

## I. A UNIQUE BOOK

"The entire universe is not as worthy as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs are the Holy of Holies."<sup>1</sup> In these passionate words, Rabbi Akiba was upholding the right of the Song of Songs to a place in the Scriptures. The warmth of his defense testifies to the vigor of the challenge to which it was subjected, probably stronger than in the case of Esther, Koheleth and Job.<sup>2</sup>

The Song of Songs is unique among the books of the Bible in spirit, content and form. It is the only book in the canon lacking a religious or national theme, the Divine name occurring only once and then only as an epithet (8:6). To be sure, Esther also makes no direct mention of God, but its national emphasis is unmistakable. Even that is lacking in the Song of Songs. The reason for the doubts as to its canonicity is not hard to discover. Fragments of secular poetry are imbedded in the Bible,<sup>3</sup> but this is the only complete work which is entirely secular, indeed, sensuous, in character.

As in the case of Koheleth,<sup>4</sup> more than one factor helped to win admission for this little book into the canon of Scripture. While the charm and beauty of its contents played their part, if only on the subconscious level, there were two basic factors operating consciously. First was the occurrence of Solomon's name in the text,<sup>5</sup> which led to the attribution of the whole book to him, as witness the title: "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's" (1:1). The several references to "the king"<sup>6</sup> were, naturally enough, identified with Solomon as well. Second was the allegorical interpretation of the book, according to which the love of God and Israel is described under the guise of

<sup>1</sup> For the entire passage in M. Yad. 3:5, see note 38 below.

<sup>2</sup> On the canonicity of these contested Biblical books, see F. Buhl, *Canon and Text of the O. T.* (Edinburgh, 1892), pp. 3-32; H. E. Ryle, *Canon of the O. T.* (2nd ed., London, 1909); as well as the suggestive treatments of Max L. Margolis, *The Hebrew Scriptures in the Making* (Philadelphia, 1922), pp. 83-96, and S. Zeitlin, "An Historical Study of the Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures," in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. III (1932), pp. 121-58. See also R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the O. T.* (New York, 1941), pp. 50-70.

<sup>3</sup> See below, sec. VI.

<sup>4</sup> See R. Gordis, *Koheleth — The Man And His World* (New York, 1951), chap. IV (later referred to as *KMW*).

<sup>5</sup> In 1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12.

<sup>6</sup> In 1:4, 12; 7:6.

a lover and his beloved.<sup>7</sup> This seemed reasonable since wise King Solomon would surely occupy himself only with recondite, spiritual concerns. Hence the Solomonic authorship of the book undoubtedly strengthened, if it did not create, the allegorical interpretation of the Song. This interpretation found Biblical warrant in the frequent use by the Prophets of the metaphor of marital love to describe the proper relationship of Israel to its God.<sup>8</sup> This combination of factors overcame all doubts about the sacred character of the Song of Songs, and its canonicity was reaffirmed at the Council of Jamnia in 90 C. E., never to be seriously challenged again.<sup>9</sup>

## II. THE ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION

The allegorical view of the Song of Songs to which we owe its inclusion in the canon and therefore its preservation was already well established in the first century C. E. The Apocryphal book *IV Esdras* uses the figures of "lily," "dove," and "bride" to refer to Israel (5:24, 26; 7:26). While the comparison to a bride might conceivably be based on other Biblical passages, like Jer. 2:2; Isa. 62:5, the references to "lily" and "dove" point unmistakably to our book. The only passage in the *Septuagint* which may point to a mystical interpretation is the rendering of *mērōsh 'amānāh* in 4:8 as "from the beginning of faith," but this is far from certain, since *'amānāh* has the meaning "faith" in Neh. 10:1. The Mishnah cites the description of Solomon's wedding in 3:11 and refers it to the giving of the Torah and the building of the Temple.<sup>10</sup> The same view underlies the Targum on the book, and the Midrash *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*, as well as many talmudic interpretations of various verses in the book.

Medieval Jewish commentators like Saadia and Rashi accepted

<sup>7</sup> After the preliminary draft of this study was completed, Professor H. H. Rowley sent me his new book, *The Servant of the Lord and other Essays on the O. T.* (London, 1952). It contains a characteristically thorough yet engrossing study of "The Interpretation of the Song of Songs" (pp. 189-234), incorporating two earlier papers of the author in *JThS*, vol. 38 (1937), pp. 337 ff., and *JRAS* (1938), pp. 251 ff., and supplemented with valuable references to recent literature, from which I have profited greatly. On p. 232, note 3, he cites the older surveys of the history of the interpretation of the Song, from C. D. Ginsburg and Salfeld to Vaccari and Kuhl, to which he acknowledges his own indebtedness.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Hos., chaps. 1-2; Jer. 2:2; 3:1-3; Isa. 50:1 f.; 54:5; 62:4 f.; Ezek., chaps. 16, 23; II Esdras 9:38; 10:25 ff.

<sup>9</sup> In Christian circles, Theodore of Mopsuestia, who opposed its place in the canon, was excommunicated as a heretic.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. Ta'an. 4:8.

its assumptions unhesitatingly. It is possible that the unconventional Abraham Ibn Ezra may be expressing his secret doubts on the subject by the method he employs in his commentary, which he divides into three parts, the first giving the meaning of the words, the second the literal meaning of the passage, and the third the allegorical interpretation.<sup>11</sup> Commentators differed as to details, but the general approach was clear. The book narrates, in symbolic fashion, the relationship of God and Israel from the days of the Patriarchs and the Exodus, extols the steadfast love and protection that God has given His beloved, and describes the fluctuations of loyalty and defection which have marked Israel's attitude toward its divine Lover.

When the Christian Church accepted the Hebrew Scriptures as its Old Testament, it was easy to transfer the parable from the old Israel to the New Israel, though there were variations of attitude. The first known allegorical treatment was that of Hippolytus of Rome, written early in the third century. He precedes Origen, Jerome, and Athanasius, who referred the book to Christ and the Church, while Ambrosius and Cornelius a Lapide identified the Shulammitte with the Virgin Mary. Other figurative theories also were not lacking. Some of the older commentators, like Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, saw in it an allegory of the mystical union of the believing soul with God, a particularly congenial view, since mysticism has often expressed itself in strongly erotic terms.<sup>12</sup> Luther saw in it an allegory of Christ and the Soul.

The allegorical theory has been generally abandoned by modern scholars in its traditional guise. Yet a few contemporary Roman Catholic scholars<sup>13</sup> and some Orthodox Jewish writers<sup>14</sup> still interpret the book as an allegory of Israel's history.

<sup>11</sup> To be sure, in dealing with a similar procedure by Origen in his *Commentary on the Song*, Rowley (*op. cit.*, p. 200) denies that it implies any adherence to a literal meaning of the text. But what may be true of the 3rd century Church Father is not necessarily true of the medieval Jewish commentator, who frequently felt compelled to disguise his adherence to heterodox views, and even to polemicize against ideas that he found attractive.

<sup>12</sup> Cf., for example, R. A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London, 1914); G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1946).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. P. Joüon, *Le Cantique des Cantiques* (1909); A. Robert, "Le genre littéraire du Cantique des Cantiques," in *Revue Biblique*, vol. 52 (1943-44), pp. 192 ff.; E. Tobac, "Une page de l'histoire de l'exégèse," in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 21, part 1, 1925, pp. 510 ff., reprinted in *Les cinq livres de Salomon* (1926); G. Ricciotti, *Il Cantico dei cantici* (1928).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. J. Carlebach, "Das Hohelied," in *Jeschurun*, vol. 10 (1923), pp. 97 ff., especially pp. 196 ff.; R. Breuer, *Das Lied der Lieder* (1923).

Other forms of the allegorical theory have not been lacking. Isaac Abrabanel and his son Leo Hebraeus, basing themselves on the fact that Wisdom is described in *Hokmah* literature as a beautiful woman, who is contrasted with the "Woman of Folly" in Proverbs,<sup>15</sup> interpreted the beloved in the Song as a typological symbol of Wisdom, a view suggested in modern times by Godek and Kuhn. However, the details in the Song of Songs are both too concrete and too numerous to support this or any other allegorical view, which has accordingly found few adherents.

### III. THE CULT THEORY

The most modern form of the allegorical theory regards our book as the translation of a pagan litany. In 1914, O. Neuschatz de Jassy suggested that it is a version of an Egyptian Osiris ritual, while Wittekindt proposed the view that it is a liturgy of the Ishtar cult.<sup>16</sup> The theory was most vigorously propagated by T. J. Meek,<sup>17</sup> who, in 1922, published the theory that the Song is a liturgy of the Adonis-Tammuz cult, the rites of which were undoubtedly practised in Palestine and were denounced by the prophets.<sup>18</sup>

The influence of Mowinckel and others<sup>19</sup> has popularized the view that the poetry of the Old Testament is in large measure cult-material, most of which was taken over from Canaanite religion.<sup>20</sup> Once the

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Prov. 8:1 ff.; 9:1 ff., 22 ff.; B. S. 14:23; 15:2; Wisdom of Solomon 8:2 ff., and see *per contra* Prov. 9:13 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Neuschatz de Jassy, *Le Cantique des Cantiques et le mythe d'Osiris-Hotep* (1914); Th. J. Meek (see the following note for references); W. Wittekindt, *Das Hohe-Lied und seine Beziehung zum Istarkult* (Hanover, 1925); L. Waterman, in *JBL*, vol. 45 (1936), pp. 171-87; Graham and May, *Culture and Conscience* (1936), pp. 22 f. The same theory underlies the excellent commentary of M. Haller, *Die fünf Megillot* (Tuebingen, 1940).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. his papers, "Canticles and the Tammuz Cult," in *AJSL*, vol. 39 (1922-23), pp. 1 ff.; "The Song of Songs and the Fertility Cult," in W. H. Schoff ed., *The Song of Songs, a Symposium* (Philadelphia, 1924), pp. 48 ff.; "Babylonian Parallels for the Song of Songs," in *JBL*, vol. 43 (1924), pp. 245 ff. In private correspondence he later informed Professor Rowley that he had modified his views, without indicating in what direction. Cf. Rowley, *op. cit.*, p. 213, note 5.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Isa. 17:10 f.; Ezek. 8:14; Zech. 12:11. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether Jer. 22:18 refers to the ritual, and Isa. 5:1-7 surely is not connected with it.

<sup>19</sup> S. Mowinckel, *Psalmstudien*, vol. 2 (1922), pp. 19 ff.; Hempel, *Die alt-hebraische Literatur und ihr hellenistisch-juedisches Nachleben* (Wildpark-Potsdam, 1930-34), pp. 24 ff.; O. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das A. T.*, pp. 94 ff.; E. H. Leslie, *The Psalms*, pp. 55-62.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. L. Kohler, *Theologie des A. T.* (Tuebingen, 1936), pp. 169, 182;

theory was set in motion, not merely the Psalms, but also the books of Hosea,<sup>21</sup> Joel,<sup>22</sup> Nahum,<sup>23</sup> Habakkuk<sup>24</sup> and Ruth,<sup>25</sup> have been interpreted, in whole or in part, as liturgies of the fertility-cult, and the end of the process is not yet in sight. Thus Haller declares that the Song of Songs was originally a cult-hymn for the spring festival of Hag Hamazzot, which the Canaanites observed with a litany glorifying Astarte as "the beloved" and Baal as Dod "the lover." The Song, we are assured, is part of the widespread Near Eastern ritual of the dying and reviving god.<sup>26</sup> Deuteronomic theologians are then assumed to have profanized the originally sacred text, so that today it appears as a collection of erotic lyrics of a secular character. The impact of recent archaeological discoveries, particularly of Ugaritic literature, have given this view a new vogue.

Nevertheless, the cult-theory of the book can not be sustained, we believe, when subjected to analysis.<sup>27</sup> It begins with a hypothetical approach to the Hebrew Bible which is highly dubious. That the Old Testament contains only *Kulldichtung* is a modern version of the attitude which regards the Bible exclusively from the theological standpoint, instead of recognizing it, in A. B. Ehrlich's succinct phrase, as the Hebrews' "national literature upon a religious foundation."<sup>28</sup> Undoubtedly the religious consciousness permeated all aspects of the national life in ancient Israel, but the existence of secular motifs can not be ignored, particularly in the area of Wisdom, to which the art of the Song belonged, and with which it was identified.

There are other telling objections to the view that the Song of Songs is a liturgy of the dying and reviving god. That the Hag Hamazzot was such a festival in Israel is a gratuitous assumption, with

G. Hoelscher, *Geschichte der israelitischen und juedischen Religion* (Giessen, 1922), pp. 62 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. H. C. May, "The Fertility Cult in Hosea," in *AJSL*, vol. 48 (1930), pp. 73 ff.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. I. Engnell, in *Svenske Bibliskt Uppslagsverk*, vol. 1 (1948), col. 1075 f.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. P. Humbert, in *ZATW*, NF, vol. 3 (1926), pp. 266-80; *idem*, in *RHPR*, vol. 12 (1932), pp. 1 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. E. Balla, in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (1928), col. 1556 f.; E. Sellin, *Einleitung in das A. T.* (7th ed., 1935), p. 119.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. W. E. Staples, in *AJSL*, vol. 53 (1936), pp. 145 ff.

