

## THE SONG OF SONGS: TRANSLATION AND NOTES

Our translation of the Song of Songs attempts to adhere as closely as possible to the Hebrew text. As such, we follow the lead set by Everett Fox, most prominently, in his approach to translation.

In addition, we have attempted to utilize common English words to render common Hebrew words and rare English words to render rare Hebrew words (see notes h and ac, for example).

We also follow Fox's lead in our representation of proper names. Throughout this volume we have used standard English forms for proper names (Gilead, Lebanon, Solomon, etc.). In our translation, however, we have opted for a closer representation of the Hebrew (i.e., Masoretic) forms (Gil'ad, Levanon, Shelomo, etc.).

We further believe that the Masoretic paragraphing should be indicated in an English translation, and thus we have done so in our presentation of the text. While we consider (with most scholars) the Aleppo Codex to be the most authoritative witness to the biblical text, in this case we are encumbered by the fact that only Song 1:1–3:11 is preserved in the extant part of the Aleppo Codex. Accordingly, we have elected to follow the paragraphing system of the Leningrad Codex. *Setuma* breaks are indicated by an extra blank line. The sole *petuha* break in the book, after 8:10, is indicated by two blank lines. The Aleppo Codex, as preserved, has *petuha* breaks after 1:4 and 1:8, whereas the Leningrad Codex has *setuma* breaks in these two places. As for the remaining part of the Song of Songs in the "Aleppo tradition," we note a difference of opinions by the editors responsible for the two major publications of the Aleppo Codex at one place. Mordecai Breuer (*Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim* [Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kook, 1989], גש) indicates a *setuma* break after 4:11, which is also reflected in the Leningrad Codex; the *Keter Yerushalayim* volume (notwithstanding its nod to Breuer on the title page) has no break of any sort at this juncture (737/ז'תש"ז).

We also have introduced different fonts in our translation to reflect the different characters present in the Song of Songs, as follows:

- Minion Pro is used for the two principal characters, with the more flowing italic *Minion Pro* used for the dominant female voice and the regular Minion Pro used for the responsive male voice.
- The superscription in 1:1 is indicated by Garamond.
- The lines spoken by the chorus are produced in Gill Sans.
- The few lines spoken by the brothers, 8:8–9, in the mouth of the female, are indicated by Skia.

Note that one cannot be absolutely certain about the attribution of all the spoken lines to a particular character (male lover, female lover) or group (chorus, brothers). Such uncertainty, however, probably is germane for only about 10 percent of the lines. In most cases, when the second-person masculine singular forms (verbs, pronouns, etc.) are used, we assume that the female lover is speaking, addressing her beloved. Conversely, when the second-person feminine singular forms are used, we assume that the male lover is speaking.

Finally, observe that there are two sets of notes accompanying our translation. The lettered notes (a, b, c) refer to general literary uses, while the numbered notes (1, 2, 3) refer specifically to issues relevant to the *hijā'* and *tašbīb* genres raised in chapter 4.



Scott B. Noegel and Gary A. Rendsburg,  
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 Linguistic Studies in the Song of Songs*  
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## THE SONG OF SONGS

- 1:1 The song of songs, which is Shelomo's.<sup>1</sup>  
 1:2 *May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,  
 For your love is better than wine.*<sup>a 2</sup>  
 1:3 *To the scent of your good oils,  
 "Turaq oil"<sup>b</sup> is your name;  
 Therefore the maidens love you.*<sup>3</sup>  
 1:4 *Draw me, after you let us run;  
 The king has brought me to his chambers,  
 Let us be glad and let us rejoice in you,  
 Let us recall<sup>c</sup> your love more than wine,  
 (More than) smooth-wine, they love you.*
- 1:5 *Black am I, and comely,  
 O daughters of Yerushalayim;  
 Like the tents of Qedar,  
 Like the curtains of Shelomo.*<sup>5</sup>

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a. The shift from third person in the first stich to second person in the second stich sounds odd to English ears, but this is common in Hebrew poetry.

b. The Hebrew word *turaq* remains an enigma. Presumably it describes a particularly fine type of oil.

c. The Hebrew root *zkr* typically means "remember," thus our rendering "recall." But a homonymous root, which serves as the basis for the common word *zākār* "male," bears a sexual connotation. Accordingly, a second meaning is evident as well, something like "let us make-love your love."

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1. Or, in light of the object of the invective, "the song of songs concerning Shelomo." See also the references to this wealthiest of kings in 1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12.

2. The poet begins immediately with the wine imagery that will flow throughout the poem, a feature that the Song of Songs shares with Arabic *hijā'* poetry.

3. The female lover notes that other women love the male protagonist as well, both here and in the final stich of the next verse. See also 6:9, though in this passage we learn that other women acclaim the female lover. The praise by others, external to the main characters, is another feature of *hijā'* poetry, on which see chapter 4, pp. 152–53.

4. Given the *hijā'* quality of the poem, we opt to retain MT here (see ch. 4, p. 141) and thereby reject the oft-proposed emendation to "Salma."

