Three Methods of Preserving Guttural Consonants in the Tiberian Tradition: הַרְּעִמָהּ, וּזֲהַב, וַיְקַנְאוּ

This article is devoted to the unusual pointing of the verb **הַרְּעִמָהּ** (“to make her fret”) in I Samuel 1:6. This word represents the infinitive form of the *hif*‘*il* conjugation from the root R‘M, and it is unclear why the *resh* constituting the first letter of the root carries a *dagesh*. Although Abraham Geiger offered a convincing explanation for this pointing as long ago as 1857, the research has generally adopted the opinion of Ezra Zion Melamed (1947), while Geiger’s suggestion has been forgotten. This article seeks to substantiate Geiger’s solution and set it in its broader context: preserving the pronunciation of guttural consonants in the Tiberian tradition.

Explanation of the Form הַרְּעִמָהּ in Exegesis and Scholarship

The ancient Hebrew grammarians were preoccupied by the unusual *dagesh* in the form הַרְּעִמָהּ. Rabbi Judah Hayyuj noted that this is an unusual form; Rabbi Jonah ibn Janah and Rabbi David Kimhi suggested that its function is to strengthen the pronunciation of the consonant *resh*; and Rabbi Tanhum ben Joseph (Tanhum ha-Yerushalmi) suggested that the *dagesh* may be the product of the difficulty in pronouncing the combination of *resh* and *‘ayin* (Maman & Ben-Porat 2012:148-149).

Geiger 1857:50 proposed, alongside his suggestion that the proper noun **רוּת** (Ruth) should be regarded as a secondary form of the noun **רְעוּת** (“fellowship,”) that the *mappiq* in the *resh* of הַרְּעִמָהּ is intended to prevent the swallowing of the following *‘ayin*:

רעות = רות wie es der Syrer wirklich schreibt. Ain wird wie Alef nach dem mit Schwa versehenen Reseh im Hebräischen (noch mehr in den Dialekten) (…) Die Punctatoren fühlten Dies gleichfalls und setzten desshalb bei הַרְּעִמָהּ (1. Sam. I, 6.) einen Punkt in das Besch als Mappik, um anzuzeigen dass das Resch das Ain nicht verschlucken und das Chirek zu sich ziehen solle, vielmehr als mit Schwa versehen für sich, das Ain aber mit dem Vocale auszusprechen sei, gerade wie sie es bei הַרְּאִיתֶם (1. Sam 10, 24. 17, 25. Kön. 6, 32.) machten. Umgekehrt sind sie bei Eigeanamen weniger darauf bedacht, die Yerschlucknng zu verhüten nad deuten dieselbe gerade durch die Punctation an, und wie sie Dies bei הָראוּבֵנִי (4. Mos. 26, 7. und sonst) thun, wo sie das Schwa vom Resch abwerfen und das U des Alef ihm zuwenden (vgl. Heidenheim in der Anm. zu En ha-Kore a. a. O.).

Geiger’s explanation of the origin of the name **רוּת** was not accepted by all scholars (Zakovitch 1976:338). However, his principle claim and the connection he proposed between **הַרְּעִמָהּ** and **הַרְּאִיתֶם** (“did you see”) are extremely convincing.

Ezra Zion Melamed (1947:1) offered a different explanation. He suggested that the *dagesh* in **הַרְּעִמָהּ** denotes that the root R‘M in this verse in Samuel has the meaning of anger or resentment, as distinct from the sense of a loud, thundering sound, as for example in **הִרְעִים** (“thundered,” Psalm 29:3). Melamed’s opinion was accepted by Israel Yeivin 1985:362 and Geoffrey Kahn 2013:306.

It is true that, on occasion, the Masoretes distinguished between sacred and profane forms, such as **אֲבִיר/אַבּיר** (“mighty one,” Melamed 1947, Yeivin 1985:361-362), and sometimes also between different meanings of similar forms, such as **יָלִין/יַלִּין** (“he will sleep,” “he will complain,” Gesenius 1910:202). However, the use of pointing to distinguish different meanings is an unusual phenomenon. Moreover, the connection between **הִרְעִים** and **הַרְּעִמָהּ** is relatively tenuous. The forms themselves are not similar, and the meaning of each form is clearly distinguishable from the context in which it appears. Accordingly, it seems rather improbable that the Masoretes were concerned that readers might associate the two forms and hence felt a need to distinguish them.

