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THE SYRO-HITTITE RITUAL BURIAL OF MONUMENTS

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THE Syro-Hittite cultures which are relevant to the subject of this study existed and flourished in Syria and southern Anatolia from the Late Bronze Age until the final annexation of these areas to Assyria during the eighth century B.C. These cultures are renowned for their characteristic monumental architecture and art. Two typical features of these are basalt orthostats carved in the shape of lions, which were incorporated against the jambs of monumental entrances, and statues of gods and kings carved in the round which were installed outside or inside monumental buildings.

Most of the monumental structures containing these gate-lions and statues were burned and razed to the ground by a conquering enemy. The gate-lions and statues (and also other monuments and reliefs) were then broken to pieces, carried away by the enemy, taken to be reused in other structures, or left buried under the ruins. Sometimes monuments were left in their original place and position where they remained for a long period. However, in five cases of monuments discovered in Alalakh, Hazor, Zincirli, and Arslantepe near Malatya, a different procedure may be observed. Following the destruction by an enemy, gate-lions and statues were intentionally buried in the ground with much care. These burials seem to point to the existence of a Syro-Hittite ritual-custom of burying monuments. This assumed ritual burial forms the subject of this paper and we shall now proceed to discuss it in detail.

In Alalakh Sir Leonard Woolley unearthed several successive temples, among them the Level IB temple¹ which was in use during the later part of the thirteenth century B.C. The temple was destroyed and burned, probably by the invading Sea Peoples, at the beginning of the twelfth century B.C., and this destruction marks the end of Alalakh and the temple. Remains of a later short occupation ("Level O"), dated to the middle of the twelfth century B.C., were found in the excavation, and Woolley observed that, above the Level IB temple ruins, "foundations of heavy stones were laid for a reconstruction which perhaps was never carried to a finish."²

In a room in the annexe of the Level IB temple the statue of Idri-mi, king of Alalakh, was placed and probably fixed on a basalt throne. What happened to the statue when the temple was destroyed, and the circumstances of its discovery are vividly described by Sir Leonard as follows:³

In a room in the annexe of the temple proper . . . we found a hole which had been dug into the floor and filled with earth and large stones (the largest weighing nearly a ton and a half) and smoothed over; under the stones there was a broken statue; the head, which had been knocked off, was set beside the body together with two smaller fragments, one of the beard, the other of a foot; only part of one foot was missing [Cf. our Fig. 1]. The statue belonged

¹ L. Woolley, *Alalakh, An Account of the Excavations of Tell Atchana in the Hatay 1937-1949* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 85-89.

² *Idem*, *A Forgotten Kingdom*, "Pelican Book," No. A261 (London, 1953), pp. 170-71.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 122; see also Woolley, *Alalakh*, pp. 89, 240, and L. Woolley *apud* S. Smith, *The Statue of Idri-mi* (London, 1949), p. 2.

to the throne found on the temple floor. . . . We can be sure that the statue was on its throne when the temple was destroyed because the breaking of the feet must have resulted from its being knocked violently off its base into which the feet were socketted. . . . After the sack of the temple someone must have crept back and piously collected all that he could find of the figure and hidden it in a hastily-dug hole

The above description speaks for itself, and it is obvious that after the destruction of the temple the mutilated statue of Idri-mi was deliberately and carefully buried in the ground.

In Hazor, Y. Yadin and his colleagues unearthed four successive temples dating to the Middle and Late Bronze Ages,⁴ which bear striking architectural resemblance to the temples of Alalakh,⁵ one of which was discussed above. Temple Ib in Hazor, dated to the fourteenth century B.C., was a magnificent and richly equipped structure; following its destruction temple Ia was built. The latter, "the last in Canaanite Hazor—was in fact a reconstruction of the earlier temple and reused the main part of its walls."⁶ The walls of the outer hall of temple Ib were decorated with a dado of basalt orthostats, and two lions carved on basalt orthostats were incorporated in the main entrance to the edifice. Only one of these lions was recovered in the excavation, and Yadin described its discovery as follows:⁷

One of the most interesting experiences of the season occurred during the excavations of the south-west corner of the porch, where part of the southern wall was missing. In trying to trace its foundations, we found under a heap of stones the basalt head of a lion, nearly life-size. When the stones were removed a basalt orthostat, 1.7 m. long, was revealed, one side bearing the relief of a crouching lion with its fully sculptured head fashioned from the front of the stone [Cf. our Fig. 2]. . . the lion orthostat was part of the entrance jamb. . . . Its location was a mystery which remained unsolved until we had cleared the whole area. It then became clear that the lion had in fact been thrown into a pit, deliberately cut through the two cobbled floors of the courts of the two earlier temples and then covered with a heap of stones.

