

Freyberger, Klaus Stefan; Henning, Agnes; Hesberg, Henner von (Hrsg.): *Kulturkonflikte im Vorderen Orient an der Wende vom Hellenismus zur römischen Kaiserzeit*. Rahden: Verlag Marie Leidorf 2003. ISBN: 3-89646-641-0; VIII, 303 S.

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The present volume emanates from an enjoyable conference which took place in Cologne, in February 2000.¹ The twenty-three contributions deal with some of the Levantine sub-regions in the period in which the Hellenistic power structure gave way to an often precarious balance between Rome and the Parthians, thus creating, for the centuries to follow, „Rahmenbedingungen einer neuen Ordnung“ (p. 1). In their introduction, skilfully framing the variegated papers, K. S. Freyberger and H. von Hesberg draw attention to what could also be described in terms of an epigraphic and sculptural habit², namely the fact that any originality of the region from the early Roman period onwards is especially interesting in the light of the relative paucity of material known from the Hellenistic period. The steadily growing amount of sources available from before Roman domination over the Near East could indeed urge one to think of other parameters for the approach to the region in the Classical period.³ In any case, the stunning individuality of the various local civilizations, according to their material remains, stands out, with different cultural spheres of influence interacting in different ways according to their context. Together the contributions create „ein Bild sich überlagernder Identitäten, die ganz unterschiedliche Qualitäten als verbindende Elemente ansehen und in Anspruch nehmen konnten“ (p. 4).

A „reiches Spektrum an unterschiedlichen Einheiten“ (p. 1) is reflected in the manifold contributions to the volume, although there are two clear centres of gravity, Palmyra (six papers) and the Hauran (ten). In what follows, I will not be able to deal with all the papers in an equal manner, and the review perhaps inevitably indicates my own interests. I will not follow the order of the articles in the

book. To start with the papers on Palmyra, the search for Hellenistic Palmyra has gained new momentum with the exploration of the area south of the wadi, i.e. south of the wall of Diocletian, which is the topic of the brief presentation by A. Schmidt-Colinet. A single glance at the map of ancient Palmyra suffices to make clear how this wall has helped to decide which buildings are preserved and which are not. The propylaea of the sanctuaries of Bel and of Nebu, the gates from the agora and a road leading from the theatre are but the most explicit signs that the area to the south of the present ruins once formed the heart of the city. To what extent one ought to denote this area as that of the Hellenistic city is open to debate. The central colonnade was built in stages from the middle of the second century AD onwards, and it is likely that the area south of the wadi continued to be of importance in the early Roman period as well, and possibly even after the new colonnade came to function as a new axis. In the Palmyrene instance 'Hellenistic' would probably not imply that much of a break with 'early Roman'.⁴ In any case, the only literary source which refers to Palmyra in the first century BC, a passage in Appian (*bell. civ.* 5,9) which records how the city was raided by soldiers of Mark Antony, is seriously problematic and certainly not good evidence for life at Palmyra in 41 BC.⁵

As regards the question of what Palmyra was from the early Roman period onwards,

¹ The reviewer participated in the conference (cf. p. 3), but opted not to publish the presented paper (on sacred laws at Palmyra) in the proceedings, as it became in its entirety a section in: *The Religious Life of Palmyra* (Oriens et Occidens 4), Stuttgart 2002, p. 167-177. Thanks are due to the British Academy for support through the award of a Postdoctoral Fellowship.

² „Aufgrund einer neuen Art von Monumentalität werden 'derartige Gemeinschaften' nun stärker als zuvor auch archäologisch fassbar.“ (p. 1)

³ See now the major work by Sartre, M., *D'Alexandre à Zénobie. Histoire du Levant antique, IVe siècle av. J.-C.-IIIe siècle ap. J.-C.*, Paris 2001, whose approach of the Roman Near East is set against the Hellenistic heritage.

⁴ For further information on the exploration of the area south of the wadi, see Schmidt-Colinet, A.; al-As'ad, Kh., *Archaeological news from Hellenistic Palmyra*, *Parthica* 4 (2002), p. 157-166.

⁵ The argument is set out in full by Hekster, O.; Kaizer, T., *Mark Antony and the raid on Palmyra. Reflections on Appian, *Bella Civilia* V.9*, *Latomus* 63 (2004), p. 70-80.

