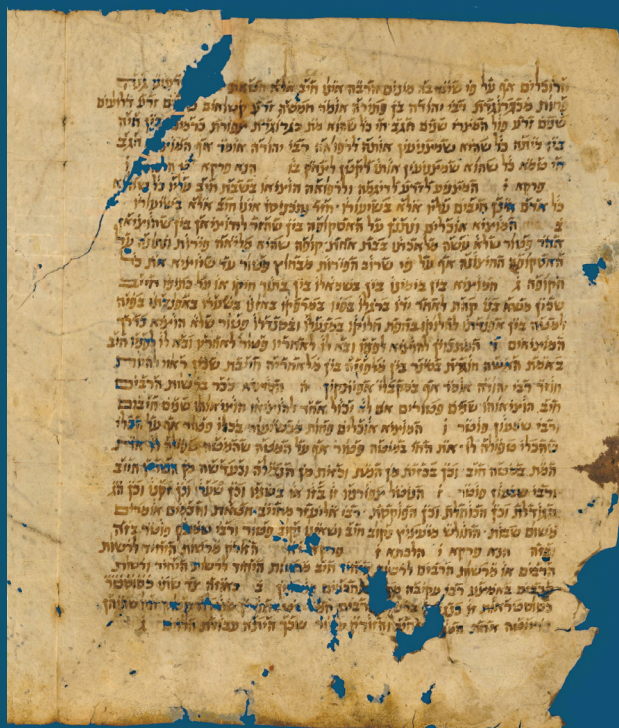


Studies in Rabbinic Hebrew

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Cover image: A fragment from the Cairo Genizah, containing Mishnah Shabbat 9:7-12:4 with Babylonian vocalisation (Cambridge University Library, T-S E1.47). Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

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8. VOWEL REDUCTION IN GREEK LOANWORDS IN THE MISHNAH

THE PHENOMENON AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

*Shai Heijmans*¹

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article I would like to discuss a phonological phenomenon relevant to Greek loanwords in the Mishnah that seems to have been largely overlooked by previous scholars. There are approximately 300 Greek loanwords in the Mishnah.² A comparison between the form of these loanwords in the printed editions of the Mishnah and the form of their Greek etymons purportedly yields many phonological incongruities. And indeed,

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- 1 This article is a translated and revised subsection of my PhD dissertation: Shai Heijmans, “Greek and Latin Loanwords in the Mishnah: Lexicon and Phonology” (in Hebrew; PhD dissertation, Tel-Aviv University, 2013), pp. 281–284.
 - 2 In this number are also included loanwords from Latin, most of which made their way into Hebrew not directly from this language, but through Greek; for the purposes of this article they may, therefore, be considered Greek loanwords. A list of the loanwords with their Greek and Latin etymons can be found in Chanoch Albeck, *Introduction to the Mishnah* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1959), pp. 203–215; see also Heijmans, “Greek and Latin Loanwords in the Mishnah: Lexicon and Phonology”, pp. 291–295.

it cannot be denied that loanwords were especially vulnerable to scribal errors. But when a comparison is made between the form of loanwords in excellent manuscripts of the Mishnah, on the one hand, and the form of their etymons according to Greek pronunciation in the Roman and Byzantine periods, on the other hand, many incongruities vanish, and a more consistent picture emerges.

A case in point is the word קנויָא ‘conspiracy’. The word is documented 35 times in rabbinic literature, most notably in two well-known tractates of the Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metziah* and *Baba Bathra*.³ But in the three best manuscripts of the Mishnah — MSS Kaufmann, Parma, and Cambridge — the word appears in a slightly different form, with a *yod* after the *qof*: קינויָיא, קינויָיה, קינויָיא etc.⁴ This loanword is derived from Greek *κοινωνία*.⁵ In Classical Greek the letter-combination *oi* represented the diphthong [oi], making the Hebrew form less than an exact equivalent. However, in the relevant era (i.e., at the end of the Hellenistic period and the beginning of the Byzantine period), the combination *oi* represented the rounded front vowel /y/;⁶ consequently we may assume that the pronunciation of the word

3 For a complete list of occurrences in the Babylonian Talmud see Chayim Yehoshua Kosowsky, *Otsar leshon ha-talmud*, vol. 34 (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1975), p. 517. Medieval scribes were more familiar with the Babylonian Talmud than with any other rabbinic compilation. The form of the word in Modern Hebrew is also derived from the Talmud in its printed edition.

