

The Case of the Closed *Mem*: Isaiah 9:6 in Medieval Masorah and Midrash

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By the tenth century, the broad terrain of Jewish textual learning featured two independent streams of tradition concerning a scribal anomaly in Isa 9:6, one in the form of a Babylonian midrash and the other within standard Masorah.¹ The Bavli's redactors had preserved a clever midrash attributed to Bar Kappara, based upon the oddity of a closed *mem* in the middle of the first word of the verse: למרבה.² The Masoretes, on the other hand, consistently wrote two words, למ רבה, while marking in the margin that they be read as one: למרבה. Bar Kappara, infamous disciple of Judah the Prince, claimed the secret of this mid-word *mem sofit* had to do with the identification and eventual revelation of the Messiah. The masoretic tradition, however, offered no ground for such an idea. A trained scribe would have simply responded that the premise of the Talmudic story was false; Bar Kappara's midrashic imagination had been permitted to go unchecked by the exacting discipline of authoritative scribal tradition.

Herein I attempt to survey our earliest available material sources—Bible manuscripts, verse citations, and commentaries—to map the

¹ In some of the cases surveyed below, we cannot know whether or to what degree tradents of one were aware of the other. Although extant manuscripts within each stream presuppose an ideological insularity from the other, we will see that in practice a manuscript's production did not always conform to its presumed ideals.

It is a joy for me to contribute to this Festschrift honoring Dr. Marcus. My first encounter with his work was twenty years ago at the University of Washington, in Prof. Scott Noegel's Akkadian class. Our text? *A Manual of Akkadian* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1978). I felt so intimidated; I recall asking myself in amazement, "Who is David Marcus?" Though I do not remember the hundreds of cuneiform signs, I will never forget the first mnemonic I learned from him: "chocolate" (*Akkadian*, p. 4)! Then, a year later in Rabbi Hillel Gamoran's *gemara* class there he was again: *A Manual of Babylonian Jewish Aramaic* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1981). But David's work on the Masorah has been most meaningful to me personally and has helped shape the thought behind this very study.

² BT *Sanhedrin* 94a.

chronological development of masoretic and midrashic knowledge concerning this discrepancy up to the sixteenth century.³ Where possible, attention is given to both the ideological and practical elements of each manuscript. On the ideological front, it seems that the absence of substantive crosstalk between these parallel streams facilitated the further legitimation of each trajectory. That is, midrashic forms became more and more wildly imaginative while the Masorah enjoyed an increasing variety of articulations of its unwavering stance. In medieval midrashic play we see an ongoing effort to attach new meanings to this mysterious closed *mem*, even while citing scribal knowledge—albeit out of context—as support. But within the official Masoretic stream, there was simply “no *there* there”; the scribes’ traditional “two-word” position was only restated in different ways.

The practical side is a bit more perplexing. As we will see, a talented scribe working according to a masoretic ideal will in some cases be influenced by midrash. Moreover, a scribe copying a midrashic text will in some cases create a masoretic-looking product. Finally, a copyist of a midrashic text can miss the midrash and the masorah altogether. The only plausible explanation for these cases is that we are not only dealing with diversities in skill and competence or with human error. According to the manuscript evidence surveyed, neither the copyists’ prior training nor their willingness to work were necessarily bound along ideological lines. A chart of the relevant manuscript data appears in the *Appendix*, but in what follows I will provide a short description of each source. The chronology of this survey roughly

³ I employ the lowercase *masoretic* and *midrash/midrashic* when referring to the genre of transmission of a particular tradition and reserve the capitalized forms for references to the accepted or modern canons of these bodies of knowledge. For the most part I have adopted a chronology based upon age of manuscripts rather than by imagined or reconstructed age of the idea or concept. For example, we have no access to a pre-Islamic Babylonian Talmud. Rather, we have Geniza fragments and late manuscripts, and even later printed editions. We therefore cannot know the wording of an imagined third or fourth century midrash, whether it was transmitted orally or in writing, whether it was modified or even inserted by a later copyist. Finally, this survey is not exhaustive due to the inaccessibility of numerous manuscripts, but the evidence from those selected sufficiently establishes the general pattern laid out here. The introduction of the printing press adds new levels of complexity to the long history of text reproduction which are beyond the scope of this article.

follows that of data from datable manuscripts. Therefore, since quality material evidence for the Masorah predates that for the Talmud and Midrash, I address it first. But before moving into the medieval world, I must address our single ancient witness.

Qumran - למ רבה

The oldest manuscript containing our passage is the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a).⁴ This priceless document, written in Aramaic script, dates to 125 BCE and is our only ancient Hebrew witness to our verse. Near the bottom of the eighth column, we find what appears to be למ רבה, with a reasonably sized space between the *mem* and *resh*. The non-final *mem* here is no guarantee that the scribe considered this the single word למרבה and that the spacing is merely accidental. Throughout the manuscript he employed what would become the standard final forms for all five consonants, yet within short words this was not consistently the case.⁵ Within the same column we find the following instances of non-final *mem* (according to line numbers in Column VIII): 5 העמ; 8 הזה; 11 וכשלו במ; 13 מעמ יהוה; 14 עמ אל; 18 אמ לוא; 24 למ רבה; 24 העמ ההולכים.

Admittedly, whether the scribe of the Great Isaiah Scroll intended למ רבה or למרבה cannot be determined with complete certainty. Yet if Kutscher is correct in holding that the primary language of the scribe was Aramaic, the particle למ/לם would not necessarily have been strange to him.⁶ This does not address the question of what למ רבה might have meant to the scribe, which I do

⁴ Beautiful, high-resolution images have been made available online by the Israel Museum, Jerusalem: dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah

⁵ Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 219.

⁶ On the word למ, see Jacob Hoftijzer and Karel Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions, Part One: ' - L* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 578-79; Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2004), 630. Concerning the scribe of 1QIsa^a, Kutscher writes: "Our scribe, whose mother tongue seems to have been Aramaic, and who was undoubtedly familiar with the Aramaic literature of his day, now and again inadvertently grafted Aramaic forms upon the Hebrew text..."; Edward Yechezkel Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll: 1QIsa^a* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 24. I do not know whether Kutscher ever addressed the problem of למ רבה.

not seek to answer here. My only point is to suggest the high plausibility that the Great Isaiah Scroll has two words rather than one, a memory preserved centuries later within the authoritative Masorah.

