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“A Mask Looking Towards the City and the Valley”: Observations on the “Charonion” in Antioch

A peculiar rock-cut monument rises above Antioch on the Orontes (modern Antakya, Türkiye)¹ (Ill. 12, Ill. 13). The relief’s unfinished state, poor condition and the lack of archaeological context hinder exact dating and identification. In 1865, Ernest Renan [26] had pointed out the similarities between this monument and a passage in the “*Chronographia*” of John Malalas, author of the 6th century A.D. The passage describes a plague that happened during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.). To counter the epidemic, Leios, a wonder-worker or priest (τελεστής, *telestēs*), created a talisman on the mountain, inscribed it, and thus brought the plague to an end:

“During his reign, when there was a plague and many people in the city perished, Leios, a wonder worker, ordered that a rock from the mountain above the city be carved with an enormous mask, crowned and looking towards the city and the valley. He wrote an inscription on it and stopped the deaths from the plague. To the present day the Antiochenes call this mask Charonion” [14, p. 108]².

Indeed, the rock-cut mask occupies this recognizable position over the modern city. However, despite the correlation, Malalas’ testimony poses new questions regarding the identification and interpretation of this monument. The term “Charonion” (Χαρώνιον, a location connected to Charon) is usually applied to caves with toxic fumes, places of cult and healing [22, p. 79–156]. The use of this rare and specific word cannot be explained as merely the “mistake” of the later author and needs to be elaborated upon.

The monument is mentioned often, but only briefly, in overviews of the history, topography, and cults of the city. It is generally considered one of the few Hellenistic remnants of Antioch [9, pp. 103–104; 6, p. 64; 8, p. 44; 7, pp. 84–85, 90–91, 127–129].

There are only two recent papers dedicated specifically to this relief. The first is 2017 article by Hatice Pamir [23]. She presents a systematic review of evidence and proposes to identify the figures as the *Dea Syria* and Tyche. In her view, the link with Charon appeared as the result of an original or later cultic development. The other publication is a 2021 book chapter, in which Felipe Rojas provides a thought-provoking look at the historiography of the relief [27].

¹ I would like to thank Ekaterina Berzon and Oleg Gabelko for bringing this monument to my attention; and Natalia Astashova, Ekaterina Mikhailova and Denis Nenakhov for sharing their photo archives.

² Greek text after Thurn [36, p. 155]: “Ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς αὐτοῦ βασιλείας λοιμοῦ γενομένου καὶ πολλῶν διαφθαρέντων τῆς πόλεως, Λήϊός τις τελεστής ἐκέλευσε πέτραν ἐκ τοῦ ὄρους τοῦ ὑπεράνω τῆς πόλεως γλυφῆναι ἔχουσαν προσωπεῖον μέγα πάνυ, ἐστεμμένον, προσέχοντα ἐπὶ τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὸν αἰθῶνα· καὶ γράφας ἐν αὐτῷ τινα ἔπαυσε τὴν λοιμικὴν θνήσιν· ὅπερ προσωπεῖον καλοῦσιν ἕως τοῦ νῦν οἱ Ἀντιοχεῖς Χαρώνιον” (Malalas 8.21 (205)).

Building upon the works of previous scholars, I would like to offer some observations regarding the iconography and format of the relief and its place in the landscape and urban setting of Antioch. In the last section of the article, I will also touch upon the subject of the “Charonion” interpretation’s possible source.

The relief in Antioch vs the “Charonion” of Malalas and other texts

Antioch was one of the prominent centers of the Seleucid Kingdom in Syria (Fig. 1). The city’s layout is defined by the Orontes flowing from the north-east to the south-west. A mountain rises on the east bank of the river, divided into two massifs by a ravine³. Our relief is located on the west slope of the northern half, Mount Staurin, on a small terrace — perhaps a sacred area in antiquity [10, p. 85, 23, fig. 28.4].

