

ADALYA

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SUNA & İNAN KIRAÇ RESEARCH INSTITUTE ON MEDITERRANEAN CIVILIZATIONS

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Cultic Symbolism at the City Gates: Two Metal Foundation Pegs from Tell Atchana, Alalakh (Turkey)

Gonca DARDENİZ*

Introduction

Foundation pegs – also known as dedication nails, foundation nails or cones – were objects of sacred function pinned on the walls of religious or administrative buildings. These objects were also hidden through burial in the foundations of structures to mark them as divine properties of deities or of a deified king/ruler of the society.

The practice of placing such ritual objects in the foundations of temples or high-status buildings became a long tradition starting in the third millennium B.C. Cuneiform inscribed nails or figurines representing gods and goddesses, lion- and bull-shaped figurines¹, inscribed bricks, beads, even tablets were used as foundation deposits². It has become apparent from archaeological contexts that, during the deposition of pegs and tablets, certain rules had been observed. Metal and wood were used for the figurines, whereas stone and metal were preferred for the tablets. Frit and/or gold beads were thought to emphasise different ritual functions, though the ceremonies and rituals related to the foundations are unknown except some archaeological artefacts may be associated with these. Additionally, a limited amount of Hittite texts provides information on foundation rituals³.

This article examines the significance of metal foundation pegs in the second millennium B.C. by using two examples found at Tell Atchana, Alalakh. These objects come from two different levels of the ancient settlement: one dated to the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) and the other to the Late Bronze Age (LBA). By comparing these two foundation pegs as representatives of different periods and examining similar finds from the region, this study reviews the ritual attributions, the change in stylistic trends, and the symbolic as well as social meaning of these objects within their archaeological contexts.

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¹ Rashid 1983, 132.

² Braun-Holzinger 1999.

³ Süel 1990; Haas 1994.

Description of the Site, Excavation History, and Chronology

Tell Atchana, Alalakh is located in Turkish province of Hatay on the plain of Antioch, today called the Amuq valley. The site is almost 2 km. from the Turkish-Syrian border and situated near a major branch of the Asi (Orontes) River⁴.

It was the capital city of the territory often referred to as Mukish in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (ca. 2000-1300 B.C.), which controlled the territory of the Amuq Valley and the lower Orontes Valley⁵. In the 1930s R. Braidwood surveyed Tell Atchana as a part of the Oriental Institute's Syro-Hittite survey⁶. Sir C. L. Woolley, on behalf of the British Museum and Oxford University, initiated the first rounds of excavations at Tell Atchana. Eight seasons of excavations conducted in 1936-1939 and 1946-1949 revealed eighteen occupational levels, which are now known to correspond to the Middle and Late Bronze and the Iron I-II Ages⁷.

Following the completion of the Woolley expedition, the inconsistencies and discrepancies in the final publication⁸ led immediately to a discussion about the stratigraphy, chronology, and political history of the settlement⁹ that continues today. Focusing on the later second millennium B.C. chronological problems, a new round of excavations at the site by K. A. Yener started in 2000 with a site survey¹⁰.

Excavations at Tell Atchana have exposed the architectural remains of fortresses, palaces, temples and residential areas together with a wide range of artefacts including two royal archives containing approximately one thousand tablets and tablet fragments¹¹. Among the assemblage of rich and unique materials, two metal foundation pegs have been chosen as the subject of this research to be re-evaluated in their social and ritual context. This will hopefully contribute new perspectives to our understanding of the use of city gates during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages.

Archaeological Material: Alalakh Metal Foundation Nails

The two metal foundation nails – the subject of this research – are from Woolley's first excavation campaign at Alalakh. Both of these artefacts are archived today in the British Museum in the Alalakh showcases in the Levantine Gallery.

The MBA foundation nail (AT/38/277; Museum inventory: 126126) was made of copper or copper alloy. It comes from Level VII, which consisted mainly of the tripartite city gate, ramparts, temple and so-called Yarim-Lim Palace. The foundation nail, which depicts a god or deity with extended arms, is 7.1 cm. tall and wearing a high, pointed headdress (Fig. 1). The figure sits on a bird with extended wings indicating it is in full flight. Woolley refers to this object as "a god borne by an eagle"¹². A socket protrudes from the bottom of the bird.

⁴ Yener et al. 2000; Yener 2005, 2010.

⁵ Serangeli 1978; Magness-Gardiner 1994; Yener et al. 2000; Yener 2010, 2013a; von Dassow 2008.

⁶ Braidwood 1937.

⁷ Woolley 1955; Yener 2013b.

⁸ Woolley 1955.

⁹ E.g. Albright 1957; Mellink 1957.

¹⁰ Yener et al. 2000; Yener 2005.

¹¹ Smith 1949; Wiseman 1953; Woolley 1955; von Dassow 2008; Yener 2010, 2013a, 2013b.

¹² Woolley 1955, 276.

The object was found on the floor of the Level VII town gate that provided access to the north-western quarter of the city. Lateral towers that flanked the tri-compartment entrance created a rampart or glacis where the foundation nail was uncovered¹³. Woolley identified the find-spot of the artefact: “In the hole by the central pier from which the door-socket had been removed, was found the small bronze figurine of a god seated upon an eagle”¹⁴.

Based on this definition, the foundation nail must have been found somewhere around the middle of the tripartite gate, probably in the hole which was faintly visible in Woolley’s drawing (Fig. 2). The associated assemblage included a hematite weight, a broken dagger-blade of uncertain type (no AT number), and a bronze lance-head (AT/38/262-Type Sp. 12) found at the ground level of the gate. Together with these artefacts on the floor coming out of the wall-foundations, a bronze dagger (AT/38/282), fragments of a human skull, a bronze bodkin (no AT number), and a star-headed nail (AT/38/274) were recovered¹⁵.

