

*Voyage to the antique sanctuary  
on the mountain Nemrut Dagı in Turkey*

*Bernd Rohrmann*

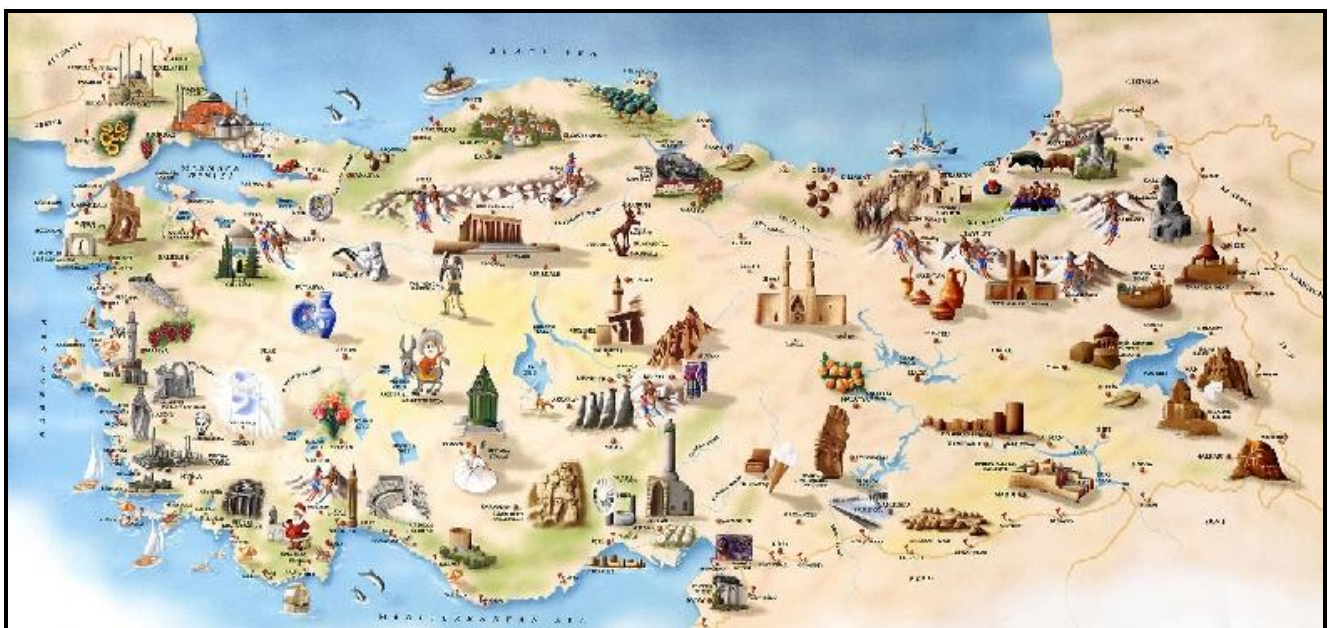


# Voyage to the antique **Sanctuary** on the mountain **Nemrut Dagı** in Turkey

Report by *Bernd Rohrmann* - February 2016

## WHERE IS THE NEMRUT DAGI SANCTUARY?

It is in south-eastern Turkey. Nemrut Dagı is a mountain of 2150 m height. It's located roughly in the middle between the cities of Malatya and Diyarbakır, and north of Adiyaman.





The Nemrut Dagı Sanctuary is not the most-known sightseeing venue in Turkey - the most popular being Istanbul and the historic cities at the west coast, as well as Konya and Kayseri - nevertheless it is presented in almost all picture maps for travellers, despite of its remote location.

## WHAT IS IT?

From 163 BC to 72 AD "Commagene" was an independent small kingdom, located at the eastern end of the Roman Empire and west of Armenia and the Parthian Empire.



In 72, Commagene was taken over by Rome and became part of the Roman province Syria.



In 62 BC, in the reign of the fourth king of Commagene, Antiochus I Theos of Commagene, a huge sanctuary and tomb was built on the mountain Nemrut Dagı (to be described below). Though the kingdom existed only for about 200 years as independent country, it still for some time had its own coins.



