

6 Conclusions

The Akkadian literary corpus under study is labelled the *Great Hymns and Prayers*. It includes nine poetical compositions addressed to the gods Nabû, Marduk, Šamaš, Gula (*Gula Bullussa-rabi* and *Gula Syncretistic*), and Ištar, which share formal and linguistic features, and, occasionally, similar themes and formulations. Concretely, they are 200 lines or more long, and are divided into couplets or poetical strophes marked by horizontal rulings; moreover, they make use of a special literary idiom (the so-called ‘hymno-epic dialect’). In addition, these texts contain several passages that show ‘philosophical’ reflections which resemble wisdom literature.

Chapter 1 provides readers with a general overview of the *Great Hymns and Prayers*. First, the difficulties in defining the literary genres of Mesopotamian literature are outlined, for instance, the fragmentary state of preservation of the texts and the lack of native poetic classifications, are acknowledged. After a brief summary of the evolution of Sumerian and Akkadian hymns and prayers, I describe the standard structure and form of the two genres. Then I present the actual corpus of the Akkadian *Great Hymns and Prayers*, taking into account different aspects of the compositions, such as the layout of the tablets, the prosodic structure, language, spelling conventions and content. The majority of the texts exhibit the standard metrical pattern of Akkadian literature (i.e. the *Vierheber* verse) and display

numerous hymno-epic features, including shortened pronominal suffixes, ŠD-stem verbal forms and a special vocabulary. With only a few exceptions, almost all the tablets preserving the *Great Hymns and Prayers* are first-millennium copies, characterised by the typical traits of late manuscripts, e.g. irregular case endings, or apocope of final vowels; verbs can present overhanging vowels.

With respect to the content, I briefly describe several passages in the *Great Hymns and Prayers* which concern problems of human suffering and divine justice. Indeed these compositions employ various wisdom motifs which also occur in the poems of *Ludlul* and the *Theodicy*, and in some penitential prayers. The formulations and literary tropes appearing, for instance, in *Marduk1*, *Marduk2*, *Nabû Prayer* and *Ištar Prayer*, express the supplicant's feelings of despair, the loss of divine protection, their misfortunes and petitions; they reflect the standard language of the *diġiršadabba* and *eršaġuġa* penitential prayers.

Chapters 2 and 3 contain new critical editions of the *Nabû Prayer* and *Ištar Prayer*. Both texts are provided with an introduction, in which I present the stylistic and structural traits of the texts with a detailed prosodic analysis, a list of the hymno-epic traits and a description of the spelling conventions. Chapter 2 offers some observations with regard to the wisdom features of the *Nabû Prayer*, as well. The editions include transliterations, transcriptions and translations of the two prayers; furthermore, any remarkable or problematic philological issues are discussed in the commentaries. I have collated the texts from the original tablets and offer new readings and restorations, in part thanks to some recently discovered additional fragments. In addition, I was able to partially or completely reconstruct several lines in both prayers through comparison with textual parallels.

In chapter 4, I delve into the concept of intertextuality in the *Great Hymns and Prayers*, exploring their meaningful connections with other literary and technical texts. This investigation sheds light on how closely related these hymns and prayers are to each other, as well as how they engage in dialogues with various other texts present in the Akkadian literary and scholarly corpus. These intertextual connections provide valuable insights into the history of their composition and transmission. Lexical lists have proved to be particularly helpful in the understanding and reconstruction of the *Great Hymns and Prayers*, as scribes used them in the process of composition. Chapter 4 reveals how entries from the lexical sources were occasionally inserted into these texts, often in the form of poetic enumerations. The opposite process was also possible, and these learned texts were a source of inspiration for scholars composing scholarly commentaries and lexical texts.

The linguistic and stylistic complexity of this corpus is due not only to their hymno-epic features, including the special vocabulary partially borrowed from the lexical lists, but also to the extensive use of rhetorical devices. The poetic figures and imagery employed in these texts are often inspired by the natural world. In this respect, chapter 5 offers a poetical analysis of the corpus, illustrating the numerous phonetic, semantic, syntactic and morphological figures that enrich the texts under study.

The *Sitz im Leben* of the *Great Hymns and Prayers* remains difficult to define, since they do not bear any clear indication as to their use within a cultic or liturgical setting. Due to their sophisticated style and language, together with their length and the themes they develop, scholars have suggested that their scope might have been purely literary. Although the original purpose of these texts remains speculative, they were certainly employed in scribal schools. After all, most of the *Great Hymns and Prayers* are preserved on multiple manuscripts, many of them being school-exercise copies. As they were transmitted until the last period of the cuneiform culture, they were probably well-known texts, studied and copied as ‘classics’ of the Mesopotamian literature.

In conclusion, it is clear that these compositions were produced through a careful balance of lexical sources, wisdom themes, poetic forms and religious beliefs, thus showing the inextricable web of connections running through the various realms of Mesopotamian written tradition. In these texts, scribal scholarship is interwoven with poetry and creativity, and traditional schemes are moulded and reshaped into new forms. The *Great Hymns and Prayers*, intricately crafted and skilfully composed, were handed down through countless generations of scribes, carefully preserved within the scribal curriculum, and regarded as invaluable knowledge.

