Myth or Reality?
A Geographical Examination of Semiramis' Journey in Diodorus

Iris Sulimani

In the first five books of his *Bibliotheke*, dedicated to myths, Diodorus Siculus in the first century BCE describes journeys made by gods and culture-heroes. During their campaigns Diodorus' heroes traversed vast lands, conquered countries and contributed to the welfare of their inhabitants. The routes taken by these heroes have hardly been studied in detail. My aim in this paper is to argue that Diodorus did not depict merely imaginary paths and sites, but that he drew on real geographic information and modelled the tracks of his heroes on journeys made by historical figures. Semiramis' voyage illustrates my point well.[1]

In the course of her journey Semiramis passed through several countries in Asia and Africa, all of which (with one exception) had been visited by Alexander the Great. The Persian kings, Alexander's predecessors, had also toured most of these countries, as had the Hellenistic kings and Roman leaders, his successors. This is not surprising since, as we shall see in the examination of Semiramis' voyage, she travelled along existing main roads, mostly trade routes, and, as a rule, stopped at the area's principal sites, whether cities, mountains or rivers. In the following discussion I propose to trace Semiramis' route and to examine every road and each site that she visited, using information found in various sources to show their importance, especially in Diodorus' own time.

Diodorus devotes seven chapters to Semiramis' journey.[2] The beginning of the tale is clear: Diodorus says that after Semiramis had completed the building of Babylon, she set out for Media with a great force (II.13.1). The preparations made by Semiramis for the expedition are not mentioned, unlike in the cases of Osiris (I.17.3) and Sesostris (I.54.1-

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[1]   On Semiramis and her legend see, among other studies, C.F. Lehmann-Haupt, 'Semiramis', in *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, W.H. Roscher (ed.), Leipzig, 1910, vol. 4, 678-702; W. Nagel, *Ninus und Semiramis in Sage und Geschichte*, Berlin, 1982; G. Pettinato, *Semiramis: Herrin über Assur und Babylon. Biographie*, Zurich and Munich, 1988. On Semiramis' ports of call see I. Borzsák, 'Semiramis in Zentralasien', *AAntHung* 24, 1976, 51-62.

[2]   The *Persica* of Ctesias of Cnidus was Diodorus' main source. In my opinion, however, Diodorus did not rely entirely on Ctesias' work, but added to it information from other sources as well as his own thoughts and ideas. The question of Diodorus' sources, albeit an important one, is beyond the scope of this paper. I have dealt with it in I. Sulimani, 'Journeys of Gods and Culture-heroes in the *Bibliotheke* of Diodorus Siculus, Books I-V: The Concept of the Pagan Mission in the Hellenistic Era', Ph.D. thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2004 (in Hebrew). The bibliography on Diodorus' *Quellenforschung* is relatively large. See, for example, E. Schwartz, 'Diodorus Siculus', in *RE*, A. Pauly, G. Wissowa (eds.), vol. 9 (V.1), 1903, cols. 663-704, and recently K. Sacks, *Diodorus Siculus and the First Century*, Princeton, 1990, passim; K. Sacks, 'Diodorus and his Sources: Conformity and Creativity', in *Greek Historiography*, S. Hornblower (ed.), Oxford, 1994, 213-32.

6), but Diodorus gives a detailed account of the various stages of her journey (II.13-14, 16-19).[3] The end of the voyage is also explicit: having failed to conquer India, Semiramis returned to Bactra and a short while later disappeared from the face of the earth (II.19.10-20.2).

Semiramis set out from Babylon to Media. On her way through Media she paused at Mount Bagistanus (Behistun) and the town of Chaoun (II.13.1-3), and then continued to the Zarcaeus (Zagros) mountain range and the city of Ecbatana (II.13.5-6). She obviously travelled from one prominent site to another. The first stage of her journey began in Babylon, the capital of Assyria, and ended in Ecbatana, the capital of Media. Strabo uses the word μητρόπολις escribe both cities' status (XVI.1.16 C 743, XI.13.1 C 522). We will discuss Babylon first. Herodotus names Babylon βασίλειον (I.178), as does Strabo (II.1.31 C 84; XV.3.9 C 731), and Pliny employs the term *caput* in order to emphasize Babylon's central position (*NH* VI.121). But evidence of the Assyrian capital's importance is not limited to the various titles that the Greek and Roman writers employed in order to characterise it. The considerable interest shown, over the centuries, by kings and leaders in Babylon is further proof. Cyrus conquered Babylon and lived there for seven months out of twelve (Hdt. I.188-191; Xen. *Cyr.* VII.5.15-34, 6.22). After besieging the city for a long period of time, Darius I captured it, and later restored and repopulated it (Hdt. III.150-160).

Other leaders used Babylon as a military base. Artaxerxes III assembled his forces in Babylon before going to battle and returned there victorious (Diod. XVI.42.1, 43.1, 51.3). Darius III, during his war against Alexander, held a meeting of his generals in Babylon and concentrated all his auxiliary allied forces — Scythian, Bactrian and Indian — in the city (Diod. XVII.31.1-2, 6, 39.1, 53.3; Curt. III.2.2, IV.6.2, 9.2). Alexander followed in the footsteps of the Persians (Curt. X.1.16, 19) and, impressed by Babylon, he extended his stay in the city and chose it as his royal seat in preference to Susa. He set up an administrative centre in Babylon and planned to continue to rebuild the city (Diod. XVII.64.3-4, 108.4; Strabo XV.3.9 C 731, XVI.1.5 C 738; Curt. V.1.36; Arr. VII.17.2). After Alexander's death, the *diadochi* fought fiercely to gain control over Babylon and its surroundings (Diod. XIX.12.3, 55.2-3, 100.4-7, XX.47.5; Paus. I.16.1; Curt. X.8.11).

Babylon is depicted as a strong, wealthy and celebrated city (Hdt. I.178; Curt. V.1.7). Built on the banks of the Euphrates River, with easy access to the Tigris, it occupied an excellent strategic position (Curt. IV.9.6; Plin. *NH* VI.124). Babylon was seen by the ancients as one of the ornaments of the kingdom, *ornamenta regni* (i.e. of the Persian kingdom), which were considered 'the cause of war', *causa belli* (Curt. V.I.7), as well as 'the prize of the war', τοῦ πολέμου τὸ ἆθλον (Arr. III.16.2). But Babylon, according to the ancient authors, lost much of its fame during the Hellenistic era due to its competition with Seleucia, which was founded on the banks of the Tigris River at the end of the fourth century BCE. As a consequence, a segment of Babylon's population was moved to Seleucia, a large part of it abandoned, ἡ δ' ἔρημος ἡ πολλή (Strabo XVI.1.5 C 738, cf. XVI.1.16 C 743) and Babylon became a desert, *ad solitudinem rediit* (Plin. *NH* VI.121-122; see also Paus. I.16.3, VIII.33.3; Diod. II.9.9).[4]

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3   In chapter 15 Diodorus cut off the sequence of Semiramis' deeds, launching into a long-winded exposition of Ethiopian burial customs.

4   The transfer of population from Babylon to Seleucia is also attested by a Babylonian source which describes Antiochus I's reign (276-274 BCE): S. Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts*, London, 1924, 150-59; M.M. Austin, *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman*

Yet there is evidence suggesting that Babylon continued to be a well-organised city under the Seleucids. None of the sources claims that the city's population was transferred *en masse* to Seleucia. Pausanias, for example, asserts that Seleucus I 'brought to it (i.e. to Seleucia) Babylonian colonists', Βαβυλωνίους...ἐπαγόμενος ἐς αὐτὴν συνοίκους. His phrasing alludes to the effort made to populate the newly established town with Babylonians, who were relocated to Seleucia, a common enough procedure when founding a new colony (I.16.3). Ammianus Marcellinus mentions both Babylon and Seleucia as two of Assyria's most notable towns, without so much as hinting that the latter appropriated the place of Babylon (XXIII.6.23).

In addition, there is some physical evidence to indicate that Babylon was in fact transformed into a Greek polis. Archaeological excavations in Babylon have uncovered a Greek ostrakon dating from the first half of the third century BCE. According to the ostrakon, several army units commanded by Greek officers — referring, perhaps, to a Seleucid garrison — were stationed in the city.[5] A clay tablet containing a Greek inscription, from 110 or 109 BCE, was also found. The inscription, which records the names of the winners of sports competitions held in the city, bears witness to the existence of a gymnasium.[6] The town also supported a Greek theatre, built at the beginning of the Hellenistic period, and later renovated by the Seleucids.[7] Finally, according to Diodorus, within the city there was also an *agora*, which he mentions when describing Babylon's destruction at the hands of the Parthians in 126 BCE (XXXIV/XXXV.21; cf. Poseidonius, Jacoby, *FGrHist* IIA, 87 F 13; Iust. XLII.1.3).[8]

An inscription dating from 166 BCE, hailing Antiochus IV as the saviour of Asia and the founder of the city, σωτῆρος τῆς 'Ασίας καὶ κτίστου τῆς πόλεως (*OGIS*, 253), has led scholars to argue that this king was the founder of the Greek polis in Babylon.

