

# EN-ĤEDU-ANA: THE BIRTH OF LITERATURE THROUGH THE GODDESS

By ANNETTE ZGOLL

Who created literary texts in ancient Mesopotamia, and did the Mesopotamians have a concept of “literature” (→ 1)? A core witness is the song *Innana B / nin me šara* (NMS → 2). New translations and an inductive analysis of references to text, addressee, and speaker reveals NMS to be created by a priestess for a war ritual (→ 3). Instead of staking a claim to authorship, however, the song stresses a claim for priesthood (→ 4). New evidence shows why: the creators of ritual songs are gods, and En-ĥedu-ana is only allowed to create such a song when she herself acts as a priestess embodying a deity (→ 5 and 6). The last section will offer proof that NMS belongs to the category of literature, from both ancient and modern perspectives, and explain why it is also to be regarded as both a mythic and ritual text (→ 7). The analysis demonstrates the birth of literature through the goddess Nin-gal, embodied in En-ĥedu-ana.

“Die Kunst ist zwar nicht das Brot, aber der Wein des Lebens.”

Jean Paul (1763–1825)

In Mesopotamian adaptation:

“Art may not be the bread of life, but it is the beer of life.”

To Andrew who has given us back so many masterpieces of the Mesopotamian “beer of life,” in gratitude and with best wishes for long years of enjoying and discovering this and other sorts of beer ...

## 1. Literature. Theory, methodology, state of research

Categories and the semantic fields associated with them shape what and how we perceive.<sup>1</sup> Apprehending the modes of perception of other cultures is both a challenge and a special incentive to look beyond our own horizons and open up new ones. What we subsume under the category of ‘literature’ is shaped by our own frame of reference, which can be outlined conceptually. In contemporary Ancient Near Eastern research, the concept of literature is inextricably linked to the concept of the author. Such authors are considered to be ‘writers’ (in German, *Schriftsteller*), i.e., people who create something in the form of writing and whose name is attached to their work.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This study is part of a larger research project on myth and ritual that was conducted within the framework of the research group 2064 STRATA. The study was made possible by a substantial grant from the German Research Foundation (DFG). It is a continuation of the article “Sacred Texts and the First Myth about the Creation of Writing” (A. Zgoll 2022); a preview has been presented in A. Zgoll 2021a, see also “Die Geburt des Autors: Das Lied der Hohepriesterin Encheduana” (A. Zgoll 2015a). The larger research project to which this study belongs will be published as a monograph entitled “Rituale. Die verborgene Welt hinter der Keilschrift”. I would like to thank

the members of the research group for a lively, concise, and inspiring exchange. Jana Matuszak and Mark Weeden have organized two stimulating conferences on Mesopotamian literature. Gene McGarry, meticulous proofreader of English, Felix Müller and finally Jana Matuszak, careful editors, have helped to finalize it. Thank you for all the effort! Finally, special thanks go to Andrew George, whose tireless and outstanding work has unlocked great treasures of Mesopotamian literature.

<sup>2</sup> This applies to general research on authorship as well, see e.g., Jannidis et al. 2012.



Fig. 1. Creation of a text by a modern writer, generated with AI by A. Zgoll using a free version of canva.com

‘Literature’ is a label associated *inter alia* with texts that are distinguished by their style and craftsmanship and exhibit a *special degree of quality*.<sup>3</sup> Literature is thus understood in the narrower sense as a form of art. This art, in turn, may claim an autonomous space; it does not have to serve any purpose other than to exist (*l’art pour l’art*). Nevertheless, literature serves various metafunctions:<sup>4</sup> it is assumed that authors write for their personal needs, that they seek their identity through writing, and that they want to increase their prestige, win fame, and secure a place for themselves in the ‘literary world.’<sup>5</sup>

The question raised in this article is whether one can speak of a perception of ‘literature’ in Mesopotamian culture, which predates many major intellectual-historical turning points—enlightenment, individualization and pluralism, democratization, and the primacy of the natural sciences, technology, and economy, as a result of which literature and ‘art’ are perceived as occupying a special niche—and in what kind of reference system such literature was framed. The question is twofold: (1) Were certain ancient texts regarded as literature, and (2) was there a notion of authorship? A further objective is (3) to determine how we can categorize texts in a scientifically meaningful way *today*.

For our test case, we will turn to the source that is the supreme touchstone when it comes to questions of literature and authorship in ancient Mesopotamia, the so-called song *Immana B* or *nin me šara* (henceforth NMS). NMS has become the center of discussions of literary authorship because it contains a statement by a first-person speaker who claims to have “given birth”<sup>6</sup> to the song. This speaker is identified in the text as a high priestess named En-ĥedu-ana. A person of this name is known from other sources to have been installed as high priestess of Nanna, the god of the city state of Ur.<sup>7</sup> The text of NMS, however, is only attested on around one hundred clay tablets written some five centuries later, in the OB period. In modern research it has therefore been much discussed whether the statement

<sup>3</sup> See Black et al. 2004: XIX–L.

<sup>4</sup> For the concept of metafunctions see A. Zgoll 2003.

<sup>5</sup> See below and → 3.2; cf. the differentiation by Halton and Svård 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Textual variants: to have built/spoken.

<sup>7</sup> Several seals and an alabaster disk, contemporaneous to En-ĥedu-ana’s lifetime, testify to her as high priestess, see → note 20 and → 5.2.1.

about En-ĥedu-ana “giving birth to” the text is to be regarded as historically correct.<sup>8</sup> Was this text created by En-ĥedu-ana, or was it a product of OB scribes? Lately, however, the question of who composed NMS has been dismissed as unimportant, and people have instead asked why authorship itself might have been viewed as important by OB scribes.<sup>9</sup> This question itself must be questioned, since it rests on the assumption that authorship was indeed important for OB scribes. If the assumption on which the question is based is wrong, then the question will inevitably lead to a wrong answer.

Methodologically, it is striking that such assumptions about authorship were not developed inductively from NMS itself; in fact, the text is not quoted much in the context of these questions, and it is certainly not discussed as a complete work. Instead, the question of authorship is deductively applied to the text from the outside. The question is derived from a scenario that has been invented for the OB scribes, namely, that they wanted to increase their prestige and create a particularly exclusive identity for themselves by writing Sumerian texts; other hypotheses operate with scribes and scholars of earlier times.<sup>10</sup> This scenario of scribal authorship is based on the coordinate system in which literature and authorship stand today, in the twenty-first century AD, but, as will be shown, that system cannot accommodate the creation of texts such as NMS. In summary, the discussion of authorship in Mesopotamia has given rise to many questionable hypotheses.<sup>11</sup>

A methodologically sound analysis must begin with the texts themselves and proceed inductively. Surprisingly, this has only been done in rudimentary ways thus far.<sup>12</sup> This gap in the research will be closed here. To address the topic we have to rely on our sources as our compass. Not only our answers, but also our questions have to be rooted in our sources. We will therefore first approach the text by giving an overview of its content and structure and its main formal features (→ 2). To reconstruct ancient perspectives on literature, we will take as our point of departure the text-referential, addressee-referential, and self-referential statements of the text: What do they disclose, and to which questions and answers do they lead? It will become clear that the text is to be regarded as a song addressed to a goddess by a priestess (→ 3). Second, we will analyze the first-person statement about the birth of the text in comparison to self-identifications expressed with “I am ....” This will show that the text is not making a claim about *authorship* but about *priesthood* (→ 4). A third section will reconstruct the wider cultural background: the creators of ritual songs are gods,

<sup>8</sup> One may wonder if the historicity of the speaker’s statement would have provoked the same amount of discussion if the first-person “author” had been depicted not as a high priestess but as a high priest. (1) Copies of royal inscriptions that name kings contemporary to En-ĥedu-ana and are dated to the same time as the copies of En-ĥedu-ana’s song are routinely interpreted as copies of original inscriptions (see A. Zgoll 2025, chapter 10.4). (2) The so-called “Homeric question”: Although even the mere existence of Homer cannot be proven, much contemporary research in Classics tends to assume that Homer was a real person and to attribute the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* or both to Homer. (3) This is all the more remarkable since historical research has shown that elite women in the 3rd millennium were responsible for fulfilling demanding religious and political duties.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Michalowski 1996: 185: “Whatever the matters at stake, the historicity of Enheduana’s authorship is largely irrelevant; the ideological games are undoubtedly Old Babylonian, when anonymity of authorship was the rule;” and in his steps Helle 2019, Helle 2020, Konstantopoulos 2021.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Michalowski 1996: 184–85; Lambert 2001; Gadotti 2001: 195–96; Glassner 2009; Helle 2019; Helle 2020. Cf. Rubio (2016), who states that the OB texts came from the environment of priests and temples and were used in rituals, *loc. cit.* 247–48, and A. Zgoll 2021a.

<sup>11</sup> Civil’s verdict on the date of the praise song *Innana C!* is often cited as evidence that NMS (= *Innana B!*) must be a product of the OB period (most recently Helle 2020: 58). But Civil (1980: 229) writes: “Parmi ces textes [attribués à En-ĥedu-ana] se trouve l’hymne in-nin ša-gur<sub>4</sub>-ra

[= *Innana C*] ... L’examen de sa langue et de son vocabulaire me fait soupçonner que le texte date de l’époque de Larsa. Si cette hypothèse est correcte, Enheduanna était à cette époque un nom générique pour désigner la prêtresse de Šin à Ur. Les implications de cet hymne [= *Innana C*] seront très différentes selon qu’il se rapporte à une fille de Sargon ou à une fille de Rīm-Šin.” Orthography is not a mandatory criterion for dating texts (Keetman 2010: 39). For a detailed discussion of dating criteria for NMS (textual criticism, orthography, lexicematics and semantics, literary history, and general history) see A. Zgoll 1997: 179–84.

Not cited in this article are contributions in which the imagination of the author prevails over the results of philological and historical research—e.g., by postulating a regular incestuous sexual encounter between the high priestess and the god Nanna, embodied in the king, i.e., her father or nephew (Schrott 2003: 35); or a “marriage-like communion” between the goddess Innana and the high priestess En-ĥedu-ana (Helle 2023: 198–99), a type of relationship that is nowhere to be found in sources about Mesopotamian deities (it would also imply an incest-like relationship between Innana and her mother Ningal, embodied in En-ĥedu-ana; → 5.2.1). Such theses rely on the dismissal of scholarly translations (e.g., Attinger 2019) as “interpretation,” while classifying one’s own interpretations as “translation” (Helle 2023: 194).

<sup>12</sup> An exception is the discussion of the linguistic and historical evaluation of NMS in A. Zgoll 1997: 41–169, and the dating criteria summarized there (179–84).

and En-*hedu-ana* is only allowed to create such a song when she herself acts as a goddess (→ 5 and 6). The last section will offer proof that NMS belongs to the category of literature, from both ancient and modern perspectives, and explain why it is also to be regarded as both a mythic and ritual text, and how such classifications can be simultaneously valid (→ 7).

The analyses are relevant not only to questions of literature and authorship but also to historical research, ritual studies, and women's studies.

