

Pāṭah and Qāmeṣ: On the Etymology and Evolution of the Names of the Hebrew Vowels

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***Patah* and *Qames*:  
On the Etymology and Evolution  
of the Names of the Hebrew Vowels<sup>1</sup>**

Richard C. STEINER

The vocalization of the Hebrew vowel name *pth* has long been considered problematic. Already in the sixteenth century Elias Levita wrote:

פתח      נקודת הפתח ידועה ורוב ימי תמהתי  
על מה שקוראין התירי רפוייה וקרי היא ראוייה  
להדגש אחר הפתח גם רוב היהודים קורין  
המלה מלרע ואינו אלא מלעיל וכן קוראין אנחנו  
האשכנזים בפתח מלעיל:<sup>2</sup>

The פתח sign is well known, and for most of my life I have wondered at the fact that people read the *t* with a lenis pronunciation, when it ought to be fortis. Furthermore, most Jews read the word with the stress on the final syllable (oxytone), when it is really stressed on the penultimate syllable (paroxytone). That is how we German Jews read it, with *a* and stressed on the penultimate syllable.

This statement is perplexing. If the penultimate stress of the Ashkenazic pronunciation of the word is correct, why is the spirantized *t* the problem? With penultimate stress, the name can only be a segolate, and, thus, if anything is problematic, it is the vocalization of the first syllable: פתח instead of פתח.

In any event, the Ashkenazic tradition, cited by Levita, would seem to be an excellent starting point for discussion of this problem, since that reading tradition distinguishes *ā* from *a* and *t* from *t* — two distinctions that happen to be at the heart of the problem. The Ashkenazic vocalization פתח, which survives to this day in Yiddish *pásax*<sup>3</sup>, appears to be evidence against

<sup>1</sup> This is the English version of a Hebrew article written for a Festschrift in honor of Prof. Aaron Dotan. I am greatly indebted to Prof. Dotan and to Profs. C. E. Cohen, S. Z. Leiman, J. S. Penkower, and J. Yahalom for their generous assistance at various stages during the preparation of this article. They are in no way responsible for the errors in it.

<sup>2</sup> Elijah Levita, *Sefer ha-tishbi* (Basel 1601) 76a. The vocalization is that of the author; see S. Z. Leiman, "Abarbanel and the Censor", *JJS* 19 (1968) 49, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the form *posax* found in some Yiddish dialects is not an archaism. It is the product of a sound change — the same one that produced the form *šobas*; see U. Weinreich, "Ha-ivrit ha-ashkenazit ve-ha-ivrit she-be-yiddish: beḥinatan ha-ge'ografit", *Lesonenu* 24

an original פתח, פתח, פתח, פתח (not to mention פתח, פתח, פתח, etc.). However, it is well known that the Ashkenazic reading tradition did not begin to distinguish *ā* from *a* until the fourteenth century — too late to affect many Hebrew loanwords in Yiddish. Hence, the Yiddish form *pásax* need not reflect an original פתח. It could reflect פתח or פתח, just as Yiddish *dag* reflects דג, *dam* reflects דם, *kháver* reflects חבֿר, *yam* reflects ים, *klal* reflects כָּלֵל, *ksav* reflects כָּתָב, *leváye* reflects לִוְיָה, *navenad* reflects נָע וְנָד, *prat* reflects פֶּרֶט, etc.<sup>4</sup>. All of these “merged Hebrew” forms reflect the early pronunciation of Ashkenaz, which had a vowel system with only five qualities, instead of the seven qualities of the Tiberian reading tradition<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the only portion of the Ashkenazic form *pásax* that can help in our quest for the Tiberian form is the spirantized *ṭ*.

Levita’s comment triggered a search for a better vocalization. J. Buxtorf, focussing on Levita’s first sentence, suggested פתח:

פתח *Pathach, vocalis A brevis apud Grammaticos. Miratur Elias hīc duo: primò, quare dicatur Pathach פתח cum ת leni, quod debebat dagessari: secundò quòd multi Judæi pronuncient Pathach cum accentu in ultima. Cum Dagesch certē esset formæ שְׂדִי, פִּנָּג, פִּדָּן, quæ etiam accentum habent in ultima*<sup>6</sup>.

L. Reggio opted for פתח (on the pattern of רָשָׁע), contrasting with קָמֵץ<sup>7</sup>. J. Derenbourg vocalized the vowel names as imperatives: פתח פּוֹמֶךְ, קָמֵץ פּוֹמֶךְ, etc.<sup>8</sup> M. Lambert asserted that the names of the Hebrew vowels must have had the same vocalization as the Syriac names: פתח, קָמֵץ, etc.<sup>9</sup> P. Haupt and G. Bergsträsser pointed most of the vowel names as segolate verbal nouns: פתח, קָמֵץ, etc.<sup>10</sup>. These vocalizations were based more on speculation than on hard evidence from reliable manuscripts.

