Love I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and Ancient Near East

Thomas Römer

Love

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1. Terminology. Contrary to many modern languages, biblical Hebrew does not make a distinction in vocabulary between "love" and "friendship." The same root *ʾāhab* is used for both terms (Wallis).

There are other roots that belong to the semantic field of "love": the root *y-d-d* is used mainly in substantives, like *dôd* (the loved one or the lover); famous names constructed with this root include David as well as Solomon's other name Jedidiah (Yĕdîdyâ) (2 Sam 12:25, "YHWH's beloved one"). In the plural form, the term *dodîm* indicates "lust, sexual desire," especially in the Song of Songs.

Other roots related to love are *d-b-q* ("to cling, to stick to," cf. Deut 11:22; Prov 18:24) and *ḥ-p-ṣ* (cf. 1 Sam 18:22, "to take pleasure, to desire").

The root *ʾ-h-b* is used mainly to describe the following relations:

a) the love between a man and a woman (e.g., 1 Sam 18:20, Michal's love for David);
b) the love between two men (e.g., 1 Sam 1:26, David and Jonathan);
c) the love of a father for his son (e.g., Prov 13:24);
d) a slave's love of his master (e.g., Exod 21:5–6);
e) the love of neighbors (Lev 19:18) and of foreigners (Lev 19:34);
f) the love of a vassal towards his suzerain (e.g., 1 Kgs 5:15);
g) Israel's love towards YHWH (e.g., Deut 6:5);
h) YHWH's love towards individuals (e.g., Cyrus Isa 48:14) or his people (e.g., Isa 43:4).

2. Love and Marriage. As is still the case today in some parts of the world, marriage is not directly related to the sentiment of love between a man and a woman. In the ANE, it was a social obligation, and it was inconceivable that young people would remain unmarried. Often marriages were arranged inside a tribe (see Gen 24, where Abraham charges his servant to seek a wife for his son), and the wife became part of her husband's family. Marriages were related to economic interests, but above all, were intended to provide offspring for the husband's line. A wife who was unable to bear children could easily be divorced. Therefore, Assyrian marriage contracts stipulate that a sterile wife can adopt the son of her female servant (this practice is presupposed in Gen 16). Depending upon his economic situation, a man could have several wives and/or concubines (as Jacob, David, or Solomon). Although marriage was primarily an arrangement between families, some married couples in the Bible are presented as loving each other (e.g., Isaac and Rebecca in Gen 26).

3. Homosexual Love? Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 prohibit sexual intercourse between two men, and Lev 20:13 even prescribes capital punishment for such a "transgression." Generally, Lev 18 and 20 forbid incest and other sexual relations that cannot produce offspring. It seems that for the priestly authors of these passages sexuality is to be limited to procreation. The story of David's rise to the throne contains, however, a secondary plot, which is centered on Jonathan's love for the young David, and many scenes of their encounters are depicted in a very erotic way (Schroer/Staubli; Römer/Bonjour). It is quite possible that the author who narrated the story about David's rise knew the description of the erotic relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, which can be described as "heroic love" (Ackermann), and used some of these motifs to describe the relationship between David and Jonathan. Although David and Jonathan would not qualify as a "gay couple," David characterizes Jonathan's love for him after his death as greater to him than the love of women: "greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Sam 1:26).

4. Dangerous Love. Some biblical narratives focus on the idea that falling in love can have dangerous or even deadly outcomes. The story of Gen 34 tells how Shechem fell in love with Jacob's daughter Dinah after having had extramarital sex with her (34:2–3; it is disputed whether he did "rape" her, cf. Macchi). Shechem's father then agrees to have the whole city that he rules circumcised so that his son can marry Jacob's daughter. But before the men recover from their circumcision, they are killed by Simeon and Levi, who justify their act by claiming that Shechem treated their sister like a whore (34:26–31). Another episode of dangerous love is the story of Samson and Delilah. Samson fell in love with Delilah (Judg 16:4), but she betrayed him by appealing to his love for her in order to learn the secret of his strength. After he revealed to her that his strength is related to the length of his hair, she cuts it and sells him to the Philistines who capture and blind him (16:15–31). Both stories deal with "mixed marriages" which are presented as dangerous.

