THE ACCORDING TO THE PRACTICE OF THE EARLY VOCALIZERS

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Among the many marks added to the Bible text by the תֶּזֶזִים of Tiberias, one of the most problematical for the later Hebraists has been the short vertical stroke under a letter earlier than the accented syllable of certain words. Most modern grammars of Biblical Hebrew term it the טד or מַחַם. Materially it is the same as the סְלַי or accent on the last word of a verse, and the second part of the תָּלְלָה (the disyllabic accent which marks the caesura or main break within the longer verses of Psalms, Job, and Proverbs). Although I will not insist upon a unifying characteristic of all sounds shown by a vertical stroke underneath, there need be nothing disconcerting about the multiple uses of the same mark: all of them are compatible with some sort of emphasis—coming down heavily on the given vowel; and the vertical stroke is an apt symbol.

Paul Kahle (1927–30, II, 59*; Kittel and Kahle, 1929–37, p. iv) deserves credit for calling attention to the fact that the מַחַם is much less frequent in early codices. Even if he otherwise exaggerated the differences between them and the editions based on late medieval codices, he was quite right about the מַחַם. He did not, however, show in what situations the early vocalizers normally marked

1. In a very special environment, exemplified by עֹרְבָּתָן (Judg 20:15, 17), it comes later than the accented syllable.
2. I shall not go into the varied terminology of earlier treatises.
3. The printers’ custom of sloping the latter accent to the left, as in רַבִּים instead of רַבִּים (Ps 1:1), originated through a misapprehension. Many vocalizers had simply not taken the trouble to make proper vertical strokes, just as they were also in the habit of slanting the Hebrew letters to the left.
it. That is my subject; but instead of attempting to cover all of it, I will take up those patterns which reveal most about Hebrew phonology and morphology, or about the amazing precision of the vocalizers.

In my opinion the later codices, which differ mainly in their extensive use of the ḫהס הָּ, have little or no independent value. Something of importance about the דְּקֵדְוִיק הָּוֶּשֶׁס might, however, be elicited from certain aberrantly pointed manuscripts, noteworthy for marking nearly every letter with רַם or with לֶשֶׁש, except for the gutturals. The earliest dated one of this type is Codex Urbinas Hebraicus 2 in the Vatican (A.M. 4739 = A.D. 979); but I have had only a cursory look at it on microfilm.

The rules as stated in the דְּקֵדְוִיק הָּוֶּשֶׁס (besides other medieval treatises) are far from coinciding with the practice of any early vocalizer. By a maxim of linguistics, no grammatical work—no matter how influential—ought to take precedence over the facts of usage. Therefore I am little concerned with the controversy over the attribution of the דְּקֵדְוִיק הָּוֶּשֶׁס to Aaron ben-Asher of Tiberias. Wickes (1887, pp. viii-ix) noticed the discrepancies between the rules for the מַהְוֶּש there and the actual marking of it in the Aleppo codex, and was fatally misled into rejecting the colophon of the Aleppo codex which names Aaron ben-Asher—with the tragic consequence that the codex was neither systematically collated nor photographed till after it suffered grave damage in 1947.5

As I see it, the discrepancies can prove at most the human limitations of the author (or compiler) of the דְּקֵדְוִיק הָּוֶּשֶׁס. Whether it was Aaron himself or others trying to expound the best practice of Tiberias in a set of rules, either way it is no wonder that the formulation falls short of encompassing the reality. For Aaron was, like his father Moses ben-Asher, primarily a Massorete—i.e., he had mastered the entire מֵכֶר אֲמָר or traditional oral reading of the Scriptures, plus a notation for recording it. To extract from such knowledge of the corpus a grammar, a number of generalizations, was quite secondary, although useful to outsiders interested in learning.

The essential evidence is in those codices to which an expert reader like one of the ben-Ashers added the pointing by ear. In time the custom changed so that the scribes at a distance from Tiberias copied the points and accents along with the letters but were liable to be influenced by rules they had learned, since they were no longer registering or relying upon their own pronunciation. No two of the early codices present identical evidence throughout. Besides the

4. Edited by Dotan (1967), earlier by Baer and Strack (1879; repr. Jerusalem, 1970, with D. S. Loewinger’s critique of Dotan’s ed.).

