Commagenian Tiaras: Royal and Divine*

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The sculptural program of Antiochus I, King of Commagene (ca. 69–34 B.C.), is only imperfectly known; yet we have enough to demonstrate that its scope was sweeping and grandiose. Excavation has so far been confined to two sites: the sacred mountain Nemrud Dağ, and the site at Eski Kâhta, called in antiquity Arsameia on the Nymphaeus. In addition we have the invaluable survey made by two great German archaeologists, Carl Humann and Otto Puchstein, which records sculptural remains at several other sites within the kingdom. At Nemrud Dağ alone there once stood some ninety stelae bearing reliefs of men and gods. Finally, we have sculptural evidence of another kind on the rare coinage of Antiochus, as well as the even rarer issues of his father Mithradates. The monuments which remain are notable in many ways, perhaps most of all for the precious details of iconography which they preserve for us. In this paper I shall consider one iconographic feature only: headdress.

The paternal ancestors of Antiochus were Iranians. They were portrayed on a series of fifteen stelae at Nemrud Dağ. As we should expect, their headdress is invariably the tiara, to which is added the diadem. I use the term tiara broadly to indicate any high Iranian cap equipped with lappets and necklace. The Commagenian monuments record four main kinds of tiara.

The first kind I shall call the Persian Tiara. This tiara was well known to the Greeks; they used it to designate not only Persians but Orientals in general: Scythians, Amazons, Trojans, and other Easterners. It consists of a high cap, apparently of felt, with a rounded peak which nods forward; to its lower edge a pair of lappets and a broad neckpiece were attached. In Commagene we see the diadem pulled across the edge of the cap over the forehead and tied in back. Further, here the cap is almost invariably decorated with stars which extend on to the lappets and presumably the neckpiece as well. The Commagenian diadem, when worn with the tiara, was also almost invariably decorated.

The Persian Tiara is depicted as headdress of both men and gods. The mortals appear on the row of stelae at Nemrud Dağ which present the paternal ancestors of Antiochus. This tiara is worn by the following members of the line only:

A. The First Ancestor, identified by an inscription as Darius Son of Hystaspes.  
B. The Second Ancestor, identified as . . . ης, Son of Darius.  
C. The Fourth Ancestor, unidentified since the inscription is lost, but presumably Aroandes (cf. No. 4).  
D. The Fifth Ancestor, identified as Artasouras Son of Aroandes (= Orontes).  

For the third ancestor the evidence is lacking, while the sixth ancestor and those who followed him in the line apparently wear a different kind of tiara. The four who do wear the Persian Tiara show the lappets pulled beneath the beard and apparently tied under the chin. They also wear the diadem, decorated either with a row of eagles or with alternating discs and lozenges.

* I wish to express my gratitude to the Bollingen Foundation for making my trip to Commagene possible, and to Miss Theresa Goell for permission to study the sculptures at Nemrud Dağ. To W. F. Albright, F. E. Brown, and F. K. Dörner I am indebted for advice and encouragement.

1 Miss Theresa Goell has directed these important excavations under the auspices of the American Schools of Oriental Research. She summarizes her work in BASOR 147 (1957) 4ff.

2 Directed by F. K. Dörner of the University of Münster. For the site, see Dörner-R. Naumann, Forschungen in Kommagene = Istanbuler Forschungen 10 (1939). Dörner discusses the excavations in Biblioteca Orientalis 9 (1952) 94; Das Altertum 2 (1956) 82.

3 C. Humann and O. Puchstein, Reisen in Kleinasien und Altertum (Berlin 1890). Henceforth referred to as HP.

4 On this dynasty see Honigmann in RE, Suppl. 4, s.v. Kommagene.

5 These include Attis, hence the common but misleading term “Phrygian Cap."

6 West Terrace: HP pl. xxxv 3; inscription: Jalabert and Mouterde, Inscriptions grecques et latines de Syrie 1, no. 14. For the newly discovered East Terrace counterpart see AIA 59 (1955) pl. 71, fig. 6.

