

Metamorphoses of a Monument: The Materializations of the Karabel Relief (Turkey)

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This article examines the processes involved in materializing the past. The recording of archaeological objects plays a pivotal role in establishing artefacts as valuable data that can be categorized, classified, and analysed to turn into historical narratives. It contributes significantly to shaping our understanding of the past: while conveying information about the objects themselves, this documentation inherently captures the subjective context of its recording and continues to influence our interpretations. In this article, both objective details and subjective conceptions are analysed from the records (drawings, photographs, reports) made at the rock figure of Karabel (Turkey), a monumental bas-relief discovered by European explorers in the 1830s. The author uses Karabel's diverse and controversial interpretations to examine how knowledge and ideas about the past evolve. To counterbalance the conventional linear interpretation of the past, he offers some insights into non-academic aspects of the monument.

Keywords: archaeological representation, artefacts as data, scientific discourse, non-academic views, historiography

INTRODUCTION

'It is truly instructive to look upon a monument which has not only stood the decaying influences of thirty-three centuries, but more than this, has baffled for that space of time the human passions which have conspired to destroy it. It is an illustration of the aid rendered by remains of this nature toward establishing the statements of history as truths indisputable, and never to be shaken.' (Van Lennep, 1870: 322)

Deborah Cherry encourages us to explore how people interact with the afterlives of monuments through observation, drawing, photography, film, remodelling, reuse, or damage (Cherry, 2013: 1). The prefix 'after' in afterlives emphasizes the cultural change between the time of a monument's creation and its later interactions with people (Rojas & Ben-Dov, 2021: 1). While archaeologists may be ill-equipped to study every interaction with a monument, they are best placed to examine how

identity is conferred to a monument when it is recorded. This materialization constitutes a retrospective narration, moving from the present to the past. Specifically, the act of reproducing and commenting on a monument gives form to the past. In this study, a monumental (c. 2.5 × 1.5 m) bas-relief carved on a rock face at Karabel near Izmir in western Turkey (Figure 1), attributed to the Hittite period (thirteenth century BC), forms the basis of a reflection on the various ways a monument has been interpreted in diverse historical contexts. Karabel's geographical location at the crossroads of many distinct worlds, including Hittite, Greco-Roman, and modern Western societies, provides a unique opportunity to examine how identities are evaluated and re-evaluated over time. I shall focus here on the period ranging from its discovery by European scholars to the present day.

Monuments have been widely considered by multiple disciplines to reveal the memorial ambitions of the time of their creation or to mark a site of contestation (Nora et al., 1998). Moreover, while monuments might be physically stable, the associated memories are highly mutable and vulnerable (Osborne, 2017). The physical destruction of monuments (iconoclasm) has been documented in numerous locations, at separate times, and with a wide range of motivations (Gamboni, 1997; Clay, 2012; Spicer, 2017). Recent studies have included examining how people interacted with ancient monuments, but interactions in the recent past are still mostly elusive (Rojas & Ben-Dov, 2021: 23–24). Such an approach sees monuments as touchstones that bring to light not only collective but also personal expressions of identity that are not documented in written or physical objects.

Cathy Lynne Costin (1998) has emphasized that the study of ancient craftsmanship provides not only a vast amount of

information about artisan identity and the role of objects and monuments in generating identity, but also social, political, and spiritual power. Materialization often precedes identification, as something needs to physically exist before its characteristics, significance, or identity can be recognized and understood. Here, I explore how the identity of a monument is materialized and how it creates power and meaning in our society, focusing on what could be called 'modern' craftsmanship; that is, the way artefacts are identified since their discovery by Western scholars. The aim is to gain a better understanding of how the materialization of artefacts reflects a personal worldview, in line with Fabian's argument that 'our ways of making the Other are ways of making ourselves' (Fabian, 1990: 756). By 'identity', I refer to the process of identifying oneself with certain groups and experiencing a sense of belonging to them, while simultaneously excluding others. In this article, after considering the period in which researchers were searching for signs of the past, my focus shifts to a time when scholars, instead of searching for the past, created representations of the past to convince colleagues and the public of their interpretation. Our understanding of the materialization of the past is a continual process that also includes non-academic views, a subject I shall touch on in conclusion.

PROLOGUE: HERODOTUS AND KARABEL

In the age of expanding European contact with the Middle East in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scholar-travellers turned to Herodotus's reporting on the customs, cultures, and histories of various peoples known to the Greeks, to identify buried cities and lost civilizations (Marchand, 2023: 311–17). The following



Figure 1. Map showing the location of the main places referenced in the text. Coastal boundaries © EuroGeographics. Map created by the author using R software. Projection EPSG:4087 (World Equidistant Cylindrical). Computational code available at: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13925342>.

passage was therefore well known among scholars of this period:

‘[2] There are in Ionia two figures of this man [Sesostris, king of Egypt] carved in rock, one on the road from Ephesus to Phocaea, and the other on that from Sardis to Smyrna. [3] In both places, the figure is over twenty feet high, with a spear in his right hand and a bow in his left, and the rest of his equipment proportional; for it is both Egyptian and Ethiopian; [4] and right across the breast from one shoulder to the other a text is cut in the Egyptian sacred characters, saying: “I myself won

this land with the strength of my shoulders.” (Herodotus, Histories 2.106.2–4, translated by Godley, 1920)

In this passage, Herodotus confidently asserts that the figure—one of the two mentioned being equated with that depicted at Karabel—represents Sesostris, a legendary ruler whose career reflects Greek and Egyptian historical traditions related to the reigns of several pharaohs (Cook, 1956; Haywood, 2021; for Herodotus’s interpretation of the monument, see Lloyd, 1988: 16–18, 313; West, 1992; Zwingmann, 2013; Rojas & Sergueenkova, 2014; Sergueenkova &

Rojas, 2017; Rollinger, 2021). By mapping the ‘Father of History’s’ narrative, scholars aimed to establish connections with Classical antiquity, seeking to trace the historical roots of Western culture, politics, and society.

