

e-ISSN 2550-0589
p-ISSN 1412-0674

philosophica et theologica

"O Love, In (Your) Delights"
The Song of Songs 7:7-10a in the Light
of the Ancient Near East (ANE)'s Background
Nikolas Kristiyanto

Narsisisme Para Imam dalam Perayaan Ekaristi Suci
Sohmon Ranja Capah

Peran Orangtua dalam Pendidikan Calon Imam
Sebelum Memasuki Jenjang Pendidikan
Seminari Menengah
Roberto Reno Sitepu

Pengaruh Media Sosial
Bagi Tugas Penggembalaan Imam
Pada Era Revolusi Industri 4.0
Avelinus Moat Simon

Inspirasi Kitab Daniel untuk Menghadapi Stres
Benturan Peradaban
Supriyono Venantius

* * * * *

TELAAH BUKU

studies

philosophica et theologica

e-ISSN 2550-0589

p-ISSN 1412-0674

STUDIA PHILOSOPHICA ET THEOLOGICA (ISSN Print 1412-0674 and ISSN Online 2550-0589) is a bilingual (Indonesian and English language) and peer reviewed journal published by Center of Research of Widya Sasana School of Philosophy Theology, Malang. STUDIA specializes in researched papers related to contextualization and inculturation of theology and philosophy from inter-disciplinary-methodological point of view. Journal has 2 issues per year (April and October).

STUDIA welcomes philosophical and theological contributions from scholars with various background of disciplines. This journal uses English and Indonesian Language. STUDIA is an open access journal whose papers published is freely downloaded.

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PUBLISHER :

P3M Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Teologi
Widya Sasana Malang
Jl. Terusan Rajabasa 2,
Malang 65146 Indonesia
Telp. 0341 - 552120
Fax. 0341 - 566676
Email : stftws@gmail.com
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Studia Philosophica et Theologica

E-ISSN 2550 - 0589

ISSN 1412-0674

Vol. 19 No. 2 Oktober 2019

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“O LOVE, IN (YOUR) DELIGHTS”¹

The Song of Songs 7:7-10a in the Light of the Ancient Near East (ANE)’s Background

Nikolas Kristiyanto*

Abstract

The interpretation of the Song of Songs has a long history. The traditional Jewish and early Christian interpreters apply the allegory method to find a “spiritual” meaning. For example, they try to understand the Groom as the Lord and the Bride as Israel. Furthermore, early Christian tradition interprets the Groom as Jesus and the Bride as the Church. Nevertheless, in this article, we try to read the Song of Songs in other perspective by understanding it in the light of Ancient Near East (ANE)’s background. We will focus on the exegesis and general analysis on Song 7:7-10a. This passage is a part of a big section of Song 6:4-7:11 (“New Songs of the Beloved Man”). Song 7:7-10a is an *admiration-movement*. We try to propose a new general structure of Song 7:7-10a and its meaning in the light of ANE’s background on royal ideology, temple, wisdom, promised land and love traditions.

Keywords: Song of Songs, ANE, royal ideology, love traditions, wisdom

Interpretasi Kidung Agung memiliki sejarah yang panjang. Para ahli interpretasi Yahudi tradisional dan kekristenan awal mengaplikasikan metode alegori untuk menemukan sebuah makna “spiritual”. Sebagai contoh, mereka mencoba untuk memahami “Pengantin Pria” sebagai Tuhan dan “Pengantin Wanita” sebagai Israel. Selanjutnya, tradisi kekristenan awal menginterpretasikan “Pengantin Pria” sebagai Yesus dan “Pengantin Wanita” sebagai Gereja. Namun, di dalam artikel ini, kita mencoba membaca Kidung Agung dalam perspektif yang lain dengan memahaminya dalam konteks Timur Dekat Kuno. Kita akan fokus pada eksegesis dan analisis umum mengenai Kidung

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1 All the picture of the figurines from the Ancient Near East (ANE) in this article come from O. Keel, *The Song of Songs: A Continental Commentary* (transl. by F. J. Gaiser) (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994). The text of The Song of Songs, in this article, is based on “Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 5th (fifth) Edition” by Bible Society, published by Amer Bible Society (1997). The English Translation of this text is also based on “Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 5th (fifth) Edition” in order to be closer to the Hebrew Text.

Agung 7:7-10a. Perikop ini masuk dalam sebuah struktur besar dari Kidung Agung 6:4-7:11 (“Kidung-Kidung Baru Lelaki yang Terkasih”). Kidung Agung 7:7-10a adalah sebuah *gerakan-kekaguman*. Kita mencoba untuk mengajukan sebuah struktur umum yang baru dari Kidung Agung 7:7-10a dan maknanya dalam terang Timur Dekat Kuno mengenai ideologi kerajaan, kuil, kebijaksanaan, tanah terjanji dan tradisi-tradisi cinta.

Kata kunci: Kidung Agung, Timur Dekat Kuno, ideologi kerajaan, tradisi-tradisi cinta, kebijaksanaan

1. Introduction

The Song of Songs 7:7-10a is a part of a big section of Song 6:4-7:11. G. Barbiero thinks that this section (6:4-7:11) can be divided into two parallel songs: 6:4-12 and 7:1-11². These two *New Songs of the Beloved Man*, 6:4-12 and 7:2-10a are linked by the dialogue of 7:1. Then, the movement in 6:11-12 leads to the “dance” in 7:1; and 7:2-6 will describe it further.³

A : The description of the body of the woman (6:4-9)

B : A global consideration of wonder (6:10)

C : A movement toward union characterized by the first person singular (6:11-12)

A' : The description of the body of the woman (7:2-6)

B' : A global consideration of wonder (7:7-8)

C' : A movement toward union characterized by the first person singular (7:9-10a)

In this article, we will do an exegesis and general analysis on Song 7:7-10a (*admiration-movement* in the second part) and read it in the light of ANE's background.

MT (Song 7:7-10a) Translation

מֵה־יִפְיִיתַי וּמֵה־נִנְעַמְתִּי	^{7a}	7a How beautiful and pleasant you are,
אֶהְבֶּהּ בִּתְעֻנּוֹתַי:	^{7b}	7b O love, in [your] delights
וְאֵת קוֹמְתֶיךָ דְּמִתְהָרָה לְתֹמָר	^{8a}	8a This your height is like a [date]-palm tree,
וְשִׁדְיֶיךָ לְאַשְׁכְּלֹת:	^{8b}	

2 G. Ravasi, *Il Cantico dei Cantici*, Commento e Attualizzazione (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1992), 490-495. G. Barbiero, *Song of Songs: A Close Reading* (transl. by M. Tait), *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 144 (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2011), 322.

3 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 323.

אֶמְרָתִי אֶעֱלֶה בְּתַמָּר ^{9a}	^{8b} and your breasts [are like] clusters [of dates]
אֶתְנֶה בְּסִנְסֵנִי ^{9b}	^{9a} I said to myself: Let me climb up a [date]-palm tree
וַיְהִי־וַיֵּגֵא שְׂדֵיָהּ פֶּאֶשְׁקֵלוֹת הַגָּפֹן ^{9c}	^{9b} Let me grasp its [clusters of] dates
וַיִּרְיַח אֶפְדֵּה פֶתְפוּחִים: ^{9d}	^{9c} May your breasts [will] be like clusters of the vine,
וַחֲכִידֵּה כְּיֵינוֹ הַטּוֹב ^{10a}	^{9d} and the scent of your nose like the apples,
	^{10a} and your palate like good wine

2. Exegesis of Song 7:7-10a (also In the Light of ANE’s Background)

In this part, we will do an exegesis on the text (Song 7:7-10a). Furthermore, at the same time, we will focus on some details which can be linked to some of the details in ANE’s background.

