The Dead Sea Scrolls and the transliterations of Hebrew in the Hexapla are chronologically close; one expects, therefore, that their Hebrew be similar as well. There are indeed some similarities, yet the differences seem to be much more striking.

The relations between Qumran Hebrew and the Hexapla transliterations were discussed by Einar Brønno, who compared several linguistic features in these sources involving vowel length. Brønno contended that the vowel of the qutl scheme was short in the Hebrew of the DSS and in the Hexapla, whereas it underwent lengthening in Tiberian Hebrew (henceforth T). On the other hand, he inferred that Tiberian Hebrew and the Hexapla distinguished between pausal and non-pausal forms while DSS Hebrew did not.

The aim of the present essay is to compare the behavior of the weak consonants in these two sources. It seems that in some points, for example, in their treatment of glides, these traditions resemble each other so that one can be supported by the other. In other respects, for example, the treatment of the gutturals, the traditions diverge.

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1. GLIDES INTERCHANGE

1.1. The interpretation of the hexaplaric word וּכְפַת 35,192 is not immediately obvious. Elsewhere the lexeme בִּאָר has a iota in the translation: וּכְפַת (T. בִּאָר) 31,9, וּכְפַת (אִבְרַי) 18,38, וּכְפַת (אִבְרַי) 18,41 etc. Omission of the consonantal [y] in וּכְפַת requires an explanation. In order to probe the question one should compare וּכְפַת with יָשָׁהוּ 4Q98g 6 and יָשָׁהוּ 4Q88 X 11 which occur several times in the DSS. As was remarked by Qimron, the semi-vowels [y] and [w] as well as the glottal stop [‘] (aleph) are liable to undergo weakening in intervocalic position and, as a result, to be used interchangeably. This phenomenon called “glides interchange” is common to the idiom of the DSS as well as to various traditions of Hebrew and other languages. The absence of the iota, therefore, is preferably explained as the sound change [y] → [‘]. In other hexaplaric sources there is an additional form displaying such a shift: יֵכְפַת (T. יֵכְפַת) Ps 9,17.

1.2. As for the semi-vowel [w], I found in the Hexapla an example of the shift [w] → [‘]: הוּ (T. הוּ) 49,6 lacks [w], in contrast to הוּ (T. הוּ) which has a plural suffix instead of possessive pronoun: וּכְפַת (T. בִּאָר) 31,19, וּכְפַת (אִבְרַי) 18,38, וּכְפַת (אִבְרַי) 18,41 etc.

2 Hexapla citation is by G. Mercati, Psalterii Hexapli Reliquiae (Vatican, 1958). Unless otherwise indicated references are to the book of Psalms.

3 In the Tiberian tradition יְשָׁהוּ parallels to יָשָׁהוּ. In the Hexapla יָשָׁהוּ and יְשָׁהוּ have a plural suffix instead of possessive pronoun: וּכְפַת (T. בִּאָר), וּכְפַת (T. בִּאָר)

4 See E. Bronno, Studien über hebräische Morphologie und Vokalismus auf Grundlage der Mercatischen Fragmente der zweiten Kolumne der Hexapla des Origines (Leipzig, 1943), 61.

5 Speiser, Bronno and others prefer to interpret this form as a scribal error, see E. A. Speiser, “The Pronunciation of Hebrew according to the Transliterations in the Hexapla”, JQR 16 (1925–6), 354, E. Bronno, Studien über hebräische Morphologie, 62.

6 Regarding the nature of glides see, for example, P. Ladefoged and I. Maddieson, The Sound of the World Languages (Oxford, 1996), 322–326.


8 A similar explanation was proposed by O. Pretzl in “Die Aussprache des Hebräischen nach der zweiten Kolumne der Hexapla des Origenes”, BZ 20 (1932), 16.

9 Twenty years later the same explanation was adduced by Gumpertz, אֵלֶי יִבְרָי, מַכְּנָה, פִּטָן, יָדָּוְי הַשִּׁיָּמָה, 82.

10 See F. Field, Origend Hexaplorum, vol. II, 1875 (Hildesheim, 1964), 99. This form was also adduced by Gumpertz, אֵלֶי יִבְרָי, מַכְּנָה, פִּטָן, 82.