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PHRYGIAN ROCK-CUT STEP MONUMENTS: AN INTERPRETATION

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INTRODUCTION¹

The kind of Phrygian rock-cut monument which is characterized by having a series of steps is usually referred to as a step altar or a step throne connected with the Phrygian Mother goddess Matar or Kybele,² *i.e.* these monuments are referred to as if we know their exact function in cult. This, however, is not the case; we know neither their function nor with which deity or deities they were associated. Because of their uncertain function I here prefer to use the more non-specific term, step-monument.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the role of the rock-cut step monuments in cult and to discuss which deity or deities they may have been connected with. In order to this, I will begin by examining the features and structures of the step monuments.

FEATURES AND STRUCTURE OF THE STEP MONUMENTS

There are more than 50 known Phrygian step monuments, with the majority in the Phrygian Highlands (the area between Afyon and Eskişehir), but there are also examples known from central Phrygia (Tekören, Dümrek) and the Eastern Phrygian periphery, east of Halys.³ In general the step monuments are very difficult to date, but

¹ I wish to thank Professor Charlotte Scheffer and Dr. Geoffrey Summers for their valuable comments of this paper.

² For earlier studies of step monuments, see Ramsay 1889, pp. 167–174; Akurgal 1955, pp. 96–98; Haspels 1971, esp. pp. 93–97; Mellink 1981; Naumann 1983, pp. 92–100; de Francovich 1990, esp. pp. 49–72; Vassileva 1995; Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, esp. pp. 187–191; Tüfekçi Sivas 2002; Roller 1999, pp. 79, 96; Vikela 2002, pp. 75–79; Berndt 2002, esp. pp. 34, 39–43, 50, 62 and Berndt-Ersöz 2006. For a summary of earlier interpretations of step monuments see Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 172–173 with notes 231–232.

³ There are today *c.* 50 step monuments known from published material. For a detailed description of these, see Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 240–270, nos. 42–48, 50–54, 56–61, 64, 67–70, 73–80, 84–85, 88–93, 95–96, 98–108, and 111–112. In addition to these, there are also several unpublished step monuments, see Berndt-Ersöz 2006, p. xx, note 4, cat. nos. 43, 46, 47, 57, 75, 76, 101 under the heading Topography; Tamsü 2004, cat. nos. 21–23, 34–38, 43, 48, 50, 55–60, 65–68, 70–82.

it is plausible that some date to the Early Phrygian period,⁴ *i.e.* the period before the destruction at Gordion,⁵ while others definitely date to the Middle Phrygian period, *i.e.* between 800 and 550 BC. But even later dates in the Late Phrygian period, *ca.* 550–330 BC, cannot be excluded.

The main characteristics of a step monument are of course the steps, usually varying in number from one to six.⁶ Above the steps there are different kind of rock-cut features, such as a semicircular disc (Fig. 1a) or a kind of rock-cut seat (Figs 1b; 2a) and we can divide the step monuments into groups according to these features; basically two main groups can be discerned, one group with a semicircular disc and one group without.

Let us begin by examining the location of the step monuments; the ones with a semicircular disc are usually situated on top of rock outcrops or close to their summits.⁷ Some are rather inaccessible,⁸ while those without a semicircular disc are always situated at ground level and are easily accessible.⁹

The number of steps appears not to be of much importance, but we can note that the preferred number of steps is four.¹⁰ The group with a semicircular disc have certain features in common; in general the steps are too small to have functioned as steps for climbing since in some cases, for example, the depth of the tread is not more than a few centimetres. The top step is usually differentiated from the ones below, either by having a greater depth or a smaller height. Occasionally at each short end there is also a rock-cut feature that resembles an elbow-rest (Fig. 2b). The group lacking a semicircular disc have, in contrast, steps with a greater depth, usually between 30 and 40 cm, *i.e.* big enough to have been used for climbing, with no differentiation between the top step and those below. All examples in this group lack the rock-cut features resembling an elbow-rest. A few step monuments have more than one flight of stairs, either parallel or set at an angle (Figs 1b; 3a).¹¹

⁴ For a discussion of the dating of step monuments see Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 132–137, 141, 208, where I have suggested that at least certain step-monuments at Dümrek are Early Phrygian.

⁵ The destruction at Gordion has based on carbon 14 examinations been dated to *c.* 800 BC. (DeVries *et al.* 2003). *Cf.* Muscarella 2003; Keenan 2004. See also DeVries and Voigt in this volume (Eds).

⁶ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 41–42.

⁷ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, p. 15. For examples of step monuments of this type, see Haspels 1971, figs. 230–231; Berndt 2002, figs. 51, 66–67, 110; Berndt-Ersöz 2006, figs. 61–63, 68, 72, 83, 89, 92–93, 95, 127–128, 133.

⁸ For examples of inaccessible ones, see Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 15, 242, 261, nos. 47, 93; Haspels 1971, 95, fig. 504.10; Berndt 2002, 34, no. 45.

⁹ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, p. 15, nos. 56, 67, 68, 69, 77, 85; Haspels 1971, figs. 19, 29, 30; Berndt 2002, figs. 37, 68, 91.

¹⁰ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, p. 41, table 10.

¹¹ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 42–45.

