The Portrait of Queen Semiramis as a Warrior – Queen in Selected English Children’s Literature

**ABSTRACT**

Queen Semiramis is considered the most famous Mesopotamian queen compared to other queens from different civilizations. Greek historians were the first to record her history by adding some mythical elements to her story making it a great legend that survived till this day. Due to the queens’ great character, her legend is retold to children by many children writers. In this research, two children adaptations; Semiramis: Child Of The Doves by Marianna Mayer (1999) and Queen Semiramis: The Legend (2020) by Ingrid de Haas were taken as examples of the portrayal of queen Semiramis personality as a warrior queen during the Assyrian civilization. The researchers compared and contrasted the children adapted versions to Semiramis Legend by Diodorus Siculus, the original legend of the queen. The researchers concluded that, although many details were either changed or deleted compared to the original legend, yet all changes did not affect her portrayal as a warrior – queen with great achievements.

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Tجسيد شخصية الملكة سميراميس كملكة محاربة في قصص انكليزية مختارة للأطفال

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الخلاصة:

تعد الملكة سميراميس من أشهر ممالك في بلاد الرافدين مقارنة بغيرها من الملكات من الحضارات الأخرى. إن أول من سجل تاريخها الإغريق وأضافوا إلى سيرتها الكثير من الخيال لتظهر لنا أسطورة سميراميس للمؤرخ الإغريقي ديودورس سكلس. في هذا البحث تم اختيار قصتين من أدب الأطفال تتناول شخصية الملكة سميراميس: سميراميس: ربيبة الحمام ل لماريانا مير 1999 و الملكة سميراميس: الأسطورة ل انغريد دي هاس 2000. حيث تم دراسة هاتين القصتين كمثال عن تجسيد شخصية الملكة سميراميس كملكة محاربة في أدب الأطفال. بعد مقارنة القصتين المخصصة للأطفال بالعربية الأصلية لديودورس سكلس استنتجت...
Semiramis was a great Mesopotamian queen famous throughout history as a powerful female, and a legendary warrior (Crusemann et al., 2019, p. 155). Queen Semiramis is known by many names such as Shammuramat and Sammuramat, but she is widely recognized by her Greek name Semiramis. As a historical figure many facts about her are questionable (Mark, 2014). She was the wife of Shamshi-Adad V and after the death of her husband, she became governor for five years while her son Adad-nirari was still a child. According to historian Gwendolyn Leick, “This woman achieved remarkable fame and power in her lifetime and beyond. According to contemporary records, she had considerable influence at the Assyrian court” (p.155) As an Assyrian queen, she is known for joining her spouse on a military campaigns, which was uncommon for an Assyrian queen during that time (Leick, 2010, p. 155). The Assyrian civilization was officially controlled by kings for the whole 1400 years of its history (Lassen & Wagensonner, 2020, p. 48) and queen Semiramis broke this role becoming the first warrior-queen in the history of Mesopotamia a matter that attracted many authors to her character. Outside of Mesopotamia, this female Assyrian military leader becomes the center of mythical tales (Leick, 2010a, p. 155). She is known by Greeks, Assyrians, Armenians, and others major civilizations at that time as a semi-divine queen (Mark, 2014), a demi god born from a goddess mother and a human father. Her mother abandoned her in the desert (Souchal et al., 1974), thus, she was nurtured by doves. The stories about Semiramis are mostly attributed to the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, who quoted an older work by Ctesias, that is now lost. Historians argue that, it seems so unbelievable that the people of Assyria, especially men, to be successfully ruled by a woman. Maybe that is why her achievements created awe greater than that of any male monarch because it was uncommon for women to achieve such leadership success (Mark, 2014). History, although filled with controversy, showed without doubt that Semiramis was an Assyrian queen who defeated the Medes and Armenians and all myths and legends sprang from the achievements of a real historical lady, Sammu-Ramat. (Mark, 2014).
The problem of the research lies in the lack of Arabic children stories dedicated to this great Mesopotamian queen compared to the rich bulk of English children stories that richly portrays queen Semiramis as a powerful, beautiful, warrior – queen.

