1 Introduction

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This study focuses on a group of Akkadian literary hymns and prayers commonly labelled by scholars as *Great Hymns and Prayers*. These texts share several characteristics: they are over 200 lines long,[1] feature numerous rhetorical figures and show a significant degree of similarity in their literary structure. Notably, none of these compositions provide a clear indication of the use, function or social context for which they were intended. The literary style of these texts suggests that they were primarily intended for a literary purpose, rather than being designed to be recited as part of religious practices. The hymns and prayers examined in this study deserve detailed study not solely because of their remarkable style and structure, but also for the complexity of the themes and ideas they occasionally convey. This study offers a comprehensive overview of the entire corpus, including descriptions of the form, language and content of the texts under examination (chapter 1). It also presents new critical

1 Scholars have suggested that these texts may originally all have been 200 lines long, but some were expanded over time (see, e.g. Fadhil, Jiménez 2019, 162).

DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-752-4/001

editions of the *Great Prayer to Nabû* (chapter 2) and *Great Prayer to Ištar* (chapter 3), including transliteration, translation, transcription and philological commentary. Copies of the manuscripts preserving the *Great Prayer to Nabû* are also provided. Chapter 4 delves into the intertextual connections between the *Great Hymns and Prayers* and various texts, including lexical lists. Chapter 5 conducts a poetic analysis of the compositions, listing and explaining the numerous rhetorical devices employed in these texts. The appendix includes a poetical study of two wisdom compositions: the *Babylonian Theodicy* and *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*.

1.1 Mesopotamian Hymns and Prayers

1.1.1 Definition of the Genres

Taking as starting point the notion of literature in Mesopotamia provided by Röllig,[2] who considers literary only those texts, that may, with respect to their form and contents, be regarded as works of art, it is safe to affirm that the compositions under study are among the finest examples of Akkadian literary texts.

Not only are they literary, but they also qualify as poetic, being enriched with many rhetorical devices and figurative images.[3]

Yet, before describing the most prominent features of these compositions, it is necessary to linger briefly on the problem of literary genres in the Mesopotamian literature.

Vanstiphout has highlighted the difficulties in conducting a generic analysis for the Mesopotamian literature in his works on this

2 Röllig 1987-90. For a similar definition, see Livingstone 1989, XVI, according to whom, literary texts are "compositions exemplifying and expressing a creative effort, but not including functional genres such as rituals, incantations, or royal inscriptions, which follow a fixed tradition and format, nor the day to day religious literature". This concept of literature is vastly different from the one implied in the expression 'Stream of Tradition': coined by Oppenheim 1977, 13, this phrase indicates the Mesopotamian literature in the broadest sense, encompassing every work "that was maintained, controlled, and carefully kept alive by a tradition served by successive generations of learned and well-trained scribes", thus including, for example, lexical and grammatical texts, or omina. The tradition of scholarly and literary texts was, however, not as fluid and seamless as Oppenheim's phrase might suggest (on this see Robson 2011). For an overview of the different definitions of literature in Assyriology, see also Goodnick Westenholz 1999, 81-2.

3 Groneberg (1996) considers imagery as the most defining trait of poetic texts, because it produces a 'meta-level' of discourse, in which the expressed meaning transcends the immediate surface of the wording.

subject.[4] He mentioned six main obstacles, that can be summarised as follows: a) the fragmentary state of preservation of texts; b) the interruption of continuity in their transmission; c) the lack of a Mesopotamian *Ars Poetica*, that is, of a formal organisation of literature; d) the relative uniformity of the literary style, which prevents from distinguishing genres simply on the basis of the stylistic features of texts;[5] and e) the general lack of standard forms or structural schemes in many literary compositions.[6]

In addition, it is often impossible to determine the *Sitz im Leben* of texts: in most cases, scribal schools are the only social and cultural context to which literary compositions can be ascribed with certainty.[7]

Nevertheless, in spite of the above-mentioned difficulties, there are indications that the learned Mesopotamians perceived some generic differences between compositions. Indeed, although no formal native classification exists,[8] texts were occasionally labelled according to their function or to the way in which they were performed (e.g. the rubrics *zamāru* for hymns or epic poems, or ÉN for incantation and incantation prayers, see below).[9] In addition, ancient catalogues would list various compositions by their title, occasionally grouping texts with shared similarities.[10] These catalogues, being primarily 'genre-specific', provide valuable aid to modern scholars in better understanding the nature of the transmitted texts.[11] An indication

4 Vanstiphout 1986; 1999a; 1999b. Vanstiphout has further investigated the concept of the 'life-cycle' of texts, i.e. the evolution of literary compositions, a process which might bring about structural changes and shifts between different generic categories, see Vanstiphout 1999a; 1999b. Cf. also George 2007b.

5 Some stylistic poetic traits, for instance a distinctive layout or special grammatical features, can occur in texts normally classified as belonging to different genres, such as incantations and epic narratives, on this see Groneberg 1996.

6 Vanstiphout 1986, 2-6; on the problem of genres in Mesopotamian literature, cf. also Lenzi 2019, 37-8 with further references.

7 Vanstiphout 1986, 4; George 2003, 36-9; 2007, 5-7.

8 See Black 1998, 24-8 commenting on the lack of a Mesopotamian 'poetic'; cf. chapter 5 in the present work.

9 For different types of rubrics in hymnic texts, see Groneberg 2003, cf. also Metcalf 2015, 56-8 for rubrics in some Akkadian Old Babylonian Hymns; see also Geller 2000 for rubrics in incantations. Cf. also Vanstiphout 1999b, 81-3; Wasserman 2003, 176; George 2007b, 42-4. On the concepts of the 'critical genre', i.e. the modern classification, and the 'ethnic genre', i.e. the indigenous classification, as applied to the Mesopotamian literature, see Tinney 1996.

10 See the remarks by Vanstiphout on these 'catalogue texts', in Vanstiphout 1999b, 81-2. See also Groneberg 2003; Delnero 2010; cf. Steinert 2018 for catalogues of technical compendia (e.g. omina and medical texts); cf. Krecher 1976-80 for Akkadian literary catalogues.

11 On 'genre-specific' catalogues, cf. Delnero 2010, 41-9, and Steinert 2018, 7, with fn. 6.

of native genre-consciousness is offered, for instance, by the compilation tablets (*Sammeltafeln*) which contained several wisdom texts, a fact that suggests that these texts were perceived as belonging to a similar group and probably reflected a genre.[12] Collections of tablets compiling sets of hymns and prayers are likewise attested. For instance, there are *Sammeltafeln* which gather Old Babylonian adab-songs, or an Old Babylonian *Sammeltafel* which includes three hymns dedicated to Papulegara (*Papulegara* A-C). Notably, the latter is, together with a compilation tablet collecting two hymns to Mama (*Mama* A-B), the sole surviving *Sammeltafel* that preserves hymns in the Akkadian language.[13] Incantation prayers are occasionally also collected in compilation tablets, such as the first-millennium *Sammeltafel* comprising a group of *namburbi* prayers.[14] These examples of sorting and labelling, however, cannot be understood as a generic taxonomy in our modern sense.

Nevertheless, whereas one should not force western labels and categories on cuneiform texts, which should instead be considered in their *Eigenbegrifflichkeit*,[15] that is, in their own cultural autonomy, some classification is necessary. As explained by Erica Reiner in her essay on Akkadian literature, using terms borrowed from classical literature in order to identify Mesopotamian genres (i.e. the customary classification which employs terms such as hymns, prayer, epics, wisdom texts, etc.) can be justified by the fact that numerous Mesopotamian compositions share similar features, in matters of form and content, with texts of the classical western tradition.[16] Moreover, the use of modern or classical labels, however approximate, can enhance our understanding of Mesopotamian literature.[17]

12 On *Sammeltafeln* of wisdom texts see Cohen 2013, 13-14 and 60-2 and 2018, 43. Cf. more recently also Lenzi 2019, 37.

13 For compilation of Old Babylonian hymns in Sumerian, often composed on behalf of kings, see Metcalf 2015, 18-19. Cf. also the recent contribution by Streck and Wasserman (2023), where two so far unknown manuscripts of two Old Babylonian hymns (Papulegara and Ištar Louvre) are discussed.

14 Lenzi 2011, 40.

15 This term was first introduced by Landsberger (1965) who stressed the necessity of affirming the distinctiveness of the Mesopotamian civilisations. It was translated in English as 'Conceptual autonomy' (Landsberger 1976, transl. Jacobsen, Foster, von Siebenthal).

16 See Longman 1991, 12-13 for a brief clarification of the concept of generic similarity. Cf. Reiner 1992, 294: "There are enough similarities between Babylonian works and comparable genres of classical literatures, which determine our categories, to warrant a gross classification of Babylonian works into these categories familiar to the modern Western reader".

17 See Longman's remarks on the utility of an 'etic' approach, i.e. an approach which uses modern criteria of classification and identification for a generic analysis of Mesopotamian literature, in that "the meaning of a text is genre-bound", and therefore a proper genre identification helps in the textual interpretation (Longman 1991, 15-17).

For the purpose of this study, I will use therefore the terms 'hymn' and 'prayer' to define the texts under consideration.[18] In general, hymns and prayers, both in antiquity and in contemporary religious practice, share common formal and content features, and serve similar functions: both forms of discourse, in fact, have the purpose of securing divine favour, and both are mostly addressed to a supra-human addressee (a god, or other kinds of higher entities).[19] It can be safely asserted that the performance of hymns and prayers is a religious act and is therefore related to other aspects of religious worship, such as a specific spatial context (e.g. a temple, an altar), a certain type of gesture (the act of kneeling, joining hands) and behavior.[20] Defining the exact differences between hymns and prayers is difficult. Some scholars, especially with reference to ancient Greek texts, have pointed to alleged differences in style, suggesting that hymns would represent an 'embellished' form of prayers.[21] Others, on the other hand, have pointed to possible variations in recitation.[22]

Similar considerations have also been suggested with respect to Mesopotamian hymns and prayers. Indeed, Mesopotamians hymns and prayers share the aforementioned overall characteristics, appearing similar to each other to the point that they elude precise distinctions and strict definitions as well.[23] Possible distinctions between hymns and prayers in Mesopotamian literature have been drawn by various scholars, who attempted to highlight differences in terms of

Cf. also George 2007b, 38-9. Nevertheless, Lenzi (2019, 38) highlights the potential pitfalls of contemporary categorisations, which can lead to more confusion rather than to clarification. For example, different scholars may classify the same texts as belonging to distinct genres. This might happen because, for instance, some texts that we perceive as being of different genres sometimes share the same emic terminology (e.g. the term *zamāru* for both hymns and epics, cf. *infra*).

18 See Streck 2020 for a discussion on Old Babylonian hymns as a literary genre.

19 See Lenzi 2011, 2-8 on hymns and prayers in a broader, religious studies perspective; cf. Lenzi 2011, 8-24 for a narrower focus on Mesopotamian hymns and prayers. In the Mesopotamian context, the supra-human addressee could be, beside gods, protective spirits, or ghosts. In addition, there are cases where the addressee is a king or a deified object, see below in Sumerian hymns. See Lenzi 2011, 9 with previous bibliography.

