

TIN Rep TEST

by Test Test

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¹Diodoros begins his work with one of the most powerful statements in the history of historiography: “The writers of universal history bring great good to all people, since they are willing through their own toil to help the common good”.² Diodoros does not refer to history in general but particularly to universal history, which at the time was not a new phenomenon but had not yet reached its apogee; that was to come with the historians of the Augustan period.³ Yet, Diodoros marks an important milestone in the evolution of the genre, since he is the first writer of holistic universal history; he believes that he is the first truly universal historian.⁴ In the opening of the *Bibliothēke*, Diodoros relates his vision and his aim to the reader: a scope of historical inquiry so vast that his claim of being the first to attempt it seems fully justified.⁵

² According to Diodorus' own work, he was born at Agyrium in Sicily (now called Agira). With one exception, antiquity affords no further information about Diodorus' life and doings beyond what is to be found in his own work. Only Jerome, in his *Chronicon* under the "year of Abraham 1968" (i.e., 49 BC), writes, "Diodorus of Sicily, a writer of Greek history, became illustrious". However, his English translator, Charles Henry Oldfather, remarks on the "striking coincidence" that one of only two known Greek inscriptions from Agyrium (I.G. XIV, 588) is the tombstone of one "Diodorus, the son of Apollonius".

Polybios is the first of the extant historians to claim that his work is a universal history.⁶ For Polybios, universal means the history of the recent past and his own times, albeit from a pan-Mediterranean perspective created by the unification of the region affected by Roman conquest.⁷ Diodoros' perspective of a holistic universal history would be, as Momigliano rightly noted, “alien” to Polybios.⁸ More importantly, Polybios has a definite aim: to explain the momentous and rapid rise of Rome, which as he rightly says was “unprecedented”.⁹ Consequently, his focus is on political events and their connections, since

¹ A version of this paper was presented in the Universal Historiography in Greek and Roman Antiquity and Beyond. A Conference. (Manchester 21-22/06/07); the final version is expected to published in the conference proceedings.

² Diodoros 1.1.1. I have to agree with Burton (1972:35): “Diodoros general introduction to his history, a eulogy of this form of literature, reaches a degree of eloquence unsurpassed by any other author”, although I have to disagree with Burton's sentiment that it is “far superior to the rest of his work”. On the prooemion being Diodoros' own: Sacks (1990:11, n9).

³ Alonso-Núñez (2002:96).

⁴ Burton (1972:37).

⁵ Rubincam (1987:314).

⁶ Polybios 1.4.3.

⁷ Polybios 1.3.3-4. Smitther (1979:92). Polybios' view of the unity of his subject: Alonso-Núñez (2002:74).

⁸ Momigliano (1982:542): “The idea of a universal history from the origins of mankind was alien to Polybios”.

⁹ Polybios 1.1.5.

to Polybios there lays the key to achieving his aim.¹⁰ Thus, his history is an account of causality and its implications. In that, he follows the vision of another famous exile: Thucydides, the first pragmatic historian, who also sought to explain another unprecedented event.¹¹

Consider the following text from Diodoros:

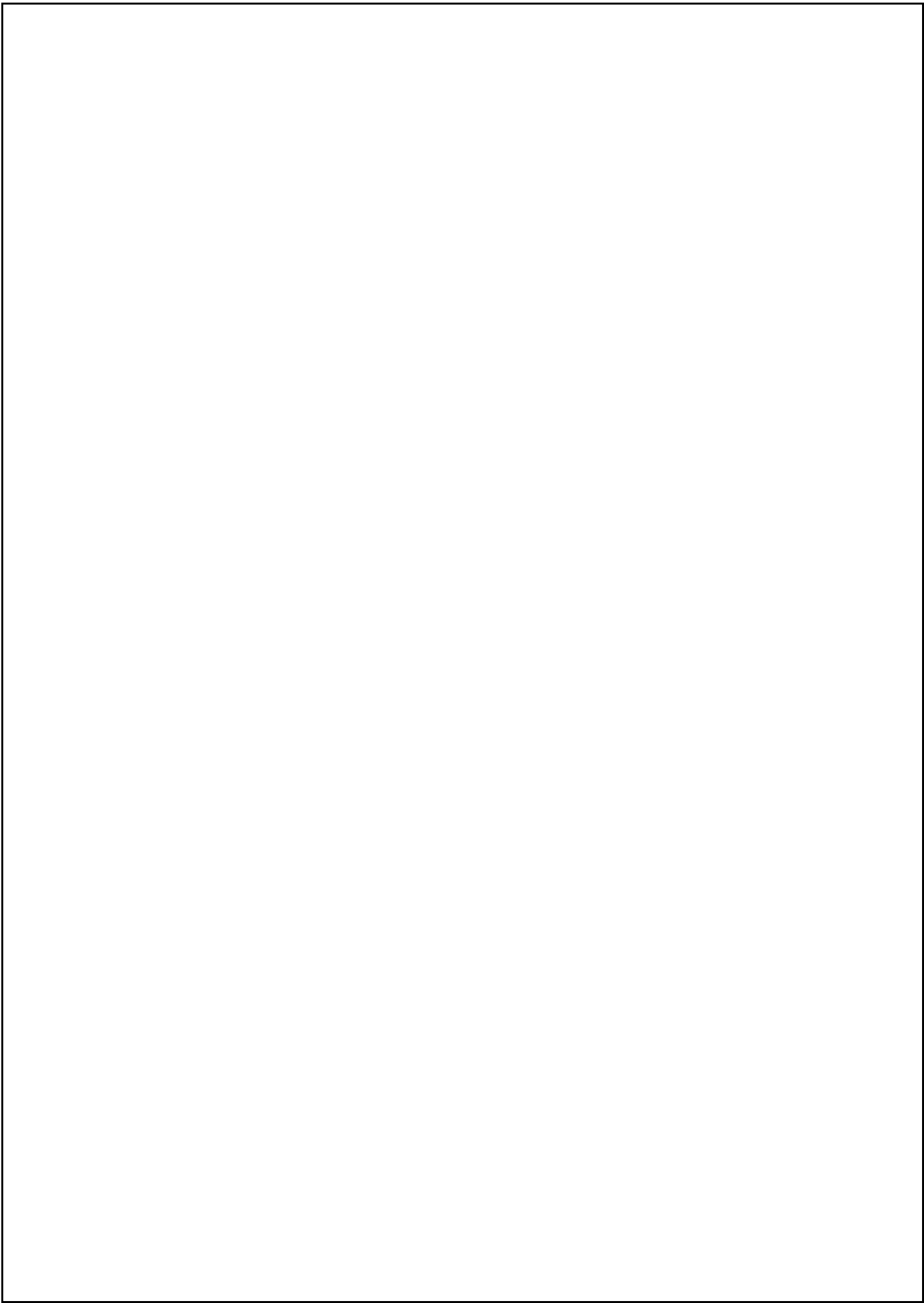
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 “Such, then, is in substance the story that is told about the birth of Semiramis. And when she had already come to the age of marriage and far surpassed all the other maidens in beauty, an officer was sent from the king's court to inspect the royal herds; his name was Onnes, and he stood first among the members of the king's council and had been appointed governor over all Syria. He stopped with Simmas, and on seeing Semiramis was captivated by her beauty; consequently he earnestly entreated Simmas to give him the maiden in lawful marriage and took her off to Ninus, where he married her and begat two sons, Hyapates and Hydaspes. 2 And since the other qualities of Semiramis were in keeping with the beauty of her countenance, it turned out that her husband became completely enslaved by her, p363and since he would do nothing without her advice he prospered in everything.” Diodoros 2.5.1

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¹⁰ Polybios 9.2.4; Mortley (1996:41).

¹¹ Alonso-Núñez (2002:80).



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