Commentary

Looking at the Whole

Throughout the preceding seven chapters we have looked at the Song from the standpoint of its major themes, beginning with the defining theme of wisdom, continuing with its imagery, symbols, mythical and esoteric elements, and concluding with a chapter in which motifs relating to the drawing, that is, the eros of God, are gathered. Thus for some readers the book proper ended with the conclusion of Chapter 7. But for the sake of those readers who are interested in the text of the Song, and desire to see all the verses covered, we will in this much shorter second part look at every verse as it occurs, focusing especially on those which have so far escaped notice, with reference back to earlier discussions of verses already commented upon by means of chapter and section number.1 This second part, therefore, provides the opportunity, not for a detailed commentary, since the constraints of space preclude anything so thorough, but for the acknowledgement at least of some important points not yet touched upon, and in order to gain a sense of the Song as a whole.

But first I should like to begin this part with a quotation from John of the Cross, whose poem The Spiritual Canticle is imbued with the imagery of the Song. And although the influences which formed John produced a more rarefied atmosphere than did the influences which formed our author, the direction and intensity of eros is the same. And what John writes about the Spiritual Canticle in the Prologue to his prose explanation applies equally to a prose explanation of the Song:

Since these stanzas, then, were composed in a love flowing from abundant mystical understanding, I cannot explain them adequately, nor is it my intention to do so. I only wish to shed some general light on them... As a result, though we give some explanation of these stanzas, there is no reason to be bound to this explanation. For mystical wisdom, which comes through love and is the subject of these stanzas, need not be understood distinctly in order to cause love and

1 For example a reference in parentheses (§1.6) refers to Chapter 1, Section 6.
affection in the soul, for it is given according to the mode of faith, through which we love God without understanding Him.²

That is to say, what speaks to the soul, whether understood by the rational mind or not, is the poetry of the Song. If John is unable to explain his own poetry adequately there cannot be any hope of one not the author explaining poetry no less exalted. What precedes in the Introduction and seven chapters of the first part, and what now follows is, then, at best, faltering indications of what I believe the genius who created the Song intends, supported by whatever biblical or extra-biblical texts it seems appropriate to adduce.

CHAPTER 1

The Song of Songs which is Solomon’s.
May he kiss me from the kisses of his mouth, for your breasts are better than wine.
For fragrance your oils are good; your name is oil poured forth, therefore the maids love you.
Draw me, we will run after you; the king has brought me into his chambers. Let us rejoice and be glad in you, let us praise your breasts more than wine; righteous ones love you.

We will look at a few verses at a time, following the Masoretic paragraph divisions, except where it is necessary to make further divisions to facilitate comment.

We saw, in the Introduction, that the title could as well be translated ‘The Hymn of Hymns’ and, at §1.1, that the significance of the name Solomon is that it declares the work to be sapiential, and, no less fundamentally, citing Ellen Davis, points to the association of the Song with the Temple.

The verse, ‘May he kiss me from the kisses of his mouth’, coming directly after the declaration, implicit in the title, that what follows is to be understood as wisdom in the context of worship, sets the tone for the entire Song. It speaks directly to that part of the soul which relates readily to God. For these kisses are desired by the one who is drawn by the eros of God, who yearns to be ravished by him at a level beyond sensation but no less intense, to which the literature generated by the mystics of the great world religions provides ample witness (§7.2).

If the Song is unique in the Bible in portraying this intensity of eros for God it is

nevertheless consistent with the rest of the Hebrew Bible, which nowhere uses the verb nāšaq, ‘to kiss’, of lovers’ kisses. Neither is ‘mouth’ used with sexual connotation. BDB manages to produce only three references under peh, ‘mouth’, for ‘organ of kissing’ and the other two, apart from our verse, are references to idol worship (1 Kgs. 19: 18: ‘all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him’, and Job 31: 27: ‘if I have looked at the sun when it shone . . . and my mouth has kissed my hand’). ‘Mouth’ in biblical language stands primarily for the vehicle of speech, especially for that into which God puts words. Some commentators think ‘mouth’ is redundant here, but the reading ‘your breasts are better than wine’ (noting the word for ‘breasts’ here is dad, ‘teat, nipple’, namely, that which goes into the mouth), suggests a play on these images, and enables us to agree with those commentators who see a hidden pun in yissāqâni, ‘Oh that he would kiss me’, for ‘Oh, that he would let me drink’, yasqâni, a reading which goes well with ‘your breasts are better than wine’, and supports my suggestion that ‘breasts’ had, at some stage in the history, a cultic significance which the poet wishes to recall.

The change in person ‘May he . . . for your breasts’, known by the term enallage, that is, the substitution of one grammatical form for another, occurs in the Bible in poetry and usually takes the form of shift in person, as here. The AV retains such shifts; the RSV and other modern versions generally amend them, but the NRSV has restored this one in the Song. Such shifts usually occur in relation to God, and a reader familiar with shift in person would be likely to take God as the subject of the verse in which it occurs unless a subject other than God is explicitly mentioned. And once God is understood to be the subject of this verse, a vertical reading follows unhindered.

The reading ‘breasts’ is found in the LXX and the Vulgate, and the evidence reveals Hebrew ‘love’ as being a later reading supplied by the pointing of the Masoretes (§2.4). The use of breast imagery as a symbol of nourishment—especially the nourishment of the Torah—is explored in Chapter 2, and is found to be confined to this meaning throughout the Bible. Thus ‘wine’ is seen here as being in parallel to the milk implicit in the breasts.

‘Fragrance’ is a keyword in the Song. Here, at 1: 3, it is in a form always used in the context of sacrifices, and thus gives support to the suggestion (§2.5) that the opening verses of the Song ‘imply a procession and thus plunge us into its liturgical activity from the beginning of the book’. If so, the ‘oils’, of which the fragrance is good, would be anointing oils, though these were lacking in Second Temple times, a lack I believe the poet is supplying, as we shall see shortly.

3 Some typical examples are: Exod. 4: 15; Num. 12: 8; 22: 38; 23: 5, 12; Deut. 18: 18; Jer. 1: 9; Ps. 40: 3.
4 See for example Michael Fox 1985: 97. More recently, Stoop-van Paridon makes a good case for ‘O that he would let me drink’, but undermines it when she goes on: ‘It is certainly conceivable that the author of the Song of Songs is alluding to “l’embrassement sur les lèvres”, “French kiss.”’ 2005: 22.
5 Unless one thinks that Solomon, as a man, is the object of the bride’s desire, as some commentators do.
The next line is difficult, literally: ‘Oil you are poured forth your name’, taking tūraq as second masculine singular (it is also third feminine singular) of the verb ‘to be poured/emptied out’, since both ‘name’ and ‘oil’ are masculine. To add to the difficulty, the form (hophal) does not otherwise occur. The reader who has taken God to be the subject of the shift in person in verse 2 would also expect direct address combined with ‘name’ to be a further reference to him because, of the 109 occurrences of the forms ‘your name’ and ‘my name’, 92 are direct address to God and eleven are direct address from God or his angel. Thus God is confirmed as the likely subject for the attentive reader who reads ‘oil poured forth is your name’.

There is an obvious play on sounds in the Hebrew (šēm = name, šemen = oil), and we may wonder whether there is an allusion here to oil as one of the five missing elements in the Second Temple, with the implication that the pouring forth of the holy Name is all the oil that is needed for true sanctification. We have seen (§2.3) one instance which suggests that the poet is a defender of the sanctity of the Second Temple in the defence of the ‘little sister’ against the charge at Cant. 8: 8 that she has no breasts. I believe this is another, and that there are two more (that I have discerned) which we will see when we come to them (Cant. 3: 6 and 8: 6).

The plural form of maidens, ‘ālāmôt, occurs again at Cant. 6: 8 in a context which is also, I believe, liturgical (§2.5)). Here, in the opening verses, a procession is implied by the use of ‘ālāmôt who appear in procession both at Ps. 68: 25 and, in the form ‘al-‘ālāmôt, in the procession of the ark at 1 Chron. 15: 20.

The verb ‘to draw’ is much used in the Hebrew Bible. Pope writes: ‘The verb māšak is used of the drawing power of divine love in Hosea 11: 4, “I drew them (Israel) with bands of love”, and Jeremiah 31: 3, “I loved you (Israel) with an eternal love, therefore I drew you (with) constancy [ḥēsed]”.’

As noted at the conclusion of §1.10, ‘The king has brought me into his chambers’ is redolent of the Jewish mystical literature (Hekhalot) in which ‘king’ occurs hundreds of times, and forms of heder, ‘chamber’, are numerous. Alexander has a long note on this verse of which here is a part:

God’s ‘chambers’ have been doubly identified as (1) Mount Sinai, and (2) the heavenly treasury where he kept the Torah. Tg. rather pointedly avoids a mystical interpretation here. It makes no reference to the idea that Moses at Sinai actually ascended into heaven to receive the Torah, a tradition which it knew . . . and that is easily attached to the words ‘the king brought me [Moses] into His chambers.’ The Merkabah mystics may have had this same phrase in mind when they spoke of the ‘chambers’ of the Merkabah (3 Enoch 18: 18; 38: 1), or of God’s heavenly palaces being ‘chamber within chamber’ (3 Enoch 1: 2). Note how Cant. R. 1.4, §1 attaches the story of the four who entered Pardes to the words, ‘the King has brought me into His chambers.’

6 See Cant. Rabbah VIII. 9, §3, and, for a complete list of rabbinical literature on this topic, C. T. R. Hayward 1999: 38 n. 23.


8 Alexander 80 n. 26. Alexander concludes the note by directing the reader to his Introduction (6. 2, n. 15) where, however, he no less pointedly avoids attributing a mystical meaning to the Song. He cannot help noticing connections because he knows the mystical literature so well,
‘Chambers’ is followed by ‘Let us rejoice and be glad in you’, a frequent combination of verbs, always in address to God, while ‘let us praise your breasts more than wine’ shows a preference, in conjunction with the first person plural, for the nourishment of milk/Torah over the intoxication of wine. At Cant. 2: 4, however, in conjunction with the first person singular, the female claims, ‘He has brought me into the house of wine.’ The first might be interpreted as reinforcing the idea of public worship, suggesting the greater suitability of milk for the congregation generally, while the similar verse at 2: 4 conveys the intoxicating character of the personal relationship with the One worshipped. I am following the Targumist for the translation of mešārim as ‘righteous ones’, which seems to me far likelier than ‘rightly’, the favoured translation of mešārim here.9

How, then, might these four opening verses be understood? Taking the title as the Hymn of Hymns and therefore an invitation to join the procession entering the Temple to worship and to praise, the alternation which follows between first person singular and first person plural could be understood to reflect the experience of the worshipper who naturally shifts between identification with the individual self—‘Oh, that he would kiss me’, ‘the king has brought me into his chambers’—and identification with the congregation—‘let us rejoice’, ‘let us praise’—the two combining in ‘Draw me, we will run after you.’ Thus the Talmudic versions of the Pardes story conclude with: ‘Draw me, we will run after you’, which includes both ‘me’ and ‘we’, while Cant. Rabbah concludes, ‘the king has brought me into his chambers’—the essence of the Song in half a verse.

The Masoretic text provides a paragraph break after these verses, and v. 5 clearly embarks on a different aspect of the poem.

5 I am black but comely,
O daughters of Jerusalem;
as the tents of Kedar,
as the curtains of Solomon.

6 Look not on me because I am black,
because the sun has gazed upon me.
My mother’s sons were incensed against me;
they set me to keep the vineyards.
My vineyard which belongs to me, I have not kept.

but at the time of working on the Targum he was evidently identified with the exoteric outlook of the Targumist. His more recent writings manifest a move ‘inwards’, notably his remarkable study which compares The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and the Celestial Hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite (2006b), and I yet cherish the hope he might produce a commentary on the Song itself in which he would make up—and much more—for all the deficiencies of this one.

9 Alexander 80 n. 29: ‘Tg. takes Heb. mešārim (“rightly”) as = “the righteous”, possibly through repointing as meyashšerim.’ This form occurs at Prov. 9: 15 plus the definite article.
These lines introduce the hearer, or reader, to the intention of the poet in writing this work. His concern is to present a paradisal picture in which Israel’s long history of unfaithfulness is shown to be forgiven, and the ragings of the prophets over the sins of Jerusalem are in the past.

We may, I think, read the first two lines with Luther: ‘I am black . . . like the tents of Kedar; I am comely . . . like the curtains of Solomon.’ The first adjective ‘black’ used here occurs again at Cant. 5: 11 in reference to the black locks of the beloved. The second adjectival form, ‘blackish’, only occurs here. André Robert points out that the verb sāḥar and the noun sēḥōr are used, the one at Job 30: 30 and the other at Lam. 4: 8, to designate the colour of skin which results from a state of great suffering, both physical and mental. That the strength of the sun can entail suffering is implied by several texts, for instance: ‘They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the burning heat nor sun strike them’ (Isa. 49: 10), and: ‘The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night’ (Ps. 121: 6).

The ‘tents of Kedar’ provide a double simile for blackness. First, the tents are them-selves black, being woven from the wool of black goats, and, second, the root of qādar means ‘to be dark’. As a proper noun it refers to an Arab tribe, descended from Kedar, the second of Ishmael’s twelve sons, according to Gen. 25: 13, and is mentioned otherwise eleven times, notably Ps. 120: 5, where the phrase ‘tents of Kedar’, in a context of suffering, also occurs. Elsewhere we learn that the tribe was rich in flocks and powerful in its mighty men. Isaiah prophesies that ‘all the glory of Kedar will come to an end, and the remaining bows of Kedar’s warriors will be few’ (21: 16–17), while Ezekiel, in his lamentation over Tyre, notes that: ‘Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your favoured dealers in lambs, rams, and goats’ (27: 21).

Goats are implicit both in the ‘tents of Kedar’ and in the ‘curtains of Solomon’ made for the Tabernacle, and their significance is suggested by their fate to be offered on the one hand as a sin offering and on the other—with oxen, rams, and lambs—for a peace offering, the former linking with the black tents and the latter with Solomon, the name which stands for peace. If the claim of the speaker to be ‘black . . . like the

11 RTF, 69.
12 The preoccupation of recent commentators with negritude in the light of the lady’s claim to be black, and, consequently, how to express comments on the subject with all necessary ‘correctness’, is, it seems to me, too anachronistic to merit comment. In any case, Pope has covered the subject for all time and for all commentators with his eleven pages on it (307–18). (In contrast, he entirely overlooks mention of the next word, ‘comely’.)
13 See especially Numbers 7, in which goats for peace offerings always follow goats for a sin offering.
14 The widely favoured emendation, in the interests of parallelism, of ‘Solomon’ to ‘Salmah’, the name of an Arabian tribe mentioned in ancient non-biblical sources and later Jewish sources, notably Targum Onqelos, provides better parallelism. Nevertheless, the Masoretic pointing, with its strong suggestion of the Temple, conveys the interests of the text. I am encouraged to resist the assumption that parallelism is invariable by a paper ‘Repetition, Variation, Metaphor: Some New Insights into the Nature of Biblical Parallelism’, given by Knut Heim at the Society for Old Testament Study, Oxford, 2004.
tents of Kedar’ is a confession of sin, the contrasting claim to be ‘comely . . . like the curtains of Solomon’ is an acknowledgement that nevertheless she enjoys ‘peace with God’. But the word ‘comely’ must be examined before the picture I believe to be there can properly be seen.

‘I am . . . comely’, nāʾwâ, ‘comely, befitting, seemly’. This word is another of those which suffer seriously in translation unless used as at Isa. 52: 7: ‘How fitting upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace’, or as at Ps. 93: 8: ‘Holiness befits your house, O Lord.’ As an adjective it occurs ten times, four of them in the Song, three in Proverbs, twice in the Psalms, and once at Jer. 6: 2, this last being, I think, the text the poet is here reversing. The occurrences in Proverbs and Psalms indicate a wisdom term, for instance, Ps. 33: 1: ‘praise is befitting for the upright’. There are moral and spiritual elements invariably present in the word which have implications for its use in the Song.

The verse at Jer. 6: 2 reads: ‘The comely and the delicately bred daughter of Zion I will destroy.’ The vocabulary of this verse presents several problems, and is variously translated in consequence. First, a letter has dropped out of ‘comely’, which has led NRSV to translate ‘pasture’ here;15 second, ‘delicately bred’ (or ‘daintily bred’, BDB, 772), fails to convey to a modern reader that Jerusalem has been bred to take ‘exquisite delight’ in God; but third, the main crux is whether to translate dâmâ as ‘be like, resemble’ (BDB, I at p. 197) or ‘cease, cut off, destroy’ (BDB, II, ‘cause to cease, cut off, destroy’, at p. 198). BDB cites Jer. 6: 2 under II, and this not only fits the context exactly but does not introduce the problems raised by ‘to be like’.16 More difficult still is how to interpret the tone of the verse. It is generally taken to be insulting of Jerusalem. For instance, Brueggemann, who well conveys God’s íros for Israel/Judah/Jerusalem in his commentary on Jeremiah—the term he repeatedly uses is ‘yearning’—writes on this verse: ‘The prophets, who seem to harbor great resentment against the urban elite, delight in mocking and caricaturing the women who are the quintessence of such self-indulgent well-being’,17 and he points to texts which, he believes, support this view, notably Isa. 47: 1: ‘Come down, and sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon . . . for you shall no more be called tender and delicate.’ Here ‘delicate’ is in parallel with the adjective ‘tender’, the uses of which confirm that ‘delicate’ is being used in its negative aspect in the context of Babylon. But for Ps. 37: 4, for instance, BDB gives: ‘take exquisite delight in the Lord’, and similarly at v. 11: ‘The meek shall inherit the land and take exquisite delight in abundant peace.’ Again, at Isa. 66: 11, in reference to Jerusalem restored to her former place and glory: ‘Rejoice with Jerusalem . . . that ye may suck, and be satisfied from the breast of her consolations . . . and be delighted with [or: ‘take exquisite delight in’] the abundance of her

15 ‘I have likened daughter Zion to the loveliest pasture.’ The absence of the µ in ‘comely’ has produced this translation. But see BDB under II, also I, and I.