20 Furley, Bremer 2001, 1-2.

21 Pulleyn (1997, 49-50), for instance, suggests that Greek hymns represent artistic creations, "an adornment for the gods to delight in", serving as votive offering in their own right; In this regard, she provides an example by citing a fragment from Pindar, in which the poet appears to refer to his own poetry as a θυσία, a votive offering. In other words, hymns are, according to Pulleyn, "negotiable commodities in a way that prayers are not". In contrast, prayers can be understood as requests made in exchange for a different, more concrete kind of offering (e.g. libation or sacrifice). Cf. also Furley, Bremer 2001, 4.

22 Furley, Bremer 2001, 3.

23 Cf. Streck 2020 for a brief overview of the differences between Old Babylonian hymns and prayers according to various scholars, and for a useful comparison between hymns and epic texts.

style, content and performance. For instance, Edzard suggested adopting the recitation style as a criterion for distinction. According to him, the delivery would be faster and more akin to vernacular language in prayers, while it would be slower or more solemn in hymns.[24]

However, although there is ample evidence to suggest that Mesopotamian hymns were accompanied by musical instruments,[25] we cannot ascertain the exact nature of their oral reception and transmission. Moreover, it seems that at least in some cases prayers were recited with a musical accompaniment as well.[26]

Other scholars focus on the context in which hymns and prayers were transmitted, assuming that the former were always recited in a public context (e.g. in cultic rites), while the latter were recited in a more private setting.[27] However in many cases the exact identification of a *Sitz im Leben*, whether private or public, whether related to the cult, to the court or to a more personal context, can prove difficult (cf. also below, § 1.3.5). In fact, while it is highly likely that most Sumerian and Akkadian hymns were recited in public ceremonies within temple settings, the same can be said of numerous prayers.[28] Additionally, it is plausible that texts initially performed in a private context could have been later recited in public.[29]

Another often overlooked aspect, which is of some importance in distinguishing literary genres, is the physical arrangement of the manuscripts. In certain cases, the material aspect of the tablet clearly indicates the type of text it contains, such as letters or lexical and administrative texts.[30] Indeed, a fairly common layout of tablets preserving Akkadian hymns involves the division into stanzas, sometimes

24 Edzard 1994, 20-1; cf. Streck 2020, 660.

25 Metcalf 2015, 19-20; cf. Shehata 2009, 250-62.

26 Shehata 2009, 245.

27 Streck 2020, 661; cf. Wasserman 2016, 20-1.

28 This applies in particular to prayers written in Sumerian (Gabbay 2013, 103-4); the majority of Akkadian prayers did have an individual character, and usually involved only a few people, such as the exorcist priest and the supplicant. There were, nevertheless, several prayers in Akkadian, that were performed in royal and temple rituals, see Lenzi 2011, 20-1.

29 On the distinction between public and private spheres in Mesopotamian contexts see Wasserman 2016, 20-1; note Wasserman's remark: "In principle, a text which at first was composed for, and presented at, some official ceremony, could later be used in a private context; inversely, a text whose origin was private could later be re-worked and used in an official setting" (2016, 21).

30 On this topic, see Taylor 2011; cf. also Hess 2015, who mostly focuses on the layout of epic texts of the Old Babylonian period. Hess concludes that indeed, even within the literary genre of epics, there is a high degree of variation and heterogeneity. However, in certain instances, the consistency in material aspects (format, layout, spacing) of the manuscript tradition also implies a deliberate preservation of poetic features, establishing a connection between form and content (Hess 2015, 273).

accompanied by horizontal rulings. These material traits, which are also present in numerous manuscripts of the *Great Hymns and Prayers*, are already attested in tablets of the Old Babylonian period, as can be seen, for instance, in the manuscripts of the hymns to Agušaya A and B.[31] However, this feature is not a reliable specific criterion for identifying the genre of hymns, since it is too inconsistently attested.[32]

Several scholars, such as von Soden,[33] Foster,[34] and Lenzi[35] distinguish hymns from prayers mostly on the basis of their content. As von Soden writes, a hymn

> preist die Gottheit, ihre Macht, ihre Eigenschaften und ihr Tun. Es gibt aber nur wenige Kompositionen, die sich auf diese Thematik beschränken; die meisten verbinden in verschiedener Weise Hymne und Gebet miteinander.[36]

Therefore, as summarised by Streck, a distinction between the two genres can only be achieved by examining the extent to which praise and prayer are developed within the text.[37]

Hence, in the scope of this investigation, I follow the latter criterion of distinction, that is, I call hymns, those compositions in which the praise to the deities takes the central place, and consider as prayers those texts, whose main purpose is the petition.

The developments and the main characteristics of the two genres will be illustrated in the next paragraph.

31 Hess 2015, 262.

32 Although more common in hymns, it is not always present and, moreover, is also found in some manuscripts preserving other literary genres, such es epic texts (e.g. *Atrahasīs*, see Hess 2015, 263).

33 Soden 1957-71; 1972-75.

34 Foster 2005, 38.

35 Lenzi 2011, 9.

36 Von Soden 1972-75, 544.

37 Cf. Streck 2020, 660.

1.1.2 Sumerian Background and Akkadian Tradition

Sumerian hymns are numerous and have come down to us from the Early Dynastic period,[38] yet Sumerian hymnic literature thrived in the Old Babylonian period.

Sumerian hymns are characterised by a descriptive style; occasionally, they include narrative episodes.[39] The Sumerian language does not have a specific term for 'hymn', although many Sumerian hymnic compositions end with the subscripts a d a b, or t i g i, which were types of songs. This corroborates the hypothesis that these texts were composed to be sung.[40] The doxology z à - m í 'praise' is also attested at the end of Sumerian hymns.[41]

Sumerian hymns can praise deities, kings, temples, cities and even sacred objects. Clear indications on the use and *Sitz im Leben* are lacking, although it is possible that the hymns praising the kings were employed in court ceremonies, while those addressed to deities could be used in a cultic context.[42] For example, Sumerian hymns of the third millennium BCE (e.g. the z à - m í hymns from Abu-Salabikh[43] or the so called 'Temple Hymns'[44] of Enheduanna) were very likely sung in the liturgy.[45] Sumerian hymns of the Old Babylonian period tend to offer more detailed contextual information, although they do not mention that they were intended for any specific historical setting or event, probably lending themselves to multiple performances. Possible occasions of recitation were, for example, new-year celebrations (as *Iddin-Dagan* A, a hymn to Inanna) or the delivery of divine statues in temples (as the hymn to Numušda known as *Sin-iqišam* A).[46]

38 I.e. a cycle of Sumerian hymns found at the site of Abu-Salabikh, see Biggs 1974, 45-56 and the recent work by Krebernik, Lisman 2021; cf. Hrůša 2015, 109.

39 Narrative episodes in Sumerian hymns are relatively rare, although they do occasionally include short passages which recount the elevation of the deities they address to. An example of a longer, narrative episode is found in the hymn labelled as Ninisina A (ll. 105-9). On this see Metcalf 2015, 29.

40 Metcalf 2015, 19-20; see Shehata 2009, 251-7 for an extensive treatment of the t i - g i and a d a b-songs, with an emphasis on how they were performed and accompanied by musical instruments.

41 Metcalf 2015, 17. The doxology z à - m í is not exclusively found at the end of hymns or compositions that predominantly contain praises to deities. Instead, it appears to be used in a more general sense, occasionally in conjunction with other markers. See Metcalf 2015, 17 fn. 7 with further references.

42 Wilcke 1972-75; Römer 1989.

43 Krebernik, Lisman 2021.

44 Zimmern 1930; Sjöberg, Bergmann 1969; cf. Wilcke 1972 and Krebernik, Lisman 2021, 19-20. For a recent translation of Enḫeduanna's hymns, see Helle 2023.

45 Krebernik, Lisman 2021, 20-1.

46 Metcalf 2015, 21, with further references.

Up to the Old Babylonian period, no corpus of texts that can be considered prayers in the strict sense, i.e. petitions directed to a superior entity and used in liturgy, has come down to us: Sumerian prayers in the third millennium only exist as encased in other types of texts, such as royal inscriptions or construction-hymns, which include a petition in the closing section (e.g. the Gudea cylinders).[47] Prayers in Sumerian were also embedded in literary texts, such as myths, epic narratives or city laments; literary prayers to kings are also attested. In addition, a special form of private prayer emerged, in which the addressee would directly communicate with the deities through a message in the form of a letter that functioned as a votive offering. These texts are the so-called letter-prayers, and can be dated back to the end of the third millennium.[48]

Various types of prayers written in Sumerian were developed during the Old Babylonian and Kassite periods: they were used in cultic practice, and were occasionally accompanied by musical instruments.[49] Some prayers bear the name of the instrument used in the cultic performance (e.g. the *balaĝ*, which denoted a type of stringed instrument or (later) drum, or the *eršemma*, which one could translate as 'lamentation (accompanied by the) šè m - d r u m'). Most types of Sumerian prayers of the second and first millennium were composed in the Emesal dialect.[50]

Most of the original Sumerian literary texts ceased to be produced at the end of the Old Babylonian period, giving way to Akkadian literature, which rose from the Sumerian background partially maintaining the Sumerian literary tradition, but also renewing and transforming previous models.[51]

47 Hymns which include mention of kings often end with a prayer, while hymns with no mention of a ruler usually exhibit a zà-mí formula at the end. As noted by Metcalf (2015, 31), the presence of prayer in hymns composed on behalf of kings probably constituted an integral aspect of the hymns themselves.

48 On letter-prayers see Borger 1957-71; Hallo 1968 and 1996, 232-6. See also Hrůša 2015, 208-9 and Lenzi 2019, 162 fn. 376 for further references.

49 These texts might have emerged in written form mostly from the Old Babylonian period, but the history of their transmission is much longer. Indeed, it is most likely that Sumerian lamentation prayers had been transmitted orally for a long time, through cultic performances, before they were put into writing (Gabbay 2019, esp. 205). On the context of performance of Sumerian prayers, see Gabbay 2013.

50 Falkenstein 1957-71; Römer 1989; cf. Hrůša 2015, 109-11. For the *balaĝ* prayers, see Cohen 1981; for the *eršemma* prayers, see Gabbay 2015, and cf. Gabbay 2014a for a study on all types of Sumerian prayers in Emesal. Cf. also Maul 1988 and Shehata 2009, 247-57.

51 Metcalf 2015, 50. While the composition of original Sumerian literature mostly declined from the second millennium BCE, Sumerian literary texts, including numerous *balaĝ* and *eršemma* prayers, continued to be copied and transmitted, some even up to the end of the first millennium (cf. Gabbay 2014b; Delnero 2020, 44-5). Other Sumerian literary texts whose transmission continued in late periods include, for example

Akkadian hymns and prayers display similar features in both their structure and content, to the point that the two genres might seem to overlap. There are, however, several differences by which they can be distinguished.

