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# Assyrian history of Herodotus: The missing and the extant *logos*

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## Abstract

Herodotus wrote down a very brief account of the history of Assyria in his *Histories*, but he promised to deliver a complete *logos* as well. We can find two remarks on this future project that (possibly) never materialized in the end. In the preserved text, there are only several mentions of Assyrian kings, history, and customs, but it seems he planned to expand the narrative further, potentially in a separate piece of work. The result was a mysterious Assyrian *logos*. In this article, I will explore the possible influence of Herodotus' account on the Greek tradition about this eastern land through either one of these *logoi*, if, in fact, he had any at all. In the first part, I will examine the sources, whether they refer to his more detailed treatise on Assyria, and what can be said about this work in general. In the second part, I will focus on his extant Assyrian *logos*, whether any later author (most notably Ctesias and Berossus) could have used his work as a source, and who became the authorities on the history of Assyria, considering the changes in the narratives.

## Keywords

Herodotus; Assyria; Histories; Ctesias; Berossus

## Introduction

The history of the Assyrian Empire in ancient Greek sources is mostly a collection of stories about the lives of oriental kings and queens with little to no historical core and value.<sup>1</sup> The whole chronology, history, deeds of rulers, or even names are heavily distorted accounts written by the Greeks for the Greeks, possibly not exclusively rooted in ancient eastern oral traditions, even less so in the eastern written sources. The problem of the usage of these sources by the Greeks for the history of the Near East is a complicated issue, and it will not be my main point of discussion in this article. To sum it up briefly, the Greek authors are very vague about their sources, and with one exception (Berosus, whose work is rooted in Babylonian sources)<sup>2</sup> it is impossible to determine where they gathered their information from. The claims of Ctesias (Persian written sources, Persian informants)<sup>3</sup> or Herodotus (Mesopotamian informants)<sup>4</sup> could potentially have convinced his listeners and readers, as they deemed them trustworthy and authoritative, but they are easily questionable in modern research. A quick look at the outline of Assyrian history according to modern research completely shatters the history of Assyria as it is presented by the Greeks. It should be not that surprising. By the time Herodotus and his contemporaries started to write their works, Assyria was gone from history. Nineveh had been lying in ruins for about two centuries, and Babylon was absorbed into the Achaemenid Empire one hundred years before the creation of the first historiographical texts. Thus, the Greeks had to rely on the stories describing ancient times, as their study of written sources appears to be out of the question.

Be it careful listening to eastern stories, or one's imagination, who was the author whose work later became the go-to text for Assyrian history? The earliest account can be found in the *Histories* by Herodotus, but his two remarks on a planned project could have meant that there was a longer treatise in the works. About fifty years later, Ctesias followed Herodotus in his division of the empires; moreover, the account of the physician from Cnidus far surpassed his predecessor in length and details. Most notably, the lives of three kings, Ninus, Semiramis, and Sardanapallus, became the staple of Near Eastern history. About eighty years after Ctesias, Berossus, priest of Marduk, finished his work, *Babyloniaca*, a project rooted in local sources, and perhaps directed to correct the Greek images of the East.<sup>5</sup> In the meantime, lesser-known authors also touched on the topic of Assyria. Were any of the later authors indebted to Herodotus for their Assyrian stories? The main question is related to a supposed work on Assyria by Herodotus, as this one text could have influenced the later sources and shaped the Greek tradition about this

1 See the following studies in general: Drews (1973); Heller (2015); Rollinger (2017).

2 Verbrugghe & Wickersham (1996: pp. 15–27); Bichler (2004: pp. 499–500); van der Spek (2008: pp. 284–287); de Breucker (2011: pp. 643–647).

3 For example, see Llewellyn-Jones & Robson (2010: pp. 55–65); Stronk (2010: pp. 15–21); Almagor (2012: pp. 21–23); Gufler & Madreiter (2015: pp. 388–391); Waters (2017: pp. 16–19).

4 In the case of Babylon/Mesopotamia, see MacGinnis (1986: pp. 83–84).

5 Van der Spek (2008: p. 290); Tuplin (2013: pp. 187–188).

ancient land, but I will explore his short *logos* in the *Histories* and compare it to the later sources as well.

## 1. The problem of missing Assyrian *logos*

It is necessary to start with a remark that the Assyrian *logos* of Herodotus is not missing *per se*. A short description of the history of Assyria, the city of Babylon, and local customs is present in the *Histories*. Herodotus devotes about twenty chapters to the description of Assyria (chapters 178–200 of the first book). A more suitable title for this *logos* would be, however, the Babylonian *logos*, because the city and the local customs are the main points of interest. I will return to this section, its problems, and historical narrative parts in the third chapter. Now I will focus on the promises of Herodotus, as there could potentially have been a longer study centred on Assyria, and what can be said about this work. In chapter 106,<sup>6</sup> Herodotus says he will return to the description of the conquest of Ninus (= Nineveh) by the Medes, although he never does in the *Histories*.<sup>7</sup> Later, in chapter 184<sup>8</sup> Herodotus asserts that he will describe the reigns of many kings who ruled the city of Babylon. The complete list is left out of the work. There are mentions of several such rulers in the *Histories*, but no detailed account of Assyrian history by Herodotus exists in the modern day.

For this chapter, I have to work with two premises: Herodotus finished this *logos*, and it carried some influence, or he never wrote it. In the following chapters, I will disclose why I would rather incline to the latter, although I cannot completely deny the potential existence of the text. His two remarks sparked a discussion over the potential existence of another work written by Herodotus. Whether this writing ever existed or was just a concept is a matter of debate (see the following). His sources for Assyria in general are, likewise, as elusive as his supposed work on Assyria is. The vague statements like “they say” or “it is said”<sup>9</sup> do not offer us much insight. He had some informants for local customs, cities, kings, and historical events since he hardly visited the place himself.<sup>10</sup> How much material he obtained this way is completely unknown. Whether his *Assyriaca* was supposed to be as long or even longer than the Egyptian *logos* (one book), or just a planned, shorter part of the *Histories* cannot be determined. From both remarks, it appears that Herodotus planned to write a treatise specifically on Assyrian history, as his comments suggest (the conquest of Nineveh and the kings of Babylon). His extant Assyrian *logos* in the *Histories* contains very little historical information. Herodotus mostly

6 Hdt. 1.106.2. καὶ τὴν τε Νίνον εἶλον (ὡς δὲ εἶλον, ἐν ἑτέροις λόγοις δηλώσω).

7 The siege is described in the later sources, most notably Ctesias (D.S. 2.27). For his account, see MacGinnis (1988).

8 Hdt. 1.184. τῶν ἐν τοῖσι Ἀσσυρίοις λόγοις μνήμην ποιήσομαι.

9 Examples from the *Histories* and the specific part: λέγουσι οἱ Χαλδαῖοι (Hdt. 1.181.5); Φασὶ δὲ οἱ αὐτοὶ οὗτοι (Hdt. 1.182.1); ἀμφοτέραι δὲ αὐτὰ λέγονται (Hdt. 1.182.2).

