

Time, Echoes and Experience

*Perceiving the Landscape in Commagene**

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Introduction

Commagene is mountainous, riverine, heavy with snow in winter and thick with dust in summer. Even sequestered in the modern cities, the landscape crowds in and cannot be ignored. The landscape, and how the landscape was perceived, is an essential part of the discussion of Commagene itself. In this chapter, I frame a discussion of the landscape and its perception around twin poles: the impact of the landscape on the formation of Hellenistic culture, and how the people who lived in Commagene may have perceived the Hellenistic monuments built by their kings. Accessing past perception is extremely difficult (impossible?) and this has led to the approach taken here, where I set out three interconnected ways of attempting to access how ancient inhabitants may have perceived the landscape of Commagene. First, the forms of the 'natural' landscape, and how the physical facts of mountains, sky and rivers may have influenced how the people who lived there felt about themselves and perceived themselves as a group (or not). Second, cognitive aspects of landscape, that is, the myths and the stories that were told in and of the landscape, and how they may have shaped the landscape and its understanding. And third, social forms of landscape perception, through the ways that the landscape was physically changed – both by the elite, and also by the forgotten masses – through participation in extraordinary events such as religious rituals or large scale building projects.

Each of these elements is worked through in three different ways in this chapter. Starting by questioning the 'betweenness' with which Commagene is often described, the first approach to thinking about landscape perception asks how time depth contributes to how people perceive themselves, here thinking about how inhabitants prior

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to the Hellenistic period used and marked the natural landscape, transforming it into mental and social space. Second, to examine ways the Hellenistic occupants responded to these earlier narratives, myths, deities and monuments, and built a sense of their own mental and social place in the landscape, I suggest the metaphorical notion of 'echoes', as a way to draw out aspects of landscape perception that may be witnessed in parallels between the built monuments of the Commagenian kings, those of rulers before them, and the natural landscape. And finally, to attempt to address issues of experiencing the landscape, I conclude by thinking about the physical presence and visibility of the Commagenian monuments and how they influenced social behaviours, that is, how both the royal family and ordinary people would have participated in or interacted with them, and how these monuments contributed to building a mental map of the world that contributed to the construction of a Commagenian self-narrative.

Time Depth

The landscape of Commagene is marked by the colossal watercourse of the Euphrates at the eastern border of the rocky, difficult mountain terrain of the north, and the gentler hills to the south of the region. Although Commagene possesses diverse landscapes within its tentatively reconstructed borders¹, there are clear differences from the surrounding plains to the east of the Euphrates, or to the west of the Taurus range (see fig. 2 in the volume's introduction). The physical facts of mountains, sky, rivers and forests may well have contributed to the self-perception of the inhabitants, but to try to avoid environmental determinism, here I will think about how the people who lived here in the Iron Age and Hellenistic period used and marked this diverse and dramatic natural landscape, and how awareness of time depth contributes to how the people of Hellenistic Commagene perceived themselves as belonging to this place.

The story begins with the earliest records of the area. Taking a long view over 3000 years, the area later known as 'Commagene' seems to have indeed been a land sandwiched 'between' the Hittites in Anatolia and the Assyrians in Mesopotamia, but the people would not necessarily have described themselves as living 'between'. The area is perhaps to be identified in the middle Bronze Age Hittite records from Hattuša

1 The outlines of Commagene are not precise. For example, Seleukeia/Zeugma, the twin cities on the Euphrates that sit at the southern/eastern edge of Commagene, changed hands a number of times: given to Antiochos I by Pompey in 65/64 BCE, it was reallocated to the province of Syria a few years later by Octavian, as punishment for Commagene siding with Antony at Actium (see Versluys 2018, 49). There is argument too about Doliche's inclusion within the boundary of Commagene: Millar 1993 suggests that it too was allocated to Roman Syria by Octavian, Blömer – Winter 2011 suggest that it was part of Commagene for only 37 years; whereas Brijder 2014, 218, following Wagner 1975 suggests that Doliche was one of the four cities of Commagene mentioned in the inscription on the Chabinas Bridge in the period of Septimius Severus.

as a semi-independent region belonging to a city called Kummaha;² more firmly, the city-state of Kummuh that is identified with the later Hellenistic capital of Commagene, Samosata³, is known from the annals of the Middle Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (c. 1114–1076 BCE). Located between the kingdoms of Malatya to the north and Karkamiš to the south⁴, Kummuh was situated on the banks of the Euphrates, and is now submerged by the floodwaters created by the Atatürk Dam. The enormous tell of the city occupied a strategic ford on the great river, offering one of the more accessible places through which trade and communications could pass from Mesopotamia into the Anatolian plateau.⁵ Kummuh seems to have grown wealthy on its position, and Kummuhian merchants are known to have sold skins and linen in Harran, for example.⁶ In the later Iron Age, c. 900–700 BCE, Kummuh became a truly independent kingdom, a part of the collection of small Neo-Hittite states that carved out their places along the old borders between the Hittite and Assyrian Empires. The Hittite heritage of (some of) the people is clearly witnessed in the names of the rulers, which drew on the names of the Hittite kings at Hattuša – Šuppiluliuma, Hattušili.⁷ Kummuh was, however, allied with Assyria during most of this period, as witnessed in references to the tribute paid by Kummuh to Assyria under Aššurnasirpal II (866 BCE)⁸, or in objects such as the Pazarçık Stele, which records the boundary between Kummuh as Assyrian client kingdom and its neighbour Gurgum (Kahramanmaraş) in 805 BCE.⁹ Following a brief, and given the quantity of tribute he demanded, perhaps forced, alliance with Sarduri II of Urartu in the mid-700s, Kummuh was welcomed back into the Assyrian fold, before Sargon II finally extended Assyrian occupation into the surrounding regions of Melid (Malatya) and Gurgum, and conquered Kummuh for good in 708 BCE, after the king, Muwatalli, changed allegiance and sided with Urartu. Sargon's annals

