

VU Research Portal

Mesopotamia in Greek and Biblical Perceptions

Vlaardingerbroek, H.M.

2014

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Vlaardingerbroek, H. M. (2014). *Mesopotamia in Greek and Biblical Perceptions: Idiosyncrasies and Distortions*. [PhD-Thesis – Research external, graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam].

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

3 Cities

3.1 Mesopotamian Cities

Mesopotamia was a land of cities and towns.¹ An in Antiquity unusually large part of the Babylonian populace lived in cities in the Late-Babylonian period.² And the largest and most impressive of these cities was Babylon, in the mid-first millennium larger than any other city in the Mediterranean and the Ancient Near East. These cities made a deep impression on their contemporaries, and on later generations, as we know from the Hebrew Bible and the works of Greek historians and geographers. Although reality was impressive enough, Nineveh and Babylon grew in works such as Herodotus' *Historiae*, Ktesias' *Persika* and the biblical books of Daniel and Jonah to mythical proportions. Their descriptions speak of city walls that were almost ninety kilometres long and of statues of colossal dimensions, made of pure gold. These cities were thought to have been founded in a very remote past by men and women of the same legendary stature: Enoch, Nimrod, Belos, Ninos and Semiramis. This chapter describes and compares the ideas of Greek and biblical authors about the size and splendour of Assyrian and Babylonian cities.

Knowledge of Mesopotamian cities

The Hebrew Bible mentions a number of Mesopotamian cities, most of them in Genesis and Kings,³ for example, Akkad, Ashur, Babylon, Haran, Kalah, Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Resen, Ur and Uruk.⁴ The majority of these cities are mentioned only a few times, some of them only once, and most of them are only names. We do not hear anything about them. This could either mean that the readers were expected to know these cities, in the same way as a modern author would not feel the need to

¹ What makes a city a city, is not really important in this context, neither are theoretical concepts of urbanisation. What an ancient or biblical author calls a city, is a city. On the use of the concepts of urbanisation in biblical scholarship, see Grabbe 2001 and Nefzger 2001.

² The degree of urbanisation changed through time, but it was probably high in the Late-Babylonian period. Figures are difficult to come by. According to Van de Mieroop (1997: 95), estimating the population size of an ancient city is almost impossible. Estimating the population of a country or area is equally difficult.

³ There is also a list of five unidentified Mesopotamian cities in Ezr. 2:59 = Neh. 7:61 and in Ezr. 8:17 a city is mentioned that is called Casiphia.

⁴ At the end of this section, a list of biblical and Greek names of these cities can be found.

explain names such as Amsterdam or Berlin, or it could mean that the authors of these passages did not know anything about these cities. Nineveh and Babylon are the exceptions. They are mentioned more often than the other cities and they are the only ones about which we hear more than their names, especially Babylon.⁵ However, the Hebrew Bible does not give us a description of the city, as Greek authors such as Herodotos and Strabo do.

Greek authors often describe Mesopotamia as a land of many cities, but authors living before Alexander seem to have known only a few of them. According to Herodotos (1.178), Assyria is renowned for its many cities, but he mentions only five of them in his Babylonian Logos. He tells us much about Babylon,⁶ and a little about Nineveh, Is, Arderikka and Opis, but he does not mention important cities such as Arbela, Borsippa, Kalah, Kish, Sippar, Ur and Uruk. Herodotos' knowledge of Babylon is probably based on hearsay. It is unlikely that he has visited Mesopotamia or the city of Babylon himself,⁷ but his near contemporary Xenophon (430/425 – ca 355 BC) has doubtlessly been in Mesopotamia. He mentions a number of cities, most of which he has visited: Babylon, Charmande, Larissa (Kalah), Mespila (Nineveh), Opis, Sittake and Thapsakos. However, his knowledge of the country and its history is limited. He considers Larissa and Mespila as deserted cities of the Medes. He does not know that they had been Assyrian cities, although he had heard about the Assyrians, as the prologue to his *Cyropaedia* proves, where he mentions – among many other nations – the Medes, the Assyrians (distinct from the Syrians), and the Babylonians. Ktesias, who lived in the same period as Xenophon, also claimed to have visited Babylon (Ael. NA 17.29),⁸ but the measurements that he gives of the city walls and of some cult statues are so vastly exaggerated that some doubts remain whether he really ever saw Babylon with his own eyes.⁹ Of course, the conquests of Alexander and his successors enlarged the knowledge of the East and especially of

