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Channelling His Inner Semiramis: Alexander and His Quest to Overcome the Assyrian Queen

Alexander the Great desired to outdo all the great generals in history and one of them was the famed Queen Semiramis. The episodes from their lives were occasionally put in comparison, and both gained legendary status among the ancient rulers. Alexander eventually surpassed Semiramis, but why was she so important to Alexander? The life of Semiramis was for the first time described by Ctesias in his Persica. The problem is that he died several decades before the rule of Alexander. Therefore, he did not record the striking similarities between her life and the episodes from Alexander's conquest. Ctesias' original account was adapted by later authors who altered some elements of the story in the wake of Alexander's expedition. In this article, we will focus on the similarities in the episodes from the lives of two conquerors, how Alexander fared compared to the Assyrian queen, and who was responsible for putting the tales in comparison, whether it was Ctesias, Diodorus, or someone else.

Keywords: Alexander the Great, Semiramis, battle of Hydaspes, Sogdian Rock, Bactria, temple of Ammon

1. Introduction

The most famous conqueror of antiquity, Alexander the Great, spent much of his life on campaign, defeating his foes wherever he went. His desire to rule the whole known world and to set foot on the boundaries of the Earth was stopped only by his untimely death. He also wished to surpass previous mighty kings, real or legendary.[1] One of these rulers was the queen of Assyr-

[1] Two are prominent – Cyrus the Great and Semiramis. Alexander's admiration for both is attested in many sources – Curt. 7, 6, 20; 9, 6, 23; Arr. *An*. 6, 24; Str. 15, 1, 5; Plin. *HN*. 6, 49.

ia, famous Semiramis. In the sources, she sometimes acted as a female counterpart of Alexander. She proved herself to be a skilled general as well as the founder of many cities and monuments across her empire. Several episodes from her life are, however, somewhat suspiciously similar to the events we know from the conquests of Alexander. There is no doubt that her deeds belong to the realm of legends (but as we will see, multiple real-life personalities were the inspiration for the life of the Assyrian queen). A mythical account of the ancient ruler itself would not be that suspicious; however, the first account of the life of Queen Semiramis in the Greek sources was written before Alexander was even born. Who was therefore responsible for the similar accounts in the lives of Alexander and Semiramis if there was any modification going on?

In this article, we will take a closer look at the problem of the transmission of the legend of the Assyrian queen. Several episodes from her life went through at a partial transformation from the original account given by Ctesias of Cnidus in the centuries following the life of Alexander. We will focus on the episodes, where the similarities between the rulers are the most obvious. Those are the campaigns of both generals in Central Asia and their journeys to India with a short mention of their trips to the sanctuary of Ammon as well. In these episodes, we can find allusions to the battles and endeavours of the Macedonian king. Throughout the article, we will focus on the original account of Ctesias and which later author could be responsible for possible modifications of the legend or who could add the parallels to Alexander's deeds.

2. Semiramis

The conquests of Alexander and his life are well-known,[2] therefore, it is not necessary to repeat them again here. On the other hand, we can summarize

[2] We have four main ancient sources dealing with his life – Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, Arrian's *Anabasis*, *Histories of Alexander the Great* by Curtius Rufus, and one book of Diodorus' *Historical Library* is dedicated to Alexander (D.S. 17). Two books of Justin's epitome are also centred on Alexander (Just. *Epit*. 11–12).

the life and deeds of Semiramis as we know them from the account of Diodorus (quoting Ctesias). Her name is sometimes associated with one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World – the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.[3] But her fame far exceeded the construction of a sole structure. Her name is first attested in Herodotus' *Histories*. There we find only two brief mentions of the Assyrian queen who built banks on the river Euphrates and who had a city gate in Babylon named after her.[4] Half a century after Herodotus, Ctesias of Cnidus was the first Greek author who gave a detailed account of her life. Much of the spirit of the original work is nevertheless lost since his *Persica* has not survived to the modern-day, and we have only fragments and notes from the works of later authors.

Ctesias' Semiramis was not completely his own creation. Several Assyrian queens could have influenced the Greek legend. The most notable one is her namesake – queen Šammu-ramat.[5] The wife of Assyrian king Šamši-Adad V and the mother of Adad-Nirari III held considerable power during five years of her supposed rule or regency in the late ninth century BC. Her campaign alongside her son is attested on the stele found in Aššur.[6] While the legendary queen bore the name of this woman and warfare is one of the most important points in the story, other queens (or more precisely, wives of the Assyrian kings; these women were not ruling themselves) from the Neo-Assyrian Empire also added elements to the legend.

By far the most prominent of them was Naqia (also called Zakutu). The wife of Sennacherib and the mother of Esarhaddon started many construction projects in Babylon and Nineveh, even owning vast amounts of land and estates as well as great wealth. Her powerful position was likely reflected in the legend of Semiramis,[7] although she was possibly already mentioned by

[3] For the existence and the location of this wonder, see Bichler–Rollinger (2005); Dalley (2013). In the more famous variant, the Gardens were built by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II for his wife (J. *Ap*. 1, 19). Diodorus explicitly denies that Semiramis built the Gardens (D.S. 2, 10, 1).
[4] Hdt. 1, 184; 3, 155.
[5] Dalley (2005: 12–14); Waters (2017: 46–47).
[6] *RIMA* 3 A.0.104.2001.
[7] Dalley (2005: 15–21).

Herodotus as Nitocris.[8] Two other women could also influence the overall story of Semiramis, Adad-guppi, the mother of Nabonidus, and the wife of Sargon II.[9] The legend as we know it today was very likely a combination of the stories about different Assyrian queens, each adding new elements to the tale.[10] If Ctesias did not model his account on eastern stories, then he could have based his Queen Semiramis on Greek legends and sources. As a reaction to Herodotus, Semiramis could be modelled on the Egyptian king Sesotris with the Assyrian queen eventually being more successful than him, or the Persian queen Atossa as described by Hellanicus could also be a candidate if we are not looking for an eastern source of the legend.[11]

In a lengthy passage, Diodorus used Ctesias as one of his sources for his description of the history of Assyria.[12] It should be noted that Ctesias was not his only source, and this problem is also connected to the topic of our article. Diodorus also names Cleitarchus and a certain Athenaeus among other unnamed authors. While he allegedly read many works, his choice of episodes, the overall structure of the work, and the narrative were completely in his hands. Diodorus was free to pick any information he needed from various sources to pursue his own vision.[13] That was highlighting the great deeds of famous personalities in history and how they improved the well-being of humankind, as benefactors (*euergetai*), in general.[14] Ctesias' (or Diodorus') Semiramis suits this goal well. Let us now proceed to the legend of Semiramis as it is recorded by Diodorus.

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[8] Hdt. 1, 184–187. Dalley (2005: 15). On the other hand, Nitoctis could be a rendition of Nebuchadnezzar II – Drews (1973: 79–80).

[9] König (1972: 34–37). According to him, the wife of Sargon could have played a part in the construction of the monuments during his reign.

[10] Several different combinations were suggested: Šammu-ramat + Naqia (Zakutu) – Pettinato (1985: 40–42); Stronk (2017: 526–530); Lenfant (2004: XLIV–XV); Naqia + Adad-guppi – Bichler (2004: 503). Goddess Ishtar might have also influenced the story of Semiramis – Gardiner-Garden (1987: 5). For other roles of goddesses, see Gera (1997: 70–72).

[11] Bichler (2014: 56–59).

[12] The account of Semiramis' life occupies about fifteen chapters in total – D.S. 2, 4–20.

[13] On the method of Diodorus and his reception, positive, or negative, see for example: Hornblower (1981:27–32); Sacks (1990: 9–22); Stylianou (1998: 49–131); Green (2006: 25–34). In the context of the work of Ctesias, see Stronk (2010: 64–66); Stronk (2017: 36–37).

