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Commagenean archaeology and the quest for the burial place of Antiochos I. Was Nemrut Dağı a cenotaph?

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Commagenean Archaeology and the Quest for the Burial Place of Antiochos I. Was Nemrut Dağı a Cenotaph?

(-) the sacred tomb of my body, on the topmost ridges of the Taurus range (-). / (-) I have taken forethought to lay the foundation of this sacred tomb (-) / (-) indestructible by the ravages of time (-) (Great cult inscription / Nomos III,1)

Introduction: The tomb of Antiochos I on Nemrut Dağı

From Karl Sester's discovery of the monument of Nemrut Dağı at the end of the nineteenth century onwards, many scholars working on the mountain and its *hierothesion* have looked for the burial place of king Antiochos I, who ruled Commagene from around 70 BCE until his death in 36 BCE (Fig. 1).[1] So far, however, the quest to locate the tomb has been in vain and speculations about its whereabouts on the site and its characteristics have proliferated as a result. In this essay we will first provide a brief overview of the most important hypotheses to date, concluding that no *communis opinio* on the matter has arisen whatsoever. Nor, for that matter, has the burial place of Antiochos I been found or located with certainty. For that reason, we will, secondly, provide a different hypothesis that, we feel, is overlooked and should be made part of the discussion: the possibility that the body of Antiochos I was not buried at Nemrut Dağı at all. This essay will *not* conclude that such indeed is the case but rather argue that the idea that Nemrut Dağı was a cenotaph – a word that literally means 'empty tomb' in ancient Greek and that is used to indicate a monument, generally in the form of a vacant sepulcher, which is erected to honor a dead person whose remains are elsewhere – should be considered a serious hypothesis. Lastly, we will argue that the quest for the burial place of Antiochos I, central to the work of many of Nemrut Dağı's explorers in the twentieth and twenty-first century, is, in fact, of relatively minor and subordinate meaning for Commagenean archaeology at large. It should therefore not (be allowed to) play a central role in future research: the (archaeological) investigation of Commagene has other priorities. Through his work in Doliche, the honorand of this volume, Professor Engelbert Winter, has, as one of the towering figures in Commagenean archaeology from the final decades of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century, already set the example, also in this respect.

The Quest for the Burial Place of Antiochos I: An Ancient Source and Modern Reconstructions

All scholarly hypotheses on the location of the burial place of Antiochos I at Nemrut Dağı depart from the same and single source; the *Nomos* compiled by the king himself. The term *Nomos* (literally 'law') refers to the Great Cult Inscription inscribed on the back of the throne-bases of the colossal statues of Nemrut Dağı's East and West terraces (Fig. 2). The inscription provides all kinds of decrees regarding the functioning of the sanctuary as well as the intentions of Antiochos I for building it. Parts of the same text were found at other Commagenean sites as well and we may therefore conclude that, as a form of monumental writing, the text was displayed on a variety of monuments all around the king-

1 For introductions to and interpretations of the site see, most recently, Brijder (2014); Versluys (2017); Blömer et al. (2021). We would like to thank Michael Blömer and Eric M. Moormann for their critical reading of the manuscript. This study was supported by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) through the Dutch Research Council (NWO), as part of the Anchoring Innovation Gravitation Grant research agenda of OIKOS, the National Research School in Classical Studies, the Netherlands (project number 024.003.012).

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Fig. 1: Nemrut Dağı, Eastern Terrace, overview of the current situation. (© Forschungsstelle Asia Minor).

dom, certainly also for reasons of dynastic *Selbstdarstellung*.[2] What does it tell us about the possible location of the tomb? The relevant passage reads as follows:

> And I have taken forethought to lay the foundation of this sacred tomb, which is to be indestructible by the ravages of time, in close proximity to the heavenly throne, wherein the fortunately preserved outer form of my person, preserved to ripe old age, shall, after the soul beloved by god has been sent to the heavenly thrones of Zeus-Oromasdes, rest through immeasurable time so I chose to make this holy place a common consecrated seat of all the gods; so that not only the heroic company of my ancestors, whom you behold for you, might be set up here by my pious devotion, but also that the divine representation of the manifest deities might be consecrated on the holy hill and that this place might likewise not be lacking in witness to my piety. (II, 1)

In part III, 1, moreover, the text identifies Nemrut Dağı as "*the sacred tomb of my body, on the topmost ridges of the Taurus range*."