<sup>26</sup> The difficult נָחֵלֶת in 6:4, 10, he regards as a textual error for *Nergal*. On this passage, see *Commentary ad loc.*

<sup>27</sup> Cf. the trenchant criticism of N. Schmidt, "Is Canticles an Adonis Liturgy?", in *JAOS*, vol. 46 (1926), pp. 154-64; and H. H. Rowley, in *JRAS* (1938), pp. 251-76, now amplified in his *The Servant of the Lord*, pp. 219-32.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. his *Kommentar zu Psalmen* (Berlin, 1905), p. V.

no evidence in Biblical or in post-Biblical sources. The proponents of the theory are driven to adduce as proof the synagogue practice of reading the Song of Songs during Passover. The oldest reference to the custom, however, is in the post-Talmudic tractate *Sopherim*, which probably emanates from the sixth century C. E.,<sup>29</sup> at least a millennium after the composition of the book. Its liturgical use at Passover can be explained without recourse to far-fetched theories. It is eminently appropriate to the festival, both in its literal sense and in the allegorical interpretation which has been official for centuries. Its glorification of spring (cf. 2:11 ff.; 7:11 ff.) was congenial to the "festival of Abib" and the Midrash refers many passages in the text to the Exodus, with its moving spirits, Moses and Aaron. Efforts have indeed been made to find vestiges of the Ishtar-cult in the text, but none of them are at all convincing.<sup>30</sup> The Song of Songs makes no references to

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Sopherim* 14:16 (ed. Higger, p. 270), which apparently refers to its reading on the last two days of the festival, as observed in the Diaspora: בשיר השירים קורין בשרי אחרונה של בלילה שני: אחרונה בשני לילי ימים טובים של נלוות האחרונים חציו בלילה אחר וחציו בלילה שני: On the date of the tractate, see Higger, *op. cit.*, Introduction. The reason is indicated in *Mahzor Vitry*, p. 304: ולכן אנו אומרים בפסח על שם ששיר השירים מדבר מאוולת מצרים שנה לסותח: The medieval *piyyutim* which have entered the Passover liturgy are largely based on the *Song of Songs*, as in the cycle of hymns which begin with ברח דודי (Cant. 8:14).

<sup>30</sup> It has been argued that *zāmīr* in 2:12 must mean a "ritual song" (cf. Meek, in Schoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 49 f.). Actually, the root *zāmar* means "sing, make music," generally used in the Bible of ritual song, to be sure, but only because of the Bible's preoccupation with religious themes. The noun is used in a secular sense in Isa. 25:5, וְיִצְיִים, "the tyrants' song of triumph"; note the parallelism. See also Isa. 24:16; Job 35:10. It is noteworthy that the Talmud interprets Ps. 119:54, וְיִצְיִים, in a specifically secular sense and criticizes David for treating God's laws as mere song: מַמְיָן מַה נִּעְשֶׂה דָּוִד בְּעוֹמָה מִפְּנֵי שֶׁקָּרָא לְסֵפֶר תּוֹרָה וּמִרָתוֹ הוּא לִי חֲקִיקָה, "Why was David punished in the incident of Uzzah (II Sam., chap. 6)? Because he called the scroll of the Law mere 'songs'" (B. Sotah 35a; Yalkut Shimeoni, Psalm 119, sec. 480d). Actually, וְיִצְיִים is cognate to the noun וְיִצְיִים (cf. קָרָם, קָרִים, קָרָם, Jer. 18:14, on which see Gordis, in *JThS*, vol. 41, 1940, pp. 37 ff.). The root is used to refer to a secular song in *direct connection with our book*; cf. Tōs. Sanh. 12:10: רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אָמַר הַמִּנְחָנֶה קוֹל בְּשִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים בֵּית הַמִּשְׁחָאוֹת וְעוֹשֶׂה אִמּוֹ כִּמְיֵן וְאֵין לוֹ חֶלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, "He who gives his voice a flourish in reading the Song of Songs in the banquet-halls and makes it a *secular song* has no share in the world to come."

The 10th century agricultural calendar of Gezer lists ירחו ומר, "two months of vine-pruning." The Vav is best taken as a dual, status construct (so I. G. Février, in *Semitica*, vol. 1, 1948, pp. 33 ff.; W. F. Albright, in J. E. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Princeton, 1950, p. 320a), rather than simply as the old nominative ending (so D. Diringer, *Le iscrizioni antiche-ebraiche Palestinesi*, 1934, p. 5; Th. C. Vriezen-J. H. Hosper, *Palestine Inscriptions*, Leyden, 1951, pp. 12 f.). However, *yryhw zmr* comes after קץ ירחו and therefore, as Dalman (*PEFQS*, 1909, p. 119) points out, "it cannot be the first pruning which comes in March, but the second,

this spring festival or any other, or, for that matter, to any ritual observance.

Proponents of the theory are in diametrical disagreement on a fundamental issue, whether the alleged pagan ritual in the Song has remained in its original and unmodified form<sup>31</sup> or whether it has been drastically reworked as part of the JHVH cult.<sup>32</sup> If the former is the case, it is an insuperable difficulty that the entire book makes no references to dying<sup>33</sup> nor to weeping for the dead god<sup>34</sup> nor to the decay of

in June or July." Rowley (p. 229 f.) follows him in interpreting Song 2:12 as a reference to this second pruning. But this is very unlikely, since, according to the poem, the winter and the rain are just over and the first bloom is taking place. For this, June-July is too late. So, too, the parallelism with "the voice of the turtle-dove" strengthens the view that *zāmīr* refers to "singing." Accordingly, there is no basis for interpreting it either as a ritual song or as meaning "pruning," which is against the parallelism and the context (against Ehrlich).

Another *locus classicus* of the cult-theory has been קדור (5:9), which is rendered, "Who but: Dod is thy beloved?" (Meek, in Schoff, *op. cit.*, p. 55; Wittekindt, *op. cit.*, p. 82). Meek argues that *mah* means "who" in Babylonian, or that it is a textual error for קי. But even this assumed correction does not suffice to yield the required sense, which would have been expressed by some such phrase as קי דוד קי-אם דוד; cf. Isa. 42:19, קי עור כי אם-עקב, "Who is blind but My servant?" Actually, there is no real evidence for Dod as a divine name used in Israel. Conversely, Meek's objection to the usual interpretation is not valid. He argues that the rendering "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" requires the addition of "other." I do not know of an exact analogy in Hebrew for the construction, on either view, but supplying "other" is justified. Cf. Gen. 3:1: וְהָיָה הָיָה עָרִים, "The serpent was wiser than all *other* beasts of the field"; cf. *ibid.* 3:14; 37:3; Deut. 7:1; 33:24, בָּרוּךְ מִכֻּנִּים אֲשֶׁר, "Blessed above all *other* sons is Asher"; Judg. 5:24; Ps. 45:3. The usual rendering, literally, "What is thy beloved above (the class of) lover," is therefore eminently satisfactory.

The difficult בְּנִגְלוֹת (6:4, 10) is emended to נִגְלוֹל, "like Nergal," the Babylonian god of the underworld, who was the partner of Ninurta, the summer sun, and "whose powerful gaze is contrasted with the milder light of the dawn and the moon (Haller)." Even if this attractive suggestion be adopted, it offers no real support to the cult-theory. Ritual texts and mythological allusions may employ the same figures, but they are worlds apart in their outlook, as Homer and Milton, or Vergil and Dante, abundantly attest. Biblical writers use Leviathan, Tehom, Mot, Reseph, and other elements of pagan religion, but for them, unlike the Babylonian and Ugaritic epics, these are mythological references, not religious verities. This is particularly true with regard to astronomical phenomena. Cf. the Babylonian names of the months in the Hebrew calendar, which include the god Tammuz himself, or the modern names of the planets, the days of the week and the months. Actually, there are some important objections to the emendation. For these and for an alternative interpretation, see the Commentary *ad loc.*

<sup>31</sup> So de Jassay, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>32</sup> So Meek, in *Song of Songs — a Symposium*, p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> "Death" and "Sheol" are mentioned in 8:6 purely as similes.

<sup>34</sup> As, e. g., in Ezek. 8:14 ff., where it is clearly condemned as a foreign rite.



In the Christian Church, too, the literal view was known and fought. The position of the fourth-century Theodore of Mopsuestia was declared a heresy by the Second Council of Constantinople in 353. His objections to the book were repeated, in 1544, by Chateillon, who wanted it expunged from the canon as immoral. It is characteristic of the broader conception of canonicity in Judaism that no such demand for its elimination was made, even by the anonymous French Jewish commentator of the twelfth century or by a few other medieval Jewish writers who regarded it as a song written by Solomon for his favorite wife.<sup>40</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries various scholars suggested that the book was a collection of eclogues, and analogies with the Idylls of Theocritus were frequently invoked. It was Herder who, in 1778, explained it as a collection of songs extolling the joys of human love. This view, however, receded in popularity for over a century thereafter.

#### V. THE DRAMATIC THEORY

In the eighteenth century, years before Herder, several scholars, like Wachtel (1722) and Jacobi (1771), espoused the view that the book is a drama. This view is perhaps foreshadowed by two Greek manuscripts of the fourth and fifth centuries C. E., which actually supply speakers for the various verses of the book. It is the dramatic theory which was the first to win wide acceptance among modern scholars and readers in two variant forms. According to the first, adopted by Delitzsch, there are two main characters, King Solomon and a rustic Shulammitte maiden, and the book consists substantially of expressions of love by the two principal characters. According to the other view, first propounded by J. S. Jacobi and elaborated by Ewald, there are three characters, a beautiful maiden, her shepherd lover, and King Solomon, who on a visit to the countryside discovers her and becomes enamored of her beauty. The luxuries of the royal court and the blandishments of the king are powerless to shake her love. At length the young rustic lovers are reunited, and the play ends with a song on the lips of the maiden and her shepherd lover.<sup>41</sup>

ואחר כך משלי ואח"כ קהלל ופייתי ליה ר' יונתן מדרך ארץ כשאדם נער אומר דברי שיר הנדיל אומר  
דברי משלות חזקין אומר דברי הבליים:

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Rowley, p. 206, n. 4.

<sup>41</sup> The division of the book according to both views is conveniently set forth by S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the O. T.* (New York, 1906), 12th ed., pp. 437-43.

It is obvious that the second view has a dramatic tension lacking in the first, and it has been increasingly espoused by those who favor the dramatic theory.<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, the theory suffers from several grave drawbacks which must be clarified, since this view is still taken for granted in most popular treatments of the book:

1. That speakers must be supplied for the various lines would be natural and constitutes no difficulty. The crux lies in the fact that *the entire plot must be read into the book and the natural intent of the words be ignored again and again*. One or two instances must suffice. Thus Driver, following Ewald, attributes the opening section, 1:2-7, to the maiden in these words:

"Scene I. (The Shulammitte and Ladies of the Court.) — The Shulammitte, longing for the caresses of her absent shepherd-lover, complains that she is detained in the royal palace against her will, and inquires eagerly where he may be found."

Now none of this reconstruction is in the actual text. The opening verses 2-4 make no reference to the lover as being absent. Moreover, the complaint in verse 7, which is addressed directly to him, is not that she is detained against her will by the king, but that she can not find him among his fellow-shepherds. Finally, this interpretation does not do justice to the text of verses 5 and 6. The proud words of these verses, in which the maiden praises her own beauty and explains her dark hue, are hardly the words appropriate to one who wants to flee the court and the king's advances, in order to be reunited with her shepherd lover.

The remainder of chapter 1 is assigned to Scene II as follows:

Solomon (9-11) seeks to win the Shulammitte's love. The Shulammitte (12, aside) parries the king's compliments with reminiscences of her absent lover. — Solomon (15) — The Shulammitte (v. 16, aside) takes no notice of the king's remark in v. 15 and applies the figures suggested by it to her shepherd-lover.

Now verses 9-11 might *conceivably* be Solomon's words as he seeks to win her love, but there the plausibility of the reconstruction ends. Verse 12, "while the king sat at his table (or couch), my spikenard

<sup>42</sup> Thus only the older commentators, Hengsterberg, Keil, and Kingsbury, favor the first. The second is accepted by Driver (*op. cit.*). The catena of commentators who share this view is given in R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the O. T.* (New York, 1941), p. 715.

sent forth its fragrance" (JV), can not naturally mean (*pace* Driver) that "while the king *was away from me*, at table with his guests, my love (for another) was active" (italics Driver's). Nor is there anything to suggest that vv. 13-14 *parry* any of the king's compliments or that she has more than one lover in mind at all. Finally, assigning v. 15 to the king and v. 16 to the maiden, who is *referring to her absent lover*, means to divide what is obviously a single literary unit, both in form and in content. The love-dialogue is clear:

"Thou art fair, my beloved, thou art fair, thine eyes are doves."

"Thou art comely, my lover, and sweet, and our couch is fragrant."

There are many other instances where the exigencies of the dramatic theory artificially divide obvious literary units. Thus 2:2 is assigned to Solomon, while 2:3 is again attributed to the maiden as an *aside*.

2. Incidents which in a drama should have been acted out are narrated, as in 2:8; 5:1, 4. This is perfectly comprehensible in a lyric, but not in a play.

3. The climax of the plot is assumed to be 8:11 ff. Here the young lovers spurn the luxury of Solomon's court in favor of the delights of love, contrasting the high financial returns of Solomon's vineyard with the "vineyard" of the beloved's person and charm. But precisely here the dramatic form is totally lacking. Solomon is not addressed at all, which is what one should have expected in a dramatic confrontation of king and commoner as they contend for the maiden's hand. Instead, it is clear from the narrative phrase, "Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-Hamon," that Solomon is *not* present, and the adjuration in v. 12 is therefore rhetorical and not actual.

