

# Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes

Sex and sophistry  
in the Old Testament  
*A new English translation*

T. Givón

John Benjamins Publishing Company

# Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes



# Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes

Sex and sophistry in the Old Testament

A new English translation

T. Givón

University of Oregon

John Benjamins Publishing Company

Amsterdam / Philadelphia



The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences – Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

DOI 10.1075/z.222

**Cataloging-in-Publication Data available from Library of Congress:  
LCCN 2019007579 (PRINT) / 2019016522 (E-BOOK)**

ISBN 978 90 272 0319 9 (HB)

ISBN 978 90 272 6251 6 (E-BOOK)

© 2019 – T. Givón

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, photoprint, microfilm, or any other means, without written permission from the publisher.

John Benjamins Publishing Company · <https://benjamins.com>

# Table of contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>VII</b>
PART I	
<b>Biblical Hebrew as a diachronic continuum</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Introduction	1
2. Texts and grammatical variables	3
3. Change and variation in Biblical Hebrew	5
3.1 Word-order and tense-aspect	5
3.2 The grammar of relative clauses	14
3.3 The grammar of verbal complements	16
3.4 The grammar of adverbial clauses	19
4. Discussion	22
4.1 Recapitulation	22
4.2 Language contact as added explanation	23
Abbreviations of grammatical terms	24
PART II	
<b>On translation</b>	<b>25</b>
1. The triple conundrum	25
2. Linguistic theory as a theory of translation	27
3. On translating of <i>Song of Songs</i> and <i>Qohelet</i>	28
4. Revisionist interpretation of vexing texts	29
5. Scribal misinterpretation of the Hebrew script and grammar	31
PART III	
<b>Song of Songs</b>	<b>35</b>
Chapter I	36
Chapter II	42
Chapter III	47
Chapter IV	51
Chapter V	56
Chapter VI	61
Chapter VII	65
Chapter VIII	69

PART IV

**Ecclesiastes** 73

Chapter I 75

Chapter II 81

Chapter III 90

Chapter IV 96

Chapter V 104

Chapter VI 110

Chapter VII 116

Chapter VIII 124

Chapter IX 132

Chapter X 140

Chapter XI 147

Chapter XII 151

**Bibliography** 157

# Preface

The core of this book, indeed its *raison d'être*, is a new English translation of the two shortest, most controversial and perhaps most vibrant books in the Hebrew Old Testament – Song of Songs (a.k.a. Song of Solomon) and Qohelet (a.k.a. Ecclesiastes). The two books slipped into the Jewish – and eventually Christian – Canon by a series of all-too-transparent misrepresentations. The first, Song of Songs, is linguistically the latest book along the dialect continuum of Biblical Hebrew, perhaps as late as 300–100 BC. In most of its core grammatical features, its language closely resembles Mishnaic Hebrew (2nd Cent. AD). The book comprises of an unabashedly carnal poetic account of an illicit love affair, where lusty exchanges between the female beloved and her male lover are interspersed with rustic contemporary love songs. The ultimate provenance of the text may be older than the time it was recruited into the Canon, or the time suggested by its Late Biblical dialect.

The admission of *Song of Songs* into the Canon hinged on two dubious claims: First, the attribution of authorship to King Solomon (ca. 1,000 BC), as well as some explicit suggestions in the text that Solomon himself was the illicit male lover. And second, a re-interpretation of the original carnal love story as either a spiritual relation between the people of Israel and their God (Jewish tradition), or between the human soul and God (Christian tradition).

The second book, Qohelet, is linguistically earlier on the Biblical Hebrew dialect continuum, to judge by multiple grammatical variables, though certainly following the return from the Babylonian exile (ca. 550 BC). Unlike Song of Songs, which is linguistically coherent and bears all the marks of having been produced by a native speaker (or speakers), Qohelet is replete with non-native usage and grammatical infelicities, and was most likely produced by a speaker (or speakers) of Aramaic, the lingua franca of Persian-controlled Palestine and of the returned exiles.

In terms of its contents, Qohelet is an oft-nihilistic assault on the two most hallowed institutions of its time – the secular Kingdom, be it pre-exile Judea or the post-exile empire of Cyrus the Great, and the Jewish priestly establishment centered around the Jerusalem temple. The book was allowed into the Canon



by attributing it to King Solomon, again an inspired fabrication. What is more, some Hellenic contact, perhaps during the Hashmonai kingdom (following the Alexandrine conquest ca. 333 BC), may be inferred from the philosophical arguments, most likely contact with post-Socratic philosophy and the subsequent Cynics or early Stoics.

Multiple English translations of the two books exist, including Fr. Roland Murphy's (1990, 1992) two monumental volumes, which include extensive commentaries, annotations and bibliographies. No word of praise will suffice to extol the scholarly virtues of Fr. Murphy's work. Nonetheless, in one way or another all previous translations suffer from two main drawbacks: First, their interpretation of the grammar – and on occasion also the vocabulary – of Biblical Hebrew is sometimes questionable. And second, the poetic quality of their English leaves much to be desired, paling in comparison to the stark beauty of the Hebrew original.

It takes a considerable measure of *hubris*, or *hutzpah*, to offer a new rendition of these much-translated texts. In defense, I can only plead that this has been a labor of love, born of a lifetime of reading and contemplating the two texts.

My attachment to Song of Songs goes back to my childhood, when in the late 1940's the collective village I grew up in, Maabarot, endeavored to celebrate the anniversary of its settlement in Wadi Hawareth, better known in Hebrew as Emek Hefer, by producing *Song of Songs* as a musical extravaganza. Much of the Biblical text was set to music by a member of the collective, Nisim Nisimov. And much of the village's population, including us kids, was roped into the production. To this day, I can still hum the entire treasury of Nisimov's tunes. The book's unabashed celebration of earthy carnal love still hovers, in my mind, over the terrain of sandstone hills, drained swamps, and citrus groves. The meandering Iskandrion river still snakes its way to the coast through of the plain of the Sharon, with the hills of Samaria rising hazy to the east.

My personal involvement with Qohelet, ever since reading it first at the age of seven, has been prompted by more philosophical conceits, dating back more than 50 years to my first introduction to the minor Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope and the Chinese mystic Lao Tse. But it was also prompted by the book's unabashed anti-establishment aura, somewhat akin to the *zeitgeist* of California in the 1960s, where for the whole decade I enjoyed a wild second childhood. It is thus a compound challenge to try and do justice to both the contents and form of these two magnificent, deliciously subversive poetic works.

This work comprises the following parts:

Part I: A straight-forward linguistic study of the diachronic dialect continuum of Biblical Hebrew, tracking down the parallel changes of several morpho-syntactic features from Early Biblical Hebrew (henceforth EBH; the so-called Five Books of Moses, Joshua, Judges I,II and Kings I, II), through an intermediate post-exile period comprising of several highly-variable books (Lamentations, Esther, Nehemia); then onward to Late Biblical Hebrew (henceforth LBH) and the two books translated here, Song of Songs and Qohelet.

Part II: A short essay on the art and science of translation; first in general terms; then as it touches more specifically on the problems of translating from Biblical Hebrew to contemporary English; then as pertaining to the translation of these two LBH texts.

Parts III and IV: The translated texts of Song of Songs and Qohelet, in order, including extensive annotation, with the notes touching on the contents, the language, previous scholarship and the eternal pitfalls of translation. At the beginning of each chapter, the original Hebrew text – shorn of the traditional Mesoratic vocalization – is given.

The bibliography, supporting both the prefatory chapters and my various translation choices and dilemmas, does not aim to be as all-inclusive as the inimitable example of Fr. Murphy's two volumes. I am indebted to my long-time editor Kees Vaes of J. Benjamins, Amsterdam, for his patience and support, and to Fr. Agustinus Gianto, SJ for his most encouraging comments on the ms. Last but not least, I am indebted, albeit posthumously, to Fr. Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., for his magnificent two volumes of exemplary Biblical scholarship. Whether intended or not, Fr. Murphy's work has reinforced my conviction that while the translator must ever strive to do better, and then better yet, the translation itself remains, at best, just barely good enough.

White Cloud Ranch  
Ignacio, Colorado  
September 2018



# Part I

## Biblical Hebrew as a diachronic continuum

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The rationale for interpreting grammatical variation across the Biblical Hebrew (BH) texts as a diachronic linguistic continuum is fairly straightforward, and may be given first as the old adage: If it looks like a duck, and walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then by golly it *must* be a duck. Translated into the present context, if the grammatical variation across the texts of Biblical Hebrew lines up along known universal directional trends of diachronic change, and if all linguistic variables show a similar distributional drift across the same texts, then the BH texts *must* represent a natural diachronic continuum. The force of *must* here is not that of logical necessity but rather of plausible hypothesis. Like all useful hypotheses, ours makes testable predictions that can either be falsified or not.<sup>2</sup> In this particular case, the prediction is:

- (1) The frequency distribution of multiple grammatical variables will line up the same books of the Old Testament in the same temporal order.

The methodology proposed here depends, transparently, on conceding the existence of universals of grammatical change. Under the current label of **grammaticalization**, the study of the diachrony of grammar harkens back to the very roots of modern linguistics in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, with

<sup>1</sup> The materials presented in this chapter have been condensed, revised and in some cases re-analyzed from two previous works (Givón 1977, 1991b), with revised versions also to be found in Givón (2013, 2015 chapters 9,10). I am indebted to Agustinus Gianto, SJ, Eitan Grossman and Bernd Heine for comments and suggestions on the revised version. The imperfections that still remain here are entirely my own. In particular, I apologize to traditional philologists for the somewhat reduced marking of the BH vowels and geminate consonants. To my best knowledge, these omissions do not impinge on the grammatical variables studied here.

<sup>2</sup> And, as is the case of all explanatory hypotheses in science, the alternative of presenting no hypothesis leaves the puzzles unexplained, or else explained in a less systematic way.

illustrious forebears such as Franz Bopp (1820), Hermann Paul (1890), Antoine Meillet (1921) and Otto Jespersen (1917, 1921, 1924). More modern renditions and elaborations may be found in Heine *et al.* (1991), Traugott and Heine (eds 1991), Hopper and Traugott (1993), Bybee *et al.* (1994), Heine and Kouteva (2007) or Givón (1971, 1979, 2000, 2009, 2015), *inter alia*. For the purpose of this chapter, the following universal directional trends in grammaticalization may be invoked:

(2) **Universal directional trends in grammaticalization:**

- a. **Morpho-genesis:** Grammatical morphemes arise from lexical words.
- b. **Cliticization:** When lexical words cliticize as bound morphemes, they become phonologically de-stressed, reduced and shortened.
- c. **Irregularity:** Morpho-phonemic irregularity and variability increases with the age of grammatical morphemes.
- d. **Syntacticization:** Tightly-packed syntactic constructions arise from loosely-concatenated paratactic configurations, a process that most often also involves morpho-genesis.
- e. **Functional motivation:** Grammatical change is communicatively motivated, so that functional extension always precedes structural re-adjustment.
- f. **Functional ambiguity:** Consequently, the early stages of grammatical change are characterized by functional ambiguity, whereby the same construction performs both its old and new function.
- g. **Word-order change:** The directionality of word-order change, absent substratum contact, tends to be:

SOV > free/pragmatic word-order > V-first > SVO

A strong claim implicit in universals (2a–g) is that of **uni-directionality**; that is, that grammatical change proceeds, overwhelmingly, in the direction suggested in (2a–g) but not in the opposite direction.<sup>3</sup>

Many universal trends of diachronic change are specific to particular grammatical constructions or morphemes. To the extent that diachronic trends are universal and overwhelmingly uni-directional, they allow us to make precise

<sup>3</sup> I will disregard here the utter silliness of unearthing rare exceptions to the uni-directionality of diachronic changes and then claiming that such exceptions somehow ‘disprove’ the overwhelming trend. General trends in biological, cultural and linguistic evolution are seldom exceptionless, given that population variation and multifactor causation are integral parts of the mechanism of change.

judgements about a grammatical construction or morpheme being older or younger along a diachronic continuum. In the case of Biblical Hebrew, this allows us to place at least some of the books of the Old Testament along the continuum.

## 2. Texts and grammatical variables

The Hebrew Old Testament is a complex mix of early oral traditions that were later pressed into written form, together with texts that were probably written to begin with. Natural diachronic change, however, takes place overwhelmingly in the spoken language. As long as a written text reflects, albeit with some time-lag, the naturalness of a spoken dialect; and as long as the scribes were fluent native speakers, one could assume that their written grammar was natural and coherent. But to a grammarian it is fairly clear that many late books in the Old Testament, especially those committed to writing or re-edited after the Babylonian exile, were written by people whose first language was not Hebrew. Consequently, vexing methodological issues plague the selection of Old Testament books to be investigated in a study of this kind.

In principle, all the books of the Old Testament could be subjected to the kind of tests used here, since the grammatical variables chosen are fairly frequent in text. This assumption of general applicability raises relatively few problems with the Five Books (Pentateuch) and the Early Prophets up to and including Kings II. However, problems begin to crop up with some of the later texts. Three examples will illustrate the point.

On our proposed diachronic continuum, the book of Lamentations is problematic. Its language seems progressive ('later') according to some grammatical variables, but conservative ('earlier') according to others. The book of Job is by all philological evidence a relatively late book, reflecting contact with post-Socratic Greek philosophy, presumably during the Hellenistic period. But its grammar is as conservative as that of Genesis, and gives all appearances of a non-native-speaking scribe using written EBH texts as a **stylistic template**.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, Song of Songs may harken back to older oral texts, but its grammar is the most progressive ('latest') on our proposed diachronic continuum. The reason for such an apparent conflict may have to do with the socio-linguistics

4 This appears to also be the situation with the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, whose compilers strove valiantly to emulate EBH grammar, interspersing numerous grammatical infelicities across the text, in a manner reminiscent of the Qohelet text.

of genre and gradual change – this book is couched in the most earthy, folksy, oral language of the Old Testament, thus reflecting a more progressive dialect.<sup>5</sup>

Another issue in selecting Old Testament texts for this kind of study is that genre differences may affect the distribution of grammar in text. Thus, poetic texts may pose a problem because their language often harkens back to older layers of usage, as compared to the narrative within which they are embedded. To the extent possible, I have tried to deal with comparable narrative texts.<sup>6</sup>

It is beyond my competence and the scope of this chapter to resolve all these issues. The texts studied here were selected by purely linguistic criteria: The presumed grammatical changes must line up, for all variables studied, along the *same directional trend*; that is, conform to prediction (1). The strength of the proposed method thus rests on the implicit assumption that grammatical change is coherent rather than chaotic; and that speakers are largely unconscious of their grammar.

The following books seem to line up coherently along the proposed continuum, and were chosen for this study:

**(3) Text selected along the Biblical Hebrew diachronic continuum:**

- i. **Early Biblical Hebrew (EBH):**
  - a. Genesis (chapters 1–12 or 1–20)
  - b. Kings II (chapters 1–12 or 1–20)
- ii. **Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH)**
  - c. Esther (entire text)
  - d. Lamentations (entire text)
  - e. Ecclesiastes (entire text)
  - f. Song of Songs (entire text)
- iii. **Mishnaic Hebrew (MH)**
  - g. Masekhet Brakhot, Seder Zraḥim (chapters 1–9)

<sup>5</sup> There remains here the conundrum of the extent to which Hebrew was still a spoken language after the Babylonian exile, including the Mishnaic period. The native-like quality of the language of Song of Songs, as well as further natural grammatical innovations found in Mishnaic Hebrew, suggests that it somehow had. Or, at the very least, that a body of speakers retained native-like competence.

<sup>6</sup> The three unavoidable exceptions are Lamentations, an exhortative prayer text, Qohelet, an aphoristic text, and Song of Songs, a poetic text with some dialogic features. Of the three, Lamentations proved the most problematic.

The fact that Mishnaic Hebrew (ca. 2nd Century AD) conforms in all grammatical variables studied here to the language of Song of Songs serves to uphold the usefulness of our methodology.<sup>7</sup>

The grammatical variables studied here are:

(4) **Grammatical variables:**

- a. Word-order
- b. Tense-aspect
- c. Relative clauses
- d. The subordinator *‘asher* vs. the contracted *she-*
- e. Verbal complements
- f. Adverbial clauses.

These morpho-syntactic features are relatively frequent in text, and are presumably independent of the contents.

### 3. Change and variation in Biblical Hebrew

#### 3.1 Word-order and tense-aspect

While in principle distinct, word-order and tense-aspect are in fact closely correlated in Early Biblical Hebrew. This is so because one word-order, the most-frequent VSO (V-first), is strongly associated with the *preterit* (perfective; erroneously labeled ‘imperfect’), the most frequent tense-aspect in narrative text; while another word-order, SVO (X-V, T-V-X), is strongly associated with either the *perfect* or with stative/imperfective (copular or participial) clauses. This association is motivated by the pragmatics of **referential and thematic continuity**, a communicative dimension that motivates the choice of both aspect and word-order (Hopper 1979, ed. 1982; Givón ed. 1983, 1988, 2017). As an example of the strong association of referential/thematic continuity in EBH with both the VS word-order and the preterit/perfective tense-aspect, consider:

7 There are many added grammatical innovations in Mishnaic Hebrew that are not yet attested in Song of Songs.



- (5) a. ...wa-yo'mer 'elohim: y-hi 'or,  
and-3ms/say/PRET God 3ms-be/IRR light  
'...and God **said**: "Let there be light",
- b. wa-y-hi 'or;  
and-3ms-be/PRET light  
and there **was** light;
- c. wa-ya-r' 'elohim ki-ṭov,  
and-3ms-see/PRET God SUB-good  
and God **saw** that it was good,
- d. wa-ya-vdel 'elohim beyn ha-'or  
and-3ms-divide/PRET God between the-light  
u-veyn ha-ḥoshekh,  
and-between the-dark  
and God **separated** the light from the dark,
- e. wa-yi-qra' 'elohim l-a-'or yom,  
and-3ms-call/PRET God to-the-light day  
and God **called** the light day,
- f. we-l-a-ḥoshekh qara' layla...  
and-to-the-dark call/PERF/3ms night  
and the dark he **called** night... (Gen. 1:3–5)

In all but the last verbal clause above, (5f), the VSO (or V-first) order is correlated with the *preterit* tense-aspect; in all but (5f), thematic and referential continuity is maintained. The last clause switches the topical referent – here the object – from 'light' to 'dark', using a **contrastive fronting** device ('Y-movement'). This thematic and referential shift precipitates the use of an OV order and the *perfect* tense-aspect.

Some of the complexity of using the double contrast of tense-aspect cum word-order to mark the distinction between thematic/referential continuity vs. discontinuity is further illustrated in (6) below:

- (6) a. we-ha-'adam ydaṣ 'et-hawa 'isht-o,  
and-the-man know/PERF/3ms ACC-Eve wife/of-3sm  
'And Adam **knew** his wife Eve,
- b. wa-ta-har wa-te-led 'et-qayin,  
and-3fs-conceive/PRET and-3fs-give.birth/PRET ACC-Cain  
and she **conceived** and **gave birth** to Cain,

- c. wa-to-'mer: qan-iti 'ish 'et-YHWH,  
and-3sf-say/PRET bought/PERF-1s man ACC-Jehova  
and she said: “I bought a man with (from?) God”,
- d. wa-to-sef la-ledet 'et-'aḥi-w 'et-hevel;  
and-3fs-add/PRET to-give.birth ACC-brother-3sm ACC-Abel  
and she went on to give birth to his brother Abel;
- e. wa-y-hi hevel rofeh tso'n  
and-3ms-be/PRET Ebel herder/of sheep  
and Abel was a sheep-herder
- f. we-qayin haya Ṣoved 'adama..  
and-Cain be/PERF/3sm worker/of soil  
and Cain was a tiller of the soil...’ (Gen. 4:1–2)

There are three loci of thematic discontinuity in (6) above: (6a) is a chapter-initial clause, introducing a brand new subject/topic – Adam, thus employing the perfect cum SV order. In (6b), Eve takes over as the subject/topic, having been first introduced as object in (6a), thus deemed continuous. The narrative continues in the preterit and V-first word-order through (6b–d)<sup>8</sup> In (6c), a direct-quoted verbal complement is treated as a *thematic lacuna*, thus discontinuous and marked by the perfect aspect, with the V-first word-order a predictable consequence of referential continuity.<sup>9</sup> The subject/topic shift in (6e) is not considered a major thematic break since Abel already appeared in the preceding clause (6d) as a topical object. So (6e) proceeds with the preterit tense-aspect and V-S word-order. Finally, in (6f) the subject/topic switch from Abel to Cain precipitates the use of the perfect with SV word-order.

A consistent if less-than-perfect deployment of word-order cum tense-aspect combinations to code continuity vs. discontinuity may also be seen in:<sup>10</sup>

8 Referential continuity (here of Eve) makes the subject NP superfluous here, given the obligatory subject pronominal agreement of Hebrew.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Clause (7a) is another example of the less-than-perfect pairing of the perfect aspect and S-V (or X-V, or T-V-X, or inverse word-order; see Vennemann 1973; Givón 1988, 1994). Because of traditional misunderstanding of the role of the perfect in EBH as a marker of thematic discontinuity, (7a) is sometimes mistranslated as a nominalized temporal ADV-clause, i.e. *bi-re'shit bro' elohim 'e-ha-shamayim wi-'et ha-'asrets* ‘In the beginning of God’s creation of the sky and the earth’.

- (7) a. be-re'shit bara' 'elohim 'et-ha-shamayim  
 in-beginning create/PERF/3sm God ACC-the-sky  
 ve-'et-ha-'arets  
 and-ACC-the-earth  
 'In the beginning God **created** the heaven and the earth,
- b. we-ha-'arets hay-ta tohu wa-vohu  
 and-the-earth be/PERF-3fs chaos and-confusion  
 and the earth **was** chaos and confusion
- c. we-hoshekh šal pney ha-tihom;  
 and-dark on face/of the-precipice  
 and darkness over the precipice;
- d. we-ruah 'elohim meraḥef-et šal pney ha-mayim;  
 and-spirit/of God hover/PAR-fs on face/of the-water  
 and the spirit of God **was hovering** over the water;
- e. wa-yo-'mar 'elohim: y-hi 'or,  
 and-3ms-say/PRET God 3sm-be/IRR light  
 and God **said**: “Let there be light”,
- f. wa-y-hi 'or;  
 and-3ms-be/PRET light  
 and there **became** light;
- g. wa-ya-r' 'elohim 'et-ha-'or ki-ṭov...  
 and-3ms-see/PRET God ACC-the-light SUB-good/sm  
 and God **saw** the light(,) that it was good...’ (Gen. 1:1–4)

Clause (7a) is text-initial, by definition a context of thematic discontinuity. It is marked with the perfect tense-aspect. The novel subject/topic – God – appears in the VS (TVX) word-order because of the fronted adverb (see further below). The subject/topic switch in (7b) is marked by the predicted combination – the perfect tense-aspect with SVO word-order. The subject/topic switch in (7d) is again marked with the SVO (TVX) word-order, but the imperfective aspect is coded here by the *participle*. Imperfectives are distributed in language mostly in thematic lacunae, strongly associated with thematic discontinuity (Hopper ed. 1982). In (7e–g), at long last, the action picks up with the thematic backbone of the narrative and its main topic/subject – God, with the predictable combination of the preterit cum V-first word-order.

The next example shows lacunas of thematic discontinuity in the use of both an ADV-clause (8d) and V-complement (8f, g, i), again marked by the perfect

(or other discontinuity-associated aspects such as *imperfective* or *irrealis*), with the V-first order again the consequence of referential continuity:

- (8) a. wa-y-hi rašav b-a-'arets,  
and-3ms-be/**PRET** famine in-the-land  
'And there **was** famine in the land,
- b. wa-ye-red 'avraham mitsraym-a la-gur sham,  
and-3ms-descend/**PRET** Abraham Egypt-ALL to-live there  
and Abraham **went** down to Egypt to live there
- c. ki-kaved ha-rašav b-a-'arets;  
SUB-heavy the-famine in-the-land  
because the famine was heavy in the land;
- d. wa-y-hi ka-'asher hiqriv la-vo' mitsraym-a,  
and-3ms-be/**PRET** SUB-REL near/3sm/**PERF** to-come Egypt-ALL  
and so when he **neared** Egypt,
- e. wa-yo-'mer 'el sarah 'isht-o:  
and-3ms-say/**PRET** to Sarah wife/of-3sm  
he **told** his wife Sarah:
- f. hineh-na yadaš-ti ki-'isha yifat mar'eh 'at;  
lo-EMPH know/**PERF**-1s SUB-woman pretty/sf/of visage you/2sf  
Indeed I **have known** that you are a good-looking woman;
- g. we-haya ki-yi-r'-u ha-mitsrim  
and-be/3sm/**PERF** SUB-3m-see/IRR-3mp the-Egyptians  
we-'amr-u:  
and-say/**PERF**-3mp  
so if it **were** that the Egyptians saw (you) and **said**:
- h. 'isht-o zo't,  
wife/of-3ms this/fs  
"she is his wife",
- i. we-harg-u 'ot-i  
and-kill/**PERF**-3mp ACC-1s  
and they **would kill** me
- j. we-'ot-akh yi-ḥay-u...  
and-ACC-2fs 3m-let.live/IRR-3mp  
and **will let** you live..."... (Gen. 12:10–12)

Relative clauses are likewise thematic lacunae, often pointing back to previous loci in the discourse, with a high frequency of the *perfect* aspect, though invariably with the V-S order. Thus consider:<sup>11</sup>

- (9) a. ...wa-ya-r' 'elohim 'et-kol 'asher šasa...  
and-3ms-see/PRET God ACC-all REL make/PERF/3ms  
'...and God saw all that he **had done**...' (Gen. 1:31)
- b. ...we-'et-kol nefesh ha-ḥaya ha-romeset 'asher  
and-ACC-all soul/of the-animal the-crawling REL  
sharts-u ha-mayim...  
spawn/PERF-3mp the-water  
'...and all the crawling living souls that the water **had spawned**...' (Gen. 1:21)

Lastly, the use of the perfect-cum-SV to mark discontinuity is most apparent in the series of subject/topic switches in:

- (10) ...u-li-shem yulad gam hu'...,  
and-to-Shem bear/PASS/PERF/3ms also he  
'...and to Shem (to him too) **was born**...,  
we-'arpashad yalad 'et-shelaḥ,  
and-Arpashad bear/PERF/3ms ACC-Shelah  
and Arpashad **sired** Shelah,  
we-shelaḥ yalad 'et-'ever,  
and-Shelah bear/PERF/3ms ACC-Ever  
and Shelah **sired** Ever,  
u-l-'ever yulad shney banim...  
and-to-Ever bear/PASS/PERF/3ms two sons  
and to Ever **were born** two sons...' (Gen. 10:21–25)

The distribution of the SV and VS word-orders in the various tense-aspects and clause types in EBH is given in Table 1, below.

<sup>11</sup> The use of the VS word order in object rel-clauses and ADV-clauses, often in strong association with the perfect aspect, is common in languages that retain some subject-position flexibility, such as Spanish, Arabic, Swahili or German. Such subject post-posing is associated with the topicalization – often by fronting – of a non-subject argument (Vennemann 1973; Givón 1976, 1988, 2001 vol. 1 chapter 5). I used to think it also reflected the putative syntactic conservatism of subordinate clauses, but am not as sure about this any more.

Table 1. Tense aspect and word-order in EBH (Genesis)

	Preterit		Perfect		Partic.		Copular		Irrealis	
	VS	SV	VS	SV	VS	SV	VS	SV	VS	SV
main clauses	177	/	2	21	/	4	5	72	12	12
fronted OBJ/ADV	/	/	13	/	/	1	2	15	1	/
subord. clauses	2	/	25	/	2	/	10	1	2	/
<b>total: (379)</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>/</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>
percent:	<b>47%</b>		<b>16%</b>		<b>1.8%</b>		<b>27%</b>		<b>7%</b>	

Table 1 suggests some interesting associations:

- The preterit shows **100%** association with the VS word-order.
- The preterit appears almost exclusively – 177/179 or **98%** – in main clauses.
- The preterit is the most frequent tense-aspect in the text – 179/379 or **47%**, as compared to **16%** for the perfect and **27%** for the stative/copular.
- The perfect in main clauses shows a 21/23 or **91%** association with the SV word-order.
- The perfect occurs most frequently – 38/61 or **62%** – in either subordinate clauses or topic-shifting (‘inverse’) construction.
- Subordinate clauses show a 33/34 – **97%** – association with the VS word-order.
- The overall text frequency of the VS word-order is 253/379 or **66.7%**.

The text-frequency of the preterit/perfective in Table 1 – 47% – is under-represented, due to three related facts:

- Zero-subject clauses, with pronominal agreement on the verb, were not counted.
- Zero-marking of subjects is associated, overwhelmingly, with maximal referential continuity (Givón ed. 1983, 2017).
- The preterit/perfective is the main tense-aspect venue for high thematic/referential continuity.

To estimate the magnitude of this under-representation, the overall occurrence of the preterit – with and without a full-NP subject – was counted in the first 12 chapters of Genesis were. The number of all preterit-marked clauses was 379, and 200 of them appeared in zero-subject clauses, as against 179 with an overt subject as listed in Table 1. The percent of zero-subject preterit-marked

clauses in the 12 chapters is thus 200/379 or 52.7%. The under-representation of the text-frequency of the preterit in Table 1 is thus substantial. While other tense-aspects may have suffered similar under-representation, their lower text-frequency and their stronger association with thematic discontinuity may suggest a lower impact.

At the tail end of the BH diachronic continuum one finds *Song of Songs*. By this stage, the two grammatical variables tested here – tense-aspect and word-order – have undergone profound re-structuring. First, the EBH *perfect* has become the main *preterit/perfective* tense-aspect in LBH text. And second, the SV word-order, less frequent, ‘marked’ and strongly associated with the *perfect* tense-aspect in EBH, has become the most frequent, ‘unmarked’ word-order in Late Biblical Hebrew.

To illustrate briefly the strong association between the *perfect*, SV word-order and thematic/referential continuity in LBH consider:

- (11) a. ...pashaṭ-ti 'et-kutant-i, 'eykha 'e-lbash-ena?  
take-of/PERF-1s ACC-dress-1s how 1s-put.on/IRR-3fs  
‘...I **took off** my dress, how shall I put it on?’
- b. raḥats-ti 'et-ragl-ay, 'eykha 'a-ṭanf-em?  
wsh/PERF-1s ACC-feet-1s how 1s-dirty/IRR-3mp  
I **washed** my feet, how shall I dirty them?’
- c. dod-i shalah yad-o min-ha-hor  
lover-1s send/PERF/3ms hand-3ms from-the-hole  
my lover **sent** his hand through the opening
- d. u-meṣ-ay ham-u ṣal-aw,  
and-guts-1s buzz/PERF-3mp on-3ms  
and my guts **called** for him,
- e. qam-ti 'ani li-ftoaḥ li-dod-i  
rise/PERF-1s 1s to-open to-lover-1s  
I **got up** to open (the door) for my lover
- f. we-yad-ay naṭf-u mor...  
and-hands-1s drip/PERF-3mp myrrh  
and my hands **dripped** with myrrh...’ (SoS, 5:3–5)

The text distribution of the VS vs. SV word-order in the various tense-aspect and clause types in Song of Songs is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Tense aspect and word-order in LBH (SoS)

	Preterit		Perfect		Partic.		Copular		Irrealis	
	VS	SV	VS	SV	VS	SV	VS	SV	VS	SV
main clauses	4	5	7	18	/	8	16	65	/	/
fronted OBJ/ADV	1	/	4	0	/	/	/	/	/	/
subord. clauses	/	/	15	2	/	/	6	4	/	/
<b>total: (151)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>/</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>/</b>	<b>/</b>
percent:	6%		30%		5%		57%		0% <sup>12</sup>	

The more salient features of the distributions in Table 2 may be summed up as follows:

- The old *preterit* now comprises only 6% of the total sample, mostly used now to mark *irrealis*.
- The old *perfect* – now functioning as the new *preterit/perfective* – now comprises 30% of the sample.
- Verbless predicate clauses comprise 57% of the total sample, probably due to the elliptic, poetic nature of the text.
- In main clauses, the *perfect* outstrips the old *preterit* – now *irrealis* – 25/9. It now comprises 25/34 – or 73% – of the total sample of main clauses..
- In main clauses, 101/123 or 82% now show the SV word-order.

For the sake of brevity, Table 3 below summarizes only our two main variables across the texts selected to represent the BH diachronic dialect continuum:<sup>13</sup>

- The percent distribution of the *SV word-order* (vs. VS) in main clauses; and
- The overall text-frequency of the *perfect* form in all verbal clauses (excluding verbless predicate and copular clauses).

<sup>12</sup> Due to the largely dialogic nature of the Song of Songs text, irrealis clauses, with either 1st or 2nd person subject, appear in high frequency. But because subject pronominal agreement on the verb is obligatory, this verb form requires no independent subject NP. We have not counted here the multiple cases of irrealis with only subject pronominal agreement.