The *Nomos*, therefore, is very clear about the fact that Antiochos I would be interred *on* the site. Departing from that conclusion and, therefore, taking the text at face value as historical evidence, all expeditions exploring the monument archaeologically have looked for it subsequently. Carl Humann, the first archaeologist working on Nemrut Dağı in the 1880s, imagined there would be some kind of dromos that would enter the tumulus from the outside.[3] To verify this hypothesis, he opened the altar-like structure on the East Terrace, without, however, finding any evidence for an entrance to the tumulus whatsoever. In fact, Theresa Goell, together with Friedrich Karl Dörner the most prominent explorer of Nemrut Dağı in the twentieth century (see below), accuses her predecessor of destroying large parts of this

2 We quote the *Nomos* after the translation of F. K. Dörner that was finalized in 1991 and published in Goell/Sanders (1996) 206–217. For a brief introduction and interpretation of its function, see Versluys (2017) 101–104, 124–127, 168–172.

3 Akin to the construction of the Mycenaean tombs that Humann would have been familiar with.

Fig. 2: Nemrut Dağı, Western Terrace, Nomos Inscription, at the back of the footstools of the colossal statues (© Forschungsstelle Asia Minor).

structure in order to find the entrance of the tumulus.[4] The Ottoman expedition led by Osman Hamdi Bey that investigated the monument around the same time, mentions that a lot of traces of attempts to enter the tumulus could be detected: "Because one hoped to discover a tomb full of treasures, large holes had been made behind the colossal statues on both terraces, in an effort to enter the tumulus."[5] These holes probably have to be interpreted as the activities of tomb robbers prior to the first archaeological expeditions. Apparently these Raubgräber have never been able, over the centuries, to find a tomb.

After these first two missions from the end of the nineteenth century, archaeological work was only resumed in earnest from around the 1950s onwards by Dörner and Goell.[6] Both were actively trying to find the tomb of Antiochos I. In his popularising overview of Commagenean archaeology published in the 1980s, Dörner presents his work and ideas on the tomb in a brief chapter entitled "*Das Geheimnis des Nemrud Dağ*".[7] Dörner writes that he had his own try in 1956, while he was working with a team at Arsameia ad Nymphaeum. Directed by the "erfahrenen Bergleute Wilhelm Jessusseck und Wilhelm Stank"[8], so he says, he had the Turkish workmen to first clear the gravel that fell down from

4 Sanders/Goell (1996) 114 with n. 46 talks about: "reckless destruction (-) in their search for the entrance of Antiochus' tomb". In view of Goell's own work in this regard, that we will discuss below, this is quite a remarkable statement.

5 Hamdi Bey/Efendi (1883) 10, quoted after Brijder (2014) 192.

6 For an excellent and extensive overview of the history of research, see Brijder (2014) 176–310 (for Commagene) and 311–431 (for Nemrut Dağı specifically).

7 Dörner (1987) 241–243, starting with the observation: »Immer wieder hat man versucht, einen Zugang zum Inneren des Tumulus aufzuspüren, wie einige Aushöhlungen anzeigen« (241). These were probably the same traces that Hamdi Bey talked about.

8 Dörner (1987) 242.

the tumulus and had assembled at the back of the footstools of the colossi. After that, they started building a tunnel behind the statue of Zeus-Oromasdes:

> Ausgehend von der Annahme, dass der gesamte Tumulus aus Schotter aufgeschüttet sei, hofften wir, auf diese Weise in das Innere des Hügels vordringen zu können. Aber wir kamen nicht weit; denn schon bald setzte der gewachsene Felsen unserem weiteren Vordringen ein Ende.[9]

Dörner, therefore, did not find the entrance of the tumulus but discovered that the tumulus did not consist of gravel, as had been generally thought so far, but largely of the natural rock of the mountain that was terraced and then covered by a layer of gravel alone.