2.1. “How Beautiful and Pleasant You Are” (v.7a)

מְהֵיפִית וּמְהֵנֵמֶת

On the grounds of the contents of Song 7:7, it is clear that a man is speaking here (i.e., King Solomon). It is supported by the literary composition of Song 7:2-6, especially by the fact of Song 7:6c which mentions מֶלֶךְ (King) in the text.⁴ In Song 1:16 we can find “יָפִי” and “נֵעִם”. In that verse, those adjectives are placed in the mouth of the female character. On the other hand, in our case (in 7:7), King Solomon uses the verbal forms “יֵפִית” and “נֵעִמֶת” (not *adjective* as in 1:16). Therefore, in 1:16, the nominal clauses describe a state – the female protagonist (in 1:16) expresses her opinion to her beloved (handsome and charming) based on her experience of him. While, in 7:7, the verbal clauses represent an event (an activity, a happening, a deed) where King Solomon only thinks that *the Shulammitte* looks beautiful and delightful (*attractive*) with his observation at that moment.⁵

Pleasant or delightful (נֵעִם). In Ugaritic, the beauty and charm of male and female are expressed by the term “n’m”.⁶ This term “n’m” has a

4 P. W. T. Stoop – van Paridon, *The Song of Songs: A Philological Analysis of the Hebrew Book*, ANES, Supplement 17 (Louvain – Paris – Dudley, MA: Peeters Publishers, 2005), 387.

5 Stoop – van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 387-388.

6 M. H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2008), 632.

7 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 390.

strong mythological background, connected with the god of vegetation.⁷ It can be found in the legend of King Keret.⁸

Give me Lady Hurriya, the fairest (n'mt) of the offspring of thy firstborn;
whose fair (n'm) is like the fair (n'mh) of Anat,
[whose] beau[ty] like the beauty of Astart;
(KRT A. 3.143-146; 6.288-293)⁹

In this case, the beauty of King Keret's beloved is compared to that of the goddesses Anat and Astart. The term is also applied to King Keret and the young hero Aqht¹⁰:

n'mn!lmil "Handsome lad of El" (KRT A.1.40-41; 2.61-62)¹¹
n'mnꞤmqnšm "Handsome, strongest of men" (2 AQHT.6.45)¹²

From this historical background, we can find that "the beloved one" (*the Shulammitte*) in Song 7:7 is described as a goddess (like Anat and Astart). At the same time, she also has a charism as an important noble person (like King Keret and the young hero Aqht). Therefore, in this case, the praise to the beloved one ("how beautiful and pleasant you are") implicitly has *the divinity and humanity aspects* altogether. Moreover, it is supported by the word "*the Shulammitte*" in 7:1 which has both aspects (*divinity and humanity*) altogether.

The Shulammitte (הַשְּׁלֹמִיטָה) in 7:1 has already interpreted by many commentators. At least, there are five interpretations: *First, Shulammitte* can be connected with a divine figure, e.g., "the moon goddess Ishtar under a feminine form of the name Shelem."¹³ *Second, Shulammitte* is pos-

8 Pope, *Song of Songs*, 632.; Furthermore, Ginsberg makes a brief summary about the story of King Keret: King Keret's family has been entirely wiped out except for himself. He weeps bitterly over the extinction of his line, but El appears to him in a dream, and Keret begs him to grant him posterity. Thereupon El gives Keret detailed instructions for preparing and conducting a military expedition to Udum and demanding the granddaughter of Udum's king in marriage: the king's name is Pabel, the girl's Hurriya. Keret follows the directions and, as El predicted, Pabel dispatches a delegation to his headquarters to treat for peace. So Keret makes his not unreasonable demand, the messengers retrace their steps, and the tablet ends as they begin to apprise their lord of Keret's terms." Cf. H. L. Ginsberg, "The Legend of King Keret: A Canaanite Epic of the Bronze Age," in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (Supplementary Studies Nos. 2-3; Jerusalem - Baghdad - New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1946), 8-9.

9 In this case, Ginsberg translates "n'mn" as "Naaman"; on the other hand, Pope translates it as "Handsome" from the root "n'm". Cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 632; Ginsberg, "The Legend of King Keret", 14-15.

10 The goddess Anat threatened to trample the young hero Aqht, after she had failed in her efforts to seduce him in order to get his prized bow. Cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 632.

11 Ginsberg, "The Legend of King Keret", 17, 21.

12 W. W. Hallo - K. L. Younger, *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden - New York: Brill, 1997), 347.

13 Cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 597.A. Bloch - C. Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 1995), 197. M. T. Elliot, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle*. EHS 23. Theology. Vol. 137

sibly derived from *šalem*, a poetic term for Jerusalem.¹⁴ Third, in “שׁוֹלָמִיִּית”¹⁵, we can see the root “šlm” which also appears in שְׁלֹמֹה (Solomon). It means that the author of Song 7:1 wanted to indicate the connection between the female protagonist and King Solomon. Therefore, *Shulammit* is the feminine form of שְׁלֹמֹה (Solomon).¹⁶ Fourth, *Shulammit* can be interpreted as “inhabitant of Shunem”. The Arab name of the city of “Shunem” is “Sulem”.¹⁷ Fifth, *Shulammit* can also be derived from the root “peace” (šlm).¹⁸ It means that *Shulammit* indicates “the pacified woman”. It is supported by the parallel of Song 8:10, “I have become in his eyes as one who has found peace.”¹⁹ In conclusion, for Barbiero, these five possible meanings of *Shulammit* has to be maintained to open a large perspective and association which is also possible intended by the author.¹⁹

In our context (Song 7:7-10a), this *Shulammit* receives a compliment from King Solomon. It begins in 7:7, “How beautiful and pleasant you are.” This general admiration is based on “הִזְהָה” (to see) in 7:1 (a synonym of “רָאָה” in v.13). This verb “הִזְהָה” describes a “gaze full of emotion” of Solomon (Cf. Mic 4:11; Ps 27:4; Job 36:25).²⁰ At the same time, Barbiero explains that “הִזְהָה” is a specifically sacral term:

“It is [הִזְהָה] the technical word for prophetic vision (cf. Isa 1:1; 2:1; 13:1), and has God as the object (Exod 24:11; Ps 63:3; 17:15; 11:7; 27:4; 46:9; Job 19:26-27; 36:25) or his work (Job 36:24-25); sometimes it even has God as the subject (cf. Ps 11:7; 17:2).”²¹

Therefore, the verb “הִזְהָה” not only refers to the voyeuristic desire, but it also expresses a sacrality of “seeing”.²² Barbiero argues that it is probable that the author deliberately makes a transference from *religious lan-*

(Frankfurt - Bern - New York - Paris: Peter Lang, 1989), 163. O. Keel, *Das Hohelied*. ZBK. AT 18 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1986), 210.

14 “In his derivation, the *šulammit* retains the root of *šalem*(šlm), but adopts the vocalic sequence *u - a* contained in the fuller name *yerušalayim* ‘Jerusalem’ (the *u* is long in both *šulammit* and *yerušalayim*) [...] This is not to rule out that *šulammit*, via its root *šlm*, may also allude to notions of peace [...] or perfection, or to the name of Solomon (*šalomoh*) [...] Indeed this specific local epithet may have been chosen by the poet precisely for its echoes of *šalomand šelomoh*.” Cf. A. Bloch - C. Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, 198.

