Dynastic Zoroastrianism in Commagene: the religion of King Antiochos

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The Religion of King Antiochos[*]

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The material and epigraphic legacy of king Antiochos I of Commagene is to a large extent religious in nature[1], but in spite of considerable intellectual efforts no satisfactory interpretation of 'the religion of king Antiochos' has ever been produced.[2] Attempts to reduce the complexity of the evidence to conventional labels such as 'Hellenistic religion' or 'Zoroastrianism' have failed, but the failures in these two cases – the main ones to have been suggested[3] – are distinct in nature. In the former case, that of 'Hellenistic religion', the problem seems to be one of a lack of specificity. Although there may be good grounds to trace certain *longue durée* developments in the general religious culture of the ancient world in the Hellenistic period, that world itself is far too large and far too diverse to allow for a meaningful reconstruction of 'religion' in the period that would help us understand the evidence from Commagene better.[4]

* Indispensable help with the writing of this article was received from my friends Miguel John Versluys, Antonio Panaino, and Lucinda Dirven. None of them should be blamed for any mistakes.

1 Although this claim in itself seems absolutely justified, and although popular accounts of the finds at Commagene make frequent appeals to it with titles like *Der Thron der Götter auf dem Nemrud Dağ* (Dörner 1987), existing scholarly literature has been extremely reluctant to delve into the religious aspects of the evidence. This reluctance is clearly in need of closer inspection and will be taken up below.

2 The only attempts known to the present writer are Waldmann 1973 and Waldmann 1991, as well as Boyce – Grenet 1991, 309–352. Waldmann 1973 was based on a chronology of the inscriptions (divided over the reign of distinct kings) that has since been shown to be mistaken; Waldmann 1991 is based on interpretations of (evidence for) Zoroastrianism that are unacceptable. Boyce – Grenet 1991 is by far the best study of the religion of Commagene and has been unduly neglected in recent scholarship. Its main drawback, however, is that it rests on assumptions about the nature of Zoroastrianism that are anachronistic, and that it uses 'ethnic' arguments (i. e., interference from 'local' or 'Greek' religious traditions) in order to maintain those assumptions.

3 I include 'syncretism' in the category of 'Hellenistic religions' as explanation. The most detailed (and much criticized) 'Hellenistic' interpretation of the inscription is probably that of Dörrie 1964, which focuses heavily on philosophical connections.

4 This may be the reason why Dörrie 1964 ultimately sought the key to understanding the main cult inscription of Commagene in Hellenistic *philosophy*, and more particularly (and implausibly) in

The problem with the Zoroastrian interpretation is its exact opposite: that label has suffered in academic writing from being over-specific. Because of the nature of the evidence for the history of Zoroastrianism – a religion that did not write down either its religious or its literary texts[5] and that mainly survived in a material form that did not require, and therefore did not leave, traceable evidence – scholars have tended to reconstruct the religion on the basis of two distinct clusters of textual evidence: an early liturgical corpus in Avestan and a late collection of priestly writings in Middle Persian.[6] Because these two bodies of evidence are often in consonance with each other, scholars have postulated a comparatively stable ('conservative') tradition. It is this reconstructed tradition that has most often been used as the chief instrument of interpretation of all evidence that somehow, intuitively, strikes individual scholars as possibly 'Iranian' or 'Zoroastrian', including the evidence from Commagene. Since specialists in this field tend to be philologists, there is a clear 'textualist' bias even in the interpretation of material culture, including iconography.[7]

While this approach to the history of Zoroastrianism has unquestionably been productive in its potential to elucidate a large variety of Zoroastrian ideas, narratives and practices (most powerfully the extensive repertoire of purity rules), it comes at a significant cost. Two things are relevant for the present discussion: the first is that this approach makes it very difficult to trace and understand historical and regional variety and development. Although the two clusters of evidence are separated by almost two millennia and come from the opposite ends of the Iranian world (Central Asia and Southwestern Iran, respectively), the fact that in core assumptions and prescriptions

Euhemerism. It certainly is the reason why almost all discussions of the evidence restrict their interests to ruler cult. For the implausibility of this, see below.

5 In spite of appearances, this distinction is not anachronistic: in the Iranian world, the transmission of religious traditions and the transmission of literary works (of entertainment, panegyric, narrative, and instruction) were in the hands (or, more precisely, in the minds) of two distinct classes of specialists: priests and *gosans* respectively. The two lines of tradition intersect in what can be called the 'Communal Narrative' (De Jong forthcoming a), but in those cases where we have (later, written) evidence for meaningful stories in both priestly and epic traditions, a different emphasis can often be observed. This is the case, for example, with the story of Arjasp and Zarer, known from the Middle Persian text *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* and from Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeh*. Interestingly, the prescriptions king Antiochos gives for the organization of his (memorial) cult show that he invested equally in priests and *mousikoi*.

6 The early corpus are the texts known as the Avesta, in their own specific language; these texts are impossible to date, but it is generally believed that they span a period from the late-2nd to the mid-1st millennium BCE, and that they mainly came into being in Eastern Iran/Central Asia. Both chronologically and geographically, they are thus very far removed from Commagene in the 1st c. BCE. The late corpus are the Zoroastrian books in Middle Persian (Pahlavi), which cannot be dated satisfactorily either, but in their current form cannot be earlier than the 8th–10th c. CE; although they include small compositions that may have a more eastern Iranian background, the vast majority very clearly comes from South-Western Iran (i. e., Pars). These texts are thus equally far removed from Commagene in the time of Antiochos I.

7 This was rightly stressed in Shenkar 2014, 6–9.

they were (or were believed to be) fully consonant very strongly supported, as we have seen, the construction of a conservative tradition. It has since been pointed out, however, that this interpretation of the evidence is at best partially correct. The two source clusters are by no means independent of each other, but the Middle Persian sources largely have their roots in a 'scripturalist' movement that was made possible by the writing down of the Avestan texts in the late-Sasanian period. This scripturalist movement is, furthermore, decidedly a priestly tradition.[8]

This is where the second problem comes in. The writing of pre-Islamic Iranian history has always been dominated by the history of four empires – the Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian Empires[9] – but neither the Avestan nor the Middle Persian texts derive from an imperial context. In the case of the Avestan texts, this is clearly because no concept of kingship existed. In the case of the Middle Persian texts, this is because the bulk of these texts date to the early-Islamic period. The ideal of a Zoroastrian monarchy is still reflected in Middle Persian literature, but for the authors of these texts it very clearly was a reality of the past. Since these texts do not record antiquarian realities, but largely reflect either on the current situation or on what were supposed to be timeless realities, they provide us with no information about the practice of religion in an imperial setting. And in those places where they do reflect on religion and the Iranian monarchy, their representations are wholly informed by the late-Sasanian context – and therefore not immediately helpful for an understanding of royal practice in different settings.

It is clear that we are in need of a different approach. Fortunately, recent finds and recent discussions have contributed to a better understanding of regional and historical varieties of Zoroastrianism.[10] In many of these, the discussion still comes in the shape of registering divergence from a postulated normative system, but the insight that this system itself is an historical development is slowly gaining ground. This has important consequences. On the one hand, Zoroastrianism as we thought we knew it is transformed into a much more diverse and much more complex world. On the other hand, the variety of distinct religions that scholars have continued to invent in order to make sense of the evidence can be greatly whittled down.

8 De Jong 2009.

9 Since most Iranists tacitly assume that there is substantive meaning to the distinction between 'Iranian' and 'foreign'/'non-Iranian' (which is one of the foundations of their academic field), the Seleucids (and in many cases, the Parthians as well) have often simply been written out of the history of ancient Iran, by reducing them to 'intruders' and essentially by denying them the type of legitimacy (through conquest) that *is* extended to the 'Iranian' dynasties. There are many obvious (and fatal) problems with this, some of which will be discussed later in this article.

10 Recent finds especially include the excavations of a palace in Akchakhan-Kala (ancient Chorasmia; see Minardi – Khozhaniyazov 2011) with its spectacular Zoroastrian iconography (Betts et al. 2015; Shenkar 2019). For regional (and historical) variation, see for example, De Jong 2008; Crone 2012; Shenkar 2017.

All of this has important implications for the subject of the present chapter, for it means that we should reassess which evidence is actually relevant for a better understanding of the religion of king Antiochos. An argument will be presented here that this relevant evidence – while inevitably sparse – is available for two distinct elements that should frame future discussions. The first of these concerns local Greek-speaking Zoroastrians in Anatolia and their literature. The second concerns dynastic religion in an Iranian setting and its relations with different styles of Zoroastrianism. This certainly does not exhaust the dossier of comparative evidence that needs to be assembled, but it exhausts those dossiers that are within the competence of the writer, and that are felt to have been absent from the discussion so far. Before we reach these two subjects (and their interrelations), however, some more general remarks still need to be made about the ways in which the comparative evidence from assumed parallels has been, and continues to be, handled in the specific case of Commagene.

Domestication Strategies

Antiochos' *hierothesion* on the Nemrud Dağ is an arresting place to visit even today. The size of the monumental sculptures, and of the site itself, is impressive and its inclusion in the landscape is awe-inspiring. In spite of the fact that sometimes large numbers of visitors will be present, to modern travellers the site feels remote and different. It is clear that it has induced the same feelings in those scholars who have attempted to make sense of it (regardless of whether they have, or have not, visited the place). On the one hand, there is the excitement of a wealth of material and epigraphic evidence dotting and in fact constructing a meaningful landscape. On the other hand, very little of the evidence makes immediate sense. There is an illusory element to the totality of the evidence: it *looks* as if it should be familiar – the inscriptions and a sizeable part of the material evidence are 'Greek' – but upon closer inspection much of the familiarity dissipates. Many scholars have therefore tended to highlight what struck them as 'strange' in the evidence, and more often than not interpreted this strangeness as a sign of degeneration.[11] The fact that it looked Greek but was not Greek enough was then easily rationalized by appealing to the geographical and ethnic marginality of Commagene, or to the idiosyncrasy of its king Antiochos.

11 For such interpretations of the artistic production, see the important remarks of Versluys 2017, 2–21, with the references given there. The language and style of the inscriptions were subject to the same type of reasoning; see Versluys 2017 198–200. For a more recent, and more descriptive, interpretation of the style and rhetoric of the inscriptions, see Papanikolaou 2012; and see Kim 2017, for a very clear exposition of interpretations of 'Atticism' and 'Asianism' (note, however, that his sympathies for the latter style more or less end with our king Antiochos, who is still described as using a 'bombastic' (and unique) repertoire).

Even in this early stage, it is remarkable to see that the obvious presence in the materials of Iranian elements never led to an active involvement of, or invitation to, Iranists to give their opinion on how they would make sense of the evidence. Some of them did, of course, but much of their work was barely received by the small number of specialists working on the archaeology and epigraphy of Commagene.[12] This led to the rise of two distinct strategies of interpretation, a Hellenistic one and an Iranian one, that are rarely brought into conversation with each other. Both of them essentially subordinate the evidence to larger reconstructions of royal display and ideology in the two respective contexts. Rhetorically, both argue that there is nothing special or unique about Commagene[13], and both make use of notions of legitimation in order to demonstrate the 'normalness' of the royal cult. We shall need to review both trajectories of interpretation here.

The oldest one, without a doubt, is the interpretation of the evidence in terms of a "Hellenistic ruler cult".[14] This interpretation, which was immediately suggested in the first reports of Humann and Puchstein[15], has maintained itself as the most often suggested background to the totality of the evidence. It has survived dramatic shifts in the understanding of Hellenistic ruler cult itself[16], and has had to face principled opposition from a number of leading scholars, who simply dismissed this as a viable interpretation, on a variety of grounds. These grounds themselves reflect those same shifts in understanding the phenomenon. Some scholars felt, for example, that the distinction between the king and his ancestors (as 'heroes') on the one hand and the gods on the other hand, or the related distinction between royal τιμαί and divine θυσίαι, precluded any interpretation in terms of a Hellenistic ruler cult.[17] Others felt uneasy about the

12 See, for example, Duchesne-Guillemin 1984; Boyce – Grenet 1991; Panaino 2007. An important exception to this academic separation can be found in the long academic discussion on 'Parthian art' initiated by M. Rostovtzeff (see for this debate especially Dirven 2016 and the contribution by Hauser in this volume). Within this discussion, material culture from Commagene was often included, but only to support or illustrate pre-given interpretations.

