

## SEMIRAMIS

Perception and presentation of female  
power in an Oriental garb*Brigitte Truschneegg***Introduction**

Focusing on aspects of female power, this chapter will seek to define the characteristics of Semiramis as an important literary figure in classical sources from the fifth century BCE (Herodotos) to the fifth century CE (Orosius). The varied depictions of Semiramis have been affected by each author's individual perspective on Assyrian history, the quality of the sources used in each case, and, not least, by each of these authors' cultural backgrounds and views on gender issues. I will show that different cultural elements and gender performances were moved in different streams of tradition, each interpreting Semiramis in their own way. The steadily increasing emphasis on her negative moral qualities illustrates the mounting uneasiness of the classical tradition about the performance of a female Assyrian ruler, who did not fit the political and social norms of either Greece or Rome. This uneasiness could be responsible for the consistent presentation of Semiramis with alien, "Oriental" stereotypes of luxury and promiscuity.

Current discussions of Semiramis deal with the historical background and/or the literary aspects of the legend, as well as the cultural and historical context of the sources. There are those who are skeptical about the importance of the historical figure in the background,<sup>1</sup> but there are also scholars who support the view that there is a deeper historical Assyrian background for Semiramis.<sup>2</sup> It is unclear how much the Greeks knew about the historical figure of Sammu-ramat, but the similarity of the names is hardly coincidental.<sup>3</sup> Semiramis became an object of interest to scholars of the ancient Near East and classical history more than 100 years ago.<sup>4</sup> Her status as one of the ancient "exceptional women" was of particular interest at the time.<sup>5</sup> Certain aspects and the perception of the legendary Semiramis (e.g. the hanging gardens of Babylon) have been discussed before.<sup>6</sup> Her effect as a sort of "role model" for the presentation of subsequent rulers (e.g., Alexander the Great who reportedly emulated her (and Kyros II) on his march through the Gedrosian desert) have also been investigated in recent years.<sup>7</sup> Recently, scholarly debate on the subject has turned from the 1970s discourse on Semiramis as an "exceptional women" into a topic discussed in terms of gender issues and roles.<sup>8</sup> A recent study focused on the gender performance of Sammu-ramat and of the literary figure of Semiramis.<sup>9</sup> Semiramis also appears to serve as a basis for transmitting Greek and later Roman ideas of power, rulership, and femininity.

## Semiramis in the classical sources

Classical sources from the fifth century BCE to the fifth century CE narrate the story of an Assyrian queen named Semiramis and depict her in various ways. The textual evidence is not easy to assess: the various texts belong to different literary genres and the classical authors write about Semiramis in the context of their perspectives on Assyrian history, influenced by their primary sources, their specific cultural backgrounds, and, not least, by their views on gender issues and female power. Current research has investigated a cross-section of these aspects, but a longitudinal section, so to speak, is better able to visualize recurrent narrative elements. This has been successfully presented in a recent study that completed a detailed contextualization of the Classical sources with an analysis of important narrative patterns (*Erinnerungsbausteine* literally “memory building blocks”) on Semiramis in the *longue durée*.<sup>10</sup> How do the classical sources on Semiramis deal with female power and how does their representation change over time?

### Aspects of female power

The classical sources depict Semiramis in the diverse situations of royal female life: as a ruling queen, as a general, as the wife of a king, and as the mother of the next king. Semiramis’ power is expressed, on the one hand, in public political space (as queen and in terms of rulership, military expansion, and building projects where she broke political norms) and on the other hand in social space (motherhood, promiscuity), where she breaks social norms.

### *Ruling an empire and building monuments*

Two narrative elements representing public political space appear in almost all descriptions of Semiramis and form a constant basis for the various forms of the story: her role as female ruler and her building projects. And it is Herodotos who lays the foundation for this.