Here, then, is a second case of the burial of a monument following the destruction of the building where it was placed.

In Zincirli, capital of the kingdom of Sam'al during the first quarter of the first millennium B.C., the German expedition unearthed the acropolis of the town and its fortifications. In the area between the Outer Gate of the acropolis ("Aeußeres Burgthor") and the Inner Gate ("Inneres Burgthor"), and about 12–18 m. from the latter, the excavators found five gigantic basalt gate-lions.⁸ As these lions originally flanked monumental entrances and were thus placed in pairs, the recovery of five lions point to the existence of a sixth one which was not discovered. The lions are carved in two different artistic styles and their original position can only be surmised. R. Koldewey reconstructed all of them in the Inner Gate of the acropolis,⁹ situated near by, but it is difficult to accept his suggestion that six huge gate-lions, carved in two different styles, were incorporated

⁴ Y. Yadin, *IEJ*, 8 (1958), 11–14; *IEJ*, 9 (1959), 81–84.

⁵ *Idem*, *IEJ*, 8 (1958), 14.

⁶ *Idem*, *IEJ*, 9 (1959), 81. See also n. 23 below.

⁷ *Idem*, *IEJ*, 9 (1959), 82–83. See also Y. Yadin

et al., *Hazor*, Vol. III–IV (Jerusalem, 1961), pls. CXI, no. 1, CXVIII–CXX.

⁸ Königliche Museen zu Berlin, *Mittheilungen aus den orientalischen Sammlungen*, Hefte XI–XV (Berlin, 1893–1943): *Ausgrabungen in Sendschirli I–V*. Cf. Vol. II, pp. 128–30, Vol. III, pp. 230–36.

⁹ *Sendschirli II*, fig. 37 on p. 130.

in a single gate-house.¹⁰ It seems that all the lions were transferred to the spot where they were found when the structures in which they were incorporated were destroyed. As two of these lions, owing to stylistic criteria, have to be dated to the eighth century B.C., all lions were probably transferred following the destruction of the acropolis and its palaces, which occurred at the end of the eighth or the beginning of the seventh century B.C.¹¹

The gate-lions were buried in a pit specially dug for the purpose at the spot to which they were transferred. Their burial is described by R. Koldewey as follows:¹²

The position of the lions, as they were found during the excavation, is very strange. They did not lie on the level ground, but in a depression in front of the gate . . . dug in the usual clay soil mixed with pebbles which formed the entire mound [Cf. our Fig. 3]. In the level above it and directly over the lions extended a layer of burned reeds, and the earth adjacent to this layer was reddish in colour. Therefore, a large fire of reeds had been lit directly over the lions which lay in a quite irregular fashion in the depression. This whole discovery points to the view that the lions were dragged to the depression in front of the gate while it was being demolished, the depression perhaps being further deepened to form a pit. Here their "terrible splendour" practically, and indeed symbolically, was destroyed by burning a funeral pyre of reeds over them. They were thus ceremoniously buried. . . . Therefore, during the demolition of the gate, doubtless to be attributed to a destructive conqueror, our gate-lions were treated with special respect and sent to the next world with tender care, as a result of a superstitious fear, this being quite an understandable situation in an idolatrous age.

Summing up, we see here a clear case of the ritual burial of monuments. Five gigantic lions were dragged to one spot, and, when taking their size and weight into consideration, we can only wonder at the enormous effort invested in their transfer. Here all were buried in a pit, probably in connection with certain religious rites whose performance included the burning of fires.

We now turn to Arslantepe near Malatya, the site of ancient Milid, where L. Delaporte excavated the "Lions' Gate." This is a monumental gate-house, decorated with lions and reliefs, which received its final form during the first quarter of the first millennium B.C.¹³ The gate-house contained an inner chamber in which a royal statue was placed.¹⁴ The statue was fixed on a stone pedestal which faced the gate-passage, with its back against the wall of the gate-chamber, and blocked a side entrance which was built in this wall. The majestically carved statue portrays a robed royal figure larger than life size. B. Landsberger and H. G. Güterbock are probably right in ascribing¹⁵ the erection of the statue to Muttallu, the last king of Kummuh. That king conquered and ruled Milid between 712 and 708 B.C., and the erection of his royal statue at the gate of Milid marked his conquest of the town. In 708 B.C. Muttallu revolted against Assyria and was dethroned by Sargon. It was probably then that Muttallu's statue was knocked off its base.¹⁶ The statue fell forward, its front striking the ground, and as a result the hands, nose, lips, and beard were partially broken.

