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## Religious Poetry and Musical Performance under King Hammurāpi of Babylon and His Successors

### Summary

At the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE Mesopotamia enters into a new period which is marked by changes taking place on political, social and religious levels. Incoming Amorrite dynasties take over political power in central Babylonia, subsequently establishing their own essentially 'Akkadian' heritage. Throughout this process, former Sumerian traditions are maintained, overlapped or abandoned. There are many conspicuous innovations under King Hammurāpi and his successors. This chapter analyzes cuneiform manuscripts with the aim of identifying changes of temple and court music in terms of song genres, tuning systems and performance. It further searches for the initiators of these processes and their possible motivation on political and cultural grounds.

Keywords: cultic song repertoire; temple musicians; king; Akkadian vs. Sumerian; religious change; Babylonia; 2nd millennium BCE

Mit Beginn des 2. Jt. v. Chr. erlebt Mesopotamien einen historischen Wandel auf politischer, sozialer und religiöser Ebene. Aus dem Westen einwandernde so genannte amurritische Dynastien übernehmen die politische Macht in Zentralbabylonien, wo sie ihr eigenes ‚akkadisches‘ Erbe begründen. Ursprüngliche sumerische Traditionen Südmesopotamiens werden dabei entweder aufrechterhalten, überlagert oder aufgegeben. Vermehrt sind Neuerungen unter König Hammurāpi und seinen Nachfolgern zu verzeichnen. Basierend auf der keilschriftlichen Überlieferung werden in diesem Kapitel Wandlungsprozesse mit Auswirkungen auf die Tempel- und Hofmusik identifiziert und analysiert. Hierbei wird auch der Frage nach den Initiatoren solcher Prozesse und ihrer politischen wie kulturellen Motivation nachgegangen.

Keywords: Kultlieder; Tempelmusiker; König; Akkadisch vs. Sumerisch; religiöser Wandel; Babylonien; 2. Jt. v. Chr.

## 1 Introduction

Ancient Mesopotamian music has long been silent. Nevertheless, surviving textual and iconographic evidence provides insights into many of its facets, including its performance.<sup>1</sup> Since the region was a melting pot of ancient cultures, it is unsurprising that its music was under constant change throughout the four thousand years of Mesopotamian history. It therefore offers a useful background against which to explore relevance of Change to the subject of this volume. Changes are clearly discernable in the iconography. There, for example, new types and shapes of musical instruments indicate changes in musical performance and sounds over time. In most cases these changes seem linked to shifts in political power, or to the migration of peoples. Historic descriptions of Mesopotamian music therefore generally refer to ‘Sumerian’, ‘Babylonian’ or ‘Assyrian’ music, making clear distinctions between the different periods of ethnic and political history. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 show two examples of Mesopotamian musical instruments that frequently appear in different Ancient Near Eastern periods.

This chapter takes as its primary case study the written evidence of songs, hymns and prayers performed in public ceremonies and divine rituals.<sup>2</sup> From the information contained in these texts, which I will call the vocal repertoire of priests and temple musicians, I will isolate and discuss a change in ritual music performance which took place in the 2nd millennium BCE, or more precisely, contemporaneous with the reign of King Hammurāpi of Babylon and his successors. Further, I will explore a range of political and social motives which may have led to these changes. They both had an effect on the language and form of religious vocal repertoire, as well as on the institutional organization of poets and actors for public performance.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 Historical background

King Hammurāpi of Babylon was the central political figure in the cultural period which today is called ‘Old Babylonian’. The period began a few hundred years before his rise to power, and is marked by the demise of the third dynasty of Ur, in or around 2004 BCE. The end of the Old Babylonian period corresponds to the fall of the city of Babylon, King Hammurāpi’s capital, to the Hittite invasion of 1595 BCE (Fig. 3).<sup>4</sup>

1 This article draws on ideas explored in my dissertation *Musiker und ihr vokales Repertoire*; Shehata 2009. It is intended as a generally comprehensive version of an in-depth study in preparation.

2 Most of these texts can be reviewed on Sources of Early Akkadian Literature at <http://www.seal.uni-leipzig.de/> (visited on 19/07/2019).

3 In this chapter the character š in Sumerian and Akkadian approximates sh in English. Š is an emphatic s. Vowels with a macron, such as ū indicate a lengthening of the sound. Accented vowels such as ũ indicate a lengthening by ‘assimilation’.