13 This is an exaggeration that is easily counterbalanced by frank statements that certain aspects of the evidence are in fact wholly specific (e. g., Versluys 2017, 21).

14 This concept traditionally came with the assumption of a heavy impact of the Near East on the development of Greek politics and religion. In that sense, the evidence of Commagene very powerfully propped up already existing notions. Although the notion that the Hellenistic ruler cult arose under the influence of the Near East has been abandoned by many specialists, it seems to be very tenacious in the minds of more general ancient historians, together with the almost inevitable interpretation of this development as a sign of degeneration. A good example is Green 1990, 396–408.

15 Humann – Puchstein 1890, 211–406. This first description, written by Otto Puchstein, remains a masterpiece, both stylistically and in terms of content. It is more nuanced in its appraisal of the evidence than most, partly because he had the advantage of being the first to report on the evidence.

16 My thinking on this subject has been greatly helped (and influenced) by Versnel 2011, 439–492, which includes a convenient sketch of major developments on pp. 456–460.

17 Thus, magisterially, Nilsson 1974, 170–171 ("Diese Anschauungen schließen den geläufigen Herrscherkult aus").

absence of the living family members of the king: the queen, the crown-prince and other children, who most often are not mentioned at all (unless they predeceased the king, see below).[18] All had to struggle, moreover, with the fact that hardly anything of conventional core elements of Hellenistic ruler cult was actually in evidence in the materials from Commagene.

This begins with explicit evidence for a *cult* of the living king[19], which is vanishingly rare in Commagene, certainly when compared with the evidence for rituals in memory of deceased members of the family.[20] There are, of course, sacrifices on the birthday of the king, and the day of his accession to the throne, but the living king is explicitly mentioned as recipient of these sacrifices only once, in a very particular context: the great cult inscription on what he was laying out as his tomb on the Nemrud Dağ. The assumption that it seems to have been only the deceased king (who would have joined the company of the gods according to the inscription), who would share in the sacrifices is supported by an eye-catching difference in the versions of the cult inscription on the Nemrud Dağ on the one hand, and that of Arsameia on the Nymphaios on the other. In Arsameia, the place where his father was buried, the "splendid sacrifices" must be performed "for the worthy honour of the gods" (εἰς τιμὴν δαιμόνων ἀξίαν; A 123), whereas for his own tomb these sacrifices were destined "in honour of the gods and in my honour" (εἰς τιμὰς θεῶν τε καὶ ἡμετέρας; N 144–145).[21] We shall review more evidence below that strongly supports recognizing that there is a real pattern that it is only the deceased members of the family who would be recipients of the cult.

To this pattern, which it would be adventurous to disregard, there is one important exception. This is the stele with *temenos* text from Sofraz Köy (SO), which has been much discussed.[22] The main reason for the debates over this stele is the fact that it departs from the rest of the epigraphic corpus in major ways. Famously, it establishes a cult to two named gods that do not reoccur in the rest of the corpus: Apollo Epēkoos and Artemis Diktynna, both of whom are considered to be 'genuinely Greek'. The text of the stele has therefore been relegated to an 'early' stage of the cultic development of king Antiochos, before the 'syncretistic' stage.[23] But this is not the only element in

18 Hoepfner 1983, 60.

19 For the centrality of precisely this aspect of ruler cult in the Hellenistic world, see Chaniotis 2003; Caneva 2012.

20 This was highlighted already by Musti 1982.

21 I have mainly used Waldmann 1973 and Crowther – Facella 2003 to find my way in the epigraphy of Commagene. A full re-edition (with commentary) of all inscriptions is urgently needed, and has been promised by Charles Crowther and Margherita Facella.

22 Crowther – Facella 2003, 71–74 (with references); Boyce – Grenet 1991, 318–321.

23 I find myself incompetent to judge the plausibility of this interpretation, but there are other elements in the inscription that strongly support it, chiefly the fact that in the royal titulature the king does not refer to himself as a 'great king', but merely as king. See for this in general Facella 2006, 280–282, and for the importance of the title 'great king', the contribution by Strootman, this volume.

which the inscription stands out. There are two more aspects of direct relevance to the present discussion that should be highlighted. The first is that this is the only inscription that makes use of the conventional language of euergetism (for which, see below). The king refers to himself (SO 4–5) both as εὐεργέτης, 'benefactor', and as κτίστης, 'founder', two very regular epithets for the Hellenistic ruler cult, and for honorific inscriptions in general, that are entirely absent from the rest of the corpus. The second crucial departure is the explicit invitation (SO 24–28) to "kings or dynasts or generals or ethnarchs" to visit the sanctuary and to "make burnt offerings of incense and libations on the altars established in this sanctuary, *and likewise to the image of me* that has been established together with the images of the gods".[24] To anyone familiar with Hellenistic ruler cult there is nothing surprising in all of this, but it is important to highlight that these characteristic elements from that repertoire *only* occur on the Sofraz Köy stele, and are remarkably absent from the rest of the corpus (see below).

The nature of the sacrifices themselves is, to say the least, unclear.[25] They are chiefly mentioned in generic ways, as part of traditional custom, and as part of the communal festivities, to which officials and the wider population are invited, and during which they are fed. These festivals, which are explicitly identified by the king as 'new', are to be celebrated not only on the birthday and accession day of the living king, but also on those same days after his death (as they were in Arsameia on the Nymphaios on the birthday of the king's father as well as that of the king himself). The food and wine provided for these festive meals is described as lavish, but at no point is a connection made between the sacrifices and the festive meals – in fact, the two are generally kept distinct (as θυσίαι and σύνοδοι).[26] In addition, there were sacrifices without festive meals, to be celebrated by the priests only. Sacrifices in general were never substantial enough to feed large groups of people, even where this is suggested as a literary topos.[27] Archaeological evidence for the sacrificial cult at the various sites has been very sparse[28] and

24 Text and translation in Crowther – Facella 2003, 72.

25 Brijder's representation of the sacrifices (Brijder 2014, 165–167, largely based on Van Straten 1995), can only be qualified as a work of fantasy; it is nowhere connected to the archaeological reality of the sites.

26 The word σύνοδος does not refer to the meal itself, but to the gathering of the people attending. See Papanikolaou 2012, 139 n. 12.

27 See especially Naiden 2012, for very important observations on Greek sacrifice in general, calculations, and a confrontation with literary representations. This may help to explain one of the enduring mysteries of the archaeology of Antiochos' cult: the fact that not a single site has yielded evidence for these sacrifices in the form of deposits of animal bones, or layers of ash. This absence (which stands in marked contrast to the abundance of similar evidence in local cult sites, see Blömer 2012, 119–121) has occasionally been invoked to support the notion that the *temene* and *hierothesia* of Antiochos' cult were unfinished and never used. Against these assumptions, see Brijder 2014, 114–117; Versluys 2017, 68.

28 It is not just the absence of animal bones, as was highlighted in the previous footnote, but also that of ceramics relevant to the sacrifices and the banquets. See already Dalglish 2017, 137.

controversial, and it seems worth noting that an altar *for the king*, which is a regular feature in ruler cults in other parts of the Hellenistic world, has not been attested.

Similarly lacking from the dossier is the language of euergetism, which has been much foregrounded in recent work on the Hellenistic ruler cult.[29] Much of that work focuses on the ruler cult as a mutual undertaking between the ruler and other political or social institutions of his realm, something else that is not at all in view in the entire corpus from Commagene (with the exception of the Sofraz Köy stele). The only voice we get to hear is that of the king, extending an invitation to his people to the festivities mentioned above. Although the king speaks, occasionally, of some of his deeds (and those of this father), at no point does his discourse even begin to resemble the conventional qualities of benefactors in the vast corpus of Hellenistic inscriptions. Although he refers obliquely to some of his political and military successes, he does so only in the context of demonstrating piety. Where he mentions somewhat more extensively his building activities (one of the core manifestations of munificence), these are only relevant to the palace, the cult, and the memory of his father and of himself. The dominant theme of the inscriptions, as becomes clear from the remarkable exordium in the longest texts, is piety (εὐσέβεια), which is closely coupled to holiness (ὁσιότης). The latter term is very rare in comparable inscriptions.[30] The former is very commonly encountered, but never in the way it is used in this corpus.[31]

This is immediately clear from the fact that the *only* parallel that has been adduced for it takes us to the easternmost limits of the Greek-speaking world: the Greek version of the inscriptions of the Maurya king Aśoka.[32] This is not a very good parallel. There seems to be general agreement that εὐσέβεια in the inscriptions of Aśoka does not owe much to its usage in Greek inscriptions, but needs to be seen as an attempt to render the key term *dhamma* into Greek in a meaningful way. In the Greek-Aramaic bilingual from Old Kandahar, where in Greek we have εὐσέβεια the Aramaic uses the word *qšyṭ'*, 'truth'. The point of Aśoka's Greek and Aramaic inscriptions in these passages is to demonstrate that the king has *done* something: his *dhamma* is a programme of action. The point of Antiochos' emotional exaltation of piety as the driving force of his being and source of his success, "the sweetest enjoyment" of his life, is not to announce that

29 Caneva 2016, 11, for example, presents what he calls "euergetic discourse" as "the current paradigm".

30 The most famous case probably is the honorary decree from Colophon for the chresmologos Menophilos published by Robert – Robert 1962, where we find both εὐσέβεια and ὁσιότης in the same line (both, incidentally, restored but with great certainty), but with distinct meanings: the former refers to his piety towards the gods, the latter to his piety ("bonne et juste attitude") towards fellow humans. In a decree from Delphi in honour of Attalos II of Pergamon, the king is praised for having a disposition that is both εὐσεβής and ὅσιος. See Bringmann – von Steuben 1995, 154–158 (no. 94). The most extensive study of the word ὅσιος, but restricted to the 5th c. BCE is Peels 2016.

31 See Argyriou-Casmeridis 2019 for conventional Hellenistic usage.

32 Thus, among many others, Dörrie 1964, 52. 177; Boyce – Grenet 1991, 344; Crowther – Facella 2003, 49. For the inscriptions, see Falk 2006, 241–245; Lerner 2013.

he has done something, but to share with the hearers/readers of the texts what the foundation of his (and their) happiness has been. The religious candour with which the king declares this importance of religion in his personal life is without parallel in Greek epigraphy. It is not surprising, therefore, that it has tended to be mistrusted, or disbelieved (or even ridiculed).

