

# The Historical Depth of the Tiberian Reading Tradition of Biblical Hebrew

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Cover image: T-S AS 8.129. A leaf from a Cairo Geniza biblical codex containing Gen. 30.17–20 and showcasing Moshe Mohe's non-standard Tiberian pointing of the standard Tiberian pronunciation of *Issachar* (see within, ch. 4), courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

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## 5. לְקַרְא *LIQRA*(?)T

In view of its semantic link to קָרָה I (= קָרָא II) ‘meet, befall, happen’, combined with consistent orthography with the radical *ʾalef* characteristic of קָרָא I (= קָרָה II) ‘call, read’, the Masoretic BH infinitive-cum-preposition לְקַרְאֵת ‘to meet; opposite, toward’ is anomalous. Cf. the expected infinitive construct of קָרָא I in (לְ)קָרָא and of קָרָה I in (לְ)קָרוֹת\*.<sup>1</sup>

It also, arguably, furnishes an especially instructive glimpse of dissonance between the written and reading components of the Tiberian tradition of BH. In this case, not only can divergence of the spelling and vocalisation traditions be substantiated, but there is evidence that each reflects a realisation of profound historical depth, with roots stretching back to the Iron Age. If so, the disharmony, though evidently secondary, reflects truly ancient diversity. When one takes seriously the testimony of the individual components, the ostensible ‘problem’ inherent in a scriptural tradition composed of discordant elements proves invaluable in tracing the phonological development of the specific form in question as well as characterising the historicity of the components of the tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> A clear case of conflation in the MT is לְבִלְתִּי קְרֹאוֹת ‘not to call’ (Judg. 8.1). The merger of קר"ה and קר"א is more advanced in RH, where infinitival forms such as לְ(י)קְרֹא(א)וֹת ‘to read, call, recite (the *Shema*)’ outnumber those of לְקָרוֹא. The expected III-y infinitive of קָרָה I in (לְ)קָרוֹת\* may be attested in 4Q179 f1i.3, but seems otherwise undocumented until *piyyuṭ* in the Byzantine Period.

## 1.0. The Tiberian Spelling and Similar Traditions

The Masoretic spelling—which is also the dominant orthography in the DSS, the Samaritan written tradition, and RH—is לקראת. As *ʾalef* is traditionally grouped with *heh*, *waw*, and *yod* as *matres lectionis*, in the case of phonetic realisations of לקראת along the lines of Tiberian *liqraṭ*, it is sometimes assumed that the otherwise otiose *ʾalef* serves as a *mater lectionis* for *a*. There is widespread agreement, however, that quiescent *ʾalef* in the Masoretic written tradition is nearly always etymological and that only at a relatively late date, under the influence of Aramaic spelling conventions, became a pure *mater* for *a*-vowels (GKC §7e; Andersen and Forbes 1986, 32, 49; Ariel 2013, 942). The use of *ʾalef* as a *mater* for *a* is comparatively common in the DSS (Reymond 2014, 43–47).

While the exact Iron Age pronunciation of the consonantal form לקראת, including whether it was realised with or without an audible *ʾalef*, must remain conjectural, the consistency of the spelling with *ʾalef* in Masoretic and other sources can be interpreted as evidence of the erstwhile existence of a matching pronunciation characterised by a word-internal glottal stop. How long such a pronunciation endured is difficult to determine given the available evidence.

## 2.0. The Tiberian Pronunciation and Similar Traditions

Conspicuous in the Tiberian phonetic realisation לקראת *liqraṭ* is syncope of the *ʾalef* consistently preserved in the orthographic tradition. Similar pronunciations are known from the Babylonian

biblical recitation tradition (Yeivin 1985, 258–59, 1133–34) and from RH.

The Samaritan realisation *alqē<sup>l</sup>rāt̄* appears to result from normal phonological processes that resolve syllable-initial consonant clusters, presupposing a form along the lines of *lqrat*. Given SH's penchant for eliding gutturals, it is no surprise that the 'alef goes unpronounced here, as in the Tiberian and similar traditions. Interestingly, however, the ultimate stress in the form *alqē<sup>l</sup>rāt̄* may constitute indirect evidence of a formerly realised glottal stop, since ultimate stress in the Samaritan recitation tradition is restricted to words with a guttural second or third radical (Ben-Hayyim 2000, §§4.4.2–3).

