

# Song of Songs: “I am black – and beautiful” (1:5)

## The integration of sexuality and spirituality?

Outline (with genre indications; bold numbers 1-14 indicate poems; cf Tremper Longman viii)

**Note:** four *wasfs* (Arabic, a literary genre that portrays the beloved person, describing the parts of the naked body with metaphors; 4:1-7 → fem; 5:10-16 → masc; 6:4-10 → fem; 7:2-7 [1-6 MT] *wasf* 4 → fem.)

**1:1** Title: The most beautiful of poems, dedicated to Solomon

**#1 1:2-4** Her love poem to a male “*king*”

**1:5-6** A beautiful black/dark woman addresses the daughters of Jerusalem

**1:7** She addresses her beloved as “*shepherd*”

**1:8** He or the chorus responds

**1:9-11** Poem praising a queenly woman: “I compare you, my love, to a/my mare...”

**1:12-14** Dining with a “king” who reclines on his divan

**1:15-17** Duet in rustic setting: “How beautiful you are...Our bed of green herbs”

**2:1-7** Woman: “I am a rose of Sharon...”

**2:2** Poem praising a woman: “as a crocus among thorns...”

**2:3-7** Poem praising a male: “as the apple tree among the trees of the wood...”

**#2 2:8-17** Poem praising a male “leaping upon the mountains...like a gazelle”

**2:15** Duet: “the little foxes...ruin our vineyards”

**2:16-17** Poem praising a male: “He pastures his flock among the lilies...Return, my beloved”

**3:1-4** Urban woman’s dream and street adventures (1)

**3:5** “I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem...do not awaken love / the beloved...until he/it pleases”

**#3 3:6-11** Woman hails royal wedding procession; “Solomon’s litter...Zion’s Daughters come out to see”

**4:1-9** Praising a woman: “your eyes are two doves...” (mountain setting: he *ascends*)

4:1-7, *wasf* 1 → fem. could be woman praising woman

**4:8-9** Invitation to the bride/sister (to *descend* from mountains)

**4:10–5:1ab** Duet: Entering in my/your garden: ‘I have drunk my wine... milk’

**5:1c** Chorus: “Drink all you want”

**#4 5:2-16 Urban dream and street adventures: to search and (not) to find**

**5:8-9 Dialogue with the daughters of Jerusalem: “I am dying with love...”**

**5:10-16, *wasf* 2 → masc. 5:9 implies that a woman praises a male friend:**

**6:1-3 Chorus: “Where has your beloved gone...?” “...to his garden...to graze...among the lilies”**

Note inclusion of 6:1-3 → 11-12 framing inclusion of 6:4 → 10

**#5 6:4-10 Lover: “awesome as an army with banners...” (inclusion frames poem) → 10 Chorus**

*wasf* 3 → fem. Poem praises a woman (context: images of the court); speaker could be a woman

**6:11-12 She/He: “I went down to the nut orchard...my soul set me among the royal chariots...” ?**

**6:13-7:10 [7:1-11 MT] The dancing Shulamite. Chorus: “Return, return, O Shulamite!”**

**She: “And what do you wish to see of the Shulamite?” Chorus: “...like a dance before two armies?”**

**7:1-8 (2-9 MT) *wasf* 4 → fem.** Probably a male speaks, since he refers to a “king” held captive in the hair of the woman. Leaving the dance, he first describes the feet and continues upward, comparing the sexual awakening of the woman to the awakening of the earth in the spring.

**10 [11 MT] I am my lover’s (*dod*) and his desire is for me. → 2:16; 6:3**

**7:11-13 [MT 12-14] She invites lover to escape to countryside: “There I will give you my love” (12d)**

**8:1-4 Poem first addressing a male: “Oh, that you were like a brother.... breasts”**

**8:4 “I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem...not to awaken love until it so desires”**

**#6 8:5-7 CONCLUSION “Erotic love is the flame of Yah[weh] (the liberator God of the Exodus)”**

**8:5a Chorus: “Who is that coming up from the wilderness?...”**

**8:5c “Under an apple tree I roused/awakened you...”**

**#7 Three Inclusions: two breasts; two vineyards; two lovers**

**8:8-10 The Two Breasts. *Brothers and Breasts*: “Our little sister has no breasts...a wall...a door....”**

**8:10 “I was like a wall, my breasts like towers. Thus I was in his eyes...like one who brings peace”**

**8:11-12 The Two Vineyards.**

**8:13-14 The Two Lovers.**

**To the woman in the garden: “Let me hear your voice...”**

**To the man: “Hasten...like a gazelle upon spice mountains”**

The *Song of Songs* is **the only book in the Bible whose principal theme is *erotic love***.<sup>1</sup> Notably, in the erotic poems that constitute the book, the lovers make love outside the confines of matrimony, in friendship,<sup>2</sup> as an expression of mutual pleasure, and without any intention to procreate.<sup>3</sup> With its incessant erotic praising of the human body (the masculine as well as the feminine), the book totally contradicts the Neo-platonic contempt for the body (as the “prison of the soul”) and the Augustinian sexual ideology dominant in the churches (sex only within the context of monogamous matrimony, exclusive and permanent, and for the sole purpose of procreation).

Thus, due to the dominant body-loathing philosophies, for more than two thousand years, “orthodoxy” (Jewish and Christian) totally distorted and censured the true meaning of the book through allegories that had nothing to do with the original meanings of the poems – allegories concerning the love of Yahweh for Israel or the love of Christ for the Church. The two breasts of the Shulamite (4:5; 7:3, 7-8; 8:8,10) came to signify Moses and Aaron or the two Testaments of the Christian Bible, her navel (7:2), the Great Sanhedrin or the holy order of preachers.<sup>4</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century produced a revolution in its interpretation with the rediscovery of the book’s original meaning, and such a recognition of the literary genre of the *Songs* as erotic poetry attained a universal acceptance in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, even in more traditional Catholic and Protestant circles<sup>5</sup> — but in many cases without affecting the Augustinian/Neo-Platonic ideology.

**Jerusalem, the symbolic center of the world in the *Songs*, is its place of composition.** However, the linguistic clues and geographical allusions in some of the poems also suggest influences from northern Israel. Although traditionally assigned to Solomon in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, **a post-exile date – between 400-200 B.C.** - is now more commonly accepted. After a century of dispute over the book’s unity, the majority now conclude that *Songs* is not simply an anthology of disparate poems, but an artistic composition that utilizes pre-existing traditions.

Especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became common to use the poems to attempt to construct a narrative, but such endeavors to discern a plot are very subjective, have produced no consensus, and no evidence whatsoever that any action occurs, since it is impossible to distinguish between reality and imagination in such poems. The lovers converse or speak of the other with passionate desire, at times recalling or anticipating an encounter, but in reality *nothing really happens* – we merely read of love in poems where the lovers play various roles: as princess and king, or peasant girl and shepherd. Chana Bloch believes that the relationship between the two lovers and the daughters of Jerusalem, the mother and her sons, and the guards all taken together appear to be a plot with a narrative thread.<sup>14</sup> Also, she notes the symmetry between the introduction and the conclusion of the book:

1:1, 5	Solomon	→	8:11-12
1:6	the vineyard	→	8:11-12
1:6	sons and mother	→	8:8
1:3-4, 7	companions	→	8:13

Bloch concludes, however, that *Songs* is neither a narration nor a drama, but a sequence of lyric poems whose structure is episodic.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the emphasis on goodness and the extreme pleasure of human sexual love, *Songs* respects human freedom and limits itself to insisting on the great power of love as an expression of the very being of God<sup>16</sup>, as mysterious as the divine ineffable name itself. Therefore, the sexuality of each human being is something unique and mysterious.<sup>17</sup> **The identification of erotic love as the “flame of Yah[weh]”** (*Song of Songs* 8:6) anticipates the affirmations in 1 John 4:8 and 16 that “God is love” and indicates how to avoid creating a dichotomy between erotic love and spirituality. Obviously, if God is love and human love comes from God (1 John 4:7; Romans 5:5), we shouldn’t think of human sexuality as dirty or sinful, nor assume Platonic dichotomies between body and soul, nor think of the human body (created by God) as something inferior to the spirit. Therefore, even though the Judeo and Christian allegories (about God’s love for Israel or Christ’s love for the Church) are mistaken as *interpretations* of the *Songs*, they may be accepted as *applications* that point to other spheres, in addition to

sexuality, where God's love manifests itself in human life. Juan Carlos Sánchez Sottosanto comments (in a personal letter):

Paradoxically, many of these allegories are strongly erotic. In the Spanish language the most beautiful are the celebrated poems "Dark Night" and "Spiritual Song" of San Juan de la Cruz (Juan de Yepes). A non-Catholic reader could read them simply as erotic poetry. In fact, the Catholic Church sought to rescue these poems from their erotic content. But literary critics and poets of the stature of Paul Valery or the Argentine Juan Gelman (winner of the Cervantes prize) appropriated and read them in a purely erotic key.

The mutual love expounded in the erotic poems of the *Songs* has many parallels in other spheres: the members of the body of Christ in dialogue and mutual service, the search for the "lost sheep", the readiness to listen to questions and criticism, and the risking of life for the love of one's fellow creature or brother/sister.

**In *Song*, however, the garden in the middle of the book (4:16-5:1a)**, where the lovers meet and make love, is the holiest of places. There Yahweh's flame – like the Temple lamp – burns with a power that is inextinguishable and eternal (8:6-7), for "the greatest of all is love" (1 Cor 13:13).<sup>62</sup>

**1 The Poor.** Being erotic poems, all of the vocabulary of the *Song of Songs* concerns love<sup>18</sup> and there is no specific vocabulary for the poor, the oppressed, violence or justice. One poem describes an experience (perhaps a dream) of street violence, where someone is beaten by the police (5:7) – all commentators suppose that the person walking the street at night looking for a male beloved is a woman – but the Hebrew text is not so specific.

Because of the poetic language, the socio-economic level of the lovers also is difficult to discern: are they childless country folk claiming to be royalty – or perhaps educated figures of the royal court pretending to be peasants? Or simply common folk freely amusing themselves, alternating between peasant and royal metaphors. In antiquity, written poetry commonly was produced at the courts, but at times the courts simply reduced to writing the rich village oral traditions.

A peasant/village environment is suggested in various texts:

1:5-6	she is a black peasant girl who tends the vineyards
1:7a, 8	he is a shepherd
1:7	as a veiled woman (suspected of being a prostitute)
1:16-17	a rustic bed in the country
2:13, 15	the vineyards...the little foxes that destroy the vineyards
4:1-2	flock of goats....
4:1-5:1	the lovers meet in the countryside
6:2, 11-12	in the garden
6:5-6	flock of goats...of sheep
7:11-13	let us go out to the fields...to the villages...to the vineyards
8:5b, 13-14	in the garden

Other texts, however, suggest an urban and/or royal context:

1:1, 5	King Solomon, poet and supreme lover (cf 1 Kings 4:32)
1:9-11	the Pharaoh's chariots, she with jewels of silver and gold
1:12	the king reclines in his divan
2:4	the banquet / wine room
3:2-3	the city with streets, plazas and guards
3:6-11	arrival of Solomon's litter

5:6	violence by the guards of the city walls
6:8, 9b	seventy queens, eighty concubines, innumerable virgins (royal harem)
6:12	the royal coaches
7:1	the prince's daughter
7:5	a king is held captive in the tresses
8:11-12	Solomon had a vineyard planted in Baal-hamon (place unknown)

Norman Gottwald concludes that the poetry of the *Songs* has gone through a dialectic trajectory, (1) beginning with peasant poems (where the poor project their fantasies of being royalty); (2) passing through the opulence of the court (where the sophisticated pretend to escape to become simple and primitive country folk); (3) ending in wisdom circles which attempted to synthesize both elements in order to make the best of the songs the wisest of loves.<sup>19</sup> The second stage could represent “a process similar to the Greek and Latin bucolic poetry that idealized the life of pastors and read them erotically; see for example Theocritus and Virgil, whose Eclogue II speaks of the love of two male pastors, Corydon and Alexis” (Juan Carlos Sánchez Sottosanto, personal letter). See 3:6-11 under “3 Sexual Minorities” for another possibility.

