NEO-BABYLONIAN LAUNDRY

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The clothes of the gods were regularly washed by specialized craftsmen in Neo-Babylonian temples (Bongenaar 1997: 304ff.), but who did the laundry of ordinary people? It is symptomatic of the character of Neo-Babylonian documentation that a simple question like this one is difficult to answer: while craftsmen and craft production lie at the heart of the kind of bookkeeping that is preserved from Neo-Babylonian temples (Jursa 2004a: 163, 169), private accounting is only sporadically concerned with the consumption of craft goods or their production. Erratic data have to be culled from many different archives only to yield a very patchy picture of the artisan outside of the temple economy. This article helps reconstruct that picture with a study of washermen in the service of private households. This study is occasioned by the discovery of five new laundry contracts in the British Museum which, together with published texts, offer an insight into the business of dirty laundry in Babylonian cities of the mid-first millennium BCE.

1. The texts

The evidence comes from Borsippa (nos. 1 - 5), Uruk (nos. 6 and 7)\textsuperscript{1} and Babylon (nos. 8 and 9) and dates from the second half of the 6\textsuperscript{th} century and the beginning of the 5\textsuperscript{th} century BCE (Nbn 03 - Xer 01). Most of the pertinent texts can be dubbed ‘laundry contracts’: a washerman (indeed always a man) undertakes to do the laundry of a person or a private household over a period of time, often a year, against a form of payment. The phraseology of such contracts is standardized, as will be shown below. In addition to laundry contracts, other contract types could be adapted for the purpose: text no. 3 is an oath by a textile craftsman to wash and return a client’s dirty clothes within ten days, and text no. 9 is a combination of a slave hire contract and a laundry contract. All the texts derive from the archives of the clients.

Copies of previously unpublished tablets (nos. 1-5) can be found after the transliteration. I wish to thank the Trustees of the British Museum for the permission to publish these tablets here.

no. 1 BM 29228 (98-11-12, 404)
[Borsippa], [Nh]n 10-XII-03 (Ibnāja A archive)

\textsuperscript{1}The Uruk texts were pointed to me by M. Jursa.

\textsuperscript{*}The research on this article was conducted within the framework of project P17151-G02 funded by the Fonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung (Austria). M. Jursa (Vienna) kindly read and commented upon an earlier draft of this article, for which I am very grateful. Any mistakes that remain are of course entirely my own.

1. The Uruk texts were pointed to me by M. Jursa.
Translation: (1) For the agreed period, Ina-t™ßî-™†ir, the washerman, son of Iddinå of the ·ulamºßu family, will clean and whiten the 'whites' of the house of Nabû-ßumu-ukºn, son of Nådin of the Ibnåja family. (7) Nabû-ßumu-ukºn will pay 1 ß silver a year to Ina-t™ßî-™†ir as his wages. (10) Witnesses: Kudurru/Muß™zib-Nabû/Kidin-Sîn, Nabû-iddin/Nabû-™†ir. (13) Scribe: é.maß-z™ru-iqºßa/Nabû-a ü-id-din/Siåtu. (16) [Borsippa], [Nb]n 10-XII-03. (18) From the first of month nisannu (I) the muiptu garments will be at his disposal.

Commentary: For ³âßtu ³âru (l. 3-6) “to bleach, whiten”, see below (sub 2.). For the archival context and provenance of BM 29228, see Waerzeggers 2005: 359.

no. 2 BM 102345 (1906-5-12, 266)
Borsippa, Cyr 30-XIIb-06 (archive unassigned)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obv.</th>
<th>lín.su-šu-a ³la-ša ³la-a-šu ³a-ša ³la-mù</th>
<th>Rev.</th>
<th>³la-ša ³la-a-šu ³a-ša ³la-mù</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>[a-di] šu-pi-ša ³la-sù-šu-šer</td>
<td>11.</td>
<td>³la.µu-še-zib.³dag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>[³la-ši]-³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-mù</td>
<td>12.</td>
<td>³la.-dì-³la-a-šu ³la-mù</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>a ³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša</td>
<td>13.</td>
<td>³la.-dì-³la-a-šu ³la-mù</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>šu ³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša</td>
<td>14.</td>
<td>³la.-dì-³la-a-šu ³la-mù</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>³la-mù-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša</td>
<td>15.</td>
<td>³la.-dì-³la-a-šu ³la-mù</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša</td>
<td>16.</td>
<td>³la.³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša</td>
<td>17.</td>
<td>³la.-dì-³la-a-šu ³la-mù</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša</td>
<td>18.</td>
<td>³la.-dì-³la-a-šu ³la-mù</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša</td>
<td>19.</td>
<td>³la.-dì-³la-a-šu ³la-mù</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša ³la-ša</td>
<td>20.</td>
<td>³la.-dì-³la-a-šu ³la-mù</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Translation: (1) Kušur, the slave of Liblub/or-Bélšunu/Buraqu, will do the laundry of Nabû-šumu-ukín/Shamaš-šumu-lišir/Esaggila-massî for the agreed period. (5) Nabû-šumu-ukín will pay 1 š silver a year to Kušur. (7) Thereof he (Kušur) has received 1/2 š. (9) Witnesses: Gimillu/Nabû-mukín-zéri/Naggâru, Ša-Nabû-šu/Kalâb/Ubaliessu-Marduk. (12) Scribe: Kidin-Marduk/Bél-ahğê-iddin/Ilia. (14) Borsippa, Cyr 30-XIIIb-06.

