

Michael Blömer, Stefan Riedel, Miguel J. Versluys, Engelbert Winter (eds.), *Common Dwelling Place of all the Gods: Commagene in its Local, Regional and Global Hellenistic Context*, (*Oriens et Occidens* – 34), Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2021, pp. 598 + multiple figures + maps; ISBN 978-3-515-12925-1

Due to its location at the crossroads of Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Syria, Commagene played a strategic role in the Romano-Parthian relations from the 1st c. BCE to the 2nd c. CE. Under the Achaemenids Commagene was a part of the satrapy of Armenia, remaining tied to that region in the early Hellenistic era. In the 3rd c. BCE, Commagene was controlled by the Kingdom of Sophene, to fall into the hands of the Seleucids by the end of that century. The land finally won its independence in 163 BCE, when its *epistates* Ptolemy rebelled against his Syrian overlords. As an independent Hellenistic kingdom, Commagene played a minor role in the politics of the day; however, the discovery of dynastic cult sanctuaries in Arsameia on the Euphrates and on Nemrud Dağ (respectively built by two kings of Commagene, Mithridates I and Antiochus I) brought Commagene to the attention of scholars. The untypical architecture of these sanctuaries and inscriptions found within (recording the genealogies of the ruling house of Commagene and rituals pertaining to the cult of the ruler) attracted considerable scholarly interest, with a particular focus on Antiochus I's complex of Nemrud Dağ, exceptional in terms of its sculptural decoration (and its ideological and artistic significance).

The combination of Persian and Greek elements typical to the material culture of Commagene led the scholars to treat this state not only as a case study for cultural phenomena of the Hellenistic era but also as a touchstone for analysing how other Mediterranean cultures of the Hellenistic era have accommodated Greek cultural practices. Many studies on these and similar topics were amassed in the proceedings volume of the conference “Beyond East & West. Hellenistic Commagene in its local and global Eurasian context,” held in Münster from November 29 to December 1, 2018.

The conference gathered several scholars from a number of countries, all of them studying either history and culture of Commagene or those of other regions of the Hellenistic world. The conference organisers set themselves two aims: (1) to collect and appraise new data on history of Hellenistic Commagene to bring about original developments in the field across the world; and (2) to represent Commagene as a part of the broader Hellenistic world to highlight its place in relations between different regions (cf. pp. 12–13). Texts collected in the proceedings volume were divided into three parts.

The first section (‘Theoretical and Conceptual Introductions’) comprises chapters on methodological problems analysed through case studies: although these are local in scope,

they touch upon issues of ‘inbetweenness’ and ‘multiculturalism’—as such, they are of use to those studying Commagene. ‘Inbetweenness’ and ‘multiculturalism,’ as employed by the authors of these chapters, denote cultural phenomena of interaction that have been long studied by scholars: accordingly, these terms do not aim to introduce new research paradigms but, apparently, to concretise and capture more fully some of the analysed historical and cultural phenomena. Out of four chapters in the first section, two directly concern Commagene,¹ whereas two discuss Ai Khanoum and Alexandria, with indirect references to Commagene.²

The second section of the proceedings (Part II (Within): ‘Archaeology and History of Hellenistic Commagene: The Local Context’) comprises seven chapters on Commagene’s history in the local context. Authors of the chapters discuss a variety of issues, such as the influence of dynastic ties between rulers of Commagene and the Seleukids on the ruling style of Commagene,³ iconography of coins struck in Commagene,⁴ Antiochus I’s religious thought,⁵ particulars of the local architecture⁶ and the role of landscape in shaping the local identity.⁷

The third section of the proceedings (Part III (Between): ‘Comparative Studies on Hellenistic Commagene: The Regional and Global Context’) presents Commagene as a part of the broader historical and cultural milieu, prioritising the previously mentioned ‘inbetweenness.’ Three chapters adopt an Eastern perspective,⁸ two consider Commagene from the South,⁹ whereas the next three texts offer a glimpse from the West.¹⁰ The volume closes with A. Lichtenberger’s concluding remarks (‘Hellenistic Commagene in Context: Is “Global” the Answer and Do We Have to Overcome Cultural “Containers”?’; pp. 579–587). The author questions the validity of other contributors’ use of modern terms (such as globalisation) to speak of ancient phenomena, arguing that their use

¹ S. R. Hauser, ‘Hellenized Iranians?’ Antiochos I and the Power of Image, pp. 45–69; M. P. Canepa, *Commagene Before and Beyond Antiochos I: Dynastic Identity, Topographies of Power and Persian Spectacular Religion*, pp. 71–101.

