

**Berosos and Manetho,
Introduced and Translated**

*Native Traditions in Ancient
Mesopotamia and Egypt*

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CHAPTER 3

Berossos—Fragments

History of Babylonia, Book 1

F1

Eusebius *Chronicon* (*The Chronicle*), p. 6, line 8–p. 9, line 2 Karst, in an Armenian translation: Whatever Berossos wrote in his first book, I will report and add it to what I have already narrated from his first book. This is exactly what Polyhistor (*FGrHist* #273 F79) did when he cited Berossos's work. Polyhistor recorded one event in Berossos's history right after another, corresponding in the following manner in his form of presentation. (From here the Armenian version basically agrees with Syncellus's Greek.)

Syncellus *Ecloga Chronographica* (*Chronological Excerpts*) 50–53: From Alexander Polyhistor (*FGrHist* #273 F79), on the ten Chaldean rulers before the Great Flood, the Great Flood, and Noah and his ark. In his account, he mentions some incredible events, as recorded in Berossos's writings. (Syncellus continues as follows.)

Berossos reports in the first book of his Babylonian history that he was a contemporary of Alexander, the son of Philip, and that many public records, which covered a period of over 150,000 years ago¹ about the history of the sky and the sea, of creation, and of the kings and of their deeds, had been preserved with great care.

1. The manuscript reading of this number is in doubt. See T11a.

First he says that the land of the Babylonians lies between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. It produces wild wheat, barley, chickpea, and sesame, and even, in its marshlands, edible roots, called *gongai*.² These roots are the equal of barley in nutrition. The land also produces dates, apples, and all sorts of other fruit, as well as fish and birds, field birds as well as waterfowl.

There are also in the land of the Babylonians waterless and infertile regions near Arabia, while lying opposite Arabia there are hilly and fertile areas. In Babylonia there was a large number of people of different ethnic origins who had settled Chaldea. (51) They lived without discipline and order, just like animals.

In the very first year there appeared from the Red Sea (the Persian Gulf) in an area bordering on Babylonia a frightening monster, named Oannes, just as Apollodoros³ (*FGrHist* #244 F84) says in his history. It had the whole body of a fish, but underneath and attached to the head of the fish there was another head, human, and joined to the tail of the fish, feet, like those of a man, and it had a human voice. Its form has been preserved in sculpture to this day. Berossos says that this monster spent its days with men, never eating anything, but teaching men the skills necessary for writing and for doing mathematics and for all sorts of knowledge: how to build cities, found temples, and make laws. It taught men how to determine borders and divide land, also how to plant seeds and then to harvest their fruits and vegetables. In short, it taught men all those things conducive to a settled and civilized life. Since that time nothing further has been discovered.⁴ At the end of the day, this monster Oannes went back to the sea and spent the night. It was amphibious, able to live both on land and in the sea.

Later other monsters similar to Oannes appeared, about whom Berossos gave more information in his writings on the kings. Berossos says about Oannes that it had written as follows about the creation and government of the world and had given these explanations to man.

2. *Gongai* would appear to be a native name for these edible roots and has no Greek or English equivalent.

3. On Apollodoros the grammarian, see T3b. Jacoby (*FGrHist* #244 F83–F87, see Kommentar), however, considers mistaken late authors, such as Eusebius, who say that Apollodoros used Berossos as a source.

4. One of the concerns of the ancients was to account for how humans learned to do things. For those who saw the gods as responsible for all things, as here for Berossos, a solution to this question was to attribute all learning, all skills, all science, all art to the instruction of the gods, their gift. The idea of humans themselves learning how to do things, of making progress, was not taken into account. Also, on a purely logical basis, since the battle among the gods, which Oannes goes on to describe, took place before Marduk created human beings, it would be necessary for them to be informed of what had happened before Marduk created them.

