The *Babyloniaca* of Berossos is an important as well as fascinating work, as it bridges two cultural milieus: Babylonian and Greek. It is a unique work in Mesopotamian historiography and a typical product of Hellenistic Greek historiography. Yet there is at present no in depth study of it. The present study aims to fill that lacuna.

In Part I, the focus is Berossos and his context. In Chapter 1, I present the few testimonies on his life. They date Berossos, whose Akkadian name was ‘Bēl-rē’û-šunu’, to the time of Alexander the Great, who ruled over Babylonia from 331 until his death in 323 BC. Berossos was a priest of Belos, i.e. Bēl-Marduk, the patron god of Babylon, which means that he was connected to the god’s temple complex in that city, the Esagila. Berossos dedicated his work to the Seleucid king Antiochus I (co-regent from 295/4 on; king 281-261 BC).

Berossos’ second life – his supposed departure for Cos, where he opened a school, his invention of a type of sundial, his statue set up by the Athenians – is in my view a forgery, linked to the inauthentic astronomical-astrological fragments that were ascribed to Berossos. Another legend makes him the father of one of the Sibyls. The chapter also includes an introduction to Berossos’ work, the *Babyloniaca*.

In Chapter 2, I describe Berossos’ political and cultural context. Berossos lived in an age of political change: the collapse of the Achaemenid empire, the ephemeral world empire of Alexander the Great, the emergence and consolidation of the Seleucid empire, which meant that Greek became the language of the new ruling elite in Babylonia. Babylonia was an urban culture and in its cities the temple was an important political and economic institution. The temple was de facto dependent on the Seleucid king, who supported it. The temple administration of Esagila represented the traditional Babylonian population vis-à-vis the Seleucid administration. Perhaps we should understand Berossos’ dedication of his work to Antiochus in this framework of interconnections between temple elite and Seleucids.

In Berossos’ time cuneiform culture was confined to the realm of tradition, religion and scholarship. It was fostered by an urban elite connected to the temple. Age-old canonical compositions that belonged to the Mesopotamian ‘stream of tradition’ were copied and studied. The temple was the centre of scholarship and knowledge: the Esagila employed scholars and probably had a large library. Scholars were trained in all branches of learning. The scribal profession was basically hereditary. This suggests that Berossos will have belonged to a family of scholars. Apart from this high cuneiform culture, there was also a popular culture in Babylonia, which used Aramaic as vernacular. This is very likely to have been Berossos’ mother tongue. Since Aramaic was written on perishable material, almost nothing has survived.
Babylonia was a multi-ethnic society. It is difficult to say whether and if so, to what extent, it was also multicultural. Cuneiform sources deal virtually exclusively with the traditional high culture; sources in other languages are not available. There are some hints that a mixed culture, mingling Babylonian and not-Babylonian elements, emerged in the course of time. Already before Alexander, Babylonians had encountered Greek culture. This process intensified dramatically after the Greco-Macedonian conquest. Due to the limitations of the sources, it is difficult to gauge how intercultural contacts developed. There is evidence of Greek culture in Babylon after it lost its status as imperial capital to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, but it is not possible to establish the degree of Hellenisation in Babylonia. We should be careful of drawing a sharp dividing line between Babylonian culture and Hellenism. Berossos demonstrates that both could be combined in one and the same person.

In Chapter 3, I make some general observations on Babylonian historiography. The Babylonians had no genre approximating to our idea of ‘historiography’. It seems that they had a cyclical concept of history in the sense that dynasties of kings came and went. There were clearly links with divination and astrology. A distinct profession of historian did not exist; the production of historical texts was part of the scribal tradition. I provide a detailed overview of the sources Berossos had at his disposal, which does not necessarily mean that he used them. They are king lists, chronicles, literary historical narratives and prophecies, (fictitious) royal letters, royal inscriptions and popular tales. The Dynastic Chronicle, which gave a mainly chronographic overview from the beginning of times until, at least, the middle of the 8th c. BC, is very likely to have been a prime source for Berossos. I argue that from the time of Nabonassar (747-734 BC), there was a running account which was used for the compilation of the Babylonian Chronicles on the Recent Past and the historical sections of the Astronomical Diaries. I end with some remarks about historiography in the time of Berossos. Writing historical documents took place in or around the temple. This was the environment where historical documents were composed, copied, studied and preserved in libraries. The large number of historical texts that have been preserved from the late period may hint at an increased interest in the past at that time. Foreign domination and the need to redefine Babylonian identity probably gave rise to this interest in the nation’s past. It is notable that not a few compositions from the Persian-Hellenistic periods treat Babylonian kings who liberated their country from foreign rule.

