

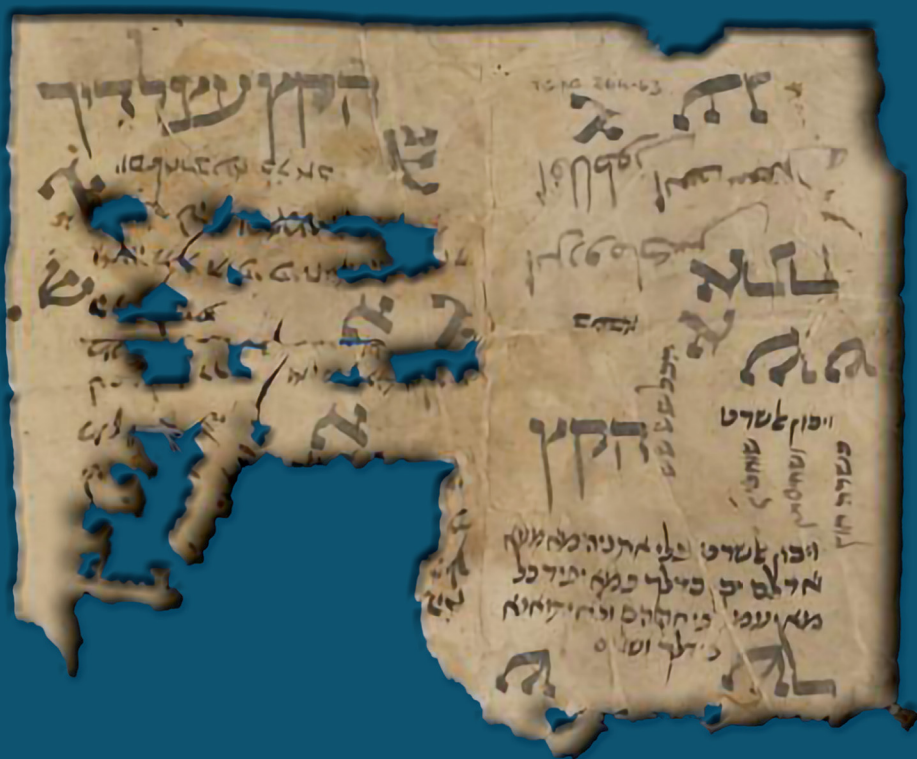
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Volume 1: Hebrew and the Wider Semitic World

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HEALED BY ‘HIS WOUND(S)’, ‘HIS BRUISING’, OR ‘IN HIS COMPANY’?: ISAIAH 53.5 AND *DAGESH MAVHIN**

Benjamin Kantor

1.0. The Philological Problem of חֲבֵרָה in Isaiah 53.5

Most conventional or traditional translations of Isa. 53.5 read something like the following:

- (1) וְהוּא מִחֲלָל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ מִדָּבָר מְעֹנִינֵנוּ
 מוֹסֵר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ עָלָיו **וּבְחֲבֵרָתוֹ** נִרְפָּא-לָנוּ:
 ‘And he was pierced for our transgressions,
 crushed for our iniquities,
 the chastisement of our peace was upon him,
 and by his wounds we are healed.’
-

* I would like to thank Randall Buth for first drawing this issue to my attention many years ago and Geoffrey Khan for discussing this idea with me over the years. I would also like to thank those in attendance at the 2022 SBL Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado, for their feedback on an earlier version of this paper that I presented there. I am also grateful to the two reviewers who offered helpful feedback on an earlier iteration of this paper. Their constructive comments have made this final version of better quality. Any remaining errors are only my own.

There is, however, one potential philological problem with this translation. The word translated as ‘wounds’ (*NIV*; *ESV*) or ‘stripes’ (*KJV*) may not—at least according to the Tiberian-pointed Masoretic Text—mean ‘wounds’ or ‘stripes’ at all.

1.1. The Lexeme חַבּוּרָה ‘wound’ in the Bible

In the Hebrew Bible, the consonantal sequence חב(ו)רה is normally vocalised with a geminated *bet* as the lexeme חַבּוּרָה/חַבְרָה ‘wound, stripe’. Indeed, aside from the verse under consideration, wherever the sequence חב(ו)רה is used to refer to ‘wound(s)’ or ‘stripe(s)’ (6x), it has *dagesh forte* in the *bet*:

- (2) כִּי אִישׁ הִרְגֹתִי לְפָצְעִי וְיֹלֵד לְחַבְרָתִי:
‘for I killed a man for my wound, and a young man **for my stripe**’ (Gen. 4.23)
- (3) כְּוִיָּה תַחַת כְּוִיָּה פָצַע תַּחַת פָּצַע חַבּוּרָה תַּחַת חַבּוּרָה:
‘burn for burn, wound for wound, **stripe for stripe**’ (Exod. 21.25)
- (4) פָּצַע וְחַבּוּרָה וּמִכָּה טְרִיָּה
‘wound **and stripe** and a fresh blow’ (Isa. 1.6)
- (5) הַבְּאִישׁוֹ נִמְקוּ חַבּוּרָתִי
‘**my stripes** stink and rot’ (Ps. 38.6)
- (6) חַבְרוֹת פָּצַע תִּמְרֹק (ק'; כ': תִּמְרִיק) בִּרְעַ
‘**stripes** that wound cleanse away evil’ (Prov. 20.30)

As noted, the only case of a noun represented by the consonantal sequence חב(ו)רה without a *dagesh* occurs in our passage

in Isa. 53.5.¹ It is, of course, possible that the Hebrew Bible admits two morphological or phonological byforms for the word ‘wound’, namely חבוּרָה and חִבוּרָה. The pattern קטוּלָה is itself quite rare in Biblical Hebrew (BH) (Huehnergard 2015, 55); the pattern קטוּלָה is much more common, also overlapping with the feminine singular passive participle in the *qal*. There are at least some other pairs that may exhibit parallel byforms, whether in קטוּל or קטוּלָה, e.g., אֲשָׁרִי ‘my steps’ (Ps. 17.5) versus אֲשָׁרִי ‘my step’ (Job 31.7); שְׁכוּלָה ‘bereaved’ (Isa. 49.21) versus וְשָׁכְלָה ‘and bereaved’ (Song 4.2) (Fox 2003, 201).

