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# Getting Steamy in Amnon’s Chamber: Philological and Metaphorical Observations on 2 Samuel 13

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## Abstract

2 Samuel 13:1–19 presents us with dueling perspectives on a rape scene. Despite Tamar’s protests, the narrative voice reflects Prince Amnon’s lustful viewpoint, in which he and Tamar are acting out a scene of steamy seduction. Within this framework, the unexpectedly detailed description of Tamar preparing the dumplings deserves more attention. I examine the Hebrew words לִבְבוֹת (“heart-cakes”), יצק (“to pour out”), and מִשְׁרֵת (traditionally, “baking pan”), offering a philological explanation of their associations that diverges from much modern scholarship. This new understanding of the food-preparation scene makes it clear that Tamar’s actions are a narratively realized metaphor: in preparing the food to be consumed, she is preparing herself to be consumed erotically—at least, as viewed by Amnon. In other words, using the language of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, TAMAR IS THE CAKE.

## Keywords

2 Sam 13 – Tamar – Amnon – metaphor – food – philology – cake

## 1 Introduction

Then she [Tamar] took the dough, and she kneaded [it], and she *LBB*ed [it] in his sight, and she boiled the *levivot*, and she took the *masret*, and she poured [it] out before him.

וּתְקַח אֶת־הַבָּצֶק וְתִלֹּשׁ וְתִלְבֵּב לְעֵינָיו וְתִבְשֵׁל אֶת־הַלֶּבְבוֹת וְתִקַּח אֶת־הַמְשָׁרֶת וְתַצֵּק  
לְפָנָיו

2 Samuel 13 contains one of the most detailed rape scenes in the Bible. It also contains one of the most detailed food preparation scenes in the Bible. These two statements may sound discordant, even irrelevant to each other—but a closer look reveals that their juxtaposition is no coincidence. Despite the superficial innocence of Tamar preparing cakes for her half-brother, the reader already knows his lascivious intentions for her, and that knowledge overshadows the details of her cookery. In the light of what precedes and follows her actions, they are fraught with ominous foreshadowing, and they deserve attention for that reason alone. Moreover, when we look closer, the narrative reveals itself as layered and evocative; the details of dough manipulation are far from incidental to the broader plot. Just as Tamar manhandles and prepares the dough for consumption, so will Amnon manhandle her and prepare to consume her metaphorically.

Unfortunately, the narrative details that reiterate this parallel have been obscured by most interpreters, resulting in a comparative lack of interest in Tamar's culinary activities. A close analytical reading of these verses, focusing on the Hebrew words לֶבְבוֹת (“heart-cakes”), יִצֵק (“to pour out”), and מְשָׁרֶת (traditionally, “baking pan”), provides a sharper picture of exactly what Tamar's cakes entailed. In turn, that picture illuminates the broader narrative, revealing the way that the text reflects Amnon's twisted, lustful frame of mind. This article reexamines Tamar's actions in 2 Sam 13:8b–9a, offering a new reading of the scene, and then briefly explores the significance of that scene to the broader narrative through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT).

### 1.1 *Historical Attention*

I am not the first to note the remarkable step-by-step description of Tamar's preparations in this scene.<sup>1</sup> For instance, Stone observes, “Tamar's actions in preparing the cakes for Amnon are described in considerable detail. Indeed, the amount of detail used in this description is quite remarkable for a biblical narrative.”<sup>2</sup> Yet no one has given a satisfactory explanation of *why* this

1 For general discussion of this passage, cf. the major modern scholarly commentaries: Auld (OTL), Campbell (FOTL), McCarter (AB), and Smith (ICC). See also Andersson, *Untameable Texts*, 246–251; Bader, *Sexual Violation*; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 239–282; Conroy, *Absalom*, 17–42; Dijk-Hemmes, “Tamar,” 135–156; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 99–114; Müllner, *Gewalt*; Ridout, “Rape of Tamar,” 75–84; Stone, *Sex*, 106–119; Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 37–63; Yamada, *Configurations of Rape*, 101–132. See also Conroy, *Absalom*, 1–13 for an overview of earlier historical analyses of 2 Sam 13 and the broader narratives that contain it.

2 Stone, *Sex*, 112.

sequence is so detailed—why Tamar's actions are focalized so thoroughly. Conroy attempts an explanation, but he does not address the specific choice of details:

At this point the narrator pauses again (cf. v. 4), giving a very detailed description of the baking operations which is irrelevant to the onward progress of the plot though it increases the reader's imaginative entry into the world of the text; as a result, the reader's expectancy heightens.<sup>3</sup>

Gray comes closest to my stance when he argues that the “meticulous attention” creates a passage “replete with *double entendre* and sexual innuendo which help cultivate a fetid atmosphere redolent of peril for Tamar.”<sup>4</sup> The innuendos he identifies include the mention of lying in bed, the sensual activity of kneading, and the “boiling; ‘seething’ point of lustful frenzy.”<sup>5</sup> I agree with his general conclusion, but I would take it one step further: Tamar's actions are not merely generically erotic, and not merely appealing to the reader. Contrary to Conroy's claim that the details are “irrelevant,” they are carefully and specifically meaningful, and they go beyond mere *double entendre*.

In this article, I offer a new justification for the detailed cooking sequence—one that not only explains its elaborate detail but also shows how the text positions Tamar within the conceptual metaphor of WOMAN IS FOOD. In short, I argue that the cooking sequence is a foreshadowing of the brutal events that immediately follow it. Tamar's treatment of the dough mirrors Amnon's treatment of her, and it echoes Amnon's sexualizing intentions. This narrative parallel has an immediate effect: it puts Tamar in the role of food, something to be manipulated by Amnon for consumption. Just like Nathan's parable in the previous chapter, when he metaphorically placed Bathsheba in the role of a slaughtered lamb, this sequence foregrounds an ambient cultural metaphor in order to manipulate the reader's perception of events.

## 2 “Lusty Latkes”? Interrogating the לִבְבוֹת

In my translation at the beginning of this article, I left some words untranslated. Their original semantic connotations comprise the focus of the next two sections of this paper—starting with the verb לָבַב/*LBB* and its associated noun

<sup>3</sup> Conroy, *Absalom*, 21.

<sup>4</sup> Gray, “Amnon,” 44.

<sup>5</sup> Gray, “Amnon,” 45. Gray also notes the fact that “the verbal form of the noun בָּצַק can mean to ‘swell’ or ‘rise up,’” but I find this point less persuasive.

לִבְבוֹת/levivot. This foodstuff is central to the story of Tamar and Amnon, but the term לִבְבוֹת is unique to this passage, resulting in uncertainty about its nature. I begin with a narrative exploration of where and how the term appears, then turn to a philological examination of the word and its root. My goal here is not to propose a single denotative meaning for the *levivot*, but rather to explore what their wide-ranging connotations might have included.

### 2.1 *What's in a Name?*

If we examine the broader scene of 2 Sam 13:1–22, the food that Tamar prepares is central to the story, but the title of that food actually varies throughout the text: לֶחֶם (v. 5), בִּרְיָה (vv. 5, 7, 10), and לִבְבוֹת (vv. 6, 8, 10). The first two terms can both be translated generically as “food” or “sustenance”; לֶחֶם is a common word for food (or specifically bread), and בִּרְיָה, though it only appears in this passage, comes from the root בר״ה, which has connotations of feeding, sustaining, and bringing to health.<sup>6</sup> לִבְבוֹת, which also only appears here, has more obscure connotations, as I will soon discuss at length.

First, though, it is worth noting which character uses each term. The cooking-and-feeding sequence occurs four times in 2 Sam 13: once as a suggestion from Jonadab to Amnon (v. 5), once as a request from Amnon to David (v. 6), once as a command from David to Tamar (v. 7), and once as narrated action between Tamar and Amnon (vv. 8–9). Bar-Efrat has an excellent analysis of the differences between these narratives; he observes that Jonadab is the most skillful, “camouflaging” Amnon’s intentions in flowery clauses and obfuscating requests. In contrast, Amnon’s request is an unsubtle reflection of his desires, while David’s command is a “naïve” oversimplification that ignores Amnon’s true goal.<sup>7</sup> But despite his subtle observation of details, Bar-Efrat does not address the varying terms for the food, even though it is the only constant that appears in all three requests, other than Amnon and Tamar themselves.<sup>8</sup> The following chart summarizes the food’s names:

6 Cf. 1 Sam 2:29; 2 Sam 12:17; 3:35; Ps 69:21. I tentatively reject the fascinating but unsubstantiated claim of Bledstein (“Was Habbiryâ a Healing Ritual?,” 15) that “*habbiryâ* is not merely a designation for food, but ... a healing ritual performed by a woman.”

