

## Foreword & Acknowledgements

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In the winter of 2018, from 29 November to 1 December, the *Forschungsstelle Asia Minor* and the cluster of excellence entitled “Religion and Politics”, both at Münster University, hosted the international conference *Beyond East & West. Hellenistic Commagene in its local and global Eurasian context*. The meeting brought together, for the very first time, almost all important specialists that currently work on the archaeology and history of Commagene in Hellenistic and Roman times.

The fact that these people travelled from all over the world to Münster was also a fitting tribute to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Forschungsstelle Asia Minor*. This institute was founded by Friedrich Karl Dörner, the doyen of Commagene research, in 1968. Dörner conducted fieldwork in Commagene from the 1930s onwards and was director of the excavations at the royal residence of Arsameia on the Nymphaios. He established the *Forschungsstelle* as a homestead for further research in and about the area. In subsequent decades, the institute inspired new generations of scholars to examine the epigraphy, history, and archaeology of Commagene across the widest spectra. Its most recent project is the large-scale excavation of the ancient city of Doliche and the sanctuary of Jupiter Dolichenus.

The conference grew out of the recent cooperation between the *Forschungsstelle Asia Minor* and a VICI project based at Leiden University entitled *Innovating objects. The impact of global connections and the formation of the Roman Empire (ca. 200–30 BC)*. From its initiation in 2016, this collaboration has focused on unlocking the important legacy data of the rescue excavations that took place in Samosata, the capital of ancient Commagene, between 1978 and 1989. The conference and this resulting book are among the many results of this Leiden-Münster axis that has developed so fruitfully during the last decade.

Our initiative was received with great enthusiasm by the invited speakers and characterised by the lively discussions that were incited by their lectures. We hope that this volume, through its many debates (sometimes even between individual contributions), has retained at least some of the intellectual energy of the Münster meeting.

Our aim was to provide a state-of-the-art overview of the history and archaeology of Hellenistic Commagene itself, while simultaneously exploring its wider Eurasian context structurally and in depth. Taken together, the 21 papers we present in this volume are an ambitious response to that challenge. We hope that the overview of the history

and archaeology of the area combined with its contextualisation on local, regional, and global scales, which this book offers, will make Hellenistic Commagene into a much-used and lively debated subject for general discussions on the history and archaeology of the Hellenistic world, at last.

The conference and the publication of this volume were made possible by the (financial) support of The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the cluster of excellence “Religion and Politics”, Münster University, and the *Historisch-Archäologischer Freundeskreises Münster e. V.* We are most grateful to all of them, as well as to Josef Wiesehöfer and the other editors of *Oriens et Occidens* for welcoming this volume into their distinguished series, and to Steiner Verlag for their important help with the swift publication.

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Beyond East & West  
*Hellenistic Commagene between Particularism  
and Universalism*

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**Introduction**

The history and archaeology of Hellenistic Commagene is a rich field of study, all in its own right, not in the least because of the remarkable monuments and inscriptions of king Antiochos I (who ruled between ca. 70 and 36 BCE) that could be said to have dominated the Commagenian landscape and its scholarly study until the present day. Over the last decades, important work has been published that is now slowly replacing, so it seems, the earlier *communis opinio* on Commagene as formulated in the foundational work by scholars like Friedrich Karl Dörner, Theresa Goell, Wolfram Hoepfner and Jörg Wagner.<sup>1</sup> We identify two different developments, in that respect. On the one hand important new work has been done on Commagene proper, providing novel interpretations of the epigraphical and historical record<sup>2</sup> or the archaeological data and individual sites.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, scholars have tried to better understand ancient Commagene not by zooming in on the region or the Orontid dynasty, but rather by zooming out to the wider Mediterranean and Near Eastern context of their reign and its cultural products.<sup>4</sup>

1 Hoepfner 1983; Dörner 1987; Wagner 1987; Sanders 1996. For a brief overview of the *Kommagene Forschung* see Versluys 2017, 41–45 and, for specifically the ‘hybrid’ Antiochan style, Versluys 2017, 191–199.