4. The distribution of the name "Solomon" in the book is worthy of note. Aside from the superscription (1:1), the name occurs six times more — in 1:5, where it is used generically,<sup>43</sup> and in two other sections, i. e. in chapter 3 (vv. 7, 9, 11) and in chapter 8 (vv. 11, 12), and *nowhere else*. The full significance of this fact will be discussed below. Suffice it to note that if Solomon were a principal protagonist of the drama, we should expect a more consistent use of his name

<sup>43</sup> יָרֵעוּחַ שְׁלֹמֹה means "Solomonic curtains," being parallel to "Arab tents," like our phrases "Louis Quatorze furniture," "Queen Anne fashions," and the like. On the meaning and poetic structure, see the Commentary *ad loc.*, and see Gordis, "Al Mibneh Hashirah Haivrit Haqedummah," in *Sefer Hashanah Liyhudei Amerikah* (New York, 1944), pp. 151 ff.

throughout the book than the existing pattern. As for the noun "king," *hammelek*, which might conceivably be an epithet for Solomon in the drama, it is also very rare in the book, occurring in only three additional passages (1:4, 12; 7:6) besides its use together with "Solomon" in two cases (3:9, 11).

5. That the book is a drama presupposes that it is a literary unit. This is, however, ruled out categorically by linguistic considerations. The noun *pardēs* (4:13) is of Persian origin, and the passage in which it occurs can not, therefore, be older than the Persian period (6th century B. C. E.). On the other hand, in 6:4 the lover compares his beloved to Tirzah and Jerusalem. The parallelism makes it clear that the poet must be referring to Tirzah, the old capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was replaced with Samaria by Omri in the first half of the ninth century B. C. E.<sup>44</sup> A lover does not usually praise his beloved by comparing her to a city ruined centuries earlier! Hence this passage can not be later than the ninth century B. C. E.<sup>45</sup> It is obvious that if at least one passage in a book can not be earlier than the sixth century, and another can not be later than the ninth, the work is manifestly not a literary unit, and the dramatic theory is conclusively ruled out.

## VI. SONG AS A BRANCH OF WISDOM

In the Hebrew Bible, the Song of Songs finds its place in the third section, the Hagiographa, in proximity to Psalms and Lamentations on the one hand, and to Proverbs and Job on the other. This third section is not a heterogeneous collection but, on the contrary, possesses an underlying unity, being the repository of *Hokmah* or Wisdom. Wisdom was much more than a branch of literature. It included all the technical arts and practical skills of civilization. The architect and the craftsman, the weaver and the goldsmith, the sailor and the magician, the skillful general and the wise administrator of the state, are all described as *hakāmim*, "wise."<sup>46</sup> In Rabbinic Hebrew the epithet *hakāmāh* is applied also to the midwife.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Cf. I Kings 16:23 f. Oesterley-Robinson, *History of Israel* (Oxford, 1932), p. 463, dates the accession of Omri to the throne as 886 B. C. E. W. F. Albright, in L. Finkelstein, ed., *The Jews* (New York, 1949), p. 33, places it as circa 876 B. C. E.

<sup>45</sup> The grounds for maintaining that there is even older material in the book, going back to the 10th century B. C. E., will be presented below.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Gen. 41:8; Ex. 28:3; 35:25, 31; 36:1; Isa. 10:13; 29:14; 44:25; Jer. 9:16; 10:19; 49:7; Ezek. 27:8; Ps. 107:27.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. M. Shab. 183; M. R. H. 2:5; B. 'Er. 45a.

While all these phases of *Hokmah* disappeared with the destruction of the material substratum of ancient Hebrew life, it was these practical and technical aspects of *Hokmah* that were primary, and its more theoretical meaning to designate metaphysical and ethical truths embodied in literature is a later development. This semantic process from the concrete to the abstract, which is universal in language, is validated also for the Greek *sophia*, which is strikingly parallel in its significance.<sup>48</sup> The basic meaning of the Greek word is "cleverness and skill in handicraft and art," then "skill in matters of common life, sound judgment, practical and political wisdom," and ultimately, "learning, wisdom and philosophy."<sup>49</sup> The adjective *sophos* bears the same meanings, being used of sculptors and even of hedgers and ditchers, but "mostly of poets and musicians."<sup>50</sup> The noun *sophistes*, "master of a craft or art," is used in the extant literature of a diviner, a cook, a statesman, and again of poets and musicians. From Plato's time onward, it is common in the meaning of a professional teacher of the arts.<sup>51</sup>

The Hellenic culture-area serves as a valuable parallel, shedding light not only on the origin and scope of ancient "Wisdom," but also on the development and function of the teachers and protagonists of the discipline, but that is not our concern here.<sup>52</sup>

One of the most frequent uses of the term *Hokmah* refers it to the arts of poetry and song, both vocal and instrumental, for the composition and the rendering of songs, which were often done by the same individual, required a high order of skill. Thus the women skilled in lamentation at funerals are called *hakāmōth* by Jeremiah (9:16).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Gordis, *KMW*, pp. 18 ff., 30 ff., for a full discussion of the parallels between Greek *sophia* and Hebrew *Hokmah*.

<sup>49</sup> In its first meaning, *sophia* is applied to Hephaestus, the god of fire and the arts, to Athena, to Daedalus, the craftsman and artist, and to the Telchines, a primitive tribe who are represented under three aspects: 1) as cultivators of the soil and ministers of the gods; 2) as sorcerers and envious demons, who had the power to bring on hail, rain, and snow, and to destroy animals and plants; and 3) as artists working in brass and iron. (Gen. 4:20-22 offers a suggestive parallel.) *Sophia* is used of such crafts as carpentry, driving a chariot, medicine and surgery. It is used preeminently of singing, music and poetry (*Homeric Hymn to Mercury*, lines 483, 511; Pindar, *Odes*, 1, 187; Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 1, 2, 8). On the usage of all three terms here discussed, cf. Liddell-Scott, *Greek Lexicon*, s. v.

<sup>50</sup> Pindar, *Odes*, 1, 15; Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 12:38; Plato, *Laws*, 696c. See Liddell-Scott, *op. cit.*, s. v.

<sup>51</sup> Pindar, 1, 5, 36; Aeschylus, *Fragmenta*, 320; cf. Liddell-Scott, *op. cit.*, s. v.

<sup>52</sup> For a characterization of Wisdom, see Gordis, "The Social Background of Wisdom Literature," in *HUCA*, vol. 18 (1944); *KMW*, pp. 16-38.

The relationship between Wisdom and Song was so close that the terms were used interchangeably. Thus in I Kings 5:10-12 we read: "And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men: than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the nations round about. And he spoke three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five."<sup>53</sup> Ethan and Heman, who are here described as "wise,"<sup>54</sup> are the eponymous heads of the musical guilds in the Temple in Jerusalem. Note, too, that the same Biblical passage attributes both "proverbs" and "songs" to Solomon.

The songs of the prophet Balaam are called *māshāl* (literally, "parable, proverb"), perhaps because the poems are replete with comparisons (Num. 23:7, 18; 24:3, 15, 20, 21, 23). But essentially the term is a synonym for "song." Thus the unknown poets, whose military epic is cited in the fragment in Num. 21:27-30, are called *mōshelīm* (literally, "makers of *mashal*"). The term *hīdāh*, "riddle, mysterious saying," together with *māshāl*, is applied to the song played on the *kinnōr*, "the lyre" (Ps. 49:5; 78:2). The recently discovered evidence from Ugaritic sources corroborates the Biblical tradition, previously dismissed as anachronistic, which declares that these guilds of singers are very ancient. In fact, they probably go back to the Canaanite period.<sup>55</sup>

Now Wisdom literature as a whole began on a secular note and only gradually took on a religious coloration. This is clear from the chronology of the best attested branch of Oriental Wisdom, that of Egypt, where religious motifs are late in appearing. Similarly in Israel, as Pfeiffer correctly says, "We know positively that the secular school (of Wisdom) flourished before the pious."<sup>56</sup> The oldest popular Hebrew proverbs and the Wisdom fragments imbedded in the Historical books are all secular in character.<sup>56a</sup>

A similar development may be postulated for that branch of Wisdom called *shir*, which includes both poetry and music. The Song certainly played an important role in religious ritual, at sacrifices processions and festivals, but it was not limited to these areas. Actu-

<sup>53</sup> Or, "five thousand," with the Septuagint.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. I Kings 5:10-12 with I Chron. 15:19 and the superscriptions of Psalms 88 and 89, and see Gordis, *KMW*, p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> So W. F. Albright, in an unpublished paper, "The Canaanite Origin of Israelite Musical Guilds."

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 650.

<sup>56a</sup> Cf. I Sam. 10:12; 24:14; II Sam. 14:14; I Kings 20:11; II Kings 14:9; Jer. 23:28; 31:29; Ezek. 16:44; 18:2.



ally, it was coextensive with life itself, dealing with all the normal secular concerns of life, such as combat and victory,<sup>57</sup> the opening of a well, vintage and harvest,<sup>58</sup> feasting and carousing,<sup>59</sup> the glory of nature and the tragedy of death.<sup>60</sup>

Undoubtedly the poems of national significance, like those of war and victory, were given a religious character, as in the "Song of the Sea" (Ex. 15) or the "Song of Deborah" (Judg. 5), since the historical experience of Israel was conceived as reflecting the will of God. But it is noteworthy that many of the briefer snatches of song which are preserved in prose narratives and are explicitly quoted from older collections, like the *Book of the Wars of the Lord* (Num. 21:14) and the *Book of Jashar* (probably the "Book of Heroes," Josh. 10:13; II Sam. 1:18; I Kings 8:53 in the Greek), are purely secular in content. The Song, like Wisdom, as a whole, later developed a religious stamp, but it remained an acquired characteristic.

For self-evident reasons, the secular note would be more likely to be preserved in the area of love and courtship, which has inspired more poetry and music than any other field of human interest. Into this area, where the sensual and the physical play so important a part, the traditional religious coloration would have the greatest difficulty in penetrating. The existence of secular love-songs in ancient Egyptian and Akkadian literature,<sup>61</sup> as well as among contemporary Arab peasants and city dwellers,<sup>62</sup> strengthens this contention, besides offering many a key to the understanding of the Biblical song.<sup>63</sup>

## VII. THE SONG OF SONGS AS A COLLECTION

If the Song of Songs be approached without any preconceptions, it reveals itself as a collection of lyrics. This view of the book was taken by a Middle High German version of the 15th century, which

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Gen. 4:23; Judg. 15:16; I Sam. 18:7.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Num. 21:17 ff.; Isa. 16:10; 22:13; 27:2.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Amos 6:5; Isa. 5:12; Job 21:12; Ps. 69:13.

<sup>60</sup> II Sam. 1:19 ff.; 3:33; cf. Amos 5:16; Jer. 9:16 (מקטנות, חכמות, יודעי נהי).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. A. Erman, *Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, tr. by Blackman (London, 1927); J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near-Eastern Texts Relating to the O. T.* (Princeton, 1950).

<sup>62</sup> For a collection of these songs, containing text, translation, and notes, see the extremely valuable study of St. H. Stephan, *Modern Palestinian Parallels to the Song of Songs* (Jerusalem, 1926).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Gordis, *KMW*, pp. 16 ff., and note R. H. Pfeiffer's judicious statement on the subject (*Introduction*, p. 712): "There must have existed in Palestine during the last centuries of our era a considerable amount of erotic poetry of which our book alone survives by accident."

divided it into 54 songs. A long catena of modern scholars have adopted the same position, though naturally differing on the division of the book.<sup>64</sup>

A great step forward in the interpretation of the Song was taken in 1893, when J. G. Wetzstein, Prussian consul in Damascus, called attention to the nuptial customs of the Syrian peasants, who have the couple sit on a "throne" during the wedding-meal as "king" and "queen," while the guests sing songs of praise (*wasf*), glorifying the bride and groom. In some cases, the bride also executes a "sword dance" during the festivities. The affinities with several passages in the Song are obvious, and many scholars were accordingly led to interpret the entire collection as emanating from such wedding celebrations.<sup>65</sup>

That the praise of the bride on her wedding day was a regular feature of Jewish weddings in Second Temple days, and that these songs of praise were a technical art and therefore part of Hokmah, is clear from an ancient Talmudic tradition. It reads as follows: "How is one to dance before (i. e. praise) the bride? The Shammaites declare: 'By praising her for the qualities she actually possesses.' The Hillelites say: 'By saying of every one, O bride, beautiful and gracious.'"<sup>66</sup> The same function continued to be performed by the *badhān* or humorous rhymster at East-European weddings until our day.

On the other hand, it is clear that some of the lyrics in the Song of Songs are not connected with wedding ceremonies or with married love at all.<sup>67</sup> The only justifiable conclusion is that the Song of Songs,

<sup>64</sup> Jastrow and Budde each finds 23 songs, though they differ on the subdivisions. Haller finds 26, Bettan 18. We divide the book into 28 songs, several of which are fragmentary and some of which may be doublets. Popular songs frequently circulate in many versions.

<sup>65</sup> So Wetzstein, Budde, Stade, Cornill, Kautzsch, Jastrow, Cassuto, Goodspeed, and others. Cf. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 716.

