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Prestige on Display: Markers of Economic and Social Status in Ur III Babylonia

https://doi.org/10.1515/janeh-2024-0005
Received May 23, 2024; accepted September 4, 2024; published online September 26, 2024

Abstract: The Ur III kingdom, which flourished in southern Mesopotamia at the end of the third millennium (ca. 2110–2003 BCE), produced and kept detailed administrative records from which historians can reconstruct the economic and social life of the period. Among these sources, we find household inventories of wealthy individuals, lists of temple treasures, receipts of luxury gifts, and accounts documenting allocations of prestige goods. Collectively, these documents shed light on the material culture of Babylonian society in the Early Bronze Age. Clothing, footwear, accessories, jewellery, weapons, and furniture feature among the objects most frequently associated with royals, priests, urban notables, and other elites. By combining data from these diverse textual sources and comparing them with possible parallels in glyptic iconography and the archaeological record, we will examine the elements that most clearly identify high-status individuals to determine the relationship between the economic and sociocultural value of these objects, and reconstruct the context within which they were gifted and displayed.

Keywords: Ur III period; prestige goods; gift-giving practices; elite display objects

Text abbreviations follow the Database of Neo-Sumerian Texts (http://bdtns.filol.csic.es/). The authors have co-written the introduction (§ 1) and conclusions (§ 6); Notizia wrote §§ 2 and 5, while Borrelli authored §§ 3 and 4.

We are deeply grateful to the anonymous reviewers, who provided valuable criticism and helpful suggestions. Thanks are also due to Manuel Molina for his comments on an early version of the manuscript and for sharing with us his forthcoming article "A Cache at the Merchant's House: New Evidence of Robbery in Ur III Texts?" Needless to say, any remaining errors are our own responsibility.

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1 Introduction

During the last century of the third millennium BCE, southern Mesopotamia was unified under the kingdom of the Third Dynasty of Ur. This highly centralized state relied on an unparalleled bookkeeping system that has left us thousands of detailed administrative documents from which historians can reconstruct in detail the economic and social life of the land of Sumer and Akkad.

Redistribution of wealth was a key mechanism for the functioning of the Ur III kingdom, which was not limited to the practice of allocating foodstuffs and ordinary clothing to low-ranking workers, but also included the gifting of prestige goods to selected individuals, a strategy aimed at cementing the allegiance between state elites and the royal house (Sallaberger 2019). Sharing religious and social practices such as feasting, wearing fashionable attire,[1] using insignia of office, and owning and displaying luxury furniture and precious metal objects created a common identity and generated a narrative that framed the king and his loyal followers in opposition to the uncharacterized mass of subjects, helping to structure and reinforce the social hierarchy and perpetuate economic inequality. Household inventories of wealthy individuals, documents recording the division of family estates, receipts of royal gifts, and accounts documenting allocations of prestige objects shed light on the commodities most frequently associated with the highest echelons of Babylonian society in the Ur III period, while iconographic parallels and archaeological data allow us to visualize such markers of status and identity.

In this paper, we analyse these sources in order to better define the materiality of prestige goods, the location of their manufacture, and the circumstances of their circulation. We argue that access to certain classes of items and to artefacts of the highest quality, which required expensive raw materials, complex craft techniques, and/or the combined labour of different types of artisans, was restricted to members of elite circles. It is suggested that elites controlled the production and distribution of such luxury objects – which could hardly be manufactured in non-institutional workshops or acquired by purchase – thereby legitimizing their privileged access to these goods.

In the following, three categories of goods will be considered: items of clothing and accessories, wooden furniture, and metalware. Together with stone artefacts and semi-precious stones, which are more rarely documented, they represent the most valuable possessions of high-ranking individuals in third-millennium Babylonia, as is

1 By "fashionable attire", we mean specific items of clothing and accessories that were perceived as appropriate to wear on certain social and religious occasions, where the choice between new styles or more conservative forms of dress was meaningful and aimed at creating easily recognizable differences in status and wealth. The existence of new/old styles and fashion trends in Early Dynastic and Sargonic Babylonia has been suggested by Baadsgaard (2008) and Foster (2010), respectively.

well illustrated by PPAC 5: 798, an inventory summarizing some of the assets of the governor of Ĝirsu/Lagaš and his brothers.

PPAC 5: 708
515 bronze or copper objects,
238 carnelian (beads),
22 millstones,
1,061 L of [scented?] oil,
1,319 assorted garments,
733 chairs, beds, and (wooden) items:
"Estate" (**e_2-du_6-la**)[2] of Ur-Lama, the governor (of Ĝirsu/Lagaš), and his brothers.

2 The Wardrobe of the Elite: Garments, Headgear, and Staffs

One of the most effective ways to show status and express one's identity within a given society is through clothing and the use of specific accessories and footwear, which was likewise the case also in Ur III Babylonia. In the vicinity of the town of GARšana, in Umma province, resided one of the best-known couples of the Ur III period: Princess Simat-Ištaran – in all likelihood a daughter of King Amar-Suena – and her husband, the general (**šagana**) and physician (**a-zu**) Šu-Kabta.[3] Among the many facilities operating in their rural estate, a textile mill and a leather workshop were devoted to the production of fine articles of clothing and footwear, many of which were intended for Šu-Kabta and his consort (Kleinerman 2011; Waetzoldt 2011). However, judging from the number, variety, and quality of the garments and accessories attested in the texts, it is safe to assume that some of the numerous articles produced in the GARšana workshops were destined for prominent individuals in the employ of the estate's owners or residing at the estate.[4]

Black caps and coloured footwear were some of the pieces reserved for the wardrobe of Šu-Kabta and Simat-Ištaran, as well as their peers. In one text (CUSAS 3: 782), a set of articles manufactured at the GARšana establishments, including coloured boots and sandals, are described as "of Šu-Kabta-quality", i.e., "(fitting for) Šu-Kabta", an

2 On this term, see the recent discussion by Stępień (2012: 27–30), with previous literature.

3 As indicated by its legend, Šu-Kabta owned a seal of the highest quality, in the same style as those gifted by the king himself to the kingdom's most prominent officials (Mayr and Owen 2004).

4 Little is known about the internal circulation of finished products at GARšana. Kleinerman (2011) and Waetzoldt (2011) argue that local production aimed to meet Šu-Kabta and Simat-Ištaran's needs in terms of garments, shoes, and accessories. Needless to say, these included the articles periodically distributed to the household's personnel, ranging from ordinary garments (see, e.g., CUSAS 3: 589; 818) to high-quality ones.

indicator of superior quality frequently attested in the corpus.[5] The position of two black headdresses (**tug2saĝšu ĝi$_6$ sig$_5$**) as the first items in the account and the use of the term **sig$_5$** to denote them testify to their even higher quality.[6]

CUSAS 3: 782 obv. 1–5
2 good-quality black woollen **saĝšu** caps,
2 pairs of Šu-Kabta-quality leather boots finished with red-brown webbed cloth,
1 pair of Šu-Kabta-quality green leather sandals finished with red-brown webbed cloth,
1 pair of Šu-Kabta-quality leather sandals finished with red-brown webbed cloth.

Another administrative tablet (CUSAS 6, p. 435) from the GARšana archives provides information on the weight and the labour required for manufacturing one such piece of good-quality black headgear: ca. 50 g of fabric – thus a very light object – and two days of work.[7]

CUSAS 6, p. 435 rev. iv 15–18
1 piece of good-quality black woollen headgear,
its weight (is) 6 shekels (ca. 50 g),
its "gold-coloured clay" (is) 3 shekels (ca. 50 cm^3),
its labour (is) 2 days.

The term "black" (**ĝi$_6$**) may not simply refer to the natural colour of the wool, but probably also indicates the result of a dyeing process. In fact, the text records that the headgear was treated with "gold-coloured clay" (**im-ku$_3$-sig$_{17}$**), a material tentatively identified with either ochre or orpiment. Since "gold-coloured clay" appears in third-millennium administrative documents alongside tanning and dyeing agents like alum and madder, this paste should be interpreted as a colouring product (cf. Molina and Steinkeller 2023: 32 n. 25). In particular, evidence from the early second-millennium Isin Craft Archive shows that, contrary to what its name would suggest, "gold-coloured clay" was used for "darkening" (**ba-ĝi$_6$**) leather products, giving them a "black" appearance (Van De Mieroop 1987: 31 and n. 24).

5 Compare the high-quality **niĝ$_2$-LIM$_4$** clothes denoted by the name of King Šu-Suen or Ibbi-Suen in Ĝirsu/Lagaš texts (Pomponio 2010: 192). That "Šu-Kabta" is a quality marker and did not indicate the recipient of the objects is also demonstrated by the fact that the general and physician was already dead when most of the documents recording his name in association with pieces of clothing and footwear were drafted (cf. Waetzoldt 2011: 432).

6 Since black wool was the least valuable sort, **sig$_5$** must be considered as an attribute of the final product (cf. Waetzoldt 2011: 431). Nevertheless, black clothes fit for the gods are also documented (Waetzoldt 2010: 201–202). At GARšana, good quality black **saĝšu** caps were made of third- or fourth-quality combed wool.

7 In CUSAS 3: 756 obv. 4–6, two good quality black **saĝšu** caps made of fourth-quality combed wool had a weight of ca. 55 g each.

In GARšana texts, **saĝšu** caps are also associated with the name of Šu-Kabta's wife, Princess Simat-Ištaran. The colour of these caps for women is not specified, but it is noted that they were made of *takkīrum*, a precious fabric woven in small quantities and conceivably intended for manufacturing garments for prominent individuals (Waetzoldt 2010: 206–207).[8]

The production and distribution of **saĝšu** caps are rarely documented in Ur III texts and almost exclusively in royal archives.[9] Besides GARšana, **saĝšu** caps of various types were also manufactured in institutional workshops at Ur, Puzriš-Dagan, Nippur, and Umma. Evidence from the Treasure Archive of Puzriš-Dagan confirms that high-quality **saĝšu** caps were considered an attribute of power and status. The tablet BIN 3: 344, for instance, describes one **saĝšu** as the "crown" (**aga$_3$**) to be worn by a high priest or priestess upon his/her installation.[10] The **saĝšu** was enriched by the addition of golden decorative elements, either embroidered or sewn onto the fabric, and adorned with an agate eye mounted on the forehead. Considering the conspicuous amount of red gold used in its manufacture – almost 300 g – this must have been a unique luxury object crafted by skilled artisans in a royal workshop. Other valuable items completed the set, including a golden pectoral and dozens of gold beads most likely used as decorative elements for a garment.[11]

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8 **Saĝšu** caps made of *takkīrum* fabric were all of Simat-Ištaran quality. Black, white, and *takkīrum* **saĝšu** are also attested lexically; see OB Nippur Ura 4 (MSL 10, pp. 144–49) 105–107.

