

שׁוֹשַׁנָּה of the Canticle(*)

One of the many sayings of Jesus which will be familiar to anyone who has read the Gospels is: “And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these”. (Mt 6,28-29; cf. Lk 12,27-28). Generally these flowers τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ are understood as “the lilies of the field”, and the references to these “lilies” appear only twice in the NT, whereas in the LXX this same lexeme κρίνον occurs more often. The dominant use is noticed in the Song of Songs where it renders the original שׁוֹשַׁנָּה. The aim of this paper is to revisit the lexeme שׁוֹשַׁנָּה and its meaning, primarily in the Hebrew text of the eight chapters-long Canticle which is ascribed to Solomon (1,1). After a short presentation of how the LXX manages to translate the occurrences of שׁוֹשַׁנָּה (part I), attention will be paid primarily to the term itself. The etymology is still not unanimously accepted (part II). Searching for its meaning, we examine the three somewhat different uses of this term, focussing mainly on its occurrences in the Song where it features prominently (part III). This may be regarded as a test case itself for the meaning of שׁוֹשַׁנָּה⁽¹⁾.

(*) I am grateful to Prof. Alviero Niccacci for careful reading of the first draft of this essay. His and Prof. Othmar Keel’s remarks helped me to strengthen some of the weak points.

⁽¹⁾ BDB, 1004, defines this noun as “usually lily, probably any kind of lily-like flower”; KBL³ IV, 1454-1455: “lily”, “the flower of the lily” or “lotus blossom”. E.D. Klein translates only with “lily”. Klein reports that some scholars identify the word with the Egyptian lotus *sšn*, *sšn* (Coptic *šōšēn*), the others to *Ranunculus asiaticus*, still others to *Cyperus papyrus*. According to others the word goes back to Akkadian *šusu* (six-sided); *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (Jerusalem 1987) 647. The Greek *souson* and Latin *Susanna* are therefore, according to Klein, the Semitic loan words. P. REYMOND, *Dictionnaire d’hébreu et d’araméen bibliques* (Paris 1991) 380: “lys”, “lotus” (in the Temple architecture), and an unknown musical instrument (in the Psalms); L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *Diccionario bíblico hebreo-español* (Madrid 1994) 755: “azucena, lirio”.

I. Kpívov in the LXX translation

1. *The understanding of κpívov as “lily”*

The ambience in which the first Church was born was strongly linked to Graeco-Roman culture and to the Greek language⁽²⁾. Therefore, for the first Christians the flower which the Greek labelled as κpívov — well known in Asia Minor, as well as it is in the botanical world today — meant “lily”, in its basic species of *Lilium candidum*. The purpose of this paper is not to examine whether Jesus’ saying refers to *Lilium candidum* or *Anemone coronaria*, or to another species, since my aim is to explore the word שושנה in its context of the Hebrew Bible⁽³⁾.

Even if the first Christians did not understand the word κpívov to be some species of the lily flower, later generations certainly assumed this, as the Vulgate and other translations show. The fact was that the LXX was the Bible of the Early Church⁽⁴⁾. Only in the context of the LXX some lexical and theological concepts of the NT may be well explained⁽⁵⁾. Besides the NT writers there were Philo and Josephus who often quoted the Greek text as the Greek and Latin fathers did⁽⁶⁾. It may be concluded with some certainty that when the writers and readers of early Christianity encountered the word κpívov in the LXX, they thought of a lily. This understanding had an incisive impact on

⁽²⁾ Cf. R. PENNA, *L’ambiente storico-culturale delle origini cristiane. Una documentazione ragionata* (Bologna 1991) 97-173; G. SEGALLA, *Panorama storico del Nuovo Testamento* (LoB 3,5; Brescia 1984) 13-71; N. FERNÁNDEZ MARCOS, *La Bibbia dei Settanta. Introduzione alle versioni greche della Bibbia* (IsBS 6; Brescia 2000) 315-317, 322-325.

⁽³⁾ For further discussion about the “lilies of the field”, see H.N. MOLDENKE – A.L. MOLDENKE, *Plants of the Bible* (ChBo 28; New York 1952) 41-46, 116; M. ZOHARY, *Plants of the Bible. A complete handbook to all the plants with 200 full-color plates taken in the natural habitat* (Cambridge 1982) 170.

⁽⁴⁾ Cf. F.C. HOLMGREN, *The Old Testament and the Significance of Jesus. Embracing Change – Maintaining Christian Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge, UK 1999) 47-52.

⁽⁵⁾ Cf. D.M. SMITH, “The use of the Old Testament in the New”, *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays. Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring* (ed. J.M. EFIRD) (Durham, NC 1972) 3-65; ID., “The Pauline Literature”, *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honor of Barnabas Lindars, SSF* (eds. D.A. CARSON – H.G.M. WILLIAMSON) (Cambridge 1988) 265-291.

⁽⁶⁾ Cf. M.K.H. PETERS, “Septuagint”, *ABD* V, 1093-1104; Y. ‘AMIR, “La letteratura giudeo-ellenistica: la versione dei LXX, Filone e Giuseppe Flavio”, *La lettura ebraica delle Scritture* (ed. S.J. SIERRA) (Bologna 1996) 31-58.

the understanding of its Hebrew original שושנה which had been labelled as “lily”. Nobody seriously questioned this labelling except recently some scholars like Loretz⁽⁷⁾, M.H. Pope⁽⁸⁾ and especially O. Keel. He states that behind the Hebrew term שושנה lies the Egyptian flower lotus⁽⁹⁾.

2. κρίνον – the translation of שושנה

The LXX reads κρίνον in all occurrences where שושנה refers to a flower. Only in the superscription of the psalms, the LXX translates the lexeme in a completely different way: τῶν ἀλλοιωθησομένων, Pss 45[44],1; 60[59],1; 69[68],1; 80[79],1. In one instance, 1 Kgs 7,22, the LXX does not have a translation at all.

On the other hand, the LXX employs κρίνον in some other instances where the Hebrew term שושנה does not appear (Exod 25,31-40; Num 8,4). The MT interestingly employs in this description of the top of the lamp-stand the more general term פֶּרֶךְ. The LXX seemingly implies the word שושנה as its rendering κρίνον in these instances reveals, Exod 25,31⁽¹⁰⁾.33.34. In v. 33 of the MT the first descriptive clause is repeated twice but in the LXX this repetition is minus⁽¹¹⁾. More intriguing is that the LXX in the description of the manufacture of the lamp-stand in Exod 37,17-24 does not use κρίνον anymore, although in both Exod 25,33 and Exod 37,19 the phrases in question

⁽⁷⁾ O. LORETZ, *Studien zur althebräischen Poesie I*. Das althebräische Liebeslied. Untersuchungen zur Stichometrie und Redaktionsgeschichte des Hohenliedes und des 45. Psalms (AOAT 14; Kevelaer – Neukirchen-Vluyn 1971) 13, considers that “Wahrscheinlich ist der in der Kunst berühmte blaue Lotus (*Nymphaea caerulea* Sav.) gemeint”. Yet, in his translation he opts for “lily”.

⁽⁸⁾ M.H. POPE, *Song of Songs*. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB 7C; New York 1977).

⁽⁹⁾ O. KEEL, *Deine Blicken sind Tauben*. Zur Metaphorik des Hohen Liedes (SBS 114/115; Stuttgart 1984) 63-78; Id., *Das Hohelied* (ZBK 18; Zürich 1986). For the symbolism of love in the Canticle in the context of Near East, see his “Hoheslied”, *NBL* II (1995) 183-191 and “Le Cantique des cantiques: parallèles littéraires”, *MoBi* 128 (2000) 38-43.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Symmachus has ἄνθη “bloom, blossom” instead of κρίνον, whereas Aquila has βλαστοί a literalism from פֶּרֶךְ (to sprout, to bud); cf. J.W. WEVERS, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus* (SBLSCS 30; Atlanta, GE 1990) 405-407.

⁽¹¹⁾ M.L. Wade explains that “there is no ‘loss’ of meaning, but rather the MT communicates this organizational meaning more explicitly, i.e. by repeating it”, whereas the LXX communicates the same meaning more implicitly, i.e. without repeating it; *Consistency of Translation Techniques in the Tabernacle Accounts of Exodus in the Old Greek* (SBLSCS 49; Atlanta, GE 2003) 181, n. 61.

have identical Hebrew wording. C.L. Mayer explains that the phrase כַּפֶּתֶר וְפֶרֶחַ is a hendiadys⁽¹²⁾. This suggestion gives credit to the LXX 38,15 for its adequate rendering, yet, M.L. Wade admits some potential ambiguity in that phrase⁽¹³⁾. Moreover, Mayer's suggestions do not solve the problem of LXX 25,33.

