



## The Karaçay/Pazarcık Stele of Storm God

### Karaçay/Pazarcık Fırtına Tanrısı Steli

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#### ABSTRACT

The depiction of storm god on rock reliefs, orthostats and stelae was a very common feature of the Neo-Hittite city states. Similar stelae dating back to the Gurgum kingdom period within the boundaries of Kahramanmaraş province are exhibited today in both regional and local museums. In these stelae, the storm god is usually depicted as facing right, bearded, wearing a helmet, and holding an axe in his right hand with a trident thunderbolt in his left hand under a winged disc. In this study, the Karaçay stele exhibited in the Kahramanmaraş Museum was evaluated. In this context, a new dating is proposed by comparing the style and iconographic features of other similar stelae in the region and by considering the location of the stele.

**Keywords:** Strom-God, Neo-Hittite, Gurgum, Maraş

#### ÖZ

Geç-Hitit Kent Devletleri'nin kurulu bulunduğu coğrafyada kaya kabartmaları, orthostatlar ve steller üzerinde Fırtına Tanrısı tasvirlerinin yaygın olduğu bilinmektedir. Kahramanmaraş İli sınırları içerisinde yer alan Gurgum Krallığı Dönemi'ne tarihlenen benzer tasvirler bugün hem bölge hem de yerel müzelerde sergilenmektedir. Bu betimlemelerde Fırtına Tanrısı genellikle sağa bakan, sakallı, başlık takan, sol elinde trident şimşek ve sağ elinde balta ile kanatlı güneş kursunun altında tasvir edilmiştir. Bu çalışmada Kahramanmaraş Müzesi'nde sergilenen Karaçay Fırtına Tanrısı steli değerlendirilmiştir. Söz konusu stel bölgedeki diğer benzer Fırtına Tanrısı tasvirleri ile üslup ve ikonografik özellikleri bakımından karşılaştırılarak yeni bir tarihlendirme önerilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Fırtına Tanrısı, Geç-Hitit, Gurgum, Maraş

## Introduction

The depiction of the storm god on rock reliefs, orthostats or stelae are very common in south-eastern Anatolia among the Neo-Hittite city-states of the Iron Age (Fig. 1). The Kahramanmaraş (hereafter Maraş) region is no exception. There are several stelae in the Maraş region where the storm god is portrayed with his usual attributes and symbols. In these examples, the storm god typically surmounted by a winged disc, facing right, bearded, wearing a helmet, and holding an axe in his right hand with a trident thunderbolt in his left hand. However, none of these reliefs were recovered from controlled excavations or surveys. To date, no systematic excavation or survey has been carried out in and around the Maraş province to locate or uncover the remains of the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Gurgum.<sup>1</sup>

This small Iron Age kingdom emerged as a prosperous state in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century BC until its annexation by the Assyrian king Sargon II in 711 BC in today's Maraş province of Turkey. Despite the lack of research in this region, there are archaeological remains such as royal stelae, inscriptions, and funerary stelae from the region that reflect the rich and diverse material culture of this small Iron Age kingdom. The majority of these remains constitute funerary stelae with their unique style in terms of their subject and styles. In most of these stelae, ordinary people were portrayed as opposed to the second millennium BC tradition where only kings, queens, or gods were shown. There are men and women together, sometimes with their children sitting in front of a table with their daily clothes.<sup>2</sup> However, this study will not focus on this well-known but understudied group of stelae regarding the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Gurgum. Instead, this paper will deal with the storm-god stele from the Pazarcık district of the Maraş province, the Karaçay stele, which was part of this Iron Age kingdom. In doing so, the focus is to not only look at the stylistic and iconographic features of the aforementioned stele but also to provide a stylistic and contextual comparison between this and other well-known similar stelae from the wider region of the Near East. Another attempt will be made to consider its location within the sacred Iron Age landscape of the Pazarcık/Maraş region. Also, this paper would offer a location and a new date for the Karaçay stele.