Akkadian hymns are lyrical compositions which glorify deities,[52] and are termed *zamāru* or *šēru* 'song', in Akkadian. Further subscripts of Akkadian hymns, attested at the beginning and at the end of an Old Babylonian *Sammeltafel*, are *pārum* and ŠÈR *tanittim* ('song of praise').[53] The term *pārum*, whose meaning is not clear, appears to be the only term of purely Akkadian origin, while the others are borrowings from Sumerian terminology.[54] Like Sumerian hymns, Akkadian hymns can also be found within literary texts of various genres, such as epic (e.g. in *Enūma eliš* VI-VII), wisdom texts (e.g. the hymnic opening in *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*), and royal inscriptions.[55]

Most scholars hypothesise that the context of Akkadian hymns, like that of hymns in Sumerian, was primarily cultic.[56] In some cases, explicit indications of the cultic context of hymns are found, such as the ritual text composed for the festival of the goddess Ištar in Mari, which lists a series of hymns to be recited during the ceremony,[57] or the mention of a festival in the Old Babylonian hymn to Ištar Agušaya (*Agušaya* A and B).[58]

Sumerian and Akkadian hymns share a tripartite structure, containing an opening section (*invocatio*), in which the addressed god is identified, followed by the central body of the text in which the praises of the divinity unfold (*laudes*); finally, they end with a petition for the well-being of the supplicant and occasionally with a salutation

compositions like The Curse of Agade, The Instructions of Šuruppak and Lugalbanda (see e.g Veldhuis 2010, 30-1).

52 Akkadian hymns usually praise deities, although several consist in praises to kings, e.g. the hymnic compositions addressed to the king of Larsa Gungunum (see Hunger, Groneberg 1978, 522), cf. also Groneberg 2003, 56.

53 The terms *pārum* and ŠÈR *tanittim* appear in the Old Babylonian *Sammeltafel* which preserves the hymns to Papulegara mentioned earlier (*Papulegara* A-C, see above in the previous paragraph). The rubric ŠÈR *kummi*, occurring only in one hymn to Adad, was probably based on the Sumerian ŠÈR-compounds, such as ŠÈR *tanittim*, see Metcalf 2015, 69; on the ŠÈR-compounds, see Shehata 2009, 262-88.

54 Metcalf 2015, 54-7.

55 Lenzi 2011, 56-7.

56 See Pohl 2022, 10-12, for a discussion of the context and use of Old Babylonian hymns, which were most probably delivered in temples as well. Pohl (2022, 11) also remarks that hymnic compositions in other cultures, such as the Hebrew psalms or the Egyptian hymns, were also very likely performed in the cult. On this see also Shehata 2009, 223-4; moreover, see Krebernik, Lisman 2021, 20-1 with respect to the *Sitz im Leben* of the zà-mí hymns, likely used for recitation in temples.

57 Ziegler 2007, 55-63.

58 Pohl 2022, 10, with further examples of hymns probably employed in cultic occasions.

(*preces*). The structural similarity between Akkadian and Sumerian hymns, which is mostly evident in the stock phrases and rhetorical devices occurring in the invocation, and in common motifs employed in the praises, clearly illustrates the strong stream of tradition, which runs between the Sumerian and Akkadian literatures.[59]

By contrast, the dominant element in prayers is the petition for the personal well-being of the worshipper. Various forms of Akkadian prayers are attested: prayer-like formulations appear in personal names, or might be encased in literary compositions; some prayers are part of commemorative inscriptions, and several royal prayers, that request welfare and long life for the king and his reign, are also preserved.[60] Furthermore, a large group of prayers, the so-called 'incantation prayers', were employed in liturgical or cultic contexts; they can be addressed, aside from deities, to the *materia magica* used in ritual practice, for instance tamarisk or salt.[61] Incantation prayers can bear the label ÉN 'incantation' at the beginning and TU_6/t e ÉN (or only ÉN) at the end, and the Sumerian introduction to rubrics k a i n - i m - m a ('wording'). The Mesopotamian scribes used these labels and rubrics to categorise and contextualise these compositions.[62]

In spite of their variety, Akkadian prayers often share the following elements: the hymnic introduction (*invocatio*, see above), the self-presentation of the worshipper, the description of his illness or troubles (the 'lament'), the plea for divine aid, and ultimately the promise to glorify the deity in the future.[63]

Both Akkadian hymns and prayers underwent structural and formal changes over time. Old Babylonian hymns differ from later hymns in structure and style, usually being shorter and characterised by self-contained lines. First-millennium hymns tend to be linguistically and stylistically more complex, and favour long series of subordinate

59 For hymns in Akkadian, see von Soden 1972-75 and Hecker 1989; cf. also Hrůša 2015, 111-12. I follow here the structure of Sumerian and Akkadian hymns provided by Metcalf 2015, 25.

60 Hecker 1989, 718-83; von Soden 1957-71.

61 Reiner 1992, 309-10.

62 For a study on incantation prayers see Mayer 1976; Zgoll 2003b; Frechette 2012; Jaques 2015. Cf. also Lenzi et al. 2011, 24-52; 2019, 161-7. Cf. also Hrůša 2015, 207-9 for further references. Some incantation prayers bear the rubric *diĝiršadabba* and are therefore known as *diĝiršadabba* prayers. Their scope was to appease an angry god and some scholars label them 'penitential prayers', cf. Lenzi 2019, 167.

63 This structure is particularly typical of some types of incantation-prayers, such as *šuilla*s or *namburbi*s, which may include the description of the actions of the supplicant. On the opposite, the *diĝiršadabba* prayers seem to display less structural homogeneity (on this see Jaques 2015, 134-91. Cf. Lenzi 2019a, 167).

clauses defining the attributes of the god being praised.[64]

Old-Babylonian Akkadian prayers, in the same way, display a terser and less elaborate language than later prayers, which, moreover, make greater use of rhetorical devices.[65]

These differences are, of course, tendencies rather than rigid aspects, and not significant enough to date the texts in an unequivocal manner. The *Great Hymns and Prayers*, in fact, generally align with these characteristics, being two hundred lines in length or more, and displaying a syntactic and linguistic complexity typical of first-millennium compositions. Nevertheless, we know that at least two texts belonging to the corpus under study (*Marduk*1 and *Anūna Prayer*) were composed during the Old Babylonian period.

1.2 The *Great Hymns and Prayers*: Definition of the Corpus

1.2.1 Previous Editions and Studies

I call the group of texts under study *Great Hymns and Prayers*, borrowing this label from Foster, who has treated these compositions in his anthology of Akkadian literature.[66] The corpus so far includes nine texts – five hymns and four prayers – [67]addressed to several deities:

64 Foster 2005, 21-2; 2007, 104-5. For a recent treatment of Akkadian Old Babylonian hymns, with a detailed analysis of stylistic and linguistic features, see Pohl 2022.

65 Reiner 1992, 310; Foster 2005, 40-1. The general tendency for a more elaborate style and a greater poetic complexity is a feature observable also in other genres beside hymns and prayers in the first millennium, see Foster 2007, 104-7; cf. also the study on the language of first-millennium incantations by Schwemer 2014.

66 See Foster 2005[3], 583-635 (also below in this paragraph), cf. also Foster 2007, 78-81. In Foster's anthology, however, the corpus is slightly different from the one presented here, as it includes an incantation prayer to Ištar (Foster 2005[3], 599-605, § III.27, "The Great Prayer to Ištar", see also Zgoll 2003a, "Ištar 2", 41-80) that I have excluded due to its differences from the other compositions, e.g. its length (105 lines) and its clearly ritual purpose. I excluded from the corpus, furthermore, another hymn to Ninurta (Mayer 1992; Mitto 2022a) and the so-called *Syncretistic Hymn to Ištar* (Lambert 2003; Földi 2021b) because they also do not entirely conform to the other *Great Hymns and Prayers*, with the first being only 55 verses long and the second, 36. Additionally, the group identified by Foster does not include the *Prayer to Anūna*, nor the *Syncretistic Hymn to Gula*. It is essential to specify, however, that the definition of this corpus, as well as the determination of literary genres and subgenres, is purely formal and not devoid of possible changes: this corpus is not a closed set, and it is quite possible, even likely, that new texts will be discovered in the future, exhibiting the same characteristics of the *Great Hymns and Prayers*. Further compositions which could also be included in the corpus are, for instance, the damaged and so far unpublished *Hymn to Ninisina* BM 38169, and the *Hymn in Praise of Babylon* (Fadhil, Jiménez forthcoming). Both were probably transmitted in series together with some of the other *Great Hymns and Prayers*. See *infra* in this chapter.

67 For the selection of the texts belonging to the corpus, I follow Lambert 1982, 173. Note that many scholars labelled all these texts as 'hymns', making no distinction

1. The *Great Šamaš Hymn* (*Šamaš Hymn*)
2. The *Gula Hymn of Bullussa-rabi* (*Gula Bullussa-rabi*)
3. The *Hymn to the Queen of Nippur* (to Ištar) (*Queen of Nippur*)
4. The *Great Prayer to Ištar* (*Ištar Prayer*)
5. The *Prayer to Anūna* (to Ištar of Babylon) (*Anūna Prayer*)
6. The *Great Prayer to Marduk* (*Marduk1*)
7. The *Great Hymn to Marduk* (*Marduk2*)
8. The *Great Prayer to Nabû* (*Nabû Prayer*)
9. The *Syncretistic Hymn to Gula* (*Gula Syncretistic*)

In most cases these literary hymns and prayers have been comprehensively edited only once, often accompanied by a translation and brief commentary. Typical examples are Lambert's critical editions of *Gula Bullussa-rabi* (1967), of the *Šamaš Hymn* (1960, 121-38), of *Marduk*1 and *Marduk*2 (1959-60, 55-66) and of the *Ištar Prayer* (1959-60, 50-5). The latter composition is edited here for the second time: the new edition includes a recently identified new fragment, previously published within the journal *KASKAL* in the series *Notes from the eBL Lab* (Jiménez, Rozzi 2022). The edition of *Queen of Nippur*, noticeable for its composite structure, has also been published by Lambert (1982). In addition, the same author edited the *Anūna Prayer* (Lambert 1989), which was recently re-edited by Lenzi in a digital format (Lenzi 2018). Von Soden (1971) published the first complete edition of the *Nabû Prayer*, and more recently Lenzi has published a digital edition of the same text on his project website (Lenzi 2021). Here a new edition of the *Nabû Prayer* is provided; it comprises a new fragment recently identified within the *eBL* project.

New fragments of the *Šamaš Hymn* have been published by Geller (1997) and George and Al-Rawi (1998); further newly discovered fragments recently appeared in the Assyriological journal *KASKAL*, within the series *Notes from the eBL Lab* (Rozzi 2021b; 2022; forthcoming). In the same series, Földi (2019b; 2020) provided editions of additional manuscripts of *Gula Bullussa-rabi* and of *Queen of Nippur*.

Several fragments of *Marduk*1, *Marduk*2 and the *Šamaš Hymn* were included in Gesche's study on the Babylonian scribal curriculum (Gesche 2001; see Oshima 2011, 86 and 89 for the list of fragments of these two compositions which appeared in Gesche's book). The first complete edition of *Gula Syncretistic* was recently published by Bennett (2022).[68]

between them, while others called 'hymns' those texts I here refer to as 'prayers', or *viceversa* (see Oshima 2011, 33 fn. 165). In the end, it is, as has been mentioned earlier in the discussion on genre (see above § 1.1.1), an approximate classification, which only serves to highlight the general tone characterising the texts, whether more 'hymnic' or rather more 'penitential'.