This is partly due to the way in which specialists in Greek epigraphy do their work: in many cases, they attempt to understand inscriptions on the basis of parallels with others. Where no literal or well-established parallels exist, a remedy is sought in what one could call approximate similarity. In general, much of this is inevitable, but it is here that things can go wrong very quickly. A good example of this would be the rare word σύνθρονος, which occurs once in the great cult inscription on Nemrud Dağ (N 60), where the king describes the sculptural programme of his tomb and announces that he represented himself 'sharing the throne' with the gods. The word σύνθρονος is rather rare in classical and Hellenistic Greek and becomes much more common after the beginning of the common era, especially in Christian literature.[33] There are, however, at least two very good roughly contemporary parallels for the usage in Commagene[34], one literary and one epigraphic, both of which refer to the process of adding a statue of a *living* person to a collection of statues of gods. The first, best-known, parallel comes from the famous scene leading towards the death of Philip II of Macedon, as recounted by Diodorus Siculus.[35] The setting is that of a wedding, between Philip's daughter Cleopatra and Alexander, the king of Epirus. The king organizes contests, plays and lavish banquets to impress his Greek guests. After the wedding, in the procession leading to the theatre, Philip ensured that statues of the twelve Olympian gods occupied an important place, and to those he added a thirteenth, of himself, thus claiming a place for himself "enthroned among" the Twelve. The best inscriptional parallel comes from the complex and much-discussed dossier on the Pergamene benefactor Diodoros Pasparos.[36] Among his many deeds of munificence, we are told in one of the inscriptions honouring him (IGR IV,293), was his role as gymnasiarch for one of the

33 Although the term is not used there, a key passage is Rev 3,21, "He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne". A good introduction to Christian (and Jewish) usage is Scott 1997. The lengthy survey of relevant features in literature, art, and liturgy in Kantorowicz 1963 makes it very regrettable that his death prevented this great scholar from finishing his study 'Synthronos'; see, however, Kantorowicz 1953 for some clues. Early Christians were especially fond, of course, of using the concept of 'throne-sharing' to explore the depths of trinitarian and triadological theology.

34 There is a third one that helps very much to rein in possible flights of religious fancy: in the poem that proudly announces the completion of his *Garland*, Meleager of Gadara makes a punctuation mark speak and declare to "sit enthroned" (σύνθρονος) "at the finish line of his great learning": Anth. Pal. 12,257; see van Sickle 1981, 66; Gutzwiller 2014 (translation taken from p. 86).

35 Diod. Sic. 16,92,5.

36 See, comprehensively, Chankowski 1998. The dating of Pasparos has long been controversial, but it is now generally accepted that he was a real contemporary of Antiochos I.

city's gymnasia, which he virtually rebuilt and saved from dilapidation. For this he was to be honoured in various ways, but especially by the consecration of a marble statue representing the benefactor, which would make him "σύνθρονος with the gods of the palaestra (i. e., Hermes and Heracles)".[37]

Both for reasons of its semantic transparency and because of these parallels, one would think that the interpretation of the occurrence of the term in the great cult inscription would not cause too many problems. But many specialists read into it something that cannot be supported either by the text itself, or indeed by these parallels. This would be the proposal that σύνθρονος is a synonym of the much better attested term σύνναος[38], which would immediately lead towards general patterns of Hellenistic ruler cult.[39] This interpretation was strongly suggested by A. D. Nock in an authoritative article[40], and it is no doubt due to the enormous intellectual impact of Nock that it has seemed so natural to many that it hardly required any argumentation. But the inscription itself shows that the king had something else in mind. Once again, it is the sharp contrast between the great cult inscription on Nemrud Dağ and the inscriptions from other sites (in this case, especially Zeugma and Samosata) that provides enough evidence of this. For the former is the *only* text that actually mentions heavenly thrones and explains that the king's soul[41] will rise up to the thrones of Zeus-Oromasdes after death. It is the end-result of this belief that is represented on the mountain. The parallel passages in the great inscriptions from Zeugma and Samosata[42] have a very similar reference to the sculpture programme, where the king indicates that he has represented himself "receiving the benevolent right hands of the gods".[43] Georg Petzl used these references to explain the very common representation of the *dexiosis* between king and god in a novel way. Building on his original insight, Bruno Jacobs and Robert Rollinger

37 See the appendix to Chankowski 1998, 198–199 on this specific part of the inscription. Of further interest to the evidence from Commagene is the insistence in IGR IV,293, ll. 35–41 that another (honorific) statue of his should be produced 'out of the same stone' as the architectural ensemble in which it would fit.

38 Thus, e. g., Pleket 1968, 445. This was, incidentally, already the interpretation of Otto Puchstein; see Humann – Puchstein 1890, 338 ("σύνθρονον wie sonst σύνναον").

39 The word σύνναος, 'sharing a temple', refers precisely to the practice of rulers (and their spouses) inscribing themselves in the temple-cult of another deity: Chaniotis 2003, 439. Buraselis 2012 has collected the evidence for the parallel organization (and naming) of suitable festivals. It is to be noted that this type of (named) festival is not attested in Commagene at all.

40 Nock 1930.

41 The deceased king's soul itself is qualified as θεοφιλής, 'beloved by (the) God(s)', which again is unknown from Greek epigraphy of the period. It is used every now and then, much later, in the context of the cult of the Roman emperor and it is, of course, very common in Christian epigraphy. In literary sources, the word occurs sporadically, but not (it seems) in reference to post-mortem qualities of the soul.

42 For once, the great cult inscription from Arsameia on the Nymphaios is rather non-explicit on the subject of the meaning of the representations.

43 BEc 20–21; Sx 25–26.

have fleshed this out. They argue that the scene is neither a welcome nor a farewell, nor a sign of apotheosis (interpretations that had earlier been suggested), but a representation of divine succour.[44] The sculptural programme on the mountain represents a new step in the king's relations with the gods – but this clearly is a step that would only be taken after his death. In this case, therefore, we meet a situation where the inscriptions in terms of language have convincing parallels in both Greek literary and epigraphic texts, but in meaning depart very strongly from both.

The priests, the *hierodules* and the musicians appointed for the cult, again, are in no way comparable to what is normal in contemporary examples of Hellenistic ruler cult. These are all lifelong, full-time, exclusive and hereditary vocations. Neither the priests nor the musicians are expected, or allowed, to do anything other than their tasks for the royal cult.[45] These are not eponymous priesthoods handed out to confidantes of the king, but these are hereditary functions that cannot be combined with other vocations in life – a most unusual feature in Greek priesthoods.[46] The same is true for the masses of sacred slaves and musicians, although the former category is well attested (especially, it must be stressed, in literary texts) all over Anatolia[47], and the latter category is well attested generally, but not in this specific cultic context.[48]

There thus are numerous points in which the inscriptions of king Antiochos strongly resist being interpreted in terms of what we think we know about Hellenistic ruler cult. We have focused mainly on institutional or organizational aspects: the worship of the living king – the nature of the sacrifices – the absence of euergetism – the priesthood and other functionaries. Underpinning this were vital ideological differences: the focus on piety (and on filial piety), the belief that a pious life will ensure an afterlife in the company of the gods (and a throne in heaven).[49] These were supported by vital

44 Petzl 2003; Jacobs – Rollinger 2005.

45 There are obvious practical issues to be sorted out here: can we really imagine that the priests and the musicians would live in/near the sanctuary throughout the year, snowed in as it is in winter? At the very least, no traces of domestic dwellings capable of housing them have been found on the site. Right now, we are merely interested in what the inscriptions tell us about the way religious life is set up.

46 Hereditary priesthoods are not entirely unknown, however. Important cases are discussed by Lupu 2009, 44–46. In almost all cases he mentions, the hereditary priesthoods (which came with considerable privileges) were bestowed upon the family who founded the sanctuary, or who promised to rebuild it. One of the inscriptions he discusses, LSAM 13, from Pergamon (before 133 BCE), offers very interesting parallels to the evidence from Commagene.

47 See, for example, Welwei 1979, Lozano 1999, Budin 2009; it cannot, however, be coincidental that Dignas 2002, 193–194 refers precisely to the inscriptions from Commagene to discuss these functionaries (followed by the tricky claim that it would have been identical in similar contexts).

48 The regular Greek context, of course, is that of musical (theatrical, literary, etc.) competitions, of which – again – there is no trace at all in Commagene. On these competitions, see the superb article by Rotstein 2012.

49 This may also be the strongest counterargument to the often heard claim that the lion horoscope would somehow signify a *katasterismos* of the king.

terminological and discursive novelties, which we have by no means exhausted (but many of which have been pointed out by others).[50] We shall see that many of these are most easily understood in a Zoroastrian context.

It has always been clear, of course, that the evidence from Commagene – both the archaeological evidence and the inscriptions – resists being subsumed in general patterns of Hellenistic ruler cult. If we skip those scholars who seem to have blinded themselves to this fact, or who have resorted to the assumption of madness (megalomania), we are left with serious attempts to join up the evidence, such as it is, with parallels from all over the Hellenistic East. To do this, the most important recent study, by Miguel John Versluys, resorted to a fragmentary approach: while acknowledging that something exactly similar cannot be found anywhere in the ancient world, Versluys focused on a number of characteristic elements that could be joined up with relevant parallels. These were 1) a hilltop sanctuary; 2) a temple tomb in the form of a *tumulus*; 3) colossal statues; 4; a canonical text; 5: *dexiosis* reliefs and other sculptural decorations; and 6) ancestor galleries.[51] When it comes to the criteria for relevance, Versluys shows himself chronologically and geographically *very* generous, in adducing parallels that go back more than a millennium (the Bronze Age Aegean, pre-Achaemenid Phrygia) and move West (the Aegean, even Rome) and South (Egypt) considerably. But with the exception of Dareios I's relief in Behistun, Iranian parallels are never included.[52] This enables him to treat the claims to 'Persian' traditions in the inscriptions themselves, and in the material culture, as 'invented traditions' that would form part of a culture of bricolage that, in turn, would be characteristic of the late-Hellenistic age in general, and of late-Hellenistic kingship in particular. The result is an unusual combination of the willingness to question the veracity of everything (or to declare everything, including all of Antiochos' predecessors, historically questionable) with a robust annexation of all the evidence into the concept of Hellenistic kingship.

There are elements in the evidence, however, that resist this argumentation, and there are further elements that make the argument that all we know pertains to Antiochos, and to Antiochos alone, implausible. These will be highlighted when we discuss Zoroastrianism in Anatolia and dynastic Zoroastrianism. First, we need to review the other 'normalizing' case that has been made for the king(s) of Commagene: that of (Middle) Iranian kingship.

That there were remarkable parallels between dynastic shrines in the Iranian world broadly defined and the architectural, artistic, and epigraphic programme of Antiochos I in Commagene was first underlined by Helmut Waldmann, but since his catalogue of comparanda came in the midst of a chaotic and idiosyncratic reinterpretation

50 Especially Boyce – Grenet 1991.

51 Versluys 2017, 111–135.

52 In all fairness, this changes considerably when he moves to the (much more important) discussion of the possible *meaning* of the evidence, for example with a long discussion of the Parthian Empire.

of the evidence, this particular observation was generally disregarded together with the rest of Waldmann's work.[53] The real watershed came, it seems, with the discovery and publication of the Rabatak inscription, which documented the construction of a dynastic shrine, containing statues of a series of relevant gods as well as the king himself and selected ancestors, by the Kushan king Kanishka the Great, in the first year of his reign, with additional provisions (in terms of money and servants) made over the first six years of his reign (that is, most likely, from 127 to 133 CE).[54]

The Rabatak inscription, a stone slab of approximately one meter by sixty centimeters, was found near the village of Rabatak in the Baghlan province of Afghanistan, together with a few fragments of sculpture (featuring especially lions, "of Indian style").[55] Although these were accidental finds from a site that has not been excavated, they are believed to come from a site that would have been similar to the much better-known site of Surkh Kotal (in the same province), which was excavated by the French archaeological mission in Afghanistan in the 1950s and 1960s.[56] There, too, Bactrian inscriptions were found, which identified the structure as a temple (Bactrian βαγολαγγο), just as the Rabatak inscription does.[57] The main inscription itself is not, however, about the construction or the function of the temple, but about its repair (or rather, the reconstruction of a well) in a slightly later stage of the development of the temple. The most striking find from Surkh Kotal apart from the inscriptions was (part of) a life-size statue of king Kanishka. By combining the known architecture and decoration from Surkh Kotal with the information from the Rabatak inscription, scholars deduced that both temples would have been dynastic shrines in which dynastic gods would be worshipped together with the king and (deceased) members of his family, all of whom (gods and mortals) would have been represented by statues.[58] With the existence of two similar centres that were somehow connected to the Kushans (i. e., the complex at Khalchayan that may have belonged to the Yuezhi, and the Kushan dynastic shrine in Mat, near Mathura, in India), a pattern was duly established and this pattern turned out to be common to many other parts of the Iranian world. It is the particular merit of Matthew Canepa to have brought together the relevant materials

53 Waldmann 1991, 149–157 (see Jacobs 1992); Waldmann continued his reinterpretations of the evidence in a series of articles and lectures that were, eventually, collected in Waldmann 1996 (nos. IX, XIV, and XV). Rather than engaging with his critics, he chose in those articles to follow his own intuitions, which eventually led him to reconstructions both of Zoroastrianism and of Vedic religion, and their application to the evidence from Commagene, that lack all empirical or historical support.