<sup>13</sup> The full tabulations may be found in Givón (1977).



**Table 3.** Text frequency of SV and perfect aspect in verbal clauses<sup>14</sup>

	VS	SV	Total	% SV	Perfect	Total	%-perfect
Genesis	196	109	305	35%	61	274	22%
Kings-II	215	94	309	30%	125	399	31%
Esther	103	56	159	35%	76	226	33%
Lamentations	45	49	94	52%	90	119	75%
Ecclesiastes	43	120	163	73%	60	185	32%
SoS	27	96	123	78%	46	64	71%
Mishnaic H. (Zrařim)	9	115	124	92.8%	nc	nc	nc

### 3.2 The grammar of relative clauses

REL-clauses throughout the BH continuum are finite, overwhelmingly with V-first word-order, and introduced with the subordinator *'asher/she-*. This may be seen in the following examples, first from EBH:

(12) a. **Subject REL-clause:**

...min-ha-'adamah 'asher pats'-a 'et-pi-ah  
 from-the-earth REL open/PERF/3fs ACC-mout-3fs  
 '...from the earth that has opened its mouth...' (Gen. 4:11)

b. **Direct-object REL clause:**

...va-ya-sem sham 'et-ha-'adam 'asher yatsar...  
 and-3ms-put-PRET there ACC-the-man REL create/PERF/3ms  
 '...and he put there the man that he had created...' (Gen. 2:8)

c. **Prepositional-object:**

...kol ha-maqom 'asher ti-drokh kaf ragl-khem b-o...  
 all the-place REL 3fs-step/IRR sole/of foot-3mp on-3ms  
 '...every place that the sole of you foot steps on (it)...' (Joshua, 2:3)

d. **Manner REL-clause:**

...k-khol 'asher shamař-nu l-moshe...  
 like-all REL listen/PERF-1p to-Moses  
 '...just (like) the way we listened to Moses...' (Joshua, 1:17)

<sup>14</sup> While diachronic-change curves tend to be S-shaped, much like typical learning curves in psychology, it is not possible to place the BH books studied here on an absolute temporal scale.

e. **Copular predicate, locative:**

...shnayim shnayim mi-kol ha-basar 'asher b-o  
 two two from-all the-flesh REL in-3sm  
 ruah hayim...  
 breath/of life  
 ‘...two from each flesh that has the breath of life in it...’ (Gen. 7.15)

f. **Copular predicate, possessive:**

...we-'et kol 'asher la-hem...  
 and-ACC all REL to-3pm  
 ‘...and everything that belongs to them...’ (Joshua 2.14)

The same finite pattern predominates REL-clauses in the LBH texts, with the subordinator *asher* now shortened into *she-*:

(13) a. **Subject REL-clause:**

...ke-šeder ha-šizim she-galsh-u  
 like-herd/of the-goats REL-slide/PERF-3mp  
 me-har gilšad...  
 from-mountain Gilead  
 ‘...like the herd of goats that slid down from Mount Gilead...’  
 (SoS, 4:2)

b. **Direct-object REL-clause:**

...biqash-ti 'et-she-'ahav-a nafsh-i...  
 sought/PERF-1s ACC-REL-love/PERF-2fs soul-1s  
 ‘...I looked for the one my soul loved...’ (SoS, 3:1)

c. **Prepositional object REL-clause:**

...b-a-šaṭara she-šitr-a l-o 'im-o  
 at-the-crown REL-crown/PERF-3fs to-3ms mother-3ms  
 ‘...at the crown that his mother made for him...’ (SoS, 3.1)

d. **Manner REL-clause:**

...she-kakha hishbaš-ta-ni...  
 REL-thus swear/PERF-2ms-1s  
 ‘...that you have sworn me like this...’ (SoS, 5:9)

e. **Copular predicate, possessive:**

...karm-i she-l-i li-fan-ay...  
 vineyard-1s REL-to-1s to-face-1s  
 ‘...my vineyard is in front of me...’ (SoS, 8:12)

The second REL-clause pattern is limited to the *participial/nominal/imperfective* tense-aspect, and used only in subject REL-clauses. Examples from EBH are:

(14) a. **Definite:**

...u-ve-khol ha-haya **ha**-romes-et šal ha-'arets...  
 ...and-over-all the-animal **the**-crawl/PAR/fs on the-earth  
 '...and over all the animals **crawling** upon the earth...' (Gen. 1:28)

b. **Indefinite:**

...deshe' šesev mazriaš zeraš le-mine-hu  
 turf grass seed/ms seed to-kind-3ms  
 ...turf of grass **seeding** (its) seeds of all its kinds...' (Gen. 1:12)

The frequency distribution of *'asher* vs. *she-* as REL-subordinator across the BH dialect continuum is given in Table 4 below (Givón 1991b).

Table 4. The contraction of *'asher* to *she-* in rel clauses

	'asher		she-		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Genesis	93	100	/	/	93	100
Esther	100	100	/	/	100	100
Lamentations	9	75	3	25	12	100
Ecclesiastes	69	52	62	48	131	100
Song of Songs	/	/	25	100	25	100
Mishnaic H. (Zrašim)	1	1	122	99	123	100

The general trend lining up the books in the same order along the continuum persists.

### 3.3 The grammar of verbal complements

In this section I will consider indirect-quote complements of cognition-perception-utterance (CPU) verbs such as 'know', 'see', 'hear' or 'say'/'tell'. Two main finite patterns predominate in Biblical Hebrew. The first pattern, with either the preposition *ki* ('as', 'like') or the de-verbal *we-hine* ('and-be', 'and-lo') as subordinators, predominates in the EBH texts. As examples, consider:

(15) With the *ki*-subordinator:

- a. ...wa-ya-r' 'elohim *ki* tov...  
and-3ms-see/PRET God SUB good  
'...and God saw that it was good...' (Gen. 1:10)
- b. ...wa-y-hi ki-shmoaf 'elisha 'ish ha-'elohim  
and-3ms-be/PRET SUB-hear/INF Elisha man/of the-God  
*ki* qaraaf melek h yisra'el 'et-bigad-aw...  
SUB tear/PERF/3ms king/of Israel ACC-clothes-3sm  
'...and so it was that when Elisha the man of God heard that the  
king of Israel had torn his clothes...' (Kings II, 5:8)

With the *ve-hineh* subordinator:

- c. ...wa-ya-r' *ve-hineh* harv-u pney ha-'adama  
and-3ms-see/PRET and-be dry/PERF/3mp face/of the-earth  
'... and he saw that – lo – the face of the earth had dried up...'  
(Gen. 8:13)

The second pattern, with the REL-subordinator *'asher/she-*, predominates in LBH and is phased in gradually along the BH continuum. Some examples of its use from the latter portions of the dialect continuum may be seen in:

- (16) a. ...tov '*asher* lo' ti-dor...  
good SUB NEG 2ms-swear/IRR  
'...it is better that you don't swear an oath...' (Eccl. 5:4)
- b. ...we-ra'i-ti 'ani *she*-yesh yitron l-a-ħokmah...  
and-see/PERF-1s I SUB-is advantage to-the-wisdom  
'...and I saw that there was advantage in wisdom...' (Eccl. 2:13)
- c. ...mah t-agid-u l-o? *she*-ħolat 'ahava 'ani...  
what 2mp-tell/IRR-PL to-3ms SUB-sick/sf/of love 1s  
'...what should you tell him? That I am sick with love...' (SoS, 5:8)
- d. ...we-yadaf-ti gam 'ani *she*-miqreh 'eħad yi-qreh  
ad-know/PERF-1s too 1s SUB-fate one 3ms-befall/IRR  
'et-kul-am...  
ACC-all-3mp  
'...and I knew too that one fate will befall all of them...'  
(Eccl. 2:14)

In Table 5 below we list the relative distribution of the two main V-complement subordination patterns across the BH diachronic continuum (Givón 1991b).

Table 5. Distribution of V-complement subordination patterns

	<i>ki/vehineh</i>		' <i>asher/she-</i>		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Genesis	24	100	/	/	24	100
Esther	7	50	7	50	14	100
Lamentations	7	87	1	13	8	100
Ecclesiastes	12	34	23	66	35	100
Song of Songs	/	/	24	100	24	100
Mishnaic H. (Zraṣim)	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc	nc

By and large, with Lamentation again the odd woman out, the distributional data here conform to the general trend of our suggested diachronic continuum.

Table 6 below gives the distribution of the subordinator '*asher* vs. the contracted *she-* in V-complement clauses across the BH diachronic continuum. This affords us a comparison with the REL-clause data given in Table 4, above.

Table 6. The contraction of '*asher* into *she-* in V-complements

	' <i>asher</i>		<i>she-</i>		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Genesis	/	/	/	/	/	/
Esther	7	100	/	/	7	100
Lamentations	/	/	/	/	/	/
Ecclesiastes	11	48	12	52	23	100
Song of Songs	/	/	25	100	25	100
Mishnaic H. (Zraṣim)	/	/	24	100	24	100

Largely conforming to the frequencies shown in Table 4, the distributional data again tag Ecclesiastes as the mid-point of the continuum, with 52% completion. Song of Songs is again at the 100% completion point, with only *she-*,<sup>15</sup> the same as in Mishnaic Hebrew.

<sup>15</sup> The only occurrence of the unreduced '*asher* in Song of Songs is in the introductory line, external to the actual text: *shir ha-shirim 'asher li-shlomo*, lit. 'song of songs **that** (is) to Solomon'. It probably represents a literary hyper-correction by a non-native-speaking editor using the EBH model.

### 3.4 The grammar of adverbial clauses

In this section we will consider the distribution of two major patterns of ADV-clause formation across the BH diachronic continuum, both already attested in EBH. The first is a **nominalized** pattern whereby a preposition such as *b-* ('at'), *k-* ('like') or *l-* ('to') is attached to the nominal/infinitive form of the verb, or to some locative/temporal noun that often precedes the verb in this pattern. Either the subject or object of the clause in this pattern is marked as *genitive* (possessor). This pattern predominates in EBH texts, and there are reasons to believe that it is the older pattern not only for ADV-clauses but also REL-clauses (Givón 1991b, 2009 chapter 4). Some examples of this nominalized pattern in EBH are:

- (17) a. ...**bi-**yom ʕasot YHWH 'elohim 'erets we-shamayim  
 at-day/of make/**NOM**/of YHWH God earth and-sky...  
 '...on the day when God made earth and sky...'  
 (lit.: '...upon the day of **God's making** earth and sky...') (Gen. 2:4)
- b. ...**be-**hibar'-am...  
 at-PASS/create/**NOM**-3mp  
 '...when they were created...'  
 (lit.: '...upon **their creation**...') (Gen. 2:4)
- c. ...ʕad shuv-kha 'el ha-'adama...  
 time return/**NOM**-2ms to the-earth  
 '...till you return to the ground...'  
 (lit.: '...the time of **your return** to the ground...') (Gen. 3:19)
- d. ...'**akharey** holid-o 'et-mahal'el...  
 following/of sire/**NOM**-3ms ACC-Mahalel  
 '...after he sired Mahalel...'  
 (lit.: '...after **his siring** Mahalel...') (Gen. 5:13)
- e. ...**ki-**shmoaf malkey ha-'emori...  
 like-hear/**NOM**/of kings/of the-Emorite  
 '...when the Emorite kings heard...'  
 (lit.: '...upon **the Emorite kings' hearing**...') (Joshua 5.1)
- f. ...**ki-**lhokh ha-shor 'et-yereq ha-sadeh...  
 like-chew/**NOM**/of the-ox ACC-grass/of the-field  
 '...the way the ox grazes the grass of the field...'  
 (lit.: '...like the **ox's grazing** the grass of the field...')

The second ADV-clause pattern is finite. It is marked with the REL-subordinator *'asher/she-* and often follows a locative/temporal noun. This pattern is in the early stages of launching itself in EBH, and there are good grounds for believing that it is being extended from the REL-clause pattern, perhaps via the V-complement pattern. In LBH, on the other hand, this finite pattern predominates. Some examples from EBH are:

(18) a. **Temporal:**

...ka-'asher hikriv la-vo' mitsraym-a...  
 like-REL near/PERF/3ms to-come Egypt-ALL  
 '...when he came close to Egypt...'  
 (Gen. 12:11)

b. **Purpose:**

...li-mašan 'asher ye-tsave...  
 to-answer/NOM REL 3ms-order/IRR  
 '...so that he order...'  
 (lit.: '...for the purpose that he order...')

c. **Purpose:**

...we-sam-ti 'et-zarf-kha ki-šafar ha-'arets, 'asher  
 and-put/PERF-1s ACC-seed-2ms like-dust/of the earth REL  
 'im yu-khal 'ish li-mnot...  
 if 3ms-can/IRR man to-count...'  
 '...and I shall scatter your seed like the dust of the earth, so that if  
 a man could count...'  
 (Gen. 13:16)

Examples of this finite ADV-clause pattern in LBH are:

(19) a. **Temporal:**

...we-'im ti-šorer-u 'et ha-'ahavah šad she-te-špats...  
 and-if 2-wake/IRR-mp ACC-the-love time REL-3fs-desire/IRR  
 '...and if you will wake up love till it will desire...'  
 (SoS, 2:7)

b. **Temporal:**

...šad she-ya-fuaḥ ha-yom...  
 time REL-3ms-blow.away/IRR the-day  
 '...till the day expires...'  
 (SoS, 2:17)

c. **Temporal:**

...ki-mšaṭ she-šavar-ti me-hem...  
 like-little REL-pass/PERF-1s from-them  
 '...(when) I had almost passed them...'  
 (SoS, 3:4)

d. **Temporal:**

...mah na-ʕase' li-'aħot-enu **b-a-yom**  
 what 1p-do/IRR to-sister-1p **on-the-day**  
**she-yi-dubar** b-a?...  
**REL-3ms-speak/PASS/IRR** at-3fs  
 ‘...what shall we do with our sister on the day she is spoken about...’  
 (SoS, 8.8)

A few examples of the nominalized ADV-clause pattern survive in LBH, as in e.g.:

(20) ...**bi-yom** ĥatunat-o u-**vi-yom**  
**on-day/of** wed/**NOM/of-3ms** and-**on-day/of**  
 simħat lib-o..  
 rejoice/**NOM/of** heart-3ms  
 ‘...on the day of his wedding and on the day of his heart’s rejoicing...’  
 (SoS, 3:11)

The distribution of the two patterns for temporal ADV-clauses across the BH dialect continuum is given in Table 7 below (Givón 1991b):

**Table 7.** Frequency distribution of the two ADV-clause patterns across the BH continuum

	Nominalized		Finite		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Genesis	41	<b>95</b>	2	5	43	100
Esther	13	<b>81</b>	3	19	16	100
Lamentations	2	50	2	50	4	100
Ecclesiastes	1	5	17	<b>95</b>	18	100
Song of Songs	2	18	9	<b>82</b>	11	100
Mishnaic H. (Zraʕim)	7	12	47	<b>88</b>	54	100

In the main, again, the shift in the frequency distributions follows the same trends noted above, lining up the same BH books in the same temporal order.



## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Recapitulation

The grammatical changes surveyed above are largely independent of each other. Each of them occurred under its own motivation and via distinct mechanisms, in spite of some obvious connectivity in areas of the grammar. They comprise:

- a. Change of word-order
- b. Changes in the functional distribution of tense-aspects
- c. The phonological contraction of an erstwhile lexeme into a bound morpheme
- d. The transfer of subordinator patterns from REL-clauses to V-complements
- e. The transfer of subordinator patterns from REL-clauses to ADV-clauses

Although the motivation and mechanisms driving these changes were not emphasized here, they are all fairly well understood (Givón 1977, 1991b, 2015 chapters 9, 10). What is more, these changes conform to well known universals of grammaticalization (see (2) above).

To give just one example of a fairly transparent mechanism, consider the hybrid construction whereby a verb takes both a nominal object and a verbal complement. Such a construction constitutes an **analogical bridge** between REL-clauses and V-complements, and is found in both EBH and LBH. With relatively little re-analysis, the V-complement clause following an NP can be still interpreted as a REL-clause, given that REL-clauses follow head nouns while V-complements follow verbs. It is the syntactic contexts – ambi-valence verbs that can take either direct object and verbal complement – that make such a hybrid construction possible. Thus compare, with typical ambi-valence verbs such as ‘see’, ‘hear’ and ‘know’:

- (21) a. wa-ya-r'                    'elohim 'et-kol 'asher řas-a  
 and-3ms-see/PRET God    ACC-all REL    make/PERF-3ms  
**we-hineh řov    me'od**  
**and-be    good    very**  
 ‘...and God saw all that he had done and lo it was very good...’  
(Gen. 1:31)
- b. wa-ya-r'                    'elohim 'et-ha-'or    ki řov  
 and-3ms-see/PRET God    ACC-the-light SUB good  
 ‘...and God saw that the light was good...’  
 (lit.: ‘...and God saw the light that is was good...’)      (Gen. 1:4)

- c. shamaʕ-nu 'et-'asher hovish JHWH 'et-yam suf  
hear/PERF-1p ACC-REL dry/PERF/3ms Jehovah ACC-sea/of reed  
'...we heard that God had dried up the Red Sea...' (Joshua, 2:10)
- d. 'al ti-r'-u-ni she-'ani shħarħor-et...  
NEG 2-see/IRR-mp-1s REL-1s swarthy-fs  
'...don't see that I am swarthy...'  
(lit.: '...don't see me that I am swarthy...') (SoS, 1:6)
- e. yadaʕ-ti she-gam zeh hu' raʕayon ruah...  
know/PERF-1s REL-too this/m 3sm folly/of spirit  
'...I knew that it too was folly...' (Eccles. 1:17)

Examples (21a, b, d) are the old hybrid constructions in EBH. Example (21c) is a more advanced intermediate with the REL-subordinator *'asher/she* invading the paradigm. Example (21e) is the final product in LBH.

Like all grammatical changes, and like the usage variation that gives rise to them, the changes studied here occur sub-consciously and unobtrusively. This is what makes the frequency distribution of morpho-syntactic constructions across the BH dialect continuum so remarkable. With relatively few distortions, notably the book of Lamentations, these grammatical changes line up the very same books in the very same directional – and, I suggest, temporal – order.

Whether the temporal/diachronic interpretation of this order is supported by non-linguistic historical evidence is a question I am not qualified to answer. But if the distributional patterns shown above are fortuitous accidents, those accidents are surely governed by a perverse intelligence that has somehow conspired to make Biblical Hebrew look like a natural language, with natural-seeming distributions, variation and change. For my money, still, if it looks like a duck, and it waddles like a duck, and it quacks like a duck, it would be a bit shocking if it turned out to be anything but a duck.

## 4.2 Language contact as added explanation

The grammatical changes that span the Biblical Hebrew dialect continuum look like run-of-the-mill gradual diachronic changes, prompted by run-of-the-mill language-internal communicative motivations. However, one still needs to wrestle with the possible effects of the post-exile language contact situation in LBH. That problem is not confined to the seemingly-aberrant frequency distributions of morpho-syntactic variants in the book of Lamentation, but has its footprints spread all over the late ('latter prophets') books. Unlike the largely coherent usage variation and frequency distributions found in the EBH corpus,

the later books of the Old Testament are littered with non-native usage and/or scribal misinterpretation – above and beyond the expected norm.

A comparison between the two books translated here is perhaps instructive. While the frequency of scribal slips and grammatical infelicities in Song of Songs appears at the same low level as in the EBH books, the frequency of non-native-like usage in Qohelet is an order-of-magnitude higher. The Qohelet text, it seems, was assembled – either composed or edited or re-transcribed or all three – by non-native speakers. While it is not my intent to resolve this problem in a definitive way here, a quantified assessment of it will be given in Part II, below, and discussed in multiple footnotes throughout Part IV.

## Abbreviations of grammatical terms

ACC	accusative	REAL	realis
AGT	agent	REL	relative subordinator
ALL	allative	REM	remote
ERG	ergative	S	subject
EXH	exhortative	SUB	subordinate
GEN	genitive	SUBJUN	subjunctive
IMPER	imperative	1s	1st person singular
IMPFV	imperfective	1p	1st person plural
INDIC	indicative	2ms	2nd person masculine singular
INF	infinitive	2mp	2nd person masculine plural
INSTR	instrumental	2fs	2nd person feminine singular
IRR	irrealis	2fp	2nd person feminine plural
LOC	locative	3ms	3rd person masculine singular
NEG	negative	3mp	3rd person masculine plural
NOM	nominative, nominal	3m	3rd person masculine
PASS	passive	ms	masculine singular
PAT	patient	mp	masculine plural
PERF	perfect	fs	feminine singular
PFV	perfective	fp	feminine plural

## Part II

# On translation

### 1. The triple conundrum

Translation may be considered at three intertwined levels – the linguistic, the cultural, and the stylistic or creative. While the linguistic level is the gateway to the other two, and while it is the most concrete and thus in principle the most straight-forward, it is hardly simple. In the introduction to her translation of *The Yellow Emperors Classic of Internal Medicine* (1972), Ilza Veith makes the following observation concerning the translation of Classical Chinese texts into English:

...The Classical Chinese scholar, however, took pride in expressing highly complicated sentences with as few characters as possible. In such cases, as in the *Nei Ching*, even the smallest grammatical aids are lacking and the translator or even Chinese reader is frequently confronted by Pythian oracles....

(1972: xii)

Re-cast in less oracular terms, Veith is saying, first, that Classical Chinese employed an ideographic writing system that marked only lexical words but not grammatical morphemes. And second, most likely, that even the spoken language during the Classical period was heavily *pidginized*, thus lacking many – perhaps most – grammatical operators such as conjunctions, subordinators, tense-aspect-modal markers, voice indicators, articles, pronouns, case-markers and the like.

While my citation of Veith pertained more narrowly to my own attempt to translate Lao Tse's *Tao The Ching*, an archaic Chinese text from ca. 600 BC, it may be, indirectly, also relevant to discussing the translation of Late Biblical Hebrew texts from somewhere between 500 and 100 BC.

At its most concrete nuts and bolts, language may be divided into three major components:

- **lexical meaning:** the more-or-less invariant meaning of individual words;
- **lexical organization:** the distribution of lexical meaning among the words in the verbal clause;<sup>1</sup>
- **grammatical form:** the morpho-syntactic organization of clauses and clause-chains.

At this down-to-earth level, cross-language translation is torn between three oft-conflicting imperatives:

- a. Fidelity to the lexical meaning, lexical organization and grammatical form of the source language;
- b. Fidelity to the lexical meaning, lexical organization and grammatical form of the target language;
- c. Fidelity to the communicative intent and creative spirit of the source text.

Concerning imperative (a) first, it is fairly clear that fidelity to the lexical meaning of the source language is most desirable in translation – except when it conflicts with imperative (b). Fidelity to its lexical organization and grammatical form, however, must yield to the target language (b).

Concerning imperative (b), it is obvious that maximum fidelity to the lexical meaning, lexical organization and grammatical form of the target language is an absolute requirement, *sine qua non*, upon which translation may rise or fall.

Imperative (c), lastly, is the least concrete of our three imperatives, depending in many subtle ways on all three components of the target language – lexical choice, lexical organization and grammatical form. This is indeed the most complex arena where fierce if subtle competition takes place between the cultural context and the living spirit and stylistic/creative intent of both the source and target language. This is also where the translator cannot be just a competent linguist or an accomplished bi-lingual, but must also be, willy nilly, a writer.<sup>2</sup>

1 Languages may package the very same lexical-semantic contents in either a single lexical word, two words or more; that is, in a multi-word phrase. A conspicuous examples of this are serial-verb constructions, whereby what is a single-verb clause in one language may be rendered as a multi-verb clause in another (Givón 1991a).

2 One of the most glaring examples of a translation that manages to violate all three imperatives, perhaps my all-time favorite, is A. T. Murray's (1925) English rendition of Homer's *Iliad*. This over-burdened, hyper-literary English concoction manages, at the same breath, to misrepresent *both* the lexical, grammatical and clause-chaining structure of the original Homeric Greek and the lexical, grammatical and clause-chaining structure of 20th Century English, in the process nearly obliterating the creative poetic genius of Homer.

## 2. Linguistic theory as a theory of translation

Many scholars, anthropologists and linguists don't believe that the meaning, communicative intent and creative spirit of a text – any text – can be detached from the structure of the particular language in which it has been conceived, spoken or written. This belief in the cognitive, cultural and structural **uniqueness** of each language – thus in a principled lack of cognitive, communicative and cultural **universals** – is often cast in terms of the so-called *Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis* (Whorf 1950, 1956). Such an anti-universalist perspective, taken to its ultimate conclusion, would deny the feasibility of *both* translation and second language acquisition.

My own take on this issue is that in spite of wide cultural and linguistic chasms, translation is eminently possible, if seldom ideal. And that the meaning, communicative intent and creative spirit of a source-language text can be divined and recast into a target language – albeit with considerable investment in historical, philological and subject-matter research. This belief in the feasibility of cross-language translation is anchored in a theoretical perspective on language that takes for granted *both* universality and diversity, in this sense a perspective akin to that of modern evolutionary biology. It may be given in terms of three inter-dependent theoretical observations:<sup>3</sup>

- **Universal functional domains:**

There exist cognitive, semantic and communicative universals that define the various domains coded by lexicon and morpho-syntax. Like all biologically-based generalizations, these functional universals are not absolute, but are still statistically robust. The universality of such language-coded functional domains is a foundational assumption that makes the tasks of *both* cross-language translation and second language acquisition possible, though by no means trivial.

- **Structural-typological diversity:**

The same – or roughly the same – functional domain can be coded by diverse lexical, morpho-syntactic and discourse structures in different languages. Our understanding of such structural-typological diversity, and thus of the **functional equivalence** of the diverse structures that code the same functional domain, is what makes it possible to find cross-language **translation equivalents**, however rough and approximate.

3 See Givón (1979/2018, 2002, 2016).

- **Diachronic emergence:**

The diverse synchronic structures that code the same functional domain in different languages are produced by diverse diachronic pathways. The source constructions that are recruited as starting-points for these diachronic pathways are chosen, to begin with, because their original functional domains all exhibit **functional similarity** or **partial functional overlap** with the target domain. It is thus the functional definition of both source and target domains in the diachronic emergence of grammar that determines the range of cross-language structural-typological diversity, thus also the availability of translation equivalents.<sup>4</sup>

What this theoretical perspective does, for translation, naturally and inadvertently, is:

- Define the universal functional organization of the lexicon ('words'), verbal clauses ('propositions') and discourse ('communication');
- Circumscribe the range of possible cross-language structural diversity;
- Thereby suggest the range of available translation equivalents.

These three are what makes translation possible. Though of course, growing up multilingual, living as a stranger in strange lands, and the life-long burden of coping with translation as a way of life, a frame of mind and an ever-present burden, does not hurt either.

### 3. On translating of *Song of Songs* and *Qohelet*

As the preceding discussion suggests, translating *Song of Songs* and *Qohelet* into English may pose problems that arise from structural-typological differences between Late Biblical Hebrew and contemporary English. Fortunately, such problems are much less severe than in translating into English from Classical Chinese, Homeric Greek, Uto Aztecan, Australian Aborigine, Western Niger-Congo or Papuan Highlands languages. This is so because Biblical Hebrew and Modern English are typologically rather similar. Nonetheless, the translation presented here still depends on an accurate analysis of the lexicon and grammar of both Late Biblical Hebrew and Modern English. It also depends on identifying the sometime-subtle differences between the native-like dialect of *Song of Songs* and the oft-problematic usage of *Qohelet*.

4 See examples and extensive discussion in Givón (1979, chapters 1, 4).

As noted earlier above, I have been fortunate in having had access to the most exhaustive, indeed admirable work of Fr. R. E. Murphy (1990, 1992), which I consider the benchmark of painstaking historical and philological scholarship. There is no way I could match Fr. Murphy's scholarship, and I have no intention of trying; and my notes, interspersed through the two translated texts (Parts III, IV, below), rely heavily and unabashedly on Fr. Murphy's work. At the same time, I take issue now and then with what I consider to be errors in Fr. Murphy's interpretation of the Hebrew texts, be it linguistic or cultural. In addition, I hope to have produced English translations that reflect better, if possible, both the poetic style and creative spirit of the Hebrew originals – the unabashed carnality of Song of Songs, the bitter stoic pessimism of Qohelet.

#### 4. Revisionist interpretation of vexing texts

The devout interpretation that made it possible to include Song of Songs and Qohelet in the Judaic and Christian Canons may be seen, somewhat ironically, as an added layer of translation. The attribution of both books to King Solomon was an early attempt at white-washing, perhaps around the time when these possibly-oral texts were written down, codified, or edited. The more substantive act of cleansing, first of *Song of Songs*, proceeded in two discrete steps. First, within the Judaic homiletic tradition, the 2nd Century AD Mishnaic scholar Rabbi Aqiva interpreted the illicit carnal love story symbolically as the love between the people of Israel and their God, cautioning against a literal interpretation of the text:

...Whoever sings the Song of Songs in a tremulous voice in a banquet hall and so treats it as a sort of ditty (Ar. *de-min zemer*) has no share in the world to come...<sup>5</sup> (see Murphy 1990, p. 13)

The Christian interpretive tradition, just as anxious to keep the cleansed love story in the Canon, re-cast it as the more universal love between the human soul and God.<sup>6</sup> Thus, one finds the following discussion of Song of Songs 1:2 in the devotional writing of the Carmelite mother superior Sta. Teresa de Jesús (Teresa de Ávila):

“...*Béseme con el beso de su boca,  
Por que mejores son tus pechos que el vino.*”

5 See further discussion in Murphy (1990, pp. 11–21), as well as Urbach (1971), *inter alia*.

6 See again Murphy (1990, pp. 11–21).



I have noted aplenty, that the Soul seems (in as much as one could at all understand this) to be speaking of one Person, but begging Peace from another. For it says: ‘May he kiss me with the kisses of his Mouth’, but then, ‘Your Breasts are better than wine’. But how could one ever understand this plainly, the way it is written? And is not our *not* understanding indeed a rare Gift to us? For verily, one had better not conceive of the Soul in such a base Light, nor have her respect for her God expressed in a Manner such as can only be perceived through our carnal Senses. Thus I recommend to you, Sisters, that when you read this Book, as when you hear certain Sermons, or when you reflect upon the Mysteries of our Holy Faith, that what your Mind cannot understand, don’t tire your poor Souls in trying; for it is not for Women, and indeed often not even for Men, to understand this...” (*Vida y Obras Completas*, vol. 2, p. 583; my own English translation).

My own take on this, having grown up with the original text in its original geographic context on the plains of Sharon and the hills of Judea, Samaria and the Galilee, is, of course – let the story speak for itself.

The devout re-interpretation of *Qohelet*, aside from attributing the authorship to King Solomon and re-branding Qohelet as *Ecclesiastes* (‘priest’), is less extreme, perhaps due to a mis-perception of how subversive the text really was to both the Priesthood and the Kingdom. The book’s nigh-nihilistic rejection of major tenets of the Old Testament, of both its epistemology of revealed knowledge and its carrot-and-stick ethics, may reflect acquaintance with Greek philosophy, perhaps both Plato and Aristotle. Though the pervasive cynicism is more in line with Diogenes of Sinope; and the cyclic dialectics may echo Heraclitus of Ephesus, and perhaps through him, however indirectly, the dialectic mysticism of Lao Tse.

Lastly, it is perhaps worth noting that in his double infraction against Temple and Empire Qohelet presages, eerily, an equally impertinent rabble-rouser who preached a few centuries later, Jesus Christ.

## 5. Scribal misinterpretation of the Hebrew script and grammar

The Hebrew Bible was written originally in a consonantal script, with the vowels left unmarked. Three minor exceptions to this are the use of the glides /w/ (*waw*) and /y/ (*yod*) to mark, on occasion, the vowels /o/u/ and /i/ey/, respectively; and the occasional use of word-final /h/ (*heh*) to mark the vowel /a/. But Hebrew vowels are crucial for decoding both lexical meaning and grammatical function, in both the nominal and verbal paradigms. When scribes eventually began adding vowel markings underneath, above and in front of the consonantal letters, numerous misinterpretations of the vocalization found their way into the codified ('Mesoratic') text. Some of those are noted in the codified version itself, by marking the correct interpretations in the margins. But many others have been left unnoted.

A second reason for mis-interpreting Hebrew writing is the graphemic similarity of several consonantal letter pairs. Thus, for example, the /y/ (*yod*) and the /w/ (*waw*) are often interchanged because they differ only in vertical length. Likewise, the /t/ (*taw*) and the /ħ/ (*het*) differ by a minor modification at the bottom-left. And the /k/ (*kaf*) and the /b/ (*beyt*) differ by a minor modification at the bottom-right. Likewise, the /z/ (*zayn*) and the /w/ (*waw*) differ by minor details at the top. All these were, apparently, pitfalls to both the scribes-copiers and the readers-interpreters.

