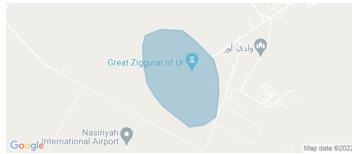


# Enheduana's Exaltation of Inana

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Entry tags: Mesopotamian Religion, Ancient Mesopotamian Text, Sumerian Text, Sumerian religions, Text, Religious Group, Hymn, Mesopotamian Religions

The Exaltation of Inana is a hymnic and narrative poem attributed to Enheduana, the daughter of king Sargon of Akkad, who served as the high priestess of Nanna in the city of Ur. She appears as the narrator and protagonist of the poem, but because all manuscripts of the text date to five centuries after her lifetime, the attribution is uncertain. The poem details Enheduana's expulsion from the city of Ur following a revolt led by a man named Lugal-Ane. She prays to Nanna, the god she has served, but he does not answer; so she turns instead to Nanna's daughter Inana, the goddess of love, war, transformation, and paradox, aiming to recruit Inana to her cause and elevate her to the top of the Sumerian pantheon. Most of the poem is a passionate, metaphor-laden paean to the terrifying powers of Inana, culminating in a self-referential scene where Enheduana composes the text we have been reading in a night-time encounter with Inana - swaying and exalting the goddess, and thus saving herself.



Date Range: 2300 BCE - 1700 CE

Region: Ur (Tell al-Muqayyar)

Region tags: Middle East, Iraq

The city of Ur (modern Tell al-Muqayyar) in what is now southern Iraq.

## Status of Readership:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists

## Sources and Corpora

### Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Sophus Helle, *Enheduana: The Complete Poems of the World's First Author*. New Haven: Yale University Press (2023).
- Source 2: Annette Zgoll, *Der Rechtsfall der En-hedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 246. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag (1997).
- Source 3: Benjamin R. Foster, *The Age of Agade: Inventing Empire in Ancient Mesopotamia*. New York: Routledge (2016).

### Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: [enheduana.org](http://enheduana.org)
- Source 1 Description: A collection of information resources about Enheduana and her poems

### Online Corpora

Relevant online Primary Textual Corpora (original languages and/or translations)

- Source 1 URL: <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.4.07.2>
- Source 1 Description: Translation of the Exaltation through the ETCSL website
- Source 2 URL: <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=c.4.07.2>
- Source 2 Description: Original text of the Exaltation through the ETCSL website
- Source 3 URL: [https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/search\\_results.php?SearchMode=Text&PrimaryPublication=CDLI+Literary+000623&MuseumNumber=&Provenience=&Period=&TextSearch=&ObjectID=&requ](https://cdli.ucla.edu/search/search_results.php?SearchMode=Text&PrimaryPublication=CDLI+Literary+000623&MuseumNumber=&Provenience=&Period=&TextSearch=&ObjectID=&requ)
- Source 3 Description: Photographs and line drawings of the manuscripts on the CDLI website.

## General Variables

### Materiality

#### Methods of Composition

- Incised or Inscribed

- ↳ Method of inscription
  - Other [specify]: Stylus

Medium upon which the text is written/incised

- Clay

- ↳ Clay object
  - Clay tablet

Was the material modified before the writing or incising process?

- Physical preparation

Was the text modified before the writing or incising process?

- Physical preparation

## Location

Is the text stored in a specific location?

[Note at which point in time, for reference, if known; select all that apply]

- Field doesn't know

Notes: Almost all the recovered manuscripts can be traced to a school context, but it is not known whether the text would have been stored in other locations as well.

Is the location where the text stored accompanied by iconography or images?

- No

Is the area where the text is stored accompanied by an-iconic images?

- No

## Production & Intended Audience

### Production

Is the production of the text funded by the polity?

- No

Is the text considered official religious scripture?

- No

Written in distinctly religious/sacred language?

- Yes

- ↳ Archaic ritual language?
  - Yes

Notes: The poem is written in a distinct, highly elevated form of Sumerian, which in the Old Babylonian period (when the manuscripts of the poem were written out) had died out and was been used primarily for religious rituals.

- ↳ Considered endogenous by the group itself?
  - Yes

- ↳ Considered exogenous by the group itself?
  - No

↳ Blended languages/creolizations/specific dialects?

– No

↳ Possess its own distinct written language?

– No

↳ If known: which authority (authorities) describe(s) the language as sacred?

[Select all that apply]

– Institutions

Notes: The sacrality of the language was established through its use in religious rituals.

