

Making Things from the Heart: On Works of Beauty in the Old Testament

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ABSTRACT

Following on a study of the perception of human beauty in the Old Testament, this article proposes to extend the topic by enquiring into the perception of what is beautiful in that which humans do. Apart from pictorial art, five spheres of human achievement perceived to be beautiful are considered, namely crafts, music, words, wisdom and food. Within these, the work of artisans, accomplishments of the mining industry, so-called sacred and profane forms of music, the self-conscious creation of poetic beauty, aesthetic judgements on wisdom and culinary enjoyment are surveyed. It is concluded that the main characteristics of the beauty concept related to things tally with those related to humans. The results warrant a further extension of the investigation to include at least the beauty of God and the relevance of the concept in the cult.

A INTRODUCTION

The beauty of human handiwork may not be something for which ancient Israel is renowned. Neither is it one of the central themes in her Scriptures. But it was certainly noted, commented upon and assessed in Israel. This assessment can sometimes entail positive appreciation, but what impresses some people as positive can sometimes also be frowned upon by others on religious grounds – not only in ancient Israel, but also attested through the centuries, from Europe's Inquisition to Afghanistan's Taliban and South Africa's own history of censorship. In the OT the use of the beauty motif is quite variegated. It can be dominant in one context and recessive in another, positive in one context and negative in another. But even where the context is negative, the effect of that which struck people as beautiful becomes all the more forceful for fuelling criticism. A good example is the following passage in the Book of Ezekiel about the effect of mural art:¹

¹ Ezek 23:14-15. Although this passage does refer to artefacts of clothing, it is primarily concerned with the depiction of foreign men wearing them. The focus is not on their clothes, but on the erotic effect of the picture, which is negatively commented upon in the interests of prophetic criticism. Elsewhere I have discussed this passage together with its context in the rest of Ezek 23 as an expression of male beauty: James A. Loader, "The Pleasing and the Awesome," *OTE* 24/3 (2011): 657-658. Since neither this nor a comparison with Ancient Near Eastern art is of interest to us here, the passage is not discussed again. It is only quoted to show the existence of a conscious-

She looked at men portrayed on the wall,
 images of Chaldeans engraved in red colour,
 belts girded around their waists, flowing turbans on their heads, all
 with the appearance of officers,
 the picture of Babylonians
 whose land of birth is Chaldea.

Although there are several difficulties concerning the details of this text,² the gist is clear: a woman (Oholibah, representing Jerusalem) looks at wall pictures of men and is enthralled and aroused by what she sees. Although this is not enough to dub the chapter "pornographic," as Goldingay³ does, it is clear that dashing *objets d'art* did have the power to charm. That is what I propose to investigate in this paper – not the question whether pictorial art existed in Israel,⁴ but the forms of human achievement that were perceived as beautiful. This seems the logical follow-up question prompted by an exploration of what Israel found beautiful in humans themselves.

B THE BEAUTY OF HUMAN WORK

In the OT the beautiful things that humans produce include the production of physical objects, but artistic work is by no means limited to this aspect. No distinction in kind is made between the "physical" and the "spiritual" or "mental" dimensions. On the contrary, these spheres that seem distinct to the modern Western mind are seen as aspects of one entity, notably human work. An indication of this is given in Gen 4:20-22, which at the same time shows the high esteem in which the work of artisans and musicians was held. In a passage on

ness of the effects of beauty in Israel, the contours of which this article proposes to draw.

² For a detailed discussion of the textual and exegetical issues involved, cf. Silvia Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder: Nachrichten von darstellender Kunst im Alten Testament* (OBO 74; Göttingen/Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 180-187; cf. also Walther Zimmerli, *Ezechiel 1-24* (vol. 1 of *Ezechiel*; 2nd ed.; BK XIII/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979), 546, who finds the inference problematic that these pictures caused the first contacts with the Babylonians and suggests that – despite Jer 22:14 – the intended pictures could not have been present in Jerusalem; André Parrot, *Babylon en het Oude Testament* (trans. Israel S. Herschberg; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1957), 132 (to whom Zimmerli is indebted), points out the similarities between the technique described in this text and that of drawings from Tell Achmar on the Euphrates and Cassite paintings from Dur-Kurigalzu.

³ John A. Goldingay, "Ezekiel," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 643-644. However, neither Ezekiel's words (!) nor the pictures on the wall intend sexual stimulation.