The aims of the research is to study the portrayal of queen Semiramis as an Assyrian Warrior – Queen in selected English children’s stories by analyzing the accuracy of her portrayal compared to the original legend on one hand, and with historical records of the queen on the other.

2. The Legend Of Semiramis:

In order to compare and contrast between the portrayals of queen Semiramis as a warrior queen in children’s stories a brief account of the original Semiramis Legend by Diodorus Siculus’ is crucial. Siculus was a Greek historian who wrote a universal history. His history encompassed 40 books. Among the books that have remained, his most major sources for Greek history were undoubtedly Ephorus (for 480-340 BC) and Hieronymus of Cardia (for 323-302 BC) (Diodorus Siculus, n.d.). Semiramis Legend by Diodorus Siculu starts with Semiramis born in the Syrian city Ascalon, her mother was the Syrian goddess Derceto. She had been involved in a relationship with a good-looking Syrian youth. She felt ashamed of her union with a mortal man, Derceto left her daughter in the desert and then threw herself into a lake, with half of her body of a fish and with a human head). Her child is nurtured by doves, later on, a group of shepherds take her ad gave her to Sammas and called her Semiramis. Semiramis grows and becomes a great beauty. She married to the Assyrian officer Onnes, and they bore two sons, Hyapates and Hydaspes, Onnes loved her a lot and he asked for her advice almost in everything. The Nenievh king Ninus ordered his army to conquer Batrica, they succeeded in having control over all the Batrica except for Bactra. They siege Bactra for a long time, Onnes sent for his wife. Semiramis, showed great courage when devising a plan to capture the city. She thus catches the eye of the Assyrian king Ninus, who motivates Ones to commit suicide by telling him to leave his wife and marry one of the king’s daughters and so the king marries Semiramis. She bore Ninysin the king’s son and later on the king died and she became the Queen. Semiramis, made a great job as she built Babylon. After she was securing the architects she gathered from her whole kingdom, she built bridges, an expensive quay, also built two palaces engraved with wild animals, she also built a square reservoir. Semiramis also built cities over all the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. She also built trading-places then she went to Ecbatana, where she established palaces and roads, she
made mounds, which some time consider as tombs for the generals who died. After she finished construction works, she visited all Egypt, Ethiopia Lydia and have heard about the beauty of India. Later on, her son Ninayas became against his mother. After she gave her son the kingdom, some claimed that she turned into the shape of a dove and flew with other birds thus, Semiramis, who had control over all of Asia, except India, died.

3. *Queen Semiramis: The Legend by Ingrid de Haas (2020)*

Haas’ legend starts long time ago were a beautiful girl was born; her name was Semiramis. She was the baby of the goddess Derceto. Semiramis’s mother was obliged to return to her home in the lake without her baby. She left her child with a flock of doves to take care of the baby. Later on a cowshed found the child, took her, and gave her to the keeper of the king’s shed Simmas and his wife because they had no children. The baby grew up and became a very beautiful and smart girl, she got married to the advisor of the king of Assyrian Onnes. Her husband, loved her a lot and he took her with him wherever he went. Onnes decided to take Semiramis with him to attack Batrica by the king’s order. The king at first refused that woman company them in the battle, but he changed his mind after Onnes explained to him how clever she was. The King and his army were able to conquer Batrica but not its capital. As Semiramis suggested a plan and she told her husband and the king, and they agreed about. She planned to attack the citadel on the top of the hill because it was the only spot without guarding and her plan succeeded. The King was very thankful to her and gave her many gifts. On their way return to Nineveh Onnes died. Many years passed, she got married to the king and bore a son named Ninyas. After a short time, the king died, and Semiramis became the queen of Assyrian who ruled the city for five years. In this short period, she did a great job. She built cities and continued the series of wars of the king that left off. The first city she built was Babylon. She gathered the best architects to do so. In addition to houses, she built two enormous palaces on the west and east of the Euphrates River, and she connected them with a bridge. She also built palaces in Media and Ecbatana. She also built many cities along the Euphrates and Tigris. Later on, she moved to conquer some lands such as Egypt, Ethiopia and India. Her conquer of India, showed her cleverness in deceiving the enemy. At first, the victory was for Semiramis but later on, everything changed because of a traitor who told the Indian king about the fake elephants. Semiramis left the battle because she did not want to lose more of her men and returned home. As her son was ready to rule the kingdom, she turned to be a dove and flew with the dove's flock.
3.2. **Semiramis: Child Of The Doves by Marianna Mayer (1999)**