↳ Are non-religious institutions involved with the support of teaching religious language(s) for this text?

– Yes

↳ Are non-religious written languages used by the group's adherents to support religious study of text?

– Yes

↳ Are oral traditions used to support the religious study of the text?

– Yes

### Intended Audience

What is the estimated number of people considered to be the audience of the text

This should be the total number of people who would serve as the intended audience for the text.

– Field doesn't know

Does the Religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members?

– No

Are there clear reformist movements?

(Reformism, as in not proselytizing to potential new conservative, but "conversion" - or rather, reform - to the "correct interpretation"?)

– No

Is the text in question employed in ritual practice?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The text describes itself as being performed by a religious specialist known as a gala, or lamentation priest, and draws on the language of ritual, but scholars are divided as to whether it was actually performed as a ritual.

Is there material significance to the text?

– No

## Context and Content of the Text (Beliefs and Practices)

### Context

Is the text itself accompanied by art?

– No

Are there multiple versions of the text?

– No

Notes: While there are manuscript variants in the received tradition, these are not significant enough to constitute separate versions.

Is the text part of a collection of texts?

– Yes

Notes: The text is part of a collection of ten Sumerian poems known as the Decad, but the exact nature and significance of the Decad is debated: it is often held to be a curricular grouping, corresponding to a stage of education for Babylonian scribes, but the evidence is unclear.

↳ Is there a sense of canonization?  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Is the text part of a series of volumes?  
– No

If the text is not explicitly scripture, is it part of another important literary tradition?

– Yes

↳ Cultural with religious implications?  
– Yes

↳ Behavioral literature?  
– No

### Content

Are there lineages or a single lineage established by the text?

– No

Does the text express a formal legal code?

– No

Formulating a specifically religious calendar?

– No

### Beliefs

Is a spirit-body distinction present in the text?

– No

Is belief in an afterlife indicated in the text?

– No

Is belief in reincarnation in this world specified in the text?

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses dictated in the text?

– No

Does the text indicate if co-sacrifices should be present in burials?

– No

Does the text specify grave goods for burial?

– No

Are formal burials present in the text?

– No

Are there practices that have funerary associations presented in the text?

– Yes

Notes: L. 69 mentions the ki-si3-ga, Akkadian kispu, which are offerings regularly presented to the souls of the dead, to keep them fed and happy in the afterlife.

↳ Do these practices take place at tombs/burial sites?

– Yes

↳ Do these practices take place for the veneration OR worship of the dead?

– Yes

↳ For the worship of a deceased person(s)?

– No

↳ For the worship of a deified human?

– No

↳ For the worship of a deceased hero?

– No

↳ For the veneration of a deceased person(s)?

– Yes

↳ For the veneration of a deified human?

– No

↳ For the veneration of a deceased hero?

– No

Are supernatural beings present in the text?

– Yes

↳ A supreme high-god is present

– Yes

Notes: The high god of the Sumerian pantheon is conventionally thought to be Enlil or An, and while these gods do retain their supreme position in the Exaltation, the text presents itself as an attempt (successful according to its own logic) to make Inana the supreme deity of the pantheon. This ambition is indicated in the very first words of the text, which served as its Sumerian title: nin me šara, "Queen of all cosmic powers."

↳ The supreme high god is anthropomorphic or described in anthropomorphic terms

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god is a sky deity

– Yes

- ↳ The supreme high god is chthonic (of the underworld)
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god)
  - No
- ↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is a kin relation to elites
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god has another type of loyalty-connection to elites
  - Yes
    - Notes: The Old Akkadian kings were thought to have a special connection to Inana; their reign would be referred to by one Babylonian scholar as "the reign of Ishtar."
- ↳ The supreme high god is unquestionably good
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god has knowledge of this world
  - Yes
    - ↳ Knowledge is restricted to a particular domain of human affairs
      - No
    - ↳ Knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region
      - No
    - ↳ Knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region
      - Yes
    - ↳ Knowledge is unrestricted outside of sample region
      - Field doesn't know
    - ↳ Can see you everywhere normally visible (in public)
      - Yes
    - ↳ Can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home)
      - Field doesn't know
        - Notes: While this may be the case for the Exaltation, it is worth noting that in Inana and Shukaletuda, Inana is unable to locate the gardener Shukaletuda when he hides from her in the crowded city.
    - ↳ Can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives)
      - Field doesn't know
    - ↳ Knows basic character (personal essence)
      - Field doesn't know
    - ↳ Knows what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight)
      - No

↳ Has other knowledge of this world  
– Yes

Previously human spirits are present  
– No

Non-human supernatural beings are present  
– No

Does the text attest to a pantheon of supernatural beings?  
– Yes

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model?  
– Yes

↳ Organized hierarchically?  
– Yes

↳ Power of beings is domain specific?  
– Yes

Are mixed human-divine beings present according to the text?  
– No

Notes: The existence of mixed human-divine beings is attested in other Sumerian texts, but not in the Exaltation.