⁵ On Babylon in the Hebrew Bible, see e.g. Kratz 1999; Vanderhooft 1999.

⁶ On Herodotos' description of Babylon, see Baumgartner 1950 (repinted 1959); MacGinnis 1986; Rollinger 1993; Kuhrt 2002; Henkelman, Kuhrt, Rollinger and Wiesehöfer 2011.

⁷ Fehling 1989: 243; Rollinger 1993: 184-187.

⁸ Ktesias *FGrH* 688 F 45b.

⁹ Despite Bigwood 1978.

Mesopotamia. Greek authors from the Hellenistic period, such as Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy, knew more cities, for example, Arbela, Borsippa and Haran (Carrhae), and had a better understanding of the geography of Mesopotamia.

Size matters

Mesopotamian cities were large in the eyes of the Israelites and the Greeks.¹⁰ In the Hebrew Bible, Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, is called the great city (הַעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה *hagg'dōlā*), for example in God's command to Jonah: 'Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their wickedness has come up before me' (Jon. 1:2). Another example is found in the (apocryphal) book of Judith: 'It was in the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh' (Jud. 1:1). The book of Jonah even tells us how large Nineveh was: 'Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city (עִיר־גְּדוֹלָה לְאֱלֹהִים), a three days' walk across' (Jon. 3:3), and how many people lived in it: 'Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons' (Jon. 4:11).¹¹ This notion of Nineveh as an exceedingly large city is also found in Greek literature, for example in Diodoros, whose figures are from Ktesias' *Persika*: 'For having accomplished deeds more notable than those of any king before him, Ninos was eager to found a city of such magnitude, that not only would it be the largest of any that then existed in the whole inhabited world, but also that no other ruler of a later time should, if he undertook such a task, find it easy to surpass him' (Diod. 2.3.1).¹² Diodoros describes the dimensions of Nineveh: 'the longer sides of the city were each one hundred and fifty stades in length, and the shorter ninety' (Diod. 2.3.2), giving the city a perimeter of almost 90 kilometres. Xenophon, who saw the ruins of Nineveh with his own eyes, although he did not know it as Nineveh, but as Mespila, also describes it as a large city, but his figures are far more realistic (Xen. *An.* 3.4.10). All authors agree that Nineveh was an impressive city.

¹⁰ On the real size of ancient Mesopotamian cities, see Sasson 1990: 312; Van de Mieroop 1997: 94-97 and Van der Spek 2008b.

¹¹ It has been suggested that Jon. 4:11 speaks of 120,000 children ('persons who do not know their right hand from their left'), but according to Sasson (1990: 314) this is unlikely: 'ādām may refer collectively to a whole population and thus include women and children [. . .] but 'ādām cannot refer just to children'.

¹² Translation by C.H. Oldfather (1933).

