

this episode is described as a witness (*‘ēdā*) against the people, in case they attempt to deceive their deity. While in this episode the law is written on a scroll and not the stele that is erected, the scroll is not read, but is immediately backgrounded to the stele and the ritual entering of the covenant. The stone does not seem to presence YHWH, but does act as an independent agent that “witnesses” the ritual and “testifies” against the people in the sense that it serves as a material reminder of the covenant and reifies a sense of monitoring, even though it is not identified with a specific unseen agency.

The law itself, and particularly the Decalogue, is identified with a specific named unseen agency, and it is that naming that may have provided the initial point of contact between the law and the presencing media that came before it (cf. Hogue 2019a). Seth Sanders (2008, 2010, 2012, 2015, 2019) has argued in several places that the use of first-person speech on monumental inscriptions not only served to assert ownership of property and authority over sociomaterially significant space, but to “ventriloquize” the author, or manifest the sense of their presence. The Mesha Stele (see fig. 7.3) is the earliest extant example of this phenomenon, as Sanders (2010, 114) explains:

The stela of Mesha is the first known alphabetic inscription to address an audience in the first-person voice of the king. It presents a man who claims, in Moabite, to be the king of Moab. The shift in participants from earlier alphabetic royal inscriptions is decisive. The inscription now designates itself by the speaker, not the object, no longer “(this is) *the stela* which Mesha set up” but “*I am* Mesha, son of Kemoashyat, King of Moab, the Dibonite.” The inscription presents royal power by making the king present in language, ventriloquizing Mesha as if he were standing in front of us.

This represents “an unrecognized landmark in West Semitic literature” for Sanders (2008, 99).

Another example that is more directly relevant to this chapter’s discussion is that of the Katumuwa inscription, which was discussed in relation to personhood in the first chapter. Note the first-person address in the first line:

1 *’nk.ktmw. ’bd.pnmw.zy.qnt.ly.nšb.b.*
2 *hyy...*

1 I am Katumuwa, servant of Panamuwa, who created this stele for myself
 during
2 my life...¹⁷

¹⁷ I have followed Timothy Hogue and my own precedent in understanding the verb *qny* to be able to reflect creation in certain contexts (but see Thomas 2018). Hogue (2019b) bases his argument on the conventions of Luwian monumental inscriptions.