



Reaching for Divinity

The role of Herakles in relation to dexiosis

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Cover Photo: *Dexiosis* relief of Antiochos I of Kommagene with Herakles at Arsameia on the Nymphaion. Photograph by Stefano Caneva, distributed under a CC-BY 2.0 license.

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Introduction

In the late Hellenistic period the power of the Seleucid kingdom was waning, creating opportunities for other rulers and dynasties to rise to power. One of these, Antiochos I of Kommagene, left an impressive and intriguing assemblage of architecture and sculptures behind. These sculptures and buildings were part of a larger ideological programme of the ruler, spread throughout the kingdom, visible for everyone. Particularly important for this study, are a set of reliefs on which Antiochos himself is depicted shaking hands, a gesture known as *dexiosis*, with three different deities: Zeus-Oromasdas, Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes and Artagnes-Herakles-Ares (henceforth: Zeus, Apollo and Herakles). The reliefs are a unique portrait of a Hellenistic ruler interacting with gods, meant to communicate a specific message. The reliefs were placed at the famous tomb of Antiochos at Nemrud Dagh, one of the highest mountains in the Taurus range. In addition to this there were several smaller cult locations spread out through the kingdom, all of which contained the reliefs of Antiochos shaking hands with Apollo, Herakles, or both, often located at the entrance of these sites. On several of the reliefs an inscription is added on the back which tells us the specific names of the three deities.

The repetition at the different locations and the peculiar gesture are not the only aspects to make these reliefs interesting, the typical style used for the visualisation of Antiochos and the deities clearly show influences of different cultures. We see Antiochos wearing official Iranian styled attire whereas Apollo and Herakles are depicted in a Greek style, fully nude and with their attributes. Understanding the message that Antiochos tried to communicate with these reliefs would be a valuable insight in the use of ideology in the late Hellenistic period, and the use of different cultural styles.

The aim of this study is to find out what the role of Herakles is in relation to *dexiosis* on the reliefs of Antiochos. Two aspects of the relief are key to a better understanding of what Antiochos tried to communicate. Firstly, the gesture of *dexiosis*; shaking hands is a well-known gesture in our day, but has ambiguous connotations and it symbolises different things in different situations. In Antiquity, this was no different and, to explore what different meanings *dexiosis* could have, a wide range of sources will be discussed. The gesture is visualised in artworks such as reliefs and vase paintings, and textual sources which use the term *dexiosis*. Secondly, the addition of a fully Greek Herakles amongst the rest of the gods is rather interesting, on the one hand because of the Greek stylistics, and on the other the choice of this specific deity along with Zeus and Apollo. To understand the selection of Herakles by Antiochos, our perspective must broaden to several other Hellenistic rulers and their ideology as we have no further evidence from Kommagene of the hero being worshipped there. Comparisons with other rulers are an indication of Hellenistic perspectives on the hero. Sources on the ideology of rulers can be deduced from artworks or texts issued by rulers themselves, forming a direct connection to what the ruler saw as important. However, there are many works which are produced by others, concerning the rulers. These sources give information indirectly but are just as important as they represent a more general view of how the ideology was reproduced and interpreted by the rulers' subjects.

There have been several studies on the ideological programme of Antiochos, although most only fleetingly mention the *dexiosis stela*. Zeus, Apollo and Herakles are all taken together, said to be portray an image of divine aid and Antiochos' *apotheosis*. Whereas the deities Zeus and Apollo

have a clear connotation with Hellenistic kingship, Herakles' role is less certain. Zeus, as king of the gods, claimed supremacy through overcoming difficult battles such as defeat of his father Kronos, the wars with the Titans, Giants and Typhon.¹ The myths of Zeus in which he earns his sovereignty through victories appealed greatly to Hellenistic kings and employed the king of gods to endorse their own supremacy.² Kingship sanctioned by Zeus is well attested in the *Theogony*, describing that kings come from Zeus, while the in the *Iliad* Odysseus says: 'great is the anger of kings nourished by Zeus: their honours come from Zeus, and Zeus the Counsellor loves them.'³ A later view on the relation between Zeus and kings is given by the Hellenistic poet Kallimachos, in his hymn to Zeus. In the hymn Kallimachos describes that kings owe their position to Zeus of whom none are more divine.⁴ Rulers showing that Zeus supported their position thus formed a strong legitimisation in the form of divine support. The Persian god Oromasdes is the supreme god of the heavens, similar to Zeus. Apollo, initially an evil averting god, was associated with the sun-god Helios in later times. A sun-deity in relation to kingship was associated with passing legislation and distributing justice, a corresponding characteristic with the sun-gods of the Ancient Near-East.⁵ What then, is the role of Herakles? Argued by Herman Brijder to form a role-model for bravery, valour and strength, corresponding to the characteristics of the Artagnes and Ares who are both gods of war. Artagnes-Herakles-Ares is thus seen as a role-model for warfare.⁶

On the aspect of *dexiosis*, The visualisation of the gesture between a ruler and gods are unique which makes the symbolism more difficult to interpret. The thorough study of Bruno Jacobs and Robert Rollinger, whose views will be discussed in the last chapter, are of particular value to gain a deeper understanding. Interestingly, previous studies looking at reliefs have either looked only at *dexiosis*, or only at the presence of the gods; they have never been thoroughly studied in combination with each other. Yet, in my opinion, it the combination of the two that enables us to interpret the relief and its message. Before we can look at the relief specifically, a short summary of the historical background of Antiochos' dynasty and his ideological programme is necessary as to understand the context the *stele* were created in.

Historical background

The history of the region of Kommagene is shrouded in mystery as there are very few sources available to us. The past of the kingdom is reconstructed as follows: Stemming from a small Syro-Hittite kingdom, it was annexed by Assyria as a province in 708 BC under Sargon II.⁷ During the 6th century, when the power of Assyria was waning, the region was conquered by the Achaemenid Empire and remained so until the arrival of Alexander the Great in the 3rd century. After the death of Alexander, Kommagene became a province of the Seleucid Empire. In the 70's and '60's of the 2nd century BC a succession crisis arose within the Seleucid dynasty, creating an opportunity for an epistates by the name of Ptolemy, to rebel and declare Kommagene independent in 163/2 BC. Ptolemy was supposedly a descendent of the Orontid dynasty of Armenia, as grandson of the king

¹ Morford *et al* (2011), 78-83.

² Anagnostou-Laoutides (2012), 6.

³ Hes. *Tb.* 84-6;901-2. Hom. *Il.* 2.196-7

⁴ Kall. H. 1, 79-81.

⁵ Anagnostou-Laoutides (2013), 54.

⁶ Brijder (2014), 84-85.

⁷ Bryce (2012) 110-114.

Arsames, who traced his lineage back to the Orontides I. However, no evidence has been found for the lineage of Ptolemy to be fully certain of this assertion. Whether Ptolemy was from the Orontides line or not, a close link between the kingdoms of Armenia and Kommagene is often seen by the (re)founding of two cities by Armenian Kings: Samosata by king Samus and Arsameia by king Arsames.⁸

There is not much known about the son of Ptolemy, Samos II, who reigned from 130 until 109 BC. He ordered the construction of the fortress of Samosata, now sadly submerged by the water of the Atatürk Dam. We know he married the daughter of the king of Pontus, Pythodoris with whom he had his heir Mithridates I Kallinikos, who married Laodike VII Thea Philadelphus, daughter of the Seleukid king Antiochos VIII Grypos in ca. 100 BC. This marriage was extensively celebrated in the Kommagenian royal propaganda, as politically it meant that the rulers of Kommagene became Seleukid vassal monarchs. After the death of Laodike's father Antiochos VIII Grypos the Seleukid empire was torn apart by succession wars, causing a power vacuum which was quickly filled by the Romans, who annexed Kilikia and Syria as provinces, and also by the Parthians. Besides these two major powers, there were various others competing for power such as Mithridates Eupator of Pontus, Tigranes the Great of Armenia and Kleopatra VII.⁹

Born in these times of political uncertainty, Antiochos I, son of Mithridates I Kallinikos and Laodike VII, inherited the kingdom of Kommagene ca. 70 BC. With the power vacuum not fully filled, and by the ancestry of his mother, Antiochos I could still claim the Seleukid inheritance. The geographical situation of Kommagene was, however, not without its problems. Bordered on the north side by Armenia and Cappadocia, in the west by Kilikia and in the south by Syria, all of which were already, or became, Roman Provinces in the time of Antiochos, Kommagene became a buffer state between the Romans and the Parthian empire on the other side of the Euphrates. Maintaining a good relationship with the Romans was essential to Antiochos as the strategic position of Kommagene, and the Euphrates crossing, was of high importance. On the one hand, having the Romans as allies was also beneficial, Antiochos remained king and was even gifted more land to add to his kingdom, on the other, however, it was necessary to make it worth the Romans while to keep them a vassal and not be annexed into the Roman Empire. This precarious relationship with the Romans is visible in the use of the epithet of *philorhomaïos*, demonstrating the imperativeness of exhibiting good relationships with the Romans for the survival of Antiochos as a monarch.¹⁰

The land itself was, according to several ancient authors, rich in resources. Strabo described Kommagene as a small country with a fortified city, surrounded by fertile land on which many fruit-trees are present.¹¹ Flavius Josephus adds to this by saying that there were many trees present and Tacitus describes how a lot of the wealth came from minerals present in the country.¹² In addition to the natural resources, the strategic position of having one of the best crossings over the Euphrates, on which tolls could be placed, all added to the vast riches of the small kingdom. The rulers of Kommagene could therefore also make it more worthwhile to the Roman in terms of finances, and had enough money to finance huge building projects such as on Nemrud Dagh.

⁸ Chahin (2011) 190-191.

⁹ Strootman (2016) 222-224.

¹⁰ Facella (2010), 182-183, 197.

¹¹ Strabo, 12.2.1.

¹² Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 14, 441. Tacitus, *Historiae* 2.81.

Theoretical framework

With the history of the kingdom and the ancestry of Antiochos known, how are we to interpret this information in relation to the *dexiosis stelae* of the king with Herakles? The different cultural elements present in the stylisation of the sculptures, the merging of different gods as described in the inscriptions on the reliefs and the aim of the entire building programme are all important to understand.

It is vital to realise though that, before it becomes possible to understand the choice of style used, and the identity the king creates, that we must look critically at what we know about Kommagene under Antiochos' rule and, more importantly, how we know it. Sources on the history of Kommagene, meaning before Antiochos, are scarce; There are no texts, literary or epigraphic, available besides the Assyrian reference to 'Kummuh'. It is not until Cicero that there is another literary source which mentions Kommagene. Archaeological sites show the region had a long history of human occupation but mainly provides information on religion.¹³ Any information on the Iron Age and Achaemenid periods is scarce, and the only source of the Hellenistic period is Antiochos himself with his ancestor *stelae* and the Great Cult Inscription.

However, the information given on the history of Kommagene and its rulers by Antiochos should not be taken at face value. The familial tie between Ptolemy and the Orontid dynasty, implied by Antiochos on his paternal *stelae*, is in no other sources attested. Ptolemy as founder of the Kommagenian dynasty is mentioned by one other source, Diodorus Siculus, but the fragment is brief and rather problematic.¹⁴ Sources on his ancestors such as Samos II and even his father Mithridates I Kallinikos, beside the inscription by Antiochos, exists of coins and nothing else. Even the founding of the cities of Samosata and Arsameia by the Orontid kings is based on the information given by Antiochos and the similarity between the names.¹⁵

Taking my cue from the recently published book, *Visual Style and Constructing Identity in the Hellenistic World*, by Miguel John Versluys, the information given by Antiochos, as summarized above, should not be interpreted as historical facts. Not only are the sources that we possess mainly one-sided, it consists largely of the Antiochan material culture, all part of his dynastic project. How this project of Antiochos was received or to what degree the different cultural influences reflected Kommagenian culture is absent from the sources left to us. It is therefore not possible to see the Antiochan material culture as an ethnic and traditional reflection of the Kommagenian population or its royal house. Furthermore, the lack of sources on the Kommagenian culture means we cannot see the Greek or Iranian elements as something from tradition, stemming from a linear historical process, leading to an amalgamation of cultures in Antiochos ruler cult. Giving a different perspective, Versluys suggests we should see Antiochos' ruler cult as a dynastic Hellenistic project based on the invention of tradition and not, as is often done, the continuation of tradition. The king's project consists of a set of choices which were for specific reasons, for a variety of factors in which the social and turbulent political context of Antiochos' time played an important role. This means that what most scholars think to know about the history of Kommagene and its dynasty, as described above, is mainly how Antiochos wanted it to be known, not necessarily the truth.¹⁶

¹³ Versluys (2017), 46.

¹⁴ Diod. 31, 19. Facella, (2010)

¹⁵ Versluys (2017), 172-175.

¹⁶ Versluys (2017), 157.

In order to understand Antiochos's ideology better we have to place it within the context of the Hellenistic period. The king's ideas may have culminated into a unique style, the different elements were all used by other rulers as well. With two case studies, Sarapis and Isis, Versluys analyses and compares the ruler cult of Antiochos with the rise to power of the Ptolemies in Egypt, hereby drawing three conclusions. Firstly, a new image or idea became a central element in conveying new ideas and often this new image had a composite character. Secondly, this composite character had no simplistic direct relationship to the identity of the image or to the identity of the population and, lastly, this composite characteristic could mean many different things.¹⁷ The invention of a new idea or image was not uncommon in Hellenistic times, but the creation of a dynastic project can be taken to an even broader context. As Versluys continues his analysis of Antiochos' dynastic project he compares it to several other Hellenistic dynasties, such as the forming of the Hasmonean dynasty around 150 BC and the rise to power of the client kings Herod the Great and Juba II. What these rulers have in common is their relatively new position as ruler, and all of them created identities for their Hellenistic kingships with the use of invented traditions, local elements, Hellenism and, in some cases, also Persianism.¹⁸

I think that the argumentation for the use of invented tradition by Antiochos and other Hellenistic rulers by Versluys, gives valuable insights for the understanding of the king's dynastic project in its political and social context. The symbolism used in Antiochos' project was, as such, part of royal self-presentation, meant to publicly demonstrate the message of his legitimate rule. In addition to this, Antiochos was not alone in using artistic representations and architecture to enforce the message, the creation of elaborate visual strategies of self-promotion was evident with many of the Hellenistic rulers.¹⁹ In my opinion, the deliberately chosen elements were purposefully selected to impress both the local subjects as well as, on the level of the wider Hellenistic world, meant to be seen by other (rival) rulers. Through the suggestion of novelty, modernity and cultural know-how, and the appearance of different foreign elements, this eclectic style became a part of the same framework Hellenistic rulers operated within.²⁰ In order to 'broadcast' their message, these rulers used elements of a repertoire that was familiar to them and would show their intentions loud and clear so others would understand. The *dexiosis* reliefs formed a part of the Antiochan visual strategy of which the different deities present on the *stelae* were a part of this wide-spread repertoire, with both Greek and Iranian elements present. Art and architecture can illustrate and impose power in a way that words cannot, and the chosen style of the ruler is a deliberate choice to communicate a message, one we can hopefully still interpret to this day.

But how are we to understand these different elements, denoted as "Greek" and "Iranian", and what did the style of the sculptures contribute to the message Antiochos wanted to convey? Versluys makes a distinction between style as design, the formal features of an object, and style as culture-style, referring to a set of common characteristics, shared and displayed by large groups of

¹⁷ Versluys (2017), 145-146.

¹⁸ Versluys (2017), 158-159.

¹⁹ Kropp (2013), 3.

²⁰ According to Kropp it is necessary to take the viewpoint of the locals, for they would use the new and grand buildings made during the reign of these new rulers, see the artworks and use the bronze coins with the ruler's chosen image and message on it. Kropp (2013), 5. However, I argue that the chosen style in the dynastic projects was part of a wider political playing field, meant to be seen by other rulers, especially in the case of Antiochos who continuously throughout his reign had to fight to remain independent.

artefacts over extended geographical ranges and or periods of time. This means that when an object has Greek and/or Iranian elements it is not referring to a specific ethno-cultural group or a period anymore but the common characteristics displayed by objects.²¹ They do not represent Greek or Persian people or culture in their authentic form, they only have the aim of suggesting a style which embodies traditions. When words such as “Greek” are used they therefore denote a style regarded as such or a geographical region.

In the case of the deities mentioned by Antiochos the influences become a little more complicated. Artagnes, Herakles and Ares are all equated as one deity as though they are the same. Seeing deities of different cultures as being the same can be considered as translation. It means that one god of cultural area or community has a certain degree of similarity in his or her specific character, expressed in myths, hymns and rites for example, which then becomes translatable with another deity with similar traits.²² Even if the cultures were regarded as being “the other” than religion could form a middle ground between them. The term middle ground can be defined as:

‘a field with some balance of power in which each side plays a role dictated by what it perceives to be the other’s perception of it, resulting from mutual misinterpretation of values and practices’²³

By mutual misinterpretation, such as in the case of translation of different gods, Antiochos represents different cultures he wants to reach with his ideological message, creating a middle ground. This was practice used by all Hellenistic rulers in different ways, trying to create unity within their kingdoms. The role of Herakles in particular in this middle ground will be studied in part III.

To summarise, Antiochos set up an elaborate ideology which forms our main source on Kommagene and its ruler. It is important to remember that this information is given to us the way that Antiochos wanted others to see it. It is part of an invented tradition, hereby giving us insight in his ideology. Characteristic of the Hellenistic period, several dynasties had to build up an ideology to legitimise their position as rulers, making Antiochos’ project part of a larger paradigm. With the creation of their ideologies new ways were used to communicate a message, possessing a composite character which could mean many different things. However, these new communication styles used elements of an existing repertoire, known internationally, so that it is possible to make comparisons between them. Among this repertoire is Herakles whose characteristics were translated to local deities, hereby taking part in the creation of a middle ground between different cultures and the known repertoire.

To solve the question of what role Herakles plays on the reliefs of Antiochos in relation to *dexiosis*, this study will be divided in three parts after a small introduction on the ideological programme of Antiochos himself. The first part focuses on *dexiosis*. The aim is to find out what this gesture could symbolise and express. Sources from different cultures and periods have to be used to see if it is possible to draw any general conclusions that could have an influence on the symbolism of the Antiochan *stelae*. In the second part Herakles and his role in Hellenistic ruler ideology will be the main topic. Comparisons between rulers who found themselves in similar

²¹ Versluys (2017), 187.

²² Assmann (1997), 2, 46.

²³ Malkin (2011), 46.

political situations, will give a more comprehensive concept of how they ideology to legitimise their positions in connection with Herakles. All of the information gathered in part one and two will then be combined in part three. My own conclusion will be compared with the few studies that wrote about the *stelae* before, ending with my own interpretation of the relief.

Description of the Kommagenian sites

Famous for its grandeur and splendour, the *hierothesion*, the sacred tomb, of Antiochos on Nemrud Dagħ is an adamant demonstration of king's building project.²⁴ Built on the highest peak of the Taurus mountain range, the monument was visible everywhere in the surrounding area. The *hierothesion* is said to contain his final resting place, the *tumulus*, although it has never been found. Antiochos was behind the construction himself, stated in his inscription present on the mountain. Around his *tumulus* three artificial terraces have been made on which Antiochos set up representations of deities and heroized ancestors.