Exod 25,33	בַּקֶּנֶה הָאֶחָד כִּפְתָר וּפְרֵחַ ... בַּקֶּנֶה הָאֶחָד כִּפְתָר וּפְרֵחַ
LXX 25,33	ἐν τῷ ἐνὶ καλαμίσκῳ σφαιρωτῆρ ⁽¹⁴⁾ καὶ κρίνον
Exod 37,19	בַּקֶּנֶה הָאֶחָד כִּפְתָר וּפְרֵחַ ... בַּקֶּנֶה אֶחָד כִּפְתָר וּפְרֵחַ
LXX 38,15	ἐκ τῶν καλαμίσκων αὐτῆς οἱ βλαστοί

I can see two possible explanations for the different LXX renderings of the Hebrew phraseology. It could be a clear deliberate choice of the LXX, the reasons for which would be very difficult to trace, if possible at all. Another option is to assume the subsequent change — that is later than the LXX translation — had taken place in the MT⁽¹⁵⁾. The LXX would be a witness to the Hebrew *Vorlage*. The second explanation seems to be more plausible, since the fact is that the whole of Exod 25 comes from the late period⁽¹⁶⁾. The MT Num

⁽¹²⁾ C.L. MEYERS, *The Tabernacle Menorah. A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult* (ASORDiss. 2; Missoula, MO 1976) 25.

⁽¹³⁾ WADE, *Consistency*, 219.

⁽¹⁴⁾ This translation is unique in the whole of the LXX. It occurs once more, in Gen 14,23, where it renders טַרְטֵן a part of sandal.

⁽¹⁵⁾ F.M. Cross's theory about the origin of the Pentateuch postulates three textual families of the different geographical origins: Egypt (the *Vorlage* of the LXX), Palestine and Babylonia. Among several of his studies, see "The History of Biblical Text in the Light of Discoveries of the Judean Desert", *HTR* 57 (1964) 281-299; Id., "Some Notes on a Generation of Qumran Studies", *The Madrid Qumran Congress. Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls Madrid 18-21 March 1991* (eds. J. TREBOLLE BARRERA – L. VEGAS MONTANER) (STDJ 11,1; Leiden – New York – Köln – Madrid 1992) I, 1-14. But several theories about the origin of the MT and the LXX reflect the complexity of the problem in this field; cf. FERNÁNDEZ MARCOS, *La Bibbia*, 79-94; H.-J. FABRY, "Die griechischen Handschriften vom Toten Meer", *Im Brennpunkt: Die Septuaginta. Studien zur Entstehung und Bedeutung der Griechischen Bibel* (Hrsg. H.-J. FABRY – U. OFFERHAUS) (BWANT 153; Stuttgart – Berlin – Köln 2001) 131-133.

⁽¹⁶⁾ According to A.F. CAMPBELL – O'BRIEN, *Sources of the Pentateuch. Text, Introductions, Annotations* (Minneapolis, MN 1993) 44, n. 56, 55, n. 67; J.L. SKA, *Introduzione alla lettura del Pentateuco. Chiavi per l'interpretazione dei primi cinque libri della Bibbia* (CBI; Roma 1998) 165, Exod 25 is of P origin and chapters 33-39 are secondary.

8,1-4, in the LXX translation of which κρίνον reappears, is just another later specification of Exod 25,31-40⁽¹⁷⁾.

The Egyptian elements in the OT⁽¹⁸⁾ and in the Pentateuch are a given fact and these links reflect some cultural traditions or religious beliefs of ancient Egypt⁽¹⁹⁾. Especially in the Book of Exodus the parallels with Egyptian texts and traditions are numerous⁽²⁰⁾ and the outcome of the biblical narrative is negative for the Pharaoh, Egypt and its people⁽²¹⁾. This ideological contestation of Egypt which is profiled well on the redactional level of the Pentateuchal narrative, finds the most compelling context of its origin in the Persian period⁽²²⁾. I am not able to detect to what extent the late disappearance of the term שושנה might reflect that redactional tendency⁽²³⁾.

3. *The proper names reflecting the root שושן*

Before leaving the LXX and moving to the term שושנה, it is necessary to assess two other proper names Σούσα and Σουσαννα, which indisputably resemble the root שושן. Mostly the LXX does not translate the proper names but transliterates them according to the phonetics. In the case of these two names there is an Hebrew original only for the name of the city Susa but not for Susanna since this occurs in the LXX Susanna narrative only.

⁽¹⁷⁾ M. NOTH, *Numbers. A Commentary* (OTL; London – Philadelphia, PA 1968) 65-68.

⁽¹⁸⁾ R. KESSLER, *Die Ägyptenbilder der Hebräischen Bibel. Ein Beitrag zur neueren Monotheismusdebatte* (SBS 197; Stuttgart 2002).

⁽¹⁹⁾ J.D. CURRID shows that the Egyptian culture is not only being falsified by the Biblical writers but rather representative in the Biblical text; *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI 1997) 53-155.

⁽²⁰⁾ A. NICCACCI, “Sullo sfondo egiziano di Esodo 1–15”, *SBFLA* 36 (1986) 7-43; ID., “Yahweh e il Faraone: Teologia biblica ed egiziana a confronto”, *BN* 38 (1987) 85-102; KESSLER, *Ägyptenbilder*, 109-115.

⁽²¹⁾ F.V. GREIFENHAGEN, *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map. Constructing Biblical Israel's Identity* (JSOTSS 361; Sheffield 2002) 256-271.

⁽²²⁾ GREIFENHAGEN, *Egypt*, 223-255.

⁽²³⁾ Lotus was a favourite shape for the design of both major architectural features of the temples and the small bowls, lamps and the other similar items; cf. “Lotos” in *LÄ* III, 1091-1094; R.H. WILKINSON, *Reading Egyptian Art. A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture. With 450 illustrations* (London 1992) 121.

a) The city of Susa⁽²⁴⁾

The etymology of the proper name of this city remains unclear. M. Lurker suggested that it comes from the name of the lunar divinity in Elam “the god of the lilies”⁽²⁵⁾. We know that the name of the capital city of Elam in its first period was *Šûšan*. KBL³ indicates that the name is from the root שׁשׁ II⁽²⁶⁾. The name is known in Old Persian as *Sūšā*, in Sumerian as *Šûšina/Šûšan/Šûšan*⁽²⁷⁾ and in Akkadian as *Šûšan*⁽²⁸⁾. The chances of an Egyptian origin are minimal.

The name Susa can be found in several instances, since this city plays a topographical background for the Book of Esther, 1,2.5; 2,3.5.8; 3,15; 4,8.16; 8,14.15; 9,6.11-15.18. It was in Susa that Daniel had his vision (Dan 8,2). Its inhabitants are among those who signed an indictment against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem, drawn up during the reign of Ahasuerus (Ezr 4,6-9). The words of Nehemiah are spoken in Susa (Neh 1,1). OT does not specify this city more precisely.

b) The name Susanna

H. Engel suggests that the use of name Susanna in the narrative about Susanna (Sus 1-63) depends on Hos 14,6 and especially on the relevant texts from the Song, in which שושנה has a substantial importance⁽²⁹⁾. This name does not appear anywhere else in OT except Sus, not even in the later Judaic literature. Once it appears in

⁽²⁴⁾ For the brief history and the survey of the excavations, see E.M. YAMAUCHI, *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI 1996) 276-303; J. PERROT, “Birth of a City: Susa”, *Capital Cities. Urban planning and Spiritual Dimensions. Proceedings of the Symposium held on May 27-29, 1996, Jerusalem, Israel* (ed. J. GODDNICK WESTENHOLZ) (Jerusalem 1998) 83-97.

⁽²⁵⁾ “Lilie”, M. LURKER, *Wörterbuch biblischer Bilder and Symbole* (München 1973) 198.

⁽²⁶⁾ KBL³ IV, 1455.

⁽²⁷⁾ D.O. EDZARD – G. FARBER – E. SOLLBERG, *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen der prä-sargonischen und sargonischen Zeit* (Wiesbaden 1977) 154; cf. ID., *Die Orts- und Gewässernamen der Zeit der 3. Dynastie von Ur* (Wiesbaden 1974) 171.

⁽²⁸⁾ S. PARPOLA – K. KOSKENNIEMI, *Neo-Assyrian Toponyms* (AOAT 6; Kevelaer – Neukirchen-Vluyn 1970) 340; cf. D.J. WISEMAN, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626-556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London 1956) 16, 50.

⁽²⁹⁾ H. ENGEL, *Die Susanna-Erzählung* (OBO 61; Freiburg/Schweiz – Göttingen 1985) 74. Cf. H. FISCH, “Susanna as Parable: A Response to Piero Boitani”, *The Judgment of Susanna. Authority and Witness* (ed. E. SPOLSKY) (SBLEJL 11; Atlanta 1996) 37.

NT (Lk 8,3). The name Susanna does not reflect the person inhabiting the city of Susa either. Her presentation as being “named Susanna ... a very beautiful woman” (SusTh 2) may give an indication for its meaning⁽³⁰⁾. Susanna, as presented in the narrative, in spite of being brought up according to the law of Moses and fearing the Lord, was condemned to death. Daniel opposed the unjust process and helped to prove her innocence and “nothing shameful was found in her” (SusTh 62-63)⁽³¹⁾.

Why does this beautiful woman, faithful wife and very religious Jewess carry such a name? Although this is not our major interest in this paper, yet this name will be treated once more briefly in the concluding paragraph. I assume that her name was chosen on purpose⁽³²⁾.