Mayer’s story begins in Syria, near Ascalon, where the goddess Derceto bore her baby in the forest and abandoned her there. A flock of doves heard her cries, the doves went to Sisona (king Ninus’ shepherd) and tried to tell him about the baby. The shepherd and his wife followed them. Sisona and his wife had no children. As they reached the baby's place, they understood that the birds wanted them to take care of the baby. The shepherd and his wife named the baby Semiramis, who grew up in the shepherd’s cottage and became a very beautiful girl. Semiramis’s beauty charmed Menon the king’s principal officer who begged her to marry him, after a while she accepted. Menon was very obsessed with her beauty to the extent that he kept her hidden. When Menon was called to fight in a war, Semiramis went with him. The Assyrian king and his army were able to conquer one city after the other except one. The king ordered his army to return home but Semiramis surprised the king with an idea that would make victory. King Ninus was impressed by her courage and allowed her to lead his army to the top of the citadel; soon later the Assyrians conquer the city. The king was fascinated with Semiramis’ beauty and courage and he wanted her to be his wife but Menon refused. As a consequence of Menon’s refusal, the king blinded and imprisoned him, who later on died. The king and Semiramis married, as Semiramis got power, she put Ninus in prison to avenge her previous husband Menon. She became the royal queen of Nineveh for a long period. She made a lot of constructions like Babylon and the hanging gardens. She also conquered many countries. She and Alexander Great were the only ancients who made war beyond the Indus River. After being a queen for forty-two years, later on, she gave the throne to her son. Eventually, she was worshipped as a goddess in dove form or worshipped as the form of the goddess Astarte.

4. **Analysis and Discussion**

Before analysing the military Semiramis, it's important to have a look at the Assyrian military. The Assyrians have a long history of being vicious and merciless warriors. If there was one quality that distinguished the Assyrian kingdom, it was their love of battles. Assyria was one of the earliest great military powers in the world. The army was formidable, aggressive, and cunning. Soldiers were educated to be merciless. (Somervill, 2010, pp.111-117). The Assyrian army was very professional and well-organized. It consisted of a fixed army of infantry, cavalry, and horse-drawn war chariots that were utilized as platforms for launching arrows. Furthermore, the Assyrians possessed the first major army armed with iron weapons. Another aspect that
The military Semiramis, was someone for rulers to follow in this environment, particularly women in positions of authority who needed to demonstrate conventionally masculine characteristics. Military success requires more than ambition, and authors have praised the queen's military abilities in combination to her unwomanly thirst for conquest. The tale of Semiramis mounting the acropolis at Bactra is an early example of this (Worrall, 2019, pp. 83-90). As she became the ruler of the kingdom, that gave her the opportunity to show her ability in war. She continued the king's persuasion to conquer lands. She subdued Egypt, Lydia, and Ethiopia as well, and the great of them all was her try to conquer India. She appeared as very resourceful and cunning. As she heard that the army of the Indian king was great from all sides, she felt inferior to the Indian army because she did not have elephants, though she prepared her army very well with all matters of wars such as boat, horses, and weapons. So, she ordered to make fake elephants. This shows how much she was able of controlling all the situations with her smartness. She ordered to make them out of oxen hides also ordered them to draw the exact appearance of the real elephant on them to look real. And she succeeded in terrifying the enemy at first. The trick was going on very well and they almost achieved victory at first. Stabrobates the Indian king heard about the fake elephant, which made his army feel brave and attracted the Assyrian army. In Mayer version, the author did not refer to the battle with India details as in the original version or the de Haas version but she only mentioned that "Remarkably Semiramis was the only sovereign among the ancients, except Alexander the Great, whoever carried a war beyond the Indus River"( Mayer, 1999, p. 24).

