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An Ancient Sung-Poem and Vehicle for Kabbalah: The Song of Songs in the Hebrew Bible

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Abstract

The biblical poem entitled Shir Ha-Shirim (The Song of Songs) composed by Shlomo, the third King of the united tribes of Israel about 1,000 years before the Common Era was composed in Hebrew. However, it was also translated and sung by numerous bards in ancient Arabic dialects, as well as being translated to Kurmanji Kurdish. The King composed this poem to substantiate the primeval identity of his kingdom and its connection to the expanses leading up to Jerusalem and the mountain range surrounding Jerusalem. The poem's underlying meaning leans on the King's knowledge of the ancient science of Kabbalah. The eight chapters included in the Hebrew Bible as debated in the first century CE, and recorded by the mishnaic Sages of Tiberias in the second century CE, now constitute what we have on record of the Song of Songs. The external shell of the poem, the first chapter of which mentions apple-wine and love, and tribal ethics, symbolizes and reminds of the first moment of love's intoxication and knowledge. The King is mentioned in the Qur'an as prophet Suleimān, and is known in English as King Solomon. This study ends with an original translation of the Song of Songs with Notes.

Keywords: Hebrew Bible, Song of Songs, ancient Kabbalah, ancient Arabic dialects, wine as symbol, prophet Suleiman, Kurmanji Kurdish

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Introduction

The Song of Songs (*Shir Ha-Shirim*), a sung-poem is written down and recorded in the last section of the Hebrew Bible, in the Writings (*Kətubim*). There is no doubt that it is sublime. But beyond that there is hardly any accord about its interpretation—even that it is indeed one poem and not many poems. It is almost a miracle that a book of the Bible, the understanding of which is built up around arbitrary interpretations, far from being set aside as has the Book of Nahum, has been glorified in the extreme.

The initial impetus to this research was when I realized that in order to make sense of the rest of the chapters of the Song of Songs, a meaningful translation of the first chapter was needed and to my knowledge not available. Moreover, while translating the poems and the novel *Sages of Darkness* by the contemporary Kurdish poet and novelist Salīm Barakāt, I could not refrain from supposing that there must be an in-common origin of sorts with the Song of Songs, such as known earlier sung-poems and the ancient science of Kabbalah.²

Rabbinic tradition considers the Song of Songs to be an allegory in which love between two people is compared to the Almighty's love for His chosen people, Israel. It is attributed to the king Shlomo (English: King Solomon) and was accepted into the Jewish canon of scripture in the second century CE, after a period of controversy in the first century.

Modern scholars still puzzle over how to view the Songs of Songs. The academic Robert Alter in his book *Strong as Death is Love* (2016) sees the Song of Songs as a “celebration of young love, frankly sensuous, with no reference to God or covenant. It offers some of the most beautiful love poems of the ancient world.” Alter and others consider the Song of Songs to be a collection of separate poems and have apparently not noticed the tight connection between each chapter. The simplest pointer to the continuity from Chapter 1 to Chapter 8 is the repetition of verses or hemi-stiches, or even single words, from time to time throughout the poem of what we have that remains from its long period of transmission throughout orality. Some examples are as follows:

Example One—Oaths:

² Barakāt, Salīm (1st edition, 1994). *Fuqahā' al-Zalām* / فقهاء الظلام [*Sages of Darkness*]. Baghdad: Al-Mada Publishing House. Translated to English by Aviva Butt in collaboration with the author (2022-3): *Sages of Darkness* (awaiting publication).

1. Chapter 2:7. By the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field. I swear to you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you awake and if you awaken love, not until it is desirable. [7]
2. Chapter 3:5. I swear to you, O daughters of Jerusalem. By the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field, if you awaken and if you arouse love, not until it is desirable.[5]
**Chapter 2:7 is similar to 3:5, but the oath is in a different situation.*
3. Chapter 5:8. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem. If you find my lover, what you will tell him is that I am love-sick.
4. Chapter 8:4. I swear to you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you awake and if you awaken love, not until it is desirable.

Example Two—The Watchmen:

1. Chapter 3:3. The watchmen found me roaming about the city. You saw what my soul loves!
2. Chapter 5:7. The watchmen circulating in the city found me. They struck me, wounding me. The watchmen at the [city] walls snatched my veil from me.

Example Three—The Uncles:

1. Chapter 1:2. May he arm me with kisses from his mouth. While your uncles are benevolent from wine.
2. Chapter 4:10. How praiseworthy your love, O bride. How beneficent your uncles due to wine, And the fragrance of your ointments of all kinds of spices.*
**Permission granted, the wedding has taken place*
3. Chapter 5:1. I went to my garden, my sister, O bride. I picked my myrrh [along] with my spices. I ate of my forest. With my honey, I drank my wine, despite my milk. Eat! Friends drink. Uncles become intoxicated.
4. Chapter 5:9. What is your uncle's assessment, O most beautiful of women. What is your uncle's assessment that thus you adjure us?
5. Chapter 7:10. And your mouth. Like fine wine for my uncle, pours out—warming my sleeping lips.

Example Four—Imagery, Symbolism, Summary

1. Chapter 2:6. His left [hand] under my head. His right [arm] embraces me.
2. Chapter 8:3. His left [hand] under my head. His right [arm] embraces me.

**The succeeding verses repeat previous notions and summarize:*

I swear to you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you awake and if you awaken love.

Not until it is desirable.[4]

Who is this coming out of the desert. Leaning upon her lover

Under the apple-tree, I shall arouse you.

There your mother conceived you.

There she conceived and she bore you.[5]

3. Chapter 2:3, 2:6. Apple. Chapter 7:9. Apple. Chapter 8:5. Apple.

Thus, the continuity seen in the structure and repetition of words and lines, as well as the ongoing themes show that the eight chapters are one long poem.

The Composer of the Song of Songs and His Purpose

In the first century CE, the mishnaic Sages of Tiberias debated as to whether or not the Song of Songs should be included in the Hebrew Bible. Then in the second century CE, Rabbi Akiva (c. 50–135 CE) is thought to have had the final word, insisting on its importance as it was composed by the king “Shlomo,” and it was a total misconception to think it was intended to be sung in a contemporary wine café. Looking at the Mishnah,³ we see that Rabbi Levi ben Gershon (1288-1344 CE) considers that the Song of Songs was “set in order,” just as the King assembled Proverbs or Kohelet—but that the King saw the Song of Songs as being more significant. Rabbi Gershon’s comment explains the external meaning of the sung-poem, which is immediately introduced in its second verse: May he arm me with kisses from his mouth / While your uncles are benevolent from wine[1:2]. The “uncles” refers to the tribal societies of the times, who deal with ethical issues. They will look kindly upon love when things are going well, which already tells us that there is an opposite to such ecstasy, meaning the suffering the lovers will endure. As an aside, the poet is not averse to adding suspense to the tale! The mishnaic Sage concludes his comment saying that the purpose the King had in mind with this extensive output was to reach a vast public. The King intended to make known his own qualifications to rule the

³ See <https://www.mgketer.org/tanach/30/1/1>. The text of the first verse that the biblical mishna comments on reads: The Song of Songs By Shlomo / שיר השירים אשר לשלמה.

tribes, and the nature of his peace-loving and ethical reign. My research shows that bards sang his sung poem in various Arabic dialects (as literary Arabic had not as yet come into existence), and also Kurmanji Kurdish, which would also have reached out to an Iranian public (Babayiğit, 2020; Babayiğit and Tanrikulu, 2021). Then in the second century CE, after much debate, the Song of Songs was written down and recorded by the sages of the Mishnah in Tiberias to be canonized as part of the Hebrew Bible.

