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Textile Workers in the Royal Archives of Mari

(Syria, 18th Century BC)

*Cécile Michel*¹

Abstract: The 18th-century-BC archives excavated in the royal palace of Mari (Syria) document the management of a huge palace dated to the Middle Bronze Age. Administrative texts and letters mention the existence of a large textile industry where the majority of workers were women, mainly slaves and prisoners of war. Some women were referred to according to the type of textiles they were producing. The work of men seems to have been more specialised, and men were regularly at the head of teams of workers, receiving raw materials and delivering finished textiles and garments. However, women also supervised teams of textile workers that were usually mainly composed of women. The textile workshops were located outside of the palace walls and some included hundreds of workers. There is no archaeological evidence of these workshops at Mari. Large households belonging to high officials or private individuals could also include textile workshops.

Keywords: textile industry; Middle Bronze Age; Mari

The economy of the ancient Near East is built on its land and its herds. Since the 4th millennium BC,² the textile sector has been one of the most productive of Mesopotamia, based on a large wool production. During the 3rd millennium BC large manufacturers of textiles employed hundreds of weavers in South Mesopotamia. These are especially well-documented by the numerous administrative archives of the Third Dynasty of Ur.³ Production in the domestic context presumably already existed in the 3rd millennium, however private archives are rare before the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. The archives of the Assyrian merchants excavated at Kültepe, ancient Kaneš, mainly dated to the first half of the 19th century BC, highlight the production of textiles by their wives in Aššur: the surplus of textiles was exported and sold in Central Anatolia.⁴ Several studies have been dedicated to these women who were paid for their work but were never referred to as professionals.⁵

A century later, the archives found in the palace of Mari, on the Middle Euphrates, depict the management of a huge economic institution of the Middle Bronze Age, including an important textile industry. Mari specialists have published detailed works on textile terminologies, techniques, and the movement of raw materials and finished products,⁶ but until now few have been written up concerning the textile workers, their status, and their organisation within the craft industry.⁷

The archives excavated in the royal palace of Mari documenting textile workers are of various types. Administrative texts include inventories of the palace personnel: in addition to those performing spinning and weaving, other workers, both male and female, produced specific types of textiles or specialised in particular techniques. Their tasks will be presented here in a gender perspective. Letters dealing with the fabrication of luxurious garments for the king or queen might also refer to skilled textile professionals. Deliveries or receipts of raw materials or finished products involve various textile workers and team leaders. These different sources allow an investigation into the textile workers' world. This study includes an analysis of the textile workshops, their organisation, their sitings, the identity of their leaders and the general supervision of these workshops by a high official of Mari Palace.

¹ Archéologies et Sciences de l'Antiquité, Maison Archéologie et Ethnologie, Nanterre (France); cecile.michel@mae.cnrs.fr

² Breniquet – Michel 2014.

³ Waetzoldt 1972. See also the recent studies by Garcia-Ventura 2016 and Lafont 2016, with further references.

⁴ Veenhof 1972, 103–123; Michel 2006; Michel 2016a; Michel forthcoming, chap. 4.

⁵ Michel 2016b.

⁶ See, for example, Durand 1983, 376–392 (*teinture, colle et bitume*), 393–505 (*habits et étoffes*); Bardet 1984; Joannès 1984; Durand 2009 (which details all the textile terminology used at Mari); Beaugéard 2010.

⁷ Note that Durand 1997a used the large lists of textile personnel to investigate the onomastics of the workers.

Sources for textile work at Mari

During the excavations in the palace of Mari, archaeologists unearthed some 17,000 tablets and fragments, which might correspond to some 13,000 to 15,000 complete texts, of which about 9000 have already been published.⁸ The great majority consist of administrative texts produced by the different bureaus of the palace in charge of the receipt and the transformation of raw materials and the delivery of finished products.⁹ These include lists of textile workers and the movement of goods. The palace archives also contain many letters exchanged between the officials and the king, and between the king and members of his family as well as diplomatic letters.¹⁰ These letters occasionally mention skilled textile workers or unskilled women assigned to textile workshops.

Lists of personnel

Among the administrative texts, very large tablets written over several columns and containing long lists of textile workers were found in several rooms. Such lists, comprising a majority of women, give the name of textile workers and the name of the head of the team to which they belong.¹¹ These lists had two aims: making an inventory of the personnel working for the palace and distributing rations to workers.