7 Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 252–254.

8 Conroy does note the different terms for food during the requests, calling בִּרְיָה the “more neutral” alternative, but he does not extend this observation to the narrative that follows.

Verse	Term	Speaker	Addressee
5	לֶחֶם	Jonadab	Amnon
5	בְּרִיָּה	Jonadab	Amnon
6	לִבְבוֹת	Amnon	David
7	בְּרִיָּה	David	Tamar
8	לִבְבוֹת	Narrator	–
10	בְּרִיָּה	Amnon	Tamar
10	לִבְבוֹת	Narrator	–

A few patterns are visible here. First, בְּרִיָּה is the only term used when speaking to Tamar. One may speculate that David and Amnon are responding to common associations between women and nurturing behavior, attempting to appeal to Tamar's "tender side" by encouraging her to provide sustenance for the ill Amnon.<sup>9</sup> (Jonadab also uses the term, but as Bar-Efrat establishes, his request is the most carefully crafted, and he may have a similar goal in mind.)

Second and more importantly, only two people use the term לִבְבוֹת: Amnon and the narrator. Indeed, the term apparently has important connotations to Amnon, since the two לִבְבוֹת and their associated verb לִבֵּב are literally the only words in his request that do not derive from Jonadab's suggestion.

Third, Amnon does not wish to emphasize the term's connotations to Tamar, since he changes his reference to בְּרִיָּה when he speaks to her. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, the narrator also uses this term twice; indeed, it is the only

Jonadab's suggestion (v. 5b, overlap bold)	Amnon's request (v. 6b, overlap bold)
<p>תָּבֹא נָא תָמֹר אֶחָוִיתִי וְתִבְרַנִּי לֶחֶם וְעִשְׂתָּהּ לְעֵינַי אֶת־הַבְּרִיָּה לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה וְאֶכְלֵתִי מִיָּדָהּ</p>	<p>תְּבוֹא־נָא תָמֹר אֶחָתִי וְתִלְבֵּב לְעֵינַי שְׁתֵּי לִבְבוֹת וְאֶבְרָהּ מִיָּדָהּ</p>
<p>Please let my sister Tamar come and nourish me with food. Let her make the sustenance in my sight, so that I see it. Let me eat from her hand.</p>	<p>Please let my sister Tamar come and <i>LBB</i> two <i>levivot</i> in my sight, so I can sustain myself from her hand.</p>

<sup>9</sup> Alternatively, if Bledstein is correct about the term's cultic implications, perhaps the men wished to impress and disarm Tamar with their sacred intentions.

term used by the narrator for the food. Tribble notes this when, after observing that “Amnon switches to a special term (*lbbt*) suggesting an erotic pun,”<sup>10</sup> she marks the term’s reappearance: “the narrator views the occasion *through the eyes of Amnon* to designate the bread as special food (*lbbt*), the desire of his heart, rather than as the standard nourishment that Jonadab and David have specified.”<sup>11</sup>

This observation suggests that the narrative, at least at this point, is focalized through Amnon’s point of view, creating a situation of Free Indirect Discourse, as used in literary theory.<sup>12</sup> Free Indirect Discourse is a technique where a superficially third-person narrative actually reflects a character’s perspective. Put more technically, Gavins explains that “readers of Free Indirect Discourse tend to sense that the voice of the narrator of the text has been joined by, merged with, or replaced by that of another enactor in the text-world,” and that “the presence of the thoughts and opinions of a text-world enactor can usually be detected through certain lexical choices which may be indicative of a particular enactor’s personality.”<sup>13</sup> In this case, as revealed by what Eckardt

10 Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 58 n. 16. Later discussion in this section will reveal why the word is an “erotic pun,” though Tribble herself does not go into further detail here.

11 Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 59 n. 20 (emphasis mine).

12 Although he does not use this term, Bar-Efrat observes this trait when he notes, “The narrator is omniscient, but does not tell everything. ... The unlimited knowledge is expressed particularly in the large number of inside views: ‘and Amnon, David’s son, loved her’ (v. 1), ‘And Amnon was so tormented ...’ (v. 2), ‘and it seemed impossible to Amnon ...’ (v. 2), ‘But he would not ...’ (vv. 14, 16), ‘Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred; for greater was the hatred with which he hated her than the love with which he had loved her’ (v. 15), ‘he was very angry’ (v. 21), ‘for Absalom hated Amnon’ (v. 22).” (Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 275–276) What Bar-Efrat does not point out is that all of these “inside views,” save the final two, give us insight into *Amnon* alone. We do not see the internal thoughts of Tamar, or David, or Jonadab. Thus, rather than simply calling those observations evidence for an omniscient narrator, we should label them evidence for Free Indirect Discourse on Amnon’s part. (The final two examples, which show us Absalom’s internal state, indicate that the focalization has shifted to Absalom at that point of the narrative, where it will remain until Absalom kills Amnon.)

13 Gavins, *Text World Theory*, 128. Free Indirect Discourse has received considerable attention in literary theory, most of it beyond the bounds of my argument. Note, however, that the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Baldick, “Free Indirect Style,” n.p.) summarizes that “This form of statement allows a third-person narrative to exploit a first-person point of view, often with a subtle effect of irony, as in the novels of Jane Austen.” That “subtle effect of irony” is most certainly present in our passage. Although Free Indirect Discourse has not been widely examined within biblical studies, I point to Lee’s observation (*Logic of Narratives*, 145): “the existence of FID has been attested in non-European languages,” which “suggests that FID may be part of our general linguistic and cognitive capacities.”

calls the “micro level indicators”<sup>14</sup> of individual syntactic selection, the neutral omniscient narrator of the story has merged with Amnon’s own lascivious viewpoint.<sup>15</sup>

But is it fair to identify the *levivot* with lasciviousness? The rest of this section will address that question. While the word לְבִבּוֹת does not appear elsewhere in the Bible, or in the known lexicons of other ancient Semitic languages, we can glean some clues as to its meaning from a few sources, including the context here and the meanings of the root לִב in Hebrew and other languages. I now examine these clues in turn, in order to see what לְבִבּוֹת means—and what it might have connoted.

## 2.2 Narrative Context

The noun \*לְבִבּוֹת appears three times in 2 Sam 13, always plural; the verb לִבֵּב appears another two times. These appearances are listed here:

וּתְלַבֵּב לְעֵינַי שְׁתֵּי לְבִבּוֹת	13:6	Then let her <i>LBB</i> two <i>levivot</i> before my eyes.
וְתִקַּח אֶת־הַבֶּצֶק וְתִלוֹשׁ וְתִלַּבֵּב לְעֵינָיו וְתִבְשֵׁל אֶת־הַלְבִּיבוֹת	13:8	Then she took dough, kneaded, <i>LBB</i> -ed before his eyes, and boiled the <i>levivot</i> .
וְתִקַּח תָּמָר אֶת־הַלְבִּיבוֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂתָה	13:10	Then Tamar took the <i>levivot</i> which she had made.

A few observations can be made:

First, to *LBB* is a specific stage of food preparation, coming between kneading and boiling. To *LBB* is an activity specific to making *levivot*; we do not see it in other depictions of bread-making (e.g., Gen 18:6; 1 Sam 28:24; Hos 7:4). Therefore, I would translate לִבֵּב as “to shape dough into *levivot*.”<sup>16</sup>

14 Eckardt, *Semantics*, 6. These “micro level indicators,” narrative choices of individual words, stand in contrast to “macro level indicators”—entire sentences that point to a character as their author.

15 This viewpoint is emphasized by the key phrase לְעֵינָיו, “in his sight/before his eyes.”

16 Some commentaries take this direction even further and define it as “to mould dough into heart shapes” (see, e.g., Auld, *I and II Samuel*, 474: “let her heart-shape before my eyes two heart-cakes.”). I am uncertain what shape they mean by this. The heart as an organ is a vaguely conical lump, hardly a distinctive shape for bread. On the other hand, the modern “heart shape” is a stylized symbol that came to popularity long after the composition of Samuel; its first clear manifestations are medieval (Kemp, *Christ to Coke*, 81–107.). Therefore, whatever shape the *levivot* were, it would not resemble what modern readers would call a heart, and their name did not derive from their shape. The CAD does list a handful of “objects shaped like a libbu” (L.167), including NINDA *lib-bu*, which it translates





largely convincing, though I will return later to her definition of מִשְׁרֵת as “colander.” The *levivot* were, in short, a boiled dumpling.<sup>22</sup>

Third, these dumplings have an additional qualifier: Amnon specifically requests *two* of them (שְׁתֵּי לֶבְבוֹת). Many translations diminish the specificity of this request by translating it as “a couple of *levivot*” (NRSV, NJPS, even King James). Yet among the 769 places where “two” (שְׁנַיִם) appears in the Bible, the NRSV and NJPS only translate it as “a couple of” in a single other instance, 1 Kgs 17:12.<sup>23</sup> Everywhere else, שְׁנַיִם is simply rendered as “two.” The difference between “two” and “a couple of” is a matter of specificity; if the translations had said “two cakes,” a reader might wonder, “why exactly two?”—a question that previous scholars have not addressed.