The North Terrace is significantly different from the other two, probably forming the entrance to the rest of the *hierothesion*. The East and West Terraces both contain a row of colossal limestone statues, five of which are (semi-) gods, flanked on the sides by a lion and eagle. On the East Terrace, behind the statues, there is a path of about 3.5 m width, from which the Great Cult inscription can be read, inscribed on the lower blocks of the statues. The colossal statues sit on thrones with their feet resting on footstools. They are placed on a higher two-stepped podium. Of the five statues, the middle one is the largest designated as Zeus-Oromasdes. He is flanked by Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes and Artagnes-Herakles-Ares on his left side while the goddess Kommagene and Antiochos I are seated on his right side. The names of the gods are all mentioned in the inscription on the back of the statues, the so-called Great Cult Inscription.²⁵ The clothing of the male deities is regarded to be Persian with the boots, trousers, long-sleeved tunic and the cloak.²⁶ On the East Terrace the colossal statues are placed in a similar way, however, the clothing of the deities does not resemble the Persian garb, the long mantles covering the left shoulder, chest and back, tied by a pair of dis-shaped brooches, are more akin to the traditional Armenian or Kommagenian clothing style.²⁷

All the statues are holding an attribute. The goddess Kommagene is holding a *cornucopia* upright in her left hand and has flowers and fruit in her lap. Herakles is holding the attribute characteristic of the hero, his club. The remaining male deities probably all have a *barsom* in their left hand, a small bundle of tamarisk twigs that *magoi* held in their hands at ritual ceremonies.²⁸ According to Herman Brijder, the statues were painted, or had the intention to be. Because all the sculptures in antiquity were painted, both indoor and outdoor it is logical for Brijder that this is also the case for the statues and reliefs on mount Nemrud. It would further increase the visibility of the statues and reliefs, which is strong argument for having them painted. There can be no doubt that Antiochos wanted his *hierothesion* seen as far as possible.²⁹

The statues look out over the terrace and the region around Nemrud Dagħ. On the East Terrace, there are four *dexiosis stelae* which once stood on a podium in front of the gods. These reliefs are badly damaged but the remaining fragments show a resemblance with the *stelae* on the

²⁴ The term *hierothesion* is possibly a Kommagenian creation. The generally accepted view on the interpretation of the term is that it concerns a tomb and at the same time functioned as sanctuary where ceremonies could be held in honour of both the gods and Antiochos' dynasty. For a discussion of the term see: Crowther and Facella (2003), 51.

²⁵ An extensive study of the inscription is given by F.K. Dörner and J.H. Young in: Goell (1995), 176-360.

²⁶ Brijder (2014), 86-87.

²⁷ Ibidem, 85.

²⁸ Ibidem, 90-91.

²⁹ Ibidem, 103-107.

West Terrace, standing in a row beside the statues. On these four *stelae* Antiochos is performing the practice of *dexiosis*, corresponding to the deities of the colossal statues. The style of clothing of the deities is a mix between the style of the statues and new elements. The goddess Kommagene is wearing a *chiton* and *himation*, regarded as Greek, both on the statue and the *stela*. Apollo is dressed in his Armenian or Kommagenian attire of the East Terrace with a Phrygian cap and sixteen sunrays around it and Zeus-Oromasdes, seated on a throne and has a *tiara* adorned with stars and beads along the outline. Herakles on the other hand is entirely different from the statues, he is depicted naked with his club and lionskin draped over his arm. On all of these *stelae* Antiochos is depicted in Iranian attire, but there are slight differences in the adornments. Next to the *dexiosis stela* with the gods there the relief of the Lion horoscope, showing a lion moving towards the right with an open muzzle and a jutting tongue facing the onlooker. Around and on the lion are several eight-pointed stars and a moon crescent is hanging on the front of his chest. On the top of the relief there are three sixteen-pointed stars, representing the planets Jupiter, Mercury and Mars, with the names inscribed above them.

Spread out in two rows, the paternal and maternal ancestor *stelae* present on both the East and West Terrace take up a central place. Through the *stelae*, Antiochos shows his legacy, of which his paternal side shows five members of the Persian royal dynasty of the Achaemenids, starting with Achaemenids Darius I and his son Xerxes I, followed by a group of three Armenian satraps and kings and ends with his grandfather Samos II and his father Mithridates I. Amongst these forefathers it is possible to distinguish between three types, firstly the Persian-Achaemenid, secondly the Armenian satrap and the Armenian king and lastly the Kommagenian type which is very similar to the Armenian satrap.³⁰ The row of *stelae* with the ancestry of the Antiochos' mother is as extensive as the row on his paternal side. These *stelae* start off with the Macedonian Alexander the Great and is then continued into the Seleukid house with the successor Seleukos I Nikator. In this row, not only Seleukid kings are depicted but the last four *stelae* are women. The identity of three of these remains unclear, but the fact that the maternal line is as prominently present as the paternal line, and the inclusion of not only one but three women is an interesting element.³¹ In addition to this, the Seleucid dynasty is said to have descended from Alexander but this is clearly not the case, creating a remarkable, yet understandable, connection between the two.³²

Lastly there are the investiture *stelae* present on the East and West Terraces, a set of five reliefs, badly preserved showing several persons. The middle one shows two men facing each other and are holding a single wreath. The wreath is a *stephanos*, a crown of honour, which is possibly handed over between the men. The identity of the two men is not certain but possibly it is Antiochos I handing over the wreath to his heir Mithridates II.

The entire monument of the *hierothesion* is thought to have been built at the end of Antiochos' reign, around the period of 50-36 BC. There are many discussions on whether the monument was fully finished or not and whether the *hierothesion* in the end functioned as a cult place as Antiochos intended. In the different sculptures, there are several which are missing details, often interpreted that the monument was not finished. Brijder on the other hand argues that these details were left out intentionally for it was finished by the painters who would add the last details.³³

³⁰ Brijder (2014), 101.

³¹ For more information see Strootman (2016), 219-222.

³² Ogden (2017), 53.

³³ Brijder (2014), 114-115.

The theory that the *hierothesia* never functioned is argued by the lack of artefacts found and the presence of snow for large parts of the year, making it impossible to enter the terraces. For this reason, it is difficult to see the monument as a cult location in use.³⁴

Besides Nemrud Dagħ we know of at least two other large *hierothesia* that were related to Antiochos I, namely Arsameia on the Nymphaion and Arsameia on the Euphrates. At Arsameia on the Nymphaion, during excavations in the '50's by Goell and Dörner at a strategically located flattened hilltop, another *hierothesia* was found. On the platform, a large *dexiosis* relief was discovered of Antiochos I and Herakles above the entrance. It is one of the best preserved *dexiosis* reliefs found. Besides the three large *hierothesia* there must have been at least ten smaller cult places, so called *temene*, throughout Kommagene. These *temene* consisted of a small precinct with one or more *stelae*, on which usually a cult inscription is written on the back and the practice of *dexiosis* on the front with Antiochos I and the deity Apollo-Mithras or Artagnes-Herakles. One Herakles *dexiosis stela* comes from Selik, and two more were found at Belkis Tepe at Seleukia/Zeugma, in various states. Despite missing fragments of some of the Herakles *stelae*, it is possible to conclude that there are only very minor differences visible between them. For example, the abdominal muscles of Herakles on the relief of Nemrud Dagħ are made in the typical god-like Greek style, whereas the relief at Arsameia on the Nymphaion show the ribcage more strongly.³⁵ The differences between the sites and inscriptions on the sites are most likely an indication that they were created at various times during Antiochos' reign. Which of the sites were built earlier than others have culminated in many discussions without a decisive conclusion.³⁶ However, as Jacobs and Rollinger have argued, the long-term construction of the sites also meant that the ideology behind these constructions slightly developed over time, making it possible that the symbolism of the *dexiosis stelae* changed.³⁷ Following the theory of Jacobs and Rollinger it means that *dexiosis* in combination with Herakles could have multiple associations.

To sum up, Antiochos' extensive building programme has left us with a unique insight in his ideology. The sites show different influences in style and architecture, giving an indication of the transcultural aspect of his ideology. The various locations of the *hierothesia* and *temene* show the importance of spreading Antiochos' ideology throughout the most important parts of the kingdom. The colossal statues and the *dexiosis stelae* show the important place the gods had, of which Apollo and Herakles are particularly used to demonstrate Antiochos' relation with the gods. The ancestor reliefs propagate his alleged royal and divine ancestry, tracing both parental lines back to Alexander the Great through the Seleukids, and Darius I. With this elaborate ideological project, Antiochos placed himself amongst the great Hellenistic rulers, partaking in a wider context of legitimising his position. To see what the reliefs with Herakles communicated within this ideology will be studied in the following chapters.

³⁴ For an overview of the different theories and argumentations on this see Brijder (2014), 114-115

³⁵ Brijder (2014),

³⁶ Crowther and Facella (2003), 62-65. Brijder (2014) 161-163 Wagner (2000), 19-21.

³⁷ Jacobs and Rollinger (2005), 144.

Part I

Dexiosis and its symbolism in Ancient art and Texts

Introduction

Shaking hands is a well-known symbolic gesture in today's society, used in many different contexts. Upon meeting someone new, it is customary to shake hands when introduced to each other. It can be meant as greeting between people, as well as making our farewells. In some cases, the gesture is used to seal a deal and shaking hands confirms the agreement between two parties. The gesture of shaking hands remains a potent symbol but it is not limited to modern day society. How this gesture came to be or why we have the connotations with these symbolic meanings is not known. That the shaking of hands has a long history is certain as there are depictions of the gesture in Assyria that go back as far as the 9th century BC, the earliest evidence we know of. The continuous use of the gesture throughout history does not make the ambiguous meaning of the practice any clearer as the different contexts have connotations unknown to us. To understand the different symbolic meanings of shaking hands when it is used around us or when it is visible on a picture is often not difficult, the context of new people or arriving or the text that is present with a picture explains to us what the meaning behind the gesture is. This is not the case when we look at depictions of individuals shaking hands in Antiquity, where we often lack explanatory indications to their meaning in that time and situation. In most cases, it is necessary to deduce the meaning from the context it was found in, limiting us sometimes in possible interpretations.

In the case of the reliefs of Antiochos we also miss a clear-cut and well-defined symbolic meaning for the handclasp gesture. The placement of the numerous *stelae* Antiochos on Nemrud Dagh and throughout Kommagene in other *hierothesia* and the smaller *temenoi* with the king is clearly an attempt to communicate a message with this symbolic gesture, but in what manner does *dexiosis* underline this form of expression? The uniqueness of Antiochos' building project makes it difficult, however, to interpret the gesture as there are no known parallels of Hellenistic rulers shaking hands with a god. However, Antiochos operated within a paradigm, working with elements from a repertoire known by other Hellenistic rulers. By looking at different contexts in which the symbolic gesture of shaking hands was used, it will hopefully elucidate the different meanings and associations of the motif and give a deeper understanding of what it could mean in the Antiochan building programme. As there are no known parallels in Kommagene itself, and as the only evidence comes from Antiochos and his building programme, it will not be possible to draw any conclusions on a specific meaning of the gesture in Kommagenian culture. However, as the message of the sculptures is most likely meant to reach the local population as much as it was meant to reach outward to other kingdoms, I think it is justified to look at the motif in different contexts and cultures, to investigate what could have inspired Antiochos to design the reliefs as he did. The main objective for this chapter will therefore be the investigation of *dexiosis* in different contexts, where the question I ask is: What symbolic meaning or message is communicated with the use of *dexiosis*.

The reliefs were denoted as *dexiosis stelae* for the first time by the art historian John Young, a member of the archaeological team of Theresa Goell. His choice to use the term *dexiosis* came from the wish to express the gesture in neutral terms.³⁸ Originating from the Greek word **δεξιόσις**, and the verb **δεξιόμοι**, to give the right (hand), it was meant to describe the action of the gesture and not include a possible meaning of it. Regarding the *dexiosis stelae* of Antiochos, the practice of *dexiosis* means the meeting of two figures with on the right side a deity is depicted and on the left side the king. The two figures face each other while they shake their right hand.

Research on the practice of *dexiosis*, both regarding the *stelae* of Antiochos as well as in other cultures, has been carried out before. To be able to understand the different arguments and parallels scholars have given for their theories on the Antiochan *stelae* it will be necessary to look at where these parallels come from, in what context they have been used and lastly see what conclusions are drawn from them. The sources available on *dexiosis* differ immensely depending on where they came from. There are, for example many Classical and Hellenistic grave reliefs on which individuals shake hands with each other, but whether their meaning remained the same is still be a topic of debate. When we look for examples of ancient Iranian culture there are a lot less examples of art with *dexiosis* available to us. A few textual sources luckily can give us a little more insight, although in some cases it creates more questions. When going through the different examples of *dexiosis* I decided to place these examples in different themed sections, hereby crossing both cultural boundaries as well as time periods. Under no circumstances are these different themes clear-cut separated topics, on the contrary, they will often have aspects that are similar, but their context gives a different emphasis on the meaning.

³⁸ Goell (1995), 157.

1.1 Dexiosis in the Ancient Near East

The following examples of *dexiosis* are to be seen as though used in the context of making an agreement. I have specifically chosen *agreement* for it is a general term that can be applied in multiple contexts, whether it is an arrangement between two friends, a business transaction or a political treaty. Often it will concern a formalised version of an agreement, and occasionally have strong ritualistic connotations. The necessity of making agreements between individuals or parties is as old as humanity itself, but what is interesting is how this practice is culturally expressed and what role *dexiosis* plays in it.

The oldest example we know of stems from the 9th century of the Assyrian ruler Shalmaneser III, who built an impressive fort which functioned as both his royal residence as well as his arsenal. The construction of the fort is designated to Shalmaneser as his name is accounted for in the stones used in the building. The fort is located at the southern edge of the city of Kalhu in modern day Iraq. The fort covered a large area, with large inner courtyards, workshops, treasuries, barracks, private quarters and extensively decorated apartments. That the fort became a central governing place for Shalmaneser III to rule, can be concluded from the throne room present in the southern section of the building. In this room, approximately 50 centimetres above the level



Figure 1: Iraq museum, Mallowan (1966) 446.

of the floor, a carved platform has been placed in the middle. It is likely that on the platform stood the throne. All around this platform are various achievements of Shalmaneser depicted.³⁹ At the front of the throne, visible to those who would be standing in front of it, a scene is depicted on which Shalmaneser III is shaking hands with the Babylonian ally and vassal Marduk-zakir-shumi, whose name is inscribed on the back of the throne-base (see fig. 1).

Shalmaneser is on the right wearing Assyrian royal headdress, with a well-equipped escort behind him. On the left the Babylonian king Marduk-zakir-shumi is shown with his escort behind him. The excavator Mallowan interprets this scene as a ceremonial form of ratifying a treaty by the gesture of shaking hands, possibly denoting some degree of homage paid by the ruler of a client state.⁴⁰ We know from inscriptions on the Balawat Gates that a peace treaty was struck between Shalmaneser's great-grandfather Adad-nerari II and Babylonia. This treaty was renewed by

³⁹ Mallowan (1966), 444-445.

⁴⁰ Mallowan (1966), 445, 446.

Shalmaneser which then obliged him to come to the aid of Marzuk-zakir-shumi when he was faced with a rebellion led by his brother. After leading two campaigns, Shalmaneser succeeded in reinstating Marduk-zakir-shumi. The scene on the throne-base would then be the commemoration of this intervention.⁴¹ According to David Oates there was the expression 'to take the hand of Marduk' in Babylon, which was a standard part of an annual ceremony that renewed the alliance between the Babylonian king and the god, confirming his kingship. Seeing the *dexiosis* between Marduk-zakir-shumi and Shalmaneser III Oates sees it as going too far to suggest the Assyrian king saw himself as a god that confirmed the rule of Marduk-zakir-shumi and looks at diplomacy in the second millennium for comparisons. Although it is not always possible to determine the status of the two persons clasping hands, in some cases it is clear *dexiosis* is a formal confirmation of an international agreement between a vassal and overlord.⁴²

This interpretation is not without its problems, however, as the two kings are depicted as equals, shown with the same height. In Assyrian art, the kings are usually depicted as without equals and are significantly larger than those around them. Furthermore, the text of the inscription on the gates gives the impression that the Babylonian king owes his position to the help of Shalmaneser, clearly indicating that they were not equal.⁴³ Yet the prominence of the position on the front side of the throne-base indicates the scene must have had a significant meaning for the Assyrian king. The context of the *dexiosis* scene on the throne-base would indicate the commemoration of Shalmaneser's successful aid to Marduk-zakir-shumi. The stylistic presentation of the two kings on the other hand seems uncommon for what we know of the royal representation of the Assyrian kings. Sadly, there are no other comparisons of this cultural region available, making it difficult to draw any general conclusions on the usual stylistics on the depiction of *dexiosis*. The context of this specific example however, shows quite clearly it concerns a political treaty, and the prominent placing on the front of the throne-base indicates it had the purpose of communicating an important message to everyone in front of the king. Furthermore, it seems logical to assume that, because of this placement, it was also a gesture that should be commonly understood for the message to be successfully transmitted.

With the context of the inscription present, it becomes clear that *dexiosis* between the two rulers has an essential role in visually expressing the treaty that was struck. The presence of their subjects, who could either their personal guard or perform the task of carrying gifts to be exchanged between the two nations as a show of good-will, gives the scene a rather official outlook. The canopy above the heads of the rulers also contributes to the officiality, placing the scene clearly in a political context. I argue therefore, that the practice of *dexiosis* had a strong symbolic meaning in unifying the two rulers in the closure of a successful treaty, with enough knowledge by others to interpret what the relief was trying to communicate.

There several centuries between the first visual evidence that we have of *dexiosis* and the other imagery. The chronological gap can be lessened with the use of the textual sources, in which sporadically the practice is mentioned. The following examples are texts written by Greek authors who have written about the Persians and occasionally refer to the gesture as a custom among Persian leaders. As is generally the case with the work of every Ancient writer, the degree of truthfulness is difficult to prove, but what is more important in the case of these fragments is

⁴¹ Mallowan (1966), 446, 447.

⁴² Oates, (1962), 22.

⁴³ Jacobs and Rollinger (2005), 146.

writer's view on *dexiosis* as they saw it. It is possible that their view on the practice is what influenced the customs on *dexiosis* in later periods.

In an account of the Greek writer Ktesias we read about the Persian king Cyrus the Great on his deathbed ordered his sons and several others to seal a pact of friendship by giving their right hand. Ktesias was a physician at the Persian court during the reign of Artaxerxes. His work is often viewed rather negatively for its trustworthiness of the given information was already under discussion in Antiquity. Furthermore, we only have a small fragment left of Ktesias' work, most of it has been lost and has been reconstructed from other authors.⁴⁴ Whether the (reconstructed) account of Ktesias is a truthful report of the events happening around the death of Cyrus or not, his view on the practice remains interesting. Ktesias writes:

On the point of death, Cyrus appointed his eldest son to the kingship. Tanyoxarkes, the younger brother, he installed as lord of the Bactrians and their lands, Choramnians, Parthians and Carmanians; and Cyrus ordained that he was to hold them free of tribute. As for the sons of Spitamas, he appointed Spitakes satrap of the Derbicae, Megabernes of the Barcanians. He urged them to obey their mother in all things; he had them seal a pact of friendship with Amorges and each other with the right hand.⁴⁵

Similar to the interpretation given to the *dexiosis* present on the Assyrian throne-base, it is a handclasp with the right hand that underlines an agreement. In this passage it is clear how much value the gesture was given that the two parties would keep their word. By giving the right hand one agrees to specific terms and promises to uphold them, bound by the symbolic gesture. Another Greek author, Xenophon, has written about the death of Cyrus, hereby also mentioning *dexiosis*. However, his account is entirely different from Ktesias. Xenophon gives a description of a speech Cyrus supposedly held before his death, and at the end he 'gave his right hand to everyone, covered himself, and so died.'⁴⁶ In this speech the importance of upholding good relations amongst everyone present at his deathbed is emphasized earlier,⁴⁷ but there is not a clear indication of how the *dexiosis* gesture is to be interpreted. Unlike the fragment of Ktesias, there is no mentioning of an agreement between Cyrus, therefore it could also be possible that, if it was customary, the scene is to be interpreted as a gesture of goodbye to those present. In a different work, but also written by Xenophon, *dexiosis* is mentioned again, but this time in relation to an agreement between Cyrus the Younger, brother of the Persian king Artaxerxes II, and the Persian military commander Orontas, who had betrayed Cyrus. As Xenophon writes, the two reconciled and gave the hand-clasp of friendship ($\delta\epsilon\xi\iota\acute{\alpha}$).⁴⁸ *Dexiosis* in terms of an agreement does appear with more certainty, but this is not the only context it was used in.