Conquest, Cambridge, 1981, 240-41, no. 141. However, according to the same source, Babylon's large temple was rebuilt, evidence that there was no intention to liquidate the city. See also Austin (n. 4), 310-11, no. 189, and below. There are some scholars who accept the picture painted by the Greek sources: S.K. Eddy, *The King is Dead: Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism 334-31 B.C.*, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1961, 115-16; G.M. Cohen, *The Seleucid Colonies*, Wiesbaden, 1978 (Historia Einzelschriften 30), 18; W.W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, Cambridge, 1951, 60-62; S.A. Pallis, *The Antiquity of Iraq*, Copenhagen, 1956, 30; E.R. Bevan, *The House of Seleucus*, New York, 1966 (1st ed. London, 1902), vol. 1, 253-55; J.D. Grainger, *Seleukos Nikator: Constructing a Hellenistic Kingdom*, London, 1990, 146, 190.

5   S.M. Sherwin-White, 'A Greek Ostrakon from Babylon of the Early Third Century B.C.', *ZPE* 47, 1982, 51-70.

6   *SEG* 7, 1934, no. 39; S.M. Sherwin-White, 'Seleucid Babylonia: A Case-Study for the Installation and Development of Greek Rule', in *Hellenism in the East*, A. Kuhrt, S. Sherwin-White (eds.), London, 1987, 21; Sherwin-White (n. 5), 66; S. Sherwin-White, A. Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire*, Berkeley, 1993, 157. See also G.E. Kirk, 'Gymnasium or Khan? A Hellenistic Building at Babylon', *Iraq* 2, 1935, 223-31.

7   See, for example, O. Mørkholm, *Antiochus IV of Syria*, Copenhagen, 1966, 117-18; S. Sherwin-White (n.6), 20-21; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (n. 6), 155-56; M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, Oxford, 1959 (1st ed. 1941), vol. 2, 1049, vol. 3, 1586-87 n. 17.

8   Excavations in the site also uncovered various Greek artifacts. For details and references see Sherwin-White (n. 6), 21.

However, this cannot be accepted without several reservations. First, the inscription does not mention Babylon by name. Second, the inscription was not discovered *in situ*. Finally, since it was common in the Hellenistic era to honour kings with the title of founder, κτίστης, there is no certainty that Antiochus IV is meant here. The polis in Babylon may well have been founded before his time.[9]

On the whole, it would appear that while Babylon lost some of its former eminence, it remained one of the Seleucid kingdom's important cities. It possessed a mint, which continued to function and issue its own coins, even after Seleucus I's coronation and the establishment of Seleucia on the Tigris. Visiting Babylon, Antiochus I offered sacrifices to the city's gods and restored its temple. During Seleucus III's reign, local religious festivals were celebrated in the city. Finally, there are signs that the town served as one of the Seleucid kingdom's administrative centres.[10]

In view of the above, is it hardly surprising that Diodorus decided to choose Babylon as the starting point of Semiramis' voyage. Nor is it surprising that he devoted several chapters to the description of the city and its history (II.7.2-10.6). He confesses that in his day Babylon was only partly populated and that much of its land had been turned over to agriculture (II.9.9). Yet this does not contradict the conclusion according to which Babylon was still a living town in the Hellenistic era. Diodorus relates to the diminished status of Babylon but he offers his readers an image of Babylon far different from the miserable picture of an impoverished and destitute city painted by Strabo (XVI.1.5 C 738).

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9   See Sherwin-White (n. 5), 64-6; Sherwin-White (n. 6), 20; Sherwin-White, Kuhrt (n. 6), 156-58; G.J.P. McEwan, *Priest and Temple in Hellenistic Babylonia*, Wiesbaden, 1981, 195-96; compare Mørkholm (n. 7), 117-18; Tarn (n. 4), 187-88; V. Tscherikower, *Die Hellenistischen Städtegründungen von Alexander dem Grossen bis auf die Römerzeit*, Leipzig, 1927 (Philologus Supplementband 19 Heft 1), 92 no. 19, and also R.J. van der Spek, 'The Babylonian City', in *Hellenism in the East*, A. Kuhrt, S. Sherwin-White (eds.), London, 1987, 65-70, who maintains that Babylon was and remained a traditional Mesopotamian city, and that, despite his colonizing policy across Babylonia, even Antiochus IV did not transform it into a Greek polis.

10   See E.T. Newell, *The Coinage of the Eastern Seleucid Mints from Seleucus I to Antiochus III*, New York, 99-106; A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, TCS 5, New York, 1975, 119-24, 283-84, nos. 11-13b, esp. 11, 13, and 22-28, 277-78; S.M. Sherwin-White, 'Babylonian Chronicle Fragments as a Source for Seleucid History', *JNES* 42, 1983, 265-70, esp. 265-66, 268; S.M. Sherwin-White, 'Ritual for a Seleucid King in Babylon?', *JHS* 103, 1983, 156-59 and also Polyb. V.51.3-4. An inscription attributed to Antiochus I tells of temples that were built in both Babylon and Borsippa: J.B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, 1950, 317; Austin (n. 4), 310-11, no. 189; A. Kuhrt, S. Sherwin-White, 'Aspects of Seleucid Royal Ideology: The Cylinder of Antiochus I from Borsippa', *JHS* 111, 1991, 71-86. The Babylonian 'King Lists', which contain information about the Seleucid rulers as well, confirm that the latter held Babylon in high regard: Austin (n. 4), 236-37, no. 138; A.J. Sachs, D.J. Wiseman, 'A Babylonian King List of the Hellenistic Period', *Iraq* 16, 1954, 202-11. On the continuing existence of Babylon see also J. Oelsner, 'Kontinuität und Wandel in Gesellschaft und Kultur Babyloniens in hellenistischer Zeit', *Klio* 60, 1978, 101-16; J. Oelsner, 'Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft des seleukidischen Babylonien: Einige Beobachtungen in den Keilschrifttexten aus Uruk', *Klio* 63, 1981, 39-44; van der Spek (n. 9), 60-70.

As in the case of Babylon, the phrases that the ancient authors used to describe Ecbatana reflect the city's importance. They call it 'capital of Media', μητρόπολις, *Caput Mediae*;[11] 'the king's seat', τὸ βασίλειον/τὰ βασίλεια; and 'great city', μεγάλη πόλις (Polyb. V.27.5; Diod. XVII.110.6-7, XIX.44.4; Strabo XI.13.1 C 522; Plin. *NH* VI.43; Isidor. Char. *Parth.* 6; Curt. V.8.1; cf. Hdt. III.64, 92). Again like Babylon, Ecbatana also attracted leaders and rulers. The Persian, the Seleucid and the Parthian kings all chose Ecbatana as their summer residence (Strabo XI 13.1 C 522, 13.5 C 524, XVI.1.16 C 743; Curt. V.8.1, X.4.3; Xen. *An.* III.5.15, *Cyr.* VIII.6.22; cf. Aesch. *Pers.* 16, 535; Ps.-Arist. *Mund.* VI.398a). Cyrus, Xerxes, Artaxerxes and Darius used it as a military base, where they prepared for battle and whither they retired (Hdt. I.153; Diod. XI.36.7, XIV.22.1, XVII.64.1-2; Arr. III.16.1, 19.2; Curt. V.8.1, 13.1). Alexander acted the same way (Arr. III.19.5), while Antigonus, during the Diadochian war, planned to set out from Ecbatana to subdue the northern satraps (Diod. XIX.19.2, 44.4, 46.6).

Furthermore, Alexander considered the conquest of Ecbatana, Persepolis and Bactra to be prime military objectives in the east (Curt. IV.5.8). He also decided, like the previous rulers of the region, to keep his treasure in Ecbatana (Deioces of Media: Hdt. I.98; Arbaces of Media: Diod. II.28.7; Alexander: Diod. XVII.80.3, 110.7, Strabo XV.3.9 C 731, Iust. XII.1.3; and also the *Diadochi*: Diod. XIX.46.6; Ecbatana as a treasury in general: Isidor. Char. *Parth.* 6).[12] Antiochus IV founded a Greek town in Ecbatana by the name of Epiphaneia, after his own sobriquet (Steph. Byz. s.v. 'Αγβάτανα). His high regard for Ecbatana is demonstrated in his installation of a mint in the city, which continued to operate well into the reign of Demetrius I.[13]

Babylon and Ecbatana resembled each other in more ways than one. Ecbatana too, was built in an advantageous location. It was described as a wealthy city, which possessed formidable fortifications and a splendid palace (Hdt. I.98; Polyb. X.27.3-10; Plin. *NH* VI.43; Amm. Marc. XXIII.6.39).[14] Together with Susa, Ecbatana was considered the heart of the Persian empire (Xen. *Cyr.* VIII.6.22), as well as its pride,

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11 Cf. the book of Ezra 6.2: בירתא די במדי מדינתא.