[14] Sacks (1990: 23–82); Green (2006: 23–24). See also the prooemium of Diodorus (D.S. 1, 1–5).

Semiramis, a demigod (her mother was goddess Derceto, her father was a mortal man), was exposed as a baby, but then doves miraculously saved her. Raised by an attendant of the king, she was later married to the courtier Onnes. At that time, king Ninus was campaigning in Bactria but was unable to conquer the city of Bactra. Onnes sent for his wife, who not only exceeded every woman in beauty but proved herself to be very smart and skilled as a general as well. After she had helped to capture the fort (see below), Ninus fell in love with her and forced Onnes to divorce her. Ninus died soon after that and Semiramis became the queen of Assyria. Diodorus continues with a lengthy description of her works in Babylon, the city founded by her, followed by the foundations of many other monuments across her vast empire, mostly in Media or the Persis area. Diodorus also records her expedition to India. Despite her great efforts, she was unable to conquer the country and was defeated by the local king Stabrobates (see below). Diodorus then proceeds to the end of her reign, when she peacefully handed the throne to her son Ninyas, even though he was scheming against her.

Diodorus' account of the reign of Semiramis with Ctesias as one of his sources could be compared at some points to the other fragments, although not all of them used Ctesias as their source (or not directly). Diodorus mostly focuses on the great construction works of Semiramis and her military achievements, thus fulfilling his own goals, as he portrays the queen from a more heroic, positive perspective. Other sources tend to describe Semiramis more as a cruel, lustful woman.[15] This is only mentioned in passing by Diodorus,[16] as she supposedly consorted with many handsome soldiers, then killed them and buried them in mounds. There are other accounts of murders, either the murder of her husband Ninus,[17] or even her own death at the hands of Ninyas.[18] How many of these accounts were already present in Ctesias' *Persica* cannot be solved for his work is lost as are many other writings quoted

[15] By Orosius (Oros. *Hist*. 1, 4, 4–8) for example.
[16] D.S. 2, 13, 4.
[17] Ael. *VH*. 7, 1. The source here was Dinon. The same story is told by Diodorus but assigned to unknown Athenaeus (D.S. 2, 20, 3–5).
[18] Euseb. *Chron*. 17. Eusebius quotes Cephalion.

by Diodorus. As it appears, Diodorus chose specific stories from the work of Ctesias, while he downplayed Semiramis' darker side.[19] To what extent his account is a representative piece of Ctesias' *Persica* remains a question.[20]

To further complicate the issue, which will bring us closer to our topic, Diodorus did not rely solely on Ctesias. Diodorus mentions him by name a total of eleven times, by far the most among the authors in his second book.[21] But did he use the original text, or did he already have a modified version of the work?[22] Who could be the culprit that could be at the same time responsible for the inclusion of the allusions to the conquest of Alexander? The most obvious author in this case would be Cleitarchus. Diodorus also used his work as one of his sources. Cleitarchus even wrote on the same topics as Ctesias,[23] and most importantly was one of the biographers of Alexander. As one can expect, his work is lost. Therefore, we cannot make comparisons to *Persica* and *Bibliotheca*. Diodorus could have used Ctesias' work directly, or indirectly through the account of Cleitarchus (both options could have been possible in the end)[24] who could have reworked the episodes from the lives of Semiramis and Alexander and brought them closer together. Cleitarchus was also one of the sources for Diodorus' description of the conquest of Alexander, although never mentioned directly, thus he gave him less credit than was due.

Next to Cleitarchus, his father Dinon, also an author of *Persica*, could have altered the stories known from Ctesias in his own work,[25] in turn possibly used by Diodorus, although he never names him. There was also nothing that could stop Diodorus from inserting his own ideas into his work, and we have several examples of this.[26] The account of Queen Semiramis

[19] Comploi (2002: 230–237).
[20] See for example Bigwood (1980: 198–203); Stronk (2017: 36–37).
[21] For the sources of Diodorus for his second book, see Bigwood (1980: 196–198); Gardiner-Garden (1987: 8–9); Stevenson (1997: 29–34); Eck (2003: XI–XIII).
[22] Eck (2003: XV–XVI); Stronk (2010: 64–66). From the evidence gathered by these scholars, it looks like Diodorus did not rely on a reworked material.
[23] Lenfant (2009: 53–56).
[24] Stronk (2010: 64–69).
[25] Jacoby (1922: 2069). For an introduction to Dinon, his work, and his use of Ctesias, see Lenfant (2009: 53–74).
[26] For the examples of information not coming from Ctesias' *Persica* in the second book of

originating from Ctesias' *Persica* suffered from (possibly even more than one) modification, and the resulting legend in *Bibliotheca* could hardly be the same as in the early fourth century BC, when Ctesias finished his work. To be fair, there are many possibilities of what could have happened to the story and whose account was the source for the others. Whether Diodorus mixed more sources[27] but quoted Ctesias as the authority,[28] added bits of his own invention here and there[29] directly to the original or used an already modified *Persica*[30] can never be answered with any satisfying results. Obviously, it is not an answer one would strive for, but the fragmentary nature of the original texts leaves us no option to make absolute claims. While we cannot say what the original looked like, we can point out what was very likely not part of the text, at least not in the same way as narrated by the later sources. In the episodes, we can find similarities to the conquest of Alexander, and from time-to-time anachronisms[31] that could not have been recorded by Ctesias, for he died before Alexander's campaigns. Let us now proceed to the episodes from the legend of Semiramis, which could have been influenced by the conquests of Alexander (or vice versa).

3. Siege of Bactra

We can encounter the first problematic passage in the course of the siege of Bactra. There, Ninus only captured the local fort with the help of Semiramis. The way Semiramis managed to conquer Bactra shows similarity to the siege of the Sogdian Rock known from Alexander's campaign. Ninus was a remarkably successful general himself, but the fort of Bactra was a tough nut to crack. After several victories in field battles, Ninus laid siege to the largest city of Bactria, which had grand fortifications and was well-prepared for a

Bibliotheca, see Bigwood (1980: 203–206).

[27] See n. 21.

[28] Stronk (2010: 66).

[29] In the case of Alexander, Semiramis, and *imitatio Alexandri*, see Sulimani (2005); Szalc (2015).

[30] Goosens (1940: 38–44).

[31] See Eck (2003: XVI).

long siege. As time went on, Onnes sent for his wife, who already showed her wits while travelling (she created a dress perfectly suitable for a long journey), and then quickly captured the fort after observing the defences of the city. Semiramis noticed that many defenders of the stronghold were leaving their spots to help the defenders in the other parts of the city, as Ninus did not attack the stronghold directly due to its strong position. Semiramis thus took with her many soldiers who were accustomed to climbing the rocks and difficult terrain, passed through a ravine, and made her way to the top of the fort. Then she gave a signal to the attackers, while the defenders were struck with terror by her valiant effort and surrendered.[32]

Alexander used similar tactics during the siege of the Sogdian Rock. Sogdians fled to the fort on the top of the mountain laughing at the peace offer of Alexander, as they believed the stronghold could not be conquered. Since they had enough provisions and the Rock was extremely steep, they responded that the soldiers of Alexander would need wings to capture the fort. This did not discourage the Macedonian king. He picked three hundred men experienced in rock climbing. Under the cover of darkness, they climbed the Rock on its steepest part, where the lowest number of defenders was expected. By dawn, they made their way to the top and gave a signal to Alexander. The shocked defenders then surrendered. This episode appears in *Anabasis* by Arrian and with some differences in the writing of Curtius.[33]

We can easily dismiss the campaign of Ninus as fictitious; no Assyrian king ever ventured into Central Asia. Semiramis' legend might be influenced by several historical queens of Assyria, but none of them led soldiers through the rocky terrains of Bactra. The legendary account is nevertheless far too similar to the episode in the Alexander's conquest. Both generals face the same problem – a certain king of Central Asia (Bactrian or Sogdian) escapes to a well-fortified city, which cannot be captured by force.[34] The

[32] D.S. 2, 6.