4 This is also the main form in MS Leiden of the Palestinian Talmud; it has even been retained in several occurrences in the printed editions of the Babylonian Talmud, in the more obscure tractate *Arakhin* (folio 23a).

5 See, e.g., Samuel Krauss, *Griechische und Lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum*, vol. 2: *Wörterbuch* (Berlin: Calvary, 1899), p. 532.

6 See Eduard Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik*, vol. 1: *Allgemeiner Teil, Lautlehre, Wortbildung, Flexion* (2nd ed., Munich: Beck, 1953), p. 195; for additional references see Heijmans, “Greek and Latin Loanwords”, p. 276.

in those times was /kynonia/, which is the pronunciation reflected in the spelling קינוניא. We see therefore, that that an overlap exists between the form of the loanword in good manuscripts and its pronunciation in Koine Greek. Systematic research confirms that most incongruities between Hebrew forms and Greek forms can be explained in this way, and that both the vocalisation and the spelling of the loanwords in good manuscripts reflect a reliable tradition of pronunciation of these words.⁷

2. VOWEL REDUCTION

A systematic comparison between the vowels in loanwords and their equivalents in Greek shows that in a considerable number of words we find a *shewa* in Hebrew against a vowel in Greek. In most cases this reduction is evidenced in an open pretonic syllable, i.e., the syllable before the final syllable.⁸ Thus we find, for instance, that the Greek *πάρδαλις* was loaned as פֶּרְדִּילֵס 'leopard' (*Baba Kamma* 1.3), and *ἀτελής* was loaned as אֶטְלֵס 'market' (*Bekhoroth* 5.1). It ought to be emphasised, that the term 'pretonic syllable' refers here to the syllable structure of the word *after* it was loaned, because during their passage from Greek to Hebrew (and Aramaic), words often changed their syllable structure, especially due to loss of endings. For example, in the word *χαράκωμα* > פֶּרְקוֹם 'palisade' (*Ketuboth* 2.9), the vowel reduction occurred in the pretonic syllable after it had been loaned into Hebrew. The material also shows that the vowel /a/ was more prone to reduction than other vowels. In the following

7 That was the main conclusion in my dissertation (Heijmans, "Greek and Latin Loanwords").

8 The stress in Greek loanwords is usually on the ultimate syllable, as we can deduce from cantillised occurrences. Notable exceptions are טופס 'mould, formula' and אורז 'rice', which behave as segolate nouns, and therefore have penultimate stress.

subsections data from MS Kaufmann is presented, occasionally with examples from other manuscripts of the Mishnah.⁹

2.1 Reduction in open pretonic syllables

(1) Reduction of the vowel /a/

סְטָדִיּוֹן < στάδιον, סְפָתִי < σπάθη, מַגִּי < μαγίς, פִּיטְטָכִיּוֹן < πιττάκιον,
פְּרָדָלִיס < πάρδαλις, קַנְבֵּס < κάνναβις, פֶּרֶן < φάρος (if the etymology

9 In order to save space, and to make the material more readable, I have omitted references and the glosses for each word. This information can readily be found in a rabbinic dictionary, such as Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* (London: Luzac, 1903). The following abbreviations are used: **K** = MS Kaufmann (Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest, Kaufmann collection A50); **Pa** = MS Parma A (Biblioteca Palatina, Catalogue De Rossi 138); **C** = MS Cambridge (CUL Add.470.1); **Pb** = MS Parma B (Biblioteca Palatina, Catalogue De Rossi 497); **Ps** = MS Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale, hébreu 328–329); **M** = The autograph of Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah (facsimile edition: *Maimonidis Commentarius in Mischnam*, 3 vols., Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1956–1966); **GF** = Genizah fragments of the Mishnah, cited from Gabriel Birnbaum, *The Language of the Mishna in the Cairo Geniza: Phonology and Morphology* (in Hebrew; Sources and Studies [New Series], vol. 10; Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2008); **GFBab** = Genizah fragments of the Mishnah with Babylonian vocalisation, cited from Israel Yeivin, *The Hebrew Language Tradition as Reflected in the Babylonian Vocalization* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1985); **Ym** = Manuscript of the Mishnah, order *Moed*, vocalised according to the Yemenite tradition (facsimile edition: *Seder moed shel ha-mishna: ktav yad be-nusah teman*; Ḥolon: Ḥasifat Ginze Teman, 1976); **Yj** = Manuscript of the Mishnah, orders *Nezikin*, *Qodashim*, and *Tohorot*, vocalised according to the Yemenite tradition (facsimile edition: Shlomo Morag [ed.], *Sidre ha-mishna nezikin, qodashim, tohorot*, Jerusalem: Makor, 1970); **Ant** = Genizah fragment containing *Negaim* 2.1 to *Zabim* 5.9, MS Leningrad, Antonin collection 262. When no source is mentioned, MS Kaufmann should be assumed to be the source.