The central figure is in the form of a bust (Fig. 2). It reaches approx. 5,40 m in height. According to George Elderkin, it was left unfinished [10, p. 84]. The main volumes were carved from the local bedrock, but no details were added. However, it can be assumed, that the figure had always meant to be a bust, and not a full figure.

The face is broad, slightly turned towards the left. The chin and neck are well-pronounced, heavy-set. The head is covered, with the two edges of the veil framing the face.

Above the left shoulder of the main figure, there is a secondary image. It is smaller (height: 2,8 m) and depicts a standing person. The condition is extremely poor. We can see the outlines of a long dress and a tall *kalathos*-style headgear.

There is a small triangular element over the right shoulder of the main figure, which seems to be man-made, but its intended shape and relation to the rest of the images are ultimately unrecognizable.

The earliest mention of the relief in question (with reference to it being called the “Charonion” by the Antiochenes) is the passage by John Malalas, quoted above.

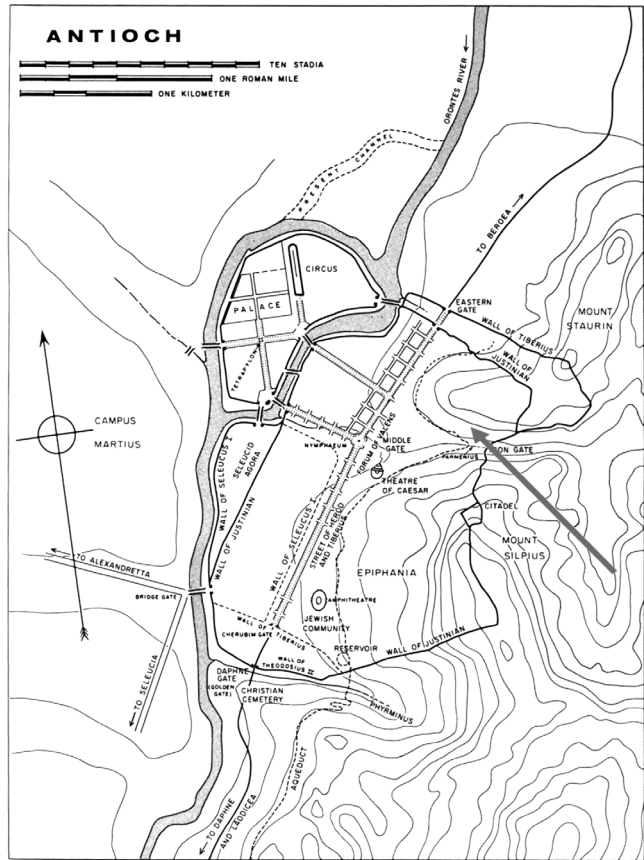


Fig. 1. Map of ancient Antioch with the location of the relief. After: [9, fig. 11].

³ On the identification of the mountains and their toponyms [30].



Fig. 2. The approximate outlines of the main and secondary figures on the relief. After a photograph by Natalia Astashova

John Malalas was a Syrian, perhaps even from Antioch [36, p. 1]. As a learned man, he had access to specific sources and could also rely on local knowledge. His description fits the location and overall look of the monument, with one major discrepancy: the inscription, which is not present on or near the relief. Nevertheless, the gap between Malalas and the presumed Hellenistic date of the monument's creation is around seven centuries, fraught with cultural and historical changes. The original intended identity, function and perception of the monument could have been altered over this period⁴. So Malalas can be projecting a later understanding of the relief into an earlier period.

The mention of the creator is symptomatic. Leios is one of the many *telestai* (priests, “wonder workers”) mentioned in the “*Chronographia*”. They create magical talismans, often in the shape of statues. As such, their activities are a popular theme. In fact, as Liudmila Alekseevna Samutkina points out, there is only one named sculptor (Pheidias), but four named *telestai* [32, p. 160]⁵.

What was the role of Antiochos IV in this story? It is possible to imagine him as the patron of such a monumental undertaking, but the text does not support this thesis. When the king

⁴ This is not an exception, but rather the rule for rock-cut monuments, which, due to their prominent position in the landscape, tend to accumulate new meanings over time [13; 27]. See also, for example, my attempt at tackling the intended meanings and afterlives of Anatolian rock-cut monuments [15].

