

## Early Iron Sites

### Alaca Höyük

Advanced

Alaca Höyük or Alaca Tell (Höyük means tell or hill) was an important city in pre-Hittite times, like [Kültepe](#). It actually was "the" city of the flourishing **Hattian culture** during the Early Bronze Age. Starting around 1800 BC the Hittites eventually took over. They peaked around 1400 BC under **Suppiluliuma I** and Alaca Höyük lost importance as the near-by Hittite capital [Hattusa](#) of the Hittite empire rose to prominence. The more showy remains in Alaca Höyük, for example the "Sphinx Gate", are from the Hittite time. Alaca's claim to fame, however, comes from **royal tombs** where Hattian kings were buried. These graves yielded a wealth of metal objects, including the famous "iron dagger" of Alaca Höyük.



Alaca Höyük today

Source: Hürriyet Newspaper, Thursday, June 13, 2013 .

Some of the graves (or all; I don't know) have been opened already in 1910 - and that is one reason why the dating is a bit uncertain. While they are usually dated to 2300 BC - 2100 BC, Ünsal Yalçın recently reasoned that 2 500 BC is more likely.

Even more recently (2018) he wrote a detailed paper about the graves. you can find it [here](#). Here is a reconstruction of such a grave as seen in the (local) museum in Çorum.

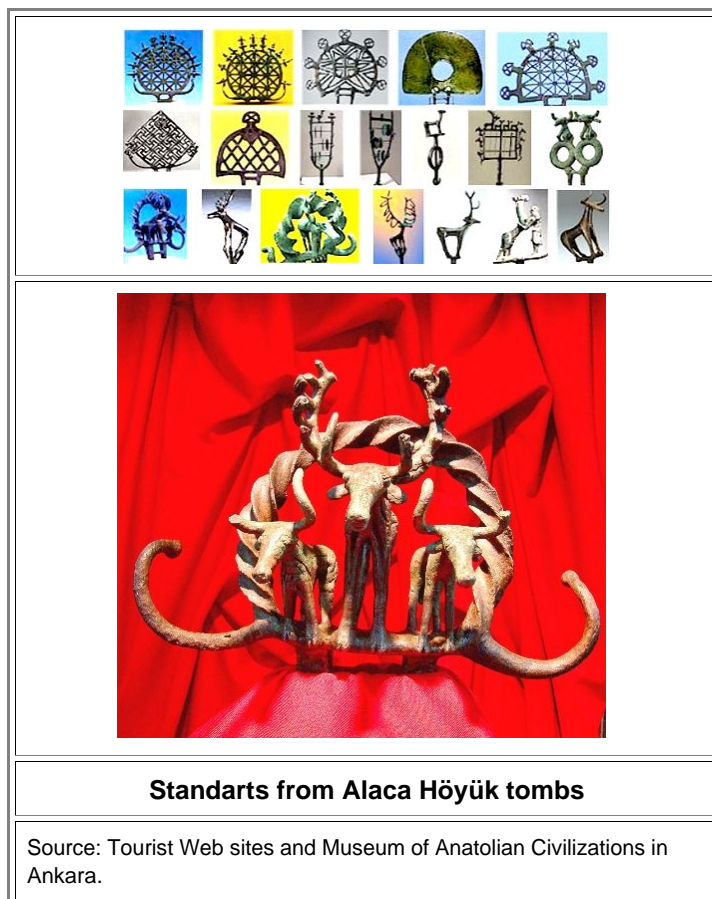


Parts of Royal Tomb with metal "standarts"

[Large size picture](#)

