

## ‘Hellenized Iranians?’ *Antiochos I and the Power of Image*

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When the *Forschungsstelle Asia Minor* was inaugurated at the University of Münster in 1968, its director Friedrich Karl Dörner (1911–1992) had already been working in Commagene for 30 years.<sup>1</sup> It is worth stressing that finding support for such an institution was an amazing achievement, since Dörner’s interest in Eastern Anatolia was decidedly outside the mainstream topics of the fields of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History, which tended to rather simply dismiss outlying cultures and their material culture at this time.<sup>2</sup> The history of research on Nemrud Dağ and its place in intercultural perspectives was repeatedly tainted by negative judgements and still calls for studies in between established academic disciplines. The difficulties to describe and categorize Nemrud Dağ already started with Carl Sester’s discovery of Antiochos’ I *hierothesion* in 1880.<sup>3</sup> His wrong attribution of the sculpture as Assyrian, although most probably positively connotated, is telling.<sup>4</sup> Osman Hamdy Bey in turn, despite his detection of “a certain sentiment of art” was irritated by the rough stone and the dimensions of the

- 1 Dörner visited Commagene the first time in 1937 together with Rudolf Naumann supported by the Reisestipendium of the German Archaeological Institute. After World War II he returned to Turkey in 1948 and started to work in Commagene in 1951, cf. Dörner 1966, 29–31. On the history of the *Forschungsstelle* cf. Winter 2015.
- 2 On Hellenocentrism and resulting Orientalism and exclusion of research topics in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c. ‘Altertumswissenschaften’ cf. Hauser 2001a and Hauser 2001b/2009.
- 3 At this point Asia Minor had been barely explored at all, the notable exceptions being Texier who travelled intensely between 1833 and 1837 (Texier 1839–42) and Hamilton 1842. After a break in connection with the Crimean War and its aftermath explorative travels and first attempts to excavations resumed coeval with and slightly after the discovery of Nemrud Dağ in 1880, cf. Alaura 2006, 16–32. On the history of archaeology in Anatolia, cf. Matthews 2011; on research in the ancient Near East in relation to politics in the later 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> c., Hauser 2014b.
- 4 In retrospect the idea appears nearly as wishful thinking, as the rediscovery of Assyrian palaces in the 1840s and the sensational exhibition of their reliefs and cuneiform texts in London, Paris and elsewhere, prompted a certain Assyriomania. On the rediscovery of the Assyrians cf. Larsen 1996, on their reception Bohrer 2003.

statues and ascribed them to an “*époque de decadence*”:<sup>5</sup> Neither one of them could easily consider them Greek or Hellenistic. But even the Pergamum altar, nowadays one of the most famous ensembles of ancient art, which was just being excavated by Carl Humann at that time, received very ambivalent reactions in the late 19th century. Its sculptures were considered of minor, i. e., non-classical quality and were not easily accepted as valuable examples of Greek art. It turned out that a difficult and lengthy debate about the value, the essence and the fuzzy limits of Greek art was needed before it was acquired by Prussia and, much later, assigned a prominent place in the Berlin Museum.<sup>6</sup>

This should apply even more to the statuary program of Nemrud Dağ, which even Otto Puchstein and Carl Humann – who provided the first detailed description, including excellent plans of the site as well as outstanding drawings and even plaster casts of sculptures that are now only badly preserved – considered of high value in the local context of Hellenized barbarians, but beyond the limits of Greek art.<sup>7</sup> As Miguel John Versluys aptly summarized: they “characterized the Antiochan style as (1) a local phenomenon, that was (2) made by non-Greek artisans, that is (3) artistically uninteresting and had (4) something to do with a combination of Greek and Persian, even if ‘empty and meaningless’”<sup>8</sup> No wonder summaries of Greek (and Roman) art would refrain from embracing this ‘megalomaniac’ work. Antiochos I’s visual statement of power only finds consideration in rather recent studies of Hellenistic sculpture, but with obvious reluctance. Brunilde Ridgeway concluded that “the unusual layout and the unique character of the sculptures at Nemrud Dagh may seem of little use for the study of Hellenistic sculpture, except to demonstrate the far-reaching diffusion of Greek iconographic and stylistic details intentionally adopted by a monarch who at the same time emphasized his descent from a Persian royal line.”<sup>9</sup> And for R. R. R. Smith, the sculptural program of Antiochos I is intentionally blemished by this “hereditary local ruler of Kommagene”, “a Hellenised Iranian, with some Seleucid blood in his veins”:<sup>10</sup> According to him, the *dexiosis* relief from Arsameia demonstrates that “the sculptors were clearly capable of carving naked male figures in good koine or naturalistic style, as seen elsewhere in the kingdom; but here, in accordance with the king’s stylistic instructions, they make a vigorous effort to introduce ‘un-Greek’ com-

5 Hamdy – Effendi 1883, 17–18.

6 On the history and political background of German excavations in Western Turkey and the changes in the self-assessment of classical scholarship prompted by the new approach, cf. Marchand 1996, 92–115. 190–199.

7 Humann – Puchstein 1890, 345. For the history of research in Kommagene and especially at Nemrud Dağ cf. the detailed review by Brijder 2014, 176–431.

8 Versluys 2017, 193.

9 Ridgeway 2002, 38. Ridgeway refers to a “fusion of imagery”, in which the “use of Oriental attire, esp. the tall Persian tiaras, convey a predominantly foreign impression”, while the poses, “the occasional presence of sparse folds” and the parted lips “in keeping with late Hellenistic trends” demonstrate the Greek influence; Ridgeway 2002, 37.

10 Smith 1991, 226–227.

ponents, by artificially barbarizing the anatomical scheme. There could be no genuine Achaemenid element in such figures, because nudity and naked images had always been anathema to Iranians.”<sup>11</sup> As a result “the synthetic style of the sculptures has a certain hollowness that well expresses Antiochos’ dynastic vision. The monuments of Kommagene were probably the atypical products of a troubled time and a troubled mind.”<sup>12</sup> While largely ostracized from discussions of Greek sculpture and given a poor image, Nemrud Dağ did make its entry into a different world: the Parthian-Persian or Iranian world, as westernmost exponent of the ‘Hellenized Iranian East’.

This paper, in its first part, reviews the various arguments for the resilient powerful image of Antiochos I’s Persian/Iranian connections and his visual program and discusses them in respect to the recently changing image of ‘Arsacid art’, by debating concepts of cultural exchange and bricolage.<sup>13</sup> The second part addresses the question of systems of ideas in which Antiochos I’ program was situated and how the images created at and by Nemrud Dağ embody and engage with power, social standing and Roman imperialism.<sup>14</sup>

### **Nemrud Dağ as Example of Iranian Religion and Persian/Parthian Art**

The idea of Nemrud Dağ’s relation to Iranian religion and Persian/Parthian art is generally based on three interwoven arguments: a) the Iranian deities featured and venerated in Antiochos’ I *hierothesia* and *temene* (‘religion’), b) the supposedly non-Greek, presumably Iranian style of the sculptures (‘art’), and c) the Persian(ite) dress of sculptures and cult personal (‘realia’) lending support to the assumption of some kind of Persian cult. All three are presented against the background of the Persian-Achaemenid ancestors mentioned by Antiochos I.