The other major Mesopotamian city, Babylon, was smaller, according to Ktesias, but still impressive: 'the wall being three hundred and sixty stades in circumference, as Ktesias of Knidos says' (Diod. 2.7.3). Fifty years earlier, Herodotos had made Babylon even larger: 'a vast city in the form of a square with sides one hundred and twenty stades long and a circuit of four hundred and eighty stades, and in addition to its enormous size it surpasses in splendour any city of the known world' (Hdt. 1.178).¹³ Nineveh and Babylon were large, but not that large. Nineveh covered 750 hectares, and Babylon covered 890 hectares, which made it the largest city in antiquity until imperial Rome.¹⁴ A century after Herodotos, Aristotle regards Babylon because of its size more as a nation than as a city: 'and a case in point is perhaps Babylon, and any other city that has the circuit of a nation (ἔθνος) rather than of a city (πόλις); for it is said that when Babylon was captured a considerable part of the city was not aware of it three days later' (Aristot. *Pol.* 3.1.12 = 1276 a 28). Herodotos has almost the same story, but without mentioning a specific interval: 'owing to the great size of the city the outskirts (ἔσχατα) were captured without the people in the centre (μέσον) knowing anything about it' (Hdt. 1.191). A similar sentiment is found in the Hebrew Bible, in the book of Daniel, which in its present form was written in the second century BC: 'Is this not the magnificent Babylon, which I have built as a royal capital by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty?' (Dan. 4:30). Fascination with the size and splendour of Mesopotamian cities is in the Bible often mixed with horror and hatred. The prophet Nahum, who lived in the mid or late seventh century,¹⁵ speaks of Nineveh as a 'city of bloodshed, utterly deceitful' (Nah. 3:1), and of its 'countless debaucheries', calling the city a prostitute and a mistress of sorcery (Nah. 3:4). And Habakkuk, who lived in the late seventh or early sixth century,¹⁶ calls Babylon a city built by bloodshed and founded on iniquity (Hab. 2:12).

¹³ See Boiy (2004: 75-77) for the length of the walls in other ancient authors.

¹⁴ Boncquet 1987: 44-45, 72-74; Van de Mieroop 1997: 95; Frahm 2008: 13, 17.

¹⁵ Nahum's prophecy was uttered between the fall of Thebes (663) and the fall of Nineveh (612). See Roberts 1991: 38-39; Spronk 1997: 12-13; Fabry 2006: 27-31.

¹⁶ Haak 1992; Andersen 2001: 24-27.

Apparently, Nineveh and Babylon, both in biblical and in Greek literature, were regarded as cities that were unsurpassed in dimensions and splendour, adorned with wonders without equal. These dimensions are not based on measurements: 'three hundred and sixty stades', the number of days in a year, or 'a three days' walk across' are meant to give an idea of the enormous size of the city, and not as accurate measurements. Yet, fascination with the size of Nineveh and Babylon seems more a Greek preoccupation than a biblical one and it is perhaps not a coincidence that most biblical parallels are from books from the Hellenistic period, such as Daniel and Judith. But it is not certain that all references to the size and splendour of Mesopotamian cities in the Bible are from this period. Nineveh is called 'the great city' in Genesis 10 and in Jonah, texts that are difficult to date, but were written earlier than Daniel and Judith. Genesis 10:11-12 was probably added to an already existing Table of Nations in the (early) Persian period (see chapter six 'Founders'), but the words 'that is the great city' (הַיָּרֵחַ הַגְּדֹלָה *hī hō'ir hagg'dolā*) are a gloss, which could have been added to the main text at any given moment of its history. The book of Jonah is often dated to the Hellenistic or Persian period.¹⁷ Bolin, for example, argues that the use of הִיָּתָה *hōy'tā* (3sg.f. perf. qal) in Jon. 3:3 implies that Nineveh belonged to the distant past and must have been utterly destroyed when the book of Jonah was written.¹⁸ This view places too heavy a burden upon the use of the perf. qal of הִיָּה, as Sasson rightly maintains.¹⁹ Neither the use of הִיָּתָה nor the image of Nineveh in the book of Jonah prove that it was written shortly or long after the city had been destroyed, or even when the city still existed. According to Sasson, there is very little certainty about the dating of Jonah: the final version of the book was probably written in the Persian or Hellenistic period, but an exilic date cannot be excluded.²⁰ Remarkably little is said about Nineveh in Jonah: it is populous and exceedingly large (Jon. 1:2; 3:2-3; 4:11) and it is evil and violent (עָרָה רָעָה 'wickedness' [Jon. 1:2]; דַּרְכֵי הָרָעָה *darkō hārā'eh* 'evil way', חֲמָסָה *hōmās* 'violence' [Jon. 3:8, 10]). Although Jonah and Nahum do not use the same vocabulary, the image of Nineveh in Jonah is more like the image of the city in

¹⁷ Bewer 1971: 13; Wolff 1977: 56.