The LBA foundation nail (AT/39/67; Museum inventory: 1939,0613.101.a) was found in Level V around the town gate, though Woolley does not provide any detail for the exact find-spot. This foundation nail is 11.4 cm. long and 2.5 cm. wide¹⁶ (Fig. 3). The figure on the nail depicts a god with an elongated head or a sharp cone together with extended arms similar to AT/38/277. Woolley refers to the headdress as a “high pointed crown”¹⁷. The ears are pierced, and one copper-wire earring is shown in Woolley’s drawing¹⁸. However, during this author’s research in the depots of the British Museum in February-March 2014, this copper earring was found to be missing.

Woolley did not provide detailed information either on the context or the associated assemblage of the Level V foundation peg, which might be due to the poor level of conservation of the Level V gateway. By examining the remains, Woolley showed that the passageway of the tripartite gate of Level VII was changed to two right-angled turns, and the wall foundations of Level V ran across the passageway of the Level VII gate¹⁹. The Level V “castle” that was adjacent to the gate might have served as an administrative building, though detailed reinvestigation is now ongoing²⁰.

According to British Museum records, there is another peg figurine described as a “Bronze peg figurine; seated figure of Idrimi, King of Alalakh, wearing a crown”. The records, museum number, find location, dimensions and registration number of this peg are the same as the Level V figurine AT/39/67 except for the acquisition date and the definition of the object. The online British Museum records refer to the “Annual Report of the General Progress of the Museums for the year 1936” for the details of acquisition of this mysterious peg²¹. On the other hand, a detailed examination of the aforementioned annual reports failed to reveal such an acquisition neither in 1936 nor in 1937 or 1939. Thus, it is important to clarify the confusion in the British Museum records as it seems there are only two foundation pegs recovered from

¹³ Woolley 1955, pl. 2; Yener 2005, 106.

¹⁴ Woolley 1955, 150.

¹⁵ Woolley 1955, 150-151.

¹⁶ Woolley recorded it as 12 cm. in Woolley 1955, 276.

¹⁷ Woolley 1955, 276.

¹⁸ Woolley 1955, 276, pl. LXX.

¹⁹ Woolley 1955, 151.

²⁰ Yener 2005, 107.

²¹ BM Natural History 1937, 10-11.

the Woolley excavations. The record belonging to the “seated figure of Idrimi, King of Alalakh, wearing a crown” is actually AT/39/67 from Level V.

Alalakh Levels VII to V

Both foundation pegs, besides being metal objects with similar iconography such as extended arms and pointed headdresses, come from the context of the city gates. Thus, it is crucial to understand the socio-cultural role of city gates in the Level VII and Level V of Alalakh.

Level VII of Alalakh was thought to have been founded by king Yarim-Lim during the 18th century B.C. (MBA). During his reign Alalakh was subservient to the Amorite kingdom of Yamhad based at Halab (modern Aleppo). The Level VII palace archives yielded 175 tablets spanning two rulers, Yarim-Lim and Ammitaqum of Alalakh, who coincided with at least five rulers at Yamhad covering approximately 50-75 years²². Throughout the MBA, regional powers dominated northern Syria. The kingdom of Yamhad, based in Aleppo, dominated the northern part of Syria through a chain of subservient states expanding from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean coast. The names Alalah, Ugarit, Ebla, Emar, Carchemish, Urshu, Hassu and Tunip were mentioned in the tablets found in the Level VII palatial archive of Alalakh. These cities were referred to as subservient or ally states and connected to Yamhad²³. The construction of massive city walls and gates could be thought as the result of this unstable and insecure portrait of political relations and struggles of dominance around the region.

Our knowledge of the social and political aspects of Level V is vague. Due to the paucity of textual records from Levels VI to V, Woolley refer to these periods as “dark ages”. Several scholars use imported Cypriot or Syro-Mesopotamian wares to date these levels between MBIIc and LBI periods (ca. 1575-1460 B.C.)²⁴. However, to rely solely on imported wares as chronological markers is dangerous without synchronising them with a fine-tuned local ceramic seriation and radiocarbon dating²⁵.

Subsequent to Levels VI and V, Level IV emerged with its famous palace known as Niqme-pa Palace and its palatial archives. This palace most probably originated earlier in the reign of Idrimi, the father of Niqme-pa, at the time when Alalakh became a vassal to the Mitanni Empire in the 15th-14th centuries²⁶. The allegiance of Alalakh shifted to the Hittite Empire later in the 14th century B.C. as the materials from later levels (Levels III-I) at Alalakh have suggested²⁷.

Peripheral to the kingdoms of the Middle Bronze Age and empires of the Late Bronze Age, Alalakh was a marginal actor in the political arena due to its strategic and commanding location. Alalakh became a battlefield; and sandwiched between the empires, both of its palaces (Level VII Palace and IV Palace) were destroyed. Alalakh survived more than six hundred years as a regional kingdom, serving as a buffer zone between the more powerful and expansionist empires of the era²⁸. This might partially explain the importance of defence systems such as the city gates for the kingdom of Alalakh. The city needed security and protection: deities and sacred artefacts like foundation pegs could have played a vital role in achieving that.

²² Bryce 2005; Yener 2005.

²³ Wiseman 1953; Bryce 2005, 70.

²⁴ Gates 1987; Stein 1997.

²⁵ Yener 2005, 102.