TABLE 1: Outline of the paper

1 Literature. Theory, methodology, state of research	5 Cultural context: the creation of ritual songs
2 Approaching the source: NMS	5.1 Gods create ritual texts
3 Inductive text analysis 1: song of a priestess for a goddess	5.2 En- <i>hedu-ana</i> as goddess creates a ritual song
3.1 Self-references in the text	5.2.1 En- <i>hedu-ana</i> as a goddess
3.2 References to the addressee	5.2.2 En- <i>hedu-ana</i> as a goddess may give birth to songs
3.3 References to the first-person speaker	6 Conclusion on the authorship of NMS from a Mesopotamian perspective
3.4 Conclusion on the analysis of the self-referential and text-referential statements in the text	7 Literature, ritual, or myth?
4 Inductive text analysis 2: the birth of the song	7.1 NMS as literature
4.1 "I gave birth to it": content and formal design of the statement	7.1.1 Like the best beer. Ancient perspective
4.2 "Giving birth" to the song: the immediate context	7.1.2 Water and fire. Scientific perspective
4.3 "Giving birth" to the song: the overall context	7.1.3 The three-dimensional text profile of NMS
4.4 Conclusion on the birthing, transmission, and transcription of the song	7.2 Conclusion: NMS as literature, En- <i>hedu-ana</i> as the earliest known author
	8 Bibliography

## 2. *Approaching the source: NMS*

The text of NMS is available on around one hundred tablets dating from the OB period (18<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century). It is a song addressed to the goddess Innana. Following ancient tradition, we can refer to the song by its opening words, *nin me šara* "mistress of all numinous means of power." The text is linguistically complex and demanding (Wilcke 1976). Hallo and van Dijk (1968) presented a short first edition. A second edition that draws on a larger number of manuscripts and provides philological, text-critical, and historical evaluations was published by A. Zgoll (1997); Black et al. 2003 rendered Zgoll's German translation into English, with minimal changes to the content. The text-critical studies were continued by Delnero (2006: 1062–216). New philological analyses have led to improved translations.<sup>13</sup> A. Zgoll (2021) has reconstructed myths that are incorporated into this song.

The text of NMS consists of two parts plus an epilogue and subscript:

1–59 Invocation of Innana as a warrior goddess who controls all numinous means of power.

60–142 Supplication to Innana. This supplication has a sophisticated structure. It alternates five times between reviews of the dramatic life of the high priestess En-*hedu-ana* and the warlike deeds of the goddess Innana, on the one hand, and glimpses of warlike deeds expected of Innana in the future on the other.

143–152 A later epilogue, distinguished from the rest of the text by its form and content.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See A. Zgoll 2015a, A. Zgoll 2015b, Attinger 2019, and A. Zgoll 2021.

<sup>14</sup> See A. Zgoll 2021: 15: 49 n. 98. This evaluation is based on a comparison of the vocabulary in lines 1–142 and 143–53 as well as an analysis based on the TTEPP criteria (→ 3.4). – Later additions to an ancient text, often at the beginning or

the end of the original, testify to the value and veneration of the text itself and thus underscore the authenticity of a text (Milstein 2016; C. Zgoll 2019: 324–25; A. Zgoll 2022: 282–83). The epilogue of NMS is one such supplement. It does not alter the text of the song itself. The added epilogue redefines the relationship between the deities Innana, Nanna,

(153 Subscript)

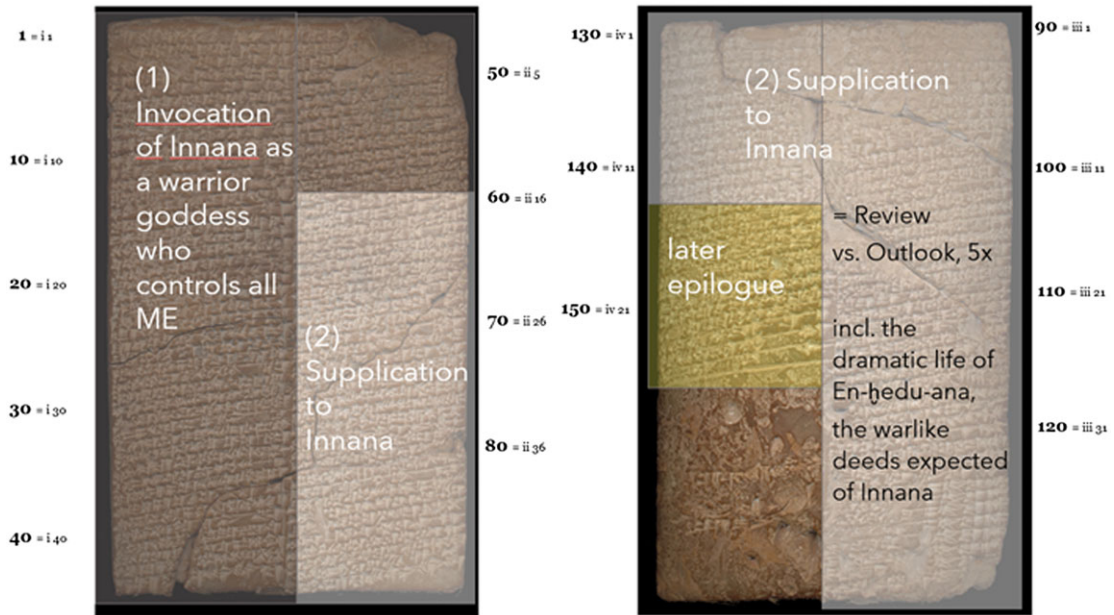


Fig. 2. Manuscript NiA, CBS 7847 + UM 29-15-422, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, with an overview of the major sections of NMS

The text contains clear historical references to a civil war in the Old Akkadian period (23<sup>rd</sup> century BC), when a coalition of Sumerian city-states rose up against the Akkadian central empire headed by Narām-Sîn and put this ruler in great danger; he attributed his rescue solely to Innana.<sup>15</sup>

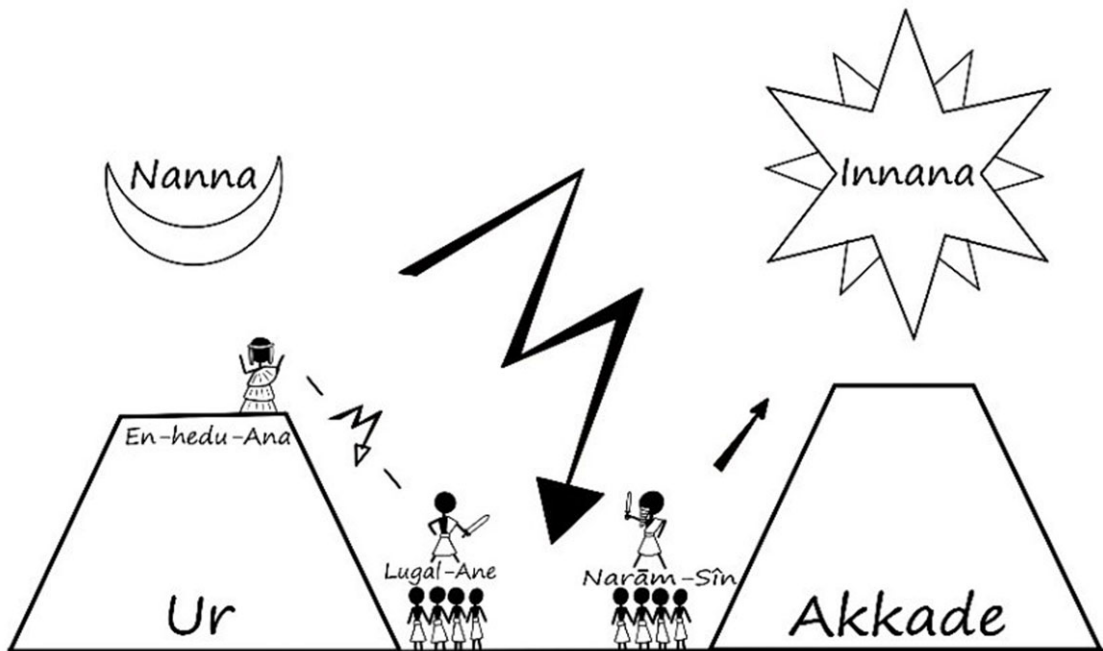


Fig. 3. Context of the song NMS in Mesopotamian perspective, design A. Zgoll, realization A. Göhlich

and Nin-gal. This perspective on the gods, which is alien to the rest of the song, is typical of the theology of the Ur III period.

<sup>15</sup> See the so-called *Bāseṭki-inscription of Narām-Sîn* (Frayne 1993: 113 no. 10). On the historical situation, see below.



In addition to the allusions to conflict, which we today classify as historical, there are also narrative materials that we refer to as mythical. The following myths have been identified and reconstructed in NMS through the hylistic analysis of narrative materials:<sup>16,17</sup>

(Myth 1) AN LETS INNANA EXECUTE HIS JUDGEMENT ON ENEMIES AND SUMER

(Myth 2) INNANA LETS NANNA EXECUTE HER JUDGEMENT ON UR AND EVERY REBELLIOUS CITY

(Myth 3) INNANA EXECUTES JUDGEMENT ON THE ANUNA GODS

These myths belong together and form one composite myth:

INNANA BECOMES RULER OF THE GODS IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH

All these myths are aggressively directed against the autonomy of the traditional Sumerian city-states. They are extremely anti-Sumerian. So-called “rebellious” cities like Ur and its people, the Sumerians, are humiliated and killed. The text therefore could not have been composed or used or conceived as a symbol of Sumerian culture.<sup>18</sup>

Formally, the text can be described as a prayer that is anchored in a ritual context (→ 3). The language is dramatic (“because of my fate-determining song—must I die?”, 99), aggressive (“you will devour corpses like a predator”, 127) and urgent (“right now you will tell An”, 76). Many statements are formulated in the first person and put into the mouth of a high priestess named En-ḥedu-ana. Unlike the case of *Sîn-lēqi-unninni*, for example, who is listed in the so-called *catalogue of texts and authors* from the Neo-Assyrian period as the author of the *Gilgameš Epic*,<sup>19</sup> the historicity of this En-ḥedu-ana is clearly proven by various contemporary sources. En-ḥedu-ana was the high priestess of Nanna in the city of Ur, from the reign of Sargon of Akkad to that of his grandson Narām-Sîn (23<sup>rd</sup> century BC). An inscription and a pictorial representation of En-ḥedu-ana have been preserved on an alabaster disk from her own time (→ 5.2.1), as well as several seals and seal impressions whose owners can be identified as associates of the high priestess En-ḥedu-ana.<sup>20</sup> The historical information from NMS comports with other historical information about the period, in particular the uprising against Narām-Sîn, the so-called “Great Rebellion.”<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Inductive text analysis I: song of a priestess for a goddess

#### 3.1 Self-references in the text

In order to determine—from an ancient perspective—what kind of text we are dealing with, we must examine the text’s three references to itself: the “radiant song,” the “lamentation of tears,” and the “prayer.” “Radiant song,” Sumerian *ser<sub>3</sub> ku<sub>3</sub>* (63, 99), has recently been precisely defined as a composition that resonates with today’s ideas of sacred texts but is even more powerful. Such a song is a divine instrument of power, so that *ser<sub>3</sub> ku<sub>3</sub>* can be paraphrased as “numinous-powerful song.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup>These narrative materials are not directly accessible in textual form but rather must be reconstructed on the basis of their expressions in various media. This is accomplished by hylistics, a methodology of content analysis developed in the context of Göttingen myth research groups. It begins at the level of the smallest action-bearing units, or hylemes (see, e.g., C. Zgoll 2019; A. Zgoll and C. Zgoll 2020; Gabriel et al. 2021; A. Zgoll, Cuperly, and Cöster-Gilbert 2023). Hylistic methodology enables narrative materials processed in texts to be reconstructed with maximum precision. It is a necessary tool for recovering and analyzing myths and other narrative materials.

<sup>17</sup>See A. Zgoll 2021: 21–44.

<sup>18</sup>See A. Zgoll 2021.

<sup>19</sup>See the balanced discussion by George 2003: 28–33, including his personal assessment: “I believe his [i.e., *Sîn-lēqi-unninni*’s] reputation as author rested on a greater achievement: that while producing a text in many places exactly faithful to one or other of his sources he wrought at the same time major changes on the epic and cast the poem anew.” (ibid. 32).