(1960) 249-50. The sound change accidentally restored what I believe to be the original form (see below).

<sup>4</sup> H. Yalon, *Pirke lashon* (Jerusalem 1971) 267; M. Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language* (Chicago 1980) 356-57. I am indebted to C. E. Cohen for the former reference.

<sup>5</sup> See Weinreich, *History* 390-91 and I. Eldar, *Masoret ha-qeri’ah ha-qedam-’ashkenazit* (Jerusalem 1978-79) 1.30-32 and the literature cited there.

<sup>6</sup> J. Buxtorf, *Lexicon chaldaicum, talmudicum et rabbinicum* (Basel 1640) 1871-72.

<sup>7</sup> Leon di Zaccaria Reggio, *Grammatica ragionata della Lingua Ebraica* (Livorno 1844) 8.

<sup>8</sup> J. Derenbourg, “Review of G. Schneidermann, *Die Controverse des Ludovicus Cappellus mit den Buxtorfen, über das Alter der hebr. Punctuation*”, *Revue critique d’histoire de littérature* 25 (1879) 459; cf. W. Bacher, *Die Anfänge der hebräischen Grammatik* (Leipzig 1895) 15.

<sup>9</sup> M. Lambert, “Quelques remarques sur les voyelles hébraïques”, *REJ* 18 (1889) 123; id., *Traité de grammaire hébraïque* (Paris 1946) 19.

<sup>10</sup> P. Haupt, “The Names of the Hebrew Vowels”, *JAOS* 22 (1901) 17; G. Bergsträsser, *Hebräische Grammatik* (Leipzig 1918) 49 §8e. Cf. already H. Ewald, *Ausführliches Lehrbuch der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Bundes* (Göttingen 1863) 90 §29e, cited below. The vowel names used in Babylonia — *myph pwm*, *myqps pwm*, *pyth*, *yms* — are in fact verbal nouns; see S. Morag, “Mi’alam shel rishonim: ‘al darkam shel hakhme ha-masorah we-‘al munnahim ‘aramiyyim she-tave’u”, *Lešonenu* 38 (1974) 59-62; I. Yeivin, *Masoret ha-lashon ha-ivrit ha-*

A more promising vocalization appeared in S. D. Luzzatto's Italian works on Hebrew grammar, published in 1836 and 1853. There we find פתח, contrasting with קמץ<sup>11</sup>. In 1886, P. de Lagarde noted, in a parenthetical remark, that "פתח und קמץ ... sind wie שג, aramäische Participia"<sup>12</sup>. Reactions to this vocalization were mixed. Haupt rejected it out of hand: "Lagarde's idea that the names פתח and קמץ should be pronounced as Aramaic participles, viz. פתח, קמץ, is untenable."<sup>13</sup> So too Bergsträsser: "Weder die Vokalisierung und Erklärung als Partizipien (P de Lagarde ...) noch die als Imperative (Derenbourg ...) hat in der Überlieferung irgendwelche Stütze."<sup>14</sup> For C. Levias, on the other hand, the Luzzatto-Lagarde theory was just as valid as that of Lambert or Haupt, for "פתח and קמץ, like פסק, דגש, and many accent names, had many forms"<sup>15</sup>. In support of the Luzzatto-Lagarde theory, he pointed to "Arabic spellings like פאתחה קאמצה" and the "analogy with forms like מאריך"<sup>16</sup>. H. Hyvernat too considered the theory plausible. In discussing פתח, he wrote: "La ponctuation primitive était peut-être פתח (*qui ouvre*)."<sup>17</sup> Hyvernat's rendering "qui ouvre" is similar to his translation of קמץ: "qui resserre, qui fait resserre (la bouche)"<sup>18</sup>. Clearly, he too understood these names as participles. More recently, G. Khan has arrived at the same conclusion: "The same applies to the vowel names פתח and קמץ, which are vocalized thus in the medieval Karaite sources. It seems that these also are in origin Aramaic active participles. This would parallel the Arabicized forms פאתחה and קאמצה which are found in some Judaeo-Arabic texts."<sup>19</sup>

In the index to Dotan's edition of *Sefer diqduq ha-te'amim*, the only vocalized form listed for *pth* is פתח<sup>20</sup>. One of the attestations comes from a Masoretic note in the well-known Codex Leningrad B19<sup>a</sup> written in 1009<sup>21</sup>. Another early attestation of this vocalization comes from a Genizah frag-

*mishtaqefet ba-niqqud ha-bavli* (Jerusalem 1985) 54; Y. Ofer, *Ha-masoret ha-bavlit la-torah: 'eqronoteha u-drakheha* (Jerusalem 2001) 41.