The Transmission

Arabic dialects at the time are now known to have been abundant in the Arabian Gulf, Mesopotamia (Babylonia) and Northern Syria (Assyria) where Kurmanji Kurdish was spoken (Babayiğit, 2021; Karacan & Babayiğit, 2017), as well as in the Iranian Empire with its Medes. In these regions, Aramaic was used in inscriptions, and for political interchange. Reuven Snir's article on an ancient Nabatean inscription in Aramaic (four lines) and Arabic (two lines) elucidates the use of two languages by an ancient peoples in a geopolitical situation who were familiar with more than one language of necessity.⁴ Moreover, the inscription of 'En 'Abdat (c. 88/9 and 125/6 CE) found in the Negev offers evidence of an early evolutionary stage of ancient Arabic poetry. Snir writes that certain aspects of the Arabic Text, especially its poetic value, are beyond any doubt. The Arabic Text as indicated by J.A. Bellamy is the 'earliest meaningful extant piece of literary Arabic, antedating the famous Namārah inscription of 328. It is the first poetic text in support of the common-sense view that Arabic poetry must have gone through a long period of development before the composition of the earliest extant poems.'⁵

What might confuse a present-day readership used to hearing about carousing in wine cafés and recitations of medieval wine-songs (full of love and ecstasy) is the use of the symbol "wine" in a conversation about ethics. Let us turn to the Qur'an, which as is known, was written down and recorded in the Arabic language, not Hebrew.

Example—Wine Symbolism in the Qur'an:⁶

⁴ Nabateans were Arabs who spoke Arabic but wrote inscriptions and other formal communications in Aramaic. The name Nabatean is probably derived from the same root as Akkadian *nabatu* meaning "to shine brightly." John F. Healey in his University of Manchester Project holds the opinion of many other historians, and also archaeologists, that Nabataeans normally spoke a form of Arabic, while, like the Persians on so on, they used Aramaic for formal purposes and especially for inscriptions.

⁵ Professor Snir's article appeared in the journal *Abr-Nahrain* 31 (now entitled *Ancient Near Eastern Studies*), Leuven Belgium: p. 111.

⁶ The below English translation on wine symbolism is from *The Noble Qur'an*, Darussalam, Revised Edition: July 2011.

1. In the Gardens of Delight (Paradise) / Facing one another on thrones. / Round them will be passed a cup of pure wine— / White, delicious to the drinkers.[37:43-46]*

**White, like the apple-wine in the Song of Songs.*

In the above quotation, we also find evidence of a connection between Arab ancient tribal oral traditions, and a Hebrew oral tradition that is distinguishable as such. In fact, the nature of ancient tribal society is relevant to understanding the Song of Songs and the King's purpose in composing this particular poem, its intended audience and hence its line of transmission.

The underlying nature of the tribal society and the meaning of the Song of Songs are linked. As said, the external shell of the poem deals with love and ethics. The ongoing internal current of the poem touches on practicalities, seen as calculations that reveal what was and what will be, the science of knowing what is Evil and what is Good. Matthew Melvin-Koushki in defining the occult in science makes a clear distinction between the fundamental approach of ancient and medieval Middle Eastern civilization to science and our own modern scientific grandiosity:

Among the most piquant ironies of modernity. . . is the fact that modern Science. . . . has again been wreathed about with sacrality. It is also frequently *occult* (Ar. and Pers. *khafī* . . .), an adjective that in standard premodern Western usage simply denotes those disciplines in which nonvisible data is extrapolated from visible, a procedure productive of both wonder and technological innovation. That we moderns now use the premodern term exclusively as a slur on a par with 'spooky,' and prefer neo-logistic prefixes like 'dark,' 'sub-,' 'super-' or 'para-,' does not make largely occult sciences like psychology and astrophysics less technically epistemologically so.⁷

Melvin-Koushki's discourse is relevant to understanding the internal content of the Song of Songs, which offers an undercurrent of an ancient science, which in modern times is spoken of as Islamic Kabbalah or Jewish Kabbalah. Salim Barakat, author of the philosophical novel *Fuqahā' al-Zalām*, English title: *Sages of Darkness*, 1985 (al-Mada publication 2018),⁸ offers a

⁷ Melvin-Koushki, Matthew (2023). Research Article (Routledge, Taylor and Francis' Group): "Safavid Twelver Lettrism Between Sunnism and Shi'ism, Mysticism and Science: Rayab al-Bursī vs. Maḥmūd Dihdār." Academia.edu <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2022.2163914>.

⁸ In 2023, I translated Barakat's novel to English in collaboration with the author, and it is awaiting publication. The Arabic original is available online: Barakāt, Salīm (1st edition, 1994). *Fuqahā' al-Zalām* / فقهاء الظلام [*Sages of Darkness*]. Baghdad: Al-Mada Publishing House.

picturesque explanation of the science of Kabbalah, that is, a description of its workings in context of a tribal society in Qamishli Syria. Barakat describes the life of his “cast of actors” against the setting of his own place of birth in late Ottoman times, in a way that is unique to Kurds and Kurdish tribal society. The ancient, medieval, and modern melt one into each other, through the lens of the no-time, and there is no abrupt cut-off. A brief quotation from the text of the novel is as follows:

While Bekas spoke, the father’s eyes fixed on the carpet. A solid blue square protruded from the carpet, its corner disappearing under the covers. Abstracted, Benav was preoccupied with ribs that seemed to exit the horizontal lines, dissolving into an angle, and then into a vertical line. Scanning up-and-down, he didn’t find words. The blue square transposed into nightmarish language by making the blue of the square expand, but not through any alphabet—the essence of which are geometrical shapes.⁹

A FURTHER DISCOURSE TO REPLY TO SOME KNOWN PRECONCEPTIONS:

A comparison of the Song of Songs to medieval Sufi poems should be sufficient to confirm the notion that this early sung-poem uses a diction that would later appear in Sufi poems. The first “Sufi” poems were sung in medieval society and more often than not in the cities of Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkiye; much such poetry was anonymous, but there is also extant poetry of great fame. The tribal life in the short-lived period of the First Temple that the king Shlomo built (970-586 BCE) contributes to the notion that the Song of Songs passed through improvisations and translations by different bards especially to Arabic and also to Kurmanji Kurdish (Demiral, Babayiğit and Koçak, 2023), long before medieval Sufi orders and Sufi poems appeared in the ninth century CE. A look at the grammar helps to identify a language other than Hebrew or Arabic. An example in Chapter 5:13 is when the present translator to English carefully obliterated the structure found in the text—and wrote:

His cheeks are like a bed of spices, apothecaries. His lips, lilies.