II. שושנה in the MT

1. *The etymology*

The word שושנה is a feminine form of שושן/שושין, coming from ששן I. This lexeme is not a Hebrew word, nor does it come from another Semitic language, even though Zimmern⁽³³⁾ makes a reference to the Akkadian substantive *šešānu*. The substantive *šišnu/šišānu* refers to a kind of plant name⁽³⁴⁾ or bush, which can be found in the list of plants⁽³⁵⁾, but it does not have a connotation of the name of a flower. This root is reflected in the other Semitic languages such as Aramaic (*šwšān’/šwšnt’*), Syriac (*šaušantā*), Nabatean (*šwšnt*) and Arabic

⁽³⁰⁾ ENGEL, *Susanna-Erzählung*, 92-93.

⁽³¹⁾ His charge challenged the statement of the two elders, who were both judges: “Have you condemned (κατεκρίνατε) a daughter of Israel without examining (οὐκ ἀνακρίναντες) and without learning the facts (οὐδὲ τὸ σαφὲς ἐπιγνόντες)?” (Sus 48). שושנה of the Canticle may give quite a different flavour to Daniel’s judgment: “beauty has deceived you (τὸ κάλλος σε ἠπάτησεν)” (Sus 56) “and lust perverted your hearts”, (SusTh 56). For the critical edition, see J. ZIEGLER (ed.), *Susanna – Daniel – Bel et Draco*. Versionis iuxta “Theodotionem” fragmenta; iuxta LXX interpretes textum plane novum (Septuaginta XVI,2; Göttingen 1999) 216-233.

⁽³²⁾ There are several women in the OT, among which the mothers of Samson or of Maccabees (LXX), who played important roles in the relative narratives, but yet their names remain unknown.

⁽³³⁾ H. ZIMMERN, *Akkadische Fremdwörter als Beweis für babylonischen Kultureinfluß* (Leipzig 1915) 58.

⁽³⁴⁾ AHw III, 1250b: *šišnu (šišānu)*: Lieschgras.

⁽³⁵⁾ CAD Š3, XVII, 126: *šišnu (šišānu, šešānu)*: (a rush); plant list.

(*sausan/sūsan*). In the Late Hebrew the meaning is “bud, flower, rose, lily, in the form of calyx”⁽³⁶⁾.

The root שׁשׁ I comes from Egyptian *sššn/sšn/sôšēn* – “lotus”⁽³⁷⁾ which became *šošēn* in the Coptic⁽³⁸⁾. It is intriguing that this Egyptian word *sšn* had been translated into Greek as κρίνον or σοῦσον⁽³⁹⁾. The rendering σοῦσον⁽⁴⁰⁾ appears to be later than the first translation κρίνον. The translation κρίνον, not the most suitable one, goes back, as O. Keel observed, to a famous Greek tourist, Herodotus (c. 490 – c. 425 BCE), in Egypt who some years after 460 BCE wrote in the second book of his History: “When the river is in flood and overflows the plains, many lilies (κρίνεα πολλά), which the Egyptians call lotus (τὰ Αἰγύπτιοι καλέουσι λωτόν), grow in the water”⁽⁴¹⁾.

This first Greek rendering must have had a significant impact on the translators of the LXX who, rooted in the Egyptian culture, had no other choice but to translate שׁשׁ with κρίνον. For them most probably both lexemes κρίνον and λωτός stood for “lotus”. Since λωτός was a name applied to various plants and trees, providing fodder or fruit⁽⁴²⁾, and one that could easily have had a very negative connotation⁽⁴³⁾, the choice of κρίνον appeared to be the most

⁽³⁶⁾ M. JASTROW, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York 1950) 1543.

⁽³⁷⁾ BDB, 1004; T.O. LAMBDIN, “Egyptian Loan Words in the Old Testament”, *JAOS* 73 (1953) 154; A. ERMAN – H. GRAPOW (eds.), *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache. Im Auftrage der Deutschen Akademie III.* (Berlin 1982) 485-486.

⁽³⁸⁾ M. ELLENBOGEN, *Foreign Words in the Old Testament* (London 1962) 159.

⁽³⁹⁾ E. MASSON, *Recherches sur les plus anciens emprunts sémitiques en grec* (Paris 1967) 58-59.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Most probably, employed firstly by Athenaeus in his *Deipnosophistoi*. See below.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Herodotus, 2.92.

⁽⁴²⁾ Cf. “λωτός”, LSJ, 1070. Herodotus (2.92) seems to be responsible for a confusion of λωτός with water-lily. However, Theophrastus (c. 370 – c. 287 BCE), the great authority of antiquity in the botanic field, had clarified the distinction of λωτός from Egyptian bean (*Nelumbium speciosum*, Greek κύαμος) and the water lily (σίδη); Theophrastus, *Hist. Pl.* 4.8.9-11; 4.10.2-3. See also n. 43.

⁽⁴³⁾ Cf. “lotus-eaters” λωτο-φάγοι a mythical people on the coast of North Africa; “λωτο-φάγοι”, LSJ, 1070; attested already by Homer, *Od.* 9.84-96. Homer was the first to speak about the lotus-tree (using for it only the term λωτός). The next one to write about “lotus-eaters” was Herodotus. He used also the term

convenient. Another Greek writer, Athenaeus (c. 190 CE), whose work is a fruitful source of information on the literature and usage of ancient Greece⁽⁴⁴⁾, when speaking about the beauty of the city Susa, clarifies in his *Deipnosophistoi*: "...for *suson* (σοῦσον γὰρ) is what in the Greek language is called *krinon* (τῆ Ἑλληνῶν φωνῇ τὸ κρίνον)"⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Although Athenaeus is from late antiquity, yet his work is a solid confirmation of some century-long tradition of κρίνον meaning lotus. Athenaeus gives us important elucidation regarding the relation κρίνον – lotus: the Greek κρίνον may well stand for the Egyptian *sšn*, rendered in the Greek also phonetically as σοῦσον.

I presume that the flower in question שושנה/κρίνον is the Egyptian aquatic plant known as white lotus *Nymphaea lotus*, or its blue species *Nymphaea caerulea*, which were so well known and used that they became symbolic of Upper Egypt, just as papyrus was a symbolic flower of Lower Egypt. These flowers were abundant of course in lakes of the Nile delta too, which was just taken as a matter of fact by the LXX translators too⁽⁴⁶⁾. The translation of שושנה/κρίνον as "lily" I hold as incorrect⁽⁴⁷⁾. Besides, it has been shown that white or blue

λωτός when he referred to a plant; Herodotus, 4.177. But he used (like Homer) the same term also for a tree too; 2.96. Theophrastus in his typically detailed manner wrote extensively about this lotus-tree and recognized that besides several kinds of trees (*Hist. Pl.* 4.3.1-4) the various plants too bore this same name λωτός (*Hist. Pl.* 7.15.3).

⁽⁴⁴⁾ M.C. HOWATSON (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (Oxford – New York 1997) 70; H. CANKIK – H. SCHNEIDER (eds.), *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike* (Stuttgart – Weimer 1997) II, 196-199.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 12.513.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ One should be careful not to mix this Egyptian lotus with its Eastern sacred species *Nelumbo nucifera* (*Nelumbium speciosum*). *Nelumbo* was introduced into Egypt from Persia only in the Greek Ptolemaic period; cf. W.J. DARBY – P. GHALIOUNGUI – L. GRIVETTI, *Food: The Gift of Osiris* (London 1977) II, 620-644, esp. 640-641. Cf. WILKINSON, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 120-121. Theophrastus gave the first extensive description of this plant; *Hist. Pl.* 4.8.7-8.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ The vast majority of the modern translations of the Canticle in its different editions of the Bible may show at best that the flower lily is simply assumed. I list just some of the recent commentaries which confirm also the translation "lily". A. MARIASELVAM, *The Song of Songs and Ancient Tamil Love Poems. Poetry and Symbolism* (AnBib 118; Roma 1988), takes simply "lotus" but M.H. Pope's translation "lotus" has basically not been followed. See M.V. FOX, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison 1985); R.E. MURPHY, *The Song of Songs. A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis 1990). G. Garbini translates "rosa", *Cantico dei cantici. Testo, traduzione, note e commento* (Biblica. Testi e studi 2;

lotuses were growing in ancient Palestine too and they still grow in the coastal plains or in the Hula Reserve⁽⁴⁸⁾.

