

ENHEDUANNA

the first named poet

her life... her world... her poetry...



FAQs ABOUT THE FACTS

Q1. How do we know about Enheduanna?

For more than a hundred years treasure-hunters and archaeologists from Germany, Italy, France, Britain, America, Japan, Poland, Iraq and elsewhere have dug at the sites of long-lost cities in Iraq. They found temples, palaces, streets, houses, libraries, beautiful objects of all sorts, and thousands upon thousands of inscribed clay tablets. The objects and clay tablets are now in museums and private collections throughout the world. Archaeological evidence for Enheduanna as a person and a poet is significant.

- Her image and name appear on a carved alabaster disk found at the site of the city of Ur.
- Her name appears in the text and as the author of many lines of poetry.
- There are references to her on cylinder seals which were like the ID cards of her staff, and in the historical records of her father, two brothers and nephew, all of whom were kings of Sumer and Akkad.

Q2. Where did Enheduanna live?

Enheduanna lived most of her life in the city of Ur at a time when the river Euphrates flowed nearby. She was in charge of Ur's important temple of the moon god, Nannar, as the *en-priestess*. Her office and accommodation were in the part of the temple known as the *gipar* where she had special responsibility for the statue of Nannar's wife, Ningal. She was probably born in Akkad (Agade), the city founded by her father Sargon as the capital of his empire, the first empire in world history. Her mother's name—Tashlutum—is Sumerian.

Q3. When did Enheduanna live?

The exact dates of Enheduanna's birth and death are unknown but have been estimated by the Sumerologist William W. Hallo to be 2285-2250 BCE. The poetry attributed to Enheduanna was composed more than a thousand years before Sappho and Homer.

Q4. What does the poetry attributed to Enheduanna consist of?

- A long compilation of 42 fairly short Temple Hymns
- Three long poems dedicated to the goddess Inanna

This poetry is rooted in a literary tradition of writing about deities which was already hundreds of years old when Enheduanna took it up and developed it.

Q5. What language is the poetry written in?

Sumerian, using cuneiform script.

Q6. Is the poetry in Enheduanna's handwriting?

No. The texts we have were written on clay tablets by scribes who were required to know and copy a literary curriculum as an essential part of their professional training. Enheduanna's poetry was treated with great respect by the literary elite for generations after her death.

Q7. Is there any doubt about these facts?

Yes and no. Some academic specialists question the authorship of the poetry attributed to Enheduanna just as some question the authorship of the poetry attributed to Homer and to Shakespeare. Many accept that the facts are as correct as they can be about people and poetry from a time nearly 4500 years ago.

Dr Alasdair Livingstone, Reader in Assyriology at Birmingham University, champions Enheduanna as the author of the poetry attributed to her. During a lecture he gave in January 2010 to the British Iraqi Friendship Society he clinched his case with a question. 'In a male-dominated society why would anyone claim this poetry was composed by a woman if it wasn't?' Dr Livingstone concluded his lecture with a quote from Robert Burns.

*Time but the impression deeper makes
as streams their channels deeper wear.*