4 All dates given in this article follow the so-called

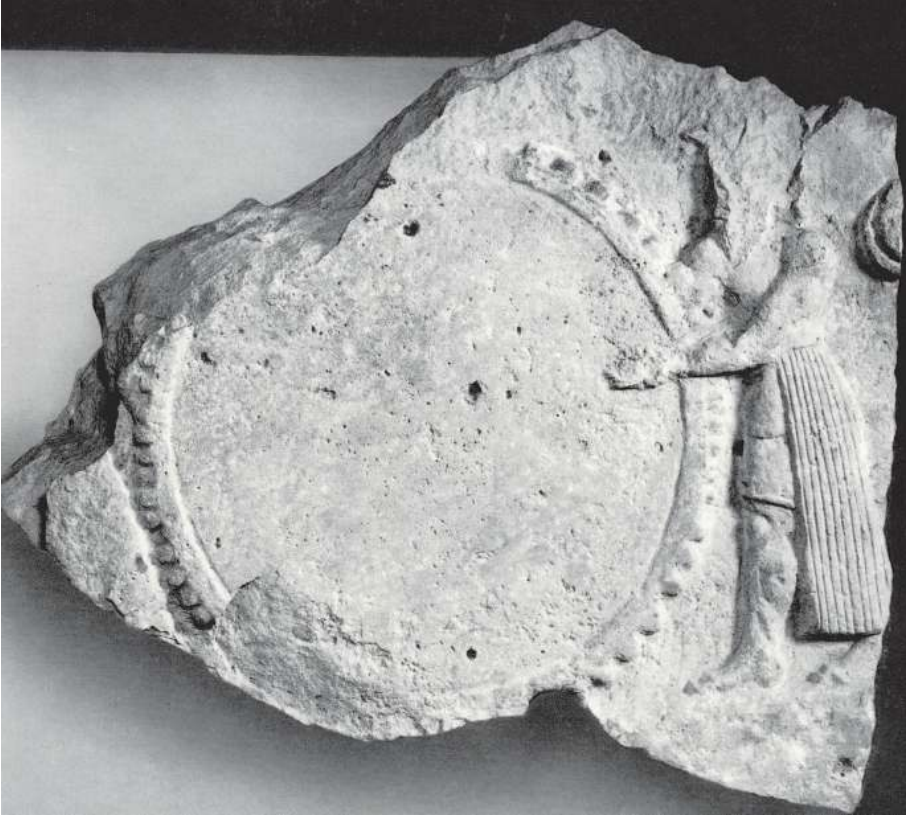


Fig. 1 Giant frame drum. The enormous drum depicted here in a music scene from the stela of Lord Gudea of Lagash (2122–2102 BCE) is only known from three other iconographic attestations, the latest of them dated to the reign of King Ur-Namma (2112–2095 BCE), the founder of the Third Dynasty of Ur. Nevertheless, from written sources we know that giant drums called *alû* in Akkadian were still in use until the Old Babylonian Period, i. e. the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE (see now Mirelman 2014). From the information given in the texts it remains unclear whether they looked exactly the same as their forerunners from the end of the 3rd millennium BCE. The fragment from the Gudea-stela was found in Girsu (modern Tello, Iraq) and is now held in the Musée du Louvre (AO 4573); for more information see Rashid 1984, 70–71.

The Old Babylonian Period circumscribes a cultural turning point which marks the end of a ‘Sumerian Era’ and the rise of several more or less independent Akkadian-speaking Amorrite dynasties in the major cities of Mesopotamia (Fig. 4). In contrast to the Sumerians, Amorrites migrated into central Mesopotamia over many decades, coming – as their name indicates – from the West.<sup>5</sup> Among their many local royal dynasties spread

Middle Chronology; a general overview of this period of Mesopotamian history is given in Mieroop 2004; with more details in Charpin 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Akkadian *amurru* means ‘West’; for the Amurru see further the introduction in Streck 2000, 21–76.



Fig. 2 The 'dancing dwarf'. This famous terracotta plaque, 15,5 cm in diameter, was purchased by the Iraq Museum of Baghdad in the 1930s (IM 32062). It shows a procession scene with female dancers, evidently trained monkeys and dwarf musicians. The 'dancing dwarfs' are a frequently represented in Old Babylonian iconography, especially in terracotta reliefs. In many instances they appear playing the lute, an instrument that is only verified for Mesopotamian music performance by the time of the great rulers of Akkade (2334–2193 BCE). Even though it was known to later Sumerian dynasties, still it was never shown in their music scenes. It obviously was not part of traditional Sumerian music performance; for more information about dwarfs and the Mesopotamian lute see Rashid 1984, 74–75 and Eichmann 1988.

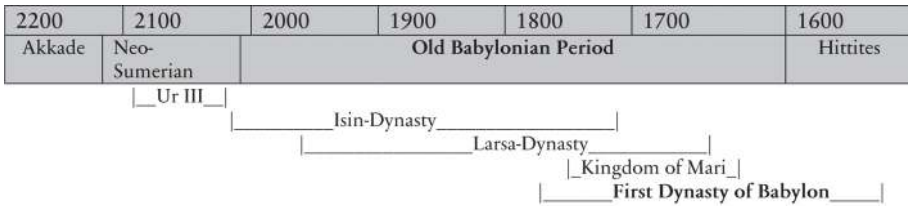


Fig. 3 Timeline for the Old Babylonian Period.

across Mesopotamia, three gained significant political power: the dynasty of the city of Isin in central Mesopotamia, which lasted for approximately two hundred years (2017 to 1793 BCE), the Larsa dynasty of King Rīm-Sîn, its last and most enigmatic figure (2025 to 1763 BCE), and finally Hammurāpi’s own Babylonian dynasty (1894 to 1595 BCE).

Even though the historical impact of the Amorrite dynasties conquering Mesopotamia essentially signalled the end of all Sumerian culture, the Sumerian language remained. It was taught in scribal schools, used for formulaic language in administrative texts, and kings continued to compose their royal inscriptions in it. Nevertheless, since Sumerian was already a dead language in this period, scribes either added Akkadian

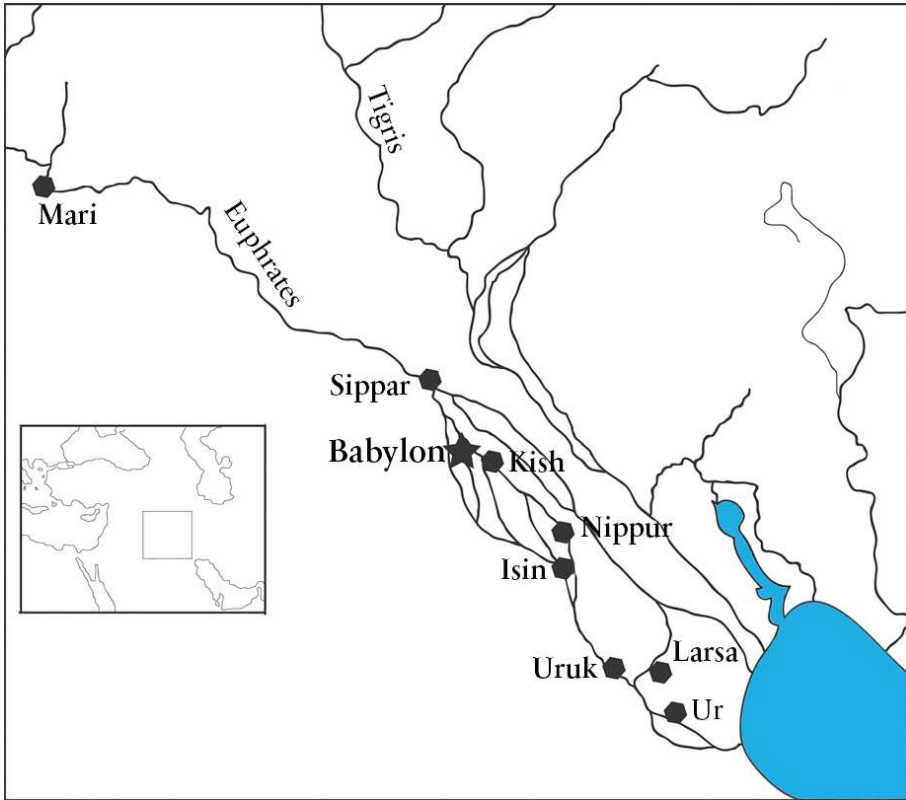


Fig. 4 Babylonia at the time of King Hammurâpi.

translations to originally Sumerian texts or wrote their new Sumerian compositions as Bilinguals. Though representing an extinct culture, the high status of Sumerian in the preservation of ancient traditions remained unaffected, a phenomenon which may be compared to the use of Latin in medieval times. Most remarkable however is its use as a spoken language: Sumerian and especially its register the Emesal,<sup>6</sup> became the main language of liturgy, a function which persisted until the Seleucid period (320 to 60 BCE).<sup>7</sup> In contrast to Sumerian, the dominant language in 3rd- and 2nd-millennium literary tradition, Akkadian was only widely introduced into literary writing at the outset of the

<sup>6</sup> In this chapter the word ‘register’ is used in the linguistic 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.