Weakening of the Pronunciation of Guttural Consonants in the Biblical Text

In contrast to Melamed’s explanation, that of Geiger can draw on solid support. Various scholars, including Meir Lamber (1906:321), Raphael Kutscher (1961), and Yoel Lerner (1983), have already noted that when two consonants, the first non-guttural and the second guttural, are followed by a vowel, the tendency is for the guttural consonant to weaken. In such contexts, the guttural consonant often weakens completely and is not pronounced. In such instances, the phenomenon may be represented as follows: CGV > CV. In some cases, an interim stage or hypercorrection is documented: the pronunciation of the guttural consonant is maintained, but the vowel that follows it shifts back and follows the preceding consonant, yielding the pattern: CGV>CVG.

Complete Omission of the Guttural Consonant

The following is an example of complete omission preserved in the Biblical orthography: **לַהְשׁוֹת** (to lay waste,” II Kings 19:25; the parallel text in Isaiah 37:26 has **לְהַשְׁאוֹת**). The form **לַהְשׁוֹת** reflects two changes that occurred in two stages. Firstly, in the stage documented in the Biblical orthography, the guttural consonant *aleph* was omitted from the sequence CGV. At a later stage, documented in the Tiberian Masoretic pointing, a change occurred in the sequence of vowels in the segment **לְהַ** at the beginning of the form. The vowel shifted back, creating the sequence **לַהְ**, and in schematic terms: CGV > CVG.

Geiger mentioned the Masoretic reading **הָרֻאוּבֵנִי** (“the Reuvenite,” Numbers 26:7). Contrary to his view, the weakening of the pronunciation of *aleph* is found not only in personal nouns, but also in the verb system, as for example in **חֹטִאים** (“they sin,” I Samuel 14:33), **יְראוּ** (“they see,” Psalm 34:10), and elsewhere (Bergsträsser 1918:91-92).

It is also worth mentioning two forms in which the “Qri” tradition appears to differ from the “Ktiv” tradition, which may be interpreted, as Ginsburg 1934:215 suggested, as representing infinitive forms of the *qal* conjugation: **בֵּעָטֵף** (“in swooning,” Lamentations 2:11; according to the “Qri” tradition, the original form was \*בְּהֵעָטֵף, and the *he* between the consonant and the vowel disappeared). A similar instance is **וּבִכָּשְׁלוֹ** (>\*וּבְהִכָּשְׁלוֹ “on his stumbling,” Proverbs 24:17). This reading tradition suggests that readers of the Bible were familiar with the phenomenon of the omission of a guttural consonant between a consonant and a vowel, and accordingly they could interpret the written form without the *aleph* as reflecting the pronunciation following the weakening of the guttural consonant.

Vowel Change as Part of the Preservation of the Guttural Consonant

As mentioned above, in some instances the vowels changed without the silencing of the guttural consonant. The pronunciation of the guttural consonant was preserved, but the vowel following the guttural consonant shifted behind the preceding consonant (CGV > CVG). Examples of this include: **מַהְלְכִים** (<\*מְהַלְּכִים, “access,” Zechariah 3:7); **וְהַמַּהְגִּים** (<\*מְהַגִּים, “they mutter,” Isaiah 8:19); **בָּהְשַׁמָּה** מֵהֶם (“while she lies desolate without them,” Leviticus 26:43, and cf. 26:35 **הָשַּׁמָּה**); **מַחְלְמִים** (“you cause to be dreamed,” Jeremiah 29:8); **יָחְנְךָ** (“He will be gracious unto you,” Genesis 43:29, cf. Numbers 6:29 **וִיחֻנֶּךָּ**); **לַעְשֵׂר** (“to tithe,” Deuteronomy 6:29); **מַעְזְרִים** (“they help,” II Chronicles 28:23).[[1]](#footnote-1)

Forms of Preservation of Guttural Consonants in the Tiberian Tradition

(A) Doubling of a Consonant to Preserve the Pronunciation of a Following Guttural Consonant