15 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 364.

16 Cf. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 364.; R. Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary* (New York: KTAV, 1974), 68. A. Robert - R. Tournay; avec le concours de A. Feullet, *Le Cantique des Cantiques: Traduction et Commentaire* (Paris: l’Institut français d’Archéologie de Beyrouth, 1963), 249-250.

17 Cf. A. Robert - R. Tournay, *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, 250. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 365.

18 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 365.

19 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 365.

20 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 365.

21 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 365.

22 Cf. O. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 229. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 365.

guage to the contemplation of woman's body. In our case (Song 7:7-10a), the great works of God are contemplated in the Shulammitite's body which is related to God himself.²³ Therefore, at the same time, the divine and human aspects are related to one another.

2.2. "O Love, in (Your) Delights" (v.7b)

אהבה בְּתַעֲנוּגִים

The noun "love" (אהבה) can have a *concrete* or an *abstract* meaning. In our case (7:7), "love" (אהבה)²⁴ has no article. In the Song of Songs, the noun "אהבה" occurs eleven times: five times with the article "ה" (2:7; 3:5; 8:4; 8:7 [2x]) and six times without the article (2:4.5; 3:10; 5:8; 7:7; 8:6). The "אהבה" without the article, in our case, can be considered to have a concrete meaning.²⁵ It is supported by the context of our text (7:7-10a) which focuses on the Shulammitite in v.1. and the "you" in v.8, to whom the man refers, is not an abstract principle, but a person.²⁶ Therefore, in this case, "אהבה" expresses the personification of love.²⁷

Furthermore, "אהבה" (love), in this case, refers to the Shulammitite. She is the source of "delight and/or pleasure" (תענוג).²⁸ In the OT, the root "ענג" (delight or daintiness) refers to YHWH (cf. Ps 37:4; Isa 58:13-14) and his gifts (Isa 55:2; 66:11; Ps 37:11). This root "ענג" has a semantic cluster similar to that of "המד" (desire or delight) which transposes physical enjoy-

23 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 365.

24 LXX rendered ἀγάπη (love); Vulgate uses *charissima* (most dear one). Cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 632; Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 390.

25 In this case, the rule by JM (§137 j) can be applicable where "abstract nouns can be taken in a determinate way and so have the article," even though there are some exceptions to it. In the Song of Songs, whenever the noun "love" (אהבה) occurs without the article, it has more of a concrete implication. (Cf. P. W. T. Stoop – van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 115.; R. E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 133.

26 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 390.

27 Cf. M. T. Elliot, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle*, 171. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 391.

28 "In (your) delights (or pleasures)" (בְּתַעֲנוּגִים, ים) in MT (v.7) is a *lectio difficilior* which is confirmed by the LXX, the Vetus Latina and the Vulgate. Cf. G. Krinetzki, *Kommentar zum Hohelied: Bildsprache und theologische Botschaft*, BET 16 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981), 284. Ravasi, *Il Cantico*, 567.; Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 391. It is also possible as a *haplography* for *bat ta'āngm* (daughter of pleasures). It can be found in the Syriac and Aquila. Cf. H. Graetz, *SchirHa-Scirimoder das salomonische Hohelied* (Wien: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1871), 197. P. Joüon, *Le Cantique de Cantiques: Commentaire philologique et exégétique* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1909), 292. A. Robert – R. Tournay, *Le Cantique de Cantiques*, 269. D. Colombo, *Canticodei Cantici*, NVB (Roma: Ed. Paoline, 1975), 121. BARBIERO, *Song of Songs*, 391.. In this case, we prefer to the *lectio difficilior* of MT.

ment to YHWH, his laws, and his loving-kindness.²⁹ Therefore, in our case (7:7), she is seen as *the gift of God* and a part of *the promised land*.³⁰ This description will be explored in the next verses (vv.8-10a).

2.3. "This Your Height is Like a [Date]-Palm Tree" (v.8a)

זֹאת קוֹמַתְךָ דְּמִתְּהָ לְתַמָּר^{8a}

The demonstrative pronoun "זֹאת" (*this*) in the beginning verse (8a) indicates that the beloved (*King Solomon*) is in front of the woman (*the Shulammitte*) whom he is describing.³¹ The first description of this woman, in v.8a, is about "קוֹמָה". It can be translated to "figure, stature or height." This word "קוֹמָה" expresses the aspect of *length*.³² In the OT, we can find this word "קוֹמָה" is used many times. But, in our case, we can focus on 1 Kings and Exodus. The "קוֹמָה" is used to describe the height of the furnishings in the temple that Solomon built (cf. 1 Kgs 6-7). In Exodus, in the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness, "קוֹמָה" also occurs in the context of the construction of the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle (cf. Exod 25-38). For that reason, this verse (v. 8a) also has a connection to the temple tradition in Israel.

Furthermore, the height of the woman, in this verse, is described like a [date]-palm tree. The palm tree was a manifestation of divinity. The palm is also the archetype for the holy tree in the Ancient Near East (Figs. 1; 2).³³ Additionally, the palm tree was also connected with an important goddess (e.g., in Mesopotamia with Ishtar; Fig. 3).³⁴

29 Cf. T. Kronholm, 'anag, in *TDOT*, vol. XI, 213-214. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 391, n.323.E. Salvaneschi, *Cantico dei Cantici: InterpretatioIudica* (Genova: Il Melangolo, 1982), 85. E. Kingsmill, *The Song of Songs and the Eros of God: A Study in Biblical Intertextuality* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2009), 81.

30 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 391.

31 I follow Barbiero's interpretation. This is different from Stoop and Van Paridon's interpretation. For Stoop and Van Paridon, the demonstrative pronoun "זֹאת", in this case (v.8a), is also used to refer to the "figure of yours resembles [...]" of the daughters of Jerusalem. Stoop and Van Paridon tries to interpret what the King Solomon sees in *the Shulammitte* which is also found in "the daughters of Jerusalem." For that reason, this demonstrative pronoun "זֹאת" indicates some distance between the King Solomon and *the Shulammitte* (the daughters of Jerusalem). Therefore, Stoop and Van Paridon translate it as "that" (*figure of yours resembles*). Cf. Stoop - van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 390-391. Furthermore, the position of "זֹאת" in this case (v.8a) is unusual. For that reason, it should not be surprised that the majority of modern translations omit it, following the *Vetus Latina* and the *Vulgate*. Cf. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 392.

32 Stoop - van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 389.

33 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 242. (Note: The numbering of figures is mine. I did not follow Keel's book).

34 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 242.



Fig. 1: A naked goddess touching her breasts with two reclining gods which are belongs to the domain of the goddess and the palm trees is flanking them. In this case, the palm tree is understood as the holy tree. (Mitanni cylinder seal impression from Kirkuk; 14th century BCE.)



Fig. 3: Ishtar climbs a mountain, at the same time kicking a fleeing god in the back; to her left are the palms regularly associated with her. To the left of the palms are two gods waving. (Cylinder seal from the Akkad Period; ca. 2200 BCE.)



Fig. 4 (above): The Egyptian tree-goddess, who provides the dead with water and food, is sometimes pictured as a date palm, perhaps under Asiatic influence. (Relief from Abusir, 13th century BCE.)

Fig. 5 (below): The mistress of palms stands here not within the palm itself but, in human form, next to the palm; she gives water to Ba-birds (birds representing souls of the dead). (Painting on a wooden sarcophagus from Thebes; ca. 1000 BCE.)