Dripping, myrrh passes through his lips[13]

⁹The square symbolizes the logical mind and the body. Barakat’s prose text written in lines reads as a poem:

كابوس المربع
الأزرق يسطر على اللغة
في جعلها زرقاء ممتدة في الساحة، لا في الحروف ذات الهندسة.

But if one were to accurately follow the text, it would read: “. . . His lips are lilies, dripping myrrh passes through his lips [5:13].” To describe this pair of words, that is, “His lips.....his lips,” let us resort to the word Michael L. Chyet uses to describe a category of Kurmanji Kurdish prepositions called circumpositions—namely, “sandwich.”¹⁰ Here, and elsewhere the Song of Songs exhibits features of Kurmanji grammar that are awkward in Arabic or Hebrew language structure, or poetics. Thus, difficulties in the biblical text hint at a Turkic language such as most likely Kurdish; it should be remembered that two of the Jewish “lost” tribes are known to be Kurdish Jewish tribes.¹¹ Otherwise, certain of the vocabulary, words that are “obscure,” that is, unknown in biblical Hebrew, are easily recognized as being Arabic cognates and can be translated by comparing the word(s) to Arabic. Clearly, the Song of Songs has been translated both to and from Arabic dialects and that is immediately obvious from the appearance of vocabulary left untranslated in Arabic, the spoken language of the bard.

Examples in Chapter 2:

1—2:5 Support me. With a flagon, present me with apple [wine].

**The Arabic of the root letters of רָפָןִי is رَفَد (to support).*

2—2:15 They caught the foxes, the little foxes that vandalize the vineyards

**The language is colloquial in Hebrew and Arabic if translated. The meaning is that they caught the little foxes on behalf of all of us.*

3—2:17 Until the day exhales [its fragrance], and the shadows flee. . .

** Compare the Hebrew יָפוּחַ to Arabic يَفَاح Root: فَوَح . This says: The fragrance [of apples].*

Example in Chapter 3:

4—3:3 I seized it and did not indulge it

** Hebrew text reads אֲרַפְנִי. This is Arabic أَرَفَ: indulge it.*

Example in Chapter 4:

¹⁰ See p. 54, *Em hîni Kurmancî dibin* (1999).

¹¹ This subject is beyond the scope of the present study. See e.g., “Neubauer, A. (Oct. 1888). “Where Are the Ten Tribes?: I. Bible, Talmud, and Midrashic Literature” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol.1 no.1: pp. 14-28: University of Pennsylvania Press, JSTOR <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1449853>; Hasan Karacan, and Aviva Butt (2021), “The Antiquity of Kurmanji Kurdish and the Biblical Book of Nahum” in *Prizren Social Science Journal*, April 2021: pp. 90-96. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32936/pssj.v5i1.206>; and recent research especially into the history of various Kurdish communities.

5—4:2 Your teeth are like a herd of fleecy sheep come out of the wash

**Hebrew קצוֹבוֹת could stand for the Arabic: كصوفي Like a fleecy [herd].*

Example in Chapter 5:

6—5:16 His speech is eloquent. All of him is praiseworthy.[16]

**Praiseworthy: Hebrew מְהִמְדִּים / cf. Arabic حميد*

Example in Chapter 6:

7—6:9 She is dutiful to the one who bore her.

**Dutiful: The Hebrew ברה takes up the same meaning as its Arabic cognate بر (barr).*

Example in Chapter 7:

8—7:10 Like fine wine for my uncle, pours out warming my sleeping lips.

**Warms (דוֹבֵב) / Arabic دَفَّ .*

Example in Chapter 8: 0

In his article “The Inscription of ‘En ‘Abdat: An Early Evolutionary Stage of Ancient Arabic Poetry” (1993), Reuven Snir offers an explanation for the above phenomenon, that is of the appearance of vestiges of other languages:

The writer’s switch from Aramaic to Arabic and then again to Aramaic, is crucial to the understanding of the Arabic Text’s literary value. A convincing explanation for this may be found by answering a simple question: in writing or speaking in a language not their own, but one which they know well, when do Arabs return to Arabic? The answer is clear: when wanting to say something whose translation cannot convey the special linguistic, rhetorical, stylistic or aesthetic value and features, embodied in the original, as in proverbs, common sayings or poetry.¹²

Worthy of note is that Noegel and Rendsburg in their study “The Song of Songs: Translation and Notes,” (2009) also observed the presence of Arabic vocabulary. They called attention to the Arabic words and obscure Hebrew vocabulary and structural features of the poem which led them to compare it to Arabic *hijā*’ poetry. They justifiably turned to an extant tradition of poetry, but

¹² Professor Snir’s article appeared in the journal *Abr-Nahrain 31* (now entitled *Ancient Near Eastern Studies*), Leuven Belgium: p. 113.

the wrong one. Their translation has a militaristic motif (as do like *hijā* ' poems), at a time of peace under a King who reigned in peace and was known for his wisdom and just rule.

Let take as hypothesis the following: The Song of Songs was composed by Shlomo about 3,000 years ago in Hebrew and sung by various bards to make known the nature of his reign centred around the expanses leading up to Jerusalem, and the River Jordan and mountain range surrounding Jerusalem. The first chapter identifying the king as “wise and ingenious,” a binarism, a common manner of expression in the Hebrew Bible. The Song of Songs, an ancient sung-poem has features in common with the message and poesy of Middle Eastern civilization. By way of example, let us take Shah Ismā'il I founder of the Safavid dynasty in Iran (1501-24 CE). Amelia Gallagher quotes Vladimir Minorsky on the manner of the Shah's introduction to his public:

Minorsky's introduction to these self-glorifying poems shaped the theory that Shah Ismail's poetry effectively served as a tool of propaganda for the Safavid cause. In other words, Shah Ismail used verse to inculcate in his followers the belief in his divine nature as their *murshid-i kāmil* [guide]. The Paris *dīvān*, when seen as “an historical document characteristic of the strivings of the age,” stands as a primary source for Qizilbash beliefs and the impetus of the Safavid revolution. . . ¹³

Thus, that Shlomo's Song of Songs starts out with self-praise, telling of a King who is “wise and ingenious,” does not at all imply that someone other than himself composed this long sung-poem—a poem for publicity and public consumption, its style not intimate, but rather declamatory. It is a poem that speaks openly of a physical world that provides symbols pointing to an internal mystical meaning of that same physical world, symbols in a world of dream, a world with a beginning and an end that can be reached through the ancient science of Kabbalah. The poetry that most interested the young Shah in Azerbaijan was the poetry of Nesimi, who in turn was interested in Lettrism, in his case Hurufism (‘ilm al-ḥurūf / the science of letters), “Hebrew Kabbalah's coeval twin”¹⁴

¹³ Amelia Gallagher (April 2004), *The Fallible Master of Perfection: Shah Ismail in the Alevi-Bektashi Tradition*. PhD Diss. McGill University, Montreal Quebec: p. 120.