5. A facsimile has recently been published by Goshen-Gottstein (1976). Yeivin had already brought out a detailed study of its peculiarities, to which I am much indebted, particularly for the long section on the מַהְוֶּש or הָּוֶּשֶׁש (1968, pp. 89–194). However, the problems that I concentrate on here were treated only incidentally by Yeivin.
Aleppo codex of Aaron ben-Asher (hereafter abbreviated A), Loewinger (1971) has published facsimiles of the complete codex of the Prophets made by Moses ben-Asher (827 years after the destruction of the Second Temple = A.D. 895) and now in Cairo (hereafter C), and of the whole י”.rabbit made by Samuel ben-Jacob (around A.M. 4770 = A.D. 1010) and now in Leningrad (hereafter L). The other important codices, most of them fragmentary, are more or less accessible on microfilm. I am far from having collated them exhaustively, but my samplings have alerted me to some facts not generally known or stated by Hebraists. Further research can be expected to define the facts more exactly.

One is that in several outstanding manuscripts any word which is otherwise uniformly accented on the next-to-last syllable receives a תח in there instead of an accent when hyphenated to the next word. E.g., הָיָה (Josh 22:9, CAL), הָיָה (1 Kgs 11:36, CAL and 2 Firk. 39; Kahle, 1927–30, I, pl. 21/5), יָה (1 Sam 7:17, CL:-היכנ A). The hyphen (or תח) indicates that the word has no intonation, but the תח indicates that one syllable is more prominent even so.

These two medieval marks tell us something about the spoken Hebrew language in ancient times. The preserved Hebrew texts were read in a formal, intoned style of public elocution; the colloquial may have been a lot different, but we have no specimens to judge it. Still we can conclude from the phenomenon of the תח in a hyphenated word, where the intonation has the least effect, that there was a sort of word-accent which did not depend on intonation and which, if it came on the penultimate syllable, was not liable to be neutralized—no matter what followed.

6. Kittel and Kahle based their edition (1929–37) upon the latter; but in regard to the תח (see pp. iv, viii) the two editors disagreed, so that their text of Genesis and Isaiah, which they brought out first, reflects a compromise between them that leaves the reader in the dark as to the authenticity of many תח, and their text of the remaining books reflects another compromise that still deprives the reader of information as to the true placement of the תח in many verses of L. Cf. Dotan (1964, p. 59).

7. It was my good fortune in 1956–58 to have Washington University purchase a microfilm of every Bible ms. in the public library of Leningrad catalogued by Kahle (1927–30, I, 19, 58–77, with a specimen page from each ms. reproduced at the end of the volume). Secondary prints were later made in St. Louis for the Hebrew University.

8. A referee consulted by the editor has raised an interesting objection that since the two hyphenated words are counted as one, the תח is used according to the rules for a single word. This would not be at all surprising, if true; I find, however, that the תח is in fact used more on the next-to-last syllable before a hyphen than in a phonetically similar environment within a word. Thus, according to CAL, it is omitted in פְּסַכְנָא (1 Sam 13:5), פְּסַכְנָא (Hos 11:10), פְּסַכְנָא (1 Sam 15:3), פְּסַכְנָא (Hos 9:16), פְּסַכְנָא (Isa 59:14). The difference is most noticeable in L; for C often uses the תח within a word—e.g., פְּסַכְנָא in Judg 6:33 and פוֹסָנָא in Isa 14:30, both contrary to AL—while A often omits it even in a hyphenated word: פְּסַכְנָא with תח twice and without it twice in Josh 10:5 (CL show it uniformly there and in dozens of other passages).
While my subsequent examples are going to suggest that the הָדֻּמָּה symbolizes the holding of a vowel, I regard that as consistent with taking it to be an accent of stress in these hyphenated words. For some early Hebrew grammarians taught that any vowel is long when accented. The basis in auditory experience for such a doctrine was, presumably, that the same vowel is shorter when pronounced without stress.