Is there a supernatural being that is physically present in the/as a result of the text?  
– No

Does the text guide divination practices?  
– No

### Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present in the text?  
– Yes

Notes: Inana in particular monitors whether human beings sufficiently honor and respect her. For many of the other crimes listed in these questions, other texts indicate that they were treated as offenses that could be punished by the gods, but such punishment is not mentioned in the Exaltation. Further, Inana is described in texts such as Inana and Enki or the Hymn to Inana as the patron deity of such immoral practices as lying, gossip, etc.

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular  
– No

↳ Do expectations of ritual offerings play a role in supernatural monitoring?  
– Yes

↳ Libations?  
– Yes

↳ Food?

– Yes

↳ Animal sacrifice?

– Yes

↳ Human sacrifice?

– No

↳ Sacred objects?

– No

↳ Daily life objects?

– No

↳ Other?

– Specify: Inana expects praise in the form of ritual lamentations, which attest to her terrifying powers.

↳ Supernatural being care about taboos

– No

Notes: The worship of Inana was widely associated with the breaking of various taboos, especially around gender and sex.

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of coreligionists

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other religions

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other polities

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about sex

– Yes

Notes: Inana was the goddess of sex, and though this aspect of her character is not foregrounded in the Exaltation, she is said to dispel sexual activity in the city that rebelled against her rule (l. 55-57).

↳ Adultery

– No

↳ Incest

– No

↳ Taboo about close blood relations (beyond incest) [e.g. from same clan group, village, settlement, so forth].

– No

↳ Specifies taboo regarding power relations (i.e. defines what constitutes abusive behavior)

– No



↳ Does worship/veneration include sex acts/references?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Some scholars have seen in the Exaltation an allusion to a ritual known as the Sacred Marriage, in which a male ruler embodying a god would consummate the union with that god's high priestess, but the existence of such a ritual is hotly debated.

↳ Supernatural beings care about lying

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about honouring oaths

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about laziness

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about sorcery

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about non-lethal fighting

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about shirking risk

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about disrespecting elders

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about gossiping

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about property crimes

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about proper ritual observance

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about performance of rituals

– Yes

Notes: As stated above, Inana particularly expects regular expressions of praise and ritual obeisance, such as the lamentations that display her powers.

↳ Supernatural beings care about conversion of non-religionists

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about economic fairness

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about personal hygiene

– No

↳ Supernatural beings care about or expect the maintenance of the place?

– Yes

Notes: In her appeal to Inana, Enheduana highlights the fact that the usurper Lugal-Ane has desecrated and sullied the House of Heaven (Eana), the temple in Uruk shared by Inana and An.

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment in the text?

– Yes

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known?

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god

– No

↳ Done by many supernatural beings

– Yes

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle

– No

↳ Done by other entities or through other means

– No

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known?

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence?

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce group norms?

– No

Notes: This is the case in other cuneiform texts, but is not stated explicitly in the Exaltation.

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness?

– No

↳ Done randomly

– Yes

Notes: While this is not stated explicitly, the text does repeatedly highlight the unpredictable, unknowable nature of Inana, suggesting that punishment too may be meted out without obvious reason.

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife?

– No

Notes: This is the case in other cuneiform texts, but is not stated explicitly in the Exaltation.

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime?

– Yes

↳ Highly emphasized by the religious group?

– Yes

↳ Consists of bad luck?

– Yes

↳ Political failure?

– Yes

Notes: The premise of the text is that Enheduana has been cast into exile because she has lost the favor of the gods.

↳ Defeat in battle?

– Yes

↳ Crop failure or bad weather?

– Yes

↳ Disaster on journeys?

– Yes

Notes: While this is not made explicit in the Exaltation, it is stated in another text that is closely related to it, namely the Hymn to Inana, which was also attributed to Enheduana.

↳ Mild sensory displeasure?

– No

↳ Extreme sensory displeasure?

– Yes

↳ Sickness or illness?

– Yes

↳ Impaired reproduction?

– Yes

↳ Back luck visited on descendants?