¹⁰ On this problem see also my article "Der alte Bau in Zincirli," *BASOR*, No. 189 (1968), pp. 50-53.

¹¹ Cf. *Ausgrabungen in Sindschirli IV*, p. 240; B. Landsberger, *Sam'al: Studien zur Entdeckung der Ruinenstätte Karatepe* (Ankara, 1948), pp. 79 ff.

¹² *Sindschirli II*, p. 130. The passage quoted here is a translation from the German text.

¹³ Cf. L. Delaporte, *Malatya, Arslantepe*, Fasc. I: *La Porte des lions* (Paris, 1940).

¹⁴ On this statue cf. *ibid.*, pp. 35-38.

¹⁵ Landsberger, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-79; H. G. Güterbock, *BASOR*, 162 (1961), 49-50.

¹⁶ Cf. Landsberger, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-79 and n. 203.

When L. Delaporte excavated the "Lions' Gate" he found that, following its collapse, a "tomb" had been constructed around the statue (Cf. Fig. 4).¹⁷ The statue was now lying on its back with its face upwards beside the spot where it fell, and it is obvious that it had been turned over once. Almost certainly this was done deliberately, indicating the wish to treat the statue with respect and bury it facing upwards, as in the case of human burials. A low clumsy wall, constructed mainly of squarely shaped stones, had been built around the statue, covering it and in this way creating a tomb above ground-level.

Another case of a ritual burial, similar to that in Malatya, was recorded in Zincirli. A statue, erected on a double lion-base, was placed against the outer wall of Kilamuwa's palace J.¹⁸ The statue portrays a god or, as suggested by H. Frankfort and W. Orthmann,¹⁹ a royal figure. It was knocked off its base, almost certainly when palace J was burned and razed to the ground. The statue fell forward with its front striking the ground, and as a result its face, hands, and scepter were damaged. The statue was then rolled aside to a distance of about a meter from the side of the lion-base. As in the case of the Malatya statue, it was left lying on its back and then buried. This ritual burial is briefly described by F. von Luschan and G. Jacoby.²⁰ They found the statue lying in "dark soil" and surrounded by a row of large stones which formed the tomb.

Concluding the discussion on the available factual data it may be said that a ritual burial of monuments was practiced in the Syro-Hittite world for over half a millennium. We admit that this ritual burial was practiced only in a few cases, and no satisfactory explanation can be given at present why other monuments of that kind, which were desecrated by a conquering enemy in similar circumstances, were not buried as well. On the other hand, the effort invested in the burial of the monuments discussed above, and the repetition of similar phenomena in four places, rules out the possibility that the parallelism in all cases is accidental. Therefore the existence of analogous ritual burials of two categories, gate-lions and statues, seems to be established. In both the cases in the first category, the gate-lions were dragged a certain distance to their burial-pit and in both cases one gate-lion, known to have existed as a pair to a buried one, is inexplicably missing. On the other hand, no fire had been lit in the burial-pit in Hazor, as had been done in Zincirli. In the three cases of the second category, the statues were buried on the spot, near the place where they had originally been installed. Furthermore, the two upright statues were placed on their back when buried, and in all three cases the base of the statue (Idri-mi's throne, Zincirli's lion-base, and Muttallu's pedestal) was discarded and not buried.

The ritual burial of gate-lions and royal statues points to their importance in the cult and beliefs of the Syro-Hittite world. The ritual burial seems to support the view that the gate-lions were not merely decorated orthostats meant to strengthen the superstructure of the gates in which they were incorporated, but, as guardians of the gate were considered to possess godly, demonical, or punitive powers. In the case of the royal statues it is known that in the Syro-Hittite world royal images were portrayed as gods²¹

¹⁷ For other photographs of the statue's entombment see Delaporte, *Malatya*, pls. XIV, XXVI-XXVIII.

¹⁸ On this statue cf. *Sendschirli IV*, pp. 288-89, 362-69, figs. 194, 261-68, pl. LXIV.

¹⁹ H. Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the*

Ancient Orient (London, 1954), p. 180; W. Orthmann in *Vorderasiatische Archäologie, Studien und Aufsätze Anton Moortgat* (Berlin, 1964), pp. 221-29.

²⁰ *Sendschirli IV*, pp. 289, 363; also cf. pl. II.

²¹ Cf. Orthmann, *op. cit.*

and were probably considered as such. The statue of Idri-mi, who probably reigned before the fourteenth century B.C., was kept at least for two centuries in a room of the temple, a fact indicating its cultic importance.

