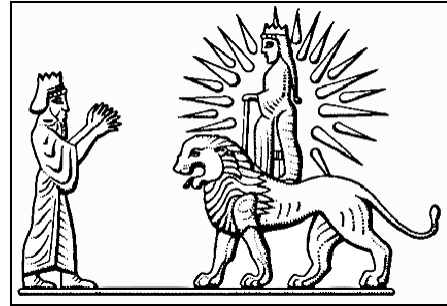


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“Some Observations on the Image of the Assyrian and Babylonian Kingdoms within the Greek Tradition”

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SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE IMAGE OF THE ASSYRIAN AND BABYLONIAN KINGDOMS WITHIN THE GREEK TRADITION

Reinhold Bichler

Preface: Berossus and the former Greek tradition¹

Within the field of extant Greek historical writing on the subject of the Assyrian and Babylonian kingdoms the fragments of Berossus' *History of Babylonia*, written by a so-called "Chaldean" priest², but addressed to a Greek-speaking audience, deserve our special attention. How could Berossus' account correspond to the legendary and speculative tradition presented by the former Greek historians? Since Berossus probably had access to some cuneiform sources and was more familiar with the cultural tradition of his country than any other author of our sources written in Greek, he should be able to give us more solid information than his famous predecessors, in particular Herodotus and Ctesias. And this is certainly true, as far as only names and dates are concerned and – to a certain extent – also some concrete deeds of the rulers of *Babylon* in the first millennium BC, mainly during the time of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. But there are a number of major problems to consider, if we look at the information given in the fragments of his work as far as the history of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and his relationship to the contemporary Babylonian kingdom are concerned. Yet even the fragments relating directly to the Neo-Babylonian kings are in some way dubious since they seem to be written under the influence of former Greek traditions. It would be important to know exactly to what extent Berossus was forced to pay tribute to this kind of tradition, formed by fascinating combinations of fact and fiction. But there are limits to such a comparative inquiry, since the fragments of Berossus' *History*, as far as they relate our subject, consist mainly in dynastic-lists, names and chronological dates of rulers and rather brief comments on their deeds and their correspondence to the information given in the Holy Books of the Hebrews. There is no opportunity to hear more about the so-called sacred prostitution or the famous bride-market as presented by Herodotus, and a good part of Ctesias' stories about a secret world of sex and crime at the "oriental" court³ seems to be totally ignored. Nevertheless, even concentrating on

- 1 First of all I want to express my gratitude to Robert Rollinger who encouraged me to participate in the 5th International Melammu conference although I am not an Assyriologist. He gave me a great deal of advice regarding publications I would otherwise have missed. Many thanks also to Leona Cordery who did her best to correct my English.
- 2 Berossus' social and cultural status is not easy to define; cf. for example Burstein 1978, 5 f.; Kuhrt 1987, 48; Verbrugge – Wickersham 1996, 13 ff.; Oelsner 2002, 184 f., with further references.
- 3 We must not underestimate the importance of Ctesias as the one who established what Helen Sancisi-Weerdenburg has called "the concept *Orient*". It means "associations of harems, eunuchs, luxury and intrigues. It has connotations of softness, closedness, indulgence and lack of rigour"; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1987, 43 f. Pierre Briant expresses a similar judgment concerning Ctesias' image of the Persian court: "...la cour perse, dominée par les eunuques et

a rather boring theme like the dates of dynastic history we should be able to make some startling observations when comparing Berossus' fragments with the former Greek tradition.

I. Herodotus and Ctesias

Concrete information concerning the Assyrians is scarce in Herodotus and their relationship to the Babylonians remains rather vague.⁴ Nevertheless, some aspects seem to be clear. Herodotus imagined that at one time the Assyrians dominated a widespread territory, including the region of Babylonia, and he calculated that their powerful empire lasted approximately 520 years until the Medes rebelled and the Assyrians lost a great number of their former allies (I 95).⁵ Finally, the Medes, ruled by King Cyaxares, defeated their former masters and conquered their capital Ninus, i.e. Nineveh. Herodotus had evidently no knowledge that the Medes were successful due to a coalition with the rising new kingdom of Babylonia. He regarded Babylon as the most important city of the Assyrians and as their royal city after the fall of Nineveh. He knew that the Babylonians (as part of the former Assyrian Empire) were ruled by sovereign kings until Cyrus conquered their famous metropolis. But there is no doubt that Herodotus had only vague ideas about the extent of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and even the kingship of Nebuchadnezzar is not clearly presented in the *Histories*.⁶

There is also no king-list comparable to that of the Lydians or the Medes. Instead we find a loose series of remarks relating to the one or other prominent ruler over Assyria or Babylonia. To start with the concept of origins, Herodotus simply mentions a certain King Ninus, seen probably as an – eponymous – founder of the metropolis⁷ located on the river Tigris, and he considers Sardanapallus to be his son (II 150). And probably – but this is not the actually information given by Herodotus – this Ninus is the same person as Ninus, the son of Belus, grandson of Alcaeus and great-grandson of Heracles (I 7). On the other

les femmes, est traversée des rumeurs de complots et d'assassinats, eux-mêmes souvent menés à l'instigation des eunuques et des femmes"; Briant 1989, 39 f. - For a short survey of Ctesias' influence during the centuries until now see Karttunen 1997.

- 4 See Högemann 1992, 56 f., 153 f.; Bichler 2000, 119. – The general distinction between Syria (= Levante) and Assyria (=Mesopotamia) drawn in Herodotus' *Histories* is important enough to consider it a "turning point" in opposition to the former confusion of the two. Cf. Frye 1992, 282.
- 5 I have omitted the miraculous Scythian rule over Asia during 28 years, an intermezzo which ended a short time before the fall of Ninus according to Herodotus (I 106), since there are no traces of that story in Berossus.
- 6 Thus, for example, Herodotus mentions the battle at Magdolos – i.e. probably Migdol - fought by the Egyptian king Necho at the end of the 7th century BC (II 159), but he was not able to link the enemy with the Babylonian king. For the historical background see Haider 1996, 103 with n. 222.
- 7 If there should be a real Assyrian background behind the figure of Ninus, Herodotus did not seem to take much notice of that tradition. In his eyes Ninus is directly connected with the name of the city. Cf. Vannicelli 2001.

hand the last-mentioned Ninus is the father of Agron, the first king of the Heraclid dynasty in Lydia (I 7).⁸ Following this concept, the origins of almost all imperial power in Asia can be traced back to Heracles.