Since the edition of ben-Hayim (1525) we have become used to Bibles exhibiting the הָדֻּמָּה regularly at an interval before the accent within certain words. But when we look for it in the early codices, most times it is not there. The chances of meeting it are increased under some circumstances:

(1) The הָדֻּמָּה is marked when nothing else can distinguish a rare word from a frequent one. Thus the verb הֶנָּבָא ("she is wise") in Zech 9:2 only, whereas the noun הָנָבָא occurs over 70 times (with the accent בֵּֽמֶּחֶטֶּ in Exod 36:2, Jer 49:7, Ezek 28:12, Eccl 1:18, 7:11, 25, 9:13). The marginal Massorah on Zech 9:2 notes הֶנָּבָא = "nowhere else." Similarly הֶנָּבָא ("she remembers") in Lam 1:7 הֶנָּבָא in 1:9 in opposition to the coaxing imperative הֶנָּבָא (Neh 6:14 + 6 passages with other accentuation).

But the converse of this is that if the word not admitting of הָדֻּמָּה is rare while the one admitting of it is commoner, the latter will usually be without הָדֻּמָּה. The coaxing imperative הַנָּבָא ("and eat") has of course no הָדֻּמָּה in its sole occurrence (Gen 27:19), but neither has the "converted perfect" הַנָּבָא ("and she is to eat") 14 times out of 16, according to L (10 of them with בֵּֽמֶּחֶטֶּ), and similarly 13 times out of 15 in the Prophets according to C, although C otherwise has the הָדֻּמָּה somewhat more frequently. When there is no הָדֻּמָּה, does that argue that הַנָּבָא ("and she is to eat") is a homophone of הַנָּבָא ("and eat") — not merely a homograph? I will try to answer this presently.

(2) The two instances of הַנָּבָא with הָדֻּמָּה in L (Isa 10:17, Jer 17:27) have the

9. That seems first to emerge from the clumsy terminology of Hayyuj near the beginning of his treatise on pointing, translated from Arabic into Hebrew by Ibn Ezra (Nutt, 1870, p. 121):

"And if anyone raises an argument and says that between the ב and the י in the word [the perfect tense, vocalized שֵׁם, שֵׁם] there is a quiescent [i.e., a (theoretical) ש] and yet it is pointed open[ב = ma, not י = ma], here is the reply to him — that it is thus because of the continuation of the ב with the accent" (cf. the Arabic original; Nutt, p. III). See Prijs (1950, p. 47).

10. The preserved pages of A agree with L and C.

Henceforth, when I do not specify a manuscript, my source is a consensus of the three, or whichever are extant in the particular verse. C, besides being limited to the Prophets, is blurred or faded on quite a few pages. Everything before Deut 28:17 and after Cant 3:11 is missing from A, as well as miscellaneous leaves in between.

11. The Sephardic (and modern Israeli) distinction between, pronounced like, and, pronounced like was of course alien to the school of Tiberias, whose, always had the quality [a] intermediate between [a] and [o].
accent: and this combination is pretty regular, especially when there is no previous word with a conjunctive accent. But in C it is הָלַכְכֵפָך instead of הָלַכְכֵפָך. When the accent is מְשַׁטְּפָך or מְשַׁטְּפָך, a prior vowel will often take a הָלַכְכֵפָך; examples can be found in almost any column of the twenty-one “prose” books — e.g., נַפְלֵי (Joel 1:19, CAL), הָלַכְכֵפָך (Exod 4:26, L). Among the less frequent accents, הָלַכְכֵפָך has the greatest affinity for הָלַכְכֵפָך. These four accents are all disjunctive. The other disjunctives (יִרְאוּ) and all the conjunctives (יֵשָׂר) take the הָלַכְכֵפָך more or less exceptionally.

So, for example, when הָלַכְכֵפָך appears with הָלַכְכֵפָך in Ezek 21:6 and הָלַכְכֵפָך in Zech 8:4, but in many more occurrences with no הָלַכְכֵפָך and some other accent, the minority with the הָלַכְכֵפָך cannot constitute a different word with a distinct meaning. There must be some other cause for the peculiar distribution of the הָלַכְכֵפָך.