Commentary: It is not clear to which Borsippa archive this tablet belongs. The slave and his master are unknown. There is a distant family connection between the client, Nabû-šumu-ukín/Shamaš-šumu-ukín/Esaggila-massî, and Marduk-šumu-ibni/Ilia, the protagonist of the Ilia A archive (Waerzeggers 2005: 355): Nabû-šumu-ukín is the brother-in-law of Nabû-bélšunu, the eldest brother of Marduk-šumu-ibni (BM 26731 Nbn 12). Nabû-šumu-ukín is once attested as scribe in the Ilia A archive (BM 26498 Nbn 02), but he does not play any further role in Marduk-šumu-ibni’s affairs. It is therefore doubtful whether BM 102345/no. 2 should be connected to the Ilia A archive through this distant family relationship.

(9) Gimillu/Nabû-mukín-zéri/Naggâru also appears as a witness in the Rêš-alipi archive (BM 26628 Dar 11) and in the archive of Šaddinu/Bélîja’u (BM 95853 Dar 11).

no. 3 BM 96390 (1902-4-12, 502)
Borsippa, Camb 29-VII-05 (Bélîja’u archive)

Obv. 1. a-\text{di}^{1} [ud].10.kam ša \text{ii}
2. l_/PN\ a-šu \text{1ad}-nu-zu ka-ši-ru
3. \text{ina} l\text{den} a^{1} \text{dag} a-na l\text{sad}-din-nu
4. a-šu^{1} \text{tin-su} a \text{en-ia-ú} it-te-me
5. a-di a-ki-i tŪg ār-šā ˇ\text{sad}-din-nu
6. a-na zi-ku-tu id-din-nu
7. ud\text{1}.10.kam ša \text{ii}
8. u-za-ak-ku-ú-ma a-\text{n}[a]

Lo.E. 9. l\text{sad}-din-nu a-nam-[din]

Rev. 10. l\text{mu-kin}-nu \text{dag}-šeš-meš-tin a-šu
11. <<a-šu>> \text{dag}-mu-mu a \text{Ilâšimug}
12. l\text{den-en-numun} a-šu \text{ble}-mut
13. a l\text{mu-1pap.sukkal} l\text{umbisag} l\text{dutu-mu}
14. a-šu \text{dag}-da a l\text{du-a-a bar-sîkkî}
15. l\text{du}_9 ud.29.kam mu.5.kam

U.E. 16. l\text{1kam-bu-zi-ú} lugal \text{ekî}
17. lugal kur.kur
Translation: (1) Until the 10th day of month arašamma (VIII) [PN] son of Abi-ul-idi, the tailor, promises Šaddinnu, son of Balassu of the Bêlija’u family, under oath: “The dirty clothes that Šaddinnu has given (to me) for cleaning, I will clean the dirty clothes by the 10th day of month arašamma (VIII) and return them to Šaddinnu”. (10) Witnesses: Nabû-aḫḫē-bullītu/Nabû-šumu-iddīn/Nappātu, Bēl-bēl-zēri/Rēmût/Iddin-Papsukkal. (13) Scribe: Šamaš-iddin/Nabû-le’i/Îbnāja. (14) Borsippa, Camb 29-VII-05.

Commentary: The person who will clean Šaddinnu’s ‘dirty clothes’ is a kåširu, a tailor, which indicates that washing could be undertaken by different professionals in the textile business, not only by washermen. This also transpires from the Ebabbar archive where a clothes mender (mukabbû) receives textiles for washing (ana zikûti) at one occasion, Bongenaar 1997: 313 n. 296.

(1ff.) Note the contorted formulation of the oath: the promised date of prestation precedes the actual oath, and the introduction to the (positive promissory) oath in l. 5 should be kš adi.

(13) Šamaš-iddin/Nabû-le’i/Îbnāja also wrote BM 96177 Camb 06 (Bêlija’u archive).

no. 4 BM 29471 (98-11-14, 104)
Borsippa, Dar 27-II-12 (Bêlija’u archive)
Translation: (1) From the first day of month simanu (III) for the agreed period, Nabû-uballît son of Nabû-zêru-lišîr will do the work of the washermen, of all the laundry and the ‘whites’ of Šaddinnu, son of Balassu of the Bêlija’u family. (7) He will pay 1 :1.4 dates a year to Nabû-uballît. (10) Witnesses: Qibi-Bêl/Nabû-êtir-napšâti/Kidin-Sîn, Mušêzib-Nabû/Nabû-šumu-iškun/Ibnâja, Zêr-Bâbili/Nabû-êtir-napšâti/Damiqû. (16) Scribe: Nabû-gamil/Nabû-šumu-ukûn/Bêlija’u. (17) Borsippa, Dar 27-II-12. (20) Copies are at the disposal of each.