– No

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards in the text?

– Yes

↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known?

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god

– No

↳ Done by many supernatural beings

– Yes

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle

– No

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence

– Yes

Notes: The main reward described in the text is Inana's coming to Enheduana's aid at the end of the text, in exchange for Enheduana's hymnic praise of the goddess

↳ Done to enforce group norms?  
– No

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness?  
– No

↳ Done randomly  
– No

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in the afterlife?  
– No  
Notes: This is the case in other cuneiform texts, but is not stated explicitly in the Exaltation.

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in this lifetime?  
– Yes

↳ Highly emphasized?  
– Yes  
Notes: In a sense: Inana's aid to Enheduana is the climax and telos of the text.

↳ Consists of good luck?  
– Yes

↳ Consists of political success or power?  
– Yes

↳ Consists of success in battle?  
– No  
Notes: As with many other answers in this section, this is the case in other cuneiform texts, but is not stated explicitly in the Exaltation.

↳ Consists of peace or social stability?  
– No

↳ Consists of healthy crops or good weather?  
– No

↳ Consists of success on journeys?  
– No

↳ Reward in this life consists of mild sensory pleasure?  
– No

↳ Reward in this life consists of extreme sensory pleasure?  
– Field doesn't know  
Notes: The final section of the text (l. 143-53), which describes a woman being wrapped in beauty and joy, may refer to either Inana or Enheduana - if it refers to Enheduana, it would constitute another reward for her hymn.

↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced health?  
– No

↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced reproductive success?  
– No

↳ Reward in this life consists of fortune visited on descendants?  
– No

### Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present in the text?  
– No

Is an eschatology present in the text?  
– No

### Norms & Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the text?  
– Yes

Notes: Specifically, the text encourages obedience to Inana and, by extension, to the Old Akkadian kings who affiliated themselves with her.

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious text?  
– No

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the text?  
– Yes

↳ Honesty/trustworthiness/integrity  
– No

Notes: Once again, some of these virtues are advocated in other cuneiform texts, but not stated explicitly in the Exaltation.

↳ Courage (in battle)  
– No

↳ Courage (generic)  
– No

↳ Compassion/empathy/kindness/benevolence  
– No

↳ Mercy/forgiveness/tolerance  
– No

↳ Generosity/charity  
– No

↳ Selflessness/selfless giving  
– No

- ↳ Righteousness/moral rectitude  
– No
- ↳ Ritual purity/ritual adherence/abstention from sources of impurity  
– No
- ↳ Respectfulness/courtesy  
– No
- ↳ Familial obedience/filial piety  
– No
- ↳ Fidelity/loyalty  
– No
- ↳ Cooperation  
– No
- ↳ Independence/creativity/freedom  
– No
- ↳ Moderation/frugality  
– No
- ↳ Forbearance/fortitude/patience  
– No
- ↳ Diligence/self-discipline/excellence  
– No
- ↳ Assertiveness/decisiveness/confidence/initiative  
– No
- ↳ Strength (physical)  
– No
- ↳ Power/status/nobility  
– No
- ↳ Humility/modesty  
– No
- ↳ Contentment/serenity/equanimity  
– No
- ↳ Joyfulness/enthusiasm/cheerfulness  
– No
- ↳ Optimism/hope  
– No

- ↳ Gratitude/thankfulness
  - No
- ↳ Reverence/awe/wonder
  - Yes
- ↳ Faith/belief/trust/devotion
  - Yes
- ↳ Wisdom/understanding
  - Yes
  - Notes: Specifically in the form of eloquence in the Sumerian language.
- ↳ Discernment/intelligence
  - No
- ↳ Beauty/attractiveness
  - No
- ↳ Cleanliness (physical)/orderliness
  - No
- ↳ Other important virtues
  - No

#### Advocacy of Practices

Does the text require celibacy (full sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require castration?

– No

Does the text require fasting?

– No

Does the text require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods)?

– No

Does the text require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations?

– No

Does the text require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of adults?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of children?

– No

Does the text require self-sacrifice (suicide)?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of property/valuable items?

– Yes

Notes: While the text does not require it as such, it repeatedly shows humans offering their property to Inana as an expression of their powerlessness before the goddess.

Does the text require sacrifice of time (e.g. attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.)?

– Yes

Notes: Again, the the text does not require it as such, but it does repeatedly show humans engaging in prayer and lamentation for the goddess.

Does the text require physical risk taking?

– No

Does the text require accepting ethical precepts?

– No

Does the text require marginalization by out-group members?