12 It is possible that the Persians maintained archives containing royal documents in both Babylon and Ecbatana, Ezra 6.1-2. See E.G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri: New Documents of the Fifth Century BC from the Jewish Colony at Elephantine*, New Haven, 1953, 35 n. 46; J.M. Myers, *Ezra. Nehemiah*, New York, 1965, The Anchor Bible, vol. 14, 51.

13 On the coins see Newell (n. 10), 162-227; G. Le Rider, *Suse sous les Séleucides et les Parthes* (Mémoires de la Mission Archéologique en Iran, t. 38), Paris, 1965, 324-45; Mørkholm (n. 7), 111-13, 177-79; Sherwin-White, Kuhrt (n. 6), 74, 223. On the founding of Epiphaneia see Mørkholm (n. 7), 116-17; Tscherikower (n. 10), 99-100, 176-77. Pliny's account (*NH* VI.43), which attributes Seleucia's foundation to Seleucus, is incorrect. See also F.W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, Oxford, 1967, vol. 2, 233. Our knowledge of Ecbatana, the modern Hamadan, is rather limited, as the city has never been excavated. See S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., 1996, s.v Ecbatana; *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, New York, 1962, vol. 2, s.v. Ecbatana; E.H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography*, London, 1879, vol. 1, 258-59; Bevan (n. 4), 263-64; Rostovtzeff (n. 7), 480.

14 Compare with the description of אחמאתא (Ecbatana), in the Book of Judith, 1.1-4. Just how many of the details are invented is not clear. That at least some are fabricated is borne out by Polybius' obviously circumspect language (X.27.7-8). See Walbank (n. 13), 233-34; C.A. Moore, *Judith*, New York, 1985, The Anchor Bible, vol. 40, 124-25.

κόμπος...Περσικός (Ael. *NA* XIII.18). Unlike Babylon, however, not one source so much as hints that Ecbatana declined in the Hellenistic era, despite the fact that both Alexander and his successors damaged the city and plundered its treasures (Polyb. X.27.11-13). Quite the opposite: Strabo and Curtius Rufus remark that in their time (νῦν/*nunc* are the words they use) Ecbatana remained the Parthian rulers' formal summer residence (Strabo XI.13.1 C 522; Curt. V.8.1).[15] Isidorus, using the present tense, writes that the Ecbatanians 'are always offering sacrifices', ἀεὶ θύουσιν (Isidor. Char. *Parth.* 6), a clear indication that the city's temple was still active in his day.

Located on important crossroads, both Babylon and Ecbatana became notable staging posts on the routes connecting East and West. While Ecbatana was, in this respect, the more important of the two, Babylon too, possessed several distinct advantages. For one thing, it lay on the banks of the Euphrates River. Strabo compares the Tigris (on whose banks, as noted, Seleucia lay) to the Euphrates, and concludes that while it was easy enough to sail along both rivers, the Euphrates was not only the bigger of the two, but it also, thanks to its winding route, σκολιῷ τῷ ῥείθρῳ, passed through more land, πλείω διέξεισι χώραν. Beginning in the northern Taurus, the Euphrates flowed through a number of countries, including Armenia and Syria, until it reached the Persian Gulf (II.1.26 C 80; XI.12.3 C 521, 14.2 C 527, 14.8 C 529, XV.3.5 C 729, XVI.1.5 C 738, 1.9 C 739-40). Strabo's words suggest that the Euphrates offered merchants an easy and convenient way to transport their goods from the Persian Gulf to the hinterland, thus turning Babylon into one of the region's major trading stations.

The above conclusion is confirmed by Diodorus, both in his description of the actions of Semiramis — particularly in the matter of founding cities along the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris, intended to serve as trade centres — and in his accurate historical and geographical explanation which follows. Having pinpointed the sources of both the Euphrates and the Tigris, Diodorus adds: being big, μεγάλοι δ' ὄντες, and passing through vast land, συχνὴν χώραν διαπορευόμενοι, they offer many advantages to those who use it for for commercial business, πολλὰς ἀφορμὰς παρέχονται τοῖς ἐμπορικῇ χρωμένοις ἐργασίᾳ. As a result, the banks of each river were dotted with flourishing market places, increasing the glory of Babylonia (II.11.1-3).[16] Babylon on the Euphrates was clearly one of these successful trade centres. Nor did the establishment of Seleucia on the Tigris diminish its status. True, several important trade routes passed through Seleucia, but as far as transporting merchandise from the Persian Gulf was concerned, Seleucia commanded, at least according to Strabo, a different, possibly less favourable trade route than Babylon.[17]

Ecbatana was one of the stations on the main East-West highway. Beginning in Palibothra, the road passed through Taxila, Alexandria-Kapisa, Bactra, and Hecatompylus, from where it continued to Ecbatana and Artemita, until it reached Seleucia on the Tigris (Isidor. Char. *Parth.* 2-19; Strabo XI.8.9 C 514, 13.5-8 C 524-525; Plin. *NH* V.42-45, cf.

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15   On Strabo's use of expressions meaning 'our times', see S. Pothecary, 'The expression "our times" in Strabo's *Geography*', *CPh* 92, 1997, 235-46. Pothecary, however, does not note the use of the word νῦν.

16   Cf. Diod. XVII.104.3, 107.1, Alexander's order to Nearchus to meet him at the mouth of the Euphrates, once the latter had completed his voyage along the ocean's shores, is further evidence that the route connecting the Persian Gulf to the Euphrates was in use.

17   See Sherwin-White (n. 6), 18-9.

Polyb. V.44; Arr. III.19-20).[18] Ecbatana was also one of the stations on the route from Antiochia to Alexandropolis (Kandahar), described by Isidorus of Charax (*Parth.* 6), and it was mentioned as being on a 'military road', *via militaris* (Curt. V.8.5), which began in either Babylon or Susa, and passed through Ecbatana, from where it continued to the Caspian Gates (Arr. III.19.2).[19]

Furthermore, the route that Semiramis followed, according to Diodorus, was identical with the region's principal highway. Before reaching Ecbatana Semiramis visited Mount Bagistanus, the town of Chauon (Concobar is the name used by Isidorus)[20] and the Zagros mountain range, three of the stops mentioned by Isidorus on the main road from Seleucia to Ecbatana (*Parth.* 2-6). However, while Isidorus marks Seleucia as the road's starting point, Semiramis began her journey in Babylon. It may well be that this difference is a consequence of the decline of Babylon and the rise of Seleucia.

Bagistanus is a cliff, on top of which lies a town by the same name (Steph. Byz. s.v. Βαγίστανα; Isidor. Char. *Parth.* 5). It is described as a fertile area, a land of plenty, filled with trees and fruit, which supplied mankind with all the necessities and luxuries of life (Diod. XVII.110.5; Curt. X.4.3). Semiramis is said to have carved a statue in her own image in Bagistanus (Diod. II.13.2; Isidor. Char. *Parth.* 5). Diodorus adds that the queen, having smoothed part of the cliff's side, chiselled a figure of herself and her spear-carriers and alongside it an inscription. The resemblance between the description of Semiramis' deeds according to Diodorus and a relief found in Bagistanus commemorating Darius I's subjugation of the Satrap rebellion, following his assumption of the throne, is striking. It seems at first as though Semiramis set the precedent for Darius I, but it is far more likely that in shaping Semiramis' character Diodorus (or his source) was influenced by the acts of the historical king.[21]

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[18]   Tarn (n. 4), 61-2; W.W. Tarn and G.T. Griffith, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 3rd ed., London, 1952, 243; H.G. Rawlinson, *Intercourse Between India and the Western World*, New York, 1971, 115, 128; M. Cary, *The Geographic Background of Greek and Roman History*, Oxford, 1949, 192-94; E.H. Warmington, *The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India*, London, 1974, 22; Grainger (n. 4), 149.

[19]   On Babylon's and Ecbatana's key role in the road system see also K. Miller, *Itineraria Romana: Römische Reisewege an der Hand der Tabula Peutingeriana*, Bregenz, 1988, 782-83, 790-92.

[20]   See W.H. Schoff, *Parthian Stations by Isidore of Charax: The Greek Text with Translation and Commentary*, Chicago, 1989 (repr. of London, 1914), 28.