16 The Vulgate has assimilavi: Speciosae et delicatae assimilavi filiam Sion, ‘To a lovely and delicate woman I have likened the daughter of Sion.’ The LXX is altogether different: Και-άσβαμεθήσεται τὸ ὑψός θύγατερ Ζίων, ‘the [your] eminence will be taken away, O daughter of Zion’.

glory.’ Thus a study of the two words nā’weh, ‘comely’ and ānōg, ‘delight’ suggest a rather different reading to that offered by Brueggemann for Jer. 6: 2, one that intensifies the tragedy of God’s decision to destroy Jerusalem, the special object of his yearning love. For the very one who was ‘seemly’, ‘suitable’, ‘appropriate’ (nā’weh), for his great purposes, who had been ‘delicately nurtured’ to respond with ‘exquisite delight’ (ānōg) to the one who is both husband (Jer. 2: 2; 3: 1, 14, 20, etc.) and father to her (Jer. 3: 4, 19, etc.), whom he planted a noble vine of wholly good seed, turned and rebelled against him, like an alien vine (cf. Jer. 2: 21).

What follows in Jeremiah has similarities with what follows in the Song at 1: 7–8, though the differences are equally marked. In the Song there are shepherds, flocks, and tents, and the occurrence of ‘at noon’—as in the Jeremiah passage—and the setting is one above all of peace and security. In Jeremiah, following the intention to destroy the comely and delicate daughter of Zion, there are shepherds and flocks, but they have come up against her, and the setting is one of war and destruction.

All these connections confirm the view that the speaker at Cant. 1: 5–7 is Jerusalem, Jerusalem personified as in Jeremiah above all, but no less in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Lamentations. Her opening statement, ‘I am black like the tents of Kedar’, is the confession of sin required at Jer. 3: 13: ‘Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God’, while ‘I am comely like the curtains of Solomon’ conveys that she is now at peace with God. But the confession is not yet over, for she goes on: ‘My mother’s sons were incensed against me; they made me keeper of the vineyards’—the relationship of Jerusalem to the rest of Israel—‘but my own vineyard I have not kept.’

18 Thus the vineyards in the Song represent Israel which, collectively, is ‘the vine brought out of Egypt’. It was the role given to Jerusalem to be ‘keeper of the vineyards’, that is, to have been a model for the whole vine, but she failed to keep her own vineyard, and thus the prophets, ‘my mother’s sons’ of v. 6, speaking on behalf of the one whose love for her she had betrayed, were incensed against her. But now she is forgiven and there is a sense of restoration taking place.

Tell me, you whom my soul loves,  
where you pasture your flock,  
where you make it lie down at noon,  
lest I be like one going astray19  
by the flocks of your companions.

If you do not know,  
O fairest among women,  
go forth in the footsteps of the flock,  
and pasture your kids  
beside the shepherds’ tents.

18 Modern commentators, with the exception of André Robert, take the vineyard which the female claims as her own to be her body. Pope’s treatment is typical (323–7).

19 See הולא, ‘wander, astray’, BDB, 380, in preference to the Hebrew form derived from הולא, ‘wrap, envelop oneself’, BDB, 741. The former is supported by Syriac, Symmachus, Vulgate, and Targum, according to BHS, and makes sense in relation to the propensity of sheep for going astray, taking the woman here as herself representing the flock of Israel.
This passage is discussed at §3.13, where it is suggested that it depicts the central relationship of the entire Bible, that between the Shepherd of Israel and his chosen flock.

‘Companions’ are found also at Cant. 8: 13: ‘You who dwell in the gardens, the companions hear your voice.’ Joüon (138) interprets the companions in both places as the angels, which would make ‘the flocks of your companions’ here a poetic way, in the context of shepherds and sheep, of referring to the heavenly hosts, that is, God’s associates in the care of his creation. But the word hāberîm, ‘companions’, could mean those associated in the worship of God, as in the Jewish mystical literature, where it is much used.

The shepherd replies in terms which suggest that ‘the fairest among women’ ought to know where to find the place of food and rest but if she does not she must go forth in the footprints of the sheep, that is, those faithful followers of the shepherd who have gone before. And, walking in the same, she—now Jerusalem—is to pasture her kids (a feminine form which only occurs here in the Bible) ‘by the shepherds’ tents’. ‘Kids’ are generally kids of goats, and there is no reason to suppose they are otherwise here. But the meaning of goats rather than sheep must then be sought in the next two words, the ‘shepherds’ tents’.

The word translated ‘tents’ here is miškānôt, a plural, and poetic, form of the word which, in the singular, is used for the Tabernacle in the Pentateuch, where it is specifically the ‘dwelling-place’ of God. The plural form occurs twenty times, and the context of most of its occurrences confirm the sacred sense of the word, especially in the Psalms, for instance, 43: 3, 46: 5, and 84: 2: ‘How lovely is your dwelling place (miškēnôtēkā), O Lord of hosts.’ Modern translations give the word in the singular on the basis of a theory that it sometimes occurs in plural with singular meaning. If this is so, the miškēnôt at Cant. 1: 8 may represent the Temple itself, and the kids the goats for sacrifice, both for sin-offerings and peace-offerings, which would continue the thought we found in the ‘curtains of Solomon’ three verses earlier.

Thus the choice of the word miškēnôt conveys a sense both of the kind of ‘tents’ intended, and also the kind of shepherds who occupy them. In the prophetic literature, Jeremiah and Ezekiel above all, the shepherds are the human guardians of the flock who miserably fail in their calling by feeding themselves and not the sheep. In the Song, on the contrary, the implication is that the shepherds are fulfilling their designated role in harmony with the chief shepherd, the Shepherd of Israel.

The Masoretic text provides a second paragraph break at the end of v. 8, with good reason as the following verses take us into another area of the subject.

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20 The Targum interprets the kids here as young scholars, a commonplace, Alexander notes, in Rabbinc literature, 85 n. 60.

21 ‘How lovely’ is the usual translation here for Ἡ καλὴν ἡμῶν, but ἡ δικαιαῖη means ‘beloved’ not ‘lovely’, cf. LXX: ὡς ἀγαπητά = ‘How worthy of love’.

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To my mare among the chariots of Pharaoh
I have likened you, my companion.
Your cheeks are comely with circlets,
your neck with strings of beads.
Circlets of gold we will make for you
with studs of silver.

At Cant. 1: 9 the male figure calls the female ‘my companion’, for the first of nine times, the word meaning also ‘friend’, ‘fellow’. Perhaps it could by extension mean a very special friend, but translations such as ‘my love’ are hardly justified. The loveliest translation is found in the Latin, amica mea.

The arguments in favour of reading ‘to a mare’ and not ‘to my mare’ are set out by Pope: ‘The i ending of lesûsatî has nothing to do with the possessive suffix but is, as many commentators have recognized, the survival of the old genitive case ending dubbed hireq compaginis by early grammarians’ (338). This reading may well be the correct one, but I am inclined to think that ‘my mare’ is intended, and that she represents the people of Israel in Egypt.

But if this is the intention of the poet, the view he proposes—though consistent with his taking the opposite view to the prophets throughout—is, I believe, unique. Is he viewing the entire history of the Israelites eschatologically, showing them to be redeemed from the heavenly standpoint from the very beginning of their history? The Targumist is unable to enter into the poet’s spirit here and expounds the verse as an allusion to the rebellion of the Israelites at the Red Sea. But the Targumist, I believe, perfectly understands the next two verses as being of the very stuff of which rabbinical exegesis is able to make sense because the meaning is dependent on the Hebrew text. For this purpose, therefore, I will draw on Alexander’s notes to these two verses.

The word for ‘circlets’, tôrîm, suggests a plural form of Torah to the Targumist, thus the Written and the Oral Torah, and thus also ‘words of Torah on the cheeks’ suggests that Torah is being compared to a horse’s bridle: just as a bridle stops the horse from straying, so the words of Torah keep Israel from straying. The ‘beads’ similarly are taken by the Targumist as symbolizing the precepts of the Torah, although another way of understanding them is given (§2.5) where the musician-priestesses of Egypt, impersonating the goddess, hold out their bead necklaces for the onlookers to touch.

But to continue with the Targumist: Torah upon the neck suggests the common image of Torah as a yoke. ‘Yoke’ in turn generates the image of the ploughing ox, which is reinforced by the tôrâ/Torah wordplay. ‘Circlets of gold’ are seen to relate to Ps. 19: 11: ‘More to be desired are they [the judgements of the Lord] than gold, yea more than much fine gold’, and ‘studs of silver’ to ‘The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in the crucible’ (Ps. 12: 7). Alexander adds: ‘Here the “gold” is the inner sense (derash) of the Torah, the “silver” the outer sense (peshat).’
much more which could be drawn out from these two verses, and a study of Alexander’s notes to the Targum on them is particularly rewarding. The Song and the Targum are talking largely in the same tradition and in the same language at this point, both equally obscure to those not versed in either.

To summarize, verses 9–11 begin with a reference to ‘the chariots of Pharaoh’, which is an allusion to the time of bondage in Egypt. Contrary to the earthly history as recounted in Exodus, but even more as envisaged by Ezekiel, especially in chapter 23, the bride, under the metaphor of a mare—the only occurrence of the feminine form of ‘horse’ in the Hebrew Bible—is pictured as gloriously arrayed in the trappings of the commandments. Is it a difficulty that, according to biblical chronology, they had not yet been given? Perhaps not since the poet seems to be presenting a heavenly reality, not an earthly one.

While the king reclined at his table, my nard gave forth its fragrance

This verse is set out by itself in BHS, and as any connection with either the previous or the following verse is not clear, we will look at it on its own.

The word ‘king’ occurs in the Song four times, twice alone, 1: 4 and 12, twice combined with Solomon, 3: 9 and 11. Both occurrences of ‘king’ alone suggest being brought into a state of prayer, that is to say, into relationship with the One to whom prayer is made. The first, ‘the king has brought me into his chambers’, links with the chambers of the Temple, as we have seen, while this occurrence, linked to ‘fragrance’, also denotes a state of prayer. ‘Fragrance’ is, as we have seen (§3.5, and above at Cant. 1: 3), a key word in the Song, occurring eight times. ‘Nard’ occurs three times, here at 1: 12 and at 4: 13 and 14, and twice in the Gospels, Mark 14: 3 and John 12: 3, where the word is the same, nardos. The situation here, at Cant. 1: 12, and in these Gospels is also the same:

As he reclined, a woman came with an alabaster jar of ointment, pure nard, very costly . . . (Mark 14: 3)

There they made him a supper . . . Mary took a pound of costly ointment, pure nard . . . and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. (John 12: 3)

The same scene is found also in Matt. 26: 7–13, but the word ‘nard’ does not there occur. Of the two Gospels in which it does, only John has ‘fragrance’, osmeh. That the word ‘nard’ is used in the Gospels to point to the nature of Jesus as king and messiah is evidently known to the Targumist for he contextualizes this verse (Cant. 1: 12) to the Golden Calf episode, identifies the king not with God but with Moses, and instead of nard ‘giving forth its fragrance’ he claims it gives forth a stink: ‘the wicked of that generation . . . arose and made the Golden Calf . . . Whereas formerly their fragrance

25 A fifth occurrence at Cant. 7: 5 is given a different translation. See §4.9.
had spread through all the world, after that they stank like spikenard, the odour of which is very bad." The Targumist is employing anti-Christian polemic here as one of the spices of paradise, for which purpose he translates it by a different word meaning 'crocus'.

Three passages in relation to prayer suggest a reason for 'fragrance' being a key word in the Song. The first is from Teresa of Avila:

The whole creature, both body and soul, is enraptured as if some very fragrant ointment, resembling a delicious perfume, had been infused into the very centre of the being [marrow], or as if we had suddenly entered a place redolent with scents coming not from one, but from many objects; we do not know from which it arises nor what it is, although it entirely pervades our being.27

The second, written more than a thousand years before Teresa, is from Cassian, in his Conference IV:

Often by the sudden visitation of God, we are filled with perfumes sweeter than any made by man, so that the soul is enraptured with delight and, as it were, caught up into an ecstasy of spirit, becoming unconscious that it still dwells in the flesh.28

Thirdly, St Augustine in the Confessions (10: 27), in the famous ‘Late have I loved thee’ passage, exclaims, ‘Thou didst send forth thy fragrance, and I drew in my breath . . . ’29

13 A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me,
that abides between my breasts.
14 A cluster of cypress is my beloved to me
in the vineyards of En-gedi.

The first of these two verses suggests the opposite situation to that in Hosea at 2: 2: ‘Plead with your mother [Israel] . . . that she put away her harlotry from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts’ (§2.3). The Targumist makes a connection between the 'bundle of myrrh' and the 'binding of Isaac'. This is explained by a study of the Hebrew. The word for 'bundle', šèrôr, which BDB (865) tells us means 'prop. a binding, i.e. something bound up', is related to words for 'straits', 'distress', and, combined with myrrh, which is closely connected to a number of nouns all denoting

26 At 91 n. 95 Alexander observes: ‘Spikenard is normally regarded as sweet-smelling.’ He goes on: ‘Tg. may reflect a puritanical attitude towards perfume and cosmetics in general.’ Alexander does not share Raphael Loewè's (entirely justified, it seems to me) suspicions of the Targumist's Zweifrontenkrieg against Christianity on the one hand and Jewish esotericism on the other.
27 Benedictines of Stanbrook 1913: 158.
28 Ibid. in a footnote provided by the translators.
bitterness, whether of taste or spirit, suggests something more than Pope’s ‘a sachet of some perfumed substance’ (351). The combination leads to the story of the binding of Isaac at Gen. 22: 1–14. Thus the meaning of Cant. 1: 13 might be that while, in Hosea, it is Israel’s unfaithfulness which lies between her and God’s Torah, symbolized by the breasts, in the Song it is Israel’s faithfulness in the figure of Abraham, symbolized by the ‘bundle of myrrh’, which enables her beloved, that is, the divine presence, to abide in her midst.

Looking well below the surface of these verses it is possible to catch a glimpse of a poetic compression intended to suggest the span of Israel’s history, from the obedience of Abraham to the promise of a messiah, this latter suggested by the development of symbolism attached to ‘esköl, ‘cluster’, in early Syriac theology (§3.9), rooted in Isaiah:

Thus says the Lord,

when the new wine is found in the cluster,
then he will say, Do not destroy it,
for there is a blessing in it.
So will I do for my servants’ sake,
and not destroy them all.
I will bring forth a descendant from Jacob,
and from Judah an inheritor of my mountains;
my chosen will inherit it,
and my servants will dwell there.

(65: 8–9)

The noun kōper, translated ‘cypress’, a shrub which grows eight to ten feet in height, occurs only here, 1: 14, in the singular, twice in plural at 4: 13 and 7: 12, and not otherwise in the Bible with this meaning. The existence of such a shrub need not be doubted, but that the poet intended a literal understanding may be questioned, especially here in the singular. The verb kāpar means ‘to cover over’ in regard to sin, ‘to make propitiation, to atone’. In the majority of cases it is applied to humans atoning for sin, but BDB gives examples of God as subject, and adds somewhat ponderously: ‘It is conceived that God in his sovereignty may himself provide an atonement or covering for men and their sins which could not be provided by men’ (497 under the Piel form). If dōd represents an aspect of God in the Song, the exclamation of the female that he is a cluster of kōper may be a play on words meaning he is the source of forgiveness for Israel, the one who covers over her sins and, in the next verse, consequently, sees her as wholly ‘fair’.

En-gedi, meaning ‘eye’ or ‘spring of a kid’, does not otherwise occur in the Song but as a place name it is cited seven times in the Bible, notably at 2 Chron. 20: 2 where

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30 See Pope, 352, for a good passage on this shrub.
31 Cf. יִיָּהָ תָּבָּא – ‘Day of Atonement’. It appears unlikely that the verb and the noun meaning a shrub are related, but that would not have weighed with the poet, who is, I think, using precisely because in an unpointed text the two words would look identical.
it is stated that the place Hazazon-tamar (= ‘dividing of the palm’) is En-gedi, which links with Sir. 24: 14: ‘I grew tall like a palm tree in En-gedi’, and in turn links with Cant. 7: 8: ‘This your stature is like a palm tree / and your breasts like clusters.’ Thus, it appears that Wisdom, who speaks in the first person in Sirach, is similarly the one addressed at Cant. 7: 8, an identification supported here at 1: 14 by the address of the beloved which follows in the next verse: ‘Behold you are fair, my companion.’

15 Behold you are fair, my companion,
    behold you are fair; your eyes are doves.
16 Behold you are fair, my beloved, pleasant indeed.
    Truly our couch is luxuriant.
17 The beams of our house are cedar,
    our rafters are fir.

The exchange between the male and the female in these verses suggests a perfect equality between them, of like calling to like. The beloved declares his companion to be fair and to possess doves’ eyes. The companion declares the beloved to be fair, pleasant indeed, using a wisdom word which conveys much when its other uses resonate in the reader’s mind, as well as suggesting David, ‘the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the pleasant psalmist of Israel’ (§1.12). That the couch is ‘luxuriant’ confirms the connection with worship, whether true or false (3.§6) and also with God, to whom the phrase ‘luxuriant fir’ is applied at Hos. 14: 9. Between the words ‘luxuriant’ and ‘fir’ in our passage comes ‘The beams of our house are cedar’, which hardly needs the verse at 1 Kgs. 6: 15 to indicate its meaning (§3.6). Thus at the end of the chapter (although the chapter divisions are medieval they make good sense) we are back where we started, in the Temple.

CHAPTER 2

1 I am a bud of the plain,
    a lily of the valleys.
2 As a lily among the thorns,
    so is my companion among the daughters.
3 As an apple tree among the trees of the wood,
    so is my beloved among the sons.
    In his shade I delight and will abide,
    and his fruit is sweet to my taste.

These verses are spoken alternately, first by the woman, second by the male and third by the woman again. The translation, ‘I am a bud of the plain’, deprives us of AV’s

32 The adjective הָעַנֶּחָה, ‘pleasant’, is often translated ‘sweet’ in this line from 2 Sam. 23: 1.
lovely ‘rose of Sharon’. But we have already learnt (§3.2) that the habazelet is understood in Cant. Rabbah to be the same flower as the lily, but at an early stage of its development, namely, when it is in bud.

‘Sharon’ (šārôn) is both a proper name and a common noun meaning a ‘plain’. Neither the LXX nor the Vulgate took the word to refer to the place, but the place cannot be ruled out. BDB puts šārôn under yāsār, ‘straight, right’, all forms of which include connotations of uprightness. Jewish commentators, as far as I can discover, always read the first verse as spoken by the female. Christian commentators from Origen onwards, though not without exception, read the verse in the light of the Incarnation and therefore as spoken by the bridegroom. For the Christian reader this view is attractive but yields to the Jewish reading when the symbolism of the lily is taken into account.