¹⁸ Bolin 1997: 130, 140, 145.

¹⁹ Sasson 1990: 228.

²⁰ Sasson 1990: 26.

Nahum than in Greek Hellenistic historiography, as it emphasizes the violence and bloodshed which made the city great more than the luxury and decadence.

To sum up, Greek and biblical authors were both impressed with the size and splendour of Mesopotamian cities. Greek and biblical authors both mention the wealth, luxury and decadence of these cities (see also chapter four 'Customs'), but in biblical books such as Nahum and Jonah the violence and bloodshed which made this cities great receives more attention than in Greek historiography.

Waterworks and Temples

Assyrian and Babylonian cities with their temples, palaces and waterworks made a strong impression on foreigners. Some Assyrian kings were especially proud of their waterworks, for example Sennacherib (705-681).²¹ Greek authors often mention these waterworks in their descriptions of Mesopotamia, for example Herodotos: 'It was Semiramis who was responsible for certain remarkable embankments in the plain outside the city, built to control the river' (Hdt. 1.184). Arrian tells us that Trajan, more than five centuries later, visited these embankments (Arr. *Parth.* frg. 74). Ktesias speaks of the bridges and quays that Semiramis had built in Babylon (Diod. 2.8.1-3), and he even tells us that she changed the course of the Euphrates temporarily (Diod. 2.9.1-3), a story which is also found in Herodotos, where this feat is attributed to Nitokris (Hdt. 1.186), and in Philostratos' *Vita Apollonii* (third century AD), where it is attributed to 'a Median woman' (Phil. 1.25.1). Biblical authors were less interested in the bridges, quays and embankments that the Assyrian and Babylonian kings had built. Yet, an allusion to Assyrian waterworks is, according to Weissert and Goldstein, found in Isaiah and Kings, in the speech of Sennacherib's envoys: 'I dug wells and drank waters' (Is. 37:25).²² The appreciation of the Assyrian king's achievements in this text differs from that of Herodotos and Ktesias. The author seems to regard the boasting of the Assyrian king about his waterworks as a sign of pride. Yet, this text suggests that its authors knew about the waterworks in Mesopotamia.

²¹ Bagg 2000.

²² Weissert 2011: 296.

Babylon was also a city of temples and gods. This is probably already reflected in its epithet ‘holy’ (Βαβύλωνος ἱερός) in an Alkaios fragment. A description of Esagila, the temple of Marduk (Βήλος) is usually a prominent element in Greek descriptions of the city of Babylon. According to Herodotos (1.183), this temple housed an altar and a statue (ἄγαλμα) made of gold, a sitting figure of Bel (Marduk). In Cyrus’ time, the temple had also contained ‘a solid golden statue of a man (ἄνδριάς) some fifteen feet high’, which was later stolen by Xerxes.²³ According to Ktesias (Diod. 2.9.5), this temple had been built by Semiramis. As usual, Ktesias wants to outdo his predecessor. He writes that the temple contained three golden statues (ἄγάλματα), one of Zeus, one of Hera and one of Rhea, and that the highest one, the statue of Zeus, was forty feet high. These golden statues, especially Herodotos’ ἄνδριάς, are suggestive of Nebuchadnezzar’s golden statue (LXX: εἰκόν) of sixty cubits high, which is mentioned in Daniel (3:1), but as a rule biblical authors are not very much interested in Assyrian and Babylonian deities, temples and statues. Babylonian religion is regarded as idol worship, especially by deuterio-Isaiah and the author of Jeremiah’s prophecy against Babylon.