⁴ As its title suggests, the dissertation by Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder*, is devoted to this topic in general.

the ancestors of the branches of human culture, Tubal-Cain is mentioned as the first smith who worked copper and iron. This is anachronistic, since for Israel ironmongery only started in Canaan. So it is a telescoped reference to the origins⁵ of the craftsmanship of working with metals *per se*. Although no explicit mention⁶ is made of the beauty of what Tubal-Cain crafted, two features of the text show how basic it was regarded to human existence and therefore in what high esteem it was held. First, his skill, namely metallurgic artistry (v. 22) and only one other skill, musicianship (v. 21), are paired with the very source for the livelihood of nomads, namely husbandry (v. 20.)⁷ Second, they are situated together at the dawn of human cultural history and therefore given primordial status.

1 Crafting Beauty by Hand

We first attend to the Tubal-Cain category in as far as its being deemed beautiful is concerned.⁸

1a Artisans' Work

Objects of human craftsmanship are often called beautiful. In the blessing of Bileam this is done quite emphatically:⁹

How beautiful are your tents, o Jacob,
your dwellings, o Israel!

The beauty of Israel's tents is situated in an idyllic picture of gardens planted among streams by God himself, which represents the paradise motif (Gen 2:8). Although the motif of beauty occurs in a context of an effusive blessing for Israel's overall happiness, it still remains a picture of the beauty of human-made Bedouin tents. This also occurs in Canticles, where the tanned female body is compared to the tents of Kedar for their beauty:

I am dark-skinned and beautiful, o daughters of Jerusalem
like the tents of Kedar, like the tent-cloths of Shalma.¹⁰

⁵ The word, אבי "father," "ancestor," is missing here, but the parallel with vv. 20 and 22 together with the anachronism shows that we have the same idea in all three cases mentioned in the passage – the origins of livestock husbandry, music and metal work.

⁶ Cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (vol. 1 of *Genesis*; 2nd ed.; BK I/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976), 452.

⁷ ישב אהל ומקנה, "Those who occupy tents and livestock," omits the verb "tend" by syllepsis.

⁸ A general survey of craftsmanship in the OT is given by Frank Ueberschaer, "Handwerk/Handwerker," in *Das wissenschaftliche Bibelllexikon im Internet: Old Testament Section*, (ed. Michaela Bauks & Klaus Koenen; Stuttgart: DBG 2011), n.p. [cited 5.5.2011]. Online: <http://www.wiblex.de/>.

⁹ Num 24:5; מִה־טוֹבוֹ אֵהְלִיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתַיִךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Here the focus is on that which is being compared rather than what it is being compared with. The force of the comparison shows that these tents were especially appreciated for their aesthetic appeal. Not only the dwelling itself, but also its interior decoration can be regarded as beautiful:¹¹

By knowledge rooms are filled
with wealth, splendour and beautiful things.

In this case the focal point is not the beauty of a decorated interior itself, but that by means of which it can be achieved. Nevertheless, the attractiveness of the beautiful ornaments is used to convince the learner to accept the sapiential way of acquiring an aesthetically pleasing life-style. Therefore not the intellectual prowess, but the reward that comes with it is the generally accepted given, in this case described by נָעִים for the pleasing effect of the beautiful room.

The appeal of beautifully made garments and accessories of dress is likewise encountered several times in a variety of literary genres. In Josh 7:21 Achan confesses to having seen among the spoils of Jericho silver and gold together with "a beautiful garment from Sinear" (אֲדָרֶת שְׁנֵעַר אַחַת טוֹבָה). It is possible that the feminine form can also mean "garment" as אֲדָרֶת II, which itself would confirm the appreciation for beautiful clothes. This seems to be corroborated by Mic 2:8, where a beautiful piece of clothing is mentioned apart from the ordinary garment:

From the front of the garment (שְׂמֹלָה) you strip the beauty (אֲדָרֶת).

Here, again, אֲדָרֶת can also mean "garment,"¹² which however does not seem likely together with שְׂמֹלָה. Whether an over-cloak or the ornaments on it are intended, the reference is to clothes beautiful enough to be coveted and confiscated by social bullies. A whole industry of fine clothing seems to be referred to in the poem on the industrious housewife (Prov 31:21, 24 and 25). One of the words for "beauty" is used in v. 25 (הֲדָר) in a metaphor for honour worn as a garment, which by virtue of the very imagery again shows how highly fine clothing was valued.

