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Vocalization, Palestinian

1. INTRODUCTION

The term ‘Palestinian vocalization’ refers to a type of vocalization system that was used during the Middle Ages to represent the Palestinian pronunciation tradition of Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic. The Palestinian vocalization system was used alongside the Tiberian system for some time, but fell out of use probably around the 10th or 11th century (Alloni 1963:31–32). All the texts we possess with Palestinian vocalization originate from the Cairo Genizah. The first text was published by Neubauer (1894–1895), and the first extensive study is that of Kahle (1927–1930). Most of the material contains Palestinian *piyyuṭim* (poems for liturgical use), but there are also biblical, mishnaic, talmudic (both Palestinian and Babylonian), midrashic, and targumic texts. No text is vocalized in its entirety as in the Tiberian vocalization of the Bible, and often just a few signs can be found on a page of text. Due to the relative paucity of the material, and the lack of uniformity regarding both the use of the signs and the pronunciation tradition they represent, there is no scholarly consensus concerning the interpretation of the material, nor do we have a systematic description of it.

2. THE SIGNS

Two signs (given here over the letter כ) are used to denote the vowel /a/: אָ and אֲ. When both signs are used, the former serves mainly as the counterpart of the Tiberian *pataḥ*, and the latter as the counterpart of the Tiberian *qameṣ*. However, interchanges between these two signs are frequent. Two signs are also used to represent the vowel /e/: אֵ and אִ. When both signs are used, the former serves mainly as the counterpart of the Tiberian *seghol*, and the latter as the counterpart of the Tiberian *šere*. Like the former pair, here also interchanges between the two signs are frequent. The vowel /i/ is represented by אִי, the vowel /o/ by אִו, and the vowel /u/ by אִי. Where we would expect, according to the Tiberian tradition, a mobile *shewa*, one of the signs for a full vowel is usually employed, mainly אֲ or אִ (see § 4 below).

The signs אָ, אֲ, and אִ (the latter two having probably developed from the first) are used as *dagesh*, e.g., מִשְׁמָרִים (Tiberian מִשְׁמָרִים *məšammārīm*) ‘conserve (mpl)’, or as *mappiq*, e.g., אַחֲרֵיתָהּ (Tiberian אַחֲרֵיתָהּ *’aḥārītāh*) ‘her end’, וְעֲנֹתְךָ (Tiberian וְעֲנֹתְךָ *wə-’anwātākā*) ‘and your (ms) condescension’. In some cases the signs can be interpreted as counterparts of the Tiberian mobile *shewa* (Fassberg 1990:46–47). The sign אֲ corresponds to the Tiberian *rafe*; it can also be used to denote a *mater lectionis*.

The distinction between the two phonetic values of the letter ש is marked by small letters above it—שׁ and שׂ (these can also be found written below the letter), or by a dot to the right and the left of its middle leg of the ש, as in the Palestino-Tiberian system: שׁ and שׂ. The pronunciation /s/ may also be denoted by the signs שׁ, שׂ, or ש׃. Palestinian signs may occasionally be replaced by their Tiberian counterparts. Some of the signs may have additional uses or sub-forms (for further reference see especially Yahalom 1970:26–39; 1997:28–78).

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PRONUNCIATION TRADITION

Due to its inconsistency, Palestinian vocalization cannot be said to reflect with any certainty a uniform pronunciation tradition. The following points, therefore, are a basic description of the main characteristics of the vocalization, shared by some of the manuscripts. The examples quoted below are from Bendavid (1958), Yahalom (1997:12–27), and Revell (1970:61–71).

(a) /a/ and /e/. A salient characteristic of Palestinian vocalization is the fact that some manuscripts exhibit only one sign for Tiberian *pataḥ* and *qameṣ*, and only one sign for Tiberian *seghol* and *šere*; others may have two signs for one or both of the pairs. Even when all four signs are used, frequent interchanges occur between the signs for *pataḥ* and *qameṣ* and between the signs for *seghol* and *šere*. Despite these significant differences among manuscripts, it seems that the Palestinian vocalization represented, in essence, a pronunciation with only one /a/ vowel and one /e/ vowel, thus possessing a total of five vocalic phonemes—as opposed to the Tiberian and the Babylonian vocalic inven-

tories of seven and six phonemes, respectively (for other opinions see below, §4).