10 For Herodotus' description of the city and comparison with the real layout and sights, see MacGinnis (1986) or Henkelmann et al. (2011).

focuses on the ethnography and geography of Mesopotamia. Historical events are rare in this part. This could mean that he really wished to explore Assyrian history further and had more material to write about. At first, I will summarize the modern views on the text before I will proceed to its potential use by other sources.

There are many possible outcomes of what happened to the text if it existed at all. If Herodotus indeed finished a separate work, it did not survive for many centuries. Modern views on this supposed work are diverse. It is possible that the Assyrian *logos* was for an unknown reason intended to be a separate work, even though all the other *logoi* are a part of the *Histories*.<sup>11</sup> Another option would be a future inclusion of the Assyrian *logos* into the *Histories*, but, again, for an unknown reason, Herodotus failed to eventually incorporate it in the text. Whether he simply forgot his own remarks after rewriting the work,<sup>12</sup> made these notes for himself, but later erroneously left them in the text,<sup>13</sup> intentionally added these notes as a sort of advertisement,<sup>14</sup> or died before he could revise the text cannot be answered with any certainty.<sup>15</sup> There could also be a possibility that Herodotus included at least a part of this planned *logos* in the *Histories*, or that the work is actually complete. The key word in that case would be τῶν. When Herodotus announced his intention to write an Assyrian *logos* and description of the rule of local kings, he used this article, which could be understood as a genitive partitive,<sup>16</sup> thus the work is complete, i.e., he is going to mention *some* rulers of Assyria. This reading is, however, disputed.<sup>17</sup>

If the Assyrian *logos* had been a part of the *Histories*, then it was lost during the following centuries. There is no hint where this *logos* would have been placed, but the most logical place is before (or after) the capture of Babylon by Cyrus.<sup>18</sup> Exactly that space of the *Histories* is already occupied by the extant Assyrian *logos*, thus his work seems complete. However, according to MacQueen, there is a possible break in the text, precisely in chapter 200, where the description of the rule of Assyrian kings could follow up, but

11 For this view, see MacQueen (1978: p. 284 with notes).

12 Powell (1939: pp. 18–23).

13 Zawadzki (1984).

14 Drews (1970: pp. 190–191). Drews points to the stories about the Assyrian king Sardanapallus that reached Athens during the fifth-century BCE, as the tradition was shaping up during that time, suggesting Herodotus wished to explore this topic in more detail.

15 MacQueen (1978: pp. 284–285 with notes).

16 Asheri et al. (2007: p. 203).

17 MacQueen (1978: p. 285). For the occurrences, see Powell (1938: p. 227).

18 Descriptions of histories of nations conquered by Persians (Lydians, Medes, Egyptians, we can add Scythians and Cyrenians to the list as well) precede the conquest or campaign of a Persian king, therefore the *logos* and its brief notes on Assyrian history appear to be in the correct spot and nothing is missing. An alternative would be a placement in the third book, where Babylon is captured once more after a revolt against the Persians if Herodotus found this event more suitable for an inclusion of the history of Assyria, as the area was conquered at last. This is the view of Wood (1972: p. 87). Otherwise, nothing suggests that the *logos* was ever part of the text there, and why Herodotus would have wanted to return to his opened question at that place. Some sort of summary of history of foreign land would have also appeared twice, which would be unusual.

Herodotus jumps to Central Asia instead.<sup>19</sup> Why and when precisely this part got lost is, again, unresolved, as is how much extra space Herodotus should have devoted to Assyria. I would personally be in favour of a planned separate work. Material on Assyria to work with was rich, so a fairly long description of ancient Mesopotamia would have been expected, potentially one book in length. There does not seem to be much space for that in the *Histories*. If Herodotus wanted to dedicate only a handful of chapters to Assyrian history, then he could have done so (and he did to some extent). From the opinions on his two remarks, I would agree with Drews the most (see note 14), since Herodotus seemingly gathered some new tales about Assyria and wanted to present them to his listeners at some point, maybe after he had already finished the first book, but he planned it to do outside the *Histories*. The content could have been different, so a separate treatise would have been preferable to a part within the *Histories*. Is there a chance that he finished this work?

Now it is time to take a look at the sources. Except for Herodotus' own notes, there are no unequivocal mentions that would indicate the existence of this text. The waters of ancient historiography are deadly silent when it comes to Herodotus' *Assyriaca*. There is one *possible* reference to this work, specifically in *Historia Animalium* by Aristotle,<sup>20</sup> which contains a passing mention of the siege of Ninus and Herodotus' name attached to it.<sup>21</sup> The event and the episode (a description of birds of prey and an eagle) is indeed missing from the *Histories*, but several manuscripts contain the name Hesiod and even Homer. These two lived before Nineveh was conquered, therefore they could have hardly referred to the siege, and Herodotus should be read instead as the only one who knew of this event. While this could be used as a proof of the existence of the work, at the same time, we gain absolutely no new information from Aristotle. The siege is simply mentioned with no details, warring sides, nature of conquest, or outcome. Even Herodotus himself in his short remark on the siege describes the event in greater detail. It would appear that Herodotus was not even a necessary source for Aristotle. We cannot trace this information to any extant source, and the origin is completely obscure, even more so with the alternative readings.

No further direct quotation of the possible work on Assyria appears in the sources. There were numerous authors writing on the ancient Near East, but their works are lost, and even in the fragments, we cannot find any direct reference to Herodotus and his history of Assyria. Therefore, I cannot prove whether authors writing on the history of Assyria used Herodotus as their source text, so I would claim that he did not finish it. One dubious quote by Aristotle is simply not enough. There are still potential points of interest. One curious remark appears in Joannes Malalas, who assigns the description of peculiar Scythian customs and laws to Herodotus,<sup>22</sup> but they do not come from the *Histories*. The whole passage focuses on the origin of the Parthians, who entered the area

19 MacQueen (1978: pp. 287–290). MacQueen compares this account to the Egyptian *logos*.

20 Huxley (1965) explores the possibility of the existence of the text.

21 Arist. *HA*. 8.18 (= 601b3).

22 Mal. 2.26.

of north-eastern Iran in the third century BCE, thus after the death of Herodotus. Naturally, the area of Parthia was known already in the times of Herodotus,<sup>23</sup> but the origin of its inhabitants is not described in the *Histories*. Malalas could even be referring to the Parni tribes from Central Asia who later settled in Parthia, adopted the local language, and then founded the Parthian Empire. The origin of these tribes is known,<sup>24</sup> but they obviously could not have been mentioned by Herodotus. Why he would even want to include Scythia or Parthia in the Assyrian *logos* is unknown.<sup>25</sup> Malalas probably mentioned Herodotus as an authority for his account, with no specific work or passage in his mind.

Something similar can be said about two further remarks that would point at Herodotus as an authority on the history of Assyria. The first one appears in *Chronicle* by Eusebius.<sup>26</sup> He quoted Cephalion, who used older sources dealing with the history of Assyria, Herodotus among them. His name appears a few sentences later again. This time he is referred to as one of the authors who wrote about Semiramis and the building of the walls around Babylon. That is true: Herodotus mentions Semiramis, although he does not actually attribute her with the construction of the walls but rather with the banks along the river Euphrates (see below). Exactly the same fragment is preserved by Syncellus.<sup>27</sup> Herodotus is mentioned once more as an authority on the history of Assyria and Semiramis is connected to the building of the Babylonian walls, but this is not a piece of information to be found in the *Histories*.