<sup>66</sup> B. Ket. 16b: כיצד מרקדין לפני הכלה בית ששאי אומרים כלה כמות שהיא בית הלל אומרים: כלה נאה וחמודה.

<sup>67</sup> At the same time, Gebhardt's objection to the view *in toto* is much too extreme. The doubts which have been raised by H. Granquist as to the existence of such a custom as a "king's week" among the Arabs of Palestine overlook the clear-cut references in Jewish practice to שבוע ימי המשתה, "the seven days of feasting" following the wedding, which are observed to the present day with a repetition of the Seven Nuptial Blessings first recited at the marriage. Moreover, Rothstein's objection that the bride is never called "queen" in the Song loses part of its force when it is recalled that while Rabbinic literature cites and elaborates on the proverb חתן דומה למלך, "The bridegroom may be compared to a king" (Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, chap. 16), there is no corresponding phrase about the bride. However, the Sabbath is described

like the Psalter, is an anthology, running a wide gamut of its emotions. It contains songs of love's yearning and its consummation, of coquetry and passion, of separation and union, of courtship and marriage.

The division of the songs will depend upon the changes in theme, viewpoint, background or form. These criteria will not always be sufficiently exact to command universal assent. Much will be dependent upon the literary taste and insight, as well as upon the knowledge, of the interpreter. But this is simply a restatement of the truth that exegesis is essentially an art, which rests upon a foundation of scientific knowledge.

### VIII. SOLOMON IN THE SONG OF SONGS

If the Song of Songs is an anthology of love poems, how are the seven instances of Solomon's name in the text to be explained? For on this view he is neither the author of the book, as the traditional view claims, nor its hero, as is maintained by the dramatic theory.

Several of these instances are easy to explain. In the opening verse of the book (1:1), we have a later superscription by an editor who had already accepted the theory of Solomon's authorship.<sup>68</sup> In three other passages, the use of the name is authentic. These are in 1:5 ("Solomonic hangings"), where it is a descriptive term like our "Louis XIV furniture," and in 8:11 and 12, where Solomon is used to typify a possessor of great wealth, as the ancients used "Croesus" or as moderns might use the name of a multi-millionaire like Vanderbilt or Rockefeller.

The other three examples of Solomon's name, it is generally suggested, are glosses which were induced by these authentic occurrences of the name in the text, and were reinforced by the tradition of Solomon as the "great lover" (I Kings 11:1 ff.). It would therefore be natural to believe that he was also intended by the word *melekh*, "king," in the Song, though the word actually referred to the bridegroom. Hence "Solomon" was added as a gloss in three more verses (3:7, 9 and 11).

For all its apparent plausibility, however, this approach is not adequate. Not only do we find "Solomon" used without the word "king" in 3:7, but the word "king" occurs several times in the book without the gloss "Solomon" (1:4, 12; 7:6). The clue to the solution

as both "queen" and "bride" in Talmudic and post-Talmudic sources; cf. Shab. 119a and Solomon Alkabetz' famous hymn *Lechah Dodi*.

<sup>68</sup> Hence the use of the relative *še*, instead of *'asher*, and the high valuation on the book expressed in the title. See the Commentary *ad loc*.

lies in the observation that the only three passages in the book in which Solomon is apparently unauthentic (3:7, 9, 11) *all occur in the same poem*.

This poem (3:6-11) is generally regarded as a rustic wedding song. But if it is scrutinized carefully, a variety of problems arise:

The poem contains many descriptive traits which, literally viewed, can not apply to a simple peasant wedding. The pillars of smoke (v. 6) and the sixty heroes trained in war (v. 7) are often dismissed as poetic hyperbole. However, v. 10, "he made its pillars of silver, the top thereof of gold, its seat of purple, its inside being inlaid with ivory,"<sup>69</sup> is much too explicit to be merely the product of a poet's heightened imagination. A country lover might describe the open fields as his fresh couch, the cedars as the walls of his home and the sycamores as his rafters (1:16 f.), but the circumstantial description of a luxurious palanquin, far beyond the reach of a rustic couple, would be a mockery rather than a tribute of praise to the lovers.

Another difficulty is the explicit national note to be found only here. Not only do we have a reference to "the daughters of Jerusalem" (3:10), which is familiar from other passages in the Song (2:7; 3:5; 5:8, 16; 8:4), but "the daughters of Zion" (3:11) are mentioned in this poem, and nowhere else. Most important of all, while the Palestinian locale pervades the entire book, the only national reference, that to "Israel," occurs in 3:7.

Moreover, the occurrence of Solomon's name in these verses is not easily solved by deletion. In 3:7, "king" does not occur and "Solomon" can not be removed without leaving a lacuna. Hence the entire stich must be dropped. In v. 11 the deletion of "Solomon" irreparably destroys the rhythm of the verse.<sup>70</sup> Even in v. 9, the excision of the name is not required on rhythmic grounds.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Reading *הַבָּיִת* with Graetz and most moderns, or *בְּבֵית* with Tur-Sinai; cf. I Kings 10:22; Amos 6:4. See the Commentary.

<sup>70</sup> The meter of the verse is 2:2:2 || 3:3:3. *B'yōm h'ṯhunāthō* receives three beats, both because of its length and the exigencies of the meter. On this procedure, as well as on the technique of longer stichs at the end of a poem, cf. the study by Gordis cited in note 43 above, pp. 136-59, especially pp. 140 f., 145 f.

<sup>71</sup> The *kinah* rhythm is not limited to the 3:2 pattern, its basic trait being a longer stich followed by a shorter. Scholars have been led astray here by the conjunctive accents linking *hammelekh šelōmōh*, when actually the words belong to separate stichs, with a 4:3 meter for the verse, which is in climactic or complementary parallelism. Similarly, in Num. 23:7 the words *bālāq melekh mō'ābh*, though linked by conjunctive accents, belong to separate stichs. For a full discussion of the meter of the verse, cf. Gordis, "A Wedding Song for Solomon," in *JBL*, vol. 63 (1944), especially pp. 266 ff.

These difficulties, cumulatively viewed, all point to the conclusion that we have here no song for a rustic wedding but, quite the contrary, an epithalamium for a wedding of great luxury, one possessing even national significance. In fact, all the details cited are easily explained by one assumption — *that we have here a song composed on the occasion of one of Solomon's marriages to a foreign princess*, probably an Egyptian.<sup>72</sup>

Such a poem has survived in Psalm 45, in which an Israelite king is marrying a Phoenician princess.<sup>73</sup> Obviously, songs were composed for and sung at different stages of the wedding ceremony. Psalm 45 is addressed to the king (vv. 3–10) and to his new queen (vv. 11–14), perhaps after the marriage rites had been concluded. Our song, on the contrary, is a chorus of welcome addressed to the bride as her procession approaches from across the wilderness which separates Palestine on the east and on the southwest from its neighbors.

All the details of the poem are explained naturally on this simple premise. The princess travels with a large retinue, which encamps at night and sends up pillars of smoke (v. 6). Her palanquin was sent to her by Solomon and is escorted by the royal bodyguard, sixty of the heroes of Israel (v. 7; cf. II Sam. 23:8 ff.; I Kings 1:10). The litter is made of the finest cedarwood of Lebanon, one of the by-products of his commercial relations with Phoenicia. Its decorations of silver, gold, purple and ivory (v. 10) are in keeping with Solomon's penchant for luxury, and may well have been prepared by the noble ladies of Jerusalem (v. 11).

All the references to Solomon in the book, aside from the title, are thus authentic, including the three references in this song, which dates from Solomon's reign. The presence of this poem, in the collection, would serve as the nucleus for the tradition attributing the entire book to Solomon.

In connection with this early date for the song, two linguistic problems must be considered. Graetz derived the word 'apiriōn, "litter, couch" (3:9), from the Greek *phoreion*, which would imply a

<sup>72</sup> On Solomon's foreign marriages in general, cf. I Kings 11:1 ff.; on his marriage to the Egyptian princess, cf. I Kings 3:1.

<sup>73</sup> The dating of Psalm 45 has been the subject of wide difference of opinion. While it has been referred to Solomon (Kirkpatrick), to Jehu (Briggs, ICC), to Ahab and Jezebel (Hitzig, Buttenwieser), or to Jehoram and Athaliah (Delitzsch), Pfeiffer's judgment that the king's name can not now be determined is the soundest view. Evidently, such compositions must have been common, though only one has survived in the Psalter. The preservation of another example in the *Song of Songs* is perfectly natural, in fact even more appropriate.

period considerably after Solomon's day. However, this etymology is far from certain. On independent grounds, many scholars prefer other derivations, the most plausible being from the Sanskrit *paryanka*, "sedan, palanquin."<sup>74</sup> That Solomon had regular commercial relations with India is being increasingly recognized, as scholars re-evaluate the Biblical evidence in the light of new extra-Biblical data.<sup>75</sup> Ac-

<sup>74</sup> So Robertson-Smith in Yule, *Glossary of Anglo-Indian Words*, p. 502; Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Lexicon*, s. v. Tur-Sinai (in his paper, p. 4, n. 1) adduces an Akkadian parallel *cp* (*p*)*aru*, meaning "hut of reeds" and also "head covering." Erbt and Wittekindt read 'appidyōn, from Babylonian 'aphad = "come as messenger." Zapletal reads *appadan*, Babylonian "tent," which occurs in Dan. 11:45. Tur-Sinai makes a new suggestion in *Halashon Vehasepher* (Jerusalem, 1951), p. 389, where he argues that a litter is too small an object and suggests that the word is actually a scribal combination of מָא, "also," and an unknown word מִין.

<sup>75</sup> The technical term "ship of Tarshish," which the book of Kings applies both to Solomon's vessel that sailed with Hiram's navy and brought back "gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks" (I Kings 10:22) and to the ships of Jehoshaphat which sailed from the southern port of Ezion-geber (I Kings 22:49), has been regarded as a generic term for a large vessel, no matter what its destination, like our English "Indiaman." Thus it could be used of vessels going eastward to Arabia, Africa, or even India. This in spite of the fact that the place-name "Tarshish" has been generally equated with some port west of Palestine, such as Carthage (LXX on Ezek. 27:12), the Roman province of Africa (Targum on I Kings 22:49; Jer. 10:9), Tarsus in Cilicia (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1, vi, 9), Etruscan Italy (Cheyne), Tharsis on the Black Sea (Desnoyers), Tharros in Sardinia (Covey-Crump), or, as is most generally accepted, Tartessos in Spain (first proposed by Eusebius and revived by Bochart; cf. W. Max Müller, *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, pp. 683 f.; Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon*, pp. 510 f.).

On the other hand, it seems clear that the book of Chronicles thought of Tarshish as lying to the east of Palestine, since it uses the phrase "ships going to Tarshish" in its account of these same nautical enterprises of Solomon and Jehoshaphat (II Chron. 9:21; 20:36). This was long dismissed as another example of the unreliability of the Chronicler. Recent scholarship has, however, gone far in rehabilitating his credibility (cf., for example, Von Rad, *Die Geschichtsbildung der Chronistischen Werke*, Stuttgart, 1930; Martin Noth, *Uelterlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, Halle, 1943; W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, Baltimore, 1940, p. 268). It is, therefore, not impossible that the Chronicler's view of Tarshish is another example where his value was unduly discounted in the past. Thus Bochart's old attempt to validate the Chronicler's references by assuming that there were two localities referred to as "Tarshish," one in the Western Mediterranean, the other in the Indian Ocean, was dismissed summarily by scholars (cf. W. Max Müller, *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, p. 684n). On the other hand, J. Hornell recently contended vigorously that Tarshish refers to "a great mart on the west coast of India," from which gold, spices, pearls, and other gems were shipped westward (cf. his paper, "Naval Activity in the Days of Solomon and Rameses III," in *Antiquity*, vol. 21, p. 72). This view is favorably considered by Salo W. Baron (*A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd ed., New York, 1952, vol. 1, p. 321, n. 3.).

Whatever the identification of Tarshish, the Oriental provenance of 'apiriōn,

cording to our sources (I Kings 10:22), Solomon's imports from the East included ivory, apes (*qōph*) and peacocks (*tūkī*). As the derivation of these words indicates (Sanskrit, *kapi*; Malabar, *toqai*, *toqhai*), India was the point of origin of these luxuries. In addition, Solomon's ships might well have imported the palanquin, or at least the materials from which it was constructed, from India, together with its native name.

The syntactic construction in 3:7 (*miṭṭāthō šeliš-lōmō*), which would seem to reflect Aramaic influence,<sup>76</sup> does not represent an insuperable objection to a Solomonic dating for the poem as a whole. Popular songs often tend to be supplemented and modified with time, so that a late phrase may enter an early poem, and inconsistencies result. The composite character of folk-poetry must always be kept in mind. Thus, in a modern Palestinian love-lyric, the girl Fulla is addressed as Jewish, Mohammedan and Christian, all in the course of the eleven stanzas of the song.<sup>77</sup> While she is called Serena, a popular name of Spanish-Jewish actresses (stanza 4), she is described as making her ablutions before prayers, a Mōhammedan practice (stanza 6), while the marriage ceremony is described by a specifically Christian term (stanza 9).