KARABEL’S IDENTIFICATION BY EUROPEAN EXPLORERS

Right when the scramble for the past was at its peak (Bahrani et al., 2011), the discovery of a relief corresponding to Herodotus’s description was proof of the authenticity of his accounts (van Wees, 2002). The quote I chose at the beginning of this article (about ‘indisputable true statements of history’) was taken from the biographical account of Rev. Henry John Van Lennep (1815–1879), who served as a missionary in the Ottoman Empire and is well known for his Oriental drawings (e.g. Van Lennep, 1862). He reminisces about his feelings when, in the 1860s, he faced the monument of Karabel, which had become famous among Western scholars some twenty years earlier (Lepsius, 1840; see Kohlmeyer, 1983). Van Lennep uses the existence of the monument and Herodotus’s identification to assert his own identification and connect with the past after thirty-three centuries of ‘decaying influences’.

From a European perspective, Karabel was rediscovered by Oriental travellers in the early nineteenth century (Lepsius, 1840, 1846; Kiepert, 1843; Texier, 1849; review in Kohlmeyer, 1983). There is some dispute over precisely when Karabel was discovered by (and for) Western scholars, but it began to be mentioned in travelogues from the 1830s onward. It was described or discussed by many prominent scholars, including Carl (Karl) Richard Lepsius, who was becoming the pre-eminent German Egyptologist and linguist

and who led the Prussian expedition to Egypt and Sudan in the 1840s (Peck, 2005). Lepsius ‘revealed’ the existence of the Karabel monument, beginning his account by listing the people who saw it and how he acquired knowledge of it (Lepsius, 1840, 39–40). In the 1840s, it was of utmost importance to establish the knowledge transmission chain and ascertain the reality of the relief, at a time when gaining access to the past presented a real challenge. For scholars, documenting the monument through drawings became a crucial way of proving its authenticity.

Obtaining the first drawing of the Karabel monument to present it to an academy of science was convoluted. Lepsius became aware of the relief during a stay in London and reported it to the famous explorer and scientist Alexander von Humboldt in Paris in January 1838 (Lepsius, 1846: 271). Humboldt requested a drawing of the monument from the Baron de Nerciat, Dragoman of the French Consulate in Smyrna (Izmir), supposedly through the Société de Géographie in Paris. The request was passed to the French explorer Charles Texier, who was on his way to his second expedition in Asia Minor and who drew the figure in 1839. He was accompanied by the botanist Hippolyte François Jaubert and the cartographer Colonel Pierre M. Lapie. Jaubert describes the visit in the following terms (note that the text is highly influenced by Orientalist views and features many stereotypes):

‘A few days ago, we were told about a monument to search for based on vague indications and according to the wishes of Mr Humboldt, in the vicinity of Nif or Nymphio, about six leagues from here. An Englishman who had visited this region some time ago had mentioned it to the archaeological society in Rome; according to this traveller’s account, it was a figure of great

antiquity sculpted on a rock in the middle of the woods. It was on this information that we went to Nif. The road, heading east, crosses a range of the Sipylus Mountains. After two stops in fairly poor cafés, but which always arouse our curiosity with the varied scenes that take place there, we arrived at Nif around eleven o'clock, in the courtyard of the aga, or village chief. He received us very politely; he is an educated man for a Turk, and he spoke to us about Xerxes, to whom he attributes the construction of the ruined castle overlooking the village. In this country, travellers are assigned billets from the local authority, but of course, they must pay their expenses to the host who accommodates them. Ours was a Greek. [...] At one o'clock, we were on horseback, in search of our monument, with a local guide; he led us straight to it, two small leagues away. We crossed a region that could be described as deserted if, from time to time, one did not see in the coolest places some black tents of Turkmen watching over their herds. They are true nomads. We met one of their families crouched down for a meal; it was a scene Mr Texier regretted not having time to draw. On the other hand, he accurately copied the sculpted figure on the rock, and Mr de La Bourdonnaye took a view of the site, which is very picturesque. The sculpted figure is that of a man from the time of the Medes, armed with a bow and a pike; he wears the pointed cap and poulaine shoes typical of the period. We were all delighted with our find: Mr Humboldt will receive a copy of this figure, signed by all of us.' (Jaubert, 1842: 334–35; my translation, see [Supplementary Material 1](#))

The baron gave the drawing to Humboldt, who forwarded it to Lepsius (Lepsius, 1846: 272; Texier, 1849: 305). Although Lepsius did not publish the drawing,

Texier published it himself (Texier, 1849: 304–08). In the initial publication, Lepsius only commented on the drawing and stated that it is the same relief as that mentioned by Herodotus. He noted that it depicted a pharaoh, but also highlighted inconsistencies with Egyptian monuments, such as the form of the hieroglyphs and position of the inscription. A possible copy of Texier's original 1839 drawing is housed in the Lepsius legacy in the Manuscript Department at the State Library in Berlin (Figure 2; Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, 2007), and closely resembles the one published by Texier in 1849 (Figure 3).