Biblical Manuscripts and Masorah - לם רבה

Our oldest Masoretic sources preserve the knowledge that there are eight places in the Tanakh where the scribes “write two words but read one.” Various formulations of this list appear in diverse Bible manuscripts and independent Masoretic treatises. I offer two tenth-century examples. One version of the title to this Masorah Magna (MM) list appears as ה מלין דכתבין וקריין חדה, “Eight words, which they write two but read one.”⁷ Abbreviated versions of this title are found in the Masorah Parva (MP), such as a note in the Aleppo Codex which reads “(they) write two words and read one.”⁸ The לם רבה found at Isa 9:6 has always been one of these eight, and in every manuscript I have seen there is an MP note in the margin next to it: ק למרבה. There is no Masoretic source where the single word למרבה finds legitimation.⁹

In the earliest extant Masoretic manuscripts of our passage there is a space between the *mem sofit* and the *resh*: לם רבה. The Aleppo Codex (A, 930 CE), the most famous among them, provides two witnesses to this.¹⁰ The first is found in the consonantal text of Isaiah, as written by the scribe Solomon ben Buya’ah.¹¹ Ben Buya’ah’s elegant style and careful spacing make it clear that

⁷ Masorah Magna of MS Sassoon 1053 at 1 Sam 24:9. The eight locations are Judg 16:25, 1 Sam 9:1, 1 Sam 24:8, Isa 9:6, Isa 44:24, 2 Chron 34:6, Lam 1:6, and Lam 4:3. See Fig. 1.

⁸ Masorah Parva at Isa 44:24. The full title is presumably ה מלין וקריין חדה.

⁹ But as we will see, copyists sometimes strayed from Masoretic discipline.

¹⁰ When introducing a manuscript, I will usually provide both an abbreviation and estimated date in parentheses. These abbreviations will be used in the accompanying charts.

¹¹ A convincing argument that Ben Buya’ah is indeed the scribe of A is made by Yosef Ofer, “The History and Authority of the Aleppo Codex,” in *Jerusalem Crown: The Bible of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: Companion Volume*, ed. Mordechai Glatzer (Jerusalem: Karger Family Fund, Basel, 2004), 36-37, and his more recent monograph, *The Masora on Scripture and Its Methods*, eds. James K. Aitken et al, (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 134-35; Geoffrey Khan, *A Short Introduction to the Tiberian Masoretic Bible and its Reading Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 9-10.

he intended two words. The second witness in this codex enjoys the weight of an even greater authority. The master Masorete Aharon ben Asher himself, in his MM note for ולשלום at 2 Kgs 9:18 wrote למ רבה המשרה as the *siman* for Isa 9:6.¹² Of our witnesses, the testimony of the Aleppo Codex is of crucial importance; it is not only the oldest complete Tanakh (pre-1947 damage); it is the only witness produced by an actual Tiberian Masorete.

Other important early witnesses reflect this same tradition for Isaiah. Sassoon 1053 (*S^l*, 10th c.), has a clear space between the *mem* and *resh*, as does the Cairo Codex of the Prophets (*C*, 9th-11th c.). Additionally, the Cairo Codex preserves a nicely arranged MM note at 1 Sam 9:1, where the *ketiv* and the *qere* for each item in the list of eight are written in vertical pairs.¹³ Here we find למ רבה with למרבה directly below it. The spacing of the word in Codex Petrograd (*P*, 916 CE) is debatable, although I believe the scribe intended a space. But this tenth-century manuscript also clearly preserves the two-word tradition in a MM note at Isa 44:24, where the scribe wrote a *maqef*-like dash between the words of the *siman*: למ־רבה.¹⁴

MS *EVR* II B 9 (10th-11th c.) is a highly damaged manuscript of the prophets in which our verse is preserved, yet it does appear that the two words are pressed together: למרבה. It is unlikely that this was a mistake on the part of the scribe, as the MM note at the bottom of the same page features למרבה המשרה as a *siman* for the list of twelve occurrences of ועד עולם. The Masorah was ignored in favor of a midrashic tradition.

Isa 9:6 in the Leningrad Codex (*L*, 1008-9 CE) also appears to have למרבה written as a single word, contrary to the authoritative Masorah. *BHS* certainly interprets it in this manner. Was Samuel ben Jacob, the chief scribe of *L*,

¹² At Jer 25:5, Ben Asher wrote the *qere* למרבה as a *siman* in the list for ועד עולם. However, in at least two other instances he wrote the *ketiv* rather than the *qere* as a *siman* in MM notes: כי טוב at Judg 16:25 (MM title כטוב) and מלכם at Isa 3:15 (MM title נאם אדני יהוה צבאות).

¹³ Decoratively arranged in the bottom margin with the MM title כת תרת וקר חדה אין (אלין). The MP note in the margin is מבנימין ק. On the provenance of *C*, see Yosef Ofer, "Cairo Codex," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* 4 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 769-70.

¹⁴ The MM for Isa. 44:24 in *P* gives the full, unabbreviated title as ח מלין דכתבין ב תיבהון וקריין חד מאתי ק מלה. The MP for this verse is ק מאתי ק.

influenced by the midrash here? I believe this to be the case.¹⁵ Ben Jacob clearly appreciated and preserved the Masoretic knowledge of “two words to be read as one,” but whenever citing this verse as a *siman* he wrote למרבה, the simple *qere*.¹⁶ With every other item from this list of eight he wrote two distinct words in the consonantal text, but at Isa 9:6 he wrote them as one and retained the closed *mem*. There is no place in *L* where Ben Jacob clearly intended לם רבה, despite his obvious knowledge of the list.

Like Ben Jacob of *L*, the scribe of the Madrid Codex (*M¹*, 13th c.) was careful to write two words at each verse featured in our list except at Isa 9:6, where he wrote the single word למרבה. Given this manuscript’s carefully planned layout, it would be difficult to argue that a space was intended. However, in at least five places this beautiful witness cites the two-word לם רבה as a *siman*, some in standard MM blocks and some in its micrographic decorative masorah.¹⁷ The scribe who wrote these notes was a skilled artist who carefully conserved the Masoretic tradition. How then do we explain the appearance of למרבה in the text of Isaiah itself? We cannot exclude the likelihood that he was motivated by lore concerning the mid-word closed *mem*.

Another skilfully written thirteenth-century manuscript of the entire Tanakh is Paris BN 25 (*Paris 25*, 1232). It is clear the copyist intended to present למרבה as a single word in the consonantal text. As a *siman* in the MM list for ולשלום, he wrote למרבה המשרה ולשלום, which features the non-final *mem*; that is, the *qere*.