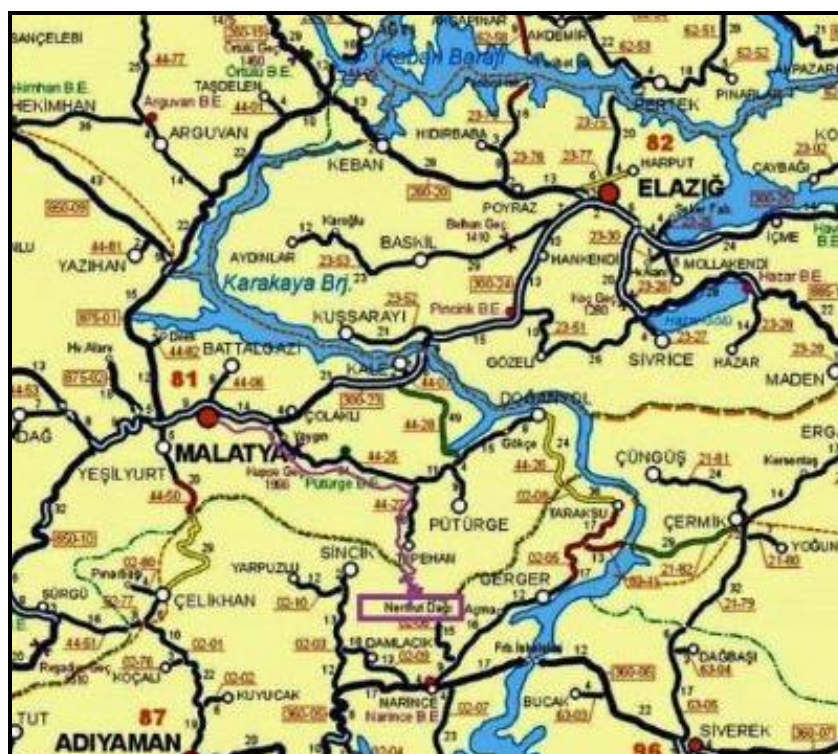
The minor Commagene kingdom was soon forgotten, yet its famous sanctuary survived 2000 years.

### WHY DID I WANT TO VISIT IT?

In 1977, on my first voyage to Turkey, I had 7 weeks available to explore this large country. I wanted to visit not only all the "must-see" places, yet also places which are truly different in terms of nature or culture, regardless how far away they were. So, once I had read about the very unique Commagene sanctuary, this became a vital target.

### HOW TO GET THERE

At that time, many remote parts of Turkey did not have sealed roads. It turned out that Malatya was the best starting point, for getting first some plain roads and then tracks to reach Nemrut Dagı.







My car, the very robust Peugeot-404-Station, did well. Nemrut visitors were pretty rare, and one needed a decent map. The final track led right to the antique sanctuary.