The words šārôn, ‘plain’, and ‘amāqîm, ‘valleys’, with first ‘bud’ and then ‘lily’ suggest that the bride is not yet fully developed in righteousness (yāsār) but is fully developed in the depths (valleys) of tribulation. The vocabulary leads to two verses in Isaiah: ‘It [the bud] shall blossom abundantly, even with rejoicing and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon will see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God’ (35: 2). And, ‘Sharon shall be a pasture for flocks and the valley of Achor [‘trouble’] a place for herds to lie down, for my people have sought me’ (65: 10).

The male responds indirectly to the female, ‘As a lily among the thorns, so is my companion among the daughters’, that is, the nations, though the meaning of ‘daughters’ varies (§3.12). She responds similarly by likening her beloved to an apple tree, and just as he has declared that among the daughters she is as superior to the ‘thorns’ among whom she is situated as a lily, so she declares that he is as superior among the sons as an apple tree to the trees of the forest. But if the beloved belongs to the heavenly realm, who are the ‘sons’?

The Targumist takes the sons to be the angels on the basis of Gen. 6: 2 (‘The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair’), and Job 38: 7 (‘all the sons of God shouted for joy’). In an article, ‘The Targumim and Early Exegesis of “Sons of God” in Genesis 6’, Alexander writes: ‘as far back as we can go in the exegetical tradition on Gen. 6: 1–4, bēnê ’elôhim are taken as angels’. But, we learn, in time this interpretation became unacceptable, the first note of dissent being sounded in the middle of the second century CE by R. Simeon b. Yohai, who cursed all who called the bēnê ’elôhim ‘sons of God’. The article reveals the richness of the subject, but when Alexander comes to the ‘sons’ in the Targum to the Song he does not explain how the Targumist was able to remain with or restore an exegesis which had been authoritatively forbidden.

The word for ‘apple’, tappûah, occurs four times in the Song and not much otherwise. A verse in Joel at 1: 12 is set in the midst of total desolation: ‘The vine withers, the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are withered, and gladness is dried up from the people.’ On the face of it this looks like a
list of staple foods essential for life and health. But, as John Barton points out in his commentary on Joel, ‘the association of vines with fig trees is proverbial in the Old Testament, the juxtaposition usually signifying peace and prosperity’, while the presence of the pomegranate alerts us to the possibility that the list is symbolic (§5.3) as does also, I believe, the apple. Another occurrence, Prov. 25: 11—‘Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word fitly spoken’—can only be figurative. There is a paucity of reference to this fruit in the Old Testament outside the Song, which contrasts with the rest of the ancient Mediterranean world where ‘apples’ (mela, a word which covers not only apples but quinces, peaches, and pomegranates) are often found in mythology, and in Greek love spells. In regard to the Song, Pope tells us that the apple tree has a special significance in the Sumerian sacred marriage mythology, and he provides a remarkable parallel:

He has brought me into it, he has brought me into it.
My brother has brought me into the garden.
Dumuzi has brought me into the garden;
I strolled [?] with him among the standing trees,
I stood with him by its lying trees,
By an apple tree I kneeled as is proper.

Pope goes on to say (371–2) that the bride also refers to the groom as ‘My apple tree that bears fruit up to its crown.’ This background must have been known to the poet in some form or another but, without losing sight of it, there seems to me to be a further way of understanding what the poet intends by his use of tappûah, ‘apple tree’, and tappûhîm, ‘apples’, which emerges from looking at the related Hebrew forms combined with the contexts in which ‘apple’, whether the tree or the fruit, is placed.

BDB (656) puts tappûah, under the verb nâpah, ‘to breathe, blow’, and gives: ‘(from aromatic scent (breath) . . . )’. Another verb, pûah, with the same meaning, is like the word for apple, and is used in the Song at 2: 17 in a difficult verse: ‘Until the day breathes, and the shadows flee away . . . ’. Yet another word, similar in both pronunciation and meaning, is rûâh, ‘breath, wind, spirit’, while a close relation of this word is rēâh, ‘fragrance’, for which BDB (926) gives: ‘scent, odour (prop. breath)’.

An interpretation, therefore, of the apple tree which links it with ‘spirit’ or

36 Some commentators claim that the apple was unknown in Palestine in biblical times, but see Zohary 1982: 70.
37 See Christopher A. Faraone 1999, especially 69–78. But his discussion slides from the symbolic to the literal and thus claims that apples contain aphrodisiacal properties, a claim commonly made in modern discussions of the fruit in the Song, in defiance of the daily experience of eating them. I am more inclined to the view that if brides were required to eat apples on their wedding night it was not in order to arouse their libido but for the purpose of making them wholesome to their husbands. But neither is this an adequate explanation for a number of the rituals involving ‘apples’.
'fragrance' will, I believe, bring us nearer to what is intended than focusing on the fruit itself. The apple evidently does symbolize love, but in the Song it is the love which brings a person to prayer, and to the experience of dwelling in the shade of the spirit, and of tasting the sweetness of the spirit’s fruit.

4 He has brought me into the house of wine, 
   and his banner over me is love.

5 Sustain me with raisin cakes, 
   support me with apples, 
   for I am faint from love.

6 His left hand is under my head, 
   and his right hand embraces me.

7 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, 
   by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, 
   that you stir not up nor awaken 
   love ‘til it please.

At the end of 2: 3 the bride likens the beloved to an apple tree and says that in his shade she delights and will abide. The word for ‘abide’ also means ‘to sit, remain,’ and thus, seated in the shade of the apple tree or, metaphorically, of the spirit, the female describes being brought into a state of prayer: ‘He has brought me into the house of wine, and his banner over me is love.’ The allusions in this verse are complex, especially in the second half.

‘His banner over me is love’ is a much-contested translation. In a short paper, ‘The Root DGL in the Song of Songs’, Robert Gordis writes: “The traditional rendering “his banner over me is love” is highly resonant, but unfortunately it is virtually meaningless’, and by recourse to the Assyrian root he arrives at ‘His look upon me was in love, i.e. loving.’ Gordis’s reasoning was approved by Pope (375–6) and improved upon to provide ‘his intention toward me was love’, a reading now adopted by NRSV, thus depriving us of one of the most significant markers to meaning, and possibly to provenance, in the Song.

The noun degel, meaning ‘banner’ or ‘standard’ occurs thirteen times in Numbers, while the identical form to that in the Song at 2: 4, ‘his banner’, occurs twice at Num. 1: 52 and 2: 2. In addition, verbal forms occur in the Song at 5: 10; 6: 4 and 10, neither noun nor verbal forms occurring otherwise in the Bible. The meaning of ‘his banner’ in the Song is, therefore, to be sought in Numbers and, having been alerted to the understanding that the organization of the tribes in the desert reflects some divine order, that is where we are prepared to find it (§5.7).

The theme in the opening chapters of Numbers of the organization of the tribes around the Tabernacle in preparation for the journey from Sinai to the Promised

38 Robert Gordis 1969: 204.
39 There is a verbal form at Ps. 20: 6 but HALOT replaces it, incontestably, with יָדַע, ‘we will rejoice’.
Land is found in the early Rabbinic literature,\(^\text{40}\) and, no less significantly for the present purpose, forms of *degel* occur in the Hekhalot literature.\(^\text{41}\) We have already encountered (§4.3) in 3 Enoch, ‘the four great and honoured princes who are in charge of the four camps of the Shekhinah’, the heavenly counterparts to the four leading camps and their standards described at Num. 10: 14–28. The line in the Song, ‘His banner over me is love’, clearly in my view, links to all this, and informs us, it seems, that the intention of the poet is to align his work with the great theme of cosmic order described in the first ten chapters of Numbers, and taken up in much of the early Jewish mystical literature. On the parallel character of the word ‘love’ with the letters of the Tetragrammaton see §7.5.

The ‘raisin cakes’ are found at 2 Sam. 6: 19 and in the corresponding passage at 1 Chron. 16: 3. The context of these passages is the bringing of the ark into ‘the city of David’, when David whirls in an ecstasy of praise before the ark of the Lord, like a whirling dervish, after which he distributes to all the people three items of nourishment, the third being a raisin cake. It seems the poet uses the word ῥάσατοτ, ‘raisin cakes’, to remind the reader of the entry of the ark into Jerusalem and, if this is so, Tournay’s belief, that one of the poet’s concerns is to call ‘to mind the outstanding event which marked the beginning of David’s reign’ (§4.4) is given added weight.

Again Pope (384) provides a remarkable parallel to the next two lines from a Sumerian sacred marriage song:

Your right hand you have placed on my vulva,
Your left hand stroked my head.

It seems that the earlier the material the more likely sexual terms will be used. Erich Neumann refers to this in a paragraph following the one quoted in the Egyptian section (§2.5): ‘What was to be expressed had from the very outset no sexual connotations; it was meant symbolically.’ And again: ‘All visceral centres, which also function as affective centres controlling sexuality, are already centres of a higher order.’\(^\text{42}\) It appears that some concept of the spiritual senses, namely that the five senses of the physical world have an exact counterpart in the spiritual world (a concept we know from Origen, who took it up and brought it into prominence in the third century), could well have been a commonplace of understanding in earlier civilizations such as the Egyptian and the Sumerian.\(^\text{43}\) In India we find a similar tradition continuing well

\(^{40}\) See the references under לֶבַע in Jastrow. I first heard this interpretation in a class in Oxford some years ago when Professor Jonathan Webber expounded the cosmic order of the tribes around the Tabernacle in what was to me an astonishing illumination of the opening chapters of Numbers.

\(^{41}\) Forms of *degel* occur in the Hekhalot literature about twenty times. See Schäfer 1981.


\(^{43}\) An observation in the Introduction of Faraone’s book (cited earlier) is striking in this connection: ‘I shall focus mainly on the interpersonal use of love magic, that is, spells used by persons to force others to lust [because] such spells are by far the most frequently attested in our extant sources and because the Greeks themselves so frequently call attention to them in their myths and stories, a noteworthy fact when one searches in vain for any mention of the practice in ancient Mesopotamian or Egyptian myth literature’ (23–4, my emphasis).
into the Middle Ages, exemplified in the *Gita Govinda*, a long, apparently erotic poem describing the love between Krishna and Rhada, which is often referred to as the Indian Song of Songs, although the similarity between them seems to be confined to the love between the protagonists and appears not to be multi-layered in the same way as the Song.

‘I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem/by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field’. This is the first of four adjurations in the Song, the other three occurring at 3: 5; 5: 8 and 8: 4, the last two without calling on the animals as witnesses to the charge. The plural form of ‘gazelle’ only occurs in the Song with this meaning. Otherwise it means ‘hosts’: the Lord of hosts, heavenly hosts, or hosts in the sense of an army. In addition to the discussion on these creatures (§1.5), which saw them as representing Wisdom, there seems to be another link here between the four adjurations and the four standards or banners of Numbers 10, and a play on the singular form of sābā’, ‘army, host’, in the first chapter of Numbers in which the organization of the tribes for their march from Sinai to the Promised Land is described, as noted above in connection with ‘His banner over me is love.’

For it is about love, that is, in my understanding of the Song, prayer, that the daughters of Jerusalem are being adjured: ‘Stir not up nor waken love ’til it please.’ At the beginning of this unit the female declares that ‘he’ has brought her into the house of wine, that is, into a state of prayer. And this state has caused the sleep of the faculties (§7.6), which must not be disturbed by those outside it, that is, the daughters of Jerusalem. The poet envisages Jerusalem—which stands for the whole people of Israel—brought into perfect communion with her God which the nations—as the ‘daughters’ possibly here represent—are charged not to disturb.

8

The voice of my beloved!
Behold, he comes,
leaping upon the mountains,
bounding over the hills.

9

My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young hart;
behold, he stands behind our wall,
gazing through the windows,
peering through the lattice.

10

My beloved answered and said to me:
Arise, my companion,
and go forth my fair one.

11

For lo, the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.

12

The blossoms appear in the land;
the time of singing has arrived,
and the voice of the turtle-dove
is heard in our land.
The fig tree has formed its green figs, and the vines are in bud and give a fragrance.

Arise my companion, and go forth, my fair one.

And into this state of prayer comes the voice of the beloved. The word for ‘voice’ can equally be translated ‘sound’, but if there is an allusion here to the fourth of four passages in Jeremiah, 7: 34; 16: 9; 25: 10 and 33: 11, ‘voice’ is to be preferred. The first three of these depict scenes of desolation, God having caused to cease from the ‘cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem’, or from ‘this place’, or from ‘them’, the ‘voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride’. In the fourth passage, Jer. 33: 11, all is reversed: ‘Again there shall be heard in this place ... the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.’ The theme of the ‘voice of the bridegroom’ is taken up in the Gospel of John: ‘He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full’ (3: 29).

In the language of wisdom the bride then presents a picture of the beloved as like a gazelle (singular form of the word used in the adjuration) or a young hart, standing behind ‘our wall’, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice—similar to the scene at Sir. 14: 20–7—and she reports what the beloved has come ‘leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills’ to say to her: ‘Arise, my companion / and go forth my fair one.’ According to André Chouraqui, the poet is here presenting the call of God to Abraham at Gen 12: 1, and he complains that the translators who interpret הָלֵךְ לָךְ as ‘come away’ (AV, RSV, NRSV) betray, he believes, ‘le mouvement le plus profond et le plus signifiant du Cantique’. Tournay took up this idea and expanded it, as we have seen (§4.10). We will return to the motif of Abraham in the Song at the end of this chapter.

The next eight lines depict what may be seen as the raison d’être of the Song: ‘For lo, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The blossoms appear in the land, the time of singing has arrived.’ This, we are being shown, is heaven, if not yet heaven above, certainly heaven on earth. Here is the bliss of forgiveness, of communion, of nourishment by and harmony with God. In contrast, and as hell to heaven, the book of Lamentations depicts the torment of sins unforgiven, of rejection, starvation by and disharmony with God. The further difference is that the bliss described in the Song cannot be recognized as historical reality, whereas the horrors of Lamentations, whether historical in its time or not, can. The poet, I believe, is depicting the messianic age when the ideal originally intended will be restored.

44 The LXX gives διά, ‘through’, for both occurrences of יָד, usually ‘from’ in Hebrew, but ‘through’ seems to be required here. Cf. Cant. 5: 4 and BDB, p. 579, 2. (b).
45 André Chouraqui 1984: 50. But the LXX also understood ‘come’, and so did Jerome, if the verbi in the Vulgate goes back to his translation from the Hebrew. Nevertheless, Chouraqui, followed by Tournay, makes an important link with יִלַּע–יִלָּה.
The vocabulary in this unit includes several unusual words. The one about which there is most disagreement, *zāmîr*, can equally mean ‘song’, or ‘pruning’. The LXX takes it to mean ‘pruning’, and so also does the Targum. Pope has an excellent discussion (395–6), which presents both sides of the argument but comes down on the side of ‘pruning-knives’ in the light of what he calls ‘the most instructive passage’, that at Isa. 18: 5. But a much more instructive passage is that at Isa. 51: 3, which describes exactly what is being conveyed in ours, and concludes with a form of the same word for ‘song’:

For the Lord will comfort Zion,  
he will comfort all her waste places,  
and will make her wilderness like Eden,  
her desert like the garden of the Lord;  
joy and gladness will be found in her,  
thanksgiving and the voice of song (*zimrâ*).

A further point in favour of links with this passage is the next verse where the Lord says that a law, *tôrâ*, will go forth from him, and in the next line in the Song we have ‘the voice of the turtle-dove’, *qôl hattôr*, ‘is heard in our land’, which looks like a reference to the Torah. And if the Torah is heard, which is to say ‘obeyed’, then the paradisal state portrayed is the certain consequence. The Targumist takes the voice of the turtle-dove to be ‘the voice of the holy spirit’, a symbolism which, Alexander notes, while standard in Christian iconography, is harder to parallel in Rabbinic literature.

The last two lines, ‘The fig tree has formed its green figs, and the vines are in bud, giving a fragrance’, complete the paradisal picture, the juxtaposition of figs and vines, as we have seen in the discussion on apples, being symbolic of peace and prosperity (see Mic. 4: 4. for an oft-cited example). And so, having delineated a state of supernal perfection, the beloved repeats his invitation: ‘Arise my companion, and go forth my fair one.’

A Hebrew paragraph division occurs at the end of verses 8–13, and again after the next single verse—which suggests we should take it on its own.

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14 *O my dove, hidden in the clefts of the rock,*  
in the secrecy of the steep places,  
*let me see your appearance,*  
*let me hear your voice,*

46 Wilfred Watson notes that the poet is archaizing here, and showing his erudition. He goes on to say that a measure of the poet’s skill is that the central word of the stanza [2: 10–13], *RYMZ*, is an ancient Hebrew word, used in the Gezer calendar, which both epitomizes the theme of the stanza and the entire poem itself, since the word means both ‘song’ and ‘pruning’ (1986: 371).

47 Alexander 108–9 nn. 73, 77.
for sweet is your voice,
and comely your appearance.

The vocabulary of ‘hidden in the clefts of the rock, in the secrecy of the steep places’ leads in several different directions. First, the phrase ‘in the clefts of the rock’ occurs three times: here at Cant. 2: 14, Jer. 49: 16, and Obad. v. 3, these last in relation to Edom. Both Jeremiah and Obadiah foretell the total destruction of Edom, and that its rocky, mountainous country will afford no protection against God. The prophecy against Edom in Jeremiah, 49: 7–22, begins: ‘Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, Is wisdom no more in Teman, has counsel perished from the prudent?’ And the passage continues at v. 10: ‘I will strip Esau bare, I will uncover his hiding places, so that he shall not be able to hide himself.’ And at v. 16: ‘You who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who cling to the height of the hill; though you make your nest as high as the eagle’s, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord.’ And the ‘vision of Obadiah’ paints the same picture.

Likewise, the word which follows, madreģâ, meaning ‘steep’ or ‘high place’, occurs otherwise only at Ezek. 38: 20 in a passage of similar fury and destruction: ‘On that day . . . all human beings that are on the face of the earth, shall quake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground.’

The verse in the Song, on the contrary, depicts the dove, that is, Israel, dwelling securely in the clefts of the rock, safely hidden in her high place, so that the Lord is constrained to beseech her to let him have a sight of her and to hear her voice. For whereas the vocabulary suggests that it lies in his power to cast her down from her ‘clefts of the rock’ and her ‘steep place’ as in times past, now she is no longer in danger from his anger.