¹⁵ That Samuel ben Jacob dabbled in midrash is known from some MM notes he wrote in another manuscript. See Yosef Ofer, “Masoretic Comments on Grammar in MS L^S (A Manuscript from St. Petersburg Containing the *Tafsir* of Saadia Gaon),” in *Language Studies 8*, ed. Aharon Maman (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 2001), 26-27 [Hebrew].

¹⁶ See the MM notes in *L* at Gen 30:11, 2 Kgs 9:18, Jer 7:7, and Lam 1:6.

¹⁷ See masorah notes at Gen 30:11 (in micrography), Judg 16:25, 1 Sam 24:9 (in micrography), Isa 44:24, and Lam 4:3. Even if more than one scribe is behind these various notes, they share the singular intention to keep the two words separate. After submitting this article I was informed that this list is also found in the appendices to *M1*. Cf. Elvira Martín-Contreras, *Apéndices masoréticos, código M1 de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid* (Madrid: CSIC, 2004), 108.

The eight-item “they write two words, read one” list is also found in the Mishnah-mimicking compilation called *Massekhet Soferim*, but its presentation in the earliest manuscripts is not uniform.¹⁸ Ms. Oppenheim 726 (14th c.) identifies only the *qere* למרבה.¹⁹ The contemporaneous Munich Bavli (Munich 95) also contains the tractate, and employs the same abbreviation in both *Soferim* and in the Bar Kappara story in *Sanhedrin*: למרב'.²⁰ On the other hand, the fifteenth-century manuscript Paris Hebr. 837 was read by Michael Higger as having the single word למרבה.²¹ If Higger’s transcription is correct, then the only explanation is that midrashic lore associated with Isa 9:6 corrupted the copyist’s presentation of official scribal knowledge.

¹⁸ *Massekhet Soferim* is technically rabbinic, but since it is substantively a collection of scribal knowledge which explicitly records the Masorah list in question, I include it in this section rather than with my treatment of rabbinic midrash and commentary. For a general overview, see H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to Talmud and Midrash*, 2nd ed., trans. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 227-28.

¹⁹ This manuscript served as the main text in Michael Higger, *Massekhet Soferim* (New York: Debei Rabbanan, 1937).

²⁰ The Bavli *Sanhedrin* citation is addressed in the next section.

²¹ Higger, *Soferim*, 183. In investigating an image of the manuscript, I could not dismiss the possibility that the copyist intended למרבה. If this is the case, then Higger’s transcription reflects bias against the Masorah rather than the manuscript’s copyist or his source.

	Masorah Magna: “8 words which they write two words but read one word” ח מלין דכתבין ב תיבהון וקריין חד מלה [Petrograd, Is 44:24] ח מלין כת תרתין וקר חדה [L, Lam 1:6]	Mnemonic: דוד גברא טבא איתפריק מחרבא דשאול דרדפיה במדברא “David the good man was delivered from the sword of Saul when he pursued him in the wilderness”
Isa 9:6 לם רבה	לְמַרְבֵּה [למרבה] הַמְשִׁרָה וּלְשָׁלוֹם אֵין-קִין עַל-כֹּסֵא דָּוִד וְעַל-מַמְלַכְתּוֹ לְהַכִּין אֹתָהּ וְלִסְעָדָהּ בְּמִשְׁפָּט וּבְצִדְקָה מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם קִנְאַת יְהוָה צָבָאוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה-זֹאת	דוד David
1 Sam 9:1 מבן ימין	וַיְהִי-אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי-יָמִין [מבנימין] וְשֵׁמוֹ קִישׁ בֶּן-אֲבִיאל בֶּן-צֹרֹר בֶּן-בְּכוֹרֹת בֶּן-אֲפִיחַ בֶּן-אִישׁ יְמִינֵי גִבּוֹר חָזָל	גברא the man
Judg 16:25 כי טוב	וַיְהִי כִי טוֹב [כטוב] לָבָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ קְרָאוּ לְשִׁמְשׁוֹן וַיִּשְׁחַק-לָבוֹ וַיִּקְרָאוּ לְשִׁמְשׁוֹן מִבֵּית הָאֲסִירִים [האסורים] וַיִּצְחַק לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲמִידוּ אוֹתוֹ בֵּין הָעַמּוּדִים	טבא the good
Isa 44:24 מי אתי	כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה גְּאֻלָּהּ וַיִּצְרָף מִבְּטֹן אֲנָכִי יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה כָּל נְטֵה שָׁמַיִם לְבַדִּי רַקַּע הָאָרֶץ מִי אֲתִי [מאתי]:	איתפריק he was delivered
2 Chr 34:6 בהר בתיים: L: A, S':	וּבְעָרֵי מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶפְרַיִם וְשִׁמְעוֹן וְעַד-נַפְתָּלִי בְּהַר בְּתֵימָהּ [בחרבתיים] סָבִיב	מחרבא from the sword
1 Sam 24:9 מן המערה	וַיִּקְם דָּוִד אַחֲרֵי-כֵן וַיֵּצֵא מִן-הַמְּעָרָה [מהמערה] וַיִּקְרָא אַחֲרֵי-שָׂאוֹל לְאֹמֵר אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּבֹט שָׂאוֹל אַחֲרָיו וַיִּקַּד דָּוִד אַפְּיָם אַרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ	דשאוול of Saul
Lam 1:6 מן בת	וַיֵּצֵא מִן-בֵּת- [מבת]-צִיּוֹן כָּל-הַדָּרָה הָיָה שְׂרִיָּה כְּאֵילִים לֹא-מִצְאוּ מְרֻעָה וַיִּלְכוּ בְּלֹא-כֹחַ לִפְנֵי רוֹדְף	דרדפיה when he pursued him
Lam 4:3 כי ענים	גַּם-תִּנְיִן [תנים] חָלְצוּ שֵׁד הַיְנִיקוּ גּוֹרִיָּהוּ בַת-עַמִּי לְאֶכְזָר כִּי עֲנִים [כיענים] בְּמִדְבָּר	במדברא in the wilderness

Figure 1. Aramaic Mnemonic from Cambridge MS Add.652, f.296r

Aside from the witnesses of לם רבה in early copies of Isaiah, its employment as a two-word *siman* in diverse places and the various iterations

and formulations of the “write two, read one” list, which always include this verse, there is yet another affirmation of this stream of tradition. A masorah note in a Pentateuch-Hagiographa codex dated to fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Spain contains an Aramaic mnemonic, each word corresponding to a *siman* in the “two words read as one” MM list.²² I present it here, following the format of analysis found in David Marcus’ *Scribal Wit* (see fig. 1 above), with the Hebrew text from *BHS* and with the *qere* in brackets. Though taken from a relatively late source, this mnemonic is in the style of those found in early strata, and it precisely preserves official Masoretic tradition. It just so happens that the first word in the mnemonic is the name *David*, serving as the *siman* for our passage containing לם רבה.