In Egypt, a female divinity who gives nourishment and life is often represented as a tree (*tree-goddess*). This is a variant of the motif of the “tree of life” – which also represents the goddess of fertility and love. Then, it is often described as the palm tree (Fig. 4, 5).³⁵

In the OT, “palm tree” is also important. *First*, the name “Tamar” (*palm*) is linked to the attractive woman (cf. Gen 38; 2 Sam 13; 2 Sam 14:27). In our case, we can use the description of the *Shulammitte’s* height (*stature*) “like a palm tree”, in Song 7:8, to describe her attractiveness in front of the beloved one (King Solomon). *Second*, in Deut 34:3 and Judg 1:16, Jericho was called “the city of palms.” *Third*, Engeddi was renowned for its palms (cf. Sir 24:14). *Fourth*, the enclosure and sanctuary of the temple were decorated with motifs inspired by the palm (cf. Ps 92:13-14; 1 Kgs 6:29, 32, 35; 7:36; Ezek 40:16; 41:18-20).³⁶

Therefore, the “palm tree” is used in Song 7:8 to describe the *importance, attractiveness, and also manifestation of divinity* in the woman’s body whom King Salomon is describing.

2.4. “Your Breasts [are like] Clusters [of Dates]” (v.8b)

וְשָׂדֵךְ לְאֶשְׁכּוֹלֹת׃^{8b}

In this verse (v.8b), there is a discussion about the word “אשכול” (*clus-*

35 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 393. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 243, 248.

36 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 393.

ter) in v.8b. The question is “What kind of cluster is meant in this verse?” Stoop and Van Paridon argue that “אשכול” (*cluster*) in v.8b is designated for cluster of grapes.³⁷ On the other hand, the majority of commentators (Pope, Ginsburg, Delitzsch, Goulder, Keel, Murphy, Fox, Graetz, Barbiero, Bloch and Bloch) argue that “אשכול” (*cluster*) in v.8b refers to “cluster of the dates of the palm tree.”³⁸ At least there are two arguments which can be proposed: *First*, from the traditional point of view, according to Keel, the man’s plan to climb the palm and lay hold of its cluster of fruits (i.e., he dates) (Fig. 6.) has also “the aura of a sacral act”.³⁹



Fig. 6 : With the aid of a ladder a man climbs a stylized date palm, either to pollinate it or to harvest the fruit. (Orthostatic relief from Tell Halaf; 9th century BCE)



Fig.7: Old Assyrian relief from ca. 1800 BCE; reused in a temple at Tell al-Rimah during the Middle Assyrian Period, ca. 1400 BCE.

In ancient iconography, the fruit of the palm (i.e., dates) are represented in pairs which hang symmetrically from the two sides of the palm.⁴⁰ In the middle of the Assyrian Period (ca. 1400 BCE), there was a description (in a relief) about a goddess who stands between two palm trees as the date clusters fall on the shoulders of the goddess which seems to be supporting her breasts (Fig.7.).⁴¹

Furthermore, the palm metaphor also glorifies the Egyptian dancers who have slender figures with well-developed

obvious motive for this is the expectation that he will be able to harvest the fruit from it, and this can certainly be understood in a metaphorical sense. And in 7.9b he expresses the hope that her breast will be like clusters of the vine. Wine and the pleasure connected with it occur in a number of places in the SofS as a metaphor for the enjoyment of love. The context makes clear that this is also the case in 7.9. To my mind the author expresses two aspects of the breasts of *the shulammitte*: in 7.8 the overall form of them as this can be seen, from some distance away [...]; in 7.9 as a source for the enjoyment of love, which Solomon imagines he will experience when he embraces *the shulammitte*.” Cf. Stoop – van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 391-392.

38 Cf. Stoop – van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 391, n.22. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 239, 246. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 391.

39 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 246.

40 Cf. Robert – Tournay, *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, 271. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 392.

41 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 245, fig. 139.

breasts.⁴² From this historical background, “the cluster of dates” to describe the breasts of the woman in v.8b has a great possibility. Moreover, it is supported by the *second* reason which focuses on the textual parallelism in vv.8a-9b:

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| A | : ^{8a} This your height is like a [date]-palm tree, | זֹאת קוֹמַתְךָ דְּמַתְּהָ לְתֵמָר ^{8a} |
| B | : ^{8b} and your breasts [are like] clusters [of dates] | וְשָׂדֶיךָ לְאַשְׁכּוֹלִים ^{8b} |
| A' | : ^{9a} I said to myself: Let me climb up a [date]-palm tree | אָמַרְתִּי אֵלַיָּה בְּתֵמָר ^{9a} |
| B' | : ^{9b} Let me grasp its [clusters of] dates | אֲחַזְּהָ בְּסִנְסִינִי ^{9b} |



Fig. 8: Probably no statues were so widely distributed in Judea from the eighth to the sixth century BCE as female figures of this type; their bodies are shaped as pillars and their crudely formed hands support full breasts. (The left figure is from Beer-sheba, the right figure from Jerusalem; both found at 8th century BCE.)

From the textual parallelism in vv.8a-9b, we can find “תמר” ([date]-palm tree) in AA’ (8a//9a). Furthermore, we can find “אשכול” (*cluster*) in v.8b and “סנסנה” (*fruit stalk of date tree*) in v.9b. Therefore, “clusters” in v.8b can be refers to “fruit stalk of date tree” in v.9b and all together make a perfect parallelism.⁴³ Then, we can interpret “אשכול” in v.8b as “clusters of dates.”

Furthermore, the “breasts” throughout Israel during eight-six centuries BCE represent the “pillar goddess”. These goddesses with their prominent breasts have been called *DeaNutrix*(nourishing goddess) (Fig. 8).⁴⁴ In our case (Song 7:7-10a), the woman in v.8b

can also be considered as a “nourishing woman” in the eyes of the beloved (King Solomon).

2.5. “Let Me Climb Up and Grasp” (vv.9ab)

אָמַרְתִּי אֵלַיָּה בְּתֵמָר ^{9a} אֲחַזְּהָ בְּסִנְסִינִי ^{9b}

The verb “אמר” (*to say*) in this verse can be translated either in the present (Rudolph and Ginsburg) or in the past tense (Delitzsch and Fox). Both are grammatically justified.⁴⁵ For that reason, we can focus on the context of Song 7:7-10a. In v.7a, we can find that King Solomon expresses his amazement to *the Shulammit* in the present tense, “How beautiful

42 Cf. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 237, fig. 131. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 392.

43 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 392.

44 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 246.

45 Stoop – van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 392.

and pleasant you are.”⁴⁶ At the same time, in v.9a, the same subject (King Solomon) expresses his desire “to climb up” and “to grasp”. For that reason, the verb “אמר” (*to say*) in this verse – based on the context – can also be translated in the present. Furthermore, this verb also expresses an *interior process of the subject* in the “present”. Joüon also argues that it “expresses the ardour of the desire of the Bridegroom and the energy of his decision.”⁴⁷ Therefore, “אמר” in this verse can be translated “I said to myself.”⁴⁸

The next two verbal forms of “עלה” and “אזח” in v.9ab are in the cohortatives.⁴⁹ For that reason, we can translate both verbal forms into: “let me climb up” (אֲעֲלֶה) and “let me grasp” (אֲחַזֵּךְ). Then, the object of both verbs is indeterminate (without article). Some scholars (like Pope and Barbiero) read “בְּתֶמָּר” with the article. It means that they read “בְּ” (with the article) – instead of “בְּ” [without an article] as indicated by the MT. It is similar to the LXX’s reading “τῷ φοίνικι” (with the article).⁵⁰ In my opinion, I choose “a [date]-palm tree” based on the philological argument of Stoop and Van Paridon (instead of Pope and Barbiero’s translation).⁵¹ Moreover, this choice can form a parallel between v.8a and v.9a where both of them talk about “[date]-palm tree” in the indefinite form (without an article). Therefore, this preference (without an article) is probably a deliberate choice of the author to form a parallelism in the poetry.