Apart from this piece of Greek mythological speculation about the “true” origins of Asian power, Herodotus fails to name any Assyrian king within his account of Near Eastern history in Book I. It is only by dealing with the Egyptian affairs that he suddenly sidesteps and tells us a story of King Sardanapallus, son of Ninus, who was robbed in a cunning way by some thieves who dug a channel from the River Tigris to his famous treasury (II 150). There is no hint here of the frivolous tradition of an effeminate king, living a secret and scandalous life behind the walls of his palace as described by Ctesias. However, we should observe that Herodotus does not apparently give us the full story and that Aristophanes took the knowledge of some negative stories about Sardanapallus for granted since he makes a very short allusion to this in his *Birds* dated 415 BC (v. 1021). A later scholion to the play remarks that Hellanicus – a younger contemporary of Herodotus, whose literary activities took place in the late 5th century, – was even forced to believe in the existence of two separate kings with the same name of Sardanapallus (FGrHist 4 F 63a).⁹ The origin of the different Greek ideas of this curious “oriental” king remains unclear, although there is some important evidence in an Aramaic text relating to the conflict between Assurbanipal and his brother Shamash-shum-ukin, the rebellious ruler in Babylon, whose defeat may well have been an initial reason to develop the later Greek story of Sardanapallus’ death.¹⁰ But Sardanapallus’ place in an imaginative Herodotean king-list is not beyond doubt, since we cannot take for granted that *this* Sardanapallus, son of Ninus, is considered to be the grandson of Belus, father of Ninus, and therefore belongs to the early years of the Assyrian kingdom.¹¹ However, Ctesias created *his* Sardanapallus as an effeminate representative of a late period of

8 Cf. Bichler 2000, 135 ff.; Vannicelli 2001.

9 F. H. Weißbach RE I A2 (1920), 2436 – 2475 s. v. Sardanapal; cf. especially 2437.

10 The text is written in Demotic script and its main theme was the New-Year festival of an Aramaic-speaking community in Upper Egypt; the text can be dated about 300 BC, but it preserves some older traditions. It concludes with a propagandistic story of Assurbanipal and his rebellious brother *Sarmuge* (= Shamash-shum-ukin). The sister of the two rivals tried in vain to persuade Sarmuge to surrender himself; so she announced the circumstances of his forthcoming death by his own hand: “...let fire burn you/ together with your sons/ and your daughters/ and your doctors/who have made you act brashly”. And that is, of course, what happened. Cf. the translated text in Steiner 1997, Col. XVII.5 – XXII.9, especially Coll. XX.6-11. I am very grateful to Karen Radner (Munich) who drew my attention to this document! A strong resemblance between the early Greek traditions about Croesus’ death and that Aramaic text is as remarkable as the muddling of the brothers in the Greek legend of Sardanapallus! The suggestion that Ctesias’ report of the fall of Nineveh includes, besides a great deal of fantasy, some knowledge based on cuneiform traditions about the siege and conquering of Babylon by Assurbanipal – see especially Macginnis 1988 –, could be raised again with new arguments.

11 At least the term *son of Ninus* names the king, not the city. Cf. Zawadzki 1984, 261 f.

decline and consequently places him at the end of his Assyrian king-list.¹² This was then generally accepted by later historians.

The last Assyrian king mentioned by Herodotus is Sanacharibos, king of the Arabians and Assyrians, who tried to conquer Egypt, but was denied his goal by a miraculous intervention: a swarm of field-mice gnawed the leather-parts of the weapons of his army (II 142). A great deal of controversial research work has been done in order to compare Herodotus' story with other Greek traditions of the central literary motif and the Egyptian documents with their scanty content on the one hand and with the Jewish tradition of King Hezekiah, saved from an Assyrian attack under the command of Sennacherim by means of divine intervention, and the relevant Assyrian annals on the other.¹³ There is no need to go into further detail. But we should not forget to consider the chronological framework given by Herodotus. Sanacharibos is seen as a contemporary of Sethos, whose reign was followed by twelve kings with equal rights, and after them by Psammetichus and his dynasty. He belongs more or less to the same chronological level as Semiramis, the Babylonian queen who, in Herodotus' opinion, lived only four generations (i.e. in the fifth generation) before Nitocris, the mighty mother of the last sovereign ruler of Babylon (I 184).¹⁴ If we now consider Herodotus' calculation that a powerful Assyrian kingdom, before the revolt of the Medes, lasted about 520 years (I 95), we come to realize that the chronological span between Ninus as the legendary founder of the Assyrian capital and Herodotus' Semiramis (who is considered as a Babylonian queen) must be estimated to be more than those 520 years.

Ctesias' effort to present Semiramis as a partner of Ninus and founder of Babylon swept such calculations away. Evidently Ctesias did a good job as a storyteller. Herodotus' Semiramis was still a rather unimportant figure. She is mentioned as one of two existing female rulers of Babylon and the remarkable dykes in the plain are attributed to her (I 184). Ctesias took the opportunity to transform her into an immortal literary character. By his influence Semiramis became the most important example of a barbarian queen before Cleopatra, whereas the traces of Sennacherib disappeared: they are neither to be found in Diodorus, our main source for Ctesias' *Assyriaca*, nor in Strabo or Justinus who also depended – though not directly – on Ctesias' gallery of kings and queens when they turned their attention to the Assyrian Empire. Of greater importance, therefore, is Berossus' critical commentary on the Greek legends of Semiramis and his rich account of Sennacherib.

But let us return to Herodotus' account! After the fall of Nineveh, a part of the former Assyrian territory was dominated by the Median king Cyaxares and his

12 That in Ctesias' story "Sardanapalus, after he had enjoyed pleasure in strange ways, died as noble as he could" (cf. Athenaeus XII 529 b; translated by Charles Burton Gulick), should not be overseen, but it belongs to the same concept: "K. (scheint) es gerade als pikant empfunden zu haben..., wie der Weichling tapfer wird"; Jacoby 1922, 2052; cf. also Briant 1989, 43.

13 Cf. for a first documentation of the different sources and problems Borger – Hinz – Römer (Hg.), 1984, 388 ff.; West 1987, 268 ff.; Lloyd 1988, 99 ff.; Loretz 1996; Schoors 1998, 25 ff., 96 f.