54 Sims-Williams – Cribb 1995/1996; Sims-Williams 2004.

55 For these fragments, see Sims-Williams – Cribb 1995/1996, 75.

56 Schlumberger et al. 1983.

57 For the main inscription, see Gershevitch 1979.

58 This is mentioned explicitly in the Rabatak inscription, but is not certain for Surkh Kotal, where only the statue of Kanishka himself was found.

in a large number of important publications.[59] In those, he used evidence from (from West to East) Pontus, Commagene, Armenia, Elymais, Persia proper (the Frataraka), Parthia, and the Kushans.[60] He proposed to recognize that those elements that had earlier been foregrounded in an attempt to 'domesticate' Commagene as part of the 'Western' Hellenistic world are equally found in these Middle Iranian sites, but in this case *not* in a fragmented way (where each site would yield a parallel for one particular feature), but most often as a unified whole.[61] In fact, he concludes that the religious structures of Antiochos I of Commagene "make perfect sense within the context of the Iranian dynastic sanctuaries, which, of course, had nothing to do with 'orthodox' Zoroastrianism (itself a late antique Sasanian invention)."[62]

Through the addition of this final point, Canepa argued himself into a very difficult corner. For his disavowal of Zoroastrianism left him with a much reduced playing field for the interpretation of the evidence.[63] In order to expand that playing field somewhat, he decided to reintroduce much of the Zoroastrian evidence under a different name: Iranian (a concept, and possibly a reality, that does not correspond to anything actually attested in ancient sources).[64] Strikingly, he attributed the genesis of what he came to term 'Middle Iranian' kingship not to anything specifically Iranian (by whatever definition), but to the Seleucids.

In ascribing to the Seleucids and to their tradition of 'charismatic Macedonian kingship'[65] the essential impetus for the formation of Iranian dynastic rituals, including the evidence from Commagene, Canepa joined a growing chorus of recent voices in Seleucid studies that aims to reconsider the historical and cultural relations between the Seleucids and Iran.[66] Formerly the Seleucids were seen, and treated, as no more than

59 Canepa 2010; 2015a; 2015b; and especially the grand summation in Canepa 2018; see also the contribution by Canepa in this volume.

60 It is surprising that the abundant evidence from Hatra is absent from this discussion. See Dirven 2008 for an overview of the combination of monumentality, human and divine statues, epigraphy, and elite display, all in an 'Iranian' context.

61 These would be monumentality, sanctuaries that combined statues of (living and dead) rulers with those of deities, inscriptions, extra-urban location, preferably on elevated places (where available), and possible linkages with a funerary cult.

62 Canepa 2015b, 81–82.

63 It is also simply not true that 'orthodox' Zoroastrianism would be a Sasanian invention. It is clear that his addition of the adjective 'orthodox' matters here (as a way of distancing himself from the interpretations of Mary Boyce), but with or without it, two things must be clear here. First of all, there is no clear evidence for Sasanian orthodoxy either. But in structural terms, the Achaemenids successfully reformulated and reorganized Zoroastrianism into an empire-wide system of beliefs and practices, and so did the Sasanians. Although their activities in this field are not explicitly recorded (there is very little 'internal' evidence for the Achaemenid Empire after Xerxes), they are traceable in virtually all post-Achaemenid manifestations of Zoroastrianism (see below, for Anatolia).

64 See De Jong 2017.

65 For which, see O'Neil 2000; Greenwalt 2019.

66 See, among many others, Capdetrey 2007; Plischke 2014; Strootman 2014; Engels 2017.

an interlude in the history of ancient Iran, and the fact that they were Macedonian conquerors, and therefore 'foreigners', was of great help to those scholars who wanted to marginalize their role in Iranian history (even though no one could reasonably point at any evidence that the concept of the 'foreigner' corresponded to something meaningful in ancient Iran). Further support came from the exceptional dossier of the hatred of the Seleucids among the Judaeans, which led to the assumption that this Jewish resistance would have been symptomatic for a more general pattern of 'Near Eastern resistance' to the Seleucids (and their Hellenism).[67] This led to the enduring notion that the Near East and the Hellenistic world were two distinct ideational realms shackled together exclusively through conflict and mutual resentment. Obviously, that appreciation of the evidence could not last, and from the late 1980s onwards, scholars began to demolish it successfully.[68]

Doing so was comparatively easy in the case of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor, but ran into considerable difficulties in the twin cases of Judaism and Iran. This was not a simple matter of scholarly traditions unable to deal with changing perspectives (although this undoubtedly played a role), but there was something in these specific cases that created obstacles to a reconsideration of the evidence. In both cases, it was precisely kingship and royal custom that was the issue. In the Judaean case, what was at stake was (first) an internal and (then) an external conflict over the rights and duties of the king with respect to the temple in Jerusalem. Here, the king became actively involved, as he did in Babylonia, but it was an unexpected 'nativist' response that created considerable difficulty. In the Iranian case, the opposite scenario seems to have been active: here, the Seleucids refused to follow Iranian royal custom.[69] Although scholars have been very generous to the Seleucids in speculating that the many signs of active Seleucid involvement in, and reshaping of, Babylonian royal support of religion would be mirrored in a similar investment in Iranian custom[70], there is absolutely no evidence to support this generosity, and quite a bit that suggests the opposite is more likely to be correct.[71] This is not to deny that the Seleucids were invested in maintaining and protecting their Iranian possessions, or that they employed symbolic practices for this as much as military and economic ones, but these symbolic practices specifically did not align well with local expectations or understandings.

This makes the case for the Seleucid 'invention' of Iranian dynastic traditions fragile as a whole, but it especially creates difficulties for understanding what the innovation (if such it was) of dynastic cult centres that would form the core of Middle Iranian

67 Much of these ideas came together in Eddy 1961, which is notably weak in its coverage of ancient Iran.
68 Sherwin-White – Kuhrt 1993 was a defining work for this new trend.
69 I follow here the remarkable works of Kosmin 2014 (on space) and Kosmin 2018 (on time).
70 Wiesehöfer 1994, 57–62.
71 See especially Tuplin 2008.

kingship meant to those involved. It is in this quest for meaning that both those who support an interpretation of the evidence from Commagene as simply a manifestation of Hellenistic ruler cult and those who align it with Iranian royal display seem to be of one opinion. In both cases, the meaning of the religion of Antiochos is reduced to a search for (personal, or dynastic) legitimacy. Everything the king (said he) did is habitually interpreted in terms of legitimation theory. This interpretation effectively reduces meaning to power, and can thus never be of much help to understand the *specific* nature of any given royal practice. The point seems to be, however, that this specific nature is deemed uninteresting the moment the reduction to power has taken place.

The problems inherent in the hegemonic rise of the quest for legitimacy/legitimation as an interpretation of political, cultural and religious behaviour in pre-modern societies have been pointed out by many with great cogency, but to surprisingly little effect. Where such a situation obtains (i. e., when scholars stubbornly hold on to a perspective to which serious and compelling objections have been raised), it is most often a sign that something vital in our modern societies is at stake. Nowhere is this more evident than in legitimation theory and its use of Max Weber. Weber's ideal types of legitimate authority (which were explicitly never intended to be used as labels that would actually explain behaviour) are indissolubly linked to the patterns of social, political, and existential disintegration of Wilhelmine Germany that framed a major part of his life.[72] They are among his more important contributions to a theory of modernity, which has raised the question of their applicability to pre-modern realities. What is not in doubt, obviously, is the current belief in a crisis of legitimacy of our own political orders, and the attendant belief in political strategies of maintaining or establishing legitimacy. The question is whether these anxieties and strategies are of any use in understanding symbolic behaviour in very different contexts.

These problems have been highlighted with examples from two very different corners of the ancient world: the early Roman Empire and pre-modern India.[73] In both cases, as well as in more theoretical literature, the argument was made that for legitimation theory to work, a perceived crisis in legitimacy is necessary. There is no evidence for this crisis (or its presumed remedies) at all, and on a theoretical level the very possibility of conceptualizing a crisis in legitimacy has been seriously questioned.[74] Thus, the critique of the centrality of legitimation as an interpretation of pre-modern political behaviour is not only that it is starkly functionalist and anachronistic (presentist, ethnocentric, flattening, and predictable), but that it in effect conjures up or fabricates out of thin air the very evidence necessary to give it even the minimum level

72 Wolin 1981.

73 Lendon 2006 (early Roman Empire); Pollock 2006 (India).

74 "Weber seems to be looking at the past from a location of modern disenchantment and extending back into time the separation of structures and beliefs characteristic of modernity". (Pollock 2006, 518).

of support. Its plausibility resides, in other words, in the assumption itself, not in the evidence that is actually there.[75]

All of this applies, in the present writer's understanding, very much to the evidence from Commagene.[76] In fact, none of the three ideal types of Weberian legitimacy (traditional, legal, charismatic) really helps us understand what is going on in Commagene. The former two are explicitly contradicted by the many pronouncements and the clarity in the material evidence that something radically new is coming into being here.[77] It is the third type, charismatic rule, that most often underlies the appeal to Weber's theory of legitimate rule. It is generally accepted that charisma is an *ascribed* quality that exists, by definition, only in a social relation between the central figure and his following. One of the key indicators for the presence of a charismatic ruler is the type of behaviour of his following that Weber called *Wirtschaftsfremdheit*: the neglect of any concern of economic gain or propriety.[78] While there is the factual evidence of this type of behaviour on the part of the king himself, it is wholly unclear whether he had a significant following. All evidence, in fact, suggests otherwise. It is time to return to that evidence once again.

The Religion of King Antiochos

The only person who certainly displayed an enormous *Wirtschaftsfremdheit* was king Antiochos himself, who invested incalculable amounts from his own wealth and that of his realm, and incalculable hours of hard labour by his people, for two self-declared reasons: piety and filial piety. He wanted to honour the gods, whose grace he had experienced, and he wanted to honour the memory of his father, both for its own sake and in the hope that his children would follow this example after his death. Honouring the gods, honouring the memory of his father, creating the possibility to receive the same honours after his own death, meant a number of things: rituals, performances, and festivals with lavish meals. Two groups were specifically invited for these: the gods

75 "That decision is not one of reason, it is one of faith". (Lendon 2006, 62).

76 There are, however, serious counterpoints to this position. See, for example, Gellner 2009; Sommer 2011.

77 Miguel John Versluys pointed out to me that the fact that the great cult inscription refers to itself as "the law" may actually be meaningful in this context. He may be right, but Weber's point in the context of 'legal' grounds for legitimacy had much to do with predictability, which does not seem to work in this specific context. See also Lendon 2006, 55, for an important brief discussion of the question whether in the early Roman Empire the power of the emperor in fact depended on the law, or whether the power of the law depended on the emperor (clearly the option he prefers).