²⁶ Woolley 1955; Yener 2005; von Dassow 2008.

²⁷ Woolley 1955; Yener 2005, 2010.

²⁸ Yener 2005.

The foundation nails must have been loaded with many apotropaic attributions, one of which might be the perpetuity of the city. In order to appreciate the ritual significance of foundation nails within the town gate context, it is crucial to understand how the use of foundation pegs became a tradition.

The Tradition of Foundation Nails

In the ancient Near East, the construction of a palace, temple or other socially significant structures was a major political and religious activity. Starting from the selection of a proper location, such construction work was completely intertwined with ritual and symbolism. The Sumerian Flood story provides a good example: “Let them build many cities... let them lay the bricks of many cities in pure places, let them establish places of divination in pure places, and... I (Enki, god of fresh waters) will establish well-being there²⁹”.

According to these textual references, the cities must have been built in ritually pure places so that gods (here the god Enki) would bless the cities. Royal inscription(s) deposited in the foundations or walls of the buildings precisely described building materials such as baked bricks, bitumen, cedar, juniper or boxwood³⁰. Such specifications were necessary indicators of care and control while erecting monumental structures, since they reflected royal power and authority.

Rituals are another aspect of the construction business. Textual records demonstrate symbolic activities like mixing aromatic oils or honey into the mortar, spilling oil, salt, fruit and vegetable seeds or pouring beer and/or wine as well as placing bronze figurines in the foundations³¹. It is clear at this point that the foundation pegs played a part during these rituals. Inscribed and non-inscribed examples and associated artefacts like a tablet offer invaluable information on the founder and function of the buildings, which have enabled scholars not only to determine the date of the buildings but also to understand the social and religious attributions of the excavated remains³².

By the beginning of the Early Dynastic Period (ca. 2900-2350 B.C.) in Mesopotamia, it was ordinary to equip important public buildings with a deposit of objects carrying inscriptions. The alabaster foundation figurine of the king Lugalkisalsi inscribed as: “For (the goddess) Nanna wife of (the god) An, Lugalkisalsi, king of Uruk and king of Ur erected this temple of Nanna”. This is a clear example demonstrating both the function and the founder of the building³³. These inscribed depository artefacts were placed in hidden spots with an expectation of magical protection.

The foundation objects are generally made out of valuable materials, and certain types of stone and metals are especially favoured. This study focuses solely on metal foundation nails in chronological order to provide a background and reasonable framework to understand the Alalakh foundation nails.

²⁹ As cited in Aruz – Wallenfels 2003, 9.

³⁰ Roaf 1995, 431.

³¹ Darga 1985, 48; Boosan-Dietrich 1987, 67; Klinger 1996, 638.

³² Marzahn 2003, 64-65.

³³ Ellis 1968.

Metal Foundation Nails

The earliest and the simplest metal foundation pegs were found in the Nippur Level VIIa Temple of Inanna (2600-2400 B.C.) as deposited in the walls near a door³⁴. Two foundation pegs recovered in the Nippur strata 7N 223 (Metropolitan Museum of Art no. 62.70.79) and 7N 222 (Metropolitan Museum of Art no. 62.79.80a) were made out of flat and thin copper/bronze plate with one end curving out to represent horns³⁵.

It is not clear exactly when and where the practice of depositing nails in foundations became a regular practice, but the site of Tello, ancient Girsu, in southern Mesopotamia is one of the candidates due to its assemblage of forty pegs. Dated to the Early Dynastic IIIB Period (ca. 2400-2250 B.C.), one of these pegs depicts Enmetena (or Entemena?). It is still on exhibit at the Eski Şark Eserleri Museum, Istanbul (Museum inventory: 1521, 1531). The torso of the figurine has clasped hands, from which a long peg extends below. The figurine has a smiling gesture, curly hair and a pair of horns, which indicate the deified nature of the foundation nail. The articles associated with this peg include a tablet mentioning the duties of Mesopotamian kings for building temples for their gods³⁶.

Girsu foundation pegs have various styles. In a different typological assemblage, now in the British Museum collections (Museum inventory: 966565), a torso figurine has been inserted through a copper or copper alloy disc. The flat surface around the disc is inscribed as: "Ur-Nanshe, King of Lagash, has built the shrine of Girsu"³⁷.

A bronze peg similar to the Girsu foundation nails was recovered at the foundation of the Ninhursag Temple at Mari City II dated to ca. 2550-2220 B.C.³⁸. In later periods of Mari (2200-1760 B.C.), foundation nails and foundation bricks were recovered at the Temple of Lions³⁹.

Animals, especially lions were favourite elements for foundation pegs. Two examples include one (ca. 2200-2100 B.C.) from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (museum inventory: 48.180) and the other (ca. end of the third millennium) from the Louvre Museum (museum inventory: Urkish Lion); both depict lions. The peg at the Louvre Museum had a tablet in association upon which is written: "Tišatal, king of Urkish, built the temple of Pirigal [or Nergal?]"'. The lion in the Metropolitan Museum of Art was inscribed as: "Tišatal, king of Urkish"⁴⁰.

Foundation pegs known as basket carriers (canephore) were excavated at Nippur. These canephore figurines were generally inscribed. A total of seven of them were excavated in brick foundation boxes covered with bitumen under the foundations of the É-dur-an-ki temple of Inanna built by Shulgi (ca. 2094-2047 B.C.), who was the second king of the Third Ur Dynasty. The inscriptions varied from "Shulgi at Ur" to "To Inanna the lady of Eanna, his lady, Urnammu the mighty king, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad, her temple he built, to its place he restored it"⁴¹.

