THE ASIATIC CAMPAIGN OF AGESILAUS —
THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE ROUTE
FROM EPSHESUS TO SARDIS

by Lorraine Botha
(ex-University of South Africa)

The present investigation deals with a facet of a M.A. dissertation submitted at the University of South Africa on the Asiatic campaign of Agesilaus, a subject which originally depended upon the versions of the events given by Diodorus and Xenophon. The discovery of the papyrus known as the Hellenica Oxyrhynchia, now recognized as a source of Diodorus, and its publication by Grenfell and Hunt in 1908, introduced a new factor to the study of the problem. More recently additional fragments of the papyrus have come to light. The controversy in the last resort is now mainly confined to the Oxyrhynchus papyrus (referred to as P in learned discussions) and Xenophon, and a debate on their respective credibility as sources. The amount of literature up to the present is large and can be differentiated mainly as supporters of P, which include Grenfell and Hunt, Eduard Meyer, Dugas, Rühl, Jacoby, Bruce, Delebecque, on the one hand, and on the other hand contestants in favour of Xenophon, such as Busolt, Cornelius, de Sanctis, Breitenbach, Lehmann, Anderson and Gray. It became clear from the outset that the issue centred largely upon the route which Agesilaus is supposed to have taken in his march on Sardis.

The first reaction, soon after the publication of the papyrus, came from Busolt, who attributed sheer invention to P and rejected the western route upheld in Diodorus and P along the Karabel pass, Mount Sipylus and Nymphaeum — on the ground that it was not the ‘shortest route’, τὴν συντομωτάτην, referred to by Xenophon (Hell. 3.4.20): ‘auf dem Umwege über das Sipylos-Gebirge, gefolgt vom Feinde, genötigt zum Marsche ἐν πάλιν δὲ ἦν Ἀγεσίλαος nicht in der doppelt so langen Zeit die Gegend von Sardes erreicht. Die ganze Erzählung des Marsches mit allen Einzelheiten, die uns der neue Historiker bietet, ist also eine blosse Erfindung, die völlige Unkenntnis militärischer Dinge beweist. . . . Der Marsch des Agesilaos nach Sardes wird von der kürzesten Strasse nach dem Umwege über den Sipylos verlegt.’ 7 Meyer took the opposite view, commenting on Tissaphernes’ defence of Caria (Xen. Hell. 3.4.21): ‘So gewinnt Agesilaos einen Vorsprung; unbehindert gelangt er, unterwegs reichlich foragierend, in drei Tagen in die Nähe von Sardes. Auch nach dieser Darstellung kann er nur auf der Strasse über Nymphaeum gezogen sein.’ 8 The dispute also concerns what was regarded as the ‘ordinary’ or ‘normal’ route, supposedly the Hypaepa-Tmolus route to Sardis.
Kaupert maintained that there were various routes across the Tmolus mountain which date from antiquity and were probably in a better condition than they are today. He identified four. In the westernmost part of the Tmolus was the Karabel pass at a height of 450 m. This was a very important route. A second pass crossed the Tmolus above Bayındır at a height of 841 m. A third route proceeded from Ödemiş crossing the Tmolus at a height of 934 m. The most easterly route of Kaupert's alternatives, also proceeding from Ödemiş went past Hypaepa and Gölcük, the latter at a height of 1065 m. These alternatives exclude the modern road yet further east, crossing the Tmolus along Birgi and Boz Dağ and attaining the height of 2137 m. There is not much difference between these routes in the distances from Ephesus to Sardis, but the real difference lay in the degree of passability. Agesilaus could have marched over the Karabel pass which would be the road taken by an army proceeding from Ephesus. Tissaphernes, on the other hand, according to Kaupert, in order to save Sardis, had no alternative to the easterly route, that is to say, coming up from Tralles, to cross the Tmolus along the Ödemiş-Hypaepa-Gölcük route. The cavalry and light-armed troops led the way, to be joined in due course by the infantry en masse. In the final analysis Kaupert believed on general military grounds, 'militärisch gewürdigt', that Busolt was right in preferring Xenophon's account of the Sardis campaign to that of P.¹¹

It is not without awareness of the seeming presumption on my part, in venturing upon the field of professional archaeologists, that the following impressions of my own are offered, based on personal observation of the terrain most directly concerned in a study of the route which Agesilaus supposedly took in his march on Sardis in 395. The divergences of opinion among scholars on the route involve disagreement with their views on sundry aspects of the campaign as a whole, such as the point at which the Persians overtook the Greeks, the ambush in P-Diodorus omitted in Xenophon, as well as topographical disagreement on the location of the battle of Sardis and the direction of the Persian flight, eventually affecting the overall verdict on the credibility of our two primary sources respectively. My impressions are confined to the two routes between Ephesus and Sardis mostly concerned in discussions, namely the western route through the Karabel pass and an easterly crossing of the Tmolus via Hypaepa.