5. From Divine to Human Erotic Love. The Song of Songs (which was probably composed in the

- 10.1515/ebr.love

Hellenistic period; see Heinevetter) makes clear reference to sensuality and to a relationship of physical love. It does so already in the first few lines: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine" (Song 1:2). The text depicts two lovers who are trying to meet so that they might express their love despite several obstacles. This compilation of erotic poems describes all the different types of love, including its sexual dimension. The wish, "O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me!" (Song 2:6, and 8:3), evokes an iconographic scene that has often been reproduced in the ANE: a naked couple embracing each other before sexual intercourse. In contrast with many erotic poems, the Song of Songs describes not only the body and beauty of the woman, but also that of the man, and understands love and sexuality as a gift offered to humankind. The compilers of this text also understand love as giving sense to human life, which is limited by death: "Love is as strong as death" (8:6). The rhetoric of love and sexuality in this text is quite similar to ANE texts that describe the erotic love between a goddess and a god, especially between Ishtar and Tammuz, or Nabu (mentioned in Isa 46:1) and his consort Tashmetu. The dialogues between these two deities are very similar to the speeches of the young man and woman in the Song (for a translation see Foster: 944–48). They describe how Nabu and Tashmetu go to a bedroom, have sex there and then go out to a garden. Apparently, this reflects a ritual during which priests and priestesses brought statues of both deities to special places in order to represent their erotic encounter. Like in the Song of Songs (1:17), Thashmetu invites Nabu to meet her "under the shade of the cedar," and Nabu compares Tashmetu, again with great similarity to the Song of Songs, with a gazelle of the plain or a delicious apple. And both deities desire their lover's "fruit." Apparently, the author of the Song of Songs knew and adapted poems about divine sexual love in order to apply them to a young unmarried couple, transferring the divine character of love to human love (Nissinen). It has sometimes been argued that women were the authors of this kind of love-poetry (Carr: 95–100), and the same may be the case for the Song of Songs.

6. YHWH's Love for his "Wife" Israel. During the period of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, YHWH was worshipped in association with a goddess, either Asherah or the "Queen of Heaven" (cf. Jer 44). It is possible that during this period there were similar ideas about YHWH and the goddess as there were about Nabu and Tashmetu. When Asherah was eradicated from the official Judean cult (perhaps under Josiah, cf. 2 Kgs 23:6–7), YHWH's wife was replaced by his people Israel. This is especially the case in prophetic books, particularly in Jer, Ezek, and Hos. According to Jer 2:2–3, Israel, YHWH's fiancée, loved her husband and followed him in the wilderness, but as soon as she entered the land she became a harlot and followed other lovers (other gods, Jer 3:1–5). Similar pictures appear in Hos 2, where Israel, despite YHWH's love, followed other lovers (2:15), and in Ezek 16:8–43, where YHWH's love is again betrayed by his wife Israel. In order to punish her, YHWH announces that he will gather all her lovers so that they can collectively rape her (16:36–37). Contrary to the Song of Songs, this depiction of YHWH's betrayed love and his punishment clearly reflects male fears and fantasies (see also Ezek 23, where YHWH is depicted as a polygamous husband of the two sisters Oholah [Samaria] and Oholibah [Jerusalem]).

7. Other Depictions of YHWH's Love. Theologians often tend to emphasize the importance of YHWH's love for the understanding of the theology of the HB/OT (Spieckermann). However, as shown above, the description of the relationship between YHWH and Israel in the husband-wife metaphor has a very patriarchal background and appears especially in prophetic oracles of judgment. Some texts, however, claim that YHWH will love Israel forever (Jer 31:3). Other descriptions of YHWH's love for Israel compare it with the love of a father towards his son (Hos 11:1), or are used, in the book of Deuteronomy, in order to give a reason for his election of Israel (Deut 4:37; 7:8). YHWH's love of individuals is directed to righteous people (Ps 146:8), but also to the Persian king Cyrus (Isa 48:14), whom he chooses to deliver his people from captivity.

8. Love and Loyalty. The exhortation of Deut 6:5 to love YHWH with all one's heart, soul, and might reflects a political use of the term "love." It is taken over from Assyrian vassal treaties (Moran), and especially Esarhaddon's loyalty oaths from 672. He admonishes his vassals to love his son and successor Assurbanipal and to serve him alone in this treaty. In this context, the root *ʾ-h-b* comes close to the lexeme *ḥesed*, which is sometimes considered as an equivalent for "love" (Sakenfield), but which denotes more the idea of loyalty and faithfulness. Equally, the texts that deal with a servant's love for his master, or a son's love for his father, denote an attitude of respect and solidarity, rather than the idea of affection.