68 Few fragments of this text had been edited previously, see Bennett 2022, 186 for older bibliography.

The most recent comprehensive editions of *Marduk*1 and *Marduk*2 have been offered by Oshima (2011, 137-90 and 216-70) in his volume on Babylonian prayers to Marduk. An edition of a new manuscript of *Marduk*1 has been recently published by Fadhil, Jiménez (2019, 162-77).[69] In addition, new fragments of *Marduk*1 (nos. 137-90), *Marduk*2 (nos. 97-127), *Gula Bullussa-rabi* (nos. 57-62) and the *Šamaš Hymn* (nos. 128-42) appeared in George and Taniguchi's edition of Lambert's folios (2019).

Online editions of all the compositions here mentioned, except for *Marduk*1, *Marduk*2 and the *Anūna prayer*, have been prepared by the *electronic Babylonian Literature* (*eBL*) project, and are now available on the project's platform.[70]

In some cases, scholars discussed the formal elements of these poetic compositions: in their analysis of the *Šamaš Hymn*, for example, both Reiner (1985, 68-84) and Castellino (1976, 71-4) note the peculiar cyclical structure of the text and other poetic features (cf. chapter 5). Some formal characteristics of these compositions were also mentioned in several studies concerned with Mesopotamian poetic language and style. In that respect, Vogelzang referred to various forms of repetitions in the *Šamaš Hymn* and in *Gula Bullussa-rabi* in her study about repetition as an essential poetic device (Vogelzang 1996, cf. also chapter 5). Wasserman notes a few stylistic features in *Gula Bullussa-rabi*, *Marduk*1 and the *Anūna Prayer* in his analysis of the style and form of Old Babylonian literature (Wasserman 2003, 23, 67, 76 fn. 72, 85 fn. 111, 95, 124 fn. 143, 123, 125, 150). Furthermore, Groneberg included numerous examples from the *Great Hymns and Prayers* in her investigation of the language and style of Akkadian hymnic texts (Groneberg 1987). Recently, de Zorzi focused on the use of repetition and parallelism in the *Šamaš Hymn* (2019; 2022).

Among the authors who offered translations of these hymns,[71] Foster presents these texts as a unified group, setting them apart from other clearly devotional compositions, and naming them "Great Hymns and Prayers" (Foster 2005[3], 583-635).

69 A new edition of both *Marduk*1 and *Marduk*2 is being prepared by E. Jiménez (pers. communication).

70 The *eBL* project (2018-24; for information about the technical features of the project, see Simonjetz et al. 2024), supported by the Sofja Kovalevskaja Award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, aims to provide reconstructions and digital editions of first-millennium Akkadian literary texts. The 'Fragmentarium' is the backbone of the project: it is an online searchable database, which contains thousands of transliterated cuneiform texts, and has already proved crucial for the restoration and identification of numerous cuneiform tablets. Thanks to the *eBL* project, and especially through the Fragmentarium, it has been possible to find numerous new manuscripts of the *Great Hymns and Prayers*.

71 Cf. Castellino 1976; Falkenstein, von Soden 1953; Seux 1976.

1.2.2 Manuscript Tradition

The following manuscripts preserve the *Great Hymns and Prayers*:

1. ***Šamaš Hymn***. Editions: Lambert 1960; George, Al-Rawi 1996; Rozzi 2021a (*eBL* edition); 2021b; 2022a; 2023b; Heinrich forthcoming; a new comprehensive edition of the text is being prepared by the Author and will be published in the next future (Rozzi forthcoming). Manuscripts edited by Lambert (the *Siglum* of the following manuscripts is borrowed from Lambert's edition): A = K.3182+ (new joined fragment: K.19835 edited in Rozzi 2022b); B = 3650, C = Sm.1033+, D = BM 98631, E = K.10866, F = BM 98732 (Nineveh, Neo-Assyrian); g = VAT 10174,[72] h = VAT 10071,[73] VAT 10756[74] (school tablets, Assur; Neo-Assyrian), i = Si 15 (school tablet, Sippar; Neo-Babylonian).
   Additional manuscript edited by George, Al-Rawi 1996 (the Siglum of the following manuscript follows George's and Al-Rawi's edition): k = IM 124633 (Sippar; Neo-Babylonian).
   Additional manuscripts published in Lambert, Taniguchi 2019, nos. 128-42: BM 37502 (school tablet, from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian); BM 37122 (school tablet, from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian); BM 35077 (Sp-II.613, school tablet, probably from Babylon; Late Babylonian); VAT 17553 (school tablet, Babylon; Late Babylonian); BM 36296+BM 38070 (school tablet, from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian); BM 74197 (probably from Sippar; Neo-Babylonian); BM 65472+ (probably from Sippar; Neo-Babylonian); Si 832 (probably from Sippar; Neo-Babylonian); BM 134517 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian); K.20637 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian); BM 42652 (school tablet, probably from Babylon; Late Babylonian); BM 40080 (school tablet, probably from Babylon; Late Babylonian); BM 33465+ (school tablet, probably from Babylon; Late Babylonian. A new fragment belonging to this manuscript has been recently identified by Zs. Földi and added to the *eBL* edition: BM 48914); BM 65461 (school tablet; Sippar; Neo-Babylonian).
   A Graeco-Babylonian fragment edited by Geller 1997: BM 33769 (school fragment; Babylon; Late Babylonian).
   A fragment only recently identified by T. Mitto, from Uruk: UrkLB1 (*eBL*) = IM 135964 (copy SpTU 1, no. 68), not available for collation, but incorporated in the *eBL* edition.

72 Recently republished in Maul, Manasterska 2023, 112-19.

73 Recently republished in Maul, Manasterska 2023, 100-3.

74 Recently republished in Maul, Manasterska 2023, 103-8.

Additional manuscripts edited by Rozzi 2021b; 2022a; 2023b (the *Siglum* of the following manuscripts is borrowed from Rozzi's edition on *eBL* [Rozzi 2021a], where all the manuscripts with their respective references can be found): BabLB1 = BM 38849 (Babylon; Neo-Babylonian);[75] BabLBSch7 = BM 38061; BabLBSch8 = BM 38167; BabLBSch14 = BM 37287; BabLBSch15 = BM 48214+BM 48226 (school tablets; Babylon; Late Babylonian);[76] BabNB2 = BM 39096 (Babylon; Neo Babylonian);[77] NinNA3c = K.19543 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian); SipNBSch3 = BM 55181; SipNBSch2 = BM 55080+BM 54856 (the latter was recently joined to BM 55080 by E. Jiménez and identified as a manuscript of the Šamaš Hymn by Zs. Földi; school tablet, Sippar; Neo-Babylonian) (school tablets; Sippar; Neo-Babylonian).[78] A previously unknown fragment was recently discovered within the *eBL* project, and will be published in Heinrich forthcoming: BM 40396 (school tablet, Babylon; Neo-Babylonian).

The hymn is also quoted in few commentaries: BabLBQuo1 = BM 40837 (Babylon; Neo-Babylonian), *Sagig* IV;[79] BabLBQuo2 = BM 92705 (Babylon; Neo-Babylonian),[80] *Iqqur īpuš*; SipNBQuo1 = BM 66965+BM 76508 (Sippar; Neo-Babylonian) (*Sagig* IV).[81]

2. ***Marduk*1**. Editions: Lambert 1959-60, 55-60; Oshima 2011, 137-90 (see Oshima 2011, 85 for prior editions); Fadhil, Jiménez 2019, 162-75. Manuscripts published by Lambert 1959-60: A = A1 = K.3216+, A2 = K.8237, A3 = K.3175+, A4 = K.3158+, A5 = K.3186, A6 = K.9430; B = K.8003 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian); C = DT 239 (Nineveh; Neo-Babylonian).

   Additional manuscripts published by Oshima 2011: D = BM 78278 (Babylon; Old Babylonian); E = Ashm.1924.1820 (probably from Kish; Neo-Babylonian); F = BM 76492 (Sippar; Late

75 Cf. also Leichty, Finkel, Walker 2019, 404.

76 Leichty, Finkel, Walker 2019, 683.

77 Leichty, Finkel, Walker 2019, 410.

78 There is, moreover, a recently identified fragment from Sippar (see SipNB3c in *eBL*), which will be published by S. Adalı within the Istanbul-Sippar project Catalogue. Dr. Adalı has given me permission to include the transcription of this manuscript in the *eBL* online edition, for which I am most grateful. Another so far unedited Sippar fragment (SipNB2, IM 132673) will be published shortly by E. Jiménez and A. Fadhil. Again, I am grateful to Prof. Jiménez and Dr. Fadhil for their permission to use this text in the *eBL* transcription. A further known manuscript from Aššur (AššNA1 in *eBL*: IM 148526) has also been included in transcription in the *eBL* edition; an edition of this fragment by A. Fadhil will appear in the future.

79 Leichty, Finkel, Walker 2019, 459.

80 Leichty, Finkel, Walker 2019, 49.

81 See Frahm 2011, 106.

Babylonian); G = BM 66652 (now joined to additional fragments, see George, Taniguchi 2019, 5-6, nos. 83 and 87; probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian); H = BM 45618 (probably from Babylon; Late Babylonian); I = BM 34366 (Sp-I.483)(+) BM 45746 (81-7-6, 159) (Babylon, it has an Arsacid colophon and can be dated 35 BCE, see George, Taniguchi 2019, 5); J = BM 34218+ (probably from Babylon; Late Babylonian); k = VAT 14642 (school-tablet, Babylon; Late Babylonian), l = BM 33716 (school tablet, Babylon; Late Babylonian), m = BM 36676 (Babylon; Late Babylonian), n = BM 36437 (school tablet, from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian), o = BM 37571+BM 37931 (school tablet, from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian).

Additional manuscripts published in George, Taniguchi 2019, nos. 81-96: BM 72181 (probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian); BM 38343 (from Babylon or Borsippa; Neo-Babylonian); BM 54980; BM 38025; BM 36656 (all from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian).

Additional manuscript published by Fadhil, Jiménez 2019: IM 124504 (Sippar; Neo-Babylonian).

3. ***Marduk*2**. Editions: Lambert 1959-60; Oshima 2011, 216-70 (see Oshima 2011, 89 for prior editions). Manuscripts published by Lambert: A = A1 (K.6906+), A2 (K.3183+), A3 (K.2872+), A4 = (K.10825), B = K.3459, C = K.9917+, E = E1 (K.9918), E2 (K.99178) (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian); D = VAT 11152+VAT 11170 (Aššur, Neo-Assyrian; unedited fragment: VAT 10313, see George, Taniguchi 2019, 6).

   Manuscripts published by Oshima (2011): F = K.17797 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian), G = K.18397 (Niniveh; Neo-Assyrian) H = BM 61649+ (probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian); I = BM 61635+ (Sippar; Late Babylonian.); J = 136878+ (probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian); K = Si 851 (probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian); L = BM 66558 (from Sippar; Late Babylonian); M = BM 62292 (Sippar; Late Babylonian), N = Ashm.1924.1420 (probably Kish; Neo-Babylonian); o = VAT 10174 (school tablet; Aššur. Neo-Assyrian); p = K.20949 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian); q = BM 66609 (school tablet; probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian); r = BM 66956; s = BM 87226 (unknown provenience, school tablet; Late Babylonian); t = BM 36726 (school tablet, from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian); u = BM 54203 (school tablet, probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian), v = BM 37959+ (school tablet, from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian), w = BM 77118, y = Ashm.1924.1807 (Babylon; Neo-Babylonian).