Mixups of graphemically-similar letters are particularly frequent in the late books, presumably read and copied by non-native scribes. In our two texts, many more unnoticed misinterpretations of vocalization and grammar were found in *Qohelet* than in *Song of Songs*, in all likelihood due to the non-native scribes/interpreters of the former. Such misinterpretations of vowel value, consonants and grammar, often crucial for interpreting the meaning of the text, are noted repeatedly below, in the footnotes across the two books. Still, it would be instructive to have a quantitative assessment of the extent of the problem.

In Table 1, below, I list first, for comparison, the number of traditionally-noted mistakes printed in the margins in four books of the Old Testament. These mistakes are divided into three categories: vowel confusion, consonant confusion, and missing or mis-ordered consonants. The texts are Genesis (EBH; first 12 pp.), Jeremiah (Late Prophets; first 12 pp.) and our two translated books (LBH; the entire texts). I then list the counts I made myself, in the two translated books, lumping together all the non-native-like graphemic and grammatical glitches found in the entire text.

Table 1. Misinterpretation of the Biblical Hebrew writing<sup>7</sup>

Book	Vowel confusion	Consonant		Total
		Confusion	Missing/ mis-order	
<b>Note by the Mesoratic editors:</b>				
Genesis (12 pp.)	/	1	/	1
Jeremiah (12 pp.)	14	13	2	29
Song of Songs (6 pp.)	1	1	/	2
Qohelet (10 pp.)	1	6	3	10
<b>Noted by the translator:</b>				
Song of Songs	nc	nc	nc	2
Qohelet	nc	nc	nc	89

If these counts are indicative of anything, they highlight the similar native-like quality of Genesis (EBH) and Song of Songs (LBH), contrasting them with the much less native-like quality of both Jeremiah and, especially, Qohelet. The vast majority of the 89 non-native-like distortions I found in Qohelet involved, transparently, faulty grammar, though those were often precipitated by the mis-interpretation of vowels or consonants. By comparison, the Mesoratic editors noted only 10 faulty usages in Qohelet, most of them involving faulty vocalization.

Lastly, in the transcription of BH words and lines in the footnotes to the two texts, I have used the following phonetic symbols for the consonantal letters:

א	'alef = /ʔ/	ט	ṭeṭ = /ṭ/	פ, פה	peh = /p/, /f/
ב	bet = /b/, /v/	י	yod = /y/	צ, צה	tsade = /ts/
ג	gimel = /g/	כ, כה	kaf = /k/, /kh/	ק	qof = /q/
ד	dalet = /d/	ל	lamed = /l/	ר	reysh = /r/
ה	heh = /h/	מ, מה	meym = /m/	ש	shin = /sh/
ו	waw = /w/	נ, נה	nun = /n/	שׁ	sin = /s/
ז	zayin = /z/	ס	samekh = /s/	ת	taw = /t/, /th/
ח	het = /ħ/	ע	ʕayin = /ʕ/		

In rendering the vowels, I have elected to go with only the five cardinal vowels /i, u, e, o, a/ plus the neutral schwa /i/.

<sup>7</sup> The Mesoratic Hebrew Old Testament edition I used for this study and translation was published by Koren Publishers Ltd., Jerusalem (2009).

The original Hebrew version, with my suggested line breaks and punctuation to fit the poetic rhythm, syntactic structure and discourse coherence of the texts, is given at the beginning of each chapter. My decision to dispense here with the traditional vocalization has been motivated by three considerations. First, the original Hebrew text was itself un-vocalized. Second, the traditional vocalization, as noted above, is riddled with non-native phonetic glitches and faulty grammatical interpretation, particularly in the Ecclesiastes text. And third, I wanted to give readers who know Hebrew the flavor of how hard it must have been for the scribes who vocalize the original consonantal script to make the requisite phonetic and grammatical decisions; and incidentally, how hard it was also for me, on occasion, to interpret their decisions.



## Part III

# Song of Songs

### שיר השירים

#### א (1)

- א שיר השירים אשר לשלמה,  
ב ישקני מנשיקות פיהו,  
כי טובים דודיך מיין,  
ג לריח שמניך טובים, שמן תורק שמך,  
על-כן עלמות אהבוך:
- ד משכני אחריך, נרוצה,  
הביאני המלך חזריו,  
נגילה ונשמחה בך, נזכירה דודיך,  
מיין מישרים אהבוך:
- ה שחורה אני ונאווה, בנות ירושלים,  
ו כאהלי קדר, כיריעות שלמה,  
ז אל תראני שאני שחרורת, ששזפתי השמש,  
ח בני אמי נחרו בי, שמוני נטרה את הכרמים,  
כרמי שלי לא נטרתי:
- ט הגידה לי, שאהבה נפשי,  
י איכה תרעה? איכה תרביץ בצהרים?  
שלמה אהיה כעטיה על עדרי חבריך?  
יא אם לא תדעי לך, היפה בנשים,  
יב צאי לך בעקבי הצאן  
יג ורעי את גדיתיך על משכנות הרעים:

ט	לססתי ברכבי פרעה דמיתוך, רעיתי,
י	נאוו לחייך כתורים, צוארך כחרוזים
יא	תורי זהב נעשה לך עם נקדות הכסף:
יב	עד שהמלך במסבו נרדי נתן ריחו,
יג	צרור המור דודי לי, בין שדי ילין,
יד	אשכל הכפר דודי לי בכרמי עין גדי:
טו	הנך יפה, רעיתי,
	הנך יפה, עיניך יונים:
טז	הנך יפה, דודי, אף נעים,
	אף ערשנו רעננה,
יז	קרות בתינו ארזים, רהיטנו ברותים:

## I

- 1 Song of Songs of Solomon<sup>1,2</sup>
- 2 Smother me with your kisses!<sup>3</sup>  
For your loving is sweeter than wine,<sup>4</sup>
- 3 Your oils run fragrant,  
Your scents waft like you name,<sup>5</sup>  
For this have young maidens loved you.<sup>6</sup>
- 4 Fetch me with you, let us run,  
Bring me, oh king, to your chambers,<sup>7</sup>  
Where we shall rejoice in you,  
Feast on your loving,<sup>8</sup>  
More precious than wine.<sup>9</sup>
- 5 I am dark and comely,  
Oh daughters of Jerusalem,  
Like the tents of Qedar,<sup>10</sup>  
Like Solomon's awnings;

- 6 Do not see me that I am dark,<sup>11</sup>  
That the sun has scorched me,  
My mother's sons have spurned me,<sup>12</sup>  
Made me guard their vineyards;  
My own vineyard I left unguarded.<sup>13</sup>
- 7 Tell me, love of my soul,  
Where do you graze your herd?  
Where do you bed them at noontime?  
For why should I slink around your friends' flocks?<sup>14</sup>
- 8 If you should only know,  
Oh fairest of women,  
Go run your herds  
And pasture your goats  
Near the shepherds' tents.
- 9 I imagine you, my bride,  
A mare in Pharaoh's stable,  
10 Your cheeks blooming with pendants,  
Your neck adorned with beads;  
11 We shall mint you golden earrings  
Studded with silver.
- 12 All the way to the king's chambers<sup>15</sup>  
My spice clump wafted its fragrance;<sup>16</sup>  
13 My lover is a bundle of myrrh  
Resting between my breasts,  
14 A bunch of grapes  
In the vineyards of Eyn Gedi.<sup>17</sup>
- 15 How fair you are, my beloved,  
How comely, your eyes like doves!



- 16 How handsome you are, my lover,  
 How sweet and eager!  
 Our bed is freshly made,  
 17 Our house beams are cedars,  
 Our rafters junipers.

## Notes (Chapter I)

- 1 Only in this line, the editorial title line of the poem, do we find the use of the full relative-clause subordinator *'asher*. Otherwise the text of Song of Songs is entirely consistent in using the contracted form *she-*, tagging the text as the latest on the BH dialect continuum (see Part I). The format of the entire book involves the alternation of three relatively distinct voices: The female beloved, the male lover, and a Greek-like chorus, often if implicitly identified as 'daughters of Jerusalem'. These voice alternations are sufficiently obvious in the text, and require no overt marking, as is done in some scholarly translations.
- 2 As noted earlier above, the attribution to King Solomon is part of the traditional effort to cleanse this earthy love poem and make it admissible into the religious canon.
- 3 *yi-shake-ni mi-nshikot-aw* in the original Hebrew text is cast in the 3rd person sg., thus lit. 'may *he* kiss me with *his* kisses' (the preposition *mi-*, lit. 'from', may be a scribal slip, originally intended as *bi-* 'with'). I have elected to render the line in the 2nd person, i.e. 'smother me with *your* kisses', to conform better with the rest of the verse (1:2–4), which runs in the 2nd person. That is, the female beloved addressing her male lover directly.
- 4 Both the Jewish and Christian traditions render *dodey-kha* as the more chaste 'your love'. The root *\*dwd* is the one from which 'lover', 'loving', 'uncle', 'cauldron', the name 'David', and the noun from which the aphrodisiac mandrake fruit, *duda'im* (re. the story of Ruben in Gen. 30:14) are all derived. Both the Judaic and Christian traditions thus obscure the difference between *\*dwd* and *\*hv*, as in '*ahava* 'love' or '*ohev* 'lover' (masc.), '*ahuv-a* 'beloved' (fem.), etc.. The more chaste *\*hv* is used consistently throughout the poem to render the less carnal sense of 'love' (see v. 1:3, directly below). In fact, *\*dwd* is often used in the even-more-raw sense of 'sexual organs' or 'virginity' (see v.1:4 and fn. 9, below).

- 5 This line may be an allusion to the proverb *tov shem tov mi-shemen tov* ‘better a good name than good oil’ (Eccl. 7:1); perhaps also to the more cynical *shemen roqah yaqar mi-hokhma* ‘distilled oil is more precious than wisdom’ (Eccl. 10:1). It also introduces the recurrent carnal allusions to the male sexual essence as ‘oil’.
- 6 The traditional translation of *salam-ot* ‘young women’ as ‘virgins’ is part and parcel of the effort to scrub down the raw sexual reading of the poem, given the availability of the more explicit *bʔul-ot* ‘virgins’.
- 7 The switch to third person and making ‘the king’ the subject, as well as the use of the *preterit-prefect* form in *hevi’-ani ha-melekh li -hadar-aw* ‘the King brought me to his chambers’, is again in line with the attempt to equate the male lover with King Solomon. But a second-person reading of the un-vocalized Hebrew script, switching from *preterit-perfect* to the *imperative/subjunctive* – thus *havi’-eni, melekh le-ḥadarey-kha* ‘bring me, oh King, to your chambers’ – conforms much better to both the preceding and following context, with the vocative use of ‘king’ a recurrent glorifying reference to the male lover, rather than to King Solomon.
- 8 *n-a-zkir-a* is lit. ‘let us remind’, in the causative *hifʔil* paradigm from \**zkr* ‘remember’, and is rather naturally extended to ‘memorialize’ and then by further extension to ‘celebrate’.
- 9 The literal reading of the ellipted *mi-yeyn meyshar-im* ‘*ahev-u-kha* is most likely ‘they loved you more than honest (‘straight’) wine’. The contrast in these two lines, between the more explicitly sexual \**dwd* ‘love-making’ and the more chaste \**ahv* ‘love’, is striking, with the object of ‘love’ being wine. The plural ‘they’ here no doubt refers to the ‘young maiden’ in v. 1:3, above.
- 10 *Qedar* most likely refers to nomadic desert tribes east of the Jordan river.
- 11 This is the bridge construction that is found in both EBH (*va-yar’ Elohim* ‘*e-kol* ‘*asher šasa ve-hine tov* ‘and God saw all He had done and (that) it was good’; Gen. 1:33) and LBH. As noted earlier (Part I), this hybrid construction served as intermediate in transferring the subordinator ‘*asher-/she-* from REL-clauses to V-complements.
- 12 Here I elected, for a better fit in the context, to render the original *ni-ḥar-u b-i*, lit. ‘became angry at me’, as ‘spurned me’.
- 13 The vineyard in the contrastive preposed-object (OV) construction in *karm-i shel-i lo’ naṭar-ti* ‘my own vineyard I did not guard’, is a transparent sexual allusion to ‘my sexual treasure’ or ‘my virginity’. The beloved is thus

presenting herself as a ‘fallen woman’ shorn of her ‘virtue’. This is in line with the recurrent use, throughout the poem, of fruits and spices metaphors for the female sexuality. It also conforms to Pope’s (1977) interpretation of the female narrator as ‘a fallen woman’.

- 14 *ṣoṭ-ya*, from the root \*ṣṭ, could be interpreted as ‘circle around’ or ‘hover’ (viz. the nominal *ṣayit* ‘vulture’), and by extension then ‘tend to’, ‘wait upon’ or ‘come upon’. The ‘vulture’ connection may be due to the extension from ‘come upon’ to ‘fall upon’ to ‘pounce upon’.
- 15 ‘King’ here does not allude to Solomon, but is the same recurrent glorifying reference to the male lover (see v. 1:4 and fn. 7). The locative-nominal expression *bi-m-sib-o* lit. ‘in his place of sitting’ may be rendered as ‘in his rooms’, ‘in his chambers’ or even ‘in his court’, given the allusion to ‘king’. The verbal root \**sb*, orig. ‘turn’, ‘circle’, may have been extended through ‘sit around’ to ‘sit’ (\**shv*). A connection to \**shv* ‘return’, ‘come around’ is also plausible. The whole line thus parallels v. 1:4 (see fn. 7).
- 16 Murphy (1990) translates the Hebrew *nerd* as ‘nard’, a rather obscure term but still in line with the recurrent allusion to the woman’s sexual organs as ‘a bundle of spices’. In parallel, directly below, the male lover’s sexuality is likened to fruit (see e.g. v. 1:14).
- 17 I have chosen to interpret *Eyn Gedi* (lit. ‘Spring of the Kid’) as the well known – indeed still extant – oasis on the western slope above the Dead Sea.

## ב (2)

- א אני חבצלת השרון, שושנת העמקים,  
 ב כשושנה בין החוחים כן רעיתי בין הבנות,  
 ג כתפוח בעצי היער כן דודי בין הבנים,  
 בצלו חמדתי וישבתי ופריו מתוק לחכי,  
 ד הביאני אל בית היין ודגלו עלי אהבה:  
 ה סמכוני באששות, רפדוני בתפוחים  
 כי חולת אהבה אני,  
 ו שמאלו תחת ראשי וימינו תחבקני:  
 ז השבעתי אתכם, בנות ירושלים  
 בצבאות או באילות השדה,  
 אם תעירו ואם חעוררו את האהבה  
 עד שתחפץ:
- ח קול דודי הנה זה בא,  
 מדלג על ההרים, מקפץ על הגבעות:  
 ט דומה דודי לצבי או לעפר האילים,  
 הנה זה עומד אחר כתלנו  
 משגיח מן החלונות, מציץ מן החרכים:
- י ענה דודי ואמר,  
 קומי לך רעיתי יפתי ולכי לך,  
 יא כי הנה הסתו עבר, הגשם חלף הלך לו,  
 יב הנצנים נראו בארץ, עת הזמיר הגיע  
 וקול התור נשמע בארצנו,  
 יג התאנה חנתה פגיה והגפנים סמדר נתנו ריח:  
 קומי לך רעיתי יפתי ולכי לך:  
 יד יונתי בחגוי הסלע, בסתר המדרגה,  
 השמיעני את קולך,  
 כי קולך ערב ומראיך נאוה:

טו                      אחזו לנו שועלים,  
שועלים קטנים מחבלים כרמים,  
וכרמינו סמדר:

טז                      דודי לי ואני לו, הרעה בשובשים,  
יז                      עד שיפוח היום ונסו הצללים  
סב, דמה לך דודי לצבי  
או לעפר האילים על הרי בתר:

## II

- 1 I am the lily of Sharon,  
Rose of the valleys;<sup>1</sup>
- 2 Like a rose among the thorns  
So is my beloved among the maidens;<sup>2</sup>
- 3 Like an apple among the forest trees  
So is my lover among the boys,  
In his shadow I succumb, reclining,<sup>3</sup>  
And his fruit is sweet to my mouth,<sup>4</sup>
- 4 He brought me down to the wine cellar  
And planted his love pennant upon me.<sup>5</sup>
- 5 Prop me with raisins<sup>6</sup>  
Bed me with apples,  
For I am afflicted with love;
- 6 His left is under my head  
And his right embraces me.
- 7 I enjoin you, daughters of Jerusalem<sup>7</sup>  
In the name of God's hosts<sup>8</sup>  
Or the does of the field,  
Do not waken up love  
Lest it consume you with wild passion.<sup>9</sup>

- 8    Lo, my lover's voice is coming,  
      Leaping over the mountains,  
      Skipping over the hills;
- 9    My lover is like a stag  
      Or the deer's fawn,  
      Here he is standing  
      Right behind our wall,  
      Looking in the windows,  
      Peeking through the cracks.<sup>10</sup>
- 10   My lover kept calling:<sup>11</sup>  
      Arise, my beloved,  
      Alight, my beauty,
- 11   For lo, the fall is passed,  
      The rains are come and gone,
- 12   Flowers are budding in the fields,  
      Time of the nightingale is upon us  
      And the voice of the dove is heard in the land,
- 13   The fig trees are bursting with fruit  
      And the vines are wafting their scent;<sup>12</sup>  
      Arise my beloved, my beauty, alight.
- 14   My dove in the crack of the rock,  
      Sheltered upon the ledge,  
      Reveal yourself, beloved,  
      Let me hear you,  
      For your voice is sweet  
      And your face enticing.<sup>13</sup>
- 15   Go catch the foxes,  
      Little foxes spoiling the vineyards,  
      For our grapes are yet unripe.<sup>14</sup>

- 16 My lover is mine and I am his,  
 He who grazes in the roses;<sup>15</sup>  
 Till the day has expired  
 And the shadows have lengthened  
 Turn and run, my lover  
 And be like the stag,  
 Like the deer's fawn  
 On the mounts of Beytar.<sup>16</sup>

## Notes (Chapter II)

- 1 There is a long-drawn confusion in the translation of *havatselet ha-sharon* as 'rose of the Sharon'. Should this makes *shoshanat ha-šamaq-im* 'rose of the valleys' just another type of rose? The choice of *shoshana* as 'rose' is supported by the next line, where *shoshana* 'rose' is depicted as sitting among the thorns. A more fine-grained knowledge of the geography and ecology of Palestine yields the following observations: The Sharon plains lie between the Judea-and-Samaria mountains and the Mediterranean coast. On the other hand, 'valleys' is a plausible reference to the mountain valleys of Judea and Samaria. One of the most common flowering plants in the Judea, Samaria and Galilee mountains – but not on the plains of the Sharon – is the pink-colored wild rose that yields its edible red rose-hip fruit in the early fall. In contrast, the plains and low sand-stone hills of the Sharon are dotted in the spring with a white, yellow-trimmed flower of the bulbous *Lilium* genus, the *havatselet*. These considerations have motivated my choice of 'lily of the Sharon', to contrast with 'rose of the valleys'.
- 2 The intended sense of *ban-ot* 'daughters', and *ban-im* 'sons' directly below, is most likely 'young women' and 'young men', respectively; that is, the eligible tho not-yet-married young.
- 3 *himad-ti*, lit. 'I loved', 'I enjoyed', 'I cherished' or by extension 'I availed myself', is a fairly transparent reference to love-making.
- 4 Here as elsewhere, 'his fruit' refers to the male lover's sweet love-making, or even sex organ.
- 5 *ve-digl-o šal-ay 'ahava*, lit. 'and his pennant/banner (planted) upon me (with) love', is a fairly transparent earthy reference to the lover's sexual organ planted in his beloved as a trophy of love, a salacious allusion to male penetration as conquest.

- 6 *'ashish-ot*, an obscure reference, a fem. pl. noun, is translated by Murphy (1990) as 'raisin cakes'.
- 7 Here the masc. *'et-khem*, rather than the correct fem. *'et-khen*, is one of the few clear scribal slips in the Song of Songs text.
- 8 Here *tsva'ot* 'armies' makes better sense as 'God's hosts', in line with the recurrent Biblical reference to *'adon-ay tsva'ot* '(my) Lord of hosts'.
- 9 The literal form here is a conditional followed by a time-ADV clause: 'if you ever wake up love *till* it would desire'. In the present context, however, I have chosen to render it as a negative-subjunctive followed by a concessive, thus: 'do not waken up love *lest* it consume you with passion'.
- 10 The persistent lover is described here as laying siege to his beloved's house.
- 11 *ʕana dod-i ve-'amar*, lit. 'my lover replied and said' may be interpreted as a serial-verb construction, with the light verb 'replied' meaning 'did again', 'kept doing'; hence my rendition 'my lover kept calling'. It is similar to the serial-verb use of *\*ħzr* 'return', as in *we-ħazar we-'amar* 'and he said again'. In Israeli Hebrew, another 'return' verb, *\*shv*, has been transformed into the adverbial 'again', this time in the nominal/infinite form, as in *hi' shuv ba'a* 'she again came'.
- 12 *smadar* is the early stage of grape bunches, between flowering and ripening, with a distinct astringent smell (and taste), typically in early April, often around Passover time, when young lovers would go courting in the vineyards.
- 13 This is a fairly explicit reference to the hide-and-seek courting games played in the vineyards at springtime.
- 14 The fox-in-the-vineyard theme may involve a complex metaphor, in part agrarian and perhaps contaminated by Aesop's fable; in part sexual, alluding to illicit love-making in the vineyards; whereby the marauding fox may stand for the lover and the unripe grapes for the still-virgin beloved.
- 15 'Grazing in the roses' is another earthy allusion, with roses standing for the beloved's sexuality.
- 16 I have chosen to interpret the vocalization of the place-name *Bater* here as a scribal slip, most likely a reversal of the order of the vowels from *Betar*. Consequently, I have rendered the obscure King James' *Bether* as the well-known Judea city of *Beytar*, one of the last cities to fall to the Romans during the Bar-Kokhba rebellion of 132 AD.



## ג (3)

- א על משכבי בלילות  
בקשתי את שאהבה נפשי,  
בקשתיו ולא מצאתיו:
- ב אקומה נא ואסובבה בעיר,  
בשוקים וברחובות  
אבקשה את שאהבה נפשי,  
בקשתיו ולא מצאתיו:
- ג מצאוני השומרים הסכבים בעיר,  
את שאהבה נפשי ראיתם?  
ד כמעט שעברתי מהם  
עד שמצאתי את שאהבה נפשי,  
אחזתיו ולא ארפנו,  
עד שהביאתיו אל בית אמי  
ואל חדר הורתי:
- ה השבעתי אתכם, בנות ירושלים  
בצבאות או באילות השדה,  
אם תעירו ואם תעוררו את האהבה  
עד שתחפץ:
- ו מי זאת עלה מן המדבר בתמרות עשן,  
מקטרת מר ולבונה מכל אבקת רוכל?  
ז הנה מטתו שלשלמה,  
ששים גברים סביב לה  
מגברי ישראל,  
ח כלם אחזי חרב, מלמדי מלחמה,  
איש חרבו על ירכו מפחד בלילות:

ט אפריון עשה לו המלך שלמה מעצי הלבנון,  
 י עמודיו עשה כסף, רפידתו זהב,  
 מרכבו ארגמן, תוכו רצוף אהבה  
 מבנות ירושלים:  
 יא צאנה וראנה, בנות ציון  
 במלך שלמה,  
 בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו  
 ביום חטנתו וביום שמחת לבו:

### III

- 1 On my bed at night  
 I reached out for my soul's beloved,  
 I looked, but he wasn't there;
- 2 I rose, went out  
 And wandered the city,  
 Roaming the dark streets and markets  
 Searching for my soul's beloved,  
 Looking for him, I couldn't find him;
- 3 The watchmen who walk the city stopped me;  
 Have you seen my soul's beloved?  
 I beseeched them;
- 4 I had almost passed them  
 When I found my soul's beloved;  
 I held to him and wouldn't let go  
 Till I brought him to my mother's house,  
 To the place where I was born;<sup>1</sup>
- 5 I swear you, daughters of Jerusalem,  
 In God's hosts or the does of the field,  
 Do not awaken nor let-loose love  
 Lest it consume you with wild passion.<sup>2</sup>

- 6 Who is she, rising from the desert<sup>3</sup>  
In a cloud of smoke,  
Wafting myrrh and frankincense  
And all merchants' powders?
- 7 Behold her in Solomon's bed<sup>4</sup>  
Guarded by sixty knights,  
The fiercest of Israel,  
All bedecked in their armor,  
Well drilled for war,
- 8 Each his sword on his thigh  
For fear in the night.
- 9 King Solomon made himself a canopy  
Of Lebanon cedars,
- 10 Its posts sparkling silver  
Padded with shining gold,  
Its bearings crimson,  
The bed strewn with love  
Of all the maidens of Jerusalem.
- 11 Come and behold, daughters of Zion,  
See King Solomon,  
See the crown his mother made him  
Upon his wedding day,  
The day his heart rejoiced.

## Notes (Chapter III)

- 1 The possessed nominal *hora-t-i* can be interpreted as either the agentive ‘the one who bore me’, thus ‘my (fem.) parent’, or the locative ‘the place of my birth’. The verbal root *\*hr* is the gender-specific ‘get pregnant’, ‘conceive’, a possible metaphoric extension from *har* ‘mountain’ (viz. *wa-ta-har wa-te-led ben* ‘and she conceived and gave birth to a son’).
- 2 This recapitulates the dire injunction in v. 2:7, above (see chapter 2, fn. 8).
- 3 This verse, beginning with ‘Who is she, rising from the desert?’, is one of the darkest verses in the entire poem, evoking the dangers of love and the extreme vigilance required thereby; hence the depiction of the sixty knights guarding the beloved in the king’s – her lover’s – bed.
- 4 *hine miṭa-t-o she-l-shlomo* is lit. ‘behold Solomon’s bed’. The context, both preceding and following, licenses the image of the beloved herself in Solomon’s bed, guarded – surrounded, *saviv l-a* ‘around her’ – by sixty of the king’s knights. Again, the allusion is to the male lover as ‘king’.

## ד (4)

- א הנך יפה, רעיתי, הנך יפה,  
עיניך יונים מבעד לצמתך,
- ב שעריך כעדר העזים שגלשו מער גלעד,  
שניך כעדר הקצובות שעלו מן הרחצה,  
שכלם מתאימות ושכלה אין בהם:
- ג כחוט השני שפתותיך ומדברך נאווה,  
כפלח הרמון רקתך מבעד לצמתך,  
כמגדל דוד צוארך, בנוי לתלפיות,
- ד אלף המגן תלוי עליו, כל שלטי הגברים,  
שני שדיך כשני עפרים תאמי צביה  
ה הרעים בששנים,  
ו עד שיפוח היום ונסו הצללים  
ז אלך לי אל הר המור ואל גבעת הלבונה:  
ח כלך יפה, רעיתי, ומום אין בך:
- ט אתי מלבנון, כלה,  
אתי מלבנון תבואי, תשורי,  
מראש אמנה, מראש שניר וחרמון,  
ממענות אריות, מהררי נמרים:
- י לבבתני אחתי כלה, לבבתני באחת מעיניך,  
באחד ענק מצורניך;  
יא מה יפו דדיך, אחותי כלה,  
מה טבו דודיך מיין  
וריח שמניך מכל בסמים,  
נפת תטפנה שפתותיך, כלה,  
דבש וחלב תחת לשונך  
וריח שלמתיך כריח לבנון:

יב	גן נעול, אחתי כלה,
	גן נעול, מעין חתום,
יג	שלחידך פרדס רמונים עם פרי מגדים,
	כפרים עם נרדים,
יד	נרד וכרכם, קנה וקנמון
	עם כל עצי לבונה,
	מר ואהלות עם כל ראשי בשמים,
טו	מעין גנים, באר מים חיים
	ונוזלים מן לבנון:

#### IV

- 1 How fair you are, my love,  
How lovely!  
Your eyes twin doves  
Peeking through your braids,  
Your hair a flock of goats  
Gliding down Mount Gilead,
- 2 Your teeth a herd of shorn ewes  
Rising from the dipping vat,<sup>1</sup>  
All twinning,  
Not one bereft of her lamb;<sup>2</sup>
- 3 Your lips red coral,  
Your mouth enticing,<sup>3</sup>  
Your temple under your braid  
Like a pomegranate slice;
- 4 Your neck stands proud  
Like David's tower,  
A thousand shields adorn it,  
All emblems of might;

- 5 Your breasts are twin fawns  
Grazing in the roses;
- 6 Till the day expires  
And the shadows fade away  
I will climb your mound of myrrh,  
Your scented hill of frankincense,<sup>4</sup>
- 7 For you are all beauty, my love,  
No blemish in you.
- 8 With me from Lebanon, my bride,  
Come with me from Mount Lebanon,  
Let us gaze down the Amana summit,  
From the peaks of Snir and Hermon,  
Lair of lions, den of leopards.<sup>5</sup>
- 9 You have enchanted me, my sister bride,  
Enticed me with your eyes,  
With one bead of your necklace;
- 10 How scented is your loving, my sister bride,  
How sweeter than wine!  
Your fragrant oils trump all perfumes,<sup>6</sup>
- 11 Your lips drip nectar, my sister bride,  
Milk and honey under your tongue  
And the whiff of your skirts  
Like the scents of Lebanon.
- 12 You are a locked garden, my sister bride,<sup>7</sup>  
Locked garden, sealed spring;
- 13 Your limbs a pomegranate grove,  
Fruit dripping nectar and spikenard,<sup>8</sup>

- 14 Incense and saffron, henna and cinnamon<sup>9</sup>  
 And frankincense trees,  
 Myrrh and aloe and spice,
- 15 Your flowing springs and fresh well water  
 Cascade from mount Lebanon.<sup>10</sup>

## Notes (Chapter IV)

- 1 The feminine-plural *qtsuv-ot* ‘cut’, ‘trimmed’ is best interpreted in this context as ‘shorn of their wool’. Immersing sheep in a dipping vat after the shearing is a common practice, salving their cuts and ridding them of parasites before the heat of the summer.
- 2 *she-kul-an m-a-t'im-ot*, in the causative *hif'il* paradigm, is ambiguous, meaning either ‘that they all fit together’ or ‘that they all bear twins’. Both interpretations trace back to the root *\*t'm*, with ‘fit together’ most likely the original meaning, extended to ‘resemble’ and then ‘twin’. The first interpretation, ‘fit together’, is more in line with the simile of the beloved’s even teeth. The second interpretation, opted for in the King James as well as here, is more in line with mundane sheep-herding concerns, whereby *ma-t'im-ot*, ‘twinning’, was the best outcome of breeding and *shakul-a*, ‘bereft of child’, the worst. The line *'eyn shakul-a b-an*, lit. ‘there is not (one) bereft of a child among them’, thus supports the second (King James’ and mine) interpretation, i.e. ‘twinning’.
- 3 The interpretation of *mi-dbar-ekh* as the object nominal ‘your speech’ is the most plausible literal interpretation here. However, it is also possible to assign an agentive nominal interpretation, ‘your speaker’, metaphorically ‘your mouth’. This fits in well with the concrete, earth imagery of the entire description.
- 4 This is a prime example of the recurrent allusion to the beloved’s *mons veneris* as ‘mound of myrrh’ and ‘hill of frankincense’, making my choice to add ‘your’ all but inevitable.
- 5 The original *har-ey nimer-im*, lit. ‘mountains of tigers’, does not sit well with the known tropical ecology of the tiger (*Panthera tigris*). A species of leopard (panther, puma, jaguar, mountain lion) is more likely in the dry ecology Palestine.



- 6 The sexual metaphor *reah shman-ay-ikh* 'the scent of you oils' is again a fairly transparent allusion to the beloved's flowing love juices.
- 7 'Locked garden' may well be a transparent reference to the virgin's sealed hymen. This is fully compatible with the recurrent use of fruits, spices and juices as sexual metaphors. In addition, it also evokes, willy nilly, a much later if not wholly unrelated tradition, that of the walled gardens of Spain's Moorish harems. Which in turn shade into the medieval Courtly Love tradition, as in e.g. Andreas Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love (De Arte Honestae Amandi)*, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Le Roman de la Rose*, and the Troubadour romances of Guillhaume de Machaud and Crétien de Troyes. This Medieval tradition is also traced back to Ovid's *The Art of Love* and *The Cure of Love*.
- 8 *kfar-im sim nard-im*, lit. 'resins with nards', is a rather obscure reference.
- 9 The translation of *karkom kaneh* as 'henna' is somewhat obscure. *karkom* is a color term, perhaps denoting 'dark orange'. *kaneh* is literally 'reed', and Murphy's (1990) translation as 'cinnamon' (Sp. *canela*) is nor fully warranted.
- 10 Here the flowing water may be another allusion to the beloved's love juices, making Mount Lebanon perhaps another stand-in for her *mons veneris*.