Scribes who treasured the Masoretic tradition considered this list to be important enough to merit the composition of a clever memory device: “David the good man was delivered from the sword of Saul when he pursued him in the wilderness.” As with the Aramaic mnemonics generally, the phrase celebrates scribal ingenuity as well as Masoretic authority; in this case we find yet another affirmation of the scribal standard for writing and reading Isa 9:6. Though copyists would often ignore it, the Masorah remained adamant; there was no place for למרבה in official Scripture.

Midrash in Talmud and Medieval Commentators - למרבה

We now turn to the stream of tradition that attributes significance to a closed *mem* in the middle of the word. Though our oldest Bavli fragments containing the Bar Kappara midrash are newer than our early witnesses to the Masorah,

²² Cambridge MS Add.652, f.296r, at Lam 4:3. See Christian David Ginsburg, *The Massorah: Compiled from Manuscripts. Alphabetically and Lexically Arranged, Vol II, Caph-Tav* (Repr.: New York: Ktav, 1975), 54. Ginsburg records this mnemonic in list #483 along with each of the verses. He presents the two words from Isa 9:6 as לם רבה, but I am unaware of his source for the vocalization he provides. He also mistakenly included Job 38:1 here, which belongs in the prior list, #482. For an excellent introduction to the invention and employment of these Aramaic mnemonics and a thorough analysis of their appearance throughout *L*, see David Marcus, *Scribal Wit: Aramaic Mnemonics in the Leningrad Codex* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013). It is a delight that this mnemonic provides an apt title for this *Festschrift* in his honor. The cover art for this volume is excerpted from this manuscript.

there is no reason to doubt the story's antiquity.²³ Rashi addressed it in his Talmud commentary. Furthermore, the lore surrounding this supposed closed *mem* enjoyed interest beyond Bar Kappara's interpretation. Ibn Ezra and Radak drew upon and expanded this midrash in their Bible commentaries. The kabbalists behind the Zoharic literature stretched it even farther. In each case we find not only the ideological privileging of midrashic interpretation over the tradition of the Masorah but a championing of ever more creative explanations.

The Bar Kappara passage at BT *Sanh* 94a is too rich to handle here in its entirety. Full of wordplay and allusion, it is worthy of its own treatment.²⁴ For the present purpose it will suffice to cite his opening statement concerning our verse as preserved in the printed Vilna edition:

מפני מה כל מ"ם שבאמצע תיבה פתוח וזה סתום

Why is it that every *mem* in the middle of a word is open, but this one is closed?

At this point a scribe trained in the Masorah would have answered, "You err; it is two words." But absent this corrective voice, the story goes on to explain how this *mem* came to be closed in the first place. It had not always been so. The Holy One had thought to make Hezekiah the Messiah, but upon hearing a protest from the Attribute of Justice he refrained and closed this *mem*.²⁵ That the Hebrew script in Hezekiah's time did not have any final forms was either unknown to the composer of the midrash or it was of no concern; what

²³ Talmudic texts obtained through the online database, "Hachi Garsinan – Bavli," *The Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society*, <https://fjms.genizah.org>, BT *Sanhedrin* 94a. The three oldest manuscript witnesses to the Bar Kappara story in *Sanhedrin* are: Cairo Genizah fragment T-S AS 78.124 (uncertain date), MS Firenze II.1.8-9 (early 13th c.), Cod. Hebr. 95, aka "the Munich Bavli" (1342). For descriptions of Talmudic manuscripts, see Menachem Katz et al, "The Complete Manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud, Version 2," *Introduction: The Friedberg project for Talmud Bavli variants – 'Hachi Garsinan,'* https://www.academia.edu/33974422/Background_to_Complete_Manuscripts_of_the_Babylonian_Talmud_2019. Accessed October 21, 2021.

²⁴ A main feature throughout this and subsequent midrash on the open and closed *mem* is an exploitation of the verbs לסתום 'to close' and לפתוח 'to open'.

²⁵ In Yerushalmi *Sanhedrin* 10 our verse is used as a reference to Hezekiah, but there is no mention of any closed *mem* or scribal anomaly; it is simply answering the question עד איתו קיימת. השעה זכות אבות קיימת.

mattered was the text as he believed it to be. In two surviving manuscripts of *Sanhedrin* the closed *mem* was written in accordance with Bar Kappara's claim, one of them even in extra-large letters.²⁶ Yet for some reason Shlomo ben Shimshon, the fourteenth-century copyist of the oldest complete Bavli, Munich Ms 95, disregarded it, writing only 'למרב'. Perhaps the manuscript(s) he copied from had missed it as well. Did he not recognize the need for a closed *mem* here, as demanded by the very question Bar Kappara was asking? On the other hand, if his focus was simply on the arduous and monumental task of copying an entire Talmud, it would not be appropriate to expect him to catch or understand minute literary details contained therein.

We now look to a few of the early rabbinic commentators who engaged both midrashic lore and Masoretic knowledge.²⁷ In his commentary on Isaiah, Rashi (France, 1040-1105) made no mention of this mysterious *mem*. As we will see, he did address it in his Bavli commentary, but without any reference to the Masorah.²⁸ Was he unaware of the scribal explanation? Did he observe the conflicting traditions concerning this verse and decide to avoid addressing it?

מם שבתִיבֵת לַמְרַבָּה הַמְשֻׁרָה סְתוּם, לַכֵּךְ נִסְתָּם, לּוֹמֵר, נִסְתָּמוּ הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁעָלוּ
בְּמַחְשָׁבָה וְלֹא נַעֲשֶׂה. ל"א (לִישָׁנָא אַחֲרִינָא): שְׁבִיקֵשׁ הַקַּב"ה לְסִתּוּם צְרוּתֵיהֶן
שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁבִקֵשׁ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ מְשִׁיחַ. וּמוֹרֵי רַבֵּי פִירֵשׁ לְפִי שְׁנִסְתָּם פִּיּוֹ שֶׁל חֲזַקִּיָּה
וְלֹא אָמַר שִׁירָה

The *mem* in the middle of (the phrase) *Of the increase of the government* is closed, and therefore concealed. That is, things that arose in thought were concealed, and not done. Another meaning: that the Blessed Holy One sought to stop Israel's enemies who sought to make him Messiah. My teacher and rabbi explained that Hezekiah's mouth was stopped,

²⁶ The two manuscripts which preserve the closed *mem* are a Cairo Genizah fragment (T-S AS 78.124) and a Yemenite manuscript (Yad Harav Herzog 1). See the *Appendix*.

