
שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים § THE SONG OF SONGS

In the Hebrew Bible, the *Song of Songs* figures among the 'Writings'; it is one of the five *Megillot*, or 'feast scrolls' – the *Song* being read at Passover. The *LXX* places the book among the Wisdom Books, as do the *Vulgate* and modern Christian Bibles, presumably because of its internal attribution to Solomon (1:1). It teaches the excellence and dignity of the love that draws man and woman together; it presents a love as free of puritanical restraint as it is of licentious excess. People have found it surprising that a book that makes no mention of God and whose vocabulary is so passionate should figure in the sacred canon; but the doubts in Jewish and Christian circles of the 1st Century AD were settled by an appeal to tradition.

No book of the Bible has more diverse interpretations. One proposes an origin in the cult of Ishtar and Tammuz, and in the 'divine marriage' ceremonies that, the king performed as a substitute for the god but this cultic theory is unconvincing. An allegorical interpretation is much more ancient, becoming current among the Jews from the 2nd Century CE onwards: the love of God for Israel and the love of Israel for God are conveyed under the imagery of a relationship between husband and wife. However, a literal interpretation is now widely accepted, supported by the most ancient traditions of all: there is no sign of any allegorical interpretation before the Christian Era, and the Qumran scrolls give no hint of any such thing; nothing indicates that anything should be read into it other than the natural meaning of the text: it is a collection of songs celebrating the loyal and mutual love that leads to marriage. Throughout, the **BLUE SUBTITLES** indicating the speaker(s) are from the *NJB* (generally following the *Vg*) and are present in neither *MT* nor *LXX*.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATES

It is impossible to date the book with any certainty. The attribution to Solomon as author (1:1) is due to the mention of his name in 3:9,11, 8:11–12, and perhaps to the claim made in 1K 4:32. Its origin may be sought in the festivities taking place at weddings (cf. Ps 45, Jr 7:34, 16:9) and useful comparisons have been made with the ceremonies and wedding songs of the Syrian and Palestinian Arabs. But the *Song* is not a collection of popular songs: whatever ancient models the author may have known, he was an original poet and an able man of letters. The closest parallels are in the love songs of ancient Egypt but he cannot be shown to have borrowed his ideas from these; the 'poems' into which this translation has been divided merely suggest possible grouping of shorter entries and it is useless to look for any marked progression of thought or action from one to the next. Once the allegorical interpretation of the *Song* has been abandoned and, with it, the supposed allusions to historical events, the dating of the book becomes difficult to establish. Some scholars assign it to a date as early as the reign of Solomon, but the Aramaic features of the language, and the borrowing of one word from Persian (4:13) and of another from Greek (3:9), indicate a date after the Exile, in the 5th or 4th Century BCE. The place of composition was certainly Palestine.

שיר השירים פרק א

SONG OF SONGS 1

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמֹה: ^א 1 The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's:

BELOVED:

יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ ^ב

2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,
for your love is sweeter than wine.

כִּי־טוֹבִים דְּדִיף מִיַּיִן:

לְרִיחַ שְׁמֹנֶיךָ טוֹבִים ^ג

3 Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfume,
your name is like oil poured out,
and that is why the girls love you.

שְׁמֵן תּוֹרֵךְ שְׁמֶךָ

עַל־כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אֶהְבֹּדָךְ:

SONG OF SONGS 1

- ¹ The preposition ל in אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמֹה has been taken as: **1** authorship ('which is written by Solomon') – the *lamed* of authorship (also known as *lamed auctoris*) is well attested in Hebrew, particularly in the Psalms (e.g. Ps 18:1, 30:1, 34:1, 51:1, 52:1, 54:1, 56:1, 57:1, 59:1, 60:1, 63:1, 72:21); **2** dedication ('which is dedicated for Solomon') – the *lamed* of dedication is attested in Ugaritic psalms dedicated to Baal or about Baal; **3** topic ('which is about Solomon') – the *lamed* of topic is attested in Hebrew (e.g. 1 Ch 24:20) and in Ugaritic. The ל is most likely denoting authorship; followed by a name in the superscription of a poetic composition in the OT, it usually (if not always) denotes authorship. Just as the superscription לְדָוִד claims Davidic authorship within the Psalter, the heading claims Solomonic authorship. Note that the initial ש is presented as an enlarged letter, just as it appears in almost all *Hebrew MSS*.
- ² The phrase יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ ('let him kiss me with kisses') is a cognate accusative expression used for emphasis. In place of 'love is sweeter', the LXX has 'breasts are better' (ἀγαθοὶ μαστοὶ σου). Vv. 2–4 serve as a prologue, announcing the general theme of the poems to follow, and striking the key-note of passionate tenderness that dominates the whole collection. Abrupt transitions from third to second person are characteristic also of Egyptian love songs. The Lover is absent, yet present in the heart of his Beloved, with whom her comparisons associate themselves (v. 4b); these are the daughters of Jerusalem (v. 5). The prologue offers parallels with the royal marriage song of Ps 45:8–9, 15–16.
- ³ The 2nd line is an alliterative play on the words שְׁמֵן ('name') and שְׁמֶךָ ('oil'), oil being suggested by the perfumes of the previous line. The preposition ל of לְרִיחַ has been understood in three ways: **1** dative of reference ('with respect to your fragrance, pleasing is your perfume'); **2** emphatic ('indeed, pleasing is the fragrance of your perfume'); **3** comparative ('more pleasing is the fragrance of your perfume'). The term שְׁמֶךָ refers to perfumes or colognes (Qo 7:1, 10:1, Sg 4:10). In Israel, bodily oils were expensive (1K 17:12ff, 2K 2:4ff); possession of oils and perfumes was a sign of prosperity and luxury (Dt 32:8, 33:24, Job 29:6, Pr 21:17, Ezk 16:13, 20). Wearing cologne was associated with joy (Ps 45:8, Qo 9:8, Is 61:3) because they were worn on festive occasions (Pr 27:9). The meaning of the phrase שְׁמֶךָ שְׁמֵן is difficult to determine; several options have been

מְשַׁכְנֵי אַחֲרֶיךָ נְרוּצָה ד
 הַבֵּיָאֲנִי הַמְּלֶכֶךְ חֲדָרָיו
 נִגְלִיָּה וְנִשְׂמַחְהָ בְּךָ
 נִזְכִּירָה דְּלִיךָ מִיַּיִן
 מִיִּשְׂרָיִם אֶהְבֹּדָה:
 {פ}

4 Draw me in your footsteps, let us run.
 The king has brought me into his rooms;
 you will be our joy and our gladness.
 We shall praise your love more than wine;
 how right it is to love you.

שְׁחֹרָה אֲנִי וְנֹאזָה בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם ה
 כְּאֹהֲלֵי קֶדָר
 כִּירְעוֹת שַׁלְמָה:
 {פ}

BELOVED:

5 I am black but lovely, daughters of Jerusalem,
 like the tents of Kedar,
 like the pavilions of Salmah.

proposed: **1** Traditionally, תּוֹרֵק is taken as a verb that functions as an attributive adjective modifying the noun שְׁמֹנֶיךָ; the phrase is taken in this way by the LXX (ἐλαίον ἐαχεομουν – ‘poured out oil’), NJB and NRSV. However, this is syntactically awkward because the noun is masculine but the verb is feminine, and this would demand an adjective function. **2** Other Greek MSS, including Aquila, translate literally, reading, ‘μύρον ἐαχενωθῆν’ (‘perfume poured out’), reflecting a passive participle functioning adjectively. This involves simple orthographic confusion between ה and מ and may be reflected in Qumran MS 6Q^{Cant} (מדקחה מודקה, ‘perfumed, poured out’). **3** Some emend תּוֹרֵק to the noun תּוֹרֵק (‘purification’). **4** A simpler solution is to take תּוֹרֵק as a previously unrecognised noun related to the Ugaritic *tra*, which refers to high-grade cosmetic oil: ‘your name is like finest oil’ (as JPS).

4 The ‘king’ is not Yahweh, as the allegorical interpretation would have it, nor Solomon in the original poem. Engaged couples are called ‘king’ and ‘queen’ in Syrian marriage songs. Possibly, the line is simply a reminiscence of Ps 45:15. An alternative reading of the last line is, “how the righteous love you!” Scholars debate whether מִיִּשְׂרָיִם should be taken as a substantive (the righteous), abstract noun (righteousness), or adverb (rightly). The LXX reading, “εὐδύτης ἠγάπησέν σε,” (‘righteousness loves you’) is awkward.

5 Her sunburnt complexion comes from the farm-work she has been forced to do (v. 6); she compares herself to the black tents, woven from goat hair, of the Bedouin Arabs. The ancient Arabic poets contrast the pale complexion of well-born girls (here, the daughters of Jerusalem) with that of slaves and servant-girls who had to work out of doors. The ‘daughters of Jerusalem’, or the ‘daughters of Zion’ (3:11) represent an audience, whom the lovers invoke here and at 2:7, 3:5,11, 5:8,16, 8:4, or who intervene to introduce or accelerate the development of the poem (v. 8, 5:9, 6:1, 7:1). ‘Salmah’ (שַׁלְמָה) is conjectural; the MT vocalises שַׁלְמָה – ‘Solomon’. ‘Salmah’ and ‘Kedar’ (קֶדָר) are two nomadic Arab tribes: the re-vocalisation produces tighter parallelism between Kedar and Salmah than Kedar and Solomon.

אֶל־תִּרְאוּנִי שְׁאֲנִי שְׁחַרְחַרְתָּ
 שִׁשְׁזָפַתְנִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
 בְּנֵי אִמִּי נִחְרוּ־בִי
 שָׁמְנִי נִטְרָה אֶת־הַכֶּרְמִים
 כֶּרְמִי שְׁלִי לֹא נִטְרָתִי:
 הַגִּידָה לִּי שְׂאֵהְבָה נַפְשִׁי
 אֵיכָה תִרְעָה
 אֵיכָה תִרְבִּיץ בַּצִּהָרִים
 שְׁלָמָה אֶהְיֶה כְּעֵטִיהַ
 עַל עֲדָרֵי חֲבֵרֶיךָ:

אִם־לֹא תִדְעִי לָךְ הֵיפָה בְּנָשִׁים
 צְאִי־לָךְ בְּעַקְבֵי הַצֹּאן וְרַעֲלִי אֶת־גְּדֵי־תֶיךָ:
 עַל מִשְׁכְּנוֹת הָרֹעִים:

{פ}

- 6 Take no notice of my dark colouring;
it is the sun that has burnt me.
My mother's sons turned their anger on me;
they made me look after the vineyards.
My own vineyard I had not looked after!
- 7 Tell me then, you whom my soul loves,
where will you lead your flock to graze,
where will you rest it at noon?
For, why should I wander like a vagabond
beside the flocks of your companions?

CHORUS:

- 8 If you do not know this, O loveliest of women,
follow the tracks of the flock, and take your kids to graze
beside the shepherds' tents.

⁶ The last line means that she has given her heart to the man whom she loves. The noun כֶּרֶם (*'vineyard'*) is used figuratively here; some suggest that it refers to her virginity, which she has lost, but this runs contrary to the moral purity accorded to the Beloved throughout the Song. It is better to take the imagery as a reference to her ability to take care of her physical appearance.