A further instance of metaphorical confirmation of the wearing of attractive products of craftsmanship is the characterisation of wisdom itself as elegant ornaments worn by upper class men. The very fact that the highest virtue known in sapiential circles is called a "graceful garland" (לְיִיִּתְהֵן), "pendants" (עֲנָקִים) and even a "beautiful crown" (עֲטֻרַת תְּפָאֶרֶת)¹³ establishes the taste for such things in privileged society.

¹⁰ *Parallelismi causa* the vowels are to be pointed as *šalmā* and not *š' lōmō*.

¹¹ Prov 24:4.

¹² Cf. 2 Kgs 2:13-14; 1 Kgs 10:5, 25.

¹³ Prov 1:9 and 4:9.

There are several more cases of this kind of appreciation, but these are better discussed in connection with the mining for the materials needed to make them. However, a last example worthy of mention before that is offered by the oldest Hebrew poetry we know, the Song of Deborah. The vessel in which Jael brought Sisera nourishment before killing him is said to be "of beautiful appearance" (אֲדָרָתָהּ, the same word used a little earlier in the poem to describe the splendour of important people, Judg 5:25, cf. v. 13). Since this is authentic, old poetry, it is valuable evidence of the age of the appreciation for crafted objects in Israel.¹⁴

1b Mining and Jewellery

Probably the most unmistakable expression of the awe inspired by craftsmanship is to be found in the poem on unattainable wisdom in the Book of Job (Job 28). Of course the actual beautiful things admired by their owners are manufactured by the craftsmen who work with what is provided to them by the miners whose activities are described here. But the obvious admiration for the mining profession as the basic industry underlying metallurgic craftsmanship places it on the highest level of possible human achievement. The Ancient Near Eastern mining industry is described in the first two stanzas of the poem (vv. 1-11).¹⁵ In the third stanza (vv. 12-18[19]) an index is given of what they produce for artisans to make into beautiful things: metals (silver, gold, iron, copper) and precious stones (cornelian, lapis lazuli or sapphire, rock-crystal, coral stone jewels (פְּנִינִים), chrysolite or topaz and glass (זְכוּכִיתָהּ, v. 17). The reference to a washing process (v. 1) and the specific terms for refined gold (פֶּזֶז), ingots (סְנוּרִים) and plated gold (כֶּתֶם) suggest that the metals were probably not only mined but also refined for delivery to the artisans. According to the Deuteronomistic History, gold (1 Kgs 10:21), silver (1 Kgs 20:39) and copper (1 Kgs 14:27) were provided to the craftsmen who made the beautiful objects out of them.

Although this kind of activity does not fathom divine wisdom, the beauty of what *is* produced remains very impressive – both in the poem itself and in several texts from the Pentateuch (especially Exod 31 and 35-36). For one, the striking objects of metal, gems and wood are created by the inspiration of God himself:¹⁶

And Yahweh spoke to Moses: ² See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: ³ and I have filled him

¹⁴ This remains the case whether the poem is seen as older than the prose narrative of the context or not. Cf. Athalya Brenner, "A Triangle and a Rhombus in Narrative Structure: A Proposed Integrative Reading of Judges iv and v," *VT* 40 (1990): 129-138.

¹⁵ Cf. James Alfred Loader, "Fools Can Explain it, Wise Men Never Try," *OTE* 8 (1995): 138-140.

¹⁶ Exod 31:1-6.

with the spirit of God, with wisdom, understanding and knowledge in all kinds of craft,⁴ to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and copper,⁵ in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for working in all kinds of craft.⁶ And see, I have appointed with him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given wisdom in the hearts of all the skilful, so that they may make all that I have commanded you.

The beautiful works of art come into existence through several stages. First, they are thought out and planned (לחשב מהשבת), which refers to the pre-production design, and then they are actually created (לעשות). This is for the enjoyment not only of humans, but also of God himself. He is the one who commissions the works of art and also the one who gives the artisan the necessary inspiration (רוח-אלהים) to be able to create.¹⁷ This is also how the text was interpreted in early Christianity, for instance by Clemens Alexandrinus.¹⁸ It is thus fair to say that God is conceived of as a commissioner of art because he himself is pleased by it. This view in Israel is not at all a question of the hijacking of art by religion, but rather evidence of the aesthetic character of faith, even in the imageless Israelite cult.¹⁹ To be sure, the beauty of the human works of art is used as norm to measure the worth of divine wisdom (Job 28:15-19). That in itself shows how highly these objects of beauty were esteemed. It is only because of this intrinsic value that the aesthetic quality of human works could appropriately be used to express the astonished wonder of faith at the wisdom of God (cf. Ps 139:13-16).