Among the metal foundation figurines of Tello, probably the best known and the most common examples were the ones of Gudea. The figurines that depict a kneeling male figure

³⁴ Musceralla 1988, 303-305.

³⁵ Musceralla 1988, 303.

³⁶ Musceralla 2003, 80-81.

³⁷ Ellis 1968, 51.

³⁸ Margueron 2014, 97, fig. 98.

³⁹ Margueron 2014, 99, fig. 101.

⁴⁰ André-Salvini 2003, 223; de Lapérouse 2003, 223.

⁴¹ Musceralla 1988, 306-310.

wearing a horned headdress and holding a thick peg remained in fashion only during the reign of Ur-Ba'u and his successor Gudea (ca. 2144-2124 B.C.). In Lagash, of which Girsu (Tello) was the principal city, almost twenty examples of such foundation pegs were recovered. These have been distributed among collections worldwide including the Louvre Museum, the Eski Şark Eserleri Museum, the British Museum, and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City⁴².

The identity of the deity depicted in the Gudea figurines remains unknown, though it could be a personal god of Ur-Ba'u and Gudea. O. W. Musceralla argued that it was perhaps a foundation for the dynasty and temples, or it might have served as an eternal blessing for the kings⁴³. As Ellis suggested, some of the representations were certainly deities, but some of them were assumed to show the king himself participating in the temple construction⁴⁴.

This broad overview using many examples from Mesopotamia illustrate that foundations of temples usually contained these nails. On the other hand, Alalakh does not yield foundation pegs from any temple context, which is a unique feature thus far when compared with other contemporaneous foundation pegs of the region.

Comparative Material

Among second millennium B.C. sites in Anatolia, the examples most similar to the Alalakh foundation pegs have been found in the MBA levels at Oylum Höyük, perhaps the ancient city of Ulisum/Ullis/İllis⁴⁵. Oylum Höyük is located at Kilis on the modern Turkish-Syrian border close to the Euphrates River. The site has yielded three foundation nails from two phases of the MBII levels. The first foundation nail measuring 10.5 cm. tall depicts a god posing with extended arms and a pointed headdress. It was uncovered at the foundation of a wall belonging to a house with unknown purpose⁴⁶. A copper-alloy axe was uncovered in association with the nail. Engin refers to this foundation peg as the twin of the Alalakh Level V peg (AT/39/67) and asserts that the Oylum Höyük and Alalakh pegs are possibly the products of the same workshop⁴⁷.

Two other foundation pegs as a pair were recovered from the same building of Oylum Höyük, 55 cm. above the aforementioned foundation nail. These foundation pegs are also dated to the MBA. A. Engin defines them as a god and goddess by attributing the objects as gender specific⁴⁸. This continuously occupied MBA building yielded a total of three foundation pegs; however, the exact purpose of the structure has not been identified. What is obvious is that the construction is not a city gate.

Tilmen Höyük, located in the Islahiye region of Gaziantep, has also yielded a foundation peg similar to the one from Alalakh Level V. This copper or copper alloy foundation nail is 8,6 cm. tall and depicts a god with outstretched arms and an elongated headdress⁴⁹. The artefact comes from the MBA palace debris from sounding C, which is dated to local Phase IIa of

⁴² Ellis 1968; Musceralla 2003.

⁴³ Musceralla 2003, 439.

⁴⁴ Ellis 1968.

⁴⁵ Engin 2014.

⁴⁶ Engin 2011, 20, dwg. 2, fig. 2.

⁴⁷ Engin 2011, 26.

⁴⁸ Engin 2011, 20-21.

⁴⁹ Duru 2013, pl. 111,1.

the site. At Tilmen Höyük, phases IIb and IIc were destroyed by fire, and a partial abandonment is visible. Area C, where the peg was found, has been suggested as a continuation of a MBA (Phase IIb and IIc?) administrative building called Building A. According to Refik Duru, Level II (Tabaka II) of Tilmen Höyük and Level VII of Alalakh⁵⁰ are contemporaneous⁵¹. It must be stressed here that Duru's comparative peg from Alalakh comes from the Level V deposit.

There is foundation peg, now in the British Museum (museum number: E12542; Reg. 1883, 1018.72), which is similar to artefacts found at Alalakh, Oylum Höyük and Tilmen Höyük. Like the other MBA parallels, the figure has extended arms, wears a tall headdress, and is stylized like a "Hittite God" according to the definition provided by the British Museum. The object is dated to ca. 1600 B.C. The provenance is vague although a reference to southern Anatolia has been given.

Another Hittite god-style foundation nail with an elongated headdress is documented in Rezzan Elbeyli's private collection⁵². Even though the figure cannot be identified and its recorded provenance is the Adana region, a secure context cannot be claimed. This foundation nail is also similar to AT/39/67 from Alalakh Level V.

Another group of pegs with similar typology to the Alalakh Level V, Tilmen Höyük and Oylum Höyük objects are recorded from Kahramanmaraş. More than thirty figurines were recovered at Hasancıklı, Kalaycık mevki, where a terrace-type settlement has been identified with numerous foundation pegs and figurines⁵³. However, none of these objects came from archaeological excavations. They were all purchased by the Kahramanmaraş Museum, thus preventing further attributions and linkages to well-attested archaeological materials.

