

## REVIEW

### ALIEN WISDOM

John Dillery, *Clio's Other Sons: Berossus and Manetho*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015. Pp. xxxviii + 494. Hardback, \$85.00. ISBN 978-0-07227-9.

**C***lio's Other Sons* is the culmination of John Dillery's writing on Berossus and Manetho for almost twenty years. This engrossing and well-argued book consists of a lengthy preface, an introductory chapter that sets out the historical and historiographical contexts for the study, then six chapters divided into two sections: 'The Vectors of History: Time and Space' and 'Narrative History'. An 'After Words' treats the late Hellenistic Jewish writer, Demetrius the Chronographer, by way of contrast: his main figures, Berossus and Manetho, are writing types of narrative histories that lacked models from their indigenous cultures, while Demetrius attempted to conform his received tradition of the Hebrew Bible to what seems to have become a universalizing type of Greek chronographic writing.

Alexander may have conquered vast swathes of the Persian Empire, but he did not live long enough to consolidate his rule. It was left to his generals who partitioned it to devise region-specific modes of governing. In the earliest days of their rule the Seleucids in Persia and the Ptolemies in Egypt turned to native elites to facilitate their new regimes, and in each place a figure emerged who wrote a chronological history of his respective world—Mesopotamia and Egypt—but in Greek and thus for Greeks. Berossus was a native Babylonian priest of Marduk who wrote a *History of the Babylonian Empire* around 290 BCE, under Antiochus I. Manetho was a native Egyptian priest from Sebenny-tus who wrote under the first Ptolemies (323–245 BCE). He has been credited with a history of Egypt, an *Against Herodotus*, and several tracts on Egyptian religion. Dillery argues that both men were analogous to the Greek 'friends' (*philoi*) of the crown found within the courts of the Successors. The easier argument is for Manetho, because Dillery can point to highly placed contemporary Egyptian priests who left accounts of their services to the crown, e.g., Udjahorresne and Petosiris (36–41). Berossus is more problematic, not the least because the evidence for his presence or for others like him within the Antiochene court is slim.

Despite the fact that they are both writing chronological accounts of their country's history from 'the beginning' to their here and now, structured as lists of monarchs interspersed with significant events within a reign, Dillery works

hard to distinguish the two: particularly interesting is his treatment of the fish-man sage Oannes in Berossus (59–79) and Manetho's innovations on the king-list (171–2). But their very pairing as Clio's 'other' sons acts as a centripetal force to bind them together as outsiders appended to an already formed intellectual tradition, and inevitably we see them as more alike in agendas than they may have been. And this is Dillery's central argument: that the two wrote their respective histories under the stimulation of Greek historical writers like Hecataeus of Miletus, Herodotus, Hecataeus of Abdera, and Ctesias, who had at earlier stages written about Babylonian and Egyptian culture for Greeks. Whether we view the writings of Berossus and Manetho as essentially commissioned by the crown for propagandistic purposes, or to make their cultures more explicable to colonizing Greeks, or as a native desire to stake a claim for the priority and traditions of their respective cultures in the face of foreign conquest, or some mix of the three, the fact remains that they survive today only in fragments and only because they have been co-opted by writers like the Jewish Josephus or the later Christian chronographers Eusebius and George the Syncellus, who did so manifestly in service of their own agendas. What remains is capable of being assembled in many different ways.

Dillery negotiates the morass of transmission and reception of the fragmentary material that now make up Berossus and Manetho with sensitivity, but the very nature of his task means that there is much that a reader can disagree with. And, of course, he is writing from the inside, as a Greek historian who necessarily filters his subjects through his own understanding and valuation of prior Greek historical writing.<sup>1</sup> He also negotiates Babylonian and Egyptian sources well, using to good purpose the arguments of Near Eastern scholars such as Amélie Kuhrt, Stephanie Dalley, Kim Ryholt, and Jan Assman.

Dillery's Part Two on 'Time' and 'Space' proceeds through the assemblage of discrete facts (and factoids) to bring the reader to his conclusions. Though the individual data points are not always significant and often incoherent as a result of transmission, his arguments are carefully made and are, on the whole, persuasive. A key part of his chapter on Time is the composition and function of king lists. He begins with the vital point that king lists are meant to promote individual reigns and thus will vary not only in which predecessors are included, but also in how the prehistoric and mythic past is incorporated. Berossus, he argues, historicizes the Flood myth (76–9) and includes sages within his lists (66), while Manetho inserts the Trojan War into

<sup>1</sup> Dillery's objections to Ian Moyer's work obviously stem in part from Moyer's earlier critique of him, but Moyer is the one scholar writing about Herodotus and Manetho who is, in fact, a trained Egyptologist. I wish Dillery had engaged more thoroughly with Moyer's contentions that Herodotus gained his own innovative sense of human causality from the Egyptian organization of the past.

his chronology (xxx–xxxi). He begins his chapter on ‘Space’ with a discussion of the ‘discovery’ of an ancient book within a wall or temple space that contains religious, ceremonial, or prophetic information (123–33). Some of these discoveries are genuine, but others are pseudepigraphic, intended to confer a sense of continuity with an ancient past.<sup>2</sup> For Berossus, he argues that Babylon is central in both political and symbolic terms (133–52). He is surely right in locating Manetho within the Egyptian House of Life, as priest/scribe probably at Heliopolis. Only within the Egyptian scribal milieu would he have had access to the king lists and narratives that formed his history.<sup>3</sup>

In Part Three on ‘Narrative History’ Dillery first turns to a discussion of how Josephus, who is the main source for both Berossus and Manetho, repurposed their writings, and then dedicates a chapter to analyzing the narratives of each man. Much of this material has already appeared in the earlier chapters, but now reordered to make more concretely historiographical points. Berossus, he concludes, had a ‘deterministic’ view of history that led him to see Alexander’s conquest as inevitable and that ‘the transfer of imperial power was a process working through time and not (by implication) a spasmodic series of violent upheavals’ (298–9). Citing Arnaldo Momigliano and Fergus Millar, for whom the ‘concept of succession of world empires was a Greek development’, he concludes that it may have led to the apocalyptic strain that is found in both Berossus and Manetho.

Long and complex in arguments and details, *Clio’s Other Sons* is well worth the time it takes to read and it sets a higher standard for those engaged in writing about the Hellenistic world of non-Greeks.

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<sup>2</sup> This does not seem to have been a Greek narrative habit before the Second Sophistic, when we see it appear in the fictions of Antonius Diogenes and Dictys of Crete.

<sup>3</sup> Although Dillery does not discuss it, Manetho’s tract on Egyptian religion must also have depended on arcane knowledge only accessible to a priest within a temple complex.