CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Textual Problems in Textile Research: The Use of the Talmud in Studies of Ancient Jewish Dress

KATIE TURNER

INTRODUCTION

For historians interested in dress and adornment, material remains – textiles, jewellery and accessories, footwear – provide our most tangible resource. These are the personal items that past peoples arranged on their bodies each day, worn to denote their sense of self. However, material remains do not come to the historian collated as ‘complete outfits’, and they are often fragmentary (textile remains in particular). Artistic representation and literary references to clothing and dress behaviour are invaluable resources, therefore, as they can clarify and contextualize the material artefacts: providing information on how items were arranged on the body; what styles were popular during specific periods; what was considered ‘appropriate’ or ‘normative’ dress behaviour; and how gender, class, occupation, ethnicity, geographic location, trade and religion affected one’s appearance. Still, one must be careful to avoid using art and literature as ‘tools’ for interpreting material artefacts, but instead recognize that they too were created in response to many of the same factors that influence clothing construction and dress behaviour. Considering, then, the context and motivations underlying the creation of any artistic or literary work used in one’s analysis of clothing and dress is an important part of the research process.

Looking specifically to Jewish clothing and dress in antiquity, one finds an impressive quantity of clothing artefacts from the Roman period, preserved primarily in the Dead Sea region (and surrounding locales). In contrast to this wealth of material, however, one also finds a challenging lack of artistic representation. Biblical prohibitions regarding idolatry (Exod. 20.3-6; Lev. 26.1; Num. 33.52; Deut. 4.16, 27.15) were generally understood as a proscription against all depictions of the human form. The earliest instance of Jewish self-representation is found in a mid-third-century synagogue in Dura-Europos: numerous frescos depicting biblical scenes decorate the

Many thanks to Dr. Laliv Clenman and Ann Helfgott for their invaluable help with the talmudic literature.

1 Thousands of Roman-era textile remains, as well as additional dress items (belts, shoes, pins and fibulae, jewellery, hairnets, veils, etc.) known to have belonged to Jewish people have been discovered at Masada, Qumran, Nahal Hever (the Cave of Letters), Nahal Mishmar, Nahal Qidron (in a site known as the Christmas Cave), Wadi Murabba’at, Wadi Ed-Daliyeh and Ketef Jericho.
interior, displaying both Greco-Roman and Parthian-Iranian dress styles. Additional examples of Jewish self-representation come even later, in the fifth and sixth centuries (cf. the mosaic floors in the Zippori [Sepphoris] Synagogue, the Beth Alpha Synagogue and the Huqoq Synagogue).

Literary references are more numerous and, seemingly, more illustrative. Those found in biblical texts tend to be regulatory in nature: the law of sha’atnez (שיוותע) prohibits the mixing of animal with plant fibres (Deut. 22.11); the law of tzitzit (תיצצ) prescribes the addition of knotted tassels on the ‘four corners’ of a man’s garment (Deut. 22.12); Numbers 15.38 requires the inclusion of a blue thread, tekhelet (תכלת), in tzitzit. Other passages focus on issues of appearance (cf. Deut. 22.5; 1 Tim. 2.9; 1 Pet. 3.3-4) or relay details of dress within unrelated discussions (notably, 2 Tim. 4.13; also Mt. 9.20, 23.5; Mk 15.17; Lk. 8.44, 23.11; Jn 19.2, 23; and the apocryphal 3 Macc. 2:28-29). The passages with the greatest level of detail and visual description deal specifically with the sacred vestments of the High Priest Aaron and his sons (Exod. 28, 39; Lev. 8.7-9, 23; Ezek. 44.17-18). Further description of the Priestly vesture is found in the first-century writings of Philo of Alexandria (Spec. Laws 1.83) and Flavius Josephus (Ant. 3.152-78, 4.80, 20.216-18).