## ה (5)

- טז עורי צפון ובואי תימן,  
הפיכי גני, יזלו בסמיו,  
יבוא דודי לגנו ויאכל פרי מגדיו:
- א באתי לגני אחתי כלה,  
אריתי מור עם בשמי,  
אכלתי יערי עם דבשי,  
שתיתי ייני עם חלבי,  
אכלו, רעים, שתו ושכרו דודים:
- ב אני ישנה ולבי ער,  
קול דודי דופק, פתחי לי  
אחתי, רעיתי, יונתי, תמתי,  
שראשי נמלא טל, קוצותי רסיסי לילה:  
ג פשטתי את כתנתי, איכה אלבשנה?  
רחצתי את רגלי, איכה אטנפם?  
ד דודי של ידו מן החור ומעי המו עלו:  
ה קמתי אני לפתח לדודי וידי נטפו מור  
ואצבעתי מור, עבר על כפות המנעול:  
ו פתחתי אני לדודי  
ודודי חמק עבר,  
נפשי יצאה בדברו,  
בקשתיהו ולא מצאתיהו,  
קראתיו ולא ענני:  
ז מצאני השמרים הסבבים בעיר,  
הכוני, פצעוני,  
נשאו את רדידי מעלי שמרי החמות:  
ח השבעתי אתכם, בנות ירושלים,  
אם תמצאו את דודי, מה תגידו לו?  
שחולת אהבה אני:

ט	מה דודך מדוד, היפה בנשים?
	מה דודך מדוד שככה השבעתנו?
י	דודי צח ואדום, דגול מרבבה,
יא	ראשו כתם פז,
	קוצותיו תלתלים, שחורות כעורב,
יב	עיניו כיונים על אפיקי מים,
	רחצות בחלב, ישבות על מלאת,
יג	לחיו כערוגת הבשם, מגדלות מרקחים,
	שפתתיו שושנים נטפות מור עבר,
יד	ידיו גלילי זהב ממלאים בתרשיש,
	מעיו עשת שן מעלפת ספירים,
טו	שוקיו עמודי שש מיסדים על אדני פז,
	מראהו כלבנון, בחור כארזים,
טז	חכו ממתקים וכלו מחמדים:
	זה דודי וזה רעי, בנות ירושלים:

## V

- 16 Awake, north wind!<sup>1</sup>  
 Come hither, south!  
 Blow through my garden,  
 Let its scents waft!  
 Enter, my lover, into your Eden  
 And devour its honeyed fruit!<sup>2</sup>
- 1 I came into my garden, sister bride,  
 I culled my nectar with my scents,  
 I ate my honey-comb with my nectar,<sup>3</sup>  
 I drank my wine with my milk;  
 Eat up, friends! Drink and indulge, lovers!<sup>4</sup>

- 2 I am asleep but my heart is awake,<sup>5</sup>  
Lo, the voice of my lover knocking:  
Open up, my sister bride,  
My dove, my fairest,  
For my head is drenched in dew,  
My hair wet with the night's mist.
- 3 Having shucked my robe,  
How shall I pull it back on?  
Having washed my feet,  
How can I now soil them?
- 4 My lover slipped his hand through the hatch  
And my belly howled for him;
- 5 I rose to open to my lover,  
My hands dripping myrrh,  
My fingers smearing the door handle;<sup>6</sup>
- 6 I opened to my lover<sup>7</sup>  
But he sneaked by and was gone;  
My soul cried out to him,  
I sought him but couldn't find him,  
I hailed him but he wouldn't answer;
- 7 The watchmen found me,  
Slapped me around, hurt me,  
The guards tore off my veil.
- 8 I enjoin you, daughters of Jerusalem,  
If you ever find my lover  
What will you tell him?  
That I am afflicted with love.
- 9 What sets your lover apart of all others,  
Oh loveliest of women?  
What marks him so  
That you thus enjoin us?

- 10 My lover is fair and ruddy,  
He stands out among ten thousand,
- 11 His head crowned in gold,  
His curls dark raven,
- 12 His eyes twin doves upon the brook,  
His teeth washed in milk, perfectly set,<sup>8</sup>
- 13 His cheeks spice beds  
Sprouting with scented herbs,  
His lips roses dripping myrrh,
- 14 His arms golden rods trimmed with beryl,<sup>9</sup>  
His belly carved ivory set with sapphires,<sup>10</sup>
- 15 His legs marble posts founded in gold,  
His face like the Lebanon,  
Towering with the cedars,<sup>11</sup>
- 16 His mouth all sweets,  
Utterly lovely;  
This is my lover, my mate,  
Oh daughters of Jerusalem.

## Note (Chapter V)

- 1 The traditional assignment of this verse to the end of chapter 4 is dubious, given that it changes the narrative theme and opens the next long passage, spilling over into v. 5: 1 and beyond.
- 2 The wind blowing into the woman's garden and wafting her scents is, again, a transparent carnal imagery, culminating in the lover being called to avail himself of the garden's honeyed fruit. The 3rd pers. possessive pronoun in *pri mi gad-aw*, lit. 'fruit of *its/his* sweetness', is ambiguous, and may refer to either the garden or to the lover. As in several other like instances, I have also chosen here to render the original 3rd-person hortative here as a 2nd-person exhortation. Lastly, the change of the first 'my garden' into 'your Eden' was done to reduce repetition; though it couldn't fail calling to mind the apple in the garden of Eden, thus the carnal interpretation of both the fruit and the Fall.

- 3 The literal meaning of *'akhal-ti yaṣar-i sim divsh-i* is 'I ate my honey-comb with my honey', following the common use of *yaṣar-at dvash* 'as 'honey-comb'. To avoid repetition, I changed 'honey' to 'nectar' here.
- 4 The literal meaning of *shikhr-u* is the plural hortative 'get drunk!' The rendition of the Hebrew 'get drunk' as the English 'indulge' was done for the sake of avoiding the repetition of 'drink and get drunk'. In Hebrew, those are two distinct verbal roots, *\*sht* 'drink' and *\*shkr* '(get) drunk'; though there is a remote possibility of their being distantly related.
- 5 Here the poem re-visits the night-time misadventure of v. 3: 1–5, above.
- 6 'My hands dripping myrrh' and 'smearing the door's handle' is another brazen reference to the woman's love juices.
- 7 'I opened to my lover', with the woman's hands dripping myrrh (see fn. 6 above), harkens back to the 'locked garden, sealed spring' theme in v. 4: 12 (see chapter 4, fn. 7).
- 8 Strictly speaking, this line continues the reference to the lover's eyes. However, both 'washed in milk' and 'perfectly set' evoke much better a description of the lover's perfect white teeth.
- 9 The meaning of *ta-rshish* is obscure, perhaps tracing back to a doublet of the root *\*rsh*, which in BH is often used as *rash* 'poor'. Though it could also trace back to *\*r'sh* 'head', 'first'. Neither of these make much sense in the present context, which invokes jewels and riches.
- 10 *meyṣ-aw*, lit. 'his intestines', makes better sense in this context as 'his belly'.
- 11 *baḥur* is open to two interpretations: first, the common noun 'young man'; and second, the de-verbal *adjectival/passive* (in the *paṣul* paradigm) 'chosen', from *\*bhr*. The latter interpretation goes well with the preceding context – 'what sets your lover apart from all others?' (v. 5: 9), and 'standing out among ten thousand' (v. 5: 10). The concrete image of 'like (the) cedars', rendered here as 'with the cedars', makes both 'chosen' and 'distinguished' somewhat intrusive, with either 'tall' or 'towering' fitting better in the context; though, admittedly, neither choice is ideal.

## ו (6)

- א אנה הלך דודך, היפה בנשים?
- ב אנה הלך דודך ונבקשנו עמך?  
דודי ירד לגנו, לערגות הבשם,  
לרעות בגנים וללקט שושנים:
- ג אני לדודי ודודי לי, הרועה בשושנים:
- ד יפה את רעיתי כתרצה,  
נאוה כירושלים, אימה כנדגלות,
- ה הסבי עיניך מנגדי, שהן הרהיבני,  
שערך כעדר העזים שגלשו מן הגלעד,  
שניך כעדר הרחלים שעלו מן הרחצה,
- ו שכלם מתאימות ושכלה אין בהם:  
ז כפלח הרמון רקתך מבעד לצמתך:
- ח ששים המה מלכות ושמנים פילגשים  
ועלמות אין מספר,
- ט אחת היא יונתי, תמתי,  
אחת היא לאמה,  
ברה היא ליולדתה,  
ראוה בנות ויאשרוה,  
מלכות ופילגשים ויהללוה:
- י מי זאת הנשקפה כמו שחר?  
יפה כלבנה, ברה כחמה, אימה כנדגלות?
- יא אל גנת אגוז ירדתי, לראות באבי הנחל,  
לראות הפרחה הגפן, הנצו הרמונים,
- יב לא ידעתי נפשי, שמתני מרכבות עמי נדיב:

## VI

- 1 Where has your lover gone,  
Oh loveliest of women?  
Where has your lover gone  
That we may seek him with you?
- 2 My lover has gone down to his garden,  
To the spice beds,  
To graze in the orchards  
And gather roses;
- 3 I am my lover's  
And my lover is mine,  
He who grazes in the roses.<sup>1</sup>
- 4 You are sweet like Tirza, my beloved,<sup>2</sup>  
Comely like Jerusalem,  
Awesome like a fortress;<sup>3</sup>
- 5 Take your eyes off me  
For they dazzle me;  
Your hair is like a herd of goats  
Cascading down mount Gilead;
- 6 Your teeth a flock of ewes  
Rising out of the dipping vat,  
All twinning,  
None missing her lamb;<sup>4</sup>
- 7 Your temples are like pomegranate  
Peeking through your braids.
- 8 There are sixty queens,  
Eighty concubines  
And countless maidens  
In the King's harem;<sup>5</sup>



- 9 But my fair dove is one and only,  
 One and only to her mother,  
 Purest to the one who bore her;  
 When maidens see her  
 They bless her,  
 When queens and concubines spy her  
 They praise her:
- 10 Who is this one  
 Shining like the dawn,  
 Fair like the moon,  
 Awesome like a fortress?
- 11 Down to the walnut grove I went  
 To walk the bend of the river,  
 See if the vines have blossomed,  
 If the pomegranate buds have puffed;
- 12 Before knowing my own heart  
 I was made chariot to my great people.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes (Chapter VI)

- 1 Again, the sexual imagery of the lover grazing in his beloved's 'garden', picking her 'roses.'
- 2 *Tirza* is most likely the name of a rural locality in the Judea hills.
- 3 *ka-ni-dgal-ot* is lit. 'like the ones (fem. pl.) fixed with flags'. The King James chose to render it as 'as awesome as an army with banners'. Given the feminine locality name *Tirza*, plausibly a fortress town, and the fem. Jerusalem, a fortified walled city, and given the fem. pl. *ni-dgal-ot* that is incompatible with the masculine pl. *tva'-ot* 'armies', I have opted for 'fortress towns', which were commonly bedecked with pennants. The generic *šir* 'town', 'city' as well as all named towns in the Old Testament carry an inherent fem. gender.
- 4 This verse recapitulates v. 4:2 of chapter 4, above.

- 5 I have chosen here to add 'in the King's harem' for clarity. Such clarification would not have been necessary for the contemporary audience, only too familiar with King Solomon's polygamous proclivities.
- 6 This is another sharp transition, from the preceding innocent pastoral scene to a somewhat obscure darker reflection, whereby the enamored country maid is transformed, rather abruptly, into a national figure, 'chariot to my great people'. I have no plausible interpretation of the chariot simile, short of noting that chariots, used by warring armies, were the exclusive prerogative of kings.

## (7) ז

- א שובי, שובי, השולמית,  
שובי, שובי ונחזה בך:  
מה תחזו בשולמית במחלת המחנים?
- ב מה יפו פעמיך בנעלים, בת נדיב,  
חמוקי ירכיך כמו חלאים, מעשה ידי אמן,
- ג שררך אגן הסהר, אל יחסר המזג,  
בטנך ערמת חטים סוגה בשושנים,
- ד שני שדיך כשני אפרים, תאמי צביה,  
ה צוארך כמגדל השן,  
עיניך ברכות בחשבון על שער בת רבים,  
אפך כמגדל הלבנון צופה פני דמשק,  
ו ראשך עליך ככרמל  
ודלת ראשך כארגמן מלך אסור ברהטים:
- ז מה יפית ומה נעמת אהבה בתענוגים,  
ח זאת קומתך דמתה לתמר ושדיך לאשכלות:  
ט אמרתי אעלה בתמר, אחזה בסנסניו  
ויהיו-נא שדיך כאשכלות גפן וריח אפך כתפוחים  
י וחכך כיון הטוב, הולך לדודי למישרים,  
דובב שפתי ישנים:
- יא אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו,  
יב לכה, דודי, נצא השדה,  
נלינה בכפרים,  
יג נשכימה לכרמים,  
נראה אם פרחה הגפן, פתח הסמדר,  
הנצו הרמונים, שם אתן דודי לך:  
יד הדודאים נתנו ריח ועל פתחינו כל מגדים,  
חדשים גם ישנים, דודי צפנתי לך:

## VII

- 1 Come back, come back, oh Shulamit,<sup>1</sup>  
Come back, come back  
And let us gaze upon you!  
Why should you gaze at the Shulamit  
In the dance of the twin camps?<sup>2</sup>
- 2 How lovely you tread in your sandals,  
Oh prince's daughter!  
Your thighs curved with jewels  
Set by the artist,
- 3 Your navel round like the moon  
Not a slice missing,  
Your belly a heap of grain  
Strewn with roses,
- 4 Your breasts like fawns, doe's twins,
- 5 Your neck an ivory tower,  
Your eyes the dark pools of Heshbon  
At the gate of Bat-Rabin,<sup>3</sup>  
Your nose like the tower of Lebanon  
Gazing upon Damascus,
- 6 Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel,  
Your lush purple hair  
Binds a king in its tresses.
- 7 How lovely, how sweet you are  
In the throes of your pleasure!
- 8 Towering like the palm,  
Your breasts bunched grapes;

- 9 Let me mount your palm tree  
And grab its clustered dates,  
May your breasts be my bunched grapes,  
May your breath scent my apples,  
10 May your palate be my good wine  
Gushing forth to your lover,<sup>4</sup>  
Prying loose the sleepers' lips.<sup>5</sup>
- 11 I am my lover's,  
His passion stamped upon me;  
12 Alight, my lover,  
Let us run to the fields,  
Sleep in the hamlets,  
13 Rise at dawn,  
Go to the vineyards,  
See if the vines have bloomed,  
If the grapes have flowered,  
If the pomegranates have budded;  
There shall I give you my loving<sup>6</sup>
- 14 While the mandrakes waft their scent  
And down our gates all nectars flow;<sup>7</sup>  
New and old juices, my lover,  
I have saved them all for you.

## Notes (Chapter VII)

- 1 *Shulamit* is a woman's proper name, though it may have a common-noun interpretation here, perhaps designating the female lead-dancer in an old-time country fair. Such an interpretation is reinforced by use of the definite article (*ha-Shulamit*), usually redundant with proper names. Murphy (1990) renders *shuv-i* 'come back!' as *suv-i* 'turn!' While both renditions make sense in this context, I see no reason for his choice, especially that *\*sb* 'turn' is spelled with *sameh*, not *sin*, so one could not invoke a minor scribal slip

(*shibolet-sibolet?*). It is of course possible that ‘turn’ and ‘return’ are historically related in spite of the graphemic distinction.

- 2 *mholat ha-mahan-ayim* ‘dance of the two camps’ (or ‘two troupes’) may refer to a contemporary country dance, in which *the Shulamit* may have been the female lead dancer (see fn. 1, above).
- 3 *Heshbon* and *Bat-Rabin* are most likely contemporary place names.
- 4 Given that the speaker of this verse is the male lover, *li-dod-i* ‘to my (male) lover’ makes little sense; rather, *li-dod-ekh* ‘to your lover’, referring to the speaker himself, makes better sense, certainly in the recurrent sexual context of flowing love juices.
- 5 This is probably a reference to how wine loosens tight lips and prompts careless talk.
- 6 Here again *dod-ay* is clearly ‘my carnality’, ‘my sex’, or ‘my virginity’; or, to judge by the plural form of the possessive suffix *-ay*, ‘my sexual treasures’.
- 7 Again, the sexual imagery of flowing juices. I have chosen to render the Hebrew *ptahey-nu*, lit. ‘our openings’, as ‘our gates’, a plausible reference to the lovers’ sex organs.

## ח (8)

- א מי יתנך כאח לי, יונק שדי אמי,  
אמצאך בחוץ, אשקך, גם לא יבוזו לי,  
ב אנהגך, אביאך אל בית אמי תלמדני,  
אשקך מייך הרקח, מעסיס רמוני:
- ג שמאלו תחת ראשי וימינו תחבקני,  
ד השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלים  
מה תעירו ומה תעררו את האהבה  
עד שתחפץ:
- ה מי זאת עלה מן המדבר, מתרפקת על דודה?  
תחת התפוח עוררתיך,  
שמה חבלתך אמך, שמה חבלה ילדתך:  
ו שימני כחותם על לבך, כחותם על זרועך,  
כי עזה כמות אהבה, קשה כשאול קנאה,  
רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבתיה,  
ז מים רבים לא יוכלו לכבות את האהבה  
ונהרות לא ישטפוה,  
אם יתן איש את כל הון ביתו באהבה  
בוז יבוזו לו:
- ח אחות לנו קטנה ושדים אין לה,  
מה נעשה לאחותנו ביום שידבר בה?  
ט אם חומה היא, נבנה עליה טירת כסף,  
ואם דלת היא, נצור עליה לוח ארז:  
י אני חומה ושדי כמגדלות,  
אז הייתי בעיניו כמוצאת שלום:

יא כרם היה לשלמה בבעל עמון,

נתן את הכרם לנטרים,

איש יביא בפריו אלף כסף;

יב כרמי שלי לפני,

האלף לך, שלמה

ומאתים לנטרים את פריו:

יג היושבת בגנים, חברים מקשיבים לקולך,

השמיעני:

יד ברח, דודי, ודמה לך לצבי

או לעפר האילים על הרי בשמים:

## VIII

- 1 Oh that you were my brother  
Nursing at my mother's breasts,  
I would seek you out and kiss you  
And no one would fault me;<sup>1</sup>
- 2 I would lead you by the hand,  
Bring you to my mother's house,  
She who nursed me,  
I will let you drink my blended wine<sup>2</sup>  
With my pomegranate nectar.<sup>3</sup>
- 3 His left is under my head  
And his right embraces me;
- 4 I enjoin you, daughters of Jerusalem,  
Do not awaken nor stir up love<sup>4</sup>  
Lest it consumed you with passion!



- 5 Who is she, rising from the desert<sup>5</sup>  
Hanging on to her lover?  
Under the apple tree I aroused you,  
Where your mother had conceived you,  
She who gave you life.
- 6 Stamp my seal upon your heart,<sup>6</sup>  
My emblem on your arm,  
For love is fiercer than death  
And jealousy harsher than hell,  
Its flares are like raging fire,
- 7 Great waters won't extinguish love  
And mighty rivers won't quench it;  
If a man should bet his fortune on love,  
He will be thoroughly despised.
- 8 We have a little sister  
But she has no breasts,  
What shall we do with our sister  
When the day comes to betroth her?
- 9 If she be a wall  
We'll build our silver towers upon her,  
If she be a gate  
We'll buttress her with cedar planks.
- 10 I am the wall  
And my breasts are its towers,  
Till I become in his eyes  
Guardian of his peace.<sup>7</sup>

- 11 Solomon had a vineyard  
 At Baal Hamon,  
 He leased it to keepers,  
 Each paying for the fruit  
 One thousand talent of silver;
- 12 Behold my own vineyard, oh Solomon!<sup>8</sup>  
 A thousand talent to you,  
 A hundred-fold to the keepers.
- 13 You who dwells in the gardens,  
 Friends are pining for your voice,<sup>9</sup>  
 Let me hear you!
- 14 Flee, my lover,  
 Alight like the stag  
 Or the deer's fawn  
 Upon the scented mountain.<sup>10</sup>

## Notes (Chapter VIII)

- 1 The literal meaning of *lo' ya-vuz-u l-i* is 'they will not despise me'.
- 2 *yeyn ha-reqah* is lit. 'concocted wine', from *\*rqh*, in this context perhaps 'distilled wine' and thus perhaps liquor.
- 3 Again the sexual imagery of the beloved drenching her lover in her 'fruit juices'.
- 4 This recapitulates the dire imprecation of v. 3:5, with the original '*im* 'if' now changed to *mah* 'what', perhaps better rendered as *la-mah* 'why', thus lit. 'why should you waken and stir up love?'; which I again chose to render as a negative injunction with 'lest'.
- 5 This recapitulates the opening line of v. 3:6 (see chapter 3, fn. 3).
- 6 An alternative rendition here would be 'stamp my seal upon your heart'. This line opens one of the book's most terrifying imagery of passionate love and its oft-dire consequences.

- 7 The end of this verse is obscure, given both the context and form. *'az hay-iti bi-fen-aw ki-motse'-t shalom* is literally 'then I became in him eyes like a finder of peace'. My suggested rendition attempts to fit this in the directly preceding context, given the defensive flavor of 'wall' and 'towers'.
- 8 *karm-i shel-i li-fan-ay, Shlomo*, lit. 'my own vinyard (is) in front of me, oh Solomon', is obscure. I have chosen to render it as *li-faney-kha, Shlomo* 'in front of you, oh Solomon', thus 'behold my own vinyard in front of you, oh Solomon'. The woman is here, most likely, comparing her own vineyard, a metaphor for her sexuality, with Solomon's proverbial vineyard in Baal Hamon.
- 9 *maqshiv-im li-qol-ekh* is lit. 'listening to your voice'. The 2nd pers. fem. sg. possessive pronoun makes it likely in the Hebrew text, if not in the gender-neutral English translation, that the speaker here is the male lover. This interpretation is reinforced by the 1st pers. sg. object pronoun in the next line, *ha-shmiʿ-i-ni*, lit. 'make me hear' (in the causative *hifʿil* paradigm), preceded the 2nd pers. fem. sg. subject pronominal suffix. The inference of 'let me hear you' is fairly obvious in the directly preceding context of 'listening to your voice'.
- 10 *ʕal har-ey bʕamim*, lit. 'on mountains of scents', is again an allusion to the woman's – the speaker's – *mons veneris*.

## Part IV

# Ecclesiastes

### א (1)

א דברי קהלת בן דוד, מלך בירושלים:

ב הבל הבלים, אמר קהלת,

הבל הבלים, הכל הבל:

ב מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו

שיעמל תחת השמש?

ד דור הלך ודור בא

והארץ לעולם עמדת,

ה וזרח השמש ובא השמש

ואל מקומו שואף, וזרח הוא שם:

ו הולך אל דרום וסובב אל צפון,

סובב, סבב הולך הרוח

ועל סביבתיו שב הרוח:

ז כל הנחלים הלכים אל הים

והים איננו מלא,

אל מקום שהנחלים הלכים,

שם הם שבים ללכת:

ח כל הדברים יגעים,

לא יוכל איש לדבר,

לא תשבע עין לראות

ולא תמלא אذن משמע:

- ט מה שהיה הוא יהיה  
ומה שנעשה הוא שיעשה  
ואין כל חדש תחת השמש:
- י יש דבר שיאמר, ראה, חדש הוא,  
כבר היה לעלמים אשר היה מלפננו:
- יא אין זכרון לראשנים, וגם לאחרנים שיהיו  
לא יהיה להם זכרון עם שיהיו לאחרנה:
- יב אני קהלת הייתי מלך על ישראל בירושלים,  
ונתתי את לבי לדרוש ולתור בחכמה  
על כל אשר נעשה תחת השמים,  
הוא ענין רע נתן אלהים לבני האדם לענות בו:
- יג ראיתי את כל המעשים שנעשו תחת השמש  
והנה הכל הבל ורעות רוח,  
מעות לא יוכל לתקן וחסרון לא יוכל להמנות:
- יד דברתי אני עם לבי לאמר,  
אני הנה הגדלתי והוספתי חכמה  
על כל אשר היה לפני על ירושלים,  
ולבי ראה הרבה חכמה ודעת:
- יז ואתנה לבי לדעת חכמה ודעת, הללות ושכלות,  
ידעתי שגם זה הוא רעיון רוח:
- יח כי ברב חכמה, רב כעס,  
ויוסיף דעת יוסיף מכאוב:

## I

- 1 The words of Qohelet, son of David,  
King in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>
- 2 Vanity of vanities, said Qohelet,<sup>2</sup>  
Vanity of vanities, all is vanity;  
3 What does one gain from all one's toil  
Under the sun?
- 4 Generation comes, generation goes  
But the earth keeps treading in place;<sup>3</sup>  
5 Sun rises, sun sets,  
Then it turns back to rise again;  
6 Blowing north, blowing south  
The wind keeps gusting on and on  
Till it blows back to where it started.
- 7 All the rivers rush to the sea  
But the sea is never filled,  
And so to where they come from  
The rivers keep returning.<sup>4</sup>
- 8 All words are worn out,<sup>5</sup>  
Nothing new is ever said,  
The eye is sated with all sights,<sup>6</sup>  
The ear is deafened by all sounds.
- 9 What has come will come again  
And what is done will be done again  
For nothing is new under the sun;  
10 You may think this one is new,  
But it has already transpired  
In the eons before us.

- 11 There is no memory  
To those who came before us,<sup>7</sup>  
Nor to those yet to come,  
Nor to those at the end of time.
- 12 I, Qohelet, was King of Israel in Jerusalem,  
13 I put my mind to learn and probe  
All that was done under the sun,  
And lo, it is all a bad affair,  
What God has saddled the sons of Adam with<sup>8</sup>  
To puzzle and confound them.<sup>9</sup>
- 14 And I saw all that was done under the sun  
And lo, it is all vanity and the mind's delusion;<sup>10</sup>  
15 What has been twisted cannot be made straight,<sup>11</sup>  
What has been broken cannot be mended.<sup>12</sup>
- 16 And I told myself in my heart,<sup>13</sup>  
Here I am, grown old with knowledge  
Past all who came before me in Jerusalem,  
For my eyes have seen much wisdom and learning;  
And I put my heart to probe further  
Into wisdom and knowledge  
And debauchery and folly,<sup>14</sup>  
And I found that too  
To be the mind's delusion;
- 17 For in more wisdom, more worry<sup>15</sup>  
And in more knowledge, more pain.

## Notes (Chapter I)

- 1 *Qohelet* is a personal name that bears no translation, perhaps with the feminine-singular suffix *-et* following a verbal root \**qhl*, analogous to *šovedet* '(she is) working', from \**šbd* (in the *pošel* paradigm). As noted above (Part II), the attribution of the text to the son of David who was king in Jerusalem, thus Solomon, is a late-period ploy aimed at legitimizing the book's inclusion in the Canon. The Greek Christian title *Ecclesiastes*, 'priest', 'churchman' is in line with the Judaic maneuver.
- 2 The traditional rendition of *hevel*, lit. 'steam' or 'breath', as 'vanity' is awkward at best, and certainly not in line with the current sense of 'vanity'. The best English equivalent is probably 'nonsense' or 'drivel', or even the more earthy vernacular expletive. I have chosen to retain 'vanity' for the sake of its great familiarity, granting its fundamental inadequacy.
- 3 The theme of verses 4,5,6,7 is the same – the cyclical, dialectic nature of all things, rising and falling and reverting back to their point of origin. This is all too familiar in Taoism, viewing the Tao – ultimate reality – as both the source and destination of all things. Thus: "...Before heaven and earth, there was a mystery...mother of all things; I don't know its name, I call it Tao..." (Lao Tse, *Tao Teh Ching*, sutra 27). And likewise "...The world flows into Tao like rivers into the sea..." (*ibid.*, sutra 32). A more proximate potential source to Ecclesiastes' dialectics may be Heraclitus of Ephesus, the pre-Socratic dialectician. Thus: "...All things come into being by conflict of opposites, and the sum of all things flows like a river..." (Diogenes Laertius, vol. II, book IX, chapter 1: *Heraclitus*, p. 415)
- 4 The more literal rendition of this verse, 'to the place where the rivers go, there they keep returning again and again' makes less sense, except perhaps as a tautology or a cyclical dialectics. I have chosen instead Galling's (1969) interpretation, which is, among other things, more in line with a dialectic interpretation of Qohelet, be it Taoist or Heraclitan (see fn. 3 above).
- 5 *dvar-im* is literally 'words', 'speech' or 'sayings', from \**dbr* 'speak', 'talk'.
- 6 An alternative rendition here could be: 'the eye will not be more sated by seeing more, the ear will not be more filled by hearing more'.
- 7 The Hebrew text of this verse has it, literally, *ri'shon-im* 'first ones' and *aḥaron-im* 'last ones', which I chose to expand.



- 8 The REL-clause subordinator *she-* must have been elided in *hu' šinyar raš [she-]natan 'elohim li-vney ha-'adam la-šanoṭ b-o*, lit. 'it is a bad affair [that] God gave the sons of Adam to vex themselves with'.
- 9 *la-šanoṭ* is lit. 'to answer', thus by extension 'to solve' or 'to puzzle over'; and the locative preposition *b-* 'in', 'at', 'on' would be awkward if the intended interpretation were 'answer'. However, the same verbal root \*šn also means 'torture', a plausible natural extension of 'puzzle'; hence my choice of 'vex'. In this sense, a reflexive/middle form, *le-hit-šanoṭ b-o* 'to torture oneself with (it)' (in the *hitpaʕel* paradigm), would have been a better fit, making the use of the preposition *b-* more felicitous.
- 10 *rišut ruaḥ* is lit. 'herding of (the) wind', thus by plausible extension 'chasing the wind'. But *ruaḥ* 'wind' can be extended metaphorically to 'soul' or 'spirit', analogous to the way *nefesh/neshef* 'breath' yields 'soul'. My interpretation here – 'delusion of the soul' or 'the mind's delusion' – is based on a plausible scribal confusion of \*rś 'herd' with \*r' 'see', thus by extension 'vision' and 'delusion'. This passage carries a distinct whiff of the Buddhist doctrine of *Samsara*, whereby objective reality is but a delusion of the human mind. A slightly less judgemental position is held by classical Taoism; that is, Lao Tse's concept of the *Tao* as the undifferentiated ultimate reality that is impervious to both our senses and rational understanding (see Givón 1979/2018, chapter 8).
- 11 *yi-tqon* is lit. 'be fixed', with a possible scribal confusion with *yi-tkon* 'be put together', 'be planned'. This may also be, ultimately, an old passive/middle derivation, \**t-kn* (in the *hit-paʕel* paradigm) of the old bi-consonantal Semitic root \**kn*/\**hn* 'be', 'be here', thus perhaps by extension 'be whole'.
- 12 The monetary metaphor *li-him-man-ot* 'to be counted' is extended by inference to 'be counted in full', thus further to 'be (made) whole' (see fn. 11 above).
- 13 *dibar-ti 'ani šim libb-i*, lit. 'I talked with my heart', is a stand-in for interior speech, thus 'I *thought* in my heart', perhaps also the reflexive 'I thought to myself', in line with the more standard reflexive use of *šatsm-i* 'my bone' or *naʕsh-i* 'my soul'. The latter is the standard reflexive in many spoken Arabic dialects.
- 14 I have chosen to interpret *holel-ut* 'wildness' as, by extension, 'debauchery'; see e.g. *hit-holel* 'go wild'.
- 15 *kaʕas* is lit. 'anger'.