   Manuscripts published in George, Taniguchi 2019, nos. 97-127: BM 41295 (probably from Babylon; Late Babylonian); HSM 6836 (probably from Babylon; Neo Babylonian); F4;

F5 (probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian); BM 35285 (Sp-II.854) (probably from Babylon; Late Babylonian); BM 37659 (from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian); BM 37354 (from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian); Sm.1751 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian); BM 55300 (school tablet, probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian); BM 37392 (school tablet, from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian); BM 33811 (school tablet, probably from Babylon; Late Babylonian); BM 37692 (school tablet, from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian); BM 55408 (school tablet, probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian); BM 37937+ (school tablet, from Babylon or Borsippa; Late Babylonian).

4. ***Ištar Prayer***. Editions: Lambert 1959-60; Jiménez, Rozzi 2022. Manuscript published by Lambert (1959-60): K.225+K.9962 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian). The online edition of this text was prepared by the Author within the *eBL* project (Rozzi 2023a), and a comprehensive edition is offered here in chapter 3. Both the online and the present edition include the recently discovered manuscript B = BM 35939+BM 35868+BM 35957 (Babylon; Late Babylonian).
5. ***Gula Bullussa-rabi***. Editions: Lambert 1967; Földi 2019b; 2021a (*eBL* edition); 2022c. Manuscripts published by Lambert (1959-60; the *Siglum* of the following manuscripts is borrowed from Lambert's edition): a = Ashm.1937.620 (Babylonian script; provenience unknown, 6th cent. BCE); b = BM 33849+ (Babylonia, Neo-Babylonian); c = BM 34655+ (Babylonia; Late Babylonian); d = 81-7-27,202 (Nineveh; Neo-Babylonian); E = K.3225+ K.6321; F = K.13320; G = K.7934; H = K.9258+17508; I = Sm.1420+, J = 128029 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian).
   Additional fragments edited by Földi (2019b; 2022b; the *Siglum* of the following manuscripts is borrowed from the *eBL* edition [Földi 2021a]): SipLB1 = BM 54801 (probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian; cf. the copy in George, Taniguchi 2019, 60); BabNB1 = BM 49157 (joined to BM 33849+, Babylon; Late Babylonian); BabLB2b = BM 36003+? BM 36236 (Babylonia; Late Babylonian; it probably belongs to Lambert's MS c); BM 38078; BM 38196; BM 39678 (Babylon; Neo-Babylonian); SipLB2 = BM 62744 (Sippar, Late Babylonian; cf. the copy in George, Taniguchi 2019, 58); SipLBSch1 = BM 99811 (school tablet, probably from Sippar; Late Babylonian; cf. the copy in George, Taniguchi 2019, 62). NinNA1c = K.10065 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian; cf. the copy in George, Taniguchi 2019, 61); NinNA2b = 83-1-18,430 (Niniveh; Neo-Assyrian, probably part of MS F; cf. the copy in George, Taniguchi 2019, 57); NinNA1b = Sm.1036 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian; it probably belongs to Lambert's MS E).

Moreover, this hymn appears quoted in several ancient commentaries and in the *Catalogue of Texts and Authors*,[82] see BabLBQuo1 (Babylon; Late Babylonian); BabNBQuo1 (Babylon; Neo-Babylonian), NinNAQuo1 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian), BorLBQuo1 (Borsippa; Late Babylonian) in Földi 2021a; 2022c.

6. ***Anūna Prayer***. Editions: Lambert 1989; Lenzi 2018 (digital edition): CBS 19842 (Nippur; Old Babylonian).
7. ***Nabû Prayer***. Previous edition: von Soden 1971: A = K.2361+, B_1 = K.15248, B_2 = K.21022 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian). This prayer is newly edited here in chapter 2 (cf. *eBL* edition: Rozzi 2022b).
8. ***Queen of Nippur***. Editions: Langdon 1923; Lambert 1982; Földi 2020; 2021c (*eBL* edition); 2023: A = Rm-II.164+79-7-8,56, B = 79-7-8,182, C = 79-7-8,181, D = K.9955+Rm.613 (new join K.17569 published by Földi 2020), E = K.2552, F = K.10725+89-4-26,105 (new join Sm.1856, published by Földi 2020), I = K.8697+Sm.1356, J = Rm.939, K = K.18129, L = K.10661+ (new join K.21889, published by Földi 2020), M = K.14194 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian), g = K.6100+ (Nineveh; Neo-Babylonian; new indirect joins: K.19108 and K.19352, published by Földi 2020 and Földi 2023 respectively), h = Si 9 (Sippar; Neo/Late Babylonian).
   Additional fragments edited by Földi (2020; 2023); the *Siglum* of the following manuscripts is borrowed from the *eBL* edition, Földi 2021c) NinNA4b = K.10725+?Sm.1856+89-4-26,105; NinNA2b = K.9955+?K.17569+Rm.613 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian). Further fragments have been recently identified within the *eBL* project and published by Földi 2023: BM 39432 (Babylon or Babylonia; Neo-Babylonian); K.19352 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian).
9. ***Gula Syncretistic***. Editions: Ebeling 1918, 49-52; 1953, 140-1; Bennett 2021 (*eBL* edition); 2022; 2023b: A = K.232+K.3371+K.13776 (Nineveh; Neo-Assyrian), B = VAT 9670+VAT 9931 (Aššur; Neo-Assyrian), a = BM 36333 (school tablet, Babylon; Neo-Babylonian), b = BM 34399 (Babylon; Late Babylonian), c = BM 37616 (Babylon; Neo-Babylonian), d = BM 75974, e = BM 76319, f = BM 68611 (Sippar; Neo-Babylonian); further fragments have been recently identified within the *eBL* project and published in Bennett 2023b: BM 44062 (BabNB2 in the *eBL* edition; Babylon; Neo-Babylonian); BM 40339 (BabNB3 in the *eBL* edition; Babylon; Neo-Babylonian); BM 40298 (BabNB4) in the *eBL* edition; Babylon; Neo-Babylonian).

82 Mitto 2022b.

The vast majority of the manuscripts available for the reconstruction of these hymns and prayers are first-millennium copies, many of them coming from the Ashurbanipal's library in Nineveh (seventh century BCE). Nevertheless, the corpus includes also two Old Babylonian copies: one exemplar of *Marduk*1, i.e. BM 78728 (MS D in Oshima's edition), can probably be dated to the time of Hammurapi;[83] and the Old Babylonian manuscript preserving the *Anūna Prayer*, which cannot be dated with certainty, but might go back to the early Cassite period.[84]

The date of composition of these texts is uncertain. Lambert has suggested a Cassite date for most of the *Great Hymns and Prayers*, because of their sophisticated vocabulary and other stylistic features (the hymno-epic dialect, see below § 1.2.4).[85] Furthermore, in his edition of the *Nabû Prayer*, von Soden proposed a first-millennium date for this text, on the basis of style as well, but also for reasons of spelling conventions of the main manuscript (cf. chapter 2 for a study of the language and style of the *Nabû Prayer*). The new manuscript is too small and fragmentary to provide any further indication.

The *Gula Syncretistic* was probably composed in the Middle-Babylonian period, considering the scholarly speculations and the learned explorations of divine names, which recall the list of the fifty names of Marduk in *Enūma eliš*: similar displays of erudition are found in literary texts composed at the end of the second millennium BCE.[86] A similar scholarly technique can be observed in *Gula Bullussa-rabi* and in *Queen of Nippur*. *Queen of Nippur*, moreover, has been compared by Lambert[87] to the *Šamaš Hymn* due to its 'pastiche' structure, which appears to be the result of a compilation of multiple texts (see *infra* in the next paragraph). In both hymns, it is possible that some sections are older than others. Lambert proposed this theory based on the use of certain terms in the central section of the *Šamaš Hymn* that are not attested beyond the Old Babylonian

83 Oshima 2011, 138-9; Fadhil, Jiménez 2019, 162.

84 According to Lambert, the manuscript is probably not Old Babylonian. He observes that the name Anūna for the goddess Ištar was used only until the Middle Babylonian period. Furthermore, he thinks that the *Anūna Prayer* might have been originally written in Babylon, and be connected to *Marduk*1, which also probably comes from Babylon (Lambert 1989, 323-4).

85 Note that the name of the alleged author of *Gula Bullussa-rabi*, i.e. Bullussa-rabi, is attested in several Middle Babylonian sources. This would confirm Lambert's hypothesis, who argued that this composition might have been composed between the Cassite and Neo-Babylonian period. On this see Földi 2019a. It seems, furthermore, that Bullussa-rabi was mostly a female name in the Cassite times, and thus the author of the hymn might have been a woman (Földi 2019a).

86 Bennett 2022, 176-8.

87 Lambert 1982, 179.

period.[88] Consequently, despite the fact that, like other texts, the *Šamaš Hymn* has only survived in manuscripts from the first millennium, it may have an Old Babylonian core.

Hence, some stylistic traits and content characteristics might point to a late date of composition for most of the *Great Hymns and Prayers*, perhaps around the Cassite period or even later. However, the Old Babylonian manuscripts of *Marduk*1 and the *Anūna Prayer* prove that at least these two texts were composed earlier.[89]

Judging from the extant portions, none of these poems bears a label at the beginning, e.g. the Sumerian ÉN 'incantation', but in two cases a rubric is attested: *Marduk*1 closes with the rubric *unnīnu*, 'Prayer';[90] the *Ištar Prayer* also had a rubric, which is partially preserved, and allows us to reconstruct the number of lines and the incipit of the composition. Thanks to a recently identified fragment, moreover, we can assume that the *Ištar Prayer* was mentioned in the *Catalogues of Texts and Authors* (Mitto 2022b), and was thus a well-known work of literature within the scribal elite (see *infra* in chapter 3).

It is possible that the *Great Hymns and Prayers* were organised in a series. In fact, *Marduk*1 has a catch line, which is most likely the opening line of the *Šamaš Hymn*, and similarly, the *Šamaš Hymn* contains a catch line of an unidentified text.[91] In addition, one manuscript of the *Ištar Prayer* bears the phrase ZAG.TIL.LA.BI.ŠÈ 'completed', which is found at the end of series.[92] Moreover, a manuscript of *Gula Bullussa-rabi* (BM 33849+BM 47756) also preserves a catch line, which corresponds to the beginning of *Gula Syncretistic* (see Földi forthcoming, correcting Földi 2022b). An additional fragment (BM 38169), now identified as a hymn to Ninisina, seems to contain the opening lines of the hymn to Gula in its catch line. The beginning of *Gula Bullussa-rabi* may also be preserved in the catch line of another fragment (BM 38674), probably a hymn to a goddess, and perhaps the hymn to Ninisina mentioned above. If this was the case, one could

88 Lambert 1960, 122.

89 For the Old-Babylonian forerunner of *Marduk*1 see Oshima 2011, 138; Fadhil, Jiménez 2019, 162.

90 Oshima 2011, 138-9.

91 On the transmission in a series of *Marduk*1 and the *Šamaš Hymn*, see Oshima 2011, 141 and Fadhil, Jiménez 2019, 171; cf. also George, Al-Rawi 1998, 203, who comment on the colophon in a Sippar manuscript of Šamaš, which contains the expression *ul qati* 'it is not finished', and therefore indicates that the hymn was probably followed by another composition. It is possible that the text following the *Šamaš Hymn* was the so-called "Hymn in Praise of Babylon" (Fadhil, Jiménez forthcoming; Jiménez personal communication).