7 West Terrace: HP pl. xxxvii 1; inscription: Jalabert-Mouterde, op. cit. no. 15.

8 West Terrace: unpublished; new find.

9 West Terrace: HP pl. xxxvii 1; inscription: Jalabert-Mouterde, op. cit. no. 16.
Two gods also wear the Persian Tiara. They are shown on stelae at Nemrud Dağ in the company of Antiochus himself. Their identities are also confirmed by inscriptions on the backs of the stelae: Zeus Oromasdes, and Apollo Mithras Helios Hermes. Since they wear this tiara, they are manifestly thought of here as the Iranian gods Oromasdes (= Ahuramazda) and Mithra. They too wear the diadem that of Ahuramazda decorated with winged thunderbolts, that of Mithra with discs and lozenges. Here the lappets of the tiara are allowed to fall naturally along the shoulders.

Another kind of tiara represented in Commagene is similar to the Persian Tiara. It differs in that the peak of the cap is not rounded but pointed, and instead of nodding forward it stands stiffly upright, tipping slightly toward the back. I shall call this the Pointed Tiara. It too is encircled by the diadem and is equipped with lappets and necklace, the lappets hanging loose over the shoulders. The Pointed Tiara is worn by the following kings:

A. Mithradates, father of Antiochus. On his coinage this is regularly his tiara. The last ancestor stela at Nemrud Dağ, that of Mithradates, does not preserve the tiara, but the loosely hanging lappet appears. On the funeral monument at Karakuş Mithradates again wears this tiara.

B. Samos, father of Mithradates and grandfather of Antiochus, as he is shown on the great rock-cut relief at Gerger. His identity is confirmed by epigraphical evidence.

C. The eighth ancestor on the Nemrud Dağ stelae, whose name is recorded as . . . Šārvṣs, son of Arandoes.

D. A figure displayed upon a stela in the North Annex of the East Terrace at Nemrud Dağ.

Epigraphical evidence identifying him is lacking.

We may also note that the fifth and sixth ancestor stelae at Nemrud Dağ show the lappets hanging free, although the tiaras themselves are missing.

It seems certain that one god also wore the Pointed Tiara. He is identified on a stela at Nemrud Dağ as Artagnes Heracles Ares. In this relief he appears in the form of the Greek Heracles, and wears on his head a wreath of vine leaves. But among the colossi at Nemrud Dağ he is easily recognized again by the club he carries and here he appears in Persian garb as the god Artagnes (= Verathragna). On both the East and the West Terraces the peak of his headdress has been broken away. Yet it is certain that the peak was not a separate block (as is the case for the nodding Persian Tiara) so that it must have risen to a simple point.

That a third kind of tiara was also worn by some of the paternal ancestors at Nemrud Dağ is proved by two unpublished fragments of reliefs, neither of which can be attributed to any specific stela. They are unquestionably Iranian, and again resemble the Persian Tiara except that the upper part of the cap is so limp as to allow it to fall forward in a baggy fold which partly obscures the diadem over the forehead. This corresponds to the kind of tiara shown on coins of satraps, and I thus call it the Satrapal Tiara. How the lappets were arranged is uncertain.

The fourth kind of tiara found in Commagene is more complex and more heavily ornamented than the three we have already considered. The cap itself is keel-shaped, reversed so that the bulging part fits tightly around the head while the keel itself rises as the cap narrows above. The decoration