## ב (2)

- א אמרתי אני בלבי, לכה-נא  
אנסכה בשמחה וראה בטוב,  
והנה גם הוא הבל:
- ב לשחוק אמרתי מהולל ולשמחה מה זה עשה,  
ג תרתי בלבי למשוך ביין את בשרי,  
לבי נהג בחכמה ולאחז בשכלות,  
עד אשר אראה אי זה טוב לבני האדם  
אשר יעשו תחת השמים מספר ימי חייהם:  
ד הגדלתי מעשי, בניתי לי בתים, נטעתי לי כרמים,  
ה עשיתי לי גנות ופרדסים ונטעתי בהם עץ כל פרי,  
ו עשיתי לי ברכות מים להשקות מהם  
יער צומח עצים:  
ז קניתי עבדים ושפחות ובני בית,  
היה לי גם מקנה בקר וצאן הרבה היה לי  
מכל שהיו לפני בירושלים:  
ח כנסתי לי גם כסף וזהב וסגלת מלכים והמדינות,  
עשיתי לי שרים ושרות ותענוגות בני האדם,  
שדה ושדות,  
ט וגדלתי והוספתי מכל שהיה לפני בירושלים,  
אף חכמתי עמדה לי:  
י וכל אשר שאלו עיני לא אצלתי מהם,  
לא מנעתי את לבי מכל שמחה,  
כי לבי שמח מכל עמלי  
וזה היה חלקי מכל עמלי:

- יא ופניתי אני בכל מעשי שעשו ידי  
ובעמל שעמלתי בו לעשות,  
והנה הכל הבל וראות רוח  
ואין יתרון תחת השמש:
- יב ופניתי אני לראות חכמה והוללות ושכלות,  
כי מה האדם שיבוא אחרי המלך?  
את אשר כבר עשוהו?
- יג וראיתי אני שיש יתרון לחכמה מן הסכלות,  
כיתרון האור מן החשך,  
יד החכם עיניו בראשו והכסיל בחשך הולך:  
וידעתי גם אני כי מקרה אחד יקרה את כלם,
- טו ואמרתי אני בלבי,  
כמקרה הכסיל גם אני יקרני,  
ולמה חכמתי אני אז יותר?  
ודברתי בלבי שגם זה הבל,  
טז כי אין זכרון לחכם עם הכסיל לעולם,  
בשכבר הימים הבאים הכל נשכך,  
ואיך ימות החכם עם הכסיל?
- יז ושנאתי את החיים,  
כי רע עלי המעשה שנעשה תחת השמש,  
כי הכל הבל ורעות רוח:
- יח ושנאתי אני את כל עמלי  
שאני עמל תחת השמש,  
שאניחנו לאדם שיהיה אחרי,  
יט ומי יודע החכם יהיה או סכל  
וישלט בכל עמלי שעמלתי  
ושחכמתי תחת השמש,  
גם זה הבל:

- כ וסבותי אני ליאש את לבי  
על כל העמל שעמלתי תחת השמש:  
כא כי יש אדם שעמלו בחכמה ובדעת ובכשרון,  
ולאדם שלא עמל בו יתננו חלקו,  
גם זה הבל ורעה רבה:
- כב כי מה הוה לאדם בכל עמלו  
וברעיון לבו שהוא עמל תחת השמש?  
כג כי כל ימיו מכאבים וכעס ענינו,  
גם בלילה לא שכב לבו,  
גם זה הבל הוא:
- כד אין טוב באדם שיאכל ושתה  
והראה את נפשו טוב בעמלו,  
גם זאת ראיתי אני כי מיד אלהים היא,  
כה כי מי יאכל ומי יחוש חוץ ממני?  
כו כי לאדם שטוב לפניו נתן חכמה ודעת ושמחה  
ולחוטא נתן ענין לאסף ולכנוס,  
לתת לטוב לפני האלהים,  
גם זה הבל ורעות רוח:

## II

- 1 And I said in my heart,<sup>1</sup>  
Go on, drink and be merry,<sup>2</sup>  
Have a good time!  
And lo, this too was vanity.
- 2 So I said to merriment, you are debauchery,  
And to joy, what of it?<sup>3</sup>

3 And I let myself indulge in wine,<sup>4</sup>  
Trusting my heart to stay alert  
And fend off folly<sup>5</sup>  
Till I could learn what was good  
For the children of Adam to do under heaven,  
Where their days are numbered.<sup>6</sup>

4 So I let myself do more,  
I built homes, I grew vineyards  
5 And gardens and orchards,  
Planting them with all manner of fruit trees;  
6 I dug ponds to water my groves,  
7 I bought slaves and maids to work them,  
I raised house-born servants<sup>7</sup>  
And herds of cattle and countless sheep  
Beyond what anyone had done  
Before me in Jerusalem.

8 I hoarded silver and gold<sup>8</sup>  
And all treasures of princes and kings,<sup>9</sup>  
I gathered courtiers and courtesans  
And all manner of toys and trappings,  
9 Hoarding up more than anyone ever had  
Before me in Jerusalem,  
All along trusting my wisdom to sustain me;<sup>10</sup>

10 Whatever my eyes craved  
I would not deny them,<sup>11</sup>  
Sparing my heart no pleasure;  
For my soul rejoiced in my work  
And I was, I thought, rewarded for my toil.

- 11 Then I turned to inspect my deeds,  
What I wrought with my own hands  
And all the toil I have expended,  
And lo, it was all vanity  
And the mind's delusion,  
No gain for me under the sun.
- 12 So I turned to probe wisdom  
And debauchery and folly;  
For what could he do who ruled after me  
But what has already been done?
- 13 And I thought I saw vantage  
To wisdom over folly,<sup>12</sup>  
Like the light over dark;
- 14 For the eyes of the wise are open  
While the fool meanders in haze;  
Then I found out that  
The same fate befell them both.
- 15 And I said in my heart,<sup>13</sup>  
If the fate of the fool will be mine too  
Then why hoard all this wisdom?  
And I said in my heart  
This too is vanity;
- 16 For there is no lasting memory to the wise,  
Just like the fool,  
For in the days to come  
They will both be forgotten,  
The wise dying like the fool.

- 17 So I came to scorn my life,  
All I have done under the sun  
Went sour on me,  
For it was all vanity and the mind's delusion.
- 18 And I loathed all the toil  
That I toiled under the sun,  
Whose fruits I would leave behind  
To whoever may come after me,
- 19 For who knows if he be wise or foolish?  
Yet he will still rule after me  
Over all I have struggled to build,  
All the wisdom I gleaned under the sun;  
And this too is vanity.
- 20 And again my heart despaired<sup>14</sup>  
Of all I had done under the sun;
- 21 For behold a man toiling  
With wisdom and knowledge and skill,  
Then one who didn't toil  
Comes and grabs his share,  
And this too is vanity and great evil;
- 22 For what does a man gain<sup>15</sup>  
Of all the labors of his scheming heart<sup>16</sup>  
As he toils under the sun?
- 23 His days are pain  
And vexation is his lot,<sup>17</sup>  
Even at night his heart won't rest;  
And this too is vanity.
- 24 Thus nothing is better for a man  
But to eat and drink and delight in his work;  
For this too I saw,  
That it is all in God's hand;

- 25 So why should I care who will eat<sup>18</sup>  
And drink and feel after me?<sup>19</sup>
- 26 For whoever God finds pleasing,  
To them He gives wisdom  
And knowledge and joy,  
To the sinner too He gives his lot<sup>20</sup>  
To gather and crave and hoard before God;  
And this too is vanity  
And the mind's delusion.<sup>21</sup>

## Notes (Chapter II)

- 1 The conjunction *w-* in BH is multiply ambiguous, or rather under-specified, interpreted variously as 'and', 'then', 'so' or 'but'. In this line, it is in fact missing. Thus *'amar-ti 'ani bi-libb-i* is lit. 'I said in my heart'. However, if 'in-my-heart' is interpreted as the reflexive 'to myself', another plausible interpretation would be '(and) I told myself'. As noted earlier, this reflexive use in contexts of 'internal speech' recurs throughout the book.
- 2 *'a-naskh-a* is lit. 'let me offer libation', eliding the stereotypical (antipassive) object, 'wine'.
- 3 The original *mah-zo't sos-a* is lit. 'what does this one (fem.) do?', a rather garbled, non-native grammar.
- 4 Here the repeated *'a-naskh-a* 'let me offer libation' (from *\*nshk*; see v. 2:1 and fn. 2, above) may interact with *\*mshkh* 'pull', 'draw' as well as with *\*mshh* 'anoint', thus *li-mshokh bi -yayin 'et-bsar-i* 'to anoint my flesh with wine'. Here again, *bsar-i* 'my flesh' may be another reflexive form, thus 'myself', much like *nafsh-i* 'my soul', *libb-i* 'my heart', in line with the more standard reflexive *šatzm-I*, lit. 'my bone'.
- 5 *li-'ehoz bi-sikhlut*, lit. 'to hold on to foolishness', is better rendered in this context as 'to hold off foolishness', thus by further extension 'to ward/fend off foolishness'. This fits better in the context of *šad 'asher 'e-r'e* 'till I may see'.
- 6 *mispar yim-ey hay-ey-hem*, lit. 'the number of the days of their lives', makes better sense in this context as 'seeing as how their days are numbered'.



- 7 Here the use of the sg. possessive *hay-a l-i* ‘there was to me’ instead of the technically more correct pl. *hay-u l-i* ‘there were to me’ is a common cross-linguistic neutralization of the sg./pl. agreement in existential-possessive constructions, in line with the fully neutralized present/habitual *yesh l-i* ‘there is to me’, meaning ‘I have’.
- 8 *kanas-ti* is lit. ‘I caused to gather’, by common extension then ‘I caused to enter’, ‘I caused to come in’, or ‘I pulled in’.
- 9 *sgul-ot*, fem. pl., from the fem. sg. *sgul-a* ‘property’, ‘attribute’, is often used with the latter’s more abstract sense. It may be ultimately related, by some complex extension, to the masc. sg. *segol* ‘purple’, a precious dye extracted in the eastern Mediterranean from a marine mollusc.
- 10 *'af hokhmat-i samd-a l-i*, lit. ‘also my wisdom stood for me’, makes little sense in this context, prompting my choice of ‘*expecting* my wisdom to stand by me’, thus ‘to sustain me’. The potentially contrastive *'af* – ‘also’, ‘even’, ‘though’, ‘any’ – may hint at another possible reading here, with an elided negative: ‘even my wisdom *didn't* stand by me’.
- 11 *lo' 'atsal-ti me-hem*, most likely intended to mean ‘I didn’t keep away from them’, makes much better sense if interpreted as a scribal slip, switching \**'tsl* ‘be lazy’ and \**'tsr* ‘stop’, ‘cease’, with the intended form thus *lo' 'atsar-ti me-hem* ‘I didn’t stop from them’, then by extension ‘I didn’t keep away from them’.
- 12 The factive *wi-ra'-iti*, lit. ‘and I saw’, is better rendered in this context as the non-factive ‘and I thought’, given the contradiction a few lines below.
- 13 *wi-'amarti 'ani bi-libi*, lit. ‘and I said in my heart’, is again an instance of interior speech, with ‘in my heart’ perhaps intended as a reflexive, thus ‘and I told myself’.
- 14 *wi-savo-ti*, is lit. ‘and I turned’, ‘and I circled’, from \**sb*, thus by extension ‘and I repeated’. This is a well-known aspectual use of a serial-verb construction, meaning ‘repeatedly’ or ‘again’. There might be a scribal confusion here with the perhaps-related verb \**shb* ‘return’, as in *we-shav we-'amar* ‘and he again said’ (lit. ‘and he returned and said’). The Mesoratic vocalization of *wi-savo-ti* is aberrant, with the expected *perfect* form being *wi-sav-ti*.
- 15 The form *meh howe* is aberrant, and should have been, most likely, *mah yesh* ‘what is (there)’.
- 16 *raṣayon libb-o*, lit. ‘(the) idea of his heart’, may be a scribal mixup of \**r* ‘idea’ with \**r'* ‘see’. If one accepts this conjecture, then *raṣayon libb-o* is analogous to *r'ut ruah* ‘the mind’s vision’, by extension ‘the mind’s delusion’.

- 
- 17 *šinyan* ‘business’, ‘affair’, ‘thing’, may be a nominalization of \**šn* ‘answer’.
- 18 *ya-ḥush*, from \**ḥsh*, is ambiguous, either ‘(he) will hurry’ or ‘(he) will feel’.
- 19 One may interpret this verse as an extreme subjectivist argument, challenging both the epistemological and ethical prevailing wisdom of the Old Testament. This may hint at a non-Judaic philosophical source, possibly tracing back to a Hellenic school, most likely the Cynics (Diogenes of Sinope; see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, vol. II).
- 20 *šinyan* ‘business’, ‘affair’, ‘thing’, thus by extension here ‘preoccupation’ (see fn. 17, above).
- 21 This whole passage is a bald Cynic assault on the traditional Judeo-Christian ethics of reward and punishment (see fn. 19, above).

## ג (3)

- א לכל זמן, ועת לכל חפץ תחת השמים:
- ב עת ללדת ועת למות,  
עת לטעת ועת לעקור נטוע,  
ג עת להרוג ועת לרפוא,  
עת לפרוץ ועת לבנות,  
ד עת לבכות ועת לשחוק,  
עת ספוד ועת רקוד,  
ה עת להשליך אבנים ועת כנוס אבנים,  
את לחבוק ועת לרחק מחבק,  
ו עת לבקש ועת לאבד,  
עת לשמור ועת להשליך,  
ז עת לקרוע ועת לתפור,  
ח עת לחשות ועת לדבר,  
עת לאהב ועת לשנא,  
עת מלחמה ועת שלום:
- ט מה יתרון העושה באשר הוא עמל?  
י ראיתי את הענין אשר נתן אלהים  
לבני האדם לענות בו,  
יא את הכל עשה יפה בעתו,  
גם את העלם נתן בלבם  
מבלי אשר לא ימצא האדם את המעשה  
אשר עשה אלהים מראש ועד סוף:  
יב ידעתי כי אין טוב במ כי אם לשמוח  
ולעשות טוב בחייו:
- יג וגם כל האדם שיאכל ושתה  
וראה טוב בכל עמלו,  
מתת אלהים היא:

- יד ידעתי כי כל אשר יעשה האלהים הוא יהיה לעולם,  
עליו אין להוסיף וממנו אין לגרוע,  
והאלהים עשה שיראו מלפניו:
- טו מה שהיה כבר הוא ואשר להיות כבר היה,  
והאלהים יבקש את הנרדף:  
טז ועוד ראיתי תחת השמש,  
מקום המשפט שמה הרשע ומקום הצדק שמה הרשע:  
יז אמרתי אני בלבי,  
את הצדיק ואת הרשע ישפט האלהים,  
כי עת לכל חפץ ועל כל המעשה שם:  
יח אמרתי אני בלבי על דברת בני האדם,  
לברם האלהים ולראות שהם בהמה המה להם,  
כי מקרה בני האדם ומקרה הבהמה ומקרה אחד להם,  
כמות זה כן מות זה ורוח אחד לכל ומותר האדם מן הבהמה אין,  
כי הכל הבל:  
כ הכל הולך אל מקום אחד,  
הכל היה מן העפר והכל שב אל העפר:  
כא מי יודע רוח בני האדם, העולה היא למעלה?  
ורוח הבהמה, היורדת היא למטה לארץ?  
כב וראיתי כי אין טוב מאשר ישמח האדם במעשיו כי הוא חלקו,  
כי מי יביאנו לראות במה שיהיה אחריו?

## III

1 There is time for everything  
And a moment for every wish under heaven:<sup>1</sup>

2 Time to be born and time to die,<sup>2</sup>  
Time to plant and time to uproot,

3 Time to kill and time to heal,  
Time to wreck and time to build,

4 Time to cry and time to laugh,  
Time to mourn and time to rejoice,<sup>3</sup>

5 Time to cast stones and time to gather them,  
Time to embrace and time to fend off,

6 Time to seek and time to let go,  
Time to keep and time to discard,

7 Time to tear down and time to repair,  
Time to be silent and time to speak up,

8 Time to love and time to hate,<sup>4</sup>  
Time to fight and time to make up.

9 What does a man gain of all his toil?

10 I have seen the burdens God has placed  
Upon the children of Adam,

11 For He has made all beauty in its proper time<sup>5</sup>  
And placed the world in people's heart<sup>6</sup>

Without them being able to fathom<sup>7</sup>  
All His creation from start to end.

12 And I know nothing better for them  
Than to rejoice in their life,<sup>8</sup>

13 So let them eat and drink  
And love the fruit of their labor,  
For it is all God's gift;

- 14 For this much I know,  
What God has wrought is here forever,  
No adding to it nor subtracting,  
For He has made it all  
So that we may tremble before him.
- 15 Whatever has passed is still here,<sup>9</sup>  
And what is yet to come is already gone,  
And God will watch over the oppressed.<sup>10</sup>
- 16 And more I saw under the sun:  
In courts of law injustice reigns,  
And in the temple of righteousness evil abounds;
- 17 And I said in my heart:  
God will judge both the just and the evil,  
For there is time for all design  
And purpose to all deed.
- 18 And I said in my heart  
Of the affairs of men that God had made,  
Seeing that they are like the beasts,<sup>11</sup>
- 19 For the fate of man and beast  
Is but one,  
As the one dies, so does the other,  
One spirit animates them all,  
No vantage to man over beast,  
For it is all vanity.
- 20 All things march to one end,  
For they all come from dust  
And to dust they shall return.

- 21 Who knows the soul  
Of the children of Adam?  
Does it soar to heaven  
While the soul of the beasts  
Dives down to earth?<sup>12</sup>
- 22 And I saw nothing better  
For the children of Adam<sup>13</sup>  
But to rejoice in their deeds,  
For it is their lot,  
For who will ever show them  
What is to come after?

### Notes (Chapter III)

- 1 The alternation here between *zman* and *ʕet*, both meaning ‘time’, may hint at an older contrast between time and place. *ʕet* is possibly related to *ʕad*, which has both locative and temporal senses (vis. *mo-ʕad* ‘place of meeting’ vs. *mo-ʕed* ‘festive time’, *yá-ʕad* ‘destination’ vs. ‘*id-an* ‘period’, *ʕad ha-bayit* ‘till the house’ vs. *ʕad maḥar* ‘till tomorrow’). This whole long verse carries a strong whiff of dualist, dialectic context-dependent relativism, reminiscent of either Lao Tse or Heraclitus.
- 2 *la-ledet*, lit. ‘to give birth’, is better rendered in this context as ‘to be born’.
- 3 While the literal meaning of *rqod* is ‘to dance’, I elected to render it here as ‘rejoice’, contrasting more obviously with *ʕfod* ‘to mourn’. The loss of the infinitive/allative *l-* in this pair may be another scribal slip, and should be better rendered as *li-ʕfod* and *li-rqod*, respectively.
- 4 The title of Ernest Hemingway’s novel “Time to Love and Time to Die” may be, intended or nor, a splice of this line with the first line of v. 2, above, ‘time to be born and time to die’.
- 5 *b-ʕit-o* ‘in its (proper) time’ could just as well be translated as ‘in its (proper) place’ (see fn. 1 above).

- 6 This may or may not be a hint of Hellenic contact, in this case with Plato's epistemological Rationalism, which holds that we perceive worldly objects the way we do because the underlying idea – or essence – of each object is already *innate* in the human mind. Thus, from the *Meno* dialogue: "...Thus the soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge by virtue of everything else which, as we can see, it once possessed..." (E. Hamilton & H. Cairns, eds 1961, p. 364). In this passage, Socrates suggests a rather concrete explanation to the doctrine of innate ideas, an explanation reminiscent of the Eastern notion of reincarnation: The soul has already lived many times in this and other worlds, so it has already seen – and formed ideas of – all things under the sun. This, in turn – above and beyond his profound cynicism – may account for Qohelet's perspective of 'nothing is new under the sun'.
- 7 The double negative in *mi-bli 'asher lo' yi-mtza'*, lit. 'without him *not* finding', is a well-known subjunctive device in many languages (e.g. Classical Greek). The verb *\*mts'* 'find' here is better rendered as 'discover', thus by extension 'understand' or 'fathom'.
- 8 There is a glaring grammatical slip here, with the masc. pl. in *eyn tov b-am* lit. 'there's no good in *them*' clashing with the masc. sg. *wi-la-fasot tov bi-hay-aw* 'and to do good in *his* life'.
- 9 Contrasting the *perfect* form *hay-a* '(it) was' with *kvar hu'* '(it) already is' is a nice play on the tense-aspect system of Biblical Hebrew, where the demonstrative pronoun *hu'* 'that', 'he' is also the present/participial of the verb *\*hy/\*hw* 'be'.
- 10 This line appears at first glance widely out of context. *yi-vakesh* 'will ask' is by extension also 'will seek' or 'will look for'. The only way the line would make sense in the deeply-fatalistic directly preceding context is by further extending 'look for' to 'look after' (or alternatively, by extending 'seek' to 'seek the benefit of'), with the object being oppressed humanity; that is, *'et-[ha]-ni-rdaf* 'the pursued', 'the oppressed'. The missing definite article here is another grammatical lapse. Murphy (1992) chose to interpret *ni-rdaf* 'pursued' (a passive verb form in the *nif'al* paradigm) as an abstract inanimate 'what has been pursued', arguing for a better fit in the directly-preceding context. The alternative chosen here is just as plausible, however, with the whole of humanity being oppressed by the dialectic paradox of recycling time, and God then looking after the oppressed.



- 11 *she-hem bhema hema la-hem*, lit. ‘that they are (like the) beasts to them’, is another grammatical slip. The intended meaning is ‘that they are like the beast’, and the redundant *hema* ‘they’, the Aramaic version of the Hebrew *hem*, may be an acceptable emphatic use. But the following *la-hem* ‘to them’, another emphatic use of the pronoun, is an overkill. The only way a dative object would make sense here, given the preceding context, would be if it referred to God Himself, thus the masc. sg. *l-o* ‘to Him’. This would be fully compatible with God’s presumed indifference to humanity, so that humans are ‘like the beasts to Him’. It is perhaps worth noting that Qohelet’s view of God’s indifference to humanity is reminiscent of the Taoist Doctrine of *Straw Dogs* (Lao Tse, *Tao Teh Ching*, sutra 5).
- 12 *li-maṭa l-a-'arets* is another grammatical slip, especially if the intended meaning is ‘underneath the earth’. *li-maṭ-a* is by itself ‘downward’, ‘to the bottom’, doubling the current BH *allative* preposition *l-* with the archaic *allative/dative* suffix *-a*. But this doesn’t sit well with *l-a-'arets*, lit. ‘to the earth’ – unless intended as an apposition (‘downward, toward the earth’). If the intended meaning were ‘underneath the earth’, a better alternative would have been *taḥat ha-'arets*, or even *mi-taḥat l-a-'arets*, lit. ‘from underneath to/of the earth’.
- 13 From here to the end of the verse I have chosen to switch from the generic singular (‘son of’) of the original to the more inclusive plural (‘children of’).

## ד (4)

- א ושבתי אני ואראה את כל העשוקים  
אשר נעשים תחת השמש,  
והנה דמעת העשוקים ואין להם מנחם,  
ומיד עשקיהם כח ואין להם מנחם:
- ב ושבח אני את המתים שכבר מתו  
מן החיים אשר המה חיים עדנה,  
וטוב משניהם את אשר עדן לא היה,  
אשר לא ראה את המעשה הרע  
אשר נעשה תחת השמש:
- ד וראיתי את כל העמל ואת כל כשרון המעשה  
כי היא קנאת איש מרעהו,  
גם זה הבל ורעות רוח,  
ה הכסיל חבק את ידיו ואכל את בשרו:  
ו טב מלא כף נחת ממלא חפנים עמל  
ורעות רוח:
- ז ושבתי אני ואראה הבל תחת השמש,  
ח יש אחד ואין שני, גם בן ואח אין לו  
ואין קץ לכל עמלו, גם עיניו לא תשבע עשר:  
ולמי אני עמל ומחסר את נפשי מטובה?  
גם זה הבל וענין רע הוא:
- ט טובים השנים מן האחד,  
אשר יש להם שכר טוב בעמלם,  
י כי אם יפלו, האחד יקים את חברו,  
ואילו האחד שיפל, ואין שני להקימו:

- יא גם אם ישכבו שנים, וחם להם,  
ולאחד איך יחם?
- יב ואם יתקפו האחד, השנים יעמדו נגדו  
והחוט המשלש לא במהרה ינתק:
- יג טוב ילד מסכן וחכם ממלך זקן וכסיל  
אשר לא ידע להזהר עוד,
- יד כי מבית הסורים יצא למלך,  
כי גם במלכותו נולד רש:
- טו ראיתי את כל החיים המהלכים תחת השמש  
עם הילד השני אשר יעמוד תחתיו,  
טז אין קץ לכל העם, לכל אשר היה לפניהם,  
גם האחרונים לא ישמחו בו  
כי גם זה הבל ורעיון רוח:
- יז שמור רגליך כאשר תלך אל בית האלהים  
וקרוב לשמע מתת הכסילים זבח,  
כי אינם יודעים לעשות רע:

#### IV

- 1 And again I saw the oppressed<sup>1</sup>  
And the evil done to them under heaven;<sup>2</sup>  
Behold the tears of the oppressed  
And no one there to shield them  
From the brute force of their oppressor,  
No one to comfort them.
- 2 And I praised the dead<sup>3</sup>  
Who have already departed<sup>4</sup>  
Over the living who are still with us;

- 3 And better off still are those not yet born,<sup>5</sup>  
For they haven't yet known  
All the evil under the sun.
- 4 And I saw all the hustle and clever deeds  
That raise one man's envy toward another,  
And this too is vanity and the mind's delusion,  
5 The idiot sitting on his hands  
While still gobbling up his meal;  
6 Better a fistful of peace of mind  
Than an armload of hustle  
And mindless delusion.<sup>6</sup>
- 7 And again I saw all the vanity under the sun,  
8 A man all alone,  
No son nor brother to carry his name,  
No end to his toil  
And his eyes see no joy:<sup>7</sup>  
Who am I toiling for,  
Depriving myself of all pleasure?<sup>8</sup>  
And this too is vanity and a bad affair.
- 9 Better the two than the one,  
Together they are well rewarded  
For all their labor,  
10 If the one stumbles  
The other will prop him,  
But if the one falls alone<sup>9</sup>  
No one is there to pick him up.
- 11 And if the two lie down together  
They will warm each other,  
But the one alone  
How will he keep warm?

- 12 If the one is attacked,<sup>10</sup>  
 The other will rise to defend him;<sup>11</sup>  
 For the three-ply thread  
 Is not easily broken.<sup>12</sup>
- 13 Better a poor wise child  
 Than a rash old king  
 Who knows no caution,
- 14 For the child may yet rise  
 Out of prison to reign<sup>13</sup>  
 In spite of having been born poor.<sup>14</sup>
- 15 I have seen all the living  
 Who walk under the sun,  
 Like the poor child who rises to reign:<sup>15</sup>
- 16 Countless people came before him  
 And are long gone,<sup>16</sup>  
 And those who follow  
 Will not rejoice in him either,<sup>17</sup>  
 For this too is vanity and the mind's delusion.

## Notes (Chapter IV)

- 1 *we-shav-ti 'ani wa-'e-r'-e*, lit. 'and I returned and saw', is another serial-verb use of \**shb* 'return', 'repeat', to convey the *repetitive* aspect, thus the adverbial 'again'. The change of grammatical aspect here, opening with the *perfect* in the semantically-light serial verb *we-shav-ti*, then the *perfective/preterit* in the semantically-heavy second verb *wa-'e-r'-e*, is another grammatical infelicity, as is the superfluous post-verbal (VS) independent subject pronoun '*ani*', a high-frequency usage in Qohelet. An equi-aspect construction here – *we-shav-ti we-ra'-iti* – would have been more felicitous.
- 2 The original line *kol ha-Sashuq-im 'asher na-Sasim taḥat ha-shemesh*, lit. 'all the *oppressed* that are done under the sun', makes little sense, and must

be another grammatical slip. Most likely, the vowel was misinterpreted here, inserting /u/ to yield the erroneous object nominal *ʕashuq-im* ‘the oppressed’ (in the de-transitive *paʕul* conjugation), rather than /a/ for the more plausible action nominal *ʕashak-im* ‘oppressions’. Likewise, the directly following two clauses – *u-mi-yad ʕoʕhqe-y-hem koaḥ wi-'eyn la-hem mi-naḥem*, lit. ‘and from the hand of their oppressors power and they have no comforter’ – are equally garbled, and should have been better rendered as a single clause: *u-mi-koaḥ yad ʕoʕhqe-y-hem 'eyn la-hem mi-naḥem* ‘and from the power of the hand of their oppressors they have no comforter’, thus ‘no one to comfort them’.

- 3 *we-shabeaḥ 'ani*, lit. ‘and to praise I’, is another grammatical slip, with the infinitive wholly unwarranted. The finite *perfect* form *wi-shibaḥ-ti* ‘and I praised’ would have been more felicitous; with the independent subject pronoun, normally used for contrast, emphasis or swith-reference, again rather superfluous here. Lastly, ‘praise’ here could also be rendered as ‘congratulate’, ‘greet’, ‘salute’ or ‘hail’.
- 4 *ʕad-ena* ‘already’ may be a compression of *ʕad hen-a*, lit. ‘till to-here’ and thus by a common extension ‘till now’. This extension of the sene of *ʕad* from ‘place’ to ‘time’ follows a universal pattern (see chapter 3, fn. 1). A more common rendition of ‘already’ would have been *ʕad-ayyin*, a plural/dual version of *ʕad*. Finally, *ʕadena* may have also been an Aramaic borrowing.
- 5 This line, indeed the whole verse, is reminiscent of Jeremiah 11:14: ‘Cursed be the day I was born, may the day my mother gave birth to me not be blessed’.
- 6 I chose to render *ri'ut ruaḥ* here, lit. ‘the mind’s delusion’, as ‘mindless delusion’, to amplify the meaning as well as for stylistic variation.
- 7 There is a clear grammatical slip in the pronominal agreement here, where the masc. pl. subject doesn’t match the fem. sg. verb agreement. That is, *ʕen-aw* (3rd masc. pl.) *lo' ti-sba'* (3rd fem. sg.) *'osher*. This may be due again to a scribal slip in vocalization, given that the consonantal script makes no difference between *ʕeyn-o* ‘his eye’ and *ʕeyn-aw* ‘his eyes’. The correct line should have thus been *ʕeyn-o lo' ti-sba'* ‘his eye won’t be satisfied’. Alternatively, the fem. pl. suffix may have been elided here, in which case the correct form should have been *ʕeyn-aw lo' ti-sba'-na* ‘his eyes won’t be satisfied’.

- 8 Here *u-mi-ħaser 'et-naḥḥ-i*, lit. ‘and denying my soul’, most likely involves the use of ‘my soul’ as the reflexive ‘myself’, like *libb-i* ‘my heart’ and the more standard *ṣatsm-i* ‘my bone’. *mi-ṭova* is lit. ‘from good’, which I chose to render as ‘of pleasure’.
- 9 The first use of *ha-'eḥad* here, lit. ‘the one’, is taken to mean ‘one of the two’; while the repeated use that follows must mean ‘the lone one’.
- 10 *wi-'im yi-tqif-o ha-'eḥad*, presumably meaning ‘and if *someone* attacks the one’, is another instance of garbled grammar. First, the definite-accusative ‘*et-*’ is missing, i.e. ‘*et-ha-'eḥad*’ ‘the one’, marking it as the object of ‘attack’ rather than the erroneous subject. Second, the 3rd sg. masc. subject *yi-tqif-o*, lit. ‘(he) will attack him’, should have been the impersonal plural *ya-tqif-u*, lit. ‘they will attack him’, thus by a near-universal extension ‘*someone* will attack him’. This glitch could have again been due to a scribal misinterpretation of the vocalic /w/, as /o/ (‘him’) rather than /u/ (‘they’). These considerations motivate my choice of the English passive, i.e. ‘if the one is attacked’.
- 11 *ha-shnayim ya-ṣamd-u negd-o*, lit. ‘the two will stand against *him*’, makes little sense in the present context. First, given the pair-wise comparison structure of the entire passage, the second line here, following ‘if one is attacked’, should have been ‘the other will stand’, thus *ha-sheni ya-ṣamod*. And second, given the preceding impersonal-plural interpretation (see fn. 10 above), this second line should have been better rendered as *ha-sheni ya-ṣamod negd-am* ‘the second one would stand against *them*’, i.e. against the attackers.
- 12 The reference of ‘the three-ply thread’ is most likely a metaphoric allusion to the fact that in spinning a thread or plying a rope, a three-ply (or two-ply) is stronger than a single-ply.
- 13 Rendering *beyt ha-sur-im* as ‘house of the Syrians’ is a glaring scribal slip, most likely for *beyt ha-'asur-im* ‘prison’, lit. ‘house of the imprisoned’. The culprit here is, most likely, the common scribal confusion of the letter /*sin*/ *shin*/ (viz. *sibolet/shibolet*), converting the intended *beyt ha-'asur-im* ‘house of the imprisoned’ first into *beyt ha-'ashur-im* ‘house of the Assyrians’ (in the process confusing the intended /*samekh*/ as /*sin*/), then coming up with *beyt ha-sur-im* ‘house of the Syrians’. The subject here must be again the humble boy-king of v.14. That boy must have also been the subject of the next line ‘and even though he became king, he was born poor’ (see fn. 14 directly below).

- 14 *ki gam bi-malkhut-o nolad rash*, lit. ‘because also in his kingship he was born poor’, is a woefully under-specified concessive, literally begging for ‘*afilu* ‘even though’.
- 15 *ha-yeled ha-sheni 'asher ya-šamod taht-aw*, lit. ‘the *second* child who will stand *under* him’, is obscure in the extreme – if taken out of context. However, it may allude back to the poor wise child – contrasted with the foolish old king – in the directly-preceding v. 14. Thus ‘the second’ may easily mean ‘the following’, ‘the next’, given the etymological connection of *shen-i* ‘second’ to the verbal root \**shn* ‘repeat’, ‘change’. Further, *ya-šamod taht-aw*, lit. ‘will stand *under* him’, can easily be interpreted as ‘will stand *instead* of him’, thus ‘will reign *after* him’. This is indeed the King James’ interpretation, which goes on to assign the reference of ‘him’ in v. 16 – ‘will not rejoice in *him*’ – to the same poor-but-wise child-king of v. 14. I have chosen to dispense here with ‘after him’ because of the extreme awkwardness of the anaphoric-pronominal reference in this discourse context, reaching too far back to the preceding verse.
- 16 I have taken the liberty here of adding ‘and are long gone’ in order to make better sense of the last three verses of this chapter. If the meter would have allowed, I would have added the implicit ‘and are long gone without ever knowing him’, thus conforming with v. 16.
- 17 *lo' yi-smikh-u b-o*, lit. ‘will not rejoice in him’, can also be rendered, plausibly, as ‘will not praise him’, or even ‘will not remember him favorably’.



