

# 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*.

### **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](mailto:vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl)

## 7 Founders



## 7.1 Introduction

Ethnic groups, nations or peoples often have myths of origin about their founders or their ancestors.<sup>1</sup> Often, people also have myths of origins about foreign nations, or cities, and their founders. Many Greek historians were extraordinarily interested in myths of origin,<sup>2</sup> and they were often part of ethnographical writing.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, Greek and biblical myths about the founders of Nineveh and other cities in Mesopotamia will be discussed. According to the Bible, Nineveh and three other cities in Assyria were founded by Nimrod. According to Greek historiography, Nineveh, called Ninus in Greek, and the Assyrian empire were founded by Ninus.

Founders can be divided into foreign founders and autochthonous founders. Both in the Bible and in Greek historiography, foreign founders play an important role. This introduction contains a short discussion of the foreign founder in biblical and Greek historiography. In the genealogies that have been discussed in the fifth chapter, we find some founders of cities, nations or religious institutions who came from a foreign country and introduced new ideas or ways of life in their new homelands. They came from Egypt, Phoenicia or Babylonia and went to Canaan, Assyria or Greece, where they founded cities and introduced new religions, ideas and inventions. These foreign founders include Danaos and Kadmos, who have been discussed in the fifth chapter, but also Abraham, Belos and Moses. A short list in alphabetical order from various sources and periods, both from Greek and biblical historiography follows (a more detailed account can be found in Gruen's *Rethinking the Other* and in Wazana's paper on this subject).<sup>4</sup>

**Abraham.** Abraham went from Ur of the Chaldeans in Babylonia to Canaan (Gen. 11:31) and became the ancestor of the Israelites, Judeans and many other nations. In the Hebrew Bible, Abraham is not a culture hero, but sometimes he is one in Greek

---

<sup>1</sup> See the introduction (chapter one), page 9, and chapter five.

<sup>2</sup> Bickerman 1952.

<sup>3</sup> Bar-Kochva 1996: 10.

<sup>4</sup> Wazana 2005; Gruen 2011.

or Jewish Hellenistic historiography, where he introduces astrology to the Egyptians (Eus. *PE* 9.17.8; 9.18.1) or to the Phoenicians (Eus. *PE* 9.18.2).<sup>5</sup>

**Belos.** Belos went from Egypt to Babylonia and established the priesthood of the Chaldeans (Diod. 1.28). It is not certain who Diodoros' source was. It is possible that it was Hekataios of Abdera (late fourth, early third century), as is often thought.<sup>6</sup>

**Danaos.** Danaos went from Egypt to Greece and became king of Argos (section 5.3; Diod. 1.28; 40.3). The Greeks are called Δαναοί in epic literature, allegedly after Danaos.<sup>7</sup> He was considered the first man to build a ship (Schol. Eur. *Med.* 1; Apoll. 2.1.4; perhaps a late tradition) and he himself or his daughters introduced irrigation (Strab. 1.23; 1.2.15; Strab. 8.6.8 = *Ehoiai* frg. 128) and the rites of Demeter in Argos (Hdt. 2.171). Sometimes he is also credited with the introduction of writing in Greece (Hekataios of Miletos<sup>8</sup>), but more often this honour goes to Kadmos.

**Kadmos.** Kadmos was a Phoenician from Tyre (section 5.3; Hdt. 2.49; Paus. 9.12.1-4). He went to Greece and founded Thebes' acropolis, the Καδμεία.<sup>9</sup> The inhabitants of this city are called Καδμείοι or Καδμείονες (Homer, Hes. *Th.* 326), allegedly after Kadmos. He introduced writing in Greece (Hdt. 5.57-61; Ephoros<sup>10</sup>) and according to a very late source (the Byzantine author Georgios Hamartolos or Georgios Monachos<sup>11</sup>) even arithmetic and astronomy.

---

<sup>5</sup> Pseudo-Eupolemos *FGrH* 724; Holladay 1983: 157-187.

<sup>6</sup> Gmirkin 2006: 34-38; Bar-Kochva 2010: 109-113.

<sup>7</sup> The connection between 'Danaos' and 'Danaoi' goes at least back to the fifth century. In his lost play *Archelaos*, Euripides says that Danaos made the Πελασγιῶται change their name into Δαναοί (Strab. 5.2.4; cf. Strab. 8.6.9).

<sup>8</sup> Hekataios *FGrH* 1 F20.

<sup>9</sup> Thebes has two foundation stories attached to it, one in which it is founded by the twins Amphion and Zethos, and another in which it is founded by Kadmos. According to Berman (2004), the first is the older and has Mycenaean roots, while the second is younger and dates from the archaic period. The first does not concern us here.

<sup>10</sup> Ephoros *FGrH* 70 F105.

<sup>11</sup> Most 2006: 211 (T77).

**Moses.** Of course, the biblical Moses differs from the others in this list in that he never reached the promised land, but the Moses of Hekataios of Abdera (Diod. 40.3) is more easily recognised as a foreign founder. Moses and his followers went from Egypt to Judea and founded Jerusalem and established the Jewish religion and institutions. The Byzantine bishop Photios says that Diodoros attributed this story to Hekataios of Miletos, without doubt a mistake for Hekataios of Abdera.<sup>12</sup> Although this version of Moses' life differs from the Biblical account, and although it has been influenced by Greek founding myths, it seems probable that it represents a version of Moses' life that existed in Jewish priestly circles in the late fourth century.<sup>13</sup>

**Noah.** In the Hebrew Bible, Noah is a culture hero, the inventor of viniculture (Gen. 5:29; 9:20), but he is not a foreign founder. In Apollonios Molon's *κατὰ Ἰουδαίων* (second-first century BC) he is one. He is expelled from Armenia and he settles in a desolate and mountainous part of Syria (Eus. *PE* 9.19.1). Molon seems to give Noah the role that is normally given to Abraham.

**Pelops.** Pelops went from Phrygia or Lydia to the part of Greece that would come to bear his name, the Peloponnese. Pelops is connected with the Olympian games and sometimes regarded as their founder.

It has been argued, for example by Hall, that the Greek foundation myths in this lists are very Hellenocentric.<sup>14</sup> Danaos and Kadmos come from a foreign country to Greece, but they are Greek by descent. Their ancestors were Greek heroes and gods. Of course, it is true that these founders are Greek by descent, but nevertheless they were perceived as foreigners. In drama, in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, the daughters of Danaos wear oriental clothes: 'Your clothes are strange to us – close-woven, soft, barbaric gowns' (234-236). Their skin is dark (71, 155) and they sound foreign (117-119, 972-973). Pelasgos, the king of Argos perceives them as very unGreek (277-

---

<sup>12</sup> Most scholars accept that Diod. 40.3 is based on Hekataios' work, e.g. Mendels 1983; Bar-Kochva 1996: 7-43; Bar-Kochva 2010: 90-135. Gmirkin (2006: 34-71) believes that Theophanes of Mytilene (first century BC) is Diodoros' source.

<sup>13</sup> Mendels 1983; Römer 2007 [*L'Historiographie Biblique*]; Römer 2007: 181, 193 [*Les guerres de Moïse*]; Römer 2008: 12.

<sup>14</sup> Hall 1996: 339.

290).<sup>15</sup> In Greek art, Pelops is often and Danaos sometimes depicted with oriental characteristics.<sup>16</sup> Herodotos calls Kadmos a Tyrian (Greek Τύριος in 2.49), not a Greek who accidentally lived in Tyre, and he more than once stresses that many of the accomplishments of the Greeks, for example their script, were imported from Egypt or Phoenicia.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Strabo says that ‘in the ancient times the whole of Greece was a settlement of barbarians’ (7.7.1) and then mentions Pelops, Danaos, Kadmos and many others. Despite their Greek descent, they were often depicted as foreigners and the customs and cultural accomplishments that they imported were Egyptian or Phoenician in origin. They were really foreign founders.

Of the subjects of this chapter, Nimrod is a foreign founder, but Ninos is not. Yet, some modern scholars believe that Ninos and Nimrod are identical, in the sense that they both represent the Assyrian king Tikulti-Ninurta I (1244-1208). The idea that Nimrod and Ninos are the same person is old. They were already identified in two ancient Christian writings, the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* (third century AD)<sup>18</sup> and the *Chronicon Paschale*, also known as *Chronicum Alexandrinum* (ca. 630 AD).<sup>19</sup> The *Recognitiones* say: ‘First among (the worshippers of Zoroaster<sup>20</sup>) is named a certain king Nimrod [...], whom the Greeks also called Ninos, and from whom the city of Nineveh took its name’ (*PsClem. R.* 4.29.1).<sup>21</sup> In the *Chronicon Paschale* it is said that the Assyrians call Nimrod Ninos: ‘The Assyrians called Nimrod Ninos. He taught the Assyrians to worship fire. And thereafter the Assyrians made him, whom they had

---

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell 2006: 212-214.

<sup>16</sup> Miller 2005.

<sup>17</sup> It is often thought that the name Kadmos is derived from the Semitic root *qdm*, which means ‘east’ or ‘primeval time’, If this is true, the name Kadmos is of eastern origin, but, of course, Greek historians did not know this.

<sup>18</sup> Edition: Strecker 1992 and 1994. A summary of the Pseudo-Clementines can be found in Jones 2001: 53-57, a history of research in Vielberg 2000: 15-19 and Jones 2001: 67-74.

<sup>19</sup> A recent edition or translation of the *Chronicon Paschale* (*Chronicum Alexandrinum*) does not exist. The most recent one is Dindorf’s edition from 1832 (Migne PG 92).

<sup>20</sup> Sometimes Nimrod is identified with Zoroaster (*PsClem. H.* 9.5.1-2), but in the *Recognitiones* he is a follower of the Persian mage (on the identification of Nimrod and Zoroaster: see Bousset 1907: 369-373; Schoeps 1950: 19-23).

<sup>21</sup> Translation by Thomas Smith. The parallel text in the *Homiliae* (H 9.4-6) does not mention Babylon, Nineveh or Ninos (see Bremmer 2010: 14).

given the name Ninos, the first king after the flood. Thus says Petrus'.<sup>22</sup> This chapter examines what the origins and character of Nimrod and Ninos are and to what extent they are comparable.

---

<sup>22</sup> *Chron. Pasch.* ed. Dindorf p.50-51; PG 92: 123-126.





## 7.2 Nimrod, Primeval King

The author(s) of Genesis 10:8-12 believed that Nimrod, son of Kush, had been the first king of Babylon, and that he was the founder of the Assyrian cities Nineveh and Kalah. Nimrod is not only mentioned in Genesis 10:8-12, but also in Micah 5:5 and 1 Chronicles 1:10. Of these texts, Gen. 10:8-12, which is part of the Table of Nations, is the most detailed. It offers a number of intriguing problems and has been the focus of much speculation and scholarship, bent upon finding the real Nimrod, the historical or mythological character after which the biblical Nimrod was modelled. Many kings and even deities, not only from Mesopotamia, but even from Egypt and Libya, have been mentioned as the real Nimrod, but despite all the ink spilled on the identification of Nimrod, the matter has never been convincingly settled.

Genesis 10:8-12 is part of the Table of Nations, which has been discussed in chapter five. According to Genesis 10, after the flood the sons of Noah became the ancestors of the nations that inhabit the earth. The Table of Nations lists seventy-two nations, represented by their eponymous ancestors. Among these descendants of Noah, Nimrod is mentioned as the son of Cush, the son of Ham, the third son of Noah. This poses two problems. First, it is not clear why Nimrod, the first Babylonian king, is connected with Cush and Ham, two African eponymous heroes, and second, it has to be explained why Genesis 10:8-12 is so different in character from the remainder of the Table of Nations. By discussing these questions it is possible to achieve some insight in the concerns of the author of Genesis 10:8-12 and some related texts in Genesis on primeval history.<sup>23</sup> But first, Micah 5:4-5 will be discussed.

