
Lucinda Dirven
et que les uns sont des temples dédiés aux dieux, les autres aux empereurs ?...

Une seule chose est sûre : A. S. doit impérativement actualiser ses connaissances sur le Hauran. On lui conseillera donc de lire entre autres et attentivement :


The present volume is the result of the conference “Lokale Identität im Römischen Nahen Osten”, that was held at the University of Münster in 2007 and was organized by the universities of Münster and Pisa. By stressing local identities, the organizers react against an older approach to the region, in which various regions were lumped together under the headings Roman Near East or Orient. In their introduction to the volume, Blömer, Facella and Winter argue that the interaction between Rome and the Near East is better described in terms of identity than in terms of Romanization, because identity allows for more variety and flexibility on the part of Near Eastern cultures. Essential is the insight that Roman culture was received differently throughout the Near East, depending on the existing local cultures and the social and economic circumstances.

With the exception of the contribution by M. Sommer, the articles assembled in this volume do not deal at great length with methodical issues. Instead, they try to illustrate a complicated cultural process by means of detailed case studies. The present reviewer applauds this approach, for in-depth case studies are indeed the best remedy against over-generalizations. The more varied picture of the Roman Near East that prevails today is due first and foremost to our increased knowledge about various regions and cities and not to abstract methodical discussions. The ten papers assembled in this volume take various disciplines as their starting point and cover a large geographical area and wide time span. Consequently, they not only stress differences in the region, but are very different amongst themselves. This variety incited the editors to arrange the contributions alphabetically, according to the name of the author. In this review the articles are arranged according to two sub-themes; the persistence of local cultural elements and the interaction between local elites and their Roman overlords.

The persistence of local traditions lies at the heart of the articles by M. Blömer, P. Haider and A. Lichtenberger. As one of the excavators of the sanctuary of Jupiter in Doliche, M. Blömer sets out to illustrate the persistence of local traditions in the worship of storm gods in the North Syrian region (p. 13-47). Blömer takes as his starting points two reliefs from Ceylanli that represent a so-called smiting god standing on a bull. Subsequently, he lists various reliefs with a similar representation from North Syria. In the past, they were all identified as representations of Jupiter Dolichenus, the god from Doliche that became popular in the western provinces during the first three centuries of the Common Era. Blömer argues from iconographical differences in the North Syrian reliefs that they represent different local storm gods that were of old worshipped in North Syria. As such, they have nothing to do with the god of Doliche.
A relief of Jupiter Dolichenus that was recently found in his sanctuary, suggests that the iconography of this and other local storm gods remained the same throughout the ages.

P. Haider compares the religious worlds of Parthian Assur and Nineveh, both important religious centers in the Assyrian period (p. 49-74). Haider’s outline of the available sources shows that indigenous deities still figured prominently in Assur, whereas the religious world of Nineveh was thoroughly hellenized. Inscriptions from Parthian Nineveh are in Greek, and the iconography of the deities is strongly influenced by Graeco-Roman traditions. Unfortunately, Haider does not attempt to explain this remarkable difference between the religious worlds of both cities.

The richly illustrated article by A. Lichtenberger uses the local coin issues of the Phoenician cities Berytos and Tyr to establish their identities during the Roman period (p. 151-175). Like Assur and Nineveh, both cities go back a long time in history. It follows from Lichtenberger’s case studies that it is impossible to arrive at a general statement about the cultural identity of these Phoenician cities during the Roman period. Instead, each city has its own specific development in which Phoenician customs interacted with Graeco-Roman traditions.

The remainder of the articles in the present volume deal in some way or other with the interaction between the local elites and their Roman overlords. The introduction of M. Sommer’s article is a useful summary of the current discussion on the interaction between the centre of the Roman Empire and the periphery and provides ample references for further reading (p. 236-248). The two case studies that illustrate Sommer’s point —law and myth— are rather weak. So little is known about the interpretation of Greek mythological stories in the Roman Near East, that it is impossible to tell whether these stories still have a mythological status in the sense that Sommer presupposes. The mosaics from Antioch that Sommer refers to fail to convince this reader, not in the least because they are not illustrated and references to pictures are missing.

A. Kropp’s article focuses on emperor worship outside the Roman Empire, installed by dynasts that were loyal to Rome (p. 99-150). By way of introduction, Kropp lists the available evidence for emperor worship in the Roman provinces of the Near East —highly useful, since a comprehensive study on the subject is missing to date. In the Roman Near East, emperors usually received a cult in the main sanctuary of the city, beside the major deity of the place. This stands in marked contrast with the four sanctuaries of the Julio-Claudian period dedicated to Roman emperors that are the focus of Kropp’s article. Significantly, all four temples originate from the so-called client kingdoms. Three were built by Herod the Great of Judaea and one was constructed by an anonymous local ruler on Mount Faqra near Beirut. Kropp’s meticulous description of the four temples shows that the temples of Herod were very different from the sanctuary of Mount Faqra; whereas architecture and decoration of the three Judaean temples were Graeco-Roman in style, the temple on Mount Faqra was purely local.