(3) The vowel [i] gets the הָלַכְכֵפָך almost as consistently in the early codices as in the standard editions from ben-Hayim on — no matter which accent comes later on in the word. The דַּקָּדַמ הָלַכְכֵפָך (§ 32, p. 31 Baer-Strack, based here on one ms.) expresses it as a rule for forms of the verb that means “fear,” in opposition to the one that means “see.” This is well illustrated by הָלַכְכֵפָך or הָלַכְכֵפָך (“and they feared,” 1 Sam 7:7, Josh 10:2), הָלַכְכֵפָך (“and they saw,” Judg 1:24, 18:7). So the הָלַכְכֵפָך serves like the הָלַכְכֵפָך in הָלַכְכֵפָך (“she is wise”) and הָלַכְכֵפָך (“she remembers”). But it is just as constant הָלַכְכֵפָך or הָלַכְכֵפָך (Josh 19:47, etc.), where no opposed word without הָלַכְכֵפָך existed in the Biblical corpus. Besides, the דַּקָּדַמ הָלַכְכֵפָך remarks that once (in Job 6:21) הָלַכְכֵפָך has a הָלַכְכֵפָך although the meaning is “see.”

12. See Yeivin (1968, pp. 217–278; 1969, p. 117). In A it is הָלַכְכֵפָך; but Aaron ben-Asher’s הָלַכְכֵפָך is practically vertical like his הָלַכְכֵפָך much of the time. In Jer 3:24, to be sure, he has הָלַכְכֵפָך with a definite הָלַכְכֵפָך; in L too the stroke is rather diagonal. This confirms the statement of Samuel ben-Jacob, the scribe of L, on f. 479 that he copied מַכְשַׁפְד הָלַכְכֵפָך from the correct, annotated books made by the teacher Aaron ben-Moses ben-Asher — may he rest in paradise. "The plural ‘books’ argues against taking A to be Samuel’s sole model. Besides, Loewinger (1960, pp. 60ff) has shown that the agreement of L with Aaron ben-Asher’s text resulted rather from subsequent correction.


14. Confirmed by CAL. The plene spelling of הָלַכְכֵפָך did not, in itself, affect the vocalizer’s pronunciation of the vowel[i], making the הָלַכְכֵפָך sign unnecessary. If the [i] in a given word admits of the הָלַכְכֵפָך, he would mark it without regard to the presence or absence of a “mater lectionis.”

15. Also הָלַכְכֵפָך (“and they poured,” 2 Kgs 4:40). הָלַכְכֵפָך (“and let them toil,” Jer 51:58 = רְחֵב). Hab 2:13, if it had no הָלַכְכֵפָך, could be taken for a form of another verb: cf. חָפָךְ ("an ox will low," Job 6:5). The הָלַכְכֵפָך distinguishes מְשַׁפְד הָלַכְכֵפָך ("they will sleep," Prov. 4:16) from הָלַכְכֵפָך ("they will repeat," Job 29:22).

16. Confirmed by AL, Dotan (1967, p. 225) categorizes this as an instance of the “musical” הָלַכְכֵפָך (limited to Psalms, Job, and Proverbs). The pausal הָלַכְכֵפָך ("and you feared") comes a little later in the same verse. The הָלַכְכֵפָך of the root מַדְי is, in fact, never omitted after the prefix ת- או ר- or ל.
When the treatise says that the words of “seeing,” without מָלכַת, are short (תֵּס), we logically infer that the מָלכַת is a sign of prolongation. This accords with another medieval grammar, which teaches that you have to drag a little upon the letter that has it — doubtless upon the vowel rather than the consonantal part of the syllable. Now, of all phonological features, length is most obviously relative. So the מָלכַת tells us that here the vowel is held longer than a vowel-sound of the same quality is held otherwise. But what then was taken to be the ordinary duration of a vowel, and therefore unmarked?

