THE HISTORY OF HORSERADISH
AS THE BITTER HERB OF PASSOVER

Introduction

Many Ashkenazic Jews specifically use the root of the horseradish plant at least one of the two times that bitter herbs are called for at the Passover seder. Surprisingly, horseradish has not always been used for maror. Only since the Middle Ages, as Jews migrated northward and eastward into colder climates, has horseradish taken its place on the seder table. The possibility even exists that horseradish was not present in Israel in Biblical and Talmudic times and hence could not possibly be identified with maror. In addition, it can be argued that the characteristics of horseradish do not even fit the Talmudic requirements for bitter herbs since horseradish is not bitter (מד) but rather is hot and sharp (חרוץ). In this paper I will trace and


בגלה מחסריומון מסל אמפורותינו מנסים להזין לארץ המושבתה והמטפס את התוצרת והמר
נכולת קיצTraversal.

2. See J. Feliks, ibid. The Babylonian Talmud (Pesahim 39a) mentions

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account for the history of the widespread use of horseradish for the bitter herbs of Passover.

I

The Mishnah mentions five species that may be used for

maror:

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Our use of horseradish is predicated on its identification with

maror. Both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds identify

maror in their respective vernaculars. The Babylonian is of little

help when it states-maror because the word is not defined.

Seemingly, a word of Greek origin, its identification has

been the object of some discussion and suggestions, but it is

certainly not identified with horseradish.

Whether or not horseradish even existed in the Middle

East during Mishnaic or Talmudic times is a difficult question
to answer. The general assumption is that it did not.

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3. I would like to emphasize that horseradish could have halakhically

be fulfilled to permit the use of horseradish as maror, see comment of R.

Moses Isserles to Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 473/5, and the commentaries

thereon. Also see the comment of R. Menahem Ha-Meiri in Bet ha-Be'ha
to Pesahim, ed. Klein (Jerusalem, 1966) pg. 124. The Meiri is one of many

Rishonim who interpret the fifth species of the mishnah, רָמא, as a
generic term for any bitter plant.

4. Throughout the Roshonim and Aharonim, רָמא is spelled at times with

a כ and at times with a ע. For the sake of consistency it will be spelled

throughout this paper with an ע.


The same order is found in Ha-Mishnah Al Pi Ketav Yad Kaufman

(Jerusalem, 1967) pg. 113. The mishnah found in the Vilna edition of

the Babylonian Talmud lists רָמא second and רָמאא מָסֵך fourth. See R.

Rabinovitch DS to Pes. 39a, note 5. This change in order has significant

halakhic bearing since in the order in the mishnah is taken to imply an

order of priority. Thus, if רָמא (lettuce) cannot be found, the next plant

listed should be used, and so on. See, for example Sefer Ra'ananah

Jerusalem 1964 repr.) II, 101, who seems to be the first to mention this

rule.


7. T.J. Pesahim 29c.

8. See Feliks, op. cit., pg. 59, who mentions the views of Löw (endive) and

Dalman (member of the parsley [umbellifer] family). But see Dalman,

op. cit., II, 275-276, who is more descriptive. Dioscorides, a first-
century C.E. Greek botanist, describes a plant Gingidion which seems

typical of an umbellifer. See The Greek Herbal of Dioscorides, ed. by

R.T. Gunther (New York, 1959) pg. 178. Also see Pliny, Natural

History (Loeb Classical Library, London, 1950) XX:16, who writes,

"They [Syrians] sow a vegetable called by some, gingidion, that is very

much like staphylinus, only it is lighter and more bitter." Staphylinus

seems to be an umbellifer and not related to horseradish.

9. It is far easier to be certain that a species did exist in a certain area and
time than to be certain that it did not. There are few cases where one

can be absolutely sure that the plant in question was not present in the

area under study. The best examples are those plant introductions that

were brought from the new world to the old world after the Spanish

discoveries. Thus, for example, we know that tomatoes and potatoes

were not found in Europe until the 1500's and hence we can be certain

that the Rishonim did not use boiled potatoes for karpos on Passover.