<sup>20</sup>The seal of En-ḥedu-ana’s “hairdresser” has been published (Frayne 1993: 38 no. 2003; Rohn 2011: 10–11 no. 137). This individual presumably also referred to himself as her “servant” (Rohn 2011: 111 no. 137). Seals of other personnel linked to En-ḥedu-ana have also been published: the seal of her steward (Frayne 1993: 38–39 no. 2004; Rohn 2011: 10–11 and 113 no. 183) and the seal of one of her scribes and servants (Frayne 1993: 38 no. 2005; Rohn 2011: 10–11 and 114, no. 196). The authenticity of another seal, which is said to have been made by a scribe and servant of En-ḥedu-ana and now belongs to the private collection of J. Rosen, is doubtful, according to an analysis by Rohn (2011: 11 note 96 and 232 to no. 928).

<sup>21</sup>On the so-called “Great Revolt” see Wilcke 1997: 11–32; Zgoll 1997: 31–32; 155–62; A. Westenholz 1999: 35; 38–39 and 51–54; Sommerfeld 2000: 419–36; Foster 2016: 12–13; 259–60. On the general historical context see Foster 2016, and most recently Podany 2022: 155–63.

<sup>22</sup>See A. Zgoll 2022 and, in a similar vein, Worthington 2019.

In addition, the word  $ir_2$ , which primarily means “tears” and also “lament,” namely in the sense of a lament accompanied by tears or “lament of tears” (82), is used to describe the text. Finally, the text is also identified as an a-ra-zu “prayer” (81).

The text’s references to itself indicate that it was understood in ancient times as a prayer, more precisely as a ritual song, to be performed in a plaintive mode, accompanied by tears.<sup>23</sup> Such a song is believed to have divine-numinous power, i.e., it can change the present and the future. The effects attributed to the song in the present case are particularly concentrated in a passage that is characterized as the climax of the text in terms of content<sup>24</sup> and form.<sup>25</sup> It closely links retrospection on the past and an outlook for the future, which is visually illustrated in the following table.<sup>26</sup> In terms of content, this passage is the clearest indication that the powerful ritual text is to be understood as part of a war ritual which is made clear by a new translation<sup>27</sup> (→ 4.2):

TABLE 2: NMS 122–132

<i>A look back at the past</i>	<i>Outlook for the future</i>
	122a It will absolutely be known, will absolutely be known:
122b That Nanna has not pronounced judgment on all this, that he has said, “Judgment (on Ur, Lugal-Ane and En-ḫedu-Ana) is yours, Innana!”	
123 Because you have become as high as the heavens,	it will absolutely be known (that the judgment is yours)!
124 Because you have become as wide as the earth,	it will absolutely be known (that the judgment is yours)!
	125 Because you will destroy rebellious regions, it will be known without fail (that the judgment is yours)!
	125a Because you will roar against enemy countries, it will be known without fail (that the judgment is yours)!
	126 Because you will slay all the enemies, it will be known without fail (that the judgment is yours)!
	127 Because you will devour the corpses like a beast of prey, it will definitely be known (that the judgment is yours)!
128 Because your gaze (full of anger) has become terrifying,	it will absolutely be known (that the judgment is yours)!
	129 Because you will turn this (wrathful) fearful gaze everywhere (on the enemies), it will be known without fail (that the judgment is yours)!
130 Because you have made this gaze (full of anger) sparkle everywhere (against the enemies),	it will absolutely be known (that the judgment is yours)!
131 Because you have become overpowering and unyielding,	it will absolutely be known (that the judgment is yours)!
	132 Because you will triumph everywhere, it will definitely be known (that the judgment is yours)!

<sup>23</sup> The ritual function of NMS means that a number of descriptions of the text in modern research literature—as an autobiography (passim), a story, or an inscription, similar to royal inscriptions (Lambert 2001)—must be abandoned as inaccurate. Cf. in contrast, Keetman (2010: 38): “Nin me šara is meant for a ritual,” and Halton and Svärd 2018: 51.

<sup>24</sup> See, inter alia, the dramatic and aggressive nature of the passage.

<sup>25</sup> See, inter alia, the intensity resulting from the refrain-like repetitions.

<sup>26</sup> The alternation between looking back to the past and looking forward to the anticipated actions of the gods has been overlooked in previous translations; only A. Zgoll 2021 takes this peculiarity into account.

<sup>27</sup> The Sumerian text reads: <sup>122</sup> ḫe<sub>2</sub>-zu ḫe<sub>2</sub>-zu-am<sub>3</sub> <sup>d</sup>Nanna li-bi<sub>2</sub>-in-du<sub>11</sub>-ga za-a-kam bi<sub>2</sub>-in-du<sub>11</sub>-ga <sup>123</sup> an-gen<sub>7</sub> mah-a-

### 3.2 References to the addressee

The entire prayer is addressed to Innana. It begins with Innana's invocation as "Mistress of all numinous instruments of power,"<sup>28</sup> it is characterized through and through by addresses to Innana and it ends<sup>29</sup> with a double address to Innana:

ša<sub>3</sub>-zu na-ma-se<sub>25</sub>-de<sub>3</sub> For my sake, nobody must cool your heart down!<sup>30</sup>  
NMS 137  
ib<sub>2</sub>-ba-zu ib<sub>2</sub>-gu-ul ša<sub>3</sub>-zu nu-TE.EN.TE.EN As long as your rage about that (has become =) is  
NMS 142 still huge, nobody will calm your heart!

The fact that the text ends on such a negative note, with the goddess's rage undiminished, has caused confusion.<sup>31</sup> And indeed, such an ending would be incomprehensible if this text were a fiction generated to serve the individual needs of a later writer. Who in Mesopotamia would dare to use a song for a *war ritual* to urge the most powerful goddess to act out her anger, just to increase his own prestige (→ 1)?<sup>32</sup> Such an idea is absurd for those familiar with attitudes toward ritual in religious cultures. But this is not a "story" or even an autobiographical account written after a crisis, from a safe distance. Rather, the distressing events have not yet come to a standstill. The song and its conclusion are therefore drastic: the first-person speaker urges the goddess to prolong her anger:

"No one must calm your heart ... No one will calm your heart!"

A narrative analysis<sup>33</sup> of the lines, including the context, shows even more clearly the explosive nature of this conclusion to the song (implicitly reconstructed hylemes<sup>34</sup> are in grey):

#### **Innana and her anger: how it arises and how she can be calmed down again**

*Enemies* make Innana's anger great.

Innana is angry *with the enemies*.

Because of En-*hedu-ana*, no one is allowed to calm Innana now:

En-*hedu-ana* arouses Innana's anger against the enemies.<sup>122–133</sup>

So far the explicit content of the song, which implies the following:

*Innana gives free rein to her anger against the enemies:*

*Innana destroys the enemies.*

*Then someone (= En-*hedu-ana*) calms Innana's anger.*<sup>35</sup>

*Innana is calm.*

The aggressive conclusion of the song is thus perfectly understandable. It corresponds exactly to the climax of the song in 122–132, quoted above, which promises that Innana's power will be known; namely, the "judgment," i.e., the decision about the future, lies with her. This future is evoked in the

za he<sub>2</sub>-zu-am<sub>3</sub><sup>124</sup> ki-gen<sub>7</sub> dağal-la-za he<sub>2</sub>-zu-am<sub>3</sub><sup>125</sup> ki-bal  
gul-gul-lu-za he<sub>2</sub>-zu-am<sub>3</sub><sup>125a</sup> kur-ra gu<sub>3</sub> de<sub>2</sub>-za he<sub>2</sub>-zu-am<sub>3</sub>  
<sup>126</sup> sağ ġeš ra-ra-za he<sub>2</sub>-zu-am<sub>3</sub><sup>127</sup> ur-gen<sub>7</sub> ad<sub>6</sub> gu<sub>7</sub>-za he<sub>2</sub>-zu-  
am<sub>3</sub><sup>128</sup> igi huš-a-za he<sub>2</sub>-zu-am<sub>3</sub><sup>129</sup> igi huš-bi IL<sub>2</sub>.IL<sub>2</sub>-i-za  
he<sub>2</sub>-zu-am<sub>3</sub><sup>130</sup> igi gun<sub>3</sub>-gun<sub>3</sub>-na-za he<sub>2</sub>-zu-am<sub>3</sub><sup>131</sup> uru<sub>16</sub>-na  
nu-še-ga-za he<sub>2</sub>-zu-am<sub>3</sub><sup>132</sup> u<sub>3</sub>-ma gub-gub-bu-za he<sub>2</sub>-zu-am<sub>3</sub>.  
A detailed philological discussion can be found in A. Zgoll  
1997: 421–28; see also most recently A. Zgoll 2021 with  
discussion of Attinger 2019.

<sup>28</sup> The meaning of the word (Sumerian: me) will be clarified in the forthcoming book about rituals (see note 1).

<sup>29</sup> For the epilogue see → 2 with note 14.

<sup>30</sup> To cool down means to calm.

<sup>31</sup> See Attinger (2019 note 107), who asks why Enheduana ended her address on such a negative note: "Comme c'est la fin de la prière d'Enheduana à Innana, j'ai de la peine à croire que l'interprétation traditionnelle 'ton coeur ne se calme pas/ ne s'est pas calmé' soit correcte. Pourquoi Enheduana terminerai-elle son adresse sur une note si négative?"

<sup>32</sup> And in which epoch after En-*hedu-ana* could this fit historically? Given the proclamation of Innana as supreme deity, while Enlil is not important at all and Nanna is explicitly subordinated to Innana, the composition of the song cannot be dated to the Ur III period. Nor can Isin-Larsa in the wake of Ur III or the OB period be assumed either (A. Zgoll 1997: 183; A. Zgoll 2015a: 340).

<sup>33</sup> For a general idea of the methodology of hylistics, see → 2, for an exemplary hylistic reconstruction of the myths incorporated into NMS see A. Zgoll 2021.

<sup>34</sup> See note 16.

<sup>35</sup> This hyleme is inferred from the temporal subordination ("as long as"): "As long as your rage about that (has become =) is still huge, nobody will calm down your heart!" In other words, when Innana's anger is no longer great, someone will calm her heart. From the context, it is obvious that this someone will be none other than En-*hedu-ana*.



complete destruction of Innana's enemies, whose very corpses will not remain. From the perspective of the text, the conclusion of the song is *not at all negative*, but rather an expression of the goal toward which everything is heading: the positive resolution of the crisis through the defeat of the enemies of Innana (and of En-ḥedu-ana). The song for the war ritual must achieve the goal before its power is allowed to fade.

### 3.3 References to the first-person speaker

Self-referential statements about the first-person speaker appear three times in the text:

en-me-en En-ḥe<sub>2</sub>-du<sub>7</sub>-an-na-me-en  
NMS 67

I am the high priestess, I am En-ḥedu-ana!

En-ḥe<sub>2</sub>-du<sub>7</sub>-an-na-me-en a-ra-zu ga-mu-ra-ab-du<sub>11</sub>  
NMS 81

I am En-ḥedu-ana, I want to say a prayer to you (Innana)!

en dadag-ga <sup>d</sup>Nanna-me-en  
NMS 120

I am the radiant high priestess of <sup>deity</sup>Nanna!

None of these declarations has anything to do with literature or authorship. If En-ḥedu-ana were asserting authorship, then one would expect a statement such as \*‘‘I am the person X who created the text’’ or, in keeping with the thesis of an origin in writing, \*‘‘I am the person X who wrote the text’’; i.e., the text would include an authorial attribution, a sphragis.<sup>36</sup> Nothing of the sort can be found. In all three passages, the first-person speaker, En-ḥedu-ana, asserts her identity as the high priestess. The increasing intensity of her repeated claim leads inductively to the question of why this particular statement is emphasized. The answer can be found in the text: the first-person narrator tells us that the insignia of the high priestly office were snatched from her, and that she was given a dagger and driven away. Taken together, this does not sound like a fictional story composed by learned scribes for learned scribes. On the other hand, it sounds exactly like a prayer addressed to a powerful goddess in an emergency. In this prayer, a high priestess struggles to decide whether she is still a priestess. If she is no longer a high priestess—as those who threatened her and chased her away obviously claim—then, as will become clear (→ 5.2.2), she has no right to perform a ritual to the goddess Innana and to create a song for this ritual.