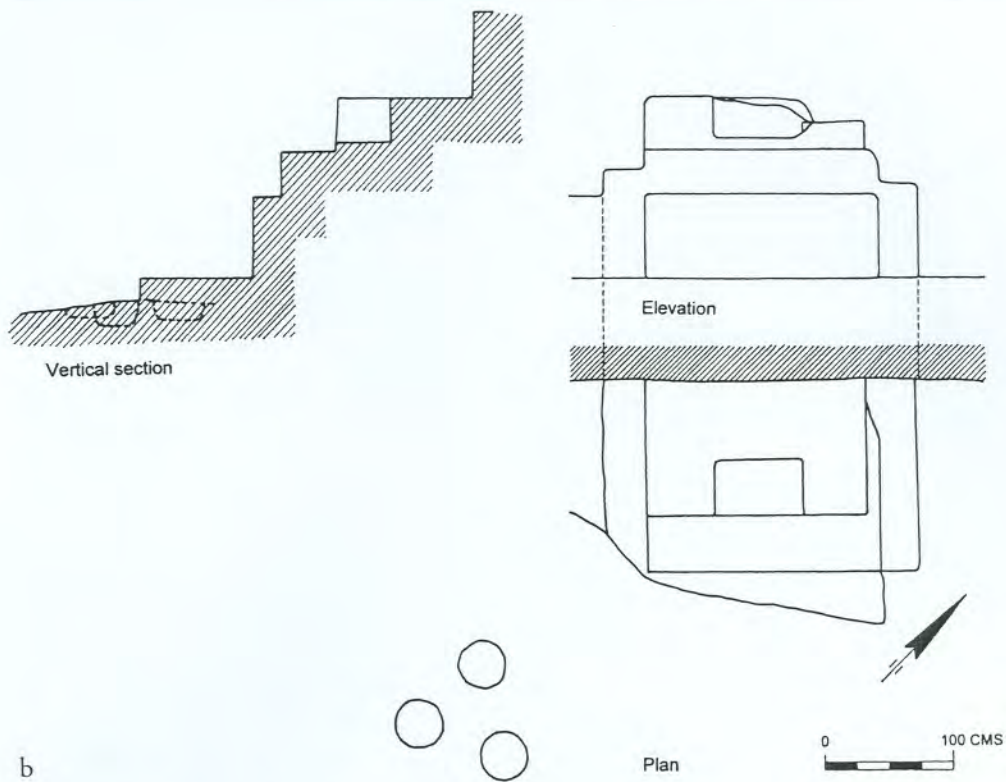


Fig. 1: a Step monument at Midas City with a semicircular disc at top. (Photograph S. Berndt-Ersöz); b Step monument at Midas City with a rectangular seat at top. Below the steps three cup-marks (after Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pl. 132b; Haspels 1971, fig. 529.1).

In a few cases the front face of the semicircular disc carries the image of a double-idol carved in relief (Fig. 3a). The semicircular discs have certain features in common, such as being of considerable depth, and often having a rounded back.¹² Eight of the step monuments have a smaller disc adjoined to each side of the central one (Figs 2b; 3b), always of the same depth as the main disc, usually in the shape of a quarter of a circle, but in one case the form is more like a complete circle.¹³ These features also described as bolsters are, with one exception,¹⁴ always joined to the main disc. At two step monuments animals on each side flank the semicircular disc; the first one is the step monument at Karahisar, close to Alaca Höyük, where the animals plausibly are lions. Although the animals of the second step monument, situated in the Köhnüş valley, are too eroded for the species to be definitely determined (Fig. 4a),¹⁵ the preserved remains suggest that the standing figures had claws, like birds, implying that the creatures might have been birds or creatures with the body of a bird.¹⁶ The preserved body shape also supports such an interpretation because it is almond-shaped seen from above (Fig. 4a).

Certain rock-cut features are frequently associated with the step monuments, such as benches or podiums, platforms, cup-marks, basins, bosses, *i.e.* protruding circular objects (Fig. 4b), and small insignificant niches.¹⁷ Some of these features only occur with particular types of step monuments, such as rock-cut benches that are only found together with the more monumental step monuments (Fig. 3a). A limited platform can usually be found behind the type of step monument with a cut rectangular area at the top. Other features, such as cup-marks, bosses and small niches, are associated with all types of step monuments; these features are, however, more frequently connected with the step monuments lacking a semicircular disc. It is worth noting that the bosses are always situated in triangular groups of three, which are located besides the steps so as not to impede access (Figs 2a; 4b).

INTERPRETATION OF THE FUNCTION

What kind of interpretation can we then make based on the features given above? Let us first consider the group with a semicircular disc. The size of the steps in front of a disc is usually not large enough to allow people to climb up to the disc. Rather,

¹² Berndt-Ersöz 2006, p. 46.

¹³ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 244–246, 254, 256, 262, 264, 266, figs. 59, 90a.c, 92, nos. 53, 54, 57, 75, 79, 96, 101, 106; Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pls. 142, 144b, 146; Brixhe and Tüfekçi Sivas 2003, pls. 2, 3b; Haspels 1971, fig. 528.1.

¹⁴ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, p. 245, no. 54, fig. 59; Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pp. 169–170, pl. 146 (here Fig. 3b).

¹⁵ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 54, 246, 266–267, nos. 58, 108, figs. 68, 95; Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pls. 147–150; de Francovich 1990, figs. 81, 376; Temizer 1949, pl. 77; Prayon 1987, pl. 5d.

¹⁶ Apart from predatory birds, both sirens and birds with male heads are known from Phrygian contexts. There are *e.g.* two bronze cauldrons from Tumulus MM at Gordion with such figures attached (Young *et al.* 1981, pp. 104–110, pls. 51–57).

¹⁷ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 59–65.

