

## Ancient Civilizations of the Middle East—Mesopotamia

## Biography

# Enheduanna

c. 2285–2250 BC



### HOW SHE AFFECTED THE REGION

Enheduanna, the daughter of Sargon the Great, was a priestess and a writer. She is often considered history's first known author.



*As you read the biography below, think about what it must have been like for Enheduanna to be a writer during her time.*

Enheduanna was the daughter of Sargon the Great, the king who founded the first great empire in history. Sargon the Great, also known as Sargon of Akkad, conquered all of Sumeria around 2347 BC. He was the first king to unite northern and southern Mesopotamia. Sargon appointed his daughter Enheduanna to serve as high priestess at Ur, one of the Sumerian city-states.

Enheduanna was a writer and a poet. She is the oldest author who is known by name. Enheduanna wrote two or three major works. These are lengthy **hymns** to Inanna, the Sumerian goddess of love and war. She also wrote 42 shorter hymns about the Akkadian temples in the different cities in Mesopotamia, and the **deities** that were worshipped at those temples.

As high priestess Enheduanna was connected to the moon god Nanna, as well as his daughter Inanna. Many of Enheduanna's writings were devoted to Nanna and Inanna. Her poems show her faith in her role as high priestess and express her feelings toward Inanna, whom she favored over the other gods. In addition to praising her gods, Enheduanna wrote about her own life and the struggles she faced because of her faith. She also wrote about what she was thinking as she wrote her hymns.



### VOCABULARY

**hymn** a song of praise

**deities** gods

Enheduanna is considered the oldest author known by name, but her writings are rarely studied in school. This may be because her style of writing was complex and challenging. Her writings have been preserved on cuneiform tablets that have survived more than 4,000 years.

It is likely that Enheduanna wrote many works that have been lost. Her most famous surviving works are *The Exaltation of Inanna* and *In-nin sa-gur-ra*. Both of these works were hymns written to be sung in praise the goddess Inanna. Enheduanna's work has a strong and personal presence, which is likely autobiographical in nature.

Little else is known about Enheduanna, although she is believed to be among the figures on a stone disk that was discovered by archaeologists at the site of the temple in Ur. The disk depicts a group of priests making an offering to the Sumerian moon god Nanna. The tallest figure in the center of the disk is thought to be Enheduanna.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

**1. Identify** What were the subjects of Enheduanna's writings?

---

---

**2. Contrast** Compare what you have learned about Enheduanna with another famous writer. Tell how they are alike and how they are different.

---

---

---

### ACTIVITY

Think about whether you prefer daytime or nighttime. Write a poem to either the sun or the moon, based on your preference. Use what you have learned about Enheduanna to try to make your poem unique.