

The Second Column of Origen's Hexapla and the Transcription of BGDKPT Consonants: A Confrontation with Transliterated Hebrew Names in Greek Documents

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Abstract : This research analyses the pronunciation of Hebrew consonants 'bgdkpt' in II- III C. E. in Palestine, through the confrontation of two kinds of data: the fragments of transliteration of Old Testament in the Greek alphabet, from the second column of Origen's synopsis, called Hexapla, and Hebrew names transliterated in Greek documents, especially epigraphs. Origen is a very important author, not only for his bgdkpt theological and exegetic works: the Hexapla, synoptic six columns for a critical edition of Septuaginta, has a relevant role in attempting to reconstruct the pronunciation of Hebrew language before Masoretic punctuation. For this reason, at the beginning, it is important to analyze the column in order to study phonetic and linguistic phenomena. Among the most problematic data, there is the evidence from bgdkpt consonants, always represented as Greek aspirated graphemes. This transcription raised the question if their pronunciation was the only spirant, and consequently, the double one, that is, the stop/spirant contrast, was introduced by Masoretes. However, the phonetic and linguistic examination of the column alone is not enough to establish a real pronunciation of language: this paper is significant because a confrontation between the second column's transliteration and Hebrew names found in Greek documents epigraphic ones mainly, is achieved. Palestine in II - III was a bilingual country: Greek and Aramaic language lived together, the first one like the official language, the second one as the principal mean of communication between people. For this reason, Hebrew names are often found in Greek documents of the same geographical area: a deep examination of bgdkpt's transliteration can help to understand better which the real pronunciation of these consonants was, or at least it allows to evidence a phonetic tendency. As a consequence, the research considers the contemporary documents to Origen and the previous ones: the first ones testify a specific stadium of pronunciation, the second ones reflect phonemes' evolution. Alexandrian documents are also examined: Origen was from there, and the influence of Greek language, spoken in his native country, must be considered. The epigraphs have another implication: they are totally free from morphological criteria, probably used by Origen in his column, because of their popular origin. Thus, a confrontation between the hexaplaric transliteration and Hebrew names is absolutely required, in Hexapla's studies: first of all, it can be the second clue of a pronunciation already noted in the column; then because, for documents' specific nature, it has more probabilities to be real, reflecting a daily use of language. The examination of data shows a general tendency to employ the aspirated graphemes for bgdkpt consonants' transliteration. This probably means that they were closer to Greek aspirated consonants rather than to the plosive ones. The exceptions are linked to a particular status of the name, i.e. its history and origin. In this way, this paper gives its contribution to onomastic studies, too: indeed, the research may contribute to verify the diffusion and the treatment of Jewish names in Hellenized world and in the koinè language.

Keywords : bgdkpt consonants, Greek epigraphs, Jewish names, origen's Hexapla

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