5. "The sons of my mother," of course, is a poetic way of stating "brothers" (who would have to be full brothers, not half-brothers). Given that "brothers" can refer to political allies in Biblical Hebrew (see ch. 4, pp. 157–58), we suggest that a political reading may be inherent here, as befitting the overall charges within *hijā'*

- 1:6 *Do not look at me, that I am dark,  
That the sun has glared at me;  
The sons of my mother were angry at me,  
They set me as keeper of the vineyards,  
(But) my own vineyard I have not kept.<sup>6</sup>*
- 1:7 *Tell me, O whom my inner-being<sup>d</sup> loves,<sup>7</sup>  
Where do you desire/shepherd?<sup>e 8</sup>  
Where do you cause-(them)-to-lie-down at noon?  
Lest I become like one-who-veils,<sup>f</sup>  
Beside the flocks of your friends.*
- 1:8 *If you do not know, yourself,  
O most beautiful among women;  
Go out, yourself, by the footprints of the flock,  
And shepherd your kids,  
At the dwellings of the shepherds.*
- 1:9 *To a mare in Pharaoh's chariotry,<sup>9</sup>*

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d. Here and throughout the translation we render *nepes̄* with “inner-being,” which captures the essence of the ancient Hebrew understanding of the word better than English “soul” or other alternatives.

e. Note the Janus parallelism (see ch. 1, §1.1.2, pp. 13–14), with the pivot word *tir' e<sup>h</sup>* meaning both “desire” (paralleling what precedes) and “shepherd” (anticipating what follows).

f. The notoriously difficult Hebrew term *‘ōtyā<sup>h</sup>*, on which see also chapter 4, p. 154 n. 84.

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poetry. Among other relevant passages in the Song of Songs, see, for example, 8:1 with “brother” meaning “ally.”

6. The first of numerous references to vineyards, orchards, and gardens within the Song of Songs, which is also characteristic of *hijā'* poetry in the Arabic tradition (see ch. 4, pp. 147–49). See also 1:14; 2:13, 15; 4:12, 13, 15, 16; 5:1, 13; 6:2, 11; 7:13; 8:11–12, 13.

7. The Hebrew root *'hb* “love” is used for “fealty” in a political sense throughout the Bible, and we suggest that this undertone is present in the Song of Songs as well (see ch. 4, p. 157).

8. The double meaning in this word and the Janus parallelism inherent in this verse is treated in note e (see also §1.1.2, pp. 13–14). Yet a third connotation is present, however. The verbal root *r'y* can bear both humans as the subject, in which case the sense is “shepherd,” and animals as the subject, in which case the sense is “graze.” With the latter sense, however, the meaning can be extended to “devastate” (< “overgraze”), and thus this passage also contains a veiled critique of the king; see chapter 4, p. 153.

9. One does not necessarily expect military terminology within love poetry, but

- I liken you, my darling.<sup>10</sup>
- 1:10 Your cheeks are lovely with circlets,  
Your neck with strings-of-beads.
- 1:11 Circlets of gold we will make for you.  
With spangles of silver.
- 1:12 *While<sup>g</sup> the king is on his divan,<sup>h</sup> <sup>11</sup>*  
*My nard gives forth its scent*
- 1:13 *A sachet of myrrh is my beloved to me,*  
*Between my breasts may he lodge.*
- 1:14 *A cluster of henna is my beloved to me,*  
*From the vineyards of <sup>c</sup>En Gedi.*
- 1:15 Behold you are beautiful, my darling,  
Behold you are beautiful, your eyes are doves.
- 1:16 *Behold you are beautiful, my beloved, indeed pleasant,*  
*Indeed our bed is verdant.*
- 1:17 *The rafters of our house are cedars,*  
*Our runners are cypresses.*
- 2:1 *I am a daffodil of the Sharon,*  
*A lily of the valleys.*
- 2:2 Like a lily among the brambles,  
So is my darling among the daughters.<sup>12</sup>

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g. Hebrew <sup>c</sup>*ad še-*, rendered “until” throughout the Song of Songs, though we opt for “while” here for better sense.

h. Hebrew *mesab*, a rare noun, rendered here with “divan,” a relatively rare English word. In addition, “divan” conveys a sense of royalty, aristocracy, and officialdom and thus befits the mention of the king here.

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the parallel with *hija*<sup>7</sup> poetry (on which see ch. 4, p. 149–50) accounts for the presence of such language in the Song of Songs. For other relevant passages, see 3:7–8; 4:4; 6:4, 12, 7:5; 8:9–10.

10. This is the first of many passages in the poem that extol the female lover but that, in light of *hija*<sup>7</sup> technique, are to be understood as satirical praise. In addition, the term *ra<sup>c</sup>yā<sup>h</sup>* “darling” is the feminine form of *rēa<sup>c</sup>* “friend,” which elsewhere bears the political connotation of “ally” (see ch. 4, p. 158).

