

BOOK XVI.

SUMMARY

The sixteenth Book contains Assyria, in which are the great cities Babylon and Nisibis; Adiabene, Mesopotamia, all Syria; Phœnicia, Palestine; the whole of Arabia; all that part of India which touches upon Arabia; the territory of the Saracens, called by our author Scenitis; and the whole country bordering the Dead and Red Seas.

CHAPTER I.

1. ASSYRIA is contiguous to Persia and Susiana. This name is given to Babylonia, and to a large tract of country around; this tract contains Aturia,¹ in which is Nineveh, the Apolloniatis, the Elymæi, the Parætacæ, and the Chalonitis about Mount Zagrum,²—the plains about Nineveh, namely, Dolomene, Calachene, Chazene, and Adiabene,—the nations of Mesopotamia, bordering upon the Gordyæi;³ the Mygdones about Nisibis, extending to the Zeugma⁴ of the Euphrates, and to the great range of country on the other side that river, occupied by Arabians, and by those people who are properly called Syrians in the present age. This last people extend as far as the Cilicians, Phœnicians, and Jews, to the sea opposite the Sea of Egypt, and to the Bay of Issus.

2. The name of Syrians seems to extend from Babylonia as far as the Bay of Issus, and, anciently, from this bay to the Euxine.

Both tribes of the Cappadocians, those near the Taurus and those near the Pontus, are called to this time Leucosyrians (or White Syrians),⁵ as though there existed a na-

¹ According to Dion Cassius, xviii. § 26, Aturia is synonymous with Assyria, and only differs from it by a barbarous pronunciation; which shows that the name Assyria belonged peculiarly to the territory of Nineveh.

² Aiaghi-dagh.

³ It is to be remarked that the people bordering upon the Gordyæi are the only people of Mesopotamia here mentioned, for the whole of Mesopotamia, properly so called, is comprised under the name of Assyria.

⁴ The bridge or passage at the foot of the modern fortress Roum-Kala.

⁵ B. xii. c. iii. § 5; Herod. i. 6 and 72.

tion of Black Syrians. These are the people situated beyond the Taurus, and I extend the name of Taurus as far as the Amanus.¹

When the historians of the Syrian empire say that the Medes were overthrown by the Persians, and the Syrians by the Medes, they mean no other Syrians than those who built the royal palaces at Babylon and Nineveh; and Ninus, who built Nineveh in Aturia, was one of these Syrians. His wife, who succeeded her husband, and founded Babylon, was Semiramis. These sovereigns were masters of Asia. Many other works of Semiramis, besides those at Babylon, are extant in almost every part of this continent, as, for example, artificial mounds, which are called mounds of Semiramis, and walls² and fortresses, with subterraneous passages; cisterns for water; roads³ to facilitate the ascent of mountains; canals communicating with rivers and lakes; roads and bridges.

The empire they left continued with their successors to the time of [the contest between] Sardanapalus and Arbaces.⁴ It was afterwards transferred to the Medes.

3. The city Nineveh was destroyed immediately upon the overthrow of the Syrians.⁵ It was much larger than Babylon, and situated in the plain of Aturia. Aturia borders upon the places about Arbela; between these is the river Lycus.⁶ Arbela and the parts about it⁷ belong to Babylonia. In the country on the other side of the Lycus are the plains of Aturia, which surround Nineveh.⁸

¹ Al. Lucan. b. xi. c. xii. § 4; b. xiv. c. v. § 18; b. xvi. c. ii. § 8.

² Probably walls built for the protection of certain districts. Such was the *διατείχισμα Σεμιράμιδος*, constructed between the Euphrates and the Tigris, and intended, together with canals brought from those rivers, to protect Babylon from the incursions of the Arabian Scenitæ or Medes. B. ii.

³ *κλίμακες*, roads of steep ascent, with steps such as may be seen in the Alps of Europe; the word differs from *ὁδοί*, roads below, inasmuch as the former roads are only practicable for travellers on foot and beasts of burthen, the latter for carriages also.

⁴ The union of these two names, says Kramer, is remarkable, and still more so is the insertion of the article *τῆς* before them: he, therefore, but with some hesitation, suggests that the word *μάχης* has been omitted in the text by the copyist.

⁵ Assyrians.

⁶ *Erbil*.

⁷ Called also Zabus, Zabatus, and Zerbes, now the Great Zab.

⁸ Adopting Kramer's reading, *καὶ ἄ*.

In Aturia is situated Gaugamela, a village where Darius was defeated and lost his kingdom. This place is remarkable for its name, which, when interpreted, signifies the Camel's House. Darius, the son of Hystaspes, gave it this name, and assigned (the revenues of) the place for the maintenance of a camel, which had undergone the greatest possible labour and fatigue in the journey through the deserts of Scythia, when carrying baggage and provision for the king. The Macedonians, observing that this was a mean village, but Arbela a considerable settlement (founded, as it is said, by Arbelus, son of Athmoneus), reported that the battle was fought and the victory obtained near Arbela, which account was transmitted to historians.

