The Appetites of the Dead: West Semitic Linguistic and Ritual Aspects of the Katumuwa Stele

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My ghost you needn't look for; it is probably here, but a dark one, deep in the granite, not dancing on wind

--Robinson Jeffers, "For House"

The stele of Katumuwa from eighth-century Zincirli casts new light on the relationship between written texts and ritual practice concerning the afterlife in Iron Age Anatolia and the Levant. It not only presents the most detailed Northwest Semitic funerary inscription known from the period, but the first discovered in an archaeological context providing extensive evidence for its use. This uniqueness is also at the root of the inscription's interpretive challenge: it is a sui generis text, in a dialect known from only one area, representing a funerary tradition that is otherwise mostly lost. This study begins with a solution to the "lexical crux" of the inscription, the term for the site of My ghost you needn't look for; it is probably here, but a dark one, deep in the granite, not dancing on wind. It first sets the philology of the stele on firmer ground by drawing on substantial untapped West Semitic evidence; second, it integrates this philological view with new archaeological data about the stele's use and previously unmined linguistic and cultural data about its Luwian and West Semitic cultural background; and finally builds these into a more coherent picture of how the inscription worked as a ritual artifact in a funerary installation.

Four years after its discovery, the Katumuwa stele from eighth-century Zincirli has already found a place in handbooks of ancient Near Eastern culture and religion.1 A ghost in basalt, rather than granite, the stele has retained a strong element of mystery even as it promises to cast light on the relationship between written texts and ritual practice concerning the afterlife in Iron Age Anatolia and the Levant. It not only bears the most detailed Northwest Semitic funerary inscription known from the period, but is the first such object discovered in an archaeological context with good evidence for its use. But the stele's distinctiveness has brought with it a set of seemingly intractable problems, which previous studies have highlighted: it bears a sui generis inscription, in a dialect known from only one area, representing a

1 Interpreting this unique and valuable material was unusually challenging because it required the integration of evidence from multiple West Semitic cultures and languages with Anatolian archaeology and Luwian linguistics. It would have been infeasible without a large and generous scholarly community. Dennis Perdue and Matthew Suriano provided the detailed discussion and encouragement that motivated the paper's writing. Mary Sacharina, Edward Cook, Chip Hawks, Alexandra Gilbert, Lidenwile de jong, and Aaron Koller helpfully commented on drafts. Dominik Rosan, Virginia Herrmann, Craig Melchert, Nya Yakubovich, and Anick Payne shared their work with me and provided guidance in matters Anatolian, and Alessandra Avanzini, Ryan Byrne, Federico Giussolfi, Andrew Gross, Eulador Stribley, Nirmor Marem, and West Semitic cultural background; and finally builds these into a more coherent picture of how the inscription worked as a ritual artifact in a funerary installation.

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funerary tradition that is otherwise mostly lost. Since the inscription's publication, its "lexical cru-"—the term for the funerary inscription itself—has resisted a clear and convincing explanation, as have the epitaphs of some of the gods, aspects of the ritual act that inaugurates the stele, and the nature of the being that inhabits it. These unsolved philological problems are inextricable from the stele's complex cultural background, as its creators participated in at least three intertwined cultural traditions: Luwian, a local Aramaic-influenced culture, and a broader West Semitic culture, any of which may or may not explain any given belief or practice it represents. As a result, the pool of potentially relevant contemporary data is large and difficult to navigate; in response, previous studies have tended to focus on isolated subsets, with few attempts to integrate the data and evaluate the larger picture. This study proceeds from narrow philological problems to larger issues of meaning and use. It first attempts to set the inscription's philology on firmer ground by ap- plying an extensive set of clear West Semitic evidence to the lexical cru and related problems. Second, it evaluates which comparative cultural and linguistic data are most relevant (Luwian, earlier West Semitic, later South Arabian). Finally, it integrates philology and archaeology into a more coherent view of the stele's ritual role.

What Did Funerary Rituals Do? Connecting Textual Evidence with Practice

Not everybody in the ancient Levant died. That is, while the biological mortality rate was 100%, there are many open questions about the culture of mortality: how—or whether—everybody was thought to die, in the sense that both bodily functions and personhood ended. In fact, a wide range of textual and archaeological evi- dence from the Late Bronze and Iron Ages suggests that some people were less dead than others, because their bodily function and personhood, as perceived, were ritually contin- ued in funerary practices. Such practices are well known in the history of religions: cross-culturally, many socie- ties have fed their dead.