Rabbinic discussions of dress provide our greatest collective Jewish resource, and it is to this literature that scholars frequently turn when evaluating and contextualizing Jewish material remains from the Late Roman period. From some of the earliest rabbinic texts (Mishnah and Tosefta) we learn that the textile production process was long and arduous (m. Šabb. 7.2; t. Ber. 6.5), and men (m. Šabb 13.4; t. Ber. 6.5) and women (m. Ketub. 5.5, 9; m. B. Qam. 10.9; m. Neg. 2.4) participated. We can tell from context that two main articles of clothing were the haluq (חלוק, tunic or shirt) and tallit (תלית, equivalent to the Greek bimation or Latin pallium, possibly with tzitzit; m. Me’il. 5.1; m. Šabb 10.3; t. Meg. 1.6; t. Tehar. 8.9). A small passage implies that a haluq was constructed from two sheets of fabric (m. Neg. 11.9). Garments were white (m. Šabb 1.9, 15.3), vibrantly hued (m. B. Mesi’a. 2.2; m. Neg. 11.4) or were a combination of both.

**RABBINIC LITERATURE: CONTEXT AND CONSIDERATIONS**

Overall, the rabbinic material is an excellent source, but it is also our most challenging. As with all written material, the texts have been filtered through the lens of the authors and their contexts, with all the biases that may imply: generally, this means elite, literate and male. In this respect, the rabbinic material, produced from within the rabbinic community and centred around rabbinic concerns, is little different. Beyond that, the challenge to the historian is quite specific to this body of literature. The entire catalogue of rabbinic writings (Mishnah, Tosefta, Midrash, Talmuds Yerushalmi and Bavli) are the products of various geographic and cultural environments, spanning

---

2The full catalogue of murals from Dura is available to view at ‘Dura-Europos: Excavating Antiquity’, Yale University Art Gallery, http://media.artgallery.yale.edu/duraeuropos/dura.html

3Roman writing is generally more descriptive than rabbinic. For example, Quintilian discussed the proper length of one’s tunic and how one should wear a belt (Inst. Orat. 11.3.138-9), while Ovid wrote long passages on attractive dress behaviour for men and women (Ars Amoria LXIV, III.II-V). Still, the rabbinic literature offers a wealth of information with which to engage.

a composition and redaction period of over 600 years. Each ‘text’ is a compilation of oral and written material, not easily classifiable, redacted and co-authored across generations.5

At some stage along this process, as Sacha Stern writes, the ‘redacted works began … to be treated as single, identifiable entities’: this is how the Bavli considers the Mishnah.6 Furthermore, although authorial attributions exist, and some are indeed credible, most are rooted in tradition and faith, much like the Gospels. Moshe Levee argues that attributions attached to ‘later developments’ may simply be a means of imbuing them with the authority of ‘earlier generations, and to sages from the Land of Israel’.7 Consequently, dating the rabbinic material with precision is exceedingly challenging. Still, some texts can be placed in ‘compilation eras’ more reliably than others. The earliest set of texts – the Midrash Tannaim, the Mishnah (edited c. 200 CE) and Tosefta (edited c. 250 CE) – all ‘composed’ in Hebrew, emerged late in the Tannaitic period (1–250 CE).8 The aggadic Midrashim, Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem/Palestinian Talmud) and Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud) came later, during the Amoraic (250–500 CE) and, for the Bavli, into the early Geonic (c. mid-sixth century) periods. The Talmuds, ‘composed’ in Hebrew and Aramaic, each reflect their geographically disparate schools of thought (developing from within the Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic academies, respectively) and display dialectical differences between Western and Eastern Aramaic. The Yerushalmi was completed first, redacted sometime between the third and mid-fifth centuries, in a Late Roman and Early Byzantine context. The Bavli, displaying stronger editorial involvement (a unifying ‘voice’) than any of the previous rabbinic texts, was redacted sometime between the fifth and eighth centuries in Persia.9

The use of rabbinic literature in clothing and dress research is further complicated by authorial motivation. Naftali Cohn explains:

According to the Mishnah itself, rabbis were a relatively small group within the complex social landscape of Roman Palestine, and the majority of Judeans did not follow rabbinic teachings. Even though the rabbis were not particularly powerful or influential, they still saw the relationship between themselves and the entire Judean people as one of instruction.10

Rabbinic literature represents the rabbis’ specific (male-centric) notion of idealized behaviour and practice. Furthermore, as Isaiah Gafni writes, ‘the variegated corpus of rabbinic literature did not preserve any work that might point to an effort on the part of the rabbis at producing a

8Some talmudic material predates the destruction of the Second Temple ... from groups or individuals other than rabbis, since the earliest rabbis lived after ... The Talmud does not explicitly distinguish this material from Tannaitic statements per se ... Much of this material has been rabbinized, that is, made to conform to rabbinic standards.’ Richard Kalmin, Migrating Tales: The Talmud’s Narratives and Their Historical Context (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), x–xi.
9Works addressing the content, composition, redaction, cultural contexts and dating of the rabbinic literature are plentiful (cf. many of the texts cited throughout this chapter). Due to developments in the field, one is advised to refer to more recent scholarship.
systematic and critical study of the past'. Of course, no ancient author ‘recorded history’ in a modern, academic sense. Still, the rabbis did not apply a natural causality to historical events (in the classical fashion) and often incorporated anachronistic elements in their treatment of the past. This does not mean that there is no valuable historical information contained within the corpus of literature, but instead that we must first understand the motivations, desires and methods employed by the various rabbinic communities as they discussed and evaluated both the biblical past and their contemporary situation.

**JEWISH DIASPORA AND THE TALMUD**

One topic that weighed heavily on the Jewish mind, addressed both biblically and rabbinically, was the very existence of a Jewish Diaspora. The migration patterns of Israelites were interpreted not simply as the consequences of war, economic needs and other factors common to human history but as a result of disturbances to the connection linking God to his people and therefore to the land promised to them. This plays a large role in the shaping of all rabbinic literature post-70 CE, but specifically within the diasporic Babylonian population. As Ronit Nikotsky and Tal Ilan write, ‘the importance of narrative in creating a sense of a unified group becomes very clear in cases of diaspora’. The desire to maintain group identity outside of one’s homeland, to prevent total assimilation to the local culture, functions as an undercurrent, pulling at and shaping the creation and compilation of the Bavli. There is, for example, a preoccupation throughout the texts with various ‘others’, undoubtedly a by-product of post-Temple diasporic identity formation. Lavee demonstrates a distinctly different attitude towards conversion between the Yerushalmi and the Bavli as one iteration of this concern:

Palestinian rabbinic sources portray positively the spread of Jewish customs and beliefs among the gentiles ... They drew gentiles near, brought them to recognize God, the value of the people of Israel and their norms, and in rare cases even stimulated their conversion. Babylonian parallels of these sources tend to ‘convert’ these traditions, internalise them, and present them as an inner-Jewish issue.

There is a preference in the Bavli, Lavee writes, ‘to reject liminal modes of identity, and to mark people as either fully here or completely there’. Undoubtedly, these concerns would have affected

---

13The ‘trustworthiness’ of rabbinic narratives must be evaluated with an understanding of how the community producing the material interacted with the world around them (a different experience for the Palestinian and Babylonian communities), as this affected how they depicted the past. Richard Kalmin, ‘Jewish Sources of the Second Temple Period in Rabbinic Compilations of Late Antiquity’, in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman culture*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Catherine Heszer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 17–54.
16Ibid., 112.
both one’s personal presentation and interpretation of appearance as it related to the notion of ‘self’ and ‘other’, and to one’s place within the increasingly insular diasporic community.\textsuperscript{17}

Due credit has not thus far been given to the ways in which the differing temporal and cultural contexts of the rabbinic communities – and the subsequent divergent forms of identity construction presented in the rabbinic literature – may have impacted Jewish clothing and dress behaviour recorded therein. Christina Katsikadeli observes that

the study of possible differences due to regional factors has been played down by generalizing conclusions, stating that Jewish people would more or less share the same ‘basics’ with other inhabitants of the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{18}

Even less attention has been given to Jewish dress farther East and to the evidence in the Bavli from within its own context.