The answer is right beneath our noses, if we imagine the dumplings as they were originally made. Using a basic recipe for boiled bread dumplings, but substituting unrefined date paste<sup>24</sup> and whole wheat flour<sup>25</sup> as more typical of the ancient world, I made a batch of *levivot*. Once cooked, each pair of smooth, round, tawny dumplings was evocative of a pair of breasts.<sup>26</sup> On its

22 While we do not have other biblical examples of boiled bread, steamed or boiled yeast dumplings are popular the world over. From Chinese *mantou* to Zulu *ujeqe* to German *Hefeklösse*, these bread rolls are a hearty dish, yet light and fluffy from their yeasted dough. One cookbook writes that “*Hefeklösse mit Zimmetsosse* (yeast dumplings with cinnamon sauce) were considered a meal in itself. When the cooks took the time to prepare dumplings with cinnamon sauce, the usual meat course was not served” (Hoppe, *Seasons of Plenty*, 137). As a simple, delicate treat, dumplings would be ideal food for an invalid; even today, in America, chicken and dumplings are a classic food to serve to someone sick.

23 In this sole instance of 1 Kgs 17:12, a woman is gathering “a couple of sticks,” שְׁנַיִם עֵצִים, to make a fire. Here, “couple” may be appropriate, because exactly two sticks would not make a very successful fire. On the other hand, exactly two sticks are used in the stereotypical method of *starting* a fire, by rubbing them together. Regardless, this possible exception stands against 768 other instances where שְׁנַיִם means “exactly two.”

24 Kaufman, *Cooking*, 3.

25 Kaufman, *Cooking*, xli.

26 Nor would they be the only example of breast-shaped delicacies; in Sicily, white-glazed cherry-topped sweets are called “*minni di virgini*” (“virgin’s breasts”), eaten to honor Saint Agatha, a martyr whose breasts were cut off. Cf. Mazzoni, *Women*, 81–84. (See also di Schino, “Waning,” 68–69, who connects the breast-cakes to votive offerings and ancient fertility rites.)

Closer to our ancient Near Eastern context is a type of Assyrian cake, *kamān zīzi*. *Kamānu* was a cake that could have either secular or cultic associations; they are probably the כֶּמֶן צִזּוּ that Jeremiah condemns baking in Jer 7:18 and 44:19. As for the *zīzu*, it indicates either a type of onion, or (as Dalley argues) is identical to *zīzū*, breasts, cognate to Hebrew צִי (Esther’s *Revenge at Susa*, 151). Dalley (ibid.) also claims that the Assyrian text “implies that they symbolized or looked like a heart,” but unfortunately does not cite the details that lead to that conclusion. In one ritual text, *kamān zīzi* are listed next to “heart-bread” and “wrist-bread,” implying that they too may refer to a body part (SAA 20, 27, line 9). Most

own, this resemblance might be coincidental; not all pairs of round objects are breasts, any more than all rods are phalluses. But the connotations of this pair of dumplings become clearer when we examine their linguistic parallels elsewhere.

### 2.3 *Linguistic Parallels*

The relevant parallels to לִבְבוֹת can be divided into three categories: Hebrew connotations of “heart” (לֵב/לִבָּ), Hebrew appearances of the root לב”ב, and other Semitic parallels.

#### 2.3.1 The Biblical Heart

The most obvious association for the *levivot* is the heart (לֵב/לִבָּ), and most modern commentators connect the two terms.<sup>27</sup> Broadly speaking, the over 800 references to the heart in the Hebrew Bible fall into four categories: literal, metaphorical, metonymic, and psychological. Literally, of course, the heart is the organ that pumps blood through the body (e.g., 2 Sam 18:14; 2 Kgs 9:24). Metaphorically, it can also mean the center or core of something, e.g., the “heart” of the sea (Ps 46:3) or sky (Deut 4:11).

More importantly for our purposes, לֵב/לִבָּ can refer metonymically to the entire chest, i.e., the area of the body that surrounds the heart. In Nah 2:8, the women of Nineveh flee, “beating their breasts [lit. ‘hearts’]” (מְתַפְּפֹת עַל-לִבְבֵיהֶן). Likewise, in Exod 28:30, the Urim and Thummim are placed in Aaron’s breast-plate, “so they will be upon his breast [lit. ‘heart’] when going before YHWH” (וְהָיוּ עַל-לֵב אֶהֱרֹן בְּבֹאוֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה). In both cases, “heart” is a metonym for the chest area. Based on this meaning, we might tentatively translate לִבְבוֹת as “bosom-cakes,” i.e., a metonym for breast-shaped cakes. As a euphemistic metonym, though, this association is necessarily somewhat speculative.

More thoroughly established are the broad psychological associations of the heart. In contrast to its modern associations, the Israelite “heart” was not specifically connected with feelings of love and romance. However, it was the seat

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intriguingly of all, the fullest context for a *kamān zīzi* is the Assyrian ritual K.164.35, where the cake is offered, along with other ritual foods and objects, as part of a healing ritual for a prince that features the symbolic death of his sister! (Cf. von Soden, “Aus einem Ersatzzopferritual,” and Scurlock, “K 164 (BA 2, P. 635)” for a defense of this interpretation of the evocative text, though Parpola (SAA 20, 34) calls it a “Burial of a Queen.”) While I hesitate to conclude that the biblical text alludes specifically to an Assyrian ritual that is known from only one copy, the parallels between the ritual and 2 Sam 13 are certainly worth investigating more fully.

27 Virtually every modern commentary makes this connection; Smith (*Samuel*, 328), e.g., wrote in 1899 that Amnon requests “two *heart-shaped* cakes” (emphasis author’s).

of emotion, intellect, and willpower more broadly.<sup>28</sup> This range may include romantic love; for instance, in Judg 16:15, Delilah protests to Samson, “How can you say ‘I love you,’ when I do not have your heart?” (אֵיךְ תֹאמַר אֶהְבֵּתִיךָ וְלִבִּיךָ אֵינִי). Nevertheless, it would be misrepresenting to say that “heart-cakes” imply love. A safer assumption would be that they imply internal emotion, thought, or passion of some kind.<sup>29</sup>

### 2.3.2 Elsewhere in the Bible לבב

The discussion so far has centered on לֵב/לִב, the masculine term for heart. However, the word לִבְבוֹת is feminine—and indeed, feminine words that seem connected to the root לִב appear twice in the Bible (vocalized as לִבָּה\* and לִבָּה\*), as does another instance of the verb לִבֵּב. These instances reveal a clearer picture of the term's associations in 2 Sam 13.

The first לִבָּה\* is in Exod 3:2: “a messenger of YHWH appeared to him [Moses] from a *labbah* of fire within the bush” (וַיֵּרָא מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֵלָיו בְּלִבְת־אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ) (הַסִּפְּנָה). From context, most scholars assume that לִבָּה refers to a flame, perhaps derived from the root לִבֵּב (“to burn”) rather than לִב. We could thus translate it as a “kindling” of flame—a term with evocative connotations. Kotzé surveys anger and lust in metaphor, and he notes that “a prominent source domain [for anger] which is found in almost all languages studied to date is heat.”<sup>30</sup> Moreover, as Kotzé cites Lakoff, “the source domains used to conceptualise lust

28 Basson (“Metaphorical Explorations of the Heart,” 310) summarizes that “ancient Hebrew anthropology did associate emotions such as joy, courage, anger, grief, fear and distress with the heart,” in addition to it being “the seat of understanding, thought, and planning” (Keel, *Song of Songs*, 162). Bowling (“לִבֵּב,” 1071) acknowledges this broad range when he notes that “it is the most frequently used term for man's immaterial personality functions as well as the most inclusive term for them since, in the Bible, virtually every immaterial function of man is attributed to the ‘heart.’”