In the middle of the fifth century BCE, Herodotos introduces Semiramis into classical literature as one of two queens who ruled over the Babylonians (1.184). As a further detail of her rulership, he mentions that she has created amazing dams on the plain of Babylon that protect the land from flooding. A gate named after Semiramis indirectly refers to further building projects of hers in the city (3.155).<sup>11</sup> From this time onwards, the classical sources present Semiramis as a ruler who initiated impressive construction projects.

The most detailed story about Semiramis is based on Ktesias of Knidos (fourth century BCE) and handed down by Diodoros in the first century BCE (2.4–2.20), who stresses the following aspects: after Ninus’ death, Semiramis ruled the Assyrian Empire, founded the city of Babylon, and built streets, tunnels and palaces (e.g. Ekbatana).<sup>12</sup> She is admired both as a great builder (for instance, the Bisutun relief was ascribed to her) and as a ruler.

The importance of prestigious building projects for the image of a ruler may be seen in the short comment on Semiramis by Berossos the Babylonian, at the beginning of the third century BCE. Berossos criticizes the existing historical tradition on Semiramis (Jos. *c.Ap.* 1.20) and depicts his favorite kings Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonid as initiators of numerous important buildings at Babylon. He thus adapts history to his personal interests and denies Semiramis the fame that went with these achievements.

Geographical works from the time of the early Roman Empire also deal with the queen and her building activities. At the beginning of the first century CE, the Greek geographer Strabon describes her as the wife of king Ninus and mother of his successor. He presents her as a successful builder of various monuments that are shown in Babylonia and beyond in her

empire (Strab.16.1.2). He depicts her as the founder of Babylon (2.1.17)<sup>13</sup> and as a constructor of walls (11.14.8: Opis) and mounds (12.2.7: Zela; 2.1.17 and 16.1.2).<sup>14</sup> In the first century CE, the Roman geographer Pomponius Mela (*De chorographia libri tres*) presents a positive image of Semiramis that is primarily based on her qualities as a ruling queen (1.63).<sup>15</sup> Under her reign, Syria was at the top of its power. She is described as an excellent ruler, who founded Babylon and built an artificial water system (1.63): “Her works certainly have many distinctive characteristics: two in particular stand out: Babylon was built as a city of amazing size, and the Euphrates and Tigris were diverted into once dry regions.”<sup>16</sup>

The Roman Historian Quintus Curtius Rufus, who wrote a history of Alexander the Great, probably in the second half of the first century CE, reflects in several passages on the admiration Alexander had for the achievements of Semiramis.<sup>17</sup> Semiramis is described as the founder of Babylon, a city whose beauty is explicitly named (5.1.24); she appears as a constructor of various monuments (9.6.23); and she was adored for her admirable deeds and her fame (7.6.20). Also in the first century CE, Pliny the Elder offers some short comments on Semiramis in his extensive work *Naturalis Historiae*, focusing in particular on her qualities as a founder of various cities (he names Melita in Kappadokia, Arachosia, Abaisamis and Saraktia) and as a builder of monuments (altars in Sogdiana).<sup>18</sup>

The Roman historian Suetonius in the second century CE mentions Semiramis in his biography of Julius Caesar, at a point when Caesar is faced with criticism that he is acting like a woman (*Jul.* 22.2). Suetonius describes her female rulership positively, although he clearly ascribes it to Asia and thus as far distant from Rome.

It is not until the second century CE that classical sources demonstrate a need to explain female rulership. Arrian mentions Semiramis first in passing when he reports that it was common in Asia that women ruled over men (*Anab.* 1.23.7).<sup>19</sup> He confirms the existence of the rulership of women over men and his comment characterizes this rulership as an exceptional aspect of a foreign society, one which has to be addressed.<sup>20</sup> He does not report anything on Semiramis’ construction activity.