The present reviewer doubts whether the temple on Mount Faqra may be labeled an Augustaeum. The inscription from this building shows that it was dedicated to both the Emperor Claudius and the ancestral god Beelgalasos (p. 114). The practice to combine emperor worship and local cult accords well with the usual practice in the Near East. This implies that the temples of Herod are the only exceptions to the rule. Kropp rightly stresses the extraordinary position of Herod as a Jewish ruler. As is well known, Jewish religion excluded the worship of the emperor. In my view, this partly explains Herod’s exceptional choice to dedicate temples exclusively to the emperor: co-worship of the emperor and another deity was simply not an option in Judaea.

The interaction between Roman legionary units and the cities Resaina and Singara is central to O. Stoll’s 90 p. article (p. 249-340). Departing from local bronze issues from these two north Mesopotamian cities, Stoll shows that figures like Tyche and Kentaur are interpreted jointly in a military and a civic context. Stoll’s comprehensive article not only touches upon numismatics and questions of identity, but provides a thorough and indispensable overview of the history of this highly neglected region during the period of Roman occupation. For anyone interested in the Roman history of North Mesopotamia, Stoll’s article is indispensable. The only real drawback of the article is the absence of illustrations.

Fortunately, the articles by W. Oenbrink (p. 189-221) and A. Schmidt-Colinet (p. 223-234) on funerary monuments from Roman Syria are both lavishly illustrated. Both contributions fit in with a trend in archaeological studies that interprets funerary monuments as markers of cultural identity. Starting from the now-lost mausoleum of Samsigeramos in Emesa (present-day Homs), Oenbrink uses funerary monuments from central and north Syria to show that there was both continuity and change in the way the local elites buried their dead. The elite adopted Roman elements to demonstrate and enforce their relationship with Rome, but simultaneously held on to regional traditions. The same ambiguity can be seen...
in the iconography of the two Palmyrene sarcophagi discussed by A. Schmidt-Colinet in his contribution to this volume. According to Schmidt-Colinet’s analysis of these spectacular objects, the deceased is shown here in various ways, according to the different cultural identities he possessed.

U. Hartmann’s research of the 13th Sibylline oracle focuses on the implications of this pseudo-oracle for the Syrian self-consciousness around the middle of the 3rd cent. AD (p. 75-98). This objective is seriously hampered by the lack of information on the author and his background. Hartmann’s idea that the author was a Diaspora Jew writing in Syria around 265 AD is largely based on the content of the oracle and is bound to remain hypothetical. If his suggestion is correct, however, it is telling that this Syrian resident stresses the intricate relationship of Syria and its rulers with Rome. It suggests that Rome was an important component of the identity of the Syrian elite. It is even more remarkable that the postulated Jewish background of the author did not have any decisive influence upon the contents of the oracle. If the author was indeed a Jew living in the Diaspora, his ethnic identity and adherence to Rome were apparently more important than his religious identity in the context of this oracle.

By far the most thought-provoking article of this volume is F. Millar’s discussion of Libanius of Antioch’s characterization of the Near East in the 4th cent. AD (p. 177-187). In contrast to the case studies in this volume that point out the regional variations in culture and identity in the Near East, the scriptures of Libanius (AD 314-393) invariably picture the culture of the Near East as essentially Greek. Millar subscribes to the idea of the regional variation in the Near East during the first three centuries AD, but simultaneously stands up for the historical trustworthiness of Libanius and argues that regional variety declines dramatically from the beginning of the fourth century onwards. To substantiate his argument, Millar points to the all pervasive use of the Greek language at the expense of local languages and the Greek political organization of cities and villages in the region. The situation in Palmyra, which lost its typical culture after its defeat by Aurelian, is cited as a case in point.

Although there can be no doubt that the cultural landscape in the Near East changed dramatically around the beginning of the fourth century, this reviewer doubts whether the Hellenization of the Near East was as pervasive as Libanius’ scriptures imply. With respect to religion, it follows from archaeological remains that there was far more local variety than Libanius suggests. For example, the recently discovered paintings in the Mithraeum of Huarte (near Apamea, about 100 km south of Antioch), testify to the local development and variation of this cult at the end of the 4th cent. AD (M. Gawlikowski, « The Hawarte Mithraeum and its Paintings », JRA 20, 2007, p. 337-361). It is by no means my intention to discredit Libanius as a historical source. However, it seems to me that his Graeco-Roman cultural identity applied to a particular social stratum and not to the population of the Near East as a whole.

One cannot help wondering whether Libanius’ identity would have been equally Greek if he had been writing a century earlier. Be that as it may the case of Libanius illustrates that diversity in cultural identity is not based exclusively on historical reality, but is at least partly determined by the beholder.

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Matthias Grawehr est l’auteur, dans la même série, d’une étude très bien documentée et fort utile sur les lampes (dans Petra –ez Zantur III, Teil 2, Die Lampen der Grabungen auf ez Zantur in Petra = Terra Archaeologica, Band V, Mayence, 2006). Il expose ici ses recherches sur un atelier de bronzier nabatéen fouillé sur ce site. L’ouvrage est, comme tous ses prédécesseurs, magnifiquement édité : l’illustration est abondante et de qualité (26 tabl. et 205 ill., dessins et photogr. n/b d’excellente venue), l’appareil documentaire très complet (notes de bas de page, bibliogr.), et le livre reste fort maniable (tables, nombreux renvois internes, résumé en anglais). La réalisation fait honneur à la Fondation Suisse-Liechtenstein pour les recherches archéologiques à l’étranger, aux institutions, en particulier l’Université de Bâle, les organismes et programmes de recherches qui y ont contribué, et aux travaux de la mission dirigée