We can trace a similar trajectory for the title of the *Songs*.<sup>20</sup> The Bible views kings and their wealth with certain suspect – and King Solomon in particular.<sup>21</sup> But in the *Songs* (ca. 400 – 200 B.C.) Solomon and his opulent kingdom (ca. 970 - 931 B.C.) had already become legendary:<sup>22</sup>

1. In the poems of the *Song of Songs*, Solomon is an important figure in the lovers' fantasies, legendary for his splendor, wealth, wisdom,<sup>23</sup> and loves.<sup>24</sup> But in the conclusion of the book the lovers declare that all of Solomon's wealth is worthless compared with love.
2. “The Shulamite (a feminine “Solomon”) disparages the foolish rich man who would try to buy love (8:7) and her lover rejects the king and his vineyards and his need to watch over them (8:11-12)...In the Song, even the magnificent king is not comparable to the lovers enjoying themselves and celebrating the splendors of their love.”<sup>25</sup>
3. Perhaps, impressed by the important place that Solomon had in the poems of the book, and to assure the book's survival and promote its acceptance, a male scribe put as a title the dedication “For Solomon.”<sup>26</sup>
4. Finally, the title dedication was misinterpreted as an indication of the author, a ridiculous conclusion that resulted in numerous distortions of the original meaning. However, in the canonical context the title preserves a fundamental value in that it makes us remember that the Shulamite was not a second Moses giving us laws to control sexuality, but a second Solomon who, with the literary genre of erotic poetry, offers us wisdom and brings us to experience the joy and peace of a loving erotic relationship (8:10).

Whatever the socio-economic context of the poems may be, confronted with the human hierarchies and authorities, erotic love, that ‘flame of Yah[weh]’, they evidently functioned socially as something playful and subversive. As is evident in so much literature – from *Romeo and Juliet* to the film “*Titanic*” – erotic love tends to penetrate barriers and transcend national and ethnic borders that attempt to dominate and crush it. Thus, the erotic love of the *Songs* subverts the patriarchal order that discriminates against poor peasants, persons of color.

## 2 Women.

In addition to being the only book in the Bible whose principal theme is erotic love, the Song of *Songs* may be **the only book whose author is a woman**, and where we mainly hear a feminine voice that subverts patriarchal values:

Into this world of reproductively focused sexuality, hierarchies, male rights, and vilified sexually proactive women comes the Song of Songs. The Song begins with female sexual initiative in the famous opening lines, ‘Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your lovemaking [*dodeycah*] is better than wine’ (Cant 1:2). This woman’s voice and presence dominate the rest of the Song<sup>6</sup>

The woman is very young, barely past puberty, according to her brothers<sup>7</sup> At the end of the book the lovers declare their independence both from the brothers and from Solomon and his court (8:10-14).

Worse yet (for patriarchal and white ideologies) the author confesses to being a person of color, and – instead of the expected humility – insists that her very blackness is *beautiful*.<sup>8</sup> In part, the color of the Shulamite is genetic, but also partly due to the fact that she was not a sheltered “daughter of Jerusalem”, nor a concubine of King Solomon with his slaves, but a mere country girl obliged to work under the Palestinian intense sun (1:6).

To avoid the subversive conclusion that the author was a black woman, some have suggested that the woman who dominates the *Songs* is nothing more than the erotic fantasy of a male author, who dreams of encountering such a woman, since the literary production of antiquity was a virtual masculine monopoly.<sup>9</sup> However, we might concede to males their virtual literary monopoly without negating the possibility that, at least in oral tradition, the poems represented a feminine contribution, since the Bible associates women with poetry and song.<sup>10</sup>

Modern interpretations of the *Songs* as a manifesto for women’s liberation has its antecedents in the commentary of Christian David Ginsburg (1857), a Jew converted to Christianity and sympathizer with various minority and oppressed groups.<sup>27</sup> The principal pioneer in the modern feminist interpretation, however, has been the highly respected lesbian Biblicist Phyllis Trible.<sup>28</sup> Marvin Pope, sums up her contribution to the interpretation of the *Songs*, concluding that Trible “is certainly correct in recognizing the equal and even dominant role of the female and the absence of male chauvinism or patriarchalism” in the book.<sup>29</sup> Chana Bloch summarizes the evidence for the prominence of the Shulamite and other women in the book, concluding: “One might be tempted to call the Song subversive were it not the least polemical of books.”<sup>30</sup>

However, even though the intention of the author may have been peaceful (8:10), confronted with such patriarchal, societies, whether ancient or modern, the effect of the book, well interpreted, is quite subversive, as is evident in the innumerable attempts for two thousand years to censor and distort its meaning. Renita Weems delineates well the evidence that the rhetoric of the book communicates “an underlying and subtle polemic”<sup>31</sup> and concludes: “It is not simply the beauty of love and the wholesomeness of human sexuality in the abstract that the lovers insist on. It is the beauty of *their* love for each other and their irresistible attraction to each other that they insist on. They are two lovers whom society for inscrutable reasons sought to keep apart, perhaps because they were from different classes, from different ethnic backgrounds, or of a different color.”<sup>32</sup> Or perhaps instead of such *differences* some poems may reflect the experience of *same*-sex lovers like David and Jonathan or Ruth and Noami. Even though it appears probable that the poems of the *Songs* came from a women (only traditional prejudices are against it, see above), we mustn’t confuse the questions of authorship and ideology, since a male could also write erotic poems which are subversive to the patriarchy and machismo – especially a male in love, since love itself, confronted with oppression, is subversive.

As for the Shulamite, Chana Bloch<sup>33</sup> sums up the principal evidence of her prominence in the book, as she is not the traditional maiden, passive and veiled – but:

- she has the first and last word (1:2 y 8:14);
- she takes more initiative in the acts of love and hence is the lover seeking her beloved (3:1-5; 5:6-7);
- risks her life looking for her beloved in the streets at night (7:12-14; 8:5; 6:11-12);
- only she makes dramatic declarations about herself (1:5; 8:10)
- only she commands the elements of creation (4:16; cp. Jesus, Mc 4:35-41);
- she is the most dynamic (“imposing like an army”, (NNJB 6:4, 10);
- she concludes the book with a unique theological climax, affirming the supreme power and value of erotic love and emphasizing its eternal character (8:6)

Given that some poems speak of the mother and her house, but never of the father, some see evidence of an Edenic matriarchal society which later became an oppressive patriarchal society.<sup>34</sup> The Shulamite’s mother appears to be an unwed mother or a widow (3:4), while the beloved’s mother conceived and gave birth beneath an apple tree (8:5b) – suggesting a lifestyle as scandalous as that of the lovers. The third mother mentioned in the book is that of Solomon, who crowned him on the day of his marriage (3:11). The text does not specify which wedding it was (Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines), nor that Solomon’s mother was Bathsheba (2 Sam 11) -- and great king David, who committed adultery with Bathsheba, is not mentioned. In other books the fathers create and transmit the traditions, but in the *Songs* only the mothers transmit the traditions of love (8:2). The three mothers are active, not passive, and are as strong as the Shulamite herself.

In addition to the Shulamite, the book refers to the “daughters of Jerusalem / Zion” (1:4b-5; 2:7; 3:5, 10-11; 5:8-9, 16b; 8:4), younger girl friends function as a chorus and “act as a foil to the Shulamite and as an audience for her.”<sup>35</sup> She shares her intimate feelings about love to them and instructs them, but also appeals to them for help.

**3 Sexual minorities, animals and the Creation (“Nature”).** With the reading of the *Song of Songs* each spring during Passover, Jewish tradition implies that the liberation from oppression Yahweh accomplished in the Exodus may extend even to the sphere of erotic love. Understood in this way, the book is the Magna Carta of sexual liberation – the liberation from all the efforts of oppressors to control and to extinguish the “flame of Yah[weh]”, the Liberator God who is Love. The lovers appear to experience great “passion” (from the Latin *patior*, “suffer”),<sup>36</sup> but “They don’t *suffer* love, they savor it..”<sup>37</sup> Solomon comes from the desert, thirsty, in spite of his 1,000 women (3:6-11);<sup>38</sup> the Shulamite, comes from the desert content and leaning upon her beloved (8:5, 10; cp. 6:10).

When the Song opens the lovers already enjoy a sexual relationship, and the book ends, not with a wedding (like Solomon’s, referred to in 3:6-11), but with a rejection of the brothers’ marriage plans for their sister (8:10), a strong criticism of Solomon with all his money and harem (8:11-12; 6:8-9), and firm affirmations of the liberation the lovers have sought and defended throughout the book ( 8:12a, 13-14). The conclusion echoes the erotic relationship that exists from the beginning (1:2) and implies its continuation (8:14). Contrary to the hopes of theologians who attempt to derive a sexual “ethic” from *Songs*, the book does not actually end with the climactic affirmations of the power and the permanence of love (8:5-7). In fact it concludes with an invitation to escape again from society (with its agenda of marriage, offspring and inheritances), with the woman’s exhortation to her beloved and its implicit images of freedom (8:13-14).

At times the lover addresses the Shulamite as “bride” or “sister” (4:8-12; 5:1-2), but these metaphors do not suggest imminent marriage or incest.<sup>39</sup> Usually, the Shulamite addresses the male as “my lover, never as husband.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, she refers six times to his excellence in his “acts of sexual love”.<sup>41</sup> Although the language is metaphorical, the poems make clear that the lovers make love many times (5:1; 6:12) – and do not limit themselves to caresses, soft petting and sweet discourse.<sup>42</sup>

The sexual love of the lovers in the *Songs*, though enjoyed outside the framework of tradition and the Law, is not condemned as “against Nature” or the Will of the Creator. Rather, the book celebrates eroticism with images of creation: of plants, exotic products – and above all, of *undomesticated* animals. Though the book does not provide very good publicity for foxes<sup>43</sup>, the Shulamite chooses images of wild animals to extol the liberty, force and grace

of her beloved who seems more like a ballet dancer<sup>44</sup> than a humble shepherd. She demands a vow from the daughters of Jerusalem “by the gazelles and hind of the field” (3:7; 3:5; cp. 5:8; 8:4) instead of in the name of Yahweh.<sup>45</sup> As in Genesis 2 and Isaiah 11, in *Songs* there is no conflict nor opposition between human beings and animals, nor hierarchies or male dominion over woman and the animals. The lovers seem to have returned to Eden to enjoy life abundant and without sweat (Gen 2).<sup>46</sup>

The friends<sup>47</sup> appear to be other un-married shepherds who encircle the Shulamite, listening to her voice with admiration. Although at the end the woman finds herself “in the gardens” surrounded by these friends (8:13), she ends up inviting her beloved to escape with her again, to enjoy the freedom and privacy of the countryside (8:14). According to many translations, the Shulamite says that she does not want to wander about “covered” (with a veil, like a prostitute<sup>48</sup>). But may best translated as “lost”<sup>49</sup>, since in pastoral contexts it was common to lose the path<sup>50</sup> and throughout the book the lovers are thought of as naked more than veiled or covered.<sup>51</sup>

In the absence of the father, the brothers exercise the oppressive patriarchal authority. They scold the Shulamite and punish her – perhaps for her sexual conduct with her lover (1:6). They plan to select a respectable husband for their little sister, barely adolescent (8:8-9). The book, however, does not dignify them with the title “brothers” (8:1), but calls them “sons of the mother”<sup>52</sup>. Probably, when the text refers to “the little foxes that ruin the vineyard” (2:15) this may simply be a metaphor for the efforts of the brothers to keep an eye on and to control the sexuality of the sister.<sup>53</sup> The efforts of the brothers to impose the traditional sexual morality seem to be supported by the violence of the city guards (3:1-3; 5:6-7). As frequently in history, defenders of traditional “morality” are those who most often violently offend against liberty, justice, love – and life.