<sup>11</sup> S. D. Luzzatto, *Prolegomeni ad una grammatica ragionata della lingua ebraica* (Padua 1836) 16, 19 n. 2; id., *Grammatica della lingua ebraica* (Padua 1853) 13. Luzzatto does not discuss the forms explicitly in these works, but he may have done so elsewhere.

<sup>12</sup> P. de Lagarde, "Review of *Targum Onkelos* (Herausgegeben und erläutert von Dr. A. Berliner)", *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* 22 (1886) 873.

<sup>13</sup> Haupt, *JAOS* 22, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Bergsträsser, *Hebräische Grammatik* 50 §8e. He admits, however, that *hṭp*, *dgš*, *mpyq*, and *rpq* are Aramaic participles (50 §8f).

<sup>15</sup> C. Levias, "The Names of the Hebrew Vowels", *HUCA* 1904, 146.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> H. Hyvernat, "Le langage de la Massore", *RB* 14 (1905) 525, n. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 529.

<sup>19</sup> G. Khan, *The Early Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical Thought, Including a Critical Edition, Translation and Analysis of the Diqduq of Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ on the Ha-ḡiographa* (Leiden 2000) 24.

<sup>20</sup> *Sefer diqduq ha-te'amim le-R. Aharon ben Mosheh ben Asher* (ed. A. Dotan; Jerusalem 1967) 410.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 129.

ment believed by Mann to be “probably from the ninth or the tenth century”<sup>22</sup>. In a section of this vocalized text entitled “the order of signs” (see below), we find פתח and קמץ, each attested twice<sup>23</sup>. The variation in the vowel of the second syllable is particularly telling. The same variation can be seen in פתח חדא ופתח חדא “for it (a sleeping gazelle) closes one (eye) and opens the other” (y. Shabb. 14.1, 14b), with *yod* (= *e*) in one participle but  $\emptyset$  (= *a*) in the other. The lowering of *e* to *a* before final pharyngeals (and *r*) is exhibited by Biblical Aramaic participles like פלח and ידע (vs. עבד and שאל).

As noted by Lagarde and Levias, the use of participles here fits the larger picture. Many other Masoretic terms appear to have originated as Aramaic active participles. This can be seen in מפקין “one brings out (from the mouth)”<sup>24</sup> and in cases where *CāCeC* or *CaCeC* vocalizations have survived, e.g., זקר “one makes erect”, גרש “one drags (out)”<sup>25</sup>, אול “one goes”<sup>26</sup>, פסק “one stops”<sup>27</sup>, פשט “one extends”<sup>28</sup>, etc.

If the names פתח and קמץ are participles, they must be abridgments of sentences. Both are transitive participles, used of body parts like the eyes (cf. the Yerushalmi passage cited above) and the mouth. We may follow the overwhelming majority of scholars in assuming that the original object of these participles was *pwm*-, or rather the Galilean Aramaic form *p(y)m*-<sup>29</sup>. A Masoretic note to Prov 1:28 (אז יקראני ולא אענה ישחרני ולא ימצאני) in the Aleppo Codex may be cited in this connection:

<sup>22</sup> J. Mann, “On the Terminology of the early Massorites and Grammarians”, in: *Paul Haupt Anniversary Volume* (Leipzig 1926) 438.

<sup>23</sup> N. Allony, “Reshimat munnahim qara’it me-ha-me’ah ha-sheminit”, in: *Sefer Korngren* (Tel-Aviv 1964) 331 (photograph), 342; reprinted in Allony, *Mehqere lashon we-sifrut* (Jerusalem 1986-) 2.112 (photograph), 123. Remarkably, Allony dismisses the vocalization פתח; see his *Ha-balshanut ha-ivrit bi-tveryah* (Jerusalem 1995) 128.

<sup>24</sup> I.e., one makes (letters that are sometimes silent) audible. Although the Aramaic participle מפקין can be the plural of either passive מפק or active מפק, its normal use in the Masorah appears to be active: (וא) מפקין ה’ א/אל”ה/י”ו “(and) they do (not) pronounce *he/aleph/waw*”.

<sup>25</sup> *Sefer diqduqe ha-te’amim le-R. Aharon ben Mosheh ben Asher* (ed. S. Baer and H. L. Strack; Leipzig 1879) 26; *Diqduqe ha-te’amim* (Dotan) 10, 118. The meaning “drag” is attested in Galilean Aramaic and in Christian Palestinian Aramaic. For a different interpretation (“expulsor”), see A. Dotan, “Masorah”, *EJ* (= *Encyclopaedia Judaica*) 16, 1454.

