

Carsten Wilke
Farewell to Shulamit

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Volume 2

Carsten Wilke

Farewell to Shulamit

Spatial and Social Diversity in the Song of Songs

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1 Space and Gender in the Song of Songs

Is Zion a metaphor? Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem vigorously debated this question in 1916, the latter answering in the affirmative and the former answering in the negative.¹ One hundred years later, the field of Cultural Studies has taken on the semantics of space as one of its central objects of study. However, it remains no less open to debate whether this category provides a constitutive framework of human activity, as those who study geopolitics, ecology, and military terrain analysis tend to see it, or whether, conversely, it is a social construction that reflects traditional analytical parameters such as discourse, class, culture, and gender. On the whole, Scholem's position seems to have won out over Benjamin's. Noted urbanist Edward Soja remembers how, at the outset of the Spatial Turn in the 1960s, he had a hard time convincing his fellow Marxists that “spatial processes shaped social form just as much as social processes shaped spatial form.”²

Soja's argument, which tries to avoid the lure of constructivism as well as the fallacy of retrospective determinism, will guide my approach to the issue of biblical philology that I will explore in this paper, namely, the entangled literary treatment of space and gender in the Song of Songs.³ The multiple settings depicted in this beautiful and enigmatic book on love, which takes the reader in quick succession from the palace (1:4) to the vineyard (1:6), from the desert (1:8) to the forest (1:17), and from the king's populous harem (6:8) to the pastoral couple's blissful isolation (8:5), add up to a series of marked spatial contrasts. While the court of “King Solomon” and the city of the “daughters of Zion” seem to most interpreters to be mere metaphors for power

The idea for the present study originated when I taught an MA seminar (“Divine Love in Religious History”) in the Religious Studies Program at Central European University in Budapest during the Winter Term of 2015. I would like to thank here the students who participated in that seminar, especially Thomas Bensing, Darja Filippova, Daniel Schmidt, and Hanna Shelia, for their feedback and engaging discussions. I was able to work on the manuscript during my sabbatical research leave in 2015–2016 with the support of a senior fellowship grant from the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies at the University of Hamburg. I wish to thank Giuseppe Veltri, the Centre's founder and director, as well as Guy Bar-Oz, Paolo Bernardini, Seth Bledsoe, Gábor Buzási, Bill Rebiger, Matthias Riedl, Rabbi Isaac S.D. Sassoon, Ursula Schattner-Rieser, and Charles Snyder for their comments. Finally, I am grateful to Michael Helfield, who has revised the language and style of the present text.

¹ Eric Jacobson, *Metaphysics of the Profane: The Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 256; Günter Bader, *Die Emergenz des Namens: Amnesie, Aphasia, Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 252.

² Edward Soja, “Taking Space Personally,” in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Barney Warf and Santa Arias (New York: Routledge, 2009), 11–35, here 21.

³ On the spatial turn in Biblical Studies, see Michal Kümpel et al., ed., *Makom: Orte und Räume im Judentum* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2007); Jon Berquist and Claudia Camp, ed., *Constructions of Space*, 5 vols (New York: T&T Clark International, 2007–2013).

and sanctity, respectively,⁴ the blistering sun in the vineyard and the echo of steps in the market at night (3:2) acquire a hauntingly sensorial reality.

In the present study, I will argue that long-standing neglect of the poem's spatial diversity has led to oversimplified conclusions about its meaning. And this is particularly regrettable in a text that has been the major model in the West for divine love as well as for much of its profane variant. From antiquity until now, most interpreters have tended to view the poem's representation of love as a unified ideal, a concept which they define through the lens of their own predilections for asceticism, monogamy, romance, feminism, environmentalism, frugality, or hedonism. These ideological readings have supported such changing social conventions as affectionate piety, contemplative spirituality, bourgeois marriage ethics, and the ideal of egalitarian love; however, they have invariably been couched in a paradigmatic female character, whose name, "Shulamit," adapts an unclear generic term from 7:1 and whose voice is allegedly heard throughout the Song.

A critical approach, however, can and should distinguish between the text and its instrumentalizations by detecting the hermeneutical problems that dogmatic and moralistic interpretations have encountered. For example, the poem's most frequently quoted verse, "Love is as powerful as death" (8:6), is now generally understood as a call for life-long conjugal fidelity because of its liturgical enactment in wedding ceremonies and in popular culture more generally. Yet it is possible to peer through the smoke screen of this institutional reception and to ascertain a textual source that seems content with exalting the impact of emotion in its characteristic social ambivalence.

Opting for a skeptical reading that necessitates very little in the way of interpretive conjectures and textual emendations, I will suppose here that the poem's focus on love does not aim to streamline various emotional states toward a common institutional finality, but rather inversely depicts the centrifugal manifestations of a unique existential force. Rather than having a plot that progresses along a linear timeline, the Song has a plan that spreads out in a wide spatial grid. Rather than bundling its meaning in a moral message, the poem disperses it in a prism reflecting four different images of gender relations, the contradictions of which are conspicuously left unreconciled. Rather than blurring and blending social environments, it differentiates between them. In the evocations of elite and popular social life and erotic practice, difference is not denied, nor fought over, nor even made to disappear in an ideal unity: instead, it is maintained from one end to the other, bridged only by the universal experience of desire, pleasure, and reciprocity. In sum, I will suggest here a more adequate mapping and contextualization of the poem's manifold erotic attitudes and situations, which can be achieved through an exploration of its discontinuous spaces.

⁴ Samuel Krauss, "Die 'Landschaft' im biblischen Hohenliede," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 78,1 (1934), 81–97, here 96.

To start with, this point of view requires a new retrospective on the history of the text's exegesis. I do not need to return to the major debates about the content of the text (i.e. divine love, human love, or both?) and about its literary genre (i.e. drama, lyric anthology, or epic narrative?), but I will discuss and analyze previous interpretations of the poem according to the importance they accord to its spaces.

Space as Allegory: Premodern Readings

The incoherent, diatopical structure of the Song could rarely have been a source of embarrassment for exegetes, so long as they treated the landscapes of the poem as metaphors illustrating a unified system of meaning outside the text. In accordance with the rabbinic view, which apparently goes back to Rabbi Akiba (c. 55–135 CE), the settings of the poem's love dialogue allude to phases of sacred history.⁵ In the most common Christian understanding of the text, which is that of Origen (185–254 CE), they outline a process of spiritual perfection.⁶ Finally, the stations may express constellations of conjugal relations, as in a dissident view held by Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428 CE), which was proscribed as heretical until Hugo Grotius revived it in 1644.⁷ According to rabbinic understanding, the deserts, mountains, valleys, vineyards, gardens, towers, and chambers alluded to holy places from the biblical past. For the Church Fathers, they signified a spiritual sanctuary: the mental and emotional states of divine love on the path to salvation. In Grotius' reading, all of these landscapes were discrete metaphors referring to the female body.

The three allegorical interpretations mentioned above – the collective, the spiritual, and the physical – share some basic assumptions. First, the various erotic situations evoked in the text are all inscribed into a conjugal framework. Second, all masculine and feminine speech in the text are attributed to one single couple: all masculine speech was believed to be that of the bridegroom, and all feminine speech is that of the bride. Third, and most importantly, all spaces are *only* metaphors and they therefore have to stand in a logical relation to their archetypes, but not necessarily to themselves. God, for example, may be hinted at by an inconsistent set of signifiers, here as a king, there as a shepherd. The allegorical bride may successively enjoy royal honors or graze goats; she may be tanned or ivory-skinned; and she may have brothers or be an only child. These qualifications could easily be understood as being complementary aspects of the same archetype, be it Israel, the soul, or the female body. Contradictory and/or discontinuous imagery is no obstacle, then, to driving home the allegory. On the contrary, the obvious impossibility of or-

⁵ *Midrash Rabbah*, Vol. 9: *Esther, Song of Songs*, tr. Maurice Simon (London: The Soncino Press, 1951).

⁶ Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentaries and Homilies*, tr. R.P. Lawson (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1957).

⁷ Hugo Grotius, "Annotata ad Canticum Canticorum," in Grotius, *Annotata ad Vetus Testamentum* (3 vols, Paris: Cramoisy, 1644), I, 541–548.

ganizing the dialogues into a coherent and meaningful plot has been emphasized by various exegetes as an argument in favor of a merely allegorical reading of the text.⁸

The problem with the allegorical approach, however, is that it is entirely based on projection. The text of the poem offers no internal references to either the Exodus or to Christ. And it does not even refer or allude to monogamy; rather, it is a text about impulsive sexual love, with marriage only making a brief appearance in the middle of the text – and even here it is about King Solomon marrying his sixtieth wife.⁹ Allegorists have indeed acknowledged that their readings of the Song were counterintuitive and that they could not be understood without a prior familiarity with religious doctrine.¹⁰

Space as Scenery: Nineteenth-Century Readings

A newfound sensitivity for the non-metaphorical significance of the Song of Song's spaces appeared in the eighteenth century. The text's persons and spaces were freed from the prison of allegorical semantics; they came to be understood as mimetic landscapes that form the natural scenery of a story. From signifiers, spaces now rose to the rank of the signified, and their relationships with one another had to meet the demand of inner coherence. A non-metaphorical plot had to be invented in order to connect the disparate settings of the poem, and this plot had to be given a moral message – for example, the praise of romantic monogamy¹¹ – that could compensate for the loss of the allegorical level of meaning.

Baroque taste would send the royal couple to the countryside for a pastoral dialogue, as this had already been proposed by John Milton in 1642.¹² Enlightenment optimism imagined that King Solomon, untainted by class prejudice, wedded a naïve and healthy village girl.¹³ The romantic plot, which was first proposed by Johann Friedrich Jacobi in 1771 and which eventually came to dominate nineteenth-century interpretation of the poem, had the Shulamite prefer the true love of a shep-

⁸ Paul Jotion, *Le Cantique des Cantiques: Commentaire philologique et exégétique*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1909), 64–65; Joseph Carlebach, *Das Hohelied übertragen und gedeutet* (Frankfurt: Hermon, [1932]), 132–133.

⁹ André LaCoque, *Romance, She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Songs of Songs* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 7–8; Yair Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied* (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 39.

¹⁰ Origen, *The Song of Songs*, 23.

¹¹ Georg Heinrich August Ewald, *Das Hohelied Salomo's, übersetzt mit Einleitung, Anmerkungen und einem Anhang über den Prediger* (Göttingen: Rudolph Deuerlich, 1826), 46: “Der Zweck des Dichters ist die Vorzüge der Monogamie zu zeigen.”

¹² Milton in his essay *The Reason of Church-Government Urged against Prelaty* (1642) refers to the Song of Songs as a “divine pastoral drama.”

¹³ Johann Jakob Hess, *Geschichte Davids und Salomons* (Tübingen: Schramm und Balz, 1788), II, 373.

herd to King Solomon's decadent seduction.¹⁴ Heinrich Graetz, who rejected this dramatic triangle as indecent, narrated instead the faithful couple's adventures at court, where the polygamous king appears only as a negative moral example, not as a rival.¹⁵

While these exegetes contributed an acute awareness of the Song's uneven spatial arrangement, they based their dramatic or narrative interpretations on imaginary and imagined stage directions, quite blatantly ignoring explicit textual details in the process. Only through a huge arsenal of hermeneutical twists and turns could the canonic plot of romantic monogamy, leading from infatuation to wedding and sexual consummation, be enforced on the Song's order (or disorder), which starts with a bedroom encounter and ends with a woman's voice dispatching her lover to the mountains.¹⁶ Confronted with the Song's apparent discontinuity, many scholars found themselves having no choice but to suggest radical textual emendations.¹⁷

The failure of dramatic or narrative plotting assured lasting success for the fragment hypothesis that Johann Gottfried Herder formulated in 1778, during the very time in which he had been collecting and anthologizing German folksongs.¹⁸ With the defenders of the dramatic hypothesis, however, Herder shared a mimetic under-

¹⁴ Johann Friedrich Jacobi, *Das durch eine leichte und ungekünstelte Erklärung von seinen Vorwürfen gerettete Hohe Lied* (Celle: Gsellius, 1771).

¹⁵ Heinrich Graetz, *Schir ha-schirim, oder, Das salomonische Hohelied* (Wien: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1871), 87–88. Graetz's explanation as to why the Song speaks more about polygamy than about monogamy still seems to be persuasive for Étan Levine, *Marital Relations in Ancient Judaism* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 219: "Even the Song of Songs with its manifold eroticism is exclusively monogamous: its only polygamous reference is to King Solomon, and that by invidious contrast to the monogamous love of the poet."

¹⁶ Wilhelm Rudolph, *Das Buch Ruth, das Hohe Lied, die Klagelieder* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1962), 97. Those interpreters who espoused the canonic plot of romantic monogamy pointed to the central verse 5:1 as the moment of marriage consummation, which divides the poem equally between pre-coital flirting and affirmations of conjugal fidelity. Exegetes and translators committed to this linear interpretation had to reinterpret the past tense forms in the first half of the Song (e.g. הָבִיאָנִי, "he has brought me" in 1:4 and 2:4) and the future tense forms appearing in the second half of the Song (e.g. הָבִיאָנָא, "I will bring you" in 8:2). The word תִּחְזַקְנִי ("may he embrace me," 2:6, 8:3) is thought to refer first to the future, then to the past. Much sagacity was spent in order to explain away the fact that even after various explicit love scenes, the girl still asks her friends not to wake up her love (2:7, 3:5) and her siblings believe that no man has yet shown interest in her (8:8). On the desperate efforts to harmonize the ending "flee!" (ברֹאך, 8:14) with the rest of the poem, see Chana Bloch (in collaboration with Ariel Bloch), *The Song of Songs: A New Translation, Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Random House, 1995), 221.

¹⁷ See the total rewriting of the text in Paul Haupt, "Difficult Passages in the Song of Songs," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 21 (1902): 51–73; and the criticism of this "vicious method" in Morris Jastrow, *The Song of Songs, Being a Collection of Love Lyrics of Ancient Palestine* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1921), 18–19.

¹⁸ J.G. von Herder, *Salomons Lieder der Liebe, die ältesten und schönsten aus dem Morgenlande. Nebst vierundvierzig alten Minneliedern und einem Anhang über die ebräische Elegie*, 1778, ed. Johann Georg Müller (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1827).

standing of literary landscapes; according to this presupposition, he concluded that the abrupt change between spaces in the Song of Songs was proof of the text's incoherence. The poem, then, should be seen as a concatenation of heterogeneous lyric fragments derived from courtly poems and peasant folksongs of different ages, which were haphazardly sewn together by a collector.

This folksong hypothesis, as it were, postulates that these allegedly oral materials preceded the Hebrew-Aramaic language change of the Persian period. However, its defenders rarely tried to show the existence of such sources on linguistic or formal grounds. Their only argument remains the discontinuity of the poem's settings and dialogues. "How different is everything here!" exclaimed Herder, when, at the turn of a verse, he was stepping off the purple tapestry of the palace onto the clay of an open field.¹⁹ Conversely, advocates for a coherent narrative or drama in the text now felt forced to minimize the abrupt scenic shifts,²⁰ and Graetz went so far as to deny them altogether: "We do not remark the least change of scenery in the Song of Songs."²¹

Space as Travesty: Twentieth-Century Readings

Since the turn of the twentieth century, pressing the text into dramatic or narrative plots could no longer convince.²² The exegetical pendulum swung back to a solution that combined a form of metaphorical reading with a compilation hypothesis. This time, however, the lavish scenes of harem lust and outdoor intercourse were not read as allegories that would express truth about the ideal form of love, but as travesties that act out its unrealized potential through role play.²³ On this view, the relationship between image and reality in the poem is not logical but dialectical, and the key to the text's understanding was its ancient ritual context.

On the basis of a dubious ethnographic parallel, Johann Gottfried Wetzstein claimed in 1873 that the poem's court scenes must have been fragments of a dramatic farce that supposedly accompanied ancient wedding rituals.²⁴ Meanwhile, in 1906 Wilhelm Erbt argued that a fertility ritual lay at the core of the text, in which the

¹⁹ Herder, *Salomons Lieder der Liebe*, 3: "Wie anders ist alles hier! Dort Duft und Salben, Wein und Freuden, Freundinnen und Königskammern; hier eine Hirtinn auf offener Flur."

²⁰ Ernest Renan speaks of the "changement brusque de situation" (*Le Cantique des Cantiques* (Paris: Arléa, 1990 [1860]), 39. Cf. Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied*, 32: "abrupte Wechsel von Schauplatz oder Adressaten."

²¹ Graetz, *Schir ha-schirim*, 16: "Wir nehmen durchaus keinen Scenenwechsel im H. L. wahr."

²² Stefan Schreiner, *Das Hohelied: Lied der Lieder von Schelomo* (Frankfurt/M.: Verlag der Weltreligionen im Insel Verlag, 2007), 118.

²³ See the references in Gianni Barbiero, *Song of Songs: A Close Reading* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 14.

²⁴ Johann Gottfried Wetzstein, "Die syrische Dreschtafel," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 5 (1873): 270–302; Karl Budde, *Die fünf Megillot: Das Hohelied, das Buch Ruth, die Klagelieder, der Prediger, das Buch Esther* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1898), XVII–XXI.

holy marriage of two gods was reenacted.²⁵ In the 1960s, during the sexual revolution, it became common to consider the Song of Songs as a collection of profane love poems that had its social setting, its *Sitz im Leben*, in the animation for palace banquets, wine houses, and brothels,²⁶ an argument often based on superficial similarities between the poem and various love songs from Pharaonic Egypt.²⁷ In sum, twentieth-century readers assumed that ancient rituals of sexuality must have included burlesque role-play, which allowed participants to escape from the far more constrained and reserved realities of the institutions that these rituals stood for. After having been searched for deep metaphysical and/or ethical truths, the poem became a script for virtual erotic dalliance that scholars presumed was incorporated into the Jewish canon by an almost comical kind of accident.

The travesty hypothesis succeeded in explaining the variegated hedonistic landscapes in the Song of Songs as escapist fantasies, which were inconsistent by definition and which could only be characterized through a dialectical relation with the reality in which they were performed. Indeed, travesty is always the travesty of something; it acknowledges the ontological priority of being over imagination and, in the literary field, of mimesis over metaphor. While the Song's spaces were wholly metaphorical for the allegorists and wholly mimetic for the dramatists, the travesty hypothesis supposed, like Brechtian "epic theater," a double layer of dramatic fiction: a harem society enacts pastoral scenes, a peasant wedding enacts the harem, and an urban middle class enacts "upward" and "downward" travesties.²⁸

With its inherently dichotomic structure, however, the travesty hypothesis also invited speculations about a social ideology in the text, which pitted, for example, nature against decadence. Feminist scholarship, in particular, starting with an essay by Phyllis Trible published in 1973, brought about a revaluation of the Song's presumed message.²⁹ While nineteenth-century exegetes had made their Shulamite embody bourgeois ideals of female "innocence," chastity, and passivity, feminist scholars rediscovered the female erotic agency in the Song. And whereas twentieth-century (still mostly male) scholars indulged in fantasies of frivolous, commodified, or ritualized sexual talk, feminist scholars sought after "serious emo-

²⁵ Wilhelm Erbt, *Die Hebräer: Kanaan im Zeitalter der hebräischen Wanderung und hebräischer Staatengründungen* (Leipzig: Hinrichs 1906), 196–202.

²⁶ See especially Rudolph, *Das Buch Ruth*, and Oswald Loretz, *Gotteswort und menschliche Erfahrung: eine Auslegung der Bücher Jona, Rut, Hoheslied und Qohelet* (Freiburg: Herder, 1963).

²⁷ Max Müller, *Die Liebespoesie der alten Ägypter* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1899); John Bradley White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Poetry* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978); Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

²⁸ Hans-Peter Müller, "Travestien und geistige Landschaften: Zum Hintergrund einiger Motive bei Kohelet und im Hohenlied," *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 109 (1997): 557–574.

²⁹ Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (1973): 30–48.

tion” and strong theological statement.³⁰ The latter were particularly attracted by an interpretation that, since Karl Barth, had endowed the Song’s egalitarian eroticism with a redemptive power that could overcome the misogynist curse of Eve found in Genesis.³¹

This feminist emphasis on gender as the dominant category of interpretation did not necessarily have to break with the fragment hypothesis. Marcia Falk and Athalya Brenner could accept the idea of a more or less haphazard anthology, if some or all of its ingredients were hypothetically traced back to female court entertainers and the poem could thus be considered to be “essentially female.” Brenner admits that the Song depicts a “patriarchal society,” but she also gives a feminist twist to the liberal tradition that has interpreted the courtly scenes as pieces of anti-monarchic satire.³² The balance she tried to broker between sociology of literature and the gender approach should prove to be fragile.

Space as Agonizing Metaphor: A Twenty-First Century Trend

Advances in form analysis slowly eroded the idea of the Song of Songs as a heterogeneous collection of ritualized travesties. Even in the nineteenth century, some scholars objected to the fragment hypothesis, citing as evidence for their critique an abundance of stylistic symmetry and regularity in the text (e.g. catchwords, rhymes, refrains, chorus lines, double panels, chiasm).³³ Literary research since the 1970s has further confirmed these results and has shown that the impression of chaotic compilation is superficial.³⁴ The conclusion that scholars reached, however, is puzzling to say the least. The poem has pervasive marks of formal structural

³⁰ Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, “Traces of Women’s Texts in the Hebrew Bible,” in *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. A. Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 17–109, here 75: “For women, love is a serious emotion.”

³¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), III.2, 313–314; see also Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 375–377.

³² Athalya Brenner, *The Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 55.

³³ See the list in Franz Delitzsch, *Das Hohelied* (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1851), 4–6.

³⁴ Joseph Angénieux, “Structure du Cantique des Cantiques en chants encadrés par des refrains alternants: Essai de reconstitution du texte primitif avec une introduction et des notes critiques,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 41 (1965), 96–142; J. Cheryl Exum, “A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs,” *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 85 (1973), 47–79; Roland E. Murphy, “The Unity of the Song of Songs,” *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (1979), 436–443; William H. Shea, “The Chiastic Structure of the Song of Songs,” *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92 (1980), 378–396; M. Timothea Elliott, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989); David A. Dorsey, “Literary Structuring in the Song of Songs,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 46 (1990), 81–96; Duane A. Garrett and Paul R. House, *Song of Songs/Lamentations* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 30–35; J. Cheryl Exum, “On the Unity and Structure of the Song of Songs,” in *Shai le-Sara Japhet: Studies in the Bible, Its Exegesis and Its Language*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher et al. (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2007), 305–316.

unity, but, at the same time, it does not show any signs of having a coherent narrative flow.³⁵ If the *Song of Songs* is neither a compilation nor a coherent narrative, then interpreters should pursue more sophisticated solutions, assuming either a redactor who skillfully connected disparate fragments³⁶ or, conversely, an author who conceived from the outset a deliberately discontinuous text.

Among twenty-first century scholars, there is, indeed, a tendency to treat the *Song* in the context of biblical wisdom literature and to return to the assumption of a unified narrative imposed by an author or an intelligent redactor. This narrative is no more axed on a linear progression toward marriage, but conceives the romantic couple as an ideal abstraction transcending chronological sequence, spatial boundaries, and social order. This trend reflects the results of form analysis, but also the idealized reading of the *Song* in feminist reception. The spatial and social cleavage between court and pastoral that had obsessed nineteenth-century readers and that was still at the core of the travesty hypothesis found itself mitigated, if not emphatically denied, in the interpretive mainstream starting in the 1980s.

In his Barthian reading, Francis Landy feels uneasy with the “petty social discriminations” that are formulated in the *Song*.³⁷ Hans-Josef Heinevetter systematically implemented textual emendations in order to expurgate the references to money and labor which had already incommodeated Herder.³⁸ And Michael V. Fox, stepping beyond the travesty idea, reduces them to absurdities. If the relations between the sexes are distinguished by “egalitarianism,” then class barriers also need to be porous: “In the lovers’ world in *Canticles* the young shepherd becomes a king, the vineyard keeper a *bat nādīb*, a noblewoman.” The *Song*, Fox claims, constructs a purely “psychological reality;” it “reflects a metaphysics of love rather than a social reality or even a social ideal.”³⁹ From this perspective, it may even be said that the social

³⁵ Brenner, *The Song of Songs*, 37: “The links between poems are effected by catch phrases or similarity of subject matter or imagery, but not of plot”; Walter Bühlmann, *Das Hohelied* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997), 12: “daß zwar eine Textstruktur, nicht aber eine damit verbundene Sinnstruktur aufgewiesen wird”; Elie Assis, *Flashes of Fire: A Literary Analysis of the Song of Songs* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 16: “They speak of the unity of the book without depicting any development running through it.” See also the rejoinder by Elliott, *The Literary Unity*, 33: “The poem not only *has* a structure, it *is* a structure.” Defenders of the fragment hypothesis suppose in these cases either a process of *Zersingen*, that is, the spontaneous oral variation of common motifs in folk performance (Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied*, 73), or a purposeful scheme set up by a highly competent compiler.

³⁶ This approach was defended by Othmar Keel, *Deine Blicke sind Tauben: Zur Metaphorik des Hohen Liedes* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1984), 11; Id., *Das Hohelied* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1986); Id., *The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary*, tr. Frederick J. Gaiser (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Hans-Josef Heinevetter, “*Komm nun, mein Liebster, Dein Garten ruft Dich!*” *Das Hohelied als programmatische Komposition* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1988).

³⁷ Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983), 132.

³⁸ Heinevetter, *Komm nun*, 166: “Wir wollen diesen Wunsch nun redaktionskritisch erfüllen.”

³⁹ Michael V. Fox, “Love, Passion, and Perception in Israelite and Egyptian Love Poetry,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 219–228, here 228. See Delitzsch, *Das Hohelied*, 156: “Sie stehen sich

ideal of the Song is the escape from society. Phyllis Trible writes that “love is fulfilled when the woman and the man close the circle of intimacy to all but themselves.”⁴⁰ Tikva Frymer-Kensky describes the text as “an idyll of romantic love unconstrained by societal considerations.”⁴¹ Carey Walsh flattens out the Song’s diversity by suspending the principle of non-contradiction: “Identity is cloaked, undisclosed, and therefore forever open. The lover could be Solomon, he could be a shepherd, he could be both.”⁴² Tremper Longman III likewise believes in the impersonal character of the personae: “The woman is not a particular woman but stands for all women. The same may be said for the man.”⁴³ For J. Cheryl Exum, the “blurring” of time-space categories is the Song’s central aesthetic principle.⁴⁴ And according to Elie Assis, the social characteristics of the figures are likewise blurred, metaphorical, and ultimately indifferent: “We cannot, in fact, say with any certainty what the woman’s occupation is.”⁴⁵ This accords well with the view of Gianni Barbiero, who posits that the references that the Song makes to social reality are “not historical information but literary artifice, psychological projection.” In love, says Barbiero, “the social conventions and conditions of daily life no longer apply.”⁴⁶ Like Exum, Assis, and Barbiero, Stefan Fischer supposes a meandering plot in the text and defines it roughly as “the seeking and finding of two lovers, with the use of several travesties and locations.”⁴⁷ As opposed to the basic reality of the couple, the poem’s “locations” are contradictory and chaotic fictions.⁴⁸ Yvonne Sophie Thöne devoted her thesis to the “dynamic” reading of the Song’s spaces as metaphorical projections of a

Person gegen Person, Seele gegen Seele, gleichsam entkleidet der Zufälligkeiten irdischer Verhältnisse gegenüber.”

40 Phyllis Trible, “Love’s Lyrics Redeemed,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 100–120, here 120.

41 Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 197.

42 Carey Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2000), 127.

43 Tremper Longman III, *The Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 91; See also *ibid.*, 108: “We are dealing with figurative language here. We are not to interpret this as an actual event. The Song is not telling the story of a specific couple. The country, as opposed to the city, is a place of private intimacy in the Song.”

44 J. Cheryl Exum, “The Poetic Genius of the Song of Songs,” in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 78–95, here 85.

45 Assis, *Flashes of Fire*, 13.

46 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 14.

47 Stefan Fischer, *Das Hohelied Salomos zwischen Poesie und Erzählung: Erzähltextanalyse eines poetischen Textes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 228: “Handlung um das Suchen und Finden zweier Liebender, dazu werden mehrere Travestien und Handlungsorte verwendet.”

48 *Ibid.*, 56: “Die Protagonistin *Frau* befindet sich einerseits in einer idealen Situation, nämlich der Zuwendung des Königs an dessen Hof (I,2–4), und andererseits in einer Konfliktsituation mit ihren Brüdern in ländlicher Umgebung (I,5–8). Einmal ist sie mit ihrem Geliebten vereint, das andere Mal getrennt. Verschiedene Szenen, die miteinander verwoben und aufeinander bezogen sind, führen zum zentralen Ereignis der Begegnung und Vereinigung im Garten (4,16–5,1).”

unique couple's gendered experiences,⁴⁹ while for Annette Schellenberg, the Song dreams up an ideal world of unlimited mobility, an "immersion in a paradise-like counterworld characterized by anti-structure and boundary mergers."⁵⁰

As these borrowings from the vocabulary of globalization indicate, the interpreters' common reluctance to address the social frameworks of intimacy reveals less about the literary ideals of the Bible than about contemporary assumptions, which tend to give romantic love a key role in family-building, socialization, and the leisure economy while turning the sociocultural construction of love into a taboo. American sociologist Jessi Streib stated in a recent publication that "there are many myths about social class. One myth is that class has nothing to do with love and marriage."⁵¹ Susan Goodwin and Joanne Finkelstein explain the rise of this myth during the second half of the twentieth century: "While intimate relationships are subject to cultural regulation in contemporary Western societies, they are also, ironically, the aspect of social life most associated with ideas about personal choice, freedom and privacy [...] Love, not economics and social class, seems to be the cement that sustains the modern relationship."⁵² Simon May has perhaps offered the most acute deconstruction of this modern ideal of autonomous love: "By imputing to human love features properly reserved for divine love, such as the unconditional and the eternal, we falsify the nature of the most conditional and time-bound and earthly emotion, and force it to labour under intolerable expectations."⁵³

In the thrall of this pseudo-religious conception, then, the post-feminist cultural horizon has ensured that the molding of the Song's dialogues into a monolithic male-female duality remains as much a commonplace in the most recent interpretations as it was in medieval allegory. Still in 2015, Edwin M. Good adheres to the latter as if he was stating unquestionable textual evidence: "I find three speakers in the book: a woman, whom I identify as 'she,' a man, whom I name 'he,' and a group of women referred to as 'Jerusalem's daughters.'"⁵⁴ Most, if not all, modern Bible translations indeed supply these specifications as if they were part of the original text.

In sum, the pattern of monotheistic tradition, where one feminized humanity craves for one masculine God, still informs all contemporary interpretations of the

⁴⁹ Yvonne Sophie Thöne, *Liebe zwischen Stadt und Feld: Raum und Geschlecht im Hohelied* (Berlin: Lit, 2012).

⁵⁰ Annette Schellenberg, "Boundary Crossing in and through the Song of Songs: Observations on the Liminal Character and Function of the Song," in *Reading a Tendentious Bible: Essays in Honor of Robert B. Coote*, ed. M.L. Chaney et al. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 140 – 154, here 152.

⁵¹ Jessi Streib, *The Power of the Past: Understanding Cross-Class Marriages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4.

⁵² Susan Goodwin and Joanne Finkelstein, *The Sociological Bent: Inside Metro Culture* (Victoria: Thomson, 2005), 71 – 72. See also Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Paul James Johnson and Steph Lawler, "Coming Home to Love and Class," *Sociological Research Online* 10 (2005).

⁵³ Simon May, *Love: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 4 – 5.

⁵⁴ Edwin M. Good, *The Song of Songs: Codes of Love* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 19.

text. It is tempting to explain the resilience of this mystical dyad as being part of the modern philosophical struggle, accurately described by Michel Foucault, to defend the continuity and sovereignty of the subject against the de-centering assaults of Marxist social dialectic, Nietzschean psychological insights, and – we may add – the cultural relativism of Franz Boaz’s posterity.⁵⁵ The postulate of essential subjectivity obtained in this case not only the victory, but even the unanimity. Before the twentieth century, interpreting the Song meant that one had to tie it down to the rules and roles prescribed by normative marriage ethics. To a present-day reader, the same text is conversely advertised as a void projection screen, an antidote to the androcentric normativity enshrined elsewhere inside the biblical canon. Yet the result is largely the same: a single, ideal heterosexual couple is construed as the dual protagonist of the text, while the significance of spatial, social, and historical diversity is quite consciously discounted. Though occasionally proclaiming a “spatial turn,” twenty-first century exegeses treat spaces as agonizing metaphors: they only exist to signify their own insignificance.

Space as Life-World: Preliminary Considerations for a Pluralistic Reading

In order to explore the stakes of today’s dominant approach, it is instructive to go back to its most eloquent expression, which can be found in J. Cheryl Exum’s detailed and well-argued presentation. While Michael Fox argues that social difference is irrelevant for love and may therefore be ignored, Exum maintains that it is so strongly divisive that it *must* remain unacknowledged. Only an erotic love beyond space, she claims, can resonate with readers regardless of their historical, social, cultural, and psychological backgrounds:

The Song’s lovers are archetypal lovers – composite figures, types of lovers rather than any specific lovers. In the course of the poem, they take on various guises or personalities and assume different roles. The man is a king and a shepherd; the woman is a member of the royal court and an outsider who tends vineyards or keeps sheep. She is black (1:5), as well as like the white moon and radiant sun (6:10), with a neck like an ivory tower (7:4 [5H]) – an impossible combination in one person according to many commentators. By providing access only to the voices of the lovers, to what they say not who they are, the poet is able to identify them with all lovers. Their love is timeless. All this makes it easier for readers to relate the Song’s lovers’ experience to their own experience of love, real or fantasized.⁵⁶

Several elements of Exum’s reasoning, however, appear to be problematic. To start with, abstract couples have never been particularly successful in fiction. No one, ex-

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *L’archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 23.

⁵⁶ J. Cheryl Exum, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2005), 8; similarly ead., “The Poetic Genius of the Song of Songs,” 83–84.

cept medievalists, still reads the allegorical novel *Roman de la Rose*. The most paradigmatic lovers in world literature, such as Tristan and Iseult, Romeo and Juliet, Carmen and José, and Odette and Swann, have always been perceived as members of a concrete, often strange social fabric that most readers do not know from their own experience, but explore through the eyes of the couple. Literary love seems to need this friction with society. And, of course, the lovers in the Song *do* say where and who they are. As Exum recognizes, they are connected to their social status with abundant concrete and time-specific details about skin color, domestic animals, perfumes, weaponry, punch recipes, and agricultural finance. These precise (albeit conflicting) textual elements only appear blurred in the eyes of the beholder, provided he or she makes the conscious effort to process them in order to uphold the pure male-female polarity. In a gesture similar to Graetz's apodictic denial of scenery changes, Exum proclaims: "The Song offers no clue that the male and female speaking voices belong to different men and women."⁵⁷ This is not the only case in which Exum, after having enumerated some of the many textual clues pointing to social diversity in the Song, ultimately decides to ignore them.⁵⁸

The unified narrative, then, is the result of a doubly laborious enterprise trying to make a visibly discontinuous text conform to the postulate of coherence. As social mobility and class fusion are not described anywhere in the Song, they have to be exegetically generated through the mixing of motifs from neighboring verses. The third chapter of the poem gives us an illustrative example of such forced narrative synthesis. In verse 3:6, a person, grammatically feminine, is said to transport myrrh and frankincense through the desert in the midst of a dust cloud. In the following verses (3:7–8), King Solomon sleeps in his bed at night guarded by soldiers. Most exegetes maintain that the words "who is she?" (תַּאֲנִי־יָה) in the first verse are the question to which "here is Solomon's bed," in the second verse, is the answer.⁵⁹ Scholarly literature thus invariably imagines how the king, bedded and with incense fuming around him, is carried by his soldiers through the desert in the dead of night. The strange scene of a "wedding procession through the desert"⁶⁰ needs either textual emendation or some sort of free translation in order to justify the ungrammatical reading of a feminine interrogative pronoun ("who is she?")⁶¹ as a neuter form ("what is that?"). Exum picks this presumed "procession" as the main example for

57 Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 34.

58 In an earlier study, she perceives a psychological contradiction in the woman's view of herself, but then insists on invalidating her observation in order to save the protagonist's unity; see Exum, "Asseverative 'al in Canticles 1,6?" *Biblica* 62 (1981): 416–419, here 418.

59 Heinevetter, *Komm nun*, 110–112.

60 Fischer, *Das Hohelied Salomos*, 145, 147, "Hochzeitszug durch die Wüste." The title of the scene is "Ein nächtlicher Hochzeitszug" already in Günter Krinetzki, *Kommentar zum Hohenlied: Bildsprache und theologische Botschaft* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1981), 118.

61 This expression refers explicitly to a woman in the parallels in 6:10 and 8:5; see Yair Zakovitch, "Al shelosh she'elot 'mi zot' be-Shir ha-Shirim," *Mirqamim* 1 (2013): 33–40. Against the reading as a neuter, see also Assis, *Flashes of Fire*, 104.

her theory of blurred spaces. Amalgamating the two verses, she makes the meaninglessness of the hybrid scene homiletically meaningful: the undefined spatiality of the nightly desert trip is meant to proclaim the boundless character of poetry as well as love as being “always already in progress.”⁶² The exegetical blending of actors and spaces has given the text a nonsensical appearance, which in turn is considered as proof of its deeper truth.

Contemplating the sheer amount of discursive artifice that is necessary in order to explain away this and other diatopical shifts in the Song, one might stop for a moment and consider whether we are not heading in the wrong direction. It might do more justice to the text if, by a turnaround, we tried to focus our attention instead on its many space-related contradictions, testing the one hypothesis that Exum is so eager to discard, namely, “that the male and female speaking voices belong to different men and women.” However reluctantly a historian risks jeopardizing the Shulamite’s “archetypal” beauty, a notion with which readers over the centuries have cooperated, and however unwillingly one might discover that past ages affirmed social contrasts and boundaries more positively than our own, we can nevertheless hope to be rewarded by a fuller appreciation of the poetic topography of this text, shaped by a variety of speakers, themes, and human erotic experiences that are hidden below the (allegedly unified) surface. If we therefore decide to break with the common exegetical subordination of class to gender, the alternative should not be a Marxist reading subordinating gender to class, but rather the search for a plurality of human conditions that are characterized by the juxtaposition of both categories.

If one were to search for such pluralistic readings in the vast scholarly literature on the Song of Songs, one would be astonished to discover how rare they actually are. To be sure, the romantic “shepherd hypothesis” (*Hirtenhypothese*) has frequently distributed the male voices between two persons of different social class, but we have to return to its more extreme forms in order to find interpretations that also assume multiple female lovers. Ferdinand Hitzig and Ernest Renan, in particular, introduced in chapter 7 of the poem a second female protagonist, a harem dancer, in order to spare their virgin heroine the shame of dancing publicly before the court.⁶³ In 1888, Johann Gustav Stickel envisioned the possibility that the Song’s pastoral scenes represent a parallel, non-interacting dramatic plot and so thereby posited an additional couple of lovers in the story. It seems, however, that he simply could not make up his mind between the “king hypothesis” and the “shepherd hypothesis,” and he therefore conflated the unlikely presuppositions of both.⁶⁴

In a 1989 publication, Athalya Brenner calls out for the necessity of searching for the presence of diversity in the text. In her interpretation of the Song, which is a var-

⁶² J. Cheryl Exum, “Seeing Solomon’s Palanquin (Song of Songs 3:6–11),” *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (2003): 301–316, here 312.

⁶³ Renan, *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, 71.

⁶⁴ Johann Gustav Stickel, *Das Hohelied in seiner Einheit und dramatischen Gliederung* (Berlin: Reuther, 1888); cf. Budde, *Die fünf Megillot*, XIV.

iation on the fragment hypothesis (discussed above), Brenner argues that, in principle, “a plurality of voices should be looked for, several loving couples,”⁶⁵ though she prefers not to push the issue further.⁶⁶ Among the more recent exegetes of the Song, the feminist tendency to present “the” Shulamite as the hegemonic symbol of liberated womanhood has apparently been an obstacle to admitting the existence of multiple femininities. Apart from Brenner’s lucid, but cautious and hitherto unheeded appeal,⁶⁷ the hypothesis of “several loving couples” hardly has any scholarly precedents to support it. I will therefore have to review the text’s structure anew from a different perspective, one that takes as its starting point the poem’s imagined correlation between space, class, and gender.

⁶⁵ Brenner, *The Song of Songs*, 29. Cf. already Krauss, “Die ‘Landschaft’ im biblischen Hohenliede,” 95: “daß der Dichter mehrere Liebespaare vor Augen hat.”

⁶⁶ Athalya Brenner, “‘Come Back, Come Back the Shulammite’ (Song of Songs 7:1–10): A Parody of the *wasf* Genre,” in Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion*, 234–259, here 236: “I do not wish to make a stand here either on the question of the homogeneous vs. collective nature of the SoS, or on that of its dating.”

⁶⁷ Marcia Falk likewise presumes that the love poems in the Song presented the love of a number of couples; see her *The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 113. Thöne, *Liebe zwischen Stadt und Feld*, 86, is aware of the critical horizon of the fragment theory, but concludes that our understanding may safely follow the traditional unification of the speakers: “Unter Berücksichtigung des Sachverhalts, dass das Hohelied eine *Sammlung* von Liebesliedern darstellt, ist davon auszugehen, dass hier ursprünglich ganz unterschiedliche Frauen- und Männergestalten beschrieben worden sind. Mit einem synchronen Blick auf den vorliegenden Endtext jedoch ist es gerechtfertigt, die Figuren als eine Frau, einen Mann, ein Liebespaar zu betrachten.”

2 A Sociospatial Approach to the Song of Song's Structure

The Twenty Idylls

Structural analysis of the Song has a long history, and it has yielded highly variable results. Some studies have found five sense units in the text, while others have found as many as fifty. This considerable variation is precisely why some scholars have not looked favorably on it as a useful tool. However, not every issue that produces disagreement is futile.⁶⁸ Structural analysis must indeed arrive at different conclusions depending on whether the division is to follow grammatical form, be deduced from a preconceived plot,⁶⁹ or reflect (as we will do here) the shifts between spatial environments.

This spatial approach to the Song has managed to find its way into the scholarly literature as of late,⁷⁰ but it needs to be refined in several important ways. In order to take the functional context of spatial references into account, I have, in my approach, distinguished between mimetic (descriptive) spaces and metaphorical spaces while allowing for the possibility of the existence of “real-and-imagined spaces”⁷¹ that, like the vineyard in 1:6, are mimetic and metaphorical at the same time. I have also been reluctant to engage in guesswork concerning the emotional moods connected to places in the poem. More generally, I have tried to avoid binary classifications such as feminine-masculine, city-countryside, elite-popular, closed-open, and protected-dangerous.⁷² Indoor and outdoor spaces, the distinction of which seems so crucial for a reader accustomed to a northern climate,⁷³ blend smoothly in the same scenes. It is hardly more helpful to impose the city-countryside dichot-

⁶⁸ See the remarks by Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 17.

⁶⁹ Assis, *Flashes of Fire*, 25, candidly acknowledges this kind of projection: “The structure here reflects exactly what the reader and all readers of the romantic literary genre expect: the realization of the lover’s desire to unite.” He later admits the failure of this kind of convention-based reading and concludes (261): “Thus, yearning becomes the main thrust of the SoS, rather than realization.”

⁷⁰ See especially Jill M. Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron: The Imagery of the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 117–142 (“Images in Space and Time”) and Fischer, *Das Hohelied Salomos*, 173–209 (“Ort und Raum”).

⁷¹ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

⁷² A representative example of binary thinking is Maria Deckers, “The Structure of the Song of Songs and the Centrality of *nepeš*,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 192–196, here 176. The author, based on the semiotics of A.J. Greimas, attributes positive and negative emotional values to the situations depicted in the Song through “the so-called thymic disjunction (antithesis of euphoric and dysphoric passages in the text)” and “spatial disjunctions (e.g. town and country).”

⁷³ Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 127–135, dwells on this duality for quite some time.

omy, a product of industrialization, on the Song,⁷⁴ which distinguishes fields from pastures and does not even have a common concept that would oppose both of them to the city.

Exploring the non-dichotomist descriptions of landscapes and their association with production and consumption activities as well as with types of gender relations, it seems likely that the Song's author has intentionally juxtaposed brief lyric episodes presenting different couples in their respective *milieux*. This author had no intention of inventing any overarching plot, but created formal literary unity in his work by employing a wide variety of structural and poetic devices. What structural analysis needs to be able to distinguish in the poem are not narrative episodes, but lyric images. It will be important to show below that our text stands in close parallel with the short lyric forms that emerged in the Greek poetry of Alexandria during the first half of the third century BCE, most importantly the dramatic image, the "idyll" (εἰδύλλιον), a form that can be found in the works of Theokritos.⁷⁵ My hypothesis cannot but embrace the historical dating of the Song to the second half of the third century, a thesis that was first defended by Heinrich Graetz and that has been bolstered more recently by additional arguments from a growing minority of scholars.⁷⁶

I will now propose a division of the Song of Songs into idylls (verse numbers in round brackets) that will be based on the references to mimetic spatial settings indicated in the text (verse numbers in square brackets). In a second step, I will study the formal means by which these structural units are distinguished from and linked to one another in the text. So to start at the beginning, here are the divisions that I propose:

⁷⁴ The assumption of a "fundamental polarity between nature and civilization" guides, for example, the environmentalist reading of Hans-Josef Heinevetter (*Komm nun*, 179–188). The clash between the thesis "city" and the antithesis "field" is believed to produce the synthesis "garden." Thöne, *Liebe zwischen Stadt und Feld*, 75, also applies Fischer's analysis based on "binäre Raum-Oppositionen (wie Stadt und Land, drinnen und draußen)."