For interesting histories of many plants see "Our Vegetable Travelers"

by V. Boswell, in National Geographic 96 (1949) 145-217. For more

detailed studies, Evolution of Crop Plants, ed. N.W. Simmonds (New

York, 1976), is by far the most comprehensive work of its nature.

10. Horseradish does not seem to be mentioned by any of the early Greek or

Roman botanists. A. De Candolle in The Origin of Cultivated Plants

(New York, 1959, repr. of 2nd edition, 1836), pgs. 33-36, charts the

probable place of origin and later migrations of horseradish, based
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Rashi (1040-1105), a contemporary of R. Nathan living in North France, also defines המבש as horehound,\(^{17}\) as do the various books attributed to his school.\(^{18}\) In Provence (South France), in the late twelfth century, R. Issac b. Abba Mari likewise defines המבש as horehound.\(^{19}\) In North Africa, at about the same time as Rashi, R. Isaac Alfasi (1013-1103) defines המבש as רעיסטל,\(^{20}\) which is possibly a form of rape.\(^{21}\) Oddly,

Classical Library, Mass. 1955) III, 39, "And it has also profited to drench the plants in horehound’s bitter sap.” Dioscorides, op. cit. pg. 349, refers to it by its Greek name Prasonım and also describes it as bitter. It is also mentioned by many medieval herbalists, including one of the most important, the Circa Instans of the 12th century (In The Herbal of Rufinus, ed. L. Thorndike, Chicago, 1946, pg. 231). In a thirteenth-century Hebrew translation of the Circa Instans, Sefer ha-Ezer (I.T.S. MS. micro. 5517), its description is as follows:

In a later copy of the Sefer ha-Ezer (I.T.S. MS. micro. 5518) it is spelled, רעשטי, מבעיש. I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Tobias of the J.T.S. library, who brought this manuscript to my attention. For the origin of the name horehound see A.H. Hareuveni in Sinai 22 (1948) pgs. 302-303. For alternative interpretations see The Englishmen’s Flora by G. Grigson (London, 1955) pg. 328; Oxford English Dictionary, s. v. horehound and J. Lust’s The Herb Book (New York, 1974), which states that horehound was dedicated by the ancient Egyptians to the god Horus, the god of the sky and light.

17. Rashi’s commentary to Pes. 39a. See A. Darmestater and D.S. Blondheime, Les Gloses Françaises dans les Commentaires Talmudiques de Rascli (Paris, 1929) I, no. 687 for variant readings. Also see I. Low, "Pflanzennamen bei Raschi" in Festschrift zum 70th geburtstage A. Berliners (Frankfurt a.m. 1903) p. 246.


20. Hilkhot ha-Rif (Constantinople, 1509) to Pes. 39a. The J.T.S. ms. Rab. 692 (fac. repr. by Makor Publishers. Jerusalem, 1974) fol. 45b reads נמל and מברית ולא מראה את the latter which is undoubtedly a post-Alfasi addition. The manuscript has been described as thirteenth-century Provençal and the additional vernacular definition coincides well with this origin. Pseudo-

largely on philological considerations. His conclusion is that horseradish originated in eastern Europe and later moved westward. Also see the article by J.W. Couther and A.M. Rhodes. "Historical Notes on Horseradish" in Economic Botany 23 (1969) 156-164 and the sources in note 1. of this paper.

11. Dioscorides, op. cit., pg. 197. Under the description of what he calls Thlaspi (Shepherd’s purse) he writes, “Crateras reckons up another kind of Thlaspi which some call Persicum Sinai, broad leaved and big rooted.” See also Couther and Rhodes, op. cit.

12. The Encyclopedia Judaica has been used for spelling of names and dates of personalities, unless otherwise noted.


14. Pliny (XIX:43) did not have much regard for cardoon, considering it "a monstrosity of the earth" used "for purposes of glutony." He relates that it was often preserved in honey, vinegar and spices.