<sup>26</sup> Dotan, *ibid.* 1455. For the relationship of this form to אול ( *Diqduqe ha-te’amim* [Dotan] 396), see n. 49 below.

<sup>27</sup> *Diqduqe ha-te’amim* (Baer-Strack) 22, 27; I. Eldar, *Torat ha-qeri’ah ba-miqra’* (Jerusalem 1994) 170, l. 9.

<sup>28</sup> So in Kalonymus b. David’s vocalized treatise on the accents at the end of Abraham de Balmes, *Miqneh Avram* (Venice 1523). For the relationship of this form to פשט ( *Diqduqe ha-te’amim* [Dotan] 410), see n. 49 below.

<sup>29</sup> In Galilean Aramaic, “your mouth” would be *pymk*. Thus, in a Galilean Aramaic *piyyut*, the month of Nisan tells Adar: קמץ פיםך לא חמלל “close your mouth, don’t speak”; M. Sokoloff and J. Yahalom, *Shirat bene ma’arava* (Jerusalem 1999) 232, l. 38; cf. 238, l. 40: פתח פיםיה (for פתח פיםיה?). Contrast the view of Levias (*HUCA* 1904, 146) concerning קמץ that “the participial form is originally no noun, but a whole sentence ... meaning ‘one should pronounce or vocalize with *kameç*’”. According to this view קמץ is a denominative participle whose object is *mylth*/ “the word”, not *pymh*/ “the mouth”.

כל מלה דבקרייה דאית בה תריין מתאמין דמיין  
 אן<sup>30</sup> קדם להון געי רבא או געי זעירא פתחין  
 בפמה בר מן ו... ואן לא קדם להון געי לא  
 פתחין כמות הנני חקקי<sup>31</sup>

Whenever a word in Scripture has two identical (adjacent consonants), if they are preceded by a major or minor *ga'ya*, one<sup>32</sup> opens the mouth (to pronounce *ā* between the two consonants)<sup>33</sup>, except for six cases ... but if they are not preceded by a *ga'ya*, one does not open (it), as in הַנְּנִי and חֲקֻקִי.

Another Masoretic note, preserved only in later sources, provides even clearer support: דאכיל פתח פומיה ודלא אכל קמץ פומיה<sup>34</sup>. This note refers to the contrast between Ezek 18:11 אֶל־הֶהָרִים אָכַל and Ezek 18:6, 15 אֶל־עַל־הֶהָרִים לֹא אָכַל. Its literal meaning is: "He who eats opens his mouth; he who does not eat closes his mouth." As a directive for reading, it means: "He who reads *'kl* opens his mouth (in the final syllable); he who reads *l' 'kl* closes his mouth (in the final syllable)." We may also compare the Babylonian vowel names *mpth pwm'* and *mqs pwm'*<sup>35</sup>.

As for the subject of the participles, it seems likely that it is a singular pronoun referring to the reader, either *hw'* or *'t*. A proto-Masoretic note preserved in y. Sanh. 2.3, 20b seems to point to the latter: "throughout Scripture you read (the name of David's wife as) [Avigayil] except in this verse (1 Sam 25:32, where you read [Avigal])"<sup>36</sup>. Also in the second person is the very common Rabbinic formula אל תקרי rather than אל יקרי \*. On the other hand, *Sefer diqduqe ha-te'amim* refers to the reader in the third person singular. Thus, in referring

<sup>30</sup> The reading *'y* (and *w'y* in the continuation) is impossible for several reasons, *pace* D. S. Loewinger, "The Aleppo Codex and the Ben Asher Tradition", *Textus* 1 (1960) 69. First, *'y < 'yn* "if" is a Babylonian form, not attested in authentic Galilean Aramaic; see M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic* (Ramat-Gan 2002) 108; id., *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic* (Ramat-Gan 1990) 47, 63. Second, the letter in question is far too long to be *yod*, and it has the wrong head as well. Even though it does not descend below the base line, it is a final *nun*, virtually identical to the one in *mn*, eleven words later. The correct reading is found in I. Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* (ed. E. J. Revell; Missoula, Mont. 1980) 105.

<sup>31</sup> *Keter 'aram sova'* (Jerusalem 1976-) 563; *Diqduqe ha-te'amim* (Dotan) 391.

<sup>32</sup> In theory, the subject of תריין מתאמין דמיין here, but the impersonal use of קמץין ("one closes") elsewhere in the Masorah Magna of the Aleppo Codex makes this unlikely.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., רַבְּבוֹת; see n. 37 below.

<sup>34</sup> See J. S. Penkower, *Ya'aqov ben Hayyim u-smiḥat mahadurat ha-miqra'ot ha-gedolot* (Hebrew University dissertation 1982) 133. The *yod* in דאכיל suggests that all the verbs are participles. However, this version of the note is known only from a late (14th-15th century) source. In Radaq's commentary (to Ezek 18:11), we find אכל פתח פומיה, אכל קמץ פומיה, or (according to *Miqra'ot gedolot ha-keter*) אכל פתח פומא, אכל קמץ פומא. I am indebted to Y. Maori for all of these references.