Although Dörner does not mention Goell in his Chapter, these explorations must have been undertaken together with her, as the two scholars were working together at Nemrut Dağı in these years. In fact, Goell writes in similar terms about her search for the tomb in 1954:

> We drove a tunnel westward from the colossos of Zeus towards the core of the tumulus. (. . .) We also hoped to locate in this process a *dromos* leading to the royal tomb. At 5.40 m. our tunnel reached the east face of a rock-cut platform (. . .) above which a sloping stepped revetment of stone led to a second platform (. . .). On this upper level a cavity had suggested to our minds the opening of a *dromos*. This proved to be misleading, for it turned out to be a previous drilling made by tomb-robbers. What we did find was the living rock of the mountain beneath the gravel facing of the tumulus and the continuation of the stepped revetment upward.[10]

It seems that both authors describe the same activities that they must have undertaken together in 1954 (and not 1956 as Dörner later remembered it). They were without any concrete results regarding the location of the tomb.

Seismic investigations aimed at examining the natural rock and look for a tomb hewn somewhere in the limestone mountain were, therefore, a logical next step; and these were indeed executed soon after. First by the Italian Lerici-Institut, in 1963, through electrical resistance measurements, and then, in 1964, by Jeremy R. Hutt through other geophysical measurements (and sponsored by the National Geographic Society).[11] Both attempts were (only) able to identify "anomalies" in the mountain that could, however, very well be natural features. Much has been said about (the importance as well as the flaws of) Goell's work that was finally published in the 1990s.[12] Most relevant in the context of this paper is the observation by Brijder, with which we agree, that Goell "(-) was obviously mesmerized by the idea to discover Antiochus' tomb": the ultimate goal of her campaigns in the 1950s and 1960s indeed was finding the king's burial place.[13] Her attempts, however, were in vein. It might even be true, moreover, that the dynamite used for the geophysics undertaken in the 1960s resulted in severe damage to the colossal statue of Commagene on the East Terrace.[14]

Between 1987 and 1990, Dörners's scholars Elmar Schwertheim, Jörg Wagner and Sencer Şahin started a new project on Nemrut Dağı to which restoration and preservation were key. They also, however, continued looking for the tomb by using geophysics. Şahin mentions „Tumulusforschung: Erforschung der Tumulusstruktur und Versuch der Or-

9 Dörner (1987) 242.

10 Goell (1957) 12–13 in a section entitled »Search for the tomb«; also quoted in Brijder (2014) 303, with pictures (fig. 195a–b) clearly showing the activities Goell describes and their results. For the figure of Theresa Goell and her work on the site see Moormann/Versluys (2005) 139–141 and Brijder (2014) 298–310.

11 Brijder (2014) 401–407 provides a detailed overview of this work and its results and consequences.

12 Goell/Sanders (1996) see the comments in Jacobs (1998) and Brijder (2014) 298–310. 402–409.

13 Brijder (2014) 302. This also becomes clear from the excellent biographical sketch of Goell's life by Donald H. Sanders and David W. J. Gill (Sanders/Gill [2004] 482–524), who draw from the Theresa B. Goell Archives (housed at the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College and at the Semitic Museum, Harvard University), which include Goell's excavation reports, personal letters and interviews. They write: "Having finally reached the site that seemed for so long but a legend, Theresa Goell began planning a way to fulfil her dream of many years – to excavate the tomb of Antiochus I of Commagene, atop Nemrud Dagi" (493).

14 As suggested by Brijder (2014) 402–405, see already Moormann/Versluys (2005) 140–141. Goell herself suggested that the statue had been struck by lightning and in a letter of October 1, 1963, to Prof. William F. Albright, written in Eski Kâhta, commented as follows: "The reports of our experiments – circulated by the local gossip and trouble-makers – that we were blowing up Nemrud Dagh created a running sensation, and we were visited frequently by gendarmes, muhtars [headmen], and local officials. Finally, I was summoned to Yeni Kahta and Adiyaman to explain what we were blowing up. It was quite a trip in the midst of our work, but my descriptions and the photographs of the sound-waves allayed all suspicions about what we were doing with dynamite in a restricted military zone. They finally were convinced that I had received clean permission for the work and after six days of running around I was on Nemrud Dagh again – rather weather-beaten but safe and sound". (from Sanders/Gill [2004] 510).