Receipts and deliveries

Many texts mention deliveries to textile workers of raw materials, primarily wool. They all follow a similar structure: firstly giving the quantities and qualities of wool being transferred, the name(s) of recipient(s), and sometimes the bureau or person from which the wool originates, and then a date. Often, the scribe gives the total amount of wool delivered at the end of the tablet: 'In total 2 talents 28 $\frac{5}{6}$ minas of first quality wool, 18 talents 30 minas wool of textile workers' best choice: receipt by the textile workers, 7 talents of second quality wool, 24 talents 20 minas of wool for the head-of-ten: Zatimu; day 14th of month i.'¹²

At the other end of the *chaîne opératoire*, finished textiles were delivered to the palace by the official in charge of production. Many administrative texts contain lists of textiles and clothes delivered to the king or other individuals. For example, more than seventy garments for the royal wardrobe were received by Dāriš-Lībūr from Mukannišum, a high official supervising both the palace storerooms and personnel.¹³

Letters

Letters exchanged between high officials, members of the court and the king also provide data on textile workers and their organisation in large workshops. As an illustration, in the following letter addressed to the king, the governor of Qaṭṭunān refuses to transfer to the king's vassal an attractive captive woman who has been assigned to a textile workshop:¹⁴ 'On the release of a maidservant to the envoy of Hayašumu (of Ilaṣura), my lord wrote me the following, "Agree on a substitute for this maidservant and release his wife." I have really looked into all these matters. This maidservant is one of the palace's servants. When my lord captured Hazzakkannum, this servant was being raised; she is now a textile worker. Realising how beautiful is this maidservant and (in contrast) how aged is the one they are

⁸ Numbers given by Charpin 2013, 34; Sasson 2015, 4.

⁹ The Mari texts have been published in the series 'Archives royales de Mari' (Paris) since 1950.

¹⁰ Letters have been republished in Durand 1997b; Durand 1998; Durand 2000. See also Heimpel 2003; Sasson 2015.

¹¹ These texts come for example from rooms 115, 135, 160 and 215 of the palace.

¹² ARMT 22, 106. See also ARMT 22, 103, 104+M. 7244 (= Durand 2009, 417–418) and ARMT 22, 105+107 (= Durand 20019, 418–419).

¹³ M. 5260 edited by Durand 2009, 353–354 and dated to 3/ix/Zimī-Lîm 7.

¹⁴ ARMT 27, 85, letter from Zakira-Hammu, translated by Sasson 2015, 46 (1.3.a.iii.3).

holding as replacement, I have decided not to release this maidservant to Haya-sumu's envoy.' It is not only because she had been trained as a weaver that the governor of Qaṭṭunān refused to transfer this woman – since the education of all girls included spinning and weaving – but mainly because she was beautiful.

Female and male textile workers in Mari texts

All these texts mention various types of textile workers but compared to the variety of textiles attested,¹⁵ very little is said about the former although the texts do refer to both men and women. Female textile workers are the most numerous.

Female textile workers

The female textile worker is referred to by the Sumerian word *munus-uš-bar*, which corresponds to the Akkadian word *išpartum*. This term is regularly translated as 'female weaver', and its masculine counterpart *lú-uš-bar* as 'male weaver'. However, even if not specified in the texts, the *munus-uš-bar* was in charge of both the spinning and the weaving,¹⁶ and thus, the translation 'female textile worker' would be better. Indeed, most of the time of the *munus-uš-bar-meš* was spent receiving raw wool and using it to manufacture textiles. These textile workers were slaves or prisoners of war. Their qualification as textile workers is not always specified and they often occur only under the Sumerian logogram *munus* 'female'. The long inventories of personnel also mention some *munus-tur*, 'girls', of unspecified ages, that were also working in the textile workshops.