2 Beautiful Music

Music is often associated with beauty, presented as a manifestation of beauty and indeed explicitly qualified in terms of the aesthetic norm.

2a David as Musician

One of the attractive features of David mentioned together with his handsome looks and other positive qualities is his ability to play music:²⁰

¹⁷ In the second century B.C.E. Ben Sira no longer reckons artisans under those who acquire wisdom, but he does find them a stabilising force and thinks that cities cannot survive without them (cf. Sir 38:24-39:11[esp. vv. 32-34]; cf. Christopher A. Rollston, "Ben Sira 38:24-39:11 and The Egyptian Satire of the Trades: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 120/1 (2001): 131-132; Ueberschaer, "Handwerk/Handwerker," n.p.

¹⁸ Cf. Patrick J. Sherry, "Schönheit II: Christlich-trinitarisch," *ThRE* 30: 241.

¹⁹ This is the topic of another article that I hope to publish in the not too distant future.

²⁰ 1 Sam 16:18.

... a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who knows to play music, a brave hero, a warrior, an able speaker, and a man of good appearance, and Yahweh is with him.

Although determined by the context of the king's need for a musician, it remains interesting that this feature is mentioned first, before David's cavalier-like prowess and his good looks. He is identified as a man who can make beautiful music on the lyre (the root טיב is used, "good," that is, beautiful; 1 Sam 16:16). Also the effect of the music is anticipated: it is expected to soothe the melancholy of King Saul, which is exactly what happens (1 Sam 16:23). Saul's melancholy mood is ascribed to an "evil spirit from Yahweh," contrasted with the blessing of Yahweh that is said to be upon David. Nevertheless, this is not a religious substantiation for the improvement in the king's condition, for the recurrent upturns in the king's frame of mind are only ascribed to David's playing on the strings "with his hand."

However, the motif of David's music does acquire a highly religious dimension in the Book of Psalms. Here the tradition of his musicianship is developed to what is called the "Davidisation" of the Psalms. This expression stems from Martin Kleer²¹ and points to the tendency to associate the Psalter as such with David. Seventy-three psalms in the Hebrew Psalter and eighty-three in the Septuagint are ascribed to David, while another thirteen do so through providing biographical data comparable to narratives from the Books of Samuel. Together with the still later tradition of calling the whole of the Psalter "the Psalms of David," this served the purpose of identifying with the persecuted and sinful David who nevertheless remained "the one pleasing to Yahweh." Thereby Jews in exile could derive comfort from the idea that they remained the people "pleasing to Yahweh" despite being persecuted by the Babylonians for their sins. The combination of David's gift for music with his other pleasing characteristics did therefore acquire a highly theological significance in that the beautiful music became more than a soothing medium, notably a vehicle of hope.

It can thus be said from a critical perspective that the Davidic tradition combined what we would call the profane or non-religious and the religious or theological dimension of musical beauty.

2b "Profane" Music

Although no distinction is made in the OT between "profane" and "sacred" music, music with no specific religious bearing is often mentioned and also called "beautiful." Clear instances of this are to be found in the Book of Isaiah:

²¹ Martin Kleer, *Der liebliche Sänger der Psalmen Israels* (BBB 108; Bodenheim: Philo, 1996), *passim*.

And there are lyre and harp,
 tambourine and flute and wine at their feasts,
 but the work of Yahweh they do not observe
 nor see what his hands do.²²

The context is criticism of the opposite of what is proper religious conduct. God is not observed, but the opulent feasts are accompanied by music on all kinds of instruments. Music as such is thus regarded as beautification of the good life. The critical perspective is not directed against the music or the beauty of the feast, but against the fact that beauty is enjoyed without paying heed to God.²³ This logic is found in the so-called Isaiah Apocalypse as well:²⁴

Gone is the exultation of tambourines,
 the roar of the jubilant has ceased,
 gone is the exultation of the lyre.