92 See, e.g. the series of Maqlû, tablet viii (Abusch 2016, 272, 366, 391), and SB *Gilgameš* XII (George 2003, 737).

propose the existence of a series of hymns to goddesses with the sequence Ninisina, *Gula Bullussa-rabi* and *Gula Syncretistic*.[93]

The richness and the longevity of the tradition testify to how widespread and probably well-known these texts were. The fact that many manuscripts of these compositions were exercise tablets confirms their popularity in scribal circles.

1.2.3 Layout and Prosody

Even though the original format of some of the small fragments is impossible to reconstruct, the majority of sources of the compositions under study are full-text tablets with the standard four-column format.[94]

The *Great Hymns and Prayers* are characterised by a distinctive layout. In this regard, the following five compositions exhibit horizontal rulings after every two lines in most or all their manuscripts: the *Anūna Prayer*, the *Šamaš Hymn*, *Marduk*1, *Marduk*2 and the *Nabû Prayer*. The latter text also includes two sets of three verses (see chapter 2). In some cases, this formal arrangement seems to match the poetic structure. Some of these compositions contain the so-called 'lyrical repetition', that is, the identical repetition of a distich, which differs only by the delayed introduction of the name of the invoked god in the second set of lines (cf. chapter 2, § 2.2 for the use of this figure in the *Nabû Prayer*; see also chapter 5 sub 'Delayed introduction'). This structure follows the Sumerian hymnic model, and is also characteristic of Old Babylonian Akkadian hymns;[95] it is employed fairly consistently in the *Nabû Prayer*, in *Marduk*1, in the first part of *Marduk*2 (ll. 1-4) and in the *Šamaš Hymn* (ll. 1-4 and sparsely), but it does not appear in the *Anūna Prayer*. Nevertheless, this arrangement into couplets often appears as purely artificial, since the rulings marking the distichs can be put at the wrong places, see, e.g. in the *Šamaš Hymn*, ll. 174-5, which clearly belong together, but are instead split into two different couplets.[96]

The remaining three texts of this corpus are divided into strophes. The Assyrian manuscript of the *Prayer to Ištar* presents rulings every

93 On the serialisation of *Gula Bullussa-rabi* see also Földi 2022b.

94 Although also rarer formats are attested, such as the six-column format of a manuscript of *Gula Bullussa-rabi* (MS c), see Földi 2019b, 87.

95 Metcalf 2015, 22; 58-9 designates this as *a-a'* structure.

96 Lambert 1960, 123; 2013, 28; the same phenomenon is observed in *Marduk*1, see Fadhil, Jiménez 2019, 162. This could be due to text modifications that occurred during transmission. Cf. also Groneberg 1996, 64-5 for some observations on the line-division markers in Akkadian literary texts.

tenth line, although it is clear that the text is structured into couplets; the manuscripts of *Gula Bullussa-rabi* divide the text into strophes of various lengths, which can include from 8 up to 14 lines. In this case as well, the line division does not always accord with the content of each section.[97] The manuscripts of *Gula Syncretistic*, despite preserving the text overall uniformly, show traces of rulings inconsistently.[98]

The *Queen of Nippur* is the longest of this corpus, containing more than 300 lines. It was compiled with materials from various sources: different texts were probably manipulated and combined to form a composition, in which different sections can be recognised. The end of each section is marked by horizontal rulings in some manuscripts; not all the manuscripts have markers of division, but those that do generally agree with each other. In addition, rulings are placed every 13 lines throughout the portions of the text that seem to be derived from a hymn in strophes; the hymn was probably entirely incorporated in the composition.[99] Lambert postulated a similar process of compilation for the *Šamaš Hymn*, which also displays a noticeable unevenness between its sections.[100]

The *Great Hymns and Prayers* can be scanned for the standard Akkadian metre, that is, the so-called *Vierheber* verse, which became the predominant metrical pattern from the latter part of the second millennium onward. In this metrical system, the line constitutes the basic metrical unit, and is divided into two hemistichs by a *caesura*. Each hemistich contains two feet, i.e. two smaller metrical units, and the last foot is usually trochaic or amphibrach. The trochaic ending is often the most regular part of the verse.[101]

According to the completely preserved or restored lines, the *Great Hymns and Prayers* tend to respect this standard prosodic structure. The majority of verses in the *Šamaš Hymn* display four metrical units and end with a trochee, although there also occur longer lines whose metrical rhythm is difficult to identify because they resemble prose (e.g. ll. 105, 118, 150).[102] *Marduk*1, *Marduk*2, the *Ištar Prayer* and the *Nabû Prayer* show overall a regular prosodic pattern, employing the

97 Lambert 1967, 103.

98 Bennett 2022, 188-9.

99 Lambert 1982, 175.

100 Lambert 1960, 122-3; 1982, 175 and 178.

101 On the Akkadian 2+2 metrical structure, Hecker 1974, 113, 130-5; West 1997a; George 2003, 162-5; Lambert 2013, 22-8; Jiménez 2017a, 72-6. For the trochaic ending (also known as *clausula accadica*), see Landsberger 1926-7, 371; Held 1961, 3 fn. 22; Groneberg 1971, 158; Knudsen 1980, 14; von Soden 1981, 170-2; Edzard 1993, 149; West 1997, 183-4; Hecker 2000, 265; Lambert 2013, 18-20; Jiménez 2017a, 74-5; Pohl 2022, 90-4. Cf. further in chapter 2, § 2.1.1.

102 See Lambert 1960, 122.

2+2 verse structure in most of the preserved text. Manuscript A of the *Nabû Prayer* is worthy of particular attention, as it contains a vertical ruling in the first column, that seems to represent the metrical *caesura* (for a detailed analysis of the *Great Prayers to Ištar* and *Nabû*, see chapters 2 and 3).

The *Queen of Nippur* also displays a fairly regular metrical structure, as far as can be seen from the extant text. In contrast, *Gula Bullussa-rabi* contains *Vierheber* verses, but also numerous exceptions, such as shorter lines containing only three or even two units (e.g. ll. 38, 45, 58-9, 72-3, 76), or longer lines, with a 3+2 structure (e.g. ll. 70 and 140). It includes also long verses, whose metrical pattern is difficult to identify (e.g. l. 71, perhaps to be analysed as follows: *rabâtu* | *pulḫāssu* | *eli ilī* || *kullat kalīšunu* | *nibīssu* | *šaḫṭū*, "His fear is great among the gods: every one of them reverences the name", Lambert 1967, 120-1).

The *Anūna Prayer* is too damaged to allow a metrical analysis, but judging from the extant lines, it does not respect the metrical pattern consistently: it includes 2+2 verses with a trochaic ending, but it also displays 2+1 lines (e.g. l. 108). In most lines, however, the metrical structure is too uncertain to be distinguished. The *Gula Syncretistic* displays an irregular metric structure and deviates from the *Vierheber* pattern for the majority of the lines, as can be observed in the opening section (approximately ll. 1-37).

1.2.4 Language and Style

The present compositions exhibit several features characteristic of the so-called 'hymno-epic dialect', a high-literary register also found in numerous other Akkadian hymns and epic narratives.[103] Its earliest attestations are found in Old Babylonian literary texts, but it

103 The term 'dialect' first coined by von Soden is in fact a misnomer, and many scholars have suggested different definition, such as 'idiom' (Lambert 1959-60, 49; 2013, 34) or 'style' (George 2003, 172), on this see Hess 2010, 102-3. Hess further interprets the hymno-epic dialect as comparable to the Homeric dialect, because it is a combination of archaic, foreign and artificial elements, i.e. a *Kunstsprache*, that is, both an 'artificial' and 'creative' language (Hess 2010, 114). Pohl (2022, 13) considers the hymno-epic dialect as related mostly to hymnic compositions, and suggests to treat it as a purely hymnic style, defining it as a "register". I have followed Pohl in adopting the term 'register' to define the hymno-epic dialect, as it pertains to a specific context of use. However, the term 'style' would not be incorrect; it would simply describe this language from a different perspective, focusing on its aesthetic qualities. As noted by Hess (2010, 104 fn. 9), function and aesthetics need not to be mutually exclusive. Cf. also the definition employed by Shehata (2019, 161), who understands register "in the linguistical and philological sense of Sprachstil, signifying a variant form of a language particular to a certain situation, such as a profession or an environment. It is distinct from 'dialect' which typically indicates a variant that is defined by geographical region or ethnic group". On the difference between style and register, see Biber, Conrad 2009.

probably continued to be used until the Late Babylonian period. The hymno-epic dialect involves both grammatical and lexical peculiarities, such as the following: shortened pronominal suffixes, rare verbal stems (e.g. ŠD-stem), inversion of the standard word order, adverbial endings (i.e. the locative suffix *-um*, terminative suffix *-iš* and their combined form *-uš*), third person singular feminine marker *ta-* in verbs, special forms of the *status constructus*, a special vocabulary. Within the *Great Hymns and Prayers* adverbial endings are often found, for instance:[104]

- *Marduk*2, l. 37'': *qātukka* 'to your hand'.
- *Marduk*1: l. 41 and l. 63 *uggukka* 'in your anger'; l. 67 *ṭīdiš* 'into mud'; l. 194 *rīštuk* 'in your celebration'.[105]
- *Ištar Prayer*: l. 140 *anukki* 'at your consent'; l. 183 *iṣṣūriš* 'like a bird' (cf. chapter 3).
- *Nabû Prayer*: l. 84 and 192 *qibītukka* 'at your command'; l. 90 *ištarāniš* 'to the goddess' (cf. chapter 2).
- *Šamaš Hymn*: l. 47 *ṣītukka* 'at your rising'.
- *Queen of Nippur*: col. iv, l. 5 *malkatuš* 'like a queen'.
- *Gula Bullussa-rabi*: l. 116, *apiš* 'like reed'; l. 178 *rūqiš* 'from afar'.
- *Anūna Prayer*: l. 139 *qudmukki* 'in your presence'.

Shortened pronominal suffixes also occur, for example:

- *Ištar Prayer*: l. 153 *iratuš* 'his chest'; l. 161 *kibsuš* 'his path' and *išdūš* 'his foundations' (cf. chapter 3).
- *Queen of Nippur*: col. iv, l. 48 *kabattuk* 'your reins'; col. iv, l. 49 *libbuk* 'your heart'.[106]
- *Marduk*1: ll. 5/7 *amāruk* 'your stare'.
- *Gula Syncretistic*: l. 55 *šīmass*[*un*] (*si vera lectio*).[107]

In addition, verbal forms with the feminine *ta-* prefix (*Ištar Prayer*: l. 177 *talli*, see chapter 3), ŠD-stem verbs (*Marduk*2, l. 89: *tušpaṭṭar*; *Šamaš Hymn*, ll. 1/3 *mušnammir*),[108] and cases of *status constructus* in *-u* (e.g. *Gula Bullussa-rabi*, l. 13 [*bē*]*lu abāri* 'possessor of might' (Ashm.1937.620); *Šamaš Hymn*, l. 138 *ētiqu puluḫti*, '(the caravan)

104 On the standard features of the hymno-epic dialect see von Soden 1931, 163-227; 1933, 90-183; Groneberg 1978, 15; Goodnick Westenholz 1997a, 25-6; Krebernik 2003-04, 11; Hess 2010, 102-22; Jiménez 2017a, 76-9. For further examples of hymno-epic traits in the compositions under study, cf. Groneberg 1987, vols 1 and 2, *passim*. Cf. also chapter 2, § 2.3.