²⁷ I am not concerned here with the manuscript history of these rabbis' commentaries, as their ideology is clear from their discussion of the text. That they believe there is a closed *mem* in the middle of the word is evident.

²⁸ Hebrew text of Rashi's comments at *Sanhedrin* 94a are from the Vilna edition.

and he could not utter a song.

Rashi began with the general statement that a closed *mem* can refer to the inaccessibility of thoughts that are not acted upon.²⁹ He then proceeded to include two other explanations that stray from the tale preserved in *Sanhedrin*. First, the closed (סתום) *mem* might hint at the stopping (לסתום) of Israel's enemies. Second, it might represent Hezekiah's closed (נסתם) mouth (that is, his incapacity to compose and sing psalms as David had done). But according to the Bar Kappara tradition, the *mem* became closed only after the Attribute of Justice had complained to the Holy One that Hezekiah did not merit becoming the Messiah. It is evident that Masoretic authority had no place in Rashi's statements here; rather, he accepted the למרבה reading and advanced the exploitation of the root סתם which had begun with Bar Kappara.

Like Rashi, Ibn Ezra (Spain, 1089-1167) retained the word's association with Hezekiah. But he raised a completely different meaning.

דרך דרש הסופרים, כי המ"ם סגור בתוך המלה והיה ראוי להיות בסוף,

רמז לאות השמש ששב הצל לאחור

According to the scribes' exegesis, a closed *mem* is in the middle of the word when it should be at the end, an allusion to the sign of the sun when the shadow went backward.³⁰

The story of the shadow going backward alludes to the account of Hezekiah's miraculous healing and extended lifespan (Isa 38:8). In the midrash recounted by Ibn Ezra, the *mem sofit* symbolizes the sun or the shadow, which in למרבה has evidently moved backward from the end of the word. Another differentiation from the other commentators is Ibn Ezra's use of מילה instead of תיבה, and סגור instead of סתום. On this point, he does not seem

²⁹ This idea expands what is found in the Bavli concerning the open and closed forms of the letter *mem*. In *Shabbat* 104a, there is a discussion of the meanings of the Hebrew letters. For *mem*, it says סתום מאמר פתוח מאמר "Open *mem*, closed *mem*; open teaching, closed (secret) teaching." Rashi comments יש דברים שנתן רשות לדורשן ויש שאתה מצווה לסותמן כגון מעשה מרכבה "There are things that are permitted to exegete, and there are those that one is commanded to conceal, such as the theophany of the divine chariot (in Ezekiel 1-3)."

³⁰ Ibn Ezra's commentary on Isa 9:6. Hebrew text obtained from *Miqra'ot Gedolot "Ha-Keter,"* ed. Menachem Cohen, <https://www.mgketer.org>.

to be responding to the text of the Talmud; perhaps he is not even aware of it. It is also unclear whether Ibn Ezra attributed this entire saying to דרש הסופרים, or only the description of the misplaced *mem sofit*, in which case the idea of the moving shadow could be his own. Either way, this is another creative explanation lacking accountability to the instruction of the Masorah.

Radak (Provence, 1160-1235) exploited the midrash as well. Amplifying the messianic interpretation, he believed there was more to this mysterious closed *mem* than what had been shared or even known by his predecessors. Radak mustered additional help from the world of the Masorah to reveal a midrashic logic behind his confidence in future redemption.

המ"ם סתומה בכתוב, וקרי במ"ם פתוחה. ובהפך זה בעזרא המ פרוצים (נחמ' ב,
 יג) – המ"ם פתוחה בסוף התיבה, בכתוב. ויש בו דרש: כאשר יסתמו חומות ירושלם,
 שהם פרוצים כל זמן הגלות, ולעת הישועה יסתמו הפרוצים, ואז תפתח המשרה
 שהיא סתומה, על ידי מלך המשיח

The *mem* (of לַמְרֵבָה) is closed in the written form but is read with an open *mem*. This is the opposite of Ezra's *hem p̄arušim* (Neh 2:13), written with an open *mem* at the end of the word (*hem*). There is a midrash here: Just as the walls of Jerusalem, which are broken throughout the time of the Exile, and at the time of deliverance the broken (walls) will be sealed up, so will the dominion, which is now sealed, be opened, at the hands of the King Messiah.³¹

Just as the Masoretic tradition preserves a list of eight instances where the scribes write two words but read one, it also preserves a list of fifteen instances where they write one word but read two.³² The word המפרוצים at Neh 2:13 is one of these fifteen. Yet this nuance of scribal classification did not deter Radak; he extracted only what he needed for his exegesis, ignoring the fact that according to the scribes there is no such open *mem*; the *qere* for this word is recorded in the Masorah as הם פרוצים, not המ פרוצים. But as far as Radak

³¹ Radak's commentary on Isa 9:6. Hebrew text obtained from *Miqra'ot Gedolot "Ha-Keter,"* ed. Menachem Cohen, <https://www.mgketer.org>

³² Full list given in *L* at Gen 30:11.

was concerned, the word *המ* provided the perfect complement to *למרבה*. The open (*פתוחה*) *mem* of *המ* (signifying the walls of Jerusalem) shall be sealed up (*יִסְתָּמוּ*), and the closed (*סתומה*) *mem* of *למרבה* (signifying Israel's hope for future messianic dominion) will be opened (*תִּפְתָּח*). The mystification of scribal lore was thus perpetuated.³³

There is a Geniza fragment (11th-13th c.) that contains some of Saadia Gaon's Judeo-Arabic translation of Isaiah 9.³⁴ While we do not know Saadia's opinion on the matter, the copyist clearly intended to write a single word with a closed *mem*: ...*לכתרה אלריאסה*: *למרבה*, *for the abundance of leadership*... There is no midrash offered here, only the first word of the Hebrew serving as an index for the translation of the verse. The only explanation for this choice is that *למרבה* had acquired the pseudo-status of *ketiv* under the influence of lore concerning the closed *mem*.