Three times the Shulamite adjures the “daughters of Jerusalem” not to “stir up or awaken love until it is ready” – perhaps the only significant norm for sexual conduct in the book, yet one which she herself immediately breaks (8:5c).<sup>54</sup> This entreaty reflects the common perspective of wisdom literature: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Ecl 3:1; see the brothers’ apparent opposition to pedophilia in Song 8:1). But the entreaty, not in Yahweh’s name, but “by the gazelles or the wild does” (*Song* 2:7; 3:5) suggests a context in which a common temptation would be to manipulate others, especially in the romantic realm, with spells, aphrodisiacs, and enchantments.<sup>55</sup> We might also ask if the mothers and/or the Shulamite herself, had suffered some form of sexual abuse that brought them to life styles so contrary to the dominant morality.<sup>56</sup>

Other women, all sexual minority representatives, appear as members of the court of Solomon: 60 queens, 80 concubines and innumerable maidens<sup>57</sup>. These probably are the women who requested that the Shulamite repeat her dance and want to observe her (7:1 [6:13]). Surely, the brothers, guardians of patriarchal morality, would not be very happy with such erotic stimulation in front of a multitude of observers. However, perhaps all this “voyeurism” is not literal, but an image which stimulates eroticism in the lovers. The Shulamite repeatedly seems to claim to possess her lover in an exclusive relationship: “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine” (2:16; 6:3; 7:10; cp. 8:6, 10). Some relate the reference to the well (4:15) to the exhortation in → *Proverbs* 5:15-20 to maintain a sexual exclusivity with the spouse of one’s youth. They also understand *Songs* 8:6-7 as an affirmation of a permanent relationship.

However, in such erotic poems, whatever be the couple’s commitment to establish a monogamous sexual relationship, exclusive and permanent, it arises freely as an expression of love and is not imposed on others as law or absolute universal sexual ethic. The “daughters of Jerusalem”, for example, are observers, not participants in such a commitment, and the slaves, 700 wives and 300 concubines of Solomon, had no such option (nor did slaves who were members of the New Testament churches). And even in the case of the hypothesized exclusive and permanent couple/s in *Songs*, it would be risky to suppose that “possessive” mutual love necessarily indicates an absolute control over the genitals of the other. For example, to imagine that such a committed love implies a total abstention from masturbation during long periods of separation (which seem to be common in the poems) goes beyond the implications of the text. And if solitary masturbation is permitted during absences, what about mutual masturbation? And other erotic expressions that do not involve vaginal penetration (oral sex, homoerotic relations,

etc.)? The Hebrew Bible often seems to restrict a woman's sexual relations to marriage<sup>58</sup>, but the attempt to control extra-marital relations has nothing to do with sexual "ethic" but with property, since the sexuality/fertility of the maiden was the property of the father, and that of the wife belonged to the husband (see Prov 5:9-10 condemning against the waste of family resources to pay for relations with a prostitute; cf. Luke 15:30).<sup>59</sup>

The purpose of erotic poetry is never to dictate laws nor establish an absolutist ethic, but to project an admirable paradigm that is worthy of respect and imitation for those who freely so decide. In the poems, the lovers always demonstrate tolerance and respect for those in other situations and with other sexual options (the daughters of Jerusalem, the unwed mothers and widows, the brothers, friends, etc.). Only Solomon seems to be targeted for negative criticism for his life style in general, and for his attempts to manipulate and control everyone with his royal power and money (8:7, 11-12).

In the Bible, descriptions of heterosexual attraction do not constitute a law – they merely reflect the wisdom that results from observing the mystery of common human reality<sup>60</sup>. Wisdom results from observing the complex and mysterious reality that surrounds us and at no time seeks to dictate simplistic or unjust laws that do not recognize the complexity of reality. While in *Proverbs* 30:18-19 the wonder is the way of the man with the woman, in the *Songs* it is more the unmarried woman in search of her beloved, with love and mutual pleasure being the only motive – not an oppressed housewife with domestic chores and worries about offspring and inheritance<sup>61</sup>.

*Songs*, like *Proverbs*, underlines the mystery of sexuality. Neither do *Genesis* 1:28 and 2:23-24 lay down "laws" or give us "ethics" – they are etiological tales, stories of creation. We may do theology starting with history (*Exodus*), but the result is then always a contextual theology, not a simplistic ideology. In → *Proverbs* 5:15-19 a father urges his (strangely reluctant?) son to admire the breasts and enjoy sexual relationship with the older wife of his youth, rather than wasting family resources on sex-workers and divorce. Such divorces were commonly initiated by men who wanted to marry wealthy, but idolatrous, foreign women (a common practice in the time of → *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*). Even → *Ecclesiastes*, when he recommends that the youths enjoy life with a beloved woman (9:7-9), qualifies such a life as "vanity" (2:8) and also complains that he never met a trustworthy woman (7:28).

Nevertheless, both the feminist/womanist interpretation and the alternative hypothesis (that reduces the dominant woman to be but an erotic fantasy of a male author) **presuppose a heterosexist ideological framework for the interpretation of the poems:**

If the poem praises the masculine body, they are supposed to be the words of a woman;  
And if it praises the feminine body, it is supposed that the author is a male.

However, the book does not support these suppositions, since the original Hebrew consonantal text (without the addition of vowel points by masoretic scribes) does not indicate the speaker (male/female?). The fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls are examples of the primitive Hebrew text, without consonants.<sup>11</sup> Hence, most of the poems originally could have been homoerotic.<sup>12</sup> The late date now commonly accepted for the *Songs* (400-200 A.D.) also supports Paul Johnson's hypothesis of homoerotic poems, since the impact of the Greek culture after Alexander the Great is evident in Palestine precisely in this period (gymnasiums, public baths, the accepting of nudity and a tolerance for certain expressions of homoeroticism).<sup>13</sup> However, instead of supposing many poems to be homoerotic, it would be easier to accept the idea of a lesbian or bisexual author (see the Greek poetess Sappho of Lesbos, ca. 600 a.C.). The book's final order, alternating female and male voices, supports a predominantly heterosexual reading (see especially 1:3 and 5:9ff), although other poems might be homoerotic (1:4cd, 5-6; 6:1, 9-10, 12-13/7:1).. Nevertheless, the NIV (English) preserves the ambiguity of the original Hebrew, with notes that speak of "lover", "beloved" and "friends" (with no indication of gender). But – completely contrary to the book itself– the NVI (Spanish) presupposes that it is always the male that takes the initiative as "Lover" and that the "Beloved" is always a passive woman. In this Spanish NVI, the Hebrew ambiguity thus disappears, since each word must have gender: "La amada" (female beloved), "El amado" (male beloved), "Los amigos" (friends, male or non-gender specific).

## **Song of Songs: wise norms for sexual praxis.** Helmut Gollwitzer (1978/79)

1 The book “clearly points to equality of women” (40). [Note: the deconstruction of patriarchal ideology and patriarchal (arranged) marriage probably is the book’s major contribution to the subversion of heterosexism, since if males are not superior to females, a male may be penetrated sexually like a woman without losing his honor or upsetting the moral universe].

2 “The desires of the two lovers never lead them to pressure one another. The other is always wanted as a person, a partner, not as a thing, a means for sexual gratification. None is reduced to a mere sex object. All the expressions of affection are appeals to the free emotions of the beloved, voicing the hope that the other will respond with the same love. This concern for the other as person rules out both the brutality of rape and the cunning of seduction” (40). [Note: cf. patriarchal arranged marriages].

3 “We have already pointed out that the love portrayed in the Song of Songs is physical, sensual, sexual love....Now...we must add...that this love is also at one and the same time wholly spiritual. To put it more precisely, here is a love that knows no separation of physical and spiritual...its focus [is] on the person of the partner. This partner is not simply a representative of the opposite sex, interchangeable with any other, a mere sex object. The partner is rather a unique and irreplaceable ‘thou’, this *particular* member of the opposite sex, whose place no other could take. Only this man, this woman—this person alone—is loved. The king may have countless queens and ‘young women without number’ at his disposal in his harem, “But I love only one,’ boasts the man (6:8-9), and he is for her the only one, ‘the one I love’ (1:7; 3:1-3). This physical love is a completely personal love, and this personal love is fully physical and sensual....[The traditional dichotomy between physical-sexual love and spiritual-personal love] is repeated even to the present day in the practice of random promiscuity, which is why promiscuity never results in person to person intimacy, never leads to escape from loneliness. But this very intimacy is precisely the goal of sexual love—the intimacy of two persons in an encounter that is at once both physical and spiritual” (41-42). [Note: The book never seeks to heal any dichotomy between sexuality and spirituality, since it doesn’t even exist].

4 “‘My lover is mine, and I am his,’ the woman sings (2:16; 6:3, and again, ‘I belong to my lover, and he desires me’ (7:10). This complete oneness of sensual and personal love means, in the fourth place, that love’s riches are to be found not in oneself but in the other. Each is the source of pleasure for the other. The use of another as a means of attaining one’s own pleasure has been done away with altogether. This is not to suggest that desire for the other has been squelched! Desire is still strong, but love has now made it wise. Self-centeredness—I need that person for myself, for my own happiness—is the *power* of eros, whereas the knowledge that I will be happy only through the happiness of my partner is the *wisdom* of eros. Eros understands that we each get what we want, not simply when or if the partner’s wants are also met but precisely in and through their being met. In the fullness of this wisdom each of the lovers in the Song of Songs is there wholly for the other, desiring the other completely and yet at the same time totally concerned for the other. Anyone who thinks only of his or her own happiness will miss the riches promised here” (42-43; [see 2:16 note in NJB]).