2 It is not certain that this Kummaha is the same as the later city and kingdom of Kummuh – Garstang and Gurney have identified Kummaha as Kemakh, further to the north near Erzincan: Garstang – Gurney 1959, 35, but see Röllig 1997, 286, where he instead argues for Kummaha being located further south of Karkamiš at Tell Ahmar. However, Röllig also mentions that in the region of Kummaha are “forests and the landscape seems to be mountainous” (Röllig 1997, 286). This does not tally well with the topography of Tell Ahmar.

3 See also the contribution by Kruijjer and Riedel in this volume.

4 Bryce 2012, 110.

5 There were other fording points, notably further south at Birecik near Zeugma and north near Malatya.

6 The continued prosperity of the city is indicated too by the tribute demanded by the Urartian king Sarduri II when he attacked the kingdom in the 740s BCE: 40 minas of gold, 800 minas of silver, 3000 garments, 2000 copper shields, and 1535 copper bowls. Other texts record also numerous animals, beautifully dyed woollen and linen cloth and clothing, elephant hides and tusks, and precious woods. Blaylock 2009, 30.

7 Bryce 2012, 110.

8 Blaylock 2009, 30.

9 Bryce 2012, 113.

switch to referring to Muwatalli as an ‘evil Hittite’¹⁰, which although it rather smacks of the deployment of ethnicity to suit the political present, also demonstrates something important about the long-standing self-perception among the rulers (and people?) of Kummuh as Hittite successors: we may be able to infer from this that Assyrian control was rather limited to urban centres.

Kummuh’s relationship with Assyria had always been troublesome. The records reveal that Kummuh rebelled against the Great King Tiglath-Pileser I in the 11th c. BCE, and the city was captured. It seems, however, that the Assyrians never commanded the river crossing points, and the Euphrates was seen as a major obstacle by Tiglath-Pileser I.¹¹ Not for the last time, some urban inhabitants of Kummuh were deported to Mesopotamia, with Mesopotamians brought in to run the city.¹² However, what is particularly interesting here is a small detail: that those who survived the Assyrian attack and were not captured, “took their gods and fled to the mountains”.¹³ Presumably, this means that groups of refugees from the city gathered the statues of their deities and made their escape, up into the wild Taurus mountains that tower over 2,200 m high in the distance on the Euphrates’ western bank. The necessity of taking the gods with them demonstrates the importance of the bond between place and divinity, and the deliberate severance of this link that statue-stealing in the ancient Near East enacted, an act of war that was understood as “actualising the rupture between the god and his native land”.¹⁴

It is not known which gods were taken up into the mountains, but it is possible to hazard some reasonable guesses: likely are the imperial Hittite deities that continued to be venerated into the Iron Age, such as Tarhunzas the storm god, but perhaps more local gods were taken too, for example, city gods of Kummuh itself. Worship of the storm god was certainly established by c. 900 BCE (as shown by the ADIYAMAN 2 stele), but this presumably reflects a monumentalisation of worship that existed prior to this; similarly, his worship also seems to have been present at the sanctuary at Dülük Baba Tepesi on the outskirts of Gaziantep by the 9th c. BCE¹⁵, although it is unknown if this area was politically part of Kummuh at this stage. Although the evidence dates from after the period in question, perhaps it is also relevant to consider other important cults of the area, in particular Kubaba: with the advent of Karkamiš as the main regional political player in the Neo-Hittite period, her goddess, Kubaba, became widely worshipped, with dedicatory stelae found near Karkamiš at Körtün, Tell Ahmar, and Aleppo.¹⁶ In addition, her worship was known later in the Iron Age

10 Blaylock 2009, 30.

11 Llop-Raduà 2012, 214, 216.

12 See Hawkins 1975; Summers 1991, 1–6; Facella 2006, 73–78; Versluys 2018, 46.

13 Beaulieu 1993, 242.

14 Beaulieu 1993, 242, referring to Meissner 1925, 126–128.

15 Messerschmidt 2017, 37.

16 Hawkins 1981, 149. KÖRKÜN; TELL AHMARI I, II; ALEPPO 2.

at temples within the territory of Kummuh, at Ancoz and Boybeypinarı (see fig 1): although these shrines may represent politico-religious dedications that show allegiance to Karkamiš, Kubaba's worship was regionally important from the early second millennium onwards.¹⁷ At Boybeypinarı, the pair of stelae were given by the wife of Šuppiliumas between 805–773 BCE, and record the setting up of a throne on a podium to the goddess, with an offering table. The shrine at Ancoz to Kubaba and the Hittite deity of hunting, Runda-Runtiyas, was apparently similar.¹⁸