In Texier's published drawing, the graphic rendering of Karabel contrasts sharply with the Hittite reliefs of Yazılıkaya that he drew in 1834 (Figure 4). Yazılıkaya is a rock sanctuary decorated with elaborate reliefs, located on the outskirts of the Hittite capital Boğazköy/Ḫattuša in Central Anatolia, approximately 700 km east of Karabel. Today, most people would agree that the styles of Yazılıkaya and Karabel reliefs are similar, but little or no information was available to Texier. When he visited Boğazköy and Yazılıkaya in 1834, he did not have strong preconceptions about what he was looking at but his opinions on the context of creation of the reliefs and their interpretation show that they could be interpreted only with great difficulty. After his visit, on 15 November 1834 he sent a report with his drawings to the French government (Rapports de l'Académie, 1837: 7). He indicated that he stopped at the village of Boğazköy during the summer of 1834, where, according to the local people, he was supposed to find carved stones. In his notes to the Académie, Texier proposes that the monument depicts the queen of the Amazons contracting an alliance with a foreign prince. The Académie made other suggestions (Astarte or Semiramis). They



Figure 2. Possible original drawing of Karabel by Texier (Strupler, 2024a). Drawing of Karabel (“Sesostris”) found in the Richard Lepsius estate at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Geneva: Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13891707>.



Figure 3. Texier’s published drawing of Karabel, based on his visit in 1839 (Texier, 1849, pl. 132).

further comment: ‘Finally, if, abandoning allegorical interpretations and distrusting traditions in the Oriental style, we were to seek an explanation based on the incomplete notions provided by history, could it be that they wanted to represent a meeting, perhaps a marriage, between a prince of ancient Phrygia and the daughter of a king of the Medes, a dominant people in Asia after the fall of the Assyrians?’ (Rapports de l’Académie, 1837: 12–13, reproduced in Texier, 1839: 232; see full passage and translation in [Supplementary Material 2](#)).

While we can only speculate about what Texier had in mind when he drew the Yazılıkaya relief, he was clearly influenced by images depicting Egyptian pharaohs when he drew the Karabel monument and provided an identity for it (Figure 3 and 4). He reported that his first impression reminded him of the Egyptian reliefs of Nahr el-Kalb (Texier, 1849: 304) in Lebanon, just north of Beirut. In the

drawing of Karabel, the influence of the Egyptian style on Texier is evident in the proportion of the figure, its facial features, and the headdress resembling the Egyptian ‘double crown’. In the case of Yazılıkaya (Figure 4), even though the drawings are schematic and fanciful, the details are closer to reality and less influenced by Egyptian canon.

The inconsistencies between Texier’s drawing of Karabel and the actual bas-relief were quickly and widely criticized by contemporary and later colleagues. This was not a matter of Texier’s artistic ability but an indication of his need to adapt reality to make it more accessible. To make the past more comprehensible and easier to understand, it was necessary to represent the relief in an Egyptian style that met expectations. Lepsius, who visited the monument



Figure 4. *Texier's drawing of Yazultkaya, drawn in 1834 (Texier, 1839, pl. 78).*

in December 1845, saw no reason, given the relief's correspondence with the description in Herodotus, to doubt its Egyptian origin. He even acknowledged that the drawing was necessary to prove the authenticity of Herodotus's claims (Lepsius, 1846: 271–72). To turn Karabel into a monument, i.e. a source of information to reconstruct the past, it was essential to transpose it into a document.

TRANSFORMING KARABEL INTO A MONUMENT OF THE PAST

For historians in the nineteenth century, 'document' was more important than 'monument', and the understanding of these words rapidly evolved at this time (see Ricoeur, 1988: 116–26; Ceserani, 2019; see also Regazzoni, 2022). In French or English, 'monument' evolved from the meaning of 'tomb' (tenth century AD), to 'written document' (fifteenth–sixteenth century), to 'work of architecture or sculpture that conveys a

memory to posterity' or 'something erected for future memory' (seventeenth century) (CNRTL, 2012; see also Hoad, 2003). In the nineteenth century, it has the meaning of 'an object that attests to the existence, the reality of something, and can serve as evidence' (CNRTL, 2012 citing Michelet 1831). The monument was not the evidence itself but the document.

The transposition of Karabel onto another medium (primarily drawing and commentary) provides significant insights into the process of materialization. Although Texier's drawing was the earliest, it was not published for ten years, so Heinrich Kiepert has the claim of being the first academic to publish a drawing of Karabel (Figure 5). He visited Karabel in 1842, three years after Texier, and asserts that his descriptions and drawings are as accurate as possible while conceding that any drawing will have limitations:

'The figure [...] is very blurred [...] so that every drawing will always turn out to be too precise, as it also has to

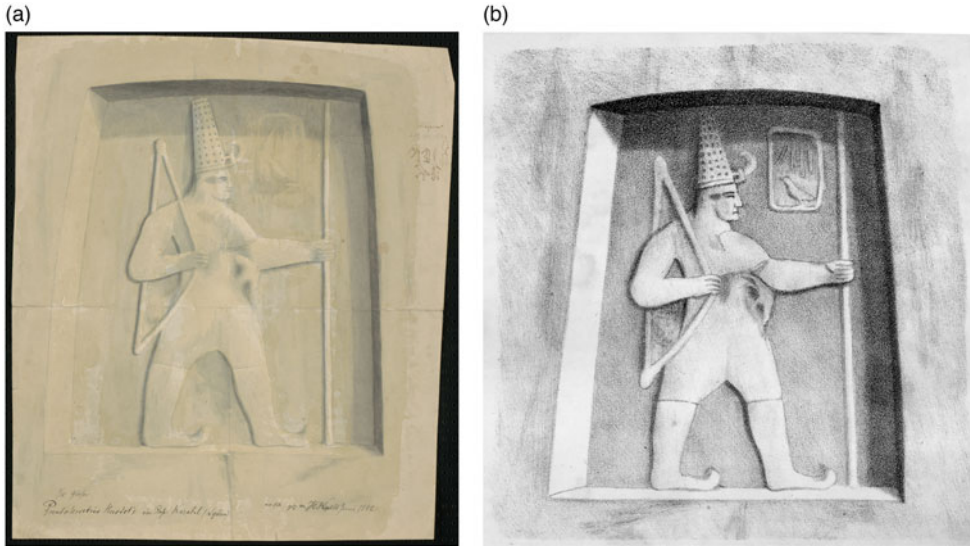


Figure 5. a) Kiepert's original drawing of Karabel conserved at the Berlin State Library (Strupler, 2024b). b) Kiepert's published drawing of Karabel (Kiepert, 1843, pl. 2 'Sogenanntes Monument des Sesostris bei Smyrna').