In all three sentences of the stich the verb is followed by a *genitivus explicationis*. The *nomen regens*, מְשִׁישׁ, the experience of pleasure and joy, is twice qualified by a *nomen rectum* referring to a musical instrument. Therefore the music expresses the pleasure and joy of the people referred to. All of this enjoyment will disappear as punishment for their sins (v. 5). This is confirmed in v. 9, where the joy of wine and singing is said to vanish. Again the magnitude of the negative statement highlights the meaning of that which is lost. When the beauty of joyous music serves to illustrate the severity of the imminent punishment, the inverse proportionality exemplifies the value accorded to it. Exactly the same is found in Ezek 26:13, where the cease of singing and lyre music in the city of Tyre expresses the reversal of what is beautiful:

I will bring to an end the music of your songs;
 and the sound of your lyres will be heard no longer.

In Ezek 33:32 the terminology we have found elsewhere, is applied to music:

And see, you are to them like a singer of love songs with a beautiful voice and who plays well on the strings; they hear what you say, but they will not do it.

²² Isa 5:12.

²³ That not the music itself, but the attitude with which it is enjoyed in a context calling for social justice is being chastised, is particularly clear in Amos 6:4-6. Here the same motif is found in the same kind of context referring to Zion as well as Samaria (v. 1), but with explicit mention of David and his musical instruments. This is done in a comparison with David and applies his talent with musical instruments as an ideal norm. Therefore the motif itself cannot be used *in malam partem*.

²⁴ Isa 24:8; cf. also v. 9.

The singer is said to combine a beautiful voice (יפה קול) with the ability to play stringed instruments (שׁוֹרֵב נָגַן).²⁵ Since the beauty is specified, it shows that there are different varieties of beauty (or else it would not have been necessary to specify beauty). Again we see that beauty is manifested in a concrete expression and is therefore not an abstract concept. That does not mean however that we cannot speak of an ideal beauty, as Oeming seems to suggest.²⁶ A collection of quite concrete features of beauty, both regarding human appearance and human work, make up a model combination and can therefore be called an ideal expression of beauty.

In the Book of Job the pleasure of beautiful music is mentioned as one of three pivotal manifestations of a blessed and joyful life:²⁷

They sing to the tambourine and the lyre,
and rejoice to the sound of the flute.

When the pleasure of such a life is lost, Job in his final speech conversely chooses music to typify the loss of its beauty:²⁸

So my lyre is turned into mourning,
and my flute into the voice of those who weep.

In both prophetic and sapiential literature music thus has a clearly established place as an aspect of the adornments of the good life.

2c Hymnic Music

As can be expected, the use of music to praise God is particularly prominent in the Psalms. In addition to psalms where the use of musical instruments and singing are mentioned in contexts where the joy of pleasing God with hymns is clear but implicit (cf. Pss 71:22-23, 149:3 and especially the listing of instruments that makes up the backbone of Ps 150), there are also psalms in which this kind of music is explicitly called "beautiful."

Raise a song, sound the tambourine,
the beautiful lyre with the harp.
Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
at the full moon, on our festal day!²⁹

²⁵ The same expression is used in 1 Sam 16:17 to describe David's attractiveness (the participle of שׁוֹרֵב in the *hiph^cil* and the infinitive construct of נָגַן in the *pi^cel*).

²⁶ Cf. Manfred Oeming, "Schönheit. II. Biblisch-theologisch," *RGG* 4: 961; cf. also Loader, "The Pleasing and the Awesome," *OTE* 24/3 (2011): 656, on the *kalokagathia* of David (1 Sam 16:17).

²⁷ Job 21:12.

²⁸ Job 30: 31.

²⁹ Ps 81:3-4.

Here the lyre is qualified by נעים, "pleasing," "beautiful," which is a metonymical statement that the music produced on the lyre is beautiful. But in Ps 147 the music itself is profusely described as such:

Hallelujah! How good it is make music for our God,
yea, it is delightful, a song of praise is beautiful!³⁰

Here טוב נעים, as well as נאווה are used to describe the aesthetic quality of hymnic music. This is corroborated by the injunction of Ps 33:

Praise Yahweh with the lyre;
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings.
Sing to him a new song,
play delightfully on the strings, with jubilation!³¹

"Play delightfully/beautifully" is expressed with almost the same phrase as the one used to describe David's musical ability (היטיב נגן). The only difference is that here the imperative of טוב is used in the causative stem and not the participle, also however with נגן in the *pi'el* as in the Book of Samuel (cf. 1 Sam 16:17 and Ezek 33:32).