29 In addition to these general biblical associations of the heart, the organ (both literal and metaphorical) specifically plays a significant role in the Succession Narrative within which Tamar's rape is embedded. At the end of her story (2 Sam 13:20), Absalom counsels her “not to take this matter to heart” (אַל־תִּשִׂיתִי אֶת־לִבִּיךָ לְדַבַּר הַזֶּה). Yet in the royal conflict to come, the text speaks of emotions swaying the heart of the king (2 Sam 13:33; 14:1), while Absalom “steals the hearts” of the Israelites (2 Sam 15:6), and David speaks to the hearts of his servants (2 Sam 19:7). Meanwhile, Amnon dies when his heart becomes “merry with wine” (i.e., drunk, 2 Sam 13:28), and Absalom dies by a spear through his heart (2 Sam 18:14). These instances may be coincidence or a deliberate *leitwort*—but in either case, they emphasize the connection between the heart and times of great passion and war. My thanks to Cindy Chapman for noting these repeated instances of the term in correspondence.

30 Kotzé, “Women,” 243.

overlap remarkably with the source domains of metaphors for anger.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, there is evidence that this threefold association—LUST IS ANGER IS HEAT—functions specifically within the Hebrew Bible, as seen in Prov 6:27–29 and Song 8:6, both of which metaphorically connect sexual desire to burning heat.

This same threefold association is also at work in the Bible’s second \*לְבָה, in Ezek 16:30, part of an extended metaphor depicting Jerusalem as a harlot:

מָה אִמְלָה לְבַתְּךָ	How fever-hot is your <i>libbah</i> ,
נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה	says Lord YHWH,
בְּעִשְׂוֹתַי אֶת-כָּל-אֲלֵה	that you would do all this,
מַעֲשֵׂה אִשָּׁה-זֹנֶה שְׁלֹטָה	the acts of a wanton dominatrix! <sup>32</sup>

This is admittedly a difficult verse, particularly its first line, but major commentaries like Greenberg, Eichrodt, and Zimmerli all translate the verb אִמְלָה to refer to feverish heat—“how hot your ardor is,”<sup>33</sup> “how fever-hot was your heart,”<sup>34</sup> and “how feverish is your heart,”<sup>35</sup> respectively. In this they follow Stummer, who cites both a parallel Arabic root and a medieval Karaite poet to support the translation of “fever-hot.”<sup>36</sup> While Eichrodt and Zimmerli ignore the fact that לְבָה is feminine, Greenberg views it as deliberate, perhaps even a neologism by the author: “*libba* seems to fuse *labba* ‘flame’ (Exod 3:2) and *leb* ‘heart,’ and hence is better rendered ‘ardor.’”<sup>37</sup> In sum, this verse seems to be drawing on the same three-part metaphorical cluster: LUST IS ANGER IS HEAT. Wanton Jerusalem is aflame with desire, and her *libbah* is the source or locus of that desire.

Finally, while the interpretation of Ezek 16:30 may still be debated, the only appearance of לְבָב as a verb, in Song 4:9, has an undisputed context and

31 Kotzé, “Women,” 244.

32 אִשָּׁה-זֹנֶה שְׁלֹטָה, literally “a dominating whore-woman.” Obviously the modern associations of “dominatrix” do not all apply, but שְׁלֹטָה is a *hapax legomenon* derived from שָׁלַט, which elsewhere always has masculine connotations of power, rulership, and domination; it is etymologically related to the title of “sultan.” Thus, this is a whore who deliberately takes on a masculine role of domination—which is the straightforward etymological meaning of “dominatrix.”

33 Greenberg, *Ezekiel* 1–20, 271.

34 Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 200.

35 Zimmerli and Clements, *Ezekiel*, 322.

36 Stummer, “אִמְלָה (Ez XVI 30A),” 34–40.

37 Other scholars, including Koehler and Baumgartner, connect the term to the Akkadian term *libbātu*, “anger, rage,” but that meaning is less appropriate for the sexual context of the passage.

general meaning. I therefore turn to it for a firmer foundation for the word's implications.

לְבַבְתִּי אֶחָתִי כָּלָה	You have <i>LBB</i> -ed me, my sister-bride;
לְבַבְתִּי בְּאַחַד מְעִינֶיךָ	you have <i>LBB</i> -ed me with a single gaze,
בְּאַחַד עֵנֶק מְצוּרְנֶיךָ	with a single strand of your carcanet.

Like most of Song of Songs, chapter 4 is erotic love poetry; without knowing anything about the word, one might fill in “enchanted,” “seduced,” or “captured” as possible meanings for לבב. Given the verb's resemblance to the noun “heart,” most translations render it as doing something to the heart or mind: “you have ravished my heart” (NRSV, Murphy), “you have captured my heart” (NJPS, Exum), “you ravish my mind” (Pope). A more precise meaning can be inferred by comparing the verse with the following two verses (Song 4:10–11). House insightfully notes that “all three strophes have the same logic: two lines describe the intoxicating power of her lovemaking, and a third line describes something delightful that she is wearing.”<sup>38</sup> The parallels between the three strophes are clear:

לְבַבְתִּי אֶחָתִי כָּלָה	You have <i>LBB</i> -ed me, my sister-bride;
לְבַבְתִּי בְּאַחַד מְעִינֶיךָ	you have <i>LBB</i> -ed me with a single gaze,
בְּאַחַד עֵנֶק מְצוּרְנֶיךָ	with a single strand of your carcanet.
מֵה־יָפוּ דְדִידֶיךָ אֶחָתִי כָּלָה	How lovely are your breasts, <sup>39</sup> my sister-bride;
מֵה־טֹבֵי דְדִידֶיךָ מִיַּיִן	how much sweeter than wine are your breasts,
וְרִיחַ שְׁמֵנֶיךָ מִכָּל־בְּשָׂמִים	and the scent of your oils than any spice.
נֹפֶת תִּטְפְּנָה שְׁפֹתֶיךָ כָּלָה	Syrup drips from your lips, O bride;
דְּבַשׁ וְחֹלֵב תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנֶיךָ	honey and milk are under your tongue,
וְרִיחַ שְׁלֹמֹתֶיךָ כְּרִיחַ לְבָנוֹן	and the scent of your clothing is like the scent of Lebanon.

38 Garrett and House, *Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 187.

39 The Hebrew which I translated as “your breasts” is דְדִידֶיךָ, often rendered as “your love.” With repointing, however, it becomes דְדִידֶיךָ, “your breasts” (cf. Prov 5:19), and indeed, numerous ancient translations (including LXX and the Peshitta) understood it that way. (I am aware of the obvious parallel between this passage and Song 1:2, 4, where דְדִידֶיךָ is traditionally read as the man's “love”; without too much tangential discursion, I will note that I would repoint that passage to refer to the woman's breasts as well.) However, even if “love” is meant instead of a specific body part, this is no abstract affection. Texts like Ezek 16:8 and Prov 7:18 make it clear that physical, sexual lovemaking is the connotation of this term. Thus, if not “your breasts,” דְדִידֶיךָ should be translated as “your lovemaking,” not “your love.”

All three strophes have an AAB form: a line that establishes sexual attraction (and ends in “bride,” כַּלְיָה), a line that repeats and amplifies the sentiment, and a line that draws in an adornment to “garnish” the observation. The physical senses are richly at play; scent, taste, and touch are evoked through comparisons to food and drink. In short, this trio of tricola unequivocally refers to sexual pleasure and physical interaction. Based on this context, לִבֵּב refers to the kindling of arousal—and indeed, “kindle” or “enflame” may be a particularly appropriate term, given the fire connotations discussed above.<sup>40</sup>

We thus exhaust our biblical instances of לִבֵּב-rooted words by noting that every instance, setting aside 2 Sam 13, can be explained as an influx of either literal heat or metaphorical heat (anger/lust/passion). However, our set of data is admittedly small. For that reason, many scholars of 2 Sam 13 have turned to other Semitic parallels for the root לִבֵּב.