According to the history of the Assyrian queen Semiramis, a military leader was a model to the king Alexander the Great, Semiramis influenced him to attack India (Worrall, 2019, p.91). In fact, Semiramis is depicted also on the walls of the Castello's sala baronale della Mantain Italy as
one of the nine female worthies. Semiramis's hair is one of her distinguishing attributes. One side of her hair is plaited in, while the other half is not. The image echoes one of the most famous myths about the Queen, specifically that when she heard of a rebellion during her toilette, she immediately departed to repress the insurrection. She marched on her foes with her hair half-braided. It's a narrative of bravery. And these traits from the uprising tale served as visual signals, making Semiramis stand out among the eight other military queens shown (Worrall, 2019, pp. 100-101).

The story of her hair is also depicted on tapestry from the fourteenth century. It depicted three women. The woman in the middle, dressed in a magnificent surcoat over fancy armor, is combing her hair as she faces a messenger armed with a long arrow, and a servant carries a mirror to the left. And on the top of tapestry the following inscription: “I was Semiramis, Queen of Babylon. I conquered barbarian Indians and Svrans. I went up into the North and set my throne there, and slew the king of the Ethiopians” (Souchal et al., 1974, pp 90-91). Despite the variations of all art works, all of them portray Semiramis as a great woman from all aspects whether as a warrior, builder, or as a queen.

Besides her beauty, Semiramis is gifted with cleverness for in Siculus’ original legend and the retold version by de Hass. She is depicted as extremely clever to the extent that her husband was not able to do anything without her advice “he didn't go anywhere without Semiramis, because he didn't make any decisions without first consulting with her” (de Haas, 2020, p.6). Her smartness has no limitation for she prove her this both in marriage and war.

Semiramis as a warrior amazed the king when she led them to conquer the capital of Batrika, in a time men were not able to conquer the capital of the city, and this is a simple example of her cleverness in the military field. In retold story by Mayer, Semiramis was depicted in an illustration in the beginning of the story as a strong black-haired warrior wearing war clothes, with a helmet on her head, as well as a sword in one hand and armor in the other hand. conveys to the children Semiramis’ smartness, Semiramis went to the king and his assembled and told them about her clever plan to conquer the city “But no one will volunteer to lead such a raid. It is suicide!” declared the councilors. I will lead your troops, Majesty, Semiramis said. So impressed was the king that he endorsed her plan.” (Mayer, 1999, p.23). She was courageous more than men, to the extent that she was volunteered. She faced the arrows and the stones bravely while most
courageous men were shivering. In De Haas retold story, The King was impressed by her strength and cleverness “King Ninus was very grateful to Semiramis, and he gave her many expensive gifts” (de Haas, 2020, p.8). Semiramis was able to fulfil the king’s desire in conquering the city. As a result, she acquired the king’s respect and love.

Many classical historians admired Semiramis for her accomplishments as a queen, a warrior and a conqueror, and a great builder. In Siculus’s original legend and the retold stories by de Haas and Mayer’s versions, her great constructional achievement are described in details. Her buildings were intricate and variegated, but most importantly, they were massive. The Assyrian queen's efforts compared to the labours of Cyclopes or giants, in length reaching the stars and bulk and strength as solid as a rock created by the gods (Worrall, 2019, p.48). In Siculus and De hass’s stories, the two authors carried her great achievement as builder, the first city she built was Babylon and she gathered the best architects to do so. In addition to houses, she built two enormous palaces on the west and east of the Euphrates River, and she connected them with a bridge. She made the Hanging Gardens which consider one of the great seven wonders. After she finished building Babylon city, she built a great wall sounding the city. She also built many cities along the Euphrates and Tigris. She went to visit Media and she built a palace there next to the sacred Bagistanus Mountain. She also visited Ecbatana, and built an enormous palace and ordered her men to cut a tunnel for water to people there. In Mayer’s retold version(1999), Babylon was called “the Golden city”(p.24). The author did not give any further description of Semiramis’ achievements as a builder like the author de Haas.