⁴⁴ Stronk, (2010), 2, 6.

⁴⁵ Ktesias, *Persica* = FGrH F9 (8). Translation: Kuhrt (2007), 101.

⁴⁶ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, VIII 7, 28. Translation: Kuhrt (2007), 102.

⁴⁷ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, VIII 7, 23-24.

⁴⁸ Xenophon, *Anabasis*, I,6.6.

Another fragment by Xenophon describes the switching sides of Cyrus' commanders because they were brought *dexia* by the king.⁴⁹ In this case it does not concern the actual action of shaking hands, as the king never came near the encampments of the commanders. Instead, Xenophon is possibly speaking of a different practice namely that of giving hand-tokens. It is not possible to support this theory with archaeological evidence from the Achaemenid empire. However, the way Xenophon describes the giving of the right hand without the Persian king being present gives the impression he speaks of an object rather than the actual gesture.⁵⁰ The referral to hand-tokens happens twice in independent passages in the work of Xenophon as well as with Cornelius Nepos and Plutarch. In all of these, the authors write about *dexiai* in context of ancient Iranian rulers and implicitly speak of the right hand being brought or sent, in other words, transported to the other person of the agreement or deal. As in the passage of Xenophon, they often refer to agreements with the promise of reconciliation, but the right hand is always given by the ruler in question. It is therefore an agreement subjected to someone from above. So, in the case of these hand-tokens we have again a certain symbolic trust placed in an object, most likely in the form of a right hand, to ascertain that both parties involved will uphold the terms. In Persian culture, these hand-tokens seemed to express a certain pledge of trust between the two parties, but the status of one of these is higher than the other.⁵¹ The hand-tokens are given by the king, possible no one else, so there is only one side the gesture is initiated from only one side.

To conclude, so far *dexiosis* seems to be used in an official, political context in the form of an agreement or treaty between two parties. From the descriptions, both of the throne-base as well as in the textual sources, there appears to be one side which has the upper hand. This is particularly clear with the sources on hand-tokens, which only seem to be initiated by someone of the royal family, deciding the terms of the agreement. The visualised *dexiosis* on the throne-base seems at odds with the given inscription on the back of it, which clearly shows the Babylonian king owes his position to Shalmaneser, yet the relief shows a strong element of equality. What is possible to conclude from the inscription and the textual sources is that *dexiosis* expresses the makings of a successful agreement in which the two parties underline the trust in upholding the terms by the gesture of shaking hands.

⁴⁹ Xenophon, *Anabasis*, II, 4.1-2. Amelie Kuhrt translates $\delta \epsilon \xi \iota \acute{\alpha}$ in this case with *pledges*, but there is no mentioning of *pisteis* (pledges).

⁵⁰ Sherwin-White, (London 1978), 183.

⁵¹ Knippschild (2004), 294-299.

1.2 Dexiosis in Ancient Greek culture

The oldest source stemming from Greek culture comes from the Iliad. The works of Homer were well known in the Hellenistic age and were seen as an important part of understanding Greek culture.⁵² In the work of Hellenistic poets references to either the Iliad or the Odyssey could be found directly or indirectly and in it is known that in Alexandria, during the rule of the Ptolemies, scholars made copies or commentaries on the Homeric works.⁵³ There is no evidence available which shows Antiochos was familiar with the Iliad, however, as the Homeric epics were known to a wider range of Hellenistic rulers it might be worth to take a look at it. There are in total three passages which refer to *dexiosis*.

The first passage is when the horseman Nestor of Gerenia speaks to assembly gathered by Agamemnon in book two, where he says: 'What then is to be the end of our compacts and our oaths? Into the fire let us cast all counsels and plans of warriors, the drink offerings of unmixed wine, and the handclasps in which we put our trust.'⁵⁴ In this passage the meaning of placing trust into the gesture of the handclasp indicates how the gesture is a symbolic form of expressing trust between the two parties to hold up the agreement that was made. This form is also strongly present in the agreement made between Priam and Achilles, where the Trojan king is allowed to bring back the body of his son Hektor, in which is said: 'When he had thus spoken, he clasped the old man's right hand by the wrist, lest he should take fright in his heart.'⁵⁵ The handclasp in this case is extra insurance for Priam that Achilles will uphold the agreement. The view that Achilles purely gives the handclasp to assure the Trojan king underlines the act of shaking hands to be seen in the context of an agreement. The last passage is similar to the first as it speaks of placement of trust in the handclasp: 'Yet in no way is an oath of no effect and the blood of lambs and drink offerings of unmixed wine and the handclasp in which we put our trust.'⁵⁶ Agamemnon speaks here to his dying brother Menelaos of the breaking agreements but as in the previous passages the element of trust remains important in the symbolic gesture for an agreement.⁵⁷

The presence of dexiosis in the Iliad has been noted before by Gerhard Neumann, who sees the previously discussed passages as an official, ritualised greeting, specifically in the context of bestowing 'guest-friendship' (*xenia*).⁵⁸ In my opinion these passages show the specific theme in relation to an agreement or deal made between two individuals, not necessarily in the context of friendship. The gesture of shaking hands symbolises the expression of the trust, which forms a definite close on the agreement. Although a greeting might have been involved in the first two, the last passage with Agamemnon and Menelaos refers to *dexiosis* between brothers and not the meeting

⁵² Alexander the Great probably likened himself to the Homeric heroes, see Looijenga, A.R. 'The Spear and the Ideology of Kingship in Hellenistic Poetry' in: Harder, M.A. (ed.) et al, *Hellenistic Poetry in Context* (Leuven 2014) and Kropp (2013), 52.

⁵³ Rutherford, (2005), 115-116.

⁵⁴ Il. 2. 340-341. Translation: J. Henderson, *LCL 170* (Harvard 1995).

⁵⁵ Il. 24. 671-672. Translation: J. Henderson, *LCL 171* (Harvard 1995).

⁵⁶ Il. 4.158-159. Translation: J. Henderson, *LCL 170* (Harvard 1995).

⁵⁷ The first and the last passage have another thing in common however, as not only the handclasp is a given with the making of an agreement, there is also a ritualistic element to it in the form of drink offerings and the blood of lambs. The inclusion of a highly ritualistic aspect to seal the deal, so to speak is something that Rollinger sees as originating from ancient Oriental cultures such as Assyria, which have a similar ritualistic framework when establishing agreements. See Rollinger (2004), 400ff and Jacobs & Rollinger (2005), 147-148.

⁵⁸ Neumann (1965), 50.

of strangers. Furthermore, the explicit referral to trust in every passage seems odd when it concerns an official greeting but does not have another addition of a cause for why it is necessary to uphold trust between the two, underlined by *dexiosis*. Especially in the dialogue between Achilles and Priam, an agreement is struck between the two and to signify both will uphold this agreement the shake each other's right hand on it. Another aspect apparent in the description of the gesture is the highly ritualist aspect of it. At least in two of the fragments there are ceremonial components such as drink offerings of unmixed wine and the blood of lambs, indicating these agreements were given a special status of a more official, and perhaps also religious, nature.

A more specifically political context in relation to *dexiosis* is the political decree between Athens and Samos in the year 405BC. It described the privileges given by Athens to Samos and its citizens in recognition of the Samian attitude towards the close of the Peloponnesian War. On the relief are the deities Athena and Hera depicted, who are shaking each other's hands (fig. 2). The goddesses are representative for the two parties, expressing the acceptance of the alliance in symbolised manner. The inscription gives us the context for the interpretation of the gesture, which cannot be differently interpreted than the final agreement and closure of the treaty, visualised by *dexiosis*, in a manner which feels similar to the closing of political alliances in our own time, conducting international diplomatic activity. The presence of the goddesses representing a collectiveness of people only strengthens this idea, which makes it less like a mythological or religious presentation and more a source of political context.⁵⁹

Thus far, *dexiosis* is used when two parties want something from each other and need to uphold the agreed terms. The gesture of shaking hands hereby enforces both parties to place trust in each other and can be used to visualise this coming together of the two sides and the agreement both must uphold. In contrary to the previously discussed hand-tokens, the Iliad and Athenian relief have less emphasis on inequality between the two parties. The high degree of importance given to the gesture, given a more ritualistic aspect in the Iliad, shows it must have been a widely-used gesture. *Dexiosis* is only shown between rulers or (representative of) leaders so far, who use the visualisation of the gesture to communicate an important message for everyone to see. Looking at the gesture in different context will give us a more comprehensive idea.



Figure 2: Athens, Acropolis museum. Jobansen (1951), 150.

Dexiosis as apotheosis

Other than reliefs and texts, *dexiosis* was also depicted on a number of Archaic and Classical vases. The mythological scenes of the gods and heroes were a popular theme to be depicted on vases, which could be in the context of every-day use or placed in homes as status objects. Created in the

⁵⁹ Herman (1987), 130-134.

late 6th century and 5th century, these vases appeared long before the kingdom Kommagene even existed and it seems highly unlikely these would have spread far enough to specifically have any influences on the visual imagery of Antiochos. The reason why I do think it is important to include a few of these vases in this discussion is because they are one of the few sources to actually depict *apotheosis* in relation to *dexiosis* without any ambiguous connotations.⁶⁰ The theme appears more often but I shall discuss only three vases on which Herakles is shaking hands with Athena. The best-preserved of these three is an Attic black-figure amphora, depicting Herakles killing the Nemean lion on one side, while the hero is shaking hands with Athena on the other side.⁶¹ Herakles is wearing his lionskin on his head and hold his club in his left. Behind Herakles is his nephew Iolaos. Athena is recognisable from her short-sleeved *chiton*, the high-crested Athenian helmet and the spear that she holds in her left hand. Behind Athena there is another deity, Hermes, wearing boots with draw-straps and a *petasos*. He holds his *kerykeion* and is facing downwards. The presence of Hermes on the vase, in combination with *dexiosis*, makes the whole meaning of the depiction rather clear. Hermes, known for his role as guide, both to the underworld as well as Olympus. In this case Hermes will lead Herakles to the dwelling of the gods, after the *dexiosis* with Athena, who expresses the welcoming of the hero Herakles to their divine ranks, making him an equal of the gods.⁶²

Another black-figure vase shows the exact same theme of Herakles with the Nemean lion and with Athena, only instead of Iolaos there is a female individual, possibly a goddess, behind the hero.⁶³ The last example is a little different as it is not the lion but the struggle between Apollo and Herakles for the Delphic tripod and although the other side depicts the *dexiosis* between Herakles and Athena, Hermes is not included in this scene.⁶⁴ Although Hermes is missing, I would argue that the similarity of having one of Herakles' godlike deeds depicted on one side, and the theme of Herakles and Athena shaking hands on the other of these three, shows that although various stylistic elements and different scenes could be added, the overall use of *dexiosis* in this context is used to visualise the *apotheosis* of the hero. That there was not one unambiguous way of showing the *apotheosis* of the hero can be seen on a different vase where Athena is leading Herakles towards Zeus, on which she holds his left hand with her right hand.⁶⁵ Hermes is again present in this scene, guiding the hero and his patron goddess towards Zeus, seated on his throne. However, these examples do show how that, although *dexiosis* was more or less common on Greek vases, there are only a few of these that depict *apotheosis*, but it is a theme known in visual imagery in Greek culture.⁶⁶

The act of *dexiosis* and its connotations is a little less-clear cut than that we have seen in the textual sources. What is the reason for Herakles and Athena shaking each other's right hand? Have

⁶⁰ For depictions of Herakles' *apotheosis* without *dexiosis* see: Schefold, K., and Jung, F., *Die Urkönige Persens, Bellepheron, Herakles und Theseus in der Klassischen und Hellenistischen Kunst* (München 1988) 221ff.

⁶¹ CVA USA 14, 30, pl.41.

⁶² Davies (1985), 627.

⁶³ CVA Germany 37, 47-48, pl. 393.

⁶⁴ CVA Italy 45, 3 pl. 1-2.

⁶⁵ Haspels (1936), 217.

⁶⁶ The practice of *dexiosis* is certainly not an uncommon theme on Greek vases and it is not my intention to show that shaking hands is always connected to *apotheosis*. On the contrary, there are many different scenes which use *dexiosis* in different contexts such as or where Herakles and Apollo settle their disagreement on their struggle concerning the Delphic tripod (Beazely (1963) 1420.6) but also scenes less mythological such as a farewell between a warrior and a woman (CVA Germany 14, 15-16 pl. 14-15), or a husband holding the hand of his newly wed wife (see Steinhauer, G., *Marathon and the Archaeological Museum* (Athens, 2009): 12, 242-247).

they, as we have seen before, come to an agreement after with each other which resulted in the *apotheosis* of the hero? Is the gesture meant as a greeting by Athena, welcoming Herakles as an equal amongst their ranks after his death or does it underline the special bond between the hero and his patron goddess, who stood beside him through all his struggles? According to Gerhard Neumann, the *dexiosis* between heroes and gods is an intimate gesture which not only illustrates a special occasion, but also symbolizes something deeper at the same time, namely the close relationship between the two. In the case of Athena and Herakles, it is a visible expression of their friendship.⁶⁷ In my opinion there could be something to say for the multiple interpretations in one gesture. The *apotheosis* of Herakles is mythological scene which means that at some point there must have been given thought about how visualise this phenomenon. The actual *apotheosis* probably did not have a standard visualisation but the rare occasion of gods shaking hands with each other makes this depiction interesting. In poetry, such as the Iliad, *dexiosis* is never mentioned between gods, or gods and heroes, and the rarity of the occasion makes the gestures between Herakles and Athena more significant.

To sum up, the various vases with Herakles and Athena shaking hands show an uncommon visualisation of *dexiosis* in combination with the hero's *apotheosis*. Although it is clear the scene depicts the deification of the hero as a reward for his difficult tasks, the gesture itself remains ambiguous. It certainly expresses the bond between Herakles and his patron goddess but whether it symbolises the gratitude of Athena, the welcome of his newly acquired position amongst the gods or some form of an agreement between the two is unclear, but one interpretation does not exclude the other. A possibility is that the choice of the gesture was specifically made because it could be interpreted in different ways. What remains important is that the vases show a direct connection between *dexiosis* and *apotheosis*.

⁶⁷ Neumann (1965), 52.

1.3 Dexiosis in Greek funerary art

Dexiosis in funerary art

So far different cultures gave different contexts and situations on the practice of *dexiosis*, which sometimes overlaps in meaning even if the context is not the same. There is however one context which has not been discussed yet, namely those in funerary context. All of the Antiochos' *dexiosis stelae* have been placed at the sacred (family) tombs, the *hierothesia* and *temenoi* yet none of the



Figure 3: Hermitage, Sint Petersburg. Pfluhl and Möbius (1977) no. 1104, pl. 166..

examples we have seen so far could be interpreted to belong to this funerary context. There are no examples of *dexiosis* having any connection to Assyrian, Persian or Parthian funerary culture, however, in Greek grave reliefs there is a widespread custom of depicting the deceased performing a large variety of gestures. *Dexiosis* is one the gestures that becomes common in the fifth and early 4th century on grave reliefs in Greek cultures, both in the mainland of Greece as well as the many islands and colonies.⁶⁸ A first look at these grave reliefs shows harmonious compositions which depicts the finality and separation of death, while at the same time showing affection between loved ones. However, when it is necessary to look the reliefs to find out what happens there and what *dexiosis* stands for it becomes a little more complicated. Unlike the vases, of which we most of time are still able to gather what kind of scene is depicted, it is quite often impossible to figure out what is depicted with *dexiosis* on the grave reliefs. By giving three examples of the Hellenistic period I shall demonstrate the difficulty of understanding the gesture in this context.

The first example stems from the late 3rd century, found in Mesambria, and depicts a seated woman who gives her right hand to a smaller person, possibly a child (fig. 3). Behind the seated woman there is another smaller woman, possibly a daughter or a servant. The centralized position of the woman, as well as her size, draws all the attention to her. Without an inscription clarifying anything about the scene, the relief indicates that the seated woman is the deceased and to whom this grave relief is dedicated.

⁶⁸ Neumann (1965), 49. For example, there are several loculus slabs on which *dexiosis* is depicted in Egypt, created during the reign of the Ptolemies. The scene with the gesture is in this case painted and the slab was then placed to close off niches in the wall where the urn with the ashes of the deceased was located. For a description of these loculus slabs see: Brown, B.R. *Ptolemaic Paintings and Mosaics and the Alexandrian Style* (Cambridge 1957).

The second relief shows a similar scene (fig. 4).⁶⁹ There is again a woman seated, this time on left of the depiction, and her right hand is also clasped together with a youth. On this relief there is an inscription present, giving us the name Monodoros, clearly not the name of the woman but of the youth. With the addition of the inscribed name it would then make more sense that the deceased is the youth depicted in the stone instead of the woman. Compared to the first example, it becomes rather difficult to make any generalization about the person on the left or right, seated or not, old or young, and decide from the depicted scene who is the deceased. It is possible the both persons could have passed away and were buried together. The last example, a relief from north-west Turkey, at Eskibalçik there are two scenes depicted and also two names inscribed (fig. 5).⁷⁰ The top depiction shows a hunt scene with a man on a horse in full gallop, the one underneath it shows a woman, again



Figure 4: Schwertheim (1980), 137, nr. 330, pl. 26.



Figure 5: Schwertheim (1980), 133, nr. 318, pl. 25.

seated, who is holding the hand of a man

standing next to her. The names, Menemachos and Babeis, most likely refer to the man and woman depicted in the double-relief and it is likely that they were buried together, but with this relief both individuals are named, whereas the previous two examples had only one name or none. And what if there are three or more persons depicted on the relief, all whom are named, is it then still possible to see them all as deceased (simultaneously) and buried in the same place? Of course, these three examples do not represent the numerous examples of grave reliefs with *Dexiosis*, but they do show the difficulty of understanding the depicted scenes on these reliefs. For if it is not even possible to identify the deceased person, how are we then to interpret the meaning of the *dexiosis* gesture.

Comprehensive literature on the different motifs and especially symbolic themes and gestures for this time seem not to have been conducted yet.⁷¹ Several corpora were made in the previous century, which focused on grave reliefs in specific areas and period, collecting as much as was known at that time.⁷² On the use of *dexiosis* there is usually only a general interpretation given, hereby referring to the high popularity of the gesture in Greek funerary art, used to illustrate the last farewells of the deceased to family or friends, in which case it would not matter who of the depicted persons has departed.⁷³ But this interpretation seems too simplistic. For this reason I am using the theory of Friis Johansen, who encountered the same problems when studying the Attic grave reliefs of the Classical period.

⁶⁹ Schwertheim (1980), 137, nr. 330, pl. 26.

⁷⁰ Schwertheim (1980), 133, nr. 318, pl. 25.

⁷¹ An exception is the banquet scene on which several articles appeared recently in the book by Draycott and Stamatopoulou (2016).

⁷² For example the several volumes by Pfluh and Möbius on eastern Greek reliefs or by Schwertheim on reliefs in specific areas in Asia Minor.

⁷³ Neumann (1965), 49.

When comparing different *dexiosis* reliefs and their details such as the number of individuals present, whom of these individuals is named or indicated as deceased in an inscription belonging to the relief, and the manner of depiction of those present, Johansen encountered too many varying details to conclude in what manner *dexiosis* contributed to these scenes. In his words: ‘The situation is felt to have been intended as the expression of some thought not immediately intelligible to us. The interpretation obviously depends on the meaning attributed to the handshake.’⁷⁴ But how are we then to understand the thought behind these scenes on the grave reliefs?