City Founders

Impressive cities must have important founders. Although the Hebrew Bible does not show the same interest in foundation myths as Greek historiography, we still find two accounts of the founding of cities in the primeval history, one in Gen. 4:17 and the other in Gen. 10:8-12. The first is the shortest and the most obscure. It reads: ‘Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch (חֶנוֹךְ *ḥ^anōk*), but it is often thought that the text is in disarray, and that in the original reading, Enoch built the first city and named it either after himself or after his son Irad (עִירָד *‘īrād*).²⁴ A city called Enoch is not known, but Irad could be the Hebrew name of the Sumerian city Eridu. However, this is highly speculative and it seems wise not to build on it. The second story, Gen. 10:8-12, is

²³ Asheri 2011: 202-203.

²⁴ Westermann 1974: 443-444; Hess 1993: 40.

about Nimrod, first king in history, legendary hunter, ruler of Babylon, Uruk and Akkad, and founder of Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Kalah and Resen. Nimrod is a cultural hero as well as a city founder, and will be discussed in chapter seven of this study.

In Greek tradition, the city and the city founder often bear the same name. The city founder (the ἡρώς ἐπωνύμιος) is supposed to have given his name to the city, but, of course, in reality it is the other way round. For example, Strabo (16.1.3) mentions Arbelos son of Athmoneus (Ἄρβηλος ὁ Ἀθμονέως) as founder of the city of Arbela.²⁵ And Chalaos (or Chaalos), who is mentioned by Abydenos,²⁶ must have been the founder of Kalah. But the most famous of all eponymous heroes is Ninos, the founder of Nineveh, Νίνος in Greek. He was not only regarded as founder of Nineveh, but also as the first king in history to subdue other nations and the first founder of an empire. Modern historians have made a number of attempts to identify Ninos with one of the many Assyrian kings known from the cuneiform sources, but none of these attempts is really convincing. Ninos is a Greek invention, a typical empire builder and city founder. Although Ninos is a fictional figure, he and his also fictional successors give us a clear understanding of what the Greeks thought of the Assyrians and their rulers (see chapter seven 'Founders').

All Greeks agree that Ninos founded Nineveh. When it comes to the founding of Babylon, things are more complicated. At least three, and probably four kings or heroes were mentioned as founder of the city. Two of them are eponymous heroes. Abydenos mentions a certain 'Babios son of Belos',²⁷ probably a mistake for Babilos, eponymous hero of Babylon and perhaps founder of the city, but we do not hear anything about him. Stephanos of Byzantium says that 'in a very remote past' the city was founded by a certain Babylon, 'a very wise man, son of Belos, and not by Semiramis, as Herodotos says'.²⁸ Of course, Stephanos is a bit sloppy here. Herodotos mentions Semiramis, but he does not call her founder of Babylon (Hdt. 1.184). It

²⁵ According to Radt (2009: 255), Ἀθμονεύς is not a proper name, as Jones translates it, but it means 'aus dem Attischen Demos Athmonon stammend'. It seems a little farfetched.

²⁶ Abydenos *FGrH* 685 F 7-8.

²⁷ Abydenos *FGrH* 685 F 7-8.

²⁸ Stephanos of Byzantium sv Babylon.

makes one wonder how precise quotations and attributions in general in Stephanos and other Greek authors are, but, as the works of most authors that are quoted have been lost, we do not often have the means to check their reliability. But, whatever the truth in this matter, it is likely that the Babi[l]os of Abydenos and the Babylon of Stephanos are both eponymous heroes.