Gollwitzer concludes citing *Songs* 8:6-7 [“the flame of Yahweh”] as “the highest expression of erotic love” (44). Nonetheless, we must note that the book itself concludes with the expression and with metaphors of the *freedom* of love (8:14). So the book in its totality presents us with a dialectic that suggests that exclusive and permanent love between a couple is a free option on their part, a wise and inspiring paradigm. But the passionately erotic poems of *Songs* does not attempt to offer the reader a new “law” or “absolute ethic” that governs all people and each expression of erotic love – since the Shulamite is not a new “Moses”, but a new “Solomon” who offers a path of wisdom which we take to experience and establish peace (*shalom*), total well-being, the “abundant life”. Furthermore, the parable of the “Good Samaritan” in the New Testament reminds us that anonymous love may also be authentic (Luke 10:29-36) and, like conversations and intimate relations, may arise between people unknown by name (see the disciples of Emmaus, Luke 24:13-35).

**Davidson, Richard M. (2007). *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson**  
**Return to Eden? Sexuality in the → Song of Songs (545-632).** Davidson concludes his treatment of Sexuality in the Old Testament with two flaming chapters on the Song of Songs (13-14), interpreted as reechoing the paradigm of sexual ethics attributed to Gen 1-2 (Eden). Had he *begun* his work with Song of Songs, the only canonical book in the Bible with sexual love as its exclusive theme, and given the erotic poetry a less ideological reading, a very different Encyclopedia might have resulted (same trees for the most part, but a very different forest). According to Davidson, the Song returns us to Eden, where we can forget the sordid realities portrayed elsewhere throughout the Bible and happily rediscover a sexuality characterized by

**1 Sexuality as a Creation Order** (554-56). Davidson admits that procreation, so fundamental to the concerns of Gen 1-2, is “conspicuous by its absence” from the Song (604), but then extricating a long list of ethical absolutes from a collection of erotic poems, we realize, can be even more difficult than extracting them from creation narratives that take shameless nudity for granted and demand maximum procreation, vegetarianism and Jewish Sabbath observance. No wonder he took 25 years to write the book!

**2 Its heterosexual Marital Form** (556-61). To Davidson’s credit he summarizes the ridiculous efforts of some scholars to give a queer/gay reading of the Song (556-57), overlooking only Paul Johnson (1990), who pointed out that in the Hebrew consonantal text, poems praising a woman’s beauty do not necessarily come from a male, nor do those praising male beauty necessarily indicate female authorship—the *heterosexualization* of the poems is the contribution of later Jewish scribes who added the vowel points. However, since the “daughters of Jerusalem” (not voyeurs but figments of the female imagination) said that “the maidens love you” (1:3) we can be sure that all the poems make heterosexuality an ethical absolute (557, 575, 618 note 38).

**3 Its “monogamous marital form”** (561-569): Solomon’s procession for marriage, 3:6-11 (596), followed by his acquisition of 699 additional wives and 300 concubines. Davidson, takes literally “Solomon’s” marriage procession but cites commentaries that take the more common view that rustic lovers metaphorically address each other as “King” and “Queen for the day” (Roland Murphy 1990:152; J. Cheryl Exum 2005:138-51; Tremper Longman 2001:133, 219, referring to the negative view of Solomon in 8:11-12).

**4 Solomon as a pioneer-prophet of women’s lib, advocating “equality of the sexes without hierarchy”** (569-578, calling for a return to the Genesis creation order, 22-35). In these remarkable pages, Davidson draws on his favorite earlier feminist studies which eloquently argue for a woman author, a radical feminist who systematically deconstructs the patriarchy of her culture and highlights “egalitarianism, mutuality, and reciprocity between the lovers” (569; see also Christopher King QBC 2006:361-365). He expresses disappointment with more recent postmodern/feminist studies that seek to deconstruct the earlier feminist reading of the Song (Davidson 583, note 134). I know of nothing remotely approaching Davidson’s concise and comprehensive summary of feminist studies and evangelical responses and debates on relevant biblical texts. However, the combination of such erudition and liberationist courage conjoined to his view that King Solomon authored Song of Songs and hence advocates all this liberationist theology will discourage many from taking Davidson seriously. Especially in the New Testament section (639-52) he struggles to harmonize women’s equality in ministry with her submission to her husband in the home (Gen 3:16; 1 Tim 2:8-15; also 1 Cor 14:34-35, but neglecting to mention the textual problem).

**5 Wholeness** (578-87). Davidson agrees with André LaCocque that the Song of Songs is “fundamentally a critique of...the dualism between body and soul prevalent in sophisticated as well as in popular mentalities” (2007:581, citing LaCocque 1998:7; see Plato and neoplatonism). Thus the lovers are also “friends” (585, citing 5:1, 16) whose praise of one another, although emphasizing physical attributes, also includes character and virtues: “Your *name* [character, reputation] is like perfume poured out” (1:3, cited 585). “The motif of wholism in sexuality also entails solidarity with the larger units of family and friends” (586; the man’s mother, of course, is Bathsheba, according to Davidson’s view of Solomon’s authorship; see note 48). The Song’s emphasis on wholeness is especially manifest in the importance of physical closeness and “the presence and/or absence of the

lovers to each other” (Murphy, cited 578 and note 118). Finally, “The motif of wholeness is...best summarized and sustained throughout the Song in the play on words between Solomon, the Shulamite, and *shalom* ‘peace,’” (587, citing 1:1, 5:3:7, 9, 11; 6:13/7:1; 8:10-12; see 1 Cor 7:15 and the peace that characterized the same-sex relations of David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, Jesus and the Beloved Disciple).

**6 Exclusivity** (587-88). The Shulamite “refers to exclusivity as well as mutuality when she says, ‘My beloved is mine and I am his’ (2:16 [similarly 6:3; 7:11/ET7:10]). Duane Garrett comments: “If it means anything at all, it means that the two belong to each other exclusively” (1993:379, cited on 588). The Shulamite, on this reading, must have been somewhat disappointed when “Solomon” went on to acquire a total of 700 wives and 300 concubines. Davidson, however, points out the progression in the claim, which in the third refrain almost seems to succumb to King Solomon’s polygamy (“I am his”), but relinquishes the claim “he is mine” (“I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me,” 7:11/ET7:10]; cf Gen 3:16). This might also be interpreted as an abandonment of jealous possession, recognizing that “love is not jealous” (1 Cor 13:4). Thus Christopher King interprets the refrain as an expression of “subversive equality and erotic *autonomy*” 2006:361-365; cp Davidson, 592!).

**7 Permanence** (588-92). Solomon’s commendable fidelity, exemplifying the Bible’s sexual theology that extols the value of permanence in marriage, is evident, I suppose, from the fact that in the process of acquiring a grand total of 700 wives and 300 concubines, Solomon never ditched his first wife (see especially 588, note 155). As the climactic versus of the Song say, “Love is strong as death, ardent/zealous/jealous love as relentless as Sheol” (8:7). Davidson agrees with Garrett, “Those who passionately love are passionately possessive. One cannot trifle with love or with one’s lover. Yahweh himself is a jealous God (Exod 20:5)” (cited 592, note 175). But how does this relate to the sacrificial love in the New Testament, which is “not jealous” (1 Cor 13:4; Eph 5::25-33)?

**8 Intimacy** (592-604). Like Robert Alter, Davidson understands the entire Song to be “an ode to intimacy” (cited 592, note 178). The intimacy implied in the “clinging” and “one-flesh” reference in Gen 2:24 (46-48) is developed in the Song and then completed in the New Testament section on “intimacy versus incest, understood as an excess/distortion of intimacy” (657; see the role of intimacy in Davidson’s biblical “12-step program” to achieving/maintaining sexual purity, note 93). Although not accepting the dramatic interpretations of the Song popularized by 19-century commentators (Delitzsch (1851), Davidson argues that the Song evidences “distinct movement from somewhat restrained and reserved to more intense and intimate sexual language as one moves from the prenuptial to the postnuptial sections of the Song” (599; the Song is thus morally divided into “premarital”, marriage [3:6-11], and “postmarital” sex-tions). Davidson even detects evidence in the Song for each of the twelve types of intimacy expounded by Howard and Charlotte Clinebell: physical, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, creative, recreational, work, crisis, conflict, commitment, spiritual/lifesharing, communication (cited 601-602). Examples of “communication intimacy” are found in the 10 names of endearment used for the woman, which build up a sense of self-worth (603-04). Dr. Ralph Blair also has written extensively on intimacy, arguing that gay men need to have exclusive male partners, since what they really seek is not sex but intimacy with someone they can trust with their secrets ([www.ecinc.org](http://www.ecinc.org)). In → Judges Samson’s compulsion to spill the secret of his strength to Delilah exemplifies this common need (Judges 16; cf. the compulsion of sexual minorities to “come out” with the secret of their orientation). Davidson, of course, recognizes that many modern commentators do not accept his moralistic perspective on intimacy in the Song: “The entire Song strums the chord of ‘free love,’ neither recognized or institutionalized [by marriage]” (LeCocque, cited 593, note 179)

**9 Procreation** (604-605, NT 658). Although Sexuality is a “Creation Order” (554-56), the Song’s “deafening silence” (604) regarding the Genesis procreation imperative is a bone swiftly swallowed with no audible choking (“conspicuous by its absence,” in contrast to pagan fertility cults, 604). The possibility that the Song’s deconstruction of the procreation imperative might be understood as opening the door for permanent committed loving homoerotic relations (David and Jonathan with their explicit covenant) is sternly rejected (556 note 40) Since Davidson admits that procreation, so fundamental to the concerns of Gen 1-2, is “conspicuous by its absence” from the Song (604), extricating a long list of ethical absolutes from this collection of erotic poems,

proves even more difficult than extracting them from creation narratives that take shameless nudity for granted and demand maximum procreation, vegetarianism and Jewish Sabbath observance.

**10 “The Wholesome, Holy Beauty of Sexuality” (Chapter 14, 607-32).** Or more accurately, according to Davidson in this edifying chapter, “The Wholesome, Holy Beauty of *Heterosexuality*” but even that only when expressed in a marriage that is monogamous, exclusive, and permanent and of course not when the woman is menstruating, since anything else would be grave sin.

**Conclusion.** For anyone seriously investigating (theses, term papers) or teaching in the area of sexuality in the Bible, especially in the Hebrew Bible, Davidson’s encyclopedic work is simply must reading and invaluable as a reference work for interpretive options, linguistic and exegetical details and bibliography. For the vast majority of readers who would not share much of his sexual ideology and theology, the work loses little of its value as a reference work, especially since other viewpoints are amply represented in text, notes and bibliographies. And in many cases attempts to interact with and critique his conclusions will be worth the effort. I suspect that it will be a long time before we are gifted with such a thorough work and that future contributions largely will interact with a portion of the data and attempt to present more coherent “forests” with perhaps a few additional trees. My desire and prayer for the author would be that he come to manifest the same solidarity and passion with oppressed sexual minorities that he evidences in the cause of straight women, since his book might accurately be described as **Good News for women, unless they be lesbians, Bad News for gays and other sexual minorities.**

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Translation (with gender indications); # 1-7 indicate poems (Cheryl Exum 2005:37-41)

**Note:** *tour wasfs* (arabic, a literary genre that portray the beloved, describing the parts of the nude body with metaphors; 4:1-7 → fem/f; 5:10-16 → masc/m; 6:4-10 → fem/f; 7:2-7 [1-6 MT] *wasf* 4 → fem/f)

**1:1 Title: The most beautiful of poems, dedicated to Solomon**

1 Song of the songs which [is] to/for/about/by *Solomon* → 1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12

**#1 A 1:2-4 Her love poem to a male “king”**

(sex without marriage?)