These may be some of the deities that the people took with them to escape the onslaught of the Assyrians at the time of Tiglath-Pileser I. But where did they go, to where were the gods taken? Which mountains provided sanctuary for the people and their deities? The forbidding outcrop at Gerger might be one suggestion, where the great Hellenistic period inscription suggests that a sacred precinct for a goddess known only as Argandene – perhaps a local deity similar to Kubaba – existed here in the Iron Age, perhaps a shrine was set up here in this first period of refuge?¹⁹ Or it might be that Direk Kale, another mountaintop sanctuary complex with remains from the Roman period, has much older origins. There are doubtless other unknown mountain shrines yet to be discovered, but without further investigation these suggestions are purely speculative. What this textual detail implies, however, is that the mountains were perceived by the people of Kummuh as beyond Assyria's reach: that these were protective and sheltering places which offered sanctuary for the gods and outcast people who needed them, forbidding the Assyrians' advance with their rocky arms. And perhaps this observation of the mountains as sanctuary (in both its meanings) begins to shed some light on how the natural landscape of Commagene influenced the self-conception of the people and the deities there: using the mountains as refuge enables them to be perceived as welcoming or even hospitable landscapes; and taking the gods up to the mountains also starts to sanctify those mountain places. Although this process was no doubt already underway, in addition, a group self-conception of the inhabitants of Kummuh as 'mountain people' may have begun to emerge in the early Iron Age in response to the aggressions of the Assyrians.

Alongside mountains, rivers and water were a major source of spiritual energy across the Hittite world: in particular, limestone sinkholes were perceived as places of entry into the underworld in Hittite Anatolia, referred to in Hittite texts as KAŠKAL. KUR: "divine roads of the earth".²⁰ Assyria's kings understood (or borrowed from the Hittites?²¹) the importance of such naturally spiritual places such as rivers or springs,

17 Hutter 2003.

18 Hawkins 1981, 149. BOYBEYPINARI IV B1–C1; ANCOZ, 1.

19 Blömer – Winter 2011, 70.

20 Sørensen – Lumsden 2016; Harmanşah et al. 2017.

21 Osborne 2017, 98, on the Assyrian monuments at the source of the Tigris: "by situating the monument near a subterranean water course, the Assyrians were playing on the Hittite practice of placing monuments at watery locations with chthonic associations. The Source of the Tigris

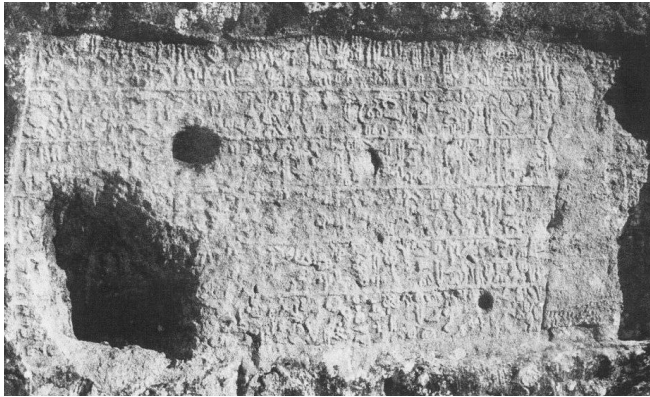


Fig. 1 Relief at Malpınar. Photo by J. D. Hawkins.

and similarly, marked them with rock reliefs that commemorated and proclaimed their idealised kingship and which “claimed places as previously untouched [...] rock reliefs and stone monuments attempt to capture the temporal power and longevity of geological time, associating themselves with ‘nature’s processes’ rather than cultural phenomena”.²² At least some of this perception and belief must have passed into later periods, as certainly rivers, springs and river gorges were spiritually and politically important in Neo-Hittite Kummuh. The relief of a local king, Atayazas, at Malpınar (fig. 1), was carved on an escarpment by a spring leading to the Göksu, and is now submerged in the floodwaters of the Euphrates. He describes himself as a “river lord” under the rule of Hattušili of Kummuh (770–750 BCE).²³ An earlier Iron Age (10th c. BCE) relief carved into the rocks above the river Karasu in the south of the region shows a god with spear and bow standing on the back of a stag (fig. 2), probably the god of the hunt, Runda-Runtiyas, or perhaps the more local deity Karhuhas, known also from Karkamiš.²⁴ Hellenkemper and Wagner suggest that this place, located on an outcrop

monuments thus represents the Assyrian adoption and manipulation of local landscape practices to communicate their own rhetoric of kingship”.

22 Harmanşah 2013, 94.

23 One way to see meaning in this relief is to view it in the light of Costly Signalling Theory (CST), where it may represent a demonstration of political instability, that is, rival rulers may have benefited from knowing about each other’s resources (the cost of investing in rock reliefs proving these resources), which may mean that Hittite monuments were constructed “as a medium through which rivals negotiated ongoing territorial disputes [...] the very existence of a large number of monuments with diverse authors indicates an unsettled political situation in which communications of strength via monument building was required” (Osborne 2017, 93). However, this was not the sole purpose or meaning, however, and a divine interaction or purpose – especially for a monument located in an inaccessible or striking setting – may have been just as if not more important, discussed further by Osborne 2017.