15. See Arukh ha-Shalem, ed. Kohut. See note 5 for variant readings of the crucial final word.

16. Horehound is described as bitter by Columella, De Re Rustica, (Loeb
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We find the first mention of horseradish in rabbinic literature of mid-twelfth century Germany. R. Eliezer b. Nathan of Mainz, (c.1090-c.1170) a contemporary of R. Tam, mentions meorettich, the German word for horseradish. However, it is not mentioned as a bitter herb, but rather as an ingredient in his recipe for haroset. In fact, when he does define the herbs of the mishnah he defines all but meorettich R.

manuscript of the Perush ha-Mishnayot (with an introduction by S. Sassoon, facs. by Ejnar Munksgaard Pub., Copenhagen, 1956, I, pg. 284), dating from the time of Maimonides, it can clearly be seen that the definition of meorettich is מ늘. For Maimonides' definition of meorettich see DFDJ I, 439. Regarding the Arabic translation of the Rif, see DFDJ I, 439, which may be a form of rape or a completely different plant (see note 21), the fact that no such similar plant is mentioned by the Rishonim or Abaronim is unusual. It seems possible that, in fact, as a result from an error in copying a very early manuscript. The earliest reference we have of the Rif mentioning meorettich is an early thirteenth-century lexicon by Tanhum ha-Yerushalmi (latter "ם" printed in Leshonenu 33 (1969) 280-298 by H. Shai). If, however, the Rif wrote מנהס or נא, it is not difficult to imagine the error being mistakenly changed to a 'ב by the addition of a short stroke, and the samekh being changed into a final mem, thus forming מנהס from נא. See the comment by R. Eliahu Shapiro (Elyahu Rabah, Sulzbach 1757, repr. N.Y. n.d., pg. 164b.), who writes that the Rif defines meorettich as מנהס. A more detailed study of someone expert in this field is necessary.

26. Even ha-Ezer, Sefer Ra'avan (Prague, 1610) 74b. The origin of the words meereetch and horseradish are fascinating. Meereettech indicates a radish (rettich) that grows near a body of water. Hence its Latin generic name Armoracia, formed form the Celtic: ar near, mor the sea, rich against. Merrettich may have evolved into horseradish by taking mor to be mare, a horse, and thus sea-radhish became horseradish. Another possibility exists that horseradish means a strong or hot radish. See "Historical Notes on Horseradish", op. cit. Also see the Hokhmat Shelomo of R. Shelomo Kluger to Shilhon Arukh, Oray Hayim 473/5, who suggests that if meereetch can be used for moro, so can plan rettich (radish, Raphanus sativus L.) since by their names, they must be very similar plants. Most probably he was referring to the sharp varieties of radish.

Eleazer of Worms (c.1165-c.1230) also mentions meereitcht only as an ingredient of haroset and, in his definitions of the five herbs of the mishnah, identifies אמאראית with וברד, which is probably a corruption of andorn, the German word for horseradish. In Germany, then, at least until the period of Eleazer of Worms, there is no mention of horseradish as maror. The lettuce of a leafy or 'romaine' type was used.

28. Ha-Roke'ah (Fano, 1505) 284:

Apparantly it was customary, at least in North France and in Germany, to add vegetables to the haroset in order to make it thick. See, for example, Rashbam to Pes. 116a, s.v. סלעמטק.

29. Ibid., 282. See I. Low, DDFJ I, 431. It does not take too much imagination to see the two and first אמאראית replacing, due to a scribal error, the ל and first אמאראית. In the Sefer ha-Assufot (Studies and Texts) by M. Gastner, London 1925-1923, III, 216-243), אמאראית is defined as anandor (pg. 221). See Maavo Lesefer Ba'alei Assufot by B.Z. Benedict in Sinai 27 (1950) 322-329 and Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. Lattes, Judah.

