As is the case for most of the Old Testament, the textual critic of Song of Songs is almost totally dependent on the ancient versions. Hebrew sources offer no help. Only in one case does a Masoretic manuscript offer an interesting (though not convincing) alternative reading, viz., in 8:6, whereas the Qumran material is limited to two small fragments, which do little to help solve text-critical problems.

The readings of the versions are recorded in the critical apparatus of *BHQ* in so far as (in the judgment of the editor) they “arguably, but not necessarily” represent a Hebrew text differing from the lemma derived from M L. Inclusion of a reading in the apparatus, therefore, only indicates that it is worth considering, in light of the little textual material we have. Actually, the editor will most likely include a number of cases, possibly most of them, while not believing for a single moment that the alternative reading is any challenge to M. In recording these readings he abstains from standing in between the text and the user.

Thus the user of the edition is called upon to evaluate the readings of the apparatus. In the present article this is done by the *BHQ* editor himself, though not in that capacity but rather as an interested user, that is, so to say, from the other side. This is partly to satisfy his own curiosity and partly to present his considerations to other users of this text. Only the readings of the two major witnesses that cover the whole of Canticles, G and S, will be dealt with.

Cases which involve only the vocalization are, strictly speaking, not of text-critical interest since the Masoretic vocalization is an interpretation of the consonantal text. Venerable though it may be, it is subject to challenge on the basis of another interpretation of that text, certainly when that interpretation is as old as G or S.

First, those readings of G will be considered in which it deviates from M without support from S, then those of S in which it deviates from M without support from G, thirdly those readings in which G and S agree against M, and finally those cases in which both versions differ from the Hebrew in a different way.
The way in which lemma and alternative readings are presented below is not determined by consistency but by readability. The readings of the other versions have only incidentally been mentioned. The apparatus commentary for Canticles in BHQ may give some additional information. The signs > and < stand for “is translated/read as” and “is derived from” respectively.

1. **G Differs From M + S**

*Variations in Vocalization*

1:2, 4 (cf. G + S at 4:10): הָֽעִ֔ד הָֽעִ֔ד, “your love” > הָֽעִד הָֽעִ֔ד “your breasts” (+ V): Almost universally the vocalization of M is followed. One of the few exceptions is E. A. Livingstone, who holds that original “breasts” was changed to “love” for anti-anthropomorphic motives.1

5:13 (S missing) מַלְחָמָּה יִבְנֵי מִלְעָל נִיִּמְשַׁכְתּ “towers (of perfumes)” > פֹּֽעָלְסָא = מַלְחָמָּה יִבְנֵי מִלְעָל = מַלְחָמָּה יִבְנֵי מִלְעָל, “bringing forth (perfumes)”, which relates to מַלְחָמָּה יִבְנֵי מִלְעָל read as a plural: This reading, also found in V and T, is accepted by many, e.g., Horst in the apparatus of BHS, Würthwein,2 נֶֽרְסֵ ("yielding fragrance"). *CTAT* gives two reservations:3 (1) (following Ehrlich): beds of spices bring forth the ingredients, not the final product, the perfumes. The question, however, is whether such a sharp distinction between the plant and the product is justified; compare מַלְחָמָּה יִבְנֵי מִלְעָל, which means both balsam tree and balsam as spice. Unfortunately מַלְחָמָּה יִבְנֵי מִלְעָל occurs only here. (2) The parallelism with v. 13b suggests that in v. 13a the second clause refers to “his cheeks” and not to “beds”. It is, however, noteworthy that in vv. 13b, 14a, b, the second clause begins with a participle. In favour of M *CTAT* quotes Gerleman, who thinks of the “Salbkegel”, known from Egypt.4 Following this lead, Keel translates “Wie Türme von Salben”.5 Yet, the “towers” of M remain

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1 E. A. Livingstone, “‘Love’ or ‘Breasts’ at Song of Songs i 2 and 4? The Pre-Masoretic Evidence,” *Studia Patristica* 30 (1997), 8–11.
3 D. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament*, vol. 5 (OBO 50/5; Fribourg & Göttingen, forthcoming), ad loc. (cited from a copy of handwritten notes kindly provided by the author). *(CTAT 5)*
5 O. Keel, *Das Hohelied* (ZBK 18; Zürich, 1986), ad loc.