

Visual Style and Constructing Identity in the Hellenistic World

Located in the small kingdom of Commagene at the upper Euphrates, the late Hellenistic monument of Nemrud Dağ (c. 50 BC) has been undeservedly neglected by scholars. Qualified as a Greco-Persian hybrid instigated by a lunatic king, this fascinating project of bricolage has been written out of history. This volume redresses that imbalance, interpreting Nemrud Dağ as an attempt at canon building by Antiochos I in order to construct a dynastic ideology and social order, and proving the monument's importance for our understanding of a crucial transitional phase from Hellenistic to Roman. Hellenistic Commagene therefore holds a profound significance for a number of discussions, such as the functioning of Hellenistic *koine* and the genesis of Roman "art," Hellenism and Persianism in antiquity, dynastic propaganda and the power of images, Romanisation in the East, the contextualising of the Augustan cultural revolution, and the role of Greek culture in the Roman world.

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Visual Style and Constructing Identity in the Hellenistic World

Nemrud Dağ and Commagene under Antiochos I

MIGUEL JOHN VERSLUYS

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“Le savant généralise, l’artiste individualise”

(Jules Renard, *Journal*, 17 janvier 1889)

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Preface

This book has long been in the making.¹ I began working on it during my appointment as a post-doctoral research fellow at the Amsterdam Archaeological Centre from the University of Amsterdam in 2002. I warmly thank the UTOPA Foundation for providing me with this fellowship and in particular its chairman, Loek Dijkman, for his enthusiasm and trust.

Through this appointment I was able to assist professors Herman A.G. Brijder and Eric M. Moormann, directors of the international Nemrud Dağ Project, with their first three campaigns in Commagene in 2001, 2002 and 2003.² This book could not have been written without my involvement in their project and my long stays at Commagene during that time. The ideas expressed in this study took shape during those years, and many project members introduced additional points of research by providing information, criticism or practical support. In particular, I would like to thank Herman Brijder, Eric Moormann, Onno van Nijf, Marlies Schipperheijn, Tesse Stek, Ellen Thiermann and Jurriaan Venneman, as well as Maurice Crijns and Anne ten Brink from the International Nemrud Foundation. Doing fieldwork in Commagene has been an unforgettable experience, and my participation would not have been possible without the support from many people in Turkey and, in particular, those of the province of Adıyaman. I would like to thank them all, and in particular Fehmi Eraslan, director of the Adıyaman Museum, who facilitated an in-depth study of the relief fragments from Nemrud Dağ; the various guards from the site of Nemrud Dağ coming from the nearby village of Horik; and my friends Nurhan Turan (Ankara) and Hayder Turanli (Kahta).

In 2004 I took up a lectureship at the Faculty of Archaeology from Leiden University and was forced to end my involvement with the Nemrud Dağ Project. I was fortunate, however, to be able to extend my

¹ Short summaries of the main argument have been published as *Versluys 2014b* and *2014c*.

² The final publication of that project is now available in *Brijder*. The first three campaigns (2001–2003) had already been published in interim reports by E.M. Moormann and myself: *Nemrud Dağ Project 1*; *Nemrud Dağ Project 2*; and *Nemrud Dağ Project 3*.

research fellowship, which I combined with my Leiden responsibilities, until the end of 2008. Thanks to a sabbatical and an invitation from the Netherlands Institute in Turkey (NIT) director, Fokke Gerritsen, a first draft of this text was finished during my stay there in 2010. My manuscript was brought to the attention of the editors of the *Greek culture in the Roman world* series from Cambridge University Press. It was an excellent idea of the series editors, in particular Jaś Elsner, to suggest that I expand and further ameliorate the manuscript; I can only apologise that it took me so long to properly do that.

However, the long genesis of this book also gave me the opportunity to investigate some of my key concerns from a more general perspective as well as in cooperation with other scholars elsewhere. The shift from inter- to intra-cultural connectivity that I propose in Chapter 1 is extensively debated in *Globalisation and the Roman world: world history, connectivity and material culture*.³ In addition, the emphasis on the impact of objects from that perspective, which goes beyond issues of representation, is central to our *Handbook of archaeology and globalisation*.⁴ The importance and feasibility of memory construction and legitimation for our period, which are both crucial concepts in Chapter 3, are similarly and more widely explored in the volume *Reinventing 'The invention of tradition'*?⁵ Finally, the concept of Persianism, which is central to the argument presented in Chapter 4 as well as to my interpretation of Nemrud Dağ and Commagene under Antiochos I, has recently been applied and evaluated by an international group of scholars consisting of Iranists, classicists, archaeologists and historians in the volume *Persianism in antiquity*.⁶ Ideally, therefore, this monograph should be read on par with those four volumes.

Over the past years several colleagues have read the manuscript in one form or another. I would like to sincerely thank Herman Brijder, Eric Moormann, Onno van Nijf, Rolf Strootman and Rolf Tybout for their criticisms and comments. Equally important was the critique of (in total) five anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press, from which I profited immensely and learned much. I would like to thank Frederick Naerebout especially here: not only for his corrections of the various manuscripts but also for our many discussions on culture contact in the ancient world, which have shaped and sharpened my ideas. The fact that I could share my thoughts on Antiochos I and Commagene with Michael

³ Pitts/Versluys 2015. ⁴ Hodos et al. 2016; see also Van Eck/Versluys/ter Keurs 2015.

⁵ Boschung/Busch/Versluys 2015. ⁶ Strootman/Versluys 2017.

Blömer from the Forschungsstelle Asia Minor in Münster has been a great stimulus; as have been discussions on the final manuscript with Caroline Van Eck, Tamar Hodos and Bruno Jacobs. The unfailing support for the present book by Jaś Elsner I mention with much pride and gratitude.

Although Herman Brijder has already been mentioned several times above, he deserves a special and final word of thanks. His support has been crucial in acquiring the UTOPA Foundation fellowship that has made this research possible. In subsequent years our ideas about how to approach Nemrud Dağ and late Hellenistic Commagene began to diverge more and more. Still, he continued to support my work and was always willing to provide room for my alternative views. This is certainly not the Nemrud book that he envisioned me writing more than a decade ago, but it still owes much to his support, criticism and patience.