[21]   For text and discussion of Darius' inscription, see e.g. G.G. Cameron, 'The Old Persian Text of the Bisitun Inscription', *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 5, 1951, 47-54; R.G. Kent, 'Cameron's Old Persian Readings at Bisitun: Restorations and Notes', *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 5, 1951, 55-7; E.N. von Voigtlander, *The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great: Babylonian Version*, London, 1978; F. Malbran-Labat, *La version akkadienne de l'inscription trilingue de Darius à Behistun*, Rome, 1994; R.G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon*, 2nd ed., New Haven, 1953, 107-08; A.V. Williams Jackson, *Persia Past and Present*, New York, 1906, 175-212; F. Sarre and E. Herzfeld, *Iranische Felsreliefs*, Berlin, 1910, 189-98; E. Herzfeld, *The Persian Empire: Studies in Geography and Ethnography of the Ancient Near East*, Wiesbaden, 1968, 289-92, and also Schoff, *Isidore of Charax*, 28. Gotarzes II of Parthia also left behind written testimony carved onto the face of the cliff. See N.C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia*, New York, 1968, 173-74; Sarre and Herzfeld (n. 21), 190 n. 2; Herzfeld (n. 21), 13-4. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* XI.8-10, XII.10, 13-14. It is interesting to compare Curtius Rufus' 'historical' account with Diodorus'

Stephanus of Byzantium (s.v. Χαύων) mentions, albeit briefly, the town of Chauon. Noting that Chauon was in Media, Stephanus quotes Ctesias, who remarked that Semiramis passed through the town.[22] The Zagros mountain range was regarded as Media's border with Persia and Babylonia (Polyb. V.44.6-7; Strabo XI.12.4 C 522, 13.6 C 524). The ability to cross it endowed the range with the title 'Median Gate', Μηδικὴ πύλη (Strabo XI.13.8 C 525, cf. XVI.1.18 C 744; Ptol. *Geog.* VI.2.7).[23]

Semiramis' route was in constant use throughout antiquity, clear evidence of its importance. Xenophon and his companions on the *Anabasis* were told of the road (Xen. *Anab.* III.5.15). Darius reached Ecbatana after his defeat at Gaugamela (Arr. III.16.2; cf. Diod. XVII.64.1; Curt. V.1.9). Alexander, while marching from Babylon to Ecbatana, made a slight detour and stopped at Bagistanus (Diod. XVII.110.5-6; cf. Curt. X.4.3). He obviously made his way back along the same road, as indicated by his encounter with the Cossaeans, who lived in the Zagros (Diod. XVII.115.5-112.1; Curt. X.4.3; Arr. VII.15.1-4; cf. Plut. *Alex.* 72.1, 73.1).[24]

The records of modern explorers, such as Rawlinson and Buckingham in the 19th century and Williams Jackson in the early 20th, attest to Semiramis' route. Rawlinson reached Ecbatana by way of Zagros, Bagistanus and Chauon. Buckingham visited Ecbatana, Bagistanus and Chauon. All three reports relate to the nature of the roads, the commemorative inscriptions found in Bagistanus, and the outstanding location of Chauon, which was built on a plain surrounded by hills, about 32 miles from Bagistanus, on the road to Ecbatana.[25]

Persis was Semiramis' next destination. From there she continued her voyage and visited every other country, ἐπῆλθε...τὴν ἄλλην χώραν ἄπασαν, which she ruled throughout Asia, ἧς ἐπῆρχε κατὰ τὴν 'Ασίαν (II.14.1). Content with this rather vague statement, Diodorus fails to name the places that Semiramis visited either in Persis or in the rest of Asia, which makes the task of tracing her precise route in the area a difficult one. Diodorus' phrasing, however, reveals a resemblance between the journeys of Semiramis and Alexander even in this case. He uses almost the same wording in two other voyages: Osiris visited the other nations throughout Asia, ἐπελθεῖν δὲ καὶ τἄλλα τὰ κατὰ τὴν 'Ασίαν ἔθνη (I.20.1), while Alexander is said to have visited much of the

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'mythical' one. According to Diodorus, Semiramis built a huge park filled with plants at the foot of the mountain. This accords well with Curtius' portrait of the Bagistanus as a lush region, bursting with fruit trees (Diod. II.13.1; Curt. X.4.3). On Semiramis at Bagistanus see also E.D. Phillips, 'Semiramis at Behistun', *C&M* 29, 1968, 162-68; D. Gera, *Warrior Women: The Anonymous* Tractatus de Mulieribus, Leiden, 1997, 79-80.

22   It should be noted that though Stephanus and Diodorus (II.13.3) used the same source, their wording is different.

23   See J.V. Harrison, 'Some Routes in Southern Iran', *GJ* 99, 1942, 116-17.

24   On the question how Alexander chose his route and the difficulties he encountered along the way see D.W. Engels, *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army*, Berkeley, 1978, 73-80.

25   See e.g. F. Sezgin (ed.), *Studies on the Geography of Islamic Countries by Henry Rawlinson*, Frankfurt am Main, 1997 (Islamic Geography, vol. 254), 1-158; J.S. Buckingham, *Travels in Assyria, Media, and Persia*, London, 1971 (repr. of 1829), 54-75, 135-67; Williams Jackson (n. 21), 144-244. On Ecbatana's key role on the main East-West highway see Tarn (n. 4), 62; Tarn and Griffith (n. 18), 243; Warmington (n. 18), 24-5; P. Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 3rd ed., London, 1951, 28-9.

country (i.e. Asia), ἐπῆλθε πολλὴν χώραν (XVII.104.4). In view of the similarities stated above, it seems likely that when writing about his two mythical heroes, Osiris and Semiramis, Diodorus had in mind Alexander's expedition to the East.

Some idea regarding Semiramis' path in Asia can be obtained from a comparison with previous stages in her journey. We have seen that the Assyrian queen visited both Babylon and Ecbatana, the capitals of Assyria and Media respectively. On the assumption that she kept to her custom of visiting the region's principal cities, it is probable that she stopped at Persepolis, the capital of Persis. Like Babylon and Ecbatana, Persepolis possessed sumptuous palaces and a wealth of treasures. It also served as a way-station for travellers and merchants moving from eastern Asia to the west (Strabo XV.3.3 C 728, 3.6 C 729-730, II.1.23 C 78-79, XVI.1.17 C 744; Diod. XVII.71.3-7, cf. 72.1-6).[26] This conjecture accords well with Alexander's route. He travelled in the opposite direction from that of Semiramis, making his way from Persepolis to Ecbatana (Arr. III.18.10-19.5; Diod. XVII.69.1-73.4; Curt. V.6.1-8.2).[27]

The remainder of Semiramis' journey further supports the hypothesis that Alexander's campaign served as the inspiration for Diodorus' tale of Semiramis. Once she had completed her tour of Asia, Semiramis made for Egypt and Libya. According to Diodorus, she visited all Egypt, τὴν ... Αἴγυπτον πᾶσαν ἐπῆλθε, and after subjugating most of Libya, τῆς Λιβύης τὰ πλεῖστα καταστρεψαμένη, she set off for the Oracle of Ammon, seeking to discover what the future had in store for her (II.14.3). Alexander also came to Egypt and Libya, where he consulted the Oracle of Ammon. The description of his route is indeed more detailed. The Macedonian king reached Egypt by way of Syria and the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. In Egypt he visited Memphis and founded the city of Alexandria.[28] He then travelled along the Egyptian shore to Paraetonium, where he turned inland and made for the Oracle of Ammon in Libya.[29] Having consulted the Oracle, Alexander returned to Memphis (Arr. III.1.1-4.5; Curt. IV.4-8.3; Diod. XVII.40.2-47.6, 49.1-52.7; Iust. XI.10.6-11.13; Plut. *Alex.* 24.2-27.4, cf. Ps.-Callisthenes I.30-35).

We do not know if Semiramis took a similar route. Yet bearing in mind Diodorus' custom of leading his heroine along existing main roads, such as the route from Babylon to Ecbatana via Bagistanus, Chauon and Zagros, one might suggest the following path: having toured all over Asia before setting out to Egypt, it is likely that Semiramis

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26 On the highway see Tarn (n. 4), 62; Tarn and Griffith (n. 18), 243; Warmington (n. 18), 24-5.

27 See e.g. Engels (n. 24), 73-80; A.B. Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*, Cambridge, 1988, 91-104; N.G.L. Hammond, *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman*, London, 1981, 163-72.

28 Diodorus (XVII.51.4-52.1), Curtius Rufus (IV.8.1-2) and Justin (XI.11.13) all claim that Alexander founded Alexandria upon his return from the Oracle of Ammon. On the other hand, Arrian (III.1.5) and Plutarch (*Alex.* 26.2-6) argue that he established the city while on his way to the Oracle. The latter authors based their work on two different sources — Aristobulus and Ptolemy son of Lagos — which accounts for the two versions of Alexandria's foundation (Arr. III.4.5).

29 On the route to the oracle see A. Fakhry, *Siwa Oasis*, Cairo, 1990 (repr. of 1973), 145-50. On Alexander's opinion of the god and his temple see A.B. Bosworth, 'Alexander and Ammon', in K.H. Kinzl (ed.), *Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean in Ancient History and Prehistory*, Berlin, 1977, 51-75.

marched west along the trade route to Zeugma (Isidor. Char. *Parth.* 1). From there she presumably made her way to Antiochia, the capital of Syria, and to the coastal Phoenician towns. Semiramis would then have taken the traditional road south to Gaza and Pelusium (Strabo, XVI.2.5-7 C 750-751, 22-33 C 756-760), a road favoured by various leaders, such as Alexander the Great and the Roman Emperor Titus (Joseph. *BJ* IV.659-663), at different times.[30] In Egypt, in keeping with her habit of visiting a country's principal cities, Semiramis may have stopped at Memphis and Alexandria, Egypt's capitals before and after Alexander respectively. Finally, she called upon the Oracle of Ammon.