The foundation nails found at Oylum Höyük and Tilmen Höyük as well as two other examples from museum and private collections demonstrate a deity with extended arms and a high-pointed cap, all of which are similar to the Alalakh Level V foundation nail. On the other hand, comparative material for the foundation nail AT/38/277 from Level VII of Alalakh is yet to be encountered in the literature. The closest parallels are the two figurines archived in Elbeyli's private collection. Both are claimed to have been found at the Adana region: one of these depicts a god (?) on a bull⁵⁴ whereas the other depicts a similar god on a bird, possibly an eagle⁵⁵. A god sitting on an eagle (?) typologically relates this figurine to the Alalakh Level VII foundation peg, although establishing further linkages with unprovenanced artefacts should be avoided.

Maşat Höyük, a site located at the south-western part of Tokat province, reveals a very well-provenanced foundation nail. This is the first votive foundation nail found in a securely dated Hittite temple. At the southern wing of temple at level III of the trench square R/7, a nail was uncovered that had been inserted under the north-eastern corner of a foundation block. The block and the nail were found in hard-packed floor with a plastered surface⁵⁶. The associated assemblage includes a terracotta bull's head and leg fragments known from bull-shaped rhytons from Boğazköy and İnandıktepe. The nail has a rounded head coated with a silver-sheet with two wavy lines above a hexagon having a circle decorated with dots

⁵⁰ For the chronological assessments, Duru follows Woolley's chronology.

⁵¹ Duru 2013, 37.

⁵² Aydıngün 2008, 117, şek. 1-2.

⁵³ Akdoğan – Ersoy 2014.

⁵⁴ Aydıngün 2008, 118-21, şek. 3-4.

⁵⁵ Aydıngün 2008, 121-4, şek. 5-6.

⁵⁶ Özgüç 1994, 228.

in it. According to T. Özgüç, such a combination of motifs is not known from seals or other objects from the 15th century B.C. He further argues that the tradition of foundation nails has been taken over from Mesopotamia since such votive evidence or foundation offerings are not found at Kültepe⁵⁷. However, none of the foundations of temples at Kültepe have been reached yet, which postpones any claim for a Mesopotamian origin.

Comparative Depictions in Different Media

It is possible to compare the iconographic elements (i.e., headdresses, gestures) observed in the two foundation pegs from Alalakh with the artefacts of various media both from Alalakh and from other sites in the region.

A terracotta plaque (AT/39/240) from Level III of Alalakh depicts a deity with wings and a similar headdress to the Level V foundation nail⁵⁸. Even though it belongs to a chronologically later phase, the continuity of stylistic trends is noteworthy. Similar conical headdresses are also commonly documented on the cylinder seals of Alalakh⁵⁹. High-cone headdresses are also known from Kültepe Level Ib where the so-called “goddess figurine” stands as a good example⁶⁰. An example from the Kültepe ceramic cult vase assemblage is shaped like a boat, carrying pointed-headed gods together with a temple, which has an eagle-like bird figurine inserted on top⁶¹. The conical headdress is a common stylistic feature used to depict deities in the second millennium B.C. Last but not least, the Hittite gods from the Yazılıkaya Room B suits the discussion as stone-carved examples of this artistic style⁶².

Besides the conical headdress, the eagle or eagle-like bird also exists in the Kültepe cultic ceramic tradition. Eagle depictions are well known in the ritual assemblages of Kültepe, such as a 19th-century B.C. cult vase which itself is shaped like an eagle⁶³. The aforementioned ritual ceramic vase has an eagle figure inserted on top of the temple carried in the boat⁶⁴. The eagle seems to be a favourite bird in Anatolian art. It may be because of the bird’s powerful and strong appearance so that objects using an eagle as a motif are considered as symbols of authority. Consequently, representations of the eagle are especially common in high-status artefacts in various media. For example, the famous Şarkışla ceremonial axe (14th-13th century B.C.) is heavily decorated with eagles⁶⁵. The god depicted on the blade part of the axe is surrounded with eagle-heads. The eagles are placed at the cutting edge of this ceremonial piece. Likewise, the bulla belonging to the Murshili III found in Boğazköy depicts the god as riding a bird (eagle?)-shaped wagon⁶⁶. This iconography underlines the role of the eagle as a symbol of supremacy and divinity.

The existence of similar or equivalent imagery on ceramics, seals, bullae, sculptures or other types of artefacts indicates a well-known and shared imagery not only for power and legitimacy but also for sacred rituals. The visualisation and variety on the material assemblage

⁵⁷ Özgüç 1994. For the motifs see figs. 5a-c.

⁵⁸ Woolley 1955, 244, pl. 56.

⁵⁹ Collon 1982.

⁶⁰ Özgüç 2005, 205, fig. 241.

⁶¹ Özgüç 2005, 188-191, figs. 241-224.

⁶² Seeher 2002, 115, fig. 6.

⁶³ Özgüç 2002, 125, fig. 8.

⁶⁴ Özgüç 2005, 188-191, figs. 241-224.

⁶⁵ Emre 2002, 225, fig. 8.

⁶⁶ Neve 1992, 54-55; Güterbock 1993, 113, fig. 8.1.

is remarkable. All these depictions and marks on the material culture gain additional significance within an archaeological context.

Archaeological Context: City Gates of Alalakh

The second millennium B.C. comparisons for foundation nails at Alalakh demonstrate various find spots. Excluding the unprovenanced nails, temples stand out as the primary context for the foundation pegs (Maşat Höyük and the many early examples from Mesopotamia) followed by contexts at or around the doorsteps of the administrative buildings (Tilmen Höyük) or buildings of unknown function (Oylum Höyük). Alalakh, on the other hand, introduces a new pattern to this by yielding foundation pegs at the city gates. To understand the role of these symbolic nails for Alalakhians, an examination of the social, religious and administrative role of city gates for a second millennium B.C. capital is necessary.