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10 West Terrace: HP pl. xxxix 1; inscription: Jalabert-Mouterde, op.cit. no. 34.
11 West Terrace: HP pl. xxxviii 2; inscription: Jalabert-Mouterde, op.cit. no. 35.
12 When Apollo Mithras Helios Hermes is represented in his Greek manifestation he is bareheaded: Jalabert-Mouterde, op.cit. no. 52 with bibliography; I owe a photograph to the kindness of the British Museum.
13 Wroth, BMC, Galatia etc. pl. xiv 7; Babelon, Rois de Syrie pl. xxx fig. 2 (here said to wear a "Persian tiara"; the coin is in fact so worn that the headdress is unclear.
14 HP pl. xxxvii 3; the drawing fails to indicate the lappet, which is clear on the stela; inscription: Jalabert-Mouterde, op.cit. no. 8.
15 Karakuş: HP 221, fig. 41; cf. p. 42: "ohne weiteres deutlich ist daran nur die konische Tiara"; inscription: Jalabert-Mouterde, op.cit. no. 50.
16 HP 355, fig. 50; inscription: Jalabert-Mouterde, op.cit. no. 47.
17 West Terrace: HP pl. xxxv 4; inscription: Jalabert-Mouterde, op.cit. no. 18.
18 HP pl. xxxv 2.
19 HP pl. xxxix 2; inscription: Jalabert-Mouterde, op.cit. no. 35.
20 HP pl. xxxix right. Heads: East Terrace HP pl. xxx 1 and 2; West Terrace HP pl. xxx 1 and 2.
21 E.g., BMC, Lionel pl. xxxi nos. 5ff. Oroetes son of Artashes also wears the Satrapal Tiara on the coins (Hunterian Collection 2, pl. lviii 2), although he wears the Persian Tiara on the fifth ancestor stela at Nemrud Dağ.
is on the sides and at the top. On the side it consists of a single figure in relief, usually a lion, which is framed front, back, and above by floral sprays. These sprays rise from the front and back of the cap and come together in the center above; sometimes the leaves spring naturally from a winding central stalk, sometimes they are packed together into tight rectangular borders. On the coins, where there is less room, the decoration is instead a star flanked by an eagle at either side. From the top of this cap rise five points; when shown in detail we can observe that each point is really a very tall pointed palmette, and that where it springs from the cap its base is covered by a second palmette, low and spreading. From the lower edge of the cap depend the necklace and a pair of lappets, the latter decorated again with floral sprays. Over the lower edge of the tiara the diadem is tied; it too is decorated, often with a row of lions.

This headdress is well known to numismatists, since it appears on certain Late Hellenistic coins of Armenia, especially as the headdress of Tigranes the Great on his famous coinage. It is called by them the “Armenian Tiara,” and I shall use this term for it. In its developed form it may well be that its origin is Armenia, but the general type is surely of ancient Iranian origin. In Commagene it is used as the headdress of Antiochus, both on his coins and his monuments. On the former the lappets fall naturally over the shoulders, but on the latter they are invariably pulled up over the diadem where they overlap across the crown of the head. The Armenian Tiara appears on the following representations, in every case identified by epigraphical evidence:

1. Antiochus, on his coinage.
2. Antiochus, at Nemrud Dağ, the West Terrace dexiosis relief which shows him with Commagene.
3. Antiochus, at Nemrud Dağ, the West Terrace dexiosis relief which shows him with Apollo Mithras Helios Hermes.
4. Antiochus, at Nemrud Dağ, the West Terrace dexiosis relief which shows him with Zeus Oromasdes.
5. Antiochus, at Nemrud Dağ, the West Terrace dexiosis relief, which shows him with Artagnes Heracles Ares.
6. Antiochus, at Selik, the dexiosis relief which again shows him with Artagnes Heracles Ares.

The above list cites every known example where epigraphical evidence makes it certain that Antiochus is represented, and where his tiara is preserved.

We may now summarize our evidence for the use of these four types of tiaras in Commagene (pl. 11, fig. 1).

1. The Persian Tiara is worn by the earliest Iranian ancestors of Antiochus as they are represented at Nemrud Dağ. It is certainly worn by Ancestors 1, 2, 4 and 5, and probably by all the first five. It is worn by two gods in their Iranian aspect: Ahuramazda and Mithra, whose identities are confirmed by inscriptions.

2. The Pointed Tiara is worn by the later Iranian ancestors of Antiochus, including his father and his grandfather, and also as far back as the Sixth Ancestor in his lineage as portrayed at Nemrud Dağ. It is also worn by the god Artagnes Heracles Ares when he is represented in his Iranian form, Verathragna.

3. The Satrapal Tiara was apparently worn by at least two of the later Iranian ancestors of Antiochus as shown at Nemrud Dağ.

4. The Armenian Tiara is worn by Antiochus I of Commagene, wherever he is surely identifiable, and, as far as direct epigraphical evidence attests, by him alone. It is his only headdress.