⁷ Another reading of the 3rd line is, "tell me lest I wander around." The causal relative pronoun *שֶׁ* (*'because'*) is prefixed to the interrogative particle *לָמָּה* (*'why'*) to form the idiom 'lest'; however, used with an imperfect (*אֶהְיֶה*), the phrase emphasises why something should or should not be done. The meaning of *כְּעֵטִיהַ* (from the root *עָטָה* – *'to veil oneself'*) is debated: some explain it in terms of Israelite culture, wrapping oneself in a veil as a sign of mourning (Ezk 24:17, 22), uncleanness (Lv 13:45) or shame (Mi 3:7); others connect with the veiled cult-prostitute soliciting business among shepherds, and that the young woman wished to avoid what Tamar tried to do (Gn 38:14–23). *Symmachus*, the *Peshitta* and the *Vg* reflect a usage with metathesis of the first two consonants, giving (as here), *'to wander about like a stray'*.

⁸ 'Know this' follows the *NJB*; the *NRSV* has simply *'know'* and the *LXX* has *'know yourself'* (*γνώσ σεαυτήν*).

ט לְסָסְתִי בְרֶכְבִּי פָרְעָה
 דְּמִיתִיךָ רַעֲיָתִי:
 י נְאוּן לְחַיִּיךָ בְּתַרְיִם
 צֹאֲרֶךְ בְּחֶרוֹזִים:
 יא תּוֹרֵי זָהָב נַעֲשֶׂה-לְךָ
 עִם נִקְדּוֹת הַכֶּסֶף:

יב עַד-שְׁהַמְלֶךְ בְּמִסְבּוֹ
 נִרְדֵּי נִתַּן רִיחֹו:
 יג צְרוֹר הַמָּר | דּוֹדֵי לִי
 בֵּין שְׁדֵי יְלִין:

LOVER:

- ⁹ I compare you, my love,
 to my mare among Pharaoh's chariots.
- ¹⁰ Your cheeks show fair between their pendants
 and your neck within its necklaces.
- ¹¹ We shall make you golden earrings
 with studs of silver.

DUO:

- ¹² While the king rests in his own room,
 my nard yields it perfume.
- ¹³ My love is a sachet of myrrh
 lying between my breasts.

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- ⁹ Comparison of the Beloved to a mare, worthy of a royal comparison, may seem quaint, but was a high compliment to feminine beauty among the ancient Arab poets, as also with Theocritus.
- ¹⁰ The LXX text of this verse is rather different: "How your cheeks are beautiful as a turtledove, your neck as pendants." (τί ὠραιώθησαν σιαγόνες σου ὡς τρυγόνες, τράχηλός σου ὡς ὀρμίσκοι.)
- ¹¹ NJPS has 'three' before 'golden earrings'; this is omitted by both the NJB and NRSV.
- ¹² The lovers are together: the rare and heady perfumes, nard, myrrh, and henna flowers, symbolise the pleasures of their meeting (vv. 12-14). There follows a battle of compliments (vv. 15-16, 2:1-3). The meeting-place is ill defined: a bed of greenery (v. 16), a palace (v. 16), or a cellar (2:4 - but see the footnote thereto). However, the outcome of the meeting is clear: the lovers are enfolded in each other's arms (2:6) and the man begs that no one should disturb his Beloved (2:7); this will be taken up as a refrain in 3:5 and 8:3-4. This is perfectly fitting if the *Song* is considered as a collection of marriage songs and if no attempt is made to find a continuous development from one poem to another.
- ¹³ The term 'myrrh' (מֶרְרָה) refers to an aromatic gum (*Commiphora abessinica* resin) that exudes from the bark of the *Balsmodendron myrrha* tree, which was native only to Arabia, Abyssinia, and India. It was an expensive luxury item, which had to be imported into Israel. In liquid form, it could be carried in small bottles like nard, but it was also used in solid form in which it was carried in a small cloth pouch or sachet worn next to the body. The myrrh was mixed with fat and shaped into cones and as the fat melted from the body heat, the aroma of myrrh and the anointing

יד אֲשַׁבֵּל הַכַּפָּר | דוֹדִי לִי
 בְּכַרְמֵי עֵין גֵּדִי:
 {ס}
 טו הַגֵּד יִפָּה רַעֲיָתִי
 הַגֵּד יִפָּה עֵינַיִךְ יוֹנִים:
 טז הַגֵּד יִפָּה דוֹדִי אֶף נָעִים
 אֶף-עַרְשָׁנוּ רַעֲנָנָה:
 זי קִרְוֹת בְּתֵינּוּ אֲרָזִים
 רַחֲטָנוּ רַהֲיִטָנוּ בְּרוֹתִים:

- 14 My love is a cluster of henna flowers
among the vines of En-Gedi.
- 15 How beautiful you are, my beloved,
how beautiful you are! Your eyes are doves.
- 16 How beautiful you are, my love, and how you delight me!
Our bed is the greensward.
- 17 The beams of our house are cedar trees,
and our panels are cypresses.

oil would perfume a woman's body. Because it had a very strong aroma, which would last for long periods, women often wore it to bed to perfume themselves for the next day. Because of its beautiful fragrance, it is associated with romance (Is 3:24).

- ¹⁴ In place of 'henna flowers' (הַכַּפָּר), the LXX has 'camphor' (κύπρου). 'En-Gedi' ('the Goat's Spring') was on the west bank of the Dead Sea with a fertile oasis where, according to other texts, there grew balm and palm trees, which brought welcome refreshment to the weary traveller.
- ¹⁵ In the ancient East, there was an unusual emphasis on beauty of a woman's eyes. This was probably because women veiled themselves and wore long robes so that no portion of their body or face was exposed to sight except for their eyes (Gn 26:17). The only indication of a woman's beauty was her eyes. There was no better (indeed, no other) way to praise a woman's beauty in the ancient Middle East.
- ¹⁶ The term רַעֲנָנָה ('lush', 'verdant') refers to the colour green and is often used in reference to luxuriant foliage or trees (Ps 37:35, 52:8, Jr 11:16, Ho 14:8). The impression given here is that the young lovers are laying down together on the grass in the woods, enjoying the delights of their caresses. The term עַרְשׁ ('bed') describes a canopied bed (Ps 6:7, 41:4, Pr 7:16) or marriage couch.
- ¹⁷ The translation of the last line is uncertain (the NRSV has 'our rafters are pine'). The *Kethib*/*Qere* difference here appears to be a case of simple *he/het* confusion.

שיר השירים פרק ב

א אֲנִי חֲבַצְלֵת הַשָּׁרוֹן
שׁוֹשַׁנַּת הָעֲמָקִים:
ב כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה בֵּין הַחוֹחִים
כֵּן רַעִיָּתִי בֵּין הַבָּנוֹת:
ג כְּתַפּוּחַ בְּעֵצֵי הַיַּעַר
כֵּן דּוּדֵי בֵּין הַבָּנִים
בְּצֶלֶל חֲמַדְתִּי וַיִּשְׁבְּתִי
וּפְרִיָּו מְתוֹק לְחַפִּי:
ד הֵבִיאֲנִי אֶל־בַּיִת הַיַּיִן
וַדְגִּלּוּ עָלַי אַהֲבָה:

SONG OF SONGS 2

- 1 I am a rose of Sharon,
a lily of the valleys.
- 2 As a lily among thistles,
so is my beloved among girls.
- 3 As an apple tree among the trees of the wood,
so is my love among young men.
In his shade, I delight to sit,
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.
- 4 He has taken me to his house of wine,
and his banner over me is love.

SONG OF SONGS 2

- 1 The 'rose of Sharon' (חֲבַצְלֵת הַשָּׁרוֹן) – the LXX has 'flower of the plain' – 'ἄστρος τοῦ πεδίου') is probably the meadow saffron or crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*) that grows in the coastal plain; the 'lily' (שׁוֹשַׁנָּה) is the chamomile (*Anthemis palaestina*), a daisy-like flower native to Palestine.
- 2 The Beloved compares herself to the rose and the chamomile (v. 1); the Lover embroiders on this: she is a lily among thorns (the thistle plant *Poterium spinosum*, which has prickly spines covered with thistles, but also sprouts beautiful small red flowers); he loves no one but her. Here, as in 4:13–14, it is perhaps wrong to smother the poetry under the weight of botanical pedantry.
- 3 Apple trees were not native to Palestine and had to be imported and cultivated. To find a cultivated apple tree growing in the forest among other wild trees would be quite unusual; the apple tree would stand out and be a delightful surprise. Like a cultivated apple tree, the Lover was unique and stood out among all other men. In ancient Middle Eastern love literature, the apple tree was a common symbol for romantic love and sexual fertility. The 'apple tree' motif is used in the Song in a similar manner (here and 8:5). Likewise, the motif of 'apples' is used as a symbol of fertility (Jl 1:12) and sexual desire (Sg 2:5, 7, 9).
- 4 The MT vocalises the consonantal הֵבִיאֲנִי as the Hiphil perfect tense הֵבִיאֲנִי ('he has taken'); however, several mediaeval Hebrew MSS vocalise the form as the imperative, הֵבִיאֲנִי ('take me'), which is reflected in the Peshitta and LXX (Ἐἵσαγάγετέ με), and such an interpretation provides a tighter parallelism with the imperatives of v. 5. In place of 'house of wine' (בַּיִת הַיַּיִן) – the literal translation), the NJB has 'cellar', and the NRSV and JPS have 'banqueting house' (Est 7:8, Qo 7:2 and, following Jr 16:8–9, a reference to marriage feasts).

<p>סִמְכוּנֵי בֶּאֱשִׁישׁוֹת ה</p> <p>רְפְדוּנִי בְּתַפּוּחִים</p> <p>כִּי־חֹלֵת אֶהְבֶּה אֲנִי:</p> <p>שְׂמְאַלֹּז תַּחַת לְרֵאשִׁי ו</p> <p>וַיְמִינֹו תַחְבְּקֵנִי:</p> <p>הַשְּׁבַעְתֵּי אֶתְכֶם ז</p> <p>בְּנֹוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם</p> <p>בְּצִבְאוֹת אֹז בְּאֵילוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה</p> <p>אִם־תִּעְרִינָו וְאִם־תִּעוֹרְרוּ אֶת־הָאֵהָבָה</p> <p>עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">{ס}</p>	<p>5 Feed me with raisin cakes; restore me with apples, for I am sick with love.</p> <p>6 Let his left arm be under my head and his right arm embrace me.</p> <p>7 I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem, by all gazelles and wild does, do not rouse; do not wake my beloved before she pleases.</p>
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⁵ In place of ‘raisin cake’ (בֶּאֱשִׁישׁוֹת), the NRSV has ‘raisins’ and JPS has ‘dainties’; raisin cakes were cultic offerings in the ancient Middle East and were prominent in fertility rites (Is 16:7, Ho 3:1). In Israel, they were eaten during festive celebrations, being viewed as enhancing sexual fertility (2S 6:19, 1Ch 16:3). Scholars regard the ‘raisin cakes’ as: **1** literal food viewed as an aphrodisiac to cure her love-sickness; **2** a figurative expression for sexual passion or lovemaking; or **3** double entendre referring to the literal food as an aphrodisiac and her desire for lovemaking. Amnon was lovesick for Tamar (2S 13:2), the sole biblical parallel, but there are others to be found in Egyptian songs.