Commentary:
(2) There is a contemporary namesake of Nabû-uballît/Nabû-zêru-lišîr in the Kidin-Sîn family, who is mentioned in a tablet of Šaddinnu as a witness (Waerzeggers forthcoming: no. 7). It cannot be determined with certainty whether or not the same person is concerned.
(8) The surface of the tablet is worn and scratched. The wedge-like shapes at the beginning of the line result from two scratches and should not to be mistaken for cuneiform signs. Because of the damages, it is difficult to determine exactly how many kor of dates were stipulated as Nabû-uballît’s wages. One horizontal stroke is visible, but there might have been one more originally. The habitual annual pay of a washerman was 1 š silver (see below, sub 4): 1 :1.4 kor of dates as the equivalent of 1 š silver is slightly under the average exchange rate in this time, but the price of dates did fluctuate.
(10) Qibi-Bêl/Nabû-êtir-napšâti/Kidin-Sîn is a regular witness and scribe in the archive of Šaddinnu: he is recorded at least ten times in this capacity between Dar 02 and Dar 12. A published example is VS 5 85: 15 (Dar 08?!).
(16) Nabû-gamil/Nabû-šumu-ukûn/Bêlija’u too is regularly attested in the archive of Šaddinnu, especially in prebendary contexts.

Commentary:
(8) Erība/Iddin-Nabû/Naggāru is also a witness in BM 29408 [Dar 19?] and BM 96346 [Dar x], both from Šaddinnu’s archive.
(9) Bēl-ēṭiṭ/Guzānu/Šigūa is one of the most frequently attested scribes in the archive of Šaddinnu. The following tablets written by him are published: BM 96167 (Zadok, NABU 2003/33), VS 3 124 and 128.

no. 6 YOS 19 68
[Uruk (?)], Nbn 19-[IV 2-x] (Sin-leque-unninni archive)

Obv. 1. [līb]-luṭ a-šā šā ldag-mu-gin
2. dul-ṭu a-šā ldutu-šeš-mu a-šā šā
3. ldu.gur-dan-mu šā ldīg.babbar-ū-tu ip-pu-uš
4. ina mu.an.na 1 gīn bit-qa láṭi kū.babbar
5. ldutu-šeš-mu i-di-šā
6. i-nam-<<da-nam>>-din
7. ul-tu ud.1.kam šā iti ne dul-ṭu
Translation: (1) Liblu† son of Nabû-ßumu-ukºn will do the work of Šamaš-aḫu-iddin son of Nergal-dân - that of the washerman. (4) Liblu† son of Nabû-ßumu-ukºn will pay 7/8 ß silver a year as his wages. (7) From the first day of month 
\( \text{abu} \) (V) the work is due from Liblu†. (8) Liblu† has received his wages at the beginning of the year and half of his wages at the end of the year. (12) Whoever breaks the contract (shall be liable to pay) 1/2 ß silver. (11) Witnesses: Nabû-a™-bulli†/Nanåya™-reß, Nabû-balassu-iqbi/Nabû-a-iddin. (15) [Scribe: x]-zu/Nådin. (16) [Uruk (?)], Nbn 19-[IV x].

Commentary: There are two laundry contracts with Liblu† in the archive of Šamaš-aḫu-iddin of the Sîn-leqe-unninnº family: 2 YOS 19 68 (no. 6) and CTMMA 3 103 (no. 7). It is unfortunate that the date of YOS 19 68 should be broken because this renders it impossible to determine the exact relationship between the two contracts. They document either an increase or a decrease in Liblu†’s pay depending on whether YOS 19 68 (7/8 ß a year) comes before or after CTMMA 3 103 (1 ß a year). I tentatively suggest to date the contracts in the same year, taking CTMMA 3 103 (written in month 
\( \text{abu} \) of Nbn 11) as a revision of YOS 19 68 shortly after Liblu† started working on the terms of this contract in the beginning of 
\( \text{abu} \) (l. 7). On the other hand, one would expect that YOS 19 68 had been destroyed at the redaction of the new contract.

no. 7 CTMMA 3 103 (plate 79)

Uruk, Nbn 13-V-11 (Sîn-leqe-unninnº archive)