We must now turn our attention to the huge
seated figures of the gods, the most awesome of the sculptural remains at Nemrud Dağ. These are a row of five gods, shown enthroned on the East Terrace, and repeated on the West Terrace. They were first discovered and described by the German expedition led by Humann and Puchstein in 1890.29 Here again there is epigraphical evidence. Across the back of the five thrones runs the famous Nemrud Dağ inscription, which among other things makes clear that the figures were called synthonoi theoi, and that they represent: Zeus Oromasdes; Apollo Mithras Helios Hermes; Artagnes Heracles Ares; Commagene personified; and Antiochus himself.30 Which was which was a problem left for Puchstein to solve.

His task was not altogether easy. The costumes of the colossi were generalized and very sketchily rendered. The best evidence for identification lay, therefore, in their faces; but the blocks which formed the heads had, with one exception, fallen to the ground, and many of them were hidden among other blocks strewn on the terraces. The blocks for the heads alone were huge and so heavy that the German expedition was hardly able to move them. Puchstein began the business of identification on the East Terrace, where he was further hampered by the fact that the head belonging to the figure at the south end of the line had fallen and could not be found. He thus faced the following sequence:

Head Missing—Female—Bearded Face—Youthful Face—Bearded Face, Club

The female figure—the only one of the colossi to have the head still in place—was manifestly the goddess Commagene. The bearded figure at the north end of the line held an upright club in his left hand and must then be Heracles, the Artagnes Ares Heracles of the inscription. Puchstein next observed that the central colossal was larger even than the others and that its throne jutted forward from the line; this must then be the greatest of the gods both Greek and Persian, Zeus Ahuramazda (the Zeus Oromasdes of the inscription).

Now of all the heads of the East Terrace colossi, that which could be best studied was the one belonging to the figure31 seated between Zeus and Heracles, since it had been set upright by the Turkish expedition led by Hamdy Bey which visited the site between the first and second German visits. Puchstein decided after careful study that this head displayed portrait-like features not to be found in the other faces. He thus identified it as an idealized portrait of Antiochus.32 The headless statue at the south end must then be assigned to Apollo Mithras, and the identification of the colossi was established as follows from left to right:

Apollo Mithras—Commagene—Zeus Oromasdes—Antiochus—Artagnes Heracles

The colossi of the West Terrace were so arranged as to present the same sequence to the viewer as those on the East. Here all five heads were located by the German expedition, although some were even more difficult to study, since not only the heads but most of the blocks which formed the bodies had been thrown to the ground. They presented the following order, again left to right (here north to south):

Youthful Face—Female—Bearded Face—Youthful Face—Bearded Face

The tiaras could here be recognized, except that the one worn by the figure at the right was then assumed to be the Persian tiara. Puchstein had already decided on the sequence of identification based on his study of the East Terrace heads and found no reason to alter it here.33 The West Terrace figures he again identified as:

Apollo Mithras—Commagene—Zeus Oromasdes—Antiochus—Artagnes Heracles

It is a tribute to the respect every scholar feels for the word of Otto Puchstein that these identifications have never been questioned.

And yet there is one false note in Puchstein's arrangement of these figures, one which cannot identified as Antiochus could not at first be found; it was finally discovered almost hidden among the mass of huge blocks which covered much of the terrace, lying on its left side and so encumbered that photography was impossible. Puchstein wrote of it: "One gets the impression that the artist had intended to strip everything portrait-like from the features of the deified king and to render him entirely as an ideal, with a calm friendly smile. Yet its identity with the East Terrace head of Antiochus is recognizable beyond doubt in the broad face, the strong cheekbones, and the short straight nose."