⁷⁵ The British Orientalist Sir William Jones (1746–1794) first counted the Song "inter idyllia Hebraea;" he inspired John Mason Good "to regard the entire song as a collection of distinct idyls upon one common subject;" see John Mason Good, *Song of Songs, or, Sacred Idyls* (London: Kearsley, 1803), IV. According to Good, this common subject is not love but Solomon's marriage.

⁷⁶ Among recent literature, see the references in Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 35. Traditionally, late datings have been built on Graetz's derivation of the word for palanquin, אֲפִירָיִן *apiryon* (Song 3:9), from the Greek φορεῖον *phoreion*, the counter-argument being that a derivation from the Aramaic פָּרִיּוֹן *puryon* seems also imaginable (Frederick William Dobbs-Allsopp, "Late Linguistic Features in the Song of Songs," in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 27–77, here 67–68). I will base the present study on observations from ancient realities and literary conventions; yet, it seems to me that the prothetic vowel in *apiryon* must indeed be explained by the fact that Hebrew cannot reproduce the fricative "f" at the beginning of a word. In rabbinic literature, which was familiar to Graetz, Greek φορβεία *phorbeia* ("halter"), for example, had to be rendered either as פּוּרְבִּי *purbi* (by turning a fricative "f" into an occlusive "p") or אַפּוּרְמָבִּי *afrombia* (by adding a prothetic vowel).

1. The king's "bedchambers" (חַדְרֵי, 1:2–4 [4])⁷⁷ is the first space evoked in the Song. A feminine speaker introduces her beloved with the expressions "he," "you," "we," and "the king," and praises the voluptuous caresses that she and other maids (עֲלֵמֹת)⁷⁸ receive from him. The courtly interior is distinguished by luxury consumption (i.e. wine and ointment).

2. The scene shifts to the "vineyards" (הַכּרְמִים, 1:5–6 [6]) and to a peasant girl who has been appointed by her ungracious family to be their guardian. Alone in the blazing sunlight, she has dark skin and has not been able (or willing) to refuse sexual advances.⁷⁹

3. The "shepherds' encampments" (מִשְׁכָנֹת הַרְעִים, 1:7–8, [8]), another rural production space, is the destination of a nomadic goatherdess, who is this time not tied to any landed property but able to move freely across the steppe in search of her beloved.⁸⁰

4. A royal "banquet" (מִשְׁבֵּט, 1:9–14, [12]), with its associative field of luxury consumption, frames the dialogue between a masculine speaker, apparently the "Pharaoh" or "king" mentioned in the text, and his "companion."

5. A "forest" (עֵץ, 1:15–2:3, [3]) is metaphorically as well as physically the scene of a dialogue between two lovers, a dialogue placed during or after an outdoor sexual encounter and the subsequent consumption of wild fruits.

6. The "wine house" (בֵּית הַיַּן, 2:4–7, [4]) now hints at an urban consumption space. A girl, apparently without previous sexual experience, confesses that she has fallen in love with a man she has met in a tavern. In two choruses at the end of the idyll, she expresses her wish for intimacy and her simultaneous hope to delay it.

7. Back in "our vineyards" (כַּרְמֵינוּ, 2:8–17, [15]), we find ourselves in what is presumably a farmstead surrounded by a wall (כְּתַלְנוּ), where a feminine speaker reports the discreet visit of a man from the mountains who came to court her. In the double

77 This is the biblical sense of the word, a synonym of *mishkav*; see the examples in Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*, 6th edition (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 303. The interpretation of the location as a bridal chamber, common among the more moralizing exegetes, forces the sense of the text.

78 I interpret the term עֲלֵמֹת as referring to concubines of slave status. Of the two parallel number riddles at the end of Proverbs, the first ends on 'almah (Prov. 30:19) and the second on *shifhah* (Prov. 30:22). On the parallel in Palmyra, see Pope, *Song of Songs*, 301.

79 Pope, *Song of Songs*, 326: "self-proclaimed premarital promiscuity." Thöne (*Liebe zwischen Stadt und Feld*, 117) speaks of a "consensus" on this interpretation. See also Stefan Schorch, *Euphemismen in der Hebräischen Bibel* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 140, 235.

80 The text presents the tasks of field guard and nomad in such a contradictory manner that it is difficult to share the hypothesis of Assis (*Flashes of Fire*, 13) "that the woman is a shepherdess and tends the vineyards as well."

chorus, the woman ambiguously invites the lover to stay (or come back) for the night.⁸¹

8. The “city” (רֶשֶׁת, 3:1–5, [1]) is now mentioned explicitly. A feminine voice narrates a dream she had about the successful nightly search for the man she desires. The chorus again expresses her apprehension of intimacy.

9. The “wilderness” (מִדְבָּר, 3:6) hosts the short monologue of a speaker’s voice describing the arrival of a woman from the desert; she transports myrrh and frankincense, products typically found in the Arabian Peninsula.

10. Three courtly objects structure this idyll: King Solomon’s “bed” (תְּהִלָּתָה, 3:7–11 [7]), where the monarch’s sleep is protected by sixty armed guards, his sumptuous “palanquin” (אֲפִירִזָּה, [9]), and a “wreath” (עַתְּרָה, [11]) that he wears from his wedding. An unidentified speaker invites the “daughters of Jerusalem” to watch the king as he appears in public.

11. In the following address (4:1–7), a masculine speaker praises the beauty of his beloved by describing her from head to breast. The idyll is without a clearly determined spatial setting, but three spaces are successively identified on a metaphorical level: “Gilead” as a production space for wool (i.e. from shepherding), the “Tower of David” and other metaphors of military architecture, and the “Incense Mountains” already mentioned in the chorus of idyll 7.

12. The “Lebanon” mountains (כָּבָן, 4:8) are the setting of another short address by a masculine speaker calling from afar to his nomadic beloved, here identified as “bride.”

13. The “closed garden” (גַּן תְּשִׁלֵּחַ, 4:9–5:1 [4:12]) is presented as the metaphorical setting of a dialogue between a groom and his “sister-bride” during the consummation of their marriage. The proximity to the previously announced royal wedding and the exuberance of luxury consumption (i.e. wine, honey, perfumes, spices, and incense) seem to demand a courtly setting.

14. The “city” (רֶשֶׁת, 5:2–6:3 [5:7]) is again the location of a dream narrative voiced by a feminine speaker addressing the chorus.⁸² She dreams that her lover calls briefly at her closed door and that she then tries to find him in the town at night. Her dream ends with her being arrested and mistreated by the city guards. When the chorus asks

81 The meaning of the chorus is ambiguous, and deliberately so (cf. Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 119–120). First, it is not clear whether the time when “the day will breathe and the shadows flee” refers to the morning or the evening; second, ‘ad she- in late biblical Hebrew may mean not only “until” but also “when, as long as” (cf. Eccl 12); and third, the mountains may be taken either literally (as in 2:8) or metaphorically. The question is whether the woman sends her pretender away and asks him to walk in the mountains until a certain time (as she probably does in 8:14), or, conversely, whether she invites him to haunt the perfumed mountains (i.e. her body) until daybreak (as in the *Tagelied* pattern and in 4:10). In Graetz’s extremely moralistic reading, she does not even ask him to come back (*Schir ha-schirim*, 45).

82 In this study, I will have to use this word with two different meanings. Above, in my discussion of idyll 6, it refers to the repeated lines in a poem, and here, it refers to the group of performers in a dramatic play.

her about her beloved's appearance, she describes his beauty and surmises that he is waiting for her in a garden.

15. A “walnut garden” (רֶשֶׁת אֲגַמָּה, 6:4–7:6 [6:11]) appears as the next scene, where the masculine speaker, who will in the final verse be identified as the king, praises his beloved and extols her status as a publicly recognized favorite among the many wives, concubines, and slave girls in his retinue. Finding her by surprise in the garden, he watches her dance and be praised by the women's chorus,⁸³ who proclaim the domination she has over her kingly lover.

16. We are back in a “field” (שָׂדָה) among “vineyards” (כִּרְמִים, 7:7–14 [12]), with the dialogue between a masculine and a feminine voice: he evokes his erotic desire with metaphors about eating dates, grapes, and apples right from their source; she promises him an outdoor encounter among the fruit trees, where she will make love to him. She finally invites him to eat from the harvest stored in her house.

17. The mention of a “street” (צְדָה, 8:1–4 [1]) with passers-by hints at an urban setting. A feminine voice laments the impossibility of meeting and caressing her beloved. If he were her brother, she fantasizes, she would be allowed to kiss him in the street and bring him into her mother's home. For the third time, the double chorus underscores desire mingled with fear.

18. The “wilderness” (מִדְבָּר, 8:5–7 [5]), which provides the setting for the dialogue between a masculine and a feminine voice, this time refers to a forest or an orchard. The space reference completes a generational cycle, as the woman invites the man to have intercourse with her under the tree where his mother had given birth to him. She praises the consecrated mutual love, which is a power as fatal as death and a good of inestimable value.

19. A “wall” (חָמָם, 8:8–10 [10]) is the metaphorical description of a girl who is approaching the age of being betrothed. Her siblings decide to display her if she is too secluded and retain her if she is too outgoing. She insists that she has reached the age at which it is appropriate to find a man's favor.

20. “Gardens” (כִּרְמִים, 8:11–14 [13]) frame the ambiguous speech of a woman, who, comparing her body to a vineyard (כִּרְמִים), indulges in a reflection on lucrative land leasing.⁸⁴ When a masculine speaker mentions the presence of “friends,” she graciously bids him farewell.

⁸³ The reported speech in 7:1–6 concretizes the praise of the favorite by the court women mentioned earlier in 6:8, according to the plausible hypothesis of Rashi and Franz Delitzsch echoed by Heinrich Graetz (Graetz, *Schir ha-schirim*, 189). In most other interpretations, the woman exhibits herself for the excitement of a male audience, supposedly indicated by the “chariots of Aminadab.”

⁸⁴ According to most interpreters, the speaker is “the bridegroom,” who affirms his property rights over the woman's body. See J. Cheryl Exum, “The Little Sister and Solomon's Vineyard: Song of Songs 8:8–12 as a Lovers' Dialogue,” in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis R. Magary (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 269–282, here 278. However, postulating an implicit change of grammatical referent between the two occurrences of “my vineyard” (כִּרְמִי שְׁלִיל) in 1:6 and 8:12 seems artificial and unconvincing to me. The feminine speaker establishes a parallel between Solomon's property rights on

Spatial references intervene so regularly in the poem that they must be retained as a major organizing principle in its composition. Of our twenty idylls, seventeen are located in clearly identified and characterized landscapes, evoking a peculiar social life-world, with its unique production and consumption patterns, and specific erotic activities. As to the exceptions, idylls 13 and 19 have an exclusively metaphorical setting, namely, a “closed garden” and a “wall,” respectively, while the actual object of the description is in both cases a woman. The setting of idyll 11, which occupies the center of the poem, is metaphorical as well as multifold (Gilead, Jerusalem, Arabia).

Although the division I am proposing here is based on a single criterion (i.e. space), it coincides in part with the structure that scholarly tradition has conventionally given to the Song.⁸⁵ As the chorus verses have long been identified as section endings, the majority of the scholarly works that I consulted proposed structural breaks after idylls 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 17, and 18. However, stretches 1–3 and 4–6 are generally treated as coherent blocks, and I find few precedents for the separation of the short pieces 9 and 12 from the following longer ones.⁸⁶ The dialogue in idyll 14 was treated as a distinct and continuous unit already by Herder, Renan, Budde and others, but the following text is broken down into smaller sense units by virtually all interpreters, the exceptions being Graetz, who apparently treats idyll 15 as a unit,⁸⁷ and Exum, who proposes a division very similar to my own. Idylls 18 and 19 have been identified as clearly delimited units by Herder and much of the subsequent literature; Goulder, however, is to my knowledge the only precedent for considering, as I do, the six final tristichs (i.e. idyll 20) as one separate unit.⁸⁸

I will now use form analysis to demonstrate that the variation between the twenty episodes is too purposeful to be explained by the fortuitous agglutination of fragments or even by the careful work of a redactor, as their juxtaposition manifests, on all structural levels, a deep concern for aesthetics. Reflecting upon a specific example, I will further point out that the social landscapes of the Song of Songs are mutually exclusive and cannot be melted into a coherent narrative or drama, at least not with the elements that the text is ready to give us. I will argue that the alternative hypothesis, according to which the text contains a succession of travesties that depend on an implicit main plot, is contradicted by the fact that the inhabitants of these stories appear as authors rather than as products of space-related imagination.

his vineyard and those she has on her own body. Scholars who have engaged in patriarchal as well as feminist moralizing have been eager to turn this parallel into an opposition, with the idea that Solomon offers (rather than demands) money. See Dawid W. De Villiers, “Not for Sale! Solomon and Sexual Perversion in the Song of Songs,” *Old Testament Essays* 3 (1990): 317–324.

⁸⁵ In his 2009 book, Elie Assis is very outspoken in his rejection of physical space and social class as interpretive categories for the Song (*Flashes of Fire*, 13). Yet he proposes a division into sense units that exactly matches my own for idylls 1 to 11.

⁸⁶ Herder (*Salomons Lieder der Liebe*, 22) treated idyll 9 as a separate fragment, and Budde (*Die fünf Megillot*, 21) argued the same regarding idyll 12.

⁸⁷ Graetz, *Schir ha-schirim*, 182, 186, 196.

⁸⁸ Michael D. Goulder, *The Song of Fourteen Songs* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 68.

Finally, I will group the idylls evenly into four landscape categories and characterize the ten speakers that appear in them.

Evidence from Versification

As the Midrash suggests, the title *Shir ha-shirim* must originally have had the meaning “a song composed of songs”⁸⁹ before its successful reception made it into a *Ho-heslied*, a “supreme” or “major” canticle. This specification leaves open, of course, the question of whether the composition is due to a compiler of heterogeneous materials or to a single author. In the post-exilic scriptures, theme blocks organized by means of key terms and catch phrases also appear in purposefully arranged collections such as the Fifth Book of Psalms.⁹⁰ Observations on the numerical regularity of composition have been put forward to defend the authorial unity of other post-exilic biblical books, especially Job,⁹¹ Kohelet,⁹² Ben Sira,⁹³ and Wisdom.⁹⁴ The Song of Songs may be another such case, though the counting of syllables, *cola*, verses, and strophes must remain hypothetical, all the more so when conjectures concerning possible lacunae have to be taken into account. On the basis of my own reconstruction of the text’s *parallelismus membrorum* and other prosodic patterns (given in the appendix to the present study), it seems possible to argue in favor of numerical regularity. Indeed the verse count that seems most likely to me adds up to 400 single *cola*, 100 of which belong to the initial seven idylls, 100 to the central six idylls, and 200 to the final seven idylls. The symmetrical location of the exceptionally long idylls 7 and 14 in their respective seven-idyll sections completes the bipartition of all three sections in proportions that resemble Euclid’s golden ratio.⁹⁵ The se-

⁸⁹ *Shir ha-Shirim Rabba* I 11.

⁹⁰ Erich Zenger, “The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms: Psalms 107–145,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (1998): 77–102; Michael K. Snearley, *The Return of the King: Messianic Expectation in Book V of the Psalter* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

⁹¹ Jan P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible: At the Interface of Hermeneutics and Structural Analysis*, 4 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1998–2004); Id. *The Book of Job in Form: A Literary Translation with Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

⁹² Addison G. Wright, “The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qohelet,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968): 313–334; Id. “The Riddle of the Sphinx Revisited: Numerical Patterns in the Book of Qohelet,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980): 35–52, and “Additional Numerical Patterns in Qohelet,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 32–43.

⁹³ Jeremy A. Corley, “A Numerical Structure in Sirach 44:1–50:24,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007): 43–63; Id., “Searching for Structure and Redaction in Ben Sira: An Investigation of Beginnings and Endings,” in *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology*, ed. Angelo Passaro and Giuseppe Bellia (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 21–47.

⁹⁴ Addison G. Wright, “The Structure of the Book of Wisdom,” *Biblica* 48 (1967): 165–184; Id. “Numerical Patterns in the Book of Wisdom,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29 (1967): 524–538.

⁹⁵ 60:40, 61:39, and 129:71, respectively, to be compared to the ideal ratio of 62:38.

quence of 7+6+7 idylls is thereby developed further into a no less symmetrical 6+1+3+3+1+6 pattern.

idylls 1–6	idyll 7	Idylls 8–10	Idylls 11–13	idyll 14	Idylls 15–20
60	39 (+1 missing in 2:9)	39	61	70 (+1 missing in 5:11)	128 (+1 missing in 7:5)
	100		100		200

As the Song's division into verses is not in all cases unequivocal, the exact decimal result of this calculation may be due to coincidence and therefore does not warrant any further conclusions. However, the general observation of a structured and even symmetrical formal variation must be further explored. Inside this quantitative grid, the twenty "songs" or idylls are distinguished not only by their setting and action, but also on the formal level through the sophisticated use of parallelisms in versification, wording, or meaning.

The structural function of rhetoric in the Song of Songs has been analyzed so far mainly with respect to the repeated panels and refrains (or chorus lines, to be more precise), but versification and strophic patterns are a no less important guide to the Song's interpretation. As is the case elsewhere in biblical poetry, verse is the combined result of semantic parallelism and the repetition of an accentual pattern which, if counted according to the Ley-Budde-Sievers tradition,⁹⁶ alternates here between the four modes 2:2(:2), 3:2(:2), 2:3(:2), 3:3(:3); only exceptionally do we find 4:4 in idyll 13. The basic elements of versification are distichs and tristichs. Occasionally, there is a peculiar form of the chiastic tetrastich that envelops a central parallelism:

"What a woman is she, who appears like the dawn,
as beautiful as the moon,
as bright as the sun,
as awesome as troops under banners!" (6:10)

These basic elements (henceforth d, t, and q) are combined into different types of stanzas, namely, tetrastichs (dd), pentastichs (dt), odd hexastichs (tt), even hexastichs (ddd), heptastichs (ddt), and occasionally longer units. These stanzas in turn compose idylls of varying strophic patterns. If we leave out the chorus lines for

⁹⁶ This is a method that bases its reconstruction on the Masoretic distribution of main word accents. Its applicability is debated, but it is still quite widely defended by scholars. Klaus Seybold, for example, returns to "traditional structural analysis" and to "certain constellations of the so-called accentual method" after critically evaluating various alternatives; see his *Poetik der Psalmen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 108, 125; and likewise Wilfred G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 97–103; and W. McConell, "Meter," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 472–476, here 473 with literature.

the moment, it can be argued that each one of the twenty idylls follows its own peculiar composition scheme. The twenty idylls can be divided into five one-stanza idylls (2, 3, 6, 9, 12), five two-stanza idylls (1, 4, 5, 17, 20), five three-stanza idylls (8, 10, 11, 18, 19), and five idylls with four or more stanzas (7, 13, 14, 15, 16).

Of the one-stanza idylls, idyll 9 consists of one tetrastich (dd), idyll 6 of one pentastich (dt), idyll 3 of one odd hexastich (tt), idyll 12 of one even hexastich (ddd), and idyll 2 of one heptastich (ddt).

As for the two-stanza idylls, idyll 17 has two tetrastichs (dd-dd), idyll 1 two pentastichs (dt-dt), idyll 20 two odd hexastichs (tt-tt), idyll 4 two even hexastichs (ddd-ddd), and idyll 5 an even octastich-hexastich sequence (dddd-dddd).

Of the three-stanza idylls, idyll 19 is composed in two tetrastichs and one distich (dd-dd-d) and idyll 8 in three chiastic tetrastichs, the central one being expanded to a pentastich (q-qh-q). Idyll 18 has three pentastichs (td-td-dt). Idyll 10 starts with an odd hexastich, continues with an odd octastich, and ends with a tetrastich (tt-ttd-dd). Idyll 11 can be divided into two decastichs and an even hexastichic chorus (dddddd-dddddd-ddd).

The five longer idylls follow a common pattern insofar as they are divided into two semantic units, which are structurally but not quantitatively symmetrical. In idyll 16, the four distichs of the first part and the four chiastic tetrastichs of the second part can be read as 1+1 symmetrical strophic units (dddd-qqqq), although the second part is twice as long as the first and a quantitative viewpoint would rather distinguish 2+4 tetrastichs. In the four other long idylls, the first part is dominated by odd and the second by even stanzas. Idyll 13 consists of 2+2 stanzas: three lines of three cola, then four lines of four cola make up the first part (ttt-dddd) and two even hexastichs the second part (ddd-ddd). Idyll 7 follows a 3+3 pattern: the first part is distributed into three tristichic stanzas (tt-tt-tt), each of which starts with the word *הָרָה*; the second part is in three tetrastichs (dd-dd-d), each of which is introduced by an imperative verbal form. In idyll 15, the bipartite scheme is extended to 4+4 stanzas. The first part falls into a pentastich, an octastich (here, the text block 6:5b-7 is filled with a repetition from 4:1–2), an odd nonastich, and a chiastic tetrastich that echoes the initial pentastich (td-ddd-ttt-q). The second part consists of two even hexastichs and two octastichs with a final punch line (ddd-ddd-dddd-dddt). Finally, idyll 14 likewise comprises four stanzas in the first part, structured by the odd verses in the stanza endings (ddd-ddt-ddt-ddt), while the second part is a dramatic recitative of twenty-two distichs that is only structured by its subject matter, so that two decastichs seem to envelop two dodecastichs.

In the idylls containing multiple stanzas, the breach between strophic units is often stressed through the emphatic use of imperatives in the first word of the new stanza.⁹⁷ This is most regularly the case in the long idylls, where the change of musical rhythm from the first to the second part is accentuated by the emphatic

⁹⁷ See in idyll 1 (בְּשַׁבְּעַנִּי), idyll 6 (בְּשַׁבְּעַנִּי), idyll 10 (בְּנַעֲצָנִי), idyll 18 (שִׁירַנִּי), and idyll 20 (בְּרַחַת)

imperative form that starts the second movement.⁹⁸ This structuring procedure has frequent parallels in the symmetrical compositions included in the Book of Psalms, where Pieter van der Lugt similarly detects imperatives and interrogative pronouns as “transition markers” dividing each psalm into stanza-groups or “cantos.”⁹⁹

Varying a relatively limited canon of prosodic elements, the poet succeeds in giving each idyll its distinctive strophic pattern without ever repeating the same composition. The refined poetic craftsmanship corroborates to some extent the structural division that I have proposed above on the basis of spatial settings, insofar as the borders between the idylls are generally marked by changes in versification.¹⁰⁰ The common bipartite construction scheme of the long idylls (13–16) may also count as an argument in favor of treating them as structural units.

As I will show, the repetition and variation of recurrent motifs intervene on five different levels: parallelism can connect verses belonging to the same idyll; subdivide a given idyll; stitch together neighboring idylls; distinguish sequences of landscapes and characters (there are four of them, as we will see); and occasionally create links that cut across these categories. In some cases, idylls are set apart from each other with the help of a procedure called *inclusio*, which frames a sense unit by placing the same expression at its beginning and at its end. This happens in idyll 3 with references to sheep-grazing (תְּרֵעוֹת at the start and תְּרֵעוֹת at the end), in idyll 7 with the invocation of the deer (צְבָבִי אוֹ לְעֵפֶר הַאֲלִילִים), in idyll 13 with the mention of honey and milk, and in idyll 15 with words referring to royalty (קָלְבָּות early on in 6:8 and קָלָךְ at the end in 7:6). The long idyll 15 is also unified through the long series of Syro-Palestinian toponyms that starts with Tirzah and ends with the Carmel.

More often, repeated words or phrases at the end of stanzas singularize the units. In each of its two stanzas, idyll 1 ends the first line with the phrase “your loving more than wine” (דְּךָ מִיְּנָךְ) and the last line with “they love you” (אַהֲבָוֹת). In idyll 7, the tristich and the distich sections both end with the word “blossom” (קְמַדְרָה). The tristich stanzas in this idyll present six verse endings of the type “verb + indirect object,” first using two Pi’el, then two Hif’il, and finally two Nif’al verbs. Idyll 8 repeats three entire phrases. In idyll 11, the verses בְּנֵךְ יִפְהָה רְעִיתִי and בְּנֵם יִשְׁבְּלָה אֵין בְּנֵם that open and close the first movement become the two *cola* of the idyll’s final verse, בְּלֵךְ יִפְהָה רְעִיתִי and וּמוֹמֵן אֵין בְּנֵם. Both stanzas of the tristich section of idyll 13 have the verse endings “spices” (בְּשָׂמִים) and “Lebanon” (לְבָנָן). In the same way, the tristich section of

⁹⁸ See in in idyll 7 (קָמִים), idyll 13 (שְׁמָנִים), idyll 15 (שְׁמָנִים), and idyll 16 (לְבָנָן).

⁹⁹ In symmetrical psalms, the second movement often starts with an imperative (Ps 45:11, 47:7, 112:6, 123:3, 126:4, 132:8, 137:7, 142:5), with a question opened by the interrogative pronoun *mi* or *mah* (Ps 42:6, 113:5, 114:5, 116:12; cf. Song 6:10), with the word *hinneh* (127:3, 128:4; 132:6) or with the word *barukh* (124:6). See Pieter van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (3 vols, Leiden: Brill, 2006–2014), I, 77–81, 536–564; III, 3–4.

¹⁰⁰ The switch from pentastichs to hexastichs signals the beginning of idyll 4, just as the reverse switch occurs in idyll 6. A rhythmic switch from distichic to tristichic stanzas marks the start of idylls 7, 10, 13, 15, and 20, as well as the reverse turn in idyll 17.

idyll 15 repeats the stanza ending “terrible as armies” (אִימָה כְּנֶגֶלֹת), while the distich section repeats “prince” (גָּדִיב) at the end of its first two stanzas. Simpler rhymes also play a role in individualizing the idylls. Rhymes on *-im* are present in idylls 3, 5, 7, 13, and 16. The rhyme is *-or* in idyll 14, *-i* in idyll 17, and *-ah* in idylls 18 and 19, the former having in addition a recurrent alliteration on *-ish-*.

However, the variations in the poetic form of the idylls do not simply duplicate the spatial shifts in the content of the idylls. In a fairly systematic way, the repetition of phrases, rhymes, words, and concepts also serves to draw together neighboring sections. This procedure, defined as *concatenatio* in classical scholarship and as “association” by M.D. Cassuto in his study on the Song,¹⁰¹ is detectable in all twenty idylls that I have defined. The king, for example, who is the protagonist of idyll 1, is again metaphorically mentioned in idyll 2. The cycle of agricultural tasks connects the guarding of the vineyard in idyll 2 to the grazing of the sheep in idyll 3.¹⁰² The mention of running quadrupeds leads from the sheep and kids at the end of idyll 3 to the horses at the beginning of idyll 4; in addition, the kids (קָדְנִים) at the end of idyll 3 are also echoed by the place name Engedi (עֶגֶד), meaning “Kid-Fountain,” at the end of idyll 4. In a similar way, the repeated mention of trees links idylls 4 and 5, and that of apples connects idylls 5 and 6. An entire repeated word sequence “like the gazelle and the fawn of the deer” stitches the end of idyll 6 to the beginning of idyll 7. At the end of the latter, the imperative “let us seize” (לְקַח-וּ) announces “I seized him” (לְקַחְתָּא) at the end of idyll 8; also “day” at the end of idyll 7 is echoed by its opposite, “night,” at the start of idyll 8. The markets in idyll 8 and the merchants in idyll 9 cluster two of the Song’s three references to trade. Two rhyming endings ‘ashan, rokhel, Yísra’el, and ‘argaman connect idyll 9 to the beginning of idyll 10. Solomon’s sword-bearers in idyll 10 and David’s shield-bearers in idyll 11 create the following connection. The mountain chorus in idyll 11 prepares Lebanon’s appearance in idyll 12, which is metaphorically repeated in idylls 13 and 14. Similarly, the formula “my sister, my bride” (כָּלָה) in idyll 13 has its echoes in the words “bride” (כָּלָה) in the preceding idyll and “sister” (כָּתָה) in the one that follows. The garden setting, the long distichic praise of the beloved’s body, and the lily image place the two outstandingly long idylls 14 and 15 into a close parallel. The phrase “see if the vine flourished” (הִפְרַחַת הַגַּפֵּן) in idyll 15 is taken up again in idyll 16. The reference to “the mixed wine” (הַקְּמַת) in idyll 15 has its counterpoint in the phrase “like the strong wine” (כִּיּוֹת הַשּׁׂבֵב) in idyll 16, which in turn is mirrored by “from the spiced wine” (מִן הַרְקֵחַ) that occupies the same metrical position in idyll 17. The phrase “I would not be despised” (לֹא-יִבְזֹה לִי) in idyll 17 is followed by “he would be utterly despised” (בֹּזֶבֶז לִי) in idyll 18. The two last named idylls highlight the mother as their common theme, and this is followed by the emphasis on the sister

¹⁰¹ Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied*, 67–68.

¹⁰² For a more detailed study of the associations between the first three idylls, see Thöne, *Liebe zwischen Stadt und Feld*, 111–112.

in idyll 19. After money has been mocked in idyll 18, the verse-ending “silver” (נָזֶב) is shared between idyll 19 and idyll 20. And the mention of King Solomon in the latter links the end of the cycle to its beginning.

The regular appearance of these stylistic devices seems to show that the text is less corrupted than has been thought and that its study is definitively possible without textual rearrangements and emendations.¹⁰³ Moreover, these sophisticated exercises of literary parallelism give the collection another earmark of being thoughtfully arranged by an individual author with a simultaneous care for symmetrical construction and constant variation. Even Othmar Keel’s hypothesis of a smart compiler who “stitched together” heterogeneous raw material by inserting chorus lines and adding parallel words and concepts here and there is difficult to maintain in the face of the sheer amount of cross-references between the different units.¹⁰⁴ If Keel was right, the Song would consist of more stitches than patches.¹⁰⁵ It seems far more likely that most, if not all, of the twenty idylls were written with a view of the macrostructure of the Song in mind. This simultaneous use of parallels for the five named purposes – to subdivide the idyll, to individualize it, to connect it to its neighbors, to create larger sequences, and to create a common structure – is indeed the reason why the structural analysis of the Song can lead to many different results and why scholarship has not failed to produce them. I conclude that the formal poetic devices clearly prove the unity and coherence of the composition; but structural analysis can only use them as auxiliary means inside an organizing scheme mainly based on the concept of space, to which we now have to return.

Spatial Discontinuity and Formal Cohesion in Song of Songs 1:9 – 2:7

Most interpreters see idylls 4, 5, and 6 as a single continuous dialogue in spite of their different settings.¹⁰⁶ To be sure, there is a great similarity between the first two: they are both dialogues between lovers lying alongside each other; both start with a man’s compliment in the second person and end with a woman’s statement mentioning the lover in the third person; both borrow images from plant life; and

¹⁰³ The only clear cases of text corruption seem to be the missing endings in 2:9, 5:11, and 7:5, as well as the unclear word נָזֶב in 7:1. The repeated verses in 6:5b-7 may not have originally belonged there.

¹⁰⁴ Brenner, *The Song of Songs*, 75; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 5, 17, with the conclusion: “I find no overall formal structure.”

¹⁰⁵ This is indeed the outcome of Hans-Josef Heinevetter’s textual criticism of the Song: since he attributes systematically all the structuring elements to a redactor named “R,” the latter is finally held responsible for most of the text and all of its presumed meaning. See Heinevetter, *Komm nun*, 67–68.

¹⁰⁶ See on the unity of this passage especially Exum, *The Song of Songs*, 97.

both express a blissful mood. Both of them are in hexastichs and only differ by their meter, which shifts from 2:2 to 3:2. However, the couple in idyll 4 reclines at a royal banquet, whereas the one in idyll 5 is making love in a forest.

The sequence of contrasting settings is continued in idyll 6, where a woman speaks about her desire for an absent, otherwise unidentified man whom she has met in a tavern. In her chorus, love is still described as sleeping, a mere possibility waiting to be woken up. While she intensely desires to become intimate with him, she fears this experience at the same time.¹⁰⁷ Carl Gebhardt pertinently interpreted the chorus as a manifestation of “sexual anxiety” (*Geschlechtsangst*).¹⁰⁸ In sum, the lovers in idylls 4 and 5 are joyfully having a physical relationship, but in idyll 6, a single woman – supposedly a young girl – still anticipates it with apprehension.

The stage directions given by the female speakers confirm the impression of an organized frieze of independent dramatic mini-scenes. The male character in idyll 4 appears as reclining (רֹלֶה) in the woman's embrace; the man in idyll 5 is standing upright while she is sitting in front of him; in idyll 6, both characters seem to be seated. Finally, in idyll 7 the man will be introduced as running and jumping, while the woman is called to rise. Commentators who tried to organize these scenes into a linear narrative supposed that the king and his companion attended a banquet, went on a country spree, and relaxed in a tavern, after which the man mysteriously disappeared. Even with this complicated construction, we would still have to explain how the woman has recovered her inexperience between idylls 5 and 6. One may argue that the awakening of love in the latter idyll is told as a flashback explaining how the lovers first met,¹⁰⁹ but why should the king have picked up his mistress in a tavern? Though idyll 5 and idyll 6 can hardly be connected by narrative means, they are subtly knitted together on a formal level. Not only do they share a common reference to apples, they also possess final words that form a rhyme pair with strongly contrasting affective values: there it is bliss (לְחַנְקָה), and here it is suffering (תְּלִין אֲבַבָּה).

It is, at this point, important to analyze the sequence of contrasting place designations from the perspective of the social institutions and literary conventions of antiquity. The two biblical *hapax legomena* “banquet” (כָּבֵד) in idyll 4 and “wine house” (גִּתְּתָה) in idyll 6, often understood as synonyms by interpreters,¹¹⁰ name the two typical environments of wine consumption in ancient Greek society, both

¹⁰⁷ The literal meaning of the chorus line “do not wake up love” obviously contradicts the assumption of a continuous plot in idylls 4 to 6. Interpreters have opted for the unsatisfactory hypothesis that the speaker entreats the daughters of Jerusalem not to *trouble* her love “before it pleases her.” See Heinevetter, *Komm nun*, 94.

¹⁰⁸ Carl Gebhardt, “Das Lied der Lieder,” *Der Morgen* 6 (1930): 447–457, here 450.

¹⁰⁹ Ewald, *Das Hohelied Salomo's*, 71–72.

¹¹⁰ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 391.

being interpreted in literature as markers of class distinction.¹¹¹ The banquet or symposium (συμπόσιον) was an institution of the cultivated aristocracy, to which women were not admitted, except in entertainment functions as waitresses, flutists, and hetaerae. It is when evoking this Greek institution, which Judaeans had already tried to imitate,¹¹² that the Song introduces the neologism “my companion” (רִעִיתִי). It is the only biblical book to use this term. The Hebrew רִעִיתִי and the Greek ἑταίρα have a similar meaning, and the woman appears indeed in the exact context where an Athenian female could only appear if she was a hetaera in the narrow sense of the word, that is, a professional of refined erotic entertainment.¹¹³ However, the possessive pronoun in “my companion” designates this woman as the king’s mistress, which points to a slightly more gender-balanced version of the sympotic ritual. Alexander the Great created the Hellenistic royal banquet as a synthesis of the Athenian philosophical circle, the Macedonian companionship of arms, and the Persian hierarchic display of opulence.¹¹⁴ His symposia were attended by sixty to seventy officers and civil office-holders according to a strict order of rank. Hellenistic custom progressively allowed for the presence of women.¹¹⁵ Banqueters could bring their lovers, sometimes masked, and let them speak in public: the first Ptolemy’s mistress, the hetaera Thais, famously intervened at the Persepolis symposium and suggested the destruction of the Achaemenid palace.¹¹⁶ Two Jewish sources, the Book of Daniel and Josephus, were particularly attentive to the female companions who shared in the royal banquets. King Belshazzar feasted with “his nobles, his wives and his concubines.”¹¹⁷ Demetrius II, the Seleukid king of Syria during two periods in the second century BCE, was likewise represented banqueting with concubines in conditions close to those shown in idyll 4.¹¹⁸ Song 7:3 mentions the mixing bowl that was used at symposia,¹¹⁹ with a revealing comparison between this object and the concubine’s pri-

¹¹¹ John F. Donahue, *Food and Drink in Antiquity: Readings from the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 191.

¹¹² See Sira 32:1–5.

¹¹³ Kathryn Topper, *The Imagery of the Athenian Symposium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 107: “In fact, attendance at a symposium is now accepted as one of the few features that securely identifies a *hetaera* in vase painting.” On hetaerae at banquets, see also James Davidson, “Making a Spectacle of Her(self): The Greek Courtesan and the Art of the Present,” in *The Courtesan’s Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 29–51, here 36–41; Marek Wełowski, *The Rise of the Greek Aristocratic Banquet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 33.

¹¹⁴ Konrad Vössing, *Mensa regia: Das Bankett beim hellenistischen König und beim römischen Kaiser* (Munich: Saur, 2004), 27–92; John Wilkins and Robin Nadeau, eds, *A Companion to Food in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 246–248.

¹¹⁵ Vössing, *Mensa regia*, 83, 128–129, 225–226.

¹¹⁶ Diodorus, *Library of History* XVII 70.

¹¹⁷ Dan 5:2.

¹¹⁸ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* X.11.2–3; XIII.14.2; *Jewish War* I.4.6.

¹¹⁹ Martin Langner, “Where Should We Place the Krater? An Optimistic Reconstruction of the Vessels’ Visibility during the Symposium,” in *Approaching the Ancient Artifact: Representation, Narrative,*

vate parts. Understandably, appearing at a banquet was considered demeaning for a wife of rank, as the opening chapter of the Book of Esther shows.¹²⁰

In complete contrast to the symposium, the tavern (καπηλεῖον) was a social hub and indeed a daily necessity of the urban populace, a space that middle class women could patronize alone, just as men did, without endangering their reputation. The Athenian institution of the tavern has been recently studied and, one must say, discovered by Clare Kelly-Blazeby,¹²¹ who arrived at the conclusion that “men and women must have come together to drink in non-sexualized situations.”¹²² Even slaves occasionally patronized taverns, as it appears from the Talmud.¹²³ Tavern signs, indicating to passers-by that a cask had been opened, underscored the universal access to the place.¹²⁴

In sum, the tavern displaying its inviting sign was as egalitarian as the banquet in the king’s presence was exclusive. The banquet and the tavern thus correspond to plainly distinctive class horizons, social rituals, and gender regimes. In the Song, the distance between the banquet scene (idyll 4) and the tavern scene (idyll 6) is further emphasized by the intervening forest scene in idyll 5. Moreover, the three idylls do not only possess a different setting and social environment (courtly, pastoral, urban), they also deal with different types of consumption goods (perfumes, apples, pastries) and finally give a distinctive meaning to sexual love (as a polygynous, exclusive, or imaginary relationship). Whereas the king at the banquet compares his concubine to racing horses, the nomadic lovers in the forest compare each other to flowers and trees. The city girl does not name, describe, or compare the man who courted her at the tavern; she is entirely given to solitary introspection and observes in herself the awakening of Eros.

In all three cases, the women double their immediate surroundings by an imagined space. The court woman first mentions the precious spikenard oil that she wears as a perfume on her body; she then likens her lover to a bundle of myrrh that is (or might be) hanging between her breasts; and, on an entirely imaginary level, she compares the reclining lovers to plants growing beside one another, with herself being the vine and her lover being the henna bush (הַכְּפַר אֲשֶׁר). By passing from a pair

and Function, ed. Amalia Avramidou and Denise Demetriou (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 385 – 398, here 396 – 397.

¹²⁰ Esth 1:12; cf. Vössing, *Mensa regia*, 47.

¹²¹ Clare Kelly-Blazeby, *Kapeleion: Casual and Commercial Wine Consumption in Classical Greece* (PhD Dissertation, University of Leicester, 2008), 61: “The elite ‘reality’ which they collectively construct during the *symposium* serves to deny the external world of encroaching democracy and aristocratic decline. At the opposite pole, the tavern was almost the deconstruction of the elite ideal.”

¹²² Clare Kelly-Blazeby, “Woman + Wine = Prostitute in Classical Athens?” in *Greek Prostitutes in the Ancient Mediterranean, 800 BCE – 200 CE*, ed. Allison Glazebrook and Madeleine M. Henry (WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 86 – 105, here 105.

¹²³ *bBaba Metzia* 64b.

¹²⁴ In his *Viticulture and Brewing in the Ancient Orient* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922), Henry Lutz compares the Song of Songs with references in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry (138, 149).

of processed vegetal commodities to another pair of imagined living plants, she fictitiously transports herself and her lover into a metaphorical agriculture. In a similar but antithetical way, the woman in the forest is bedded with her lover in a grassy nest among a third pair of plant species, cedars and juniper trees, while describing this vegetation as a metaphorical architecture that provides the couple with bedding (עַרְשָׁנוּ), beams (קָרְוָת בְּתִיעַ), and rafters (רָהִיטָנָה): a palace hall where they can relish in their love-making as if they were attending a metaphorical banquet.

In a word, the courtly woman imagines her banquet couch as a vineyard, and the woman in the wilderness likens her forest to a palace. Both couples live a distinct experience, but fantasize about each other's spaces. A similar dialectics is generated by the girl's fantasies in idyll 6: she desires (and fears) a lover's embrace that is twice depicted as real in the two preceding idylls. This reciprocity of imagination and experience shows the intricate coherence between the idylls. At the same time, it excludes any hierarchic order of reality and travesty. The court, the forest, and the tavern are real on the same level because they are able to generate imaginations of each other. The Song's characters, far from being travesties, appear side by side, each one being coherently typified by his or her social distinctiveness. All persons, women as well as men, are equally overwhelmed by feelings of love, but they realize them in different ways: one love bond is described as hierarchical, the other as reciprocal, and the third as introspective. These varying patterns in gender relations are a central signifier of social stratification. The characters are conscious of the limitations imposed on them by their environments, but they (or more exactly, the women) overcome them through the power of their respective fantasies. Most of the Song's spaces, animals, plants, and other *realia* thus appear in two different semantic horizons, with mimetic as well as metaphorical meanings.¹²⁵ Though the travesty hypothesis has the merit of revealing the Song's two-tiered poetics, it unduly simplifies it by assuming that a wedding or some other unified normality must be the exclusive substrate of all the imagined scenes.

In brief, neither a linear narrative arc leading from acquaintance to sexual consummation nor a vertical hierarchy distinguishing between real and virtual spaces is

125 Wine and oil in idyll 1 and idyll 13 are explicitly given mimetic and metaphorical meanings in the same context. The same happens with the vineyard in idyll 2 and idyll 20, as well as with the horse in idyll 4, the forest in idyll 5, honey in idyll 13, and fruit in idyll 16. Nomads' tents, a metaphor of black skin in idyll 2, appear as *realia* in idyll 3. The metaphorical dark curtains in idyll 2 are, as we will see below, those of the royal banquet tent, which becomes the scene of idyll 4. Other objects that are physical elements of the scenery in one idyll and metaphors of comeliness in another include the sun (to which there is a mimetic reference in idyll 2 and a metaphorical one in idyll 15), sheep (3 vs. 11, 15), gold and silver (4, 10, 20 vs. 11, 14), jewels (4, 13 vs. 14, 15), cedar trees (5 vs. 14), apples (6 vs. 16), sweets (6 vs. 16), flowers (7, 16 vs. 5, 14), birds (7 vs. 14), fruit trees (7 vs. 13, 16), mountains (7 vs. 11), walls and towers (7, 8 vs. 11, 15, 19), troops (8, 10, 14 vs. 11, 15), cedarwood (10 vs. 19), purple (10 vs. 15), curtains (10 vs. 2), Mount Lebanon (12 vs. 13, 14, 15), milk (13 vs. 14), doors (14 vs. 19), gardens (15, 20 vs. 13, 14), pomegranates (15, 16 vs. 11, 15, 13), ivory (15 vs. 14), henna bushes (16 vs. 4), and the apple tree (18 vs. 5).

likely to help us organize these scenes and understand their meaning. They have to be perceived in their dialectical contrast as mirror images of each other. Their interpretation needs an understanding of their symmetrical variation. The least coercive interpretation of the Song of Songs is that of a well-crafted cycle of twenty poems by the same author, who in an intentional pursuit of variety has introduced different sets of speakers in distinctive social and psychological conditions.

