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Voices in stone: Studies in Luwian historical phonology

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Introduction

It cannot be denied that the Luwian language has an air of outlandishness about it to those who first become acquainted with it. To no small degree, this is due to its relative obscurity (compared to other languages from the Ancient Near East such as Sumerian, Akkadian or Hittite), as well as the cuneiform and hieroglyphic scripts in which Luwian has been transmitted to us. Even for those who study the language intently, it can be difficult at times to remember that all those meticulously crafted pictures of hands, cattle heads and triangles represent a language used by real people. Likewise, it is easy to forget that these signs represent spoken sounds as well, communicating thoughts and wishes, complaints and ideas to people who could understand them thousands of years ago, even though we did not even know about their existence until they were rediscovered in the last two centuries. This thesis tries to recover some of these sounds from their stone, clay and metal tombs in which they were buried and forgotten.¹

When I embarked on this PhD journey, my supervisors and I agreed that my main objective would be to provide an updated version of prof. Craig Melchert's (1994) *Anatolian Historical Phonology*. After 25 years of new insights and updated sources, it has become outdated in some respects, even though it remains the most important source for anyone interested in the phonological details of the Anatolian languages and their Proto-Anatolian

¹ It is in this sense that historical linguistics, according to one of my students, can rightfully be called 'linguistic necromancy'.

and Proto-Indo-European origins. At the onset of my project, I knew full well that preparing a new *Anatolian Historical Phonology* would be a near-impossible feat to accomplish within the constraints of a PhD project. Indeed, just after a few months, as the discoveries that would appear in the first chapter of this thesis were materialising, it was clear that my dissertation would not be a mere replacement or update of Melchert's monumental work. Rather than building on Melchert's foundations (which would have involved simply restating a lot of correct observations made by my predecessors), I could make a greater contribution to the field of Anatolian historical phonology by focusing on specific outstanding questions. This is the reason why this dissertation has taken a distinct focus on Luwian and, to a lesser degree, on Lycian. It also explains its current shape, being a collection of five separate studies rather than a monograph.

Central question

Despite the variety of topics treated in these different parts and chapters, one central question resonates through all of them:

“Is there a rationale behind the randomness?”

Each chapter deals with a set of seemingly random elements and attempts to provide an explanation for the observed situation by uncovering hitherto unnoticed structural distributions or complementary relationships. In the first four chapters of this thesis, the ‘system’ takes the form of *contrast*: they start with the observation that both vowels and consonants are spelled in multiple different ways, even though our current understanding of Luwian phonology assumes that these variants mark one and the same phonetic and phonological feature. As we will see, however, the use of spelling variants is often not as random as commonly thought. One mode of writing often prevails over others in writing a particular lexeme or morpheme while it is wholly absent in the spelling of others. The underlying methodological principle I follow in these chapters is that systematic orthographic variation may well be indicative of underlying phonetic variation, simply put: the

scribes spelled words differently because they pronounced them differently. Naturally, not every spelling contrast needs to be principled, and not every principled spelling contrast needs to have a phonetic contrast at its basis (cf. Chapter 1); nevertheless, I believe this maxim ('contrast conveys meaning') is the most powerful heuristic tool at the disposal of any historical phonologist. As soon as we assume, *a priori*, that an instance of orthographic variation cannot reflect anything linguistic without checking if there is an underlying system, we close our eyes for potential new linguistic discoveries and miss an opportunity to obtain a better understanding of the phonetics and phonology underlying the script.

In Chapter 5, the underlying system takes the shape of *unity* rather than contrast on a different, more abstract level. We will not focus on spelling variation there, but on a set of phonetic developments that characteristically altered the shape of not only Luwian but also Lycian, a closely related language. Although these sound changes have been independently proposed and yield very different results on a phonetic level, there is greater cohesion between them than meets the eye. We will investigate on which fronts these sound changes bear similarity to one another and try to find a common trigger for their phonologisation in developments preceding them.

Outline of this thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters, each of which has been either published or submitted for publication in the past four years. The text has been modified slightly in some areas, in order to show their internal coherence and new insights that were not available at the time of publication and submission. Together, these chapters capture the most important aspects of Luwian phonology: vocalism (ch. 1–2), consonantism (ch. 3–4) and syllable structure (ch. 5). Although there is a clear focus on Luwian, the other Anatolian languages (most notably Lycian and Hittite) are frequently mentioned and used for comparison in order to interpret the Luwian material as accurately as possible.

Chapter 1 investigates two ways in which vowels are spelled in Hieroglyphic Luwian: some vowels are simply written as part of a consonant-

vowel sign, such as the vowel *a* in HLuw. *i-zi-i-ha* ‘I did’. Elsewhere, however, we find *i-zi-i-ha-a*, with an additional vowel sign *a*, even though there is no reason to expect that the vowel is phonetically or phonologically different. This chapter departs from the idea that spellings of the latter type (‘plene spellings’) could be used for aesthetic reasons. Currently, it is assumed that the scribes used these spellings in order to avoid gaps in only a specific subset of hieroglyphic texts. In this chapter, the validity of this space-filler idea is tested for the entire Iron Age corpus.