### **Nimrod in Micah**

Nimrod is not only mentioned in the Table of Nations, but also in the book of Micah. Nimrod is mentioned once in Micah, in Mic. 5:5 (Mic. 5:6 in the NRSV). If these words are from Micah's time, Nimrod must have been known in the eighth century. The prophet Micah lived in the eighth century and he spoke out against social injustice and announced the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah by the Assyrians. But most

---

<sup>23</sup> This author is often called the Jahwist, but see chapter five, page 134-135.

scholars believe that only chapters 1-3 contain words of the prophet Micah, that chapters 4-7 were added at various stages, and that they were written after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, much of it even in the Persian or Hellenistic period.<sup>24</sup> Of course, there is no unanimity about the redaction history of the book of Micah: some scholars divide it into two parts (Mic. 1-5; Mic. 6-7),<sup>25</sup> some into three, others into four parts.<sup>26</sup> Often Mic. 5:4f is regarded as one of the youngest parts of the book, added to an already existing version of Mic. 5.<sup>27</sup> In the following section, the text of Mic. 5:4f will be discussed, its form, its function, its time of origin, and finally what it tells us about Nimrod.

<sup>4</sup> If the Assyrians come into our land,  
and march into our fortresses<sup>a</sup>,  
we will raise<sup>b</sup> against them seven shepherds<sup>c</sup>  
and eight leaders of men<sup>d</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> They shall rule Assyria with the sword,  
and the land of Nimrod with the dagger<sup>e</sup>;  
they shall rescue<sup>f</sup> us from the Assyrians  
if they come into our land  
and march into our borders.

<sup>a</sup>. MT בַּאֲרָמֹתֵינוּ *b<sup>e</sup>’arm<sup>e</sup>notēnū* ‘in our palaces’ or ‘in our fortresses’.<sup>28</sup> The Septuagint and the Peshitta suggest בְּאַדְמֹתֵינוּ *b<sup>e</sup>’admōtenū* ‘upon our soil’ (LXX ἐπὶ τὴν χώραν ὑμῶν ‘upon your soil’), but it is better to regard the MT as original, as Kessler and Wagenaar argue,<sup>29</sup> and translate it as ‘into our fortresses’.

<sup>b</sup>. MT וְהִקְמֵנוּ *wah<sup>a</sup>qemonū* (1pl.) ‘we will raise’. Because it is unclear who these ‘we’ are, several emendations have been proposed. The Septuagint has ἐπεγερθήσονται

<sup>24</sup> Kessler 2000: 41-47; Jeremias 2007: 115-121.

<sup>25</sup> Van der Woude 1985: 10-11; Utzschneider 2005: 16.

<sup>26</sup> Wagenaar 2001: 6-45.

<sup>27</sup> Kessler 2000: 47, 234; Jeremias 2007: 119, 187.

<sup>28</sup> HAL sub voce; Wagenaar 2001: 182.

<sup>29</sup> Kessler 2000: 231; Wagenaar 2001: 182-183.

(3pl.) and makes the shepherds subject of the sentence: 'seven shepherds will rise against them'. Another proposal is וַהֲקִים *w<sup>h</sup>eqīm* (3sg.) 'he will raise' (subject: the ruler of v1-3). Yet, there is no reason to change the text, because it can be explained without emendations (*vide infra*).

<sup>c</sup>. Wagenaar reads רַעִים as *rō'īm* 'evil (spirits)' instead of *ro'īm* 'shepherds', but רַעֵו *rō'ū* 'graze' (=> NSRV 'rule') in v5 suggests that it is to be read *ro'īm*.

<sup>d</sup>. Wagenaar reads נֹשְׁכֵי אָדָם *noš<sup>h</sup>kē 'ādōm* 'biters of men' (evils spirits). The 'rulers of men' may give offense to many scholars, because the expression is a tautology, but that is insufficient reason for an emendation: authors sometimes use tautologies, or poetic repetition, and there is no reason why prophets should be different.

<sup>e</sup>. MT בַּפְתִּיחַ *bip̄tōḥēḥ* 'in its entrances'. Parallelism suggests that it is better to read בַּפְתִּיחַ *bap̄tīḥ* 'with the dagger' (BHS. app.). Of course, it could also be argued that the MT has the more difficult reading and therefore is probably original.

<sup>f</sup>. MT הַצִּיל *hiṣṣil* 'he shall rescue' (3sg.). Kessler, Utzschneider and many others retain the 3sg.<sup>30</sup> In that case, the man from v1-3 must be subject of the verb. But it seems more natural to regard the shepherds and rulers of men as the subject of the sentence, as Wagenaar does.<sup>31</sup> In that case, הַצִּיל must be changed into הַצִּילוּ (3pl.), or read as an infinitive absolute (*haṣṣel*).

**Form.** It has been convincingly argued that Mic. 5:4f shows 'close similarities with with a number of ancient Near Eastern incantations against evil'.<sup>32</sup> In form and structure it is an incantation. The next question is which function these words have in the whole of Micah 5.

---

<sup>30</sup> Kessler 2000: 230; Utzschneider 2005: 117.

<sup>31</sup> Wagenaar 2001: 188.

<sup>32</sup> Wagenaar 2001: 294-300.

**Function.** Probably one of the first questions of many readers of this chapter is the question of the identity of the ‘we’ in v5. In v2 the prophet addresses Bethlehem in Judah (‘you’) and announces the coming of a ruler who will bring peace (‘he’). The ‘we’ in v5 stands in a marked contrast to the preceding verses. Kessler’s idea that the ‘we’ in this text represents the Jewish community in the Persian or Hellenistic period is unlikely.<sup>33</sup> Such leaps in time make the text almost incomprehensible to its readers. A better answer lies in the structure of the book of Micah. In its final form, it is a dialogue, or even a drama, in which the words of Micah – or words attributed to the prophet – are heard, but also of his contemporaries and his opponents.<sup>34</sup> It is left to the reader to distinguish between the different and sometimes opposing voices. In Mic. 5:4-5, and also in v6-8, the voice of opponents of the prophet is heard, who have a more radical vision of the future: not one ruler who will bring peace (v1-3, v9f), but seven shepherds and eight rulers who will rule Assyria with the sword.

This brings us to the question who Nimrod is. The parallelism between Assyria and the land of Nimrod suggests that the land of Nimrod is identical with Assyria. Some scholars, for example Lipiński, believe that the land of Nimrod is Babylonia,<sup>35</sup> but Micah 5 speaks only of the Assyrians, and it seems a bit far-fetched to interpret the land of Nimrod in Mic. 5:5 as Babylonia. Most scholars accept that the land of Nimrod is Assyria, but Assyria has in their view become a code name for any foreign power that threatened Israel or Judah. As Mic. 5:4f speaks of an invasion, and it is difficult to see which invasion should have threatened Judah in the Persian period, it is often thought that Mic. 5:4f is Hellenistic in origin, and that Assyria originally referred here to the Syrians, i.e. to the Seleucids.<sup>36</sup> But it is impossible to determine the time of origin of this text, as Wagenaar argues: ‘The incantation is effective against Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians or Seleucids alike. The incantation may, therefore, date from all periods in the history of Israel and Judah from the days of the first Assyrian invasion to the Maccabean era’.<sup>37</sup> Although an incantation

---

<sup>33</sup> Kessler 2000: 234.

<sup>34</sup> Van der Woude 1985: 10-11; Utzschneider 2005: 11-16.

<sup>35</sup> Proksch 1924; Lipiński 1966.

<sup>36</sup> Jeremias 2007: 187.

<sup>37</sup> Wagenaar 2001: 300.

against an invasion in the Persian era is unlikely, basically Wagenaar is right. If Mic. 5:4f is read as a fragment, as a separate block, it is impossible to date. Determining the date of Micah 5 as a whole seems even more difficult.

To sum up, in Micah 5:5, the land of Nimrod is Assyria. The uncertainty about the time of origin of the text makes it difficult to determine if this expression was already used in Micah's time, the eighth century, but it is possible. There are no convincing arguments to support the idea that Mic. 5:4f is from the Hellenistic period and speaks about the Maccabees repelling a Seleucid invasion. The threat of the Assyrians in the eighth and seventh centuries, and the campaigns of the Babylonians during Zedekiah's reign, provide an equally suitable historical context for the incantation in Mic. 5:4-5. After discussing Micah, now we will turn to Nimrod in the Table of Nations.

### **Translation<sup>38</sup> with Annotations**

<sup>8</sup>Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on earth to become a mighty warrior.<sup>E</sup> <sup>9</sup>He was a mighty hunter before the Lord;<sup>F</sup> therefore it is said, 'Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.'<sup>10</sup> The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh,<sup>G</sup> in the land of Shinar. <sup>11</sup>From that land he went into Assyria,<sup>H</sup> and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, and <sup>12</sup>Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

<sup>E</sup> Nimrod is called the first גִּבּוֹר *gibbor* on earth; גִּבּוֹר (or גִּבּוֹר) means vigorous, mighty, hero or warrior. Nimrod was apparently regarded as the first man to rule by force, i.e. the first king on earth, and he reigned over Babel (Babylon), Erech (Uruk), Accad (Agade, Akkad) and Calneh (*vide infra*) in Shinar (Babylonia).<sup>39</sup> Genesis does not tell us who the founder of these cities was, but many ancient and medieval authors assume that Nimrod also founded Babel and built the tower of Babylon.

---

<sup>38</sup> The translation is from the NRSV – with some small changes.

<sup>39</sup> These geographical names are discussed in chapters two and three.

<sup>F</sup> Nimrod is called a גִּבּוֹר־צַיִד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה *gibbor-ṣayid lipnē yhw* ‘a mighty hunter before the Lord’. By some scholars v9 is singled out as an interpolation.<sup>40</sup> Others consider the founding of the Mesopotamian cities a later addition.<sup>41</sup> The first view seems preferable, because v10 reads as a direct continuation of v8: Nimrod, the first king, ruled over Babel, Erech and Accad. Of course, in both views the hunter and the city founder are separated. It is not certain that this is really necessary.

<sup>G</sup> NSRV: ‘all of them’. כלנָה has never been identified satisfactorily. Therefore, some scholars read *kullānā* ‘all of them’ (cf. Gen. 42:36; 1K. 7:37) instead of *kalnē*,<sup>42</sup> but most scholars just remark that Calneh has never been identified.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>H</sup> Two issues confront the interpreter of the verses about the founding of Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah and Resen: the identification of two of these cities and the identity of their founder. Of course, Nineveh and Kalah (Kalhu) are well known Assyrian cities, but the identification of Rehoboth-Ir and Resen is uncertain (see chapter three).<sup>44</sup> The second and in the present context more important problem is the identity of the founder of these cities: Nimrod or Ashur. Two translations of v11 are possible: ‘From that land he [Nimrod] went into Assyria, and built Nineveh’ (NSRV), or ‘Out of that land went forth Ashur, and builded Nineveh’ (KJV). According to the first translation, Nimrod founded Nineveh and the other Assyrian cities, but according to the second one, it was Ashur.

Difference of opinion on the interpretation of v11 already existed in antiquity. The Septuagint, Midrash Rabbah, Targum Onkelos and Targum Neofiti consider אַשּׁוּר *’aššūr* as subject of the sentence, but the Targum pseudo-Jonathan translates אַשּׁוּר as

---

<sup>40</sup> Gunkel 1911: 91; Skinner 1980: 208.

<sup>41</sup> Jirku 1917; Levin 1993: 55.

<sup>42</sup> Albright 1944; Speiser 1964: 67; Fenton 2010: 26.

<sup>43</sup> Westermann 1974: 690-691; Ruppert 1992: 440-441; Seebass 1996: 253; Soggin 1997: 172.