11. Possibly the allusion here is to the laziness of the king (see also 3:7 and 9, with other furniture terms, where Shelomo is mentioned specifically by name). This would be a very direct critique of royal behavior, needless to say; see further chapter 4, p. 167.

12. Once the undertone of *ra<sup>c</sup>yā<sup>h</sup>* “darling” as “ally” is established (see n. 10), it is easy to sense the secondary meaning of *bānôt* “daughters” as “vassals” (see ch. 4, p. 158–59).

- 2:3 *Like an apricot-tree among the trees of the forest,  
So is my beloved among the sons;  
In his shade I delight and I sit,<sup>i</sup>  
And his fruit is sweet to my palate.<sup>13</sup>*
- 2:4 *He brought me to the house of wine,  
And his glance<sup>j</sup> toward me is love.<sup>14</sup>*
- 2:5 *Support me with raisin-cakes,  
Spread me among the apricots;  
For I am sick with love.*
- 2:6 *His left-hand is beneath my head,  
And his right-hand embraces me.*
- 2:7 *I adjure you, O daughters of Yerushalayim,  
By the gazelles, or by the hinds of the field;<sup>15</sup>  
Do not rouse, and do not arouse love,  
Until it desires.*
- 2:8 *Hark, my beloved,  
Behold he comes,  
Bounding over the mountains,  
Leaping over the hills.*
- 2:9 *My beloved is-like<sup>k</sup> a gazelle,*

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i. The Hebrew construction collocates two suffix-conjugation verbs, separated by the conjunctive “and.” A more idiomatic rendering would be “I delight to sit.”

j. If taken from the Hebrew noun *degel*, then “his banner.” But we have chosen to relate the word here to the Akkadian verb *dagālu* “see.” Of course, both meanings could be inherent, given the thread of polysemy that permeates the book.

k. The hyphenated form “is-like” is used here to render the verbal root *d-m-h*, in contrast to “is like” and “are like” in a number of other passages, where the Hebrew includes the unexpressed copula followed by the preposition *kə-*. In four other passages (1:9; 2:17; 7:8; 8:14), we are able to avail ourselves of the verb “liken” to render verbal forms of *d-m-h*.

13. The erotic imagery here is part and parcel of the *hijā'* style.

14. The noun *'ahābā<sup>h</sup>* “love” indicates “alliance,” once the political reading of the Song of Songs within the context of invective poetry is recognized. See also 2:5; 5:8 and the refrains in 2:7; 3:5; 8:4.

15. Here and in the parallel passage (3:5) the words *ṣabā'ôt* and *'aylôt* can be understood as terms for “rulers, nobles,” in addition to which the first word carries the meaning of “armies.” Such political language shines through in the *hijā'* genre; see chapter 4, p. 163.

- Or a fawn of the hinds;<sup>16</sup>*  
*Behold, he stands behind our wall,*  
*Gazing through the windows,*  
*Peering through the lattices.<sup>17</sup>*
- 2:10 *My beloved speaks, and he says to me:*  
*“Arise,<sup>m</sup> my darling, my beautiful, and go forth.*
- 2:11 *For behold, the winter has passed,*  
*The rain has departed, gone.*
- 2:12 *The blossoms appear in the land,*  
*The time of pruning/singing<sup>n</sup> has arrived;*  
*The voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.*
- 2:13 *The fig-tree perfumes its young-fruit,*

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l. Typically in biblical literature, we gain the male perspective, and thus we witness “the woman in the window” motif through a man’s eyes; that is, the “reader” is outside, and he or she views Rahab, Sisera’s mother, Michal, Jezebel, and Lady Wisdom looking out *be’ad haḥallôn* “through the window” (see ch. 4, p. 156, for references). Here, by contrast, we gain the female perspective. True, she remains inside the house, which is the woman’s domain, but the “camera” is there with her as she looks out to see her male lover approaching and peering *min haḥallônôt* “through the window” (lit. “windows”) from without.

m. The actual expression is *qûmî lāk*, with an additional element “you, yourself” after the verb, as also occurs at the end of this stich in *lākî lāk*. While we have managed to capture the latter with “go forth,” instead of simple “go,” we have not attempted to capture the former, but rather content ourselves with simple “arise.” The same wording occurs at 2:13.

n. In one of the most brilliant of all passages in the Song—indeed, in the entire Bible—we are treated here to a dazzling display of the poet’s talent with this Janus parallelism. The Hebrew word *zāmîr*, placed in the middle stich, means both “pruning” and “singing”; with the first meaning it looks back to the first stich and the key word “blossoms,” while with the second meaning it looks forward to the third stich with the key phrase “voice of the turtledove.” See C. H. Gordon, “New Directions,” *BASP* 15 (1978): 59–66.

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16. The first refrain above (2:7 = 3:5) introduces fauna (especially deer imagery) into the poem, the effect of which is heightened here by the female lover’s comparing her beloved to a gazelle or a fawn. This too is an element of *hijā’* poetry, as discussed in chapter 4, p. 149. Many other passages also refer to animals: 2:15, 17; 4:1–2 (≈ 6:5–6); 4:5 (≈ 7:4); 4:8; 5:11, 12; 6:9; 8:14.