2 For instance: Facella 2006; Crowther – Facella 2014; Jacobs 2017; to only give a single, representative example for each author.

3 Representative examples include: Blömer 2012; Brijder 2014; Winter 2017.

4 Representative examples include: Kropp 2013; Versluys 2017; Riedel 2018.



**Fig. 1** Map of Eurasia indicating locations dealt with in this volume and their geographical references to Commagene, © J. Porck, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University

From all this work, a very different picture now seems to emerge. A picture in which Hellenistic Commagene is no longer understood as the peripheral and out-of-the-ordinary, but as an important node in a large Hellenistic network, a “Common Dwelling Place” in all respects.<sup>5</sup> Given its strategic position in that network, at the interface of the Mediterranean (or western Afro-Eurasia) and the Near East (or central Afro-Eurasia), Commagene might perhaps even have been exemplary of socio-cultural developments in a Hellenistic *oikumene* that stretched from the Atlantic to the Oxus. Building on this exciting development, and including almost all of its key discussants, the present volume aims to provide a critical evaluation of all these new data and ideas on the basis of a state-of-the-art overview for the history and archaeology of Hellenistic Commagene. As such, the first objective of this book is to take stock of the new, dynamic and more international phase of the *Kommagene-Forschung* and thus add to its fruitful continuation. Our second aim is to explore the wider Eurasian context of Hellenistic Commagene structurally and more in depth, on both a regional and a global scale.<sup>6</sup> What did the Eurasian network that Hellenistic Commagene was part of look like? How did it function? And what was the relation between Commagene and other nodes in the network?

The focus of this book is the history and archaeology of Commagene in, roughly, the final two centuries BCE. The term we use to indicate that time frame, ‘Hellenistic’,

<sup>5</sup> For the *Sonderstellung* of Commagene as perceived by previous research, see Versluys 2017, 1–37.

<sup>6</sup> The wider context discussed by Kropp 2013 is mostly regional while the foci of his analysis are dynastic images and monuments alone. Versluys 2017 could be said to cast the net wider but limits its ‘global perspective’ largely to the wider Mediterranean. It is therefore certainly true that that book detaches Hellenistic Commagene too much from its Iranian or Central Asian context; as is already explicitly acknowledged in the volume itself (Versluys 2017, 24 n. 61). Strootman – Versluys 2017 was a first attempt to redress that imbalance; this book is the second.

is therefore meant to include the growing Roman influence in the region. Commagene and its dynasty seem to have greatly profited from the *Neuordnung des Orients* by Pompey that resulted from the congress at Amisos in 65/64 BCE. At that occasion, the important Euphrates crossing at Seleukeia on the Euphrates (Zeugma) was granted to Antiochos I. As a result, Commagene further established itself as one of the richest kingdoms of the Hellenistic East and an important strategic player between the volatile Roman and Parthian Empires. It seems that after Actium, when Seleukeia/Z Zeugma had been added to the province of *Syria*, things became rather different in terms of political influence, possibilities for dynastic self-presentation and economic dynamics. Although members of the Orontid dynasty managed to remain highly connected to the main centres of power, like Rome, we see little repercussions of their role as cosmopolitan brokers in Commagene itself. In that respect, it is telling that the last dynastic monument of the dynasty, the tomb of Philopappos (C. Iulius Antiochos Epiphanes), is located in Athens. After the final annexation of the kingdom in 72/73 CE, Commagene changed into a frontier province, with a Roman legion stationed at Samosata. Although the history of Commagene and the area around Seleukeia/Z Zeugma in the first two centuries CE is, of course, strongly related to developments in the region in the first two centuries BCE, it seems clear that the Augustan period is a crucial transition in many respects. This book mainly deals with the period before the Augustan transition and uses the qualification ‘Hellenistic’ to indicate that focus.