24 Hawkins 1981, 147; Blömer – Winter 2011.



Fig. 2 Relief at Karasu. Photo from Hellenkemper and Wagner.

overlooking the Karasu near to where it inflows into the Euphrates, was a water shrine: there are over thirty rock cut hollows and cup marks, as well as a 12 m long rock cut trench and remains of a square building in the vicinity.²⁵ The hollows resemble receptacles for libation or offerings, of the kind detailed in a Hittite ritual text aimed at entreating a spring god to return, KUB 15 34 iii,²⁶ in which a table is set up at the point where the water disgorges from a spring. In this ritual, seven holes are made and filled with beer, wine, sweet wine, honey, fine oil, fat, and sweet milk. The text also mentions the return of “vigorous cedar-gods”, an element which shall be explored later in this paper.²⁷ Because of the position of the Karasu relief at an area considered as the intersection between the states of Kummuh and Karkamiš, it may be that the relief, shrine, and the associated Iron Age buildings represent a deliberate act of both spiritual and political boundary marking by the independent state of Kummuh.²⁸

Echoes

Having established a sense of the earlier history, use and marking of the landscape, I would now like to think about how the presence of Iron Age cultural and religious el-

25 Hellenkemper – Wagner 1977, 173. A settlement is also proposed nearby, but further work is needed to confirm this.

26 The tablet refers to the city of Taurisa. Its location is unknown, with suggestions that it is near to the Zuliya river (modern Çekerek, near to Tokat). See Taracha 2010; Galmarini 2015, 53.

27 Bier 1976, 125.

28 Setting up monumental reliefs in frontier zones is suggested to have been a common practice of both Kummuh and Commagene, see French 1991, 17–19. The Hittites and the Assyrians are also known to have engaged in political and spiritual boundary construction and negotiation through the carving of reliefs. See in particular recently, Harmanşah 2013; Sørensen – Lumsden 2016.

ements in the landscape contributed to building cognitive aspects of later inhabitants' understandings of Commagene; that is, the memories, meanings, myths and narratives that were told and how they contributed to shaping the landscape and its perception. Rock reliefs and monuments are always reused and reinterpreted through time, relationally engaged in forging new meanings for new people:²⁹ here, I am interested to think about how both the indigenous population and new occupants of the Hellenistic period responded to these earlier stories, monuments, places, and practices, and how they used them to build a sense of their own place in the landscape.

To try to open up this deeply inaccessible aspect of landscape reception and perception, the obvious place to start is by looking for narratives in Commagene and how they relate to the landscapes. However, there is an extraordinary lacuna in written sources between the Late Neo-Hittite period and the late-Hellenistic period – a gap of some 600 years³⁰ – presumably driven in part by incorporation into other administrative provinces under the Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians and Persians. This lack of written evidence may in part reflect the multiple displacements of people, occupation by alien garrisons, and rule by non-locals; but although writing may have been lost, stories themselves cannot have been completely forgotten.³¹ Myths and narratives about places will have existed and despite displacement and occupations, some must have continued to be told and remembered. In order to find them, it is necessary to think creatively about what kinds of stories and memories might have carried on being told by people in and about the landscape in the years from independent Kummuh through Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian and Macedonian Greek occupations. Certain places in the landscape might have had longer term memory and narrative associated with them: battlefields, because they are temporary places of extreme physical and psychological energy, places associated with extreme suffering and loss, which loom large in human memory whether battles are won or lost; and sanctuaries, because of their supra-temporal links to the supernatural.

Battlefields play an important part as landscape loci of memory and identity, because they are the location of the battle event itself.³² During recent centenary commemorations, WWI battlefields were used by political leaders as places to consider the European project and to mark pan-European healing; and the WWI battlefield at Gallipoli has emerged over the last decades as a place for Australians to acknowledge

29 See Osborne 2017.

30 Blömer – Winter 2011, 22.

31 For example, the myths associated with the cult of the storm god at Mount Kasios on the Mediterranean coast continued to be told and retold into the later Iron Age, despite the destruction of Ugarit and the collapse of the Hittite cities that had been the main Bronze Age powers in the area. The myths of the storm god and the mountain itself seem to have been told to visiting Euboeans at the foot of Mount Kasios, who took the story with them to other locations in the Mediterranean. See Lane-Fox 2009.

32 Carman – Carman 2009, 292.

and connect with their national past and feel a powerful, emotional sense of national identity.³³ Ancient battlegrounds too have been used to foster modern national identities, for example, the battle of Marathon between Athens and Persia in 490 BCE was a metaphor for contemporary battles against the Turks in the 1960s, but in antiquity too, it was also “anchored in Athenian ritualised memory”.³⁴ Is it possible to imagine that this kind of landscape memory connected with warfare was also present in Commagenean self-conceptualisation? For example, the battle against the Urartian alliance, of which Kummuh was (unwillingly?) part, was won by the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III in 743 BCE.³⁵ This battle might have loomed large in both the defeated Kummuhian and the victorious Assyrian self-narratives, given that the Assyrian annals describe “the gorges and the precipices of the mountains filled with their bodies”, the capture of nearly 80,000 people, and the river Sinzi (Göksu) “died red like wool”.³⁶ Tiglath-Pileser must be permitted his exaggeration and Sarduri some dignity in defeat, but it is reasonable to imagine some fairly bloody battles in the uplands of Kummuh.³⁷ Even with changing elite commanders, the location³⁸ of a transformative victory/defeat such as this will surely have been remembered for some time by those who were involved or who lost loved ones, perhaps through ritualised actions at the site of the battle, or, perhaps more likely given Assyria’s reassertion of dominance, through oral traditions.