<sup>40</sup> The idea of kindling has the further advantage of explaining Job 11:12, the only place in the Bible outside Song 4 and 2 Sam 13 where the verb לִבֵּב appears. While most commentaries note the connection between Song and 2 Samuel, few draw in the Job passage—understandably so, as it is both linguistically enigmatic and apparently unrelated to sexuality. Nevertheless, it deserves a brief mention in this survey. The verse is an alliterative proverb: וְאִישׁ נָבוֹב יִלְבֵּב וְעִיר פָּרָא אָדָם יוֹלֵד. Although the meaning of the latter half is debated (perhaps “a wild donkey will be born a domesticated donkey”?; cf. Pope, *Job*, 85 for this interpretation), the gist of the first half is that a “hollow person” will be *lbb*-ed. “Hollow person” is usually translated as “fool,” but “hollow” (נָבוֹב) has unclear metaphorical implications; its appearances elsewhere in the Bible are all quite literal. Moreover, the preceding verses speak of God’s judgment on the “worthless” (שָׁאָ, Job 11:11), not the ignorant. A couple of possibilities arise:

1. The colloquial English proverb of “lighting a fire under someone” may be at work here: the “hollow person” is devoid of action, and cannot be induced to react, any more than a wild donkey can be induced to act tame. Thus, acknowledging the second half as dubious, the proverb would be translated, “If a wastrel can be kindled to act, then a wild donkey can be born a domesticated donkey.”

2. Noegel (“Maleness,” 81) suggests that a “hollow man” may refer to an impotent man—“a ‘hollow pipe,’ as it were (à la the vulgar English idiom ‘shooting blanks’).” In that case, the same meaning as in Song of Songs can be applied to לִבֵּב: “if an impotent man can become aroused, then a wild donkey can be born a domesticated donkey.” This interpretation has the virtue of simplicity, since it explains the two instances of לִבֵּב with the same definition, but it relies on a speculative and otherwise unattested metaphor for impotence.

In either case, though, an entirely new meaning for לִבֵּב is unnecessary. The proverb in either English translation is hardly as mellifluous as in its original Hebrew, but it makes coherent sense.

## 2.3.3 לבב/לב in Semitic Parallels

The word *lb* for “heart” is a universal, primary one in Semitic languages, so common that reviewing examples would not be particularly useful. As in Hebrew, the Semitic heart is often a metaphor for the internal mind, desires, or will, without its specific modern connotations of tender romance. Compare, for instance, the passage in the Epic of Baal where Anat’s “heart filled with joy” during battle,<sup>41</sup> a Ugaritic letter where the king warned his mother that she would “break [his] heart,”<sup>42</sup> and the numerous Akkadian examples in CAD L 169–172.

That said, several scholars have argued for another, related set of euphemistic connotations for the “heart.” In particular, some (most prominently Pope) have connected the verb לבב to a set of Mesopotamian incantations titled ŠÀ.ZI.GA (*nīš libbi*): “rising of the heart.”<sup>43</sup> Traditionally, “heart” here has been understood as a straightforward euphemism for the male member. For instance, Biggs cites lines like “(if a man) desires the ‘woman of his heart’ and looks at the woman, but his ‘heart’ does not rise for him”<sup>44</sup> as evidence that “ŠÀ.ZI.GA is not, then, simply the term for a man’s interest in sexual relations or his wish for sexual intercourse, but for the ability to get and maintain an erection sufficient for sexual intercourse.”<sup>45</sup>

Nor is this euphemism limited to those incantations, although they have been the focus of the most attention. Noegel notes that “Akkadian texts describe impotence as a *libbu* (‘heart’) that is *lā išari* (‘not straight’).”<sup>46</sup> He also cites an Egyptian text that uses *ib*/“heart” as a euphemism for “penis,”<sup>47</sup> and a rabbinic text that describes impotence as “weakness of the heart” (חולשא דליבא).<sup>48</sup> Likewise, Assante reads ŠÀ/“heart” as a euphemism in Sumerian sexual texts: “‘May they place his heart with my heart for me’ is rife with word plays. Since ‘heart’ (šà) can also mean ‘interior,’ or ‘penis,’ the subtext of the line is, ‘May they place his penis in my interior for me.’”<sup>49</sup>

The actual connotations of this euphemism, however, are somewhat more nuanced. In a recent dissertation, Hoppe redefines the term: “ŠÀ.ZI.GA

41 *ymlu lbh bšmht*, KTU 1.3.ii.26

42 *tṭbrn lby*, “you will break my heart,” KTU 2.72.16

43 Cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 479–480. The standard edition of these texts is Biggs, ŠÀ.ZI.GA.

44 Biggs, ŠÀ.ZI.GA, 2.

45 Biggs, ŠÀ.ZI.GA, 3.

46 Noegel, “Maleness,” 82. Unfortunately, Noegel does not cite the texts that contain this description.

47 Noegel, “Maleness,” 82 n. 77.

48 Noegel, “Maleness,” 83 n. 79.

49 Assante, “Sex,” 41. Text source: Sefati, *Love Songs*, 248. One is reminded of Song 5:4, where the man inserts his “hand” into the woman’s “hole” (דודי שלח ידו מן-החור).

bezeichnet die sexuelle Appetenz von Männern und Frauen, deren Fehlen beim Mann zu einer Erektionsstörung führen kann.”<sup>50</sup> He bases this redefinition in large part on evidence from the Assur Medical Catalog, which includes incipits like ŠÀ.ZI.GA.MUNUS.A.KÁM: “[incantations] to make a woman come [and for] arousing a woman’s desire.”<sup>51</sup> In her discussion on this line, Steinert concludes that “the translation better fitting the Sumerian expression šà-zi-ga ‘raising/lifting the heart’ is thus ‘arousal [of desire]’ rather than ‘potency.’”<sup>52</sup> This redefinition can be successfully inserted into most of the examples above, so a broader meaning of “arousal” for heart in Mesopotamian sources is a safer conclusion. With that, we turn to the next Akkadian parallel sometimes cited for לִבָּב.

The verb *labābu* is, of course, the simple Akkadian equivalent of Hebrew לִבָּב. It has the meaning “to rage, to ravage” and is the root of the common noun *libbātu*, “anger.” (Notably, given my previous observations, the Š-stem verb *šulbubu* refers to the hot ravages of fever.)<sup>53</sup> In an influential article, Waldman argued that this verb was the cognate to לִבָּב in Song 4:9. He notes that לִבָּב in its meaning of “incite anger” is attested in a midrash,<sup>54</sup> and suggests that “a semantic development has taken place in the Hebrew from a sense of ‘rage’ or ‘be aroused to fury’ to one of ‘be aroused sexually.’”<sup>55</sup> While he admits that the Akkadian verb does not evince that development, he points to other linguistic instances that do, including the Greek ὀργή (“passion, wrath”) or ὀργάω (“swell with lust, be excited”) and the Hebrew root רָעַז, connected to both anger and sexual love.<sup>56</sup> Waldman does not mention it, but that root’s Akkadian cognate, *ezēzu*, has similarly mixed associations, as Foster notes: “Arousal’ [*uzzu*] may refer to onset of sexual desire or anger.”<sup>57</sup> As a whole, Waldman’s argument is intriguing, and it brings in an impressive array of etymological evidence, although it would be considerably stronger with any attestations where Akkadian *labābu* was used in a sexual context.

The final Akkadian parallel is one that has not, to my knowledge, been noted by any biblical commentators: the words *libbu* and *liblibbu*. *Liblibbu* most

50 Hoppe, “Texte,” 11.

51 Steinert, “Assur Medical Catalogue,” 217.

52 Steinert, “Assur Medical Catalogue,” 266.

53 Cf. CAD L.7, which translates KAR 321 r. 6. (*išātu tu-šal-bi-bu-šu tuṭib širīšu*) as “(the one that) fever has ravaged, his flesh you soothed.” Propp (*Exodus 1–18*, 199) cites this instance when he connects *lababu* to the לִבָּב of Exod 3:2.