[33] Arr. *An*. 4, 18, 4–19, 5; Curt. 7, 11. For Arrian and his sources, see Bosworth (1993: 124–134).

[34] We can compare the descriptions of the places – D.S. 2, 6, 4: τὰ δὲ Βάκτρα διά τε τὴν ὀχυρότητα καὶ τὴν ἐν αὐτῇ παρασκευὴν ἠδυνάτει κατὰ κράτος ἑλεῖν; Arr. *An*. 4, 18, 4–5: Ὀξυάρτου αὐτὰς ὡς ἐς ἀνάλωτον δῆθεν τὸ χωρίον ἐκεῖνο ὑπεκθεμένου …

defenders have enough provisions to withstand the siege, therefore both generals have to show their wits. The taunting by Sogdians is missing from the account of Diodorus. Semiramis simply observes the progress of the siege and finds the best spot to attack – the place where guards are leaving their positions to help elsewhere in the stronghold.[35] Alexander observes the steepness of the Rock and the favourable conditions of barbarians, which infuriates him into trying to conquer the place.[36] The resolution is practically the same. Semiramis takes with her soldiers accustomed to rock climbing and captures a part of the stronghold after passing through an arduous ravine.[37] Alexander does not climb the Rock himself, but chooses three hundred soldiers experienced in rock climbing. They made their way to the top of the Rock in a night assault.[38]

Both parties have to overcome environmental elements, either a ravine or the steepest part of the Rock[39] (combined with snow), to successfully capture the fort. There is also an interesting choice of word, to climb a rock (πετροβατεῖν), which is attested only three times in the Greek corpus, and twice it is connected to the episodes discussed. Both generals also attack the same spot, where they do not expect defenders or only a few of them.[40] Once the soldiers had climbed up, they gave a signal to the rest of the army below.[41]

καταλαμβάνει πάντῃ ἀπότομον ἐς τὴν προσβολήν.

[35] D.S. 2, 6, 7: Παραγενομένη δ΄ εἰς τὴν Βακτριανὴν καὶ κατασκεψαμένη τὰ περὶ τὴν πολιορκίαν, ἑώρα κατὰ μὲν τὰ πεδία καὶ τοὺς εὐεφόδους τῶν τόπων προσβολὰς γινομένας, πρὸς δὲ τὴν ἀκρόπολιν οὐδένα προσιόντα διὰ τὴν ὀχυρότητα, καὶ τοὺς ἔνδον ἀπολελοιπότας τὰς ἐνταῦθα φυλακὰς καὶ παραβοηθοῦντας τοῖς ἐπὶ τῶν κάτω τειχῶν κινδυνεύουσι.

[36] Arr. *An*. 4, 18, 6: ξὺν ὀργῇ ἐμβεβλήκει Ἀλέξανδρον.

[37] D.S. 6, 8, 8: Διόπερ παραλαβοῦσα τῶν στρατιωτῶν τοὺς πετροβατεῖν εἰωθότας, καὶ μετὰ τούτων διά τινος χαλεπῆς φάραγγος προσαναβᾶσα, κατελάβετο μέρος τῆς ἀκροπόλεως …

[38] Arr. *An*. 19, 1–3: ξυνταξάμενοι δὴ ὅσοι πετροβατεῖν ἐν ταῖς πολιορκίαις αὐτῷ μεμελετήκεσαν, ἐς τριακοσίους τὸν ἀριθμόν, … ἐκδήσαντες τῆς νυκτὸς προὐχώρουν κατὰ τὸ ἀποτομώτατόν τε τῆς πέτρας … οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ ἀναβάντες ὑπὸ τὴν ἕω καὶ τὸ ἄκρον τοῦ ὄρους καταλαβόντες.

[39] Curtius made them climb the least steep part of the Rock (Curt. 7, 11, 14: *qua minime asper ac praeruptus aditus videbatur*), but this does not affect the story in any way.

[40] D.S. 2, 6, 7: τοὺς ἔνδον ἀπολελοιπότας τὰς ἐνταῦθα φυλακὰς; Arr. *An*. 4, 19, 1: καὶ ταύτῃ ἀφυλακτότατον.

[41] D.S. 2, 6, 8: καὶ τοῖς πολιορκοῦσι τὸ κατὰ τὸ πεδίον τεῖχος ἐσήμηνεν; Arr. *An*. 4, 19, 3:

In both accounts, the defenders are completely terrified (καταπλαγέντες and ἐκπλαγέντες) by the sight of an enemy army on the top of the fort or the Rock (ἐπὶ τῇ καταλήψει τῆς ἄκρας and τοὺς κατέχοντας τὰ ἄκρα) and give up on defence.[42] Both generals face the same situation, roughly in the same area, both employ the same tactics, and both successfully capture a seemingly impregnable fort with hardly any casualties. Before we proceed to the problem of the transmission, there are two other bits we need to point out.

The first one is the rival of both generals. Alexander fought against a king named Oxyartes.[43] The name itself is a corrupted form of a word of Persian origin.[44] Now comes the tricky part because exactly the same name, Oxyartes, appears in the account of Diodorus, where this Oxyartes is the king of the city of Bactra. This would bring us to the conclusion that even the name of the king was copied and the text of Ctesias' *Persica* was revised in the Hellenistic period,[45] but the question is much more complicated. The name Oxyartes appears only in one of the manuscripts of Diodorus' text. The general in *Persica* likely possessed a different name, not related to the general from *Anabasis*. Other variants from *Bibliotheca* suggest the name Exaortes or Hoxaortes.[46] While it is not completely different from Oxyartes, scholars opt to read this name as Exaortes/Xaortes, or even Zaortes as it is known from other manuscripts and sources.[47] We cannot say what the name mentioned by Ctesias was. Later writers could have connected this particu-

σινδόνας κατέσειον ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ στρατόπεδον τῶν Μακεδόνων.

[42] D.S. 2, 6, 8: Οἱ δ΄ ἔνδον ἐπὶ τῇ καταλήψει τῆς ἄκρας καταπλαγέντες ἐξέλιπον τὰ τείχη καὶ τὴν σωτηρίαν ἀπέγνωσαν; Arr. *An*. 4, 19, 4: οἱ δὲ βάρβαροι ἐκπλαγέντες τῷ παραλόγῳ τῆς ὄψεως καὶ πλείονάς τε ὑποτοπήσαντες εἶναι τοὺς κατέχοντας τὰ ἄκρα καὶ ἀκριβῶς ὡπλισμένους ἐνέδοσαν σφᾶς αὐτούς: οὕτω πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν τῶν ὀλίγων ἐκείνων Μακεδόνων φοβεροὶ ἐγένοντο.

[43] Arr. *An*. 4, 18, 4; Curt. 7, 11, 1 (However! In this specific episode with the siege, the enemy is named Ariamazes by Curtius, but he knows Oxyartes as well – Curt. 8, 4, 21). Also, see Strabo (Str. 11, 11, 4).

[44] For the etymology, see Schmitt (2006: 237–239).

[45] Eddy (1961: 122); Auberger (1991: 145, n. 16).

[46] See Eck (2003: 114).

[47] The editors of Diodorus' and Ctesias' works are more inclined not to connect Oxyartes from *Anabasis* and the king of Bactria from *Bibliotheca*. For the commentary, see Boncquet (1987: 65–68); Eck (2003: 114–115, n. 46); Lenfant (2004: 237, n. 131); Stronk (2017: 93, n. 40).

lar story from the life of Semiramis to the conquest of Alexander by altering the name of the Bactrian king (at least in the case of one of the scribes who could have written the name as Oxyartes since the name possibly reminded him of Alexander's conquest).