\textit{Diaspora and dress behaviour: Tzitzit as exemplar}

Take, for example, one distinctly Jewish aspect of clothing: \textit{tzitzit}. Although some early rabbinic references (cf. \textit{Midr. Num. Rab}. 27.5) indicate that \textit{tzitzit} (with \textit{tekhelet}) acted as a desirable visible marker of identity, whether this biblical prescription was adhered to during the Roman period remains ambiguous: no Greco-Roman author mentions this aspect of Jewish clothing, and neither does Philo or Josephus;\textsuperscript{19} the archaeological record is absent of any examples of \textit{tzitzit};\textsuperscript{20} and though fringe seems to be depicted on the edge of some mantles illustrated at Dura-Europos, whether this should be interpreted as \textit{tzitzit} is debatable.\textsuperscript{21} By contrast, and as Joshua Schwartz has also mentioned in his chapter in this book, the pseudepigraphical \textit{Letter of Aristeas} (158) mentions ‘symbols of remembrance’ of God worn on ‘our garments’; there is an unambiguous reference made to \textit{tzitzit} (Greek: Κρασπεδον) in Matthew 23.5, denoting the author’s, and his community’s, familiarity with this adornment;\textsuperscript{22} and, in his \textit{Dialogue with Trypho} (46), Justin Martyr notes the biblical commandment to remember God through \textit{tzitzit}.

Turning back to the talmudic literature, one finds only a few references to \textit{tzitzit} in the Yerushalmi. The Bavli, by contrast, displays a protracted concern with adherence to \textit{tzitzit}, including the necessary addition of \textit{tekhelet} (b. Menah. 38a–44a). Catherine Hezser persuasively argues that references to \textit{tzitzit} (and other aspects of dress and appearance) in the Mishnah and Yerushalmi

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17}Some rabbinic passages may be interpreted as condemnation against assimilation, even in appearance (cf. \textit{Sifre Deut}. 81.4).
\item \textsuperscript{18}Katsikadeli's re-evaluation of one such oft-repeated conclusion (on supposed Greek and Latin loanwords found among rabbinic clothing terminology) provides a good companion piece for this chapter. Christina Katsikadeli, ‘Jewish Terminologies for Fabric and Garments in Late Antiquity: A Linguistic Survey Based on the Mishnah and the Talmuds’, in \textit{Textile Terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the Third to the First Millennia BC}, ed. Cécile Michel and Marie-Louise Nosch (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), 153–63, 55.
\item \textsuperscript{19}Shaye Cohen's well-known argument for assimilated Jewish appearance in antiquity is largely based on this absence: Shaye J. D. Cohen, ‘Those Who Say They Are Jews and Are Not: How Do You Know a Jew in Antiquity When You See One?’, in \textit{Diasporas in Antiquity}, ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen and Ernest S. Frerichs (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 25–68.
\item \textsuperscript{20}Shamir, ‘Prehistoric’, 304–6.
\item \textsuperscript{22}Κρασπεδον is also mentioned in Matthew 9.20 (also Lk. 8.44). It can translate to either (1) an edge/border or (2) a tassel/corner. Given the context in Matthew 23.5, only the second definition, ‘tassel’ (i.e. \textit{tzitzit}), makes sense and thus other instances of the word, though more ambiguous, are best understood accordingly.
\end{itemize}
should be treated as examples of ‘staged’ rabbinic identity: a desire on the part of the rabbis to visually mark themselves as sages, separated from their compatriots by their unique wisdom and piety.\(^\text{23}\) This differs significantly from that found in the Bavli, which instead focuses on adherence to the Law within the wider Jewish population and on Jewish identity within the gentile world. Though some scholars have looked to the Bavli when studying tzitzit in Greco-Roman Judaea,\(^\text{24}\) it is worth considering whether this is appropriate. Babylonian references to tzitzit may be better analysed in relation to diazporic identity formation in Western communities of Late Antiquity/ the Sassanian period. Did visible markers of identity hold greater importance and/or were they emphasized in one’s dress more so than in earlier, more Western Jewish populations? The Bavli’s focus on tzitzit would suggest so, but this must be studied further. The historical realities and motivational needs behind the composition of rabbinic literature necessitate a careful evaluation before one uses these texts as carriers of historical detail or as historicity proof texts.