Obv. 1. [\( \text{ul} \)]-tu ((ud.x.kam)) šá iškin šá mu.11.kam
2. [\( \text{a-di} \)] ((ud.x.kam)) šá iškin šá mu.12.kam
3. [\( \text{dag-ní.tuk} \)] lugal tin.tiki
4. [\( \text{lib-lu} \)]-šá šá \( \text{I} \)dag-mu-gin
5. dul-lu Išu-gabbar-ar-tu šá Idu-tu-šeš-mu
6. a-š śa \( \text{Idu} \)gur-dan-na ((\( a \) x x))
7. šá?! mu.an.na! !! gin kù.babbar ip-pu-uš
8. \( \text{lib-lu} \)-ša i-di-šá a-diš mu.12.kam
9. ina šuI Idu-tu-šeš-mu e-tir

Rev. 10. \( \text{Imu-kin} \)-ni kal-ba-a a-šá šá
11. \( \text{I} \)e-rib-šá \( \text{Idu} \)tu-gin-a a-šá šá
12. \( \text{Idu} \)tu-šeš-meš-mu a \( \text{I} \)hu-un-zu-ú
13. \( \text{I} \)umbisag \( \text{I} \)ba-ú-šeš-mu a šá šá
14. [\( \text{I} \)maš-mu-gin?] a \( \text{Il} \)sanga-dmaš
15. [unugki \( \text{It} \)ne ud.13.kam
16. mu.11.kam \( \text{dag-i} \) lugal tin.tiki

Translation: (1) From ((day x, erased)) of month \( \text{ul} \)ulu (VI) of the 11th year, [until] ((day x, erased)) of month \( \text{ul} \)ulu (VI) of the 12th year of Nabonidus, king of Babylon, (4) Liblu† son of Nabû-šumu-ukin will do the laundry of Šamaš-aḫu-iddin son of Nergal-dân for 1 ß silver a year. (8) Liblu† has received his wages...

Commentary: For the reader’s convenience, I have reproduced the transcription and translation of CTMMA 3 103 from I. Spar and E. von Dassow, CTMMA 3 p. 215 (plate 79). However, my transcription differs from that of the editors in l. 7, where I propose to read “šá mu.an nan 1 gin kù.babbar” instead of “a µmu-utu 11 gin kù.babbar”. Apart from the fact that the name Iddin-amaß is not attested as a family name, the correction suggests itself from the standard formulary in laundry contracts (see below sub 2). The proposition to read “1 gin” instead of “11 gin”, despite the Winkelhaken and the vertical wedge visible on the copy, is based on the following considerations: (1) the normal wage of the washerman was 1 ša a year (see below sub 4), (2) a second laundry contract with the same washer fixed his wage at 7/8 ša (YOS 19 68/no. 6), which is only slightly less than 1 ša but considerably less than 11 ša, and (3) the vertical wedge is placed on top of the cuneus, which suggests that the scribe corrected a mistake.

no. 8 VS 6 86 (NRVU 668 ; Ungnad 1944 : 328f.)

Babylon, Nbn 28-XII-13 (Sîn-illi archive)

Obv. 1. zi-ku-tu šâ 4ba-ú-šar-rat 4dumu.munus-šá šá (?)1
2. 1bašâ ú dumu.meš-šu ú šá 2 1šun.meš ḫ-šu
3. ul-tu ud.1.kam šâ šišára a-dî
4. ṭup-pi pu-ú ṭup-pi 1é-sag-gil-bû-di-ia
5. ú-za-ak-ku ú ḫa-āš-tu zab-ba-ni-tu
6. 1i-11-šá ina 1 gur še.bar
7. ṭuâ 1 gur zû.lum.ma ina 11[x]
9. [1é]-sag-gil-bû-di-ia1

Rev. 10. [ta-nam-din] pu-ut mu-sip-tu
11. [na-šâ 1šu]-mu-ku 1šu-ti-ia
12. [a-šâ šâ 1 x x]1 1šu-ti-ia
13. [1šu]-mu-šû a-šâ šâ 1šag-û-bal-î̂t
14. a 1šu-30-dingir u 1šû.umbisag 1šu-šê-šê-šu
15. a-šî šî 1šû-en?1-tin tin.tî 1šê
16. ud.28.kam mu.13.kam 1šag-i
17. lugal tin.tî

Translation: (1) Esaggil-bûdia will do the laundry of 4Båbu-šarrat, daughter of Iqºßa, and her children and of her two slaves, from the first day of month nisannu (I) for the agreed period, (5) and he will make the whites really white. (6) 4Båbu-šarrat will pay 1 kor barley in month ajjaru (II) and 1 kor dates in month [x] to Esaggil-bûdia. (10) He takes responsibility for the clothes. (11) Witnesses: Dummuq/[PN]/Sîtia, Rêmût/Nabû-uballišt/Sîn-illi. (14) And scribe: Bûl-ahu-iddin/Bûl-balå†u. (15) Babylon, Nbn 28-XII-13.