is correct). If the original word had two consecutive open syllables before the stressed syllable, the pretonic reduction results in a closed antepenult syllable: טַסְטֶס < ἰσάτις, בְּרָקוֹס < χαράκωμα, מְבִנָּה < μηχανή, פְּרָגוֹד < παραγαῦδης, קוֹלָמוֹס < κάλαμος, קִינָרס < κινάρα (but K₂: קִינָרס < קִינָרוֹן < καμάρα, רוֹקְנָה < ρυκάνη, אֶסְפְּרָגוֹס < ἀσπάραγος. The form קַטְפֶּרס < κατωφερής contains two reduced vowels: in the pretonic syllable and in the third-from-last syllable.

Outside K we find the following forms: אַמְבָּטִי < ἐμβατή. Thus Ps, and with *shewa* also in M, GF, Pb, GFBab, Yj; but K and Pa preserve the vowel. — חֶשְׁכָּה < ἐσχάρα. Thus Pa (alongside חֶלְכָּה), M, Ym; we find *shewa* also in the Sifra MS Vatican and in *Halakot Gedolot* MS Paris; but K and Ps preserve the vowel. — טַפִּית < τάπης. Thus Ps, Yj; but K: תַּפִּית, and so also Pa and Pb. — נַפּוֹס < *napus*. Thus Pb, GFBab, and Yj; but K, Pa, C, Ps and M preserve the vowel. — סָגוֹס < σάγος. Thus Pa, Ps, Pb, Ant, Yj and Sifra MS Vatican; but K: קִנְקִלִין — קָגוֹס < καγκέλλιον. Thus Ps, but K: קִינְקִילִין (first *yod* erased), and similarly Pb. — טִסְנִי < τισάνη. Thus Pb, and similarly Ant, GFBab, Yj; but K preserves the /a/ vowel: טִסְנִי and similarly Ps.

(2) Reduction of the vowel /e/

סְטֶסֶס < ἀσθενής, דְּתֶרַס < διφθέρα, לְבִיס < λέβης. Pretonic reduction in words containing two consecutive open syllables: סְטֶסֶס < ἀτελής, הִיגְמוֹן < ἡγεμών, מְרִוֹן < κῆρυξ, בְּבִנּוֹס < νούμερος, בְּבִלְמוֹס < πόλεμος. Outside K: אֶסְלָה < σέλλα (thus Pb in margin, and Ym; but K, Pa, Ps, Pb have an /a/ vowel instead of *shewa*).

(3) Reduction of the vowel /i/

דְּלֶפֶס < δελφική (alongside דְּלֶפֶס), לָמֶן < λιμήν, קַסְסִידָה < *cassida* (alongside קַסְסִידָה). Pretonic reduction in words containing two consecutive open syllables: בִּלְמוֹס < βούλιμος, בְּבִלְמוֹס < βασιλική,

קִלְקִים (singular) < κιλίκιον. Outside K: קִלְקִי < ὀμφάκινον (Yj). Reduction of vowels represented by *u* in the original Greek can be found in the words: קִלְקִי < κοτύλη, סֻט < τύπος (alongside תְּרִיס טֻסִים טֻסִים), < θυρεός.¹⁰

(4) Reduction of the vowel /o/

סֻט < στολή,¹¹ פִּוּדִיקִי < πανδοκεῖον. Pretonic reduction in words containing two consecutive open syllables: דִּיפֹרֶס < δίφορος, הַמְּנוּפֹל < μονοπώλης, פִּירִיאֵן פֶּרֶס < φορειαφόροι, אֲנִלִּים < ἀναλογεῖον. It seems that נִקְלָס < Νικόλαος also belongs here, if we assume that a consonant cluster existed in the ending, i.e., /lavs/, which eventually broke into /laves/.¹² Outside K we find: הֶפְתֶּק < ἀποθήκη. Thus Ps, and cf. *Halakot Gedolot* MS Paris: הֶפְתֶּק (but K with preservation of the vowel /o/: קֶפְתֶּק, and so also C and M).