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the different variations, Johansen deems it necessary to look at the historical background of the different themes on these reliefs. He notices that during the Classical period in Attica there are at least two popular themes simultaneously in use, which have varying details but are notably different from each other. The first theme is not as difficult to interpret as the second, for they portrait the deceased in everyday scenes that is characteristic for them. They tend to be alone or with a subordinate and often hold accessories fitting their social position and gender. Men, both seated and standing, are often depicted with a mourning slave, sometimes a relative, holding parts of their equipment. In the case of women, both seated and standing as well, they often have children or attributes such as jewellery in their hands. Countless variations appear but they all visualise the deceased in an idealized everyday scene.⁷⁵

The second theme is a little more difficult to interpret for these consist of two or more individuals that interact with each other somehow, often by the gesture of *dexiosis*.⁷⁶ Of those interacting, it is difficult to ascertain who is the deceased for they are not distinguishable from the living. It implies that the emphasis is not mainly on the deceased but the close union between the individuals depicted, in which the handshake has a significant meaning. An interesting aspect is that in the first theme, when there are multiple individuals present, they are never depicted with *dexiosis*. The problems with the interpretation is apparent by other studies, who often interpret the second theme as a last farewell of the deceased, most often seen as the one seated, to the survivors. Ironically then, it is the ones that are to depart who are the ones that are seated. Although this interpretation might very well be the case in some instances, others have interpreted this scene as a reunion of two parties separated by death, both in the sense of the living visiting the dead at their tombs as well as the recently deceased being reunited with those that came before.⁷⁷ The different aspects such as *dexiosis* and the varying details therefore lead to a wide range of possible interpretations, which could all be correct in their own specific contexts but the widespread use of this theme hints at a specific meaning to those who saw these reliefs.

By comparing the Classical grave reliefs to those made in Archaic times, Johansen hopes to learn from the traditions and conventions which were behind the creation of these older depictions.⁷⁸ From these archaic reliefs and stele there is one style notably present, a style that Johansen refers to as heroizing. On these reliefs there are usually two or more individuals depicted but the deceased in this case are often seated on elaborate, throne-like seats and are notably larger than the remaining persons. The difference between the dead and the living is made clear by

⁷⁴ Johansen (1951), 29.

⁷⁵ See fig. 1-12 Johansen (1951), 15-26.

⁷⁶ See fig. 13-25 Johansen (1951), 28-46. There are also

⁷⁷ Johansen (1951), 57-61.

⁷⁸ Whereas Johansen mainly looks at grave reliefs, another study also uses the marble lekythoi as a source but comes to the same conclusion, see Schmalts (1983), 214-220.

chthonic symbols such as the pomegranate and the presence of a snake depicted near them, whereas the living bring offers such as roaster and flowers. The depictions give an impression of the deceased not merely as people who were once among the living, but who are now in the circle of chthonic powers and claim their part of the reverence and worship due to these. Furthermore, in most cases it is the iconography and stylistics which make the dead distinguishable from the living and not the inscribed names which are written side by side without any distinction.⁷⁹

From around 500 BC until 440 BC there is a drought of sources in Attica, for very little funerary art of any kind is found from this period. After 440BC there is another rise in grave reliefs, now often also taking the form grave steles. On these steles only the deceased are depicted but even with these it could be argued their representation is heroic and often still with the chthonic symbols.⁸⁰ Over time the sharp contrast between the living and the dead are lessened. The seats of the dead become less decorated and represent more simple chairs than thrones, and the difference in size becomes gradually smaller until the living and the dead are equally depicted. The humanizing of the dead is already visible in late Archaic times, during which difference between the living gradually starts disappearing. Instead of the heroized dead being worshiped the reliefs show a gradual change towards an intimate scene between the dead and the surviving relatives. They gradually become more complex with entire groups depicted, resembling the second themed reliefs with the deceased amongst the living in a group. Although the depictions of the dead change, what remains important with the first as well as last trend is the unity of the family, even after the separation of death. The reliefs express in the Archaic period a more cultic communion whereas the later reliefs show the dead more humanizing, hereby expressing more intimacy and closeness. This last development is what Johansen sees more strongly emphasized during the 5th century by *dexiosis*, when the dead are more difficult to distinguish from the living and closely connected by a handshake. It is a manifestation of the thought that the two parties make a whole, the family, and both sides take an equal part in this unity. It is therefore not so much about leaving, saying goodbyes or a reunion of the ancestors, whether the union between the deceased took place during their lives still or in the after-life, for the reliefs show a common theme on which was endlessly varied.⁸¹

Johansen only limited himself so the Archaic and Classical period, which of course means that over time the motif could change and it is still possible that not every culture and area saw the same depictions as carrying the same meaning. Many places had different, local preferences concerning the depictions on their grave reliefs, something which during the Hellenistic period became more elaborately expressed and varied upon when different motifs, such as the banquet scene, became popular.⁸² But even with these new and different motifs appearing on the reliefs there are still elements or stylistics, such as the pomegranate or the depiction of snakes or other animals, show that some remain in use.⁸³ In the case of *dexiosis* this is true as well, as it remained strongly present in Hellenistic times and shows a clear similarity with the Classical depictions

⁷⁹ Johansen (1951), 111, 151. This heroizing theme is also visible in the Hellenistic times, which still has chthonic symbols on it but are rather different from the Classical depictions. If there is any form continuation in this case it would require extensive research. None of the heroizing examples which I have could find show any form of *dexiosis*. For further examples of the Hellenistic heroized theme see: Pfuhl and Möbius (1977), 47 and (1979), 374ff.

⁸⁰ Johansen, (1951), 146-147.

⁸¹ Johansen (1951), 150-151.

⁸² Zanker (1993), 229.

⁸³ Stamatopoulou (2016), 460-461.

making it likely that with these *dexiosis* grave reliefs the use of tradition and customs the same ideas and values were still used, even if there were still variations upon it.⁸⁴

An example from Smyrna shows a more elaborately decorated use of the *dexiosis* motif, most likely from the early 2nd century BC, with the handshake still as the centre piece, drawing the viewers' attention to it (fig. 6). A woman, seated on the right is shaking hands with a man standing on the left. A relative or friend is standing behind the seated woman, also having her right hand extended as if to place her hand on the hands of the other two. In a much smaller size there are male and female servants present, and in the back, there are several domestic accessories such as a chest with a hat leaning against it. The *dexiosis*, as in the Classical period, gives the impression emphasizing not the final goodbye of the departed but the familial unity in a domestic setting.

To summarise, *dexiosis* was extensively used on grave-reliefs, but the rich amount of variations on the theme make it difficult to interpret the gesture. With the theory of Johansen, who distinguishes two different types reliefs, it is possible to come to a more generalised conclusion. Stemming from traditions of ancestor worship, the scenes depicted on grave reliefs gradually develop in expressions of familial unity. Those in the act of *dexiosis* are of equal status, making it even impossible to identify the deceased. The endless variations on the theme show it was possible to interpret the whole scene in different ways, but *dexiosis* remained an expression of intimacy, equality and unity.

The wide variety of sources on the gesture have their own connotations and differences in what they wish to express. With this rich array of associations, it is possible that the ambiguity of *dexiosis* was one of the charms of the gesture and became deliberately exploited because it could express a variety meanings, adaptable over time. This could also explain the reason as to why there are so many discussions on the meaning of the gesture amongst scholars. In the case of funerary monuments, which were produced on a larger scale, it is possible that the expression of familial unity in place, the depictions could have additional meanings for the relatives who chose the specific grave relief. The multiplicity of interpretations could have formed its attraction. With the visualisations of *dexiosis* in the context of agreements I argue that the situation is different as the artwork is usually specified by individual design. The leader or ruler responsible for setting up the artwork communicated a message to whoever saw it for a specific purpose. But the gesture still had to be well-known in order to have been understood by its audience. Furthermore, the coming together through the shaking of hands, an expression of unity and the equalized status of those taking part in, it is an interesting detail that seems to be visualised so far in every depiction of *dexiosis* that has been discussed. The Persian custom of the hand-tokens is in this case an exception, as it seems to be only initiated by the king. With the other examples, the performing of the interlinking of the hands literally unites individuals, whether they are family, political allies or gods. Although



Figure 6: Pfuhl and Möbius (1977), 272, nr. 1104 pl. 166.

⁸⁴ See for example: Pfuhl and Möbius (1977), 262-273 pl. 1050- 1105. Schmaltz (1983), 228.

the emphasis on the connotations could vary, *dexiosis* illustrates the unity between the two sides. In all these cases, *dexiosis* could illustrate this message perfectly.

With the various examples of the gesture an attempt has been made to create a more coherent picture of the practice of *dexiosis* in different contexts, cultures and periods. The aim was to obtain a deeper understanding of this gesture and how these different depictions emit a specific message or have a symbolic meaning, representing or referring to a historical event, worthy of creating an everlasting image in stone. There is however, one more aspect of *dexiosis* crucial to the understanding of Antiochan *stelae*, namely who the Kommagenian king is performing *dexiosis* with. To understand this essential part of the reliefs, a thorough research will be done of the appearance of Herakles in the Hellenistic Period.

Part II

Herakles in the ideology of Hellenistic Rulers

Introduction

The role of Herakles in the dexiosis reliefs of Antiochos I of Kommagene can only be understood in the context of the ideology of other Hellenistic rulers. Therefore, in this chapter, the main objective will be to see how different rulers, after Alexander the Great, have used and adapted the figure and theme of Herakles in their ideology. Before we can start on the Hellenistic rulers, it will be important to understand how the connection between rulers and the divine can be seen and why Herakles was used to symbolise royal and divine power consistently. The use of Herakles will be largely based on what we know of Greek mythology for most of the rulers had a background in Greek culture and although many variations or adaptations could be made, it was a Greek Herakles they used as a starting point. Visualisations of the hero form an important part of the sources on the ideology of rulers, but, as was usually the case, an image can convey multiple meanings and connotations, depending on what and where it was used, and by whom it was seen. In this chapter, however, I am particularly interested in one kind of meaning that could be conveyed, namely the inference to a divine nature through the presence of Herakles.

There has been extensive research on the use of Herakles by the Argead dynasty and will therefore only be discussed shortly.⁸⁵ The successors of Alexander also have been the subject of research for a long time, but a detailed comparison between these Hellenistic rulers in relation to Herakles and his *apotheosis* has not yet been attempted. The aim of these comparisons is to show that these rulers used the hero and his legends to indicate a divine nature of the ruler in question and that this was a phenomenon that was well-practiced in this period. The increasing importance of the divinity of rulers is expressed through the ruler cult. In the Hellenistic period things are changing, for example visible in the works of Euhemeros, a late 4th century philosopher, active at the Makedonian court. In his *Hiera anagraphe*, one of the earliest works to attest to these changes, he describes how the Olympian gods started as mortals, but became worshipped after their death because of their extraordinary deeds and virtues. The deeds they accomplished were interpreted as divine by later generations.⁸⁶ There was a difference between these deified men who are described as *epigeioi theoi*, “earthly gods”, and the *ouranioi theoi*, the “heavenly gods”, stars and celestial bodies which are immutable and eternal.⁸⁷ Because his work is only preserved in fragments by other authors it is not possible to be absolutely certain about the intention behind his work but we do know he was criticised for his irreverence toward the gods.⁸⁸ However, it may have had its effects on the ruler cult. The divinity of the rulers expressed through cults was thus a rather a new phenomenon, an endeavour that was experimented on by Hellenistic rulers.

⁸⁵ For example: Scheer (2003), 218ff.

⁸⁶ Euhemeros, *FGrH*, 63.

⁸⁷ De Jáuregui (2012), 2554.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 2554.

It is clear that in the Hellenistic period, rulers started to walk a thin line between being human or a god. However, understanding to what degree these rulers assumed or were regarded with divinity is a more complicated matter. To what 'degree' the rulers were regarded as divine? Were they henceforth regarded as Olympians who could give protection or other benefactions when appealed by worshippers? There are many discussions on the subject but in this study, for the sake of brevity, I argue that kings have a claim to divine honours because of their extraordinary achievements and benefactions they accomplished during their life. Kings can rise to the same level as the gods because they can, for example, provide *soteria*. In exchange for their services the kings is to receive the same honour as the gods. Several rulers assumed the title of *Soter*, the saviour (Ptolemy I, Antiochos I, Attalos I, Eumenes I etc.) or *Kallinikos*, winner of fair victories (Seleukos II, Mithradates I). These titles were attestations of accomplishments exceeding human measure, likening them to gods. But in every case there is difference of a ruler associating himself with a god or being one. They are therefore, in the words of Henk Versnel, 'playing gods' rather than specifically becoming one of the Olympians.⁸⁹ However, by propagating their extraordinary deeds and divine ancestry allusions were made by visual representation, which lent a potential for a range of meanings. In this case, the acknowledgement of others to see the ruler as having a divine nature is just as important, making it indispensable to incorporate it carefully within ideology. In order to have this divine nature accepted by others, Herakles played an essential role. What appeal there was for the Hellenistic rulers in using Herakles in their ideology, can be best highlighted by four key characteristics of the hero.

Firstly, the fame of Herakles is visible in the multitude of legends that have survived to our time. Because of their sheer number, and the diversity of their roots, mythographers, both ancient and modern, struggled to create a coherent yet inclusive biography of the hero. The ubiquity of myths, and their different (localized) versions, is at the heart of why this hero is so unique. Herakles is the only true Pan-Hellenic hero, worshipped in many parts of the Greek world, with nearly as many cults as there were myths. But the boundaries of the Greek world are still too limited, as it is highly unlikely the myths are all originally of Greek culture.⁹⁰ The theme of a hero undergoing difficult tasks and slaying monsters is highly reminiscent of myths about heroes belonging to different cultures and tales. For example, several deities such as the Phoenician Melkart, the Israelite hero Samson, the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh and the Cilician god Sandas are regarded to have many similarities, both iconographical and mythological, with the Greek version of Herakles.⁹¹ These heroic figures, and the myths surrounding them, translated across cultural and geographical boundaries and were refined into certain qualities and ideals understandable by all.

Everything we know of Herakles therefore, stems from a vast accrument of information, much of which changes over time with some pieces being forgotten and new parts being added. The myths could therefore show strong similarities, often making it difficult to distinguish between what was known about the hero by the majority of the Greek world, versus those stories known only by the specific regions in which they originated. It is argued that the grouping of the twelve labours, of which we have known only since the 5th century, are an attempt by the Greeks to bring a certain degree of order to the daunting array of deeds assigned to the hero and they act as a

⁸⁹ Versnel (2011), 488, 492

⁹⁰ Shapiro (1983), 7-8.

⁹¹ Mordford *et al* (2011), 579

commonly agreed middle ground.⁹² This transcultural aspect is one of the main reasons Herakles formed an attractive role model, as the main points of the stories were understandable by all and flexible enough to suit different situations.⁹³

Secondly, the wanderings of Herakles throughout his tasks meant the hero had travelled far and wide. For the Greeks, who were themselves descendants of gods such as Herakles and the Asia-conquering Dionysos, this provided a legitimate claim to follow in their footsteps, increasing their capacity to cope with new territory and alien environments. Moreover, they considered the annexation and integration of these lands a reclamation of their ancestral heritage; they did not view themselves as foreign invaders, but as descendants retracing the steps of the gods.⁹⁴

Thirdly, Herakles had a unique aspect which made him attractive as a role-model for rulers: the demonstration of his unnatural, divine strength which made it possible for him, and him alone to complete the most difficult of tasks and become the benefactor of all humankind.⁹⁵ The nature of Herakles' tasks mainly involved the slaying of monsters and evil, barbaric entities, thereby bringing order and civilisation to the region, a feat that could be equated to the accomplishments of kings, whose political struggles, and battles to keep the realm safe, were no easy tasks either.⁹⁶ In this sense, the extraordinary achievements of the hero, placed him above man on the level of a god, worshipped by all, as explained by Euhemeros above. In this respect, rulers could follow the example of Herakles with their own accomplishments, of which military success and protection of their territories were the most important, for it gave the ruler the opportunity to portray his extraordinary skills as divine properties.

Finally, by following the example of Herakles, rulers could assume that the displaying of divine properties would lead to divine honours whilst they lived and, upon death would lead to the greatest reward of all: *apotheosis*. By embodying the characteristics of Herakles through strength in defending their people, the spreading of civilisation by conquest, and by ensuring that they proved themselves unique among all men, rulers could prove their legitimacy beyond doubt and elevate themselves in the eyes of their people to divine status.

To demonstrate the view of Herakles discussed above, four dynasties or kings will be discussed: The Ptolemies, who have an essential part in this chapter as we still have an extensive number of sources on their ideology and the Seleukids, whose ideology had a major impact on the areas under their rule; and of the later Hellenistic period, the Attalids, whose rise to power was a resounding success and lastly, Mithridates of Pontos, a contemporary of Antiochos I who provides insight into the use of Herakles in the same century.⁹⁷

⁹² Malkin (2011), 119-120.

⁹³ Malkin (2011), 140.

⁹⁴ Scheer (2003), 219f.

⁹⁵ Morford (2011), 565.

⁹⁶ On Herakles as a bringer of civilisation see below with the poetry of Kallimachos.

⁹⁷ There are more examples of Hellenistic rulers who have used Herakles in their ideology, however, because of space limitations I have selected four examples which would be most likely to have had directly or indirectly influence on Antiochos I of Kommagene.

2.1 Makedonian Empires

Makedonian royal house

The well-known connection between Alexander the Great and Herakles, propagated thoroughly by the king, originated from a longer standing tradition of the Makedonian royal house.⁹⁸ The dynasty supposedly originated of the kings of Argos, of which the heroes Perseus and Herakles both descended.⁹⁹ The oldest coins with Herakles prominently present are issued by Perdikkas II (c. 454-413 BC), and is continued by his successors, though to varying degrees. The father of Alexander, Phillip II (359-336 BC), is well attested for having a close connection with Herakles, not only supported by the presence of the hero on coins but also in literature. The writers Isokrates and Speusippos greatly contributed to the connection between Phillip and Herakles for they emphasised his divine ancestry to justify his rule over the Greeks and beyond. Speusippos argued that as a descendant of Herakles, Phillip had every right to possess the territories of the Greek world as they belong to the heritage of the hero.¹⁰⁰ Isokrates wrote that Phillip could unite all of the Greek world and take them to battle against the Persians, hereby following the example of his ancestor Herakles.¹⁰¹ The assassination of Phillip however gave that legacy to Alexander, who uses it to its fullest.

The role of Herakles in the ideology of Alexander can be summarized in four main aspects. Firstly, the Argead lineage meant that Alexander could claim to be of Greek origin instead of being seen as a barbarian. The notion of **συγγένεια** was meant to strengthen the bonds between Makedonia and the Greek poleis so that the rule of Alexander could be seen as uniting all the Greeks instead of a barbaric invasion. The emphasis on Herakles supported his claim of Greek origins¹⁰² Secondly, Herakles became a tutelary deity to Alexander, giving guidance during the hardships of his reign. Images of his patron god appeared everywhere he went, be it by the spreading of his coins or the statues and cults that followed in his wake.¹⁰³ Thirdly, Alexander is following Herakles in his footsteps by conquering eastwards, trying to surpass his ancestor by conquering Aornos, a citadel the hero had allegedly failed to take.¹⁰⁴ The travels Herakles undertook in order to fulfil his tasks brought hero in many unconquered, wild terrains, an example that Alexander followed. Lastly, Alexander received many divine honours during his lifetime and promoted his own divinity after 334 BC¹⁰⁵. After his death, many cults in his name still existed for a long time. Just as Herakles, Alexander was regarded to have become a god.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ For example: Diod. Sic. 17.97.1-3. Just. *Epit.* 11.4.5. Curt. 3.12.27.