4. After Arbela and the mountain Nicatorium¹ (a name which Alexander, after the victory at Arbela, superadded), is the river Caprus,² situated at the same distance from Arbela as the Lycus. The country is called Artacene.³ Near Arbela is the city Demetrias; next is the spring of naphtha, the fires, the temple of the goddess Anæa,⁴ Sadracæ, the palace of Darius, son of Hystaspes, the Cyparisson, or plantation of Cypresses, and the passage across the Caprus, which is close to Seleucia and Babylon.

5. Babylon itself also is situated in a plain. The wall is 385⁵ stadia in circumference, and 32 feet in thickness. The height of the space between the towers is 50, and of the towers 60 cubits. The roadway upon the walls will allow chariots with four horses when they meet to pass each other with ease. Whence, among the seven wonders of the world, are reckoned this wall and the hanging garden: the shape of the garden

¹ Probably a branch of the Karadgeh-dagh.

² The Little Zab, or Or.

³ As the name Artacene occurs nowhere else, Groskurd, following Cellarius (v. Geogr. Ant. i. 771), suspects that here we ought to read Arbelene, and would understand by it the same district which is called Arbelitis by Ptolemy, vi. 1, and by Pliny, H. N. vi. 13, § 16, but as this form of the national name is nowhere to be found, it would appear improper to introduce it into the text. It is more probable, continues Kramer, that Strabo wrote Adiabene, of which Arbelitis was a part, according to Pliny, loco citato.

⁴ The same, no doubt, as the goddess Anaitis. B. xi. c. viii. § 4, and b, xv. c. iii. § 15.

⁵ All manuscripts agree in giving this number, but critics agree also in its being an error for 365. The number of stadia in the wall, according to ancient authors, corresponded with the number of days in the year.

is a square, and each side of it measures four plethra. It consists of vaulted terraces, raised one above another, and resting upon cube-shaped pillars. These are hollow and filled with earth to allow trees of the largest size to be planted. The pillars, the vaults, and the terraces are constructed of baked brick and asphalt.

The ascent to the highest story is by stairs, and at their side are water engines, by means of which persons, appointed expressly for the purpose, are continually employed in raising water from the Euphrates into the garden. For the river, which is a stadium in breadth, flows through the middle of the city, and the garden is on the side of the river. The tomb also of Belus is there. At present it is in ruins, having been demolished, as it is said, by Xerxes. It was a quadrangular pyramid of baked brick, a stadium in height, and each of the sides a stadium in length. Alexander intended to repair it. It was a great undertaking, and required a long time for its completion (for ten thousand men were occupied two months in clearing away the mound of earth), so that he was not able to execute what he had attempted, before disease hurried him rapidly to his end. None of the persons who succeeded him attended to this undertaking; other works also were neglected, and the city was dilapidated, partly by the Persians, partly by time, and, through the indifference of the Macedonians to things of this kind, particularly after Seleucus Nicator had fortified Seleucia on the Tigris near Babylon, at the distance of about 300 stadia.

Both this prince and all his successors directed their care to that city, and transferred to it the seat of empire. At present it is larger than Babylon; the other is in great part deserted, so that no one would hesitate to apply to it what one of the comic writers said of Megalopolitæ in Arcadia,

“The great city is a great desert.”

On account of the scarcity of timber, the beams and pillars of the houses were made of palm wood. They wind ropes of twisted reed round the pillars, paint them over with colours, and draw designs upon them; they cover the doors with a coat of asphaltus. These are lofty, and all the houses are vaulted on account of the want of timber. For the country is bare, a great part of it is covered with shrubs, and produces

nothing but the palm. This tree grows in the greatest abundance in Babylonia. It is found in Susiana also in great quantity, on the Persian coast, and in Carmania.

They do not use tiles for their houses, because there are no great rains. The case is the same in Susiana and in Sitacene.

6. In Babylon a residence was set apart for the native philosophers called Chaldæans, who are chiefly devoted to the study of astronomy. Some, who are not approved of by the rest, profess to understand genethliology, or the casting of nativities. There is also a tribe of Chaldæans, who inhabit a district of Babylonia, in the neighbourhood of the Arabians, and of the sea called the Persian Sea.¹ There are several classes of the Chaldæan astronomers. Some have the name of Orcheni, some Borsippeni, and many others, as if divided into sects, who disseminate different tenets on the same subjects. The mathematicians make mention of some individuals among them, as Cidenas, Naburianus, and Sudinus. Seleucus also of Seleuceia is a Chaldæan, and many other remarkable men.

7. Borsippa is a city sacred to Diana and Apollo. Here is a large linen manufactory. Bats of much larger size than those in other parts abound in it. They are caught and salted for food.