The list of those who visited the Oracle of Ammon in the Hellenistic age is short. It contains, however, several prominent names, evidence of the interest it aroused at the time. In 304 BCE the Rhodians sent a delegation to Libya to ask for the Oracle's advice concerning their intention of honouring Ptolemy as a god, a way of expressing their gratitude for his help against Demetrius Poliorcetes, who was besieging their island (Diod. XX.100.3-4). Ptolemy son of Lagos himself dedicated an altar to Ammon in the temple, according to Pausanias, who explored the site of the Oracle and noticed a hymn by Pindar carved onto a tablet on the side of the altar (IX.16.1). Hannibal was informed by the Oracle of Ammon where he would die (Diod. XXV.19; Tzetz. *Chil.* I.801-802; Plut. *Flam.* 20; Paus. VIII.11.11). Cato the Younger, fleeing to Numidia after Pompey's defeat at Pharsalus, also visited the site, though he rejected his companions' suggestion that he consult the Oracle (Luc. IX.511-586).

Strabo emphasizes the contrast between the respect that the Oracle commanded in the past and its fading reputation in his day. He points to Alexander's burning desire to consult the Oracle and then to the fact that, in his time, the Oracle was virtually abandoned (XVII.1.43 C 813-814). Nevertheless, the Oracle continued to attract scholars and writers. Plutarch notes that Cleombrotus of Sparta visited the site in the first century CE (*De def. Or.* 410a),[31] while Pausanias, as we have seen, travelled there as late as the second century CE.

Alexander's experience may well have disposed Diodorus to send Semiramis to the Oracle of Ammon. It is reasonable enough that Diodorus should have been influenced by the events of his own day. This supposition finds support in Lucan's epic, which describes Cato the Younger's journey in the area. As this journey took place in 47-48 BCE, it is probable that Lucan preserved something of the flavour of Diodorus' age. Yet Lucan himself lived somewhat later, between 39 and 65 CE, a possible indication that interest in the temple of Ammon had not died out even as late as the first century CE.

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30   Julius Caesar, it is worth noting, took a different route. He sailed from Asia Minor to Rhodes and from there to Alexandria. On the way back, he travelled both by land and by sea. He set sail from Alexandria to Acre, whence he marched to Antiochia. Then he put to sea once again by way of the port of Seleucia and sailed to Cilicia. From Cilicia he turned north and proceeded by land to Pontus (e.g. App. *BC* II.89, 91; *Bell. Alex.* 33, 65-66; Plut. *Caes.* 49; Luc. IX.1000-1005; cf. Dio XLII.47.1). See T. Rice Holmes, *The Roman Republic and the Founder of the Empire*, New York, 1923, vol. 3, 211-12, 509-10. For the influence of Caesar on Diodorus' work see M. Sartori, 'Note sulla datazione dei primi libri della *Bibliotheca Historica* di Diodoro Siculo', *Athenaeum* 61, 1983, 545-52; M. Sartori, 'Storia, "utopia" e mito nei primi libri della *Bibliotheca Historica* di Diodoro Siculo', *Athenaeum* 62, 1984, 492-536, and below.

31   See H.W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon*, Oxford, 1967, 194-252; Fakhry (n. 29), 86-9.

Lucan first records how Cato reached the Oracle of Ammon (IX.511, 544-546). He then describes the site itself, explaining and underlining its significance (IX.512-537), quoting Lavienus, who urged Cato to seek the Oracle's advice (IX.546-563). Finally he gives Cato's reply in detail (IX.564-584). The structure of this particular excerpt from Lucan supports the idea that even in the middle of the first century BCE the Oracle was still held in some regard. Lucan tells of people who had travelled all the way from the East to consult the Oracle and who, while patiently awaiting their turn, allowed Cato to move to the head of the queue. He also describes how Lavienus implored Cato to ask the Oracle about the fate of Caesar and to enquire what the future held for Rome. Cato, as noted, refused — not, however, because he despised the Oracle but rather, as Lucan makes clear, because he firmly believed that the gods inform every man at birth what he should know. The closing line of the scene, containing the words *servataque fide templi*, 'and the honour of the temple was preserved' (IX.585), further strengthens the conjecture that the Oracle had maintained some of its former reputation.

Furthermore, the decision of Cato and his companions to visit the temple of Ammon in the first place is rather strange. Fleeing Caesar, they were on their way to Numidia. But, having tried and failed to cross the Syrtis Bay by sea, they resolved to go round it by land. The journey through the desert was hard and exhausting, which makes their decision to lengthen it more by visiting the Oracle which lay at a point south-east of their destination an odd one (Luc. IX.444-510; cf. Plut. *Cat. Min.* 56; Dio. XLII.13.4-5). True, the Oracle was situated in an oasis, but given the massive detour involved, was it necessary to pass through it?

Ethiopia was Semiramis' next port of call. Upon returning from these places, ἀπὸ δὲ τούτων γενομένη, Semiramis, Diodorus writes, visited most of Ethiopia, τῆς Αἰθιοπίας ἐπῆλθε τὰ πλεῖστα (II.14.4). Diodorus' phrasing bears out the assumption that Semiramis first returned to Egypt and then travelled up the Nile to Ethiopia as did, according to him, Osiris and Sesostris (I.18.3, 55.1), but not Alexander! The Macedonian king did not reach Ethiopia, but he did receive Ethiopian envoys who, in a way, acknowledged his superiority (Arr. VII.15.4). As for the places Semiramis visited along the way from Egypt to Ethiopia, Diodorus does not offer his readers any geographical details, simply noting that she surveyed the wonders of the land. However, the wording he uses to describe the end of this part of Semiramis' voyage is almost identical to that used of Alexander, a fact that supports the conjecture that the Assyrian queen's actions were based upon those of the Macedonian king: once she had set the affairs of Ethiopia and Egypt in order, Semiramis 'returned to Bactra in Asia together with her forces', ἐπανῆλθε μετὰ τῆς δυνάμεως εἰς Βάκτρα τῆς Ἀσίας (II.16.1); Alexander 'returned to Syria together with his forces', ἐπανῆλθε μετὰ τῆς δυνάμεως εἰς τὴν Συρίαν (XVII.52.7). Diodorus' use of the verb ἐπανέρχομαι indicates that Semiramis had already been to Bactra and thus we have another piece of evidence regarding her ports of call in Asia before her departure for Egypt.

As was her wont, Semiramis chose to stop once again in a country's capital, this time that of Bactria. According to Curtius Rufus Bactra was 'the principal city of that region', *regionis eius caput* (VII.4.31); Diodorus and Ptolemy say that Bactra served as the Royal Seat (Diod. II.6.2: τὰ βασίλεια; Ptol. *Geog.* VI.11.9: Βάκτρα βασίλειον). Strabo mentions Bactra (together with Daraspa and Eucratideia) specifically when discussing Bactria's towns, dismissing the rest with the words 'and many others', καὶ ἄλλας πλείους (XI.11.2 C 516). Arrian included Bactra in his list of Bactria's greatest cities, μέγισται...πόλεις, and in one place went so far as to crown it as Bactria's greatest town,

τὴν μεγίστην πόλιν (III.29.1; IV.1.5). Ammianus Marcellinus too distinguished Bactra from Bactria's other towns, claiming that both the kingdom and its people took their name from the city (XXIII.6.58; cf. Curt. VII.4.31; Strabo XI.11.2 C 516; Plin. *NH* VI.48).

The pre-eminence of Bactra is also reflected by the interest shown in the city by various rulers and commanders. Cyrus planned to lead an army to Bactra, in the hope of subduing it (Hdt. I.153). Under Darius I it became the empire's twelfth satrapy (Hdt. III.92). Darius III sought to reach Bactra after his defeat in Gaugamela (Curt. V.8.1, 13.2; Diod. XVII.73.2), as did Bessus, after he murdered the Persian king (Curt. V.13.18, cf. VI.3.9; Diod. XVII.73.4, 74.1). Alexander, having arrived at Bactra while pursuing Bessus, intended to stay there for a while (Curt. VI.11.32, VII.10.10; Arr. III.29.1; Strabo XV.2.10 C 724; cf. Diod. XVII.83.3). Moreover, Alexander clearly regarded Bactra, alongside Persepolis, Ecbatana and the easternmost boundaries of the Persian empire, as a valuable military prize (Curt. IV.5.8). Conquering the city, he surrounded it with colonies, in which he settled his Greek soldiers (Curt. IX.7.1; cf. Diod. XVII.99.5). Alexander, in fact, established settlements throughout Bactria and its vicinity, populating them both with natives as well as with his own mercenary warriors (Diod. XVII.83.1-2; Iust. XII.5.13; Strabo XI.11.4 C 517, XV.2.10 C 725; Curt. VII.3.23; Arr. III.28.4, IV.4.1; Plin. *NH* VI.62; Plut. *De Alex. fort.* 328F; Steph. Byz. s.v. Ἀλεξάνδρειαι).[32]