9 **Saĝšu** caps produced with **niĝ$_2$-lim$_4$** fabric used third-quality wool only, while **saĝšu** made of *batabtuḫḫum* fabric could be made of third-, fourth-, and ordinary-quality wool, and their weight ranged from ca. 40 (TMH NF 1–2: 238, from Nippur, Ummi-ṭabat archive) to ca. 90 g (CUSAS 3: 747, from GARšana). Cheaper white **saĝšu** caps made of scraped-off wool (**siki ĝir$_2$-gul**) weighted ca. 66–87 g (CUSAS 3: 679; CUSAS 6: 1571, both from GARšana). Both these and the *batabtuḫḫum* headdresses were produced in larger quantities than the more luxurious ones.

10 Recent editions of this document can be found in Paoletti (2012b: 392–93) and Sallaberger (2024: 163).

11 Sallaberger (2024: 154) has recently proposed to equate the **saĝšu** crown mentioned in BIN 3: 344 with the "brimmed cap" of the Ur III and Old Babylonian kings. According to his new interpretation of BIN 3: 344, this crown was made of wood, as the royal headgear worn by Ur-Namma and his successors must also have been. However, it remains uncertain whether these really were wooden helmets plated with gold, as suggested by Sallaberger, or headdresses made of felt or sheep fleece – which may occasionally have been decorated with thin sheets of hammered gold – as the surviving representations of Gudea's brimmed cap featuring rows of curls unquestionably indicate. Sallaberger's interpretation rests mainly on the reading of the semantic indicator preceding the sign **saĝšu** in BIN 3: 344, which is a clear giš. Nevertheless, an emendation **tug$_2$**$^{\text{I}}$(giš) (see already Paoletti 2012b: 392) would help us solve the issue of the currently only known example of a wooden **saĝšu**; more importantly, it would explain why this precious object was temporarily entrusted to a fuller (**aslag$_7$**), a specialist involved in the washing and final processing of woven textiles. In this regard, note that into the interior of MesKALAMdu's famous golden helmet (U.10000) from the Royal Cemetery of Ur "was fitted a quilted cap, fragments of whose cloth and wool stuffing were found" (Woolley 1934: 552). The conventional plain appearance of the brimmed cap in the Ur III and Old Babylonian iconography, as opposed to Gudea's patterned prototype, is not particularly

The appearance of this priestly crown is unfortunately impossible to reconstruct, since we lack visual representations of male or female cultic officials wearing headdresses comparable in their richness of decoration to the one described in BIN 3: 344 – as is the case with several other realia that do not have an iconographic counterpart.[12] However, despite our unsatisfactory knowledge of the materiality of this class of objects, we see that specific headdresses were indeed associated with high-status individuals in glyptic and used as markers of identity. Most prominently, provincial governors of the Ur III kingdom could wear a type of head covering similar to the royal brimmed cap (Mayr 2005: 63), a peculiar headdress with a broad rim widely attested in third- and early second-millennium iconography as a distinguishing attribute of kings. In the audience scene depicted on one of his official seals (Mayr 2005: 403 seal no. 955 E), the Umma governor Ur-Lisi wears a head covering which closely resembles the one worn by King Amar-Suena, who is seated on a throne in front of him; however, the domed headdress – whose Sumerian name is unknown – has an upturned brim that appears narrower than the standard cap of the Ur III kings (Figure 1).[13]

In addition to the governor's cap, there is at least one other piece of headgear displayed on late third-millennium seals. This has not yet been identified with a specific term,[14] but was apparently reserved for high officials of the kingdom. This type

problematic: it can be explained as a process of visual simplification, or may be due to a shift from sheepskin to fabric as base material; *contra* Sallaberger, we do not see any particular reason why a plain surface could not represent fabric or leather in imagery. Indeed, a degree of simplification in the visual rendering of this royal headgear in the late third and early second millennium must be assumed, as all post-Gudea brimmed caps appear completely undecorated and unadorned, with the notable exception of the headdress worn by Iddin-Suen of Simurrum in his rock relief (Shaffer and Wasserman 2008), which features what may be interpreted as crescent-shaped appliqués. For the iconographic antecedents of the brimmed cap, see Steinkeller (2019b) (to which add the "fur cap" worn by one of the figures depicted on the Early Dynastic plaque OIP 44, no. 201 (pl. 144) from Khafajah). In the Ur III period, bronze and copper **saĝšu**s are attested in a temple treasure inventory from Irisaĝrig (Nisaba 15/2: 343); since their weight is not indicated in the text, it is difficult to establish whether these metal helmets were reserved for humans or used to adorn divine statues.

12 In the Ur III and early Old Babylonian iconography, high priestesses usually wear circlets or headbands. To our knowledge, the only third-millennium representation of an elaborate crown associated with a priestess is the unique headgear worn by Naram-Suen's daughter Tuṭṭanabšum, high priestess of Enlil, in the seal of her servant Aman-Eštar (Suter 2007: 324–25).

13 It is remarkable that a local governor wanted to be depicted on his seal with the same headdress worn by his king. As noted by Suter (2013: 309), "glyptic is perhaps the only media of ancient Mesopotamia that could occasionally reflect real politics and challenge – if only on a symbolic level – the regime's claim to absolute power". Note that governor Ur-Lisi appears bearded and wearing a different type of headdress in one of his earlier seals (Mayr 2005: 402 seal no. 955 B).

14 The Sumerian terminology for headwear accessories is not particularly rich; it is likely that **saĝšu** was employed as an umbrella term denoting head coverings of different shapes and materials – including the "brimmed cap".

Figure 1: Seal of Ur-Lisi on BCT 2: 10 (detail) and copy of the seal legend (Mayr 2005: 403 seal no. 955 E).

of cap was not included by Boehmer (1980–83: 204–206) in his repertoire of Mesopotamian headdresses, although it was particularly widespread also on seals of the early second millennium.[15] One such helmet-like cap appears on the seal of the royal scribe Ur-Šulpae (Buchanan 1981: 249 seal no. 650), in which the worshipper is portrayed in the act of carrying a sacrificial animal and offering it to the seated king (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Seal of Ur-Šulpae on BIN 3: 550 (detail) and copy of the seal legend (Mayr 2005: 55 fig. 28).

Another example is the seal of Babati (Tsouparopoulou 2015: 157–59 seal no. 48a), uncle of Šu-Suen and brother of Queen Abi-simti, where he is depicted wearing a cap and is introduced to the king by a goddess standing before him and grasping his wrist (Figure 3).

Yet another representation of this headgear is found on the seal of Šarakam (Buchanan 1981: 254–55 seal no. 660), scribe and son of a royal land registrar, who is represented with his right hand raised in a gesture of salutation (Figure 4).

15 See the Ur III and early Old Babylonian examples provided in Collon (1982: 131, 1986: 21–22, 37–38). In his unpublished work on seal impressions on Ur III tablets from Umma, Rudolf Mayr was able to identify 20 worshippers who seem to be wearing caps/hats (Mayr 2005). Although most of Mayr's identifications appear to be correct, some remain questionable. For the Puzriš-Dagan evidence, see the remarks by Tsouparopoulou (2015: 32).

Figure 3: Seal of Babati on (A) Christie's Erlenmeyer Collection no. 81 and (B) BbJ 2, p. 18 no. 11.

Figure 4: Seal of Šarakam on (A) YBC 3647 (Buchanan 1981: 255 no. 660) and (B) AUCT 3: 422.

In the inscriptions of these seals, all of outstanding quality, the owners expressed their subordination by calling themselves servants of the Ur III kings. Most of them had their seals designed and carved by skilled artisans; others belonged to the small circle of individuals who could boast of having received their seal as a gift from the ruler: in either case, these customized items undoubtedly served the function of markers of status and wealth.

A remarkable combination of the helmet-like cap and another symbol of social standing is found exclusively on sealings from Puzriš-Dagan tablets and bullae. This is the case of the seal of the royal servant type belonging to Naram-ili, secretary in charge of doorkeepers (**sukkal i_3-du_8**) and father of General Šu-Kabta (Buchanan 1981: 246 no. 648).[16] In the audience scene, Naram-ili stands in front of the enthroned king: he wears the helmet cap and holds a staff as an emblem of his office (Figure 5).[17]

16 On this influential courtier and the title **sukkal i_3-du_8**, see Sharlach 2017: 50–53.

17 On the association of the staff with the office of secretary, see Wiggermann 1985–86.

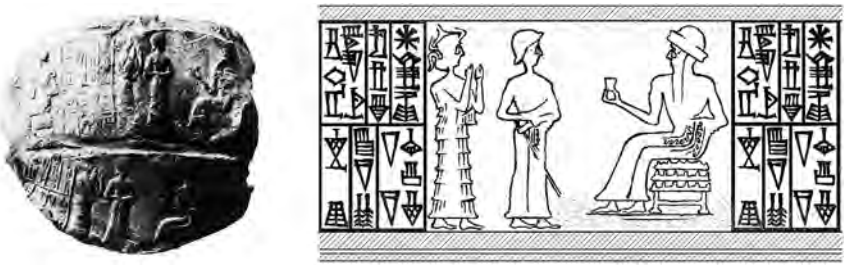

Figure 5: Seal of Naram-ili on SAT 2: 645 (Buchanan 1981: 247 no. 648) and copy of the seal legend (Mayr 2005: 68 fig. 43).

In late third-millennium glyptic, representations of human figures carrying long staffs on seals belonging to secretaries (**sukkal**) – including that of Arad-Nanna, the powerful state chancellor (**sukkal-mah**) of the Ur III kingdom – are not common (Mayr and Owen 2004, seals nos. 13, 19, 20, 27). The seal of Naram-ili is even more unique in that it shows both the staff and the helmet cap in the same scene. The only other example of this combination of attributes can be found on AO 4359 (Figure 6); this votive seal, bearing a dedication to Ninĝeszida for the life of Šulgi, belonged to Niĝkala, an official in charge of sacrificial sheep (**sipa udu niga**), who is depicted as a worshipper being introduced to a seated deity by either a human or a divine figure (the god Alla, Ninĝeszida's minister?) wearing the helmet-like cap and holding a long staff.[18]

Figure 6: The votive seal of Niĝkala (AO 4359); © 2016 Musée du Louvre, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / Chipault - Soligny.

18 Collon (1982: 131, 1986: 21–22, 37–38) did not completely rule out the possibility that in some Ur III and Isin-Larsa seals, the alleged headdress worn by the worshipper was a hairband or represented the figure's hair. However, we find it unlikely that the iconographic evidence for different types of headgear presented in this contribution could be interpreted in this way. As the detail of the curls of hair coming out of the cap on the neck of the figure holding the staff in AO 4359 indisputably proves, headdresses other than the brimmed cap were indeed represented in Ur III glyptic.