At the end of the fourth century CE, a detailed narrative on Semiramis again enters the historical tradition. Once again, female power as reigning queen and building activities are combined to form a positive picture. Marcus Junius Justinus’ *Eptome historiarum Philippicarum* is a condensed compilation of the lost *Historiae Philippicae* by the Augustan historian Pompeius Trogus.<sup>21</sup> It is very likely that Justin’s dependence on Trogus is responsible for the “revival” of a more detailed narrative about Semiramis. As the wife of King Ninus, Semiramis played a central role in the Assyrian government. Justin ascribes the founding of Babylon and the construction of the famous city walls to Semiramis. And, like Arrian, Justin has to explain Semiramis’ regency. However, he does not blame “Asian customs” for it, but a trick of the extraordinary Semiramis. According to Justin, Semiramis did not dare to take over the rulership on her own or to give it to her young son after her husband’s death. Neither did she expect that a woman would be accepted as a ruler of the empire. She therefore disguised herself as a man. Wearing long garments and a turban on her head, she pretended to be her son (1.2.1).<sup>22</sup> With this explanation, Justin indicates that for his readership, a queen as an absolute ruler would have been unthinkable even for Assyrians (a strange and faraway people). After she has been very successful politically, Semiramis lays down her male costume and reveals herself to her people as a woman. Her reputation was not reduced by this: “a woman surpassing not only women but men, too, in manly achievement!” (1.2.6)<sup>23</sup> Rather casually, the story ends with the remark that her son killed her because she desired him.

Christian literature takes up this explanation of female rule, but paints a negative idiom of the Assyrian ruler. At the beginning of the fifth century CE, Paulus Orosius from Bracara in Portugal wrote the first Christian universal history, *Historiae adversum paganism*, a work in seven volumes.<sup>24</sup> Published in 416–417/418, it begins with the fall of mankind (1.1.4) and starts with

the king who built the first great empire, the Assyrian Ninos.<sup>25</sup> That Justin was a major source for his work is well demonstrated by the passage dealing with Semiramis.<sup>26</sup> This passage shows both strong parallels to, as well as remarkable differences from Justin, especially in the areas of rulership, sex-change, conquests, and building activities. Orosius narrates that Semiramis started her public performance as a man: “She had her husband’s spirit and took on his son’s appearance.”<sup>27</sup> But, in contrast to Justin, she is characterized very negatively by Orosius. This is not because she is a woman, since her husband was, according to Orosius, a “bloodthirsty” and “greedy” man and Semiramis is declared to have surpassed her husband in this regard. It is her sex life in particular that Orosius describes as licentious and unnatural: “This woman, ablaze with lust and thirsting for blood, lived amid an unending fornication and murder” (1.4.7).<sup>28</sup> She killed all her lovers and “on illicitly conceiving a son, she vilely exposed him. Then, when she learned that she had indulged in incest with him, she covered her personal disgrace by inflicting this crime on all her people” (1.4.7).<sup>29</sup> The political and military ability of Semiramis, which Justin rated rather positively, Orosius treated negatively. The Christian author stresses the bad moral qualities and the bloodthirstiness of the foreign queen. This negative characterization quite overshadows her building activities in Babylon, which she made the capital of her empire.<sup>30</sup>

### *Leading an army*

Leading an army is another aspect of female power in the public sphere and Semiramis is not only described as a reigning queen and a builder of famous buildings, but she also leads military campaigns with cleverness and great drive and successfully enlarges the Assyrian Empire.<sup>31</sup> Like her rulership, Semiramis’ military successes were not questioned in the Greek and Roman sources for a long time and often are mentioned only briefly.

According to Ktesias (*apud* Diod. Sic. 2.6.5–9), who is the first to mention the military qualities of Semiramis, these already played a role in her time as wife of Ninos. During that time, Semiramis supported him in the war against Baktria. After Ninos’ death Semiramis expanded the Assyrian Empire and conducted military campaigns against distant countries (Aithiopia, India: Diod. 2.13–14, 16–20). She also started a well-prepared campaign against the Indian King Stabrobates. Even though both parties had to withdraw from the battle, she is reported to have fought bravely.