¹⁴ See Melvin-Koushki's Research Article (Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group), “Safavid Twelver Lettrism Between Sunnism and Shi'ism, Mysticism and Science: Reyab al-Bursī vs. Maḥmūd Dihdār.” <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2022.2163914> (academia.edu).

To turn once more to Gallagher's dissertation, she quotes Thackston on the major form of Shah Ismā'il's *dīvān* poetry, the *ghazal*:

The Persianate *ghazal* is first and foremost the vehicle of love poetry. The expression is in terms of lover and beloved, both of which were cast in fixed and unchanging molds: [an]. . . unapproachable. . . beloved worshipped and adored by a distraught miserable lover. . . .¹⁵

The Song of Songs was transmitted in times of orality and well before the advent of medieval Sufi poetry. Moreover, it was translated multiple times from perhaps Hebrew to Kurdish to Turkic languages,¹⁶ Persian and Arabic, and eventually the Hebrew was recorded along with the Aramaic translation of Onkelos. As Professor Reuven Snir wrote me in our email correspondence: Arabic literature is a continuity that must be studied as a one whole; its past is necessary to the understanding of its later development and its modern manifestations may help us to understand various ancient phenomena." I now reply in turn that the same holds true for Hebrew literature from which has never evolved a medieval or modern period of consequence when compared to Arabic literature. On the principle summarized above by Professor Snir that Arabic literature 'must be studied as a one whole,' let me add that the same holds for Middle Eastern scripture, as a manifestation of our civilization, it is justifiable to present it as a whole, as the prophets have done. On this principle, it is also justifiable to compare the Song of Songs to known Sufi poetry in the Arabic (or the accepted Arabic translation from for example Kurdish or Persian or Hebrew as the case may be), since the diction and even an element of ecstasy of the Song of Songs appears in extant Sufi poems of the future.

Language in the Song of Songs in Common with Extant Sufi Poems

The symbolic language of the first chapter of Shlomo's ancient sung-poem immediately makes evident its shared commonality with Middle Eastern customs and way of life, and also with the language of medieval Sufi poems. Snir describes the latter as "early mystic Arabic poetry arising along with the development of Sufi theory at the beginning of the ninth century A.D. and flourishing during the next several centuries. Its origins were in the spontaneous utterances of the early Sufis, who poetically expressed their love of God and at the same time

¹⁵ Amelia Gallagher: p. 122.

¹⁶ See Note to Chapter 5:13 below.

their rejection of worldly pleasures.”¹⁷ Hence, it is obvious that the Song of Songs although it uses symbols that were later adopted in Sufi poetry precedes the earliest known Sufi poems. That is, it is not a Sufi poem. It also precedes the penetration of ancient Greek philosophy occurring especially in the times of the Kingdom of Israel in northern Syria, centuries after the king Shlomo. The diction in Sufi poems reminiscent of the Song of Songs, and to again quote Snir’s email correspondence: “There are many Sufi poems that allude to various themes and motifs in the Song of Songs, by Arab and Persian poets, particularly those of Ibn al-Arabi and Ibn al-Farid. These are phenomena which also evidence the transmission via Arabic-speaking bards to when it was recorded in the Hebrew Bible by Sages living in the newly established city of Tiberias,¹⁸ at which time, Tiberias was a mixed community speaking a multiplicity of languages and dialects.

To cite an example from the poetry of Sharafu’d-Dīn ‘Umar Ibn al-Fārid (d. 633 AH), an Andalusian poet revered as a saint in his time, as was Muḥyī’ d-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638 AH). The poem entitled *al-Khamriyyah* (The Wine-Song) uses wine as a symbol, as said by Martin Lings, “a symbol of Gnosis and Love.” It opens as follows:

Rememb’ring the beloved, wine we drink
Which drunk had made us ere the vine’s creation.
A sun it is; the full moon is its cup:
A crescent hands it round; how many stars
Shine forth from it the moment it be mixed!
But for its fragrance ne’er had I been guided
Unto its tavern; but for its resplendence
Imaging could no image make of it.¹⁹

To quote a few lines from Ibn ‘Arabī’s poetry as translated by Martin Lings, the following is from the *Tarjumān*:

We were letters, exalted! not yet uttered.
Held aloft in the keep of the Highest of Summits,

¹⁷ Reuven Snir (2006). Chapter Three, p. 81. In: *Religion, Mysticism and Modern Arabic Literature*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

¹⁸ The Romans established Tiberias in the wake of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

¹⁹ Translated by Martin Lings. See: <https://archive.org/details/sufi-poems-a-mediaeval-anthology-martin-lings/page/29/mode/2up>: pp. 67, 68.

I Therein am Thou, and we are Thou,
 And Thou art He, and All is in He is He—
 Ask of any that so far hath reached.²⁰

Ibn ‘Arabī’s lines point us to the source of the science of Lettrism, that is, a branch of the ancient science of Kabbalah. Just as Ibn Arabī relates Lettrism to a specific landscape, the “Highest of Summits,” so do others, sometimes with the addition of an expansive lowland and a river. Moreover, the symbolism may become ever more complex. To serve as an example from a contemporary poet, Salim Barakat, I quote a passage from his novel *Sages of Darkness*:

Meantime the young, enthusiastic teacher devoted himself to arranging the world of Hassan Bin Kojarei. In the fall and winter, the teacher wore a red tie around his neck and in the spring and summer a red triangle, the corner of a red handkerchief, protruded from his shirt pocket. He used horizontal lines to underline names and places, and vertical columns for numbers, arranged like bricks on a wall. The father of Mullah Benav, between one thing and another, saw the white spaces as plateau with mountains on the far side of the village river. And he saw the protests in Lausanne, and the crowds in what looked like the heart of the Kurdish villages.²¹

The above passage shows a way of life in which the science of Kabbalah is entrenched. Moreover, calculations by the tribal chiefs are made in context of a specific landscape.