<sup>35</sup> See n. 10 above.

<sup>36</sup> This passage should be added to the discussion of early Masoretic activity in I. Yeivin, *Ha-masorah la-miqra'* (Jerusalem 2003) 110-111.

to the realization of *shewa* as [ā]<sup>37</sup> between two identical adjacent consonants (e.g., רָבָבוּת pronounced רַבְבוּת), Aaron ben Asher writes: יִפְתַּח פִּי בְּאוֹת הָרָאשׁוֹן<sup>38</sup>. We may therefore reconstruct אֶת/הוּא פִּימָךְ/פִּימִיָּה and אֶת/הוּא קֶמֶץ פִּימָךְ/פִּימִיָּה as the source of our vowel names<sup>39</sup>.

Luzzatto was not consistent in vocalizing the vowel names. Although his קֶמֶץ and פֶּתַח are Aramaic participles, he vocalized other names as Hebrew segolate verbal nouns: חָרַק, חָלַם, and שָׁרַק<sup>40</sup>. Such vocalizations are actually attested here and there in Judeo-Arabic manuscripts of early grammatical works: חָלַם in Saadia Gaon's grammar, שָׁרַק and חָרַק in one of Ḥayyuj's grammatical treatises, חָלַם, חָרַק, and שָׁרַק in *Hidāyatu l-qāri'*<sup>41</sup>. Two of these forms are used in a non-technical sense by *payṭanim* like Qillir: *bḥrq šnyw* "with gnashing of his teeth" and *bšrq* "with a whistle"<sup>42</sup>.

Luzzatto's inconsistency was apparently viewed as a fatal flaw by subsequent scholars, most of whom tried to impose some uniformity on the names. In my view, consistency is not to be expected here, since the names in question come from more than one system of classification<sup>43</sup> and more than one period: *pṭḥ* and *qmṣ* are certainly older than *ḥrq*, *ḥlm*, *šrq*, etc.<sup>44</sup>. Evidence for this assertion was presented already by Levita:

אך זה לבד מצאתי, כי בעלי המסורת לא קראו  
שמות לנקודות, רק לקמץ ולפתח ובכללם הצרי  
והסגול, דהיינו שקראו לצרי ג"כ קמץ, ולסגול  
ג"כ פתח.... אבל שאר הנקודות לא נזכרו  
בשם בכל המסרה גדולה וקטנה, רק קראו  
לחירק א', ולחולם או, ולשורק או....<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup> This was, of course, the default pronunciation of mobile *shewa* in the Tiberian tradition.

<sup>38</sup> *Diqduqe ha-te'amim* (Dotan) 115, l. 3. This is his Hebrew paraphrase of פתחין בפמה in the Masoretic note cited above from the Aleppo Codex. Cf. מה שיפתח בפה (ibid. 286, l. 7), יפתח בפה בקריאה (ibid. 377, n. 8). Cf. also ידע הקורא "let the reader know" (ibid. 126, l. 2).

<sup>39</sup> This is not far from the theory of Derenbourg and Bacher that these vowel names were originally commands; see above.

<sup>40</sup> S. D. Luzzatto, *Prolegomeni* 16, n. 1 and 19, n. 2. Cf. Dotan, *EJ* 16, 1449.

<sup>41</sup> A. Dotan, *Or rishon be-hokhmat ha-lashon: sefer šaḥot leshon ha-'ivrim le-rav Se'adyah Ga'on* (Jerusalem 1997) 447 l. 48; Judah b. David Ḥayyuj, *The Weak and Geminative Verbs in Hebrew* (ed. M. Jastrow; Leiden 1897) XXXII (English section); Eldar, *Torat ha-qeri'ah* 120, 124, 125.

<sup>42</sup> See Academy of the Hebrew Language, *Ma'agarim*, s.v. I am unable to say whether or not these forms have pointing in the original manuscripts. Qillir also uses the phrase *bšph qmwšh*, but the precise meaning of the phrase (and its relevance to our discussion) is controversial; see E. Fleischer, "Munnah diqduqi qadum be-fiyuṭ qalliri", *Leš* 36 (1972) 263-67 and Z. Malachi, "Zaqef qameš — zaquf be-lashon we-qamuš bi-šfatayim", *Leš* 56 (1993) 137-41. (I am indebted to J. Yahalom for the latter reference.)

<sup>43</sup> See Dotan, *EJ* 16, 1448-49.