(b) *Qameṣ ḥatuf*. In closed unstressed syllables, the vowel originating from an original **u* is usually pronounced /o/ in the Palestinian pronunciation: אָזַנְךָ (Tiberian אֲזַנְךָ 'āznākā) 'your (ms) ear', קָרְבֵּן (Tiberian קֶרְבָּן qārbān) 'offering', as opposed to /ɔ/ in the Tiberian pronunciation, and /u/ in the Babylonian pronunciation (→ Tiberian Reading Tradition; Vocalization, Babylonian).

(c) /o/ and /u/. These two vowels constitute separate phonemes in the Palestinian pronunciation. In some cases, however, /o/ can be found where the Tiberian pronunciation has /u/. This occurs primarily in closed stressed syllables, or in closed unstressed syllables if the vowel precedes a doubled consonant, e.g., זֶבֶל (Tiberian זֶבֶל zəbūl) 'residence, temple', חֻקֶּךָ (Tiberian חֻקְךָ huqqākā) 'your (ms) rations'. This phenomenon is known from Rabbinic Hebrew and from Galilean Aramaic (Kutscher 1969). On the other hand, in open unstressed syllables Palestinian pronunciation may exhibit /u/ where the Tiberian pronunciation has /o/: נַפְשֹׁתֵינוּ (Tiberian נַפְשֹׁתֵינוּ nāpšōtēnū) 'our souls', קֹמְמִיּוּת (Tiberian קֹמְמִיּוּת qōmamiyyūt) 'in an upright position'. In Samaritan Hebrew both these phenomena have evolved further, /o/ appearing almost always in closed syllables, and /u/ almost always in open syllables (Ben-Hayyim 2000:44).

(d) /e/ = Tiberian /i/. In certain cases, primarily in closed unstressed syllables, Palestinian vocalization may reflect the vowel /e/ where the Tiberian pronunciation has /i/, e.g., הָאֲדָרֹשׁ (Tiberian הָאֲדָרֶשׁ ha-'iddārōš) 'should I let myself be inquired?' (Ezek. 14.3). This phenomenon is well attested in Rabbinic Hebrew and in Galilean Aramaic (Kutscher 1969).

(e) Where the Tiberian tradition has a mobile *shewa* we often find in the Palestinian vocalization the /a/ or /e/ signs, e.g., נֹתְנִים (Tiberian נֹתְנִים nōtnīm) 'give (mpl)', בְּרִיתְךָ (Tiberian בְּרִיתְךָ bərītākā) 'your (ms) covenant', לְגַדְלוֹ (Tiberian לְגַדְלוֹ ləgaddəlō) 'to make him great', גְּלוּיִים (Tiberian גְּלוּיִים galūyīm) 'exposed (mpl)'. Sometimes signs for both /a/ and /e/ are used for *shewa* in the same manuscript. These different representations were interpreted by Bendauid (1958:486–487) as reflecting a mid-central vowel [ə], which served in the Palestinian pro-

nunciation tradition as the counterpart of the Tiberian mobile *shewa*.

(f) *Shewa* before *yod* and before a guttural. According to Tiberian pronunciation, a mobile *shewa* has the quality of *hireq* before *yod*, and before a guttural it has the quality of the vowel of the guttural (→ Tiberian Reading Tradition). Although the application of both rules is reflected in Palestinian vocalization, e.g., מִיַּצֵּב (Tiberian מִיַּצֵּב [mīyaššēb]) 'positioning (ms)', לְאִישׁוֹן (Tiberian לְאִישׁוֹן [l'īšōn]) 'to a pupil', the latter is usually ignored, especially in the *piyyuṭim*, and the 'regular' vocalization is found, e.g., לְעוֹלָם (Tiberian לְעוֹלָם [l'ōlām]) 'for eternity'.

(g) The quiescent *shewa*. In some cases Palestinian vocalization reflects a vocal pronunciation where the Tiberian pronunciation tradition has a quiescent *shewa*, e.g., מְשַׁלֵּךְ (Tiberian מְשַׁלֵּךְ mēšlīk) 'throwing away (ms)', תִּקְצֹר (Tiberian תִּקְצֹר tiqšōr) 'you (ms) shall sow', תִּשְׁפַּלְנָה (Tiberian תִּשְׁפַּלְנָה tišpalnā) 'will be humbled (2/3 fpl)'. As Bendauid (1958:488–489) has pointed out, this shows that the *shewa* was a flexible phonetic entity—the mobile *shewa* could become quiescent and vice versa. This flexibility of the *shewa* is known also from Tiberian pronunciation, e.g., אֶקְרָא 'I shall call' (Ps. 18.7) as opposed to אֶקְרָא 'eqrā' (Ps. 18.4) (cf. Bergsträsser 1918:23).