Narratives associated with special places or sanctuaries that demonstrate continuity of practice might offer other opportunities for discovering landscape perceptions. Although on the edges of Commagene proper, a good example is the sanctuary of the storm god at Dülük Baba Tepesi. Careful excavation of the sanctuary at Dülük Baba Tepesi by the team from the Universität Münster have revealed that the first monumental mud brick temple was already constructed by the 9th c. BCE, and that, despite the advent of Assyrian, Babylonian and Achaemenid control of the region, the temple remained in use and ritual practices involving large scale animal sacrifice and burning events at the site continued unchanged.³⁹ This continuity of practice seems to support the regional observation that mountains and mountain sanctuaries in particular continued to be widely revered as places where the storm god dwelled, through the collapse of ruling structures and into the domination of new powers. Although no myths

33 Midford forthcoming.

34 Derks – Roymans 2009, 97.

35 Astour 1979.

36 Astour 1979, 7–8, referring to the Annals and the Nimrud Tablet; Blaylock 2009, 29.

37 Archers will have been especially important in difficult terrain like this: some 40 years later, following the victory of Sargon over Kummuh and the formal annexation of the kingdom by Assyria, 20,000 archers from Kummuh were deployed on the frontier with Urartu (Blaylock 2009, 30). Given this, the worship of the archer god Runtiyas may have had important resonances at this time, and places of his worship particular significance.

38 Astour 1979 identifies the battlefield as near the Kummuhian town of Halpi on the lake at Golbaşı, with ongoing skirmishes into the uplands as Sarduri retreated.

39 Messerschmidt 2017.

or stories about the god of this particular place survive, the storm god was a hugely powerful figure in Commagene and the wider region,⁴⁰ and the litany of texts from elsewhere from the Bronze Age through to the Iron Age and period of Greek contact (from Ugarit, Hattuša, and recalled in Hesiod's *Theogony*⁴¹) suggest that there was likely a rich repertoire of myth-narratives about the storm god and the other deities that continued to be told and transmitted orally.



Fig. 3 Shrine to Zeus Soter at Damlica. Photo by M. Blömer.

In the Hittite religious imagination, however, the mountains themselves were also gods in their own right: for the Hittites the landscape was possessed of spiritual qualities, perhaps bordering on animism. Water sources and water courses were seen as naturally numinous, and the earlier monuments at river places in Kummuh that have been explored above may have continued to be visited, used, and venerated in later times. In addition, however, the Hellenistic period also sees renewed spiritual and financial investment in sanctuaries which were constructed close to the water, for example, that dedicated to Zeus Soter at Damlica, in the steep cliffs above the Euphrates downriver from ancient Samosata (fig. 3). The inscription at this strange, boxy and inaccessible cliff-face shrine names the deity only in Greek, but it has been argued that the *interpretatio Graeca* “Zeus the Saviour” likely conceals an indigenous Commagenian deity, probably related to the river itself.⁴² Was this a shrine built by new, Greek-speaking occupants to honour an ancient indigenous deity, or one built by the native population, honouring their traditional god with an abstracted name in a new language? Or does it perhaps represent something between these two extremes, a sanctuary for an ancient native god, financed by Greek-speaking native elites?

40 See for example, Bunnens 2006.

41 See discussion in Lane-Fox 2009.

42 Blömer – Winter 2011, 145.

It is extremely difficult to argue for what or any level of interaction the people of the Hellenistic period had with earlier monuments if there are no material traces of these interactions. However, there may be some clues that can be gleaned from association, or from echoing. As Canepa has argued, there was a conscious re-occupation of late Hittite sites by the Sopherian kings in Commagene, which were then in turn prime reference points for the later Hellenistic kings, especially Antiochos I.⁴³ In the same way as the ruined settlement mounds, the images of earlier Iron Age deities and kings were present in the living landscape, such as in the rock reliefs carved at Malpınar, the Karasu, and elsewhere, highlighting the ‘special’ quality of those places. The figures of the god or king were also transformed into the permanent stone through the medium of these reliefs in these places of natural spiritual numen. Whether the people who lived here after Kummuh was annexed by the Assyrians, under Babylonian and Persian overlords, possessed any real knowledge of who these figures were is impossible to know. But these figures carved into the stone are clearly echoed in the way the kings of Hellenistic Commagene chose to represent themselves: as relief figures carved onto stelae and erected in special places, which can be interpreted in some way as a testimony to the continued observation of and connection to the earlier monuments of kings and divinities, and the perception of these perhaps as a ‘Commagenian’ way of doing things. Echoes of these Iron Age reliefs, and also of the Commagenian royal dexiosis-reliefs are seen again, in monuments such as the rock relief at Haydaran/Taşgedik (fig. 4), north of Adıyaman, the figures in which have been interpreted as members of the Commagenian aristocracy.⁴⁴ Carving figures of important people – whether these



Fig. 4 Relief from Haydaran. Photo by F. K. Dörner.

43 Canepa 2018. Cf. also the contribution by Canepa in this volume.

44 Blömer 2011; Blömer – Winter 2011, 140; Brijder 2014, 213–214.

are local elites, kings, or deities – into rocky outcrops brings their presence directly into the place, marking it as meaningful, visited, remembered.