The Four Cycles

In spite of their multiple scenic shifts, the twenty idylls show effects of *déjà vu*. Recognizable settings and constellations tend to reappear at certain intervals. More precisely, the Song's episodes can be divided among four recurrent environments – the king's retinue, the city, the vineyard, and the wilderness – that are populated by inhabitants who respectively follow courtly, urban, rural, and pastoral patterns of life. The twenty idylls are distributed among the four environments with a concern for balanced variation, since each one of the cycles apparently comprises an equal number of five idylls.

Court (idylls 1, 4, 10, 13, and 15)

The successive courtly locations of a bedchamber, banquet, procession, and walnut garden host the numerous persons and objects that compose the king's retinue: women, soldiers, horses, chariots, a ceremonial bed, and a royal palanquin. These elements of a palace or an itinerant court are never named with any unified designation; rather, they are kept together through the parallel mention of the king in idylls 1, 4, 10, and 15. The first three of these idylls are marked by the practice of sophisticated and conspicuous material culture, an element which allows for the adding of idyll 13 to the same cycle, as it mainly consists in long enumerations of exotic aromatics and other luxury items. The refined pleasures of this courtly space thus focus progressively on ointments, jewels, furniture, spices, and, finally, the king's polygynous relationships with the three types of women listed in 6:8: wives, mistresses, and slave girls. The feminine voices in the sequence seem to cover this three-tiered range of female characters in a bottom-up succession. In idyll 1, the king appears in private with one of the maids (עֲלֵמֹת); his public symposium partner in idyll 4 likewise seems to be a hetaera, who is addressed as “my companion” (רַעֲנָתִי); the procession in idyll 10 shows him without a partner but remembering his mother and impressing the onlooking “daughters of Zion;” idyll 13 displays his sexual consummation with a woman he always calls “my sister-bride” (אֲחֹתִי בָּלָה); and idyll 15 introduces the favorite mistress, who is once again called “my companion,” as the dominant person at court: she bears here the title “the *shulamit*” (הַשׁוֹלָמִית). The abundance of women of all social classes, from slave to queen, is

counterbalanced by a male crowd of “friends” (5:1) and soldiers, who protect the king’s sexual activity without competing with it. The court, though dominated by a male master, is a space of proportional representation of the genders: the numerical equivalence between the sixty wives and countless concubines, and the sixty body guards and one thousand soldiers is obvious.

City (idylls 6, 8, 14, 17, and 19)

This place is explicitly named “the city” (*ha-‘ir*) in the two dream scenes, which mention markets and fortifications as the typical urban buildings. The wine house, the street, and the house of the protagonist’s mother (twice mentioned in idylls 8 and 17) indicate the same setting elsewhere. The speaker is a young city girl who had met and admired a youth in a tavern, who evokes him in her dream fantasies, but who is anxious to delay the fulfillment of her desires because she is intensely aware of the social illegitimacy of the caresses she longs for (8:1). Her ambivalent feelings are expressed in the “Lovesickness” refrain (closing idylls 6, 14) and two chorus sections, the “Caress” distich (6, 17) and the “Adjuration” tetrastich (6, 8, 17), which overlap on two occasions.¹²⁶ The girl always appears in the midst of her family and her female friends who form the chorus, but she has not yet opened up to a masculine partner, so that her singleness distinguishes the sequence of urban scenes from the three other environments. This sequence is also the only cycle that does not include any male “friends,” as men appear only as objects of female fantasy: either as the violent city watchmen, or as the visual ideal of the lover. The girl’s anticipation of the imagined relationship includes the rather limited scenes of her greeting him with a brotherly kiss (17), bringing him home (8, 17), catering for him under the supervision of her mother (17), and being caressed by his hands (6, 17). For an ancient audience, this speaker’s naïve references to street-walking, embraces, and favors had probably a certain comic effect because they evince her incomprehension of erotic speech and practice. Idyll 19, with its metaphorical urbanism, apparently belongs to this cycle and closes it. The girl’s siblings here comment on her imminent puberty and start preparations for match-making, to which the heroine responds with eagerness.

Vineyard (idylls 2, 7, 11, 16, and 20)

This space is explicitly named *kerem* in idylls 2, 7, 16, and 20, which in addition mention other rural features, namely, a walled-in farmstead (2:9), a dovecote (2:14), a

¹²⁶ Gordon Johnston, “The Enigmatic Genre and Structure of the Song of Songs, Part 3,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (2009): 289–305.

granary (7:14), fields (7:12), gardens (8:13), different fruit trees (2:13, 7:8, 7:12), wild doves (2:12), and mountains in the distance. This cycle's distinctive chorus section, the "Perfumed Mountains" tetrastich (idylls 7, 11, and 20), connects the hybrid idyll 11 to this sequence. The protagonist is an unmarried peasant woman who by order of her brothers has to guard the family's vineyard. Though her marginal workplace is not enjoyable and although she regrets her "black" tan, she profits from the relative lack of social control for erotic encounters. The idylls pertaining to this cycle introduce possibly more than one male lover. A masculine voice in idyll 11 uses first pastoral, then military metaphors, in both cases referring exclusively to the sense of vision. In contrast, relations with the man in idylls 7 and 20 lay emphasis on hearing and speech;¹²⁷ metaphors are drawn from wildlife; and he himself is compared to a mountain stag (2:9:17, 8:14). The man in idyll 16 uses domestic plants and fruits as metaphors while experiencing his beloved with the senses of touch, smell, and taste. The "Mutual Possession" chorus distich occurs in the dialogue with both the "stag man" (2:16) and the "fruit man" (7:11), but while the heroine temporizes with the former, she invites the latter to steal away to the fields and make love there. None of the two occasions inspires to her the conventional fantasies of introducing her partner into her home and family; on the contrary, she sends the stag man away in the last line of the Song. Her language is that of a sexually experienced woman who masters the art of ambiguous speech. The ending of idyll 2 is generally read as a veiled allusion to a previous promiscuous life; the "Perfumed Mountains" chorus can be given different levels of sexual invitation. The calls to catch foxes (in idyll 7) and to smell and eat stored fruits (in idyll 16) are placed on the same level of erotic wordplay. Finally, the allusions to vineyard leases and visiting "friends" (in idyll 20) may even imply hopes for paid returns. However, this woman's erotic life is probably not meant to be fully transparent to the reader, and the impression is that of coquetry rather than outright promiscuity.

Wilderness (idylls 3, 5, 9, 12, and 18)

Explicit "wilderness" (*midbar*) and related settings in the steppe, forest, mountains, and desert distinguish this cycle of short (or even very short) pieces from the others. They show a goatherdess on her way through a vast Middle Eastern landscape, grazing her animals, trading with merchants, and searching for her beloved shepherd. Two idylls (5, 18) show the lovers' embrace in a forest, which is also identified as the man's birthplace. These allusions to geographical origin, as well as the conven-

¹²⁷ Five out of the six times the word "voice" (*bîp*) occurs in the Song are in these two idylls. Twice he invites her to "let herself be heard" (יִשְׁמַעְנָה, 2:14, 8:13).

tional “hierarchy of herdsmen,”¹²⁸ suggest that the goatherdess is inferior to the shepherd in both wealth and status. Social pressure exemplified by the man’s “friends” demands and legitimizes their relationship (1:7), but the lovers’ intense searching for one another and the mutuality and exclusivity of their attachment are the more characteristic features of this sequence of idylls. The praise of love vanquishing death in idyll 18 has been recognized by most interpreters of the Song as the central message of the entire poem; these lines are connected to the words of the goatherdess and are apparently spoken by her as well.

The Macrostructure of the Song of Songs

Ten Speakers in Four Landscapes: The Tetractys Pattern

We can now observe that each of the four environments hosts a specific type of erotic interaction. The poet has placed scenes of longing in the city, scenes of search in the wilderness, scenes of seduction in the vineyard, and scenes of power play at the king’s court. Yet these spaces are more than psychological projections. The four environments are at a time physical landscapes and social metaphors, as they correspond to four population groups and four types of gender relations.

The social hierarchy represented in the Song finds its expression in the quantitative distribution of the text (in *cola*).

	I	II	III	IV	V	Sum
Court	10	12	18	29	54[+1]	123[+1]
City	11	17	70[+1]	13	10	121[+1]
Vineyard	7	39[+1]	26	24	12	108[+1]
Wilderness	6	14	4	6	15	45
<i>Total</i>						397[+3]

Of the 400 *cola*, the courtly and urban cycles contain no less than 246, compared to 154 for the cycles depicting lower-class milieus. This proportion of 61.5:38.5 once again resembles the golden ratio. Moreover, the length of the idylls in the king’s cycle shows a continuous crescendo, whereas the narrative structure of the urban cycle is shaped as a steep arch that reaches a central climax with the rape fantasy and then declines toward the end. The rural cycle forms a plateau of successive erotic invitations, and the pastoral cycle has the form of an inverted arch befitting its plot of losing and finding.

¹²⁸ On the opposition between the shepherd (*ποιμήν*) and the goatherd (*αἴτόλος*) in Alexandrian poetry, see Daniel W. Berman, “The Hierarchy of Herdsmen: Goathering and Genre in Theocritean Bucolic,” *Phoenix* 59 (2005): 228–245.

Not unlike Greek comedy, our text shows a class bias insofar as it privileges the action of the upper strata of society. Reception history has shown an inverse bias, as it has tended to attribute to the Song a pastoral character¹²⁹ that in reality can only apply to a seventh of the poem. To be sure, the poet's sympathies are with the model of love embodied by the class who is most distant from the rule of state, labor, consumption, and money, but neither the shepherd's life nor any other of the four cycles appear as an ideal world. The poet has taken care to endow each of the four landscapes with its specific hardship, mentioning blazing heat in the vineyard (1:6), political murders at court (3:8), ferocious beasts in the wilderness (4:8), and police violence in the city (5:7). The four-tiered image of the social world in the Song thus expresses cultural relativism, not a naturist agenda or a sense of despair of civilization.

Where most of the Song's interpreters find in the text only one class-blind couple, I propose to deconstruct this monolithic dyad into ten lovers. I distinguish six women, namely – in the order of their appearance – a maid (idyll 1), a peasant girl (idyll 2), a goatherdess (idyll 3), a city girl (idyll 5), a queen (idyll 13), and a court mistress (idyll 15), as well as four men: King Solomon (idyll 1), a shepherd (idyll 3), and two village lovers, probably a hunter (idyll 7) and a peasant (idyll 16). Choral voices that do not take part in the love relationships belong to the “daughters of Jerusalem” in idyll 14, the court women in idyll 15, the city girl's siblings in idyll 19, and an unidentified narrating voice in idylls 9, 10, and 18.

The way in which the Song organizes these ten lovers into four cycles resembles the scheme of the “tetractys” ($1+2+3+4=10$), a basic numeric proportion that the Pythagoreans considered to be “the source and root of the ever-flowing nature.”¹³⁰ This numeric proportion seems to have lost its original cosmological meaning here; rather, it is reflected as a merely arithmetic grid that allows distributing the ten voices in a regular progression among the four landscapes and four erotic constellations:

City	Longing	Monad: one girl.
Wilderness	Monogamy	Dyad: one woman and one man.
Vineyard	Coquetry	Triad: one woman and (apparently) two men.
Court	Polygyny	Tetrad: one man and three women.

The most unexpected element in this frieze, namely the non-monogamous relationships of the king and the peasant girl, are announced from the start in idyll 1 (“therefore the maids have come to love you”) and idyll 2 (“my own vineyard, I have not kept”), creating a strong contrast with the language of mutual affection in idyll 3.

¹²⁹ Joan B. Burton, “Themes of Female Desire and Self-Assertion in the *Song of Songs* and Hellenistic Poetry,” in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 180 – 205, here 201: “The Song focuses similarly on the pastoral world.”

¹³⁰ Christoph Riedweg, *Pythagoras: His Life, Teaching, and Influence*, tr. Steven Rendall (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 82.

Three-Idyll Sequences

The alternating chorus sections, the subdividing function of which has been well described in the research literature, create an approximately regular distribution of the text into sequences of three idylls closed by a chorus.¹³¹ Remarkably, the six three-idyll sequences never repeat a combination, and the five chorus types intervene in a symmetrical order:

- 1 court, 2 vineyard, 3 wilderness
- 4 court, 5 wilderness, 6 city, *chorus* (C, A)
- 7 vineyard, *chorus* (M, P)
- 8 city, *chorus* (A)
- 9 wilderness, 10 court, 11 vineyard, *chorus* (P)
- 12 wilderness, 13 court, 14 city, *chorus* (M)
- 15 court, 16 vineyard, 17 city, *chorus* (C, A)
- 18 wilderness, 19 city, 20 vineyard, *chorus* (P)

Symmetries inside the Cycles

As we have seen, the courtly cycle is organized in such a way that it corresponds to the different ranks of the king's three female partners. In the other three cycles, the distribution of scenes between the first and second halves of the Song shows evidence of symmetry. This is most obvious in the city cycle, where the two urban encounter scenes closed by the double chorus (idylls 6 and 17) and the two dream scenes of nightly searches that incorporate a single chorus (idylls 8 and 14) form easily recognizable pairs. In the rural cycle, the scenes concerning vineyard-keeping (idylls 2 and 20) and the encounter in the fields (idylls 7 and 16) stand in a similar parallel. In the pastoral cycle, the scenes of love-making in the forest (idylls 5 and 18) and the appearance of the goatherdess from the wilderness (idylls 9 and 12) also stand in correspondence to each other. These parallel panels are not randomly distributed, as the hypothesis of folk motif repetition (*Zersingen*) would have it; on the contrary, the regular insertion of parallel idylls into the first and the second decade of the twenty idylls reveals that the layout of the poem was created intentionally. Together, the six double scenes can be systematized as follows:¹³²



¹³¹ I use initials for the choruses “Adjuration” (A), “Caress” (C), “Mutual Possession” (M), and “Perfumed Mountains” (P).

¹³² I use the initials C (city), V (vineyard), and W (wilderness).

Symmetries across the Cycles

By a rather subjective choice, traditional interpretation of the Song has been fascinated by the figures of the king and the goatherdess. In reality, the most talkative persons in the Song are the two unmarried girls who appear, respectively, in the city and vineyard scenes. Close to half of the text (107 and 71 cola, respectively), is put into their mouths. As I mentioned above, their rhetoric can be read antithetically: while the city girl constantly slides into involuntary erotic ambiguity, the peasant girl makes a purposeful and competent use of double entendre.

There is no narrative connection between the four cycles, but there is a certain parallelism: courtship develops in similar steps, though not in the same order. There are two environments in which the woman seeks the man (idyll 3 in the steppe, idylls 8 and 14 in the city at night), two of joint wine-drinking (idyll 4 at court, idyll 6 in the city), two in which the man secretly visits the woman's home (idyll 7 in the village, idyll 14 in the city), two of marriage preparations (idyll 10 at court, idyll 19 in the city), two of precoital talk (idyll 1 in the king's bedchamber, idyll 16 in the field), and two of sexual consummation (idyll 5 in the forest, idyll 13 at the royal wedding).

Love in its infinite variation goes through similar phases and stirs up similar feelings all throughout the social world. However, the Song of Song's succession of lyrical images should not be confused with a narrative plot about love, as the evolution inside the four cycles takes place through a shift of perspective rather than through a progressing story. All cycles present a similar ending, namely, they reveal how their respective female protagonist has succeeded in appropriating and subverting her hierarchical social environment:¹³³ the hetaera counters the demeaning zoological metaphor of charioteer and horse with another, more egalitarian one, the image of a symbiosis between plants (idyll 4); the royal favorite secretly inverts her power relations with the king (idyll 15); the Bedouin woman, having tracked down her elusive lover, imposes her "seal" on him (idyll 18); the city girl confronted with a marriage arrangement emphasizes her maturity and her ability to protect herself (idyll 19); and the peasant girl, who finds herself at the bottom of the hierarchy of landownership, compares herself twice to King Solomon and claims exclusive lordship over her own tanned body as a lucrative property (idyll 20). The seemingly one-sided determination of the *dramatis personae* of the Song by their genders and social conditions thereby becomes ambivalent.

The following semantic analysis will show the detailed manner in which the four environments of the Song correspond to the coexistence in the poem of different social, economic, cultural, geographical, ethnic, anthropological, psychological, and erotic patterns. It will also show the extent to which, through its poetic treatment, this symmetry becomes a paradox. First of all, however, it is necessary to look at the literary ideal that stands behind this Song's poetic juxtaposing of diverse social classes.

¹³³ Compare the observations by Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 144–145.

3 The Poetics of Social Diversity

Greek Literary and Visual Models

The genre of a well-structured, though seemingly random, concatenation of short idylls in dialogue form is difficult to find in the literary traditions of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, or biblical coinage that have usually been evoked in order to contextualize the Song. The Egyptian parallels that have most frequently been adduced never include direct dialogue; they never seek to characterize their subjects by social class; and they never vary their scenery. However, those scholars who have compared the Song to Greek literature of the third century BCE seem to have discovered in all these aspects a more fertile field for literary comparison. Hellenistic poets, especially the Alexandrian circle around Ptolemy II Philadelphos, sought inspiration in the dramatic characterization of social types that had become popular on the comic stage.

Greek literature of the Ptolemaic period aimed at depicting ordinary people in everyday situations as opposed to depicting heroic individuals in unique situations, which had been the purview of tragedy. The interest in human types was inherited from models that existed in the satirical dialogues of Sophron, the characters of Theophrastos (c. 371-c. 287 BCE), the New Comedy of Menander (c. 342-c. 290 BCE), and the theaters in the Hellenistic world, which concentrated on mime performances and “amusement of rather the plainest kind.”¹³⁵

In the worldview of later Greek comedy, it was not the Platonic ascension to intellectual truth or the Aristotelian pursuit of the virtuous life that directed the vision of the individual, but the quest for pleasure, which was defended philosophically by Menander’s classmate Epikouros (341–270 BCE). However, even in Menander’s New Comedy, characters would occasionally formulate didactic aphorisms and address them directly to the audience; this convention replaced the *parabasis* (παράβασις) of Old Comedy, the moment in which the chorus would remain alone on stage, take off their masks, and expound the play’s moral.¹³⁶ The lines on the overwhelming power of love in idyll 18, spoken by the goatherdess close to the end of the Song, align quite nicely with the convention of New Comedy. Moreover, the statement that love is as strong as death (8:6, אַבָּה בְּתוּתָה עַזָּה) and that it mocks wealth parallels the choral ode to Eros in Sophocles’ tragedy *Antigone*,¹³⁷ which started with the words: “Love, unconquered in the fight” (Ant. 781: ἔρως ἀνίκατε μάχαν).

¹³⁵ Arthur Segal, *Theatres in Roman Palestine and Provincia Arabia* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 14.

¹³⁶ David Konstan, “Defining the Genre,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy*, ed. Martin Revermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 27–42, here 37.

¹³⁷ On the *parabasis*-like function of the Sophoclean choral odes, see Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, “Elysian Voices: Thoughts about the Sophoclean Chorus,” in *Nomodeiktes: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald*, ed. Ralph M. Rosen and Joseph Farrell (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 557–571, here 562.

Idyll 17 of the Song, where the girl wishes that her lover was her brother, so that she could kiss him in the street, gives us another striking illustration of the impact that Greek drama must have had on the pseudonymous Hebrew poet. In the initial scene of Menander's *The Shorn Girl* (Περικειρομένη), the heroine kisses her brother in the street and thereby provokes a misunderstanding with her lover. The entanglement of different love intrigues as well as the juxtaposition of simultaneous places of action on the stage can be found elsewhere in Menander as well: in the imaginary scene of *The Grouch* (Δύσκολος) of 317 BCE, two houses with inhabitants of different social status, the urban gentleman Sostratos and the peasant Knemon, are indicated on both sides of the scene.¹³⁸ As scene painting was mainly verbal in Greek comedy, attributing the corners of the stage to opposing settings was a way of displaying sociocultural difference through the order of space, so that the “standardisation of space went hand-in-hand with hybridisation.”¹³⁹ The conscious aesthetic ideal behind this juxtaposition of social classes was variation (ποικιλία). To be sure, comedies bringing together couples from all of the Song's four social spaces, the courtly, the urban, the rural, and the pastoral, do not seem to have existed in documented theater history before Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. But visual and lyric genres were ahead of the drama in this respect.

The literary models of New Comedy seem to have encouraged the exploration of social difference in Hellenistic visual art, which developed standardized representations of the soldier, the scholar, the artisan, the city girl [Fig. 7], the hetaera, the peasant [Fig. 9], the hunter, the fisherman, the shepherd [Fig. 10], the old woman, the female attendant [Fig. 8], and the African slave – often with grotesque features.¹⁴⁰ Poets writing after Menander, attracted by the court in Alexandria, found compelling means to evoke social and spatial hybridization in brief literary forms. Philitas of Kos (c. 340-c. 285 BCE) wrote a series of “playthings” (παίγνια), epigrams in imitation of the sketches that masked pantomimes used to perform. These poetic scenes were not written with a view to public performance; they were far too short for this: the only one that has come down to us only possesses two lyric couplets. Among Philitas' younger contemporaries, Herodas specialized in “mime iambs” (μιμίαμβοι), sequences of comical scenes set in an urban environment, while Theokritos of Syracuse (c. 315-c. 250 BCE) wrote “dramatic idylls” (εἰδύλλια δραματικά), short lyric or comic dia-

¹³⁸ Bernhard Zimmermann, *Die griechische Komödie*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt: Verlag Antike, 2006), 181, 195, 197, 204.

¹³⁹ Antonis K. Petrides, *Menander, New Comedy and the Visual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 121 (also referring to *The Grouch*).

¹⁴⁰ Nikolaus Himmelmann, *Über Hirten-Genre in der antiken Kunst* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1980); Hans Peter Laubscher, *Fischer und Landleute: Studien zur hellenistischen Genrepräplastik* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1982); Nikolaus Himmelmann, *Alexandria und der Realismus in der griechischen Kunst* (Tübingen: Wasmuth 1983), 75; Jerome Jordan Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 141; Wilhelm Völcker-Janssen, *Kunst und Gesellschaft an den Höfen Alexanders d. Gr. und seiner Nachfolger* (Munich: tuduv, 1993), 232. Some examples of these representations can be found in the image section of this book.

logues, each of which introduces its own locality, social environments, and personae. Starting with Hugo Grotius, there is already a rich research literature on the motivic parallels between the work of Theokritos and the Song of Songs,¹⁴¹ so that I can concentrate here on the aspects of landscape and social class. Though a one-sided reception has labeled Theokritos as a bucolic poet,¹⁴² he sacrificed to two alternating conventions of social mimesis, the pastoral “idyll” and the urban “mime.”¹⁴³ More precisely, these genres were not defined by subject matter at all: an “idyll” in its ancient meaning is, according to Kathryn Gutzwiller, any short poem “that emphasizes diversity over unity, brevity over length, and self-mocking playfulness over seriousness.”¹⁴⁴ Theokritos contrasted his famous shepherd poems (idylls I, III, IV, and V) with others showing field harvests (idylls VII and X), the city (idylls II, XIV, and XV) and the court (idylls XVI and XVII), with all of these four being mixed with a large number of poems on mythic themes.¹⁴⁵ Theokritos always uses the first sentences of his dialogues to allude to social and spatial settings, a technique that functions as a form of poetic scene-painting.¹⁴⁶ Idyll I opens with the words “pine,” “spring,” “goat,” “kid,” and “rocks” to evoke the pastoral setting. A new setting, a vineyard, is introduced from line 45. In idyll II, the words “door” and “school” immediately indicate the urban setting of the poem. In idyll III, we have another pastoral opening with the words “goats,” “hill,” “watering,” and “cave”, and idyll VII

¹⁴¹ Graetz, *Schir ha-schirim*, 89; William G. Seiple, “Theocritean Parallels to the Song of Songs,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 19 (1903): 108–115; Walter W. Hyde, “Greek Analogies to the Song of Songs,” in *The Song of Songs: A Symposium*, ed. W.H. Schoff (Philadelphia: Commercial Museum, 1924), 31–42; Mark Rozlaar, “Shir ha-Shirim ‘al reka’ ha-shirah ha-erotit ha-yavanit-helenistit,” *Eshkolot* 1 (1954): 33–48; Hans-Peter Müller, “Eine Parallel zur Weingartenmetapher des Hohenliedes aus der frühgriechischen Lyrik,” in “Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf”: *Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient*, ed. Manfried Dietrich and Ingo Kottsieper (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 569–584; Anselm C. Hagedorn, “Of Foxes and Vineyards: Greek Perspectives on the Song of Songs,” *Vetus Testamentum* 53 (2003), 337–352; Burton, “Themes of Female Desire,” 180–205; Richard Hunter, “Sweet Talk”: Song of Songs and the Tradition of Greek Poetry,” in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 228–244.

¹⁴² See the chapter “Theocritus and the Bucolic Genre,” in Marco Fantuzzi and Richard Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 133–190, especially 134.

¹⁴³ On these genres, see Karl-Heinz Stanzel, “Neuer Wein in neuen Schläuchen? Kallimachos’ Iambik, die Mimepen Theokrits und die Mimiamben des Herodas,” in *Alexandreia und das ptolemäische Ägypten: Kulturgegungen in hellenistischer Zeit*, ed. Gregor Weber (Berlin: Verlag Antike, 2010), 187–207.

¹⁴⁴ Kathryn Gutzwiller, “The Evidence for Theocritean Poetry Books,” in *Theocritus*, ed. M. A. Harder, R. F. Regtuit, and G. C. Wakker (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996), 119–148, here 129, 131, 133.

¹⁴⁵ Joan B. Burton, *Theocritus’ Urban Mimes: Mobility, Gender, and Patronage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Helga Scholten, “Die kulturelle Bewertung körperlicher Arbeit in den Gedichten Theokrits,” in *Arbeit in der Antike, in Judentum und Christentum*, ed. Detlev Dormeyer et al. (Berlin: Lit, 2006), 66–83, here 69–71.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Reinhardt, *Die Darstellung der Bereiche Stadt und Land bei Theokrit* (Bonn: Habelt, 1988), 83, 85.

creates a field landscape with “harvesters,” “first fruits,” “Demeter,” and “threshing-floor.” This technique of space-marking is one that would reappear in the Song of Songs. Theokritos also marked the shift between these social and spatial *milieux* in his poems by alternating from idyll to idyll between more refined speech and artificially vulgar speech, a device that post-exilic Hebrew, as a merely literary language, could not imitate.

The popularity of the theatrical dialogue unmistakably led to its serving as a model for the new poetic genres invented in Alexandria. However, it should not be automatically assumed that the idylls of Theokritos, the mime iambs of Herodas, or, for that matter, the Song of Songs were actually intended to be performed in the same genre that they tried to imitate. The question of the medium, context, and form in which these lyric compositions were intended to be presented goes beyond the simple alternative between a full-scale dramatic performance and a dialogue written for individual reading. It is possible to imagine that these lyric pieces in dialogue form were read aloud, with or without a certain amount of dramatic intonation and a ritualized framework, by a speaker at courtly or urban events that we are unable to reconstruct from the extant texts. This lyric genre, which was inspired by the dramatic performance, but which used other frameworks for its presentation, is referred to by Classicists as the “literary mime.”¹⁴⁷

As was done in Greek New Comedy, with its intricate naturalistic detail, Theokritos and Herodas describe the human world through the standardization and juxtaposition of social types. While Menander enjoys contrasting the city-dweller with the peasant, Theokritos plays out the “herdsman or harvester”¹⁴⁸ opposition, namely, the difference between the tiller of the soil and the nomadic shepherd: while the former enjoys a better social rank, his working conditions are more painful and he is unfree.¹⁴⁹ Concerning the image of women, Alexandrian poets enjoyed presenting female characters who express their desires quite freely,¹⁵⁰ as it is also the case in the Song of Songs. This is a continuation of a classical Greek literary convention, where “women were generally seen as more lustful than men, or less capable of controlling lust.”¹⁵¹ The inclusion of marginal women such as hetaerae in the works of the Alexandrian poets makes literary femininity appear erotically liberated in a way

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin Acosta-Hughes, “Nor When a Man Goes to Dionysus’ Holy Contests’ (Theocritus 17.112): Outlines of Theatrical Performance in Theocritus,” in *Theater Outside Athens: Drama in Greek Sicily and South Italy*, ed. Kathryn Bosher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 391–408.

¹⁴⁸ Theokritos, *Idylls* VII.29.

¹⁴⁹ Hans Bernsdorff, *Hirten in der nicht-bukolischen Dichtung des Hellenismus* (Stuttgart, F. Steiner, 2001), 28–29.

¹⁵⁰ Burton, “Themes of Female Desire,” 193.

¹⁵¹ Andrew Lear and Eva Cantarella, *Images of Ancient Greek Pederasty: Boys Were their Gods* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 132.

that is certainly not representative of women's actual conditions in ancient societies.¹⁵²

Theokritos' younger contemporaries exacerbated Philitas' aesthetic ideal of concision and carefully crafted allusions. Through a profane variation of the classical genres of the epitaph and the aphorism, the Alexandrian poets Asklepiades of Samos (c. 320-c. 275 BCE) and Posidippos of Pella (c. 310-c. 240 BCE) created the genre of the convivial epigram treating wine, friendship, sports, and, most of all, the love of boys and women in short compositions mostly not exceeding four or six lines.¹⁵³ Kallimakhos of Cyrene (c. 305-c. 240 BCE) would impose this pursuit of brevity on the poetic mainstream. The particular appeal of the amatory epigram lay in the tension between the sharp rationality of the form and the subjectively emotional character of its content.

Asklepiades' epigrams are often composed of dialogues and have been referred to as "miniature mimes," a characterization that could easily be applied to the Song of Songs.¹⁵⁴ Of course, the Song's idylls are clearly distinct from epigrams by virtue of the latter's generic convention imitating the epitaph, which spells out the name of a person which it individualizes and which can be the "I" of the poet. In the Song, only the six initial and the two final idylls resemble in their form the Alexandrian epigrammists' pursuit of brevity (βροχύτης), but the Hebrew poem shares with this poetic school the technique of creating vividness (έναρξις) through the alternation between precise narrative detail and expressive redundancy,¹⁵⁵ the search for metric diversity (πολυείδεια),¹⁵⁶ and, finally, a number of peculiar motifs which are often developed in parallel versions by the same poet.¹⁵⁷ For example, the praise of a Black woman, which is placed at the beginning of the Song (1:5), is also the object of a fa-

152 Linda-Marie Günther, "Bürgersfrau oder Hetäre? Zum Frauenbild bei Herondas und Theokrit," in *Antike Lebenswelten: Konstanz-Wandel-Wirkungsmacht*, ed. Peter Mauritsch et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 265–276, here 267.

153 *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams*, ed. Andrew S.F. Gow and Denys L. Page, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

154 Cf. Giovanni Garbini, "Poesia alessandrina e 'Cantico dei Cantici,'" in *Alessandria e il mondo ellenistico-romano: Studi on onore di Achille Adriani*, ed. Nicola Bonacasa et al. (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1983), 25–29, here 29: "Una lirica delicata, ma anche molto costruita, secondo i dettami delle scuole poetiche ellenistiche che l'autore ebreo assimilò, con ogni probabilità, proprio ad Alessandria."

155 Kathryn Gutzwiller, "The Paradox of the Amatory Epigram," in *Brill's Companion to Hellenistic Epigram*, ed. Peter Bing and Jon Steffen Bruss (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 313–332, here 319.

156 Kallimakhos alternated between five metrical schemes and three dialects. See Christopher M. Dawson, "The Iambi of Callimachus: A Hellenistic Poet's Experimental Laboratory," *Yale Classical Studies* 11 (1950): 3–167; Gutzwiller, "The Evidence for Theocritean Poetry Books," 132–133; Fantuzzi and Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry*, 36–41, with a larger overview of the "metrical experimentation" practiced by the Alexandrian poets.

157 Sonya Lida Tarán, *The Art of Variation in the Hellenistic Epigram* (Leiden: Brill, 1979).

mous epigram by Asklepiades¹⁵⁸ and several verses by Theokritos on “charming Bombyca, everyone calls you Syrian, thin and sun-scorched, I alone call you the color of honey.”¹⁵⁹ Asklepiades is said to have invented the epigrammatic genre called “lament on the doorstep” (παρακλαυσίθυρον), in which a male lover, after a nightly revel, arrives at the home of his beloved and begs him or her to let him in – just as we have it in Song 5:2.¹⁶⁰ Finally, many Hellenistic epigrams develop the theme of the overworked weaving girl who decides to become a hetaera, not unlike the allusion made in Song 8:12.¹⁶¹

Most importantly, each epigram is individualized through the indication of a peculiar time and space. Asklepiades distinguishes in a common way the setting of each of his urban epigrams, as Gutzwiller observes: “His epigrams invite the reader to imagine a narrow range of settings for the represented speech act – the symposium, the bedroom, the closed entrance to the beloved’s dwelling; at times, however, a poem lacks any indication of setting.” His art thus consists of “dramatizing a moment in time within a suggested physical setting.”¹⁶²

There was no more of a common plot in epigrammatic collections than there is among the twenty idylls of the Song of Songs, but it should not be concluded that the individual pieces were put together at random. Until recently, only individual Alexandrian epigrams were preserved, having come down to us via Byzantine anthologies.¹⁶³ A path-breaking discovery published in 2001, namely, a papyrus containing 112 epigrams by Posidippus copied around 220 BCE by a professional scribe,¹⁶⁴ provides us for the first time with a coherent poetic collection of the Ptolemaic age. As is becomes clear from this papyrus, Hellenistic poets by the mid-third century BCE had started editing short poetry in sophisticated thematic cycles; they used a sequential order by motivic association, concatenation, juxtaposition, and alternation; and at least parts of the individual poems were apparently written with the composition scheme of the *libellus* already in mind.¹⁶⁵ The opening section of the Posidippus

158 Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra* (New York: Schocken, 1984), 55; Frank M. Snowden, Jr., “Asklepiades’ Didyme,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 32 (1991): 239 – 253, here 250 – 251.

159 Theokritos, *Idylls* X.26 – 29; translation by Neil Hopkinson in *Theocritus, Moschus, Bion* (Loeb Classical Library, no. 28; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 161.

160 Tarán, *The Art of Variation*, 113.

161 Ibid., 115 – 131.

162 Gutzwiller, “The Paradox,” 315, 327.

163 All in all, the *Anthologia Graeca* attributes 63 epigrams to Kallimakhos, 33 to Asklepiades, 23 to Posidippus, and 11 to Hedylos.

164 It is the beginning of a scroll with 606 lines of Greek text distributed over sixteen columns; see Posidippo di Pella, *Epigrammi* (P. Mil. Vogl. VIII 309), ed. Guido Bastianini et al. (Milan: Edizioni Universitarii, 2001).

165 Alissa Ann Vaillancourt, *Leonidas of Tarentum: A Wandering Poet in the Tradition of Greek Literature* (New York: City University of New York, 2013), makes this point for another third-century poet.

papyrus, a cycle of twenty epigrams “On Gems,” has been described as a ring composition: the precious stones are associated with series of animals after which they were named, foreign countries that produced them, and kings and women who wore them.¹⁶⁶ In sum, the interpretation of the Song of Songs that I propose here, namely, as a collection of short lyric dialogues with changing speakers organized in four cycles through a certain pattern of repetition and variation, can fit quite well with the third-century poetic tendency of comparing courtly, urban, rural, and pastoral environments in ring composition.¹⁶⁷

The idea of making speakers reappear is not common in the Alexandrian lyric cycles. Just as there is only one epitaph per deceased person, each amatory epigram should in principle introduce a different fictional lover. Asklepiades thus “presents an ever-changing array of love objects – both women, who included virgins and hetairas, and young males.”¹⁶⁸ However, the preserved material from the epigram cycle *Erōtika* of a Syrian poet, Meleager of Gadara (fl. c. 100 BCE), addresses a dozen female and male lovers alternatingly, so that the poet returns no less than seventeen times to a certain Heliodora and twelve times to the “sweet boy” Myiskos, creating dispersed but recognizable poetic subcycles.¹⁶⁹ In later Greek literature, Lucian of Samosata does implement a similar alternation technique in his *Dialogues of the Gods*, where couples such as Zeus and Hera, Apollo and Hermes, and Aphrodite and Eros reappear at certain intervals. Meleager as well as Lucian are supposed to have been imitators of the poet and Kynic philosopher Menippos of Gadara (fl. c. 250 BCE), who also hailed from Ptolemaic Syria.¹⁷⁰

The symmetrical combination of four couples is, most of all, a visual staple, which seems to be linked to the ornamental service it could render on circular surfaces. From the mid-sixth century BCE, profane vase painters cherished the depiction of two, four, six, and eight courting couples distributed around the vessel in frieze form, so that the pairs would be depicted symmetrically opposite each other. Pederastic and heterosexual courtship or intercourse scenes would often be juxtaposed on such representations.¹⁷¹ A kylix by the painter Douris from c. 470 BCE, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, shows six groups on its outer side – three heterosexual couples in different stages of courtship, one lesbian couple,

¹⁶⁶ Charles Fuqua, “An Internal Ring Composition in Posidippus’ ‘Lithika,’” *The Classical World* 102 (2008): 3–12; Regina Höschele, *Die blütenlesende Muse: Poetik und Textualität antiker Epigrammsammlungen* (Tübingen: Narr, 2010), 14–37, 150–170, see especially 14, 34, 150, 162–163, and 170.

¹⁶⁷ The term τὸ ποίημα τὸ κυκλικόν appears in Kallimakhos, *Epigram* 28.1 Pf.

¹⁶⁸ Gutzwiller, “The Paradox,” 315.

¹⁶⁹ Regina Höschele, “Meleager and Heliodora: A Love Story in Bits and Pieces?,” in *Plotting with Eros: Essays on the Poetics of Love and the Erotics of Reading*, ed. Ingela Nilsson (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009), 99–134, here 102.

¹⁷⁰ Diogenes Laërtios, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, VI.99–101.

¹⁷¹ Lear and Cantarella, *Images*, 129–131.

one trio of two women and a youth, and one single woman.¹⁷² Quite interesting for the understanding of the Song of Songs is a banquet scene of four heterosexual couples depicted on South-Italian kylix from c. 470 – 460 BCE, now in the Antikenmuseum in Basel [Fig. 11]. The figures are three bearded men and one youth feasting with naked hetaerae, a scene similar to the one we have encountered in idyll 4.¹⁷³ The cross-wise distribution of four couples thus became an artistic convention that survived into Hellenistic times. For example, a cup from Pergamon in the British Museum shows four erotic scenes positioned in cross-wise fashion.¹⁷⁴ It is in this pattern and in the similar scenes depicted in mime performances that I believe the visual inspiration for the four alternating dialogues in the Song can be found. These visual models are important because they prefigure the Song's original deviance from Theokritean love poetry as well as from prophetic allegory: its speakers, except Solomon, do not have names. While Thyrsis in Theokritos' tenth idyll is a poetic person¹⁷⁵ and while Oholiba in the Bible (Ez 10) is an archetype, the nameless characters of the Song are neither one nor the other; rather, they are social types.

Production and Consumption

The most interesting commonality between the Song and the above-mentioned Greek plays, epigrams, and images is that the four places and their twenty scenes combine couples that differ in character, age, class, and the degree of intimacy they have attained, and that these differences are expressed by their aspect and by the material objects that are associated with them. The Song manifests an interest in the depiction of social classes and professions, naming maids (1:3), shepherds (1:8), city watchmen (3:3, 5:7), merchants (3:6), soldiers (3:7, 4:4), artisans (7:2), and vineyard-keepers (8:11). As is the case in Hellenistic Greek poetry, the Song avoids the immediate portrayal of humans at work. However, it often points at its figures' past and future tasks, which results in quite a comprehensive picture of the ancient economy. The king appears in different contexts of representation at court (1:12) and in the city (3:11); his soldiers have guard duties (3:8); the "daughters of Jerusalem" weave textiles (3:10); the city girl imagines her future home-making (8:2); the peasants are in-

¹⁷² New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 23.160.54; see Lear and Cantarella, *Im-ages*, 131–132.

¹⁷³ Basel, Antikenmuseum, Käppeli collection, inv. Kä 415. A similar frieze, with six heterosexual couples performing various sympotic and sexual activities, is reproduced in Andrew Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London: Routledge, 2003), 319. The motif of feasting couples was still popular around 340 BCE. See Langner, "Where Should We Place the Krater?" 386, 389.

¹⁷⁴ London, British Museum, no. 1904,0204.935.

¹⁷⁵ With two exceptions, the protagonists in Theokritos' idylls always have names. See Karl-Heinz Stanzel, *Liebende Hirten: Theokrits Bukolik und die alexandrinische Poesie* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995), 192.

volved in keeping vineyards (1:6) and orchards (7:13); and the Bedouins are busy with herding (1:8) and trade (3:6).

Moreover, the poem's economy is structured by a number of oblique markers of social distinction. Among exegetes, the most famous of these is the physical aspect of the human body, namely, the "black and comely" skin color that the feminine speaker in verse 1:5 has acquired from her vineyard-keeping. While the peasant girl here laments her tan, the city girl's imagined lover is "fair-skinned and ruddy" (5:10), with an ivory-colored belly and marble-colored legs (5:14–15); the king's mistress is "fair like the sun" (6:10), has an ivory-colored neck (7:5), and a wheat-colored belly (7:3).¹⁷⁶

Body shapes also play a role in marking out social class. Whereas the royal favorite's hair is like shining purple cloth (7:6), the metaphor-laden stanzas that are shared between idylls 11 and 15 describe a woman whose hair resembles a goat's fleece (4:1, 6:5), with locks falling into her face (4:3, 6:7), and whose breasts have the conic shapes of "two young roes that are twins" (4:5, 7:4). In contrast, the peasant girl's breasts are compared to hanging clusters of grapes (7:8–9),¹⁷⁷ and the underage city girl's breasts are pointed according to her own estimation, but still non-existent according to her sisters (8:10). The Song's allusions to physical eroticism also differentiate between its characters. The king compares his mistress with a mare before his chariot (1:9)¹⁷⁸ and his bride with a garden under the breeze (4:16), whereas the peasant lover reaches upwards toward the hanging grapes (7:8). The caresses mentioned by the goatherdess and the city girl are oral (2:3) and manual (2:6), respectively.

The characters' bodies differ even more radically in the amount of artificial adornment. The king (1:3) and queen (4:10) practice the Greek custom of greasing their skin with aromatic concoctions based on olive oil.¹⁷⁹ The king's women wear jewelry in abundance (1:10–11, 4:9), the city girl mentions her tunic (5:3) and veil (5:7), while the women of the countryside and the pastures make no references at

176 Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 181, has argued that the poet shows "an ethnically mixed couple," but this conclusion has to rely on the procedure of amalgamation that we have already discussed (see above, "Space as Environment: Preliminary Considerations for a Pluralistic Reading").

177 See Hagedorn, "Of Foxes and Vineyards," 346 on this metaphorical use of grapes.

178 On precedents of horse-race allusions in erotic epigrams of Alexandrian poets, see Alan Cameron, "Two Mistresses of Ptolemy Philadelphus," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 31 (1990), 287–311, here 295–301; Victor Matthews, "Sex and the Single Race-Horse: A Response to Cameron on Equestrian Double-Entendres in Posidippus," *Eranos* 98 (2000): 32–38; Elizabeth Kosmetatou, "Bilistiche and the Quasi-Institutional Status of Ptolemaic Royal Mistress," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 50 (2004): 18–36, here 31–32; Alexander Sens, *Asclepiades of Samos: Epigrams and Fragments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), lxiii.

179 Nigel M. Kennell, "Most Necessary for the Bodies of Men: Olive Oil and its By-products in the Later Greek Gymnasium," in *In Altum: Seventy-Five Years of Classical Studies in Newfoundland*, ed. Mark Joyal (St. John's, Newfoundland: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2001), 119–133.

all to any such apparel and are praised only for their physical beauty. The presence or absence of cleanliness concerns enhances these contrasts in the characters' references to the body. The city girl is disgusted by the mere idea of getting dusty feet (5:3), whereas the shepherds and peasants joyfully sprawl on the bare earth in a forest (1:16–17) and in a field (7:12).

The most efficient social marker, however, is the access to consumption goods. In ancient Greek poetry, the distance between consumers and producers is played out as a means of contrasting and diversifying the characters that are portrayed.¹⁸⁰ This occurs in the Song with respect to the five biblical "trees of the field," which are successively mentioned with their respective products: the grape, the fig, the pomegranate, the date, and the apple (Joel 1:12). As we could already remark with respect to idylls 4 and 6 in the Song, nothing symbolizes social standing better than the ways that each couple is connected to the consumption of wine. The king lies with his concubine at a festive symposium (1:12), and his slaves also appreciate wine-drinking, though less than kissing (1:2, 1:4). This courtly society consumes wine in the elegant way, diluted with water from a mixing bowl (7:3).¹⁸¹ The city girl drinks her cup in the casual environment of a tavern (2:4), and she prepares at home a sort of punch from spiced wine and pomegranate (8:2). The peasant couple consumes "good wine" (7:10), which presumably means a strong mixture, and swallows it "directly" (לְמִשְׁרִים) in the coarse manner of the populace.¹⁸² The peasants are frequently shown being involved in the complex stages of the wine-production process, which includes overseeing the vineyard (1:6), pruning the vines (2:12),¹⁸³ controlling the blossom (2:13, 7:12), catching the foxes (2:15),¹⁸⁴ harvesting the grapes (7:9), storing

¹⁸⁰ Scholten, "Die kulturelle Bewertung körperlicher Arbeit," 68.