2 Let *him* kiss me with kisses of his mouth,

for better than wine [are] **your (acts of) love-making** (*dwd=dod*) → see final note.

3 Good/pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumed-oil;

Perfumed-oil poured out [is] your name;

Therefore the maidens/virgins **love** you. (*‘ahab*) 1:3-4, 7; 3:1-4 (7x) [hetero/sexual; 5:9-6:3] 4

Take me away with you—let us hurry!

(non-jealous attitude; → cf 8:6)

The **king** has brought me to his bedroom. → 1:4b, 12; 3:9, 11; 7:(1, prince), 5/6

We rejoice and we delight in you [fem!];

We will praise as better than wine **your (acts of) love-making** (*dwd=dod*).

Justly do they **love** you. (*‘ahab*) 1:3-4, 7; 3:1-4 (7x) [hetero/sexual; 5:9-6:3] 4

**B 1:5-6 A beautiful black/dark woman addresses the daughters of Jerusalem**

5 Dark (am) I and/but lovely, *daughters of Jerusalem*; → 1:4,8,11; 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8-9,16; 6:1,9-9;13; 7:1;

(Dark) Like the tents of Kedar;

**8:4 + 3:11 daughters of Zion**

Like the tent curtains of Solomon.

6 Don't stare at me because I am dark,

Because the sun gazed at me.

**My mother's sons** were angry with me; → **mother, 3:4,1; 6:9; 8:1, 2, 5; mother's sons, 2:5; 8:8-9**

They made me take care of the vineyards.

--my own vineyards I've neglected.

**C 1:7 She addresses her beloved as “shepherd”**

7 Tell me, you whom my soul/self **loves**, (*‘ahab*) 1:3-4, 7; 3:1-4 (7x) [hetero/sexual; 5:9-6:3] 4

Where you graze (your flock),

Where you make (them) rest during middays.

Why should I be like one who veils herself

(“like a prostitute” BNP; see 1:6d; Gen 38:13-15)

Besides the flocks of your companions/friends?

(for the veil see 4:1, 3)

**1:8 He or the chorus responds**

8 If you know not, most beautiful of women,

Follow the tracks of the sheep

And graze your young goats

by the shepherds' tents.

**D 1:9-11 Poem praising a queenly woman: “I compare you, my friend, to a/my mare...”**

- 9 I compare you, **my friend**, (*ra’yah*; 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2, 16; 6:4)  
To a/my mare among Pharaoh’s chariots. [To my mare (in heat) (turned loose) among  
10 Your cheeks are beautiful with (their) earrings, (the stallions pulling) Pharaoh’s chariots?]  
Your neck, with strings of jewels.  
11 Gold earrings we will make for you  
With studs of silver.

**E 1:12-14 Dining with a “king” who reclines on his divan**

- 12 While the king was on his couch  
My perfume spread its fragrance.  
13 A sachet of myrrh is **my lover** (*dwd=dod*) to me;  
He rests all night between my breasts. (sex without marriage?)  
14 A cluster of henna blossoms is **my lover** (*dod*) to me;  
From the vineyards of Engedi.

**F 1:15-17 Duet in rustic setting: “How beautiful you are...Our bed of green herbs”**

- 15 Behold, you (fem) are beautiful, **my friend** (*ra’yah*)! → 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2, 16; 6:4  
Behold, you are beautiful, your eyes (as) doves!  
16 Behold, you (masc) are beautiful/handsome, **my lover** (*dod*), truly charming;  
Our bed is green; (sex without marriage?)  
17 The beams of our houses, cedars;  
Our rafter, pine/fir.

**G 2:1-7 A woman: “I am a rose of Sharon...”**

- 2:1 I am but a crocus of Sharon,  
A (mere) lily of the valleys.

**2:2 Poem praising a woman: “as a crocus among thorns...”**

- 2 Like a lily among the thorns  
So is **my friend** (*ra’yah*)! among the maidens/daughters. → 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2, 16; 6:4

**2:3-6 Poem praising a male: “as the apple tree among the trees of the wood...”**

- 3 Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest,  
So (is) **my lover** (*dod*) among the sons/young men.  
In his shade I delight and I sit  
and his fruit (is) sweet to my taste/palate.  
4 He took me to the banquet hall  
And his banner over me (is) **love**. → (*ahabah*) 2:4-5,7; 3:10; 5:8; 7:6/7; 8:4, 6-7,7; 10x  
5 Strengthen me with raisins  
Refresh me with apples,  
For I am faint from **love-making**. → (*ahabah*) (sex without marriage?)  
6 His left arm (is) under my head → 8:3 [MT 2]  
And his right arm embraces me

**2:7 “I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem...do not awaken love / the beloved...”**

**7** I charge you, *daughters of Jerusalem*, → 1:8; 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8,16; 6:1; 7:1; 8:4; + 3:11 ...of Zion  
By the gazelles and the does of the field

**Do not arouse and do not awaken love/the beloved → 3:5; 8:4(-5) → (‘ahabah)**

**Until it/he so desires.** (with aphrodisiacs, pornography, manipulation, seduction?)

**#2 A 2:8-17 Poem praising a male “leaping upon the mountains...like a gazelle” → 8:14**

**8** The voice/sound of **my lover (dod)**!

Look! There he comes,

Leaping across the mountains,

Bounding over the hills.

**9 My lover (dod)** is like a gazelle

or a young stag.

Look! There he stands behind *our* wall, **(not the lover’s dwelling)**

Gazing through the windows,

Peering through the lattices.

**10 My lover (dod)** spoke and said to me

Arise, **my friend (ra’yah)**; → 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2, 16; 6:4

And come with me, my beautiful one,

**11** for behold, the winter is past,

The rain is over and gone.

**12** Flowers are seen on the earth,

The season of singing has come;

The sound of the dove

Is heard in our land.

**13** The fig tree forms its early fruit;

And the vines blossom, they spread fragrance.

Arise, come, my **friend (ra’yah)**, → 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2, 16; 6:4

My beautiful one, come with me.

**14** My dove in the clefts of the rock,

In the mountainside hiding place,

Show me your face,

Let me hear your voice,

For your voice is sweet

And your face is lovely.

**2:15 Duet: “the little foxes...ruin our vineyards”**

**15** Catch/seize for us the foxes, (see the same verb in 3:4, where she seizes her lover)

The little foxes (BNP note: “previously a danger for the vineyard not cared for” → 1:6e)

That ruin the vineyards

Our vineyards that are in bloom.

**2:16-17 Poem praising a male: “He pastures his flock among the lilies...Return, my beloved”**

**16 My lover (dod) is mine and I am his; → 6:3; 7:10/11**

He browses among the lilies.

(“she...dreams of self-giving and total possession” BNP note ix)

**17** Until day breaks

And the shadows flee,

Turn, **my lover (dod)**,

be like a gazelle

Or to a young stag

On cleft mountains

**B 3:1-5 Urban woman's dream and adventures in the street (1) (a prostitute's adventure?)**

- 1 On my bed nightly [Hebrew plural, "in the nights"]  
I sought him whom my *soul loves*; → ('*ahab*) (4x, 3:1-4; "soul," Hebrew *nephesh*; see final note)  
I sought him but found him not. (sex without marriage?)
- 2 I will arise now and comb the city  
Through the streets and through the squares  
I will search for the one whom my *soul loves*; → ('*ahab*) (4x, 3:1-4; "soul," Hebrew *nephesh*)  
So I sought him but found him not.
- 3 **The watchmen** found me → 5:7, 7  
As they made their rounds in the city:  
"Have you seen the one whom my *soul loves*?" → ('*ahab*)
- 4 Scarcely had I passed them  
When I found him whom my *soul loves*. → ('*ahab*)  
I *seized* him and would not let him go (see the same verb in 2:15, "sieve/trap" the little foxes)  
Until I had brought him to my **mother's** house, → **mother, 1:6; 3:4, 11; 6:9; 8:1, 2, 5**  
into the very room of her who conceived me. (sex without marriage?)

**3:5 "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem...do not awaken love / the beloved...until he/it pleases"**  
**5 Daughters of Jerusalem, I adjure you → 1:8; 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8,16; 6:1; 7:1; 8:4; + 3:11 ...of Zion**  
**By the gazelles and by the does of the field**  
**Do not arouse nor awaken love**  
**Until it/he pleases. → 2:7; 3:5; 8:4(-5)**

**#3 3:6-11 Woman: Royal Wedding Procession; "Solomon's litter...Zion's Daughters come out to see"**

(an actual historical event? more likely a *Solomon/royal fiction*)

- 6 What/who is this (fem.) coming up from the desert thus Murphy 1990:152; Longman 2001:133;  
Like columns of smoke Exum 2005:141; cf Psalm 45)  
Being perfumed with myrrh and incense  
Made from all the merchants' spices?
- 7 Behold it is Solomon's litter/portable bed  
Surrounded by 60 warriors (power; cf David's 30, 2 Sam 23)  
From the warriors of Israel,
- 8 All of them bearing the sword,  
Experienced in battle,  
Each with the sword at his thigh, (fallic euphemisms? See "the perils of the night")  
Armed against the terrors of the night. (sexual violation, anal penetration?)
- 9 The King made the carriage/palanquin for himself,  
Solomon, from the woods of Lebanon.
- 10 Its posts he made of silver, (wealth, luxury)  
Its base/back of gold, its seat, purple;  
Its interior **lovingly** inlaid → ('*ahabah*)  
By the **daughters of Jerusalem. → 1:8; 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8,16; 6:1; 7:1; 8:4;**
- 11 Come out and look, **O daughters of Zion + 3:11 ...of Zion**  
At King Solomon with his crown  
The crown with which his **mother** crowned him → **1:6; 3:4; 6:9; 8:1, 2, 5** (Bathsheba, if historical!)  
On the day of his *wedding*, (only reference to wedding/marriage in the Song)  
On the day of his heart's rejoicing.

**B 4:1-9 Praising a woman: “your eyes are two doves...” (mountain setting: he ascends)**

(*wasf* 1-7 → fem. could be woman to woman)

1 Behold you, my beautiful **friend** (*ra'yah*)! → 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; → 4:1, 7; 5:2, 16; 6:4

Behold you, how beautiful.

Your eyes, doves, behind your **veil**;

Your hair like a flock of goats

Descending from Mount Gilead.

(“The watchmen...abuse the woman, perhaps because they identified her by her dress and by the veil” BNP note xiv)

2 Your teeth like a flock (of sheep) just shorn

Coming up from the washing,

Each with its twin

Not one of them unmatched.

3 Like a scarlet ribbon are your lips

And your mouth, lovely,

Like pomegranate halves, your cheeks

Behind your **veil**.

(see 4:1c)

4 Like the tower of David is your neck,

Elegantly built,

Hung with a thousand shields

All of them warriors' shields.

5 Your two breasts like two fawns,

Twins of a gazelle

Browsing among the lilies.

(“describe the naked female body, BNP note xii”)

6 Until the day breathes

And the shadows flee

*I will go to the mountain* of myrrh

And to the hill of incense.

7 You are totally beautiful, my **friend** (*ra'yah*), → 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2, 16; 6:4

Absolutely flawless.

**4:8-9 Invitation to the bride/sister (to descend from mountains)**

8 Come with me from Lebanon, **my bride**;

Come with me from Lebanon.