### **Hellenistic Commagene between Particularism and Universalism**

Central to *all* interpretations of the history and archaeology of Hellenistic Commagene, probably, explicitly or implicitly, are questions of cultural dynamics. This is due to the fact that ‘inbetweenness’ seems to be the defining characteristic of what still is our main source material: the Antiochan project. At Nemrud Dağ, for instance, there are clear references to both the Mediterranean and its history (in the form of Hellenism) as well as to Central Asia and its history (in the form of Persianism).<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Antiochos I also qualifies himself as *philorhomaïos*, next to the better known *philhellene*, which was already in use for a century at his time.<sup>8</sup> Irrespective of their interpretations, scholars have struggled with accounting for this ‘multiculturality’ from the very beginning. This is the conclusion the first, modern explorers of Nemrud Dağ, Carl Humann and Otto Puchstein, draw after an extensive presentation of the finds in their publication from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

7 For Persianism see Strootman – Versluys 2017.

8 See Facella 2005.

“Allerdings können die Skulpturen des Antiochos keinen Anspruch darauf erheben, in einer Darstellung des Entwicklungsganges der allgemein-griechischen Kunst berücksichtigt zu werden: dort haben sie weder durch ihre Wirkung auf die Folgezeit noch um ihrer eigenen künstlerischen Bedeutung willen einen Platz verdient [...]. Ihren Wert haben diese Skulpturen daher nur für die Lokalgeschichte: sie müssen als Leistungen hellenisierter Barbaren geschätzt und als solche um so mehr beachtet werden [...]”<sup>9</sup>

Significant is the word *Lokalgeschichte* (local history) and the tension between local and global that becomes clear from this conclusion: while the cultural products of Antiochos I ultimately are considered to be distinctly local it is acknowledged that they certainly depend on the much wider world of Greek art at the same time. One feels exactly the same tension between local and global, between particularism and universalism, in the book by Andreas Kropp from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, dealing with images and monuments of Near Eastern dynasts between 100 BCE and 100 CE.<sup>10</sup> As one of the first to do so, his monograph studies Commagene and the Orontid dynasty in the regional context of other major players in the Near East in the period, like the Hasmoneans, the Nabateans, the Itureans and the Herodian dynasty. Kropp convincingly shows that many structural parallels between all these dynasties exist in terms of making deliberate choices from a large Hellenistic repertoire (or koine) that also includes Roman and Persian references. The analysis, therefore, clearly moves beyond *Lokalgeschichte*. Still, his general characterisation of Hellenistic Commagene concludes:

“But the visual language of Antiochos I is too idiosyncratic and far removed from regional trends and traditions to allow for generalizations about what the statues of other dynasts might have looked like”<sup>11</sup>

9 Humann – Puchstein 1890, 345.

10 Kropp 2013.

11 Kropp 2013, 87.



**Fig. 2** Map of Commagene and its geographical position within the extended region 'between' Asia Minor, Syria, Armenia and Persia,  
© J. Porck, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University

A summarizing overview of the *Forschungsgeschichte* shows that indeed all scholars working on Hellenistic Commagene struggle with accounting for its 'inbetweenness', which they most often do in terms of ethnic or cultural character and identity. Generally, it can be concluded that there are two different ways of explaining Commagene's 'multiculturalism'.<sup>12</sup> There is a strong tendency, first, to link Hellenistic Commagene to a specific culture, understood as a distinct, exclusive and demarcated entity called, for example, Greek, Hellenistic, or Parthian. Commagene should primarily belong to one of these 'containers', although, due to its 'multiculturalism', never in the pure form in which these cultures are imagined to exist. Secondly, it is often argued that geographical context is determining for those cultures and from that perspective Hellenistic Commagene would literally illustrate the blending of what is called East and West. Both strands of interpretation put distinct ethnic, geographical or cultural 'containers' at the core of their explanatory model. Could this be the reason that they continue to wrestle with integrating the local and the global in their interpretation? It is on purpose, therefore, that we have placed this methodological and theoretical problem at the very heart of this volume, and the conference on which it was based.