Textual evidence from the royal archives of Ur and Puzriš-Dagan confirms that staffs were indicators of social identity. A silver staff of unspecified size and weight, adorned with gold and silver, was gifted to Lu-Nanna, general of NAGsu, most likely on the occasion of a major military achievement (TIM 6: 36 obv. 1–6).[19] It is tempting to associate this object, called **ha-ad** in Sumerian, Akkadian *ḫaṭṭum*, with the short ceremonial baton or swagger stick borne by high-ranking military officers as a symbol of authority and an insignia of their office also in modern times.[20] Bronze staffs with silver and tin decorations are frequently documented among the precious articles made in Ur III royal workshops.[21]

Mesopotamian glyptic imagery undoubtedly offers a good starting point for reconstructing the attire of influential individuals and identifying objects of status and power; on the other hand, it is considerably less informative when it comes to items of clothing, footwear, and personal ornaments. It is well known that seal iconography of the late third millennium suffers from a high degree of standardization. On seals, but also in statuary, human participants are always depicted barefoot; they generally do not wear jewellery and are almost invariably dressed in the standard toga garment characteristic of mortals, decorated with vertical fringes. Textual sources, on the other hand, can provide a great deal of information on these items, especially elite dresses.

A set of inspection records and inventories enumerate the possessions of several high-ranking functionaries and wealthy individuals from Ĝirsu/Lagaš and Umma, two of the most important provinces of the kingdom.[22] Significantly for our investigation, seven inventories detail the personal effects and valuables that belonged to the three sons of the governor of Ĝirsu/Lagaš, who also served as chief administrators of some of the most important temple households in the province.[23] All these documents show

19 According to UET 3: 660 obv. 1–2, the weight of a silver staff was ca. 362 g.

20 It seems reasonable to assume that in Ur III texts, **ha-ad** indicated staffs in general, including the long ones held by secretaries in glyptic imagery. Attestations of early Mesopotamian rulers holding such staffs can be found on two unique Ur III seals belonging to the son of a steward of divine Gudea, in which the deceased ruler is depicted with a secretary's staff in his right hand (Suter 2013). No visual representations exist of a third-millennium king holding a sceptre (**ĝidru**). Nevertheless, gold, bronze, and copper sceptres feature in inventories of temple treasures (see, e.g., CRRAI 63, p. 346 no. 4 obv. 5; Nisaba 15/2: 178 obv. i 9–10, rev. i 9); these objects were used primarily as accessories for divine (UET 3: 300; 538; 740 obv. i 2′) and royal (CUSAS 40–2: 432) statues.

21 MFM 2, p. 24 no. 5 obv. 3–4; UET 3: 406 obv. 4–7; 428 obv. 1–2. A reference to the possible use of the lost-wax technique for the production of metal staffs can be found in UET 3: 567 obv. 1–3. Cf. Molina and Steinkeller 2023: 30.

22 On these records, see Maekawa 1996, 1997, Heimpel 1997, Lafont 2001, and Notizia 2020.

23 The household inventories of the sons of the Ĝirsu/Lagaš governor are HSS 4: 5 and OBTR 244 for Lugalzuluhu; TUT 126 and MVN 17: 7 for Ur-Bau; Berens 89 and UDT 1 for Dudu; ASJ 18, p. 159 no. 3 for all three brothers. Cf. also ASJ 19, p. 287 no. 10, a tablet-basket label mentioning surveys of the properties of

that a wide array of different articles of clothing was available to individuals of the highest status. Except for some minor differences, the wardrobe of these urban notables comprised the same suite of garments, generally of above-average quality, some of which were seemingly produced at a household level.[24] Little is known about the appearance of these dresses, apart from what can be gleaned from the analysis of Sumerian clothing terminology and from lexical equations. They include cloaks, capes, shawls, linen and woollen undershirts, sashes and belts, headbands, and, more importantly, festival garments. The latter is the currently accepted interpretation of the Sumerian term ^{tug2}**niĝ$_2$-LIM$_4$**, a fine wrap-around garment presumably of red colour and lightweight, worn by men and women alike on special occasions. Given the highly ceremonial and courtly setting of the scenes carved on late third-millennium seals, in which the devotees are depicted in the act of presenting themselves to the deities or the king, we propose to identify the toga garment they wore with ^{tug2}**niĝ$_2$-LIM$_4$**, the ceremonial dress par excellence, first attested in art during Naram-Suen's reign (Foster 2010: 127–28), and apparently owned by most elite individuals, as demonstrated by their household inventories.[25] Additional precious pieces of apparel, like the *aguḫḫum*[26] and the *batabtuḫḫum* garments, are attested in two inspection records only.[27] These were all dresses of the finest quality, fit for upper-class individuals, and could require hundreds of work days to manufacture (Waetzoldt 1972: 139–40).

The most common body-wrapping garments and other woollen and linen items of clothing attested in household inventories from Ĝirsu/Lagaš and Umma are summarized in Table 1.[28]

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the governor, his sons, and the chief provincial administrators. Other inventories from Ĝirsu/Lagaš and Umma considered in this article are ASJ 18, p. 164 no. 7 (Gubani); ASJ 18, p. 166 no. 8 (Šeškala); ASJ 18, p. 167 no. 9, PPAC 5: 1664, and PPAC 5: 1685 (Allamu; division of inheritance); Nik. 2 528 (transfer of assets from governor Ayakala to Dadaga); RTC 304 (Lugalirida, superintendent of weavers).

24 At the time of the inspection documented in HSS 4: 5, unfinished **bar-dul$_5$** and **niĝ$_2$-LIM$_4$** fabrics were found still "on the loom" (**ĝeš-a ĝal$_2$-la**; cf. Waetzoldt 1972: 148), presumably in one of Lugalzuluhu's residencies.

25 On the **niĝ$_2$-LIM$_4$** garment, see Attinger 2021: 795 s.v., with previous literature. Foster (2010: 133–34) suggests identifying the toga garment with **ša$_3$-ge-da$_5$**/*šaqītu*, a term attested in Classical Sargonic documents, and perhaps **bar-dul$_5$** in later third-millennium textual sources. Fragments of a red-coloured woven fabric have been retrieved from the Royal Cemetery's Great Death-pit, PG/1237 (Woolley 1934: 239).

26 A garment made of *kaunakes* cloth? See Attinger 2021: 123, 659 n. 1911.

27 TUT 126 obv. ii 24 (Ur-Bau, son of the Ĝirsu/Lagaš governor); MCS 8, pp. 84–87 obv. i 20–21 (Gubani).

28 Garments attested only in one inventory record are not included in Table 1. The entries do not take into account the quality, size (small, large), or condition (old, tattered, mended) of the garments. Allamu's (ASJ 18, p. 167 no. 9) and Dudu's (UDT 1) inventories, as well as ASJ 18, p. 159 no. 3, provide only the total number of textiles and garments summarized as **tug$_2$ (gada) hi-a** and (**tug$_2$**) **gada niĝ$_2$-sig-sig hi-a**. On the meaning of **niĝ$_2$-sig-sig**, see Waetzoldt 2011: 440–41.

Table 1: The most common articles of clothing in Ur III household inventories.

Type of garment	Ur-Bau	Lugalzuluhu	Lugalirida	Gubani
niĝ$_2$-LIM$_4$ garment	29	3	3	1
bar-dul$_5$ garment	9	2	4	2
guz-za garment	36	6	6	5
belt (^{tug2}**bar-si niĝ$_2$-la$_2$**)	34	4	2	0
stole (^{tug2}**bar-si gu$_2$-e$_3$**)	1	3	0	0
shawl (^{tug2}**gu$_2$-e$_3$**)	14	2	0	2+x
cape (^{tug2}**gu$_2$-la$_2$**)	8	4	1	x
waist-binding cloth ($^{tug2/gada}$**šа$_3$-ga-du$_3$**)	5	7	2	x+2
headband for women (^{tug2}**balla$_2$**)	8	0	5	0

Conspicuously absent from these household inventories, however, are **saĝšu** caps and footwear. Unless they were left unrecorded for reasons that escape us,[29] the sons of the governor of Ĝirsu/Lagaš, as well as Lugalirida and Gubani, were apparently excluded from the possession of this class of goods. The absence of headgear and shoes from the inventory records of these wealthy individuals also confirms that these items were regarded as prestige goods that could not simply be purchased or exchanged for other commodities. Since they were only produced in specific institutional ateliers, their circulation remained firmly embedded in elite gift-giving practices.

3 Footwear

Because of the craftsmanship required to produce them and the specific circumstances in which they could be obtained, shoes were considered prestige items in Ur III Babylonia. From the available documentation, it appears that footwear production was carried out in most of the provinces of the Ur III kingdom as well as in workshops located within royal estates. In both contexts, craftsmen attached to these institutions took care of their manufacture, which in the case of the most refined pieces required a collaborative effort among different artisanal expertise. The value of such commodities is clearly reflected in their distribution pattern:

29 The rationale behind excluding specific items of movable or immovable property from Ur III household inventories remains unclear. That being said, it is reasonable to assume that this type of document was not intended to record the entirety of an individual's possessions.

footwear made of leather could be acquired only as royal gifts or through ad hoc top-down donations.[30]

Textual sources show that shoes were distributed exclusively by institutional order, in the form of direct allocations to high-status individuals or as a socially recognizable and loyalty-generating reward to royal subjects in recognition of a particular achievement. Even more visible in the texts is the production of footwear in royal cities and, remarkably, on royal estates, where they were circulated at the discretion and for the benefit of the estate owners and their peers. Distributions to non-elite people in these contexts are rare, mostly limited to specific events, and almost always related to items of medium or ordinary quality. On the contrary, a higher quality of materials and a great variety of decorations and fashion details characterize footwear sported by elite people. Allocations of shoes to prominent individuals are frequent, and differences of colour or model may reveal specific social preferences or dress-code requirements. Indeed, shoes were often bestowed upon members of the social and military elites by the king himself or during royal gatherings. Institutional donations of shoes were so important that scribes meticulously kept track of every disbursement, and the extent of this administrative praxis has been reconstructed through the so-called *Schuharchiv*, a coherent group of documents stemming from the royal centre of Puzriš-Dagan.[31]

As previously stated, although footwear is absent from the iconographic repertoire of the Ur III period[32] and – as far as textual evidence is concerned – from household inventories, plenty of information can be gathered from other administrative sources that inform us about the components, colours, and quality of shoes, as well as about the materials and workdays required for their manufacture.

