-85.
- Roccati, A. (1970). "Una tabella lignea inscritta da Gebelein". *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 45, 1-10.
- Viscardi, G.P. (2017). "Verità e rappresentazione. Logiche discorsive e pratiche performative del dis/velamento nell'antica Grecia". Ferrara, Saggiario, Viscardi 2017, 59-87.
- Watson, W.G.E. (2018). "Terms for Textiles, Clothing, Hides, Wool, and Accessories in Ugaritic. An Etymological Study". *Aula Orientalis*, 36, 353-90.