12 Versluys 2017, 185–201. It is interesting to note that research from the 1950s and 60s seems to have had less difficulties with evaluating Commagene's 'inbetweenness' on its own terms than later scholarship (Michael Blömer, personal comment).

### Within and Between – The Structure of the Book

Are there other models that perhaps do allow for an integration of the particular and the universal for Hellenistic Eurasia? How to account for the ‘inbetweenness’ of Hellenistic Commagene in a way that does justice to the local, the regional and what we could call the global? How to overcome ‘container-thinking’ in our study of the Hellenistic *oikumene* of which Commagene was part? These are, from a methodological and theoretical perspective, the overarching research questions for the present volume as a whole. We have designed and structured its content accordingly.

The first part of the book, therefore, is devoted to four theoretically orientated discussions that deal with questions of cultural complexity, ‘inbetweenness’ and ‘multiculturalism’ in Hellenistic Eurasia in relation to what happens in Commagene. We hope that, taken together, these papers help establishing a proper methodological framework for Commagene Studies. They do so in addition to Kropp’s *Images and monuments* and Versluys’ *Visual style and constructing identity* that focussed on the regional and Mediterranean-wide context, respectively<sup>13</sup>, by critically discussing and developing those initial ideas. It is on purpose, therefore, that the papers in Part I are mainly engaged with the Iranian and Central Asian context, as an important addition to those earlier attempts.<sup>14</sup>

The second part of the book (called *Within*) focusses on the history and archaeology of Hellenistic Commagene proper. Invited experts deal with their specific expertise; from coins and architecture to ethnicity, religion and dynastic iconography; and from the phenomenology of landscape to new work on Samosata, the capital of Commagene, and its legacy data. Taken together, these essays not only present a state-of-the-art overview for the history and archaeology of Hellenistic Commagene, but also try to move beyond what remains one of our main methodological problems in terms of data: the over-representation of (the remains of) the Antiochan project.<sup>15</sup>

The third part of the book (called *Between*) tries to place Hellenistic Commagene in its regional and global Eurasian context. Looking east, south and west, we have identified eight Hellenistic contexts that serve to illuminate what happens in Commagene in terms of analogical reasoning, from Armenia to Nabataea and from the Italic peninsula to Seleucia on the Tigris.

The overarching conclusion by an invited expert, but a scholar from outside the field of Commagene Studies proper, critically evaluates how successful the volume re-

13 Kropp 2013; Versluys 2017.

14 See n. 6 above.

15 For this problem and its discontents see Blömer 2012; Versluys 2017, 108–184, in particular 137–141, 172–184.



ally is in positioning Hellenistic Commagene between particularism and universalism and, importantly, what remains to be done, also in that respect.

Before we will outline the content of the book more in depth and in terms of the discussion above, we will first briefly elaborate on our key terminology: the pairing of particularism and universalism or, in other words, the interplay between the local (*Within*) and the global (*Between*).

### Beyond East & West – Thinking with Globalization

Globalization is a debate on how to understand and study complex connectivity.<sup>16</sup> It is not about homogenisation, as is often still thought, but about the interaction between the local and the global. What we call ‘global’ is as much constituted by the particular as it is by the universal as when the global is brought to the local level, the local becomes global simultaneously. Globalization, therefore, is inherently *glocalization* and therefore always and automatically about the interplay between the universal and the particular.<sup>17</sup> Thinking with globalization implies that understanding the (socio-cultural) character and identity of a person, artefact, region, dynasty, style or even empire is *not* about choosing for the one cultural container versus the other; *not* about trying to measure the degree to which people, objects or socio-cultural phenomena would belong to a specific culture. Instead, research questions focus on the impact of connectivity and, hence, not on traditions but on the *invention* of traditions; not on communities but on *imagined* communities; et cetera. Thinking in terms of intense connectivity and hence a continuous interplay between the local and the global for our study of the Hellenistic world directs us to the importance of its social *imaginaries*.<sup>18</sup> One of the effects of this continuous interplay was the ‘disembedding’ of all kinds of (socio-cultural and religious) elements, which moved between a concrete, tangible, and local context and a more abstract or global level. Things that we call Greek or Persian or Roman (et cetera) in the final two centuries BCE travelled widely, thereby often changing in meaning. By being used in different contexts, they often lost their geographical and cultural specificity and developed into ‘cultural scenarios’.<sup>19</sup> They were, in other words, ‘unmarked’ from their origin (or *universalised*) and subsequently appropriated and made to work in different contexts for different purposes (or *particularised*). In characterising these