It is obvious that Eusebius<sup>28</sup> and Syncellus used Cephalion's work since the fragments are completely the same (Eusebius in the Latin translation, Syncellus in the Greek version), and they were not reading Herodotus' supposed work on Assyria themselves. Cephalion lived in the second century CE, during the reign of Hadrian. His work is lost, but he wrote on the history of Assyria, starting with Ninus and ending with the conquest of Alexander the Great. His *Assyriaca* was divided into nine books named after the Muses. Brief information on his life and work comes from Photius,<sup>29</sup> including a tremendous number of sources and authors he apparently used for his writing. Could he have used Herodotus as his main source as he claims? Just a quick look at the short summary of his work by Eusebius and Syncellus leaves us hardly any divisive points. His basic outline

23 They appear several times, Hdt. 3.93.3; 3.117.1; 7.66.1.

24 Their origin and foundation of the empire can be found in Justin (Just. *Epit.* 41–42).

25 In chapter 1.106, the Scythians are mentioned as the rulers of Asia for twenty-eight years. Later in the same chapter, Herodotus makes the remark on the siege of Ninus by the Medes and future *logos*. If Herodotus wrote about Assyria more and developed these events further, then he could be referring to the Scythian origin of the Parthians, as Scythian war bands attacked Media and Assyria. Afterwards, he could have proceeded to the conquest of Ninus in a separate work or chapters within the *Histories*, and the Scythians could be mentioned in the work since they had some importance in the course of the history of Asia. But this kind of information appears solely in Malalas, and it seems very far-fetched.

26 Euseb. *Chron.* 17.

27 Syncell. *Chron.* 167A.

28 Eusebius himself used older material on Assyrian history, and Herodotus is not among the authors directly quoted. This does not mean much though, as Eusebius ignores Ctesias or Dinon, who wrote at length on Assyria in their works as well.

29 Phot. *Bibl.* 72 § 68.

of Assyrian history is directly taken from Ctesias' *Persica*,<sup>30</sup> therefore Cephalion's usage of Herodotus' work should have been very limited. If he added some information from the *Histories* cannot be proven. The only way Herodotus could have been the authority on Assyria as Cephalion suggests would have required Ctesias and Dinon to have copied a lost work by Herodotus with the outline of Assyrian history and the most important kings from him. While it is possible (neither the sources of Ctesias and Dinon can be verified, nor their works are preserved), it would be a safer bet to say that Cephalion relied primarily on their original works that do not come from a mysterious text on Assyria by Herodotus. For Cephalion, it seems, Ctesias was the main source, with Herodotus simply appearing as another authority that should not be omitted.

Whether Herodotus only planned to write a work dedicated to Assyria, or perhaps even finished one and even included this *logos* in the *Histories*, cannot be proven with any certainty. What happened to the text, if there ever had been one, is a complete mystery. Later ancient sources do not directly quote the *Assyriaca*, and if the name of Herodotus appears in connection to Assyria, then these remarks are highly questionable. Aristotle, Cephalion, and Joannes Malalas refer to the passages that are not a part of the *Histories*. That would mean some unknown chapters or even a whole work would have still existed in the sixth-century CE when Malalas finished his writing, but where this text suddenly disappeared to is a question without any satisfying answers. Possibly, they simply named Herodotus as an authority for the history of Assyria, attributing him with something he had not, in fact, done. Perhaps, Asheri was right when he said, "the rest of the material does not survive, for reasons that perhaps it is useless to search after."<sup>31</sup> If I judged the sources, then I would say the text was not written down. Perhaps, Herodotus performed this *logos* only orally and did not manage to finish a physical copy. He clearly had more material prepared, but maybe new tales from the East started to circulate in Greece, and Herodotus wanted to update his stories. If later authors took his *logos* as their source, then the changes would have to have been significant. In the following chapter, I will explore his extant *logos* in the *Histories*, where it will be clear that Herodotus was not the biggest authority on the history of Assyria. I will also show how the tradition changed, and what Herodotus' additional account on Assyria would have to have contained if later sources were indebted to him in any way.

## 2. Assyrian kings in *Histories*: The extant *logos*

Information on Assyrian history in the extant *logos* is limited, but it can still be compared to the later tradition. No complete list of Assyrian or Babylonian kings appears in the *Histories*. It is also highly questionable how much Herodotus knew about the earlier history of the Middle East, as his account contains many problems. Foremost, Herodotus

30 For the comparison, see Diodorus' account for which Ctesias was the primary source (D.S. 2.1.4–2.28). There are some minor differences between Diodorus and Cephalion, but the overall structure of the history of Assyria remains the same. See also Adler & Tuffin (2002: pp. 194–198).

31 Asheri et al. (2007: p. 203).



does not clearly distinguish between Assyria and Babylonia. He uses the word Assyria for the area of Babylon (mostly in chapters 1.178–200, where the Assyrian area proper is not meant) and for the whole of Mesopotamia in a wider sense. This is evident from some passages. After the capture of Nineveh, the Medians became the masters of the Assyrians except for the Babylonian area, thus, Assyria appears to be a general term for the whole region.<sup>32</sup> Another peculiar remark appears at the start of the Assyrian *logos*, where he says that there are many great cities in Assyria with Babylon being the most notable one.<sup>33</sup> Again, Babylon is just an area within Assyria and not a separate kingdom. In the previous sentence, he narrates that Cyrus attacked the Assyrians. The Babylonian Empire was the historical target, but Herodotus will keep using Assyria for any kingdom in this part of the world.<sup>34</sup>

His mixture of Assyria and Babylon is surprising from the standpoint that he was aware of the fact that the rule was transferred from Ninus (Neo-Assyrian Empire) to Babylon (Neo-Babylonian Empire). In his nomenclature, however, this is not reflected, as if there was not a significant change. The empire persisted and one dynasty continued to rule, only from a different city.<sup>35</sup> Later sources do not really reflect this most of the time. Ctesias completely forgoes any trace of an independent Babylonian Empire.<sup>36</sup> According to him, Babylon had always been a part of the Assyrian or Median Empire, with no transfer of power. He even ignores the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great (539 BCE), or at least this event is missing from the fragments. Castor, Diodorus, and Cephalion simply follow his lead. It was Berossus who broke the silence and brought the Chaldaean dynasty, clearly rulers of an independent kingdom in his work, to the light. It seems only those who quoted him (Alexander Polyhistor, Abydenus,<sup>37</sup> Flavius Josephus, indirectly Eusebius) described the Neo-Babylonian Empire or were aware of a certain Chaldaean dynasty in Babylon, while the rest is content with Assyrians as the rulers of Asia. As far as Herodotus' influence is concerned, Berossus hardly used Herodotus as his source,<sup>38</sup> and in the case of other authors, Herodotus would have to have “eliminated” one of the empires in the future *logos* even though he was initially right. The unclear usage of the words Assyria and Babylon persists through the ancient sources (except for Berossus).