The disagreements among the manuscripts are not the only problem related to the Bactrian king. In other sources that refer to the siege, this person appears as Zoroaster.[48] The Greek rendition of the name Zarathuštra bears no connection to the event from the reign of Alexander, therefore it breaks the link between the stories and cancels out the reading Oxyartes. On the other hand, Zoroaster does not appear anywhere else in the fragments of Ctesias, and the mage is not generally known as a king of Bactria or a commander. Justin (quoting Pompeius Trogus) and Eusebius (quoting Cephalion) could have connected the name to another famous personality from mythological time, especially if the original reading had been close enough with zeta, Zaortes.[49] If anything, their accounts show that Ninus' campaign in Bactria appeared in *Persica,* and it is not an invention of Diodorus. It is tempting to say that the episodes even contain the general with the same name, but that would be a hasty assumption, although the name from *Persica* was definitely altered through time and the sources. The later authors (and/or scribes) potentially modified the name to bring it closer to Zoroaster or Oxyartes, depending on the reading and their agenda. In the case of the latter, this would add another resemblance to the two stories already filled with parallels, but Diodorus himself was likely not responsible.

There is also a tiny detail in the episodes that shows a resemblance, although it is difficult to tell whether this was intentional. Both generals, Semiramis and Alexander, found their husband/wife during the siege. Next to the course of the battle and its outcome, we have another similarity on the level of private life:[50] Semiramis met Ninus during the siege of Bactra, and Alexander met Rhoxane during the siege of the Sogdian Rock. However, only

[48] Just. *Epit*. 1, 1, 9; Euseb. *Chron*. 28–29.
[49] Gnoli (2000: 43–44). See also n. 44.
[50] Eddy (1961: 122); Szalc (2015: 504); Stronk (2017: 97, n. 44).

the occasion of the meetings is the same because the ways they married are significantly different. Semiramis already had a spouse by that time, Onnes, and Ninus, who was impressed by her military skill and beauty, forced her husband to divorce her.[51] On the other hand, Rhoxane, the daughter of Oxyartes, was a captive who had done nothing remarkable when it comes to the war. Alexander married her due to her extraordinary beauty (she was the second most beautiful woman in Asia).[52] The marriage of Ninus and Semiramis is more of a tragic love triangle, while the marriage of Alexander is a completely straightforward affair, love at the first sight. The language does not show much resemblance either.[53] Ctesias probably devoted more space to the love story, but both episodes are passed over quite quickly in the later sources. Questions arise when we start to read other authors. Plutarch and Curtius do not place the meeting of Rhoxane and Alexander during the siege (of any rock).[54] If Diodorus, Arrian, or any of their sources wanted to point out that the marriage of both rulers took place under similar circumstances, then this part of the episode would count. Sadly, the key passage from Diodorus' work that could likely clarify things more (Alexander's siege of the Rock and the meeting with Rhoxane) is missing.

Since the original *Persica* and the works of the historians of Alexander are lost, the discussion on the transmission of the legend will always stay in the realm of speculation. We can try to disclose possibilities, and there are many of them,[55] but the final assumption should be marked with an asterisk. In no way could Ctesias refer to Alexander, therefore the later authors must have inserted the parallels in the stories. We could say that, in the case of this siege, Ctesias was the model; later authors copied this episode and assigned it to Alexander as one of the comparisons to Semiramis. However, this could also mean that Alexander never besieged the Rock, and it is only

[51] D.S. 2, 6, 9–10.
[52] Arr. *An*. 4, 19, 5. The first one was the wife of Darius III.
[53] Diodorus: … ὁ βασιλεὺς θαυμάσας τὴν ἀρετὴν τῆς γυναικὸς τὸ μὲν πρῶτον μεγάλαις δωρεαῖς αὐτὴν ἐτίμησε, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα διὰ τὸ κάλλος τῆς ἀνθρώπου σχὼν ἐρωτικῶς; Arrian: … καὶ ταύτην ἰδόντα Ἀλέξανδρον ἐς ἔρωτα ἐλθεῖν αὐτῆς.
[54] Curt. 8, 4, 23; Plut. *Alex*. 47, 7.
[55] For this specific episode, see the list by Stronk (2017: 533, n. 17).

a myth based on an older source. If the siege of the Rock indeed took place, then the Macedonian king appears to have been motivated to surpass Semiramis and knew the legend.[56] Did he want to imitate her deeds in real life? How much careful preparation, planning, and luck would he need to find a suitable place to emulate the same siege is beyond comprehension, even though, as the sources say, nothing was impossible for him.[57] Also, the sheer coincidence of the similarity of the two episodes, especially on a literary level, seems improbable.

If we abandon more speculative grounds, which author could be responsible for the parallels in the stories? We know the siege from three different sources. Diodorus assigns the siege to Semiramis (and presumably to Alexander in the missing part as well), Arrian and Curtius (although the occasion is slightly different in the case of these two writers) to Alexander. The course of the battle and the outcome always stay the same, and both rulers even marry there (in two sources). Diodorus based his account mostly on Ctesias (or at least he claims that). If Diodorus stayed true to *Persica* (and that seems to be troublesome if we consider his goals),[58] then Arrian and Curtius (or more likely their sources) would have to have been familiar with the work of Ctesias as well and narrate the same episode later. This way, Ctesias would be the source.[59] If Diodorus modified the episode following Alexander's campaign, then we have two options – Diodorus altered the legend himself, or

[56] See n. 1 and below.

[57] Plut. *Alex*. 5, 2; Arr. *An*. 4, 21.

[58] See n. 13 and 14. Also see Sulimani (2011: 229–306).

[59] We should not omit one very important source or perhaps an inspiration: Herodotus. In some way, Ctesias and the historians of Alexander could continue in a tradition of sieges by famous generals. Herodotus narrates the way Sardis was captured (Hdt. 1, 84) and again we can find some similarities. Cyrus the Great tried to conquer Sardis by storm but failed. The fortifications were too strong and brute force not a suitable solution. Then, we have a story of one soldier who noticed that one section of walls was not well-guarded since the walls were too high, and thus any attack there was not expected. Consequently, this soldier found a way and scaled the high walls with the rest of the Persian army following him.

Parallels can be found here. We have an impregnable fort, neglected watch, observation of the defences, soldiers climbing the steep parts of the fort. It is possible that the real source for the deeds of Alexander and Semiramis is rooted somewhere else, although Herodotus denies Cyrus the glory, and it is a common soldier who helped to capture the city.

his unnamed source filled the story with parallels (even a combination of these two options would be possible). In the case Diodorus himself was the culprit, then Arrian and Curtius must have copied the episode from him.

The last option appears to be the most realistic for this episode. All three authors, Diodorus, Arrian, and Curtius, derived their accounts of the siege from one common source, only Diodorus assigned the episode to Semiramis earlier in his work as well. It is not easy to point to a non-existent work, but there is hardly a better solution. Arrian quotes Ptolemy and Aristobulus as his sources for *Anabasis*.[60] Curtius is much less clear about his sources, but he relied mostly on Cleitarchus and Diyllus.[61] Diodorus used Cleitarchus for his account of Alexander, and partly for his history of Assyria.[62] Cleitarchus would be a worthy candidate because he was familiar with both Alexander and the work of Ctesias. What could come next? Did Cleitarchus directly copy the story from Ctesias to his own work centred on Alexander, or create a very similar episode for his work and with others following him (whether Alexander really besieged the Rock is not important)? In this case, Diodorus would have to keep his story intact on two occasions, especially after he had read the original *Persica*. If other authors, Ptolemy or Aristobulus, were influenced by the episode from *Persica* and added a similar one to their accounts of Alexander is equally uncertain. We cannot discard the possibility that Diodorus was more active and transformed the episode from one of Alexanders' historians and retrospectively assigned the altered version to Semiramis (the siege of Bactra appeared in *Persica,* so maybe not many changes were necessary), while Arrian and Curtius followed the source for Alexander. Diodorus and one unknown text would be responsible for the similarities between the episodes. It is not a completely satisfying answer but, in our eyes, the most probable one.