(52) There was, he says, a time when the universe was only darkness⁵ and water, and in it there were wondrous beings with peculiar forms who were able to engender other living beings. For men with two wings were born, as were other men with four wings and two faces. Some of these had one body but two heads, male and female, and two sets of sexual organs, male and female. Further, there were other men with the legs of goats and the horns of goats on their heads. Yet others had horses' feet, and others had the body of a horse for their lower extremities and human bodies for their upper body, which are the forms of hippo-centaurs. Bulls were engendered with human heads, as were dogs with four bodies, who had fish tails on their hindquarters. There were also horses with dogs' heads, men and other creatures with the heads and bodies of horses, men with tails of fish, and all sorts of creatures who had the forms of all sorts of animals. In addition, there were fish, snakes, crawling things, and many other amazing creatures that had the appearance of two different animals combined. Their images are preserved one next to the other in the temple of Bel. Over all these a woman had control, named Omorka, who in Chaldean is named Thalath (Tiamat), but in Greek her name is translated as Thalassa (i.e., Sea) or, with the same value of the letters in the name, Selene (i.e., Moon).⁶

While the world was in this state, Bel rose up against the woman and cut her in half. (53) Out of the first half he made the earth and out of the second the heavens. The animals who were in her he destroyed. All this, he says, is an allegorical explanation. For when all was water and only monsters were in it, the god cut off his own head, and the other gods mixed the flood of blood with earth and created men. Because of this men have reason and share in the gods' wisdom.

But then Bel, whose name is translated into Greek as Zeus, cut through the darkness and separated the sky and the earth from one another and established order in the universe. The monsters could not endure the strength of the light and were destroyed. Bel, however, as he saw an empty and barren region, gave an order to one of the gods to cut off his own head and mix

5. Darkness most likely was not what Berossos wrote but was added later to make a reading more like the description of creation given in Genesis 1.2.

6. Greek letters also served as numbers. By adding the numerical value of each letter in a word, the word's numerical value could be determined. The Greek letters to spell *Omorka* have the same value when added together as those of the Greek letters that spell *Selene*. This use of numerology, ascertaining the numerical value of a word and then freely substituting like values, provides an interesting and entertaining, if not always logical, way to offer new interpretations or explanations of things.

earth with the flowing blood and to create men and the animals that could breathe the air.⁷

Bel created the stars and the sun and the moon and the five planets.⁸ All this, according to Polyhistor (*FGrHist* #273 F79), Berossos reported in his first book.

F2

Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* (*The Philosophers' Banquet*) 14.44: Berossos in the first book of his Babylonian history says that the feast of Sakaia begins on the sixteenth day of the month Loos,⁹ and lasts for five days. During the celebration the custom is that the masters are given orders by their slaves and that one slave, wearing the royal robes of the king, rules the house. This slave is called Zoganes. Ktesias (*FGrHist* #688 F4) also relates this festival in the second book of his *Persica* (*Persian History*).¹⁰

History of Babylonia, Book 2

F3

Eusebius *Chronicon* (*The Chronicle*) p. 4, line 11–p. 6, line 4 Karst, in an Armenian translation: Syncellus, *Ecloga Chronographica* (*Chronological Excerpts*) 53, 30, 71–72:

And in Berossos's second book he chronicled the kings, one after the other, as he says, "At the time (53) In his second book, Berossos described the ten kings of the Chaldeans and the length of their reigns,

7. Syncellus in section 53 has preserved two different versions of how Bel (Marduk) created the human race. In the first, Marduk cuts off his own head and makes humans from his own blood. In the second, it seems that another god willingly at Marduk's order serves as the raw material not only for humans but for all life. The second is closest to the description found in the *Creation Epic*, the *Enuma Elish*, the central religious text of first-millennium B.C. Babylon. In it, Marduk defeated the forces of chaos led by Tiamat. He cut her in half and used one part of her for the sky and the other for the earth. Then Marduk, after other gods incriminated Kingu, a god who had sided with Tiamat in her fight against him, has them make humankind from his blood. See *ANET*³ 60–72.

8. See T1a–b.

9. The twelve months of the Babylonian year were Nisanu, Aiaru, Simanu, Duzu, Abu, Ululu, Tashritu, Arasammu, Kislimu, Tebetu, Shabatu, and Addaru; see E. J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World* (Ithaca, 1968), 20. Loos would most likely be Duzu, corresponding to June/July.

10. Zoganes does not appear elsewhere in Greek literature. In Strabo *Geographica* 11.8.4 Sakaia is an annual sacred festival in Zela in Armenia among the Sakai to celebrate a Persian defeat, but in 11.8.5 Strabo gives an alternate explanation that it was a Persian festival to celebrate a victory over the Sakai.