14 Cf. Bichler 2000, 137 f.; table nr. 1.

son Astyages, i.e. Umakishtar and Ishtumegu following the cuneiform tradition. Finally, Cyrus the Great took over the Median capital, Ecbatana, and built up his own powerful Persian Empire. The basic dates given by Herodotus correspond to our knowledge. But in Herodotus' report Cyrus' campaign against Babylon took place rather towards the end of his reign than at a date corresponding to our year 539 BC. Also the circumstances of this campaign are as legendary and as marvelous as his famous description of the city of Babylon.¹⁵ And we must realize the fact that the same author, who preserved a rather surprising memory of King Sennacherib and was able to differentiate between the kings of Assyria and the later rulers of Babylon, probably had no real information concerning the rule of Nebuchadnezzar II and evidently underestimated the limits and the power of Babylon during the time between the fall of Nineveh and Cyrus' campaign. To be aware that both male figures, the late king Labynetus, the former husband of Queen Nitocris, and their son, the younger Labynetus, Cyrus' weak adversary, reflect in some way a certain knowledge of the existence of King Nabonidus is not much help, since Herodotus gives no further information relating to his person. Of far greater importance in Herodotus' report are the famous stories of Queen Nitocris with particular reference to her tomb which bore a mock-inscription through which King Darius was deceived, and to her efforts to divert the course of the river in order to provide greater security for the city – a dubious measure that enabled Cyrus to follow this example and conquer the city in this very way (I 185 – 187).

The problems posed by Herodotus' stories of Queen Nitocris are notorious. Of course we know about some women within the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian dynasties who were able to exercise a powerful role as the king's mother or widow and could even have buildings erected in their name like, for example, Naqia, the mother of Esarhaddon. Furthermore, it is important to note that King Nabonidus' mother Adad-guppi was also such a powerful person¹⁶. However, the *concrete* relationship to Herodotus' colourful report of this queen's deeds, and her name Nitocris, which she shares with the only Egyptian queen mentioned by Herodotus, is more than doubtful.¹⁷ The Babylonian Nitocris seems to have totally disappeared in the later Greek historiography, but some of the motives in Herodotus' account of the deeds of that dubious queen have survived in various forms.¹⁸ The story that the River Euphrates was once diverted in order to enter the besieged city of Babylon was even accepted – as we shall see – by Berossus.¹⁹ I do not wish to speculate too much by tracing back the general motif

15 Cf. Rollinger 1993, 19 ff.; Kratz 2002, 152 f., with further references.

16 Cf. M. P. Streck, RIA IX (1998/2001), 165 s. v. Naqi'a and 590 f. s. v. Nitokris; Reade 2000, 199 f. But we should not neglect all the details and the special colour in Herodotus' stories which differ a great deal from the information based on cuneiform sources! Dalley 1996, 529, simplifies the problem: "H.s (i.e. Herodotus') Nitocris is generally thought to incorporate the character and works of Naqia".

17 See Asheri 1988, 374 f. For the Egyptian Nitocris see Haider 2002.

18 Th. Lenschau, RE Suppl. VII (1940), 570 – 572 s. v. Nitokris.

19 Stephanie Dalley tends to accept the basic fact in Herodotus' report, if only the legendary diversion of the Euphrates would be located at a greater distance to the city: "It seems

to the Sumerian tale of Gilgamesh's death, but one should at least consider the possibility.²⁰ Much more important in regard to the development of the later Greek historiography is the total lack of any concrete knowledge about the rulers of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom and the widespread power attributed to them in Ctesias and those writers of a universal history or geography who are basically influenced by his work, either directly or through intermediaries: Diodorus, Strabo, Justinus. So it is time to take a closer look at Ctesias' account.

Ctesias' name is widely associated with fantasy, invention, even lies.²¹ On the other hand, those who want to defend his veracity believe in the existence of otherwise unknown written or – easier to pretend – oral traditions as the basis for his stories.²² To make my point clear I have to admit that I do not consider Ctesias to be an author who fits into the usual categories of historical writing. He should be neither regarded as a liar nor be defended for his reliability. In order to narrow my approach I shall concentrate on the well known testimony of Photius, the Byzantine patriarch, who composed a general abstract of the *Persica*: “Read a work of Ctesias of Cnidos, the *Persica* in twenty-three books. In the first six he deals with Assyria and events before the existence of Persia. From the seventh onwards he deals with Persia. In Books 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13 he discusses Cyrus, Cambyses, the Priest, Darius and Xerxes, in almost every point giving an account opposed to Herodotus; he accuses him of lying frequently and calls him a storyteller” (Bibliotheca Nr. 71 p. 35 b Wilson).²³

possible that Cyrus diverted the river in order to enter the greater Babylon past the Median wall, since this interpretation would explain why nobody in central Babylon noticed what was going on”; Dalley 1996, 528. But such a “correction” of Herodotus' report destroys its literary wit: The Persians entered the city along the passable river-bed by an act of surprise meanwhile the citizens were celebrating a feast (I 191). Now it is possible that Cyrus took Babylon by force, corresponding to the core of the Greek tradition. But no exact method enables us to detect the concrete “real” history behind Herodotus' (or other Greeks) stories as long as there are no clear cut references in cuneiform texts. Cf. also Kratz 2002, 152, especially n. 36. – Nesselrath 1999 who aims to defend Herodotus' status as an eye-witness in Babylon, stresses the argument that he had access to some oral traditions based not immediately on cuneiform records: “Herodot verdankt seine Darstellung sicher keinem jener schriftlichen Zeugnisse, auf die mehr als anderthalb Jahrhunderte nach ihm ein Berossus noch zurückgreifen konnte, sondern einer Quelle, die selbst von diesen Zeugnissen wohl schon sehr weit entfernt war“; Nesselrath p. 203. The basic argument is simple: whatever Herodotus may have reported as legendary in our eyes is reduced to otherwise unknown oral traditions. Cf. also the critical remarks in Wiesehöfer 2002, 38: “Es bleibt allerdings zu fragen, in welchem Verhältnis die so vermittelten Nachrichten, die sich Autopsie verdankenden Teile und die neu gestalteten Passagen im babylonischen Logos Herodots zu einander stehen sollen“.

20 Cf. the English translation of the Sumerian text: The Death of Bilgamesh: “The great wild bull is lying down”, in: George 1999, 195 ff.; cf. especially M 239 ff. (p. 205 ff.).

21 One of the most prominent scholars of this sceptical tradition is Felix Jacoby: “Wer die großen Exzerpte bei Diodor, Nikolaos, Photios hintereinander liest, begreift die Diskussionen nicht, die gelegentlich immer noch die Glaubwürdigkeit des K. und seinen Wert als historische Quelle für einzelne Partien seines Werkes zu retten suchen“; Jacoby 1922, 2047.