<sup>44</sup> Lipiński 1966; Sasson 1983; Hurowitz 2008 (Resen is *Dūr-Šarrukīn*). In Assyrian sources, the most important cities are Ashur, Nineveh, Kalah and Arbela (Nissinen 2001: 187). Of these four cities, Arbela is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. On Ashur, see section 2.2.

an accusative of direction. Modern scholars are also divided.<sup>45</sup> Grammatically the first translation is the most likely, but the interpretation of אשור as an accusative of direction is possible. Normally 'to Assyria' is expressed by אשורה 'aššūrā (Gen. 25:18; 2K. 15:29; 17:6, 23; 18:11; Is. 19:23), but sometimes אשור is found (Hos. 7:11; 8:9). These examples show that grammatically it is possible that אשור in Gen. 8:11 means 'to Assyria' and that Nimrod is subject of the sentence.

Nimrod being subject of the sentence is supported by two arguments. First, if Ashur is subject of the sentence, he is introduced without his relation to Nimrod or anyone else in Gen. 10 being explained, which is odd. Of course, in v22 Ashur is called a son of Shem, but no connection whatsoever is made between v11 and v22. Second, the expression ארץ נמרד 'ereš nimrod 'the land of Nimrod', which is found in Micah (5:5), refers to Assyria, which suggests a connection between Nimrod and Assyria and therefore points to Nimrod as the founder of the major Assyrian cities. However, the interpretation of Mic. 5:5 is also contested: sometimes the land of Nimrod is thought to be Babylonia.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the question how to translate v11 is difficult to decide, but the interpretation in which Nimrod goes to Assyria to found Nineveh and Kalah seems the most likely.

### **The quest for the real Nimrod**

Most characters mentioned in the Table of Nations are eponymous heroes. When the nation that they represent is known, their origin is explained. However, Nimrod is not an eponymous hero. Therefore the question who the real Nimrod was – i.e. after which historical or mythological character he was modelled – presents itself. Before the cuneiform was deciphered, Nimrod was often identified with Orion, the mythological Greek hunter.<sup>47</sup> After 1850, when the cuneiform script had been deciphered and more and more became known of Ancient Near Eastern history and culture, a bewildering number of answers have been proposed to the question who

---

<sup>45</sup> Accusative of direction (acc. loci): Westermann 1974: 664, 691; Ruppert 1992: 441; Seebass 1996: 253. Subject: Jacob 1934: 282-283; Speiser 1964: 67-68; Lipiński 1966: 84; Levin 1993: 124-125.

<sup>46</sup> Proksch 1924; Lipiński 1966. See chapter seven.

<sup>47</sup> Still mentioned in Jeremias 1930; Skinner 1980.



the real Nimrod was. Some scholars explain Nimrod as an African prince, because of his connections with Ham and Cush. However, most modern authors search for Nimrod's origins in Mesopotamia. It is often thought that many parts of the Old Testament were written when the Assyrians or Babylonians dominated the Ancient Near East politically and culturally. Especially Genesis 1-11 probably contains much material of Babylonian origin.<sup>48</sup> Therefore a Babylonian origin seems likely and several Mesopotamian deities and kings have been named as the real Nimrod. The gods that have been mentioned include Marduk, Nergal and Ninurta. The kings that have been mentioned include Lugalbanda and Gilgamesh, who belong as much to the realm of legend as to the realm of history, but also many historically better known kings, such as Sargon of Akkad, Naram-Sin, Hammurabi, Nazi-Maruttash and Tukulti-Ninurta I. The story of the identification of Nimrod seems to run almost parallel to the gradual increase of knowledge of Mesopotamian culture and history. One sometimes gets the impression that every discovery was seized upon eagerly to find a new identity for Nimrod.

### **Nimrod as an African Prince**

Sometimes Nimrod's origins are sought in Africa. After all, the author of Genesis makes Nimrod a son of Cush and Cush is the eponymous ancestor of the Cushim, the Αἰθίοπες of the Septuagint, the inhabitants of the northern part of what is now Sudan. Of the brothers of Cush, one (מצראים *mišraim*) is the eponymous ancestor of Egypt, another (פוט *pūt*) of Libya. Nimrod therefore has strong connections with Africa. Two theories seeking Nimrod's origin in Africa have been put forward, one by Meyer, another by Sethe.

Meyer in 1888 derived Nimrod from *Nmrt* or *Nmrθ*, a name which is sometimes found in Egyptian sources.<sup>49</sup> *Nmrt* is Libyan in origin and, according to Meyer, a great hunter like Nimrod is much better at home in the Libyan wilderness than in the cultivated lands of Mesopotamia. Meyer's explanation of Nimrod's origin is not convincing. Suppose that Meyer is right. Then it remains unexplained how Nimrod

---

<sup>48</sup> Lambert 1965 (and several reprints); Hendel 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Meyer 1888.

became a primeval king and founder of a number of important Mesopotamian cities. This question was answered by Jirku almost thirty years later.<sup>50</sup> According to Jirku, the text of Genesis 10 is slightly in disarray, and it was Ashur, mentioned in v 11 and v22, not Nimrod, who founded the principal Mesopotamian cities, not only in Assyria, but also in Babylonia. In this way the mythical hunter Nimrod is separated from the mythical city-builder Ashur. However, this idea is not convincing either, because v10 is clearly a continuation of v8.

Another African theory was proposed by Sethe. In 1913 Sethe identified Nimrod with the Egyptian pharaoh Amenophis III, who reigned in the fifteenth century BC.<sup>51</sup> Of course, the name Amenophis does not resemble Nimrod, but in the Amarna letters this pharaoh is known as *Nibmu('a)reya* or *Nimmu('a)reya*, a name that shows some resemblance to Nimrod.<sup>52</sup> From his own inscriptions we know that Amenophis, like Nimrod, was a great hunter, and in the fifteenth century Egypt's power extended into Syria, although not into Mesopotamia. However, Sethe's theory has the same weakness as Meyer's. It leaves unexplained why an African prince was seen as the first king of Babylon and the founder of Nineveh. Therefore support for both theories is scant.

### **Nimrod as a deity from Mesopotamia**

In the nineteenth century Nimrod was often equated with the Babylonian god Marduk.<sup>53</sup> The most important argument is that Babylonia is the land of Marduk, according to the Babylonians, and the kingdom of Nimrod, according to Genesis 10. As a consequence Nimrod has to be the Hebrew name for Marduk. According to the Babylonian tradition Marduk is a monster-slayer and therefore he can be described as a hero and a great hunter, as is Nimrod in Genesis. However, it is difficult to derive the name Nimrod from Marduk. A lot of ingenuity has been devoted to this subject, often connecting Nimrod with Akk. *nawru*, *namru*, *namiru* 'bright, shining'

---

<sup>50</sup> Jirku 1917.

<sup>51</sup> Sethe 1913: 650.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. EA 1:2; 2:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1.

<sup>53</sup> Sayce 1873; Grivel 1874; Wellhausen 1889.

and Sum. UTU ‘sun’ or UD ‘day’. This explanation cannot be upheld, because UTU and UD are sumerograms, which were not pronounced as transliterated. Therefore Lipiński, who has tried to revive the idea that Nimrod is Marduk, explains Nimrod as a *tiqqun soferim*, a deliberate distortion of Marduk.<sup>54</sup> According to Lipiński the author of Genesis 10 wanted to avoid the name of a pagan god in combination with the expression לַפְּנֵי יְהוָה *lipnē yhw̄h*, because it would suggest Marduk’s superiority to Yahweh, and changed the name Marduk into Nimrod.<sup>55</sup> Of course, Lipiński’s theory is only possible if ארץ נמרוד *’ereṣ nimrod* in Mic. 5:5 is Babylonia and if Ashur, not Nimrod, is the founder of Assyria’s major cities. Marduk is too much connected with Babylon to make it plausible for him to figure as founder of Nineveh and Ashur. Both are possible, but unlikely, and therefore Lipiński’s theory, however ingenious, has not found much support.

The god Ninurta (written <sup>d</sup>Nin.ĪB, <sup>d</sup>Ni-in-nu-ur-t[a], <sup>d</sup>MAŠ) is a more likely candidate than Marduk.<sup>56</sup> In 1917, it became clear that the name of the god <sup>d</sup>Nin.ĪB had to be read Ninurta,<sup>57</sup> and after that, the identification of Nimrod with Ninurta became quickly very popular.<sup>58</sup> There are several arguments to support this idea. Clearly, Nimrod resembles Ninurta in name. He also does so in character. Originally Ninurta was a fertility god and a protector of civilisation, but he is also associated with hunt and war.<sup>59</sup> Like Hercules he fought several monstrous creatures, representations of chaos, and secured safety and peace for mankind.<sup>60</sup> Finally, Ninurta was the city-god of the Assyrian capital Kalhu and was held in high esteem by many Assyrian kings, which could explain the Nimrod’s connection with Assyria.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, it would not be surprising if this deity, regarded as a primeval king, was the origin of Nimrod, a mighty hunter and the first warrior on earth. However, there are also objections.

---

<sup>54</sup> Lipiński 1966.

<sup>55</sup> A different explanation of *lipnē yhw̄h* in Fenton 2010.

<sup>56</sup> On Ninurta, see: Streck in *RLA* sv Ninurta (2001); Annus 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Ungnad 1917.

<sup>58</sup> Proksch 1924; Von Soden 1960; Van der Toorn 1990; Uehlinger 1995, 1999; Fenton 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Mayer 1992: 36 n15; Streck in *RLA* sv Ninurta (2001) 520.

<sup>60</sup> Cooper 1978: 147-154; West 1997: 467-469; Annus 2002: 110-115.

<sup>61</sup> Streck in *RLA* sv Ninurta (2001) 520; Annus 2002: 42.

Nimrod is clearly human, a king and a founder of cities. None of this can be said of Ninurta. Even more important is that Ninurta was eclipsed by Nabû as tutelary deity of the Assyrian kings in the middle of the eighth century.<sup>62</sup> If the land of Nimrod is the land of Ninurta, and this is Assyria, this expression must date from the eighth century or earlier. The Assyrian pronunciation of the name of the deity, which must have been the source of 'Nimrod' if the expression is from that period, was *Inurta* or *Inušta*, as Aramaic transcriptions of Assyrian names make clear.<sup>63</sup> It is obvious that Nimrod cannot that easily be derived from *Inurta*, and even less so from *Inušta*. This means that the identification of Nimrod with Ninurta is not as convincing as is often thought.

### **Nimrod as a king from Mesopotamia**

There have always been scholars who did not accept the identification of Nimrod with Marduk or Ninurta on the ground that Nimrod is depicted as a human king and therefore cannot be identified with a god. More specifically it is sometimes argued that it is unlikely that a 'false' deity would be connected with the phrase **לפני יהוה**. Therefore, attempts have been made to equate Nimrod with a number of Mesopotamian kings. The most important of them are Sargon of Akkad (2340-2284), his grandson Naram-Sin (2260-2223), Hammurabi of Babylon (1792-1750) and the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244-1208). Gilgamesh, who is included in this section, in a certain sense stands halfway between the deities and the human kings, as he was two third divine and one third human.

In 1875 George Smith in his *Chaldean Account of Genesis* identified Nimrod with Gilgamesh. Smith's *Chaldean Genesis* was a great success. Within a year a German translation and an American edition followed. Smith's ideas about Nimrod were accepted by great orientalists like Friedrich Delitzsch and A.H. Sayce and became the dominant view for more than fifty years.<sup>64</sup> The main argument for the identification of Nimrod with Gilgamesh is the similarity in character. Gilgamesh

---

<sup>62</sup> Annus 2002: 44-49.

<sup>63</sup> Tadmor 1965; Hübner 1992: 87-88; Streck in *RLA* sv Ninurta (2001) 513.