78 In itself, this is obviously one of those aspects that make Weber's insights as a whole difficult to apply to pre-capitalist societies, see Pollock 2006, 519–520. Weber's *Wirtschaftsfremdheit* is sometimes reversed and attributed to the charismatic ruler himself (Hatscher 2000, 212–213). Against this as evidence for charismatic authority see especially Flaig 2004, 528–530.

and the deified ancestors (including the king himself after death) on the one hand, and the general population of the kingdom (as well as foreigners) on the other. Mediating between these were priests, dressed in Persian attire, and musicians and performers, all of them in hereditary full-time consecration to this specific cult.

A number of times, the king tells us that all of this, including the writing of the great cult inscription (part of which was simply called "the law"), was not his initiative, but came to him from the gods. Over the course of the large cult inscription on the Nemrud Dağ and the other sites, he stresses this several times. It is his piety that has protected him and made him successful, cult sites are constructed on divine command (A 10), the gods have inspired the text of the law, and even though it would seem to be the voice of the king, it is in reality the 'mind of the gods' (N 122; A 93) that has inspired these words (and these rules). In the inscription on the Nemrud Dağ, the king expresses his belief that after death, the soul will leave the body and, when beloved by (the) god(s), will rise up to the heavenly thrones of Zeus-Oromasdes and there join the company of the righteous ancestors and the gods (N 40–44).

In the inscription from Arsameia-on-the-Nymphaios (and its very poorly preserved double from Arsameia-on-the-Euphrates), this astonishing representation of a religious perception of reality that is quite alien to conventional Greek (or local) religiosity is given much greater depth. Although most scholars believe that all large cult inscriptions that include the text of the 'law' are roughly contemporary and need to be studied as an ensemble, we have already seen that there are frequently meaningful differences between the inscriptions. In this particular case, the concrete background of the long pious peroration is not easy to establish. Partly, we are confronted with a series of threats and injunctions that are also known from a separate inscription on the Nemrud Dağ (Np), again with interesting differences.[79] These are very reminiscent of the so-called sacred laws from various Greek and Anatolian sanctuaries, and from curse inscriptions protecting graves, in that their chief purpose seems to be to regulate entry to the sanctuaries (only to those who come with the right intentions, and made pious by works of justice) and to admonish those who come to steal or destroy that the place is overseen by divine watchers and that the gods are ready and quick to punish

79 Np has the unique threat with the "Galatian punishment" that will befall desecrators, a reference to those Galatians, led by Brennos, who attempted to pillage the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi in 279 BCE, but were routed. This decisive moment in Greek history was widely known and represented all over the Hellenistic world, both in inscriptions (Champion 1995), and in art, with very notable examples in Pergamon (Papini 2016). The defeat of the Galatians was accompanied by thunderstorms and other natural calamities and was widely believed to have been accomplished by the god Apollo himself. The connection is made explicit in Np in multiple references, to "images of the Delphian power" that the visitor needs to behold, and to a comparison of the mountainous setting of the shrine in Delphi and the *hierothesion* itself. Some scholars have interpreted this to suggest that with this simile, Antiochos intended to establish his *hierothesion* as a 'second Delphi' (Waldmann 1973, 79), or even as a 'Near Eastern Delphi' (Andrade 2013, 83). Against this, see the judicious remarks of Petzl 1976, 372.

evildoers.[80] There are prominent differences to the genre as well, which are not easily explained.

These differences seem to be connected to a particular interpretation of the interconnections between moral rectitude and ritual purity, and between mental states and acts. Two scenarios are sketched: the first one concerns a person who accidentally ends up in the sanctuary and then realizes that he has entered a sacred space. He is admonished to remove himself from that place, to seek refuge in a non-ritual/public (βέβηλος) place and compensate for the impurity he inadvertently contracted by experiencing the appropriate emotion of being in awe of the gods (Np 17–24; A 198–205). His purity, however, is not one that is conditioned by the ordinary Greek (or, for that matter, Zoroastrian) concerns for ritual purity[81], but it is a purity produced by 'works of justice'.[82] The inscription suggests, therefore, that although everyone (literally) is invited to come to the sanctuary, there is a precondition for actually entering this space, and it is one of coming prepared through having performed good deeds.

Likewise, those who come to the sanctuary in order to do harm, can produce harm (and, thus, expect divine retribution) not only through actual acts of violence (theft, destruction), but also through mental acts of hatred, jealousy and refusing the king the benefits of being remembered properly. Together with the promise of divine punishment, this is where the inscription on the Nemrud Dağ comes to an end.[83]

The inscriptions in the Arsameias continue, however, in an even higher register of religiosity. The evildoer's wicked heart, the very source of his unjust life, will be pierced by the unfailing arrows of Apollo and Heracles; this will cause him to feel pain in the deepest recesses of his villainous personality. Punishment will come from Hera's wrath in revenge of his unholiness; and his family will be obliterated by the lightning of Zeus-Oromasdes, lest it continue to pollute God's earth with its wicked progeny.

By contrast, those who are holy, pure and unsullied by deeds of injustice and who desire to perform holy deeds, will reap lavish rewards: they will confidently face the

80 See Parker 1983, 176–190, and Lupu 2009, for the sacred laws, and Strubbe 1991 for the grave inscriptions and important general observations.

81 See, however, discussions of 'ritual' versus 'mental' interpretations of pollution in Chaniotis 1997 and Petrovic – Petrovic 2016 for ancient Greece, and De Jong 1999 for Zoroastrianism.

82 The inscriptions speak of a person who is ἄναγνος δικαίων ἔργων. The meaning of this is not immediately obvious, but generally the word ἁγνός takes a genitive to indicate "pure from" (something I learnt from Romney 2019, 31 n. 20). The expression may mean, therefore, that the person should 'not be free from works of justice'. This makes Dörrie's insistence that these 'works of justice' are restricted to the royal cult (Dörrie 1964, 101. 122–123) and have no moral (or generalizable) import impossible to maintain.

83 Once again, there is a striking difference between the Sofraz Köy inscription and the *hierothesion* inscriptions. While the Sofraz Köy text is concerned about insulting the holiness of the place (and of the remembrance of the king; SO 24–end), it does not have the same moral/mental focus that the *hierothesion* inscriptions have. A sign of the difference may be the use of the (rare) words μ(ε)ισάγαθος and μ(ε)ισόχρηστος, both meaning 'hating what is good', in the *hierothesion* inscriptions (as well as μ(ε)ισάδικος, 'hating what is unjust' in the inscriptions from the two Arsameias).

gods, eye to eye, and will travel along the paths of the blessed in the confidence of attaining a good life (after death). They will see the house of Zeus in heaven and be seen and heard while praising the gods. And when, in their lifetime, they behold and praise the deeds of the kings, the gods and the deceased heroes will become fellow soldiers with them in the battle for good deeds.

These passages are difficult to understand from the perspective of Greek conventions and have generally been recognized as evidence for Zoroastrian thought. In some well-known cases, this is impossible to deny: both the expression of a "good life" and the notion that the gods join mortals in the battle for good deeds can hardly be explained otherwise.[84] The former has plausibly been interpreted as the Greek adaptation of one of the standard Avestan (and Iranian) expressions for 'heaven', the "best existence".[85] With regard to the latter there is a rare consensus that this is as alien to Greek religiosity as it is common to Zoroastrianism. But when it comes to the specific combination of ideas about (ritual) purity and morality, the evidence is difficult to harmonize *both* with Greek and with Iranian common notions. The vast majority of purity regulations in both religious systems have little to do with moral concerns: a polluted deeply devout person is still polluted and a pure sinner may be evil and in need of correction, but would still be ritually clean. To this general pattern there is the well-known exception in the Greek case of the murderer, who is polluting because of his crime; and in both systems ideas that seek to negotiate connections between undesirable patterns of behaviour and ideas about pollution are occasionally found. Still, the notion that the offspring of a desecrator, because they share his "evil blood" (κακοῦ αἵματος, A 234), will sully God's earth, or that one needs to purify oneself through works of righteousness is not easily found in the very physical world of Greek and Iranian ideas of purity and (contagious) pollution.

The only plausible background to this conundrum seems to be the nature of the texts themselves. Both generally and, in some often-discussed passages, the inscriptions show an extremely complex interplay between temporal referentiality[86] and timelessness. Although the inscriptions are astonishingly vague about actual events and developments in the king's lifetime[87], when it comes to their actual subject – the estab-

84 Boyce – Grenet 1991, 334–337.

85 Boyce – Grenet 1991, 335, building on Duchesne-Guillemin 1978, 190–191, who makes wholly justified objections to the interpretation of Dörrie 1964, 121–123. Struggling with the very type of public declaration the king makes, Dörrie saw no other option but to reduce everything to the royal cult itself, or to a promise of delights in the life before death. Even in his own demonstration, this leads him to multiple impasses from which he attempted to extricate himself by his implausible appeal to Euhemerism.

86 With this I mean a reference to actual developments in actual time.

87 It is profoundly alienating to see Antiochos' inscriptions listed alongside the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* as examples of *Tatenberichte* of Hellenistic (etc.) rulers in Chaniotis 1988, 11–12 with n. 18. Although Versluys 2017, 125–127 has judiciously compared the two texts as examples of very long monumental inscriptions, in terms of content they are profoundly dissimilar, especially with re-

lishment of new religiously defined ways of tying together the royal family (in its many generations), the land of Commagene, and its inhabitants – much stress is placed on the fact that much of this was new. At the same time, the innovation the king accomplished joined together inherited tradition (of the royal family itself, and of the people in general), going back many generations, and a timeless future. The establishments – the sites, the priesthoods, the musicians and servants, which are either newly repaired or altogether new – and their funds are meant to endure forever, just as the king's body will rest and his soul will enjoy the delights of the hereafter forever. The king thus acts as a pivot in historical time, and the fact that this role may be connected to an actual (but never named) event in the king's lifetime has always been strongly suggested by the presence of the famed lion horoscope near his tomb. For this horoscope is believed by all to represent a date of significance for his kingship (or his kingdom, or his life).[88]

The interpretation of the lion horoscope is subject to much controversy. Multiple possible dates have been suggested, none of which is obviously tied to any known development in Antiochos' own life or that of his kingdom. There is no shortage of potential references, but most of these pertain to the political history of Commagene: the extinction of the Seleucid Empire, the defeat of Tigranes the Great of Armenia, the expansion and preservation of the territory of Commagene itself. Other scholars believe that the date of the lion horoscope should reference something of significance in the king's life itself, such as his coronation[89], or his divinization (in terms of apotheosis or, more particularly, *katasterismos*).[90] Finally, some scholars have suggested that the hierarchy between the lion horoscope and the life of the king(dom) should be reversed: that the horoscope marks a celestial event observed by astronomers that impacted the king in such a way that he produced a wholly novel religious expression.[91] Obviously, underlying these very different attempts at interpretation we find very different general interpretations of the whole religious programme: those who believe that the religion of king Antiochos was a not very remarkable branch of the larger phenomenon of Hellenistic ruler cult, and who interpret the larger phenomenon generally in political-social terms, are more at ease to attribute everything found in the kingdom to the realm of (inter)national politics. Those who focus on the king are most likely to support the programme in terms of a quest of legitimacy. Although some of these

gard to the frequent references the emperor makes to consular periods, actual negotiations, and actual sums of money expended, none of which have a counterpart in the texts from Commagene.

88 We do not know, however, *which* date. Specialists in astrology have come up with several rivalling computations, but the majority have settled for the year 62 BCE. I have been very impressed (and convinced) by the long discussion in Bechtold 2011, 100–115. Cf. also the contribution by Jacobs in this volume.

