

Who was Semiramis?

Semiramis is the English transliteration of the Greek translation of the name of a famous queen of Assyria who, for a time, had sole reign. Much is written about the woman Semiramis, but little is substantiated. She was beautiful beyond compare and a fine military strategist, and she left her mark on several construction projects. Other than that, there seem to be three completely different ideas of who Semiramis was.

One theory is that Semiramis was the wife of Ninus, the founder of Nineveh. Some say the words Shinar, and thus Sumeria, come from Semiramis's original name, Sammur-amat, or "gift of the sea." (Legend has it she was the daughter of the fish goddess who abandoned her to be raised by doves.) The story of how Semiramis met her husband varies, as well. Some say she appeared out of the sea foam as his ships approached. Others say she was a madam that he knew professionally. Yet another story is that she helped him take the capital of Assyria, and he fell in love with her and stole her from her husband. At any account, she eventually killed her husband and reigned as sole queen for 42 years until her son, Ninyas, betrayed her to take the throne for himself.

Semiramis was well-known for her building projects and military exploits. She built the city of Babylon, including the walls and castles, and possibly the hanging gardens. It's possible she had a hand in building up the banks along the Euphrates, and the name of the ancient Armenian city Shamiramagerd means "created by Semiramis." After her husband's death, it's said she conquered much of Asia, Libya, and Ethiopia and was wounded in battle against the king of India.

The Scottish minister and writer Alexander Hislop added to Semiramis's mythology in his 1853 book *The Two Babylons*. Hislop claimed that Semiramis was married to Nimrod (see

Genesis 10:9-11). The Bible describes Nimrod as “the first on earth to be a mighty man” (Genesis 10:8); some take “mighty man” to be a reference to one of Nephilim. Nimrod established or conquered Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar, then went to Assyria and built several more cities, including Nineveh. According to Hislop, Semiramis’s greatest accomplishment was aiding her husband in replacing the worship of God with a polytheistic system based on the stars. She became associated with Ishtar/Astarte/Ashtoreth: the original Queen of Heaven (see Jeremiah 44:15-19). Her son (fathered by Nimrod, another man, or the rays of the sun sent down by the deceased Nimrod) joined her in creating the world’s first mother/son cult. The Semiramis/son pair inspired Isis and Osiris in Egypt, Venus and Adonis in Greece, and Ushas and Vishnu in Hinduism. Hislop also claimed that the Catholic Church adapted mother/son worship into their veneration of Mary. The identity of the son in the myth is unclear; possibilities include Damu (related to the Tammuz mentioned in Ezekiel 8:14), Horus, and Gilgamesh.

A more respected story has Shammuramat living 1,300 hundred years later, in the early 800s BC. She was the wife of Shamshi-Adad V and mother of the Assyrian king Adad-Nirari III. In this tale, Semiramis only reigned for four years as her young son’s regent, and her military conquests and construction projects were much more modest but still significant for a woman at that time.

There are many other claims. Some say Semiramis is the foundation behind the Christmas tree, Easter, and the Statue of Liberty. Others say she was the original whore of Babylon. The truth is, we don’t know who she was. Like all mythology of the time, the stories have gone through thousands of years of changes and adaptations. It’s possible that because of her we have polytheism, the mother/son cult, and a long tradition of goddesses of love. But it’s also possible that her only lasting monument is that she

shares her name with a luxury hotel in Cairo.