<sup>7</sup> There has been much discussion of the demise of all living Sumerian language. For an overview and a different opinion, see Woods 2006; for Emesal see recently Schretter 2018; for 1st-millennium prayers and cultic laments: Gabbay 2014.

Amurrite dynasties in 2nd-millennium Babylonia. Still the earliest known written evidence of a mythical poem written in Akkadian – the famous hymn to the sun-god *Šamaš* – dates to the 25th century BCE and comes from Southern Mesopotamia.<sup>8</sup> We therefore have to consider the existence of an Akkadian oral tradition including not only myths and epics but also hymns and prayers, which might have partially found its way into the Old Babylonian literary corpus.

After the fall of Ur as the capital city of the last Sumerian dynasty in central Mesopotamia, the legacy of Sumerian tradition was largely cared for and even cultivated by kings of the Isin dynasty. Most remarkable is their imitation of former Ur III hymns and prayers, which were written exclusively in Sumerian using the same poetic genres and phraseology.<sup>9</sup> In order to confirm their Sumerian heritage the kings of Isin had even established a Sumerian school (*edubba'a*) in their capital city following Sumerian prototypes in Nippur, the traditional centre of Sumerian scholarship, and in Ur, the former capital.<sup>10</sup> There is nevertheless some evidence of innovation in Isin music. Several very fragmentary clay tablets, which most probably preserve the lyrics of a royal hymn, bear the earliest evidence for the often-discussed heptatonic and diatonic scale system known mainly from later Babylonian and Assyrian texts.<sup>11</sup> Some of them seem to function as a kind of rudimentary music notation.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the tablets are poorly preserved and the date of their creation has not yet been fully determined. Therefore, no further statements can be made here about the totality of their meaning.

The first hymn known to us which is fully written in the Akkadian language was composed under King Gungunum of Larsa (1932 to 1906 BCE). Despite the poor preservation of the text, it was probably composed for the occasion of a royal votive to the moon god Nanna/Sîn.<sup>13</sup> By this time Akkadian was used for everyday language while Sumerian was reserved for religious literature so the appearance of this unique cultic song written entirely in Akkadian strongly points to some significant change in religious cult performance. Still we have to keep in mind, that its primary concern is royal ideology and not daily liturgy.

Better preserved are religious songs composed during the reign of the last king of the same dynasty, Rīm-Sîn of Larsa, about a century later. Among them is a hymn dedicated to the god Amurru, a deity who was newly introduced to the Sumerian pantheon during the Amurrite migration, at the earliest, towards the end of the 3rd millennium

8 Krebernik 1992.

9 For translations see Black et al. 1998–2006: *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (ETCSL) online at <http://etcs1.orinst.ox.ac.uk/> (visited on 19/07/2019), Oxford 1998–2006, Text numbers 2.4.1-5 and 2.5.1-8. For an elaborate study of Ur III and Isin royal hymns see Klein 1990; see also Brisch 2007, 19–31, for alternative opinions.

10 George 2005.

11 Kilmer 1993–1997.

12 Kilmer and Civil 1986; Kilmer and Tinney 1996; Kilmer and Tinney 1997.

13 van Dijk 1976, 9, 41; see Groneberg and Hunger 1978. Sources of Early Akkadian Literature File 2.1.21, and its recent edition see Wassermann 2018.

BCE.<sup>14</sup> The text is entirely written in Akkadian. Like many other hymns and prayers of that time it bears a subscript. A subscript is a paragraph at the very end of the text preserving information either about the scribe, the date of composition or the genre and dedication of the hymn. In our case, the subscript might denote the text as a *Tigi*-song in an unusual spelling (Example 1). This type of song is otherwise only attested in subscripts of Sumerian hymns.<sup>15</sup> It shows us that whilst the composition itself is devoted to an Amurrite god and is written in Akkadian, its form and performance are those of a traditional Sumerian song-type.

Example 1: Subscript of the Rīm-Sîn hymn to the Amurrite god Amurru, ll. 46f.

Translation:

‘It is a [Ti]gi<sup>2</sup>-song for the pleasure of habitations, in the name of the shepherd of the subjects of Sîn.’

Transliteration:<sup>16</sup>

Line 46: [t]i<sup>2</sup>.gi<sup>2</sup>(KI).am<sub>3</sub> i-na ga-ma-al šu-ba-tim i-na šu-mi-im

Lower edge: ša re-i bu-la-at i<sup>d</sup>.EN.ZU<sup>1</sup>

The ‘shepherd of the subjects of Sîn’, the moon god, is none other than King Rīm-Sîn himself who has commissioned this hymn to Amurru. Interestingly, there are no other Sumerian *Tigi*-songs known from the reign of this king, but only one single *Adab*, a song-type similar in form and content.<sup>17</sup> However, innovations in poetry composed under the kings of the Larsa Dynasty are not restricted to the Akkadian language. Poets of the same period are responsible for the creation of a whole new genre of Sumerian royal prayers hitherto unknown to the Sumerian literary tradition.<sup>18</sup>

### 3 Babylonian innovations in poetry and musical performance

Many more religious compositions written in Akkadian are known from the reign of King Hammurāpi of Babylon and his successors (ca. 1792 to 1595 BCE) than from any previous period. The best example, because of its innovative character and uniqueness,

14 Gurney 1989, 15–19, no. 1; Edzard 1987–1990.

15 Shehata 2009, 251–257.

16 Reading after Gurney 1989, No. 1, and Sources of Early Akkadian Literature File 2.1.2.2, line 46–47 with emendations by the present author.