With many options floating around and the lack of written material, the question of the siege will remain open. The siege of Bactra appeared in Cte-

[60] Arr. *An*. 1.pr.
[61] See Hammond (1983: 116–159).
[62] See Hammond (1983: 12–85).

sias' *Persica*, but we are missing more information on the event. If the way Semiramis captured the fort was already present there cannot be answered with any certainty. If any later author (Diodorus) changed the narrative for his work (on his own, or under the influence of another source) is not clear. The siege of the Sogdian Rock with parallels appears likewise in the works of Arrian and Curtius. Their episodes should be based on an older source, the same one Diodorus had access to before. Who that was (Cleitarchus probably, Ptolemy or someone else less likely) sadly cannot be answered.

4. Sanctuary of Ammon

One short episode from the lives of Semiramis and Alexander is connected to their visit to the sanctuary of Ammon. Located in the Siwa oasis in the middle of the Libyan desert, the temple was visited or consulted by several famous personalities (Hannibal, Cato the Younger, also legendary heroes, Perseus and Heracles), so there is thus no surprise that both generals travelled to the site. The accounts of their visits are not very detailed. Semiramis went to Africa after her travels in Asia.[63] Unlike Alexander, she was not a conqueror of Egypt, as her husband had already subdued this country before.[64] However, she added large parts of Libya and Aethiopia to her kingdom, surpassing the success of Alexander in Africa in this regard. Her visit to the temple of Ammon is summarized in two mere sentences. She inquired about her death. The oracle answered that she would disappear from among the men and receive undying honours. That would happen after her son Ninyas had conspired against her.[65] There is nothing more added to her stay in Egypt; only later is the prophecy fulfilled.[66]

[63] See Sulimani (2005: 45–53).
[64] D.S. 2, 2, 3.
[65] D.S. 2, 14, 3: Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τήν τε Αἴγυπτον πᾶσαν ἐπῆλθε καὶ τῆς Λιβύης τὰ πλεῖστα καταστρεψαμένη παρῆλθεν εἰς Ἄμμωνα, χρησομένη τῷ θεῷ περὶ τῆς ἰδίας τελευτῆς. Λέγεται δ΄ αὐτῇ γενέσθαι λόγιον ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀφανισθήσεσθαι καὶ κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν παρ΄ ἐνίοις τῶν ἐθνῶν ἀθανάτου τεύξεσθαι τιμῆς· ὅπερ ἔσεσθαι καθ΄ ὃν ἂν χρόνον ὁ υἱὸς αὐτῇ Νινύας ἐπιβουλεύσῃ.
[66] D.S. 2, 20, 1.

Alexander's visit to the sanctuary is much more detailed, including the description of the route, the oasis, and the temple itself.[67] Contrary to Semiramis, Alexander primarily inquired about his origins, and who his real father was. There is an interesting juxtaposition, Semiramis asked the oracle about her death and Alexander about his birth. Alexander had more questions for the oracle, not only about his origin. He also inquired about his conquest of the world and the punishment of the murderers of Philip II. The sources agree that Alexander was delighted by the answers, as he was indeed the son of a deity, he would rule the whole of Asia, and the murder of Philip had been avenged. Therefore, both generals were demigods (Semiramis did not need confirmation from the oracle), both of their kingdoms were roughly the same size, and both were honoured as gods after their deaths.[68] Only some of this information was revealed by Ammon during their visits to the sanctuary, however.

We will now return to the transmission of the legend. While both rulers made their way to the temple and had questions for the god, both inquired about different affairs (the death of the queen compared to the origin and future exploits of the Macedonian king). If there is some hidden play with the opposites meant, the oracles carry more significant message, or a mere visit to the site would be sufficient for *imitatio Alexandri* is impossible to tell. How much space Ctesias dedicated to Semiramis' stay in Africa is not clear, and Diodorus is the only source who mentions Semiramis' visit to the temple of Ammon.

If we turn to the opinions of scholars, Alexander's visit to Siwa could be an adaption of Ctesias' work by the later author(s)[69] who added this episode and Diodorus copied it. Or it was an invention of Diodorus himself, who wished to put the lives of the king and queen in comparison.[70] The solution is probably much more simple, and not all scholars are looking for similarities in the case of this episode when it comes to the *imitatio Alexandri*.[71] If

[67] D.S. 17, 49–51; Arr. *An*. 3, 3–4; Plut. *Alex*. 26, 10–27, 11; Curt. 4, 4–8.
[68] On the cult of Alexander, see Chaniotis (2003: 434–435).
[69] Goossens (1940: 38–44).
[70] Eddy (1961: 123); Sulimani (2005: 53–55); Szalc (2015: 499).
[71] Boncquet (1987: 107–108); Eck (2003: 137–138); Stronk (2017: 111, n. 119).

Ctesias wrote about Semiramis in Egypt (and he did),[72] then her journey to Siwa was probably intended as a reflection of the same deed by Cambyses,[73] who later wished to campaign in Aethiopia as well.[74] The Ammon episode is thus just a coincidence, and no changes were needed to be made to the text of Ctesias. Trips to the oracle were also, frankly, quite common for famous personalities, and they were nothing that extraordinary.[75]

5. Indian campaign

The legend of Semiramis then brings us to her campaign in India. It is one of the most detailed episodes in the account of Diodorus,[76] but still very brief in comparison to the long descriptions of Alexander's battles in that area.[77] The results of both campaigns are very different, and Alexander clearly surpassed his supposed idol on this occasion. How do they fare here? India was the last land in Asia still not under the rule of Assyrians. Semiramis prepared a large-scale invasion of the rich country. Her opponent was king Stabrobates.[78] Semiramis lacked any casus belli; the king even warned her of impending defeat, to which the queen replied only with laughter and further remarks. Semiramis took her time and spent three years preparing her army. The numbers are, as one would expect, completely overblown, as she commanded the army of three million foot soldiers, two hundred thousand cavalrymen, and one hundred thousand chariots. Lacking real elephants, she devised their dummies to surprise Indians. Even though her effort was

[72] Semiramis' expedition to Egypt is mentioned by Diodorus in the first book of *Bibliotheca* with Ctesias as the source as well (D.S. 1, 56, 5). This time it is connected to the foundation of Egyptian cities.
[73] Eck (2003: 136); Lenfant (2004: 242, n. 210). The journey of Cambyses to Siwa is mentioned by Diodorus (D.S. 10, 14, 3).
[74] Hdt. 3, 25–26.
[75] Lenfant (2004: 242–243, n. 211).
[76] D.S. 2, 16–19.
[77] The Indian campaign occupies almost two books (5 and 6) in *Anabasis*, the same can be said about Curtius (books 8 and 9). Diodorus dedicates about twenty chapters to it (D.S. 17, 84–105); Plut. *Alex*. 57–66.
[78] For the name (of Iranian, not of Indian origin), see Eilers (1971: 24, n 24); Boncquet (1987: 114); Eck (2003: 139–140); Schmitt (2006: 280–282).

huge, Stabrobates amassed an even greater army and many well-armed elephants. The battle of the Indus, if we can use this name, started in favour of Semiramis. Her boats took command of the river. Then she built a large bridge over the river and crossed it with most of her army. The attack of cavalry by Stabrobates was in vain, as the horses were scared by camels. Nevertheless, the charge of elephants proved to be decisive. The army of Semiramis was crushed by the beasts, Stabrobates himself attacked Semiramis and even injured her. The queen fled, and many of her soldiers drowned in the river during the retreat. Then she cut down the bridge and returned to Bactria, soundly defeated.