#### a) Religious Connections<sup>15</sup>

Just when Theresa Goell finished her cleaning of the eastern and western terraces,<sup>16</sup> Hans Henning von der Osten surmised in his *Die Welt der Perser*: “The Iranian cultural influence was very strong in this Roman-Parthian frontier area [...] The most

11 Smith 1991, 228. On other examples of Orientalist judgements cf. Root 1991; Hauser 2001a.

12 Smith 1991, 228.

13 In this case the entire spectrum of meanings for resilience, from indestructible to elastic, is included.

14 This paper is often forced to reiterate arguments provided in much more detail in the most excellent study of M.J. Versluys 2017 in order to add remarks or argue for different opinions.

15 This topic is discussed in more detail and depth by de Jong in this volume.

16 Cf. Sanders 1996, 35–47; Brijder 2014, 312–381.

outstanding monument in this area is the tomb of King Antiochos [...] Aside from a number of large scale sculptures he had images of his ancestors, who were mainly of Iranian descent, made in relief. Greek was only the appearance [outer garb], i. e. the make-up and design, but the content is purely Iranian.<sup>17</sup> It is not expressly stated why the content appeared Iranian to him, but since he continues with a discussion of Mithras, his interpretation seems to rely on Antiochos I's relation to this deity.<sup>18</sup> In stressing the Iranianess of Antiochos I through his *dexiosis* with Mithras, von der Osten followed Franz Cumont's idea, who only six years after Nemrud Dağ's discovery argued for Commagene as link between the ancient Iranian god and Mithras' later prominence in the Roman Empire.<sup>19</sup> A special relationship between Mithras and Antiochos I was repeatedly purported for the simple reasons that both are dressed the same way in the *dexiosis* reliefs at Nemrud Dağ, although they differ in their headdress; Antiochos I is seen wearing the Armenian five-pointed tiara, while Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes wears the typical upright cap ('tiara?') used in Roman representations of 'Parthians'. (Sun) rays emanate from behind his head high-lighting his Helios-persona. The image of a genuinely Iranian religious setting was taken up by various scholars.<sup>20</sup> During

17 von der Osten 1956, 113: "der iranische Kultureinfluß war in diesem römisch-parthischen Grenzgebiet äußerst stark [...] Das weitaus großartigste Monument aus diesem Gebiet ist das Grabmal des Königs Antiochus I. [...] Außer einer Reihe von Großskulpturen hat er dort auf Relieftafeln seine Ahnen abbilden lassen, die vorwiegend iranischen Ursprungs waren. Griechisch ist nur das äußere Gewand, das heißt die handwerkliche Ausführung und Gestaltung, der Inhalt aber ist rein iranisch." It is funny to observe that for von der Osten the rather fragile argument for Iranian descent on Antiochos I father's side took precedence over the clear sequence of his mother's Greek ancestors. His position can be supported by Str. 11,14,16: "The sacred rites of the Persians are held in honor by both Medes and Armenians."

18 von der Osten 1956, 113: "Auf der einen Relieftafel erscheint Antiochos I., wie er Mithra-Helios zur Bestätigung des Lehnverhältnisses die Hand reicht." I refrain from a discussion of the idea of feudal relations. Whether there is more than an assumed connection of the Iranian god and Zoroastrianism with the Roman Mithras cult is an open question. While the 'Persian clothing' of the deity in Roman contexts clearly insinuates an Iranian background, there is no indication that the idea behind the god and its cult show any continuity. The debate cannot be taken up in detail here. Severe criticism of Cumont started among specialists in the 1960s, cf. Beck 2002, although some defend a connection between Commagene and the Roman cult of Mithras. According to Beck 1998 Antiochos I played a major role in the transformation of Mithras worship by his equation of Mithras with Helios, and paved the way for the later transfer of Mithraism to Rome in connection with the deposition of Commagene's last king Antiochos IV and his relocation to Rome in 72 CE. Cumont 1896/1898.

19 Cf. Duchesne-Guillemin 1984, 17: "Die Wichtigkeit Mithras ist in Kommagene offenbar. Erstens ist er der einzige Gott, dem ein spezieller Priester gewidmet ist; zweitens nennt der König sich selbst gerecht (δικαιος, ein beliebtes Epitheton Mithras); drittens trägt der König Mithras Gewand und Halsband; viertens will Antiochos die Nemrud-Dagh-Anlage als ein zweites Delphi verstanden wissen. Darüber hinaus geschah vermutlich, wie wir sahen, die Nemrud-Dagh-Stiftung unter astrologischem Einfluß, und bekanntlich spielte die Astrologie in den römischen Mithrasmysterien eine große Rolle." None of these arguments appears fully convincing in my view. On the other hand, Duchesne-Guillemin 1984, 13, acknowledges that the deities appear "zuallererst als griechische oder makedonische Götter mit einem dünnen iranischen Firnis".

her excavations at Nemrud Dağ, Goell felt forced to identify a highly suspicious fire-altar.<sup>21</sup> And also Dörner was enthralled by the idea of Iranian connections. Otherwise it would be difficult to understand his interpretation of the 158 m long tunnel at Arsameia, which ended in a kind of chamber, as being connected to some Mithras cult in which the king should have appeared from the depths as ‘Epiphanes’ and ‘reborn of Mithra.’<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note the preparedness of many scholars to look for Iranian traits to the demise of the Greek component, although the latter was obviously at least as important. Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin and Bruno Jacobs tried to demonstrate on various occasions that the religious program originally concentrated on Greek deities and that the ‘Iranian’ component was added only during the ‘syncretistic’ reconfiguration.<sup>23</sup> But regardless of chronology, the important point is that Antiochos I clearly felt the need to make sure that everybody, not only those with a more western ‘Hellenistic’ background, but also people in the East, understood that his divine support was supreme. Therefore, he created deities of high complexity as indicated by their combinatory names. However, the fact that all images of these deities were accompanied by inscriptions detailing their names should be interpreted as evidence that these explanations were considered necessary, because otherwise neither the population nor visitors from outside might have (fully) understood their significance.<sup>24</sup>

But because the interesting aspect of the syncretistic deities is their comprehensibility within various communicative or religious traditions<sup>25</sup>, the isolation of and emphasis on Mithras in earlier research appears misguided. Concentrating on Mithras not only dismisses the divine aspects of Apollo, Helios and Hermes, it also leaves aside the other ‘syncretistic’ deities represented in *dexiosis* reliefs and as monumental statues,

21 Brijder 2014, 348–354. Goell’s perspective is summarized by Jacobs 1996, 348: “Bei der religions-historischen Einordnung betonte Goell stärker die iranischen Traditionen. Allerdings werden Begriffe wie ‘Feuerkult’ und ‘Feueraltar’ (z. B. S. 144 f.) schlagwortartig und völlig unreflektiert gehandhabt; wenn Mithraskult und Feuerverehrung miteinander in Verbindung gebracht werden (S. 146), wenn das Barsombündel als Symbol des Heiligen Feuers apostrophiert wird, das während ‘Persian-Mithraic religious sacrifices’ gebraucht wurde (S. 101), wird deutlich, daß das Verständnis der orientalischen Komponente eher unscharf blieb.”