30. Meereitcht is mentioned as a form of maror, although not as אמאראית, in the Pseudo-Rashi commentary on the Rif to Pes. 39a. There, meereitcht is given as the definition of the fifth species. It is similarly found in ms. Bod. 545 and Br. Mus. 473 fol. 88a of Alfasi with Pseudo-Rashi. According to Rabbenuochivi (in a short note to the DS at the end of Shekalim) the Pseudo-Rashi dates to the second half of the thirteenth century and is part of the general literature that sprang up around the Rif, due to the earlier ban on studying Talmud. It is therefore not surprising that it mentions horseradish. In the Sefer ha-Assufot (SH) (see note 29), meereitcht is mentioned as one of the ingredients of horoseth where it is also identified with אמאראית which is the laaz of Rashi and many others (for example, the Ra'avan, Ra'avyah, Roke'ah) for the fifth species אמאראית. Earlier in the SH, pg. 221 (משה) of the mishnah is also defined as אמאראית but with the accepted German vernacular of wormwood, as it is in the Ra'avan, Ra'avyah and Roke'ah. Amerfoil cannot be both wormwood and horseradish unless, as I. Low suggests, it is just a general term for 'bitter leaves'. The other possibility is that the second amerfoil, associated with horseradish and horoseth, is a later addition. Considering the lack of manuscripts and general confusion surrounding the authorship of the SH (see above note), no conclusions may be drawn.

31. See note 30. Iceberg, or head lettuce as we know it, seems to have originated sometime in the late Middle Ages and is associated with a simple mutation. It is first described in Fuchs' sixteenth-century herbal as Lactuca capitata and would now be considered as L. sativa var. capitata. The picture associated with L. capitata in Fuchs' herbal, looks more like a romaine lettuce than a head lettuce in spite of its name and, in fact, romaine (Cos) lettuce are a loose heading form of lettuces, as opposed to a leaf lettuce. See "Salads For Everyone — A Look at the Lettuce Plant" by T.W. Whitaker in Economic Botany 23 (1969) 261-264.

32. See note 30.


34. Tanyah (Cremona, 1565) pg. 57b.


36. Sefer Mizvot Gedolot (Venice, 1547) 118a, Aseh 41.

37. This comment is found in the Hiddushei ha-Ritva (Warsaw, 1864 and repr. after his commentary to Shabbat in many editions) to Pes. 39b.

For information regarding the authorship of the Ritva to Pesahim see
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maror, which was prohibited by R. Tam, R. Peretz rules that one must be certain to remove the root of the lettuce plant when it is used. If, in fact, horseradish was used, mention of its root would certainly have been made. In Provence, R. Manoah of Narbonne (end of thirteenth and first half of fourteenth century) defines המ_ARROW as a form of endive, like Maimonides, while his contemporary, R. Aaron of Lunel, continues the tradition of horehound. In Spain, R. Moses Halawa (mid-fourteenth century) quotes Alfas’s definition of המ_ARROW with the additional comment המ_ARROW water, while R. Joseph Habibah (beginning of 15th cent.) also defines המ_ARROW as horehound. R. Simeon b. Zemah (1361-1444), originally from Spain but forced to move to N. Africa in 1391, quotes Alfs’s Arabic translation and adds that it is a form of lettuce. Even by the early sixteenth century, Obadiah of Bertinoro, who first lived in Italy and later in Eretz Yisrael still makes no mention of horseradish as maror when he defines the species of the mishnah.

The first mention we have of המ_ARROW translated as horseradish is in the late thirteenth-century Germany, in the Haggahot Maimunyyot, written by R. Meir Ha-Kohen, student of R. Meir of Rothenburg (c. 1215-1293). Surprisingly, among no other student of R. Meir from whom we have written records, do we find similar mention of horseradish. In addition, the first corroboration, from later commentaries, that the Haggahot Maimunyyot defined המ_ARROW as meeretich does not occur until about two hundred years later. It seems possible that Hebrew text was corrupt and the Hebrew text יראותיך translated as meeretich, which makes no sense in a number of manuscripts of the Haggahot Maimunyyot is mentioned in all but one. The Constantine 1509 ed. 133b has only meeretich as a synonym for meeretich (although it appears more like meeretich with a samekh). In ms. Br. Mus. 501 (fol. 85) described as sixteenth-century Italian, (Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Br. Mus. by G. Margoliouth (London, 1965) II. 112 there are no translations of any of the species. In Bod. 844 fol. 146a המ_ARROW is defined as מ_1078 אף מ_1078 but otherwise it is in J.T.S. ms. Rab. 350 which again makes no sense. Bod. 641 fol. 144b mentions מ_1078 but also quotes the Arukh in the Nurnberg Landeskirch, Arch. 88 2 there is מ_1078 מ_1078, after which the Arukh is quoted, which in turn is followed by an additional מ_1078 which I could not make out. How much of these comments were actually written by R. Meir Ha-Kohen, or whether any part at all was, is questionable. See for example, E.E. Urbach’s Ba’alei ha-Tosafot (Jerusalem, 1954) pg. 435.