Footwear was classified into two large groups – boots (^{kuš}**šuhub$_2$**) and sandals (^{kuš}**e-sir$_2$**) – but local varieties were also known, like the *tukšium* shoes from Puzriš-Dagan (Paoletti 2012a: 288).

30 It is very likely that most of the Babylonian population protected their feet with footwear made of readily available vegetal materials, as was the case in Egypt (Veldmeijer 2019); this type of footwear could easily be manufactured at home. However, it is worth noting that in Mesopotamian art of the third and early second millennium, elite and non-elite individuals are virtually always depicted barefoot, not only on religious and festive occasions, but also in working and military contexts. Importantly, ethnographic evidence from southern Iraq suggests that ordinary people rarely wore shoes (Ochsenschlager 2004: 16). Compare also Sir Wilfred Thesiger's photographs of the inhabitants of the Iraqi Marshes – available on the website of the Pitt Rivers Museum (https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/collections-online#/search) – which confirm that men, women, and children carried out their daily activities mostly barefoot.

31 On this archive and the terminology related to footwear, see Paoletti 2012a.

32 The identification of "shoes with heels" allegedly worn by Ur-Namma on the seal of Ḫašḫamer (Paoletti 2012a: 274; see Figure 9) is questionable; cf. Collon's description of the seal imagery (Collon 1982: 168–69 seal no. 469).

Sandals and boots were made of sheep, goat, and ox leather of various qualities, ranging from royal to ordinary, and often dyed in green, white, or red[33] or multi-coloured. Generally, softer skins like sheep hides were used for boots, while harder materials like goat and oxen hides were used for soles (KI.KAL)[34] and straps (**za-hi-ru-um**). Mordents and dying agents such as madder, alum, and gypsum powder are recorded as materials required for manufacturing footwear.[35] Both types of footwear could be made of webbed cloth (**tug$_2$-du$_8$-a**) obtained from combed wool of the third and fourth quality, which usually came from red-brown (**su$_4$**) fleeced sheep. The inner linings (**ša$_3$**) of boots could be cut from third-quality **niĝ$_2$-LIM$_4$** fabrics, which points both to comfort and possibly to a style preference for red hues, while shoe insoles were usually made of darkened leather. Red was also used as the preferred colour for soles, although occasionally boots could be provided with white soles.[36] Boot soles were secured with glue and stitched with tendons. Sandals could feature heels (**suhuš**)[37] and leather straps to anchor them at ankle height. Both sandals and boots featured decorations made of dyed linen and wool, or precious embellishments made of gold or, less frequently, silver.

Colour played a key role in defining the value of an object. Whether due to more complex artisanal procedures or simply to personal taste, coloured footwear, like coloured garments, was restricted to elite consumers, while ordinary shoes were more easily allocated to travelling officials and soldiers.[38] A true identity marker, coloured footwear abundantly features in archives coming from settlements characterized by a massive royal presence, such as GARšana, Irisaĝrig, and Puzriš-Dagan. General Šu-Kabta and his wife Simat-Ištaran outfitted themselves with green-dyed footwear finished with red-brown webbed cloths. At Irisaĝrig, boots were almost exclusively a prerogative of high-status women, including royal princesses, wives of high-ranking

33 The red dye is defined as **u$_2$-hab$_2$**, a vegetable substance identified with madder (*Rubia tinctorum*). The use of **e-ri$_2$-na** as a qualifier for red footwear is restricted to boots and attested only in Irisaĝrig texts. On this term, see Paoletti 2012a: 284–85 and Molina and Notizia 2012: 58–59.

34 See, however, MVN 14: 216, from Umma, a text mentioning the use of poplar wood for sandals, most likely for (reinforcing) their soles (**2 ^{ĝeš}asal ĝeš ^{kuš}e-sir$_2$-še$_3$**). For a different interpretation, see Paoletti 2012a: 278.

35 See, for instance, Nik. 2 438 obv. 1–8, from Umma, listing all the materials needed for producing sandals with insoles made of ox leather.

36 See, e.g., OIP 121: 497 obv. 1, from Puzriš-Dagan.

37 Attested exclusively in texts from Puzriš-Dagan; see, for instance, StOr 9-1 32.

38 It is perhaps no coincidence that some of the few visual representations of footwear in Mesopotamian art of the third millennium – all dating from the Sargonic period (Collon 1982: 29) – are associated with military leaders, armed men, heroes, and warrior gods: see, for instance, the Victory Stele of Naram-Suen, in which the Sargonic ruler wears sandals, and the seal of the royal scribe Kalaki (Collon 1982: 73 seal no. 141), which depicts a soldier, possibly a scout of foreign origins, wearing shoes with upturned toes.

military officials, high priestesses of royal blood, and concubines of the king. Baqartum, daughter of Šulgi, sister of Šu-Suen,[39] and wife of the Irisaĝrig governor Urmes, received an annual provision of 36 fine-quality women's boots, three pairs per month.[40] When it came to colours, royal women may have had style preferences. Ninzagesi and the four royal concubines (**lukur 4-ba**) of Irisaĝrig usually received white boots,[41] while Šat-Mami – daughter of Šulgi and wife to the state chancellor Arad-Nanna – used green boots, as did Šat-Šu-Suen, but in a smaller version or size (**tur**).[42] However, all these royal women also received red boots on two occasions.[43]

As anticipated, the gifting of shoes was often a royal prerogative. King Šulgi honoured Pu'udu, seafaring merchant and captain of the royal fleet, with a pair of green sandals (**^{kuš}e-sir$_2$ duh-ši-a**) on the completion of his expedition to secure chlorite (**^{na4}duh-ši-a**) from abroad.[44] Likewise, the royal prince Šu-Enlil customarily received pairs of green sandals,[45] and on at least one occasion, these were bestowed upon him as a reward for his military success in the eastern kingdom of Šimaški.[46] Recipients of green footwear also included queens and royal children,[47] high-ranking military officers,[48] high priestesses,[49] and provincial governors.[50] An exemplary text in this regard is the summary tablet Nisaba 8: 386, from Puzriš-Dagan, which documents the donation of green sandals and boots to royal women and other high-status individuals.

Colour codes may have also changed from one place to the other or depending on the occasion on which footwear was received and worn. Green is by far the most attested colour for boots and sandals in Puzriš-Dagan texts, as opposed to Irisaĝrig, where major disbursements of red-dyed footwear are attested, although in just two

39 For her seal, see BiOr 70, p. 610 no. 2.

40 Nisaba 15/2: 454.

41 CUSAS 40–2: 275; 284; Nisaba 15/2: 133; 1015.

42 CUSAS 40–2: 275; 373. Notably, the princess, who was probably the daughter of Šulgi, also acted as high priestess of divine Šu-Suen.

43 Nisaba 15/2: 1009 (month ix) and 1011 (month x).

44 MVN 13: 672 obv. 1–3. Since Pu'udu was active on the trade routes towards Magan (on the Omani coast), the shipment was likely coming from there, bringing goods that originally came also from the other side of the Gulf – that is, the land of Marḫaši. On this venture and on the **duh-ši-a** stone, see Steinkeller 2012: 263–66. For the identification of **duh-ši-a** as calcite, see Thavapalan 2019: 260.

45 Nisaba 8: 386 obv. 8–9; Nisaba 33: 103 obv. 2–3.

46 MVN 13: 672 obv. 4 – rev. 2. On Prince Šu-Enlil's career, see most recently Sharlach 2022: 46–48.

47 PDT 1: 434 lists several royal women and the governor of Nippur receiving green boots; BPOA 10, p. 401: obv. 8–11 mentions Queen Abi-simti receiving a pair of green sandals for a cultic event.

48 OIP 115: 137: General Niridaĝal receives three pairs of green boots; PDT 1: 216: the state chancellor and General Niridaĝal each receive five pairs of green boots and five pairs of green sandals.

49 Nisaba 15/2: 1011 rev. 6–7: a pair of green boots is received by the high priestess of Ašnan.

50 TIM 6: 6: Zariq, governor of Ešnuna, receives 10 pairs of green boots, three pairs of boots with webbed cloths, and one pair of sandals with webbed cloth; Aegyptus 10, p. 286 no. 64: Bazamu, governor of Ḫurti, receives green sandals and boots and two pairs of *tukšium* shoes.

tablets.[51] These two documents list mostly the same recipients, the majority of whom are princesses, elite spouses, royal concubines, high priestesses, and high-profile men, like the state chancellor Arad-Nanna and his deputy, Ur-Šu-Suen.

As for the circumstances of their acquisition, which are rarely recorded, there may have been specific reasons why beneficiaries received a particular type of footwear. It is tempting to speculate that some colours were intrinsically linked to the occasions for which such articles were assigned or worn. For instance, one wonders whether the Irisaĝrig allocations of red shoes to high-status women and men (see n. 43 above), who often received footwear of a different colour, can be related to a particular collective event that required a specific dress code.

Even in those provincial archives that do not mention coloured shoes, patterns in the distribution of footwear are easy to observe and indicate a neat demarcation of status among the beneficiaries. Shoes of the finest quality are delivered exclusively to governors and their wives,[52] high-ranking military men, and royal officials after specific tasks.[53] However, provincial workshops were also involved in the production of less prestigious footwear, meant for common people.[54] For instance, two tablets give us insights into the extent of shoe production in Umma province, whose annual availability ranged from 410 to 547 pairs of boots. Footwear was unevenly distributed among provincial districts, most likely based on the size of the administrative subdivision and thus according to the district's population.[55] Unsurprisingly, the district of Umma was the main consumer, followed by Apišal, then by Guedena and Mušbiana districts.[56] It is noteworthy how the number of shoes clearly confirms that even ordinary products were not intended for the entire population, but that the allocations were restricted to those individuals who deserved to receive footwear for some reason,

51 Nisaba 15/2: 1009 (month ix) and 1011 (month x). The first tablet records 12 regular red boots and 11 small red boots, whereas the second tablet lists 14 regular red boots and 10 small red boots. In both texts, Princess Šat-Šu-Suen received two pairs of small red boots.

52 See Aleppo 488; BIN 5: 203; SAT 2: 65, all from Umma.

53 Ontario 2: 407 mentions the allocation of second-quality sandals to royal scribes in charge of field surveys.

54 Sandals are also documented as export goods in seven merchant accounts from Umma: Nisaba 26: 69; YNER 8: 4; 7; 8; TCL 5: 6046; 6052; 6056. These texts record the silver value – not the price – of the shoes and indicate that they were traded for copper, bitumen, silver, and other commodities.

55 MVN 16: 632 records a total of 547 boots (421 at Umma, 76 at Apišal, 50 for Mušbiana and Guedena); it is noteworthy how this account identifies the districts by their chief administrators. CST 571 records instead a total of 410 boots divided as follows: 296 boots for Umma; 86 boots for Apišal; 28 boots for Mušbiana and Guedena.