<sup>64</sup> Smith - Delitzsch 1876; Smith - Sayce 1880; Jeremias 1891; Skinner 1980; Gispén 1977.

was a great king, living at the beginning of history, and a mighty hunter, who killed the Bull of Heaven. Nimrod is portrayed in the same vein. Moreover, the story of Gilgamesh was widely known, not only in Mesopotamia, but also in Palestine, where a fragment of the Epic of Gilgamesh was found near Megiddo. The only difficulty is the name. There is no similarity whatsoever between Izdubar, as the name of the hero was read in the nineteenth century, and Nimrod, or between Gilgamesh and Nimrod. Several solutions were presented, but none of them is really convincing. Probably the best is the one advocated by Gispén, who says that Gilgamesh personifies the rebellious character which according to the Israelites was typical of the great kings of Babylonia and Assyria and that he therefore is called נמרד 'we shall rebel'. There is an alternative explanation of Nimrod from the Sumerian, deriving Nimrod from NU.MARAD 'hero of Marad', EN.MARAD.DA 'lord of Marad' or AN.MARAD 'god of Marad'.<sup>65</sup> However, Gilgamesh was king of Uruk, not of Marad. The most famous king of Marad was Lugalbanda, the father of Gilgamesh. This urged Kraeling in 1922 to identify Nimrod with Lugalbanda, but Kraeling's view never gained the popularity of the Gilgamesh theory.

The identification with Sargon of Akkad and Naram-Sin was first proposed by Van Gelderen and has found some support, lately by Levin and Knohl.<sup>66</sup> Especially the identification with Sargon is inviting, because he was the first monarch in Mesopotamian history to create a centralised empire. In that sense Sargon could be considered as the first גבר on earth. Akkad, Sargon's seat of power, was one of Nimrod's cities. Moreover, this theory explains why Nimrod is the son of Cush. Cush is identified by Van Gelderen and Levin with Kiš, a Sumerian city. Sargon had been cupbearer to its last king, Ur-Zababa(k), before he came to power.<sup>67</sup> Of course, the name 'Nimrod' is a problem, because Sargon does not resemble Nimrod. It has been suggested that something resembling Nimrod was his real name – Sargon 'the true king' is clearly a throne name - but that is not very likely. It is difficult to explain how Sargon's real name, not handed down in a single cuneiform record, could have been known to the author of Genesis. Nimrod could be a nickname, derived from

---

<sup>65</sup> Smith - Sayce 1880; Kraeling 1922.

<sup>66</sup> Van Gelderen 1914; Levin 2002; Knohl 2008.

<sup>67</sup> Jacobsen 1973: 110-111.

the verb מרד *mrd* ‘to rise in revolt’, as is sometimes suggested in connection with Gilgamesh, but this is something of a makeshift contrivance. The most likely solution is probably Van Gelderen’s, stating that Nimrod is a corrupted version of Naram-Sin. Sargon and Naram-Sin became the subjects of legends and epics that were preserved into the neo-Assyrian period and even into later times, which easily explains how the story of Nimrod reached the author of Genesis 10.<sup>68</sup> Finally, confusion between Sargon of Akkad and Sargon II of Assyria (721-705) could be responsible for the connection with Assyria.

Another name that has come up occasionally is that of Hammurabi (1792-1750).<sup>69</sup> His empire was based in Babylonia and included Assyria. Of course, his name does not resemble Nimrod and in antiquity he was not nearly as famous as Sargon. The view that Nimrod is modelled on the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244-1208) finds more support.<sup>70</sup> Tukulti-Ninurta ruled over Assyria and Babylonia, his name was immortalised in an epic that was composed to glorify his war against Babylon and the second part of his name resembles Nimrod. Of course, there are also problems. No explicit connection is known between Tukulti-Ninurta and hunting. Later Assyrian kings spoke of hunt exploits in their inscriptions, but this was not yet done in the time of Tukulti-Ninurta. A more important point is that the beginning of his empire was not Babel, Erech or Accad. The nucleus of his power lay in Assyria. If Nimrod is Tukulti-Ninurta, then the expression ראשית ממלכתו *rēšit mamlaktō*, which is usually translated ‘the beginning of his kingdom’, has to be translated as ‘the most important part of his kingdom’. Of course, this is possible, but it produces a somewhat strained translation of the text (cf. e.g. Jr. 28:1, where the same expression is used, apparently in a chronological meaning)<sup>71</sup> and it does not really resolve the difficulty.

---

<sup>68</sup> Drews 1974; Kuhrt 1997: 47; Westenholz 1997: 1-2. Texts: Haul 2009.

<sup>69</sup> Kraeling 1922; Procksch 1924.

<sup>70</sup> Speiser 1964; Speiser 1967; Ebach 1979.

<sup>71</sup> Miano 2010: 99-100.

## Nimrod as a symbol of kingship

As outlined in the preceding sections, the few facts told about Nimrod have become a source of speculation for generations of scholars, bent upon finding the real Nimrod, the mythological or historical character on which Nimrod had been modelled. Nimrod has been identified with Orion, Amenophis III, Marduk, Ninurta, Gilgamesh, Sargon of Akkad, Tukulti-Ninurta I and many others, but none of these identifications is completely convincing. This has led some scholars to believe that there is no real Nimrod, but that he should be considered as ‘der Typos eines Herrschers der Frühzeit Mesopotamiens’ or as ‘a legendary – and composite – eponym of Mesopotamia’.<sup>72</sup> In this context the name Nimrod can be explained as נמרד ‘we shall rebel’ to characterise Babylonian kingship, and perhaps of kingship *per se* (cf. 1 Sam. 8:7-9), as rebellious against God and perhaps to anticipate the story of the tower of Babylon. In a certain sense it is a somewhat disappointing point of view, because it makes the quest for the real Nimrod a wild goose hunt and all the scholarship invested in it obsolete, but it does explain why Nimrod has things in common with so many mythological and historical kings, especially Gilgamesh and Sargon.

## The real Nimrod

Identifying the real Nimrod among all these pretenders has proven a difficult task. Amenophis, Gilgamesh and Marduk can be dismissed, as we have seen in the preceding sections. Explaining Nimrod as a symbol of kingship and nothing more than that does not convince either. Of course, it is possible, and even very likely, that Nimrod became a symbol of kingship, that he was seen as the archetypical Mesopotamian king and that his name was interpreted as נמרד ‘we shall rebel’, but this leaves the origin of the name Nimrod unexplained. From Gen. 10:9 (עַל־כֵּן יֹאמַר) and Mic. 5:5 (אַרְץ נִמְרֹד), it is apparent that Nimrod was a well known character; עַל־כֵּן יֹאמַר signals an etiology and etiologies explain existing names, customs or proverbs. The reader is expected to know the saying ‘like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord’. Likewise the authors of the book of

---

<sup>72</sup> Westermann 1974: 688; Machinist 1992.

Micah expected their readers and hearers to know what the land of Nimrod was. Both texts imply that Nimrod must have been a well known character, a primeval king and a proverbial hunter, who was used by the authors of Genesis as a symbol of Mesopotamian kingship. It is clear that Ninurta, Sargon and Naram-Sin are the best candidates, but none of them is completely convincing.

Explaining Nimrod as Ninurta is the most popular view at the moment. The role of proverbial hunter fits Ninurta, and Ninurta was the city-god of Kalhu and protector of the Assyrian kings,<sup>73</sup> which could explain why Assyria could be called the ‘land of Nimrod’. But if the name Nimrod was already known in the late monarchical period, this explanation is not convincing, because Ninurta was pronounced *Inušta* in the first millennium in Assyria, and *Inušta* does not resemble Nimrod much. Of course, it could be argued that Nimrod is based on the Babylonian pronunciation, but this is not likely for the late monarchical period. As a rule, names of Assyrian kings are transcribed in accordance with the Assyrian pronunciation (see chapters two and eight). It is not likely that Ninurta’s name, if it was heard for the first time in the monarchical period, would be written according to the Babylonian pronunciation. Sargon and Naram-Sin, kings of Akkad, are the most convincing alternatives. The name Nimrod could be a garbled form of Naram-Sin, and Sargon and Naram-Sin were kings who enjoyed a very high prestige as rulers of the first real empire in Mesopotamian history.<sup>74</sup> The nucleus of their empire lay in Babylonia – also the nucleus of Nimrod’s empire – but their power stretched into Assyria.<sup>75</sup> This makes these rulers of Akkad good models for the first king and city founder Nimrod, although their connection to Assyria is not as strong as one could wish.

### **Nimrod and the Table of Nations**

Genesis 10:8-12 is part of the Table of Nations. The way in which it is embedded in Gen. 10 presents us with two problems. The first has to do with Nimrod’s ancestry. At first sight it is not clear why Nimrod, a Babylonian king, is connected with Cush

---

<sup>73</sup> Annus 2002: 42.

<sup>74</sup> Braun-Holzinger and Frahm 1999: 143, 144; even outside Mesopotamia: Beckman 2001.

<sup>75</sup> Salgues 2011.



and Ham, two African eponymous heroes. The second problem has to do with the difference between Gen. 10:8-12, the story of Nimrod, and the remainder of Gen. 10, a genealogical table of the eponymous ancestors of the peoples of the earth, which has been discussed in chapter five.

Nimrod is the son of Cush, the son of Ham, the second son of Noah. If Nimrod is an Egyptian prince or pharaoh, it is easily understood why his father was Cush. However, if Nimrod's origins lie in Mesopotamia, the relation between Cush and Nimrod is more difficult to explain. A number of solutions have been offered to this problem. According to Wellhausen Cush was a very vague grouping, analogous to the Αἰθίοπες of the Greeks; De Fraine, quoting Herodotos as support, argues that the author of the Table of Nations thought the Babylonians were of African stock; and according to Van Selms the writer of Genesis 10 had only very vague notions of geography.<sup>76</sup> According to Kraeling the Chaldeans, inhabitants of Babylonia, were connected with the peoples of Southern Arabia, who also were sons of Cush.<sup>77</sup> According to Wiseman the Sumerians were seen as sons of Cush and in this way separated from the Semitic Assyrians.<sup>78</sup> None of these explanations has found much support. Three other solutions, however, are more popular. Two of them separate Cush as father of Nimrod from Cush as the eponymous hero of the Cushim, while the third gives a socio-cultural explanation why Cush is Nimrod's father.

Probably the most popular solution is the view that Cush represents the Kassites.<sup>79</sup> The Kassites were a people from the Zagros mountains who ruled Babylon from the sixteenth till the twelfth century BC. In Babylonian Kassite is *kaššû*, sometimes *kuššuhhu*, which could explain Cush. This view is held even by Speiser, according to whom Nimrod is Tukulti-Ninurta I, the Assyrian king who defeated Kaštiliaš IV (1232-1225), a Kassite ruler of Babylon. Another solution that has gained some

---

<sup>76</sup> Wellhausen 1889; De Fraine 1962; Van Selms 1967.

<sup>77</sup> Smith - Sayce 1880; Kraeling 1922. However, the Chaldeans are sons of Shem, not of Cush.

<sup>78</sup> Delitzsch 1881; Wiseman 1994: 259-261.

<sup>79</sup> Gunkel 1911; Skinner 1980; Speiser 1964; Lipiński 1966; Speiser 1967; Van Seters 1992; Uehlinger 1995; Uehlinger 1999.

popularity is the equation of Cush with the Sumerian town Kiš.<sup>80</sup> In Kiš the first kings after the flood reigned.<sup>81</sup> The town could have been personified as the father of the first king in Mesopotamia. This solution is organically connected with the explanation of Nimrod as Sargon of Akkad, but it can also be found in other contexts. These solutions both separate Cush in v8 from Cush in v7, having their names in common, but not their origins, and they assume that the Nimrod story was incorporated into the Table of Nations by someone who did not understand that the father of Nimrod and the eponymous hero of the Cushim originally were different characters, but identified them because of their similar or identical names. Another, perhaps more convincing explanation can be given by looking into the *principium divisionis* of the Table of Nations (see chapter five, p.144-145): Nimrod, the first king and city founder must be a (grand)son of Ham, because Ham is the father of those who live in towns and practice agriculture.