Whether "profane" or "sacred," music is clearly a human activity which is appreciated for its aesthetic quality.

3 Beautiful Words

As with his music, so also David's mastery of the spoken word is regarded as part of his *kalokagathia*.³² Combined *inter alia* with his musical skills and his handsome appearance his ability to speak well (נבון דבר) is presented as one of his attractive features, which should make him acceptable to King Saul. But especially the sapiential and psalmic literature unmistakably express the beauty of words. Both the quality of well-spoken words and the pleasing effect of poetry are characterised as beautiful.

Psalm 45 explicitly calls the poetic word "goodly" or "beautiful".³³

My heart stirs with a goodly word,
I recite my work to the king.
My tongue is like the pen
of a skilful scribe.

The remarkable aspect of beauty here is that the emotive *origin* of the "goodly word" (דבר טיב) is also mentioned in the poem itself: the poet is moved

³⁰ Ps 147:1.

³¹ Ps 33:2-3.

³² 1 Sam 16:18; cf. section 1a above.

³³ Ps 45:2.

by the beauty of what he experiences in his heart. So the beauty stirs him and is realised in expressive poetry. The stirring clearly concerns the poetry itself, whether דבר refers to the already expressed word or the idea underlying it. But the poem is not only about its own beauty, it is also about the beauty of the king (*ל. יפּוּ יפּיּת*, v 3) and that of his royal bride (*יפּיּר*, v 12). So this poem is permeated by the motif, both the beauty of humans and of their achievement.³⁴

"Beautiful words" is a well-known topos in sapiential literature, of which I give one example:³⁵

Golden apples in silver filigree,
so is a word spoken according to circumstance.
A golden ring or an ornament of fine gold
so is a wise rebuke to a listening ear.

The comparison to beautiful handwork of silver and gold uses the idea of pleasing metallurgic craftsmanship to illustrate the equally pleasing craftsmanship of sapiential words. The parallel in v. 12 confirms the beauty of wise words and thereby of wisdom (see below). As in Ps 45, the different aspects of beauty combine to support each other in these aphorisms.

4 The Beauty of Wisdom

The filigree comparison is the cue for a next kind of beautiful human achievement, namely wisdom. The motif of beautiful words in the Book of Proverbs already demonstrates this, as we have just noticed, for the beauty lies precisely in the sapiential appropriateness of the spoken word in an educational context:³⁶

Pleasing to people is an answer of mouth,
and how good is a word in season!

A word in season (*דבר בעתו*, "a word on its time") is a word appropriate to a specific context according to the sapiential concept of order. Here the essence of its beauty is clearly expressed in the parallelism: beauty is that which pleases (*שמחה לאיש*). So the joy generated by spoken wisdom constitutes its beauty. The beautiful jewellery may even consist of a reprimand (e.g. Prov 25:12; cf. Eccl 7:5), because this too is beneficial for the receiver. Moreover, the comparison of wise words with fine artefacts of silver and gold is in full accord with what we have found in another sapiential text, notably in Job 28. In the latter, the motif of mining and craftsmanship functions as a metaphor for

³⁴ Cf. also Ps 141:6, where the beauty of the speaker's words is expressed by *נעם* Qal.

³⁵ Prov 25:11-12; cf. also 15:23 (*טוב*) and 26 (*נעם*); 16:24 (*נועם*); 23:8 (*נעים*).

³⁶ Prov 15:23; cf. 22:17-18.

wisdom in general and therefore expresses the same idea. This is also exemplified by the motif of precious metals with which wisdom is compared:³⁷

Happy is he who finds wisdom,
 and who acquires understanding,
 for her reward is better than silver,
 and her gain better than gold.
 She is more precious than jewels,
 and nothing you can want compares with her.

Wisdom itself is therefore presented as a phenomenon of beauty in its own right. No wonder wisdom can also be pictured as a woman who is to be loved:

Do not forsake her, then she will keep you;
 love her, and she will guard you.³⁸

Or in her own words:

I love him who loves me,
 and who seeks me, will find me.³⁹

In the first case, the antecedent of the third person feminine singular suffix attached to the imperative (אֶהְיֶה) is the wisdom referred to in the previous verse.⁴⁰ Even where love is not explicitly mentioned, the feminine imagery is fully in accord with the positive personification of the sapiential concept as Lady Wisdom (Prov 1:20-33; 8).