22 Cf. for example Lenfant 1996 with further references. Cf. also n. 25

23 The quoted translation is given by Wilson 1994, 55.

That Ctesias gave “in almost every point an account opposed to Herodotus”, is easy to confirm if we follow the patriarch’s abstract. I will give a short selection of striking examples²⁴: Croesus, defeated by Cyrus, was not saved by a miracle from the burning funeral pyre but could free himself from his chains several times; there is no mention in Photius’ abstract that Cyrus conquered Babylon, but Cambyses died in this city; he had wounded himself by carving a piece of wood with his knife - a rude mockery in contrast to Herodotus’ story of the king’s fateful death; Cyrus, on the other hand, was wounded in his last battle in the same way as Cambyses in the *Histories*, but his adversaries were not the Massagetes but the Derbikes; Cambyses, who conquered Egypt, fought against Amyrtaios instead of Psammenitos; Herodotus’ “false” Smerdis appears to be transformed into a “false” Tanyoxarkes whose deception is even more incredible than that of his Herodotean counterpart, and the revolt against his later reign is perpetrated by men whose names differ – with the only exception of Darius himself – totally from what we know from Herodotus and the Behistun inscription;²⁵ the bloody revolt of Babylon is not connected with Darius and Zopyros, but with Xerxes and Megabyzos; Darius’ general Datis was killed in the earlier battle at Marathon – in complete contrast to Herodotus; Leonidas’ famous defense at Thermopylae came to a fatal end due to the bad advice of some traitors, so Xerxes’ Spartan guest Demaratos who is presented in the *Histories* as an honest man with respect to his Greek countrymen; the chronological order of the battles at Plataea and Salamis is inverted in a similar way as the order of some of Cyrus’ campaigns; the Persian general Mardonius was not killed at Plataea and the refugees in the acropolis at Athens were not massacred but could escape when Xerxes’ army set fire to it, and so on, every point contradicting Herodotus’ report.²⁶

Could *all this* be regarded as being based on otherwise unknown sources, such as popular traditions, court gossip, not forgetting simple cases of misunderstanding and error? On the other hand, must we then consider these anti-Herodotean stories to be the simple result of forgery and lies? In my opinion there is a better way to understand Ctesias’ intention if we are ready to accept this strange kind of opposition to Herodotus as a game, like a kind of persiflage, and thus, we must not take this as a serious attempt to correct his famous predecessor. Also Ctesias’ corresponding tendency to evidently neglect some of the most colourful reports in Herodotus and instead to present a series of pretty “new” stories and otherwise unknown details should not be overlooked. This fulfills the same purpose: to amuse an educated audience. If there are even strong arguments to interpret his autobiographical remarks as fictitious, we could also consider this aspect of his work to be part of a literary game²⁷. But I do not insist on this

24 For further examples cf. especially Jacoby 1922.

25 Lenfant 1996 is even prepared to believe that the names of these six conspirators which differ totally from the information given by Herodotus’ report and by Darius’ inscription at Behistun are based on competitive oral traditions; cf. 373 ff.

26 Cf. the translated text in Wilson 1994, 56 ff. The Greek text with a German translation and a commentary is given by König 1972.

27 See Dorati 1995, especially 46 ff. But Dorati does not stress the aspect of a literary game in Ctesias’ pretension as being an accurate eye-witness at the king’s court, he rather regards the

understanding of his biography. However, it may be helpful for our approach to Ctesias' reports about Assyria and Babylonia to bear the importance of irony and persiflage in his contradiction of Herodotus in mind.

Now let us first consider the outlines of Ctesias' history of Assyria and then some of the most important topics mentioned in his royal portraits. For him, the Assyrian Empire lasted a very long time and was finally followed by the Medes and their Persian successors. During all this time the region of Babylonia figured as some sort of a satrapy of first the Assyrians and then the Medes. A sovereign Babylonian kingdom does not occur in Ctesias' fragments. The beginning and the end of the Assyrian empire are represented by colourful, even unforgettable persons: Semiramis, the powerful wife and widow of King Ninus and Sardanapallus, the effeminate mock-image of an oriental king who dominates the world outside from the secret interior chambers of his palace. Around these most important figures the historical writer's imagination has woven a rich setting of novels with other sharply defined characters. There are Semiramis' different opponents, and last but not least her husband Ninus and their decadent son Ninyas. Then there is Sardanapallus' court with all its eunuchs and mistresses and on the other hand the mighty adversaries who could finally defeat this former greatest Empire.²⁸ But between the reign of Semiramis' son Ninyas and that of Sardanapallus we find a gap in Ctesias' report, filled up only with proper names and the dates of 30 rulers (including Sardanapallus) – a great number of unimportant kings who reigned over a period of 1300 or 1360 years, i.e. approximately double the length calculated by Herodotus for the existence of the Assyrian Empire before the secession of the Medes under their king Deioces.

If we are not misled by the fragmentary status of Ctesias' work, the king-list is "filled up" with some chronological cross-references to the Greek mythological past, but the only remarkable date in Diodorus' eyes was the supply of soldiers delivered by king *Teutamios* (Diodorus II 22) which were required to defend Troy against the Greek heroes. – In contradiction to Herodotus the origins of the Assyrian empire are not chronologically correlated – not even in a very approximate way – with the fall of Troy but are estimated as going back almost as far as the fall of Troy was antecedent to the end of the Assyrian empire.²⁹ In contradiction to Herodotus' report, through her marriage Semiramis became the first Assyrian queen and is praised as the foundress of Babylon, whose most important buildings were simply buildings not mentioned in Herodotus' famous description of the city. And just to be contrary the city of Ninus, founded by her husband, is located near the River Euphrates. Diodorus seems to follow Ctesias faithfully in his "error", but he gives the correct placement of Ninus within another source-context

"historian" as a victim of the newly established rules to argue with reference to the superior qualities of an eye-witness: "...l'autopsia costituisce prima di tutto un *topos* ed un'aprioristica esigenza dello storico"; p. 51.

28 For the general aim of Ctesias' image of the Assyrian Empire see Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1987 (cf. above n. 3).

29 A detailed analysis of Ctesias' king-list is presented by Boncquet 1990; cf. especially p. 15: "In his eagerness to improve on Herodotus and to demonstrate that the Assyrians had an older history than the Greeks, Ctesias put Ninus some 1000 years before the Trojan War".

(cf. XVII 53,4 and 55,3), while Nicolaus of Damascus (i.e. the Byzantine *Excerpta de insidiis*) corrected Ctesias' "error" without any commentary (FGrHist 90 F 3, line 22 f.).³⁰ Strabo who was probably dependent on Ctesias through some intermediary sources avoided the "mistake" (cf. XVI 1-3).

