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Research Article

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A Grave Stele from the Kekliktepe Necropolis

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Abstract The aim of this study is to make a comprehensive evaluation of the funerary stele found in Kekliktepe Necropolis, which bears similarities with the examples from Zeugma. The Kekliktepe Necropolis is located in the Keklik Neighborhood, Nizip District, Gaziantep Province, on 164 block and 1-2 parcels. It is also very close to the Western Necropolis of the Ancient City of Zeugma and is located approximately 600 meters to the west. By analyzing the iconographic and stylistic features of the stele, this research aims to provide insight into its historical context and cultural significance. The stele's architectural structure, figurative composition and Greek inscription will be analyzed through a comparative analysis with similar examples from Zeugma and the surrounding area. This approach will help to determine the artistic characteristics and possible function of the stele. Among the conclusions of the study is that the funerary stele from Kekliktepe Necropolis shares a common artistic tradition and production style with the Zeugma stelae dating to the first half of the 2nd century AD. In addition, the figures and inscriptions on the stele provide valuable clues to the identity, social status and belief systems of the deceased.

Keywords Grave Stele · Kekliktepe Necropolis · Zeugma · Gaziantep · Burial Customs

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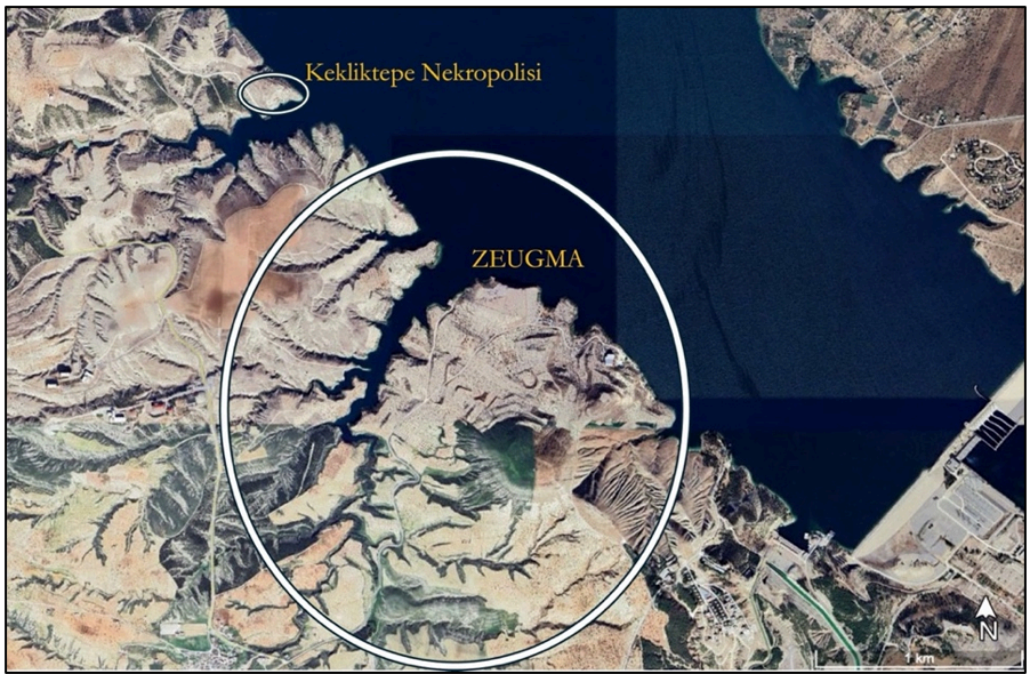
Introduction

The grave stele included in this study was found at the Kekliktepe Necropolis, located within the boundaries of the 164th block, parcels 1-2 in Keklik neighborhood, Nizip district, Gaziantep province (Figure 1). The Kekliktepe Necropolis was registered as a First Degree Archaeological Site by the Gaziantep Regional Conservation Board on July 30, 2015, with decision number 1315. The grave stele was discovered as a result of an illicit excavation carried out in the vestibulum-style front room of the hypogeum-type tomb, which was carved directly into the bedrock, and it was subsequently brought to the Gaziantep Museum Directorate.[1] Due to the area being heavily subjected to illicit excavations, the Gaziantep Museum Directorate carried out cleaning and salvage excavations, which led to the identification of three additional tomb structures. Kekliktepe Necropolis is located approximately 1.5 km west of the Ancient City of Zeugma and approximately 600 meters west of the Zeugma West Necropolis. The current location of Kekliktepe appears to be an extension of the Western Necropolis (Figure 1).[2]

The grave stele has a rectangular form and the back side is left flat in a sloppy manner. On the front side; there is a portrait of a young woman in an arched and deep niche, plaster columns on the sides of the niche, eagle figures on each column, a smaller portrait of a girl in the lower left part of the stele and reliefs of acroteria in the upper corners. There is a two-line Greek inscription on the lower part of the stele (Figure 2). When the general characteristics are analysed, it is noteworthy that the portraits of eagles, baskets or representations of the deceased, which are frequently seen in Zeugma examples, are carved in similar styles. On the other hand, with the help of the fact that the location of the stele is very close to the ancient city of Zeugma, a typological and chronological comparison was made with the grave stelae found in and around Zeugma.