¹⁸¹ Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World*, 353–354, s.v. "Wine-Mixing." I would explain the word *mezeg* (מְזֵג, "mixed drink") with reference to the Greek *κρᾶσις*. A less persuasive explanation presumes here an Aramaic form of the Hebrew *mesekh* (Ps 75:9, ךְסֵךְ), which may have been a kind of beer (cf. Is 5:22, לְסֵךְ שָׁבֵךְ) similar to the Greek ritual drink *κυκεών*, which was made of barley, wine, and cream.

¹⁸² Kelly-Blazeby, *Kapeleion*, 80–81.

¹⁸³ With the Midrash Rabba and the Vulgate, I read the phrase עַת הַקְשִׁיר הַעֲדָה (Song 2:12) as "the pruning season has come," in parallel to לְהַקְשִׁיר לְהַעֲדָה, "and the harvest season has come for her" (Jer 51:33). The translation "the time of the lark" is an anachronistic mistranslation.

¹⁸⁴ The reference to the foxes in 2:15 caused discomfort among exegetes whose sense of aesthetic convenience did not tolerate such a reference to agricultural work in a lovers' dialogue; see, for example, Krinetzki, *Kommentar zum Hohenlied*, 107: "Daß es sich um eine Allegorie handeln muß, versteht sich von selbst, weil ein bloßes Winzerlied sich in einer Liebesliedersammlung höchst sonderbar ausnehmen würde." Since Herder, it has been widely held that this verse is an intruded folksong fragment in need of an allegorical reinterpretation. The Song's frequent use of socioeconomic markers makes this reasoning unnecessary. The other problem with the verse is that the imperative plural נִלְעָזְבָּא is used where one would expect the cohortative form as in נִלְעָזְבָּא (Gen 34:16). However, to suppose confusion between ' and ı seems far more plausible than the invention of a whole new textual source. Indeed, 2:15 is solidly integrated into the architecture of the poem as the last of three tetrastichs starting with suffigated imperative forms (first לְקַמְּבֵן, then הַרְאִיְתֵן, and finally נִלְעָזְבָּא). Moreover, the final word קַמְּבֵן echoes the ending of the poem's first part in 2:13 and rhymes with

the harvest (7:14), and carrying out the financial transactions related to vineyard leasing (8:11–12). Only the Bedouin couple is not connected in any way to the wine cycle.

In comparison to wine and grapes, apples appear almost as frequently in the Song, but their connection to the couples' social status is inverted: they are not mentioned on the royal table, but the city girl eats them as sweets (2:5); the peasant boy uses their taste to express an erotic comparison (7:9); and the pastoral couple takes its rest in the orchards, the production spaces of apples and related products (2:3, 8:5). Pomegranates are metaphors at court (4:13, 6:7); they are consumed in the city (8:2), they are produced in the village (4:3, 6:11, 7:12); and they are unknown among the shepherds.

The choicest food, produced and consumed only at court, is the walnut (6:11, **רַגְלָה**). This fruit was indeed a novelty at the time. Introduced by Alexander the Great from Bactria-Sogdiana, it came to be called the “Persian” or “royal” nut (κάρπον βασιλικόν, *Juglans regia*).¹⁸⁵ The “heap of wheat” (7:3, **עֲרָמָת חֶפְץ**) mentioned as a metaphor in the courtly cycle is reminiscent of another far-reaching innovation in Ptolemaic agriculture: the husked wheat (emmer and spelt) of Pharaonic tradition was replaced with the more expensive free-threshing wheat (durum and bread wheat), whose grain can be separated from the husk by clubbing.¹⁸⁶ The city girl relishes raisin cakes (2:5, **שְׂוִתְשָׁנָה**) and sweets (5:16, **מִתְקִים**), but such processed food items are absent from the rural and pastoral environments. The villagers feed on figs (2:13), dates, and grapes (7:8–9), and the shepherds complete their main meals with fruit from wild trees (2:3).

Of animal products, milk and honey are consumed at court (4:11, 5:1); the former also serve as metaphors in the city environment (5:12). The metaphorical mentions of ivory are likewise limited to the two upper classes (5:14, 7:5). Although the rural and pastoral scenes contain various descriptions of the breeding of sheep, goats, and pigeons, they never even allude to the consumption of their meat. The aspects that link consumption to killing are conspicuously absent from the Song.

The four couples in the Song are not only distinguished by their consumption patterns, but by their overall involvement in the money economy as well. Ostentatious use of precious metal is made by the king for the adornment of his women (1:10–11) and occasionally for his own appearance (3:10). For the city girl, by contrast, precious metals are only mentioned to express the imaginary qualities of her masculine beloved (5:11, 14–15). The peasant girl counts with them as a currency in the context of wine production, which links her world to the royal treasury (8:11). The Bedouin woman, however, only mentions money once and with disdain

נְבָרֶה in 2:11; perhaps **רַגְלָה** in 2:17, at the end of the poem, was once meant to be part of the rhyme as well.

185 Theophrastos, *Historia Plantarum* III.14.4, calls the plant περσικός. See Pope, *Song of Songs*, 574–575.

186 Dorothy J. Crawford, “Food: Tradition and Change in Hellenistic Egypt,” *World Archaeology* 11 (1979), 136–146; Donahue, *Food and Drink in Antiquity*, 57.

(8:7): she is not only excluded from the consumption economy, but she renounces it consciously in the final distich of the pastoral cycle. The subsequent reference to the king's land lease concludes the Song with a dramatic contrast between the monetary and the non-monetary spheres of the rural economy. This ending allows one to recognize the underlying structural principle behind the exceedingly detailed differentiation of the four landscapes: it is none other than the cultural myth of the Four Ages of Man, an ambivalent narrative of technical progress and moral decline oriented in its classic version¹⁸⁷ by the successive modes of production: gathering, agriculture, fortified urbanism, and long-distance commerce.

Geographical Horizons

In Hellenistic literature, consumer goods mediate the experience not only of social *milieux*, but they also signify power relations toward the geographical spaces where they originate. The triumphal procession of Ptolemy II Philadelphos in c. 274 BCE prominently featured spice tributes; it makes a distinction between the Arabian products frankincense and myrrh, on the one hand, and four expensive Indian spices, here saffron, cassia, cinnamon, and orris, on the other.¹⁸⁸ Ptolemaic queens in particular were associated with these imported aromatics¹⁸⁹ as are the biblical queens in Ps 45:8 and Sir 24:15. The king's "sister-bride" in verse 4:13–14 of the Song is said to smell of all spices and oils, and she is indeed the only one of the Song's female characters to use the four Indian drugs, namely, saffron, calamus, cinnamon, and aloes, in addition to the four Arabian scents, namely, spikenard, myrrh, frankincense, and henna.¹⁹⁰ Belonging to a lower social rank, the king's mistress wears only the Arabian substances, minus the frankincense (1:12–14). Myrrh is the only fragrance used by the city girl and her imaginary lover (5:5, 5:13). The peasant girl smells of apples and mandrakes (7:14). Though she does not use any imported fragrances, she recognizes the henna bush (7:12) and contemplates the mountains from where myrrh and frankincense are brought. Both are precious substances that the goatherdess is said to bring from the desert (3:6).

¹⁸⁷ Ovidius, *Metamorphoses* I.89–162. This is a "well-worn theme" according to Brooks Otis, *Ovidius as an Epic Poet*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 378.

¹⁸⁸ Athenaios, *Learned Banqueters* V.201 A. See Ellen E. Rice, *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 18–19, 93.

¹⁸⁹ Athenaios, *Learned Banqueters* XV.689 A; Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, 27.

¹⁹⁰ I follow the common botanic identifications of קְרֵכֶת with saffron (*Crocus sativus*), קְנָה with calamus (*Calamus odoratus*), קְנָמָן with cinnamon (*Laurus cinnamomum*), לְלָתָת with aloes (*Aquilaria agallocha*), נְרַדִּים with spikenard (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), מֵרָה with myrrh (*Commiphora myrrha*), לְבָנָה with frankincense (*Boswellia sacra*), and בְּפִרִים with henna (*Lawsonia inermis*), and in 7:14 דְּזָרָאִים with mandrakes (*Mandragora officinarum*). See Pope, *Song of Songs*, 493–494.

Once again, production, trade, and mere imagination fill up the wide gap between the material cultures of the different social classes. Though the Bedouins are the least involved in the urban ways of consumption and exchange, they are mentioned as the champions of overland trade. When the nomad woman is presented as coming from the desert with her cargo of incense, the allusion evokes the most active long-distance trade route from the fourth to the first century BCE, namely, the Nabataean “Incense Road” that led from the “Mountains of Incense” in Dhofar (present-day Oman) through the Hejaz to the caravan hub at Petra. From there, a southern road headed out to Gaza and a northern one to Damascus. On this road, Nabataeans and other Arab semi-nomads were raiding and trading intermittently.¹⁹¹ As it seems from the geographer Strabo, caravans never went the entire way from Dhofar to Gaza; rather, a series of short-range intermediate suppliers were responsible for most of the incense trade.¹⁹²

The Bedouin woman in the Song covers some portion of this road in the wide travels that are progressively depicted in her various appearances in the poem. She describes her origins in the Sharon Plain in the west of the Syrian province (2:1) and then arrives with incense from the Arabian Desert in the east (3:6). Her lover calls her from Mount Lebanon in the north (4:8), and both finally arrive from a desert whence they have to come “up” (8:5), the latter being an obvious reference to the Dead Sea depression in the south. Their meeting place is under an apple tree in a forest at the crossroads of the four cardinal directions.

The courtly idylls are similarly full of precise yet metaphorical references to far-away places. The hetaera remembers Engedi, then known for the Ptolemaic royal balm gardens,¹⁹³ obviously from a visit in the king’s entourage. Idyll 13 describes the Lebanon and the sources of the River Jordan; and idyll 15 circumscribes the king’s realm by comparing physical features of his mistress with places in six districts of Ptolemaic Syria, possibly corresponding to administrative units (Ὀπάρχειαι).¹⁹⁴ The initial stanza praises two cities in the central highlands, namely Tirzah in Samaria and Jerusalem in Judaea, whereas the last stanza apparently enumerates four places located at the southwestern, southeastern, northeastern, and northwest-

¹⁹¹ Bradley Z. Hull, “Frankincense, Myrrh, and Spices: The Oldest Supply Chain?,” *Journal of Macromarketing* 28.3 (2008), 275–288. Paul J. Ray Jr., “Connectivity: Transjordan during the Persian Period,” in *Connectivity in Antiquity: Globalization as a Long-Term Historical Process*, ed. Øystein S. LaBianca and Sandra Arnold Scham (London: Routledge, 2014), 75–92, here 81–82.

¹⁹² Raoul McLaughlin, *The Roman Empire and the Indian Ocean: The Ancient World Economy and the Kingdoms of Africa, Arabia and India* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2014), 53.

¹⁹³ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* IX.7; Klaus Bringmann, *Geschichte der Juden im Altertum* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 74.

¹⁹⁴ Werner Huß, *Die Verwaltung des ptolemaischen Reichs* (Munich: Beck, 2011), 147; Jan Dušek, *Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Mt. Gerizim and Samaria between Antiochus III and Antiochus IV Epiphanes* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 67.

ern corners of the province, respectively.¹⁹⁵ The first of them, Migdal Shen (“ivory tower”), may have referred to a commercial center in Idumaea, as I will argue below. The enumeration then moves on to Hesbon in the Ammanitis, the “Tower of Lebanon” in Ituraea, and Mount Carmel in the district of Dor. In the present state of the idyll, the number of districts has been brought to seven thanks to the intrusion of the repeated verses 6:5b-7, which mention the Galaaditis. While the nomads’ travels and the peasants’ imaginations cross political borders, the geography seen from the courtly perspective affirms them, not unlike Posidippos’ epigram cycle on precious stones, which mentions the rivers and countries of Alexander’s empire and thereby indicates, according to Peter Bing, “the range of lands available to the Ptolemies as a source of wealth.”¹⁹⁶ Idyll 15 is, in short, an anthropomorphic and versified map of Ptolemaic Syria created by a poet who was visibly linked to the royal administration and very much interested in it.¹⁹⁷ Anthropomorphic maps are first attested in the pseudo-Hippocratic treatise *De Hebdomadibus*, where the author, writing apparently in the fifth century BCE under Pythagorean influence, establishes a correspondence between the seven parts of the body and seven regions of the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁹⁸

The vineyard and city settings, in contrast, impose restrictions on movement. While among the Bedouins, the woman as well as the man travel over wide distances, there is a difference in the range of movement of the two genders in their rural environments. The peasant girl’s village, precisely located near a place called “Baal-Hamon” (8:11), is in view of an elevation called the “Mountains of Beter” (2:17) and the “Mountains of Spices” (8:14), which she believes her lover to come from and go to, but which she never accesses, as her life occurs between house, garden, vineyard, orchard, and field.

The city is experienced from the perspective of the woman protagonist in an even narrower horizon, centered on her mother’s house and its immediate vicinity; the

¹⁹⁵ Only seldom have commentators tried to give a literal interpretation of the place names in Song 7:5 – 6. The hypothesis of an anthropomorphic map was exceptionally defended by André Robert, “La description de l’Époux et de l’Épouse dans Cant. V, 11 – 15 et VII, 2 – 6,” in *Mélanges Pierre Claude Emmanuel Podechard: Études de sciences religieuses* (Lyon: Faculté de théologie, 1945), 211 – 223, here 223: “Ainsi le bien-aimé est identifié avec le Temple, et la bien aimée avec la Terre Sainte.” The order of the place names shows “une énumération allant du sud au nord” (Robert, “La description de l’Époux,” 222), a “South-North geographical sweep” (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 626 – 627).

¹⁹⁶ Peter Bing, “The Politics and Poetics of Geography in the Milan Posidippus Section One: On Stones,” in *The New Posidippus: A Hellenistic Poetry Book*, ed. Kathryn Gutzwiller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 119 – 140, here 122 – 123.

¹⁹⁷ See also Detlef Jericke, “Toponyme im Hohenlied,” *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 121 (2005): 39 – 58, here 46 – 47, 51.

¹⁹⁸ Wilhelm Heinrich Roscher, *Über Alter, Ursprung und Bedeutung der hippokratischen Schrift von der Siebenzahl: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der ältesten griechischen Philosophie und Prosaliteratur* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1911), 5 – 6, 9 – 13, 37, 107 – 108, 126; Martin L. West, “The Cosmology of ‘Hippocrates,’ De Hebdomadibus,” *Classical Quarterly* 21 (1971): 365 – 388.

street; the tavern; and her friends, the “daughters of Jerusalem.” Unmarried city girls, whether Greek¹⁹⁹ or Jewish, were not supposed to go out; rather they were to stay “enclosed in their chambers” with their mothers (3 Macc 1:18). From their perspective, the domestic space has large and fear-inspiring peripheries – the market at night, the city walls, the “garden” – where men such as the king and the guards appear as dominant and even violent figures.

Metaphorical references to gardens and wildlife serve to describe a world beyond the one in which the characters live. For the village girl, the garden is her own space that she shares with her “friends” (8:13). For the king, it is a feminine space that he penetrates as an intruder (4:12–5:1, 6:11–12). For the city girl, the garden is a male space beyond her reach (6:2). The shepherds, finally, make no references to gardens; they come, however, closest of all to wild vegetation and dangerous animals such as lions and leopards (4:8). Doves and foxes appear as part of the natural environment of the vineyard; in addition, the peasant girl imagines the gazelles, stags, and fawns in the “mountains.” Animals are wholly absent from the city, yet the heroine dreams intensely of the roes in the “fields” (2:7), the ravens and doves near the river (5:12). The emblematic courtly animal is the race horse, which appears as a real-and-imagined metaphor (1:9), but the king’s dialogues are the only ones without the imagination of wildlife outside.

In sum, the reach of spatial movement and representation serves as an additional distinctive feature that is shared between the Song’s figures. The accessibility and significance of spaces are determined not only by gender, but also by class. The city girl lives the most restricted life, her freedom being limited to a few steps’ radius around her house. She imagines the outlying circles with apprehension. The peasant girl, however, moves fearlessly through the countryside around her village, but she knows the mountains only from afar and believes that her lover is travelling there at his pleasure. The courtly society lives inside a protected precinct, but it possesses a wide range of geographical knowledge and imaginary spatial references. Only the Bedouins, the women as well as the men, have the freedom to cover the entire Levant as a real space.

In short, spatial relations are not blurred. On the contrary, in addition to their distinctive consumption patterns, the four sociospatial locations, namely, city, vineyard, court, and wilderness correspond to a domestic, local, provincial, and transregional radius that is assigned to the movement of their respective inhabitants, especially from a female perspective.

¹⁹⁹ Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 80.

Social Gender and the Exchange of Fantasies

As the geographical representation of the “Mountains of Incense” shows, social distinction concerns not only experience, but the use of metaphor and imagination as well. Each milieu possesses its distinctive sensations of the natural world, the juxtaposition of which seems to be organized in part by the physical scheme of the four elements. The Song’s one-time references to earth (2:12), wind (4:16), and fire (8:6) occur in the rural, courtly, and pastoral cycles, respectively, while the four existing references to water are equally distributed and progressively expanded across the four environments: we find rain in the vineyard (2:11), fountains in the palace (4:15), rivers in the urban imagination (5:12), and great seas in the metaphorical discourse of the pastoralists (8:7).

The perception of time, too, is space-bound. Of the four canonic times of the day, noon is located in the wilderness (1:7, בָּצָחָרִים), evening in the vineyard (2:17, עַד שִׁיפּוּחַ), night in the city (3:1, תָּלָתֶךָ),²⁰⁰ and the metaphorical dawn (6:10, שְׁחָרָתֶךָ) in the palace. The king’s time is structured by the planned events of building and getting married; the city girl experiences time in accordance with her coming of age, with Eros arriving either too slowly or too fast; the peasants’ sense of time depicts the cycle of seasons and daylight; and the pastoralists imagine time as being inserted into a trans-generational chain of being. It has often been remarked that all speakers in the Song define their family history by way of their mothers and siblings, never mentioning their fathers.²⁰¹ The mother is the source of property and conflict for the peasant girl (1:6), the source of homeliness for the city girl (3:4, 8:1–2), the source of dynastic empowerment for the king (3:11), the source of exclusive admiration for the king’s concubine (6:9), and the symbol of the insertion into a pre-human life cycle for the shepherd (8:5).

Concerning the perception of human beauty, we must equally be careful not to read its representation in accordance with a unified aesthetic or psychological norm. The anachronistic term “*waṣf*,” which since Wetzstein has so universally been applied in Canticles scholarship to any metaphorical praise of the beloved’s body, has been a mixed blessing from Arabic Studies. It has frequently led to the assumption of an eternal Oriental genre that is believed to have followed roughly the same conventions from Pharaonic Egypt to modern Arabic poetry.²⁰² This is visibly a simplification, as the Song’s lovers describe each other according to quite diversified poetic patterns. Some of these metaphors become personal symbols of the Song’s chief protagonists. The courtly lovers mutually praise their bodies with references to precious perfumes and jewelry, to military and equestrian sports, as well as to other luxuries (1:3, 1:9–11, 4:12–16). The king claims for himself the Platonic soul

²⁰⁰ The courtly (3:8), urban (5:2), and rural cycles (7:12) include other night scenes.

²⁰¹ Burton, “Themes of Female Desire,” 191.

²⁰² Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 24, adduces his examples alternatingly from both sources.

symbol of the chariot; he identifies his mistress with the mare and his bride with a lavish garden. The urban erotic imagination evokes the male beloved as a statue (5:14–15), while the city girl endorses the symbolic identity of the wall that is suggested by her family (8:10). The peasant girl chooses the old biblical metaphor of the vineyard for herself; her lover compares her with the products of the dovecote and the orchard (7:8–9), while she likens his fleet-footed legs to wild deer (2:9). Finally, the Bedouins use comparisons with wild trees and flowers (2:1–3): the woman defines her own symbolic identity as the lily and that of her lover as the wild apple tree.

The women of the Song repeatedly introduce these metaphorical self-definitions in the first person with an אֵנִי (idylls 2, 5, 6, and 19), intensely reflecting on the shapes and colors of their own bodies. The king uses נַפְשִׁי (lit. “my soul”) when expressing how he perceived his own desire (6:12). None of the other men use the “I am”; they are not given any reflective self-consciousness, but are said to experience their own ego through the possession or desire of women.²⁰³ In expectation of sexual intimacy, the king feels joy (3:11, לְכָה שְׁמַנְתָּן) and the peasant feels lust (7:7, מְעַמְּתִים).

The king is the only figure who is said to have fear, פִּחד, namely, the fear of being murdered at night (3:8); he is, however, unafraid and even unaware of the traps of Eros (7:6). The introverted city girl experiences her nascent sexual desire as a painful illness, which entails getting dirty (5:3) and being mocked by her family (8:1), but she nonetheless indulges in fantasies about the threatening nightly world of Eros and violence that lurks outside her mother’s house. Conversely, the peasant girl is comfortable in the open field among her trees, birds, and lovers, but she is uncomfortable with her family (1:6) and even with her own skin color. If the city girl imagines a lovers’ refuge, it is inside her home (3:4), as if with a beloved brother (8:2); by contrast, for the country girl it is out in the field (7:12) and far from the brothers who dislike her. The goatherdess is not afraid of deserts, wild beasts, death, floods, or the money economy, but she is haunted by fear of the social opprobrium of being single (1:7). Shame individualizes these three women: only the goatherdess is ashamed of being without a man; only the peasant girl is ashamed of her body; and only the city girl is ashamed of her desires.²⁰⁴

Until its most intimate detail, the man-woman relationship is distinctive for each couple, and the varieties are closely related to the social and ecological conditions of the lovers. While the representation of this relationship on the mimetic level is thus thoroughly consistent in all four cycles, the metaphorical self-expression of the characters occasionally consists in “poaching” images from other social environments. We have seen the concubine of idyll 4 zoom out from the banquet toward a rural environment and, vice versa, the goatherdess of idyll 5 imagine her forest as a palace. The Bedouins in idyll 9 make the scent of their merchandise evoke the spice mer-

203 Mark McGinniss, *Contributions of Selected Rhetorical Devices to a Biblical Theology of the Song of Songs* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 16 (and the literature indicated therein).

204 See the three parallel sentences “do not mind that I look blackish” (1:6, אַל-תִּתְאֹנוּ שְׁאַנִי שְׁחִרְתָּהָרָתָה), “shall I wait like shrouded” (1:7, אַל-בָּזָה קָעַטְתָּה אַדְרָה קְלָמָה שְׁלָשָׁה), and “they would not mock me” (8:1, לֹא-בָּזָה ?).

chant in the city market, while in idyll 18 they mock the rich patrician's wealth. In one single verse of idyll 2, the peasant girl describes her body by metaphorically quoting from the urban, pastoral, and courtly worlds, as she successively addresses the "daughters of Jerusalem," the tents of Kedar, and Solomon's curtains (1:5).

This systematic procedure of doubling, tripling, or even quadrupling social reality through metaphor is most evident in the part-by-part descriptions of the beautiful body that researchers have commonly called *wasf*. On three occasions, the praise of the beloved runs through a pattern of strophe and antistrophe with contrasting metaphorical frames of reference.²⁰⁵ Idyll 11, apparently directed to the peasant girl, consists of two decastichs that employ pastoral and military imagery (4:1–4), respectively. In the speech of the city girl to her absent beloved in idyll 14, one dodecastich describes the head with metaphors from animal and plant life, and the other evokes the body as a sculpture made of various precious materials (5:11–16). The court women's praise of the king's mistress in idyll 15 devotes, in reverse order, one octastich to the body, likened to the urban crafts of sculpting, brewing, and milling, and then one antistrophe to the facial profile, which is compared to the border defenses in Syria (7:2b-6). Each of the three strophe-antistrophe sequences elaborates a contrast on the metaphorical level, while the signified human anatomy ends up becoming a mere pretext for this. The first strophic pair shifts from the flock to the army, the second from nature to art, and the third from labor to power.

The metaphorical imagination of the characters transcends their respective environments, but this journey across social hierarchies does not actually allow the out-classed peasant girl to escape her subaltern condition. On the contrary, the diversity of imaginary spatial references creates a subtle parallelism that confirms and standardizes social boundaries instead of blurring them. All characters experience their own condition in the fictional encounter with others. Even their erotic sensations and amorous relationships are nowhere a private issue that would remain inside the bubble of a romantic dyad. They are everywhere discussed and judged: among "friends" (1:7, 5:1, 8:13), siblings (1:6, 8:8), court women (1:3, 6:9), neighbors (8:1), and the faceless crowd personified by the chorus. Erotic choice is presented as the result of fierce social competition. The Song's lovers constantly assess, compare and rank one another's aesthetic value; this is true for the shepherds (1:5, 2:2–3) and city youth (5:9–10, 6:1), but is most explicit when it comes to the court women (6:8–9). This competitive beauty pageant has its losers, who vainly protest against the central criterion of the ranking, which is skin pigmentation (1:5–6).

The lives of all four couples are largely reactions to this social pressure. Court life, framed by a complex social order and material culture, is the theater of multiple hierarchic relationships, while the open horizon of the Bedouins favors and indeed demands exclusive commitment among the migrant couple. The city girl in the midst

²⁰⁵ Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 125, details "the instability of setting" among the metaphors, but does not note their symmetrical distribution.

of a densely inhabited urban space is subject to a family control that obliges her to confine her love to erotic dreams and fantasies; in contrast, the peasant girl, who has little social prestige to defend, can engage in premarital sex without having to take many precautions.

In the comedies of the Greek playwrights Aristophanes and Menander, the countryside had a better image than the city in terms of chastity and fidelity; the general idea being that the harsh workload of the peasants made them less inclined to have amorous feelings than the idle urban classes.²⁰⁶ The Song makes the exact opposite judgment, displaying the village as the space of sensuality and city as the space of inhibition, while putting the *parabasis* into the mouth of a third character, the Bedouin woman, which lets the listeners (and readers) know the poet's moral preference. Yet one cannot say that any one of the other three attitudes toward love are disparaged. Refined luxury, natural sensuality, corresponsive mutual faith, and ardent longing are all developed by the poet as delicious pleasures. Love can have multiple faces, or, as the philosopher Epikouros put it, "all sensations are true."²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Bernsdorff, *Hirten*, 31, 36, speaks of the "erotikfeindliche Atmosphäre des Landlebens in der neuen Komödie."

²⁰⁷ Gisela Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 77.

4 Ptolemy IV Philopator and his Religious Policy

Women

Love in the Song of Songs is eminently social, but it is political as well. A figure mentioned by all heroines of the Song, except the goatherdess, is King Solomon himself. His presence is a sexual experience for the court women, a visual spectacle for the “daughters of Jerusalem,” and an economic challenge for the peasants, while the Bedouins can safely ignore him. The portrait of the king as a luxury consumer and passionate lover does not fit the biblical ideal of judge and army commander. The only scriptural basis for the Song’s representation of courtly eroticism is the mention of Solomon’s “seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines” in 1 Kgs 11:3, which is corrected to slightly more realistic quantities – namely, “sixty wives, eighty concubines and countless maids” – in Song 6:8. Among the actual panorama of royal lovers, the first category is exemplified by the sister-bride in idyll 13, the second by the woman who appears in idyll 15 as a favorite mistress and dancer, and the third by the “companions” in idylls 1 and 4.

A hypothesis formulated by Heinrich Graetz maintains that the image of Solomon as a womanizer is meant to depict the Alexandrian court life under King Ptolemy IV Philopator (245 – 204 BCE), who inherited the throne in 221 BCE and who became known for his passion for wine, women, poetic amateurism, and Dionysian revelry [Fig. 12].²⁰⁸ “Solomon” (הַשְׁלָמָה) would in this case have been a code word for Ptolemy (תְּלִמְיָה). One must agree that the Song’s sensuous court scenes hardly promise anything that would have remained unfulfilled in Philopator’s entourage.²⁰⁹ In terms of their relationships with females, Ptolemaic rulers were famous for their conjunction of a sister-wife, one or several mistresses, and a host of entertainment slaves of both sexes. Ptolemy IV, if we believe the Greek writers Polybius (fl. second century BCE) and Plutarch (fl. second century CE), was particularly eager to use his royal prerogatives. The Latin historian Justin summarizes the common views on this ruler: “He resigned himself, as if all had gone happily with him, to the attractions of luxury; and the whole court had followed the manners of their king.”²¹⁰

Sibling marriage was engaged in by various Ptolemaic rulers in order to legitimize their claims to the Pharaonic throne.²¹¹ Two such marriages took place during

208 Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, II, 2 (Leipzig: Oskar Leiner, 1876), 257–258; Id., *Schir ha-schirim*, 90–91.

209 For a detailed account of his reign, see Werner Huß, *Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit, 332–30 v.Chr.* (Munich: Beck, 2001), 381–472.

210 Justin, *Epitome XXX.1*; translation by John S. Watson (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), 217; cf. Gabriele Marasco, “La valutazione di Tolomeo IV Filopatore nella storiografia greca,” *Sileno* 5–6 (1979–1980): 159–182.

211 Günther Hölbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 95; Elizabeth D. Carney, “The Reappearance of Royal Sibling Marriage in Ptolemaic Egypt,” *Parola del Passato* 237

the Ptolemaic rule over Judaea. Around 277, Ptolemy II Philadelphos married his sister Arsinoë II, who was already a widow at her wedding. Theokritos celebrated this marriage in his idylls (XVI and XVII) and was aware of the symbolism of Greco-Egyptian unity that this prohibited union was meant to achieve.²¹² At some point between 220 and 217,²¹³ Ptolemy IV Philopator married his underaged sister Arsinoë III [Fig. 13] and subsequently had a son with her.²¹⁴ In order to rule more independently, he murdered his mother (and mother-in-law), Queen Berenike II. However, he established a cult to her, and saw to it that paean songs were performed on a daily basis in her honor.²¹⁵

The Ptolemaic rulers had a Macedonian tradition of royal polygyny to follow, but their quasi-official mistresses may also have mitigated, in the eyes of the Greeks, the scandal provoked by the incestuous marriages.²¹⁶ The strong woman at the court of Ptolemy IV Philopator was Agathoklea (c. 245–203 BCE), the daughter of a rich and renowned Greek family. Being related to the Ptolemaic dynasty on her paternal grandmother's side, she ruled court affairs together with her mother Oenanthe and her brother Agathokles.²¹⁷ The family tried to take over the government of the empire after Philopator's death around 204, but they were cruelly massacred in a rebellion.

In the Song of Songs, the king's mistress is introduced as a “prince's daughter” (בָתְנִדִיב, 7:2). Placed in the court hierarchy between the “bride” (כָלָה) and the “maids” (תִינְמָלָעַ), she is given the enigmatic generic term *ha-shulamit* (השׁוֹלָמִית, 7:1), which I suppose has the meaning of “mistress, favorite” through a mirror translation from the Greek. The Hebrew term *shalom* in 8:10 does not literally mean “peace,” but stands for a lover's “favor” in exactly the same way that *charis* (χάρις, lit. “grace”)

(1987), 420–439; Sheila L. Ager, “Familiarity Breeds: Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 125 (2005): 1–34.

²¹² Susan A. Stephens, *Seeing Double: Intercultural Poetics in Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 168; Sabine Müller, *Das hellenistische Königspaar in der medialen Repräsentation: Ptolemaios II. und Arsinoe II* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009); Mark A.J. Heerink, “Merging Paradigms: Translating Pharaonic Ideology in Theocritus' Idyll 17,” in *Interkulturalität in der Alten Welt: Vorderasien, Hellas, Ägypten und die vielfältigen Ebenen des Kontakts*, ed. Robert Rollinger et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 383–407.

²¹³ Werner Huß, *Untersuchungen zur Außenpolitik Ptolemaios' IV* (Munich: Beck, 1976), 263.

²¹⁴ On her young age, see Joyce E. Salisbury, *Encyclopedia of Women in the Ancient World* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2001), 18.

²¹⁵ Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, Vol. 2 (New York: Continuum, 2005), 212.

²¹⁶ Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, 49–51; Rolf Strootman, *Courts and Elites in the Hellenistic Empires: The Near East after the Achaemenids* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 183. The poet Sotades wrote a harsh condemnation of the king's incestuous marriage (Athenaios, *Learned Banqueters* XIV.621 A).

²¹⁷ Daniel Ogden, *Polygamy, Prostitutes and Death: The Hellenistic Dynasties* (London: Duckworth, 1999), 81–82.

can be understood in Greek erotology.²¹⁸ It is thus imaginable that the derivation of *ha-shulamit* from *shalom*²¹⁹ recreates that of *charitoméne* (χαριτωμένη, “favorite”) from *charis*. The association between the two terms was probably encouraged by the parallel greeting formulae סְלָמָן and χαῖρε, which the New Testament (Luke 1:28) would later make famous.

The final line of the royal mistress’ poetic portrait in the Song shows the king as her “captive” (7:6), which brings to mind the common slander about Ptolemy Philopator that Greek and Roman historians have faithfully transmitted to us. For example, Polybios asks: “And was not Ptolemy Philopator the slave of the courtesan (ἢ ἐταίρα ἐκράτει) Agathoclea, who overturned the whole kingdom?”²²⁰ Furthermore, Plutarch explains that due to his “womanish temper” (γυναικοκρασία) the young king let Agathoklea rule over himself as well as over his entire kingdom:

For the king himself was so corrupted in spirit by wine and women that, in his soberest and most serious moments, he would celebrate religious rites and act the mountebank in his palace, timbrel in hand, while the most important affairs of the government were managed by Agathoclea, the mistress (έρωμένην) of the king, and Oenanthe her mother, who was a bawd (πορνοβοσκόν).²²¹

This judgment is further elaborated by Justin, who reports that the mistress (*meretrix*) Agathoklea, her brother Agathokles, and her mother Oenanthe were not only the actual rulers of the kingdom, but were also acclaimed as such by the populace wherever and whenever they appeared in public. The family “kept the king enslaved” (*de-vinctum regem tenebat*). The Song uses the same formula (אָסָף חֶלְמָה), but without the moralizing and misogynist tone reproduced by the ancient Graeco-Roman sources. The inversion of political and gender roles is the punch line of idyll 15 and of the entire courtly cycle, yet the powerful royal favorite encounters the most flattering praise rather than blame.

Besides his sister-wife and powerful mistress, Ptolemy IV was known to excessively exploit slaves for his pleasure: “The king [...] was absorbed with women and Dionysiac routs and revels.”²²² His grandfather Ptolemy II Philadelphos had already institutionalized slave concubinage to such a degree that he had statues and temples

²¹⁸ Barbara Breitenberger, *Aphrodite and Eros: The Development of Greek Erotic Mythology in Early Greek Poetry and Cult* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 105.

²¹⁹ The literal Greek version of Aqilas translates the word as εἰρηνευούσα (lit. the pacified), obviously supposing a passive noun in the feminine derived from סְלָמָן (peace). See Frederick Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt, sive Veterum interpretum Graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1875), II, 421; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 600.

²²⁰ Polybios, *Histories* XIV.11.5; translation by William R. Paton, Vol. IV (L oeb Classical Library, no. 159; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 513.

²²¹ Plutarch, *Kleomenes* 33; translation by Bernadotte Perrin, in Plutarch, *Lives*, Vol. X (Loeb Classical Library, no. 102; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 125.

²²² Plutarch, *Kleomenes* 34.

erected to honor his concubines. His favorite cupbearer, Kleino, was represented drinking from a horn in the slave attire of a simple tunic.²²³

The image of the three classes of royal partners (i.e. sister-wives, mistresses, and slaves) includes exaggeration, but this was not considered indecent in antiquity. On the contrary, the epigrammatic genre demanded a certain amount of ironic indiscretion.²²⁴ Alexandrian poets, for example, defended their literary freedom by relativizing court life through its juxtaposition with popular scenes.²²⁵ Reading the Song of Songs, we should resist an influential exegetical trend – developed by nineteenth-century liberals – which sees the poem as a moralistic satire on decadent court life. Solomon's hedonism, polygamy, and financial exploitation are reported without any echo of the critical discourse that such topics invite in the First Book of Kings (1 Kgs 11). On the contrary, the splendor of the king's exuberance is positively highlighted. His slave concubines find their master appealing and lovingly serve him at the banquet. The city women are eager to gaze at his many weddings. The political sibling marriage turns out to be an erotic success. The crowd of spouses acknowledges without jealousy the privileges of the one whom he has named as his favorite. Even the rural taxpayer admires and imitates the king's skillful accumulation of silver. To discard any doubt about how he was regarded, we can read from the beginning the exhortation to the king that "the righteous love you" (1:4). This formula reflects the Theokritean encomium praising the "half-godly" royal couple for its "virtue" (ἀρετήν),²²⁶ but also the biblical exaltation of a glorious king, whose masculine desire is highlighted as a part of his majesty (Ps 45:12 and 18).

While the Roman Republic promoted a political culture of virtuous frugality, a "philosophy of excess" – material and sexual – was still considered to be a part of political virtue in the Eastern Mediterranean.²²⁷ Opulence, τρυφή, was considered as "the ideal center of true power,"²²⁸ and Ptolemy IV in particular was nicknamed *Tryphon* (the "Opulent").²²⁹ Official iconography eroticized the incestuous royal cou-

²²³ Polybios, *Histories* XIV.11.2; Athenaios, *Learned Banqueters* XIII.576 – 577; Anika Aulbach, *Diadochendynastien: Eine prosopographische Studie zur weiblichen Entourage Alexanders des Großen und seiner Nachfolger* (Munich: Herbert Utz, 2015), 122 – 127.

²²⁴ Ulrich Hamm, "Zum Phänomen der Ironie in höfischer Dichtung oder Ironie ist, wenn der Herrscher trotzdem lacht," in *Ironie: griechische und lateinische Fallstudien*, ed. Reinhold F. Gleis (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2009), 77 – 105; Évelyne Prioux, "Machon et Sotadès, figures de l'irrévérence alexandrine," in *Le poète irrévérencieux: Modèles hellénistiques et réalités romaines*, ed. Bénédicte Delignon, Yves Roman, and Sarah Laborie (Paris: Librairie de Boccard, 2009), 115 – 131.

²²⁵ Ernst-Richard Schwinge, *Künstlichkeit von Kunst: Zur Geschichtlichkeit der alexandrinischen Poesie* (Munich: Beck, 1986), 58 – 59.

²²⁶ Theokritos, *Encomium of Ptolemy Philadelphus*, ed. Richard Hunter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 90 – 91.

²²⁷ Sheila L. Ager, "The Power of Excess: Royal Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty," *Anthropologica* 48 (2006): 165 – 186; Ead., "Response to Michael M.J. Fischer," *Anthropologica* 49 (2007): 301 – 310.

²²⁸ Vössing, *Mensa regia*, 41.

²²⁹ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VII.208: "Tryphon cognominatus est."

ple: the king was represented with a nude, athletic body [Fig. 5], and the queen was represented with transparent clothing and features of Aphrodite and Isis.²³⁰ With respect to the Alexandrian court poet Posidippos, Ann Kuttner pertinently argues that the literary praise of the royal pleasures “implicates the reader in the aesthetics and ethics of τρυφή: an ideological agenda in which power, by sharing pleasure, seduces as well as compels obedience.”²³¹

Banquets

Defining τρυφή as “the epitome of the festive culture promising abundance and good life,”²³² Sabine Müller has argued that the Ptolemaic court visualized this “semantic system” essentially through two ephemeral structures: the banquet tent (σκηνή) and the procession (πομπή).²³³ Both are reflected in idylls 4 and 10 of the Song, but it is possible to recognize the first of these institutions already in the allusion to “Solomon’s curtains” (1:5, מה שִׁירְיעָוֹת לְמַה) that precedes the explicit mention of the banquet (1:12). The dark royal “curtains” stand here in parallel to “Kedar’s tents,” since the word “curtains” is a synonym of “tent” in biblical Hebrew (cf. 2 Sam 7:2). Again, there is no precedent for such textile objects being associated with Solomon, but their mention, just as the banquet decoration described in the Book of Esther (Esth 1:6), must have evoked images of the scenery found in the Hellenistic world. Ptolemy II Philadelphos became famous by the precious banqueting tent that he had built in Alexandria for his soldiers and guests. The Jewish author of the *Letter of Aristeas* tells us quite specifically that the tent could hold more than one hundred dining couches. Athenaios transmits a detailed description of the tent, which includes the rugs from Miletus and Samos that decorated it.²³⁴

230 Silvia Barbantani, “Goddess of Love and Mistress of the Sea: Notes on a Hellenistic Hymn to Arsinoe-Aphrodite (P. Lit. Goodsp. 2, I-IV),” *Ancient Society* 35 (2005): 135–165, here 143. See also the life-size cult statue of Arsinoë II found underwater in Canopus/Abukir in 2000 and shown in the Biblioteca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum, inv. M/II/23.

231 Ann Kuttner, “Cabinet Fit for a Queen: The Λιθικά as Posidippus’ Gem Museum,” in *The New Posidippus: A Hellenistic Poetry Book*, ed. Kathryn Gutzwiller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 141–163, here 144.

232 Müller, *Das hellenistische Königspaar*, 164: “Fruchtbarkeit und Wohlleben spendender Inbegriff von Festkultur.”

233 Athenaios, *Learned Banqueters* V.196 A–197C (σκηνή), 197D–203B (πομπή); cf. Müller, *Das hellenistische Königspaar*, 176–205.

234 Athenaios, *Learned Banqueters* V.197 A; Franz Studniczka, *Das Symposium Ptolemaios’ II nach der Beschreibung des Kallixeinos* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914), 8–9; Richard A. Tomlinson, “The Banqueting Tent of Ptolemy Philadelphus,” in *Alessandria e il mondo ellenistico-romano: Studi in onore di Achille Adriani*, ed. Nicola Bonacasa et al. (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 1983), 263–264; David T. Jenkins, *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), I.103; Vössing, *Mensa Regia*, 107–110, 115; Judith McKenzie, *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt, c. 300 B.C. to A.D. 700* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 49; Müller, *Das hellenistische Königspaar*, 176–205.

The “mobile architecture” of the tent and the procession celebrated royal opulence as a festive event inserted into a cultic order of time, but it evoked at the same time Alexander’s campaigns and spoils as the fundamental historical justification of Ptolemaic power.²³⁵ When Ptolemy IV Philopator fought and traveled in Syria during the summer of 217 BCE, he obviously reenacted the self-representation of Alexander and Ptolemy II, since he used to show himself in his “principal and official tent,” that is, “the tent in which the king used to dine and transact business.”²³⁶ The tent and the palanquin, considered as the most symbolic features of Hellenistic kingship,²³⁷ were also those elements which the Judaeans could most likely perceive with their own eyes, all the more so as their leaders were much-envied guests of honor at the royal banquets.²³⁸ The admiring depiction of courtly debauchery in the Song is perfectly in line not only with the Greek models, but also with the “overwhelmingly positive attitude towards the foreign monarchy” that historian Martin Hengel finds in Jewish literature of the early Hellenistic period.²³⁹

Horse Races

On the degree to which King Ptolemy IV Philopator’s sexual taste was a matter of public knowledge and public policy, there is a telling anecdote reported by Plutarch on the Spartan courtier Kleomenes and a conversation that he had held with a visiting stranger:

Nikagoras returned his greeting in a friendly manner, and said that he was bringing horses for the king, some fine ones for use in war. At this, Cleomenes gave a laugh and said, “I could wish that thou hadst rather brought sambuca-girls and catamites, for these now most interest the king.”²⁴⁰

It is interesting to observe that Kleomenes’ comparison between slave girls (and boys) and race horses also appears in the Song of Songs when the king compares his concubine to his “mare in Pharaoh’s chariots” (1:9, לְסֶסֶתִי בָּרְכָּבִי פָּרָעָה). The chariot (ἄρμα) had not been used in warfare since the fifth century BCE, but it remained an important ceremonial vehicle in cults, weddings, and sporting events. It was not the charioteers, but the owners of the horses who were credited for victories in the great

istische Königspaar, 185–186; Elena Calandra, “A proposito di arredi: Prima e dopo la tenda di Tolomeo Filadelfo,” *LANX* 5 (2010), 1–38, here 17–19.

²³⁵ Müller, *Das hellenistische Königspaar*, 189.

²³⁶ Polybius, *Histories* V.81.5; translation by Paton, III 217.

²³⁷ Josephus, *Jewish War* II.7.1.

²³⁸ Vössing, *Mensa regia*, 93, 105.

²³⁹ Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1974), I 29.

²⁴⁰ Plutarch, *Kleomenes* 34; translation by Perrin, X 129.