² R. Mairs, ‘Ai Khanoum God with Feet of Marble’: Reading Ai Khanoum through Commagene, pp. 33–44; H. Fragaki, *Reversing Points of Reference: Commagene and the Anfushy Necropolis from Alexandria in Modern Scholarship*, pp. 103–136.

³ R. Strootman, *Orontid Kingship in its Hellenistic Context: The Seleucid Connections of Antiochos I of Commagene*, pp. 295–317.

⁴ M. Facella, *Sovereignty and Autonomy in the Hellenistic Coins of Commagene*, pp. 139–161.

⁵ B. Jacobs, *The Syncretistic Episode in Late-Hellenistic Commagene: The Greek-Persian Religious Concept of Antiochos I and the Ethnicity of the Local Population*, pp. 231–251; A. de Jong, *Dynastic Zoroastrianism in Commagene: The Religion of King Antiochos*, pp. 253–294.

⁶ W. Oenbrink, *The Late-Hellenistic Architecture of Commagene*, pp. 163–184; L. Kruijer, S. Riedel, *Transforming Objectscapes in Samosata: The Impact of the Palatial Complex*, pp. 185–230.

⁷ A. Collar, *Time, Echoes and Experience: Perceiving the Landscape in Commagene*, pp. 319–339.

⁸ G. Traina, *Armenia and the ‘Orontid Connection’: Some Remarks on Strabo, Geography 11, 14, 15*, pp. 345–356; L. Fabian, *Beyond and Yet In-between: The Caucasus and the Hellenistic Oikoumene*, pp. 357–379; V. Messina, *Beyond Greece and Babylonia: Global and Local at Seleucia on the Tigris*, pp. 381–406.


⁹ O. Peleg-Barkat, *Herodian Art and Architecture as Reflection of King Herod’s Many Faces*, pp. 409–438; S. G. Schmid, *Was There a Nabataean Identity – And If Yes, How Many?*, pp. 439–472.

¹⁰ Ch. Michels, ‘Achaemenid’ and ‘Hellenistic’ Strands of Representation in the Minor Kingdoms of Asia Minor, pp. 475–496; M. Trümper, *Delos Beyond East and West: Cultural Choices in Domestic Architecture*, pp. 497–539; A. Haug, *Decoscapes in Hellenistic Italy: Figurative Polychrome Mosaics between Local and Global*, pp. 541–575.

may induce one to jump to hasty and erroneous conclusions.¹¹ Achim Lichtenberger also notes that to speak of Commagene in terms of ‘inbetweenness’ is neither reasonable nor methodologically appropriate;¹² he voices similar reservations about ‘cultural containers,’ understood as isolated, insular cultures (pp. 583–584), and depicting Commagene as a ‘node in a large cultural network,’ extending from the Atlantic to the river Oxus (pp. 581–582). These well-argued and welcome critical remarks oppose a widespread trend of employing modern social science terms to interpret ancient behaviours, motivations and phenomena in these anachronistic terms. Despite the inherent value of such terminology, A. Lichtenberger rightly observes that their misuse in the historical interpretive process may easily lead scholars astray.

Even though contributors to the volume strove to depict Commagene as a superregional seat of power and cultural centre, the picture they painted does not support their hypothesis. Nevertheless, the proceedings volume deserves recognition for the sheer breadth of examined topics, pertaining not only to Commagene but also to history and culture of other Hellenistic polities. Taking into account A. Lichtenberger’s well-argued critical remarks, a reader of the volume should first read the Introduction¹³ and the concluding section, to follow up with the remainder of chapters. This reading order will allow one to better comprehend and contextualise arguments put forward by other contributors.

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¹¹ ‘... applying the term global runs the risk of patronizing antiquity with our ideas and terminology. Of course, globalization theory or glocalization can be used as excellent and powerful tools for understanding cultural processes in the ancient world on an abstract level, opening our eyes to multiculturalism. However, to blur the terminological line between ancient self-designations (that are rooted in tradition) and modern concepts is problematic. If we shift the focus from looking at origins to contemporary meaning, we have to be aware that we relativize cultures to the extent that we lose labels and are left with mere -isms. Ultimately, this can feed into a perilous narrative of degeneration and decline’ (p. 583).

¹² ‘... the in-betweenness of Commagene is not to be seen as in-between cultural entities (Greece and Persia) but rather as adaptive to Greek, Persian and other cultural concepts’ (p. 580).

¹³ Cf. M. J. Versluys, S. Riedel, *Beyond East & West: Hellenistic Commagene between Particularism and Universalism*, pp. 11–30.