In the first century CE, Strabon completes this list of military campaigns with Semiramis’ crossing of the Gedrosian Desert (15.1.5–6). However, according to him, Semiramis died before she could start her campaign on India (15.1.6). Quintus Curtius Rufus picks up this topic in his passages on Alexander’s admiration for the deeds of Semiramis. In a speech to his army, Alexander emphasizes that Semiramis subjugated people (5.1.24), and appeals to his soldiers not to lose their ambition before they have reached the same fame as this woman. Following the same tradition as Strabon, Arrian agrees that Semiramis died before she could start a military campaign to conquer India (*Ind.* 5.7), but reports (referring to Nearchos) that she successfully crossed the Gedrosian desert (*Anab.* 6.24.2).

Probably due to his source Pompeius Trogus, Justin again picks up the Indian campaign and reports Semiramis’ military activities in Ethiopia and India, attesting that she turned out to be a very skillful military leader (1.2.7). As with previous observations on Semiramis’ rulership and building projects, the evaluation of her character—more positive (Justin), respectively more negative (Orosius)—dominates the depiction of her campaigns. According to Orosius, she even surpasses her greedy and bloodthirsty husband in the military field: “This woman [...] crushed Aithiopia in war, drenched it in blood [...] At that time hunting down and slaughtering peoples who lived in peace was a more cruel and serious matter than it is now” (1.4.5–6).

### ***Preliminary results on aspects of female power in the public space***

Since Herodotos, aspects of female power in the public space (rulership, building projects, army leadership) have been recurrent narrative elements in the description of Semiramis, independent of the literary genre and the scope of the stories handed down. Apart from a few exceptions, all texts mention these three components, which were clearly seen as positive until the first century CE. It was not until the second century CE that, for the first time, there was felt to be a need to explain the regency of a woman. In the sources of the fourth and fifth centuries CE, narrative elements attributing negative moral qualities to Semiramis move to the foreground of the descriptions.

The most important result of this overview is that the female power in the public space attested for Semiramis does not differ in its representation from male power in the public space. The only difference is that a woman exercises it. This is particularly highlighted by the texts naming Semiramis as a model for Alexander III: successful expansion and crossing of the Gedrosian desert (Strab.15.1.5, 2.5; Arr. *Anab.* 6.24.2) and honoring her as a ruler over Syria (Suet. *Iul.* 22.2). That the walls of Babylon could be perceived as a monument for eternal memory is emphasized by a passage in Dionysios of Halikarnassos about the legendary king Servius Tullius (Dion.Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.25.3–4). The project appears to be unsuitable for Servius Tullius, as it only serves to heighten the reputation of a single person and not the welfare of many.

When, according to Curtius Rufus, Alexander III told his soldiers to remember the fame of a queen, he was playing, on the one hand, with Semiramis as a positive role model (7.6.20), and on the other hand, with the idea that men should surpass women (9.26.23). Julius Caesar also turns the accusation of behaving like a woman into a positive one by presenting Semiramis as a positive role model (Suet. *Iul.* 22.2).

The positive image of Semiramis during the first century CE, which had been based on her rulership and activities, developed even further, even making her a role model for men.

### **Female power in the social space**

Semiramis' power in the social space is described in the sources above all when Semiramis fails to observe standards for female behavior as a queen, wife, mother, and woman and becomes subject to moral assessments.

### ***An Assyrian queen and “mundus muliebris”***

A remarkable passage on Semiramis by Valerius Maximus dates from the first third of the first century CE. His *Facta et dicta memorabilia* is the oldest complete collection of *exempla* in the Latin language.<sup>32</sup> The passage on Semiramis in book nine (chapter 3: “*De ira aut odio*”), starts with a reference to the Punic general Hannibal as a child (Semiramis is referred to in the following as “Samiramis”).<sup>33</sup>

Such was the force of hate in a boy's heart, but in a woman's too it was no less potent. Samiramis, queen of Assyria, was busy doing her hair, when news came that Babylon had revolted. Leaving one half of it loose, she immediately ran to storm the city and did not restore her coiffure to a seemly order before she brought it back into her power. For that reason her statue was set up in Babylon showing her as she moved in precipitate haste to take her vengeance.