43. Sefer Ma’amor Hamez (printed together with Sefer Yavin Shemu’ah, Livorno, 1744, repr. Jerusalem, 1970) 35a:


45. To Mishnah Torah, Hilkhot Hamez u’maza, 7:13. In the modern printed editions there are contradictory vernaculars. The Amsterdam 1702 edition quoted above follows מ_1078 מ_1078, which makes no sense. In a number of manuscripts of the HM studied, meeretich is mentioned in all but one. The Constantine 1509 ed. 133b has only meeretich as a synonym for meeretich (although it appears more like meeretich with a samekh). In ms. Br. Mus. 501 (fol. 85) described as sixteenth-century Italian, (Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Br. Mus. by G. Margoliouth (London, 1965) II. 112 there are no translations of any of the species. In Bod. 844 fol. 146a המ_ARROW is defined as מ_1078 אף מ_1078 but otherwise it is in J.T.S. ms. Rab. 350 which again makes no sense. Bod. 641 fol. 144b mentions מ_1078 but also quotes the Arukh in the Nurnberg Landeskirch, Arch. 88 2 there is מ_1078 מ_1078, after which the Arukh is quoted, which in turn is followed by an additional מ_1078 which I could not make out. How much of these comments were actually written by R. Meir Ha-Kohen, or whether any part at all was, is questionable. See for example, E.E. Urbach’s Ba’alei ha-Tosafot (Jerusalem, 1954) pg. 435.

46. Sefer Sefer ha-Parnes by R. Moshe Ha-Parnes (Vilna, 1891) par. 57, 6a; Sefer Tashbazz (Cremona, 1556) 6a, only mentions that if one cannot find maror then wormwood can be used. For Asheri see note 22.

47. The first to mention that the Haggahot Maimunyyot defines המ_ARROW as meeretich.

Hiddushei Ha-Ritva, Masechet Eruvin (Jerusalem, 1974) ed. by M. Goldstein, p. 15. The prohibition of using the root is attributed here to R. Samson of Coucy, brother-in-law of R. Moses of Coucy. In most sources, it is attributed to R. Tam. See second half of this paper.

Sefer ha-Menucha (Constantinople 1718, repr. in Kovez Rishonim al Mishneh Torah, Jerusalem 1967) 24a.

In Sefer ha-Ezer (note 16) המ_ARROW is given as a synonym for meeretich (endive), together with meeretich, endive, and merech. Scariola is also described in the Circa Instans, pg. 125 as a type of endive.

38. For information on the relationship of the Sefer ha-Menucha to Maimonides, see H. Tchernowitz, Toldot ha-Posekim (New York, 1946) III. 281.

39. Orhot Ha-Emunot (Florence, 1750) 79a. A contemporary, R. Menahem Ha-Emunot (1249-1316), defines המ_ARROW as מ_1078 מ_1078 מ_1078 מ_1078 which is how Rashi defines meeretich. A study of the la_3013 would demand a much larger study than this note can offer. But, see Sefer Ra’ayyuth ed. by Aptowitzer, II. 101, note 1 for an idea as to what such a study might produce.

40. Perush Maharam Halawa al Masechet Pesahim (Jerusalem, 1966) to Pes. 39a.

The last two words may either be part of the Alfasi that R. Halawa used or may be R. Halawa’s own addition. See note 20.

that this comment in the *Haggahot Maimuniyyot* may have resulted from a later addition, and not from the late thirteenth century.48

By the first half of the fourteenth century, horseradish is clearly mentioned as an acceptable form of maror. R. Alexander Suslin (d. 1349), of Frankfurt and later Erfurt, in eastern Germany, distinctly mentions the custom of using *meerethich* when lettuce could not be found, although he does not explicitly define *meerethich* as such.49

During the middle of the fourteenth century the custom of using horseradish already existed. It was, however, considered preferable to use lettuce when available, and there are indications that in western Germany, lettuce was indeed available Passover time.50 We have reason to believe, though, that lettuce was at times difficult to obtain, as evidenced by the comments of R. Shimshon b. Zadok51 (student of R. Meir of Rothenburg) and R. Alexander Suslin52 who describe situations where it was not obtainable.