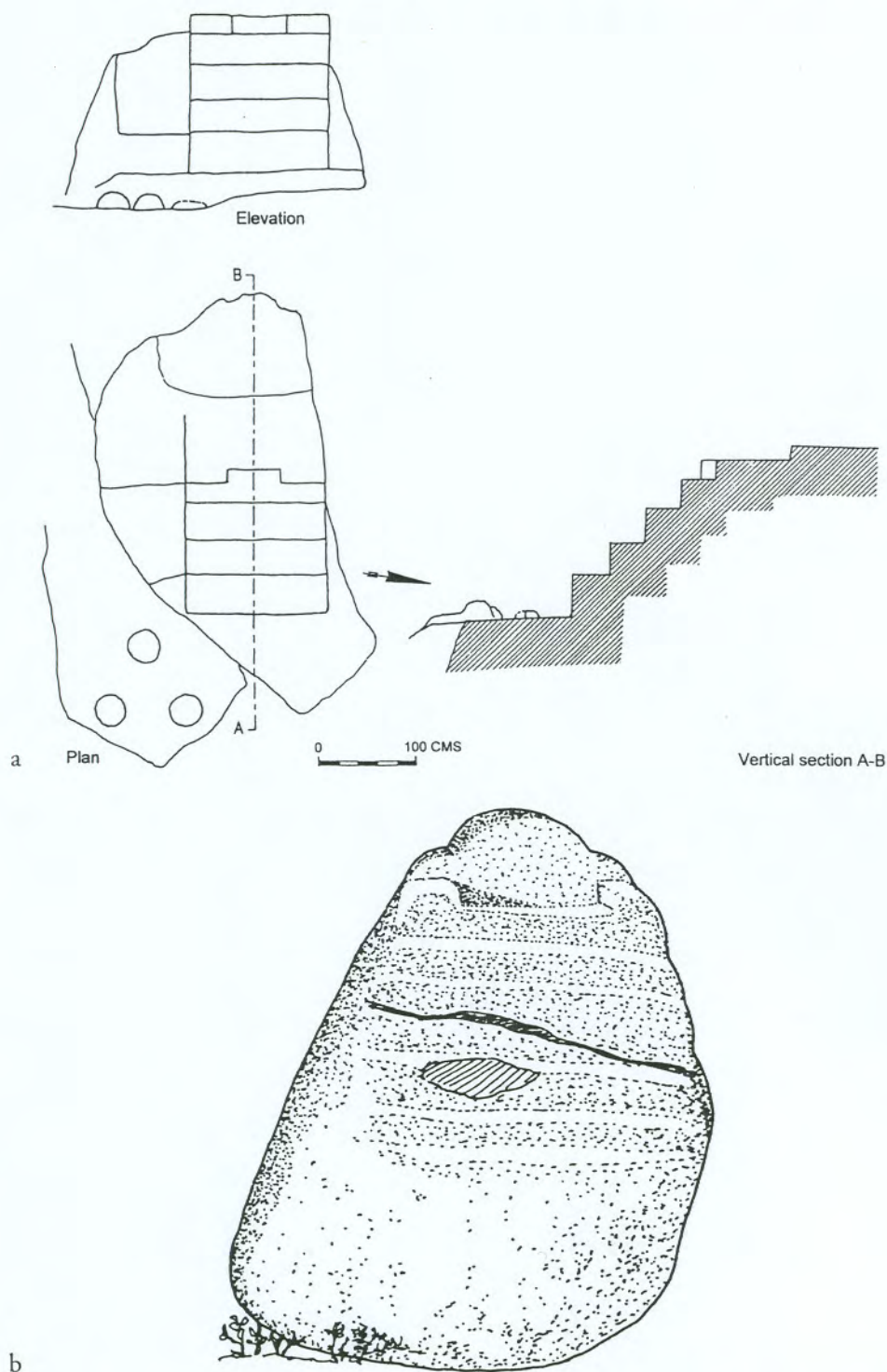


Fig. 2: a. Step monument at Midas City with a rectangular seat at top. Below the steps three bosses (after Ramsay 1889, fig. 20 and Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pl. 131b); b. Step monument at Dümrek, north of Gordion. Above the steps is a semicircular disc flanked by a quarter disc on each side. The uppermost step has an each side an 'elbow-rest'. Height of rock c. 2.2 m (drawing and measurement based on published material).

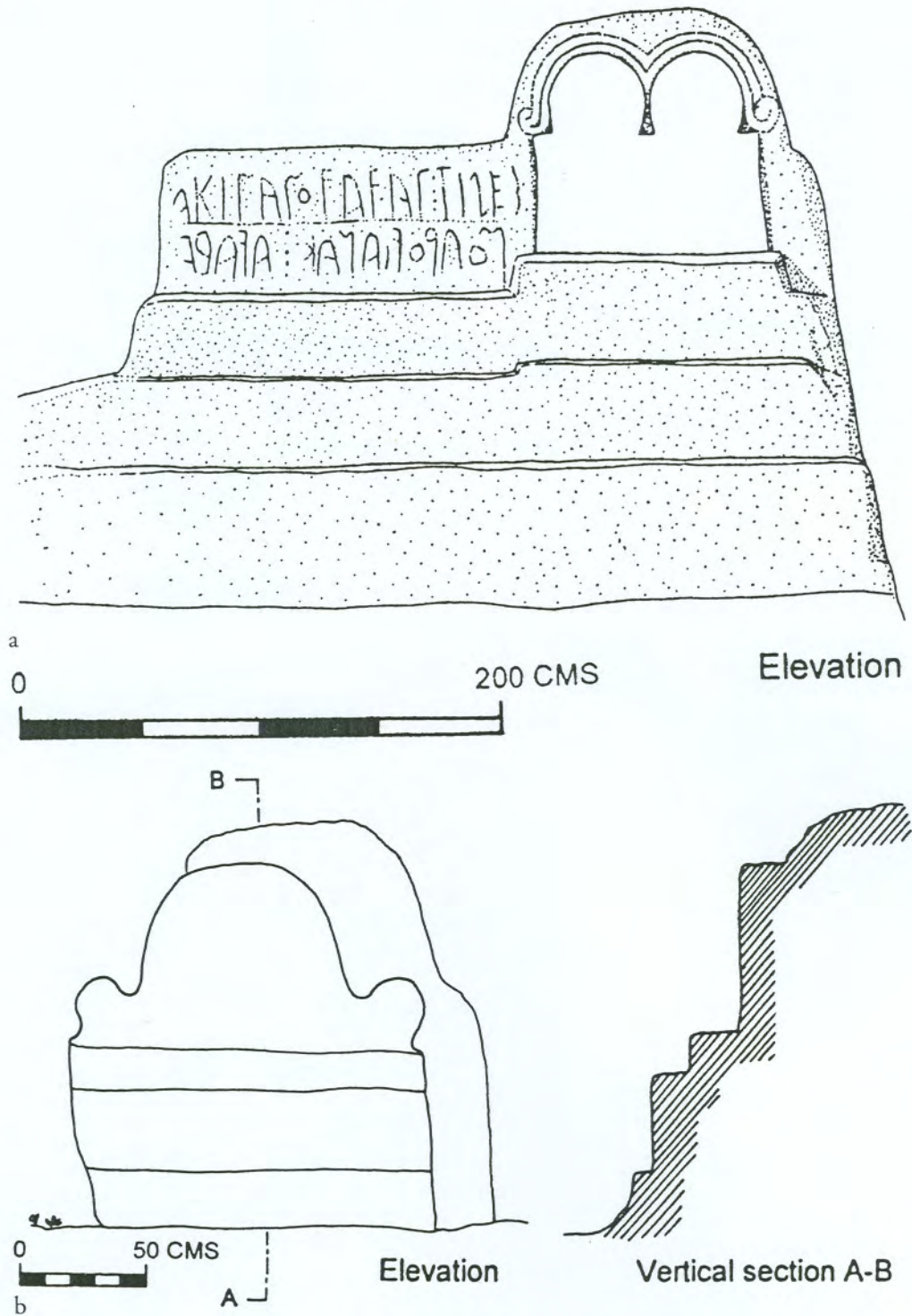


Fig. 3: a. Step monument at Midas City (drawing after published material, see Ramsay 1889, fig. 23; Brixhe and Lejeune 1983, p. 22); b. Step monument in the Köhnüş Valley. At top a semicircular disc flanked by smaller discs (after Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pl. 146b).