(*kallah*, 8-12; + sister, 9-10, 12;

*after the wedding of 3:6-11)*

*Descend* from the crest of Amana,

From the crest of Senir, Hermon's summit,

From the lions' dens,

From the mountain haunts of leopards.

9 You have captured my heart, **my sister, my bride**;

You have captured my heart with a single glance,

With one jewel of your necklace.

**4:10–5:1ab Duet: Entering in my/your garden: ‘I have drunk my wine... milk’**

4:10 How beautiful are your (**acts of**) **love-making** (*dwd=dod*), **my sister, my bride!**

How much better than wine your (**acts of**) **love-making** (*dwd=dod*),

And the fragrance of your perfumes

Better than all spices.

11 Your lips drip nectar/honey comb, **my bride**,

Honey and milk are beneath your tongue.

And the fragrance of your garments

Like the fragrance of Lebanon.

12 You are a garden locked, **my sister, my bride**,  
 An enclosed spring, a fountain sealed.  
 13 Your plants/shoots are a pomegranate orchard,  
 With the choicest fruits,  
 Henna with nards.  
 14 Nard and saffron,  
 Calamus and cinnamon,  
 With all trees of frankincense,  
 Myrrh and aloes  
 With all the finest spices,  
 15 A garden fountain,  
 A well of living/flowing waters  
 Streaming down from Lebanon.  
 16 O north wind, awake  
 And come, south wind,  
 Blow on my garden  
 Defuse its fragrances.  
 Let **my lover (dod)** enter his garden  
 And taste its choice fruits.

5:1ad "I have entered my garden, **my sister, my bride**;  
 I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.  
 I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey;  
 I have drunk my wine and my milk."

**5:1e-f Chorus: "Drink all you want"**

1c "Eat, o **friends**, and drink!  
 Drink your fill, o **lovers (dodim)**!"

#### #4 5:2-16 Urban dream and adventures in the street: to search and (not) to find

5:2 Although asleep, my heart was awake.  
 The sound of **my lover (dod)** knocking! (**unmarried, not living together**); Rev 3:20

"Open to me, **my sister, my friend (ra'yah)**, → 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; → 4:1, 7; 5:2, 16; 6:4 → Rev 3:20  
 My dove, my flawless/perfect one,  
 For my head is drenched with dew  
 My hair, with the night dampness."

3 But I have taken off my robe--  
 Must I get dressed again?  
 I have bathed my feet--  
 How could I soil them?  
 4 **My lover (dod)** thrust his hand through the hole;  
 My insides pounded for him.  
 5 I arose to open for **my lover (dod)**,  
 My hands dripping with myrrh,  
 My fingers, with myrrh flowing  
 On the handles of the lock.  
 6 I opened for **my lover (dod)**  
 But **my lover (dod)** had left, disappeared;  
 My heart had gone out to him when he spoke.

I searched for him but found him not,  
I called him, but he answered not.

7 **The watchmen**, however, found me, → 3:3

As they made their rounds in the city.

They beat and bruised me;

They stripped my **cloak/veil** from me (due to her veil they treat her as a prostitute, BNP note xiv)

Those **watchmen** of the walls.

**5:8-9 Dialog with the daughters of Jerusalem: “I am dying with love...”**

**8 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, → 1:8; 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8,16; 6:1; 7:1; 8:4; + 3:11 ...of Zion**

If you find **my lover (dod)**, (6:2?)

What should you tell him?

That I am sick/faint with **love**. → (*‘ahabah*)

9 How is **your lover (dod)** better than any other **lover (dod)**,  
Most beautiful of women?

How is **your lover (dod)** better than any other **lover (dod)**

That you so charge us?

**5:10-16, wasf 2 → masc. 5:9 implies that a woman praises a male friend:**

(describes the nude body of the male, BNP note xv)

10 **My lover (dod)** is radiant and ruddy,  
distinguished among ten thousand:

11 His head, the purist gold,

His curly hair, black as a raven;

12 His eyes like doves

By streams of water,

Bathed in milk,

Perched beside a full pool;

13 His cheeks, like beds of spices,

Mounds of sweet-smelling herbs;

His lips are lilies,

Dripping liquid myrrh;

14 His arms, rods of gold

Set with chrysolite jewels;

His member, an ivory tusk

Crowned with sapphire;

15 His legs, marble pillars

Set on bases of gold;

His countenance, like Lebanon,

Choice as its cedars;

16 His mouth, most sweet,

He is totally desirable.

This is **my lover (dod)** and this **my friend** (not “my husband”; *ra’yah*; masc only here → 5:2

**O daughters of Jerusalem. → 1:8; 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8,16; 6:1; 7:1; 8:4; + 3:11 ...of Zion**

**6:1-3 [Chorus]: “Where has your beloved gone...?” “...to his garden...to graze...among the lilies”**

Note inclusion of 6:1-3 → 11-12 framing inclusion of 6:4 → 10

6:1 Where has your **lover (dod)** gone,  
O most beautiful of women?  
Which way did your **lover (dod)** turn  
That we may join you in your search?

2 **My lover (dod)** went down to *his* garden (**5:8?**) (“his” garden, metaphor for the woman, v. 3)  
To the beds of spices  
That he might graze in the gardens  
And gather *lilies*.

3 **I am my lover’s (dod)**  
**and my lover (dod) is mine: → 2:16; 7:10/11**  
He grazes among the *lilies*.

**#5 A 6:4-9 Lover: “awesome as an army with banners...” (inclusion frames poem) → 10 Chorus**

4 Beautiful as Tirzah, you are, **my friend (ra’yah; 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; → 4:1, 7; 5:2, 16; 6:4)**  
Lovely as Jerusalem,  
*Awesome as troops with banners.* → inclusion, **Coro, 10c**

5 Turn away your eyes from me  
For they overwhelm me;  
Your hair is like a flock of goats **6:5c-7b // 4:1-3**  
Descending the slopes of Gilead;

6 Your teeth, like a flock of sheep,  
Going up from the washing,  
All of them bearing twins,  
Not of which is alone.

7 Your cheeks behind your **veil**,  
Like pomegranate halves.

8 Sixty queens there are, with eighty concubines  
And innumerable maidens/virgins. (the royal harem; 1 Kings 11:3, 1000?)

9 But my dove is unique, perfect,  
Her mother’s only daughter, → **mother, 1:6; 3:4, 11; 6:9; 8:1, 2, 5**  
Favorite of the one who bore her

The maidens/virgins saw her, blessed her,  
The queens and concubines praised her:

**B 10** “Who is this, appearing like dawn,  
Fair as the moon, bright as the sun,  
*Awesome as an army with banners?”* → inclusion, **4c**

**6:11-12 She/He: “I went down to the nut orchard...my soul set me among the royal chariots...” ?  
(unmarried)**

11 To the grove of nut trees I went down (nut imagery for male/female genitals?)  
To look at the new growths in the valley,  
To see if the vine had budded,  
Or if the pomegranates had bloomed.

12 Before I realized, my desire set me (whisked me away) (Acts 8:39; 2 Cor 12:2-4)  
On the royal chariots of my people [Heb. *Ammi-Nadib*]. (Gen 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11)

**C 6:13-7:10 [7:1-11 MT] The dancing Shulamite. Chorus: “Return, return, O Shulamite!”  
She: “And what do you wish to see of the Shulamite?” Chorus: “...like a dance before two armies?”**

6:13 [7:1 Hebrew MT] “Come back, come back, O Shulamite, (Shulamite only in this verse)  
Come back come back, that we may gaze on you! (homoeroticism, voyeurism?)

Why should you stare at the Shulamite (fem form of Solomon, meaning “peace”; see 8:10)  
As upon *dancing* (maidens) before two armies? (following *wasf* begins with feet)

**7:1-6 (2-7 MT) *wasf* 4 → fem.** Probably a male speaks, since he refers to a “king” held captive in the hair of the woman. Leaving the dance, he first describes the feet and continues upward, comparing the sexual awakening of the woman to the awakening of the earth in the spring.

7:1 [7:2 MT] How beautiful your *sandaled feet*, (links with dancing in previous verse)  
O **prince’s** daughter! → **1:4b, 12; 3:9, 11; 7:(1, prince), 5/6**

Your rounded thighs like jewels,  
A craftsman’s handwork;

2 [3 MT] Your navel (vulva), a rounded goblet, (navel and belly, euphemisms?)  
Never lacking blended wine;

Your belly, a mound of wheat  
Encircled with lilies;

3 [4 MT] Your two breasts like two fawns,  
Twins of a gazelle;

4 [5 MT] Your neck, like an ivory tower;  
Your eyes, pools of Heshbon  
By the gate of Bath-rabbim;

Your nose, like the tower of Lebanon  
Facing towards Damascus;

5 [6 MT] Your head crowns you like Carmel  
And the hair of your head, like royal tapestry,  
With the King held captive in its tresses.

6 [7 MT] How beautiful you are, how pleasing,  
O **love**, with your delights! → (*‘ahabah*)

7 [8 MT] Your stature is like a palm tree,  
And your breasts like its clusters.

8 [9 MT] I exclaimed, “I will climb the palm tree  
I will lay hold of its fruit.

Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine  
And the fragrance of your breath like apples

9 [10 MT] And your palate/mouth like the best wine  
May it go down smoothly for **my lover** (*dod*),

Gliding over lips and teeth [LXX; MT: “sleepers”].

**10 [11 MT] I am my lover’s** (*dod*) → **2:16; 6:3** (*mutual* ownership, subverting patriarchy?)  
**And his desire is for me.** (in contrast to Eve’s desire in Gen 3:16)

**D 7:11-13 [MT 12-14] She invites lover to escape to countryside: “There I will give you my love” (12d)**

11 [12 MT] Come, **my lover** (*dod*),  
Let us go to the countryside/fields,  
Let us spend the night in the villages;

- 12 [13 MT] Let us go early to the vineyards;  
 Let us see if the vine has blossomed,  
 If the pomegranates have bloomed—  
 There I will give you [fem!] my caresses / (acts of) love-making (*dwd=dod*).
- 13 [14 MT] The *mandrakes* send out their fragrance (aphrodisiacs; Gen 30:14-16)  
 And at our doors are all choice fruits,  
 Both new and old,  
 That I have stored up for you, **my lover** (*dod*). (not husband; unmarried)

**E 8:1-4 Poem first addressing a male: “Oh, that you were like a brother.... breasts”**

- 1 Who could (= Oh that someone would) make you like a *brother* for me, → 1:6  
 One nursing at my **mother’s breasts?** → **mother, 1:6; 3:4, 11; 6:9; 8:1, 2, 5**  
 Should I encounter you in public, I would kiss you  
 And none would despise me. (obviously they are not married; Longman 2001:204)
- 2 I would lead you, I would bring you  
 Into my **mother’s** house-- → **mother, 1:6; 3:4, 11; 6:9; 8:1, 2, 5**  
 She who used to teach me  
 I would give you spiced wine to drink,  
 The nectar of my pomegranates.
- 3 His left arm is under my head → 2:6  
 And his right arm embraces me.