56 Data related to the demand for footwear match the information we have about the size of the three districts: Da-Umma contained 60 % of the provincial domain units and was the most populous district; Apišal held 20 % of the provincial land units; and Guedena and Mušbiana, the remaining 20 % (Vanderroost 2013: 3).

possibly because they needed it most to perform the work associated with their occupations (e.g., travelling and military personnel).

Texts from Umma and Ĝirsu/Lagaš also inform us about extra-provincial shipments,[57] sometimes intended for military outposts. One such shipment comprised hundreds of shoes destined for the troops led by Apilaša, general of Kazallu, in northern Babylonia: while the soldiers sent to the front line received ordinary footwear, their leading general got a pair of good-quality sandals.[58]

4 Household Furniture

Clothing was not the only way to display social status. Furnishing one's own house with items that were out of reach for most of the population also conveyed the message of affluence. Again, the most common way to obtain these objects was through donations, which often took place during social events, that is, occasions where the act of gift-giving acquired additional value by virtue of being seen by a large audience.

4.1 Thrones, Chairs, Footstools, and Tables

Textual sources dealing with chairs and stools testify to differences in timber, decorations, paddings, and linings, which created a distinction between ordinary and sophisticated seats, let alone thrones of royals and deities.[59] Chairs were gifted to men and women alike, and documents often indulge in classifying models by gender, including royal thrones. Chairs and stools consistently occur in household inventories (Table 2), which provide us with many details on their appearance, ranging from simpler backless models (Figure 7) to seats with elongated backs and elaborated legs and armrests.

Models differed by size, and chairs possibly provided with covers are also known.[60] The basic structure could be made of either reeds or hardwood. The most-used timber for elite chairs was poplar, boxwood, apple, tamarisk, mangrove, willow, and other

57 Leather products including hundreds of shoes produced in Umma (MVN 16: 768; UTI 3: 1772; UTI 6: 3678) and Ĝirsu/Lagaš (TUT 83; 87; MVN 5: 273) were regularly sent to the foreign city of Madga, possibly as gifts or to be exchanged for bitumen. On the Ur III texts dealing with Madga, see Heimpel 2009.

58 MCS 6, p. 55 AOTc 329, from Ĝirsu/Lagaš. On Apilaša's troops, see TCTI 2: 3315.

59 An appraisal of the evolution of the style of royal thrones in third-millennium Babylonia, based on iconographic material, is offered in Suter (2020). For an overview of Mesopotamian thrones based on textual sources, see Pappi 2014.

60 See RIAA 86 and MVN 10: 230, mentioning a ^{ĝeš}**gu-za hal-bi**, "winter chair".

Table 2: Furniture in Ur III household inventories.

Furniture	Household inventories							
	Ur-Bau	Dudu	Lugalzuluhu	Gubani	Šeškala	Allamu		
							Ĝirineisa	Arad-Nanna
^{ĝeš}**gu-za**	97	64	16	31	16	21 (Ĝirineisa) 21 (Arad-Nanna) 1 (Agadani)	11+x	21
^{ĝeš}**gu-za ser$_3$-da**	–	4	2	–	–	–	3	1
^{ĝeš}**ĝiri$_3$-gub**	5	6	2	5	2	1 (Agadani)	2	2
ĝeš-nu$_2$	10	17	6	10	4	3 (Ĝirineisa) 3 (Arad-Nanna) 2 (Agadani)	6	4
^{ĝeš}**banšur**	8	13	7	9	5	7 (Ĝirineisa) 7 (Arad-Nanna) 1 (Agadani) 1 (Throne personnel of Allamu)	7	9
^{ĝeš}**ma-al-tum**	42	15	11	11	–	11 (Ĝirineisa) 11 (Arad-Nanna) 6 (Throne personnel of Allamu)	11	9

Figure 7: Clay model of a stool (BM 137760), from Ur; © The Trustees of the British Museum.

exotic species, like the renowned Magan tree, i.e., sissoo wood, esteemed for its richly hued timber with warm, dark-red veining. Only chairs made of valuable wood were considered of good quality (**sig$_5$**), and they immediately signalled the wealth of their owner. The widespread use of multiple types of timber for the different components of chairs is significant and may underline the preference for multicoloured patterns, but it could also represent a clever artisanal technique. Since most of the wood used in elite chairs was precious and expensive, carpenters may have used cheaper and more accessible timber for the basic structures and then incorporated exotic wood as inlays or veneer.[61] Clay models of chairs retrieved from archaeological excavations at Old Babylonian sites show that backseats could be carved with animal, geometric, abstract, and even architectural motifs (Figure 8).[62]

In the most precious examples, the wooden structure was plated with copper or bronze (BPOA 6: 1045 obv. 4–5) and decorated with silver or gold (UET 3: 313). While metal scraps were used for armrests, which could be inscribed and embellished with decorations (UET 3: 684), a more complex artisanal work was required for the base. High-quality chairs often featured "thin" (**sal$_4$-la**) legs, while sedan chairs were ornamented with theriomorphic feet. The use of theriomorphic legs may reflect the style of the moment and the attempt of elites to evoke royal splendour: indeed,

61 Fragments of wooden inlays combining dark and light timber were found on small woodwork specimens retrieved in tombs PG/645, PG/709, PG/789, and PG/871 at the Royal Cemetery of Ur (Woolley 1934: 386).

62 For clay models of furniture, see Cholidis 1992.

Figure 8: Clay models of chairs (BM 116854; BM 116855), from Ur. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Ur-Namma's own throne – as it is depicted on the seal of Ḫašḫamer, governor of Iškun-Suen (Figure 9) – was embellished with bull legs.[63]

Like the structure, the legs were also plated with precious metals (UET 3: 627). In a particularly distinguished example, silver was used for the "shoes" of the thin legs of a chair,[64] while the legs were embellished with ivory on their corners and plated with gold (AUCT 1: 651). Besides metal plating, chairs also featured precious inlays, like turtle carapaces (MVN 16: 1368 obv. 4 – rev. 1). Sides were made of reed mats (CUSAS 3: 1381 obv. 7) and covered with white (Nisaba 31–2: 69 rev. 3–6) or red leather (CUSAS 3: 1517 rev. 1–2), while the seat was padded with wool[65] and upholstered with high-quality fabrics[66]

63 It is noteworthy that the administrative record contains no surviving mention of thrones decorated with leonine legs or protomes, which are instead depicted on seals (Suter 2020: 29–30). See also the famous silver lioness head decorated with shell and lapis lazuli inlays (U.10465) found in Puabi's tomb (PG/800) at Ur, which according to Woolley (1934: 383) may have been part of a pair of protomes adorning the armrests of a chair.

64 For a possible archaeological parallel to the metal "shoes" applied to the legs of wooden furniture, see the remarks by Woolley (1934: 203) on the copper "ferrules" found in tomb PG/1850.

65 Atiqot 4, pl. 21 no. 45; Studi Mander, p. 165 no. 4. See also Van De Mieroop (1987: 39), mentioning the use of wool padding in later sources (e.g., BIN 9: 32).

66 The textile **ha(-bu)-um** (Waetzoldt 2011: 449–50) is attested in connection with royal thrones (e.g., CUSAS 3: 821 obv. 5; 631 obv. 3–4; UET 3: 1754 rev. 8) and armrests (UET 3: 1612 obv. 1–4), whereas it

Figure 9: Seal of Ḫašḫamer (BM 89126); © The Trustees of the British Museum.

or dyed leather.[67] Red leather was particularly appreciated for covering seats and armrests, and in some very exclusive models, it was combined with white leather as well. The high level of craftsmanship required for manufacturing chairs is summarized in a brief text from Umma recording the combined work of two smiths and one leatherworker who plated a chair with bronze and upholstered it with leather and cloth straps (PPAC 5: 406).

Although it has been proposed that leather and wool may have been used in combination with reed for the webbing of the seats of chairs and stools in a way similar to the matting technique used for beds (Waetzoldt 2007: 117), Ur III texts instead suggest that leather was used for their coverings,[68] as also confirmed by Isin period administrative sources, which explicitly mention leather "covers" (**ka-du$_3$**)[69] applied to seats by leatherworkers (e.g., Fs Meyer 247 obv. 7–9).[70]

Red and white leather was draped on the women's and men's chairs received by Ninmelam, the wife of Umma governor Ur-Lisi (MCS 6, p. 3 BM 105481).[71] It is

appears only once in connection with divine thrones (YOS 4: 296 rev. 14). Other textile coverings included *batabtuḫḫum* and **niĝ$_2$-LIM$_4$** fabrics, as in the case of Šu-Kabta's seat (e.g., CUSAS 3: 737).

67 See, e.g., Nisaba 15/2: 1110 from Irisaĝrig, recording red leather to be applied on the throne (**dur$_2$-ĝar**) of Ninzagesi.

68 E.g., CUSAS 3: 1376 obv. 2–3; 1517 rev. 1–2.

69 Leather covers for chairs identified by the term **ka-du$_3$** are also attested lexically: see OB Ura 1 177 (^{ĝeš}**gu-za ka-du$_{10}$-e du$_3$-a**) and the Middle Babylonian source PBS 12: 17 obv. 36 (^{ĝeš}MIN<**(gu-za)**> ^{kuš}**ka-du$_3$-a de$_2$**).

70 Cf. also BIN 9: 342 obv. 3–4, mentioning a leather cushion made of two white oxhides.

71 Two long chairs were covered with one red and one white ox-hide, as was the men's seat, while the four women's chairs were draped with two red and two white oxhides.

noteworthy that the chairs mentioned in this document are identified as ^{ĝeš}**dur$_2$-ĝar**, a term that is far less attested than ^{ĝeš}**gu-za** in the Ur III administrative corpus. However, the two words are not synonyms, and they clearly refer to two different types of seats, as demonstrated by their co-occurrence in the same text (e.g., BPOA 6: 959 rev. 5–6).[72] The two types of seats share many details, including the choice of woods (Buffalo SNS 11–2, p. 125 no. 2 rev. 1–5), use of leather coverings and plaited fabrics (e.g., AAICAB 1/3: Bod S. 138 rev. i 13), reed mats (e.g., BPOA 1: 1030), and legs plated with bronze.[73] A sedan model (**^{ĝeš}dur$_2$-ĝar ser$_3$-da**) is attested once (Buffalo SNS 11–2, p. 125 no. 2 rev. 6), while three tablets mention a "long seat" (**^{ĝeš}dur$_2$-ĝar gid$_2$(-da)**),[74] which can either be interpreted as a sort of backless bench or as a model provided with backrest, a proposition that casts doubt on the identification of this seat with a stool. As far as recipients and owners of ^{ĝeš}**dur$_2$-ĝar** are concerned, these seats are associated with noblewomen, governors, deities, and cultic officials, confirming their nature as prestige objects and markers of status. One emblematic case is that of the wandering ^{ĝeš}**dur$_2$-ĝar** mentioned in connection with the funerary offerings for Geme-Lama, the high priestess of Bau (Jagersma 2007: 298), which may point to a specific use of these seats in cultic settings. This seems supported by the frequent occurrence of ^{ĝeš}**dur$_2$-ĝar** seats in religious contexts, like their presence among the properties of the temple of the god Šara (e.g., ASJ 9, p. 315 no. 3 obv. 2) or among the cultic paraphernalia used for the rites performed in the Sheepfold (**e$_2$-maš**) at Umma (e.g., Nisaba 33: 550 obv. 10),[75] which allows for an interpretation of the term as "throne". However, as appealing as it may be, this hypothesis does not account for the ^{ĝeš}**dur$_2$-ĝar** seats allocated to private individuals like Babati (BPOA 1: 567 rev. 2–4) or the same Ninmelam, leaving unanswered the question of whether the peculiarity of this type of seat was related to its context of use or its stylistic features.