But the meanings of funerary rituals changed. What results did a ritual bring about for participants in a specific time and place? In the ancient Near East, the evidence for such practices has remained fragmentary, with only a few texts often found and treated separately from funerary objects and sites. As a result, scholarship on the topic has tended to vacillate between stimulating but conjectural reconstructions and cautious statements of fact.2

The recently excavated monument of Katumuwa, a royal official from eighth-century B.C.E. Zincirli in south- eastern Anatolia, represents a unique case that lets us connect the pieces. The new monument is the first case where we can tie the text of an Iron Age Levantine funer- ary ritual to its precise context of performance. What is more, the monument's own inscription does this work by referring to the physical context in which its ritual is to be carried out. The editor, Dennis Pardee, interpreted the text thus:

1. I am Katumuwa,2 servant of Panamuwa, who com- mitted for myself (this) stele while

2. still living. I placed it in my eternal chamber (?) (bydayry'my) and established a feast (at)
3. this chamber (?) (s-dayr); a bull for Hadad QR/ 4. SWD/RN, a ram for Samal, a ram for Hadad of the Vineyards,
5. a ram for Kubaba, and a ram for my 'soul' (nbdy) that
6. Henceforth, whoever of my sons or
7. of the sons of anybody (else) should come into pos- session of
8. this chamber (?) (s-dayr), men, let him take from
9. the best (produce) of this vineyard (as) (a) presen- tion?—offering
10. year by year. He is also to perform the
11. slaughter (prescribed above) in (proximity to) my
12. (nbdy)
13. and is to apportion
14. for me a leg-cut.

Written in a Northwest Semitic dialect known from this area and a highly distinctive carving style, the text is local in both linguistic and physical form.3 These local epigraphic difficulties of the text is that it is not a single local script of this period, D has fused with R, resulting in unclear readings for a set of crucial terms.4

For a careful analysis of the linguistic features of the text and its relationship to the variations found near Zincirli, see Pardee 2009. The referents of Zincirli gave Northwest Semitic languages and alphabetic writing a unique level of preservation from Iron Age Anatolia, containing three texts in Phoenician (KAI 24) or Aramaic (KAI 216, 217) cursive script, from non-architectural buildings and three Sam'dalic texts into non-architectural monuments (KAI 214, 215, Katumuwa). Compare the site of Carchemish, with its extensive architectural use of Luwian relief, to Zincirli's architectural alphabetic relief (Gilbert 2011). Within the ancient Northwest Semitic corpus, relief carving is unusual. Only the name of Zincirli is known to have incorporated linear alphabetic inscriptions in relief prominently into its architecture (though a roughly contemporary fragment in relief mentioning Rebet and Kubaba was excavated at Tell Sif: see Michalini 1962 and Naveh 1966; for a 10th-century Phoenician fragment in relief near Byblos, see Ben-David 1977). The style is likely modeled on the earlier prestigious style of biblical inscriptions on definitive stone texts in relief. The site is also—perhaps not coincidentally—the single richest case in the Middle East for inscriptions on everyday objects. In the context of a century, monuments are found first in a standard Phoenician (KAI 24, 25), the distinctive local variety (KAI 216, 215), and then a standard Semitic alphabet (KAI 216, 217).

1. A pardee's transcription of the untranscribed name based on the evidence of the uniform transcription and other Luwian vocaliza- tions later brought by Younger (2011) that the name is not an old root Katumuwa, with the known Luwian element Kata- alongside the widely-attested -muwa, known from hititite, luwian, and lydian (for the elements of the sam'alamic royal names Kiiamunu and Passamunu, see Toppee 1991: 30, 68 with bibliography). On current evidence, this is the most plausible proposal, but it is important to remember that the first element is uncertain because hititite and luwian names in -muwa often incorporate the Luwian element Hittite (often simply the still-unresolved first element of Kiiamunu and Passamunu); than van den Hout (personal communication July 2011) drew my atten- tion to earlier Hittite inscriptional evidence of this kind. For example, a similar evidence is provided in the seventh-century inscription of serif (KAI 222, fitzhauer 1993 for copies and photos; contrast...