**8:4 “I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem...not to awaken love until it so desires”**

- 4 I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem; → 1:8; 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8,16; 6:1; 7:1; 8:4; + 3:11 ...of Zion**  
**That you not arouse nor awaken love** cf 8:5c! (with magic, aphrodisiacs, pornography,  
**Until it so desires.** → 2:7; 3:5; 8:4(-5) manipulation, seduction?)

**#6 8:5-7 CONCLUSION “Erotic love is the flame of Yah[weh] (the liberator God of the Exodus)”**

**8:5a Chorus: “Who is that coming up from the wilderness?...”**

- 5a Who is this [fem.] coming up from the desert,  
 Leaning on her **lover** (*dod*)?

**8:5c “Under an apple tree I roused/awakened you...”**

- 5c Under the apple tree *I roused/awakened you*, (8:4!) (see apple tree, 2:3)  
 The very place your **mother** conceived you, → **mother, 1:6; 3:4, 11; 6:9; 8:1, 2, 5**  
 Where she went into labor and birthed you.
- 6 Set me like a *seal* upon your heart, (indicating mutual ownership that is exclusive and permanent)  
 Like a *seal* on your arm, (see lovers’ names tattooed on body parts today)  
**for love is strong as death, → (‘ahabah)**  
**Jealousy is fierce/unyielding as the grave,** (appropriate barrier against religious  
**It blazes flames of fire,** or sexual infidelity; cf 1 Cor 13:4, love *not* jealous)  
**The very flame of Yah[weh]. → 1 John 4:7-8, 16 “God is love....love is of God”**
- 7 Many waters cannot quench *love*, → (‘ahabah)  
 Nor can river torrents wash it away.  
 If one were to offer for *love* → (‘ahabah)  
 All the wealth of his house  
 He/It would be utterly scorned/despised → 8:11-12

#7 Three Inclusions: two breasts; two vineyards; two lovers

A 8:8-10 The Two Breasts. *Brothers and Breasts*: “Our little sister has no breasts...a wall...a door....”

8 We have a little *sister* **Inclusion** → 1:5-6

Who has no *breasts* (yet).

What shall we do for our *sister*

On the day when she is spoken for?

9 If she is a *wall*,

we will build on her towers/battlements of silver;

But if she is a *door*,

We will enclose her with cedar panels.

8:10 “I was like a wall, my breasts like towers. Thus I was in his eyes...like one who brings peace”

10 I was a *wall*

And my *breasts* like towers;

Thus I became in his eyes

Like **one who brings (yts' ) peace (shalom)**.

B 8:11-12 The Two Vineyards.

11 *Solomon had a vineyard* in Baal-hamon; → **Inclusion 1:1, 4-5, 12-14**

He let out the vineyard to tenants/keepers.

Each was to bring for its fruit

A thousand pieces/shekels of silver.

12 *My vineyard*, my very own, remains before me (is mine to give); → **1:6e**

You, O Solomon, may keep your thousand → **8:7**

And the keepers of the fruit, their two hundred.

C 8:13-14 The Two Lovers (unmarried, as from the beginning). → 2:8-9, 14, 17

**To the woman in the garden: “Let me hear your voice...”** (she speaks, persuades, invites)

13 O you who sit enthroned/ dwell in the *gardens* → **Inclusion 4;12-5:1; 6:2-3, 11**

With attending-friends (*khabirim*, masc.; only reference to male friends; cf 1:7; foxes, 2:15?),

Let me hear your voice!

**To the man: “Hasten...like a gazelle upon spice mountains”** (he acts; image of freedom)

14 Flee / Make haste / come away, **my lover (dod)** → **Inclusion 2:8, 17**

And be like a gazelle

(she speaks, commands, persuades, 13; he acts, 14)

Or a young stag

(free, not domesticated; see mother's house, 8:2)

On the spice-laden *mountains*.

**(not married; Longman 2001:204)**

## Notes

**Note 1:2 root, *dwd=dod* (total 39x; Schökel DBHE 1994:173; cp Davidson 2007:590-91, nota 168)**

**Amante(s) / lover(s):** 1:13a 14a, 16a; 2:3b, 8a, 9a, 10a, 16a, 17c; → 4:16e; 5:1f [plural: masc + fem], 2b, 4<sup>a</sup>, 5<sup>a</sup>, 6<sup>a</sup> +b, 8b, 9<sup>a</sup> +b +c +d, 10a, 16c; 6:1a +b, 2a, 3a +b; 7: 9b, 10a, 11a, 13d; 8:5b, 14a (total 34x).

**Actos de hacer el amor / acts of love-making:** 1:2b, 4b; → fem. 4:10a + b; 7:12e (total 5x);

The vocabulary of *dwd=dod* in Song of Songs is one of many arguments against Davidson, who emphasizes the poem about “Solomon’s” wedding (3:6-11) and interprets all the preceding texts as speaking only of “prematrimonial” caresses and interprets the texts after the wedding poem (→) as referring to sexual relations. But the poems before the wedding refer continually to the male as a “lover” who engages in acts of love and then afterwards (→) the poems do not speak of a married couple in their home, but to lovers who continue to engage in sexual relations in a variety of places (Garrett 1995:385; Longman 2001: 90, nota 15; Exum 2005:91, 93; Prov 7:18; Ezek 16:8; 23:17). Translations commonly disguise these facts with ideological paraphrases (cf our translation above with key vocabulary in boldface). Cf Davidson who assigns all the poems before Solomon’s wedding (3:6-11) to a betrothed couple, and to a married couple after the wedding poem (2007:599-601). As John W. Rogerson (2003:475) points out, the translations that distinguish between a male “lover” and a female “beloved” imply that the male is always active and the female passive, which does not correspond to the reality described in the poems.

**Note 1:3. to love. → (*ahab*) 1:3, 4, 7; 3:1-4 (7x);**

**love → (*ahabah*) 2:4-5, 7; 3:10; 5:8; 7:6/7; 8:4, 6-7, 7; (10x)--raiz 17x**

**Note 1:9 Friend (*ra’yah*, Schökel DBHE 1994:712; Exum 209) 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; → 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4;**

**+ masc. only in 5:16. (total 10x).** They address one another as “lover” or “friend”, never “husband/wife”.

**Note 1:10-11** 1 Tim 2:9-10 prohibits “gold or pearls or expensive clothes” (1 Pedro 3:3-4); condemned in Isa 3:16-26, Hos 2:15; but praised in Song of Songs 1:10-11; 4:9; 7:1/2; commanded for priestly vestments, Ex 28; 39. Thus, “Not an absolute prohibition against jewelry for people of faith” (Longman 2001:104); see anal sex in → Rom 1:27. Similarly, divorce prohibited (Mk 10:11-12), commanded by God (Ezra 10:3; Neh 9:2; 13:23-27); “If anyone will not work, let him not eat” (2 Thes 3:10); exceptions: children, sick, handicapped; “They had all things in common” Acts 2:44; “with the exception of women” (Tertullian, *Apologetics* XXXIX.4).

### The sexual ideologies imposed by “translations”:

RVR95, BA and SE: esposa, esposo, coro (una pareja casada, desde principio hasta el final)

BNP: esposa, esposo, coro (siempre una pareja casada; pero sustituye títulos temáticos por personas)

NBJ: novia, novio, coro/poeta (amantes no casados en todo el libro; cp NNJB inglés: beloved, lover)

NRSV English (Michael Fox): son novios en todo el libro (bride, groom, friends).

NVI: la amada, el amado, los amigos/el coro (cp NVI inglés: beloved, lover)

DHHBE y BL: ella, él, coro (neutro en cuanto al matrimonio; heterosexista)

**Notes 2:7, 16 Two refrains, 3x each:**

**2:7 I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem; → (1:8); 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8,16; 6:1; 7:1; 8:4; + 3:11 ...of Zion**

**That you not arouse nor awaken love cf. 8:5c!** (with magic, aphrodisiacs, pornography,

**Until it so desires. → 2:7; 3:5; 8:4(-5)** manipulation, seduction?)

**2:16 My lover (*dod*) is mine and I am his; → 2:16; 6:3; 7:10/11 (*mutual ownership, subverts patriarchy?*)**

**He browses among the lilies / And his desire is for me. (contrast Eve’s desire in Gen 3:16)**

**2:15 Duet: “the little foxes...ruin our vineyards”**

15 Catch/seize for us the foxes, (see the same verb in 3:4, where she “seizes” her lover)  
The little foxes (see “wolves” as sexually aggressive males)  
That ruin the vineyards  
Our vineyards that are in bloom.

Elsewhere the vineyard represents the woman (1:6) or the place of love-making (6:11). “The little foxes” thus appear to represent the threats to their blossoming relationship (Longman 134-25; Exum 128), perhaps especially aggressive lovers, since in the context the couple seeks to escape (“come away with me,” 2:10, 13), in order to enjoy the private intimacy (the secluded “dove,” 2:14) of their exclusive relationship (2:16).

**Note 3:1-4 “him whom my soul [*nephesh*] loves/desires passionately” (4x, 3:1-4)**

“En la esfera de la respiración: *aliento, respiro*; su órgano: *garganta, cuello*;  
como principio de vida, *alma*;  
en la esfera del deseo y afecto: *apetito, afán, hambre, codicia, gula, gusto; estómago*.  
equivale a *individuo, persona, ser*; a pronombres personales con cierto énfasis” (Schökel DBHE 504)

“In the sphere of breathing: *breath*; its organ: *throat, neck*;  
As the principle of life, *soul*;  
In the sphere of desire and affection: *appetite, hunger, coveting, stomach*;  
Equivalent to *individual, person, human being*; to personal pronouns with a certain emphasis.

**Note 8:10d** Spanish translations prefer “finds” peace (qal active participle of the verb *mts* ʿ), which seems more egotistical than loving. English translations prefer “brings” peace (hiphil-causative form of the verb *yts*’; see NRSV “brings peace”; NIV “bringing contentment”; Exum 2005:244,258; Longman 2001:218). The theological implications of the text are considerable, since if a good sexual relation and experience are normally a basic dimension of peace (*shalom*) then the biblical texts that refer to peace may also suggest or imply a satisfactory sexual relationship. Commentators on New Testament texts referring to peace commonly ignore this sexual dimension of the Hebrew concept and suggest a neoplatonic spiritualizing interpretation (see, however Paul’s realism in 1 Cor 7:1-7, 15).

BNP “soy mensajera de paz”; DHHBE “ya he encontrado la felicidad”  
“como quien ha hallado la paz” NBJ, BL, RVR95 y NVI; cp SE “paz”; BA “halla la paz”

**Note “Solomon” (1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12);  
“the king” (1:4b, 12; 3:9, 11; 7:1 [“prince”], 5/6; (DHHBE, nota 1:1).**

As Pablo Andiñach comments regarding the Solomon’s arrival reclining in his luxurious bed (3:6-11): “The couple of the Song ought not be understood in relation to this [royal] world, but in opposition to it...Humble persons don’t possess luxurious furniture...The contrast between the world of the couple and the upper classes is too great...The poetess has no interest in linking the couple’s experience to the monarchy and its practices, but rather presents a critique of that model” (1997:100). And regarding 8:11-12 Andiñach says: “Here the target of the words is Solomon himself...The placement of this poem towards the end of the book indicates that we face a thematic conclusion. Solomon has been referred to repeatedly and here the writer completes her message of rejection of the Solomonic model and that of the ruling class of the epoch” (1997:152-53). Therefore we should not be surprised that 3:6-11 ridicules Solomon as effeminate (“Who is this [fem.]...?”). See the following note.