**NEW METHODOLOGIES IN RABBINICS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO TEXTILE ESEARCH**

Among rabbinicists, methodologies have progressed significantly since the 1960s; not only are historical- and literary-criticism being employed but, as Nikolsky and Ilan explain, ‘historians are conceding the significance of the literary components of rabbinic literature, [and] literary criticism is rediscovering the importance of context, including historical context’.\(^\text{25}\) Rabbinicists once believed that the Bavli and Yerushalmi originated from within the same cultural milieu and could therefore be read and understood synthetically (i.e. ‘if the Palestinian text displayed difficulties, scholars believed that the explanations supplied by the Bavli were the ones intended by the original authors of the texts’). Now the consensus is that it is ‘unsound to assume that the Greco-Roman backdrop [appropriate to study of the Yerushalmi] is a priori the correct one against which to study the Bavli’.\(^\text{26}\) Babylonian rabbinic culture is increasingly studied alongside Sassanian, with the Bavli read in the company of Middle-Iranian languages and literature (keeping in mind rabbinic concerns about the Diaspora).

I would contend that this same thought process should be applied when looking at rabbinic texts in conjunction with material remains. When comparing textiles discovered in Jewish sites of the Roman East – particularly those dated to the Second Temple period and the two revolts against Rome (c. 70 and 132–135 CE) – to references found in rabbinic literature, the earliest and most contextually related texts – the Mishnah and Tosefta, chiefly, as well as the Yerushalmi – should be given preference to the Bavli.\(^\text{27}\) Moreover, references to clothing and dress behaviour should be

\(^{23}\)Hezser, *Rabbinic Body Language*, 24–68. Perhaps this ‘staged identity’ began among the Pharisees, the forbearers to rabbinic Judaism, accounting for Jesus’s rebuke of the Pharisees ‘long krapas’ found in Matthew 23.5.


\(^{25}\)Nikolsky and Ilan, ‘From There to Here’, 18.

\(^{26}\)Ibid., 9–10, 25–6; Also, Hezser, *Rabbinic Body Language*, 20.

\(^{27}\)Dafna Shlezinger-Katsman argues similarly: ‘The focus must be on Palestinian rabbinic sources, [although] at times a cautious use of traditions transmitted in the Babylonian Talmud is necessary … Additional research must focus on the study of ancient Jewish literary references to garments worn by Jews, both in rabbinc and Greek Jewish literature, [as] little has been done in this regard, particularly from a historical-critical and gender studies point of view.’ Dafna Shlezinger-Katsman, ‘Clothing’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. Catherine Hezser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 365, 78.
evaluated from within the temporal and cultural contexts in which the texts were composed and redacted. Approaching the rabbinic literature in this manner should lead to many fascinating and diverse studies on Jewish dress, its regional differences, nuances and particularities. Additionally, some key conclusions drawn about Jewish clothing in previous decades should be re-evaluated in light of these developments within rabbinics. For the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly readdress one such conclusion.