## ה (5)

- א אל תבהל פיך, ולבך אל ימהר להציא דבר לפני האלהים, כי אלהים בשמים ואתה על הארץ, על כן יהיו דבריך מעטים,
- ב כי בא החלום ברב ענין וקול כסיל ברב דברים:
- ג כאשר תדר נדר לאלהים, אל תאחר לשלמו, כי אין חפץ בכסילים: את אשר תדר, שלם,
- ד טוב אשר לא תדר משתדור ולא תשלם: אל תתן את פיך לחטיא את בשרך ואל תאמר לפני המלאך כי שגגה היא, למה יקצף האלהים על קולך וחבל את מעשי ידיך?
- ו כי ברב חלמות והבלים ודברים הרבה, כי את האלהים ירא:
- ז אם עשק רש וגזל משפט וצדק תראה במדינה, אל תתמה על חפץ, כי גבה מעל גבה שמר, וגבהים עליהם: ויתרון ארץ בכל היא מלך לשדה נעבד:
- ט אהב כסף לא ישבע כסף ומי אהב בהמון, לא תבואה, גם זה הבל:
- י ברבות הטובה, רבו אוכליה, ומה כשרון לבעליה כי אם ראות עיניו?

- יא מתוקה שנת העבד אם מעט ואם הרבה יאכל  
והשבע לעשיר איננו מניח לו לישון:
- יב יש רעה חולה ראיתי תחת השמש,  
עשר שמור לבעליו לרעתו,  
ואבד העשר ההוא בענין רע
- יג והוליד בן ואין בידו מאומה,  
כאשר יצא מבטן אמו,  
ערום ישוב ללכת כשבא
- יד ומאומה לא ישא בעמלו שילך בידו,  
וגם זה רעה חולה:
- טו כל עמת שבא, כן ילך,  
ומה יתרון לו שיעמל לרוח?
- טז כל ימיו בחשך יאכל וכעס הרבה  
וחליו, וקצף:
- יז הנה אשר ראיתי אני טוב,  
אשר יפה לאכול ולשתות  
ולראות טובה בכל עמלו  
שיעמל תחת השמש:  
מספר ימי חייו אשר נתן לו האלהים,  
כי הוא חלקו:
- יח גם כל האדם אשר נתן לן האלהים עשר ונכסים  
והשליטו לאכל ממנו ולשאת את חלקו ולשמח בעמלו,  
זה מתת אלהים היא,
- יט כי לא הרבה יזכר את ימי חייו,  
כי אלהים מענה בשמחת לבו:

## V

- 17 Mind your step when you enter God's house,<sup>1</sup>  
Come closer to hear fools offer their sacrifice,<sup>2</sup>  
For they know not the folly of their ways;<sup>3</sup>
- 1 Do not rush to open your mouth  
And may your heart resist spewing  
Empty words before the Lord;<sup>4</sup>  
For God is high in Heaven  
And you are down on earth,<sup>5</sup>  
May your words thus be few;
- 2 For idle dreams resound with much noise  
And the voice of fools rings loud with hollow talk.<sup>6</sup>
- 3 When you pledge before God  
Don't delay paying up,  
For He has no use for laggards or fools;  
Whatever you promise, pay,<sup>7</sup>
- 4 Or better yet, do not promise  
Rather than promise and not pay.
- 5 Do not let your mouth ensnare you in sin <sup>8</sup>  
Nor tell off God's angel to his face,  
For why let God wreak his anger on you  
And frustrate your work?
- 6 Idle dreams yield vanity and cheap prattle,  
So better fear God.
- 7 If you see the poor oppressed  
And right and justice perverted,  
Do not wonder why,  
For the mighty rule those beneath them,<sup>9</sup>  
And are in turn ruled from above;

- 8 All a country gains from a king  
Is being raked harder, like a field.<sup>10</sup>
- 9 Those who lust for gold are never sated,  
Those who crave riches will reap the wind,<sup>11</sup>  
For this too is vanity;
- 10 When goods are abundant  
So are those who grab for them,  
So what vantage does the owner gain  
But his eye's delusion?<sup>12</sup>
- 11 Sweet is the worker's sleep  
Whether he ate much or little,  
While the rich's full stomach  
Robs him of his rest;<sup>13</sup>
- 12 For I saw this evil under the sun:<sup>14</sup>  
The rich amasses wealth to his detriment,
- 13 Once his wealth is lost in a bad venture,  
Even if he has raised a son  
He has nothing to hand down.
- 14 Naked we come out of the womb  
And naked we leave,<sup>15</sup>  
Taking no fruit of our work with us  
As we depart;<sup>16</sup>
- 15 And this too is rank evil:  
The way a man comes,  
So shall he leave,<sup>17</sup>  
And what has he reaped of his life  
But the wind?
- 16 All his days he sups in the dark,  
His rage boiling over,  
His sickness, his fury.<sup>18</sup>

- 17 And this good I saw:  
 Best eat and drink  
 And rejoice in your work under the sun,  
 For your God-given days are numbered,  
 For it is your lot.
- 18 Whomever God has given wealth and goods  
 Had better savor His bounty,<sup>19</sup>  
 Bear his burden, enjoy his labor,  
 For it is all God's gift;
- 19 Soon he won't remember  
 The days of his life,  
 May God grace the joys of his heart.<sup>20</sup>

## Notes (Chapter V)

- 1 Verse 4:17 is obviously the opening verse of chapter 5.
- 2 *wi-qarov li-shmoaš* is a conspicuous grammatical glitch. If the meaning is 'and come closer to hear', i.e. with an imperative or subjunctive sense, then the vocalization of the verb should have been *wi-qrav* or *wi-qrov*, thus the imperative pattern. The use of the preposition *mi-* 'from' in *mi-tet ksil-im zevaḥ*, 'lit. 'from fools giving sacrifice', is both aberrant and superfluous. The whole line should have been rendered more plausibly – given the context – as *wi-qrov li-shmoaš ('et-)tet ksil-im zevaḥ* 'and come closer to hear fools offer sacrifice'.
- 3 A literal reading of *ki 'eyn-am yodš-im la-šasot raš*, lit. 'for they don't know (how) to do evil', makes little sense here. I have chosen, following Murphy (1992), to go with an alternative that is a bit more plausible. The problem with that alternative is, of course, that the infinitival V-complement *la-šasot* ('to do') is not compatible with it. A better grammatical choice, given a meaning that is compatible with the context, would have been *ki 'ey-am yodš-im šal šasot raš* 'for they don't know about doling evil'. The contraction of *šal* 'on', 'about' to *l-* 'to' is a plausible scribal re-interpretation, analogous to the earlier contraction of the allative '*el-* to *l-*'.
- 4 *le-hotsi' davar*, lit. 'to let out a word', may refer to taking an oath.

- 5 This line as well as several passages further below echo, however obliquely, Job's catalog of the arbitrariness of omnipotent God (see e.g. Job 9:1–15).
- 6 This line is reminiscent of the Aramaic proverb *'itztra ba-lugina kis-kish-karia* 'a coin in an (empty) barrel rings loud'.
- 7 The verb root *\*shlm*, seen here in *shalem* 'pay (up)', means lit. 'make whole'. It is related to *hi-shlim* 'complete', 'make whole' (in the causative *hifil* paradigm), as well as to the nominal *shalom* 'peace'. The meaning 'make whole' could have been plausibly extended to 'fulfil', 'make good', and thus 'pay up'.
- 8 *la-ha-hṭi* 'et-bsar-kha is lit. 'to make your flesh sin', whereby 'your flesh' may be interpreted as another reflexive form, with the intended sense then of 'to make *yourself* sin'. This parallels the use of *libb-i* 'my heart' or *nafsh-i* 'my soul' elsewhere in the poem, as well as the standard reflexive *ṣatsm-i* 'my bone'.
- 9 Here *shomer* is lit. '(he) guards', '(he) watches over'. However, in this context 'controls' is perhaps a better interpretation, compatible with the directly-following cynical conclusion.
- 10 The grammar here is again garbled, with the rather elliptic *wi-yitron 'eretz b-a-khol*, perhaps intended to mean 'and the advantage to a country in all of this', followed by *hi' melekh li-sadeh ne-sevad*, perhaps intended to mean 'is (like having) a king over a cultivated field'. The 3rd pers. fem. pronoun *hi'* 'she/it' agrees neither with the masc. *yitron* 'advantage' nor with the masc. *sadeh* 'field', and should have been better rendered as the masc. *hu'* 'he/it'. The seditious interpretation I opted for may be paraphrased as: 'What can one expect of kings but that they treat you like a field ripe for the raking?' Needless to say, such a cynical view of the ruler, traditionally considered God's anointed, is hardly compatible with the attribution of the book to King Solomon.
- 11 *be-hamon* is lit. 'in noise', 'in a crowd' or 'in quantity'. *lo' tvu'a* is lit. 'no harvest', originally perhaps 'no coming' or 'no income', with *t-vu'-a* derived from *\*b'* 'come', analogous to *t-shuv-a* 'answer' (from *\*shb* 'return'), *t-ruf-a* 'cure', 'medicine' from *\*rp'* 'cure', etc. A better grammatical form here would have been *wi-'eyn l-o tvu'a* 'and he has no harvest'.
- 12 The vocalization of *r'it* is no doubt another scibal slip, probably due to misidentifying the longer original /w/ (*waw*) as the shorter /y/ (*yod*). The correct vocalization should have thus been *r'ut ṣeyn-aw* '(the) vision of his eyes', thus by extension 'mirage' or 'delusion', in line with the more frequent *r'ut ruaḥ* 'the soul's delusion'.

- 13 The traditional vocalization of *we-ha-sava*’ makes little sense here. This nominalization from the root \**sb*’ ‘be satiated (with food)’ would have been better rendered as *we-ha-sóva*’ ‘and the satiation’.
- 14 *ħol-a*, lit. ‘sick’ (fem. sg.), is often used in the book as the negative intensifier ‘bad’, as in e.g. *raša ħola*, lit. ‘a sick evil’, meaning ‘a great evil’.
- 15 Here I chose to change the original generic ‘a man’ into the more inclusive generic ‘we’.
- 16 The line *mi’uma lo’ yi-sa’ bi-šamal-o she-y-o-lekh bi-yad-o*, lit. ‘he will carry nothing of his work that makes-go by his hand’, is a garbled grammatical concoction. If intended to mean ‘he will carry away nothing from the toil of his hand’, as the context suggests, the inelegant grammar is not much help. *bi-šamal-o* is lit. ‘by his labor’; the causative *she-y-o-lekh* is lit. ‘that he will make go’ (in the causative *hifšil* paradigm); *bi-yado* is lit. ‘by his hand’. A more coherent rendition of this line would be, perhaps, *mi’uma lo’ yi-sa’ šim-o me-šamal yad-o* ‘he will take nothing away with him of his hand’s toil’.
- 17 *kol šuma-t she-ba’*, lit. ‘all the manner of (that) he came’, may have been intended as *ki-l-šuma-t she-ba’* ‘like the manner of his coming’, thus the manner comparative ‘the way he came (into the world)’. As elsewhere, the confusion here may have been due to a scribal slip, a mixup between the shorter /y/ (*yod*) and the longer /w/ (*waw*), thus vocalizing *kol* ‘all’, which makes little sense here. The source of *šuma* or *l-šuma-t*, often interpreted as ‘in comparison with’, ‘in contrast with/to’ or ‘against’ (as in *li-šuma-t-o* ‘against him’) is somewhat obscure, and perhaps even an Aramaic borrowing.
- 18 The conjoined *we-ħely-o we-qetzef*, lit. ‘and his sickness and fury’, are most likely missing the verb, plausibly pointing back to ‘rise’, thus ‘bubble up’, in the preceding line. The latter goes well with the original sense of *qetzef* ‘foam’.
- 19 The causative *hi-shliṭ-o* is lit. ‘made him rule’ or ‘made him a ruler’, thus ‘empowered him’ and by further extension ‘enjoined him (to do)’.
- 20 *ma-šaneh* here is lit. ‘(he) responds’, thus perhaps by extension ‘assents’ or even ‘blesses’ or ‘graces’. But the root is ambiguous, and is possibly related to \**ṅg* ‘enjoy’, ‘be happy’, thus yielding here the interpretation ‘for God blesses/graces the gladness of his heart’. Less plausible here is to the homophonous transitive verb \**šn* ‘torture’.

## ו (6)

- א יש רעה אחת אשר ראיתי תחת השמש  
ורבה היא על האדם,
- ב איש אשר יתן לו האלהים עשר ונכסים וכבוד  
ואיננו חסר לנפשו מכל אשר יתאוה,  
ולא ישליטנו האלהים לאכל ממנו  
כי איש נכרי יאכלנו:  
זה הבל וחלי רע הוא:
- ג אם יוליד איש מאה ושנים רבות יחיה,  
ורב שיהיו ימי שניו  
ונפשו לא תשבע מן הטובה  
וגם קבורה לא היתה לו,  
אמרתי טוב ממנו הנפל,  
ד כי בהבל בא ובחשך ילך  
ובחשף שמו יכסה,  
ה גם שמש לא ראה ולא ידע נחת לזה מזה:  
ו ואילו חיה אלף שנים פעמים וטובה לא ראה,  
הלא אל מקום אחד הכל הולך:
- ז כל עמל האדם לפיהו,  
וגם הנפש לא תמלא,  
ח כי מה יותר לחכם מן הכסיל?  
מה לעני יודע להלך נגד החיים?
- ט טב מראה עינים מהלך נפש,  
גם זה הבל ורעות רוח:



- י מה שהיה כבר נקרא שמו  
ונודע אשר הוא אדם,  
ולא יוכל לדין עם שהתקיף ממנו,  
יא כי יש דברים הרבה מרבים הבל,  
מה יתר לאדם?  
יב כי מי יודע מה טוב לאדם בחיים?  
מספר ימי חיי הבלו ויעשם כצל,  
אשר מי יגיד לאדם מה יהיה אחריו  
תחת השמש?

## VI

- 1 I have seen evil under the sun, all too often  
Among the children of Adam,  
2 A man with God-given wealth  
And property and honor,  
Lacking none of his heart's desires  
And still God won't let him enjoy it<sup>1</sup>  
But rather has a stranger reap his corn;  
This too is vanity and a bad affliction.<sup>2</sup>  
3 If a man begets fifty sons  
And lives to be a hundred,  
However many may his years be<sup>3</sup>  
His soul won't be content with his bounty,  
Nor will he have a proper burial;  
So I say:  
A miscarried child  
Would have been better off,

- 4 Entering the light of day with nothing  
And departing in the night  
With nothing but darkness  
To shroud his name,
- 5 For he had never seen the sun  
Nor known pleasure,  
Like the one, like the other;<sup>4</sup>
- 6 Had that man lived two thousand years  
He would have still seen no joy,  
For we all wind up just the same.
- 7 A man's labor feeds his mouth  
But his soul is never sated,
- 8 And what vantage has the wise over the fool  
Or the rich over the poor?  
For which of them knows  
How to walk among the living?<sup>5</sup>
- 9 Better the witness of the eye  
Than the musings of the soul,<sup>6</sup>  
But this too is vanity and the mind's delusion.
- 10 He who has already lived<sup>7</sup>  
Has been given a name  
By which he may be known,<sup>8</sup>  
Yet he cannot contend with mighty.<sup>9</sup>
- 11 With many words comes much confusion<sup>10</sup>  
And what does one gain by that?
- 12 For who knows what is good for a man's life?  
His days of vanity are numbered,  
Like the fleeting shadow;  
For who can tell a man<sup>11</sup>  
What will come after him under the sun?

## Notes (Chapter VI)

- 1 Here the causative use of \**shlt* ‘rule’ (in the *hifsil* paradigm) is seen again in *we-lo' y-a-shlit-eno ha-'elohim le-'ekhol mimen-o*, most likely intended to mean ‘and God would not *empower* him to eat from it’. By further extension this may be then rendered as ‘and God would not *let* him eat from it’. The corresponding affirmative of this usage has been noted in v. 5:18 (see chapter 5, fn. 16).
- 2 In the expression *holi ras*, lit. ‘a bad sickness’, ‘bad’ is used as a negative intensifier, reminiscent of *rasa hola*, lit. ‘a sick evil’ (see v. 5:2).
- 3 There is a complex grammatical glitch here in *we-rav she-yihy-u yim-ey shan-aw*, presumably intended to mean ‘and however many the days of his years may be’. To begin with, the sg. *we-rav* ‘and plentiful’ should have been better given as the pl. *we-rab-im*, agreeing with the plural subject *yim-ey shan-aw* ‘the *days* of his years’. Further, the plural *shan-aw*, intended to mean ‘his years’, is of the wrong gender. The fem. *shana* ‘year’ indeed has an irregular masc. plural *shan-im*. But in the possessed construction it is be pluralized as feminine, thus *shn-ot-aw*. And likewise *shn-ot hay-aw* ‘the years of his life’.
- 4 The comparison here is, most likely, between the rich man and the miscarried baby in v. 3–5 directly above.
- 5 The last two lines of v. 8 have been re-arranged out of a compressed, grammatically mangled single line of the Hebrew original: *mah l-a-šani yodeaš la-halokh neged ha-ḥayim?* The literal reading of this line, perhaps ‘what to the poor man knows to walk against life’, makes little sense. The dative *la-šani* ‘to the poor (man)’ makes no grammatical sense here as the presumed subject of *yodeaš* ‘(he) knows’. The nominal infinitive of the verbal root \*(*h*)*lk* ‘walk’ should have been rendered as either *la-lekhet* or *li-halekh*, thus fitting better in the verbal complement construction ‘knows (how) to walk’. My interpretation of this garbled line as ‘for which of them knows how to walk among the living?’ is admittedly creative, but is designed to make sense in the context, where the rich and the poor are compared.
- 6 In this – his second – venture into Classical epistemology, Qohelet opts for Aristotelian empiricism, (re. the opening paragraph of *De Interpretatione*) over his earlier flirting with Platonic rationalism (see chapter 3, v. 3:11 and fn. 5). The last line, the cynic’s contribution, dismisses *both* the eye’s testimony and the soul’s musing as the mind’s delusion.

- 7 *mah she-haya* is lit. ‘what has been’ or ‘what has already happened’. However, the following line makes my reading – *mi she-haya* ‘whoever has already been/lived’ – more plausible.
- 8 *we-no-daš 'asher-hu' 'adam* is lit. either ‘and it was known that he is a man’ or ‘and he was known (by his given name) as a man’. Either interpretation makes little sense under the more mundane reading of the verbal root \**dš* ‘know’. The interpretation I chose, with the passive *no-daš* as ‘be known’ or by extension ‘be famous’, is semantically plausible, paralleling another de-transitive form of the verb, the adjectival/middle *yaduaš* ‘known’ (in the *pašul* paradigm). The main advantage of this interpretation is that it fits much better in the recurrent contrastive reading of many of the verses in this chapter, in this instance ‘in spite of the fact that his name is well known, he still cannot contend with the mighty’.
- 9 The reflexive/middle of the verb \**tqf* ‘attack’ (in the *hit-pašel* paradigm), is *hit-tqif*, thus here *she-hit-tqif*, lit. ‘who became aggressive’, ‘who became dominant’, or ‘who became stronger’; which I have elected to trim further to ‘the mighty’.
- 10 *ki-yesh dvar-im harbeh marb-im hevel*, presumably intended to mean ‘for there are many words that increase fog/vanity’, is another instance of garbled non-native grammar. However, one could perhaps interpret the *ki-* as a time-adverb subordinator *ki-* ‘when’, given the un-vocalized script (see Part I, above). The interpretation I opted for is compatible with the context: ‘when there are many words, vanity rises’, or ‘with many words comes much confusion (or nonsense)’. This observation also dovetails with the first line of Lao Tse’s *Tao The Ching*: ‘The Tao that can see put in words is not the real Tao’.
- 11 Here the REL-clause subordinator *'asher* by itself also functions as the reason/cause-ADV subordinator ‘because’ (‘for’; see again Part I, above, as well as Givón 1991b).

## ז (7)

- א טוב שם משמן טוב  
ויום המות מיום הולדו:
- ב טוב ללכת אל בית האבל מלכת אל בית המשתה,  
אשר הוא סוף כל האדם והחי יתן אל לבו:
- ג טוב כעס משחוק, כי ברע פנים ייטב לב:  
ד לב חכמים בבית האבל ולב כסילים בבית שמחה:  
ה טוב לשמוע גערת חכם מאיש שמע שיר כסילים,  
ו כי כקול הסירים תחת הסיר כן שחק הכסיל,  
וגם זה הבל:
- ז כי העשק יהולל חכם  
ויאבד את לב המתנה:
- ח טוב אחרית דבר מראשיתו,  
טוב ארך רוח מגבה רוח:
- ט אל תבהל ברוחך לכעס,  
י כי כעס בחיק כסילים ינוח:  
אל תאמר מה היה,  
י שהימים הראשנים היו טובים מאלה,  
י כי לא מחכמה שאלת על זה:
- יא טובה חכמה עם נחלה ויותר לראי השמש,  
יב כי בצל החכמה בצל הכסף  
ויתרון דעת החכמה תחיה בעליה:
- יג ראה את מעשה האלהים  
כי מי יוכל לתקן את אשר עותו?
- יד ביום הטובה היה בטוב וביום הרעה ראה,  
גם את זה לעמת זה עשה האלהים  
על דברת שלא ימצא האדם אחריו מאומה:

- טו את הכל ראיתי בימי הבלי,  
יש צדיק אבד בצדקו  
ויש רשע מאריך ברעתו:
- טז אל תהי צדיק הרבה ואל תתחכם יותר,  
למה תשומם?
- יז אל תרשע הרבה ואל תהי סכל,  
למה תמות בלא עתך?
- יח טוב אשר תאחז בזה  
וגם מזה אל תניח ידך,  
כי ירא אלהים יצא את כלם:
- יט החכמה תעז לחכם מעשרה שליטים  
אשר היו בעיר,
- כ כי האדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב  
ולא יחטא:
- כא גם לכל הדברים אשר ידברו אל תתן לבך,  
אשר לא תשמע את עבדך מקללך,
- כב כי פעמים רבות ידע לבך  
אשר גם אתה קללת אחרים:
- כג כל זה נסיתי בחכמה,  
אמרתי אחכמה, והיא רחוקה ממני,
- כד רחוק מה שהיה ועמק עמק,  
מי ימצאנו?
- כה סבותי אני ולבי לדעת ולתור ובקש חכמה וחשבון,  
ולדעת רשע, כסל והסכלות הוללות,
- כו ומוצא אני מר ממות את האשה,  
אשר היא מצודים וחרמים לבה, אסורים ידיה,  
טוב לפני האלהים ימלט ממנה  
וחוטא ילכד בה:

כז ראה זה מצאתי, אמרה קהלת,

אחת לאחת למצא חשבון,

כח אשר עוד בקשה נפשי לא מצאתי,

אדם אחד מאלף מצאתי

ואשה בכל אלה לא מצאתי:

כט לבד, ראה, זה מצאתי,

אשר עשה האלהים את האדם ישר,

והמה בקשו חשבנות רבים:

## VII

- 1 Better a good name than good oil,<sup>1</sup>  
Better the day of your death  
Than the day of your birth;
- 2 Better a house of mourning  
Than a house of feasting,<sup>2</sup>  
For the house of mourning marks the end,  
So the living had better pay heed.
- 3 Better anger than laughter,  
For a sour face may mask a happy heart;
- 4 The heart of the wise dwells in the house of mourning,  
The heart of the fool in the house of feasting.
- 5 Better to be chided by the wise  
Than be cheered by a fool;
- 6 For the laugh of the fool is like  
One pan grinding upon another,<sup>3</sup>  
And this too is vanity;
- 7 The oppressor may praise the wise<sup>4</sup>  
But lacks generosity of spirit.<sup>5</sup>

- 8 Better the end than the beginning,  
And patience trumps pride;
- 9 Do not rush your soul to anger,  
For anger sours the heart of fools.
- 10 Do not ask why the days of old  
Were better than these,  
For there is no wisdom in such query
- 11 And wisdom is better than wealth,  
Even more so to the living;<sup>6</sup>
- 12 For a whiff of knowledge  
Is like a spark of silver,  
It keeps the wise alive.
- 13 Pay heed to God's work,  
For who could straighten what He has bent?
- 14 Enjoy the good day  
And hail the bad one too,  
For God has put them one next to the other  
And nothing is there afterward.<sup>7</sup>
- 15 I have seen this in my days of vanity,  
The righteous lost in his righteousness  
While rogues thrive in their evil;
- 16 So don't be overly righteous  
Nor too wise,<sup>8</sup>  
For why should you lose it all?
- 17 Don't do much evil either  
Nor be much of a fool,  
For why should you die before your time?<sup>9</sup>
- 18 Better hold fast to one  
While cleaving to the other,  
For the fear of God reigns over all.<sup>10</sup>



19 Wisdom will shield the wise  
Better than a dozen armed guards,<sup>11</sup>  
20 For no righteous child of Adam<sup>12</sup>  
Does only good and no evil;  
21 So brush aside idle gossip  
Lest you may hear your own slave curse you;  
22 For you have often known in your heart  
How you yourself have maligned others.

23 I have tried all this in wisdom,<sup>13</sup>  
I begged Him, let me be wise!  
But wisdom has eluded me;  
24 What is past is now faded,  
Buried, who will unearth it?  
25 I have wandered the earth,  
My heart seeking wisdom and reckoning,  
Seeking to decipher folly and evil  
And greed and debauchery in their wake;  
26 And through it all I have found  
The woman bitter than death,<sup>14</sup>  
For she is a bagful of tricks,<sup>15</sup>  
Her heart is barren, her hands forbidding;  
Whoever is favored by God will shun her  
But the sinner will be ensnared.

27 Behold, this too I have found  
Say I, Qohelet,<sup>16</sup>  
Having reckoned things one by one,  
Striving to add them up, make sense:  
28 What my soul had sought  
I haven't found,  
One man in a thousand I did find,  
But a woman amongst them I didn't;

- 29 For lo, only this have I found:  
 In the beginning God made Adam's children straight,  
 But they soon commenced their crooked reckonings.<sup>17</sup>

## Notes (Chapter VII)

- 1 Oil stands, presumably, for tangible goods, contrasting with one's ephemeral good name. Perhaps this verse amplifies on Proverbs 10:7: *zekher tsadiq li-vrakha ve-shem rishaḥ-im yi-rqav* 'may the memory of the just be blessed and the name of the evil-doers rot'.
- 2 *beyt mi-shteh* is lit. 'house of drinking'; but the nominal *mi-shteh* 'drinking' also stands for 'a feast' or 'feasting'.
- 3 *qol ha-sir-im taḥat ha-sir*, lit. 'the sound of the pans under the pan', is somewhat obscure. To begin with, an ellipted verb – 'grinding on' or 'chafing upon' – is surely missing. And further, the plural in *ha-sir-im* 'the pans' is superfluous, and the line may have been better rendered as *qol ha-sir taḥat ha-sir* 'the sound of one pan under another', with 'grinding' presumably implied.
- 4 *ki ha-šosheq yi-holel ha-ḥakham* is both ambiguous and grammatically aberrant. First, with the unmarked stress and the flexible VS/SV word-order of BH (see Part I above), *ha-šoshek* could be interpreted here as either 'the oppressor' (*ha-šoshéq*) or 'oppression' (*ha-šósheq*). The latter interpretation – 'for the wise will praise oppression' – makes little sense in the present context. Either way, the definite accusative 'et-' is missing here, so that the Hebrew text should have perhaps been: *ki ha-šoshéq yi-holel 'et-ha-ḥakham* 'for the oppressor may praise the wise'.
- 5 *wi-yi-'abed 'et-lev ma-tanah*, lit. 'and (he thus) loses the heart of gift', is aberrant in both lexicon and grammar. Given the interpretation of the preceding line, several interpretations could have fitted here, none fully supported by the mangled grammar. To begin with, *ma-tanah*, from \**tn* 'give', is most commonly the object nominal 'gift', not the action nominal 'giving' or the more abstract 'generosity'. Further, the Hebrew possessive construction (*status constructus*) normally requires a definite possessor, thus in this instance *'et-lev ha-ma-tanah* 'the heart of gift/giving'. All in all, an inelegant mess. My chosen interpretation, while not full-proof, is the one most compatible with the context, with \**bd* 'lose' interpreted, by extension, as 'lack'.

- 6 *ro'e-y ha-shamesh* is lit. 'seers of the sun', 'those who see the sun', which I chose to interpret as a metaphor for 'the living'.
- 7 Murphy's (1992) more pious rendition of this line, 'so that no one may fault Him', is supported by neither the grammar nor the philosophical context. *šal divr-at she-* is lit. 'on the saying that', plausibly extended to 'meaning that'. The complement clause, *she-lo' yi-mtsa' ha-'adam 'ahar-aw mi'uma*, lit. 'that man may find nothing after him', is ambiguous as to the reference of 'him' – either 'God' or 'man (himself)'. The latter interpretation is more compatible with Qohelet's cynical intent – there is nothing to be found after this life. The link to the preceding line – God placed (in front of us) the good next to the bad – is subtle but still coherent: God has placed both the good and the bad in front of us, so we had better accept both – or either – with equal stoicism, since there is neither good nor bad in the afterlife. In support of this interpretation, see also chapter 9, v. 9:10.
- 8 This line may have been transposed with the first line of v. 7:17. The concluding line of v. 7:18 supports the double contrast here – the righteous vs. the evil and the wise vs. the fool.
- 9 This line is reminiscent of the utilitarian ethics of Taoism – *He who opposes the Tao dies young* (Lao Tse, *Tao Teh Ching*, sutra 55).
- 10 *yire'-'elohim*, lit. '(he who) fears God', with the agentive nominal of \**yr'* 'fear', is most likely a grammatical slip, whereas the context clearly demands the action nominal *yir'-at 'elohim* 'the fear of God'. The grammatically inelegant *ye-tse'-'et-kul-am* is lit. 'will exit (for) all', thus by extension 'will be the outcome for all', where 'come out' somehow functions as a transitive verb. Alternatively, the def. accusative *'et-* may have been meant as 'with' (viz. the variation *šim-i* vs. *'it-i* 'with me'). A better rendition yet would have been with the dative preposition: *ye-tse' li-kul-am* 'will come out for all of them'.
- 11 Here *šir*, lit. 'town', 'city', probably means a fortified walled settlement.
- 12 I elected to render the gendered *'adam* 'man' here as the more inclusive 'child of Adam'.
- 13 *kol zo't nisi-ti bi-ħokhma*, lit. 'all this I have tried in wisdom', would have been better rendered as *kol zo't nisi-ti bi-ħokhmat-i* 'all this I tried in my wisdom'.
- 14 This passage is the epicenter of the book's misogyny, with Qohelet venting his bitter life-long disappointment, as in the more oblique v. 28, further below. The book of Legend (*Sefer ha-Hagadah*) has a more subtle version

of venting the author's – again attributed to Solomon – frustration at his inability to understand women: “There are three that have always baffled me, and four I have never understood: The way of the eagle in the sky, the way of a boat in the sea, the way of the snake on the rock, and the way of a man with a woman”.

- 15 The grammar of several clauses here is problematic, with strange plural agreement of nominal predicates and, on occasion, faulty gender-agreement: *'asher hi' mi-tsod-im* ‘that she (sg. fem.) is traps’ (pl. masc.); *wi-har-am-im libb-a* ‘and her (fem. sg.) heart (masc. sg.) is injunctions (masc. pl.)’; *'asur-im yadey-ha* ‘her hands (fem. pl.) are prisoners’ (masc. pl.); or, alternatively, ‘her hands (fem. pl.) are forbidden’ (masc. pl.).
- 16 The fem. *'amrah qohelet* is clearly wrong here, and should have been *'amar qohelet* ‘Said qohelet’.
- 17 *wi-hema biqsh-u heshbon-ot rab-im* is lit. ‘and they sought many reckonings’. In the present context, *heshbon-ot*, lit. ‘reckoning’, ‘figuring’ or ‘accounting’, doesn’t make much sense except in contrast with *yashar* ‘straight’, ‘honest’; hence my decision to interpret the line as ‘but they soon commenced their crooked reckoning’.