### 3.4 Conclusion on the analysis of the self-referential and text-referential statements in the text

The evaluation of NMS's references to text, addressee, and first-person speaker reveals a text that is understood as a prayer or ritual text, is addressed to a goddess, and whose first-person speaker is repeatedly identified as a person who emphasizes that she is really and truly a high priestess. From a stratification-analytical point of view, applying the TTEPP criteria (T = time and themes, E = events, P = places and persons<sup>37</sup>) developed for the analysis of narrative material (hylistics),<sup>38</sup> there is nothing in the narrative material of NMS 1–142 that might point to different layers. Nothing points to a context involving writing or learned writers.<sup>39</sup> NMS 1–142 consists of a single homogeneous layer whose elements form a consistent whole, namely a prayer by a priestess. In other words, the first inductive textual analysis clearly indicates that the text originates as a prayer voiced by the high priestess named En-ḥedu-ana.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> The *Temple Hymns* present an interesting possibility for further research and should be reexamined in light of the present results.

<sup>37</sup> In German ZOPHT: Zeit, Ort, Personen, Handlungen, Themen.

<sup>38</sup> See → 2 and A. Zgoll, Cuperly and Cöster-Gilbert 2023: 298.

<sup>39</sup> The hypotheses of Lambert (2001), who imagines the author as a ‘‘ghost-writer,’’ as in the case of royal inscriptions, and of Glassner (2009), who thinks of a royal

scholar in Old Akkadian times, are thus outdated, as is Gadotti's (2001: 195–96) statement that this literary composition might have been composed in the context of an OB scribal school.

<sup>40</sup> Glassner (2009: 228–29) rightly emphasizes that not every textual ‘‘I’’ can be equated with an authorial ‘‘I.’’ In the present case, however, the evidence for En-ḥedu-ana's authorship is so extensive that one should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. – See Lion (2011: 97): ‘‘The essential point is that in antiquity unusual men, such as

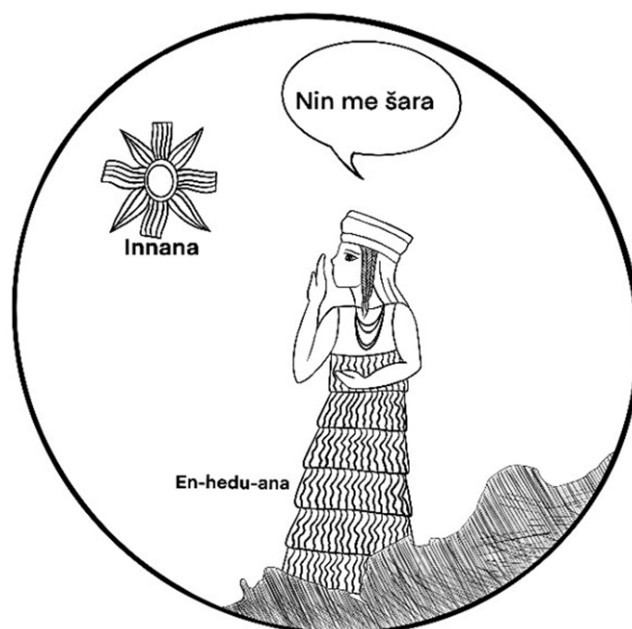


Fig. 4. Creation of NMS as a prayer by the high priestess En-hedu-ana, design A. Zgoll, realization S. Dak

#### 4. Inductive text analysis 2: the birth of the song

The next methodological step is to analyze the statement that En-hedu-ana “gave birth to” the song, which is invariably cited as a reference to authorship. Here, too, a methodical inductive approach is required to determine from the text itself what type of statement is present and how the statement is structured in terms of content and form. It is also necessary to examine how the statement about the birth of the text relates to the immediate context and to other statements about the text.

##### 4.1 “I gave birth to it”: content and formal design of the statement

The statement that En-hedu-ana gave birth to the song is—as is so often the case in Sumerian texts—succinctly formulated: “Since it has become full to me, since it has become overflowing to me, powerful lady, I have given birth to it for you.” The grammatical object of this statement has been identified three lines earlier; it is the song of Innana’s raging.<sup>41</sup> The predicate of the statement is attested in several variants: once it is expressed as “giving birth” (du<sub>2</sub>), twice as “building, creating” (du<sub>3</sub>), and five times as “speaking, intoning” (du<sub>11</sub>).<sup>42</sup> All of these verbs are pronounced as /du/ in Sumerian. They can be differentiated on the basis of their spelling—but they can also be simplified by using the common word du<sub>11</sub> (“to speak”).<sup>43</sup> In addition to the purely quantitative distribution, a text-critical analysis must also consider the qualitative weight of the spellings in the evaluation of the passage,<sup>44</sup> and so “giving birth” emerges as the first choice here, as the *lectio difficilior*; it is also attested in other sources in reference to the creation of sacred texts (→ 5.1). Overall, it is clear from all of the spellings that En-hedu-ana produced this song, regardless of whether it is described in terms of birthing, building, or speaking or singing:

rulers, or a woman such as Enheduanna, exceptional because of her high birth and religious duties, could equally be regarded as authors.”

<sup>41</sup> Sumerian mir-mir-za, “(song) of your raging,” 135.

<sup>42</sup> In text witness UrB, instead of -du<sub>11</sub>-ge<sub>4</sub>, possibly -du<sub>8</sub> could be read; see Delnero 2006: 1206 sub 604 (there as text witness Ur<sub>1</sub>).

<sup>43</sup> The simplification can be made at the level of the text or of the content, or both.

<sup>44</sup> A. Zgoll 1997: 489–90.

- <sup>138</sup> im-ma-si im-ma-điri-ga-ta nin UN-gal ma-ra-  
du<sub>2</sub> (with variants: -du<sub>3</sub>/-du<sub>11</sub>) <sup>138</sup> Since it (the heart<sup>45</sup>) is full for me,  
since it has become overflowing for me,  
powerful lady, I have given birth to it (song  
of your raging<sup>-1. 135</sup>) for you (with variants:  
created/sung).

Again, it is striking that there is no sphragis here to “seal” the text by naming its author (see → 3.3). This statement therefore *does not* revolve around authorship.

#### 4.2 “Giving birth” to the song: the immediate context

The immediate context shows that the statement about the song’s birth is included as one action alongside others. It is located shortly after the passage quoted above, which forms the heart of the ritual song—the evocatively repetitive lines 122–132, which make it known that Innana has power over the future and that she will now overpower the enemies, as she has overpowered enemies before—in the following, final section of the song (138):

- <sup>133</sup>dNanna li-bi<sub>2</sub>-in-du<sub>11</sub>-ga za-a-kam bi<sub>2</sub>-in-du<sub>11</sub>-ga That Nanna has (said nothing =) rendered no  
judgement (about the fate of Ur, Lugal-Ane,  
En-ĥedu-ana), that he has said about it:  
“(It =) The judgement is yours (= Innana)!”—  
my Queen!—since that has made you even  
greater, since you have become the most  
powerful,—  
<sup>134</sup> nin-ĥu<sub>10</sub> i<sub>b</sub><sub>2</sub>-gu-ul-en i<sub>3</sub>-maĥ-en my Queen, beloved of An!—(therefore) I will  
sing it (= this song) about all of your wrath!  
<sup>135</sup> nin ki-aĥ<sub>2</sub> An-na-ĥu<sub>10</sub> mir-mir-za ga-am<sub>3</sub>-du<sub>11</sub> I have heaped up the coals, the purification  
rites are prepared here (= in the temple E-  
ešdam-ku<sup>→137</sup>) for it (= for the song).<sup>→ll. 135, 138</sup>  
<sup>136</sup> ne-mur mu-dub šu-luh si bi<sub>2</sub>-in-sa<sub>2</sub> <sup>137</sup> The (temple called) Ešdam-ku (‘Sacred  
Inn’) is ready for you here (= for the rituals  
that incite your anger)—your heart must not  
cool down for my sake!  
<sup>137</sup> (E<sub>2</sub>-)eš<sub>2</sub>-dam ku<sub>3</sub> ma-ra(-an)-ĥal<sub>2</sub> ša<sub>3</sub>-zu <sup>138</sup> Since (my heart)<sup>46</sup> had become full, since it  
had become more than full for me, powerful  
mistress, I have born/created/intoned it (= the  
sacred song<sup>→ll. 63, 99, 135</sup>) for you.  
<sup>138</sup> im-ma-si im-ma-điri-ga-ta nin UN-gal ma-ra-  
du<sub>2</sub>/du<sub>3</sub>/du<sub>11</sub> <sup>139</sup> What was said to you in the (dark) night,  
that is (what matters)!  
<sup>139</sup> niĥ<sub>2</sub> ĥi<sub>6</sub>-u<sub>3</sub>-na ma-ra(-an)-du<sub>11</sub>-ga-am<sub>3</sub> <sup>140</sup> The cult singer will definitely repeat this to  
you at the bright noon.  
<sup>140</sup> gala-e an-bar<sub>7</sub>-ka šu ĥu-mu-ra-ab-ge<sub>4</sub>-ge<sub>4</sub> <sup>141</sup> As long as <sup>141</sup> because of your seized  
husband, because of your seized protégé <sup>142</sup>  
<sup>141</sup> dam dab<sub>5</sub>-ba-za-ke<sub>4</sub>-eš dumu dab<sub>5</sub>-ba-za-ke<sub>4</sub>-eš your anger has grown great, no one<sup>→ll. 41, 38</sup>  
<sup>142</sup> i<sub>b</sub><sub>2</sub>-ba-zu i<sub>b</sub><sub>2</sub>-gu-ul ša<sub>3</sub>-zu nu-TE.EN.TE.EN will appease your heart!

An application of narrative analysis (→ 2) shows the context in which the song’s birth takes place. It is a war ritual that En-ĥedu-ana performs for Innana:

<sup>45</sup> See A. Zgoll 1997: 428.

<sup>46</sup> See A. Zgoll 1997: 428.

### En-ĥedu-ana creates a war ritual with a song for Innana

Nanna transfers the power of command (over Ur) to Innana. <sup>l. 133</sup>

// Innana becomes more powerful than Nanna. <sup>l. 134</sup>

Innana becomes the most powerful (among the gods). <sup>l. 134</sup>

*Ur does not follow Innana's command (to submit to the king she has appointed, her husband).* →ll. 133–135

*Ur acts hostile (against Innana and her king).* →ll. 133–135

*Ur (and other enemies) seize Innana's (consort and protégé =) king.* <sup>47</sup> →ll. 133–135, 141+111

Innana's anger (at the actions of Ur and other enemies) becomes great. ll. 135, 142

*Innana does not (yet) intervene.* →whole text

*En-ĥedu-ana sees Innana's side (the king, the troops, the central kingdom, herself) in great distress.* →l. 138

En-ĥedu-ana is oppressed by hardship. <sup>l. 138</sup>

En-ĥedu-ana wants Innana to intervene now, i.e. for Innana to strike down the enemies in her anger. → ll. 135–138, 122–133

*En-ĥedu-ana plans a ritual that is supposed to ignite Innana's anger to such an extent that Innana intervenes.* →direct context

*En-ĥedu-ana performs this war ritual:*

En-ĥedu-ana performs purification rituals in Innana's temple Ešdam-ku for her singing. ll. 136–137

En-ĥedu-ana prepares Innana's temple Ešdam-ku for Innana. <sup>l. 137</sup>

The Ešdam-ku temple is ready for Innana. <sup>l. 137</sup>

*En-ĥedu-ana awaits the coming of Innana in the temple Ešdam-ku.* → l. 137

Night falls: <sup>l. 139</sup>

*Innana appears.* <sup>48</sup> → l. 137

*En-ĥedu-ana trusts that Innana hears the ritual song.* →l. 137

En-ĥedu-ana (now) creates the song of Innana's rage. →ll. 135, 138–139

i.e. En-ĥedu-ana (now) sings the song of Innana's anger.