‘imrah as clavi

In his monumental study of the excavation of the Cave of Letters, Yigael Yadin analysed and contextualized material remains using the full catalogue of rabbinic literature. Looking to the construction of the tunics (sewn together from two rectangular sheets), he settled a dispute on the etymology of haluq and confirmed its translation as ‘tunic’. Yadin continued:

The identification of the tunics found in the cave with the talmudic haluq brings forth another matter, the term ‘imrah, often used together with the word haluq.29

Yadin examined talmudic references to ‘imrah (אימרא) in relation to recognizably Roman clavi (two decorative bands running from shoulder to hem) found on Jewish-worn tunics and presented his now widely accepted conclusion that ‘imrah should be identified as the Hebrew equivalent to clavi.30 Yadin begins by citing y. Qidd. 42a (65b):

R. Avun in the name of R. Pinchas: They stood themselves out like ‘imrah on a haluq.

It was customary for men (and less frequently, women) to display their clavi by draping their outer garment, their mantle, in a way that left one tunic shoulder, with its decorative clavus, exposed.31 This style is frequently depicted in Roman-era art, notably on many Fayum mummy portraits

---

28 cf. Hezser’s study of rabbinic self-presentation, *Rabbinic Body Language*, as recorded in the Palestinian texts asks how rabbinic aspects of non-verbal communication (including dress) may have differed from that of the wider Jewish population, as well as from other sages and philosophers of Greco-Roman and early Christian societies. Like Hezser, Cohn’s, ‘Women’s Adornment and Judean Identity in the Third Century Mishnah’, looks beyond the simple (though no less important) conclusion that Jewish populations dressed as their neighbours did, recognizing that even as this holds broadly true, clothing and bodily adornment may still have been worn in a way to express specifically Jewish identity, ideologies and beliefs (with variations across sects, communities, geographic regions and temporal lines). See also the chapter by Joshua Schwartz, this volume.


and on the Greco-Roman figures depicted in the Dura synagogue murals. The above passage certainly reads like a comprehensible Roman-era expression when Yadin’s interpretation of ’imrah as clavi is applied. In his full analysis, however, Yadin used rabbinic sources from the Bavli and Yerushalmi interchangeably, with no consideration for differing contexts (changing time periods, geography and authorial motivation), a methodology now considered outdated and problematic. For example, Yadin cites b. Šabb. 118b:

And R. Yose said: In all my days, the walls [or, beams] of my house never saw the ’imrah of my tunic as well as a similar verse in y. Yoma 38d (5a):

She told them: there should come over me if the beams of the roof of my house even see the hair on my head, and the ’imrah of my tunic.

While both passages deal with modesty, the passage from the Bavli refers to male dress behaviour, while the Yerushalmi describes the dress of a woman, Qimchit. Interestingly, Yadin does not mention this important dissimilarity; he does not include the opening ‘she told them’ (להן אמרה) in his reproduction of the Yerushalmi text, as he does when he notes that R. Yose spoke the words recorded in the Bavli. Because dress behaviour could differ considerably between the genders, this distinction should have been taken into consideration as he sought to understand the terminology being used.

Looking at y. Yoma 38d first, we find Yadin’s interpretation of ’imrah is acceptable. The full portion tells us that Qimchit’s seven sons all served as High Priest, in part due to her extraordinary modesty. Women were more likely than men to cover their bodies completely with their mantle, or with a mantle and veil, in such a manner that their tunic would not be seen. This type of veiling, however, was generally part of public behaviour (m. Šabb 6.5-6). It is noteworthy then that Qimchit is said to cover herself thusly within the privacy of her own home.

Applying Yadin’s conclusion to b. Šabb 118b meanwhile, we may reason, as Lucille Roussin did, that ‘in Roman Palestine’ the tallit [covered] the entire tunic. However, this is likely an overgeneralization. There is little evidence for widespread usage of this draping style by men in the Greco-Roman world (the ‘expression’ in y. Qidd. 42a would be less intelligible if there had been). Nearly all Greco-Roman figures illustrated in the Dura synagogue have part of their tunic exposed. Only David is illustrated with his mantle draped over both shoulders, covering his tunic (Samuel Anoints David, WC3). Perhaps the talmudic passage represents a rabbinic way of dressing. As Hezser writes, ‘the midrashic text … implies that [the scholarly wrapping style] was different

35 Roussin, ‘Costume in Roman Palestine’, 184.
from that of ordinary non-rabbinic Jews'.

Furthermore, by the late fourth century, prior to the Bavli's redaction, this style is seen more frequently in Christian images seeking to depict Jesus as a Mediterranean rabbi.