⁵ However, Samutkina does not include Leios in her list, thus we have a total of five *telestai*. On statues and votives in Antioch see also [29; 19].



Fig. 3. Silver didrachm of Hierapolis-Bambyce, 4th century B.C. Obv.: bust of Atargatis. Rev.: Abd Hadad at altar. British Museum, No. 1902,0610.55 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 license

initiated the construction of a bouleterion and a new quarter, this is clearly marked by Malalas as a royal achievement (Malalas VIII.21 (205)). Although I think it is worth mentioning here, that Antiochos (likely the same Antiochos IV Epiphanes) was the patron of another “monumental mask”: Pausanias reports, that there was “a gilded head of Medusa the Gorgon, and round it is wrought an aegis” on the south wall of the Acropolis of Athens (Paus. 1.21.3; see also 5.12.4 for the identification of the king). This is a peculiar position: above the Theater of Dionysos and, consequently, above the monumentalized cave of the Choragic monument of Thrasyllus [37, p. 562–565], but under the walls of the Acropolis. This placement is similar to the location of the relief in Antioch: halfway up the mountain, near a cave, under the fortified summit⁶.

But the creation of the “mask” is related to Leios. On the one hand, this fits well with the aforementioned focus on the activities of “wonder workers”. On the other hand, according to Nicholas Wright, the monument could have appeared at the behest of the Antiochenes [40, p. 149]. The name of king Antiochos is evoked as the dating formula.

The next interpretation of the monument can be found in the medieval or later manuscript *Vaticanus Arabus* 286. It mentions “a sculptured stone which is an idol called The Weeping Woman”, a place of healing, where the Antiochene mothers cure their sons [27, p. 170]. This piece of evidence shows both continuity and change: the name “Charonion” is no longer applied, but the image (now “The Weeping Woman”) still holds the power to end diseases (if not the plague, then the common cold). Felipe Rojas rightly stresses the importance of this oft-overlooked passage in his recent book chapter [27, p. 170], as it shows the ongoing interaction of the population of the city with the rock-cut monument.

European travelers of the 18th–early 19th centuries do not mention the “face in the rock”, despite its prominent position over the city. Richard Pococke gave a detailed account of the antiquities and sights of Antioch, including the cave church of St. John (now known as St.

⁶ Just a side-note, related to the ancient re-interpretation of monuments: Pausanias mentions a “head of Medusa made of stone, which is said to be another of the works of the Cyclopes” near the sanctuary of Kephisos, where an underground river “can be heard flowing under the earth” (Paus. 2.20.6–7).



Fig. 4. Cult relief of the Gad (Fortune) of Palmyra, from Dura-Europos, 159 A.D. Yale University Art Gallery, No. 1938.5313 © Public domain



Fig. 5. Funerary relief of Moqimu, from Palmyra, 50–150 A.D. British Museum, No. 1895,0401.7 © The Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 license

Peter), which is near the rock-cut relief. The situation is similar in James Silk Buckingham's work [25, p. 188–193; 3, 556–563].

The first mentions of the relief and the efforts to identify it in the corpus of European travel literature appear around the mid-19th century⁷.

The monument is mentioned by Francis R. Chesney: “Again, at no great distance above the gate of St. Paul are the ancient excavations forming part of the church of St. John; and in the vicinity a colossal head, probably that of a Sphinx; also a fulllength ‘Egyptian’ figure, both in bold relief, cut in the solid rock evidently at a very remote period” [4, vol. 1, p. 425]. His account brought the relief into the center of attention and it was included in most later travelers’ and researchers’ itinerary.