⁹⁹ Huttner (1997), 66.

¹⁰⁰ Speus. *Ad Phil.* 2-3.

¹⁰¹ Isokr. 5, 105ff.

¹⁰² Huttner (1997), 92.

¹⁰³ The relation between Herakles and Alexander is also attested in ancient literary sources about the Makedonian king, see for example: Plut. *Alex.* 2, 1. Sen. *Epist.* 83, 23 *Arr.am.* 1,4,5. Strab, 3,5,5. Huttner (1997), 93ff. Dreyer (2009), 223ff. Thonemann (2015), 4f. Dreyer (2009), 219.

¹⁰⁴ Chaniotis (2003), 434. Huttner (1997), 102ff.

¹⁰⁵ Anagnostou-Laoutides (2013), 52.

¹⁰⁶ Dreyer (2009), 223-234. According to Bosworth there is no doubt that Alexander thought of himself as divine, see: Bosworth (2006), 19.

With Herakles as an ancestor and role-model for Alexander, the son of Phillip became an example himself for his successors as to how ideology could be used for obtaining a divine status. According to Albert Bosworth there was no parallel to Alexander's self-conscious promotion of his own divinity and that the difference with his successors is striking.¹⁰⁷ I would argue that the difference is less striking than Bosworth makes it out to be, partly because of their use of Herakles as a perfect example on how to gain a divine status. The use of Herakles, both with the Diadochi and the rulers of the later Hellenistic period, demonstrates their divine aspirations, as we shall with the Ptolemies and the Seleukids.

Ptolemies

With the death of Alexander the Great, a period of political instability started, which culminated in many wars between his successors. Although Diodorus Siculus probably could not have known the truth of what happened on Alexander's deathbed, his description of the Makedonian king to leave his empire 'to the strongest', does summarize the events that followed quite well.¹⁰⁸ In 306 BC, Antigonos the One-Eyed was the first to declare himself and his son Demetrius kings, but his example was quickly followed by Ptolemy, Seleukos, Lysymachos and Cassander, who all became each other's rivals in obtaining parts of Alexander's empire.¹⁰⁹ All of the successors had to find ways to legitimize their rule and by successful military battles, either to defend or to add new regions to their kingdoms, they could claim to have the right of rule. This claim had to be made widely known amongst the subjects of their kingdom and to do this, rulers created a well-thought out ideology to communicate the message they wanted. The first dynasty we shall look at are the Ptolemies, who ruled Egypt for three centuries and managed to build a strong kingdom with an ideology.¹¹⁰

For the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty, Ptolemy I Soter, we have very little evidence regarding Herakles and the place the hero had during his reign. The coins issued depict the head of Herakles in the same style as Alexander the Great, with no variations leaving his own mark on the theme, whereas coins with his own portrait are depicted with the royal diadem.¹¹¹ It is very likely therefore, that this coinage was part of a continuation in remembrance of Alexander. It is not until Ptolemy III, who left an inscription in Adulis at the Red Sea recording his deeds and divine ancestry, that we have the first evidence issued by the Ptolemies themselves which attests to their ancestry of Herakles (see the appendix).¹¹² His parents, Ptolemy II Philadelphos and Arsinoë, are denoted as Saviour Gods and through his father's side, Ptolemy III is a descendant of Herakles, and through his mother's side of Dionysos.¹¹³ The inscription continues with a description of the vast contours of the Ptolemaic kingdom, followed by a report of his campaign into Asia and the plentiful successes he accomplished. The correlation between Ptolemy's divine ancestry and his

¹⁰⁷ Bosworth (2006), 20.

¹⁰⁸ Diod. 17.117.4.

¹⁰⁹ Bosworth (2002), 246-247.

¹¹⁰ As is the case with every dynasty and ruler which will be discussed, the ideology existed of many facets and in different layers of society, but to summarize and discuss the different aspect lies outside the scope of this study.

¹¹¹ SNG Copenhagen, Egypt: The Ptolemies, pl. IIff

¹¹² OGIS 54, Translation: E.R. Bevan.

¹¹³ A detailed explanation on the ancestry of Ptolemy IV is given by Satyros, an author of the second century BC. In his poem *On the Demes* Satyros traces Ptolemy's lineage back to Dionysos and Herakles, see Satyr. *FGrHist.*, 631 F1 = P. Oxy XXVII 2465. Huttner (1997), 125.

military accomplishments demonstrate the divine nature of this ruler even if it is not explicitly stated. With his conquests into Asia, Ptolemy is literally following his ancestors Herakles and Dionysos, who went there before him, which is why he specifically mentions these two gods as his ancestors. Although there is some expression of his father's accomplishments, the main reason for their addition seems to be to show how he surpassed these, elevating his status even more. With this inscription of Ptolemy III we have therefore a subtle attestation of how Herakles, as part of the divine ancestry, could allude to a divine nature of the ruler which is demonstrated in his military prowess.

With the later Ptolemies the coinage with Herakles changes. The Alexandrine style will appear now and then but now variants also appear with the portrait of one of the Ptolemies, carrying attributes from different gods, for example with a radiate diadem, associated with the sunrays on the crown of Helios, the aegis of Zeus hung around the neck, the trident of Poseidon or the club of Herakles.¹¹⁴ On bronze coins issued between 221 and 140 BC we see the club of Herakles depicted on portraits of the first Ptolemies.¹¹⁵ When compared with each other, the attributes of Herakles are used less often than others and from this and lack of other evidence Ulrich Huttner concludes that Herakles only formed a part of the Ptolemaic ideology as an ancestor and, although important, he remains more in the background than for example Dionysos.¹¹⁶ Without discrediting the role of the other gods, the role of Herakles is in my opinion more than simply an ancestor, which becomes apparent from other sources. The link between Herakles and the Ptolemies was not only present in images or texts issued in their name, but also found resonance in the works of others for the Ptolemies, showing that Herakles was well-known amongst the Ptolemaic subjects to be used effectively. Therefore, the way in which these works portray the connection between the Ptolemies and Herakles will be of great interest. The works of the court poets Kallimachos and Theokritos in particular are of great value and will be discussed shortly.

Born in the fourth century BC in the Greek colony of Kerene, Libya, Kallimachos became a schoolmaster in the suburbs of Alexandria, but managed to rise to working at the library under the patronage of Ptolemy II Philadelphus.¹¹⁷ Throughout his life at the court of Ptolemy II, Kallimachos wrote many works, the majority of which are sadly only available to us in fragments. Of these there was a variety of different types of poems, but the *Aetia*, which is the most important for this study, was probably written throughout his entire career and became one of Kallimachos' greatest influences on the genre of poetry in later times. It consists of four books in elegiac verse, every book hereby being longer than a thousand lines, describing tales and myths which concerned the origins of cultural customs and religious practices, often explained in an historical context.

The first two books differ in form, possibly meaning that the complete work was written or compiled at different times during his life. Both of them describe how Kallimachos, imagining himself as a young man, asks questions on numerous topics of the Muses. In books three and four Kallimachos no longer uses the conversational framework, but a straightforward juxtaposition, making it difficult to see the four books as a whole on first sight. According to the classicist Anette Harder, there are 'several indications within the books that suggest that there was an

¹¹⁴ SNG Copenhagen, Egypt: The Ptolemies, pl. 8, 196.

¹¹⁵ SNG Copenhagen, Egypt: The Ptolemies, 447f.

¹¹⁶ Huttner, (1997), 132, 145.

¹¹⁷ Bulloch (1985), 10.

overall composition of the works in a later stage, in which the poems were carefully arranged and introduced so that the ‘message’ of the work was subtly reinterpreted and adapted to the new situation.¹¹⁸ Whilst no intact copy of the entire work has been found, many fragments have been recovered from citations written down by other ancient authors, giving us an overall idea of the contents of the *Aetia*.

There are in total four sections or poems in which Herakles is mentioned, yet not all are as positive of the hero. When all the fragments in which the hero is mentioned are taken together there seems to be a certain development in his character. The first relevant passage describes Herakles as an indifferent brute, taking the livestock of a farmer, to fulfil his own gluttonous needs.¹¹⁹ Yet the remaining passages portray Herakles in a more positive light. In the poem with Thiodamas of Dryopia there is contrast in that Herakles again steals an ox, but this time to feed his hungry son. However, the farmer refuses, leading to a fight between Herakles and the Dryopians. In the end Herakles is victorious and to bring an end to the bad habits of the Dryopians, they are deported to Hermoine and Asine.¹²⁰ In this poem, Heracles is not acting egotistically, and from the narrative it becomes apparent that the fight is started by Thiodamas and his band of brigands.¹²¹

In book three there is a more direct link between the Ptolemies and Herakles with the *Victoria Berenikes*. The poem celebrates the victory of Berenike II, the wife of Ptolemy III Euergetes, in the chariot-race of the Nemean Games, won by her team. As Kallimachos praises her victory, he simultaneously describes the myth behind the origin of the games, namely the defeat of the Nemean lion by Heracles.¹²² The emphasis, however, is not on the battle with the lion, it lies on the poor Molorcus, who temporarily hosts Hercules before the hero goes into battle. Poor, because the Nemean lion makes it impossible to use the land for farming, Molorcus tries to entertain Heracles with a meal fit for the hero, hereby sacrificing the only goat he has. Heracles tells Molorcus to wait with the sacrifice until he has slain the lion, so that poor man has an abundance of meat.¹²³ Unlike the gluttonous greed in the first poem, Heracles now shows modesty, and with the defeat of the lion, evil has been purged and the lands and can be cultivated again, bringing back civilization to that area.¹²⁴

The last reference describes the work of Heracles in the Augean stables, in which he is hired to clean the stables of King Aegeas but, after succeeding, Heracles does not get paid. The son of the king, Phyleus, judged his father to be in the wrong and was therefore exiled. Heracles returned with an army, destroyed Elis and gave the kingdom to Phyleus and in this way restored order. During the war, the population was severely diminished so Heracles told the soldiers of his army to bed the widows of the Elean soldiers, so that the population would be restored.¹²⁵ With the refusal of the Heracles’ payment and the banishment of his own son, who convicted his father in a fair trial, Aegeas is depicted as lawless tyrant, unfit to rule. By killing the king and placing his son on the throne, Heracles removes the uncivilized threat of the land and restores order to land of Elis.

¹¹⁸ Harder (2002)a, 7.

¹¹⁹ Kall., *Aet.* Fr. 23

¹²⁰ Kall., *Aet.* Fr. 24-25.

¹²¹ Heerink (2012), 52-53.

¹²² Parsons & Kassel (1977), 42.

¹²³ Fantuzzi & Hunter (2005), 84.

¹²⁴ Ambühl (2004), 43.

¹²⁵ Kall., *Aet.* Fr. 76b-77d

So far we encountered three poems in Kallimachos' *Aetia* depicting Heracles in a positive light for, and one that does not. With Heracles being such an important part in the claim to legitimate rule of the Ptolemaic dynasty, it seems odd to include a description of a mean brute who will do anything to get food, unbothered by whom it may harm. It is only in the later poems that Heracles takes on the role as bringer of civilization, suitable for the context of the Ptolemies. However, if the *Aetia* is seen as portraying thematic development in terms of expansion, progress and the increased spreading of civilization by the description of killing or punishing of monsters and villains, presenting the world with a number of places that received civilisation.¹²⁶ Observing the development of Heracles' role, the discrepancy between the first poems and the latter ones seem to describe how the ancestor of the Ptolemaic dynasty brings civilization to more places. From a young Heracles, who was indifferent to the fate or wishes of others, he becomes more and more the destined hero of legends, defeating evil and ending chaos by completing his works and his many side quests, thereby bringing order, safety and stability, so that these regions can flourish. In the myths of the Lindan farmer and the defeat of Thiodamas one could argue that existing civilizations were already present. From the myths, however, it becomes apparent that these leaders were not fit to rule, placing Heracles in the role of restoring order, one that followed the law and banished evil and chaos from the lands, in a similar way barbarian lands are brought civilization, suiting the ideology of the Ptolemies.

Whilst the Ptolemies were busy founding a new dynasty, they used Herakles in their ideology to strengthen their rightful position, which is reflected in Kallimachos' *Aetia*. Heracles was a hero that travelled far and wide, during which travels he managed to kill many monsters and villains, hereby restoring order and bringing civilization to the often rural or far-away kingdoms. Kallimachos did not just write poems in praise of Heracles, he used a far subtler style to address the ancestor of the Ptolemies. By being described as a young hero, who displays foolish behaviour towards the Lindan farmer, but grows into the strong hero of legends, Kallimachos underlines not only a development in the increasing civilization of the world, but also of Heracles himself, embedding a subtle feeling of progress. This role of Heracles as the traveller who defeats evil during his journeys, who subdues chaos and brings civilization to remote and barbarous places, is a role that fits perfectly with the ideology of the Ptolemies. In their desire to establish a world-order by eliminating barbarian threats as well as conquering lands, they could style themselves as saviours and claimed to have brought civilization to these new areas. In the role of protector, the Ptolemies took on semi-divine responsibilities towards their subjects, which is reflected in the *Aetia* by the role of Heracles. In the poems of Theokritos Herakles receives distinctive attention as well.

Theokritos

Theokritos composed hymns, encomia, both formal and informal, as well as pastoral poems. It is uncertain whether Theokritos received patronage by Ptolemy III, though there are enough allusions in his works asking for support of the Ptolemaic ruler.¹²⁷ In Theokritos' *Idyll* 24 and 25, Herakles is the main character. The first, sadly incomplete, tells the tale of the hero as a ten-month-old child, describing the moment that Hera sends the two dreadful snakes to Herakles and his brother Iphicles, culminating in the famous moment of Herakles strangling the snakes with his bare hands.

¹²⁶ Harder (2003), 302, 304.

¹²⁷ Hunter (2003), 28-29.

The *Idyll* continues with Alcmena asking Teiresias for his advice concerning the strange incident and ends with a description of all the skills Herakles was taught during his adolescence. In this *Idyll* there are two fragments which could allude to the Ptolemies, but the connection is arguable but even if they are meant to be, and one can doubt about how many others could understand the references besides the Ptolemies themselves. Because of this, Huttner concludes that it is not possible to speak of court propaganda, only that he was a general symbol of ruling power and royal struggle against any unfair treatment.¹²⁸ Whereas I agree that Herakles formed a powerful symbol, in my opinion Huttner does not regard the image that is created of the hero as important enough. Besides the famous scene of strength where of a young child kills two snakes before his first birthday, the remaining description of Herakles contains some interesting aspects. The vision of the future in which Teiresias foretells the *apotheosis* of the hero as follows:

This son of yours, when he is a broad-chested man, is destined to ascend to the starry sky, and he will be mightier than all beasts and all other men. It is fated that when he has accomplished twelve labours he will live in the house of Zeus, while a pyre on Mt. Trachis will hold his mortal remains; he will be called son-in-law of the gods.¹²⁹

This passage gives an interesting view on the hero himself, described as mightier than all others, be they beast or man, and that when he has accomplished his labours, then he will live amongst the gods. The emphasis on his *apotheosis* is rather strong, expressed three times in this small fragment. It clarifies the duality existing within the hero, possibly inspired by the work of Sophokles, with a clear distinction between his mortal and immortal heritage.¹³⁰ His mortal side, inherited from his mother, will be burned away, whereas the immortal side of his father is welcomed amongst the gods. The ancestry plays a large part in the ideology of the Hellenistic rulers in general and this explanation, that an inherited divine nature and the fulfilling of tasks, which could only be done by someone with godly abilities, is exactly what a ruler is aiming to show in his ideology. Even if there is no possibility of linking *Idyll* 24 directly to the Ptolemies, as Huttner comments, the overall passage gives us an important impression about how the hero was viewed at the court culture of the Ptolemies.¹³¹

Idyll 25 is a little more problematic as there is a lot of criticism on the authenticity of belonging to Theokritos. However, linguistic evidence and the correspondence of the subject with other poets have concluded that the poem originates from the same period as Theokritos and Kallimachos, making it still relevant for this study.¹³² The poem tells of the arrival of Herakles at the Augean Stables, however, instead of describing this task, the hero meets a countryman who asks about the

¹²⁸ Huttner (1997), 137-140.

¹²⁹ Theoc. *Idyll* 24, 80-84. Translation: J. Henderson, *LCL* 28.

¹³⁰ In his *Trachinae* Sophokles describes how the mortal remains of Herakles are burned away on Mt. Trachis, while the part inherited from his father, the part which has a divine nature, is welcomed amongst the gods. Soph. *Trach.* 1191-215.

¹³¹ Another important factor could be the ideal skills connected with kingship, for there is an elaborate description of every ability the hero is taught when he is growing up, but further research would be necessary to make a conclusive remark on it. See: Theoc. *Idyll* 24, 103-134.

¹³² Fantuzzi & Hunter (2005), 210-15.

hero's struggle with the Nemean lion and a large part of the poem is dedicated to giving a vivid description of this encounter.¹³³ In similar fashion of *Idyll* 24, a description is given of the hero as divinely strong, capable of completing tasks no ordinary man could do. More importantly, the poem shows also a strong similarity with the description of Herakles in the *aetia*. The narration of the tale about the lion starts with the horror and problems the beast caused to the lands where it roamed. The cultivated land lay barren and untouched for all the farmers were too scared to leave their houses.¹³⁴ The suffering of men and flocks is repeated at the end, giving the impression that the emphasis is placed on Herakles returning order to the land by killing the monster, letting civilization return to the region.¹³⁵ The theme of Kallimachos with the hero as bringer of civilization and order can be said to have been a general view.

One of the most important works of Theokritos for this study is his *Idyll* 17, an encomium of Ptolemy II Philadelphos. In this work the poet presents the king as a heroic figure and reflects on his divine nature, highlighted through less than subtle allusions. This divine nature and status of Ptolemy II is presented by likeness and analogy, difference and similarity, which is present throughout the entire poem.¹³⁶ The ending of the encomium reads as a hymn to a god, and refers to Ptolemy as a demigod.¹³⁷ Overall, Theokritos takes elements from both the king's self-presentation as well as the ruler cult, emphasizing hereby not only his Heraklidian origins but also the alignment with the god. Two elements shall be discussed for better clarification, the ancestry and the description of Ptolemy's accomplishments, for I argue that both have a similar view of the relation between Herakles and the ruler as we have seen with the previously discussed poems.

Theokritos praises the divine qualities of Ptolemy's deified parents, Ptolemy I Soter and Berenike. Soter is said to have inherited the power to accomplish any great deed once he sets his mind to it, so that Zeus made him equal in honour of the gods and gave him a place on Olympus. The relation between performing tasks no other man can do, with the specific reward of immortality is recalled here. In the dwelling of the gods Soter is in the company of Alexander, who sits next to him, and facing both them is Herakles, an arrangement which probably indicates a certain hierarchy amongst them.¹³⁸ Explicitly expressed is that both Alexander and Soter trace their lineage back to him.¹³⁹ The aspect of ancestry is once again clearly present, but what is interesting is that it specifically concerns Herakles. The Ptolemies traced their lineage back to several gods, yet Theokritos chose to emphasize Herakles instead of others. The three gods are enjoying a banquet and when Herakles, a little tipsy from the nectar, returns to his wife Hebe, Alexander and Soter are entrusted with his weapons, demonstrating the closeness between them.¹⁴⁰ The description of the ancestry on the one hand gives a clear view on the divine lineage of Ptolemy, but the closeness of his father with Alexander and Herakles gives an impression of how close the king, or his bloodline, is to the divine. On the other hand, the lineage emphasizes the divine qualities Ptolemy inherited from them.

¹³³ On the narrating style and peculiar setting see: Gow (1950), 438-39. Henderson (2015), 340-341. Fantuzzi & Hunter (2005), 210-15.