(h) Vocalization of the *waw*-copulative. Where in the Tiberian vocalization we find *shurəq* (i.e., before the consonants בּוּמ"ף *b-w-m-p* and before a letter with *shewa*), in the Palestinian vocalization we sometimes find the signs for /a/ or /e/: וְתִדְבֹּר (Tiberian וְתִדְבֹּר u-tḏabbēr) 'and you (ms) shall speak', וְזֵרֹעַ (Tiberian וְזֵרֹעַ u-zrō'ā) 'and an arm', וְמֶלֶךְ (Tiberian וְמֶלֶךְ u-melek) 'and a king'.

(i) In some cases the vowel /e/ is maintained before gutturals in the Palestinian pronunciation, while in the Tiberian pronunciation it was lowered to /a/, e.g., מֶלַח (Tiberian מֶלַח melah) 'salt', נֶשֶׁחַ (Tiberian נֶשֶׁחַ neṣah) 'eternity', נֶעֱשׂוּ (Tiberian נֶעֱשׂוּ nā'āšū) 'they were made'. Bendauid's suggestion (1958:490), that this phenomenon should be seen as a *pataḥ-seghol* interchange, resulting from a connection between the Palestinian and the Babylonian pronunciation traditions, was rejected by Revell (1970:64). It is more likely that in Palestinian pronunciation the influence of

gutturals on vowels in their vicinity was different from the influence of gutturals on vowels in the Tiberian pronunciation; for example, cf. Palestino-Tiberian vocalizations such as *וְלִצְטָטְ*, *פְּתִינָה* (see Yahalom 1997:25; → Guttural Consonants: Masoretic Hebrew).

4. EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCES AMONG MANUSCRIPTS

As noted above (section 3a), manuscripts can exhibit five, six, or seven signs for full vowels. Several explanations exist for this phenomenon:

(a) Bendauid (1958:484–485) and Morag (1972:37) assume that manuscripts with seven vowels, corresponding to the Tiberian vowels, represent an earlier stage of pronunciation. In a later stage the oppositions *qameṣ-pataḥ* and *ṣere-seghol* were neutralized. This neutralization is reflected by the frequent interchanges between signs or by the reduced number of signs employed.

(b) Yahalom (1997:8–11), on the other hand, assumes that fewer vocalization signs are evidence of an earlier stage of pronunciation, while manuscripts with seven signs reflect the development of distinct vowel qualities, and therefore represent a later stage of pronunciation.