(*Val. Max.* 9.3, ext. 4)<sup>34</sup>

This is the only mention of Semiramis in the whole of Valerius' collection of almost 1000 *exempla*.<sup>35</sup> Here, Semiramis is put into a typical female environment, practicing a typical female activity. She is staying in her private rooms, taking care of her appearance. She is located exactly where women are supposed to be according to the so-called *mundus muliebris*; she had only left it for a short period to fulfill her rulership and military commitments and then returned to caring about her appearance again!<sup>36</sup> The presentation of her as an Assyrian queen depends mainly on the Greek sources, but the image also corresponds to the cultural background and the current gender concerns of the Roman texts.

Her active reaction and her immediate campaign against the revolting city can be considered as a hallmark of typically male behavior. However, even though she acts swiftly and successfully, she reaps little positive attention for it. It is the manner in which she reacts to the report of the rebellion, which exposes her—in the presentation of Valerius Maximus—as a typical female. Not wise consideration, but quick-tempered anger characterizes her abrupt reaction. Semiramis is driven by her emotions, a severe character deficiency for both genders, from a Roman point of view. However, lack of control of emotions is described primarily as characteristic of women.<sup>37</sup> Valerius Maximus emphasizes her undue haste by her unfinished, inappropriate hairstyle for a public appearance.

### ***Semiramis under moral judgment—motherhood, promiscuity and stereotypes***

Semiramis mainly survived in Roman literature as an *exemplum* of outstanding female behavior, which had different values in different contexts. As a female ruler, she did not fit into the Roman worldview. The increasing emphasis, perceptible from the second century onwards, on her moral qualities clearly demonstrates the growing uneasiness of the Roman authors about the gender-crossing performance of this Assyrian queen.

From the first century CE onwards, the sources refer with increasing frequency to Semiramis' origin from the "East," using this circumstance to explain her extraordinary position, power, and behavior. The *Roman History* of Cassius Dio (second/third century CE) can be seen as a turning point in the evaluation of Semiramis. The Assyrian queen explicitly serves as a negative role model for Iulia Domna, the mother of the Roman Emperor Caracalla. According to Cassius Dio, Iulia Domna was accused for trying to rule on her own and alone (79.23): "how she might attain the imperial position rendering herself the peer of Semiramis and Nitocris, since she came in a way from the same regions as they."<sup>38</sup> The passages in Arrian and Justin explaining to the audience why a woman can rule in Assyria have already been discussed. Together they depict the strangeness of Semiramis.

An exceptional passage in Pliny the Elder fits in with this. Pliny focuses in particular on Semiramis' qualities as a founder of various cities and then he reports one quite outstanding aspect. In book 8 of *Naturalis Historiae*, which deals with the nature of horses, Pliny (referring to the Numidian king Juba) reports that Semiramis loved her horse so much that she had sex with it (8.64, 155).<sup>39</sup> However, after this stunning announcement, Pliny gives no further comment on her behavior. The passage seems primarily intended to demonstrate the estimation of the horse and only in a secondary capacity highlights an abnormal sexual activity. It appears that the image of the Assyrian queen was already linked with abnormal sexual practice so closely that the passage needed no further explanation.