29 East Terrace: HP 253ff, pl. xxivff; West Terrace: HP 293ff, with reconstruction on 328.
30 Dittenberger, OGIS 383 = Jalabert-Mouterde, op.cit. no. 1, with bibliography.
31 HP pl. xxix 3-4.
32 HP 257: "A certain lifeless expression of the features is brought about chiefly through the schematic treatment of form; yet they seem to recall a specific individuality rather than an idealized Greek god."
33 The West Terrace counterpart to the East Terrace head
fail to startle the student of Commagenian sculpture. It is a matter of rank. In Commagene the place of honor is at the right, but at the right as it appears to the spectator. We see this in the Dexiosis reliefs where the god stands to our right, the king at our left, whereas in the funeral relief from Karakuş the king stands to our right, the dying princess to our left. So, although by our etiquette it is entirely correct to seat the goddess Commagene at the right hand of Father Zeus, by Commagenean standards it is Antiochus (if we accept Puchstein's identifications) who occupies the position of honor, while the gods Apollo and Heracles are elbowed out to the ends of the line. To be sure, those who have read the words of Antiochus as set forth in his great inscriptions would scarcely call him a modest king, but at the same time his ceremonious piety is indubitable and everywhere apparent. So uncertainty arises, and with it a desire for more positive evidence.

Fortunately, this evidence is now at hand. The American expedition, with better equipment, was able to set upright all the colossal heads seen by Puchstein. In addition, several of the topmost courses which formed the peaks of the tiaras have also been found, so that the headresses are now better understood. Finally, the missing head from the East Terrace was recovered, and it wears the Armenian tiara. Once again, we may repeat the sequence on each terrace, this time with the types of headress and with Puchstein's identifications in brackets:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youthful Face</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Bearded Face</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armenian Tiara</td>
<td>[Apollo Mithra]</td>
<td>[Commagene]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persien Tiara</td>
<td>[Zeus Ahuramazda]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table makes it clear that not only is the sequence itself curious, but that the headresses of the two youthful colossi contradict all the other evidence. Elsewhere we have noted that Apollo Mithra wears the Persian Tiara, while the Armenian Tiara at Commagene is regularly the headdress of Antiochus alone. What could have caused this unprecedented exchange of headgear? Or, instead, can we possibly reverse the identification of the two youthful figures?

The figure identified in the table above as Antiochus was recognized by Puchstein because of its "portrait-like" features. Can we confirm this portrait-like quality? Any comparison with the heads of Antiochus on the coins will be fruitless, for not only are these idealized but they are so small that to properly compare them with the giant heads of the colossi would be folly. Furthermore, the heads on the coins, as well as the larger heads on the stele, are not only generalized but are presented in profile, while the colossal heads were meant to be seen from the front alone. One test remains: if the head from the East Terrace identified by Puchstein as a portrait of Antiochus is in fact a portrait it should closely resemble the corresponding head from the West Terrace, for it is clear that models of some sort must have been used by the sculptors of these huge heads. In my forthcoming study of the sculptures at Nemrud Dağ I shall try to show that models were indeed used, in the following way. Leaving the heads of the goddess Commagene apart, there are two types of faces on each terrace: the mature bearded faces of Zeus and Heracles on the one hand, and the youthful beardless faces of Apollo Mithra and Antiochus on the other. I believe it is clear, especially on the West Terrace, that a pair of models was used, one for both the bearded faces, the other for the youthful faces, so that on the West Terrace both Zeus and Heracles were sculptured after the same model, the faces of Antiochus and Apollo after another; but these two models were not the same as those used for the corresponding faces on the East Terrace. Now if the heads of Apollo Mithra and of Antiochus were fashioned after the same prototype, how are we to say which is which without further identification?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youthful Face</th>
<th>Bearded Face</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persian Tiara</td>
<td>[Antiochus]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pointed Tiara</td>
<td>[Heracles]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verathragna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And if this is difficult for us, consider the plight of the ancient visitor, who must make the distinction with heads twenty feet and more above him. Surely the one striking difference which he could not fail to observe was the difference of the tiaras. The tiaras were meant to be his key:

Bearded face with Persian Tiara = Zeus Ahuramazda
Bearded face with Pointed Tiara = Heracles Verathragna
Youthful face with Persian Tiara = Apollo Mithra
Youthful face with Armenian Tiara = Antiochus, wearing the tiara which was uniquely his
Puchstein’s identifications of Antiochus and Apollo Mithra are surely wrong and must be reversed. Considering that in his time the heads were partly obscured by debris, and that one was lost, it is easy to see how he could make such a mistake. And yet there has always been one clue, independent of the heads themselves, to their proper identification. It lies in the words of Antiochus himself. For in the great inscription on the backs of the colossal thrones he says: “I have set up these divine images of Zeus Oromasdes and of Apollo Mithras Helios Hermes and of Artagnes Heracles Ares, and also of my all-nourishing homeland Commagene, and from the same stone, throned among the gracious daemons, I have consecrated the features of my own form, and thus admitted a new Tyche to share in the ancient honors of the great gods.”