Finally, a sixteenth-century manuscript of *Ruth Rabbah* contains a variation on Bar Kappara's midrash.³⁵ The six measures of barley given to Ruth by Boaz (Ruth 3:15) represent six future *tzaddikim* who will be descended from her. A verse of Scripture is cited for each of the six, and Hezekiah is one of them. In good midrashic style, both Isa 9:6 and its supposed closed *mem* are given as support.

למרבה המשרה לם רבה כתב ולית כת' בקריאה מם סתומה באמצע תיבה
ולמד שלו גדול מכל למד שבתורה

Of the increase of the dominion... *לם רבה* is written, and nowhere else in Scripture is there a closed *mem* in the middle of a word. And its *lamed*

³³ Bahya ben Asher (1255-1340) repeats a variation of this same explanation in his Torah commentary at Gen 47:28.

³⁴ T-S Ar.28.124. I thank Prof. Geoffrey Khan for his kind assistance with this fragment.

³⁵ Oxford Bodleian Library MS. Selden Super 102 (also known as Neubauer 164) is dated to 1513. It was the main manuscript used for Lerner's critical edition in his dissertation: Meron B. Lerner, *The Book of Ruth in Aggadic Literature and Midrash Ruth Rabba* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1971). An earlier manuscript of this midrash, Codex Parma 2342 (13th-14th c.) is less developed and does not contain this citation. This makes it particularly difficult to identify when this tradition became part of *Ruth Rabbah*. For a fuller discussion, see Elvira Martín-Contreras, "Text Preserving Observations in the Midrash Ruth Rabbah," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 62 (2011), 311-23.

is larger than every *lamed* in the Torah.

Surprisingly the copyist of this manuscript was careful to write two words, as would a Masorete: לם רבה. The very next statement, לית כת' בקריאה, “there is nowhere else in Scripture (with a closed *mem* in the middle of a word),” is meant to sound masoretic. But not only is it inauthentic, it is in direct contradiction with what the copyist had just presented—לם רבה—rather than למרבה. Either it is two words, or it is a single word with a misplaced *mem sofit*. But even more strangely, the next line asserts that the letter *lamed* here is larger than any other *lamed* in the Torah. No manuscript evidence supports this claim, and it is not even clear how the *Ruth Rabbah* passage benefits from it, except that it simply sounds authoritative.³⁶ One wonders how invested this copyist was in the meaning or coherence of the words he was copying.

Zohar

In late thirteenth-century Spain a new genre of Bible interpretation was being written down and distributed. Transmitted in Aramaic as esoteric Torah commentary originating from the second-century rabbinic sage Shimon bar Yohai, texts that would later be part of *Sefer HaZohar* gained popularity.³⁷ A variety of manuscripts survive from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, with the mysterious closed *mem* of Isa 9:6 appearing in sections from Genesis, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.³⁸ However, its significance in this body of work marks a retreat from prior midrashic approaches and a move toward convoluted letter mysticism. Rather than pointing to Hezekiah or the revelation of the Messiah, it seems that the author is connecting a theme found in *Sefer HaBahir* (12th c.)—namely, various symbolic properties attributed to the open and closed *mem*—with the surface-level assumption held in

³⁶ The Vilna edition (late 19th c.) of *Ruth Rabbah* also contains a blunder at this location. It reads למרבה המשרה כתיב חסר מ"ם “it is written lacking a *mem*.” An inattentive copyist and/or typesetter was responsible for this.

³⁷ For a general history, and for the compelling case that the *Zohar* became a proper book only in the hands of printers, see Boaz Huss, *The Zohar: Reception and Impact*, trans. Yudith Nave (Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016).

³⁸ From sections *Bereshit*, *Shelakh Lekha*, and *Vayelekh*.

midrashic thought since Bar Kappara.³⁹

In the *Zohar* לַמְרַבָּה serves only as an anchor for teachings concerning the mystical meanings of the letter *mem*. Here is an example from its commentary on *Parashat Vayelekh*.⁴⁰

רבי שמעון אמר... מ"ם פתוחה נהרא דנגיד ונפיק ואקרי מ"ם
והוא רזא דתנינן מ"ם פתוחה מ"ם סתומה כמה דאוקימנא לַמְרַבָּה המשרה

Rabbi Shimon said, "...an open *mem* ('water') is a stream that is drawn and goes out, and it is called *mem*. And this is a mystery that we teach: an open *mem* and a closed *mem*, as we have established *lemarbeh hammisrah*."

For my purpose, it is only necessary to show that the Zoharic conception of our passage is influenced by the midrashic tradition that finds a closed *mem* where it does not belong and attaches significance to that fact, "as (we have) established." The Masorah's assertion of it being two words would have undermined the exegetical opportunity eyed by the kabbalists. This is important because some of the Zoharic manuscript evidence is influenced by that very same Masorah. That is, among our earliest witnesses we find that sometimes copyists wrote לַמְרַבָּה instead of לַמְרַבָּה as we would expect.⁴¹ The best explanation for this is that the copyists commissioned to write these manuscripts had received some measure of training according to the Masoretic tradition and were less interested in the meaning of the mystical texts they copied. Still, other manuscripts reflect complete ignorance on both fronts.

This trajectory of Zoharic midrash continues into the fourteenth century, with new imaginative flair. The *Tikkunei Zohar* contains an explanation completely unlike anything we have seen from previous midrash.

³⁹ See *Sefer HaBahir* #84-86. There is no citation of Isa. 9:6 in this work.

⁴⁰ Hebrew and Aramaic text from Yehudah Ashlag, "Vayelekh 40," *HaSulam*, www.ashlagbaroch.org/Zohar/VaYeLech.pdf, p. 13.

⁴¹ See Appendix. In some manuscripts it is obvious that the copyists knew neither the midrashic tradition about לַמְרַבָּה nor the Masorah. I thank Prof. Ronit Meroz of Tel Aviv University for sharing images of the 14th c. Zohar manuscript Cambridge Add. 1203.

