

Profile of Enheduanna, Priestess of Inanna

Ancient Author and Poet

By **Jone Johnson Lewis**

Updated March 05, 2019

Enheduanna is the earliest author and poet in the world that history knows by name.

Enheduanna (Enheduana) was the daughter of the great Mesopotamian king, [Sargon of Akkad](#). Her father was Akkadian, a Semitic people. Her mother may have been Sumerian.

Enheduanna was appointed by her father to be priestess of the temple of Nanna, the Akkadian moon god, in the largest city and center of her father's empire, the city of Ur. In this position, she would also have traveled to other cities in the empire. She also apparently held some civil authority, signaled by the "En" in her name.

Enheduanna helped her father solidify his political power and unite the Sumerian city-states by merging the worship of many local city goddesses into the worship of the Sumerian goddess, Inanna, raising Inanna to a superior position over other deities.

Enheduanna wrote three hymns to Inanna which survive and which illustrate three quite different themes of ancient religious faith. In one, Inanna is a ferocious warrior goddess who defeats a mountain even though other gods refuse to help her. A second, thirty stanzas in length, celebrates Inanna's role in governing civilization and overseeing the home and children. In a third, Enheduanna calls on her personal relationship with the goddess for help in regaining her position as priestess of the temple against a male usurper.

The long text that tells the story of Inanna is believed by a few scholars to be mistakenly attributed to Enheduanna but the consensus is that it is hers.

At least 42, perhaps as many as 53, other hymns survive that are attributed to Enheduanna, including three hymns to the moon god, Nanna, and other temples, gods, and goddesses. Surviving cuneiform tablets with the hymns are copies from about 500 years after Enheduanna

lived, attesting to the survival of the study of her poems in Sumer. No contemporary tablets survive.

Because we don't know how the language was pronounced, we cannot study some of the format and style of her poems. The poems seem to have eight to twelve syllables per line, and many lines end with vowel sounds. She also uses repetition of sounds, words, and phrases.

Her father ruled for 55 years and appointed her to the high priestess position late in his reign. When he died and was succeeded by his son, she continued in that position. When that brother died and another succeeded him, she remained in her powerful position. When her second ruling brother died, and Enheduanna's nephew Naram-Sin took over, she again continued in her position. She may have written her long poems during his reign, as answers to parties that rebelled against him.

(The name Enheduanna is also written as Enheduana. The name Inanna is also written as Inana.)

Dates: about 2300 BCE - estimated at 2350 or 2250 BCE

Occupation: priestess of Nanna, poet, hymn writer

Also Known as: Enheduana, En-hedu-Ana

Places: Sumer (Sumeria), City of Ur

Family

Father: King Sargon the Great (Sargon of Agade or Akkad, ~2334-2279 BCE)

Enheduanna: Bibliography

Betty De Shong Meador. *Inanna, Lady of Largest Heart: Poems of the Sumerian High Priestess Enheduanna*. 2001.

Samuel N. Kramer, Diane Wolkstein. *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth*. 1983.