Bactria was no less important to Alexander's successors. Perdiccas was quick to subdue a rebellion which had broken out among the Greek settlers near Bactra's borders (Diod. XVIII.7.1-9). Seleucus I occupied Bactria shortly after his conquest of Babylon (Iust. XV.4.10-11). He crowned his son, Antiochus, king of the northern parts of Asia, designating Bactria as the centre of his son's kingdom (Plut. *Dem.* 38), a region also coveted by Demetrius Poliorcetes (Plut. *Dem.* 46). Seleucus I's colonisation was as impressive as Alexander's (App. *Syr.* 57),[33] and Antiochus I, whose mother was a native

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[32] As the eleventh town with the name of Alexandria in Stephanus' list appears Ἀλεξάνδρεια κατὰ Βάκτρα. Some scholars claim that this was Bactra itself, restored by Alexander and named after him. They also identify Ἀλεξάνδρεια Ὠξειανή, mentioned by Ptolemy and situated, according to him, between the rivers Oxus and Jaxartes (*Geog.* VI.12.6), as Tarmita (Termez). It has recently been argued that Alexandria κατὰ Βάκτρα and Ὠξειανή are one and the same. At the same time, excavations in the area have raised the possibility that it is, in fact, Aï Khanoum. See, for example, Tarn (n. 4), 114-15, 118-19; W.W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, Cambridge, 1948, vol. 2, 235, 255-59; W.W. Tarn, 'Two Notes on Seleucid History', *JHS* 60, 1940, 89-94; A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, Delhi, 1980 (repr. of the Oxford 1957 edition), 40-2; P.M. Fraser, *Cities of Alexander the Great*, Oxford, 1999, 153-56, and below. The Greek and Roman authors disagree as to the number of towns Alexander founded: while Diodorus does not state a precise number and just says there were 'other' ones, Strabo lists eight such towns and Justin twelve.

[33] It may well be that Seleucus established the town discovered during the archaeological excavations in Aï Khanoum. See L. Robert, 'De Delphes à l'Oxus: Inscriptions Grecques Nouvelles de la Bactriane', in L. Robert, *Opera Minora Selecta*, Amsterdam, 1989, 510-51; P. Bernard, *Fouilles d'Aï Khanoum IV: Les Monnaies Hors Trésors, Questions d'Histoire Gréco-Bactrienne*, Paris, 1985; P. Bernard, H.P. Francfort, *Études de Géographie Historique sur la Plaine d' Aï Khanoum (Afghanistan)*, Paris, 1978, and also G. Frumkin, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia*, Leiden, 1970 (Handbuch der Orientalistik, Abteilung 7, Band 3, Abschnitt 1), 61-70, 81, 110-13; F.R. Allchin and N. Hammond, *The Archaeology*

Bactrian (Arr. VII.4.6), continued his father's work (Strabo XI.10.2. C 516; Plin. *NH* VI.47; Isidor. Char. *Parth.* 14). Antiochus on assuming the throne not only built settlements but developed the road network, as can be inferred from the preliminary 'research' operations carried out by Patrocles, one of his army's commanders (e.g. Strabo II.1.14 C 72-73; XI.11.6 C 518). In addition, the journey along these roads, which led from the West to Bactria, became, thanks to the massive colonisation, a much more manageable and comfortable affair.[34]

The Hellenistic kings desired Bactria long after the consolidation of their kingdoms. Diodotus, governor of Bactria, rebelled against his Seleucid master, Antiochus II, and declared Bactria an independent kingdom (Iust. XLI.4.5; Strabo XI.9.2-3 C 515, cf. XI.11.1-3 C 516-517, XV.1.3 C 686). Antiochus III tried to reclaim the lost land. Having first forced its ruler Euthydemus to barricade himself inside his own capital, Antiochus agreed to come to terms, according to which Euthydemus was allowed to retain the title of king but, in return, had to recognise the Seleucid's ascendancy and provide Antiochus with any logistical help he might need on his various expeditions (Polyb. X.49, XI.34, cf. XXIX.12.8). Bactria continued to flourish under its Hellenistic kings. They expanded their realm, adding to it territories beyond the Hyphasis River (Strabo XI.11.1 C 516, XV.1.3 C 686). It was not until the middle of the second century BCE that Bactria was conquered by invaders from the East (Strabo XI.8.2, 8.4 C 511).[35]

The wealth and location of Bactria, the country, and Bactra, the city, attracted the interest of other rulers. The city was described as possessing property and wealth, *bona* and *opulentia,* beyond imagining (Curt. V.10.9), and was spoken of as 'Bactra and the assets of the virgin region', *Bactra et intactae regionis opulenta* (Curt. V.9.16). This region, in which Bactra was situated, was referred to as the very rich Bactrian empire, *opulentissimum...Bactrianum imperium* (Iust. XLI.1.8). The country was celebrated for its large number of towns. Its governor was known as the governor of the thousand Bactrian cities, *mille urbium Bactrianorum praefectus* (Iust. XLI.4.5; Strabo XV.1.3). Bactra was clearly the most important of them all. It also possessed a mint, as befitting a prominent town, like Babylon and Ecbatana.[36]

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of Afghanistan, London, 1978, 198-99; Tarn (n. 4), 118-19, 208-09; Grainger (n. 4), esp. 105-07, 150-57, 214; Sherwin-White, Kuhrt (n. 6), 108-10.

[34]   Sherwin-White, Kuhrt (n. 6), 62, 73-4; F.L. Holt, *Thundering Zeus: The Making of Hellenistic Bactria,* Berkeley, 1999, 38-9; Fraser (n. 32), 35-9; Grainger (n. 4), 155-56. The impressive urban construction programme carried out by the Seleucid Kings in Syria bears witness to their remarkable urbanisation policy. See J.G. Grainger, *The Cities of Seleucid Syria,* Oxford, 1990, passim, esp. 47-61.

[35]   On Bactria in the Hellenistic period see Tarn (n. 4), passim; Narain (n. 32), passim; F.L. Holt, *Alexander the Great and Bactria,* Leiden, 1988, 87-103; Holt (n. 34), passim; G. Woodcock, *The Greeks in India,* London, 1966, 62-73; Bevan (n. 4), 273-78, 286-90, vol. 2, 21-3; D. Musti, 'Syria and the East', *CAH* 2nd ed. 1984, vol. 7/1, 210-16; Sherwin-White, Kuhrt (n. 6), 103-13, 197-99; J.D. Lerner, *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau: The Foundations of Arsacid Parthia and Graeco-Bactria,* Stuttgart, 1999 (Historia Einzelschriften 123), passim.

[36]   On the mint see Newell (n. 10), 228-49; B.V. Head, *Historia Numorum,* London, 1963 (1st ed. 1886), 835-40. Bactria's manifold advantages are also attested in a description of Sir Alexander Burnes, who visited the city in the 19th century: A. Burnes, *Travels into Bokhara together with a Narrative of a Voyage on the Indus,* 4th ed., Karachi, 1973 (1st ed. London, 1834), vol. 1, 245-46.

Curtius Rufus used Bactria as a geographical landmark which signalled, with or without India, the eastern edge of Asia. When he speaks, for example, of the boundaries of the land of the Scythians, he writes that these stretched as far as 'the end of Asia, which is Bactra', *ultima Asiae, qua Bactra sunt* (VII.7.4, cf. IV.11.13). Yet Bactra owed much of its status to the fact that it was located in the centre of Asia. As a result, the city became one of the most important junctions of Asia. Two of the principal routes linking eastern Asia to the West passed through Bactra. The first, already referred to, began in Palibothra in India and ended in Seleucia on the Tigris (Plin. *NH* VI.45; cf. Arr. IV.22.3-4).[37] The second route is mentioned by Strabo who, quoting Aristobulus, remarked that the Indians transported a considerable amount of goods along the Oxus River to the Caspian Sea and from there to the Black Sea by way of the Cyrus River (XI.7.3 C 509). Bactra, which lay close to the Cyrus, inevitably served as a station for those travelling along this lane as well.[38]

In addition, Bactra was a staging post along the 'Silk Road'. Ptolemy, the geographer, speaks of a 'road which stretches eastwards to Bactra', ἐπὶ τὰ Βάκτρα ὁδὸς ἐκτείνεται πρὸς ἀνατολάς, and from there northwards to the Comedus Mountains and eastwards to the land of the Seres (*Geog.* I.12.7-10; cf. Amm. Marc. XXIII.6.60).[39] Strabo, who mentions not once but twice that there were three different roads leading out of Bactra, provides further proof of the town's important position. Recording the distances between various sites in Asia, he notes the distance 'to the meeting point of three roads from Bactra', ἐπὶ τὴν ἐκ Βάκτρων τρίοδον (XI.8.9 C 514), and, tracing the route from the Caspian Gates through Parthia and Bactria until 'the meeting point' mentioned, he employs virtually the same words (XV.2.8 C 723). These three roads, which connected Bactra with the rest of the countries of Asia, turned the city into the region's primary trading centre.[40]

Thus Diodorus once again brought Semiramis to one of Asia's foremost cities, and to a land which, as Strabo fittingly put it, 'is the jewel of the whole of Ariana', τῆς συμπάσης 'Αριανῆς πρόσχημα εἶναι τὴν Βακτριανήν (XI.11.1 C 516, cf. II.1.22 C 79). Exposed to Greek culture introduced into the region and cultivated by its Greek settlers, Bactria prospered in the Hellenistic era. Aï Khanoum is a striking example of the Greeks' immense influence over it. Archaeological excavations at the site have revealed typically Greek constructions, such as a theatre and a gymnasium, and an inscription in Greek. The inscription contains Delphic maxims and a brief preamble explaining their origins and naming Clearchus as the man who brought them to Aï Khanoum. Clearchus is thought by some to be the philosopher from Soli in Cyprus (circa 340-250 BCE). It is

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37   See Tarn (n. 4), 61-2, 139; Holt (n. 34), 37-41; Holt (n. 35), 11; Sherwin-White, Kuhrt (n. 6), 65-7, and also Tarn and Griffith (n. 18), 243; Warmington (n. 18), 22-4; M.P. Charlesworth, *Trade-Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire*, Hildesheim, 1961 (1st ed. Cambridge, 1924), 103-04.