The availability of lettuce and other leafy annuals that must be sown from seed depends on climatic factors. In areas such as Spain, Provence, Italy, Eretz Yisrael and N. Africa, all bordering the Mediterranean, the climate is such that lettuce is easily obtainable in March–April. As one moves northeast, the climate in winter becomes progressively colder, and spring, which heralds the growing season, begins progressively later.53 In western Germany, as previously mentioned, lettuce was generally available. In unusual years, especially when Passover occurred early, it is probable that lettuce was difficult to obtain, or at least it was prohibitively expensive.54 Further east, in cities such as Erfurt, it was probably even more difficult to procure. In contrast to the leafy annuals, a perennial root crop such as horseradish would be obtainable in cooler climates. Its leaves would push forth from the ground with the advent of spring, and in colder regions, where even the leaves would not be available, the root itself could be stored and made available throughout the year. The dependence on horseradish, then, probably started in the cooler climates of eastern Germany and moved to the even colder climates of Poland and Russia. The reverse may also be true; the custom of using horseradish may have begun in the colder portions of eastern Europe, for which

48 See note 45. For the reader who feels that I am making emendations too quickly see “The Lazzim of Rashi and of the French Biblical Glossaries” by M. Banitt, in *The World History of the Jewish People*, ed. C. Roth, vol. 11. The Dark Ages. ch. 12, pgs. 291–297 and notes and bibliography. See especially pg. 295 where he writes, “Curiously enough, neither Rashi nor any rabbi of his period could resist the temptation of inserting into their commentaries translations in a foreign tongue which they did not understand, but which they had found in their sources and which must have been practically useless for their countrymen... In fact, we are faced with the general medieval traits of an inveterate compulsory attitude and a strong verbalistic trend in education.” If this is true for Rashi and his period it is all the more true among the later commentators and copyists. The *Haggahot Maimuniyyot* is a fine example.

49 Sefer ha-Agudah (Cracow, 1571). 162a.

50 However, when defining the species immediately before, he does not define *meerethich* at all, much like the Ra’avan and Ra’ayyah.

51 See note 46.

52 See note 49. Suggestions that lettuce should be bought *mafla’as hayekef* may also be indicative of the increasing difficulty, even in northern France, of obtaining lettuce. See, for example, the gloss to *Amudei Golah (Semak)* (Cremona, 1556) 107b Par. 220. Rashi, too, is reported to have had difficulty in obtaining lettuce one year. See *Mahzor Vitry* and *Sefer ha-Orah* (my note 18).


54 See note 52.
we have few written records, and once established, moved to the relatively warmer Germany where it could be depended upon whenever necessary. In either case, the custom of using horseradish for maror and its identification with one of the species of the mishnah, thereby legitimizing its use and giving it roots in tradition, seems to stem from the migration of the Jews north-eastward into Europe, and the flowering of new Jewish communities in these colder regions.