In Babylonia and Assyria, the sacred tree is notably the date-palm tree. This sacred date-palm tree was the source of life. Its branches and leaves carried its mystic power and virtue.⁵² Going further to the description of “climbing up a [date]-palm tree” and “grasping its [clusters of] dates”, we can trace these images back through centuries in ANE (Fig. 9).⁵³ In brief summary, we can say that a man who is *climbing* a date palm tree and *grasping* clusters of dates is a description of *pollination* or *harvest* of a [date]-palm tree.

These actions (*climbing* and *grasping*) also have a sacred meaning – to take a mystic power and virtue from the sacred tree (date-palm tree). In the famous fresco of Mari, the palm is a part of the temple. In this sense, “the palm” brings an expression of “distance” and “inaccessibil-

46 Stoop – van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 392.

47 Cf. Joüon, *Le Cantique de Cantiques*, 293. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 394.

48 Cf. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 394. Stoop – van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 393.

49 Stoop – van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 393.

50 Cf. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 394. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 635.

51 Stoop – van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 393.

52 E. O. James, *The Tree of Life: An Archaeological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 42.

53 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 243.

ity" (*sacred*). It is supported and well described in v.8a by the word "קומה" (*height or stature*) which expresses a "distance" and "inaccessibility." Nevertheless, at the same time, two men were climbing to gather the dates in that fresco (of Mari). It means that they can overcome this "distance" and "inaccessibility" (Fig. 10).⁵⁴

Furthermore, the verb "אחז" (*to grasp or seize or squeeze*) has a certain sense of violence. In the Song of Songs, this verb "אחז" already occurs three times before 7:9b, i.e., in 2:15; 3:4, 8. In Song 2:15 and 3:8, we can find that the verb "אחז" really has a sense of violence: "seize for us (אֶחְזוּ-לָנוּ) the foxes, the little foxes, which spoil the vineyards [...]" (2:15); "they all 'seized by the sword' (אֶחְזוּ הַחֶרֶב), trained in battle; each one with his sword on his hip [...]" (3:8). In Song 3:4, we can find an interesting comparison with our verse (7:9b). In Song 3:4, the woman *squeezes or holds*



Fig. 9: (Left) A Goddess giving a blessing appears between two palms. (Grave stele from Carthage; 4th-2nd centuries BCE.) (Right-Above) Two men climb a date palm, either to pollinate it or to harvest its fruit. (Relief on a grave stele from Carthage; 4th-2nd centuries BCE.) (Right-Below) A man climbs a date palm to harvest the fruit. (Relief from a Punic grave stele; 4th-2nd centuries BCE.)

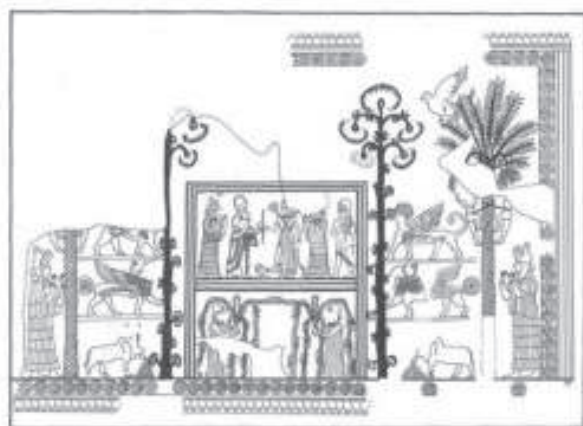


Fig. 10: In the middle of the famous symmetrical wall painting from Mari stands the warlike *hlmr* in the cells of a temple, with her right foot on the lion. The temple is flanked by two stylized trees, two palms – each being climbed by two men to pick the dates and two gigantic doves on palms.

tight (אֶחְזָתִיר) the man after having searched him for a long time during the night. While, in Song 7:9b, the man *squeezes* (אֶחְזָה) the woman. Therefore, in this case, the woman is not only the *object* (7:9b) but also the *subject* (3:4) of the action. It is supported by the mutual belonging between them in Song 7:11.⁵⁵

Moreover, "let me grasp its [clusters of] dates" in v.9b

54 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 394.

55 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 395.

can also be interpreted that the man wants to be nourished by the woman to get a “new life”⁵⁶. This description also can be found in Egypt (ca. 15th – 13th centuries BCE) where the *nourishing goddess* gives a *new life* to the King (Fig. 11; 12).⁵

Another possibility to understand the verb “to grasp (seize)” in Song 7:9b is to link that verse to a passage on Wisdom at Prov 3:18: “She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her and happy is everyone that retained her.” Then, the “breasts”, in this context (Song 7:7-10a), can refer to the “Lady Wisdom” in Prov 5:19: “Let her breast inebriate you at all times.”⁵⁸ Therefore, in this case, Song 7:8-9b can be interpreted as a part of wisdom where the man (King Solomon) tries to “grasp” or “seize” the *wisdom* from the main source, i.e., “The Lady Wisdom” (cf. Prov 3 and 5).



Fig. 11 (left): The goddess Isis in the form of a tree nurses the dead Thutmose III in order to give him new life. (Painting in the tomb of Thutmose III in the Valley of the Kings; ca. 1430 BCE.) (cf. relief from Abydos, 13th century BCE, where the tree-goddess is pictured as a date palm)

Fig. 12 (right): A goddess in human form nurses the dead King Seti to give him new life. (Part of a painted relief in the mortuary temple of Seti I in Abydos; ca. 1280 BCE.)

Therefore, in this case, Song 7:8-9b can be interpreted as a part of wisdom where the man (King Solomon) tries to “grasp” or “seize” the *wisdom* from the main source, i.e., “The Lady Wisdom” (cf. Prov 3 and 5).

2.6. “May Your Breasts [Will] be Like Clusters of the Vine” (v.9c)

וְיִהְיֶינָא שְׂדֵיךָ כְּאֲשַׁכְּלוֹת הַגֶּפֶן 9c

In this verse, the “breast” occurs again. If in Song 7:8b, the imaginary of the breasts like “clusters of dates”, in this case (v.9c), the breast is described as “clusters of the vine.” It is not surprising, even the word “גֶּפֶן” (*vine*) seems out of place after the word “clusters” in v.9c (because in v.8b, the word “clusters” refers to “dates”). Nevertheless, structurally this verse (v.9c) is not connected so much with what precedes it (v.8b – *clusters of dates*) but with what follows (v.10a – *good wine*).⁵⁹ It can be described by following diagram:

v.9c : may your breasts [will] be like clusters of the vine
v.10a: and your palate like good wine ➔

56 It is supported by the next verse (v.9d) where the metaphor of “nose” appears that brings also an association to the “breath of life.” This association between *nose* and *breath* can also be found in Barbiero’s analysis. Cf. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 397.

57 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 177, 243.

58 Kingsmill, *The Song of Songs*, 82.

59 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 396.