38   See J.I. Miller, *The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire*, Oxford, 1969, 149-50.

39   See Warmington (n. 18), 22-3; L. Boulnois, *The Silk Road*, New York, 1966 (trans. D. Chamberlain), 62-3; Miller (n. 38), 121-37; E. Barger, 'Exploration of Ancient Sites in Northern Afghanistan', *GJ* 93, 1939, 387-88.

40   See Bunbury (n. 13), 486-87; Rawlinson (n. 18), 69; Tarn (n. 4), 139; Miller (n. 38), 174, 211-12. A table listing the region's trade routes published in Miller's book (n. 38), 148-52, underscores Bactra's strategic location. Almost every overland route, whether connecting the countries of Asia to each other or to the West, passed through Bactra.

said that he copied the maxims in Delphi and then travelled all the way to Bactria in order to dedicate them to Cineas who was, possibly, the city's founder.[41] In light of the above, it is not surprising that the Hellenistic authors, whether Diodorus or his sources, included Bactria in their version of the Semiramis myth.

The final leg of Semiramis' journey strenghthens the hypothesis that Diodorus based Semiramis' route on the voyages undertaken by various historical figures, such as the Persian kings or the Seleucids, but above all Alexander. It further proves that Diodorus led the queen along the main roads of the ancient world and particularly the Hellenistic era. While in Bactra, Semiramis resolved to march on India. After three years of preparations for the campaign, she left Bactra and reached the Indus River, ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰνδὸν ποταμόν (Diod. II.16.2, 16.5, 17.1, 18.2). There, according to Diodorus, Semiramis won a battle, and 'advanced in pursuit of the Indians', προῆγεν ἐπιδιώκουσα τοὺς Ἰνδούς (II.18.6). Diodorus' phrasing hints that Semiramis visited other sites in India, though they are not mentioned by name. Later, however, driven back across the Indus River, Semiramis was defeated and forced to flee back to Bactria (II.19.1-10).

Like Semiramis, both Alexander (Arr. IV.18.1-22.4, 30.7; Curt. VIII.2.19-5.1, 10.1-2; Diod. XVII.86.3) and Antiochus III (Polyb. X.49.1-15, XI.34.1-12) left Bactria for India, as did Bactria's rulers, once they had broken with the Seleucid kingdom (Strabo XI.11.1 C 516, XV.1.3 C 686; Iust. XLI.6.4-5).[42] Before setting off for India, Alexander, again like Semiramis, equipped his army in Bactria (Curt. VIII.2.13). He also ordered a bridge to be built over the Indus River in order to convey his soldiers to the other side (Arr. IV.30.9, V.3.5, 4.3; Diod. XVII.86.3; Curt. VIII.12.4; cf. Diod. II.18.6).[43] Furthermore, Alexander, though under different circumstances from Semiramis, was forced to abandon his dream of conquering all of India (e.g. Diod. II.37.3, XVII.93.4-94.5, 108.3; Arr. VIII.2.8, 4.1).

It is interesting to note that, unlike Diodorus' story of Sesostris, Semiramis' achievements in India at no point eclipse those of Alexander. In Sesostris' tale we read that the Egyptian king crossed the Ganges River, reached the ocean and visited all of India. Diodorus further emphasizes that Sesostris passed through lands into which Alexander did not come (I.55.3-4). There are several possible explanations for this distinction between Sesostris and Semiramis. The first concerns Diodorus' treatment of his sources. It is possible that he based his description of Semiramis' deeds strictly on authors, such as Ctesias and Cleitarchus, who had lived before Alexander or during his own time, choosing

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[41]   For the text and discussion of the inscription see Robert, 'De Delphes à l'Oxus', 510-47; Austin (n. 4), 314-15, no. 192; Holt (n. 34), 37-47, 175. See also P. Bernard, 'An Ancient Greek City in Central Asia', *Scientific American* 246, 1982, 126-35; A.N. Oikonomides, 'The Lost Delphic Inscription with the Commandments of the Seven and P. Univ. Athen 2782', *ZPE* 37, 1980, 179-83; F.W. Walbank, *The Hellenistic World*, Harvard, 1993 (revised ed.), 60-2; Fraser (n. 32), 153-56; Allchin and Hammond (n. 33), 198-99; *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. Clearchus, Cineas.

[42]   See, for example, Bosworth (n. 27), 104-39 (Alexander); Lerner (n. 35), 45-62 (Antiochus); Narain (n. 32), 46-73 (Bactria's Greek kings). Compare Sir Alexander Burnes' expedition in the 19th century to the countries between India and the Caspian Sea: he left India, crossed the Indus River and arrived in Balkh (Bactra), whence he continued in a north-westerly direction. Burnes (n. 36), 74-246.

[43]   See Engels (n. 24), 106-9.

not to adapt Semiramis' tale, as he did elsewhere in his composition, to later events and developments.

The second explanation involves Diodorus' knowledge of Alexander's high regard of Semiramis, commented upon in the ancient literature. It is said that Alexander admired Semiramis' (and Cyrus') accomplishments above all others, and that one of the reasons he chose to go to India in the first place was that he hoped to succeed where his heroine had failed (Curt. VII.6.20, IX.6.23; Arr. VI.24.1-3, VIII.5.7; Strabo XV.1.5 C 686, 2.5 C 722; cf. Plin. *NH* VI.49).[44] Perhaps this piece of information caused Diodorus not to refashion the myth of Semiramis. A careful reading of Curtius' version of Alexander's speech during his campaign in India suggests a third possible explanation, according to which Semiramis did not eclipse Alexander's achievements because she was a woman. Alexander supposedly implored his friends to think that they have come to lands in which 'the name of a woman is most renowned because of [her] valour', *feminae ob virtutem celeberrimum nomen est*. He then praised her great works, especially the cities that she built and the peoples that she defeated. Alexander concluded by saying: 'We have not yet equalled a woman in glory, and has a satiety of fame already captured us?' *nondum feminam aequavimus gloria, et iam nos laudis satietas cepit?* (IX.6.23).[45]

The road from Bactra to India was a trade route and part of the main highway connecting the East to the West (Ptol. *Geog.* I.12.7-9, 17.5; Plin. *NH* VI.62-63; Strabo XI.8.9 C 514, XV.2.8 C 723).[46] Diodorus does not list the stations along Semiramis' way, so we do not know if she, like Alexander (Arr. IV.22.5-6), took the route commonly used by travellers and merchants to India, marching first to Alexandria-Kapisa near the Kophen River in Hindu-Kush and then moving on to the Indus River. However, Diodorus clearly took a special interest in India and in the roads leading to it. At least four of his heroes — Osiris, Sesostris, Dionysus and Semiramis — not only visited the country, but also arrived there by different routes, which may be explained by the flourishing trade with India in the first century BCE. The Romans' growing passion for luxury articles, mainly from the east, and their subjection of Egypt, which made it easier to reach India, contributed much to the growth of trade with India.[47] This is attested by

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44   It should be noted that Arrian records two different versions of Semiramis' arrival in India. According to Nearchus Semiramis invaded India but escaped with a small part of her army (VI.24.2). Megasthenes, on the other hand, says that Semiramis tried to invade India but died before she could carry out her plan (VIII.5.7). Elsewhere Megasthenes does not mention Semiramis among those who got to India (VIII.9.9). See Arrian, *Anabasis Alexandri*, trans. P.A. Brunt, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1983, vol. 2, 319, n. 4.

45   Eddy (*The King is Dead*, 121-24), though admitting that the deeds of Alexander inspired the 'Semiramis Legend' as presented by Diodorus, does not credit Diodorus with the idea. He thinks that because of Semiramis' visit to Ethiopia 'Alexander's accomplishments came off a bit smaller than the woman's', so it follows that the 'comparison of Alexander and Semiramis was not invented by a Greek'.

