A TEXT IMMERSION IN THE SONG OF SONGS

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The Song of Songs: Context and Historical Interpretation

To understand the context of the Song of Songs, one must first explore the milieu in which it arose. As the Song neither alludes to historical events nor pushes a particular political agenda, it is difficult to date. Given factors such as linguistic structure and archeological findings however, scholars surmise that the Song of Songs was composed at some point between the fourth and second centuries B.C.E.[1] Linguistically, the text of the Song of Songs cannot be classified as classical biblical Hebrew. Rather, the Hebrew uses constructions not found in classical writings, but which are at home in Mishnaic Hebrew.[2] Scholar Michael V. Fox notes that the text was likely "composed in the period of transition between classical biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew" and that "its language certainly is not earlier than the Second Temple period."[3] Remnants of the book that were found at Qumran, an archeological site near the Dead Sea, provide evidence that the Song of Songs had gained popularity as a religious text by the first century CE.

At its core, the Song of Songs is a series of love poems. To truly understand the work, it is necessary to see it as part of a tradition of love songs connected to earlier Mesopotamian and Egyptian works. The manuscripts of some of the first known Egyptian love songs date back to the Ramesside period (ca. 1302-1150 BCE).[4] Despite the gap of almost a thousand years between Egyptian manuscripts and the Song of Songs, it is likely that the former influenced the latter. Fox notes that "sons of vassals in Palestine were often raised and educated in the Egyptian court, where they undoubtedly

[1] Fox, 189.
[2] See Fox, 187-9.
[3] Fox, 189.
[4] Ibid, 181.

learned Egyptian and probably acquired a taste for the style and art of their prestigious and powerful neighbor."[5] Circumstances such as this, as well as interactions and exchanges through trade, could account for the ancient Egyptian love poetry making its way into Palestine beginning around the 13th century BCE.

Both the Egyptian love songs and the Song of Songs primarily contain poetic material about lovers. "The poets reveal their views of love not by speaking about love in the abstract, but by portraying the people in love, making lovers' words reveal lovers' thoughts, feelings, and deeds."[6] Spanning eight chapters, however, the Song lacks the cohesion of an apparent narrative. While there is abundant repetition in imagery and phrasing, implying some sort of underlying structure, the book does not appear to be a unified unit.[7]

Although the Song of Songs is contextually unique when compared to surrounding material within the biblical cannon, its material was likely widespread and popular within ancient Israel. Schoville and Sperling reflect that "song, music, and dance, both sacred and secular, have been vehicles for expressing the deepest human emotions from time immemorial, and it is doubtful that the line dividing one from the other was as clear to the ancients as it appears to the moderns."[8] Just as Egyptian parallels suggest that they were used as a "diversion of the heart," so too might the Song of Songs have been used as a source of entertainment.[9] Biblical prophets as well as early rabbinic writers help

[5] Fox, 191-2.
[6] Ibid, 295.
[7] Matter, 492.
[8] Schoville and Sperling, 15.
[9] Fox, 247.

to shed light on ways in which love songs were used among the Israelite population. Most often, the songs were likely enjoyed during celebrations of religious holidays, or any other celebratory occasion where song and dance were generally employed.

In a divine warning by God to the prophet Ezekiel, that his prophetic message won't be received by the people, the text of Ezekiel 33:31-32 demonstrates that hearing love songs was an established societal activity.[10] Through warning that Ezekiel's words won't be taken seriously given that they are viewed almost as entertainment, one can make the connection that love songs such as Song of Songs were popular sources of entertainment in gatherings. Also, Isaiah's "Song of the Vineyard" opens with the words "אָשִׁירָה נָּא לִידִידִי שִׁירַת דּוֹדִי לְכַרְמוֹ׃ כֶּרֶם הָיָה לִידִידִי בְּקֶרֶן בֶּן-שָׁמֶן," showing the widespread usage of love songs.[11] Isaiah draws upon the familiar motif of the love song as a metaphor to spread his prophetic message.