Commentary: 4Båbu-šarrat, daughter of Iqºßa from the family Kutimmu, was the wife of Îåbia/Sîn-illi, the protagonist of the Sîn-illi archive from Babylon.3 After Îåbia’s death (ca. end Nbn 11, beginning Nbn 12) she ran the household and managed some of the property (mostly slaves and houses), while the sons took over the ‘harder’ lines of Îåbia’s business (i.e. the agricultural partnerships). VS 6 86 dates from this period when 4Båbu-šarrat was in charge of domestic affairs. (1) The reading “dumu.munus-šá šá” at the end of the line is against Ungnad’s copy but it is the best solution in view of 4Båbu-šarrat’s family history. Ungnad 1944 : 328 n. 1 also opted for this reading. Nevertheless, the possibility to read “âu” - which is more in keeping with the copy - cannot entirely be excluded: in that case 4Båbu-šarrat’s elderly father belonged to the household. Iqºßa’s last recorded activity dates

from Nbk 42 (VS 3 30). If he was still alive in Nbn 13, he was well over 70, because his first attestation dates from Nbk 06 (56 years before Nbn 13).

(6) The verb i-zi-a-ku causes problems. In analogy with the attestations of the phrase ḫāṭu Ḫāru listed below (sub 2), we expect i-ḫa-ara-ri (cf. no. 9: 10) or i-ḫa-ra (cf. no. 1: 6) or another form of the verb Ḫāru at this place. Instead we find an incorrect form of the verb zakā in the G stem, apparently in intransitive use. Because the verb is grammatically wrong, and the G stem does not make sense in a transitive context, it seems justified to consider the whole verb as a mistake, perhaps caused by the parallel position of the verb u-za-ak-ku in the preceding line. Collation could be useful: it may be doubted whether the verbal form is really to be read i-zi-a-ku in view of the shape of the sign -ku in lines 1 and 5, which looks different.

no. 9 BE 8 119

Babylon, Xer 23-I-01 (Eppêš-ilü archive)

Obv. 1. ʾka-lu-bu-ut{-tu}a dumu¹[munus] ʾlu²en-mu
2. ʾlu²ag-ina-ē.sag.flu-la₂₃mar³ gal-la
3. šā lu²mu-še-zib-⁴uamar.utu dumu šā lu²en-dû dumu-šā
4. ʾka-lu-bu-ut-tu₂a-na-i-di-šā
5. a-na iti ¹(pl) ⁴bān še.bar a-na lu²ag-lu-ā-si-lim
6. qal-la šā lu²er,d-amar.utu dumu šā lu²šli-bi
7. dumu lu²e²dingir ta-at-ti-in
8. dul-lu zi-ki-ā-tu u ha-āšt-a-ta
9. ma-la ina ē lu²mu-še-zib-[d]uamarin.utu

Lo.E. 10. u-za₃ak-ka¹ u i-ḫu-ara-ri al-[tu]
11. ud.¹kam šā i³lu₂u₂mu₂.kam

Rev. 12. ʾlaḫ-ši-iš-ma-ra-rī-ši lugal ei₂⁵
13. ʾlu²ag-ina-ē.sag.flu-la₂₃mar ina igi
14. ʾlu²ag-lu-ā-si-lim lu₂mu₂-kîn-mu
15. ʾlu²um-qu dumu šā lu²en-ad-ārū a ēši-qu-ū-a
16. ʾlu²aamarin.utu-en-šā-nu dumu šā ʾlu₂gi₂mil-dšū
17. a lu²i₂ši₂tim ʾlu₂ki₂-amar.utu₂tin a-šā šā lu₂i₂bar₂₂.4d₂uamarin.utu
18. a lu₂šu₂ku₂ lu₂mu₂-₃ag dumu šā lu₂šu₂zu₂-bu
19. a lu₂er₂d₂umar.utu lu₂en-e₂-te₂-ru
20. ʾlaḫumbisag a-šā lu₂la₂ba₂-ši eki
21. i⁵bāra ud.23.kam mu₂.kam

U.E. 22. ʾlaḫ-ši-iš-mar-raš-ši lugal ei₂⁵
23. u kur.kur

L.H.E. 24. lu²en-mu₂-mu₂ a-šā šā lu₂u₂gur₁-x₂₄x₂⁵
25. a lu₂du₂ en²a ta šā-i³tal₁-{ri}²
26. i₂k₂ur₂-


Commentary: Dar 556, a tablet from the same archive (Jursa 2005: 64), adds the important detail that Nabû-lū-silim was a trained washerman (aslika). In BE 8 119 he buys the labour of a slave with his own craftsmanship: the slave’s master is offered laundry service in return for the slave’s labour (l. 8-10). The monthly rent of the slave, given in l. 5, is twice the amount charged to ʾBābu-sarrat by the washerman in no. 8 (1 kor barley and 1
kor dates a year), which is in keeping with the average wage (see below, 4). Depending on how Nabû-lū-silim’s laundry offer is interpreted (as a supplement to the rent of the slave, or as its actual form of payment), Nabû-lū-silim hired a slave for the approximate price of two or three laundry commissions. He probably intended to employ the slave in his business, for example as a manual worker or as a delivery boy.