In this case, the link between the *clusters of the vine* and *good wine* can once again recall our attention to the Wisdom text in Prov 5:19: “Let her *breast* inebriate you at all times.” Like wine, the man is drunk with joy because of her breasts.⁶⁰ It means also that the man (King Solomon), in Song 7:9c.10a, “is drunk with joy” because of the wisdom which he finds in “The Lady Wisdom” who has “the fountain of water” (cf. Prov 5:18) – the main source of the wisdom that can inebriate him (cf. Prov 5:19).



Fig. 13: A goddess, naked except for her jewellery, presents a cluster of grapes in each hand. She is standing on a mountain; her wings characterize her as a heavenly power. (Ebostrum tile from northern Syria; 9th/8th century BCE.)

Furthermore, the gifts of a goddess sometimes appear as “the cluster of the vine”. We can find a description about “a naked goddess with her abundant jewellery is holding two bunches of grapes” from the northern Syria, ca. 9th/8th century BCE (Fig. 13).⁶¹

Moreover, “the beloved woman” is also described by using the metaphor of the “vineyard” and “vine”. Vineyard is also full of erotic associations. In the ANE, “vineyard” is also a place where a woman meets her lover. It is also supported by an Egyptian letter from the 13th century BCE.⁶²

“Thou art come into Joppa, and ... findest the fair maiden who is watching over the [wine] gardens. She takes thee to herself as a companion and gives thee the color of her lap.”⁶³

2.7. “The Scent of Your Nose Like the Apples” (v.9d)

גְּרִינָה אֶפְדָּה כְּתַפּוּחִים^{9d}

The word “גָּרָא” can be translated into many possibilities. Pope trans-

60 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 397.

61 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 246.

62 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 49, 247.

63 Cf. J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton:Princeton University Press; 3rd revised edition,1969), 478. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 49.

lates: “The scent of *your vulva*.”⁶⁴; Delitzsch: “And the breath of *thy nose*.”⁶⁵; Mathieu: “Only the odour of *your breath*.”⁶⁶; Fox: “Only the scent of *your nose*.”⁶⁷; Bresciani: “It is *your kisses*.”⁶⁸ From this comparison, the translation of Pope is the most difficult to be accepted. Pope has the philological arguments⁶⁹ for his decision to use “vulva” to translate “רֶחַץ” in this verse (v.9d). However, the meaning “vulva” does not fit with this verse (v.9d) and verse 5 where the “nose” is also described as the “tower of Lebanon.” For that reason, in this case, we can find a plausible interchangeability between the terms “nose”, “breath” and “kiss.” “The scent of one’s nose” can only be smelled in a close distance.⁷⁰ Therefore, it can describe a “[nose] kissing.”⁷¹ Furthermore, “the scent of nose” can also be an excitement of love to access the intimacy of the beloved one.⁷²

The metaphor for “the scent of nose” of the beloved one is described as “apple” (תפוח). The Hebrew term “תפוח” can signify literally “fragrant.” At the same time, apple is also considered as a fruit which can awaken love. This sense is confirmed also in Song 8:5: “Under the apple tree, I awakened you.”⁷³

Moreover, in our case (v.9d), the phrase “the scent of your nose” can also be found in “The Egyptian Love Songs” (ca. 1290 BCE)⁷⁴:

64 Pope, *Song of Songs*, 593.

65 F. Delitzsch, *Proverb, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes* (transl. by M. G. Easton) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 131.

66 B. Mathieu, *La poésie amoureuse de l'Égypte Ancienne: Recherche sur un genre littéraire au Nouvel Empire* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1996), 62.

67 M. V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (London: SPCK, 1985), 21.

68 E. Bresciani, *Letteratura e poesia dell'Antico Egitto, I Millenni* (Torino: Einaudi, 1990), 464.

69 Pope's philological analysis: “The word *ap* in Ugaritic is applied to the nostril(s) of a horse as the aperture through which medicine is administered, but it is also used of the nipple(s) of the breast(s) of the goddesses Asherah and Anat. In the poem called “The Birth of the Beautiful Gods” the newborn gods are dubbed “Suckers at the nipple(s) of the breast(s) of the Lady,” *ynqm bap dšt* [...]. The Akkadian cognate *appu* is used of the nose and also of the tip or crown of other parts of the body such as the nipple of the breast and the *glans penis*. Medicine was sometimes administered to an infant by putting it on the nipple of the mother (*inaappitulummiðu*). In 1:14 there is mention of a sachet of perfume between the breasts, but perfume on the nipples would be less effective than on the larger area. [...] It may be that Ugaritic *ap* in the sense of “opening,” “entrance” is cognate with Akkadian *apu*, “hole,” and *aptu*, “opening,” “window,” and has nothing to do with *appu*, “nose,” “tip.” In any case, the reference to the apple-like aroma of the lady's $\frac{3}{4}ap$ suggests an aperture or a tip other than nostril or nipple, perhaps the vulva or clitoris.” Cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 636-637.

70 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 397.

71 Stoop - van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 396.

72 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 397.

73 Cf. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 397-398. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 246-247.

74 Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 21-22.

“When I behold sw[ee]t cakes,
[they seem like] salt.
Pomegranate wine, (once) sweet in my mouth-
it is (now) like the gall of birds.

The scent of your nose alone
is what revives my heart.
I have obtained forever and ever
what Amon has granted me.⁷⁵

In that Song, the couple rub noses and smell each other’s face. The nose kiss was a common gesture of affection in Egypt at that era.⁷⁶

Furthermore, ca. 600 BCE, the image of the apple is used to portray the sweet and proud (female) lover by Sappho: “Like a sweet apple reddening on the high tip of the topmost branch and forgotten by the pickers – no, beyond their reach.”⁷⁷ According to an Assyrian incantation, the image of the apple is used as an erotic symbol (*aphrodisiac* – to awaken libido by consuming the fruit or food)⁷⁸:

“[Incan]tation. The beautiful woman has brought forth love.
Inanna [the goddess of love], who loves apples and pomegranates,
Has brought forth potency ...
Its [i.e., the incantation’s] ritual: either (to) an apple or pomegranate
You recite the incantation three times.
You give (the fruit) to the woman (and) you have her suck the juices.
That woman will come to you; you can make love to her.”⁷⁹

In the Sumerian Paradise Myth, we can find a story about Enki and Ninhursag. This myth talks about “apples” and “grapes” (in comparison to our text – Song 7:7-10a). Briefly, Enki (*the Sumerian water-god*) had already impregnated the goddess Ninhursag (*the mother of the land*) and two other goddesses (Ninmu and Ninkurra). Furthermore, Enki wanted to impregnate the goddess Uttu, but Nin+ursag intervened and gave advice to Uttu not to cohabit with Enki until he brought her a gift of cucumbers, apples and grapes. Finally, Enki obtained the cucumbers, apples and grapes from a gardener and gave them to Uttu⁸⁰:

He [*a gardener*] brought him [*Enki*] the *cucumbers* of his cultivation,
he brought him the **apples** in their luxuriant greatness,
he brought him the **grapes** in their clusters (?)

75 Cf. Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 21. (Papyrus Harris 500, group B, no.12 B-C; J. B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry*. SBLDS 38 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 173. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 247.

76 Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 21-22 [Footnote C].

77 Cf. W. Barnstone, *Sappho* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1965), 43. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 247.

78 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 88.

79 Cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 381.; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 88.

Enki, his face turned pale, he gripped the staff.

Enki waited for Uttu.

In her house he cries: "Open! Open!"

"Thou, who art thou?"

"I am the gardener, I would give thee *cucumbers*, **apples** and **grapes**,
According to thy wish."