17. On the level of reading the Song of Songs as *hijā’* poetry, we note that gender reversal (see n. l) can serve to enhance the invective (see ch. 4, pp. 156–57).

*And the vines in bud, they give forth fragrance;  
Arise, my darling, my beautiful, and go forth.*<sup>20</sup>

- 2:14 O my dove, in the crannies of the rock,  
In the covert of the cliff,  
Show me your visage,  
Let me hear your voice;<sup>18</sup>  
For your voice is sweet,  
And your visage is lovely.
- 2:15 *Catch us the foxes,  
The little foxes,  
Ruining the vineyards,  
And our vineyards in bud.*<sup>19</sup>
- 2:16 *My beloved is mine, and I am his,  
Grazing among the lilies.*<sup>20</sup>
- 2:17 *Until the day(-wind) blows,  
And the shadows flee;  
Turn, liken yourself, my beloved, to a gazelle,  
Or to a fawn of the hinds,  
Upon the mountains of cleavage.*<sup>p</sup>
- 3:1 *On my couch at night,  
I sought whom my inner-being loves,*

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o. Note that identical lines (2:10b, 13c) bracket the male lover's speech to the female lover in her imagined 3.5-verse representation of his words.

p. Hebrew *beter* (here in pausal form *bāter*) has elicited much discussion. We prefer to derive the word from the verbal root *b-t-r* "cleave," thus our rendering "cleavage," and to see here a reference to the female lover's breasts, imagined as mountains. That is to say, she invites her beloved to her breasts, echoing the sentiment expressed in 1:13.

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18. While the physical distance between the two lovers has been intimated from the outset (see 1:7), here we gain a reminder that the two lovers are apart. This point comprises an important component of *hijā'* poetry (see ch. 4, pp. 145–46)—and see further below, especially 3:1; 5:6; 6:1.

19. Since viticultural terms are used metaphorically for Israel in the Bible, quite possibly the "foxes" here allude to Israel's (sc. the vineyard's) enemies attacking her. See chapter 4, p. 164.

20. The reference to "grazing" both here and in the parallel verse in 6:3, once more suggests an invective against the king (see above, n. 8 on 1:7).

- I sought him, but I did not find him.*<sup>21</sup>  
 3:2 *Let me arise, please, and let me roam the city,  
 In the streets and in the piazzas,  
 Let me seek whom my inner-being loves;  
 I sought him, but I did not find him.*
- 3:3 *The watchmen found me,  
 They who go-about the city;  
 "He whom my inner-being loves, did you see (him)?"*
- 3:4 *Scarcely had I passed them,  
 When I found him whom my inner-being loves;  
 I grabbed hold of him, and I would not let him loose,  
 Until I brought him to the house of my mother,  
 And to the chamber of she-who-conceived-me.*
- 3:5 *I adjure you, O daughters of Yerushalayim,  
 By the gazelles, or by the hinds of the field;  
 Do not rouse, and do not arouse love,  
 Until it desires.*
- 3:6 *Who is this coming up from the wilderness,  
 Like columns of smoke;  
 Redolent with myrrh and frankincense,  
 With every powder of the merchant.*
- 3:7 *Behold the litter of Shelomo,  
 Sixty heroes surround it, from among the heroes of Yisra'el.*
- 3:8 *All of them, grasping the sword,  
 Trained in battle,  
 Each-man, his sword on his thigh,  
 For fear of the night.*
- 3:9 *The king Shelomo made himself a palanquin,  
 From the trees of the Levanon.*
- 3:10 *Its pillars he made of silver,  
 Its support of gold;  
 Its riding-seat of purple,*

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21. The poet here increases our awareness, in very direct wording, of the distance between the two lovers.

- Its interior arranged/burning with leather/love,<sup>q</sup> 22  
 From the daughters of Yerushalayim.
- 3:11 *Go out and see, O daughters of Ziyyon,  
 The king Shelomo;  
 With the crown (with) which his mother crowned him,  
 On the day of his wedding,  
 And on the day of the happiness of his heart.*
- 4:1 Behold you are beautiful, my darling,<sup>23</sup>  
 Behold you are beautiful,  
 Your eyes are doves,  
 Behind your braids;  
 Your hair is like a flock of goats,  
 That flow down from Mount Gil'ad.
- 4:2 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn-ones,  
 Who come up from the washing;  
 All of whom are twinned,  
 And none of them bereaved.
- 4:3 Like a thread of scarlet are your lips,  
 And your mouth<sup>r</sup> is lovely;  
 Like a slice of pomegranate is your cheek,  
 Behind your braids.
- 4:4 Like the tower of David is your neck,  
 Built to the heights;  
 A thousand shields hang upon it,  
 All the weapons of the heroes.