The first specific mention of the landscape in Shlomo’s Song of Songs is in Chapter 2:8: “The sound of my beloved. Behold he is coming. / Leaping over the mountains. / Jumping over the hills.” These lines also introduce an element of ecstasy; the ecstasy mingled with a symbolism that signified the ancient science of what came to be known as Kabbalah, also anticipated the aim of the medieval Sufi poem.

²⁰ Translated by Martin Lings. See: <https://archive.org/details/sufi-poems-a-mediaeval-anthology-martin-lings/page/29/mode/2up>: p. 64.

²¹ وبين تلك السطور، وهذه، ثغرات بيضاء يرى منها أبو الملاً بيناف نهر قرية «عاكولة»، وهضبة «معيريك»، وقبر «شمدين» في «موزان»، والحشود التي يهيئها عباس البدوي على تخوم قرى الأكراد.

Conclusion

The Sages of Tiberias, despite opposition were determined to include the Song of Songs in the Hebrew Bible. Chapter 8 became a vehicle for presenting religious ethics. The king Shlomo mentioned ethical beliefs of his kingdom at the outset of his sung-poem, and the last chapter would now also commence with a statement of ethics, but with a different purpose in mind. The chapter commences:

Would that you were as a brother to me, [one] suckled at my mother's breast.

I shall find you outdoors, I shall [but] kiss you.

So that they need not be shamed by me.[1]

Chapter 8:1 ends with "So (literally "also") that they need not be shamed by me" / גם לא יבוזו לי . The Hebrew of the entire verse reads: מי יתנך כאח לי יונק שדי אמי אמצאך בחוץ אשקך גם לא יבוזו לי . The word / gam / גם (also) in the text points to the biblical mishna.²² "Also" is talmudic terminology, a sign indicating that there is an addition, an addition by the sages / חכמים of the Mishnaic period. That is, Rabbi Gershon's below comment is worked into the biblical text:

רלב"ג כדי שתוכל לנשקו במקום רואים בלא בשת

So that she can kiss him in a place we see as without shame.

Thus, Chapter 8:1 points to the *halacha* that modern Jews would study and practice. In the final analysis, this ancient love song was accepted into the Hebrew Bible and gained enormous prestige.

The concluding four verses of Chapter 8 take us to a garden environment:

Shlomo had a vineyard at Baal Hamon. He gave the vineyard to [others] to keep.

The fruit brought to each a thousand pieces of silver.[11]

The vineyard before me, is mine. The thousand for you, O Shlomo.

Two hundred to those keeping his fruit.[12]

You who dwell in the gardens, companions heed your voice. Let me hear it![13]

Scamper off, my beloved. And likewise, the deer or the young bucks.

On the mountains of spices.[14]

²² See www.mgketer.org/tanach/30/8/1.

In the above verses, we read about the King's garden, with a private vineyard in it—one he gave to others to keep. Shlomo left a legacy; he did not want to be forgotten. These last lines of the Song of Songs prompt us to turn once more to Chapter 1. Read in retrospect, Chapter 1-7 seem to have taken place a long time before, when the king Shlomo was alive.

Middle Eastern scripture, Middle Eastern civilization as summarized by prophets, delivers to us a notion of the commonality of Middle Eastern civilization. Such is the greatness of Shlomo's Song of Songs.

Translation and Notes

The Song of Songs. A Song by Shlomo [1]²³

May he arm me with kisses from his mouth,²⁴

While your uncles are benevolent from wine [2]²⁵

The aroma of your perfumes is pleasing. Your name is Turkish ingenuity²⁶

Accordingly, the 'alamoth love you [3]²⁷

You possess me. We shall rush after you.

The King received me in his chambers.

[A King] who sings, circles and rejoices with you,

May your love be ineluctable from wine²⁸

I shall love you passionately. [4]²⁹

Annotation

²³ Song, i.e., sung-poem. The word "that" (אשר), sometimes omitted from the Hebrew text, is probably intended to be a means of clarifying whether the sung-poem is "for" or "by" Shlomo. The Hebrew word "Shlomo" is retained in this translation, since according to the Talmud, Shevuot 35b:16, "Shlomo" is not the actual name or even not the stand-in for the name of the King. As I understand it, "prophet Suleimān" as in the Qur'an is the King's actual name, from which we have the English "Solomon."

²⁴ May he arm me with kisses from his mouth (ישקני מנשיקות פיהו): The same root (נשק) means both kisses and armaments; with poetry, meaning-upon-meaning is a desired feature. An alternative translation would be: "May he water me with kisses from his mouth" since in classical Arabic literature kisses between lovers are presented as each of the lovers watering the other with his own saliva.

²⁵ The second hemi-stich of this verse uses wine as a symbol of love's intoxication. Swayed by love, the tribal society will be benevolent.

²⁶ Turk / תורק: perhaps from the classical Persian ترک meaning Turk. Ingenuity: שמן.

²⁷ The alamothe are an ancient animal, which tells us that the King had ancient wisdom.

²⁸ In the opening verse, דודיך meant "uncles." The poet introduces the sound of this word. Then using the poetic device of sound symbolism, he gives a message using the same word with the different meaning of "love"—in the dual. Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah of Basrah (d. 185AH / 801CE) for one wrote: Two hearts (قلوب) I give Thee, a heart that yearns, / And a heart that is Thy due (Trans. Martin Lings 2004, p. 2). The word "love" can be substituted for "heart."

I am black and passionate, O daughters of Jerusalem³⁰

Like the tents of Qedar.³¹ Like the [tent] curtains of Shlomo. [5]³²

May you not look upon me that I am black. That the sun burned me.

My mother's sons scorned me. They made me watch over the pastures.

[Except] mine,³³ I did not watch over it. [6]³⁴

Tell me, my soul's love, where do you keep watch, where do you pasture [your goats] at noon,

For why should I be as one veiled, in the vicinity of the herds of your companions. [7]

If you do not know, O most beautiful of women, set out following the herd,

And pasture your goats in the vicinity of the shepherds' tents.³⁵ [8]

I compare you, my dear one, to the horses of Pharaoh's chariots. [9]

Your cheeks are ornamented with circlets, your neck with beads. [10]

We will make you circlets of gold with studs of silver. [11]

When the King was roundabout, my perfume sent forth its fragrance.³⁶ [12]

My beloved is to me a bundle of myrrh. He will lie between my breasts. [13]

My beloved is to me the wafting fragrance.³⁷ In the meadows of Ein Gedi.³⁸ [14]

Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved. Behold, your dove's eyes are beautiful. [15]

²⁹ Love (root אהב) you passionately: The Masoretes voweled the verb 'to love' as intensive. To express the intensive, the translator adds the word "passionately."