But let us return to the catalogue of kings and queens. The best documented Assyrian king in Herodotus, Sennacherib, simply disappears under the influence of Ctesias' work, if we take Diodorus, Strabo and Justinus as our evidence. Nevertheless, he is brought back to mind by Berossus and the later chronographers. But we also observe the loss of Herodotus' Babylonian queen Nitocris and she was never mentioned by later writers. If one should consider her to be a tolerable loss, with regard to her doubtful historical existence, we must take in evidence the fact that her husband and her son disappeared with her. However, more importantly, due to Ctesias' influence, there is no hint at all of the former existence of a sovereign Babylonian Empire either in Diodorus or in Strabo and Justinus. Herodotus' superior historical knowledge was underestimated by those important writers of universal history and geography.

Now there are strong arguments that Ctesias had his own good reasons to "correct" Herodotus' report concerning the history of Babylon after the fall of Nineveh. If he pursued the idea that at any time one mighty kingdom held the position of hegemony over (upper) Asia, the Medes, as the ones who – according to Herodotus! – took the capital of the former Assyrian Empire must also be regarded as the heirs of this power, whereas the region of Babylonia appeared to be only some kind a satrapy of either the Assyrians or the Medes.³¹ This approach bears his logic, but we must not forget the price which has to be paid by Diodorus, Strabo and other writers under Ctesias' influence: they had to neglect Herodotus' otherwise well-known *Babylonian Logos* as far as the history of the city was concerned. And, of course, they had to ignore Berossus' *Babylonian History*, but this would not be surprising if we consider the limited reception of his work as a whole.³² This neglect of Berossus' work by those authors who formed the mainstream of universal-history is a pity since he himself must have been eager to reach the Greek-speaking public. Thus we have to take a closer look at his situation between his own Babylonian tradition and the dominance of Greek historiography.

II. Berossus and the Greek tradition

Berossus was evidently forced to make certain compromises for Greek-speaking public and – more important – to the Greek art of historiography in general. He wrote in Greek, he presented himself as the author, he considered the telling of the mythological tradition – stories about the creation of the world and the origins of mankind – as a primary factor in relating *history* and he embedded the history of Babylonian kingdoms in the description of the country, its geography and its

30 See Bigwood 1980, 197.

31 Cf. Kuhrt 1987, 32 f.

32 Cf. Verbrugge – Wickersham 1996, 27 ff.

specific products.³³ But there are also important differences to the common Greek tradition of historiography. Of course, our knowledge is limited by the very unsatisfactory status of the fragments, but it seems to be not only accidental that there are a few traces of real stories, of all that rich tradition of novels and even romances. Nevertheless, Berossus seems to follow certain lines of Greek tradition given by Herodotus and – more important – by Ctesias, a tradition so different from the information Berossus could have received from cuneiform sources.

Before we go into detail, we have to be aware that Berossus concentrated his attention on the kingdom of Babylon and neglected the importance of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. This fact is well known and a plausible explanation is given, for example, by Amélie Kuhrt: “Assyrian history was completely ignored except for those Assyrian kings who had ruled directly over Babylon; in this Berossus was clearly following the Babylonian chronicle tradition”.³⁴ But a closer look at the relevant fragments lets one pose some critical questions. No easy answer will do. Berossus was in some respect influenced by Greek traditions concerning the Assyrian Empire, but he was not able to conceal these traditions with his concept of Babylonian rule. He had, in my opinion, only vague ideas about the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its most important rulers and that impression is – probably – not a simple consequence of the fragmentary status of his work.³⁵

Let us first consider the rank he attributed to the legendary Queen Semiramis, legendary not meaning her actual existence, since her name may be traced back to Sammuramat, wife of Samshi-Adad V and mother of Adad-Nirari III, “although there is no evidence she bore a title equivalent to the modern conception of what a queen is”.³⁶ Yet, she certainly had a special rank in the royal family and for some years she ruled *de facto* the empire, including Babylonia. We are not able to follow the way through the darkness of all these unspecified “cultural relations” which may have been responsible in bringing about a piece of solid tradition concerning her role in early Greek historiography. From the time of her first appearance in Herodotus’ *Histories*, Semiramis maintains her position in the western image of Assyria and Babylonia and, due to Ctesias literary power, she was even respected as the mother of a long-lasting dynasty and the city-founder of Babylon.³⁷

33 See especially Kuhrt 1987, 46 ff.; Verbrugge – Wickersham 1996, 25 ff.

34 Kuhrt 1987, 45.

35 Of course, if one considers Alexander Polyhistor to be the source of almost all the relevant later “fragments” – cf. especially Schnabel 1923, 134 ff.; Burstein 1978, 10 ff. –, it would be easy to attribute all kinds of confusion or ignorance to him and to those using him as their source. But the problems raised by the extant fragments remain the same. One could even move one step further and follow Schnabels conviction that Polyhistor based his *Assyriaka* and *Mediaka* primarily on Ctesias, “ihn aber gelegentlich durch eine Einlage aus Berossos ergänzte, ebenso wie er in sein Berossosexzerpt Einlagen aus anderen Schriftstellern machte”; cf. Schnabel 1923, 153. But in this way our judgement about the problem, what could be attributed to Berossus and what not, would become widely arbitrary.

36 Verbrugge – Wickersham 1996, 21.

37 The main source for our knowledge of Ctesias’ portrait of Semiramis is Diodorus, but he adjusted the tradition in order to develop his own picture, and there are strong arguments that the image of the queen in Ctesias’ original work was in a great many details worse, more

Berosus certainly knew about her husband Ninus from his Greek sources and he was probably aware of the dubious character of this person who appeared as an eponymous hero corresponding to Greek ideas of mythological city-founders. There is also no doubt that he would never have accepted Ctesias' provocative gesture to place Nineveh, Ninus' new capital, on the River Euphrates. In Berosus' dates for the Mesopotamian kings there was evidently no room for king Ninus. But regarding his wife, the situation is different.³⁸ Berosus probably rejected all the romantic and novelistic imaginary accounts of Semiramis as an attractive, even frivolous and indeed very powerful woman, and he could not sanction her position as the lady who founded Babylon of her own will. But what we know for certain from all his doubts – due to Josephus' quotation – is not much: “Thus Berosos gave his account about the kings mentioned above and about many other things besides in the third book of his Chaldean history, in which he also blames the Greek writers for their silly mistake in saying that Semiramis of the Assyrians founded Babylon and ascribing to her its wondrous buildings” (F 9a Verbrugge – Wickersham).