Pan-Hellenic competitions, and this made Hellenistic rulers eager to improve the image of their power and Greekness through chariot-racing victories in the athletic competitions such as the Olympic and the Isthmian games. The Ptolemies were particularly successful in this respect, as they had focused on the prestigious four-horse chariot race (*τέθριππον*). During the first half of the third century, when documentation of this phenomenon is available, thirty to fifty percent of Olympic *tethrippon* contests were won by members of the Ptolemaic royal family.²⁴¹ Ptolemaic Alexandria also had its own hippodrome.²⁴²

The Song's two references to chariots, "Pharaoh's chariots" (1:9) and "the chariots of Ami-Nadiv" (6:12, מִרְכְּבֹת עַמִּי נָדִיב), are disposed parenthetically in idylls 4 and 15, referring once to feminine beauty and once to male desire. In the latter verse, reputed to be the most difficult in the Song,²⁴³ we may assume that "Ami-Nadiv" stands in a semantic parallel to "Pharaoh" as another chariot-race winner. May this term, which means "prince of my people" and which is proverbially undecipherable,²⁴⁴ be perhaps a mirror translation from another language, presumably from Greek? The Septuagint gives only a transliteration in Song 6:12 ('Αμιναδάβ), but translates *nedivei 'amim* in Ps 47:10 by ἄρχοντες λαῶν in accordance with its usual employment of ἄρχων for *nadiv*. Using the same terms, Aqilas' literal translation interprets Ami-Nadiv as λαοῦ ἄρχοντος.²⁴⁵ Ami-Nadiv would therefore be the Hebrew equivalent of Arkhelaos. Now, King Arkhelaos I of Macedonia, a dynastic ancestor of the Ptolemies, famously won the Olympic race in the *tethrippon* at the 93rd Olympic Games in 408 BCE.²⁴⁶ Known for his passion, he was killed by his male lover.²⁴⁷ "Unwittingly

²⁴¹ Marco Fantuzzi, "Posidippus at Court: The Contribution of the Ἰππικά of P. Mil. Vogl. VIII 309 to the Ideology of Ptolemaic Kingship," in *The New Posidippus: A Hellenistic Poetry Book*, ed. Kathryn Gutzwiller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 249–268; Sofie Remijsen, "Challenged by Egyptians: Greek Sports in the Third Century BC," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 26 (2009): 246–271.

²⁴² McKenzie, *The Architecture of Alexandria*, 48.

²⁴³ Graetz, *Schir ha-Schirim*, 106, 186; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 584.

²⁴⁴ Exegetes have unconvincingly tried to identify Ami-Nadiv with one of the Amminadabs mentioned in the Bible, none of which is known as a possessor of chariots. See Martin J. Mulder, "Does Canticles 6,12 Make Sense?" in *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Studies in Honour of A.S. van der Woude*, ed. F. García Martínez et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 104–113; Karlfried Froehlich, "'Amminadab's Chariot': The Predicament of Biblical Interpretation," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 18 (1997): 262–278, here 267.

²⁴⁵ Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt*, II, 421.

²⁴⁶ Solinus, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* IX.16; Eugene N. Borza, "The Philhellenism of Arche-laos," *Archaia Makedonia* 6 (1993): 237–244; Nicholas Hammond and Guy Griffith, *A History of Macedonia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 150; Mark Golden, *Sport in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London: Routledge, 2004), 14; Donald G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 225. He is also remembered for having funded the games at Olympia and having founded those at Dion. Known as "Euergetes" (lit. "Beneficent") by the Athenians, he was the protector of the playwright Euripides, who authored the *Bacchae* at his court.

²⁴⁷ Plato, *Alcibiades* 141d.

my soul carried me off like Arkhelaos' chariots" can be read as a metaphor of the desire that ravishes the narrator at the sight of his dancing mistress, an image that is referencing the allegory of the black horse of passion running wild before the soul's chariot in Plato's *Phaidros*.²⁴⁸ This interpretation would suppose that both the poet and his audience lived in a bilingual culture, and that the Song had a cross-cultural agenda.²⁴⁹

Bacchanals

Immediately following the word play on Ami-Nadiv/Arkhelaos, idyll 15 yields another possible allusion to Hellenic cults. It is early spring; the king enters by chance into a garden and sees his "favorite" dancing "in sandals" in an atmosphere of secrecy (7:2). She is acclaimed by a group of onlookers, presumably formed by the other court women, whose praise of her had been introduced earlier (6:9). The already quoted punch line, exalting the favorite's dominion over the king (7:6), ends the women's chorus and the entire cycle of courtly idylls.

This scene of a king spying on dancing women in the woods and eventually being overpowered is reminiscent of the myth of Pentheus, King of Thebes, who prohibited the Dionysian mysteries and followed, dressed up in feminine garb, the wine god's female followers, the maenads, when these celebrated their cult dances in the Kithairon Mountains. In their frenzy, women took the intruder for an animal and tore him to pieces. Ancient iconography shows the king in hiding and kneeling between two trees outside his palace gate.²⁵⁰ In literary treatment, most famously in Euripides' last play *The Bacchae* (406 BCE), the Pentheus myth was interpreted in the sense that the women's victory was psychological as well as physical because the king succumbed to the Dionysian frenzy that he tried to repress.

The parallel scene in the Song gives the inexplicable specification that the king's mistress moved "like the dance of the Maḥanaim" (מַחְנֵן הַמַּחְנֵן, 7:1). This phrase has been

248 Plato, *Phaidros* 253e-254a; translation by Harold N. Fowler, in Plato, Vol. I (Loeb Classical Library, no. 36; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1914), 495: "Now when the charioteer beholds the love-inspiring vision, and his whole soul is warmed by the sight, and is full of the ticklings and prickings of yearning, the horse that is obedient to the charioteer, constrained then as always by modesty, controls himself and does not leap upon the beloved; but the other no longer heeds the pricks or the whip of the charioteer, but springs wildly forward, causing all possible trouble to his mate and to the charioteer, and forcing them to approach the beloved and propose the joys of love." Medieval exegetes already made this association. See Froehlich, "'Ammidanab's Chariot,'" 272.

249 On the (limited) linguistic, religious, and literary hybridity in the cities of Hellenistic Palestine, see the study by Menahem Stern, "Yahadut weyawanut be'Erts Yisra'el ba-me'ah ha-shelishit we-ha-sheniyah lifnei ha-sefirah," in Stern, *Mehqarim betoledot Yisra'el bimei bayit sheni*, ed. Isaiah Gafni et al. (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1991), 3–21, here 11–17.

250 Jean Charles Balty, ed., *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae* (LIMC), VII/1: *Oidipous – Theseus* (Zurich: Artemis, 1994), 308.

interpreted either as a dance typical of the city of Maḥanaim in Gilead (about which we know nothing), or as a no less hypothetical group dance “in two camps, or in two circles”²⁵¹ (but the woman is apparently dancing alone). As for me, I would suspect a textual corruption behind this difficult term. The Masoretic vocalization *ha-maḥanayim* does not deliver the expected end-rhyme with *ha-rimonim* (6:11) and *ba-shoshanim* (7:3).²⁵² In the initial wording, perhaps a reference to the proverbial orgiastic devotees, the Midianites (מִדְיָנִים *ha-midyanim*, Nm 25:17–18),²⁵³ created the oblique reference to the maenads (μαινάδες). The most characteristic movement of the maenads was the wild tossing of their heads,²⁵⁴ and this frantic movement²⁵⁵ is the most convincing explanation for the curious fact that the bottom-up description in Song 7:1–6 reaches the eyes before the nose, which is said to point upwards like a tower. Similar to the standard visual representations of the maenadic dance, the *shulamit* is depicted in sandals,²⁵⁶ with parts of her body uncovered and her head thrown back [Fig. 14].

The association between the favorite’s dance in idyll 15 and the maenads’ rites is made likely by the season in which the scene is said to take place. Graetz, guided by his excellent intuition, already surmised on this basis that the Song of Songs was written for a spring celebration, a Jewish appropriation of the major Dionysian festival known as the Anthesteria, which started on the last full moon of winter with the feast of the Pithoigia or “cask-opening” (Πιθοίγια) of the new wine.²⁵⁷ Not only does the Song have a central emphasis on wine-production and wine-consumption, as well as on the early spring (2:11–13, 6:11, 7:12),²⁵⁸ it also shows, on two occasions located respectively in the exact center and at the end of the poem, the gatherings of “friends” in a garden (5:1, 8:13), for a feast at which the audience is invited to drink

251 Assis, *Flashes of Fire*, 206.

252 The only possible rhyme-word is *ba-na’alayim* (7:2) inside the following distich.

253 Philo, *On the Virtues*, §§ 34–44, imagined in detail the lascivious strutting of the Midianite women.

254 Matthew Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (London: Routledge, 2002), 144.

255 This gesture is dramatically exhibited in a famous sculpture by Skopas (c. 335 BCE, Roman copy in Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, inv. 133).

256 This type of footwear appears on the six much-copied maenad reliefs attributed to Kallimakhos the sculptor (c. 425 BCE; Roman copies in Madrid, Museo del Prado); see Lori-Ann Touchette, *The Dancing Maenad Reliefs: Continuity and Change in Roman Copies* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London, 1995).

257 Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, II, 2, 254. He did not provide proof for his hypothesis, but only added the following in a footnote: “Es wird an einem anderen Orte unwiderleglich nachgewiesen werden, dass das griechische Fest πιθοίγια = *Vinalia* auch bei den Judäern Eingang gefunden hat.”

258 The “pruning season” of the vine (Song 2:12) was at the end of the winter. See Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* XVII.191; Columella, *On Agriculture* IV.10. In interwar Palestine, pruning was generally done in February according to observations made in the Judaean hills by Gustav Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina IV: Brot, Öl und Wein* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1935), 312, 330.

and to get drunk. The consumption of milk and honey, which is mentioned in this context, was also associated with the Dionysian feast.²⁵⁹

Talmudic sources famously denounce the Song's recitation during certain banquets,²⁶⁰ and we can even risk being more precise concerning its original *Sitz im Leben* and its place in the ritual calendar. On the second day of the Anthesteria, called Choës or "pitchers" (Χόëς), the populace of all classes came together to recline on beds of rushes, drink, and eat provisions they brought from home.²⁶¹ As days were counted from sunset, the Pithoigia and Choës both took place on the same evening. The participants drank from individual pitchers of uniform size, and the king gave the sign when excessive drinking had to start. Outsiders such as slaves and aliens were allowed to join; miniature pitchers were given to the children; and it was believed that the wine even attracted the souls of the dead from the netherworld.²⁶² The Choës ritual included the symbolic representation of the wedding of Dionysos with Ariadne [Fig. 15], which was enacted by a member of the ruling family. This tradition invited in Hellenistic times the appearance of the king in the role of the wine god.²⁶³

Ptolemy II Philadelphos introduced Athenian-style public festivals in honor of Dionysos, where well-mannered maenads appeared prominently.²⁶⁴ His grandson Ptolemy IV Philopator, according to the description by Athenaios, cherished the inter-class fraternization and transformed the Dionysian banquet into a festival of the ruler cult, whereas Queen Arsinoë III is known to have despised and avoided this "filthy celebration" organized by her brother-husband among "people of every

²⁵⁹ Ludwig Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1872), I 583.

²⁶⁰ *tSanhedrin* 12:10; *bSanhedrin* 101a; cf. Keel, *Song of Songs*, 6

²⁶¹ Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*, I 554; Ludwig Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956), 96–112; Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, tr. Peter Bing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 213–247; Richard Hamilton, *Choës and Anthesteria: Athenian Iconography and Ritual* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Barbara Goff, *Citizen Bacchae: Women's Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 38–39; Dominik Fugger, *Verkehrte Welten? Forschungen zum Motiv der rituellen Inversion* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013), 57–65.

²⁶² See Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 215, 217 on the date and hour of the festival, 220 on the king's sign for drinking, 227 on the souls of the dead, and 227–230 on the invitation of rural aliens to the city.

²⁶³ Julien Tondriau, "Dionysos, dieu royal: Du Bacchus tauromorphe primitif aux souverains hellénistiques 'Neoi Dionysioi,'" *Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves* 12 (1952): 441–466; On third-century BCE Ptolemaic iconography, see Huß, *Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit*, 468; Müller, *Das hellenistische Königspaar*, 165–166; Marden Fitzpatrick Nichols, "Appliqué of a Ptolemaic King as Dionysos," in *Pergamon and the Hellenistic Kingdoms of the Ancient World*, ed. Carlos A. Picón and Seán Hemingway (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 209.

²⁶⁴ Françoise Dunant, "Fête et propagande à Alexandrie sous les Lagides," in *La fête: Pratique et discours d'Alexandrie hellénistique à la Mission de Besançon*, ed. Françoise Dunant (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1981), 13–40; Dillon, *Girls and Women*, 125, 146–147.

kind, who'll serve themselves a meal consisting of nasty leftovers.”²⁶⁵ The king's mistress Agathoklea, in contrast, readily occupied religious dignities in women's mystery cults.²⁶⁶ Plutarch mentions her among the reveling royal concubines of the Alexandrian court: “Samian flute-girls, ballet-dancers, women like Aristonica and Oenanthê with her tambourine and Agathoclea have trampled on the crowns of kings (διαδήμασι βασιλέων ἐπέβησαν).”²⁶⁷

Gabriele Marasco explained the disagreement on the Choës banquet ritual with a rivalry between court factions, and he found in the Letter of Aristeas some support for the assumption that the Dionysian party of the mistress Agathoklea, the minister Sosibios, and the physician Andreas was more protective of Judaean interests than the circle around Queen Arsinoë.²⁶⁸ In any case, the institution of a royal banquet for all social classes must have made a considerable impression among the Judeans. It is still recorded in the Book of Esther (1:5) and is associated with the joyful celebrations of the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar (9:19), that is, precisely during the last full moon of winter. The intention behind these details in the Esther scroll is obviously that of giving an alternative Jewish meaning (or aetiology) to the Dionysian picnic in which I would locate the ritual framework of the Song. In quite a similar way, the Greek city of Eretria (in Euboea) transformed in the third century BCE its Dionysian festival into a liberation festival commemorating the departure of the Macedonian garrison.²⁶⁹

One of the literary rituals of the Dionysian spring festivals was the dithyramb contest that took place before the dramatic performances.²⁷⁰ In the Athenian setting, this poetic contest was carried out among the ten districts of the city, with each district sending out a chorus of fifty people to sing two heroic ballads praising stations of Dionysos' life and cult. Each year, the dithyramb contest therefore involved the recitation of twenty poems.²⁷¹ In the fourth century BCE, Philoxenos reinvented the genre, which was originally a purely choral performance, as a sequence of mini-

²⁶⁵ Athenaios, *Learned Banqueters* VII.276B-C; translation by S. Douglas Olson, Vol. III (Loeb Classical Library, no. 224; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 271–273; Vössing, *Mensa regia*, 134–138; John M. Wilkins and Shaun Hill, *Food in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 104.

²⁶⁶ Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, 49–50.

²⁶⁷ Plutarch, *Dialogue on Love* 9 (753D); translation by Edwin L. Minar, in Plutarch, *Moralia*, Vol. VIII (Loeb Classical Library, no. 425; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 333. Cf. Polybios, *Histories* 15.25.32; Justin, *Epitome* XXX.1.9.

²⁶⁸ Gabriele Marasco, “Les médecins de cour à l'époque hellénistique,” *Revue des études grecques* 109 (1996): 435–466, here 451–452.

²⁶⁹ Angelos Chaniotis, “Gedenktage der Griechen: Ihre Bedeutung für das Geschichtsbewußtsein griechischer Poleis,” in *Das Fest und das Heilige: Religiöse Kontrapunkte zur Alltagswelt*, ed. Jan Assmann and Theo Sundermeier (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1991), 123–145, here 125, 136, 137.

²⁷⁰ Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*, I 556.

²⁷¹ David M. Lewis and John Boardman, ed. *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. V: *The Fifth Century B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 271–272.

dramas; he wrote them for individual actor-musicians who would speak in dialogue with the choruses. In their content, dithyrambs now consisted of any song praising wine-drinking, flute-playing, and fertility; and they explored a great variety of poetic and musical forms.²⁷² This poetic genre, which was consumed and produced in numerous Hellenistic *poleis*, is almost entirely lost, and we can only guess as to whether it inspired the sequence of twenty idylls which the Song of Songs comprises. In this case, one might qualify the Song, if this expression may be excused, as a kosher dithyramb.

Dionysian Politics

As opposed to Rome, where the Bacchanalia were perceived by the Senate as a threat to the public order and were violently repressed in 186 BCE, the Ptolemaic empire not only represented “a sane political order [that] leaves some room for the Dionysian dimension,”²⁷³ but also made the participation in the Dionysian mysteries an obligation of citizenship by connecting it to the royal cult. Ptolemaic kingship had initially employed a multicultural strategy with two parallel symbolic codes, one Greek and the other Egyptian.²⁷⁴ However, the “mixed Greco-Egyptian style” that Ptolemy IV propagated in architecture and art manifests a programmatic religious syncretism.²⁷⁵ His cultural choice comes as no surprise, since the war of 219–217 BCE with the Seleukids had forced him to massively recruit Egyptian natives for the defense of the Syrian border.²⁷⁶ Following a policy that had proven its utility in Egypt, Ptolemy IV Philopator tried to make the mysteries into a state cult that was also to be obligatory for his Syrian subjects, at least those who wanted to enjoy full legal status within the empire.²⁷⁷ This conclusion is supported by an edict that dates from the immediate postwar period and that is conserved in a papyrus from Upper Egypt, in which

²⁷² Fantuzzi and Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry*, 20–21; Bernhard Zimmermann, *Dithyrambos: Geschichte einer Gattung* (Berlin: Verlag Antike, 2008), 124–125.

²⁷³ Matthias Riedl, “The Containment of Dionysos: Religion and Politics in the Bacchanalia Affair of 186 BCE,” *International Political Anthropology* 5 (2012): 113–133, here 126.

²⁷⁴ Françoise Dunant, “La problématique des transferts culturels et son application au domaine religieux: Idéologie royale et cultes dynastiques dans le monde hellénistique,” in *Transferts culturels et politique dans le monde hellénistique*, ed. Jean-Christophe Couvenhes and Bernard Legras (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006), 121–140, here 133.

²⁷⁵ Huß, *Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit*, 451; McKenzie, *The Architecture of Alexandria*, 64.

²⁷⁶ Christelle Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 157–164.

²⁷⁷ Paul Perdrizet, “Le fragment de Satyros sur les dèmes d’Alexandrie,” *Revue des études anciennes* 12 (1910), 217–247, here 244: “Nous pensons que Philopator, pour donner plus de cohésion à la population hétéroclite d’Alexandrie, eut l’idée d’un syncrétisme qui réunirait Juifs et Grecs.”

the king proceeded to set up a central register of the Dionysian fraternities and their sacred scriptures.²⁷⁸

That the reveler-king undertook considerable effort to impose his new state cult also on the Judaeans is affirmed in the late second century BCE, one century after the events, in the Third Book of the Maccabees (3 Maccabees). Few historians today consider this book to be a reliable historical account of the events under Ptolemaic rule;²⁷⁹ rather, it seems to project into the past the later Jewish-Hellenic antagonism that developed under the Seleukid ruler Antiochos IV Epiphanes after 167 BCE.²⁸⁰ With this caveat in mind, the passage of the book on Dionysian branding deserves to be read carefully, as it seems to have conserved fragments of the lost history by Ptolemy of Megalopolis, from which Polybios quoted as well in his *Histories*.

The conflict between the Judaeans and the king is said to have broken out immediately after the latter's victory at the Battle of Raphia in 217 BCE. We know from Polybios and other sources that the royal couple then traveled the Syrian province between June and October that year. "Ptolemy took without resistance Raphia and the other towns, each community endeavouring to anticipate its neighbours in going over to him and resuming its allegiance [...] there was no extravagance of adulation to which they did not proceed, honouring Ptolemy with crowns, sacrifices, altars dedicated to him and every distinction of the kind."²⁸¹ An inscription shows that the king and his sister-wife were received as gods in Marisa, the capital of Idumaea,

278 Lenger, *Corpus des Ordonnances*, no. 29; cf. Wilhelm Schubart, "Ptolemaios Philopator und Dionysos," *Amtliche Berichte der Königlichen Kunstsammlungen* 38 (1917), 189–198; Richard Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen nach ihren Grundgedanken und Wirkungen*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), 103; Lucien Cerfaux, "Influence des mystères sur le judaïsme alexandrin avant Philon," in *Recueil Lucien Cerfaux*, Vol. I (Gembloux: Université de Louvain, 1954), 65–112, here 67; Günther Zuntz, "Once More: The So-Called Edict of Philopator on the Dionysiac Mysteries (BGU 1211)," *Hermes* 91 (1963): 228–239; Eric G. Turner, "The Ptolemaic Royal Edict BGU VI 1211 Is to Be Dated before 215/14 B.C.," in *Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer (P. Rainer Cent.): Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, ed. Helene Loebenstein (Vienna: Generaldirektion der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, 1983), 148–152; Huß, *Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit*, 454–456.

279 Cerfaux, "Influence des mystères sur le judaïsme," 84; Victor Tcherikover, "The Third Book of Maccabees as a Historical Source," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 7 (1961): 1–26; Courtney Jade Friesen, *Reading Dionysus: Euripides' Bacchae among Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2013), 141. Among the few who accepted this source are Aryeh Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: The Struggle for Equal Rights* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 217–219; Joseph Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 149. See Philip Alexander and Loveday Alexander, "The Image of the Oriental Monarch in the Third Book of Maccabees," in *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers*, ed. Tessa Rajak et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 92–109, here 94–95.

280 At that time, Antiochos IV tried to impose Dionysian ritual on the Jews, see 2 Macc 6:7.

281 Polybios, *Histories* V.86.8 and 11; translation by William R. Paton, Vol. III (Loeb Classical Library, no. 138; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 231; cf. John P. Mahaffy, *History of Egypt*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1914), IV, 134; Huß, *Untersuchungen*, 83.

and probably in Joppa (Jaffa) as well.²⁸² Philopator also reorganized the military, fiscal, and cultic administration of the province.²⁸³ As part of this reorganization process, the king entered into the temples of various cities (which often doubled as their treasuries). According to 3 Maccabees, the king committed the sacrilege of entering the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem, which antagonized the Judaeans. Seeing his authority questioned, Philopator tried to enroll the Judaeans perforce into his Dionysian cult by putting before them a cruel choice: 1) those who accepted to be initiated into the mysteries would have equal citizenship on par with Alexandrians; 2) those who only accepted to be “branded on their bodies by fire with the ivy-leaf symbol of Dionysos” would be registered for the poll tax and have the status of slaves; and (3) those who refused to compromise in any form would be arrested and put to death. Some of the Judaeans submitted to the initiation and/or the branding, “since they expected to enhance their reputation by their future association with the king,” but the majority refused and escaped registration by offering bribes. When Philopator nonetheless ended persecuting these pious men and women, they were saved by some kind of divine miracle. In the aftermath of this event, they took revenge on those Judaeans who had adopted Dionysian rituals, killing three hundred of them.²⁸⁴

In a close reading of 3 Maccabees, N. Clayton Croy discovered an anti-Dionysian polemic “ridiculing the God of wine and exalting the God of Israel:” wine consumption is regularly followed by sleep, memory loss, or rage.²⁸⁵ If the desacralization of the divine drink conveys a religious and political message, then the reverse should also be true – and we find it in the Song of Songs: its overall positive presentation of wine and love indicates that we are in a religious world that is positively Dionysian. This is remarkable not only in comparison to the monotheistic polemic of 3 Maccabees, but even in comparison to some of the more realistic scenes in Theokritos’ poetry, where love is always close to disappointment, conflict, and jealousy: a lover’s infatuation is frequently the object of incomprehension and even mockery, one of the dialogue figures playing the role of the *irrisor amoris*.²⁸⁶ In contrast, the Song invokes the joy of love and wine without letting any shadow fall upon them. The chorus of the “daughters of Jerusalem” expresses solidarity with the desire of the protagonists (6:1). In the Song, the complex of wine, beauty, love, dance, and spring is conceived in a spirit of religious celebration rather than by mere bucolic poetry.

282 Huß, *Untersuchungen*, 71–72, 262.

283 Hermann Bengtson, *Die Strategie in der hellenistischen Zeit: Ein Beitrag zum antiken Staatsrecht* (Munich: Beck, 1952), III, 164.

284 3 Macc 2:27–33.

285 N. Clayton Croy, “Disrespecting Dionysus: 3 Maccabees as Narrative Satire of the God of Wine,” in *Scripture and Traditions: Essays on Early Judaism and Christianity in Honor of Carl R. Holladay*, ed. Patrick Gray and Gail R. O’Day (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 3–19.

286 Scholten, “Die kulturelle Bewertung,” 75, 77.

Tattoos

Philopator's forcible tattooing was a feature that later Jewish authors would associate intensely with idolatry²⁸⁷ and that should become the symbol of pious resistance precisely because of its association with the Dionysian mysteries. Egyptians and Bedouins used tattooing, branding, and scarring from early antiquity, but for Greeks and Jews alike, these were practices typical of “barbarians.” Mosaic Law strictly forbids them, and Graeco-Roman tradition never records them as being voluntary decorative practices or as being signs of magical protection or loving commitment. Wherever used, the marking of the body was meant as a punishment, and it was mainly imposed on criminals and fugitive slaves. The exception in the Greek world is, precisely, the branding (χαρακτήρ) of the ivy leaf that Ptolemy IV ordered his subjects to be stamped with in order to show their initiation into the mysteries of the Dionysian cult.²⁸⁸

This fact gives a new connotation to the Song's *parabasis*, where the pastoralists compare the beloved woman with a seal or stamp (טְהִתָּה, 8:6) put on the heart and arm of the loving man. The expression parallels biblical verses which use the signet ring as a metaphor for a precious good that is jealously kept from use by others. God puts Israel or the King of Judah like his signet ring on his right hand, that is, he considers it as his dearest personal possession.²⁸⁹ This formula is literally reflected in the Song, but it appears here with the idea that the metaphorical signet ring is not worn “on the hand” but “on the heart” and “on the arm.” On the basis of abundant archaeological testimony both from Egypt and from Palestine/Israel, the term טְהִתָּה has therefore been explained with more likelihood as a scarab used as an amulet.²⁹⁰

Given the focus on branding in the Ptolemaic state cult, it must sound curious that the Song's praise of love culminates in the marking of the lover's body with a seal put on the arm. The expression indeed approaches a related biblical metaphor, in which the “seal” does not mean the graven signet, but the mark left by it. In this expression, God writes “on the hearts,” and he “seals” in the hands of humans.²⁹¹ In the rabbinic Grace after Meals, he “seals” his covenant “in our flesh” (בריתך שְׁחַתְמָה בְּבָשָׂר). In this figurative use, the “seal” put on the arm can be seen as a mark that is

²⁸⁷ Philo, *On the Special Laws* I.58.

²⁸⁸ Plutarch, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* 56E, uses the word “stamps” (ἔγχαράξεις). See Christopher P. Jones, “Stigma: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987): 139–155, here 152.

²⁸⁹ Jer 22:24, פְּחֻזָּת עַל־לְבָבָךְ, פְּחֻזָּת כְּחֻזָּת יְמִינִי; Hag 2:23, פְּחֻזָּת עַל־רוֹאשׁךְ; Song 8:6, יְשִׁימָנִי כְּחֻזָּת עַל־לְבָבָךְ, פְּחֻזָּת כְּחֻזָּת יְמִינִי.

²⁹⁰ On the transformation of seals into amulets in ancient Egypt, see Ulrike Dubiel, *Amulette, Siegel und Perlen: Studien zu Typologie und Tragesitte im Alten und Mittleren Reich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 135–143. In his study on amulets in ancient Palestine, Christian Herrmann counts approximately 10,000 seals and 1,300 of other forms; *Ägyptische Amulette aus Palästina/Israel, mit einem Ausblick auf ihre Rezeption durch das Alte Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 4, 83. On Song 8:6, see here 88.

²⁹¹ Jer 31:32, בְּיַד־כָּל־אָדָם יְחִתּוּם יְהִתְרֹחַת־בְּקָרְבָּם, וְעַל־לְבָבָם אַכְתְּבָה;

indelibly applied to the skin, just like the mark put on Cain or the mark placed on the forehead of the righteous in prophetic visions.²⁹² The expression “to put a seal,” then, would in this case not mean “to store away a signet ring” or “to wear an amulet,” but “to brand.”

This allusion to the “sealing” of arms and hearts does not, of course, warrant the conclusion that the author meant to promote King Ptolemy’s rite of branding among the Judaeans. As his edict concerning the Dionysian fraternities only calls for the submission of sealed scrolls containing mystery scripts (*iεροὶ λόγοι*), the literary text and its possible performance may well have counted as a substitute for actual participation in the Dionysian rituals.²⁹³ In their interaction with the foreign cult, Judaeans of the Ptolemaic age should obviously not be judged by the standards of later Jewish observance, but it would be no less anachronistic to redefine “Judaeaness” as an ethnic identity untouched by religious concerns and injunctions.²⁹⁴ The Song must be added to the known examples of Hellenistic era Judaeans creatively searching for means “to show their loyalty toward the ruling dynasty without participating in the polytheistic rituals.”²⁹⁵ While Theokritos indulges in the deification of the ruler,²⁹⁶ there is no trace of this in the Song. What can be inferred from our analysis so far is that the Song’s celebration of eroticism expressed literary acculturation and, more specifically, an effort to satisfy a ruler, who seems to have expected from the Judaeans a physical, ritual, or, at least, literary commitment to the Dionysian state cult.

²⁹² Gen 4:15, אָזֶת לְקָרְבָּן יְהוָה שְׁם יְהוָה הַתִּתְיַרְּךָ וְעַל-מִצְחֹתָה אֲנוֹשִׁים; Ez 9:4, מִשְׁמָרָה יְהוָה לְקָרְבָּן אָזֶת.

²⁹³ On the sharing of *iεροὶ λόγοι* as a form of Jewish-Dionysian syncretism, see Livia Capponi, “Aristoboulos and the Hieros Logos of the Egyptian Jews,” in *Proceedings of the 25th International Congress of Papyrology*, ed. Traianos Gagos (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Library, 2010), 109–120.

²⁹⁴ See, for example, Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 109, “[B]efore the second or first century B.C.E., we can speak not of ‘Jewishness’ but ‘Judaeaness.’ ‘Judaeaness’ was a function of birth and geography; *Ioudaioi* belonged to the *ethnos* of Judaeans in Judaea.” But see also Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007): 457–512, here 485: “An ancient *ethnos* normally had a national cult.” It is reasonable to conclude with Simon Claude Mimouni, *Le judaïsme ancien du VI^e siècle avant notre ère au III^e siècle de notre ère: Des prêtres au rabbins* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), 24: “Ajoutons toutefois que les termes ‘Juif’ ou ‘juif’, même si l’un relève plus de l’époque antique et l’autre plus des époques postérieures, ont cependant des significations relativement proches: ils renvoient en tout cas, l’un ou l’autre, à des dimensions ethnico-religieuse et ethnico-géographique.”

²⁹⁵ Stefan Pfeiffer, *Herrscher- und Dynastiekulte im Ptolemäerreich: Systematik und Einordnung der Kultformen* (Munich: Beck, 2008), 33. Cf. 3 Maccabees 3:3–4: “The Jews, however, continued to maintain good will and unswerving loyalty toward the dynasty; but because they worshipped God and conducted themselves by his law, they kept their separateness with respect to foods.”

²⁹⁶ Martin P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion. Zweiter Band: Die hellenistische und römische Zeit*, 4th ed. (Munich: Beck, 1988), 159.

Negotiating Religion

A syncretistic endeavor on the part of a Jewish poet should not be considered *prima facie* as unlikely. As the “Dionysos Mansion” in Sepphoris in the Galilee shows, explicitly Dionysian motifs of drunkenness and erotic scenes were still acceptable and appreciated in Jewish upper class culture in rabbinic times.²⁹⁷ In the words of Tessa Rajak, “Greek culture was deeply intertwined with Jewish life from the early Hellenistic period to an extent where contemporaries were not themselves fully aware of the strands.”²⁹⁸ I would, however, consider the possibility that the synthesis manifested in the Song was not a spontaneous hybrid but the result of a carefully negotiated compromise.

The abstract personification of “Love,” paralleled in other late biblical texts,²⁹⁹ betrays an influence of Greek religious thought, but not necessarily of mythic and cultic traditions, “Eros being mainly a creation of poets, philosophers and artists.”³⁰⁰ The personified principle of “Love” appears in all four social spaces of the Song in the typical ambivalence between an existential and a mythological interpretation. The peasants praise Eros (אֶחָד) as a source of pleasure (7:7). In the shepherds’ *parabasis*, he becomes a cosmic power, as strong as death (8:6–7). The city girl is the one who most closely personifies Eros, especially when she mentions “Love” flying like a tavern sign over her and her beloved (2:4, עַל אֶחָד עַל אֶחָד). Images of loving couples with the winged god Eros hovering above them were among the most popular motifs in post-classical Greek art [Fig. 1].³⁰¹ The girl’s complaint about lovesickness (2:5, 5:8) recalls the Sapphic and Platonic topos of “love-disease” (έρωτική νόσος).³⁰² Still, the same girl begs in her chorus line that “Love” should not be awoken (2:7, 3:5, 8:4): this

²⁹⁷ Eric M. Meyers, “Aspects of Everyday Life in Roman Palestine with Special Reference to Private Domiciles and Ritual Baths,” in *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities*, ed. John R. Bartlett (London: Routledge, 2002), 193–220, here 195, 197; Sean Freyne, “Dionysos and Herakles in Galilee: The Sepphoris Mosaic in Context,” in *Religion and Society in Roman Palestine: Old Questions, New Approaches*, ed. Douglas R. Edwards (London: Routledge, 2004), 56–69.

²⁹⁸ Tessa Rajak, *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome: Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 4.

²⁹⁹ Parallel cases of abstract personifications are “Death” in Job 28:22, “Wisdom” and “Folly” in Prov 8–9, “Hatred” and “Love” in Prov 10:12, and “Earth” and “Fire” in Prov 30:16.

³⁰⁰ Pieter W. van der Horst, “Eros,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 304–306, here 305. Van der Horst it must be said, explicitly affirms that the god Eros is absent from the Hebrew Bible.

³⁰¹ Many examples on red-figure ceramic from ca. 480–280 BCE are listed in Jean Charles Balty, ed., *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae (LIMC)*, III/1: *Atherion – Eros* (Zurich: Artemis, 1986), 904–906.

³⁰² Monica Silveira Cyrino, *In Pandora’s Jar: Lovesickness in Early Greek Poetry* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 140. According to Plato (*Phaidros* 245b), “love is a serious mental disease.” Theokritos clearly follows the Sapphic topos when he depicts Simaitha, a woman of Kos, complaining of love-disease (*Idyll* II.88–90, 106–110). See Benjamin Acosta-Hughes, *Arion’s Lyre: Archaic Lyric into Hellenistic Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 17, 24.

poetic image only makes sense against the background of the mythical representation of Eros as a sleeping child, which is attested in visual art from the late fourth century BCE onward [Fig. 3].³⁰³ The new convention of multiple winged cupids accompanying lovers appears in literature starting with the poems of Theokritos.³⁰⁴ Its immense popularity as an ornament in the applied arts [Fig. 4]³⁰⁵ is apparently also reflected in the imagined embroidery that decorated the interior of the king's ceremonial palanquin (3:8, אֶבֶן צְבָא תָּמָם).³⁰⁶ The “daughters of Jerusalem” not only participate in the king's procession as onlookers, but they are also assigned the honorific task of weaving a cultic textile with figurative motifs, just as women of Athens did for the Panathenaia festival.³⁰⁷

Aphrodite's fruit, the apple,³⁰⁸ and her bird, the dove, are common elements that the Song associates with love in all social spaces, except for the court.³⁰⁹ Both the dove and the deer make frequent appearances in the Song, but only in metaphorical and mythical contexts. When the city girl urges the “daughters of Jerusalem” not to awake the power of love, she makes them take a solemn oath by the deer (2:4), that is, the sacred animal of the virgin goddess Artemis, who was considered to be the protector of women and girls.³¹⁰ A close parallel to this scene can be found in Eur-

303 Its most famous precedent is a late-third-century Rhodian bronze in New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art. See Carol C. Mattusch, *Classical Bronzes: The Art and Craft of Greek and Roman Statuary* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 160–163. The motif can already be found in a fourth-century Macedonian terracotta figure (Louvre). See Magdalene Söldner, *Untersuchungen zu liegenden Eroten in der hellenistischen und römischen Kunst* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1986).

304 Lieven Defreyne, “Erotes and Eros in the Epigrams of Asclepiades,” *Aevum Antiquum* 6 (1993): 199–236.

305 László Török, *Hellenistic and Roman Terracottas from Egypt* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1995), 44–52; Sabine Schlegelmilch, *Bürger, Gott und Götterschützling: Kinderbilder der hellenistischen Kunst und Literatur* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 257–289. Winged cupids were not, however, an Alexandrian invention. They attained the peak of their popularity in Southern Italy already around 330–250 BCE. See Rebecca Miller Ammerman, *Il Santuario di Santa Venera a Paestum, II: The Votive Terracottas* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 155.

306 See already Grotius, “Annotata,” 543: “Id est, media lecticæ amorum historias habent, mulierum Iudæarum acu pictas.”

307 Angelos Chaniotis, “Processions in Hellenistic Cities: Contemporary Discourses and Ritual Dynamics,” in *Cults, Creeds and Contests in the Greek City after the Classical Age*, ed. R. Alston, O.M. van Nijf, and C.G. Williamson (Louvain: Peeters, 2013), 21–47, here 30; Mireille M. Lee, *Body, Dress, and Identity in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 223.

308 Seiple, “Theocritean Parallels,” 113–115.

309 For the shepherd, eyes are, like doves, messengers of love (1:15; 4:1). The peasant lover compares his beloved with a dove hiding in a rock cave (2:14). The city girl dreams of her man calling her a dove (5:2), and she imagines her lover's eyes fluttering like doves on streams of water (5:12).

310 The image convention of Artemis the Huntress (*Αγυρτέα*) shows her with a stag. Her cult was the most frequent occasion for women's choral performances; see Claude Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece: Their Morphology, Religious Role, and Social Function*, tr. Derek Collins and Janice Orion (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 91–101. The third-century poet Kallimakhos in his hymn praises Artemis for saving Proitos' daughters from madness and for defending her own

pides' tragedy *Hippolytos* (428 BCE), where the protagonist Phaidra, tormented by her illicit desire for her stepson, confesses her suffering to the women of Troezen, who form the chorus, and urges them to swear by Artemis that they would maintain their silence.³¹¹

Each one of the six women expands the common cult of Eros by a distinctive allusion to further religious representations. In the courtly world, the maid participates in the ruler cult (1:3); the mistress performs a dance apparently belonging to the women's springtime mysteries (7:1); and the queen invokes two personalized winds (4:16).³¹² The city girl asks the stags of Artemis for protection, as we have seen, and the peasant girl seems to express her religious representations in the obscure verse 7:10, where the metaphorical wine consumed by the kissing lovers is said to "move the lips of the sleepers" – a possible reminiscence of the animistic belief that the Dionysian drinking ritual alerts the deceased in the netherworld.³¹³ Finally, the Bedouin woman expresses and names monotheist piety at Song 8:6,³¹⁴ a passage which may reflect a tradition that associated the desert Arabs with the cult of a single, dominant or aniconic divinity, or with the worship of a numinous force.³¹⁵ In Antiquity, both YHWH and Dusares, the Nabataean god, were identified with Dionysos,³¹⁶ presumably because of these three gods' character "as chthonic deities of death, afterlife, and resurrection."³¹⁷

chastity from the advances of men. See Heather White, "The Daughters of Proetus in Callimachus' Hymn to Artemis," *Orpheus* 2 (1981): 374–379; Ivana Petrovic, *Von den Toren des Hades zu den Hallen des Olymp: Artemiskult bei Theokrit und Kallimachos* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

³¹¹ Euripides, *Hippolytos*, 713–714; see James Harvey Kim On Chong-Gossard, *Gender and Communication in Euripides' Plays: Between Song and Silence* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 165.

³¹² The feminine gender attributed to Boreas and Notos takes the gender of *ruaq* in Hebrew into account, but may well refer the *Aurai* or wind nymphs.

³¹³ On the attraction that the wine of the Anthesteria exerted on the souls of the dead, see Gerard van Hoorn, *Choes and Anthesteria* (Leiden: Brill, 1951), 19, 21: "Ghosts also longed for wine."

³¹⁴ Martti Nissinen, "Is God Mentioned in the Song of Songs? Flame of Yahweh, Love, and Death in Song of Songs 8.6–7 A," in *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum*, ed. David J.A. Clines and Ellen van Wolde (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 273–287.

³¹⁵ On Arab aniconism, see Isabelle Sachet, "Dieux et hommes des tombeaux d'Arabie Petrée: Iconographie et aniconisme des élites nabatéennes," in *Dieux et déesses d'Arabie*, ed. Isabelle Sachet (Paris: De Boccard, 2012), 225–258. On pre-Islamic Arab henotheism, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 73–78.

³¹⁶ Herodotos, *Histories* III.8; Morton Smith, "On the Wine God in Palestine (Gen. 18, Jn. 2, and Achilles Tatius)," in *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday. English Section*, ed. American Academy for Jewish Research, Vol. II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 815–829, here 820–824; Lester L. Grabbe, "The God who Is Called IAO": Judaism and Hellenistic Mystery Religions," in *Religious Identities in the Levant from Alexander to Muhammed: Continuity and Change*, ed. Michael Blömer et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 75–82.

³¹⁷ James M. Scott, *Bacchus Iudeus: A Denarius Commemorating Pompey's Victory over Judea* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 86–87; similarly Robert Wenning and Helmut Merklein, "Die

Vague motivic parallels with the Dionysian cult can be found in the praise of wine as well as in the allusions to banquets, racing games, the wreath, and the maenads' dance, which all belong to the courtly cycle of the Song. The victory of wine and love over death [Fig. 16] may reflect the myth of Dionysos entering into Hades to save his mother Semele and his lover Ariadne. The Ariadne myth also comes to mind when the city girl is twice represented as sleeping (3:1, 5:2),³¹⁸ dreaming of a lover who, like Dionysos, is long-haired and pale-skinned (5:11).³¹⁹ Even the caresses she desires recall the iconography of these mythical lovers [Fig. 2].³²⁰

On the metaphorical level, her portrait of the absent beloved as a statue of gold, ivory, marble, and cedarwood with inlays of beryl (שְׁנִיר) and sapphire (5:14–15) quotes the chryselephantine technique that distinguished the most venerated Greek cult images, namely the monumental statue of Zeus in Olympia and the much-copied statue of long-haired and bare-chested Dionysos in Athens.³²¹ The chryselephantine tradition of combining various precious materials was brought to the extreme in the most celebrated Hellenistic cult image, namely the blue statue of Sarapis in the Sarapeion built by Ptolemy III in Alexandria.³²² According to Clement of Alexandria, the sculptor Bryaxis "used a mixture of various materials in its construction. He had filings of gold, silver, bronze, iron, lead, and even tin; and not a single Egyptian stone was lacking, there being pieces of sapphire, hematite, emerald, and topaz also."³²³ After the destruction of the statue in the fourth century CE, Rufinus resumed its fame in the remark that "this monster is said to have been made of every kind of metal and wood."³²⁴

These borrowings from the imagery and ritual of different pagan cults are indeed extensive, but they are given strict limits. If wine is celebrated in the Song, the supe-

Götter in der Welt der Nabatäer," in *Petra: Antike Felsstadt zwischen arabischer Tradition und griechischer Norm* (Mainz: Zabern, 1997), 105–110, here 105.

318 Sheila McNally, "Ariadne and Others: Images of Sleep in Greek and Early Roman Art," *Classical Antiquity* 4 (1985): 152–192.

319 See the description of Dionysos as being effeminate in Euripides, *Bacchae*, ll. 455–459; cf. Victoria Wohl, "Beyond Sexual Difference: Becoming-Woman in Euripides' *Bacchae*," in *The Soul of Tragedy: Essays on Athenian Drama*, ed. Victoria Pedrick and Steven M. Oberhelman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 137–154, here 144.

320 Compare Song 2:6 with the image of Dionysos and Ariadne in Picón and Hemingway, *Pergamon and the Hellenistic Kingdoms*, 249: "He stands embracing his consort with his right hand, which is visible on her shoulder, while caressing her chin with his left—a gesture often seen in depictions of Eros and Psyche."

321 On the latter, see Kenneth D.S. Lapatin, *Chryselephantine Statuary in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 98–100.

322 John E. Stambaugh, *Sarapis under the Early Ptolemies* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 22–25; Brunilde Sismondo Ridgway, *Fourth-Century Styles in Greek Sculpture* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 231–232.

323 Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* IV.43; translation by G.W. Butterworth (Loeb Classical Library no. 92; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1919), 109.

324 Rufinus, *Ecclesiastical History* XI.23.

riority of love-making over wine-drinking is emphasized by both the courtly (2:4, 4:10) and the rural couple (7:9), who have experienced both (the city girl knows only wine, and the nomads only love). Wine is second to love, and if love is a universal force, it is not an independent divinity either. It is even implicitly (or perhaps explicitly) attributed to the “flame of Yah.”