Chapter 4 treats Greek historiography. The distinction made by F. Jacoby between ethnography and local history is in a sense arbitrary: a historian like Berossos can be labelled as ‘ethnographer’ as well as ‘local historian’. Greek local historiography flourished in the Hellenistic period: cities and regions seemingly felt the need to redefine their identity within the new political and cultural constellation. The origin of a city and its mythological history were effective building blocks for creating a glorious past and helped shape a new identity. Taking primarily the Atheniographers as my example, I discuss some features of local historiography that could be relevant in analysing Berossos’ work. The other genre relevant for
Berossos was Greek ethnography. I give an outline of the development of this genre. A ‘classical’ historical ethnography consisted of 4 parts: 1) geography; 2) origin and primeval history; 3) historical overview; 4) customs. I single out the works of two older contemporaries of Berossos, Hecataeus of Abdera, who wrote an Aegyptiaca, and Megasthenes, author of an Indica. It is possible that Berossos knew these works and that they served him as models.

Already prior to Berossos, Greeks wrote about Babylonian history. I give an overview of these authors and what they wrote about Babylonia. Here, the accounts of Herodotus and Ctesias were very influential. I conclude the chapter by comparing Berossos with some other eastern writers, who produced a history of their people based on authentic local sources. More specifically, I compare Berossos’ work with those of the Egyptian Manetho, the Judaean Flavius Josephus and Philo of Byblos (in Phoenicia). These authors share similarities in form, contents and purpose.

Part II of this study is dedicated to the Babyloniaca. The work has only been preserved in fragments that have come down to us through a long and complex process of transmission. In Chapter 5, I give an overview of the text transmission. I present the ‘primary sources’, on which our text reconstruction is based and, where possible, I explain the motives for an author to cite Berossos. This should make us aware of the very biased view we have of the Babyloniaca. First, I reconstruct the ‘main path’ of the transmission. Our largest fragments derive from the lost epitome Alexander Polyhistor made of Berossos’ work in the first half of the first century BC. This abridgement was used by Flavius Josephus and the Church Father Eusebius of Caesarea (in his Praeparatio Evangelica and the first book of his Chronicle). This book is only known in an Armenian translation and the work of the Byzantine monk Syncellus. Alexander Polyhistor was almost certainly interested in paradoxographical anecdotes (wondrous tales), whereas Josephus and Christian authors used Berossos for apologetic or chronographic purposes: i.e., they wished to prove the veracity of the Old Testament or establish Biblical chronology. It is, therefore, no surprise that almost all of their citations from Berossos have a link to the Old Testament. Besides this ‘main path’, minor fragments are found in the works of other authors, both Christian and pagan. The mention of a festival in Babylon by the pagan author Athenaeus shows that the Babyloniaca was wider in scope than suggested by the fragments from the ‘main path’.

I end with a discussion of the, in my view inauthentic, astronomical-astrological fragments attributed to Berossos, which have survived in the works of pagan Greek and Roman scholars.

Chapter 6 deals with the reception of the Babyloniaca. We have no indication how the work was received by Berossos’ contemporaries. From the first century BC we have evidence that Berossos’ work circulated in Greek and Roman learned circles: it was known to encyclopaedic scholars, antiquarians and lexicographers. Jews and Christians read and studied the work for apologetic and chronological reasons. After the consolidation of Christianity, Berossos’ work, more specifically, the
mythological period, continued to be cited, as Eusebius’ *Chronicle* gained the status of a standard work of Christian chronography and, as a consequence, the excerpts from Berossos therein became part of Christian chronographic tradition. For this reason, material from Berossos, especially his antediluvian king list, found its way into Greek and Oriental Christian chronographies. Apart from the *Babyloniaca*, the character of Oannes enjoyed some fame in Antiquity.

In Chapter 7, I defend my decision to use a new arrangement of the fragments. Unlike Jacoby, I give priority to the Greek text of Syncellus, alternatively Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica*, instead of the Armenian translation of Eusebius’ *Chronicle*, as the latter contains translation errors and further corruption. Since the fragments from Abydenus in fact derive from Alexander Polyhistor-Berossos, I have placed each of them after the relevant fragment from the latter. Finally, in accordance with their contents, I have split up some of Jacoby’s fragments and arranged them where they very likely belonged in Berossos’ original text. The result of this new arrangement is shown in a table of concordance with Jacoby and Verbrugghe & Wickershame. The edition, with Dutch translation, of the testimonies and fragments in this new arrangement is presented in Chapter 8.