J.-B. Yon shows how the city's institutions both conformed to Graeco-Roman models and simultaneously sported particularities, and what the consequences are for the way scholars understand Palmyra's civic and ethnic identity.⁶ And as far as 'tribal identity' is concerned, M. Gawlikowski adds another innovative chapter to the discussion of 'the four tribes of the city', arguing that the „four artificially conceived *phylai*“ (p. 10) came to form the civic body of Palmyra only under Claudius. Two, and possibly three, of the 'four tribes' are attested before the introduction of Roman rule at the city, and it is of course very unlikely that there was no connection between the 'old' and the 'new' tribes with the same name. Gawlikowski puts forward the hypothesis that the fourth tribe was the *phyle Klaudias*, hinting at the date of the creation of the new 'tribal system'.⁷

The funerary sector at Palmyra is represented by two papers. A. Henning argues that the changes over time in the striking tower tombs cast light on the way Palmyrenes chose to represent themselves and the development of societal values with which this was connected. G. Schenke searches the early funerary reliefs for clues to how Palmyrene men and women wanted to be conceived of (an important question is of course 'by whom?'). Looking for the role of imagery in the construction of the identity of Palmyra 'as a city', M. Meyer concludes that there is a substantive distinction between public and private imagery, with clear assimilation to Greek imagery on the city's seal. Rather than political identity, Meyer envisages „territoriale Identität“ (p. 285) as what binds individual Palmyrenes (although her evidence is that of Palmyrene expatriates).⁸

The collected papers illustrate nicely how different were the various regions covered in the volume. Simultaneously, they make clear „daß sich die Grenze zwischen Tradition und bewußtem Aufgreifen von Gestaltungsweisen nicht immer deutlich zu erkennen gibt“ (p. 2). Thus, the Hauran in southwest Syria may not have been united politically, but the area as a whole presented a seemingly cultural unit, prompted above all by specific local conditions. Hence most of the papers focus on, or at least relate to, the basalt

stone that dominated the region, its buildings and sculptures. L. Mounif writes on the technique applied to basalt sculptures, E. M. Bopp on the decoration of houses in the Hauran, and S. Felicia Meynersen discusses the sculptures of animals (some of them used to denote modern cross-roads, p. 136-137) as standing „zwischen 'Fremdeinfluß' und 'Eigenständigkeit'“ (p. 125). H. Laxander's article on Qanawat is especially interesting with regard to the relative „Mangel an konkreten Fundkontexten“ (p. 143) for basalt sculpture, and R. Wenning has a note on the sculptures from the region which are now at Princeton. P. Henrich argues from pottery finds at Qanawat that this town was (unsurprisingly) incorporated in a supra-regional trade network, and the circular tombs at this same site are discussed by W. Oenbrink, pointing out a development „vom einfachen Tumulus“ to „den architektonisch umfassend ausgestalteten Rundbauten“ (p. 81), with a growing emphasis on the burial chambers themselves and also on the entrance to the tombs.

In the introduction to the volume, Freyberger and von Hesberg write that the absence of political unification of the Hauran region as such could lead to „regional begrenzten Ausprägungen von großer Eigenständigkeit“ (p. 3). As an example they refer to the temple at Sahr, first documented by the Princeton team at the beginning of the last century, and the subject of two innovative papers in the present volume. A new plan and a new chronology are presented by M. Kalos, taking into account findings which point to an earlier building phase from the mid-first century BC. Building on some of the hypotheses put forward by Kalos, the paper by T. M. Weber reconstructs a statuary group

⁶Yon's paper rests heavily on his doctoral thesis, which is now published as: *Les notables de Palmyre*, Beirut 2002. Cf. my review in *Gnomon* (2004, in press).

⁷It could have been the case that the *phylè Klaudias* incorporated all those traditional groupings which did not come to form part of the other three tribes 'new style'. Cf. Kaizer (n. 1), p. 65-66.