A similar arrangement could lie behind CTMMA 3 69 (Egibi archive, Dar 28). As in BE 8 119, a slave (Balå†u) is hired from his master by another slave (Itti-ëdi-Bél). The master is offered two forms of payment: a monthly pay (mandattu) and a service provided by Itti-ëdi-Bél. This service is described as follows: dullu ša bit PN ippuš “he will do the work of the house of PN (the master)”. I suspect that this is an abbreviation of the phrase dullu ašlàkåtu or dullu zikåtu u ḥâṣṭî4 and that the kind of service on offer was laundry. This is somehow corroborated by the fact that the slave hired was a clothes mender (mukabbîh), which suggests that the two slaves intended to embark upon a partnership in the textile business together, each with his own area of specialization.

2. Form and terminology of the laundry contracts

The basic information contained in laundry contracts consists of the name of the client, the name of the contractor, the type of job, the start and duration of the contract,5 the form and amount of pay. Some contracts provide security clauses: both parties face a fine for breach of contract in no. 6, and the laundryman is responsible for the clothes in his care in no. 8 (pîṭ musı̄pti našā). Often, special conditions or circumstances are noted: the time of pay (no. 6, no. 8), pre-paid wages (no. 2, no. 7), details of the job at hand (“dirty clothes” in no. 3, “all the laundry” in no. 5), the members of the household included in the contract (no. 8). Nonetheless, certain aspects of the work remain unknown: the collection and delivery of the laundry, the types of textiles to be washed, the frequency of the service. Formally, two types of laundry contracts can be discerned. The difference however is one of formulation only, and both types are found next to each other in the same towns and the same archives. The central clause of the first type of contract is:6 PN dullu (ša) ašlàkåtu7 ša (bît) PN, ippuš “PN will do the work of the washerman of (the household of) PN.”8 A more natural translation would be “PN will do the laundry of (the household of) PN”. The second type of contract describes the work of the washerman in more elaborate fashion. Usually, two of his tasks are specified: dullu (ša) zikåtu zukkå and dullu (ša) ḥâṣṭu ḥâru. The meaning of both phrases has been misunderstood in the past and requires comment.

Attested variations of the clause:
(PN) dullu zi-ki-î-tu u ḥa-âš-a-ta mala ina bît PN, û-za-ak-ku u i-ḥa-a-ri (BE 8 119/no. 9)
PN ḥaš-së-e-ti ša ša PN, ū-za-ak-ku u i-ḥar-ra (BM 29228/no.1)
zî-ka-tu ša PN, ū-za-ak-ku u ḡa-ât-tu₄ babbanîtu i-za-ak-ku⁵ (VS 6 86/no. 8)
(in oath:) lubûnu aršu ša PN, ana zî-ku-tu iddinu ū-za-ak-ku-i (BM 96390/no. 3)
PN dullu ašlàkå ša zi-ki-tu₄ gâbbi u ḡa-ât-tu₄ ša PN, ippuš (BM 29471/no. 4)

Zikåtu zukkå. San Nicolò and Ungnad (NRVU 668) refrained from translating this phrase in VS 6 86/no. 8 after considering and then rejecting “to make free” for zukkå and “freeing” for zikåtu, because this noun is known as zakåtu. Nonetheless, AHw (p. 1507) listed zikåtu under zakåtu, while admitting that “Befreiung” can not be correct in BE 8 119/no. 9. CAD (Z p. 117) provided a separate entry, without translation, for zikåtu in VS 6 86/no. 8 and BE 8 119/no. 9. The problem was solved by A.C.V.M. Bongenaar (1997:

4. This is the terminology of laundry contracts and will be discussed immediately below (sub 2).
5. It is noteworthy that two contracts start on the first day of the calendar year: no. 1 and no. 8. Text no. 2 is written on the last day of the year (Cyr 30-XIIb-06) and will probably have started on the first day of the new year as well, but this is not explicitly said so.
6. In the following discussion PN stands for the contractor (or washerman) and PN for the client.
7. On the reading ḥtûg.babbar = ašlàkå see below, sub 3.
8. Nos. 2, 5-7. An abbreviated version of this clause may be found in CTMMA 3 69 : 23f.: dullu ša bit PN, ippuš. See the commentary at the edition of text no. 9 for more on CTMMA 3 69.
9. See the edition of VS 6 86/no. 8 for a discussion of the problems related to the verb i-za-a-ku.
312f.), who found new attestations of zikûtu and zukkû in a meaningful context: the textile dossier of the Ebabbar archive. Zukkû is well attested in the meaning of washing clothes, for example, in the OB literary composition “At the fuller’s” (Reiner 1995) a customer gives the following order: šubāti zukki “clean my suit!”.