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q. A double polysemy is present here. Hebrew *rāšûp* means both “arranged” and “burning,” while the common noun *’ahāba<sup>h</sup>* “love” bears the rarer meaning of “leather” (cf. Arabic *’ihāb*).

r. Not the usual Hebrew for “mouth,” namely, *pe<sup>h</sup>*, but rather a unique word *midbār*, literally “speaking-organ,” evoked here for the purposes of alliteration, as explained in chapter 2.

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22. While we have lined up the translation options respectively, “arranged with leather” and “burning with love,” the political reading of the poem suggests a cross-over to allow for the reading “arranged with love,” i.e., “arranged in an alliance” as well. One can only marvel at this kind of poetic virtuosity. The political overtones continue in the next verse with reference to the king’s crown.

23. This is the first of the *waṣf* poems (4:1–7) describing the female lover, which describes her beauty in great detail and which at the same time is to be seen as ironic praise.

- 4:5 Your two breasts are like two fawns,  
Twins of a doe,  
Grazing among the lilies.
- 4:6 Until the day(-wind) blows,  
And the shadows flee;  
I will go to the mountain of myrrh,  
And to the hills of frankincense.
- 4:7 All of you is beautiful, my darling,  
And there is no blemish in you.
- 4:8 With me, from Levanon, (my) bride,<sup>24</sup>  
With me, from Levanon, come;  
Bound from the summit of <sup>ʿ</sup>Amana,  
From the summit of Senir and Ḥermon,  
From the dens of lions,  
From the mountains of leopards.
- 4:9 You entice me, my sister, (my) bride,<sup>25</sup>  
You entice me with but one of your eyes.  
With but one strand from your necklace.
- 4:10 How beautiful is your love,  
My sister, (my) bride;  
How better than wine is your love,  
And the scent of your oils, than all spices.
- 4:11 Your lips drip honey, (my) bride;  
Honey and milk under your tongue,  
And the scent of your clothes is like the scent of Levanon.
- 4:12 A locked garden is my sister, (my) bride;  
A locked fountain, a sealed spring.
- 4:13 Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates  
With fruit of choice-fruits;  
Henna with nard.<sup>26</sup>

24. Another term that suggests a political arrangement is introduced here, since *kallāh* “bride” can mean “nation” (see ch. 4, p. 158).

25. The first of a series of occurrences of the word “sister” as the epithet by which the male lover calls his female lover, all in very close proximity to each other at the middle of the composition (see also 4:10, 12; 5:1, 2). The term naturally raises the issue of incest, which also is present in *hijāʿ* poetry (see ch. 4, pp. 153–55). For “brother,” see 8:1.

26. The poet spices his or her language with references to sweet-smelling aromatics in the central section of the composition (4:13, 16; 5:1, 13). This feature is found in *hijāʿ* poetry as well, on which see chapter 4, pp. 151–52.

- 4:14 Nard and saffron,  
Cane and cinnamon,  
With all trees of frankincense;  
Myrrh and aloes,  
With all heads of spices.
- 4:15 A spring of the gardens,  
A well of living water,  
And streams from Levanon.
- 4:16 Awake, north(-wind), and come, south(-wind),  
Blow upon my garden,  
*May its spices stream;*  
*May my beloved come to his garden,*  
*And may he eat of the fruit of its choice-fruits.<sup>27</sup>*
- 5:1 I have come to my garden, my sister, (my) bride,  
I have plucked 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 with love!
- 5:2 *I am asleep, but my heart is awake,<sup>28</sup>*  
*Hark, my beloved knocks,<sup>s</sup>*  
*“Open for me, my sister, my darling,*  
*My dove, my perfect-one,*  
*For my head is filled with dew,*  
*My locks with droplets of the night.”*
- 5:3 *I have removed my tunic,*  
*How shall I put it on?*  
*I have washed my feet,*  
*How shall I soil them?*
- 5:4 *My beloved sent forth his hand through the hole,*  
*And my innards emoted for him.*
- 5:5 *I arose to open for my beloved,*

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s. In the lines that follow, the female lover envisions the male lover addressing her, and thus we have placed these words in quotation marks. On the string of epithets “my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect-one,” see chapter 3, p. 123–24.

27. Another erotic image, characteristic of *hijā'*, as explained in chapter 4, pp. 147–49.

28. This passage introduces the dream scene, which is paralleled in *hijā'* poetry, as noted in chapter 4, pp. 146–47.

- And my hands dripped myrrh,  
 And my fingers, flowing myrrh,  
 On the handles of the lock.<sup>29</sup>*
- 5:6 *I opened for my beloved,  
 And my beloved, turned-away, passed;  
 My inner-being went out when he spoke,  
 I sought him, but I did not find him,  
 I called him, but he did not answer me.<sup>30</sup>*
- 5:7 *The watchmen found me,  
 They who go-about the city,  
 They struck me, they wounded me;<sup>t</sup>  
 They lifted my shawl from upon me,  
 The watchmen of the city-walls.*
- 5:8 *I adjure you, O daughters of Yerushalayim,  
 If you find my beloved,<sup>31</sup>  
 What will you tell him?<sup>u</sup>  
 That I am sick with love?*
- 5:9 *How is your beloved more so than other beloveds,  
 O most beautiful of women?  
 How is your beloved more so than other beloveds,  
 That you adjure us so?*
- 5:10 *My beloved is radiant and red,<sup>32</sup>*