In the Table of Nations the Nimrod passage stands out as different. First, Nimrod is the only one about whom more is told than his name, his ancestry and the region where he lived. Nimrod was king of Babylonia and founder of a number of cities in Assyria. Nothing similar is told of anyone else in the Table of Nations. Second, Nimrod is not an eponymous hero. He is king of three cities in Babylonia, and founder of four cities in Assyria, but he is neither the eponymous hero of the Assyrians, nor of the Chaldeans, who have their own eponymous heroes: Ashur and Arpachshad. Nimrod must have been a well known character before he was incorporated in the Table of Nations.

Clearly, the Nimrod legend shows some affinity to the list of Kain's descendants in Gen. 4, in which genealogy and cultural progress are combined. In Gen. 4 we are told of the emergence of city building (17), tending livestock (20), making music (21) and working metal (22). The emergence of the state, and perhaps even of the first world empire, personified in Nimrod, the first ruler, could be seen as a continuation of Gen. 4. Nimrod is clearly a culture hero, and he is also a foreign founder. He goes from Babylonia to Assyria to found four major Assyrian cities and probably,

---

<sup>80</sup> Van Gelderen 1914; Simons 1959; Levin 2002.

<sup>81</sup> Jacobsen 1973: 76-77; ANET 265; Van Seters 1997: 70-72; ABC 197.

although it is not said explicitly, to lay the foundations of Assyrian imperialism. Nimrod's coming to Assyria also symbolises its cultural dependence on Babylonia.

It looks like Gen. 10:8-12 was at a certain stage in the creation of Genesis detached from its original context and added to an already existing version of the Table of Nations. Apparently, the emergence of the state and of the first world empire were considered so specifically Mesopotamian, that Nimrod, its first ruler, was made part of the Table of Nations and connected with the origins of Babylonia and Assyria. This makes it even more likely that Naram-Sin, a proverbial arrogant king who considered himself a god, was chosen as the exemplary primeval king. Afterwards, Nimrod's name was interpreted as 'we shall rebel' and felt like a sign, perhaps even a prefiguration, of the pride of the Babylonians of later times (cf. Is. 47; Hab. 1:6-11) and especially of Babylonian kings like Nebuchadnezzar or Nabonidus (most clearly in Dan. 4:38-30), who in their turn became symbol of all tyranny and oppression in Israel's history.

## **Conclusion**

The first chapters of Genesis do not offer a full account of primeval history, let alone of the earliest history of Assyria and Babylonia, but they give some insight in what its authors thought about the earliest history of mankind. Cities do not play an important role in this primeval history. The founding of the first city by Cain or his son Enoch is mentioned in Genesis 4:17. About the founding of other cities nothing is told, but in Genesis 10 we encounter Babylon, Uruk and Akkad as cities that apparently already existed when Nimrod became their king. To the authors, and readers, of Genesis Nimrod must have been someone of renown from these early times. His origin has been the subject of much debate in scholarly literature and Nimrod has been identified with Amenophis III, Marduk, Ninurta, Gilgamesh, Sargon of Akkad, Tukulti-Ninurta I and many others. A definitive conclusion has not been reached, but the deity Ninurta and the kings of Akkad, Sargon and Naram-Sin, are the most convincing candidates. It is clear that Nimrod was seen as a symbol of Babylonian kingship and that his name, whatever its origin, was interpreted as 'we shall rebel'. He was included in the Table of Nations, and made a son of Cush and a grandson of Ham, because the Babylonians, the people whose king Nimrod was,

were agriculturists and town dwellers, like the Egyptians and the Canaanites, who were also descendants of Ham. This Nimrod became the first man to rule by force, i.e. the first king on earth, and his realm initially comprised Babylon, Uruk and Akkad, three major cities in Babylonia. Apparently, the building of cities and the institution of kingship were thought to have originated in southern Mesopotamia, and from there exported to Assyria. Nimrod was also regarded as the founder of Nineveh, Kalhu and two other cities in Assyria. Finally Nimrod was a great hunter, like many of the kings of Assyria and the pharaoh's of Egypt. The text does not explain the relation between Nimrod, the first Babylonian king, and Ashur, the eponymous hero of the Assyrian people. It is often said that Genesis 10:8-12 reflects the cultural dependence of Assyria on Babylonia, bringing urban civilisation from the South to the North. However, the relation between their protagonists Nimrod and Ashur remains shady and there is nothing in Genesis that clarifies this relation. As a consequence, these questions have become a source of speculation, not only in the modern scholarly literature, but much earlier, in the Talmud, Midrash Rabbah, Targums and Hellenistic Judean historians.



### 7.3 Ninos, Founder of Nineveh

As we have seen before, the best-known and most extensive history of Assyria from antiquity is the first book of the universal history that Diodoros of Sicily wrote in the first century BC, which was based on Ktesias' *Persika*. According to Ktesias, the founder of the Assyrian empire and of its capital Nineveh, Νίνοϛ in Greek, was called Ninos. What Greek and Roman historians after Ktesias wrote about Ninos was often based upon Ktesias.<sup>82</sup> Many attempts have been made to identify this Ninos with one of the many Assyrian kings that we know from the cuneiform sources, but none of these attempts is really convincing. Ninos is a Greek invention, an eponymous hero, a typical empire builder and city founder. The portrait of Ninos always remains sketchy. Ninos does all things that are expected of the founder of an empire, but he never really becomes a man of flesh and blood. Some new elements are introduced by these later historians, but they do not really change Ninos' character. Ninos always remains an empire builder, a fighting king, bent upon conquering other nations. In this respect he differs from all other Assyrian kings in Greek historiography, who were luxury loving, effeminate and sluggish, but by their wiliness were nevertheless able to hold together the empire that Ninos had created.

#### **Ktesias and the founder of Nineveh**

Diodoros, echoing Ktesias, starts his history of Asia with Ninos: 'In the earliest age, the kings of Asia were native-born, and in connection with them no memory is preserved of either a notable deed or a personal name. The first to be handed down by tradition to history and memory for us as one who achieved great deeds is Ninos, king of the Assyrians' (Diod. 2.1.4).<sup>83</sup> Ninos was not the first king, but he was the first king who was known to have built an empire.<sup>84</sup> About his predecessors Ktesias only tells us that they were native-born (ἐγγχώριος). It is not clear what this means. It

---

<sup>82</sup> See section 1.3 'Assyria in Greek Historiography: An Overview'.

<sup>83</sup> Translation by C.H. Oldfather (Loeb, 1933).

<sup>84</sup> Much later, the Roman historian Pompeius Trogus (first century AD) says that the Egyptian pharao Vezosis and the Scythian king Tanaus had made large conquests before Ninos, but that they fought for glory only and did not found an empire (Just. 1.1). See Alonso-Nunez, 1987.

has been suggested that these indigenous kings were Sumerians and that Ninos was the first Akkadian king. In that case, Ninos should be identified with Sargon of Akkad (2340-2284). However, this is highly speculative, because it is unlikely that Ktesias, or any other Greek historian, knew anything about the difference between Sumerians and Akkadians. Two Sumerian characters, Gilgames (Gilgameš) and \*Euechoros (En-ma[r]-kar), are mentioned by Aelian (*NH* 12.21), who lived in the second century AD, but nothing indicates that the Greeks knew the Sumerians as a nation different from the Babylonians. These shady predecessors of Ninos, whether they were Sumerians or not, remain anonymous. Ninos seems to spring from nowhere. Nothing is told about his predecessors or his coming to power, not even the name of his father is mentioned. As will be seen, according to many classical authors Ninos is a son of Belos. However, Diodoros does not mention Belos as father of Ninos, although he does mention him elsewhere as king of Babylon (1.28.1) and principal deity of the city (2.8.7; 2.9.5). It is not likely that Ktesias called Ninos a son of Belos and that Diodoros left Belos out, because Diodoros explicitly says that no personal name or notable deed of any of Ninos' predecessors is known, while Belos was well known to Diodoros. Apparently, for Ktesias the history of Asia started with Ninos.

Diodoros tells us that Ninos first trained the strongest of the young men of his realm. After he had composed an army in that way, he formed an alliance with Ariaios, the king of Arabia, and together they attacked the nations around Assyria, first the Babylonians, then the Armenians, and finally the Medes. Babylonia was subjected and its king killed; Barzanes, the king of Armenia, in time realised that he was no match for Ninos, surrendered and was treated with magnanimity; finally Pharnos, the king of Media, who opposed Ninos, was beaten and killed. In the next seventeen years Ninos subdued many other countries, including Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria, Asia Minor and Persia. After conquering all of Asia from the Don to the Nile, Ninos decided to found a new city to ensure that his name would live on for generations to come. After dismissing the Arabian king, he returned to his homeland, founded on the river Euphrates a city of unsurpassed magnitude, which he called Ninos, the Greek name for Nineveh. Having founded his new capital, Ninos decided to attack Bactria, which until then had withstood the power of Assyria. At

this point, Diodoros interrupts his story to relate the birth of Semiramis, who was to play a decisive role in the siege of Bactra, the Bactrian capital, and whom Ninos was to marry afterwards.<sup>85</sup> Now Semiramis becomes the main character of Diodoros' story. When Ninos attacked Bactria, she was still married to Onnes, one of the members of Ninos' council. During the siege of Bactra Onnes sent for his wife and after a long journey Semiramis reached the Bactrian capital. She devised a means to conquer the city and Ninos was so impressed by her ability and her beauty, that he wanted to marry her. Onnes killed himself and Ninos and Semiramis married. Laden with the spoils of war, they returned to Assyria. They had a son, called Ninyas, and shortly afterwards Ninos died, leaving Semiramis as his successor.

Diodoros' account of Ninos is sketchy and a bit colourless. Ninos acts as is to be expected from the founder of an empire, creating an army, attacking his neighbours and founding a city, but he has no characteristic qualities and there are no exotic tales attached to him. This colourlessness cannot be attributed to the fact that Diodoros made a summary of Ktesias' *Persika* and left out the details which would have given the story more zest, as is shown by the contrast with the history of Semiramis. The first real story in Diodoros' Assyrian history is on the birth of Semiramis, which is full of exotic details. It is followed by an account of the siege of Bactra, in which the ingenuity and bravery of Semiramis carried the day for the Assyrian army. Apparently Ninos did not captivate the imagination of the Greek historians or their sources the way Semiramis did.

### **The search for the real Ninos**

There is not much historical truth in Ktesias' narrative, which earned him the name of one of the least reliable ancient Greek historians. The Assyrian empire in reality never had the dimensions Ktesias attributed to it. His description better fits the much larger Persian Empire, in which Ktesias lived as physician of Artaxerxes II Mnemon (404-363/357). Another error, which earned Ktesias much blame, is the location of Nineveh on the Euphrates (Diod. 2.3.2), because in reality it was located

---

<sup>85</sup> Semiramis' birth story belongs to the well known type of the 'tale of the hero who was exposed at birth' (Binder 1964; Lewis 1980).



on the Tigris, as Herodotos already knew (Hdt. 1.193). Nevertheless, many scholars have tried to identify Ninos with an Assyrian king known from history. Not surprisingly, most of the kings that are proposed are from the Neo-Assyrian period: Šamši-Adad V, Sargon II and Sennacherib. Kings from this period are more probable to have been remembered in the time in which Ktesias lived than earlier kings. Nonetheless, two kings from an earlier period have been named: Šu-Ninua and Tukulti-Ninurta I. A short discussion of the kings mentioned as the real Ninos follows here, as almost all these identifications are based on Ktesias' account of the founding of Nineveh and of the Assyrian Empire by Ninos.