⁸On the notion of Tyche and its Aramaic counterpart *Gad*, see also my: *De Dea Syria et aliis diis deabusque*. A study of the variety of appearances of *Gad* in Aramaic inscriptions and on sculptures from the Near East in the first three centuries AD, Part 1, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 28 (1997), p. 147-166; Part 2, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 29 (1998), p. 33-62.

on a prominent podium, as a „nicht unbedeutendes Staatsdenkmal [...], welches den Herrschaftsanspruch der Herodier in einem Heiligtum des ursprünglichen Feindeslandes aufzeigt“ (p. 265), and identifies the main figure of the scene with either Agrippa I or his son Agrippa II. Last but not least, in a paper on the Hauran in the Hellenistic period J.-M. Dentzer connects its typical sculptures with those „situées apparemment très loin dans le temps et dans l'espace“ (p. 202), material coming from the north of Syria and dating from the early first millennium BC, arguing not only for iconographic, but also for technological traditions transmitted to the late Hellenistic and early Roman period.

A recurrent theme in the volume is the ubiquitous building activity in the Near East from the arrival of the Romans in the Levant.⁹ That said, and structural similarities notwithstanding, it is of course clear that „in der verschiedenartigen Ausformung setzten sich die einzelnen Regionen jedoch gegen andere wiederum ab“ (p. 2). But other sub-regions are only scantily represented. P.-A. Kreuz sketches out the history of the religious topography of the so-called Limestone Massif in northwest Syria. Late-Hellenistic Commagene is dealt with by B. Jacobs, who refers to a swiftly declining „Großmachtgefühl“ (p. 121) under the successors of Antiochus I. G. Lindström investigates the contribution of seals to our understanding of cultural and ethnic identity in Uruk in the Hellenistic period. W. Thiel describes the alterations over the Hellenistic period which took place in part of the area which later came to be known as the Decapolis. S. Japp distinguishes between traditional and innovative aspects of the religious building policy of Herod, arguing that especially the temples make plain an „Anerkennung der römischen Oberhoheit, Öffnung des Landes nach außen, Toleranz gegenüber allen ethnischen und religiösen Gruppen, besondere Aufmerksamkeit gegenüber der jüdischen Religion und Präsentation der eigenen Person“ (p. 297). Two papers in the volume set out to deal with particular facets of the Near East as a whole. M. Tabaczek searches for the early imperial colonnades, predecessors of what became from the second century AD for places like Palmyra „beinahe so et-

was wie eine urbanistische Verpflichtung“ (p. 23). It is obvious that there is a difference between what our literary sources tell us about the early period and the actual lack of archaeological support, and Tabaczek points to the long conception of the notion of a colonnaded street. M. Konrad shows how the Roman military machine was founded on different considerations in the three Levantine provinces, in each case influenced by distinctive political and geographical factors.¹⁰

The volume presents an interesting cross-section of recent work on the late Hellenistic and early Roman Near East, and especially on the interaction (but not necessarily 'conflicts') between various cultural spheres of influence. Some of the contributions to the book are well-researched articles of specific aspects, while others seem to be 'Vorberichte' of further studies. The papers are arranged neither in geographical, nor in chronological, nor in alphabetical order, and the thematic division which lies underneath might have been brought out more clearly.¹¹ Some, but not all, of the papers are divided in paragraphs with separate sub-headings. It is unfortunate that there is no index added, and the lack of consistency in the references given in the notes of the various contributions (some of them with separate bibliographies) is surprising. However, in the end the volume keeps its promise, in that it can „nur eine Art Zwischenbericht darstellen, zugleich aber auch eine Möglichkeit bieten, zu bestimmten Fragestellungen schnell Zugang zu gewinnen“ (p. viii).

⁹See, above all, Freyberger, K. S., *Die frühkaiserzeitlichen Heiligtümer der Karawanenstationen im hellenisierten Osten*, Mainz 1998. For a different approach, see the review on that work by M. Gawlikowski, in: *Topoi* 8 (1998), p. 381-388.

¹⁰The study by Gebhardt, A., *Imperiale Politik und provinzielle Entwicklung. Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Kaiser, Heer und Städten im Syrien der vor-severischen Zeit*, Berlin 2002, appeared too late to be put to full use by Konrad (n. 1), p. 237. See also my review of Gebhardt, in: *Classical Review* 54,2 (2004), p. 502-504.

¹¹But see the remarks in the introduction (p. 2): „In der Bündelung der einzelnen Beiträge nach übergreifenden Themenbereichen wurde versucht, den unterschiedlichen Erscheinungen gerecht zu werden und die Fragen zu konzentrieren. Deshalb ist in der Anordnung der Beiträge die Gliederung im Kolloquium weitgehend beibehalten worden.“

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