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- 1 The Neo-Hittite kingdom of Gurgum, based in today's Kahramanmaraş province, - bordered from the south by Sam'al (Zincirli), to the east Kummuh, and to the north the Elbistan Plain which was controlled by Militia and the western boundary was limited by the Que in Cilicia. See Hawkins (2000a, pp. 249-252) for historical context and its hieroglyphic inscriptions.
  - 2 The reliefs and inscribed monuments on display in various museums both in Turkey and abroad are known to originate from the Maraş region, and dated to the Neo-Hittite Kingdom but are shown with unknown provenance. These reliefs attracted the attention of foreign missionaries active in the Maraş region, especially in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and were collected by various museums or private collectors abroad. In addition to the artefacts that made their way abroad, numerous reliefs of unknown provenance were uncovered by illegal digging are found in various museums in Turkey, particularly at the Kahramanmaraş Museum. For royal inscriptions, see Hawkins (2000a, pp. 249-281), reliefs and funerary stelae see Orthmann (1971, pp. 84-91, Taf. 43-48), Bonatz (2000) Darga (1992, pp. 308-322), and Tiryaki (2010).

## Original Location

The Karaçay stele is on display at the Kahramanmaraş Museum with Inventory No. 2214 (1.05 x 0.58 x 0.25 m). The Museum record states that the aforementioned stele was found in 1969 during the construction of the irrigation regulator in Karaçay village of Pazarcık (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> There are no further details of the location and thus it is hard to know the context of discovery. But it is still possible to comment where it might have originated by taking into account the survey that was conducted in the region.

The Karaçay village, where the stele was uncovered, is located 35 km southeast of Maraş and 2 km south of the Aksu river. There are three archaeological sites in close proximity to the village; Tulhum (210 x 140 x 30 m.) to the east, Osmandede (200 x 130 x 27 m.) to the northwest and Hanobası (300 x 150 m.) to the south where the stele might have originally been erected. Two of these sites, Osmandede and Hanobası, are known to have been occupied during the Late Bronze and Middle Iron Ages (Dodd, 2002, pp. 327-328, 331-330, Figs. 5.2, 5.3, 5.6 and 5.7). The site of Tulhum shows an uninterrupted occupation from the Late Bronze Age through the Early and Middle Iron Ages (Dodd, 2002, pp. 329-330, Figs. 5.4 and 5.5). These three sites are very close to each other and form a circle around the Karaçay village from the west, south, and east. Aksu River runs through the north. In the middle of these sites is the Karaçay village. The stele may have come from any of these sites or indeed from the Karaçay village itself. The stele may belong to an important storm god temple or sanctuary located at the Karaçay village serving all of these sites or it may have been erected on an important road leading from Maraş to Pazarcık and then to Gaziantep or Adıyaman, or it even could have marked a border region. For example, the Pazarcık stele, not far away from the Karaçay village was erected by the Neo-Assyrian king Adad-nirari III (810-783 BC) to mark the boundaries between Gurgum and Kummuh (Donbaz 1990; Köroğlu, 2018, pp. 174-175, Fig 11a-b). It is also equally possible that the stele could have been erected on the bank of the Aksu River. However, despite all of this it is still hard to pinpoint the exact location of the stele. But it is evident that the region was densely occupied from the Late Bronze to the Middle Iron Age and the storm god was the main deity and worshipped in the region.

## The Karaçay Stele

The stele shows a storm-god standing on the back of a bull, brandishing an axe and possibly a trident-thunderbolt<sup>4</sup>, a winged disk above the scene, and since the lower part of the relief is missing it is hard to know if the ground line was marked by a guilloche (Figs. 2-3) while the upper section of the stele has a curved form. It is made with a low relief technique

3 The relief was briefly mentioned by G. Bunnens (2006, pp. 36 and 57) in his catalogue of the Iron Age Syro-Anatolian storm god.

4 See, Green (2003, pp. 124-127) and Schwemer (2008, pp. 17-22) for the storm god and his main attributes in Anatolia.

and there is some damage to the right side. The relief surface is heavily corroded. But despite the corrosion on the surface, it is still possible to trace the details of both the storm-god and the bull.