89 Facella 2014.

90 It would seem that such claims are impossible to maintain after the critical evaluation of Bechtold 2011.

91 This seems to be the position of Boyce – Grenet 1991.

suggestions have a certain degree of plausibility (the accession of Antiochos *did* coincide with very complex political and military events in his region), none of them even remotely help to explain the (much more prominent) 'timeless' moralizing parts of Antiochos' inscriptions. The third type of interpretation, that focuses on developments in the king's personal life that led him to change his life and establish new ways to perform religion in his kingdom, may have the advantage of allowing greater possibilities to understand the pious inflection of his inscriptions, but it is by definition incapable of direct evidence and seems to rely on an interpretation of the practice of astrology that is not known from the ancient world.[92] The exact interpretation of the *meaning* of the lion horoscope is therefore likely to remain unknowable. But its *function* is at least somewhat clear: it supports the notion that the king, without inhibiting traditional custom in any way, strongly experienced that the gods ordered him to do something new for his kingdom: to reshape it into a lasting abode of the gods and of his own blessed ancestors, whose ranks he would join in due time. This is, of course, literally what he tells us.

This situation of the king heeding the command of the gods, both for himself and for his realm, may help understand the immediacy, the eternity and the moralizing of the king in his great cult inscriptions. The negotiation of a past consisting of inheritance/tradition, a present that actually references the king's deeds, and the promise of eternal rewards for the pious has often reminded scholars of a trend in Zoroastrianism that has come to be known as Zurvanism, which supposedly focused a lot on time and timelessness.[93] In fact, expressions referencing time in the inscriptions have often been seen as 'translations' of the name and epithet of the god Zurvan ('Time').[94] In more recent scholarship, the reality of Zurvanism has been doubted very strongly and the most recent book-length treatment on the subject has included a negative interpretation of the case made for a specific presence of Zurvanism in the inscriptions from Commagene.[95] It is important to stress, however, that the assumption of Zurvanism is by no means necessary for an interpretation of these aspects of the inscriptions on a model of Zoroastrian ideas about time and history. The story of Zarathustra as the pivot of human history, who makes known to humankind the will of the gods and who promises humans an eternal life of bliss if they listen, as well as the attendant story of Vishtaspa, who put the power of his realm in the service of that same message, are foundational elements of Zoroastrianism and work according to the same logic as the

92 See Heilen 2005 for the lion horoscope, and especially Heilen 2015 for what can and what cannot be attributed to ancient astronomy/astrology.

93 The classical 'strong' statement of Zurvanism, building on much earlier work is Zaehner 1955. The scholarly construction of Zurvanism was very effectively dismantled by Shaked 1992. The most comprehensive discussion is Rezania 2010.

94 Most influentially: Junker 1923.

95 Rezania 2010, 152–155. This, however, is not a very satisfactory treatment of the matter in relying almost exclusively on Dörrie.

moralizing time references in the inscriptions. The king nowhere refers to this narrative, of course – not a single Zoroastrian king in history has ever done so. But the time references in the inscriptions are fully consonant with general, and quite well attested, notions of time and history in the Zoroastrian world.[96] It is to that world that, finally, we need to turn now.

Lessons Unlearned and Paths Not Taken

So far, the argument has largely been negative. A careful reading of the inscriptions with the same willingness to question received wisdom that characterizes Miguel John Versluys' reappraisal of the material culture, shows that there is hardly any evidence to support the common interpretation of the religion of king Antiochos on the model of Hellenistic ruler cult. Not only is there is no cult of the living king, virtually all core elements of Hellenistic ruler cult are actually absent: euergetism and acclamation, the proper socio-political contractual relationship between king and subjects, eponymous priesthoods. In that respect, the fact that there is but a single attestation of the class of royal *philoi* from this supposedly Seleucid-inspired kingdom may well turn out to be meaningful.[97] Much of this is, of course, present in the Sofraz Köy inscription, and if one follows the consensus about this inscription that it is an early text (compared to the rest of the epigraphic corpus), we face the interesting development that while Antiochos' reign started out, indeed, in a more or less conventional late-Hellenistic style of kingship, it suddenly began to depart from that model in very significant ways. This was highlighted already by Peter Mittag, who sought to explain this change in what he termed "self-stylization"[98] on the basis of *Realpolitik*: the extinction of the Seleucid house, and the rise of the Parthians. Essentially, he claims that the increasing focus on piety in the inscriptions is an indication of failure. In an almost futile attempt to preserve the *status quo* of his realm between the two opposing superpowers, Rome and Parthia, the king saw no other option than to withdraw from the realm of politics and place his hope entirely on the gods.[99]

This is clearly not at all plausible, for a number of distinct reasons. The first is, quite simply, that it did not happen (in the sense that there is no evidence of such a withdrawal from the stage of international politics). Moreover, this interpretation unneces-

96 See, for example, De Jong 2005. Very little of these Zoroastrian ideas are incorporated in Kosmin 2018, which weakens the case he has made for the Seleucid generation of new concepts of time considerably (see Dawdy 2020 for similar reservations to an otherwise exemplary work).

97 For the royal *philoi* and their absence from Commagene (with only one suspected case reported), see Savalli-Lestrade 1998 (with the one case from Commagene on p. 201).

98 German *Selbststilisierung*; although Mittag does not really explain it (and does not seem to use it in the ordinary Foucauldian way), the concept itself strikes me as irredeemably anachronistic.

99 Mittag 2004.

sarily and anachronistically creates a contrast between political and religious motivations. Mittag's argument rests on a hypothesized consonance between the religiosity of the king and its reception by his subjects. For this, he relies heavily on an early article by Anneliese Mannzmann[100], which gave a sketch of king Antiochos as essentially a failure on the battlefield, who attempted to compensate for his incompetence by inventing himself as a god.[101] Here, too, it is not just the case that the king did not actually do that[102], but the expected response by his subjects is a mere fantasy – and the whole sketch (and with it, Mittag's adoption of it) comes down to "Weberian" legitimation theory once again. And so we have come full circle. Perhaps we should go in search of new possibilities.

Greek-speaking Zoroastrianism

Some ten years ago, the Turkish ancient historian and numismatist Sencan Altınoluk made a significant discovery. While she was gathering information for her important book on the city of Hypaipa in Lydia[103], she also prepared the catalogue of the coin collection of the regional archaeological museum of Ödemiş[104], where most of the finds from the site of Hypaipa are kept. The collection included a previously unknown and extremely important Roman bronze coin from Hypaipa, from the 2nd c. CE. The obverse is unremarkable, in showing a bust of the goddess Artemis facing right, with a quiver on her shoulder, but the reverse is truly sensational. It shows, without a doubt, a Zoroastrian priest. The priest wears *kandys* and *tiara* and holds a bundle of *baresman*-rods over a fire, which is represented as a pyramidal mountain of ash. The coin legend simply reads ΥΠΑΙΠΗΝΩΝ, 'of the inhabitants of Hypaipa'.

Since the city of Hypaipa in Roman times was the subject of her research, Altınoluk was well aware of the famous passage in Pausanias (5,27,6–7) about a shrine in that city maintained by those Lydians who call themselves 'Persians'. Pausanias' description surprisingly comes in the fifth book of his *Guide to Greece*, which treats of the many sights of the region of Elis on the Peloponnese, which included the ancient site of Olympia. It is in Olympia that Pausanias describes a small, artistically inferior, bronze sculpture of a horse that has strange magical properties. In spite of its diminutive and

100 Mannzmann 1976.

101 Mannzmann is among those who believe the lion horoscope is evidence for Antiochos' *katasterismos*. Against this, see above nn. 88, 90.

102 The only possible argument in favour of a self-divinization of the king would be the fact that one of his epithets is θεός. But like δίκαιος, that was an epithet used by Parthian kings, who do not seem to have divinized themselves in a straightforward way (likewise, kings calling themselves Φιλοπάτωρ, also frequently used by the Parthian kings, do not necessarily truly love their fathers).

103 Altınoluk 2013.

104 Tekin – Altınoluk 2012.

inferior qualities, it drives the stallions of the place mad with lust and they habitually break loose and mount the statue, not only in the breeding season but throughout the year. Following this, he adds 'another miracle' he knows of personally (it is widely assumed that Pausanias was, in fact, from Lydia). This is the text that interests us: those Lydians who are called 'Persians'[105] have sanctuaries in the cities of Hierocaesarea and in Hypaipa.

> "In each sanctuary is a chamber, and in the chamber are ashes upon an altar. But the colour of these ashes is not the usual colour of ashes. Entering the chamber, a magician[106] piles dry wood upon the altar; he first places a tiara upon his head and then sings to some god or other an invocation in a foreign tongue unintelligible to Greeks, reciting the invocation from a book. So it is without fire that the wood must catch, and bright flames dart from it."[107]

Altınoluk followed, it seems, the nineteenth-century emendation that made Pausanias' text a reference to the most famous aspect of the two cities he mentions: their possession of a temple of the Persian goddess Anaïtis.[108] While this is perhaps likely, it is important to stress that no such claim is evident from the text of Pausanias itself – which merely mentions a nameless shrine kept by a community of Lydians who call themselves 'Persians'. Most details of Pausanias' little miracle story are immediately recognizable from standard versions of Zoroastrianism: the fact that the sacred fire is kept in a separate room of a larger temple complex, the fact that it is tended by a magus,

105 There is an acknowledged problem in the text here. The text reads ἔστι γὰρ Λυδοῖς ἐπίκλησιν Περσικοῖς ἱερὰ ἔν τε Ἱεροκαισαρείᾳ καλουμένῃ πόλει καὶ ἐν Ὑπαίποις. This has been taken to mean "There are sanctuaries belonging to those Lydians who are nicknamed 'Persians' in the city called Hierokaisareia and in Hypaipa". I take this to mean that there are Lydians who refer to themselves as 'Persians' (which I believe, in this time, to have a religious meaning; see De Jong 2017). In the 19th century, the philologist Karl Buresch proposed an emendation to the text that would transform its meaning: following those manuscripts that read Περσικῆς instead of Περσικοῖς, he assumed that a word meaning 'goddess' or the name Artemis had accidentally been omitted from the manuscript and that Pausanias' reference was not to a shrine in Hypaipa maintained by a particular group, but that it was to a shrine to the Persian goddess, whose importance in Hypaipa is clear from many pieces of information. See Buresch 1898, 66 (Karl Buresch (1862–1896) died young, and this work was published posthumously). The problem with the standard reading, which I prefer, is the use of the adjective Περσικός instead of the ethnonym Πέρσης.

106 Since I use the translation of W. H. S. Jones, and since the whole passage builds on the story of the magical horse, I have retained this translation of the Greek ἀνὴρ μάγος. All agree, however, that this reference is to be taken literally, as a reference to a *magos*, i. e., a Zoroastrian priest. The expression ἀνὴρ μάγος itself is interesting; it strikingly resembles Middle Persian *mog-mard* (which led to the confusing practice of using the ordinary word *mard*, 'man', to indicate a priest). There are at least two further usages in Greek, however: Hdt. 1,132 mentions the mandatory presence of a μάγος ἀνήρ during the sacrifice among the Persians, and in Pl. Ax. 371a, Socrates relates that Gobryas, an ἀνὴρ μάγος, told him about the judgement of the soul after death (in terms that are strongly reminiscent of Zoroastrian ideas, but include several strong departures from standard Zoroastrianism; see Graf 2014).

107 Jones 1926, *ad locum*.

108 See also Altınoluk 2014.

that that magus covers his head when entering the fire chamber, that he tends the fire and that he recites a long invocation in a mysterious language. There is one element only that is very surprising: that the priest would recite this invocation from a book. In better known versions of Zoroastrianism, liturgical texts were transmitted orally, and were not to be written down. But apart from that, Pausanias' testimony has often been seen as evidence for the surprising longevity of Zoroastrianism in Anatolia.