Textual data certainly confirm that chairs were used in domestic, cultic, and funerary contexts, but also for travelling. Both men and women were gifted with them, and the gender distinction was also kept for the thrones of the queen[76] and king.[77] From the household inventories, we know that Ur-Bau, the son of the Ĝirsu/

72 It is commonly assumed that **dur$_2$-ĝar** referred primarily to stools, that is, backless seats (Röllig and Waetzoldt 1993–95: 327–28); however, this seat is often interpreted also as a throne (Van De Mieroop 1987: 39).

73 See BM 23996, which records ca. 925 g of bronze for the four legs of the stool, with an alloy ratio of 7 (i.e., six parts copper to one part tin). A very similar amount, ca. 900 g, is attested in ITT 2: 691, again to produce four bronze legs.

74 BPOA 6: 959 rev. 5; Fs Lenoble, p. 169 no. 43 obv. 1; MCS 6, p. 3 BM 105481 obv. 1–3.

75 On the rites that took place in the **e$_2$-maš**, see Huber Vuillet 2019: 293.

76 UET 3: 1498 obv. vi 3; CDLJ 2012: 1 §5.06 obv. 8′.

77 Nisaba 5: 163 obv 2; Nisaba 15/2: 549 obv. 7.

Lagaš governor, owned 97 chairs. Evidently, this furniture was intended for multiple houses and for the whole family, since it included chairs for women and small models. The existence of double chairs (**^{ĝeš}gu-za e_2-ba-an**) and double sedan chairs (**^{ĝeš}gu-za ser_3-da e_2-ba-an**) also points to a family setting, where couples hosted their guests and travelled together.[78] Sedan chairs could also be embellished with precious metals, ranging from simple copper plating (AUCT 3: 335) to more artistic work, like gold filigree applied on a bronze base (UET 3: 313).

According to household inventories, other elite individuals had fewer chairs than the governor's sons; however, they did own special models, like Magan chairs. Besides being made of exotic wood coming from abroad, Magan chairs might have had a specific style, whose exclusivity is reflected in the meagre number of attestations in the textual record.[79] The value of such seats is strengthened by the fact that the king himself received one decorated with gold and silver as a gift when attending the banquet for his daughter's marriage to Šarrum-bani.[80] The value of chairs is not just demonstrated by their occurrence as gifts or as part of the household property, but also by the frequency of the efforts made to repair old and broken models,[81] and the inclusion of these damaged items in household inventories.

Thrones and high-backed chairs were paired with footstools (**^{ĝeš}ĝiri$_3$-gub**). The governor's sons had a total of 23 footstools, of which 10 were of good quality. Footstools could be made of the same varieties of timber that were used for chairs, including poplar, sissoo, tamarisk, *ḫaluppu*, and nut tree. The use of the *ḫaluppu* tree alone was enough to consider a footstool of good quality (**sig$_5$**).[82] There is scarce evidence for decorations in either bronze (CUSAS 40–2: 822) or gold (BPOA 10, p. 479 Phillips 13 obv. i 25–26), but it is noteworthy that the latter was applied on footrests destined for royalty.

Among the household furniture used on convivial occasions, inventories also include tables (**^{ĝeš}banšur**), which were often made from different scraps of valuable wood (UET 3: 804 obv. 1), again suggesting the possible use of veneer. Tables could be

78 Note that Verderame (2012: 156) is against the common interpretation of **^{ĝeš}gu-za ser_3-da e_2-ba-an** as a double sedan chair. In his translation, "sedia (munita) di una coppia di stanghe", **e_2-ba-an** refers to the two carrying poles used to transport the litter.

79 AAICAB 1/3: Bod. S 138 obv. i 17; Bod. S 139 obv. i 8′; BPOA 10, p. 479 Phillips 13 obv. i 22–24; MCS 8, pp. 84–87 obv. iii 11; MVN 9: 115 obv. 8′; PPAC 5: 1685 obv. i 15; UET 3: 829 obv 3′. Most of these texts mention the use of other foreign timber as part of the Magan chair.

80 BPOA 10, p. 479 Phillips 13 rev. i 22–24. On this event, see Weiershäuser 2008: 171–73.

81 See, e.g., BPOA 7: 2569, Nisaba 31–2: 79 rev. 2–4, and, possibly, Nisaba 15/2: 549.

82 The *ḫaluppu* tree, which came to Mesopotamia chiefly via the Gulf trade, has usually been identified with an eastern variety of oak (see, most recently, Focke 2015: 411 n. 4060; Heimpel 2011: 132–33). After discussing the various hypotheses, Gadotti (2014: 47–49) suggests identifying the tree with the *Prunus mahaleb*. The relevance of the *ḫaluppu* tree is reflected in the famous episode narrated in *Gilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld* in which the bed and throne of the goddess Inanna were manufactured by Gilgameš from the *ḫaluppu* tree planted in her orchard at Uruk (ll. 144–148).

plated in silver, bronze, and copper,[83] and their construction required 10–15 days of work.[84] At the banquet for the marriage of the princess, the king and queen themselves were honoured with two tables: the plating of the item presented to the king required 3 kg of gold and silver (BPOA 10, p. 479 Phillips 13 obv. ii 1–3), while the queen's gift had just 1.3 kg of silver plating (obv. iii 13–4).

4.2 Beds and Matting

Finally, beds were among the fine articles of craftsmanship available to elites and often attested as royal donations. These pieces of furniture, like tables and chairs, were luxury goods enjoyed by elites, since the majority of people slept on improvised bedding made of reed mats or animal skins. The timber used in their manufacture differed from that employed for chairs and footstools. Fig, apple, pomegranate, and pine trees appear together with willow and sissoo, but black poplar and bamboo were the most popular. The greatest variety of timber is found in Lugalzuluhu's inventory, which tallies six beds made of five different woods: hackberry, apple, pomegranate, pine, and poplar.

The various components of beds – such as frames, headboards, crossbeams, and legs – fostered the combined use of diverse types of hardwood and softwood, creating a polychrome effect that was clearly prized by owners. Among the decorative elements of a bed, legs were the real focus. Thin legs were made of exotic wood, like ebony and *ḫaluppu*, and were often applied to beds destined for royal ladies.[85] This design alternative may have been slimmer than theriomorphic legs, giving the chair a taller and more elegant form. As for chairs, bovine legs were also frequent and plated with precious metals.[86] In a particularly lavish example donated by the king, the bovine legs were plated with gold and further decorated with gold inlays, while the "shoes" of the legs were plated with silver (PDT 1: 543).

83 See, e.g., AUCT 1: 7 for silver plating and BIN 3: 482 for bronze plating.

84 See UTI 5: 3372, recording 15 man-days to produce a regular table (obv. 3–4) and 10 days for an offering table (rev. 1–2), which was probably smaller.

85 See PDT 1: 337, recording the delivery of finished beds from Aḫuni to Le'išin, a mounted courier working for royal ladies (Paoletti 2012b: 66). The same Le'išin appears again in PDT 2: 1249 as the conveyor of two thin-legged beds, together with their woollen mattresses, to Aḫuni.

86 See, e.g., HSS 4: 5 obv. iv 3, plated with copper, or PDT 1: 682 obv. 1–2, plated with silver. Métal, p. 287 no. 15 obv. 3–4 records 416.5 g of copper to plate the bed legs. A similar weight in silver is used to plate the bed in UET 3: 644 obv. 2′–4′. However, AUCT 1: 424 obv. 1–2 records only 67 g of silver scraps to plate one bovine leg, indicating that the metal plating was not necessarily applied to the whole leg or that this could have been a case of a decoration combining different metals, such as the one recorded in PDT 1: 543.

Wooden beds were also provided with woollen mattings (**ša$_3$-tuku$_5$**)[87] and linen bedsheets (Figures 10 and 11). Forty-six days of work were required for the female weavers of the Guabba textile facility to produce four linen bedsheets intended for a bed of royal quality (PPAC 5: 327 rev. ii 3–4). Five kilograms of wool were needed to produce a high-quality matting,[88] whereas half of the wool sufficed for the regular webbing supplied to a roadhouse.[89]

A unique record from Ur (UTI 5: 3372) informs us of the man-days required for manufacturing different types of wooden furniture, such as beds (obv. 1–2). An average of 20 workdays was needed to finish a bed, denoting a production of a certain value. In fact, the only piece of furniture that required more workdays was a women's chair.

Inventories also contain canopy beds (**^{ĝeš}ma-al-tum**), which seem to have been made mostly of *ḫaluppu* wood and were rarely plated with bronze (MVN 5: 155 rev. i 9; Berens 89 obv. ii 7). According to UTI 5: 3372 (obv. 7–8), the production of a canopy bed required four workdays, thus suggesting a lighter, smaller piece of furniture in comparison with regular beds. Nonetheless, canopy beds were provided with

Figure 10: Bed model in clay (51.25.19), from Nippur. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

87 For a discussion of the term **ša$_3$-tuku$_5$**, see Waetzoldt 2007: 113–17.

88 See BPOA 1: 834 obv. 1–2 and MCS 8, p. 95 BM 105556, both from Umma, recording 5 kg of wool for the matting of the governor's bed. Mattings belonging to elites were routinely cleaned, as recorded in OrAnt 19, p. 100.

89 UTI 3: 2214 records ca. 2.9 kg of wool for the bed matting. In MVN 16: 1535, the roadhouse is also provided with glue and leather for a bed, likely used to attach the matting to the bed frame, as suggested by Waetzoldt 2007: 114.