While such parallels could, at least theoretically, shed light on the form in Isa. 53.5, the form וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ is unlikely to reflect a mere byform of חבוּרָה without some semantic nuance or distinction of its own. If such were the case, the apparent byform חִבוּרָה would be attested only here. By contrast, the parallel examples of אֲשֶׁר- and שְׁכוּלָה(ו) cited above attest to their byforms without gemination many times throughout the Bible. It would thus be hard to explain why the lone case of the byform חִבוּרָה—without any apparent semantic distinction—occurs only here in Isa. 53.5, especially when the more regular form חבוּרָה occurs in Isa. 1.6.

¹ Note, however, the non-similar sounding form חִבְרָה, which occurs once in the phrase לְחִבְרָה ‘in company’ (Job 34.8). This same noun may also occur in the Samaritan Pentateuch (and oral reading) in וחברתם = [wa:ba:ra:'timma] ‘and their company’ (Gen. 49.7).

1.2. The Lexemes חֲבוּרָה ‘wound’ and חֲבוּרָה/חֲבוּרָה ‘company; association’ in Rabbinic Hebrew

A separate lexeme חֲבוּרָה (or חֲבוּרָה), with a distinct meaning, is, however, attested in Rabbinic Hebrew (RH). In MS Kaufmann of the Mishna, for example, the form without *dagesh* consistently has the meaning ‘company’ or ‘association’, e.g., לֹא יַעֲשֶׂנוּ דָּמִים עָלַי חֲבוּרָה ‘he may not charge its value against the association’ (m. Pesah. 7.3); שְׁתֵּי חֲבוּרוֹת שָׁהוּ אוֹכְלוֹת ‘two associations which were eating’ (m. Ber. 7.5).² The form with *dagesh*, on the other hand, has the meaning ‘wound’ or ‘stripe’, as in the Bible, e.g., זָרַק חֲבוּרָה לַעֲשׂוֹת ‘he threw [it] to inflict a wound’ (m. Shabb. 11.6).³

1.3. Summary of the Philological Problem

According to the vocalisation traditions reflected in the Lenin-grad Codex (L) and RH,⁴ then, it seems that at face value the vocalisation of the form וּבְחֲבוּרָתוֹ in Isa. 53.5 reflects a reading like ‘and in his association’, ‘and in his company’, or ‘and by union with him’. While it is possible that חֲבוּרָה could reflect a mere

² See also m. Eruv. 6.6; m. Pesah. 7.3, 13; 8.6–7; 9.8–10; m. Beṣa 2.3. Although MS Kaufmann has *holem*, note that חֲבוּרָה/חֲבוּרָה are presumably byforms in Rabbinic Hebrew (possible due to the *resh*); the form with *shureq* is typical in Hebrew lexica (Jastrow 1926; *Milon Even-Shoshan*). Note also that the Babylonian tradition of RH often has *shureq* here, e.g., חֲבוּרוֹת (m. Ber. 7.5; Yeivin 1985, 917).

³ See also m. Shabb. 11.6; m. Beṣa 2.8; m. BabaQ. 8.1, 3, 5; m. Sanh. 11.1; m. Shevu. 5.5. Translations in consultation with Neusner (1988).

⁴ There is some variation in the presence of *dagesh* in the lexeme חֲבוּרָה in the Babylonian tradition of RH (Yeivin 1985, 962–63).

byform of חַבּוּרָה ‘wound’, it seems unlikely that such a (phonological?) byform without any semantic distinction of its own would be attested in just this one verse when the result would actually be homophonous with a distinct lexeme meaning ‘company’ or ‘association’. After all, the word חַבּוּרָה ‘company; association’ would have been known to the early tradents of pre-Tiberian reading traditions. Indeed, it would be reasonable to expect a rendering like ‘and by his wound’, ‘and by his bruise’, or ‘and by his stripe’ to have been passed down in the reading tradition with the vocalisation וּבְחַבְרָתוֹ**.

2.0. Isaiah 53.5 in Modern Translations and Commentaries

Why, then, is the rendering ‘and by his wound(s)’ or the like nearly universal in major translations and commentaries? There are likely two factors at play. First, interpreters have probably afforded more weight to what rendering would best fit the wider context of the verse than to strict adherence to the vocalisation of the Tiberian tradition. Second, it is plausible that the Septuagint’s rendering has exerted significant influence on the course of interpretive history.⁵ These two explanations, of course, are not

⁵ The Septuagint translates וּבְחַבְרָתוֹ as τῷ μῶλωπι αὐτοῦ ‘by his wound’. Elsewhere in the Septuagint, the lexeme μῶλωψ is only ever used to translate what the Tiberian vocalisation tradition vocalises as חַבּוּרָה (Gen. 4.23; Exod. 21.25; Ps. 37.6; Isa. 1.6). In fact, the only place where חַבּוּרָה is not translated with μῶλωψ is in Prov. 20.30, where the phrase חַבְרוֹת פָּצַע ‘blows that wound’ is rendered as ὑπώπια καὶ συντρίμματα ‘bruises and fractures’. The Septuagint rendering may indeed reflect a reading tradition that pronounced וּבְחַבְרָתוֹ as /wa-v-habbu:ra:θo:/ (i.e.,

mutually exclusive. In any case, however we explain it, this interpretation is nearly universal among translators and commentators.

