

## Pataḥ as a Consonant

K. Jongeling, Gouda

1 Most classical grammars of Biblical Hebrew explain the so called *pataḥ furtivum* as a helping vowel. We quote only two examples. The first one is taken from the introductory grammar of Cook and Holmstedt<sup>1</sup>:

Gutturals ה, ח, and ע at the end of a word following a long vowel take an *a-class* ‘helping’ vowel called a *furtive patach* (this is the only instance where two vowels occur in a row). רוּחַ [ruach]

The second one is from Gesenius grammar as edited by Cowley<sup>2</sup>:

After a heterogeneous long vowel, i. e. after all except *Qames*, the hard gutturals (consequently not א), when standing at the end of the word, require the insertion of a rapidly uttered *ă* (*Pathah furtivum*) between themselves and the vowel. This Pathah is placed under the guttural, but sounded before it. It is thus merely an orthographic indication not to neglect the guttural sound in pronunciation, e.g. גְבוּהַ, הַשְּׁלִיחַ, רַעַע, נוּעַ, רוּחַ *rû<sup>a</sup>h*, (when consonantal ה is final it takes Mappiq) but e.g. רוּחִי, &c., since here the rapidly uttered *ă* is no longer heard.

2 Comparable to the *pataḥ furtivum* is the short *ă* introduced in words ending in two consonants of which the first is a laryngeal. This occurs e.g. in the short imperfect forms of ה"ל verbs with a laryngeal as a first consonant, cf. the numerous examples as וַיַּעַשׂ, וַיַּעַשׂ < *wayya's*, *wayya'n*, and in perfect forms, sg. 2 f., of verbs ending in a laryngeal. The secondary nature of this *a* is, of course, easily concluded from the corresponding plural imperfect forms where this short *ă* is represented by a *hatef pataḥ*, resp the other perfect forms where no helping vowel is to be found. It is interesting to note that in case the second consonant of this type of root is one of the *litterae begadkefat* this consonant may have been sounded without aspiration, cf. forms like וַיַּחַד, וַיַּחַד < (*way*)*yihd*. We found the following examples:

Perfect forms with the ending of the second person fem.:

יַגַּעְתְּ	Jes 47:12; 57:10; 62:8
יַגַּעְתְּ	Jes 47:15
שָׁכַחְתְּ	Jes 17:10; Jer 13:25; Ez 21:12; 23:35
וְהִשְׁתַּכַּחְתְּ	Dan 5:27
הִמְלַחְתְּ	Ez 16:4
לְקַחְתְּ	1 Reg 14:3; <sup>3</sup> Ez 21:12;

Imperfect forms without ending:

יַחַד	Job 3:6
וַיַּחַד	Ex 18:9.

Gesenius-Cowley describes this phenomenon twice:

1 John A. Cook & Robert D. Holmstedt, *Biblical Hebrew, A Student Grammar*, 2009, p. 12.

2 A. E. Cowley (transl.), *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar as edited .. by E. Kautzsch*, Oxford, 1910, reprint 1956, pp. 77-78.

3 According to Gesenius-Cowley, p. 172, here some editions actually give לְקַחְתְּ.

In<sup>4</sup> this form [i.e. תָּלַשׁ] the *Dageš lene* remains in the final *Tāw*, although a vowel precedes, in order to point out that the *Pathah* is not to be regarded as a really full vowel, but merely as an orthographic indication of a very slight sound, to ensure the correct pronunciation.

And further:

Forms<sup>5</sup> like תָּלַשׁ *thou* (fem.) *hast sent*, in which we should expect a aspirated ת after the vowel, cf. תָּלַשׁ Ex 18<sup>9</sup>, have arisen from תָּלַשׁ, תָּלַשׁ, &c.; *Pathah* being here simply a helping vowel has no influence on the tenuis.

In the historical grammar of Bauer and Leander<sup>6</sup> the problem is discussed in the paragraph entitled: *Entwicklung neuer Vokale*. They note:

Wenn (*h*.) *h* oder ' als erster zweier Endkonsonanten stand, entwickelte sich zwischen den beiden Konsonanten (deren letzterer immer eine Explosiva war, ...) ein *a*: \**īagā't* > תָּאָגַת *īāzā'at* "du (f.) warst ermüdet", \**laqāht* > תָּלַקְתָּ "du (f.) nahmst", *īihd* > תָּיְהַד *īihād* "er freue sich" (für *h* findet sich kein Beispiel). Wie aus den Beispielen ersichtlich, wird durch den Einschub die folgende Explosiva nicht spirantisiert (wohl nach der Mask.-Form).

3 This description leaves one with three problems, viz. the non-spirantization of the following *littera begadkefat*, secondly the awkward situation of one vowel-indicator in the whole Masoretic system that has to be pronounced before the consonant with which it appears, and in the third place that the so called *pataḥ furtivum* follows directly after another vowel, which is inconsistent with the rule that in Masoretic Hebrew every syllable contains only one vowel.

It seems that the three problems are easily solved when we suppose that the *pataḥ* in these constructions does not indicate a vowel. If not a vowel, then this *pataḥ* must indicate consonant, and this is, of course, the consonant under which it appears in writing. This shows that, at the time the Masoretes were developing their intricate system to record the correct pronunciation of the Hebrew Bible text, the laryngeals were not any more pronounced, or at least not clearly and distinguishable, and if they could be heard it was as a sound more comparable to /a/ than anything else. As the consonantal text was, of course, invariable, the residue of these consonantal sounds had to be indicated by a sign comparable to the vowels and *pataḥ* was probably the nearest candidate. The choice is, of course, analogous with the Greek rendering βααλ of Hebrew בַּעַל, where the second α indicates *ḡ*, rather than the second *pataḥ* as a supposed helping vowel. This way of describing this part of the Masoretic system concurs more or less with the remark in Gesenius' grammar quoted supra: "the *Pathah* is not to be regarded as a really full vowel, but merely as an orthographic indication of a very slight sound, to ensure the correct pronunciation." One only has to remove the words 'really full' to arrive at the correct description.

---

4 Ibid., p. 94, note 2.

5 Ibid., p. 76.

6 H. Bauer & P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache*, Halle 1922, p. 214.