The next mention in is the account of Emily Beaufort (the future Lady Strangford). She described the cave church, the surrounding landscape and the relief: “Some way above this, and only to be reached by a steep scramble up the cliff, there are some curious colossal figures sculptured on the face of the rock, — one is a female head and figure down to the waist, the features are worn away but the hair is still distinct, parted in the centre and rolled back, — beside her stands a full-length male figure; they are supposed to be Egyptian — why, I do not know: they are curious, and the view over the beautiful plain from them, is fine” [1, vol. 2, p. 312]. The mention of the supposed “Egyptian” character of the carving is a reaction to Chesney’s interpretation.

⁷ Hatice Pamir provides a helpful overview, but with a few minor mistakes regarding the various researchers’ suggestions: she reports that Förster suggests Attis/Mitra, and Perdrizet & Fossey suggest Charon [23, p. 544]; see below for more details. In Karl Otfried Müller’s work, referenced by Pamir, the *relief* is, in fact, not mentioned: Müller recounts the story from Malalas [20, S. 62], but does not relate it with any extant monument.

Following in Chesney's footsteps, orientalist Ernst Renan also visited the relief and provided a detailed description. He was also the first among the European researchers to draw attention to the correspondence between the monument and Malalas' account [26]. Paul Perdrizet and Denis Fossey some 30 years later polemicized with Renan [24]. They rejected the identification of the monument as Charon or Demeter and Kore. In their opinion, one must take into account, that the monument had been created in a necropolis and therefore must have had funerary connotations. They arrived at the conclusion, that the main figure is a male, Attis or Mitra. To them, the Charonion of Malalas is "Byzantine folklore": "in the melancholic figure that an initiate had sculpted next to his tomb, the Christians of Justinian's Antioch saw the funereal face of a demon <...> Charon" [24, p. 84]. The authors also posited, that the sculpture might be of the Roman period, not Seleucid [24, p. 83]. Ultimately, however, they agreed to retain the apotropaic-talismanic character of the carving from Malalas' account, but did not correlate it with their own position regarding the identification.

The polemics were continued by Richard Förster, who sided with Renan against Perdrizet & Fossey [12, p. 177, n. 1] in seeing the figures as depictions of females. In his article from 1897, Förster also proposed, that the term "Charonion" does not necessarily relate to the relief, but perhaps to the broader area [11, p. 108] — I will return later to this idea.

In the 1930s, George Elderkin excavated in Antioch under the aegis of the Princeton University [10]⁸. The project included brief investigations in the area of the relief, but the final publication was limited to general remarks and the observation about the unfinished state of the monument. He stated that "no cave was discovered near the colossal image" [10, p. 84, n. 5] — here Elderkin ignores the nearby cave church (see below). In Elderkin's opinion, the name "Charionion" "was due to the belief that the colossal bust was that of a chthonic goddess who had been appeased and brought to an end the affliction which sent many souls to Charon" [10, p. 84].

Thus, the question remains open: who was depicted?

Identification, iconography and format

It is evident, that the main relief does not represent Charon. The iconographic counterarguments are well laid out in Hatice Pamir's article [23, p. 548–551]. And it must be reiterated, that Malalas doesn't say that the mask *is* Charon — he writes that the mask is *called* "Charonion".

The identification of the figure as Attis, proposed by Perdrizet and Fossey [24], seems quite unlikely, although there are some formal parallels, for example with the head of Attis from Algeria [39, p. 51, no. 140]. But Attis does not fit on a structural-compositional level. He can be depicted with Cybele, but, as a rule, in such compositions the goddess occupies the central position. Then Attis could only be the secondary figure by the "mask" in Antioch (cf. [38, Pl. XIII/1–2]). But, ultimately, the main character is shown in a multi-layered veil, not in a Phrygian cap.

Demeter and Kore are rarely discussed as possibilities, although iconographic and compositional parallels are easy to come by: two female figures, one larger, the other smaller. Such a combination can be found in (arguably, quite distant from Hellenistic Syria) 5th–4th century B.C. terracotta figurines of Demeter carrying Kore [17, tabl. CXVII/no. 9]. However, the composition of the Antiochene relief is more schematic and formalized. The motif of carrying or any kind of contact is missing. The figures are interrelated in an abstracted hierarchic structure (see below).