Berosus' statement about the Greek writers sounds rather sharp, nevertheless, he made a substantial contribution to their legendary tradition about Semiramis: he gave her a place at the beginning of a special epoch, starting with her as the founder of a dynasty who was followed by 45 anonymous kings over a time span of some 526 years until we come to other well-known representatives of Assyrian power: to Phulos and to Senakheirimos, both embedded in either the Hebrew or the Greek tradition. The chronological time span of 526 years may remind one of Herodotus' calculation that the existence of the Assyrian Empire lasted about 520 years until the Medes revolted during the reign of their king Deioces. However, the number of 45 kings would be difficult to conceal with Herodotus' ideas.³⁹ On the other hand, the resemblance to Ctesias' king-list should not be overlooked. There was also a long series of rather unimportant kings, i.e. 29 persons who ruled over a span of even 1300 or 1360 years. And this king-list covered a gap of historical information between the famous deeds of the family of the city-founders – i.e. Ninus, Semiramis and their son Ninyas – and the colourful story of the decadent last emperor, Sardanapallus. A similar but in other ways different gap in Berosus' report included all the kings between Semiramis and Phulos, but finally, he too marked the beginning and the end of a constant reign over Assyria with the kingship of Semiramis and that of Sardanapallus. But there is a tricky

oriented on the themes of sex and crime. See Comploi 2000, especially 233 ff., with a comparison of the different fragments and further references.

38 Kuhrt 1987, 45, stresses the argument that in Berosus' account “Ninus and Semiramis were entirely absent“. That should be corrected in respect to Semiramis. Nevertheless, she is right to refer back to Abydenus, quoted by Eusebius (Karst 1911 p. 25): “Des Ninus und der Sâmiram haben sie (die Chaldäer) nicht sonderlich acht”.

39 Herodotus himself preferred the widely accepted calculation which was the equivalent of roughly three generations to a total of 100 years; see Ball 1979; Burkert 1995. The tradition about the Lydian dynasty as reported by Herodotus – 22 generations of rulers of Heraclidean origin over 505 years (I 7) – is highly dubious. A calculation with 45 kings during an estimated time of 526 years would be impossible in Herodotus' eyes.

problem: it seems to be unclear to what extent this king-list was oriented on the rule over Assyria as well as over Babylon.

One should, therefore, take a first step to consider the names of these queens and kings in the extant fragments of Berossus which are explicitly connected in some way or the other with the Neo-Assyrian Empire; there are only a few! First, Semiramis is introduced as a queen who reigned over Assyria. Her position as the first in a new dynastic series demonstrates her estimated importance, but her identity as a concrete “historical” figure in the modern sense would remain doubtful as far as Berossus is concerned, whose chronological calculation would take her back to the Bronze Age, at least more than 400 years before the reign of Sannuramat.

The next figure to be examined is Phulos. It is unclear in how far Berossus reported the special deeds of this king, since our information does not go back to Berossus himself, but to Alexander Polyhistor and those referring to him, whose special concern was to prove the correctness of the Holy Scriptures by quoting Chaldean traditions given by Berossus.⁴⁰ If we are able to identify Berossus’ king Phulos as Tiglatpileser III, this is mainly due to the Hebrew tradition (cf. especially *Regnorum* IV 15, 29) in correspondence to our cuneiform sources; but it is also possible that Berossus himself mentioned the king’s name in a manner that enabled Polyhistor (and his followers) to identify him as the well-known Assyrian conqueror. Nevertheless, we should note that Polyhistor simply refers to him as “King of the Chaldeans”. It is only due to Polyhistor’s or Eusebius’ remark that “the history of the Hebrews mentions (him) and also calls Phulos” (F 5 Verbrugghe – Wickersham) that a reader, who had no knowledge based on cuneiform records, would necessarily conclude that this Phulos ruled over the entire Assyrian empire.

There is no similar problem regarding Sennacherib. Josephus testifies that “Berossos, the writer of the Chaldean history, records the kingship of Senakheirimos and says that he ruled the Assyrians...” (F 7 Verbrugghe – Wickersham). But another obstacle is presented by Eusebius’ quotation: since his reference-author Polyhistor (if not Berossus himself) wrote that this Senakheirimos was king (immediately) after Phulos (F 5 p. 52 Verbrugghe – Wickersham), we have to consider a remarkable gap in the expected Assyrian king-list. Neither Shalmanesser V nor Sargon II is mentioned in the fragments. However, their successor Sennacherib was important enough to find his place in Berossus’ report. For once his presence is mentioned in the Holy Scripture, noted at least by Polyhistor (if not yet by Berossus) and, therefore, by the later chronographers (F 8b Verbrugghe – Wickersham). But Berossus – via Polyhistor - gave much more information. What he said about Sennacherib’s confrontation with the Greeks in Cilicia is very important for our knowledge⁴¹, though there are some details which must be treated with great

40 To what extent our knowledge of Berossus’ work depends mainly on Polyhistor is not easy to decide; cf. Kuhrt 1987, 34 ff.; Verbrugghe – Wickersham 1996, 27 ff. Cf. also n. 42.

41 See Haider 1996, 85 ff., especially n. 151 with further references.

caution.⁴² Josephus finally mentions a campaign “throughout Asia and Egypt” (F 8a Verbrugge – Wickersham). In this respect Herodotus maintains a greater knowledge. Nevertheless, Berossus’ account has other qualities. He gives a great many details concerning the treatment of Babylon during Sennacherib’s reign as reported by Eusebius via Polyhistor (F 8b Verbrugge – Wickersham). With one important exception – concerning the reign of Ashur-nadin-shumi who is ignored as is Mushezib-Marduk – and apart from some minor errors, Berossus’ extant fragments present a correct king-list for Babylonia during the reign of the Assyrian king Sennacherib.⁴³ But Eusebius probably had no clear-cut ideas about the concrete relationship between those rulers over Babylon and the Assyrian-Empire, with the one exception of Sennacherib’s campaign: “Senakheirimos, king of the Assyrians, led an army against Babylonia, showed a bold front, and conquered. He took captive Belibos (i.e. Bel-ibni) and his friends and brought them to Assyria. He then ruled over Babylonia and made his son Asordanios (i.e. Esarhaddon) king over them. Then he went back to Assyria” (F 8b Verbrugge – Wickersham).