Moreover, the evidence is constantly growing that an "Aramaic" usage is not necessarily late in Hebrew. Not only in Northern Israel, but even in the south, the close linguistic affinities of the two languages<sup>78</sup> were strengthened by continuous relations between Israel

rather than the proposed Greek etymology for the word, becomes increasingly more plausible.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Dan. 3:26; 4:23, and such frequent Mishnaic locutions as רבנו של עולם.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Stephan, *op. cit.*, pp. 35 f.

<sup>78</sup> That this affinity involved not only the vocabulary, but also the phonetic and morphologic structure of Hebrew, was conclusively demonstrated by Max L. Margolis. Cf. E. A. Speiser in Max L. Margolis, *Scholar and Teacher*, edited by R. Gordis (Philadelphia, 1952), pp. 31-34.

On the various categories of "Aramaisms," see *KMW*, pp. 59, 362 f. Cf. also Driver's judgment (*op. cit.*, p. 440) that "š and many words common in Aramaic are part of the northern dialect." They represent part of the North-West-Semitic vocabulary, common to both Aramaic and Hebrew, except that some words became common in the former and were used only sporadically in the latter. To this category of a common *Wortschatz*, we may assign, in addition to the relative (cf. Judg. 5:7; 6:17; 7:12; 8:26; II Kings 6:11), ברוח (1:17, instead of ברוש; cf. שבלח for שבלח in Judg. 12:6) and שלקח (1:7), a Hebraized form of the Aramaic דלקח.

Many others have classical Hebrew parallels: לכי (2:13 Kethib, cf. II Kings 4:2 Kethib); נש (1:6; cf. Lev. 19:18; Amos 1:11, reading נש for נש; Jer. 3:5, 12, etc.); קפץ, "leap" (2:8; cf. קפץ, "close, clench," Deut. 15:7; Isa. 52:15); הרחיב (6:5;

and Syria throughout the pre-Exilic period.<sup>79</sup> The usage may, accordingly, be older than can at present be documented in our extant sources.<sup>80</sup>

Moreover, related instances of pronominal anticipation occur in Biblical Hebrew and Phoenician.<sup>81</sup> Hence we are not forced to delete the entire clause from the poem, or even to assume that it was introduced later.<sup>82</sup>

Whatever approach be adopted on this detail, the unique features of this poem mark it as a royal wedding-song going back to Solomon's reign. It is at present the oldest datable unit in the book. By contributing to the growth of the tradition of Solomonic authorship, it helped to win inclusion for the entire Song of Songs in the canon of Scripture.

## IX. DATE OF THE BOOK

Being lyrical in character, with no historical allusions, most of the songs are undatable. There are, however, a few exceptions, which have already been noted. The song in which Tirzah, the early capital of North Israel, is referred to (6:4), must predate the year 876 B. C. E., when Omri made Samaria the capital of his kingdom, while the use of a Persian word like *pardēs* (4:13) can hardly antedate the 6th century. Yet even this latter inference must be qualified by the consideration already adduced above, that folk songs often undergo many

cf. Isa. 3:5; *Rahab* the mythological monster mentioned in Isa. 30:7; Job 9:13, etc.); Lamed accusative (2:15; 8:13; cf. Lev. 19:18, 34; II Sam. 3:30).

Authentic Aramaic borrowings seem to be חרכים (2:9); כחל (2:9); סחו (2:11); סמר (2:13, 15; 7:13); פו (2:13); טף (5:3); טטניס (7:9); and סנה (7:3), though new texts may change the picture. See note 80.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. A. T. Olmstead, *A History of Palestine and Syria* (New York, 1931).

<sup>80</sup> Thus the word 'ašāh occurs only in the Hebrew of Ben Sira (50:3) with no Biblical parallel, but it is found in the Mesha Inscription (Line 9) as 'ašāh. The late Biblical and Mishnaic word *nechasim* occurs once, in Josh. 22:8. The root *kibbel*, occurring only in Job 2:10 and Esth. 9:27, and generally regarded as a late Aramaism, was recently found by Albright in the Tell-el Amarna Letters (*BASOR*, 89, Feb., 1943, pp. 29 f.). On the conjunction *še*, once regarded as a "late Aramaism," see note 78.

<sup>81</sup> In Biblical Hebrew, pronominal anticipation occurs a) with a verbal suffix (Ex. 2:6; 35:5; Jer. 9:14; Ecc. 2:21); b) with a nominal suffix, which resembles our usage more closely (Ezek. 10:3; Prov. 13:4; Job 29:3; Ezra 3:12; possibly also Num. 23:18; 24:3, 5) and c) after the preposition Lamedh (Ezra 9:1). That the usage is early in origin is attested by its occurrence in Phoenician in the Karatepe Inscription of Azitawadd (9th or 8th century B. C. E.); cf. Text C, I, lines 17-18, לשבתם דדניס, lit. "for the dwelling of them, of the Danunians"; III, line 4, לחתי בעל כרנחריס, lit. "for the giving of him, of Baal Kalendris (?)." Cf. C. H. Gordon in *JNES*, vol. 8, 1949, pp. 113 f.; N. H. Tur-Sinai in *Leshonenu*, vol. 17, no. 4, p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> So Jastrow, H. L. Ginsberg (orally, to the writer), Haller.

changes with time, so that later words and expressions may well be inserted into such older material. The grounds for attributing one song (3:6–11) to the period of Solomon have already been set forth. Thus the datable material in the Song spans five centuries. The period begins with Solomon's accession to the throne (c. 960 B. C. E.), includes the early days of the Northern Kingdom (c. 920–876), and reaches down to the Persian era (6th–5th century).

The variations in language, which point to a considerable difference in the dates of the different songs, are only one factor, though decisive, in making it impossible to agree with Rowley, who has "the impression of a single hand" in the Song with "a corresponding unity of theme and style."<sup>83</sup> So, too, the varying geographical locales, from the Lebanon mountains in the north to the Dead Sea region in the south, from Transjordan to the central valleys, plainly point to a different provenance for the various songs. The change from rustic simplicity in some lyrics to the sophistication of the city in others points in the same direction.

It is most probable that the other songs in the book fall within the same four centuries as the datable units, with the bulk of the material being pre-Exilic rather than post-Exilic. The freshness of the poetry, the naturalness of the references to the Palestinian landscape, and the unabashed attitude toward love all seem to point to the period before the Babylonian Exile. No national disaster has yet cast its shadow over the temper of the people, and there is no echo as yet of the deepening of the religious consciousness which followed the Restoration under Cyrus and the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. That most of the place-names are northern and eastern also points to the pre-Exilic era, in fact to the period preceding the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B. C. E., since the Jewish settlements were restricted largely to Judah in the south during the Persian and pre-Maccabean period. The book was redacted in the Persian period, the heyday of Wisdom literature, not later than the fifth century.

#### X. HEBREW ELEMENTS IN THE SONG OF SONGS

Love lyrics are, as we have seen, difficult to date because their basic emotion knows no limit of time. Since the sentiment is not limited in space, love songs are not specifically national. In this respect, the Song of Songs shares the qualities of Wisdom literature as a whole, which is the most secular and least particularist element of Hebrew literature.

<sup>83</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 212 f.

Nonetheless, some specific *national* coloring is to be found in the book. The reference to "the heroes of Israel" (3:7) is needed in this epithalamium of a foreign princess to indicate the nationality of her bodyguard. The "tower of David" upon which the shields of the heroes are hung (4:4) testifies to the widespread living character of the tradition of David's band of heroes, which is now embodied in the lists in II Sam. 23:8 ff.

The only other national notes are *geographical*, the cities, hills, and valleys of the country. Principally, the book reflects the background of Northern Israel. It is the northern mountain range which appears in Hermon and Senir (modern Jebel esh-Sheikh) as well as in Lebanon (now Jebel Libnan) and 'Amana (the modern Jebel Zebedâni).<sup>84</sup> The central territory of Northern Israel appears in Shunem,<sup>85</sup> in Carmel and Sharon, as well as in Tirzah, if its location is to be sought at Tel-el-Fâr'ah. Transjordan appears in Heshbon (modern Hesban), in the south, in the districts of Gilead and possibly in Bashan to the north.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, the territory of Judah is sparsely represented. Aside from the references to the daughters of Zion (3:11) and of Jerusalem (3:5: 5:8), only En-gedi on the Dead Sea is mentioned (1:14).

The preponderantly northern coloring of the book, as already noted, is significant in strengthening the view that the songs are predominantly pre-Exilic. The northern provenance of the songs also explains the Aramaisms in the book, which reflect the close proximity of the pre-Exilic Kingdom of Israel to Syria. Foreign products and articles bear foreign names, whether Sanskrit or Persian.<sup>87</sup>

Attention to the geographical locale is sometimes helpful in delineating the literary unit. The passage 1:9–17 is often regarded by commentators as one song.<sup>88</sup> However, the references to Pharaoh's horses and chariots (v. 9), which were most likely to be seen in Southern Palestine, and the mention of the vineyards of En-gedi on

<sup>84</sup> On the modern identification of these sites, see Wright-Filson, *Historical Atlas to the Bible* (Philadelphia, 1945), pp. 107 ff. While Deut. 3:9 informs us that Senir was the Amorite equivalent for Hermon, the Song (4:8) treats them either as distinct mountain peaks or as a wider designation for the Anti-Lebanon range.

<sup>85</sup> The equivalence of "Shulammit" with "Shunemite," long maintained, is attested by *Sulem*, the modern Arabic name of *Shunem*. On other recent theories, see the Commentary *ad loc.*

<sup>86</sup> If *בְּסֻדְרֵי הַשֵּׁן* in 7:5 is to be read as *בְּהַקְשֵׁן*, in view of the other geographical similes in the *wasf*.

<sup>87</sup> Thus *שָׂרָדִים* (4:13) is not a garden, but a park. Of the spices mentioned, *אֶהְלֹחַ*, *קִנְמֹן* and *בָּשָׂר* are probably Indian, like *אֶרְנוֹן* and *אֶשְׁרֵיִן*. *אֶנֶן* may be Persian. See the Lexicons of Brown-Driver-Briggs and Baumgarten-Kohler, *s. v.*

<sup>88</sup> So e. g., Jastrow, Haller. Pfeiffer (*op. cit.*, p. 710) regards vv. 12–17 as a unit.

the western shore of the Dead Sea (v. 14), point to Judah in the south. On the other hand, the reference to the lovers' meeting in the forest, their "house walled with cedars" (v. 17), must necessarily reflect a North Israelite locale, since cedars never grew in southern Palestine.<sup>89</sup> So, too, the Aramaized form *berōthīm*, "sycamores," for the more common Hebrew *berōšīm* (v. 17), points to the Northern Kingdom, which was more exposed to Aramaic influence. It is therefore clear that the passage consists of two independent songs (1:9-14 and vv. 15-17).

When this is recognized, other divergences which tended to be overlooked or misunderstood receive a natural and unforced explanation. The first song speaks of the beloved as luxuriously decked out in jewels (vv. 9-11), and the lover is called "king" (v. 12) and is therefore the bridegroom. He is probably speaking during the festivities of the bridal week and hence uses the plural (*na'aseh*, v. 11) in the presence of his friends. Hence, too, the frank reference to sexual intimacy (vv. 12-13). The second song, on the other hand, reflects the simplicity of an outdoor tryst of lovers (note *dōd*, v. 16), not of the bride and groom, hence the delicate reticence regarding their relationship.

Religious motifs are even rarer in the book than specific national references. In the noun *šalhebhethyāh*, "flame of God" (8:6), the Divine name is used to express the superlative, and the word is equivalent in meaning to "a mighty flame." This usage has many analogies in Biblical Hebrew.<sup>90</sup>

We believe that Hebrew religious attitudes, hitherto unrecognized, lie at the base of a unique phenomenon in the book, the adjuration "by the gazelles and the hinds of the field" (2:7; 3:5), "not to disturb love until it be sated." That the gazelle and the hind were symbolic of love is, of course, clear from Biblical and post-Biblical Hebrew, where they were used as metaphors for a graceful and loving young woman.<sup>91</sup> Ebeling, in his study of Babylonian magic, calls attention to the Babylonian practice of tying a gazelle to the head of the bed and a ram at the foot as a magical rite to induce potency, with the formula, "like that ram may my husband love me."<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *Enzyklopädie Miqra'it* (Jerusalem, 1950), vol. 1, p. 554b.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. *קִשְׁלָה*, "deep gloom" (Jer. 2:31); *קִרְבָּה*, "great enlargement" (Ps. 118:5); *נָבוֹר צִיד לַקִּנִּי ה'*, "an exceedingly mighty hunter" (Gen. 10:9); *אֵל אֱלֹהֵי הַצֵּד*, "mighty cedars" (Ps. 80:11).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *אֵלֶּה אֲהַבִּים וְיָצַלְתָּ מֵהֶם* (Prov. 5:19). These and similar terms are frequent in the love poetry of Jehudah Halevi, Immanuel of Rome, and other medieval Hebrew poets.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. J. Ebeling, "Liebeszauber im alten Orient," in *Mittheilungen der alt-orientalischen Gesellschaft*, I (1905), pp. 27, 33.

This is, however, far removed from an oath "by the gazelle," particularly for the strongly monotheistic Hebrews. A closer parallel is afforded by the Greek custom, practiced by no less a figure than Socrates, of swearing by an animal, as e. g. "by the dog," "by the goose," or by any nearby plant or object, such as "by the caperberry," "by the almond" and "by the cabbage."<sup>93</sup> The Greek philosophers defended this usage by asserting that the Greeks never intended to swear by the animals as gods, but used the animals as substitutes for gods. This was no mere apologetics, but a reflection of the widespread fear of the consequence of an unfulfilled oath. Hence arose the desire for an "escape formula."