Figure 1

General View of Zeugma and Kekliktepe Necropolis (Google Earth)



[1] The data regarding the exact location where the grave stele was found in this study is based on information obtained from the Gaziantep Museum Directorate.

[2] According to archival studies conducted at the Gaziantep Regional Directorate of the Conservation of Cultural Heritage, the Kekliktepe Necropolis has been registered as a separate site and is located just outside the boundaries of the Zeugma Ancient City site.

Figure 2
View of the Grave Stele



Technical Specifications

The grave stele is made of yellowish coloured, soft and perishable limestone. Similarly, due to the geological structure of the ancient city of Zeugma and its surroundings, the use of this type of limestone as raw material is common (Butcher, 2003: 175-179; Karaca, 2008: 8-33). Accordingly, graves built in bedrock and tombstones made of limestone are common in the region (Parlasca 1982; Sadurska and Bounni 1994; Skupinska-Løvset, 1999). The height of the grave stele is 75 cm, the preserved width is 66 cm and the thickness is 22 cm. The stelae recovered from Zeugma generally vary between 45 cm and 189 cm in height, 36 cm and 80 cm in width, and 9 to 29 cm in thickness (Yaman, 2013a: 194). Within the scope of these measurements, it is possible to state that the dimensions of the grave stele subject to the study are compatible with the Zeugma examples.

It is possible to say that the grave stele is generally well preserved. However, there are fractures and deficiencies on the upper corners and lower right corner of the stele, and small fractures or deformations on the surface of the figures on the front face. There is another partially preserved small rounded gap in the upper right corner on the obverse. Although the upper left corner of the stele cannot be seen because it is broken and missing, there is probably a similar gap in this corner. Similar gaps or holes are found on Zeugma grave stelae or on the upper corners of the reliefs on the grave walls (Wagner, 1976, Taf. 30, Nr. 9,15, Taf. 31, Nr. 13, 16, 25, Taf. 32, Nr. 22, 23, 24; Blömer & Raja, 2019: 13, Figure 2.11). Nails were inserted into these gaps, and flowers or garland-shaped leaves brought by the visitors to the tomb were hung on them. This activity, which seems to have been done to decorate the grave, is thought to be related to some kind of commemoration ceremony (Görkay, 2012: 297; Yaman, 2020: 345-346, Figs. 13-14). On the other hand, there are corner acroterae in light relief on the upper corners of the stele. However, due to the destruction on the corners, the acroteria are faint and no clear identification can be made. Chisel and comb marks can

be seen especially on the niche and upper part of the stele. While the front side of the stele shows a rich workmanship, the back side is slightly curved and left flat without any ornamentation (Figure 3).

The typological characteristics of the grave stele in our study were tried to be determined according to the Zeugma examples. The earliest typological evaluation of Zeugma stelae was made by Wagner and the classifications were determined according to the architectural elements on the stele (Wagner, 1976: 156, Abb. 19). On the other hand, Yaman, categorized Zeugma grave stelae into three different types: those with architectural designs, those without architectural designs and massive blocks (Yaman, 2013a: 197-199; Yaman, 2013c, 31, fn. 7). Our grave stele seems to be in the group of 'arched stelae' under the type 'with architectural design' (Wagner, 1976: 156, Abb. 19, Type IV; Yaman, 2013a: 199-200, Drawing 2). In addition, the figures on the front of the stele were evaluated separately in terms of stylistic, iconographic and chronological aspects.