tung der königlichen Grabkammer“ as a distinct part of the project; and its proposed planning makes clear that opening the tomb („Eröffnung der Grabkammer (ohne äußere Schädigung des Tumulus), falls die Erkenntnisse aus den Photos dies rechtfertigen“) is imagined as part of this program.[15] The results of the geophysics turned out to be important for a better understanding of the geological features of the limestone core of the tumulus and, again, showed several anomalies that indicate the existence of cavities. However, such cavities are often a natural phenomenon in limestone bedrock and do not necessarily indicate the existence of a (man-made) tomb chamber hewn from the rock. As Lütjen and Utecht prudently concluded: „Die Anomalien sind deshalb nicht unmittelbar als ›Grabkammern‹ zu interpretieren.“[16]

The International Nemrut Dağ Project under the aegis of Herman Brijder (University of Amsterdam) executed fieldwork on site in the years 2001–2003.[17] Although locating the tomb was never officially part of the project's objectives it certainly played an important role in the background. When, in the 2003 season, the statue of Antiochos I on the East Terrace was stabilised, a square block was found lying in the centre of the lowest course of the statue, on the bedrock. This immediately instigated ideas about a tunnel leading into the mountain as an entrance to the tomb. Brijder quotes Maurice Crijns, who functioned as project coordinator and whose International Nemrud Foundation was the main sponsor of the International Nemrut Dağ Project, as saying that the block does not provide any structural stability and therefore might be a cover stone for some sort of cavity.[18] Earlier, Crijns had already outlined, in a popular publication, his ideas about the location of the tomb and in conversations with team members he mentioned the subject often as being one of his main objectives.[19] In the years 2005–2010, the Middle East Technical University (METU) conducted a large-scale Turkish project at the site in the form of the *Commagene Nemrut Conservation and Development Program* (CNCDP), which focused solely on the conservation of the site.[20]

From this brief overview we may conclude that for almost all archaeological teams working on the mountain the quest for the burial place of Antiochos I was an important, if not central concern. In scholarly literature, many (implicit) suggestions of its whereabouts and characteristics surface. In their archaeological guide to Commagene, Michael Blömer and Engelbert Winter argue that Mithridates II, the son of Antiochos I, buried the body of his father “in the space designated for it in the tomb on Nemrut Dağ”; prudently refraining from any further specifics on this burial place.[21] Herman Brijder draws our attention to the fact that, in the *Nomos*, Antiochos I says that he first laid the foundations of his sanctuary and that “in these foundations” his mortal remains will rest. This leads him to the interesting suggestion that the tomb must be associated with the foundation or platforms of the monument rather than with the tumulus.[22] When Bruno Jacobs discusses the choice for the mountain of Nemrut Dağı as burial place, he draws on Karakuş and Sesönk as (chronologically younger) parallels for Nemrut Dağı in terms of the building structure of the tomb: “(-) in ihrer Architektur von diesem insofern abhängig, als auch bei ihnen das Grab resp. die Gräber durch einen Mantel aus geschütteten Steinen geschützt werden.”[23]

It is useful to discuss the tumulus of Karakuş a bit more in depth since the monument is frequently evoked as an important parallel for Nemrut Dağı as tomb-monument. Karakuş is located close to Nemrut and was commissioned under Antiochos I's direct successor and son Mithridates II.[24] Like Nemrut Dağı, it consists of a tumulus that is surrounded, at three sides, by architectural and sculptural decorations; these recall the Antiochan program. Although much smaller and less elaborate or grand, Karakuş is therefore commonly interpreted as imitating the design of Nemrut

15 Şahin (1991) 28.

16 Lütjen/Utecht (1991) 38.

17 See the interim reports Moormann/Versluys (2002), Moormann/Versluys (2003) and Moormann/Versluys (2005) and the final publication in Brijder (2014).

18 Brijder (2014) 445.

19 Personal observation M. J. Versluys. Crijns thereby often referred to the geophysical research by T. Utecht. The finding and opening of the tomb were part of the original project proposal as formulated by the International Nemrud Foundation (INF) but taken out by Brijder and his team and thus not included in the official application of the International Nemrut Dağ Project and its planning.

20 In fact, one of the project's leading investigators, Neriman Şahin Güçhan, explicitly distanced herself from previous efforts to find the tomb, cf. Şahin Güçhan (2011) 314.