Using İzmir or ancient Smyrna as a base, and with the assistance of a local guide, Captain Rames Tutić, who also acted as interpreter and chauffeur, we followed the two routes, namely through Karabel and Ödemiş close to the ancient Hypaepa.

(i) The Karabel route.

As one travels southwards along the present-day main road from İzmir to Ephesus, the road passes through green farmlands interspersed with leafy trees and bordered in the distance by a lofty mountain range, which is the ancient Messogis, now known as the Aydın Sıra Dağları, and rising just north of the
ancient Meander. There are several villages along this highway of which the first
of note is Torbah; next comes Çaybası, where a road branches off to Bayındır; the
following village is Pamukyazı, which is about 18 km distant from Ephesus and
from which a branch road leads to Mahmutlar. Pamukyazı is close to ancient
Metropolis where Agesilaus is thought to have left the Ephesus-Smyrna road.
Another important junction is Belevi which, like Torbah, has a road to Ödemiş
leading off it. Finally, about an hour and a quarter after leaving İzmir by car, one
arrives at Selçuk, which is close to ancient Ephesus.

The Ephesus-İzmir road as far as Belevi and Pamukyazı or Metropolis passes
through the fertile Cayster valley, studded today by many small farms which
produce cotton and tobacco crops. The valley is watered by the Cayster which is
now known as the Küçük Menderes or Small Menderes, as distinct from the Büyük
Menderes or Great Menderes, which is the modern name for the ancient
Meander. Two or three kilometres north of Torbah a rough, stony road,
indicated by triangles on the accompanying map, branches off from the Ephesus-
İzmir road and leads in a north-easterly direction to the Karabel pass, close to the
Kemalpaşa Dağ and crossing the western edge of the Boz Dağları or ancient
Tmolus mountain range. This road, which grows progressively worse, passes the
village of Dağkuzulka. It took about an hour to negotiate this pass by car but it
seems more likely that Agesilaus would not have followed a winding route such as
this but would have given preference to a crossing over a lower ridge a little
westwards of the present road.

On the further, i.e. northern side of the Karabel pass, proceeding from
Ephesus, one enters the Gediz or ancient Hermus valley, passing first the village
Kemalpaşa which is northeast of Mount Sipylus and about 30 km from Torbah.
Kemalpaşa is known to be the Nymphaeum of antiquity where Agesilaus must
have joined the ancient Smyrna-Sardis road if the view that he made the Karabel
crossing is correct. The Gediz or Hermus valley is broad and fertile with
numerous small farms, dotted with clusters of trees, and well-cultivated. Here
also the road passes many cotton and tobacco fields. As one travels eastwards
towards Sardis the valley is flanked on the south by a lofty mountain range,
beginning with the mountain Kemalpaşa Dağ or the ancient Olympus which
reaches a height of 450 m and merges into the Boz Dağları or Mount Tmolus,
soaring even higher in the east to 2100 m at Boz Dağ. In the distance to the north
the Gediz is obscured by trees. The Gediz-Hermus valley therefore stretches
wide and fertile between the mountains lying south and the river to the north, a
paradise it would seem, and irresistible to the ravaging army of an invader. It also
offers sufficient level and unobstructed terrain for whatever manoeuvres such an
army might find necessary.

Some distance further along this road to Sardis or Sart as it is now known, one
reaches Turgutlu, a hamlet about 33 km from Kemalpaşa, which might well be
the Thýbarnaë of Diodorus. At 18 km beyond Turgutlu the road passes the next
village Ahmetli, which could also be considered in an attempt to identify
Thýbarnaë. Beyond Ahmetli, which is about 24 km distant from Sardis, there are
wooded foothills which would have served very well for the ambuscade described by P-Diodorus. On approaching Sardis the first sight which meets the eye is the Acropolis on which survives only the remnant of a wall, possibly of a later date. Crossing the dry bed of the Pactolus, supposedly the source of Croesus' gold, which flows quite close to the fortifications of Sardis, and turning to the right, namely southwards, towards the mountain side, one reaches the part of Sardis which the Americans have excavated and partly restored. But this Sardis is a city of the Hellenistic and Roman period. From this vantage point Sardis appears to be surrounded by high, almost impassable mountains on three sides, leaving one easy approach, namely the road through the Gediz valley.