2.2 Exceptions: vowel reduction in non-pretonic syllables

In six words in K we find vowel reduction in non-pretonic syllables. In half of those the reduced vowel is /a/: מְלֻזָּמָא <

10 This is the etymology according to most scholars; but some derive the occurrence in *Betzah* 1.5 from θυρίς; see the discussion in Heijmans, “Greek and Latin Loanwords”, pp. 231–232. In the framework of this article it does not matter which etymology is adopted.

11 In the printed editions the form of this word is אֲצִטְלִית, with the meaning ‘an item of clothing, cloak’; the word should be distinguished from אֲצִטְלִי in Amoraic Hebrew (e.g., *y.Sotah* 21d: משה להן משע, meaning ‘stele’).

12 From the Hellenistic period onwards, and especially in the Byzantine period, the letter-combination *av* was pronounced as /av/; see Edwin Mayser, *Grammatik der griechischen Papyri aus der Ptolemäerzeit*, vol. 1: *Einleitung und Lautlehre* (2nd ed., Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970), pp. 92–94; Francis T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, vol. 1: *Phonology* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, [1976]), pp. 226–229.

μάλαγμα, קְלָמְרִין < καλαμάριον (alongside קְלָמְרִין) קֶטְלָה < *catella*, גְּנִיסָיָה < γενέσια. The form מְלִפְפֹּן < μηλοπέπων contains two reductions: in the pretonic and in the pro-pretonic syllable. The word γλωσσόκομον is documented in K in several forms, all with their *samekh* vocalised with a *shewa*, i.e., pro-pretonic reduction: בְּלֹסְקֹמָא, בְּלֹסְקֹמָא and מְקֹלֶסְקֹמָא. Once we find in K reduction in the fourth-from-last syllable: דְּלִמְטִיקִין < *Δαλματικάϊον (if we consider the ending מְטִיקִין to consist of two syllables).

Outside K we find four additional cases of pro-pretonic reduction: קְטִיגֹר < κατήγωρ (thus Ps, Yj; but K: קְטִיגֹר) פְּרִקְלִיט < παράκλητος (thus Ps, M, Yj, and Sifra MS Vatican; but K: קְמֹלִיָּה), (thus Pa and Ps; other variants have their *qof* vocalised with *hireq*). In the form פְּרִקְרִיגְמָא < παραχάραγμα (thus Ps; but K: פְּרִקְרִיגְמָא) we find two reduced vowels, in the fourth- and third-from-last syllables.

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of vowel reduction is well known in the Greek of the Roman and Byzantine periods, but it is mainly limited to vowels before and after the consonants /l, m, n, r/.¹³ Most notably, we see vowel reduction before /l/ in Latin loanwords. In Hebrew this phenomenon can be seen in the words טַבֵּלָה < τάβλα < *tabula*, סַפְקֵלָרִיא < σπεκλάριον < *specularium*, סְקוּטִילָה < σκούτλιον <

13 See Gignac, *Grammar*, pp. 306–310; Mayser, *Grammatik*, pp. 123–124; Karl Dieterich, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der griechischen Sprache von der hellenistischen Zeit bis zum 10. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898), pp. 123–124; Leslie Threaght, *The Grammar of Attic Inscriptions*, vol. 1: *Phonology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), pp 395–407. The Greek papyri contain a sizeable number of interchanges between α and ε, some of which were seen by Gignac as representing vowel reduction. However, these α-ε interchanges appear both in stressed and in unstressed (pretonic and non-pretonic) syllables; it seems, therefore, that they bear no relation to the discussed phenomenon.

scutella.¹⁴ Another phenomenon in Greek which may be relevant here is elision due to dissimilation, i.e., the elision of the second of two identical vowels, appearing before and after /l, m, n, r/, e.g., σκόροδον < σκόρδον ‘garlic’. This type of elision, known as ‘Kretschmer’s Rule’, can explain the reduced vowel in קְלִמְרִין < καλαμάριον and in the second syllable of פְּרָכְרִיגְמָא < παραχάραγμα.¹⁵