22 Dörner 1966, 75 (and several other times since 1960, e. g. Dörner 1991, 351): “Hier in der Tiefe der Erde entsühnte der König – so scheint es – sich und sein Volk als ein ‘Epiphanes’, wie der Beiname des Königs von Kommagene lautet, das heißt als eine sichtbare Erscheinung göttlichen Wirkens, als ein Wiedergeborener des Gottes Mithras.” The idea was originally prompted by the failure to reach any water source as expected. Doubtful about this pre-Mithraeum already Duchesne-Guillemin 1984, 18.

23 Duchesne-Guillemin 1984, 17; Jacobs 2012b, 103, but cf. Versluys 2017, 178–182, questioning the chronological evidence.

24 For a related idea cf. Kropp 2013, 315, who remarked that “to the native Aramaic-speaking population [...] one set of gods was as alien [...] as the other”. But cf. the contribution of Jacobs in this volume correctly cautioning against Kropp’s direct correlation of language and ethnicity which is the basis for his suggestion.

25 This does not necessarily imply that these specific syncretisms were easily comprehended by contemporaries and accepted outside their Commagenian context.

especially Oromazdes-Zeus, whose place in the middle of the line-up of statues on the Nemrud Dağ terraces was certainly not accidental.<sup>26</sup>

### b) 'Parthian Art'

For other scholars, the images themselves and art historical arguments took precedence over religious aspects in the connection between Antiochos I's sculptural program and Iranian or Persian heritage. Von der Osten's estimate of a mixture of cultures was entirely shared by Roman Ghirshman in his monumental handbook *Iran. Parther und Sasaniden*, but the direction of the arguments differed.<sup>27</sup> Aside from the Zoroastrian pantheon, he stressed the Iranian attire of the former kings, their tiara, and the *barsom* of the gods, as well as the "taste for the colossal, which follows a tradition that had been created in the past and was resumed by Achaemenid artists". He concluded: "But they also prove the infiltration of new currents, the influence of the Parthian world, which extended fast in these frontier zones of the empire."<sup>28</sup> Still, Ghirshman refrained from calling the sculpture from Nemrud Dağ 'Parthian art'.

The question of 'Parthian art' was originally posed by Gerhard Rodenwaldt, who, following Riegl's idea of 'Kunstwollen', argued in the 1920s that Roman art was more than just (poor) copies of the Greek ideal. In 1931 he wrote: "The problem of Parthian art or rather the Art of the Parthian Empire is one of the most acute, but also one of the most difficult in archaeology. What do we understand as Parthian culture? Did it exist at all? Rostovtzeff answered this question already by calling the culture of Palmyra nearly completely Parthian. From him, as the foremost expert on these frontier areas, we could expect [can hope for] the decisive advancement of this problem."<sup>29</sup> Being nudged that vigorously, Rostovtzeff complied. In his seminal study *Dura and*

26 His central position in turn led some scholars to claim that the whole *hierothesion* was strongly influenced by Zoroastrianism, e.g. Sommer 2005, 60. Facella 2006, 291–293, convincingly argues that there was nothing Zoroastrian (or Persian) to the cult than the added names. Neither in Nemrud Dağ nor in any other place in Commagene exists any evidence for Magoi or sacred fires. On Zoroastrianism in the Arsacid period cf. de Jong 2015 and in this volume.

27 Ghirshman's book was published in several languages in 1962. My translations from the German version sometimes differ slightly from those provided by Versluys 2017, who translated from the Italian version, both in turn mirror the different translations from the original French into Italian and German.

28 Ghirshman 1962, 67–68.

29 Rodenwaldt 1931, 291: "Das Problem der parthischen Kunst oder richtiger der Kunst des Partherreiches ist eins der akutesten, aber auch schwierigsten der Archäologie. Was verstehen wir unter parthischer Kultur? Hat es überhaupt eine solche gegeben? Rostovtzeff hat die Frage schon beantwortet, indem er die Kultur Palmyras als fast vollständig parthisch bezeichnet. Von ihm als dem besten Kenner dieser Grenzgebiete dürfen wir die entscheidende Förderung dieses Problems erhoffen, [dessen Lösung für die Geschichte der spätantiken Kunst von größter Wichtigkeit wäre]." On the problem of 'Parthian art' see Hauser 2014a; Jacobs 2014, 77–82; Dirven 2016.

*the Problem of Parthian Art* (1935), he defined ‘Parthian art’ as an art characterized by a strict frontal representation and by an inherent spirituality expressed in “the large piercing eyes, full of religious fervor and enthusiasm”.<sup>30</sup> Rostovtzeff argued that this art was furthermore characterized by linearity and increasingly schematic rendering of figural contours and drapery – in contrast to the more natural Greek rendering of bodies – and ethnographic realism/verism with love for detail in dress or weaponry.<sup>31</sup> The result seemed “no longer almost Greek, with a slight Achaemenid touch”, but “much more Iranized, much more Parthian.”<sup>32</sup>

For Rostovtzeff this was not “merely a barbarized and degenerate version of the Graeco-Mesopotamian art of the Hellenistic period”<sup>33</sup>, but the essence of a particular material culture, ‘Parthian art’ in its own right, which he saw as an expression of neo-Iranian identity. “The discussion of the material culture thus served to support his description of Arsacid policy. The political and the material had become intermingled.”<sup>34</sup>

Rostovtzeff tried to identify traces of this neo-Iranian art on three levels, first at the (still) unknown Arsacid imperial court<sup>35</sup>, second in regional developments in Fars and Babylonia, where he assumed the tendency of Graeco-Babylonian style to develop to “linear, stiff, and spiritual” ‘Parthian’ style<sup>36</sup>, and third in Iranian artistic traditions outside the empire in Central Asia, Armenia and neighbouring regions. His main example became Nemrud Dağ. “As much Iranized as the Sarmatian kingdoms [...] was a large part of Asia Minor, especially the eastern section of it. We know very little of the development of art in Pontus and Cappadocia [...] More is known about Kommagene. The splendid mountain sanctuary of Nimrud Dagh with its fascinating sculptures has been studied many times by various scholars. There is no difference of opinion on the Iranian character of these sculptures, evident not only in the dress, arms, religion but

30 Rostovtzeff 1935, 232. This result had already been suggested by Rodenwaldt 1931, 292–293.

31 Rostovtzeff 1935, 299.

32 Rostovtzeff 1935, 232. As augmented elsewhere, Rostovtzeff’s discussion of ‘Parthian art’ had two independent aims, his need to interpret the unusual visual culture encountered in his excavations at Dura Europos and his interest in the ‘Parthian Empire’ and its character not the least reflected in its material remains, which he considered “an independent source of historical information, no less valuable and important, sometimes more important than written sources”, Rostovtzeff 1922, p. VIII. His discussion of ‘Parthian art’ therefore is not only a debate about certain art styles, but about the character of the ‘Parthian Empire’ and its history in general, cf. Hauser 2014a, 128–129.

33 Rostovtzeff 1935, 160.

34 Hauser 2014a, 129.

35 In this context he referred to the temple sculptures from Hatra following Walter Andrae’s erroneous assumption that the temples were the palace of the kings of Hatra.

36 Rostovtzeff 1935, 182. 186. On the other hand, he describes the art of Babylonia in Parthian times as “hybrid art” with “main currents” from “Greek, Babylonian, and Iranian art”, Rostovtzeff 1935, 189–190.

also in the style.”<sup>37</sup> Representing the state of the research, this image of Iranianess will have greatly influenced Goell and Dörner when they started to work in Commagene.