17 Black et al. 1998–2006, 2.6.9.8; Brisch 2007, 241–244; Shehata 2009, 251–257.

18 Referred to after their refrain as *lugal-mu*-prayers; newly edited and discussed by Brisch 2007.

is a narrative song called *Agušaya*, after its Akkadian subscript, which may be translated as ‘the whirling [one]’.<sup>19</sup> *Agušaya* is an epithet, signifying the Akkadian goddess of war and love, Ištar.

In essence, this mythical song tells of a newly created war goddess named *Šaltu* who threatens all divine orders and the world’s existence. In the end, Ea, the god of wisdom manages to calm *Šaltu* down and averts all the threats posed by her. It is important to note that the story is not known from any other written source. In fact, it has no known Sumerian forerunner. Nevertheless the nub of its plot, the soothing of an outraged goddess who has been bringing danger to the world order, is a common enough motif amongst Sumerian liturgical compositions, especially for the Emesal-prayers *Balaġ* and *Eršema*.<sup>20</sup> Prayers and lamentations on this topic presumably had an apotropaic purpose.<sup>21</sup> They are perhaps to be seen as tools for influencing raging gods or goddesses in order to avert evil and the destruction of mankind. According to the last lines of the song *Agušaya*, it was composed on behalf of King Hammurāpi:

Example 2: *Agušaya* B, Column V, 23–29

‘And the king, who has heard me  
with this Song  
[which is] a sign of your (Ištar’s) warriorship,  
a praise of yours! –  
Hammurāpi, with this Song  
your praise has been fulfilled  
under his reign,  
let him live forever!’

Although the text is written in Akkadian, its function conforms to Sumerian archetypes. Furthermore, the narration is interspersed with rubrics: technical terms with various meanings subdividing the narration into episodes or paragraphs. Such rubrics are typical of Sumerian poetic literature. The poem of *Agušaya* especially contains those appearing in the Emesal *Balaġ*-prayers. Altogether *Agušaya* has ten numbered ki-ru-gu<sub>2</sub> sections, literally the ‘place of opposing,’ each followed by an antiphon, the Sumerian ġiš-gi<sub>4</sub>-ġal<sub>2</sub>.<sup>22</sup> As to our current knowledge, the ki-ru-gu<sub>2</sub> rubric marks episodes of the song

19 The title is related to the Akkadian verb *gāšum* ‘to run, hasten.’ The text was re-edited by Groneberg in 1997; important additional comments are made by Streck 2010. For speculations on its ritual background in connection to cultic whirling dances dedicated to the goddess, see Groneberg 1997, 71–72.

20 Shehata 2009, 72–78; Gabbay 2014.

21 Gabbay 2014, 15–16; Groneberg 1997, 59, has already pointed to the apotropaic function of *Agušaya*, which may also be indicated by the sentence on the tablet’s edge *uttār MUŠ*, ‘the snake has been driven back’.

22 Groneberg 1997, 61–62, 71–72.



which were to be performed at different cultic places.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the closing rubric usually appearing in Sumerian liturgy, the *ki-šu<sub>2</sub>* ‘place of covering(?)’, is missing in the Akkadian *Agušaya*.

In the case of *Agušaya*, we may reasonably conclude that it was performed in much the same way as in Sumerian liturgy, namely in the *Balaĝ*-laments. It might have been an attempt to replace formerly Sumerian traditional prayers in divine ritual dedicated to the Sumerian counterpart of the goddess Ištar, which is Inana.

As I stated earlier, the song of *Agušaya* is unique in form and content. There is no other example of an Akkadian song using these particular Sumerian rubrics. Interestingly too, the text has so far survived in only one version. It seems not to have been copied and handed down for later generations of scribes or priests. Only its title reappears, in a literary catalogue dating to the Middle Assyrian period. I will return to this later.

A second example of Akkadian songs meant for liturgical use is preserved in a catalogue of lamentations addressing the mother goddess Dingirmah, or Mami.<sup>24</sup> It is a single tablet listing the titles of eight songs altogether, with only two of them in Sumerian. Their main topic is lamentation about destroyed cities or temples, and they bear titles like ‘Woe! Her temple’ or ‘The temple’s plight’. According to the tablet’s subscript the songs are attributable to the mourning women, a group of cultic performers whose profession – according to the evidence – was not obviously present in earlier texts, at least with ownership of its own written repertoire. Written evidence for mourning women in second-millennium Babylonia is extremely rare, presumably because they did not belong to the literate class in society. Their absence from temple administration may point towards a greater private demand of their mourning activities, accompanying private funerals or other similar occasions.<sup>25</sup> The song catalogue presented in the following Example is preserved on an undated cuneiform tablet, but according to form and style it must have been composed somewhere around the time of King Hammurāpi’s reign over Babylonia.<sup>26</sup>

Example 3: Ancient song-catalogue of the genre *Amerakūtum* ‘(Art) of the mourning woman’

2 tablets:<sup>27</sup> ‘Like a cow which roared like a bull!’ (*Akkadian*)

4 one-column-tablets: ‘Alas! Song of Woe! It has become a devastated haunted

23 Shehata 2009, 348–349.

24 Shaffer 1993, 209–210.

25 For the evidence see Shehata 2009, 104–106.

26 Two hitherto unpublished cuneiform tablets held in the British Museum, London, preserve the lyrics of such a song (Sources of Early Akkadian Litera-

ture File 3.1.2.5). Its content conforms to the titles preserved in the aforementioned catalogue. The edition of the tablets is separately in preparation by the present author as well as by Takayashi Oshima.

27 Each catalogue line begins with a scribal note of the number of tablets that the composition occupies.

place? (*Sumerian*)

4 one-column-tablets: 'Woe! Her temple!' (*Akkadian*)

7 one-column tablets: 'Her mercy is praised!' (*Akkadian*)

7 one-column tablets: 'Like a cow which roared like a bull?' (*Akkadian*)

8 one-column tablets: 'The duties of the house?' (*Akkadian*)

6 one-column tablets: 'I consulted the city?' (*Akkadian*)

1 one-column tablet: 'Woe! she says. Woe! she says?' (*Sumerian*)

Two tablets and 37 one-column tablets of the '(Art) of the mourning woman' of Dingirmah.