The concept of ‘haunting’ may be useful here, in the sense that Carl Knappett uses it: he suggests that in the act of careless forgetting (of an object’s function, of a place’s meaning) that object or place falls out of the understood world. “Objects in the world of ideas are sucked back into the phenomenal, in the process losing their transparency”⁴⁵, that is, their meaning becomes lost, and through that process of acquiring meaninglessness, they become somehow threatening. Places that once had meaning too may be subject to this process of careless forgetting or abandonment: ruins or forgotten places are potential sites of haunting. Leaving a community open to places of haunting might be dangerous: as Knappett suggests, “a lack of biographical care – a lack of inter-generational remembering of ancestral spirits – might very conceivably threaten individual and collective identity.”⁴⁶ In contrast, careful forgetting or continuing memory work counters or negates the possibility of haunting. Perhaps later occupants in Commagene did interact with the earlier rock reliefs in order to continue to appease these dangerous, poorly understood spirits, and this concept may also suggest a way of interpreting what the Commagenian kings had in mind in their echoing of the rock reliefs of earlier rulers and gods.

In addition to ‘continuity’ of practices such as the carving of figures into flat rock surfaces, there are also examples not of continuity *per se* (although there may have been), but of the deliberate use of important Iron Age places in the Hellenistic period. The early-8th c. BCE shrine at Ancoz dedicated by the king Šuppiliuma and his son Hattušili to Kubaba, Runtiyas and other deities was used also in the Hellenistic period, shown by the fragments of inscriptions and architecture, and it may have been continually venerated in between. In particular, it seems to have been a locally sacred place where the ruler cult of Antiochos I was superimposed.⁴⁷ Similarly, the throne and shrine to Kubaba at Boybeypinarı discussed earlier was arranged in a way that the worshipper had to walk around the monument. However, the preservation of these inscriptions is in part due to their reuse as part of a “Classical period wall”⁴⁸, or at least, a wall with some late classical architrave incorporated.⁴⁹ What was this building? Were these earlier monuments recognised for their spiritual quality or importance, and reused carefully as a way to incorporate or mitigate these earlier spiritual energies, or as unintelligible blocks useful only as foundation building materials? Without these details it is difficult to discuss continuity of use or memory work in this place. However, a third example is found at Gerger, the Commagenian city of Arsameia on the Euphra-

45 Knappett 2011, 189.

46 Knappett 2011, 208.

47 Blömer – Winter 2011, 118–121.

48 Hawkins 2000, 330–340.

49 von der Osten 1933, 140.

tes. This fortress in the northern part of Commagene is physically difficult to access, situated on top of a vertical-sided bluff in the cliffs above the Euphrates. The castle remains there today are Byzantine, but it was also an Iron Age sanctuary, and with the advent of the Commagenian royal family, an important location of ancestor worship. Inscriptions and reliefs reveal that it was a *hierothesion* for the founding father of the royal family, Samos II: the monumental relief looking out from the north-western corner of the promontory is assumed to depict him and the inscription informs the reader that he was buried here.⁵⁰ As with Ancoz, Gerger seems to demonstrate the reuse of an earlier sacred place as a location for the veneration of the Commagenian kings. Andrade has described the imposition of the Antiochan ruler cult in Commagene as a process of “erasure of local traditions”, one which did “epistemological violence” upon the Syro-Hittite continuities.⁵¹ This may possibly be the case, but it is important to be aware of the negative spin to which Antiochos is often victim: perhaps the imposition of the Commagenian ruler cult in this place could instead be seen as the regeneration and recasting of ancient religious loci in contemporary terms. By drawing diverse local places into a wider regional framework of sanctuaries with the Commagenian king at their core, Antiochos elevates localised or regional Commagenian deities and sanctuaries to universally accessible heights, bringing together these local identities and places of worship into something new, that starts to resemble a specifically ‘Commagenian’ way of doing things, a nascent Commagenian identity.⁵²

The Antiochan royal burial monuments form the last body of monuments through which I will explore the concept of echoes, and in particular, that these monuments form a series of specific landscape metaphors, whereby they also act to reflect or echo elements in the natural landscape. Doing so allows the possibility to draw out aspects of landscape perception that may be witnessed in parallels between monuments and landscapes, and to simultaneously highlight elements that may be missing from the modern landscapes that are observed today. Most obviously, the burial tumuli (seemingly borrowed from neighbouring Cappadocia⁵³) themselves directly echo the shapes of the mountains, especially in the northern area of Commagene, where the conical, pointed summits of Ulu Baba and a number of other mountains, clearly visible across the Euphrates from Arsameia on the Euphrates (fig. 5), were perhaps the direct inspiration for Antiochos I’s tumulus on Nemrud Dağ.

More abstractly and rather controversially, perhaps it is also possible to see echoes between the columns erected at these monuments and great trees? The Assyri-

50 Blömer – Winter 2011, 70.

51 Andrade 2013, 81.

52 See also the ideas expressed in Canepa (2018, chapter nine) which discuss the creation by Antiochos of a ‘newly ancient’ royal lineage and identity, which linked himself into a Graeco-Iranian and Armenian spiritual and ritual heritage and which allowed him to “navigate between Rome and Parthia” Canepa 2018, 203. Cf. also the contribution by Canepa in this volume.