Part III – the centre piece of the present study – is an in depth commentary on the testimonies and fragments. Where necessary, I first tackle text critical problems and explain the context in order to contribute to a better understanding of the fragment. The focus of my analysis is to search for the sources Berossos used or could have used. If these sources can be traced, I compare them with Berossos’ version. This should lead to insights on how he dealt with his sources.

The main results of my analysis of the testimonies (T 1-11) are presented in Chapter 1 of this study (see above).

Berossos began his work with a proem in which he introduced himself and his sources, very probably stressing their reliability (F 1a-b). Such an introduction is unknown for Mesopotamian works, but quite common in Greek ones. After this, Berossos describes the land of Babylonia, its geography, fauna, flora and population. This geographical section is one of the constituents of a Greek historical-ethnographic work and is in this sense typically Greek.

After stating that the first men lived like wild animals, Berossos continued with the story of how the fish-man Oannes civilised primitive men. This account is based on the Mesopotamian tradition of the antediluvian *apkallû* (sages), mediators between the wise god Enki/Ea and humankind. The first and most important of them was Uan(na), whose name Berossos transcribed as ‘Oannes’. It is possible that Berossos’ portrayal of Oannes is influenced by the Greek topos of the ‘culture hero’. Since Oannes surpasses the ‘culture heroes’ of other civilisations in terms of his antiquity and after him nothing more was invented, Berossos seems to imply that all other nations derived their civilisation from Babylonia.

In his account of the primeval chaos and the creation of the universe and humankind – a story which Berossos surprisingly attributes to Oannes, he follows
a tradition close to the so-called Babylonian Epic of Creation, Enūma Elish. The aetiology that man is intelligent, because he is formed from the blood of a god is an elucidation of a passage in the Epic of Atraḫāsīs. The allegorical explanation of the primeval chaos and the myth reflects Greek philosophical concepts. It is not clear whether this explanation goes back to Berossos himself. If so, it proves that he was also acquainted with Greek philosophy. The second version of the creation of the universe contains Babylonian features, but has clearly been adapted by Jews or Christians. It must remain uncertain whether this second account goes back to Berossos or is a later interpolation.

F 1c-d summarises the primeval chaos and the organisation of the world by Belos, as described in F 1a-b. This god surrounded Babylon with a wall. In accordance with Enūma Elish, Berossos very likely also stated that the city was founded by Belos.

F 1e is a fragmentary entry from a glossary written on a papyrus (provenance: Oxyrhynchus in Egypt).

F 2, in which Berossos describes the Sacaea, a Saturnalia-like festival in Babylon, is a very important fragment, as it clearly demonstrates that the Babyloniaca was wider in its scope than the excerpts from Josephus and Christian writers would indicate. This fragment from Book 1 very likely proves that Berossos include a section on Babylonian customs in his first book – one of the constituents of a Greek ethnography. Since the extant sources, i.e., the cuneiform documents, seldom treat everyday culture, it is not possible to identify the Sacaea with a Babylonian feast. The second book of the Babyloniaca opened with an overview of the antediluvian kings and their sages (F 3a-d). Berossos here closely follows the Mesopotamian tradition of the antediluvian kings, as it is attested in several king lists. The list of their sages refers to the seven antediluvian apkallu’s, fish-cloaked sages, whose names have been preserved in incantations and the Hellenistic ‘Apkallu List’. Whereas the Dynastic Chronicle lists 9 kings and 5 cities, Berossos’ list contains 10 kings and only 3 cities. I argue that Berossos’ text originally had the same numbers as the Dynastic Chronicle. In the process of transmission his list of 5 cities has been reduced to 3. Since one of the 10 kings listed actually reigned after the Flood, I assume that Jewish or Christian users inserted this name in Berossos’ list in order to fabricate a correspondence with the ten Old Testament patriarchs. Several kings are labelled as ‘Chaldaean’. In doing this, Berossos aimed to emphasise their autochthony – a qualification that in the Greek world enhanced the prestige of a nation.

In F 4a-e, the account of the Flood, Berossos follows in broad lines the Babylonian Flood Story, as we know it from the Gilgamesh Epic or the Epic of Atraḫāsīs. These stories do not mention the burying of all writings in Sippar; nevertheless there are indications that it reflects a genuinely Mesopotamian tradition. Some narrative elements – the date of the beginning of the Flood, the muddied claws of the second set of released birds, the return of the survivors to Babylonia – are not found in the cuneiform sources. These elements, however, occur in Old Testament tradition. I assume that both Berossos and these Biblical tradition go back to a common
source. The paradoxographical note on the remains of the ark (F 4a-e) probably also represents a popular tradition.