Moreover, most of the pagan symbols of the Dionysos cult are avoided. Central Dionysian rituals such as trans-dressing, snake-bearing, participating in a tumultuous procession (*κῶμος*), and pouring out wine libations are nowhere alluded to.³²⁵ The exuberant vegetation imagery avoids Dionysos’ most symbolic plants, the ivy and the thyrsus. No mention is made of flutes and tambourines, or, for that matter, any musical instruments whatsoever. The Song is inventive when it comes to using metaphors to reference women’s breasts and genitals, but it never evokes the phallos. Its large panorama of sexual attitudes includes polygamy, slave concubinage, prostitution, and even incest, but it still leaves out homosexuality.³²⁶

As I have already come to notice, the Song’s panorama of the four couples goes back to visual models that juxtapose representations of heterosexual and same-sex practices. Marriage and procreation are part of its frieze, but they are treated with the same non-hierarchical spirit as the other erotic constellations. The king’s voluptuous captivity, the city girl’s erotic anxiety, the peasant couple’s satyr-like sensuality, and the Bedouins’ mutual faith inside a perceived chain of birth and death are all described with the same suggestive poetic intensity. By characterizing these four forms and frameworks of love through a common element of pleasure, which sidelines the aspects of conjugal virtue or biological reproduction, the Song comes as far as it can get to acknowledging the diversity of human sexualities, which all manifest the same divine force.

In addition to these Dionysian overtones, erotic pluralism conveys a political message. The Song faithfully echoes the common symbolism of Ptolemaic rule, which had reenacted Pharaonic succession through sibling marriage, Macedonian kingship through Olympic victories, and Alexander’s Indian conquests through opulent tent life. Most importantly, the poet uses the motif of royal promiscuity in order to associate the Hellenistic ruler with the biblical King Solomon, the founder figure of the Judaean temple state.

325 Judith Behnk, *Dionysos und seine Gefolgschaft: Weibliche Besessenheitskulte in der griechischen Antike* (Hamburg: Diplomica, 2009), 49, 51.

326 On the rejection of homosexuality and the royal deification from the cross-cultural project depicted in the Letter of Aristeas, see Sylvie Honigman, “‘Jews as the Best of All Greeks’: Cultural Competition in the Literary Works of Alexandrian Judaeans of the Hellenistic Period,” in *Shifting Social Imaginaries in the Hellenistic Period: Narrations, Practices, and Images*, ed. Eftychia Stavrianopoulou (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 207–232, here 221 and 226.

5 Was the Song of Songs Composed in Amman?

“Jewish Sheikhs” of Transjordan

As it has become clear, the Song of Songs is not a folk anthology, but a refined product of highbrow culture with literary ambition, a political context and a religious agenda. Our poet, whom I would situate chronologically at the height of Dionysian state propaganda in or shortly after 217 BCE, must have written for a local Judaean audience that was cultivated in classical Hebrew and yet involved in the Hellenic experience, including dramatic performance and, by implication, Dionysian cult practice.³²⁷

In the search of a Judaean population that was exposed and receptive to these new urban features, we must remember the observation by Eric M. Myers that “Hellenistic culture encroached only gradually and unevenly in Palestine.” During the Ptolemaic century, “many of the towns and villages were completely unaffected by Hellenism. Especially in the Judaean heartland, with Jerusalem at its center, there is little evidence for the encroachment of Greek culture.”³²⁸ Jerusalem’s archaeological record from that period is indeed very poor, pointing to a population of barely one thousand inhabitants.³²⁹ The city’s only Greek building, the citadel, seems to have been almost hermetically sealed off from its urban environment.³³⁰

Hans-Peter Müller has already speculated on the function of the Ptolemaic colonies of the Jordan Valley region, later known as the Decapolis, in the transmission of Alexandrian poetic taste to the Song’s author.³³¹ Most of these cities were administered according to the Greek model of the *polis*, inhabited by a Greek minority and a

³²⁷ François Chamoux, *Hellenistic Civilization* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 289.

³²⁸ Eric M. Meyers, “Jewish Culture in Greco-Roman Palestine,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 134–180, here 141; similarly Martin Hengel, “Jerusalem als jüdische und hellenistische Stadt,” in *Hellenismus: Beiträge zur Erforschung von Akkulturation und politischer Ordnung in den Staaten des hellenistischen Zeitalters*, ed. Bernd Funck (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 269–306, here 271; Lester L. Grabbe, “The Hellenistic City of Jerusalem,” in *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities*, ed. John R. Bartlett (London: Routledge, 2002), 6–21.

³²⁹ Andrea M. Berlin, “Between Large Forces: Palestine in the Hellenistic Period,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 60 (1997), 2–51, here 8–9; Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period, II: The Coming of the Greeks: The Early Hellenistic Period (335–175 BCE)* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 36; Oded Lipschits, “Jerusalem between Two Periods of Greatness: The Size and Status of the City in the Babylonian, Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods,” in *Judah between East and West: The Transition from Persian to Greek Rule (ca. 400–200 BCE)*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Oded Lipschits (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 163–175.

³³⁰ Letter of Aristeas in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XII.133; Gregory J. Wightman, “Temple Fortress-es in Jerusalem Part I: The Ptolemaic and Seleucid Akras,” *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israeli Archaeological Society* 9 (1990): 29–40. Located north of the Temple Mount, the Ptolemaic Akra must be distinguished from the Seleukid “Akra of the Syrians,” the remains of which may have been discovered in 2015 on the southern side of the Mount (See <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/archaeology/premium-1.683905>).

³³¹ Müller, “Travestien und geistige Landschaften,” 571.

majority of more or less Hellenized natives. To be sure, the huge theaters of Scythopolis and Philadelphia (present-day Beit She'an and Amman, respectively) were only built in imperial Roman times, but one might presume that at least the former city's reputation as the center of the Dionysos cult in the Levant started already under the Ptolemies.³³² What archaeological excavation can establish is the existence of massive fortifications, comfortable residences, and military sites. While Gadara, the "city of philosophers" in the northeast, had an overall pagan character,³³³ Scythopolis in the southwest held a sizeable Judaean minority, which is said to have lived amicably with the majority before the Maccabean Revolt.³³⁴ Under these circumstances, theatrical performance can have crossed cultural borders.

Another hypothesis on the Judaean audience of the Song, which has been proposed several times since the nineteenth century, points to the circumstance that the power of the Oniads and the related priestly families over the temple state was challenged during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods by a second dynasty, the Tobiads,³³⁵ whose close contacts with the Ptolemaic court in Alexandria are the object of a detailed, but problematic account by the historian Flavius Josephus.³³⁶ Heinrich Graetz has first made the case for tracing the Song's origins to this Judaean counter-power, the residence and audience of which he placed in Jerusalem.³³⁷ The archives of a Greek merchant in Egypt discovered in 1915 and known as the "Zenon papyri" have opened a new perspective on this issue by locating the Tobiads' center of activity in Transjordan.³³⁸

332 Its fraternities of itinerant *technitai*, Dionysian artists and mimes, later exported cultic musicians all over the Eastern Mediterranean; Getzel M. Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 293–294; Aryeh Kasher, *Jews and Hellenistic Cities in Eretz-Israel: Relations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel with the Hellenistic Cities during the Second Temple Period (332 BCE – 70 CE)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 81–83; Joachim Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine: Archaeological, Written, and Comparative Sources*, tr. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 250, 260.

333 Shimon Applebaum, *Judea in Hellenistic and Roman Times* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 33; John T. Fitzgerald, "Gadara: Philodemus' Native City," in *Philodemus and the New Testament World*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 343–397, here 358.

334 2 Macc 12:30: "The Jews that dwelt there had testified that the Scythopolitans dealt lovingly with them, and entreated them kindly in the time of their adversity." Cf. Gideon Fuks, "The Jews of Hellenistic and Roman Scythopolis," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982): 407–416; Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, 292.

335 Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959), 127–142; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, I, 267–277; Mimouni, *Le judaïsme ancien*, 293–297.

336 Dov Gera, "On the Credibility of the History of the Tobiads (Josephus, *Antiquities* 12, 156–222, 228–36)," in *Greece and Rome in Eretz Israel*, ed. Aryeh Kasher (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1990), 21–38.

337 Graetz, *Schir ha-Schirim*, 81–90.

338 Edition by Xavier Durand, *Des Grecs en Palestine au III^e siècle avant Jésus-Christ: Le dossier syrien des archives de Zénon de Caunos (261–252)* (Paris: Gabalda, 1997).

Tobias, Joseph, and Hyrkanos, the three family heads that rose to importance under the Ptolemies, can be dated to between 260 and 175 BCE. Tobias appears in the papyri repeatedly as a regional military commander in the region known as the Ammanitis, between the Jordan River and the Greek colony of Philadelphia (i.e. present-day Amman), where his troops presumably defended the imperial border against the incursions of nomads from the Arabian Desert. From May 257, there are letters attesting to a direct correspondence between this dignitary and King Ptolemy II Philadelphos. He was doubtlessly "the most influential and wealthiest Jew from the period," ranking far above the high priest Onias II in Jerusalem, his brother-in-law.³³⁹

Josephus has transmitted a cycle of partly legendary accounts on the career of Tobias' son Joseph, who became tax collector for the entire Ptolemaic province of Syria and Phoenicia. Moving through the country protected by two thousand infantrymen, he made himself dreaded by slaying the magistrates of any Greek city that tried to evade its taxes.³⁴⁰ According to Josephus, this powerful man brought about a breakthrough in terms of Hellenization and a decisive rise in the Judaeans' cultural standards: He "had been an excellent and high-minded man and had brought the Jewish people from poverty and a state of weakness to more splendid opportunities of life during the twenty-two years when he controlled the taxes of Syria, Phoenicia, and Samaria."³⁴¹ Joseph's long career cannot easily be dated;³⁴² most frequently, it is made to coincide with the last years of Ptolemy III (r. 246–222 BCE) and the rule of Ptolemy IV. Joseph's familiarity with the banquets, performances, and women of the Alexandrian court supplies the material for an anecdote told by Josephus. He dined with the king and became infatuated with an actress. His scandalized brother secretly replaced the Gentile woman with his own marriageable daughter because, Josephus explains, "the Jews were prevented by law from having intercourse with a foreign woman." The girl played the hetaera's role with talent; she later became Joseph's second wife and gave birth to his youngest son, Hyrkanos.³⁴³ Whatever its historical value, this anecdote expresses the cultural ideal of an elite that partakes of courtly opulence without compromising its Jewish morality.

When Hyrkanos grew up, he inherited his father's position thanks to the direct contact he had with the Alexandrian court, which he established at the birth celebra-

³³⁹ Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 236.

³⁴⁰ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XII.4.5.

³⁴¹ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XII 4.10; translation by Ralph Marcus, Vol. V (Loeb Classical Library, no. 365; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 113–115.

³⁴² See the discussion in Fawzi Zayadine, "Les Tobiades en Transjordanie et à Jérusalem," in *'Iraq al-Amir: Le château du Tobiade Hyrcan. Texte*, ed. Ernest Will and François Larché (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Geuthner, 1991), 5–23; Dušek, *Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions*, 137–145.

³⁴³ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XII 4.6; translation by Ralph Marcus, V 97.

tion of a prince,³⁴⁴ possibly the future Ptolemy V born in 210 BCE. Having to defend his authority against his half-brothers and a fraction of the Judaean elites, he eventually left Jerusalem and retired into the Transjordanian family stronghold. Even after the Seleukid conquest, Hyrkanos profited from the instability of the new regime and established himself around 187 BCE as a pro-Egyptian, but de facto independent, ruler of the Western Ammanitis. Josephus describes in detail the magnificent fortress that he built in this borderland “between Arabia and Judaea” (μεταξὺ τῆς τε Ἀραβίας καὶ τῆς Ἰουδαίας).³⁴⁵ This building complex has been identified by most historians with the monumental remains of a Hellenistic palace, today named Qasr al-‘Abd, which has been excavated and restored in the village of ‘Iraq al-Amir west of Amman [Fig. 17]. Archaeological excavation has confirmed that this structure was erected during the first quarter of the second century BCE, that it was supposed to become a pleasure palace (παράδεισος) with gardens and pools, and that it was still unfinished when construction activity abruptly ceased.³⁴⁶ This is again in line with Josephus’ account, according to which King Antiochos IV turned against Hyrkanos after his coronation and forced the latter to commit suicide around 175 BCE.³⁴⁷

The Jewish warlord Hyrkanos is a fascinating and much-studied personality. Joseph Klausner tried to attribute the biblical book Kohelet to him. In less speculative historical studies, the Tobiads’ political function has been rather precisely contextualized. Elias Bickerman and other historians called Tobias/Tuvyah a “Jewish sheikh” because of his function as half-autonomous regional commander in a frontier area.³⁴⁸ The Zenon papyri show that both the territory he ruled and the settlers living on it were named after him as the land and the men “of Toubias” (Τουβίου). In the current parlance of papyrology, the Tobiads are therefore described as “eponymous officers,” that is, high political officials, whose tasks were not only military, but fiscal and administrative as well.³⁴⁹ They ranked above the army commanders, so that “their” men could be mercenaries as well as settlers of different origins.³⁵⁰

344 Ibid. XII 4.7.

345 Ibid. XII 4.11; translation by Ralph Marcus, V 119.

346 Werner Vyhmeister, “The History of Heshbon from Literary Sources,” *Andrews University Studies* 6 (1968): 158–177, here 165; Elias Joseph Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 72; Israel Shatzman, *The Armies of the Hasmoneans and Herod: From Hellenistic to Roman Frameworks* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 14–17; Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of the Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 103.

347 Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, 271.

348 Elias Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees: Foundations of Post-Biblical Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1962), 57; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, I 41.

349 Roger S. Bagnall, *The Administration of the Ptolemaic Possessions outside Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 17; Stefan Pfeiffer, “Der eponyme Offizier Toubias: Ein lokaler Vertreter der ptolemäischen Herrschaft in Transjordanien,” *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 56 (2010): 242–257; Id., “Die Familie des Toubias: Eine (trans-)lokale Elite in Transjordanien,” in *Lokale Eliten und hellenistische Könige zwischen Kooperation und Konfrontation*, ed. Boris Dreyer and Peter Franz Mittag (Berlin: Verlag Antike, 2011), 191–215.

350 Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society*, 158–159, 190.

Before pursuing Graetz's speculations about a possible connection of the Song with the Tobiads, we need to take the nature of this military population into account.

One Thousand Cleruchs between Arabia and Judaea

Alexander and his successors transformed the vast conquered space between the Nile and the Indus through a systematic colonization policy, which generally involved the joint foundation of cities and garrisons. The balance between these two types of settlements was a necessary condition for the stability of the Diadoch states.³⁵¹ The soldiers of Ptolemaic garrisons were in general not considered citizens of the *polis* that they defended, but they formed a semi-autonomous corporation (πολίτευμα). By this separate organization, Aryeh Kasher writes, the Ptolemies "kept the soldiers outside the civic body and subject to direct royal discipline."³⁵²

One model of the Hellenistic military settlement (κατοικία) involved the distribution of agricultural land to otherwise unpaid army veterans. These cleruchs (κληροῦχοι) were free from paying land rent but bound to military service.³⁵³ The appearance of such a part-time soldier is depicted by a third-century BCE terracotta figure from Naukratis, which shows a man in an urban garb, a short, belted tunic with sleeves, and with an oval shield in the Gaulish style [Fig. 6].³⁵⁴ The cultivation and defense of the land by such "settler-citizen-soldiers" was always limited by the availability of territory that was either recently conquered or newly put under the plough.³⁵⁵ In Ptolemaic Syria, the king's lands were mainly located in the sparsely populated areas of the Galilee and the upper Jordan Valley, as well as in the Transjordanian mountains,³⁵⁶ which had the peculiar history of being a borderland. After the fall of the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom in the sixth century BCE, followed by centuries of de-urbanization and depopulation,³⁵⁷ Transjordan became a power vacuum that attracted both the colonizing activities of Mediterranean empires and the infil-

351 Wolfgang Orth, *Königlicher Machtanspruch und städtische Freiheit* (Munich: Beck, 1977).

352 Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 179–181.

353 Fritz Uebel, *Die Kleruchen Ägyptens unter den ersten sechs Ptolemäern* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1968).

354 Donald M. Bailey, *Catalogue of the Terracottas in the British Museum*, Vol. IV: *Ptolemaic and Roman Terracottas from Egypt* (London: The British Museum Press, 2008), 135, 147, plate 102, no. 3550.

355 Nicholas Sekunda and Philip de Souza, "Military Forces," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, Vol. I: *Greece, the Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome*, ed. Philip Sabin et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 325–367, here 334–335.

356 Bickerman, *Jews in the Greek Age*, 73; Berlin, "Between Large Forces," 4–5.

357 Ez 25:3–5; see Udo Worschel, *Das Land jenseits des Jordan: Biblische Archäologie in Jordanien* (Wuppertal and Zurich: Brockhaus, 1991), 207–208; Katja Mueller, *Settlements of the Ptolemies: City Foundations and New Settlement in the Hellenistic World* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 52, speaks of a "glaring gap" in the history of all excavated Transjordanian settlements. For opposing views, see Ray, "Connectivity," 76–77.

tration of nomads from the desert. The Ptolemaic rulers mainly relied on their armies to carry out settlement policies in this “frontier of the state.”³⁵⁸

The frontier character of the Ammanitis may explain the fact that the “men of Toubias” are the only documented case of cleruchs living in the Syrian province.³⁵⁹ The question of the ethnolinguistic identity of this extraordinary cleruchy, then, becomes one whose answer could shed light on the context in which the Song was written. Given that Judaean mercenaries were numerous in Ptolemaic Egypt;³⁶⁰ one may safely assume that the Tobiads recruited soldiers among their Judaean compatriots and that these took over progressively the tasks of security and financial administration when the recruitment of Macedonians declined.³⁶¹ Two documents support this assumption more explicitly. One papyrus from the Zenon archive, dated to the spring of 259 BCE, records Zenon’s acquisition of a slave girl from Nikanor, one of Tobias’ Greek agents, while three of Tobias’ cleruchs act as guarantors and witnesses, respectively, of the transaction. Though damaged, the papyrus gives a perfect idea of the heterogeneous background of the “men of Toubias,” since it mentions one “Persian” cleruch with a theophoric Judaean patronym (Ananias, i. e. Hananyah), another “Persian” with an impeccably Greek patronym (Agathon), and finally a “Macedonian,” Polemon son of Straton.³⁶² The names show that the adjective “Persian” must be understood as a political rather than as an ethnic term. It apparently refers to the autonomous constitution that the temple state of Judaea had inherited from the Achaemenid era.³⁶³

This Judaean element in the ethnically mixed military colony that controlled the Ammanitis seems to have continuously subsisted until the Maccabean Revolt. In 163 BCE, alarmed by the Jerusalem uprising against Greek rule, the neighboring city-states sought to exterminate the Judaean populations who were living in their midst. Judah Maccabee had the Jews of Galilee and Gilead evacuated to Judaea,³⁶⁴ but help came too late for those of the Ammanitis, whose military commander had initiated a massacre. The First Book of the Maccabees quotes a Jewish source from

³⁵⁸ For the concept of the frontier as “a contact zone between the state and tribal society,” see Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 6.

³⁵⁹ Uebel, *Die Kleruchen Ägyptens*, 352; Mimouni, *Le judaïsme ancien*, 289.

³⁶⁰ Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt*, 83–87; Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, II, 302–303.

³⁶¹ Bickerman, *Jews in the Greek Age*, 72–73. The Hellenistic pottery from 'Iraq el-Amir follows Judaean patterns; see Nancy L. Lapp, *The Excavations of Araq el-Amir: Volume I* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 115, 118.

³⁶² Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, I, 59; Durand, *Des Grecs en Palestine*, 47; Jane Rowlandson, ed., *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 166–167; Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, II, 291–292.

³⁶³ James W. Watts, ed., *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001).

³⁶⁴ 1 Macc 5:23 and 5:45.

Gilead: “All our brothers in the [land] of Toubias³⁶⁵ have been killed, their wives and their children have been taken captive, and their possessions have been carried off. A force of about 1,000 men has been destroyed there.”³⁶⁶ While the Nabataeans sided with the Jews in this war, other Arabian tribes fought with the Greeks.³⁶⁷ The Jewish settlement in the former “land of Toubias”, renamed as the Peraea, restarted from scratch after the conquests of Alexander Iannaios in 96–93 BCE.³⁶⁸

Warfare in a Love Poem

The account in 1 Maccabees suggests the conclusion that the Judaean members of the Tobiad settlement lived in a colony of their own with women and children. In contrast to the cliché of unlimited ethnic mixing under the Hellenistic rulers, it seems indeed that mercenaries were often accompanied by wives, daughters, and sisters of their own nation.³⁶⁹ It is therefore not surprising that the “warriors of Israel” and the “daughters of Jerusalem” appear jointly in idyll 10 of the Song of Songs, forming a fifth collectivity alongside the courtly, urban, rural, and pastoral protagonists. Both groups are the only characters in the Song that are explicitly identified as being Jewish. This cannot simply be a poetic whim, because the Song is quite prolific when it comes to military matters.³⁷⁰ The poet distinguishes and even quantifies three types of security personnel, all of them being characteristically Ptolemaic.

The watchmen who walk around the city (3:3, 5:7) are reminiscent of the police guards (φυλακίται) that patrolled the streets of the Greek cities of the Ptolemaic empire organized in groups of ten and led by an officer (δεκανός).³⁷¹ The irony behind

³⁶⁵ Original: ἐν τοῖς Τουβίου. Tobias’ Jewish cleruch in Zenon’s papyrus is introduced as Τῶν Τουβίου [ιππέων] κληροῦχος.

³⁶⁶ 1 Macc 5:13; cf. 2 Macc 12:17–18 and 21; Bezalel Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus: The Jewish Struggle against the Seleucids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 82–83; Shatzman, *Armies of the Hasmoneans*, 20–21; Gera, *Judea*, 45–49. See an older hypothesis in Kasher, *Jews and Hellenistic Cities*, 74–75, 77, which locates the account in the biblical Land of Tob (Jud 11:3) north of the Yarmuk River.

³⁶⁷ 1 Macc 5:25 and 5:39.

³⁶⁸ 1 Macc 5:45; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XIII.13.3.

³⁶⁹ Angelos Chaniotis, “Foreign Soldiers – Native Girls? Constructing and Crossing Boundaries in Hellenistic Cities with Foreign Garrisons,” in *Army and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. Angelos Chaniotis and Pierre Ducrey (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002), 99–114, here 111: “In many garrisoned sites we find evidence for women from areas which supplied the Hellenistic armies with mercenaries; it is reasonable to assume that they were dependents (wives, daughters, or sisters) of members of the garrison.”

³⁷⁰ This fact is normally glossed over in exegesis. An exception is Carol Meyers, “Gender Imagery in the Song of Songs,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 197–212, here 202–204.

³⁷¹ Graetz (*Schir ha-Schirim*, 63) observed this already. On the φυλακίται, see Clemens Homotho-Kuhs, *Phylakes und Phylakon-Steuer im griechisch-römischen Ägypten: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte*

the repeated expression “to walk around the town” is in the different connotation that nightly street-walking evokes in a single woman (3:1, *בָּבָה בָּבָה עִיר אַסְתָּבָה*) and in a band of men (3:3, *הַסְּבָבִים בְּעִיר הַסְּבָבִים*):³⁷² perhaps one can find here a pun on περίπολοι, meaning both vagrants³⁷³ and a class of border-guards.

The word play on סְבָבָה (“to surround”) is continued in the following military allusion. The sixty personal guards protecting King Solomon’s bed are referred to by the poet with words that have the same Hebrew root, “men around it” (3:7, *גְּבָרִים לְבָבִיב לְבָבִיב*), as well as with the term “sword-bearers” (*אַחֲרֵי חֶרֶב*). Both of these expressions can be read as mirror translations from the Greek.³⁷⁴ The “sword-bearers” (*μαχαιροφόροι*) were a distinguished division of the Ptolemaic army, some of whom were tasked with protecting the divinized royal couple and were named the “around the kings” (*περί τοὺς βασιλεῖς*). A part of this palace guard was recruited among Semitic mercenaries, so-called “Idumaeans,” stationed in Memphis and organized in socio-religious associations (*σύνοδοι*).³⁷⁵

The third armed unit is mentioned in 4:4, where the plates on a woman’s necklace are compared to the thousand shields (*לְלָךְ הַקְּפָנִים*) of the royal guard hanging on a tower,³⁷⁶ which would imply that the shields were also made out of some precious metal. The biblical Solomon made his three hundred gold shields so as to be treasure, not for military use,³⁷⁷ while the Song rather seems to evoke phalanx fighters with uniform armament. Suspending shields in line on a wall was a Greek decorative practice,³⁷⁸ which appears in art in order to signify a recently concluded peace.³⁷⁹ The three thousand “shield-bearers” (*ύπασπιστής*), later called “silver shields” (*άργυράσπιδες*), were the most legendary unit of Alexander’s military during his conquests in the East. An elite infantry guard with silver-plated shields continued to serve in the armies of the Diadochs. The Seleukids in particular fielded ten thousand of them in the Battle of Raphia, which, on June 22, 217 BCE, opposed them to the Ptolemaic

des antiken Sicherheitswesens (Munich: Saur, 2005); John Bauschatz, *Law and Enforcement in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

372 Heinevetter, *Komm nun*, 108.

373 Pollux, *Onomasticon* VII.203.

374 In the Bible, only Ps 34:8 and 125:2 show the expression סְבָבָה in the sense of protecting a person.

375 Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society*, 151. Concerning the enrollment of Jews in Hellenistic armies, see Guy T. Griffith, *The Mercenaries of the Hellenistic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 167; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, I, 15–17; Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period, I: The Persian Period (539–331BCE)* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 195–196; Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society*, 124, 258.

376 An allegedly “incongruous” image, according to Fox, “Love, Passion, and Perception,” 226–227.

377 1 Kg 10:17, 14:26; 2 Chr 9:16; 12:9.

378 Rabun Taylor, “Roman Oscilla: An Assessment,” *Res* 48 (2005): 83–105, here 93: “The habit of suspending shields in stoas, basilicas, temples, and other colonnaded structures is pervasive in Greco-Latin antiquity.”

379 See their presence in the banquet scene on the Basel kylix (Kä 415) mentioned above.

army.³⁸⁰ In ancient literary testimony, the elite guard of “shield-bearers” (ἀσπιδιῶται) appears prominently in Theokritos’ praise of Ptolemy II.³⁸¹

The Song mentions yet another military function when speaking metaphorically in 6:4 of standard-bearers (τοῦργοι; cf. σημαιοφόροι). The poet’s most revealing reference to Hellenistic warfare is, however, the repeated metaphorical evocation of round towers (4:7, 7:5, 8:10). Towers used to be of quadrangular shape in ancient Oriental architecture. Only after the catapult, the ballista, and other artillery devices were developed in Alexander’s time did the more resistant round tower become a typical element of fortification architecture. The best preserved regional specimen of such a tower has been excavated in Samaria [Fig. 18].³⁸²

The poet was obviously well-versed in matters of military organization, and he (or she) even seems to have followed military events closely at the time of the Battle of Raphia. The fact that verse 3:8 imagines the king’s sleep being protected by bodyguards “because of the danger in the nights” (מִפְחַד בְּלִילּוֹת) is possibly reminiscent of an event that took place on the eve of that battle. A Ptolemaic defector in the Seleukid service, Theodosos of Aetolia, managed, with only two companions, to get into the Egyptian camp in order to assassinate King Ptolemy IV in his sleep. Having entered the wrong tent, however, he slew the royal physician Andreas instead, and the king was therefore able to escape unharmed.³⁸³ According to 3 Maccabees, he owed his life to the intervention of Dositheos, son of Drimylos, a Judaean courtier and apostate.³⁸⁴

Such familiarity with military matters would be understandable if the poet of the Song was in some way linked to the one regiment of Judaean cleruchs that existed in Ptolemaic Syria, that is, the garrison commanded by the Tobiads in Transjordan. As the poet’s perspective is invariably that of the Ptolemaic army, let us now explore the imbrication between military and urban spaces in the Song.

³⁸⁰ Polybios, *Histories* V.79.4, 82.2; Plutarch, *Eumenes* 16.4; Richard A. Billows, *Kings and Colonists: Aspects of Macedonian Imperialism* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 18.

³⁸¹ Theokritos, *Idylls* XVII.93–94; Id., *Encomium*, ed. Burton, 86–87; Burton, “Themes of Female Desire,” 190–191.

³⁸² Philon of Byzantium, *Mechanics* I.2; Anthony W. McNicoll, *Hellenistic Fortifications from the Aegean to the Euphrates* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 8–10; Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of the Holy Land: from the Destruction of Solomon’s Temple to the Muslim Conquest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 70, with a photography of the Samaria tower.

³⁸³ Polybios, *Histories* V.81; 3Macc 1:2–3; cf. Elazar Galili, “Raphia, 217 B.C.E., Revisited,” *Scripta Classica Israelitica* 3 (1976–1977): 52–126; Gabriele Marasco, “Les médecins de cour,” 451–452.

³⁸⁴ 3 Macc 1:3; Dov Gera, *Judaean and Mediterranean Politics: 219 to 161 B.C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 14–15. On Dositheos/Matityahu, see Alexander Fuks, “Dositheos Son of Drimylos: A Prosopographical Note,” *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 7/8 (1954), 205–209.

A Judaean Garrison and a Greek City

A distance of twenty-one kilometers separated the citadel of Amman from the Tobiad headquarters at 'Iraq al-Amir. Both sites were mountainous, with the former located at 835 m and the latter at 480 m above sea level. The Greek *polis* and the Judaean *politeuma* would clash during the Hasmonean Revolt, but it seems that the two settlements had flourished alongside each other during previous generations.³⁸⁵ Philadelphia, formerly named Rabbat-Ammon, had the status of an independent city-state on the Greek model, but, like the other Ptolemaic colonies in Syria known from archaeological evidence,³⁸⁶ it must have appeared with its L-shaped citadel like any regional hilltop city, lacking as it did the symmetrical street design and most of the public buildings associated with classical Greek urbanism. It is all the more remarkable that Philadelphia is the only urban center in the Decapolis for which the existence of a gymnasium, the most central of Greek urban institutions, could be proven.³⁸⁷ Other surviving remnants of its Hellenistic period are parts of the acropolis walls and two dozen wine amphorae stamps from Rhodes, whose dates are quite evenly spread between 250 and 100 BCE.³⁸⁸

Polybios names Gadara in the north and “Rabbatamana in Arabia” (Ραββατάμανα τῆς Ἀραβίας) in the south as the two military centers of the Ptolemaic defense line during the Seleukid attack of 218 BCE.³⁸⁹ While the Arab tribes rallied to the invaders’ side in the fighting, the Greek and Tyrian settlers of Amman, as well as the strong armed forces concentrated there, remained loyal to Ptolemaic empire. Antiokhos’ troops vainly besieged the city “until a prisoner revealed to them the position of the underground passage by which the besieged went down to draw water. This they burst into and filled it up with wood, stones, and all such kinds of things, upon which those in the city yielded owing to the want of water and surrendered.”³⁹⁰

³⁸⁵ Kasher, *Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 50: “To our sorrow, we know nothing about the relations between The Land of Tobias and the neighboring *polis* of Philadelphia, the administrative capital of the hyparchy of Ammonitis. It is reasonable to assume that, during the period of Ptolemaic rule, relations between them were more or less orderly.”

³⁸⁶ Mark A. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 32.

³⁸⁷ Oren Tal, “‘Hellenistic Foundations’ in Palestine,” in Grabbe and Lipschits, *Judah between East and West*, 242–254, here 252. On Hellenistic Philadelphia, see Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, 268–273.

³⁸⁸ Sahar Mansour, “Study of the Rhodian Amphorae Handles Stamps from Amman Citadel,” *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 48 (2004): 211–225, here 213.

³⁸⁹ Polybios, *Histories* V.71.3–4; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 15.

³⁹⁰ Polybios, *Histories* V.71.8–10; translation by Paton, III 191–193; cf. Fawzi Zayadine, “La campagne d’Antiochos III le Grand en 219–217 et le siège de Rabbatamana,” *Revue biblique* 97 (1990): 68–84.

Ptolemaic rule over the city was apparently restored in 217 and must have lasted until 198.³⁹¹

The Zenon papyri suggest that Tobias' troops frequented the city also during more peaceful moments in the third century BCE. The already mentioned slave sale of 259 BCE took place in a locality called "Birta of the Ammanitis" (Βίρτα τῆς Ἀμμανίτιδος), which most probably refers to the citadel of Amman,³⁹² since Tobias' garrison is mentioned in the same source as "Sourabitt" (Σουραβίττ).³⁹³ The latter toponymal, which must have read Tur 'Abid, "Servant's Rock," in the original Aramaic,³⁹⁴ as well as the settlement itself, apparently go back to "Tobias, the Ammonite servant" (תֹּבִיא הַעֲבֵד הַעֲמָנִיט, Neh 2:10 and 19), a Transjordanian governor in the Persian service in the fifth century BCE.³⁹⁵ Recent excavation on the Hellenistic site has shown that a fortress and settlement existed long before construction work on Hyrkanos' palace had started.³⁹⁶ A hoard of coins found in 1993 suggests that the settlement was already a center of fiscal administration in 243 BCE.³⁹⁷ Some archaeologists have even made a case for "the continuous Tobiad habitation at 'Iraq al-Amir during the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods."³⁹⁸ Josephus mentions Tur 'Abid as "Tyre [...] not far from Essebonitis" (Τύπον ... οὐ πόρρω τῆς Ἐσσεβωνίτιδος).³⁹⁹ The Persian governor's title is still reflected in the site's present name Qasr al-'Abd (قصر العبد) and perhaps also in the name of the Bedouin tribe from the area, the 'Abbadi (العابدي).⁴⁰⁰

Josephus' location of the Tobiad fortress in the region of biblical Hesbon stands in striking parallel with the Song's precise reference to "the pools of Hesbon at the

³⁹¹ Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, 269.

³⁹² For this interpretation, see Siegfried Mittmann, "Zenon im Ostjordanland," in *Archäologie und Altes Testament: Festschrift für Kurt Galli*, ed. Arnulf Kuschke (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970), 199–210, here 208–209; Durand, *Des Grecs en Palestine*, 50–51; Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, 237–239, 268; Dušek, *Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions*, 134–135.

³⁹³ Many scholars, however, locate the "Birta" there as well. See Berlin, "Between large Forces," 11; Gera, *Judea*, 41–44; Huß, *Verwaltung*, 146; Magness, *Archaeology*, 73.

³⁹⁴ I would like to thank Ursula Schattner-Rieser for suggesting the Aramaic reconstruction to me.

³⁹⁵ Mittmann, "Zenon im Ostjordanland," 202.

³⁹⁶ François Villeneuve, "Iraq al-Amir," in: *Contribution française à l'archéologie jordanienne* (Amman: Institut Français d'Archéologie du Proche-Orient, 1985), 49–59, here 56; Chang-ho C. Ji and J.K. Lee, "From the Tobiads to the Hasmoneans: The Hellenistic Pottery, Coins and History in the Regions of 'Irāq al-Amir and the Wādi Ḥiṣbān," *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 8 (2004): 177–188; Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*, II, 42, 48; Teresa Bürge, *Der Palast von Iraq al-Amir* (MA thesis, University of Vienna, 2011), 6, 13–14.

³⁹⁷ Christian Augé, "Note sur le trésor de monnaies ptolémaïques de 'Irāq al-Amīr," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 45 (2001): 483–486.

³⁹⁸ Chang-ho C. Ji, "A New Look at the Tobiads in Iraq al-Amir," *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Liber Annus* 48 (1998): 417–440, here 425.

³⁹⁹ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XII.4.11; translation by Marcus, V 119.

⁴⁰⁰ Frederick G. Peake, *A History of Jordan and its Tribes* (Coral Gables: University of Florida Press, 1958), 166.

gate of Bat-Rabbim" (7:5).⁴⁰¹ While some readers of the passage have dismissed it as mere exotic name-dropping,⁴⁰² others have gotten the strong impression that the poet must have been familiar with the topography of the place.⁴⁰³ Hesbon is generally identified with the archaeological site of Tell Hesban situated half way between the present cities of Amman and Madaba, but this urban settlement was abandoned from the sixth to the second century BCE.⁴⁰⁴ It is plausible that the poet, who has already used Kedar for the Nabataeans, Zion for Jerusalem, and Tirzah for Samaria, employed biblical code names in order to refer to a contemporary geographical reality. In early Hellenistic times, the fortified settlements that existed in the vicinity of the ruins of biblical Hesbon were Betharam/Al-Rama (twenty kilometers to the west), Tyre/Iraq al-Amir (twenty-one kilometers to the northwest), and Philadelphia/Amman (twenty-five kilometers to the northeast).

The Song seems to contain poetic allusions to these three places. To be sure, all cities of the region could boast elaborate water supply systems, so that the "pools" mentioned in "Hesbon at the gate of Bat-Rabbim" (7:5) cannot be a distinctive criterion for locating the place, unless the allusion was meant for a local audience. The large ponds that formed after rainfalls on the plateau of 'Iraq al-Amir were a natural marvel of the site, which Hyrkanos would integrate into his palace complex.⁴⁰⁵ Betharam is a possible location of the Song's Beter or Betar (2:17, it forms a rhyme pair with *semadar*); a village named Besimot by Josephus existed in the vicinity.⁴⁰⁶ The Mountains of Betar (or of Spices, *besamim*) would in this case stand for Mount Nebo, which can indeed be seen from 'Iraq al-Amir.⁴⁰⁷ Finally, I would support Athalya Brenner's hypothesis that reads "Bat-Rabbim" as an anagram of Rabbat-

⁴⁰¹ Jericke, "Toponyme im Hohenlied," 53.

⁴⁰² Zakovitch, *Das Hohenlied*, 247: "Anscheinend hat der Dichter eine Vorliebe für abgelegene, exotisch wirkende Orte."

⁴⁰³ Already in 1826, Ewald, *Das Hohenlied Salomo's*, 135, exclaims: "Wie genau kennt der Dichter jene Gegend! In seiner Einfalt nennt er selbst das Stadttor, wo die klaren Teiche sind."

⁴⁰⁴ A small military post was built on the site by the Seleukids, and only in Roman times did the city again emerge under the name of Esbus. See Larry A. Mitchel, *Hellenistic and Roman Strata: A Study of the Stratigraphy of Tell Hesban from the 2nd Century B.C. to the 4th Century A.D.* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1992), 7, 17, 31.

⁴⁰⁵ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* XII.4.11; Claude R. Conder, *Survey of Eastern Palestine: Memoirs of the Topography, Orography, Hydrography, Archaeology, etc.*, Vol. I: *The Adwān Country* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1889), 79, 86; Pierre Gentelle, "Un paradis hellénistique en Jordanie: Étude de géo-archéologie," *Hérodote* 20 (1981), 70–101, here 86–87; Id., *Traces d'eau: Un géographe chez les archéologues* (Paris: Belin, 2003), 87–105; Ehud Netzer, "Floating in the Desert: A Pleasure Palace in Jordan," *Archaeology Odyssey* 2 (Winter 1999): 46–55; Bürge, *Der Palast von Iraq al-Amir*, 40, 49–50, with plates 2 and 19.

⁴⁰⁶ Josephus, *Jewish War* IV.7.6 (Βησιμώθ), possibly corresponding to the biblical site of Bet-Yeshimot; Num 33:49; cf. Nikos Kokkinos, "An Approach to Herodian Peraea," in *Viewing Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology: Vehinnei Rachel, Essays in Honor of Rachel Hachlili*, ed. Ann E. Killebrew and Gabriele Faßbeck (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 271–290 here 279 (on Besimot), 283–287 (on Betharam).

⁴⁰⁷ Conder, *Survey of Eastern Palestine*, 87.

Ammon, the traditional name of Philadelphia, which is often shortened to Rabah in the sources.⁴⁰⁸ Rabah stands next to Hesbon also in Jeremiah 49:3. This might encourage us to interpret the toponymal “Baal-Hamon” (8:11), near the king’s vineyard, as another coded expression for Rabbat-Ammon. The confusion between the gutturals *y* and *n* in spoken Aramaic⁴⁰⁹ and the equivalence of Aramaic *rab* with Hebrew *ba’al*, both meaning “master,” makes a hypercorrection likely.⁴¹⁰ The Song regularly uses synonym pairs for the place names that appear in non-metaphorical contexts: Betar/Besamim, Jerusalem/Zion, and Senir/Hermon refer to certain characters’ geographical origin, while Baal-Hamon apparently doubles with Bat-Rabbim as the location of the vineyard plot.

The metaphorical place names “Hesbon” and “Bat-Rabbim” have also been interpreted as if they were synonyms in a parallel construction.⁴¹¹ However, they should be seen in the context of the four geographical metaphors that occur in the last stanza of idyll 15 (Song 7:5–6). As I have already remarked, these place names trace the borders of Ptolemaic Syria in a counter-clockwise direction on an anthropomorphic map, which follows the same route as the one taken by the merchant Zenon of Kau-nos in 260–259 BCE and documented in his papyri.⁴¹²

Neck: “the Ivory Tower” (second verse missing) presumably in the southwest;

Eyes: “the pools of Hesbon at the gate of Bat-Rabbim” in the southeast;

Nose: the “Tower of Lebanon looking toward Damascus” in the northeast; and

Vertex: “the Carmel, whose hair/gate is of purple,” in the northwest.

Each one of the four geographical references seems to evoke two neighboring places. This is most evident in the case of the Tower of Lebanon (*Migdal ha-Levanon*), which was obviously not a feature in Damascus itself, but a place on the mountain road that led from there to the valley of the Litani River, now known as the Beqaa, and further into Palestine. Polybios’ account of the Seleukid campaigns during the Syrian Wars in 222, 219, and 202 BCE depicts the double Ptolemaic defense line at the northern front: the army of King Antiochos III Megas first confronted the border city of Damascus and then the twin fortresses Gerrha and Brokhoi, which controlled the

⁴⁰⁸ See Athalya Brenner, “A Note on Bat-Rabbim,” *Vetus Testamentum* 42 (1992): 113–115. The rhyme, overlooked in Brenner’s emendation of Rabbim to Rabah, can provide us with an explanation for the use of the uncommon plural form.

⁴⁰⁹ Gustaf Dalman, *Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905), 58–59.

⁴¹⁰ Both names, Bat-Rabbim and Baal-Hamon, have hitherto resisted geographical identification. See Jericke, “Toponyme im Hohenlied,” 50–51, 53.

⁴¹¹ Bat-Rabbim is read “as a cognomen or epithet of Heshbon” by Pope, *Song of Songs*, 626.

⁴¹² Mittmann, “Zenon im Ostjordanland,” 200: “einer kreisförmigen Route durch das mittlere und nördliche West- und Ostjordanland.” Josephus follows the same order when enumerating the cities. See Kasher, *Jews and Hellenistic Cities*, 271.

pass crossing the Anti-Lebanon Mountains.⁴¹³ According to the most persuasive hypothesis, these two fortresses were located on the site of present-day ‘Anjar and Majdel ‘Anjar, which are located at a distance of fifty-seven kilometers from Damascus on the main road to Beirut.⁴¹⁴

The remaining geographical metaphors can be read in the same way: each of them names a fortress located behind a trade city at one of the provincial borders. The military settlement near Hesbon was facing Amman, just as the fortification line on the Carmel⁴¹⁵ was adjacent to the extensive landed possessions of the Phoenician cities of Ptolemais/Akko and Tyre, here symbolized by their most famous product, purple.⁴¹⁶

Only the initial “Ivory Tower” is impossible to locate, because it has lost its second verse by a textual accident. The distich’s last word seems to have been another city name, this time in the remaining fourth corner of the province, the southwest, where the most likely candidate is Gaza. In any case, the lost verse must have ended on *-ah*: the strophe and the antistrophe in 7:2–6 are connected by a refined rhyme pattern, where the rhyme words *aman*, *mezeg*, *shoshanim*, and *tsviyyah* are reflected in an inverse order by [*Azz]ah*, *Bat-Rabbim*, *Damesek*, and *argaman*. I would surmise that the “Ivory Tower” was a fort on the road that brought African ivory to the Mediterranean, which led through Idumaea to Gaza.⁴¹⁷ The fortresses on this highway formed a southern defense line of Ptolemaic Syria, which started in Marisa,

⁴¹³ Polybius, *Histories* V.46, 1–4; 61.7. Later literary sources mention in this area the Ituraean stronghold of Chalkis under Libanos, which has not yet been identified by archaeological research. See Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIV.7.4 and *Jewish War* I.9.2; Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, 239–242.

⁴¹⁴ Aryeh Kasher, *Jews, Idumaeans, and Ancient Arabs: Relations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel with the Nations of the Frontier and Desert during the Hellenistic and Roman Era (332 BCE – 70 CE)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 107; Elaine A. Myers, *The Ituraeans and the Roman Near East: Reassessing the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 83, 86, 90–97.

⁴¹⁵ Mordechai Aviam, “Hellenistic Fortifications in the ‘Hinterland’ of Akko-Ptolemais,” in Aviam, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in the Galilee, 25 Years of Archaeological Excavations and Surveys: Hellenistic to Byzantine Periods* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 22–30; Samuel Rocca, *Herod’s Judea: A Mediterranean State in the Classic World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 182.