54 Waldman, “A Note on Canticles 4:9,” 216.

55 Waldman, “A Note on Canticles 4:9,” 215.

56 Waldman, “A Note on Canticles 4:9,” 215.

57 Foster, *Before the Muses*, 186.



commonly means “descendant, offspring,” but it probably originally derived from the more specific meaning of “offshoot of a date palm.”<sup>58</sup> The only major study on date-palms in Akkadian sources makes it clear that these offshoots are referred to as *libbu*<sup>59</sup> or *libbi libbi* (*liblibbi*).<sup>60</sup> They were apparently a common economic product whose leaves were used for weaving products like rope.<sup>61</sup>

Although this meaning is unattested in Hebrew, לְבָב and לְבָבָא appear in Jastrow's dictionary of Aramaic, with the definition “to bloom, sprout.”<sup>62</sup> We do not have an alternate name for palm tree offshoots, and we do know that palm cultivation took place widely in ancient Israel,<sup>63</sup> so it is reasonable to suppose that the term also had this meaning in Israelite date cultivation. Of course, 2 Sam 13 is not an agricultural text, but its central female character is Tamar, תָּמָר, which means “date-palm.” Thus, the link to the date-palm's reproductive cycle is, at the least, suggestive. One is reminded of Song 7:8–9a:

זֹאת קוֹמַתְךָ דְּמַתְּהָ לְתָמָר וְשִׁדְיֶיךָ לְאַשְׁכְּלוֹת אָמַרְתִּי אֶעֱלֶה בְּתָמָר אֲחַזְּקָהּ בְּסִסְיָו וַיְהִי-וַיֵּנֵא שִׁדְיֶיךָ כְּאַשְׁכְּלוֹת הַגֶּפֶן וְרִיחַ אֶפְדָּךְ כְּתַפּוּחִים	Your stature resembles a date-palm, and your breasts are its clusters. I have said, “Let me mount the date-palm, let me grasp its flower-stalks!” I would that your breasts were clusters of grapes, and the scent of your nipple <sup>64</sup> like apricots.
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58 While date palms can be propagated by seedling, the combination of genetic variability and the 50% chance of a male (i.e., non-fruit-bearing) plant make this method undesirable (Chao and Krueger, “Date Palm,” n. p.). As an alternative, “Offshoots develop from axillary buds on the trunk near the soil surface during the date palm's juvenile stage. Offshoots, after 3 to 5 years of attachment to the parental palm, produce roots and can be removed and planted” (ibid). Indeed, these offshoots must be removed in order to prevent an entire cluster of palm-trees from growing up around the mother palm; “eventually in place of one straight bole there will be a number of bent and jostling shoots” (Dowson, *Dates*, 37).

59 Landsberger, “Date Palm,” 23.

60 Landsberger, “Date Palm,” 46–47; see also ibid., 29.

61 Contrary to its literal English translation, the term likely did not refer to our “heart of palm” food product (Landsberger, “Date Palm,” 13–14).

62 Jastrow, *Dictionary of Targumim*, 689. Jastrow links these definitions to לְבָב, לְבָבָא, “to blaze,” but the connection between blossoming and blazing is tenuous.

63 For details, cf. Jacob, “Flora,” 807.

64 “Nipple” is my translation of אָף, normally translated as “nose.” It appears most famously in the description of the “gracious gods” in KTU 1.23.34 (*ynqm b āp zd ātrt*, “those who suckle at the nipple of the breast of Asherah”) but also in Akkadian medical texts (CAD A2.187). Cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 637 for a discussion of this possibility here.

In this passage, which comes immediately after a *wasf* about the woman's beautiful body, the fruit-clusters (אֶשְׂכּוֹל) and flower-stalks (סִיסְיָה) of a palm tree become metaphors for the woman's breasts. It requires little imagination to suppose that the offshoots of the palm could have a similar connotation—particularly when the lady in question is literally named “palm tree.”

#### 2.4 *Bringing Together the Evidence*

The term לִבְבוֹת clearly encompasses a complex blend of allusions and connotations. The many possibilities we have discussed include:

- Boiled yeasted dumplings that may have visually resembled a pair of breasts;
- the heart, and the emotional forces that it conveyed;
- the verb לָבַב, connoting sexual arousal and heat, and its possible Akkadian cognate *labābu*;
- Akkadian and Sumerian texts that use “heart” as a euphemism for sexual desire;
- the Akkadian term for date-palm shoots that bud from the main trunk.

Clearly, these allusions are varied and cannot be united into a single “true” meaning. Rather than argue for one of them, I therefore turn to the idea of the “metaphoric gestalt”: the range of meanings and connotations that an object can entail, instead of signifying a simple one-for-one correspondence with a single idea. The *levivot* were more than food; they connoted emotions, passions, folly, arousal, heat, and a woman's breasts—specifically, the offshoots of a *Tamar*. Many or most of these associations, we can surmise, were known by the author and therefore projected onto Amnon's mind when he used the term, whether in direct dialogue or in his thoughts (as reflected in the narrator's vocabulary). The word לִבְבוֹת is foreshadowing and embodied metaphor; its allusiveness explains why David omits it from his order to Tamar and uses a more neutral term.<sup>65</sup> And as the next section will demonstrate, the *levivot* are not our only clue to the sexualized point of view that dominates Amnon's thoughts.

65 As a parallel, if this took place in the modern world, Amnon might have asked Tamar to deliver him a lollipop—a treat with sexual connotations that range from Lil Wayne to Nabokov. David, for his part, might have asked her to take him “candy.” Bringing Amnon a lollipop would not represent disobedience to David (contra Reis's interpretation in “Cupidity and Stupidity,” 47), but rather a fulfillment of his request; meanwhile Amnon would view it as vindication of his own narrative. Notably, Amnon requests “a pair of *levivot*” (v. 6), but Tamar simply makes him “*levivot*” (vv. 8, 10), indicating that she did not fulfill that particular aspect of his lustful vision.

### 3 Liquid Definitions: יצק and מִשְׁרֵת

The NRSV translates 2 Sam 13:9a as “Then she took the pan and set them out before him,” evoking a domestic image of a tray of baked goods. Yet as we have already established, these goods were boiled (בשל), not baked. A closer examination of v. 9 reveals that two of its key words have also been consistently mistranslated, thereby obscuring the actual narrative scene—and, consequentially, its metaphoric associations.

The first key word is the central verb יצק; most modern translations render it as “to set out” (the *levivot*), which McCarter supports with a detailed philological aside:

Josh 7:23 shows that *yāṣaq/hiššiq lipnê PN* means “set before” or “put down in front of.” In reference to food, then, it means “serve” (cf. 2 Kings 4:40, 41) like *yšq bʿap-* in the hippatric texts from Ugarit (CTCA 160 [= UT4 55]:3, 5, 9, 29; 161 [= 56].11, 16, 20, 22).<sup>66</sup>

But McCarter, like other modern translators, does not address the plain meaning of the verb in both Hebrew and Ugaritic: to pour out a liquid, whether water, molten metal, or (as in the 2 Kings passage he cites) stew. It appears in this meaning in dozens of locations in the Hebrew Bible. The only two exceptions I can find, in which יצק does not refer to a liquid, are Job 38:38 (in which dust is poured out) and Josh 7:23 (in which silver coins are poured out); but both dust and coins refer to liquid-like masses of countless small objects, which can be “poured” in English as well.<sup>67</sup> (The same is true of McCarter’s cited hippatric texts, which refer to pouring a medicinal liquid or ground powder into a horse’s nose.)<sup>68</sup>

66 McCarter, *II Samuel*, 322.

67 In modern physics, these substances would be called “granular materials,” defined as “Matter that is made up of a large number of discrete particles larger than a micron in size. Examples of granular materials are sand, cement, grain, and powders.” (Law and Rennie, *A Dictionary of Physics*, n.p.) Although granular materials may be comprised of solids, they behave like liquids in many situations, and can therefore be treated linguistically as liquids.

68 For instance, Pardee (“Trente ans,” 155–188) translates KTU 1.85.2–4:

2) <i>kygʿr ššw št ʿqrbn</i>	Sile cheval tousse, (une mesure)-šT de “la plante-scorpion”
3) <i>ydk w ymsš hm b mskt d lht</i>	on doit broyer et la dissoudre soit dans un mélange de
4) <i>hm b mndg w yšq b āph</i>	jus pur
	soit dans du MNDG et lui administrer (ceci) par les
	naseaux.

Moreover, most ancient translations recognized that the verb's emphasis was on expelling, not presenting: the Septuagint uses the verb *κατακενώω* ("to empty out"), Targum Jonathan uses *רִיק* in the *aphel* (again, "to empty out"), and the Vulgate uses *effundo* ("to pour out"). Only the Peshitta uses *סנן* (*sym*, "to set out"), and I will return to the Peshitta's translation momentarily. Thus, most linguistic parallels indicate that we should translate *וַתִּצֶק* as "and she poured out"—a translation that might cause some concern in the absence of a liquid, but is utterly natural after boiling a dumpling.

Shafer-Elliott develops this idea further by examining *מְשֻׁרֶת*, a *hapax legomenon* normally translated as a variant of "baking tray."<sup>69</sup> Relying on a meaning proposed by Strong's Concordance, she translates it instead as a perforated dish, i.e., a colander—an appealing possibility, if there were support for that etymology beyond Strong's unsubstantiated claim.<sup>70</sup> Even if Shafer-Elliott is correct, though, it reinforces the image of Tamar as pouring out a liquid rather than setting out a solid.