⁸ On the history of the expedition see [elfkbnm, p. 27–33].

The much closer parallel for the main figure is provided by the iconography of the *Dea Syria*/Atargatis, as discussed by Hatice Pamir [23]⁹. The coins of Hierapolis-Bambyce show the bust of Atargatis, positioned frontally, her head covered with a veil and a crown (Fig. 3).

The format of the bust makes one wonder, whether the creators of the relief in Antioch consciously depicted their figure in this way, to associate it with the iconographic type already known to many.

This is important to consider, because the bust format is not at all common among rock-cut reliefs. Anthropomorphic images are more likely to be displayed in full (for example, the 2nd century B.C. relief of a goddess in the İncesu canyon in Türkiye [34]).

Another potential appeal of the format was the stronger achievable sense of monumentality. A five-meter-tall standing figure is imposing, of course, but a five-meter-tall *half*-figure hints at an even greater size. Yet, visitors to the relief do not find themselves dwarfed at the feet of an aloof and distant colossus, but are lifted closer to the face of this “friendly giant”. The image is awe-inspiring, monumental, yet also approachable¹⁰.

On a visual level, the format of the bust can hold another association. The figure, as represented, is “incomplete”, truncated, framed in an unusual way. However, the “missing” body can be easily imagined and reconstructed by the viewer. Taking into account the very material of the relief — the living rock — this reconstruction means that the body of the deity is one with the mountain. This visual and corporeal interplay could have accentuated the chthonic aspects of the depicted figure¹¹ and its strong connection with the location — the mountain towering above Antioch.

According to Pausanias (6.2.6), Eutychides, a pupil of Lysippos, made the image of the Tyche of Antioch. The statue survives in Roman-era copies¹² and its idiosyncratic iconography is used on coins [6, fig. 2.5]. It depicts Tyche with the mural crown, seated on a rock, stepping on the personification of the river Orontes — a young male nude, emerging from the waters below. The lesser figure on the “Charonion” relief is depicted standing, and is surely not a reflex on the Eutychides type. However, if we take into account the surrounding landscape, then a similar composition emerges: the figure is on the mountain, rising above the valley of the Orontes. One can even interpret the real fortifications of the city [2, pl. 10.2], which ran on top of the mountain, as corresponding to Tyche’s mural crown.

But it is not only the Hellenized image of Tyche that can be subjected to examination.

The Syrian equivalent of this goddess is Gad [35, pp. 88–100]. A 2nd century A.D. relief from Palmyra [35, pl. XVIII]¹³ depicts an enthroned goddess (Allat or Astarte?). She rests her feet on a struggling male figure, who might be the personification of a spring [35, p. 97]. The main deity is attended to by a second goddess, who stands on her right. This figure is identified as the Gad=Tyche of Palmyra. The Gadde of Palmyra and Dura-Europos are shown on two 2nd century A.D. reliefs [35, pls. XXVIII, XXIX]¹⁴ (Fig. 4). A mortal offering-bearer approaches Zeus Kyrios=Baalshamin from the left [35, pl. VI]¹⁵. Nicholas Wright considers the option

⁹ For the cult of the “Syrian Goddess”/*Dea Syria*, see [18].

¹⁰ As shown by the vernacular healing practice described in *Vaticanus Arabus* 286 (quoted above).

¹¹ One is reminded of the half-figure of Ge rising from the ground on the east frieze of the Pergamon Altar.

¹² E.g. Vatican, No. 2672, Louvre, Inv. BR 4453.

¹³ Archaeological Museum of Palmyra, Available at: <https://virtual-museum-syria.org/palmyra/relief-depicting-ishtar-and-tyche-the-tyche-of-palmyra> (accessed: 1 November 2024).

¹⁴ From Dura-Europos. Yale University Art Gallery, Nos. 1938.5313, 1938.5314.