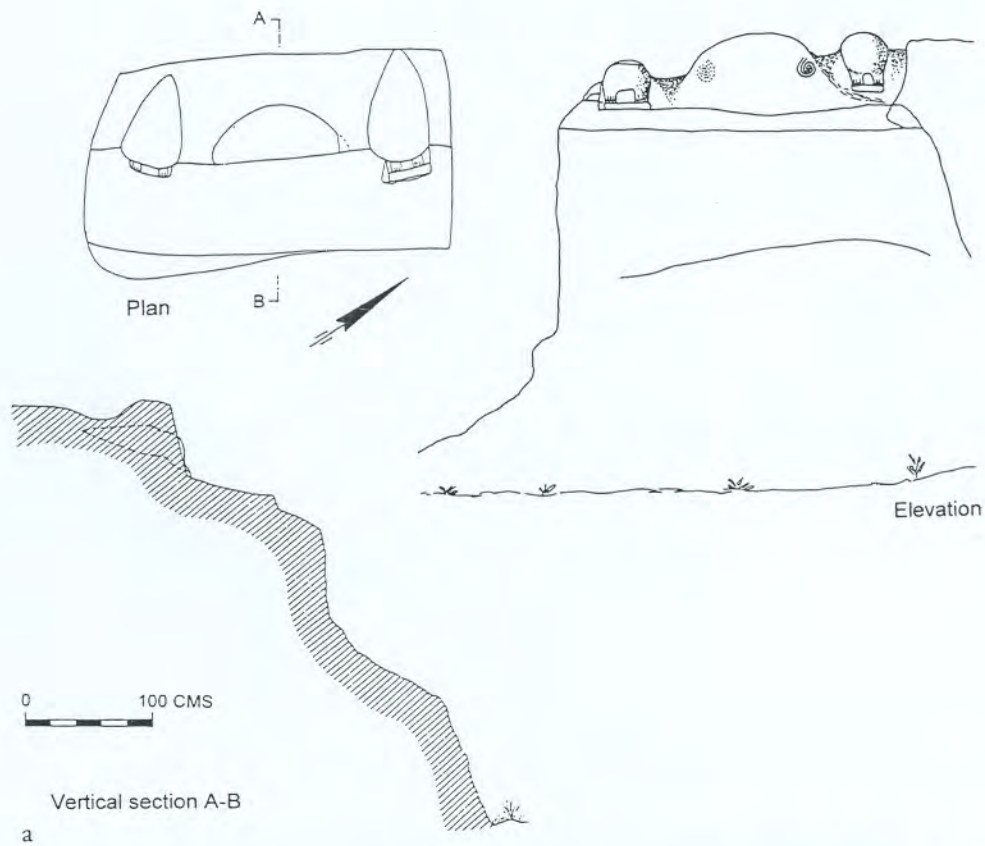


Fig. 4: a. Step monument in the Köhnüş Valley (after Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pls. 149-150);
b. Three bosses situated below a step monument at Midas City (Photograph S. Berndt-Ersöz).

the steps appear to emphasize the elevated position of the monument, generally situated on top of a rock and not at ground level. The uppermost step probably had a specific function because it differs from those below both in having a greater depth and in the fact that it is sometimes flanked by elbow-rests or sculptured animals/creatures. These are features suggestive of a throne and we may therefore suggest that the upper step be interpreted as such. The main step monument at Midas City (Fig. 3a) further supports such an interpretation since the steps at the right part below the semicircular disc are elevated so that they are higher than their counterparts below the bench on the left. A double-idol is also situated above the elevated steps, a further indication of the importance of these steps. To conclude, it is suggested that, although they are not made as true imitations since the backrest is made as a thick semicircular disc, the step monuments with a semicircular disc can be interpreted as elevated thrones.

Let us now consider the semicircular disc itself, which has been compared with idols and has also been referred to as an idol itself.¹⁸ It has, however, not been explained why it should be regarded as an idol, since a semicircular disc can hardly be described as an idol. An idol has a clearly distinguished circular head attached to a trunk, features that the semicircular disc lacks; these facts cannot be left out of account when describing them as idols.

When a step monument has a kind of backrest, it is always made in the shape of a semicircular disc and appears to be the monument's most important feature. We may therefore suggest that this shape symbolized something, and could therefore take no other form. The semicircular discs have some common characteristics. The upper part of the semicircle protrudes and is free-standing, and often the disc has a considerable depth. The semicircular disc is in most cases situated at some distance above the uppermost step; this is especially notable if the protruding, free-standing part of the disc is of a low height.¹⁹ There are several parallels in appearance between a semicircular disc and a stele. A stele has a rounded or semicircular-shaped top, a considerable depth and sometimes a rounded back. The same is true for most of the step monuments with a semicircular-shaped top; they are, however, not made as a complete stele but rather with what appears to be the upper rounded part of a stele. Several of the semicircular discs carry on their front the relief of a double-idol (Fig. 3a),²⁰ similar to the relief of a double-idol on the stele from Sincan outside Ankara.²¹ There are also

¹⁸ Mellink 1981, p. 98; Naumann 1983, p. 96; Rein 1993, p. 33; Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pp. 189–191; Vikela 2002, p. 76; Berndt 2002, pp. 27, 31, 34.

¹⁹ See for example, Berndt 2002, fig. 67; Berndt-Ersöz 2006, figs. 68, 72, 83, 135; Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pl. 153b.

²⁰ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 251–252, 261–263, nos. 70, 95, 98, figs. 80, 90, 136; Haspels 1971, figs. 28, 31, 528.1; Berndt 2002, figs. 52, 62.

²¹ Metin and Akalın 2001. Another double-idol relief is known from Faharet Çeşme outside Ankara, but whether this stone relief was originally part of a stele cannot be determined today as the relief is incorporated into a fountain (Prayon 1987, pl. 15c).

two known examples of stelae with a single idol carved in relief on the front from the Eastern Phrygian periphery; the first is a mini-stele from Boğazköy, the second is a newly found stele *in situ* inside the city gate chamber at Kerkenes Dağ.²² Thus, we can suggest that the concept of a stele carrying either a double-idol or a single idol was widely spread throughout Phrygia, and the stele-shape itself was intimately connected with the image of an idol. Since there are no known examples of a semicircular disc carrying the relief of a single idol, we may suggest as a working hypothesis that the semicircular disc itself was enough to indicate the presence of a god. If we accept that the semicircular disc symbolised a deity or a single idol, then it follows that when a double-idol was intended, it was necessary to make an image. This would explain why only double-idols occur in relief on the front of a semicircular disc. In this context we should also note that we have a couple of cases where a single idol has actually been made above a rock-cut step, but not as a relief on a semicircular-shaped disc.²³ We will now take this hypothesis, *i.e.* that the semicircular disc was proof of divine presence, one step further by trying to more closely determine the role of the semicircular disc.