2.1. Modern Translations

In a survey of over thirty English Bible translations' renderings of the phrase וּבְחֶבְרֵתוֹ in Isa. 53.5, *all of them* exhibit the rendering 'and by his wound(s)' or some synonymous expression. None of them exhibit a rendering such as 'and in his company':⁶

- *NIV, NASB, CSB, HCSB, NHEB, WEB, CPDV*: 'and by his wounds'
- *ESV*: 'and with his wounds'
- *GWT*: 'from his wounds'
- *NET*: 'because of his wounds'
- *KJV, AKJV, ASV, JPS* (1917), *AFV, DBT, ERV, WBT*, Geneva (1587), Bishops' Bible (1568), Coverdale (1535): 'and with his stripes'
- *NKJV*: 'and by His stripes'
- *BSB*: 'and by His stripes'
- *SLT*: 'and in the marks of his stripes'
- *ISV, Douay-Rheims*: 'and by his bruises'
- *YLT*: 'and by his bruise'
- *NASB* (1977), *NASB* (1995), *LSV*: 'and by His scourging'
- Amplified Bible: 'and by His stripes (wounds)'
- *NLT*: 'he was whipped'

the equivalent of וּבְחֶבְרֵתוֹ) with gemination. This interpretive tradition seems to be reflected in the New Testament as well (see 1 Pet. 2.24).

⁶ Survey conducted online at <https://biblehub.com/parallel/isaiah/53-5.htm>.

- *CEV*: ‘by taking our punishment’
- *GNT*: ‘by the blows he received’

Nor do any of these translations appear to footnote the possibility of alternative renderings such as ‘and in his company’, ‘and in his association’, or ‘and by union with him’. This philological crux is thus not apparent in the English translations surveyed.

2.2. Modern Commentaries

A similar pattern is found in modern scholarship and commentaries on this passage. Most modern commentators interpret the phrase as ‘and by his wounds’ or the like, with no comment on the philological difficulty of a lack of *dagesh* in the *bet*. This is the case, for example, in the commentaries of Westermann (1969, 254) in *The Old Testament Library*, Blenkinsopp (2002, 345) in *The Anchor Bible Commentary* series, and many others as well.⁷

There are, however, some notable exceptions to this trend. Goldingay and Payne (2006, 307–8), in *The International Critical Commentary* series, specifically refer to the lexeme in question in v. 5 as ‘*ḥabburāh*’ (with a double *bb*!). Nevertheless, they do not comment on the fact that the form in the MT is without a *dagesh*; rather, they follow the conventional interpretation of ‘wound’. And yet, without connecting it to the vocalisation of the MT, they

⁷ See also Buttrick (1956, 622–23); Duhm (1968, 399); McKenzie (1968, 130–31, 134–35); Herbert (1975, 107, 112); Beuken (1983, 187, 217–18); Watts (1987, 224, 226, 231); Grimm (1990a, 83; 1990b, 412–13); Hanson (1995, 163–64); Berges (1998, 403–5); Koole (1998, 253–54); Oswalt (1998, 384, 387–89); Childs (2001, 407, 414–16); Schmidt (2013, 226, 230–31).

note that the Targum's rendering (ובדנתנהי לפתגמוהי) 'and in that we attach ourselves to his words'; see fn. 9) may point to the more common meaning of 'uniting' or 'joining' for the root חב"ר.

Baltzer, in the *Hermeneia* commentary series, renders Isa. 53.5 differently from all other commentators. He translates וּבְחֶבְרֹתוֹ נִרְפָּא־לָנוּ as 'and through his fellowship/invocation we have received healing'. Despite the unconventional translation, however, Baltzer does not base his rendering on the absence of *dagesh* in the term חֶבְרֹתוֹ. Rather, by appealing to alternate meanings associated with the root חב"ר, he suggests two possible interpretations (2001, 392–429, especially 411–12):

1. First, drawing on examples in which חב"ר refers to '(snake) charming' (e.g., Deut. 18.11; Ps. 58.6), he suggests that the phrase might be rendered as something like 'and through his (snake) charming we received healing'. This would be an allusion to the bronze serpent in Num. 21.4–9 and the exclusive healing ability of Moses in such a context. It might also be set against other contemporary cultic practices and invocations.
2. Second, he suggests that the root חב"ר might better be regarded as referring to 'community' in this context, albeit without any reference to the lack of *dagesh* in the word. Instead, he calls up words like חֶבֶר 'community', חָבֵר 'companion', and חֶבֶר 'fellow-guildsman'. This leads him to the possible alternative rendering of 'through fellowship with him we received healing'. Similarly, this 'community' or 'guild' of the Servant is to be distinguished from contemporary foreign cults and guilds.

While Baltzer touches on literary arguments that may shed light on alternative interpretations of the word חִבְרָתוֹ (וּבְ), his philological arguments actually find further support in the vocalisation of the sequence וּבַחֲבֵרָתוֹ in Tiberian Hebrew and the attestation of this word in RH.

There does appear to be more interaction with the exceptional lack of *dagesh* among commentators writing in Modern Hebrew. Paul, for example, writing in the *Miqra le-Yisra'el* series, notes that “this is the lone occurrence in which the *bet* of the word חִבְרָתוֹ is without a *dagesh*” (translation mine). Nevertheless, he explains the phrase וּבַחֲבֵרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא-לָנוּ as ‘and because of his wounds, we have been healed’ (translation mine) (Paul 2008, 368). In the English version of his commentary, however, published as part of the *Eerdmans Critical Commentary* series (2012), he expounds on this point. After noting that “in every other occurrence... the letter *beth* has a *dagesh* in this word,” he suggests that perhaps the Masoretes “omitted it in order to interpret the word as ‘his company’, thereby tempering the gravity of the servant’s condition” (Paul 2012).