The word for ‘appearance’, usually glossed ‘countenance’ or ‘face’, is a noun meaning ‘sight, appearance, vision’, from the root ‘to see’. It is used widely, from the appearance of cows (Gen. 41: 2) to the appearance of the glory of the Lord (e.g. Exod. 24: 17). Combined with ‘beauty’ it is used of Sarah, Rachel, Tamar, and David. But it most often occurs in visionary sequences, notably in Daniel and Ezekiel, and frequently elsewhere. The translation ‘your face is lovely’ (NRSV) fails to convey that the dove is here addressed as wholly fitted (‘comely your appearance’) for her role as God’s chosen one.

Modern critical studies of early Syriac writings have revealed a line of tradition which takes us back to Jewish literature of the intertestamental period, 1 Enoch for instance, and to the many ideas then current about Paradise. One such study, ‘Les hymnes sur le Paradis de saint Éphrem et les traditions juives’ by Nicholas Séd, shows Ephrem’s understanding of Paradise as a mountain, a subject closely related to that of the Temple, and sees the symbolism of the Song of Songs as being among the sources for this understanding. Séd discusses the two words, sêter and madreģâ, in our present verse, and what follows is based on his study of them.
First, the word *sêter*, ‘covering, hiding place, secrecy’, occurs in three psalms which reveal it to represent a place where the righteous are hidden and protected by God: 27: 5: ‘For in the evil day he will hide me in his shelter; he will conceal me in the *secret place* of his tabernacle/tent; he will set me high on a rock’; 91: 1: ‘The one dwelling in the *secret place* of the most High, shall abide in the shadow of the Almighty’; 119: 114: ‘You are my *hiding place* and my shield.’

Séd follows these with three characteristic uses of the word in Isaiah, at 4: 6, 16: 4, and 32: 2. He then goes on to tell us that *sêter* is a technical term in Syriac (*setoro*), used by Ephrem in his description of the mountain of Paradise as the place where the souls of the righteous may wait in security for the resurrection. But it is, perhaps, on the next word, *madrêgâ*, that the argument hangs.

This word translated, he says, *faute de mieux* by *parois escarpées*, steep walls (of rock), comes from the root *drg*, admitting of the idea of a gradual elevation. He goes on to say that ‘this image of the Canticle immediately recalls the “degrees” (*deroge* in Syriac) of glory of the mountain of Paradise. One can, therefore, think that it concerns the protected shelter, hidden by the mountain, that is to say, the Shekhinah.50 Again, the importance of the Canticle of Canticles for the symbolism of Ephrem’s Paradise is evident’ (470–1).

The discussion on this verse has focused largely on the unusual vocabulary. But there is another resonance, the similarity of this scene with that at Exod. 33: 18–23. There Moses implores the Lord to allow him to see his glory and the Lord replies that he will put Moses in the cleft of the rock, and will cover him with his hand while his glory passes by, allowing him to see his back parts ‘but my face shall not be seen’. The vocabulary is not that of the Song— the poet needed to use those words which pointed to scenes of God’s anger in order to portray the reversal. But he also wishes, it seems, to suggest another reversal, one more difficult to understand but a feature of the Song, which is that the male figure, God, or the Messiah, in the interpretation given here, uses language of love and of supplication which we normally expect to be confined to the human side of the relationship. Thus, in the scene in Exodus it is Moses who begs God to reveal something of himself. But here, in the Song, it is the Lord who desires to see the appearance of the one he created to be his companion, that is, his equal.

As already noted, the Masoretes marked this verse off with paragraph divisions, which confirms its importance, and suggests that they saw the connections suggested here—and doubtless many more.

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49 See BDB under יָדָי, 201. See also S. Talmon on *'har* (1978: 433): ‘While in some cases the slopes [of mountains in Palestine] are smooth, in other cases terracing gives the impression of a stairway (*madhreqah*, Ez. 38: 20; Cant. 2: 14).’

50 Namely, God himself, and not as in the later development of the term.
We see in this verse that the ideal life, to which the bride is exhorted to rise and go, is not beyond being attacked. Although the poet is painting an idyllic picture, this verse suggests that vigilance is necessary; that there are always foxes of one kind or another who, unless seized, either by the community or by the individual, will corrupt the good fruit that is coming into bud (§3.9).

This verse occurs again at 6: 3, and the first half of it a third time at 7: 11 (7.§7). The verb ‘to pasture, tend, graze’, occurs six times, and here could mean either ‘he pastures his flock among the lilies’, as RSV/NRSV give, ‘his flock’ being supplied, or ‘he who feeds among the lilies’ (3.§13), this latter being more likely and subtly contributing to the sense of eros in the first line. My understanding of this verse is that it represents a person at prayer, the individual in turn representing the people symbolized by the lilies (3.§2) among whom the beloved ‘feeds’ when they are thus united to him.

The discussion of Cant. 2: 17 (§4.10) does not include a similar verse at 4: 6 or the final verse of the Song, which links with both the earlier verses, and, as already mentioned, further comment on all three will be found below at the last verse of the poem.

The Hebrew paragraph division given here agrees with the chapter division.

CHAPTER 3

By night on my bed I sought
him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but I found him not.
I will rise now and go about the city;
in the streets and in the broad ways
I will seek him whom my soul loves.
I sought him, but I found him not.

The watchmen who go about the city found me.
‘Have you seen him whom my soul loves?’

Hardly had I passed from them
when I found him whom my soul loves.
I held him and would not let him go
until I had brought him into my mother’s house,
and into the chamber of her who conceived me.

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field,
that you stir not up nor awaken
love ‘til it please.

These five verses are enclosed on either side by a paragraph division, and are discussed at §7.8. Here we will only note the dramatic change of scene in the first four verses of this chapter. The city has been fleetingly evoked by address to the ‘daughters of Jerusalem’ (1: 5 and 2: 7), but now we are in the city itself in contrast to the classic biblical themes of vineyards, flocks, mountains, land, fig trees, and vines of the first two chapters, and the beloved is nowhere and must be sought.

The last verse of this unit, v. 5, reveals that what the bride had failed to obtain in v. 1, that is, the sleep of the faculties in prayer, has now been granted, and there follows an exact repetition of the adjuration at 2: 7, not to awaken love ‘til it please.

Who is this coming up from the wilderness
like columns of smoke,
being censed with myrrh and frankincense,
and with every kind of powder of the merchant?
Behold his bed which is Solomon’s.
Sixty mighty men surround it
from the mighty men of Israel.
All hold a sword,
being instructed in war;
each has a sword upon his thigh,
from fear in the night

The question, ‘Who is this (fem.)?’ has received many answers but I have found none better than the one suggested by Gerald Sheppard in his *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, in which he sees a parallel between this passage in the Song and Sirach 24, where Wisdom makes her way through the cosmos to the beloved city, Jerusalem, and is given both rest and power (§1.5). I should like here to reflect further, with the help of another scholar, on the implications of the incense in this passage.

But first, the phrase ‘columns of smoke’ occurs otherwise only at Joel 3: 3 (ET 2: 30) in an apocalyptic oracle describing the ‘great and terrible day of the Lord’, the columns of smoke being one of the portents in heaven and earth. The passage in Joel is moving in the direction of Jerusalem as are the passages in the Song and in Sirach. If
the poet is recalling Joel he is giving a double meaning to the columns of smoke for in the Song they refer to incense, as the next word, a pual participle meaning ‘being censed’, related to ‘censer’, makes clear—or would make clear if the meaning of the form was understood. But translators and commentators are usually unfamiliar with censers, and with the practice of censing things and people, and of being censed, with the consequence that some odd translations are provided, BDB’s ‘fumigated’, for instance (883). The most frequent translation is ‘perfumed’, which, if not entirely incorrect, deprives us of the significance of incense in this context. And here I turn to the article, ‘Sirach and Wisdom’s Dwelling Place’, by C. T. R. Hayward.

Section 3 of this article is entitled ‘The alleged defects of the Second Temple’. These are things missing or lacking their former sanctity, and we have seen one of them—oils—at Cant. 1: 3. Here it is the incense, which would also have been missing. About this Hayward writes:

Sirach 24: 15 compares Wisdom with incense which, according to 2 Maccabees 2: 5, could not have been burned in the Second Temple . . . Elsewhere, Sirach compares incense with wisdom and its students (39: 13–14); and a similar tradition linking wisdom with Torah study is found in the Qumran literature at 4Qflor 1: 6–7, and in Rabbinic texts like b. Men 110a; Ber. 43b, and PJ of Exod 40: 5. In all these sources, including Sirach, biblical information about the incense is assumed: of the highest degree of holiness, it is offered next to the divine Presence (Exod 30: 36). Like the anointing oil, it is confined to the sanctuary: imitations for use outside the holy place are forbidden under the strictest penalties (Exod 30: 32–33, 37–38).

Hayward then goes on to say that the references to Wisdom’s tabernacling in the holy tabernacle (24: 8, 10) now take on an added meaning: ‘It seems that Sirach is joining hands with defenders of the sanctity of the Second Temple.’ The description of the figure being censed with myrrh and frankincense on the way to Jerusalem at Cant. 3: 6 is, I believe, making the same point. That the author of the Song makes it in one verse while Ben Sira takes twelve is typical of their very different styles although, if Sirach pre-dates the Song, it could be attributed to the poet needing to do no more than allude to his predecessor.

If the first three lines of 3: 6 exercise the minds of commentators, the ‘merchant’ in the fourth tends to render them quiescent, modern commentators passing lightly and sometimes altogether over the subject. But an examination of rókel in Ezekiel, emporos in Revelation, and taggara in Syriac tradition, reveals that there is quite a lot to be gained from the role of the ‘merchant’.

In Ezekiel and the Apocalypse he is portrayed negatively as an enabling element in the kind of commerce which is corrupting Tyre and Babylon. Approaching this question from the perspective of the Song we find that there is a significant overlap of vocabulary between Ezekiel 27 and the Song, but even more so in the description of the cargo at Rev. 18: 12–13. The list consists of twenty-eight nouns, five of which have no counterpart in Hebrew. Of the remaining twenty-three, sixteen are explicitly in the

51 HALOT overlooks the form altogether. The LXX gives a perfect passive participle, τεθυµιαµένη, which is similarly overlooked in the concordance of Hatch and Redpath.

52 1999: 39.
Song as follows: gold, silver, precious stone, marble, purple, scarlet, wood, ivory, cinnamon, spice, incense, frankincense, wine, oil, sheep, and horses. Another item with which the merchants trade in both Ezekiel (27: 13) and Revelation (18: 13) is ‘souls’, often understood to mean traffic in slaves. We will shortly see, when looking at the positive role of the merchant, that ‘souls’ fits.

The correspondence between the list in Revelation and the vocabulary of the Song is suggestive. The list is generally taken as consisting of the items of those days in which a merchant would trade. And doubtless that is what it is. But the connection of so many of the items with the cult is striking. Tyre and Babylon are extreme examples of one of the chief concerns of the biblical literature: the misuse of religion to create power and wealth, thus corrupting the cult, and turning all its original goodness to arrogance, to usurpation of the purposes of God for its own purposes. And so it is God who decrees their ruin. Consequently the merchants are themselves brought to ruin through the ruin of that which they serve.

But in Syriac tradition the merchant is presented as serving the interests of God. In a chapter called ‘Titles shared by Christ and Apostles, Bishops’, Murray writes: ‘Another figure expressing apostolic functions is that of a merchant (taggara), either seeking the pearl which is Christ, or trading with talents.’ He goes on to say that although the immediate source of both allusions is the Gospels, the image has a long prehistory in Mesopotamian religious language, and he provides a substantial footnote indicating ancient sources, which includes: ‘The divine merchant (the saviour or his agent) deals in merchandise, i.e. souls and their merits, which will be subjected to scrutiny by the heavenly customs officers’ (174–5).

In the Song, however, it is the negative role of the merchant in Ezekiel which is reversed, the poet showing that this merchant is properly providing for the worship of the Temple, the implicit subject from ‘Who is this?’ to the end of the chapter. ‘Behold his bed which is Solomon’s’ is interpreted by the Targum as a metaphor for the Temple as also by Numbers Rabbah 11: 3: ‘Behold the litter alludes to the Temple.’ The ‘sixty mighty men’ are taken by both the Midrash and the Targum to be the sixty letters of the Priestly Blessing at Num. 6: 24–6 which protects Israel like an encircling wall, and was regarded, Alexander tells us, as one of the most potent spells in Jewish magic. 53

Alexander cites a further meaning for the ‘mighty men of Israel’ from parallels in Numbers Rabbah where they are taken to be ‘the Priests, the Levites and all the tribes of Israel’ (123 n. 35). But this would be more easily understood if they represent the Levites only. For what follows, ‘each with his sword upon his thigh’, recalls Exod. 32: 26–7 where, after the episode of the Golden Calf, the Levites gather themselves to Moses, who says to them: ‘Put every man his sword upon his thigh . . .’. The wording of Exod. 32: 27 is identical with the wording at Cant. 3: 8, and I think the poet has preserved this one detail from the story of the Golden Calf because he understands the command to the Levites, ‘Put every man his sword upon his thigh, go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man

53 Alexander 123 n. 34, 123 n. 35, 124 n. 38.
his companion, and every man his neighbour', to mean something like: cut down those earthly ‘attachments’ which lie at the root of apostasy. The command from Moses is difficult, even read metaphorically, but read literally it would mean that the Levites—since all of them were gathered to Moses—slaughtered each other. A further clue is found at Deut. 33: 8–11 where Moses blesses the children of Israel before his death:

for they [the Levites] have kept your word
and guarded your covenant.
They shall teach Jacob your judgements
and Israel your law;
they shall put incense before you,
and whole burnt offerings upon your altar.

(9b–10)

The last verse of the passage asks God to bless Levi’s virtue and the work of his hands and concludes—and this may be the point—with the request to God to crush the loins of his adversaries, of those that hate him, that they rise not again. Thus, there may be an implicit polemic on behalf of the Levites at Cant. 3: 7–8.

To return to the Targum, Alexander notes that at Cant. 3: 8, ‘from fear in the night’ the Targumist heard an echo of Ps. 91: 5–6: ‘You shall not be afraid of the terror by night’, and he goes on to say that Psalm 91 was regarded in Rabbinic magic as an incantation against demons, which agrees with the sense of Cant. 3: 8.54

The Masoretic text provides a paragraph break between 3: 8 and 9, and there is certainly an alteration of tone though not, I think, of subject.

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

10 He made its pillars of silver,
its support of gold,
its seat of purple,
its interior paved with stones.

11 Daughters of Jerusalem go forth,
and behold, O daughters of Zion,
King Solomon in the crown,
with which his mother crowned him
on the day of his nuptials,
and on the day of the gladness of his heart.

In b. Soferim, we read: ‘All occurrences of the name of Solomon in the Song of Songs are sacred except one which is secular. Which one is it? “Behold, it is the litter of Solomon” (3: 7). Others say: “Thou, O Solomon, shalt have the thousand”’ (8: 12).

54 Alexander 124 n. 40.
But I would like to suggest—if there must be one occurrence when God is not given the title ‘King of Peace’ in the Song—that it is here, and that we read ‘King Solomon made for him [namely for God] a palanquin’, the ‘palanquin’ and all that follows representing the Temple which Solomon did indeed make for God. This kind of cryptic allusion is so typical of the poet that I find it difficult to take the line in any other sense. On the other hand, if Solomon stands for God here, which is not disputed in rabbinical exegesis, then God must be understood as the real builder of the Temple.

‘Palanquin’ translates a word of obscure origin, ‘appiryôn, not otherwise in the Hebrew Bible (see Pope, 441). ‘From the wood of Lebanon’ recalls Solomon’s speech to Hiram, King of Tyre (§4.11). In this account of the building of the Temple (1 Kgs. 5: 5, 6) there is no mention of silver until its completion when Solomon ‘brought in the holy things of his father David, the silver, the gold and the vessels . . .’ (1 Kgs. 7: 51). But at 1 Chron. 22: 14 David tells Solomon: ‘With great pains I have provided for the house of the Lord one hundred thousand talents of gold, one million talents of silver’. For a possible explanation of ‘its seat of purple’, with its suggestion of a link to ‘chariot mysticism’, see §4.4.

The attempts to amend the Hebrew in the line ‘its interior paved with love, from the daughters of Jerusalem’ are numerous. The word generally translated ‘paved’ is a passive participle of a verb meaning ‘to fit out, fit together’ and does not occur otherwise in the Bible. Michael Fox translates ‘its interior laid with stones’ because, as he rightly observes, the noun derived from the verb, rispâ, means ‘pavement’, and ‘always applies to floors’. The floors are those of the Temple, cf. 2 Chron. 7: 3; Ezek. 40: 17–18, and the stones are found at 1 Kgs. 5: 17: ‘And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, to lay the foundation of the house.’ Again at 1 Chron. 22: 2 ['David] set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God.’ Fox’s amendment becomes the more compelling the more references to stones for the building of the Temple are studied, while a comparison of the word for ‘stones’ and a plural form for ‘love’ supports the suspicion of some corruption having taken place. The next verse, then, has the daughters of Jerusalem in parallel with the daughters of Zion and, thus amended, these verses give the sense of meaning restored.

The last verse of chapter 3 brings it to a glorious conclusion. Reflecting on the name Solomon earlier in the passage, Theodoret links it to 1 Chron. 22: 9–10: ‘His name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel for ever.’ On the reason why it is Solomon’s mother who crowns him, Gregory of Nyssa connects the mother in this verse with God who crowns the king in Ps. 21: 4, saying that the terms ‘mother’ and ‘father’ mean the same where God is concerned since there is neither male nor female in God. This seems to me a point of great importance, but I think the ‘mother’ in the Song points to

55 M. V. Fox 1985: 126.
56 רספ = ‘stones’, and לוב = a plural form of ‘love’, the meaning of which is far from certain. It occurs, for instance, at Prov. 5: 19, usually translated ‘loving’ (‘loving hind’), and at Prov. 7: 18 no less incomprehensibly.
Wisdom, especially here since it was with wisdom that Solomon was crowned in consequence of his request for it. Perhaps Gregory was not entirely satisfied with his explanation for he concludes: ‘But it would be more effective to set out the divine words themselves, which go exactly like this: ‘Daughters of Jerusalem go forth, and behold, O daughters of Zion, King Solomon in the crown, with which his mother crowned him on the day of his nuptials, and on the day of the gladness of his heart.’