More likely is a pair of possibilities that I have not seen elsewhere—two potential emendations that have a similar result. The first, which does not require changing the consonantal text, simply repoints the *sin* as a *shin*, making *מְשֻׁרֶת* a variant<sup>71</sup> on the word *מְשֻׁרָה* ("liquid," from the conjectured *וַיִּשְׂרָה* \**שרה*, which is attested in cognate languages<sup>72</sup>). The term *מְשֻׁרָה* only appears once in the Bible (Num 6:3, where it refers to a grape-derived liquid), but is well attested extrabiblically; in Aramaic, Jastrow defines it as "infusion, steeping."<sup>73</sup> This, I believe, is the likeliest possibility.

The other option involves emending the *ר* to a *כ*<sup>74</sup> and the *ש* to *ס*,<sup>75</sup> resulting in \**מסכת*. This feminine form does not appear in the Bible, but its root verb *מסך* and the noun *מִסְכָּד* do, with connotations of a mixed liquid; cf. Prov 9:2, 5 and Ps 102:10. While a consonantal emendation is a more substantial change,

69 This meaning has no clear etymological support, but it became common in later Hebrew and Aramaic (cf. McCarter, 2 *Samuel*, 317). However, as with the term *levivot*, these later instances may have been influenced by the popular reading of 2 Sam 13.

70 Shafer-Elliott, *Food*, 171. Shafer-Elliott does not mention the Lucianic Text's translation, which may support her idea. It translates this first phrase, *καὶ ἔλαβεν εἰς ὃ ἀποχεύουσιν*, "and she took [that] into which they pour."

71 There are several similar instances of feminine nouns varying between a ה- and a ת- ending, e.g., *גִּדְרֶת/גִּדְרָה* ("wall"). Cf. GKC 94–95 for other examples.

72 Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 4:1653.

73 Jastrow, *Dictionary of Targumim*, 858.

74 This emendation assumes an orthographic error in scribal transmission. Cf. Tov's discussion (*Textual Criticism*, 245–247) of the ד/ר cluster, the ב/כ cluster, and the overlaps between the two (e.g., Josh 11:2 and 15:47).

75 As Gesenius notes in §6k, the two sibilants can be interchanged in Hebrew.

it has the felicitous result of appearing in conjunction with the verb יצק in the aforementioned Ugaritic hippiatric text KTU 1.85.2–4:

- 2) *k ygr ššw št 'qrbn* If the horse has a bad cough, one should  
 3) *ydk w ymsš hm b mskt d lht* bray<sup>76</sup> a šT(-measure) of “scorpion-plant”  
 4) *hm b mndg w ysq b aḫ* and dissolve it either in a mixture of natural  
 juices or in MNDG and administer it through  
 its nostrils.<sup>77</sup>

Although this context is medicinal rather than culinary, it reiterates the definition of *mskt* as a liquid mixture that could be poured (*yṣq*).

Regardless of whether the error was in pointing or in orthographic transmission, the fact that מִשְׁרַת is a *hapax* made it more susceptible to inaccurate transmission. Indeed, the generally faithful translator of the Peshitta chose to avoid the phrase altogether.

2 Sam 13:9a	Hebrew	Syriac
Original	וַתִּקַּח אֶת־הַמִּשְׁרַת וַתַּצֵּק לִפְנֵי וַיִּמְאַן לְאָכֹל	ܘܡܨܒܬܐ ܠܚܘܬܐ ܐܫܡܪܬܐ ܡܘܨܒܘܫܐ. ܐܠܐ ܥܠܐ ܥܘܕ ܠܚܘܬܐ.
Translation	Then she took the liquid and poured it out before him, but he refused to eat.	Then she took the “heart-cakes” and set [them] before him, but he would not eat.

Similarly, the Vulgate translates הַמִּשְׁרַת as *quod coxerat* (“that which she had cooked”). It appears that these ancient translators were as puzzled by the obscure term as the Masoretes must have been.

Regardless of which emendation is closer to the original text, we now have both a verb referring to liquid and a noun meaning “liquid,” leading to a straightforward series of events: Tamar boiled the *levivot*, then took the cooking liquid and poured it out, thereby turning out the *levivot*, as an American Southerner might pour out a portion of chicken and dumplings. Thus, the text’s picture is very different from Tamar presenting a tray of baked goods; instead, we see her picking up the pot of simmering liquid and pouring it before Amnon. Having

76 I.e., powder or crush.

77 Translation from Bordreuil and Pardee, *A Manual of Ugaritic*, 224. Emphasis mine.

clarified the narrative details, we can turn to the narrative and metaphoric significance of those details.

#### 4 A Recipe for Passion

In Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the villainous Claude Frollo confesses his passion for the beautiful Esmerelda in the song "Hellfire." Multiple kinds of fire intertwine in this musical and visual spectacle: the threat of hellfire, the metaphorical flames of lust, the promise of a witch's pyre, and the literal fireplace in Frollo's room. This final fireplace is a prime example of a *realized metaphor*: a conceptual metaphor (LUST IS HEAT) that becomes embodied, not in a statement that cannot be taken literally, but in the actual diegetic<sup>78</sup> framework of the narrative. Frollo's room literally has a fire that is literally burning—but that burning points metaphorically toward the passion of his lust.<sup>79</sup>

In the same way, Tamar's *levivot* are a literal part of her narrative. Nevertheless, the fact that these "heart-cakes" (with all their associated connotations) appear surrounded in simmering liquid is no incidental detail. In fact, boiling carries connotations both anthropological and metaphorical.

Anthropologically, Lévi-Strauss has examined the techniques of cooking as part of his broader project on the significance of "the raw and the cooked." He notes the basic divide between boiling and roasting as cooking techniques, and argues that "the boiled can most often be ascribed to what might be called an 'endo-cuisine,' prepared for domestic use, destined to a small closed group, while the roasted belongs to 'exo-cuisine,' that which one offers to guests."<sup>80</sup> Moreover, because the boiled is associated with the domestic (as it requires

78 "Diegetic" is a term popularized by film studies; it refers to things that are real within the narrative (e.g., a character playing a piano), as opposed to elements that are not real within the narrative, (e.g., a piano soundtrack to a scene).

79 This modern example is felicitous because it draws on the same metaphorical associations of heat that I examine in the Hebrew Bible. However, my primary reason for evoking it is to illustrate the concept of a realized metaphor, not to argue that metaphorical associations can simplistically be transplanted from one culture to a vastly different one. As one example of this fallacy, Emanatian ("Everyday Metaphors," 217) has noted that although heat and lust are also associated in the Chagga language, heat is "not ascribed to the *desiring* person," whereas English allows for metaphors like "He has the hots for him." Conceptual Metaphor Theory recognizes that some metaphors are virtually universal, due to their connection to the physical human experience of reality, but their specific framing and connotations must be examined individually in each culture.

80 Lévi-Strauss, "Culinary Triangle," 42.

the use of cooking pots, a bulky manufactured object), he notes “a subsidiary association of the roasted with men, the boiled with women.”<sup>81</sup> To be fair, Lévi-Strauss has meat in mind, not bread, but it is worth noting that even in modern American cuisine, boiled dumplings are considered home cooking (and thus women’s purview), not haute cuisine (and thus the product of male chefs).<sup>82</sup> If Lévi-Strauss is correct, then the cooking method of boiling marked the *levivot* as home cooking, women’s cooking. (A more Freudian analysis might seize upon his observation that boiling “evokes the concave”<sup>83</sup> to posit a link between the cooking-pot and the womb; however, this analysis will sidestep that speculation). This observation stands in addition to the general extent to which bread-making more broadly was “women’s work” in ancient Israelite culture.<sup>84</sup>

The more important association of boiling, however, turns to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). After all, this is a literary passage, not a documentation of real food habits. In CMT, as I touched upon in my discussion of \*לֶבֶת and הַבֵּית, one common and well-explored metaphor is ANGER IS HEAT, along with its more specific version, ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER. Numerous English metaphors realize this conceptual metaphor, e.g., “my blood was boiling,” as do cartoon images of steam coming out of a furious character’s head. As Lakoff and Kövecses have shown,<sup>85</sup> the metaphor is far from confined to English, occurring across the world in completely unrelated languages and cultures. Indeed, it ties closely to the physiological experience of anger, as Lakoff notes when he lists various epistemic correspondences between the “source” (heat of fluid in container) and the “target” (anger). His many correspondences include the following:

Source: The effect of intense fluid heat is container heat, internal pressure, and agitation.

81 Lévi-Strauss, “Culinary Triangle,” 43.

82 For instance, Harris and Guffre (*Taking the Heat*, 51) note, “Because everyday cooking is associated with unpaid labor done by women, [male chefs’] emphasis on technical skills and artistry is another way of addressing feminization threat. Food writers and critics are important in the process of legitimizing chefs and separating high-status cuisine from home cooking, and, therefore, defining professional cooking as ‘men’s work.’”