The enjoyment provided by wisdom is also for the pleasure of the sage himself:⁴¹

For wisdom will come into your heart
 and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

The person who acquires wisdom experiences for himself the pleasure it brings. The beauty of knowledge (רֵעָה), which is a synonym for wisdom (חִכְמָה), is said to be mentally beautiful (נֶעַם Qal). The beauty of wisdom is therefore not only a matter of principle (as in Prov 15:26) or found to be so by a third party observing or hearing it (as in Prov 15:23), but is also aesthetically pleasing to the one who practises it.

³⁷ Prov 3:13-15; cf. v 21 and 2:4; 8:10-11, 19.

³⁸ Prov 4:6.

³⁹ Prov 8:17.

⁴⁰ Prov 4:5, where חִכְמָה and בִּינָה are parallel.

⁴¹ Prov 2:10.

Yet another dimension is that wisdom itself *is* not only beautiful, it also *makes* beautiful. It notably adorns the wise man like jewellery, so that his beauty becomes observable to others (Prov 1:9; 4:9; Sir 6:31; 27:8).

The beauty of wisdom therefore appears in at least three dimensions: it is beautiful in itself, it brings the joy of beauty to its practitioner, and it makes the sage beautiful to others. This all but completes the picture of beautiful human achievements as that which pleases.

5 Pleasant Food

In Prov 9:17 there is a reference to "tasty" bread, using the same root we have often encountered above (קָלַל *qal*, "find pleasing"), and in Prov 23:3 we hear about delicatessen (קִּיטְטִים). In both cases the aesthetic norm is presupposed in connection with food. Appreciation for good food is also found elsewhere in biblical sapiential literature (cf. Eccl 9:7 and the royal fiction in Eccl 2:4-10). Likewise the Deuteronomic tradition has evidence of a comparable esteem, here in the context of cultic joy (Deut 12:7,12; 14:26). Although the specific terminology of the semantic field of beauty is not extensively used, the aesthetic criterion is clear, so that we are entitled to count food among the beautiful things that humans are able to produce.⁴²

C CONCLUSION

From the collected evidence it can be concluded that the main characteristics of the beauty concept related to things tally with those related to humans.

In the case of human work the relationship of **the aesthetic norm to the religious norm** is especially clear in the case of artefacts made for cultic use and of hymnic music the beauty of which is to please God. There does seem to be a deep-seated affinity of the one for the other, which has been a source both of joy and criticism.⁴³

This does not mean that things produced by humans have to be cultic in order to be beautiful. We have found many forms of art such as wall paintings, craftsmanship, music and poetry to be beautiful because they impress and please people, irrespective of whether the overall effect is thought to be desirable or not or the context is regarded as suitable or not. So human work con-

⁴² Cf. James Alfred Loader, "Schön/Schönheit," in *Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet: Old Testament Section*, (ed. Michaela Bauks & Klaus Koenen; Stuttgart: DBG 2011), n.p. [cited 10.5.2011]. Online: <http://www.wibilex.de/>, par. 2.2.5.

⁴³ Cf. John D. Peters, "Beauty's Veils: The Ambivalent Iconoclasm of Kierkegaard and Benjamin," in *The Image in Dispute: Art and Cinema in the Age of Photography* (ed. Dudley Andrew; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 10: "Everything in religion that Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud and allies attacked abounds in beauty ..."

firms the view that the essence of beauty is **that which impresses itself on the human mind as categorically pleasing**. A special feature of this is the expressive character of the beauty created by human artistry. This is usually present as an overtone in the fervour of the prose or poetry describing the inspiration of handwork, the effect of wall paintings, the joy of music and the driving force of poetry. In the case of poetry this expressiveness itself is at least once a motif in the beautiful words themselves (Ps 45).

In an article devoted to human beauty,⁴⁴ I suggested further investigation into aspects of beauty other than human attractiveness. The results produced by the present investigation warrant yet a further extension of the investigation to include at least the beauty of God and the relevance of the concept in the cult.

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⁴⁴ Loader, "The Pleasing and the Awesome," 652-667.

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