Ḥakham, in his Hebrew commentary on Isaiah in the *Da‘at Miqra* series (1984), presents a similar picture. Although he regards the form in Isaiah as a case of the lexeme חִבְרָתוֹ ‘wound’, he specifically notes how the lack of *dagesh* in וּבַחֲבֵרָתוֹ (Isa. 53.5) contrasts with the presence of *dagesh* in פָּצַע וְחִבְרָתוֹ ‘bruise and wound’ (Isa. 1.6). When commenting on the exceptional vocalisation, he writes the following in a footnote:

The pointing חִבְרָתוֹ (*havurato*) with *bet rafa* is intended out of respect for Israel. Its purpose is to hint at the fact that they are not really bruised or wounded, but that they are

good friends (*ḥaverim ṭovim*) and their society (*ḥevratam*) brings healing to the world. And this same meaning comes through in Targum Jonathan, who renders [the phrase] וכדנציית לפתגמוהי חובנא ישתבקון לנא [as] ובחברתו נרפא לנו 'and when we obey his words, our iniquities will be atoned for us'. That is, when we attach ourselves (*nithaber*) to him and obey his teaching, our iniquities will be atoned for and we will be healed from our blows (Ḥakham 1984, 570–71, translation mine).

It is difficult to know exactly how to take Ḥakham's explanation in the footnote, since he treats the word as חבירה 'wound' in the main body of the commentary. His argument appears to be that, while the original intention of the biblical author was 'wound' or 'stripe', the oral reading tradition eventually revocalised this word as 'connection' or 'association' to draw attention to the positive aspects of union with Israel. An oral realisation implying Israel's bruising was thereby avoided. This could be compared to cases like the end of Job 2.9, where the euphemistic phrase בִּרְךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת: 'bless God and die!' is written in the consonantal text, but 'curse God and die!' is intended—and thus the unanimous translation. Given that the euphemism of Job 2.9 is found already in the consonantal text,⁸ however, there may be better examples for comparison. Note, for instance, cases where לִרְאוֹת—normally vocalised as a *qal* verb 'to see'—is vocalised as לְהִרְאוֹת 'to appear' (cf. לְהִרְאוֹת) when פני יהוה 'the face of YHWH' would otherwise be the object of the *qal* verb (Exod.

⁸ There is thus no incongruence between the written and reading traditions.

34.24; Deut. 31.11; see Hornkohl 2023, 56–58). Such an explanation might thus satisfy our earlier question about the uniform rendering of modern translations, while at the same time acknowledge that the vocalisation without *dagesh* should mean something different.

In any case, like Paul, Ḥakham admits that the meaning of חֲבוּרָה should be expected to differ from that of חִבּוּרָה, yet concludes that the different meaning was not actually the original intention of the biblical author. Rather, it serves as a sort of respectful way to minimise the hurt and suffering of Israel and/or the Servant. Also, like Goldingay and Payne, Ḥakham sees significance in the Targum. In fact, the relevance of the Targum for the history of interpretation of this passage is touched on by a number of scholars, even if it does not necessarily impact their reading of the MT. Nevertheless, because Targum Jonathan plays an important role in this study, we will presently turn to its rendering of this passage in greater detail.

3.0. Targum Jonathan and וּבַחֲבֵרְתּוֹ as ‘and in his company’

While, as noted above, few modern translations and commentaries take וּבַחֲבֵרְתּוֹ as ‘and in his company’, there may be evidence of this interpretation already in late antiquity. In Targum Jonathan, the phrase וּבַחֲבֵרְתּוֹ נִרְפָּא לָנוּ is rendered as וּבְדִנְתָּנְהִי לְפִתְגְּמוּהִי חוּבְנָא ‘and in that we attach ourselves to his

words, our debts will be forgiven to us'.⁹ The rendering *וּבְדַתְנֵהִי* 'and in that we attach ourselves' is presumably based on a reading of *וּבַחֲבֵרְתּוֹ* that sees in it the root *חב"ר* with the meaning of 'connection' rather than 'wound'. This might imply an interpretation that read *וּבַחֲבֵרְתּוֹ* as containing the RH lexeme *חֲבוּרָה/חִבּוּרָה* 'company; association' rather than the BH lexeme *חֲבוּרָה* 'wound'.

Although multiple Targum scholars appear to be aware of the possibility that the *meturgeman* worked on the basis of an alternate meaning of the root *חב"ר*, none seem to identify the connection with the vocalisation of the Masoretic Text. Kim (2008, 89), for example, rather than drawing on the RH parallel *חֲבוּרָה/חִבּוּרָה* 'union, association', appeals instead to the term *חֲבֵרָה* 'company':

The Targum seems to have achieved [the interpretation of 'by our devotion to his words'] by altering the vocalization of *בְּחֲבֵרְתּוֹ* to *בְּחִבְרָתּוֹ* [*sic!*] ('in his company'—through which we gather around him and he is with us), taking the root from *חֲבֵרָה* 'company, companion' (Job 34.8).

While his interpretation of the Targum seems to be on the right track, it does not actually require us to assume that the *meturgeman* had in mind such an alternative vocalisation. For an ancient (or medieval) reader acquainted with various traditions and forms of Hebrew—not just its biblical traditions—the form *חֲבֵרְתּוֹ* would already mean 'his company'.

⁹ See Chilton (1997, 253) for translation, especially the rendering of *וּבְדַתְנֵהִי* as 'and in that we attach ourselves'. Jastrow (1926) glosses the *itpe'el* form of *נָה"י*, namely *אֶתְנֵהִי*, as 'to follow eagerly'.

Also important to note here is the fact that the theme of the suffering of the Servant is entirely absent. In fact, the phrase *וּבְדִנְתָּהּ לְפִתְגְּמוֹהִי חוּבָנָא יִשְׁתַּבְּקוּן לָנָא* in the Targum is part of a wider interpretive vision of the Messiah rebuilding the Temple (Chilton 1997, 253–54). Because the Targum probably has its origins between 70–132 CE, one can imagine why the vision of a triumphant Messiah would have been important. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the idea that the Messiah would come and restore it to its former glory would be most welcome.¹⁰

If the more ‘original’ vocalisation—or at least that of some ancient communities—had been (the equivalent of) *וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ* ‘and by his wound’,¹¹ one wonders if such a socio-historical background might have given rise to the vocalisation in the MT. Schorch (2006; 2009) has argued that the parabiblical traditions

¹⁰ For more on the social and historical background of this passage in the Targum, see Bruce (1982, 63); Chilton (1997, 253–54; 1999, 135; 2007, 243–44); Evans (2004, 102–3); Kim (2008, 87–89); Huizenga (2009, 196–97); Flesher and Chilton (2011, 171, 189–90); Shepherd (2014, 97–100).