This song is decisive (i.e. it will bring about the decisive turning point). <sup>49</sup>

“Out of oppression, I, En-ĥedu-ana, create the song for you, Innana!

Don't let your heart cool down for my sake!

When the night (and with it the time of distress) is over, a cult singer will repeat the song for you! ll. 139–140

Because of your great anger (at the deeds of the enemies), no one will calm your heart (until you have destroyed the enemies)!”

Two observations are particularly important for the question of authorship:

1. There is no mention of *writing* anywhere in the text. Rather, the text is a song that is created by being sung. The creation of sacred texts through singing is a typical concept in ancient Mesopotamia (→ 5.1).
2. The creation of the song through singing is part of a sequence of actions:

#### 2.1 Purification rituals

En-ĥedu-ana performs purification rituals in Innana's temple Ešdam-ku before singing the song. This is a necessary procedure for rituals. <sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> This phrasing is the typical way of indicating that the king, as the embodiment of Innana's Dumuzi, is threatened by demons or enemies.

<sup>48</sup> Innana can be manifested in a cultic context, e.g., in a star and/or in the form of a statue or standard.

<sup>49</sup> A repetition of the copula in line 139: “is (what matters).”

<sup>50</sup> Before one interacts with a deity, it is essential to perform purification rituals to avoid angering the deity. In this specific case, purification rituals are the necessary prelude to performing the following war ritual and its song. They also serve as an invitation for Innana to be present at the ritual and to listen to the words of the high priestess.

## 2.2 Preparation of the Ešdam-ku temple

En-ĥedu-ana prepares the temple Ešdam-ku for the coming of Innana through the purification rituals.

## 2.3 Creating the song

En-ĥedu-ana sings and creates the song of Innana's rage (→ 5.1).

The sequence of purification rituals, temple preparation, and singing the song shows that singing is seen as a priestly task alongside other priestly duties.

### 4.3 "Giving birth" to the song: the overall context

The statement about giving birth does not stand alone in the text, but is accompanied by many parallel statements that describe the actions of the high priestess in relation to the text:

TABLE 3: Actions of the high priestess with reference to NMS

Line	Text name	Actor	Action	Addressee
63	"your (Innana's) numinous-powerful song", ser <sub>3</sub> ku <sub>3</sub>	En-ĥedu-ana	say = sing <sup>1</sup>	implicitly: Innana
81	"Prayer" a-ra-zu	En-ĥedu-ana	say = sing	you = Innana
82–83	"Lamentation of tears", ir <sub>2</sub>	En-ĥedu-ana	give free rein	you = Innana
83	"Thine (is) the judgment!"	En-ĥedu-ana	say = sing	you = Innana
99	"my (En-ĥedu-ana) numinos-powerful song", ser <sub>3</sub> ku <sub>3</sub> -ġa <sub>2</sub>	En-ĥedu-ana	–	implicitly: Innana
135	"(Song) of your (Innana's) raging", mir-mir-za	En-ĥedu-ana	say = sing	implicitly: Innana
138	("Song of your raging")	En-ĥedu-ana	give birth	you = Innana
139	("Song of your raging")	implicit: En-ĥedu-ana	say = sing	you = Innana
140	("Song of your raging")	cult singer, gala	repeat	you = Innana

<sup>1</sup>Since "prayer" is used here as a generic term for the numinous song, this prayer is not spoken but sung.

The actions of En-ĥedu-ana with reference to the text are homogeneous: it is the high priestess herself who, in a cultic context, is engaged in singing the song for Innana here and now.<sup>51</sup> All other statements in the song reinforce this: The intention behind the song is specific to a high priestess called En-ĥedu-ana living in a civil war during the reign of Narām-Sîn.<sup>52</sup> The birth of the song is logically placed in this context: En-ĥedu-ana sings this song, which she created for a war ritual. A look into the future reveals an exception: after En-ĥedu-ana has sung the song during the night, a cult singer is said to repeat it at bright noon. This statement indicates that the song is to be included in the repertoire of the temple cult. Here, too, we are not talking about the writing of the song, nor about learned authors, but about temple singers. Looking to the future, the focus is also on the *performance of the song in the ritual*, not on a *written text*. The "birthing of texts" is not only mentioned in this text, but also in other texts. This will be discussed in section → 5.1.

<sup>51</sup>In these statements, so-called cohortative forms ("I will ...") are often used, which are to be understood as performative statements ("I do now/hereby ..."). The use of the cohortative for performative statements is equivalent to the use of the precativ as an affirmative of the future.

<sup>52</sup>See A. Zgoll 1997; A. Zgoll 2015a: 340; A. Zgoll 2021 and Halton and Svärd 2018: 93: "En-ĥedu-anna puts herself and her petition at the very center of this composition."

Foster (2019: 14) remarks that the "highly individual style, autobiographical and historical content, certain spellings and usages, and ancient subscripts to manuscripts of her works naming her as author favor ascribing at least the three long poems [including NMS] to her"; see also Foster 2016: 206–08. In the case of NMS the information about her "authorship" is woven into the song itself.



#### 4.4 Conclusion on the birthing, transmission, and transcription of the song

The statement that En-ḥedu-ana gave birth to the song is not linked to a copula statement (“I am ...”). It is also not given any special weight in comparison to the many other statements in the first person found in the text. In the immediate context, the statement is parallel in form and content to statements about En-ḥedu-ana’s cultic activities. In the text as a whole, the birthing of the song is parallel to statements about the *singing of the song*. En-ḥedu-ana sings the song, and later the cult singer is to repeat it for Innana. Everything that is said in this text about the origin and use of the text has to do with singing.<sup>53</sup> The “birthing” of the song takes place through the singing of the song.<sup>54</sup> This singing, in turn, is part of a ritual that is initiated by purification rites.

The explanation of how the song is to be transmitted to the regular cult reveals important aspects of the tradition: En-ḥedu-ana herself sings it “at night,” and the cult singer is to repeat it “at midday.” Within the context of the composition of NMS, however, these are not just simple indications of time: the “night” also refers metaphorically to the period of distress during which the entire song is composed, while “midday” anticipates the situation after the hoped-for positive turnaround, i.e., after the enemies have been overcome. Is this scenario typical of the tradition of new ritual songs? Did one first test the efficacy of a song by ascertaining whether the gods had acted in the spirit of the ritual song, i.e., accepted the song, before incorporating it into the regular cult? This is a perfectly reasonable assumption. Only if the song had achieved its purpose would there have been a reason to record it in writing.<sup>55</sup> It would not have been preserved and transmitted for its literary value alone (→ 5.2.2).

Inductive analysis of information gleaned from the text itself thus clarifies the original Mesopotamian perspective on the creation of the song. The song was created as part of a ritual performed by the high priestess En-ḥedu-ana. The ritual was devised for a unique purpose: it was a war ritual intended to end the civil war by recruiting the goddess Innana to completely destroy the enemies of the Central Kingdom under Narām-Sîn. During this crisis, the powerful high priestess sang a new song while performing the ritual, thereby creating it.

The second inductive text analysis shows that, in the context of literature and authorship, the text is not about the *production of literature* but about the *creation of ritual*. The text was not created in a private chamber by a scribe hoping to elevate his own reputation,<sup>56</sup> nor in the chancellery of a royal palace,<sup>57</sup> but in a temple, at night, by a high priestess seeking the ritual-transformative elevation<sup>58</sup> of a deity who could preserve an endangered empire.<sup>59</sup> Subsequently it entered the repertoire of the cult singers at the temple.

#### 5. Cultural context: the creation of ritual songs

The preceding analysis demonstrates that NMS was created by the high priestess as part of a war ritual for the warlike goddess Innana. However, in order to reconstruct the original Mesopotamian perspective on the creation of the song as precisely as possible, it is methodologically important to evaluate also the wider cultural context.

<sup>53</sup> The text has nothing to say about the *writing* of the song.

<sup>54</sup> The three categories of authorship presented by Svärd (2013) can therefore be expanded somewhat: alongside texts whose authorship is defined in terms of dictation are a substantial number of texts in which authorship effectively takes the form of singing.

<sup>55</sup> A similar authentication procedure can be found elsewhere in Mesopotamia, e.g., in the field of divination, where messages from the gods had to be verified as such. If, for example, someone had a dream that was suspected to contain a message from the gods, it was necessary to obtain confirmatory omens to determine whether the dream could in fact be regarded as a divine message (A. Zgoll 2006: 353–68).

<sup>56</sup> See above → 1.

<sup>57</sup> This is the thesis of Glassner (2009), who assumes that a palace scribe was better equipped than a high priestess to put the dominant “ideology” into words. However, NMS is not a political proclamation; the problematic situation of the ruler is only alluded to, in a restrained manner. Rather, it is a ritual text, well within the *métier* of a high priestess. See the overview of the “traditions of cultic speech” used in NMS—an enthronement ritual for the high priestess, elements of the Dumuzi cult or the language of laments—in A. Zgoll 1997: 112–17.

<sup>58</sup> The song is about empowerment; see A. Zgoll 2021.

<sup>59</sup> In this respect, Lambert’s (2001) conviction that the “distinctive style of her claimed compositions could be that of a courtier as easily as that of the lady herself” misses the point; see also the following section.

### 5.1 Gods create ritual texts

Research in recent years has made it clear that the texts used in rituals for individuals in Mesopotamia were regarded as revelations from gods. The sources repeatedly note that these rituals are the words of gods, in particular the ritual god Enki/Ea and his son Asalluḫi/Marduk.<sup>60</sup> A study of sacred texts in ancient Mesopotamia has shown that in the context of rituals performed at the temple, it is high-ranking deities such as Enlil, Nintu, Enki, Utu, or Erra who are credited with the creation of sacred texts.<sup>61</sup> Although scholars today treat these texts as anonymous compositions, from the Mesopotamian standpoint, each one had a divine author. This had important consequences in ancient times: because these texts were assumed to have been revealed by gods, they could not be altered. These revealed texts can (but need not) bear a separate note certifying them as the “wording of the (divine) words” (sum. ka enim-ma).<sup>62</sup> The study of sacred texts has also shown that divine songs and other ritual texts do *not* originate as *written* texts. When a written version of a sacred text is described, it is clearly secondary! Thus, the state god Enlil sings a numinous and powerful ritual song that turns a building in Keš into a consecrated place, i.e., a temple. Afterward, the goddess Nissaba creates a written version specifically to safeguard this song of Enlil. This is a guarantee that in rituals it is actually Enlil’s words that are being sung. Enlil’s singing is primary, Nissaba’s writing is secondary.<sup>63</sup> Sources from the third to the first millennium show that deities create powerful ritual songs and spells through their singing and speaking. These songs and spells are used in rituals to achieve the highest ends of Mesopotamian culture, such as the proper functioning of temples and thus the prosperity of the city-state. The “birthing” of songs also belongs in this context. Innana, for example, “gives birth to” and thus “creates” a dirge for her beloved husband Dumuzi:

nin-e nitalam-ni-ir ser<sub>3</sub> mu-un-ši-ib<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>3</sub>-du<sub>2</sub> The mistress (Innana) began to give birth to a song for  
her husband (Dumuzi),  
ser<sub>3</sub> mu-un-ši-ib-dim<sub>2</sub>-e began to create a song for him.

*Innana and Bilulu* 74 (with parallel line 75, where names are explicit)

The terms “birthing” and “creating” emphasize that the goddess is bringing forth a new, unprecedented song.

### 5.2 En-ḫedu-ana as goddess creates a ritual song

Since the prevailing idea in Mesopotamia was that it was the gods alone who created ritual songs and ritual sayings, the question arises as to how En-ḫedu-ana could even dare to create such a ritual song. The Mesopotamian sources provide a clear answer to this: En-ḫedu-ana, as the high priestess, does not act as a ‘human being’ when she creates a ritual. Rather, she is the *embodiment of a deity* in the ritual! This is attested by an alabaster disk that dates back to En-ḫedu-ana’s own time (23<sup>rd</sup> century) and contains both an inscription and an image of her.