<sup>44</sup> Eldar, *Torat ha-qeri'ah* 120, n. 1. However, there is no basis for Kahle's theory that even the early grammarians did not use *ḥrq*, *ḥlm*, *šrq*, etc.; see M. Wilensky, "Le-toledot ha-niqqud ha-tavrani" in his *Mehqarim be-lashon u-v-sifrut* (Jerusalem 1978) 4-6.

<sup>45</sup> *The Massoreth ha-Massoreth of Elias Levita* (ed. C. D. Ginsburg; London 1867) 131-32.



But this is what I found: The Masoretes did not give names to the (vowel) points except for *qms* and *pth*, which included *šry* and *sgwl*, i.e., *šry* was called *qms* by them and *sgwl* was called *pth*.... But the rest of the (vowel) points are not mentioned by name anywhere in the Masorah, *magna* or *parva*; rather, *hyrq* is called *i*, *hwlml* is called *o*, and *šwrq* is called *u*....

In several early expositions of the Hebrew vowels or vowel letters, we can still see the stage in which *pth* and *qms* (or *pthh* and *qms̄h*, sometimes with an adjective)<sup>46</sup> are the only names derived from phonetic descriptions:

שבע נקדוֹת למאד כבודוֹת

...

ראשונה היא קמֶצֶה, בפה היא קבוצה.  
ושניה היא פתחה, מגדת נכוחה.  
ושלישית פתחה קטנה, כל פתיים מבינה.  
ורביעית קמצה קטנה, שתי נקדוֹת מְכוֹנָה.  
וחמישית נקֶדָה אחת,<sup>47</sup> לבדה מונחת.  
וששית ושביעית, אֵי ואוֹ האמצעית.<sup>48</sup>

שבעה מלכים בראשם עטרה

...

ראשונה קמצה ופתחה<sup>49</sup> גדורה.  
ושלש נקודות עמם מסורה.  
רביעית וחמישית אֵי אוֹ החמורה.  
וששית ושביעית אֵי אוֹ במ קשורה.  
שָׁנָא לבדה עצורה תשרת כלם במקרא.<sup>50</sup>

For a discussion of this passage, see J. S. Penkower, “‘Iyyun meḥuddash be-sefer Masoret ha-masoret le-‘Eliyyahu Bahur”, *Italia* 8 (1989) 35-36.

<sup>46</sup> For these forms, see n. 49 below.

<sup>47</sup> I.e., *hlm*; *hrq* is mentioned in the next line.

<sup>48</sup> *Diqduqe ha-ṭe’amim* (Baer-Strack) 11, bottom.

<sup>49</sup> The vocalization פתחה given here by Baer-Strack is not found in any of the manuscripts (personal communication from A. Dotan). The vocalization פִתְחָה is attested in *Diqduqe ha-ṭe’amim* (Baer-Strack) 12 (Codex Leningrad B19\*) and *Diqduqe ha-ṭe’amim* (Dotan) 114. If that is original, we are probably dealing not with a borrowing from Arabic but with פִתְחָה plus the feminine ending or the definite article (spelled ה- as usual in Galilean Aramaic); cf. גִּרְשָׁה ~ גִּרְשָׁה (*Diqduqe ha-ṭe’amim* [Dotan] 108, 118), וְקָהָה ~ וְקָהָה (ibid. 107, 108), פִּסְקָה ~ פִּסְקָה (*Diqduqe ha-ṭe’amim* [Baer-Strack] 22). For the (Arabicizing?) vocalizations פִתְחָה and קמֶצֶה, see *Diqduqe ha-ṭe’amim* (Dotan) 76.

<sup>50</sup> *Diqduqe ha-ṭe’amim* (Baer-Strack) 34.



סָדֵר הַסִּימָנִין. זֶה סָדֵר הַסִּימָנִין:  
 שִׁשָּׁה נְעִים הֵם שְׁלוֹשׁ אוֹתִיּוֹת.  
 לְאַלֶּף שְׁנֵי פָנִים, אֶחָד קִמָּץ וְאֶחָד פֶּתַח ...  
 כְּמוֹת: אֵ קִמָּץ אֶ פֶּתַח.  
 לוֹ לָנוּ שְׁנֵי פָנִים: אוֹ אוֹ.  
 לִיּוֹד שְׁנֵי פָנִים: אֵי אֵי.  
 אֵילוֹ הֵן שְׁלוֹשׁ אוֹתִיּוֹת שֶׁבָּהֶן נִעְשׂוּ.<sup>51</sup>

It is likely that the names *pth* and *qms* go back to the earliest attempts of the Masoretes to distinguish the vowels of their oral reading tradition. Dotan has called attention to the rare use of the label *hd qms whd pth* to refer to oppositions other than  $\bar{a} \neq a$  and  $e \neq \bar{a}$ :

It would appear that this use of the terms קִמָּץ and פֶּתַח occurred during a most ancient period, a time when these terms were not as yet serving to denote definite vowels. The vestiges of this use, both of the terms קִמָּץ, מִלְרַע, מִלְעִיל and the terms פֶּתַח, קִמָּץ indicate that in the period which preceded the invention of the vowel signs such a method of *relative* notation of vowels was current. It was therefore necessary to indicate the vowels which distinguish between homographs. There was no need for a complicated system of terms for this, and there is no evidence of special signs for it in Hebrew<sup>52</sup>.