F 5a presents an overview of Babylonian dynasties after the Flood until Tiglath-pileser III (Phulos) and Sennacherib. This part of the *Babyloniaca* has been heavily epitomised and distorted. As the commentary of Eusebius and the fragment itself indicate, Berossos originally listed the names and regnal years of each king and grouped them into dynasties, giving the number of kings and totals of regnal years. Berossos here follows Babylonian chronographic practice, as it is, e.g., attested by the *Babylonian King List A* and the *Dynastic Chronicle*. Because of the corrupt text transmission, it is not possible to identify the extant dynasties, except for the Medes, who can be identified with the Guti (22nd c. BC). Berossos seems to have made a distinction between autochthonous and foreign rulers.

F 5b is only distantly reminiscent of Berossos’ text. It shows that Christian historians developed a method to reduce the myriad regnal years of Babylonian kings to normal solar years.

F 6 is an *interpretatio Biblica* by Josephus, who identifies someone mentioned by Berossos with Abraham. It is not clear whom Berossos meant.

F 7a indicates that Berossos’ overview of kings was mainly an enumeration of names and regnal years probably down to the reign of Nabonassar and gave hardly any information about their deeds. This may reflect the dearth of material Berossos had to deal with for this period: many early kings were no more than mere names in king lists. F 7b is a fabricated explanation for this dearth of sources: king Nabonassar destroyed the ‘res gestae’, the deeds of his predecessors. It could in fact allude to a new phase in Babylonian historiographical writing that is assumed to have taken place in the reign of Nabonassar: from his time events were systematically recorded in the Babylonian Chronicles on the Recent Past. It is very likely that the reign of Nabonassar marked the end of Book 2.

F 8a-e gives in some detail an overview of Babylonian history from the end of the 8th to the end of the 7th c. BC. For this period Berossos used Babylonian Chronicles, as is demonstrated by the correspondences in contents and phraseology. The historical core of his account of Sennacherib’s campaign against Greeks attacking Cilicia goes back to the king’s Cilician campaign in 696 BC. Berossos’ story is, however, mixed with traditions about Ionians raiding the coasts of SW Anatolia and Syria in the Neo-Assyrian period. Sennacherib’s foundation of Tarsus and erection of a monument resemble the classical stories about the epitaph of Sardanapallos, pointing to a common source, which was, in my view, of Babylonian origin. The end of Sarakos (Sîn-šarra-iškun), the last Assyrian king who set himself and his palace on fire, resembles the Ctesian story about the fall of Sardanapallos and the fall of Sarmuge (Šamaš-šuma-ukîn) in an Aramaic papyrus from Egypt. The historical core of this episode is the long-drawn out struggle between Nabopolassar and Assyria, as recorded in Babylonian Chronicles. Berossos gives an abbreviated version. Whereas the Chronicles make clear that a Median-Babylonian coalition
defeated Assyria, Berossos attributes the victory to Nabopolassar alone. He follows a late tradition, attested in some (fictitious) royal letters, that presents the war as a conflict between the Babylonian king and Sîn-šarra-iškun. There are no sources confirming the marriage of Nabopolassar’s son Nebuchadnezzar II with the daughter of his Median ally.

The historical core of the victory Nebuchadnezzar gained over the rebellious satrap of Coele Syria, Phoenicia and Egypt (F 9a.1-2) goes back to the Battle of Carchemish, when the Babylonian crown-prince defeated an Egyptian army and broke Egyptian domination of the Levant. The deviations in Berossos’ account (e.g. his presentation of the Egyptian pharaoh as a rebellious satrap) probably refers to a Babylonian ideological tradition according to which Babylonia was legitimate heir to Assyria, which once controlled these regions. It is possible that Berossos aimed to support Seleucid claims on Coele Syria and Phoenicia, then occupied by the Ptolemies.

The extensive building activities the king undertook in Babylon are confirmed by the king’s own inscriptions and archaeological research. It is very plausible that Berossos used, the ‘Basalt Stone Inscription’ or a text close to it. Both Berossos and that inscription agree that Nebuchadnezzar built his large and splendid palace in only 15 days. Neither cuneiform sources nor archaeological research can prove the existence of the ‘Hanging Garden(s)’ in Babylon. I conclude that this story was originally Babylonian, possibly referring to an existing garden or building. F 9a.1 also demonstrates that Berossos was acquainted with Greek historiography, as he censures those Greek authors who falsely ascribed the foundation of Babylon and its magnificent buildings to Semiramis – a view propagated by Ctesias.