**Note. 3:6-11 Woman: Royal Wedding Procession; “Solomon’s litter...Zion’s Daughters come out to see”**

Who/what is this (fem.) coming up from the desert

Like columns of smoke

Being perfumed with myrrh and incense

Made from all the merchants’ spices?

7 Behold it is Solomon’s litter/portable bed

Surrounded by 60 warriors

(cf David’s 30, 2 Sam 23)

From the warriors of Israel,

8 All of them bearing the sword,

Experienced in battle,

Each with the sword at his thigh,

Armed against the terrors of the night.

12 The King made the carriage/palanquin for himself,

Solomon, from the woods of Lebanon.

10 Its posts he made of silver,

Its base/back of gold, its seat, purple;

Its interior lovingly inlaid

By the **daughters of Jerusalem. → 1:8; 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8,16; 6:1; 7:1; 8:4;**

11 Come out and look, **O daughters of Zion + 3:11 ...of Zion**

At King Solomon with his crown

The crown with which his **mother** crowned him → **1:6; 3:4; 6:9; 8:1, 2, 5** (Bathsheba, if historical!)

On the day of his *wedding*,

(only reference to wedding/marriage in the Song)

On the day of his heart’s rejoicing.

The reference in 3:11 to Solomon’s wedding (*khatunnah*; Schókel 288) is the book’s only reference to the institution of marriage, since the other poems all speak of “lovers” who express their love in consensual sex outside the framework of patriarchal marriage. Roland Murphy thus correctly describes the text as “a somewhat foreign body within the Song” (1990:152). Davidson (2007:564-66) follows those few commentaries who interpret 3:6-11 as a literal, historical description of Solomon’s marriage to an Egyptian princess (1 Kings 3:1; daughter of Pharaoh Siamun, 978-59 B.C.). The majority, however, believe the poem reflects another *royal fiction* where the woman calls the daughters of Zion to behold the arrival of her lover, now in the guise of “king” instead of “shepherd” (Murphy 1990:152; Longman 2001:133; Exum 2005:141; see the similar royal fictions in 1:4,12; 6:8-9; 7:4/5; 8:11-12). For Tremper Longman the poem employs the legend of Solomon, with all his wealth and military power, to celebrate love and marriage (2001:133-37).

All the other poems, however, celebrate simple consensual love, not the institution of patriarchal marriages arranged by parents for political purposes. Since the woman speaks in 3:1-5 and 11, probably she also speaks the lines of 3:6-10. In 3:6, however, it is not clear to whom (or what) the woman refers. Since the normal translation of the first Hebrew words would be “Who is *this*” (Hebrew feminine), the woman appears to announce the arrival of an effeminate Solomon. Literally, the poem thus appears to ridicule a perfumed effeminate Solomon, who arrives reclining on his luxurious, portable bed, protected by 60 warriors (see the effeminate “bed-males” condemned by Paul in → 1 Cor 6:9). In antiquity, effeminate males, rather than submitting to male anal penetration, could be “heterosexuals” who indulged in luxuries (instead of a disciplined warrior) and who preferred to spend their time in female company. Thus, we may best understand the reference to Solomon’s “mother” (3:11) as doubly subversive, since the text ignores his father David (who committed adultery with Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother) and offers as paradigmatic for marriage the worst example in the Bible (Solomon, with his harem of 1000 women, ridiculed again in 8:11-12). After the insertion of this strange poem about Solomon’s “matriarchal” marriage, the book then redirects our attention to descriptions of consensual love enjoyed outside the framework of patriarchal marriage, in the mountains and gardens (4:1-5:1). The virile lover of the other poems, bounding across mountains like a wild animal (2:8-9; 7:14), contrasts markedly with the perfumed, effeminate Solomon. We may propose a hypothetical trajectory for this marriage poem, which perhaps (1) in its original form celebrated the marriage of the historical Solomon (see Psalm 45); then (2) for centuries was recited as a simple love poem, celebrating the loves and marriages of common Israelites, with the groom imaged as a Solomonic “king”; but (3) by its incorporation in the Song began to subvert the traditional institution of patriarchal marriage and ridicule the effeminate Solomon, contrasted with the virile lover of the other poems. Such a trajectory for this poem, originating in royal circles, would differ from that proposed by Norman Gottwald for the other poems (see above under 1 The Poor).

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *dod*, *’ahab*, Hebrew; *ágape*, *agapao*, LXX

<sup>2</sup> “friend” (*ra’yah*, Schökel DBHE 1994:712; Exum 209) 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; → 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4; + masc. only in 5:16. (total 10x). They address one another as “lover” or “friend”, never “husband/wife”.

<sup>3</sup> Ariel and Chana Bloch 1995:3-4, 37-38; David Carr 2000:240-42; on friendship, see Mary Hunt 1991; Elizabeth Stuart 1995

<sup>4</sup> Chana Bloch 1995:31

<sup>5</sup> NNJB and DHHBE, introductions

<sup>6</sup> David Carr 2000:240

<sup>7</sup> 8:4-5; cp. her answer, 8:10

<sup>8</sup> 1:5; recall the African American motto in their liberation struggle: “Black is beautiful”.

<sup>9</sup> J. Sasson 1987:735; David Clines 1995:100-121; Susan Ackerman 1998:1. Juan Carlos Sánchez Sottosanto comments: “This is relative if we think of Attic or Ionic poetry. The name of Sappho is the best known but we know of more than twenty Greek women authors, although only brief fragments of their works remain” (personal correspondence).

<sup>10</sup> Miriam, Ex 15:20-21; Deborah, Judges 5; see 1 S 18:6-7; the grief in Jer 9:17-22; 2 Cr 35:25; Chana Bloch 1995:21

<sup>11</sup> Paul Johnson 1990

<sup>12</sup> see the pages at the beginning and end in Murphy (1990).

<sup>13</sup> Chana Bloch 1995:26. Juan Carlos Sánchez Sottosanto (carta personal) señala como prueba en los deuterocanónicos: 1 Macabeos 1:10-15; 2 Macabeos 4).

<sup>14</sup> Chana Bloch 1995:18

<sup>15</sup> Chana Bloch 1995:18; ver también Cheryl Exum 2005:33-37.

<sup>16</sup> 8:6, the “living flame” of the Lover Yahweh. Roland Murphy cites Ginsburg’s observation that the comparison suggests not merely the vehemence of the fires of love, but that they ‘emanate from the Eternal’ (Ginsburg, 1857:188) and concludes that “A perspective on human love is taken here that calls for theological evaluation” (190:197).

<sup>17</sup> Jaime Stubrin 1993

<sup>18</sup> Hebrew: *’ahab*; LXX: *agapao*, *agape*

<sup>19</sup> 1985:546-551; Chana Bloch 1995:19-20

<sup>20</sup> for/by Solomon *lishelomoh*, 1:1

<sup>21</sup> Deut 17:1-20; 1 Kings 11:1, 4, 9-11; see Eccl. concerning vanity, 2:4-11

<sup>22</sup> see details in Chana Bloch 1995:9-10

<sup>23</sup> 1 Kings 10:2-3; 9:26-28; 10:11, 14-22

<sup>24</sup> 11:1-3; 700 wives and 300 concubines

<sup>25</sup> (Chana Bloch 1995:11)

<sup>26</sup> 1:1; Ariel Bloch 1995:137

<sup>27</sup> Pope 1977:137-141, 205; J. H. Hayes 1999:448-449

<sup>28</sup> 1973; 1978

<sup>29</sup> 1977:210

<sup>30</sup> 1995:14

<sup>31</sup> 1992:167

<sup>32</sup> 1992:168

<sup>33</sup> 1995:4-5

<sup>34</sup> 1:6 RV; 3:4; 6:9; 8:1-2, 5b; see Gen 2:24; → Michael 7:6

<sup>35</sup> Chana Bloch 2001: 313. See 1:8; 5:1b, 9; 6:1, 13 [7:1];

<sup>36</sup> from the Latin *patior*, “suffer”

<sup>37</sup> Chana Bloch 1995:7; cp. the fever of love, 2:5; 5:8

<sup>38</sup> 3:6, “Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness?”

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- <sup>39</sup> Ariel Bloch 1995:175
- <sup>40</sup> *dodi*: 1:13-14, 16; 2:3, 8-10, 16-17; 4:16; 5:2, 4, 5, 6, 6, 8, 10, 16; 6:2, 3, 3; 7:10, 11, 12, 14; 8:14; (26 times); cp. the daughters of Jerusalem: “your beloved” 5:9; 6:1; 8:5 (three times)
- <sup>41</sup> *dodim*; 1:2, 4; 4:10, 10; 5:1; 7:13; cp. Prov 7:18; Ezek 16:7-8; 23:17; the Blochs translate “your love-making” to avoid the ambiguity of “your love” 1995:3-4
- <sup>42</sup> Chana Bloch 1995:4, 17
- <sup>43</sup> 2:15; see modern sayings about the fox in the chicken coop
- <sup>44</sup> leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills
- <sup>45</sup> cf. the Third Commandment in Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11
- <sup>46</sup> Chana Bloch 1995:9-10; Andrew Linsey 1994/96
- <sup>47</sup> *haberim*, masculine plural, 8:13; see 1:7
- <sup>48</sup> see RV95
- <sup>49</sup> NJB; cp. “astray” DHH y BL; “as wandering”, RV95
- <sup>50</sup> NJB note 1:7
- <sup>51</sup> Bloch 1995:5, 38-39, 142-143, 166-168; cf. *tšmmah*, “hair”, not “veil” in 4:1, 3; 6:7 and Isa 47:2, against NBJ, DHH, BL, NVI, NRSV, Murphy 1990:159 and Pope 1977:457-458
- <sup>52</sup> RV 1:6; cf. 8:8-9
- <sup>53</sup> Ariel Bloch 1995:156-157
- <sup>54</sup> 2:7; 3:5; cf. 8:4; BL against NBJ, DHH, NVI
- <sup>55</sup> Pope 380; see Gen 30:14-24
- <sup>56</sup> see the observation of Jesus about the prostitute who “loved much”, Luke 7:47
- <sup>57</sup> ‘*almanot*’; 6:8-9; see also the “maidens” that love the young shepherd; 1:3; 2:2
- <sup>58</sup> Chana Bloch 1995:13
- <sup>59</sup> William Countryman 2007:159-61, 196-99).
- <sup>60</sup> see Prov 30:18-19, “the way of a man with a woman”, a text which supposes an active male and a passive woman, cf. the eagle, the serpent, and the ship
- <sup>61</sup> Chana Bloch 1995:14; cf. “the good wife” of Prov 31:10-31
- <sup>62</sup> 1 Cor 13:1-13; 1 John 1:5; 4:8, 16; Roland Murphy 1990:104. Ten biblical norms for good personal relations, especially intimate sexual ones, might be summarized as follows: (1) liberation and enduring freedom; (2) justice that mutually empowers; (3) authenticity and truthfulness; (4) mutual confidence; (5) wisdom; (6) sensibility that seeks to please and honor; (7) faithful, persevering love; (8) mutual joy; (9) harmony and peace; (10) hope.
- <sup>63</sup> DHHBE, note 1:1
- <sup>64</sup> DHHBE: Shulamite = “Shalom” (8:10d)