indicate what can only be obtained through repeated, exact observation in closest proximity, and which becomes almost invisible when stepping back to a distance from which the whole can be considered. In the attached illustration, while this objection indeed also applies, an attempt has been made to give as faithful a picture as possible, and at least nothing has been added or suggested that did not become certain on close examination' (Kiepert, 1843: 39, translated by the author; see [Supplementary Material 3](#)).

Kiepert was the first scholar to question the identity of Karabel and the assumption that it was an Egyptian representation (Kiepert, 1843; West, 1992). He pointed out the differences between the style of the Karabel figure and ancient Egyptian art and proposed that, although the bas-relief matched Herodotus's physical description, Herodotus may have been incorrect in identifying it as a pharaoh. Kiepert also observed that the signs on the

relief were not Egyptian hieroglyphs. Instead, he associated the relief with the drawings from Yazılıkaya that Texier (1839) had made available in his first travelogue volume (Figure 4).

In turn, Lepsius (December 1845) criticized the drawing and interpretation of elements considered significant in determining the identity of Karabel. He drew attention to discrepancies between the reality and Kiepert's drawing, such as the cut of the garment at knee height, the invention of a frame around the hieroglyphic signs, and Kiepert's reference to a (Egyptian-like) cartouche. Lepsius also noted that the form of the headgear and hieroglyphic signs, as well as the weapon extremities, were distorted in Kiepert's drawing. Lepsius made his own drawing (Figure 6), but it was modified for the publication (Lepsius 1846: 273, fig. 1). I could not find the drawing in the Lepsius estate at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (2007). There is also no such documentation in the archives of the Lepsius



Figure 6. Drawing in Lepsius (1846: 273) with a note by the editor (A. d. H) stating that 'The following woodcut is only intended to highlight the differences [with Kiepert's drawing], while for the overall impression of the monument, namely regarding the chest and body of the figure, our drawing (pl. III) [= Kiepert's] retains the advantage of greater accuracy' (see [Supplementary Material 4](#)).

Expedition to Egypt kept at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities: his diary ends with his arrival in Smyrna and his last published letter from the expedition was sent from Smyrna just before he visited Karabel (Lepsius, 1852: 378). Under the publication of Lepsius's image (1846: 273), the editor noted that the drawing was there only to show differences from the illustration published earlier by Kiepert but did not explain why Lepsius's drawing was considered less trustworthy (Figure 6, caption; see [Supplementary Material 4](#)).

Lepsius's revision, criticism, and drawings are just one example from a vast body of literature. The relief at Karabel was in a then unknown style, now attributed to the Hittites (Müller-Karpe, 2019), and

knowledge of the pre-Classical past was limited, much of it speculative. Lepsius believed Karabel to be a representation of the pharaoh Sesostris and, to explain the stylistic differences with Egyptian monuments and its 'confusing identity', he postulated that Karabel was created out of necessity 'in the absence of Egyptian artists' by 'barbaric hands' (Lepsius, 1846: 274).

The explorer-architect Pierre Trémaux (1818–1895), like Lepsius, travelled to Karabel after a trip to Egypt. He provides a plate (Figure 7) combining a drawing and a photograph, as well as a text for his series documenting the Anatolian region (Trémaux, 1858). Trémaux labels the image 'Monument of Sesostris after Herodotus' but considers it genuinely Egyptian, albeit from a 'decadent' style. He states that, while the drawing was needed to capture details that 'cannot be seen' in a photograph, photography was necessary to capture the fuzziness of the monuments. Trémaux was among the first Europeans to take photographs of 'the Orient' (Addleman-Frankel, 2018). Photographs were used by explorers to record and describe, but also to prove their presence 'on the spot' and so the veracity of their accounts. Photographs were not necessarily privileged above other forms of illustration in the creation and presentation of knowledge (Brusius, 2009; Belknap, 2016: 30–33). Moreover, early photographs from 'exotic countries' did not meet the Romantic visualization desired by the author, the publisher, and the public (Addleman-Frankel, 2018: 32, 48–49). Even today, archaeologists praise photographs (or 3D models) for their realism, while drawings are valued for their capacity to highlight important content (see Lopes, 2009).

The drawing accompanying Trémaux's photograph appears to be a combination of Texier's, Kiepert's, and Lepsius's drawings. The figure's slim and 'Egyptian'



Figure 7. Photograph and drawing from Trémaux (1858, pl. 1 *Nymphaenum*). © Bibliothèque municipale de Toulouse, AM 150030.

appearance resembles Texier's illustration, but the garment details are more like those of Kiepert and Lepsius. Despite Trémaux's goal of familiarizing Western audiences with distant places (Ryan, 2013), this photograph did not receive widespread recognition. Salomon Reinach is one of the few to cite it, criticizing the quality of Trémaux's works (Reinach & Le Bas, 1888: 45). Reinach was interested in art history and published a new, more artistic drawing of the relief created by the illustrator Eugène Landron (Figure 8). There is no information on how the drawing was made, but the representation's lively, three-dimensional nature is closer to a naturalistic style

than the flat surface characteristic of Hittite and Late Hittite reliefs (Orthmann, 1971). Reinach is cautious when commenting on the relief and its style. The Assyriologist Archibald Henry Sayce had just proposed that Karabel was a Hittite relief, a civilization that was exclusively known from sporadic mentions in Biblical, Egyptian, and Assyrian sources until then, and was only just starting to be understood (Sayce, 1879, 1880; Tyler, 1888; Alaura, 2017b). This was probably decisive for Landron's distancing from previous drawings.