Another factor, however, often enters into the choice of a substitute, which has been overlooked — *a similarly sounding term, even if irrelevant or virtually meaningless, is often chosen*. Thus the Rabbinic vow-term *ḥorban* would frequently be replaced by *kōnām*.<sup>94</sup> In contemporary colloquial English, this phenomenon can be clearly observed. "Gosh darn" does duty for "God damn," "Gee," for "Jesus," "Jiminy Crickets" for "Jesus Christ," "Holy Cow" for "Holy Christ," etc.<sup>95</sup> Older substitutions of the same kind that entered English literature are "zounds" for "By God's wounds," "Marry" meaning "indeed," for "By Mary," "Dear me," probably for "Dio Mio," "By Cripes" for "By Christ." The German replaces "Gott" by "Potz" in "*Potzweil*," "*Potzweil*" and "*Potzblitz*." The Frenchman changes "Dieu" into *bleu* in "Corbleu," "Morableu," "Sambleu," and avoids the name of God altogether by swearing by "nom de nom."

Of the common speech of the Hebrew populace, little, if any, has reached us, and so the only extant example of this phenomenon is to be found in our book.

The most solemn Hebrew adjuration would be *be'lōhei š'bhā'ōth* or *b'el šaddai*, "by the Lord of Hosts" or "by the Almighty."<sup>96</sup> The

<sup>93</sup> Cf. the discussion in S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1942), pp. 125-27, who cites some of the abundant material assembled in P. Meinhardt, *De forma et usu iuramentorum*, pp. 77 ff., and Hirzel, *Der Eid*, p. 96, note 2.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Lieberman, *op. cit.*, p. 129, note 106.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Burgess Johnson, *The Lost Art of Profanity* (New York, 1948); esp. pp. 26, 101, 116, 117. I am indebted to Professor Mario A. Pei for this reference. I was unable to consult *A Dictionary of Profanity and Its Substitutions* by M. R. Walter, on deposit in manuscript form in the Princeton University Library, to which Johnson refers.

<sup>96</sup> The most popular oaths naturally invoked the God of Israel: a) *חַי ה'*, "As JHVH liveth" (I Sam. 14:39, 45; 19:6, and often; I Kings 1:29; 2:24, and often; Jer. 4:2; 5:2, and often; Ruth 3:13); (אלהים) *נשבע בה'* (Josh. 2:12; 9:19; I Kings 1:17; 2:8, etc.). b) *חַי האלהים* (II Sam. 2:27); *נשבע באלהים* (Gen. 21:23). c) (rarely)

deepseated reluctance to use the Divine name, which finds expression in the Third Commandment (Ex. 20:7), became increasingly felt with time. This tendency is mirrored in such Biblical books as Esther and Ecclesiastes, as well as in the editing of Psalms, and finds varied expression in Rabbinic literature.<sup>96a</sup> The desire to avoid mentioning God's name would be particularly strongly felt in connection with an oath concerned with the physical aspects of love. Hence, the lover replaces such customary oaths as *bē'lohei šbhā'ōth* or *b'el šaddai* by a similarly sounding phrase *bišbhā'ōth 'ō b'aylōth hassādeh*, "by the gazelles or the hinds of the field," choosing animals, which symbolize love, for the substitutions. It is likely that the Septuagint retained some recognition of the oath by rendering the unique Hebrew phrase "in (or, by) the powers and the forces of the field."<sup>97</sup> The Midrash also recognized the irregular character of the oath in the Song and identified "the gazelles and the hinds" with "the hosts of heaven and earth."<sup>98</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the homily rests upon a fine perception of the essential meaning of the text.

אל (Job 27:2). d. חי ה' אלהיך (I Kings 17:12; 18:10); נשבע לה' (Zeph. 1:5; Ps. 132:2).

Additional solemnity undoubtedly attached to oaths with more elaborate formulas as a) חי ה' אלהי ישראל (I Sam. 25:34; I Kings 17:11); b) "As JHVH, Lord of Hosts, liveth" (I Kings 18:15; II Kings 3:14); c) "By the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, liveth" (I Kings 18:15; II Kings 3:14). A possible double oath occurs in only one poetic passage: חי ה' וברוך צורי, "God liveth and my Rock is blessed" (II Sam. 22:47 = Ps. 18:47). So also the oath *בְּחַיִּי הָעוֹלָם*, "By Him who liveth eternally" (Dan. 12:7).

To avoid mentioning JHVH, oaths by His name became common: בְּשֵׁם ה' (Isa. 48:1); בְּשֵׁם (Deut. 6:13; Jer. 12:16); בְּשֵׁם הָרִדִּי (Jer. 44:26); בְּשֵׁם (Jer. 12:16).

Joint oaths invoking God and a human being also occur: a) חי ה' וחי נפשך (I Sam. 20:3; 25:26; II Kings 2:2; 4:30); b) "As God lives and as does your soul" (I Sam. 20:3; 25:26; II Kings 2:2; 4:30); c) חי ה' וחי אדני המלך, "As God lives and as does my lord, the king" (II Sam. 15:21).

The Lord Himself swears by His own being: a) חי אני, "As I live" (Num. 14:21; Jer. 22:24; Ezek. 5:11; 14:16, and often; Zeph. 2:9). b) חי אני (Deut. 32:40); בי, "By Myself" (Gen. 22:16; Isa. 45:23; Jer. 22:5; 49:13). c) בקדשו, "By His holiness" (Amos 4:2); בקדשי, "By My holiness" (Ps. 89:36). d) בנפשו, "By His essence, literally, soul" (Jer. 51:14; Amos 6:8). e) בימינו, "By His right hand" (Isa. 62:8). f) "By the glory of Jacob," an epithet for God (Amos 8:7).

<sup>96a</sup> Cf. now the illuminating study by S. S. Cohon, "The Name of God, a Study in Rabbinic Theology," in *HUCA*, vol. 23, 1950-51, Part I, pp. 579-604.

<sup>97</sup> Reading *ἐν ταῖς δυνάμεσι καὶ ἐν ταῖς λαχύσεσι τοῦ ἀγροῦ*. Cf. Siegfried *ad loc.*

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Midrash Shir Hashirim Rab. 2:7: אַלְעִיזֵר אֹמֵר הִשְׁבִּיעַ בְּשֵׁם ה' וּבְשֵׁם הָאָרֶץ. "By what did he (sic) adjure them? R. Eliezer says, 'He adjured them by heaven and earth. *Bišbhā'ōth* means by the host (šbhā') above and by the host below.'"

In this reticence with regard to the use of the Divine name, particularly in the context of sensual love, as well as in its pervasive delicacy of expression, which will be discussed below, the Song reveals itself as authentically within the Jewish tradition.

At times, the differences between the Hebrew poet and his Oriental confrères prove highly revealing of the Hebrew *ethos*. Moreover, what the Song does not say is often as significant for its Israelite outlook as any overt Hebrew element.

Thus, hunting was a favorite sport in Egypt and Mesopotamia, as literary sources and archaeological discoveries abundantly indicate.<sup>99</sup> In a love-song emanating from "the Golden Age" of Egyptian lyric poetry in the 18th dynasty,<sup>100</sup> the maiden expresses the yearning for her lover:

"How good it would be,  
If thou wert with me  
When I set the trap."

She is referring to a small trap set for bird-catching. It is noteworthy that in all the references to nature in the Song, hunting is not mentioned. Nimrod and Esau were hunters, but the taking of animal life for sport was not popular in ancient Israel,<sup>101</sup> an attitude crystallized further in Rabbinic Judaism.<sup>102</sup>

Even more characteristic of the Hebrew spirit is the absence of the personification of nature in the Song. In the Egyptian poem "The Tree in the Garden" the poet goes on to say, "The tree speaketh."<sup>103</sup> For the Hebrew poet, nature serves as the glorious background for human love, but never as more, exactly as nature is the manifestation of the creative power of God for the Psalmist and for Job.<sup>104</sup>

The age-old relationship of wine, women, and song finds its reflection, of course, in the Song, for wine-drinking was widespread in Israel. Nonetheless, references in our book to the first member of

<sup>99</sup> Cf. K. Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon* (Tuebingen, 1937), pp. 286 ff.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. J. A. Wilson, in Pritchard, *op. cit.*, p. 468a.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. W. H. Bennett, in Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, pp. 437 f.; K. Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon* (Tuebingen, 1937), pp. 286 ff. On the other hand, killing animals in self-defense was naturally practised (cf., for example, Judg. 14:6; I Sam. 17:34 ff.), and some game animals were used for food (Deut. 12:15, 22; I Kings 5:3).

<sup>102</sup> The Jewish laws of *shehitah*, which prescribed slaughter with a knife, effectively ruled out the use of birds or animals killed in the hunt.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Erman, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>104</sup> Cf., *inter alia*, Psalms 19 and 105; Job, chaps. 38-41.

the triad are very few.<sup>105</sup> Nothing is to be found resembling these lines of an Egyptian love song:<sup>106</sup>

"Her lover sitteth at her right hand,  
The feast is disordered with drunkenness."

The absence of this theme in the Song may, of course, be the result of the choice of poems in the collection. It is at least equally likely that it reflects a negative attitude toward drunkenness, which became traditional in Judaism.

Another common aspect of love-poetry, virtually missing here, is the motif of faithlessness and jealousy.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, the Egyptian maiden complains:<sup>108</sup>

"What meaneth it that thou wrongest another heart and me?"

To be sure, coquetry and the maiden's resistance to the lover's advances occur as themes,<sup>109</sup> but no "love triangle" is to be met with in our book. This absence, however, must be accidental, or the result of the editor's choice — the human emotion involved is ubiquitous and must have existed in ancient Israel.

#### XI. EXTRA-HEBREW PARALLELS TO THE BOOK

The universality of love as an emotion and an experience, which is responsible for the absence of any considerable degree of specific Hebrew coloration in the book, should make us wary about postulating direct borrowings from other peoples in these songs. Mere resemblances of theme are not sufficient. What is methodologically required is a special sequence of theme or some other unusual feature, not explicable in terms of Hebrew background. A few centuries later, the Palestinian city of Gadera was the home of the gifted Greek poets Meleager and Philodemus the Epicurean, who flourished in the 1st century B. C. E. It is a purely gratuitous assumption that the lyric

<sup>105</sup> Note that in 1:4 and 7:10, wine is used merely as a comparison, while in 1:6 and 8:12, the vineyard is a symbol for love. The difficult closing phrase of 5:1 is the only direct reference to heavy drinking in the Song (*šikh'ru*, literally "become drunk"). See the Commentary on this passage.

<sup>106</sup> Erman, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>107</sup> The noun *kin'ah* in 8:6, as the parallelism indicates, means "passion." The possibility of other lovers is raised in 1:7. See the Commentary *ad loc.*

<sup>108</sup> Erman, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>109</sup> As e. g. 2:14; 4:12 ff.; 5:2 ff.; 8:8 ff.

gift was limited to the Greek inhabitants of the country and that the Hebrews were congenitally incapable of love-poetry.

With the all but universal rejection of a Greek date for the book today, scholars have turned instead to the Egyptian culture-milieu in seeking evidence of borrowing in the Song of Songs. Thus, it has been argued that the use of *'āhōth*, "sister," for "beloved" is an Egyptian usage. Being unhebraic, the word was glossed by *kallāh*, "bride," everywhere except in the last passage (4:9, 10, 12; 5:1, 2).<sup>110</sup> Actually, the assumption of glossing is not supported by the meter. Of the five passages where the term occurs, it is not accompanied by *kallāh* in one (5:2), and it can not be a gloss in two others (4:9, 12), because its deletion would destroy the rhythm of the text.<sup>111</sup> In the other two passages (4:10; 5:1), metric considerations can not be invoked at all, since either the retention or the deletion of *'āhōth* would produce an acceptable rhythmic pattern.<sup>112</sup>

The entire assumption that the usage is unhebraic, however, is unjustified. The Hebrew nouns *rē'a* and *ra'yāh* (*r'ūth*), which are common in the meanings "friend" and "neighbor," also signify "beloved."<sup>113</sup> Similarly, the synonyms *'āh* and *'āhōth*, "brother, sister," develop the parallel meanings of "friend, neighbor" and "beloved."<sup>114</sup> *Ahōth* therefore means "beloved" in the Song, when the lover, in an outburst of emotion, heaps up terms of endearment, coupling "sister"

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 711. As a matter of fact, *'āhōth* occurs in the meaning of "beloved" with no gloss, in another song, 8:8. See Commentary *ad loc.*

<sup>111</sup> The MT in 4:9 has a 3:3:3 meter. The deletion of *לָהּ* would create 2:3:3, a rare, if not impossible, pattern, since as a rule closing stichs are longer than the opening ones only at the end of a literary unit, for the purpose of creating a strong close. See the following note for an example, and cf. the study cited in note 43, p. 146. In 4:12, the rhythm is 2:2:2:2, which would also be destroyed by deleting *לָהּ*, to create a 3:4 meter.