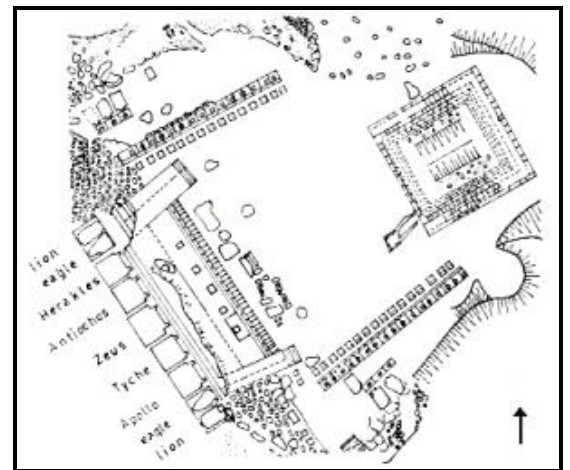
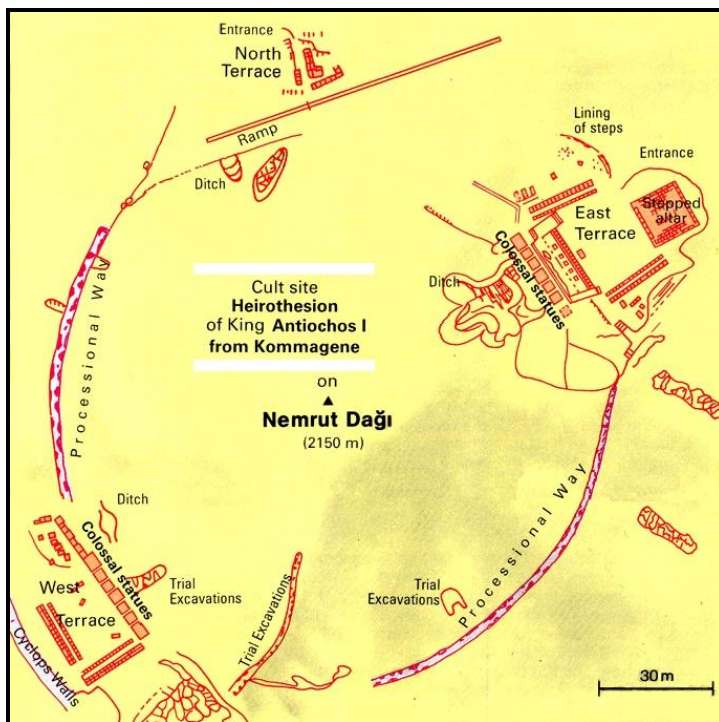


### WHAT IS THE SANCTUARY'S DESIGN?

The sanctuary consists of a tumulus of loose stones, about 50 m high, which is surrounded by three terraces. These contain sets of large statues, of which some are (were) 9 m tall.



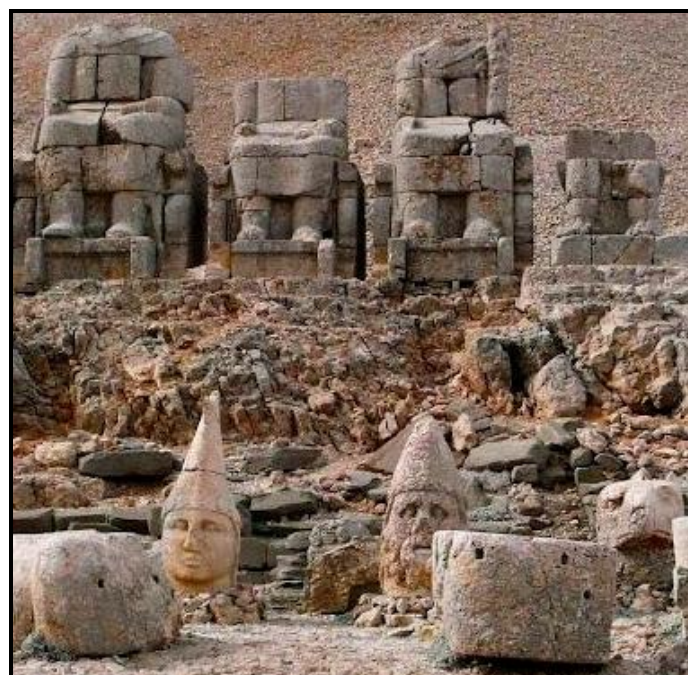
It is assumed that the tumulus was built to cover and hide the royal tomb of Antiochus I Theos of Commagene - yet a tomb has never been found. The statues, beside the king, present various Greek, Iranian and Armenian gods, plus two eagles and two lions.