¹⁵ From Dura-Europos. Yale University Art Gallery, No. 1935.45.

that the Antiochene rock sculpture is the depiction of Zeus-Hadad as the consort of Atargatis [40, p. 149]. A 2nd–3rd century A.D. relief in the Yale University collection [35, pl. XX/1]¹⁶ does indeed show Hadad as a smaller figure on the goddess' right, but nowhere near so markedly, as on the Antiochene relief.

The combination of differently sized figures in a shared pictorial field is widely attested in Palmyrene funerary portraits¹⁷ (Fig. 5). Additional, smaller figures appear above the shoulders of the main depiction of the deceased: the images of relatives.

This small sample, I think, is representative of the type of hierarchical, clean compositional types preferred in Syrian art of the early centuries of the 1st millennium A.D. This visual language is firmly rooted in the earlier, less well attested, artistic tradition. Yet, I think we should remain open to the possibility to shift the creation of the monument away from the first half of the 2nd century B.C. (as per Malalas), into the realms of Syrian art of the first centuries A.D.

Where does the “Charonion” come from?

As demonstrated above, scholars evaluate Malalas' account as conflated. But, overall, they tend to see it as a version that was relevant for the people of Antioch in the 6th century A.D.

Hatice Pamir hypothesizes, that “in local eschatology, there may have been a Charon with more of a psychopomp function than the Greek archetype <...> a protective entity”, leading to “a unique local cult synthesis pairing the mother goddess, who controls both life and death, with Greek Charon (derived from Canaanite Horon)” [23, p. 554]. The invention of such a local cult is a bit of a stretch, but the idea is interesting and could be developed further. For example, in 2nd millennium B.C. Ugaritic texts, Horon is a chthonic demon invoked in curses, but he also has the benevolent power to protect and heal, or to neutralize snake poison [33, pp. 279–281; 28, pp. 425–426]. The cult of Horon, in one way or the other, survived into the 1st millennium B.C. [28, p. 426].

The term “Charonion” holds a specific meaning in Classical sources, which must be assessed to see whether it fits the Antiochene monument or its location. The main corpus of evidence is provided by Strabo¹⁸. He localizes several Charonia in south-west Asia Minor. These are unusual caves, used in cultic activities. Poisonous vapors emanate from them, but they can also be places of healing [22, p. 79–156].

The locations given by Strabo are identified archaeologically.

First, there is the sanctuary in Acharaca, “where is the Plutonium, with a costly sacred precinct and a shrine of Pluto and Core, and also the Charonion, a cave that lies above the sacred precinct, by nature wonderful” (Strab. 14.1.44).

Second, it is the sanctuary, a “Plutonium”, in Hierapolis (Strab. 13.4.14). Archaeological excavations revealed a large complex in the central area of the city, consisting of the agora, the sanctuary of Apollo and a sacred cave. The cave had been in use possibly since Archaic times, and in the Roman period it was monumentalized with a portico, pool and a round building. Emanations are in evidence even today [5]. The Roman-era extension was facilitated by the ongoing rivalry between the cities of the region [16, p. 56–57].

¹⁶ From Dura-Europos. Yale University Art Gallery, No. 1930.319.

¹⁷ E.g. the relief of Moqimu, 50–150 A.D., British Museum, No. 125033; funerary portrait of a man with two children, 2nd century A.D., Seattle Art Museum, No. 42.11.

¹⁸ Strab. 12.8.17; 13.4.14; 14.1.14; 14.1.44–46.

The grotto in Eleusis is also worth mentioning [21, p. 99–100], due to structural similarities, although the name “Charonion” is not applied here, only “Plutoneion”.

Thus, we can see, that the Charonion in antiquity is a cave, often with emanating fumes, an imagined entry into the netherworld, but also a place of healing. Oftentimes, the sacred cave is not a separate entity, but part of a larger complex. In Acharaca the cave is on the territory of a sanctuary to Pluto and Kore, in Hierapolis – in an urban zone, next to public buildings, in Eleusis – part of the important sanctuary.