³⁰ The speaker addresses the "daughters of Jerusalem." These could be equated with the huris / *hūrīya* (حُورِيَّة) to be found in the Qur'an. Their description in detail, in various Hadith, roughly speaking matches the description of the "beloved" in the Song of Songs. See Waleed Ahmad Saleh's comment on huris, page 354 in his article / lecture "Death and Dying in the Qur'an." <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110650617-020>.

³¹ The Arab tribe of the Qedarites associated with the Nabataeans, a North Arabian tribe. Both came to prominence c. 8th to 7th centuries BCE.

³² The King would later build the First Temple in Jerusalem.

³³ [Except for]: There is no element of volition in the neglect of the speaker's own pastures. This anecdote hints at the story of Joseph and his jealous brothers in Genesis 37.

³⁴ I did not watch over it: In English, the verb calls for an object.

³⁵ The herd is divided, sheep on the right and goats on the left.

³⁶ Perfume prepared from the spikenard (nard) plant.

³⁷ Wafting fragrance: For this interpretation of these two obscure words: See

<https://www.mgketer.org/tanach/30/1/14>. Another option: My beloved is for me wisdom's ransom: אשכל is written with א. However, ה an א are sometimes interchangeable. So, השכל would be a synonym for "wisdom" i.e., חכמה. Cf. Gen. 3:6 (*Alcalay Dictionary*, p. 2614). The root letters כפר of the second of these two verbal nouns has various meanings, such as "forgiveness" or "ransom," as well as the opposite as something like "idolatrous."

³⁸ The Hebrew כרמים so dogmatically translated as "vineyards" in English, also means "meadows" in the sense of fertile meadows, see the biblical lexicon BDB. Ein Gedi today has a vast archaeological site that includes an ancient synagogue with a plaque quoting from the Song of Songs. The site is located in semi-arid plains below the range of the hills leading up to Jerusalem.

Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved. Also pleasing, even our couch is strong. [16]
The walls and beams of our house are of cedar. Our furnishings of cypress. [17]³⁹

The Song of Songs Chapter 2

I am the flower of a fertile plain, a lily of the plains [1]
Like a lily among thorns. Thus is my sweetheart among [other] daughters [2]⁴⁰
Like an apple on the trees of the forest.⁴¹ Thus is my love among [other] sons
In his shade I took pleasure and I sat. Its fruit was sweet to my taste.[3]
He brought me to a wine house. His [secret] intention towards me was love. [4]
Support me. With a flagon present me with apple [wine].⁴² For I am love-sick. [5]
His left [hand] under my head. His right [arm] embraces me. [6]
By the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field.⁴³ I swear to you, O daughters of Jerusalem
If you awake and if you awaken love, not until it is desirable. [7]⁴⁴
The sound of my beloved. Behold he is coming.
Leaping over the mountains.
Jumping over the hills.[8]⁴⁵
My beloved is like a deer or young buck. Behold [how] he stands behind our wall.
He is watching the windows peering at the lattices.[9]
My beloved distressed said to me:⁴⁶ Arise my sweetheart, my beautiful one, and go.[10]⁴⁷
For behold. The winter has passed. The rain is over and is gone [11]
The season of songsters has arrived. The time of the nightingale has come.
And the sound of the turtledoves is heard in our land:[12]

³⁹ Beams: carries a mystical connotation. Hebrew (as do both English and Arabic) has the double meaning of both beams and radiance. This verse points to the inner meaning of the Song of Songs, its scientific substratum.

⁴⁰ Daughters / girls, young women.

⁴¹ The forest is on an ascent to the heights of the mountain range.

⁴² Support / indulge me. . . present / support me. See the Arabic of the root letters of רָפַדְנִי , that is, رَفَدَ (to support). The underlying meaning of both verbs of this verse is “to support” in anticipation of the next verse in which his hand [supports] her head.

⁴³ Gazelle, a female antelope. Hind, a female deer.

⁴⁴ According to the grammar, this is an oath.

⁴⁵ The surrounding mountains; then the immediate approach to Jerusalem.

⁴⁶ Distressed? The meaning of עָנָה is not clear.

⁴⁷ Go in the sense of “get thee gone.” The Hebrew is לִקְיִי־לָהּ (fem) reminiscent of Genesis 12:1 telling Abraham to go.

The fig has formed its first fruit, the grapevine blossoms give forth fragrance

Arise my sweetheart, my beautiful one, and go.[13]

My dove in the cleft of the rock, concealed in the steppes, let me see your shape.

Let me hear your voice: For your voice is sweet, your appearance tender.[14]

They caught the foxes,⁴⁸ the little foxes that vandalize the vineyards:

For our vineyards are in bloom.[15]

My beloved is mine and I am his, he who herds among the lilies [16]

Until the day exhales [its fragrance],⁴⁹ and the shadows flee. Turn [about] my beloved

Be like a deer or young buck upon the cleft mountains.[17]⁵⁰

The Song of Songs Chapter 3

At night where I lie, I seek what my soul loves. I seek it, and I do not find it [1]

Let me arise and roam about the city, in the markets and in the lanes.

Let me seek what my soul loves. I sought it. And I did not find it [2]

The watchmen found me roaming about the city. You saw what my soul loves! [3]⁵¹

I had scarcely passed by when I found what my soul loves. I seized it and did not indulge it⁵²

Until I had brought it to the house of my mother.

And into the chamber of my parent. [4]

I swear to you, O daughters of Jerusalem. By the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field

If you awaken and if you arouse love, not until it is desirable.[5]⁵³

Who is this, coming up from the desert like smoke, ascending,

Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense from the best powder sold [6]

Behold, it is Shlomo's palanquin, sixty mighty-men surround it, of the mighty-men of Israel[7]

All of them sword-bearers, trained in warring. At night, each man his sword on his thigh.

From fear.[8]

⁴⁸ Catch / Seize אָחַזוּ לָנוּ i.e. They caught the foxes on behalf of all of us.

⁴⁹ Cf Hebrew יָפוּחַ to Arabic يَفَاح Root: فَوَح / fūḥ. Here in both Hebrew and Arabic, the poet uses sound symbolism, bringing us right back to the word for apple (ta-pū-ah) where he started from for this chapter.

⁵⁰ Cf Vs 9 and Vs 14.

⁵¹ You saw what my soul (נַפְשִׁי) loves: "my soul" indicating the distinction between matter and spiritual matter (otherwise seen as a second body) is suggestive of a later period.

⁵² Hebrew text reads אֶרְפוּ. This is Arabic أَرْفُ: indulge it.

⁵³ This verse repeats 2:7 above.