The carved figure is shown in profile standing on a bull and facing the right-hand side of the scene. The deity is wearing a helmet with a bulbous top and two horns on the backside and a single horn to its front section which is unusual for a storm god relief. While earlier in the Hittite period helmets were long with a pointed top and multi-horned, the Iron Age sculptors preferred to use a double-horned helmet with either a long-pointed cap or a shorter or even a bulbous top which is specific to the Arameans (Akurgal, 1962, pp. 110-111). The shoulders and neck part of the carved figure look like they are merging and almost absent.

The hair of the relief extends under the helmet, behind the ear in the form of two thick bands on the right shoulder and ends at waist level under the left arm, where it is slightly damaged. The curling pigtail hair shows similarities with Kürtül (Kalanç, 1964, Fig. VII A) and Tell Ahmar/Qubbah (Bunnens, 2006, Figs. 7-8), stelae, though in both examples the curling pigtails were depicted with three locks of hair as opposed to the two locks of the Karaçay stele.<sup>5</sup> It appears that to create space for the long pigtailed hair in the relief, the sharp end of the sword attached to the waist from the left-hand side has been lowered closer to the right hand of the deity that holds the axe.

The beard of the figure is depicted in a quadrangular form that extends vertically in six strips and joins the side whiskers. There is no moustache which is also the case with the Kürtül as well as the Tell Ahmar stelae group. The beard covers the chin and ends on the chest. The neck is very thick, short and almost non-existent, which seems to be a common feature of similar storm-god stelae coming from this region (for example, Maraş 11<sup>6</sup> and Kürtül).<sup>7</sup> His right hand is raised behind his head. The shoulders are depicted parallel to each other and aligned which is a common feature of similar reliefs coming from the Maraş region (e.g. Kürtül (Kalanç, 1964, Fig. VII A), Maraş 11 (Hawkins, 2000b, Fig. 121) Maraş stele (Jacobs & Messerschmidt 1992, p. 106, Text. 1).

In contrast, the right shoulders of storm god reliefs in Tell Ahmar/Qubbah, Tell Ahmar A-B (Bunnens, 2006, Figs. 7-8, 56 and 58) or Arsuz (Dinçol et al. 2015, Figs. 5-9) 1 and 2 are depicted in a lower position. The right shoulder starts with a straight line and continues with a hard and sharp transition upwards. The figure holds a double-edged axe in the right hand and is raised at the height of the helmet. The use of an axe was an invention of the Iron Age

5 Elie Borowski stele also portrays a similar curling pigtail hair with two locks. See Singer (1989, p. 185, Fig. 1).

6 The Maraş 11 stele has a largely illegible inscription which mentions three times the name of Tarhunzas and offerings (Hawkins, 2000a, pp. 270-271).

7 The Kürtül stele is dedicated to Tarhunzas by Las (son) of Laras -according to Hawkins (2000a, p. 272) who is a private citizen- and concerns an offering to the Storm God.

(Bunnens, 2006, p. 43) and was widely used in the sculpture of the period. Ichnographically, most of the portrayed axes of the period were one-sided as is demonstrated by Tell Ahmar/Qubbah, Tell Ahmar A (Bunnens, 2006, pp. 7-8 and 58; Orthmann, 1971, Taf. B/2) and a stele from Zincirli (Orthmann, 1971, Taf. B/14) where each is shown with an axe, a long blade or as in the case of Gözlühöyük (Temizsoy, 1989, p. 39, Fig. 54), Elie Borowski (Singer, 1989, p. 89, Fig. 1) and the stele of Babylon with a sharp end. Very similar double-edged axes to the Karaçay stele come from Kürtül (Kalaç, 1964, Fig. VII A), Maraş 11<sup>8</sup>, Körkün (Kalaç, 1969, Fig. VIII) and Erzin (Ensert et al. 2008, Figs. 1-3) reliefs. However, one noticeable difference of the Karaçay stele is the lower end of the axe handle where it curves inward sharply at the height of the thumb, which creates an unrealistic depiction. This part of the axe handle gives the impression that it is broken. While the left arm is extended forward, the arm which is bent at the elbow, is raised at a right angle to form a diagonal. Due to the destruction of this section of the relief, the left hand and the possible object (a trident thunderbolt?) that it holds cannot be clearly identified.