Uttu with joyful heart opened the door of the house.

Enki to Uttu behaved kindly.

gives the *cucumbers* of his cultivation,

gives the **apples** in their luxuriant greatness,

gives the **grapes** in their clusters (?).

Uttu, the fair lady ... for him, ... for him.⁸¹

Therefore, apples and grapes, in this case, can be interpreted as the gifts of the divinity.

2.8. "Your Palate Like Good Wine" (v.10a)

וְהִיָּף כִּינֵן הַטּוֹב^{10a}

This verse (v.10a) is linked to the previous verse (v.9d) where "the scent of nose" can be a description of "kissing." This verse (v.10a) can also refer to "kissing", even more intimate than before (v.9d), i.e., "French Kiss" in which tongue of the two lovers come together. In this case, there is an exchange of fluids during the kiss. The description in Song 4:11 is "honey and milk under your tongue". While, in Song 1:2; 4:10 and 7:10a, this fluid is like a [good] wine.⁸² The connection between "wine" and "pleasures" can also be found in Song 2:4; 5:1 and 7:3.⁸³ At the same time, there was a description that wine can bring joy to gods and human beings (cf. Judg 9:13; Ps 104:15). Then, wisdom says: "What is life to one who is without wine?" (Sir 31:27).⁸⁴

Furthermore, the word "חך" (*palate or roof of the mouth*) can also be found in Song 2:3 and 5:16. In these contexts (Song 2:1-3 and 5:9-16), the "חך" is used to designate "the fulfilment of the lovers' deepest longing."⁸⁵

80 Cf. S. N. Kramer, *Enki and Ninhursag: A Sumerian "Paradise" Myth*. Supplementary Studies no.1 (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1945), 6-7,14.G. Widengren, *The King and the Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion:King and Saviour IV* (Uppsala: Lundequist, 1951) 18-19, n.3.

81 Cf. S. N. Kramer, *Enki and Nin+ursag*, 6-7,14.G. Widengren, *The King and the Tree of Life*, 18-19, n.3.

82 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 398-399.

83 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 247.

84 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 44.

85 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 398-399.

Moreover, the “palate” or “roof of the mouth” (ךן) gives a special emphasis that “kissing” is a beginning of “love play” (in Song).⁸⁶ At the same time, this “kissing” is also the cumulation of a description which began in Song 7:8-9.⁸⁷

On the other hand, the word “ךן” can also be translated as “taste.” In the OT, this word has a connotation about the capacity to understand something by its “taste”: “Cannot my taste discern disaster?” (Job 6:30); “How sweet are your words to my taste; more than honey to my mouth.” (Ps 119: 103); “For my palate (taste) will mediate [on] truth.” (Prov 8:7); and also Song 2:4; 5:1; 7:3.⁸⁸

In ancient Egypt, “touching noses” was an expression of “tender contact.” It had more to do with smell than with touch (cf. v.9d). But, in the Sumerian myth for example, lovers kissed on the lips. In the myth of Enlil and Ninlil, the virgin Ninlil complains: “My lips are too narrow and have never been kissed.”⁸⁹ In the Ugaritic myth, kissing can stand for lovemaking, e.g., the myth of Shachar and Shalim tells of El bending over two women⁹⁰:

“He stooped (and) kissed their lips;
behold! Their lips were sweet [...]
In the kissing (there was) conception,
in the embracing (there was) pregnancy.”⁹¹

In the second half of the second millennium BCE, in Egypt, “kissing on the lips” seems to become common description which celebrates the intoxicating love. It can be found in the following short Egyptian love song⁹²:

“I kiss her,
her lips open,
and I am drunk
without a beer.”⁹³
(A short Egyptian love song; ca. 1300 BCE.)

Then, there are some other evidence from archaeology that kissing lips

86 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 206.

87 J. M. Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron: A Study in the Poetic Language of the Song of Songs*, JSOT203 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995), 100.

88 Kingsmill, *The Song of Songs*, 64-65.

89 Cf. H. Behrens, *Enlil and Ninlil. StudiaPhol*, Series Maior 8 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 30. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 41.

90 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 41.

91 J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clarke Ltd.; 2nd Revised Edition, 1978), 125-126.

92 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 41.

93 W. K. Simpson (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt. An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, and Poetry* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 1973), 311.

became widespread: *First*, Southern Mesopotamia (first half of 3rd millennium BCE.) (Fig. 14.); and *Second*, Tell el-Amarna (ca. 1340 BCE) (Fig. 15; 16.).⁹⁴

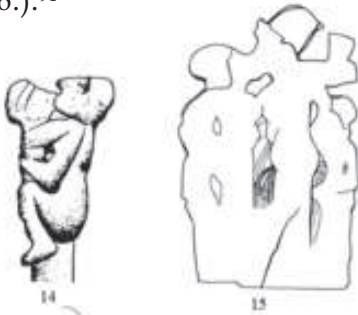


Fig. 14: A naked man (*left*) and a naked woman in close embrace kiss on the lips. (Head of a 5-inch [13 cm] copper pin from southern Mesopotamia; first half of third millennium BCE.)



Fig. 15: King Akhenaton kisses his wife Nefertiti on the lips. (Unfinished carnelian plaque; ca. 1340 BCE.)



Fig. 16: The Egyptian queen Nefertiti (Nefertiri), wife of Akhenaton, kisses one of her daughters on the mouth. (Remnant of a limestone relief from Tell el-Amarna; ca. 1340 BCE.)

3. Conclusion: General Analysis of Song 7:7-10a

Based on all the explanations above; in this part, we will focus generally on Song 7:7-10a as a unit. Then, we will focus on two important points: *First*, the general structure of Song 7:7-10a and its meaning; and *second*, royal ideology, temple, wisdom, promised land and love traditions in Song 7:7-10a.

3.1. The General Structure of Song 7:7-10a and Its Meaning

⁷How beautiful and pleasant you are, O love, in [your] delights

Bodies	Senses	1	Tree / Fruit	2	3	4	5
^{8a} your height	[sight]	like	palm [tree]				
^{8b} your breasts	[sight]	like	date [fruit]				
^{9a} Let me climb up	[touch]		[date]-palm tree [tree]				
^{9b} Let me grasp	[touch]		[clusters of] dates [fruit]				
^{9c} your breasts	[sight]	like	vine [tree]				
^{9d} <u>the scent of your nose</u>	[smell]	like	apples [fruit]				
^{10a} <u>your palate</u>	[taste]	like	good wine [a product]				

as a poetry * is created to be *listened to* and read [**hearing**]

94 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 41-42.

Based on the previous diagram, we can find some important points from the general structure of Song 7:7-10a:

- (1) Verse 7 can be read as an opening of the *wasf* of Song 7:7-10a: "How beautiful and pleasant you are, O love, in [your] delights." Then, the *beauty* and *pleasure* of the beloved (*the Shulammitte* [cf. 7:1]) are described more in detail in the next verses (vv.8-10a).
- (2) There is a dynamic of the human's *senses* in Song 7:7-10a (see no.1 of the diagram). The poetry begins with the *sight* of the woman's stature (height) (v.8a) and her breasts (v.8b); then, it goes to the *touch* of the palm tree and clusters of dates (v.9ab); after that, the sense of *sight* occurs again in the description of the woman breasts(v.9c); furthermore, the *smell* appears in the metaphor of "the scent of your nose"; and then, the *taste* of her palate is described as a good wine. Finally, Song 7:7-10a as poetry is created to be *listened to* and *read*. Therefore, in this case, the sense of *hearing* can be added in the end (*outside of the content of the poetry*). In other words, all the *five human's senses* can be found in Song 7:7-10a.
- (3) There is a parallelism AB // A'B' // A''B'' // C in Song 7:7-10a which is based on the general group of *tree* (date-palm tree and vine) and *fruit* (dates and apples). Finally, the "good wine" - as a product of the *tree* and *fruit* - appears in the end of the poem as a climax of the poem itself [C] (see nos. 2-5 of the diagram). This product (wine) cannot be separated from human effort. Then, by *testing*, the beloved one (King Solomon) can *taste* the palate of the woman (*the Shulammitte*) as a "good wine" (cf. v.10a).