City laments are a common genre known primarily from Sumerian literature. Apart from five such compositions dedicated to major Sumerian cities like Nippur and Ur,<sup>28</sup> the topics of city laments are dealt with in the already mentioned *Balaġ*-prayers. These liturgical prayers in Emesal Sumerian belonged to the repertoire of the lamentation priest (Sumerian *gala*, Akkadian *kalû*) and remained in use in divine ritual until the Seleucid Period (320 to 63 BCE). The Akkadian city laments presented here through a literary catalogue are unique. As a result, their interpretation remains rather difficult. Nevertheless they again seem to point towards the same development, of a changing religious repertoire. As in the poem of *Agušaya* mentioned above, so also the Akkadian laments to the Mother Goddess are an expansion of former Sumerian liturgy. I assume they were composed and collected under Babylonian supervision. Possible reasons for such an innovative programme might be to strengthen the presence of mourning women in public religious ceremonies. Nevertheless, since no other sources seem to confirm such a development, it remains conjectural.

New Akkadian poetry, hymns and prayers to be performed on religious occasions continued to be written during the reign of Hammurāpi's successors. King Samsuiluna (1749 to 1712 BCE) for example initiated the composition of a hymn dedicated to the Akkadian goddess Nanaya.<sup>29</sup> Great myths and narratives were also compiled, like the Akkadian flood story *Atramhasis*, written during the reign of King Ammišaduqa (1646 to 1626 BCE). Under Hammurāpi's grandson King Ammiditana (1683–1647 BCE) there is evidence of highly skilled poets writing eloquent and unique compositions like the *Hymn to Ištar*<sup>30</sup> or the Babylonian *Man and his God*.<sup>31</sup> Still, regarding their form and content, they seem to imitate Sumerian compositions, for example the Akkadian *Hymn to Ištar* reminds us of Sumerian hymns belonging to the genres *Tigi* and *Adab*, while the Akkadian *Man and his God* also has a Sumerian counterpart (ETCSL 5.2.4). However, genuine Akkadian song types were also introduced for ritual use. This is the case with

28 See Black et al. 1998–2006, 2.2.2–6.

29 Von Soden 1938.

30 Thureau-Dangin 1925.

31 Lambert 1987.

an emergent genre called *irtum* (literally ‘bosom’ or ‘breast’).<sup>32</sup> Only five of these songs are affirmed and these are on a very badly preserved tablet dating from the reign of King Ammiditana (Example 4). They are quite short compositions dealing with topics of love and fertility connecting the king with the goddess Ištar. The only remaining Sumerian rubric these songs contain is <ĝiš-gi<sub>4</sub>-ĝal<sub>2</sub>>, the ‘antiphon.’ From this clue we may reasonably conclude that they were performed by at least two opposing singers or choruses.

Example 4: Example of an *irtum*, a ‘bosom’-Song (Late Ammiditana, 1683 to 1647 BCE) Column IV, 6’–11’

‘The signs of your well-being;  
and the ever-lasting of your life;  
may Ištar give as a gift to you, Ammiditana. [...]’

Antiphon (ĝiš-gi<sub>4</sub>-ĝal<sub>2</sub>)

a ‘bosom’-song, belonging to the song-series: ‘Where is my Lover, the exalted one?’

The only other evidence for *irtum*-songs comes from the Middle Assyrian literary catalogue mentioned above, dating from about five hundred years later (ca. 1200 to 1100 BCE). This extensive catalogue, known as KAR 158,<sup>33</sup> has eight columns, with some 350 lines listing the titles of Sumerian and Akkadian songs. In its summation of column viii the catalogue assigns *irtum*-songs to each of the seven diatonic and heptatonic scales we know for Babylonia from the beginning of the second millennium onwards (Example 5). As I have already described, the earliest evidence for these scales dates from the Isin-Dynasty (2017 to 1793 BCE). Apart from the *irtum*-songs, there are only two other occasions assigning the otherwise unknown Akkadian *šitru*-songs to the diatonic and heptatonic scales or modes. Altogether, the seven scales seem to be a feature of a music performance first introduced in course of the Amurrite immigration. As was first proposed by Anne Kilmer,<sup>34</sup> it might therefore be referred to as an “Akkadian” music in contrast to previous “Sumerian” forms of music. Moreover, it seems that these songs were not used in public divine ritual until the complete demise of all vestiges of Sumerian culture in Mesopotamia.

32 Groneberg 1999; Wasserman 2016, 104–107; Sources of Early Akkadian Literature, File 4.1.3.4.

33 No. 158 in KAR (Ebeling 1919/1920). For a translit-

eration and translation see Sources of Early Akkadian Literature, File 10.3 and Hecker 2013.

34 Kilmer 1993–1997, 472.

Example 5: Middle Assyrian Literary Catalogue KAR 158 Column viii, 45–52

23 *irātu ša ešerte akkadû*

‘23 ‘bosom’-songs of the mode *Išartu*, Akkadian

17 *irātu ša kitme*

17 ‘bosom’-songs of the mode *Kitmu*

24 *irātu ša ebbūbi*

24 ‘bosom’-songs of the mode *Ebbūbu*

4 *irātu ša pīte*

4 ‘bosom’-songs of the mode *Pītu*

[...] *irātu ša nīd qabli*

[...] ‘bosom’-songs of the mode *Nīd qabli*

[...] *irātu ša nīš tubri*

[...] ‘bosom’-songs of the mode *Nīš tubri*

[...] *irātu ša qablīte*

[...] ‘bosom’-songs of the mode *Qablītu*’

According to all the examples given above, the first steps taken towards a change in religious repertoire occurred under the last kings of the Larsa dynasty. Larsa poets did not only enlarge the curriculum of song types within Sumerian liturgy, they were also the first to create hymns written entirely in Akkadian, even though their compositions were at first restricted to royal praise.

King Hammurāpi of Babylon himself seems to have compelled poets and composers to continue this tradition, commissioning for example a mythic song of Akkadian origin to be prepared for cultic performance. But even though the text of *Agušaya* was written in Akkadian, the manner in which it was performed still seems to have followed Sumerian archetypes. Under the reign of his grandson Ammiditana (1683 to 1647 BCE) a sophisticated repertoire of Akkadian liturgy using hymns, prayers and myths was created, establishing new types of songs and cultic hymns to be performed on religious occasions.