The vocalizers, as they went through the consonantal or letter text with pen in hand, implicitly compared a particular vowel in a particular word with other occurrences of that vowel, unaccented. To compare it with the vowel of a syllable that received intonation, would have been irrelevant; but if they held it perceptibly longer than was usual in the unintoned (or less intoned) part of the word, then they marked the מָלכַת before moving on.

In a previous paper (Levin, 1968, pp. 62–63) I deduced from the pattern of writing or omitting the רָפע (a horizontal line) above the letters בּלְכָּת, as well as ק and כ, that the vocalizers must have been reading aloud at a normal or nearly normal pace while they added all the little marks above, within, or below the letters. That indeed is what enabled them to show graphically so many delicate features of sound. Given their prime concern to show what the vowel-sounds were in each word — which of the seven מְלַכּות — the מָלכַת was a supplementary mark, which they naturally made when they had time.

That there was any need for it at all, occurred to them in the first place most probably because of manifest differences in meaning such as לָלֹק (‘‘and they feared’’): לָלֹק (‘‘and they saw’’). But once the need for a mark of length was recognised, it became part of their apparatus; and they used it, as they used every other symbol, to register the מָלכַת. The factors that influenced them either to make the little stroke or to go on without it were mainly physical, but also in part psychological.

With the vowel [i] there were not only certain constrasting words. Besides לָלֹק and other forms from the root “see,” the language generates innumerable words with a plain [i] — i.e., a short [i] — in unaccented syllables followed by a consonant with מָלכַת. So the words with a long [i] in an unaccented syllable comprise a conspicuous minority, worthy of being signaled.18

Furthermore it was very simple to add the vertical line to the left, if the vocalizer’s voice was still on the vowel-sound [i] when his pen finished making

17. “Manuel du lecteur” (Derenbourg, 1870, p. 385):

18. The negative vowel-sign, indicates no noticeable vowel, and consequently a minimum transition from consonant to consonant. See section 2.1-5 of my forthcoming article, “Defects, Alleged or Real, in the Tiberias Pointing,” in Masoretic Studies.
the single dot. Suppose that a chronometer had already been invented and that it
collected some other vowel-sound equal in actual time to the [i] to which the
vocalizer added a ה. It is quite possible that he would have left that other
vowel without ה because it took him longer to write two or three dots ( .... )
or a line ( _) or a line and a dot ( _ ) , and so he was through pronouncing that vowel
and was on to the next consonant.

The dot for [o] is, in itself, as momentary an act of the pen as the dot for [i].
But the hand or at least the finger has to move farther, from the space above the
letter (and left of it) to the space below it. In some manuscripts the ה indeed
appears left of the letter, straight down from the [o] dot — e.g., אָנָּמַי אָל (1 Kgs
11:34) in Codex 39 of the 2d Firkovich Collection in Leningrad (Kahle,
1927–30, I, pl. 21/5) — not centered under the letter as in printed Bibles. 19 The
Hebrew is scarce anyhow in the early codices when the vowel is [o]; for on the
whole one unaccented [o] is no longer than another. Much the same applies to
unaccented [u]; because of its infrequency in most pre-accentual positions,
time there are few instances of it with ה.

The affinity, mentioned earlier, of ה for the accent ה is easy to
correlate with the fact that this disjunctive accent admits the conjunctive accent
לְשׁוֹק on an earlier syllable of the same word, provided that the syllable is open
(not checked by the next consonant) and non-initial, and that no previous word
has already taken a לְשׁוֹק: e.g., לְלֹא יָלָה at the beginning of Jer 9:13, etc., but המ in
2 Sam 17:17 (cf. Exod 5:17). Similarly though not so uniformly, the
lesser disjunctive לְשׁוֹר is liable to be preceded in the same word by the
conjunctive accent אַלַּא, as in אֶלְּבֶנַּו at the beginning of a clause in Gen
43:23, but לְבָנַּו in Deut 13:6, where the previous word has לְבַנַּו and
instead of it comes a ה in the word with לְשׁוֹר. 20 A vowel that is intonable