The women captured as war booty were not specialists. They were assigned to different tasks according to the wish of the king or high officials as evidenced by a letter sent by Zimrī-Līm to his wife, the Queen Šibtu: 'I have just directed to you female textile workers [...] Among these and those (previous) female textile workers, select thirty – or as many as there are worth selecting –, who are attractive, who show no blemish from toenail to head hair, and assign them to (the head musician) Warad-ili-šu, so that he teaches them Subarean choir-music.'¹⁷

Among the female textile workers, some women could be experts in the production of specific types of textiles. For example, the King of Karkemiš wrote a letter to the King of Mari asking him for female textile workers with a provision of wool able to produce an Akkadian garment for him.¹⁸

Other female textile workers are directly named after the type of textiles they were able to make. In the inventory of the house of Sammêtar, a high official, there were 183 servants, and among the female workers, '20 female textile workers [...] 4 women *ša hamdê* [...] 1 woman] *ša kaširtim* and 3 women [...] *ša mardātīm*.'¹⁹ The *hamdû*-textile has been translated by J.-M. Durand as a 'fantasy textile': a small and fine textile which was precious.²⁰ The *mardatum* is a kind of decorated textile that is hung on a wall or arranged on a piece of furniture, which has been translated as 'tapestry'.²¹ According to N. Postgate, who studied the Middle Assyrian terminology of textiles, the *kāširum* would be the craftsperson who works with wool and makes knotted carpets, thus a technique which is different from weaving.²² The largest Mari list of textile workers also mentions 4 *kāširātum* women, in a section together with 4 women *ša kabali*, i.e. who make inner-shoes or wool socks, and *ša šikkatum*, those making some kind of trimmings.²³

¹⁵ The terminology of textiles and garments in the Mari texts has been studied by Durand 2009.

¹⁶ References to spinning are very rare.

¹⁷ ARMT 10, 126 (Durand 2000, no. 1166), letter translated by Sasson 2015, 44 (1.3.a.iii.1b).

¹⁸ ARMT 28, 21:28–31.

¹⁹ FM 6, 43:ii 2, 7, 9, 14; text published by van Koppen 2002, 350–356, photos 369–370.

²⁰ Durand 2009, 100–101.

²¹ Durand 2009, 61–64; Postgate 2014, 407.

²² Postgate 2014, 407–408, 414; note that *ša kaširtim* is not attested in the Middle Assyrian period.

²³ ARMT 13, 1, respectively xii 13, 5, 8.

Male textile workers

Curiously enough, the *lú-uš-bar*, the male equivalent of the *munus-uš-bar*, is exceptional in the Mari sources. It seems to appear only in some totals, at the end of long lists of personnel, in the expression *lú munus uš-bar-meš*, ‘male and female textile workers.’ In some of these lists, such designations refer to the many *lú-túg* listed in the inventory. Indeed, *lú-túg* is often paired with *munus-uš-bar*. They appear in the total of male and female textile workers;²⁴ they both receive oil rations together with other craftspersons (*ummenī*).²⁵ The Akkadian equivalent of *lú-túg* is not obvious. It has been sometimes equated to the *ašlākum*,²⁶ but it seems preferable to equate it with Akkadian *ša šubātim*, literally ‘the one of the textile’.²⁷ The *lú-túg* received wool just plucked²⁸ or wool of different qualities,²⁹ and delivered finished textiles, for example ‘total: 14 textiles of first quality, 20 ordinary textiles, that have been received from the *lú-túg-meš*.’³⁰ The word *lú-túg* has usually been translated as (male) weavers, but a translation of ‘male textile workers’ fits better with his multiple activities. The vocabulary referring to male textile workers is more specialised and implies, in some cases, a special training.

The *lú-túg-du₈*, according to H. Waetzoldt, made ‘strings, ropes, different types of plaited straps, mats and similar products.’³¹ The lists of palace or large house personnel often include *lú-túg-du₈* as, for example, those concerning the house of Bannum in Qaṭṭunān.³² To become a *lú-tug-du₈* required some time as an apprentice. An apprentice rope and mat maker (tur *lú-túg-du₈*) has been led to Mari from the city of Qaṭṭunān.³³

The *ašlākum* (*lú-aslag₂*) is clearly a male profession. It has been often translated as fuller³⁴ but in the context of Mari texts, J.-M. Durand suggested that this professional was a tailor preparing the clothes.³⁵ The tasks of the *ašlākum* are quite varied. He received wool to produce specific types of textiles.³⁶ He used oil or tallow to soften or clean the textile, when used with an alkali.³⁷ He was asked to tailor specific garments.³⁸ He could also receive alum (*gabum*), a mordant which forms part of the dyeing process.³⁹ Similar to the other textile workers, the *ašlākum* worked for the palace; thus, when necessary, he could be assigned to agricultural tasks.⁴⁰ Some *ašlākum* were prisoners of war who could free themselves by paying silver for their redemption.⁴¹

All the specialists mentioned above were presumably working with wool, but Mari texts attest the existence of linen specialists *ša gad*, literally ‘the one of the linen’, in the house of Sammêtar.⁴² The great majority of the women were spinning and weaving ordinary textiles; some, however, were able to produce specific types of woven or knotted textiles.