¹¹ In the Dead Sea Scrolls, in addition to a text that looks like the MT (1Q8 23.15), there is also one manuscript that reflects a plural form of the noun: *וּבְחִבּוּרֵינוּ נִרְפָּא לָנוּ* ‘and by his wounds we are healed’ (1QIsa^a 44.11). Though less likely, it is also possible that such an orthography reflects a singular form, since *יִ*- can sometimes be used to reflect just the vowel /o/. Nevertheless, given the likely plural number of the word, the interpretation of ‘wounds’—rather than ‘associations’—appears to be reflected. One might tentatively suggest, then, that the scribe of 1QIsa^a pronounced the sequence *וּבְחִבּוּרֵינוּ* as something like /wa-v-habbu:ro:θaw/ (i.e., the equivalent of *וּבְחִבְרֵיתִי*) with *dagesh*.

of various Second Temple Jewish and Samaritan communities exerted influence on their oral readings of the text, apart from any deliberate effort to alter its meaning.

Therefore, as a parabiblical or interpretive tradition about a Messiah who would come and rebuild the Temple developed among certain Jewish communities, this might have predisposed them to vocalise certain words in this passage differently than other communities. When they came to the consonantal sequence *ובחברתו*, they might have envisioned healing and restoration in the ‘company’ of the Messiah more instinctively than through the ‘wound’ of the Messiah. As such, they read the sequence *ובחברתו* as /wa-v-ḥāvu:ra:θo:/ ‘and in his company; and in his association’ (i.e., the equivalent of *ובְּחֶבְרָתוֹ*) in light of their parabiblical tradition. While such a hypothesis is speculative, it might explain the unique vocalisation of the MT.

Such an interpretive tradition, however, by no means reflects the majority reading in late antiquity nor in the Middle Ages. Its explanatory power is thus limited. It, therefore, behoves us to seek a new explanation that can best account for both the strong interpretive tradition sensitive to the context of the verse and the precise vocalisation of the Tiberian reading tradition.

4.0. New Explanation: *Dagesh Mavḥin*

Indeed, while it may be possible to simply read (with Targum Jonathan?) the phrase *ובחברתו* as containing the RH lexeme *חֶבְרָה/חֲבֹרָה* ‘company; association’, there may be a better philological explanation that adheres closer to the overall sense of the

passage. For this, we may turn to a phenomenon attested in various BH reading traditions known as *dagesh mavḥin* ‘*dagesh* to distinguish meaning’. This particular morphophonological phenomenon, on which Geoffrey Khan, the honouree of this *Festschrift*, has helped advance our understanding significantly, can shed further light on the phrase וַיְהַבְרֵהוּ in Isa. 53.5, both in the Tiberian vocalisation of the MT and in the history of its interpretation.

4.1. Background on *Dagesh Mavḥin*

Beginning students of BH learn that there are two types of *dagesh*: (1) דגש חזק ‘strong *dagesh*’, which serves to indicate gemination (or ‘doubling’) of a consonant (e.g., מָסַפֵּר [masap^lpe:ɛɾ]) and (2) דגש קל ‘weak *dagesh*’, which indicates the plosive pronunciation of a letter בגדכפ"ת (e.g., מִסְפֵּר [mis^lʔkɛ:ɾ]). As one delves deeper into the various reading traditions of BH, however, one encounters other types of *dagesh*. Of particular note for our present purposes is a subclass of ‘strong *dagesh*’ that has come to be termed *dagesh mavḥin* or ‘*dagesh* to distinguish meaning’. In short, *dagesh mavḥin* is the (often secondary) gemination of a consonant to distinguish otherwise homophonous words.¹²

In the Tiberian tradition, *dagesh mavḥin* is often used to distinguish ‘profane’ or ‘common’ nouns from ‘holy’ or ‘divine’ nouns. Note, for example, that while the noun אֲבִיר ‘mighty’ without *dagesh* is used in reference to God, the noun אֲבִירִי is used in

¹² On the phenomenon of secondary gemination for purposes of distinguishing meaning, see Khan (2018). For the employment of *dagesh* to distinguish meaning in the Babylonian Masoretic biblical tradition, see Yeivin (1985, 354–63, 909–12, 940, 1132–33); Khan (2018, 342–44).

reference to people, e.g., אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב ‘Mighty One of Jacob’ (Gen. 49.24), but cf. אֲבִיר הָרָעִים ‘chief of the shepherds’ (1 Sam. 21.8). Similarly, the noun עֲצָבִים without *dagesh* means ‘toils’, but the noun עֲצָבִים with *dagesh* means ‘idols’, e.g., הָעֲצָבִים ‘the toils’ (Ps. 127.2), but cf. הָעֲצָבִים ‘the idols’ (2 Chron. 24.18) (Khan 2018).

In the Babylonian tradition, similar distinctions are found. Note the difference between כְּהֲנָיִם [ko:h(a)ni:m] (Job 12.19) in reference to priests generally, but הַכְּהֲנָיִם [hakko:han'ni:m] (Zeph. 1.4) in specific reference to pagan priests. Similarly, the form לַעֲמָל [l(ʔ)-ʕm:l] without *dagesh* may be rendered as ‘for/to service (of the LORD)’ (Job 5.7), while the form עֲמָל [ʕm:l] with *dagesh* is interpreted as meaning ‘trouble’ (Job 4.8) (Yeivin 1985, 441, 940; Khan 2018).