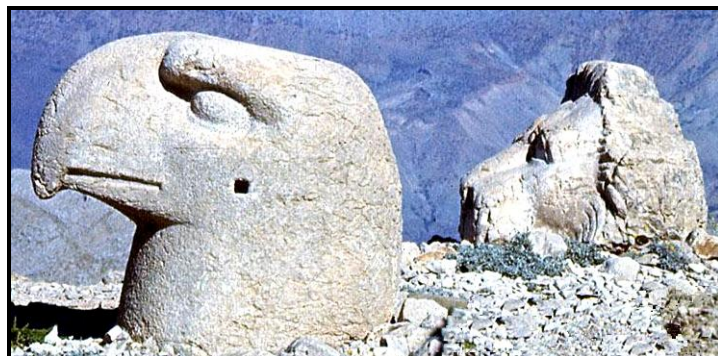
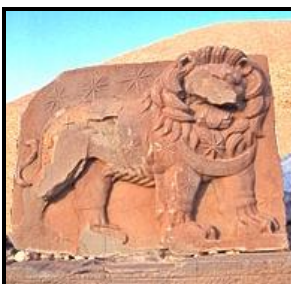
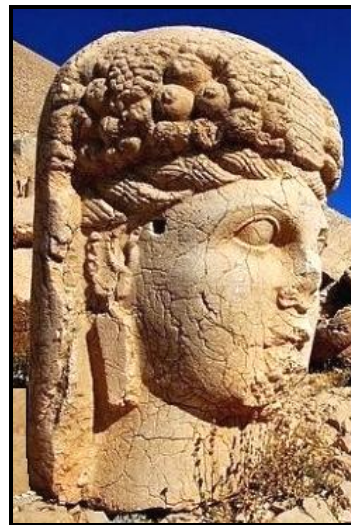
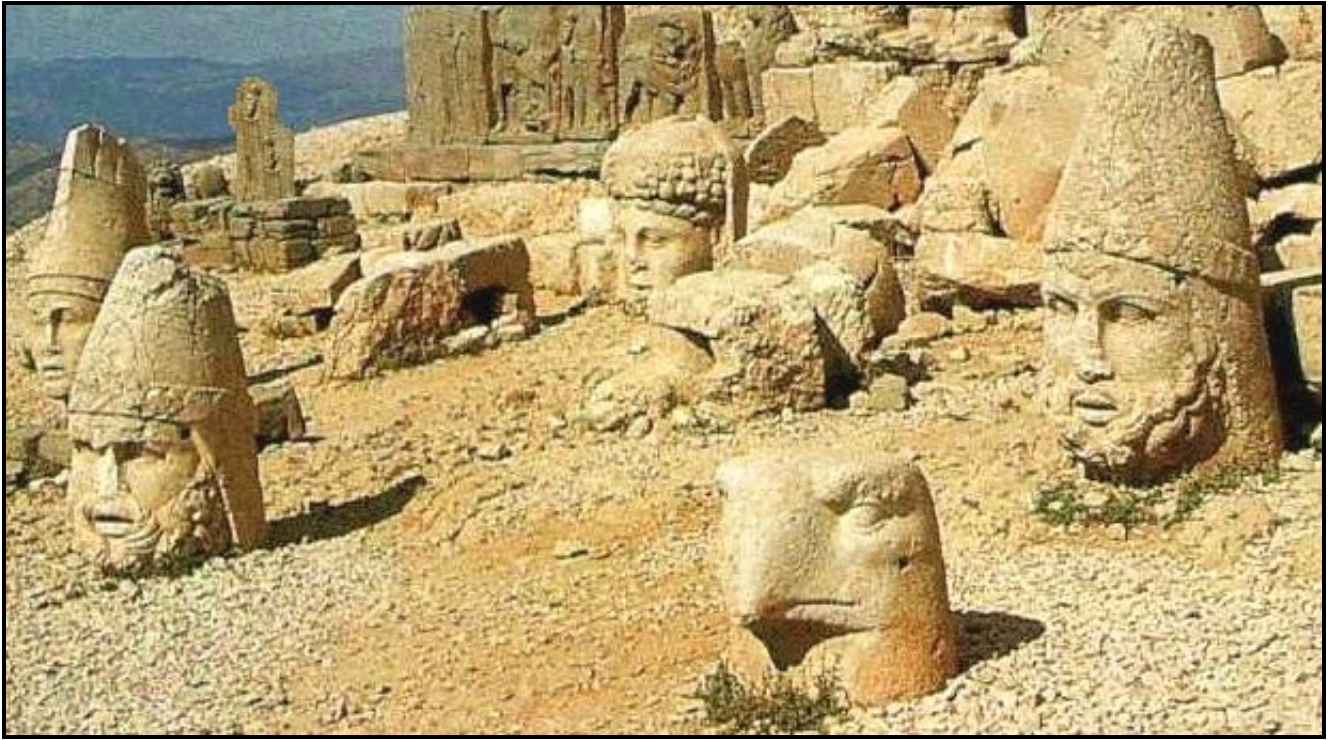
The East terrace, containing 9 statues, is the most elaborated one. It was obviously the main area for religious ceremonies. There are also remains of stone slabs with bas-relief figures that most likely were part of a frieze showing people from the kingdom's history. The heads of all statues lie on the ground; they were removed long time ago within some religious campaign. Most heads are damaged, especially the noses. Pathways leading up to the sanctuary where many rituals took place can still be seen today.