While the prophets were likely speaking about a broad corpus of love songs, Rabbi Akiba, a first to second century CE figure, mentions the Song of Songs by name. In the Tosefta Sanhedrin 12:10, Akiba declares: "Whoever warbles the Song of Songs at banqueting houses, treating it like an ordinary song, has no portion in the World to Come." This quote shows that as late as the second century CE, the Jewish people were singing the Song of Songs as a source of entertainment in festive environments.

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[10] "וְיָבוֹאוּ אֵלֶיךָ כְּמְבוֹא-עָם וְיֵשְׁבוּ לְפָנֶיךָ עַמִּי וְשָׁמְעוּ אֶת-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְאוֹתָם לֹא יַעֲשׂוּ כִּי-עֲגָבִים בְּפִיהֶם הֵמָּה עֹשִׂים אַחֲרֵי בִצְעָם לִבָּם הֹלֵךְ. וְהִנְּךָ לָהֶם כְּשִׁיר עֲגָבִים יְפֵה קוֹל וּמֵטִב נַגֵּן וְשָׁמְעוּ אֶת-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְעֹשִׂים אֵינָם אוֹתָם."

[11] Isaiah 5:1-7.

While there is evidence that the Song of Songs was used in the realm of popular culture entertainment in the first and second commonwealths and beyond, the understanding of the text at some point underwent a transition from recreational to religious. This is particularly noteworthy given that God is not mentioned at a single point throughout the book. Schoville and Sperling point out that unlike the book of Esther, which also does not mention God but is filled with "an unmistakable spirit of nationalism," absolutely no theological or religious concerns are brought up in the Song of Songs.[12] While the Song of Songs fails to delve into the world of theology, Fox believes that its contents became associated with Jewish religious practice because "the banquets at which they were sung were commonly held during leisure time afforded by religious holidays."[13] Aage Bentzen asserted that the sacralization and then canonization of the book evolved from its connection to religious festivals occurring in the springtime.[14] While the Song of Songs is currently read on Passover, there is no historical evidence that such associations were the practice in ancient days.

Only when the Song of Songs became part of the celebratory practices surrounding festivals did it gain status as a religious text. Because the Song seemingly became a staple among the peoples' religious lives, the religious leadership needed a way to justify including a story about sensuality and love into the sacred cannon. This need led to the widespread tradition of reading the material as allegory. When it comes to the interpretive tradition surrounding a text, J. Cheryl Exum notes that "the more problematic

[12] Schoville and Sperling, 15.
[13] Fox, 227.
[14] Aege Bentzen "Remarks on the Canonisation of the Song of Solomon," 1953. In Fox, 251.

a text, the more interpretation it requires to smooth over the difficulties."[15] Once a book enters a collection of sacred writings, interpreters need to justify that inclusion. In proportion to its size, the Song of Songs has more commentary and literature surrounding it than any other book outside of the Torah.[16]

Both early Jews and early Christians read the Song of Songs as allegory. Evidence of the Jewish understanding that the Song of Songs is a divinely inspired work about God's relationship with Israel can be traced back to the first century CE. Early Rabbinic interpretation tends to follow the opinion that the book is the song of love between God and Israel, given either to Moses at Sinai or revealed during the building of the ark of the covenant.[17] Rabbi Akiba, the same man who criticized the people who treated the Song of Songs as an ordinary banquet song, argued for the text's inclusion within the sacred canon. In a discussion asserting that holy books made the hands of priests impure,[18] Mishnah Yadayim 3:5 notes that when question was brought up of whether or not Song of Songs "made the hands impure," Rabbi Akiva said "God forbid! No one in Israel ever disagreed about the Song of Songs [by saying] that it does not make the hands impure. For the whole world is not as worthy as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies."