– No

Does the text require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household)?

– No

Does the text require participation in large-scale rituals?

– Yes

Notes: Rituals are mentioned or alluded to repeatedly in the text, e.g. in l. 68, where Enheduana describes herself carrying a basket of offerings and singing joyful hymns.



On average, how many participants gather in one location?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: While we can estimate the amount of people who may have participated in ancient Mesopotamian rituals, this is not specified in the Exaltation (the same applies to the following answers).



Interval of time between performances (in hours)

– Field doesn't know



Are there orthodoxy checks?

– Field doesn't know



Are there orthopraxy checks?

– Field doesn't know



Does participation entail synchronic practices?

– Field doesn't know



Is there use of intoxicants?



– Field doesn't know

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present as indicated in the text?

– No

Does the text employ fictive kinship terminology?

– No

Does the text include elements that are intended to be entertaining?

– Yes

Notes: "Entertaining" is a difficult category in this context, but if nothing else, the text aims to create a persuasive and engaging rhetorical effect.

↳ Drama?

– Yes

↳ Comedy?

– No

↳ Tragedy?

– Yes

↳ Epic entertainment?

– No

Does the text specify sacrifices, offerings, and maintenance of a sacred space?

– Yes

↳ Are sacrifices specified by the text?

– No

↳ Are there self-sacrifices specified by the text?

– No

↳ Are there material offerings present?

– Yes

Notes: See e.g. I. 26, where humanity is said to surrender their belongings to Inana without a fight

↳ Are they mandatory?

– Yes

↳ Are they composed of valuable objects?

– Yes

↳ Are they composed of daily-life objects?

– Yes

↳ Are material offerings interred at this place (in caches)?

– No

↳ Are there particular smells associated with material offerings?

– Yes

↳ Are there particular visual stimuli (colors, symbols) associated with the offerings? (I.e. 'must be bright' 'must include red')

– No

↳ Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory?

– No

↳ Is the maintenance of the place regulated by the text?

– Yes

Notes: The maintenance of the temple is negatively established in the text, in the sense that Lugal-Ane is clearly condemned for letting the House of Heaven be sullied.

↳ Is it required?

– Yes

↳ Is there cleansing (for the maintenance)?

– Yes

↳ Are there periodic repairs/reconstructions?

– Yes

↳ Is the maintenance performed by permanent staff?

– Yes

## Institutions & Production Environment of Text

### Society & Institutions

Society of religious group that produced the text is best characterized as:

– An empire

Notes: Insofar as Enheduana was installed as high priestess by the emperor Sargon of Akkad.

Are there specific elements of society that have controlled the reproduction of the text?

– A city-state

Notes: The city states of Ur and Nippur were crucial to the circulation of the text (even as they were subsumed under various states and empires, their city identities remained key).

### Welfare

Does the text specify institutionalized famine relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized poverty relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized care for elderly & infirm?

– No

Other forms of welfare?

– No

## Education

Are there formal educational institutions available for teaching the text?

– Yes

Notes: The text was part of the curriculum of the Old Babylonian schools (known as the edubba).

Are there formal educational institutions specified according to the text?

– No

Does the text make provisions for non-religious education?

– No

Does the text restrict education to religious professionals?

– No

Does the text restrict education among religious professionals?

– No

Is education gendered according to the text?

– No

Is education gendered with respect to this text and larger textual tradition?

– No

Does the text specify teaching relationships or ratios? (i.e.: 1:20; 1:1)

– No

Are there specific relationships to teachers that are advocated by the text?

– No

Are there worldly rewards/benefits to education according to the text specified by the text itself?

– No

## Bureaucracy

Is bureaucracy regulated by this text?

– No

## Public Works

Does the text detail interaction with public works?

– No

## Taxation

Does the text specify forms of taxation?

– No

## Warfare

Does the text mention warfare?

– Yes

↳ Does the text dictate how to control an institutionalized military?  
– No

↳ Does the text restrict/advocate for participation in exogenous military organizations?  
– No

↳ Does the text celebrate/bemoan protection/subjugation by an exogenous military force?  
– Yes

Notes: The Exaltation laments the fact that rebel forces have taken control of Ur.

### Food Production

Does the text mentioned food production/disbursement?

– No

### Bibliography

#### General References

Reference: Annette Zgoll. Der Rechtsfall der En-hedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag. isbn: 978-3-927120-50-1.

Reference: Benjamin R Foster. The Age of Agade. Routledge. isbn: 9781317415527.

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