<sup>112</sup> In 4:10, the MT is 4:3:3, a common form of the *kināh* rhythm. With the deletion it would be the frequent 3:3:3 meter. In 5:1, the MT exhibits the 4:3:3:3 pattern; with the deletion of *ahōth*, it would be 3:3:3:3. The closing stich, *אָהוּתוֹ*, which is widely regarded as out of place, is in 2:3 rhythm, normal at the close of a poem. See note above on the metric principle involved, and see the Commentary *ad loc.*

<sup>113</sup> On *רֵא* as "friend," cf., *inter alia*, Gen. 38:12; as "fellow, neighbor," cf. Ex. 2:13; Lev. 19:18; as "lover," cf. Jer. 3:1. On *רַעְיָהּ* as "friend," cf. Judg. 11:37 *Kethib*; as "fellow, neighbor," cf. Ex. 11:2; Jer. 9:19; Esth. 1:19; as "beloved," cf. Song 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4.

<sup>114</sup> On *אָה* as "friend," cf. II Sam. 1:26; I Kings 9:13; as "fellow, neighbor," cf. Lev. 19:17. On *אָהוּתוֹ* as "fellow, neighbor," cf. Ex. 26:3, 5, 6, 17; Ezek. 1:9, 23; 3:13.



either with "bride" or with "friend."<sup>115</sup> So too, the Hebrew and Arabic word for "daughter," *bat, bint*, means "girl" and is not restricted to the specific family relationship.<sup>116</sup>

Nor is there any objective ground for assuming that the feeling for nature was an exclusively Egyptian trait. The God speeches in Job manifest a loving insight into nature unparalleled elsewhere, and the prophets and psalmists disclose a love and observation of the external world which needed no foreign influence or literary borrowing.<sup>117</sup>

Of direct borrowings in the authentic sense, there is no evidence. Nonetheless, since love is the same anywhere, the reactions and forms of expression of love-lyrics everywhere will resemble each other. Accordingly, Oriental love poetry, ancient and modern, often sheds light upon the background of the Hebrew poem. Because of the close relationship of love to magic and religion<sup>118</sup> which modern psychology and anthropology have revealed, ancient incantation texts also add considerably to our understanding of the Song.<sup>119</sup>

Tur-Sinai<sup>120</sup> has called attention to the background underlying 8:9:

If she be a wall,  
We will build upon her a turret of silver;  
And if she be a door,  
We will enclose her with boards of cedar.

<sup>115</sup> On the equivalence of *אָח* and *רַע*, cf. Ps. 35:14, *כָּרַע כְּאָח־לִי הַתְּהַלֵּכֶתִי*, Job 30:29, *אָח הֵי־יָתִי לְתַנִּים וְרַע לְבָנוֹת וְעָנָה*.

<sup>116</sup> Tur-Sinai calls attention to this fact, *op. cit.*, p. 367. This usage is not restricted to Biblical Hebrew (Gen. 30:13; Isa. 32:9; Prov. 31:29), but is common in modern Israeli Hebrew as well.

<sup>117</sup> Cf., on the appreciation of beauty in the Bible, the eloquent presentation of S. Goldman, *The Book of Books*, vol. 1 (New York, 1948).

<sup>118</sup> Cf., *inter alia*, J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York, 1922); A. E. Crawley, *The Mystic Rose* (New York, 1927); B. Z. Goldberg, *The Sacred Fire* (New York, 1930).

<sup>119</sup> Cf. J. Ebeling, "Liebeszauber im alten Orient," in *Mitteilungen der orientalischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 1 (1925); *idem*, "Aus dem Tagewerk eines assyrischen Zauberpriesters," in *MAOG*, vol. 5 (1931). It is the merit of N. H. Tur-Sinai, in his paper "Shir Hashirim," now reprinted in his *Halashon Vehasepher*, vol. II (Jerusalem, 5711), pp. 351-88, to have utilized this material for the interpretation of our book with great brilliance. At times, however, his deductions, like his basic view of the *Song* as part of a gigantic prose-poetic history of Israel (cf. p. 388), do not carry conviction.

<sup>120</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 367. We are, however, unable to accept his interpretation (p. 368) that *šey'dubbar bāh* (8:8) means "when incantations are pronounced upon her."

Charms warding off all types of perils were couched in this form. Thus, for example, the Assyrian charm against a crying baby was as follows:

It it is a dog, let them cut off morsels for him!  
If it is a bird, let them throw clods of earth upon him!  
If it is a naughty human child, let them adjure him with  
the oath of Anu and Antu!

Even more apposite, because it demonstrates that *homah*, "wall," and *deleth*, "door," "bar," in 8:9 are synonymous and not antithetic, is the following charm against an enemy:<sup>121</sup>

If he is a door, I will open thy mouth,  
If he is a bar, I will open thy tongue.<sup>122</sup>

Obviously there is no incantation implied any longer in the Song, but the formula has survived as a love motif.

While several *wasfs* in praise of the beloved occur in the book, only one *wasf* praising the lover is to be met with (5:10-16). In part the description is highly extravagant and goes beyond the limits of metaphor. Thus, for example, 5:11, 14, 15:

"His head is fine gold . . .  
His hands are rods of gold, set with topaz . . .  
His thighs are pillars of marble  
Set upon sockets of gold . . .

Perhaps these phrases are more than mere poetic hyperbole. This is suggested by a Babylonian adjuration for the recovery of a sick person from illness:<sup>123</sup>

Like lapis lazuli I want to cleanse his body,  
Like marble his features should shine,  
Like pure silver, like red gold,  
I want to make clean what is dull.

The Biblical *wasf* may therefore be extolling the health and potency of the lover.

A long-standing difficulty in the Song is presented by 5:1. The first four stichs of the verse speak of the lover enjoying the myrrh,

<sup>121</sup> Ebeling, "Aus dem Tagewerk," p. 19.

<sup>122</sup> Ebeling's rendering "seine Zunge" is a *lapsus calami*. The Akkadian is *lišānaka*.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

honey, wine and milk that symbolize the delights of love. The fifth stich of the verse is couched in the plural:

*'ikh'elū rē'im š'thū v'sikh'rū dōdīm*

"Eat, friends, drink abundantly, O loved ones." It is, of course, inconceivable that either the love-struck youth or the maiden would invite others to enjoy the same pleasures as the loved one, and the stich has therefore been emended either to the masculine singular<sup>124</sup> or to the feminine,<sup>125</sup> either procedure requiring no less than five changes. Some have regarded the stich as a misplaced fragment of an independent song.<sup>126</sup> A solution to the problem through an illuminating parallel is offered by an Arab song, widely known all over Palestine and Syria, which would indicate that the poet may address the individual lover in the plural, as well as in the singular:

Examine me,  
O physician,  
As to what I suffered  
On behalf of the beloved one.

By God, O Lord!  
This is a wondrous thing;  
Yet my heart melted  
For the beloved ones.<sup>127</sup>

The Hebrew text of 5:1 is therefore in order and the stich is in place.

<sup>124</sup> Ehrlich reads: אכל רעי שמה ושקר דודי.

<sup>125</sup> Haller reads: אכלי רעיתי שתי ושקרי דודים.

<sup>126</sup> So Budde, who deletes the stich entirely, also Jastrow.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Stephan, *op. cit.*, p. 80. The text reads as follows:

*Ykšif 'alayya  
Ya tabb  
'Ala-lli alāni  
Min il-ḥabb  
Wāllah ya rabb  
ha-l-āmru 'ajīb  
Wāna 'albi dāb  
'Ala l-abbāb.*

Stephan (note 3) suggests that the plural *ab-bāb* is used for the sake of the rhyme (with *dāb*). That is hardly a compelling reason, since the singular *ḥabb* would be an excellent rhyme for *'ajīb*, and the second and fourth lines of the stanza would be in rhyme, exactly as in the preceding stanza, *ḥabb* rhymes with *tabb*.

## XII. MOTIFS AND PATTERNS IN THE COLLECTION

Because of the degree of subjective judgment which must enter into the delimitation of the songs, unanimity is not to be expected. Our own study of the book indicates that it contains twenty-eight songs and fragments, which fall into several patterns, though they often overlap. To mark each basic theme, we have added descriptive titles:

### A. SONGS OF YEARNING

The Call to Love (1:2-4)  
The Rustic Maiden (1:5-6)  
Tell Me Where My Love (1:7-8)  
Love's Proud Proclamation (2:4-7)  
Would Thou Wert My Brother (8:1-4)  
Let Me Hear Thy Voice (8:13-14)<sup>128</sup>

### B. SONGS OF FULFILLMENT

Love's Barriers — a Duet (4:12 to 5:1)  
How Delightful Is Love (7:7-10)  
The Beloved's Promise (7:11-14)<sup>129</sup>  
Love Under the Apple-Tree — a Duet (8:5)  
Surrender (2:16-17)

### C. SONGS IN PRAISE OF THE BELOVED

Bedecked in Charm — a Duet (1:9-14)  
My Beloved Is Perfect (4:1-7)  
Love's Enchantment (4:9-11)  
The Power of Beauty (6:4-7)  
The One and Only (6:8-9)

<sup>128</sup> V. 14 is best taken as a quotation of the words which the lover wishes to hear (השקיעני: בנה דודי), an invitation to enjoy the delights of love (so Haller; slightly differently Bettan).

<sup>129</sup> The entire passage 7:7-10 and 11-14 may constitute a single song in duet form, the first portion being spoken by the lover, the second by his beloved. However, there is no direct plea to the beloved in 7-10, which is essentially a poem of praise, and vv. 11-14 do not constitute a direct answer. We therefore prefer to regard these passages as two independent poems.

## D. DUETS OF MUTUAL PRAISE

Our Walls Are Cedars (1:15-17)  
 Who Is Like My Love (2:1-3)  
 The Lover's Welcome (2:14-15)

## E. LOVE IN THE WORLD OF NATURE

The Time of Singing Is Come (2:8-13)  
 Call From the Mountains (4:8)  
 Love's Dawning (6:10-12)<sup>130</sup>

## F. DREAM SONGS

The Dream of the Lost Lover (3:1-5)  
 Love's Trial and Triumph (5:2 to 6:3); see below.

## G. THE GREATNESS OF LOVE

The Seal of Love (8:6-7)  
 The Finest Vineyard (8:11-12)

## H. SONGS OF COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

A Wedding Song for Solomon (3:6-11)  
 The Maiden's Dance (7:1-6)<sup>131</sup>  
 The Ramparts of Love (8:8-10)

## I. LOVE'S SORROWS AND JOYS

Love's Trial and Triumph (5:2 to 6:3)

This, the most elaborate and perhaps the most beautiful song in the collection, is a blending of several patterns: (a) the *dream motif* (5:2), which incorporates the themes of coquetry (5:3) and longing (5:4 ff.); (b) the *wasf* in praise of the lover (5:10 ff.); and (c) praise of the delights of love (6:2 f.).

<sup>130</sup> It is possible that these verses may be independent fragments. V. 12 is completely untranslatable in its present form. See the Commentary for some of the emendations proposed.

<sup>131</sup> That this is a dance is clear from the fact that the description of the bride begins with her feet. That the occasion is a wedding is highly probable, both from the frank description of her physical charms, by far the most outspoken in the book, and from the reference to the "king," i. e. the bridegroom, in v. 6.

In several instances, the units seem very short and we have merely fragments,<sup>132</sup> perhaps only titles of songs, which are no longer extant in their full form. On the other hand, it must always be remembered that in these charming lyrics we lack the music to which they were invariably sung. The number of words and lines required for a song would therefore generally be fewer than in the case of poetry designed to be read. One has only to compare the few words in the popular Israeli song or traditional Hasidic melody with the longer texts of modern poetry in Hebrew or any other language to see the difference. The longest lyric in the book (5:2 to 6:3), which consists of eighteen verses, is, as has been noted, a highly complex blending of several literary motifs.

In a collection such as this, it is to be expected that phrases and verses will reappear more than once.<sup>133</sup> Glosses are, of course, not to be ruled out *a priori*, but deciding which words are secondary is a particularly precarious undertaking in a collection of popular folk-songs, where additions are natural.<sup>134</sup> Thus the two dream-songs (3:1-5 and 5:2 ff.) repeat the theme of the city watchmen, but the second passage introduces a variation, which is in thorough keeping with the more elaborate development of the song as a whole.

## XIII. SYMBOLISM AND ESTHETICS IN THE SONG

It is of the essence of poetry that it employ *symbolism* to express nuances beyond the power of exact definition. This is particularly true of love poetry, where the reticences imposed by social convention add both urgency and piquancy to the use of symbols. Hence the beloved will be compared to a flower (2:1 f.), and the lover to a tree (2:3). The delights of love will be described as fruit (2:3), wine (1:4;

<sup>132</sup> Cf., for example, 8:5 or 8:13 f. Albright has made the suggestion that Psalm 68 may contain the titles of a collection instead of being the text of a single poem.

<sup>133</sup> Such are the three adjectives of the daughters of Jerusalem (2:7; 3:5; 8:4), the first two of which include the reference to the hinds and the gazelles of the field. So, too, the same text is repeated in 2:5 and 8:3; the phrase seems less relevant in the second passage. The two dream songs (3:1-5 and 5:2 ff.) repeat the theme of the city watchmen (3:3; 5:7) with a variation in the latter.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 710, for a list of alleged glosses. Some are essential to the text and need only to be interpreted correctly (as e. g. 5:6). Most rest upon considerations of meter which of themselves do not suffice to justify excisions in the text. Not only is there great uncertainty concerning all theories of Biblical meter proposed (cf. W. H. Cobb, *A Criticism of Systems of Hebrew Meter*, Oxford, 1905), but our lack of the accompanying music makes it impossible to tell what words were repeated or lengthened in the chanting of the songs.