Even if Sumerian had not yet been abandoned from all Babylonian music performance and had been used continuously for royal hymns and prayers,<sup>35</sup> still the cultic repertoire used in divine ritual performance had clearly undergone a fundamental change, most certainly in the language used, perhaps in other aspects too.

At this point it is necessary to consider the possible motives lying behind this development. If King Hammurāpi really initiated the creation of new Akkadian myths and

35 See Black et al. 1998–2006 under *Royal praise poetry of the First Dynasty of Babylon* 28.8.2-5; royal inscriptions, a very traditional Mesopotamian genre, were written as bilinguals, i. e. in Sumerian with an Akka-

dian translation, or entirely in Akkadian; for bilingual royal inscriptions, written in Sumerian with an Akkadian translation, see Frayne 1990, 332–438.

| God                          | Hymn | Lament | Love Lyric |
|------------------------------|------|--------|------------|
| Marduk                       | 3    | 1      | –          |
| Ištar/Nanaya                 | 7    | 1      | 16         |
| Mami/Bēlet-ili<br>/Dingirmah | 2    | 9      | –          |
| Other                        | 7    | 10     | –          |
| King                         | 3    | 1      | –          |
| Unknown                      | 7    | 5      | 8          |
| Bilinguals                   | 20   | 8      | –          |

Tab. 1 Overview of the topics of Old Babylonian Akkadian religious compositions and the persons to whom they were dedicated.

hymns, what were his reasons? Why did he not follow former Sumerian poetic tradition, as had the kings of Isin before him?

The question I would raise is whether there might be other motives underlying this development than the general spread of Amurrite and Old Babylonian Akkadian in everyday speech and the dying out of Sumerian. One possible explanation may be found in the change of everyday cult and its addressees. Actually the rise of Hammurāpi and his Babylonian dynasty caused not only important political but also religious change. With the rise of the city of Babylon, its protector god Marduk became the chief god of all Babylonia.<sup>36</sup> This obviously introduced a need for new cult songs, hymns and prayers that addressed him in divine ritual and public performance. As was shown above, this was obviously true in the case of the god Amurru/Martu, favoured by King Rim-Sin of Larsa.

The table 1 gives an overview of the topics of Old Babylonian Akkadian religious compositions and the persons to whom they were dedicated. Songs to the god Marduk are not many, though the reason for this might be a lack of textual evidence.<sup>37</sup> Instead, we may notice the many love lyrics for Ištar and Nanaya, two important Akkadian goddesses of Love. Along with the already mentioned *irtum*-songs most compositions labelled as love lyrics are genuine Akkadian genres. The only Sumerian genre comparable to them are *Balbale*-Songs.<sup>38</sup> But in contrast to the Akkadian songs they hardly ever address a ruling king by his name.<sup>39</sup> In the case of the god Marduk, the newly composed Akkadian songs dedicated to him are still too scarce to be put forward as a leading motive for the change of Babylonian religious repertoire, especially since the same god Marduk was also addressed in Sumerian.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See in general Sommerfeld 1987–1990, 363–364.

<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately the Old Babylonian Period is very badly documented in the capital city itself, but we

may expect more pieces of Babylonian poetic literature to appear in the course of future archaeological

A useful next step would be to review the actors involved in the invention and performance of poetic texts. What part did they play in the introduction of new song material? How far were they bound to traditions? Or did they act rather more freely and may thus be referred to as the initiators of the observed change?

#### 4 Professions and institutions

Responsibility for the composition and performance of religious cult songs and liturgy was traditionally in the hands of an élite consisting of highly skilled scholars, priests, liturgists and musicians. Despite the large number of ancient compositions, including hymns, prayers and epics, not much is known about the composers of these texts. In fact, attribution of human authorship was almost certainly inconceivable in Mesopotamia. It was believed that religious songs, hymns, epics or myths were created, or at least inspired, by the gods themselves.<sup>41</sup> The god primarily responsible for such inspiration was Ea, the god of wisdom and art. Professions under his protection included priests and scholars as well as musicians.

Ea was also a patron of an institution called *mumum*, which is attested for the first time in the Old Babylonian period.<sup>42</sup> A *mumum* is attested for the city of Mari in western Syria, and also most obviously for Babylon.<sup>43</sup> Better documented is the one for the city of Mari, where it was attached to the palace, with the musicians and poets acting within its walls under the direct control of the reigning king. The same must have been the case with the *mumum* of Babylon, where scholars, scribes and musicians accomplished their creative work most probably for the contentment of their sovereign, Hammurāpi.

In his famous study on priests and other temple personnel in the Old Babylonian Period Johannes Renger had already observed a serious change taking place with the beginning of Hammurāpi's reign. While former influential positions like the en-priest(ess) – the traditional head of a temple in the Sumerian south – disappeared, new priestly offices were introduced. Renger therefore believes that King Hammurāpi may have re-

excavations there.

38 Sefati 1998; Shehata 2009, 293–297, with a general overview.

39 Shehata 2009, 327–333.

40 Sumerian hymns to Marduk (or Asalluhi, another name for Marduk), dating from the reign of Hammurāpi and his successors, are rare and badly preserved. See Black et al. 1998–2006, 2.8.2.1–2.8.5.

41 See Foster 1991 on authorship in Mesopotamia.

42 Pruzsinszky 2010, 113, and Michalowski 2010, 201–203, have shown that *mumum* is the equivalent of the Sumerian *umun/m* which housed musicians, opposite to the *edubba'a*, where scribes were trained. Still, since *mumum* is a genuine Akkadian word, I assume also the institution to be of an 'Akkado-Amurrite' origin.

43 Ziegler 2007, 77–78; Shehata 2010.

organized the temple's clergy, adjusting and replacing them according to his own preferences.<sup>44</sup>

Such changes also involved the 'creative' personnel of a temple. Before Hammurāpi's conquest of southern Babylonia – formerly Sumer – each major Sumerian cult city had its own chief musician associated with its principal temple (Sumerian *nar-gal*, Akkadian *nargallum*). This situation seems to have changed under Hammurāpi. From his time onwards there is evidence that the chief musician, in particular, became increasingly attached to the royal administration and to the king. In addition we read of quite a few musicians receiving land as a present from their kings. Such properties were given to subjects as a reward for special duties.<sup>45</sup> At the same time the recipient became obligated to the benefactor and his interests. Assuming that priests and chief musicians were responsible for the composition of religious texts, this might be evidence for Hammurāpi's progressive direction of creative processes.