Forrer in 1932 identified Ninos or his son Ninyas with Pân-Ninua.<sup>86</sup> Nowadays the name of this king is read Šu-Ninua, meaning 'man from Nineve'.<sup>87</sup> According to the Assyrian king list, this Šu-Ninua was the son of a certain Bazaya and he ruled over Assyria for fourteen years, but nothing more is known of him. It is not clear how stories about Šu-Ninua could have reached the Greek historians or why he would be seen as the founder of the Assyrian empire.

Ninos is often identified with the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244-1208).<sup>88</sup> Speiser in his article summarises the arguments supporting the identification of Ninos and Tukulti-Ninurta, 'the first Mesopotamian ruler to have combined effective authority on a solid base over Babylonia and Assyria'.<sup>89</sup> He believes that Νίνοϛ is the Greek form of Ninurta, the second part of the king's name. Tukulti-Ninurta was remembered in later time because of an epic, glorifying his victory over the Babylonian king Kaštiliaš.<sup>90</sup> According to Speiser Diodoros' description of Ninos' campaign against Babylonia is a last echo of Tukulti-Ninurta's epic. Finally, Speiser believes that the identification of Ninos and Tukulti-Ninurta is supported by

---

<sup>86</sup> Forrer in *RLA* sv Assyrien (1932).

<sup>87</sup> *ANET* 565; *COS* I 464; *ARI* 1: 31; Pettinato 1991: 67.

<sup>88</sup> Von Soden 1954: 68-69; Klengel 1961: 68; Von Soden 1962: 62-63; Speiser 1964: 72-73, 1967: 50-52; Huxley 1965: 210-211; Ebach 1979: 352-354.

<sup>89</sup> Speiser 1964: 72.

<sup>90</sup> *ARI* 1: 101-134; Lambert 1957; Weidner 1959: 1-146; Borger 1961: 71-97; Foster 2005: 298-317. See Kravitz (2010) on the depiction of Tukulti-Ninurta's victory in his epic and in his inscriptions.

Genesis, by Berossos and a number of other sources from antiquity. These are the four arguments used to identify the historic Ninos, not only by Speiser, but also by other scholars: the similarity in name, the events during the king's reign, the possibility that these events were known to Ktesias and the support of other sources from antiquity.

Lewy in 1952 has suggested that Ninos is a compound figure, bearing the marks of Sennacherib and Šamši-Adad V (823-811).<sup>91</sup> Šamši-Adad is mentioned solely because Semiramis, who according to Ktesias was married to Ninos, is often identified with Sammuamat, Šamši-Adad's queen.

Ninos was identified with Sargon II (721-705) by König.<sup>92</sup> König has a number of arguments to support this identification. Firstly, Sargon lived in a period when the city of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylon that the Greeks knew, did not yet exist. In that sense Ninos lived before the foundation of Babylon, which Ktesias attributes to Ninos' successor Semiramis (a peculiar argument, considering the importance of the city in Sargon's days). Secondly, Sargon waged a war against Urartu,<sup>93</sup> like Ninos did against Armenia, which in Ktesias' days was in the area where Urartu had been before. The king of Musasir, a small state between Assyria and Urartu sacked by Sargon during his campaign against Urartu, was called Urzana and according to König this Urzana is the Armenian king Barzanes mentioned by Ktesias. Sargon also fought the Medes. Finally, like Ninos, he founded a city, which he called Dur-Šarruken, after himself. A difficulty is posed by the name Ninos, which does not resemble Sargon, but König has found an ingenious solution to this problem. Sargon, *Šarru-kīnu* in Akkadian, meaning the true king, according to König was interpreted as king (*šarru*) Kinu (*Kīnu*), giving *Κίνοϝ* in Greek, which, influenced by the Greek name of Nineveh, later was changed into *Νίνοϝ*. König further argues that Sargon's namesake, Sargon of Akkad (2340-2284), has contributed to the image of Ninos. Sargon of Akkad is the first founder of an empire in Mesopotamian history and the Babylonians considered him their greatest king and a great number of

---

<sup>91</sup> Lewy 1952: 269-270; Murphy 1989: 2 n 7.

<sup>92</sup> König 1972: 36-37.

<sup>93</sup> Mayer 1980; Mayer 1983.

myths and traditions concerning this king have been handed down.<sup>94</sup> As Sargon II has used Sargon of Akkad in his propaganda, confusion between Sargon of Akkad and Sargon II is not unlikely.

Ninos was identified with Sennacherib (704-681) by Lewy.<sup>95</sup> The most important argument for identifying Ninos and Sennacherib is Sennacherib's preference for Nineveh. He made the city the administrative capital of the Assyrian Empire, strongly fortified it and adorned it with a great number of buildings.<sup>96</sup> In this sense he is the founder of Nineveh. But Lewy has more arguments. Sennacherib's first campaign was directed against Babylon, just like Ninos' first campaign. Moreover, it is possible that Sennacherib maintained good relations with a number of Arabian sheikhs (cf. Hdt. 2.141), which could have given rise to Diodoros' story about the alliance between Ninos and Ariaios. Sennacherib also fought against the Medes, like Ninos. Finally, he was married to Naqi'a.<sup>97</sup> According to Lewy, Naqi'a is one of the Assyrian queens who gave rise to the story of Semiramis, Sammuramat of course being the other. Hence it seems reasonable to identify the husbands of Naqi'a and Semiramis, Sennacherib and Ninos.

Finally, Nagel defended the identity of Ninos with Madyas, the Scythian king whose raid into the Near East according to Herodotos reached Palestine (Hdt. 1.103-106).<sup>98</sup> This Scythian raid, traces of which formerly were seen in the Hebrew Bible (Jr. 1:13-15; 4:5-6:30; Zeph. 1), is historically very uncertain.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, Nagel's view with good reason has been severely criticised.<sup>100</sup> It has won almost no support.

A king that surprisingly is never mentioned is Šamši-Adad I (1813-1781). He was the first king of Assyria to expand the power of Assyria considerably and to found a

---

<sup>94</sup> Binder 1964; Drews 1974; Lewis 1980; Braun-Holzinger and Frahm 1999: 142-143, 144 n 56.

<sup>95</sup> Lewy 1952; Reade in *RLA* sv Ninive (2000) 428 (with questionmark).

<sup>96</sup> Frahm 2008.

<sup>97</sup> On Naqia, see: Melville 1999.

<sup>98</sup> Nagel 1982: 83.

<sup>99</sup> How and Wells 1928: 105-106; Vlaardingerbroek 1999: 54.

<sup>100</sup> Dandamayev 1984; Boncquet 1987: 18-19.

large, but short-lived empire. He is the first king of whom the Assyrian king-list relates more than just his name and the number of years he reigned.<sup>101</sup> In other words, he is the first Assyrian king about whose deeds of valour something is known, which is almost exactly what Diodoros says about Ninus (2.1.4). Confusion between Šamši-Adad I and Šamši-Adad V could account for the connection between Ninus and Semiramis, assuming that Semiramis was modelled after Sammuamat.

Of these attempts to identify Ninus the identifications with Tukulti-Ninurta and Sennacherib at first sight seem to have the strongest arguments, but Šu-Ninua, Šamši-Adad and Sargon have also something to speak for them. However, a closer scrutiny of the arguments will reveal that none of these identifications is really convincing. Sometimes similarity in name is used as an argument. Of course, Νίνοϛ could be the Greek rendering of the second part of Šu-Ninua or Tukulti-Ninurta, but there is a more simple explanation. As founder of Nineveh, called Νίνοϛ in Greek, Ninus takes his name from the city.<sup>102</sup> Ninus as ἥρως ἐπώνυμος of the city of Νίνοϛ provides the most simple and therefore probably the best explanation of his name. Often resemblance between Ktesias' account and the events during a king's reign are used as an argument. However, Ktesias' description of Ninus' reign is very general. Ninus trained an army, attacked his neighbours, conquered most of Asia and finally returned to his native country to found a city of unsurpassed magnitude. He did all things that are expected from the founder of a world empire. Admittedly, similarities with deeds of many Assyrian kings exist. Most of them campaigned against Babylonia, Urartu or Media, and more than one fought against all three, but the similarities are not very specific. In fact, Ninus is very sketchily outlined, which makes any identification hazardous. Even the names of his allies and foes, Ariaios, Barzanes and Pharnos, do not help much. It is striking that each of these names can be explained as Iranian and that at least one of them is known as the name of a Persian courtier during Ktesias' days. Ἀριαῖος is the name of a friend of Kyros (Xen. *An.* 1.8.5, 1.9.31; Plut. *Artox.* 11.1). It is the shortened form of names like Ἀριαμένης, Ἀριαράμνης and Ἀριοβαρζάνης, composed with *ariya-* 'Aryan, i.e. Iranian'.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> ANET 564; Kuhrt 1997: 85-86; COS I 464.

<sup>102</sup> Dillmann 1892: 188; Boncquet 1987: 46-47; Pettinato 1991: 66-67.

<sup>103</sup> Schmitt 2006: 132-133.

Βαρζάνης, which is also found in Arrian (*An.* 4.7.1), is a shortened form of names like Ἄριοβαρζάνης and Σατιβαρζάνης, ending in *brzana-*, nomen agentis of *varz* (OP *vard*) ‘to make’.<sup>104</sup> Φάρνος is a shortened form of names like Φαρνάβαζος, Φαρνάκης, Ἴνταφέρνης, Ἄρταφέρνης and Τισσαφέρνης, containing *farnah* ‘glory’.<sup>105</sup> It is possible that Ktesias has given the friends and foes of Ninus names of people from his own time, a technique he often uses.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, using these name as an argument for the identification of Ninus with an Assyrian king is hazardous. The search for the historical Ninus is probably a wild goose hunt. Ninus is almost certainly a Greek invention, which was necessitated by the fact that a great city like Nineveh in Greeks eyes needed a founder and a founding story.

Besides Ninus Diodoros mentions a few other Assyrian monarchs: Semiramis, Ninyas, Teutamos and Sardanapallos. Ktesias mentioned more kings, as is known from Photios’ summary of the *Persika* (Phot. *frg.* 64), but Diodoros left them out, because ‘nothing was done by them which merits mentioning’ (Diod. 2.22.1). Of all the kings mentioned by Diodoros, only Sardanapallos can with some certainty be identified with a real Assyrian king, viz. Ashurbanipal (668-631/627 BC). This shows clearly what Ktesias knew about Assyria. He knew the name of Nineveh, its capital since Sennacherib’s days, but apparently not those of Ashur and Kalhu, the previous capitals; he knew that the Assyrians had ruled a large part of Asia for centuries, but he had no idea of the real size of the Assyrian empire; he had heard of Ashurbanipal and he erroneously thought he was the last Assyrian king; finally, he had some knowledge of the end of the Assyrian empire, Nineveh being taken by the Medes and the Babylonians, but nothing about its beginnings. The remainder of Ktesias’ account is invention. Clearly he had no knowledge of any historical king before Sardanapallos. Ninus is a fictional character, the invented founder of Nineveh, and he does not come alive, but remains sketchy and colourless, especially when contrasted with Semiramis, his queen and successor.

---

<sup>104</sup> Schmitt 2006: 157-159.

<sup>105</sup> Schmitt 2006: 204-205.

<sup>106</sup> Marquart 1891: 626-628; Jacoby in *RE* sv Ktesias (1922) 2052; Schmitt 2006: 66.