Here, the author not only likened the closed *mem* of לַמְרַבָּה to a wedding ring but offered an alternative tradition that calculates its significance in terms of gematria.⁴²

וכד איהי ם סתימא איהי מ"ם רבתא מלמרבה המשרה ואתעבידת עזקא
 ובגינה אתמר לגבי כלה תהא לי מקודשת בטבעת זו ם
 ועלה אתמר קוטרא בגולמא נעוץ בעזקא ואיהי חוור ולא סמוק ולא אוכח
 ולא ירוק ולא גוון כלל
 וכד אתפשטא לאנהרא איהי עבידת גוונין לאנהרא
 ס"א למרב"ה בגימטריא עזר או זר"ע בההוא היכל זרע זרעין לתקונא דיליה
 המשר"ה בגימטריא תקו"ן עם האותיות והמלה ודא מם רבתי

And pertaining to the closed *mem*, it is a large *mem* (*mem rabbetha*) from *lemarbeh hammisrah*. It was made a ring, and on account of it, it is said to a bride, "Be sanctified unto me by this ring," which is a (closed) *mem*. And concerning it, it is said an unending/unfinished band, (with a finger) inserted into the ring. And it is not white, not red, not black, not green, no color at all. But when it is stretched forth into the light, it is made of colors like light.

Another thought: *Lemarbeh* in gematria is 'ezer (help) or zera' (seed) [= 277]. In that palace there is a seed of seeds for its repair. *Hammisrah* in gematria is *t(i)kkun* with the letters and the word (תקון = המשרה = 550). This is the *mem rabbati* ('large').⁴³

The creativity inherent in the midrashic impulse is perhaps best exemplified here. Up to this point, the language of the closed and open *mem* was standard, and except for the *Zohar* the midrash had consistently been linked to Hezekiah. Not only has the closed *mem* been upgraded to the status of *rabbati*, but it is also the wedding ring given to a bride. Given this special importance, the author went even further to find numerological significance. *Tikkunei Zohar* is

⁴² Hebrew and Aramaic text obtained through digital database; David Kantrowitz, developer, "Tikkunei Zohar," *Judaic Classics Deluxe Edition*, (2007, Davka Corporation).

⁴³ *Tikkunei Zohar 19a* (page number according to the Constantinople edition of 1719). See Appendix for lists of *Zohar* and *Tikkunei Zohar* manuscripts in which the scribe wrote the *mem* larger than the other letters.

the product of an imagination free of both Masoretic and traditional midrashic constraint. Completely new meanings have been attributed, apparently without any need to justify the departure from the old.⁴⁴

Yosef Kaspi and the “Closed Mem” among Catholic Scholars

This survey would not be complete without mentioning the place of closed-*mem* lore in inter-religious dialogue within this period. Both the Catalan Dominican friar Raymond Martini (13th c.) and Franciscan monk Nicolas de Lyra (1270-1349) held that the closed *mem* of Isa 9:6 signifies the miracle of the virgin birth. In his major engagement with rabbinic texts titled *Pugio Fidei* (~1270), Martini drew attention to this “closed letter *mem* in the middle of a word, against the nature of Hebrew writing (*in medio dectionis Mem literam clausam contra naturam scribendi Hebraicum*).” He tied this directly to the Messiah, “born of a virgin uncharacteristically closed, and (against) the nature of gestation (*clausa contra... naturam*).” Just as this *mem* is closed contrary to nature, so too was the virgin pregnant contrary to nature.⁴⁵ Martini offered a Latin translation of the Bar Kappara tradition from the Bavli, but was completely ignorant of the scribal tradition concerning the verse. He redirected the midrash toward his own religious aim. De Lyra would later repeat Martini’s innovation in a treatise entitled *Against a certain Jew who denounced the Gospel according to St Matthew*.⁴⁶

This appropriation of rabbinic midrash did not go unnoticed by at least

⁴⁴ The “closed mem” of Isa 9:6 is similarly treated at *Tikkunei Zohar* 73a. A 14th-15th c. fragment of *Tikkun* #11 at the National Library of Israel (Ms. Heb. 1800.149=8) reflects the careful attention a scribe could give to writing out Scripture passages cited within the *Tikkunim*; certainly the “closed *mem*” would have received no less care from this same kabbalist-scribe than what is preserved in this small manuscript. The overwhelming artistic/visual aspect of the *Tikkunim* has been largely lost in newer printed editions.

⁴⁵ Raymond Martini, *Pugio Fidei* (Paris, 1651) 426-27; and Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. A. Schwartz, S. Nakache, and P. Peli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 148-49, 233 n. 44. For the larger historical context of Martini’s work and the influence and eventual printing of *Pugio Fidei*, see George Foot Moore, “Christian Writers on Judaism,” *HTR* 14 (1921): 197-254.

⁴⁶ A. Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird’s-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 412-13.

one contemporary Jewish scholar. In his commentary on Isaiah 9 Yosef Kaspi (Provence, 1280-1345) wrote, “Isaiah did not say וירגו *virgo*, but he said העלמה *ha’almah*.” By his writings we know that Kaspi had been exposed not only to the Latin tradition stemming from the Septuagint’s rendering of העלמה in Isa 7:14 as ἡ παρθένος, here *virgo* (transliterated into Hebrew), but to the much more recent “closed *mem*” interpretation championed by Martini and de Lyra. He pushed back against the Catholics: “It would have been more fitting that the *mem* of *ha’almah* to be thus (closed), if the prophet intended this; but (the *mem* of *ha’almah*) is quite open. For it does not hint at a woman, but at that male concerning whom it is said, ‘a child is born unto us’ and to the entire people.”⁴⁷ Kaspi went on to suggest that the Men of the Great Assembly deliberately made this change to warn Jews about the matter.⁴⁸ Even the vowel points, cantillation marks, and *ketiv* and *qere* were given by these ancient sages as a warning against wayward interpretations, such as this one found among the Christian scholars. Did Kaspi know the Masorah’s position on this word? I think not. He was convinced of an ancient, intriguing lore concerning the closed *mem*, which he conflated with various elements from the scribal tradition and then attributed to a legendary body of Jewish leaders from the distant past. Ideas expressed in the polemics between Kaspi and the Catholics further demonstrate midrashic plasticity unencumbered by the fixed Masorah.

Conclusion

The Tiberian scribes deliberately wrote two separate words at the beginning of our verse in Isaiah: לם רבה, possibly conserving a tradition as old as the Great Isaiah Scroll. In the margin of their manuscripts they instructed the reader to read one word: למרבה. This was not unique. The Masoretes had preserved a list of eight places in the Bible where two words were written but only one was to

⁴⁷ Hebrew text from *Miqra’ot Gedolot “Ha-Keter,”* ed. Menachem Cohen. <https://www.mgketer.org>.