8. The country of the Babylonians is surrounded on the east by the Susans, Elymæi, and Parætaceni; on the south by the Persian Gulf, and the Chaldæans as far as the Arabian Meseni; on the west by the Arabian Scenitæ as far as Adiabene and Gordyæa; on the north by the Armenians and Medes as far as the Zagrus, and the nations about that river.

9. The country is intersected by many rivers, the largest of which are the Euphrates and the Tigris: next to the Indian rivers, the rivers in the southern parts of Asia are said to hold the second place. The Tigris is navigable upwards from its mouth to Opis,² and to the present Seleuceia. Opis is a village and a mart for the surrounding places. The

¹ That is, at a short distance from the Persian Gulf, a little more to the south than the modern town Basra.

² Some extensive ruins near the angle formed by the Adhem (the ancient Phycus) and the Tigris, and the remains of the Nahr-awan canal, are said to mark the site of Opis.

Euphrates also is navigable up to Babylon, a distance of more than 3000 stadia. The Persians, through fear of incursions from without, and for the purpose of preventing vessels from ascending these rivers, constructed artificial cataracts. Alexander, on arriving there, destroyed as many of them as he could, those particularly [on the Tigris from the sea] to Opis. But he bestowed great care upon the canals; for the Euphrates, at the commencement of summer, overflows. It begins to fill in the spring, when the snow in Armenia melts: the ploughed land, therefore, would be covered with water and be submerged, unless the overflow of the superabundant water were diverted by trenches and canals, as in Egypt the water of the Nile is diverted. Hence the origin of canals. Great labour is requisite for their maintenance, for the soil is deep, soft, and yielding, so that it would easily be swept away by the stream; the fields would be laid bare, the canals filled, and the accumulation of mud would soon obstruct their mouths. Then, again, the excess of water discharging itself into the plains near the sea forms lakes, and marshes, and reed-grounds, supplying the reeds with which all kinds of platted vessels are woven; some of these vessels are capable of holding water, when covered over with asphaltus; others are used with the material in its natural state. Sails are also made of reeds; these resemble mats or hurdles.

10. It is not, perhaps, possible to prevent inundations of this kind altogether, but it is the duty of good princes to afford all possible assistance. The assistance required is to prevent excessive overflow by the construction of dams, and to obviate the filling of rivers, produced by the accumulation of mud, by cleansing the canals, and removing stoppages at their mouths. The cleansing of the canals is easily performed, but the construction of dams requires the labour of numerous workmen. For the earth being soft and yielding, does not support the superincumbent mass, which sinks, and is itself carried away, and thus a difficulty arises in making dams at the mouth. Expedition is necessary in closing the canals to prevent all the water flowing out. When the canals dry up in the summer time, they cause the river to dry up also; and if the river is low (*before the canals are closed*), it cannot supply the canals in time with water, of which the country, burnt up and scorched, requires a very large quan-

tity; for there is no difference, whether the crops are flooded by an excess or perish by drought and a failure of water. The navigation up the rivers (a source of many advantages) is continually obstructed by both the above-mentioned causes, and it is not possible to remedy this unless the mouths of the canals were quickly opened and quickly closed, and the canals were made to contain and preserve a mean between excess and deficiency of water.

11. Aristobulus relates that Alexander himself, when he was sailing up the river, and directing the course of the boat, inspected the canals, and ordered them to be cleared by his multitude of followers; he likewise stopped up some of the mouths, and opened others. He observed that one of these canals, which took a direction more immediately to the marshes, and to the lakes in front of Arabia, had a mouth very difficult to be dealt with, and which could not be easily closed on account of the soft and yielding nature of the soil; he (therefore) opened a new mouth at the distance of 30 stadia, selecting a place with a rocky bottom, and to this the current was diverted. But in doing this he was taking precautions that Arabia should not become entirely inaccessible in consequence of the lakes and marshes, as it was already almost an island from the quantity of water (which surrounded it). For he contemplated making himself master of this country; and he had already provided a fleet and places of rendezvous; and had built vessels in Phoenicia and at Cyprus, some of which were in separate pieces, others were in parts, fastened together by bolts. These, after being conveyed to Thapsacus in seven distances of a day's march, were then to be transported down the river to Babylon. He constructed other boats in Babylonia, from cypress trees in the groves and parks, for there is a scarcity of timber in Babylonia. Among the Cossæi, and some other tribes, the supply of timber is not great.

The pretext for the war, says Aristobulus, was that the Arabians were the only people who did not send their ambassadors to Alexander; but the true reason was his ambition to be lord of all.

When he was informed that they worshipped two deities only, Jupiter and Bacchus, who supply what is most requisite for the subsistence of mankind, he supposed that, after his conquests, they would worship him as a third, if he permitted

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