5:1), or perfume (5:1), as milk and honey (5:1), as a garden (4:12; 5:1; 6:2), or a vineyard (8:12). The maiden's resistance to the lover's advances will lead to the metaphor of a sealed fountain (4:12) or a high wall (8:9),<sup>135</sup> and the beloved "enemy" will be attacked with the power of charms (8:8 ff.). The invitation to the lover will be couched in the form of a call to enjoy the vineyard (2:15), the fountain (4:15), or the garden (4:16), while the confession that love's demands have been met will be expressed by the figure of a vineyard unguarded (1:6) or of a gazelle upon the mountains of spices (2:17; 8:14).

Symbolism is much more profound than allegory. In allegory, the imaginary figures that are chosen as equivalents for the real characters and objects involved have no independent reality of their own. The language of symbolism, on the other hand, is superior to literal speech as well, because its elements possess both existential reality and a representational character. When, for example, the maiden, in 2:4 f., announces that she is faint with love and asks to be sustained with raisins and apples, she is calling for concrete food, to be sure, but *at the same time*, by her choice of fruits that are symbolic of love, she is indicating that only the satisfaction of her desires will bring her healing. To cite another instance, when the beloved speaks of awakening her lover who is asleep under the apple-tree (8:5), the tree is real enough, but, at the same time, it symbolizes her wish to rouse the dormant desire of her lover. When the girl declares, "I am a wall and my breasts are towers" (8:10), the simile is especially apt, because it expresses both her inaccessibility to the many suitors who are besieging her, and her maturity and readiness for love when her true lover appears.

Nor is the potency of symbolism exhausted by this trait alone. It is characteristic of the delicacy of the songs that the woman in each case expresses her desire for love by indirection. While a blunt avowal would repel by its crassness, the use of symbolism, which conceals as it reveals, heightens by its subtlety the charm of the sentiments expressed. Psycho-analytic theory has offered a highly plausible explanation for this powerful appeal of symbolism to the human spirit. According to psycho-analysis, the "unconscious" persistently seeks some avenue of expression which will elude the "censor" who stands guard over the conscious mind. Symbolism performs this liberating function for the unconscious admirably, because, in its very nature,

<sup>135</sup> Thus, in Palestinian Arabic, a girl deprived of her virginity is described as *maftāḥa* (see Stephan, p. 16). Cf. also the Talmudic phrase מפתח פתוח (Ket. 9b) as a charge of unchastity.

it expresses far more than it says; its nuances are at least as significant as its explications. Its overt meaning has nothing in it to arouse the vigilance of the censor, and meanwhile its deeper content is able to cross the threshold of consciousness.

Modern psychological research has also shed considerable light on the intimate relationship between love and pain. This connection is expressed in the great "Dream-Song" (5:2 to 6:3). When the love-sick maiden wanders through the city, in search of her lover, the watchmen beat her (5:7).

Stephan cites an old *ḥaddāwiyye* from Jaffa, which affords a striking parallel:<sup>136</sup>

"The quarrel rose between me and him:  
They dragged me to the *sarai*;  
They beat me a thousand strokes;  
They beat me on my ankles."

An Egyptian love song of the New Kingdom<sup>137</sup> expresses the same theme of the lover's devotion in the face of physical attack:

"I will not let go of thy love  
Even if I am beaten,  
As far as the land of Palestine with *siebet* and clubs  
And on to the land of Ethiopia with palm-ribs  
As far as the hills with sticks  
And unto the fields with cudgels."

The variations in date and geographical provenance do not exhaust the variety to be found within this small book. The songs reflect the simplicity of rustic scenes, the sophistication of the great city, the poverty of the shepherd's hut, and the luxury of the royal palace. Hence it is possible for one scholar to find in the book "the simplest kind of ballads scarcely touched by the polishing efforts of the self-conscious poet,"<sup>138</sup> while another declares that the Song is to be classed "as belles-lettres rather than as folk-songs," and finds them "only less artificial than the idylls of Theocritus."<sup>139</sup> Actually, the book contains both the simple and unrestrained outpourings of untutored love and the elaborated literary expressions of the same basic impulse.

<sup>136</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. A. Erman, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Jastrow, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, p. 711.

Frequently the point is made that the boldness of expression in the book with regard to sexual intimacy and bodily description is not in keeping with modern taste. It is true that the description of the maiden's charms in 7:3 is more explicit and franker than has been customary in Occidental poetry, but this passage is unique in the Song. Elsewhere, the description of physical beauty is frank without crassness. To evaluate it fairly, the Song should be judged against its Oriental background. Actually, its delicacy is at least as striking as its lack of inhibitions. The symbolism used in describing the manifestations of love throughout the book adds piquancy without offending. It should also be noted that some of the most outspoken passages are to be found in songs relating to married love.<sup>140</sup> Yet even here we have none of the crassly physical references to be found in the Akkadian love-charms,<sup>141</sup> in Sumerian love-poems,<sup>142</sup> or in contemporary Arabic love-songs.<sup>143</sup>

Esthetic standards are notoriously prone to change. In describing the beauty of a woman today, we would not think of her as resembling a city or a mare (1:9), yet we do compare a city to a woman,<sup>144</sup> and we refer to a beautiful horse by the feminine pronoun. A horse was, of course, not a beast of burden, but the cherished comrade of kings and nobles.<sup>145</sup> Sociological and economic factors undoubtedly influence tastes in feminine pulchritude. The ancients liked their women large, as the Venus de Milo demonstrates and as is clear from the Song, even after allowance is made for poetic hyperbole (see 4:4; 7:5). Undoubtedly this taste for an ample woman reflected the emphasis upon child-bearing as woman's chief task. On the other hand, the modern preference for thin, "stream-lined" figures testifies to the present position of women as associates, and even as competitors,

<sup>140</sup> Thus 1:12, 13 and 7:3 f. both occur in poems where the lover is "king," i. e. the bridegroom (1:12; 7:6).

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Ebeling, "Liebeszauber," *passim*. See especially the direct references to the *membra* (pp. 11, 33) and to sexual congress (pp. 21, 43).

<sup>142</sup> See the Sumerian "Love Song to a King" (S. N. Kramer, in Pritchard, *op. cit.*, p. 496).

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Stephan, *op. cit.*, pp. 21, 39, for examples of such crudity in modern Arabic poetry.

<sup>144</sup> A striking instance where a city is compared to love occurs in Egyptian poetry:

"I will go to Memphis and say, 'Give me my sister tonight,  
Memphis is a dish of love-apples, set before the Fair of Face.'"

(The last epithet is a name of Ptah, god of Memphis). Cf. Erman, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>145</sup> See the description of the horse in Job 39:19 ff. and Horace, *Odes*, III, 2.

with men in all fields of activity in a society of small families, where child-bearing plays a considerably less important role. Yet in this area the French proverb has particular cogency: "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." The love of a man for a maid is a perennially fresh theme in literature, because it is a constant of human nature.

#### XIV. SOME STYLISTIC TRAITS IN THE SONG

Our understanding of the Song of Songs is helped considerably when certain characteristics of style are kept in mind. One of these is the *use of quotations*, without any external formula or phrase to indicate that the words are being quoted. Elsewhere we have shown how widespread this usage is in Biblical, Rabbinical and Oriental literature generally.<sup>146</sup> Several passages in the Song are best explained as instances of this use of quotations.

In 1:7-8, Tur Sinai<sup>146</sup> plausibly explains v. 8 as the words of the shepherds who want to draw her affections away from her lover:

Tell me, O thou whom I love,  
Where dost thou feed and rest thy flock at noon?  
Why should I be a wanderer  
Among the flocks of thy friends,  
*Who would mock me and say, if I asked about thee:*  
"If thou dost not know, O fairest among women,  
Go forth in the tracks of the flocks  
And feed thy kids near the shepherds' tents."

The closing verses of the Song, 8:13 f., are explained by Haller as containing the words that the lover wishes to hear from his beloved:

O thou who sittest in the garden  
With friends listening,  
Let me hear thy voice  
*Saying to me,*  
"Hasten, my beloved, and be as a gazelle,  
Or as a young hart  
Upon the mountains of spices."

In 1:4, the third stich, "We will rejoice and be merry with thee," may well be the quotation of the words of the bridegroom to his

<sup>146</sup> Cf. "Quotations As a Literary Usage in Biblical and Oriental Literature," in *HUCA*, vol. 22 (1949); see also *KMW*, pp. 95 ff.

<sup>146</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 365 f.

beloved, who responds in the following stichs, "We shall inhale thy love more than wine."

This use of quotations without a *verbum dicendi* is illustrated in a popular modern Palestinian Arab song, current in several versions:<sup>147</sup>

"If you should visit me one night, O perfection of my happiness,

I would rejoice and mortify the envious (saying:),  
"My friend regales me."

The use of similes and metaphors in the Song also requires a word of explanation. When the poet uses a figure of speech, he often continues to elaborate upon it for its own sake, without reference to the subject for the sake of which it was invoked. The figure, so to speak, develops its own momentum and has its own independent existence. Thus, in 4:2,

"Thy teeth are like a flock ready for shearing  
Who have come up from washing,"

the second stich describes the sheep, without being related back to the teeth. Similarly, in 4:4,

"Like the tower of David is thy neck,  
Built as a landmark,"

the second stich likewise refers not to the neck, but to the tower of David.

The difficulties and obscurities of the Song are due, in large measure, to the fact that it is an expression of a segment of Israelite life, which is largely unknown to us otherwise. Reference has already been made to variations in esthetic standards. These factors should caution us against facile emendations and transpositions in the text. Only in a small number of passages does emendation of the Masoretic text seem justified on the basis of our present state of knowledge.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Stephan, *op. cit.*, p. 60:

*lô zurtani fard lële yâ kamdl sa'di*  
*afrah v'atld il-'azul: — "hubbi mhaninni."*

<sup>148</sup> The following changes from the Masoretic text underlie our version:

1:2 For שְׁקִנִי read שְׁקִנִי

3:6 For בְּתִיקְרוֹת read בְּתִיקְרוֹת (doubtful)

4:15 For וְגִים read וְגִי

5:13 For קַנְדִּלוֹת read קַנְדִּלוֹת

For צְרוּנוֹת read צְרוּנוֹת

6:12 For שְׁמִתִּי קַרְבָּנוֹת read שְׁמִתִּי קַרְבָּנוֹת

7:14 For דִּוְדִי read דִּוְדִי

8:2 For וְאֵל הַדֶּגֶר הַדֶּגֶר read וְאֵל הַדֶּגֶר הַדֶּגֶר (see the Commentary)

## XV. THE SONG OF SONGS IN HOLY WRIT

Undoubtedly, the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs, aided by the ascription of the book to King Solomon who is mentioned in the text, led to its inclusion in the Biblical canon. That Pharisaic Judaism admitted the book into the canon because it was "an ancient book, a religious book, and one that had always been religious"<sup>149</sup> as part of a pagan fertility cult, is unlikely to the point of impossibility. Had there been any recollection of such a use of the material, those who objected to the canonicity of the book would not have hesitated to mention it, and its chances for inclusion would have been nil.

The view against which Rabbinic Judaism levelled its strictures and which led to lengthy discussions as to its canonicity was the widely held literal interpretation, with which the Rabbis were very familiar, as has been noted. That all objections were overridden and the Song admitted into the canon indicates that on the subconscious level, at least, another factor operated, as was the case with Ecclesiastes:<sup>150</sup> a genuine affection for the book. It was this attitude which refused to permit its exclusion from Scripture, an act that would have spelled its ultimate destruction. As Jastrow well says: "It entered the canon not by vote, but because of its inevitable human appeal. Love is sacred even in passionate manifestations, when not perverted by a sophisticated self-analysis."<sup>151</sup>

The physical basis of love is extolled in the Song without shame or prurency. Yet it serves as the foundation for the spiritual relationship, which is adumbrated in many an incidental phrase and reaches its climax in the great paean to love<sup>152</sup> in 8:7:

Many waters can not quench love,  
Neither can the floods drown it.  
If a man would give all the substance of his house for love,  
He would be laughed to scorn.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Meek, in Schoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 52 f.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Gordis, *KMW*, pp. 121 f.

<sup>151</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>152</sup> Tur-Sinai, *op. cit.*, pp. 383 f., refers the "love" which is the subject in 8:7 not to the relationship of a maiden and her lover, but to the effort of an interloper to steal the affections of a married woman from her husband. The passage is interpreted to mean that it is impossible to make monetary restitution for this heinous sin. This is highly ingenious, but we find it unconvincing. There is a clear-cut reference to the wronged husband in Prov. 6:27 ff., which Tur-Sinai adduces as a parallel, but it is entirely lacking here.

It is in this sense that the modern reader, who is not likely to read it as an allegory, will echo Akiba's passionate description of the book as "the Holy of Holies," for it is, in Herder's words, "holy as a song of pure natural love, the holiness of human life."

Over and beyond its eternal youthfulness and inherent charm, the Song of Songs, precisely because it is within the canon of Scripture, serves to broaden the horizons of religion. It gives expression, in poetic and hence in deathless terms, to the authentic world-view of Judaism, which denies any dichotomy between body and soul, between matter and spirit, because it recognizes them both as the twin aspects of the great and unending miracle called life.

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