City Gates

The primary use of city gates was to provide a passageway through the defensive walls surrounding the city and offering a controlled entry to the city. Even though texts mentioning city gates in their primary function of defence is not as common as expected, examples can be found in Hittite sources like the annals of Hattušili and Murshili II⁶⁷ or the Amarna letters⁶⁸.

At Alalakh Level VII, the gate is a tripartite structure and consists of an outer and an inner gate, providing a second line of defence with a space between them. At Level V the architecture of the gate changes to a simplistic plan and serves as an entrance to a castle-like structure with a dog-leg-shaped construction⁶⁹. Even though the reason for the change of the city gate structure is not clear yet, such a change from a tripartite structure to a castle-like construction may be attested to a political struggle creating the necessity for a change at the city gates.

Through its life span, Alalakh was heavily destroyed at least two times; one of which was the destruction of the Level VII palace attested to or slightly earlier than the Hittite king Hattušili I (ca. 1575 B.C.)⁷⁰. Political instability and socio-economic insecurity due to attacks might help to explain why the foundation nails were found at the city gates. The recovery of these symbolic objects at the city gates might be related to the security and safety of the city with the help of sacred powers. The fact that the city gate of Larsa had the representation of a divinity – indicating a strong relation between divine figures and city gates⁷¹ – may offer partial support for this hypothesis.

Besides being the key part of a defence mechanism, city gates also have social, ritual and symbolic meanings for ancient societies. City walls and gates are places that are directly associated with the people of the cities⁷². For example, neighbourhoods are named after city gates. It is also customary, as in the case of the Diyarbakır fortress, that the city gates point people to a certain direction such as the Mardin Gate leads to Mardin. The same is true for the Urfa or Harput Gates. The Erzurum (Turkey) city walls can be added as another relevant example where the Gürcükapı (Gürcü Gate) is part of the Silk Road leading to and from Georgia.

⁶⁷ Beckman 2006, 220-221.

⁶⁸ Moran 1992.

⁶⁹ Woolley 1955; Yener 2005.

⁷⁰ Bryce 2005.

⁷¹ Margueron 2014, 44, fig. 39.

⁷² Ristvet 2007, 186.

City walls and city gates also serve as strong representations of legitimacy for cities. During the reign of Assurbanipal (668-631 B.C.), the connection between the city wall and power is iconized in a crown worn by Assyrian queens. The tradition continues until the Hellenistic-Roman Period where the Tyche deities of cities wear the walls of the city as a crown, as best exemplified by Tyche of Antioch.

As part of the walls, the gates and the space between the outer and inner gates may have served as places to control traffic. They may have been used as a combination of town hall, marketplace or law court⁷³. For example, two Assyrian texts citing city gates mention businessmen positioned at the gate entrance to supervise goods or to get paid with silver.

City gates are also referred as places of judgement. Assyrian texts mention city gates several times as places of judgement:

- *inaba-ab a-bu-limsibiSukna*

bring witnesses at the gate entrance (BIN 6 75:18)⁷⁴

- *asitusaqaqqadteina pit KA.GAL- luarsip*

I piled up a pillar of heads in front of his city gate (AKA 379 iii 108 (Asn.), also 3R 8 ii 53 (Shalm. III)⁷⁵

Besides many first millennium B.C. textual references, a Hittite text extends this tradition earlier into the second millennium:

Then they bring the ram and the *surasura*-bird out from within the city, and you bring them to the city gate next to which they bring people to execute (them); you bring them to the spot where the people died⁷⁶.

The significance of the gate area is further evidenced from two second millennium texts from Tell Leilan in which city gates are mentioned as public spaces where policing and judicial activities took place. The city gate was named as *abullumkalum* and defined the place where fugitives and escaped slaves were gathered. According to Old Babylonian texts, city gates were places where oaths were taken and lawsuits were decided⁷⁷.

Hittite texts also describe the gates of the palace as the royal court⁷⁸. Sometimes the gates of the house of a guilty person is referred as a place of execution:

“If anyone among my servants speak their names, he is not my servant.
They shall slit his throat and hang him at his gate.”⁷⁹

Records referring to judgment, jurisdiction and blessing at the King's Gate are common and can be found elsewhere⁸⁰. As the textual records demonstrate, city gates have an active role by being a part of social life, functioning as markets and/or law courts. K. Veenhof views the gates of Kültepe, Kaneš as public meeting area, market and place for justice⁸¹.

⁷³ Ristvet 2007, 184; May 2014, 78.

⁷⁴ Gelb et al. 1964, vol. 1, A pt. 1, 84.

⁷⁵ Gelb et al. 1964, vol. 1, A pt. 1, 84.

⁷⁶ KUB 30.34 iv 19-24; May 2014, 677.

⁷⁷ Ristvet 2007, 184-186.

⁷⁸ Hoffner 1997, 155-157.

⁷⁹ KBo 3.27 obv. 10'-12'; de Martino 1991, 55-56.

⁸⁰ Miller 2012 with references; May 2014 with references.

⁸¹ Veenhof 1976-1980, 371a.

Additionally, city gates served as a walkway for kings and/or priests to enter or leave the city. Entering a city through the city gates symbolised power and legitimacy as well as ceremonial significance. One of the many Hittite festival texts expresses the ceremonial features of the city gates in a succinct way:

“Der König fährt mit der Kutsche nach Taurpa hinein. Wenner in der Stadt zum Tor gelangt, ruft der “Spaßmacher” vor dem Tor *abā*. Auch der *kīta*-Mann ruft. Dann fährt er (der König) mit der Kutsche zum Torbau hinauf. Die Leute der Kulthandlung laufen voran. Der König geht ins *balentuwa*-Haus hinein.”⁸².