²⁴ For example in the total of ARMT 13, 1:xiv 57.

²⁵ ARMT 21, 121; Durand 1998, no. 852.

²⁶ For example ARMT 18, 121, n. 36. In the Ur III texts, it is indeed read *lu₂-azlag₂*.

²⁷ As already proposed by Durand 2000, 204–205.

²⁸ Durand 1998, no. 852. There is no indication about who was in charge of the spinning.

²⁹ ARMT 22, 106; see above note 12.

³⁰ ARMT 21, 361:32–35.

³¹ Waetzoldt 2007, 112. Steinkeller 1980, 85–87, suggested that *lú-túg-du₈* made woven textiles used as carpets, but also cords. Durand 1997b, no. 651, translated this word as ‘tapissier’.

³² FM 2, 49:19.

³³ ARMT 23, 425:1. Durand 1997b, no. 139 mentions a textile worker producing *mardatum*-textile who went to the *lú-túg-du₈* to improve his knowledge.

³⁴ Postgate 2014, 407–408 notes that there are no references to fulling in the Middle Assyrian texts; on p. 414, he equates the *ašlākum* with the Sumerian *lú-túg-babbar* and translates it by ‘washer’ and not by ‘fuller’.

³⁵ Durand 2000, 204–205.

³⁶ ARMT 13, 10; ARMT 21, 326; ARMT 24, 180.

³⁷ ARMT 7, 57; ARMT 7, 78; ARMT 21, 149. See Firth 2010: oil was mixed with alkali to make a soapy liquid used for washing wool and for fulling.

³⁸ ARMT 10, 110 (= Durand 2000, no. 1254).

³⁹ ARMT 21, 313.

⁴⁰ ARMT 14, 48 (= Durand 1998, no. 651).

⁴¹ ARMT 13, 137.

⁴² FM 6, 43.

Organisation of textile workers in the workshops

The Mari textile workshops, including hundreds of workers, required a minimum of organisation which can be seen in the administrative texts.

Lists of textile personnel in the palace workshops

At the beginning of his last year of reign, King Zimrī-Līm defeated for the second time the city of Ašlakka which had rebelled, and captured the population, mainly feminine, of both of Ibal-Addu's palaces at Ašlakka and Hissalum. Some of the women were deported to Mari and entered Zimrī-Līm's palace, the others were assigned to the textile workshops in Dêr.⁴³ Thanks to letters sent by Zimrī-Līm to Šibtu, we understand how the selection of the women assigned to the palace was done (see above). The king asked his wife to choose the thirty prettiest women so that they could become musicians in his palace. The other women were assigned to the textile workshops and sent to Mukannišum, a high official in charge of the palace personnel.⁴⁴ Mukannišum wrote several letters to the king concerning this matter: 'On the booty of Ašlakka that has been brought to the city of Dêr: 13 male slaves, [x] female slaves, 2 girls, 16 boys are dead; 5 male textile workers, 39 women, 13 girls, 10 boys, 7 suckling babies: these people went out of the service; 66 girls: for the textile workshop; 10 women, 2 boys, 2 girls belonging to the house of Asqur-Addu and Ilī-Samuh, were delivered to the textile workshop.'⁴⁵ Such a letter shows that the majority of the personnel working in textile workshops were female slaves and prisoners of war. On this occasion, three lists of deported women were drawn up and their colophons indicate that, in all, 103 women from the booty of Ašlakka were entrusted to Mukannišum to produce textiles for the palace of Mari.⁴⁶

Textile workers in the palace workshops also originated from the houses and domains of high officials. There are other long lists of textile workers assigned to the Mari Palace workshops which show that some of the workers originated from the houses of Sammêtar, Yassi-Dagan, Halihadun, Huzzum, Yatarum and Yazrah-Dagan.⁴⁷ These lists are extremely detailed: they provide inventories of male and female textile workers but also of children and babies.⁴⁸ Some workers have been freed from work, *šubar-ra*, others work part-time, *ša ½*. The workers are grouped by teams under the supervision of a team leader (*waklum*) who could be a textile specialist.