The best documented example of such patronage is in the city of Mari. Not only were common musicians gathered by the palace, but also liturgists or lamentation priests; and there they were educated by the king's chief musician.<sup>46</sup> By engaging in this practice, the king of Mari could have gained control over the composition and performance of religious repertoire, actions which would normally have remained within the purview of the temple.

The situation in Mari raises the question of how such liturgists, especially the chief lamentation priests (Sumerian *gala-mah*, Akkadian *kalamabhum*), were treated under the rulers of the Babylonian Dynasty. Here, it is quite astonishing that there is not a single attestation of this position at any temple during the reign of Hammurāpi,<sup>47</sup> even though – both before and after – there is evidence for at least one such representative at every major temple in former Sumerian cities.<sup>48</sup> Such a remarkable gap in the evidence clearly demands an explanation. Was Hammurāpi himself responsible for it? Did he dismiss all the chief lamentation priests from their positions? Why would he do that? The traditional repertoire of lamentation priests consists of prayers and laments written entirely in Sumerian. If we assume that the Akkadian *Agušaya* – a composition commissioned by Hammurāpi himself – replaced Sumerian liturgical compositions in religious performance, might not the temple's traditionalists have balked? Is the sum of evidence then presenting us with a conflict taking place between Hammurāpi and the temple's liturgists? Again, since we lack documentation of Hammurāpi's acting towards lamentation priests, these suggestions must for the time being remain conjectural.

44 Renger 1969, 115–116 and Renger 1975, 110.

45 Shehata 2009, 25.

46 Ziegler 2007, 64–65.

47 Shehata 2009, 63–64.

48 For single attestations see now also the French online archive ARCHIBAB at <http://www.archibab.fr/> (visited on 19/07/2019).

Interestingly, evidence for the presence of chief lamentation priests can be found under Hammurāpi's successors. The reign of his immediate successor Samsuiluna was marked by a period of military and economic disaster.<sup>49</sup> This situation led to gradual decline for all the major cities in southern Babylonia. Ur, Nippur and Isin, former centres of Sumerian tradition, were adversely affected. The last text found in southern Babylonia dates from Samsuiluna's thirtieth reigning year. As a consequence of this decline, religious institutions, including cults and their attendants as well as the gods to whom they were dedicated, were transferred to the major cities in northern Babylonia, among them Sippar, Kiš and the capital, Babylon.

From this time forward there were many more priests and musicians assembled in one Babylonian city than ever before. Each of them was assigned to a different temple and its god. Hitherto, each major city had had only one chief lamentation priest and one chief musician who were responsible for all the city's temples and their ritual performances. The new situation, including many more chief musicians and lamentation priests within one city, must have demanded the reorganization of the old religious hierarchies within the city's temples. This in turn seems to have offered scope for new relationships to develop between the king and the chief lamentation priests. One indication of this changing relationship might be in the new expressions formulated in seal inscriptions. These show a new allegiance to the reigning king (Example 6) whereas previously the so-called 'servant line' of such inscriptions had contained the name of a god or goddess as a means of ascribing the seal's priestly owner to a particular temple. This change might offer a clue as to a different way of binding a new generation of priests to the king's interests.<sup>50</sup>

Example 6: Seal inscriptions of chief lamentation priests/liturgists during the reigns of Kings Ammišaduqa and Samsuditana.

(1) Chief lamentation priest of the god Zababa in Kiš (1639 to 1620 BCE).<sup>51</sup>

*Old:* Nanna-šalasad, son of Mea'imriagu, servant of the god Nergal.<sup>52</sup>

49 For an overview see Pientka 1998, 6–21.

50 This devotion to the king expressed in seal inscriptions is also attested for other priests; see for example Frayne 1990, E4.3.11.2001–2005 and Tanret 2010, 207. There the expression 'servant of King Hammurāpi' appears only twice (ibid. No. 8). In the case of the sanga, which is to say the highest priestly office at a temple traditionally in northern Babylonia, Tanret has deduced, that this process started

after Hammurāpi's eighteenth reigning year; Tanret 2010, 247–249. Contemporaneously the Marduk temple gained more power. Old Babylonian seal inscriptions can be searched on ARCHIBAB at <http://www.archibab.fr/> (visited on 19/07/2019).

51 Shehata 2009, 217–218, 389.

52 Seal J of tablet Finkelstein 1972, 13, 203: <sup>d</sup>šeš.ki-ša3-la2-sud / dumu me-a-im-ri-a-ġu10 / ir3 <sup>d</sup>ne3.eri11.[gal].



*New*: Nanna-šalasud, chief lamentation priest, son of Me'a-imriagu, servant of King Ammišaduqa.<sup>53</sup>

(2) Chief lamentation priest of the goddess Inana from Uruk, worshipped in Kiš around 1624 BCE.<sup>54</sup>

Riš-Marduk, chief lamentation priest, son of E- [...], servant of king Samsuditanā.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, changes are not restricted to musicians and liturgists. There is further evidence for the introduction of new cultic personnel in religious performance. In addition to the mourning women already mentioned, there was also the cultic dancer, the *huppû*, whose origin was most probably in Syria where the profession is already affirmed during the third millennium BCE.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, in Mesopotamia the involvement of the *huppû* during public religious festivities is first attested during the Larsa dynasty.<sup>57</sup> *Huppû*-dancers were also active under Hammurāpi of Babylon, at which time, like musicians, they received royal grants of land. Indeed, their supervisor during public religious ceremonies was the king's chief musician. Again, this further demonstrates the palace's increasing control over many of the temple's religious performance activities.

## 5 Conclusion

A change of music and its performance taking place in Mesopotamia at the beginning of the second millennium BCE is clearly evident in the iconographical record (see for example Fig. 2). Both the iconographical and philological evidence demonstrates that the new Amurrite rulers reigning over major Mesopotamian and former Sumerian cities developed their individual identities and their own ways of expressing themselves through language, art and music. Nevertheless, not all of these independent dynasties seem to have been able, or willing, to establish their own wholly exclusive socio-cultural identities. The kings of Isin in particular devoted themselves to the former Sumerian culture, imitating the last Sumerian rulers of the city of Ur by composing similar hymns and

53 Seal of tablet Finkelstein 1972, 13, 268: <sup>d</sup>ŠEŠ.KI-ša<sub>3</sub>-la<sub>2</sub>-sud / gala-mah / [dumu] me-a-im-ri-a-ġu<sub>10</sub> / ir<sub>3</sub> am-mi-[ša-du-qa<sub>2</sub>]. Though the tablet itself dates from the accession year of the following king, Samsuditanā, the seal was already in use under Ammišaduqa.