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56. As previously mentioned, it is not within the scope of this paper to deal with the definitions of all the species of bitter herbs. However, the observant reader will no doubt be bothered by the possibility that horseradish may have been used prior to the thirteenth century in countries warmer than Germany and the change that occurred in thirteenth-century Germany was a transposition of horseradish from its definition as one of the other species of the mishnah to עכבים. The only possibility of this having occurred is with the fifth species of the mishnah, the אכילים מימינו of the Talmud. As already mentioned (note 30), at least one source defines עכבים as horseradish, albeit a late one. Rashi himself defines עכבים asmando (Pes. 39a, s.v. עכבים) as מ甬דר (see Darmestater and Blondheim op. cit. for variant readings), which he is reported to have used one year when he could not find lettuce. (See sources in my note 18.) No one suggests that this might be horseradish. Darmestater and Blondheim identify it with tussilage. Low with Sonchus oleraceus-sow thistle (J.Q.R. 21 [1931] p. 328), a member of the Composite family. Others suggest pepper and purslane (see footnotes to sources in my note 18). My feeling is that עכבים refers to a peppery tasting plant, possibly garden cress or peppergrass (Lepidium sativum L.), a member of the same family as horseradish (Cruciferaeae). Pliny (op. cit. xix: 42) describes a plant whose common name is piperitiatis on account of its peppery taste, and this plant seems to be L. sativum. In the time of Rashi, though, piperitiatis or מ甬דר, if a loose term for a pungent plant, may have referred to something other than peppergrass. However, it is interesting to note that no matter what עכבים may be, after Rashi and his school it is never heard from again, and horseradish is not mentioned as a bitter herb for approximately two hundred years.

What remains unanswered is how horseradish attained its place of prominence on the list of acceptable bitter herbs. Given the conservatism of the halakhic process, the sudden introduction of a new species to fulfill so important a requirement as the eating of maror is difficult to imagine. One possibility that comes to mind is that since it was legitimately used in the haroset, as previously mentioned, it was already present at the seder table and was available to fill the void when other species could not be obtained. However, there is no real support for this suggestion. The alternative, mentioned at the beginning of this note, is likewise difficult to imagine, especially considering the silence of two hundred years between Rashi's פ นอกจาก and the Haggahot Maimuniyyot's דמוי.

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57. She'elot u'Teshuvot Mahari (Cremona, 1556) par. 58, pg. 18a: האמת הרגליות ודקי המכתש/The She'elot u'Teshuvot Mahari (Cremona, 1556) par. 58, pg. 18a: האמת הרגליות ודקי המכתש.

But see note 49.
56. Sefer Mizzvit Gedolot, op. cit.
59. It is also attributed to Shimon ben of Coucy (the 'Sar' of Coucy), the brother-in-law of R. Moses of Coucy (see note 37). It is mentioned, in the name of R. Tam, in most mss. of the Haggahot Maimuniyyot. This law appears to have originated with R. Tam and was unknown prior to him. Rashi used the הער קן המכתש which apparently was a root. See comment of Rashi, Hullin 59a, s.v. הער קן המכתש and Tosafot to Sukkah 13a, s.v. הער קן המכתש. See sources in my note 18.
60. See note 37.
ter herbs of the mishnah, R. Tam’s prohibition became a serious problem.

In Germany, ground horseradish root was commonly used as a condiment, much as we still use it today. It is not unusual, then, that when the Jews began using horseradish for maror the initial reaction was to use the root. In addition, among the Jewish communities far to the east of Germany, it is questionable whether the leaves of horseradish were available by Passover, due to the cold weather and the lateness of the growing season. R. Moellin is the first to deal with the problem raised by R. Tam’s prohibition and, in no uncertain terms, applies the principle of R. Tam to horseradish too, stating that its roots may not be used for maror.

R. Isaac Tyrnu, a contemporary of R. Moellin, writes that one may use lettuce and horseradish leaves or stems, but adds that roots should not be taken. A gloss to this ruling states:

This redefinition of the term קֹדֶשׁ, allowing the use of the main root of horseradish, has its origins in a problematic responsa of R. Jacob Weil, a student of R. Moellin. In one section he redefines the term קֹדֶשׁ, without making reference to horseradish. Later on, however, while specifically discussing horseradish he declares that one should only take that part of the plant that is above ground; any parts below ground should not be taken since they fall under the category of “root” which R. Tam prohibits.

The same paradox is found in the Leket Yosher of R. Joseph b. Moses, student of R. Israel Isserlein (1390–1460). On the one hand he quotes R. Weil’s redefinition of קֹדֶשׁ for the expressed purpose of לְיָשׁוּב בָּהּ, to justify the use of the horseradish root, which seems to have become a common custom. Later, while describing the seder of his teacher, R. Isserlein, he explains that the horseradish root does fall under the category of “root” and thereby under the prohibition of R. Tam.