#### 5.2.1 En-ḫedu-ana as a goddess

The alabaster disk of En-ḫedu-ana is remarkable for its depiction of the high priestess as a goddess (more on this in a moment), and as a model for the transmission of the song NMS. In the research literature, it is repeatedly doubted that NMS could be an authentic composition by En-ḫedu-ana

<sup>60</sup> See A. Zgoll 2022: 296–98 with further literature.

<sup>61</sup> See A. Zgoll 2022.

<sup>62</sup> A. Zgoll 2022, 295–98.

<sup>63</sup> A. Zgoll 2022, 283–89. See accordingly the colophon of the Tummal temple inscription (Oelsner 2003; Michalowski 2006), which states that it was “written down according to

the wording (ka) of Lu-Innana, the chief leatherworker of Enlil;” correspondingly, some laments sung to the accompaniment of the sem-tympani (er-sema) are described as the “wording of NN” (ka NN) (see Löhnert 2008: 431–33). Here, too, singing or speaking is primary, and writing is secondary.

because the surviving textual witnesses date to the OB period, some five hundred years after the historical En-ĥedu-ana lived, during the Old Akkadian period. But the alabaster inscription of En-ĥedu-ana proves that such a transmission over many centuries is possible. The inscription on the alabaster disk itself, carved during the Old Akkadian period, is in fragmentary condition, but the full text is preserved on an OB tablet. The transmission of the original inscription into the OB period provides a remarkable analogy for the transmission of NMS and shows in general that documents originating from this high priestess were considered valuable.

TABLE 4: Survival of the En-ĥedu-ana alabaster disk inscription and of NMS

<i>Old Akkadian (23<sup>rd</sup> century)</i>		<i>Old Babylonian (18<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century)</i>
Alabaster disk of the En-ĥedu-ana (original preserved)	➡	Transcripts of the alabaster disk
*Transcription of En-ĥedu-ana's song NMS (original not preserved)	➡	Transcripts of NMS

In general, the transmission of texts over many centuries in Mesopotamia is well attested. Many other such examples are known, such as the *song of praise of the gods Nin-tur and Ašgi* (the so-called *Keš hymn*), which was handed down for over seven hundred years,<sup>64</sup> or the *song of praise of Ninurta* (the so-called *Ninurta and the stones* or *Lugale*), which was handed down for over one thousand years.

The inscription itself and the pictorial representation preserved on the other side of the alabaster disk provide important insights into how the high priestess saw herself.



Fig. 5. Alabaster disk of En-ĥedu-ana, CBS 16665, obverse, 23<sup>rd</sup> century. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia

<sup>64</sup> See Biggs 1971: 196: “The Old Babylonian version is ... not a creation of Old Babylonian scribes using older material, but is a faithful reflection of a text that had

already been fixed in the Sumerian literary tradition for centuries.”

Modern accounts of En-ĥedu-ana usually introduce her as the daughter of Sargon of Akkad. The ancient depiction of En-ĥedu-ana on the alabaster disk presents her as a powerful figure in her own right. En-ĥedu-ana is surrounded by three priests who are depicted somewhat smaller, indicating that they are of lower rank. The four people are offering a libation on an altar. A representation of the deity to whom the libation is being offered has not survived; the modern reconstruction of the alabaster disk has added a temple tower where the deity would have appeared. The inscription on the other side of the alabaster disk confirms that the missing deity is the goddess Innana, for whom En-ĥedu-ana created an “altar of heaven.” Because the disk depicts her in the act of dedicating this altar to the goddess, En-ĥedu-ana thus presents herself here as a high priestess during the performance of a ritual before the goddess Innana, just as she does in NMS.

The inscription on the reverse is even more revealing than the pictorial representation. It mentions four titles of En-ĥedu-ana. They include the title “Child of Sargon,” but it appears in the last place:



Fig. 6. Inscription on the reverse of the alabaster disk, 23<sup>rd</sup> century (photo), courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia

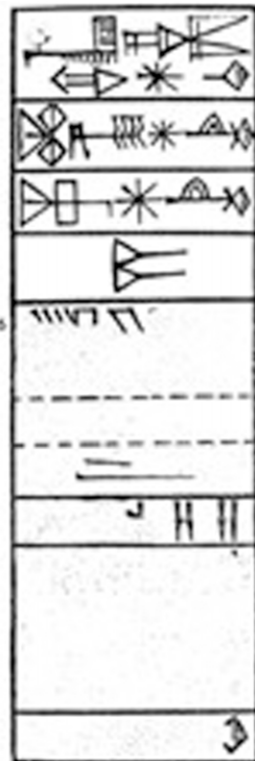


Fig. 7. Inscription on the reverse of the alabaster disk, 23<sup>rd</sup> century (copy), from Gadd/Legrain 1928: UET 1 no. 23 and pl. C

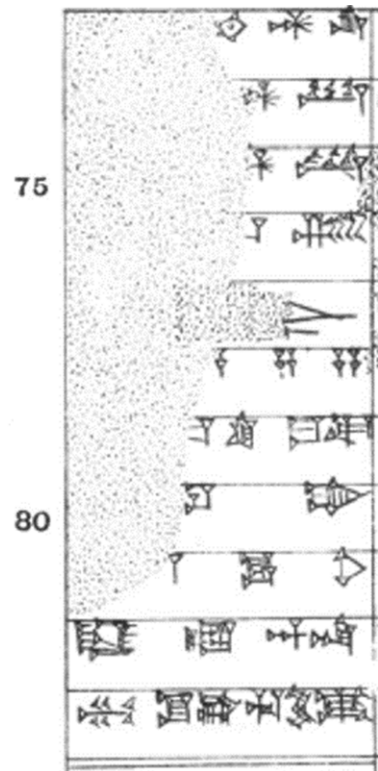


Fig. 8. Transcript of the alabaster disk inscription, 18<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century, from Gadd/Legrain 1928: UET 1 no. 289 lines 73–83

<sup>1</sup> En-[h]e <sub>2</sub> -du <sub>7</sub> -an-na	En-ḥedu-Ana,
<sup>2</sup> zirru <sup>d</sup> Nanna	zirru (= small, female bird) of <sup>deity</sup> Nanna,
<sup>3</sup> dam <sup>d</sup> Nanna	spouse of <sup>deity</sup> Nanna,
<sup>4</sup> dumu <sup>5</sup> Ṛsar-ru <sup>1</sup> -GI	child of Sargon,
<sup>6</sup> [lugal] <sup>7</sup> KIŠ	king of the world
<sup>8</sup> [e <sub>2</sub> <sup>d</sup> INNA]NA.ZA.ZA	—I have built a radiant cult pedestal in the temple of INNANA.ZA.ZA
<sup>9</sup> [ur]i <sub>5</sub> <sup>ki</sup> -ma-ka	of Ur.
<sup>10</sup> [para <sub>10</sub> ] si-ga	
<sup>11</sup> [b]i <sub>2</sub> -e-du <sub>3</sub>	
<sup>12</sup> para <sub>10</sub> banšur an-na	I have given the cult pedestal the name “Altar of Heaven.”
<sup>13</sup> mu-še <sub>3</sub> bi-še <sub>21</sub>	

The first three titles of En-ḥedu-ana are far more prestigious than the reference to Sargon. Even the “name” En-ḥedu-Ana is a title-name that expresses that En-ḥedu-ana is a high priest(ess) (Sum. en). It means “high priest(ess), ornament of heaven.”<sup>65</sup> The following two titles show that this position of power is accompanied by a transformation of essence: as high priestess, En-ḥedu-ana has become the “spouse” of the city god of Ur, Nanna, his “zirru bird,” i.e. his “sweetheart.” In other words: En-ḥedu-ana embodies the goddess Nin-gal, the “Great Mistress!” Nin-gal/En-ḥedu-ana is therefore the consort of the god Nanna and mother of the goddess Innana.<sup>66</sup>

From today’s perspective, the notion that a human can embody a deity seems strange. This is why we tend to ignore or downplay such ideas. But it is precisely in these cases that scientific inquiry is needed to reconstruct the concepts of the other, foreign culture as precisely and objectively as possible. How could anyone in Mesopotamian antiquity have imagined that a priestess could become the manifestation of a deity?

People who are transformed into powerful divine beings in their capacity as priestesses or priests<sup>67</sup> are like people who are transformed into gods in their capacity as rulers,<sup>68</sup> or like temples which, as the sources say, are transformed into the “great heaven” or the “third (cosmic space) next to heaven and earth.”<sup>69</sup> In ancient Mesopotamia, this transformative power is attributed to rituals. It is a stroke of luck that copies of songs used in the initiation ritual of the high priestess En-ḥedu-ana have survived.<sup>70</sup> During the consecration ritual, the woman, whose name prior to her consecration we do not know, becomes the high priestess En-ḥedu-ana and thus the powerful consort of the moon god, Nin-gal, the zirru sweetheart of Nanna.<sup>71</sup>

The fact that a goddess is embodied in En-ḥedu-ana is not an isolated case. The concept is well known—ritual experts describe themselves as a “statue (= embodiment) of the god Asalluḫi.” However, the phenomenon can be observed more widely. Priests, ritual experts, and kings in Mesopotamia are transformed into the embodiment of deities through rituals.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>65</sup> This name may conceal part of a myth, as it suggests that this high priestess is a piece of jewelry that belongs to heaven—it has its actual place in heaven, it comes from heaven. For the idea that outstanding “people” who are seen as the embodiment of deities come from heaven, see Kärger 2021. Such descriptions express that this entity itself has a numinous character; see A. Zgoll and C. Zgoll 2021: 585–605.

<sup>66</sup> See the important considerations by J.G. Westenholz 1989: 544.

<sup>67</sup> For this phenomenon in different cultures see Polit 2013.

<sup>68</sup> A. Zgoll and C. Zgoll 2021: 598–601.

<sup>69</sup> See *Innana and An* in translation and with commentary by A. Zgoll 2015b and *Keš-Hymn* 53 with Gragg 1969: 170 and Wilcke 2006: 223. A new edition by Brit Kärger is in preparation.

<sup>70</sup> We owe the edition and analysis of the corresponding *balbale* song on Nanna for the consecration of En-ḥedu-ana

(*Nanna C*) to J.G. Westenholz 1989: 552–55, see also Black et al. 1998: ETCSL 3.13.3.

<sup>71</sup> A close reading of the sources reveals that En-ḥedu-ana’s divine nature was taken quite seriously in antiquity. Several passages in NMS indicate that there were riots in the city of Ur, the place of worship where En-ḥedu-ana was appointed high priestess, and that En-ḥedu-ana was threatened with death and driven out. It is clear that the opponents of the central empire wanted to negate her high-priestly power. But why didn’t they simply kill her (see Podany 2022: 162)? In the Mesopotamian religious context, they feared her as the embodiment of the goddess Nin-gal. En-ḥedu-ana’s enemies hoped that the city god Nanna had long since deprived her of her office. But they could not be sure, and if they turned out to be wrong, they would incur the wrath of the gods. The song NMS is convinced that the opponents have brought the wrath of the gods upon themselves.

<sup>72</sup> See A. Zgoll 2022: 273–76; 292–98.



### 5.2.2 *En-ĥedu-ana as a goddess may give birth to songs*

That the goddess is embodied in En-ĥedu-ana does not mean that En-ĥedu-ana is identical with the goddess as a whole, in every respect, with all her aspects and powers.<sup>73</sup> But she is identified as a manifestation of the goddess Nin-gal, i.e., she is seen as one manifestation alongside others (such as a statue, symbol, or star). En-ĥedu-ana is seen as an embodiment of Nin-gal. In particular, she is the mouthpiece of the goddess, as we learn from another line of NMS:

119 enim du<sub>11</sub>-ga <sup>d</sup>Nin-gal-la lu<sub>2</sub>-ra nu-mu-na-bur<sub>2</sub> I have not revealed the decrees of <sup>deity</sup>Nin-gal to this man.