From Sardis, which by the Karabel route is approximately 103 km distant from Ephesus, one reaches Izmir partly by the road just described between Kemalpaşa and Sardis and further by a direct continuation westwards. This direct road between Sardis and Izmir must correspond very closely to the old Sardis-Smyrna road, since, with the mountain barrier on the southern side and Smyrna situated as it was and still is, direct communication with Sardis could hardly have followed another course.

Returning to Izmir, the impression gained is that the route indicated by P and Diodorus was a very likely one for an invading army to follow, passing, as it did, through fertile farmland most of the way and making the passage across the mountains over a ridge, namely the low and easy pass of Karabel, which should be easily negotiable for a body of soldiers and the baggage train.

According to the personal correspondence of Dr. Baran, the Izmir archaeologist, quoted with his permission, archaic and Hellenistic remains, consisting of graves, foundations and a fortress wall, were found near the village of Dağkızıla which is 17 km south of Kemalpaşa and about halfway on the road from Kemalpaşa or Nymphaeum to Torbali. In the pass itself, in addition to some Hittite reliefs, there are also some terrace walls which were probably built for a road. This road was well known in the Hittite period and the reliefs on the rocks were most probably intended to mark a boundary as they do in Iskele, which is near Adana and close to the south coast of Turkey, and in other South Anatolian passes. Herodotus refers to a road from Ephesus to Phocaea on which there was an engraved statue of Sesostris as he thought. It was, however, probably that of a Hittite war god, along the Karabel road. It would seem then that the road via Karabel was a very ancient one and very probably the normal or ordinary route between Ephesus and Sardis. Baran does not mention excavations or archaeological finds at Ahmetli, but of Turgutlu he says that the name means 'with (at) the ruins', and that he found old potsherds there.


Considering our means of conveyance, the reconnoitring of the route understandably followed the modern road which, after passing Ödemiş continues its ascent up the easternmost highlands of Tmolus, past Birgi and Boz Dağ whence it
descends to Sart or Sardis. As we proceed southwards along the İzmir-Ephesus road, past Torbaş and turning eastwards at Pamukyazi, approximately 18 km from Ephesus, the road passes Mahmutlar and continues to Ödemiş, which is about 60 km distant from Pamukyazi and not far from the ancient Hypaepa. From this point it is no more than 8 km to Birgi, where the mountain road to Sardis starts, once again a narrow dirt road, but well-made. This road, however, scales and skirts mountain sides over many kilometres requiring $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours to negotiate by car before reaching Boz Dağ (meaning Grey Mountain). This is a holiday resort, high up in the mountain, known by the same name, where the traveller today may enjoy a brief respite. Here we were joined for a short while by a friend of our guide, Dr. D. Cataloglu, professor of Economics at the University of İzmir. Upon learning that he had a holiday home here in the mountains, I assumed that he would be better informed on the topography of these regions than most. Accordingly we inquired of him whether the difficult road we traversed to this point was the only passage across the Boz Dağ, which happened to be the highest and most easterly point on the ancient Tmolus. He replied that there was another old road some distance to the west of the present one but that it could only be negotiated by jeep. In his opinion yet another ancient road from Ephesus to Sardis may also have passed from Torbaş over Bayumâr, to the west of Ödemiş, along Karaköy and Hurzum to Sart or Sardis. Hurzum lies on the banks of the Gencer Çayı, one of the tributaries of the Gediz or Hermus, which passes Ahmetli on its way to effect its junction with the Gediz.

'But in our time', he observed, 'this route offers only a mountain tract'. This seems to be the road mentioned by Kaupert, which crosses the Tmolus from Bayumâr and reaches a height of 841 km. Kaupert describes it as the shortest route — understandably, since it is a diagonal route — of approximately 99 km as against 103 km for the Ephesus-Karabel-Sardis route, and approximately 105 km for the Ephesus-Ödemiş (Hypaepa)-Sardis route. The road from Boz Dağ onwards continued around the precipitous mountain slopes, for a distance at the same breath-taking height, presenting panoramic views, until it commenced its gradual descent and reached in its course a wooded spot with fountains and waterfalls. It emerges eventually just to the east of Sart. This road appears to serve mainly as a connection between Ödemiş and Salihli of comparatively later times. We found, after subtracting the time spent on stops, that it had taken approximately two hours and ten minutes to cross the Tmolus mountain pass from Ödemiş or Hypaepa. The distance, however, between Birgi and Sart, the actual pass, was no more than 35 km. The road here described is the modern road, but it may serve to give an impression of the topography in general and of the difficulties an ancient army could encounter when advancing over these mountain fastnesses. At all events, the road along Birgi and Boz Dağ should be excluded; it was never specifically considered in connection with Agesilas' Asiatic campaign.