A final problem which remains to be discussed is the question of who cared for the eternal peace of the monuments and buried them. Several suggestions were made by the excavators. Woolley believes that Idri-mi's statue, "prized for its own sake" was treasured in Alalakh as "the oldest surviving monument of the local school of art" and that is why "a man risked his life to salve it" by burying it in the hope of coming to recover it later.²² Yadin raises the possibility that in Alalakh and Hazor the monuments might have been buried by the people who later rebuilt the temples when they found no further use for them in the reconstructed edifice.²³ Koldewey and Yadin²⁴ suggest that the burials were performed by the conquerors wishing to destroy the magic powers of the monuments. Von Luschan raises the possibility²⁵ that the statue from Zincirli was carefully hidden by the local inhabitants to prevent its destruction by the approaching enemy.

We venture to suggest here a different interpretation of the ritual burial which, as we believe, fits all the cases in question. It seems to us that the ritual burials should be attributed to the conquered people, the local priests and believers, they being the only ones to whom the monuments meant so much. One can imagine how the remnants of the local population and priesthood who survived the general destruction returned to the ruins of their public buildings to salvage what was left and also to pay homage to their sacred monuments which had been abused by the conquerors. These are obviously the people who would have troubled to perform the burials, and it seems that their deeds of burying "dead" monuments were motivated by reasoning and belief similar to that which motivates the burial of human beings. This last conclusion is supported by the fact, briefly discussed above, that the statues from Zincirli and Arslantepe were turned on their backs before being entombed in imitation of human burials. Furthermore, the lighting of a fire in the ritual burial of the gate-lions in Zincirli may possibly have been motivated by the practice of cremation, so often performed in Hittite burials of that period.²⁶

²² Woolley, *A Forgotten Kingdom*, pp. 122-23.

²³ Yadin, *IEJ*, 9 (1959), 83. Yadin's suggestion is partly based on the interpretation of the archeological data recovered in the excavation. Yadin believes that the outer hall of temple Ib was not reconstructed in the later temple Ia. This means that the gate-lion, which was almost certainly incorporated in the entrance to the outer hall of temple Ib, could not have been reconstructed in its original position when the edifice was rebuilt (oral information kindly supplied by Prof. Y. Yadin).

²⁴ Koldewey, *Sendschirli II*, p. 130; Yadin, *IEJ*, 9 (1959), 83.

²⁵ *Sendschirli IV*, p. 363.

²⁶ It is difficult to judge at present whether the Syro-Hittite ritual burial of monuments can be connected to other traditions of that kind in the ancient Near East. Cf. the burial of the statues in Abu Temple at Tell Asmar (H. Frankfort, *Sculpture of the Third Millennium B.C. from Tell Asmar and Khafājah*, "OIP," XLIV [1939], 3-4), and the bronze statue of the horned god from Enkomi (P. Dikaios, *Archäologischer Anzeiger* [1962], cols. 1-40. I owe this reference to Dr. T. Dothan).

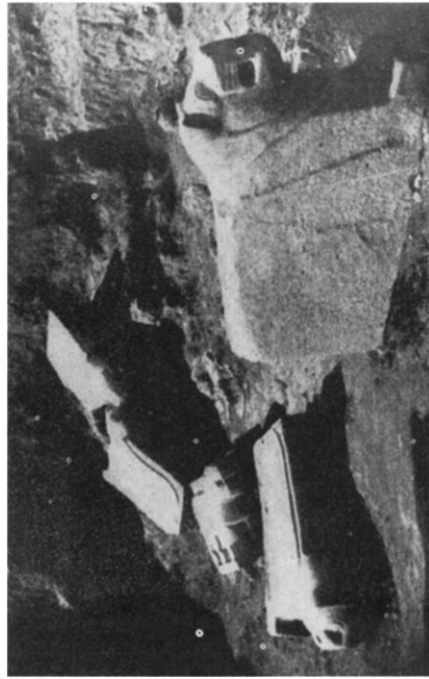


FIG. 1.—Idri-mi's statue from Alalakh as found in its burial-pit (after Woolley, *Alalakh*, pl. XII)

FIG. 2.—The gate-lion from Hazor as found in its burial-pit (after Yadin *et al.*, *Hazor*, III-IV., pl. CXIX/2)

FIG. 3.—The gate-lions from Zincirli as found in their burial-pit; one lion was placed upright by the excavators (after *Sendšchiriš III*, fig. 137)

FIG. 4.—Mutta'llu's statue from Arslantepe as found in its "tomb." (On the left corner the statue's pedestal can be seen; behind it and the "tomb" the walls of the gate-house are visible.) (After Dela-porte, *Malatya*, pl. XXVII/2)