CHAPTER 4 (UP TO 5: 1)

Behold, you are fair, my companion, 
behold, you are fair; your eyes are doves 
from behind your veil.
Your hair is like a flock of goats 
which have come forth from Mount Gilead.
Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes, 
which have come up from the washing; all of them bear twins; not one among them has miscarried.
Like a thread of scarlet are your lips, and your mouth is comely.
Your temple is like a slice of pomegranate behind your veil.
Your neck is like the tower of David built in terraces, on which hang the thousand shields, all bucklers of mighty men.
Your two breasts are like two young harts; twins of a gazelle that feed among the lilies.
Until the day breathes and the shadows disappear, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense.
You are all fair, my companion; there is no blemish in you.

These verses are enclosed on either side by a Masoretic paragraph division. But the subject of the whole of chapter 4, and the first verse of chapter 5—seventeen verses—is solidly, I believe, the Temple, the central section of the book being given to this theme.

58 McCambley 1987: 152–3, except that I have used my translation for the verse from the Song.
First, we note that it is the male voice which speaks throughout except—when we come to them—for two lines at 4: 16. He praises the different parts and the different functions of the Temple in the language of address to the ‘bride’: ‘Behold, you are fair, my companion, behold you are fair; your eyes are doves behind your veil.’ This is a repetition of 1: 15, where the context is also the Temple, but here with the addition of ‘behind your veil’, which occurs also at 4: 3 and again at 6: 7, three times in the Song and otherwise only at Isa. 47: 2. This word, šammâ, against which BDB (855) has ‘woman’s veil’ (similarly HALOT), is difficult and has, as Pope rightly says in a good discussion (458), been troublesome to early translators and interpreters.59

‘Your hair is like a flock of goats, which have come forth60 from Mount Gilead’ also occurs at 6: 4 except that ‘Mount’ is there lacking. As we have seen, the curtains of the Tabernacle are made of goats’ hair, the word ‘hair’ being implicit in Exodus and Numbers in the references to ‘goats’. In the Song ‘hair’ is supplied in the praise of the female, and is an indication that she represents the Temple in these passages. The significance of Mount Gilead is difficult, as the silence of commentators on the subject testify, though Ellen Davis is an exception with: ‘Gilead . . . evokes a series of associations with the foundational period of Israel’s history. Here the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh settled at the end of the wilderness wandering [and] God first brought deliverance to Israel through Saul (1 Sam. 13)’ (264). Without losing that interpretation, another is suggested in the covenant made between Jacob and Laban at Genesis 31 where the words gal, ‘heap, wave, billow’, and ēd, ‘witness’, are put together (v. 48) to form a play on the name Gilead. Thus, if the poet is praising the curtains of the Temple he is also, it seems, alluding—in ‘which have come forth from Mount Gilead’—to the flight of Jacob from Laban, Laban’s pursuit, and their meeting on Mount Gilead, the combination ‘mount’, or ‘mountain’, and ‘Gilead’ occurring three times in the story of Laban’s pursuit, Gen. 31: 21, 23, 25, a fourth time here at Cant 4: 1, and not otherwise. What can be said in support of this suggestion?

The story at Genesis 31 concerns Jacob’s response to God’s instruction to him—in language which echoes God’s call to Abraham at Gen. 12: 1—to return to the land of his fathers. That the poet intends to evoke the story of Jacob’s flight from Laban is further suggested by the similarity of vocabulary with Jacob’s protest when Laban overtakes him: “These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried”. The word translated ‘miscarry’, šākal, meaning primarily ‘to be bereaved of children’, also occurs at Exod. 23: 26: ‘There shall not be any who miscarry or are barren in your land.’ And whereas the Exodus verse is preceded by God’s warning to the people that he will send an angel before them, the episode at Mount Gilead is followed by Jacob being met by the angels of God, as we have seen when considering the meaning of Mahanaim at Cant. 7: 1 (§4.3).

These ‘hidden’ allusions to Jacob give the sense that Jacob is like a watermark in the paper of the biblical scroll. Behind the letters his face may, here and there, be dimly

59 More recently, an essay by Jane Barr (1994) informs us that according to Luis de Leon the word šammâ means both ‘locks of hair’ and the female pudenda—an interpretation fortunately unknown to Pope who would have given us at least ten pages on it.

60 See Jastrow under ḫōl, 251, where Cant. Rabbah on this verse is cited.
discerned. He is, after all, Israel, and it is with Israel as land and as community in loving relationship with God that the poet is concerned. This loving relationship between God and Jacob/Israel is shown in a unique passage which depicts the *eros* of God in ‘bridal’ mode, the only passage in the early Jewish mystical literature, as far as I am aware, to do so. It occurs in the context of the *yorde merkava*, the adept who descends to the chariot, the emissary of Israel whose task is to secure communion with God, and who is the one addressed in the opening line. Here is the translation of the passage in Morray-Jones:

And bear witness to them of what you see of me; what I do to the countenance of Jacob, your father, which is engraved by me on the throne of my Glory. For at the time when you recite before me: Holy! Holy! Holy! . . . I bend down towards him and caress him, embrace him and kiss him, with my hands upon his arms, three times, corresponding to the three times at which you recite the *qedushah* before me, as it is written: Holy! Holy! Holy is the Lord of Hosts! 61

On the text set out above, Morray-Jones writes:

it is clear that Jacob’s image functions as the heavenly representative of the community of Israel, which is frequently portrayed in biblical tradition as God’s beloved bride. This is a theme which continues to be developed in rabbinic literature—above all in the context of midrashic exegesis of the Song of Songs. In this passage, then, the community—as bride—is figuratively identified with the celestial throne on which God appears in his visible Glory. Moreover, the liturgical action which brings about this visible enthronement—recitation of the *qedushah* [‘Holy, holy, holy’]—is here presented as an intimate and tender act of ‘marital’ union. In this loving interchange, Jacob’s image, being the personification of the ‘bride’, necessarily occupies the ‘feminine’ role.62

‘Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes’. The Targumist understands the teeth as representing the two matching orders of Priests and Levites who eat the priestly gifts, and he compares these gifts to a flock in the line ‘Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes’. Alexander explains: “The “flock” to which the priestly gifts are compared is not just any flock, but Jacob’s flock, at a significant moment in the sacred history, namely when he is about to wrestle with the angel.”63 The Targumist is alerted to Jacob by the word ‘ewes’ because, except for the two references in the Song, 4: 2 and 6: 6, the word occurs only once with the meaning ‘ewe’ (at Isa. 53: 7: ‘as a ewe before her shearers is dumb’) apart from Jacob, who not only possessed ewes (Gen. 31: 38 and 32: 15) but loved Rachel, whose name means ‘ewe’. Thus we see another example, in the two references to ewes, of hidden allusions to Jacob.

There might be yet another in ‘All of them bear twins’, Jacob and Esau being twins. The author of the Song is the only biblical writer to use the verb ‘be double’ (here at 4: 2 and again at 6: 6, two identical passages about bearing twins) apart from Exod. 26: 24 and 36: 29, where, in both places, the instruction is to make two boards for the corners of the Tabernacle which shall be *coupled together* above and beneath. And he is likewise unique in his use of the noun ‘twins’, at Cant. 4: 5 and 7: 4 (both in relation to ‘breasts’), which otherwise only occurs in the narratives of Gen. 25: 24 (birth of Jacob

61 2009: 504. 
62 Ibid. 505. 
63 Alexander 131 n. 9.
and Esau) and 38: 27 (birth of twins to Tamar). Here, in this passage, there is a concentration in vv. 1–5 of doubles or things in pairs: the word ‘fair’ occurs twice in v. 1 followed by eyes of which there are two; teeth are in two sets, an upper and a lower; the flock of shorn ewes all bear twins; lips, like teeth, have an upper and a lower part. Moreover, passing over v. 3a for the moment, 3b, ‘Your temple is like a slice of pomegranate’, contains a rare word for ‘slice’ about which Pope writes: ‘The word may designate either of two parts of a divided object as seen from its application to millstones, both upper and lower . . . Whether the reference is to temples or cheeks, the aspects both of unity and duality are implicit’ (464). And at v. 5, ‘Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.’ In addition, the poet repeats many verses twice, these, for instance, occurring again in chapter 6. It seems that the poet is alluding to a tradition made explicit in Sirach, as we saw in the Introduction (§5): ‘All things are twofold, one opposite the other ’ (42: 24) or, from the same source: ‘Look at all the works of the Most High; they come in pairs, one opposite the other’ (33: 15). But he is also, I believe, making a connection with the two tablets of stone— which thus appropriately ascribes a double motive to his double images and doubling of verses.

Returning to 3a, the line ‘Your lips are like a thread of scarlet’ is generally seen by commentators to be an allusion to the story of Rahab and the two Israelite spies at Joshua 2, the words ‘scarlet thread’ being identical in both places, and the combination not otherwise occurring. This is confirmed, I believe, by the beginning of the sentence (Josh. 2: 18) in which the scarlet thread occurs: ‘Behold, when we come into the land’, the land being one of the principal heroines of the Song, as we have seen, especially at Cant. 7: 1–5. AV’s ‘Your mouth is comely’, in the next line, agrees with BDB: ‘mouth, as organ of speech’ (184).

‘Your neck is like the tower of David built in terraces, on which hang the thousand shields, all bucklers of mighty men.’ We saw (§4.8) that a ‘tower of David’ is not attested in the biblical literature, but there was a tradition of calling the Temple a ‘tower’; and although it was Solomon who built the Temple, the idea and the pattern for it came from David (see especially the account of the Chronicler, 1 Chronicles 28). From Pope’s discussion of v. 4, I have taken Delitzsch’s ‘built in terraces’: ‘[Delitzsch] opted for the sense “built in terraces”, with the explanation that the damsel’s neck was surrounded by ornaments so that it did not appear as a uniform whole, but as composed of terraces [which] he supposed were built one above the other like the Babylonian ziggurat’ (466–7). The language of the Song frequently leads to ziggurats, which encourages me to adopt a related word here.

There are two references, the first at Ezek. 27: 10–11, and the second at 1 Macc. 4: 57, which indicate the use of shields to decorate walls, the walls of the Temple in Maccabees. Indeed, the line in the Song sounds like an allusion to 1 Macc. 4: 57, and further encourages a late dating for the Song.

‘Your two breasts are like two young harts, twins of a gazelle.’ This line seems a particularly good example of Ben Sira’s ‘Look at the works of the Most High; they come in pairs . . . ’ coupled with the interpretation of the two breasts being a metaphor for the two tablets of the law.

‘Until the day breathes and the shadows flee’ is an exact repetition of 2: 17a, there
followed by 'turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young hart upon the mountains of cutting', here followed by 'I will get me to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense.' Thus the passage closes with a reference to myrrh, a constituent of the holy anointing oil, and to frankincense, the word meaning both incense and the mountain range, Lebanon, which provided the trees for building the Temple.

And so the beloved declares again: ‘You are all fair, my companion, and in you there is no blemish.’ The word ‘blemish’ is translated by \( \mu \omega \mu \sigma \) in the LXX and consequently links, as has often been noticed, with the passage in Ephesians where the writer, in the context of marriage, instructs his readers:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (\( \alpha \mu \omega \mu \sigma \)). (5: 25–7)

Whether the author of Ephesians was consciously making a link with the Song we do not know. But, conscious link or not, both writers are talking about the same thing, namely, the Temple or Church—the subject, I believe, of what follows.

8  

Come from Lebanon, O bride,  
    come, journey from Lebanon;  
    travel from the top of Armana,  
    from the top of Senir and Hermon;  
    from the dens of lions,  
    from the mountains of leopards.

9  

You have struck at my heart, my sister, my bride,  
    you have struck at my heart with one of your eyes,  
    with one bead from your necklace.

10  

How fair are your breasts, my sister, my bride,  
    how much better your breasts than wine,  
    and the fragrance of your oils  
    more than all spices.

11  

Your lips, O bride, drop flowing honey;  
    honey and milk are under your tongue,  
    and the fragrance of your garments  
    is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

The MT marks the beginning and end of this passage with a paragraph break which agrees with the inclusio provided by the word ‘Lebanon’ in the first and the last line: ‘Come from Lebanon, O bride . . . the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.’

For a discussion of v. 8 see §4.11. The verses which follow, 9 and 10, convey kinship with the Egyptian material (§2.5): in the use of ‘sister’ glossed with ‘bride’; in the bead necklaces of the musician-priestesses who impersonate the goddess Hathor; and in
the use of the word for ‘breasts’, dd, usually translated ‘love’. This word is also used in the Egyptian material, we learn from Fox (88), and it is worth noting that in its five occurrences in the Song (1: 2; 1: 4; 4: 10 (twice); and 7: 13) one senses the Egyptian influence. The second half of v. 10 is almost an exact repetition of the opening verses, 1: 2 and 4, except that while at Cant. 1: 2–3 the female declares: ‘your breasts are better than wine. For fragrance your oils are good’, at Cant. 4: 10 it is the male voice which declares: ‘how much better your breasts than wine, and the fragrance of your oils more than all spices.’

At v. 11 there is a line redolent of wisdom vocabulary: ‘Your lips, O bride, drop flowing honey; honey and milk are under your tongue.’ The application by the Talmud to chariot mysticism of this verse in the Song suggests a long tradition, while the image of lips dripping flowing honey takes us back to Proverbs, where it is applied to the ‘strange woman’, namely, the woman who represents the seductive power of false religion (§1.9).64

‘And the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.’ We have seen (§3.4) that the phrase ‘like the fragrance of Lebanon’ only occurs otherwise at Hos. 14: 6 (7 Hebrew) where it refers to Israel, and is one of the blessings which will come upon him when he returns to the Lord his God. There the one addressed by God is male, here female; there Israel, here the Temple. We are also reminded of Jacob obtaining the blessing from Isaac, who ‘smelled the smell of his raiment’ (Gen. 27: 27), the word ‘smell’ or ‘fragrance’ being used twice there as here.

A garden barred is my sister, my bride;
a spring barred, a fountain sealed.
Your shoots are a paradise of pomegranates,
with excellent fruit;
cypresses with nards.
Nard with saffron,
calamus and cinnamon,
with all trees of frankincense;
myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.
A spring of gardens, a well of living water,
and flowing streams from Lebanon.
Awake north wind, and come O south!
Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow forth!
Let my beloved come into his garden,
and eat its choice fruits.

64 The word ‘strange’, ṣēer, used of the ‘strange woman’ in Proverbs, is identical with the word at Exod. 30: 9 forbidding the offering of ‘strange’ incense on the altar of incense.
CHAPTER 5

I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride,
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.
I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey,
I have drunk my wine with my milk.
Eat, friends! Drink and be drunk, beloved ones!

A paragraph break at 4:11 and again at 5:1 suggests that these six verses should be taken together (see §5.2 to §5.6). But taking all seventeen verses of chapter 4, including 5:1, together, we see that they are all spoken by the male except for the second half of v. 16, ‘Let my beloved come into his garden’, which can only be spoken by the female since only she uses the term ‘beloved’.

The unit ends with: ‘Eat, friends! Drink and be drunk, beloved ones!’, which I understand as giving permission to the proficients of mystical prayer to enjoy freely the fruits of their long and difficult apprenticeship in the practice of divine loving (§5.6).

CHAPTER 5 (CONTINUED FROM 5:2)

I sleep, but my heart is awake.
A sound! My beloved is knocking!
Open to me, my sister, my companion,
my dove, my perfect one,
for my head is full of dew,
my locks with the drops of the night.

I have put off my tunic,
how shall I put it on?
I have washed my feet,
how shall I defile them?

My beloved put his hand through the opening
and my inward parts were moved for him.

I rose up to open to my beloved,
and my hands dripped with myrrh,
my fingers with flowing myrrh,
upon the handles of the bolt.

I opened to my beloved,
but my beloved had turned and gone.
My soul went forth at his departing. 65
I sought him, but I found him not;

65 Following a suggestion from Dr Hughes based on a cognate in Arabic, dabara.
I called him, but he did not answer me.

The watchmen who go about the city found me,
they smote me, they wounded me;
the keepers of the walls
took my veil from me.

A paragraph break marks 5: 2 but there is not another one until 6: 3. Here we will look at the six verses of 5: 2–7.

There is, it seems to me, a theology of God and the Temple implicit in the Song which is exactly analogous to the theology of Christ and the Church. Thus the bride in the Song is much more than the Temple building just as the bride of Christ, the Church, is much more than the structures in which God is worshipped, for she is both structure and worshipper. The teaching of Paul illumines the relationship between God and the Temple, as understood by our author, quite as much as it guided the nascent Church. ‘Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?’ Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians (3: 16). And in his second, ‘I betrothed you to Christ, to present you as a pure bride to her one husband’ (11: 2). Again, in the letter to the Ephesians, as we have seen, the writer compares the relationship between a husband and his wife to Christ and his Church, an analogy he calls a ‘great mystery’.

Here at 5: 2, the change of speaker appears to mark a change of subject, but there is only, I believe, a change of aspect. Throughout chapter 4 the bridegroom has been praising the bride as ‘Temple’. Now we encounter her as the ‘Assembly’ or the people of God. And in this aspect she is still on the way, still capable of failing—which indeed she does. Here, in a passage spoken by the bride about the bridegroom, approximately equal in length to his, the response of the female falters. We will look first at the six verses set out above.

‘I sleep, but my heart is awake.’ 66 This highly compressed half-line reveals the poet as one experienced in mystical prayer, which explains the Song’s resonance with those who pray similarly. Teresa of Ávila’s analysis of states of prayer, as we saw (§7.6), identifies a state which she calls the ‘sleep of the faculties’, and this, I believe, is what the poet is describing at 5: 2. An early commentator, Gregory of Nyssa, provides a remarkable commentary on this verse (§7.6), and I should like to adduce other early commentators, but several of particular interest, Origen, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, did not get as far as 5: 2. Others seem not to have seen a reference to prayer in this verse.

Among Jewish commentators I have not been able to discover any who tie this experience of prayer to 5: 2 of the Song. Maimonides quotes the verse in The Guide of the Perplexed, but in connection with having one’s mind always on God, even whilst speaking with others, or attending to bodily wants, which does not at all suggest the ‘sleep of the faculties’, though in all probability he knew this state.67 That Abulafia

66 The Greek and Latin versions translate the Hebrew waw as ‘and’, which is what it normally means, and perhaps is what should be given here.

knew such a level of prayer is beyond doubt, but he did not, it seems, attach it to the experience described at Cant. 5: 2. Moshe Idel, Abulafia’s modern exponent, questions Abulafia’s use of Maimonides’ teachings and his Guide as a point of departure for his non-Maimonidean view of unio mystica and asks: ‘Why did he stick to the Guide, interpreting its secrets which hint at the possibility of mystic union, instead of commenting upon the Song of Songs?’