53 Canepa 2018, 221–227. 241.



Fig. 5 Ulu Baba from Arsameia on the Euphrates. Photo by the author.

an annals reveal that alongside silver, gold, cattle and sheep, Kummuh gave cedar to the Assyrian rulers, an indication that the area was rich in cedar forests in antiquity.⁵⁴ Josephus mentions woodland in Commagene,⁵⁵ and during the Roman period festivals at Hierapolis, not far away, Lucian of Samosata tells the reader that tall trees were brought into the sacred precinct, decorated with gold and silver objects, and then set on fire.⁵⁶ The quantities of ash discovered at the sanctuary at Dülük Baba Tepesi indicate massive burning events which could perhaps be interpreted in a similar vein, and which as we have seen, apparently continued relatively unchanged from the Iron Age through to the Roman period.⁵⁷ Where did Kummuh get its cedar for the Assyrians; from where did the tall trees come to Hierapolis, or perhaps, even, to the fire festivals at the sanctuary of the storm god at Doliche?⁵⁸ Just as pollen analysis has revealed that the now largely bare mountains of Rough Cilicia were once covered with cedar trees praised in antiquity for their quality,⁵⁹ it is reasonable to surmise that the high northern mountains of Commagene must also have had extensive forests of cedar and other impressive trees which only grow above certain altitudes (although cedar can occur as low as 500 m, its more usual range is between 1,300–3,000 m).⁶⁰ The presence of such

54 In the 18th year of Aššurnasipal II (866 BCE), the king received tribute from Qatazilu of Kummuh of “beams of cedar, silver and gold”. Blaylock 2009, 27.

55 Jos. Ant. Iud. 14,441.

56 Lucian. Syr. D. 49.

57 Collar 2013, 85.

58 The ash from Dülük Baba Tepesi contains huge quantities of animal bones, see Pöllath – Peters 2011. As far as I am aware, the ash has not been analysed for floral remains, which would indicate whether wood formed part of the conflagration, but we must assume that there was some fuel used in these huge burning events.

59 Akkemik et al. 2012, 395; Karlioğlu et al. 2015.

60 Conifer Specialist Group (1998). ‘*Cedrus libani*’. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2006. International Union for Conservation of Nature. <<https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2013-1.RLTS.T42305A2970821.en>> (accessed 8. April 2020).

trees would dramatically change the perception of the landscape, especially cedar forests.⁶¹ For the Hittites, cedar trees were understood as gods (the vigorous cedar-gods of KUB 15 34 iii, above), and in Mesopotamian literature cedars were particularly associated with royalty and the divine, and used as key components of temple structures for that reason (or acquired their symbolism through their usage in such contexts).⁶² A newly discovered Babylonian cuneiform tablet (Tablet V of the SB Epic of Gilgamesh) adds to the description of the cedar forest to which Gilgamesh and Enkidu travel. Although the mythological cedar forest of the story is probably located in the Amanus mountains near Antioch, the description outlines a multi-sensory forest experience that is described as the “dwelling of gods, throne-dais of goddesses”.⁶³ The forest is represented in rich, evocative terms, inviting the reader to marvel at the height of the cedars, at their sweet shade and dripping resin, the thorny undergrowth and thick canopy and the symphony of birdsong, crickets and monkeys.⁶⁴ The divine qualities of the forest and the trees are evident here.

If it is possible to see how the tumuli echo the mountains – and with Nemrud Dağ, this echo is very clear – perhaps the columns at the burial mounds of Karakuş and Sesönk too can be perceived as a distant echo of long-gone trees: both features of the landscape which possessed inherent ancient divinity. There are divergences in this interpretation – for example, there are no columns at Nemrud Dağ and the columns have an additional function of supporting reliefs, or images of animals, at Karakuş and Sesönk. Nemrud, is of course above the tree-line, so we do not need to see ‘trees’ here, and the animal images at the Antiochan monument at Karakuş relate to astrological symbols important to the royal dynasty,⁶⁵ so these could be seen as stars held up by divine trees. Even if this playful suggestion is too far-fetched for some, do these divergences necessarily mean that the mental connection between tree and column was absent? If we can mentally step back into a Commagene that is also rich with huge ancient woodlands, then perhaps it is easier to make the connection: and the monuments of the Commagenian royal family can be seen as the creation, in earth and stone, of permanent ‘trees’ and man-made ‘mountains’. They were ideological monuments that brought Commagene into a web of Antiochan propaganda, aiming to institute new forms of social structure⁶⁶ to be sure, but they are also testimony to the self-perception of the Commagenian royal family as permanent fixtures in this landscape, and their

61 The perception and representation of the Assyrians of the landscapes of North Syria as forested are explored by Karmel Thomason 2001 and Winter 2009.

62 Hurowitz 1992.

63 George 2003:602–603, see also Ryan 2017, 75.

64 Al-Rawi – George 2014.

65 It has been recently argued that the tumulus and monuments at Sesönk are not part of the Antiochan royal tombs (Blömer 2008); the bull, lion and eagle seen at Karakuş form part of the complex astrological symbolism of Antiochos (these symbols discussed most recently by Crijns 2014).