Figure 11: Bed model in clay (BM 1856,0908.89), from Ur; © The Trustees of the British Museum.

headboards (UET 3 796; 797) and there were at least two different models: a small, longer version (**ĝeš ma-al-tum gid$_2$-da tur**) and a large one (**ĝeš ma-al-tum gal**).[90]

Beds were prized properties, as legal documents also confirm. Apparently, the theft of a bed incurred a harsh penalty (NGSU 203: obv. 1–6): when Šu-Erra, a man from Kiš, stole the bed of Ikšudum, in all probability the general of Kiš serving during Amar-Suena's reign,[91] he was sentenced to temporary servitude to the injured party.

5 Precious Metalware and Elite Display Objects

The last markers of status and wealth that we analyse in this contribution are household objects made of copper and bronze, and some peculiar silver objects associated with individuals of high social standing. Due to issues of preservation, metal vessels, utensils, manufacturing tools, weapons, and jewellery have only rarely been retrieved in third- and early second-millennium domestic settings,

90 See UET 3: 799, whose information is included in UET 3: 1498, a yearly summary of the workshop (**ĝeš-kin-ti**) availability at Ur. Notably, besides scraps of *ḫaluppu* timber, the document mentions the use of bundles made of *šakkullu* fibre.

91 Ikšudum is identified as such in the legend of his seal rolled on the tablet BPOA 7: 3022, dated to AS 5. The legal tablet NGSU 203 is indeed dated to AS 7, supporting the proposed identification.

while they are most commonly found in graves;[92] once again, inspection records and inventories prove to be an invaluable source of information for reconstructing the materiality of wealthy households when archaeological evidence is slight or lacking.[93]

In the Ur III period, items made of precious metals feature among the royal gifts most commonly received by prominent individuals; such targeted donations identified their recipients as members of the royal elite and distinguished them from the rest of the population (Paoletti 2012b; Sallaberger 2019). Although royal and local institutional ateliers were the most likely source of many of the metal objects documented in Ur III household inventories, one cannot rule out the possibility that wealthy individuals with access to expensive raw materials could contract institutional smiths who also worked outside the institutional sphere to craft high-quality metal items for them.[94]

Looking at the texts, one can easily distinguish specialized sets of objects, all pointing to communal gatherings, like banquets, and cultic use (Table 3):[95]

(1) a set comprising bronze vessels often summarized as "sundry cups and bowls" (**gal za-hum zabar hi-a**),[96] followed by containers for carrying water (**a-la$_2$**) made of bronze or copper;[97]
(2) various drinking, cooking, and serving objects;
(3) ceremonial weapons, sacrificial knives, and razors (lit. "barber's knives"), the latter possibly used for ritual cleansing.[98]

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92 Cf., e.g., McCown and Haines 1967: 79 (Nippur), Van De Mieroop (1992: 226–27 (Ur)), and Stone and Zimansky (2004: 105 (Maškan-šapir)). However, a wide array of personal ornaments and other small objects made of metal was retrieved from the Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian levels of the TA and TB residential areas at Nippur (McCown and Haines 1967: 96–113; Stone 1987: 111–14).

93 Inventory tablets concerning precious objects of metal stored in temples, on the other hand, offer valuable insights into the composition of the treasures of deities in the Ur III period. On this topic, see Owen 2013, Such-Gutiérrez 2018, Ouyang 2020, and Dahl 2021.

94 In this connection, note the "unfinished bronze kettle with handle(s)" (**šen-dili$_2$ zabar nu-til-a**) in the inventory of Ur-Bau's possessions (TUT 126 obv. i 7). Are we to assume that the object in question was being produced at a workshop located within one of Ur-Bau's residences?

95 Table 3 comprises only items attested in at least three inventories. For the remaining metal objects, see the respective texts. Dudu's inventory (UDT 1) summarizes some of the bronzeware as **niĝ$_2$-dim$_2$-ma zabar tur-tur**, "small bronze objects".

96 On the compound **gal za-hum**, see CAD Š/1, pp. 105–106 s.v. *šāḫu* and Civil (2008: 62 n. 117).

97 The set comprising bronze cups, bowls, and vessels for water is also attested in two Umma texts enumerating the paraphernalia for rituals and lustrations that were assigned to the newly established temple of Šulgi in Kian (Steinkeller 2019a: 140–48).

98 This class of objects is known from excavations of domestic spaces: see, e.g., the copper dagger (U. 17385; Figure 12) found on the floor of Room 8 of the Old Babylonian residence No. 1 Boundary Street at Ur (Woolley and Mallowan 1976: 250).

Table 3: The most common metalware in Ur III household inventories.

Metalware	Household inventories									
	Ur-Bau	Dudu	Lugalzuluhu	Ayakala to Dadaga	Lugalirida	Gubani	Allamu			
							Arad-Nanna	Ĝirineisa	Agadani	Throne personnel of Allamu
"(small) votive boat made of silver" **ma$_2$-za$_3$-gal-tum ku$_3$-babbar**;[a] **ma$_2$-gur$_8$ ku$_3$-babbar** (**tur**)	–	–	1	–	–	1	–	–	–	–
"(small) bronze cup" **gal** (**tur**) **zabar**	15 (**gal za-hum zabar hi-a**)[b]	[x] minus 1 (**gal za-hum zabar hi-a**)	2	3	12	4	1	3	3 (**gal za-hum zabar hi-a**)	3 (**gal za-hum zabar hi-a**)
"(small) bronze bowl" **za-hum** (**tur**) **zabar**			2	3	3	4	1	1		
"(small) bronze vessel for carrying water" **a-la$_2$ zabar** (**tur**)	2	[x]	4	–	–	2	1	1	–	–
"bronze mirror" **ma-ša-lum zabar**	[x]	–	–	–	2	1	–	–	–	–
"bronze kettle" **šen-da-la$_2$ zabar**	[x]	–	–	1	1	–	–	–	–	–
"(unfinished) bronze ewer with handle(s)" **šen-dili$_2$ zabar** (**nu-til-a**)	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	–

Table 3: (continued)

Metalware	Household inventories									
	Ur-Bau	Dudu	Lugalzuluhu	Ayakala to Dadaga	Lugalirida	Gubani	Allamu			
							Arad-Nanna	Ĝirineisa	Agadani	Throne personnel of Allamu
"(small) libation jug made of bronze" **šu-ša-ĝar zabar** (**tur**)	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
"a_2-GAM-vessel made of bronze" **a_2-GAM zabar**	1	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
"bronze axe" **ha-zi-in zabar**	6	[x]	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
"bronze sacrificial knife" **ĝir$_2$-udu-šum/ug$_7$ zabar**	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	1
"bronze barber's razor" **ĝir$_2$ šu-i-NE zabar**	7	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
"(small, double) 'ring' made of bronze" **har zabar** (**tur e$_2$-ba-an**)	2	–	6	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
"copper cauldron" **uruda šen**	3	[x]	1	1	–	–	–	–		–

Table 3: (continued)

Metalware	Household inventories									
	Ur-Bau	Dudu	Lugalzuluhu	Ayakala to Dadaga	Lugalirida	Gubani	Allamu			
							Arad-Nanna	Ĝirineisa	Agadani	Throne personnel of Allamu
"(all-purpose/round) copper ewer with handle(s)" **uruda šen-dili$_2$ (šu-niĝin$_2$)**	3	–	–	1	–	1	–	–	–	–
"copper (*pussulum*) vessel[c] for carrying water" **uruda a-la$_2$ (pu$_3$-su$_{11}$-lum)**	1	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
"copper 'ring'" **uruda har**	1	–	5	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
"copper axe" **uruda ha-zi-in**	1	[x]	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
"copper sickle" **uruda KIN**	–	[x]+5	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–
"copper pot" **uruda zi-ir**	–	[x]	–	–	1	1	–	–	–	–
"**a$_2$-GAM**-vessel made of copper" **uruda a$_2$-GAM**	–	–	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	–

[a]See Paoletti 2012b: 154 s.v. **ma$_2$-az-gara$_3$-tum**. [b]TUT 126 obv. i 12–13 records only one small bronze cup and one small bronze pot. [c]CAD P, p. 536 s.v. *pussulu*.

Figure 12: The copper dagger U.17385/BM 128430, from No. 1 Boundary Street, Ur; © The Trustees of the British Museum.

On the other hand, while jewelry items are only rarely mentioned in the extant Ur III inventories,[99] objects made of silver and gold are completely absent from documents of this type. Two exceptions are known: the record of the possessions of Lugalzuluhu, son of the governor of Ĝirsu/Lagaš, and the inventory of a certain Gubani, a well-to-do individual from the city of Umma, whose precise title and occupation are unknown.[100] Both had among their valuable belongings one miniature votive boat made of silver. Unfortunately, the boats' weight is not specified in

99 It remains unclear whether the undecorated, bronze and copper "rings" (**har**) owned by Ur-Bau and Lugalzuluhu (Table 3), as well as the most valuable silver exemplars disbursed to selected people as gifts by the Ur III kings, were worn as body ornaments ("bracelets, anklets"), represented currency objects ("coils"), or both; cf. Paoletti 2012b: 307.

100 Compare the text ASJ 8, p. 345 no. 1, which records the confiscation of silver and golden objects, semi-precious stone beads, and a small amount of copper from the house of the mother of Nawir-ilum, a physician (**a-zu**) and brother of Šu-Kabta of GARšana (Molina forthcoming). It is worth noting that virtually all of the artefacts made of silver and gold that were available to Nawir-ilum's mother are documented in Ur III texts, either as votive gifts for deities or as royal gifts received by high-status individuals.

the texts, but other sources indicate that such silver objects ranged from a few grams to nearly 100 g.[101]

Model boats are rarely attested in the archaeological or textual record. Typically made of baked clay or bitumen, they have been recovered primarily in graves, where they are often associated with miniature clay or copper jars (Woolley 1934: 145). However, model boats have also been found in Ur III and Isin-Larsa levels at Ur and Nippur in both religious and domestic contexts.[102] Metal models of boats found in the Royal Cemetery and in the area of the ziggurat at Ur provide a good match for the miniature boats attested in Ur III administrative texts. The most famous of these objects is a silver boat with seats and oars (U.10566; Figure 14) that was found together with a similar model in copper in tomb PG/789 (Woolley 1934: 62–73).[103] Smaller and less elaborated exemplars of

Figure 13: The miniature boats U.1584A/B15754 and U.1584B/B15755 (copper), from Ur; © Penn Museum.

101 UET 3: 754, from Ur: silver **ma$_2$-gur$_8$** boats of between one half to ca. 2 shekels (ca. 4–16 g) donated to or by various individuals; BCT 2: 143 obv. i 5, from Umma: one[?] silver **ma$_2$-gur$_8$** boat weighing 10 shekels (ca. 83 g); BPOA 6: 911, from Umma: one silver **ma$_2$-gur$_8$** boat weighing 10+ shekels (ca. 83+ g). According to Civil (2008: 151 no. 301), metal **ma$_2$-gur$_8$** boats of considerable weight should be identified as drinking utensils of a particular shape or as an accessory to drinking vessels; cf. Paoletti 2012b: 151 (**zabar ma$_2$-gur$_8$ zabar**, "Bronze-Schiffgefäß").