When the goddess is embodied in En-ĥedu-ana, the goddess can speak through her. With this essential piece of background knowledge, we can understand what is meant when the text of NMS affirms that En-ĥedu-ana created this very song. It turns out to be a powerful message. This message does not refer to En-ĥedu-ana as a human being, but to En-ĥedu-ana as the goddess Nin-gal, who is the actual creator of this new ritual song.

Concept (1), that the gods embody themselves in consecrated priestesses and priests, and concept (2), that it is the gods who create rituals and ritual texts,<sup>74</sup> explain how ritual songs can arise in a culture that believes these songs are revealed by gods; and it makes clear why the song NMS declares so forcefully that En-ĥedu-ana is really High Priestess (→ 3.3). The point emphasized here is that she is *still* High Priestess and therefore a manifestation of the goddess Nin-gal. En-ĥedu-ana's unique divine status is what allows and enables her to create the ritual song that empowers Innana to let her rage destroy the enemies.<sup>75</sup> Only high-ranking representatives of the priesthood acting as the embodiment of a deity can produce rituals and ritual songs.

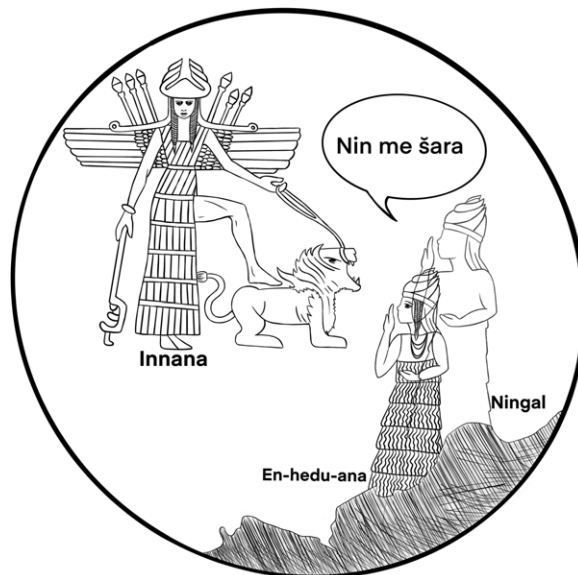


Fig. 9. Creation of NMS as a ritual song of the goddess Nin-gal embodied in the high priestess En-ĥedu-ana, design A. Zgoll, realization S. Dak

<sup>73</sup> Therefore En-ĥedu-ana can still refer to Nin-gal as outside of herself; see NMS 61 and 119.

<sup>74</sup> See ample evidence in the forthcoming book on rituals (see note 1).

<sup>75</sup> See A. Zgoll 2021.

### 6. Conclusion on the authorship of NMS from a Mesopotamian perspective

The discovery of a Mesopotamian text claiming that someone was an admirable poet because he had written great literature would be historically unprecedented and highly suspect. Questions would arise about the translation or interpretation of the text and the authenticity of the tablet itself, for its content reflects modern ideas of literature as a text and of the poet as a genius—ideas that are absent from genuine Mesopotamian texts.

Our inductive text analysis of NMS has not identified any “claim of authorship,” but rather a “claim of priestship.” According to the Mesopotamian understanding of ritual, only a person in whom a deity has manifested itself is allowed to create songs that effectively transform the gods and the world. These insights are valuable for historical evaluation, as they confirm the historical correctness of the statements in NMS: by creating the song and singing it during the ritual, the high priestess fulfils the task that a high-ranking priestly personality is allowed to perform as the embodiment of a deity.

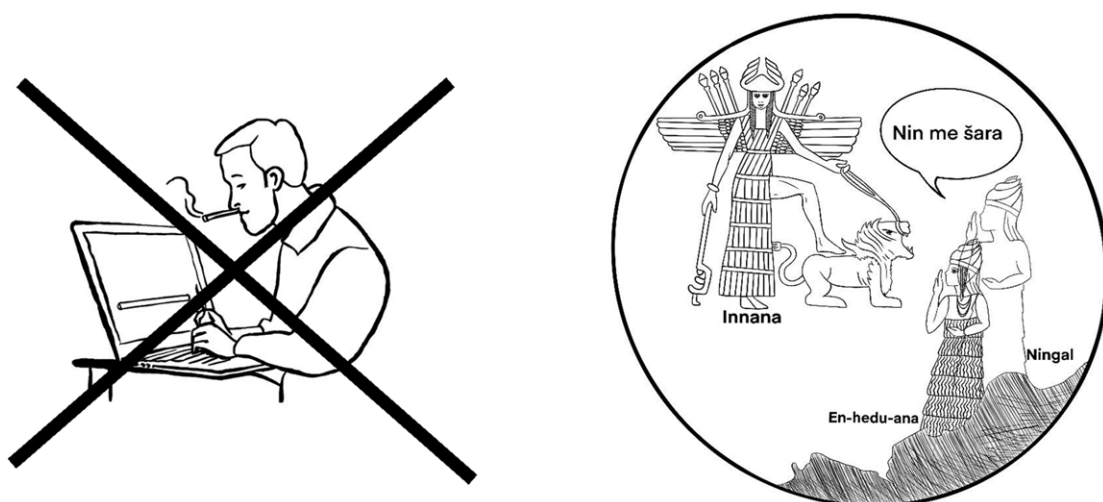


Fig. 10. Creation of a text by a modern writer vs. creation of a ritual text by an ancient Mesopotamian goddess/priestess, design A. Zgoll, realization A. Zgoll and S. Dak

The fact that the words of the song were regarded as words of the gods also explains why the deviations from the original text that accrued over five hundred years of textual transmission are minimal: *In terms of content*, the traditions preserved in at least seven different city-states are identical,<sup>76</sup> even if there are some minor differences in the form of the song.<sup>77</sup> The words of the gods must be handed down as precisely as possible.

Through several analyses from different angles—text-internal and text-external—NMS has proven to be a homogeneous structure, as summarized in the following table:

<sup>76</sup> These are the city-states of Nippur, Ur, Uruk, Larsa, Sippar, Kiš, and Tutub. The same tradition is preserved on other tablets whose provenance is unknown; see A. Zgoll 1997: 185.

<sup>77</sup> See A. Zgoll 1997: 179 on the differently transmitted order of lines 125–32.

TABLE 5: The Mesopotamian perspective: What NMS is and what it is not

<i>Properties inductively derived from NMS: NMS is ...</i>	<i>Properties not compatible with NMS: NMS is ...</i>
– a numinous and powerful song for a war ritual,	– not an individual poem,
– prepared by cleansing rituals,	– not for use outside ritual contexts,
– created while it is sung in the ritual,	– not created as a written text
– created by a high priestess fulfilling her priestly duties	– no evidence for an ingenious “invention” of authorship,
– created by a high priestess in whom a deity is embodied	– not created by a writer or learned scribe
– a ritual song that only deities are allowed to create	– not the work of human hands,
– a gift from the goddess Nin-gal to the goddess Innana,	– not composed by people for people,
– the song of a war ritual to the most powerful and warlike goddess, whose name one does not take in vain, <sup>1</sup> especially not when she is angry, <sup>2</sup>	– not conceivable as an <i>imitation of a war ritual</i> dedicated to the angry-aggressive goddess Innana, which a scribe would have invented to find his own identity in a circle of fellow scribes,
– a ritual song which subordinates the other powerful gods of the city-states to this Innana as the most powerful deity of all.	– not composed to gain prestige among human colleagues.

<sup>1</sup>The same is true today for any religious culture, group, or individual. An example: someone who belongs to a culture based on and practising Sharia law, would not even think of performing a song for a war ritual intended to incite the wrath of the mighty God in an imitation of the ritual.

<sup>2</sup>In this “song of Innana’s rage” (135), the speaker implores the goddess to roar against her enemies, to strike them down, and even to devour their corpses (125a–127).

From the *ancient Mesopotamian* perspective, En-ḫedu-ana is analogous to a statue in which the goddess Nin-gal embodies herself and through which she sings and thus creates the song NMS.<sup>78</sup> The concept that En-ḫedu-ana, as a manifestation of Nin-gal, created the ritual and its song provides the answer to the question we posed at the outset: Can we recover the original Mesopotamian concept of authorship? The answer is that NMS does not speak of the *ability* to create the ritual song, but of the *right* to act as a high priestess who creates an entire ritual, including its song. The moot question concerning En-ḫedu-ana in her historical moment is not whether she is able to *communicate* with the gods, but whether she is still able to *embody* the goddess Nin-gal! So it is not a question of authorship, but of divinity—and authorship results from divinity. From a *modern* perspective, the combination of the contemporary historical sources for En-ḫedu-ana (→ 2) and the results of the historical-original reconstruction provided here prove the authorship of En-ḫedu-ana as unequivocally as is possible in the reconstruction of historical facts.<sup>79</sup>

En-ḫedu-ana’s texts were long copied in Mesopotamia, as shown by the example of the alabaster disk, whose inscription was handed down for at least five hundred years, until the same period when the surviving copies of NMS were written.<sup>80</sup> For researchers who are familiar with Mesopotamian culture, it is not difficult to understand why scribes devoted much energy to the accurate

<sup>78</sup> For the underlying oikomorphic view of man, see A. Zgoll 2012a; A. Zgoll 2012b.

<sup>79</sup> One could only dream of such evidence in the case of Sappho, for example, the oldest known author from Greece.

<sup>80</sup> The fact that no copies from the intervening periods have survived is due to the accident of discovery (see → 5.2.1).

transmission of NMS. From a Mesopotamian perspective, Innana had acted exactly in accordance with En-ĥedu-ana's ritual in a seemingly hopeless situation: She had executed her wrath on her enemies and had indeed rescued her favorite, Narām-Sîn, "from the constriction," as it says in one of his inscriptions,<sup>81</sup> just as En-ĥedu-ana had entreated her. In the ancient worldview, this success proved that the ritual song of En-ĥedu-ana possessed divine power.<sup>82</sup> Once the power of the song had been validated, it was natural to continue singing the song of this Nin-gal/En-ĥedu-ana in cult (as promised to the goddess in NMS 139f. → 4.2), to preserve and pass it on in written form, and to use it as model of ritual effectiveness for a new time and its challenges. In this way, NMS also inspired other songs that other priestesses or priests sang as embodiments of deities.<sup>83</sup>

## 7. Literature, ritual, myth

### 7.1 NMS as literature

*"It is certainly true that the epic is a long poem on a grand theme which is clearly a very great literary masterpiece, and thus stands in a definite relation to Babylonian language and culture in the same way as the plays of Shakespeare do to English literature and culture."*  
(George 2003: 34)

With the result that the song NMS was originally understood as a song for a war ritual, the question of the relationship of the text to literature arises anew.

- (1) Were literary qualities attributed to this text in *Mesopotamian antiquity*?
- (2) *From today's perspective*, does NMS belong in the category of literature?

If literature is primarily defined in terms of the deliberate, outstanding formal design of a text, then the formal design of NMS must be examined (1) from the perspective of antiquity and (2) from today's perspective.

#### 7.1.1 Like the best beer. Ancient perspective

How was the quality of the formal design of NMS assessed in antiquity? This question can be answered because the text itself contains a statement that sheds some light on the nature of literary quality. En-ĥedu-ana sings:

<sup>82</sup> ir <sub>2</sub> -ĝa <sub>2</sub> kaš du <sub>10</sub> -ga-gen <sub>7</sub> <sup>83</sup> ku <sub>3</sub> <sup>d</sup> Innana-ra šu ga-mu-ni-re-bar ...	My tearful lament—as if it were a libation of the best <sup>84</sup> beer I will now give it free rein before you, radiant Innana ...
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

NMS 82–83

The lament, i.e., the text of NMS, is like a libation of the best beer, i.e., it is comparable to beer of the highest quality. This applies to both the content and form of the text. The statement itself demonstrates the outstanding formal, i.e., literary quality *in nuce* through its skillful mastery of

<sup>81</sup> See the so-called *Bāseṭkī-inscription of Narām-Sîn* (Frayne 1993: 113 no. 10), which attributes the unexpected victory of this king solely to the power of Innana/Ištar.