32 Hdt. 1.106.2. τοὺς Ἀσσυρίους ὑποχειρίους ἐποίησαντο πλὴν τῆς Βαβυλωνίης μοίρης.

33 Hdt. 1.178.1. τῆς δὲ Ἀσσυρίης ἐστὶ μὲν κού και ἄλλα πολίσματα μεγάλα πολλά, τὸ δὲ ὀνομαστότατον και ἰσχυρότατον και ἔνθα σφι Νίνου ἀναστάτου γενομένης τὰ βασιλῆια κατεστήκει, ἦν Βαβυλών, εὐῶσα τοιαύτη δὴ τις πόλις.

34 Hdt. 1.178.1. Κῦρος ἐπεῖτε τὰ πάντα τῆς ἡπείρου ὑποχείρια ἐποίησατο, Ἀσσυριοῖσι ἐπετίθετο. Cf. Hdt. 1.188.1 – Labynetus inherited the reign in Assyria. Ὁ δὲ δὴ Κῦρος ἐπὶ ταύτης τῆς γυναικὸς τὸν παῖδα ἐστρατεύετο, ἔχοντά τε τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐωυτοῦ τοῦνομα Λαβυνήτου και τὴν Ἀσσυρίων ἀρχήν.

35 See Dalley (2003) for the problem of the transfer of power and the relationship between the Sargonid and Chaldaean dynasties.

36 Madreiter (2011: especially pp. 262–270); Bichler (2004: p. 500).

37 Abydenus appears to be an interesting case since he wrote the *Assyriaca*, but relied heavily on Ctesias, Berossus, and Megasthenes; thus, he combined somewhat contradictory sources. Unfortunately, from the fragments it is unclear how he made a use of them, but both Assyrians and Chaldaeans were a part of his history.

38 Tuplin (2013: p. 194).

According to Herodotus, Assyrians had ruled the upper parts of Asia for 520 years, when their subjects started to revolt.<sup>39</sup> The starting point of their rule is not mentioned by Herodotus, and the last event of Assyrian history seems to be the conquest of Nineveh by the Medes. This happened in the year 612 BCE, simple counting gets us to 1132 BCE. While the Assyrian Empire rose to prominence during this period, mathematically is Herodotus mistaken. Later, he asserts that the Medes ruled Asia for 128 years. Their last king, Astyages, was defeated by Cyrus in 550 BCE. The conquest of Nineveh would have happened in the year 678 BCE<sup>40</sup> in that case, and the Assyrians had started to rule 66 years earlier.<sup>41</sup> Herodotus does not comment further on the chronology and does not disclose which event he used as the starting point for the Assyrian Empire. A few decades later, Ctesias pushed Assyrian history further back. His phase of the Median dominance over Asia was even longer than Herodotus', and the Assyrian kingdom lasted for about 1,300 years.<sup>42</sup> The rule of the first Assyrian king (Ninus) would have started at some point in the 22<sup>nd</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Later sources mostly follow his calculations, while Berossus with his use of *sars* pushed the rule of the first kings in Babylon hundreds of thousands of years back to the past.<sup>43</sup> In general, later authors considered the Assyrian Empire to be much more ancient than Herodotus had done.

Numbers and Babylonian rule aside, the turning points in the *Histories* are two major events: the conquest of Nineveh and the fall of the Assyrian Empire, and the rise of Cyrus and the fall of the Median Empire. Later authors might describe different kings or events, but these two conflicts are cemented in the Greek tradition and are continuously narrated in what was apparently the greatest contribution by Herodotus to the historical works on eastern history – the sequence of world empires. The Assyrian Empire will appear as the first and the eldest empire created in Asia<sup>44</sup> (or even the known world), and not many classical sources broke this division.<sup>45</sup> The main empires in the East then appeared in a succession starting from Assyria, continuing with Media, and finishing with Persia. This concept appeared in the *Histories* and was endlessly copied by later sources.<sup>46</sup> Ctesias also divided the history of Asia in exactly the same manner, and Dinon likewise brought no change. Diodorus Siculus or Nicolaus of Damascus also start Asian history

39 Hdt. 1.95.2. Ἀσσυρίων ἀρχόντων τῆς ἄνω Ἀσίας εἶναι ἐπ' ἕτερα εἴκοσι καὶ πεντακόσια, πρῶτοι ἀπ' αὐτῶν Μῆδοι ἤρξαντο ἀπίστασθαι.

40 Herodotus is not correct in his calculations, as the actual length of the reigns of the Median kings (as Herodotus calculates them in the Median *logos*) was longer, and we get to the year 700 BCE. The Assyrian Empire would have been founded in 1 220 BCE. See Alonso-Núñez (1988: p. 130).

41 See Alonso-Núñez (1988: p. 129); Bichler (2000: p. 136).

42 There is a huge discrepancy when it comes to the durability of the Assyrian Empire in the fragments. We can find many different numbers – 1,070 (Vell. 1.6.1), 1,228 (Oros. *Hist.* 2.2.5; 2.3.2), 1,300 (Just. *Epit.* 1.2.13), 1,306 (Agath. *Hist.* 2.25.5), 1,360 (D.S. 2.21.7), or 1,460 years (Syncell. *Chron.* 193). Other sources indicate a roughly similar timespan (Euseb. *Chron.* 18). For more information, see Boncquet (1990: p. 6f).

43 Euseb. *Chron.* 3.

44 See Drews (1965) for the later development of Herodotus' concept. See also Rollinger (2017: pp. 573–575).

45 The exception is Berossus, who described history from the Babylonian standpoint, and Assyrians only sporadically appear throughout his work. See Bichler (2004: pp. 507–515); Rollinger (2017: p. 573).

46 See, for example, Alonso-Núñez (2003); Wiesehöfer (2003).

from Assyria, while later chronicles will place Assyria as the first world empire as well. Even though Ctesias, Dinon, Abydenus, or Cephalion narrated about different rulers or events (or used the characters known already from the *Histories* but attributed them with something new), the basic outline of history in Asia was set in stone.<sup>47</sup>

Herodotus affected later authors with this division, but did he influence them as far as the kings and their deeds are concerned? As we have seen, the duration of the Assyrian Empire was prolonged, and Herodotus' calculation was not accepted. The problem of the missing Assyrian *logos* also carries a significant issue – whether any of the later sources potentially gathered their information on Assyrian kings from this supposed lost work. Since the fragments do not indicate Herodotus as the source, I would not consider this as an option, but there is no definitive proof of it, as references to Herodotus could be missing from the extant fragments. If we want to start comparing the Assyrian kings of Herodotus to the later sources, we can rely only on the *Histories*. As was the case with the duration of the Assyrian Empire, later authors do not appear to be significantly indebted to Herodotus for the description of the rule of Assyrian kings. Let us now proceed to the rulers of Assyria as narrated by Herodotus.