The figure is depicted with a short-sleeved shirt, a kilt with a belt and tassel as well as a sword. The depiction of the god with a short-sleeved shirt and kilt has its origin in the Late Bronze Age Hittite Anatolia and the findings from the southeast Anatolia and northeast of Syria demonstrated that the sculptors continue to dress gods in this tradition rather than in a long robe under the influence of Assyrian<sup>9</sup> long after the demise of the Hittite kingdom.<sup>10</sup> The kilt stretches to the knees and the fringe is rendered by straight lines. At the end of the right shoulder a vertical sewing trail is visible on the short-sleeved kilt of the Karaçay figure. A sword is attached on the left-hand side. Another similar stele from Maraş shows a lower part of a figure, possibly a storm god, in which no sword is portrayed.<sup>11</sup> This relief shows a figure in the usual short and belted tunic like the Karaçay stele. The belt is formed by two horizontal carved lines extending parallel to each other and it is disproportionately located at the armpits.

8 The relief is badly corroded and is in the Adana Museum. A typical storm god is shown with a belted tunic, sword at the waist, holding a double axe in his right hand with trident thunderbolt in his left hand (Orthmann, 1971, Taf. B/5 Taf. 44/e; Hawkins, 2000b, Fig. 121).

9 For example, Tell Ahmar B relief (Orthmann, 1971, Taf. B/2), Tell Ahmar/Qubbah and Tell Ahmar A (Bunnens, 2006, Figs. 7-8 and 58), Maraş (Orthmann, 1971, Taf. B75 Taf. 44/e), Körkün (Kalaç, 1969, Fig. VIII), Kürtül (Kalaç, 1964, Fig. VII A) and Babylon (Orthmann, 1971, Babylon 1, Taf. 5b).

10 A heavily damaged stele from the Maraş Yusufkar Neighbourhood shows a god-like figure. Although it was originally stated that the deity was dressed in a long robe in the Assyrian fashion (Jacobs & Messerschmidt, 1992, Taf. 13 Abb. 9, Tex. 1), closer analyses of the stele indicated a kilt. The figure's hair and beard are in the Assyrian style. Below the sun winged disk on the right end, a crescent is visible but the figure continues to hold trident lightning in his left hand and a double-edged axe in his right hand. Jacobs and Messerschmidt (1992) suggested that the god was first made to represent the Hittite Storm God and then later Jupiter Dolichenus, the god of the Commagene. It is dated to between the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC (Şahin, 1991) or to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC (Jacobs & Messerschmidt, 1992).

11 The stele is in the Ancient Orient Museum in Istanbul. Only the lower half of the stele remains intact and is dated to late 9<sup>th</sup> or possibly the early 8<sup>th</sup> century BC (Orthmann, 1971, Fig. B/4; Hawkins, 2000a, pp. 269-270; 2000b, Pl. 118-119).

The right leg of the god is carved from the profile, starting from the end of the kilt and narrows towards the wrist. The right foot stands on the back of the bull's rump and tail. The shoe, which has a slightly curved upwards tip, covers the upper part of the wrist and shows similarities with other reliefs from the Maraş region, though in those instances the upwards toe is more visible (Maraş 5<sup>12</sup> and 11) (Hawkins, 2000b, Figs. 119 and 121). Although the corrosion prevents us from seeing details of the shoe, it is still possible to trace the ropes that are wrapped around the top of the wrist. These ropes are highlighted by three horizontal and one curved scraping line. While his left leg is depicted in a forward manner, the left foot is pressed on the horn section of the bull from the profile. The left shoe is connected to the wrist by a diagonal line. This rope is wrapped around the upper part of the wrist with three horizontal lines.