Comparing the differences in the drawings illustrates how seeing and drawing Karabel were inevitably associated with the identity attached to it. From the strong Egyptian influence on Texier's drawing to Landron's more naturalistic rendering, the illustrations reflect contemporary preoccupations (Ford, 2003), with meaning, aim, and therefore materialization changing with time. Initial recording necessitated selecting and accentuating the primary characteristics (Moser, 2014, 2015: 1280). Only after various attempts, debates, repeated visits, and gradually discarding preconceptions did it become possible to produce an accurate drawing of the style and identity of the relief. From then on, with the general acceptance that Karabel was not a representation of Sesostris but a Hittite image, scholars have argued widely over the 'correct' identity of the person represented. This was crucial in a period when 'race' was one of the most hotly debated topics (for a concise overview on racism, see Doane, 2006).

THE RISE OF SCIENTIFIC RACISM: KARABEL, MONUMENT OF THE HITTITES

In 1879, Sayce travelled to Karabel. After recounting the history of the discovery and complaining about Texier's inaccurate drawing, he states: 'Now that the facsimile



Figure 8. Drawing by Eugène Landron (*Reinach & Le Bas, 1888, pl. 143*).

[Sayce's drawing] has been obtained, we have positive proof that the race which produced the sculpture of Karabel [...] was the race called Hittites in the Old Testament' (Sayce, 1880: 225). Sayce suggested that the long-toed shoes on the relief indicated that the Hittites 'came from a cold country such as the highlands of Armenia' (Sayce, 1880: 232). By recognizing similarities with characters on monuments and inscriptions in Asia Minor, Sayce raised questions about the identity of the 'Hittite race', a critical issue at the time (Alaura, 2002, 2017a: 20). Scholars, imbued with colonial ideology, were heavily concerned with identifying peoples and nations mentioned in the Bible and in Classical texts (Weeden,

2017: 127). For nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars, 'race' was often influenced by linguistic as well as anthropological considerations (see, for example, Toynbee, 1918). The obsession with racial categorization was supported by many researchers, such as Ripley's 1899 widely acclaimed book *The Races of Europe* (see Winlow, 2006). In *The Races of the Old Testament* (1891), Sayce demonstrates his particular interest in the origin and nature of racial groups (Lorimer, 1988: 424). Sayce argues that racial traits encompass not only physical features but also mental and moral qualities; he emphasizes that the skull shape is a distinctive and enduring racial characteristic (Sayce, 1891: 16; see Kidd, 2006; Belton, 2007: 155).

Scholars were interested in Karabel as part of a wider consideration of the common attributes of 'a race', rather than in its individual history. Hittite monuments were grouped into larger stylistic and geographical categories, to be organized and classified (e.g. Messerschmidt, 1900). The key question was to find the main characteristics of the Hittites. For example, when Felix von Luschan took part in the excavation of the Iron Age Hittite city of Sam'al (Zincirli, Turkey), he also conducted research on local people to distinguish races based on the shape of the head and language (Essner, 2023). He then used this to reconstruct the past, based on a 'likeness' with types depicted on the bas-reliefs uncovered at Zincirli (von Luschan, 1894; Smith, 2002). Similarly, monuments in Egypt depicting 'Hittites' were used to see correlations with Hittite representations, focusing on 'typical' garments, hairstyle, or body shapes, as stated by British explorer Claude R. Conder in his problematic article titled 'Hittite Ethnology':

In the picture of the Ramesseum Kadesh [...] the Hittites and their allies are represented as distinct races with different kinds of weapons. The one race is bearded, the other beardless, and in the Abu Simbel representation, the Chinese-like appearance of the Hittites, who have long pig-tails, is very remarkable.' (Conder, 1883: 22–23)

Conder's views were held by many others (e.g. Sayce, 1882; Wright, 1886: 86; Hirschfeld, 1887: 49–58; Tyler, 1888: 515). In the 1880s, a radical discovery was made in el-Amarna, the capital of Egypt under Akhenaten: several hundred clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform writing were found around 1887. Almost all are written in Akkadian, but two are written in a language unknown at the time of discovery. Although by 1902 J.A. Knudtzon

had proposed that the unknown language was Indo-European, this proposition was not well received: the prevalent historical preconceptions, influenced by the relationship to Sanskrit, were against finding an Indo-European language at this time in West Asia (Beckman, 2011). When Hogarth explained the reason for starting the Carchemish excavations (on today's border between Syria and Turkey), he formulated the critical issue of the early twentieth century: 'What part, if any, did the Hittites play in the general development of European civilization out of Asiatic?' (Hogarth, 1911: 1). Here Hogarth clearly refers to an 'Asiatic civilization' rather than to the continent of Asia.

