CHAPTER TWELVE

ON THE PROBLEMS OF KARATEPE:
THE RELIEFS AND THEIR CONTEXT

It is a good maxim that all controversial archaeological issues should be reviewed regularly in the light of new material and/or changing perspectives; and certainly one of the most controversial issues in the history of the early first millennium B.C. in the Near East has been the dating of the reliefs and inscriptions built into the two Citadel Gates at Karatepe (see contour map, fig. 1).

The site itself, set on the west bank of the Ceyhan River in the northeast corner of Cilicia, sits on a natural hill just south of a spur of the foothills that mark the beginning of the juncture of the Taurus and Amanus mountain ranges (cf. maps, figs. 2, 3). It was first discovered and explored in 1946 by a Turkish team, headed by H. Th. Bossert, investigating ancient road systems of the “Neo-Hittite” period.1 Active field seasons were initiated at Karatepe, along with soundings at the neighbouring site of Domuztepe on the opposite bank of the Ceyhan, and were continued through the mid-1950s, since which time restoration has been in process at Karatepe under the direction of Professor Halet Çambel of Istanbul University.

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1 Soon after the discovery of the site, two volumes were published containing a summary of the surface finds and results of the preliminary survey of the region: H. Th. Bossert and Halet Çambel, Karatepe: A preliminary report on a new Hittite site, Istanbul, 1946; and H. Th. Bossert and U. Bahadır Alkım, Karatepe: Kadirli and its Environments. Second preliminary report, Istanbul, 1947. Then, with the initiation of annual field seasons, excavation reports appeared in Belleten from 1947 on. The early seasons were summarized in Bossert, Alkım and Çambel, Karatepe Kâzıları (Die Ausgrabungen auf dem Karatepe, Erster Vorbericht), Ankara, 1950. Since that time, the site has generated a vast literature on specific aspects of the material. Two recent discussions, D. Ussishkin, “The Date of the Neo-Hittite Enclosure in Karatepe”, Anat. Stud. XIX (1969) 121–137, and F. Steinöhrr, “Zu einigen Problemen von Karatepe”, WO 6 (1970–71) 166–182, have provided quite complete bibliographies. It was decided therefore not to repeat them here, but simply to refer to relevant studies as the documentation requires in the course of the following article.
The significance of the site was immediately apparent, as basalt blocks including fragments of inscriptions in two languages and sculptural decoration were discovered. From these it was determined that: (1) the inscription in West Semitic characters, which turned out to be Phoenician, constituted the longest text found to date in that language, and provided important epigraphical data; (2) the second text, in hieroglyphic Hittite, or Luwian, was sufficiently parallel in content to permit important inroads into the scholarly study of that script and language; (3) the reliefs and sculpture found at Karatepe, executed in a mixture of styles and iconographic traditions related to, though sufficiently distinct from, other known monuments of southeast Anatolia and northern Syria, provided an independent picture of the same cultural diversity as was reflected in the two languages of the inscriptions.

As the text of the Phoenician inscription was made available, it also became clear that the contents, describing the ethnic and historical situation in Cilicia at the time, presented a unique perspective on the region from the inside, complementing references in the annals of the kings of Assyria to political and military activity in the area. And finally, subsequent studies of the road systems surrounding the site raised important questions regarding the strategic location of the fortification and routes of communication equally relevant to the historical situation of the citadel.

That both the inscriptions and the monuments fitted well into the tradition of the early first millennium B.C. was clear from the first report. However the specific historical moment in which it was all happening and the correlation with known Assyrian kings and their campaigns in Cilicia has proved far more difficult. Initially, a date in the second half of the eighth century B.C. was proposed by the excavators, on the basis of an assumed correspondence between mention in the Karatepe inscriptions of one Awarikus, king of the Danunites (to whom Azatiwatas, author of the texts, owed allegiance), and Uriki, king of Que (Cilicia), mentioned in the annals of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.).

A few diverging opinions were offered for slightly later dates, in the

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