The king Shlomo had made himself a palanquin from the trees of Lebanon.[9]⁵⁴

Its pillars he made silver, its roof gold, its body was purple. Inside it. It was lined with love

From the daughters of Jerusalem.[10]⁵⁵

Go out and look at the king Shlomo, O daughters of Zion. At the crown that his mother

Crowned him with on the day of his betrothal. On the day of joy in his heart.[11]

The Song of Songs Chapter 4

Behold you are beautiful, my sweetheart, behold you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves

Behind your veil,⁵⁶ your hair is like a herd of goats skittering down Mount Gilead [1]

Your teeth are like a herd of fleecy sheep come out of the wash⁵⁷

All of them even, none missing [2]

Your lips are like a scarlet thread. And your mouth is longing, like a pomegranate segment⁵⁸

Your temple, behind your veil. [3]

Your neck is like the Tower of David. Built with turrets, a thousand angels cleave to it⁵⁹

All of them shields of mighty men.[4]

Your two breasts are like two fawns. A doe's twins that pasture among the lilies.[5]

When the day breathes, and the shadows flee, I shall betake myself to the mountain of myrrh And
to the hill of frankincense.[6]

You are altogether beautiful, my sweetheart. There is no defect in you.[7]

Come with me from Lebanon, a bride. Come from Lebanon with me⁶⁰

You shall look down from the top of Amana,⁶¹ from the top of Senir and Hermon

From the dens of lions, from the mountain range with leopards.[8]

⁵⁴ Lebanon: It has been suggested that the biblical Lebanon was a mountain.

⁵⁵ The pillars would have been covered in silver leaf, the top gold leaf and the rest of the exterior stained purple.

⁵⁶ Behind your veil: a pivot phrase that could be read twice, i.e. a run-on line (enjambment), "Your eyes are doves behind your veil, behind your veil your hair. . . your teeth. . . your lips. . . your temples. . . your neck. . . your breasts. . .

⁵⁷ Hebrew קצובות could stand for the Arabic: كصوفي Like a fleecy [herd].

⁵⁸ Like a pomegranate segment: a pivot phrase that could be read twice.

⁵⁹ See www.mgketer.org/tanach/30/4/4.

צוארך - המלך. אלף המגן - הם שריון

⁶⁰ Come / תבוא Double-duty verb.

⁶¹ You shall look down / תשורי. The root שור means "wall." This is another instance of introducing the sound first. The associated word comes later.

With both my hearts,⁶² my sister, [you shall be my] bride.

With one of your eyes, you ravish the heart,

With one bead of your necklace.[9]

How praiseworthy your love,⁶³ O bride. How beneficent your uncles due to wine

And the fragrance of your ointments of all kinds of spices.[10]⁶⁴

Your lips drip honeycomb, O bride. Honey and milk under your tongue.

And the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.[11]

A bolted garden, my sister, O bride. A bolted latch. A sealed off wellspring.[12]

An orchard with pomegranates, befitting you, with a choice yield: henna with spikenard. [13]

Spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all [species] of frankincense trees,⁶⁵

Myrrh and aloe, and every important spice.[14]

You are a font of gardens, a wellspring of alive water, streaming from Lebanon.[15]

Awake, O north and come southwards! Inspire my garden,⁶⁶ its spices will overflow

Let my beloved go to his garden and eat choice fruits.[16]

The Song of Songs Chapter 5

I went to my garden, my sister, O bride. I picked my myrrh [along] with my spices.

I ate of my forest.⁶⁷ With my honey, I drank my wine, despite my milk.

Eat! Friends drink. Uncles become intoxicated.[1]

I am asleep, but my heart is awake. The sound of my lover knocks.

Open it for me,⁶⁸ my sister, my sweetheart, my dove, O perfection.

My head is filled with dew. My locks dust of night.[2]

I took off my coat. How could I wear it! I washed my feet. How did I dirty them![3]

My lover stretched forth his hand through the hole, and my insides ached for him[4]

⁶² See www.mgketer.org/tanach/30/4/9: With both my hearts: לבבתי. With the good inclination and the bad inclination—rabbinic midrash.. According to known Kurmanji Kurdish grammar, a Kurdish dialect used by Kurdish Jews in Northern Syria, the plural was used as a dual plural before a distinct dual plural emerged. The Midrash on the dual is in keeping with the Kurdish concept of Evil and Good.

⁶³ Praiseworthy / יפה: from the verbal root “to praise” יפה voweled as *yippa*. See Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary* (Massadah Publishing Co., Tel-Aviv—Jerusalem, 1965).

⁶⁴ This verse hearkens back to Chapter 1:2: “While your uncles are benevolent from wine.”

⁶⁵ The different species of frankincense trees came from far-flung places.

⁶⁶ Inspire: the poet uses personification for the north wind.

⁶⁷ The Hebrew עֵר can mean both honeycomb and forest. As “forest,” it means that the lover ate meat.

⁶⁸ Open it. I understand that he is asking her to open the bolted garden gate mentioned in Chapter 4.

I arose to open up for my lover. My hands dripping myrrh.

Myrrh passing [through] my fingers onto the catch of the lock.[5]

I opened it for my lover. But my beloved had slipped away. Because of this, I myself set out.

I sought him and did not find him. I called to him, and he did not answer.[6]

The watchmen circulating in the city found me. They struck me, wounding me.

The watchmen at the [city] walls snatched my veil from me.[7]

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem. If you find my lover.

What you will tell him is that I am love-sick.[8]

What is your uncle's assessment, O most beautiful of women.

What is your uncle's assessment that thus you adjure us?[9]

My lover is pure and chaste[10]⁶⁹

His head is yellow gold. His tresses curls, black as a raven.[11]⁷⁰

His eyes are like doves on the banks of a watercourse. Washed in milk, sitting drenched.[12]

His cheeks are like a bed of spices, apothecaries. His lips, lilies.

Dripping, myrrh passes through his lips[13]⁷¹

His hands are catchments of gold, set with topaz.

His body is polished ivory, overlaid with sapphires.[14]

His legs are pillars of marble. Set into sockets of glittering gold.

His appearance like Lebanon is elect as are the cedars.[15]⁷²

His speech is eloquent.⁷³ All of him is praiseworthy.⁷⁴

That is my lover and that is my sweetheart, O daughters of Jerusalem.[16]

The Song of Songs Chapter 6

⁶⁹ Chaste: The Hebrew text is *דָּוִם* (red). Red is the color of a newborn baby in all its innocence. My lover is pure and chaste. Binarisms of this nature common are in biblical Hebrew, either by way of synonyms or antonyms. The translation gains biblical style and achieves meaning in English. Of course, the sound symbolism afforded by the word "red" as well as a loss in the sequence of colors is a poetic device lost in the translation.

⁷⁰ Each descriptive word is also a symbol. See Aida Gasimova's article "The Hair on My Head Is Shining: Qur'anic Imagery of the Curl in Classical Azeri-Turkish Şūfī Poetry" in JQS 15.1, 2013: 69-101.

⁷¹ Here, and elsewhere the Song of Songs exhibits features of Kurmanji grammar (in the Hebrew text) that are awkward in Arabic or Hebrew as we know these two languages.