The 1905–12 excavations of Boğazköy (Hattuşa) revealed thousands of clay tablets written in the still unintelligible Hittite language as well as in the well-understood Akkadian. This discovery led to further research into the second millennium BC in Anatolia, with a primary focus on deciphering the language in cuneiform and hieroglyphic writing. Debates centred around the origin of the language and written system, with arguments for and against an origin in 'Semitic', 'Indo-European', 'Turanian', 'Scythian', or 'Sumerian' languages (and 'race'; see Cooper, 1993; Fink, 2020). As pointed out by Alaura (2015), like the 'Sumerian problem' and its supposed 'race', scholars discussed the 'Hittite problem' for more than fifty years (e.g. Lovett, 1887; Cavaignac, 1936). Eventually, Hrozný (1915) published an article announcing the decipherment of the Hittite language and thus claiming to solve the Hittite problem. He demonstrated that Hittite was an Indo-European language, but this was not initially accepted by everyone, due to its implications for identity and race (Velhartická, 2015). Some scholars could not accept this view; with respect to the language's grammatical construction,

Ferdinand Bork stated: ‘This is not how an Aryan thinks. However one may turn the matter, the Hittite language cannot be considered an Aryan language [...]. In any case, Hrozný is wrong with his Aryan theory’ (Bork, 1916: 296; see [Supplementary Material 5](#); see also Sallaberger, 2007). In short, it was unpalatable to some to accept that ‘Indo-Europeans’ had a ‘Chinese-like’ appearance (Conder, 1883; see Alaura, 2015: 27).

By and large, the definition of race led to ideological abuse (Arnold, 2006). This is especially apparent in Europe during the first half of the twentieth century, and during the emergence of ‘Turkish archaeology’ which accompanied the founding of the Republic of Turkey. Various theories were developed in this context, in an attempt to establish a connection between the present-day geographical region of Turkey and ancient Anatolia, to legitimize the nascent nation (Tanyeri-Erdemir, 2006; Atakuman, 2008; Dinler, 2018; Adalı & Erol, 2020). Although mostly quickly forgotten, these theories remain alive in modified forms even now (Ergin, 2017). Archaeologists may be too quick today to dismiss this period and consider it as behind them (Bahrani, 2003, 2006; Saini, 2019). Indeed, the dependence of Anatolian archaeology on its colonial history as a means of categorizing people and monuments has yet to be fully assessed.

MATERIALIZATION OF A KING: THE READING OF KARABEL’S INSCRIPTION

In spite of the advances being made in in the early twentieth century in reading and understanding texts written in Hittite (Hawkins, 2000: 13–17), for the short and eroded Karabel hieroglyphic inscription, it nevertheless took fifty years for the debate to settle down (Kohlmeyer, 1983: 16–19, 25–28; Hawkins, 1998). As long as its

inscription was not fully understood, Karabel was not considered on its own, only with other monuments to compare similar sign sequences.

Based on comparisons with Yazılıkaya and Gavurkalesi, John Garstang, the future founder and first director of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, considered Karabel to represent the ‘Hittite national deity’ (Garstang, 1910: 173, 1929: 178). In 1931, Sayce made a bold reading of the inscription as ‘Monument of Tuatis, the king of the country of Khalmis, the high priest’ (Sayce, 1931: 430). Kurt Bittel, future president of the German Archaeological Institute and excavator of Hattuša, was more cautious, stating that only the sign for ‘king’ could be read with some certainty and that it was unclear whether it referred to a representation of a king or a dedicatory person. He tentatively proposed the name of the king as King Tuḫaliya (IV), based on the style of the inscription and a partly conserved sign (Bittel, 1939–1941: 182). Theodor Bossert, the initial publisher of the Karatepe Bilingual (an eighth-century BC inscription in Phoenician and Luwian), which significantly advanced the deciphering of the hieroglyphic script, agreed with Bittel’s reading of the ‘king’ sign (Bossert, 1946: 72–75). He suggested that it could be a local king since the name could not be associated with a known Hittite king. This was a guess that would later prove correct. Without conclusive proof, researchers argued for one or the other solution, as well as for the dating of the relief in the fourteenth or thirteenth century BC. Bittel (1967) revised his position, stating that it represented either a member of the royal family or a local ruler, while Kohlmeyer associates Karabel solely with a ‘ruler’ (Kohlmeyer, 1983: 25–26).

The debate changed dramatically with the reading of the inscription. The

numerous new discoveries and advances in deciphering hieroglyphics proved to be decisive. Hawkins states: 'I was again pondering the reading of Karabel [...] and with my mind very much on our reading of Tarkasnawa, I suddenly saw that this is exactly what is on Karabel' (Hawkins, 1998: 4). This implies that he needed a pre-existing idea about the relief to identify and propose a name. Hawkins reached a turning point by giving an individual identity to Karabel. Like Sesostri, the individual depicted at Karabel is not an anonymous ruler but a person, allowing us to grasp some elements of his biography. Since this reading, the relief is considered as the representation of Tarkasnawa, the king of Mira, who was a vassal to the Hittite king (Hawkins, 1998; Müller-Karpe, 2019; Gander, 2022: 488–95).

NON-ACADEMIC MATERIALIZATION

While archaeologists feel confident and qualified to speak about 'ancient craftsmanship', and the role of monuments to materialize identity and social, political, or spiritual power in the past (DeMarrais et al., 1996; Costin, 1998), the present or recent past of such monuments is less often addressed. Showing the current state of a monument can expose our failure to protect it; moreover, it requires not only dealing with its previous identifications but also with the role it played and is playing in our societies (Figure 9). Here, I want to address which materialization we favour. When we research or teach about Karabel, are we more inclined to use a picture of Karabel in 'pristine' condition rather than show it in its damaged state? While there are obvious and legitimate reasons to choose the best possible images (e.g. to read the inscriptions; Hawkins, 1998), we should also show and address its current condition (Tulunay, 2006;

Baykan, 2013; Arkeologlar Derneği, 2019; Müller-Karpe, 2019).