On the assumption that the 'alef in the standard Tiberian spelling לקראת represents historical etymology, the form is arguably best explained as an infinitive in the (*la*)*qātlā* (*< PS qatlat<sup>u</sup>* [or (*la*)*qātālā* *< qutlat<sup>u</sup>*]) nominal pattern, primarily associated with semantically stative verbs, e.g., לְאַהֲבָה אוֹתָם 'to love them' (Deut. 10.15), לְאַשְׁמָה בָּהּ 'to become guilty thereby' (Lev. 5.26), אַחֲרֵי זְקִנְתָּהּ 'after becoming old' (Gen. 24.36), לְטַמְּאָהּ בָּהּ 'to become unclean thereby' (Lev. 15.32), לְיִרְאָה אֹתִי 'to fear me' (Deut. 4.10), לְקַרְבָּה אֶל־הַמְּלָאכָה 'to approach to the work' (Exod. 36.2), לְרַבְּעָה אִתָּהּ 'to lie with it' (Lev. 20.16), לְרַחֲקָהּ 'to be far' (Ezek. 8.6), וּמִשְׂנֵאֲתָו אוֹתָם 'and from his hating them'. In the specific case of לְקִרְאָת, preservation of the final *tav* is explained in line with consistent construct status. The vowel pattern is explained as follows: *qar'at* > *qarat*, due to weakening of the 'alef; *qarat* > *qarat* (*liqrat*), due to reduction of vowel distant from primary stress in construct state (GKC §§19k, 45d; Bauer and Leander 1922:

Nachträge und Verbesserung (Schluß.), p. II, n. to p. 425, ln. 8ff).<sup>2</sup> The use of the feminine infinitival form permitted semantic disambiguation: לִקְרֹאת is ‘to meet; opposite, toward’, whereas קָרָא(ל) is ‘to call, read’. Again, the expected infinitive for קָרָה I is קְרוֹת(ל)\*.

### 3.0. Ambiguous Traditions

Jerome’s transcription *lacerath* for לִקְרֹאת־ (Amos 4.12) is ambiguous. Brønno (1970) concluded that gutturals were preserved in Jerome’s Hebrew. They are often reflected by helping vowels, e.g., וּלְאֻמִּים *et Loommim* ‘and Leummim’ (Gen. 25.3), or Latin *h*, e.g., הָאֲשֵׁרִיטִי *Asrihelitarum* ‘the Asrielites’ (Num. 26.31), רְאִיָּה *Rahaia* ‘Reaiah’ (Ezra 2.47). However, the lack of any representation of *’alef* here cannot be taken as unequivocal evidence of pronunciation without a glottal stop in light of such transcriptions as פִּרָאִם *Pharam* ‘Piram’ (Josh. 10.3) and תִּרְאָלָה *et Tharala* ‘Taralah’ (Josh. 18.27). The *a*-vowel after -ל and the *e*-vowel after ק are both conventional in the transcription of his Hebrew tradition (Yuditsky 2013, 807–8, 821).

### 4.0. The Antiquity of the Realisation without *’alef*

Assuming the validity of the explanations proffered above, two principal questions remain unanswered. First, how long did a pronunciation of לִקְרֹאת preserving the glottal stop persist in Hebrew? While the extant reading traditions unanimously disregard it, it is legitimate, given its consistent orthographic representa-

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<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is an expanded and corrected revision of Hornkohl (2013a, 124, fn. 50).

tion, to wonder whether and to what extent it may have continued to be realised. There is no definitive answer to this question. The second question is: what is the historical depth of the phonetic realisation with syncopation of the glottal stop?

#### 4.1. Second Temple Evidence

For purposes of answering the second question, the available information is clearer. As has been noted, notwithstanding the received pronunciations of לקראת without a glottal stop, the form is regularly written with an *'alef*.