In the Samaritan tradition, a form like [ɑːˈda:ni] without *dagesh* refers to the one true God, but a form like [ɑːˈdanni] with *dagesh* refers to a human master, e.g., [ɑːˈda:ni] ‘Lord (divine)’ (Gen. 15.2), but [ɑːˈdanni] ‘master, sir’ (Gen. 23.6). Similarly, a proper noun may be without *dagesh*, but a common noun with *dagesh*, e.g., [wˈja:mən] ‘and Yamin’ (Gen. 46.10), but cf. [ˈjammən] ‘(to the) right’ (Num. 20.17) (Ben-Hayyim 1977; Florentin 1996, 228–35; Khan 2018).

Finally, a similar phenomenon is attested in RH. Of particular note is the tendency to use *dagesh mavhin* to distinguish between the ‘concrete’ (or ‘physical’) and the ‘abstract’. Note, for example, that חֲתִיכָה and חִתִּיכָה may be used for the abstract concept of ‘cutting’ versus the concrete physical meaning of ‘a piece (of something)’, respectively, e.g., וַחֲתִיכֶת ‘and cutting off of’ (m.

Pesah. 6.1), but cf. חֶתֶיכָּה ‘a portion; a piece’ (m. Ker. 5.4). Similarly, in the Yemenite tradition of RH, גְּבִינָה without *dagesh* may be used for the abstract process of making cheese, but גְּבִנָּה with *dagesh* for cheese itself (Khan 2018, 344–45). In fact, the abstract noun in each of these examples may simply constitute what we would refer to in post-biblical Hebrew grammar as the שם פעולה ‘verbal noun’ of the root.

Note that various scholars, most notably Khan (2018), have appealed to *dagesh mavhin* to explain other phenomena and philological cruxes in BH. In his view, the anomalous *dagesh* in the form בָּתִּים ‘houses’ originally came into being to distinguish the word from a hypothetical (but plausible) participle form */ba:ti:m/ (or */ba:ti:n/) ‘spending the night’ in an earlier stage of Northwest Semitic (Khan 2018). Kantor, expanding on an idea posited originally by Khan, has argued that the *dagesh* in the prefix consonant of the wayyiqṭol verbal form came about in the late Second Temple period to distinguish the form’s ‘past’ semantics from the ‘non-past’ semantics of the polysemous yiqṭol form (Kantor 2020; see also Khan 2021, 319–40).

The mechanism of change that brings about *dagesh mavhin* is not always clear. In some cases, the form must have originally been polysemous and the gemination developed secondarily merely to distinguish the forms. In other cases, one particular meaning of an originally polysemous form might have been pulled via analogy into a similar-sounding morphological byform. In still other cases, there may have originally been two separate patterns, but they were configured so that the one with

gemination tended to align with certain semantic categories. A combination of such factors is also possible.

However such near-homophonous pairs distinguished only by *dagesh* came about—it is unlikely to have been the same process in all cases—the important point is the resulting synchronic situation. Across the BH reading traditions, there are numerous pairs of words distinguished only by gemination of one of the root letters, which tends to occur in the latter member of contrasting semantic category pairs like the following: (i) ‘holy’ versus ‘profane’, (ii) ‘divine’ versus ‘common’, (iii) ‘monotheistic’ versus ‘pagan’, (iv) ‘abstract’ versus ‘concrete’.

4.2. *Dagesh Mavhin* and Isaiah 53.5

Returning to the near-homophonous pair of חֲבוּרָה and חִבּוּרָה, then, we may tentatively posit that the latter member of this pair constitutes an instance of *dagesh mavhin*. As was the case in the typology of the examples from RH mentioned above, the noun with the more abstract meaning is without *dagesh* (i.e., חֲבוּרָה), whereas the noun with the more concrete physical meaning is with *dagesh* (i.e., חִבּוּרָה).

While it may be tempting to see the lexemes identified above, namely חֲבוּרָה ‘company; association’ and חִבּוּרָה ‘wound’, as fitting this paradigm, such a pair would not actually satisfy the typical criteria for *dagesh mavhin*. After all, in the RH *comparanda* cited above, there is a high degree of polysemy in each pair. In the pair חֲתִיכָה ‘cutting’ versus חִתִּיכָה ‘a piece (cut from something)’, the semantics of ‘cutting’ are at the core of each lexeme from the root חת"ך. The same applies to the pair גְּבִינָה ‘making

cheese' versus גִּבְנָה 'cheese'. In each case the root גִּב"ן has a base semantic association with 'cheese'. There is not, however, any apparent polysemy that would connect the distinct lexemes חֲבוּרָה 'company; association' and חֲבוּרָה 'wound'.

Rather, based on analogy with the pairs חֲתִיכָה 'cutting' versus חֲתִיכָה 'piece cut off' and גִּבְיָה 'making cheese' versus גִּבְנָה 'cheese', we should perhaps posit the following hypothetical pair: חֲבוּרָה '(process of) wounding; bruising' versus חֲבוּרָה '(physical) wound; bruise'. While this theoretical pair would fit quite nicely with the RH examples of *dagesh mavḥin* to distinguish concrete from abstract, it requires positing the existence of a lexeme, namely חֲבוּרָה '(process of) wounding; bruising', that is unattested elsewhere in ancient or medieval Hebrew literature. Though somewhat speculative, such a hypothesised lexeme would also fit well within the wider context of the verse. Moreover, though largely overlooked in modern scholarship, numerous of the medieval Hebrew grammarians appear to have interpreted the form וַיַּחֲבֹרְתוּ of Isa. 53.5 in this way (i.e., as a verbal noun) as well. It is thus to their writings that we turn presently.

4.3. Medieval Grammarians on Isaiah 53.5 and the Implications for *Dagesh Mavḥin* in חֲבוּרָה

As implied by the discussion above, seeing *dagesh mavḥin* in the lexeme חֲבוּרָה 'wound; bruise' would imply that the form וַיַּחֲבֹרְתוּ without *dagesh* found in Isa. 53.5 has the more abstract meaning. Just such an interpretation notably appears to be reflected in at least some of the medieval Hebrew grammarians.