Among the remaining alternatives the only route from Sardis across the Tmolus to the valley of the Cayster worth serious consideration is the direct road, the
existence of which is well attested in our ancient sources, by Herodotus (5.100) and very explicitly by Strabo: 'Hypaepa is a city which one comes to on the descent from Tmolus' (13.4.7). This route also features in the Peutinger Table of the fourth century A.D., which supplies the distances, namely 20 miles from Sardis to Hypaepa and 9 miles from Hypaepa to Anogome, an unidentified place but situated on the main road in the Cayster valley to Ephesus. This road was not a major highway because of the steep climb between Sardis and the Cayster, but it was more than a mountain track as it was of strategic importance in an emergency, or for a surprise attack such as the Athenian assault on Sardis in 499 B.C. It now seems accepted that the Persians used this road across the Tmolus in 395 to meet the attack of Agesilaus who was moving on Sardis through the Karabel pass. That the Persian cavalry and light-armed forces led the way is plausible; it would also account for the presence of Tissaphernes in Sardis ahead of the Greeks at the time of the battle (Xen. 3.4.25). But it may well be asked whether the rank and file of the Persian infantry could in the circumstances have followed along the same route, even if allowance is made for their late arrival.

An investigation of the topography of the routes from Ephesus to Sardis has left me in complete agreement with the scholars who support P-Diodorus’ version that Agesilaus followed the Karabel route when proceeding to Sardis. But I follow Nellen in seeking consensus between P-Diodorus and Xenophon, and I believe that Xenophon’s ‘shortest route’ was likewise meant to be the Karabel route. The Hypaepa-Tmolus route was probably used mainly for traffic between Hypaepa and Sardis as the Ödemiş-Boz Dağ-Salihli road today serves to connect Ödemiş and Salihli, but it posed difficulties for military operations on a large scale. The study of Agesilaus’ route was hampered by a topographical preconception to the effect that the Ephesus-Hypaepa route across the Tmolus presented no great difficulty, disregarding the nature of the southern approach from the direction of the Cayster valley. Cary described it as ‘an easy pass across the Tmolus’; Dugas uses expressions such as ‘la route ordinaire’ or ‘directe’, or ‘l’itinéraire normal’. The same conception underlies de Sanctis’ ‘strada piu diretta’, or Bruce’s references to this route as the ‘ordinary’ or the ‘direct’ route, or as the ‘normal one’. This view of the Hypaepa crossing to Sardis has now seriously been questioned by Anderson, but it provided a basis for the erroneous belief that this was the route indicated by Xenophon, a belief which at the outset impugned the credibility of P after its publication by Grenfell and Hunt. In the final analysis a problem still persists: if Agesilaus’ route was correctly identified by P, could we afford to discount this source too readily in regard to all further details it provides on Agesilaus’ campaign which conflict with the version of Xenophon?

Notes


3. B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, 'Theopompus (or Cratippus) Hellenica', Oxyrhynchus Papyri 5 (1908) 110–242 ('P. Oxy. 842' or the 'London Papyri').


7. G. Busolt, op. cit. (n.6) 264,283.

8. E. Meyer, op. cit. (n.5) 5.

9. I.A.F. Bruce, op. cit. (n.5) 80; Ch. Dugas, op. cit. (n.5) 62: 'la route ordinaire'.


12. My husband, M.C. Botha, accompanied me in this undertaking and I am grateful to him for his sustained interest and support.

13. Cf. J.K. Anderson, op. cit. (n.6) 34: 'Through this pass (the Karabel) runs at the present day an unsurfaced road, adequate probably for the sturdier types of motor vehicle, but intended rather for foot-travellers and animals. It did not appear to be much used in the summer of 1951 when I rode by it to visit the famous Hittite reliefs near the head of the pass'. The modern highway, of course, follows the Ephesus-Smyrna-Sardis route.

14. Cf. J.K. Anderson, loc. cit., referring to the 'most westerly and lowest of the passes across the main Tmolus range'.