The largest of these lists, ARMT 13, 1, was found in room 115 of the palace. It measured 26 × 20cm and contained fourteen columns, seven on each side. It finishes with a colophon, with the following text: 'Release of male and female textile workers, and upholsterers in the *bīt tukla* and the administrative building at the Nergal Entrance,⁴⁹ intermediaries: Sammêtar, Aqba-ahum, Bunuma-Addu, Kapi-Adad and Mukannišum. Day 19th of month x, year 4 of Zimrī-Līm's reign.'⁵⁰ The colophon does not give the total number of workers, but we can compute it as: 880 women and 37 women working part time, 135+[x] girls (children), 185 men, 37 boys and 6 suckling babies, thus in all more than 1280 textile workers and their children. These numbers confirm that the population of the textile workshops was clearly mainly female, and was more than 80% women. Some of the women had been released (16 of them) and some worked part time (37). The activities of the women are mostly unspecified, except at the end of the list where we find a few female workers who specialised in the production of inner-shoes

⁴³ Durand 1997b, 239, n. b; Ziegler 1999a; Charpin – Ziegler 2003, 239–240, with the bibliography, n. 655. See, for example, text ARMT 13, 21 (= Durand 1997b, no. 99); this text is published again by Durand 2000, no. 1171, with some variants in the restitutions and under the wrong reference ARMT 18, 21.

⁴⁴ ARMT 10, 125 and 126 (= Durand 2000, nos. 1167, 1166); Ziegler 2007, 42.

⁴⁵ ARMT 13, 21 (= Durand 1997b, no. 99): reverse of the tablet.

⁴⁶ FM 2, 73; see also Ziegler 1999a.

⁴⁷ Von Koppen 2002, 310–312. The personnel were seized by royal order and requisitioned to work for the palace.

⁴⁸ Durand 1997a.

⁴⁹ The administrative building at the Nergal Gate was located north-east of the main entrance which led to the general storerooms.

⁵⁰ ARMT 13, 1, studied by Dossin 1964; Durand 1983, 519–520. Durand 1997b, 239, n. b, notes that some textile workers attested in the palace workshop in year 4 of Zimī-Līm, appeared in lists of personnel of Sammêtar's house at Mari, then appeared in the palace workshop later on.

or wool socks, trimmings and knotted carpets. But in the colophon, the scribe summarised all the women under the designation *lú munus uš-bar*, considering them all as textile workers. The men are either recorded without specification, or as *lú-túg* ‘textile worker’ and *tú-túg-du₈* ‘rope and mat maker.’ There is no indication about the age range of the young girls and boys.⁵¹

Teams of workers

According to these lists of textile personnel, workers were organised in teams under the direction of a team head, either a man, in twenty-seven cases, or a woman in fifteen other cases (Tab. 1).⁵²

<INSERT Tab. 1 HERE>

On average, each team consisted of 25 to 30 workers, but some teams were much smaller. According to a letter sent to the king by Asqudum, the minimum required for a team of textile workers was five: ‘About the woman who lives by herself in the Hišamta palace. This matter is inappropriate. It would have been fine had there been 5 women staying by her weaving wool. Instead, the woman keeps to herself. If my lord agrees, this woman should be escorted to Terqa or to Šuprum. She must not keep to herself, alone, like an owl.’⁵³ The palace of Hišamta, located in the district of Terqa, was abandoned, so it was suggested that this woman join the textile workers in Terqa.

Female textile workers received between 40 and 60 *silas* of barley as a monthly ration according to their status and hierarchical situation.⁵⁴ This was the average barley ration for women. They also received some 15 *silas* of oil.⁵⁵

Leaders of textile worker teams

Some teams consisted of women and girls only, though sometimes there were also young boys; thus, they included mothers and their children. The children probably did tasks suitable for their ages. Other teams were mixed, involving men as well. Teams which included men were always headed by men, except one, under the authority of the woman Šamahatum (line indicated in bold in Tab. 1).⁵⁶ Another text mentions the clothes delivered by the *ašlakû*-men who worked under the service of the women Bazatum.⁵⁷ So even if it is very rare, we do find teams of male textile workers headed by a woman.⁵⁸ But in this last case, Bazatum was a musician of Zimrī-Lîm who went to live in the city of Zurubbân where she headed a textile workshop and she was already an important woman since she was married to the high official Sammêtar.⁵⁹