In order to this we will begin by considering the previously mentioned type of semicircular disc, which has an adjoining smaller quarter of a disc on each side (Figs 2b; 3b). These smaller discs appear to be parts of the central disc in that they are always joined to it and have the same depth.²⁴ A similar concept appears on four idols, two of them from Gordion, of which one was found in Tumulus B and the other in a secondary context from Building X.²⁵ The third idol is carved in very deep relief cut into an outcrop of rock at Kes Kaya in the Highlands (Fig. 5a).²⁶ All three of these idols have on each side of the head a small three-quarter disc, seen from front. The discs are, however, not attached to the head but are situated in the position of shoulders, so that those on the Kes Kaya idol are usually interpreted as shoulders or small raised arms.²⁷ Viewed from the sides these "discs" have the same depth as the head, and can best be described as bolsters. The fourth idol is the newly found stele at Kerkenes Dağ, which has similar bolsters on each side of the head.²⁸ The

²² Boehmer 1972, p. 209, no. 2144A, pl. 78; Summers *et al.* 2003, p. 13, figs. 16–17.

²³ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 240–242, 258, 261, nos. 84, 93 and possibly nos. 42, 46, figs. 61, 62, 87; Berndt 2002, figs. 42, 44; Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pls. 118, 156. One idol has below the trunk what should rather be described as a shelf than a step, see Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 248–249, no. 65, fig. 67; Haspels 1971, figs. 25–26.

²⁴ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 244–246, 254, 256, 262, 264, 266, nos. 53, 54, 57, 75, 79, 96, 101, 106, figs. 59, 75, 90a.c, 92; Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pls. 142, 144b, 146; Brixhe and Tüfekçi Sivas 2003, pls. 2, 3b; Haspels 1971, fig. 528.1.

²⁵ Kohler 1995, pp. 20–21, no. TumB 17, pl. 11, A, B; DeVries 1990, p. 398, fig. 36.

²⁶ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, p. 243, no. 49, fig. 65; Haspels 1971, p. 98, fig. 243; Naumann 1983, p. 97, pl. 10c.

²⁷ Haspels 1971, p. 98; Naumann 1983, p. 97; Prayon 1987, 208, no. 54.

²⁸ Personal communication with Dr. Geoffrey Summers. I want to thank him for generously sharing the results of the excavation of 2004. Part of a bolster/disc can be seen on the photograph of the stele in the preliminary report of 2004 season, see fig. 40 in the internet report <http://www.metu.edu.tr/home/>



Fig. 5: a. Rock-cut idol at Kes Kaya (Photograph S. Berndt-Ersöz); b. Three idols reconstructed with curled hair. Idol at left from Tumulus B, Gordion, idol in centre from Building X, Gordion and idol at right from Kes Kaya. They are not drawn in the same scale. Height of left idol 34 cm; height of centre idol 22.5 cm; height of right idol 43 cm. The drawings are based on published photographs (Kohler 1995, p. 20, pl. 11, A,B; DeVries 1990, fig. 36; Haspels 1971, p. 98, n. 136, fig. 243). I am grateful to the late Dr. Keith DeVries who kindly provided me with the measurement of the Gordion idol from Building X.

main difference is their position that clearly precludes any possibility that they were intended to represent shoulders. These bolsters are not as deep as the trunk and the head, since the front end of the bolsters are recessed further than the head and the trunk. We can further note that the bolsters are the only part of the entire Kerkenes stele that are finished at the back of the stele. Hence, the bolsters are not integrated parts of the torso as shoulders should be. There can be little doubt that the circular discs/bolsters of these four idols are intended to represent the same thing. What kind of interpretation can we then make of the small discs/bolsters flanking the head? The Kerkenes idol help us considerably by excluding the hitherto assumption that they are representations of shoulders or small arms, and we have to look for other possibilities. The bolsters of the idol from Tumulus B have a central vertical ridge, while the bolsters of the other three idols are plain,²⁹ and it therefore appears as the kind of bolster with a vertical ridge is not necessary for the representation. Bolsters of this type with a ridge at the centre can be found in several different Phrygian contexts, *e.g.* as an architectural element or as a decoration on handles.³⁰ Hence it was a decorative shape used for different items and the vertical ridge can therefore probably not be regarded as indicative of the interpretation of the bolsters of these two idols. Let us therefore consider other features connected with them; they are all situated close the head, always appear in pairs, are considerably smaller in size than the head/semicircular disc and are either of the same depth or slightly lesser depth than the head/semicircular disc. When taking these features into consideration, I would like to suggest that the discs are simply intended to depict locks of hair. On the Kerkenes idol the discs are in the position of expected locks of hair and such an interpretation of the discs of the other three idols is also suitable (see Fig. 5b for reconstruction drawings of these three idols depicted with hair).³¹ Locks of hair are the only embellishment found with double-idols,³² and we may therefore expect a

www.kerk/kerk2/11prelim/2004/english/08fnd.html. The published photographs and reconstruction of the idol/stele based on the excavation of 2003 does, however, not depict the bolsters which were not recognised until the stele was reconstructed from many broken fragments in the Kerkenes laboratory, see Summers *et al.* 2003, figs. 16–17.

²⁹ Whether the discs/bolsters of the Kes Kaya idol originally had a vertical ridge cannot be certainly determined today because of destruction, but they appear to have been intact by the time of Haspels' documentation, and she described them as raised arms, which she would probably not have done if they had ridges (Haspels 1971, p. 98, fig. 243).

³⁰ Bolsters with a vertical ridge are part of architectural terracottas found at Pazarlı (Koşay 1941, pl. 33). For various types of bolsters with vertical ridges on ceramic and bronze handles, see *e.g.* Sams 1994, pl. 87, no. 787, pl. 109, no. 875; Haspels 1951, pls. 17c2, 17d2, 18a2; Young *et al.* 1981, fig. 80, pls. 65–67, nos. MM 55–59, MM 61–69; Özgüç and Akok 1947, fig. 43.

³¹ Regarding the discs/bolsters of the Kerkenes idol the excavators have also suggested that they may represent locks of hair, see <http://www.metu.edu.tr/home/wwwkerk/kerk2/11prelim/2004/english/08fnd.html>

³² Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 251–253, 256, 261–262, nos. 70, 72, 80, 95, figs. 80–82, 90, 114–115, 136, 119; Haspels 1971, figs. 28, 31, 36; Prayon 1987, pl. 15c; Berndt 2002, figs. 39, 52, 62, 95;

similar decoration of single idols, but hitherto none of the single idols have been identified with hair. To conclude, it is suggested that the smaller three-quarter discs flanking the heads of the four mentioned idols represent locks of hair.

Let us now turn to the semicircular discs with adjoining smaller circular discs and see whether a similar interpretation can be suggested for them. The smaller discs on the step monuments have similar features to those found on the four idols; they always appear in pairs and have the same depth as the head. Further, they are of a suitable size and situated in the correct position for an interpretation as locks of hair. Hence, I would like to suggest that the smaller "discs" found on some of the step monuments are likewise representations of hair locks. For further clarification and demonstration of this theory see **Figure 6a-b** for reconstructed drawings of this type of semicircular disc.