This interpretation has not gone uncontested. Several scholars have suggested alternative interpretations of the evidence in terms of folkloric remains, pervasive Hellenization, or simply the meagre volume of the totality of the evidence.[109] The coin from Hypaipa is unlikely to settle this debate, but it offers very strong support for the assumption of continuity. This would be a continuity maintained within a small group over a very long period of time.[110]

The last recorded presence of Zoroastrians in a position of power in Lydia was at the battle of the Granicus in 334 BCE, when Kleitos the Black prevented the last satrap of Lydia, Spithridates, from killing Alexander by cutting off Spithridates' arm that threatened to bring a hammer down upon the Macedonian's body.[111] Almost five centuries separate the downfall of Achaemenid Lydia from the production of this Hypaipan coin. During these five centuries, there was never a notable influx of Persians in the area. Lydia was never made part of the Parthian Empire, as there is no evidence that the Parthians had any interest in conquering territory beyond the Euphrates.[112] Territorial expansion beyond that highly significant border was never a feature of Parthian politics, one of many signs that the Parthian Empire was structurally and ideologically very distinct from the two more expansive Persian empires, that of the Achaemenids and of the Sasanians. So in the case of this coin, the Parthians cannot help us.

This means that the only plausible explanation of the coin remains the assumption of a long period of religious distinctiveness maintained by a group of Zoroastrians long resident in Lydia, who had adopted Greek as their language but remained distinct from their surroundings by their religion. This is the main reason to believe that the self-designator 'Persians', which Pausanias tells us this community applied to itself, should not be taken as an ethnic, but as a religious term – if, that is, that distinction is a valid one for ancient Iranian identities.

The evidence from Hypaipa is not unique. In fact, evidence for post-Achaemenid Zoroastrianism is fairly common in many parts of Anatolia.[113] It is also very heteroge-

109 E. g., Briant 1985; Brosius 1998; Herrmann 2002; Versluys 2017, 140 with n. 146.

110 Those who have argued for such continuity include Debord 1982; Boyce – Grenet 1991; Boyce 1991; Mitchell 2007; De Jong 2017; Canepa 2018, 95–121.

111 Plut. Alexander 16.

112 The only exception to this rule was the city of Dura-Europos, which they held for almost three centuries.

113 The standard reference is Boyce – Grenet 1991. Many materials have come to light since that publication and a new study is desperately needed.

neous. It consists of archaeology, literary references, iconography, Greek and Aramaic epigraphy, and numismatic evidence. This heterogeneity is part of the reason why we do not have a full discussion of the evidence. In many cases, the evidence still needs to be collected.[114] More often, however, there is a need to rethink interpretations that have been suggested earlier, or that seem to be fashionable presently. Earlier scholarship, for example, was firmly rooted in modernist assumptions about Hellenization in terms of cultural flattening; current scholarship seems to have a deep investment in (the equally modern concept of) indigeneity. The Persians of Anatolia somehow resist both intellectual investments[115], and may therefore have been seen as a less rewarding area of study. Indeed, they may have been one of many 'small religious groups' in the Hellenistic world and the Roman Empire.[116] But if so, they were a 'small religious group' with a difference: like the Jews, they made an investment in maintaining their specificity. Like the Jews, this investment tended to yield less than perfect returns, if one would expect clear-cut evidence of 'orthodoxy' or 'fidelity'. But like the Jews, the abundant evidence for processes of cultural and religious participation in general society, expressed in Greek and frequently taking on locally meaningful forms, is consistently fronted by equally abundant evidence for persistence of religious practice, and beliefs.

The evidence is particularly strong and long-lasting for Cappadocia, Pontus, and the various Armenian kingdoms (including Commagene). Cappadocia in particular has yielded virtually the only recorded evidence we have of Avestan (the liturgical language of Zoroastrianism), both in Greek and in Aramaic. To begin with, there is evidence for the preservation, down to early Christian times, of the Zoroastrian calendar for civic purposes.[117] That calendar itself contains evident traces of Avestan.[118]

114 This is especially true of coins. See, however, Dalaison et al. 2009, for Zela; Amandry – Rémy 1999, for Comana Pontica, and Altınoluk 2013 for Hypaipa. Another particularly difficult subject is the cult of the Anatolian moon-god Men, who in many ways moves within and beyond the orbit of Zoroastrianism in Anatolia. See Mitchell 2007; Parker 2017, 114; Labarre 2010.

115 It is bewildering to see the various satrapal dynasties of Anatolia reinvented as 'indigenous' in Michels 2009. It is not just that they clearly were not 'indigenous' (unless this is simply taken to mean 'non-Greek'), they explicitly shunned such a claim; see Panitschek 1989. This is equally true of the kings of Commagene. There is thus no need to assume that king and subjects inhabited the same religious or ethnic identities any more than they did the same social or political ones. See Graeber – Sahlins 2017 for the ubiquity of the 'stranger-king'. This point will be taken up in the final part of this article.

116 Gordon 2017.

117 This is genuinely rare. In most cases, Zoroastrian kingdoms only used the calendar, which was established to harmonize observance rather than to measure time, when communicating with fellow Zoroastrians, switching to Seleucid usage when interacting with non-Zoroastrian subjects. For the Cappadocian calendar see Panaino 2011 (with references).

118 The clearest evidence comes from the month name ΔΑΘΟΥΣΑ, from the genitive form *daθušō* of Avestan *daδuuah-*, 'creator'; cf. the identical Parthian month-name *dtš*. The correspondence between these two month names is decisive evidence for the fact that the Zoroastrian calendar was introduced by the Achaemenids, and the use of Avestan in it is decisive evidence for the fact that it was intended, explicitly, as a *Zoroastrian* calendar.

Other traces of Avestan have been preserved in the unique epithets applied to the goddess Anaïtis (βαρζοχαρα) and Zeus (Φαρνουας)[119], as well as in the divine name of the "Mazda-worshipping religion" (notably, as consort of the god Bel) in the inscriptions from Arebsun.[120] Similar traces of Avestan are known from other parts of Anatolia, but mainly from the Achaemenid period[121] – the evidence from Cappadocia is unique in allowing us to trace its persistence over a long period of time. And indeed, what is clearly recognizable as Zoroastrianism keeps reappearing in the record for Cappadocia. Strabo records their sanctuaries, sacrifice, and festivals as well as images and temple states[122]; Basil of Caesarea complains about their unwillingness to yield to hegemonic Roman or Christian culture[123]; the priest Kerdir notes with satisfaction that he found them all over Anatolia and 'brought them back' to orthodoxy[124]; and in the 5th c. CE, they once again become pawns in diplomatic negotiations between the East Roman Empire and the Sasanians (with the Persian Christians as counterbalance).[125]

Alongside this fairly substantial dossier, and alongside the slightly different evidence from Pontus[126] and from other parts of Anatolia, there is, of course, the very rich evidence from Armenia.[127] This evidence is largely literary, and because the whole notion of written literature only came to the Armenians when they adopted Christianity, it is largely Christian. It is not self-evident, therefore, that the evidence from Armenia would help us understand the facts from Commagene, especially since the inclusion of the Armenian kingdoms into the direct constellation of the Parthian Empire, with the rise of the Arsacid kings of Armenia, led to a revival and transformation of Armenian Zoroastrianism. Armenia was very clearly 'Parthianized', and since much of the evidence comes in a late transmission, it is by no means easy to extract from it reliable evidence for Achaemenid and Orontid Armenia.

Sometimes, there are small linguistic traces that can help us. This is especially the case when divine names are mentioned in two distinct forms. This happens to be the case, famously, with Spenta Armaiti, the goddess of the earth. She is known from Armenian texts under a presumably Old Persian form of her name, Sandaramet[128], in the

119 For references, see Debord 2005; and see the remarks of Elizabeth Tucker in Parker 2017, 102 with n. 107.

120 These inscriptions are notoriously difficult to read, understand, and date, but the reference to *DYNMZDYSNŠ*, which concerns us here, is certain. See Lemaire 2003.

121 The most famous example, no doubt, would be the Aramaic version of the Xanthos trilingual; see, for references, Parker 2017, 42.

122 Str. 15,3,13–15; De Jong 1997, 121–156.

123 Basil. Epistle 258; De Jong 1997, 408–409.

124 Boyce – Grenet 1991, 254–255.

125 Priscus, fr. 41 Blockley (Blockley 1983, 344–347); see Trombley 1994, 120–126, for an important overview.

126 For Pontus, see Michels 2009; Fleischer 2017; Canepa 2018, 104–107.

127 Russell 1987a.

128 In the Cappadocian calendar, her month is known as ΣΟΝΔΑΡΑ.

meaning "(the depths of the) earth", and under a presumably Parthian form of her name, Spandaramet, both in reference to the goddess herself, and the earth that she protects, and (surprisingly) in reference to the god Dionysos.[129]

Following these, and a host of similar, traces, it has been possible to come closer to a more general appraisal of the history of Zoroastrianism in the various Anatolian kingdoms that ultimately (claim to) go back to satrapal families, including that of Commagene. The Armenian evidence is very useful in one other respect. This is that in its late-Christian form, it offers abundant evidence for a cluster of narrative and religious traditions that seem to have crystallized all over the Iranian world only with the Parthians. The Armenians combined this, it is true, with a very firm narrative tradition about themselves, showing them in interaction with the legendary kings and heroes of the ancient Iranians. But participating in this 'Communal Narrative' eclipsed, all over the Iranian world, the memory of the Achaemenids.[130] This did not happen in those parts of Anatolia that the Parthians did not conquer. On the contrary, the satrapal kingdoms (and, it is to be inferred, the Zoroastrian communities in other parts of Anatolia) constantly and consciously *affirmed* the importance of the Achaemenids, because their history explained the very existence of these kingdoms and these communities. There are traces of this narrative importance of the Achaemenids in a variety of places: the popularity of Achaemenid-period names (or the inability to coin new meaningful names in any other language than Greek)[131]; legends about royal or satrapal founders of temples and rites[132]; and, of course, the genealogical discourses of the royal families of Pontus, Cappadocia, and Commagene.[133]

There does not seem to be any evidence of the preservation of Iranian languages (other than Avestan, which in itself is highly significant, but was never a spoken language). These were Greek-speaking communities, whose real lives included preserved traditions maintained by their priests and at home, as well as participation in locally meaningful religious lives. There is nothing surprising in any of this. Parallels for most of these elements abound, in the well-explored case of Jewish history, in the experience of the Parsis, the Zoroastrians of India, and in the reality of Zoroastrian lives both in Armenia and in Central Asia.

Uniquely, however, the Greek-speaking Zoroastrians of Anatolia also offer a tiny glimpse in literary traditions that are barely known from other parts of the Zoroastrian world. At least one piece of literature that must have belonged to them is refracted in parts of Greek and Latin literature, sadly fragmentary, but highly significant. This is the

129 See for this Russell 1987a, 426–436; Russell 1987b.
130 Much of this will be set out in De Jong forthcoming a.
131 Schmitt 2007; Mitchell 2007.
132 Cyrus, famously, for the temple of the Persian goddess in Hierocaesarea; see Boyce – Grenet 1991, 202–203.
133 Panitschek 1989.

collection of predictions of the fall of the Roman Empire known as the *Oracles of Hystaspes*.[134] What we know from this text comes largely from Lactantius, and has been the subject of long and sometimes bitter debate.[135] The difficulty of distinguishing where quotations from the Oracles end and where Lactantius takes over is an acknowledged problem. But even in its most reduced form, the references are still impressive. They show, as clearly as is known from Jewish Sibylline literature, a local community united by (narrative and) religion responding in a negative way to Rome, attributing information about its impending fall to a visionary encounter with the ancient king Hystaspes and his (famous) *vaticinans puer*. A notable part of the Oracles is a description of how Jupiter/Zeus will requite the suffering of the pious by destroying their enemies, which has obvious parallels in the cult inscriptions of king Antiochos.[136]

Although much of the work still needs to be done, even a superficial reanalysis of evidence that has long been known shows a constellation of characteristics that harmonizes very well with the evidence from Commagene. This strongly suggests that, in the evidence from Commagene, we face *real* religious continuities rather than a *bricolage* of disparate elements, partly invented, in the interest of self-aggrandizement. Within such an interpretation, the royal cult of Commagene would not constitute an example of 'Persianism'. It is an example of a local, dynastic style of Zoroastrianism.[137] That this is so is very strongly suggested by the presence, for example, of the *barsom* in the sculptural programme in the kingdom.[138] It is strongly suggested by the ancestor gallery and its selection of Iranian representatives in the male line (which, in the Iranian world, is the main factor in any genealogical claim).[139] These are two eye-catching elements in the totality of the evidence that would be very unlikely candidates for free invention. But the strongest evidence for real continuity undoubtedly comes from the

134 I have condemned the long extracts from the "hymns of the Magi" in Dio Chrysostomos' *Borysthenitica* (Oration 36) as fantasy (following Beck 1991, 539–548). See De Jong 2003. Although I still see the cogency of the argument made there, it might be worth reconsidering this text as part of the literature of the Greek Zoroastrians of Anatolia.