54 Shehata 2009, 218, 390.

55 Seal C of tablet Finkelstein 1972, 13, 90: ri-iš-

[<sup>d</sup>AMAR.UTU] / gala-mah / dumu e-[...] / ir<sub>3</sub> sa-am-[su-di-ta-na].

56 Ziegler 2007, 261–276; Shehata 2009, 40–51.

57 The Seven-Day Ritual is attested on a single tablet listing deliveries of offerings and participants, among them musicians, liturgists and dancers; it is published by J. G. Westenholz and A. Westenholz 2006, no. 1 and discussed in Shehata 2009, 136–146.

prayers, and continuing to express them in the Sumerian language. It must surely be motivated by the fact that the Isin Dynasty had emerged directly from the Ur III-Dynasty. Its founder King Išbi-Erra (2017 to 1985 BCE) had utilized his position as governor of Isin and general under the last Ur III King, Ibbi-Suen, and had practiced deception upon his sovereign in order to assume rulership over Sumer. Keeping Sumerian traditions alive would have been a powerful tool in the new king's legitimization, when he himself was not of Sumerian origin. Similar phenomena are discussed elsewhere in this volume: for example by Ingrid Furniss who considers the Chinese dynasty of Chu, its retention of the ritual music *yayue* ('Refined Music') of the previous Zhou dynasty, and how Chu music in turn continued to influence music of the Han after Chu's demise in the 3rd century BCE.<sup>58</sup>

Akkadian religious literature first surfaces during the reign of the kings of Larsa, especially during the time of their last enigmatic ruler Rīm-Sîn (1822–1763). But their songs still seem to have drawn their style and form from Sumerian song types. Further steps in developing an Akkadian liturgy were undertaken under the reign of King Hammurāpi of Babylon. The mythical song of *Agušaya* dedicated to the goddess Ištar is a remarkable example of innovative Akkadian poetry, initiated by the king himself. So, even though Sumerian prayers continued to exist, it seems as if scholars and poets were encouraged to compile new liturgy in their own language for use in public religious festivities. The new compositions might in some instances have replaced former Sumerian songs. The king himself may have initiated and supported this development by establishing a new institution for creative work, under his own control, by reorganizing the temple's personnel and by binding individual musicians to himself. His primary aim in doing this might have been to gain more control over the processes of creating and performing public religious vocal repertoire. One reason for his direct involvement might have been to establish a new cult for the Babylonian god Marduk and native Akkadian goddesses, especially Ištar and Nanaya. During the course of this development new cultic personnel not attested in Sumerian tradition were introduced, to act in religious ceremonies. However, whether or not this development was in some way connected with the absence of chief lamentation priests during King Hammurāpi's reign has still to be determined.

Under Hammurāpi's grandson Ammiditana, who managed to stabilize the now shrunken Babylonian empire, many more religious compositions of indigenous Babylonian origin were performed. Furthermore, it was only at this time that we have evidence that the system of seven diatonic scales found its way into public religious music, based on the *irtum* love-songs. Finally, it seems that a new generation of liturgists was

58 See Furniss, this volume.

established among the Babylonian temples, perhaps so that liturgical practice would be more closely controlled by the king.

Further evidence will be needed in order to test such theories fully. However, I have tried to show that changes taking place in the written material of the Old Babylonian Period are not only a concern of literary history but are also relevant to music history. The appearance of new song compositions for public religious festivities hints at the emergence of a new system of music performance. This is further confirmed by new imagery depicting different musical instruments and performers in cultic contexts. By reviewing this change through different perspectives I have tried to deduce what might have been the underlying motivation. Admittedly, it is a matter of debate as to whether this should be interpreted as representing a political conflict that arose in Babylon between the king and the temple's élite, or whether we might speak of a reform of religious performance undertaken by the kings in order to establish their own gods and cults in public ceremonies. In this connection the Babylonian Creation Myth *Enūma eliš* may be relevant.<sup>59</sup> Although it is known only from sources of the 1st millennium BCE, it is nevertheless an innovative Akkadian composition, celebrating the Babylonian god Marduk as the chief god of all former Sumerian panthea. This newly established position would surely have served to reflect and display the extensive power of an earthly sovereign reigning over all his subjects.<sup>60</sup>

It should not escape our attention that the new hymns and prayers were now able to be understood by a larger number of the Akkadian-speaking public than before, not only because of the nature of the words used but also because of the way they were expressed musically. During the reign of King Hammurāpi and his successors the vocal repertoire and its performances were evidently adjusted to the musical expectations of a mainly Amurrite population. There is no question but that this was a superior way to communicate to the public the king's self-appraisal and his positions on issues. Furthermore, it signalled a separation from old traditions – whether it suited traditional priests or not – especially since this area of public music performance was an ideal medium for generating and disseminating royal propaganda.

Interestingly, most of the innovative Babylonian compositions initiated by Old Babylonian kings are what scholars call 'unique,' meaning that no later copies of them have yet surfaced. Still, new knowledge continues to be gleaned from the texts to this day. At least some of these compositions, among them the *irtum* love-songs and probably also *Agušaya* were cited in the already mentioned Middle Assyrian catalogue KAR 158. Unfortunately, we do not know anything about the compiler or the owner of this catalogue, let alone his intentions in compiling it.

59 Lambert 2013; Gabriel 2014.

60 See for example Maul 1999.

The ultimate effect of this change, in which Hammurāpi of Babylon was one of the most important and influential figures, was finally realized at the end of the 2nd millennium BCE. By this time there was a separation of all royal religious repertoire from the temple's daily liturgy. While liturgy was written in a special liturgical register of Sumerian, namely Emesal, and remained rather static, aiming to hand down the prayers from ancient times in their exact wordings, all royal poetry reserved for the king's self-portrayal was in contrast creative and innovative in regards to its form, language and most likely also to the manner of its performance in public.

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1984, 75, fig. 57. 3 D. Shehata. 4 D. Shehata after Wasserman 2003. **TABLES:** 1 D. Shehata.

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