Figure 3

View of the Grave Stele from Different Angles



Figures and Symbols

First, a portrait of a young woman, representing the deceased family member buried in the grave, is placed in high relief in a deep, arched niche in the center of the stele. She is wearing a himation over a chiton, and the himation covers part of her head and descends over both shoulders. The young woman is looking slightly upwards and forwards over her left shoulder. Underneath the himation, which covers part of the head, there is a headdress with three rows of horizontal incisions. Below this, two layers of thick hair braids cover the head parallel to each other. Under the braids, wavy hair, detailed with thin and deep lines, is parted in the middle. The hair combed backwards falls over the ears. The forehead, which is short and

narrow, has a triangular shape due to the way the hair is parted in the middle and combed backward. The eyebrows are thin and arc-shaped in relief. The pupils in the large, almond-shaped eyes are left undecorated. Although the nose is broken and partially missing, it appears to have been structurally thin and smooth. There are also fractures and damages on the slightly protruding cheekbones. The lips are slightly parted, and the upper lip is thinner than the lower one. The long, curved jaw is slightly pointed at the tip. There are two knuckle lines on the thin and long neck. The shoulders are narrow and slightly lowered. The remaining parts of the himation on the body have thick and vertical folds. It has a 'V'-shaped collar formed by the deep fold marks created by the chiton. The right arm of the figurine, though partially concealed by the himation, is bent at the elbow and extends parallel to the ground towards the center of the chest in a dynamic posture. The right hand rests on the chest with fingers spaced apart. The left arm is also slightly bent at the elbow, and the left hand holds a spindle under the chest. Its tip is missing due to damage.

Figure 4
Details of Portraits



When the stele is viewed from the front, near the lower right corner of the stele, there is a smaller figure of a girl measuring 16 cm in height and 12 cm in width. The upper part is rendered in low relief within a small convex niche. The hair of the figure, shown frontally, is again parted in the center and combed back in thick curls that cover the ear. The forehead is triangular, the eyebrows are arched and the eyes are depicted as almond-shaped and slightly rounded. Although the eye sockets are depicted quite deep, the pupil is not carved. As far as preserved, the nose appears to have a fuller shape. The cheeks of the figure are quite puffy and exaggerated compared to the overall facial proportions, while the mouth and chin are indistinct due to damage. The clothing details of the figure are partially visible. The figure is probably depicted wearing a chiton, with the folds of the dress forming curved lines, and the neckline showing a 'V'-shaped collar. The figure is also wearing a necklace of thick chains (Figure 4).

Examples of individual portraits and multiple portraits are common in Zeugma grave stelae. However, figures representing the deceased family member as well as smaller portraits are very rare (Yaman, 2013a:

229-230, Cat. No. 184, Fig. 186). The presence of a smaller portrait of a little girl next to the main portrait on the stele is remarkable in this respect. This probably refers to family ties or a parent-child relationship. A closer look reveals that the portrait of the little girl was squeezed into a narrow space on the stele. It was probably added to the stele later as a dedication to the little girl, who was buried beside her mother who had died at a young age.

Another striking feature of the main portrait is that although the figure is young, she is depicted holding a spindle. As is well known, figures of a spindle and a distaff or basket, which are common in Zeugma examples, symbolize the position of women in the family (Yaman, 2013a: 310). On the other hand, symbols such as spindles and distaffs can be seen not only in Zeugma but also in different areas within the borders of the Syrian province (Blömer & Raja, 2019: 17-18, Fig. 2.23). Here, the presence of only the spindle symbol is likely to be a reference to the fact that many things were left unfinished and she died at a young age.

Overall, the portraits depicted on the stele exhibit similar hairstyles. However, the figure representing the grave owner is depicted with a distinct hairstyle. As previously mentioned, beneath the himation that partially covers the head, there are three rows of horizontally incised headgear and two rows of thick braided hair strands. The hair beneath the braids is parted centrally and flows backwards over the ears in long, wavy locks. Similar turban-like headgear is also frequently observed in other Zeugma examples (Rumscheid, 2019: 66, Figure 5.1–5). Additionally, there are different combinations of hairstyles under the hair braid (Yaman, 2013a, Cat. Nos. 158, 160, Fig. 159, 161), which consists of several layers and completely covers the head. However, it is noteworthy that the grave stele in this study shows a combination of three different hairstyles (Figure 4). In the depiction of the little girl, the hair is parted in the middle, and no headdress, band, or diadem is present. Considering the hairstyle features of both figures, it becomes evident that this style was commonly used in Sabina portraits, particularly during the Late Hadrianic period (Özgan, 2013: 162-168, Figs: 172-177; İnan, 1965: 18, 65, T. VII, Abb.2, IX, No.7; İnan and Rosenbaum, 1966: 72-73, Pl. XXII, No. 36).