## ח (8)

- א מי כהחכם יודע ומי יודע פשר דבר  
 חכמת אדם תאיר פניו ועז פניו ישנא:
- ב אני פי מלך שמר ועל דברת שבועת אלהים:  
 ג אל תבהל מפניו תלך, אל תעמד בדבר רע,  
 כי כל אשר יחפץ יעשה,  
 ד באשר דבר מלך שלטו  
 ומי יאמר לו מה תעשה?
- ה שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע  
 ועט ומשפט ידע לב חכם,  
 ו כי לכל חפץ יש עת ומשפט,  
 ז כי רעת האדם רבה עליו,  
 ח כי איננו ידע מה שיהיה,  
 ט כי כשאשר יהיה מי יגיד לו?
- י אין אדם שליט ברוח לכלוא את הרוח  
 ואין שלטון ביום המות ואין משלחת במלחמה  
 ולא ימלט רשע את בעליו:
- יא את כל הזה ראיתי,  
 ונתון את לבי לכל מעשה  
 אשר נעשה תחת השמים,  
 יב עת אשר שלט האדם באדם לרע לו:  
 יג ובכן ראיתי רשעים קבורים,  
 יד ובאו וממקום קדוש יהלכו  
 וישתכח בעיר אשר כן עשו,  
 יה גם זה הבל:

- יא אשר אין נעשה פתגם מעשי הרעה מהרה,  
 על כן מלא לב בני האדם בהם לעשות רע:
- יב אשר חטא עושה רע מאת ומאריך לו,  
 כי גם יודע אני אשר יהיה טוב ליראי האלהים  
 אשר ייראו מלפניו,  
 יג וטוב לא יהיה לרשע, ולא יאריך ימים כצל  
 אשר איננו ירא מלפני האלהים:
- יד יש הבל אשר נעשה על הארץ,  
 אשר יש צדיקים אשר מגיע אלהם כמעשה הרשעים  
 ויש רשעים שמגיע אלהם כמעשה הצדיקים:  
 אמרתי שגם זה הבל:
- טו ושבחתי את השמחה,  
 אשר אין טוב לאדם תחת השמש  
 כי אם לאכל ולשתות ולשמוח,  
 והוא ילוננו בעמלו ימי חייו  
 אשר נתן לו האלהים תחת השמש:
- טז כאשר נתתי את לבי לדעת חכמה  
 ולראות את הענין אשר נעשה על הארץ,  
 כי גם ביום ובלילה שנה בעיניו,  
 איננו רואה:
- יז וראיתי את כל מעשה האלהים,  
 כי לא יוכל האדם למצוא את המעשה  
 אשר נעשה תחת השמש,  
 בשל אשר יעמל האדם לבקש, ולא ימצא,  
 וגם אם יאמר החכם לדעת, לא יוכל למצא:

## VIII

- 1   Whoever, like the wise,  
     Knows the meaning of things,<sup>1</sup>  
     Wisdom will light his eyes  
     And power will transform his face.<sup>2</sup>
- 2   Obey the king's commands<sup>3,4</sup>  
     As you obey your oath to God;
- 3   Do not fear the king  
     Nor avoid his presence<sup>5</sup>  
     Nor partake in malicious gossip about him;<sup>6</sup>  
     For whatever the King wishes  
     He will do,
- 4   Reigning as he pleases,  
     And who is to tell him  
     What are you doing?
- 5   He who obeys God's commands<sup>7</sup>  
     Will meet no evil,  
     And the heart of the wise  
     Knows both time and judgement.<sup>8</sup>
- 6   There is time and reckoning to all plans  
     And man's evil knows no bounds,
- 7   For who knows what will transpire  
     Or when?
- 8   No one holds sway over the wind,  
     For who may catch it?<sup>9</sup>  
     Nor does one have power  
     Over the day of one's death,  
     Nor over the outcome of war;<sup>10</sup>  
     For evil rebounds upon the evil doer.<sup>11</sup>

- 9 All this I have seen and noted in my heart,  
All that is done under the sun,  
That a man rules over others  
To their detriment;<sup>12</sup>
- 10 And I saw sinners gain honored burial<sup>13</sup>  
As they come and then go to hallowed ground,<sup>14</sup>  
Their evil deeds soon forgotten in their town;  
And this too is vanity,
- 11 For no one recalls their foul deeds,<sup>15</sup>  
For man's heart is full of evil.
- 12 And I saw sinners wreak havoc  
But still God lengthens their days;<sup>16</sup>  
Though I knew those who fear God  
Were meant to be rewarded
- 13 And no good should befall the sinners  
Whose days should be brief  
Like the fleeting shadow,  
For they do not fear God.
- 14 And I saw confusion reign over the land,  
The just punished like the sinner,  
The sinner rewarded like the just;  
And I said, this too is vanity.
- 15 And I praised joy,  
For nothing is better for the children of Adam<sup>17</sup>  
But to eat and drink and be merry,  
Those three shall accompany them in their toil<sup>18</sup>  
All the days of their life  
That God has given them under the sun.



- 16 Then I turned my mind to inspect wisdom  
 And all that is done upon the earth:  
 Both day and night  
 Our eyes are blinded by sleep  
 So that we do not see;
- 17 And I saw all God's work,  
 And how the children of Adam  
 Cannot understand<sup>19</sup>  
 All He has done under the sun;  
 For they search but still cannot find,  
 And though the wise may claim to know,<sup>20</sup>  
 They still cannot see.

### Notes (Chapter VIII)

- 1 Murphy (1992) interprets the WH-questions here as direct questions rather than as embedded ones. But the latter interpretation makes better sense, making the two nominals 'whoever' and 'like the wise' the natural referents of the possessive pronoun in 'will light *his* eyes' and 'will transform *his* face', respectively. It is of course true that my interpretation requires considerable re-arrangement of the scribe's garbled grammar. The rendition of the Hebrew text would thus be: *mi [she-hu'] k-a-ḥakham, u-mi [she]-yodeaʕ pe-sheḥ davar* 'whoever is like the wise, and whoever (thus) knows the meaning of thing(s)', *ḥokhm-at 'adam t-a-'ir ['et-]pan-aw* 'human wisdom will light his face'. For both stylistic and contextual reasons, I also chose to change 'his face' in this line to 'his eyes', given the recurring 'his face' in the next line. I also chose to take the meaning of *davar*, originally 'word', 'saying', as the more abstract 'thing', then go for a better generic sense rendering it a the plural 'things'.
- 2 The grammar of *we-soz pan-aw yi-shune'* is hard to parse, and is open to multiple interpretations (aside from the scribal slip in *yi-shune'*, where a final /' ('alef) replaces the expected, purely vocalic /h/ (*heh*)). The two most likely literal meanings of this clause are 'and the power of his face will *be changed*', and 'and power will *change* his face'. The second interpretation,

which I opted for, makes better sense in context. One may then assume that vocalizing the verb as a passive – *yi-shuneh* ‘will be changed’, in the *puʕal* passive paradigm, – was a scribal slip, and then opt instead for the active – *yi-shaneh* ‘will change’ (in the *piʕel* causative paradigm).

- 3 In v. 2–5 of this chapter, Qohelet is trying his best to have his cake and eat it too, as to whether obeying the King is subsumed under obeying God and how one may deal with cases where the two are in conflict. He is, of course, not far from Jesus Christ’s equally unsatisfactory – but realistic and prescient – hedge in *Render unto Caesar*. Qohelet’s pragmatism is clearly displayed in v. 5 below (see also fn. 8, below).
- 4 This line is burdened with fractured grammar. First, *'ani pi melekh shmor*, lit. ‘I the king’s mouth guard!’ (or ‘to guard’), makes little sense, with the imperative (or infinitive) verb incompatible with the subject ‘I’. Given the clear *hortative* intent of the directly-following context, I have elected to add the ellipted verb ‘I say’. Still, a *declarative* interpretation, taking the aberrant verb form as a scribal slip, would have been just as plausible. That is, *'ani pi melekh 'e-shmor* ‘I (will) observe the king’s commands’. One way or another, the Confucian flavor of this verse, putting deference to the King’s wishes on par with obedience to God’s commands, is subject to two interpretations. First, taken literally, it contradicts much of Qohelet’s cynical view of the crooked, arbitrary ways of kings. Or second, it may reflect the resigned attitude of *Render onto Caesar* (but see also fn. 8, below).
- 5 *mi-pan-aw*, lit. ‘from *his* face’ and thus by extension ‘from *his* presence’, leaves the antecedent of ‘his’ wide open – either ‘the king’ or ‘God’.
- 6 *'al ta-ʕamod bi-davar raʕ*, lit. ‘do not stand at evil talk’, makes little sense literally. However, if *davar raʕ* is interpreted as ‘malicious gossip’, and if the gossip in question is then interpreted as ‘malicious gossip *about the king*’, then perhaps ‘stand’ may be interpreted as ‘stand idly by’, thus ‘do not stand idly by when hearing malicious gossip about the king’, then perhaps, by further inference, ‘do not partake in malicious gossip about the king’. This chain of reasoning is admittedly stretched, but it makes sense in the present context.
- 7 While I have chosen to interpret *mitsw-ot* (lit. ‘orders’, ‘commands’) as ‘God’s commandments’, the preceding context makes it just as plausible to interpret it as ‘the *king*’s commands’. The much-later sense of *mitsvva* as ‘good deed’ or ‘charity’ is probably not applicable here.

- 8 The somewhat obscure observation ‘knows both time and judgement’ may refer back to knowing when to obey the king’s command – and when not. It may thus be an elliptic allusion to the difference between the king’s capricious whim and God’s commandments: One is arbitrary and contingent on mundane power realities; the other is motivated, absolute, eternal. Qohelet opens a notorious can of worms here: Biblical Kings have traditionally sought to derive their authority from Divine power, thus make it an absolute mandate. But this, given Qohelet cynicism, is a crass political ploy. Qohelet’s subversive allusion here thus runs into a head-on collision with Saul-David-Solomon’s claim to divine mandate, most often transmitted by God’s prophets.
- 9 ‘wind’ here may be taken as a metaphor for the ungovernable. Murphy (1992) opts for interpreting *ruah* as ‘the (human) spirit’, plausible in principle but less so in this context.
- 10 *mi-shlah-at* is lit. ‘sending’ or ‘delegation’, from \**shlh* ‘send’. A better lexical choice would have been, perhaps, *mo-tsa* ‘exit’, thus by extension ‘outcome’, from \**ts* ‘exit’.
- 11 As traditionally vocalized, the literal meaning of *wi-lo' yim-malet reshaʿ et-biʿal-aw* means is ‘and evil shall not escape its owner’, thus ‘and evil (eventually) gets ascribed to the evil-doer’. However, the traditional vocalization of *yi-m-malet* ‘(he/it)will escape’ in the reflexive-middle *hitpaʿel* paradigm may have been a scribal slip, and could have just as well been the causative *yi-malet* ‘will let escape’ in the causative *piʿel* paradigm. Following this line of reasoning as well as the immediate context, I opted for the interpretation ‘and evil deeds cannot escape being attributed to their owner – the evil doer’; and thus by further extension ‘evil rebounds upon the evil-doer’. In the context of the entire verse, this may be another oblique reference to the king. This leaves open another potential problem of scribal vocalization: the traditionally-vocalized *réshaʿ* ‘evil’ vs. the just-as-plausible *rasháʿ* ‘evil person’.
- 12 I have chosen here to interpret *ʿet-asher*, lit. ‘(the) time that’, as a scribal slip, substituted for the intended *'et-asher*, the V-complement subordinator (see discussion in Part I, above). The latter makes better sense in the present context. The last line here re-capitulates the Cynic’s view of rulers (see fn. 3 and 8, above).
- 13 Burial rites were an important status symbol for people of higher rank.

- 14 The literal reading of *u-va'-u u-mi-maqom qadosh yi-halekh-u*, 'and they came and they went *from* a hallowed place' makes little sense in the present context, and must have been another scribal slip. I thus elected to render this line as *u-va'-u u-li-maqom qadosh yi-halkh-u* 'and they came and (they) will go on *to* a hallowed place' – i.e. to a consecrated burial ground.
- 15 The grammar here is again badly mangled. *'asher 'eyn na-šase pitgam* is lit. '(so) that no parable is made', with *pitgam* probably an Aramaic borrowing. *mašas-ey ha-raš* 'evil deeds' or 'the deeds of the evil', should be better rendered as 'their evil deeds'. And the inelegant nominal *miher-a*, lit. 'speed', 'hurrying' and thus also the manner adverb 'fast', is better rendered here as 'soon', 'in time' or even 'later'. As an adverb, it is may be missing a preposition, thus *bi-mher-a*.
- 16 *u-ma'arikh l-o* is lit. 'and lengthens for him', thus by implication 'and lengthens his days for him'.
- 17 In this verse I chose to change the generic singular *l-a-'adam* 'for (the) man' to the generic plural – *li-vney ha-'adam* 'to the sons (thus children) of Adam', and then adjust the subsequent pronouns accordingly. In the same vein in v. 17 below, I elected to change 'men' to 'the children of Adam'.
- 18 Here the odd masc. sg. *hu'* 'that/he/it' should have been better rendered as the neutral/masc. plural *hem* 'they/those', assuming it refers to the conjunct 'eat, drink and be merry'. If it referred to *ha-simħa* '(the) joy', however, it should have been the fem. sg. *hi'* 'she/that/it'.
- 19 *yi-mtsa'* is lit. '(he) will find', thus by extension '(he) will find out' or '(he) will discover'.
- 20 The use of the infinitival V-complement form in *'im yo'mar ha-ħakham la-dašat*, if intended to mean 'if the wise would say *that he knew*', is grammatically aberrant. The proper complement form in LBH should have been the finite *she-yadaš* 'that he knew', or *she-yodeaš* 'that he knows' (see Part I, above).

## ט (9)

- א כי את כל זה נתתי אל לבי לבור, את כל זה אשר הצדיקים והחכמים ועבדיהם ביד האלהים, גם אהבה וגם שנאה, אין יודע האדם הכל לפניהם:
- ב הכל כאשר לכל, מקרה אחד לצדיק ולרשע, לטוב ולטהור ולטמא ולזבח ולאשר איננו זבח, כטוב כחטא הנשבע כאשר שבועה ירא:
- ג זה רע בכל אשר נעשה תחת השמש, כי מקרה אחד לכל, וגם לב בני האדם מלא רע והוללות בלבבם בחייהם, ואחריו אל המתים:
- ד כי מי אשר יבחר אל כל החיים יש בטחון? כי לכלב החי הוא טוב מן האריה המת,
- ה כי החיים יודעים שימתו והמתים אינם יודעים מאומה, ואין עוד להם שכר כי נשכח זכרם,
- ו גם אהבתם, גם שנאתם, גם קנאתם כבר אבדה וחלק אין להם עוד לעולם בכל אשר נעשה תחת השמש:
- ז לך אכל בשמחה לחמך ושתה בלב טוב יינך כי כבר רצה אלהים את מעשיך:
- ח בכל עת יהיו בגדיך לבנים ושמן על ראשך אל יחסר, ראה חיים עם האשה אשר אהבת,
- ט כל ימי חיי הבלך אשר נתן לך תחת השמש, כל ימי הבלך, כי הוא חלקך בחיים ובעמלך אשר אתה עמל תחת השמש:
- י כל אשר תמצא ידך לעשות, בכחך עשה, כי אין מעשה וחשבון ודעת וחכמה בשאול אשר אתה הלך שמה:

- יא ושבתי וראה תחת השמש  
 כי לא לקלים המרוץ ולא לגבורים המלחמה  
 וגם לא לחכמים לחם וגם לא לנבונים עשר  
 וגם לא לידעים חן,  
 כי עת ופגע יקרה את כלם:
- יב כי גם לא ידע האדם את עתו,  
 כדגים שנאחזים במצודה רעה  
 וכצפרים האחזות בפח,  
 כהם יוקשים בני האדם לעת רעה  
 שתפול עליהם פתאם:
- יג גם זאת ראיתי, חכמה תחת השמש  
 וגדולה היא אלי,
- יד עיר קטנה ואנשים בה מעט,  
 ובא אליה מלך גדול וסבב אתה  
 ובנה עליה מצודים גדלים,  
 ומצא בה איש מסכן חכם
- טו ומלט הוא את העיר בחכמתו,  
 ואדם לא זכר את האיש המסכן ההוא:
- טז ואמרתי אני, טובה חכמה מגבורה  
 וחכמת המסכן בזויה ודבריו אינם נשמעים:
- יז דברי חכמים בנחת נשמעים  
 מזעקת מושל בכסילים:
- יח טובה חכמה מכלי קרב  
 וחוטא אחד יאבד טובה הרבה:

## IX

- 1 Over all this I let my heart ponder,<sup>1</sup>  
Over the just and the wise  
And what they attain before God,<sup>2,3</sup>  
Their loves and hates too,  
For the children of Adam know not  
What lies ahead.<sup>4</sup>
- 2 Everything turns out the same for all,  
One fate befalls them,  
The just and the sinner,  
The good and the impure,  
Those who sacrifice and those who don't;  
For God seems just as clement  
To those who swear in vain  
As to those who keep their oath.
- 3 Much evil is done under the sun  
But still one fate befalls them;  
The heart of some teems with evil  
And their life is all debauchery,  
Yet they all perish just the same.<sup>5</sup>
- 4 He who opts for the living<sup>6</sup>  
Is safe forever;<sup>7</sup>  
For better the live dog than the dead lion,<sup>8</sup>
- 5 For while the living know they are born to die,  
The dead know nothing,  
No reward awaits them  
And their memory soon fades,

- 6 Their loves and hates and envy  
Are soon forgotten,  
They have no stake, ever again,<sup>9</sup>  
In all that passes under the sun.
- 7 So eat your bread in joy  
And drink your wine in good cheer,<sup>10</sup>  
For God has noted your deeds;<sup>11</sup>
- 8 May your clothes be clean<sup>12</sup>  
And the oil on your head abundant;
- 9 Live your days with the woman you love,<sup>13</sup>  
Your fleeting, God-given life under the sun,  
Your ephemeral life,  
For it is your lot, your toil under heaven.
- 10 All that you may find in your hand's power to do,  
Do it now,<sup>14</sup>  
For there is no doing nor reckoning  
Nor knowledge nor wisdom in Hell,  
Where you are soon headed.<sup>15</sup>
- 11 Again and again I saw under the sun<sup>16</sup>  
How the fleet-footed don't win the race  
Nor do the stout-hearted prevail in battle  
Nor do the wise reap their harvest  
Nor do the crafty gain wealth  
Nor do the wise earn grace;  
For time and quick demise befall them all.<sup>17</sup>



- 12 For we know not our allotted time,  
 Like fish caught in evil's net,  
 Like birds in a snare,  
 Like them the children of Adam  
 Are trapped in vile fate  
 As it stoops to strike.
- 13 And this too I saw under the sun,  
 A lesson most striking:<sup>18</sup>
- 14 A small town with but a few people,  
 Then a great king swoops down,  
 Investing it with great siege towers;
- 15 And a poor wise man is there  
 To save it with his wisdom,  
 But no one remembers that poor man;
- 16 And I said, wisdom may trump valor  
 But the poor man's wisdom is shunned  
 And his words are not heeded.<sup>19</sup>
- 17 The words of the wise are spoken softly<sup>20</sup>  
 But heard louder than the screams of foolish kings;
- 18 Better wisdom than implements of war,  
 But one sinner may spoil much good.

## Notes (Chapter IX)

- 1 *la-vur*, lit. 'to sift', 'to pick', 'to sort' (from \**br*), is an agrarian metaphor, extended from the sifting of grain from chaff after the harvest. The metaphoric extension to 'contemplate', 'pore over' or 'reflect upon' is fairly transparent.
- 2 Here the nominalization *wi-šavd-ey-hem*, lit. 'and their slaves' (from \*šbd 'work'), is a glaring grammatical glitch. A more appropriate action nominal would have been *wi-šavodat-am* 'and their work', or *wi-ma-šasey-hem* 'and their deeds' (from \*šs 'do', 'make').

- 3 *bi-yad ha-'elohim*, lit. 'at the hand of God', 'by God' makes little sense here, and should have been better rendered as *li-fney ha-'elohim* 'in front of God'. The expression *ʕal-yad*, lit. 'on the hand of', is often used with the locative meaning 'next to', 'near'. So perhaps *bi-yad* 'by the hand of' was a somewhat inelegant analogical contamination from *ʕal-yad* 'near'.
- 4 The grammatically aberrant *'eyn yodeaʕ ha-'adam ha-kol li-fney-hem* could have been intended in either its spatial sense, 'man doesn't know all that is in front of him', or the more likely temporal sense 'man doesn't know all that is yet ahead of him'. The latter is the sense I opted for. One way or another, the line involves a quadruple grammatical glitch. First, the inappropriate negative existential *'eyn* 'there isn't', rather than the more appropriate verbal negative *lo'*. Second, the missing definite-accusative *'et-* (thus *'et-kol*). Third, the missing rel-clause subordinator (thus *'et-kol 'asher li-fney-hem*). And lastly, the singular *ha-'adam* 'the man' is recapped inappropriately by the plural object pronoun in *li-fney-hem* 'before *them*'. A better rendition of this line would have thus been *lo' yodeaʕ ha-'adam 'et-kol 'asher li-fan-aw* 'a man doesn't know all that is ahead of him'. The last glitch is perhaps understandable, given that 'the man' is used here in its generic sense, much like the indefinite plural 'men'.
- 5 *wi-'aħar-aw 'el-ha-met-im*, lit. 'and after it/him to the dead (ones)' makes little sense, and must be another grammatical slip. The intended meaning is perhaps *wi-'aħarey zo't, l-a-mawet* 'and after (all) that, (onward) to death'.
- 6 *ki mi 'asher yi-vħor 'el-kol ha-ħay-im*, lit. 'for he who chooses to all the living', involves a fairly obvious scribal slip – substituting the allative *'el-* for the intended definite-accusative *'et-*. If we correct the line to read *ki mi 'asher yi-vħor 'et-kol ha-ħay-im*, retaining the quantifier *kol* 'all', we virtually guarantee the choice of one sense of the ambiguous *ha-ħay-im* (the abstract 'life' vs. the concrete 'the living'), that is, 'for he who chooses all *the living*'. However, given that the directly-following context contrasts two concrete animal – the live dog and the dead lion – my sense of Qohelet's intent is that the quantifier 'all' must be superfluous. The line should have thus been *mi 'asher yi-vħor 'et-ha-ħay-im* 'he who chooses the living'.
- 7 The truncated *yesh biṭaħon*, lit. 'there is security/assurance', is another grammatical slip, and should have been *yesh l-o biṭaħon* 'he has security', 'he has assurance'.
- 8 This dictum, standing for 'better a mediocre life than a glorious death', is one of Qohelet's most succinct, realistic if cynical observations.

- 9 *li-ʕolam*, lit. ‘for-world’, is the standard time-ADV ‘forever’ (*in seculae seculorum*).
- 10 *bi-lev ʕov* is lit. ‘in/with a good heart’.
- 11 *rats-a* is lit. ‘wanted’, thus by extension ‘liked’, then by further extension ‘accepted’, and perhaps then ‘noted’, the rendition I chose here.
- 12 *liʕan-im* is lit. ‘white’ (masc. pl.), thus by extension ‘clean’.
- 13 Murphy (1992, p. 93), citing Lorentz (1990), notes the close parallel here with the Gilgamesh epic:
- Thou Gilgamesh, let thy belly be full,  
 Make thou merry by day and by night,  
 Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing.  
 Day and night dance thou and play!  
 Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,  
 Thy head be washed: Bathe thee in water.  
 Pay head to the little one that holds on to thy hand,  
 Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom  
 For this is the lot of [mankind]!
- 14 I must have been seven years old when I first chanced upon this passage, which to this day remains my favorite of Qohelet’s exhortations, perhaps the wisest word of wisdom in the entire Old Testament, in spite of its dark projection.
- 15 *Shi’ol* ‘hell’, ‘the nether world’, is viewed here, rather refreshingly, as just nothingness, the mere absence of life, dispensing with the punitive carrot-and-stick subsequent interpretations.
- 16 *wi-shav-ti wi-r’ot* is an inelegant grammatical slip, with the second (‘heavy’) verb rendered in the infinitive. A finite equi-aspect rendition of this common serial-verb construction – *wi-shav-ti wi-ra’-iti* ‘and again I saw’ (lit. ‘and I returned and I saw’) – is the preferred pattern in Biblical Hebrew. The slip may have originated in misinterpreting the vocalization of the Hebrew consonantal script, whereby *w-r’t* was vocalized as *wi-r’ot* rather than the more correct *wi-ra’-iti*.
- 17 *ki-ʕet wa-ʕegaʕ yi-qreh ’et-kul-am* is lit. ‘for time and disaster will happen [to] them all’, with the def.-accusative *’et-* perhaps a grammatical slip for the more standard *yi-qreh li-kul-am* ‘will happen to all of them’. The likely historical reduction of the allative *’el-* to *l-* makes the slip even more plausible.

- 18 The grammar of *u-gdola hi' 'el-ay*, lit. 'and it is great to me', is rather ungainly. A better choice would have been *u-gdola hi' bi-eyn-ay* 'and it is great in my eyes'.
- 19 *u-dvar-aw 'eyn-am ni-shma'im* is lit. 'and his words are not heard', thus by extension 'go unheeded'.
- 20 *bi-nahat ni-shma'im* is lit. 'are heard gently'. However, an alternative rendition, 'are spoken gently' or 'are spoken softly', fits better in the present context.

## י (10)

- א זבובי מות יבאיש  
יביע שמן רקח  
יקר מחכמה,  
מכבד סכלות מעט:
- ב לב החכם לימינו ולב כסיל לשמאלו,  
ג וגם לדרך כשהסכל הולך, לבו חסר,  
ואמר לכל, סכל הוא:
- ד אם רוח המושל תעלה עליך,  
מקומך אל תנח,  
כי מרפא יניח חטאים גדולים:
- ה יש רעה ראיתי תחת השמש  
כשגגה שיצא מלפני השליט,  
ו נתן הסכל במרומים רבים  
ועשירים בשפל ישבו:
- ז ראיתי עבדים על סוסים  
ושרים הולכים כעבדים על הארץ:
- ח חופר גומץ בו יפול  
ופרץ גדר ישכנו נחש:
- ט מסיע אבנים יעצב בהם,  
בוקע עצים יסכן במ:
- י אם קהה הברזל והוא לא לפניו קלקל,  
וחילים יגבר ויתרון הכשיר חכמה:
- יא אם ישך הנחש בלוא לחש,  
ואין יתרון לבעל הלשון:

- יב דברי פי חכם חן ושפתות כסיל תבלענו,  
 יג תחלת דברי פיהו סכלות  
 ואחרית פיהו הוללות רעה,  
 יד והסכל ירבה דברים:
- לא ידע האדם מה שיהיה  
 ואשר יהיה מאחריו מי יגיד לו?  
 טו עמל הכסילים תיגענו,  
 אשר לא ידע ללכת אל עיר:
- זז אי לך ארץ שמלכך נער ושריך בבקר יאכלו:  
 יז אשריך ארץ שמלכך בן חורים ושריך בעת יאכלו,  
 בגבורה ולא בשתי:  
 יח בעצלתים ימך המקרה  
 ובשפלות ידים ידלף הבית:  
 טט לשחוק עשים לחם ויין ישמה חיים  
 והכסף יענה את הכל:
- כ גם במדעך מלך אל תקלל  
 ובחזרי משכבך אל תקלל עשיר,  
 כי עוף השמים יוליך את הקול  
 ובעל הכנפים יגיד דבר:

## X

- 1 Death flies spoil precious oil  
As it bubbles up,<sup>1</sup>  
More cherished than wisdom  
As honor is more cherished than ignorance.<sup>2</sup>
- 2 The heart of the wise tends to the right,  
The heart of the fool tends to the left;<sup>3</sup>
- 3 Whichever way the fool tends,  
His heart still errs,  
Letting all know he is a fool.
- 4 If the king's harsh hand oppresses you<sup>4</sup>  
Don't cede your place,<sup>5</sup>  
For giving in to oppressors  
Makes room for sin.<sup>6</sup>
- 5 I have seen much evil under the sun,  
Justice miscarried by rulers,<sup>7</sup>
- 6 Fools raised high  
While the wise is laid low;<sup>8</sup>
- 7 I have seen a slave ride high on his mount  
While his master walks the dirt like chattel.
- 8 Whoever digs a pit will fall in it,<sup>9</sup>  
And he who breeches a fence  
A snake will bite him;
- 9 Whoever hauls stones  
Will be blocked by them,<sup>10</sup>  
And he who splits logs  
Will trip upon them.<sup>11</sup>

- 10 If the axe has gone dull  
And its edge is addled,<sup>12</sup>  
It may yet become sharper  
By the user's skill;
- 11 If a snake bites without first hissing,<sup>13</sup>  
What does it profit of having a tongue?
- 12 The words of the wise are sheer beauty  
But the lips of the fool will soon trip him,  
13 For his words start in folly  
And end in raving madness.<sup>14</sup>
- 14 The fool has many words  
But none will tell you what will transpire,  
For how could he know  
What will come after him?<sup>15</sup>
- 15 The fool's work is so tiring<sup>16</sup>  
He cannot find his way home.<sup>17</sup>
- 16 Woe is a land whose king is a child  
And whose satraps feast all morning;  
17 Blessed is the land whose king is free  
And whose satraps dine at the proper time  
In valor but not in debauchery.<sup>18</sup>
- 18 In laziness ventures collapse,<sup>19</sup>  
In lax hands the roof will leak;
- 19 Bread is made for joy,  
Wine gladdens the heart of the living<sup>20</sup>  
But money still trumps them all.



- 20 Do not deign to curse the king,  
 And in the shelter of your home  
 Don't damn the rich,  
 For birds of the sky will carry your voice  
 And the winged ones will tell the tale.

## Notes (Chapter X)

- 1 The extreme compression and opacity of this verse, combined with its pidgin-like grammar and ambiguous parsing, makes it nigh impossible to interpret with full confidence. To begin with, the initial run-on clause – *zvuv-ey mavet y-a-v'ish shemen roqah yaqar mi-hokhma* – conflates two distinct verbal clauses, presumably 'death flies will spoil (or make-fester) distilled oil' and 'distilled oil is more precious than wisdom'. Next, the plural subject 'death flies' commands the wrong (masc.sg.) subject agreement in *ya-v'ish* ('it/he will make-fester'), and should have thus been the plural *ya-v'ish-u* ('they will make-fester'). Given this revised parsing, *shemen roqah* 'refined oil' is both the object of the transitive verb 'spoil/make-fester' and the subject of the intransitive predicate 'be more precious than wisdom'. The interpretation I opted for fits well with the implicit intent of the immediate context.
- 2 This line, with its grammatical infelicities, is just as hard to make sense of as the preceding one. Given the immediate context of pair-wise contrasts, *mi-kavod sikhlut miṣaṭ* might possibly be interpreted as 'ignorance is lesser than honor', but the garbled grammar is not much help, and the use of the neutral adverbial *miṣaṭ* 'a little', with no grammatical agreement to help trace the subject, further confounds the interpreter. Choosing to interpret *mi-kavod* – lit. 'from honor' – as the comparative 'than honor', I have elected to convert the resulting negative-comparative 'ignorance is less cherished than honor' into its positive semantic equivalent – 'honor is more cherished than ignorance'. The latter accords better with the preceding context of pair-wise comparisons.
- 3 In both lines here, the absence of a definite article militates for the interpretation of the comparison as 'a wise heart' vs. 'a foolish heart'. I have nevertheless chosen to interpret this as another grammatical slip, opting instead for 'the heart of the wise' vs. 'the heart of the fool', respectively. This is supported by the clear pronominal reference to a masc. sg. in both cases – *li-ymin-o* 'to his (the wise's) right', and *li-smo'l-o* 'to his (the fool's) left'. The

possessive pronouns here clearly refers to the wise and the fool rather than to their respective hearts.

- 4 *'im ruah ha-moshel ta-saleh saley-kha* is lit. 'if the spirit of the ruler will mount upon you'. My rendition here, 'if the king's harsh hand oppresses you', opts for meaning in context over a literal translation. The original text itself is open to at least two interpretations. First, perhaps by analogy with Ezekiel 37.1 (*hay-ta sal-ay yad YHWH* 'The Lord's hand was upon me'), it could mean 'if the spirit of the ruler will prevail upon you', thus 'if you presume to act as abusively as the ruler', a caution against becoming as arrogant as the ruler. The alternative I chose is more compatible with the immediate context (see the following line as well as fn. 5, below), and was also chosen by Murphy (1992: 'if the wrath of the ruler is upon you').
- 5 *mqom-kha 'al t-a-nah*, lit. 'don't let-rest your place', is plausibly interpreted as 'don't cede your place', thus by further extension 'don't give up your position' or 'don't give in to the ruler'. Given Qohelet's dim view of rulers, the entire verse is most likely a warning against letting the ruler sway one's moral compass.
- 6 *rifu'a* is lit. either the more concrete 'medication' or the more abstract 'medicine' or 'healing', from \*rf' 'heal' (in the de-transitive *paʿul* paradigm). It is likely, however, that the scribe switched /h/ (*heh*) to /'/' (*'alef*) here. Murphy's (1992) rendition, 'calmness', is thus based on the phonetically-close root \*rf(*h*) 'lax', 'relax', 'let rest', 'let go'. Such an interpretation is much more compatible with the context, both the directly preceding '*'al-tanah* 'don't let-rest' (thus 'don't let go') and the directly following *y-a-niah* 'will let go'.
- 7 The grammar of this clause is again garbled. The fem. *shgaga* 'mistake' is incompatible with the masc. sg. subject agreement in *she-yo-tse'* 'that comes out', and should have been the fem. sg. *she-yotse'-t*. By extension, this may then be rendered as 'that comes into the open'. Such an interpretation is compatible with the directly-following context: *mi-li-fney ha-shalit'* 'in front of the ruler'. In the latter, the preposition *mi-* 'from' is superfluous, where *li-fney*, lit. 'to the face of', thus 'in front of', would have sufficed.
- 8 Here the passive *ni-(t)-tan*, lit. 'be given', is better rendered as 'be put'. The scribal vocalization of *sekhel*, lit. 'mind' and thus by extension 'smarts', is clearly wrong, given the directly-following contrast 'while the rich sit low'. An alternative vocalization, either *sokhel* or *sakhal* 'fool', would have fitted much better in the context, although the inclement grammar and extremely elliptical – pidginized – usage still leave the passage obscure. Lastly, the

contrast in this line should have been, clearly, between ‘fools’ and ‘the wise’ (rather than ‘the rich’), the original text notwithstanding.