46   Warmington (n. 18), 23-4; Charlesworth (n. 37), 103; Tarn (n. 4), 61, 139; Miller (n. 38), 149.

47   See, for example, Sall. *Cat.* 10-11; Luc. X.155-171; Suet. *Aug.* 71; Tac. *Ann.* III.55, and M.P. Charlesworth, 'Roman Trade with India', in *Studies in Roman Economic and Social History in Honor of Allan Chester Johnson*, P.R. Coleman-Norton (ed.), New York, 1951,

Strabo, who noted the large number of ships (120 is the figure mentioned) that he observed during a trip to Ethiopia in the company of Egypt's Roman *praefectus*, setting sail from the port of Myos Hormos to India (24 BCE). This, he added, was in marked contrast to the situation under the Ptolemies, when only very few dared to sail to India in order to trade in Indian merchandise (II.5.12 C 118, XVII.1.13 C 798). From Pliny, though he lived in a later period, we can learn more about the thriving commerce with India. He records the vast amount of money that the Roman empire spent each year on Indian goods, and says that, in his opinion, these enormous sums turned the route from Egypt to India into a *digna res*, an issue well worth discussing (*NH* VI.101).

As mentioned, Diodorus' gods and culture-heroes arrived in India by a variety of routes. Osiris, and perhaps Dionysus as well, reached India from the south, passing through Arabia and marching along the Red Sea coast, that is the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean (Diod. I.19.6, III.65.7). Sesostris divided his forces into two; the first he sent by sea, with the second he made his way by land. The route that Sesostris took is not quite clear but, as his previous destination was Ethiopia, it is likely that he advanced across one of southern Asia's highways (Diod. I.55.2).[48] Semiramis also came to India by land, but from the north. Each of these routes represents one of the roads commonly used to reach India in ancient times. It follows that Diodorus described the entire road network to India through the tales of his heroes.

The similarity between Semiramis' and Alexander's campaigns can also be seen in the manner in which both ended. Unlike Osiris, Sesostris, Heracles and other mythical figures whom Diodorus dealt with, Semiramis did not return to her kingdom. Like Alexander she disappeared on foreign soil. Bactra was, apparently, the last place she visited. Opening with the words 'some time afterwards', μετὰ δέ τινα χρόνον, that is shortly after she came back to Bactra, Diodorus swiftly moves on to describe the Assyrian queen's disappearance. One can assume from Diodorus' phrasing that Semiramis had no time to return home to Assyria (II.19.10-20.1). The question why some of Diodorus' heroes travelled along a circular route, beginning and ending their voyage at the same point, while others proceeded linearly from one end of the road to the other, is interesting but cannot be discussed here.

The above examination of Semiramis' route has brought to light several features, which recur at almost every stage of her journey. First, the Assyrian queen travelled along actual roads which were used in both ancient and modern times. These roads were, as a rule, main routes, which connected the East to the West and along which merchants conveyed their goods. Second, Semiramis always visited each country's largest and wealthiest cities. These were situated on important crossroads, possessed a royal palace, a mint, and occasionally even an archive. In addition, sovereigns chose to spend part of the year in them. This was true of Babylon and Bactra as well as of Persepolis, on the assumption that Semiramis arrived there while touring Persis. Third, Semiramis' entire voyage bears an outstanding resemblance to Alexander the Great's expedition. The limits of the

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131-43; Charlesworth (n. 37), 58-73; Warmington (n. 18), 35-41; F. Meijer, O. van Nijf, *Trade, Transport and Society in the Ancient World*, London, 1992, 124-29.

[48]   Sesostris may have travelled along the part of the road that connected Babylon to Susa, Persepolis and Carmania (Strabo II.1.23 C 79, XV.3.1 C 729, XVI.1.17 C 744), and then continued to Sacastana, Alexandropolis (Kandahar) and the Indus River (Isidor. Char. *Parth.* 18-19). See Tarn (n. 4), 62, 483.

Assyrian queen's journey, as well as the sites she reached, were identical to those of Alexander's. Moreover, it is possible that Semiramis, like Alexander, failed to return home.

Though Alexander inspired the tale of other mythical heroes, it was Semiramis who, more than any of them, is associated with the Macedonian king. The influence, however, was reciprocal. Curtius Rufus and Arrian, whose works document Alexander's adventures, and Strabo the geographer, who occasionally relates to the king's activities, reveal that Semiramis served as Alexander's role model and that he was driven to succeed where the Assyrian queen had failed. At the same time, accounts of Semiramis' myth written after Alexander show visible traces of Alexander's exploits. Diodorus constitutes the best example, but these traces can be seen to some extent in two other universal histories composed somewhat later, in the Augustan era, by Nicolaus of Damascus and Pompeius Trogus. Both these authors mention India, for instance, in Semiramis' expedition (Jacoby *FGrHist* IIA, 90 F 1, Iust. I.2.9 respectively), whereas India is missing in works of historians prior to Alexander, such as Herodotus (I.184) and Deinon (Jacoby *FGrHist* IIIC, 690 F 7).[49]

Even if Diodorus did not himself create the tale of Semiramis in parallel with that of Alexander, he did revise and develop it.[50] The question is why Diodorus would model Semiramis' journey on Alexander's. This is not an easy question to answer. Diodorus, so far as we know, was not a politician, so we cannot assume a political purpose. On the contrary, there is evidence that Diodorus wished to avoid meddling in the political issues of his day. He decided to exclude Caesar's deeds from his work, though it is possible that he originally planned to end it with the events of 46 BCE, as he himself hinted (III.38.2-3, V.21.2, 22.1). Yet Diodorus did take an interest in contemporary events. This is shown, for example, in his emphasis on the concept of bestowing honours equal to those of gods upon human beings because of their benefactions.[51] In my opinion, this was due to the debate over Caesar's deification, which took place at the time when Diodorus was writing his *Bibliotheke*. Admiring Caesar, Diodorus possibly found a silent way to express his own view on the subject. Diodorus' treatment of other heroes' activities reinforces this hypothesis. The journey of Heracles, for instance, has features from Caesar's adventures, such as a visit to Gadeira in Iberia (IV.18.2), or founding Alesia in

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49   The list of sources that relates to Semiramis' tale includes, among others, the anonymous *Tractatus de Mulieribus*, 1 (see Gera [n. 21], 6); Berossus (Jacoby *FGrHist* IIIC, 680 F 5.27, F 8); Lucian *Syr. D.* 14, 33; Hyg. *Fab.* 223.6, 240.2, 243.8, 275.7; Polyaenus *Strat.* VIII.26; Suda, s.v. Semiramis. Of these sources, though dating after Alexander, only Polyaenus and the Suda show some resemblance between the campaigns of Semiramis and the Macedonian king.

50   See, for example, the opinions of Eddy (above, n. 45) and O. Murray, 'Hecataeus of Abdera and Pharaonic Kingship', *JEA* 56, 1970, 162-63, who argues that Sesostris, as he appears in Diodorus' account, was modelled on Alexander, but credits Diodorus' source rather than Diodorus himself with the invention.

51   The number of times that Diodorus refers to this idea is enormous. See, for instance, I.17.2, 18.5, 20.5, 24.7, II.38.5, III.9.1, 64.2, 73.3, IV.1.7, 8.5, 53.7, V.64.6, 76.1, XX.100.3, 102.2, XXIX.18.

Gallia (IV.19.1-2).[52] It seems likely that Alexander, another prominent historical figure who was, like Caesar, appreciated by Diodorus, and whom Caesar himself appreciated,[53] also influenced Diodorus in shaping his mythical heroes.

There are, however, two other points to consider. First, the geographical accuracy of the paths taken by Semiramis hints that Diodorus wished to paint a real picture of the inhabited world and to make it the very same world in which his mythical heroine had travelled. Alexander's expedition, by which the Greeks became closely acquainted with the East, served as a perfect medium for the description of the eastern parts of the world. Second, Diodorus was far from alone in using myth as a precedent to historical events. Hence Heracles founded Alesia, the very same city that Caesar captured in a fierce battle, and Semiramis, in addition, excelled in building cities, a common act of Alexander and the Seleucids.

Diodorus' version of Semiramis, though following closely the deeds of Alexander, includes features from later periods, from the third to the first centuries BCE. Thus, for example, the urban centres which Diodorus emphasizes throughout the tale were typical of the Seleucids who, seeking to promote commerce, established a large number of towns, mostly along trade routes, as a means to foster these routes. Further, Bactria's independent rulers were captivated by India, as was Antiochus III who, like Semiramis, marched through Ecbatana and Bactria on his way to India. Finally, Diodorus' own generation clearly took more than a passing interest in the Oracle of Ammon. The tale of the mythological Assyrian queen, as Diodorus chose to write it, reflects, therefore, almost all of the Hellenistic era, from Alexander's time to the author's own age.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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[52] This accords well with the view of Sartori ('Storia, "utopia" e mito' [n. 30], passim), who suggests that Diodorus' first five books reflect contemporary politics. I fully agree that, writing in late republican Rome, Diodorus did not wish to express anti-Roman sentiments.

[53] See, for example, Caesar's reaction on seeing Alexander's statue at Gadeira: Suet. *Iul.* 7.1; cf. Dio XXXVII.52.2.