¹³⁴ Theoc. *Idyl.* 25, 218-220. Translation: Henderson (2015).

¹³⁵ Theoc. *Idyl.* 25, 280. Translation: Henderson (2015),

¹³⁶ Hunter (2003), 94.

¹³⁷ Theoc. *Idyl.* 17, 134. Henderson (2015), 257, n. 46.

¹³⁸ Huttner (1997), 142.

¹³⁹ Theoc. *Idyl.* 17, 26-27. Hunter (2003), 120.

¹⁴⁰ Theoc. *Idyl.* 17, 28-30.

Later in *Idyll* 17 Theokritos gives an elaborate view on the kingdom of the Ptolemies and the vast regions belonging to it, containing countless people and cities which can flourish because of Ptolemy:

His people work their land undisturbed: no enemy passes over the Nile, teeming with its huge creatures, to raise on land the war cry in villages not his own, and no one leaps ashore in armour from his swift ship to raid the cattle of Egypt: fair-haired Ptolemy, skilled at wielding the spear, is established in those broad plains. As a good king should, he is most concerned to keep safe his ancestral lands, and he acquires more himself.¹⁴¹

The passage makes it clear there is only one person responsible for the prosperous state of the kingdom, fulfilling the same function as his father has done before him, namely that of *soter*. Reigning over a vast amount of territory, protecting it and adding more regions to the kingdom places Ptolemy in footsteps of his divine ancestors, the reason why Theokritos calls the king a demigod. The whole description of Ptolemy reflects the virtues and accomplishments of those before him. Furthermore, it shows that both are capable of tasks which normally are done only by the gods and as such is the case, they are welcomed on Olympos and will receive immortality.

To conclude, the impression of Ptolemy II given by Theokritos in *Idyll* 17 corresponds rather well with what we have seen of the ideology of the ruler with the inscription and the coins, as well as the other poems. The *Aetia* and *Idyll* 25 both portray Herakles as a protector and bringer of civilization, by accomplishing tasks no ordinary man could do. Furthermore, *Idyll* 17 and 24 give thorough descriptions of the *apotheosis* of Herakles, of which the first poem and deification is directly linked to the Ptolemies. The first Ptolemies created therefore a heritage which would last until the end of their dynasty, keeping a close link with their deified predecessors, going back as far as Herakles. The role of Herakles, demonstrated both in ideology as well as court culture, was widespread and showed a strong connection between the divine ancestry of the ruler and therefore the divine nature within him, enabling him to accomplish tasks only gods could do. It made the role of the king indispensable, not only legitimising his position but also expressing why the ruler, and he alone, was capable of such deeds.

Seleukids

As contemporary rulers of the Ptolemaic dynasty, it will be interesting to see another Hellenistic ideology with a rivalling claim of legitimate rule, issued by the Seleukids. However, in relation to the use of Herakles figure, the evidence for a connection between Herakles and the Seleukid dynasty is sparse to say to at the least. The 4th century AD writer Libanios is the only ancient source which mentions that the Seleukids saw Herakles as their ancestor, through the line of Temenos, mythical king of Argos, continuing the line of the Makedonian dynasty who identified themselves as the Argeads.¹⁴² Libanios writes several centuries after dynasty of the Seleukids was in power and without other sources, which are closer in time, it becomes difficult to see if the Seleukids had a place for Herakles in their political ideology at all. Libanios mentions the ancestry to Herakles in a

¹⁴¹ Theoc. *Idyl.* 17. Translation: Henderson (2015), 255.

¹⁴² Lib. *Or.* 11; 91. Mehl (1986), 6-7.

speech held in honour of the city Antioch, but it is very likely that Libanios wanted to give the founder of the city, Seleukos I (358-281 BC), a more heroic ancestry to elevate the prestige of the city further.

Libanios would have had access to administrative records and, when compared with other examples of his work, his statements cannot be said to be without foundation, albeit the laudatory nature of his style may have influenced some of the information given, so that the speech was adjusted to the liking of the elite and educated in the community, to whom the speech was directed.¹⁴³ Besides the divine ancestry of the king, there are also a few passages which liken Seleukos I to the figure of Herakles as a heroic model in the speech but none of these have any foundation in a contemporary source to our knowledge. One of these is about Seleukos subduing a sacrificial bull or boar which became frantic during the ritual. While in the presence of Alexander the Great, Seleukos managed to neutralize the threat with his bare hands, hereby showing an incredible amount of strength. The overcoming of a strong, wild animal by using an abnormal amount of brute force is very similar to the several tasks Herakles performed. None of the sources attesting to the story are written down before the first century AD, making it difficult to see it as part of an ideology of the Seleukids and more likely to form a well-invented expression of Seleukos' ancestry.¹⁴⁴

A source which is contemporary and the only evidence for an ideology, are the coins issued by the Seleukid dynasty. The coins form an important part of the ruler's ideology for they would spread far and wide and were often commissioned by them.¹⁴⁵ The figure of Herakles is well-attested on coins of Seleukos I, who probably continued the images used on the coinage of Alexander on the standard Alexandrine tetradachm.¹⁴⁶ The obverse shows the head of a young Herakles, facing right, and is wearing the lion skin as a headdress, with on the reverse Zeus is depicted, enthroned, with a Nike (in some cases an eagle) in one hand and a sceptre in the other (see fig 7 and 8). This theme of Herakles and Zeus was produced at nearly every mint producing silver coinage, making it possible for this coin to have spread far and wide throughout the Seleukid empire. The iconography and the theme present on the coins of Alexander and Seleukos I show so much similarity that it must have been intended as a form of continuation from the Alexandrine type (see fig. 7 and 8).



Figure 7: Silver tetradachm of Seleukos I. Erickson (2009) 256, fig 14.

Figure 8: Silver drachm of Alexander the Great. Thonemann (2015) 5.

¹⁴³ Norman (2000), 6.

¹⁴⁴ App. *Syr.* 57, 294; Suda s.v. Seleukos; Malalas, *CSHB*, 28, 203. Mehl (1986), 12.

¹⁴⁵ Thonemann (2016), 146

¹⁴⁶ Erickson (2009), 84. See also p. 37ff. for other themes and deities used by the Seleukid dynasty.

There are a few coins with the none-alexandrine type of Herakles. From an unknown mint, this type of coin depicts a bearded Herakles on the obverse and a horned elephant on the reverse (fig.9). This is the only type known to us where the depiction of Herakles differentiates with the young Herakles type. With the eastward expansions of Seleukos I it is possible that he wanted to differentiate himself more from Alexander and devote more attention to his own accomplishments, hereby starting a new style, but still giving prominence to Herakles, but further research would be necessary to make a firmer case. As to what relation Herakles was used by the Seleukid king, therefore, remains obscure with these coins for although the image might have changed to suit different aspirations or demonstrate different accomplishments, the interest of this thesis lies in connections made to a divine nature and it is not clear yet if this was the case or if they followed an existing model. There have been a lot of discussions on the portrait of the coins to which is often argued that the depiction could not be Seleukos I for he would not depict himself with divine attributes, at least not without the approval of the Greek states. Any connotations to a divine nature would only have happened after his deification in 281/80 BC.¹⁴⁷ However, I would argue that Seleukos I did use divine attributes or the depiction of deities closely associated with him to stress a relation between himself and the divine. In the case of Herakles, the continuous use of the hero could be seen as a dual connotation of a connection with the divine ancestor as well as with Alexander. The change of the young Herakles to an older, bearded version is meant to step away from the Alexandrian type and more towards Seleukos' own connection towards a divine nature.



Figure 9: bronze coin of Seleukos I. Erickson (2009) 261, fig 29.

Taking my cue from a thorough comparative study done by K. Erickson, it may be seen that Seleukos was trying to establish a closer link with a divine nature with another interesting theme, completely different from the previous coins, the so-called “Helmeted-Hero”. Although the coin, and the identity of the featured figure, is again a heavily discussed topic, the latest generally accepted opinion is that it depicts Seleukos I, wearing a helmet covered with a panther skin, adorned with the horns and ear of a bull. The panther skins and horns are attributes associated with Dionysos, the god who conquered Asia. The coin is probably depicting the Seleukos' successful campaigns in India, or the assumption of the royal diadem.¹⁴⁸ The message behind the depiction visualises Seleukos as a victorious king, closely associated with the gods, as demonstrated by the horns. The new addition of the horns is associated with the depiction of gods from Syria, Mesopotamia and Anatolia, who are known to have worn horned helmets.¹⁴⁹



Figure 10: Tetradrachm of Seleukos I. Erickson (2009), 258, fig. 20.

¹⁴⁷ For a concise summary of views see: Hadley (1974), 9-13.

¹⁴⁸ For the eastward campaigns see Grainger (2014) 54-60.

¹⁴⁹ Iossif (2012) 99, 114-115.



Figure 11: tetradrachm of Seleukos I. Erickson (2009), 258, fig. 21.

The same symbolism which was adopted by royalty long before Seleukos set foot in the east.¹⁵⁰ With the adoption of the horns we can at least be certain that Seleukos showed aspirations of a divine nature by the king. However, Seleukid coins with horns are not very common. In the overall coinage of the Seleukids, the depiction of the rulers with divine attributes, such as the horns, is scarce in comparison. The allusions to divinity were therefore discrete.¹⁵¹ Interesting to recall, the bull

horns also remind us of the story by the first century authors and later about Seleukos subduing the sacrificial bull, but a link between the two remains impossible to prove. This new iconography did not exclude depictions of Herakles, for another example shows Herakles in the Alexandrine style on obverse, and a rider and horse both with horns on the reverse. The different motifs and iconography enforces each other more by placing a heavier emphasis on the connection with the divine. Naturally, there it is very likely multiple connotations can be given to the images on the coins but in my opinion at least one of these is the link of a divine nature with Seleukos.

With the successors of Seleukos I, Herakles is continuously used but does become less prominently as there are less and less coins found with the hero, whereas other divinities appear more often. Antiochos I (c. 324/3-261 BC), son of Seleukos I, is one of the few Seleukid rulers who, beside the standard Alexandrine style, also used adaptations, which differed in type of coin, date and parts of the kingdom where they were minted. In the eastern parts of the empire, the coins commemorate themes issued under Seleukos I, with the Herakles head on the obverse and a horned horse or a bull on the obverse. A few coins also show an obverse with the weapons of the Herakles, both the club and the bow, tucked into a bowcase. In the western parts of the kingdom Antiochos issued coins with his own diademed portrait in the obverse and a resting or weary Herakles on the obverse, made after the statue of Lysippos, created for Alexander the Great if we are to believe the Roman epigrammatist Martial.¹⁵² The resting Herakles shows the hero as

Kallinikos, victorious after his labours, something Antiochos wanted to show he shared with the hero (fig. 12).¹⁵³ By overcoming of the difficult political situations in the Near East as well as several battles in order to keep the kingdom safe, Antiochos visualised his role as a divine protector by the use of Herakles.¹⁵⁴ Antiochos II (286-246 BC) continued the use of Herakles on coinage, with similar depictions, hereby showing he was the



Figure 12: Erickson (2009), 270, fig 57.

¹⁵⁰ Erickson (2009), 72. For images of gods with horns or kings such as Naram-Sin of Agade, see: Pritchard (1954), figs 309, 475, 490, 491, 493, 498, 505, 525-27, 537-40.

¹⁵¹ Iossif (2012), 114.

¹⁵² Mart. *Epigrammata* IX, 43-44.

¹⁵³ Vermeulen (1975), 79.

¹⁵⁴ Another indication that Antiochos I associated himself Herakles is the title *Soter*, which the king allegedly received after a victorious battle, but which one is still a point of discussion. Without the certainty of knowing whether Antiochos used the title himself or if it was given for example after his death, the argument for it to have been used in his ideology programme loses credibility. Erickson (2009), 132, 153.

legitimate successor of his father as protector and saviour of cities. It is interesting to note that the coins of Antiochos I and his son with Herakles mainly appear in the eastern territories of the kingdom, and are notably used less in the western regions. The image of Herakles must have been more popular amongst the eastern regions, which could also be an explanation as to why the successor of Antiochos II, Seleukos II (265-225 BC) hardly used Herakles on his coins after losing these territories.

A later source which attests to importance of Herakles during the later Seleukid dynasty, also in the eastern part of the empire, comes from mount Bisotun. Located in the west of modern-day Iran, the mountain is famous for its multilingual inscriptions of Darius I, which records his great deeds. In the same mountain, there is a sculpture carved, showing the profile of Herakles. Dated to 148 BC, it shows the hero lying comfortably, with his club resting at his feet, bow and arrow hanging in the tree and a drinking bowl in his hand.¹⁵⁵ The sculpture shows Herakles Kallinikos in a similar fashion as the coins of Antiochos I. It is accompanied by an inscription stating that the Hyacinthos, the son of Pantauchos, dedicated Herakles Kallinikos for the well-being of Cleomenes, the governor of the Upper Satrapies.¹⁵⁶ The control of the Upper Satrapies by the Seleukids is attested by Diodorus, who writes that it consists of seven satrapies.¹⁵⁷ The inscription dates the dedication by use of the imperial calendar, the kingdom's administrative titlature and the Greek name and epithet of the hero. Pantauchos is also a markedly Macedonian name and the whole form of the inscription recalls the way in which Seleukid kings erected their letters and instructions in the region.¹⁵⁸ Although it was not directly issued by someone of the Seleukid dynasty, the whole ensemble uses the iconographic and textual markers of the Seleukids.

To conclude, the beginning of the Seleukid dynasty can be safely linked with Herakles with the help of coins. Although Herakles was not the only motif used on their coins, the hero formed an integral part of the ideology on coinage. There seems to have been a gradual change on the motif, as the first coins represent a strong similarity with the Alexandrian type, whereas during the later reign of Seleukos I, and the two successors following him, variations are created to make their own connotations with the hero. This particularly visible with the use of Herakles Kallinikos, showing that the Seleukids equated themselves with the deeds of the hero, emerging victorious. The use of divine attributes on the coins, such as the horns on the ruler's portrait, are an indication to their own divine status. However, the relatively few coins with these attributes suggest that the Seleukids were not as straightforward with showing a divine nature, as we have seen for example with the Ptolemies, but favoured more discrete insinuations. The use of Herakles, beside other deities, was particularly suitable for these allusions.

¹⁵⁵ Lushey (1996), 59-60

¹⁵⁶ Rougemont (2012), no. 70.

¹⁵⁷ Diod. 19.14. 1-8.

¹⁵⁸ Kosmin (2013), 684-685.

2.2: Later Hellenistic Kingdoms

Alexander the Great, the Ptolemies and the Seleukids had a large influence on the repertoire used for ideology, however, as new rulers and their dynasties rose to power, they somehow had to place themselves within the existing paradigm and legitimise their reign. As we have seen with Alexander and his successors, Herakles was one of the gods to play an important role both as an ancestor and as a role model. However, most of the sources used so far stem from the late 4th or 3rd century, whereas Antiochos I of Kommagene was one of the latecomers of the first century BC. It will be interesting to see therefore how the Attalids, the rulers of Pergamon, and Mithradates VI of Pontos, latecomers to Hellenistic kingship, have incorporated Herakles in their ideology.

The Attalids

The Attalid dynasty was founded by Philetairos (282-263 BC), who was placed in charge of Pergamon and the spoils and treasure placed there by the Thracian king Lysimachos.¹⁵⁹ Confiscating the vast sum, thereby betraying Lysimachos, Philetairos managed to assume a degree of independence in the area and created a well-organised domain. He masterfully manipulated the conflicts such as the Gallic invasions and the wars of the Diadochi to his own gain.¹⁶⁰ The foundations for Attalid policy that Philetairos established were wisely followed by his successors.¹⁶¹ The struggle for independency caused the friendly relations with the Seleukids to end and changed into violent competition between the two kingdoms which would last for several generations. With the newfound sovereignty, legitimisation became necessary and thus an ideology had to be created. There are several sources, stemming from the first Attalid rulers, attesting to the use of Herakles but the best source for the Attalid ideology is the magnificent altar of Pergamon.¹⁶²

In the time of Attalos I (241-197 BC) an extensive building programme started on the acropolis of Pergamon, aiming to make a state equal to the remaining Diadochi kingdoms.¹⁶³ Attalos was the first Pergamene ruler to have an important victory over a Celtic force in 237 BC which was utilised to its fullest.¹⁶⁴ The military victory earned him the royal diadem, allowing him to claim conquest through military victory as the foundation of his kingship.¹⁶⁵ The victory also enabled Attalos to assume the title of *soter* as he could claim to have protected the Greek cities. This role was normally carried out by the Seleukids but they had failed to do so, thereby creating an opening for Attalos to reject Seleukid sovereignty and place himself on equal footing with, if not above, the other Hellenistic kings.¹⁶⁶ The role of the Attalid king as *soter*, a saviour-king, became an important part of their ideology. The Attalids now presented themselves as the protectors of Hellenic civilisation against the barbarians, not only in Pergamon, but also in prominent places

¹⁵⁹ Hansen (1971), 14.

¹⁶⁰ Gruen (2000), 17f.

¹⁶¹ Kosmetatou (2005), 161.

¹⁶² For a discussion on the earliest sources see: Huttner (1997), 175ff. On other ideological artworks abroad see Gruen (2000), 18f.

¹⁶³ Schmidt (1962), 7.

¹⁶⁴ Künzl (1971), 11.

¹⁶⁵ Polyb. 18.41.7-8. Strabo 13.4.2. Kosmetatou (2005), 161.

¹⁶⁶ Strootman (2014), 83.

such as Athens and Delphi, communicating a widespread message of their victory. Both Athens and Delphi had a history of a fierce opposition of non-Greeks, one in the form of the Persians and the other in the form of the Celts. In the case of Delphi, the glorious Aitolian feat happened half a century before the Attalids placed their monument there. The defeat of the Celts was seen as miraculous, for Apollo himself was said to have aided in the battle, delivering the Greeks from the Celtic invasion. By placing a monument at Delphi of their own victory of the Celts, the Attalids equated themselves with the divine task of *soteria*, performed by Apollo before them.¹⁶⁷ The Attalids actively pursued an international image as victorious saviour-kings and god-like protectors of cities.¹⁶⁸

Besides taking up of the role of protectors of the Greek cities, another aspect became important to the ideology of the Attalids. Their new dynasty somehow had to overcome their humble origins and for this they used the myth of Telephos to prove serviceable.¹⁶⁹ It long predated the Attalids, for Telephos was born in Mysia, the land which later became Pergamon.¹⁷⁰ According to the Classical version of the myth, it was Herakles who impregnated Auge, a priestess of Athena. Her father, the king of Tegea, became enraged when he found out his daughter was pregnant and got rid of them, either by locking them in a box or shipping her off. In either version Auge ends up in the kingdom of Teuthras, marrying its king. In the version where Auge is shipped off, Telephos was left for dead on a mountaintop in Arkadia but survived through being suckled by a hind or lioness. Once of age he went to the Delphic oracle, learned about his origins and went to find his mother. The discovery led to a happy reunion and Telephos succeeding Teuthras as king.¹⁷¹ With Telephos as a son of Herakles and mythical king of the region that would become Pergamon, the Attalids gained a lineage that fit better within the broader spectrum of Hellenistic ideology.¹⁷²

The military victory over the Celts and the mythical ancestry are all brought together on the great altar of Pergamon, built during the reign of Eumenes II (197-159 BC). It consists of a colonnaded court on a massive podium, housing the sacrificial altar. The inner court was surrounded by a frieze showing the story of Telephos, whereas the outside was elaborately decorated with the Gigantomachy.¹⁷³ The battle of the gods against the giants was a well-known myth in the Greek world, visualised on many artistic works and several literary sources.¹⁷⁴ There are many versions of the myth, but in a general line it concerned a great battle between the Olympian gods and the giants, which could only be won by the Olympians if they were aided by a mortal. This is the part where Herakles enters the scene and because of him, the Olympians are saved and therefore the order and civilisation they stood for. As a reward for his services to the gods, the hero was welcomed on Olympos.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁷ Gruen (2000), 25.