135 Windisch 1929; Bidez – Cumont 1938, 2. 359–376; Flusser 1982; Boyce – Grenet 1991, 376–381.

136 Lactant. Div. Inst. 7,18,2; cf. inscription A 232–237.

137 Miguel John Versluys has kindly pointed out that these two should not be seen as existing in mutual opposition to each other. He may be correct that both here and in De Jong 2017, I may have read his proposal to recognize a mechanism of 'Persianism' too much *in malam partem*, but both there and here I would maintain that it must be possible to make a distinction between different strategies of representation and identification, perhaps with an eye to intended audience, or to the range of available options.

138 I find this an important example, because the *barsom* (the bundle of twigs or rods held during Zoroastrian rituals) is a hugely important signifier within a Zoroastrian context, but not an intuitively understandable ritual (or iconographic) element for non-Zoroastrians.

139 We will never know whether this selection of ancestors is in any way reliable. To me, that is not a relevant question, but the general reliability is much helped by the inclusion of surprising numbers of marginal (or unknown) ancestors. Genealogy matters in the ancient world – real or confabulated. So the ensemble of the male line of ancestry is an interesting fact in itself, as is the ensemble of the 'female'/Seleucid/Macedonian line, ably discussed by Strootman, this volume.

divine name Artagnes, which surprisingly has never received any convincing linguistic interpretation.

This silence is not due to the fact that the 'identity' of the god in question is unknown. It has been clear right from the start that the divine name Ἀρτάγνης is to be seen as a local rendering of the name of the god Verethraghna. Not only is there enough correspondence to recognize the name as such, but the pairing of Artagnes with Heracles and Ares into the composite deity Artagnes-Heracles-Ares, fits this interpretation very well. With Heracles, Verethraghna shares a martial character, as well as the important function of protecting dwellings and protecting travelers; with Ares he shares his main function as a war god. Even though the creation of the composite deity may have been motivated through planetary or astral logic, there is a very good theological correspondence, too.

Verethraghna's name has been recorded in a large number of different forms, over many Iranian languages and in Greek transcription.[140] None of them, however, strongly resembles Artagnes. In all other attested forms, the initial /v/ of the name has left some trace (in some cases it is preserved, in others it has developed into a plosive /b/, in some cases it has coloured the initial vowel).[141] The Old Persian form of the name of Verethraghna has not been attested. But on the example of the double names for Spenta Armaiti in Armenian, one could venture a guess that Artagnes should go back to an unattested (and unpredictable) Old Persian form of his name, plausibly via Cappadocia (where, for example, the month name Fravartinam has been recorded as Arartana). Unless new evidence comes to light, this will necessarily remain very speculative, but what is absolutely clear is that this particular name cannot have been an invention of the time of Antiochos (for this, it is too close to the various attested forms of Verethraghna's name), but must represent the name of a prominent god in the king's immediate surroundings.

The Dynastic Style of Zoroastrianism

As was highlighted in the beginning of this article, a variety of factors have long prevented the evidence from Commagene from being interpreted at least partly as an instantiation of Zoroastrianism. Some of these are located in the dominance of classical archaeologists and specialists in Greek epigraphy and material culture in this (admit-

140 These would include Parthian Warhraghn (*wrtrgn*), Middle Persian Warahran/Wahram/Bahram, Sogdian Washaghn (*wšγn*), Bactrian Orlagn (ΟΡΛΑΓΝΟ), and Armenian Vahagn. In Greek transcription, we have, for example, Ὀρθονοφατης; see Livshits 2010, 163.

141 The only possible exception would be Khwarezmian, where the name of the twentieth day of the month, according to the Istanbul manuscript of al-Biruni's *Chronology*, was Arthaghn (ʾrθγn; Livshits 1968, 445).

tedly very small) field. Others are more squarely to be attributed to certain shortcomings in the study of Zoroastrianism itself. We have dealt with the fact that Zoroastrianism, like any other religion, actually manifested itself in various ways in distinct places and periods of its wide spread and its long history. A serious reconsideration of all the evidence for Zoroastrianism in Anatolia and Armenia, including the evidence from Commagene, will go a long way in understanding this particular manifestation of Zoroastrianism.

Alongside geographical and historical variation, however, there obviously also was social variation. This, too, is generally assumed, but very difficult to prove, for the same reason that the other types of variation are difficult to demonstrate: the sources we have do not help us much. When it comes to social variation, this is due to the fact that all Zoroastrian sources, without exception, are priestly sources. Some of the difficulties that scholars have faced when trying to connect the evidence from Zoroastrian religious literature to either archaeological finds or to inscriptions find their easiest explanation in a process of mistaking idealized normative versions of Zoroastrianism for descriptions of reality. In the texts, for example, priests very clearly occupy the highest position in any imaginable social hierarchy. In real life, they did not. In the texts, priests attempt to dictate all aspects of social, political, and military decision-making. In real life, they could not. This should not be seen as an attempt to deny priests a prominent place in Iranian societies. They had an important place, as masters of ritual and keepers of tradition. But they were fare more service-oriented than can be seen in Zoroastrian texts.

It is useful, therefore, to think of Zoroastrianism in antiquity as a religion that came in four different styles, which I would term familial, dynastic, imperial, and priestly.[142] These styles obviously partly overlap: the core of Zoroastrianism is a domestic set of practices, which I call familial religion. Since a dynasty is, among many other things, also a family, there is some overlap between familial Zoroastrianism and dynastic Zoroastrianism. Since a dynasty needs to protect the majesty of its realm, there is possible overlap between dynastic Zoroastrianism and imperial Zoroastrianism. But overlap between familial religion and imperial religion is not necessarily there (see fig. 1).
The core of this representation goes back to one of the many fundamental, but strangely overlooked insights of Mary Boyce, who insisted quite clearly on the fact that what I call familial Zoroastrianism – the practice of the religion in daily life in the context of family traditions and observance – is the core of Zoroastrianism throughout its history.[143] This is more than simply stating the obvious. Since Zoroastrianism is a non-congregational religion, the 'community' actually resides in the family, not simply as the

142 I first began thinking in these terms when preparing De Jong forthcoming b, which still thinks of three styles (familial-dynastic-imperial).

143 Although she never made it the subject of a separate publication, this assumption is pervasive in most of her writings; see especially Boyce 1975 for its particular relevance for what follows.

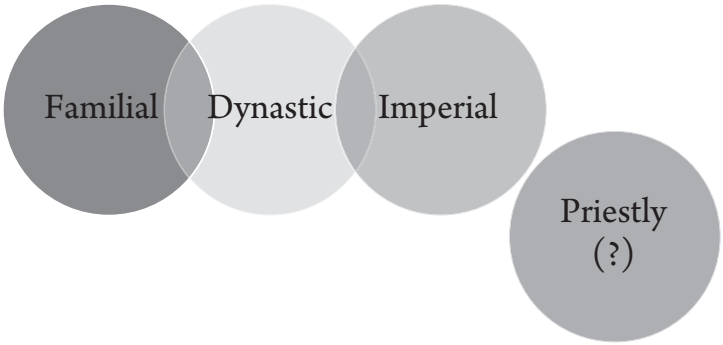

Fig. 1

most meaningful, but as the *only* religious institution. Most other aspects of Zoroastrianism are, in fact, dispensable (and historically/geographically unstable). Boyce explained many of the more eye-catching aspects of Zoroastrianism, such as the cult of fire, on the basis of this family cult, where the hearth-fire of the family would establish the family in a religious way. Since priests would reside among the families they served, it was the domestic fire of priests that would create the ritual fires necessary for community rituals. By following this logic, it can easily be shown that royal fires were (in religious terms) a further elaboration of the householder fire that would grow cold when the father of the family would die, upon which the next leader of the family would light a new fire – as did the king.

Dynastic Zoroastrianism thus is essentially familial Zoroastrianism on a grander scale. It is this phenomenon, it seems, that explains many of the materials brought together by Matthew Canepa, and while it is entirely possible that structural elements of the rituals of Middle Iranian kingship would go back to Seleucid precedents, dynastic Zoroastrianism would enable us to understand what these rituals and provisions actually meant to those involved. As we have seen king Antiochos is quite explicit about these worlds of meaning, and it is in these explicit evocations of his ideas about piety and its rewards, that his most impressive inscriptions culminate.

Imperial Zoroastrianism is a slightly different phenomenon. This would be the dynastic use of Zoroastrianism as an instrument of imperial rule. This is very well attested for the Achaemenids, whose ideology of kingship came in the language of a very close connection between Ahura Mazda and the king. It is equally well attested for the Sasanians, whose ideology of kingship mainly expresses their claim to have acted as restorers of a religiously defined monarchy. But imperial religion is not known from the Parthian Empire in any meaningful way, other than in its dynastic form.[144] In consolidating and anchoring their rule, the Arsacids relied on the familial and dynastic styles

144 See, for all of this, De Jong 2015.

of Zoroastrianism alone. The evidence from Commagene in this respect is ambiguous: the communal celebration of significant events in the king's life can clearly be seen as an example of dynastic religion, and this is obviously the case with the very heavy impact of funerary traditions in the inscriptions and the archaeology. But the warm celebration of the king's realm, the land of Commagene, and its recreation into the abode of the gods suggests something more in the nature of imperial religion.

It is important to realize that it is only the fourth style of religion, priestly Zoroastrianism, that is actually defined and maintained by Zoroastrian priests. Priests are necessary for the three other styles of Zoroastrianism as well, as experts in ritual and loyal servants of families, but they do not define these styles of Zoroastrianism. This is precisely how priests appear in the inscriptions from Commagene: as endowed employees of the king, there to perform required services. They may have assisted him, it is widely assumed, in the religious programme underlying his inscriptions, but from the polished Greek itself and the impact in the inscriptions of Greek rhetorical and philosophical elements, it is clear that Zoroastrian priests at least were not the only ones active in thinking through this programme.

Conclusion

The present article needs to be seen as a programme for possible future directions of research rather than a report on exhaustive research that has already been done. It is therefore deliberately provocative. It is inevitable that most interpretations of the evidence from Commagene, and of the religion of king Antiochos, will evince assumptions about the Hellenistic Near East, and about religion in antiquity, that bear the strong imprint of disciplinary and regional training and specialization. Hellenistic ruler cult, Greek philosophy, connectivity, Iranian royal ideology, Zoroastrianism, local religiosity have all been foregrounded as essential to interpreting the evidence, and the way these proposals are divided over the various specialists is not at all random. I have tried to show why some of these interpretations strike me as implausible, and have attempted my own reconstruction. That reconstruction relies fairly heavily on the willingness to take the king seriously. If we do so, we should follow the core lines of what he actually tells us: that it is piety that motivates him, that he desires to transform his realm into an abode of the gods, that he has personally experienced divine guidance in setting up a fitting cult for his family, and preparing one for himself, and in inviting his subjects to celebrate with him, in the hope not only of feeding them lavishly and quenching their thirst, but in the hope also of enabling them to practice piety in their own lives.

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