Nonetheless, when one reads R. Yose’s full statement on his modesty, one finds a discussion on the exposure of male genitalia. Not only were the 'imrah of R. Yosi’s tunic concealed from the beams of his house, but he never looked at his own circumcision and never put his hand below his belt. As clavi were usually associated with the shoulders, or upper body (the area left exposed by one’s mantle), Yadin’s interpretation would make that section less compatible with the other two. Further, one must ask, were the redactors, compilers and readers of the Bavli familiar with Roman clavi? If not, what would they have understood 'imrah to mean? How would this anecdote about R. Yosi have been visualized within the Babylonian rabbinic community?

The Jewish settlement in Babylonia lived under Assyrian (until 538 BCE), Persian (538–333 BCE), Hellenistic (333–247 BCE), Parthian (247 BCE–224 CE) and Sassanian (224–651 CE) rule before the Bavli’s completion. At no point did the clothing of these dominant cultures include tunics with decorative clavi. The Parthian tunic, an antecedent to the Sassanian tunic, was distinctly different from the Greco-Roman tunic: it was long sleeved and featured decorative borders around the neck and hemlines. Alternatively, one may have worn a jacket, wrapped around the chest and belted, in place of a tunic. Jackets were also decorated at the lapels and along the hem with, as Vesta Curtis has catalogued, ‘a variety of floral, astral, geometric, and even animal-shaped motifs’. The tunic or jacket was worn over trousers. Outerwear consisted of a long-sleeved coat or cloak wrapped around the shoulders. In some regions, with more contact with the Greco-Roman world, the rectangular mantle (himation) may also have been worn. In this context, Marcus Jastrow’s earlier definition (c. 1895) of 'imrah as ‘border’ may be more comprehensible. R. Yosi was asserting that the bottom border of his tunic (the area closest to his genitalia and a part of the Parthian and Sassanian tunic that would have had its own decoration) remained modestly concealed. This interpretation conforms with another passage from the Bavli cited by Yadin (though he does not discuss it in this way). In b. B. Bat. 57b we find that the tallit of a Torah scholar may be worn in any fashion, so long as ‘a handbreadth’ of one’s tunic is not visible from beneath it. R. Yosi was seemingly following the appropriate attire of a Torah scholar.

---

36Hezser, Rabbinic Body Language, 41.
37Ibid., 45, fn. 88.
39This raises an important question regarding the tallit in Babylonia: If rectangular mantles were not commonplace, were Rabbis notable for their inclusion of this garment in their daily attire? Or were tzitzit attached to another form of outerwear? On clothing in border regions: Bernard Goldman, ‘Graeco-Roman Dress in Syro-Mesopotamia’, in The World of Roman Costume, ed. Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Vesta Curtis, ‘The Parthian Haute-Couture at Palmyra’, in Positions and Professions in Palmyra, ed. Tracey Long and Annette Højen Sørensen (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2017).
40Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature; with an Index of Scriptural Quotations (New York: GP Putnam, 1926), 51.
It is worth considering that the understood meaning of *'imrab* changed over time and/or across cultural contexts. This would not be unusual, of course. Clothing terminology retained in common usage through generations or across geographic regions often holds multiple meanings. For example, *thong* carries distinctly different meanings based on region: in American and British English, a *thong* is a specific type of undergarment, while in Australian English, it is a type of sandal. Both definitions are accepted in all three language variants, but each also maintains a preferred understanding. Accordingly, Yadin certainly did not misstep in suggesting that *'imrab* be interpreted as *clivi*. Nevertheless, the word likely also meant ‘border’, particularly in the Bavli.