From these points, we can find that structurally, Song 7:7-10a is well arranged by the author. At least, there are two dynamics which deliberately are considered by the author: *First*, the dynamic of the *senses*. This begins with a *visual* aspect (vv.8ab; 9c), then *cutaneous* aspect (vv.9ab), *olfactory* aspect (v.9d), *gustatory* aspect (v.10a), and finally, *auditory* aspect by reading and listening to it. At the same time, this dynamic indirectly describes the totality of a human being (all five *senses*).; *Second*, the dynamic of *plantmetaphors*. Song 7:7-10a uses the metaphors of *trees* and *fruits*. They are used one after the other from v.8a to v.9d (see the diagram). Then, in v.10a, "a good wine" appears as the ending to "sum up" all the previous metaphors in order to "taste" it intimately. This dynamic indirectly invites us not only to "stick" in the metaphors but to go further to "taste intimately" the meaning of each metaphor which is used in Song 7:7-10a.

3.2. Royal Ideology, Temple, Wisdom, Promised Land and Love Traditions

The Royal Ideology in the Song of Songs cannot be denied. It is proved by the first verse in the Song: "Song of Songs which is Solomon's"

(Song 1:1). In our case (Song 7:7-10a), it is also clear that a man is speaking in Song 7:7 (based on the grounds of the contents vv.7-10a), i.e., King Solomon. It is supported by the literary composition of Song 7:2-6 which is mentioned מֶלֶךְ (King) (in 7:6c) – in the immediate previous text. Furthermore, the King has a role as a mediator between God and His people (it can also be found in the ANE tradition which is already explored in part II of this article). This role of King is also supported by using the word “delight” in v.7b. The Hebrew word “תִּעְנוּג” is used in this case. This word has a semantic cluster similar to that of “הַמֵּד” (*desire* or *delight*) which also describes a physical enjoyment to YHWH, his laws, and his loving-kindness. Therefore, in our case (7:7), she (*the Shulammitte*), in the eyes of King Solomon, is also seen as *the gift of God* and a part of *the promised land*. This description of *the gift of God* and *the promised land* are explored in the next verses (8-10a). Therefore, “O love, in (your) delights” (in v.7b) can be key-words for a better understanding of Song 7:7-10a as a unity.

In v.8a, the first description is about the *height* or *stature* “קוֹמָה” of the woman. In 1 Kings, this word “קוֹמָה” is used to describe the *height* of the furnishings in the temple which Solomon built (cf. 1 Kgs 6-7). Then, in Exodus, “קוֹמָה” also appears many times in the context of the construction of the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle (cf. Exod 25-38) as a manifestation of the relationship between God and His people in the wilderness. For that reason, this verse (v.8a) also has a connection to **thetemple tradition** in Israel.

The *height* or *stature* of the woman is described as a “palm tree” (in v.8a) and the King wants to climb up it (in v.9a). The “palm tree” in the ANE is used to describe (1) “tree-goddess”, (2) “sacred tree” or (3) “tree of life” which represent *fertility* and *love*. In the OT, “palm tree” is also used to point out (1) the attractive woman – Tamar (*palm tree*), (2) the importance of some places (e.g., Jericho and Engeddi), and (3) the enclosure and sanctuary of the temple which were decorated with motifs inspired by the palm (cf. Ps 92:13-14; 1 Kgs 6:29, 32, 35; 7:36; Ezek 40:16; 41:18-20). Therefore, the “palm tree” is used in Song 7:8 can also be interpreted in the light of the other passages in the OT which express the *importance*, *attractiveness*, and also *manifestation of divinity* in the woman’s body whom the King Salomon is describing; and there is also **thetemplemotif** behind the “palm tree.”

In v.8b, we can find that the breasts of the woman are described like “clusters of dates.” Then, in v.9b, King Solomon wants to grasp that “clusters of dates.” In this case, the verb “to grasp (seize)” in Song 7: 9b can be connected to a passage on Wisdom in Prov 3:18 where the woman is described as a “tree of life” and anyone who tries to *lay hold of* her and *retain* her, they will be happy. At the same time, the “breasts” (in v.8b) can also refer to the “Lady Wisdom” in Prov 5:19: “Let her *breast* inebriate you at all times.” Therefore, in this case, Song 7:8b.9b can also be

interpreted into a part of **wisdom of the man (King Solomon)** who tries to “grasp” or “seize” the *wisdom* itself from the main source, i.e., “The Lady Wisdom” (cf. Prov 3 and 5).

In vv.8a-10a, we can find some images of trees (*date-palm tree* and *vine*), fruits (*dates* and *apples*) and some components of edible entities (*clusters of dates* and *clusters of the vine*). All of these images bring a conception of *the promised land* as an *idyllic garden* which brings forth abundance of fruits (cf. Num 13:23; Deut 8:8; 2 Kgs 18:32; 2 Chr 31:5).⁹⁵ These images also express the relationship between a female lover who is the embodiment of *the promised land* and its owner who wants to *enjoy* it with all his senses. Nevertheless, the relation with the owner remains equal. It is true that in Song 7:9b the man *squeezes* (חָצַץ) the woman. But, in Song 3:4, we can find an interesting comparison with our verse (7:9b) where the woman *squeezes* or *holds tight* (חָצַץ) the man after having searched him for a long time during the night. Therefore, in this case, the woman is not only the *object* but also the *subject* of the action. It is supported by the mutual belonging between *man* and *woman* in Song 7:11: “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.” In this case, this image also presents the *core* of God’s covenant for Israel which is expressed by “the mutual belonging” between God and His people.

Finally, the whole array of parallels in the ANE love poetry and the Song of Songs is often related to the idea of a sacred marriage which is part of **the love traditions**. In this case, this relationship between the Song of Songs and the ANE tradition still conveys a complexity. For M. Nissinen, “metaphors are crosscultural, and their transfer from one socioreligious context to another is an elusive process of adaptation, interpretation, and implementation.”⁹⁶ However, beside all that complexity, there is an important point which Nissinen mentioned:

“Love is the best possible metaphor for a beneficial relationship, human and divine alike, and passion is the human feeling nourished by and responding to this metaphor [...] In all cases, love is the ideal type of relationship. It [...] alleviates the threat of violence; it expresses mutual devotion and maintains the hope of an unbroken union, changing the discontinuity of separate bodies into continuity. Though, in fact, all of this may be too good to be true, hope is reflected in the sustained yearning of the Song of Songs [...]”⁹⁷

95 A. Brenner, “The Food of Love: Gendered Food and Food Imagery in the Song of Songs”, *Semeia* 86 (1999), 105-111.

96 M. Nissinen, “Song of Songs and Sacred Marriage,” in M. Nissinen – R. Uro (eds.), *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 217.

97 M. Nissinen, “Song of Songs and Sacred Marriage”, 218.

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