21 Blömer/Winter (2011) 64.

22 Brijder (2014) 79.

23 Jacobs (2002) 31. More recent interpretations date the tumulus of Sesönk to a later period and therefore as not related to the Antiochan program, see Blömer (2008).

24 For Karakuş, its figurative and epigraphic evidence, as well as its assumed chamber tomb, see Brijder (2014) 60–62. 214–219.

Dağı. The epigraphic sources available on the site of Karakuş suggest that Mithridates II's mother Isias, his sister Antiochis and the latter's daughter Aka were interred there. One of the Commagenean royal women also commemorated here is queen Loadice, Antiochos I's sister and the wife of the Parthian king Orodes II. We know that Loadice was killed in far-away Parthia, together with her husband, in 38 BCE and it is therefore generally assumed that Karakuş functioned merely as a cenotaph for her.[25] If this is indeed the case, it suggests that the concept of a (dynastic) cenotaph was used at the Antiochan court.

In fact, when we look closer at the available evidence for a possible tomb chamber in the tumulus of Karakuş, the evidence proves to be meagre at best. Dörner conducted drillings at the tumulus and concluded that the chamber tomb was located slightly off-centre.[26] His interpretation is largely based on the anomalous but irregular occurrence of hard dolomite limestone, interpreted as building material for the tomb-chamber, in combination with a soft sandy and clayish material that he understood as the tomb-chamber's filling. These interpretations, however, were never verified through excavations. The fact that he only found evidence for a few hard limestone blocks, Dörner explained by hypothesising Roman-period grave robbers that would not only have removed the contents of the grave but also almost its entire architectural structure. The rationale behind such a laborious undertaking, according to Dörner, would have been the reuse of these blocks in the construction of the nearby Cendere bridge. This hypothesis, however, as both Blömer and Brijder have already rightly argued, is highly unlikely and not supported by any archaeological or epigraphic evidence.[27]

What we are left with, then, is the mere *assumption* of the presence of a chamber tomb at Karakuş, based on the epigraphic information and rather minimal and ambiguous coring results. The fact that scholarship has so far accepted this assumption and not worried about the absence of convincing archaeological evidence has to do, we argue, with the *a priori* conviction that a chamber tomb simply *has* to be present inside the tumulus, as this also was the case at Nemrut Dağı. As a result, we end up with a circular argument. It is important to underline, therefore, that neither in Karakuş nor at Nemrut Dağı a tomb chamber has been archaeologically attested. Volker Eid is the only scholar, to our knowledge, who recently suggested that Antiochos I might have selected a location for his tomb somewhere away from the monument in order to escape grave robbers.[28]

An Overlooked Possibility: Was Nemrut Dağı a Cenotaph?

Despite a century and a half of research on the location of the tomb of Antiochos I, no *communis opinio* on the matter has arisen. Nor, for that matter, has the burial place of Antiochos I been located or found. It is for that reason that we think it might be useful to add another hypothesis to the debate: the idea that Antiochos I was not buried at the site at all and that Nemrut Dağı is, in fact, a cenotaph.

Several indications might be understood as pointing in that direction. In the *Nomos*, for instance, attention for the tomb is limited and remains very general, while there is, on the contrary, a lot of detailed attention to the monument as a religious center for the cult of Antiochos I and his pantheon. We know, moreover, that the sanctuary was probably finished in a rather hurried-along manner when the king died around 36 BCE. Politically and otherwise, circumstances were very different at that moment than they were when the monument was originally designed, around 50 BCE. Now, around 36 BCE, Marc Antony was the strongman in the wider region and at this point in time the fate of what we know as the second Triumvirate was still anything but secure; let alone the (political) implications for Commagene and its kings.[29] Was it still feasible to bury the king as planned? Or had it always been the idea to suggest the presence of the tomb for religious and dynastic reasons, but to bury the king elsewhere so that his tomb could not be robbed? This

25 Brijder (2014) 61; Wagner (1983) 210.
26 Dörner (1975); Dörner (1987) 55–58.
27 Blömer (2008) 104 n. 5; Brijder (2014) 218.
28 Eid (2006) 111.
29 See Facella (2006).

strategy is well-known from a variety of ancient contexts, as we will discuss further below. It is remarkable, moreover, that none of the other dynastic tombs that Antiochos I mentions in his inscriptions have been located.[30]