This is emphasized in the fourth century CE by the single passage in Ammianus Marcellinus recording foreign customs demonstrating immoral behavior. Ammianus Marcellinus carries on the image of Semiramis as a negative role model and uses her as a mirror for Roman society. He accuses "Samiramis" of being the one "who was the first of all to castrate young males, thus

doing violence, as it were, to Nature” (14.6.16–17).<sup>40</sup> While criticizing the decadent behavior of Roman nobles in Roman bathhouses, Ammianus Marcellinus reports that Semiramis was overwhelmed with flatteries by her people, just as the Roman nobles were overwhelmed with flatteries by prostitutes in the Roman bathhouse (28.4.9).<sup>41</sup> With regard to gender issues, it is of great interest that a powerful female figure acting in a typical male sphere for decades is made responsible for the instigation of a custom that emasculates men (castration). The fact that Ninus is defined as her husband (and not the other way around: 23.6.22) is possibly the only reflection to the strong position that is generally ascribed to Semiramis after her husband’s death.

The portrayal of Semiramis by Justin begins very promisingly with her founding Babylon, the construction of the famous city walls, and her successful military activities in Ethiopia and India. But this success story does not have a happy ending. According to Justin, Semiramis developed an “unnatural” desire for a sexual relationship with her son, Ninyas. He did not resist, but slayed her after their affair was revealed (Just. 1.2.10). The death of the Assyrian queen is not glorious, in contrast to her military and political achievements. The fact that her son, according to Justin, did not act like a man at all, that he lived like a woman together with other women, appears to be a result of the incorrect gender behavior of his mother:

Her son, Ninias, was content with the empire built up by his parents and completely abandoned military activity. Further, almost as if he had exchanged sex with his mother, he was rarely seen by men and he grew old surrounded by women.

*(Justin, 1.2.11)*<sup>42</sup>

Her illicit sexual lifestyle is emphasized here. Her “criminal passion” for her son forces him to kill her. In this way, she is responsible for her own death and for the fact that her son committed matricide. Even after her death, she appears to be responsible for the further development of Ninyas, who is not interested in extending the empire (in contrast to his mother) and who prefers to live the life of a woman (among women) that she never lived. According to Justin she failed terribly, both as a wife and as a mother. Her deeds as a female ruler, founder, and military leader are obscured and overpowered by her negative characteristics such as her greed for power and viciousness.

At the beginning of the fifth century CE, Paulus Orosius intensifies the negative evaluation of Semiramis. He shows strong parallels with, as well as remarkable differences from, Justin in the aspects of Semiramis’ rulership and sex-change. Paulus Orosius, quoted above (1.4.7), describes the sex life of Semiramis as especially licentious and unnatural. It is obvious that these passages are influenced by the tendency to condemn war and by Christian moral standards of behavior, especially in sexual life. Semiramis suffers from a lack of shame (*pudicitia*) and a lack of chastity (*modestia*), two typical virtues expected of Roman women. She is bloodthirsty and is able to force men to follow her will, in contrast to the ideals of a Roman/Christian woman. Various lovers are the victims of female sexual violence. This sounds like the exact antithesis of the descriptions of some male rulers in Roman sources. At least the incestuous relationship with her son documents the climax of sexual misbehavior for which she paid with her life, and her son with matricide. Beyond that this atypical sexual behavior fits in perfectly with Orosius’ intention of putting the barbarians at the service of the narrative by using stereotypes of traditional historiography.<sup>43</sup>

If we look at the representation of Semiramis in various sources over the centuries, the legendary queen starts out with a fairly positive image, but is defamed more and more as a sinful and vicious woman, greedy for power, with an unnatural sexual lifestyle and an unacceptable way of life.



## Conclusion

Narrative patterns in the reception of the Assyrian queen move along in the stream of tradition from the fifth century BCE to the fifth century CE, each layer of narrative interpreting the figure of Semiramis in its own way. Different literary genres, various cultural contexts, a number of primary sources, and the author's own perspective all affect the purpose of the text. Against the background of numerous investigations into these aspects, the long-term view provides the opportunity to compare the textual sources in order to uncover patterns of female power.