## PICTURE GALLERY

In the following, a series of pictures of the statues of the gods and divine animals is presented, especially the heads which stand or lie on the ground.







On the way up to the sanctuary, some welcoming greeting scenes can be seen on sculptures.





In more recent times, various artists have generated models in which the original appearance of the statues (as assumed) is created; here are two of these.



They maintained that the sculpture of Commagene king Antiochus I Theos is larger than any other.

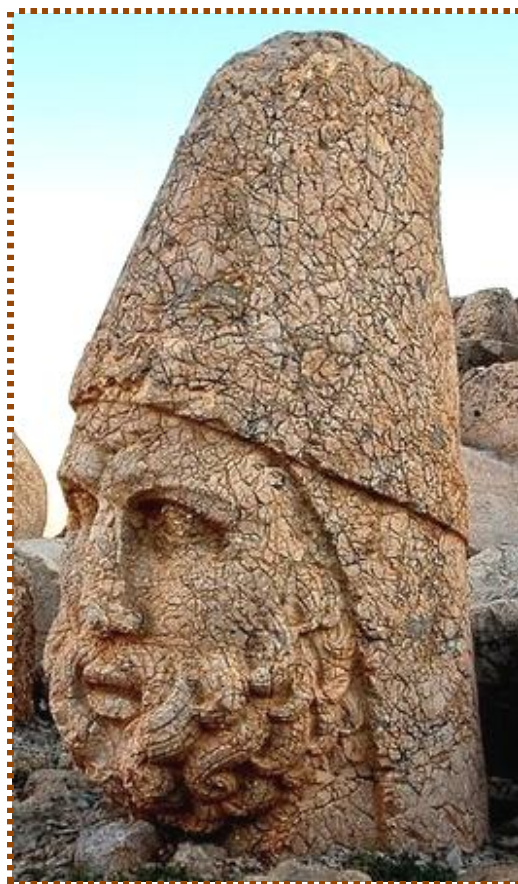


## WHAT IS THE FATE OF THE NEMRUT DAGI SANCTUARY?

In 1881 this antique sanctuary was eventually re-detected, by the German engineer Karl Sester who was employed by the Ottoman empire to investigate transport routes. He then conducted an exploration, followed by some mending of the Nemrut Dagi area. All the heads were set upright, however, the original statues, all "beheaded", were not restored. When I was there in 1977, many old pieces of the sculpture settings were resting somewhere, and a very basic fence had been set up around the three terraces. However, at a later time the Nemrut Dagi sanctuary got handled by governmental authorities with care, because it had become a popular tourist target, and better roads were built to reach it. Finally, in 1987, Mount Nemrut was made a World Heritage Site

Nevertheless, this area, at a height of 2150 m, is exposed to a harsh climate. About half of the year it is covered by snow, and at times it's quite windy as well.

This is the reason why most of the statues appear very "weathered", and the surface of the heads is rough and expressive of age. It almost reminded me of the jagged faces of senior Norwegians who live in the mountains where the climate can be fierce ...



Even though the original design and shape of this stunning 2000 years old sanctuary will never be restored, rather stay as a ruin, it nevertheless impresses as a unique place to symbolize eternity.