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t. Note that the first encounter with the night watchmen of the city, described in 3:3, was perfectly normal, whether friendly or neutral. The reader expects such an encounter here as well but is astonished and shocked to see that the female lover was mistreated by them. In short, the poet has set the reader up via the first meeting but now pulls a surprise with the second meeting.

u. Alternatively, one could read this stich as “Do not tell him,” understanding *מה* as the negative particle “not,” though this seems less likely in light of our discussion in chapter 3, pp. 115–16.

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29. Undoubtedly the most erotic line in the poem, in the female lover’s imagined encounter with her lover—which again serves the *hijā*’ nature of the composition.

30. The unrequited love, which is noted in 2:14 and 3:1, here gains its ultimate expression. As noted above and in chapter 4, pp. 145–46, this is an important feature of *hijā*’ poetry as well.

31. As with similar terminology in the Song of Songs, *dōd* “beloved” also evokes the sense of “ally”; this sense is evident, perhaps not throughout the poem, where it occurs repeatedly (in the romantic sense of “beloved”), but within the present context.

32. The description of the male lover (5:10–15) parallels the three *waṣf* poems concerning the female lover and further adds to the sarcastic nature of the poem.

- More dazzling than a myriad.*  
 5:11 *His head is gold bullion,*  
*His locks are curled,*  
*Black as the raven.*  
 5:12 *His eyes are like doves,*  
*At the rivulets of water;*  
*Washed in milk,*  
*Sitting by the pool.*  
 5:13 *His cheeks are like a bed of spices,*  
*Towers of perfumes;*  
*His lips are lilies,*  
*Dripping (with) flowing myrrh.*  
 5:14 *His hands are bracelets of gold,*  
*Inlaid with beryl;*  
*His loins are a block of ivory,*  
*Studded with sapphires.<sup>33</sup>*  
 5:15 *His calves are pillars of marble,*  
*Supported on pedestals of bullion;*  
*His form is like Lebanon,*  
*Choice as the cedars.*  
 5:16 *His palate is sweets,*  
*All of him is delights;*  
*This is my beloved,*  
*And this is my friend,*  
*O daughters of Yerushalayim.*  
 6:1 *To where has your beloved gone?*  
*O most beautiful among women.*  
*To where has your beloved turned?<sup>34</sup>*  
*Let us seek him with you.*  
 6:2 *My beloved went down to his garden,*  
*To the beds of spices;<sup>v</sup>*

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v. Note that in 5:13 the Hebrew is *‘ārûgat habbošem* “bed of spices,” with the former noun in the singular, whereas in 6:2 the expression is *‘ārûgôt habbošem* “beds

33. These two verses (5:14–15) present a series of precious stones and metals to describe the male lover’s body. On the parallel use of such imagery in *hijā’* poetry, see chapter 4, pp. 151–52.

34. Now not only the female lover, but her female friends as well, make reference to the distance that separates the two lovers.

- To graze in the gardens,  
And to gather lilies.*<sup>35</sup>
- 6:3 *I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine,  
Grazing among the lilies.*
- 6:4 You are beautiful, my darling, like Tirza,<sup>36</sup>  
Comely as Yerushalayim;  
Awesome as the luminaries.
- 6:5 Turn your eyes from before me,  
For they dazzle me;  
Your hair is like a flock of goats,  
That flow down from the Gil'ad.
- 6:6 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes,  
Who come up from the washing;  
All of whom are twinned,  
And none of them bereaved.
- 6:7 Like a slice of pomegranate is your cheek,  
Behind your braids.
- 6:8 There are sixty queens, and eighty concubines;  
And maidens without number.
- 6:9 One is my dove, my perfect-one,  
One is she unto her mother,  
Pure is she to she-who-bore-her;  
Daughters see her, and they extol her,  
Queens and concubines, and they praise her.<sup>37</sup>
- 6:10 Who is this who comes-into-sight like the dawn;  
Beautiful as the moon;  
Pure as the sun,  
Awesome as the luminaries.

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of spices," with the former noun in the plural. On this kind of variation in the Song of Songs, see chapter 3.

35. On the passage's political overtones, see chapter 4, pp. 153–54.

36. The second of the *wasf* poems (6:4–7) describing the beauty of the female lover, with many of the lines repeating (though not in verbatim fashion, as per ch. 3). As noted above, while these poems may look praiseworthy on the surface, the exaggerated flattery reveals a sarcastic tone.

37. See n. 3 above.

- 6:11 To the walnut garden I went down,  
To see the produce of the palm tree;<sup>w</sup>  
To see whether the vine blooms,  
Whether the pomegranates blossom.
- 6:12 I do not know, my inner-being sets me,  
The chariots of ʿAmminadav.<sup>x</sup>
- 7:1 Return, return, O Shulammitte,  
Return, return, that we may gaze at you,<sup>38</sup>  
How you gaze at the Shulammitte,  
Like a dance of the two-camps.
- 7:2 How beautiful are your feet in sandals,<sup>39</sup>  
O daughter of the noble,<sup>40</sup>  
The curves of your thighs are like ornaments,  
The work of the hands of an artisan.
- 7:3 Your vulva<sup>y</sup> is a bowl of the crescent,  
Let it not lack mixed-wine;<sup>41</sup>  
Your “stomach” is a heap of wheat,<sup>z</sup>

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w. Hebrew *naḥal* means both “wadi, stream” (its common meaning) and “palm tree” (a rare usage). Both senses are appropriate here—thus polysemy is evident—though we elect the latter in our translation since the context is that of fruit trees.

x. The three phrases of this verse provide no difficulties (save, perhaps, for the sense of ʿAmminadav)—and thus our rendering proceeds quite literally—yet the overall meaning is rather obscure.

y. The word *šōr* (its usual form), *šōrer* (its form here), normally means “navel,” as in Ezek 16:4 and in postbiblical Hebrew and Aramaic. In Prov 3:8 the word stands for the entire body via synecdoche. In Song 7:3, however, we take the word as a euphemism for “vulva,” especially since the b-line refers to its serving as a container of moisture, indeed, the most delectable of liquids, mixed-wine.

z. To a modern reader, comparison of the lover’s stomach to a stack of wheat may seem inapt. We understand Hebrew *beṭen*, normally “stomach,” at times “womb,” to refer to the female genitals here. The parallelism with *šōrer* “vulva” (on which see the previous note) bears this out. The wheat and the lilies then would refer to pubic hair.

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38. While on the surface this line may not look very erotic, the reader is directed to the reference in chapter 4 (p. 154 n. 64) for further elucidation.

39. The third of the *wašf* poems (7:2-10) extolling the beauty of the female lover, which once more, given the elaborate language, bears a sardonic tone.

40. Whatever the exact sense of *bat nādīb* “daughter of the noble,” we sense here another political term, not only with “daughter” as “vassal” (see above, n. 12), but with “noble, nobleman” as well.

41. The erotic language is clear and once more serves the author’s invective mode.

- Bordered with lilies.  
 7:4 Your two breasts are like two fawns,  
 Twins of a doe.  
 7:5 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,  
 Looking towards Dameseq.  
 7:6 Your head upon you is like Karmel/crimson,<sup>aa</sup>  
 The strands<sup>ab</sup> of your head are like purple;  
 A king is captured by (your) tresses.<sup>ac</sup>  
 7:7 How beautiful are you,  
 And how pleasant are you,  
 Love among enjoyments.  
 7:8 This your stature is likened to a palm tree,  
 And your breasts, to clusters.  
 7:9 I said, “I will ascend the palm tree,  
 I shall grasp its fronds”;  
 And may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,<sup>42</sup>  
 And the scent of your nose like apricots.

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Finally, note that the word *‘ārēmāh* “heap, stack” may bear sexual connotation, as in Ruth 3:6; compare the English expression “rolling around in the hay.”

aa. Hebrew *karmel*, the name of the large mountain at modern-day Haifa, but evoking *karmīl* “crimson, carmine” as well. The term is a classic example of a Janus word: as the name of a mountain, it points back to the toponyms “Levanon” and “Dameseq” in the previous verse (especially “Levanon,” another high mountain); with the meaning “crimson, carmine,” it points ahead to *‘argāmān* “purple” in the b-line. See S. M. Paul, “Polysemous Pivotal Punctuation: More Janus Double Entendres,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (ed. M. V. Fox et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 373–74; repr. in *Divrei Shalom: Collected Studies of Shalom M. Paul on the Bible and the Ancient Near East, 1967–2005* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 23; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 481–83.

ab. Hebrew *dallāh*, elsewhere used as “thrum, thread,” but here used for “hair”—and thus English “strand” works beautifully in both contexts.

ac. Hebrew *rəhāṭīm*, from the same root as *rahiṭim* in Song 1:17. In the latter instance, it means “runners” in the sense of “beams”; in our present verse “runners” means “long tresses of hair,” as the context makes clear.

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42. A final example of highly sexual imagery characteristic of *hijā*’ poetry. We note an accumulation of such passages here in chapter 7, as the Song of Songs reaches its climax.