19. Similarly בְּלִשְׁכֵּר (Josh 1:5). שְׁכִּד (1:8), בְּלִשְׁכֵּר (22:5) in C; but more often the ה in C is centered.

20. Whereas the phonetic structure alone of a word determines the co-occurrence of the two
accents, in it, the co-occurrence of ה is surprisingly affected by some morphological factors—
דָּשׁוֹר without לְבַנַּו (but often with המ, mostly upon the first syllable) being used otherwise; thus:

1. לְלֹא יָלָה (Num 22:7, 32:39, 33:8, Josh 2:1, Judg 9:49, 1 Sam 17:13, 2 Sam
4:5, 2 Kgs 17:15, לְלֹא only in Judg 2:12).

but לְלֹא יָלָה (Isa 2:3, Jer 11:12, Mic 4:2; never לְלֹא לְלֹא).
likewise לְלֹא יָלָה (Exod 5:10, Num. 31:13, 1 Sam 7:11, 2 Sam 11:17).
but לְלֹא יָלָה (Ezek 39:9, C; אַלַּא AL);

(Num 16:33).

but לְלֹא יָלָה (Ezek 26:16, 27:29, CAL):
also לְלֹא יָלָה (2 Sam 2:13).
but לְלֹא יָלָה (Jer 44:28, Ezek 5:13, 17:24, 28:22, 30:25, 34:27, AL; more often
לְלֹא לְלֹא in C).

Cf. both לְלֹא יָלָה (Ezek 2:5, 28:24, 26, 29:16, 33:13) and לְלֹא יָלָה (Gen 3:7, 1 Sam 4:6, Neh 6:16).
before סָרָה or חָלֶת, even though not intoned in a particular verse, may well have been held noticeably longer than before other accents, and therefore marked with a מְנוּלָה.

The מְנוּלָה is just as usual, however, before יִתְנַשֶּׁש — e.g., יִתְנַשֶּׁש (Josh 8:9, etc.), although this disjunctive accent admits a conjunctive only in the previous word. Yet it has a peculiar restriction: unless there is at least one syllable between the conjunctive and מְנוּלָה, it will be יִתְנַשֶּׁש instead of the usual מְנוּלָה יִתְנַשֶּׁש; e.g., יִתְנַשֶּׁש יִתְנַשֶּׁש (Exod 10:7). Of all accents the מְנוּלָה, whose name means “lengthening,” is probably most like the מְנוּלָה in sound. Graphically it is akin; some vocalizers, indeed, sloped the מְנוּלָה to the left more often than they made it vertical, while others — notably Aaron ben-Asher — did the converse, making both vertical or nearly so (see note 12). This may have been due to haste or imperfect penmanship; but I suggest that the מְנוּלָה, being a supplement to the vowel-and-accent system, was created by a small modification of the accent מְנוּלָה and perhaps was not at all differentiated from it at first (cf. Dotan, 1967, p. 188).

The מְנוּלָה accordingly indicates a minor stress early in the word — a stress which draws out the vowel somewhat. מְנוּלָה favors it just as it favors מְנוּלָה at a close interval in the previous word, whereas most of the other intonations are indifferent to the number and nature of the preceding syllables. So in general the length of a vowel in the pre-accentual syllables was neutralized or went unnoticed by the vocalizers, except before this common disjunctive accent or before סָרָה or (to some extent) סָרָה.

תְּבִי ה is rather like יִתְנַשֶּׁש in its partiality to מְנוּלָה and to מְנוּלָה, especially to the latter. While its usual conjunctive is מְנוּלָה יִתְנַשֶּׁש, מְנוּלָה replaces מְנוּלָה יִתְנַשֶּׁש unless at least two syllables intervene: מְנוּלָה יִתְנַשֶּׁש (Gen 28:1), יִתְנַשֶּׁש מְנוּלָה (Josh 2:4, CL; no מְנוּלָה in A). Furthermore, within a word, if a syllable with only מְנוּלָה intervenes, there will be the conjunctive מְנוּלָה rather than מְנוּלָה, according to C and A (if the stroke in A has been made carefully): יִתְנַשֶּׁש יִתְנַשֶּׁש (2 Sam 4:7, Jer 2:5; also Baer-Strack, §20, pp. 21–22). The knottiest use of the מְנוּלָה concerns the vowel [כ]. If held in a pre-accentual syllable, this vowel could distinguish the perfect tense of the verb (with the subject “she” expressed by the suffix). But for the most part that was the usual length of [כ] when unaccented in Hebrew words; and so the vocalizers were little more inclined to add a מְנוּלָה beside it than they were to add a מְנוּלָה to [כ] or [כ]. Only in an odd case like יִתְנַשֶּׁש יִתְנַשֶּׁש in L (“she is wise”) did the