2. *The occurrences in the OT*

The lexeme שושן I occurs 17 times in OT: 4 times in the narrative books, 8 times in the Song, 4 times in the superscriptions of Psalms and once in Hosea. Three different grammatical forms can be distinguished:

- 1) שושן in 1 Kgs 7,19; Ps 60,1; שושן in 1 Kgs 7,22.26
- 2) שושנה in Hos 14,6; Cant 2,1.2; 2 Chr 4,5
- 3) שושנים in Pss 45,1; 69,1; 80,1; Cant 2,16; 4,5; 5,13; 6,2.3; 7,3

D. Michel explains the differences as follows: the feminine singular form in Hosea and in Cant 2,1.2 designate a unique plant (form 2), whereas the masculine plural form indicates rather a group of plants (form 3). The singular form in 1 Kgs 7,19.22.26 indicates the plant species (form 1). The author admits the inconsistency in his classification because the form in 1 Kgs 7,26 (as its parallel in 2 Chr 4,5) corresponds to the feminine form⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Brescia 1992). But G. RAVASI, *Il Cantico dei Cantici*. Commento e Attualizzazione (Testi e commenti 4; Bologna 1992); D.A. GARRETT, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC 14; Nashville, TE 1993); E. FERNÁNDEZ TEJERO, *El cantar más bello*. El Cantar de los cantares de Salomón (Madrid 1994); J.-F. SIX – F. VERNY, *Le Chant de l'Amour*. Eros dans la Bible (Paris 1995); N. DE LA CARRERA, *Amor y erotismo del Cantar de los Cantares* (Madrid 1997) and F. LALOU – P. CALAME, *Le Grand Livre du Cantique des cantiques*. Le texte hébreu, les traductions historiques et les commentaires selon les traditions juive et chrétienne (Paris 1999) opt for lily. A. LACOCQUE, *Romance She Wrote*. A Hermeneutical Essay of Song of Songs (Harrisburg, PA 1998) does not exclude lotus. E. Bosetti, though realizing the need of “fior di loto” translation, opts for “giglio”; *Cantico dei cantici*. “Tu che il mio cuore ama”. Estasi e ricerca (Cinisello Balsamo, MI 2001); equally D. BERGANT, *The Song of Songs*. Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN 2001). T. LONGMAN III, *Song of Songs* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge, UK 2001) retains “lily”. The translation “lily” is no longer found in some German scholars, after the work of O. Keel: H.-J. HEINEVETTER, „Komm nun, mein Liebster, Dein Garten ruft Dich!“. Das Hohelied als programmatische Komposition (BBB 69; Frankfurt am Main 1988); W. BÜHLMANN, *Das Hohelied* (NSK.AT 15; Stuttgart 1997).

⁽⁴⁸⁾ M. ZOHARY, *Plant life of Palestine*. Israel and Jordan (ChBo 33; New York 1962) 162; F. NIGEL HEPPER, *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Bible Plants*. Flowers and Trees. Fruits and Vegetables. Ecology (Leicester 1992) 68-71, 74.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ D. MICHEL, *Grundlegung einer hebräischen Syntax* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1977) I, 64-65.

III. The usage of שושנה(ה) in its own context

If then the lexeme שושן is of Egyptian origin, we can assume that not only the morpheme but also its meaning — lotus or rose of the sea⁽⁵⁰⁾ — comes from the Egyptian language. I hope to show in the following examination that this assumption is more reasonable than the common translation “lily”. The scholarly opinions are quite unanimous about the understanding of שושנה/שושן/שושן when employed in the construction of the Solomon’s Temple. When שושנים/שושנה appear in the flower imagery phrases the agreement falls apart and the lily *versus* lotus tension takes over. In the case of the superscriptions of Psalms the scholarship is in an unknown area.

First, I present the evidence of the lexeme שושן regarding the Temple which is the least debated and the most eloquent. Secondly, the examination of the term שושנה and its plural form שושנים is the core both of this chapter and of this essay. A debated usage of this lexeme in the flower imagery of the Canticle with the support of a single occurrence in Hosea will become a corner stone of the understanding of this term. However, this inspection does not solve the enigma of the usage of this lexeme in Psalms.

1. *The capitals and the basin in the Temple*

In the construction of the Temple by Solomon according to 1 Kgs 7,19a.22a, the capitals which were put upon the pillars of the Temple had the “form of *šûšan*” שושן מִעֵשֶׂה (1 Kgs 7,19a.22a). The exterior details of this work remain obscure until now⁽⁵¹⁾.

The brim of the sea (basin) of the cast metal was shaped like the brim of the cup, “(like) the flower of *šôšan*” פֶּרֶחַ שׁוֹשָׁן, 7,26. The parallel version in 2 Chr 4,5 has the feminine form “(like) the flower *šôšannah*” פֶּרֶחַ שׁוֹשָׁנָה. M. Noth had already suggested that the exterior shape of the basin was like the flower of the open lotus⁽⁵²⁾. These are the only instances of שושנה/κρίνον in which some recent translations read “lotus” and not “lily”.

Before running into any kind of misunderstanding about my consideration regarding the first chapters of 1 Kgs I want to make explicit that I am not arguing for historical relations between Israel

⁽⁵⁰⁾ KEEL, *Hohelied*, 79-80.

⁽⁵¹⁾ Cf. M. GÖRG, „Zur Dekoration der Tempelsäulen“, *BN* 13 (1980) 17-20.

⁽⁵²⁾ M. NOTH, *Könige* (BKAT 9/1; Neukirchen 1968) 155.

and Egypt in the relevant period. I want simply to point out that the narrative reflects some kind of similarities between the Israelite architectural culture and Egyptian one. B.U. Shipper⁽⁵³⁾ and P.S. Ash⁽⁵⁴⁾ on the basis of the examined biblical, Egyptian and archaeological evidence of this period concur about the minimal relations between Egypt and Palestine in the period c. 1100 BCE – c. 950 BCE⁽⁵⁵⁾. Yet, the indirect influence of Egypt would be recognized via Phoenicia whose (primarily commercial) contact with the Egyptians, by contrast, was increasing in the same period. The early orientation of the small growing Levant states, like Israel, Moab and Ammon, was basically trade which depended on the Phoenician manufacturing cities and their sea trade⁽⁵⁶⁾. Hiram, the king of Tyre in the narrative 1 Kgs 5–10, would confirm more solidly the historical picture⁽⁵⁷⁾. Only slowly did the direct relations between the Levant and Egypt, almost extinct, start to develop from the ninth and even more powerfully from the first half of the eighth century BCE onward. The Deuteronomistic presentation of the well-built connections between Israel and Egypt seems to reflect this later period, from which, retrospectively, the Solomon period is described. The nature of the personal contacts (cf. 3,1; 7,8; 9,16; 11,1-2; 2 Chr 8,11), although questionable as presented by the narrative, is more plausible than the political-cultural ones (5,1)⁽⁵⁸⁾.

This examination of the evidence therefore, renders plausible the idea, that the embellishment of the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 5–7), may reflect the indirect Egyptian influence. Such a typical embellishment as the lotus or papyrus shape capitals was simply a *canon* in the Egyptian construction tradition. No doubt the coastland trade was the mediator not only of the material but of the skills of the artisans too. Therefore, I hold “lotus” as the only correct translation of *שׁוֹשַׁנִּים/κρίνον* in the narrative of the construction of the Temple.

⁽⁵³⁾ B.U. SHIPPER, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit*. Die kulturellen Kontakte von Salomo bis zum Fall Jerusalems (OBO 170; Freiburg/Schweiz – Göttingen 1999).

⁽⁵⁴⁾ P.S. ASH, *David, Solomon and Egypt*. A Reassessment (JSOTSS 297; Sheffield 1999).

⁽⁵⁵⁾ SHIPPER, *Israel*, 35; ASH, *David*, 62-63. A power vacuum in the Levant was an excellent occasion for the rise of the small national states.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ SHIPPER, *Israel*, 82-83; ASH, *David*, 97.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ SHIPPER, *Israel*, 60-64, 82-83; ASH, *David*, 127.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ SHIPPER, *Israel*, 83-116.

2. שירשנה of the Song of Songs

It is necessary to remember that the Canticle is entirely a poetical book which is dealing with love motifs⁽⁵⁹⁾. Therefore the most pertinent background of comparison is the love poetry of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt⁽⁶⁰⁾. The superscription ascribes this song to Solomon. He, seven times mentioned, is more a literary device which parallels this song to the love literature of these ancient traditions than information about the real authorship. The impressive parallels of the Canticle with Egyptian Literature have been discovered. Whereas in Mesopotamia the love poetry often has god and goddess as the main protagonists and speakers in the dialogue, the Egyptian love songs are mostly soliloquies by a man or a woman. The woman, often called “sister” addresses the man both in the second and third person (cf. 1,2-4). Subgenera — yearning, the poems of admiration, description of physical charms, or boasting — are typical of this kind of love poetry and of the Song too. The senses, in the literature of both Mesopotamia and Egypt are deeply involved: touching, hearing, seeing, smelling (fragrance). The atmosphere of the Song of Songs resembles that of Egyptian poetry more than any other⁽⁶¹⁾.

The difficulty in determining the structure of the book corresponds to the uneasiness in determining its genre and at times in delimitating its subgenera⁽⁶²⁾. I will pay attention rather to the smaller units — the building-blocks of poetic structure like a line or a couplet — in which the lexeme ששן occurs⁽⁶³⁾. The poetical devices of the structure of the Hebrew verse — as parallelism or *tertium comparationis* — give us a reliable indication in this research⁽⁶⁴⁾.

a) Cant 2,1-2

The first time the lexeme ששן appears it is in feminine form in the self-presentation of the girl. Moreover, she identifies herself, boasting,

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Cf. K. SEYBOLD, “Zur Sprache des Hohenlieds”, *ThZ* 55 (1999) 112-120.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Cf. M. SIGRIST, “L’amour chanté en Mésopotamie”, *MoBi* 128 (2000) 25-29; M.V. FOX, “L’amour chanté en Egypte”, *MoBi* 128 (2000) 30-32.