## Ninos after Ktesias

Ktesias did not say anything about Ninos' ancestry or his predecessor. Later authors who wrote on the history of Assyria did, for example Kastor of Rhodos, who lived in the first century BC, and Abydenos, who lived in the second century AD. Kastor of Rhodos wrote on chronology, including the chronology of the Assyrian empire, and his work contained a list of Assyrian kings, based on Ktesias' king-list. Kastor's work is lost, but a few fragments are cited in Eusebios' *Chronicon*, which is handed down in Armenian translation, and Kastor's king-list became the basis of Eusebios' list of Assyrian kings.<sup>107</sup> Kastor does not start with Ninos, but with Belos, who died after a reign of unknown duration and was revered as a god after his death. After Belos Ninos became king of the Assyrians, and he reigned for 52 years, after Ninos Semiramis, and she reigned for 42 years, and after Semiramis Zames, who is also called Ninyas.<sup>108</sup> Of course, Belos (Βῆλος), the name of Kastor's first Assyrian king, is the Greek representation of Akkadian *Bēlu* 'Lord', a title by which the Babylonian deity Marduk was often addressed. Assyrian and Babylonian king-lists, however, do not start with one of the major gods. The Assyrian king-list, for example, starts with seventeen kings living in tents, not with Marduk, Ninurta or Ashur.<sup>109</sup> The idea that a dynasty should start with a major deity is a Greek one, but the deity with which it starts is Babylonian and Belos is an obvious choice for Ninos' father, as he was the most important Babylonian god and he was known to the Greeks (Hdt. 1.181-183; Diod. 2.8.7). From this fragment of Kastor's chronography it becomes clear that Ktesias' Ninos and Kastor's Ninos were quite different. Ktesias knows neither of Ninos' predecessor nor of his father, while Kastor makes Ninos successor and probably son of Belos, although the latter is not said in so many words. Moreover, Kastor makes Belos a contemporary of the battle between gods and titans and of Ogygos, a Titan king connected with the flood.<sup>110</sup> Being a chronographer, Kastor of

---

<sup>107</sup> Eus. *Chron. Arm.* 26-27, 30-32, 81; Kastor *FGrH* 250 F 1.

<sup>108</sup> See p 11-13.

<sup>109</sup> *ANET* 564; *COS I* 463.

<sup>110</sup> Not much is known about Ogygos (Miller in *RLA* sv Ogygos [1937]; Astour 1967: 158, 212; Noegel 1998). According to Huxley (1982: 183-184), Ogygos should be changed into Gyges, but this seems unlikely, because Gyges, king of Lydia, was thought to have lived long after the period of the flood.

course is interested in simultaneousness. However, by making Belos simultaneous with the battle between Gods and Titans and with a survivor of the flood, Kastor places Belos and the beginnings of Assyrian history in the mythical period. Apparently, the earliest history of Assyria had acquired a semi-mythical character in the Hellenistic era, which it did not have in Ktesias' time.

The accounts of most later Greek and Roman authors writing about Assyria are based directly or indirectly on Ktesias' *Persika*, often with the addition of the two new elements found in Kastor's chronography. Belos as father of Ninus is found in many later authors, for example in Kephalaion.<sup>111</sup> Simultaneousness of Belos and the battle between Gods and Titans is more rarely mentioned, but it is for example found in Thallos. Thallos, a historian living in the first century AD, wrote a work entitled *The Histories*.<sup>112</sup> According to Theophilus, a second century bishop of Antioch, Thallos mentioned Belos as an ally of the Titans who fought against Zeus and the gods.<sup>113</sup> Thallos dated this battle 322 years before the Trojan war. However, not all historians regard Ninus as the son of Belos. Like Ktesias, some authors, such as the Roman historian Justinus, start with Ninus (Just. 1.1). Others, for example Abydenos, a historian who lived in the second century AD, give Ninus a longer pedigree than Kastor did. His Assyrian king-list starts with Belos, according to Abydenos the founder of Babylon. Belos was succeeded by Babios (probably an error for Babilos), Anebos, Arbelos, Chalaos, Arbelos and finally Ninus.<sup>114</sup> All these kings, except Belos, are named after major Mesopotamian cities: Babilos after Babylon, Arbelos after Arbela, Chalaos after Kalhu and Ninus after Nineveh. The origin of Anebos is not quite clear, but it has been suggested that he is named after Nippur. This pedigree reflects the increasing knowledge Greek scholars had of Mesopotamian geography. Abydenos makes Ninus the seventh of a line of kings, which, in the light of the symbolical meaning of the number seven, is probably not accidental. It has been noted that in Hebrew chronography individuals deemed worthy of special attention are often placed in the seventh position of a

---

<sup>111</sup> Kephalaion *FGrH* 93 F 1.

<sup>112</sup> Holladay 1983: 343.

<sup>113</sup> Thallos *FGrH* 256 F 2 and 3.

<sup>114</sup> Eus. *Chron. Arm.* 25-26; Abydenos *FGrH* 685 F 7.

genealogical tree.<sup>115</sup> Here the same device has been used. Ninos, the founder of the Assyrian Empire, is presented as the seventh of a line of kings. This could be an orientalisising element, something Greek readers expected to hear about an Oriental monarch. Abydenos is known to have incorporated some genuinely Oriental material in his universal history, mainly from the Babylonian historian Berossos. Therefore, it is possible, and perhaps even likely, that this pedigree is a far echo of the myth of the seven sages or some other Babylonian story.<sup>116</sup> In both cases, it reflects Abydenos' desire to make the story of Ninos more authentic by adding an oriental element to the story of Ninos.

## Conclusion

According to Ktesias Nineveh was founded by Ninos, the founder of the Assyrian empire. Nineveh was the largest city ever, even larger than Babylon. Ninos is a Greek invention and even in fiction he does not come to life, but remains colourless and sketchy. The story of Ninos contains all elements that an account on the founder of an empire should contain, but nothing more. Apparently Ktesias had not heard any stories about Ninos and he did not succeed in bringing Ninos to life. Ktesias' *Persika* is often seen as a forerunner of the Greek novel of the Hellenistic era, but his portrayal of Ninos does not show the dramatic and colourful characteristics often attributed to his work. Of Nineveh, the city whose founder Ninos was thought to have been, Ktesias does not seem to have known much. He makes Nineveh the largest city ever, with walls of an incredible width and towers of an enormous height, but the picture of Nineveh pales when compared to the more colourful description of Babylon, its wonders and its customs, either in Ktesias or in Herodotos. Nevertheless, in antiquity and long after, Ktesias became to be regarded as an authority on Assyrian history and most later accounts are based on his *Persika*. However, some new elements are introduced by later authors to give Ninos a more oriental character. Sometimes Ninos is made a descendant of Belos and the seventh in the line of Assyrian kings, using an oriental god and the symbolism of the number

---

<sup>115</sup> Sasson 1978.

<sup>116</sup> A list of the seven apkallu's (sages) living before the flood has been found in Uruk (Van Dijk 1962).



seven to give Ninos a somewhat more oriental feel. More often he is made the son of Belos, the most important god of Babylon. The connection between an Assyrian king and a Babylonian god may seem unexpected, Ashur being the head of the Assyrian pantheon and Ištar being the tutelary deity of Nineveh, but probably it did not bother Greek historians, as they were only vaguely aware of the difference between Assyrians and Babylonians, and did not know the deity Ashur. At the same time the beginning of the Assyrian empire is made simultaneous with the struggle between gods and titans, giving the story a semi-mythical character it did not possess in Ktesias. From a selfmade man, a son of nobody, as Assyrians and Babylonians would call him, Ninos became a son of the gods.

## 7.4 Belos and Ninos in Herodotos

In Herodotos' *Historiae* someone is mentioned whose name is Ninos, but this Ninos is not in any way connected with Assyria or Nineveh. Yet it is often stated that this Ninos, whose name is found in the genealogy of the Lydian kings (Hdt. 1.7), is the founder of Nineveh,<sup>117</sup> but it is not certain that he is in any way connected to the city of Nineveh. It is not even certain that he was mentioned in Herodotos' original text. Both Ninos and his father Belos are mentioned in a phrase which is lacking in the most reliable manuscripts.

### Translation<sup>118</sup>

The sovereignty of Lydia, which had belonged to the Heraklids, passed into the family of Kroisos,<sup>a</sup> called the Mermnadai, in the following way.<sup>b</sup> Kandaules, prince of Sardis, whom the Greeks call Myrsilos,<sup>c</sup> was descended from Alkaios, son of Herakles.<sup>d</sup> Agron was the first of the Heraklids to become king of Sardis.<sup>e</sup> Kandaules, son of Myrsos, was the last. The kings who ruled the country before Agron were descended from Lydos, son of Atys,<sup>f</sup> from whom the entire Lydian people, previously called Meionians, received their name.<sup>g</sup> The Heraklids, descended from Herakles and a slave-girl of Jardanos,<sup>h</sup> obtained power when their predecessors turned over the management of affairs to them because of an oracle. They reigned for twenty-two generations, a period of five hundred and five years, in which son received kingship from father, until the time of Kandaules, son of Myrsos.

### Notes

<sup>a</sup> Kroisos was the last king of Lydia. He reigned until the conquest of Lydia by the Persian king Cyrus (559-530), When Lydia was conquered by Cyrus is not certain: the traditional date is 547/6, based on the Nabonidus chronicle, but the interpretation of the chronicle is debated.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Asheri 2011: 79. It is sometimes thought that Ninos is also mentioned in Hdt. 2.150 (e.g. Weidner 1936; Drews 1973: 191 (n 192); Bichler 2004), but here the city of Nineveh is meant (Nesselrath 2001, review of Bichler 2000).

<sup>118</sup> The translation of Hdt 1.7 is my own.

<sup>119</sup> ABC chron. 7, col ii, line 16; Kuhrt 1997: 659; Briant 2002: 34-35, 882; Rollinger 2004.

<sup>b</sup> How Kandaules lost his kingdom to Gyges (ca 680 - ca 652) is told in Hdt. 1.8-12.

<sup>d</sup> Sometimes Alkaios is the name of Herakles' grandfather, sometimes of Herakles himself (Diod. 1.24.4), and in this case of his son.

<sup>e</sup> Behind Ἄγρων μὲν γὰρ, some manuscripts have the words ὁ Νίνου τοῦ Βήλου τοῦ Ἀλκαίου '[son] of Ninos, [grandson] of Belos, [great-grandson] of Alkaios', which create a connection between Agron and Alkaios. However, without these words the text is perfectly clear. It is difficult to decide whether they are original or not.

<sup>f</sup> Atys and Lydos are legendary ancestors of the Lydians (Hdt. 1.94, 7.74).

<sup>g</sup> Homer mentions the Meionians among the allies of the Trojans (Il. 2.864-966). He calls them ὑπὸ Τμώλῳ γεγαῶτες, born in the shadow of the Lydian mountain range Tmolos, but the identification of the Meionians with the Lydians was already debated in antiquity. At one point, Strabo (12.3.20) says that the Meionians (Μαίονες, Μήιονες) are identical to the Mysi (Μυσοί), but at another point he equates them to the Lydians (12.8.3).

<sup>h</sup> In other sources this 'slave-girl of Jardanos' is called Omphale, and she is the daughter of Jardanos (Diod. 4.31.6-8; Apoll. 2.6.3, 2.7.8).