This passage shows all the cultic activities in the role that the king plays while entering through the gate. This ritual is a way to emphasize royal power and presence. This tradition continues to the next millennium when some Assyrian texts refer the ritual use of the gates by also mentioning city gate-temple relations:

“when you present provisions to the temple of the gods (which is at the gate of Nineveh)”⁸³

“The men who carried the king to the temple go through the gate of Assur and sit down in front of the gate”⁸⁴

These references spanning more than one thousand years enlighten the ritual aspect of city gates and show its continuity as a tradition as a part of a temple-related ceremony⁸⁵.

Interestingly, Hittite texts refer to city gates more often in connection with rituals and festivals than military defence. This connection between rituals, festivals and city gates is a version reflecting power and authority in Hittite social life⁸⁶.

In this study, a similar function of the city gates of Alalakh is argued, based on the architectural plan of the gates and the associated material assemblage, mainly the foundation pegs, in addition to the newly excavated architectural features⁸⁷.

Foundation Pegs as a Part of City Gates

Rather than just being a passageway also serving for military defence, both the Level VII and Level V town gates of Alalakh may have functioned as a ritual and religious space. Even though no textual records have yet recovered mentioning the town gates of Alalakh, there must be a distinct variation in the use of city gates.

An apsidal building recently excavated at Alalakh provides important architectural data and a speculative relation between the city gates and the temple at Alalakh. The 2010 excavation season exposed a monumental, apsidal mud-brick building complex in Square 32.57 that had been situated in the courtyard of the Level IV Palace⁸⁸. Using details published elsewhere⁸⁹,

⁸² KBo 11.73+44.128//KUB 58.22+ii 1'ff.; Nakamura 2002, 153.

⁸³ Gelb et al. 1964, vol. 1, A pt. 1, 85.

⁸⁴ Gelb et al. 1964, vol. 1, A pt. 1, 85.

⁸⁵ See Herzog 1986; May 2014 for the ceremonial use of city gates known from biblical texts.

⁸⁶ Miller 2012, 675.

⁸⁷ Yener 2015a.

⁸⁸ Yener 2015a, 486, figs. 1a-b.

⁸⁹ Yener 2015a, 486.

these apsidal constructions were preliminarily dated to Phase 5b corresponding to Level V in Woolley's terminology. A smaller version of this apsidal building was unearthed in the same location at a later phase (Phase 2b dated to LBI) signalling continuity in the practices⁹⁰.

Yener argues that the apsidal structures may represent one of the Alalakhian deities Kumarbi, Kubi, Teshup or Hepat, whose names are mentioned in the textual records though their temples are still unidentified⁹¹. If so, this apsidal building must be a temple placed opposite the city gate. Such an arrangement at Alalakh will reveal an important aspect of the spatial organization, not only for the Royal Precinct of palace and temples but also for the associated construction of the city walls and gates. It is also important to note that gates bearing the names of gods are known at Nuzi, Babylon and Assur⁹².

Recent research by Yener allowed her to hypothesise one step further. The comparison of the Tutul temple at Tell Bi'a with the newly discovered apsidal building of Alalakh revealed a significant match in terms of both size and shape between the two temples. Even though ground truthing at Alalakh is still necessary to prove an exact architectural and functional similarity with the temple at Tell Bi'a – if recent archaeological research at Alalakh confirms Yener's hypothesis – it will then be possible to argue that the city gate is a ritually and religiously loaded structure since the gate and the temple face each other. In such spatial organization, anyone passing through the gate would see the temple while entering the city. This layout also makes another interpretation for the find-spots of the foundation pegs possible. If the gate is facing a temple, this amplifies the ritual attributions of the gate by making it a perfect location for the placement of such a symbolically loaded artefact: a votive for deities.

Deities at Alalakh come from various locations, one of which is related to the discussion here. The two basalt figures depicting a male and a female deity or ancestral guardians are found at the palace administrative wing "Castle" of Level V in room W4 standing side by side⁹³. These crude male (AT/43/-5/4) and female (AT/43/-5/3) statues were recovered in relation to the gate supporting possible religious and ceremonial practices at the city gates. It is important to note here that these basalt statues were recorded as AT/40-45/3 in Woolley⁹⁴, whereas the plates⁹⁵ cite them as AT/43/-5/4 for male and AT/43/-5/3 for the female. Yener uses inventory numbers AT/40-45/3 and AT/40/45 for the male and the female statue respectively⁹⁶.

Woolley at different parts of the site documented similar stylized stone statues; one from the double shrines from Level V located close to the Ishtar temple-related House 39c⁹⁷. Woolley referred to a similar basalt sculpture from the Mardin Gate of the city of Diyarbakır⁹⁸, and one parallel of such sculptures was unearthed in a gate context at Tell Bia-Tuttul⁹⁹. Oylum Höyük also yielded an eroded version of a chthonic basalt statue (OY 10/089) found in the context of

⁹⁰ Yener 2015a, 491.

⁹¹ Yener 2015a, 491.

⁹² May 2014, 80 with references.

⁹³ Woolley 1955, 159, 238, pl. XLIV a, b; Yener 2015b, 205.

⁹⁴ Woolley 1955, 159.

⁹⁵ Woolley 1955, XLIV a, b.

⁹⁶ Yener 2015b.

⁹⁷ Woolley 1955, XLIV, c, AT 39/119.