There are several descriptions in the chapter ‘Death and Desire in Jewish Spirituality’ in Fishbane’s The Kiss of God which indicate that the state is known and has been practised down the centuries, while Fishbane himself glosses the reference to Cant. 5: 2 in Maimonides in a way which suggests knowledge: ‘a numbing of the exterior senses so that the presence of God may be acquired in pure inwardness’ (30).

Then, while the bride is deep in prayer, ‘gripped by inaction’, as Gregory puts it, there is the sound of the beloved knocking: ‘Open to me, my sister, my companion, my dove, my perfect one.’ ‘My perfect one’ (tammātī) occurs here and again at 6: 9, where it is also juxtaposed with ‘my dove’ (yōnātī). There is a passage in Fishbane’s Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking which cites Rabbinic perceptions of the parity between God and Israel precisely, I believe, as the author of the Song wishes it to be understood:

We begin with the myth of complementarity. It repeatedly comes to expression around the phrase ‘My dove, My pure one (tamati)’ (Songs 5: 2), which in numerous homilies is part of God’s response to the people’s expression of love and expectation in the first part of the verse. According to R. Yannai, when God calls the people tamati he intends tomyati, ‘My twin’, by which is meant equivalence: ‘I am not greater (or older) than she, and she is not greater (or older) than I’. By this assertion the sage seems to have God acknowledge the covenantal complementarity of Israel and her Lord. But R. Yehoshua of Siphnin went further, reporting in the name of R. Levi (early third century, Palestine): ‘The matter may be compared to twins (te’omin). Just as one of them will feel the head pain experienced by the other, so the Holy One, blessed be He, said, “I shall be with him in affliction” (Ps. 91: 15).’ Thus the word tamati is taken to encode God’s confirmation that He is ‘paired’ with Israel in suffering.

We have seen above (Commentary at Cant. 4: 2) that the author of the Song is unique in his use of the word tē’ōmīm, ‘twins’. But he shows us that the primary ‘pairing’ with God is in love, not in suffering, except when there is a failure of love on the human side. Thus the importance of the Song for the Scriptures is that it supplies what would otherwise be lacking: a book devoted to this primary ‘pairing’—though what follows in the Song is a failure in the created ‘twin’ which does indeed lead to suffering.

The beloved goes on: ‘for my head is full of dew, my locks with the drops of the night’. It seems that, even though the bride is ‘asleep’ in prayer, and has consequently drawn the beloved to her door, he is complaining of being kept out. And her reply confirms this impression: ‘I have put off my tunic, how shall I put it on? I have washed...”

my feet, how shall I defile them?’ If ‘I sleep, but my heart is awake’ is a line of exceptional significance, this one is even more so. The first reveals the author as depicting a state of prayer, and the second suggests that he lived in a milieu of intense asceticism, that is, in a milieu which, by ascetical practices, believed it possible to remove the consequences of disobedience, the ‘garments of skin’, with which God clothed the first transgressors (§7.9). That they can to some extent be removed by the subjugation of the corporeal, is implicit in this verse, but there is always more which—as the poet makes clear in v. 7—can only be removed by God or by his appointed agents. The claim made next by the female, to have washed her feet so that she cannot therefore be expected to defile them, seems also to belong to the poet’s view that rising up in response to love’s demands and not settling down with ideas about perfection is what is being asked of her.

And so she discovers. The beloved puts his hand through the opening, a movement which stirs her ‘inward parts’ (§7.9–10), silences her reasons for staying put, and causes her to rise up and open to him. ‘My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh upon the handles of the bolt.’ The scene is more redolent of eros than any other in the Song, moving the reader at one level or another by language and imagery which touches the ‘inward parts’ with a sense of extraordinary intimacy.70 ‘Myrrh’ is seen to be closely related to a number of nouns denoting bitterness, while in this context its use apparently foresees the bitterness of losing the beloved, and the encounter with the watchmen. It seems that if ‘myrrh’ in its eight occurrences in the Song is accompanied by ‘frankincense’ then it relates to the holy anointing oil, but if it occurs alone, as here, it relates to words meaning ‘bitter’ and, consequently, to suffering.

After opening to the beloved and finding him gone, seeking and calling him and receiving no answer, the bride is found by the watchmen who are, I believe, to be identified with those appointed by God to guard the walls of Jerusalem at Isa. 62: 6. They smite and wound her and remove from her that final covering she thought she had removed but which, she now discovers, could only be removed by a power greater than any she possessed (§7.9). Then she addresses the ‘nations’:

8

I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
if you find my beloved,
what will you tell him?
[Tell him] that I am faint from love.

9

What is your beloved more than another beloved,
O fairest among women?
What is your beloved more than another beloved,
that you so charge us?

The word translated ‘faint’ here, could mean ‘sick’ (§7.8). The same phrase, ‘I am sick
The influence of this passage on early Jewish mysticism tells us how it was understood by the writers and practitioners of that literature. But the passage also suggests, more clearly, perhaps, than any other in the Song, some of the influences which went to form it. In Chapter 6 we examined the first three lines (§6.1) and noted a number of links to theophanic and apocalyptic texts which suggest that this description of the beloved represents the messianic, ‘son of man’ / ‘son of God’ figure found in several works of the late Second Temple period. The study ‘The Body of the Glory: Approaching the New Testament from the Perspective of Shiur Koma Traditions’, by C. R. A. Morray-Jones, led to our looking at the significance of the use of Cant. 5: 10–16 in the Shiur Koma literature and the evidence such use implies for the original understanding of the Song (§6.3). But from the standpoint of translating the passage, the influence upon it of the description of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (§6.2) is also, I believe, important. Even so, the passage is particularly impenetrable, and I can do no more than attempt to convey some of the ideas the vocabulary suggests to my understanding.

To pick up, then, the passage at the second half of v. 11, ‘his locks are bushy and black as a raven’ (see §6.1 and §6.2 for vv. 10–11a), this description is in strong
contrast to the white wool hair of the related passages, and is evidently intended to convey a picture of powerful youth. However, there is no simple equation, black hair = youth and white hair = age, since white wool hair is ascribed to the child born to Lamech at 1 Enoch 106, while even more difficult from the standpoint of the speculation that the beloved represents the ‘son of man’ figure, is the passage at Rev. 1:12–16 which points explicitly to ‘one like a son of man’ and goes on to ascribe to him ‘hair white as white wool, white as snow’. But another passage of similar type, in Joseph and Asenath, describes Jacob in exalted terms as being ‘exceedingly beautiful to look at’, and shows him as having a head ‘all white as snow’, while at the same time ‘the hairs of his head were all exceedingly close and thick like those of an Ethiopian’. ‘Ethiopian’ suggests a parallel cliché for blackness as ‘raven’ in the Song verse. and the passage is evidently drawing on a tradition which ascribes both the white hair of wisdom and the black hair of youth to a theophanic figure, a tradition found also in the Talmud, in b. Hagiga 14a:

One verse says: ‘His raiment was as white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool’ (Daniel 7: 9), and it is written: ‘His locks are curled and black as a raven’ (Cant. 5: 11). There is no contradiction: one verse [refers to God] in session [in the heavenly court] and the other [refers] to God in war. For a master said: In session none is more fitting than an old man, and in war none is more fitting than a young man.

The first half of the next verse, 5: 12, ‘His eyes are like doves’, reflects the similar comparison made by the male at 1: 15 and 4: 1 (see §3.12), except that here the female describes the beloved’s eyes in terms of a simile—‘like’—while he has described hers in terms of a metaphor: ‘your eyes are doves’. This point suggests both the symmetry and the difference between the two. She is Israel. He is like Israel. And yet, as the poem progresses, the poet seems to convey an increasing identity between the two, as we will see in the next chapter.

The second half of the verse gives a phrase, aphîkê-mayîm, ‘streams/channels of waters’, which occurs at Joel 1: 20 and Ps. 18: 16 and 42: 2, this last in particular suggesting a link with the male figure in the Song:

As the hart longs for flowing streams,
so longs my soul for you, O God.

The male is called a hart (stag or deer) at 2: 9, 17 and at 8: 14. This last verse charges the beloved to be like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices, while the next verse here says that his ‘cheeks are like terraces of spices’. The word ‘terraces’, ἄριγά, usually translated ‘bed’ (e.g. of roses), is a noun identical in its radicals with the verb ‘to long for’ (BDB, 788) or ‘groan, pant’ (Jastrow) in Ps. 42: 2 above. The noun also occurs at Cant. 6: 2: ‘My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds/terraces of spices’, and otherwise only at Ezek. 17: 7 and 10. The word, then, either as verb or noun, is not much used in Hebrew, but it has a cognate in

Arabic where one of its meanings is ‘he ascended’ and, in a passive form, ‘he was taken up to a high place, e.g. to the clouds of heaven’, while the noun, mi’rāj, means a ladder or series of steps on which ‘the souls ascend when they are taken from their bodies’. The link between the noun in Arabic and its related noun here in the Song, ‘His cheeks are like terraces of spices’, is strong when taken with ‘upon the mountains of spices’ at Cant. 8: 14.

But between ‘by streams of waters’ and ‘His cheeks are like terraces of spices’ there is a particularly difficult line, translated by RSV and NRSV, following AV, ‘bathed in milk, fitly set’, a rendering in respect of these last two words which has more in its favour than a first look at the Hebrew leads one to expect. Forms of the root ‘be full, fill’ occur three times in this chapter. First in the primary sense of the verb: ‘My head is filled with dew’ (5: 2); thirdly in the secondary sense of ‘set’ or ‘be filled’ with jewels (5: 14); and here (5: 12) in a form, millē’t, not otherwise found, which can be translated either way, many important witnesses to the text, such as the LXX and Vulgate, taking the word in its primary sense to mean ‘fullness’, as do also the Rabbis and, in more modern times, Luther. But exegesis based on ‘fullness’ leads away from the idea of a statue in which jewels are ‘set’ or ‘filled’, a sense of the word most often used in connection with the instructions for setting the four rows of jewels in the breastpiece of the priestly garments, notably at Exod. 28: 17, where the radicals are identical. Thus the difficult line suggests eyes of jewel inlay. But how the eyes like doves, by streams of water, bathing in milk, are to be understood pictorially is impossible to depict. A very different text which presents a similar problem is the depiction of the four living creatures in Ezekiel’s vision—for, I suspect, much the same reason. Both are vividly visual and yet defy representation, because they concern those mysteries not intended for the ordinary eye.

The next verse (5: 13), ‘His cheeks are like terraces of spices, yielding perfumes. His lips are lilies, dripping with flowing myrrh,’ again reflects vocabulary used in descriptions of the female. But here we must go to Psalm 45, not yet cited although it contains considerable overlap of vocabulary, and is the only other substantial evidence in the Scriptures of a mystical tradition similar to that claimed in earlier times for the Song. The title itself contains links: ‘lilies’, but especially ‘Song of the Beloved’, šīr yēḏîdôt, this latter word being a form of yāḏid meaning ‘beloved’. BDB translates ‘a song of love’, while HALOT gives ‘love song’, as also RSV and NRSV. But it is worth emphasizing that yāḏid means ‘beloved’, as in Jedidiah, the name the prophet Nathan

72 At a later period this word came to be particularly associated with Muhammad in The Night of the Ladder where the story of his ascension from Jerusalem to heaven is related. See E. W. Lane 1995–7. I am indebted to Dr Sara Sviri for introducing me to the importance in Arabic mystical literature of the cognates of GRE and HGWRE. The cognates in Ethiopian are similarly used, she tells me.

73 See Alexander’s long note to this verse: 157 n. 42.

74 Luther appears to be influenced by the LXX (καθήμεναι ἐπὶ πληρώματα υδάτων—‘sitting by the fullness of waters’) with ‘und sitzen an reichen Wassern’.

75 The Masoretic pointing gives ‘towers’, but a widely adopted amendment gives the piel participle of לול, translated ‘yielding’ by RSV and NRSV.
gave to Solomon at his birth, meaning ‘beloved of the Lord’ (2 Sam. 12: 25), as also at Isa. 5: 1, and wherever the word occurs.\(^76\)

Thus Psalm 45 and Cant. 5: 10–16 are both about the ‘beloved’, the divine anthropos, the second verse of the psalm declaring: ‘You are fairer by far than the sons of men;\(^77\) grace is poured into your lips, therefore God has blessed you for ever.’ In the psalm, grace is poured into the lips of the ‘beloved’ while in the Song passage his lips drip with flowing myrrh. Again, in the psalm it is his garments which are of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, a trio found otherwise only in the Song at 4: 14 and in the Proverbs passage we examined in relation to Cant. 4: 14 (§1.6), except that ‘cassia’ becomes ‘cinnamon’ in these two latter, cassia and cinnamon being closely related.

The description in the Song continues at vv. 14 and 15 with: ‘His hands are cylinders of gold set with \(\text{tars}\dot{s}\)\(^\text{s}\)\(^78\); his loins are a plate of ivory overlaid with sapphires; his legs are pillars of marble, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, chosen like the cedars.’ The word \(\text{tars}\dot{s}\)\(^\text{s}\)\(^78\) is applied both to a place\(^78\) and to some kind of precious stone, this latter being translated variously. But since it is not known what stone it represents, I have left it untranslated, and will give it in an English form in the following occurrences.

In the order of biblical chronology, \(\text{tarshish}\) as a stone first occurs at Exod. 28: 20 and again at 39: 13, in both cases in the instructions concerning the four rows of jewels to be set on the breastpiece of the priests, \(\text{tarshish}\) being the first stone of the fourth row. It occurs three times in Ezekiel, first in the vision at 1: 16 in the description of the four living creatures: ‘The appearance of the wheels and of their work was like the sparkle of \(\text{tarshish}\);’ again, in the vision at 10: 9: ‘the appearance of the wheels was like the sparkle of a stone of \(\text{tarshish}\).’ And at 28: 13 in the description of the king of Tyre, the symbol of all perfection, as was Tyre itself until its fall: ‘You were in Eden, in the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering’. And nine precious stones are cited, \(\text{tarshish}\) being the fourth. Finally, apart from Cant. 5: 14, the word occurs in the vision of Daniel in chapter 10:

\[
\text{And I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz; and his body was like \(\text{tarshish}\ldots\)}
\]

In the Song his loins are panels of ivory\(^79\) overlaid with sapphires. About these

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\(^76\) GKC has a paragraph (124e) under the heading ‘The various uses of the plural form’, which gives examples of the ‘plural of amplification’ with the \(\text{ot}\) ending, as in \(\text{yēdīdōt}\), but falters when it comes to the example under discussion, giving ‘Probably also \(\text{TDYDY}\) (heartfelt) love, \(\psi\) 45:1.’ But in the case of another word, \(\text{TDYDY}\) (Dan. 9: 23), GKC has no problem in giving ‘(greatly) beloved’.

\(^77\) For the form \(\text{TDYDY}\) at Ps. 45: 3 see Joüon and Muraoka 1996: ‘you are more beautiful (than anybody)’, vol. 1, 59d, under ‘Rare conjugations’.

\(^78\) See especially \(\text{HALOT}\) for the possibilities concerning place, none of which, however, have been established.

\(^79\) The word \(\text{TDYDY}\) as a noun does not otherwise occur. \(\text{HALOT}\) gives ‘panels of ivory’, which I have adopted.
stones a consensus has formed in recent times which tells us without hesitation: ‘For sapphires in the Bible read lapis lazuli.’ This may be correct in some instances, Lam. 4: 7 for instance (see a footnote in §6.1), though it is unlikely to be correct in every case. But, from the standpoint of this study, whether sappîrîm sometimes or never means sapphires, it is, like tarshish, the contexts of these words which are significant.

Next, ‘his legs are pillars of marble, set upon bases of gold’, a line which particularly suggests the contrast with Nebuchadnezzar’s statue at Dan. 2: 31–45 (§6.2), but also links to 1 Chron. 29: 2 where, in the list of materials gathered by David for the building of the Temple, marble is mentioned last—as here. A perception that the sum total of the figure is intended to evoke the Temple is inevitably strengthened by the next line: ‘His appearance is like Lebanon, chosen like cedars’. Again we are confronted by a certain symmetrical quality in the principal protagonists. He is now shown, at the conclusion of chapter 5, to be what we found her to be in chapter 4. Perhaps this twofoldedness of the male and the female is another example of Ben Sira’s ‘All things are twofold, one opposite the other . . . one confirms the good things of the other . . .’?

Certainly the next verse, 16, sums up the beloved in vocabulary found predominantly in wisdom literature: ‘His palate is most sweet, and all of him is precious’. ‘Palate’ (§1.10) occurs in conjunction with the abstract noun ‘sweet’ three times: at Cant. 2: 3: ‘his fruit is sweet to my taste/palate’, once in Proverbs at 24: 13: ‘[the honeycomb is] sweet to your taste’; and here. But here ‘sweet’ is in an intensified plural form, as also is the word translated ‘precious’. The final declaration: ‘This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem’, is also an example of the view, ‘All things are twofold’, applied here to the divine anthropos, since to him is now attributed the capacity to be both the beloved, that is, as representing ‘eros’, and the ‘friend’. That the bride refers to the beloved by a term meaning ‘friend’ is a departure from the rest of the book for other than on this occasion only the beloved uses a form meaning ‘friend’ in address to the bride.

This extraordinary passage remains far beyond my capacity to understand and expound, but I hope the inadequacy of my attempts to catch something of its meaning will arouse a commentator equal to the task.

80 I am grateful to an exchange of emails with Dr Alison Salvesen on the question of sapphires v. lapis lazuli. She has saved me from being too dismissive of the consensus on this point by providing a great deal of information on precious stones and their sources in ancient times. But, pending further research on the point, she inclines to the view that some of the biblical references may refer to sapphires not to lapis lazuli.


82 See Joüon 1923: vol. 2, 136g, for both these forms. And see footnote 7 in §6.2 for the reasoning in translating ידידות ‘precious’.
CHAPTER 6

Where has your beloved gone,
O fairest among women?
Where has your beloved turned aside
that we may seek him with you?

My beloved has gone down to his garden,
to the terraces of spices,
to feed in the gardens,
and to gather lilies.

I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine,
he who feeds among the lilies.

Anyone familiar with the opening of the Second Part of the Matthew Passion is hardly able to think of the first two verses of this chapter apart from Bach’s hauntingly beautiful music which accompanies them, and which prepares the listener for the Passion of the beloved of the Gospels. But what does the poet intend by the question, ‘Where has your beloved gone . . . where has your beloved turned aside . . . ?