⁶ The verb חִבַּק has a two-fold range of meanings: **1** to embrace or hug someone (Gn 29:13, 33:4, 48:10, Job 24:8, Pr 4:8; Qo 3:5, Lm 4:5) and **2** to fondle or sexually stimulate a lover (Pr 5:20, Sg 2:6, 8:3). The verb designates an expression of love by the position or action of one’s hands and is probably used here as a euphemism.

⁷ The 3rd line is a pastoral note, as in vv. 9 and 17. It is unlikely that צִבְאוֹת (‘gazelles’) and אֵילוֹת (‘does’), in this order, are a cryptogram for אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (‘the God of Israel’) to avoid pronouncing his name in this secular song. The LXX reads, “by the powers and by the strengths of the field” (ἐν ταῖς δυνάμεισιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἰσχύσεσιν τοῦ ἀγροῦ). Frequently, when oaths were taken in the ancient world, witnesses were invoked in order to solemnize the vow and to act as jurists should the oath someday be broken. Cosmic forces such as the ‘heavens and earth’ were often personified to act as witnesses to an oath (Dt 32:1, Is 1:2, Mi 1:2, 6:1–2, Ps 50:2). In this case, the witnesses are the ‘gazelles and wild does’; these animals were frequently used as symbols of romantic love in the Hebrew Bible (Pr 5:19); and, in Egyptian and Mesopotamian love literature and Ugaritic poetry, the gazelle was often associated with sexual fertility.

ח קול דודי
 הנהיזה בא
 מדלג על ההרים
 מקפץ על הגבעות:
 ט דומה דודי לצבי או לעפר האילים
 הנהיזה עומד אחר כתלנו
 משגיח מן החלונות
 מציץ מן החרכים:
 י ענה דודי ואמר לי
 קומי לך רעיתי יפתי
 ולכי-לך:
 יא כִּי־הִנֵּה הַסֶּתוּ עָבַר
 הַגֶּשֶׁם חָלַף הַלֵּךְ לֹו:

BELOVED:

- 8 I hear my love.
 See how he comes
 leaping on the mountains,
 bounding over the hills.
- 9 My love is like a gazelle, like a young stag.
 See where he stands behind our wall.
 He looks in at the window;
 he peers through the opening.
- 10 My love lifts up his voice, he says to me,
 Come then, my beloved,
 my lovely, come.
- 11 For see, winter is past,
 and the winter rains are over and gone.

⁸ At the start of this second poem, there is a change of scene. The Beloved is living with her parents in the city. The Lover comes in from the country and appears at the window (vv. 8-9, cf. 5:2ff). Egyptian and Greek poetry contain complaints of lovers faced with a closed door; here, the Lover invites his Beloved to join him, by singing to her of the delights of springtime, the season of flowers, of birds and of love (vv. 10-14). The feeling for nature, the freshness, and the modernity of this are unequalled throughout the OT.

⁹ At the end of the 2nd line, the LXX adds 'upon the mountains of Bethel' (ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη Βαιθηλ) – compare v. 17. Gazelles are often associated with sensuality and masculine virility in ancient Middle Eastern love literature; they were often figures in Hebrew, Accadian, and Ugaritic literature for mighty warriors or virile young men (2S 1:19, 2:18, Is 14:9, Zc 10:3). In ancient Middle Eastern love literature, gazelles often symbolize the excitement and swiftness of the lover coming to see his beloved.

¹⁰ Some translators put the lover's speech in the past tense: "My love spoke to me, he said..."

¹¹ The NJB lacks the word 'winter' before 'rains', here following NJPS.

יב הַנְּצַנִּים נִרְאוּ בָאָרֶץ
 עַת הַזְּמִיר הִגִּיעַ
 וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בְּאֶרְצֵנוּ:
 יג הַתְּאֵנָה חֲנֻטָּה פִּגְיָה
 וְהַגְּפָנִים | סְמֹדֵר נִתְּנוּ רִיחַ
 קוֹמִי לְכִי לְךָ רַעִיּוֹתֵי יַפְתִּי
 וּלְכִי־לְךָ:
 {ס}

יד יוֹנָתִי בְּחַגְוֵי הַסֵּלַע בְּסֹתֵר הַמְּדַרְגָּה
 הִרְאִינִי אֶת־מַרְאֵיךָ
 הַשְּׁמִיעֵנִי אֶת־קוֹלְךָ
 כִּי־קוֹלְךָ עָרֵב
 וּמַרְאֵיךָ נְאוּהָ:
 {ס}

- 12 Flowers are appearing on the earth.
 The season of glad singing has come;
 the cooing of the turtledoves is heard in our land.
- 13 The fig tree is forming its new green fruit
 and the blossoming vines give out their fragrance.
 Come then, my beloved,
 my lovely, come.
- 14 My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock,
 in the coverts of the cliff,
 show me your face, let me hear your voice;
 for your voice is sweet
 and your face is lovely.

¹² In place of 'singing' (זְמִיר), the LXX has 'pruning' (τομῆς); the intended root is debated among many ancient MSS and it is likely that the ambiguity is intentional.

¹³ The first three lines here give a vivid portrayal of springtime (budding figs and flowering vines). The *Kethib*/*Qere* difference here would benefit from an explanation.

¹⁴ The dove was a common figure for romantic love in ancient Middle Eastern love literature. This emphasis seems to be suggested by his use of the term 'my dove'. Just as the young man heard the voice of the turtledove in 2:12, so now he wants to hear her voice. Doves were often associated with timidity in the ancient world: being virtually defenceless, they would often take refuge in crevices and cliffs for safety (Jr 48:28). The emphasis on timidity and the need for security is the emphasis here because of the explicit description of this 'dove' hiding in the 'clefts of the rock' and in 'the coverts of the cliff'. Fortresses were sometimes built in the clefts of the rocks on mountainsides because they were inaccessible and, therefore, in a secure place of safety (Jr 49:16, Ob 3). He may have realised it might be intimidating for her to join him and communicate with him; she would need to feel secure in his love to do this, and it would be easy for her to hide from such emotionally exposing experiences.

אַחְזוּ-לָנוּ שְׁעָלִים טו
 שְׁעָלִים קִטְנִים מְחַבְּלִים בְּרָמִים
 וּכְרָמֵינוּ סְמֹדֵר:
 דּוֹדִי לִי וְאֲנִי לוֹ טז
 הִרְעָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים:
 עַד שִׁיפּוּחַ הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ הָעֲלָלִים ז
 סָבַדְמָה-לָךְ דּוֹדִי לְעַבִּי
 אִו לְעַפֵּר הָאֵילִים
 עַל-הָרֵי בֶּתֶר:
 {ס}

- 15 Catch the foxes for us;
 the little foxes that make havoc of the vineyards,
 for our vineyards are in fruit.
- 16 My love is mine and I am his.
 He pastures his flock among the lilies.
- 17 Before the day-breeze rises, before the shadows flee,
 return! Be, my love,
 like a gazelle, like a young stag,
 on the mountains of Bether.

- 15 This verse is an independent fragment, probably inserted here under the influence of v. 13 with its mention of vines in flower. Here, the 'vineyards' are a metaphor for the charms of girls who wish to be rid of their admirers, the 'little foxes' (foxes are always spoken of in a negative light in the Hebrew Bible and in the ancient world were particularly associated with their destructive tendencies regarding vineyards: Jg 15:4, Ne 4:3, Ps 63:10, Lm 5:18, Ezk 13:4). Such a description of these foxes here seems to confirm this as the point of comparison in mind.
- 16 This affirmation of mutual possession recurs in almost identical terms in 6:3 and 7:11 and in each case is made in the absence of the Lover, thus indicating the stability of love. However, love, for its part, years for a presence and, in each case, confidence in the Lover is linked to an appeal or to a delay (here, v. 7, 6:1 and 7:12). The 2nd line may be translated either as "he feeds (his flock) among the lilies" or as "he grazes among the lilies." The former would picture him as a shepherd pasturing his flock among a bed of flowers, which they were eating, while the latter would be picturing him as a gazelle feeding among a bed of flowers. Because of the occurrence of the gazelle motif in the following verse, it is most likely that this motif is present in this verse as well.
- 17 The day-breeze (see Gn 3:8) in Palestine blows in the evening, when the lengthening shadows seem to 'flee'. This is when the Lover will come back from the country, and so we return to the beginning of the poem (v. 8), the end of v. 17 more or less repeating the words of vv. 8-9a. For 'mountains of Bether' (הָרֵי בֶּתֶר), the NRSV has 'cleft mountains'. All explanations of this word as a common noun (JPS has 'spices') are forced and it is probably a place name, either of a real place, Bether, to the west of Jerusalem (Jos 15:59), or of a semi-legendary one; parallels in Sg 4:6 and 8:14 speak of mountains of myrrh and balm. Bether may have been the Palestinian equivalent of Punt, the land of spices in Egyptian tradition. An Egyptian love song says, "When his arms enfold me, it is like being in the land of Punt." The LXX has 'mountains with many ravines' (ὄρη κοιλωμάτων).

שיר השירים פרק ג

א על־משכְּבִי בַלַּיְלוֹת
בְּקִשְׁתִּי אֶת שְׂאֵהְבָה נַפְשִׁי
בְּקִשְׁתִּיו וְלֹא מָצָאתִיו:
ב אֶקוּמָה נָא וְאֶסוּבְּבָהּ בְּעִיר
בְּשׁוּקִים וּבְרַחֲבוֹת
אֲבַקֶּשֶׁה אֶת שְׂאֵהְבָה נַפְשִׁי
בְּקִשְׁתִּיו וְלֹא מָצָאתִיו:
ג מְצָאוֹנֵי הַשְּׂמָרִים
הַסֹּבְבִים בְּעִיר
אֶת שְׂאֵהְבָה נַפְשִׁי רְאִיתֶם:
ד כִּמְעַט שְׁעַבְרָתִי מֵהֶם
עַד שֶׁמָצָאתִי אֶת שְׂאֵהְבָה נַפְשִׁי

SONG OF SONGS 3

1 On my bed at night, I sought
the man whom my soul loves:
I sought but I could not find him;
2 "I shall get up and go through the city;
in the streets and in the squares,
I shall seek him whom my soul loves."
I sought him but I could not find him!
3 I came upon the watchmen –
those who go on their rounds in the city:
"Have you seen him who my soul loves?"
4 Barely had I passed them
when I found him who my soul loves.

SONG OF SONGS 3

- ¹ Vv. 1–4 form a complete unit, to which is added a similar refrain (v. 5) as in 2:7 and 8:4. Though the theme is again the search, as in 1:7–8, 5:2–8, this time the setting is the city and the time is night. The title could be 'The lover lost and found again'. For a girl to go out at night and take her sweetheart to her mother's house is contrary to Jewish custom that some commentators have supposed this to be a dream sequence. However, poets and lovers delight in imagining unlikely situations. The audacity of the pursuit and the longing never more to let the lover part are proofs of passionate love. At the end of this verse, the *NRSV*, following the *LXX*, adds, "I called him but he gave no answer." (*ἐκάλεσα αὐτόν, και οὐχ ὑπήκουσέν μου*) Here, we follow the *MT & NJB*.
- ² In place of 'streets' (בְּשׁוּקִים), the *LXX* has 'markets' (*ἀγοραῖς*).
- ³ The night watchmen (see Ps 127:1, Is 21:11–12) recur in 5:7, and were probably typical figures in popular poetry, like the watchmen and policemen of our own mediaeval and modern songs.
- ⁴ The literal translation of 'barely' is 'like a little'; the term כִּמְעַט, which is composed of a comparative preposition (כִּי) prefixed to a noun (מְעַט –

אֶחְזֹתוּ וְלֹא אֲרַפְּנוּ
עַד־שֶׁהֵבִיאתוֹ אֶל־בַּיִת אִמִּי
וְאֶל־חֹדֶר הַזֵּרֶתִי:

הַשְּׁבַעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם
בְּעִבְאוֹת אֹז בְּאֵילוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה
אִסְתַּעֲרוּ | וְאִסְתַּעֲזְרוּ אֶת־הָאֵהָבָה
עַד שֶׁתִּחַפֵּץ:
{ס}

י מִי זֹאת עֹלָה מִן־הַמִּדְבָּר
כְּתִימָרוֹת עָשָׂן

I caught him, would not let him go,
not until I had brought him to my mother's house,
to the room where she conceived me!