If Alexander wanted to surpass Semiramis, then the stakes were honestly not that high. The queen crossed only the river Indus and lost the battle, while Alexander made much more of an impression during his Indian campaign. Since Semiramis' invasion was short-lived, there are not many points where we can draw comparisons to Alexander. The most notable would be the battle of Hydaspes and the return from India (see below). Where Alexander was victorious, Semiramis failed. The rest of the campaign is naturally different. Alexander continued to the river Hyphasis, where his army refused to go further. Then the Macedonian king turned southwards and made his way to the ocean before crossing the desert back to Persia.

We can safely say that the campaign of Semiramis is a legend.[79] Nevertheless, she was a competitor alongside Cyrus to Alexander,[80] whose successes in the East were eventually greater than his models'. Are there any similarities in the battles and campaigns? The invasion of India was featured already in *Persica*,[81] it was hardly an invention of a later author, especially when the military operations do not completely mirror one another. In fact, in the account of Semiramis' invasion, we can find more parallels to the campaigns of Ach-

[79] However, the battle itself might reflect real events – the Assyrian campaign to Elam and the battle of river Ulai. See Eck (2003: 143); Dalley (2003: 183–187).
[80] Eck (2003: XVI–XVII).
[81] It is mentioned by Nicolaus of Damascus (only very briefly – Nic.Dam. *FGrH* 90 F1 = *Exc. De insid*. 3, 24) and by Eusebius (quoting Cephalion – Euseb. *Chron*. 29), therefore it is assumed that Ctesias' *Persica* already contained this episode – Stronk (2017: 531).

aemenid kings rather than to Alexander's.[82] This would mean that Ctesias was reacting to Herodotus and the expedition to India was never meant primarily to be parallel to Alexander, who could potentially have been inspired by the legend. There are, indeed, hints that the text of Ctesias was slightly changed after the time of Alexander, but the campaign was a reference to Cyrus, Darius, and maybe even Xerxes, although Megasthenes even denies that Cyrus or Semiramis ever campaigned in India.[83] Semiramis employs Phoenicians for the building of the ships, just as Darius did.[84] Semiramis builds a pontoon bridge, then crosses the natural boundary and is heavily defeated.[85] Two Achaemenid kings also campaigned in India or ruled over Indians, Cyrus and Darius.[86] The use of camels by Semiramis refers to the battle between Cyrus and Croesus where camels scared the enemy cavalry.[87] If we are looking for parallels, then the campaign of Cyrus against Derbices[88] also features similar elements including the defeat of the ruler (in the case of Cyrus, even his death), crossing a natural boundary, and most of all – elephants. The Indian campaign of Semiramis was thus not completely reworked or even created by one of the Hellenistic authors to suit the narrative of Alexander's conquest.

However, we can still find bits and pieces of later additions to the text. If we want to compare the battles of the generals, then both again face the same situation. Semiramis and Alexander had to fight against an enemy with plenty of elephants.[89] The battlefield was also divided by a great river (Indus and Hydaspes) and crossing was not an easy task. The way both generals solved this problem is not the same: Semiramis built a bridge, and Alexander found a ford. The battle of Hydaspes itself could have been a model for (or at least had a con-

[82] Boncquet (1987: 113); Eck (2003: 31, n. 3); Lenfant (2004: 243, n. 233); Ruffing (2011: 358); Stronk (2017: 113, n. 130); Waters (2017: 45).
[83] Arr. *Ind*. 5, 7; 9, 10; Str. 15, 1, 6.
[84] Boncquet (1987: 117).
[85] Outcome similar to Darius' invasion of Scythia and Xerxes' of Greece – Lenfant (2004: 234, n. 223).
[86] No account offers many details – Cyrus (X. *Cyr*. 1, 4; Str. 15, 1, 5; Arr. *An*. 6, 24, 3) and Darius (Hdt. 4, 44).
[87] Hdt. 1, 80.
[88] Waters (2017: 124, n. 48).
[89] Arr. *An*. 5, 9; D.S. 17, 87; Curt. 8, 44.

siderable influence on) the fight between the Assyrian queen and Stabrobates, even though the results varied unless it was the other way around – the battle of Hydaspes was an homage to Semiramis. Most of the similarities are connected to the elephants and their use in the battles. The sources pointed out that the horses are scared of elephants,[90] and the cavalry charge of Stabrobates against dummy-elephants even failed (although due to camels). Stabrobates and Porus used the same formation – elephants in front,[91] followed by foot soldiers; their cavalry (and chariots in the case of Porus) proved to be useless. Both Indian kings mounted the greatest elephant.[92] The beasts were equipped in such a way as to cause terror among enemies.[93] Elephants caused a great slaughter in both battles, among friends and foes alike.[94] They became the decisive factor in

[90] D.S. 2, 17, 2; Arr. *An*. 5, 10, 2; 5, 15, 4.

[91] Both Semiramis and Stabrobates fielded real or dummy elephants in front – D.S. 2, 19, 2; 2, 19, 4. We can also find a note that Semiramis deployed the dummies in equal intervals: καὶ τῶν κατεσκευασμένων ἐλεφάντων πρὸ τῆς φάλαγγος ἐν ἴσοις διαστήμασι τεταγμένων. This matches the description of the deployment of elephants by Porus (D.S. 17, 87, 4): τοὺς δ' ἐλέφαντας καταπληκτικῶς κεκοσμημένους κατὰ μέτωπον ἐν ἴσοις διαστήμασιν ἔστησεν. Arrian even adds a precise length of intervals (Arr. *An*. 5, 15, 5): πρώτους μὲν τοὺς ἐλέφαντας ἐπὶ μετώπου, διέχοντα ἐλέφαντα ἐλέφαντος οὐ μεῖον πλέθρου. Cf. Curt. 8, 13, 6.

[92] D.S. 2, 19, 4: τὴν μάχην ἐπὶ τοῦ κρατίστου θηρίου ποιούμενος; D.S. 17, 88, 4: **τ**εταγμένος ἐπὶ τοῦ κρατίστου τῶν ἐλεφάντων. Plut. *Alex*. 60, 6: καίτοι μέγιστος ἦν ὁ ἐλέφας.

[93] Repeated two times in connection to Stabrobates – D.S. 2, 16, 2: ἐλέφαντες πολλοὶ καθ΄ ὑπερβολὴν λαμπρῶς κεκοσμημένοι τοῖς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον καταπληκτικοῖς; 2, 17, 7: ἐκόσμησεν ἅπαντας τοῖς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον καταπληκτικοῖς λαμπρῶς. And once to Semiramis, 2, 16, 8: εἴδωλα τούτων τῶν ζῴων, ἐλπίζουσα καταπλήξεσθαι τοὺς Ἰνδούς.
Diodorus then repeats the description during the battle of Hydaspes – D.S. 17, 87, 4: τοὺς δ' ἐλέφαντας καταπληκτικῶς κεκοσμημένους.