(Judg 9:6, 2 Sam 17:21, 2Kgs 17:19, Jer 9:13, 11:8, 41:12, 14), יִתְנַשֶּׁש יִתְנַשֶּׁש (Lev 9:23, 2Kgs 13:5). The distribution of ‘‘and of’’ cannot be by accident. However, יִתְנַשֶּׁש יִתְנַשֶּׁש (Exod 21:22), יִתְנַשֶּׁש יִתְנַשֶּׁש (Zech 12:6), etc., show that ‘‘and of’’ is not absolutely excluded from the “converted perfect.”
prominence of a related form from the same root, but with the vowel shorter, call their attention to the difference in length.

A further complication was that they had a mark for shortness — two dots, one below the other — used along with the sign for this vowel and the other two open vowels _ [a] and _ [e]. Putting the two dots (the אֹש or negative vowel sign) on the right — i.e., writing them first — suggested that the vowel sound was minimally discernible. It was an economical notation, in spite of the graphic disadvantage and paradox of taking extra time to show a vowel shorter than the normal [o], [a], or [e]. For the extra two dots are needed in only a small minority of the occurrences of these open vowel qualities. One word, אֶלַחַם — along with its possessive forms — accounts for over half the occurrences of these vowel qualities. The word אֶלַחַם is more widely distributed, but still much rarer than the plain _ [a]. The אֶלַחַם is by far the rarest of all. We meet it mainly, though not exclusively, in the suffixed forms of "segholate" nouns with a guttural consonant in the root, such as אֹטֵנֶם (Judg 11:37, etc.) or אֹטֵנֶם (Hab 3:7, etc.), where for contrast there is a longer, more ordinary [o]. The אֶלַחַם or minimal vowel is constantly followed by a single consonant with a full vowel, not אֹש.

So it would have been inconsistent to point אֹטֵנֶם instead of the actual אֹטֵנֶם in Gen 27:19, where the sense is imperative "and eat," and likewise in the numerous instances of אֹגֶנֶם ("for food"). But the consequence is that in this environment the vocalizers employed the plain sign for [o]. Instead of bringing out a distinction between the unaccented [o] here and in אֹטֵנֶם (which, is naturally higher up when written just under the short letter). C, to be sure, is more partial to אֹטֵנֶם, אֹטֵנֶם, אֹטֵנֶם. A, apparently followed by L, seems to have perceived a sort of emphasis or prominence at the beginning of the word, not associated particularly with the vowel-sound [o]. For by contrast, before אֹטֵנֶם the אֹטֵנֶם regularly accompanies the [o]: אֹטֵנֶם (Num 14:31, Isa 9:8, Ezek 21:10, 25:14, 17, 29:6, 37:28, 39:22).

Still another place for the אֹטֵנֶם is underneath the vowel sign; e.g., (especially when the vocalizer was cramped for space).

21. The אֹטֵנֶם on the very first syllable of a word is sometimes placed right of the vowel-sign. Thus C has אֹטֵנֶםin 2Kgs 7:12, אֹטֵנֶם in Judg 2:10, Jer 5:4, Mic 4:12. I take the אֹטֵנֶם in that position to indicate the same actual lengthening of the vowel-sound but a momentarily earlier awareness of the lengthening on the vocalizer's part.