LOVER:

⁵ I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,
by gazelles and wild does,
do not rouse; do not wake my beloved
before she pleases.

⁶ What is this coming up from the desert
like a column of smoke,

'the small'), is an idiom that means 'scarcely' or 'within a little'. There is debate about the reason why the woman brought her beloved to her mother's house. Some note that the mother's house is sometimes referred to as the place where marital plans were made (Gn 24:28, Rt 1:8); some suggest that the woman here was unusually bold and took the lead in proposing marriage plans with her beloved. This approach emphasises that the marriage plans in 3:4 are followed by the royal wedding procession (3:6-11) and the wedding night (4:1-5:1). Others suggest that the parallelism of 'my mother's house' and 'room where she conceived me' focuses on the bedroom of her mother's house. Still others suggests that her desire was to make love to her beloved in the very bedroom chambers where she herself was conceived, to complete the cycle of life/love; if this is the idea, it would provide a striking parallel to a similar picture in 8:5, in which the woman exults that they had made love in the very location where her beloved had been conceived: "Under the apple tree I aroused you; it was there your mother conceived you, there she who bore you conceived you."

⁵ The LXX version of the 3rd line is rather different, as in 2:7 (see the footnote thereto).

⁶ For the last line, here following the NJB, NJPS has 'with all powders of the merchant' (as does the LXX - ἀπὸ πάντων κονιορτῶν μυρσιψοῦ). The poem of vv. 6-11 is not about love, is not put into the mouth of either of the two partners and is not recited by the 'daughters of Zion', since they themselves are invoked at v. 11. The poet himself is speaking now, and describes a royal procession, which v. 11 associates with wedding festivities. For a similar celebration, see 1M 9:37-39. Similar customs are still observed by the Syrian and Palestinian Arabs and go back to ancient times (Ps 45:15-16). Vv. 6-10 describe the escort and the finery sent by the bridegroom to meet the bride: their meeting is invoked in v. 11. This short poem makes a good introduction to the eulogy of the Beloved in Ch. 4. The description is high-flown; the bridegroom is a

מְקַטְרֵת מִרְ וּלְבוֹנָה
מִכָּל אֲבֻקַּת רוּכָל:
הִנֵּה מֵטָתוֹ שֶׁלִּשְׁלֹמֹה ז
שְׁשִׁים גִּבֹּרִים סְבִיב לָהּ
מִגְּבֻרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
כָּלֶם אֲחֻזֵי חֶרֶב מְלֻמְדֵי מִלְחָמָה ח
אִישׁ חָרְבוֹ עַל-יָרְכּוֹ
מִפֶּחַד בַּלַּיְלוֹת:
{ס}

אֶפְרַיִם עָשָׂה לּוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה ט
מֵעֵצֵי הַלְּבָנוֹן:
עֲמוּדָיו עָשָׂה כֶּסֶף י
רְפִידָתוֹ זָהָב מְרַכְּבוֹ אֲרָגָמֹן
תּוֹכוֹ רְצוּף אֶהָבָה מִבְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם:

perfumed with myrrh and frankincense
and every exotic perfume?

7 Here comes Solomon's litter.

Around it are sixty champions,
of the warriors of Israel.

8 All of them are skilled with the sword, expert in war.

Each man has his sword at his side,
in case of alarms by night.

9 King Solomon has made himself a palanquin
of wood from Lebanon.

10 He has made the posts of silver,
the canopy of gold, the seat of purple;
the centre is inlaid with leather, daughters of Jerusalem.

'king' (cf. 1:4,12), a 'Solomon'.

7 The term מֵטָת (here translated as 'litter') refers to a royal portable couch, spread with covers, cloth, and pillows. At the beginning of the last line, here following the MT and NRSV, the NJB adds 'the flower'.

8 An alternative translation of 'skilled with the sword' is 'girded with a sword'; the genitive construct phrase אֲחֻזֵי חֶרֶב can be interpreted in two ways: most assume that אֲחָז denotes 'physically grasp', 'hold', with differing approaches as to whether the participle functions substantively (wielders of the sword), verbally (all hold sword) or adjectivally (girded with a sword). Others suggest (as here) taking the element in its rare metaphorical sense of 'to learn' ('mentally grasp'); this nuance is much more common in the related Accadian verb meaning 'to learn'.

9 The term 'palanquin' (אֶפְרַיִם) occurs only once in the MT and may be borrowed from the Greek φορτίον (litter or carriage).

10 In place of 'leather', the NJB has the conjectural 'ebony'; the MT (and NRSV) has 'love' (אֶהָבָה). For this line, the LXX reads, "within it a stone pavement of love" (ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ λιθόστρωτον, ἀγάπη). The NJB omits the last line, which can be linked to the beginning of v. 11, if we suppress the first line thereof, not found in the LXX and possibly a gloss.

אֲנֵי בָנוֹת צִיּוֹן | וּרְאִינָה בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן
בַּמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה
בְּעֵטְרָה שֶׁעֲטָרָהּ לְאִמּוֹ
בְּיוֹם חֲתֻנָּתוֹ
וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחַת לְבָבוֹ:
{ס}

¹¹ Daughters of Zion:
come and see King Solomon,
wearing the diadem with which his mother crowned him
on his wedding day,
on the day of his heart's joy.

¹¹ The only other mention of a bridegroom's crown occurs in Is 61:10, where a different word is used.

שיר השירים פרק ד

א הַנָּדָּי יִפֶּה רַעֲיִתִי הַנָּדָּי יִפֶּה
עֵינָיִךְ יוֹנִים מִבְּעַד לְצַמְתְּךָ
שַׁעְרְךָ כְּעֵדֵר הָעִזִּים
שֹׁגְלָשׁוֹ מִהַר גִּלְעָד:
ב שִׁנְיֶיךָ כְּעֵדֵר הַקְּצוּבוֹת
שֶׁעָלוּ מִן־הַרְחָצָה
שְׂכֵלָם מִתְּאִימוֹת וְשִׂכְלָה אֵין בָּהֶם:
ג כַּחוּט הַשָּׁנִי שִׁפְתוֹתֶיךָ וּמִדְּבָרְךָ נְאוּה
כְּפֶלַח הַרְמוֹן רִקְתְּךָ מִבְּעַד לְצַמְתְּךָ:
ד כְּמִגְדָּל דָּוִד צוּאֲרֶיךָ בְּנוֹי לְתַלְפִּיזוֹת

SONG OF SONGS 4

LOVER:

- 1 How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful you are!
Your eyes are doves, behind your veil;
your hair is like a flock of goats
surging down Mount Gilead.
- 2 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep
when they come up from the washing place.
Each one has its twin, not one unpaired with another.
- 3 Your lips are a scarlet thread and your words enchanting.
Your cheeks, behind your veil, are halves of pomegranate.
- 4 Your neck is the Tower of David built on layers,

SONG OF SONGS 4

- ¹ The short poem of vv. 1-7 is a eulogy of the physical charms of the Beloved and is partly repeated in 6:5-7; there is another eulogy in 7:2-10, and a eulogy of the physical charms of the Lover occurs in 5:10-16. The portrait of the perfect housewife in Pr 31:10-31 might be a sage's reaction to this type of composition, which was widespread. Egyptian love songs contain similar eulogies, which are also a stock-in-trade of Arabic poetry (*wasf*, 'description'). Taken literally, these descriptions would offer a grotesque image of the Beloved or of the Lover. Equally unlikely is the allegorical interpretation that sees in them descriptions of the Holy Land and the Temple. In fact, they do not 'describe', they juxtapose metaphors borrowed from the entire natural world, physical, animal and vegetable, to conjure up, by associated impressions of touch, sight and smell, the sense of admiration, joy and pleasure induced by the presence of the Beloved.
- ² A more literal translation of the noun רחצה ('washing place') is 'watering hole'; the related verb דהע means 'to wash'. The meaning here is that her teeth are as white as sheep, washed before being shorn (as was customary in the ancient Middle East).
- ³ The phrase חוט השני ('scarlet thread') is a genitive construct with the genitive functioning adjectivally. This phrase is used twice in the Hebrew Bible to denote a scarlet-coloured thread or cord (Jos 2:18, Sg 4:3); it is a comparison of sight, describing the colour and shape of her lips.
- ⁴ The term כְּמִגְדָּל ('Tower') refers to a military structure, such as a defensive tower on the walls of a city (Jg 8:9,17, 9:51, 2K 9:17, 17:9, 18:8, 2Ch 14:6, 26:15, 27:4, 32:5). The feminine noun לְתַלְפִּיזוֹת ('layers') is of uncertain etymology; the LXX simply transliterates it (εἰς θαλαπιωθ).

<p>אֶלֶף הַמִּגָּן תָּלוּי עָלָיו כָּל שְׁלֹטֵי הַגְּבָרִים: שְׁנֵי שָׁדַיִךְ כְּשְׁנֵי עֶפְרַיִם ה תְּאוֹמֵי צְבִיָּה הַרוֹעִים בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים: עַד שִׁפּוּחַ הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים ו אֵלֶיךָ לִי אֶל־הַר הַמּוֹר וְאֶל־גְּבַעַת הַלְּבוֹנָה: כַּלְדָּךְ יִפָּה רַעֲיָתִי ז וּמִוֶּם אֵין בְּדָךְ: {ס} אֲתִי מִלְּבָנוֹן כְּלָה ח אֲתִי מִלְּבָנוֹן תְּבֹאִי תְּשׁוּרִי מִרְאֵשׁ אַמְנָה מִרְאֵשׁ שֵׁנִיר וְחֶרְמוֹן מִמַּעֲנֹת אַרְיֹת מְהַרְרֵי נְמָרִים: לִבְבַתְּנִי אַחֲתִי כְלָה ט</p>	<p>hung round with a thousand shields, each the armour of a hero. 5 Your two breasts are two fawns, twins of a gazelle that feed among the lilies. 6 Before the day-breeze rises, before the shadows flee, I shall go to the mountain of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense. 7 You are wholly beautiful, my beloved, and without a blemish. 8 Come with me from Lebanon, my promised bride, come with me from Lebanon, come on your way. Look down from the heights of Amanus, from the crests of Senir and Hermon, the haunt of lions, the mountains of leopards. 9 You ravish my heart, my sister, my promised bride;</p>
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⁵ On the cultural significance of the 'gazelle' in the ancient Middle East, see #2:9.