Most illustrative is the case of Arsameia ad Nymphaeum (Eski Kahta), the *hierothesion* which, according to one of the Antiochan inscriptions found at the site, would contain the tomb of Mithridates I. During excavations in the 1950s, the tomb was expected at the end of a rock-cut tunnel, which departs from a platform that includes an inscription of the *Nomos* as well as a so-called *dexiosis* relief (Fig. 3). Over several years, the German team managed to fully excavate the tunnel but without any concrete finds, let alone the discovery of a royal tomb.[31] This has been one of the reasons why Miguel John Versluys, following ideas by Wolfram Hoepfner, suggested that the *Nomos* and other Antiochan texts are, in fact, attempts at claiming and constructing history rather than historical sources we can use to reconstruct ancient Commagenean reality on the ground.[32] Antiochos I boasts three royal tombs in his inscriptions and so far none of them has been located and found.[33] In combination with the fact that the Antiochan project seems to be characterized by the invention of traditions in the first place; shouldn't that make us wonder?

We think it should, and this is an important argument to try and explore other hypotheses. In this article we put forward the idea that Nemrut Dağı was perhaps a symbolic tomb alone and as such. There is, in fact, quite some evidence for the existence of such cenotaphs in Antiquity. How relevant are these parallels for what happened in Commagene around the middle of the first century BCE? Let us briefly review some of the evidence, starting in Pharaonic Egypt, from which cenotaphs are well-known, and then move closer to Nemrut Dağı in time and place.

In Egyptology and the study of ancient Egyptian (funerary) cult, the concept of the cenotaph is used to indicate both royal and private tombs devoid of actual burial as well as other buildings of a mortuary nature without buried people in it. In ancient Egypt, a cenotaph embodied specific religious concepts and functions in the context of funerary practice. We know of tombs that "did not contain the actual interment of a body, but which through other contents or specific features are identifiable as having a symbolic function for the afterlife of the deceased" as well as "mortuary buildings where a funerary/offering cult was maintained, although the actual burial of the deceased was elsewhere." In both cases the function was "providing necessary housing and support for the *ka* of the deceased."[34] Cenotaphs, therefore, can be characterized as symbolic tombs without an actual burial and are, indeed, well-known from Pharaonic history. At the same time, however, there are in Egypt many empty or unused royal tombs that do not appear to have been purposefully designed as cenotaphs. Some kings, for instance, possessed multiple tombs and then the question of the actual versus the symbolic burial place becomes an issue. The existence of multiple tombs can also be explained from practical reasons like construction problems or political shifts. Religious reasons and issues of "postmortem transfigurations", however, might play a role as well.[35]

30 In total three dynastic tombs are known from their mentioning in Antiochian inscriptions: his own tomb, which would be at Nemrut Dağı; the tomb of his father Mithridates, which would be at Arsameia ad Nymphaeum and the tomb of his grandfather Samos, which would be in Arsameia ad Euphratem.

31 For an overview and evaluation of these excavations see Brijder (2014) 238–278 (with full bibliography); 252–255 for the (excavation of) the tunnel, as well as Versluys (2017) 174–177. As an alternative, Brijder (2014) 263–264, following ideas already expressed by Arsameia excavator Wolfram Hoepfner, has suggested to see the very large, 9 m high hall on the southern slope of the hill, cut out from the rock and with a subterranean chamber, as the tomb of Mithridates I. As the chamber was completely empty, however, Brijder prudently suggests that it might have functioned as a *kenotaphion* during the reign of Antiochos I who had the body buried elsewhere during his renovation of the site that is mentioned in the royal inscriptions. For both suggestions (that this place originally was the tomb of Mithridates I and that it would have functioned as a cenotaph later) there is no real evidence.

32 Versluys (2017) 172–184, talking about an unjustified methodological confidence about our sources in this respect and urging scholars to look »beyond the dynastic *mise en scène.*« (182).

33 We might indeed ask whether all three were meant as symbolic tombs alone; and Karakuş might be added to that list, as discussed above. See also the ideas expressed by Brijder on a possible cenotaph for Mithridates I in Arsameia discussed above (note 31): was the large hall and its subterranean chamber meant as a cenotaph from the outset?