105 On the form *riš-tuk* see Oshima 2011, 169, but cf. also Fadhil, Jiménez 2019, 174 fn. 36, where a different interpretation is suggested.

106 Lambert 1982, 204. Cf. Groneberg 1987, 2: 3.

107 The *Gula Syncretistic* features very few traits of the hymno-epic dialect, see Bennett 2022, 171-2.

108 See Lambert 1959-60, 49 for further examples of ŠD-stem forms in *Marduk*2.

passing through danger'; *Nabû Prayer*, l. 175 *šēru rēṣūtīya* 'my morning aid', see chapter 2) are attested.

The vocabulary employed in the present texts is also remarkable, as it includes rare literary terms borrowed from lexical lists and *hapax legomena* (see chapter 2, § 2.3. and chapter 3, § 3.3 for the special vocabulary in the *Nabû* and *Ištar Prayer*s; cf. also chapter 5).

These texts often display deviations from the normal word order, placing the verbal forms in the penultimate position instead of in the final position. This feature is favoured in Akkadian hymnic poetry and epic (such as in the epic of Gilgameš),[109] but often appears in the 'elevated prose' as well. It can, in fact, already be found in the early stages of Mesopotamian literature, e.g. in some Old Akkadian monumental inscriptions, and is later frequently attested in the royal inscriptions of the first millennium.[110]

Šamaš Hymn: l. 9, *puzra sattakku* ***šūḫuzū*** *barīrūka*

Furthermore, the *Great Hymns and Prayers* often feature the verb at the beginning of a verse and, rarely, the inversion of the noun and its adjective.[111]

Fronting of the predicate:
Šamaš Hymn: l. 8, ***iriššūka*** *gimiršunu igīgū*[112]

Inversion of the adjective:
Queen of Nippur: col. iv, l. 19, ***rabûtu igīgū*** *iltanass*[*umū*][113]

The placement of the verb at the beginning of the verse is also a frequently occurring trait in incantation prayers, such as *šuillas*.[114]

109 See Groneberg 1987, 175-9 and Pohl 2022, 55-61 for the hymns; Hecker 1974, 1201-38 and George 2003, 433-4 for the epic.

110 See George 2003, 434 and 2013, 43, where the term 'elevated prose' is used to describe this literary style in non-poetic texts; see also George 2007c, 41; cf. Jiménez 2017, 86 for this phenomenon in the Akkadian Disputation Poems.

111 For the placing of predicates in the front, cf. the position of the verb in Old Babylonian hymns, Pohl 2022, 58-60. Interestingly, according to Pohl, in Old Babylonian hymns transitive verbs tend to be placed in ultimate position, while intransitive verbs generally occur at the beginning of the verses. This specific phenomenon is not observable in the corpus under study: the transitivity or lack thereof of the transposed verbs does not appear to be a consistent enough element to be deemed as significant. For the transposition of adjective and noun, see George 2003, 434 and Pohl 2022, 55-7. Cf. chapter 5 sub *Anastrophe*.

112 Lambert 1960, 126.

113 Lambert 1982, 202; cf. Földi 2021c.

114 Groneberg 1987, 176-7; see Schwemer 2014 for some examples of fronting in first-millennium Akkadian incantations.

These variations in syntactic order can occasionally be attributed to metrical reasons, i.e. to allow for the trochaic ending of the verse.[115] However, this explanation does not seem to apply to our texts. Rather, in some cases it seems that the unusual word order can be better explained by poetic reasons. In fact, the different syntactic structure facilitates certain rhetorical figures, such as sound figures or chiasms (see, e.g. ll. 13-14 of the Šamaš hymn: *tušpalki bābī ša kalîš* [*parakkī*] || *ša kullat igīgī nindabêšunu* [*tuštāšir*], "You open up the gates of every [sanctuary], | You [regulate] the food offerings of the Igigi-gods",[116] where the verbs are placed in a chiastic structure). A similar phenomenon was observed by Stein in Middle and Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions.[117]

A further noticeable aspect related to the style of the present compositions is the use of rhetorical devices: parallelism and repetition occur very often, along with various figures of sound, e.g. *homoioteleuta*, assonances and alliterations, which are employed both to enhance the rhythm of the verses, and to highlight structural elements. Furthermore, numerous metaphors and similes contribute to the rich figurative language of these texts, which are also characterised by wordplays and puns (cf. chapter 5).

Many of the manuscripts of the *Great Hymns and Prayers* display the typical spelling conventions of first-millennium texts, including, for instance, irregular case endings in nouns, dropping of final vowels and overhanging vowels in verbal forms. Mimation appears rarely and inconsistently.[118]

The irregularity in case endings was caused by the progressive loss of case distinction in nominal forms during the first millennium. Examples of aberrant word-final vowels are the following:

- Irregular nominative endings: *Nabû Prayer*, ll. 21/23 *gir-ri* (MS A); *Šamaš Hymn*, l. 118 *um-ma-ni* (MS i); *Marduk*2, ll. 2/4 *par-ri-ka* (MS B).
- Irregular accusative endings: *Šamaš Hymn*, l. 48 *ma-a-tum* (MS B); l. 132 *dum-qu* (MS A); *Marduk*1, l. 206 *nak-ru-ṭu* (MSS A and F); *Queen of Nippur*, col iii, l. 34 *e-pe-š*[*u*] (MS g).
- Irregular genitive endings: *Nabû Prayer*, ll. 54/56 *ina na-ri-iṭ-ṭu* (MS A); *Šamaš Hymn*, l. 127 *šá rug-gu-gu* (MS A); *Gula Bullussa-rabi*, l. 10 *mu-da-'i-iš za-'i-ru* (MS a).

115 Cf. Jiménez 2017, 75.

116 Rozzi 2021a; Lamber 1960, 126.

117 Stein 2000, 68: "Hier liegt offensichtlich eine poetische Versstruktur zugrunde".

118 On the phenomenon of the loss of final vowels, see Aro 1975; Streck 2014; Jiménez 2017a, 277. For other examples of irregular case endings in first-millennium manuscripts, see Schwemer 2017, 69-75.

The apocope of final vowels can be observed in substantives, verbs and stative forms, e.g. *Šamaš Hymn*, l. 62 *ina ḫu-bur* for *ina ḫuburi* (MS B); *Ištar Prayer*, l. 227 (MS A) [*na-a*]*k-ru-uṭ* for *nakruṭa*; *Gula Bullussa-rabi*, l. 183 (MS c) *ba-ra-ak*, *a-ši-pa-ak and ḫi-ṭa-ak* for *asâku*, *āšipāku*, *ḫīṭāku*.[119]

Overhanging vowels are also attested, see e.g. *Nabû Prayer* l. 88 *i-šá-bi for išâb* (MS A); *Queen of Nippur*, col. iv, l. 16 *i-ša-mi* for *išâm*.[120]

The manuscripts preserving *Gula Syncretistic* appear remarkably regular and coherent, respecting both case endings and verbal forms. I could find only one instance of the nominative case in *-i*, l. 105', MS d: ˹*qa*¹-˹*rit*¹-*ti* for *qarittu*.

The manuscript of the *Anūna Prayer* is the only tablet within the present corpus which displays exclusively (Late) Old Babylonian linguistic and orthographic traits (see Lambert 1989, 223; cf. George 2003, 160-1), besides some standard hymno-epic features, such as shortened suffixes and adverbial endings.[121]

1.2.5 Content and *Sitz im Leben*

In the *Great Hymns and Prayers*, several philosophical reflections dealing with human sorrow, sin and divine justice are skilfully interwoven between the standard elements of prayer and praise.

The Akkadian corpus of penitential prayers[122] also contains references to the themes of evil and guilt, which are in fact occasionally introduced already in the opening verses. Indeed, the *diĝiršadabba* prayers commonly begin with the standard question, 'My god, what have I done?', a formula that is also found in Old Babylonian onomastics and implies guilt on the part of the supplicant.[123] Penitential prayers provide a practical solution to the problem of suffering, since it was possible to atone for guilt and regain the favour of the deity by reciting the prayer and performing the related ritual.[124] On the contrary, a more philosophical and theoretical approach to the problem can be found in wisdom texts, which extensively explore the theme of theodicy, i.e. the problem of divine justice in relation to

119 On the irregular spelling of the first singular stative endings in *Gula Bullussa-rabi*, cf. also Jiménez 2017a, 225 fn. 636.

120 On overhanging vowels, see *GAG* § 18a, 82e and 104g. See also Cagni 1969, 146-9; Groneberg 1987, 1: 143-4, George 2003, 441-2; cf. Jiménez 2017a, 278 for further references.

121 See Lambert 1989, 323.

122 See Lenzi 2019, 165-7 for a brief overview of Akkadian prayers, inclusive of penitential prayers.

123 Jaques 2015, 321.

124 Jaques 2015, 320-1.

human suffering. These texts provide a representation of Mesopotamian ethics primarily linked to religious aspects, such as the respect for ritual practices and religious devotion, but they also reflect a human dimension, which involves following laws and societal conventions (see e.g. Földi 2022a).[125] The *Great Hymns and Prayers* tackle similar themes, sometimes hinting at them briefly to evoke the standard phrasing of penitential prayers, while at other times they develop more elaborately on ideas that resonate with wisdom literature.

The theme of theodicy, meant in the sense of the attempt to understand and explain human suffering and evil, is expressed, for example, in *Marduk*1, ll. 105-10. There the poet develops the idea that sin is inevitable, and often unknown: human beings are naturally prone to evil, and not even the ignorance of one's transgressions counts as a justification.[126]

105 *mannu ša ittaṣṣaru lā iršû ḫiṭīṭu*
106 *ajjû ša ittaḫḫid*[*u*] *gillatu lā ubla*
107 *lā īdânim-ma* [*šērēt*]*ūššina lā naṭlā*
108 *ša damqat u masqat ilu muškallim*
109 *ša īšû ilšu* [*ku*]*ššudā ḫiṭâtūšu*
110 *ša ilšu lā īšû ma'dū arnūšu*

105 Who was he, so watchful, so as not to bear crime?
106 Who was he, so care[ful], that he carried no sin?
107 (People) don't know, and they don't see their [fau]lts,
108 The god is the one who reveals what is good and what is fo[ul].
109 The one who has his god, his sins are [re]moved,
110 The one who does not have his god, his crimes are many.[127]

125 Jaques 2015, 321-2.

126 Cf. also the *eršaḫuĝa* prayer 6: LÚ-*u-tú* UGU SÍG SAĜ.DU-*šú an-nu-u*-[*šá ḫi-ṭa-tu-u-šá gíl-la-tu-u-šá*], translated by Jaques in her edition as follows: "L'humanité: ses péchés, [ses fautes, ses transgressions] sont (aussi nombreux) que les cheveux de sa tête". (Jaques 2015, 92), cf. also Lambert 1974. According to the Mesopotamian traditional outlook, every misfortune that befalls human beings can ultimately be ascribed to a divine punishment sent by an angry deity for the penitent's sins. To ignore one's sins does not mean to be innocent, because human beings are born sinners. This concept is abundantly developed, and occasionally questioned, in some first-millennium wisdom texts, which are considered by modern scholars as representative of a more 'critical' wisdom genre, the so-called 'negative' wisdom. Among these texts, one can mention, for example, *Ludlul* and the *Theodicy* (on this see Alster 2005, 30; 265-339, see Cohen 2013, 14-17; cf. also Lambert 1998, 36-42). The idea of the sinful nature of human beings is also attested in a Sumerian composition labelled by scholars *Man and His God* (see Kramer 1955. For a recent translation see Klein 1997). For a brief survey on the '*Theodicy* theme' in wisdom texts and the *Great Hymns and Prayers*, see Rozzi 2021b.