## Discussion

In the *Historiae*, except in Hdt 1.7, Νίνοϛ is always the Assyrian capital Nineveh (1.102-103, 106, 178, 185, 193; 2.150). Herodotos knew that Nineveh was an Assyrian city, located on the river Tigris and captured by the Medes, but he does not say by whom it was founded. Only in Hdt 1.7, Ninos is a person. Explaining Hdt 1.7 makes a little excursion on Lydian history necessary. According to Herodotos there have been three dynasties of Lydian kings. The first one starts with Manes and Atys (Hdt. 1.7, 94; 4.45), who perhaps can be identified with the deities Men and Attis.<sup>120</sup> This

---

<sup>120</sup> Chrimes 1930: 91. Highly improbable according to Heubeck 1959: 31-32.

first dynasty was supplanted by a second one, the Heraklids. The first of this line to reign Lydia was Agron, the descendant of Herakles and a slave girl of Jardanos. Herodotos does not give the name of Alkaios' mother, but other authors call her Omphale and make her a daughter of Jardanos. Apollodoros, for example, tells the story that Herakles was sold as a slave to Omphale (2.6.3). She had been married to the Lydian king Tmolos and at his death had become queen of Lydia. The son of Herakles and Omphale was called Agelaos (2.7.8). According to Apollodoros, the last Lydian king Kroisos descended from Agelaos. According to Herodotos, however, the last of this dynasty descending from Herakles was Kandaules, to the Greeks also known as Myrsilos, the son of Myrsos. Herodotos tells a famous story about the way Kandaules lost his life and his throne to Gyges, the chief of his guard (1.8-12), who thereby became the first king of the third dynasty. This Gyges is the first of the Lydian kings mentioned by Herodotos who historically stands on a firm base. He is mentioned by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668-631/627 BC) as *Gugu* and perhaps he was known as *Gōg* to the prophet Ezekiel, who describes him as the ruler of *Maqōg*, a powerful nation in the North (Ezk. 38-39).<sup>121</sup> It is more difficult to give Gyges' predecessor his proper place in history. Myrsilos shows a remarkable resemblance to the Hittite king Muršili III, who lived eight centuries before Herodotos' time.<sup>122</sup> Muršili lost his throne to his nephew Hattušili III, who, like Gyges, had been chief of the guard before his elevation to the throne, and like Gyges, Hattušili was aided by a woman, the goddess Šaušga. Unfortunately, it is still unexplained how the story of a Hittite king from the thirteenth century BC was still known in the time of Herodotos, eight centuries later, because oral traditions seldom bridge such a long period and written testimonies from the intermittent period are not known.

However, the problem to be addressed here is the beginning of the Heraklid dynasty, not the end. Ninos being the son of Belos (Βῆλος) seems to strengthen the connection between Ninos and Mesopotamia, because Belos is the name of a Babylonian god well known to Herodotos (1.181-183). However, the presence of an Assyrian king and a Babylonian god in a Lydian genealogy needs an explanation. It

---

<sup>121</sup> Lipinski 1993.

<sup>122</sup> Kuhrt 1997: 258-263.

cannot be accepted at face value, as many scholars do.<sup>123</sup> Burkert has tried to give an explanation. He argues that Belos and Ninos were made ancestors of the second Lydian dynasty during the reign of Gyges.<sup>124</sup> Gyges, being a usurper who had murdered the last king of the preceding dynasty, sought to legitimise his reign by seeking the recognition of the powerful Assyrian king Ashurbanipal.<sup>125</sup> Therefore, the preceding dynasty was also thought to derive its legitimacy from Nineveh, which was expressed by making Belos – according to Burkert in this context the god of Nineveh, called by his title *Bēlu* – and Ninos, the founder of Nineveh, ancestors of this preceding dynasty. Herakles and Alkaios were added to this genealogy much later, in Kroisos' time, when Lydia's cultural and political orientation had turned towards Greece. However ingenious, for a number of reasons this explanation is not really convincing.

First, normally *Bēlu*, Greek Βῆλος, is Marduk, a Babylonian deity. The idea of *Bēlu* as the god of Nineveh is unusual, the goddess Ištar being the tutelary deity of Nineveh and Marduk of Babylon. Such confusion would perhaps be feasible in Herodotos' time, when Assyria and Babylonia were often confused, but it is less likely in Lydia in the seventh century, when the Assyrian empire still existed.

Second, Herakles, with whom the genealogy starts, is probably the Anatolian god Sandas under his Greek name.<sup>126</sup> Sandas is already found in Hittite inscriptions from the fourteenth and thirteenth century BC. His name is written <sup>d</sup>AMAR.UD, like Marduk's name in Mesopotamian sources, but it was pronounced Šantaš or Šandaš.<sup>127</sup> He was still worshipped in the Hellenistic era and perhaps even later in many regions in Asia Minor.<sup>128</sup> In Lydia he was known as Σανταś.<sup>129</sup> In Greek his

---

<sup>123</sup> How and Wells 1928: 57; Chrimes 1930: 91; Von Fritz 1936: 339; Kuhrt 1982: 540.

<sup>124</sup> Burkert 1995: 144-145.

<sup>125</sup> According to Fuchs (2010), Gyges sought help from the Assyrian king, because he felt threatened by the Cimmerians. Fuchs's explanation seems more likely.

<sup>126</sup> How and Wells 1928: 56.

<sup>127</sup> Kammenhuber 1990.

<sup>128</sup> Walton in *OCD* sv Sandas (1996); Melchert 2002.

<sup>129</sup> Gusmani 1964: 201.

name is transcribed as Σάνδων, Σάνδας or Σάνδης, often in combination with Ἡρακλῆς (e.g. *Lyd. Mag.* 3.64), or he is called just Ἡρακλῆς.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, it seems likely that Sandas-Herakles was part of the genealogy of Lydian kings from the start and not added later, as Burkert assumes. However, if Sandas is the ancestor of the Lydian kings, the presence of a second deity in the same genealogy, Belos, is puzzling, even more so, because he is the son of Alkaios, who himself is not a god. This difficulty can be overcome by assuming that Belos is an epithet of Sandas. Coins from the fourth century BC have been found, minted by two different Persian satraps in Tarsos, bearing the portrait of a deity and an Aramaic inscription *bl trz* 'Lord of Tarsus'.<sup>131</sup> It is known that Sandas was seen as founder of Tarsus and probably the deity on these coins is Sandas.<sup>132</sup> Perhaps *bl* or Βῆλος without the name of a city could also be used as an epithet of Sandas. Herodotos, or one of his predecessors, did not understand that Herakles and Belos were two names for the same deity and made them into two different persons. Hearing that sometimes Sandas-Herakles and sometimes Belos was mentioned as ancestor of the second Lydian dynasty, he solved the problem by incorporating them both.

If Herakles and Belos are identical, their sons Alkaios and Ninus are probably identical too and a connection between this Ninus and the city of Nineveh must be considered highly unlikely. Of course, this leaves the name Ninus unexplained. It could be a Semitic name: in Hebrew *nīn* means descendant and a name with *nīn* is attested from Phoenician.<sup>133</sup> As Belos is a Semitic name, a Semitic origin for Ninus is quite likely. However, the structure of Ninus is not very specific and a name like Ninus could originate from almost every language, but, whatever the origin of the name, there is clearly not much reason to assume that Ninus in 1.7 is the founder of Nineveh.

The somewhat disappointing conclusion is that Herodotos does not tell us anything about the founder of Nineveh. In 1.7 someone called Ninus is mentioned, but there

---

<sup>130</sup> Höfer 1915; Philipp in *RE* sv Sandon (1920).

<sup>131</sup> Hill 1963-1983: 164-165, 167-174; Head 1963: 730-731.

<sup>132</sup> Höfer 1915: 331-332.

<sup>133</sup> Benz 1972: 361.

is no reason to assume that he is the founder of Nineveh. In 2.150 Ninos is not mentioned at all. Perhaps Herodotos wanted to discuss the founding of Nineveh in his *Assyrian Logos*, which he promises in 1.106 and 1.184. However, the *Assyrian Logos* was probably never written, and if it was written, it has not been handed down to us.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, it remains a mystery whether Herodotos had any views on the founding of Nineveh. Probably he did not intend to write about the founding of Nineveh or Babylon, because in general Herodotos does not show much interest in founding stories. The reason is probably that founding stories belong to the mythical age, in which gods and heroes were directly involved in human history. Herodotos does not seem to have regarded this period as a subject fit for his historical enquiries. Heroes or gods such as Perseus and Herakles are sometimes mentioned in the *Histories* as founders of dynasties, but their exploits are not described. In the case of Nineveh there is another difficulty. Nineveh was laid waste by the Medes<sup>135</sup> and Herodotos could not pretend or suggest to have been there to make inquiries.

---

<sup>134</sup> Huxley 1965; Drews 1970; MacQueen 1978; Zawadzki 1984.

<sup>135</sup> Perhaps, the destruction of Nineveh was less radical than often thought (Dalley 2013: 185-202), but Greek (and many modern) historians believed that the city had been utterly destroyed.

## 7.5 Nimrod and Ninos

Both in Antiquity and in modern times, Nimrod and Ninos have sometimes been identified with each other. In Antiquity, the identification of Nimrod and Ninos is found in the *Chronicon Paschale* and the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*. It is likely that the similarity of the names Nimrod and Ninos and the fact that both were often seen as the first king on earth, or as the first tyrant, played an important role. The founding of Nineveh being attributed both to Nimrod and Ninos may also have been of influence, although in the LXX, Nimrod (Νεβρωδ) is not Nineveh's founder. In the modern period, the identification of Ninos and Nimrod has been defended by Speiser. According to Speiser, Ninos and Nimrod are both based on the memory of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244-1208). This Assyrian king has conquered Babylon. His deeds were immortalised in an epic, which could explain that his name was remembered. But the similarities between Tikulti-Ninurta, Ninos and Nimrod are not specific enough to justify these three characters being identified.

It has been shown in the preceding sections that Ninos is a Greek invention, and cannot be identified with a historical king in cuneiform literature, not with Tukulti-Ninurta I, Sargon, Sennacherib, or any other king that has been proposed. Ninos is a typical empire builder and city founder, the eponymous hero of the city of Nineveh, and not much more: the picture of Ninos in Greek literature remains colourless and sketchy. Nimrod's origin is more difficult to determine. The most likely candidates for the origin of Nimrod are the deity Ninurta and the Akkadian kings Sargon and Naram-Sin, but both proposals are not completely convincing, as shown in the previous sections. Yet, although they do not have the same origin, there are similarities between Nimrod and Ninos. According to Greek historiography, Ninos was the first king in the history of mankind to create an empire. According to Genesis, Nimrod was the first man on earth to become a mighty warrior, perhaps implicating that he was the first king. The institution of kingship and the creation of the first empire seem to have been regarded as Mesopotamian achievements, both by Greek historians and biblical writers, which is in accordance with the biblical image of the Assyrian and Babylonians as warlike and impetuous nations, but contrasts with the Greek image of these peoples as effeminate and decadent.



There is even more that connects the biblical hero Nimrod to Greek historiography: he is a foreign founder. Probably it is useful to make a distinction between foreign ancestors, such as Abraham, and foreign culture heroes or founders (Gr. οἰκισταί), such as Danaos, Kadmos and Moses.<sup>136</sup> Nimrod is a foreign founder of the second type. He is the son of Cush, which means that his origins lie in Africa. Even if originally Nimrod's father was the eponymous hero of the city of Kish or the nation of the Kassites, in the context of the Table of Nations, Cush is the eponymus hero of the Cushites. Nimrod becomes king of Babylonia, and then goes to Assyria and founds four cities, among which Kalhu and Nineveh, two of the most important Assyrian cities. In other words, Nimrod introduces kingship in Mesopotamia and city building in Assyria, which symbolises the cultural dependence of Assyria on its southern neighbour, and makes him a foreign founder of the same type as Danaos and Kadmos.

Foreign founders such as Abraham, Danaos, Kadmos and Moses probably symbolise that the Israelites and the Greeks saw themselves as young nations, compared with the Egyptians and Babylonians.<sup>137</sup> It is in this context not important whether these foreign founders represent an historical reality or not.<sup>138</sup> What matters is that the Greeks believed in foreigners who had founded cities and who had brought cultural accomplishments from Phoenicia and Egypt to Greece and that the Israelites and Judeans believed in men who had come from Egypt or Babylonia and brought their institutions and religion to Canaan. The author(s) of the Nimrod legend apparently also regarded Assyria as a young nation, dependant on the Babylonian civilisation, and this was symbolised in the figure of Nimrod.

---

<sup>136</sup> Weinfeld 1993: 19.

<sup>137</sup> Wazana 2005: 232 n19; Machinist 1994.

<sup>138</sup> Israel's ethnogenesis is a fiercely contested subject (an overview in Faust 2006: 170-187). Foreign founders like Abram and Moses are not archeologically discernible and do not play a role in this discussion.