

Introduction to Hebrew linguistics

April 28, 2011

Assignment for week 12

Deadline: May 4

These weeks, we are discussing the history of the sound system of Hebrew. In a previous assignment, you compared the consonants of Hebrew to the consonants of other Semitic languages. Yet, the history of the Hebrew phonological system did not stop after the development of Biblical Hebrew.

In fact, it is almost a coincidence that you use (almost) the same pronunciation in your Tiberian Hebrew class and in your Modern Hebrew class. Namely, the Jewish communities of each geographic area developed its own way of reading Hebrew during the Middle Ages, not speaking of the tradition adopted by Christian theologians and Biblical scholars. The goal of this assignment is to give you an impression of a typical contemporary Eastern European Ashkenazi pronunciation.¹

Listen carefully (and many times) to the following short video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oq4niagVL24> .

The text is the end of the first *aliya* (a portion read to the person being called to the Torah scroll) on *Hoshana Rabba* (the last one of the “half holiday” days on *Sukkot*, the Feast of the Tabernacles):

Numeri 29 (end of verse 27 and verse 28):

וְשַׁעִיר חֲטָאת אֶחָד מִלֶּבֶד עֹלֹת הַתְּמִיד וּמִנְחָתָהּ וְנֹסֶכֶהּ .

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Herziene Statenvertaling: (27)...bij de rammen en bij de lammeren, overeenkomstig hun aantal, volgens de bepaling; (28) en als zondoffer één bok, naast het voortdurende brandoffer, het bijbehorende graanoffer en het bijbehorende plengoffer. (Feel free to look it up in your Hebrew/Dutch Bibles).

Your task is to describe the differences you can observe between the pronunciation(s) you have learned and the one on the video. Pay attention to the way specific vowels and specific consonants (with or without dagesh) are uttered. Just ignore the tune.

Write me your observations in an email. As usual, send your answers (at most 1 page) in an email to me (t.s.biro@uva.nl) by Wednesday noon.

¹ I spent hours searching for a suitable video on the web. If you can find a better one (for instance, Dutch Ashkenazi tradition), please let me know!