Rostovtzeff’s opinion was not entirely shared by Daniel Schlumberger in his 1960 article *Descendants non-méditerranéens de l’art grec*, in which he described the art of Commagene. He regarded the statues of deities at Nemrud Dağ as excellent examples of block-formed statues as part of a Near Eastern tradition going back to Gudea.<sup>38</sup> He saw the *dexioseis* (which he interpreted as investitures) and the lion horoscope as something new. Still, for Schlumberger the reliefs at Nemrud Dağ were not really ‘Parthian’, as they were not frontal depictions, but three-quarter profiles of the body and full profiles of the faces. Schlumberger felt that they were about to turn from the three-quarter profile to frontality (“une tendance marquée à se tourner vers le spectateur”). Therefore, he explained, one could call this Parthian, but maybe better Graeco-Iranian, a forerunner of Parthian art proper.<sup>39</sup>

Interestingly, Schlumberger, who had been working in/near Palmyra for years and was excavating in Surkh Kotal at that time, considered the invention of strict frontal representation to be a Syro-Mesopotamian and not an Iranian development. Therefore, it was Ghirshman, whose field experience and interest was from and in Iran, who against Schlumberger identified frontality again as a native Iranian tradition.<sup>40</sup> For him, this fit well into his general image of Arsacid period art: “Whatever Iranian art accepts from the new stimulations [by Hellenism, SRH], they are not profound, but remain façade. And even where form and material seemingly adapt, the Iranian spirit remains unswayable.”<sup>41</sup> Amalgamating the opinions of Rostovtzeff and Schlumberger concerning Nemrud Dağ, Ghirshman acknowledged: “the law of frontality, one of the most striking peculiarities of Parthian art, has not asserted itself so far.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, uphold-

37 Rostovtzeff 1935, 192–193, where he compares the style to Greco-Persian gems and “still more striking” to the “almost contemporary sculptures of Palmyra”.

38 Other scholars favoured an Anatolian tradition: “fundamentally the monument was rooted in Anatolian-Hittite tradition”, Goell 1952, 141. In this she followed Rostovtzeff, who also thought that ultimately the concept of frontality derived from Syro-Hittite art in Northern Mesopotamia (thus not far from Commagene), somehow ‘invaded’ (on undisclosed ways) Central Asian nomadic art, from where it was accepted by the “nomadic Parthians”. Although these became Hellenized for a while, the “principles of their ancestral art”, among which was the “principle of frontality”, were revived along with their “national consciousness” and became the rule in religious and “ancestral secular compositions”, Rostovtzeff 1935, 240–241.

39 He concluded: “L’art parthe est un art post-grec, une version transformée, adaptée par les nouveaux maîtres de l’Orient à leur propre usage, de cet art ‘moderne’ du temps qu’est l’art grec”, Schlumberger 1960, 291–292.

40 Ghirshman 1962, 7.

41 Ghirshman 1962, 337: “Das, was die iranische Kunst anscheinend von den neuen Anregungen [des Hellenismus, SRH.] übernimmt, geht nicht in die Tiefe, sondern bleibt Fassade. Und wenn auch Form und Materie sich anzupassen scheinen, so bleibt der iranische Geist doch unbeeinflussbar.”

42 Ghirshman 1962, 68.



ing the image of the Iranian character, he concluded: “the flat relief is still under the spell of Achaemenid tradition” and “preserves Achaemenid motifs”.<sup>43</sup>

But after this clear Iranization of Antiochos I’s visual program, the approach to ‘Eastern’ art that had marked the period changed. Starting with Malcolm Colledge’s *Art of the Parthians* (1977), summaries of ‘Parthian art’ increasingly became compilations of ‘art within the Arsacid Empire’ with fewer ethnical overtones and thus they increasingly excluded Nemrud Dağ. Although the important role of frontal representation as stylistic trade mark of genuine ‘Parthian art’ remained consensual<sup>44</sup>, the art of the empire in general now increasingly appeared as “characterized by eclecticism, a willingness to borrow style and motifs from Greek and earlier Near Eastern cultures and to recombine them to create new forms”.<sup>45</sup> This results in “the overlapping of different cultural planes, which is perhaps the most truly characteristic feature of art in the Parthian empire”.<sup>46</sup>

An excellent example of what this means is the first Arsacid capital in Nisa, where a marvellously eclectic collection of artefacts was found, in particular in the so-called ‘Square Building’, a monumental, representative former banqueting space, which had been turned into a storehouse for disused precious objects.<sup>47</sup> At Nisa, we see marble statues of Aphrodite (possibly identified with Anahita), Artemis and Dionysos in purely Hellenistic style, which are in contrast to likewise ‘Hellenic’ life-sized clay-heads of which comparisons can be found in Central Asia.<sup>48</sup> But Greek and Central Asian elements are also found side by side in gilded silver or bronze figurines including Athena, Eros, gryphons and eagles.<sup>49</sup> Finally, a splendid collection of approximately 50 ivory rhyta came to light, part of which displaying Greek mythological scenes and deities on the stem. Antonio Invernizzi suggests that: “The principals of these common features are the cultural component of Greek origin and the specifically Arsacid Iranian element”<sup>50</sup>, while I would stress that their execution and the recurring presence of typically eastern subjects demonstrate the perfect blend of local and western traditions.<sup>51</sup>

43 Ghirshman 1962, 66–67.

44 E. g. Keall 1989, 51–52; Mathiesen 1992, 13–14; correctly criticised by Dirven 2016, 75, cf. on the debate Hauser 2014a, 129–131.

45 Downey 1986, 580. Colledge 1977, 144: there is “no common language of art” in the Parthian Empire. For Colledge, in a way returning to Rostovtzeff’s argument of politics and art, this coincided with a “lack of [central] control” that “reflects on social and political as much as on art history”.

46 Invernizzi 2011, 192.

47 Invernizzi 2010. On the rhyta cf. Masson – Pugachenkova 1982; Pappalardo 2010; on metal objects: Invernizzi 1999; on sculptures: Invernizzi 2009.

48 Invernizzi 2009.

49 Invernizzi 1999.

50 Invernizzi 2011, 191. Dirven 2016, 70 n. 10 pointedly remarks: “one cannot help wondering what the study of Parthian art would have looked like had Nisa been found ten years earlier”.

51 Masson and Pugachenkova 1982; Pappalardo 2010.

Still, in discussion of material culture from the Arsacid period, the image of a strong Hellenistic influence is most often considered chronologically relevant. The more than 30 statues that have been found at Susa may serve as an example. They vary from possibly even imported marble statues of Greek deities, to locally produced items according to western norms, e.g. the city Tyche, to less naturalistic, frontal representations of men in long tunic, mantle, trousers and shoes, which display every aspect of 'Parthian art' as defined by Rostovtzeff. According to Pierre Amiet, the differences represent three periods, which he interpreted as a phase of direct Seleucid control, a period of strongly Hellenized art under early Arsacid rule, and a decline of Greek influence after the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century CE.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, stratified terracotta figurines from Seleucia on the Tigris show no such abatement, but the continuous development of new types in seemingly 'Graeco-Hellenistic' as well as mixed styles.<sup>53</sup> For a long time, the continuation and development of 'Greek-looking' terracotta figurines was simply not conceded to 'the Parthians', but the evidence abounds of the way different styles were actively employed and transformed. A case in point are the alabaster statuettes that were found in Seleucia in the later Arsacid period levels I and II. While Hans E. Mathiesen sees an "astonishing [...] pure Greek style"<sup>54</sup>, the statuettes are quite obviously a local innovation based on inherited accumulated visual codes without any direct counterpart in the West.<sup>55</sup> And we should not be surprised if some 'Greek-looking' Hellenistic figurines were invented in Seleucia on the Tigris, one of the most important Hellenistic centres of its time, as those styles had been common in that area for centuries already and did not need any further stimulus from outside to thrive.