83 Lévi-Strauss, “Culinary Triangle,” 42.

84 For discussion of this, cf. Meyers (“Material Remains,” 435), who argues for “the virtual exclusivity of women as producers and distributors” of bread; see also the broader work of Meyers (e.g., “Having Their Space,” 23–28), Ebeling (e.g., *Women’s Lives*, 48–52) and Ackerman (e.g., “Digging Up Deborah,” 178–180) on the significance of this monopoly.

85 Lakoff, *Women*, 380–415; Kövecses, *Metaphor*, 140–144.

Target: The effect of intense anger is body heat, internal pressure, and agitation.

Source: When the fluid is heated past a certain limit, pressure increases to the point at which the container explodes.

Target: When anger increases past a certain limit, pressure increases to the point at which the person loses control.<sup>86</sup>

Because of these basic physiological associations, it is reasonable to suspect that most languages will metaphorically connect the domains of heat and anger. That said, “reasonable suspicion” is less persuasive than direct evidence from a specific culture, which is why I now turn to the Hebrew Bible itself.

The Bible indeed does link heat and anger, most notably around the common verb חרה (“to burn, to be angry”) and its associated noun חרון (“burning, anger”).<sup>87</sup> The idea of heated fluid is present in passages like Ezek 20:8, where God threatens “to pour out my heat/wrath upon them” (עֲלֵיהֶם חֲמֵתִי לְשַׁפֵּךְ),<sup>88</sup> and similar metaphors where this heat/wrath (חמה) is a liquid abound.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, this metaphor is specifically paralleled with imagery of heat in Ezek 22:22 (where Israel is melted like silver, as evidence that God’s wrath has poured out), in Isa 42:25 (where the pouring of wrath results in Israel “blazing” and “burning”), and in Lam 2:4 (where God pours his wrath “like fire”).

Yet anger is not the only emotion to be symbolized by heat. I have previously discussed the triad of metaphorical associations, present in both English and biblical Hebrew, between anger, lust, and heat.<sup>90</sup> Like anger, lust has a basic

86 Lakoff, *Women*, 387.

87 For discussion, cf. Wood, “חרה,” 322.

88 The noun חמה, here translated “heat/wrath,” follows Koehler et al., *HALOT*, s. v., who give “heat” as their first definition and link it to חמה, “sun/warmth.” However, חמה can also mean “poison, venom,” so it is possible that the passage refers to a metaphorical outpouring of poison from God, rather than a heated liquid. Wood (“חרה,” 322) expands upon the root under and reiterates that heat is the primary meaning, with poison and venom secondary reflections of rising body heat. All that said, I have been unable to find a detailed discussion of whether the metaphor in this passage is “only” a dead metaphor meaning “anger,” or whether it evokes hot liquid or venomous poison.

89 For instance, YHWH has a “cup of wrath” that he shares in Isa 51:17, 22 and Jer 25:15, and he “pours out” (שפך) this wrath (חמה) in Isa 42:24; Jer 6:11; 10:25; Ezek 7:8; 9:8; 20:8, 13, 21, 33, 34; 22:22; 30:15; 36:18; Ps 79:6; and Lam 2:4.

90 Modern examples where lust is metaphorically linked to a heated liquid are abundant. For instance, in his discussion of American literary depictions of desire through metaphor, Charteris-Black (“All-Consuming Passions”) lists desire as fire as the most common “desire”-based metaphor; he cites a pulp romance novel: “So he stopped thinking about it and instead allowed that burning desire to see her again flow through him.” (ibid., 31, citing Haymore, *Confessions of an Improper Bride*). But Charteris-Black’s most intriguing example for our purposes comes from a short story by Ilan Stavans (ibid., 33): “My immediate



physical link to heat—hence Emanatian's description of “two different metonymic foundations” for heat metaphors for sex: the literal body heat generated by sexual activity, and the internal warmth associated with arousal.<sup>91</sup> Within the Hebrew Bible, Prov 6:27–29 and Song 8:6 demonstrate that this metaphorical connection was familiar to ancient Israelite authors. What admittedly does not have clear biblical evidence is a metaphorical link between lust and heated *liquid*,<sup>92</sup> but the image of simmering liquid is a natural conceptually blended metaphor that integrates ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER with LUST IS HEAT; by combining two preexisting, familiar metaphors, the result is innovative but easily understood.

Given all these factors, then, boiling is a natural metaphor for the swells of emotion in Amnon, for whom “love” transformed so swiftly into hatred (2 Sam 13:15)—especially since boiling is itself a transformative process that converts food from raw to cooked. Amnon's volatile lust for Tamar made a simmering liquid the perfect realized metaphor to embody his desire and foreshadow his disgust.<sup>93</sup>

## 5 “It's Only a Cake”

Marian looked back at her platter. The woman lay there, still smiling glassily, her legs gone. “Nonsense,” she said. “It's only a cake.” She plunged her fork into the carcass, neatly severing the body from the head.<sup>94</sup>

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reaction would be to salivate. My underpants would get wet and an unusual, irregular heat, a passionate heat, would follow. The whole thing, salivation and heat and passion, could occur at the middle of the night. But it also happened at the middle of the day.” The liquid in the protagonist's mouth and underpants is inextricably linked to heat and strong emotion: “salivation and heat and passion.” Yet this experience is a liminal one, for it presents a range of reactions from the purely physical (salivation) to the physical-emotional (vaginal lubrication) to the purely emotional (passion). The heat is both literal and metaphorical—in other words, a realized metaphor.

91 Emanatian “Everyday Metaphors,” 225.

92 The closest parallel I can find is in the Akkadian ŠA.ZI.GA incantations against impotence, one of which includes the lines, “Who has poured cold water upon your heart, and has put gloom upon your heart?” (Biggs, ŠA.ZI.GA, 19). If cold water is the opposite of arousal, then heated liquid may represent arousal. This, however, is speculative.

93 In my dissertation, “Inconspicuous Consumption: Conceptual Metaphors of Women as Food in the Deuteronomistic History,” I expand this theory even further, arguing that each stage of Tamar's food preparation corresponds with a stage of her rape. Within that theory, the stage of boiling (לֶשֶׁבֶת) corresponds specifically to Amnon's transformation from love to hatred. However, the broader theory is beyond the scope of this essay.

94 Atwood, *Edible Woman*, 273.

In Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, the protagonist bakes and decorates a woman shaped out of cake. She then offers it to her fiancée, saying, "This is what you really wanted all along, isn't it?" When he refuses to eat and leaves, Marian begins to eat the cake woman herself; after all, she insists to her horrified roommate, "it's only a cake." Yet with this statement, she contradicts her earlier plan, in which her fiancée would have consumed the cake as a substitute for metaphorically consuming and reshaping Marian herself.

So are the *levivot* "only cakes"? Or do they, and the circumstances of their production and serving, constitute a metaphorical insight into the characters of 2 Sam 13? The surprising changes in food terminology in an otherwise coherent literary passage, and the great detail with which we view Tamar's food preparation, point to a deeper, layered set of associations for her dumplings. As I have established, the *levivot* are highly allusive objects, from their physical appearance to their linguistic connotations, and their cooking preparation evokes an atmosphere of simmering tension and steamy innuendo. We watch the tension and innuendo mount through Amnon's eyes, heightened by the sexual desire expressed by Amnon in the chapter's initial scene (vv.1–5), which looms like Chekhov's gun to be unleashed.

Yet there is simultaneously a certain irony underlying the situation. We know, as Amnon does not, that his actions constitute rape, not seduction. If Tamar's vocal protests did not make that fact clear, then we can recall the avenging presence of Absalom, who (Conroy notes) "overshadows the scene from the very start."<sup>95</sup> We can also note the nuanced implications of making Tamar the actor in her food preparation, thus giving her a role, albeit temporarily, of control and agency. In short, 2 Sam 13 is far from an apology for rape; what it does is something much subtler. Through its careful word choices and focalizations, it draws us into the viewpoint of Amnon, thereby providing a grim understanding of the self-deceptive narrative that justifies a rapist's actions. In the Margaret Atwood story, a cake-woman is offered unsuccessfully as a substitute for the metaphorical consumption of a woman; in 2 Samuel, a pair of cakes are similarly rejected by a man, but their baker would not escape so easily. In the allusive metaphoric gestalt of this passage, Tamar herself is consumed.

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95 Conroy, *Absalom*, 26.

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