

**Michael Blömer, Stefan Riedel, Miguel John Versluys, Engelbert Winter (ed.), *Common Dwelling Place of all the Gods. Commagene in its Local, Regional, and Global Hellenistic Context*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2021, 598 pp. [ISBN: 8793515129251].**

By virtue of its geographic position and, perhaps above all, of the ambitious monumental project of its most famous ruler, Antiochus I, a building and visual program of clearly imperial latitude in a context of evident geopolitical irrelevance, if not subordination –to the Armenian polity, and before it to the Seleukid dynasty, and later to the Roman imperial republic–, Commagene was for decades considered an oddity in the increasingly fleeting (and implicitly decadent) Hellenistic space, and the patron of the mausoleum at Nemrut Dağı a vain braggart, if not a complete lunatic.

Stepping into the wake of a tumultuous paradigm shift within what can rightly be considered a renaissance of the studies in the field, and of the so-called periphery of the Hellenistic world more generally, the volume edited by Michael Blömer, Stefan Riedel, Miguel John Versluys, and Engelbert Winter, significantly entitled *Common Dwelling Place of all the Gods. Commagene in its Local, Regional, and Global Hellenistic Context* sets out, as programmatically pointed out in the introduction, to overcome the inveterate conception of the kingdom of Commagene (and of its iconic emblem, the aforementioned complex of Nemrut Dağı) as something between two entities –the East and the West, the Hellenistic world, conceived, more or less overtly, as *Greek*, and the Parthian commonwealth, the Mediterranean and Irān– aiming instead at the much more ambitious goal of framing this space as a *node*, moreover of crucial importance, within a larger space (that of Afroeurasia) affected, at least since the Achaemenid momentum, by a steady tendency towards (growing) connectivity.

The volume, resulting from a conference (November 29<sup>th</sup> - December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018) which was hosted, not surprisingly, in Münster –home of the prestigious *Forschungstelle Asia Minor*– brings the world's Gotha of experts in the field. Its content is structured, except for the introduction and a very interesting conclusion by Achim Lichtenberger, which in placing emphasis on the unquestionable merits of this exceptional collective enterprise, however, provocatively raises some compelling questions about the *method*, if not the *merit*, that underpins the whole scaffolding of the book, along nineteen chapters divided into three sections, whose titles indicate as clearly as possible the profoundly innovative scope of the work, which therefore candidates itself to become both a milestone for specialists on the topic(s) dealt with in it, and a touchstone for other disciplines, for example Hellenistic Central Asia, which are confronted with issues similar to those addressed in the various essays collected by the editors.

The first part of the volume (pp. 33-137) is solidly methodological, and the contributions collected therein discuss one of the crucial issues in Commagene studies, namely the question of identity, both from the historical point of view and, remarkably, from the perspective of modern research, which the analysis of both Rachel Mairs and Helen Fragaki (pp. 33-44; pp. 71-102) clearly show to have often been conditioned by, while at the same time conditioning, very different spatial and temporal contexts, from Ptolemaic ruled Egypt to Bactria.

The second part (pp. 139-344), tellingly entitled *Within: Archaeology and History of Hellenistic Commagene - The Local Context*, includes seven chapters which, taken

together, offer a timely and up-to-date state of the art on the main strands of research related to the history of Commagene, from numismatics to architecture, from the world of material culture to political history and even ecology (both as a natural *space* with all its affordances and, following the seminal research of Tim Ingold, as a perceived *landscape*, thus subject to cultural practice of modelling and appropriation which are crucial to the understanding of a project such as the mausoleum of Antiochos I).

In this context, a not inconsiderable space is reserved for religion, and particularly noteworthy in this regard are the essays by Bruno Jacobs (pp. 231-254) and Albert de Jong (pp. 253-294) which underline the importance of the endurance, even in a permeable and fluid context, of *real* traditions, as opposed to allegedly *inventions* of the same, and of cults related to the Iranian world and in particular to Zoroastrianism (in its various family, royal and dynastic expressions) without which neither Antiochos' iconographic program nor the epigraphic evidence scattered through the kingdom can be adequately grasped in all its scope.

Perhaps the most stimulating and innovative section, however, is the third: *Between: Comparative Studies on Hellenistic Commagene - The Regional and Global Context* (pp. 345-578). This part, in turn, is divided into three further sections that literally look to the east (pp. 345-408), respectively to Armenia, to the polities of the Kura basin, between today's Georgia and Azerbaijan, and to the metropolis of Seleukeia on the Tigris, another node linking the Mediterranean world, Mesopotamia and the Arsakid empire, then to the south (Herod's Judea and the lands of the Nabateans) and finally to the west (Pontus, Delos, Italy).

As a result, the eight contributions making up this section of the volume do justice, hopefully once and for all, to the perceived exceptionalism – read: a bizarre anomaly – of Commagene, in fact squarely placing it within a regional context (what Lichtenberger in his contribution, p. 585, calls a meso-region) and, above all, a space «from the Atlantic to the Oxus» – as the editors write on p. 12 – unquestionably disputed between different actors on different scales and along a very long time span (*From Alexander to Actium*, to take up the title of a famous study, though perhaps now aged), but in constant dialogue within it many (multi)entangled components and above all, arguably a less self-evident aspect, united by the ability to master a single, in its exorbitant richness and variety, cultural repertoire among which options it was possible to choose with remarkable freedom in order to stage one self's, or one's (or more) group's *social* identity (cf. the essays by Matthew Canepa, pp. 71-102, Lennart Kruijer and Stefan Riedel, pp. 185-230 or Vito Messina, pp. 381-408).

As it should have emerged from this albeit swift review, the excellent quality of the individual contributions and the unifying (bold and refreshing as it is) theoretical perspective underpinning the volume make *Common Dwelling Place of all the Gods* a first-class study, which deserves to be attentively read, and carefully meditated, by anyone interested in the entangled pasts (and presents) of the ancient world.

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