Let us return now to the verb **הַרְּעִמָהּ**. The *dagesh* in the *resh* and the vocalization of this consonant[[2]](#footnote-2) were intended to prevent the weakening of the pronunciation of the following *‘ayin*. This is not the only instance in which a consonant preceding a guttural consonant was doubled. Geiger mentioned the three occurrences of **הַרְּאִיתֶם** (I Samuel 10:24; 17:25; I Kings 6:32). We may also mention the *semikhut* form with a *dagesh*יִקְּהַת – **יִקְּהַת** (“shall obey,” Genesis 49:10), **לִיקְּהַת** (“to obey,” Proverbs 30:17), which appears to reflect the root YQH (BDB 1907:429) in an analogous pattern to יִרְאָה (“awe,”) שִׂמְחָה (“joy,”) and so forth, where no *dagesh* is expected. It would seem that the *dagesh* is intended to preserve the pronunciation of the *he*. In Psalm 89:45 the form **מִטְּהָרוֹ** occurs. Yeivin (1980:150) noted the presence of the form מַטהָרוֹ, where the *mem* forms part of the derivational pattern, in the Babylonian tradition, while Alexey Yuditsky (2017:207) commented on the same form in Origen’s Transcriptions: ματ αρω > \*ματαρω. In the Tiberian tradition, too, it would seem that the *dagesh* in the *tet* is to be interpreted merely as an attempt to preserve the pronunciation of the *he*. In Daniel 8:9, we find the form **מִצְּעִירָה** (“small.”) A pointed Babylonian-Yemenite manuscript published by Shlomo Morag (1973:36) shows the form מַצעִירָה. It is possible, therefore, that here too the *dagesh* is phonetic rather than morphological. Lastly, we should mention the Masoretic tradition in the east and west regarding the pronunciation of the noun **יִדְּעֹנִי** (“familiar spirit,” Leviticus 20:27 and 10 other occurrences). The Damascus Keter (Jerusalem, National Library, Ms. Heb. 24°5702 [Sassoon 507]) includes in the Small Masorah the comment “d. for the west.,” which should be interpreted as “*dagesh* for the westerner,” hence implying that in the eastern tradition there is no *dagesh* in this form, as Yeivin (1985:1043) found while presenting this Masoretic comment in the Babylonian manuscripts. It is possible that the westerners chose the form with a *dagesh* in order to preserve the pronunciation of the *‘ayin*.

The question that now arises is why the consonant preceding the guttural consonant was doubled in these instances, but not in others.

Firstly, we should recall the comment by Rabbi Jonah ibn Janah (Derenbourg & Bacher 1886:240) that the addition of the phonetic *dagesh* is merely a tendency and does not have any fixed rules. Moreover, in the forms **הַרְּעִמָהּ, הַרְּאִיתֶם, מִטְּהָרוֹ, מִצְּעִירָה**, the doubling follows the letters *he*, *mem*. As Pretorius (1914:233-234) noted, a non-original doubling is more common after these letters, as for example in **הַצְּפִינוֹ** (“to hide him,” Exodus 2:3); **וּבְהַמְּרוֹתָם** (“in their provocation,” Job 17:2); **מִקְּדָשׁ** (“sanctuary,” Deuteronomy 23:11); **מִנְּזָרַיִךְ** (“your crowned,” Nahum 3:17). He argues that these forms result from the misinterpretation of the *he* and the *mem* as the definite article and the prepositional *min-* not forming part of the word.[[3]](#footnote-3) I see no need to assume that the *dagesh* was added due the misunderstanding of the text. It seems that, since a *dagesh* often follows a *he* or *mem,* the Masoretes allowed themselves to add a *dagesh* after these letters for phonetic purposes. In the cases of **הַרְּעִמָהּ, הַרְּאִיתֶם, מִטְּהָרוֹ, מִצְּעִירָה**, they added it in order to preserve the guttural consonants. However, this is merely a tendency, rather than an absolute or consistent rule.