<sup>82</sup> See A. Zgoll 2021: 49–50: "Innana has responded exactly as envisioned and conjured by En-ĥedu-ana's ritual... The self-evident conclusion for contemporary observers would have been to attribute the success in battle to the success of En-ĥedu-ana's ritual."

<sup>83</sup> See e.g. *Innana D* (Behrens 1998), which uses the beginning of NMS as a refrain, or another ritual song (*Išbi-*

*Erra C*), which begins with the words "mistress of the princely ME" (instead of "mistress of the countless ME" in NMS), followed by "shining forth like light" (instead of "light, shining forth" in NMS). On NMS as a model for later texts, see the remarks of Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 4 and A. Zgoll 2021: 50.

<sup>84</sup> It can also be translated "of well-made beer." Since Sumerian does not have a *morphologically* marked superlative, the formulation is to be understood as a superlative based on the *semantic* context.

imagery: the high priestess offers the goddess Innana a libation of the best quality. Just as the fine beer is poured out for the goddess, so too are the priestess's *tears* (ir<sub>2</sub>) poured out before the goddess—according to the first reading of the statement. But the priestess's *lamentation of tears* (ir<sub>2</sub>) that flows out before the goddess is also the song itself. Each of the three statements, which are condensed into one here, has an important meaning. As a priestess, En-ĥedu-ana regularly offers a libation of beer to Innana, as illustrated in the image on the alabaster disk (→ 5.2.1). Also, the description of tears as an offering is not an isolated case.<sup>85</sup> Corresponding to the pouring out of beer or tears, En-ĥedu-ana now “pours out” the song itself, the lamentation of tears, as an offering for Innana while she sings.

Nobody would dare to sacrifice inferior beer to the goddess. How would the warlike, furious goddess react to that! Accordingly, the song that is supposed to persuade the goddess to finally intervene and destroy En-ĥedu-ana's enemies must be of the highest quality in terms of content and form.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the song is of outstanding—as we would say, literary—quality, as befits a song by gods for gods.

### 7.1.2 *Water and fire. Scientific perspective*

From a formal and qualitative point of view, the song NMS proves to be a veritable firework display. More than fifty stylistic devices ranging from the micro level, such as devices of assonance (anaphora, epiphany, etc.), to the macro level, such as the overall structure of the song (climax, leitmotif, refrain, etc.), have been analyzed in terms of their function.<sup>87</sup> The artful intertwinement of retrospective comments and anticipations of a hoped-for future was already discussed in → 2, while connotative and polysemous statements were examined in → 7.1.1. A glance at the imagery alluded to in the song shows Innana as a flood of water and as fire; she is compared to a dragon, to the thunder god, to the storm, and finally to a predator that eats corpses. The highest gods, on the other hand, are compared to bats that have hidden from Innana in ruins and rubble. A literary analysis of NMS clearly validates the text as literature by today's standards. Or, to put it in the slightly adapted words of Andrew George: It is certainly true that the song is a poem on a gripping theme and is clearly a very great literary masterpiece, and thus it stands in a definite relation to Sumerian language and culture in a similar way as the plays of Shakespeare do to English literature and culture.<sup>88</sup> A singer can only create such a poem while singing if he or she has mastered the technical requirements. It is easy to imagine that the person to whom the highest priestly office had been entrusted possessed this technical mastery.<sup>89</sup>

### 7.1.3 *The three-dimensional text profile of NMS*

The analyses show that the song NMS fully satisfies the formal criteria for literature, both in its original Mesopotamian context and in contemporary scholarly terms. In this respect, the text should therefore be classified as *literature*. However, the previous sections have shown that the text was conceived as a *ritual* song. Ritual or literature: is this an inescapable dilemma? At this point in our investigation it becomes clear just how problematic one-dimensional classifications of texts are. They are certainly not sufficient to determine the category of a text.<sup>90</sup> This is because the categories of ritual and literature respond to different dimensions of a text. While classification of a text as literature is based on its *formal design*, classification of a text as ritual concerns its *function*. The third

<sup>85</sup> See e.g. Zgoll and Lämmerhirt 2009, Delnero 2020, Gabriel 2022.

<sup>86</sup> Corresponding efforts to achieve an excellent quality of the words can also be found elsewhere, e.g. in a ritual song (*Išbi-Erra C*) 22, where the prayer (a-ra-zu) is also compared to beer (there *kurun*, see Attinger 2023: 857). In the *praise song of Erra*, so-called *Erra Epic* 4, 129: *amāt Išum iqbūšu kī ulā šamni elīšu iqtib*, “The word that <sup>deity</sup>Išum had spoken to him satisfied him (<sup>deity</sup>Erra) like the finest oil.” A corresponding formulation can be found in 1:93, which deals with the speech of the seven gods (see Taylor 2017 and Jiménez 2023; I owe the reference to Selena Wisnom).

<sup>87</sup> See A. Zgoll 1997: 172–78 for an overview of the stylistic devices, in addition to detailed explanations of the function of these stylistic devices in the chapters of the book.

<sup>88</sup> Thus, with reference to the *Gilgameš Epic*, George 2003: 34, cited as the epigraph to this section.

<sup>89</sup> See Foster 2016: 208 comparing Erasmus with En-ĥedu-ana, adapted by me to En-ĥedu-ana's competence in singing a ritual song: “If Erasmus could write brilliantly in scholastic Latin, there is no reason why Enheduanna could not have” sung brilliant ritual songs in Sumerian.

<sup>90</sup> For the problems of genre categorizations see e.g. Roest and Vanstiphout 1999.



essential category is *content*. The type of a given text cannot be determined on the basis of a single parameter. Instead, a three-dimensional profile of texts is needed to account for the parameters (1) content, (2) form, and (3) function.<sup>91</sup> This approach to textual classification also has the advantage that these parameters can be determined on a culture-specific basis. From today's academic perspective, the content of NMS can be described as a combination of mythical and historical passages. From an ancient perspective, however, there are no "mythical" sections; the content is wholly historical, because the actions of the gods, whether past, present, or future, are perceived as actions that determine the course of history.<sup>92</sup>

The text type of NMS can be determined according to the three-dimensional text profile as follows:

TABLE 6: Three-dimensional text profile of NMS

	<i>Today's scientific classification</i>	<i>Original ancient classification</i>
<b>Content</b>	Mythical and historical retrospectives, <sup>1</sup> outlook on possible futures	historical: on the level of gods and humans
<b>Form</b>	literary <sup>2</sup>	of the best quality, like the best beer (i.e., corresponding to what can be called "literary" today)
<b>Function</b>	ritual	An offering from the goddess Nin-gal/En-ĥedu-ana to the goddess Innana (i.e., corresponding to what can be called "ritual" today)

<sup>1</sup>For the myths in NMS see A. Zgoll 2021; on the historical evaluation see A. Zgoll 1997.

<sup>2</sup>See A. Zgoll 1997: 171–178.

These definitions can be made more precise if, for example, the type of ritual in question is specified in modern terms, namely as a song for a war ritual. It is possible to achieve greater specificity in all dimensions when defining a text's profile in this way.

### 7.2 Conclusion: NMS as literature, En-ĥedu-ana as the earliest known author

Inductive text-based analysis and new information about the broader Mesopotamian cultural context have shown that the ritual song NMS can be identified as a song of the historically well-attested priestess En-ĥedu-ana. Singing ritual songs was one of the most important tasks of the high priestess, along with purification rituals and libations to the highest gods. The song was not created by writing, but by singing during the ritual. Such creation of a ritual song was reserved for a high-ranking priestess or priest acting as the embodiment of a deity. The words of NMS were perceived as divine words, ensuring that nobody would dare to modify them without divine permission,<sup>93</sup> even more so in this dramatic case where success was attributed solely to Innana<sup>94</sup>—as well as to Nin-gal/En-ĥedu-ana, who had empowered her.<sup>95</sup> This made her ritual song not only a sacred text but also a divine model not to be changed. From today's perspective, En-ĥedu-ana must therefore be regarded as the earliest author whose name is known.

<sup>91</sup> See A. Zgoll, 2022: 302–03.

<sup>92</sup> See C. Zgoll, 2019: 372–74.

<sup>93</sup> Adaptation of such special ritual texts was not achieved by rewriting the text but by adding discrete supplements which did not alter the text as such, see → 2 with note 14. For the general background see the discussion of the

Mesopotamian concept of rituals, their creation, and their functions in the forthcoming monograph about rituals (see note 1).

<sup>94</sup> See → 2 and the end of → 6.

<sup>95</sup> See A. Zgoll 2021.

From a Mesopotamian perspective, however, *the goddess Nin-gal*, embodied in En-ĥedu-ana, was the author of NMS.<sup>96</sup> The birth of literature took place in ritual, through the goddess Nin-gal/En-ĥedu-ana. Such songs of mythical-historical content, which are literary in form and were used functionally for rituals, are the earliest literature known worldwide. In Mesopotamia, gods were regarded as their authors. This literature was not *l'art pour l'art*, but *l'art pour les dieux*. In other words, this art was understood as art by gods for gods, and thus a Mesopotamian priestess, responding to the sentence of Jean Paul quoted in the epigraph, might have said, “Art may not be necessary for your daily bread, but for the offerings to the gods.”

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<sup>96</sup> Nin-gal/En-ĥedu-ana would not have been regarded as the *earliest* author. The earliest author named by Mesopotamian sources is the god Enlil, who is credited with the creation of the *Keš hymn*. While Enlil sings this song

to activate the temple of the goddess Nin-tur, the goddess Nissaba creates the writing to “knot” this song, i.e., to preserve it in this fixed form, as Enlil sings it (→ 5.1).

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### إن-خيدو-أنا: ولادة الأدب من خلال الإلهة

بقلم: أنيت زغول

هل كانت بعض النصوص تعتبر أدبًا في العصور القديمة، وهل كان هناك مفهوم للتأليف؟ وكيف يمكننا أن نرسم تصنيفات ذات مغزى لأنواع اليوم؟ الشاهد الأساسي للإجابة على مثل هذه الأسئلة في هذه الورقة هو أغنية (NMS Innana B/nin me šara) التي أثارت الكثير من الجدل. يكشف التحليل النصي الاستقرائي للإشارات إلى النص والمخاطب والمتحدث أن أغنية NMS هو نص أنشأته كاهنة لطقس من الطقوس. ومع ذلك، بدلاً من ادعاء التأليف بالمعنى الحديث لذلك، تؤكد الأغنية على المطالبة بالكهنوت. فقط بصفتها كاهنة عليا يُسمح للمتحدثة بالنص، En-ĥedu-ana، بإنشاء طقوس بأغنياتها، حيث إنها حينذاك فقط تعمل كتجسيد للإلهة Nin-gal. والواقع أن نظرية الطقوس في الرافدين القديمة تتطلب من الإله إنشاء مثل هذه النصوص الطقسية. ومع ذلك، هناك أدلة على أن أغنية NMS كانت تُعتبر تأليفًا ساميًا في العصور القديمة - كما هي اليوم - وبالتالي فهي تستحق تسمية "الأدب". تم تطوير ملف نصي ثلاثي الأبعاد لتصنيف خصائص النصوص؛ ملف NMS هو أسطوري تاريخي في المحتوى، أدبي في الشكل، وطقوسي في الوظيفة. وبذلك يوضح التحليل ولادة الأدب من خلال الإلهة نين-جال/إن-خيدو-أنا.