It is uncertain what exactly Sammu-Ramat did during her reign, although it appears she initiated a lot of building works and might have personally commanded military engagements. She was strong enough to have her own stele carved and erected prominently in Ashur city(Mark,2014):

Boundary stone of Adad-nirari, king of Assyria, son of Šamši-Adad, king of Assyria (and of) Sammu-ramat, consort of Šamši-Adad, king of Assyria, mother of Adad-nirari, mighty king, king of Assyria, daughter-in-law of Šalmanu-ašare-du, king of the four quarters. When Ušpilulume, king of Kummuh, caused Adad-nirari, king of Assyria (and) Sammu-ramat, consort, to cross the Euphrates River; I smashed Attar-šumki, son of Abi -rami, of the city Arpad, together with eight kings, who were with him at the city Paqarhubunu, their boundary and land. I deprived them of their camp. In order to save their lives, they went up (the mountains). In that
year they put up this boundary stone between Ušpilulume, king of Kummuh and Qalparuda, son of Palalam, king of Gurgum. Whoever takes it away from the possession of Ušpilulume, his sons, his grandsons, may the gods Aššur, Marduk, Adad, Sin, (and) Šamaš not support his lawsuit. Prohibition of Aššur, my god, (and) Sin, who dwells in Harran. (Melville, 2014, p.228).

This inscription certifies Semiramis was Assyrian queen, from bloodline, family, and military campaign. There is other inscription to her on her tomb. According to Plutarch's famous passage (1718), Semiramis states, that she constructed a monument for herself with the following inscription

Whatever king wants treasure, if he open this tomb, he may be satisfied.” Darius therefore opening it found no treasure, but another inscription of this import “If you were not a wicked person and of insatiable covetousness, you would not disturb the mansions of the dead.” (p.181)

In Mayer’s adapted legend an inscription inspired by the above mentioned original inscriptions was introduced to children. It was described as being carved under a picture of Semiramis armed with a sword on one of the lofty pillars:

NATURE MADE ME A WOMAN YET I HAVE RAISED MYSELF TO RIVAL THE GREATEST MEN. I SWAYED THE SCEPTER OF NIÑOS; I EXTENDED MY DOMINIONS TO THE RIVER HINAMES EASTWARD; TO THE SOUTHWARD TO THE LAND OF FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH; NORTHWARD TO SACCAE AND SCYTHIANS. NO ASSYRIAN BEFORE ME HAD SEEN AN OCEAN, BUT I HAVE SEEN FOUR. I HAVE BUILT DAMS AND FERTILIZED THE BARREN LAND WITH MY RIVERS. I HAVE BUILT IMPREGNABLE WALLS AND ROADS TO FAR PLACES AND WITH IRON CUT PASSAGES THROUGH MOUNTAINS WHERE PREVIOUSLY EVEN WILD ANIMALS COULD NOT PASS. VARIOUS AS WERE MY DEEDS, I HAVE YET FOUND LEISURE HOURS TO INDULGE MYSELF WITH FRIENDS. (Mayer, 1999, p.24).

The words differ from the original inscription, it lists Semiramis's achievements as a queen according to the children's story. The author just wants to inform the child that Semiramis had
her actual inscription on it, which through it, she introduces her name and her achievement as a great woman, warrior and builder.

Conclusions
Many changes and deletions were made in both children adaptations so as to suit children. Yet all changes did not affect her portrayal not only as a beautiful queen, but as clever as well. In Hass’ version of the legend, queen Semiramis is depicted as extremely clever to the extent that her husband was not able to do anything without her advice “he didn't go anywhere without Semiramis, because he didn't make any decisions without first consulting with her” (de Haas, 2020, p.6). Her smartness has no limitation for she proves this both in marriage and war. She was courageous more than other men in Mayer’s version. Semiramis went to the king and told him about her clever plan to conquer the city, the king’s councilors answered “But no one will volunteer to lead such a raid. It is suicide!” The warrior – queen responded “I will lead your troops, Majesty.” Both Haas and Mayer successfully portrayed queen Semiramis as a great Mesopotamian warrior – queen.
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