⁶ This verse is a repetition of 2:17, perhaps only secondary, evoked by the last words of v. 5, reminiscent of the end of 2:16.

⁷ Compare this verse with the eulogy of Absalom (2S 14:25).

⁸ The *NJB* omits the two occurrences of 'with me', here following the *NRSV*. The girl is called a 'promised bride' only in this part of the poem (4:8-5:1), where the phrase occurs six times. This strophe is hard to explain and is possibly a fragment of some longer poem. In conjunction with the following strophes, to which it is linked by the keywords 'promised bride' (*vide supra*) and 'Lebanon' (vv. 11,15), it might be read as an appeal to the Beloved to leave a difficult and dangerous country, to join her Lover. In place of 'look down', the *NRSV* has 'depart'. In place of 'Amanus' (אַמְנָה - *Amana*), the *LXX* has πίστρωσ, meaning 'Trust' (it may or not be a proper noun).

⁹ As also in vv. 10, 12, 5:1,2, the expression, 'my sister', may be borrowed from Egyptian poetry, where it is common. However, Egyptian poetry

לַבִּבְתְּנִי בְּאַחַד בְּאַחַת מֵעֵינֶיךָ
 בְּאַחַד עֲנַק מְצוּרְנֶיךָ:
 מֵה־יָפוּ דְדִיךָ אֲחָתִי י
 כֹּלָה מֵה־טֹבוֹ דְדִיךָ
 מִיַּיִן וְרִיחַ שְׁמֶנֶיךָ מִכָּל־בְּשָׂמִים:
 נִפְתַּת תְּטַפְּנָה שְׁפֹתֶיךָ כֹּלָה דְבַשׁ וְחֶלֶב יא
 תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנֶיךָ וְרִיחַ שְׁלֹמֹתֶיךָ כְּרִיחַ לְבָנוֹן:
 {ס}
 גִּן | נָעוּל אֲחָתִי כֹלָה יב
 גֵּל נָעוּל מֵעֵין חֲתוּם:
 שְׁלַחֶיךָ פְּרָדִים רְמוּזִים יג
 עִם פְּרֵי מִגְדִּים כְּפָרִים עִם־נֶרְדִּים:
 נֶרְדָּא וְכַרְכָּם קִנְיָה וְקַנְמֹן יד
 עִם כָּל־עֵצֵי לְבוֹנָה
 מֵר וְאַהֲלוֹת עִם כָּל־רֵאשֵׁי בְשָׂמִים:

you ravish my heart with a single one of your glances,
 with a single link of your necklace.
 10 What spells lie in your love, my sister, my promised bride!
 How delicious is your love, more delicious than wine!
 How fragrant are your perfumes, more than all spices!
 11 Your lips, my promised bride, distil wild honey.
 Honey and milk are under your tongue;
 and the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon.
 12 She is a garden enclosed, my sister, my promised bride;
 a garden enclosed, a sealed fountain.
 13 Your shoots form an orchard of pomegranate trees,
 bearing most exquisite fruit, henna-flowers, and nards:
 14 Nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,
 with all the incense-bearing trees;
 myrrh and aloes, with the subtlest odours.

uses 'brother' to mean the Lover, which Sg never does (see, in contrast, 8:1). The *Kethib/Qere* difference here warrants an explanation.

¹⁰ An alternative opening of the 1st line is, "How delightful is your love."

¹¹ The Lover is carried away by the looks of his Beloved (v. 9), by the taste of her kisses (v. 11) and by the scent of her clothes (vv. 10–11).

¹² Like the vineyard of 1:6, 2:15, the 'garden', with its spring and choice flowers (a 'paradise', v. 13, cf. Gn 2:9–10), is a metaphor for the charms of the Beloved. The word 'garden' (*κηπος*) in the 3rd line follows the LXX (and *Peshitta*); the MT has 'waves' (גל for גן, translated by JPS as 'spring'), in any case, always in the plural (a copyist's error). The *Paseq* in the 1st line is here presented in grey, as it is in the MAM text.

¹³ In place of 'shoots', the NRSV has 'channel'; the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain – the LXX has *ἀποστολαί* (*dowries*). 'Orchard' translates the Hebrew פּרָדִים (the only other occurrences in the Bible are in Ne 2:8 and Qo 2:5), a Persian word meaning 'park', from which the word 'paradise' derives. The NJB omits 'henna-flowers and nards'.

¹⁴ For the last line, here following the NRSV and MT, the NJB has 'with the subtlest odours'. For the 3rd line, the LXX reads, "with all the woods of

טו מַעֲיֵן גַּזִּים
בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים
וְנַזְלִים מִן־לְבָנוֹן:

טז עֲוֵרִי צְפוֹן וּבֹאֵי תִימָן
הַפִּיחִי גִנִּי יִזְלוּ בְשִׁמּוֹ
יָבֵא דוֹדִי לְגִנּוֹ
וַיֹּאכַל פְּרֵי מִגְדָּיו:

15 You are a fountain of the garden,
a well of fresh water,
and streams flowing down from Lebanon!

BELOVED:

16 Awake, north wind! Come, wind of the south!
Breathe over my garden, to spread its sweet smell around.
Let my love come into his garden
and taste its exquisite fruits.

Lebanon" (μετὰ πάντων ξύλων τοῦ Λιβάνου). The plants of vv. 13–14 do not grow together and, except for pomegranate, are not found in Palestine. The garden is imaginary, containing the rarest aromatic plants in existence: a common poetic theme (1:2–3, 12–14, 3:6, 5:5,13; compare Wisdom in Si 24:12–21).

¹⁵ The phrase here translated as 'fresh water' (מַיִם חַיִּים), literally 'living water' (as in the NJB) refers to flowing, fresh water in contrast to standing, stagnant water (Gn 26:19, Lv 14:5-6,50-52, 15:13, Nb 19:17, Jr 2:13,17:13, Zc 14:8). The adjective חַיִּים (*living*) frequently refers to what is fresh, healthy (Si 30:14) or thriving (Gn 43:7, 27). Fresh, flowing water is pictured as pure and a source of refreshment.

¹⁶ Some LXX MSS include the last line of this verse in 5:1.

שיר השירים פרק ה

א בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֶחְתִּי כְּלֵה
אָרִיתִי מִזֵּי עֵם־בְּשָׁמִי
אֶכְלֵתִי יַעֲרִי עֵם־דְּבָשִׁי
שָׁתִיתִי יַיִן עֵם־חֶלְבִי

אֶכְלוּ רֵעִים
שָׁתוּ וְשָׁכְרוּ דוֹדִים:

{ס}

ב אֲנִי יֹשֵׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֹר
קוֹל | דוֹדֵי דוֹפֵק
פְּתַח־לִי אֶחְתִּי רַעֲיָתִי
יוֹנָתִי תִמְתִּי
שְׂרָאשִׁי נִמְלֵא־טֶל
קוֹצוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי לַיְלָה

SONG OF SONGS 5

LOVER:

¹ I come into my garden, my sister, my promised bride,
I pick myrrh and balsam,
I eat my honey and my honeycomb,
I drink my wine and my milk.

POET:

Eat, friends, and drink;
drink deep, my dearest friends.

BELOVED:

² I sleep, but my heart is awake.
I hear my love knocking.
"Open to me, my sister, my beloved,
my dove, my perfect one,
for my head is wet with dew,
my hair with the drops of night."

SONG OF SONGS 5

- ¹ The LXX has 'bread' (ἄρτον) in place of 'honeycomb'. The last two lines of this verse are the poet's exhortation to the wedding guests: he compares the physical love between the couple to eating and drinking at a wedding feast; this is an appropriate figure of comparison because it would have been issued during the feast that followed the wedding and the consummation. The term 'drink' refers to intoxication, comparing becoming drunk on wine with enjoying the physical love of one's spouse (Pr 5:19-20).
- ² The delightful scene of 5:2-6:3 has the same setting as 3:1-4: night, the search through the city, the watchmen – but there is a reversal of roles: this time, the Lover is outside, wanting to come in (cf. 2:9), while the Beloved teases him, making futile excuses that, in fact, belie her eagerness to open the door; and, when she does so, it is too late. Note the unusual/unexpected dagesh on the *resh* in שְׂרָאשִׁי.

<p>פִּשְׁטִיתִי אֶת־כִּתְּנֹתַי ג אֵיכָכָה אֲלַבְּשֶׁנָּה רָחַצְתִּי אֶת־רַגְלִי אֵיכָכָה אֶטְנַפֵּם: דֹּדַי שָׁלַח יָדוֹ מִן־הַחֹר ד וּמַעֵי הָמוּ עָלָיו: קָמַתִּי אֲנִי לִפְתַּח לְדֹדַי ה וַיֵּדִי נִטְפוּ־מֹר וְאַצְבָּעֵתִי מֹר עֵבֶר עַל כַּפּוֹת הַמְּנַעֵוֹל: פָּתַחְתִּי אֲנִי לְדֹדַי ו וְדֹדַי חָמַק עֵבֶר נַפְשִׁי יִצָּאָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ בִּקְשָׁתִיהוּ וְלֹא מָצָאתִיהוּ קָרָאתִיו וְלֹא עָנָנִי: מְצָאֵנִי הַשְּׂמָרִים הַסֹּבְבִים בְּעִיר ז</p>	<p>3 “I have taken off my tunic; am I to put it on again? I have washed my feet; am I to dirty them again?” 4 My love thrust his hand through the hole in the door; I trembled to the core of my being. 5 Then I got up to open my love, myrrh ran off my hands, pure myrrh off my fingers, on to the handle of the bolt. 6 I opened to my love, but he had turned and gone. My soul failed when he spoke, I sought but I could not find him; I called, but he did not answer. 7 The watchmen who go about the city met me.</p>
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³ A more imperative translation of the 2nd and 4th lines opens them with ‘*must I*’ rather than ‘*am I to*’.

⁴ The Lover tries to get in by raising the latch, which from outside had to be done with a wooden key (Jg 3:25, Is 22:22). There is a more euphemistic (sexual) interpretation of the first two lines: The term יָד normally refers simply to the physical hand, but there are at least three occasions when it refers to tall stone pillars, such as those used in Canaanite fertility-cults in the form of phallic representations (1S 15:12, 2S 18:18, Is 56:5), and it is clearly used as a euphemism for the male member in Is 57:8, 10. It is now known that *yad* is sometimes used as a euphemism for the male member in Ugaritic literature; some scholars also suggest that חֹר (*‘hole’*) in the next line is the female counterpart.

⁵ Either the Beloved has scented herself, or the Lover has left this trace of his attempt and this is all she finds of him!

⁶ In place of ‘*when he spoke*’ (בְּדַבְּרוֹ), here following the NRSV & NJPS, the NJB, relating the term to the homonymic root דִּבֵּר, has ‘*at his flight*’. The LXX follows the former although, working with a consonantal text, interprets the term as a noun (ἐν λογῶ αὐτοῦ – ‘*in his word*’).

⁷ The ‘*watchmen*’ are as in 3:3 but in another role: they mistake the girl for a prostitute (see Pr 7:11–12).