The first king and the founder of the Assyrian Empire was Ninus.<sup>48</sup> This is, however, not a piece of information to be found in the *Histories*. The eponymous founder of the city of Nineveh (Ninos in Greek, Νίνοϋ) is mentioned as a member of the Heraclid dynasty in Lydia as the son of Belus,<sup>49</sup> thus not directly in relation to Assyria. Ninus, in fact, appears more times,<sup>50</sup> but with a reference to the city in mind and not to the king. In later tradition, starting with Ctesias,<sup>51</sup> Ninus became the founder of the city as well as of the Assyrian Empire. His exploits, including the conquest of most of Asia, are not present in the *Histories* or even hinted at by Herodotus. On the other hand, later sources usually associate Ninus with Belus, just like Herodotus did. In the summaries of the works on Assyria, Eusebius quotes Abydenus, Castor, and Cephalion, who mention Ninus as a descendant of Belus. The relationship is not always the same: Belus was four generations older than Ninus (Abydenus), or Ninus was the son of Belus (Castor, Cephalion) as in the *Histories*.<sup>52</sup> The most important question would be whether these authors relied on Ctesias in this particular case because Belus is missing from the fragments of the *Persica* and Diodorus starts his Assyrian history directly with Ninus with no mention of previous kings or Ninus' lineage. Since later authors seem to be indebted to Ctesias much more than Herodotus when it comes to Assyrian history, we can presume that the connection

47 An attempt by Berossus to change this view, or at least to challenge the Greek conceptions of Babylon, was almost an utter failure, but he was an outlier. See Verbrugge & Wickersham (1996: pp. 27–34); van der Spek (2008: pp. 289–290); Tuplin (2013).

48 Already in antiquity, Orosius commented on this, as he states that nearly every historical work starts with Ninus as the first king (Oros. *Hist.* 1.1).

49 Hdt. 1.7.2.

50 For example, Hdt. 1.102.2; 1.103.2; 1.106.2; 1.185.1; 1.193.2, 2.150.2; 2.150.3. The last one is more problematic since Ninus could mean the city or the person. See note 62 for more information and my stance.

51 D.S. 2.1.4–2.7.1.

52 Euseb. *Chron.* 15 (Abydenus); 15 (Castor); 17 (Cephalion).

between Belus and Ninus was made by Ctesias as well, but we cannot prove it in the extant pieces of works. If there was not a mention of Belus in the *Persica*, then later authors could be referring to the passage of Herodotus as the logical source.

The story of Ninus was fully developed by Ctesias, and exactly the same can be said about his wife and successor, Queen Semiramis. There are only two mentions of Semiramis in the *Histories*, but endless accounts of her rule can be found in later sources. Semiramis appears as the queen of Babylon, who built dykes along the river Euphrates near the city to prevent flooding,<sup>53</sup> and one of the gates of Babylon carried her name.<sup>54</sup> That is all we can get from Herodotus. While Ninus was probably not a historical character, the Greek legend of Semiramis was influenced by real queens of Assyria.<sup>55</sup> The tradition was already alive during the time of Herodotus, who has almost nothing to say about her for some reason and praises another queen of Assyria (= of Babylon), Nitocris, more instead. Semiramis is also not related to Ninus in any way in the *Histories*. As with Ninus, Ctesias delivered the fullest and the most vivid account of Semiramis, and the story of this queen entered Greek literature with fanfare. Attributed with only two structures in Babylon by Herodotus, Semiramis became the founder of the whole city with magnificent palaces, lofty walls, the temple of Zeus, and every other major sight there. The legend does not stop there, as the queen went on to conquer parts of Aethiopia and then on a large-scale invasion of India.<sup>56</sup> Her character is not portrayed by Herodotus, but she is later described also as a cruel and lustful woman.<sup>57</sup> Wherever Ctesias got his ideas for the story, his Semiramis was clearly far more influential than Herodotus'. Ctesias' sequence of rulers, Ninus, Semiramis, and their son Ninyas (not attested in the *Histories*), was followed in the later tradition.

The third king of Assyria, who became a popular character in the Greek literary tradition, was the last king of Assyria, Sardanapallus. It should come without surprise that his name is again mentioned by Herodotus, but the most renowned account copied by later authors was written by Ctesias. His name appears exactly once in the *Histories*.<sup>58</sup> As with the previous two rulers, his role is different. According to Herodotus, Sardanapallus was an extremely wealthy king of Assyria who dug an underground chamber where he stored his treasure, but some thieves managed to break into it and rob him. From Ctesias onwards, Sardanapallus became known as a synonym of the decadent, effeminate ruler who spent his life closed in his palace, accompanied only by his concubines and eunuchs, living the life of a woman.<sup>59</sup> He was also the last king of Assyria, as the commander of the Medes named Arbaces started a successful revolt against him. Sardanapallus then heaped a huge pyre and died in flames. Nothing like this can be found in the *Histories*.

53 Hdt. 1.184.

54 Hdt. 3.155.5.

55 See, for example, Dalley (2005); Waters (2017: pp. 45–59); Stronk (2017: pp. 526–530).

56 The most complete account can be found in *Bibliothèque* by Diodorus (D.S. 2.6.5–2.20).

57 Oros. *Hist.* 1.4.4–8.

58 Hdt. 2.150.3.

59 The lengthiest account derived from the *Persica* can be found in Diodorus' *Bibliotheca* (D.S. 2.23–2.27).

Sardanapallus is not specifically mentioned as the last king of Assyria, nor he is a weakling. On the one hand, Ctesias' version is missing the story of the underground treasury, on the other, the account of Sardanapallus' life suggests that he enjoyed an opulent lifestyle and a tradition of a very rich ruler from Assyria was present in Greece for a long time. But how exactly these two accounts were connected is uncertain, except for a mention of riches. Herodotus also does not comment on the character of Sardanapallus.

This problem can be further complicated by an additional fragment by Hellanicus.<sup>60</sup> He asserts that there were in fact two kings bearing this name, one, king of the Persians (*sic*), who enjoyed life in luxury, the other, who founded two cities in Cilicia, Tarsus and Anchiale. The first is clearly a reference to the decadent king as presented by Ctesias, but the other one has nothing to do with idle life in the palace. Which one of these was meant by Herodotus is difficult to answer. Since Hellanicus was his contemporary, Herodotus could have heard both versions,<sup>61</sup> but he did not develop the story or comment on this ruler (perhaps, he planned to do that in the future *logos*). Even the sole mention appears outside the description of Assyria. There is also no way to precisely place his Sardanapallus in the chronology.<sup>62</sup> All in all, there were possibly more stories about Sardanapallus circulating around Greece until Ctesias wrote the definitive account of his reign.

To return to the second Sardanapallus of Hellanicus, we can attribute the deeds of this ruler to a different Assyrian king. That would be Sennacherib known from Hebrew as well Greek sources. Hebrew sources naturally reflect his campaigns against Judea,<sup>63</sup> while Greek sources focus more on his battles with the Greeks. We can find a remark on his conquest of Babylon,<sup>64</sup> then Alexander Polyhistor and Abydenus record his campaigns to Cilicia where he defeated local Greeks.<sup>65</sup> To commemorate his victory, he erected either a statue or bronze pillars with an inscription describing his achievements. Besides that, he also founded the city of Tarsus with Babylon as the model. This mention of Tarsus could be quite important since Hellanicus attributes the foundation of Tarsus to Sardan-

60 Hellanic. FGrHist. 4 F63 (= *Schol. Aristoph. ad Aves* 1021). The name is also attested in *Birds* by Aristophanes (Ar. Av. 1021), but no further details appear. At least it gives us a glimpse that Sardanapallus was well-known in Greece in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, but the tradition was still forming.