The leaders of the textile worker teams were themselves usually specialised in the production of textiles,⁶⁰ and they received different qualities of wool according to the number of workers they

⁵¹ For other lists of textile personnel, see for example ARMT 7, 188; ARMT 9, 24–27; ARMT 21, 403–404; ARMT 22, 3 (88 *lú-túg*); ARMT 22, 10–11; ARMT 22, 50; ARMT 22, 55; ARMT 22, 72; ARMT 22, 82 (tabular format); ARMT 23, 83; ARMT 23, 242; ARMT 24, 225–226; ARMT 24, 244–245.

⁵² There are other attestations of women leading teams of female textile workers. An administrative text refers to nine female textile workers belonging to the service of the woman Atrakatum in Terqa (ARMT 9, 26:10^{*}). See also ARMT 9, 25.

⁵³ ARMT 26/1, 57, translated by Sasson 2015, 306 (6.2.c.iv).

⁵⁴ ARMT 9, 25:37–38, total: 3½ gur 20 *sila*: rations of 3 women at 60 *sila* of barley, of 2 women at 50 *sila* and of 4 women at 40 *silas*, female textile workers of the service of Atrakatum. See also ARMT 12, 12; ARMT 23, 588.

⁵⁵ ARMT 21, 121:1–4: 5 *bán* of oil for the rations of the female textile workers and male textile workers (*lú-túg-meš*) and of the craftsmen; ARMT 23, 349: oil rations for female textile workers, each received 15 *sila*, except one, perhaps the head of the team, who received 30 *sila*.

⁵⁶ For similar situations during the Ur III period, see Garcia Ventura 2016, 184–188.

⁵⁷ ARMT 9, 97, 23–24.

⁵⁸ There are other rare examples of teams headed by a woman and including male workers. Text ARMT 7, 184 mentions the woman Hammi-Hanat as the head of a textile workshop and ARMT 7, 188 refers to a workshop including six men, three women and two boys, headed by a woman.

⁵⁹ Ziegler 1999b, 74–76.

⁶⁰ Note that this is not always the case. See for example T. 210, quoted by Ziegler 1999b, 193, dated to the time of Yahdun-Lîm: list of 49 female textile workers under the responsibility of Darkatum, priestess of the god Addu.

supervised.⁶¹ The workers had to sort and prepare the wool for spinning, then to spin and weave it.⁶² The textiles produced were delivered by the leader of the team to a palace official, and this operation was recorded on a tablet. At a certain point, all these tablets were summarised in large consolidated documents. For example, a text written in a tabular format summarises the quantities of wool delivered and the production of 34 female textile workers under the supervision of Ahatum.⁶³

Some of the team leaders also received non-treated textiles together with dyes and alum, and they were in charge of the dyeing.⁶⁴

Mukannišum

All the textile personnel, including the leaders of the teams, were managed by Mukannišum, a high official of the palace under Zimrī-Lîm. Some long lists of textiles and other personnel finish by noting that they have been entrusted to Mukannišum.⁶⁵

Mukannišum was also in charge of the palace stocks concerning clothing and textile production, perfumes, oil, metals and bronze, precious stones, leather, etc. This is clear from both the administrative texts and his correspondence,⁶⁶ predominantly exchanged with the king and which often concerned specific garments to be made for the king's wardrobe.⁶⁷

The textile workshop *bīt išparātīm*

Textile workers, who were mainly prisoners of war, worked in the *nēparātum* at Mari, which consisted of, at the same time, both workshops and prisons, located outside of the palace walls.⁶⁸ There are several mentions of a *bīt išparātīm*, which may be translated as 'textile workshop', also built outside of the royal palace.⁶⁹ Such a *bīt išparātīm* also existed in the city of Dêr.⁷⁰

In these workshops, promiscuity between the hundreds of workers would have resulted in epidemics as we can see from a letter addressed to King Yasmah-Addu: 'Now the palace is fine. But there have been many losses among domestics, and textile workers of the *nēpāratum*.'⁷¹ In another letter sent by Mašiya, we learn that among the deceased workers recorded on a tablet, there were female textile workers.⁷² Some personnel inventories also mention the workers who died.⁷³ Other administrative texts refer to the distribution of oil to treat female or male textile workers who were ill.⁷⁴

⁶¹ For example, ARMT 21, 332 records a total of 11 talents 14 minas of various qualities of wool entrusted to the textile workers of Terqa.