¹⁶⁸ Strootman (2014), 87.

¹⁶⁹ Scheer (1993), 110.

¹⁷⁰ Gruen (2000), 22.

¹⁷¹ Strabo 12.8.4, 13.1.69. Paus. 8.4.9. Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.7.4.

¹⁷² For the creative continuation of the lineage of Telephus to the Attalids the figure of Pergamos was created as founder of the city. However, Pergamos but had very little impact, his name is attested in very few sources and it seems the Attalids preferred to stress their link with the supposed son of Herakles. Hansen (1971), 5-8. Gruen (2000), 23-24.

¹⁷³ Stewart (2000), 32.

¹⁷⁴ For a concise overview on sources about the gigantomachy see: Gantz (1993), 452f.

¹⁷⁵ On the mentioning of Herakles fulfilling a great service for the gods: Hes. *Theog.* 954; fr 43a.65; fr. 195.28-29. The apotheosis as a reward: Diod. 4. 15.1.

With the gigantomachy a significant allegory was made of the ruling dynasty. The Olympian gods represent the order in the world (the kosmos), whereas the giants represented chaos, which symbolised the victory of Hellenistic civilisation over barbarism.¹⁷⁶ The prominent role of Herakles in the myth is visualised on the eastern in frieze of the altar. The entrance to the precinct of the altar was possibly in the east, causing visitors immediately to see the hero, Zeus and Athena engaged in battle. The three figures most likely formed an epicentre of the fight, from which the turmoil of the battle surges towards all sides. Unfortunately, all that remains of Herakles is a claw of his lion-skin, but an inscription with his name at that place tells us the hero was fighting in the midst of the battle, next to his father. As told by the myth, Herakles is the only mortal present in this battle and forms a central figure in the frieze, clearly demonstrating a crucial role in defeating the barbaric giants. The inner court of the monument visualises the myth of Telephos, his coming of age and the incidents which lead to him becoming the successor of Teuthras. The descent of Herakles is explicitly stressed by the sculpture of him watching over the baby Telephos as he is being suckled by a lioness. Herakles is leaning on his club with the lion-skin, watching the peaceful idyll. The sculpture is placed again in a central position, mirroring the centralised place Herakles has in the gigantomachy.¹⁷⁷

To summarise, with the visualisation of the gigantomachy as well as the myth of their ancestor Telephos, the Attalids created a monument which held all the elements of their ideology. The altar showed everyone the battle the gods against the forces of chaos in a spectacular way, forming an allegory of the Attalid achievements over the barbarous Celts. By depicting the gods on the altar, the Attalids emphasised that their accomplishments were on the same line as those of the gods, fulfilling the divine task of *soteria*. In particularly the relation to Herakles is of importance in this allegory, for his accomplishments as a mortal rewarded him a place amongst the Olympian gods. It is not a coincidence that Eumenes II was deified after his death, hereby shown to have



Figure 13: Herakles looking at Telephos. Pergamon Altar. Telephos frieze. Distributed under a CC-BY 2.0 license

followed in the footsteps of his ancestor.¹⁷⁸ The choice of the gigantomachy myth, and the prominent place Herakles had in it, is connected to the Attalid dynasty in a brilliant manner, showing that a dynasty appearing later than the initial Diadochi could still claim ancestry from Herakles, if they were creative enough, as well as following the example of the hero and his *apotheosis* by propagating accomplishments of a divine level.

¹⁷⁶ Strootman (2014), 86. Gruen (2002), 7. Hansen (1971), 319.

¹⁷⁷ Schmidt (1962), 25.

¹⁷⁸ OGIS 332, 17-20.

Mithradates VI

A contemporary of Antiochos I was the ruler Mithradates VI Eupator (120-63 BC) of the Pontic kingdom. Renowned for his valiant and long struggle against the Roman Republic, Mithradates has become a legend after his death and is either seen as an incredible leader who managed to defy the Roman imperialists or as a ruthless aggressor who would stop at nothing to achieve his ambitions.¹⁷⁹ The problem with knowing anything about this Pontic king is that all the literary sources are written by later Roman authors for a Roman audience giving a one-sided view, even if not all the writers share the same view.¹⁸⁰ Besides literary sources Mithradates is said to have left several portraits and statues, but they are not without problems either as the identification is usually depended on the similarities with coins that depict the head of the Pontic king. Sources on the Pontic king, although manifold, are therefore to be approached with caution. Furthermore, these sources, in contrary to the previously discussed rulers, do not form a coherent ideological (building) programme similar as to what we have seen so far. A monument on Delos is the only example of monument for the Pontic leader, created in his honour but not commissioned by him. However, Mithradates VI found himself in a rather similar political position as Antiochos I later would find himself in, making it interesting to see how the Pontic king expressed his ideology during his reign. To understand the imagery created in this political situation it is therefore important to first discuss some of the context of Mithradates' reign, before I can turn to look at the evidence of Mithradates VI in relation to Herakles and his *apotheosis*.

The royal Pontic dynasty was said to have stemmed from one of the seven nobles that assassinated the usurper Smerdis and as a reward were gifted with the land in Anatolia, which some of successors managed to expand later on.¹⁸¹ It is not possible to reconstruct the ancestry with certainty up until the fourth century BC but it is very likely that, as we have seen before with Antiochos I of Kommagene, this was also part of an invented tradition as a claim to legitimacy.¹⁸² The dynasty did not only have a claim to Persian royalty, for several ancestors, such as Mithradates II (250-220 BC), married daughters of the Seleukid royal house, hereby relating himself to Makedonian empire.¹⁸³ The combining of different ancestors gave the claim to a double mythological ancestry, namely Perseus as the founder of the Persian dynasty, and Herakles through Mithradates' Seleukid ancestry. Both heroes appear frequently on imagery linked to the Pontic king, but there is a difference which, as I will argue later on, had an important role in relation to Mithradates ideological programme, after the political context has been explained.

Mithradates Euergetes (150-120 BC), the father of Mithradates VI, demonstrated quite some interest in the affairs of the neighbouring countries and pursued an active policy in acquiring more territories. Although he maintained a friendly relationship with Rome, even receiving Phrygia Major as gift from them (possibly with the necessary bribes), Mithradates invaded surrounding

¹⁷⁹ The contrasting view on Mithradates is not limited only to

¹⁸⁰ Amongst the most detailed works are Plutarch's *Life of Sulla* and Appian's *Mithradatica*, providing overlapping narratives but both are written in the first and second centuries AD. Justin's *Epitome of the World History of Pompeius Trogus* describes the rise to power of Mithradates and the political tensions caused by his expansionistic ambitions. Cicero and his speeches *pro Flacco*, *pro Murena*, *pro lege Manilia* that give a view of the Pontic king as a perpetrator of atrocities and one of Rome's most the ill-reputed enemies.

¹⁸¹ Lerouge-Cohen (2016), 216.

¹⁸² Erciyas (2006), 14.

¹⁸³ Mithradates is to have emphasised his descent from the Seleukids and Persian royalty during a speech to his troops, before the first war with the Romans, see: Just. *Epit.* 38.7.1.

regions such as Cappadocia and secured Inner Paphlagonia and Galatia.¹⁸⁴ It was not until his son inherited the throne that the large-scale expansion of the Pontic kingdom started, which eventually became a threat in the eyes of the Romans.¹⁸⁵ When Mithradates assumed control of throne around 116/5 BC, the king had a rather fortunate start with his reign as Rome was in the middle of civil war, Parthia was experiencing political chaos and the northern territories of the Black sea were under constant pressure of the Scythians. With the biggest political players occupied, opportunities emerged for Mithradates to build a strong army and conquer areas without a lot of problems such as the Crimea and the Bosporan kingdom. In these areas Mithradates became rather popular as he defeated the Scythians who besieged these regions, liberating the people from constantly paying tributes to the tribes attacking them.¹⁸⁶ Not only did Mithradates extend his influence over a larger territory, he was also seen as a victorious *Soter* of those regions and its people. By managing to defeat a barbaric people that Alexander nor his father had beaten and who had overpowered the Persian king Cyrus and his 20.000 men.¹⁸⁷ This image as *Soter* is what Mithradates surrounded himself with to appeal and legitimise his rule over many of his subjects.¹⁸⁸

According to the historian Erciyas, Mithradates used his common ancestry of both the Persian dynasty as well as the Makedonian kingdom, and therefore Alexander the Great, to appeal to two different groups amongst his subjects and newly acquired areas. On the one hand, there were many Greek colonies that controlled a lot of the traffic in the Black Sea, and on the other hand there were the indigenous people in several coastal areas and the hinterlands who maintained many of the sanctuaries and populated some of the major cities in Pontos.¹⁸⁹ In my opinion, whilst Erciyas makes too a sharp contrast between two cultural groups, there is a lot to say for the population of the Pontic kingdom being highly diverse and, in order to sustain his large armies for the battles yet to come, Mithradates needed a strong ideology behind his ambitious plans and to legitimize his actions. Erciyas continues that the Pontic king used his mythological ancestry of Herakles (in strong connection with Alexander the great) and Perseus for this, for they could appeal to his culturally distinct subjects.¹⁹⁰ Both heroes appear frequently on imagery linked to Mithradates, yet when it comes to statues or busts, we see the king depicted in an equalized manner as Herakles, not Perseus. This is often linked to the idea the king was popular amongst the culturally Greek cities and was a way for the Pontic king to show his affinity with the Greeks. Although it is possible that Mithradates became popular amongst his subjects for his successful campaigns against their enemies, the use of Herakles iconography meant more than a show of affinity with Greek, for we have seen already that the hero or his stylistic elements were used in a broader context

¹⁸⁴ Strabo, 14.1.38, Just. *Epit.* 37.1.2, Eutr. 4. 20. Oros. 5.10.2. On the invasion: App. *Mith.* 10

¹⁸⁵ Hind (1994) 130-132.

¹⁸⁶ There are several honorary inscriptions found, either to Mithradates VI or his generals in honour of his successful campaigns. On one specific inscription, Mithradates is described as a benefactor who resolved the instabilities of the Bosporus and is called the kings of kings, for a summary of all honorary dedications see: Erciyas (2006) 122ff. Dedications were erected in various parts of Asia Minor and the Aegean, most are judged to be from before the Mithridatic wars.

¹⁸⁷ Just. *Epit.* 37.3. Strabo mentions that Perisades, king of Bosporus, willingly gave his kingdom to Mithradates, unable to keep paying tributes to the Scythians.

¹⁸⁸ The idea of Mithradates as 'liberator of the Greeks' is described by Cicero, see *Flac.* 60

¹⁸⁹ Erciyas (2006), 9-10. The interactions between Greek culture and the different kingdoms and cities in Ancient Anatolia are more thoroughly explained by studies of language, myth, cultural and political institutions and social change in: Marek (2009) 35ff.

¹⁹⁰ Erciyas (2006), 9, 146ff.

throughout the Hellenistic period. For this it is necessary to have a quick look at a few objects attributed to Mithradates.

There have been quite a few objects which are attributed to the Pontic king but the evidence on which the arguments are based are in a lot of cases not enough to keep the theory standing. One of the most important sources, to be discussed first, are the coins issued during the reign of Mithradates, for they were the chief medium through which the ruler could communicate a message that would be seen by a large proportion of the king's subjects and therefore give some insight to what the ruler wanted to have everyone known.¹⁹¹ Another reason to start with his coins before we see any other objects, is because they carry the only depiction we can be certain of that shows the king with stylistic elements typical for Mithradates. During his reign the king increased the number of cities that minted coins by eight but the somewhat standardised type of coins indicate that Mithradates had an overall control on what was depicted on them.¹⁹²



Figure 14: Tetradrachm of Mithradates VI, c. 80-72/1 BC. Price (1991), pl. XLXI, fig. 1193.

Of the coins that have been found there are several themes used over time but a standard part was the emphasis on the mythological origins of the Pontic royal house. The combinations of the used symbols and myths are unique to Pontos but the mythological figures are depicted in the iconography and stylistic elements of the Greek pantheon. Some of the most common types were depictions of Zeus, Ares, a combination of Athena with Perseus, a naked Herakles with a club and Dionysos, whose name the king adopted.¹⁹³ On several of these coins we see the youthful head of Mithradates with the lion scalp draped over his head and long flowing hair (fig. 14). Stylistically typical for Mithradates is the lock of hair going along the right side of his ear, a prominent nose and a narrow forehead, features that make his portrait quite distinctive. The theme of an idealized young head shows a lot of similarities in the style used by Alexander the Great, showing that the Pontic king modelled his coins after those of Alexander as well his successors, intending to project a stronger Hellenistic image to the Greek world.¹⁹⁴ In similar fashion, the depictions of Perseus or Pegasus allude to his Persian ancestry and were then used to familiarize with the non-Greeks.

In my opinion it is likely that Mithradates wanted to appeal to as many diverse subjects as possible, but the division of Greeks and non-Greek is too stark and to see Mithradates trying to unify the two by using Herakles/Alexander and Perseus to overcome these differences is too much of a modern view, in the sense of a division between 'East' and 'West'. It is more likely that, the use of mythological ancestors, besides the legitimatization to rule as part of a powerful dynasty, was to show that the ruler possessed divine qualities and was something more than a man, capable of performing tasks only a powerful individual could complete. In addition to this there is also a difference between the depictions of Herakles and Perseus. Both heroes are depicted on the coins,

¹⁹¹ Thoneman (2016), 146.

¹⁹² Erciyas (2006), 115ff.

¹⁹³ App. *Mith.* 10.

¹⁹⁴ Beside the Herakles iconography there are more details and themes on other coins which are also present on the coins of Alexander. Hind (1994), 140ff. Ercuyas (2006), 147. Højte (2009), 146-148.

but it is only with the attributes of Herakles that Mithradates stylizes himself. The head could have meant to depict the hero were it not for the typical features of the Pontic king. The goal must have been to equate Herakles with the Mithradates, in similar fashion as Alexander the Great, to show the king could perform comparable difficult deeds, or in the case of defeating the Scythians, even outdo them. As the coins of Seleukos I above have shown, the use of the Alexandrine type was continuously used. Mithradates' use of the Alexandrine functioned therefore also as a demonstration that he continued the Macedonian line. However, in contrary to the Seleukids, Mithradates clearly used his own portrait, a unique feature in that style. It is the use of his own facial characteristics that make it likely that Mithradates equated himself with Herakles, Alexander and the ¹⁹⁵



Figure 15: Buste identified as Mithradates VI. Louvre, Paris.

Another type of object shows the equation with Herakles, namely several statues or busts of the king. Portrait statues were used to show the allegiance of important families or entire cities to a king, who would then hopefully be beneficiary to them. Usually there would be an inscription present, honouring the king, but in the case of Mithradates and although we know from literary sources that there were quite a few statues made for the king, there are very few inscriptions still attesting to the identity compared to the number of statues attributed to his name. One of these busts without an inscription to identify the individual is a marvellous bust, presently preserved in the Louvre. The bust meets all the criteria of the stylistics attributed to Mithradates above, giving the most secure identification. Of all the busts and statues attributed to the Pontic king, this example has the least discussions arguing for a different identity but even with this example there is no way to be completely sure. The likeness is striking however, and would fit in the ideological tradition of Mithradates to identify with Herakles. Another example is a statue group, discovered at the Great Altar of Pergamon, showing a youthful Herakles, in the act of freeing Prometheus and a personification of mount Caucasus, currently in Berlin. The face of Herakles is fashioned in a lifelike portrait of Mithradates, showing the typical sideburns and facial profile, but there are more doubts about this statue as the stylistics has more technical affinities with earlier Pergamene sculpture such as the Telephos frieze. A strong argument for the identification with Mithradates is that Herakles was master of Kolchis and the Caucasus, the region where Herakles had freed Prometheus, visualising the king as a saviour or liberator, celebrating the liberation of Pergamon from Rome in 88BC.¹⁹⁶

To conclude, there are several other busts or statues attributed to Mithradates but most are more difficult to determine because of the bad state they are in. The Louvre bust is the most convincing of these, showing that Mithradates stylised himself as Herakles. The equation is also visible on the coinage of the Pontic king, but from these we can conclude there is another aspect to these, namely the heritage of the Alexandrine and Seleukid dynasties, which Mithradates

¹⁹⁵ Price, (1968), 6.

¹⁹⁶ Højte (2009), 151.

continues and surpasses. The chosen style indicates the equation with Herakles as well as the heritage of the Macedonian kingdoms become incredibly important.

Part III

Synthesis

With the research of the previous chapters we have seen *dexiosis* in different cultures and contexts, and the role of Herakles in different ideologies amongst Hellenistic rulers. The aim of this chapter will be to bring these two aspects together so that the reliefs of Antiochos I of Kommagene can be better understood. I will shortly summarize some of the conclusions I have made in the previous chapters. As briefly presented in the introduction, there are several scholars who have gone before and expressed their opinions on the matter. However, there are few who have done research specifically on the Antiochan reliefs, and they focus either on the aspect of *dexiosis* or the presence of the gods on the *stelae* instead of considering them together.¹⁹⁷

Part one started with Near-Eastern cultures and the use of *dexiosis*, where the main context was amongst rulers. The throne-base of Shalmaneser III showed an example of *dexiosis* as a visualisation of a political treaty, struck between the Assyrian ruler and the Babylonian king.¹⁹⁸ Although a complete understanding of the relief is not without its problems, such as the equality between the two, the political context is clearly visible. Furthermore, the position of the relief on the front of a throne forms an indication that it concerned a practice that was well-known in Assyrian culture, even if we have no further evidence to support this more strongly. To continue our search for the use of *dexiosis* it became necessary to change to Greek sources, namely the authors Ktesias and Xenophon. Ktesias' report of the events around Cyrus' deathbed described clearly as to how *dexiosis* is to be interpreted. Everyone who had shaken hands with each other were to uphold an agreement, and the gesture symbolised the trust between the different parties. As was the case with the throne-base, there is again a political context for the persons present for the agreement Cyrus made them uphold concerned the fate of the Persian empire. Several passages in Xenophon add another dimension to the importance *dexiosis* in the form of hand-tokens. His descriptions are not between the two parties, but concern an object given specifically by the ruler, not in person but over distances. It would bind both parties to uphold the agreements placed upon the object but there is a clear distinction by the giver and the one who accepts. The given that it is only issued by the ruler in question and only concerns an agreement between two parties clearly shows a political background.

In the following chapter *dexiosis* was looked at from sources of Greek origin, starting with the Iliad. The three discussed passages showed less emphasis on a political background, yet they have a much stronger emphasis on the aspect of trust. In every one it concerned an agreement between two parties but *dexiosis* is explicitly used as an expression of trust to uphold the terms, similar to the fragment of Ktesias. Another Greek example which attests to *dexiosis* also being an official symbol for the making of treaties, is shown by the relief of Athens and Samos. The goddesses Athena and Hera are here clearly representatives of the two parties, having agreed to the treaty. The last sources discussed in the chapter have no inscriptions clarifying the added value of *dexiosis*, making an exact understanding of the symbolism behind the gesture more difficult.

¹⁹⁷ Jacobs and Rollinger (2005), 144ff. Huttner (1997), 198ff.

¹⁹⁸ *Supra*, n.<..>Mallowan (1966), 444-445

However, the vases stemming from the late Archaic and Classical period are the only the sources to visualise the *apotheosis* of the Herakles that we know of. Although not every depiction uses *dexiosis* to show the deification of the hero, there are quite a few examples which do. In contrary to the previous sources we cannot guarantee that the symbolism behind the gesture is a form of an agreement of sorts. The handshake between Athena and Herakles does give a strong impression of the special bond between the hero and his patron deity. The manner in which the two are depicted recalls more a scene of familiarity rather than an agreement, the gesture expressing a welcome or acceptance amongst the ranks of the gods.