(B) A *Ḥataf* in Place of a *Shva Naḥ* before a Vocalized Guttural Consonant

The second method used to preserve guttural consonants is to employ a *ḥataf*, rather than a *shva naḥ*, before a vocalized guttural consonant. I should emphasize that I am not referring to instances in which a *ḥataf* appears where a *shva na‘* would be expected. I shall confine my examples here to cases where the expected pointing is a *shva naḥ*. Using the Haketer software program, I found 17 occurrences of this phenomenon. I list them here in Hebrew alphabetical order, according to the consonant preceding the guttural consonant: **תִּבֲחַר** (“you choose,” Psalm 65:5); **אֶבֲחַר** (“I choose,” Job 29:25); **נִבֳהָל** (“hastens,” Proverbs 28:22); **וּֽזֳעָקוּ** (“wail!”) (*qri*, Jeremiah 48:20); **וּֽזֲהַב** (“and gold,” Genesis 2:12); **וּֽטֳהָר**־יָדַיִם (“and clean of hands,” Job 17:9); **וּֽלֲהַבְדִּיל** (“and to divide,” Genesis 1:18; Leviticus 10:10); **תִּלֲעַג** (“mocks [fem.], Proverbs 30:17); **שִׁמֲעָה** (“hear!” Psalm 39:13); **תִּמֲחַץ** (“it [fem.] may wade,” Psalm 68:24); **הַמֳעָרַת** (“is a den?” Jeremiah 7:11); **וּסֲחַר**־כּוּשׁ (“the merchandise of Ethiopia,” Isaiah 45:14); **בַּסֳעָרָה** (“by a whirlwind,” II Kings 2:1; the *samekh* does not have a *dagesh*); **וּסֳעָדָה** (“and refresh,” I Kings 13:7); **יִצֲחַק**־לִי (“will laugh at me,” Genesis 21:6); **וּצֳעָקִי** (“and shout!” Jeremiah 22:20).

To the above we should add the five instances of a *ḥataf ḥiriq* that appear in the Aleppo Codex (Yeivin, Keter, 21), all of which occur before a guttural consonant: הִ**שְׁ**חִיתוּ הִ**תְ**עִיבוּ (“they have dealt corruptly, they have done abominably,” Psalm 14:1); הִ**שְׁ**חִיתוּ וְהִ**תְ**עִיבוּ (“they have dealt corruptly and they have done abominably,” Psalm 53:2); לִ**קְ**חִי (take! [fem.] I Kings 17:11).

Regarding the vocalization of consonants followed by guttural consonants, a broader perspective better clarifies the details. Bergsträsser 1918:124 noted that sibilants tend to be pointed with a *ḥataf pataḥ*. Indeed, in addition to the seven examples of sibilants in the 17 examples presented above, many other examples can be found, as collated by Yeivin 1968:31. Nevertheless, rather than merely noting a general tendency, it is worth attempting to explain the pointing of the sibilants with a *ḥataf* in each specific instance. We may mention here the view of Rabbi Jonah ibn Janah (Derenbourg & Bacher 240:1886) that the *dagesh* in the *shin* in וְקַשְּׁתֿוֹתָֿם (“and their bows,” Psalm 37:15) serves to distinguish between the similar consonants š- ṯ. This insight may also explain the *ḥataf* in the words וּשֲׂדֵֿה (“and field,” Leviticus 25:34, Aleppo Codex; according to Yaacov Sapir, the similar consonants are š-ḏ); וּשֲׁתֵֿה (“and drink!” Ecclesiastes 9:7). We may also recall the tendency of sibilants to be pointed with *ḥataf* in the proximity of *pe*: הַצְּפִינוֹ (“to hide him,” Exodus 2:3); וְהַשֲׁפַתַּיִם (“and the slabs,” Ezekiel 40:43); לַשֲׁפַנִּים (“for the conies,” Psalm 104:18). I cannot clarify every instance of a *ḥataf* on a sibilant, but given the findings, it is worth noting the tendency for sibilants to be pointed with *ḥataf* when they are adjacent to the gutturals.