First, we note in regard to structure that between the bride’s declaration at 5: 16, ‘This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem’, and their question at 6: 1, there is no paragraph division, the dialogue between the daughters and the bride being seen by the Masoretes to continue without the break supplied by the chapters. And, second, this is the last time they are in dialogue (though there is one further reference to the daughters at 8: 4), and it contrasts strongly with the first time when it is the bride who addresses them, begging them not to look at her because she has been blackened by the sun’s gaze upon her (Cant. 1: 5–6). Here, on the contrary, they address her as ‘the fairest among women’ and desire to know where her beloved is so that they may seek him with her.

There is, then, a progress to be understood. If the ‘daughters of Jerusalem’ represent the nations, the Song begins with an apology to them by the one who represents the chosen of God and who should, therefore, be showing the fairest of faces to them if they are to join her in becoming similarly chosen. A few verses on (1: 8) the male figure instructs her in the path she should be following, and he calls her the ‘fairest of women’ because he knows the truth behind the appearance. Now her appearance agrees with the truth for all to see, and the nations address her accordingly, ‘O fairest among women’.

She replies in effect that the beloved is to be found in his Temple to which he has gone down ‘to feed’ and to gather ‘lilies’. And the unit concludes with a repetition of the bride’s confidence that she belongs to the beloved, and that he, no less, belongs to her.
You are fair, my companion, as beauty itself,
comely as Jerusalem,
terrible as the banded hosts.

Turn your eyes from me,
for they frighten me away.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
which have come forth from Gilead.
Your teeth are like a flock of ewes,
which have come up from the washing;
all of them bear twins,
not one among them miscarries.
Your temple is like a slice of pomegranate
behind your veil.

The usual translation for 6: 4 is something like: ‘You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, comely as Jerusalem’ (NRSV). The word tirsâ, for which BDB (953) gives ‘pleasure, beauty’, is the name of what is thought to have been the ancient capital of the northern kingdom and is, consequently, favoured by many modern translators on the grounds of parallelism with Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom. There are a dozen biblical references to Tirzah, site unknown, one at Josh. 12: 24 and eleven distributed between 1 and 2 Kings, from which it is deduced that, before Samaria, it was the capital of Israel. But not a single adjective or epithet occurs with any mention of it—not even that it was a city. All that is said about it is that a string of kings operated from it ‘who did evil in the sight of the Lord’. But it is not Tirzah’s dubious history which renders it an impossible parallel to Jerusalem. It is that in the eyes of the poet a parallel to Jerusalem is unthinkable. Jerusalem stands alone, and if it has a parallel it can only be the heavenly Jerusalem.

Two further points add to the unlikelihood of a proper noun. First, the LXX, the Vulgate and the Peshitta did not take tirsâ to refer to a place here, the first to do so as far as I am aware being Luther, followed by the AV. And second, the verse is in form a tricolon, not in a form which lends itself to parallelism. Nevertheless, it has to be asked: why did the poet use this unusual word? Apart from references to the place, it is only used four times (Num. 26: 33; 27: 1; 36: 11; Josh. 17: 3) in the story of the five daughters of Zelophehad, the youngest of them being called Tirzah. Since no sons were born to Zelophehad, his daughters presented themselves to Moses, Eleazar the priest, the princes, and all the congregation at the door of the Tabernacle, and protested their right to a share of the inheritance of their father. Moses took the matter to the Lord (Num. 27: 1–11), who came down squarely on the side of the daughters, thus providing a ruling which, in societies originally based on biblical laws, like our own, continues in force to this day. It was not only a question of justice in this world but, as

83 See the section, ‘The tricolon’ in Wilfred G. E. Watson 1986, especially 177. My sudden resort to questions of poetic structure at such a late stage of this work is a good example of Watson’s observation that ‘the main interest of commentators is exegesis, so that remarks on poetic technique are more or less of a random nature’ (1).
Commentary

one commentator puts it: ‘If the children of Zelophehad received no share of the Promised Land, they would not be included in the inheritance of the People of the Lord; the name of their father would vanish as though it had never existed.’84 But it is possible that the poet saw yet more in the episode in view of the evident concern he shows for the welfare of the female principle. The commentator just quoted moves in a similar direction: “This priestly story, with its accompanying law, is one more step toward that Church in which there is neither male nor female as respects privilege before Christ. The request of these courageous women is vindicated by God; daughters as well as sons are to have a place in the inheritance of the People of the Lord.”85 Thus the poet’s choice of a word meaning ‘beauty’, never otherwise used except as a proper name, must, I think, reflect something of the story of Zelophehad’s daughters.

The third element of the verse, ‘terrible as the bannered hosts’, confirms, in my view, that it is indeed the heavenly Jerusalem which is being addressed here. The root of ‘bannered hosts’, dgl, takes us back to Cant. 2: 4 and the discussion above, ad loc., where we saw that the use of ‘banner’ derives from the opening chapters of Num. to the theme of cosmic order, to the four leading camps and their standards described at Numbers 10: 14–28, and to their heavenly counterparts as described particularly in 3 Enoch (§4.3). Here, the heavenly aspect of the figure being praised emerges clearly at v. 10 as we shall see.

For ‘Turn your eyes from me for they frighten me away’ see §6.6; and for ‘your hair is like a flock of goats which have come forth from Gilead’ see above, Cant. 4: 1c–3, of which these verses are a repetition.

8 There are sixty queens
and eighty concubines,
and maidens without number.

9 She is one, my dove, my perfect one,
one is she to her mother,
pure is she to her who bore her.
The daughters saw her and they blessed her,
the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.

10 Who is she who looks down like the morning star,
fair as the moon, bright as the sun,
terrible as the bannered hosts?

In Chapter 2 we saw that in the Egyptian cult there were great numbers of sacerdotal princesses and that concubines were assigned to the gods, and even to certain goddesses, which raises questions about the meaning of 1 Kgs. 11: 3: ‘And he had seven hundred wives [nāšîm = women], princesses, and three hundred concubines’. And we also saw that the word ‘ālāmôt, ‘maidens’ possibly included the meaning ‘female

84 J. L. Mays 1965: 131.
85 Ibid.
cultic servants’ from the sixth century onwards, which suggests how they are to be understood at Ps. 68: 26:

Your solemn processions are seen, O God,
the processions of my God, my King, into the sanctuary;
the singers in front, the musicians last,
between them maidens (῾a˘la¯môt) playing tambourines . . .

‘One is she, my dove, my perfect one, one is she to her mother, pure is she to her who bore her.’ We have looked at this verse both at §1.13 and §3.19. That the language is wisdom language is shown also in the next two lines of the same verse: ‘The daughters saw her and they blessed her, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her’. At §1.13 we saw that these lines parallel Prov. 31: 28: ‘Her sons rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her.’ Both the verse in the Song and the verse in Proverbs are formed with waw conversives, about which Fox notes that in the Song waw conversives do not otherwise occur.86 This suggests that the poet read the Proverbs passage as a paean of praise to Lady Wisdom, and is adopting the same formula here as a clue to his meaning.

Verse 10 partly repeats v. 4 but adds a cosmic dimension: ‘Who is she who looks down like the morning star, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as the bannered hosts?’ Three verses in the Song begin ‘Who is this (female)?’ as we saw earlier (§1.4). The first, at 3: 11, ‘Who is this coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, being censed with myrrh and frankincense’, is seen by Gerald Sheppard to be Solomon identified as Wisdom, a view he supports with Wisdom’s account in Sirach 24 of her journey from ‘the mouth of the Most High’ to her resting-place in Zion. The second ‘Who is this?’ occurs here at 6: 10 and can, I believe, be equally supported by the description of Wisdom in Sirach 24:

Wisdom praises herself,
and tells of her glory in the midst of her people.
In the assembly of the Most High
she opens her mouth,
and in the presence of his hosts
she tells of her glory.

There is a difference in tone between the two passages, the Song verses containing the idea that there is a ‘terrible’ or ‘dreadful’— in the sense of ‘full of dread’— aspect to the figure being described which is hardly present in the Sirach account, although ‘Alone I compassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss’ suggests a similarly formidable figure.

I went down to the garden of nuts,
to look at the green shoots of the valley;
to see whether the vine had sprouted,
the pomegranates had blossomed.

86 M. V. Fox 1985: 153.
Before I knew it my soul had set me
in the chariots of my noble people.

We might suspect what Wilfred Watson calls ‘stanzaic mobility’ here\(^87\) except that it is possible to detect three links, one each in verses 10, 11 and 12. In v. 10 the word from which ‘bannered’ is derived, dege\(\text{l}\), is the word used in the first two chapters of Numbers and not otherwise in the biblical literature except in the Song, but much used in the Hekhalot literature. In the discussion on v. 11 (§5.7) we saw that in the mystical literature a connection is seen between the structure of the nut and the organization of the tribes in Numbers 2 which ‘reflects some divine order, so that we find no conflict between the two metaphors describing the earthly tribes and the celestial chariot as reflected in the structure of the nut’ (quoting Joseph Dan). And thirdly, in v. 12, there is a veiled reference to the merkava, the veiling being achieved by the plural form, marke\(\text{v}^{\text{\i}}\)\(\text{\o}^{\text{\i}}\)\(\text{\o}^{\text{\i}}\), ‘chariots’. Thus dege\(\text{l}\), ‘\(\text{\o}^{\text{\i}}\text{g}^{\text{\i}}\text{z}\) (nut), and merkava\(\text{\i}\), plus the verb ‘to go down’, ya\(\text{\r}^{\text{\i}}\text{rad}\), within three verses is unlikely to be accidental and should alert the scholars of Jewish mysticism to further investigation.

The verse at 6: 12 is widely agreed to be the most difficult in the Song: ‘Before I knew it [or ‘was aware’], my soul had set me in the chariots of my noble people.’ One difficulty centres on the translation of ‘ammi-n\(\text{\a}^{\text{\i}}\text{d}^{\text{\i}}\) which, in the light of 1 Chron. 29:14, I take to be drawn from that verse, in which all the people (‘my people’—‘ammi—as David calls them) are willingly (derived from n\(\text{\a}^{\text{\i}}\text{d}^{\text{\i}}\)) offering from their resources for the building of the Temple (§4.4). In the Song the verse is spoken by the female (only the female uses the word nepes\(\text{\i}\)—soul), and that she now represents the ‘willing’ people is suggested by her being called bat-n\(\text{\a}^{\text{\i}}\text{d}^{\text{\i}}\) within two verses, at 7: 2—though there is a problem with this phrase, as we shall see.

CHAPTER 7

Return, return, O Shulamite,
return, return, that we may see you.
What will you see in the Shulamite?
[You will see something] like the dance of Mahanaim.

How fair are your feet in sandals,
O noble daughter\(^88\)
The curved lines of your thighs are like ornaments,
the work of the hands of a master craftsman.

Your navel is the rounded bowl,
may it not lack the mixed wine;
your belly is a heap of wheat
fenced round with lilies.

\(^{87}\) 1986: 165–6. \(^{88}\) Lit. ‘daughter of a noble’. See the discussion which follows.
Your two breasts are like two young harts,
twins of a gazelle.

Your neck is like the tower of ivory;
your eyes are pools in Heshbon,
by the gate of Bat-rabbim;
your nose is like the tower of Lebanon
which looks towards Damascus.

Your head upon you is like Carmel,
and the hair of your head like purple cloth;
your fringe is bound with bands.

In the section ‘Visionary seeing, and “two camps”‘ (§4.3), we saw the significance of
the word ḥāzā, meaning ‘to see’ in a visionary sense. It is also, I think, worth noting
that Cant. Rabbah is popularly known by a form of this verb, Ḥāzītā, because it is the
first word of the quotation cited at the beginning of the midrash: ‘Have you seen
a man diligent in service?’ (Prov. 22: 29). On the face of it this verse appears to be an
arbitrary choice for the launch of a long work on the Song of Songs. But the rabb-
kinical writers always have their reasons, and this one emerges from a careful reading
of the five explanations given for this verse, especially the last: ‘This applies to Solo-
mon, son of David, who was diligent in the building of the Temple, as it is written, He
was seven years building it.’ The visionary verb used for the title of this midrash warns
the reader that what follows requires a ‘seeing’ into the work beyond that of ordinary
seeing. And what is to be ‘seen’ is that the work is largely about the Temple.

In the first verse of this chapter there are the four repetitions of the word ‘return’,
which we saw earlier (§4.3) link to Isa. 11:12, to the time when God ‘will assemble the
outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the
earth’. What is to be seen in the Shulamite is a vision of angels, that is to say, she is
‘God’s camp’ (Gen. 52: 3—see §4.3). The next verse, ‘how fair are your feet in sandals’,
again links to the messianic passage in Isaiah where, at 11: 15, the only other occur-
rence of ‘sandals’ in masculine plural with beth prefix is found.

The term, bat-nādīb, ‘noble daughter’, usually translated ‘prince’s daughter’ (AV,
JB, REB, NIV) but also ‘queenly maiden’ (RSV, NRSV), is translated by the LXX
θώγατρος Ναδαβ, ‘daughter of Nadab’, which is not very probable. The Vulgate is
correct with its filia principis, followed by Luther’s Fürsten-tochter, but the AV’s
‘prince’ is too specific for nādīb. The word nādīb in its twenty-six occurrences means
primarily ‘generous’, ‘willing’, ‘noble in character’. There are several occurrences,
especially in the Psalms, where nādīb is used negatively and is consequently taken to
refer to status: ‘he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless
wastes’ (Ps. 107: 40–1); ‘Put not your trust in princes, nor in any child of man’ (Ps.
146: 3); or, most negative of all: ‘Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, their princes
like Zebah and Zalmunna . . . make them like whirling dust, like chaff before the

89 There are four men called Nadab: the eldest son of Aaron (Exod. 6: 23, and Lev. 10: 1); the
son of Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 14: 20, and 15: 25–7); a Jerahmeelite of whom nothing is known (1
Chron. 2: 28); and a Gibeonite, similarly anonymous (1 Chron. 8: 30).
wind’ (Ps. 83: 12–13). In the Song the word is clearly used positively and, at 6: 12, can be translated either ‘my noble people’ or ‘my generous/willing people’. The greater problem is how to translate bat nadîb since bat is feminine and nadîb is masculine, whether as adjective or noun, and the phrase should therefore be translated ‘daughter of a noble/generous/willing man’. Nevertheless, I have chosen to translate the phrase ‘noble daughter’ because I suspect the poet has a reason for keeping both occurrences of the word nādîb in the same form.\(^90\) He wants the reader to recall those passages we saw earlier (§4.4), of which the following passage provides a further example:

Moses said to all the congregation of the Israelites: This is the thing that the Lord has commanded: take from among you an offering to the Lord; let whoever is of a generous [nādîb] heart bring the Lord’s offering: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine linen; goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, and fine leather; acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and gems to be set in the ephod and the breastpiece. (Exod. 35: 4–9)

Much of the language of that passage, as will be familiar to the reader by now, is the language of the Song, except that the poet has used a different term for crimson since he evidently wanted his word to read both Carmel and carmil (§4.9). To summarize: the passage is a minefield of metaphors and similes which point to the Temple, to its worship, and to its setting in the land of Israel. The emendation of the last verse, 7: 6, removes an unlikely king and restores, I believe, a fringe bound with bands on the veil of the Temple (4.§9).

The next passage in chapter 7 is, it seems to me, direct address to ‘love’, if to a particular form of love:

How fair and pleasant you are,
O love, for delights!

This your stature is like that of a palm tree, and your breasts to its clusters.

I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of its boughs.
Then may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your nose like apples.
And your speech, like the best wine, goes smoothly to my beloved,

\(^{90}\) Dr Hughes supports this translation: ‘On a syntactic level it is a construct noun+noun phrase rather than a noun + adjective phrase and is equivalent to “daughter of a noble”. But’, he goes on, ‘I suspect that the meaning is closer to “noblewoman”. There are a number of similar Hebrew expressions such as “sons of the gods” = gods; “sons of the prophets” = prophets; “daughters of men” = women.’
moving the lips of sleepers.
I am my beloved’s
and upon me is his desire.

In the earlier discussion on these verses (2.§3) I saw two ways of looking at this passage, the first based on the verse, ‘She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her’ (Prov. 3: 18), and the second based on the belief that the Masoretes pointed these lines with feminine suffixes whereas there are strong grounds for thinking it is the female who is addressing the male, which, if correct, would require masculine suffixes. The difficulty of it being spoken by the beloved is that he is referred to at v. 10. Moreover, from ‘This your stature is like that of a palm tree’ to ‘the fragrance of your nose like apples’ speaks of the beloved. And if, in Dan’s phrase, the Song is the parent text of the mystical literature, the word komah, ‘stature’, points to the passage being about the beloved.

Verse 11, ‘I am my beloved’s, and upon me is his desire’, is similar to verses at 2: 16 and 6: 3, but includes the significant word tēṣūqā, ‘desire’, which occurs in the speech to Eve after she has succumbed to the suggestions of the serpent, when God says to her: ‘your desire shall be for your husband’. Thus its use by the poet, put into the mouth of the woman, is a striking reversal of Gen. 3: 16, and suggests to this reader the intention of the work to portray the restoration of the feminine principle, that is, the intuitive, contemplative, and mystical life of the soul which yearns to be drawn by the eros of God into union with him (§7.7).

The next three verses are the last in chapter 7 according to the chapter divisions, but begin a new section according to the Masoretic divisions.

Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the field,
let us abide among the cypresses.
Let us rise early [and go] to the vineyards;
let us see if the vine has blossomed,
if the tender buds have opened,
if the pomegranates have come forth;
there I will give you my breasts.
The mandrakes give their fragrance,
and at our doorways is all excellence,
things both old and new,
which I have treasured up for you, my beloved.

The first line provides the original inspiration for the verse in the synagogue service for the Inauguration of the Sabbath: ‘Come, my beloved, to meet the bride’, which is repeated ten times. But the inclusion of this line dates from the practice of the eighteenth-century Kabbalists of Safed and Jerusalem who, on a Friday afternoon, some time before the onset of the Sabbath, went out of the city into an open field ‘to
meet the Bride’. There, before the traditional Sabbath prayers were spoken, the Song of Songs, ‘traditionally identified with the indissoluble bond between the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Ecclesia of Israel’, was intoned, as Scholem tells us in his On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism. A page earlier Scholem relates that a ‘mystical notion’ which played a part in the Kabbalistic Sabbath ritual was the ‘field of the holy apple trees, as the Shekhinah is frequently called in the Zohar’. Scholem goes on:

In this metaphor the ‘field’ is the feminine principle of the cosmos, while the apple trees define the Shekhinah as the expression of all the other sefirot or holy orchards, which flow into her and exert their influence through her. During the night before the Sabbath the King is joined with the Sabbath-Bride; the holy field is fertilized, and from their sacred union the souls of the righteous are produced.91

Kabbalism, as we see in that passage, was able to sustain a mystical interpretation of the Song long after Christian mystical interpretations had collapsed. But Kabbalism, too, was soon to collapse under the pressure of the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment, bringing us to modern times and to the demise of a mystical understanding of the Song.