61 See Drews (1970: p. 190); Bichler (2004: p. 501).

62 There is, however, a different explanation of the text which is following: τὰ γὰρ Σαρδαναπάλλου τοῦ Νίνου βασιλέος ἕοντα. One meaning is (and that is the one I follow and prefer in this article) Sardanapallus, king of Nineveh. The other solution would be Sardanapallus, son of the king Ninus, since Ninus (Νίνοϛ) can mean both. This would make Sardanapallus one of the earliest kings of Assyria, as Ninus was the founder of the eponymous city and the Empire. This is not in accord with the later tradition, where Sardanapallus is almost universally the last king of Assyria. It is also important that Herodotus clearly speaks about the city in the previous sentence, and Sardanapallus is missing from the lineage mentioned in the first book (Hdt. 1.7.2). Therefore, I would incline to the reading as Nineveh rather than Ninus, although as we have seen in the case of Hellanicus, numerous tales could have been circulating in Greece around that time, and Herodotus could be referring to a different person bearing this name. See Drews (1965: p. 190); Zawadzki (1984: pp. 261f); Bichler (2004: pp. 500–501).

63 For example, 2 *Kings*, 18.13; 19.16; 19.36.

64 Euseb. *Chron.* 9; 11. Both (Alexander Polyhistor and Abydenus) used Berossus as their source.

65 Ibid.

apallus (likely a derivation of the name Aššurbanipal).<sup>66</sup> Sardanapallus is also connected to a certain monument, his own tomb, in the city (it can be Tarsus, Anchiale or Nineveh) with an inscription on it, where he does, in fact, not record his military achievement as Sennacherib does, but rather his taste for luxury and soft life.<sup>67</sup>

With many traditions about Sennacherib and Sardanapallus it appears that the historical king could have influenced the Greek legend in a certain way. Berossus is correct in his account, as Sennacherib was likely responsible for the rebuilding of Tarsus.<sup>68</sup> In Hellanicus, Sennacherib could be meant as the second Sardanapallus who built Tarsus and Anchiale. Later post-Ctesian tradition once more associates Sardanapallus with these two cities, but this time his decadent nature is highlighted, and the traces of real military achievements are gone. Berossus used Babylonian sources, therefore he was maybe not familiar with the Greek interpretation or wanted to correct it, as the campaign and the construction of cities were attributed to the wrong king.<sup>69</sup> The campaign of Sennacherib is attested in one of his inscriptions,<sup>70</sup> and the Greeks were potentially aware of the events in Cilicia. Nevertheless, later the historical core is subverted, and real king Sennacherib is morphed into more-or-less legendary Sardanapallus with his typical associations.

Herodotus does not make use of the rich tradition on Sardanapallus, nor on Sennacherib. He mentions him, but in a completely different context. Sanacharibos, as Herodotus transcribes his name, led the army of Assyrians and Arabians against Egyptian king Sethos, but mice destroyed the quivers, bows, and other equipment of his army, which was then soundly defeated.<sup>71</sup> Herodotus does not comment on Sennacherib further. This episode was possibly influenced<sup>72</sup> by another campaign of Sennacherib, not directly to Egypt as in the *Histories*, but to Judea. He besieged Jerusalem but failed to capture the city after some kind of divine intervention,<sup>73</sup> although he managed to conquer Lachish and claimed to have defeated the Egyptian army.<sup>74</sup> This story of Sennacherib is,

66 The Assyrian name is Aššur-bāni-apli, Heller (2015: pp. 335–336).

67 The epitaph is preserved in several sources, even though the content differs – as much as three variants of inscription are mentioned by Athenaeus (Ath. 12.39). His sources were Amyntas, Cleitarchus, and Clearchus. Reference to this epitaph of Sardanapallus can be found in the works of Diodorus (D.S. 2.23.3), Strabo (Str. 14.5.9), or Arrian (Arr. *An.* 2.5.2–4) among others.

68 Dalley (1999: p. 73).

69 Lanfranchi (2013: pp. 66–69). However, his description of Sennacherib's campaign was perhaps a model for the Seleucid king Antiochus I. – Tuplin (2013: p. 187, n. 38), and it was not only a reaction to Greek sources.

70 Sennacherib 17 iv 61–76 (Q003491).

71 Hdt. 2.141.2–5. See West (1987: pp. 267–269).

72 The episode with the battle and mice is followed by a mention of a statue of the priest of Ptah, who holds a mouse in his hand. Herodotus thus tried to explain the veneration of mice by pharaoh Shabataka. Lloyd (1988: pp. 32–43); See also Asheri et al. (2007: p. 343); Kahn (2014: p. 27).

73 The account appears in the Bible as well (2 *Kings* 19) and is mentioned by Flavius Josephus (J. *AJ.* 10.1), who even disagrees with Herodotus' account (Josephus only repeats what Herodotus wrote and adds no new information about Assyrian history). Evans (2009: p. 183) doubts that these two (Biblical and Greek) events are connected, cf. Kahn (2014: p. 27).

74 Kahn (2014: pp. 23–24).

however, never to be found again in the Greek sources, therefore Herodotus' account was not influential. Whenever Sennacherib reappeared in the following centuries, then his campaigns in Cilicia were mentioned. The source was Berossus in this case, as Ctesias ignores Sennacherib as the king of Assyria.<sup>75</sup>

These four kings appear in the *Histories*. In later tradition, three biographies of these rulers will be developed by Ctesias and copied by subsequent sources; only Sennacherib will be partially forgotten or ignored. Ninus, Semiramis, and Sardanapallus will become the key rulers of Assyria for centuries to come, with about 25 to 30 mostly completely forgettable kings in between Semiramis and Sardanapallus.<sup>76</sup> Herodotus does not appear to have played a crucial part in the development of Assyrian history in the Greek tradition, and he would have to have expanded and changed the tales about them significantly. Nevertheless, all the previously mentioned kings will be known as the rulers of the Assyrian Empire proper, not specifically associated with a kingship restricted to Babylon (like Herodotus' Semiramis). There, Herodotus will slightly differ from the future tradition, as he proceeded to mention three more kings whose rule was restricted to the Babylonian area since they ruled only after the fall of Nineveh.

Labynetus was the first of these rulers. This name is attested several times in the *Histories*, but it was used for two different people. From a chronological standpoint, it is difficult to assess that it could be only one person, although the rule of 46 years was, of course, within the realm of possibility. The first Labynetus negotiated the peace between the Lydian king Alyattes and the Median king Cyaxares. This Labynetus is also titled the Babylonian.<sup>77</sup> This takes us to the year 585 BCE when the war between Lydia and Media ended. Now comes the tricky part, as Labynetus is the Greek rendition of the name Nabonidus. The king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire at that time was, in fact, Nebuchadnezzar II. Herodotus clearly differs between the two Labyneti (father and son),<sup>78</sup> but does not disclose which one was the mediator of peace. We can presume that Nebuchadnezzar II is the older one who also played a part during the peace talks,<sup>79</sup> but it could be Nabonidus himself who was old enough to carry this task.<sup>80</sup> We cannot find more information about him in the *Histories* though, save for the mention of him being the father of his eponymous son.