Although the base of the stele has broken off, the carved relief on this section is in remarkably good shape. There is no damage to the bull figure in which the deity is standing on (Figs. 2-3). The bull's physical features are not very detailed in contrast with those of the god. The animal is in a walking position with both left legs stepping forward while the right legs are thrown backwards. This is a very common feature in the first millennium BC in which bulls were shown marching forward. For example, the Tell Ahmar/Qubbah and Tell Ahmar B bull as well as a relief from the Karkamış Herald Wall depicted such animals in a walking forward position. While the back of the animal is leaned slightly forward, the neck is almost invisible and the head is too small in contrast to the body.

In fact, on the whole, the bull figure is portrayed as much smaller than the god figure. The visible horn is depicted parallel to its body with a gentle slope over the head of the animal. On the other hand, the tail of the bull extends parallel to the body of the animal. Then it goes downward in a straight line forming a sharp line and stops where the right leg of the animal ends. It is clear that the sculptor extended the tail deliberately to accommodate for the right foot of the storm god. In most cases, the animal tail usually ends between the hind-legs (Tell Ahmar/Qubbah and Tell Ahmar B (Bunnens, 2006, Figs. 10, 56, 71 78); Arsuz 2 (Dinçol et al. 2015, Figs. 8-9), except for Erzin (Ensert et al. 2008, Figs. 1-3) where a similar animal tail ended. Another similar tail and parts of a divine figure are also visible from a fragment of a stele in the Adıyaman Museum (Hawkins, 1970, Fig. XVIIb). In this latter example, the tail of the animal ends in a tuft whereas in the Karaçay stele it is not clear if the tail of the animal has such an ending since there is damage to this part of the relief. It is evident that the sculptor depicted the bull figure unrealistically small as if it is being crushed under the much larger god figure.

## Conclusion

The detail of the relief shows that the sculptor worked under the strict rules of iconography on the surface of the stele. However, despite this, there are some uncharacteristic elements

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12 The stele mentions offering to the storm god(?) (Hawkins, 2000a, pp. 269-270).

such as the deliberate extension of the bull tail and the shoulder alignment parallel to each other which seems to be a common feature of similar stelae from the Maraş region (Maraş 11, Kürtül and Maraş stele). The stele features all of the characteristic elements of the Tell Ahmar/Qubbah stele where the storm god Tarhunza is shown in smiting posture wearing a helmet with bulbous top, a square beard, a short-sleeved shirt, a belted kilt with a sword attached to it, an axe in his right hand and a thunderbolt on his left hand while standing on a bull. The only exception is the lack of guilloche. However, there seems to be damage to the lower end of the stele which indicates that there might have been a guilloche pattern. The storm god only stands on the bull in the Tell Ahmar/Qubbah, Tell Ahmar B and Karaçay stelae, in other stelae he stands on the ground.<sup>13</sup> However, it should also be stated that there are other reliefs of the storm god standing on a bull, but some of these reliefs show Assyrian characteristic features<sup>14</sup> or different attributes of the deity.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the Karaçay figure depicts the storm god in a more masculine way similar to the Tell Ahmar/Qubbah and at the lower end of the relief the bull is portrayed disproportionately small as if the sculptor ran out of space. But both standing figure and the bull carved on the relief are well-known elements of the storm god in the wider area of the Near East including Anatolia during the Iron Age.

The Karaçay stele was dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC by Bunnens (2006, p. 111). But as shown above all the characteristic elements of the stele indicate a much earlier period in line with the Tell Ahmar stelae and thus it should be dated to a period between the early 9<sup>th</sup> to late 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC if not the same as the date range for the Tell Ahmar group. This would be consistent with the historical account. There are no royal or local- hieroglyphic inscriptions from the Gurgum after its annexation by the Assyrian king Sargon II in 711 BC, who formed a province after its capital city Marqas (Hawkins, 2000a, p. 250, no. 23; Luckenbill, 1989 no. 29, 61). Hence, all the local hieroglyphic inscriptions belong to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC or earlier (Hawkins, 2000a, p. 250). Lastly, it should be stressed that despite the lack of the original location of the stele or its archaeological context and inscription to provide historical background, it still nevertheless possible to say that the stele may have originally been erected at an important religious sanctuary, a temple or a city in the rural areas of the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Gurgum.