Including diverse perspectives on a monument, challenging traditional linear interpretations of the past, questioning the necessity of protecting monuments, and addressing recent non-academic interactions with a monument are all aspects we should consider. These create opportunities for alternative (often marginalized) narratives, encourage a more critical understanding of historical narratives, and foster an awareness of the unique ways different cultures and societies experience and interpret historical events. Shifting the emphasis away from the role of Western scholars may also help local people to better 'own' a monument. Archaeologists tend to avoid specifying what they mean by protecting the heritage for the future (Högberg et al., 2017). Lowenthal (1996) remarks that we tend to value our heritage most when we feel it is threatened, which can inspire us to take better care of it. Damaged heritage can have a profound impact on society. Ruins themselves can convey important values and meanings that might not be as readily apparent in a restored structure (Holtorf, 2020).

Few research papers discuss the perceptions of the present-day public visiting Hittite reliefs. Yet Karabel is not only a reminder of past historical events but also a cultural landmark (Strupler, 2023). Since ancient times, it must have been a topic of discussion, passed down through oral traditions. The accounts of the 'modern discovery' or visits to Karabel always involved local people—who knew exactly what European travellers were searching for—as illustrated in Jaubert's (1842) account cited earlier. This also suggests that the monument had a social life before its 'discovery', as illustrated, for example, in a picture taken in 1907 by Gertrude Bell, which shows graffiti on and next to the relief, written in Greek or Ottoman letters (Figure 10). Even earlier photographs



Figure 9. Photograph of the Karabel pass and relief. Photographer and year unknown. © German Archaeological Institute, photo archive of the Istanbul Department, Negative No. D-DAI-IST-4078. Photograph and metadata available at: <https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/131756>.

show graffiti (Perrot & Guillaume, 1866: pl. 12, bottom right corner of relief). While today such graffiti is frowned upon, it was probably quite common in the last two centuries (see Simpson, 2015). In the later twentieth century, many visitors and scholars have been immortalized by photographs showing them next to the figure (e.g. the late David Hawkins, see Hatice Gonnet-Bağana Hittite Collection, 2015). Clearly visitors, local or not, materialize their interactions with the monument and, like Trémaux in the 1850s, mark their presence there and so prove the veracity of their accounts.

Other major interactions include destruction. Significant damage was caused to Karabel between 1977 and 1982, when the Turkish Republic financed the enlargement of the road passing through the Karabel pass, with reliefs and two inscriptions next

to the bas-relief at Karabel destroyed (Kohlmeyer, 1983). It also destroyed a triumphal arch (Ehringhaus, 2005: 87 and fig. 163) that was erected in the early years of the Turkish Republic by the governor of the region to foster interest in ‘national’ history at a local level (Strupler, 2023: 490). The Karabel relief suffered further damage in the 1980s, 1990s, and in 2019 (Arkeologlar Derneği, 2019).

The harm caused over the past fifty years highlights the need for the archaeological community to better understand and document the current condition of this monument. We must ask ourselves what responsibility modern research owes to the social environment. Karabel remained intact for thirty-three centuries under ‘decaying influences’ (Van Lennep, 1870: 322), but circumstances changed mainly after Western scholars discovered

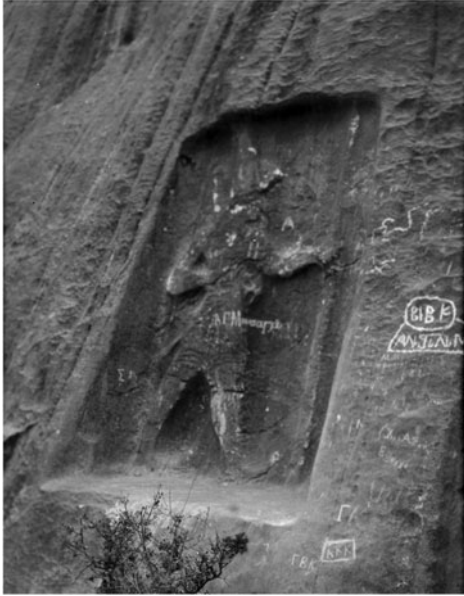


Figure 10. Photography of Karabel taken in 1907 by Gertrude Bell. Gertrude Bell Photographic Archive F_015, Newcastle University. <https://gertrudebell.ncl.ac.uk/p/gb-3-1-6-1-15>.

it. Luke (2019) provides many insights on the challenges of preserving the cultural and natural heritage of western Turkey in the face of infrastructure development projects. This helps explain the damage to Karabel in the wake of road construction in the 1970s. But no one has claimed responsibility for other damage to the Karabel relief, unlike the highly publicized destructions that took place in Afghanistan, Syria, or Iraq (Flood, 2002; Harmanşah, 2015a). The site is not well-known and has hardly been promoted as a tourist destination in the last fifty years. There could be other socio-cultural reasons for the damage. Recently, Karataş (2022) conducted ethnographic research among looters in the Black Sea region to explore the relations between archaeological remains, hodjas (self-proclaimed spiritualists), and the latter's contribution to the search and explanation of mythical signs for treasure hunting. She

demonstrates how folklore and oral traditions can justify the looting and destruction of historical sites. Similar explanations could be applied to the situation in Karabel, creating a context for 'tolerating the irreversible damage being done by the local communities involved' (Karataş, 2022: 293; see also Yolcu & Karakaya, 2017). It seems highly probable that recent damage is owed to the perpetrators being unaware of the significance of the monument and the importance of preserving it for future generations. The damage over the last twenty years, however, cannot be attributed to treasure hunting; the monument was intentionally smashed with hammers to destroy the motif, and acid was reportedly poured on the relief (Baykan, 2013).