(C) Use of Doubling Before a Guttural Consonant

The first two ways we have discussed are similar in that they both entail the vocalization of the consonant before the guttural consonant. In many instances, however, the reverse process is seen: the doubling of the consonant before the guttural consonant is omitted. This phenomenon is common in verbs formed from the roots ML’, QN’, and NS‘, such as: **מִלְאוּ** (“fill!” Numbers 32:11); **וַיְקַנְאוּ** (“they were jealous,” Genesis 37:11); **וַיִּסְעוּ** (“they journeyed,” 60 occurrences, such as Genesis 35:16). The omission of the doubling before the *ḥet* appears in the plural forms of **פִּסֵּחַ** (“lame”) and **פִּקֵּחַ** (“sighted”) – **פִּסְחִים** and **פִּקְחִים**, respectively.

Gumpertz (1953:299) offered two explanations for the omission of the doubling: “The first was that the heightened pressure of breath required for the emphasized letter before the *aleph* would consume such a large part of the breath that the amount of expiratory air required to pronounce the *aleph* would not remain. The second concern was based on the reading rule: ‘A *shva* before a guttural is emitted on the pointing of the letter following the *shva*. (…) There is reason for concern that the pronunciation of the *aleph* between two vowels will once again be obscured.”

Thus the phenomenon of the omission of doubling is a third way of preserving the pronunciation of the guttural vowels.

Conclusion

This article has presented three ways for dealing with the problem of the pronunciation of guttural consonants in a sequence comprising a non-guttural consonant, a guttural consonant, and a vowel. The first two ways are the doubling of the consonant before the guttural consonant and its vocalization with *ḥataf*, while the third is the omission of the doubling of the consonant prior to the guttural consonant.

The contradiction between these ways is obvious: does the doubling of the consonant before the guttural consonant preserve its pronunciation, or on the contrary, is it the omission of the doubling before the guttural and the retention of the preceding consonant that preserve the pronunciation of the guttural consonant?

The operating method of the Masoretes may have been quite simple: they may always have acted in an unexpected manner. If the reader expected a *shva naḥ* and a consonant without a *dagesh*, they doubled and vocalized the consonant, so that the unusual pointing would cause the reader to proceed slowly and cautiously in pronouncing the word in front of him. If he was anticipating doubling, they omitted the consonant and the reader, sensing the unusual pointing, was careful in his pronunciation of the guttural consonants. The rule was to attract the reader’s attention and direct this attention to the precise pronunciation of a word whose reading deviates from the usual rules.

1. Note also the form in Genesis 32:20 **בְּמֹצַאֲכֶם** (“when you find.”) The *ḥataf* vowel on the *aleph* in **בְּמֹצְאֲכֶם** appears to have shifted to the preceding *tzadi*, despite the fact that the *ḥataf* on the *aleph* itself has been preserved, thereby yielding the form **בְּמֹצַאֲכֶם**. A lively debate has been pursued in the research regarding forms such as **קִרְאֶן** (“call!,” Exodus 2:20, cf. **קְרֶאןָ**, Ruth 1:20); **נִפְלְאַתָה** (“it [fem.] was wonderful,” II Samuel 1:26, cf. **נִפְלָאת**, Psalm 118:23); **כְּמוֹצְאֵת** (“as one [fem.] that finds,” Song of Songs 8:10, cf. **מֹצֵאת**, II Samuel 18:22), and so forth, where a consonant is followed by a voweled *aleph*, instead of a vowel and an unvocalized *aleph*. Some scholars regard these as artificial forms (for example, see Blau 2013:52-57), while others suggest that they are double-peaked forms (e.g. Bergsträsser 1918: 92 “extension,” Ben-Haim 2002:67). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to Geiger, as quoted above, the pointing in the *resh* is not a doubling, but rather a *mappiq* intended solely to draw attention. However, the *dagesh* serves to vowelize the *resh*, transforming the sequence CGV into two distinct sequences CV-GV, thereby preventing the pronunciation CV. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that the *dagesh* was indeed intended to double the consonant *resh*, since the by-product of this doubling is the vocalization of the second doubled consonant. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It should be mentioned in this context that Rabbi Jonah ibn Janah recalls that his opponent, probably Rabbi Shmuel Hanagid, argued that the form הצפינו is a definite noun reflecting the basic form \*צפין. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)