Twelve-centimeter-high eagle figures are positioned near the points where the columns on either side of the grave stele meet the arch. The eagles are depicted with their heads in profile and bodies facing front, standing upright with wings spread, as if prepared for flight. The feathers are thickly carved in the form of fish scales. The wing details are given with incised vertical lines. The eagle figures are antithetically positioned in the centre of the stele facing the female figure in the niche (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Details from Eagle Figures



Eagle figures are found in many regions of Anatolia such as Isauria (Pfuhl-Möbius, 1979: 533, Abb: 115-116; Yılmaz, 1985, Lev. XII, Cat. No. MSA3), Phrygia (Calder, 1956: 60, Pl. 16, No. 274) and Antakya (Saraçoğlu, 1997, Lev. XCI, K.181). Moreover, eagle figures were frequently employed in regions such as Dorylaion (Pfuhl-Möbius, 1979: 532, Taf. 316, No. 2214-2215), Konya (Abay, 2016, 342, Fig. 114), Izmir (Pfuhl-Möbius, 1979, 533, Taf. 316, No. 2219). Similarly, eagle figures are frequently featured on Zeugma grave stelae and rock reliefs (Cumont, 1917, 42-47, Fig. 12-14, 17, 19, 21, 23; Wagner, 1976: 157; Yaman, 2013a: 312). Eagle symbols show different characteristics according to their posture and the treatment of their feathers (Yaman, 2013a: 212-213, Figure 3 - Figure 4). Comparable eagle figures, similar to those on the stele under study, are also preserved in the museums of Adana (Wagner, 1976: 178, 181, Abb. 20, 22) and Gaziantep (Wagner, 1976: 180, 182, Abb. 21, 23) museums. The eagle figures in these museums were carved independently and at a larger scale on grave stelae. However, the dimensions of the eagle figures appear to have been determined either by the preferences of the deceased's relatives or by the practices of the workshops where they were produced (Yaman, 2013a: 211). The eagles symbolically depicted on the stelae carry many iconographic meanings such as the sun (Wagner, 1976: 157-158), psychopompos leading the soul to the sun (Cumont, 1917: 35 and onwards; Wagner, 1976: 157-158), eternal life and rebirth (Pfuhl-Möbius, 1979: 500, 525). Moreover, eagle figures in Zeugma are understood to symbolize male individuals (Wagner, 1976: 157; Saraçoğlu, 1997: 46; Yaman, 2018: 136). Conversely, it is noteworthy that the grave stele examined in this study features eagle figures rather than the more commonly encountered basket figures (Yaman, 2013a: 216-221), which are typically interpreted as representing women in Zeugma contexts. It is possible that the eagle figures were added to the stele at a later stage, potentially to suggest that the woman who died at an early age had two sons.

Inscription

At the bottom of the grave stele is a two-line Greek inscription with letter sizes ranging from 3 to 5 cm (Figure 6). Although parts of the inscription have been damaged, the name of the deceased family member can still be discerned.

Ἡρωδιὰ ἄωρε χερε'

'Herodia, untimely/too soon, farewell'

The name 'Ἡρωδιὰ/Herodia' is etymologically thought to be the female form of the common male name Ἡρώδης/Herodes. This male name, documented in the Hellenic world since the Archaic period, is a combination of the words 'Ηρως (hero) and -ίδης (descendant)' and means 'descendant of a hero' (Pape-Benseler 1911: 473; Ilan, 2002: 282). The name Ἡρώδης (earlier form: Ἡρῴδης) was also attested among individuals of Semitic origin from the Late Hellenistic period onward (for this name see Ilan 2008, 290). Notably, the same name is borne by Herod the Great, King of Judea, as recorded in ancient sources and literature. Herod the Great is also recorded as having founded a city in Palestine named Ἡρωδιά (Joseph. AJ 14.360; Roller 1998, 364). One of the descendants of this king was named Herodias (Ἡρῳδιάς) and was associated with the death of John the Baptist (on this name see Ilan, 2002: 319). In conclusion, the occurrence of the female form of this name in the eastern regions supports the possibility that the Herodia who died at Zeugma may have been of Semitic origin[3]. Zeugma is known to have been culturally and ethnically cosmopolitan due to its location and military and commercial relations (Yon, 2006: 216; Görkay, 2012: 275; Görkay, 2015, 16; Görkay, 2020: 20). In this context, the case of Ἡρωδιά may be considered further evidence of Zeugma's multi-ethnic character. In addition, the phrase 'ἄωρε χερε' is a consoling expression rarely seen in Zeugma examples and

[3]I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Mustafa Adak for sharing his valuable information about both the reading of the inscription and the origin of 'Ἡρωδιὰ/Herodia'.

used for people who died young (Wagner, 1976: 168; Yaman, 2013a: 266, Cat. No. 63). This interpretation is further supported by the youthful appearance of the female figure depicted on the stele.