⁽⁶¹⁾ R.E. MURPHY, “The Book of Song of Songs”, *ABD* VI (1992) 150-151.

⁽⁶²⁾ Cf. MARIASELVAM, *Song*, 26-37.

⁽⁶³⁾ W.G.E. WATSON, “Hebrew Poetry”, *Text in Context. Essays by Members of the Society for the Old Testament Study* (ed. A.D.H. MAYES) (Oxford 2000) 251-285; A. NICCACCI, “Analysing Biblical Hebrew Poetry”, *JSOT* 74 (1997) 77-93.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Cf. W.G.E. WATSON, “Verse patterns in the Song of Songs”, *JNSL* 21 (1995) 111-122.

with *הבצלה* and the flower *שושנה*, v. 1. It is her beloved who confirms this charming and unique identification, v. 2⁽⁶⁵⁾.

1 (a)	אני הבצלת השרון	I am a rose of Sharon
(b)	שושנת העמקים	<i>šôšannah</i> of the valleys.
2 (a)	כשושנה בין החוחים	As <i>šôšannah</i> among the thorns
(b)	כן רעיתי בין הבנות	so is my friend among the maidens.

Comparisons are often an effective way of expressing oneself. What is the *tertium comparationis* between *שושנה* and thorn? A tempting one is the idea of beauty/ugliness. This idea is as misleading as it is attractive, although many accept this interpretation. In my opinion the term *שושנה* in v. 2 does not show any reference to the concept of beauty. In fact, the splendid form and well matched colours of the thorns of Syro-Palestine regions are an equally good argument against the “ugliness” of this plant⁽⁶⁶⁾. Anyway, the perception of beauty is more an impact on the person than a reliable argument for this metaphor.

In order to spare a lot of abstract thinking about the ugliness of the thorn, the best way to understand what the thorn is about is to check its occurrences in the Bible⁽⁶⁷⁾. Thorn appears in all these texts as a superb, arrogant and malicious plant yet ignorant of its own situation. Its image is negative and often a thorn is a sign of defeat and/or sterility, a seal of devastation or death. It grows where there is no life.

The prompt answer of the beloved in 2,2 confirms that if his girl, identified with *שושנה*, possesses or can awaken in herself such strength, she will grow and bloom even among the thorns which by contrast convey the notion of death and of a deserted space. The girl identifies herself in this first verse, most probably with the lotus, which was the chief symbol of the Egyptian idea of new birth, re-birth, or regen-

⁽⁶⁵⁾ W.G.E. WATSON, “Parallel Word Pairs in the Song of Songs”, “*Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf*”. Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient. Festschrift O. Loretz (Hrsg. M. DIETRICH – I. KOTTSIEPER) (AOAT 250; Münster 1998) 793, classifies *שושנה* as a pair word only in 2,1.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ For the more detailed presentation of the subject with illustrations, see I. LÖW, *Die Flora der Juden* (Wien 1926-1934); ZOHARY, *Plants*, 153-167; NIGEL HEPPER, *Encyclopedia*, 35-39. It is questionable whether any creation – in its shape – could be claimed to be “ugly”.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Especially 2 Kgs 14,9//2 Chr 25,18; Job 31,40; Pr 26,9; Isa 34, 13; Hos 9,6.

eration⁽⁶⁸⁾. In fact, the idea of regenerating – all-transforming love is associated with her once for all. Just as v. 2b is formed in a direct parallel with v. 3a⁽⁶⁹⁾, so the idea of awaking in 2(ab) is resumed and confirmed by the allusion to arousing power (cf. 2,5; 7,9; 8,5) associated with him in 3(ab).

b) Cant 7,3

In 7,1-5 we have a second descriptive song of the girl⁽⁷⁰⁾. It is more compact and clearer when compared to the first one in 4,1-7. Though the song 7,1-5 is more straightforward it does not Lose its complexity and describes the girl as aristocratic and queenly. Describing her from bottom to top, just in the centre, her belly is compared to “a heap of wheat, encircled with שושנים”, v. 3b. The solemnity of this one who is called Shulammite is achieved by a kind of restraint on the part of the girl.

3 (a)		בחנך ערמות חטים		Your belly is a heap of wheat
(b)		סוגה בשושנים		encircled with <i>šōšannîm</i>

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Cf. “Lotos”, *LÄ* III, 1092-1095; WILKINSON, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 120-121. KEEL, *Hohelied*, 80. O. Keel has indicated also some iconographic material dated to the first half of the first millennium BCE found in Palestine, on which the child sun is born from the lotus flower; cf. his “Parallèles littéraires”, 42. The recently excavated scarabs with the carvings of the divinity seated on the lotus flower also support this idea; cf. A. MAZAR – N. PANITZ-COHEN, *Timnah (Tel Batash)* (Qedem 42; Jerusalem 2001) II, 266-271. In order to avoid misunderstandings around the Egyptian concept of passing away from this life to another, the best choice is to employ the word transformation rather than regeneration. The concept of transformation corresponds (in the Egyptian belief) better to the idea of the entrance into the life after death, and not — as it is widespread in the common misconception — to resurrection or transmigration of the soul; cf. O. GOELET, “A Commentary on the Corpus of Literature and Tradition Which Constitutes The Book of Going Forth by Day”, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead. The Book of Going Forth by Day. Being the Papyrus of Ani* (eds. E. VON DASSOW – J. WASSERMAN) (San Francisco 1994) 151-152.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Cf. WATSON, “Word Pairs”, 785-786.

v.		כשושנה בין החוחים כן רעיתי בין הבנות		As <i>šōšannah</i> among the thorns
2b				so is my friend among the maidens.
v.		כתפוח בעצי היער כן דודי בין הבנים		As an apple tree among the trees of the forest
3a				so is my beloved among the young men.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ This first descriptive song 4,1-7 is more detailed and complicated, yet the second is not less sublime. The first song was directly spoken out by him who — compared with Solomon (cf. 3,11) — repeats twice at the beginning “you are beautiful”, 4,1. The second song, 7,1-5, is recited by his (?) chorus which compares the girl to the Shulammite and describes her nobility and royalty.

The *tertium comparationis*, as in 2,2, does not rest on the shape or form, but rather in the fertility of the belly (maternal womb) and in the nutrition (wheat). It was a widespread custom in Egypt to decorate every type of food with lotus flowers. This flower visualized the fresh and regenerating power of the food⁽⁷¹⁾.

The next verse (7,4) as O. Keel believes, would confirm this representation of the quickening strength. The image of her breasts which are like “two fawns, twins of a gazelle” does not suggest form or tenderness but rather alludes to their playful, life-giving power. Since the inhabitants of the steppes and of the deserts, like gazelles, survive the terrible territories of the desert, they could have easily become a symbol of life and its renewal. These animals often appear on the Egyptian seals and amulets too⁽⁷²⁾.

c) Cant 4,5

What has been said above is in accord with the words of the beloved in the second half of the first descriptive song about her (4,1-7), 4,5:

- 5 (a) | שְׁנֵי שְׂדֵיךְ כַּשְׁנֵי עַפְרַיִם | Your two breasts are like two fawns
 (b) | הָאוֹמִי צְבִיחַ הַרְוֵעִים בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים | twins of a gazelle (that) feed among *šôšannîm*

In the Egyptian images the lotus flower appears often beside the gazelles. It is a fact that the gazelles never feed among the lotuses; therefore in this v. 5 “gazelle” has symbolic meaning⁽⁷³⁾. Gazelles, as in 2,9, primarily symbolize their agility, playfulness, softness and the renewal of life (see above). The last characteristic is typical of the breast along with blessing, nourishment, trust building and kindness (Gen 49,25; Job 3,12).

Therefore, her breasts in 4,5 are compared to gazelles because they denote the renewal of life. The gazelles are specified quite precisely as those “which feed among שׁוֹשַׁנִּים”. This reinforces the power of imagery. The live-giving strength of her breasts must then be multiplied when they are among flowers שׁוֹשַׁנִּים.

d) Cant 6,2-3 and 2,16

In these passages it is the woman who speaks and her words convey

⁽⁷¹⁾ KEEL, *Hohelied*, 216.

⁽⁷²⁾ KEEL, *Hohelied*, 138-140.

⁽⁷³⁾ KEEL, *Hohelied*, 138-139. *Contra* L. Bossina, “I gemelli di gazzella (Ct 4,5)”, *RSO* 73 (1999) 2-6.

a surprising confidence in her beloved. She seems to be extremely delighted by his actions which are again strongly coloured by the repetition of the phrase, which underlines his enjoyment. Her words are the answer to the question of her chorus: “where has gone your beloved, o you, fairest among the women?” 6,1. She responds, v. 2:

2 (a)		דודי ירד לנו		My beloved has gone down to his garden,
(b)		לערוגות הבשם		to the beds of spices
(c)		לרעהו בגנים		to pasture in the gardens,
(d)		ולקט שושנים		and to gather <i>šôšannîm</i>

She presents herself as a garden for him (v. 2a). This may be more obvious from the following vv. 2b-3. He is somewhere where he gathers the שׁוֹשְׁנִים and as in v. 3 the reciprocal ownership is strengthened by the phrase “he feeds among שׁוֹשְׁנִים”.

3 (a)		אני לדודי ודודי לי		I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine
(b)		הרעה בשושנים		he feeds among <i>šôšannîm</i>

It is this phrase “feeds among שׁוֹשְׁנִים” which links her beloved with twins of gazelle, which “feed among שׁוֹשְׁנִים” in 4,5. Although her beloved is linked to a gazelle by this phrase, he is not compared to a gazelle⁽⁷⁴⁾. The comparison is not between her beloved and gazelle twins, but lies in the fact that the expression “feed among שׁוֹשְׁנִים” tries to convey the most intense enjoyment. This interpretation is

⁽⁷⁴⁾ There are two cases where the beloved (he) is compared (?) to the gazelle *צביה* indirectly, 6,3; 2,16 and three times directly: 2,9.17; 8,14. Only in direct comparison the form is coherently masculine *צבי*. The remaining 4 uses of this lexeme *צבי* are in feminine form *צביה*, 2,7; 3,5; 4,5; 7,4. Of these four, the first two cases have the plural form and both of them in the oath “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles...”. The last two are used in singular when her breasts are compared to the “twins of gazelle”. Concluding we see that out of 7 occurrences of “gazelle”, only 3 times is it in masculine form and it is in the context where the he-beloved is to be quick and swift like *צבי* – “(he) gazelle”. This connotation of the boy with gazelle (his swiftness) is in contrast to the context of 6,2-3 and 2,16 in which the beloved pastures, therefore he is not in a hurry at all! In 6,2-3 and 2,16 rules calmness, satisfaction, and enjoyment. Here there is no association of her beloved to the swiftness of gazelle. Therefore, this image of her beloved as gazelle in the context 6,2-3 and 2,16 does not fit and has no support. For the further discussion about the animal imagery, see O. KEEL, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob. Eine Deutung von Ijob 38-41 vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen Bildkunst* (FRLANT 121; Göttingen 1978) 61-125.

reasonable enough when we realize that the expression occurs twice after the most important statement of their mutual relationship, 2,16(a); 6,3(a). The reciprocal ownership excludes any individual abuse and the joy of it is almost “intoxicating” to both of them. The different wording of 6,3 only emphasises what she already stated before, in 2,16:

16 (a)	דודי לי ואני לו	My beloved is mine and I am his
(b)	הרעה בשושנים	he feeds among <i>šōšannîm</i>

Twice the formula of reciprocal ownership, 2,16(a); 6,3(a) is used, followed by the expression “feeds among שושנים” (2,16(b); 6,3(b)). He is not a “lotus-eater” at all, but the expression of eating among these flowers confirms — and in no way weakens — the previous joyful statement. The שושנים are in service of sealing the idea of enjoyment of this reciprocal ownership, as it is pleasant for her to state.

e) Cant 5,13

After it has been claimed that she is the “fairest among women” (5,9) she praises him in a descriptive poem (5,10-16). Here is the only time when שושנים are attributed to him: “his lips are שושנים, dripping liquid myrrh”, v. 13. To grasp the *tertium comparationis* is tricky here too. Keel proposes to see in שושנים the life-giving characteristics of the kisses. Pope in the same line finds support in Pr 24,26: “whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips”⁽⁷⁵⁾. Schmoldt disagrees with this understanding and holds to the traditional one⁽⁷⁶⁾ of the lips as red flowers⁽⁷⁷⁾.

There are some who argue that the *tertium comparationis* of שושנים is the colour red. The experts in “biblical” plants try to find out the corresponding flower of red colour like *Lilium chalcedonicum*⁽⁷⁸⁾. It would be the only place in the MT where the plural masculine שושנים refers to a specific flower. The same authors have recognized that it must have been a flower of exceptional beauty and not the simple plant *Anemone coronaria* which is most often the choice for שושנים in 5,13. The outstanding beauty and rarity of the flower is indeed recognized, for the plant *Lilium chalcedonicum* is of scarlet colour.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ POPE, *Song*, 541.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ ENGEL, *Susanna-Erzählung*, 92.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ H. SCHMOLDT, “שושן” *šûšan*”, *TWAT* VII, 1207.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ MOLDENKE – MOLDENKE, *Plants*, 129.

Is it not too little, in this highly descriptive poem of her beloved, to put the accent only on the colour of his lips? If even this would be accepted, why is it that scarlet was not rather used to describe the colour of the precious lips? In 4,3 she said: “Your lips are like a scarlet thread”. In 5,13 says:

13 (a)	לחיו כערונת הבשם	His cheeks are like bed of spices,
(b)	מגדלות מרקחים	mounds of fragrance
(c)	שפתותיו שושנים	His lips are <i>šōšannîm</i>
(d)	נשפות מור עבר	dripping liquid myrrh

In the first colon (a) the cheek’s attraction is characterised by the sweet smelling scent. The colon (b) is a resumption of the gradation of the imagery for the cheeks. As colon (b) suggests, the girl speaks in general terms about fragrance which comes from the face of her beloved⁽⁷⁹⁾. Similarly, the expression about the lips of the beloved in colon (c) is intensified in colon (d) by the excellence of the perfume of the liquid myrrh. In these last two cola we move from the level of sweet scent to the level of the effect of the scent. In other words, it does not matter how pleasant the lips smell, but that they are as attractive as the pleasant smell of “myrrh”⁽⁸⁰⁾. Moreover, since myrrh is a very precious scent, שושנים must describe not merely the stunning scent but evoke the great value of the lips of her beloved.

The power of שושנים in colon (c) therefore is not perceived in terms of colour. In fact, the images of the previous v. 12 are framed in the sphere of light (eyes, bathed doves). In verse 13 the imagery is based on odour. The preciousness of the material is the basis for the imagery in v. 14. As Keel suggests the metaphor in 5,13(ab) may be inspired by the Egyptian ointment in the form of a cone as is the case in 4,6 “the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense”⁽⁸¹⁾. The cones were prepared by cooking the oil mixed with the aromatic substances, primarily myrrh. Having been formed in the shape of a cone they used to be put on the heads of guests. In the hot climate naturally the

⁽⁷⁹⁾ In fact, in 4,14 seven different species are explicitly named, after which all the remaining fragrances are mentioned by the general term “with all chief spices” עם כל־ראשי בשמים. In 5,13 none of them appears.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ When in the text the sublime aromas בשמים are mentioned alongside the concretely mentioned myrrh מר it is either in the contest of love (5,1.13; cf. Pr 7,17) or in the cult (Exod 30,23.26).

⁽⁸¹⁾ KEEL, *Hohelied*, 188.

precious oil ran down (cf. Ps 133,2), gradually releasing the perfume which spread all around.

But the comparison 13(cd) does not rest only on the aromatic fragrance. Although שושנים's power has obviously a connotation with precious scent, yet the cola (cd) seem to suggest that both myrrh and שושנים serve to produce a fascinating attraction rather than to present a very beautiful odour. The verse 4,14 may be used as a chief argument to discard the use of שושנים as merely a fragrant flower. There are seven flowers with fragrance spices some of which occur only in the Song or only in this v. 14. After these seven plants the addition of the fullness is expressed: "with all chief spices". There is no mention at all of שושנה. If the strength of שושנים was only in its fragrance should it not be accounted among these seven flowers? The conclusion would be, that since שושנים is absent from the group of aromatic flowers in 4,14, although it is an extremely scented flower, the strength of its symbol must rest somewhere else.

The attraction is not in the form either. Another extra-biblical example of this matter is given in an ancient Egyptian love song, where a comparison with the flower *ššn* appears. The fingers of a beloved (she) are compared to this flower. The metaphor has no strength when based on the shape of the fingers, but rather on their movement which awakens the deep passion of love and the desire of her beloved⁽⁸²⁾.

Before closing the examination of שושנים in 5,13 and of all other single occurrences within the Canticle, the contextual considerations may give us some indication about the meaning and thus a further support for "lotus" translation of the lexeme of שושנה.

Referring again to the context of the Song the girl's very first request is "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" (1,2a)⁽⁸³⁾. Towards the end of the Song she presents herself ready to kiss him: "If I met you outside, I would kiss you, and no one would despise me" (8,1b). These are the only two times when the kisses are mentioned in the Song. At the very beginning, the first appeal of the main protagonist is linked to the lips' expression – kisses. Towards the end

⁽⁸²⁾ A.H. GARDINER, *The Library of A. Chester Beatty*. Description of a Hieratic Papyrus with a Mythological Story, Love-Songs, and Other miscellaneous Texts. Chester Beatty Papyri, No. 1 (London 1931) 30, XXIIA, 4; cf. KEEL, *Hohelied*, 188.

⁽⁸³⁾ This kind of language and this verse itself is as easy (apparently) to understand as to interpret in different ways.

she is ready to show outdoors the same sign of love which according to the customs of ancient society would be hardly acceptable. Yet, it seems to be assumed that everybody around would understand that this is the most sublime and the most honest expression of her real love. The two may not be despised. All in all, there is no doubt that the kiss still remains a fundamental expression of love and the lips play a fundamental role between the two affectionate hearts. So his lips remain for her a symbol of the kiss, of the gesture of love for which she longs from the beginning. The lips are a symbol of attraction which she desires too (cf. 1,4). His lips are שושנים. As her self-presentation שושנה was attractive for him (2,1-2), now his lips are equated with שושנים, attractive for her, 5,13.

What an extraordinary thing the flower of שושנים/שושנה must be when it deserves such a high appreciation in such an important and life-giving matter as love! I believe that the power of the expression “his lips are שושנים” does not rest either in colour or in scent only and even less in form. The use of שושנים conveys first and foremost the unmistakable attraction of the lovers. This understanding may be confirmed by the triple repetition of the formula of reciprocal ownership, 2,16; 6,3; 7,11. It is striking that on the third occasion the usual phrase “feeds among שושנים” does not appear but rather the decisive statement comes in the single monocolon, 7,11⁽⁸⁴⁾. All three times it comes from her mouth. Of course, for she never grows tired of emphasising the importance of their mutual relationship. But here “his desire” תשוקתו does not pervert the relationship as it was the case in Gen 3,16 when her desire (תשוקתך) towards him turned to be an occasion for him to rule over her⁽⁸⁵⁾. According to Cant 7,11 he experiences the same desire and yearning towards her which turns out to be an expression of reciprocal attraction. Consequently, what is expressed in 7,11 is a climax of what was expressed in 2,16 and 6,3 by the recurring phraseology.

2,16	6,3	7,11
דודי לי ואני לו	אני לדודי ודודי לי	אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו
הרעה בשושנים	הרעה בשושנים	-

⁽⁸⁴⁾ W.G.E. Watson classifies this monocolon as containing the inner parallelism like 2,10a; 2,10b; 7,4; 7,5a; 7,9b; cf. “Verse patterns”, 112.

⁽⁸⁵⁾ Cf. I.J. CAINION, “An Analogy of the Song of Songs and Genesis”, *SJOT* 4 (2000) 219-259.

The entire usage of שושנים/שושנה in the Canticle reflects the overwhelming influence of such a flower as was *sšn* in the Egyptian culture. The conventional use of *sšn* found its way into Israelite love poetry. Such a use was more imposing for the Song and its composer than any particular characteristic of this flower. The wide and multifarious life and love awaking efficacy of this flower rather than a single nuance match well with the surprising flower שושנים/שושנה in the Song.

I will present shortly the recurring ideas and motives of some 40 love songs studied by M.V. Fox⁽⁸⁶⁾. This particular genre of Egyptian love songs seems to be the closest poetical parallel which explains the literary devices employed also in the Song. These relate to concrete personal attitudes, male and female behaviour, with sexual and love-awakening details. The lovers are generally unmarried teenagers. The Egyptian songs are deeply erotic but they never dwell merely on the details of sexual activity. The expressions of love are treated with restraint and indirectness, but not with embarrassment or coyness. Though in Egyptian love songs the lovers are not married, often they look forward to marriage and their relation is very rarely mere flirtation. The concept of love is gradually penetrating each part of the person, so that the obedience to its demands overrides other unrelated considerations. Love is the dominant force in the lover's shared life. It makes them ill and healthy, it weakens and empowers them, causes pain and pleasure in change. The absence of the beloved causes confusion and his/her presence restores life and health⁽⁸⁷⁾.

A big part of the poems is dedicated to the description of the lover's feelings. Though the lovers speak alternatively, they never speak to each other directly, but rather to an undefined audience, or to their hearts in their soliloquies. Here the difference with the Song arises more plainly. In the Song the dialogue between two is that which raises the dramatic movement further and intensifies the relationship. The lovers in the Canticle "display their emotion rather than reporting on it, for it is the relationship that arises from the emotions of love, more than the emotions themselves that concern the poet of the Song"⁽⁸⁸⁾.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ His commentary *Song* is an excellent comparison of the Song with the great number of parallels from the literature of Ancient Egypt.

⁽⁸⁷⁾ M.V. FOX, "Egyptian Literature (Love Songs)", *ABD* II, 393-395.

⁽⁸⁸⁾ FOX, "Egyptian Literature", 395.

The Canticle is in many ways similar to the Egyptian love songs and its language can be understood better. The love appears to be a kind of primeval power which rules the whole universe⁽⁸⁹⁾. For the sake of this research it is important to remember this parallel. The flower *sšn* “lotus” — predominantly *Nymphaea lotos* — as indicated above has manifold uses in the Egyptian iconographic culture as well as in the poetical literature. Although the literary setting of the Song reflects the Syro-Palestine region, the link with the nature, customs and the royal background point also to far away countries and regions. No poet will ever spare the superlative concepts for such a supreme thing as love. The use of the flower שושנה “lotus” in the context of the Song could be easily ascribed to the wise and inventive Solomon, who is illustrated in the narrative 1 Kgs 1–11 as keeping close international relations with Egypt.

f) שושנה in the final prophecy of Hosea, 14,6

The epilogue of Hosea’s prophecy (14,2-9.10)⁽⁹⁰⁾ is a solemn conclusion full of hope. This proclamation of the divine love is articulated in two parts: 1) an encouragement of the prophet addressed to the people to return to the Lord (vv. 2-4) and 2) the answer of God to the prophet regarding the people promising His love (vv. 5-10).

In vv. 6-8 there are seven comparisons “like” of which the first is about God and the other six are about the people of Israel. The first comparison v. 6(a) makes the hearers understand the benevolence and the blessing of God: “I will be like dew to Israel”. The following comparison is the first for Israel and describes its growth and vitality, v. 6(b). The second aims at the firmness and safety of Israel, v. 6(c). The next two “like” phrases, v. 7(bc), speak about the majesty and fragrance of Israel. The last two comparisons speak about the beneficent consequence in the future. Every one regains life and will be a memorial to the rebirth of Israel (v. 8). For the sake of clarity we present these 7 comparisons dividing the verses 6-8 in cola.

⁽⁸⁹⁾ Cf. A. NICCACCI, “Cantico dei Cantici e canti d’amore egiziani”, *SBFLA* 41 (1991) 61-85.

⁽⁹⁰⁾ For recent re-examination of the unity of 14,6-10, see K. BERGE, “Weisheitliche Hosea-Interpretation? Zur Frage nach Kohärenz und literarischem Horizont von Hosea 14,6-10”, “*Wer darf hinaufsteigen zum Berg JHWHs?*” Beiträge zu Prophetie und Poesie des Alten Testaments. Festschrift S.Ö. Steingrímsson (Hrsg. H. IRSIGLER – K. ÓLASON) (ATS 72; St. Ottilien 2002) 3-23.

6 (a)	אֱהִיָּה כְּטֵל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל	I will be <i>like</i> dew to Israel
(b)	יִפְרַח כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה	He shall sprout <i>like šōšannah</i>
(c)	וַיַּךְ שְׂרָשָׁיו כְּלִבְנוֹן	he shall strike his roots <i>like</i> Lebanon
7 (a)	יֵלְכוּ יַנְקוֹתָיו	His shoots shall go forth
(b)	וַיְהִי כְּזֵית הַשְּׁלֹשָׁה	and his majesty shall be <i>like</i> the olive three
(c)	וַיִּרְיַח לְזֵיתֵי לִבְנוֹן	and his fragrance <i>like</i> Lebanon
8 (a)	יֹשְׁבוּ יְשֵׁבֵי בְצֵלֹו	Those who dwell in his shade shall return
(b)	יִחְדוּ דָגָן	they shall grow grain
(c)	וַיִּפְרַחוּ כְּגַפְןִּי	and they shall sprout <i>like</i> the vine
(d)	זָכְרוּ כִּיִּין לִבְנוֹן	His memorial shall be <i>like</i> the wine of Lebanon

V. 8(c) is primarily interested in the renewal of life of those who dwell in the shadow of Yahweh (cf. v. 8a). V. 6(b) is speaking evidently about him, which is about Israel, directly and in the singular. Israel was the object of the God's falling dew just in the previous colon 6(a). Therefore, "he shall blossom like שושנה" (v. 6b) presents not only the restoration of Israel, but clearly a restoration for God, as a natural answer to God's initiative. As in the previous verse 5, it was God who "will have healed them (Israelites)" and who "will have loved them", it is the same God in v. 6(a) who will be dew for them, for Israel. It is obvious that in these three extremely positive actions of God (vv. 5-6a) Israel is not only healed and restored but loved and cherished by his love again (cf. 11,1). She has been made attractive again, like שושנה. But not only that. It is equally understandable that straight after such a promise of the Lord's love (v. 5) and after such an eloquent and gentle image for this love which He himself explicitly chooses (v. 6a), there is employed an image which does not convey only the plain effect with the indifferent attitude of receiver (Israel). The image conveys the notion that love (of God for Israel) produces love (of Israel for God).