It is clear that he lists the gods first, beginning with Zeus in the center, next to him Apollo, and next Heracles, in the order of their importance. He then turns to figures of a different sort, flanking the other side of Zeus, again in order of importance, the goddess Commagene first, and finally the king himself—Antiochus.

We then have the following disposition of the colossal figures (pl. 12, fig. 2):

| Young Face | Female | Bearded Face | Persian Tiara
| Armenian Tiara | Commagene | Zeus Oromasdes | Apollo Mithras
| Antiochus | Horseman | Horseman |

We have now established that within the boundaries of Commagene it is Antiochus and Antiochus alone who wears the Armenian Tiara, in all cases where epigraphical evidence identifies the wearer. Once we know this for certain we may identify him by this tiara even where inscriptions fail us. I shall cite two examples. At Kāhta, the site known in antiquity as Arsameia-on-the-Nymphaeus, recent excavations have uncovered a large and beautifully preserved relief which shows a king at the left grasping the hand of a god standing before him, Heracles with his club and lion skin. Since this site is shown by inscriptions to have honored Mithradates, the father of Antiochus, and since the face of the king depicted on the relief does not resemble the faces of Antiochus at Nemrud Dağ, both Doerner, the excavator, and I have recognized in it the king Mithradates. But we have since learned how untrustworthy these Commagenian “portraits” are, and how important the tiara is for purposes of identification. This king wears the Armenian Tiara. Mithradates, on his coinage (and apparently also on the ancestor stela at Nemrud Dağ) wears the Pointed Tiara. We must change our identification and recognize in this king once again Antiochus I of Commagene.

Again, at Nemrud Dağ the German expedition found an unfinished stela on the West Terrace, uninscribed. It represented two male figures face to face; the upper portion of the figure to the left and the area between the two figures was broken away; this relief is now in the Berlin Museum. Recently, the American expedition found parts of a similar relief in clearing the East Terrace. In this case the central area is preserved and we clearly see that the figures held between them an out-stretched diadem which was being passed from one to the other. It is, then, an investiture relief, and the relief in the Berlin Museum must be its West Terrace counterpart. These are by far the earliest portrayals of an Iranian investiture so far discovered. Is it then a god invests a king after the fashion of the famous Sassanid investiture reliefs? As long as we were in doubt about the true significance of the Armenian Tiara we could not answer this question. Now we can. The more important figure, to our right, clearly wears the striking and immediately recognizable Armenian Tiara. He must be Antiochus. The unfinished state of the two reliefs points unmistakably to the only possible answer. As one of the last monuments to be set up in his lifetime, Antiochus sought to bring his sculptural program to its logical conclusion, as he hands down the diadem, symbol of royalty, to the successor, his son.

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34 Jalabert-Mouterde, op. cit. no. 1 = Dittenberger, OGIS 383, II. 54ff. I quote here the translation by Frederick C. Grant, Hellenistic Religions (New York 1953) 32.
35 To be published in the forthcoming volume on the excavations at Arsameia.
36 HP pl. xxxvi 2.
37 AJA 62 (1958) pl. 19, figs. 126.
38 A Parthian investiture relief from Susa, now in Teheran, shows Artabanus V handing the diadem to a satrap: Ghirshman, Iran (Penguin Books 1954) 280 and pl. 37. For the Sassanid reliefs see Pope, Survey of Persian Art IV, pls. 154ff.
Fig. 1. The four tiaras

1. Armenian
2. Satrapal
3. Pointed
4. Persian
Fig. 2. The colossi