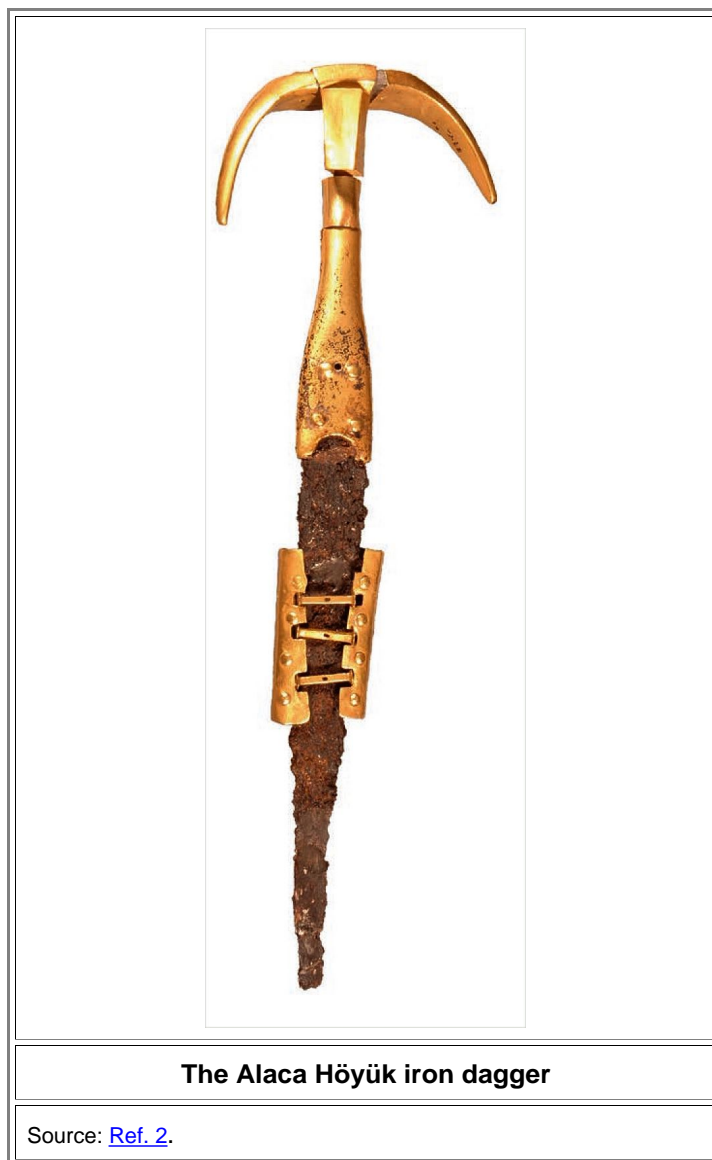
Source: Çorum Archeological Museum.

The metal objects are typically made from some kind of bronze. They are called "standards" (meaning something like "heraldic flag"), assuming that they were mounted on top of poles. Plenty of those standards have been found, and plenty of mystery is associated with their meaning and use.



● The Royal Tombs in Alaca Höyük may also mark the end of some particular period of the Hattian culture since it doesn't seem to continue into the next historical phase embodied by [Kültepe](#).

▸ We are particularly interested in the **Alaca Höyük iron dagger**, of course. The gold-handled dagger was excavated from grave K (find No. Al.K.14) and thus dates to the Early Bronze Age (ca. 2400 BC – 2300 BC) but maybe 2500 BC is a better date as stated above. In any case the dagger was made at least 1300 years before the iron age proper took off around 1200 BC. It also precedes King Tut's iron dagger by at least 1000 years. Here it is:



- So what about it? Does it signify that the Hattians knew about iron making and working about 1300 years before that became common knowledge? Or did somebody just luck out by finding a nice meteorite from which the dagger was made?

Fortunately, metallographic investigations are being made more or less right now. Ü. Yalçın and A. Hauptmann, familiar names by now, from the "Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum, Germany", are conducting a major project right now concerning the metal finds from Alaca Höyük. A Japanese group has issued a preliminary report about the composition of the dagger in 2008 <sup>1</sup> (but never a final word, it appears). The conclusion was that the dagger was probably made from meteoritic iron but I would be very surprised if that statement shall not be challenged.

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- <sup>1</sup>) I. Nakai, Y. Abe, K. Tantrakarın, S. Omura and S. Erkut: "Preliminary Report on the Analysis of an Early Bronze Age Iron Dagger Excavated from Alacahöyük". *Anatolian Archeological Studies*, Vol. XVII (2008) p. 322
- <sup>2</sup>) Ü. Yalçın and H.G. Yalçın: "Könige, Priester oder Handwerker? Neues über die frühbronzezeitlichen Fürstengräber von Alacahöyük" in: *Anatolian Metal VIII, Der Anschnitt, Beiheft 39*, Hrsg.: Ü. Yalçın, Bochum 2018, pp. 91 - 122