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- 10.1515/ebr.love

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Thomas Römer

II. Greco-Roman Antiquity

The semantic field of "love" is in Greek (and Latin) represented by a number of terms with distinct meanings: ἔρως/*amor* (sexual attraction, also transferred to desires of all kinds); φιλία/*amicitia* (association and sympathy with a partner, mostly freely chosen, mutual understanding and support); the verbs ἀγαπᾶν and στέργειν (familiarity and closeness in everyday life, "to be happy or satisfied with," φιλοστοργία often stands for the natural affection between parents and child); εὔνοια/*benevolentia* (good will, helpfulness).

On the other hand, Biblical Hebrew has a verb *ʾāhab* with many aspects and a theological dimension (God loving men, men loving God). The LXX generally translates it with ἀγαπᾶν (and the noun ἀγάπη, which is not attested in earlier sources). The choice of this translation is hard to explain from the original rather unemphatic meaning. It has been suggested that the reason was phonetic similarity. Ἀγάπη (and Latin *caritas*) became standard in theological contexts, and equivalents in modern languages took over its wide scope and metaphysical overtones. Ἔρως/*amor* is avoided, probably because of its sexual connotation.

In the conceptual field of "love," Greek and Roman culture developed several distinct lines of thought.

1. Eros. Sexual activity as an important part of life has gods as its protectors, Aphrodite and Eros. The capricious arrow shots of Eros symbolize the irrationality of "falling in love." Their irresistible power over humankind as well as gods is often pointed out in poetry. Even Zeus becomes a victim of sexual desire (Homer, *Ilias* 14). In Hesiod's *Theogony* (120), Eros is one of the three primeval entities, presumably because the origin of the world is seen (with certain exceptions) as a series of sexual procreations. Greek mythology is full of love stories, happy and unhappy. Poetry, especially tragedy, presents vivid pictures of erotic passion. It can be seen as a kind of mental disease (μανία "madness"); the beginning of Euripides' *Hippolytos* describes lovesick Phaedra in pathological detail. In cosmological theories of the Presocratics Eros appears as the power of physical attraction between the elements (Parmenides fr. 12,3 δαίμον, Empedocles fr. 17,7 φιλότης and fr. 22,5 *Aphrodite*). Hellenistic literature (new comedy and novel) develops a more optimistic picture of erotic love: a chaste and faithful love overcomes obstacles of all kinds and finds its consummation in a harmonious marriage. Philosophical psychology tried to find a place for sexual desire in the structure of the soul; the Stoics made sexual impulses one of the seven parts of the soul. There were numerous essays entitled *On Love* (Περὶ ἔρωτος). Many books by Peripatetics and Stoics are lost; the Epicurean position is found in Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 4. Notable extant treatises from imperial time: Plutarch, *Amatorius*; Maximus of Tyrus, *Diatribes* 18–19; Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.5. Marriage is a related subject (books Περὶ γάμου). Some philosophers took a skeptical view of it because it seemed incompatible with a philosophic life. A fervent diatribe against marriage is attributed to Theophrastus (Fr. 486 Fort.), but marriage is highly appreciated by Plutarch, Musonius Rufus, and the Stoic Hierocles.

2. Platonic Love. This is a complex of ideas which originated in the circle of Socrates and Plato. The starting point was the archaic custom of "boy love" (παιδικὸς ἔρως). This institution came under criticism in the 5th century, while defenders stressed the educational and minimized the sexual aspect (see "Homosexuality"). Socrates' famous discussions with adolescents had this background, and it became a subject of discussions among his disciples. Plato (in *Symposion* and *Phaedrus*) developed an elaborate explanation: fascination by sensual beauty, he claimed, could open the way to appreciation of spiritual beauty and in the last instance to a philosophical vision. These ideas became widely known and discussed, accepted, or rejected. The famous phrase in Aristotle's theology that the "unmoved mover" sets things in motion "like a thing loved" (ὡς ἐρώμενον *Metaph.* 7, 1072b3) may be understood as an allusion to the Platonic concept of a transcendental beauty being loved. Plutarch in his *Amatorius* undertook to transfer this Platonic love into the context of marital love.

3. Philia (φιλία, "friendship"). This is the most general word for friendly relations; it is a key word in social life; persons may be classed as φίλος or ἐχθρός, friend or foe. The divine protector of friend-