The next word in the passage which raises a query, képârîm, is widely translated as ‘villages’. Both the LXX and the Vulgate give ‘villages’, but Luther gives ‘Zyperblumen’ = ‘cypress flowers’, which seems more likely since the same word, kôper, also occurs at 1: 14 and in plural at 4: 13, translated ‘cypresses’; this latter form being identical to the word translated ‘villages’. ‘Cypresses’ at 4: 13 comes in the middle of the principal Temple passage, which links with Blackman’s suggestion that ‘to rise early’, ‘to do something in the morning’, may be connected with worship and mean ‘to adore in the morning’ (§2.5). One senses the Egyptian influence in these verses, not least in ‘there I will give you my breasts’, where the word for ‘breasts’ is that used in the Egyptian material and noted by Fox (88) to be a semiticism.

The next verse also suggests Egyptian influence with its reference to ‘mandrakes’ (§2.5), and if the poet is consciously using sacred Egyptian texts, the rest of the verse may be a reference to those texts, that is, Israel in the person of the female in the Song declaring: ‘at our doorways [namely, the surrounding countries, especially Egypt] is all excellence, things both new and old, which I have treasured up for you, my beloved’.92

CHAPTER 8

O that you were as a brother to me, sucking the breasts of my mother;

91 Gershom Scholem 1965b: 141, 142, 140.
92 If this is correct, it would suggest another reversal: the archetypal enemy of Israel transformed into a source of spiritual excellence.
I would find you in the street,
I would kiss you;
neither would they despise me.

I would lead you, I would bring you
into the house of my mother, she who taught me;
I would give you spiced wine to drink,
the juice of my pomegranate.

His left hand is under my head,
and his right hand embraces me.

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
that you stir not up,
nor awaken love 'til it please.

Joüon, in his commentary on the Song, heads this chapter ‘Le Désir Messianique’. Among biblical scholars generally, messianism in the Old Testament has been a marginal subject throughout the modern period until works such as J. C. O’Neill’s *Who Did Jesus Think He Was?* (1995) and Horbury’s *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (1998) signalled a change. In the Introduction to the latter work Horbury writes:

Much recent work seems to the present writer to underrate the significance of messianic hope within the scripture and tradition of Jews in [the Second Temple] period. It is urged below that a rich but largely consistent messianism grew up in pre-exilic and later Israel. In the Old Testament it forms an important theme, which was given clarity and impetus through the editing and collection of the Old Testament books. (2)

Messianism is also found in the Qumran Community, and centuries later the Targum would reflect the messianic character of the Song, if in a different spirit from that of the earlier period.

No less striking in this final chapter is the prevalence of wisdom language. Almost every line is imbued with it from the second onwards in which the bride wishes that the beloved was as a brother to her, ‘sucking the breasts of my mother’. This line recalls ‘the wife of your youth’ and the admonition to ‘let her breasts fill you at all times’ at Prov. 5: 18–19, ‘wife’ and ‘mother’ being interchangeable terms for Wisdom in the wisdom literature (cf. Sir. 15: 2, and see §1.6). ‘I would find you in the street’, and what follows, is a variation on 3: 1–4 which, as we have seen (§1.7), is a reversal of Prov. 7: 12–18. In the Proverbs passage Folly is outside and, seizing the man, kisses him. Here, at Cant. 8: 1, the bride, after finding the beloved outside, or in the street, declares she would kiss him, ‘neither would they despise me’, namely, the fools of Proverbs (§1.7).

In the next verse the bride would conduct the beloved and bring him into the house of her mother. The combination of ‘house’ and ‘mother’, that is, Wisdom in a wisdom context, points to the Temple. The noun, translated ‘spiced wine’, occurs only here in
the Hebrew Bible, but the verb takes us to Exod. 30: 25, which gives the instructions for the compounding of the holy anointing oil—from ingredients with which we are familiar: myrrh, cassia, and oil. In the next line, ‘the juice of my pomegranate’, the noun meaning ‘pressed out juice’, but usually translated ‘sweet wine’, occurs in four other places, two of them in eschatological contexts (Joel 4: 18; Amos 9: 13), which is how I understand the present passage. For ‘pomegranate’ see §5.3.

Cant. 8: 3 is a repetition of 2: 6, ‘His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me’ (§7.5), while 8: 4 is a repetition of 2: 7 and 3: 5, except that 8: 4 omits ‘by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field’. The next line, ‘that you stir not up nor awaken love ‘til it please’, is interpreted in relation to prayer in the light of 5: 2, ‘I sleep, but my heart is awake’. What follows here is the identical line to that which follows 3: 5:

5

Who is this coming up from the wilderness
leaning upon her beloved?
Under the apple tree I awakened you,
there your mother travailed with you,
there she travailed who bore you.

At 3: 5, ‘Who is coming up from the wilderness’ is followed by ‘like columns of smoke'; here it is followed by ‘leaning upon her beloved’. In the example at 3: 5 we quoted Gerald Sheppard (§1.4) who sees a parallel between the Song passage and Wisdom’s account in Sirach 24 of her journey from ‘the mouth of the Most High’ to her resting-place in Zion.

It is, then, Wisdom who is leaning upon her beloved. But is it Wisdom who, speaking to her beloved, says: 'Under the apple tree I awakened you'? Only if the Masoretes were right in their provision of masculine suffixes to the person addressed here, which, Pope (663) tells us, virtually all interpreters think they were not. And he goes on: ‘According to Delitzsch, we must change the punctuation of the text altogether, and throughout restore the feminine suffixes as those originally used, following the example of the Syriac.’ Joüon (310) takes the same view and thinks not only that the Masoretes were mistaken in providing address to the male but that Jerome’s use of a different verb, ‘Sub arbore malo suscitavi te: ibi corrupta est mater tua, ibi violata est genitrix tua’ (‘Under an apple tree I raised you: there was your mother corrupted: there was your mother violated’) exactly reflects the original reading. His point is that the verb can be repointed as the passive (Pual) of the same verb at 2: 15 (BDB, ḫāḇal II, 287) where the little foxes are ruinating the vines, and not the intensive (Piel) of an identical verb meaning ‘to writhe, twist, hence travail’ (BDB, 286). Joüon takes the three occurrences in the Aramaic of Daniel of the verb ḫāḇal, used in relation to the kingdom of God which shall not be destroyed, as a parallel, and goes on to say that the bride of the Canticle, Israel, is precisely a kingdom, and that the mother of the bride, namely, the ancient kingdom, has been ruined, lost, reduced to nothing. And he points to Isa. 51: 17: ‘Awake, awake, stand up, Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury’, where the verb is the same as in ‘I awakened you under the apple tree.’ The interest of this reading, in my view, is that it

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could well have been the reading in the time of Jerome, that is, that the kingdom had been ruined, reduced to nothing.

In regard to the apple tree (which must in some sense be related to the apple tree at 2: 3), Joüon (310–12) notes that several Christian exegetes have thought it here to be the tree of Eden of which the fruit proved fatal to Eve, and that it is possibly thanks to this application of our passage that the tree of Eden has become an apple tree. We are thus returned to the other verb meaning ‘to travail’, and to Gen. 3: 16 in which God declares to Eve after she has eaten of the forbidden tree: ‘I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing’, thus providing a double meaning, which would be typical of the poet.

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6

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm,
for love is strong as death,
ardour fierce as Sheol;
its arrows are arrows of fire,
a most vehement flame.

7

Many waters cannot quench love,
and neither can floods drown it;
if a man gave all the substance of his house for love,
they would utterly despise him.

The beauty of this passage puts it beyond interpretation. It is about love, and what does it matter whether it is human or divine love since, at this level of intensity, can a difference be maintained? Nevertheless, there is a lot to be gained from looking into it.

First, Joüon again thinks the Masoretes are mistaken, as we have seen (§4.12), in attributing masculine suffixes to the verse beginning, ‘Set me as a seal upon your heart’. It is Israel, as the bride of God, who has been unfaithful and to whom, therefore, the exhortation to be faithful is addressed. Following the prophets, the author of the Song, Joüon says, conceives the restoration of Israel as a new covenant between God and his people, and he refers the reader to such texts as Hos. 2: 21–2 and Jer. 31: 31–3. But, related to the meaning of the Song as these texts undoubtedly are, they do not contain the word ‘seal’, hôtâm, a word used at the end of the prophet Haggai: ‘In that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, my servant, says the Lord, and I will set you as a seal; for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts’ (Hag. 2: 23).

If, as I believe, there is a link here with Haggai, a beam of light is thrown on the next few verses and confirms that the Temple is central for the poet, for Haggai is concerned with one topic: the rebuilding of the Temple. As one commentator puts it: ‘To speak of Haggai is to speak of the temple and its manifold significance.’

which is strong as death, the ardour fierce as Sheol, and its arrows which are arrows of fire, is related in some way, then, to the love which was required to rebuild the Temple. There is much more to be said about these verses (see §4.12 for an attempt to say some of it). Here I will add that, in the light of the rebuilding of the Temple, the line, ‘if a man gave all the substance of his house for love’ could be taken literally, while ‘they’—those who would utterly despise such a one (§1.15) has a meaning which remains whether the previous line is taken literally or metaphorically. It can, of course, be taken at both levels, the word ‘substance’, hôn, yielding many levels of meaning.

We have a little sister,  
and she has no breasts;  
what shall we do for our sister  
on the day she is spoken against?

If she is a wall, we will build upon her  
a course of silver;  
and if she is a door we will enclose her  
with boards of cedar.

I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers;  
then was I in his eyes  
as one who finds peace.

‘We have a little sister’ follows on well from a link with Haggai if this ‘sister’ is the Second Temple (§2.3). The poet would, then, be upholding its validity and its capacity to provide nourishment, represented by the breasts she claims, against her detractors, to possess. The Targum reads the next part of the verse, commonly translated, ‘What shall we do for our sister on the day that she is spoken for?’ as ‘On the day when she shall be spoken against’, and Alexander notes that the expression ledabber be- has different meanings according to context and may denote disapproval and hostility, as at Num. 12: 1: ‘Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses’, and 21: 5: ‘the people spoke against God’, etc.⁹⁵

The Targum applies this reading to Israel, and Cant. Rabbah does similarly: ‘“We have a little sister”: these are the returning exiles. “Little” because their numbers were small.’ But then this midrash immediately goes on, after quoting ‘And she has no breasts’: ‘This refers to the five things in which the second Temple fell short of the first, namely, the fire from heaven, the oil of anointing, the ark, the holy spirit, and the Urim and Thummin.’ And then comes the quotation from Hag. 1: 8 where the Lord instructs the people to go up to the mountain, to bring wood and to build the Temple, ‘and I will take pleasure in it and I will be glorified, says the Lord’. At this point the midrash notes that ‘I will be glorified [or honoured]’ is written without the letter he, a point which is clarified by a footnote: ‘As if to signify that it will lack five things, five being the numerical value of he.’⁹⁶

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⁹⁵ Alexander 199 n. 39.  
⁹⁶ Cant. Rabbah VIII. 9, §3. Hebraists may want to consult the text here and to note with what evident intention the ה has been omitted from יִדָּבֵר at Hag. 1: 8.
The text of the Song certainly gives grounds in my view for interpreting ‘the little sister’ as the Temple by its use of vocabulary used in the description of the building of the Temple at 1 Kings 6: ‘wall’, ‘build’, ‘course’, ‘silver’, ‘door’, ‘boards of cedar’, and the word ‘tower’ used as a metaphor for the Temple. But one word is missing: ‘gold’. Could it be that the poet, while supporting the second Temple, agrees that in comparison with the first it is as silver to gold? Robert Hayward, in the article referred to above, makes this point: ‘even those loyal to the Second Temple accepted that it was somewhat deficient compared with the First’. Nevertheless, if ‘then was I in his eyes as one who finds peace’ a play on the name Solomon, is she not declaring that, in spite of her defects, she finds favour in the eyes of the original builder of the Temple, that is to say, in the eyes of God, the heavenly builder, Solomon representing him as the builder of the earthly?

_Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon;
he entrusted the vineyard to keepers;
each one will bring for its fruit
a thousand pieces of silver._

If the implied Solomon in the previous verse represents God, the explicit Solomon here similarly represents the God who brought a vine out of Egypt (Ps. 80: 9), and to whom belongs a vineyard, notably at Isa. 5: 1–7. The difficulty in this verse is the phrase usually translated as a place name, Baal-Hamon. There are eleven place names beginning with Baal listed in BDB, apart from this one, giving Baal-Hamon plausibility as a name even though not otherwise attested. In context the phrase is untranslatable, and only the Vulgate attempts a translation: _Vinea fuit pacifico in ea, quae habet populos_ (lit. ‘The peacemaker [namely, Solomon] had a vine among that which has a multitude’).

In chapter 15 of Genesis God makes a covenant with Abram to which, as we have seen, the poet refers in his use of the term _beter_. Here, it seems to me, the poet is making a link with Genesis 17 where Abraham is told by God that he will be the father of a multitude of nations. The phrase _baal-hamon_, literally ‘master/owner/lord of a multitude’ in the Song, is very close to _av-hamon_, ‘father of a multitude’, which occurs twice in Genesis 17, the pivotal chapter in the history of Israel. It is in this chapter that God makes the covenant of circumcision with Abraham after he has said to him: ‘Neither shall your name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for a father of a multitude of nations I have made you’ (17: 5). Thus God puts into Abram’s name the very letter left out at Hag. 1: 8. Later in the chapter he will also change Sarai’s name to Sarah so that the names of both the father and the mother of the people with whom God makes a covenant contain the sacred letter _he_—doubly sacred in the Lord’s name, the Hebrew of which contains two, _YHWH_.

97 1999: 38.
What follows in the Song brings the history to that point of perfection intended from its beginning. God’s vineyard, that is, the people he brought out of Egypt, is now in the hands of faithful keepers who will provide the maximum return for its fruit and to whom in return a portion both in this world and in the world to come is assured (§3.9), while the bride, who confessed her failure in regard to the vineyard in the first chapter, is now able to claim it as her own and to contemplate it with unalloyed approval. Thus the covenant made with Abraham is here seen to be brought to its proper conclusion, with this world restored to its original state of perfect harmony with the world to come.

André Robert seems to me to express the poet’s intention when he identifies the bride here with Wisdom and sees her, after her long journey (Sir. 24), as finally established in Sion—‘the gardens’ of this verse. Then the ‘companions’, a ‘groupe des fervents’, as Robert puts it (326), hearken to her voice. Another comparison can be found at Prov. 8: 32–5 when Wisdom addresses her devotees:

Now, O children, hearken to me:
  blessed are those who keep my ways.
Hear instruction and be wise,
  and do not neglect it.
Blessed is the one who listens to me,
  waking daily at my doors,
watching my openings of the doorposts.
For whoever finds me finds life
  and shall obtain favour from the Lord.

And it is to Wisdom, I believe, that the last verse of the Song is given, a verse with links to three earlier ones looked at in the context of mountains (§4.10). Here we must probe further into the meaning of the animals.

The gazelle and the hart are paired seven times in the Song—hardly an accidental number. The occurrences are in feminine plural forms at 2: 7 and 3: 5, where they are used in adjuration; in masculine forms at 2: 9, 17 and 8: 14, where the beloved is
once declared by the female to be like a gazelle or a young hart, and twice exhorted by her with imperatives to be like these creatures; and in mixed forms at 4: 5 and 7: 4 where the two breasts of the female are likened to two young harts (masculine), twins of a gazelle (feminine).

A search for the source of these creatures reveals two—or rather, one if Deuteronomy and 1 Kings are to be put under the label of the Deuteronomist. In chapters 12, 14, and 15 of Deuteronomy the gazelle and the hart occur in four verses. First: ‘With all the desire of your soul, you may sacrifice and eat flesh in all your gates according to the blessing of the Lord your God which he has given to you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, as of the gazelle and as of the hart’ (12: 15). Second: ‘As the gazelle and the hart is eaten, so you may eat of it; the unclean and the clean together may eat of it’ (12: 22). Third: ‘These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat; the hart and the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain-sheep’ (14: 4–5). Fourth: ‘You shall eat it within your gates, the unclean and the clean together, like the gazelle and like the hart’ (15: 22). The context of the verse at 1 Kgs. 5: 3 (ET 4: 23) is a description of the provision of food made each day for Solomon—the putative author of the Song. Among the animals listed are the hart and the gazelle.

Before we venture to draw out a meaning for these animals, there is a passage from a chapter called ‘Wisdom Substrata in Deuteronomy’ in Moshe Weinfeld which seems to me suggestive in relation to the Song. Weinfeld’s approach to wisdom literature is typical of the contemporary outlook which, as a representative source puts it, sees ‘the combination of practical advice on sensible living with speculation about divine wisdom [as] characteristic of the genre’.99 So Weinfeld: ‘Until the seventh century Law and Wisdom existed as two separate and autonomous disciplines. Law belonged to the sacral sphere, whereas Wisdom dealt with the secular and the mundane.’ Nevertheless, what he goes on to say links with our interests:

These two disciplines were amalgamated in the book of Deuteronomy, and the laws of the Torah were identified with wisdom: ‘... for this is your wisdom and your understanding’ (Deut. 4: 6). This identification of Torah with wisdom is indeed somewhat paradoxical, for laws and statutes which were given by God are here regarded as being indicative of the wisdom and understanding of Israel. The verse undoubtedly reflects the difficulties which resulted from the sapiential desire to identify Torah with wisdom. The inherent contradiction was ultimately resolved only by identifying wisdom with Torah, as a result of which both were conceived together as a heavenly element which descended from heaven to take up its abode among the children of Israel (Ben-Sira 24).100

The sapiential desire to identify Torah with wisdom is suggested in the Song by the references to two breasts, thus representing the feeding aspect, that is, the wisdom aspect of the two tablets of stone. At Prov. 5: 18–19 (‘A lovely hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts fill you at all times’), there is not the same sense of the Torah being identified with wisdom. There the two animals which symbolize the ‘wife’ are the

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99 ODCC, 1755. 100 Moshe Weinfeld 1972: 256.