Figure 6
Details of the inscription



Dating of the Stele

No contextual or archaeological data other than the stele itself is available for dating, as it was discovered through illicit excavations. However, one of the key indicators used for dating the stele is the hairstyle depicted in the portraits. Especially in the portraits of Sabina during the Hadrian Period, this type of hairstyle with hair parted in the middle is frequently seen (Özgan, 2013: 162-168, Fig. 172-178). In general, this type of hairstyle can be seen from the Hadrian Period to the early phase of the Antonine Period (Özgan, 2013: 214, Fig. 229a-b). Nevertheless, based on stylistic features such as the hairstyle, a short, narrow, triangular forehead, oval facial contours, a slightly pointed chin, large eyes, pronounced eyelids, and uncarved pupils, it is more appropriate to date the stele to the Late Hadrianic period. In addition, two examples from Zeugma, in which the hair is parted in the middle under the braid, as in the main portrait representing the grave owner, have been dated to the mid-2nd century AD (Yaman, 2013a: 122-124, 283-284, Cat. No: 159, 160, Fig. 160, 161). On the other hand, outside of Zeugma, a similar hairstyle can be observed on a funerary stele from Palmyra, dated to AD 125-126 (Albertson, 2016: 162-163). Based on stylistic analysis and comparative examples from Zeugma, the stele under study can be dated to the first half of the 2nd century AD.

Discussions and Conclusions

Kekliktepe Necropolis, where the grave stele was first discovered, is close to the Western Necropolis of Zeugma in terms of its location. Three more chamber tombs were discovered during the excavations conducted by the Gaziantep Museum Directorate in this area. These data provide strong evidence that Kekliktepe Necropolis is a continuation of the Western Necropolis of the city. Furthermore, the stone characteristics and dimensions of the grave stele, along with its figures, symbols, architectural elements, and inscription content, closely correspond to those of other examples from Zeugma. Considering all these features, the grave stele has been evaluated on the basis of Zeugma examples.

Grave steles, which aim to remind the deceased person forever, are important in terms of providing us with many data on how the deceased person was honored by family members or relatives in terms of both the fashion of the period and personal preferences, as well as many elements such as the clothing of the figures seen on it, accessories, combinations made with different figures. Accordingly, the grave stele in this study is analyzed typologically and chronologically. Typologically, our stele shows architectural design and arched stele characteristics compared to the Zeugma examples. In simple terms, there are four figures on the stele and two lines of Greek inscription at the bottom. Examples of such different combinations are common in Zeugma stelae. However, it stands out from other examples through features such as the inclusion and positioning of eagle figures, as well as the addition of a portrait of a young girl beside the main figure. Moreover, the hairstyle of the main portrait and the posture, particularly the hand positioning, also deviate from typical examples. In this respect, the stele can be considered unique within the context of Zeugma funerary art.

A particularly striking feature of the stele is the depiction of a young girl and eagle figures alongside the main portrait. These elements, likely added later, may carry symbolic meaning. In Zeugma stelae, dual portraits often represent familial or parent-child relationships (Yaman, 2013a: 229–230, Cat. No. 184, Fig. 186). Additionally, eagle figures are known to symbolize various concepts, including masculinity. Taken together, these indicators suggest that in terms of social status, Herodia was married and probably had two sons and a daughter.

On the other hand, the main portrait is seen holding a spindle in her left hand. On stelae of this type, female figures are usually depicted holding a spindle and a distaff together in reference to their position within the family. The fact that only the spindle is preferred here is probably a reference to her role in the family and the fact that she died at a young age and could not complete many things in her unfinished life.

The two-line Greek inscription Ἡρωδιὰ ἄωρε χερε' is translated as “Herodia, untimely/too early, farewell.” The name "Herodia" is significant as it provides clues regarding her origin. In fact, inscriptions from Zeugma contain a variety of names pointing to diverse ethnic backgrounds (Yaman, 2013a: 334–347), highlighting the city’s cosmopolitan character. The phrase ‘ἄωρε χερε’ is uncommon in funerary contexts and serves as a consolatory expression for those who died young. The youthful appearance of the main portrait further supports this interpretation.

The primary basis for dating the stele is the similarity of the portrait sculptures made according to the fashion sense of the period. In this context, the first thing that draws attention is the hairstyles in the portraits. On the other hand, the treatment of facial features also supports our dating. From a stylistic point of view, it was observed that this type of hairstyle was frequently applied especially in the Late Hadrian period and was also used in Zeugma stelae within the same period. Based on these stylistic parallels, the stele can be dated to the first half of the 2nd century AD.

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