Chapter 2 is the thematic sequel to the first chapter. It deals with a substantial group of plene spellings that cannot safely be explained as space-fillers, and tests the hypothesis that these vowel signs were used as markers of vowel length instead. The use of extra vowel signs to mark long vowels as opposed to short ones is known from cuneiform languages such as Hittite, but this would be the first time that the same phenomenon is recognised in Hieroglyphic Luwian as well. Even though the presence of phonemic vowel length is commonly assumed for Hieroglyphic Luwian, no direct evidence has been presented thus far of its direct representation in writing.

Chapter 3 is the first chapter of the part of this dissertation dealing with consonantism. It investigates the use of the Hieroglyphic Luwian signs <ta>  and <tá>  to spell dental stops followed by the vowel *a*. For many years, these two signs had been regarded as variants that did not spell out any underlying phonetic difference. Recently, however, Rieken (2010) argued that there *is* in fact a distribution: some words are always spelled with <ta> and never with <tá>, while yet others show an interchange of <ta> and <tá>. This article makes some adjustments to Rieken’s representation of the distribution, based on data from a larger corpus, and gives two new possible phonetic interpretations that are more in line with phonetic typology.

Chapter 4 continues the investigation of the spelling of dental stops + *a* in Luwian, but this time for Cuneiform Luwian, where we find variation in the use of the cuneiform signs TA  and DA . Kloekhorst (2010) discovered that the use of these two signs in Hittite is non-randomly distributed, and that different spelling patterns are used to mark different phonetic values. This chapter investigates whether the same spelling distributions can be observed in the Luwian data from the area of Kizzuwatna, and what the differences between Cuneiform Luwian and Hittite spelling might

tell us about the phonetic value of dental stops in Cuneiform Luwian as well as Proto-Anatolian.

Chapter 5 focuses on two independently proposed phonetic developments that took place in the prehistory of the Luwic languages (of which Luwian and Lycian are the most prominent members): *Čop's Law* and *Open Syllable Lengthening*. It is argued that these sound laws operate on complementary inputs and yield the same effects on an abstract level. At the same time, this chapter considers the possibility that the phonologisation of these developments in pre-Proto-Luwic can be understood by looking at the phonological system as it was inherited from Proto-Anatolian. We will investigate whether it is possible to see the two sound laws under scrutiny in this chapter as a logical and natural continuation of a tendency that had already begun to manifest itself in late Proto-Anatolian.

The concluding chapter will summarise the main findings obtained in the preceding chapters, and will briefly consider their consequences for the reconstruction of Proto-Anatolian and Proto-Indo-European.

Aims

This dissertation has the following two main aims. First, on a concrete level, it improves our understanding of the synchronic phonological system of Luwian by pointing out hitherto unnoticed phonetic and phonological contrasts. Similarly, this thesis accounts for the synchronic facts by providing historical scenarios elucidating the linguistic history of Luwian (and Lycian) all the way back to Proto-Indo-European. It uses the past to provide an explanation for the present, and uses the present to reconstruct the past.

On a second, more abstract level, this dissertation tries to eliminate several puzzling aspects of Luwian spelling, phonetics and phonology generally considered random or strange. By uncovering a hidden rationale behind orthographic and phonetic variability, many linguistic phenomena in Luwian are open to comparison with similar features attested in languages spoken in a completely different time period and part of the world. For instance, the erratic spelling of vowels in Hieroglyphic Luwian can now be compared with space-filling practices in other writing systems (such as Maya hiero-

glyphs or the Manichaean script). Its use of plene spelling to write long vowels, on the other hand, is strongly reminiscent of the marking of long vowels in the cuneiform languages, early Latin inscriptions and even modern Dutch.² Likewise, ‘Čop’s Law’, describing the tonic gemination that affected the Luwic languages, finds typological parallels in various Austronesian languages (cf. Blevins 2004: 173f.).

As such, these comparisons render Luwian less outlandish than it may seem at first glance. Buried beneath the orthographical peculiarities and phonetic/phonological unknowns, we see systems and changes that are in accordance with patterns we see in many other languages. Ultimately, this is what brings Luwian closer to its own past and to the times after its extinction, in which very similar phenomena are found. In this way, the texts that have managed to preserve this language throughout the millennia do not only provide an opening into the linguistic faculty of Luwian speakers and their predecessors, but also, to a modest extent, that of humanity in general.

² In Dutch, however, the distinction between ‘long’ and ‘short’ vowels is also expressed in tenseness.