75 There is an interesting remark by Eusebius (Euseb. *Chron.* 11), who quotes Alexander Polyhistor and Abydenus on Sennacherib and even states that he was the 25<sup>th</sup> king of Assyria. For some bizarre reason, his name is then missing from his Assyrian kings list (Mithraeus is the 25<sup>th</sup> king there), as well as the name of his son Esarhaddon (Asordanus), even though he obviously heard of them. As it seems, Berossus wrote on Sennacherib from the Babylonian standpoint (thus, these two kings appear only in the Chaldaean history). So, it is possible that Eusebius omitted him from the Assyrian list since the sources for it did not mention him, as Ctesias, the major transmitter for Assyria, had not included him in his account, and Eusebius ignored the mentions of Assyrian kings from *Babyloniaca* for the Assyrian kings list.

76 For Ctesias' list of kings and its usage, see Boncquet (1990).

77 Hdt. 1.74.3. Λαβύνητος ὁ Βαβυλωνίος.

78 Hdt. 1.188.1.

79 Asheri et al. (2007: p. 135).

80 Beaulieu (1989: pp. 89–92). See also Wiseman (1985: pp. 8–9); Bichler (2004: p. 503). This would eliminate any direct traces of Nebuchadnezzar from Herodotus' account altogether.

Nebuchadnezzar II is missing from the account of Ctesias and those who used him as a source, just like the whole Neo-Babylonian Empire. He reappears in the work of Berossus, who likely devoted to him a very favourable account as a hero of Babylon.<sup>81</sup> This can be supported by the statement of Megasthenes, who also wrote on Nebuchadnezzar around the same period as Berossus. Megasthenes says that the Babylonian king went on great campaigns,<sup>82</sup> potentially drawing his account from the same tradition as Berossus did. Nebuchadnezzar II seems to be a figure revered by Berossus, although his description of the Neo-Babylonian Empire was mostly ignored by other Greek authors, who simply skipped this part of the Mesopotamian history, Nebuchadnezzar II included. Eusebius and Flavius Josephus mention Nebuchadnezzar quite often, for he appears in Jewish tradition too, not because he was mentioned often in the Greek sources. Nevertheless, Berossus did not refer to any Labynetus in his work, and his account is not derived from Herodotus’.

The successor of the first Labynetus was his wife Nitocris. She was responsible for many sights and structures in Babylon and the surrounding area. The most significant of them were the hydraulic projects and banks preventing the river from flooding, channels in the city, and the bridge across the river. The last one was her tomb above the gate, where she was buried together with a great treasure. After Darius had opened it, he found only her body with a message that he should not disturb the dead.<sup>83</sup> Identification of Nitocris is a complicated issue. Her name is naturally not attested in the Eastern sources, but Herodotus mentions a queen in Egypt with the same name. The wife of Nebuchadnezzar II was presumably Amytis, daughter of the Median king Cyaxares, and she was not known as a great builder, nor an independent monarch. There were other, real female figures who influenced the legend of Nitocris, namely Adad-guppi,<sup>84</sup> the mother of Nabonidus (therefore, some family connection could have been real, even though Nebuchadnezzar was obviously not the father of Nabonidus),<sup>85</sup> or Naqia, queen of Assyria who was responsible for building projects in Babylon.<sup>86</sup> By far the easiest solution is that the achievements of Nitocris were, in fact, Nebuchadnezzar’s.<sup>87</sup> In his own inscription,

81 Dillery (2013: pp. 78–90).

82 Euseb. *Chron.* 11; 12. Cf. J. *Ap.* 1.137–139.

83 Hdt. 1.185–187.

84 Röllig (1969); See Dillery (1992: p. 31, n. 6) for further references. For Adad-guppi and her inscriptions, see also Beaulieu (1989: pp. 68–69; 197–198).

85 The father of Nabonidus was Nabu-balatsu-iqbi. It has been proposed that Nabonidus married the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar (see note 94), therefore the family connection was slightly different. Certain confusion when it comes to the last rulers of Babylon is not a problem only in the *Histories*. We can find the family connection also in the Bible, where Belshazzar (son of Nabonidus) even appears as the son of Nebuchadnezzar (*Daniel* 5.21–22).

86 Pettinato (1985: p. 31); Dalley (2005: pp. 18–19).

87 Drews (1973: pp. 79–80); Sack (1991: pp. 69–71). Several examples (bridge, water reservoir) are noted by Gera (1997: pp. 111–113). See also Wiseman (1985: pp. 63–64); MacGinnis (1986: pp. 78–79); de Breucker (2011: p. 646); Heller (2015: pp. 339–340).



we can find that he built large water reservoirs and defensive structures,<sup>88</sup> which corresponds to the building efforts of Nitocris.<sup>89</sup> Why Herodotus changed the gender of the king (if he had Nebuchadnezzar in mind or his source was referring to him at all) is unknown, but Nitocris could be best explained as Nebuchadnezzar due to their similar deeds, likely with some additional elements from the stories about Adad-guppi or Naqia.

This is the one and only mention of Nitocris (of Babylon) in the Greek tradition, since later sources drop her from history. Her achievements, however, did not disappear. Ctesias attributes some of her building projects in Babylon to Semiramis, namely, the building of the bridge across the river Euphrates, diverting the river to the middle of the city and dividing it into halves, building banks and channels to weaken the stream of the river and the grand walls around the city, and founding a great water reservoir near the city.<sup>90</sup> Especially the last point features the most resemblance between the two sources, echoing the inscription of Nebuchadnezzar as well. Even though the name of Nitocris vanished, the character and her deeds were absorbed into another person – Semiramis. Ctesias merged two queens into one; moreover, he attributed to Semiramis further building projects that were accomplished by Nebuchadnezzar, like building the walls around Babylon or founding the temple of Zeus Belus. Both naturally existed prior to his rule, but the layout of the city of Babylon and the sights known to the Greeks came from his period. His name disappeared in one tradition, and his building project in Babylon became associated with female rulers in the Greek tradition, starting already with Herodotus. Berossus later corrected this error,<sup>91</sup> but a female ruler was far more popular.

The last king was the son of Labynetus and Nitocris, who was named after his father. Herodotus does not describe his rule in any more detail compared to the previous rulers. For the first time, Labynetus appears as an ally of Croesus during the time the Lydian king fought against Cyrus the Great, but nothing comes out of this alliance.<sup>92</sup> It is interesting that Herodotus states that Croesus sent help to the Babylonians rather than the Assyrians, somewhat acknowledging the fact that the Babylonian Empire was not a part of Assyria anymore, although this could be a reference directly to the city instead of the Empire. The second instance Labynetus is mentioned is the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus (and referred to as the Assyrian Empire, this time). Cyrus overcame the Babylonian army in a pitched battle, and then he proceeded to besiege and successfully capture the city.<sup>93</sup> The identification is simple this time.<sup>94</sup> Labynetus is Nabonidus, the

88 For example, Nebuchadnezzar II 002 vi 22–56 (= Q005473; GMTR 4 ST); Nebuchadnezzar II 012 ii 3–22 (= Q005483; GMTR 4 C27). See also Ravn (1942: pp. 38–42).