In addition, we should be aware that dwindling (direct) Greek influence is not necessarily the same as loss of quality. Instead, it represents a different set of values and/or contexts of use. This is nicely illustrated by life-sized statues of rulers and nobility of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE excavated in shrines at Hatra, which appear rigid but demonstrate certain virtuosity in their finely embroidered tunics, trousers and shoes.<sup>56</sup> As already observed by Rostovtzeff and Schlumberger, the same steadfast quality and frontality are even found in scenes of communicative acts between persons, which do not look at each other but gaze at the beholder. This rendition in later Arsacid times produces immediacy, a direct contact between the person depicted and the observer and was obviously considered more important than a naturalistic rendering. The less Hellenized way of representation is, nevertheless, neither ethnically 'Parthian', nor official 'Arsacid art', but just the most commonly used form of visual communication.

52 Amiet 2001. Cf. on the idea of separate traditions Ghirshman 1962, 337, as in note 41.

53 Van Ingen 1939; Menegazzi 2014.

54 Mathiesen 1992, 17.

55 Cf. Hauser 2012, 1019; Fowkes-Childs – Seymour 2019, 233–237.

56 Safar – Mustafa 1974; Dirven 2008.

The statues of Hatrean nobility show us how much the way and style of images depended on contexts of use. While they had been considered prime examples of Parthian art for their frontality and linearity, it is now obvious that they were employed in temples where they lent a specific presence and permanence to those represented in sculpture. They force the viewer, human or divine, to engage and interact with the image.<sup>57</sup> But at the same time we find marble sculpture modelled on Greek classical ideals in other, functionally different contexts at Hatra, and large paintings of animal hunts, which prefigure Sasanian art, covering walls of contemporary private buildings.<sup>58</sup>

Based on this, we conclude that a deliberate choice of art styles was possible in the Arsacid empire according to their use, at least in larger city centres. And even where individual pieces might be described in fixed stylistic or even ethnic terms, the overall result is usually as time-space specific as it is eclectic. Instead of one type of ‘Parthian art’ or a single style, there was a choice between a multitude of possibilities to acquire rather idiomatic pieces or to have them blended into something new. This applies to conscious eclecticism in assemblages as much as to individual pieces demonstrating the same trend of bricolage as we encounter at Nemrud Dağ.

### c) Persianite Realia

With the redefinition of ‘Parthian art’ as ‘art in the Arsacid Empire’, Commagene was eliminated from this specific discourse. Mathiesen even stated: “Even though the art of Commagene is at times included in the treatment of Parthian art, this disposition is difficult to accept, for the Commagenian works of art do not, from neither a historical nor art-historical point of view, belong with the Parthian works.”<sup>59</sup> One might well argue against Mathiesen that, although we don’t know any genealogical assemblages from the Arsacid Empire (which might well be a result of our very fragmentary knowledge), the individual ancestor stelae fit perfectly fine into the general context of Adiabenean rock reliefs of local rulers.<sup>60</sup>

Likewise, Ghirshman’s idea that Nemrud Dağ’s ‘Iranian character’ is anchored in a rather Achaemenid Persian style, was rejected by Smith, who advanced the idea that “there is no trace of Achaemenid style or iconography” at Nemrud Dağ – and “the sculptures are a quite conscious and artificial concoction of Greek and Oriental. It is a

57 Dirven 2008; Hauser 2014a.

58 Safar – Mustafa 1974; Venco 1996, 156 fig. 5.

59 Mathiesen 1992, 85.

60 Cf. the stelae in Assur (Andrae – Lenzen 1933, 105–107; Hauser 2011, 142–143), and the rock reliefs in Batas Herir (Boehmer – von Gall 1973; Grabowski 2011), Rabana/Merguli (Khounani – Mohammadifar 2018) and Amadiya (Miglus et al. 2018).

hybrid art designed to express particular hybrid dynastic ideas”.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, Ghirshman was supported by Antiochos I’s own statements that he had the images made “according to the ancient logos of the Persians and Hellenes” and that the priests of the *hierotheresia* were to wear “suitable clothing of Persian character” (N 71). Visually this is represented by the dress of the ancestors on the father’s side, the costumes and headdresses of gods and Antiochos I himself, as well as the *barsom*.<sup>62</sup> Accordingly, Smith concluded that (even) “the colossal seated statues [...] represent Antiochos himself and the four syncretic gods of his pantheon, and wear Oriental costumes and headgear, no doubt intended to be Achaemenid”.<sup>63</sup> Goell had already discussed that this was not genuinely appropriate Achaemenid attire, arguing that “the ‘Persian’ costumes of Antiochos, his deities and ancestors do not come directly from the draped costumes in the Persepolis reliefs. They were the result of the type developing as part of a long evolution and representing a local contemporary style worn by the Parthians. Another type with long cloak and trousers that are narrow at the ankles is of Median origin. The original can be seen worn by Medes in the Persepolis reliefs and on silver statuettes of the Achaemenid period. In other words, the Nemrud Dağ figures are wearing local, contemporary costumes.”<sup>64</sup>

The appropriate question, therefore, is what Antiochos I refers to when he calls clothing or customs ‘Persian’ in his inscriptions. While modern research simply assumed that this referred to the Achaemenids, this seems far from certain. In a detailed study, Bruno Jacobs clearly demonstrated that ‘Persian’ could well have meant ‘Parthian’<sup>65</sup>, in the same way as how Roman authors refer to either Parthians or Persians without differentiating. Therefore, the explicit Persianizing of Antiochos I might in fact be aimed at the Arsacids.<sup>66</sup>

This is particularly interesting in connection with the observation that, in the process of eclectic appropriation at Nemrud Dağ, Greek elements seem far more present than ‘Persianite’.<sup>67</sup> The combination of various forms has been discussed in great

61 Smith 1988, 227–228, who sees a rather hollow, synthetic version of Oriental dynastic art. The term hybridity allows us to intellectually distance ourselves from descriptions and assignations which appear too simplistic or outright ethnocentric (and thus politically incorrect) without defining what we really mean, cf. the excellent discussion by Versluys 2017, 244–245.

62 Duchesme-Guillemin 1984; Jacobs 2017.

63 Smith 1991, 227.

64 Goell 1952, 143.

65 Jacobs 2017, 244.

66 Strootman – Versluys 2017, 18, for a very valuable definition of and discrimination between Persianization, “a (specific) form of acculturation” and Persianism (a construction of cultural memory in later circumstances).