15. Cf. Ch. Dugas op. cit. (n.5) 63: 'D’après Diodore et P, il est probable qu’Agésilas emprunte d’abord la grand voie d’Éphèse à Smyrne, mais ne la suit que jusqu’à Métropolis; là il la quittée, traverse le défile de Kara-Bel et rejouve à Nymphaion la route de Smyrne à Sardes.'


17. Diod. 14.80.2. Thybrnac cannot be identified; cf. E. Meyer, op. cit. (n.5) 13: ' . . . Dem unbekannten Orte Thybrnac (nicht identisch mit Thymbra)'; G. Busolt op. cit. (n.6) 264; J.K. Anderson, op. cit. (n.6) 51–52. It seems as if the name was already conjunctive at the time of the Patmos manuscript which is the earliest surviving manuscript of Diodorus, belonging to the tenth or eleventh century. It has the reading ἔβασαν, being an abbreviation for καὶ out of keeping with the seemingly standard use of the unabbreviated καὶ in that manuscript, as in the Florence manuscript; cf. F. Vogel – C.T. Fisher app. crit. ad. loc. in the Teubner text. I wish to record my debt to the Rev. Deacon Chrysostome Florentis, director of the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian at Patmos, for his helpful interview and the location of the relevant passage as well as supplying me with a photocost of it.

18. Herod. 5.101.2, and Strabo 13.4.5, 626: 'gold dust was brought down in it, whence, it is said, arose the fame of the riches of Croesus'.


24. Hdt. 2.106.2, W.W. How and J. Wells, comm. 219-220, ad loc., with reference to J. Garstang, The Land of the Hittites (1910) 171 ff. '... clearly not the road along the coast, but one more inland, round Mount Sipulus.'
25. Cf. C. Foss, op. cit. (n. 20) 27: as a section of the great Royal Road this route remained in use 'as a major highway as long as the cities which it connected were of importance'; and generally, D. Magie, Roman Rule in Asia Minor (1950) 786–789.
27. B. Philippson, Reisen und Forschungen in westlichen Kleinasien 2 (1910–1915) 69: 'Auch in dem abgelegenen Bergnest angekommen vor dem Kaffeehaus sass, war ich auf höchste überrascht, eine Gesellschaft Europäer ... zum Teil im Tenniskostüm mit Rackets in den Händen heranpromenieren zu sehen'.
29. Cf. B. Philippson, op. cit. (n. 27) 70: '... ein imposanter Berg', presenting 'eine klare Aussicht' on the Cayster plain in the south beyond Odemis with the ridge of the Messogis mountain beyond in the background.
30. B. Philippson, op. cit. (n. 27) 71: 'eine schöne ... ganz in der Ebene gelegene Stadt ... (und) ziemlich neuer Entstehung', with a mixed population of Turks, Jews and Armenians.
32. J.K. Anderson, op. cit. (n. 6) 33; C. Foss, op. cit. (n. 20) 27–28 and 56; D. Magie, op. cit. (n. 20) 795.
33. C. Foss, op. cit. (n. 20) 27–28; and 22: 'On the south ... the approach ... from the Cayster valley is steep and difficult, there are no foothills and the mountain slopes are precipitous, barren and rocky'. It is also described by the Izmir professor D. Catalgül. referred to earlier, as today 'only negotiable by jeep.'
34. J.K. Anderson, op. cit. (n. 6) 42.
35. W. Kaupert, Antike Schlachtfelder, op. cit. (n. 10) 281, 'die Infanterie in ihrer Masse konnte erst später eintreffen'.
37. M. Cary, The Geographic Background of Greek and Roman History (1949) 162–163; 'The Cayster had indeed a very short course, but an easy pass across Mt. Tmolus gave it access to the Hermus valley'.
38. Ch. Dugas, op. cit. (n. 5) 62 and 64.
39. G. de Sanctis, op. cit. (n. 6) 179.
40. J.A.F. Bruce, op. cit. (n. 5) 80.
41. J.K. Anderson, op. cit. (n. 6) 38: 'The arguments intended to prove that the Hypaepa route was the "normal" one in antiquity are not decisive. Very possibly the Ionians surprised Sardis in 498 B.C. because they approached by the "back door"'; and see also p. 40–41.
42. G. Busolt, op. cit. 264 and 283; see n. 6 above.
43. E.g. J.K. Anderson, op. cit. (n. 6) 41: 'The extra details given by Diodorus (and in all probability by the Oxyrhynchus historian) are not proofs of superior knowledge but mistakes and distortions'; and again p. 48: 'In view of these differences, I believe compromise to be impossible.'
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: