

Scarlet and Harlots: Seeing Red in the Hebrew Bible

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In this contribution, I offer a semiotic study of seven terms for the color red in the Hebrew Bible. I contend that such an approach allows us to recognize that the terms convey far more than mere hues in that they appear in texts that cluster references to stigmatized sexual behavior and blood and/or that involve implicitly bloody contexts. I first examine eleven texts in which the cluster appears, and then sixteen more that employ the cluster in more subtle ways. Afterwards, I offer an explanation for the cluster by examining the sympathetic and performative aspects of color in the wider Near East – specifically, how red, as the color of blood, encodes notions of protection, fertility, and defilement. Finally, I demonstrate how recognizing this code sheds light on a number of other biblical texts.

Scholars of the ancient Near East have long held an interest in the subject of color. Long ago, Hermann Kees, Roland L. Gradwohl, Wolfdietrich Fischer, and Benno Landsberger set the course for future research by defining color terms with precision and by demonstrating that color is more than an aesthetic category.¹ Since these seminal works, there has emerged an entire field of study concerned with the semiotics of colors. Shaped by research primarily in sociology, psychology, and design, this field of inquiry has helped us to appreciate both the innate and socially determined ways that colors encode meaning in different cultures.² It is the work of the semiotician to ascertain what sorts of associations colors conjure.

1 See, e.g., Hermann Kees, *Farbensymbolik in ägyptischen religiösen Texten*. Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1943); Roland L. Gradwohl, *Die Farben im Alten Testament: eine terminologische Studie*. BZAW 83 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1963); Wolfdietrich Fischer, *Farb- und Formbezeichnung in der Sprache der altarabischen Dichtung: Untersuchungen zur Wortbedeutung und zur Wortbildung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965); Benno Landsberger, “Über Farben im Sumerisch-Akkadischen,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 21 (1967): 139–73.

2 See, e.g., Umberto Eco, “How Culture Conditions the Colours We See,” in *On Signs*, ed. M. Blonsky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 157–75; Anna Wierzbicka, “The Meaning of Colour Terms: Semantics, Cultures and Cognition,” *Cognitive Linguistics* 1 (1990): 99–150; Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, “Colour as a Semiotic Mode: Notes for a Grammar of Colour,” *Visual Communication* 1 (2002): 343–68; Urmaz Sutrop, “Towards a Semiotic Theory of

Typically, semioticians divide signs into three categories: symbolic, iconic, and indexical. Symbolic signs generate meaning through conventions, like language; iconic signs employ visual representations, and indexical signs refer to origins by way of a direct material connection. To use blood as an example, the categories might include the word “blood” (symbolic), a photograph of blood (iconic), or a stain made by blood (indexical). Moreover, regardless of the category, signifiers may convey an entire host of associations. Thus, the signifier “red” can communicate caution, injury, evil, violence, murder, wine, money, or even good luck, depending on the culture in which one finds it. By necessity, the semiotic study of color terms in the Hebrew Bible is limited to “symbolic” signs. The approach employed herein differs from previous studies on color in that it is interested not in the exact hue represented by each term, but in the meanings and associations the symbolic sign “red” might conjure in Israelite culture. For example, while the דָּוֶשׁ , “stew,” (lit. “red stuff”) that Esau ate (Gen 25:30) likely would have been on the browner side of red, this does not negate the term’s semiotic ability to evoke “red” and all that “redness” conjures semiotically in a literary context. Indeed, though דָּוֶשׁ is a general term that Israelites used to refer to a continuum of hues from brown to red to pink, its exact hue matters little for this study since the term for the stew conveys the same semiotic information as the signifier “red.”³

The study of color in the ancient Near East has by no means stagnated

Basic Colour Terms and the Semiotics of Juri Lotman,” in *New Directions in Colour Studies*, ed. C. Biggam, et al. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), 39–48; Maryam Mohammadzadeh Farrodi, *Models of Colour Semiotics*. PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2012; Carole Biggam, *The Semantics of Colour: A Historical Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Such studies have moved the study of color terms well beyond the work of Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, *Basic Colour Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), whose data and universalist theory are often disputed.

- 3 The “literary-conceptual link” discussed by Athalya Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*. JSOTSup 21 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 161, comes closest to a semiotic approach. In particular, she observes that “ דָּוֶשׁ and דָּוֶשׁ , דָּוֶשׁ and דָּוֶשׁ are so similar phonetically that they absolutely demand paranomasia [*sic!*] and speculative etymologization . . .” (p. 161). Note the Targum translates the stew with דָּוֶשׁ דָּוֶשׁ , “red-red (stuff).” Maria Bulakh, “Basic Color Terms of Biblical Hebrew in Diachronic Aspect,” in *Babel und Bibel 3: Annual of Ancient Near Eastern, Old Testament and Semitic Studies*, ed. Leonid Kegan. *Orientalia et Classica* 14 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 181–216, also provides a useful etymological study of four colors (black, white, red, green-yellow) from a comparative Semitic perspective. John Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*. *Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement Series* 33 (Louvain; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2010), 29–30, 119, adopts a similar approach to Brenner, with some modification in terms of taxonomy and greater attention to the ancient translations. Still, like Brenner, Hartley’s study aims to ascertain the semantic parameters represented by each color term, i.e., to clarify their hues more precisely.

since the works of the aforementioned scholars, though advances have come primarily from archaeologists, anthropologists, and art historians working in Egyptology⁴ and Assyriology,⁵ who have had the advantage of working with colorful artistic remains. The study of colors in the Hebrew Bible also has benefitted from several important studies, but they too have not considered color terms from a semiotic perspective.⁶

- 4 See Alfred Kirchoff, "Über Farbersinn und Farbenbezeichnung der Nubier," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 11 (1879): 397–402; Gustave Lefebvre, "Rouges et Nuances Voisines," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 25 (1949): 72–76; Patrick Reuterswärd, *Studien zur Polychromie der Plastik, 1: Ägypten Erwägungen über die ursprünglichen Farbenscheinung*. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis 3 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1958); Siegfried Morenz, "Von der Rolle der Farbe im alten Ägypten," *Palette* 11 (1962): 3–9; "Die Farben des Materials im ägyptischen Kunstschaffen," *Palette* 39 (1978): 19–27; John Baines, "Color Terminology and Color Classification: Ancient Egyptian Color Terminology and Polychromy," *American Anthropologist* 87 (1985): 282–97; *idem*, *Visual and Written Culture in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 242–54; Renate Germer, *Die Textilfärberei und die Verwendung gefärbter Textilien im alten Ägypten* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992); Robert Kriech Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*. Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 54 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993), 147–48, 169–70; Gay Robins, "Color Symbolism," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 291–94; W. Vivian Davies, ed., *Colour and Painting in Ancient Egypt* (London: The British Museum Press, 2001); Elizabeth A. Waraksa, *Female Figurines from the Mut Precinct: Context and Ritual Function*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalism 240 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 102–13; Lorelei H. Corcoran, "Color Symbolism," *Encyclopedia of Ancient History* 3 (2013), 1673–74.
- 5 See Astrid Nunn, *Die Wandmalerei und der glasierte Wandschmuck im alten Orient* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), 17–28; Irving L. Finkel, "A Study in Scarlet: Incantations against Samana," in *Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. May 1994*, ed. Stefan M. Maul. Cuneiform Monographs 10 (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1998), 71–106; Sebastian W. Stork, "Colours in the Ancient Near East: A Survey on Medical and Religious Correlations," in *Farbe-Erkenntnis-Wissenschaft: zur epistemischen Bedeutung von Farbe in der Medizin*, ed. Dominik Groß and Tobias Heinrich Duncker. Anthropina 1 (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), 13–28; Andrea Sinclair, "Colour Symbolism in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Ancient Planet* 2 (2012): 1–13; Martina Zanon, "Color Symbolism in the Ancient Near East: The Royal Tombs of the Cemetery of Ur," in *Proceedings of the 7th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East: 12 April – 16 April 2010*. The British Museum and UCL, London. Vol. 2: *Ancient and Modern Issues in Cultural Heritage. Colour and Light in Architecture, Art and Material Culture*. Islamic Archaeology, ed. Roger Matthews and John Curtis (Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 2012), 221–44; Sara Pizzimenti, "Colours in Late Bronze Mesopotamia: Some Hints on Wall Paintings from Dur Kurigalzu, Nuzi and Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta," in *Proceedings of the 7th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, 303–18; Alexander Borg, "Towards a Historical and Cultural Atlas of Colour Terms in the Near East: Remarks on GREEN and BLUE in Some Arabic and Aramaic Vernaculars," in *Colour Studies: A Broad Spectrum*, ed. Wendy Anderson, et al. (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2014), 31–52.
- 6 See, e.g., A. Guillaumont, "La désignation des couleurs en hébreu et en araméen," in *Problèmes de la couleur: exposes et discussions du colloque du Centre de Recherches de psychologie comparative (mai 1954)*, ed. I. Meyerson (Paris: SEVPEN, 1957), 339–49; G. Scholem, "Farben und

With this in mind, I should like to examine biblical references to the color “red” (אָדוּם “red,” חַמָּץ “carmine,” חַמֵּר “burgundy,” שָׁרֵק “dark-red,” שֵׁשֶׁר “puce,” שָׁנִי “scarlet,” תּוֹלָעָה “crimson,” and כְּרִמְלִיל “vermilion”).⁷ Semantically speaking, together these terms constitute the Macro Category for the Basic Color Term “red.” Individually, each is a hyponym of “red.”⁸ As I aim to demonstrate, these symbolic signs convey far more than hues in that they index literary contexts involving stigmatized sexual behavior.⁹ Moreover, these same texts often include references to blood and/or involve implicitly bloody contexts.

Of course, one can find examples in modern Western cultures of red evoking forbidden sex, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s classic 1850 novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, and numerous “red-light” districts. Yet, one cannot use these examples to assert the existence of a “universal” association, because the semiotics of color

ihre Symbolik in der jüdischen Überlieferung und Mystik,” *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 41 (1972): 1–49; P. Fronzaroli, “Sulla struttura dei colori in Ebraico Biblico,” *Studi linguistici in onore di Vittore Pisani* 1 (1969): 377–89; Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*; Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*.

- 7 Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 33, rejects Gradwohl’s grouping of all similar colors together and instead opts to treat the primary terms for color first and the secondary and tertiary terms separately. I have followed Gradwohl’s approach, because I am interested in the semiotic of redness, i.e., what the term “red” might convey *beyond* color, and not in the precise hue of a given color term. My translations for the various terms denoting “red” merely aim to differentiate them. Unlike Brenner (pp. 130–31), I have not included the term חִכְלִיל and its derivatives, as it denotes darkness, not redness. See similarly, John Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 177–81. It occurs in Gen 49:12 and Prov 23:29 to describe the eyes of someone drunk on wine, but it is never used of wine. In the former passage it parallels לָבָן, “white,” suggesting it is the opposite of white. The Akkadian cognate *ekēlu*, “be dark” and Arabic cognate, حَكِي, “confused, impeded” are insightful. See CAD E 64, s.v. *ekēlu*; Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1968), 616, s.v. حَكِي. Also unlike Brenner (pp. 145–48), I do not include the terms תְּכֵלֶת, “blue,” or אֲרָגָן, “purple,” as they are distinguished from terms for “red” (e.g., Exod 25:4). See also 11Q Temple Scroll 10:12, which records the odd amalgam אֲרָגָן אָדוּם “purple-red” or “purple (and) red” (?).
- 8 See, e.g., Biggam, *The Semantics of Colour*, 21–25, 58–69. Approaches to the study of color are many and varied, depending on the discipline in which one finds them (pp. 9–20; 86–108). In the main, I have tried to avoid the technical jargon and methodologies that inform some recent developments in the field of semantics. Representative of such developments are Robert MacLaury, “Introducing Vantage Theory,” *Language Sciences* 24 (2002): 493–536; Barbara Saunders and J. van Brakel, eds., *Theories, Technologies, Instrumentalities of Color: Anthropological and Historiographic Perspectives* (London/New York/Oxford: University Press of America, 2002); Anna Wierzbicka, “The Semantics of Colour: A New Paradigm,” in *Progress in Colour Studies, Volume 1: Language and Culture*, ed. C.P. Biggam and C.J. Kay (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006), 1–24.
- 9 On sexual relationships in ancient Israel that deviate from normative social boundaries (e.g., adultery, bestiality, gender-bending, incest, sexual coercion, and prostitution), I have found especially useful Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Love, Desire and ‘Sexuality’ in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 90–152.

are culture specific, even if borrowed.¹⁰ My two examples bear this out. The use of red in *The Scarlet Letter* derives from Puritan anti-Catholic interpretations of the whore of Babylon who sits clothed in scarlet in Revelation 17:3–4,¹¹ and red-light districts have their origins in China, where brothels hung red silk lamps outside their doors (also as signs of good luck).¹²

So too is it with red and blood. Though again one might think of this identification as a cultural “universal,” the symbolic sign “red” requires a precise collection of other signs that allow us to interpret it as blood. Moreover, the word “blood” also is a symbolic sign, and thus, it too can signify different things in different cultures, and even within the same culture. In a medical context, blood might signify one’s type, whereas elsewhere it might signify kin relations. Thus, to understand why biblical writers felt compelled to “cluster” terms for red with stigmatized sexual behavior and blood in a single literary context, we must look within ancient Israel’s own semiotic system.¹³

I divide my presentation of the biblical evidence into four sections. In the first, I examine eleven texts in which the cluster appears. In the second, I turn to sixteen texts that employ the cluster in more subtle ways. In the third, I offer an explanation for the cluster by examining the sympathetic and performative aspects of color in the ancient Near East; specifically, how red, as the color of blood, encodes notions of protection, fertility, and defilement.¹⁴ In the fourth and final section, I demonstrate how recognizing this code sheds light on a number of biblical texts.

10 Thus, we also cannot integrate the recent work of social psychologists, who argue that a psychological impulse equates red clothing with sexual availability. See A.J. Elliot and A.D. Pazda, “Dressed for Sex: Red as a Female Sexual Signal in Humans,” *PLoS ONE* 7 (2012): e34607; A.J. Elliot, T. Greitemeyer, and A.D. Pazda, “Women’s Use of Red Clothing as a Sexual Signal in Intersexual Interaction,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 49 (2013): 599–602.

11 See Cynthia Murilla, “The Geneva Bible’s Scarlet-clad Woman and Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne,” *Notes and Queries* 58 (2011): 549–51.

12 Reay Tannahill, *Sex in History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), 191.

13 The way in which the texts combine the three is reminiscent of the clustering device first noted by Jonas C. Greenfield, “The Cluster in Biblical Poetry,” *MAARAV* 55–56 (1990): 159–68: “In the ‘cluster’ the Biblical writer draws from the poetical resources available to him a number of word pairs and standard epithets and uses them to construct a complex poetic structure, or to set the background framework of the material that he is presenting” (160–61). My adoption of his term represents a slight extension of his usage.

14 See Ilana Be’er, “Blood Discharge: On Female Im/Purity in the Priestly Code and in Biblical Literature,” in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 152–64.

Literary Clusters: Red, Stigmatized Sexual Behavior, and Blood

1. GENESIS 38

We first find the cluster in the story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38). After disguising herself as a זונה, “prostitute,” (38:15) and duping Judah into performing his levirate duty (38:15–22), Tamar successfully becomes pregnant and gives birth to twins.¹⁵ The auspicious moment of their births is observed when one of the infants extends his hand from the womb and the midwife binds something פְּשִׁי, “scarlet,” (presumably a thread) around his hand to mark him as the firstborn.¹⁶ However, the child, Zerah, withdraws his hand, and eventually

15 A number of scholars have argued that there is little evidence for “sacred prostitution” in the Near East and that non-cultic prostitution was an accepted, albeit marginalized and stigmatized profession. My not including the term זונה here (38:21–22) is an attempt to avoid that pitfall, though I recognize that the root of the word implies “sacredness.” In addition, Phyllis Bird (see this note, below), has shown that זונה, usually translated “prostitute,” also can refer to stigmatized sex generally, including adultery. Thus, I have avoided the word “prostitute” for this term unless it refers to the profession. See, e.g., Joan Goodnick Westenholz, “Tamar, Qēdēšā, Qadištu, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia,” *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989): 245–65; Martha T. Roth, “Marriage, Divorce, and the Prostitute in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (Madison: University of Wisconsin University Press, 2006), 21–39; Phyllis A. Bird, “Prostitution in the Social World and Religious Rhetoric of Ancient Israel,” in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, 40–58; Stephanie Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Karin Adams, “Metaphor and Dissonance: A Reinterpretation of Hosea 4:13–14,” *JBL* 127 (2008): 291–305, especially 293–94, nn. 4–7, for a useful bibliography. For an alternative way of explaining the terms, see Karel van der Toorn, “Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel,” *JBL* 108 (1989): 193–205. With Genesis 38 in mind, I also note that some relationship appears to have existed between the *qadištu* and midwives in Mesopotamia, as the Atra-ḫasis Epic makes clear. After creating the first human, the mother goddess Nintu declares: “I have created, my hands have made it. Let the midwife rejoice in the *qadištu*’s house” (1 289–90). See also M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting*. Cuneiform Monographs 14 (Groningen: Styx Publications, 2000), 172–73.

16 Cf. b. Gittin 69b, which offers several remedies for passing gallstones, one of which requires taking a scarlet thread (חוטא דזוהריתא) that has been spun by a woman of ill repute (דומה) or her daughter and hanging it on the man’s penis or a woman’s breasts. The Tosefta, Shabbat 7:1, forbids tying a red thread to one’s finger, because it belongs to “the ways of the Amorites,” i.e., the gentiles of the Graeco-Roman world. On the custom, see Heinrich Lewy, “Morgenländischer Aberglaube in Der römischen Kaiserzeit,” *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* 3 (1893): 23–40, 130–44, 238; A. Marmorstein, “Comparisons between Greek and Jewish Religious Customs and Popular Usages,” in *Occident and Orient: Being Studies in Semitic Philology and Literature, Jewish History and Philosophy and Folklore in the Widest Sense, in Honor of Haham Dr. M. Gaster’s 80th Birthday*. Gaster Anniversary Volume, ed. Bruno Schindler (London: Taylor’s Foreign Press, 1936), 409–23. This custom persisted into more recent times usually as a talisman against the evil eye or bad luck. See Michele Klein, *A Time to Be Born: Customs and Folklore of Jewish Birth*

appears second (38:27–30). The thread's color was significant to the author, since presumably a thread of any color could have served the same purpose. Yet, what is its significance? It does not appear to be common to midwifery as it does not mark the birth of the twin Esau or firstborns elsewhere in the ancient Near East.¹⁷ Further, as many biblical passages testify, scarlet cloth was an expensive luxury item, and thus an unlikely material for use during parturition. Thus, while the cord itself marked the firstborn, its color must have held other significance to the author. Indeed, the context of birthing implicitly suggests blood, which would render the thread's color somewhat illegible as a semiotic sign.¹⁸ Finally, I note that the name Zerah derives from an Aramaic root meaning "scarlet."¹⁹ Thus, the author has integrated into a single literary context the cluster: red, stigmatized sexual behavior (here prostitution), and blood.

2. JOSHUA 2

We next find the cluster in the account of the prostitute, Rahab, who binds a "cord of scarlet" (חוט הַשָּׁנִי) to her window as a sign of her oath (Josh 2:18, 2:21). Here again the color would appear significant, though the cord's conspicuous placement in the window suggests that a cloth of any color would have served equally well as a signal. In addition, the spies' deictic reference to the cord, i.e., "bind *this* chord of scarlet thread in the window" (2:18), indicates that it already was in Rahab's possession, and was not an item they had brought with them.²⁰ Therefore, it appears to be connected with Rahab's occupation.²¹ If we

(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1998), 114–15; Elly Teman, "The Red String: A Cultural History of a Jewish Folk Symbol," in *Jewishness: Expression, Identity, Representation*, ed. Simon J. Bronner. Jewish Cultural Studies 1 (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008).

17 See the comment of Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 135: "There is no obvious connection between 'scarlet' (thread) (*šānī*) and the name Zerah and we do not know what the author of Genesis 38 meant."

18 Cf. Ezek 16:6, in which the prophet describes the infant Jerusalem as kicking about in its blood.

19 For discussions of this color and its reflection as both זָהָר and זָהָר, see Gradwohl, *Die Farben im Alten Testament*, 73–78; Fischer, *Farb- und Formbezeichnung in der Sprache der altarabischen Dichtung*, 249–52; Landsberger, "Über Farben im Sumerisch-Akkadischen," 161. F. Zimmern, "The Birth of Perez and Zerah," *JBL* 64 (1945): 377–78, suggests the influence of eastern Aramaic on this text, in which זָהָרִיתָא means "scarlet." Note also the Akkadian cognate, *inzaḥurētu*, "red dye, red wool," likely a loan from Aramaic. *CAD* I 163, s.v. *inzaḥurētu*.

20 Jes Peter Asmussen, "Bemerkungen zur sakralen Prostitution in Alten Testament," *Studia Theologica* 11 (1957): 167–92, infers a bit more from the pronoun: "Wir sehen hier eine Auspielung auf den bestimmten Gegenstand, der das Haus der Rahab kennzeichnete (cfr. וְהָיָה, Vers 18!) und der Bevölkerung der Stadt bekannt war" (p. 182).

21 See similarly Phyllis A. Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 119–39, especially 136, n. 34. Asmussen, "Bemerkungen zur sakralen Prostitution in Alten Testament," 182, sees זָהָרִיתָא as simply meaning

may see the scarlet cord as belonging to the accoutrements of Rahab's trade, then its appearance in the account of Tamar's accouchement, a text in which she disguises herself as a prostitute, must have shared significance. Indeed, the connection between the two texts was not lost on later Jewish exegetes, who opined that Rahab received the scarlet cord from Zerah!²² Moreover, the two narratives share a context of inversion. In Genesis 38, the order of the infants is inverted. In the story of Rahab, the author transforms the scarlet cord from

"died cloth," and thus, cognate with the Akkadian *šinitu* (*CAD* Š/3 47, s.v. *šinitu* A). He then compares it to cloth banners posted by ancient Arab women in polyandric relationships to mark them as "occupied" with their other husband (as discussed in Thomas Achelis, *Die Entwicklung der Ehe*. Beiträge zur Volks- und Völklerkunde 2 [Felber: Berlin, 1903], 30; S. Krauss, "Klassenabzeichen im alten Israel," *ZDMG* 80 [1926]: 1–23). He also provides evidence for the use of cloth banners by prostitutes, citing Ibn Rosteh, *Kitāb al a'lāk an nafīsa*. Vol. 7, p. 107, 10–11 (= M.J. de Goeje, ed., *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, vol. 7 [Lugduni Batavorum: E.J. Brill, 1892]). Indeed, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, vol. 8 (1894), p. xxii, defines راي as "meretrix" (i.e., "prostitute") and adds the Arabic phrase ذات رايه, i.e., "one possessing a cloth." The Latin portion of the entry states that the cloth also marked taverns and veterinarians. According to Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 3, 998–1002, the root راي relates to "seeing" and can refer euphemistically both to women who "see" blood on their menstrual cloths and to the stained cloth itself (i.e., "that which is seen"). The Ibn Rosteh text glosses the name Zarnab Dāt Rāya, who was a wet nurse/concubine to Khālid b. Abd Allah b. Asad b. Kurz, by alluding to the meaning of her name: "one possessing a cloth." While this comparative data is compelling, the reading "scarlet" for רשני is preferred by all the ancient witnesses: LXX κόκκινον, Targum Jonathan והורייתא, Vulgate *coccineus*. Josephus, *Antiquities* v 5, too, translates with φοινικιδας, "red cloth." It also is possible that the Akkadian term *šinitu* refers to red-dyed cloth, as the term can refer to daubing a home with wet clay. Hh XIX 210 also lists TŪG.A.SĀ.A, TŪG.ŠU.ŪR.RA = *širpu* after TŪG.A.GI4.A = *šibutum*, *šinitum*. Since *širpu* means "red dyed wool," it is possible that *šibutum* and *šinitum* do as well. *CAD* Š 208, s.v. *širpu*. Unfortunately, the traditions adduced by Achelis and Krauss, as well as the work of Ibn Rosteh, say nothing about the cloth's color. Others have likened Rahab's scarlet thread to the account in Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.199.2, in which women wear garlands of string (θώμυγος) on their heads to attract strangers for sex; a text adopted with variations by Strabo, *Geography*, XVI.1.20. However, neither Herodotus nor Strabo relates the string's color. In fact, the word θώμυγος can be used of a bow-string (Aeschylus, *Persians*, 461; *Eumenides*, 182) or fishing line (Oppian, *Haliutica*, 3.76). The Letter of Jeremiah 6:43, also refers to women wearing cords: "The women also with cords (σχοινίον) about them, sitting in the ways, burn bran for perfume: but if any of them, drawn by some that passeth by, lie with him, she reproacheth her fellow, that she was not thought as worthy as herself, nor her cord broken." Again there is no color reference, and it is unclear if the cord was wrapped around the head or elsewhere. Therefore, there is no comparative justification for seeing Rahab's scarlet cord either as a banner marking her trade or as an item of apparel.

- 22 See Midrash HaGadol Bereshit, Ḥaye Sara, 23:1. Rashi also relates the passage to the Book of Joshua (Josh 7:2), but observes that the word "hands" appears four times in this pericope to signify four items that Achan (the descendant of Zerah) took as spoil, including a Babylonian garment, two pieces of silver weighing two hundred shekels, and a wedge of gold. This is based on Bereshit Rabbah 85:14.

an emblem of prostitution into a symbol of hope.²³ As such, it serves much like the window, which itself is an object charged with sexual import when associated with a woman, but here serves as a portal of salvation.²⁴

Moreover, the two tales not only share a context of prostitution and scarlet, they involve blood. In the Tamar episode, blood is implicit in the act of birthing. In the Rahab story, the spies underscore the terms of the oath by qualifying that if any one of Rahab's kin were to go out into the street, that דָּמוֹ בְּרֹאשׁוֹ "his blood would be on his (own) head" (Josh 2:19).

3. 1 KINGS 22

The deep associations of the sanguine color also inform the account of Ahab's death. According to 1 Kings 22:35, Ahab was mortally wounded by an archer while disguised in his chariot, and the blood from his wound spilled into the vehicle's casing. The people then brought the bloodied chariot to a pool in Samaria to clean it, and it was there that וַיִּלְקְוּ הַכְּלָבִים אֶת־דָּמוֹ וְהַזְנוּת רָחֲצוּ "the dogs licked up his blood and the prostitutes bathed" (22:38). Since the term "dog" is an epithet elsewhere given to the קַדְשָׁה, "male prostitute" (Deut 23:18–19), the passage has added allusive power. Indeed, the narrator soon informs us that Jehoshaphat rid Judah of the "male prostitute(s)" (הַקַּדְשָׁה), and adds that there was no king in אֱדוֹם, "Edom" (22:47–48), thus concluding the bloody scene by evoking the color אֶדְוִם, "red."²⁵

4. ISAIAH 1

The association of scarlet and prostitution also occurs in Isaiah 1:18–23, in which the prophet describes Zion as a זוֹנָה, "prostitute," (1:21) whose sins he likens to those of the rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah (1:10). He even explains her apostasy in terms that evoke her profession. Thus, he states that righteousness once lodged in her (rather than clients) (1:21), and

23 Indeed, the hope is signaled by the expression תְּקוּת חוּט הַשָּׁנִי, "cord of scarlet thread," since תְּקוּת also means "hope." The dual meaning was espied by the author of 1 Clement 12. See A. T. Hanson, "Rahab the Harlot in Early Christian Tradition," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 1 (1978): 53–60.

24 The "woman in the window" motif appears widely in Near Eastern literary contexts involving promiscuity and iconographic contexts involving the goddesses Astarte, Ishtar, and Kilili. For a collection of the biblical evidence, see Don Seeman, "The Watcher at the Window: Cultural Poetics of a Biblical Motif," *Prooftexts* 24 (2004): 1–50.

25 Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 158, relates the toponyms Edom and אֶדְוִים (Josh 15:7, 18:17) to אֶדָם, "red." However, she connects the toponyms אֶדְוִים (Gen 14:2), אֶדְוִים (Josh 19:36), and אֶדְוִים הַנֶּקֶב (Josh 19:33), to the word אֶדְוִים, "soil." Regardless of the etymologies, all the names semiotically connote "red" and/or "red-soil." I discuss this further below.

he spices his harangue with images of silver (1:22), mixed-wine (1:22), princes (1:23), companions (1:23), and the loaded words אָהַב, “love,” רָדַף, “pursuer,” and שְׁלֹמֹנִים, “payments” (1:23).²⁶ The mention of סִבָּא, “mixed-wine,” is of special note. As the דָּם עֲנָבִים, “blood of grapes,” wine conjures burgundy notions of both red and blood.²⁷

Despite the prostitute’s transgressions, Yahweh declares: “though your sins are like scarlet (שָׁנִים), they will become white as snow, though they are red as crimson (יֵאָדְיִמוּ כְחֹלֶעַ), they shall be like wool” (1:18).²⁸ The Targum’s rendering of שָׁנִים with כְּתִים, “blood-stained,” demonstrates that the color evokes blood in this context. Completing the cluster is Isaiah’s pronouncement that Zion’s hands are דָּמִים מְלֵאוּ, “full of blood” (1:15).

5. JEREMIAH 4

The prophet Jeremiah similarly castigates Jerusalem by asking:

“Why do you clothe yourself in scarlet (תִּלְבָּשִׁי שָׁנִי) and adorn (yourself with) adornments of gold? Why do you render your eyes with kohl? You beautify yourself for nothing. Your lovers (עֲנָבִים) despise you. They seek your life” (Jer 4:30).

Though he does not use the word “prostitute,” his plural use of the sexually charged term עֲנָבִים, “lovers,” and his listing of fine adornments establishes a context of promiscuity.²⁹ In addition, he concludes the prophecy immediately afterwards by describing Jerusalem as a woman giving birth, which again creates a literary context involving blood: “I hear a cry like a woman in labor, vexed as if delivering her first child – the cry of the Daughter Zion groaning,

26 Harlots are said to pursue (רָדַף) their lovers in Hos 2:9.

27 In Gen 49:11 וַיֵּן, “wine,” parallels דָּם עֲנָבִים, “the blood of grapes.” See also Deut 32:14, Sir 39:26, and CAT 1.4 iv 38, in which the Ugaritic phrase *dm šm*, “the blood of vines,” parallels *yn*, “wine”; for “tree resin” as “blood” in Akkadian, see CAD D 79, s.v. *damu*. For the color of wine, see Prov 23:31: “Do not look at wine (וַיֵּן), indeed it is red (וַיֵּאָדֶם).”

28 The early rabbis understood the Isaiah passage to refer to עֵיר הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲלָח שְׂעִיר בְּרֹאשׁ שֶׁל זוֹהוּרִית בְּרֹאשׁ שְׂעִיר הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲלָח, “a strip of scarlet cloth (that) was tied to the head of the scapegoat and sent (into the wilderness)” as a sin offering on Yom Kippur (Mishnah Yoma 4:2). In Mishnah Yoma 6:8, R. Ishmael relates that “a strip of scarlet cloth that had been tied to the sanctuary door turned white when the goat reached the wilderness.” When the cloth turned white, it signified that the peoples’ sins had been forgiven. *y. Shabbat* 9:3 states that, prior to this, a scarlet cloth was placed on the window of everyone’s home and God meted his judgments individually. However, when many failed the test and were embarrassed, the people used just one cloth and attached it to the temple door. *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 48:9 links the scarlet thread to which the lovers lips are likened in Song 4:3 to the scarlet cloth tied to the scapegoat. There is no reference to this cloth in the Bible.

29 On the jewelry of harlots, see also Hos 2:15. On this term, see Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 27–28.

stretching out her palms (saying): ‘Woe to me now! I am fainting; my being belongs to murderers’” (4:31).

6. EZEKIEL 16

Another illustration of the cluster appears in Ezekiel’s prophecy against Jerusalem, which repeats the root זָנָה, “prostitute, fornicate,” twelve times.³⁰ It opens by Yahweh addressing Ezekiel as “son of man (אָדָם)” (16:2), a title that paronomastically evokes both “red” and דָם, “blood.” It then calls Jerusalem’s lineage into disrepute: “... your origins and your birth are from the land of Canaan. Your father was an Amorite, and your mother was a Hittite” (16:3). The prophecy next describes the occasion of her birth. After leaving the womb, her umbilical cord was never cut (16:4), and rather than being cleaned after birth, she was tossed into an open field where Yahweh saw her kicking about: “As you lay there in your blood I said to you, ‘Live!’” (16:6). She then grew and reached puberty, but to her shame, she remained stark naked (16:7). When she became old enough for מְדֻדָּים, “love” (16:8), Yahweh washed her of her blood and dressed her in the finest clothes and bedecked her with jewels. Yet, she used her beauty to become a prostitute (16:15). All the luxury items he had given her, she used in her fornication to idols (16:19). As Yahweh complains: “In all your detestable practices and your prostitution you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, kicking about in your blood” (16:22). However, unlike ordinary prostitutes, she accepted no payments, and instead offered her lovers gifts to seduce them (16:32–34). She even gave them her children’s blood (16:36). For this, Yahweh decreed: “I will sentence you to a punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood: I will bring on you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger” (16:38). Rhetorically, he asks, “have you not committed אֶת־הַזְּמָה עַל־כָּל־תּוֹעֵבוֹתֶיךָ, “the lewdness over all your abominations?” (16:43), again using terms that refer to stigmatized sex.³¹ Yahweh then offers a parable in which he describes her as taking after her mother (16:44–45), and he recites her genealogy, which, *inter alia*, includes her younger sister Sodom (16:46, 16:49). Summarizing her deeds, he concludes: “you have lifted up your lewdness (זָמָתְךָ) and your abominations (תּוֹעֵבוֹתֶיךָ)” (16:58). To provide an inclusio of “redness,” the prophecy concludes by asserting that she is so despised that even the Daughters of Edom (אָדוּם) scorn her (16:57).³²

30 Ezek 16:15, 16:16, 16:17, 16:20, 16:22, 16:26, 16:28, 16:30, 16:31, 16:33, 16:35, 16:41.

31 For זָמָה as “stigmatized sex,” see Lev 18:17; Judg 20:6; Jer 13:27; Job 31:11. On תּוֹעֵבָה, see Lev 18:22; Ezek 22:11.

32 With many versions including the Syriac. Other manuscripts and LXX read here אָרָם, “Aram.”

7. EZEKIEL 23

Ezekiel's prophecy against Samaria and Jerusalem similarly identifies the cities as prostitutes, and sisters of the same mother, using the term זונה, "prostitute," or its derivatives no less than fifteen times.³³ He employs the term זמה, "lewdness," eight times.³⁴ Samaria, the prophet tells us, engaged in prostitution with the Assyrians, who were clad in blue (23:6), whereas Jerusalem outdid her sister's transgressions by lusting for the Babylonians after seeing a picture of Chaldean officers clothed in שש, "puce" (23:14).³⁵ Also suggesting red is Yahweh's reference to wine in his pronouncement against Jerusalem:

"You will drink your sister's cup, a cup large and deep . . . you will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow . . . you will drink it and drain it dry and chew on its pieces – and you will tear your breasts" (23:32–34).

Indeed, for the adulterous ways of the two "sisters" and their תועבותיהן, "abominations," (23:35), Ezekiel proclaims that דם בידיהן, "blood is on their hands" (23:37), a situation that demands a measure-for-measure retribution: "But as for righteous men, they will sentence them to the sentence of adulteresses and a sentence of shedding blood (דם), because they are adulterers and blood is on their hands (דם בידיהן)" (23:45). He then concludes by additional references to stigmatized sexual behavior: "Thus will I cause lewdness (זמה) to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness (זמתכנה). And your lewdness (זמתכנה) shall be recompensed upon you" (23:48–49). Once again, a context of prostitution evokes the sanguine color, this time by way of the Babylonians' clothing, wine, and the blood on their hands.

8. JOEL 4

Joel's prophecy against the nations also employs the cluster. He begins by describing the nations' crimes against Israel and Judah: "They cast lots for my people and traded the boy for the prostitute (זונה), and they sold the girl for the wine (יין), and they drank" (4:3). He then calls the warriors to action, again by drawing on images of the wine harvest: "Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample (the grapes), for the winepress is full and the vats overflow – so great is their wickedness!" (4:13). Yet, after Yahweh saves his people, he promises that "the mountains will drip new-wine" (עיס) (4:18). Moreover, as if the metaphorical references to wine and the winepress were not enough to suggest

33 Ezek 23:3 [2×], 23:5, 23:7, 23:8, 23:11, 23:14, 23:18, 23:19, 23:27, 23:29, 23:35, 23:43, 23:44.

34 Ezek 23:21, 23:27, 23:29, 23:35, 23:44, 23:48 (2×), 23:49.

35 Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 37, suggests that it "is a technical lexeme for a 'reddish brown.'"

the redness of blood, Joel adds a final touch of color to the prophecy: “Edom (אֶדוֹם) will become a desert waste, because of violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood” (דָּם) (4:19). “Shall I leave their innocent blood (דָּמָם) unavenged? No, I will not!” (4:21).

9. NAHUM 2–3

The prophet Nahum describes Nineveh as עִיר דָּמִים, “a city of blood” (3:1), and a whore: “all because of the wanton lust of a prostitute (זוֹנָה), alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution (בְּזוֹנוּתָהּ) and peoples by her witchcraft” (3:4).³⁶ The scarlet color was anticipated in Nahum’s description of Ninevite soldiers: “the shield(s) of his soldiers are red (מִצְדָּם), the men of valor are crimson-clad (מִתְלַעֲיִם)” (2:4). The color is again also invoked by reference to wine-drinking: “You too will become drunk!” (3:11).

10. LAMENTATIONS 4

Lamentations also employs the cluster. Thus, we hear that those who had been accustomed to things תּוֹלַעַת, “crimson,” now lie in ashes, and the princes who were redder (אֶדְמוּ) than rubies have become blacker than soot (4:7–8). The lament underscores the promiscuous nature of Judah’s apostasy by saying that its punishment was greater than that of Sodom (4:6). Jerusalem’s priests and prophets have shed דָּם צְדִיקִים, “the blood of the righteous” (4:13), and consequently נִגְזְלוּ בְּדָם, “they are defiled with their blood” (4:13). Nevertheless, Yāhweh will pass his punishment on to the promiscuous Daughter of Edom: “But to you too will the cup be passed. You will be drunk and stripped naked” (4:21). Once again אֶדוֹם, “Edom,” evokes the color אָדוֹם, “red,” as does the reference to wine.

11. REVELATION 17

Though this text does not appear in the Hebrew Bible, I append it here as evidence for the perpetuation of the semiotic code. According to this apocalyptic text, the whore of Babylon sits clothed in scarlet upon on a scarlet beast (Rev 17:3–4).³⁷ Written on her head are the words: “Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.” As the text also informs us, she is “drunk with the blood of God’s holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus” (17:6). The drinking of blood like wine is reminiscent

36 On the view that accusations of witchcraft and sorcery are aimed at female sex and fertility experts, see Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 84–86.

37 The word for scarlet here is κόκκινος.

of Isaiah 49:26: “They shall drink their blood (דָּמָם) like new-wine” (כַּכְּסִיס), and Ezekiel 39:19: “You will drink blood until drunk.” Thus, we again find the cluster: red, stigmatized sex, and blood, in addition to wine.³⁸

Subtle Uses of the Cluster

Sixteen texts represent more subtle uses of the cluster in that they employ one or two of the cluster’s three features (red, stigmatized sex, blood), but suggest the other(s) by way of context or allusion.

1. GENESIS 3

The account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden offers an excellent demonstration. The term for the primordial human is אָדָם, and it appears six times in the chapter.³⁹ Like the name “Edom,” it connotes the color red. As Genesis 2:7 informs us, the man was named after אֲדָמָה, “the red soil,” from which God formed him. The term “soil” also appears three times in the story.⁴⁰ Thus, the text evokes the color red nine times in just twenty-four verses. Since both words also echo the word דָּם, “blood,” they do double duty. While we do not hear explicit references to stigmatized sex, the entire story explains the couple’s forbidden discovery of their own sexual bodies and their potential to reproduce, a context underscored by the repetition of the verb אָכַל, “eat,” seventeen times, itself a sexual euphemism.⁴¹ While one might infer that Adam and Eve did not have sex until Adam “knew her” in the next chapter (4:1), his reference to her as the אִמָּה, “mother,” of all living humans in 3:20, reveals otherwise.⁴²

38 The early Church Fathers interpreted the scarlet color of Rahab’s cord (Josh 2:18, 2:21) as denoting the blood of Christ. See F. Vattioni, “Il filo scarlatto di Rahab nella Bibbia e nei Padri,” in *Atti della Settimana Sangue e Antropologia Biblica nella Patristica (Roma, 23–28 novembre 1981)*. Vol. 1, ed. F. Vattioni (Rome: Centro studi sanguis Christi, 1982), 81–117; M. Beek, “Rahab in the Light of Jewish Exegesis,” in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala: Festschrift für Prof. Mag. Dr. Dr. J.P.M. van der Ploeg O.P. zur Vollendung des siebzigsten Lebensjahres an 4. Juli 1979*, ed. W.C. Delsman, et al. AOAT 211 (Neukirchen-Vlyun: Butzon and Bercker Kevelaer, 1982), 37–44, especially 40.

39 Gen 3:8, 3:9, 3:12, 3:20, 3:22, 3:24.

40 Gen 3:17, 3:19, 3:23.

41 Gen 3:1, 3:2, 3:3, 3:5, 3:6 (2×), 3:11 (2×), 3:12, 3:13, 3:14, 3:17 (3×), 3:18, 3:19, 3:22. The text also repeats the term גַּן, “garden,” eight times, which also carries sexual overtones. See Gen 3:1, 3:2, 3:3, 3:8 (2×), 3:10, 3:23, 3:24. On these euphemisms, see Stefan Schorch, *Euphemismen in der Hebräischen Bibel*. Orientalia Biblica et Christiana 12 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999); Shalom Paul, “Euphemism and Dysphemism,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 6, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Keter, 2006), 549–50; Scott B. Noegel, “Euphemism,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffrey Khan, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 869–71.

42 The man’s declaration that the woman is “is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23), also underscores their immediate familial relation, which makes their eventual sexual union

2. GENESIS 4

This pericope describes how Eve's firstborn son, Cain, invited his brother Abel out into the field and murdered him (4:8). Apparently, he had become jealous when Yahweh accepted Abel's sacrifice (the firstborn of his flock) and not his own (4:3–4). The story subtly resounds the color "red" and the word "blood" numerous times by repeating the name אָדָם, "Adam," (4:1, 4:25) and the word מְדָרָא, "soil," (4:2, 4:3, 4:10, 4:11, 4:12 [2×]). The connection between the "soil" and the "blood" is made explicit in Yahweh's curse of Cain:

Yahweh said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood (דָּם) cries to me from the soil (מְדָרָא). Now cursed are you. From the (very) soil (מְדָרָא) that opened its mouth to take your brother's blood (דָּם) from your hand. When you work the soil (מְדָרָא), it will no longer yield its strength for you. A roamer and wanderer you will be on the earth (אֶרֶץ)" (4:10–12).

Cain's reply clarifies that he understood the connection between his crime and his curse, for he replaces Yahweh's use of the word אֶרֶץ, "earth": "Today you drive me from off of the face of the soil (מְדָרָא), and from your face" (4:14).

The story nowhere explicitly refers to stigmatized sexual behavior. Nevertheless, it is implicit in the narrative at several junctures, as a host of exegetes have averred since antiquity. First, there is some question as to who is the father of Cain and Abel. While 4:1 states that Adam "knew his wife Eve" and she conceived, Eve's own words immediately afterwards raise doubts: קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה, "I have obtained a man with Yahweh" (4:1). It is not clear exactly what is meant here, though many have sought to harmonize the passage by interpreting it to mean "with the help of Yahweh." Other traditions assert that the true father was the serpent, a demiurge, archon, fallen angel, Satan, or the like.⁴³ Eve's use of the term אִישׁ, "man," here (instead of בֵּן, "son") further complicates matters.

The narration of Abel's birth also is suggestive (4:2). It makes no reference to Adam "knowing" Eve or to her conception, and it offers no explanation as to why she gave him this name. The births of Cain and Abel stand in contradistinction to that of her third son Seth, about whom the narrator states: "And Adam knew his wife again and she bore a son and she named him Seth" (4:25).

Moreover, the story of the first descendants leaves unanswered where Cain found a wife. According to 4:17, "Cain knew his wife, she conceived, and she bore Enoch." If Adam, Eve, and Cain were the only living humans, there was

an act of incest. On the theological dilemma of incest in first generation humans, see below, pp. 15–17.

43 On the many ways that exegetes have tried to explain this problem, see John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry*. Themes in Biblical Narrative 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 11–20.

only one female option for Cain – Eve. Several ancient traditions grapple with the problem of implied incest in various ways, often by positing that they were someone’s daughters. Some traditions view these daughters as twin sisters to Cain and Abel, others as Cain and Abel’s daughters.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, there are no scenarios that leave one without a stigmatized sexual relation (cf. Lev 20:17). Thus, some traditions simply absolve the family of sin and justify the incest as necessary to populate the earth.⁴⁵

3. GENESIS 9

A subtle use of the cluster again appears in the account of Noah’s life after the flood. Yahweh follows his command to be fruitful and multiply (9:1) with prohibitions against eating and shedding blood. His words ooze the color red.⁴⁶

“But flesh with its lifeblood (דָּמוֹ) you will not eat; or I will seek your lifeblood (דַּמְּךָ). From every living animal I will seek it. And from the human (אָדָם), from a man (and) his brother, I will seek the life of the human (אָדָם). Whoever sheds the blood (דָּם) of the human (אָדָם), by the human (אָדָם) shall his blood (דָּמוֹ) be shed; for in the image of God he made the human” (אָדָם) (9:4–6).

Yahweh then places a (rain)bow in the sky as a symbol of his covenant (9:12–17), an image of divine virility that also signals the humans’ renewed ability to “be fruitful and multiply” (9:7).⁴⁷ Shortly afterwards, the narrator tells us that Noah was a man of אֲדָמָה, “the soil,” who built a vineyard (9:20). After getting drunk on his wine, he passed out in his tent, where his son Ham saw עֶרְוַת אָבִיו, “his father’s nakedness” (9:22). Upon awaking, Noah perceived that Ham had *done* something to him (9:24), and while the text does not explicitly state what

44 Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition*, 20–27.

45 *Ibid.*, 27.

46 The Ethiopic version of the Book of Enoch states that when Noah was born his body was “as white as snow and red (*qyh*) like a rose” (106:2, 106:10), a reference that the Apocalypse of Peter (v. 3) appears to have adopted to describe two figures whose bodies were white and “ruddy” (έρυθρότερα). Observed already by R.H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), 302–3, n. 10. See Michael A. Knibb and Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in the Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), vol. 1, 408; vol. 2, 245. Note that 4QEnc 5 i 28 reads שְׁמוֹק, “red.” On slight variants in the Ethiopic fragments, see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91–108* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 623–24. A fragmentary text from Qumran (4Q534:1) also uses the term שְׁמִקְמִק, “reddish,” likely in reference to Noah’s body at birth.

47 See Jacobs, “Divine Virility in Priestly Representation: Its Memory and Consummation in Rabbinic Midrash,” in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă. Bible in the Modern World 33 (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2010).

happened, a host of ancient exegetical traditions understood Ham's deed as voyeurism, castration, sodomy, or maternal-incest.⁴⁸ Noah then cursed Ham's son Canaan (9:25).

4. GENESIS 34

The sad story of Dinah's rape by Shechem also employs the cluster allusively. The narrative uses the verb "subdue" (עָנָה) explicitly (34:2), refers to her as "defiled" (34:5, 34:13, 34:27), and later likens her to a זֹנֶה, "prostitute" (34:31), thus establishing a context of stigmatized sex. While the text does not refer explicitly to the color red, Shechem is the son of Hamor (חַמּוֹר), a name that suggests חָמֵר, "burgundy." Not only does the name appear ten times, but the story concludes by noting that the plunder seized by Simeon and Levi included חַמְרֵיהֶם, "their asses" (34:28).⁴⁹ The word "blood" does not appear explicitly in the narrative. However, it is implicit in the circumcision of all the male Hivites (34:15, 34:17, 34:22 [2×], 34:24), and in Simeon and Levi's murder of all the Hivite males, including Hamor and Shechem (34:25–27).

5. JUDGES 16

The account of Samson and Delilah similarly employs the cluster with subtlety. From the start of the story, the narrator informs us that Samson went to Gaza and slept with a זֹנֶה, "prostitute" (16:1). Soon afterwards, he fell in love with Delilah, whom some later traditions also see as a prostitute.⁵⁰ The author tells us that she was from Wadi Soreq (13:4). The name Soreq (שָׂרֵק) is apt indeed, as it is the name of a vine tendril that is dark-red in color.⁵¹ Her home is thus the "Wadi Red-Vine." Of course, as a Nazir, Samson was forbidden from coming into contact with grapes and drinking wine (13:7, Num 6:1–4), though he already had visited the vineyards of Timnah (Judg 14:5) and held a seven-day drinking feast to celebrate a previous wedding (14:10, 14:17).⁵² We also thrice

48 John S. Bergsma and Scott W. Hahn, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20–27)," *JBL* 124 (2005): 25–40.

49 Gen 34:2, 34:4, 34:6, 34:8, 34:13, 34:18 (2×), 34:20, 34:24, 34:26. With Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 162, I relate the terms חָמֵר, "burgundy-wine," חַמּוֹר, "ass," and "roe-buck," חַמּוֹר, to the color חָמֵר, "burgundy."

50 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 5.306, merges the figure of Delilah with the prostitute with whom he had just slept, and refers to her as a ἐταροζομένης, "courtesan."

51 Cognates are instructive: Akkadian *šarku* (not *šarqu!*), "blood-red," and Arabic شَرَقَ, "become red like blood." *CAD* Š/2 63, s.v. *šarku*. See Landsberger, "Über Farben im Sumerisch-Akkadischen," 145, n. 28. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 4, 1539, s.v. شَرَقَ. Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 174, sees the Hebrew root as referring to "a bright sheen or lustre of a 'reddish' colour."

52 On the dual meaning of Soreq and its use in the narrative, see S. Segert, "Paronomasia in the

hear “red” when Samson informs Delilah how to subdue him. During the first two ruses, and when he finally relents and tells her the truth, he states that her actions would make him like any אָדָם, “man” (16:7, 16:11, 16:17). Though the word “blood” does not appear in the story, it is implicit in his suicide killing of more than three thousand men and women at tale’s end (16:27–30).

6. 2 SAMUEL 1

In David’s dirge over Saul and Jonathan, we find clear references to scarlet and blood. After informing the Amalekite who finished off Saul עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ [דָּמָךְ] דָּמִיךָ, “your blood be on your (own) head” (1:16), and crying מִדָּמַי הַלְּלִים, “from the blood of the slain” (1:22), David laments: “Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet (וְשָׁרְטָה) and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold” (2 Sam 1:24). Note too that the dirge’s words “tell it not in Gath” (2 Sam 1:20), evoke not just the Philistine city, but also the “winepress.” Though there is no explicit reference to stigmatized sex, the sexual association of scarlet is perhaps suggestive given David’s much debated statement about Jonathan: אֶהְבֶּתְךָ לִי מֵאַהֲבַת נָשִׁים, “your love was greater to me than the love of women” (1:26).

7. 1 KINGS 3

In this pericope, the author aims to demonstrate Solomon’s divine wisdom by reporting a situation in which two prostitutes approached him, each claiming to be the mother of a living child and blaming the other for killing and replacing her child. Solomon summons someone to cut the child in two, which compels the child’s true mother to request that he spare the child’s life. The text evokes thoughts of blood by reference to the delivery of children (3:18, 3:21) and the threat of severing the child in half (3:25). In addition, the association of red with prostitutes elsewhere naturally here also conjures thoughts of שָׁרְטָה, “scarlet.”⁵³ Moreover, the text evokes the color by way of paronomasia.⁵⁴ Specifically, note the woman’s statement that the child was exchanged when שָׁנָה, “she slept” (3:20), and Solomon’s command to divide the baby לְשֵׁנָיִם, “into two” (3:25).⁵⁵

Samson Narrative in Judges XIII–XVI,” *VT* 34 (1984): 454–61, especially 458.

53 Cf. the promiscuous woman in Jer 4:30 clothed in scarlet. In Graeco-Roman tradition, harlots also were known to wear scarlet as a pretension, replacing priestesses, queens, or brides. See Marie Johnson, Ethel B. Abrahams, and Maria M.L. Evans, *Ancient Greek Dress* (Chicago: Argonaut, 1964), 37–38.

54 On this device in the Hebrew Bible, see Scott B. Noegel, “Paronomasia,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffrey Khan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 24–29.

55 A similar polysemy involving “scarlet” and “two” appears in Prov 31:21.

8. 2 KINGS 3

This chapter describes the Moabites' unsuccessful campaign against the Edomites and the kings of Judah and Israel. According to the narrator, the prophet Elisha rightly prophesied that the wadis would quietly fill with water overnight. The next day, when the Moabites came to war against them, they encountered an optical illusion: וַיִּשְׁכְּמוּ בַבֶּקֶר וְהַשֶּׁמֶשׁ זָרְחָה עַל־הַמַּיִם וַיֵּרְאוּ מוֹאָב וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֶה דָּם וַיִּאֲמְרוּ דָּם זֶה מִנְּגִד אֶת־הַמַּיִם אֲדָמִים כְּדָם: וַיֵּרְאוּ מוֹאָב וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֶה דָּם וַיִּאֲמְרוּ דָּם זֶה מִנְּגִד אֶת־הַמַּיִם אֲדָמִים כְּדָם: וַיֵּרְאוּ מוֹאָב וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֶה דָּם וַיִּאֲמְרוּ דָּם זֶה מִנְּגִד אֶת־הַמַּיִם אֲדָמִים כְּדָם: “When they arose early in the morning, the sun shone upon the water, and to Moab, who was across the water, it was red like blood. They said, ‘This is blood!’” (3:22–23).⁵⁶ Thinking that they had slaughtered each other (“blood” against “blood”), the Moabites rushed to the plunder only to be caught off guard and defeated. Not only does the story employ the words “red” (אֲדָמִים) and “blood” (דָּם), but the term for “shone” is זָרְחָה, the red color whence the name Zerah derives. Moreover, we are told that the water flowed from the direction of אֶדְוִם, “Edom” (3:20), another echo of the color red. In fact, the name אֶדְוִם, “Edom,” appears five times in the story.⁵⁷

Though the tale contains no explicit references to stigmatized sexual behavior, the Israelites deemed the Moabites to have descended from an incestuous relationship between Lot and his firstborn daughter, who had plied him with wine in order to achieve her end (Gen 19:30–38). The tale that describes this incident understands the etymology of the name “Moab” to mean מִן + אָב “from the father,” explaining: וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מוֹאָב הוּא אָבִי־מוֹאָב עַד־הַיּוֹם, “and she called his name ‘Moab’ (lit. “from the father”). He is the father of the Moabites of today” (Gen 19:37).⁵⁸

2 Kings 3 reflects an awareness of this tradition by repeating the words “father” and “son” and by underscoring the kinship differences that exist between Judah and Israel, on the one hand, and Moab, on the other. For example, we hear the term “father” three times in the story. At the start of the tale, the narrator states that Joram “did evil in Yahweh’s eyes, but not as his *father* and mother had done. He got rid of the standing-stone of Baal that his *father* had made” (3:2). When Joram requests help from Elisha, the prophet says: “Why do you want to involve me? Go to the prophets of your *father* and the prophets of your mother” (3:13). Thus, despite the transgression in his family’s past, Joram pos-

56 Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 66, argues that if אֲדָמִים had been the color of blood, there would have been no reason to add the modifier כְּדָם. However, if we keep in mind the expectations of the cluster, then its addition makes perfect sense. Moreover, if אֲדָמִים can denote a range, then the modifier only clarifies the hue.

57 2 Kgs 3:8, 3:9, 3:12, 3:20, 3:26.

58 See Yair Zakovitch, “Explicit and Implicit Name-Derivations,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 4 (1980): 167–80.

sesses a legitimate lineage, unlike Moab. Moreover, we hear the word “father” echoed thirteen times in the name Moab, far more than the story requires.⁵⁹

In addition, the dialogue between Jehoshaphat and Joram distinguishes their kinship from that of the Moabites in a way that recalls the tradition found in Gen 19:38: *וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶן-עַמִּי הוּא אָבִי בְנֵי-עַמּוֹן עַד-הַיּוֹם*: “And she (Lot’s younger daughter) named him ‘Ben-Ammi’ [lit. “son of my people”], and he is the father of the Ammonites of today.” Thus, when Joram asks whether Jehoshaphat will fight with him against Moab, he says: *כְּמוֹנִי כְמוֹךָ כְּעַמִּי כְּעַמְּךָ*: “I am as you are, my people are as your people” (3:7). Bolstering the kinship differences that distinguish Israel and Judah from the Moabites is the author’s four-fold use of the word *בֶּן*, “son.” Observe how we hear of Joram, the *son* of Ahab (3:1), Jeroboam, the *son* of Nebat (3:3), and Elisha, the *son* of Shaphat (3:11), whereas with Mesha, we hear of no father or son, until the story’s end, when he sacrifices *בְּנוֹ הַבְּכוֹר*, “his firstborn son,” upon a wall (3:27), which brings to mind another implicitly bloody image.

9. ISAIAH 63

This prophecy starts with a dialogue in which Yahweh asks, “Who is this coming from Edom (*אֲדוֹם*), from Bozrah, with his carmine (*חֲמוּדִי*) garments? Who is this robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength?” (63:1). The reference to carmine reinforces the root meaning of *אֲדוֹם*, “Edom.”⁶⁰ The introduction initially casts the approaching figure as royalty, or at least someone of wealth, bedecked in a costly garment. However, the next query equates the color to wine: “Why are your garments red (*אֲדוֹם*), like those of one treading the winepress?” (63:2). Yahweh’s response then clarifies that the color is the stain of blood: “I trampled them (the nations) in anger, and trod them down in my wrath. Their ‘juice’ (*נִצְחָם*) spattered my garments and I stained all my clothing” (63:3). In case the metaphorical use of the word “juice” did not register as “blood” with the audience, Yahweh adds, “In my wrath I made them drunk, and poured out their ‘juice’ (*נִצְחָם*) to the ground” (63:6).⁶¹ The use of wine for blood also recalls the name Bozrah (63:1), the root for which, *בִּצֵר*, means “cut off grape clusters” (e.g., Lev 25:5; Judg 9:27; Jer 6:9), whence the related term *בִּצְיָר*, “vintage” (e.g., Judg 8:2; Isa 32:10; Jer 48:32).

59 2 Kgs 3:4, 3:5, 3:7 (2x), 3:10, 3:13, 3:18, 3:21, 3:22, 3:23, 3:24 (2x), 3:26.

60 Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 107, 115, does not treat the *hapax legomenon* *חֲמוּדִי* as a separate color term, though he does observe (p. 115) that the LXX renders it with *ἐρυθρός*, “red,” in this passage. Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 68, understands it as “possibly a ‘bright red’ . . . that “perhaps corresponds to the ‘blood-red’ indirectly referred to by v. 3 (*וַיִּזְחַם*), or the purplish ‘red’ of grape juice which is implied by vv. 2b and 3a.”

61 For wine as suggestive of blood, see also Jer 13:12–14.

10. JEREMIAH 2

A subtle use of the cluster occurs in Jeremiah's oracle against Judah, in which he describes the people's idolatry:

“Under every spreading tree you lie down like a prostitute (נְזִי). I had planted you as a tendril (שֶׁרֶץ), all of it of strong, true. How have you turned against me into a corrupt, foreign vine? Although you wash yourself with nitre and use much lye, your iniquity is blood-stained (נִקְחָם) before me” (2:20–22).

Observe how the prophet strengthens his reference to sinful Judah as a prostitute by integrating the שֶׁרֶץ, “tendril,” of a vine, which, as we have seen, is dark-red in color and suggestive of wine. Note also that though the passage does not employ the word blood, Jeremiah's use of the verb נִקְחָם, “blood-stain,” implies it, as later usage shows.⁶²

11. JEREMIAH 49

Jeremiah's oracle against Edom (49:7–22) similarly employs the cluster. Since Edom is the subject, it allows the prophet to evoke the color red five times.⁶³ His two-fold use of the name Esau (49:8, 49:10), demonstrates an awareness of the traditions concerning Esau's birth. In 49:15, Jeremiah also references red by saying that Edom will be “despised by mankind (מְאָדָּם).” For Esau's transgressions, Yahweh promises to “strip him bare and reveal his hidden parts” (49:10) and to punish him like Sodom and Gomorrah (49:18), statements that underscore the promiscuous nature of Edom's crime. The prophet also colors his words by integrating grapes and wine into his pronouncement (49:9, 49:12). The latter finds a meaningful echo in the name Bozrah (Jer 49:13, 49:22), again suggestive of בָּצֵר, “cut off grape clusters,” and בְּצִיר, “vintage.” Jeremiah concludes his prediction with a context of blood by comparing the warriors of Edom to a woman in labor (49:22).

12. HOSEA 1–4

If we may consider Hosea 1–4 a unified text, then these chapters, too, subtly employ the cluster. They begin with Yahweh commanding Hosea: “Go, marry a prostitute (אִשָּׁת זְנוּנִים) and have children of prostitution (בְּנֵי זְנוּנִים) with her, for the land verily has prostituted itself (זָנְתָה תְּזַנֶּה) before Yahweh” (1:2). Her firstborn is then named Jezreel, because of the דְּמַי יִזְרְעָאל, “blood of Jezreel” (1:3). References to prostitution, adultery, nudity, and illicit lovers continue frequently,

62 Cf. MH נִקְחָם, “(menstrual) blood stain,” and Aramaic נִקְחָם, “blood-stained.”

63 Jer 49:7, 49:17, 49:19, 49:20, 49:22.

and Hosea describes how she ornamented herself with rings and other jewelry (2:13).⁶⁴ Later, the prophet states that due to the land's prostitution, the people פָּרְצוּ וְדָמִים בְּדָמִים נִגְעוּ, "breakthrough, and blood follows upon blood" (4:2). Nevertheless, הִזְנוּ וְלֹא יִפְרְצוּ, "they will prostitute themselves, but not flourish" (lit. "break through") (4:10). Interestingly, the word for "break through" twice used here is the verb used to describe breaching the womb in Genesis 38:29, which provides the namesake for Tamar's child Perez.⁶⁵

Though Hosea does not use any terms for the color red, he evokes redness by integrating wine.⁶⁶ Thus, in 2:8–9, Yahweh threatens to take away the new wine (תִּירוֹשׁ) that he had given her. He also promises to take her vines (גִּפְנֵה), which were payments from her lovers (2:12). Hosea also describes their fornication as the result of inebriation: וַיִּין וְתִירוֹשׁ יִקְחֵלֵב, "Wine and must took away their mind" (4:11). Moreover, he declares: "Even when their mixed-wine (סִבְאָם) is gone, they continue to prostitute, they love the shame of her 'gift'" (4:18). Thus, once again we have a context of prostitution, blood, wine, and birthing.

13. SONG 4

The use of scarlet in contexts of promiscuity explains why the lover in the Song of Songs describes his beloved by saying כַּחוֹט הַשָּׁנִי שִׁפְתֵיךְ, "A thread of scarlet are your lips" (Song 4:3).⁶⁷ Moreover, note that elsewhere in the poem the author offers a different red analogy: "Your mouth is like the best wine" (יֵין) (7:2). In addition, the poet paronomastically refers to שָׁנִי, "scarlet," twice. In 7:2, we hear it in his reference to "your teeth" (שִׁנֵיךְ). In 4:5, he states that "your two (שָׁנֵי) breasts are like two (שָׁנֵי) fawns."⁶⁸ Though the word "blood" does not occur, the references to red and the "blood of grapes" serve well the poem's erotic context. Moreover, abetting the success of the cluster is the poem's rich use of wine and vineyard imagery (4:10, 4:13, 4:16).

64 Hos 2:2–3, 2:4–5, 2:7, 2:9–10, 2:13, 3:1, 3:3, 4:1, 4:10, 4:12–15, 4:18.

65 In Gen 38:29, the midwife is startled when the other infant breaches the womb first: וְהָאִמָּה מָה: פָּרְצָת עָלַיךְ פָּרָץ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פֶּרֶץ "she said, how you have breached for yourself a breach, and she named him Perez" (lit. "Breach").

66 Breaching and wine appear together also in Prov 3:10: וְתִירוֹשׁ יִקְבִיר יִפְרְצוּ: "Your granaries will be filled with plenty, and your vats will burst forth with new wine."

67 On the Song as an invective evoking promiscuity, see Scott B. Noegel and Gary A. Rendsburg, *Solomon's Vineyard: Literary and Linguistic Studies in the Song of Songs*. SBL, Ancient Israel and Its Literature, 1 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

68 Possibly also in  "your tongue," in Song 4:11.

14. SONG 7

A similar use of the cluster appears also in Song 7:6, in which the lover describes his beloved: “Your head upon you is like כְּרִמָּל, the strands of your head like purple.” As Shalom Paul observes, the term כְּרִמָּל here means both “Mt. Karmel” and “vermilion.”⁶⁹ The integration of vermilion in such a sexually charged poem fits well the expectations of the cluster.

Moreover, the erotic descriptions that follow draw heavily upon wine imagery. Thus, the lover says, “your vulva is a bowl of the crescent, let it not lack mixed-wine” (7:3). He then twice likens her breasts to אֲשַׁכְּלוֹת, “grape-clusters” (7:8, 7:9). In 7:10, he compares her palate to “good wine (יַיִן).” Twice he employs the term נֶפֶץ, “vine” (7:9, 7:13), and, towards chapter’s end (7:13), the beloved suggests a fitting place for their tryst: “let us arise-early to the vineyards (כְּרָמִים),” which also recalls כְּרִמָּל. The poem’s punning reference to vermilion, its erotic setting, and its frequent use of wine imagery encourage one to hear שָׁנִי, “scarlet,” paronomastically reflected no less than four times in the pericope. In 7:4, we hear it in his description of her breasts as “two (שְׁנֵי) fawns.” In 7:5, it resounds in the tower of “ivory (הַשֵּׁן).” In 7:10, we encounter it in the smooth wine flowing over the “lips of those-who-sleep (לְשׁוֹנֵי).” Finally, in 7:14, we hear it in the lover’s invitation to seek out fruits of the vineyard, including the “new-ones (לְשׁוֹנֵי).” Thus, just as the poet has embedded “vermilion” in כְּרִמָּל, “Mt. Karmel,” so also has he employed paronomasia to evoke שָׁנִי, “scarlet.”⁷⁰ Once again, the cluster spices promiscuous language with wine and references to red.

15. LAMENTATIONS 1

The lament opens by describing Jerusalem as a wanton woman, weeping at night, with no one to help her from among אֲהַבָּיָהּ, “her lovers” (1:2). She has sinned greatly, so that “all who honored her despise her, for they all have seen

69 Usually spelled כְּרִמָּל (e.g., 2 Chr 2:6, 2:13, 3:14 in reference to textiles in the sanctuary). Shalom M. Paul, “Polysemous Pivotal Punctuation: More Janus Double Entendres,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. Michael V. Fox, et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 369–74 (see esp. 373–74). Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 143–45, and Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 38, both treat the lexeme as a late synonym for שָׁנִי, though כְּרִמָּל does not appear in Avi Hurvitz, *A Concise Lexicon of Late Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Innovations in the Writings of the Second Temple Period*. VTSup 160 (Boston: Brill, 2014).

70 A similar allusion to color occurs immediately before כְּרִמָּל in Song 7:5: “your nose is like the tower of the Lebanon (הַלְבָּנוֹן).” However, unlike “Mt. Karmel,” which resounds “vermilion,” “Lebanon” echoes the color “white.” Note similarly the frequent inclusion of “Lebanon” in Song 4:8 (2×), 4:11, 4:15, and הַלְבֹּנוֹן, “frankincense,” in 4:6. Cf. Isa 1:18 above, in which red and white appear together as opposites.

her nakedness” (עֲרוּתָהּ) (1:8). In retribution for her transgressions, Yahweh sent an army against her: “In his winepress, my Lord trampled Virgin Daughter Judah” (1:15). Not only does the passage suggest blood by way of red wine, as we have seen several times already, but the text soon refers to the color red: “See, Yahweh, indeed my vexation, my mood reddens” (חֲמֵרִי מָרוּ) (1:20).⁷¹

16. PROVERBS 31

The acrostic of the woman of valor offers a special case for consideration as it subverts the conventional language of prostitution.⁷² Far from being a harlot or engaged in some adulterous affair, she is said in every way to be of noble character. She is married and her husband trusts her implicitly (31:11). Unlike a prostitute, who can be hired for a fee, her value is far beyond (red!) rubies (31:10), and rather than plying her trade during the night, she gets up before daylight to provide food for her family and servants (31:15).⁷³ Moreover, the poet tells us that she makes coverings for her bed of the finest textiles, but nowhere is there a reference to a bedroom invitation as convention might suggest.⁷⁴ On the contrary, throughout the text she is thoroughly clothed (31:22), even with “strength and dignity” (31:25). In fact, she makes the clothing herself and sells it to better her household (31:24). The poet makes clear that he is inverting the language of seduction when he concludes: “Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears Yahweh is to be praised” (31:30). Such inversion and the multiple references to textiles allows the poet to say that she provides for her household by clothing them all in *שָׁנִים*, “scarlet” (31:21).⁷⁵

71 Here the text uses *מָעִי*, “my bowels,” to refer to the speaker’s emotional state (as it does in Lam 2:11). Cf. the use of the root *חָמַר* in Job 16:16 in reference to a reddened, weeping face. Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 39, sees *חָמַר* and *חָמַרְוּ* in reference to the inflammation of the face or intestines and not a color, though he does note that many scholars take them to mean red, since it is the color of inflammation.

72 The poem’s context is also suggestive. Note that it follows immediately upon the advice of Lemuel to avoid spending one’s vigor on women (Prov 31:3).

73 On the redness of *כְּנִיָּוִים*, “rubies,” see Lam 4:7.

74 Cf. Prov 7:16–19: “I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let us drink deeply of love till morning; let us enjoy ourselves with love! My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey.” See also Song 1:16, 3:1, 3:9–10.

75 Midrash HaGadol Bereshit, *Ḥayē Sara*, 23:1, interprets the scarlet here as a reference to the scarlet cord of Rahab who saved the Israelite spies (Josh 2:18).

Accounting for the Cluster

The twenty-seven texts examined above demonstrate that Israelite authors employed references to the color red in literary contexts involving stigmatized sex. Since red was the color of blood, they often integrated blood into their compositions as well. So close was their mutual association, that mentioning one naturally evoked the others. I submit that we can account for this constellation of associations by recognizing that the peoples of the ancient Near East generally perceived colors to possess sympathetic and preternatural abilities. Since red is the color of blood, it naturally conveys what blood denotes – the power of life, and thus also notions of protection, fertility, and defilement. In semiotic terms, one might say that blood constitutes a Natural Prototype for the Macro Category Red (as it does in many languages).⁷⁶

1. RED AS PROTECTION

Throughout the Near East, blood was recognized for its life-giving properties. In Mesopotamia, blood was used in magical and medical practices to heal a variety of ailments.⁷⁷ Because of blood's power, the demons also were *ākil dami lā mupparkūti šunu*, “incessant drinkers of blood.”⁷⁸ Given the real and perceived powers of blood, they naturally used it in protective rituals.⁷⁹ In Israel, this practice finds its most famous application in the story of the first Passover, when the Israelites dabbed blood on their lintels and sideposts to avoid God's Destroyer (Exod 12:22–23).

The ancients often extended these properties to items that are blood-colored. Thus, in Mesopotamia, the *šumuttu*-plant, known for its blood-like color, was used in protective rituals.⁸⁰ Red salt also was used to protect a person who continually saw dead people in their dreams.⁸¹ The color carnelian (*sāmu*) also signified blood.⁸² Carnelian stone was used to ward off evil and in rituals

76 See Eleanor Rosch, “Natural Categories,” *Cognitive Psychology* 4 (1973): 328–50; Anna Wierzbicka, *Lingua Mentalis: The Semantics of Natural Language* (Sydney: Academic Press, 1980), 43; “The Meaning of Colour Terms,” 124–25.

77 CAD D 77–78, s.v. *damu*.

78 CT 16 14 iv 34.

79 See, e.g., Zvi Abusch and Daniel Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals. Studies in Ancient Magic and Divination* 8/1 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 157, 223.

80 Possibly “beet-root,” see CAD Š/3 301, s.v. *šumuttu*. Abusch and Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals*, 235.

81 “Red salt” is written MUN *amānu*. See JoAnn Scurlock, *Magico-Medical Means of Treating Ghost-Induced Illnesses in Ancient Mesopotamia. Ancient Magic and Divination* 3 (Leiden: Brill/Styx, 2006), 245, 248–50, 252–53.

82 NA4.GIG ša ŪŠ *latikta*, “tested carnelian, (the color) of blood.” Köcher, *BAM* 237 iv 40.

to “block the entry of the enemy in someone’s house.”⁸³ In the Sumerian epic *Lugal-e*, carnelian is said to be performative, capable of agency, and alive, and Ninurta rewards it for protecting him in battle.⁸⁴ Carnelian was used to counteract the effect of the scarlet-clad demon, Samanu (lit. “The Red One”), who could impair the *qadištu*, a virgin’s menses, and male sexual vigor.⁸⁵ Even a red evening sky could suggest Samanu’s influence.⁸⁶ The demon also could harm infants at birth and during weaning.⁸⁷ It is the apotropaic power of red that explains why exorcists at times also wore carnelian-colored garments.⁸⁸ Ritualists similarly used *tabarru*, “red wool,” in protective magic rituals and *kalgukku*, “red ochre,” as a sympathetic agent to repel evil and dispel witchcraft.⁸⁹ The Akkadian term *šaršarru* too (the etymon for Hebrew שָׁרָשָׁר) can refer to the colored paint used to ward off sorcery.⁹⁰

It is in this context that we may place the scarlet threads in the Tamar and Rahab stories. In the former, it marked the protection of the firstborn,⁹¹ and in

83 Stefan Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: Eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserrituale* (Main am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1994), 43, 107, 122–23; F.A.M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*. Cuneiform Monographs 1 (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1992), 13; Kim Benzel, *Puabi’s Adornment for the Afterlife: Materials and Technologies of Jewelry at Ur in Mesopotamia* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013), 77. A similar use of red ochre was used in Egypt, where red also represented blood and life-giving forces. Figurines were painted with red, which allowed them to absorb evil. They were then destroyed. See Waraksa, *Female Figurines from the Mut Precinct*, 102–13.

84 Benzel, *Puabi’s Adornment for the Afterlife*, 64.

85 See JoAnn Scurlock and Burton Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine: Ancient Sources, Translations, and Modern Medical Analyses* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 410.

86 On a bloody sky and moon as prefiguring destruction, see Joel 3:3–4.

87 See Finkel, “A Study in Scarlet,” 71–106, who rightly explains that though Samanu is not etymologically related to *sāmu*, “carnelian,” the ancients saw them as close enough in sound to be related. Hence, *Nabnītu* xxii 231: SA.MA.NÁ = *sa-ma-nu*, under *sāmu*. The demon appears also in *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* ii 62, vi 57, xv 220. See Markham J. Geller, *Evil Demons: Canonical Utukkū-Lemnūtu Incantations*. State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts 5 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2007).

88 Specifically, they wore a carnelian-colored garment covered with a carnelian-colored cloak. See ABL 0024, ll. 14–15, in S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*. State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts 10 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993), #238; CAD D 130, s.v. *sāmu*.

89 CAD T 21–23, s.v. *tabarru*; CAD K 73, s.v. *kalgukku*. Cf. the Marduk ordeal text (Assur version, KAR 143//, ll. 42–43): “[The Lady of] Babylon who has black wool on her back and red (*tabribu*) wool on her front [...]: [the red wool] on her [front] is blood (*damu*) of the heart which was shed [...],” in A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*. State Archives of Assyria 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), #34.

90 CAD Š/2 124–25, s.v. *šaršerru*.

91 I suggest that the thread served to protect the child ritually. Note also that according to the omen

the latter, the protection of Rahab's household.⁹² Indeed, both accounts involve "binding" (רָבַד), and the binding of threads and tying of knots in protective magic is widespread in antiquity.⁹³ Nevertheless, the account of Tamar also resulted in a healthy boy and the continuation of the family line, and therefore also belongs to the next semiotic type. Since the account of Solomon's wisdom in 1 Kings 3 resulted in saving the infant, perhaps we should place that cluster in this category as well.

2. RED AS FERTILITY

The Israelites viewed blood as the source of life, not just because a loss of blood might result in death, but because it indexed fertility. For women, menstruation marked female fertility and blood accompanied childbirth. Thus, several of the texts that employ the cluster of redness involve or reference childbirth (Genesis 38; Jeremiah 4; Ezekiel 16; 1 Kings 3; Hosea 1–4).

Comparative evidence from Mesopotamia is informative. The Akkadian term *sāmu*, "red, carnelian," can be used for blood and wine.⁹⁴ It too appears in numerous contexts that show it to be a semiotic code for fertility. See, for instance, the following pregnancy omens:⁹⁵

If a woman of childbearing age's womb is carnelian, she was impregnated with a male.

If the muscles/blood vessels (of her breasts) are held by threads, she is pregnant with a male. If they are carnelian, she is pregnant with a male.

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- series *Šumma izbu* 1:83, twin boys were a bad omen: "If a woman gives birth to two boys – there will be hard times in the land; the land will experience unhappiness; there will be bad times for the house of their father." See E. Leichty, *The Omen Series: Šumma izbu*. Texts from Cuneiform Sources 4 (Locust Valley, NY: J.J. Augustin, 1970), 39. On twins and the ritual means of protecting newborn babies in Mesopotamia, see Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 208–11. See similarly the tying of κόκκινον στήθιοινα, "scarlet thread," to infants' hands to protect them from demons/disease, condemned by John Chrysostom, *In Epistulam I ad Corinthios hom* (PG 61.105).
- 92 Observed by J. Gray, *Commentary on Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1967), 54, who sees it analogous to the crimson thread placed on the door of the temple before releasing the scapegoat (Mishnah Yoma 6:8).
- 93 See Michael A. Fishbane, *Studies in Biblical Magic: Origins, Uses and Transformations of Terminology and Literary Form* (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1971), 49–133; CAD K 437, s.v. *kišru*; Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 43, 143–44, (n. 637).
- 94 CAD S 126, s.v. *sāmu*, "red." The lexical list An VII 164 shows us that *sāmu* = *adamu*. See also CAD A/1 95, s.v. *adamu* A "blood," B "red garment," and C "noble person"; CAD A/1 94, s.v. *adamātu*, "dark red earth"; CAD D 75, s.v. *dāmu*, "blood," used of colors, e.g., of wine; CAD D 74, s.v., *da'mu*, "dark colored, red," used of "blood"; CAD A/1 94, s.v. *adamatu* B, "black blood."
- 95 Cited in Scurlock and Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine*, 259, 274, 276, 279.

If the muscles of a woman of childbearing age's temple are carnelian, her fetus is male.

If it (the fetus) is carnelian, her fetus is male.⁹⁶

In fact, the color red generally marks omens as positive.⁹⁷ Carnelian also describes the goddess Ishtar (Inanna),⁹⁸ who embodies fertility, sexual attraction, and the red “star” Venus: “If Venus at her appearance is carnelian: abundance for the people, the crop of the land will succeed, the king of Akkad will see rejoicing.”⁹⁹ The color's powers are evoked sympathetically against the *urbatu sām̄tu*, “red worm,” in the following incantation:

96 Cf. rituals for ridding ghosts that involve dressing a male figurine in red cloth (if the ghost is male). See Scurlock, *Magico-Medical Means of Treating Ghost-Induced Illnesses in Ancient Mesopotamia*, 203 (l. 1), 540 (l. 2).

97 See, e.g., *Šumma ālu* 1:92: “If ‘red’ men (LÚ.SI.A.MEŠ = *amēlū sāmū*) are numerous in a city; that city will be happy”; VI:30: “If a house's plaster is red (SI.A), the owner of that house will become rich”; XVII:26: “If the water of the well is red (SI.A), he will acquire grain”; XXXII:45’: “If a red (SA₅) lizard is seen in a man's house, that land will become prosperous”; XXXIII:20’: “If a red (SA₅) gecko is seen in a man's house, prosperity will continue (for) the owner of that house” (similarly in XXXIII:32’); XXXIII:115’: “If a red (SA₅) skink is seen in a man's house, the owner of that house will acquire profit.” In *Šumma ālu*, only omens dealing with red ants, red fungus, and red demons consistently portend ill (e.g., XII:55–72, XXXVII:12–1; XXXVII:47–55, 58–59), but this is true of ant, fungus, and demon omens generally. See also *Šumma izbu* IV:8: “If a woman gives birth, and at birth, (the child) is already flecked with red moles (*pindū*) – that man will prosper” (commentary, l. 128, renders *pindū* with *umšatū sāndū*, “carnelian-colored moles”); XXIV:25’: “If a red (SA₅) dog urinates on a man – that man will be happy.” In *Šumma izbu*, the only omens that refer to red and forecast negatively involve disfigurement or the mixing of red with other colors (e.g., IV:15; XVIII:13’–14’; XX:45’). See Sally M. Freedman, *If a City is Set on a Height: The Akkadian Omen Series Šumma Alu ina Mēlê Šakin*, vol. 1. Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund 17 (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1998), 32–33, 90–91, 110, 112–13, 196–97, 254–57, 276–77; *If a City is Set on a Height*, vol. 2. Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund 19 (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 2006), 204–5, 212–13, 244–49; Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma izbu*, 66–67, 175, 183, 194, 216.

98 Irene Winter, “The Aesthetic Value of Lapis Lazuli in Mesopotamia,” in *Cornaline et pierres précieuses: La Méditerranée, de l'antiquité à l'Islam; Actes du colloque organisé au Musée du Louvre par le Service Culturel les 24 et 25 novembre 1995*, ed. Annie Caubet (Paris: Documentation française, 1999), 43–58, especially 52 n. 48, relates Ishtar's connection to lapis lazuli to her “complexly gendered identity.” Benzel, *Puabi's Adornment for the Afterlife*, 79, cites Winter and includes carnelian in the discussion. For the color red and Ishtar, see also Caitlín E. Barrett, “Was Dust Their Food and Clay Their Bread? Grave Goods, the Mesopotamian Afterlife and the Liminal Role of Inana/Ishtar,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 7 (2007): 7–65, especially 25–28.

99 Erica Reiner and David Pingree, *Babylonian Planetary Omens. Part Three. Cuneiform Monographs 11* (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1998), 95. However, omens in which one finds spots of red, or partial red, typically bode evil.

The worm, the worm, the carnelian worm rose up, it covered the carnelian clouds: the carnelian rain has risen, it inundated the carnelian earth; a carnelian flood arose, it filled the carnelian river. Let a carnelian plowman bring a carnelian plow and a carnelian hod, and let him damn up the carnelian water. Carnelian door and carnelian bolt, they say, are their gate!¹⁰⁰

Similar references to carnelian rivers and canals appear in medical incantations to stop menorrhagia.¹⁰¹ The related verb *sámu*, “become red,” is used of flowering and luxuriant vegetation.¹⁰² The color *sámu* also gives its name to the *sámtu*, “carnelian” stone (NA₄.GUG, NA₄.ZA.GÌN), which appears in contexts of sexual allure and fertility.¹⁰³ Ishtar of Lagaba is said to wear an entire necklace made of carnelian.¹⁰⁴ Elsewhere carnelian is called “female lapis lazuli.”¹⁰⁵ In *The Descent of Ištar* (129, 136), Ereshkigal commands Namtar to dress Dumuzi, the “lover of her (Ishtar’s) youth” (127) in a “carnelian garment” (GI.GÍD NA₄.ZA.GÌN) and a “ring made of carnelian” (GI.GÍD NA₄.ZA.GÌN).

100 K 2354+ (Köcher, *BAM* 480 = CT 23 37 iii 65–68). See Finkel, “A Study in Scarlet,” 81 n. 10.

101 I.L. Finkel, “The Crescent Fertile,” *Archiv für Orientforschung* 27 (1980): 37–52; J. van Dijk, in J. van Dijk, A. Goetze, and M.I. Hussey, *Early Mesopotamian Incantations and Rituals*. Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts 11 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 32.

102 Cf. Gilgamesh’s encounter with a divine tree on which hangs “carnelian” (NA₄.GUG) fruit (IX 171–176).

103 The carnelian stone often appears with lapis lazuli, silver, and gold. On the use of such stones, see Wayne Horowitz, “Two *Abnu šikinšu* Fragments and Related Matters,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 82 (1992): 112–22. The *Abnu šikinšu* tablets show that the Mesopotamians attributed different (medical) powers to the stones depending on their color. The Akkadian *sámtu*, “carnelian,” is cognate with Hebrew סָמָוּ (e.g., Gen 2:12; Exod 25:7; Ezek 28:13; Job 28:16). Nevertheless, we also find the term סָמָוּ (e.g., Exod 28:17, 39:10). Both terms are rendered in the LXX the same (i.e., as σάρδιον). On the Hebrew words, see Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 166. On the Mesopotamian stone, see also Maurizio Tosi, “Karneol,” *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie* 5 (1980): 448–52; Benzel, *Puabi’s Adornment for the Afterlife*, 71–80. Benzel discusses at length the perceived power of the carnelian stone (also lapis lazuli, gold, silver, and others) and its connection to the divine and fertility. However, she has difficulty accounting for this connection other than by way of its similarity in texture and hardness to lapis lazuli and its natural aesthetic (p. 75). I submit that it is its color that connects it. The importance of the color in defining the stone is evident in its very name. On the symbolic treatment of biblical precious stones in later periods, see Christel Meier, *Gemma Spiritualis: Methode und Gebrauch der Edelsteinallegorese von frühen Christentum bis ins 18. Jahrhundert*. Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften 34/1 (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1977).

104 Wilhelmus F. Leemans, *Ishtar of Lagaba and Her Dress*. Studia ad Tabulas Cuneiformas Collectas ab De F.M. Th. de Liagre Böhl Pertinentia 1 (Leiden: Netherlands Institute for the Near East, 1952).

105 NA₄.GUG *uqnú* SAL in AMT 44, 1 ii 6 (= Köcher, *BAM*, 580 iii 18). On the gender of the stone and also its association with fertility and abundance, see Winter, “The Aesthetic Value of Lapis Lazuli in Mesopotamia,” 43–58.

This will then encourage him to *šamhāte lina*”à *kabtassu*, “let prostitutes amuse his ‘mind’” (129–30).¹⁰⁶ The stone’s fertile powers also are apparent in their use to restore hair loss and in incantations worn around the loins.¹⁰⁷ Carnelian and red-colored cloth also aid in the animation of divine statues (i.e., the *mīs pī* ritual),¹⁰⁸ and they appear in incantations to help women with difficulties in childbirth.¹⁰⁹ Thus, Mesopotamians similarly connected red with blood, wine, and fertility.

There is evidence for this at Ugarit as well in the myth of El’s marriage to two goddesses (CAT 1.23). The text relates his pre-wedding circumcision (described as the pruning of a vine), the imbibing of wine, and the healing of his impotence.¹¹⁰ The divine union produces twins. The text also tells us that the musicians who sang at El’s wedding feast were clad in *šmt*, “carnelian,” and *tn*, “scarlet” (1.23.21–22).¹¹¹ Thus, carnelian and other items of red figure prominently in a context brimming with wine and fertility.¹¹²

In ancient Israel, redness also could mark male fertility. In fact, the very word for “mankind” (אָדָם) means “red,” thus marking it as a fertile species. Some texts also emphasize virility by referring to men as ruddy in color.¹¹³ That Esau was

106 Cf. the difficult line: (Ishtar) *musimmat em[q]eti*, “reddens the experienced woman,” in STT 257, r. 3. It would help to know if *emqetu* here means wise, clever, wily, skilled, or experienced.

107 See CT 23 34 iii 29, also Köcher, *BAM* 3 ii 20; *BAM* 323:5.

108 See Christopher Walker and Michael B. Dick, “The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian *mīs pī* Ritual,” in *Born In Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael B. Dick (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 55–121, especially 77 (l. 19), 78 (l. 38).

109 See Benzel, *Puabi’s Adornment for the Afterlife*, 46; M. Civil, “Medical Commentaries from Nippur,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 33 (1974): 329–38, see 331–36. Does the use of carnelian in the *mīs pī* ritual enliven the statue because it sympathetically transmits blood?

110 On the pruning as circumcision, see Nicholas Wyatt, “The Pruning of the Vine in KTU 1.23,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 24 (1992): 403–24.

111 The lexeme *tnn* also could mean “two,” as in a “double garment.” However, its appearance with carnelian and the evidence gathered here suggests that we indeed should read it as “scarlet.” *DULAT* 921–22, s.v. *tn*.

112 The remedy for El’s impotence involves roasting a bird over “hot coals” (1.23.41). The term for the hot coals (*phm*), is also for dyed wool garments, possibly red in color. See W.H. van Soldt, “Fabrics and Dyes at Ugarit,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 22 (1990): 321–57, see 342.

113 David J.A. Clines, “David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. David J.A. Clines. JSOTSup 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 212–43, esp. 221–23, avers that “ruddy” signals physical beauty. However, the texts in which אָדָמוֹנִי appears always distinguish it from handsomeness. Thus, in 1 Sam 16:12, David is אָדָמוֹנִי עִינֵיָם וְטוֹב רֵאִי, “ruddy with attractive eyes and good looking.” In 1 Sam 17:42 he is וְאָדָמוֹנִי עִינֵיָם מְרָאֶה, “ruddy with attractive looks.” Since one can reference male and female beauty without adding אָדָמוֹנִי (e.g., Gen 29:17, 39:6; 1 Sam 16:18, 25:3; 2 Sam 14:25; Esth 2:7), being “ruddy” must signify something more. There also is no evidence for the notion, advanced first by August Klostermann, *Die Bücher Samuelis und*

born אֶדְמוֹנִי, “ruddy,” and covered with hair (Gen 25:25),¹¹⁴ not only provides the narrator with linguistic justifications for his connection to “Edom” (i.e., “red”) and “Seir” (i.e., “hair”),¹¹⁵ it foreshadows his manliness and prowess with a bow, itself a symbol of male virility (25:27, 27:3).¹¹⁶ David too is described as אֶדְמוֹנִי, “ruddy” (1 Sam 16:12, 17:42), which prefigures his virility and skill at war.¹¹⁷ In Song 5:10, the lover emphasizes her beloved’s virility by describing him as “radiant and red” (רָדָה), the male counterpart to her “scarlet lips” (4:3). Thus, the sanguine color indexed fertility in males in much the same way that that blood signaled female fecundity.

Additional support again comes from Ugarit, where the cognate *’dm*, “red,” similarly bears associations with fertility and masculinity.¹¹⁸ In Kirtu’s dream, El commands him to “rouge” (*idm*) himself before offering his sacrifice, which he does (*CAT* 1.14 ii 9; 1.14 iii 52). The aim of the act is to prepare for battle. Even when the goddess Pughat rouges herself, she does so to prepare for war (1.19 iv 42–43). Moreover, we are told that, after rouging herself and donning warrior’s equipment, she *wl tlbš nps att*, “wore the garment of a women on top” (1.19 iv 47), thus characterizing the rouge and equipment as distinctly masculine. Ugaritic texts also describe *udm*, “Udum,” the mythical city of king

der Könige. Kurzgefasster Kommentar zu den heiligen Schriften A/III (Nördlingen: C.H. Beck, 1887), that “ruddy” refers to hair color.

- 114 On the association of hair and beards with male attractiveness and virility, see Judg 17:17–22; 2 Sam 14:25–27. The word פְּרוּעוֹת, “long hair, locks,” is a synonym for “leaders” in Judg 5:2. We know that David too had a beard (1 Sam 21:13). See also Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 48.
- 115 Gen 25:30 connects the name Edom to the אֶדְמָה, “red-stew,” that Jacob gave him in exchange for his birthright.
- 116 Esau’s virility is observed in Bereshit Rabbah 63:12, which interprets Esau’s coming in “from the field” (Gen 25:29) to mean that he had sex with a betrothed woman. Targum Jonathan states that he was born complete with teeth and a beard and that in addition to sleeping with a betrothed woman, he had shed innocent blood. On the bow, see Gen 49:24, Job 29:20, and Harry A. Hoffner, “Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity: Their Use in Ancient Near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Rituals,” *JBL* 85 (1966): 327; Sandra Jacobs, “Divine Virility in Priestly Representation,” 146–70.
- 117 On constructions of male masculinity in ancient Israel, see the essays collected in Deborah W. Rooke, ed., *A Question of Sex? Gender and Difference in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007); and Ovidiu Creangă, ed., *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible*.
- 118 The term *adm*, “man,” also appears in Ugaritic. El is called the *ab adm*, “father of man,” (1.14 i 37, 42). Anat kills “the men (*adm*) at/of (the) sunrise” (1.3 ii 8). In the latter passage, *adm* is parallel to *lim*, “clan.” There also exists the word *idm*, but it appears in a broken text. It might refer to red flames or wine (1.12 ii 29–30; 1.55:4). We also find the term [...] *dm* used to describe Anat’s beauty, but the text is broken (1.14 iii 44). Since it parallels lapis lazuli, perhaps a stone is meant, like “carnelian.” Cf. Hebrew אֶדְמָה, “carnelian.” However, see the discussion of options by Nicholas Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilmilku and His Colleagues*. The Biblical Seminar 53 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 197–98, n. 103, who accepts W. Watson’s proposal to read here *sdm*, “paint (the eyes).”

Pabil as *udm rbm wudm trrt*, “Udum, abounding in rain, and Udum, the well-watered” (1.14 iii 5–6), thus identifying it as a fertile city and a fitting place to obtain a fertile wife.¹¹⁹ Indeed, it is from Udum that Kirtu obtains Hurraya, who bears him a son.

The combined evidence from Israel, Ugarit, and Mesopotamia demonstrates that the color red, like blood, also coded notions of male virility and female fertility throughout the fertile crescent. Into this semiotic category, we may place the scarlet lips in Song 4, the vermilion of Song 7, and the inverted use of the cluster in Proverbs 31. Since the accounts in Genesis 3, 38, and Ezekiel 16 resulted in healthy births, we can add them as well, though their association with forbidden sex and the blood of parturition suggests that they also fit in the next group.

3. RED AS DEFILEMENT

Since the color red signified blood, it also could signify defilement, for blood can defile. As Jonathan Klawans has shown, we may distinguish two types of pollution in ancient Israel.¹²⁰ The first is contagious, impermanent, generally not sinful, requires bathing and/or waiting, and affects one’s ritual status. Most cases of pollution of this type relate to death or sex. With regard to blood, pollution of this type comes from contact during parturition and menstruation (Lev 12:1–5, 15:16–30, 18:19, 20:18).¹²¹ Since blood coming from a dying person does not defile, pollution by blood is directly connected to female fertility.¹²² However, skin ailments and mold that merely appear אַדְמָדָם, “reddish,” in color also sympathetically render one unclean (Lev 13:18–25, 42–51, 14:37).¹²³ The ritual for cleaning skin ailments and mold is equally sympathetic and involves

119 See Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, 193 n. 79; Scott B. Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream,” *Aula Orientalis* 32 (2014): 299–316 (308–9).

120 See Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21–42, for useful proof texts. Klawans refers to the two types as ritual and moral defilement, and sees the dietary laws as a special category. He also observes that while the term נִטְמָא, “unclean,” can apply to both types, the terms תּוֹעֵבָה, “abomination,” and חֲטָיָה, “pollute,” are reserved solely for the second.

121 Cf. b. Niddah 19a, which discusses the colors of menstrual discharges considered unclean: “red (האדום), black, a color bright like a crocus, or like water of the soil (אדמה), or like diluted wine . . .”

122 The male counterpart to this type of pollution is seminal emission (Lev 15:1–18). Note the observation of Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, 38: “It is true that traditional Judaism, in both the medieval and modern periods, has been interested in primarily only one source of ritual impurity: that which originates in menstrual blood. And as is well known, of all the Mishnah tractates dealing with ritual impurity, only the tractate dealing with menstrual impurity – tractate Niddah – receives systematic treatment in the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds.”

123 Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 129–30, discusses the expression לִבְנֵה אֶדְמָדָם (and

dipping “scarlet wool” (וּשְׁנֵי תוֹלַעֲתַי) with hyssop and cedar wood in bird’s blood (Lev 14:4–6, 59–52).¹²⁴

The second type of defilement occurs through major sinful acts, such as sexual transgression, idolatry, and murder.¹²⁵ This type involves no contagion, has no ritual corrective, requires atonement by blood, and results in the pollution of the sinner, the land, and the temple.¹²⁶ This is clear in Yahweh’s command to Moses:

“Do not pollute the land where you are. The blood pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which the blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it” (Num 35:33).

Ezekiel’s prophecy further identifies the defilement of idolatry with menstrual blood:

“Son of man (בְּנֵי אָדָם), when the people of Israel were living in their own land (אֶרֶץ מִקְדָּמָם), they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Like the uncleanness of the menstruant (הַיְהוֹדָה) in my sight were their ways (דַּרְכֵיהֶם). So I poured out my wrath on them, because they had shed blood (דָּם) in the land, and because they had defiled it with their idols” (Ezek 36:17–18).¹²⁷

In addition, as numerous texts indicate, prostitution, adultery, and a man having sex with betrothed maidens rendered a woman unclean and defiled and dishonored the men of her household, whether her husband, father, or

related forms) used of a skin disease (Lev 13:19, 13:24, 13, 42–43). Cf. *Šumma izbu* 1v:8, 15, which see divine import in whether a child is born with red spots.

124 Note similarly the sympathetic use of color in the ritual of the red heifer. Priests toss “scarlet wool” (וּשְׁנֵי תוֹלַעֲתַי) into the burning red heifer (פָּרָה אֲדֻמָּה) along with cedar wood and hyssop, and use the remaining ashes in the water of cleansing (Num 19:6; cf. Heb 9:19–22). Note that both the blood and the heifer are red. Hyssop is also used to wipe the doors with blood before the first Passover (Exod 12:22). Cf. the red fungus in Akkadian texts that almost always bodes ill in *Šumma ālu* XI:55–72. See Freedman, *If a City is Set on a Height*, vol. 1, 196–97.

125 However, having sex during a woman’s menstrual period defiles both the man and the woman and results in the couple being *וּנְקָרְתוּ מִקֶּרֶב עַמָּם*, “cut off from their people,” a fate usually associated with the second kind of defilement and not a temporary infringement of ritual purity (Lev 18:19, 20:18).

126 According to Lev 20:10 and Deut 22:22, adultery was punishable by death, though Lev 21:9 states that a priest’s daughter who becomes a prostitute must be burned alive. Though Tamar is not the daughter of a priest, she nearly was burned alive for posing as a קְדֻשָׁה (Gen 38:24). On the burning of a קְדֻשָׁה and its equivalent in Mesopotamia, see Michael Astour, “Tamar the Hierodule: An Essay in the Method of Vestigial Motifs,” *JBL* 85 (1966): 185–96, especially 193–94.

127 The term דַּרְךְ, “way,” may be doing double duty here as it also occurs in reference to a woman’s menstrual period (see Gen 31:35, cf. אֶרֶץ, “path,” in Gen 18:11).

brothers.¹²⁸ Even in cases of rape, the dishonor passed to the male members of the tribe.¹²⁹ Such dishonor was punished with a blood vengeance.

It is the defiling nature of menstrual and parturient blood and the requirement of blood for capital sins that inform the great majority of clusters collected here. These include the pericopes found in Genesis 3, 4, 9, 34; Judges 16; Isaiah 1, 63; Jeremiah 2, 4, 49; Ezekiel 16, 23; Hosea 1–4; Joel 4; Nahum 2–3; 2 Samuel 1; 1 Kings 22; 2 Kings 3; Lamentations 1, 4, and Revelation 17. In most of these texts one finds the explicit integration of all three elements of the cluster (stigmatized sex, blood, and a word for red). However, in cases where one of the elements is implied by context or similarity of sound, the cluster always contains either stigmatized sex or blood. In none of the cases do we find these two elements simultaneously implicit. This is because terms for the color red alone could not signify defilement without one or the other in accompaniment.¹³⁰ It is worthy of note that references to wine appear only in this group with two exceptions – Song 4:3, 7:6.¹³¹

Seeing Red

The combined evidence shows that blood was a Natural Prototype for terms belonging to the Macro Category for the Basic Color Term “red” in ancient Israel, and that consequently, the hyponymns for “red” could index contexts of protection, fertility, or defilement. Much like word pairs, the clustered elements formed a web of mutual associations, and while Israelite bards were by no means forced to employ the cluster every time they made reference to illicit sex, blood, or the color red, the examples studied here show that using the one often encouraged the integration of the other, thus making the cluster a fairly

128 See, e.g., Lev 21:7, 21:9; Jer 13:26–27; Amos 7:17. On blood as defiling the land, see Num 35:33–34. See Bird, “Prostitution in the Social World and Religious Rhetoric of Ancient Israel,” 44–45; S. Olyan, “Honor, Shame, and Covenantal Relations in Ancient Israel and Its Environs,” *JBL* 115 (1996): 201–18. Cf. the narrator’s words concerning Enkidu after he had sex with the *ḥarīmtu*, “prostitute,” in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*: *ultahḫi* “Enkidu ullula paḡaršu, “Enkidu had defiled his body so pure” (1 199). *CAD* Š/3 207, s.v. *šuḫḫu*.

129 As seen in the story of Dinah, discussed above, which refers to defilement three times (Gen 34:13, 34:27, 34:31).

130 Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, argues that primary color terms (like אָדָם) represent a range of hues and thus require other terms to define them further. From a semiotic perspective this would be the case with all symbolic signifiers. Indeed, the need to provide further focus explains the very reasons for a cluster. Thus, terms for “red” could not index blood or contexts of stigmatized sex without the other terms in the cluster.

131 This adds weight to the argument that the references in the Song are more lewd/defiling than usually understood. On the Song as a veiled invective with double-edged barbs, see Noegel and Rendsburg, *Solomon’s Vineyard*.

productive literary convention. There appear to be no genre restrictions on the cluster's employment; it occurs in prose and poetry, prophesies and historical texts, proverbs, laments, and love poems. In this section, I should like to show how a recognition of this semiotic code allows us to see greater nuance in a number of biblical texts.

I begin by returning to the formation of the first man (אָדָם) from the soil (הָאָדָמָה) in Genesis 2:7. For centuries, scholars and theologians have observed how the similarity of their names provides an aetiology that indicates their shared essence; man "literally" derives from the soil.¹³² However, the clusters examined above suggest that it is their shared association with the color red that is significant. Like the soil, the first human bears the color of fertility, and this foreshadows his role as the progenitor of humankind.¹³³ Underscoring the soil's fertility is the narrator's observation that the soil immediately bore fruit (2:9), creating an expectation that the man might be next.¹³⁴ Further promoting the notion is the remark that Yahweh then created animals from the red soil (הָאָדָמָה) in an effort to find him a helpmate (2:18–19). The shared origins of the man and the beasts signify their shared fertility and intimate that one of the animals might be the man's sexual other. However, the narrator quickly dispatches this impression by informing us that the project failed when the man gave them names, presumably distinct from his own and that of the soil.¹³⁵ So God made a woman from the man. The man's reaction to seeing her explicitly draws the animals' creation into comparison: "This one, (*this*) time (זֶאת הַפֶּעַם), is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (2:23, cf. 29:14).

There is another dimension to the creation of man that attention to the semi-otics of redness brings to the surface. The terms for both man (אָדָם) and the soil (הָאָדָמָה) also share an essence with דָם, "blood," to which they are etymologically related.¹³⁶ Yet, the story makes no reference to blood. Indeed, comparative

132 See Noegel, "Paronomasia," 24–29.

133 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 1.34, espied the importance of Adam's "red color" (πυρρόν) when he observed: "because he was made from the red (πυρραῖς) earth kneaded together; for such is the color of the true maiden soil (παρθένος γῆ)." According to William R. Loader, *Philo, Josephus, and the Testaments on Sexuality: Attitudes Towards Sexuality in the Writings of Philo and Josephus and in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 266, this passage has sexual connotations. Cf. Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 34, who opines: "Symbolically דָם stands for manliness, strength, honor, beauty, and sin."

134 Ironically, it is one of the fertile soil's fruits that would lead to humans' sexual self-awareness and desire to procreate.

135 In a lecture at Cornell University many years ago, the late Cyrus H. Gordon suggested that the text is a subtle polemic against bestiality, which some other Near Eastern cultures treated, as he put it, "with more finesse."

136 Contra Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 161, see now A. Militarev, "Etimologija i

evidence from other Near Eastern creation accounts suggests that we should expect blood. In *Enuma eliš*, Marduk uses the blood and bone of the slain god Qingu to make the first man (vi 5–6, 32–33), and in the *Atra-ḫasis Epic*, Nintu creates the first mortal by mixing clay with the flesh and blood of the slain god Wê-ila (I 225–226). Might the presence of blood be implicit in the names of the man and the soil in Genesis in the same way that the divine *ṭemu*, “intelligence,” and the god “Wê-ila” are embodied implicitly in the *eṭemmu*, “spirit,” of the first *awīlu*, “man,” in the *Atra-ḫasis Epic*?¹³⁷ Granted, man’s creation in Genesis is asexual, but so also is it in the other creation stories. Moreover, the creation of the woman in Genesis is also asexual, but implicitly bloody, requiring “surgery.”

Moreover, the connection between soil and blood is not one of name alone. A host of ancient Near Eastern traditions identify the placenta and bloody matter that accompanies human birth as clay, and equate the womb with a kiln, revealing a semantic overlap between blood and clay.¹³⁸ Of course, undergirding

interpretacija drevnepis'mennyh pamjatnikov: biblejskie terminy 'sem'ja,' 'potomstvo,' 'plemja,' 'narod,' 'čelovečeskij rod,' *Vestnik Eurejskogo Universiteta* 7 (2002): 7–58, see esp. 54; adopted and cited by Bulakh, “Basic Color Terms of Biblical Hebrew in Diachronic Aspect,” 200. Cf. Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 108, who notes that in Aramaic and Syriac “the root *dm* yields the lexeme *dm* 'blood' and *dm* 'earth,' but not 'red.' Since in Heb there appears to be no connection between these lexemes, the similarity in their spellings may be a coincidence.”

137 On the allusive paronomasia in the Akkadian text, see Tzvi Abusch, “Ghost and God: Some Observations on a Babylonian Understanding of Human Nature,” in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. A.I. Baumgarten, Jan Assmann, and Gedaliahu Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 363–83; Bendt Alster, “*ilu awilum: we-e il-a*, ‘Gods: Men’ versus ‘Man: God’: Punning and the Reversal of Patterns in the Atrahasis Epic,” in *Riches Hidden in Secret Places: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobsen*, ed. Tzvi Abusch (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 35–40.

138 See Anne Draffkorn Kilmer, “The Brick of Birth,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 46 (1987): 211–13. Kilmer also observes (p. 212) how some Sumerian and Akkadian texts draw a correlation between *libbu*, “innards/womb,” and *libittu*, “brick,” and between SIG₇.EN.SIG₇.DU₁₀, “placenta/motherwomb,” and SIG₄, “brick,” by means of the similarity of their names. See also the anomalous birth omens known as *Šumma izbu* 1:33–34 [BE] SAL SIG₄ Û.TU [...], “If a woman gives birth to a brick... [...];” [BE] SAL₂ lu-Û SIG₄ Û.TU KUR [...], “If a woman gives birth to two or three bricks.” The omens follow others that involve membranes and clotted blood. See Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma izbu*, 34. See also the Sumerian text known as *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld* (ll. 257–58): “Did you see the man who had two sons (DUMU)?” “I saw him.” “How does he fare?” “He sits on two bricks (ŠEG₁₂) and eats bread,” in Alhena Gadotti, *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld and the Sumerian Gilgamesh Cycle*. Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie 10 (Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 58, 159, 167, 288. At Esna in Egypt, a relief depicts the creator god Khnum fashioning the first human on a potter’s wheel. The *Great Hymn to Khnum*, also at Esna, says of him: “God of the potter’s wheel... He knotted the blood flow to the bones”... “Blood congeals with semen in the bones, to knit the bones from the beginning. He causes women to birth when the womb is ready” (250:8). For the text, see Serge Sauneron, *Esna*, vol. 3 (Cairo: Institut

these equations is the notion that the earth has a womb. The concept is well-attested in Near Eastern texts, including the Hebrew Bible (Ps 139:15; Job 1:21, 38:8),¹³⁹ and it gives rise to a host of terms that apply equally to human and agricultural fertility.¹⁴⁰ Such evidence suggests that “blood” is implicit by way of name in man’s creation in Genesis.

Moreover, if we should expect blood, we also should expect water. In *Atra-ḥasis*, Nintu orders the Igigi gods to spit on the clay in order that Ea might tread upon it and she might pinch from it fourteen pieces (I 234, 252, 256).¹⁴¹ After all, without water, one cannot have clay. However, if the clay can represent the earth’s blood and birth matter, the water must represent the amniotic fluid.¹⁴² Indeed, “water and blood” constitutes a common Semitic idiom for giving birth.¹⁴³ In *Atra-ḥasis* 1 282, we also hear that a midwife *silitam iptē*, “opened the membranes,” for Nintu, a line that Marten Stol observes refers to making “the amniotic water flow for the first time in history.”¹⁴⁴ Amniotic water is also called the “water of delivery” (*mê ḥāli*). In addition, one of the goddesses of birth bears the Sumerian name “Expert of the LĀL.ḪĀR,” i.e., the subterranean waters (Apsû) where Ea dwells.¹⁴⁵ It is in the light of such passages that I aver we should understand the subterranean waters in Genesis 2:6: “a stream (נַחַל) came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the soil (הָאֲדָמָה).”¹⁴⁶

français d’archéologie orientale, 1959–2009), 130–34, nos. 250: 6–21; v. 5, 94–107. Cf. Marduk’s words, “let me knot (*kašāru*) blood, let me bring about bones, let me set up a human being, man is his name (*Enuma eliš* v1 5–6); and Psalm 139:13, “You created my innermost parts, you knit me (הִתְקַנֵּי) together in my mother’s womb.” Midwives also used potter’s wheels to assist in delivery. See Kevin McGeough, “Birth Bricks, Potter’s Wheels, and Exodus 1, 16,” *Biblica* 87 (2006): 305–18. See too the Akkadian color *šaršarru*, which can refer to a new-born child or to clay. See *CAD* Š/2 124–25, s.v. *šaršerru*. Observed by Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 174.

139 Thus, e.g., *Atra-ḥasis* S IV 49: *libalkat eṣsetu rēmša*, “let the womb of earth rebel.” The act signals the land’s infertility. See Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 125–26.

140 To list but a few examples, both “the earth” (אֲדָמָה) and “the soil” (אֲדָמָה) are feminine, “seed” (זֵרַע) applies to plants and offspring/semen, “fruit” (פֵּרִי) also can come from the womb, one’s family has a “root” (שֵׁרֶשׁ), and “offspring” (אֶצְצָא) can be plants or children. Humans can “flourish” (פָּרַח) or “wither” (קָלַל) like plants. On the likening of a woman to a field that must be plowed, see below p 38, n. 148. See above p. 10, n. 27 for references to the juice and sap of flora as “blood.”

141 In *Enuma eliš*, the creation of man involves no clay. Thus, there is no need for water.

142 The Sumerian sign A means both “water” and “semen/offspring.” See Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 4–5.

143 Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 125.

144 *Ibid.*, 125.

145 *Ibid.*, 125.

146 Rashi suggests a role for water in his comment on Gen 2:6: “He brought up the waters of the deep (תְּהוֹמוֹת) and watered the clouds to soak the dust, and man was created. Like the baker who

It is from this watered soil that Yahweh forms man,¹⁴⁷ thus making water a vital element in his creation.¹⁴⁸

Moreover, the word טָא is rare, appearing only here and in Job 36:27–28, where it also occurs with מִטָּא : “He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to its stream (טָא); the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind (מִטָּא).”¹⁴⁹ The rarity of the lexeme טָא , coupled with the author’s interest in aetiological paronomasia, supports the contention that it was selected for its similarity in sound to מִטָּא and מַטְאָה , once again to signal their shared essence.¹⁵⁰

The paronomasia between the terms for “man,” “soil,” “blood,” and “stream,” naturally places the water used to make clay in contrast with blood, for both are vital to human existence. Indeed, man’s procreation ultimately depends upon the soil and water as much as it does upon his own life-giving blood and the blood of menstruation and parturition. Likewise, the land depends on the man to till it as much as it does upon water to produce the blood of grapes and all other seed-bearing plants. Thus, the land and the man not only share essence, they are codependents. Underscoring their mutuality is Yahweh’s curse against the man, in which the soil also gets punished for his deeds.

“Cursed is the soil (הָאָדָמָה) because of you. In painful-toil you will eat from it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it will sprout for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you will eat bread

adds water (to flour) and then afterwards kneads the dough. This also here: ‘he watered’ and afterwards, ‘he formed’ (the man).”

- 147 Gen 2:7 states that Yahweh formed the man of $\text{עִפְרָה מִן־הָאָדָמָה}$, “the dust from the soil.” It is the water that turned it into clay, so dust must be dry ground. Thus, God’s statement in Gen 3:29: “dust (עִפְרָה) you are and to dust (עִפְרָה) you will return,” hints at the desiccation of the body after death (cf. the “dry bones” in Ezek 37:2). Moreover, both the soil and thus the man have their origins outside the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8, 3:23). So the man’s eventual expulsion from the garden literally returned him to the dry soil from which he came.
- 148 The language of birth employed in the pericope provides a subtext in which the earth plays a maternal, albeit silent, role in his creation. The subtext, informed also by the widespread identification of women with fields that must be tilled and sown (see Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible*, 1–2), allows us to detect the presence of alternative mythological traditions, downplayed in Genesis, in which the earth or a mother goddess occupied a larger role in man’s creation. Note that the heaven and the earth are said to have borne תּוֹלְדוֹת , “generations,” in Gen 2:4. Cf. Virgil, *Georgics*, 1. 297, who describes Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture, fertility, and motherly relationships as *rubicundus*, “ruddy.” Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.19, uses the verb *rubesco* to describe blood.
- 149 Cf. Akkadian *edû*, “onrush of water, flood.” CAD E 35–36, s.v., *edû*. On the etymological proposals for, and translation of, טָא see David Toshio Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 85–106.
- 150 Their use in Job 36:27–28 also appears deliberately paronomastic.

until you return to the soil (הָאֲדָמָה), since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (3:17–19).

Further, since their names, and therefore essences, both embody blood, neither can eat blood without a reckoning. Yahweh makes this clear for Cain when he suggests the soil’s passively complicit role by describing it as one would an animal taking food from its owner: וְעַתָּה, אָרוּר אַתָּה, מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת־פִּיהָ, לְקַחַת אֶת־דַּמִּי אֶחָיִךְ מִיָּדְךָ (“And now cursed are you from the soil, which has opened its mouth to take the blood of your brother from your hand” Gen 4:11.) Here again Yahweh also punishes the soil with infertility for Cain’s crime: “When you work the soil (הָאֲדָמָה), it will no longer yield its strength for you. A roamer and wanderer you will be on the earth” (4:12). Yahweh later will adjust the rules so that only the blood of the murderer is required, but bloodshed will continue to defile the soil as it does humans (Gen 9:4).

Recognizing the semiotics of redness also sheds light on the many references to “wine” in the clusters (wine here constitutes what current trends in semantics would refer to as a Rival for Prototype).¹⁵¹ In fact, just over half of the texts reference wine, grapes, and/or winepressing (Gen 9; Judg 16; Isa 1, 63; Jer 49; Ezek 23; 2 Sam 1; Hos 1–4; Joel 4; Nah 2–3; Lam 1; Song 4, 7; Rev 17). It long has been observed that throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, wine is associated with fertility.¹⁵² Thus, we find it at wedding celebrations, in fertility cults, erotic poems, and mythological contexts dealing with fertility.¹⁵³ Scholars typically have asserted the association based mainly on the contexts in which wine appears. However, in the light of the evidence garnered here, I submit that the association derives from the fact that grapes and wine bear the color of blood, and therefore, the color of fertility.¹⁵⁴ Further, it was liquid, and therefore, truly the “blood of grapes.”¹⁵⁵ This also explains the frequent

151 See Mony Almalech, “The Eight Kinds of Linen in the Old Testament,” *Lexia: Journal of Semiotics* 7–8 (2011): 325–64 (335); Sutrop, “Towards a Semiotic Theory of Basic Colour Terms.”

152 Cf. the chorus’s reference in Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, l. 210 to the god Bacchus as οἰνώπα Βάκχον, “burgundy Bacchus.” See also Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 34, 37–38, 50.

153 Cf. “Your wife shall be a fruitful vine” (Ps 134:3). See also Jack M. Sasson, “The Blood of Grapes: Viticulture and Intoxication in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Drinking in Ancient Societies: History and Culture of Drinks in the Ancient Near East. Papers of a Symposium Held in Rome, May 17–19, 1990*, ed. Lucio Milano. History of the Ancient Near East/Studies 6 (Padova: Sargon, 1994), 399–419; Patrick E. McGovern, *Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of Viniculture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

154 In Akkadian, the term *sāmu*, “carnelian,” was used of wine. CAD S 129, s.v. *sāmu*.

155 Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 77, argues that the use of the term “blood” with grapes has more to do with its liquidity than its color. I contend that its color and its liquidity both inform the idiom.

use of viticultural language for warfare in Ugaritic and biblical texts.¹⁵⁶ The intimate connection of prostitutes to drinking houses only contributed to the productivity of the cluster.¹⁵⁷

Of course, there are other references to red in the Hebrew Bible that I have not discussed, because they do not appear in the three-fold cluster. Nevertheless, it is plausible to think that they too might signify notions of protection, fertility, or defilement. Such might be the case, for example, with the carnelian stones (קִדְמָן),¹⁵⁸ “red-dyed” (מִאֲדָמָה) rams’ skins,¹⁵⁹ and scarlet textiles (תּוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי) used to adorn the priests and the sanctuary.¹⁶⁰ I already have presented evidence for the perceived powers of carnelian in Mesopotamia. It is likely that the Israelites held similar views.¹⁶¹ Indeed, the use of blue, red, silver, and gold in the construction of the temple and its accoutrements is very much on a par with their use in Mesopotamia, where they were viewed as possessing agency and sympathetic powers.¹⁶² Therefore, in a temple context, items of red stone and fabric likely also signified blood, and its atoning, protective, and fecund properties.¹⁶³ Certainly, later exegetes pondered the meaning of the colors of these items. Philo asserted that the scarlet color in the temple represented fire, one of the elements by which God made the cosmos.¹⁶⁴ Josephus opined sim-

156 See Robert M. Good, “Metaphorical Gleanings from Ugarit,” *JJS* 33 (1982): 55–59.

157 CAD H 101, s.v. *ḫarimtu*. Josephus, *Antiquities* v 5.8, also understands Rahab as the keeper of an καταγωγίω, “tavern.”

158 Exod 28:17, 39:10; Ezek 28:13.

159 Exod 25:5, 26:14, 35:7, 35:23, 36:19, 39:34.

160 Thus, it also was used in making the tabernacle’s finery. For example, priests placed a כִּנְדָּת תּוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי, “garment of scarlet wool,” over the Table of Presence (Num 4:8). Scarlet also was a material used in embroidering cloth items for priestly garments (Exod 28:5, 28:6, 28:8, 28:15, 28:33, 39:1, 39:2, 39:3, 39:5, 39:8, 39:24, 39:29) and the tabernacle and courtyard (Exod 25:4, 26:1, 26:31, 26:36, 27:16, 35:6, 35:25, 35:35, 36:8, 36:35, 36:38, 38:18, 38:23). All of the passages employ תּוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי, except 28:5, 35:25, 35:35, 38:23, 39:1, and 39:3, which add the definite article, i.e., תּוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי, “vermillion,” in 2 Chr 2:6, 2:13, 3:14.

161 See Wayne Horowitz and Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, “Urim and Thummim in Light of a Psephomancy Ritual from Assur (LKA 137),” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 21 (1992): 95–115.

162 See Benzel, *Puabi’s Adornment for the Afterlife*.

163 Future researchers might find it useful to examine the colors in the temple, in conjunction with the objects on which they are found, as communicative elements that operate simultaneously on an inside/outside axis and a vertical (to God)/horizontal (to the community) axis. For a representative example of such an approach with regard to the semiotic meaning of Israel’s priestly attire, see Michael Swartz, *The Signifying Creator* (New York/London: New York University Press, 2012), 35–54. However, Swartz does not focus on the color of the clothing.

164 Philo, *Life of Moses* 11 88. It is noteworthy that fire and/or burning appear in many of the passages containing the cluster (e.g., Gen 3:24, 38:24; Judg 16:8; 2 Kgs 3:27 [implicitly]; Jer 4:4; Isa 1:7, 1:31; Ezek 16:41, 23:25, 23:47; Nah 2:4, 2:14, 3:13, 3:15; Lam 1:13, 4:11; Prov 31:18 [implicitly]; Rev 17:16). In addition, in Mesopotamia “fire” is described as *sāmu*, “carnelian,” (see CAD S 129, s.v. *sāmu*). Nevertheless, fire is never described as red, or as any other color, in the Bible.

ilarly.¹⁶⁵ Various cosmological interpretations of the temple's architecture and implements also appear in rabbinic literature.¹⁶⁶ Of course, such speculation is understandable given biblical references to the temple as a microcosm of the universe (e.g., Ps 78:29).

However, in more recent times scholars have argued that the interior of the temple intended to replicate the Garden of Eden, filled with its luscious flora, including palms, flowers, and pomegranates, as well as fauna, like cattle, lions, and, of course, the cherubim.¹⁶⁷ Victor Hurowitz observed that the temple's pillars "may be stylized trees, bringing to mind the Tree of Life and the Tree of

The unknown מְהַרְהָרֵה, "shining-metal (?)" (LXX: ἠλέκτρον) in Ezek 1:4 (also 1:27, 8:2) is said to be מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ, "in midst of the fire," i.e., and not the color of the fire itself. Moreover, the context marks it as something one would not expect to see in a fire. Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 111, cites the reference to flaming torches in Nah 2:4–6 as evidence of the redness of fire, since the Ninevite soldiers are clad in red (see my discussion above). However, twice the text explicitly relates the torches to the chariots and not their riders. Moreover, the torches also are compared to lightning (2:4). Lightning never describes soldiers or their uniforms, but it can describe a bronze arrowhead (Job 20:25), a metal spear-tip (Nah 3:3; Hab 3:11), or the blade of a sword (Ezek 21:15, 21:20, 21:33), i.e., items made of metal. Therefore, the lightning in Nahum likely refers to the glitter of weapons docked on the chariots or to the chariots' metal parts. The Hebrew פָּחַם, "coal," is cognate with Ugaritic *phm*, which van Soldt, "Fabrics and Dyes at Ugarit," 342, suggests might be a red color used for dyeing textiles. However, Lam 4:8 clarifies that פָּחַם is black (as does the Arabic cognate كُحْم, "black"). The Hebrew synonym לְהִקָּחַם, "coal," also means "black" (cf. Akkadian *guhlu*, "antimony," used as eye paint, CAD G 125, s.v. *guhlu*). A heated coal perhaps could be red, but such idioms use the word for "fire" rather than color terms. Thus, אֶשׁ פָּחִים, "coals of fire" (to be read as אֶשׁ פְּחִיִּים in Ps 11:6) and אֶשׁ לְהִקָּחַם, "coals of fire" (Ezek 1:13).

165 Josephus, *Antiquities* III 6: 4, 7:7.

166 See Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

167 J.D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1998), 90–99; Victor A. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings*. JSOTSup 115/American Schools of Oriental Research Monograph Series 5 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); *idem*, "Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: A Glimpse into the Solomonic Temple," in *Capital Cities: Urban Planning and Spiritual Dimensions. Proceedings of the Symposium Held on May 27–29, 1996, Jerusalem, Israel*, ed. J.G. Westenholz (Jerusalem: Bible Lands Museum, 1999), 215–23; *idem*, "YHWH's Exalted House – Aspects of the Design and Symbolism of Solomon's Temple," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. J. Day (London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), 63–110; E. Bloch-Smith, "Who is the King of Glory? Solomon's Temple and Its Symbolism," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, ed. M.D. Coogan (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 18–31; M. Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008). Conversely, see Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *"I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood": Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399–404.

Knowledge which stood in the center of the Garden of Eden.”¹⁶⁸ The Psalmist also recalls the temple as a place of fertility and abundance (Ps 36:7–9). In such a context, the use of scarlet certainly would convey fertility.¹⁶⁹

There also are two references to red horses in the Bible, both in the visions of Zechariah. In one, the prophet sees “a man mounted on a red (אָדָם) horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in the watery-hollow (תְּצִלָּה). Behind him were red (אֲדָמִים), dark-red (שְׁחֻקִים), and white horses” (Zech 1:8). While these colors are not beyond the ordinary for horses in the ancient world,¹⁷⁰ the fact that we are given their colors suggests that the colors are meaningful.¹⁷¹ Once again, the context is ensconced in the language of fertility. The horse was a paragon of virility, as Ezekiel makes abundantly clear (23:20), so redness only would enhance this perception. Further, the horses in the vision are posed near water and myrtles, tandem images of fertility employed elsewhere (Isa 41:18–19). The imagery has led some scholars to understand the scene as the divine garden.¹⁷² Indeed, the prediction that stems from the vision is one of abundance: “My cities will again overflow (תִּפְּרֹצֵינָהּ) with good” (1:17).¹⁷³

Later the prophet has another vision featuring colored horses (Zech 6:2–3).

168 Hurowitz, “Ascending the Mountain of the Lord,” 218.

169 Cf. Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 38, who asserts that the Israelites used scarlet in the tabernacle “no doubt as symbolic of the universal rule of Yahweh,” because of its connection with royalty and nobility. On the royal ideology of the garden, see Nicolas Wyatt, “A Royal Garden: The Ideology of Eden,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 28 (2014): 1–35.

170 Cf. horses in Akkadian, which also can be “red.” CAD S 126, s.v. *sāmu*. On horses generally, consult Armas Salonen, *Die Landfahrzeuge des alten Mesopotamien nach sumerisch-akkadischen Quellen* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1951), 27. See also David Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1984), 141–43, who discusses and rejects a number of previous allegorical and symbolic attempts to understand the horses’ colors, yet concludes that the scene in which they appear is a divine garden.

171 Thus, contra Ibn Ezra who suggests that there is little meaning in the color terms since they occur in a vision: על סוס אדם ככה ראה ואין צורך לבקש למה אדום, “With regard to the red horse, it is as such a vision, and there is no need to question why it is red” (1:8). On the other hand, Rashi sees the colors as meaningful and interprets each one as an enemy nation. Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 119, surveys previous symbolic interpretations of the colors of the horses and concludes: “Given that these horses are dominant in the prophet’s visions, the colours most likely have symbolic force; but, given the antiquity of the text, that symbolic value has yet to be firmly established.”

172 See, e.g., Willem Beuken, *Haggai-Sacharja 1–8: Studien zu Überlieferungsgeschichte der frühnach-exilischen Prophetie*. *Studia Semitica Neerlandica* 10 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967), 239; Christian Jeremias, *Die Nachtgesichte des Sacharja: Untersuchungen zu ihrer Stellung im Zusammenhang der Visionsberichte im Alten Testament und zu ihrem Bildmaterial* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 114; Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, 143.

173 Interestingly, the root פָּרַץ, “overflow,” appears elsewhere only in Prov 5:16 in reference to “waters”

In it he sees four chariots coming out from two bronze mountains: in order, the sets of horses are red (רָאָה), black, white, and dappled.¹⁷⁴ The angel identifies them as the four spirits of heaven going out to the entire world: “the chariot with black horses is headed north, the one with the white horses after them, and the one with the dappled horses toward the south” (6:6). Oddly, the angel never references the red horses again, though it appears they are headed either east or west. Nevertheless, this prophecy, too, ends on a fertile note. It predicts the coming of a man named שׁוֹטָר, “Shoot,” so-called because he will שׁוֹטָר, “shoot up” and restore the temple to its former glory. The root, whence the name derives, is closely tied to plant and human fertility. For example, it is used of the plants of Eden (Gen 2:9), the foliage of a vine (Ezek 17:9), and Samson’s hair (Judg 16:22).

Conclusion

The combined evidence demonstrates that the semiotics of “red” encompassed far more than a hue. Redness conveyed blood, which allowed it to index contexts of protection, fertility, and defilement. The evidence also asserts that an appreciation for the semiotics of color in the ancient Near East can offer new perspectives for understanding ancient texts.¹⁷⁵ It is my contention that if

of pleasure from “public springs” (i.e., adulteresses), in contrast to water from one’s own cistern (i.e., one’s wife).

¹⁷⁴ Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 112–14, discusses the term רָאָה, here rendered “dappled,” as a secondary color for red, but admits that its rarity makes its definition uncertain (p. 114). If it indeed denotes a red hue, then what applies to the רָאָה in this passage holds equally for רָאָה. However, given its uncertain meaning, I have not included it. Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 214–17, also sees it as a non-color term.

¹⁷⁵ It also might shed light on Mesopotamian texts. I already have noted a number of connections between the goddess Ishtar and the color red. However, she is something of a divine embodiment of the cluster examined here. She is the patron goddess of the tavern and of prostitutes. In one text she declares: “When I sit at the door of the tavern I (Ishtar) am a loving prostitute (*ḥarīmtum*).” See G. A. Reisner, *Sumerisch-babylonische Hymnen nach Thontafeln griechischer Zeit*. Königliche Museen zu Berlin. Mittheilungen aus den orientalischen Sammlungen 10 (Berlin: W. Spemann, 1896), 105:51; CAD H 101, s.v. *ḥarīmtu*. Ishtar also is a goddess of warfare, and therefore intimate with bloodshed. On Ishtar as an ambiguous, liminal figure, see H.L.J. Vanstiphout, “Inanna/Ishtar as a Figure of Controversy,” in *Struggles of Gods: Papers of the Groningen Work Group for the Study of the History of Religions*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), 225–38; B. Groneberg, “Die sumerisch-akkadische Inanna/Ištar: Hermaphroditos?” *Die Welt des Orients* 17 (1986): 25–46; Rivkah Harris, “Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox and a Coincidence of Opposites,” *History of Religions* 30 (1991): 261–78. Harris (p. 266), refers to her as “ambiguity incarnate,” embodying opposites: love/war, female/male, virgin/prostitute, human/divine, life/death, and morning/evening. If her cult in any way provides a background for the idolatry

future researchers apply a semiotic approach to other color terms in the Bible, they too might reveal associations now lost on modern readers. It may be that such studies will elucidate not only the import of individual colors, but texts in which combinations of different colors appear.

Although an exhaustive treatment of other color terms is beyond the scope of this study, a brief look at the Hebrew words for “white” will serve as a demonstration (i.e., לָבָן, חֹר, צָח, זָכָךְ).¹⁷⁶ These terms denote a range in hue from pale to white, but they also encode their own set of related associations.¹⁷⁷ The term לָבָן characterizes the color of teeth (Gen 49:12), coriander seeds (Exod 16:31), the bright flaky scales of psoriasis (Lev 13 [15×]), and the hides of goats and horses (Gen 30:35; Zech 1:8, 6:3, 6:7).¹⁷⁸ Yet it also registers ritual and ethical purity (Isa 1:18; Ps 51:9; Dan 7:9, 11:35, 12:10; Lam 4:7; Qoh 9:8), the baking (lit. “whitening”) of clay bricks (לִבְנִים) in the sun or a kiln (Gen 11:3; Exod 5:7, 5:14), and the bareness of branches peeled of their bark (Gen 30:37; Joel 1:7).¹⁷⁹ The related term לִבְנָה denotes a poplar tree known for its white resin (Gen 30:37; Hos 4:13). The root also provides the namesake for the full moon (לִבְנָה), frankincense (לִבְנָה), Laban (לָבָן), and Lebanon (לִבְנוֹן).¹⁸⁰ The root חוּר describes bread (Gen 40:16), the complexion of an ashamed person (Isa 29:22), and cloth (Dan 7:9; Esth 1:6, 8:15).¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, it also can convey purity (Dan 7:9). The word צָח appears to reflect a very bright, illuminating white.¹⁸² It can refer to one’s complexion (Song 5:10), but also searing wind and heat (Isa 18:4; Jer 4:11). It is

described as fornication in some of the aforestudied texts, then it also might have shaped the rhetoric of those clusters. Certainly, there is no place for such a divine blending of opposites in the Israelite cosmic order, when one cannot even sow different kinds of seeds in one field or make a garment of mixed materials (Lev 19:19; Deut 22:11). Nevertheless, it is difficult to ascertain to what degree the cult of Ishtar was relevant in ancient Israel. On the debated relationship between Ishtar, Asherah, and Ashtoret, see Judith M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess*. University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 57 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

176 Hartley, *The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Colour Lexemes*, 31, 80–106, recognizes only the roots לָבָן and חוּר as belonging to the Macro Category “white.”

177 See Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 105, who also shows that the terms are not merely achromatic neutral (pp. 12–15).

178 See Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 88–90.

179 The Akkadian cognate *labānu* means “make bricks” or “beg humbly, pray contritely,” and Assyriologists distinguish them as separate roots. See *CAD* L 8, s.v. *labānu* A; 10, *labānu* B. Nevertheless, the connection of whiteness to purity perhaps suggests that the two are related.

180 On the sophisticated use of the root לָבָן in the narratives involving Laban, see Scott B. Noegel, “Drinking Feasts and Deceptive Feats: Jacob and Laban’s Double Talk,” in *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, ed. Scott B. Noegel (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2000), 163–79.

181 For the use of the root לָבָן to describe a complexion in a positive sense, see b. Ketubbot 59b.

182 Noted by Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 118–19.

used metaphorically for clear speech (Isa 32:4) and purity (Lam 4:7). The root זָכַר similarly refers to a bright white hue (Job 25:4–5; Lam 4:7), but it also can mean “clean, pure, and unadulterated” (Job 9:30, 15:15; Lam 4:7).

Even this brief survey demonstrates that the terms for “whiteness” also convey more than color. The figurative use of לָבָן in conjunction with the roots צָרַר , “refine metal,” and כָּרַר , “cleanse, purify metal” (Dan 11:35, 12:10), and its use in rabbinic Hebrew for “cleanse or smelt with fire,” connect it to extreme heat – a semantic function shared by hot altar coals (Isa 6:6–7) – and a semantic range shared by the use of לָבָן for “bake bricks,” צָח for “searing heat,” and חֹר for “baked bread.”¹⁸³ Moreover, the bareness of the stripped branch, coriander seed, and tree named for its resin, like metals in a crucible, represent reductions to bases – essences revealed. From a semiotic perspective, one might say that Hebrew terms belonging to the Macro Category “white” can index notions of purity, refinement, interiority, exposure,¹⁸⁴ and essentiality.¹⁸⁵ As such, “whiteness” stands in contrast, not just to “blackness,” but to “redness,” since the latter can communicate impurity and defilement.¹⁸⁶ Evidence for this comes again from Isaiah’s famous prophecy: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they will become white as snow, though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (1:18).¹⁸⁷ Indeed, terms for “white” often appear in contexts that reference purity. Hence, Isaiah’s use of the root צָח in 32:4: “the tongue of stutters (לְשׁוֹן עֲלִלָּיִם) will speak clearly (צָחֹת).” Since the prophecy transforms a disability into physical wholeness, it marks a change from impure to pure.¹⁸⁸ Thus, צָחֹת here means “unimpeded, sound, pure.” Consider also the root לָבָן for “full moon” (Isa 24:23, 30:26; Song 6:10; Ezra 2:45; Neh 7:48). The root indexes not only its

183 See, e.g., b. Avodah Zarah 5:12, Hullin 8a. See also the Akkadian semantic cognate *pešû*, which means “whiten” and also “sinter.” CAD P 334, s.v. *pešû*. Note too the Ugaritic Polyglott: [BABBAR = *pešû* = Hurr (?)] = *la-ba-nu*. John Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription*. Harvard Semitic Studies 32 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 142.

184 Underscoring the notion of exposure is the use of the verb חָשַׁף , “strip bare,” in reference to the branches (Gen 30:37; Joel 1:7). When used of people, it can mean “expose nudity” (Isa 47:2; Jer 13:26). Cf. the use of the hiphil הִלְבִּין , “expose, put to shame,” in b. Avot 3:11, b. Bava Metzi’a 59a.

185 Cf. b. Niddah 31a, which refers to a child within the womb as מְלֻבֵּן , “well-formed.”

186 Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, 118–19, also notes the contrast.

187 Cf. also the references to “scarlet” and “whiteness” in Song 4 and 7 discussed above. Might they register a tension between impure/illicit and pure/licit?

188 Note that the Arabic and Old South Arabian cognates mean “be healthy, intact, free of blemish and defect.” See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 1651, s.v. عَج ; Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic*. Harvard Semitic Museum Studies 25 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 421–22, s.v. ṣḥḥ . On disability as marking ritual impurity, see Saul M. Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

pale white color, but its wholeness, and its role in signaling calendrical moments that require ritual purity. Such a nuance informs Bildad's words to Job:

How can mankind be justified with God?
 Or how can he be clean (יִזְקָה), who is born of a woman?
 Behold, even the moon does not shine,
 And the stars are not pure (זָכוּ) in His sight" (Job 25:4–5).

Although Bildad uses יָרַח and not לְבָנָה for "moon," the object's whiteness parallels the purity of the stars.

This naturally raises the question of whether other basic color terms for "whiteness" index purity, refinement, interiority, exposure, or essentiality. For example, does Isaiah's reference to "white faces" (with חָוֵר, Isa 29:22) describe only a pale complexion or does it mark the shame of exposure? Note that just prior the prophecy refers to those who "seek to hide their counsel," whose "deeds are in the dark," and who see their actions as invisible (29:15), and that it promises ritual purity to those physically challenged: the deaf shall hear and the blind shall see (29:18). The emphasis on purity might explain why Isaiah chose to integrate the root לָבַן into his description of inversion: "Lebanon (לְבָנוֹן) will be turned into a fruitful field" (29:17). Similarly, one might ask whether the whiteness of the horse in Zechariah's vision merely describes its color, or whether it also conveys notions of purity and wholeness. Like the red horse of fertility, it fittingly travels to and fro upon the earth as a harbinger of Yahweh's forthcoming compassion (Zech 1:8–11). Later an angel interprets the white horses as one of the four "winds of heaven" (Zech 6:4). Might their whiteness also characterize them as hot and purifying?¹⁸⁹ Compare Jeremiah's prophecy of a רִיחַ צָח, "searing-white wind," that will come, contrary to expectation, לֹא לְהַבִּיר, "not to purify" (Jer 4:11). One also might ask whether Laban's actions of questionable ethics convey an ironic representation of the meaning of his name – to wit, the name's connection to ethical and ritual purity forces readers to evaluate his actions in the light of his name.¹⁹⁰ Examples could be multiplied,

189 Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*. Anchor Yale Bible Series 25B (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 1987), 112–13, opine that the four colors of the horses in Zechariah 1 reflect the flora of the landscape in the month of Shevat. With regard to Zechariah 6 (pp. 320–22), they do not discuss the significance of the color terms, but focus mainly on what is meant by the color designation of the fourth set of horses (i.e., בְּרוֹדִים). They conclude that the horses are multicolored. As I discuss above, red stands in opposition to white. Thus, I contend that dappled constitutes the opposite of black. This means that, like the four cardinal directions, the horses comprise two sets of merisms that express a totality.

190 To cite just three examples: Laban is enamored with the gold ring and bracelets given to Rebekah (Gen 24:30); he deceives Jacob of his intended bride on his wedding night (29:21–25); worships idols (31:19); and fails to pay Jacob properly (31:41), an act noted as a crime elsewhere (Lev 19:13;

but these few should suffice to demonstrate that as research on basic color terms continues, we stand a good chance to discover new associative clusters and constellations of meaning, especially if these color terms are semiotically read.

Deut 24:14–15; Jer 22:13). Thus, Laban earned the epithet רִמָּאָה, “the deceiver,” in rabbinic tradition (a twist of אֲרָמֵי, “the Aramean”). See, e.g., Targum Yonathan to Gen 31:24. Cf. the traditions that Laban and Balaam are the same person or that he is Balaam’s father. See Targum Yonathan to Num 22:5, 1 Chr 1:23, Yalqut Shimoni, Parshat Shemot, Remez 168, b. Sanhedrin 105a.