This crucial insight helps to explain why the vowel  $\bar{a}$  should be described in terms of closing the mouth, even though it is an open vowel compared to the other back vowels,  $u$  and  $o$ . We are dealing with a relative notation, that varied from pair to pair. In other words, the open vowel  $\bar{a}$  could legitimately be called closed when it was discussed in relation to  $a$ . The use of *qms* to refer to vowels other than  $\bar{a}$  and  $e$  was quickly forgotten. When Aaron b. Asher discusses the distribution of כָּל vs. כֵּל, he uses *qmsh* to refer to the more open vowel of the latter instead of the more closed vowel of the former (which he calls *nqwdh* 'הַר')<sup>53</sup>. In considering these facts, it is helpful to remember that (1) the terms *pth* and *qms* were used regularly by the Masoretes to express not only the  $a \neq \bar{a}$  opposition

<sup>51</sup> Allony, "Reshimat munnahim", in: *Sefer Korngryn* 331 (photograph), 342; reprinted in Allony, *Mehqere lashon we-sifrut* 2.112 (photograph), 123. The fact that *aleph* corresponds to פֶּתַח as well as קִמָּץ suggests that the author of this passage lived before Judah Hayyuj (d. ca. 1000).

<sup>52</sup> "The Beginnings of Masoretic Vowel Notation", in: *Masoretic Studies*, 1 (ed. H. M. Or-linsky; Missoula, Mont. 1974) 32; reprinted in I. Eldar and S. Morag, *Torat ha-lashon ha-'ivrit bi-yeme ha-benayim* (Jerusalem 1985) 41. Cf. also Dotan, *EJ* 16, 1432. Ginsburg has lists with the headings חָד מִלָּא חָד קִמָּץ and חָד מִלָּא חָד פֶּתַח, where קִמָּץ (פֶּתַח) is used of  $u$  in contrast to (פֶּתַח)  $o$ ; see Bacher, *Anfänge* 16, n. 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Diqduqe ha-te'amim* (Dotan) 119.

of the Tiberian reading tradition but also the  $\ddot{a} \neq e$  opposition<sup>54</sup>; and (2) it was precisely these two oppositions that were absent in Galilean Aramaic and the popular pronunciation of Hebrew (used in the liturgy, etc.) and ignored in some Masoretic mnemonics<sup>55</sup>. Thus, it appears that the most common use of *את/הוא קמץ פימך/פימיה* and *את/הוא פתח פימך/פימיה* was to guide the reader in distinguishing the vowel pairs that were normally confused in popular pronunciation. When relative notation gave way to absolute notation, the less common uses were cast aside.

Let us conclude with a word about the subsequent history of these terms. Later generations felt that the names of the vowels ought to contain the vowel itself in the first syllable. H. Ewald writes: “Die namen *Pátach, Ssēre, Chireq, Qāmeß, Shúreq, Ségol* sind, um gleich vorn bei dem ersten buchstaben den vocalton zu erkennen den sie bezeichnen sollen, stark entstellt für פתח, צרי, חרק, קמץ, שרק, סגול.”<sup>56</sup> According to Dotan: “From approximately the eleventh century the custom of introducing the indicated vowel within the name began to spread.”<sup>57</sup> The names given by Levita exhibit the completion of the first stage of this process: פתח, קמץ, חירק, שנירק,<sup>58</sup> not to mention סגול.<sup>59</sup> The names given by Isaac b. Samuel ha-Levi in 1627 are more or less the same: חולם, קמץ, פתח, צירי/צרי, חירק, שורק, סגול.<sup>60</sup>

The result of this process was the type of iconicity known as “phonetic symbolism” or “sound-symbolism”. In this way, the names of the Hebrew vowels and their signs came to resemble the names of the Hebrew consonants and their signs, viz., the letters of the alphabet. It is well known that the name of every Hebrew letter begins with the consonant to which the letter refers. This naming principle, known as “acrophony”, is also a form of phonetic symbolism. Thus, the change in the names of the Hebrew vowel was a natural one, perhaps promoted by the analogy of the alphabetic names.