Within the fragments of Berossus, this brief comment by Eusebius is the only testimony relating immediately to Sennacherib’s son and successor Esarhaddon. However, we are told that Sennacherib was killed in a conspiracy by another son, Ardumazan, a fact which is noted by Eusebius via Polyhistor (F 8b Verbrugge – Wickersham). Furthermore, Eusebius remarks generally that Polyhistor was in agreement with the Hebrew tradition when he reported about Senakheirimos’ son. This is important not only in respect of the name of the murderer Ardumazan (or Adramelos, following Abydenus who was also dependent on Berossus), but also with regard to the comment in the Book of Kings, that Sennacherib’s son Asordan (i.e. Esarhaddon) followed his father on the throne, when Sennacherib was slaughtered by his sons Adramelech and Sarasar (Regnorum IV 19, 37).⁴⁴ Without this reference and with nothing other than the comments of Eusebius, we have no chance of getting a clear idea of Esarhaddon’s kingship over the Assyrian Empire. And that he – and not his father, as noted by Berossus – indeed “campaigned throughout Asia and Egypt” would never be supposed by reading only the fragments of the *Babyloniaca*.

The case of Assurbanipal is even more complicated. He is only mentioned by Eusebius or Polyhistor who lists the successors of Sennacherib as follows: Sennacherib’s son (=Asordanios), Samoges and Samoges’ brother. The next to be mentioned is already Nabopalassaros. Evidently, Samoges’ brother must have been identified with Sardanapallus, since a few lines later Eusebius – still basing

42 Cf. Lanfranchi 2000, 22 ff.; Rollinger 2001, 240 ff. – Lanfranchi compares the different versions of the battle between Sennacherib and the Greeks in the extant fragments based on either Alexander Polyhistor or Abydenus in order to re-establish Berossus’ original version and he considers the possibility that Berossus himself blended different information based on cuneiform records with the result of his own historical reasoning.

43 Cf. Burstein 1978, 36 f. = Appendix 3, and the tables in Verbrugge – Wickersham 1996, 76 ff. The problem of the identity of Sennacherib’s brother who is listed as the next follower by Eusebius is treated by Burstein 1978, 23 n. 71: “...at present no solution seems possible”.

44 See Parpola 1980.

his facts on Polyhistor – says that after Samoges, Sardanapallus gained the throne and reigned over the Chaldeans. So far the fragmentary quotation of Polyhistor’s text corresponds to the fact that Assurbanipal had defeated his rebellious brother Shamash-shum-ukin, i.e. Samoges, and conquered the city. Next we are told by Eusebius that the father of Naboukhodonosor (i.e. Nabopolassar) sent envoys to the satrap of the Medes in order to collect a bride for his son (F 8b Verbrugge – Wickersham p. 56). No further comments on Sardanapallus are made in Berossus’ fragments. Not a single word makes an allusion to any of the fantastic stories about Sardanapallus’ deeds in the older Greek tradition. At least the usual Greek name of the king is given. But to get the idea that this Sardanapallus once reigned over the entire Assyrian Empire one has to compare the brief piece of information given by Berossus’ or Polyhistor’s fragments with the legendary Greek tradition of Sardanapallus as presented by Ctesias. Once again it seems to be unclear to what extent the rulers of Babylon, who were listed from Phulos down to Sardanapallus, are connected with a contemporary kingdom in Assyria.⁴⁵

Last but not least one should not forget that the general relationship between Berossus’ king-list from Semiramis to Sardanapallus and his remarks about the chronological order of the Babylonian kingdom is unclear. Berossus himself was aware of the lack of concrete dates and deeds relating to the kings mentioned in earlier books of the *History of Babylonia*. And there was evidently an explanation. I quote the Byzantine chronographer Syncellus: “As Alexander and Berossus record, both of whom have recounted the foundation stories of the Chaldeans, Nabonassaros, having collected the deeds of the kings who ruled before him, destroyed them, so that only from his reign on is there an accurate record of the Chaldean kings” (F 7 Verbrugge – Wickersham).⁴⁶

We could be glad if the consequences of that statement would be a Babylonian king-list from Nabonassaros down to the rulers of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and further to the Persian kings, as is the case in some cuneiform chronicles and in the Ptolemaic Canon. However, the extant fragments of Berossus are disappointing. There is still a lack of information concerning the rulers between Nabonassaros and Phulos and between Phulos and Senakheirimos. Obviously a full Babylonian king-list from Nabonassaros downwards would not harmonize with Berossus’ own ideas.

45 There is no mention of any existing ruler between Sardanapallus and Nabopolassaros in the context of the Armenian version of Eusebius related to Polyhistor (and in the fragments collected by Verbrugge-Wickersham). But obviously Berossus had more information about the last rulers of the Assyrian Empire. Abydenus mentions Sarakos (i.e. Sin-shar-ishkun) as the last ruler over Assyria and reports that his palace burned down (Eusebius ed. Karst p. 18 = FGrHist 685 F 5). The same tradition was attributed by Syncellus *expressis verbis* to Polyhistor (= Berossus F 7 d Jacoby, FGrHist 680). Burstein 1978, 26 n. 101, considers the possibility that Berossus himself transferred to Sarakos “the manner of death assigned in the Ctesian tradition” to Sardanapallus. Another consideration is presented by Murphy 1989, 36 n. 76 relating to Ctesias’ story of Sardanapallus: “If Sin-shar-ishkun did burn himself in his palace, he imitated the final act of King Shamash-shuma-ukin...in 648 B.C.”. – For the situation of Nineveh after the fall see Dalley 1993 and Curtis 2003; for the final period of Nippur see Cole 1996, 78 ff.

46 The authenticity of the quotation is clearly defended by Burstein 1978, 22 n. 66.

The lost catalogue of 45 kings between Semiramis and Phulos (cf. F 5 Verbrugge – Wickersham) could have been the result of some knowledge based on Babylonian sources and the necessary tribute to the speculative Greek tradition concerning the rulers of the Assyrian empire. On the one hand Berossus was eager to show the importance of Babylon over the centuries and therefore tried to give an exact list of the Babylonian rulers, on the other hand, he had to respect the traditions known to the Greek public. There was no easy way to avoid the dilemma. The Egyptian Manetho had similar problems. In both cases one should not underestimate the authority of the established Greek historiography. The problem even exists in those parts of Berossus' fragments which concentrate on the following epoch of the Neo-Babylonian kings.

First one should consider the strange comment made by Eusebius that the father of Naboukhodonosoros, i.e. Nabopalassaros, sent envoys to Astyages (Azdahak), the satrap of the Medes (Marer), to choose Astyages' daughter Amytis (Amuhidin) as a bride for his son (Eusebius ed. Karst p. 14 = F 8 b Verbrugge – Wickersham p. 56). Polyhistor, who is quoted as the immediate source of information, and probably Berossus himself, ignored the king-list of the Medes given by Herodotus.⁴⁷ But Herodotus is in accord with our cuneiform sources when he tells us that Cyaxares (= *Umakishtar*) was the chief of the Medes at the time of the fall of Nineveh (and not his son Astyages = *Ishtumegu*). Otherwise the motif of a political marriage which placed Astyages' daughter (i.e. Mandane, mother of Cyrus in Herodotus' story) at the head of a new era is well known from its Herodotean version. Ctesias made up his own story. He called Astyages' daughter Amytis and told some stories full of bloody slaughter about her role at the Persian court. But apart from this special approach to "history" Ctesias too – like Herodotus – reported that Astyages was the last emperor of the Medes and was defeated by Cyrus. Ctesias neglected the existence of the Neo-Babylonian Empire but he was full of stories about the empire of the Medes.