102 On model boats found at Old Babylonian sites, see Stone 1993 and Stone and Zimansky 2004: 92–93, 357–58, with previous literature.

103 One copper **ma$_2$-gur$_8$** boat is attested in the Ur text UET 9: 448 (obv.? ii′ 4′). Another model boat made of silver (Køb. 7071; see Figure 15) – allegedly from Uruk, purchased on the antiquities market – is currently kept at the National Museum of Denmark (Salonen 1939: 43 n. 1, 155).

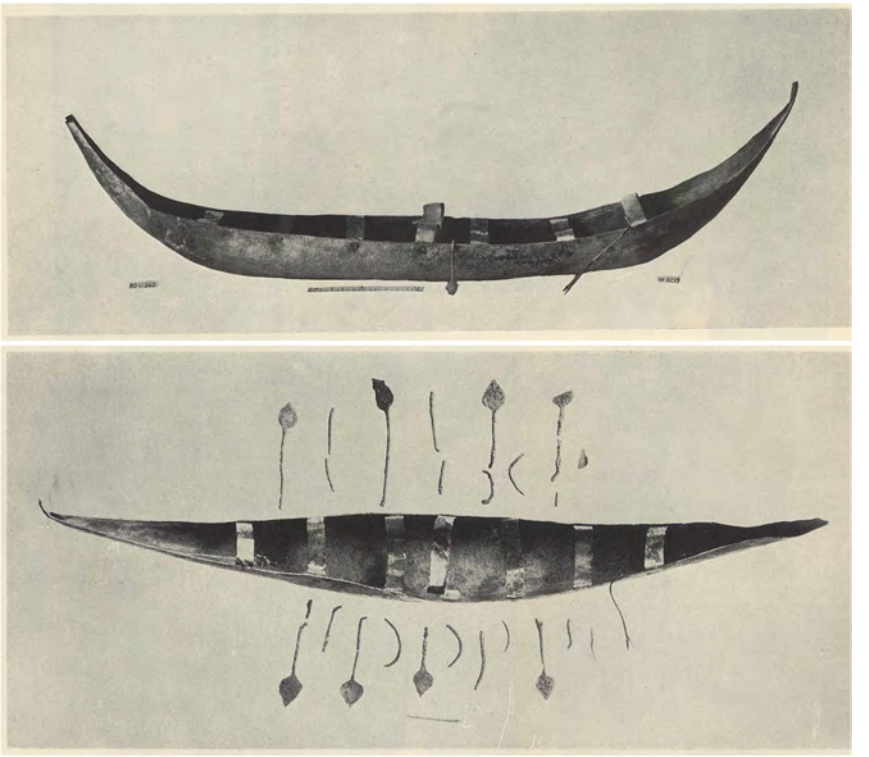

Figure 14: The model boat U.10566/IM 8259 (silver), from Ur (Salonen 1939: pls. VIII–IX).

miniature boats in bronze and copper (Figure 13), which perhaps more closely reflect the shape and size of those attested in household inventories, were deposited as votive offerings in and around the ziggurat at Ur (Woolley 1939: 111 and pl. 60, 1974: 95, 102).

The purpose and symbolism of model boats, especially those recovered in residential areas, remain a matter of speculation. While models found in burials are certainly related to religious beliefs and funerary rituals,[104] boats that were not part of grave goods – like those listed in household inventories – may reflect forms of private cult, possibly the veneration of the moon god Nanna, patron deity of the Ur III dynasty.[105] Put on display in private residences – perhaps on altars in domestic

104 According to Katz (2003: 46–47), model boats deposited in graves may allude to the means of transportation used by the dead on their journey to the netherworld.

105 One of Nanna/Suen's epithets was in fact "**Ma$_2$-gur$_8$** boat" (Frayne and Stuckey 2021: 198, 225; Krebernik 1993–97: 363). Note that the votive deposit, found under the pavement of one chamber of

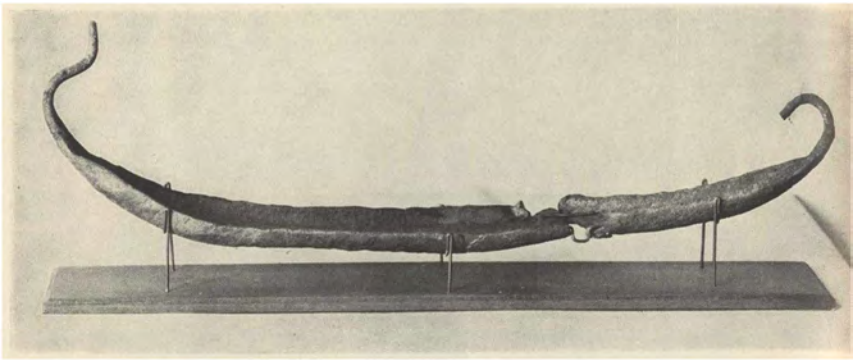

Figure 15: The model boat Køb. 7071 (silver), from Uruk (Salonen 1939: pl. X, 1); © National Museum of Denmark (https://samlinger.natmus.dk/as/asset/21309).

chapels[106] or on benches in reception rooms – silver miniature boats would be visible to clients and guests, further reinforcing the owners' social status. Regardless of the possible function and religious significance of these model boats, the rarity of silver specimens in the archaeological and textual record is indicative of limited access to this class of objects, which remained in the hands of a privileged group of individuals of high social standing.

6 Conclusions

Having reviewed the visual and textual evidence for a wide range of articles that may have served as indicators of social status and identity in Ur III Babylonia, we offer the following preliminary conclusions:

(1) Headdresses of various shapes and colours are extremely rare in texts and glyptic of the Ur III period. Being available only to a very restricted group of people, corresponding to the highest ranks of Ur III society, they were unquestionably regarded as emblems of status and power. On the other hand, it is not always easy to establish a univocal correspondence between a specific model of head covering and a certain office. In this respect, headdresses can be tricky markers of identity. Nonetheless, two types of caps can be safely

the ziggurat at Ur (see above), comprised both miniature boats and moon crescents, yet another symbol of Nanna/Suen. In early Old Babylonian Ur, miniature silver boats were frequently offered to Ningal as votive gifts (Goddeeris 2016: 162, commentary ad TMH 10 74).

106 On chapels in Ur III and Old Babylonian domestic units, see Battini 2017 and Pinnock 2019.

Figure 16: Seal of Ilum-bani (BM 89138); © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 17: Seal of Kilula (BM 89131); © The Trustees of the British Museum.

associated with proper functions: the "brimmed cap" as a symbol of kingship, and the model with the narrower brim as an attribute of provincial governors. The helmet-like caps attested in glyptic are typically reserved for scribes and other professionals close to the royal administration and the king,[107] but a clear pattern is not discernible.

(2) Among other insignia of power, rods and staffs of various sizes can also be regarded as emblems of office, being the typical attributes of secretaries and high-ranking military officers.

(3) A wide array of different articles of clothing was available to urban notables, prominent officials, and members of the royal family. Clothing and footwear

107 Cf., e.g., the hematite seal BM 89138 (Collon 1982: 163–64 seal no. 450), belonging to the royal soldier (**aga$_3$-us$_2$ lugal**) Ilum-bani, on which the worshipper appears with a short beard and wearing a hatched cap (Figure 16); and the votive seal BM 89131 (Collon 1982: 169 seal no. 470), bearing a dedication to Meslamtaea for the life of Šulgi, on which the owner, the police officer (**gu-za-la$_2$**) Kilula, wears a skull-cap (Figure 17).

destined for the wardrobe of elite individuals required numerous workdays to be produced. The manufacture of the finest pieces called for fabrics of the highest quality, woven only in institutional ateliers. Textual sources suggest a strong preference for naturally coloured or dyed materials, often combined to obtain multicoloured apparel. Luxury models of both dresses and shoes included additional decorations, like metal appliqués.

(4) Wooden furniture was a prerogative of the elites; ordinary people do not seem to have had access to chairs, beds, tables, and footstools made of precious timber.[108] Within this exclusive class of objects, the combined use of different exotic woods, leather, linen, and metal decorations, distinguished high-quality models from ordinary ones, highlighting differences in the owners' status and wealth.[109] Stylistic features and the use of polychrome wood added value to the overall aesthetics.

(5) Likewise, the possession of metal artefacts clearly distinguished elites from commoners, who presumably used only pottery for domestic purposes. Decorative items made of precious metals intended for household display were even less common and yet another sign of elite social status.

The luxury clothes and footwear, the high-quality wooden furniture, and the silver, bronze, and copper objects discussed in this contribution were all valuable goods of limited circulation and high symbolic value, accompanied by an aura of prestige that derived from the rare materials and artisanal techniques used in their manufacture and from the circumstances of their acquisition. Conceivably received mainly through redistributive mechanisms – such as institutional gifting – as a reward for service and loyalty,[110] they were proudly worn and shown by

108 The household furniture available to most of the Babylonian population was probably made of reeds or palm fronds, as was the case until very recently in Iraq (al-Gailani Werr 1996). On the use of reed mats, woven/felted fabric, and animal skins as substitutes for seating furniture and for covering floors and mud-brick benches in domestic contexts, see Otto and Einwag 2024: 214 and n. 15. Ethnographic parallels from southern Iraq (Ochsenschlager 2004: 47) also indicate that wooden furniture was virtually absent from ordinary houses.

109 See, e.g., the list of confiscated properties BM 19972 (Waetzoldt 1996; Waetzoldt and Sigrist 1993), which describes the household belongings (including beds, chairs, and occasionally tables) of middle-ranking officials, some of whom were wealthy enough to own slaves. The text does not specify the quality and type of workmanship of their furniture, except for the chairs confiscated from Ur-Bau, son of Ur-Iedena, which were made of poplar or tamarisk wood.

110 The only other documented mode of acquisition of such elite goods was not purchase, but self-production at the household level; needless to say, only a handful of individuals owned adequate facilities (e.g., Šu-Kabta and Simat-Ištaran at the GARšana estate or the sons of the governor of Ĝirsu/Lagaš) and could afford to hire skilled artisans. On the other hand, it may be speculated that the production of ordinary articles of clothing, basic tools, and other utilitarian goods for consumption by

their owners during commensal events, religious festivals, and other ceremonial occasions, a practice that helped define and reinforce the common social identity of a small group of individuals, validating their elite status and setting them apart from the broader population.

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