⁴¹⁶ Claude R. Conder, “Sycaminon, Hepha, Porphyreon, and Chilzon,” *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* 9.4 (Oct. 1877), 187–190, here 190; Nadav Kashtan, “Akko-Ptolemais: A Maritime Metropolis in Hellenistic and Early Roman Times, 332 BCE-70 CE, as Seen Through the Literary Sources,” in *Mediterranean Cities: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Iraad Malkin and Robert L. Hohlfelder (London: Routledge, 1988), 37–53, here 45.

⁴¹⁷ Makis Aperghis, *The Seleukid Royal Economy: The Finances and Financial Administration of the Seleukid Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76; Steven E. Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 39. Ptolemaic elephant hunting and the Ptolemaic ivory trade grew to a massive scale in the third century BCE. See Stanley M. Burstein, “Ivory and Ptolemaic Exploration of the Red Sea: The Missing Factor,” *Topoi* 6 (1996): 799–807.

at a distance of forty-five kilometers from Gaza, and continued to Betsoura (Bet-Tsur) and Engedi.⁴¹⁸

The four name pairs thus seem to highlight the local conjunction of an army garrison with a major Hellenistic *polis* (Gaza, Amman, Damascus, Tyre) at all four corners of Ptolemaic Syria. This would mean that these verses, while praising the physiognomy of the king's mistress, adopt the perspective of the royal military toward the urban centers that were placed under its protection. The four fortresses stand for facial features of the woman and thereby acclaim her as the secret ruler of the land, including its autonomous exclaves.

Peasants, Nomads, and Slaves

Besides being a major site of military government and Hellenistic culture, third-century Amman also served an important economic function. The “King’s Road” from Petra to Bostra and Damascus passed through this city, where it met roads coming from the west (Jerusalem) and from the east (Azraq).⁴¹⁹ The region between As-Salt and Amman has been famous since antiquity as the most fertile region on the east bank of the Jordan. According to Josephus,

Peraea, though far more extensive [than Galilee], is for the most part desert and rugged and too wild to bring tender fruits to maturity. However, there, too, there are tracts of finer soil which are productive of every species of crop; and the plains are covered with a variety of trees, olive, vine, and palm being those principally cultivated. The country is watered by torrents descending from the mountains and by springs which never dry up and provide sufficient moisture when the torrents dwindle in the dog-days.⁴²⁰

A 1996 surface survey revealed that the Tobiad fortress at ‘Iraq al-Amir was the center of a small but dense cluster of wine-producing villages and farmsteads, most of which were spread along the two adjacent valleys, the Wadi es-Seer and the Wadi Kafrein.⁴²¹ This rural prosperity was due in part to technical innovation. Surveys in ‘Iraq al-Amir have shown cisterns, wine presses and dovecotes carved in the rock, which served two important branches of agricultural production in Ptolemaic

⁴¹⁸ Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 14; Rocca, *Herod’s Judaea*, 178, 180; Berlin, “Between Great Powers,” 7–8.

⁴¹⁹ Mohammed Najjar, “Rabbat Ammon – Philadelphia – Amman,” in *Gadara, Gerasa und die Dekapolis*, ed. Adolf Hoffmann and Susanne Kerner (Mainz: Von Zabern, 2002), 88–97, here 89.

⁴²⁰ Josephus, *Jewish War* III.3.2; translation by Henry St. Thackeray, Vol. II (Loeb Classical Library, no. 487; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927), 17.

⁴²¹ Kasher, *Jews and Hellenistic Cities*, 50; Ji, “A New Look at the Tobiads,” 427–429, 431–432, and the map on p. 420; Id., “Iraq al-Amir and the Hellenistic Settlements in Central and Northern Jordan,” *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 7 (2001): 379–389.

times.⁴²² Archaeologists have recognized the monumental subterranean columbaria as a distinctive feature of third-century BCE agriculture [Fig. 19].⁴²³ Rock-carved dovecotes make an appearance in idyll 7 of the Song, where the peasant girl is called to appear at her doorstep like a dove emerges from “a rock cave, the secret place down the stairs” (2:14). In a similar scene in Theokritos’ idyll III, which has been interpreted as the rural travesty of an Alexandrian “lament on the doorstep,” a shepherd unsuccessfully tries to call his beloved Amaryllis from the cave where she dwells.⁴²⁴

Subterranean dovecotes may be counted among the Song’s many features that reflect Hellenistic innovations, alongside pastoral poetry, banquet tents, racing chariots, police squads, incense caravans, royal wreaths, round towers, silver shields, spice imports, chryselephantine sculpture, walnuts, and free-threshing wheat. But of all the economic and cultural changes that the Hellenistic era brought about in the Levant, the most important one was doubtlessly the circulation of coined silver and bronze.⁴²⁵

The mention of the king’s direct exploitation of the countryside near “Baal-Hamon” for monetary purposes in the last of the Song’s idylls (8:11–12) can be viewed in light of the political and economic history of the Ammanitis region as royal domain.⁴²⁶ The *poleis* and the military settlers leased the king’s land to native tenants or “commoners” (λαοί), who had to pay rent in kind, usually one third of sown crops and one half of fruits they harvested. Wine-growing, however, was affected most directly by the monetary economy because much of its produce was sold to the military. Property issues related to vineyards, one of the major forms of economic organization in the Ptolemaic empire, are well documented in the papyri.⁴²⁷ Sitta von

⁴²² Conder, *Survey of Eastern Palestine*, 68, 72; Villeneuve, “Iraq al-Amir,” 57, with a photograph.

⁴²³ Yigal Teffer, “Aliyot usheqi’ato shel ‘anaf gidul ha-yonim ba’arets,” in ‘Adam we’adamah be’Erets Yisra’el ha-qedumah: *Qovets mehqarim*, ed. Aharon Oppenheimer (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1986), 170–196; Berlin, “Between Large Forces,” 8; Magness, *The Archaeology of the Holy Land*, 79. Eighty-five rock-carved dovecotes are part of the archaeological site of Maresha/Marisa/Bet Guvrin, which was declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 2014. See Amos Kloner, “The Economy of Hellenistic Maresha: Inferences Based on the City Plan and Archaeological Finds,” in *Hellenistic Economies*, ed. Zofia H. Archibald et al. (London: Routledge, 2001), 74–100, here 89–92. I would like to thank Guy Bar-Oz for sharing with me his conviction that there is no causal nexus between the rise of chicken farming in the second century BCE and the decline of the columbaria.

⁴²⁴ Theokritos, *Idylls* III.6; Reinhardt, *Stadt und Land bei Theokrit*, 63–70.

⁴²⁵ Alan E. Samuel, “The Money Economy and the Ptolemaic Peasantry,” *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 21 (1984): 187–206; John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 25.

⁴²⁶ Fawzi Zayadine, “Le grand domaine des Tobiades et la politique économique des Lagides et des Séleucides,” in *Le roi et l’économie: Autonomies locales et structures royales dans l’économie de l’empire séleucide*, ed. Véronique Chankowski and Frédérique Duyrat (Lyon: TOPOI supplément 6, 2004), 267–290; here 276–278.

⁴²⁷ Joe G. Manning, *Land and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Structure of Land Tenure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); John S. Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2006), 355–586, “Appen-

Reden concludes the following from these sources: “While rents on grain land were principally assessed in kind, those on vineyards were principally assessed in cash.”⁴²⁸

The peasant girl at the end of the Song of Songs plays out quite caustically the financial chain that links the king to his settlers, administrators, and tenants down to herself, the tenants’ sister, located at the bottom of the hierarchy. Her allusion to “one thousand in silver” claimed by “King Solomon” for the lease of his vineyard is not made, at least not overtly, as a critique of over-taxation, but as a means to underline the shrewdness of the girl, who keeps her “vineyard” to herself, with the implied consequence that she does not have to pay for its use and may even reap profit from it.

The amount of “one thousand in silver” is mentioned in the Bible in a hyperbolic way as a huge royal grant (Gen 20:16, 2Sam 18:12) or as the sale price of a big vineyard (Is 7:23). In the Song, the same sum only accounts for one single tenant’s yearly share of the lease, which seems all the more strange as the detailed accountancy between the tenants and the storage keepers suggests that the quantities are not just being referred to hyperbolically. We can presume that the text counts in Ptolemaic silver drachmae (ἀρυρίου δραχμή) of 3.56 grams and not in biblical shekels, which had three times as much silver content. But even in this case, the amounts would still be too high: in the mid-third century, the yearly rent (φόρος) paid for a vineyard was on average only twenty silver drachmae per *aroura* (2,756 m²).⁴²⁹ It is thus important to remember the inflation that occurred at the beginning of Ptolemy IV Philopator’s reign, when bronze coins became the usual means of payment. The subsequent historic drop in the value of the drachma, which was reduced to 1/60 of its former value,⁴³⁰ is now used as a reliable means for the dating of Hellenistic papyri.⁴³¹ In the early second century BCE, one thousand bronze drachmae corresponded to the income from a single garden or from a single dovecote.⁴³² During a transition period in the 210s BCE, the bronze prices continued to be noted with the silver standard:⁴³³ if the Song of Songs was a papyrus, it would most probably be dated to this decade.

dix I: Dossier on Vineyard Leasing and Operations (III BCE-IV CE);” Willy Clarysse, “A Vineyard Lease in the Petrie Papyri,” in *Inediti offerti a Rosario Pintaudi per il suo 65 compleanno*, ed. D. Minutoli (Florence: Gonnelli, 2012), 162–165.

⁴²⁸ Sitta von Reden, *Money in Ptolemaic Egypt: From the Macedonian Conquest to the End of the Third Century BCE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 125.

⁴²⁹ Von Reden, *Money in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 126.

⁴³⁰ Huß, *Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit*, 444.

⁴³¹ See the classical article by Tony Reekmans, “Monetary History and the Dating of Ptolemaic Papyri,” *Studia Hellenistica* 5 (1948): 15–43.

⁴³² Kloppenborg, *The Tenants in the Vineyard*, 458.

⁴³³ Klaus Maresch, *Bronze und Silber: Papyrologische Beiträge zur Geschichte der Währung im ptolemaischen und römischen Ägypten bis zum 2. Jahrhundert n.Chr.* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996), 6–7, 30–31.

The Ptolemaic garrison's main function was to defend these cultivated areas against Bedouin inroads; and the artificial rock caves near 'Iraq al-Amir clearly show "that the inhabitants of this site were in constant danger of sudden attack."⁴³⁴ However, relationships between the sedentary population and the desert tribes included peaceful interaction and even social mixing. The image painted by Josephus of a constant confrontation between Jews and Arabs in Hyrkanos' time⁴³⁵ has been nuanced by historians with the observation of the economic interests that must have linked the Nabataeans with their caravan economy to the Judaean garrison and other agents of Ptolemaic power, while some northern Arab groups may have taken the Seleukid side.⁴³⁶ Apparently, the Tobiad domains were not only a frontier, but also a major trade hub between Petra and Jerusalem. Indeed the Greek historian Diodoros of Sicily writes: "The remaining part of Arabia, which lies towards Syria, contains a multitude of farmers and merchants of every kind, who by a seasonable exchange of merchandise make good the lack of certain wares in both countries by supplying useful things which they possess in abundance."⁴³⁷

The Song's sympathetic portrait of the "Kedarites" (the biblical code name for the Nabataeans)⁴³⁸ expresses a similarly positive view of Judaean-Arab relations. The Hebrew poem shares, in addition, a number of curious details with Diodoros, who has copied most of his information on the Arabs "rather slavishly" from the lost historical work of Hieronymos of Kardia (c. 360-c. 270 BCE), one of King Antigonos' generals, who participated in the failed attack against Petra.⁴³⁹ Indeed, all five pastoral idylls in the Song evoke pairs of *realia* that can also be found in Diodoros: the Arabs live in tents and graze animals,⁴⁴⁰ their mountain vegetation consists of cedar and juniper (the Song calls the latter species בָּרוּתִים and Diodoros βόρατον);⁴⁴¹ they bring myrrh and frankincense from the desert to the Mediterranean;⁴⁴² their wilderness on the border with Syria contains many lions and leop-

⁴³⁴ Conder, *Survey of Eastern Palestine*, I, 78.

⁴³⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities* XII.4.11: "Hyrkanus [...] seated himself beyond Jordan, and was at perpetual war with the Arabians, and slew many of them, and took many of them captives."

⁴³⁶ Kasher, *Jews, Idumaeans, and Ancient Arabs*, 9–11, 19–20; Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 313. See also the reasonable guess of Ernst Axel Knauf, "The Nabataean Connection of the Benei Ḥeziř," in *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, ed. Hannah Cotton et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 345–351, here 346: "Jews and Nabataeans were neighbors, so they were allies when they had enemies in common, and enemies if not."

⁴³⁷ Diodoros, *Library of History* II.54.3; translation by Charles R. Oldfather, Vol. II (Loeb Classical Library, no. 303; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 63.

⁴³⁸ Worschech, *Das Land jenseits des Jordan*, 213.

⁴³⁹ Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity*, 283.

⁴⁴⁰ Song 1:5; Diodoros, *Library of History* II.54.1.

⁴⁴¹ Song 1:17; Diodoros, *Library of History* II.49.4; discussed in Immanuel Löw, *Die Flora der Juden* (Vienna: Löwit, 1924), III, 33–36.

⁴⁴² Song 3:6; Diodoros, *Library of History* II.49.2; XIX.94.5.

ards,⁴⁴³ and the other extremity of their domain is near the sea and great rivers.⁴⁴⁴ Diodoros finally highlights the absence of housing and wine-drinking, by which the Arabs express their opposition to kingship and the state.

It is their custom neither to plant grain, set out any fruit-bearing tree, use wine, nor construct any house; and if anyone is found acting contrary to this, death is his penalty. They follow this custom because they believe that those who possess these things are, in order to retain the use of them, easily compelled by the powerful to do their bidding. Some of them raise camels, others sheep, pasturing them in the desert. While there are many Arabian tribes who use the desert as pasture, the Nabataeans far surpass the others in wealth although they are not much more than ten thousand in number; for not a few of them are accustomed to bring down to the sea frankincense and myrrh and the most valuable kinds of spices, which they procure from those who convey them from what is called Arabia Eudaemon. They are exceptionally fond of freedom.⁴⁴⁵

Archaeological findings confirm that the Nabataeans adopted kingship and permanent masonry structures only in the late third century BCE.⁴⁴⁶ This population from the margins of the inhabited world, which stands outside the political order and the wine cycle, nonetheless takes part in trade and in the reign of love. Just like the Song's *parabasis* in idyll 18, Diodoros concludes his chapter on Arabia with the reflection that "Nature is an excellent instructor of all animals for the preservation not only of their own lives but also of their offspring, since by planting in all animals an innate love of life (φιλοζωίας), she leads successive generations into an eternal cycle of continued existence."⁴⁴⁷

Another important lower-class population, namely, slaves, is represented in the Song by the "countless maids" (רָאשָׁת מִלְמֹת אֶזְרָעֵל, 6:8) who serve the king's pleasures, including the one who is shown *in actu* in the first idyll. Even this reference, which has so often been linked to clichés of Oriental lasciviousness, should be placed in its proper context of the young servant maids (*παιδίσκαι*)⁴⁴⁸ and slave concubines (*πολλακαι*) who were part and parcel of the Hellenistic system of army and settlement [Fig. 8]. The prophet Joel (4:4–8) mentions Judaean girls sold by the Greek army to Tyrian merchants, who then passed them on to Sabaeon caravan traders on

⁴⁴³ Song 4:8; Diodoros, *Library of History* II.50.2.

⁴⁴⁴ Song 8:7; Diodoros, *Library of History* II.54.4.

⁴⁴⁵ Diodoros, *Library of History* XIX.94.3–6; translation by Russel M. Geer, vol. X (Loeb Classical Library no. 390; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 87–89; on the rejection of kingship see also Diodoros, *Library of History* II.48.4.

⁴⁴⁶ David F. Graf, "Petra and the Nabataeans in the Early Hellenistic Period: The Literary and Archaeological Evidence," in *Men on the Rocks: The Formation of Nabataean Petra*, ed. Michel Mouton and Stephan G. Schmid (Berlin: Logos, 2013), 35–56, here 38.

⁴⁴⁷ Diodoros, *Library of History* II.50.7; translation by Charles H. Oldfather, II 53.

⁴⁴⁸ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 26; he claims the same sense for נָזְרָה נָזָר in Eccl 2:8. On the term *παιδίσκαι* as a euphemism for prostituted slave women, see Leonhard Schumacher, *Sklaverei in der Antike: Alltag und Schicksal der Unfreien* (Munich: Beck, 2001), 231.

their road through the Hejaz. Enslaved children from the Levant region, mainly daughters sold into slavery by their indebted parents, must have been a return payment in the incense trade with Southern Arabia, as their presence is attested in the inscriptions from the temple in Ma'in on the border with (present-day) Yemen. Among other Syrian cities, Amman is mentioned as a place of origin for some of the girls dedicated to this South Arabian temple.⁴⁴⁹ As we have seen, Zenon was repeatedly busy with buying girls on his travels through Idumaea and Transjordan; his business partners shipped them to Egypt or sold them in Joppa (Jaffa) to serve in temples and inns. Zenon's correspondence mentions his personal Judaean slaves and two slave girls called Johanna and Anna, apparently Judaean as well, who served his superior, the Greek Apollonios.⁴⁵⁰ Tobias and his Judaean garrison in Amman had a part in the slave trade that was flourishing in Transjordan between Greek soldiers and Nabataean merchants.⁴⁵¹ These interactions obviously had a role to play in the demographic development of the area. The Erzherzog Rainer Papyrus contains a royal edict of c. 260 BCE that forbids soldiers to enslave free-born natives and exempts their captive concubines from being included in the census of slaves and cattle.⁴⁵² The Song is similarly favorable to this social institution, as the only couple that cuts across class lines is the one that is based on the master-maid relationship.

Submitted to religious pressure, often enslaved, but occasionally empowered, Judaean were objects as well as agents of Hellenization in the Ammanitis. A regional Judaean stronghold emerged here in the immediate vicinity of a Greek city, an important Arabian power, and an ethnically mixed lower-class population. This unique constellation had consequences for the level of culture as well. While the location of the Song of Song's composition only tenuously fits into what we know about the tiny temple state around Jerusalem, a fairer guess on its origins may be the Judaean-Macedonian garrison near Amman, which lay at the crossroads of military government, urbanism, agriculture, trade, and a semi-nomadic economy [Fig. 17]. However profound the differences between these activities and their respective personnel may appear in the Song, the corresponding landscapes fit into a rather small circle between the Greek *polis* and the Tobiad fortress. Alongside Theokritos' Sicily

⁴⁴⁹ Karl Mlaker, *Die Hierodulenlisten von Ma'in: nebst Untersuchungen zur altädarabischen Rechtsgeschichte und Chronologie* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1943), 39.

⁴⁵⁰ Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, I, 41–42; Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, 129–131, 146–147.

⁴⁵¹ Frank M. Loewenberg, *The Emergence of Communal Institutions for the Support of the Poor in Ancient Judaism: From Charity to Social Justice* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 137–138.

⁴⁵² Marie-Thérèse Lenger, *Corpus des Ordonnances des Ptolémées (C. Ord. Ptol.): Réédition de l'édition princeps (1964) corrigée et mise à jour* (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1980), no. 22; cf. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, I, 15; Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism*, II, 292; Id., “Hy-parchs, *Oikonomoi*, and *Mafiosi*: The Governance of Judah in the Ptolemaic Period,” in *Judah between East and West: The Transition from Persian to Greek Rule (ca. 400–200 BCE)*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Oded Lipschits (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 70–90, here 81.

and Virgil's Arcadia, the third most powerful landscape myth of Western literature may well have had its model in this fertile corner of Transjordan.

A Skeptical Anthropology

Ptolemaic taxation, Peter Schäfer remarked, produced an “intensification of social conflict in Palestine,” since it opposed the state apparatus, its tax farmers, and the inhabitants of the Greek cities, as well as the new native upper class of landed estate owners, to the mass of heavily taxed land lessees, who had to be protected against pauperization and enslavement.⁴⁵³ These class contrasts appear, in addition, linked to a dissociation of spaces and a far-reaching sociocultural pluralism, according to Paul Veyne's recent evocation of the ancient Levantine civilization symbolized by the now devastated site of Palmyra:

One should be attentive to the rural areas and to the villagers who inhabited them. This local kind of humanity differed from that of the city; it ignored Greek and only spoke and wrote in Aramaic, a language that would outlive its Greek varnish. Hellenization meant much more to the city dweller than to the rural folk. The civilization of pagan antiquity was an urban phenomenon, nourished by a huge peasantry that remained alien to it [...] This division would come to its end four or five centuries later, when the Christian and the Muslim coastlands of the Mediterranean would each one be dominated by a religious culture that was reluctant to listen to any voice except its own, to such an extent that each one's identity (one's 'color,' in the language of the Qur'an) would be that of being a Christian, a Muslim, or a Jew.⁴⁵⁴

The hegemonic codes of religious identity would successfully overcome the sharp social boundaries that constituted the multilayered humanity of pagan antiquity.⁴⁵⁵ The symbolic languages of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, with their intense effort to regulate gender roles and to impose sexual modesty, gradually reshaped a society in which the city and the vineyard had spoken different languages and experienced the world and the body in different ways. The adherents of the religious order also claimed power over the cultural remnants of the past. This retroactive conquest had its most violent manifestations in religious persecution and monument destruction, but it occasionally allowed respectful appropriation, as in the case of the Song of Songs, whose post-biblical history has tended to merge the Black peasant woman with the White princess until both would form only one exemplary Shulamit.

Better than any other symbol, the unified heroine fabricated by the exegetes exemplifies the continuity between the modern subject and the Platonic myth of the

⁴⁵³ Peter Schäfer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2003), 14–15, 18, 21.

⁴⁵⁴ Paul Veyne, *Palmyre: L'irremplaçable trésor* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2015), 32.

⁴⁵⁵ See especially Judith Perkins, *Roman Imperial Identities in the Early Christian Era* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 32–34.

soul. In the present study, I have tried to unravel this long unification process. By using Foucault's categories of discontinuity and difference, we can reveal how the Song dissects ancient society into a diversified human panorama which emphasizes contrast yet escapes conflict through a desire for political and aesthetic harmony.

As we have seen, the Song depicts a diversity of social classes and their respective habitats rather than any form of ethnic difference. With the exception of the "warriors of Israel" and the "daughters of Jerusalem," who jointly represent the Judaean population, none of the characters is in any way defined by his or her origins. Yet I would dare to conclude that the non-ethnic juxtaposition of courtly, urban, rural, and pastoral spheres paraphrases the multiethnic mosaic of the Transjordanian region, where Judaeans mediated the intricate interaction between Egyptian rule, Greek colonization, Aramaic land tenure, and the fight and trade with Arab semi-nomads.

The king is called Solomon, but he is modeled on a pagan ruler who follows Alexandrian sexual mores by enjoying his maids, feasting with hetaerae, marrying his sister, and politically empowering his mistress. The city girl is not only a member of a Greek-style *polis* with some of its typical institutions (tavern, fortifications, police) and an architectural fantasy reminiscent of the exuberant multi-material design of the "Alexandrian baroque;"⁴⁵⁶ she is also obsessed by shame ($\alphaἰδώς$), stays inside the house, and repeatedly invokes Eros and Artemis. The tenant farmers' sister, whose blackness is a direct consequence of her underprivileged status, looks up toward the king and the "daughters," but is far less inhibited in her sexual life than her counterpart in the city. The Bedouin couple despises wine, money, and the other ingredients of civilization, crosses all borders freely, and has no relationship with the royal and military authorities.

Judaean collective characters, namely, the "warriors of Israel" and the "daughters of Jerusalem," only appear as spectators, who interact on certain levels with the other social classes. As for the male Israelite "warriors," their link to the king is exclusive. The Judaean women of the chorus are in confidential conversation with the city girl; they are addressed by the peasant girl on one single occasion (1:5); they contribute to the courtly pomp and observe it from the outside (3:10–11); and they stand in no relation to the Bedouins. The Judaean characters help the protagonists promote their erotic wishes, but they never appear themselves as lovers. In a word, the Song stages ten Gentile soloists, six women and four men, before a male and female Jewish chorus and, obviously, a Jewish audience.

The unknown Hebrew poet's focus is thus remarkably on the world of the "other." Alongside an interest in botanical, military, and geographical details, he/she drew up an anthropological panorama with a cross-cultural curiosity not unlike

⁴⁵⁶ Compare the reference to the wall topped by a silver cornice in Song 8:9 to McKenzie, *The Architecture of Alexandria*, 103; Andrew Stewart, *Art in the Hellenistic World: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 35–38.

that which seized the Hellenistic world in the third century.⁴⁵⁷ Greeks during the Persian Wars had described their own civilization as a temperate balance between the extreme climates and lifestyles of the Barbarians. On the one hand, there was the refined wealth (*τρυφή*) and the polygamy of Afro-Asian courts, and, on the other hand, there was the vigor and frugality of the northern nomadic lifestyle. The former was seen as civilized but unfree, the latter as free but uncivilized.⁴⁵⁸ The historian Herodotus opposes the Egyptians and the Scythians in exactly this way.⁴⁵⁹ A similar aesthetic convention among painters and writers of ancient Greece had the “extremes” (*ἔσοχατα*) of humanity embodied by the juxtaposition of Ethiopians and Scythians.⁴⁶⁰ Mythical tradition associated the former with satyrs and the latter with amazons, but neither ethnic group was simply believed to have been composed of savages, as Ethiopians also had a reputation for wisdom and Scythians were renowned for their virtue.⁴⁶¹

Even before Alexander’s conquests, we find Greek precedents for the fourfold division of foreign peoples: Ephoros of Cyme (c. 400 – 330 BCE) divided the surrounding population into Indians in the east, Celts in the west, Scythians in the north, and Ethiopians in the south.⁴⁶² Three of the Song’s four environments, represented by the captive king, the black field nymph, and the free and frugal nomads, respectively, have their antecedents in this Greek tradition of the anthropological quartet. Traditionally, this fourfold order never included one’s own group, which would supposedly be placed at the center of the universe. It is only consistent with this classic approach that the Song never shows Jewish lovers, but instead turns a pagan *polis* girl into the fourth manifestation of the “other.” As all Asian nations, Judaeans were barbarians in Greek eyes, but, as Erich S. Gruen writes, “they could also turn the tables.”⁴⁶³

The idea that environment can affect culture, which in Greek antiquity was known as “climate theory,” is ethnocentric insofar as it assumes an inherent contrast

⁴⁵⁷ Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 92.

⁴⁵⁸ Robert Zahn, *Die Darstellung der Barbaren in griechischer Literatur und Kunst der vorhellenistischen Zeit* (Heidelberg: J. Hörning, 1896), 6–7, 25.

⁴⁵⁹ Herodotus, *Histories* III.34. See François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, tr. Janet Lloyd (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 12–33; Christopher Pelling, “East is East and West is West – Or Are They? National Stereotypes in Herodotus,” *Histos* 1 (1997): 50–66.

⁴⁶⁰ Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1970), 171–177.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 160, 180.

⁴⁶² Klaus Geus, “Space and Geography,” in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Andrew Erskine (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 232–245, here 234.

⁴⁶³ Erich S. Gruen, “Jewish Perspectives on Greek Culture and Ethnicity,” in *Hellenism in the Land of Israel*, ed. John J. Collins and Gregory E. Sterling (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 62–93, here 64.

between in-group normality and out-group extremism. However, its worldview nevertheless follows a pluralistic design. Since its origins in Hippocrates, it has reduced the differences in men's aspect and character to the impact of environmental conditions while insisting on the common origins and the law of nature that ruled over all of them.⁴⁶⁴ This relativistic scheme explains why the treatment of social types in the Song insists on paradox and repeatedly undermines the stereotypical oppositions of white-black, city-countryside, civilization-nature, king-subject, man-woman, rich-poor, sedentary-nomad, and Jew-Gentile. The Greeks and Arabs receive good press in the Song, though Psalm 120:5 had named Israel's oppressors "Meshekhh"⁴⁶⁵ and "the tents of Kedar," and though a deadly showdown between Greeks and Jews was yet to come in Hasmonean times.

If one puts the Song into perspective and compares it to the book *Kohelet*, the philosophical underpinning behind this critical attitude toward stereotypical oppositions becomes apparent.⁴⁶⁶ The universal values of education, civilization, and virtue on which the Stoic age based its cosmopolitan doctrine⁴⁶⁷ are not those that encompass humanity in the Song. The fact that the most uncivilized ethnic group, which was also the most hostile one from the perspective of the Ptolemaic power center, namely, the nomadic Arab tribes, receives the honor of proclaiming the *parabasis* manifests a cultural criticism that the oft-alleged Jewish nostalgia for the pastoral lifestyle of the Patriarchs cannot sufficiently explain. Insisting on love, an emotion, as well as on the pursuit of pleasure as the only common element between the four human environments, the poet shared a form of anti-rational universalism that resembles the doctrines of the Kynic and the Skeptic philosophers of his time. As Pyrrhon (c. 362–275 BCE) is said to have taught, our human conditions differ so much that it becomes impossible to rationally judge one another's perceptions. "Since, therefore, there are so many anomalies depending on conditions, and since at different times people come to be in different conditions, it is no doubt easy to say what each existing object appears to be like to each person, but not to

464 Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity*, 173; James Romm, "Continents, Climates, and Cultures: Greek Theories of Global Structure," in *Geography and Ethnography: Perceptions of the World in Pre-Modern Societies*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub and Richard J.A. Talbert (Chichester, UK: Blackwell, 2010), 215–235.

465 Meshekhh, son of Japhet, appears among Magog and other Caucasian nomads in Ez 28:2, among Greeks and other sea traders in Ez 27:13, and on the Iberian Peninsula according to the *Book of Jubilees* 9:12.

466 Rainer Braun, *Kohelet und die fröhellenistische Popularphilosophie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973); Charles F. Whitley, *Kohelet: His Language and Thought* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1979); Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, "Nicht im Menschen gründet das Glück" (*Koh. 2,24*): *Kohelet im Spannungsfeld jüdischer Weisheit und hellenistischer Philosophie*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1996).

467 Harold C. Baldry, *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965); Arthur W.H. Atkins, *From the Many to the One: A Study of Personality and Views of Human Nature in the Context of Ancient Greek Society, Values and Beliefs* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970); Erich S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

say what it *is* like, since the anomalies are in effect undecidable.”⁴⁶⁸ Suspension of judgment (έποχή) and an insistence on the relativity of “conditions” is the skeptic’s reaction to anthropological diversity. Nothing different can be observed in the equidistant attitude of the Song’s poet toward the ten protagonists. In a multiethnic borderland between city, field, and desert, difference could not be denied and blurred: it had to be recognized and bridged. And for the purpose of border-crossing, the text resorts to the variegated yet common human ways of loving and enjoying rather than to universalizing archetypes and abstractions.

468 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29–30.

6 Conclusion

The “anomalies depending on conditions” is the aspect of the Song of Songs that has most intrigued nineteenth-century interpreters, but it is also the aspect that has been most systematically overlooked, if not even repressed, by Bible scholars in recent decades. According to my reading, which attempts to give this aspect its due emphasis, the Song develops a fourfold panorama of social classes and ethnic groups, with the Judaeans standing in the middle between them. These disconnected classes and groups, each being associated with an environment, are differentiated by an amazing amount of detail; they are juxtaposed with an arithmetical sense of proportion and balance; and they are all made to join in the common praise of love.

The Song of Song’s ethnographic frieze depicting Egyptian, Greek, Aramaic, and Arab lovers in front of a Jewish chorus hints at a more profound aspect of its message, which connects the Hebrew text to the Dionysian mysteries. The latter did not just celebrate wine and physical pleasure, but they also enacted a carnival-like equalization of the social order in the course of dance, inebriation, and erotic excitement.⁴⁶⁸ In the Song, the absence of communication and miscegenation between the couples shows a reluctance to think of the inter-class or even orgiastic promiscuity that was the threatening aspect in the Bacchanals. The use of eroticism to break social boundaries only seems legitimate for the king’s maids, whose praise of their royal master in idyll 1 affirms from the outset a hierarchical erotic framework.

On the literary level, the poetic unity that is given to the experiences from couples in all sectors of ancient society nonetheless leaves an impression of communion. The couples in the court, *polis*, village, and even the nomads outside it, take part in love-making and practice some sort of joyful consumerism. Their parallel engagement in these universal pleasures of the senses creates the illusion of a quasi-cultic fraternization.

In the Song of Songs, the spirit and literary pattern of Dionysian celebration is imported into a Jewish context after the most indigestible elements had been filtered out, especially homosexuality, the ruler cult, musical ecstasy, cross-dressing, and graphic phallic language. Yet the Song’s spirituality resembles a Dionysian world-view by seeking the manifestation of the divine in impulsive psychic forces, *daimones*, rather than in the moral imperative to control them. This experimental theology is famously outlined in the following words of Diotima: “God with man does not mingle: but the spiritual is the means of all society and converse of men with gods and of gods with men, whether waking or asleep [...] Many and multifarious are these spirits (δαιμονες), and one of them is Love.”⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁸ Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*, I,554: “alle mit einander, Herren und Sklaven, denn die Dionysosfeier machte Alles gleich.”

⁴⁶⁹ Plato, *Banquet* 203 A; translation by Walter R.M. Lamb in Plato, Vol. III (Loeb Classical Library, no. 166; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1925), 179.

Apart from the praise of Eros that ties together all four environments, religion is neither seen as the separating nor as the unifying element in the Song's ethnography. Though centuries of religious or mythological reading have been avidly collecting possible allusions to cults in the text, the results are mostly unconvincing. There are far fewer references to gods or God in the Song than, say, in the frivolous amatory epigrams of Alexandria. Allusions to religious identities are secondary to the major sociocultural cleavage. What remains as the glue that binds the classes together are the human pleasures of consumerism and erotic fulfillment, or rather the public celebration of both. As Bickerman writes, "it was precisely the secular quality of Greek civilization that made the impulses coming from it so powerful."⁴⁷⁰ Adopting Dionysian cultic frenzy as a part of secular entertainment could become a milder and ultimately innocuous substitute form of apostasy.

It is therefore possible to understand why the scholarly reading of the Song of Songs has been able to refer the sense of the poem alternatively to secular pleasure, monotheistic faith, or pagan myth. As we may now recognize, all three of these dimensions are present. The pleasures described in the text indeed had a religious context or, more exactly, an interreligious one. It is tempting to link the Jewish reception of the Anthesteria to similar cases of syncretic appropriation of Gentile festival rites in Jewish history, be it the Venetian Purim, the Polish-Jewish Passover baskets, or the last two hundred years of Jewish involvement in the decoration, illumination, and sentimentalization of public space during the Christmas season.⁴⁷¹ In the last case, as well as in antiquity, enhanced seasonal consumerism created a solid basis upon which diverse religious rites could be harmonized.

As a syncretic text, the Song has had a pioneering success in the history of Jewish acculturation strategies. The author could obviously not preview the controversial character that the appropriation of Hellenic cultural elements would receive after the Hasmonean Revolt. Half a century later, the Hasmonean promotion of the Purim festival would replace the agricultural celebration of the cask-opening with the political drama of Esther's redemptive intervention.⁴⁷² Yet in spite of the story of a deadly confrontation between Jewish Dionysians and Jewish patriots that the author of 3 Maccabees told one century later, this substitution was apparently a peaceful and gradual process, not unlike the reinterpretation that has transformed Passover, Shavuot, and Tabernacles from harvest festivals into historical commemorations. It seems likely that this smooth transition, as well as the ritual and literary

⁴⁷⁰ Bickerman, *Jews in the Greek Age*, 79.

⁴⁷¹ See these and more examples in Michael Hilton, *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (London: SCM Press, 1994).

⁴⁷² Philip S. Alexander, "3 Maccabees, Hanukkah and Purim," in *Biblical Hebrews, Biblical Texts: Essays in Memory of Michael P. Weitzman*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Gillian Greenberg (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 321–339, here 337; Benedikt Eckhardt, *Ethnos und Herrschaft: Politische Figurationen jüdischer Identität von Antiochos III. bis Herodes I.* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 108–111.

connection of the Song of Songs with its successor, the Esther scroll, assured the former's survival through the joint transmission of both texts inside the scriptural canon.⁴⁷³

In sum, the Song of Songs has always stood in a Jewish religious context, though with changing justifications: its *topoi* of multifarious love were collapsed into metaphors of a unified mystic intrigue and finally into moralistic examples. This long and intense interpretive activity around the Canticle has greatly enriched Jewish and Christian culture, while eclipsing the poetic exploration of human diversity and erotic universality that was, in my view, the original message of the text. More constant than religious discourse, the ritual calendar of Judaism has maintained the festival of the last full moon of winter faultlessly until this day, and the age-old practice of inebriation⁴⁷⁴ still betrays the Jewish-Dionysian syncretism that first marked the date.

473 The Song's reception during the Second Temple period remains almost entirely obscure. See Peter W. Flint, "The Book of Canticles (Song of Songs) in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Perspectives on the Song of Songs*, ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 96–104; Jonathan Kaplan, "The Song of Songs from the Bible to the Mishnah," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 81 (2010): 43–66; Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Ben Sira and Song of Songs: What about Parallels and Echoes?" in *Open-Mindedness in the Bible and Beyond: A Volume of Studies in Honour of Bob Becking*, ed. Marjo C.A. Korpel and Lester L. Grabbe (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 25–36.

474 *bMegillah* 7b; cf. Meir Rafeld, "Ad de-lo yada': Hishakkerut ba-Purim, meqorot, parshanut we-nohagim," in *Minhagei Yisra'el*, ed. Daniel Sperber (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1998), VII, 207–226.

Appendix

Images

Eros



Fig. 1. Courtship with flying Eros, symbolizing the awakening love in the young woman (cf. Song 2:4). Detail from a plate belonging to a funerary offering from Apulia, c. 330 – 320 BCE. Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe.

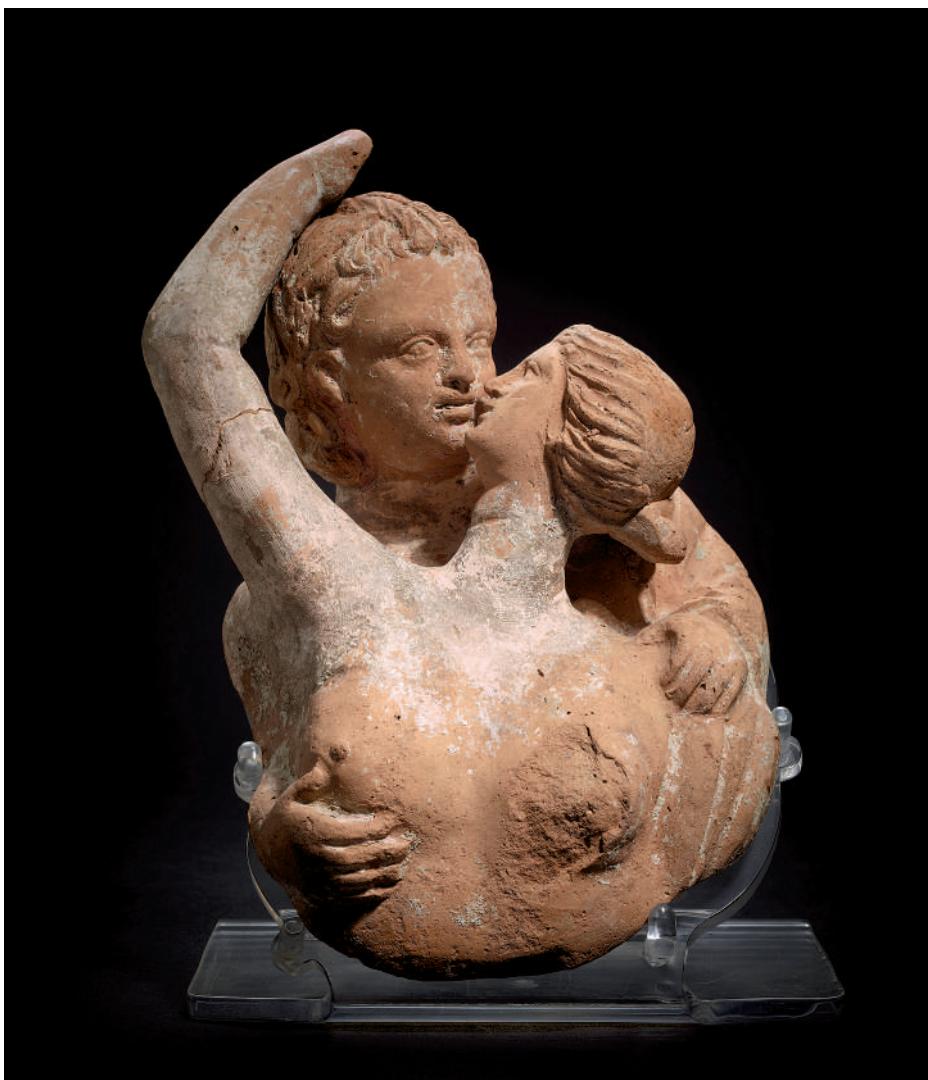


Fig. 2. Eros and Psyche with the typical gesture of embrace, his left hand lying under her head and his right hand caressing her bosom (cf. Song 2:6). Terracotta figure from Centuripe (Sicily), c. 250–150 BCE. London, British Museum.



Fig. 3. Sleeping Eros, symbolizing dormant love (cf. Song 2:7). Bronze from Rhodes, c. 200 BCE. New York, Metropolitan Museum / SCALA Picture Library, Florence.



Fig. 4. Eros as decoration on textiles, going back to a Hellenistic ornamental tradition (cf. Song 3:10). Tapestry roundel, Byzantine Egypt, c. 500–600 CE. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of The Hagop Kevorkian Foundation in memory of Hagop Kevorkian.

Hellenistic Social Types



Fig. 5. Ptolemaic king, presumably Ptolemy III. (c. 240–220 BCE) represented as an attractive youth in the nude (cf. Song 1:3–4). Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe.



Fig. 6. Cleruch (settler-soldier), wearing an urban sleeved tunic and holding a Gaulish-type shield (cf. Song 4:4). Terracotta figurine from Naukratis, Ptolemaic Egypt, 3rd cent. BCE. London, British Museum.



Fig. 7. City girl of adolescent age in elegant attire (cf. Song 8:8). Roman copy of a Hellenistic original of c. 250–225 BCE. Rome, Palazzo dei Conservatori / Hirmer Fotoarchiv, Munich.



Fig. 8. Maid among a slave gang (cf. Song 6:8). Detail from a red-figure krater painting representing Chryses trying to ransom his daughter from Agamemnon, Apulia, c. 360–350 BCE. Paris, Musée du Louvre / photographer Hervé Lewandowski.



Fig. 9. Peasant, with picked fruit (cf. Song 7:9).
Terracotta from Myrina near Izmir, 1st cent. BCE.
Paris, Musée du Louvre / photographer Marie-Lan Nguyen.



Fig. 10. Shepherd grazing his flock (cf. Song 1:7). Copper statuette from Athens, 1st cent. BCE, presumably reproducing a model from the 3rd cent. BCE. Athens, National Archaeological Museum / photographer Eleftherios A. Galanopoulos. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Archaeological Receipts Fund.

The Four Couples



Fig. 11. Men and hetaerae reclining at a banquet (cf. Song 1:12), showing four couples of different character cross-wise distributed on a circular surface. Kylix from Southern Italy, c. 470 BCE. Basel, Antikenmuseum.

The Royal Couple

Fig. 12–13. King Ptolemy IV Philopator and Queen Arsinoë III, c. 220–205 BCE, a royal couple of brother and sister (cf. Song 4:9). Gold coins from Phoenicia and Alexandria. London, British Museum.

Dionysos



Fig. 14. Maenad dancing in sandals with her head thrown back (cf. Song 7:1). One of six marble reliefs attributed to the Athenian sculptor Kallimakhos (c. 425 BCE) and known in Roman copies. Madrid, Museo del Prado / photographer Erich Lessing.



Fig. 15. Dionysos and Ariadne with elements of the Dionysian cult (offering-bearer, theater mask, deer, flying Eros), the lover-god being distinguished by his long hair (cf. Song 5:11). Detail of a calyx-krater from Apulia, c. 340 BCE. Basel, Antikenmuseum.