Zikûtu zukkû can be translated as “doing the laundry”. Note that zikûtu has the same double meaning as “laundry” in English: “the action or process of laundering clothes [...]” and “the articles of clothing etc. that need to be [...] laundered”.10 Zikûtu in the first meaning is found in BM 96390/no. 3 where the customer hands over dirty clothes “for laundering” (ana zikûti nadānu). Zikûtu in the second meaning is found in BM 29471/no. 4 and VS 6 86/no. 8 “the laundry (zikûtu) of PN2 (the customer)”.

Hanštu ḥāru. The underlying root of the verb in this phrase was misunderstood by A. Ungnad (1944: 328f.) who argued that the contractor of VS 6 86/no. 8 was hired to dig (herû) a “beautiful grave” (ḥāštu babbanitu) for ʿBābu-ṣarrat and her family, and that the tablet was a “Vertrag über die Anlegung einer Erbgruft”. The translation “to dig a grave” (ḥāštu herû) in VS 6 86 was accepted by both dictionaries (AHw p. 334, CAD Ḥ p. 143) in spite of the fact that the root of the verb appears to be weak in the middle in BE 8 119/no. 9: 10 (i-ḥa-a-ri). BM 29471/no. 4 now proves that ḥāštu ḥāru belongs to the realm of the washerman, not to that of the grave-digger. The examples listed above also show that the phrase entertains a strong relationship with zikûtu zukkû “to do the laundry”. It is very likely that a connection has to be sought with the Aramaic verb ḥwr “to be white, to shine”.11 The appearance of -ṣt- instead of -rt- in the noun is in keeping with Late-Babylonian phonology. An awkward translation of ḥāštu ḥāru would be “to whiten the whites”. A similar tradition can be found in the Talmud where a distinction is made between straightforward washing (kbs) - zukkû in our texts - and bleaching (ḥwr), which was a more demanding process, specifically applied to linen and new woolen garments.12 The skill involved in bleaching finds expression in VS 6 86/no. 8 where the washerman is expected to deliver ḥāštu babbanitu “perfect(ly bleached) whites”. Finally, it can be noted that the meaning of ḥāru is similar to that of the Akkadian verb puṣṣû “to make white, to bleach”, which was the specific task of the bleacher puṣṣāja. Although washermen (ašlāku) and bleachers (puṣṣāja) constituted two separate professional groups in the Neo-Babylonian temples (Bongenaar 1997: 301 n. 267), the reality of their profession seems to have partly overlapped.

3. The artisans

In the laundry contracts, the washerman and his trade are described with the logogram 10ṯūg.babbar(-ú-tu). In view of the syllabical spelling [10dāš]-la-ku in text no. 1, the reading lāṯūg.babbar = ašlāku seems to be secured for the Neo-Babylonian period.13 However, the appearance of a kāṣiru (tailor) in the role of the 10ṯūg.babbar in text no. 3

13. For the problems related to the reading of the logogram in Neo-Babylonian texts, see CAD A₂ 447, Kümmel 1979 : 41 n. 1 and Bongenaar 1997 : 301 n. 267.
shows that this line of work could be pursued by several specialists\(^\text{14}\) and the mention of the \([\text{lu}]-\text{la}-\text{ku}\) in no. 1 is therefore not entirely conclusive.

The persons who professionally cleaned clothes were men, at least according to our texts. No apprenticeship contracts have as yet been found,\(^\text{15}\), but the aforementioned OB sketch “At the fuller’s” gives a lively image of what was expected by an admittedly exacting customer;\(^\text{16}\) beating, plucking, soaking, ‘tumbling’ and drying of the garments, with special care of the hems. Several tools and products of the washerman are known from temple records, ritual texts and lexical lists (Cocquerillat 1975: 102 and Bongenaar 1997: 312f.). Except of the general expectation that clothes should be “laundered and whitened”, our texts do not tell much of the technical side of the job. Whenever specified, the laundry consisted of garments (\textit{mušiptu} in texts no. 1 and 8; \textit{lubāru} in no. 3). Other types of textiles, such as bed linen or blankets, are not mentioned. Perhaps the expression \textit{dullu ašlākī} \textit{rabū} \textit{u qallu} in text no. 5 (“the entire work of washermen”) relates to this aspect: this contract was eight times more expensive than average.

The washermen derived from different social backgrounds. Some of them were legally free while others were not. Free artisans could claim a family name: the \textit{ašlāku} from Borsippa in text no. 1 belonged to a small local family (Ḫulamišu).\(^\text{17}\) Most washermen however belonged to a nondescript stratum of legally free townspeople who did not use family names. Slaves on the other hand stand out much better in the record. Texts nos. 2 and 9 show that a slave could operate a laundry business independently, employ extra labour and - if CTMMA 3 69 is correctly understood - associate with other textile workers in order to offer a more complete service to the clients.

It is possible that the degree of engagement of the contractors in the actual work varied. Some mastered the trade (no. 1, no. 3), but others did not explicitly do so. Very different professional realities can lie behind the texts: while some contractors may have owned their own workshops, others could have operated as entrepreneurs, relying on contracted labour without participating in the manual process themselves.