⁴⁸ ואם אנשי כנסת הגדולה עשו זה השנוי באות הזאת להעירנו על דבר... כי אנשי כנסת הגדולה העירנו עם ידיעת ספרי הקדש בכמה מינים, גם בנקודים גם בטעמים גם בכתב וקרי

be read. But as we have seen, the list far outlasted its application. By the eleventh century we begin to see masoretic-style manuscripts that have למרבה instead of לם רבה. In the famous Leningrad Codex, only this item from the list of eight is not written according to this Masoretic rule. In subsequent manuscripts such as *Paris 25* and *M¹* we see the same pattern. Due to this contagion of non-masoretic scribal lore, Isa 9:6 began to receive special treatment which was not afforded to the other seven items on the official list.

Over this same span of time, the lone midrash from the Bavli gained traction among rabbinic commentators such as Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Radak. The basic presupposition of this developing tradition was that there is a closed *mem* in the middle of the word. No experts were consulted. The result was a growing array of colorful meanings attributed to something which a trained scribe would say does not exist. By the fourteenth century, the midrash had even spread into the domain of inter-religious polemic.

Yet there were glitches in the systems. We can attribute the drift of למרבה into otherwise “masoretic” manuscripts to a growing influence of the clever imagination of authoritative teachers and tradents. After all, people love a good midrash and will even spread it enthusiastically. In practice, and contrary to the Masorah, למרבה became a kind of folk-*ketiv*; this one item among the list of eight had become a relic.⁴⁹ What is more difficult to explain is finding ideologically “midrashic” contexts, such as the *Bavli* or *Zohar* or *Ruth Rabbah*, where the Masoretic instruction concerning Isa 9:6 is actually followed. My suggestion is that in these cases, the copyists had received training in Masoretic lists and sought to accurately represent that tradition, without concern that it went against the grain of the very lore they were preserving. It was as if an old family heirloom was taken out, dusted off, and set on the mantle. But given the immense sea of Jewish texts, who is going to notice? Who will remember?

⁴⁹ We can wonder whether a *Tanakh* will ever be printed without Bar Kappara’s closed *mem*. In the *Jerusalem Crown* these words are kept separate, of course, because it follows the Aleppo Codex. But this is a unique case in modern printed Hebrew Bibles.

In this exploration of a peculiar scribal anomaly, two distinct ideologies from the medieval Jewish textual imagination have been juxtaposed. The text practices of the Masoretic tradition were anchored in a motivation to preserve and protect; to encourage and ensure replication without modification. In contrast, the thrust of midrash was invention and creativity linked—however curiously or precariously—to a presentation of sacred, traditional text, even to the potential chagrin of its guardian scribes. In the case of the closed *mem*, the mighty fence of the Masorah was not strong enough to prevent a clever midrash from breaking through and changing how Scripture would be written.⁵⁰ The careful calligraphy, dry lists, and clever mnemonics of master scribes were no match for the bold and unrestrained imagination of the mishrashists who insisted upon the existence of something that was not “really” there. And while it seems that such midrashic creativity has long enjoyed a pride of place in popular Jewish thought about the Bible, I am grateful to scholars of the Masorah like David Marcus who have exemplified with their work a patient, happy diligence in walking a road less traveled.

Appendix: Manuscript Data for Isa 9:6

Description	Masorah <i>Siman</i>	Consonantal Text	MS	Date
Great Isaiah Scroll	n/a	לִמְרַבָּה	<i>1QIsa^a</i>	125 BCE
product of Masorete	לִמְרַבָּה הַמְשֻׁרָה	לִמְרַבָּה	<i>A</i>	930 (CE)
<i>masoretic*</i>	לִמְרַבָּה הַמְשֻׁרָה	לִמְרַבָּה	<i>Sⁱ</i>	10th (c)
<i>masoretic</i>	לִמְרַבָּה	לִמְרַבָּה	<i>C</i>	9th-11th
<i>masoretic</i>	לִמְרַבָּה	לִמְרַבָּה	<i>P</i>	916
<i>masoretic</i>	לִמְרַבָּה הַמְשֻׁרָה	לִמְרַבָּה	<i>EVR II B 9</i>	10th-11th
<i>masoretic</i>	4x לִמְרַבָּה	לִמְרַבָּה	<i>L</i>	11th
<i>masoretic</i>	לִמְרַבָּה הַמְשֻׁרָה	לִמְרַבָּה	<i>Paris BN 25</i>	1232
<i>masoretic</i>	5x לִמְרַבָּה הַמְשֻׁרָה	לִמְרַבָּה	<i>Mⁱ</i>	13th

⁵⁰ For an example of where midrash comes into the service of the masoretic tradition, see Robert Vanhoff, “A Necessary Yod: How Masorah and Midrash Helped to Clarify the Canon,” in *Torah is a Hidden Treasure*, ed. W. David Nelson and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2019), 175-85.

<i>Massekhet Soferim</i>		למרבה	Oppenheim 726	early 14th
<i>Massekhet Soferim</i>		ל'מרב'	Munich 95	1342
<i>Massekhet Soferim</i>		לם רבה or למרבה	Paris Hebr 837	15th
Geniza <i>Sanhedrin</i> frag.		למר'	T-S AS 78.124	unknown
Bavli <i>Sanhedrin</i> ms		למרבה המשרה	Firenze II.1.8-9	early 13th
oldest complete Bavli		למרב' המשרה	Munich 95	1342
Temani <i>San.</i> ms**		למרבה המשרה	Yad Harav Herzog	16th-17th
<i>Ruth Rabbah</i>		לם רבה	Selden Super. 102	1513
Saadia's Arabic trans		למרבה	T-S AR 28.124	11th-13th
<i>Zohar, Vayelech</i>		לם רבה המשרה	Camb. Add. 1023	14th
<i>Zohar, Vayelech</i>		לם־רבה המשרה	Vat EVR 208	15th
<i>Zohar, Shelach Lekha</i>		למרבה המשרה	Vat EVR 199	14th-15th
<i>Zohar, Bereshit</i>		ם רבת' מלמרבה	Vat EVR 206	15th
<i>Zohar, Vayelech</i>		מלמרבה המשרה	Vat EVR 206	15th
<i>Zohar, Shelach Lekha</i>		לם רבה המשרה	Cod Parm 3124	16th
<i>Zohar, Vayelech</i> **		לם רבה המשרה	Cod Parm 3124	16th
<i>Tikkunei Zohar</i> #13**		ם מלמרבה המשרה	Vat EVR 204	1551
<i>Tikkunei Zohar</i> #5**		ם רבתא מלמרבה המשרה	Guenzburg 130	1535

* By *masoretic* I mean a product of a non-Masorete copyist who made the Masorah a primary feature of his manuscript.

** The larger letters are original to the manuscript, and thus reflect the copyists' own emphasis and ideological motivation.