With the depiction of Semiramis as ruler and successful builder, in the fifth century BCE Herodotus introduced two basic elements of female power in the public space into the representation of Semiramis. All traditions on the Assyrian queen until late antiquity mention these two narrative elements. They remain influential, independent of the cultural and historical background of the respective source. In the first century CE, the rulership of a woman needs explanation for the first time. Arrian and the later author Justin find different ways to explain Semiramis' rulership. However, Semiramis' military activities are not called into question.

The classical sources present Semiramis with female power, but in "male action." Female power does not differ in its representation from male power in public space. In any case, the appearance of an authoritative female figure also connects with the construction of female power: all literary traditions can be seen as constructing and evaluating female power in public space.

Semiramis' power in social space is characterized by Semiramis exceeding social norms. Her behavior as a queen, wife, mother, and woman becomes subject to moral assessments. In the classical sources, Semiramis survived particularly as an *exemplum* of outstanding female behavior that had different values in different contexts. As a female ruler, she does not fit into the Greek and Roman idea of female behavior. The passage in the *exempla* of Valerius Maximus contrasts the traditional ideas of the Assyrian queen with the ideals of the daily life of a Roman *matrona*.

Narratives dealing with female power displayed in social space increasingly emphasized both the queen's origin from the "East" and her "bad" or unusual sexual behavior supposedly characteristic of the "East." The increasing emphasis on her (negative) moral qualities demonstrates the growing uneasiness of the authors about the unusual gender performance of this Assyrian queen. The moral criticism of Semiramis as an authoritative and promiscuous woman and a bad mother plays a crucial role in the classical sources and became markedly stronger over time.

## Notes

- 1 E.g., Rollinger 2010; Lanfranchi 2011: 175–223; Kuhrt 2013: 6133–4; Bichler 2014: 55–71; Heller 2015: 331–48.
- 2 E.g., Pettinato 1988; Dalley 2005: 11–22. On historical archetypes for the legendary Assyrian queen, see Frahm 2001: 377–8.
- 3 See Rollinger 2010: 385; Novotny 2002: 1083–5; Weinfeld 1991: 99–103.
- 4 Lehmann-Haupt 1901/1902 and 1918; Hommel 1921; Lenschau 1940: 1204–12; Schramm 1972: 513–21; Dietrich 1989: 117–82; Fuchs 2008: 61–145, esp. 74–5; Siddall 2013.
- 5 For the idea of exceptional women as a phenomenon of "andro-normative" historiography, see Asher-Greve 2006: 324.
- 6 Bichler and Rollinger 2005: 153–217; Rollinger 2008: 487–502; Rollinger 2010; Dalley 2013.
- 7 Bichler 2014; Szalc 2015: 495–507; Nearchos, *BNJ* 133 F 3a/b = Arr. *An.* 6.24.3; Strab. 15.1.5. For a current compilation of the history of research see Droß-Krüpe 2019.
- 8 Bleibtreu 1992: 57–72; Comploi 2000: 223–44; Melville 2004; Dalley 2005: 11–22; Asher-Greve 2006; Svärd 2015: 49–51; Svärd 2014: 17–23.
- 9 Svärd and Truschneegg forthcoming.



