THE WORDS ṣēš, būš, hūr, and karpas of biblical Hebrew refer to certain types of cloth made of natural fibers, such as linen or cotton. All four types had two qualities in common:

a. There is no evidence that they were dyed, e.g., no coloring additives and/or mordants were applied to them. As Herszberg (1924, p. 221) points out, the art of making fine “white” linen or similar cloth, although involving no usage of pigments or dyes, was known and practiced in ancient Israel during the biblical era.

b. They were all expensive — in many instances they are mentioned together with other aristocratic types of cloth, notably purple (both ḥīgāmān and ṭākēlet), as symbols of wealth and authority. Because they were colorless they fall under the blanket designation beḡādim ḥōbānim “‘white’ garments,” which occurs as such in one late instance only in the Hebrew Bible, namely Eccl 9:8.

Like many other “culture words” designating extra-linguistic entities which travel across borders of territories and boundaries of languages, satisfactory etymologies for ṣēš, būš, hūr, and karpas are not easy to trace. The dual purpose of this paper will be therefore to attempt to uncover the etymologies, as well as to relate the terms to their non-linguistic references.
The diachronic differences between the earlier šēš and the later būṣ, both denoting 'fine white linen,' were well established by Hurvitz (1967, pp. 117–121; 1974, pp. 33–34).¹ The terms differ in etymology, that is, they should be seen against separate cultural and geographical differences as well as chronological factors, although the identity of the product designated by both seems not to have changed. šēš is of Egyptian provenance,² while būṣ is of a properly Semitic origin. The latter continued to be alive in Mishnaic Hebrew (= MH) and in Aramaic, through which it passed into Greek and other European languages (Hurvitz, 1967). Recent attempts to establish a Sanskrit or Egyptian provenance for būṣ as well are far from convincing.³ Moreover, a 'white' denotation — even if only secondary to the notion of būṣ itself — apparently underlies it. Cognates to this are to be found in Arabic 'abyad 'white'; Hebrew *bēšāh 'egg,'⁴ probably after the color of the shell; and Akkadian pišū, pāšū 'be white, hueless' and pešū 'white,' 'colorless'; see Landsberger, 1967, pp. 141–142). pešū is especially appropriate as an analogical term, for in Akkadian texts it functions as a modifier for 'wool' and 'clothes' as well as for other lexemes. Veenhof (1972, p. 189) lists the cases for pešū 'cloth' and 'wool' in Old Assyrian, and Landsberger (1967, pp. 141–145) adds to these other applications — to 'human skin,' 'physical appearance' and others — from other periods of the language. Therefore būṣ, or more specifically the Semitic root byd, seems to have originally evoked a color property identical or similar to the lābān notion of biblical Hebrew.

Another equivalent to šēš, but a synchronous one, is bad = 'white linen material.' Such is the meaning of bad in the P sources which describe the priestly garments,⁵ Ezekiel⁶ and Daniel,⁷ but also in the syntagm 'ēpōd bad, which appears in the Samuel and David cycles of narratives,⁸ and cannot be considered late on any count.⁹

hūr is peculiar to the book of Esther. In 1:6 we have a cluster of textiles — hūr karpas ūṭēkēlet . . . būṣ waʾargāmān; and in 8:15—bilbūṣ malḵū tākēlet wāḥūr . . . waʾatkrik būṣ waʾargāmām. If we disregard karpas for a moment — for it seems to denote roughly the same entity as hūr, or at least a material of the

¹. Similarly also Grintz (1975, pp. 179–180).
². So both Grintz (1975) and Ellenbogen (1962, p. 164).
⁵. Exodus (twice); and Leviticus, chapters 6 and 16 (8 times).
⁶. In Ezekiel, chapters 9 and 10 (5 times).
⁷. In Daniel, chapters 10 and 12 (3 times).
⁸. 1 Sam 2:18, 22:18. 2 Sam 6:14. 1 Chr 15:27.
same color; does not appear in 8:15; and disturbs the inner balance of the double-barreled pairs — we are left with the formula  

\[ h\text{ur} + b\text{us}, \ 'a\text{rgam\text{\textasciitilde{a}}}n + r\text{\textasciitilde{a}kelet}, \]  