⁹⁸ Woolley 1955, 238, pl. XLIV: i, j.

⁹⁹ Hemker 1994, 93.

a LBA wall foundation¹⁰⁰. The new excavations¹⁰¹ have also found one similar figurine in the LBA buildings south of the so-called “Private Houses”¹⁰².

Finally, an aquatic feature of the Level VII was also investigated. Derek Ryter from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) conducted geophysical surveys and sedimentary borings around Tell Atchana. The preliminary results of his work revealed a relict channel of the Orontes River. This segment actually surrounded more than half of the settlement during the MBA leading to the possibility that the Level VII gate was functioning as a “water-gate”¹⁰³. Considering the importance of the Orontes River as a transportation route, the Level VII gate operating as a water channel added another significant usage for the gate system. Such a relation of the Level VII gate to water may also increase the ritual attributions to the gates though at this stage of research it can be only hypothesised.

Conclusions

This research has evaluated two metal foundation pegs found in the MB and LBI city gates of Tell Atchana, Alalakh. The use of foundation pegs as votive objects are generally practiced at temples, palaces and administrative buildings; however the placement of these objects at the town gates is so far unique to Alalakh. This town gate-foundation nail coupled together with the new emerging town gate-temple spatial organization of Alalakh attributes a cultic nature to the city gates.

City gates served not only as corridors at the walls, which defined the boundary between the settlement and the outside world, but they also provided a framework to the changing relationships among the settlement, its hinterland and its people. This dynamic character of the city gates included religious, economic and social aspects. The city gates are considered as symbols for multiple activities varying from being a marketplace to serving as a court of law. This judicial aspect also contributes to the interpretation of town gates as locations to display royal power. City gates are quintessential symbols of power and legitimacy binding them directly to rituals and ceremonies. Alalakh can be listed as an example where the existence of foundation pegs at the city gates marks the religious and cultic aspects of these monumental structures.

The foundation peg-town gate phenomenon, now visible at Alalakh, can be a signal showing a conversion of the social structure of society within the city and making attributions to the gates besides just defence mechanisms. Further evaluation in the light of upcoming archaeological data will open new venues in understanding the layout of a city through such symbolic attributions.

¹⁰⁰ Özgen – Helwing 2001.

¹⁰¹ Yener 2005, 257, A04-R277.

¹⁰² Yener 2015b, 206.

¹⁰³ Yener 2013b, 22.

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Özet

Şehir Kapılarında Kült Sembolizmi: Aççana Höyük, Alalah Kentinden İki Metal Yapı-Adak Çivisi

Bu çalışma, C. L. Woolley tarafından Aççana Höyük, eski Alalah kentinde yapılan kazılarda bulunmuş iki adet metalden yapılmış yapı-adak çivisini konu etmektedir. Orta Tunç Çağı'na tarihlenen Seviye VII ve Geç Tunç Çağı'na tarihlenen Seviye V'te ortaya çıkarılan şehir kapılarına yerleştirilmiş olan eserlerin buluntu yerleri, arkeolojik olarak genellikle mabet temellerinde bulunan benzerlerine nazaran farklıdır. Şehir kapıları ile bağlantılı bulunan eserlerin bu konumları, kült ve ritüel açısından da sembolik bir anlam taşımaktadır.

Bu makalede, yapı-adak çivileri geleneğinin çıkışından başlayarak bu eserlerin nitelikleri incelenmiş, Alalah buluntuları ile malzeme ve ikonografi açısından benzerlik gösteren eserler tartışılmıştır. Yazılı kaynaklardan yola çıkarak, şehir kapılarının törensel ve dini önemleri özetlenmiş ve yerleşke özelinde yapı adak çivileri ve şehir kapıları arasındaki sembolik ilişkiye dair yeni bir olgu, öneri olarak sunulmuştur.



Fig. 1
Level VII foundation
peg AT/38/277
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British Museum)

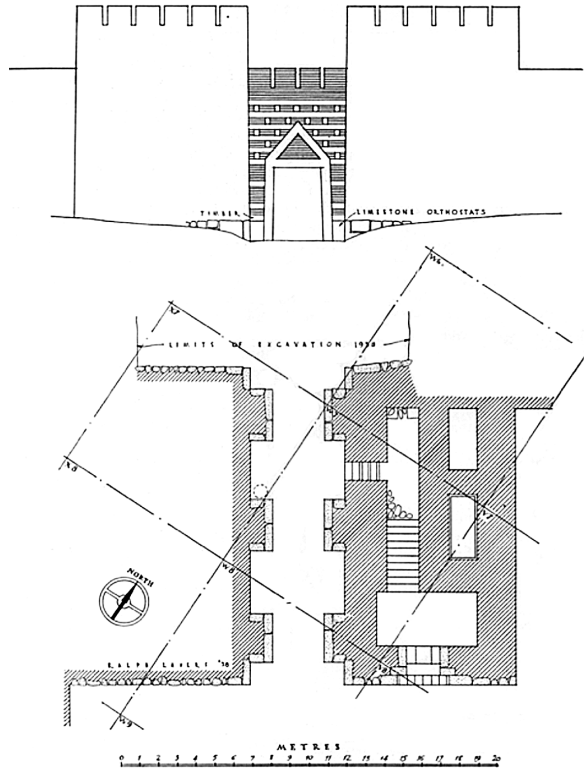


Fig. 2 Drawing of general view of Level VII gateway; circle shows possible find-spot of foundation peg AT/38/277 (Woolley 1955, Fig. 55)



Fig. 3
Level V foundation
peg AT/39/67
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British Museum)