If the smaller adjoining discs were intended to be locks of hair, it follows, of course, that the semicircular disc, with or without adjoining discs, should be interpreted as the upper part of the head of an idol. Such an interpretation is further supported by the fact that there is usually enough space left between the protruding semicircular disc and the step below, to allow for the reconstruction of a complete head of an idol (for a reconstruction drawing, see **Fig. 6c**). A comparison may be made with a small Iron Age idol of bone from Boğazköy, which has a similar outline/silhouette to the semicircular disc/idol, in that only the upper half of the head protrudes while the lower half is incised into the trunk.³³ The Boğazköy idol has eyes and nose incised and in this context we should consider the possibility that the smaller discs and/or the central disc once were painted to further underline the image of an idol. This matter cannot be determined today because there are no visible traces of paint on any rock-cut step monument.

In line with this theory, it may now be possible to explain two spirals inscribed on the semicircular disc of a step monument in the Köhnüş valley (**Fig. 4a**).³⁴ The right spiral is today visible, while the left one is badly weathered. These spirals are probably intended to depict locks of hair and are now the only traces left of the hair, since the upper part of the semicircular disc in particular has been exposed to erosion.³⁵ These spirals appear to be in a similar style to other known locks of hair on Phrygian

Metin and Akalın 2001. There is also one known example of three idols made together, all with hair, Berndt-Ersöz 2006, p. 245, no. 55, fig. 66; Işık 1999, fig. 42. There are two examples of a double-idol or two single idols next to each other, which are both too eroded to determine whether they once had locks of hair or not, see Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 241, 262–263, nos. 44, 98. One double-idol has, in addition to the hair locks, decoration on the trunks, see Berndt-Ersöz 2006, fig. 114; Prayon 1987, pl. 15c.

³³ Boehmer 1972, p. 186, no. 1892, pl. 67; Naumann 1983, pl. 9d.

³⁴ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, p. 246, no. 58, fig. 68; Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pp. 170–171, pls. 147–150.

³⁵ T. Tüfekçi Sivas has also suggested that these features may depict locks of hair (Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, p. 170, pls. 148a, 149).

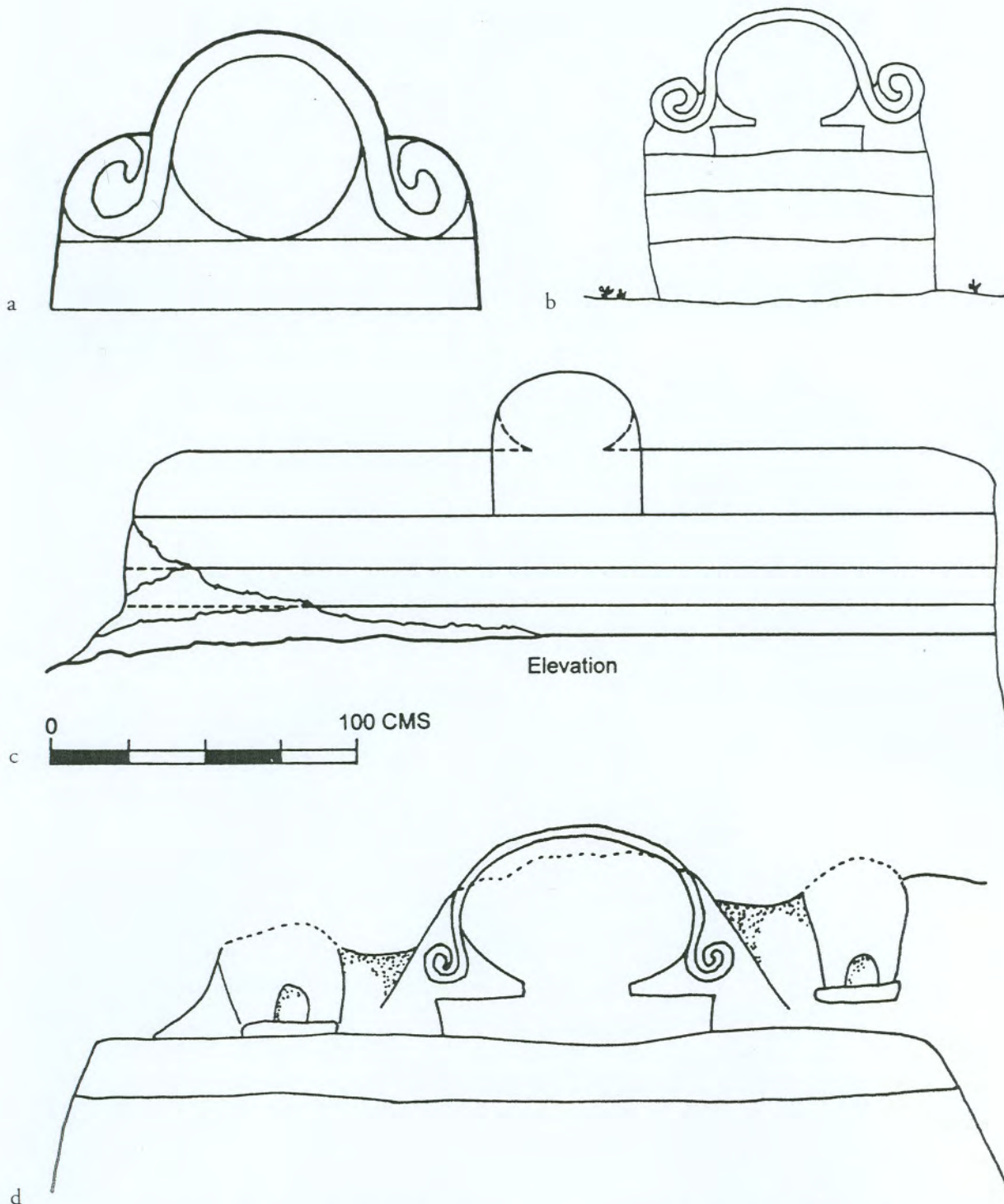


Fig. 6: a. The drawing demonstrates how a step monument with a semicircular disc flanked by quarter discs can be reconstructed to depict an idol with curled hair; b. The drawing, based on a published photograph, demonstrates how the semicircular disc flanked with smaller almost circular discs of a specific step monument in the Köhnus valley can be reconstructed to form an idol with curled hair, *cf.* Fig. 3b; c. A step monument with a semicircular disc at top reconstructed as the head of an idol, *cf.* Fig. 1 (original drawing based on Haspels 1971, fig. 528.2); d. The drawing, based on a published photograph, demonstrates how a step monument in the Köhnus valley can be reconstructed to depict an idol with curled hair, *cf.* Fig. 4a.

reliefs,³⁶ and are in the right position for locks of hair, see Fig. 6d for a reconstruction drawing.