89 Gasche (1995: pp. 204–208). See also Asheri et al. (2007: pp. 204–206). Josephus assigns the building of the walls of Babylon to Nabonnedus (J. *Ap.* 1.20), Abydenus directly to Nebuchadnezzar (Euseb. *Chron.* 11).

90 D.S. 2.7–9.

91 For comparison, see Euseb. *Chron.* 11; 13.

92 Hdt. 1.77.2.

93 Hdt. 1.188–191.

94 However, Dougherty proposed a different explanation. According to him (1929: pp. 30–42; 63), the first

last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.<sup>95</sup> Herodotus does not tell more tales about him. Later Greek sources do not bother themselves with Babylon and her last king much, as Ctesias omits him together with the whole Neo-Babylonian period. Nabonidus (with this variant of his name, not Labynetus) appears again in the work of Berossus, who gives the full account of his downfall and conquest of Babylon by Cyrus.<sup>96</sup> Otherwise, the whole Babylonian dynasty is largely ignored in the most popular Greek tradition of the history of Assyria. There we will find Sardanapallus as the last monarch, while Babylon is simply a satrapy. Nebuchadnezzar and Nitocris were partially merged with the Semiramis legend, Nabonidus gone.

### 3. Conclusion

Assyrian history as described by Herodotus did not carry much influence in the following centuries. Herodotus left a relatively short *logos* in the *Histories*, but he wished to dive deeper into Assyrian history. The extant account deals with the city of Babylon and local customs rather than reigns of kings. Some of the rulers of Assyria or Babylon are mentioned once, sometimes even randomly outside the Assyrian *logos*. The lengthiest account is centred on Queen Nitocris and her building projects, but it is still only three paragraphs long. Historical events connected to Assyrian kings are summed up extremely quickly. This would mean that Herodotus was heavily interested in writing on Assyrian history, and his two remarks of a future *logos* were not coincidental. He only touched on this topic in the *Histories*, but how would his plan turn out in the end (length, separate piece of work or *logos* within the *Histories*, selection of kings, chronology, making difference between Assyrian and Babylonian phase) cannot be answered. Around the time he was writing the *Histories*, stories about the Assyrian Empire were already circulating in the Greek world, as can be seen from the fragments of his contemporaries. The tradition of the Assyrian Empire through Greek eyes was still taking shape by this point, and the material to gather information from was particularly rich and sparked their imagination. Therefore, Herodotus wanted to explore this topic in greater detail, and added remarks to the text, as he possibly heard new stories about Assyria, but something prevented him from finishing it.

There is no direct evidence for the *Assyriaca*, nor an extra Assyrian *logos* in the *Histories*. One single disputable quotation by Aristotle brings nothing new, since he basically repeats what Herodotus said. Other remarks are too vague to prove any certainty. While it is possible that some material got lost, later sources do not give us a hint. If a separate work really existed, then it did not survive for a long time, and an inclusion of the *logos* within the *Histories* seems doubtful, as it is not clear where would it have been placed

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Labynetus was Nabonidus, Nitocris was the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, and the second Labynetus was their son, Belshazzar, known from Bible (*Daniel* 2.5) as well, against whom Cyrus fought.

95 MacGinnis (1986: p. 79); Schmitt (2006: pp. 211–212).

96 Euseb. *Chron.* 11; 14. J. *Ap.* 1.20. The name appears as Nabonedochus, Nabonidus, and Nabonnedus.

and how long would it have been. The first book is already one of the longest (216 paragraphs), and elsewhere it would have been out of place.

The Greek tradition on the Assyrian Empire changed in the following decades. The division between the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires was dropped, and kings of Babylon known to Herodotus disappeared or were merged with other legends. The Assyrian Empire started to be associated with three notable rulers, Ninus, Semiramis, and Sardanapallus. Each is mentioned by Herodotus, but he does not give us details about them and their rule. Various stories about them were eventually written down by Ctesias, whose account became the most authoritative text on Assyria. Ctesias expanded the tales on certain Assyrian kings known already in Herodotus' time, while skipping the others, but his account is hardly indebted to the *Histories*. Later authors followed Ctesias' example and developed alternative tales or simply copied information they needed for Assyria. We can compare four different accounts summarized by Eusebius (Abydenus, Cephalion, Castor, and Diodorus – with Diodorus' original text as well), and they are obviously rooted in Ctesias' *Persica* with bits of their own invention here and there. Berossus reacted to this Ctesian tradition and tried to give a full account of Babylonian history, but his attempt was not very successful, for his endless lists of kings were outshined by Ctesias' magnificent characters. He has basically nothing to comment on from Herodotus, likewise. Both Ctesias and Berossus had their own vision for their history of Assyria or Babylon.<sup>97</sup>

While I cannot claim that with complete certainty, since we possess mostly fragments, no later author was using Herodotus as his source for Assyria. Those closest to him chronologically, Ctesias, Deinon, or Cleitarchus, *might* have referred to him at some point, but that is only speculation. Since the narratives are very different, Herodotus would have to have changed his planned Assyrian *logos* in the meantime significantly, if Ctesias copied his work and followed his division or stories. That is not quite feasible, as Herodotus would have to have added sometimes contradictory information to the *Histories* if his *logos* had been a part of the work. If he planned to write a separate work with new tales, then he was free to choose the content, but it cannot be determined whether he simply expanded the topics he touched in the *Histories* or brought completely new stories. I would agree with the former. As we could see in the chapter 3, later tradition is very different, and Herodotus would have to have reworked his basic outline of Assyria almost from the scratch if his *logos* was used as a sourcebook. The main problematic parts would have been timespan of the Empire (much shorter in the *Histories*), almost

97 There could be more to Ctesias' account, however, since he very likely reacted to Herodotus, but perhaps the physician from Cnidus did not mindlessly copy Herodotus. He wanted to explore Assyria, Media, and Persia with his own history, but still had the *Histories* in mind as an inspiration, a rival source, or a point of reference. For his "playing" with Herodotus, see most notably Bichler with examples (2004: pp. 504–506); (2011). When it comes to Assyria, other examples could include the female monarch, Nitocris, as the founder of many monuments in Babylon is the penultimate ruler of Assyria, while Semiramis is the second, and their building achievements mirror one another. Ctesias could have even reacted to the promises of Herodotus and delivered the Assyrian *logos* that Herodotus had failed to finish, thus surpassing him in this regard and giving the Greeks an account of Assyrian history. Ctesias even described the fall of Nineveh (D.S. 2.27) that Herodotus had promised in one of his remarks to the planned Assyrian *logos*. Where Herodotus laid the foundations, Ctesias consciously completed them.

complete disappearance of the Babylonian Empire and its rulers, relative insignificance of important kings of later tradition (Ninus, Semiramis, Sardanapallus), and different deeds of kings overall.

One aspect should also be noted. Whether the *logos* existed or not, it was Ctesias who could have rendered obsolete any kind of information Herodotus had written, for he was possibly trying to outperform Herodotus and correct his writing. He could have deliberately chosen different, better, or updated stories on Assyrian kings and Empire and delivered the narrative to the Greek world, thus winning authority over Herodotus and “correcting” him. Be it any way, the *Persica* came off as the sourcebook, and Herodotus’ Assyrian *logoi*, missing or extant, were not regarded as relevant in later development.

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