This tension, felt already in the early fifteenth century in the writings of R. Weil, continues for the next two hundred years. On the one hand, the prevailing custom was to use the root; however, there remained opposition to its use due to the

Toledot ha-Posekim (New York, 1946) II, 260. I am assuming that the author of the gloss wrote after R. Weil.

She’elot u’Teshuvot Mahari Weil (Hanau, 1610) 67b:

In the next column he writes:


Ibid., pg. 92.

For information on the authorship of the glosses, see H. Tchernowitz.
ruling of R. Tam. For the halakhic justification of the custom, R. Weil's redaction was repeatedly referred to. At times, only parts of his comments were quoted, depending on whether the authority was justifying or opposing the use of the roots.

R. Isaiah Horowitz (1565-1630) quotes the whole responsum of R. Weil but concludes that 'יאסר לנו' not to use the roots. This phrase implies preferability of the leaves, while it recognizes the custom of using the root. R. Benjamin Solnik (1550-1640) and R. Joel Sirkes (1561-1640) both are more definitive in their rulings. R. Sirkes relays only the half of R. Weil's responsum that prohibits the use of the horseradish root. R. Solnik, while quoting the permissive half of the responsum concludes with the restrictive opinion and adds that he himself would use only that portion of the plant that grew aboveground: the leaves and the thin uppermost section of the root that protrude above soil level.

In Germany, R. Joseph Hahn (1570-1637) stresses that if one second half of the seventeenth century there was still

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68. Shenei Luhot ha-Brit (Wilmersdorf, 1868) 110a.
69. See his commentary, Beit Hadash to Tur Orah Hayyim 483, s.v. ומי רמא.
70. Sefer Masa'at Binyamin (Cracow, 1633). At the end of his responsum there are a few pages of his commentary to the Shulhan Arukh. In his commentary to Orah Hayyim, n. 3, he writes:

איך שמתרי, רב העיר, ומאשא דברים מברחים, כולם מתדרים עיקרי אף בשמשה, סמולה, וכאשר עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקרי עיקריعلوم

72. Sefer Olat Tamid (Amsterdam, 1681) 473/4:

It is interesting to note here, that the definition of הלס andфер became even less anatomical and more utilitarian. No longer is there 'root' or 'stem' but rather 'above ground' and 'below ground'. See also note 70.

73. See his commentary, Beit Hadash to Tur Orah Hayyim 483, s.v. ומי רמא.
74. See the commentary of the Tza-Magen David to Shir yalnız Arukh 473/4 where he writes:

A somewhat similar custom seems to have been prevalent in Frankfurt A.M. R. Hahn in Yosef Omez (Frankfurt A.M., 1723 reprint in Frankfurt, 1928, Jerusalem, 1965) writes that lettuce was used for moror and horseradish leaves for korekh. par. 746:

However, in later paragraphs, when describing the rituals of moror and korekh in more detail he writes (par. 765): for moror:

It would seem that if one had enough lettuce for both moror and...
Horseradish as the Bitter Herb of Passover

Jewry relied on it at Passover time, even in areas where leafy vegetables could be obtained. In 1822, R. Moses Sofer gave increased stature to horseradish when he wrote that it may even be preferable to lettuce due to the difficulty of cleaning the lettuce leaves of insects. The final irony may be that the modern Hebrew word for horseradish is hazeret, the first species of the mishnah which, according to all commentators, is lettuce!

The history of the use of horseradish for maror is one that parallels the travels and migrations of the Jewish people. As long as the Jews enjoyed the warm, calm climate of the Mediterranean region, lettuce and similar bitter, leafy vegetables were used at the Passover seder. Only as they moved northward and eastward was horseradish accepted as one of the permissible bitter herbs. As leafy vegetables became even less available, concomitant with the move into colder regions, a dependence on the horseradish root became inevitable.

The maror symbolizes not only the bitter bondage of Egypt, but also serves as a reminder of the bitter exile and the wanderings of the past and present. How fitting it is then, that the symbol of this bitterness, horseradish, is, in itself a product of these selfsame wanderings. Even the celebration of the seder has been so affected by the Diaspora that commemorative symbols have become evidence and testimony.

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