⁶² Bardet 1984, 5–11. ARMT 5, 67 (= Durand 1998, no. 852).

⁶³ ARMT 24, 178.

⁶⁴ Joannès 1984, 149–153. Dyeing was often a smelly and dirty process and for practical reasons dye-works would probably have been separated from weaving workshops.

⁶⁵ See, for example, FM 6, 43.

⁶⁶ For Mukannišum's correspondence, see mainly ARMT 13, 2–24; ARMT 18; Lafont 2002. Many of these letters concern textile work, as for example ARMT 13, 10–11; ARMT 13, 21; ARMT 18, 1. There are also a lot of administrative tablets in the volumes ARMT 21–25 which involve Mukannišum.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Durand 1997b, no. 136 (A. 1285).

⁶⁸ See, for example, ARMT 3, 84 (= Durand 2000, no. 989). For a study on the *nēparātum*, see Durand 2000, 250–254.

⁶⁹ See Ziegler 1999b, 42, n. 251. In another text, the letter ARMT 26, 179 sent by the governor of Terqa to the king, we learn that male and female textiles workers are living together with other craftsmen in a house belonging to a priestess.

⁷⁰ ARMT 13, 21 (= Durand 1997b, no. 99):9', 12'.

⁷¹ ARMT 26/1, 265.

⁷² ARMT 26/1, 264, also translated by Sasson 2015, 334 (6.6.b.ii.2).

⁷³ ARMT 22, 10 mentions in col. iv several women who are dead (ba-ug 7).

⁷⁴ ARMT 7, 2 (an ill *ašlakkum* receives 10 shekels of cedar oil); ARMT 7, 74, 76 (olive oil for ill female textile workers).

Textile workers in large households

The structures of the large households belonging to governors and high officials or to wealthy private persons were similar to that of the royal palace, though at a reduced scale. They could also have their own specialised personnel, including teams of textile workers. The inventory of the household of Banum in Qaṭṭunān included a rope and mat maker,⁷⁵ and some 180 persons, including at least 28 women and 14 men specialised in textile works, were working in the household of Sammêtar in Terqa.⁷⁶

Conclusion

The King of Mari, as well as high officials and wealthy individuals were at the head of a large staff, including textile workers. The Queen of Mari also had textile workers at her service.⁷⁷

The textile workers, predominantly female prisoners of war or slaves, spent their days in the *nēparātum* or *bīt išparātīm*, spinning and weaving for the palace. Inside the textile workshops, workers were grouped by team and managed by a man or a woman, generally a textile specialist, who received the wool and other raw materials, and delivered the finished products.

The large textile workshops attested by the royal archives of the Mari Palace have no echo in the archaeological excavations carried out at Mari since 1933, presumably because, apart from the palace, the Middle Bronze Age level has not been excavated. The only remains which could be linked to textile production are dye installations dated to c. 2700 BC in ‘chantier L’: two jars fixed in an asphalted basin.⁷⁸

As well as a huge institutional textile production, the letters excavated in the Mari Palace prove the existence of an ongoing private textile production, even among the elite. Yasīm-Dagan, a general of the King of Mari, wrote to his wife Bahlatum as follows: ‘Concerning the garment for my wardrobe that you are making – I have told you already several times, “The garments must be a full cubit longer than those that you used to do.” The garments that you are making do not fulfil my needs. I am sending you (sample) garments from this country (Babylon) for you to examine.’⁷⁹ The Queen of Mari, Šibtu, was herself able to prepare a piece of clothing for her husband Zimrī-Lîm: ‘Further, My lord can now set on his shoulders the garment and shirt that I myself have made.’⁸⁰

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List of abbreviations

ARMT

Archives royales de Mari. Transcription et traduction (Paris)

FM

Florilegium marianum (Paris)

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⁷⁵ FM 2, 49.

⁷⁶ FM 6, 42–43. In the house of Inibšina, there were six textile workers, FM 6, 48. There were at least four textile workers working in the house of Bazatum at Zurubbān, ARMT 9, 97.