13 The Erzin stele differs from those stelae for portraying a snake head at the left hand of the storm god (Ensert et al. 2008, Figs. 1-3).

14 For example, Arslan-Tash (Thureau-Dangin, 1931, Pl. II/1) and Cekke (Hawkins, 2000a, pp. 143-151; 2000b Fig. 42-43).

15 For instance, despite showing a male figure standing on a bull, the Gölpınar stele shows a sword on the left, at the relief's waist (Kulakoğlu, 1999, p. 178, Pl. 1).

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## Figures



Figure 1. Map showing the locations of Karaçay and other Storm God stela mentioned in the text.



Figure 2. Karaay stele on display in the Kahramanmara Museum.

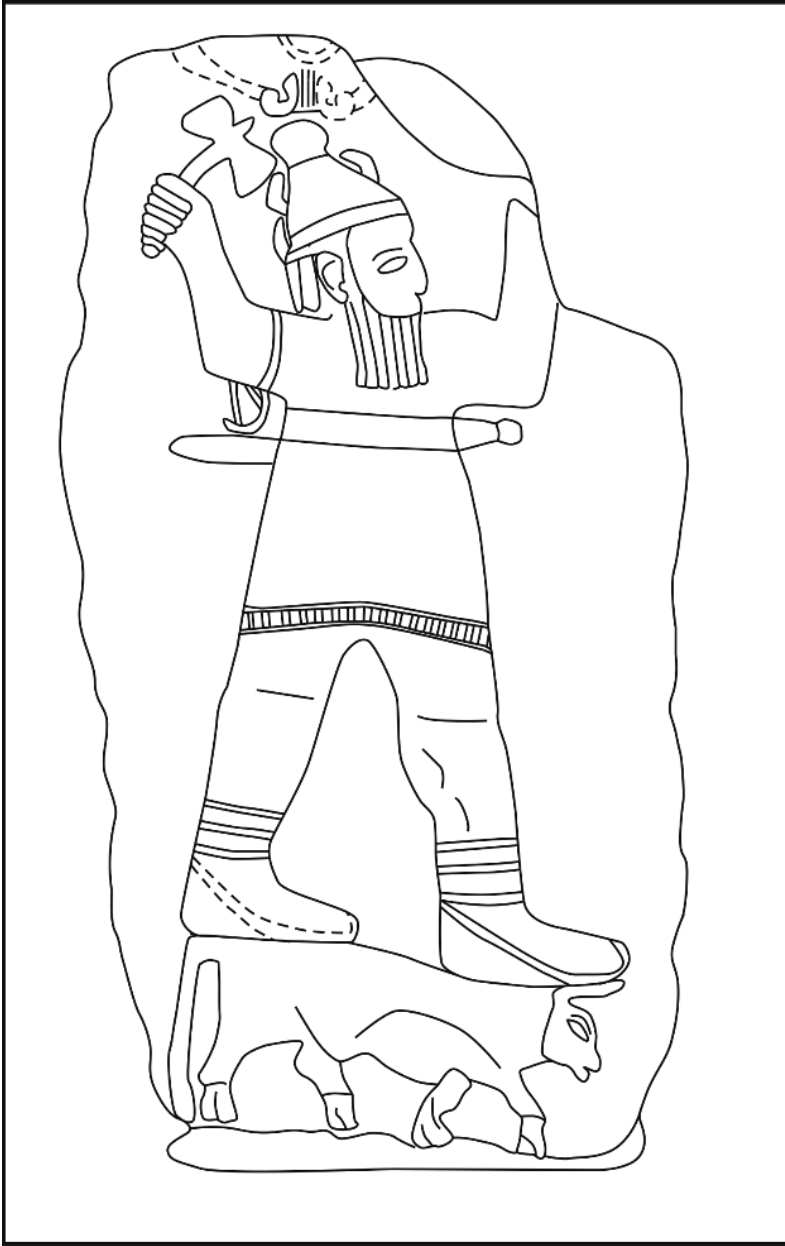


Figure 3. Drawing of Karaçay Stele.