In Jonah ibn Janāḥ's (ca 990–ca 1050 CE) famous lexicon, *Kitāb al-uṣūl*, we find the following comments on the lexeme חבורה (Neubauer 1968, 208–9):

חבורה [תחת חבורה]. הבאישו נמקו חבורותי. חבורות פצע כלֵה גرح
 وخدش. ومنه عندی ובחבורתו נרפא לנו. وهو اسم الفعل لا اسم الجرح
 نفسه على زنة [אין קול ענות גבורה]. אין קול ענות חלושה. משפט
 הבכורה... فكأنه قال وبחבור אתו.

הבאישו. 'wound for wound' (Exod. 21.25). חבורה תחת חבורה
 חבורות פצע. 'my wounds stink and rot' (Ps. 38.6). נמקו חבורתי
 'stripes that wound' (Prov. 20.30). [The meaning] in all of
 [these cases] is 'wound' and 'abrasion'. In this sense I [may
 also cite] 'and by his חבורה we are healed' (Isa. 53.5), in which [חבורה] is the verbal noun (*ism al-fiʿl*)—not the noun [referring to the physical] wound it-
 self—after the pattern of 'it is not the sound of crying out in triumph' (Exod. 32.18), 'אין קול ענות גבורה', 'it is not the sound of crying out in defeat' (Exod. 32.18), 'חלושה', 'right of being firstborn' (Deut. 21.17)... so it is as if it said 'and in bruising him'.
 (translation mine)

While Ibn Janāḥ clearly sees the semantics of חבורה as related to 'wound' and 'abrasion' in all of these passages, he makes the point that in the case of 'and in bruising him' in Isa. 53.5 we are dealing with 'the verbal noun' and 'not the noun [referring to the physical] wound itself'. His conclusion that 'and in bruising him' is equivalent to 'and in bruising him' clearly highlights the nuanced implications of reading it as a verbal noun rather than referring to a physical wound. Though Ibn Janāḥ does not explicitly impute the semantic distinction to the absence of *dagesh*, his comments certainly appear to be consistent

with seeing an abstract versus concrete distinction in חֲבוּרָה ‘(process of) wounding; bruising’ versus חֲבוּרָה ‘wound; bruise’.

A similar reading appears in Judah ibn Balaam’s (1000–1070 CE) commentary on Isaiah (Goshen-Gottstein 1992, 214):

מוסר שלומנו עליו ובחבורתו נרפא לנו – מענאה אן הד׳א אלולי אלפאצ׳ל
למא תחמל אלדאב אלוארדה עליה עלי סביל אלמחנה אד׳ כאן לא ד׳נב
לה פכאן כל אדב כאן ילזמנא נחן וסלמנא מנה קד חל בה ונזל עליה וכאן
בג׳רחה שפאנא. ובחבורתו אסם פעל.

‘the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his wound(s) we are healed’ (Isa. 53.5) – Its meaning is that this honourable Servant, in bearing the punishments coming upon him by way of trial, though he had committed no offence, [brought it about that] we escaped intact every punishment that should have fallen on us, [so that] it has befallen him and has come down upon him [instead]. And by his wound(ing) we are healed. [The phrase] וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ is a verbal noun (*ism fiʿl*). (translation mine)

The identification of the word חֲבוּרָה in the phrase וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ as an اسم فعل ‘verbal noun’ implies that Ibn Balaam also regarded it as the more abstract ‘(process of) wounding; bruising’ rather than the more concrete ‘wound; bruise’.

4.4. The Chronology of *Dagesh Mavhin* in חבורה

If the form חֲבוּרָה ‘wound, stripe’ came to be secondarily distinguished from חֲבוּרָה ‘(process of) wounding; bruising’ by means of *dagesh* in the *bet*, one might wonder if such a distinction was even present in ancient times at all. After all, if the distinguishing gemination was introduced relatively late in חֲבוּרָה ‘wound’, earlier polysemy could have given rise to a variety of interpretations of

the verse, some of which we may encounter in the ancient versions. Nevertheless, though late innovation may be the case with some instances of *dagesh mavhin*, the variety of processes by which *dagesh mavhin* can come about do not require it (see above in §4.1). Indeed, gemination of *bet* in the word חבורה ‘wound, stripe’ is attested in multiple reading traditions of BH as far back as we can trace:

Babylonian (Yeivin 1985, 962–63)

חֲבֻרוֹת ‘wounds’ (Prov. 20.30)

חֲבֻרוֹתַי ‘my wounds’ (Ps. 38.6)

Samaritan (Ben-Hayyim 1977)

labbu:ra:ti ‘for my wound’ (Gen. 4.23)

ṣab'bu:ra 'ta:t ṣab'bu:ra ‘stripe for stripe’ (Exod. 21.25)

Because gemination of /bb/ is attested in both the ‘Jewish’ and the ‘Samaritan’ branches of BH, we may reasonably posit that the form חבורה ‘wound, stripe’ is at least as old as the late Second Temple Period.¹³

Along the same lines, however, one might question how relevant the concept of *dagesh mavhin* is for the original interpretation of Isa. 53.5. While gemination of /bb/ in חבורה ‘wound’ might be as old as the late Second Temple period, the typological evidence for gemination distinguishing ‘physical/concrete’ versus ‘abstract’ adduced above is from RH. Moreover, the relevance of this phenomenon for the interpretive history of Isa. 53.5 does

¹³ The nominal pattern *qatūla is more common than *qattūla (see discussion above in §1.1).

not appear to be evidenced before the medieval Hebrew grammarians of the eleventh century. It is thus possible that seeing *dagesh mavḥin* as distinguishing חִבּוּרָה ‘bruise; wound’ from חִבּוּרָה ‘bruising; wounding’ is a later interpretive innovation.