⁷² "Elect" in the sense of "choice."

⁷³ His speech is eloquent (idiom) *הָכֹחַ הַמְּתִקֵּים*. See R. Alcalay (1963), *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary*: Massadah Ltd.

⁷⁴ Praiseworthy: Hebrew *הַמְּתִקֵּים* / cf. Arabic *حميد*.

Whither did your lover go, O most beautiful among women? Whither did your lover retire?

We shall seek him with you.[1]

My lover went down to his garden, to the beds of spices

To pasture [land] in the gardens, to pick lilies.[2]

I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. The shepherd among the lilies.[3]

You are beautiful, my sweetheart, like Tirzah desirable as Jerusalem.

Intimidating as an army with banners.[4]

Turn your eyes away from opposing mine, for they mock me.

Your hair is like a herd of goats skittering down from Gilead. [5]⁷⁵

Your teeth are like a herd of fleecy sheep come out of the wash

All of them even, none missing.[6]⁷⁶

Your dimples are like a pomegranate split open behind your veil.[7]⁷⁷

Sixty, they are queens. Eighty, they are concubines. And innumerable maidens.[8]

She is [but] one, my dove, O perfection. The one [and only] of her mother.

She is dutiful to the one who bore her.⁷⁸

Daughters notice and bless her.⁷⁹

Queens and concubines praise her.[9]

Who is this appearing like dawn:

Beautiful as a moon, dutiful as a sun.

Intimidating as an army with banners.[10]

I went down to my nut garden to see the greenery by the stream.

To see the buds on the vine, the pomegranates flowering.[11]

Unawares—my soul showed me the chariots of my noble nation.[12]

The Song of Songs Chapter 7

⁷⁵ In Chapter 4:1, we read: Your hair is like a herd of goats skittering down Mount Gilead. This verse is repeated here, except that the word "Mount" (which we already know) is omitted.

⁷⁶ This verse repeats Chapter 4:2.

⁷⁷ Your dimples רִקְמֶה was previously translated as "your temples" in Chapter 4:3.

⁷⁸ Dutiful: The Hebrew ברה takes up the same meaning as its Arabic cognate بر (barr).

⁷⁹ Bless her—meaning that the daughters of Jerusalem approve of her.

Return, return O Shulamite. Return, return. So that we shall see your image.

Verily you shall envisage the Shulamite as she twirls ecstatic.[1]⁸⁰

How beautiful your feet in sandals, O prince's daughter. The curves of your hips, like ornaments.

A creation by an artist.[2]

Your navel is a full moon. May it not lack spiced wine!

Your belly is a womb of grasses.⁸¹ The kind among the lilies.[3]

Your two breasts are like two fawns. A doe's twins that pasture among the lilies.[4]⁸²

Your neck is a tower of ivory.

Your eyes are the pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bathrabbim.

Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon overlooking Damascus.[5]

Your head on you is like [Mount] Carmel,

And the locks of your head are like a purple [mantle],

A king is bound in [your] tresses.[6]

Verily you [seem] beautiful,

Verily you befit love with [its] pleasures[7]

As for your stature, it is similar to a date-palm,

And your breasts to [their] clusters[8]

I say: I shall climb up the date-palm, I shall hold on to its branches,

And may your breasts be like clusters with tendrils.

And your face fragrant like apples.[9]

And your mouth. Like fine wine for my uncle, pours out warming my sleeping lips.[10]⁸³

I am my beloved's, and his yearning is due to me.[11]

Come, my beloved, let us set out for the fields. We shall spend the night in the villages.[12]

We shall rise early: To [go to] the meadows.

We shall see if the vines have flowered, the buds opened, the pomegranates blossomed:

There shall I give my heart to you.[12]⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Usually translated "companies," the word הַמְתַּנְּחִים could be a misreading of a word with the root הנה (to give joy). This could also have been a deliberate change by the scribe to use a version in accord with Jewish traditions. That is, the circle dance and variations was and is common, but whirling dervishes have a different distinctive history.

⁸¹ Womb. See Job 1:21, Naked I came from my mother's womb.

⁸² This verse repeats Chapter 4:5. Towards the concluding sections of the poem, earlier content is recalled.

⁸³ Warm (דֹּחֵב) / Arabic نَفْء .

⁸⁴ My hearts / my loves: dual plural meaning "both hearts." See above footnote.

The mandrakes gave forth fragrance, and on our doorstep was every choice fruit, new even old.

My beloved, I kept them for you.[13]

The Song of Songs Chapter 8

Would that you were as a brother to me, [one] suckled at my mother's breast.

I shall find you outdoors, I shall [but] kiss you.

So that they need not be shamed by me.[1]⁸⁵

I shall conduct you. I shall bring you to my mother's house. Allow me!

I shall let you drink spiced wine and pomegranate grenadine.[2]

His left [hand] under my head. His right [arm] embraces me.[3]⁸⁶

I swear to you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you awake and if you awaken love, not until it is desirable.[4]⁸⁷

Who is this coming out of the desert. Leaning upon her lover

Under the apple-tree, I shall arouse you.

There your mother conceived you.

There she conceived and she bore you.[5]

Set me as a seal on your heart. As a seal on your arm.

For love is as strong as death. Jealousy as cruel as *Sheol*,

Its sparks, sparks of fire. The mightiest of flames.[6]⁸⁸

A lot of water cannot quench love. Floods cannot wash it away.

If a man were to give all the wealth of his house for love

Shame, they would mock him.[7]

We have a little sister. She has no breasts [yet].

What should we do for our sister at the time she is spoken for?[8]

If she is a [city] wall, we shall build a silver turret upon her

And if she is a door, we shall fasten upon her a cedar tablet.[9]⁸⁹

⁸⁵ See www.mgketer.org/tanach/30/8/1: כדי שתוכל לנשקו במקום רואים בלא בשת רלב"ג

⁸⁶ This vs repeats Chapter 2:6.

⁸⁷ This verse is shortened from Chapter 2:7.

⁸⁸ Jealousy as cruel as *Sheol*. The connection between love and jealousy perplexes the present writer. Moreover, the concept of *Sheol* seems to be a syncretic addition to the poem.

⁸⁹ Tablet: Presumably with writing on it.

I am a wall. And my breasts like towers.

[Only] then was I in his eyes as someone eliciting peace.[10]

Shlomo had a vineyard at Baal Hamon. He gave the vineyard to [others] to keep.

The fruit brought to each a thousand pieces of silver.[11]

The vineyard before me, is mine. The thousand for you, O Shlomo.

Two hundred to those keeping his fruit.[12]

You who dwell in the gardens, companions heed your voice. Let me hear it![13]

Scamper off, my beloved. And likewise, the deer or the young bucks.

On the mountains of spices.[14]

Translated from the biblical Hebrew by Aviva Butt

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