67 Hoepfner 2012, 129: es handelt sich “um einen hellenistischen Akkulturationsprozess [...], bei dem orientalische Elemente auf äußerliche Zeichen wie Kleidung und Federkrone reduziert sind”. Kropp 2013, 314: “The Persian elements are both late and sporadic, being mainly limited to royal garb and added names to the deities depicted.” I disagree with the idea that the Achaemenids were crucial for Arsacid royal ideology as expressed by Versluys 2017, 215, 230, although they might have

detail by Jacobs and Versluys, who specifically stressed the combination of different elements as a kind of bricolage, i. e. the notion of “how various influences and traditions are used to create a new whole.”<sup>68</sup> Versluys convincingly argues that the styles were not related to any specific ethnic group, but – as argued above for the examples from the Arsacid Empire – the result of an active, conscious choice. As such – to quote Versluys: “The Antiochan style [...] is best described as a juxtaposition and blending of discrete elements suggestive of different cultural traditions within a single, new style as the result of conscious appropriation.”<sup>69</sup> The ancestor reliefs invited or even forced earlier research to interpret the sculptures as “plastic counterpart of the genealogy of the Commagenian house”.<sup>70</sup> But this image needs correction, since “the visual strategy of Antiochos I was [...] not about being Greek or Persian, but about doing Greek and Persian.”<sup>71</sup>

Versluys concludes that the deployment of Greek elements can be understood as an active choice to associate with civilization and modernity.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, this by no means implies that references to contemporary Arsacid culture should be regarded as less positive – or they would not be there. The representation of contemporary ‘Persian’ dress, specific crowns, and in particular the peculiar dagger simply accord to a different reference system of dignity.<sup>73</sup> As much as the Greek elements accord to a certain language to create the image of a Hellenistic ruler, the ‘Persianite’ references relate him to modern eastern kingship.

### Power, Social Standing and Roman Imperialism

The question remains why Antiochos I should make this choice for his image, especially if it seems doubtful that there was any genetically or culturally exclusive Greek or Persian population in the area? To approach this question, we have to discuss Antiochos I’s self-aggrandizing visual and cultic program in the context of power, social standing and Roman imperialism. His program consisted of: a) the foundation of (or at least the renovation of) three *hierothesia* and the establishment of numerous *temene*,

accepted suggestions of connections as occasionally helpful, cf. Shayegan 2011. Cf. also de Jong 2017, 37–38. The ancestor gallery at Nemrud Dağ is interesting in that it attempts to connect the Arsacids with the Achaimenids via Antiochos’ family.

68 Versluys 2017, 197–198.

69 Versluys 2017, 246.

70 Mathiesen 1992, 85.

71 Versluys 2017, 219.

72 Versluys 2017, 212.

73 This dagger belongs to the type of ‘four looped dagger’, which in the Arsacid period obviously became an accepted insignia of high standing from Central Asia to Nemrud Dağ as its westernmost occurrence. For comparisons for the dagger in Central Asia, Winkelmann 2013, 243–245.

together with the foundation of regular festivals, b) his personal ascendancy towards divinity, and c) the creation of a unique visualization of his royalty, which found its acme in his *hierotheresion* on Nemrud Dağ.

The entire program was obviously developed after Antiochos I was awarded the kingdom of Commagene by Pompey in 64 BC.<sup>74</sup> It has been repeatedly mentioned that Antiochos I needed the one thing that, as is widely assumed, every ruler needs: acceptance or legitimacy.<sup>75</sup> Usually, you would see three different courses that might lead to acceptance: 1) Divine selection; 2) Genealogy, i. e. successful ancestors; and 3) as Gehrke stressed, following Max Weber: charisma provided by success, in the Hellenistic period preferably through war.<sup>76</sup> The problem for Antiochos I was that none of the three factors could be claimed without reservation and hesitation. Although he asserted that he was succeeding to his ancestral kingdom he was selected by Pompey and his Roman arms; his immediate ancestors had been dependent on the Armenian kings and the Seleucids<sup>77</sup>; and if there was anything he needed to avoid, it would have

74 Appian reports that Pompey after his defeat of Mithridates of Pontos, added Sophene and Gordiène to the realm of Ariobarzanes of Cappadocia, passed the Taurus mountains and made war against Antiochos I, until they entered into friendly relations (App. Mith. 16,105–106). The state of war must not necessarily have involved any actual armed confrontation, since the relative strength was too obvious. Before leaving the region Pompey granted Antiochos I Seleucia (Zeugma) and those parts of Mesopotamia that he had conquered (App. Mith. 17, 114; Str. 16,2,3) which did not prevent him from listing him among the vanquished kings in his triumph at Rome in 62 BCE (App., Mith. 17,117). According to Plut. Pompeius 45,4, Antiochos I gave hostages.

75 I would like to thank Ab de Jong for a thought provoking debate about the usefulness of this category which indeed, as he pointed out, is often overstated and might in cases be “not only anachronistic, but intellectually mechanical, culturally homogenizing, theoretically naïve, empirically false, and tediously predictable” as Sheldon Pollock (*The Language of the Gods in the World of Men. Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Pre-modern India* [Berkeley 2006] 18; quoted after de Jong 2017, 42) summarized. In spite of this certainly often appropriate critique, I will use this category here as I assume a strong need on the side of Antiochos I to define his new kingdom and to gain acceptance and justification for his rule, i. e. legitimacy.

76 Gehrke 2013, 76.

77 Versluys 2017, 172–178, not the least building on the critical evaluation of evidence for pre-Antiochos activities in both Arsameias by Hoepfner 2012, 129, questions the validity of historicity of Antiochos’ I dynasty as augmented by Antiochos I. As much as I agree with Hoepfner and Versluys about this ‘invention of dynastic tradition’, I would argue that it does not really matter whether we believe that the kingdom existed before – based on the coins of his father and grandfather (Bedoukian 1983; Facella 2006, 209–224) – or not. Antiochos I owed both, the kingdom’s existence and its geographical extent, to the decisions of Pompey during the conference of Amisos. Assigning Antiochos I “obscure origins” (Versluys 2017, 231) is probably too harsh. The only question is why Pompey thought it prudent not to incorporate Commagene into the Roman realm. Aside from avoiding a direct, possibly confrontational frontier, he evaded additional problems with the senate at home for overstepping his imperium. At this moment (and in retrospect) the installation of a friendly king without too great ambitions, who while controlling the important crossings of the Euphrates at Zeugma and Samosata, was easily controlled himself, appeared (and appears) the much better choice.

been a war that he could only lose. Still, the foundation of a new kingdom required him to play the game: and he played it in a big way.