[94] D.S. 2, 19, 6. The attack of elephants by Stabrobates:
Διόπερ πολὺς καὶ παντοῖος ἐγίνετο φόνος, τῶν μὲν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας ὑποπιπτόντων, τῶν δὲ τοῖς ὀδοῦσιν ἀνασχιζομένων, ἐνίων δὲ ταῖς προβοσκίσιν ἀναρριπτουμένων. Συχνοῦ δὲ πλήθους νεκρῶν σωρευομένου καὶ τοῦ κινδύνου τοῖς ὁρῶσι δεινὴν ἔκπληξιν καὶ φόβον παριστάντος, οὐδεὶς ἔτι μένειν ἐπὶ τῆς τάξεως ἐτόλμα.
D.S. 17, 88, 1. The attack of elephants by Porus: μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τῶν ἐλεφάντων ταῖς τε τῶν σωμάτων ὑπεροχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἀλκαῖς δεόντως χρωμένων οἱ μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων συμπατούμενοι μετὰ τῶν ὅπλων θραυομένων τῶν ὀστῶν ἀπώλλυντο, οἱ δὲ ταῖς προνομαῖς περιλαμβανόμενοι καὶ πρὸς ὕψος ἐξαρθέντες πάλιν πρὸς τὴν γῆν ἐράττοντο καὶ δεινοῖς θανάτοις περιέπιπτον, πολλοὶ δὲ τοῖς ὀδοῦσι συγκεντούμενοι καὶ δι' ὅλων τῶν σωμάτων τιτρωσκόμενοι παραχρῆμα τοῦ ζῆν ἐστερίσκοντο.
A shorter description of bloodshed and chaos is also mentioned by Arrian (*An*. 5, 17, 6): ἀλλ᾽ οἷα δὴ ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ ἔκφρονες φιλίοις τε ὁμοῦ καὶ πολεμίοις προσφερόμενοι πάντα τρόπον ἐξώθουν τε καὶ κατεπάτουν καὶ κατέκαινον.

the battle against Semiramis, but Alexander managed to overcome this obstacle. Despite the victory, he was soon forced to leave the country as well after a mutiny of his army. Nevertheless, he outshined the Assyrian queen.

To what extent could one description of a battle influence the other one? The account of the battle by Ctesias is lost, but we can assume that Diodorus (or his source) changed some passages in the wake of the battle of Hydaspes. The campaign itself and the outcome stayed from the original text. If Diodorus followed Ctesias closely, then the unsuccessful expedition to India mirrors the defeats of Achaemenid kings elsewhere or, perhaps, it serves as an echo of the campaign of Darius to India (see above). If later authors wanted to celebrate Alexander over Semiramis, then there was no need to change the outcome of the invasion written by Ctesias. Where the queen failed, Alexander won the battle and went much farther. Most of the similarities come from the use of elephants. Diodorus employs similar wording and style when he speaks about the beasts. He is very likely simply quoting himself if the same vocabulary was not featured in his sources for Alexander's campaign already. The fascination with the beasts is not limited to the time after Alexander only. Ctesias himself describes elephants and their use in a war in his *Indica*.[95] The elephants were known to Greeks before Alexander and even earlier to Assyrians.[96] Ctesias could be writing in a similar tone when it comes to the elephants, but from the quotes above it should be clear that Diodorus' expedition of Semiramis owes something to the battle of Hydaspes. If we take a different stance, someone (Cleitarchus?) could have taken the account of Ctesias that already contained a description of extremely powerful elephants and embellished it further. In this case, again, the extant sources would have needed to copy this information independently of one another, and Diodorus would have to have kept this updated version over the original text of Ctesias, whom he was using.

From other possible later additions to Ctesias' text, we can find an anachronism that could not appear in *Persica*. The elephants of Stabrobates car-

[95] For example, Ael. *NA*. 17, 29; Phot. *Bibl*. 72 §7. For elephants in the account of Ctesias, see Scullard (1974: 33–36).

[96] Goukowsky (1972: 474); cf. Scullard (1974: 28–29). Alexander encountered elephants in the battle of Gaugamela for the first time – see Charles (2008).

ried towers on their backs.[97] This is known only from the Hellenistic period onwards, and it was probably an addition to the text by Diodorus.[98] Another passage possibly altered in later times was the battle order and the position of Stabrobates who takes command on the right wing of his army, thus occupying the same position as Alexander. In the battle, he supposedly used an oblique order,[99] a tactic not employed until 371 BC, after Ctesias finished his works. While this could mean that Ctesias' work was rewritten, the alteration of the text is disputed, and it is probably a literary device to pit two generals directly against each other.[100]

The Indian campaigns have varied results. Alexander clearly outshone Semiramis, who was defeated immediately after crossing the river of the Indus. The Macedonian king was more successful this time. The battle of Hydaspes is echoed in the expedition of Semiramis, most notably in the usage of elephants during the battle. Now, there is one last point connected to the campaigns and their similarities – their aftermath. Alexander topped Semiramis' deeds in India, then he wished to surpass her during the return trip to the core of the empire. To achieve this, he planned to cross the Gedrosian desert. According to Nearchus (who points out at local stories),[101] Alexander wanted to exceed both Cyrus and Semiramis, who made it through with only a handful of men, Semiramis with twenty, Cyrus with seven. Alexander's journey through the inhospitable region was equally disastrous, as he lost many men along the way. Nevertheless, he returned with more men than Cyrus and Semiramis, therefore it would count for his achievement and desires.

By what kind of legend was Alexander inspired? Nearchus (quoted above) said that Semiramis returned through the desert after her defeat, and

[97] D.S. 2, 17, 8: τὴν ἐπὶ τῶν θωρακίων κατασκευὴν. Diodorus later repeats this during the battle of Hydaspes where the elephants themselves resemble towers (D.S. 17, 87, 5): ἡ μὲν γὰρ τῶν ἐλεφάντων στάσις τοῖς πύργοις. Cf. Curt. 8, 14, 13.

[98] Goukowsky (1972: 475, n. 10). See also Boncquet (1987: 120); Stronk (2017: 117, n. 146). For the towers on the backs of elephants, see also Scullard (1974: 240–245).

[99] Goossens (1940: 41–42); Auberger (1990: 149).

[100] Eck (2003: 142–143).

[101] Arr. *An*. 6, 24sqq; Str. 15, 1, 5; 15, 2, 5. Arrian and Strabo explicitly name Nearchus as their source. The same story of crossing the desert by Alexander, but without a reference to Semiramis, can be found in other sources: D.S. 17, 105; Curt. 9, 10, 8–17; Just. *Epit*. 12, 10, 7.

Cyrus made an ill-fated expedition to India through Gedrosia. Megasthenes claims that there were no campaigns by either.[102] There are no mentions of any Indian campaign of Cyrus by Herodotus and Ctesias.[103] Save for the tradition mentioned by Nearchus, we also do not have direct evidence that Semiramis (or Cyrus) crossed the desert. When we look at the fragments of Ctesias, this part is missing, if it ever existed. In the account of Diodorus (very likely taken from *Persica*), we can find information that contradicts the claims of Nearchus and his supposed sources. After her defeat in India, Semiramis made her way to Bactra with only one-third of her original force.[104] Diodorus mentioned the exact number of her army before, thus she would have returned with one million soldiers. Even though the casualties were severe, it is still nowhere near close to the twenty men stated by Nearchus. With the lack of mention of any desert crossing, we would assume that in the case of this episode, the legend of Semiramis that served as an inspiration for Alexander did not come from the work of Ctesias. At the same time, however, we cannot claim with any certainty what happened to his text between his time and the usage of it by Diodorus (who could simply have dropped the episode), therefore we would not take the aforementioned statement as a matter of fact.