הַכּוֹנֵי פָּצְעוּנִי
 נִשְׂאוּ אֶת־רִדְדִי מֵעָלַי
 שְׁמַרְי הַחֲמוֹת:
 הַשְּׁבַעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם
 אִם־תִּמְצְאוּ אֶת־דּוֹדִי מִה־תִּגִּדּוּ לוֹ
 שְׁחֹלַת אֶהְבֶּה אֲנִי:

מִה־דוֹדְךָ מְדוּד
 הִיפָּה בְּנָשִׁים
 מִה־דוֹדְךָ מְדוּד
 שְׁכַכְהָ הַשְּׁבַעְתָּנוּ:

דּוֹדִי צַח וְאָדוּם
 דָּגוּל מִרְבָּבָה:
 רֹאשׁוֹ כֶּתֶם פָּז
 קוֹצוֹתָיו תִּלְתָּלִים שְׁחָרוֹת כְּעוֹרֵב:

They beat me, they wounded me,
 and they took my cloak away from me,
 those guardians of the ramparts!

8 “I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,
 if you should find my love, what are you to tell him?
 That I am sick with love!”

CHORUS:

9 What makes your lover better than other lovers,
 O loveliest of women?
 What makes your lover better than other lovers,
 to put us under such an oath?

BELOVED:

10 My love is fresh and ruddy,
 distinguished among ten thousand.
 11 His head is golden, purest gold;
 his locks are palm fronds and black as the raven.

⁸ The genitive construct חֹלַת אֶהְבֶּה (literally ‘sick of love’) denotes ‘lovesick’; this is an example of a genitive of cause, that is, the Beloved was (physically or emotionally) sick because of her unrequited love for him.

⁹ The literal translation of the 1st line is, “How is your beloved (better) than (another) lover?”

¹⁰ Some see here a description of the Temple at Jerusalem (cf. vv. 11, 14–15). A more plausible model would be one of the ivory and gold statues of oriental antiquity. This is a description of ideal masculine beauty: tall stature, luxuriant hair, good complexion, and charm of manner (cf. Saul, 1S 9:2, 10:23–24, David, 1S 16:12, Absalom, 2S 14:25–26). Hyperbole is the rule for this literary form (cf. Si 50:5–12).

¹¹ Here, we interpret the term תִּלְתָּל as ‘palm fronds’, relating it to the Accadian noun meaning ‘pollen of date-palm’ but it could also be taken as an adjective, whose meaning is unclear; the term occurs in *Mishnah* as תִּלְתָּל (“curls”), suggesting ‘his hair is curly’.

יב עֵינָיו כִּיּוֹנִים עַל־אֲפִיקֵי מַיִם
 רְחֻצוֹת בְּחֶלֶב יִשְׁבּוֹת עַל־מִלְאָת:
 יג לְחָיו כְּעֲרוּגַת הַבָּשָׂם מִגְדְּלוֹת מְרַקְחִים
 שְׁפָתוֹתָיו שׁוֹשְׁנִים נְטֹפֹת מִזֶּרַע עֵבֶר:
 יד יָדָיו גְּלִילֵי זָהָב מִמְּלֵאִים בִּתְרֻשֵׁישׁ
 מֵעֵיו עֵשֶׂת שֵׁן מְעֹלֶפֶת סַפִּירִים:
 טו שׁוֹקָיו עַמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ מִיִּסְדִּים עַל־אֲדָנֵי־פָז
 מְרֵאָהוּ כְּלִבְנוֹן בַּחֹר כְּאַרְזִים:
 טז חֲבוֹ מִמְתָּקִים וְכֹלֹ מִחֲמָדִים
 זֶה דוֹדִי וְזֶה רַעִי
 בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם:

12 His eyes are like doves beside the watercourses,
 bathing themselves in milk, perching on a fountain-rim.
 13 His cheeks are beds of spices, banks sweetly scented.
 His lips are lilies, distilling pure myrrh.
 14 His hands are golden, rounded, set with jewels of Tarshish.
 His belly is a block of ivory covered with sapphires.
 15 His legs are alabaster columns set in sockets of pure gold.
 His appearance is that of Lebanon, unrivalled as the cedars.
 16 His conversation is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovable.
 Such is my love; such is my friend,
 O daughters of Jerusalem.

12 The meaning of the last line (here following the *NJB*) is uncertain; the *NRSV* and *JPS* have 'fitly set' and some have 'mounted like jewels'.
 13 'Cheeks' refers to the lower part of the face, where the beard grows, which was scented (see Ps 133:2).
 14 A more exact translation for 'sapphires' would be 'lapis lazuli'. In place of 'jewels of Tarshish' (following the *NJB*), the *NRSV* has simply 'jewels' and *JPS* has 'beryl'. The term מֵעֵיו ('belly') is used in reference to several things in the Hebrew Bible: 1 the womb of a woman (Gn 25:23, Is 49:1, Ps 71:6, Rt 1:11); 2 a man's loins (Gn 15:4, 2S 7:12, Is 48:19 2Ch 32:21); 3 the 'inner parts' of a person, such as the stomach or intestines which are used to digest food (Nb 5:22, Job 20:14, Ezk 3:3, Jon 2:1-2); and 4 the external stomach or abdominal muscles (as here).
 15 An alternative reading for the first two lines is, "His legs are like pillars of marble, set on bases of pure gold."
 16 The term מִחֲמָדִים ('lovable') is the plural form of the noun מִחְמָד ('desire', 'desirable thing', 'precious object'); this is probably an example of the plural of intensity.

שיר השירים פרק ו

א אָנָה הִלְךְ דֹּדְךָ
הֵיפָה בַּנְּשִׁים
אָנָה פָּנָה דֹּדְךָ
וּנְבַקְשֶׁנּוּ עִמָּךְ:

ב דֹּדִי יָרַד לַגִּנָּו
לְעֵרְגוֹת הַבָּשִׂם
לְרֻעוֹת בַּגְּנָזִים וְלִלְקֹט שׁוֹשְׁנִים:
ג אֲנִי לְדֹדִי וְדֹדִי
לִי הִרְעָה בְּשׁוֹשְׁנִים:
{ס}

SONG OF SONGS 6

CHORUS:

1 Where did your lover go,
O loveliest of women?
Which way did your lover turn
so that we can help you seek him?

BELOVED:

2 My love went down to
his garden, to the beds of spices,
to pasture his flock on the grass and gather lilies.
3 I belong to my love, and my love to me.
He pastures his flock among the lilies.

SONG OF SONGS 6

- ¹ This intervention by the chorus prepares for the conclusion of the poem in vv. 2–3: but there is no point in looking for the Lover, since he is present in the heart of the Beloved, she being his ‘garden’ (see #4:12). The security of mutual love is expressed (v. 3) in terms much the same as in 2:16. Some LXX MSS include this verse as 5:17.
- ² The term גִּנָּו (*‘garden’*) is used six other times in the Song. In five cases, it is used figuratively to describe the girl’s body or the sexual love of the couple (4:12, 15, 16a, 16b, 5:1); there is only one usage in which it might refer to a real garden. Thus, here the term might be figurative or literal: **1** He went to a real garden for repose (Solomon did, in fact, own a great many gardens, Qo 2:4-7, 1Ch 27:27); **2** the garden is a figurative description referring to the young woman, their sexual love, or Solomon’s harem.
- ³ This is the 2nd occurrence of the poetic refrain that occurs elsewhere in 2:16 and 7:11. The order of the first two cola are reversed from 2:16. The significance of this shift depends on whether the parallelism is synonymous or climactic; this might merely be a literary variation with no rhetorical significance. On the other hand, it might signal a shift in her view of their relationship: originally, she focused on her possession of him, now she focused on his possession of her.

יִפָּה אֶת רַעֲיִתִי כְּתִרְצָה ד
 נְאוּה כִּירוּשָׁלַם אֵימָה כְּנֹדְגָלוֹת:
 הֶסְבִּי עֵינַיִךְ מִנְּגִדִי ה
 שֶׁהֵם הִרְהִיבֵנִי
 שְׁעָרֶךָ כְּעֶדֶר הָעִזִּים
 שֹׁגְלָשׁוּ מִן־הַגִּלְעָד:
 וְשִׁנָּיִךְ כְּעֶדֶר הָרְחִלִּים ו
 שֶׁעָלוּ מִן־הַרְחָצָה
 שְׁכֵלֶם מִתְּאִימוֹת
 וְשִׁכְלָה אֵין בָּהֶם:
 כְּפֶלַח הָרְמוֹן רִקְתָּךְ ז
 מִבְּעַד לְצַמְתָּךְ:
 שְׁשִׁים הֵמָּה מְלָכוֹת ח
 וְשִׁמְנָיִם פִּילְגָשִׁים
 וְעֲלָמוֹת אֵין מְסֻפָּר:

LOVER:

4 You are as fair as Tirzah, my beloved,
 enchanting as Jerusalem, formidable as an army!
 5 Turn your eyes away from me:
 they take me by assault!
 Your hair is like a flock of goats
 surging down the slopes of Gilead.
 6 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes
 as they come up from the washing.
 Each one has its twin,
 not one unpaired with another.
 7 Your cheeks, behind your veil,
 are halves of pomegranate.
 8 There are sixty queens
 and eighty concubines,
 and countless girls.

4 Vv. 4–10 form a short poem, the beginning and end of which are indicated by the repetition of ‘formidable as an army’. Vv. 5^b–7 partially repeat 4:1–2 & 3^b and may be an addition. The Lover proclaims that his Beloved is the only girl for him, meaning more than a royal harem (v. 8, cf. 1K 11:3, 2Ch 11:21, 13:21). ‘Jerusalem’ is ‘loveliest of all, joy of the universe’ (Lm 2:15). ‘Tirzah’, the early capital of the Northern Kingdom (1K 14:17, 15:33), is put in apposition since the name means ‘agreeable, pleasant’.

5 For the last line, the LXX reads, “which have ascended from Gilead” (αἱ ἀνεφάνησαν ἀπὸ τοῦ Γαλααδ).

6 At the end of this verse, some LXX MSS add, “Your lips are a scarlet thread and your words enchanting,” repeating 4:3^a, as the v. 7 repeats 4:3^b.

7 An alternative translation of ‘cheeks’ is ‘temples’.

8 The NJB parenthesises the last line, which it dismisses as a probable gloss. The sequence ‘sixty ... eighty ... countless’ is an example of a graded numerical sequence and is not intended to be an exact numeration.

ט אַחַת הַיָּא יִזְנֵתִי תִמְתִּי
 אַחַת הַיָּא לְאִמָּהּ
 בְּרָהּ הִיא לְיֹלְדֶתָהּ
 רְאוּהָ בָנוֹת וַיֵּאשְׁרוּהָ
 מַלְכוֹת וּפִילֵגְשִׁים וַיְהִלְלוּהָ:

{ס}

י מִי־זֹאת הַנִּשְׁקָפָה כְּמוֹ־שֶׁחַר
 יִפָּה כְּלַבְנָה בְּרָהּ כַּחֲמָה
 אִימָה כְּנֹדָגְלוֹת:

{ס}

יא אֶל־גִּנַּת אֶגְזוֹז יֵרְדֹתִי
 לְרֵאוֹת בְּאֲבֵי הַנַּחַל
 לְרֵאוֹת הַפְּרֻחָה הַגֶּפֶן
 הַנִּצְוֹ הָרְמָנִים:

9 My dove is my only one, perfect and mine.
 She is the darling of her mother,
 the favourite of the one who bore her.
 Girls have seen her and proclaimed her blessed,
 queens and concubines have sung her praises:

10 “Who is this arising like the dawn,
 fair as the moon, resplendent as the sun,
 formidable as an army?”