- 10 Droß-Krüpe 2019: 1–124. In addition, Droß-Krüpe offers a detailed and up-to-date compilation of the relevant research literature on Semiramis.
- 11 The second one was named Nitokris and lived five generations later than Semiramis (Hdt. 1.185). Herodotos describes her as cleverer than Semiramis and as a great builder: she diverted the river Euphrates in order to better protect Babylonia and also created a huge lake above Babylonia to allow navigation. On women in Herodotos, see Bichler 2000: 80.
- 12 For a detailed discussion of all passages on Semiramis by Diodoros, see Stronk 2017: 86–121.
- 13 Her husband Ninus dedicated the foundation of Ninive as capital city in (As)Syria (Strab. 2.1.17).
- 14 Strab. 11.14.8; 12.2.7, 3.37.
- 15 On the close connection of the mythical past and outstanding female behavior, see Rollinger 2000: 209, n. 84.
- 16 Translation from Romer 1998 (cf. Rollinger 2000).
- 17 How far his presentation is related to the Greek sources and to what extent it is related to his positive presentation of Alexander himself, see Comploi 2013.
- 18 Also see Plin. *HN* 6.8; 6.49; 6.92; 6.145. On women in Pliny the Elder, see Vons 2000.
- 19 Günther 2002: 437 points out that for Arrianus, Semiramis embodies an “Oriental” type of ruler. The passage is dealing primarily with the Karian queen Ada.
- 20 Günther (2002: 436) characterizes Arrianus’ understanding of gender roles as a simple one: “Dass bei Arrian also ein sehr schlichter, holzschnittartiges Verständnis der Geschlechter vorliegt.”
- 21 In contrast to earlier studies, which dated the *epitome* into the second or third century CE, more recently—because of the specific nature of the text as a *breviarium*—a more plausible date in the fourth century CE has been suggested, see Schmidt 1999; Emberger 2015: 11.
- 22 Translation from Yardley 1996.
- 23 On the narrative of Semiramis in Justin see Comploi 2002, esp. 338–9.
- 24 See van Nuffelen 2012.
- 25 Eigler 2000: 53–4; Fear 2010: 15.
- 26 This strengthens the point of Eigler 2000: 53 who stated: “He appears to have made particular use of the world history by Pompeius Trogus in Justin’s *Epitome*. This is also certainly the source of his classification of the course of history into four empires (Babylonian, Macedonian, Carthaginian and Roman).”
- 27 Translation from Fear 2010: 15.
- 28 “haec, libidine ardens, sanguinem sitiens, inter incessabilia et stupra et homicidia.”
- 29 Van Nuffelen 2012: 128 notes that Orosius was fascinated by women overstepping the limits of their sex.
- 30 “Semiramis, his wife and ruler of Asia, rebuilt the city of Babylon and decreed that it should be the capital of the Assyrian kingdom” (2.2.1). See also 2.2.5, 3.1.
- 31 Bichler 2014: 55–8 pointed out that Semiramis was seen in competition with great male conquerors.
- 32 Written late in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, it offers almost 1000 *exempla*, that is, moral anecdotes, in nine books. The nine books are divided into different categories, including *exempla domestica* and *exempla externa*. The examples in general represent more or less outstanding human behavior, almost exclusively drawn from the upper classes. On the *exempla* of Valerius in the framework of situation ethics, see Langlands 2011: 100–22.
- 33 All the other *exempla externa* in that chapter present men as military leaders. The story of Semiramis thus perfectly fits here and gains additional importance by contrasting military matters with the female morning toilette.
- 34 Translation from Shackleton Bailey 2000 (Loeb).
- 35 This episode is reported first by Valerius Maximus and later by Polyainos (8.26).
- 36 On the continuity of this theme in visual arts see Asher-Greve 2006: 344–5.
- 37 When one remembers the beginning of the passage referring to Hannibal, who acts angrily and full of hate as well, it is also probably understood as behavior typical of non-Romans. Nonetheless, one must recall that the famous Punic general is described when a child not as an adult. However, a child in an angry temper tantrum is not a very flattering comparison for Semiramis.
- 38 For general remarks on women in the *Roman History* of Cassius Dio, see Schnegg 2006: 259–60.
- 39 For the narrative in detail and its reception, see Droß-Krüpe 2019: 102–7.
- 40 Translation from Rolfe 1950–8 (Loeb).
- 41 Günther 2000.
- 42 Translation from Yardley 1996.
- 43 Yardley 1996: 176.

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## Abbreviations

Abbreviations of ancient authors, works, and document collections are those found in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (online at <https://oxfordre.com/classics/page/abbreviation-list/>).

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