⁷⁷ ARMT 21, 349 records 79 textiles that were the output of the queen’s male textile workers which were entrusted to Šubnalû (date: ix/Zimrī-Lîm 13).

⁷⁸ Margueron 2004, 108.

⁷⁹ ARMT 10, 173 (= Durand 2000, no. 1210), translated by Sasson 2015, 326 (6.5.bii.2).

⁸⁰ ARMT 10, 17 (= Durand 2000, no. 1129), translated by Sasson 2015, 326 (6.5.bii.1a).

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Caption

Tab. 1 Teams of textile workers plus babies according to ARMT 13, 1. Lines in grey: teams headed by a woman.

Textile Workers in the Royal Archives of Mari (Syria, 18th century BC)

Cécile Michel

lines	Head of team	Women	girls	men	boys	babies
i42-43	[NP]	37	4			
i60-62	Ana-Su'en-taklāku	37	4	16 lú-túg		
ii14-15	ⁱ Abi-sapar	29	5		2	
ii34-36	Rimši-El	29	5	15 lú-túg	4	
ii73-76	ⁱ Kabida	30 & 1/2	7			
ii89-92	[NP]	30 & 1/2	7	13 lú-túg		
iii38-40	ⁱ Supi-leqē	32 & 1/2	4			1
iii59-61	Nabi-ilī	32 & 1/2	4	17 lú-túg	1	
iv7-9	fAhat-abi	25 & 1/2	4		1	
iv24-26	Akka	25 & 1/2	4	12 lú-túg	1	
iv53-54	ⁱ Šandari	20 & 1 šu-bar-ra	4			
iv64-66	Šu-tillat-sú	20 & 1 šu-bar-ra	4	8		
v12-15	ⁱ Šimātum	23 & 2 × 1/2	3		2	1
v24-27	Hana-Su'en	23 & 2 × 1/2	3	7	2	1
v58-60	ⁱ Ašakuzi	24	5		1	
v69-71	Aya-kabar	24	5	7	2	
vi20-22	Kišitum-ummi	24 & 2 × 1/2	7			1
vi34-37	Iskatan	24 & 2 × 1/2	7	8	2	1
vi60-61	Annu-nabiti	18	4			
vi67-70	Yadidum	18	4	5		
vii11-13	ⁱ Išhara-napsi	16 & 5 × 1/2	1			
vii20-23	Tahšin-Aya	16 & 5 × 1/2	1	4	1	
vii68-70	Laya	37 & 1/2 & 3 šu-bar-ra	3			
vii80-82	Ahu-waqar	37 & 1/2 [3 šu-bar-ra] ?	3	7 & 1 šu-bar-ra ?		
viii40-44	ⁱ Šamahatum	27 & 3 × 1/2 8 šu-bar-ra	4	3		
viii54-56	Yarip-El	27 & 3 × 1/2	4	6 lú-túg	4	
ix3-5	-	26	7		3	
ix10-11	Iddin-Mama			4		
ix39-30	Yahadum			3 lú-túg		
ix41-42	Hunzanzi	8	1			
ix45	Abi-samas			2		
ix66-69	Iddi	13 & 2 × 1/2		4 lú-túg-du ₈		
x13-15	Etellim	7 & 1/2		2 lú-túg-du ₈		
x32-33	Su'en-lašanan	5 & 1/2		7 lú-túg-du ₈		
x43-44	Šineš-ewri	3		3 lú-túg-du ₈	1	
x63-64	Aya-lamma	18				
xi13-15	ⁱ Abba-ilī	12				
xi22-23	Du...	2	2		2	
xi32-34	urtadda	3	3	2		
xi51-53	Šamaš-abi	6 & 1/2		6	1 lú-túg-du ₈	1female
xi60-62	Unin-Šamaš	1 ša wa-...		1 lú-túg-du ₈	3	
xii5		4 ša kabali				
xii8		4 ša šikkatim				
xii13		4 kašīratum				
xii16				2		
xii20		3 ša bīt tērtim				
xii25				4 lú-túg-du ₈		
xiii32-33	ⁱ Eštar-turia	30	2			
xiii43-45	Amer-Aya	30	2	8		
xiv36-37	Bahlatum	31	5		2	
xiv48-50	Ili-iddinam	30	x	8	2	

Table: Teams of textile workers according to ARMT 13, 1.

Lines in grey: teams headed by a woman, lines in white: teams headed by a man.