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Voices in stone: Studies in Luwian historical phonology

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Voices in Stone

Studies in Luwian Historical Phonology

The Luwian language belongs to the Anatolian branch of the Indo-European language family and was spoken around 3000 years ago (approx. 1500 – 700 BCE) in an area that nowadays covers large parts of Turkey and northern Syria. Even though this language has no living descendants and left no significant traces in any language currently spoken in the area, we do have a steadily growing corpus of texts, written on clay, stone and metal, in two different writing systems: cuneiform and hieroglyphic writing.

This dissertation is concerned with the question of how Luwian must have sounded (phonetics) and how its sounds were systematically organised (phonology). It also treats the language's history, tracing the origins of its sounds back to Proto-Anatolian and Proto-Indo-European. Five chapters, each of which has been published in a peer-reviewed journal or offered for publication, cover the most important domains of Luwian phonology: vowels, consonants and syllable structure. At the same time, this thesis illustrates various methods used to retrieve phonetic and phonological details from a dead language. These involve etymology, diachronic and synchronic typology and rigorous orthographical study. Along the way, various proposals are made to refine our phonetic interpretation of the writing systems in which the language was documented, as these are still imperfectly understood.

As we face a steady increase of new textual material, Luwian is becoming more and more important as an object of study for Anatolianists and Indo-Europeanists alike. This thesis is part of a broader movement that involves a shift of scholarly focus away from Hittite to the lesser known 'minor' Anatolian languages.

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