After the building activities in Babylon, Berossos gave an overview of the king’s other constructions in Babylonia from north to the south (F 9b-c). The large reservoir above Sippar – which resembles stories in Herodotus and Ctesias – probably refers to the defensive wall the king built in that region. F 9d-e confirms the king’s restoration of the walls of Babylon. F 9f-h are short notices by Christian writers.

After the death of Nebuchadnezzar, Berossos relates the court intrigues under his successors (F 10a-d). Unlike the Babylonian Chronicles, Berossos’ account is more narrative and expresses a judgement on individual kings. The main part of his account (e.g. the end of Amēl-Marduk and the marriage of his sister with Neriglissar) can not be confirmed by other sources, but there are no indications to doubt the historicity of these events. The fall of Lābāši-Marduk and the rise to power of Nabonidus very likely parallels the account in the fragmentary ‘Babylon Stele’ of Nabonidus, implying that Berossos here followed a pro-Nabonidus tradition. The end of Nabonidus’ reign and the conquest of Babylonia by Cyrus the Great, as recorded by Berossos, follows in general lines the account of the ‘Nabonidus Chronicle’. The few discrepancies between the two are difficult to harmonise. Berossos’ remark that Cyrus destroyed the outer walls is contradicted by the archaeological evidence. The exile of Nabonidus finds a parallel in the Hellenistic
Dynastic Prophecy.
Cyrus’ death on the battle field (F 11) is very possibly historically correct. The list of his Achaemenid successors has been heavily shortened. F 12, dealing with the introduction by Artaxerxes II of the cult of Anaïtis in the satrapal capitals of the Achaemenid empire, shows that Berossos treated the Achaemenid period in some detail. Although the introduction of this cult by Artaxerxes II can not be confirmed by other sources, its historicity is generally accepted. F 13 deriving from book 3 of the *Babyloniaca*, is another very fragmentary entry from the above mentioned glossary. F 15 is also an entry in a lexicon, that of Hesychius. It gives the name of the female adorner of the spouse of Bēl-Marduk, here equated with Hera. It is known that the Babylonian goddess had a court, but it is not possible to identify her “female adorner”.

The importance of F 14 lies in the fact that it clearly shows that Berossos treated the Babylonian kings from the very first one, Aloros, to Alexander the Great. F 16 and 17 are minor fragments and do not adduce new data.

In my analysis of the astronomical fragments ascribed to Berossos (F 18-23), I conclude that they are not authentic. The idea that astronomers grouped the stars into constellations and gave them names (F 20) is not Babylonian. The doctrine of the cyclical destruction of the universe by the conflagration (*ekpyrosis*) or a flood (F 22) is a well-known Greco-Roman concept, but unknown for Babylonia. There is no evidence that the lunar theory which explains lunar phases and eclipses (F 21a-e) had a Babylonian origin. The same is true for the astrological doctrine to determine man’s maximal age on the base of the rising times of three succeeding zodiacal signs (F 23a-b). It can, however, not be excluded that Berossos indeed wrote on Babylonian astronomy/astrology, as Greek ethnographies generally treat the intellectual accomplishments of a people. In this regard, the age-old Babylonian observations Berossos mentioned (F 19) could be genuine, but the number of years given is problematic.

In my general conclusion I conclude that Berossos was the right man in the right place: being a priest and connected to the temple of Esagila Berossos had access to cuneiform sources and was able to read them. The temple elite, to which he belonged, had connections with the Seleucid administration, which could have prompted him to compose his work.

In the process of transmission the *Babyloniaca* has been heavily epitomised and sometimes distorted. What remains, is partial and biased; in our study of the text we should always keep this in mind.

Berossos used a variety of sources and, as far we can judge, he follows his Babylonian sources closely. It results in a glorifying portrait of Babylonian history and civilisation. It is possible that Berossos aimed to support the ruling Seleucid dynasty.
In the Epilogue I address a witty anecdote in the historiography of Groningen. Berossos, as he was forged by Annius of Viterbo (end 15th c.), was used to prove the origin of the Frisians. This ‘Berosus Chaldaeus’, who enjoyed enormous popularity in the 16th c., became the subject of controversy between humanists.