34 Definitions and formulations after Wegner (2005). The notoriously difficult-to-understand notion of *ka* indicates something like the divine spirit of a person; its (spiritual) double.

35 For an analysis of the Abydos material in these terms, see the interesting essay Pouls Wegner (2020). Might similar considerations have played a role for Antiochos I? Collar (2021) explores the landscape of Nemrut Dağı from a comparable perspective already.

Fig. 3: Arsameia on the Nymphaios, dexiosis relief from the platform near the rock-cut tunnel. (© Forschungsstelle Asia Minor).

For the Mediterranean world, cenotaphs and the practice of constructing symbolic tombs as a memorial for the dead are already mentioned by Homer.[36] Archaeologically attested cenotaphs from the archaic period include those of Apollonia (in Albania) and Kerkyra (in Greece).[37] A remarkable example from the Classical period is the cenotaph for Battus in Cyrene that was built to replace, also ideologically, the tumulus with the remains of the city's founder that dated two centuries earlier and was located next to it.[38] Early Hellenistic cenotaphs have been identified near Ephesos (the Belevi

36 Schnapp-Gourbeillon (2016). Her chapter is part of an important recent volume on our subject, entitled *Tumulus as Sema*, on which this section is largely based; De Jong (2021) is a fine starting point to explore religious developments in this vein for Antiochan Commagene.

37 For Apollonia see Amore (2016) 66 n. 40: "A similar structure was found in Tumulus 1 (grave 119) and identified by the excavator as a cenotaph. Here traces of burning were found as well as fragments of Corinthian and black-figures Attic ceramic vessels, which allowed dating the feature to the Archaic period. However, unlike ›grave 62‹, no bones at all were found". For Kerkyra see Naso (2016) 14: "The little tumulus of Menekrates on the island of Kerkyra on the Greek coast across the sea from southern Italy was surely a cenotaph: measuring just 5 meters in diameter, it is completely built with stone blocks. (…) There is no entrance and the monument was totally inaccessible. A dating around 600 BC is certain thanks to a Greek inscription and a lion statue found nearby (…)".

38 Kreutz (2016) 23–24: "This rebuilding was realized by the removal of the remains of the original tumulus grave and by the construction of a new monument placed directly to the east. An oblong pit was dug in the ground, lined with carefully worked ashlars as to form a sarcophagus-like stone cist. It was sealed at the top with flat horizontal stone slabs lying at the height of the ground level. Above the stone cist, a tumulus was heaped up, its dimensions corresponding approximately to those of the older mound above Battus' grave. In this way, a monument came into existence that, as to the formal aspects, conformed to a tumulus grave but which was, in fact, a cenotaph: no traces of grave goods or an interment have been found inside the stone case below the mound. Thus, its immediate adjacency to Battus' original burial and its tumulus shape do not allow any other conclusion than the identification of this new monument with a substitute for the founder's original tomb which was a heroon."

tumulus) and on Cyprus.[39] Cenotaphs are well-known from Roman period Anatolia; with two examples dating to the period briefly after the reign of Antiochos I. When Gaius Caesar, grandson and adopted child of Augustus, died in Limyra in 4 CE, after having been wounded during a battle in Armenia, he was buried in Rome, in the mausoleum of Augustus. On the spot, the Limyrans erected a cenotaph.[40] The same happens when Germanicus dies in Antioch in 19 CE: his ashes are deposited in Augustus' tomb in Rome while in Antioch on mount Amanus (and other places around the Empire for that matter) symbolic tombs are erected.[41] In eastern Thrace, lastly, six excavated tumuli that date from the late classical to the Roman period are believed to have been cenotaphs.[42] This brief overview, that, moreover, we base on the recent volume edited by Ute Kelp and Olivier Henry alone, shows that the cenotaph had a long history in (various parts of) the ancient world and that the concept as such, therefore, will not have been unknown to Antiochos I and his advisors, who were very well aware of the global world they lived in, and its history.[43] Incorporating this element could be an attempt to anchor the innovation that the Antiochan project represents. From that perspective, therefore, it is, in theory, certainly not impossible that Nemrut Dağı was a cenotaph.