Who would want to compare Alexander, Cyrus, Semiramis, and their desert suffering is difficult to trace. Nearchus' statement is very vague, Alexander is simply fuelled by excelling his predecessors,[105] but there is complete silence in the sources older than Alexander on the supposed campaigns of Cyrus and Semiramis. If Alexander was really inspired by existing legends,[106] then they come from a source we do not have access to. Moreover, Nearchus could not adjust the episode to Semiramis post quem, since Alexander would have to have known it beforehand, as Nearchus was his contemporary. The

[102] See n. 83.
[103] Bichler (2014: 60).
[104] D.S. 2, 19, 10: δύο μέρη τῆς δυνάμεως ἀποβεβληκυῖα.
[105] Arr. *An*. 6, 24, 3: καὶ ταῦτα Ἀλεξάνδρῳ ἐξαγγελλόμενα ἔριν ἐμβαλεῖν πρὸς Κῦρον καὶ Σεμίραμιν.
[106] Nawotka (2010: 331).

comparison is obvious[107] if we simply read Nearchus, but the legend becomes more complicated with Diodorus' account in hand. If there was some reworking done before or after Alexander's conquest, or a parallel legend of Semiramis existed cannot be answered due to the lack of sources.

The Gedrosian episode is also important from another perspective. We were focusing on the comparisons between Alexander and Semiramis and how could the deeds of one ruler influence the other. It should be then noted that in the main sources for Alexander's campaign, Semiramis is almost not present. She is mentioned by name three times in *Anabasis* (twice in connection to Gedrosia), once by Curtius, and not at all by Diodorus (in book 17), Plutarch, and Justin. Strabo has the same information as Arrian. From Alexander's wish to emulate the successes of past rulers, we might get an impression that Semiramis is omnipresent in the account, but that is very far from the truth, and even the crossing of the desert is questionable (see above). If Alexander raved about the Assyrian queen that much, then it is not fully reflected in the sources. Cyrus is more prominent, and his name appears more frequently, but the comparison between him and Alexander is a topic for further research.

6. Conclusion

In this article, we focused on the comparisons between the lives of Semiramis and Alexander and how certain episodes could have been transmitted from one source to another. We have chosen three episodes where the similarities can be found: the siege of Bactra or the Rock, the trip to Siwa, and the Indian campaign followed by the crossing of Gedrosia. The problem of the original text and the source for the episodes remains. Diodorus' account of Semiramis, where he used Ctesias, Cleitarchus, and other possible authors, will always be marked with an asterisk, as his sources are not extant. Unfortunately, the same can be said about the accounts of Alexander's life and campaign since we are missing the works by the authors living in the time

[107] Eddy (1961: 123).

of Alexander and shortly after. If we suppose that the comparisons were drawn by one of the authors whose work is not preserved, then there will always be a void of uncertainty and no direct evidence can be shown. Let us now summarize the accounts.

We have three very similar descriptions of the sieges in the lives of Semiramis and Alexander. Both faced the enemy encamped in a well-fortified position, and both successfully conquered the place. Semiramis captured the city of Bactra, Alexander the Rock of Sogdiana or the Rock of Ariamazes. The places differ, but the process and the outcome remain the same. The Assyrian queen observed the defences and travelled through difficult terrain with soldiers skilled in climbing the rocky terrain. She made it to the top of the fort and gave a signal to the rest of the army. Alexander chose soldiers skilled in rock climbing who scaled to the top of the Rock and waved back down to Alexander. The defenders were on both occasions perplexed and surrendered. We can find similarities in the usage of language as well. There is also a disputed name of the local king, which was very likely not copied between the sources. Many different variants of the name show that the name stated by Ctesias (and quoted by Diodorus) was not the same as the name of the Sogdian king. Alexander and Semiramis find their loved ones during the siege, but the historians of Alexander do not agree on the place of the meeting with Rhoxane.

Where this episode came from is difficult to answer with any certainty. The accounts show too much resemblance to one another, therefore all three authors likely shared one common source. But who could that have been? They are too many possibilities floating around due to the lack of extant sources. The most logical creator of the episode would be Cleitarchus. Diodorus and Curtius used his writing. Arrian quotes different sources, but he possibly gathered this story from him as well, unless it also appeared in the works of Ptolemy, Aristobulus, or Nearchus. We should not forget that Diodorus wrote about Semiramis, so there is also another aspect of transmission. Whether Diodorus himself simply used a later episode for the life of Semiramis, reworked the pre-existing story in *Persica* along the lines of

Alexander's conquest, or directly quoted his source for Assyrian history is not certain, but the second option seems the most probable, especially when we compare his account of the Indian campaigns of both generals. There is even a distinct possibility that this episode with the siege could be a reference to Herodotus and the siege of Sardis, where we can find a similar account of the conquest of the fort, therefore we could look for the real source somewhere else.

In the case of the visit to the temple of Ammon, the similarity lies in the visit itself. Alexander and Semiramis have different questions for the god, the prophecies are not exactly the same, then they both go different ways. It was pretty common for famous personalities to visit this site, and both rulers are just names among others on the list.

The Indian campaigns have very different outcomes. Semiramis is swiftly defeated, Alexander is victorious but eventually forced to return. We can find similarities in the fight against Indian king and most notably in the descriptions of elephants. This is mostly the work of Diodorus. He uses the same language when it comes to the battle tactics, strength, equipment, and havoc caused by elephants. It is hard to tell whom he followed since all the sources appear to be absolutely fascinated by these animals and their battle abilities. Diodorus' account of Semiramis' campaign also shows hints of other later additions to the text of Ctesias, possibly made by Diodorus himself. The crossing of Gedrosian desert is the only time when we can find direct comparison between Semiramis and Alexander. The Macedonian king wished to eclipse Cyrus and Semiramis, who suffered great losses during the crossing, only to see the great suffering of his own army. This episode is mentioned by Nearchus and was probably his creation. We have no traces of campaigns of Cyrus and Semiramis across the desert and the primary sources for the Assyrian queen, Ctesias/Diodorus, let her leave India for Bactra. In a paradoxical situation, when we have explicit comparison of the two rulers, then the particular episode might have never been a part of the legend in the older period before Alexander.

Let us summarize the Alexander's wishes to overcome the Assyrian

queen. Her name appears very sparingly throughout the sources, and explicit comparison is made only in the case of the crossing of the desert. Two further episodes, the siege in Central Asia and the battle against the Indian king with many elephants, shows many parallels and should come from one common source (in the case of the siege) or were added to the legend of Semiramis in the aftermath of Alexander's campaign in India. If Alexander knew the legend and was really inspired by it, then there are still only a handful of moments where he reacts to the Assyrian queen. What kind of legend he knew is also a question. The original account was written by Ctesias whose work could have been adapted in the later times to add the episodes connected to Alexander.[108] The legend itself could come from the Mesopotamian area and was recorded by Cleitarchus, who drew the parallels with Alexander.[109] Or Diodorus himself was actively trying to portray Semiramis as his heroine with Alexander as a model for her.[110] These conclusions suggest quite a significant reworking of the text, but the extant account of the legend by Diodorus shows parallels between Semiramis and the Achaemenid kings as well.[111] As we have shown above, some episodes were indeed slightly reworked in later times and indicate parallels between Semiramis and Alexander, but the core of the tales of Semiramis was already present in *Persica*.

We should not forget one aspect – that Alexander reacted to the continuity of one empire stretching across Asia and some neighbouring areas and wished to become the master of the known world just like the Assyrians and Achaemenids had been before him, with Semiramis and Cyrus as the prime examples.[112] The continuity of the empires is a staple in the Greek imagination.[113] Alexander was not going to uproot this tradition. He achieved great goals just like the previous rulers of Asia, namely Semiramis and Cyrus.

[108] Goossens (1940: 38–44); Briant (1984: 31); Auberger (1990: 149).
[109] Eddy (1961: 123–124).
[110] Szalc (2015); Sulimani (2015).
[111] See n. 82.
[112] Stronk (2017: 533–536).
[113] Lanfranchi–Roaf–Rollinger (2003); Stronk (2017: 534).

Since he wished to be venerated as legendary ruler, he had to go toe-to-toe with those kings and queens and face the same troubles and challenges. He came off no worse than them and even surpassed them on several occasions as we have seen in this article as well, thus he rightfully belonged among the greatest commanders of all time.

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