Most Greek authors do not mention Babilos or Babylon, but Belos or Semiramis as founder of Babylon. Quintus Curtius Rufus (5.1.24-27), probably writing in the first century AD,²⁹ Abydenos,³⁰ perhaps writing in the second century AD, and Ammianus Marcellinus (23.6.22-23), writing in the fourth century AD, call Belos the founder of the city. Belos is not an eponymous hero, but he is the Babylonian deity Marduk, transformed into a primeval king, a classical example of euhemerism. Most Greek authors mention the Assyrian queen Semiramis as founder of Babylon. The first of which we know he did so was Ktesias of Knidos, writing in the early fourth century BC, and he had many followers. A lot of energy has gone into the search for the real Semiramis. Some identifications are often made, while others are more rarely found: the goddesses Ishtar and Anat, Sammuramat, wife of Shamshi-Adad V (824-811) and mother of Adad-Nerari III (811-783), Atalya, wife of Sargon (722-705), Naqia, wife of Sennacherib and mother of Asarhaddon (681-669), and Adad-Guppi, mother of Nabonidus (556-539).³¹ Even monuments and great deeds of Marduk, Sennacherib (705-681), Darius (522-486) and Alexander the Great (336-323) have been attributed to Semiramis. Clearly, she is a highly composite character, who embodies much of what the Greeks regarded as oriental: a strong woman, ruling in a world of effeminate men, who is addicted to luxury and debauchery, but also the builder of many great monuments and the founder of a mighty city.

²⁹ Heckel 1984: 1-4. Strictly speaking, Curtius Rufus tells us that others ('most') thought that Babylon had been founded by Belos.

³⁰ *FGrH* 685 F 1; *Eus. PE* 9.41.5; *Eus. Chron. Arm.* p.19 trans. Karst.

³¹ See e.g. Jeremias 1891; Lehman-Haupt 1901; Lehman-Haupt 1910; Hommel 1921; Lewy 1952; Virolleaud 1963; Virolleaud 1968; Eilers 1971; König 1972; Nagel 1982; Pettinato 1991; Boncquet 1987; Weinfeld 1991; Dalley 2005.

Lost splendour

Greek authors often saw Assyrian and Babylonian cities as something of the past, once great, but now disappeared or at least in decay. To Herodotos the greatness of Babylon is still something of his own time, but Nineveh is already a city of the past. His near contemporary Xenophon did not even recognise Kalah and Nineveh for Assyrian cities, when he visited them. He calls them Larissa and Mespila (Xen. An. 3.4.6-12). He describes them as large cities, once inhabited by the Medes, but in his own time deserted. This feeling of Assyrian cities being in decay is even stronger in Greek works from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, for example in Strabo (first century BC, first century AD): 'What is more, Seleukeia at the present time has become larger than Babylon, whereas the greater part of Babylon has become so deserted that one would not hesitate to say what one of the comic poets said in reference to the Megapolitans in Arkadia: "The Great City is a great desert"' (Strab. 16.1.5).³² Lucian (second century AD) says almost the same: 'Well, as for Nineveh, skipper, it was wiped out long ago. There's not a trace of it left, and one can't even guess where it was. Babylon's over there [*pointing it out*], the place with great towers and a huge wall round it – but before long it will be just as hard to find as Nineveh' (Lucian *Charon* 23).³³ And the same sentiment is also expressed by Pausanias (second century AD), when speaking about the fickleness of Fortune: 'Mycenae, which led the Greeks in the Trojan war, and Nineveh, seat of the Assyrian kingdom, are deserted and demolished, and Boiotian Thebes, once the chosen champion of Greece, has left its name to nothing but the fortified rock and a tiny population. [. . .] The sanctuary of Bel survives at Babylon, but of that Babylon, which was the greatest city the sun saw in its time, nothing was left except a fortress wall, like the one of Tiryns in the Argolid' (Paus. 8.33.2-3).³⁴ Nineveh and Babylon had once been great cities, but in Strabo's and Pausanias' days they were eclipsed by new cities such as Alexandria and Seleukeia. In reality, the decline of the Mesopotamian cities

³² Translation by Horace Leonard Jones (1930). Cf Diod. 2.9.9.