Commagenean Archaeology: Moving Beyond the Antiochan Project

Writing up the results of a lifetime of working in Commagene at the end of his career, Dörner evaluated the quest for the tomb of Antiochos I at Nemrut Dağı as follows: "Dringender als eine Suche nach der Schatzkammer des Königs Antiochos I. von Kommagene auf dem Nemrud Dağ ist die Verpflichtung, der immer weiter um sich greifenden Zerstörung der großartigen Götterstatuen Einhalt zu gebieten."[44] We could not agree more. Besides such concerns for the *hierothesion*'s preservation, however, there is also a scholarly argument to explore other questions and invest in different issues. A century of Commagenean scholarship has yielded a thorough understanding of Antiochos I's propagandistic project, the power of its images, and the symbolism of its messages as expressed in texts, objects and ideas. If his burial place indeed would be located at Nemrut Dağı, which is a possibility we do certainly not discard, we may expect to find the same set of elements: the gods of his pantheon, *dexiosis* and coronation reliefs, a horoscope, Persian as well as Seleucid and Macedonian ancestors, the *Nomos*, et cetera. Perhaps this time these have been executed in precious metals, and finding them would no doubt make newspaper headlines worldwide, but scientifically it would bring us relatively little new, we argue, because we already are familiar with these elements as such. To understand what they meant to people in the ancient world and how they impacted them, we need to look beyond the Antiochan project and investigate its local, regional and global context. No systematic intensive field survey has been carried out in the territory of ancient Commagene. We know very little about its countryside, villages and cities; and even the capital of Samosata remains underexplored.[45] One of the main problems of Commagenean archaeology, in fact, is the overrepresentation of sources pertaining to the Antiochan dynastic project.[46] Instead of zooming in on Antiochos I, let alone the extreme myopia of looking for his tomb, Commagenean archaeology would be wise to zoom out; not only in order to explore many other

39 For the first, see Kasper (1975). For the second, tumulus tomb 77 in the Famagusta Bay on east Cyprus, see Carstens (2016) 44: "Complex tumuli built above or constructed with both concentric and radiating retaining walls covered at least two of the so-called royal tombs at Salamis in the Famagusta Bay of eastern Cyprus: Tomb 3, one of the famous princely burials of the Early Iron Age, and the so-called Tomb of Nicocreon, Tomb 77, from the early Hellenistic period. During the excavations in the 1960s this tumulus, a cenotaph, which covered a paved platform with a large-scale sacrificial deposit, was completely destroyed."

40 For this monument see still Ganzert (1984).

41 When the emperor Trajan dies, unexpectedly, in Selinus, on his way back from a Parthian war, his ashes are brought to Rome in an urn while in Selinus a cenotaph is constructed as well. These are the three best-known examples; see Rose/Körpe (2016) 378: "(-) other great Imperial cenotaphs in Anatolia (-) include those of Gaius Caesar at Limyra, Trajan at Cilician Selinus, and Germanicus at Mt. Amanus near Antioch."

42 See Yildirim (2016) 362–363: "These are Alpullu Tumulus, Hasköy, Umurca Tumulus C, Vize Tumulus D, Vize Tumulus G and Vize Tumulus I.35 (-) Neither burial nor ritual traces were found inside these tumuli. It is accepted that some of these tumuli are cenotaphs, although one cannot exclude the possibility that the burials might have not been found yet."

43 Versluys/Riedel (2021) for the global world of the first century BCE and place of Antiochian Commagene within that context.

44 Dörner (1987) 244.

45 Now Kruijer (2024) for an overview of the state of the art of our knowledge and adding new data on the first century BCE dynastic palace.

46 See Versluys/Riedel (2021) for a more in-depth evaluation along these lines.

relevant subjects but also to understand this project in its proper historical context and beyond the dynastic *mise en scène*.

It is very commendable, therefore, that the honorand of this volume, throughout his rich and rewarding career, has followed a very different strategy in his research on Commagene: orienting the *Forschungsstelle Asia Minor* away from Nemrut Dağı and focusing on the site of Doliche and from a long-term perspective instead. This has provided us with a wealth of new insights concerning ancient Commagene, its religion and its non-royal social strata. These data have, in their turn, also added valuable context to the project of Antiochos I. His work has therefore proven invaluable for clearing the path forward for the field. Lieber Engelbert: *ad multos annos*!

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