- 9 This whole passage pertains to the law of unintended consequences. The more common rendition of the first proverb here is *koreh bor b-o yi-pol* ‘he who digs a hole, in it he shall fall’. The use of the masc. *gumatz* for ‘hole’ is probably an Aramaic borrowing, perhaps related to the Hebrew fem. *guma* ‘hole in the ground’.
- 10 Here the causative *m-a-siaf*, lit. ‘makes-travel’ (in the *hifsil* paradigm, from \*sʿ ‘travel’), may have been a scribal confound with *m-a-si* ‘make-carry’ (from \*s’ ‘carry’), a common mixup of /ʿ/ (‘alef) with /ʃ/ (*ʃayin*).
- 11 The meaning of the reflexive/middle *yi-s-sakhen* is somewhat obscure. Murray (1992, p. 98), following Whitely (1979), suggests the Aramaic meaning of \**skn* as ‘be endangered’, also noting the Ugaritic ‘be pierced’. The former is more plausible in view of the Hebrew *sakan-a* ‘danger’ and *li-saken* ‘to endanger’ (in the causative *piʃel* paradigm). A possible interpretation is thus ‘will be endangered by them’. For both stylistic and sense-clarity reason, I’ve chosen ‘will trip upon them’.
- 12 This entire verse is the epitome of fractured grammar. First, the negation in *wi-hu' lo' panim*, presumably intended to mean ‘so that it has no edge’, should have been *wi-'eyn l-o panim* . Next, *qilqal wi-hayal-im yi-g-gaber* is just as impenetrable, with *qilqal* perhaps meaning ‘spoiled’ or ‘broken’, presumably involving a scribal mixup of /y/ (*yod*) with the intended /w/ (*waw*), i.e. *qulal* ‘spoiled’ (in the de-transitive *puʃal* paradigm), and thus in this context ‘lost its sharp edge’. Next, *hayal-im* could mean lit. either the concrete ‘soldiers’ or the adverbial ‘powerfully’, and *yi-g-gaber*, in the reflexive/middle *hitpaʃel* paradigm, is perhaps intended to mean ‘it will become stronger’, and thus by extension ‘it will prevail’. Next, *wi-ha-khsher hokhma* is just as garbled grammatically, with the causative verb (in the *hifsil* paradigm) possibly derived from \**kshr* ‘be able’, ‘be capable’. The correct rendition of the line should have perhaps been *wi-y-a-khsher bi-hokhma* ‘so that he (the user of the axe) may prevail through wisdom or skill’. All in all, my chosen interpretation remains a context-dependent gamble.
- 13 Here *b-lo' lahash*, lit. ‘without a whisper’, may be interpreted by extension as ‘without hissing’, then by further extension as ‘without warning’.

- 14 *'ahrit pi-hu* is lit. 'the end of his mouth', thus by extension perhaps 'the outcome of his words'. *holelut rafa*, lit. 'bad debauchery', 'bad wildness', may again involve the use of 'bad' as a negative intensifier, thus 'great debauchery'.
- 15 *wi-'asher yi-hyeh me-'ahar-aw* is ambiguous, plausibly standing for either 'whatever will be/come after him' or 'whoever will be/come after him/it'. The plausibility of the second interpretation is perhaps enhanced by the possibility of a common scribal mixup between /h/ (*heh*) and /ħ/ (*het*), thus between the verbal roots \*hy/hw 'be' and \*hy 'live. Of course, the two roots may be etymologically related.
- 16 The verbal form in *šamal ha-ksilim ti-yagše-nu* involves a compound grammatical glitch. First, if intended to mean 'a fool's work will tire him', the interpretation I have chosen here, then the masc. subject *šamal* 'toil' requires a masc. verbal agreement, thus *yi-yagše-nu* '(it) will tire him'. And second, the possessor *ha-ksil-im* 'the fools' requires a plural object agreement on the verb, thus *yi-yagš-am* '(it) will tire them'. The correct line should have thus been either *šamal ha-ksil-im yi-yagš-am* 'the work of the fools tires them', or *šamal ha-ksil yi-yagše-nu* 'the work of the fool tires him'. I have opted for the second rendition.
- 17 *'asher lo' yadaš* is lit. '(so) that he wouldn't know' is opaque as to whether we have here a REL-clause ('who didn't know') or an ADV-clause ('so that he wouldn't know'). Next, *la-lekh-et 'el-šir*, presumably meaning 'to go to town', is grammatically dubious, most likely missing the definite article *ha-*, and should have been better rendered as *la-lekh-et 'el-ha-šir* 'to go to (the) town'.
- 18 *shti* or *sheti* 'idiocy' is perhaps extended from the root \**sht* 'drink', thus by extension 'drunkenness'.
- 19 *mi-qreh* is literally 'happening'. *yi-m-makh*, a reflexive/middle form (in the *hitpaʿel* paradigm), may involve a scribal confusion between \*(h)k(h) 'hit', 'beat' and \*mħ 'wipe'. Going with the latter, this would mean lit. '(it) will be wiped out', thus by extension 'it will be thwarted'. But a similar extension could be obtained from 'hit'/'beat'; that is, 'it will be beaten down' and by extension 'it will be thwarted'.
- 20 *ħayy-im* is ambiguous, meaning either 'life' or 'the living'. The latter is the one I chose to go with here. Either way, this line is missing the definite accusative *'et-*, and should have been better given as *wi-yayin yi-samah 'et-ha-ħayy-im* 'and wine will cheer up the living'.

## יא (11)

- א שלח לחמך על פני המים  
כי ברב ימים תמצאנו:
- ב תן חלק לשבעה וגם לשמונה  
כי לא תדע מה יהיה רעה על הארץ:
- ג אם ימלאו האבים גשם, על הארץ יריקו,  
ואם יפול עץ בדרום ואם בצפון,  
מקום שיפול העץ, שם הוא:
- ד שמר רוח לא יזרע וראה באבים לא יקצור:  
ה כאשר אינך יודע מה דרך הרוח,  
כעצמים בבטן המלאה,  
ככה לא תדע את מעשה האלהים,  
אשר יעשה את הכל:
- ו בבקר זרע את זרעך ולערב אל תנח ידך,  
כי אינך יודע אי זה יכשר, הזה או זה,  
ואם שניהם כאחד טובים:
- ז ומתוק האור, וטוב לעינים לראות את השמש,  
ח כי אם שנים הרבה יחיה האדם,  
בכלם ישמח ויזכר את ימי החשך,  
כי הרבה יהיו: כל שבא הבל:
- ט שמח בחור בילדותך ויטיבך לבך בימי בחורותיך,  
והלך בדרכי לבך ובמראי עיניך,  
ודע כי על כל אלה יביאך אלהים במשפט:
- י וחסר כעס מלבך והעבר רעה מבשרך,  
כי הילדות והשחרות הבל:

## XI

- 1 Cast your bread upon the water  
For in the fullness of days you shall find it;
- 2 Split your goods in sixes and sevens<sup>1</sup>  
For you never know what evil awaits you;<sup>2</sup>
- 3 If the clouds are swollen with rain,  
They will soon dump it upon the earth;  
And if a tree falls to the north or south,  
The place where it falls is where it shall rest.
- 4 He who fears the wind will never sow,<sup>3</sup>  
And he who minds the clouds will never reap;  
5 Just as you can't tell which way the wind may blow,  
Like bones hidden in a full stomach,<sup>4</sup>  
So you cannot foretell God's deeds,  
For He directs them all.
- 6 In the morning sow your seeds  
But in the evening don't rest your hand either,  
For you never know which will come through,<sup>5</sup>  
This one or that, or if both may turn out well.
- 7 Light is sweet, and it is good  
For the eyes to see the sun;
- 8 If a man lives many years  
Let him rejoice in them,  
But let him also mind the days of darkness,  
For there will be many,  
And what is yet to come is vanity.

- 9 Enjoy your childhood, young man  
 And may your mind revel in your youth,  
 Follow the paths of your heart  
 And the visions of your eye,<sup>6</sup>  
 But do not forget – for all those  
 God will hold you to account;<sup>7</sup>
- 10 So cast all anger from your heart  
 And cleanse yourself of evil,<sup>8</sup>  
 For childhood and youth are but vanity.

## Notes (Chapter XI)

- 1 The original Hebrew has it here as ‘sevens and eights’.
- 2 The grammar of the original *ki lo' te-daš mah yi-hyeh raša šal-ha-'arets*, presumably intended as ‘for you don’t know what evil will be on the earth’, is lame in two ways. First, *raša* ‘evil’ is a fem. sg. noun, requiring a fem. sg. verb agreement (*ti-hyeh*) rather than the masc. sg. (*yi-hyeh*). And second, *šal ha-'arets* ‘on the earth’ would have been better rendered as *b-a-'arets* ‘on (the) earth’. My English rendition here was chosen for reasons of both contents and style.
- 3 *šomer ruah* is lit. ‘guardian/keeper of (the) wind’. However, the context here supports better the interpretation ‘he who watches out for the wind’, and thus by extension ‘he who fears the wind’. A better choice of verb here would have been *yore'* ‘(he) who fears’, from *\*yr'*. It is perhaps a matter of some curiosity that *\*yr'* ‘fear’ may have ultimately been derived from *\*r'* ‘see’, thus by extension ‘watch for’.
- 4 *k-a-šatsam-im bi-veṭen ha-mle'-a*, lit. ‘like the bones in a full stomach’, involves multiple grammatical glitches. First, *šetsam* ‘bone’ is a fem. noun, with the expected pl. *šatsam-ot*. Second, the definite article in both the noun ‘bones’ and the adjective ‘full’ is superfluous, since the generic sense begs for an indefinite here, thus *ki-šatsam-ot bi-veṭen mle'a* ‘like bones in a full stomach’. The superfluous definite article on the head noun ‘stomach’ may be due to scribal misinterpretation of the vowel (*bi-veṭen* vs. *b-a-veṭen*).
- 5 *yi-khšar* is lit. ‘will be able to’, thus by extension ‘will succeed’.

- 6 One wonders whether Carlos Castañeda had ever read Ecclesiastes before writing, in *A Separate Reality* (1971): *Yo siempre sigo los caminos que tienen corazón* ‘I always follow the roads that have heart’.
- 7 *yi-vi'-ekha 'elohim b-a-mishpaṭ*, if intended to mean ‘God will bring you to justice’ and thus by extension ‘God will hold you to account’, is grammatically lame. The generalized locative preposition *b-* (‘at’, ‘in’, ‘on’, ‘with’, ‘by’) is inappropriate here, and should be rendered better with the allative *l-* ‘to’, thus *li-mishpaṭ*. And further, the definite article in *b-a-mishpaṭ* ‘to the justice’ is superfluous. The whole line should have been rendered better as: *yi-vi'-ekha 'elohim li-mishpaṭ*. This line may perhaps anticipate the dire apocalyptic opening of chapter 12.
- 8 *ha-ṣaver raṣa mi-bsar-kha*, lit. ‘make evil pass (away) from your flesh’, involves the intransitive verbal root \*Ṣbr ‘pass’ in the causative *piṣel* paradigm. I have chosen to interpret *bsar-kha*, lit. ‘your flesh’, as another reflexive usage, thus ‘yourself’, in line with the more standard *ṣatsmi-kha*, lit. ‘your bone’, much like the occasional reflexive use of *lib-kha* ‘your heart’ or *naf-shi-kha* ‘your soul’.



## יב (12)

- א וזכר את בוראיך בימי בחורתך,  
עד אשר לא יבאו ימי הרעה  
והגיעו שנים אשר תאמר, אין לי בהם חפץ,  
ב עד אשר לא תחשך השמש והאור והירח והכוכבים,  
ושבו האבים אחר הגשם:
- ג ביום שיזעו שמרי הבית והתעותו אנשי החיל,  
ובטלו הטחנות כי מעטו, וחשכו הראות בארבות,  
ד וסגרו דלתים בשוק בשפל קול הטחנה,  
ויקום לקול הצפור וישחו כל בנות השיר;  
ה גם מגבה ייראו וחתחתים בדרך,  
וינאץ השקד ויסתבל החגב ותפר האביונה,  
כי הלך האדם אל בית עולמו  
וסבבו בשוק הסופדים:
- ו עד אשר לא ירתק חבל הכסף ותרץ גלת הזהב  
ותשבר כד על המבוע ונרץ הגלגל אל הבור,  
ז וישב העפר אל הארץ כשהיה  
והרוח תשוב אל האלהים אשר נתנה:
- ח הבל הבלים אמר הקוהלת, הכל הבל:  
ט ויתר שהיה קהלת חכם  
עוד למד דעת את העם  
ואזן וחקר תקן משלים הרבה:  
י בקש קהלת למצא דברי חפץ  
וכתוב ישר דברי אמת:  
יא דברי חכמים כדרבנות וכמשמרות,  
נטועים בעלי אספות,  
נתנו מרעה אחד:

יב ויתר מהמה, בני, הזהר עשות ספרים הרבה,  
 אין קץ ולהג הרבה יגעת בשר:  
 יג סוף דבר, הכל נשמע,  
 את האלהים ירא ואת מצותיו שמור  
 כי זה כל האדם:  
 יד כי את כל מעשה האלהים יבא במשפט,  
 על כל נעלם, אם טוב ואם רע:

## XII

- 1 And above all mind your maker<sup>1,2</sup>  
 In the days of your youth,  
 Before the harsh years come,<sup>3</sup>  
 Years of which you may say  
 I have no use for them,<sup>4</sup>
- 2 Before the sun had darkened  
 And the moon and the stars faded out  
 And the clouds followed the rain.<sup>5</sup>
- 3 On that day, the temple guards will tremble<sup>6</sup>  
 And armed men will shiver,  
 And your teeth will quit chewing<sup>7</sup>  
 For only few of them will have remained,  
 And your eyes will dim in their sockets<sup>8</sup>
- 4 And the doors will be shut in the market<sup>9</sup>  
 And the hum of the mills will die out  
 As they grind to a screeching halt;  
 Then the people will rise as one  
 To the shrieking of the bird<sup>10</sup>  
 As the muses fall silent.

- 5 Then the high and the mighty will tremble<sup>11</sup>  
And the roads will be pitted  
And the almond will burst in bloom<sup>12</sup>  
And the locust will swarm mad<sup>13</sup>  
And the barren woman will conceive,<sup>14</sup>  
For a man is going to meet his maker  
As the mourners circle in the streets
- 6 Till the silver chain has snapped<sup>15</sup>  
And the golden ball has cracked  
And the water jug has smashed upon the spring  
And the wheel has shattered at the pit.<sup>16</sup>
- 7 Thus you shall return  
To the dust you come from,  
And your soul will rejoin God  
Who gave it to you.
- 8 Vanity of vanities, said Qohelet,  
All is vanity;
- 9 And the wiser Qohelet grew,  
The more he kept teaching wisdom  
And weighing and probing  
And refining his many sayings,
- 10 For he strove to find apt words  
And righteous writings, words of truth;
- 11 For the words of the wise are sharp spurs  
Planted like prods in our side,<sup>17</sup>  
Gathered together,<sup>18</sup>  
Passed down from the One Shepherd.<sup>19</sup>
- 12 And above all, my son,  
Beware of making many books,  
For there is no end to them,<sup>20</sup>  
And empty prattle wearies the flesh.<sup>21</sup>

- 13 In the end, all has been said,<sup>22</sup>  
 So fear God and mind his commandments,  
 For this is all there is  
 To being a child of Adam;  
 For God will judge all deeds,  
 The hidden ones too,  
 As either good or evil.<sup>23</sup>

## Notes (Chapter XII)

- 1 The last chapter of the book opens (12:1–7) with one of the most harrowing, blood-curdling Judaic equivalent to the *Dies Irae* of the Requiem Mass, an account of the Last Judgement no doubt intended to shake the faithful in their boots. Well, sandals.
- 2 *zkhōr* is lit. ‘remember’, thus by extension ‘do not ignore’ or even ‘fear’. I have chosen ‘mind’ as a compromise between ‘remember’ and ‘fear’.
- 3 This is another example of the negative-subjunctive construction used extensively in BH. *šad ‘asher lo’ ya-vo’-u yim-ey ha-raša* means lit. ‘until the bad days had *not* come’, but is no doubt intended as the dire warning ‘until the bad days *had* come’.
- 4 Here the elliptic, grammatically dubious *‘eyn li b-a-hem*, lit. ‘I don’t have in them’, must be taken to mean *‘eyn l-i hefets b-a-hem* ‘I have no wish for them’, thus by extension ‘I have no use for them’.
- 5 *wi-shav-u ha-‘avim ‘aḥar ha-gešhem*, lit. ‘and the clouds returned after the rain’, is subject to two interpretations. First, since the verse as a whole recites a series of unlikely norm violations, the literal affirmative is appropriate here, since the norm is for clouds to precede, not follow, the rain. On the other hand, perhaps there is a missing negative here, so that the intended norm is for clouds to *return* after the rain, thus the unexpected ‘and the clouds *did not* come back after the rain’. In which case the ellipted negative must take its cue from the preceding line – ‘as long as the sun had *not* yet darkened’ (12:2). I have opted here to follow the first, literal, interpretation. The use of the perfect verb-form (*wi-sháv-u*) here is in line with its use throughout BH as a subjunctive of rare events and/or dire consequences (Givón 1977, 2015 chapter 10).

- 6 *shomr-ey ha-bayit* is lit. ‘the guardians of the house’, which I have chosen to interpret it as ‘the guardians of the Temple’; first because the Temple was more likely to have guardians than a regular house; second, because the Jerusalem Temple was commonly referred to as ‘The House’ (vis. *har ha-bayit* ‘the Temple Mount’, lit. ‘the mount of the house’); and third, because the Temple renders the description more dramatic, as is clearly intended.
- 7 *ha-ṭōhanot* is best interpreted (contra Murphy 1992, p. 112), as ‘the grinders’, a transparent, concrete reference to molar teeth. This makes the following clause, *ki-miṣaṭ-u*, lit. ‘because they had become few’, all the more plausible as a reference to the loss of teeth in old age.
- 8 In the same vein, *ha-ro’-ot ba-’arub-ot*, lit. ‘the seers in (their) chimneys’, is just as transparent a reference to the eyes in their sockets, alluding to one’s fading vision in old age. Murphy’s interpretation here (1992, p. 112) is puzzling and, to my mind, for once, wide off the mark.
- 9 *dlat-ayim*, lit. the masc. du. ‘(two) doors’, should have been better rendered as the fem. pl. *dlat-ot* ‘doors’.
- 10 *va-ya-qum li-qol ha-tsipor*, lit. ‘and he would rise to the voice of the bird’, is missing its ellipted subject, reconstructed here as *kol ha-šam* ‘the whole people’. ‘The voice of the bird’ further enhances the apocalyptic tenor of this concluding chapter, perhaps anticipating the book of *Revelation*, or the Dead Sea scroll “The War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness”. While the reference to ‘the bird’ here remains obscure, it may presage the voice of the winged angels in: “...and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne...” (*Rev.* 5:11). Or perhaps the winged locusts in: “...and the sounds of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle...” (*Rev.* 9:9–10). Or perhaps the winged dragons in: “... And another sign appeared in the heaven: Behold, a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and great horns...: (*Rev.* 12:3). I have chosen to change ‘voice’ into ‘shrieking’, in line with the dramatic context.
- 11 *gam mi-gavoah yi-ra’-u* is multiply ambiguous, meaning literally either ‘also from above they will be seen’, or ‘also from above they will see’, or ‘also from above they will fear’. The apocalyptic context dictated my choice of ‘fear’ and thus by extension ‘tremble’. The ambiguity hinges, in part, on the scribal vocalization of the old consonantal script, as either the reflexive/middle *yi-r-ra’-u* ‘(they) will be seen’ (in the *hitpaʿel* paradigm); or the active *yi-r’-u* ‘(they) will see’, or *yi-ra’-u* ‘they will fear’.

- 12 *wi-ya-n'etz ha-shaqed*, lit. 'and the almond (tree) will bloom', is somewhat obscure here, and the /'/' ('alef) totally aberrant; unless it alludes to the almond blooming *out of season* in the dead of winter. In Palestine, the almond was – and still is – the earliest blooming of all the *Rosacea* (fam.) fruit trees, a harbinger of early spring.
- 13 *wa-yi-stakel ha-hagav*, with the reflexive/middle (\**hit-sakel*), is lit. 'and the locust became foolish', thus by extension 'ran mad' or 'ran wild'. Murphy's interpretation (1992, p. 112) 'and the locust is heavy' makes little sense, neither linguistically (\**shql* 'weigh' > 'heavy') nor in the stark apocalyptic context. This line seems, again, to presage the book of *Revelations* (9:9–10; see fn. 10 above).
- 14 *wi-ta-fer ha-'evyon-a*, lit. 'and the poor woman bore fruit', is presumably intended as part of the apocalyptic vision of improbable rare events. In that context, *ha-'evyon-a* 'the poor woman' is easily extended to 'the destitute woman', perhaps then to 'the unmarried woman', and thus reminiscent of Isaiah's vision of the virgin birth. The use of the verbal root \**pr* 'fruit', 'be fruitful' makes this interpretation plausible. Here again Murphy's rendition (1992, p. 112) 'and the caperberry opened' makes little sense. The apocalyptic theme of the whole passage may again presage *Revelation*: "...Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars... Then being with a child she cried out in labor... She bore a male child who was to rule all nations..." (*Rev.* 12:1–5)
- 15 *yi-rhaq* 'became far' is plausibly a scribal mixup between the graphemically similar *het* (/ħ/) and *taw* (/t/) in the old consonantal script. I have chosen to re-interpret it here as the reflexive/ middle (*hitpaʿel* paradigm) of the verb \**rtq* 'snap', thus *yi-r-rateq* '(it) will snap'.
- 16 *na-rots* is plausibly the passive (in the *nifal* paradigm) of \**ratsats* 'smash', 'shatter', perhaps also related to \**rsis* 'broken particle'.
- 17 The spurs, mentioned first in the preceding line and then presumably the anaphoric subject of 'planted like guardians', motivated my adding 'in our sides'. On further reflection about the context and implicit intent, I opted for 'like prods' instead of the original *ki-mishmar-ot*, lit. 'like guardians' or 'like guard shifts', which makes little sense here.
- 18 The original *baʿal-ey 'asuf-ot* is rather obscure, lit. 'owners of gatherings' or 'owners of the (fem. pl.) gathered'.
- 19 *roʿeh 'ehad*, lit. 'one shepherd', is a plausible reference to God.

- 20 *wi-'eyn qets*, lit. 'and there is no end', is missing its dative subject, plausibly *l-a-hem* 'to them', presumably referring to 'books' in the preceding line.
- 21 The non-finite nominal in *yigfat basar* is lit. 'tiredness of the flesh', which I chose to render as the finite predicate 'wearies the flesh'. An equally-plausible alternative could have been 'wears out the flesh'.
- 22 *ni-shmaf* is lit. 'was heard', 'is heard' or 'has been heard'. The line is perhaps better rendered as the Cynic's observation on the futility of saying too much, thus 'in the end, all that can be said has already been said' – and thus heard.
- 23 *'im tov wi-'im ra*, lit. 'whether good or bad', has two possible interpretations here. First, 'God will judge them all, the good and the bad alike'. And second, the one I have opted for here, 'God will judge them all as either good or evil'.

# Bibliography

- Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, in J. Barnes (ed. 1994)
- Barnes, J. (ed. 1994). *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bopp, F. (1820). *Analytic Comparison of the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and Teutonic Languages*
- Bybee, J., W. Pagliuca and R. Perkins. (1994). *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect and Modality in Languages of the World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Capellanus, Andreas. (ca. 1184). *Tractatus Amoris & De Amoris Remedio*, English tr. [1941] by J. J. Parry, *The Art of Courtly Love*, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Castañeda, C. (1971). *A Separate Reality*, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Chrétien de Troyes, *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, vols I, II, III, Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion [1958]
- Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, tr. by R. D. Hicks, Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classics Library, Harvard University Press [1925; rev. 1959]
- Diogenes of Sinope, in Diogenes Laertius, vol. II, Book VI, chapter 2
- Givón, T. (1971) “Historical syntax and synchronic morphology: And archaeologist’s field trip”, *CLS #7*, University of Chicago: Chicago Linguistics Society.
- Givón, T. (1975) “Serial verbs and syntactic change: Niger Congo”, in C. Li (ed.) *Word Order and Word Order Change*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Givón, T. (1976) “On the VS word-order in Israeli Hebrew: Pragmatics and typological change”, in P. Cole (ed.) *Studies in Modern Hebrew Syntax and Semantics*, Amsterdam: N. Holland.
- Givón, T. (1977) “The drift from VSO to SVO in Biblical Hebrew: The pragmatics of tense-aspect”, in C. Li (ed. 1977)
- Givón, T. (1979). *On Understanding Grammar*, NY: Academic Press; revised edition (2018), Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.
- Givón, T. (ed. 1979). *Discourse and Syntax*, NY: Academic press.
- Givón, T. (ed 1983). *Topic Continuity in Discourse*, TSL #3, Amsterdam: J. Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tsl.3>
- Givón, T. (1988) “The pragmatics of word-order: Predictability, importance and attention”, in M. Hammond et al. (eds 1988)
- Givón, T. (1991a) “Serial verbs and the mental reality of ‘event’”, in E. Traugott and B. Heine (eds 1991, vol. 1)



- Givón, T. (1991b) "The evolution of dependent-clause syntax in Biblical Hebrew", in E. Traugott and Heine (eds, 1991, vol. 2)
- Givón, T. (1994) "Introduction", in T. Givón (ed) *Voice and Inversion*, TSL #28, Amsterdam: J. Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tsl.28>
- Givón, T. (2000) "Internal reconstruction: As method, as theory", in S. Gildea (ed.) *Reconstructing Grammar: Comparative Reconstruction and Grammaticalization*, TSL #43, Amsterdam: J. Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tsl.43.05giv>
- Givón, T. (2001). *Syntax: An Introduction* (2. vols), Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.
- Givón, T. (2002). *Bio-Linguistics*, Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.
- Givón, T. (2009). *The Genesis of Syntactic Complexity: Diachrony, Ontogeny, Neuro-Cognition, Evolution*, Amsterdam: J. Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/z.146>
- Givón, T. (2013) "Biblical Hebrew as a diachronic continuum", in C. Miller-Naudé and Z. Zevit (eds 2013)
- Givón, T. (2015). *The Diachrony of Grammar*, 2. vols, Amsterdam: J. Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/z.192>
- Givón, T. (2016) "Beyond structuralism: Exorcizing Saussure's ghost", *Studies in Language*, 40.3. <https://doi.org/10.1075/sl.40.3.08giv>
- Givón, T. (2017). *The Story of Zero*, Amsterdam: J. Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/z.204>
- Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. (ca. 1237). *Le Roman de la Rose*, English. tr. by H. R. Robbins *The Romance of the Rose*, NY: Dutton [1963]
- Hamilton, E. and H. Cairns (eds 1961). *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, Bolingen Series, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hammond, M., E. Moravcsik and J. Wirth (eds 1988). *Studies in Syntactic Typology*, TSL #17, Amsterdam: J. Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tsl.17>
- Heine, B., U. Claudi and F. Hünemeyer. (1991). *Grammaticalization: A Conceptual Framework*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Heine, B. and T. Kuteva. (2007). *The Genesis of Grammar*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heraclitus of Ephesus, in Diogenes Laertius, vol. 2, Book IX, chapter 1
- Homer, *The Iliad*, tr. by A. T. Murray. (1925), Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hopper, P. (1979) "Aspect and foregrounding in discourse", in T. Givón (ed. 1979)
- Hopper, P. (ed. 1982). *Tense and Aspect: Between Semantics and Pragmatics*, TSL #1, Amsterdam: J. Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tsl.1>
- Hopper, P. and E. Traugott. (1993). *Grammaticalization*; revised edition (2003), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jespersen, O. (1917). *Negation in English and Other Languages*, Copenhagen: A. F. Host.
- Jespersen, O. (1921). *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin*, NY: Modern Library.
- Jespersen, O. (1924). *The Philosophy of Grammar*, NY/London: W. W. Norton & Co. [1965]
- Lao Tse, *Tao Teh Ching*, tr. by T. Givón, Ignacio, CO: White Cloud Publishing [2012]
- Li, C. N. (ed. 1977). *Mechanisms of Syntactic Change*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Lorentz, O. (1990) "Altorientalische Kanaanäische Topoi im Buche Kohelet", *Ugaritische Forschungen*, 12
- Meillet, A. (1921). *Linguistique Historique et Linguistique Générale*, Paris: Société Linguistique de Paris.
- Miller-Naudé, C. and Z. Zevit (eds 2013). *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.
- Murphy, R. E., O. Carm. (1990). *The Song of Songs: A critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Murphy, R. E., O. Carm. (1992). *Ecclesiastes*, World Biblical Commentary, Nashville-Dallas-Mexico City-Rio de Janeiro: Thomas Nelson.
- Ovid, *The Art of Love (Ars Amatoria), The Remedies for Love (Remedia Amoris)*, tr. by J. H. Mozley, Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press.
- Paul, H. (1890). *Principles of the History of Language*, London: Swan, Sonnenschein & Co..
- Plato, *Meno*, in E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (eds 1961)
- Pope, M. H. (1977). *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Garden City: Doubleday.
- Teresa de Jesús, Sta., "Conceptos del amor de Dios: Sobre algunas palabras de los Cantares de Salomón"; in *Vida y Obras Completas de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, novísima edición, tomo 2, p. 583; Madrid: Felipe Gonzalez Rojas (1902)
- Torah, Nvi'im, Ktuvim* (Hebrew Old Testament), Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, Ltd, (2009)
- Traugott, E. and B. Heine (eds 1991). *Approaches to Grammaticalization*, TSL #19.1-2, Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.
- Urbach, E. E. (1971) "Homiletic interpretations of the Sages and the exposition of Origen on Canticles, and the Jewish-Christian disputation", in J. Heinemann and D. Noy (eds.) *Studies in Haggadah and Folk-Literature*, SH 22, Jerusalem: Magnes/Hebrew University.
- Veith, I. (tr. 1972). *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Vennemann, T. (1973) "Explanations in linguistics", in J. Kimball (ed.) *Syntax and Semantics 2*, NY: Academic Press.
- Whitley, C. F. (1979). *Kohelet: His Language and Thought*, BZAW 148, Berlin: De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110865172>
- Whorf, B. L. (1950) "An American Indian model of the universe", *I.J.A.L.*, 16
- Whorf, B. L. (1956). *Language, Thought and Reality: Collected Writings*, ed. by J. B. Carroll, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Qohelet (Ecclesiastes). The two books slipped into the Jewish – and eventually Christian – Canon by a series of misrepresentations. The first, Song of Songs, is linguistically the latest book along the Biblical Hebrew dialect continuum, perhaps as late as 300-100 BC to judge by its language, which closely resembles Mishnaic Hebrew (2nd Cent. AD). The book is a lush, carnal poetic account of an illicit love affair, where lusty exchanges between the female beloved and her male lover are interspersed with rustic love songs. The ultimate provenance of the text may be older than the time it was recruited into the Canon, or the time suggested by its late dialect. The second book, Qohelet, is linguistically earlier on the Biblical Hebrew dialect continuum, though still following the return from the Babylonian exile (ca. 550 BC). Unlike Song of Songs, which is linguistically coherent and bears all the marks of having been produced by a native speaker (or speakers), Qohelet is replete with non-native lexical and grammatical usage, and was most likely produced by a speaker (or speakers) of Aramaic, the lingua franca of the Persian empire and the returning exiles. Multiple English translations of the two books exist. Nonetheless, in one way or another all previous translations suffer from two main drawbacks: First, their interpretation of the grammar – and on occasion also the vocabulary – of Biblical Hebrew is sometimes questionable. And second, the poetic quality of their English leaves much to be desired, paling in comparison with the stark beauty of the Hebrew original. This book attempts to do justice to both the contents and form of these two magnificent, deliciously subversive poetic works.

ISBN 978 90 272 0319 9



9 789027 203199

*John Benjamins Publishing Company*