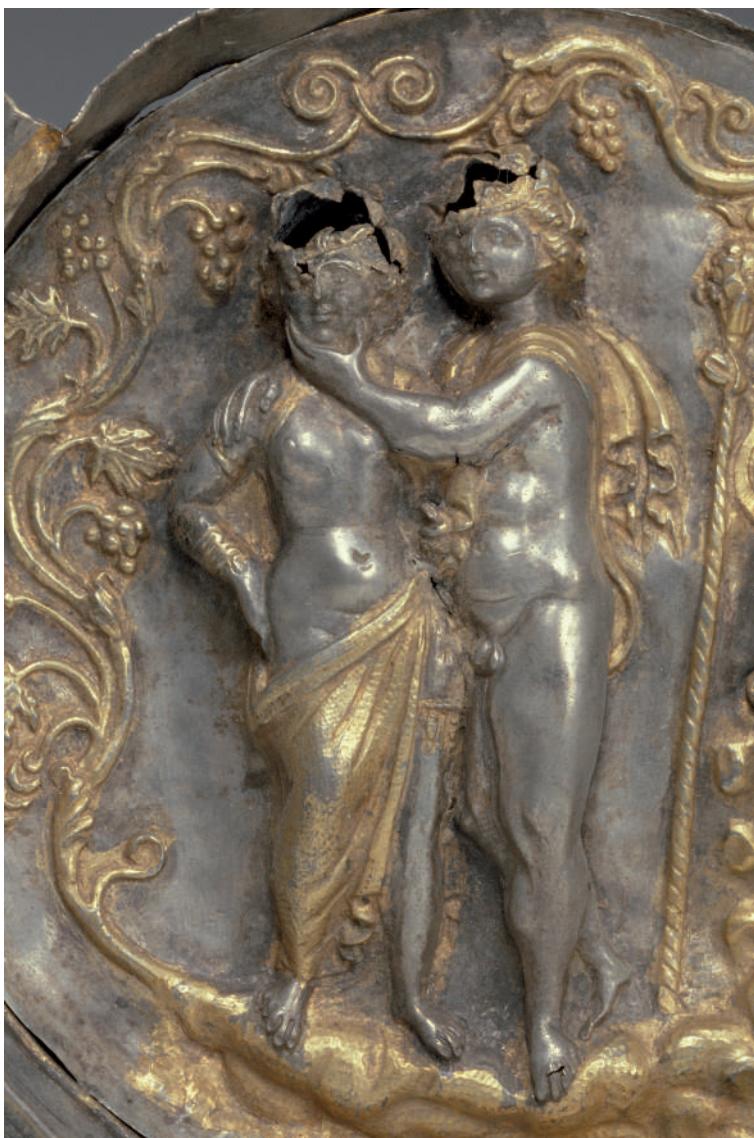


Fig. 16. Dionysos and Ariadne in embrace among vines (cf. Song 7:13) and next to a thyrsos, without further ritual elements. Detail of a bowl from Asia Minor, c. 150 BCE. Los Angeles, Getty Museum.

Landscape Features



Fig. 17. The Tobiad fortress, a possible location of the “pools in Hesbon” (Song 7:5). Palace building of c. 200–175 BCE in front of the tell of Tur ‘Abid/Qasr al-‘Abd (Jordan). Photographer Garo Nalbandian.



Fig. 18. Round tower, c. 300 BCE, of the type resembling a woman's neck (cf. Song 4:4), in Samaria/As-Samira (Palestinian Territories). Photograph from Magness, *The Archaeology of the Holy Land*, 70.

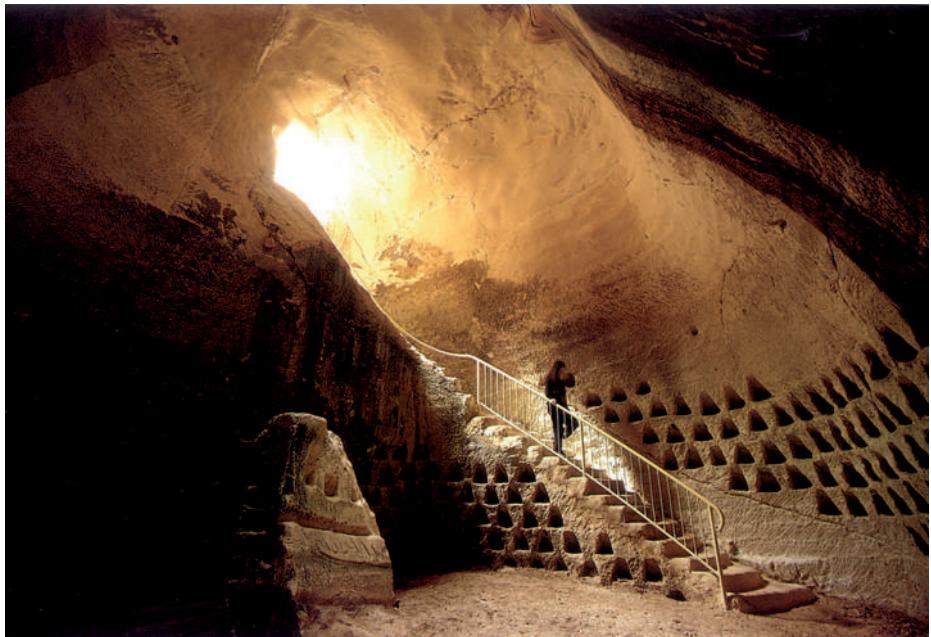


Fig. 19. Subterranean dovecote, from the 3rd cent. BCE (cf. Song 2:14), in Marisa/Bet-Guvrin (Israel), photographer Shlomo Aronson Associates.



Fig. 20. Ptolemaic Syria (cf. Song 7:5–6). Map by András Vadas, Budapest.

Structural Hypothesis for the Song of Songs

(Source of the text: <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/i/t/t30.htm>)

1 א שיר השירים, אָשָׁר לְשָׁלֹמָה.

1. Court

Two pentastichs in the meter 2:3(:2).

ב ג	ישקני מְגַשְׁיקוֹת פִּיהוֹ, לְרִיחַ שְׁמַנִּיךְ תֹּזְבִּים;
כ ד	כִּיטּוֹבִים דְּקִיךְ מִין. שְׁמַן תּוֹרֵק שְׁקָד;
ה פ	עַל-כָּנוּ, עַלְמֹות אַהֲבוֹךְ. מִשְׁרִים אַהֲבוֹךְ. {פ}

הַבְּיאַנִּי הַמְּלָךְ תְּדִירִוּ,
נְבִירָה דְּקִיךְ מִין,
נְגִילָה וּנְשִׁמְחָה בְּדַ—

2. Vineyard

One heptastich in the meter 3:2(:2).

ה ו	שְׁחוֹרָה אָנִי וְנָאָה, בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם; אַל-תְּרָאָנִי שְׁאָנִי שְׁחִירָתָתִי, בְּנִי אַמִּי נְחָרוּ-בִּי, שְׁמַנִּי
ג ז	כָּאַהֲלִי קָדָר, כִּירְיעֹת שְׁלֹמָה. שְׁשִׁזְוְפָתָנִי הַשְּׁמַשׁ; נְטוּרָה אַת-הַכְּרָמִים— כְּרָמִי שְׁלִי, לֹא נְטָרָתִי.

3. Wilderness

One odd hexastich in the meter 3:3:3.

ז ח	הַגִּזָה לִי, שְׁאַהֲבָה נְפָשִׁי, אִמְלָא תְּרֵאָה, אִיכָה תְּרֵבֵי בָּאֶחָרִים; שְׁלֹמָה אֲהִיכָה בְּעַטִּיה, עַל עֲדָרִי חֶבְרִי. צְאִי-לְךָ בְּעַקְבֵי הַצָּאן, וּרְעִי אַת-גָדִיתִיךְ, עַל מְשֻׁבְנֹת הַרְעִים. {פ}
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4. Court

Two even hexastichs in the meter 2:2.

ט י א י א י ב ג ד	לְסָסְתִי בְּרַכְבִּי פָרָעה, דְמִיתִיךְ רַעִיתִי. נָאווּ לְחִינִיךְ בָּתָרִים, צְוָאָרֵךְ בְּחַרְוּזִים. תּוֹרִי זָהָב נְעֹשָׂה-לְךָ, עַם נְקֹדֹת הַכְּסָף.
ג	עַד-שְׁתַהְמָלֵךְ, בְּמִסְבּוֹן, נְרָדִי, נְטוּרָתִי. בֵּין שְׁדֵי יְלֵן.
ד	אַרְזָרָה הַמֶּר דְזִדי לִי, בְּכָרְמִי עַזְגִּדי. {ס}

5. Wilderness

One octastich and one even hexastich. Changing meters of 3:2 (lines 1–2), 2:2 (lines 3–6), 3:3 (last line).

טו	הַנֵּך יְפָה רְעֵיתִי, הַנֵּך יְפָה עַנֵּיך יְוִינִים.
טו	אָפָּעָרְשָׁנו רְעֵנָנָה.
יז	קְרוּתָה בְּתִינָנו אֲרָזִים,
יז	רְהִיטָנו בְּרוֹתִים.
2 א	שְׁוֹשָׁנָתָה הַעֲמָקִים,
ב	כְּשֹׁשָׁנָה בֵּין הַבָּנֹות.
ג	בֵּן רְעֵיתִי בֵּין הַבָּנֹות.
ג	בֵּן דָּזָדִי בֵּין הַבָּנֹות;
	וּפְרִיוּ מְתוֹקָ לְחֶבֶי.

6. City

One pentastich followed by two choruses (a distich and a tetrastich). The meter is 2:2(2).

ד	לְהַבְיאֵנִי אֶל-בֵּית הַיּוֹם,
ה	סְמִכָּנוּ, בְּאֲשִׁישׁוֹת —
	בִּיחֹלֶת אַהֲבָה, אַנְיִ.
ו	שְׁמָאָלָה תְּחַת לְרָאֵשִׁי,
ז	הַשְּׁבָעָתִי אַחֲכָם בָּנוֹת יְרוֹשָׁלָם,
	אַס-תְּעִירָנוּ וְאַס-תְּעִירָרָנוּ

7. Vineyard

Long bipartite pattern of three odd stanzas (hexastich, hexastich, nonastich) and three even stanzas (tetrastichs) with a double chorus. The first part has the meter 3:2:2; the second part and the choruses have the meter 2:2(2).

ח	קֹול דָזָדִי, הַגָּה-זָה בָא;
ט	דָוָמָה דָזָדִי לְאַבִי,
	מַקְפֵץ, עַל-הַגְּבֻעוֹת.
	מַקְלֵג עַל-הַהְרִים —
	או לְעַפֵּר הַאַלְּיִם;
	וַיְמִינָן תְּחַבְּקִין.
ו	בְּצַבָּאֹות אוֹ בְּאִילּוֹת הַשְׁדָה:
ז	אַת-הַאֲהָבָה, עַד שְׁתַחַצֵּפָה. {ס}
	הַגָּה-זָה עוֹמֵד, אַחֲרָ בְּתַלְנוֹ —
י	עֲנָה דָזָדִי, וְאָמֵר לֵי:
יא	כִּי-הַגָּה הַסְּטוּ עָבָר;
יב	הַנְּצָנִים גָּרָאו בָּאָרֶץ,
יג	וְתַאֲנָה חַנְתָּה פְגִיה,
	וְהַגְּפָנִים סְמָדָר
	נָתְנוּ רִיחָ;
	קְוִמִּי לְדַ רְעֵיתִי
	יְפָתִי, וְלִכְיָה. {ס}
	בְּסַתְרַ המְדָרָה,
יד	יְוִנָתִי בְּחִגְיִ הַסְּלָעָ,

הראיני את-מראיך, ביקולד ערָב,	השם עני את-קולד: ונראיך נאה. {ס}
אָחָז-לָנוּ, שְׁעָלִים— מחבלים ברמים;	שְׁעָלִים קְטָנִים, וברמים סְמָדָר.
דוֹדִי לִי וְאַנִּי לוּ,	הָרָעָה בְּשׁוֹגִים.
עד שִׁיפּוֹחַ הַיּוֹם, סְבִּבְדָּה-	וְנִסְוּ הַצְּלָלִים: דוֹדִי לָצְבִּי,

8. City

Three chiastic tetrastichs (the central one extended by one colon) in the meter 2:3(3), followed by a tetrastichic chorus in the meter 2:2.

בְּקַשְׁתִּי, אֶת שָׁאַהֲבָה נֶפֶשִׁי; בְּקַשְׁתִּי, וְאַמְצָאָתִי. בְּאַקְוֹמָה נָא וְאַסְבְּבָה בָּעֵיר,	א עַל-מִשְׁבֵּבִי, בְּלִילּוֹת,
אָבְקָשָׁה, אֶת שָׁאַהֲבָה נֶפֶשִׁי; בְּקַשְׁתִּי, וְאַמְצָאָתִי. גְּמַצְאָנוּ, הַשְּׁמָרִים, הַשְּׁבָבִים, בָּעֵיר: אֶת שָׁאַהֲבָה נֶפֶשִׁי, רָאִיתָם.	בְּשָׁוֹקִים וּבְרָחֶבֶת—
עַד שְׁמַצְאָתִי, אֶת שָׁאַהֲבָה נֶפֶשִׁי; אָחִזְתִּי, וְלֹא אַרְפַּנָּו — עַד-שְׁהַבִּיאָתִי אֶל-בֵּית אָמִי, וְאֶל-חֶדֶר הַוְּרָתִי.	כִּמְעַט, שָׁעַבְתִּי מִמֶּה,
הַשְּׁבָעָתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּנֹתִי יְרוּשָׁלָם, בְּצָבֹאות, אוֹ, בְּאַיִלּוֹת הַשְּׁדָה: אֶת-הַאֲהָבָה, עַד שְׁתַחַפֵּז. {ס}	ה אֶס-תְּעִירָוּ וְאֶס-תְּעֹזָרוּ

9. Wilderness

One tetrastich in the meter 2:2.

מֵזָאת, עַלְהָ מַז-הַמְּדָבָר, בְּחִימָרוֹת, עַשְׁן: מִקְטָרָת מַר וְלִבּוֹנָה, מַכְלֵ אַבְקָת רַוְּלָה.	1
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10. Court

Three stanzas: one hexastich and one nonastich in the meters 2:3:1 and 3:2:1, respectively, then one tetrastich in the meter 2:2.

הַגָּה, מִטּוֹן שְׁלִשְׁלָמָה— בְּלָם אֲחֹזִי חִירָב, מַלְפִּיד מַלְחָמָה;	2
שְׁשִׁים גְּבָרִים, סְבִיב לָהּ: אִישׁ חַרְבוֹ עַל-יְרָכוֹ,	3

ט	אפריזוֹן, עִשָּׂה לוֹ	הַמְלָךְ שֶׁלֶמֶה —	מעשי, הַלְּבָנוֹן.
ו	עַמּוֹדִיוֹ, עִשָּׂה בָּסָר,	רְפִידָהוֹ זָהָב,	מְרַכְבָּו אַרְגָּמָן;
	תָּכוֹן רַצּוֹף אַהֲבָה,		מְבָנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם.
יא	צָאָנָה וּרְאָנָה בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן,	בְּמַלְךְ שֶׁלֶמֶה — בְּעַטְרָה,	בַּיּוֹם חַתְנָתוֹ, וּבַיּוֹם, שְׁמָחָת לְבָוֹ. {ס}

11. Vineyard

Three stanzas: two decastichs and one hexastich in the meter 2:2.

א	הַגֵּד יִפְהָה —	הַגֵּד יִפְהָה רְעִיטִי,	הַגֵּד יִפְהָה —
	מִבְּעֵד לְצַמְתָּךְ;	עִינִיךְ יוֹנִים,	
ב	שָׁוֹלְשׁוֹ מֵהָר גָּלָעָד.	שְׁעָרָךְ בְּעִדר הַעֲזִים,	שְׁעָרָךְ בְּעִדר הַקְּצִובּוֹת,
	שְׁעַלְוֹ מִן-הַרְחִיצָה:	שְׁנִיךְ בְּעִדר הַקְּצִובּוֹת,	שְׁבָלָם, מִתְּאִימּוֹת,
	וּשְׁבָלָה, אַין בָּהָם.		
ג	וּמְדִבְרָךְ נָאוֹה;	בְּחוֹטַת הַשְׁנִי שְׁפָתֹתִיךְ,	בְּחוֹטַת הַשְׁנִי שְׁפָתֹתִיךְ,
	מִבְּעֵד לְצַמְתָּךְ.	כְּפָלָח הַרְמֹן רְקִתָּךְ,	כְּפָלָח הַרְמֹן רְקִתָּךְ,
ד	בְּנֵנוֹי לְתַלְפִּיות;	כִּמְגַדֵּל דָּוִיד צְנוֹאָרֶךְ,	כִּמְגַדֵּל דָּוִיד צְנוֹאָרֶךְ,
	כָּל שְׁלֵטִי הַגְּבָרִים.	אַלְפִּי הַמְּגַן תָּלִוִי עַלְיוֹ,	אַלְפִּי הַמְּגַן תָּלִוִי עַלְיוֹ,
ה	תָּאוֹמִי צְבִיה, הָרְעִים, בְּשׁוֹשְׁגִים.	שְׁנִי שְׁדִיךְ בְּשְׁנִי עֲפָרִים,	שְׁנִי שְׁדִיךְ בְּשְׁנִי עֲפָרִים,
ו	וּנְסֹו הַצְּלָלִים —	עַד שִׁיפּוֹחַ הַיּוֹם,	
	וְאַל-גְּבֻעָת הַלְּבָנוֹת.	אַלְךְ לִי אַלְהָר הַמּוֹר,	
ז	וּמָם אַין בָּךְ. {ס}	כְּלָד יִפְהָה רְעִיטִי,	

12. Wilderness

One even hexastich in the meter 2:2.

ח	אַתִּי מִלְּבָנוֹן כֶּלה,	אַתִּי מִלְּבָנוֹן כֶּלה;	ח
	תְּשֻׁוֹרִי מַרְאָשׁ אַמְנָה,	מַרְאָשׁ שְׁנִיר וְחַרְמוֹן,	
	מִמְּפָעִנות אַרְיוֹת,	מִמְּרָאִי נִמְרָים.	

13. Court

Long bipartite pattern of 2+2 stanzas. The first part consists of a nonastich in 3:3:2 (three lines of three cola), and an octastich in 4:4, 3:4, 3:3, 2:2 (four lines of four cola). The second part is in two hexastichs with the meter 2:2 in the first two lines, then 3:3 in the last four lines.

ט	לְבִבְתָּנִי בָּאַחֲתִי מַעֲנִיךְ, בָּאַחֲדַעַךְ מַעֲרֹנִיךְ.	לְבִבְתָּנִי, אֲחָתִי כֶּלֶה;
י	מַה-טָּבוֹ דָּרוֹךְ מַיִּין, וַיְרִיחַ שְׁמַנִּיךְ מִכְלָבָשִׁים.	מַה-יְטַבוֹ דָּרוֹךְ, אֲחָתִי כֶּלֶה;
יא	דְּבָשׁ וְחַלְבָּבְךָ תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנֶיךְ, וַיְרִיחַ שְׁלָמִתִּיךְ בְּרִיחַ לְבָנָנוּ. {ס}	נִפְתַּח תְּפִנָּה שְׁפָתָתִיךְ, כֶּלֶה;
יב	גַּן גַּעַול, מַעֲנִין חַתּוֹם.	גַּעַול, אֲחָתִי כֶּלֶה;
יג	שְׁלַחְיַךְ פְּרָדָס רַמּוֹנִים, עַם פָּרִי מַגְדִּים: בְּפִרְפִּים, עַם-נְרָדִים. יְדַ גַּרְדַּק וּכְרָפֶם,	שְׁלַחְיַךְ קְנָה וּקְנָמוֹן, עַם, בְּלָעָזִי לְבָנָה;
טו	מָר, וְאַהֲלֹתָךְ, עַם, בְּלָרָאשִׁי בְּשָׁמִים. וְגַנְלִים, מַן-לְבָנָנוּ.	מַעֲנִין גַּנִּים, בָּאַרְמִים חַתִּים;
טז	וּבָזְאי תִּמְןִין,	עֹזֵר צָפֹן
	יְזָלוּ בְּשָׁמָמִיו;	הַפִּיחַנִּי גַּנִּי
	וַיְאַכְלֵ פָּרִי מַגְדִּין.	יָבָא דָזְזִי ?גַּנְנִי,
טז	אֲרִיתִי מַזְרִי עַם-בְּשָׁמִי,	5 א בָּאַתִּי לְגַנִּי, אֲחָתִי כֶּלֶה —
	שְׁתִיְתִּי יְנִי עַם-תְּלָבִי;	אֲכָלְתִּי יְעַרְיִי עַם-דָּבָשִׁי
	וְשְׁבָרוּ דָזִים. {ס}	אֲכָלְתִּי רַעִים, שְׁתוֹ

14. City

Long bipartite pattern of 4+4 stanzas. The first part consists of one hexastich and three heptastichs in the alternating meter 3:2(2) and 2:2(2). The second part consists of a chiastic sequence of two dodecastichs framed by two decastichs in the meter 2:2.

ב	קוֹל דָזִי דָזְפָק, יְוַנְתִי תְמַתִּי — קְנַזְוָתִי רְסִיסִי לְלָהָ.	אָנִי יְשָׁנָה, וְלַבִּי עָרָ; פְּתַחְ-לִי אֲחָתִי רְעַתִּי — שְׁרָאָשִׁי גָּמְלָא-טָלָ,
ג	אַיְכָה, אַלְבְּשָׁנָה; אַיְכָה אַטְבָּפָם.	פְּשַׁטְתִּי, אַתְ-כְּפָנָתִי — רְחַצְתִּי אַתְ-רְגָלִי,
ד	וְמַעַי, הַמּוֹעֵלָו.	דָזְזִי, שְׁלָח
ה	וְיִדִי גַּטְפּוֹ-מוֹר, עַל, כְּפֹזַת הַמְּגַעַל.	קְמַתִּי אָנִי, לְפַתְחַ לְדָזִי; וְאַצְבְּעַתִּי מַזְרִי עַבְרָ,
ו	נְפָשִׁי, יְצָאָה בְּדָבָרָו —	פְּתַחְתִּי אָנִי לְדָזִי,
ז	קְרָאָתִיו וְלֹא עֲנָנִי. הַסְּבָבִים בָּעֵיר,	בְּקַשְׁתִּיהְוּ וְלֹא מַצְאָתִיהְוּ, מַצְאָנִי הַשְּׁמָרִים
	נְשָׁאוֹ אַתְ-רְדִידִי	הַפּוֹנִי פְּצָעָנִי;
ח	מַעַלִי, שְׁמָרִי הַחֲמֹות.	
ט	אַס-תְּמַצָּאוֹ, אַתְ-דָזִי — שְׁחֹזְלָתְךָ אַהֲבָה אָנִי.	הַשְּׁבָעָתִי אַתְּכֶם, בְּנֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם: מַה-תְּגִידְוּ לֹ,
	הַיְפָה בְּנָשִׁים:	מַה-דָּזְדָּךְ מַדָּזָּד,
	שְׁבָכָה הַשְּׁבָעָתָנוּ.	מַה-דָּזְדָּךְ מַדָּזָּד,
	דָגָל מְרַבְּבָה.	דָזְזִי צָח וְאַדּוֹם,

יא	ראשו, בְּחָם פָּז;
יב	קְנַעֲנִי, תְּלִתְלִים,
	עִזְׁנִים, קִוְנִים
יג	רְחֹצֹת, בְּחָלָב—
	לְחִיזָּה בְּעַרְגָּת הַבָּשָׂם,
	שְׂפָתֹתִי, שׂוֹשָׁנִים—
יד	זְדִיו גָּלִילִי זְהָב,
	מַעַי עַשְׂתָּה שָׁן,
טו	שְׂזָקִי עַמּוֹדִי שָׁש,
	מִרְאָהו, פְּלַבְנָנו—
טו	חַכּו, מִמְתָּקִים,
	זָהָדִי זְהָהָרָעִי,
טז	בְּנָנוֹת יְרוֹשָׁלָם.
א	אֲגָה הַלְּךָ דָּזָךָ,
	אֲגָה פָּרָה דָּזָךָ,
ב	דָּזָךְ זִירָד
	לְרַעֲוָת, בְּגָנִים,
ג	אָנָּנוּ לְדָזָךְ וְדָזָךְ לִי,
ה	הַסְּבִּי עִינִיךְ מִנְגָּדִי,
ו	שְׁעַרְךָ בְּעַדְךָ הַעֲזִים,
ז	שְׁנִיד בְּעַדְךָ הַרְחִילִים,
	שְׁבָלָם, מִתְאִימּוֹת,
	כְּפָלָח הַרְמָנוֹן רַקְתָּךְ,
ח	שְׁשִׁים הַמָּה מִלְכּוֹת,
ט	אֲחַת הִיא, יָנָתִי תִּמְתִּי—
	רְאוּה בְּנוֹת
י	מִ-זָּאת הַנְּשָׁקֶה, בְּמוֹ-שְׁתָּר: יְפָה כְּלָבָנָה,
	בְּרָה כְּחָמָה—
יא	אַל-גַּנְתָּה אָגָז יְרָדָתִי,
	לְרָאֹות הַפְּרָחָה הַגְּפָן,

15. Court

Long bipartite pattern of four odd stanzas (pentastich, octastich, nonastich, chiastic tetrastich) and four even stanzas (two hexastichs and two octastichs with a punch line). The meter is 3:2(2).

ד	יְפָה אַתְּ רְעִיתִי בְּתִרְצָה,
ה	שְׁבִּי עִינִיךְ מִנְגָּדִי,
ו	שְׁעַרְךָ בְּעַדְךָ הַעֲזִים,
ז	שְׁנִיד בְּעַדְךָ הַרְחִילִים,
	שְׁבָלָם, מִתְאִימּוֹת,
	כְּפָלָח הַרְמָנוֹן רַקְתָּךְ,
ח	שְׁשִׁים הַמָּה מִלְכּוֹת,
ט	אֲחַת הִיא, יָנָתִי תִּמְתִּי—
	רְאוּה בְּנוֹת
י	מִ-זָּאת הַנְּשָׁקֶה, בְּמוֹ-שְׁתָּר: יְפָה כְּלָבָנָה,
	בְּרָה כְּחָמָה—
יא	אַל-גַּנְתָּה אָגָז יְרָדָתִי,
	לְרָאֹות הַפְּרָחָה הַגְּפָן,

יב	לא יָדַעְתִּי — נֶפֶשִׁי
ו	שׁוֹבֵי שׁוֹבֵי וְנִנְחֹה-בָּךְ;
ז	בְּמַחְלָת, הַמְּחַקִּים.
ח	בְּנַעֲלִים, בְּתַ-גְּדִיבָּ;
ט	מַעֲשָׂה יְדֵי אָמֵן.
י	אַל-יִחְסֶר הַמְּזֹג;
ו	סָגָה בְּשׁוֹשָׁגִים.
ז	תְּאַמֵּץ צְבִיהָ.
ח	[...]
ט	עַל-שַׁעַר בְּתַ-רְבִּים —
י	צָוָה פְּנֵי דְּמָשָׁךְ.
ו	וּדְלָת רַאשֵּׁךְ אַרְגָּמָן:
ז	מָלָךְ, אָסָור בְּרָהְתִּים.

16. Vineyard

Long bipartite pattern of four distichs and four chiastic tetrastichs. The meter is 3:2 (.:2:2).

ז	אהָבָה, בַּתְּעַנְגִּים.
ח	וְשִׁידֵךְ לְאַשְׁכָלֹת.
ט	אֲחֹזָה בְּסֶנְסִיוֹ;
י	וְהִיא-נָא שִׁידֵךְ בְּאַשְׁכָלֹת הַגְּפֹנוֹ,
ז	וְרִיחֵךְ בְּתַפְחָוִים.
ח	וְהַלְךָ לְדוֹדִי לְמִשְׁרִים;
ט	דוֹבָב, שְׁפֵתִי יְשָׁנִים.
י	גַּנְצָא הַשְׁדָה,
ז	גַּלְגָּה בְּכֶפֶרִים.
ח	פְתַח הַסְּסָמָדָר,
ט	הַנְּצָוָה קְרָמָזִים;
י	וְעַל-פְתַחַנָּנוּ כָּל-מְגִדִּים —
ז	חֲדִשִּׁים, גַּס-יְשָׁגִים;
ח	לְכָה דּוֹדִי
ט	נְרָאָה אִם-פְרָחָה הַגְּפֹן
י	מְדוֹקָאִים נְתָנוּ-רִיתָ,
ז	חֲדִשִּׁים, גַּס-יְשָׁגִים;

17. City

Three stanzas (two tetrastichs, one distich) and a tristichic refrain in the meter 2:2(.:2).

א	מִי יָתַנְךָ בָּאֵחָלִי,
ב	אַמְצָאָךְ בְּחוֹזָאָשָׁקָה,
ג	אַל-בֵּית אָמֵי — תְּלָמְדָנִי;
ד	מַעֲסִיס רַמְנִי.

ג	שָׁמָלֹל תְּחַת רָאשִׁי, וַיִּמְנוּ תְּחַבְּקִנִּי.
ד	הַשְׁבָּעַתִּי אֲתֶם, בְּנֹת יְרוֹשָׁלָם: מִה-תְּעִירָם וּמִה-תְּעִירָם, אָת-הַאֲהָבָה, עַד שְׁתַחַפֵּץ. {ס}

18. Wilderness

Three pentastichs (two of the distich-tristich, one of the tristich-distich pattern) in the varying meter 3:2, 2:2.2, 3:2, 3:3:3, 3:2:2, 3:2.

ה	מִי זֹאת, עָלָה מִן-הַמִּדְבָּר, תְּחַת הַתְּפִפּוֹת, עֹוֹרְתִּיךְ—
ו	שִׁימְנִי בְּחֹזֶם עַל-לְבָךְ, כִּי עִזָּה בְּמֹוֹת אַהֲבָה,
ז	מִים רַבִּים, לֹא יוּכְלוּ אָס-יָתָן אִישׁ אֶת-כָּל-הַזֶּן בֵּיתָו, {ס}

מַתְרֵפֶקֶת, עַל-דֹּדָה;
שִׁפְמָה חַבְלָתָךְ אֲפָךְ,
כְּחַזְתָּם עַל-זְרוֹעָךְ—
קַשְׁתָּה בְּשָׁאָלָל קְנָאתָה:
רְשָׁפֵיהָ—{רְשָׁפֵי} אָשׁ שְׁלַהְבְּתִיהָ.
לְכֹבּוֹת אָת-הַאֲהָבָה,
וּנְגַהּוֹת, לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּה;
בְּאַהֲבָה—בּוֹז, יָבֹאוּ לוּ. {ס}

19. City

Two tetrastichs in the meter 2:2 and one final distic in the meter 3:3 (as in idyll 5).

ח	אֲחוֹתָה לָנוּ קְטַנָּה, מִה-גְּנַעַשָּׂה לְאֲחוֹתָנוּ,
ט	אָס-חַזְמָה הִיא, גְּבָנָה וְאָס-דְּלָתָה הִיא, גְּנָזָר
ו	אָנִי חֹזֶמֶת, וְשָׁדֵי בְּמַגְדָּלוֹת; אָז הִיִּתִי בְּעִינָיו, בְּמֹצָאת שְׁלָום. {פ}

20. Vineyard

Two odd hexastichs in an irregular meter: the first stanza is in prose, and the second stanza is in the meter 2:2(2).

יא	יְאַרְבָּם הִיא לְשִׁילָמָה בְּבָעֵל הַמִּזְוֹן, נָתַן אָת-הַכְּרָם לְנֹטְרִים: אִישׁ יָא בְּפָרִזּ, אֶלְפּ בְּקָסּ.
יב	יְבָרְמִי שְׁלִי, לְפָנִי;
יג	תְּבָרְמִי שְׁלִי, לְפָנִי;
יד	וְדָמָה-לְךָ לְצָבִי

לְקוֹלָךְ—הַשְׁמִיעַנִּי.
תְּבָרְמִים מִקְשִׁיבִים
או לְעַפְרָה הַאֲלִילִים—עַל הַרִּי בְּשָׁמִים. {ש}

Translation of the Song of Songs

1 ¹Solomon's Song of Songs.

[1 – Court]

²He shall kiss me with kisses of his mouth!
Yes, better than wine is your loving.
³Your body oils give a good smell;
your fame is like oil refined:
maids have loved you for this cause.

⁴Draw me after you, let us make haste!
The king brought me into his chambers.
Let us be joyful with you and merry
and praise your loving more than the wine:
the righteous came to love you well.

[2 – Vineyard]

⁵I'm black and pretty, Jerusalem's daughters,
like Kedar's tents, like Solomon's rugs.
⁶Do not mind that I look so blackish:
it's that I got tanned by the sun.
My mother's sons were upset about me,
they made me guard the vineyards.
My own vineyard, I did not guard it.

[3 – Wilderness]

⁷“You, the man whom I have come to love, tell me
the place where you graze your flock and rest at midday.
Why shall I wait shrouded near the flocks of your friends?”
⁸“If you do not know it, most beautiful woman,
just follow the tracks that the sheep have made,
and graze your young kids near the shepherds' tents.”

[4 – Court]

⁹“I have a mare that draws Pharaoh's chariots
and I made you resemble her, my companion.
¹⁰Your cheeks are adorned with rows of jewels,
chains of pearls surround your neck.
¹¹Let us now gird you with golden ribbons
and studs of silver upon them.”

¹²“While the king reclines at his banquet,
my spikenard gives its smell.

¹³My lover is like myrrh in a bundle
that I keep between my breasts.

¹⁴My lover grows like a henna bush
at Engedi among the vines.”

[5 – Wilderness]

¹⁵“How pretty you are, my companion, how pretty!
Your eyes, they are like doves.”

¹⁶“How handsome you are, my lover, how pleasant,
here in our grassy bed.

¹⁷The cedars are our columns
and junipers are the beams.

2 ¹I am the crocus of Sharon,
the lily of the plains.”

²“Like a lily among the brambles
is my companion among the girls.”

³“Like an apple tree in a forest
is my lover among the boys.

I sat with delight in his shadow,
and my palate relished his fruit.”

[6 – City]

“He brought me into the wine house,
Love flew over me as its sign.

⁵Give me pastries to sustain me,
and strengthen me with apples,
I am struck with the love-disease.

⁶*I want his left hand under my head,
and his right to give me caress.*

⁷*I made you swear, daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles and the deer of the field,
that you won’t stir up Love nor wake him
unless he wants to awake.*

[colon 60]

[7 – Vineyard]

⁸My lover’s voice! Look, here he comes,
he’s running over the mountains
and leaping over the hills:

⁹my lover resembles a gazelle,

or he seems like a young stag
[--].

Look, he stands behind our wall
he's looking through the windows
he's peering through the lattices.

¹⁰My lover spoke and told me:
"Arise, my companion,
my pretty one, come along!"

¹¹For look, the winter is over,
the rain season has passed,
[--] has gone away.

¹²Flower buds appear on the ground,
the pruning season has come,
the wild dove's voice is heard in our land.

¹³The fig-tree forms its fruit,
and the vines are blooming,
giving their good smell.

Arise, my companion,
my pretty one, come along,
¹⁴my dove in the rock niches,
hidden down the stairs.

Show me your countenance,
let me hear your voice,
because your voice is pleasant,
and your shape is sublime.

¹⁵Seize us the foxes,
those little foxes
that harm the vineyards,
when our vines are in bloom."

¹⁶My lover is mine, and I am his,
he grazes among the lilies.

¹⁷Until the day breathes
and the shadows flee
Turn and be like
a gazelle, my lover,
or a young stag on Betar Hills.

[colon 100]

[8 – City]

3 ¹On my couch during the nights,
I sought whom I have come to love.
I sought him, and I did not find him.
²⁴Now I'll rise and make rounds in the city!
In the markets and in the streets
I will seek whom I have come to love!"

I sought him, and I did not find him.

³The guardsmen found me, who make rounds in the city.

“Have you seen whom I have come to love?”

⁴Shortly after I walked past them

I found whom I have come to love.

I seized him, and I did not let him go,

till I brought him to my mother's house, my progenitor's chamber.

⁵*I made you swear, daughters of Jerusalem,*

by the gazelles and deer of the field,

that you won't stir Love nor wake him

unless he wants to awake.

[9 – Wilderness]

“What a woman is she, who walks up from the desert

like fuming pillars of smoke,

who smells of myrrh and of frankincense,

of spices from all the traders!

[10 – Court]

⁷Look, here is the bed of Solomon!

Sixty warriors are around it,

all warriors of Israel.

⁸Swordfighters trained at war,

sword-girded, they protect him

from fear during the nights.

⁹He made a palanquin,

King Solomon, for himself

from trees of Lebanon.

¹⁰He made its posts of silver,

its corner bases of gold;

of purple are its cushions.

Inside, one Love stitched to the other,

from the daughters of Jerusalem.

¹¹Daughters of Zion, come and see

King Solomon with his wreath,

with which his mother crowned him

on his wedding day, his day of joy.

[11 – Vineyard]

4 ¹How beautiful are you, my companion,
 How beautiful you are!
 Your eyes, they are like doves
 underneath your locks.
 Your hair resembles a flock of goats
 that run down Gilead Hill,
²Your teeth are like lambs after shearing,
 when the washing made them clean.
 They all arrive in twin pairs,
 not one has lost its friend.
³Your lips are as scarlet ribbon,
 and you smoothly move your mouth.
 Your temples like cracks in a pomegranate
 peer out from under your locks.
⁴Your neck is like David's Tower,
 built to serve as an arsenal,
 One thousand shields are hung up there
 by heroes as arms of war.
⁵Your breasts are like two twin fawns,
 gazelles that graze near the lilies.
⁶*Until the day shall breathe,
 until the shadows flee
 I will climb the myrrh mountain,
 and the frankincense hill.*
⁷You are beautiful, my companion,
 entirely without a flaw.

[12 – Wilderness]

⁸Come with me, bride, from Lebanon,
 from Lebanon, with me!
 Rush downwards from Mount Amana,
 Mount Senir and Hermon,
 where lions dwell in caverns
 and leopards on the heights!

[13 – Court]

⁹You have ravished me, my sister-bride.
 You have ravished me with just one eye,
 with just one link of your necklace.
¹⁰How fair is your loving, my sister-bride!
 Much better than wine is your loving,
 and your ointments smell better than spices.

¹¹Your lips flow over like honeycomb, bride,
honey and milk are under your tongue
and your dress smells fresh like Mount Lebanon.

¹²You are a garden enclosed, my sister-bride,
a garden enclosed, a well that is sealed.

¹³Rich pomegranate orchards grow near your canals,
camphire with spikenards, ¹⁴spikenard and saffron,
calamus and cinnamon with all frankincense trees,
myrrh and aloes with all other spices.

¹⁵You are a fountain of gardens, a spring of fresh water
and rivers that stream from Mount Lebanon.

¹⁶⁴Awake, oh North wind,
and come here, South,
blow on my garden,
let its spices flow.

May my lover enter his garden
and eat the full of his fruit.”

⁵ ¹I have entered my garden, my sister-bride,
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.
I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey,
I have drunk my wine with my milk.
Eat, friends, and drink your fill,
and let lovers get drunk!

[colon 200]

[14 – City]

²I am sleeping, while my heart is awake.
My lover's voice knocks at the door:
“Open to me, my companion, my sister,
my dove, my flawless one,
for my head is wet with dew drops,
and my hair with the fog of the night.”

³[“]I have stripped off my tunic,
why should I get dressed anew?
I have just washed my feet soles,
why should I soil them again?”

⁴My lover, he pushed
his hand through the hole,
and all my entrails ran wild.

⁵I arose to let in my lover,
with myrrh dripping from my hands.
My fingers left stains of perfume
on the handles of the bolt.
⁶When I opened the door to my lover,
my lover had fled and gone,
and my soul escaped as it heard him.

I sought him and did not find him,
 I cried out, he did not reply.
⁷The city watchmen found me,
 while they were making rounds.
 They hit me and they hurt me,
 they took my veil and tore it,
 those guardians of the walls.

⁸I made you swear, Jerusalem's daughters,
 if my lover you can find,
 here is what you must tell him:
 I am struck with the love-disease.
⁹"How differs your lover from others,
 most beautiful woman of all?
 How differs your lover from others,
 that you make us swear an oath?"
¹⁰My lover is fair and ruddy,
 among thousands he stands out.

¹¹His head is purely golden,
 [---].
 His hair waves down in ringlets,
 like the raven it is black.
¹²His eyes, they are like doves
 that land on the riverside,
 in milk they seem to be bathing,
 they are fitly set in place.
¹³His cheeks resemble herb beds,
 and mounds of fragrant drugs.
 His lips are tender lilies
 dripping with sweet myrrh.

¹⁴His hands, golden cylinders
 incrusted with beryl.
 His belly is polished ivory
 with sapphires overlaid.
¹⁵His legs are marble columns
 on sockets of fine gold.
 His shape is like Mount Lebanon,
 towering like cedar trees.
¹⁶His palate is a choice of sweets,
 he is lovable, all of him.
 This is my companion, my lover,
 daughters of Jerusalem.

6 ¹"Where did your lover vanish to,
 most beautiful woman of all?
 How come your lover went awry?
 Can we seek him together with you?"
²My lover has descended
 to his garden among the herbs,
 he is wandering about the gardens,

and gathers the lilies he picks.

³*I am my lover's, and he is mine.*

He grazes among the lilies.

[15 – Court]

⁴You are as splendid as Tirzah, my companion,
as lovely as Jerusalem,
as awesome as troops under banners.

⁵Turn your eyes away from me
because they give me chills.

{Your hair resembles a flock of goats
that run down Gilead Hill,

⁶Your teeth are like lambs after shearing,
when the washing made them clean.

They all arrive in twin pairs,
not one has lost its friend.

⁷Your temples, like cracks in a pomegranate,
peer out from under your locks.}

⁸Sixty women are the queens,
eighty are the concubines,
uncounted are the maids.

⁹My faultless one, my dove, is unique,
her mother's only child,
endeared to the one who bore her.

Maidservants watched her,
queens exclaimed in her praise,
and concubines sang her glory.

¹⁰“What a woman is she, who appears like the dawn,
as beautiful as the moon,
as bright as the sun,
as awesome as troops under banners!”

¹¹I went down to the walnut garden
to see the buds sprout in the vale,
to see if any vine had budded,
if the pomegranates had flourished.

¹²My soul unwittingly got carried
off like Arkhelaos' chariots.

7 ¹⁴Return, return, oh favorite,
Return, return, that we can watch you!”

“What are you watching the favorite,
when like the Midianites she dances?”

²“How are your steps so beautiful,
in the sandals, princess-like!

The joints of your thighs are like jewels
crafted by a sculptor's hand.

³Your secret part is a mixing bowl,
which never lacks a drink.
Your belly is a mound of wheat,
with lilies on either side.
⁴Your breasts are like two fawns,
twin fawns of the gazelle.
⁵Your neck looks like the Ivory Tower
[which is on the Gaza road.]
Your eyes are the pools in Hesbon
out of Amman's city gate.
Your nose is like the Tower of Lebanon,
with Damascus in its view.
⁶Your head on top is like the Carmel
with its hair like Phoenician fabric:
a king is chained inside these locks.”

[16 – Vineyard]

⁷“How beautiful and comely were you,
by Love!, during the times of lust.
⁸You looked to me tall like a palm tree,
whence your breasts like clusters fell.
⁹I said: ‘that palm tree, I will climb it,
and I will clutch the clusters there,
I'll feel your breasts like grapes in clusters,
and smell your nose like apples sweet,
¹⁰and taste your palate like the good wine,’“
which pours so deep into my lover
that the dead move their wetted lips:
I am my lover's, and his desire is for me.
¹¹Come along, my lover,
let us walk into the fields,
pass the night under the bushes
¹²and wake up among the vines,
Let us see if the vines have budded,
if their blossoms opened up,
if the pomegranates have flourished:
there I will give you my love.
¹³The mandrakes send out their fragrance;
all the fruits beside our threshold,
the new harvest and the old one
have I stored, my lover, for you.

[colon 350]

[17 – City]

⁸I wish you were my brother,
who sucked my mother's breast.

In the street I'd greet and kiss you
and nobody would jest.

²I'd lead you to my mother's house,
she'd teach me all the rest.
I'd serve you wine with spices
and some pomegranate zest.

³I want his left hand under my head
and his right to give me caress.

⁴I made you swear, daughters of Jerusalem,
that you won't stir Love nor wake him
unless he wants to awake.

[18 – Wilderness]

⁵“What a woman is she, who walks up from the desert
with her lover close by her side!”

Under the apple tree I have aroused you,
at the place where your mother bore you,
where your progenitor was in labor.

⁶Place me like a seal upon your heart,
like a seal upon your arm,
for Love is as powerful as death,
passion unyielding as the grave,
its darts have the fire of Yah's flame.

⁷Many seas do not suffice
to put out the flame of Love,
nor can rivers overflow it.

If a man bid all his house
for love, one would just mock him.

[19 – City]

⁸“We have a little sister
who hasn't yet got breasts.
How shall we display our sister
when they come to talk to her?”

⁹“If she's a wall, let's crown
it with a silver cornice.
If she's a door, let's close
it with a cedar board.”

¹⁰I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers,
I am the one who found favor in his eyes.

[20 – Vineyard]

¹¹Solomon had a vineyard in Baal-Hamon;
he leased out that vineyard to tenants,
each one paid from his harvest one thousand in silver.

¹²My vineyard is mine, it is on offer;
one thousand are owed to you, Solomon,
and two hundred to the storage keepers.

¹³“You garden woman,
friends heed your voice,
let me hear it!”

¹⁴*Escape, my lover,
be like a gazelle
or a young stag on hills of spices!*

[colon 400]

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