While Jewish interpreters read the Song as the relationship between God and Israel, Christian readers interpreted it as an allegory of the love between Christ and the

[15] Exum, 74.
[16] Schoville and Sperling, 16.
[17] Matter, 492.
[18] A tactic most likely devised to keep holy books separated from food, something that the priests were unable to partake in if in an impure state.

church, or Christ and the Christian people. In her article in the *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, E. A. Matter introduces the Christian commentator Origen of Alexandria's interpretation of the biblical text. Writing primarily in the third century CE, Origen was the first commentator of note from the Christian tradition to write on the Song of Songs. Composing two separate commentaries on the subject, he "understood the book's deeper meaning with great flexibility as the love between God and the soul, or Christ and the church, or both."[19] One of Origen's commentaries describes the Song of Songs as an "*epithalamium*, or a wedding song written to celebrate the spiritual marriage of God and the Christian soul or the Christian people."[20] While Christianity, like Judaism, believed that its important institutions had always existed, given modern knowledge that the Song of Songs was extant prior to the existence of Christianity or the Church, one is able to rule out this theory. Nonetheless, evidence exists that such an interpretation of the work was widely circulated in the Middle Ages until the mid sixth century.

From the sixth through the twelfth centuries, almost one hundred commentaries as well as countless homilies on the Song of Songs were written.[21] Seventh to Eighth century CE texts such as the Targum and Song of Songs Rabbah (also known as Midrash Chazita) dealt with the text from an allegorical perspective, focusing strongly on a nationalistic-historical interpretation. Both the Targum and the Midrash establish the Song's bride figure as a representation of Israel, while the beloved is God. These works also relate details found in the biblical text to events in Israelite history such as the

[19] Matter, 493.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

redemption from Egypt or the revelation of the Torah at Sinai.[22] The Targum also asserts that the Song told the historical narrative from the Exodus through the coming of the messiah and establishment of a third Temple.[23]

Eleventh to twelfth century scholar ibn Ezra, while continuing to rely on an allegorical approach to the text, differed in his interpretive approach, using a three level analysis. Ibn Ezra first explored the text in terms of its philological structure. Next, he looked at the *peshat*, or plain meaning of the text in terms of a constructed history of a man and woman who were shepherds. Finally, he deconstructed the text through an interpretive lens concerning the relationship between God an Israel from the time of Abraham through the coming of the messiah.[24] An additional twelfth century scholar, Moses Maimonides, purported that the Song told of the "yearning of the individual soul (the receptive material intellect) for union with God (the active intellect that governs the created order)."[25] Moses ibn Tibbon, writing shortly after Maimonides in the thirteenth century, adopted this same view point.

Schoville and Sperling note that the tendency toward allegorical interpretation "permitted every generation to find consolation, solace, and hope appropriate to its own time and circumstances." They also point out that "later Jewish exegetes such as Saadiah Gaon, Rashi, Samuel b. Meir, and Abraham ibn Ezra found in the symbolism of the Song words of consolation and strength for their contemporaries. A particularly interesting

[22] Exum, 74.
[23] Schoville and Sperling, 16-17.
[24] Exum, 74.
[25] Ibid.

interpretation advocated by a few medieval and later commentators was the view that the bride represented wisdom."[26] Such a view was adopted by sixteenth century commentator Don Isaac Abravanel, who identified the male lover as King Solomon, and the bride as the personification of wisdom.

Abravanel was not the only person to identify the male lover with Solomon. The Song of Songs opens with the words "שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לִשְׁלֹמֹה," attributing authorship of the Song to Solomon, and throughout the rest of the book, Solomon is mentioned by name seven times.[27] Keeping in mind that the central characters of the Song of Songs are the lovers, Westenholz notes that in the Bible, Kings are portrayed as the greatest lovers,[28] leading one to draw a connection between the male lover and the great King Solomon, the King whose name a reader would have just encountered. While the medieval commentators believed that Solomon was an active character in the book, modern scholars have all but disavowed such assertions. Exum notes that "the Song's lovers are archetypal lovers- composite figures, types of lovers rather than any specific lovers. In the course of the poem, they take on various guises or personalities and assume different roles."[29] While the male character is sometimes a king, he is also described as a shepherd. Fox notes that these figures, like those found in the ancient Egyptian love songs, are *personae*, "created characters through whom the poets speak but who are not

[26] Schoville and Sperling, 17.
[27] See Song of Songs 1:4, 12; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12.
[28] Westenholz, 2481.
[29] Exum, 8.