There are, however, exceptions. As early as the Second Temple Period, minority spellings without *'alef* in the DSS apparently reflect phonetic realisations with an elided glottal stop: לקרת (1QIsa<sup>a</sup> 12.10 || לקראת MT Isa. 14.9); לקרת (4Q481a f2.4 || לקראת MT 2 Kgs 2.15); perhaps also לקרת בנו 'to] meet his son' (4Q200 f5.1 || Tobit 11.10); לקרתנו 'ag[ain]st us' (4Q504 f1–2Riii.13). Though the exact realisation of these forms is unknown, the omission of *'alef* comes as evidence of pronunciation without a glottal stop.

#### 4.2. Iron Age Evidence

But there is even earlier evidence of a realisation without the word-medial glottal stop. The Siloam inscription, which dates to ca. 700 BCE, includes the sentence ובימה/נקבה-הכו-החצבמ-אש. לקרת-רעו-גרזו על-גרזו 'And on the day of the / breach, the hewers struck, each man **to meet** (or **toward**) his partner, pick-axe against [pi]ck-axe' (KAI 189, lns 3–4). As in the case of the DSS examples above, there is no certainty regarding every phonetic

detail. Yet, the absence of *ʾalef* in an official inscription comes as compelling testimony in favour of an Iron Age pronunciation of לקר(א)ת without a glottal stop, not dissimilar from that preserved in the Tiberian reading tradition.

According to one approach, no glottal stop (i.e., *ʾalef*) was lost in the Siloam inscription's לקרת. Rather, the spelling reflects a realisation along the lines of *liqrot*. If so, the *ʾalef* in the Tiberian and other traditions is to be considered secondary. So reason, among others, Aḥituv, Garr, and Fassberg (2016, 61), thought it is not clear whether they believe that the *ʾalef* in question was ever pronounced as a glottal stop in the many traditions of BH and extra-biblical Hebrew in which it appears.

By contrast, the view propounded here is that the spelling with *ʾalef* לקראת is historical, i.e., reflects an ancient realisation with a medial glottal stop, and that the Siloam inscription's לקרת is an early manifestation of the secondary syncope of the glottal stop seen in the Tiberian reading tradition and similar pronunciations and in minority spellings in the DSS. The syncope in question was presumably due to lax realisation, possibly connected with vernacular Hebrew, but which at some point came to be recognised as standard despite the spelling convention with *ʾalef* (which may have come to be considered a *mater*). It should also be noted that phonetic erosion is comparatively more common in the case of function words that have undergone grammaticalisation (Heine 1993, 106), which here seems to have involved the shift from lexical infinitive to preposition.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Geoffrey Khan for calling my attention to this perspective.

## 5.0. Conclusion

Giving due consideration to both orthographic and recitation traditions, the spelling-pronunciation mismatch of the infinitive-turned-preposition לקראת appears to reflect the intersection of divergent written and reading traditions. The written traditions bear witness almost exclusively to a pronunciation that up to some point preserved a word-medial glottal stop. Occasionally, written material omits the *ʾalef* and, in so doing, furnishes early (Iron Age, Second Temple) evidence of realisations in which the presumed word-medial glottal stop had become syncopated. This is the dominant sort of pronunciation preserved in most of the extant reading traditions (Tiberian, Babylonian, RH; Jerome's Latin transcriptions and the Samaritan form with ultimate stress are possible, though by no means certain, exceptions).

While it is not known when pronunciations without the glottal stop came to dominate in Hebrew, it is evident from minority Second Temple and Iron Age occurrences of לקראת (without *ʾalef*) that such realisations were attested long before the medieval textualisation of the Tiberian reading tradition.

It is not impossible that the ubiquity of pronunciations without the glottal stop in the extant reading traditions somewhat obscures a degree of variation in the word's realisation. Perhaps in antiquity, forms with and without glottal stops could be heard. Be that as it may, it is plausible to conclude on the basis of the earliest cases of לקראת that any potential anachronism with regard to this form in the Tiberian reading and similar traditions does not apply to the *phenomenon* of syncope of the glottal stop, but only to the *extent* of the syncope. In other words, while the

pronunciation without glottal stop is likely secondary, and while its standardisation may be late, early evidence confirms the deep historical roots of the feature eventually made standard.