³³ Translation by Paul Turner (1961).

³⁴ Translation by Peter Levi (1971).

was not as rapid as was thought by many classical authors,³⁵ but the depiction of Mesopotamia as a dying culture is widespread in classical sources.

Conclusion

Greek and biblical authors were both highly impressed by the size and splendour of Mesopotamian cities, but Greek authors even more than biblical ones. Descriptions of Assyrian and Babylonian cities, especially Nineveh and Babylon, complete with hugely exaggerated measurements, are found in Greek literature such as Herodotos, Ktesias and Strabo, but not in the Bible. The similarities between Greek and biblical depictions of these cities are not very specific. They are rich, populous, and, above all, very large. Greek sources often specify how large these cities were, but biblical sources as a rule do not give any figures. The only measurement that is found in the Bible is in Jonah, which is of an uncertain date, where it is said that Nineveh was 'a three days' walk across', which is clearly hyperbolic. The three days are also found in Aristotle's *Politeia*, where it is said that, when Babylon was captured, many people in the city were not aware of it until three days later. Obviously, these three days are not meant as an exact figure, but only to give an impression of the size of the most important cities of Mesopotamia, Nineveh and Babylon. It is impossible to pinpoint the origin of this motif of three days.

Apparently, the point of view of Greek and biblical authors is different. To most biblical authors, Mesopotamian cities are something of their own world. They are large, rich and impressive, but also threatening, the seats of kings who oppressed Judah and Israel, and they are full of sorceries and decadence, filled with temples, idols and false deities. To most Greek authors, these cities are something of the past, large and impressive, but also decaying and even dying. The greatness of their founders, mighty men and women such as Belos, Ninus and Semiramis, is long gone. Nineveh and Babylon have become examples of opulence and wealth, but also of decadence and weakness.

³⁵ Van der Spek 2006.

Appendix – List of Cities

For convenience, here follows a list of the most important Mesopotamian cities that are mentioned in the Bible and in Greek literature with their names in Akkadian, Hebrew and Greek.

Three cities have already been discussed in chapter two:

- **Akkad** (Akkade, Agade, Accad), Akk. *akkadu*, Hebr. אַכַּד 'akkad (Gen. 10:10).
- **Ashur** (Assur), Akk. *aššur*, Hebr. אֲשׁוּר 'aššūr.
- **Babylon** (Babel), Akk. *bābili*, Hebr. בָּבֶל *bəbəl*, Gr. Βαβυλών.

Seven cities are mentioned in Genesis 10 (see chapters five and seven):

- **Akkad** (Akkade, Agade, Accad), Akk. *akkadu*, Hebr. אַכַּד 'akkad.
- **Babylon** (Babel), Akk. *bābili*, Hebr. בָּבֶל *bəbəl*, Gr. Βαβυλών.
- **Kalah** (Nimrud, Calah, Kalhu, Larissa), Akk. *kalhu*, Hebr. כַּלְח *kelah*; Xenophon calls the city Λάρισσα, Λάρισα (Xen. An. 3.4.7).³⁶ Its founder Chalaos is mentioned by Abydenos.³⁷
- **Nineveh** (Niniveh, Mespila), Akk. *nīnuwa*, Hebr. נִינְוָה *nīn'wē*, Gr. Νίνοϛ; Xenophon calls the city Μέσιλα (Xen. An. 3.4.10).³⁸
- **Rehoboth-Ir**, Akk. *rebit nīnuwa*, Hebr. עִיר רְחוֹבֹת *r'hobot 'ir*.³⁹
- **Resen**, Ass. *rēšēni*, Hebr. רֶסֶן *resen*. It has been suggested that *Rēšēni* was a small city near the short lived Assyrian capital *Dūr-Šarrukīn*,⁴⁰ but according to Fenton, Resen is a corruption of *Dūr-Šarrukīn* itself.⁴¹
- **Uruk** (Warka, Erech), Akk. *uruk*, Hebr. אֶרֶךְ 'erek. In Greek, the name of the city was probably Ὀρχα.⁴² Cf. Ὀρχηνοί (Strab. 16.1.6).

