

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE KARATEPE SCULPTURES¹

The most important and interesting building complexes uncovered at Karatepe up to now, are doubtless the two gateway buildings, which are lined with sculptured slabs, bearing reliefs and inscriptions. Next to the inscriptions in Old-Phoenician and Hittite hieroglyphic script, which, according to the latest studies of H. Th. Bossert and Fr. Steinherr constitute a bilinguis of the time around 730 B. C., the sculptured works may be said to be of capital importance. They offer in respect to technique, conception, disposition and style, in regard to the scenes depicted, the information offered and the foreign elements disclosed such a great variety of aspects, that they deserve extensive and detailed analysis.

The study of the panels shows that — with the exception of sculptures in the round — the rough-hewn stone slabs were set up in place and fitted together before the actual carving was begun. The study of certain unfinished, broken, discarded and crudely worked pieces throws much light on the technical processes and the consecutive steps involved in this art.

The disposition of the representations on the different slabs is not uniform, there are single figures, heraldic groups, processions, real scenes and even slabs with two superimposed registers. The figures are, with rare exceptions, represented in profile.

The subjects represented are of great variety and — with rare exceptions — there is no continuity of meaning between them. Nevertheless, they can be grouped under several headings: portal figures, mythological and divine figures, ritual scenes, and scenes from the daily life of the people and of the royal family.

The foreign influences disclosed are also of great variety. The Egyptian, Mesopotamian-Assyrian and Anatolian elements are very clear, while certain aspects in Karatepe remind us of the Tell Halaf sculptures (fig. 16).

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One of the most perplexing problems posed by the Karatepe sculptures is their surprising heterogeneity, which, had they been found out of connection with each other, would have led to their attribution to very diverse epochs and localities. Such as things are, however, the only plausible explanation is that they were made by different masters of very different levels in craftsmanship, power of imagination, artistic sense and ability, origin, affinity and outlook. Two groups of sculptures can already be clearly discriminated, those belonging to *A*, the master of movement and the good proportions (fig. 2-7) and those belonging to master *B* who is of much inferior technical and artistic level (fig. 1, 8 - 14).

No definite system seems to have existed as to the division of labor between these two masters, and even if one of them was entrusted with the general organisation and supervision of the work, in the actual carving these masters must have been quite independent from each other.

The question as to whether the foreign elements disclosed go back to masters of different origin, must be answered in the negative, for the reliefs attributed to *A* disclose Anatolian as well as different foreign elements. The probability that *A* was a man who had wandered around much in the world, who had seen and learnt a great deal is, therefore, much greater than any other hypothesis. This is all the less surprising, considering the fact that Karatepe lies on one of the chief caravan roads leading from the heart of Anatolia way down into the south, and that this road is very much trodden by men in search of work - in the past as it is still to-day.