However, the abovementioned Greek reduction phenomena are not sufficient to explain the frequent occurrence of pretonic reduction of Greek loanwords in Hebrew. Moreover, in some cases the reduced vowel occurs in a syllable which, in the original Greek form, bears the tone, e.g., סֻטָּא < ἰσάτις, בְּרָקָא < χαράκωμα, הִרְקָנָה < ῥυκάνη, מְלִפְפָּה < μηλοπέπων, קִטְרִי < κοτύλη and others. On the other hand, it is difficult to explain this reduction as an internal Hebrew phenomenon, as Hebrew /a/ vowels tend not only to be preserved, but also to lengthen in pretonic positions;¹⁶ certainly in Rabbinic Hebrew there is no evidence to suggest general pretonic vowel reduction.

In Aramaic, however, the phenomenon of pretonic vowel reduction in open syllables is well known. This process seems to have begun in Imperial Aramaic, between the seventh and third centuries BCE, and was completed by the third century CE.¹⁷ I would suggest, therefore, that the reduction in the above-

14 On the reduction in τάβλα and σπεκλάριον cf. Gignac, *Grammar*, p. 309.

15 See Gignac, *ibid.*; Schwyzer, *Grammatik*, p. 259.

16 See, e.g., Gotthelf Bergstrasser, *Hebräische Grammatik*, vol. 1: *Einleitung, Schrift- und Lautlehre* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1918), p. 117 (§21k); Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testamentes* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1922), p. 234 (§26o).

17 See Stephen A. Kaufman, *Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Assyriological Studies, vol. 19; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 146–151. Beyer proposed a later date, suggesting that in the third century BCE pretonic vowel in open syllables were not yet reduced. His view was rejected by both Kaufman and Muraoka; see Klaus Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), pp. 128–136; Stephen A. Kaufman, “The History of Aramaic

mentioned loanwords is due to Aramaic. The contact between the languages in the Tannaitic period was close, and Aramaic influence, especially on the lexicon, but also on other parts of the language, is well known.¹⁸

Pretonic reduction in Greek loanwords suggests, therefore, that Rabbinic Hebrew borrowed these words (at least in part) not directly from Greek, but from Aramaic, after the phonological rules of Aramaic had been applied to them.¹⁹

Vowel Reduction”, in: Michael Sokoloff (ed.), *Arameans, Aramaic and the Aramaic Literary Tradition* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1983), pp. 47–55; Takamitsu Muraoka and Bezalel Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (2nd ed., Leiden: Brill 2003), pp. 38–40; Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Qumran Aramaic* (Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement, vol. 38; Leuven: Peeters, 2011), pp. 31–33. As pointed out by Kaufman, the evidence presented by Beyer proves only that pretonic reduction had ceased by the third century CE; see Stephen A. Kaufman, “On Vowel Reduction in Aramaic”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1984), pp. 87–95, at p. 90.

18 See especially Isaac Gluska, “The Influences of Aramaic on Mishnaic Hebrew” (in Hebrew; PhD dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 1987), and the references to the works of Kutscher and Moreshet mentioned by Moshe Bar-Asher, “Phenomena in the Morphology of Mishnaic Hebrew”, in: Ephraim Hazan and Zohar Livnat (eds.), *Mishnaic Hebrew and Related Fields: Studies in Honor of Shimon Sharvit* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2010), pp. 17–33, at p. 18, notes 7–8.

19 The opinion that Greek loanwords reached Hebrew via Aramaic was already voiced by the Israeli classicist Abraham Wasserstein. According to Wasserstein, “[e]ine große Zahl der im rabbinischen Hebräisch und im jüdischen Aramäisch gefundenen griechischen Wörter finden sich auch im syrischen Aramäisch. Diese Tatsache erlaubt uns die Annahme, dass viele griechische Lehnwörter in beiden jüdischen Sprachen nicht direkt aus dem Griechischen sondern aus der aramäischen Koine übernommen wurden”; see Abraham Wasserstein, “Die Hellenisierung des Frühjudentums: Die Rabbinen und die griechische Philosophie”, in: Wolfgang Schlachter (ed.), *Max Webers Sicht des antiken Christentums: Interpretation und Kritik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), pp. 281–316, at p. 288. And although his argument is linguistically unconvincing (two different languages can borrow the same word at the same time), I agree with his conclusion.