16 See Pitts – Versluys 2015b and Hodos et al. 2017, 1–65 for definitions, debates and bibliography.

17 See Riedel 2018 for glocalisation and also globalization. The latter term combines the notions of growing and globalization and is meant to investigate the force of globally spreading phenomena from their perspective.

18 See already Stavrianopolou 2013 for how such a shift in perspective effectively rewrites the history of the Hellenistic world.

19 Versluys 2017, 241–248 with examples and previous literature.

elements for our period, therefore, we should in fact always put geographical, ethnic or cultural denotations between inverted comma's and talk about 'Greek' or 'Persian' or 'Roman' (et cetera) elements – and then explain what we mean by those terms.

As such, the concept of globalization is now widely used amongst scholars of Antiquity.<sup>20</sup> It is the central point of departure, for instance, of Angelos Chaniotis' recent history of what he calls the Greek world, from Alexander to Hadrian (336 BCE – AD 138), a book tellingly entitled *Die Öffnung der Welt. Eine Globalgeschichte des Hellenismus* in its German translation.<sup>21</sup> For many it works well as hermeneutic strategy as it effectively takes us away from imagining the ancient world as consisting of distinct cultural containers (Commageneans, Greeks, Romans, Persians etc.) with their various interactions. Globalization rather invites us to take intense connectivity and inherent multiculturalism as point of departure for our analyses. Our interpretations thus shift from *inter*-cultural connectivity, with related acculturation-questions of who influences whom and to what extent, towards *intra*-cultural connectivity, which sees all these cultural containers as relative and fluid, while simultaneously and fundamentally being part of a single, global Afro-Eurasian container.<sup>22</sup> Intra-cultural connectivity still asks (fundamental) questions of connectedness, but it focusses on the functioning of the network; on understanding the frequency, strength, content and directionality of the ties that hold the Hellenistic world together; and on investigating local, particular appropriations from a global, universal repertoire. It therefore goes beyond the zero-sum game that acculturation thinking implies and is much better suited to understand questions of identity and 'inbetweenness'.<sup>23</sup> This is how thinking with globalization, we argue, can help us to move beyond East and West in the study of Hellenistic Commagene and integrate local, regional and global, Eurasian-wide scales of analysis.<sup>24</sup>

### Within and Between – An Overview of the Content of the Book

As indicated above, the book purposefully starts with a set of contributions dealing with basic problems of conceptualizing 'inbetweenness' and 'multiculturalism'. This is done through four detailed and theoretically rich case studies that not only deal with

20 Jennings 2011; Pitts – Versluys 2015a; Hodos et. al. 2017; Riedel 2018.

21 Chaniotis 2018, 6: "Because of the interconnection of vast areas in Europe, Asia and North Africa, the Hellenistic world and the Roman Empire have justly been considered as early examples of Globalisation"; unfortunately, without any reference to the theoretical debate on the issue.

22 For intra-cultural connectivity see Versluys 2017 and now Pitts 2019.

23 For a discussion of Hellenistic and Roman Syria and the Near East as part of the global world of ancient Afro-Eurasia in general and from this perspective, see Versluys forthcoming.

24 For important philosophical reflections on the interplay between the local and the global, the particular and the universal, as an anthropological fact that has, throughout history, resulted in both the greatest catastrophes and innovations of mankind, see Safranski 2003.