Berossus, on the other hand, evidently had his problems not only with respect to the Neo-Assyrian Empire but also to the kingdom of the Medes. Their king is seen as some sort of Babylonian satrap. There is no comment on the fall of the Assyrian Empire due to Nabopalassaros' coalition with the king of the Medes in the extant fragments. But there must have been some tradition about a Median princess at the court in Babylon. Perhaps in this way Ctesias' Amytis found her way into Berossus' fragments. However, Josephus quotes Berossus by telling us that Naboukhodonosoros "had constructed and prepared what are called Hanging Gardens for his wife, who had a love of the mountains since she had grown up in Media" (F 9 a Verbrugge – Wickersham = contra Apionem 141). The Hanging Gardens, of Babylon found a prominent place in the later ancient literature and they appeared in different catalogues of marvellous buildings, but Berossus remains the only one to attribute their construction to King Nebuchadnezzar. To this day scholars are trying to trace the tradition of these wondrous gardens, with their architectural remains, back to a number of different places either in Babylon itself

47 Burstein 1978, 25 n. 97, calls the "identification of the Median king involved in the capture of Nineveh" in the same text "a surprising error".

or even in the former Assyrian capital of Nineveh.⁴⁸ The crucial point does not lie in the location of the Hanging Gardens nor in the romantic nature of the story of the king dedicating the gardens to a homesick wife. There is another problem to consider: The combination of Astyages as a Median satrap under the rule of Nabopolassaros and a princess named Amytis as his daughter and Nebuchadnezzar's wife seems oddly dependent on a confused Greek tradition, going back to Herodotus on the one hand and to Ctesias and later Greek writers on the other, "corrected" only by Berossus' true knowledge of the importance of Nabopolassaros and Nebuchadnezzar.⁴⁹

Apart from his explanation of the origin of the Hanging Gardens, Berossus here gives another remarkable example of his duty to his Greek-speaking public which is well recorded in the extant fragments and once again gives its author the possibility to praise the deeds of that famous king who was so badly neglected by classical Greek writers.⁵⁰ Through Josephus we are also informed that Nebuchadnezzar "rebuilt the old city (i.e. of Babylon) and added a new one outside the walls and made sure that those who intended to besiege the city could no longer divert the river's course" (F 9a p. 58 Verbrugghe – Wickersham = contra Apionem § 139). We should note that Josephus pretends to quote Berossus word for word (§ 134). This makes this testimony all the more important: Berossus or his sources were evidently in some way impressed by the legendary Herodotean tradition about Nitocris and Cyrus and their fatal measures to divert the River Euphrates.⁵¹

Thus we have to note that even this part of Berossus' report which concentrated on the Neo-Babylonian kingdom – a subject which could be

48 Cf. especially Reade 2000 with further references. His arguments support the identity of the gardens visited by Alexander the Great as being the 'Hanging Gardens' and he wants to locate them at the Kasr-district, mainly on the Western Outwork. - Dalley 2002 stresses the argument that Sennacherib evidently dedicated a part of his Western Palace at Nineveh, probably including access to the gardens, to the pleasure of his wife Tashmetum-sharrat. But her general tendency to trace the tradition of the Hanging Gardens back to Nineveh – cf. especially Dalley 1994 – is based on the assumption of a total confusion of the two capitals - i.e. Nineveh and Babylon - in the Greek tradition. Yet Herodotus was as well aware of the difference between the two cities.

49 Meanwhile, the identity of the creator of the Hanging Gardens was a kind of guess-work in the Greco-Latin tradition, Berossus was eager to establish the importance of Nebuchadnezzar. See, for example, Reade 2000, 200: "It was the failure to recognize the contribution of Nebuchadnezzar...that especially offended Berossus". Cf. also Burstein 1978, 27 n. 106: "In describing the Hanging gardens...Berossus was catering to the interests of his Greek readers". – Dalley 1994, on the contrary, suggests that "Josephus or his source wrongly attributed to Berossus a passage about the Hanging Gardens". Since there is an alternative quotation from Abydenus by Eusebius – FGrHist 685 F 6; cf. Burstein 1978, 27 F 2b – she assumes that this quotation "may be attributed correctly to Berossos but be corrupt in having the name of Nebuchadnezzar substituted for the name of Sennacherib"; op. cit. 56. Dealing with the same fragment she also assigns the water-buildings attributed to Nebuchadnezzar by Abydenus to Sennacherib; op. cit. 55 f.

50 For Megasthenes, on the contrary, see n. 52.

51 The authenticity of the tradition of the diversion of the river is stressed by Stephanie Dalley; cf. n. 19.

considered to be his domain, not covered by classical Greek historiography – shows the influence of its art of story-telling. Bearing this in mind, one should not be surprised to find that the outer boundaries of the kingdom of Nabopolassar and his son were clearly overestimated. Egypt seems to be considered to be something like a province within their kingdom – maybe as Amélie Kuhrt pointed out – the memory of those kings should be constructed as a counterpart to the idealization of ancient Egypt and its military power by writers like Hecateus of Abdera. “In this respect Berossus could have been building up on the figure of Nebuchadnezzar II presented as a world-conqueror by Megasthenes in the *Indica* ...some years earlier”.⁵² In the eyes of the new dynasty founded by Seleucus it must have been a tempting idea to see oneself in the tradition of a world-wide kingship. And once more we may take note to what extent Berossus was forced to respect the expectations of his Greek or rather Macedonian audience.

52 See Kuhrt 1987, 56; FGrHist 715 (= Megasthenes) F 1 resp. FGrHist 685 (=Abydenus) F 6 p. 407; these quotations of Megasthenes go back to Eusebius. For Megasthenes *Nabokodrosoros* even exceeded Heracles and conquered the Libyans and the Iberians and forced a part of them to settle on the right banks of the Pontos. The Iberians in question seem to be the inhabitants of a region near the Caucasus; cf. the commentary to Euseb. P.E. IX 41,1 p. 456 d 4 by E. H. Grifford (Oxford 1903).

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