which refers to expensive ‘white’ and ‘purple’ cloth symbolizing royal splendor, power and authority. \text{h\text{ur}}, then, is a synonym—at least from the aspect of its color, for the type of fiber it is made of cannot be ascertained—of \text{bus},\footnote{According to Ellenbogen (1962, p. 94), Rabin (1963, p. 240) and Kutscher (1965, pp. 98–99, 117), \text{karpas} (Esth 1:6) came to Hebrew as a loan from Sanskrit through Persian\footnote{On the other hand, Fränkel (1960, pp. 84–85) attempts to derive \text{karpas} from the Hebrew root \text{kps}, with a dissimilatory \text{lt}. His explanation is far from convincing—among other things, it disregards the practice of borrowing a foreign term with the introduction of the product designated by that same term.} together with the product (‘cotton’) carrying the} and it is probably employed here for literary and stylistic reasons. Further, the personal name \text{h\text{ur}} was quite popular throughout the biblical period, and the names \text{h\text{ur}i} (1 Chr 5:14), \text{h\text{ur}\text{\textasciitilde{a}}}\text{y} (1 Chr 9:32), and \text{h\text{or}i} (Num 13:5) may be derivations of the same root, although this is far from proven.\footnote{Although this is often amended to \text{h\text{ur}i\text{\textasciitilde{a}}} \text{\textasciitilde{e}}} paled’; see BH\footnote{Noth (1928, p. 221) does not relate these proper names to the \text{h\text{ur}r} under discussion. See also KBL\[1], vol. 1, p. 287a for alternative suggestions.} and \text{h\text{or}\text{\textasciitilde{a}}}\text{y} ( Isa 19:9)\footnote{Noth (1928, p. 221) does not relate these proper names to the \text{h\text{ur}r} under discussion. See also KBL\[1], vol. 1, p. 287a for alternative suggestions.} are derived from the root \text{h\text{wr}},\footnote{Cf. Isa 29:22, although this occurrence is considered by some scholars (Melamed, 1962, pp. 142–144) as one of the examples of Aramaic influence on the language of the first Isaiah.} — which is the standard Aramaic equivalent of Hebrew \text{lbn} ‘white,’ ‘colorless’ — then we must assume that \text{h\text{wr}} is native not only to Aramaic, but to biblical Hebrew as well. Had we not had the evidence of the personal names, be it as inconclusive as it is, we might have been justified in surmising that the root \text{h\text{w}r} — and the \text{h\text{ur}} of the Book of Esther — are late borrowings from Aramaic. As matters stand, we might try another solution. It is conceivable that \text{h\text{wr}} originally featured in Hebrew stock,\footnote{It is possible, for instance, that a convergence of homonymic forms — only some or a few of them originally related to our \text{h\text{w}r} — is the reason for the apparent identity. And see below, note 13.} but that it was later rejected as an uneconomic doublet of \text{lbn}, leaving traces only in nomenclature and technical terms (\text{h\text{ur}}, \text{h\text{or}\text{\textasciitilde{a}}}\text{y}). Then its popularity was renewed through the growing Aramaic influence during the era of the Second Temple, which facilitated the return of \text{h\text{ur}} as an allosemanteme of \text{bus}, but of which we have this isolated instance only. Meanwhile \text{bus} has supplanted \text{\textasciitilde{s}e\textasciitilde{s}}, and by and large \text{h\text{ur}} itself has no real significance outside the present formula.

According to Ellenbogen (1962, p. 94), Rabin (1963, p. 240) and Kutscher (1965, pp. 98–99, 117), \text{karpas} (Esth 1:6) came to Hebrew as a loan from Sanskrit through Persian\footnote{Cf. Isa 29:22, although this occurrence is considered by some scholars (Melamed, 1962, pp. 142–144) as one of the examples of Aramaic influence on the language of the first Isaiah.} together with the product (‘cotton’) carrying the
same name, which was first brought to the Near East from India by Sennacherib (Kutscher, 1965, p. 98). Within our context it functions as a gloss or synonym to ħūr. Rabin (1963, p. 240) shows how in Sanskrit karpas signifies 'natural, undyed cotton,' and this seems to be its meaning here.

III

What happens to all these terms in MH? Let us first deal with the rarer ones. In MH karpas hardly features; semer gepen ‘wool of the vine’ is used instead. 16 Similarly, the Aramaic idiom ‘āmar (dō)gūpnā’ is also reminiscent of Sennacherib’s description of the ‘trees bearing wool’ which he planted in his garden (Kutscher, 1965, p. 98) and which are signified by the biblical karpas. ħūr, unless reflected in the Aramaic ṭirā (with a loss of the original /h/, although Jastrow, 1903, p. 60 relates the latter to ‘ōr), disappears too. The late biblical tendency to employ būṣ instead of šēš continues, to the point that now būṣ seems to be the normative usage, the better known term of the two. When the writer of the archaizing War Scroll from Qumran uses šēš rather than būṣ, as is dictated by his biblical source material, he adds the word lābān as an explanatory gloss to šēš (12:9). 17 However, the more frequent designations for ‘white/hueless textiles’ in MH are simply bēqādim labānim, and bigdē or kālē labān ‘white garments’. The primary color term lābān is thus expanded to denote not only the natural quality of ‘white’ or ‘hueless,’ but also the man-made appearance of the same visible attributes. As such ‘ereb lābān ‘white woof’ occurs in opposition to šawī sābūa ‘dyed warp’ (Mishna, Nāga‘im. 11.4). In order to substantiate this equation we would need to find an explicit juxtaposition of bigdē lābān on the one hand, and būṣ (the current designation in MH) on the other. This is indeed to be found in the Mishna. Mishna Yoma, 3:7 supplies us, as specifications for the High Priest’s bigdē lābān, with the names for two types of būṣ that could be obtained during the post-biblical period: one is the palūsin, from Pelusium in Egypt; and the other hindōwim, from India.

16. See Kutscher (1965 pp. 98–100, 117) for the dropping of the lexeme in MH, its homonymic clash with MH karpas ‘green herbs,’ and the penetration of ktn derived terms into various Eastern and European languages.
BIBLIOGRAPHY