³⁶ De Kuyper 1982 (the origin of the name Larissa is unknown).

³⁷ Abydenos *FGrH* 685 F 7-8.

³⁸ De Kuyper 1982 (the origin of the name Mespila is unknown).

³⁹ Sasson 1983.

⁴⁰ Hurowitz 2008.

⁴¹ Fenton 2010.

⁴² Cohen 2013: 175.

Other cities:

- **Anat** (Hena), Akk. *ānat*, Hebr. הֵנַע *hena*^c (2K. 19:13).
- **Arbela**, Akk. *arbail*, Gr. Ἀρβηλα (Strab. 16.1.3).
- **Arderikka**, Gr. Ἀρδέρικκα (Hdt. 1.185), not identified.⁴³
- **Borsippa**, Akk. *barsip*, Gr. Βόρσιππα (Strab. 16.1.7).
- **Charmande**, Gr. Χαρμάνδη (Xen. An. 1.5.10), not identified.
- **Eridu** (see the discussion of Gen. 4:17).
- **Gozan**, Akk. *gūzāna*, Hebr. גֹּזָן *gōzōn* (2K. 17:6; 19:12).
- **Haran** (Carrhae), Akk. *harrānu*, Hebr. חָרָן *ḥorān* (2K. 19:12), Gr. Κάρραι. Haran was the main city of Paddan Aram.
- **Is**, Akk. *īdu*, Gr. Ἴς (Hdt. 1.179).
- **Kutha** (Cuthah), Akk. *kutê*, Hebr. כּוּתָּה *kūt*, כּוּתָּה *kūtō* (2K. 17:24, 30).
- **Opis**, Akk. *upî*, Gr. Ὀπίς (Hdt. 1.189; Xen. An. 2.4.25).
- **Sepharvaim**, Hebr. סְפַרְוַיִּם *s'parwajim* (2K. 19:13). The identification of Sepharvaim with Sippar, Akk. *sippar*, is very uncertain.⁴⁴ Cf. Gr. Σισπαρά in Berossos.⁴⁵
- **Sittake**, Gr. Σιττάκη, Σιτάκη (Hekataios of Miletos, Xen. An. 2.4.13, Ktesias).⁴⁶
- **Susa**, Akk. *šūšan*, Hebr. and Aram. שׁוּשָׁן *šūšan* (Est. often, Dan. 8:2, Neh. 1:1), Gr. Σοῦσα (Hdt. often, Strab. 15.3.2 e.a.). Susa is mentioned in Daniel, Esther, Nehemia and Herodotos as a residence of the Achaemenid kings,⁴⁷ while Pasargadae and Persepolis seem to have been largely unknown before Alexander.
- **Telassar**, Hebr. תֵּלֶאֶשָׁר *tēlaššōr*, in Eden (Akk. *bīt-adini*), identification uncertain.
- **Thapsakos**, Gr. Θάψακος (Xen. An. 1.4.11, 17), Hebr. תִּפְסָחָה *tipsah* (1K. 4:24). This city was located at an ancient crossing of the Euphrates.⁴⁸
- **Ur** (Ur of the Chaldeans), Akk. *ūru*, Hebr. אֱוֵר כַּשְׁדִּים *ūr kašdīm*.

⁴³ Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella 2011: 205.

⁴⁴ Avalos in ABD sv Sepharvaim (1992).

⁴⁵ Berossos *FGrH* F4a (2x).

⁴⁶ Hekataios *FGrH* 1 F 285; Xen. An. 2.4.13; Ktesias *FGrH* 688 F 35. See Cohen 2013: 104–105.

⁴⁷ Briant 2002: 84–85.

⁴⁸ Roller 2010: 166.