A Greek Charonion is patently not the place of worship of Charon, who has no individual cult. Charon here is the signifier of the passage into the otherworld, an intermediary figure, secondary to the main deities of the given encompassing sanctuary.

In ancient Syria, we know at least three religious ensembles that include caves: the sanctuaries of Pan on Mount Hermon, of Zeus in Gadara and of Zeus again in Gerasha [40, p. 243–249, 256–258, 263–281]. However, while some structural similarities are traceable (natural cave in a larger complex), in sources they are never named “Charonia” or “Plutonia”.

For Antioch, it is possible to hypothesize, that in Hellenistic-Roman times, there was a sanctuary on Mount Staurin, which included a sacred cave. As we have seen, caves are often parts of larger complexes, dedicated to various gods. In this case, the sanctuary could have been a place of worship of the *Dea Syria* in some shape or form, with the cave – a Charonion – acting as a supplementary locus of cult. A healing and protective element, which is present in later narratives, was quite likely already significant for the sanctuary. The relief, however, was either a different part of the complex, or a nearby, but not directly related element.

By the time of Malalas, this original distinction became blurred in the imagination and practices of local populace. They retained the concept of the place of healing¹⁹. The name of the Charonion (in itself evocative) was applied to the whole area, including the rock-cut relief. In a way, this was an inversion of a previous relationship: the secondary cave became the primary focus of the 6th century A.D. cult place.

Mount Staurin in Antioch has many grottoes, including the cave church of St. Peter, formerly dedicated to St. John [23, p. 547; 8, p. 469–470]. In the framework of this hypothesis, this or any other nearby cave could have been the Charonion, originally a part of a sanctuary on the slope of the mountain. The identity of this hypothetical complex is unknown: perhaps it is mentioned in the lists of Antiochene temples in the works of Julian, Libanius, John Malalas and others²⁰.

In fact, one passage from Malalas is worth mentioning here. In a variant of the myth, Io flees “to Mount Silpios²¹ in Syria. In following years Seleukos Nikator the Macedonian built a city, which he named Antioch the Great, after his son. Io went off to Syria and died there”. The Argives learned about this, came to Syria, and, “reasoning that Io was buried on that mountain, they built a shrine to her there”. Later, they also erected a temple to Kronos on the mountain (Malalas 2.7 (29–30)) [14, p. 14; 36, p. 21–22]. Other authors indicate the foundation of temples to Zeus, both in mythical and historical times [31, p. 58]. It is tempting to see in this mountain-tomb and sanctuary of a goddess a reflection of an earlier tradition. I imagine a

¹⁹ A powerful and always relevant idea; see the work of Ömür Harmanşah on the connection of rock-cut monuments and healing [13, p. xiv, 143–160].

²⁰ See Catherine Saliou’s collection of evidence [31, Tabl. 3.1–3].

²¹ Or “Silpion”. According to Catherine Saliou, Malalas uses the term “Mount Silpion” to denote the whole mountain range in Antioch, not just a segment of it [30, p. 576].

sacred precinct dedicated to the local main goddess (associated with the mountain) and her male consort, which also includes a cultic cave. This is, of course, a rather fanciful hypothesis.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the magnificent rock-cut relief of Antioch remains (and will always remain) somewhat of an enigma. However, I tried to highlight some of its innate and contextual features that help us to gain a better understanding.

Due to its location within the landscape, the relief united the idea of divinity with the main topoi of Antioch: the city, the mountain and the river. Thus it also implicitly referenced the Hellenistic-Roman iconography of the Tyche of Antioch. It is possible, that Tyche (whom the local populace could understand as Gad) was also represented as the second, smaller figure. But I would not exclude the option that this is a priest, priestess or offering bearer, who approaches the goddess from the left. This scheme, with the hierarchical positioning of a lesser attending figure next to the main focus of the composition, was widespread in the arts of Syria, as exemplified by reliefs from Palmyra and Dura-Europos.