Stages *b* and *c* of this process affected the second syllable. In stage *b*, it was sufficient for the vowel of the second syllable to match the first, as in

<sup>54</sup> Dotan, *EJ* 16, 1148; Yeivin, *Ha-masorah la-miqra'* 89-90. For a long list of examples, see סימן קמץין ופתחין בקריה in *Diqduqe ha-te'amim* (Baer-Strack) 61-64. Cf. also the statement of Levita cited above.

<sup>55</sup> S. Fassberg, *A Grammar of the Palestinian Targum Fragments from the Cairo Geniza* (Atlanta, Ga. 1990) 30-57; Dotan, *EJ* 16, 1435-36; Levita, *Massoreth ha-Massoreth* 247.

<sup>56</sup> Ewald, *Lehrbuch* 90 §29e.

<sup>57</sup> Dotan, *EJ* 16, 1449.

<sup>58</sup> Note the *a* in the first syllable of *qms*, contrasting with *a* in the first syllable of *pth*. It is not clear which name was changed to create this contrast. It is possible that the names were פתח and קמץ before the fourteenth century and that only the latter had its original vowel restored.

<sup>59</sup> Levita, *Sefer ha-tishbi* 17b, s.v. גם; 39a s.v. שפס, 49b s.v. לול.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 96a, s.v. תנא.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 27b, s.v. ולך. However, the pointing of the first letter of סגול is not clear, and one cannot rule out סגול.

<sup>62</sup> Isaac b. Samuel ha-Levi, *Šiaḥ Yiṣḥaq* (Basel 1627) 8b.

the form *הִירִיק*, used already on occasion by Levita<sup>63</sup>, and of course *פֶּתַח* and *צִירִי*. In stage *c*, a new idea arose: the vowel of the second syllable should be the long or short counterpart of the vowel in the first syllable. In L. Gordon's introduction to a grammatical treatise attributed to the Gaon of Vilna, we see stage *c* with some admixture of stage *b*. In this introduction, the long vowels are called *קֶמֶץ*, *צִירֶה*, *חִירֶק*, *חֹלֶם*, *שׁוּרֶק*, and the short vowels are called *פֶּתַח*, *סָגֶל*, *חֶרֶק*, *קֶמֶץ*, *שֶׁרֶק*<sup>64</sup>. It is possible that the origin of stage *c* is to be sought in Lithuania, for it cleverly exploits the merger of *o* and *e* that characterizes the Lithuanian reading tradition<sup>65</sup>, as in *קֶמֶץ* for *קֶמֶץ* and *סָגֶל* for *סָגֹל*. A *terminus post quem* for this stage can perhaps be deduced from the fact that these names do not appear in the description of vowels in the body of the work itself<sup>66</sup>.

It will be noted that Gordon did not carry his system to its logical conclusion, giving *חֶרֶק* instead of *חִירִיק* and *שֶׁרֶק* instead of *שׁוּרִיק*. These two inconsistencies are eliminated in a primer used by many *cheder* pupils in Jerusalem today. Here the long vowels are called *קֶמֶץ*, *צִירֶה*, *חִירֶק*, *חֹלֶם*, *שׁוּרֶק*, and the short vowels are called *פֶּתַח*, *סָגֶל*, *חִירֶק*, *חֹלֶם*<sup>67</sup>, *קֶבֶץ*<sup>68</sup>.

We may sum up our findings concerning the evolution of *pataḥ* as follows:

Evolution of form:

1. את/הוא פֶּתַח פימך/פימיה
2. פֶּתַח
3. פֶּתַח
4. פֶּתַח, פֶּתַח, etc.

Evolution of meaning:

1. the more open of two contrasting vowels in a minimal pair
2. the vowel *a* or the vowel *ä*
3. the vowel *a*

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<sup>63</sup> Levita, *Sefer ha-tishbi* 15b, s.v. *גִּירֶה*. Cf. the transcription *hirik* (vs. *surek*) in Johannes Reuchlin, *De rudimentis hebraicis* (Pforzheim 1506) 11.

<sup>64</sup> *Mishnat Ha-Gra* (ed. L. Gordon; Vilna 1874) 1a.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, S. Morag, "Pronunciations of Hebrew", *EJ* 13, 1127, 1142.

<sup>66</sup> *Mishnat Ha-Gra* 8a.

<sup>67</sup> This is no doubt a misprint for *חֹלֶם*, for *א* is printed beneath it, while the other occurrence of *חֹלֶם* has *אָ* under it. The author is apparently under the impression that *חֹלֶם חָסֵר* is the short counterpart of *חֹלֶם מֵלֵא*.

<sup>68</sup> Moshe Chaim Cheshin, *Ha-massoret* (on cover: *Ha-massoret ha-shalem*) (Jerusalem 1992) 21. I am indebted to Chani Jacobowitz for this reference.