#### a) The Installation of Cult Places

Obviously Antiochos I decided that if he received a new kingdom from the Romans, he was going to use it well. The various cult places throughout the country – as has been remarked very often – described the kingdom, they defined the space. Versluys appropriately suggests that “by using these spatial practices Antiochos I changed the map of Commagene into an Antiochan space.”<sup>78</sup> But in deploying these cult centres, Antiochos I not only appropriated the landscape, he also created (the new) Commagene, a political entity that had just been extended in the South by Zeugma and its surroundings and allotted the control of two of the most important crossings of the Euphrates between Rome, Armenia and the Arsacid Empire.<sup>79</sup>

The new creation of the realm is also the reason why the goddess Commagene features so prominently in his program. No other Hellenistic ruler used the image or personification of his country this meaningfully. The Seleucids claimed to descend from Apollo, who was likewise the patron-deity in Elymais, while the Ptolemies claimed to descend from Dionysos, and the Attalids from Herakles, who also became the patron deity in Mesene. But nowhere do we see as much importance assigned to the country itself as in Commagene. But there is an additional aspect: all the energy spent on building a Commagenian identity through cult is defensive in how it carves out a territory from the previous Armenian realm and from those areas that were factually under the sway of Rome. Accordingly, Antiochos I – contrary to more potent Hellenistic kings – lacked any interest in expanding his realm and simply accepted the limits of his (tax-rich) kingdom. This was a wise decision, as he would have stood no chance against the Armenians and even less against Rome. As Ulrich Gotter pointedly remarked, the rulers of the region “had learned how little it took to be disposed of [...], who held power – even on the Euphrates – could no longer remain secret. I consider it extremely plausible to see the occasion for the energetic construction of the ruler cult at Commagene in this structural delegitimation of regional kingdoms.”<sup>80</sup> So Antiochos called himself ‘Philorhomaioi’ for good reasons and just guarded the Euphrates, while at the same time he transmitted a certain image through an unusual display of power in the scale and visibility of his buildings, and in particular his *hierothesion* at Nemrud Dağ.

78 Versluys 2017, 113.

79 This responsibility also involved enormous tax revenues, cf. Jacobs 2012b, 107.

80 Gotter 2013, 222.

### b) Ascendency towards Divinity

Styling oneself a divine ruler is not exceptional in the Hellenistic world. We can refer to the Ptolemies as example.<sup>81</sup> And while the majority of ruler cults were established by the respective subjects, there were still cults elsewhere that the rulers had established for themselves.<sup>82</sup> But although “Hellenistic dynastic monuments, and in particular colossi, were designed to display power as something tangible”<sup>83</sup> the dimension and conceptual consistency of Antiochos I’s plans were outstanding. By assigning cult places throughout his territory and prescribing the participation in cultic festivities, he actively attempted to inscribe and display the new political and social realities in the physical world.<sup>84</sup> The various cult centres thereby addressed Antiochos I’s subjects directly, as they were supposed to attend at least two festivities a year, a duty they were compensated for by free meals, again intended to strengthen communal ideas.<sup>85</sup> The *hierothesion* at Nemrud Dağ will also have affected the local population, since a sizeable number of them will have helped to build this enormous monument, and it must already have been visible throughout the kingdom during the building process. A monument to refer to and a wonder to behold! The power of Antiochos I’s images thus served to establish an image of power.

### c) Nemrud Dağ and its Multiple Messages

Although Antiochos I dramatically changed the entire landscape of his kingdom, the representational efforts reached their acme and unprecedented levels in the complex

81 Jacobs 2012a, 79: The gods provide “was ihre göttliche Huld gewährend kann: die Herrschaft selbst, aber auch deren Gelingen durch Prosperität und Sicherheit.” Contrary to earlier interpretations which saw these reliefs as attempts to place Antiochos on par with the gods, his *dexiosis* inscription from Zeugma states that the representation shows him “receiving the benevolent right hands of the gods”, which they extended “to my assistance in my struggles”, cf. Crowther – Facella 2003, 47–53. Therefore, despite his calling himself theos and his mixing with the gods at Nemrud Dağ in form of a *synthronos*, Antiochos I did not place himself on the same level. Cf. Shayegan 2017, 427 n. 135.

82 Gotter 2013, 219.

83 Versluys 2017, 122 with additional literature.

84 Bourdieu 2013, 199.

85 It is often assumed that the population was supposed to participate in 24 events per year, e.g. Wagner 2012b, 44; Jacobs 2012b, 105; Rose 2013, 226 (Kropp 2013, 309, erroneously even speaks about 26 occasions!), since the ‘great cult inscription’ (N) details that Antiochos I a) “consecrated” his birthday (the 16<sup>th</sup> of Audnaios) and the day of his accession to the throne (the 10<sup>th</sup> of Loos) as annual festival, and b) ordered the observation of both events on every 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> each month. But at least the cult inscription at Nemrud Dağ clearly discriminates between the annual festivals to which the population is expected and the monthly ones which shall be observed by the priests, but not necessarily involve anyone else (N 80–104). The same holds true for the inscription from Sofraz Köy (SO 12–19, cf. Petzl 2012, 68–69). Only in Arsameia we see monthly public festivities for the birthdays of Antiochos and his father.



*hierothesion* at Nemrud Dağ. But while modern scholars tried to identify every single detail and its possible reference to hidden meanings, it is more pertinent to ask which references were distinguishable for various more or less learned audiences. Who would have been able to read the images and identify a certain crown or a stylistic trait as what it was meant to refer to? Or to pose the question slightly differently and more directly: How much could Antiochos I (trust to) capitalize on specific references? What audience was addressed in this complex ‘Selbstdarstellung’?

Surprisingly, much of the literature considered the whole scenery in terms of internal politics, as though Antiochos I had really been an independent autonomous ruler.<sup>86</sup> More recently, Kropp and Versluys successfully argued that the main target audience would have been peers from the neighbouring kingdoms. As Kropp described, Antiochos I in his “self-projection as sovereign ruler, exceeding his Hellenistic predecessors by benefitting from his double Greco-Persian heritage” was the only one of the Hellenistic kings who used images of himself in a leading role to create a new religious fabric of his kingdom.<sup>87</sup> Here we have a king, supported by Rome, who built a unique tomb for himself, a case of impressive self-aggrandizement that pushed him far up above his peers in the royal competition for social capital. This was something to talk about, not only among kings. Although we will never be able to prove the actual visits that Antiochos I expected (N 148–151) and encouraged (SO 24–33), we may well imagine that some dignitaries indeed came to see the site.<sup>88</sup>

On the other hand, we should not underestimate Antiochos I intention to impress the Romans. In contrast to Kropp and to Versluys<sup>89</sup>, who only admits that the “preprovincial status granted some freedom in building identity in cultural terms”<sup>90</sup>, I would stress that it was Rome’s presence and growing might that set the stage for Antiochos I’s program. His entire reign relied on Rome and Pompey’s decision to prefer indirect rule over the more cost-intensive direct rule. While conscious of every move of their client-king, the Romans will have been aware of the building process and the far-reaching claims of social capital that the images provided. And Antiochos I certainly addressed the Romans as audience. Neither the emblematic colossal statues of deities, which still impress every visitor today and thus come to the fore, nor the *dexiosis* reliefs, which serve to demonstrate divine assistance and approval in an almost Assyrian way, are of

86 E. g. Brijder 2014, 20.

87 Kropp 2013, 357. Cf. Versluys 2017, 159: “Antiochos I was part of – and added to – a Hellenistic symbolism that was meant to appeal to the subjects in his kingdom and to audiences in the *oikumene* at large”.

88 Cf. the old-Babylonian palace at Mari, which was so famous that the king of Ugarit wanted to visit, cf. e. g. Margueron 1995, 885.

89 Kropp 2013, 359: “Rome played no role in Kommagenian ideology”; Versluys 2017, 166: “had something to do with Roman power, but rather more indirectly”.