- 7:10 And your palate is like good wine,  
*Coursing to my beloved as smooth-wine;*  
 Fluxing (on) the lips of those-who-sleep.<sup>ad</sup>
- 7:11 *I am my beloved's,*  
*And toward me is his urge.<sup>ae</sup>*
- 7:12 *Go, my beloved, let us go out to the field,*  
*Let us lodge among the villages/henna-plants.*
- 7:13 *Let us arise-early to the vineyards,*  
*Let us see if the vine has bloomed,*  
*(If) the bud has opened,*  
*(If) the pomegranates have blossomed;*  
*There I will give my love to you.*
- 7:14 *The mandrakes give forth scent,*  
*And over our openings are all choice-fruits,*  
*New-ones, also old-ones;*  
*My beloved, I have hidden (them) for you.*
- 8:1 *Who would give you as a brother to me,*  
*One-who-sucked the breasts of my mother;<sup>43</sup>*  
*I would find you in the street, I would kiss you,*  
*And they would not mock me.*
- 8:2 *I would lead him, I would bring him to the house of my mother,*  
*She who teaches me;*  
*I would ply you with spiced wine,*  
*With the juice of my pomegranate.*
- 8:3 *His left-hand is under my head,<sup>af</sup>*

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ad. A notoriously difficult passage, with the obscure reference to *yāšēnīm* “those-who-sleep.” We have chosen the unusual verb “flux” to render the unusual (and dialectal [see ch. 1, §1.1.4, pp. 14–15]) participial form *dôbēb*.

ae. Note how the feminine major tone is demonstrated in a passage such as this. In the garden of Eden story, a woman’s urge is toward her husband’s (Gen 3:16). In the Song of Songs, by contrast, the tables are turned, and the male’s urge is toward the female lover.

af. We take note of the variation in wording, to avoid verbatim repetition: in 2:6 the phrase occurs with the preposition *taḥat lə-*, rendered as “beneath”; here the phrase occurs with the simple preposition *taḥat*, which we render with the slightly shorter English equivalent “under.” See further chapter 3.

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43. Here we get the sole instance of “brother,” as the female lover addresses her male lover. On the matter of incest and its place in invective poetry, see above, n. 25 (on 4:9).

- And his right-hand embraces me.*
- 8:4 *I adjure you, O daughters of Yerushalayim,  
Do not rouse, and do not arouse love,  
Until it desires.*
- 8:5 *Who is this coming up from the wilderness,  
Leaning on her beloved;  
Under the apricot-tree I aroused you,  
There your mother birth-panged you,  
There she-who-bore you birth-panged.*
- 8:6 *Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
As a seal upon your arm,  
For love is as strong as death,  
Passion as fierce as She'ol<sup>ag</sup>;  
Its darts are darts of fire,  
The intensest-flame.<sup>ah</sup>*
- 8:7 *Great waters cannot quench love,  
And rivers cannot swill it away;  
If one would give all the wealth of his house for love,  
They would surely mock him.*
- 8:8 *We have a sister, a little-one,  
And she has no breasts;  
What shall we do for our sister,  
On the day when she is spoken for?*
- 8:9 *If she is a wall,  
Will we build upon her a silver turret?  
And if she is a door,  
Will we confine her (with) a board of cedar?*
- 8:10 *I am a wall,  
And my breasts are like towers;*

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ag. The ancient Israelite concept of the netherworld, to which all dead people descended beneath the earth.

ah. Hebrew *šalhebetyā<sup>h</sup>* (or *šalhebetyāh*, depending on the manuscript) clearly derives from the word for “flame.” This specific form is difficult; the suffix *-yā<sup>h</sup>* (or *-yāh*) may be the shortened form of Yahweh (certainly if the latter reading is accepted), which at times may serve as the superlative. We have attempted to capture the unusual aspect of this form with our rendering “intensest-flame.”

*Thus I have become in his eyes,  
As one who finds goodwill.<sup>ai</sup>*

- 8:11 *Shelomo had a vineyard in Ba<sup>ʿ</sup> al-Hamon,<sup>44</sup>  
He gave the vineyard to the keepers;  
Each brings for his fruit,  
A thousand (pieces of) silver.*
- 8:12 *My own vineyard is before me;  
The thousand is for you, Shelomo,  
And two-hundred to keepers of his fruit.*
- 8:13 *O you who sits in the gardens,  
Friends attend to your voice,<sup>45</sup>  
Let me hear you.*
- 8:14 *Flee, my beloved,  
And liken yourself to a gazelle,  
Or to a fawn of the hinds,  
Upon the mountains of spices.<sup>aj</sup>*

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ai. Hebrew *šālôm*, continuing the pun on this root (and on like-sounding words); see further Shelomo in the next verse.

aj. The phrase “mountains of cleavage” from 2:17 has been altered to “mountains of spices” here in 8:14. The reader is to understand these passages in connection with 1:13–14, where the female lover imagines her male lover as a sachet of myrrh and a cluster of henna lodging between her breasts. This imagery, of course, reflects the well-known practice of women wearing sachets of spices between their breasts.

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44. The excesses of Shelomo are self-evident in this verse and the next; see chapter 4, p. 167.

45. Here the word for “friends” is *ḥābērīm* (see above, n. 10, for the [relatively?] synonymous term *rēaʿ* “friend”), which also can be taken as “allies.”