66 Versluys 2017, 168–172.

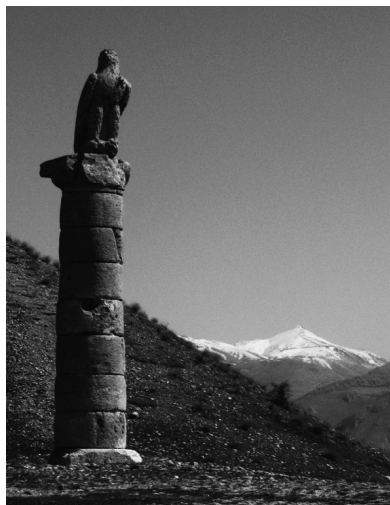


Fig. 6 Karakuş and Nemrud Dağ. Photo by the author.

places of death are marked by the epic construction of new divine mountains and forests. Their bodies nourish the soil, and these places repeat and echo the landscape that surrounds them (fig. 6). Through the way these monuments changed and highlighted the landscape, the Commagenian royal family became as integral to Commagene as the mountains and the trees. And in becoming the landscape, they also in some way mark their apotheosis – subtler, perhaps, than shaking the hand of Herakles – but in terms of the perception of the landscape as divine, just as important, in their message of royal assumption to the ranks of the mountain gods of the distant past.

Experiencing the Landscape

Finally, I turn briefly to social forms of landscape perception, through the ways that the landscape was changed and manipulated, both more obviously by the elites through the construction of monuments, but also by the forgotten masses, through participation in both extraordinary (or more ordinary, if we are to believe Antiochos!⁶⁷) events such as religious rituals as directed by Antiochos himself or, perhaps more pertinently, as labourers in large scale building projects. Although there is little proof that the in-

67 Antiochos seems to have ordered monthly festival celebrations of his person, his birthday, his assumption of the diadem and so on, to be celebrated in a specially constructed *temenos*. See discussion in Brijders 2014, chapter I.10.

habitants followed Antiochos' instructions, there are examples of more ordinary people dedicating to Kubaba at Karkamiš which are useful to note.⁶⁸

How then, did the people perceive the extraordinary royal monuments that were constructed in the late-Hellenistic period? Antiochos I, and perhaps some members of the royal family more broadly, may have perceived their monuments through a lens similar to that described above, that is, that the additions of their burial tumuli and sanctuaries to the landscape concretised their kingship, symbolising their power in the morphing of the landscape into one that was in some way, all a memorial to their dynasty, all a testimony to their status as divine.⁶⁹ By contrast, how would ordinary people have interacted with or seen these monuments? Without knowledge of what or even if rituals were actually conducted at Nemrud or any of the other monuments, it is difficult to think through the phenomenological elements that ordinary people may have experienced in connection to the monuments. However, the construction of Nemrud Dağ clearly required the participation of many thousands of labourers. Were these people free, serfs, or enslaved? Was work on the great tumulus of Antiochos a duty, a chore, an honour, or a ritual act of participation in the creation of the divine? Thousands of men (women and children too?) must have had direct experience of its building, of endless donkey loads of rocks and stones being carted up the mountain, of the searing cold, the fierce winds, and the precipitous edges. Even if they could not understand the Greek of the intimidating inscriptions he had written⁷⁰, they must have looked up at the tumulus at Nemrud with a sense of pride, testimony not just to their king's 'megalomania' and phenomenal vision of his place in the world above and below, but also of their own blood, sweat and tears.

The visibility of the monument at Nemrud is extraordinary, meaning that people across the whole of Commagene would have had visual access to it.⁷¹ Even as far south as the ancient sanctuary of the storm god at Dülük Baba Tepesi, on a clear day, the peak rises through the haze, which is c. 150 km distant (fig. 7). The imposition of such a strong visual landmark raises issues about how people experienced this monument within the landscape and how they felt about it, about their royal family, about Commagene, about themselves. The visibility of the tumulus at Nemrud across Commagene imposes a centre, a focus for the identity of the people who lived there: this, and

68 Hawkins 1981, 149.

69 Though perhaps the Greek inscription at the sanctuary at Damlıca should be mentioned here: it reveals that the sanctuary was constructed under Mithradates II, son of Antiochos I, but in naming Antiochos, only includes his epithets Epiphanes Philoromaïos. The absence of Theos and Dikaios has been taken to mean that Antiochos was no longer seen as deified (Blömer – Winter 2011, 154).

70 Versluys 2017, 33; 124–127.

71 Versluys has recently discussed the visibility of the Antiochan monumental programme across the landscape more generally, suggesting that the presence of these monuments and the specific material culture in these places would have served to remind an ordinary person of the other sites of ruler cult, and to ensure that "Antiochan kingship was strongly felt" see Versluys 2017, 136.



Fig. 7 Nemrud Dağ seen from Dülük Baba Tepesi. Photo by the author.

the other burial monuments, helped to construct a ‘Commagenian’ self-narrative that was not easily dispelled.

Because when the Romans came, they found a people who cohered to their landscape. The letter of Mara bar Sarapion records the people of Samosata, refugees once again, leaving the landscapes of their ancestors, their families, and their gods: “We are now far removed from our home, and we cannot return again to our city, or behold our people, or offer to our gods the greeting of praise”.⁷² And of those who were left behind, some were conscripted into the Roman army. The local storm god, Latinised now as the Jupiter of Doliche, Jupiter Dolichenus, that was initially taken by these cohorts of men across the Roman world to Dacia was known in his earliest configurations there as ‘god of Commagene’.⁷³ Nemrud Dağ, and Jupiter Dolichenus’ worship on mountaintops, seem to imply that where mountains and sky meet, the place where the lightning breaks, was particularly important to the people of Commagene, that the mountains themselves were at the heart of the experience of being Commagenian.

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⁷² Trans. Plummer Pratten 1885, 104–114. See also recently Ramelli 2004 and Merz – Tieleman 2012.

⁷³ Collar 2012.

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