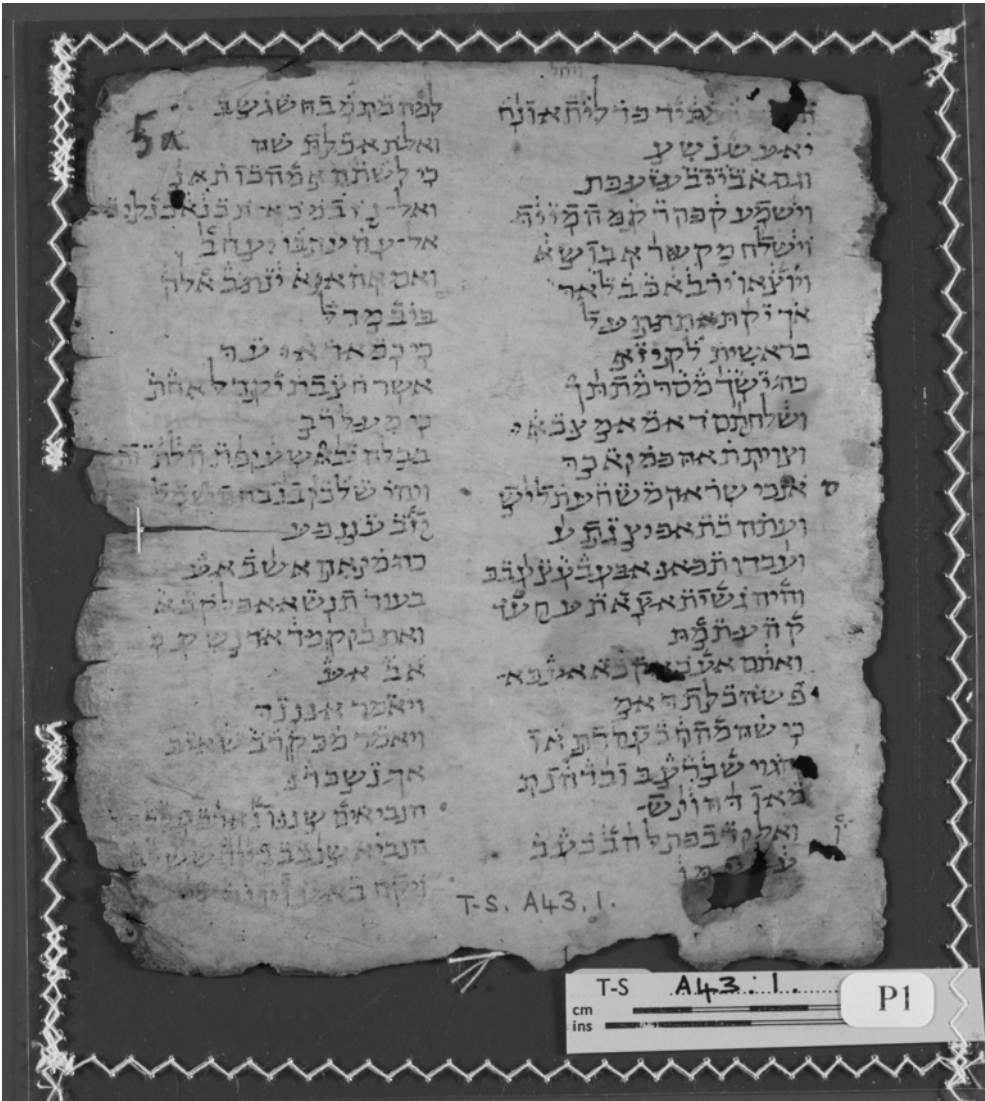
(c) Revell (1970a:109–121) rejects, on paleographic and orthographic grounds, the idea that manuscripts with fewer signs are earlier. He suggests that the difference in the number of signs is evidence for different, contemporaneous Palestinian dialects, which fall into two main groups: one more conservative, closely related to the Tiberian pronunciation, and one more open to changes. Revell further suggests that the former group of dialects was spoken in Palestine, and the latter in Egypt.

(d) Most likely, however, seems to be Eldar's explanation (1989:13, following Weinreich 1963–1964:230). Eldar rejects any geographical or dialectal differences; according to him the Palestinian pronunciation tradition had only five vocalic phonemes, and this phonetic reality is reflected in the majority of Palestinian vocalized manuscripts, whether by the use of five signs for full vowels, or by the frequent interchanges of the signs *ב* / *בּ* and *בּ* / *בּ*. Manu-

scripts that employ signs for more than five vowels do not represent a phonetic reality; rather, the vocalization in these manuscripts should be seen as a 'graphic Tiberianization', a scholarly imitation of the prestigious Tiberian vocalization tradition (and indeed such 'Tiberianizations' can also be found in Babylonian vocalization). Since most manuscripts contain post-biblical texts, Eldar assumes that the Palestinian vocalization system was first created to help the Jewish communities in pronouncing their liturgical texts. This five-vowel pronunciation of late antiquity, the forerunner of the Sephardic and the pre-Ashkenazic pronunciations, reflects the way Hebrew was pronounced when it was still a living language in Tannaitic times, and was not, therefore, directly connected with the pronunciation of the Bible by the Tiberian school.

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Vocalization, Palestino-Tiberian

1. INTRODUCTION

The term ‘Palestino-Tiberian vocalization’ (for alternative terms see below, section 3) refers to a type of vocalization that used Tiberian signs to represent a non-Tiberian pronunciation tradition of Hebrew and Aramaic. Its two salient characteristics are an extended use of *dagesh* and *rafe*, and the free interchange of *qameš* and *pataḥ*, on the one hand, and *šere* and *seghol*, on the other. Unlike its Tiberian counterpart, Palestino-Tiberian vocalization never consoli-