Thus, the suggested concept for this type of step monument is a divine throne, where the semicircular disc represents a deity thought of as an idol. Either the semicircular disc itself was enough to evoke the concept of an idol or the idol shape was made more explicit, possibly by means of painting.

Let us now consider the other group of step monuments lacking a semicircular disc. Several of these (five in number) have a rock-cut rectangular area, suggestive of a seat on the upper step (Figs 1b; 2a).³⁷ These step monuments all have several characteristics in common, such as large functional steps below the seat, additional steps or platforms next to those below the seat, and a platform behind the seat. The monuments themselves are all on accessible ground, rather than on peaks or inaccessible places. Some of them have inscriptions, cup-marks or bosses below the steps, features indicating a public role and that certain cult activities took place below the step monuments.³⁸ Thus, the seat must have played a particular role in these activities. The steps were probably used in order to climb up to the seat and the platform at the top behind the seat. One monument has in addition a small niche in the rock wall behind the seat.³⁹ The appearance of these rock-cut features suggest that the intention was to make a seat, and the measurements of these are roughly big enough to have functioned as seats for human beings. In spite of that I do not think that was the intention because of the low height of some of them,⁴⁰ which would make them highly uncomfortable for sitting. There is nevertheless an important difference between these seats and the ones below the semicircular discs, as the seats without a disc are much larger and have functional steps leading up to them, features indicating that the intention must have been to climb up to the seats and use them, plausibly by placing something on them, while in several cases the seats below the semicircular discs could not have functioned as anything other than symbolic seats. Further, the monuments without discs are all situated on accessible ground level with free space in front of them, allowing for a large gathering of people. The evidence we have is not enough to base any firm conclusions on, we can only suggest different possibilities. One explanation might be that a cult image or other image was placed on the seat of these monuments, perhaps as part of certain rituals.

³⁶ See e.g. the locks of hair of the double idols of the Sincan stele (Metin and Akalın 2001) and the main step monument at Midas City (here Fig. 3a), the sphinx of one of the Ankara orthostats (Prayon 1987, pl. 7b)

³⁷ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 249–251, 255–256, 258, nos. 67, 68, 69, 77, 85, figs. 77–79, 91, 137; Berndt 2002, figs. 37, 61, 68, 70, 91; Haspels 1971, figs. 19, 29, 30, 529.1–2.

³⁸ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 47–48, 174–176.

³⁹ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 250–251, no. 69, figs. 79, 137; Haspels 1971, figs. 30, 529.2.

⁴⁰ One “seat” is only 8 cm above the step below (Berndt-Ersöz 2006, p. 175; here Fig. 1b).

I would like to suggest that the area, which corresponded to the function of an altar, *i.e.* where the offerings were carried out, was probably located below the step monument beside the steps, as it is in this area that we can find rock-cut features connected with sacrifices, such as cup-marks. It is also in this area that the rock-cut features termed bosses are situated (Figs 2a, 4b). The bosses always appear in groups of three, arranged in a triangle, and they are of similar dimensions to the cup-marks. A similar triangular arrangement of three cup-marks can be found below one step monument (Fig. 1b), and there is also one example of three cups of terracotta in the same arrangement from an Iron Age shrine at Boğazköy.⁴¹ Considering the evidence, constituted by these examples, it appears that cup-marks and bosses were part of the same concept, and we may therefore suggest that cup-marks and bosses basically served a similar function in the rituals, *i.e.* to receive offerings. The cup-marks were plausibly used for libations, while a possible ritual for the bosses would rather have been to anoint them, *e.g.* with oil, or spread other sacrifices over them. The habit of anointing stones as part of religious rituals is well-known from both Classical and Hittite sources.⁴²

We should further note that Roman *bomoi* from various parts of Phrygia have a similar arrangement of three rock-cut bosses situated on top of them.⁴³ It is very likely that these Roman bosses reflect the same phenomenon as the Phrygian bosses, although, of course, we may assume an adjustment over time. The fact that the Roman bosses are situated on top of the altar, an area designated for offerings, further support the theory that the Phrygian bosses were used for offerings. The Roman *bomoi* further helps us to define the area, which corresponds with the function of an altar of a step monument. The area used for sacrifices connected with a step monument is the area with bosses or cup-marks. This area is always situated below the step monument next to the steps. Hence, the step monument itself cannot be regarded as an altar.

WHICH DEITY OR DEITIES WERE CONNECTED WITH THE STEP MONUMENTS?

As mentioned earlier it has usually been assumed that it was not only the rock-cut façades and the niches that were connected with Matar, but also the step monuments. These assumptions probably reflect that we have very poor evidence for other Phrygian deities. There is, however, no reason to believe that the Phrygian religion was monotheistic, rather the contrary, but it is difficult to identify other deities than the Mother, because of the anonymity provided by the group of images, referred to

⁴¹ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 249–250, no. 68, fig. 78; Tüfekçi Sivas 1999, pl. 132; Beran 1963, figs. 13–14; Bossert 2000, p. 130, no. 1105, pls. 94, 130.

⁴² For Greek sources see *e.g.* Pausanias 10.24.6; Theophrastus *Characteres* 16.5; Plutarch *Moralia* 294 *Questiones Graecae* 13; Lucian *Alexander* 30. For Hittite and Near Eastern practises see Hutter 1993, pp. 88–89, 93; Haas 1994, pp. 872, 875.

⁴³ Tüfekçi Sivas 2002, p. 342, note 42, figs. 9a–b.

as idols. The idol shape was probably not exclusively used only for one deity, but may rather have been used for several deities. An indication of this is provided by the double-idol, which I have elsewhere suggested to be a representation of the Superior Female god and the Superior Male god, *i.e.* Matar together with a Father god, a Phrygian equivalent of the Greek Zeus or the Bronze Age Weather god.⁴⁴ The fact that several of the step monuments carry images of double-idols indicates that they were not exclusively connected with a single deity. Further, the fact that we have different types of step monuments may also be an indication of that the various types were attributed to different deities.

There are six step monuments provided with inscriptions, but it is only one of them that mentions Matar,⁴⁵ and we may therefore assume that this monument, located in the Köhnüş valley, was associated with her. The only part of the inscription that has survived is the part where Matar is mentioned, *Matar kubileya* is written on the rock wall above and behind the monument, and we can therefore not exclude the possibility that other deities were also associated with this step monument. This monument belongs to the group of step monuments situated at ground level, lacking a semicircular disc. We cannot based upon this single association assume that all the other step monuments, regardless of which group they belong to, were connected with Matar.