Although I recognize that the indication of the text in this little prophecy, Hos 14,6-8 is not satisfactory enough to establish the notion of שושנה, yet the text confirms that the strength of the image of שושנה does not rest on its striking shape. The blossoming flower is the expression of the love which was awakened by another. On one side the blossoming שושנה stands for the renewed love of Israel which was awakened before by the love of her God. On the other, Israel will blossom in her attractiveness so as to awaken tirelessly God's love.

g) Summing up

It is clear, especially thanks to the several parallels with the vocabulary of the Song, that שושנה in 14,6 is employed to stress the

final message of Hosea — the fulfilment of the promise of the Lord — the restoration of life and the renewal of the love of Israel towards her God. Israel makes a commitment to regain the love of the Lord towards her. In Egypt long centuries before, שושנה was a common symbol to present such a noble reciprocal love which vivifies, renews and grows. Such a vital power of שושנה will become proverbial for the girl of the Song from her own introduction on the scene, 2,1. Her beloved can not do less than quickly affirm her attraction praising her transforming power, 2,2. In 7,3 again her vivifying ability seems to recall her fertility via שושנים around her belly. The live-giving strength of the girl's breasts is reinforced by שושנים in 4,5. In 2,16; 6,2-3 שושנים is not a plain literary device but the powerful expression in her mouth where she wants to seal the certainty of their reciprocal relationship. שושנים in 5,13 has become chief test case against the translation "lilies".

The inner context of the Song witnesses that שושנה imagery works not on the basis of its particularities but rather on that of the connotations connected with its conventional use in the love motifs. The extra-biblical evidence of the Egyptian love songs and iconography indicates that behind the lexeme שושנה stands "lotus", once a sacred flower of ancient Egypt.

3. שושנה in the Psalms

The use and the meaning of שושן/שושנים in the superscriptions of 4 psalms: 45,1; 60,1; 69,1; 80,1 is completely obscure. KBL³ ⁽⁹¹⁾ proposes 4 meanings: 1) an instrument which reflects a tone; 2) the flowers which were set in front of the arch as a decoration or as an offering, in some way with the same object of obtaining an answer from God; 3) the superscription in 45,1 would be an indication, that it is a love song; 4) based on Akk. *šuššu* the meaning could be on the arithmetic "one sixth".

This last proposal would be first to be discarded, yet even KBL³ does not give a satisfactory clarification about the use of this term in the Psalms. The third proposal finds support in the same Psalm 45,1. This suggestion agrees with the above exposed interpretation of the use of שושנים in the Song. H.-J. Kraus admitted the great difficulty of grasping the meaning of this lexeme correctly ⁽⁹²⁾. Even though E.S.

⁽⁹¹⁾ KBL³ IV, 1455.

⁽⁹²⁾ H.-J. KRAUS, *Psalmen* (BKAT 15/1; Neukirchen-Vluy 1978) I, 26.

Gerstenberger translates שושנים as “lilies”, he declares that its meaning is obscure and the use in the superscription unusual⁽⁹³⁾. F.-L. Hossfeld – E. Zenger in their second commentary on the Psalms opt for “lotus” instead⁽⁹⁴⁾.

I presume that a compositional approach to the Psalter and the theme of relative psalms may throw some light on the meaning of שושנים in this book. Since the headings were added later, they function as an interpretative key for the psalms⁽⁹⁵⁾. Terrien suggests that especially the lengthy titles appear to have a threefold classification: dedications/attribution, musical designation and indication of the melodies with which the praying community may have been well acquainted⁽⁹⁶⁾. Could not therefore, the heading of Pss 60,1; 69,1 and 80,1 reflect widely (?) spread psalmody/monody, possibly about love (cf. 45,1) or with the uplifting effect?

Even though the basic meaning of the lexeme שושנים, in all these cases, I believe, is not far away from “lotus”, I shall not go beyond the limits of this essay by entering the Book of Psalms.

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Although it is admitted that the usage of שושן/שושנים remains obscure in the superscriptions of the psalms, I consider the lexeme שושנה to be “lotus” in the other passages of the MT. The origins of the misunderstanding of the Greek κρίνον in the LXX as a “lily” is due to a distinctive lexical understanding of this Greek lexeme — as the people from the Graeco-Roman cultural background would simply assume — and to the a-contextual reading, i.e. independently of the Egyptian milieu. This is especially true in the time of NT when the Graeco-Roman background outweighed extensively the Egyptian one.

⁽⁹³⁾ E.S. GERSTENBERGER, *Psalms Part 2 and Lamentations* (FOTL 15; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge, UK 2001) 47, 103.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ In *Die Psalmen I*. Psalm 1-50 (NEB.AT; Würzburg 1993) 280-281 they explain that “Lotus” is meant, but “Lilie” is kept in the “Einheitsübersetzung”; cf. *Die Psalmen*. Psalm 51-100 (NEB.AT; Würzburg 2002) 367, 401, 453. In their HThK commentary (the LXX is treated as the document of Hellenistic Judaism) the translation is “Lotusblüte(n)”; F.-L. HOSSFELD – E. ZENGER, *Psalmen 51-100* (HThK.AT; Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2000) 152, 259, 452.

⁽⁹⁵⁾ K. SCHAEFER, *Psalms*. Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN 2001) 349-350; S. TERRIEN, *The Psalms*. Strophic structure and theological commentary (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge, UK 2003) 12.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ TERRIEN, *The Psalms*, 28-32.

The word κρίνον of the LXX had for the Early Church the same meaning as the κρίνον of the NT.

In all probability, the redactors of the Torah did not favour this “Hebrew” term שושנה and therefore they omitted it as demonstrated by the corresponding LXX texts with κρίνον. This opposing tendency towards the Egyptian influence could probably be due to the fact that they perceived the link between שושנה meaning “lotus” and Egypt and therefore felt it necessary to dissociate from this particular term and substitute it with a more general Hebrew term פרח “flower”.

In this context, I think that the narrative of Sus can be seen as a kind of rehabilitation⁽⁹⁷⁾ of the flower שושנה which the Greek only phonetically transcribed *susanna*. This tendency to present the use of שושנה as not opposing the Torah would be established at the start of the story. Susanna was brought up “according to the law of Moses” (Susth 3). The name of the young man Daniel better than any other name conveys the fact that he is a carrier of God’s judgment when the two appointed judges (without names) failed to be so. Far more important is the name of the person accused, sentenced and justly freed – Susanna. It is not of course her striking beauty which saved her, but her innocence which was brought to light by the judgment “of God”⁽⁹⁸⁾.

The narrative 1 Kings 7 shows that the use of שושנה matches the use of the lotus-shape in Egyptian sacral architecture.

The final prophecy of Hosea illustrates remarkable interest in the love of God for Israel. The metaphor for the answer of Israel to God employs the flower שושנה which more than any other flower is suitable to represent the reciprocal love relationship. The love of Israel has been awakened by the love of God. At the same time, such a love shall flourish in a way that Israel will be attractive as שושנה. She awakens the love of God.

In Egyptian culture, the lotus was associated with life-awaking

⁽⁹⁷⁾ I am not excluding the other interpretations, but rather I am pointing out that the link between the name and the high moral profile of the same woman is done purposely. For only some of many studies, see J.A. GLANCY, “The Accused: Susanna and her Readers”, *JSOT* 58 (1993) 103-116; K. KOENEN, “Von der todesmutigen Susanna zum begabten Daniel. Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Susanna-Erzählung”, *ThZ* 54 (1998) 1-13 with further literature.

⁽⁹⁸⁾ Here begins another long history linking thus “lily” with purity and chastity in Christianity. Through the misunderstanding of שושנה as κρίνον — which in the Greek language meant simply “lily” — it is Susanna — “lily” — who/which remains innocent and upright in her behaviour.

and life-restoring reality. Lovers or the people in banquets often wear on their heads under aromatic cones the lotus flower. The *שושנה* of the Cantic of Solomon reflects well the use of lotus and in the noblest way. In fact the singular is used only when spoken and paralleled with her (2,1.2). She awakens his love. In the other instances the plural is used and has more the connotation of the effect — love and life awaking character — than any particular beauty of this flower. The flower *שושנה* embodies in a magnificent way a symbol which represents mutual love in constant growth.

Lotus therefore, I assert to be a more correct and meaningful translation of both the MT *שושנה* and the LXX *κρίνον* in the Song of Songs, than lily.

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SUMMARY

The term *שושנה* is revisited primarily in the Cantic of Solomon. The most ancient translation — “lily” — of this flower though questioned in recent decades is still widely used. The LXX’s rendering *κρίνον* is examined and found as the best translation for the lexeme *שושן* — meaning “lotus” — being an Egyptian loan word. This translation fits to the OT references better than “lily”. The textual employment of *שושנה* in the poetry of the Cantic is a chief and commanding proof for “lotus”. The “lily” translation for both *שושנה* and *κρίνον* for the majority of the OT cases is seen as incorrect since it does not pay due attention to the literary and historical context of the Cantic.