Many other Hittite bas-reliefs have suffered similar damage, such as Malkaya (Kırşehir), as well as other archaeological sites. In my opinion, this stems from not involving local people enough to 'own' their monument, allow for other materializations, and reflect on how a monument might be used to investigate different worlds. Not only does displaying, depicting, talking about, or writing about multiple identities help to better integrate diverse views and better reflect what a monument meant in the past, but it also provides an opportunity to involve diverse communities in the present and reflect on what we would like to leave for future generations. By expanding our focus beyond a monument in ancient times and its role in the Bronze Age or any other period, we can open our research to a broader public and engage with its value to society.

CONCLUSION

This article explored how the different materializations of Karabel create value and meaning in societies. Rock monuments, due to their enduring visibility,

provide an opportunity to study local practices diachronically and explore multiple ‘horizons of meanings’ throughout history (Harmanşah, 2015b: 2). I have examined how various identities were attributed to the monument, starting with its documentation by Western scholars. The relief has been variously seen to represent the pharaoh Sesostris, a fictional character in Herodotus’s *Histories*, a local ruler, a Hittite king, a vassal of the Hittite king (Tarkasnawa), a site deemed less important than road expansion in the 1970s, and a place for vandalism. Yet, the relief has always remained a significant cultural landmark. While the monument is essential for the geographical history of western Asia Minor in the second millennium BC, and debates about its interpretation are ongoing (Seeher, 2009; Glatz & Plourde, 2011; Meriç, 2020; Gander, 2022: 488–95), understanding a monument entails more than its role in the past. We should also consider how it was materialized, incorporated in a corpus of sources, and reflect on what we would like it to represent for the future.

The role and memory of monuments in public spaces are currently hotly debated, highlighting the need for contextualization in the present to enable the public to appreciate or critique them. In the USA and elsewhere, a wave of statue removals (aka the ‘Statue War’) has sparked a debate about the meaning of monuments and how we should view them today (Campbell, 2017; Atuire, 2020). While disentangling the different meanings of a monument is delicate, whatever happens to a monument, there is a consensus that we should better contextualize it (Antonello & Cushing, 2021). Archaeologists and historians must not only explain why monuments were erected but also recognize that they then become the focus of new stories and representations. The narrative of any monument should include both its creation and its ongoing history, destruction, or alteration, as Young

(1993) has argued for memorials. Antonello introduced the idea of ‘re-storying monuments’ to uncover lost histories ‘in the context of current concerns around racial and social justice, climate change and the Anthropocene, and eroding working rights and conditions’ (Antonello & Cushing, 2021: 747). Karabel and its racial identity vividly illustrate how our preconceptions shape the identity we attribute to others. It could also serve as a starting point to review whether scientific racism still influences our interpretation. Finally, Karabel shows that new traces on a monument (graffiti, damage) form part of a materialization of the past. This richness enables us to envision a past that does not merely replicate itself but remains open to aspects beyond our current imagination as traces for a future past.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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Métamorphoses d'un monument : la matérialisation du bas-relief de Karabel (Turquie)

Le bas-relief sur le rocher de Karabel en Turquie, un monument redécouvert par des explorateurs européens des années 1830, est à la base d'un examen du processus de matérialisation du passé. L'enregistrement des objets et faits en archéologie joue un rôle essentiel dans l'établissement de données valables capables d'être catégorisées, classifiées et analysées dans le but de construire un récit historique. Ce processus influence de façon significative nos perspectives sur le passé : bien que la documentation archéologique nous informe sur les objets ou faits eux-mêmes, elle implique inévitablement le contexte subjectif de son enregistrement et continue à inspirer nos interprétations. Dans cet article, l'auteur

examine les détails objectifs et les notions subjectives présentes dans la documentation (dessins, clichés, rapports) concernant Karabel. Il utilise les diverses et contentieuses interprétations du monument pour illustrer l'évolution de nos connaissances et conceptions du passé. Comme contrepoids aux interprétations conventionnelles et linéaires du passé, l'auteur offre quelques observations sur les aspects non-scientifiques du monument. Translation by Madeleine Hummler.

Mots-clés: représentation archéologique, objets comme données, discours scientifique, perspectives non-scientifiques, historiographie

Die Metamorphosen eines Denkmals: die Materialisierung des Reliefs von Karabel (Türkei)

Das Felsrelief von Karabel (Türkei), ein in den 1830er Jahren von europäischen Forschern entdecktes Denkmal, bildet die Grundlage einer Untersuchung der Prozesse, welche die Vergangenheit materialisieren. Die Aufnahme von archäologischen Funden und Befunden spielt eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Erzeugung von wertvollen Daten, die kategorisiert, klassifiziert und analysiert werden, um sie in eine historische Erzählung zu verwandeln. Diese Dokumentation trägt maßgeblich zu unserem Verständnis der Vergangenheit bei: sie informiert uns über den Fund aber erfasst auch unvermeidlich den subjektiven Kontext der Aufnahme und beeinflusst unsere Deutungen in nachhaltiger Weise. In diesem Artikel untersucht der Verfasser die objektiv aufgenommenen Eigenschaften und die subjektiven Auffassungen, welche in den Zeichnungen, Fotografien, und Berichten von Karabel vorhanden sind. Er erforscht die verschiedenen und umstrittenen Deutungen von Karabel um die Entwicklung unserer Kenntnisse und Vorstellungen der Vergangenheit zu verdeutlichen. Als Gegengewicht zur traditionellen und linearen Darstellung der Vergangenheit bietet der Verfasser einige Aufschlüsse über nicht-wissenschaftliche Aspekte des Denkmals. Translation by Madeleine Hummler.

Stichworte: archäologische Darstellung, Funde als Daten, wissenschaftlicher Diskurs, nicht-wissenschaftliche Auffassungen, Forschungsgeschichte