In my opinion, the particular format for the main figure — the sculptural bust — was chosen for three reasons. First, to provide a specific iconographic reference point to images of the *Dea Syria*. Second, to increase the relative monumentality of the relief, while retaining a sense of openness and approachability of the depicted goddess. And, third, to strengthen the effect of unity between the image and the mountain that it's carved out of.

Last, but not least, as far as the passage of Malalas is concerned, I think that it possible that a Charonion had existed in Antioch, however originally it was a sacred cave (perhaps a place of healing) situated in the borders of a larger sanctuary. By the time of Malalas, this term was transformed to denote the wider area, including the relief, which now became the main and sole focus of attention.

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Title. “A Mask Looking Towards the City and the Valley”: Observations on the “Charonion” in Antioch

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Abstract. This paper presents several observations regarding a rock-cut relief situated on the mountain above Antioch on the Orontes. Due to its correspondence to a passage in John Malalas’ *“Chronographia”*, the monument came to be known as the “Charonion”, dated to the reign of Antiochos IV Epiphanes; however, the historicity of this evidence is disputed in scholarly literature.

The relief is examined in its setting in the landscape and urban context of Antioch. It is hypothesized that it embodied the idea of divinity in unity with the city, the mountain and the river (thus also referencing the iconography of Tyche). The central figure is understood as an important local goddess. It is proposed, that a particular format — the sculptural bust — was chosen for three reasons. First, to provide a specific iconographic reference point to images of the *Dea Syria*. Second, to increase the relative monumentality of the relief, while retaining a sense of openness and approachability of the depicted goddess. Third, to display the connection of the image with the mountain. The rock-cut monument is compared to Syrian funerary and votive sculpture of the first centuries of the 1st millennium A.D., where strict hierarchical compositions (e. g. the positioning of a smaller secondary figure next to a main central one) are found often. This also means, that the date of the creation of the relief can be later than the 2nd century B.C. Finally, regarding the “Charonion”, in this paper it is proposed that at some point in history, prior to the 6th century A.D., there had been a sacred cave nearby, perhaps related to the relief, and by Malalas’ time the term shifted to denote the whole area, including the rock-cut monument.

Keywords: Antioch on the Orontes, ancient Syria, rock-cut monuments, John Malalas, Charonion

Название статьи. «Маска, обращенная к городу и долине». Заметки о «Харонии» в Антиохии

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривает скальный рельеф, вырезанный на горе над Антиохией на Оронте. На основании «Хронографии» Иоанна Малалы, рельеф стал известным как «Хароний», созданный в эпоху Антиоха IV Эпифана. Однако, историчность этих сведений является предметом дискуссий среди исследователей. В статье этот памятник рассматривается с разных сторон, в том числе в контексте местного ландшафта. Согласно гипотезе, рельеф воплощает связь божественного с городом, горной вершиной и рекой Оронт (тем самым отсылая и к известной иконографии Тюхи Антиохии). Главная фигура понимается как важная богиня локального пантеона. Выдвигается идея, что выбор особого формата (бюста) был связан с тремя факторами. Во-первых, как отсылка к иконографии «Сирийской богини». Во-вторых, для создания особого эффекта монументальности, которая при этом сохраняет ощущение открытости изображенной богини в сторону верующих. В-третьих, формат усиливает связь образа с горой. В статье скальный рельеф сравнивается с памятниками скульптуры Сирии первых веков I тыс. до н.э., где строго иерархические композиционные решения повсеместны (напр., расположение второй, меньшей, фигуры, рядом с центральным персонажем). Из этого также следует, что рельеф может быть младше, чем II век до н.э. В последнем разделе статьи выдвигается предположение, что изначально «Хароний» был наименованием некой священной пещеры, располагающийся поблизости, однако ко времени Малалы так стали обозначать более широкую территорию, включая скальный рельеф.

Ключевые слова: Антиох на Оронте, древняя Сирия, скальные монументы, Иоанн Малала, Хароний



III. 12. The rock-cut relief in Antioch. Photograph by Natalia Astashova



III. 13. The rock-cut relief in Antioch, close-up view of the main and secondary figures. Photograph by Natalia Astashova