90 Versluys 2017, 167.

special importance in this context.<sup>91</sup> While the claim of nearness to or even descent from the divine itself had already been established in the Hellenistic kingdoms, it was still a difficult argument in Rome. More importantly, the genealogical reliefs, “the fortunate roots of my ancestry” (N 30–32) as Antiochos I calls them, appear in the Roman context, not only forming an unusually long line, but also displaying both lines. Antiochos I uses this paternal genealogy to provide a historical derivation of Commagene, with Armenia as Achaemenid province and Commagene as stemming from Armenia. This might have impressed the subjects and to some extent also Antiochos’ peers, in as much as they were probably only too aware of his clever inventions.<sup>92</sup> But this display of ancestors in order to establish one’s social capital was only too familiar [sic] to Romans.<sup>93</sup> The display of ancestor images was deeply ingrained in Roman society, where it played a particularly vital role in late-Republican competition among senatorial peers, i. e. just at the time when Antiochos I had his family gallery made. Therefore, Antiochos I and his designers certainly also had a Roman audience in mind. But “the heroic crowd of ancestors” (N 47–48), including the elusive previous kings of Commagene, will not have impressed the Romans as much as it might have impressed other Hellenistic rulers. While they might have admired the long pedigree, there was probably little to gain from displaying a relationship to the Seleucids, whom Pompey had just disposed of. In addition, the reference to the Armenian kings might have failed to receive the planned echo with Roman visitors, since they had just been defeated and reduced. Nevertheless, the long line of ancestors was intended to grant status and social capital, especially as these lines led to Alexander and Dareios I.<sup>94</sup>

91 Cf. the crowning ritual of the king in which Ashur places him on the throne, while Anu crowns him, Nergal provides him with his weapons and Ninurta, with whom the king is often compared, with his radiant brilliance of awe, *melammu*, cf. Maul 1999, 207–208. For the visual representation of the kings as super-human beings cf. Winter 2008, 85–86.

92 Metzler 2012, 110, interprets them as dynastic cult and considers the “Institutionalisierung des Ahnenkultes” as prime evidence for the eastern connection (and orientation?) of Commagene. It is important to note that the gallery of forefathers, despite possible offerings in front of them, was not intended for cultic veneration of ancestors themselves, who only served a supporting role for the cult of Antiochos I among the gods. Furthermore, as discussed by various scholars (esp. Hintzen-Bohlen 1990; cf. Versluys 2017, 130–135) the constant reference to ancestors as dynastic legitimation was no less present in Hellenistic contexts than in Assyria. The most pertinent example is Mithridates VI of Pontos who in 89 BCE according to Justin (Just. Epit. 38,7,1) stated that – exactly like Antiochos I – his genealogical tree would go back to Dareios and even Kyros on his father’s side and to Seleukos Nikator and Alexander in his mother’s line, for a discussion cf. Shayegan 2016.

93 The importance of capitalization on success and grandeur of dynastic *exempla* becomes obvious a few years later in the images of the Julian family (*gens*) which Augustus displayed in a parallel row to the *summi viri* of Roman history within his newly built temple of Mars Ultor, cf. e. g. Zanker 1987, 213–215. Although this example is later than the ancestor reliefs of Antiochos I, the idea behind was probably already as evident to Roman senators as to regional peers.

94 It did not really help with Cicero though, who poked fun of Antiochos I while still in Rome (Letter to Quintus dated 13 February 54 BCE) and considered him not entirely trustworthy while in

It is therefore apt to consider that the most valuable family member, at this point, was probably Antiochos I's daughter Laodike, who had been successfully married off to the King of Kings Osroes in Ktesiphon, who was certainly not a lightweight in the political arena and who provided a connection that might at times prove favourable, a situation which secured her a spot at Nemrud Dağ in a place where a living person should not belong.<sup>95</sup> As long as she lived, her inclusion can be seen as a statement vis-à-vis the Romans (and Armenians) that Antiochos I might receive protection from a third party.<sup>96</sup> At the same time, the ancestor gallery sent the clear message to the Arsacids that Laodike was worth being married to.<sup>97</sup> In this context, finally also the syncretistic and as such all-encompassing deities would find some additional justification as a gesture towards the Arsacids, a reference that might have even been prompted by this marriage itself. The insignia of the crown and the ‘Vierlappendolch’ of Antiochos I and the royal costumes worn by himself and his ancestors are explicit expressions of a shared value system.

Specific messages were also sent to the Armenian king. The inclusion of Armenians in his line of ancestors, and his adoption of an Armenian crown, while calling himself “Great King”, at the same time appears to have been an attempt to claim a rank equal to Tigranes II. There is only one difference; Tigranes II had been the most powerful monarch in the area and was reduced to *amicitia* with the Romans by Pompey, while Antiochos I had been made into a winner through the wars with Rome. Accordingly, he remained a loyal follower and supporter of Pompey, even sending him troops to fight at Pharsalos.<sup>98</sup>

Therefore, it is a pity that Pompey the Great himself never managed to visit Commagene again, as he, himself a master of the political use of architecture and of nuances of visual communication<sup>99</sup>, might have enjoyed this gigantic project of self-aggran-

Cilicia (letter to the magistrates and senate 18 September 51 BCE) although Antiochos I had sent envoys to inform and warn him about Arsacid troops crossing the Euphrates, cf. Facella 2006, 236–243, who also concludes that Antiochos I truly behaved like a *philorhomaiois*.

95 On her identification cf. Jacobs 2000, 305, followed e.g. by Facella 2006, 272–275 and Brijder 2014, 342–343.

96 The importance of this connection is likewise made obvious in the *dexiosis* between Mithradates II and his already deceased sister and the accompanying inscription Kb from Karakuş, cf. Wagner 2012b, 53–54; Brijder 2014, 60–62.

97 Messerschmidt 2012, 87, correctly points out that two previous marriages are central to the ancestor gallery: a) the marriage of Aroandas with the daughter of the Artaxerxes II, Rhodogune, which connected the Orontids with the Achaemenids, and b) the marriage between Antiochos I's parents, Mithradates and Laodike, daughter of the Seleucid Antiochos VIII Grypos.

98 Caes. B Civ. 3,4,5.

99 At exactly the same time as Antiochos I developed his program for Commagene, Pompey built a huge building complex of approximately 320 × 160 m on the Campus Martius just outside the city boundaries of Rome to memorialize his (undoubted unique military and his political) achievements and to gain further following and support in Rome. The complex consisted of the first stone theater of Rome, which was erected against the express will of the senate, and an attached temple

dizement meant to define the newly created kingdom. The artful juxtaposition and blending of discrete elements in the bricolage of legitimacy, thus providing an image of power, might have been to his taste, as he could have read the power of images as evidence for his own successful politics.

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for Venus Victrix. Adjoining was a huge quadriporticus surrounding a garden with an exquisite collection of Greek art. At the rear end a curia (the *curia Pompeii*) was created, in which the senate could meet outside the *pomerium*, but in the presence of a huge statue of Pompey in 'heroic nudity' holding a globe. The complex in its combination of representative architecture, cultic, governmental and public cultural spaces transformed the (sub-)urban space as much as it put pressure on the senate in general and in particular to senatorial competitors vying for influence. Outperforming earlier senatorial public buildings it set a new standard for self-aggrandizement and became a reference for later Imperial Fora. On the complex cf. Sauron 1987, Schröter 2008, esp. Madeleine 2014, and Klinkott 2019. For the interpretation of portraits of Pompey cf. Giuliani 1986, 25–100; Junker 2007.

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