Had this been done on any other syllable, it could have led a reader to hold the wrong vowel. The several instances of אֹטֵנֶם, אֹטֵנֶם, אֹטֵנֶם, אֹטֵנֶם, clearly do not indicate an intention to have the אֹטֵנֶם go with the (which is naturally higher up when written just under the short letter ). C, to be sure, is more partial to אֹטֵנֶם, אֹטֵנֶם. A, apparently followed by L, seems to have perceived a sort of emphasis or prominence at the beginning of the word, not associated particularly with the vowel-sound [o]. For by contrast, before אֹטֵנֶם the אֹטֵנֶם regularly accompanies the [o]: אֹטֵנֶם (Num 14:31, Isa 9:8, Ezek 21:10, 25:14, 17, 29:6, 37:28, 39:22).

22. Although on the whole I envisage the vocalizer writing each mark as he pronounced the sound, I cannot maintain that he would write all five dots in a small fraction of a second.

23. C, contrary to AL, has אֹטֵנֶם (similarly in Jer 30:18, Zech 12:7), אֹטֵנֶם (Jer 10:20), etc.
generality of other accents. This incidentally documents the difference in יָסַע or יֶסַע ("and she is to eat," Isa 10:17; Jer 17:27) and יֵסַע ("for food") with רָעַב (Ezek 34:5); but it leaves for us the question whether the earlier vowel was longer in the perfect ("converted" or unconverted) than in יֵסַע, no matter which accent came later in the word. Probably it was; for on morphological grounds יָסַע ("she has eaten," Joel 1:20, with כָּבָד) ought to have the very same vowels as יֵסַע ("she is wise"), and similarly יֶסַע ("and she is to eat," Ezek 21:3, with בָּרָה) ought to have the same as יֵסַע ("she remembers") or יָסַע ("it [fem.] is near," Deut 15:9), 24 rather than יֵסַע ("be near," coaxing imperative, Ps 69:19) 25 or the noun יָסַע (Isa 11:2).

When the vocalizers left the בּוֹל off so many instances of the perfect, they did not have in mind this sort of comparison of length. They acquiesced in what seemed to them the typical length of an unaccented [ו], in contrast to the accented [ו]. 26 As we have seen, there had to be some special motive for them to notice the length of this unaccented vowel. By nearly the same token, the shortness of the unaccented [ו] in the coaxing imperative or in a noun such as יָסַע got no particular notice from them. Once it is marked with the extra two dots, in יָסַע (`keep this,' 1 Chr 29:18) according to L. 27 Here the other [ו] has no accent because of hyphenation to the next word, and can hardly be long enough for a בּוֹל when followed immediately by a strengthened consonant and an accented vowel; but even so, the [ו] of the first syllable is shorter, and that shortness seemed worth marking. 28

The expert vocalizers did nothing at random, although they varied a little as individuals in their adherence to tradition and in their handling of the notation. Wherever we detect something short of absolute consistency and comprehensiveness, there can be found a particular cause, rooted either in the language of the text or in the constraints of the art of pointing.

24. The marginal Massorah of L notes יָסַע = "nowhere else.

25. Here the marginal Massorah of L notes יָסַע = "nowhere else short." A has only יָסַע.

26. In the immediate pre-accentual position we expect no בּוֹל, but in L we find it once — before בָּל ("my blood," 1 Sam 26:20); בָּל in CA and most edd., to emphasize or belabor the difference between this word and בָּל ("rest." Isa 62:6, etc.). The marginal Massorah notes יָסַע = "two occurrences"; the other is יָסַע in Job 16:18. Also no בּוֹל in יָסַע (Jer 51:35); there is no יָסַע for it to contrast with anywhere in the Bible.

27. A has the normal יָסַע.

28. However, not so in יָסַע ("remember for me") although the situation is apparently quite equivalent (Neh 13:22; יָסַע in 5:19, 13:14, 31). Kahle (1927–30, II, 58*) describes a group of mss. with this characteristic (among others): "Soll Kames wie o gesprochen werden (Kames Haçü) so wird ihm ein Św vorgesetzt." E.g., יָסַע in Ps 114:2, on pl. 15, see p. 52*.)
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