11 I went down to the nut orchard
 to see the fresh shoots in the valley,
 to see if the vines were budding
 and the pomegranate trees in flower.

⁹ An alternative reading of the 1st line is, “*She alone is my dove, my perfect one.*” The term אַחַת is used here as an adjective of quality: ‘unique’, ‘singular’, ‘the only one’. The masculine form is used elsewhere to describe Yahweh as the ‘only’ or ‘unique’ God of Israel who demands exclusive love and loyalty (Dt 6:4, Zc 14:9).

¹⁰ The common point in these four comparisons is that all are luminaries: in all four cases, each respective luminary is the focus or centre of attention at the hour at hand, because it dwarfs its celestial surroundings in majesty and in sheer brilliance; all other celestial objects pale into insignificance in their presence. This would be an appropriate description of her because she alone was the centre and focus of his attention. All the other women paled into the background when she was present; her beauty captured the attention of all that saw her, especially her Lover. Compare the eulogy of a wife in Si 26:16–18. The High Priest Simon is compared to the moon and the sun (Si 50:6–7). An Egyptian love song compares the beloved, unique and peerless (cf. v. 9) to Sirius, the brightest of the stars.

¹¹ Vv. 11–12 are independent of the poem and difficult to explain. It is not clear whether the Lover or the Beloved is speaking: the lover, if the garden of v. 11 represents his Beloved, as in 4:12, 16, 5:1, but the Beloved, if we suppose the 2nd part of the verse to be said by her, as in 7:13.

יב
לֹא יָדַעְתִּי נַפְשִׁי
שְׂמַתְנִי מִרֶכְבּוֹת עַמִּי נְדִיב:

¹² Before I knew ... my desire had hurled me
onto the chariots of Amminadab!

¹² This is the most obscure verse in the *Song* and defies all explanation. Probably, 'Amminadab' (here following the *NJB* - *JSP* has 'my princely people') is the Palestinian equivalent of 'Prince Mehi', who figures in Egyptian songs as riding in a chariot and interfering in other people's love affairs. At least one *LXX MS* inserts, at the beginning of the verse, "There I will give my breasts to you" (εκει δωσω τους μαστονοσ μου σοι). The translation here given follows the *NJB*, but there is a plethora of different translations: "Before I was aware, my fancy set me in a chariot beside my prince" (*NRSV*); "I did not know myself, she made me feel more than a prince reigning over the myriads of his people" (*NEB*); "Before I knew it, my heart had made me the blessed one of my kinswomen" (*NAB*); "Before I was aware, my soul set me (over) the chariots of my noble people" (*NASB*); "Before I realised it, my desire set me among the royal chariots of my people" (*NIV*); and, "I was beside myself with joy! There please give me your 'myrrh', O daughter of my princely people" (*NETB*).

שיר השירים פרק ז

א שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי הַשׁוּלָמִית
שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי וְנַחֲזֶה־בְּךָ
מִה־תִּחַזְו בַּשׁוּלָמִית
כְּמַחֲלַת הַמַּחֲנִים:

ב מֵה־יָפּוּ פְעָמֶיךָ בַּנְּעָלִים
בַּת־נָדִיב
חֲמוּקֵי יָרְכִיךָ כְּמוֹ חֲלָאִים
מִעֲשֵׂה יָדֵי אָמֹן:

ג שְׂרָרְךָ אֲגֵן הַסֶּהַר אֶל־יַחְסֵר הַמְּזֹג

SONG OF SONGS 7

CHORUS:

1 Come back, come back, girl from Shulam;
come back, come back, where we can look at you!
Why are you looking at the girl from Shulam,
dancing between two lines of dancers?

LOVER:

2 How beautiful are your feet in their sandals,
O prince's daughter!
The curve of your thighs is like the curve of a necklace,
work of a master hand.
3 Your navel is a bowl well rounded with no lack of wine,

SONG OF SONGS 7

¹ This verse is included as 6:13 in the *NSRV*; all other verse number therein are accordingly decremented. The Chorus calls, and the Poet, rather than the Lover, intervenes to introduce a new description of the Beloved (vv. 2–6). This balances the description on 4:1–6, using some of the same elements: twin fauns, tower, though in reverse order and more sensually. The images of comparison are disparate: necklace, bowl, wheat, fauns, and tower, followed by geographical features. The name ‘*Shulam*’ appears only here and remains unexplained. Reference has been suggested to the Shunamite who warned David and whose beauty is extolled in 1K 1:2–4, or to a feminine form derived from the name Solomon, ‘she who belongs to Solomon’, i.e. belonging to the Lover (cf. Sg 3:7–11). Here, the girl from Shulam is imagined as dancing between two choruses, who mark the rhythm of her steps by repeated shouts of ‘*Come back*’ – a well-known type of eastern dance by no means confined to weddings: hence, the subsequent description begins with the dancer’s feet. The text may have been recited by the Chorus, rather than by the Lover, who speaks for certain only at vv. 7–10.

² For ‘*princes’ daughter*’, the *LXX* has ‘*Daughter of Nadab*’ (*θύγατερ Ναδαβ*); (see also the corresponding description in 4:1–5). The term יָרְכִיךָ (*‘thigh’*) may refer to: **1** the fleshy upper part of the thigh where the leg joins the pelvis (Gn 32:25–32, 46:26, Ex 1:5, Jg 8:30) or **2** the outside of the thigh from the hip down (Ex 32:27, Jg 3:16, 21, Ps 45:4, Sg 3:8). The first usage is usually restricted to a figure for the male loins, the source of male procreation (Gn 46:26, Ex 1:5) and the locus of an oath (Gn 24:2, 9, 47:29).

³ The noun שְׂרָר appears in the Hebrew Bible only here and there is debate whether it means ‘*navel*’ or ‘*vulva*’. Some suggest that it is related to

בְּטֶנֶךָ עֲרַמַת חֲטִים סוּגָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים:		your belly a heap of wheat surrounded with lilies.
שְׁנֵי שָׁדֶיךָ כְּשְׁנֵי עִפְרַיִם תְּאֵמִי צְבִיָּה:	ד	4 Your two breasts are two fawns, twins of a gazelle.
צוֹאֲרֶךְךָ כְּמִגְדַל הַשֵּׁן	ה	5 Your neck is an ivory tower;
עֵינֶיךָ בְּרִכּוֹת בְּחֶשְׁבּוֹן		your eyes are the pools of Heshbon,
עַל־שַׁעַר בַּת־רַבִּים		by the gate of Bath-Rabbim.
אַפְּךָ כְּמִגְדַל הַלְּבָנוֹן		Your nose is like the Tower of Lebanon,
צוֹפֶה פְּנֵי דַמְשֶׁק:		a sentinel facing Damascus.
רֹאשְׁךָ עָלֶיךָ כְּכַרְמֶל	ו	6 Your head is held high like Carmel,
וְדֹלֶת רֹאשְׁךָ כְּאַרְגָּמָן		and its hair is as dark as purple;
מֶלֶךְ אֶסּוּר בְּרֶהֱטִים:		a king is held captive in your tresses.
מֵה־יָפִית וּמֵה־נְעֻמָּת	ז	7 How beautiful you are, how charming,
אַהֲבָה בַת־עֲנוּגִים:		my love, my delight!

the Arabic for ‘secret place’, ‘pudenda’, ‘coition’, or ‘fornication’, which is contextually supported by three factors: 1 his descriptive praise of her is in ascending order, beginning with her feet and concluding with her hair; the movement from her thighs (7:2^b), to her vulva (7:3^a), and then to her waist (7:3^b) would fit this; 2 the descriptive comparison to a glass of wine would be grotesque if her navel were in view (her navel was moist or filled with liquid) but appropriate if her vulva were in view; 3 the navel would be a somewhat synonymous reference to the belly, which is already denoted by בְּטֶנֶךָ (*‘belly’*) in the following line. Others (as here) maintain that the term denotes *‘navel’*: 1 It may be related to the bi-consonantal noun שֶׁר (*‘umbilical cord’*, Pr 3:8, Ezk 16:4); 2 in a Midrash on the Book of Numbers, the noun appears in an allusion to Sg 7:4 to justify the seating of the Sanhedrin in the middle of the Synagogue, “*As the navel is placed in the centre of the body, so are the Sanhedrin...*” 3 The meaning, *‘vulva’* never appears in the Mishnah; therefore, apart from here, there is no evidence that the term was ever used in such a manner; 4 the comparison of the navel to a mixing bowl is no more out of line than that of the belly to a heap of wheat in the next line.

4 This verse repeats the first part of 4:5 (and see the footnote thereto).

5 The LXX translates *‘gate of Bath-Rabbim’* as *‘gates of the daughter of many’* (πύλαις θυγατρὸς πολλῶν); the site has not been identified.

6 The translation of the last line is uncertain; if right, compare an Egyptian love song: “With her hair, she has thrown her nets over me.” On the *‘king’* of this verse and the *‘prince’s daughter’* of v. 2, see 1:4, 12.

7 The literal translation of *‘my delight’* is *‘daughter of delights’* (following the Peshitta and Aquila) or *‘in the delights’* (following the MT). Vv. 7–10 express passionate desire for physical possession of the Beloved.

<p>זאת קומתך דמתה לתמר ח ושדיך לאשכלות אמרתי אעלה בתמר ט אחזה בסנסניו ויהיו־נא שדיך כאשכלות הגפן וריח אפך כתפוחים:</p>	<p>8 In stature like the palm tree, its fruit clusters your breasts. 9 I have decided, “I shall climb the palm tree, and seize its dates!” May your breasts be clusters of grapes, your breath sweet-scented as apples, and your palate like sweet wine.</p>
<p>וחכך כיון הטוב י הולך לדודי למישרים דובב שפתי ישנים: אני לדודי יא ועלי תשוקתו: {ס}</p>	<p>BELOVED: 10 Flowing down the throat of my love, as it runs on the lips of those who sleep. 11 I belong to my love, and his desire is for me.</p>
<p>לכה דודי נצא השדה יב נלינה בכפרים: נשכימה לכרמים יג</p>	<p>12 Come, my love, let us go to the fields. We will spend the night in the villages, 13 and, in the early morning, we will go to the vineyards.</p>

8 Three women in the Bible (Gn 38:6, 2S 13:1, 14:27) are called ‘Tamar’ (תמר, ‘palm tree’ – a symbol of feminine beauty).
9 The MT includes the last line in v. 10, as does the LXX (και λάρυγξ σου ως οἶνος ὁ ἀγαθός).
10 The Beloved takes up the Lover’s last word (wine) to show how much she loves him in return. The text and meaning of this verse are uncertain; the NRSV, following the LXX (πορευόμενος τῷ ἀδελφοῦ μου εἰς εὐδύσητα ἰκανούμενος χεῖλεσίν μου καὶ ὀδοῦσιν) and Peshitta, reads, “Going down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth.”
11 The 2nd line is an allusion to Gn 3:16, where the same rare word (תשוקתו – ‘desire’) means the attraction exerted by a man over his wife.
12 This verse evokes spring, as 2:10–14, but here the invitation comes from the Beloved.
13 The NJB includes the 1st line in v. 12; here, we follow the MT and LXX (ὀρθρίσωμεν εἰς ἀμπελῶνας). Here, the word ‘love’ has its most realistic meaning, developed in v. 14. The fruits reserved for the Lover no longer evoke springtime but autumn, after love has been consummated.