127 Translation by the Author. Oshima 2011, 165 translates differently: "Who was so on his guard so as not to bear sin? | Where is the one, who was so careful (and) carries no guilt? | Did not they lay their [faul]t on me? Are they invisible? | A god is the one who reveals what is good and what is [b]ad".

The only possible solution to the theodicy problem is faith. The pious will, in the end, be redeemed, in spite of their crimes.[128] Within the texts under consideration, deities are indeed depicted as both severe towards those who transgress, but merciful towards the righteous.

The twofold nature of divinities is stressed, for instance, in the opening lines of *Marduk*1 (ll. 9-12) and in *Marduk*2, l. 81: *urra napšurka šēz*[*uz*]*u ušpaššˀ*[*iḫ*(?)], "In the morning there is your forgiveness, the furious one relen[ts]";[129] see also *Queen of Nippur*, col. iii, ll. 19-22, and the *Ištar Prayer*, l. 74: *anūna k*[*u*]*llumat eṭēra īd*[*e*], "She sh[ow]s terror, (but) she kno[ws] how to save" (cf. the note on this line in the commentary in chapter 3).[130]

The *Nabû Prayer* contains the same motif of the deity being first wrathful and then compassionate, and further develops this concept using natural metaphors. Within ll. 177-85 a philosophical passage is found, in which a comparison between human suffering and some natural phenomena is implied, e.g. the ripening of the dates, in the sense that a negative beginning is the necessary condition for a positive development. This thought seems to be offered as an explanation for the seemingly unmerited misfortunes, and also represents a consolation to the theodicy problem, see, e.g. l. 177 *aḫrâtiš pisnuqiš lallāriš udaššˀ*[*ap*], "For the future time, what has seemed pitiable, he will swe[eten] like syrup".[131] A similar concept appears to be developed in a passage from *Marduk*1, where the idea is expressed that reflection leads to counsel, and a wise decision is one that is not rushed, e.g. ll. 70-1: [*š*]*itūlu nēmelu mitluku kušī*[*ru*] | [*a*]*zāru uppû damiq ana ṭ*[*ēmi*], "[To r]eflect (brings) profit; to meditate, benef[it], [To for]give and to *spare* are valuable for the judgement".[132]

Among the *Great Hymns and Prayers*, the *Šamaš Hymn* contains the broadest wisdom section, which stretches for approximately 40 lines (ll. 83-127). In this portion of the text, a series of just or unjust behaviours is listed, together with their respective reward or

128 Cf. Lambert [1995] 1998, 32-3.

129 For the reconstruction of this verse, see the note on ll. 10/12 of the *Nabû Prayer* in the commentary (chapter 2). See also *Marduk*2, l. 68: *kī ītennu bēlu išta'al irēm ušpaššiḫ*, "once the lord has raged, he reflects, has mercy, and relents" (Fadhil, Jiménez 2019, 173).

130 The topic of suffering followed by deliverance plays a central role in the poem of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* (for an updated edition, see Hätinen 2022), in which the long hymnic opening section praises Marduk for his being able to destroy, but then eventually to save. This composition bears numerous structural similarities with *Marduk*1, so much that it has been suggested that the former might be an expansion of the latter (see Fadhil, Jiménez 2019, 156). For some remarks on the dual nature of Marduk in *Ludlul*, see also Sitzler 1985, 89. Cf. Piccin, Worthington 2015.

131 On the wisdom passage in the *Nabû Prayer* and its similarities with *Theodicy*, ll. 260-3, see the introduction to the text in chapter 2, § 2.5.

132 Fadhil, Jiménez 2019, 168 and 170; cf. Oshima 2011,

punishment. The poetic technique used in this hymn is particularly noticeable. The opening hymnic section, in which the Sun-god is lyrically described in his daily journey as traversing the heavens and the mountains, gives way to a stringent depiction of just and wicked judges, honest and dishonest merchants, villains and pious men, all of them subjected to the verdict of Šamaš.[133]

This section perfectly illustrates what scholars define as 'the retribution principle', i.e. the belief that the god-fearing person, who acts honestly towards other people and shows their devotion to the deities, will be rewarded, while the wicked, who deceives others and neglects the religious duties, will be punished.[134]

The *Sitz im Leben* of the *Great Hymns and Prayers* is difficult to determine. As noted above, Sumerian and Akkadian hymns were probably mostly sung during temple liturgy, and prayers were recited in rituals. In many cases, we can assert that the primary context is the cultic and ritual performance, while the literary or 'textual-scribal' aspect of the texts that have been preserved takes on a secondary role.[135]

The *Great Hymns and Prayers*, however, seem to have been primarily perceived as written literary texts by the scribes who transmitted them. Indeed, the scribes often marked the manuscripts with rulings to visually indicate the poetic structure of the compositions, and in one case (MS A of the *Nabû Prayer*), there seem to be traces of the metrical break within the first column (see below in chapter 2).[136] In fact, the lack of a clear indication of a cultic or any other ritu-

133 The use of parallelism, especially antithetic parallelism, is particularly evident in the wisdom section of this hymn. For the meaning of antithetic parallelism in wisdom texts, see the Appendix.

134 For the concept of divine retribution in Assyriological studies, see Cohen 2013, 244-7 with references to previous literature, and cf. also Oshima 2018. It is precisely this principle that is put into doubt in the poem of the *Theodicy*, in which the sceptical sufferer laments the lack of divine justice, inasmuch that evil people often prosper, while the just ones suffer. The retribution system can be found in the Old Testament as well, and has been defined by the Biblical scholarship as the 'Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang' (on this see the presentation of this concept with a concise history of research provided by Freuling 2008).

135 Note the remark of Gabbay (2019, 203) with respect to the Emesal prayers: "Emesal prayers are primarily compositions used in the liturgy of Mesopotamian temples […], and only secondarily are they written texts". See also Shehata 2009, 223-4; cf. Pohl 2022, 10-12. This perspective stands in contrast to the earlier view held by many scholars regarding Mesopotamian hymns and prayers: traditionally, many considered the received texts as the finished form of the compositions, primarily serving scribal education and scholarly purposes. For example Kramer 1990, who considered the *eršemma* prayers as prevailingly used in education.

136 This does not preclude the possibility that these texts were also recited or sung with musical accompaniment. Indeed, the division into poetic strophes is present even in manuscripts of Old Babylonian hymns that were likely used in worship, such as the *Agušaya* or *Ištar Louvre hymns*, which were probably recited during cultic occasions (Pohl 2022, 10-11). Nevertheless, the consistency with which these material traits are

al context, the *recherché* vocabulary (which includes *hapax legomena* or extremely learned words taken from lexical lists), the hymno-epic features and the wisdom reflections led several scholars to assign a purely literary purpose to this group of compositions.[137]

This theory has also been applied to other Mesopotamian hymns and prayers, particularly those embedded within narrative or epic texts, which appear to be less suitable for liturgical use.[138]

The only context that we can confidently associate with the *Great Hymns and Prayers* is the school. This remains true even though not all the texts in the corpus are preserved in school manuscripts. While *Marduk*1, *Marduk*2 and the *Šamaš Hymn* are amply attested in school fragments, to the point where it can be assumed they were an integral part of syllabus,[139] i.e. a precise selection of texts copied within the scribal curriculum, other compositions in the group under study appear rarely or not at all in school texts. The reason for this imbalance is not clear: perhaps some of these texts were considered of particular value for the education of scribes, either because they focused more on wisdom and ethical themes (such as the *Šamaš Hymn*) or because they were connected to other popular texts of the

attested in the manuscripts of the *Great Hymns and Prayers* (such as the *Šamaš Hymn*) suggests a particular interest of the scribes in the poetic elements of the texts. A similar case can be found, for example, in the manuscripts of the *Theodicy*, which also display metric scanning. The acrostic structure, however, can only be observed by reading the manuscripts, which suggests that the written text was appreciated for its literary complexity, being as much a product of scholarship as of poetry. Nevertheless, oral recitation and attention to poetic structure are not mutually exclusive.

137 Von Soden 1971, 48; Reiner 1978, 190. But cf. Lambert 1982, who maintains that these texts must have been originally composed for a practical use in the cult. Recently Oshima (2011, 219) has suggested that *Marduk*2 might have been used during the *Akītu*-festival in the month of Kislīmu in Babylon, since the ritual instructions of that festival seem to mention part of the incipit of this text (see Çağırgan, Lambert 1991-93, 96). Nevertheless, there is no conclusive evidence ascertaining that the *šuilla* prayer attested in the ritual is really *Marduk*2.

138 On this see e.g. Halton, Svärd 2017, 52; Lenzi 2019, 162-3; Wilcke 1972-75, 544; Römer 1989, 646.

139 These three texts were among the most popular in the Babylonian scribal education of the first millennium, and were copied until the very end of the cuneiform culture. It is worth noting, in this regard, that an excerpt from the *Šamaš Hymn* is even preserved on a Graeco-Babyloniaca school exercise (BM 33769, see Rozzi 2021b). In first-millennium northern Babylonia, there seems to have been a 'Marduk Syllabus', that is, a group of texts focused on Marduk and particularly employed in the school curriculum. These texts were: *Ludlul*, *Marduk's Address*, *Enūma eliš*, *Marduk*1 and *Marduk*2 (on this see Heinrich-Jiménez 2021). Interestingly, the Šamaš hymn was also often copied among these compositions, together with the Aluzinnu text (Enrique Jiménez, private communication; cf. Fadhil, Jiménez forthcoming). This should not come as a surprise, since many attributes of Marduk and Šamaš have tended to overlap over the centuries, blurring the lines between the two deities. This is exemplified by the use of *balaĝ* prayers to Marduk in the Ebabbar temple in Neo-Babylonian Sippar (Gabbay 2013, 108-9); on some similarities between Marduk and Šamaš, see also Baragli 2022a, 113, 125.

curriculum (like *Marduk*1, which shares numerous similarities with *Ludlul*). It is also possible that there were more school manuscripts preserving other *Great Hymns and Prayers*, which have not come down to us. The reasons for the varying popularity of these texts remain unclear, and it cannot be entirely ruled out that at least some of them were employed in liturgy. Nonetheless, the fact that two of these texts are mentioned in commentaries (*Šamaš Hymn* and *Gula Bullussa-rabi*), and that one of them even received a specific commentary (*Marduk*2),[140] shows that at least some of the *Great Hymns and Prayers* were used in scholarly circles.

Whether their purpose was for recitation in religious ceremonies or if, on the other hand, they were primarily the subject of erudite study by a milieu of scholars, the *Great Hymns and Prayers* are undoubtedly highly sophisticated literary compositions, destined for a small intellectual elite only.

140 See Jiménez 2017c.