We have no indication as to which deity the step monuments with a semicircular disc might have been associated with. As there is no evidence that they are associated with Matar, we have to consider the possibility of other deities. The material is not sufficient to make any definite conclusions, as the only indicators are the structure and location of these monuments. However, when taking into account that they are elevated thrones located on top of rocks close to the sky we may consider a deity with the qualities of a sky god rather than Matar. A close parallel can for example be drawn with the Greek Zeus often worshipped on mountain peaks and depicted seated on a throne or on the mountain itself, and we may therefore suggest that these step monuments could be regarded as thrones for the Weather god or the Male Superior god.

We should in this context consider a newly discovered inscription on a step monument of this type, close to Demirli Kale in the Highlands.⁴⁶ The inscription is located on the second/top step. It is rather eroded, and cannot therefore be read in its entirety. The second line contains a name, which can either be read as *Ata* or *Tata*, depending on the word boundaries, which are not clear in this case.⁴⁷ Whether this is the name

⁴⁴ Berndt-Ersöz 2004.

⁴⁵ Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 245–246, no. 56, fig. 73; Haspels 1971, pp. 91, 97, figs. 138, 526.1. For the inscription see Brixhe and Lejeune 1984, pp. 45–47, no. W-04, pl.24. For the other five monuments with inscriptions, see Berndt-Ersöz 2006, pp. 250–252, 261–262, 266–267, 269–270, nos. 69, 70, 95, 108, 112; Brixhe and Tüfekçi Sivas 2003, pp. 104–109, pls. 4–5; Brixhe and Lejeune 1984, pp. 19–23, 25–26, 242–243, nos. M-03, M-04, M-06, P-06.

⁴⁶ Brixhe and Tüfekçi Sivas 2003; Berndt-Ersöz 2006, 269–270, no. 112.

⁴⁷ Brixhe and Tüfekçi Sivas 2003, pp. 105–108.

of the dedicator or the dedicatee is unclear, because of the incompletely preserved text. However, if the inscription follows the Phrygian standard phrase of a dedication, then we would expect the phrase to begin with the name of the dedicator, followed by the name of the dedicatee, and the verb at the end. The famous inscription of the Midas Monument is for example a dedication of this type.⁴⁸ If such a word order was also used here, then *Ata* or *Tata* should be interpreted as the name of the dedicatee. It is unclear because of erosion in which case the name is written. I have elsewhere suggested that the Phrygian Superior Male god was simply addressed as Father, using the Anatolian or Hittite word for father *Atta*, which was also used for the Father of the gods or the Father god in the Bronze Age.⁴⁹ *Ata* occurs in several Phrygian inscriptions, and there is at least one dedication to *Ata* in a rock-cut inscription from Çepni.⁵⁰ Further evidence for a Phrygian Superior Male god, may be found in later epigraphical and literary sources, Arrian wrote *e.g.* that the Bithynians called Zeus Papas, *i.e.* Father.⁵¹ Papas or Zeus Papas is also attested in the epigraphical record from the area around especially Eskişehir and Kütahya, dating to the Roman period.⁵² If we turn back to the inscription from Demirli Kale and the step monument, the reading of *Ata* would, providing it designates the name of the dedicatee, give further support for that this type of step monument was associated with the Superior Male god, but also the reading of *Tata*, actually supports the existence of a Father god, because *Tata* is plausible another *Lallname* for Father,⁵³ *Tati* is *e.g.* the Luwian name for father, which was also used for the divine Father.⁵⁴ However, without having the entire inscription preserved, we cannot come to any definite conclusions.

SUMMARY

The aim of this paper have been to try and define the role and function of step monuments in cult, by means of analyzing their various rock-cut features. The step monuments can be divided into two main groups; the first group has above the steps a semicircular disc, and because of features connected with the top step and its elevated position, it was interpreted as a divine throne. It was suggested that the semicircular disc itself represented a deity, thought of in the shape of an idol. A comparison was made between a specific form of step monument and four idols, which are represented

⁴⁸ Brixhe and Lejeune 1984, pp. 6–9, no. M–01a. See also Brixhe 1983, p. 126.

⁴⁹ Berndt-Ersöz 2004, pp. 50–52.

⁵⁰ Brixhe and Lejeune 1984, pp. 54–55, no. W–10.

⁵¹ Arrian *Bithyniaka*, fragment no. 156 F 22 in F. Jacoby, *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Berlin 1923–.

⁵² Drew-Bear and Naour 1990, 2018–2022.

⁵³ Brixhe and Tüfekçi Sivas 2003, p. 107.

⁵⁴ Puhvel 1984, p. 226; Tischler 1977–94, Teil I pp. 92–93, Teil III pp. 270–271.

with what have hitherto been thought of as shoulders or short arms; these features were here re-interpreted, with the suggestion that they represent locks of hair. In line with this interpretation it was further possible to suggest that the smaller quarter-discs or bolsters that are usually attached to the central semicircular disc of the step monuments should likewise be interpreted as hair locks.

The second type of step monument lacks the semicircular disc but usually has a rectangular-cut area, suggestive of a seat, above the steps. Several of these probably had a public role, as indicated by their monumental size, location and presence of inscriptions. Both types of step monuments have certain features in common, such as rock-cut circular bosses and cup-marks, situated next to and at the bottom of the stairs. Both cup-marks and bosses were suggested to have been used for sacrifices; cup-marks plausibly for libations, while the bosses may have been used as anointing stones.

I have further discussed with which deities the step monuments may have been connected, and have tried to demonstrate that the various types of step monuments probably were associated with different deities. In this context it was suggested that the kind of step monument situated on top of rocks carrying a semicircular disc can be interpreted as a divine throne primarily associated with the Superior Male god or the Father god rather than the Mother goddess.

ADDENDUM

The suggested identification of the bolsters or circular discs, found on the shoulders on some of the single idols, as hair locks, has gained further support with the new identification of a series of idols embellished with hair at Kerkenes Dağ. During the summer season of 2006 at Kerkenes the excavators successfully managed to identify and partially restore from the many broken pieces not less than nine single idols, all depicted with hair. These idols, located at the Monumental Entrance to the Palace Complex, had a plain band of hair ending in roundels on each shoulder. These idols are very large, the head being around 1 m in diameter, with the hair represented on both front and back (i.e. they are double-sided). The representation of hair is very similar to the figure on p. 33 in Summers, G. and F., "The Kerkenes project in 2006", *Anatolian Archaeology. British Institute at Ankara Research Reports* 12, 2006. Finally I want to thank Geoffrey Summers who generously shared these new results with me.

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