The last chapter of part one approached *dexiosis* in a different context, namely that of Greek funerary art. After gaining a deeper understanding concerning the different ways *dexiosis* was visualised, the 5th century grave-reliefs express a certain familial unity, often in a domestic setting. The deviations on the theme make it impossible to see which of the depicted individuals is the deceased, and it could have been interpreted differently depending on the person who saw it or on the trend that was in fashion in that time. The most important information we can gather from the reliefs is what the scene was meant to express. The foremost meaning behind *dexiosis* between the family members emphasised the close bond of the family, showing intimacy and closeness. The earlier grave-reliefs, which show a clear unequal status between the deceased and the living relatives, expressing a cultic communion. In contrary to these, the later funerary art showed the two parties on such an equal level that it becomes impossible to figure out who is the deceased and who are not. The use of *dexiosis* therefore expresses the unity and close bond of family, even after death.

In part two, I argued that Herakles and his myths formed an attractive god for the ideology of Hellenistic rulers for four reasons. Firstly, with his transcultural character, the hero could form a middle ground between different cultures.¹⁹⁹ Secondly, the completion of his tasks brought Herakles far and wide, bringing civilisation and order wherever he went, an accomplishment rulers could follow and, in some cases, try and surpass him in with their own territorial conquests. Thirdly, the extraordinary achievements Herakles managed to accomplish showed his divine nature, making him something more than a normal mortal. Hellenistic kings had their own hardships during their rule and by taking Herakles as a role-model they could propagate their accomplishments and deeds on the same level as the hero. Lastly, and most importantly, the tasks of Herakles rewarded him with *apotheosis*, and by equating their deeds to those of the hero, rulers received the same honour. Therefore, Herakles provided rulers with a role-model for *apotheosis* that could be linked to the concept of Hellenistic kingship, demonstrated by the following examples.

The Argead dynasty was well-known for propagating Herakles as their ancestor. In particular Philip II of Macedon made extensive use of the hero in his ideology as a role-model, of which a reflection can be seen in the works of the Athenian writers Isokrates and Speusippos. Both of them emphasised Philip following in the footsteps of the hero, hereby legitimising his Greek conquests and supporting expeditions to the east, the place where his ancestor had gone before him. When Philip's legacy was inherited by Alexander, Herakles as a role-model became an essential part of Hellenistic kingship, in which both the hero and the king were used as an example. Alexander used his Argead lineage to emphasise his Greek ancestry, hereby showing his dominion over them was an attempt to unite everyone. The hero formed a tutelary deity to Alexander, who demonstrated his special bond with Herakles by using his image and instigating cults and altars

¹⁹⁹ Malkin (2011), 45, 120.

throughout his newly conquered territories. Finishing what his father was never able to do, Alexander managed to defeat the Persian empire, hereby following Herakles' footsteps eastwards and beyond. Alexander's deeds were considered to be beyond human measure, showing he, just as Herakles, had divine capabilities for which he received divine honours. With Alexander, Herakles became a role-model that would be used many times in connection to Hellenistic kingship.

The Ptolemies followed Alexander in claiming Herakles as an ancestor, as can be seen on an inscription issued under Ptolemy III. which portray how Herakles was seen at their court. Kallimachos' *Aetia* follows the hero on several of his tasks, which always result in the hero bringing back order and civilisation to a region. In true poetic style his work reflects the divine responsibilities the Ptolemies propagated to have taken upon themselves. The *Idylls* attributed to Theokritos show many similarities with the *Aetia* in the description of Herakles, enforcing the idea that there was a general view of the hero. In *Idyll 24* we have a better idea of how the *apotheosis* of the hero was viewed, emphasising his dual nature, explaining how a mortal could become immortal after death. That this dual nature could also be present in the rulers of Egypt is demonstrated by *Idyll 17*, describing the deification of Ptolemy I and his position amongst the gods. In addition to this, the poem also summarises the great deeds for the Egyptian kingdom, demonstrating the Ptolemies had accomplished deeds on the level of the divine and their place amongst the gods.

A little more problematic are the Seleukids, whose link to Herakles is more difficult to attest. We see the image of Herakles in the Alexandrine style appear the most under Seleukos I, but during his later reign as well as his successors, the image of the hero is more and more adapted to reflect the reign of Seleukid dynasty. With the changes in style, the Seleukids depicted themselves or accompanied by divine attributes, such as the club of Herakles or the horns on the helmet, sometimes mixing different ones. Styling themselves with divine attributes could have meant to show the rulers received divine aid instead of showing their own divine nature. However, the image could be interpreted in many ways and without any inscription to clarify the meaning is kept vague and versatile. This was probably the idea behind it, as to appeal to as many different people in their kingdom without causing any affront. When Antiochos I succeeded his father, a new Herakleian type arises with Herakles Kallinikos. Visualised by Herakles at rest, it symbolises victory after the accomplishments. Although we do not have a lot of evidence after Seleukos II for the use of Herakles in Seleukid ideology, a rather striking sculpture appears during the later dynasty, attesting at least to a certain degree of continuation.

During the later Hellenistic period the Attalid dynasty rose to power and competed successfully for a place amongst the greater Hellenistic kingdoms. With the creation of their ideology the Attalids needed to lay the foundations for their position as rulers and needed an ancestry that was of equal status of the rival kingdoms. One was fulfilled through the figure of Telephos, hereby managing to fabricate a lineage to Herakles as an ancestor. The legitimacy for their rule was thoroughly propagated after military victories over the Celts, in particularly of Attalos I. With their triumphs, the Attalids could assume the role of *Soter*, claiming to have protected civilisation against the invading barbarians, placing themselves amongst the other Hellenistic kings. Their accomplishments and ancestry was propagated on a large scale, but most significantly on the Pergamon Altar. The reliefs on the outer walls of the altar depicted the Gigantomachy, showing the gods in battle with the Giants, a representation of civilisation and order against chaos. The myth forms an allusion to victory of the Attalids themselves, equating their own deeds with those of the gods. The most central figure of the altar, however, is Herakles, both present in the gigantomachy as well as the inner sculptures depicting the myth of Telephos. The altar formed an

ode to Attalids accomplishments, showing they were following their ancestor's example as well in completing difficult tasks and receiving the same reward. The Altar was part of a broader ideology with the aim of depicting them as *Soter*-kings, showing their divine nature.

The lastly discussed ruler is Mithradates VI Eupator, a contemporary of Antiochos I of Kommagene. He managed to enlarge the Pontic kingdom greatly until he was eventually defeated by the Romans. The sources on the ideology of Mithradates are sparse making it not without problems to draw general conclusions. However, the coins issued by the king are very specific in their imagery, namely emphasising his two lineages. Allegedly one stemming from the Persian kings and the other from the Argead royal line. His kingdom existed of diverse groups and his ideology was adapted to appeal to as many subjects as possible. The allusion to the Argead lineage is shown by coins made in honour of Alexander the Great, hereby copying the Alexandrine style with the Herakles head. An interesting aspect, not done before by other Hellenistic rulers as far as we know, is that Mithradates used his own features in the portrait of Herakles. The bust of the Louvre, if correctly attributed to the Mithradates, shows the adoption of ruler's features in combination of Herakles' lion skin rather well. The equation with the god and Alexander shows the ambitions of the ruler, hereby trying to follow in their footsteps as protector of Greek civilisation against the Romans.

With this knowledge in mind it is important to discuss what views have been previously cast on the Antiochan reliefs in relation to *dexiosis*. The article by Bruno Jacobs and Robert Rollinger is the most influential work on the *dexiosis* reliefs. Their point of view rests on *dexiosis* symbolising the situation of closing a contract, seeing the Assyrian throne-base and the Antiochan *stelae* to have this in common. It is the act of two parties agreeing which is shown with *dexiosis*, defined by Rollinger as: 'der Handschlag der Vertragspartner.'²⁰⁰ The use of treaties and agreements was a well-practised phenomenon throughout ancient world and as, Jacobs and Rollinger argue, forms a common ground to interpret *dexiosis* in the same manner throughout different cultures.²⁰¹ To support their theory they argue that there is enough evidence, starting with the throne of Shalmaneser, to late Hellenistic times to show there is a continuous practice of making agreements, hereby using sources from Near Eastern cultures, supplemented with evidence of Greek and Roman origin.

In particularly their view on the Roman sources are important to discuss as well. In the time of the Roman Republic we know of the phenomenon *dextrarum iunctio* in the context of *foedus*. The right hand has an important symbolic value to the Romans on several occasions, such as marriage, hospitality and with the making of an oath, sealed under the protection of the *Fides*.²⁰² In this last case, an extensive study by Karl Hölkeskamp has argued for the difference in the role between the two parties conducting *dexiosis*. When a deal is made, or two individuals have come to an agreement, there is always a duality between the one giving and the one receiving because of opposite obligations, the difference between *officia* and *beneficia*. This difference means there is an unequal balance between the two partners of an agreement, usually giving one partner a more important role in the agreement as the giver, whereas the other has a more submissive role. He

²⁰⁰ Jacobs and Rollinger (2005), 147.

²⁰¹ Jacobs and Rollinger discuss for example the Neo-Assyrian treaties which, direct or indirectly, gives us evidence for existent practice up until the 7th century BC. Jacobs and Rollinger (2005), 149. The descriptions of these treaties do not give us any information on the use of *dexiosis*.

²⁰² Hölkeskamp (2000), 228.

gives hereby examples of the patron-client relationship and agreements made by the Romans and other (conquered) populations.²⁰³ Hölkeskamp argues the difference of roles based on textual sources, but Jacobs and Rollinger take this a step further and argue that in the depictions of *dexiosis* the difference in role is visible in the stylization. In every case the person representing the Roman side in an agreement is depicted on the right, whereas the individual on the left represents the other side.²⁰⁴

Taking all the sources together, Jacobs and Rollinger argue that the inscription on the back of the Apollo relief of Zeugma as a confirmation of their theory, which states:

After succeeding to my ancestral kingdom I immediately established this new temenos of the ancient power of Zeus Oromasdes and of Apollo Mithras Helios Hermes, and of Artagnes Herakles Ares, and I made the honor of the great gods grow in step with my own fortune, and I set up in sacred stone of a single compass alongside images of the deities the representation of my own form receiving the benevolent right hands of the gods, preserving a proper depiction of the undying concern with which they often extended their heavenly hands to my assistance in my struggles.²⁰⁵

With this inscription, it is possible to recognise the makings of an agreement. Antiochos increased the honour of the gods alongside the growth of his personal fortune, possibly referring to the *hierothesia* and *temenoi* the king erected in the name of the gods throughout Kommagene. In return, the gods gave him divine assistance in the struggles he experiences during his reign. Jacobs and Rollinger see this exchange as a form of agreement which has intentionally taken elements from the older existing traditions of *dexiosis*. Furthermore, similar to the examples of *dextrarum iunctio* given by Hölkeskamp, there is also an asymmetrical relationship between Antiochos and the gods. In the inscription Antiochos clearly takes the position of lower status by receiving (and needing) the help of the gods in his struggles. This asymmetrical relationship is expressed in the iconography by positioning the gods always on the right whereas the Kommagenian king is always on the left. Applying the same ideas of unequal relations between the partners of a contract to the depiction of throne-base of Shalmaneser III with the Babylonian king would also solve the issue of equal height. It is not their height which shows their status, is the position of left and right which indicate who was of higher status.²⁰⁶

When placing the conclusions of my own research together with the theory of Jacobs and Rollinger, it is clear that the gesture of *dexiosis* was used on many different occasions as the visualisation of an agreement. It could have a clear political meaning in the form of a treaty, as the throne-base and passages on the Persian rulers show. What I do not agree with is the idea of inequality based on Roman sources, which is then projected on *dexiosis* in cultures existing before the Roman Republic was even founded. Whereas it is undoubtedly the case that there were treaties and agreements made in which the parties did not have an equal standing, I would argue that

²⁰³ Hölkeskamp (2000), 231.

²⁰⁴ Jacobs and Rollinger (2005), 149.

²⁰⁵ Apollo relief at Zeugma. Translated by Crowther and Facella (2003), 24.

²⁰⁶ Jacobs and Rollinger (2005), 148.

without further evidence of the cultures themselves it is not possible to make that claim. Furthermore, Jacobs and Rollinger try to find the origins of the gesture in eastern cultures and trace the symbolism of the gesture of the Assyrian throne-base to the Antiochan reliefs, without having actual evidence of *dexiosis* being used in every contractual situation in eastern cultures. From the hand-tokens referred to by Xenophon until the *stelae* of Antiochos, there are no sources that mention or visualise *dexiosis*.²⁰⁷ The evidence to conclude that *dexiosis* was used to visualise the conducting of treaties or agreements, but mostly in which an aspect of inequality was clearly present, seems to stretch the sources too far.

I would like to argue that, beside the aspect of two parties coming to an agreement, *dexiosis* could be used to visualise multiple associations. It is striking that Jacobs and Rollinger approach the relief from a secular point of view, as all their sources concern an agreement between mortal rulers. Performing *dexiosis* with Zeus, Herakles and Apollo is regarded as an Antiochan invention but does not change anything about the meaning of the gesture according to them. The chapters on *dexiosis* have shown that the gesture expresses different associations, of which the interpretation can vary depending how they are depicted and by whom they were seen. In my opinion the inscription of the Zeugma stele does give the *dexiosis* the appearance of an agreement between Antiochos and the gods but it is only one aspect of the message the king communicated on his reliefs. With the other *dexiosis* sources we have seen that the expression of trust, a certain degree of familiarity and unity all played an important part. In my opinion it would make more sense to take these aspects into account as well rather than focus only on act of making an agreement.

To find a precise cultural derivation for the Antiochan *dexiosis* is difficult, as demonstrated by Jacobs and Rollinger, but this is probably because the Kommagenian king was not influenced by just a single one. It is certain the gesture has a long history and was well-known throughout the Ancient world. Since it was well-known and because the gesture could have a multitude of associations and meanings, *dexiosis* was a clever symbol to use for an ideology that had the aim to be seen by many. With the addition of the gods as the second party of *dexiosis*, the relief was a unique new way, designed by Antiochos, to express his ideological project. The choice of a gesture from a transcultural repertoire, with the quality of multiple interpretations, was perfectly suited for this.

So far, the emphasis has been mainly on *dexiosis*, however the place of Herakles amongst the other gods on the *dexiosis* reliefs adds a more specific meaning to the message Antiochos tried to communicate. With the example of four different Hellenistic dynasties and the use of Herakles in their ideology, it is clear that the hero had a specific function. The four characteristics were used to legitimise the positions of the rulers, on the one hand because all said to be descendants of him, and on the other hand because they formed an example that could elevate their own deeds. By equating themselves with their ancestor, rulers were performing tasks on the level of the gods, as it were, playing gods, and thereby alluding to their divine nature. Herakles thus provided a valuable model for rulers to gain *apotheosis* that could be linked to the concept of Hellenistic kingship.

Antiochos took the example of Herakles as ancestor and role-model a little further, by visualising his *apotheosis* by the gesture of *dexiosis*. Both Herakles and the gesture were well known in the Hellenistic period, forming thereby an ideal way of communicating a message that could surpass cultural boundaries. They indicate the ambition of Antiochos to compete with other

²⁰⁷ Jacobs and Rollinger assume that in Parthian culture the practice of hand-tokens was continued. Jacobs and Rollinger (2005), 149. Wolksi (1969), 320-321.

Hellenistic rulers. More importantly, the combination of the hero and the shaking hands with Herakles enforced the symbolism of each other. Antiochos follows Herakles example after his own accomplishments. Overcoming the hardships during his reign with divine aid, the Kommagenian king honoured the gods by making their cults greater, an expression of an agreement between Antiochos and the gods, visualised by *dexiosis*. But the gesture symbolised at the same time the special bond the king had with the deities, as well as equality between them, which Antiochos received after following Herakles' example. *Dexiosis* between Herakles and Antiochos thus formed an unparalleled symbol of *apotheosis*, yet by their connotations enforced the meaning of each other. In this way, Antiochos continued a trend set by Alexander and his successors, claiming he was part of the legacy of the mightiest dynasties before him.

Conclusion

The reliefs of Antiochos and Herakles were part of an elaborate ideology, visible throughout Kommagene. The constructions and artworks built for the expression of the ideology is our main source on Kommagene. This means our view is very limited on the culture of Kommagene itself, but rather shows the invention of tradition. It offers insight into how Antiochos ideology created legitimisation as ruler as well as compete with for a place amongst the other Hellenistic kings. The Kommagenian king designed new and composite imagery to communicate a message a broad public would understand. The *dexiosis* reliefs formed an essential role in communicating the ideals of Antiochos' ideology.

To understand what Antiochos wanted to communicate with the reliefs, two aspects needed to be studied. The first, *dexiosis*, has been demonstrated to have been used in a multitude of cultures throughout different periods. The aim was to find out what the gesture could symbolise and by looking at all the different examples it is possible to draw some general conclusions. The visualisation of shaking each other's right hand is ambiguous gesture, meaning that it can have multiple associations in one image. Connotations such as the successful conclusion of agreements and the trust in each other to uphold the terms, could at same time project a special bond between the two parties or their equal status. The emphasis on each association depends on the context *dexiosis* was used in.

The second aspect concerns the choice of Herakles on the reliefs. for comprehension of this choice, it was necessary to compare Antiochos' ideology with those of other Hellenistic rulers. Some of the most important dynasties have been selected to explore their use of Herakles, namely the Ptolemies, Seleukids, Attalids and, although he did not manage to establish a dynasty, Mithradates VI of Pontus. The attractiveness for each ruler of using Herakles was the same, for he embodied all the qualities and characteristics of a divine ruler. Because of these characteristics, Herakles provided a model for *apotheosis* that could be linked to the concept of Hellenistic kingship.

Antiochos visualised his connection with Herakles as a role-model on the reliefs through the use of *dexiosis*. The hero was well-known for his tasks, transcending cultural boundaries and so was the gesture of shaking hands. Together they expressed the special bond between Antiochos and the divine hero, giving him the crucial legitimacy in order to compete with the other Hellenistic rulers, all of whom had larger kingdoms. More importantly however, is the reinforcement of the idea that Antiochos wishes to portray himself as similar to Herakles, with all the benefits that entailed. By serving his people and appearing to face the hardships no other man could, Antiochos was laying the foundations for himself to match the feats of Herakles and follow the paths already walked; the handshake portrayed all of this and more through an unparalleled amalgamation of the hero with *dexiosis*.

Appendix

Inscription of Ptolemy III recording his deeds – Translation by E.R. Bevan

The Great King Ptolemaios, son of king Ptolemaios and queen Arsinoë, Gods Adelphoi, children of king Ptolemaios and queen Berenike, Saviour Gods, the descendant on the father's side of Herakles, son of Zeus, on the mother's side of Dionysos, son of Zeus, having inherited from his father the kingdom of Egypt and Libya and Syria and Phoenicia and Cyprus and Lycia and Caria and the Cyclades, set out on a campaign into Asia with infantry and cavalry forces and a naval armament and elephants both Troglodyte and Ethiopian, which his father and he himself first captured from these places and, bringing them to Egypt, trained them to military use. But having become master of all the country this side of the Euphrates and of Cilicia and Pamphylia and Ionia and the Hellespont and Thrace, and of all the military forces in these countries and of Indian elephants, and having made the local dynasts in all these regions his vassals, he crossed the river Euphrates, and having brought under him Mesopotamia and Babylonia and Susiana and Persis and Media, and all the rest as far as Bactria, and having sought out whatever sacred things had been carried off by the Persians from Egypt, and having brought them back with the other treasure from these countries, he sent his forces to Egypt through the canals that had been dug ... (remainder is missing).

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