4. Wages

The scale of pay is remarkably constant. This is important because the texts come from different towns (Uruk, Borsippa, Babylon) and cover a period of ca. 70 years (Nbn to early Xer). It implies a certain level of economic integration and stability. Moreover, the preferred form of payment was silver,\(^\text{18}\), but payments in kind (barley and/or dates) were accepted too. The normal wage was 1 𐒓 of silver per year per contract. This figure is found in texts no. 1, no. 2 and no. 7 (Borsippa and Uruk). Text no. 6 has a slightly lower figure of 7/8 𐒓 a year, but there is reason to believe that this was adjusted to the normal rate shortly after the beginning of the contract (no. 7).\(^\text{19}\) Wages paid in kind were less stable,
presumably because of fluctuating exchange rates: 2 kor of dates and barley a year in no. 8 and 1 ;1.4 dates a year in no. 4. On the other hand, the extraordinarily high pay of 8 š silver a year in text no. 5 was probably related to the size of the job, which explicitly included both the “big and small” or, entire, laundry (dullu ašläkī rabû u qallu) of the household in question.

The fact that a washerman made on average 1 š a year per contract means that he had to take on at least 12, preferably 18 or more, such commissions in order to make a decent living.20 This gives us an idea of the clientele that was necessary to support an independent laundry business.

5. The clients

The clients were members of the urban elite:21 it can be said with confidence that all of them were well-off. While it does not come as a surprise that the rich did not wash their clothes themselves, it is a surprise that outside labour was contracted for this purpose. The laundry contracts raise questions about slave labour and domestic work in the households of the rich.

It is generally assumed that families of means owned a small number of domestic slaves who worked in the household as nannies, kitchen maids, servants, cooks, house-keepers etc.22 We would be inclined to add ‘washermen, or -women’ to this list. Šaddinnu, the client of texts nos. 3, 4 and 5, owned several slaves -some of them only recently purchased-23 yet his laundry was done under contract by a specialist. In text no. 8 the lady of the house commissioned a washerman for her family and her two domestic slaves.

Why was the laundry not being done by slaves present in the household? Perhaps the washermen were hired for specialist jobs or delicate cleaning only, while daily washes were done by slaves. Texts nos. 4 and 5 however say explicitly that the contract included all the laundry of the household, even the clothes of the slaves themselves in no. 8. It is hard to believe that this work, or part of it, could not also have been done by unskilled labour. Specialist labour must have been either (relatively) cheap and efficient, or desirable among the rich. So far, there are no laundry contracts from early Neo-Babylonian times: while this could be a coincidence, the emergence of a class of professionals specializing in domestic services could have been part of the general upwards economic trend in the mid-first millennium BCE.24

6. Summary

The laundry contracts show that washermen operated in all major Babylonian towns in the mid-first millennium BCE. Even though the technical side of the trade remains hid-

20. Providing that private contracts were his only source of income. The monthly wage of a washerman should by no means be lower than 1 š, which is even for unskilled labour too low in this period. A competitive wage would be 2 š, or more, a month. For these data, see Jursa 2005: 30.
21. See the respective summaries of their archives by Jursa 2005.
23. The following tablets record slave purchases by Šaddinnu before Dar 19, the date of his last laundry contract (no. 5): VS 5 85 Dar 08, BM 29420 Dar 15, BM 28914//BM 29404 Dar 16, BM 29025 Dar 16, BM 25638 Dar 19.
den, we can say that their service was a common aspect of (elite) city life in that period: dealings with clients were written down in standardized contracts and wages were constant throughout the region. In order to be viable, a laundry business had to service at least 18 private households, which indicates that such enterprises were of considerable size and complexity. There is evidence that textile craftsmen of different training associated with each other, and that extra labour could be hired. Social conditions are only sparingly reflected in the texts: nothing more can be said than that some washermen were free while others were not, and that some of the free ones bore family names while others did not. Other aspects of the trade also escape us: the collection and delivery of clothes for instance, or the location of the workshops. Nevertheless, the laundry contracts offer a welcome glimpse of artisanal life outside of the Neo-Babylonian temples, an area of the economy that is otherwise hard to capture in the surviving documentation.

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**SUMMARY**

The role of artisans in Neo-Babylonian private economy is not well documented in the textual record from this period. The present article offers a case-study of washermen in the service of private households, based on laundry contracts preserved in the archives of the urban elites.

**RÉSUMÉ**

Le rôles des artisans dans l’économie privée néo-babylonienne n’est pas bien documenté dans les sources textuelles de cette période. Cet article présente une étude de cas consacrée aux blanchisseurs au service des maisonnées privées, à partir des contrats de blanchissage conservés dans les archives des élites urbaines.

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25. It is likely that washermen grouped in certain quarters or districts, as was the case in the Neo-Assyrian period (ADD 307: *libbi* 𒊵.tug.babbar.meš).