נִרְאֶה אִם־פְּרָחָהּ הִגְפִּין
פִּתַּח הַסְּמֹדִר הַנִּצּוֹ הַרְמוּנִים
שֵׁם אֶתֶן אֶת־דְּדֵי לְךָ:
הַדּוֹדָאִים נִתְּנוּ־לִי־יַחַד ^{יד}
וְעַל־פִּתְחֵינוּ כָּל־מִגְדִּים
חֲדָשִׁים גַּם־יְשָׁנִים
דּוֹדֵי צִפְנֹתֵי לְךָ:

We will see if the vines are budding, if their blossoms are open,
if the pomegranate trees are in flower.

Then I shall give you the gift of my love.

- ¹⁴ The mandrakes yield their fragrance;
the most exquisite fruits are at our doors;
the new as well as the old,
which I have stored for you, my love.

¹⁴ In the ancient Middle East, the 'mandrake' (הַדּוֹדָאִים) was a widely used symbol of erotic love because it was thought to be an aphrodisiac and therefore was used as a fertility drug. The unusual shape of the large, forked roots of the mandrake resembles the human body with extended arms and legs; this similarity gave rise to the popular superstition that the mandrake could induce conception and it was therefore used as a fertility drug. It was so thoroughly associated with erotic love that its name is derived from the root דָּוָד ('love') and translates literally as 'love-apples'.

שיר השירים פרק ח

א מי יתנך כֶּאֱחָ לִי
יוֹנֵק שְׂדֵי אִמִּי
אֲמַצְאֶךָ בַּחוּץ אֲשַׁקֶּךָ
גַּם לֹא־יִבְזוּ לִי:
ב אֲנִהְיֶה אֲבִיאֶךָ אֶל־בַּיִת אִמִּי
תִּלְמַדְנִי
אֲשַׁקֶּךָ מִיַּזְן הַרְקָח
מֵעֵסִים רַמְּנִי:
ג שְׂמְאֵלוֹ תַּחַת רֹאשִׁי
וַיְמִינֹו תַּחְבֵּקֵנִי:
ד הַשְּׁבַעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם
מֵה־תַּעֲרִירוּ | וּמֵה־תַּעְרְרוּ אֶת־הָאֵהָבָה
עַד שֶׁתַּחֲפֹץ:
{ס}

SONG OF SONGS 8

- 1 Ah, why are you not my brother,
nursed at my mother's breast!
Then, if I met you out of doors, I could kiss you
without people thinking ill of me.
- 2 I should lead you; I should take you into my mother's house,
the one who taught me!
I should give you spiced wine to drink,
juice of my pomegranates.
- 3 His left arm is under my head
and his right embraces me.
LOVER:
- 4 I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,
do not rouse; do not wake my beloved,
before she pleases.

SONG OF SONGS 8

- 1 This verse begins another short poem, with a different setting, and a more intense and hyperbolic flight of fancy – of a love beginning in the cradle. The 'wine' and the 'juice' of v. 2 are the equivalents of the 'fruits' of the preceding poem. The piece ends with the refrain of 2:6-7.
- 2 For the first two lines, the LXX reads, "I would bring you to my mother's house, to the chamber of the one who bore me!" (εἰσάξω σε εἰς οἶκον μητρός μου καὶ εἰς ταμίειον τῆς συλλαβούσης με). This variant probably arose due to: **1** the syntactical awkwardness of תִּלְמַדְנִי ('she taught me'); **2** the perceived need for a parallel to אֶל־בַּיִת אִמִּי ('to the house of my mother'); **3** the influence of 3:4 (*quo vide*).
- 3 See #2:6, to which this verse is parallel. The *Paseq* is here presented in grey, as it is in the MAM text.
- 4 After 'Jerusalem', the LXX adds 'by the powers, by the strengths of the field' (ἐν ταῖς δυνάμεσιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἰσχύσεσιν τοῦ ἀγροῦ – perhaps a gloss taken from 2:7 or 3:5)

ה מי זאת עלה מן-המדבר
 מתרפקת על-דודה
 תחת התפוח עוררתיה
 שמה חבלתך אמך
 שמה חבלה ילדתך:

5 Who is this coming up from the desert
 leaning on her lover?
 I awakened you under the apple tree,
 where your mother conceived you,
 where she who bore you conceived you.

BELOVED:

ו שימני כחותם על-לביך
 כחותם על-זרועך
 כי-עזה כמות אהבה
 קשה כשאול קנאה
 רשפיה רשפי אש
 שלהבתיה:

6 Set me like a seal on your heart,
 like a seal on your arm.
 For love is strong as Death,
 passion as relentless as Sheol.
 The flash of it is a flash of fire,
 a very flame of Yah.

⁵ The couplet and triplet of this verse are not connected either with each other or with what follows. They seem to be the opening lines of two poems that have not, in fact, been transcribed, as does also v. 13. This lack of context makes impossible any attempt at interpretation. The pronominal suffixes of the latter part are masculine in the *MT* and have been corrected to feminine following the *Peshitta*.

⁶ For the 4th line, here following the *NJB*, *JPS* has 'jealousy is cruel as the grave' (the *NRSV* has 'passion' rather than 'jealousy'). For the last two lines, the *LXX* reads, "her sparks are sparks of the fire of her flames" (περίπτερα αὐτῆς περίπτερα πυρός, φλόγες αὐτῆς). Nowhere up to this point has the *Song* defined what love is: the Beloved now does so in the strongest, finest terms, proclaiming its invincible strength, its ineluctable nature, and its priceless value. What follows (v. 7) is additional material. The 'seal' (חותם), representative and sign of the owner's authority, was worn hanging from the neck (Gn 38:18, 25) and resting on the chest (here, the heart), or else on the finger (Jr 22:24, Hg 2:23 – the Hebrew 'arm', used here includes the hand). An Egyptian song says, "Would I were the seal that she wears on her finger!" The term for 'passion' (קנאה) here is not 'jealousy' (as in Pr 6:34, 14:30, 27:4), 'competitiveness' (Qo 4:4, 9:6), 'anger' (Nb 5:14, 30), or 'zeal' (2K 10:16, Ps 69:10, 119:139, Job 5:2, Si 30:24); the term is parallel to 'love' in the previous line: what is meant here is passionate love. 'Sheol' is the subterranean dwelling of the dead: here, the equivalent of 'Death' in the previous line.

מִיִּם רַבִּים לֹא יוֹכְלוּ
 לְכַבּוֹת אֶת־הָאֱהָבָה וְנִהְרוֹת
 לֹא יִשְׁטַפּוּהָ אִם־יִתֵּן
 אִישׁ אֶת־כָּל־הוֹן בֵּיתוֹ
 בְּאֱהָבָה בּוֹז יְבוֹזוּ לוֹ:

{ס}

7 Many waters cannot quench love,
 neither can floods drown it.
 Were a man to offer all his family wealth
 to buy love,
 contempt is all that he would gain.

אָחוֹת לָנוּ קִטְנָה וְשָׁדַיִם אֵין לָהּ מִה־נִּנְעָשָׂה
 לְאֲחֻתָּנוּ בַּיּוֹם שֶׁיִּדְבַר־בָּהּ: אִם־חוֹמָה הִיא נִבְנֶה
 עָלֶיהָ טִירַת כֶּסֶף וְאִם־דֶּלֶת הִיא נִצָּוֵר עָלֶיהָ לֹחַ
 אֲרָז: אֲנִי חוֹמָה וְשָׁדַי כַּמְגִדְלוֹת אֲזִי הֵייתִי בְּעֵינָיו
 כְּמוֹצֵאת שְׁלוֹם: {פ}

8 Our sister is little: her breasts are not yet formed. What shall we do for
 our sister on the day she is spoken for? 9 If she is a rampart, on the crest
 we shall build a battlement of silver; if she is a door, we shall barricade
 her with planks of cedar. 10 I am a wall, and my breasts represent its
 towers; and, under their eyes, I have found true peace.

כָּרֶם הָיָה לְשִׁלְמָה בְּבַעַל הַמּוֹן נָתַן אֶת־הַכָּרֶם
 לְנֹטְרִים אִישׁ יָבֵא בַּפְּרִיֹו אֶלֶף כֶּסֶף: יְבַכְרְמִי

11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-Hamon. He gave it to the keepers;
 each was to pay a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit. 12 My own

7 The literal translation of the 4th line is 'for love'; the preposition בְּ on בְּאֱהָבָה indicates the price or exchange in. Another reading for the last line is, "he would be utterly despised;" the root בּוֹז (to despise) is repeated for emphasis – the infinitive absolute is used frequently with the imperfect of the same root as such. The point here is simply that love cannot be purchased – it is infinitely more valuable than any wealth.

8 These two pieces (vv. 8–10 and 11–12) have no direct relation with the Song as regards either characters or subject matter.

9 The verb צוֹר ('barricade', 'enclose') is used in military contexts in reference to the siege or defence of a fortress city: 1 setting up military positions (siege-walls) to surround a besieged city (Is 29:3); 2 encircling and laying siege to a city (Dt 20:12,19, 2S 11:1, 1K 15:27,16:17,20:1, 2K 6:24–25,17:5,19:9,24:11, 1Ch 20:1, Is 21:2,29:3, Jr 21:4,9,32:2,37:5,39:1, Ezk 4:3, Dn 1:1); 3 enclosing a city with sentries (Is 29:3); 4 shutting a person within a city (1S 23:8, 2S 20:15, 2K 16:5); and 5 barricading a city door shut to prevent the city from being broken into and conquered (as here).

10 'Their eyes' follows the LXX (ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ); the MT has 'his eyes'.

11 'Baal-Hamon' is an unknown place. For 'gave' (a literal translation), the NJB has 'entrusted'. 1000 shekels is about 10 Kg.

12 The term כָּרֶם ('vineyard') is used literally in the previous verse in reference to the Beloved's physical vineyard, but here it is used figuratively in reference to the Beloved: כְּרַמִּי ('my vineyard').

שְׁלִי לְפָנַי הָאֵלֶּף לְךָ שְׁלֹמֹה וּמְאֵתָיִם לְנֹטְרִים
אֶת־פְּרִיָּו: vineyard is before me. The thousand are for you, Solomon, two hundred
for those who tend its fruit.

יג הַיּוֹשֵׁבִת בַּגְּנִים
חֲבֵרִים מִקְשִׁיבִים לְקוֹלְךָ
הַשְּׁמִיעֵנִי:
יד בָּרַח | דוֹדִי
וְדַמְה־לְךָ לְצִבִּי אִו לְעֵפֶר הָאֵילִים
עַל הַרֵי בְשָׁמִים:
{ש}

13 You who dwell in the gardens,
my companions listen for your voice;
let me hear it.
14 Haste away, my love,
be like a gazelle, a young stag,
on the spice-laden mountains.

¹³ This verse is probably the beginning of a poem that has not been preserved, and to which someone has added a verse inspired by 2:17. The term *מְקִשִּׁיבִים* is in the Hiphil stem, which denotes an intense desire to hear someone's voice – that is, to eagerly listen for someone's voice (Jr 6:17). The participle functions verbally and denotes a continual, ongoing, durative action.

¹⁴ An alternative reading of the last line is, "on the mountains of spice."