Now while the ‘verbal-noun’ interpretation may not be attested explicitly in antiquity, we may be able to find some examples of gemination to distinguish ‘physical/concrete’ versus ‘abstract’ beyond just RH. After all, Khan’s (2018) argument regarding the form בָּתִּים ‘houses’ is that already in Northwest Semitic gemination came to distinguish (the more physical/concrete form) **battin* ‘houses’ from (the more abstract/participial/verbal hypothesised form) **batin* ‘spending the night’. Moreover, even though some of the clearest examples of *dagesh* to mark the more concrete entity—e.g., גִּבְנָה ‘cheese’ versus גִּבְנָה ‘making cheese’—are attested in RH, we may find some similar pairs in the Bible as well. Note that the *dagesh* in the form הַמִּקְרָה ‘the roof; the rafter’ (Eccl. 10.18) may be regarded as distinguishing the physical entity from the more abstract participial/verbal action in הַמִּקְרָה ‘the one who lays the beams’ (Ps. 104.3).¹⁴ In Babylonian Hebrew, a *dagesh* may distinguish נָא ‘raw’ (Exod. 12.9) from the interjection נָא ‘please’ without *dagesh*. Similarly, a *dagesh* may distinguish the form עָלָהּ [ʔa:l:la:hɔ:] ‘its (FS) leaf’ from something like עָלֶיהָ [ʔa:l:la:hɔ:] ‘upon her’ (see Yeivin 1985, 357–58, 965). One might even regard *dagesh mavḥin* for marking ‘human/profane’ over against ‘divine’ as loosely related to the ‘physical’ versus ‘abstract’ use attested in RH.

¹⁴ I would like to thank Ben Rothstein for bringing this example to my attention.

5.0. Conclusions: Exegetical Ramifications

The purpose of this article is not to overturn the traditional interpretation of Isa. 53.5. In fact, though perhaps requiring a slightly nuanced modification of our interpretation of **וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ** from ‘and by his wound(s)’ to ‘and by/in his bruising’, a careful analysis of the vocalisation tradition has yielded a rendering largely concentric with traditional interpretations. Rather, the main point of this article has been to draw attention to the fact that the Tiberian vocalised form **וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ** is not what we would expect for the simple meaning ‘and by his wound(s)’ and subsequently to lay out possible suitable explanations for this philological crux.

In the end, we have argued that, as is common in various Hebrew traditions in similar contexts, *dagesh mavhin* may distinguish the more physical concrete **חִבְרָה** ‘wound, stripe’ from the more abstract **חִבְרָה** ‘(process of) wounding; bruising’ in a near-homophonous pair. The form without *dagesh* in Isa. 53.5, then, would reflect the more abstract noun of the pair. Exegetically, this may imply that the text envisions the process of physical suffering endured by the Servant as bringing healing rather than focusing on the specific physical wounds themselves. Though often overlooked by modern scholars, this verbal-noun interpretation, based on a precise reading of the Tiberian vocalisation, already appears among the medieval Hebrew grammarians of al-Andalus such as Ibn Janāḥ and Ibn Balaam. At the same time, however, we should be careful to note that this use and grammatical understanding of *dagesh mavhin* is more common in post-biblical Hebrew and among the medieval grammarians. It thus remains a

question to what extent such an interpretation belongs with the original language of the text and not merely later reception history.

Indeed, we cannot totally rule out the possibility that at least some ancient Jewish communities read *ובחברתו* in Isa. 53.5 as reflecting the RH lexeme *חִבּוּרָה/חִבּוּרָה* ‘company; association’. Such a reading may in fact underlie the interpretive tradition behind Targum Jonathan. The vocalisation without a *dagesh* in Tiberian may even reflect the influence of a parabiblical tradition like that of the community in which the Targum developed. From an exegetical standpoint, this would imply that by following the teachings of the Servant and becoming his disciple, one might receive healing. Other interpretations based on taking *ובחברתו* as ‘and in his community’ or ‘and in his company’ are also possible. While it lies beyond the scope of this paper to fully flesh out what exegetical ramifications such a reading might have, we refer the reader to the commentary of Baltzer (2001; see above, §2.2) as an example of at least one possible interpretation.

Nor can we ultimately rule out the suggestion of scholars like Paul and Hakham, who argue that the vocalisation may have shifted from *חִבּוּרָתוּ* to *חִבּוּרָתוּ* out of respect for Israel and/or the Servant. As such, this vocalisation should be compared to other reverent mismatches in the Bible, like *בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים* ‘bless God!’ when the intended meaning is actually ‘curse God!’ or *לִרְאוֹת אֶת־פָּנֵי יְהוָה* ‘to appear before the LORD’ when the original meaning might have been ‘to see the face of the LORD’ (see above in §2.2). The underlying meaning, however, would still be *חִבּוּרָתוּ* ‘his wound’ rather than *חִבּוּרָתוּ* ‘his company’.

We should also note that in the late Second Temple Period, there may have been other reading traditions according to which this text was realised as (the equivalents of) *וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ* or *וּבְחִבְרָתָיו*, including that of the Septuagint translators and that of (some of) the Dead Sea Scrolls. In such cases, the traditional rendering referring to the physical wound(s) of the Servant would be the most apt translation. Indeed, wherever *חבורה* is attested with plural morphology, the ‘verbal-noun’ interpretation would presumably be excluded, or at least less likely. This point underscores the importance of taking into account multiple oral reading traditions of BH when interpreting the Bible.

Nevertheless, while allowing for a variety of possible explanations,¹⁵ we have argued that positing a distinction between *חִבְרָה* ‘(process of) wounding; bruising’ and *חִבְרָה* ‘(physical) wound; bruise’ is at least one way of respecting the Tiberian vocalisation within its wider interpretive context. It would also constitute one more example of the well-established phenomenon of *dagesh mavhin* attested in various reading traditions of Hebrew.

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¹⁵ It may even be appropriate to allow for multiple interpretations *intended* by the original author of the text. For more on this concept in the Hebrew Bible, see Paran (1973).

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