to be identified with them,"[30] and that "outside the title he is mentioned only for the sake of comparison, as a foil with which the lovers in the Song can be contrasted."[31]

With the dawn of the eighteenth century, the popularity of allegorical interpretation declined, giving rise to other avenues of interpretation for the Song of Songs. One such avenue was reading the text as a drama, with characters, a plot, and discernible morals.[32] Although most popular in the eighteenth century, reading the Song as drama was not a new invention. While third century Christian scholar Origen is most known for reading the Song of Songs as an allegory, he also described the work as "a nuptial poem in dramatic form."[33] When it comes to this approach to interpretation however, Schoville and Sperling point out that "the Song of Songs obviously lacks the elements of drama."[34] Today, such an understanding of the Song has also been discredited.

With the rise of critical biblical scholarship, the nineteenth century saw the greatest decline in reading the Song of Songs as an allegory. Exum points out that allegorical interpretation is inherently problematic because it lacks agreement among interpreters as well as verifiability. She strongly notes that "the Song is not an allegory; there is no indication that the poet ever intended it to be given an esoteric interpretation."[35] Exum, Fox, and Schoville and Sperling each address the equality between the male and female characters in the Song of Songs, noting that the text and

[30] Fox, 253.
[31] Ibid, 95.
[32] Schoville and Sperling, 17.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Exum, 76.

dialogue represent the viewpoints of both. Schoville and Sperling point out that the song presents a greater picture of gender mutuality than any other biblical book. Not only do both genders have a voice, but the female lover actually has more verses attributed to her than that of the male.[36] Given this dynamic, Fox comments that "this could hardly have been intended as a model of God's relation to Israel," as the biblical dynamics between God and Israel were inherently hierarchical in nature. [37]

The final means by which the Song of Songs has been read is through literal interpretation. From the first century CE, literal interpretations circulated along with the allegorical, however, they were continually suppressed by those in positions of power. Perhaps the most well known early champion of the literal interpretation of the Song was Theodore of Mopsuestia, a fifth century Syrian Christian exegete. While his written commentary was not preserved, it is known due to the many attacks on it.[38] Theodore asserted that the work was love poetry, written by King Solomon as a means of defending his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh.[39] This interpretation vehemently denied any spiritual or religious reading of the Song of Songs text.[40] Theodore was posthumously condemned for his excursive views by the Second Council of Constantinople in the year 533.[41] In 1873, a variation of the literal view was offered when German scholar J.G. Wetzstein began observing wedding rituals among Syrian peasants. He noted that the

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[36] Schoville and Sperling, 15.
[37] Fox, 237.
[38] Exum, 74.
[39] Reference to Solomon's relationship with Pharaoh's daughter can be found in 1 Kings 11:1.
"וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה אָהַב נָשִׁים נָכְרִיּוֹת רַבּוֹת וְאֶת בַּת פַּרְעֹה"
[40] Matter, 493.
[41] Exum, 74.

bride and groom were "crowned and treated as queen and king, and descriptive poems (*wasfs*) praising their beauty were sung in their honor."[42] Perhaps the Song is a composition of *wasfs*, originally used in the festivities of a wedding.

As mentioned previously, the overriding understanding within modern scholarship is to view the Song of Songs as a collection of lyric love songs. Schoville and Sperling note "the anthology includes songs appropriate for use at wedding feasts and others that simply celebrate the joys of youthful love. The redeeming value of this view, if one is needed, is that love in all its manifestations is the work of the Creator who made all things and pronounced them good."[43] Whether viewed as an ancient song used in celebration of a festival, a dramatic story employed to teach a lesson, a literal story of lovers, or a compilation of poetry, the Song of Songs has been actively discussed, debated, and circulated for over two-thousand years, a true testament to its popularity as well as enigmatic nature.

[42] Ibid, 79. See also Schoville and Sperling, 17.
[43] Schoville and Sperling, 18.

The Song of Songs: Chapter 3

1. עַל-מִשְׁכָּבִי בַּלֵּילוֹת

בִּקַּשְׁתִּי אֵת שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי

בִּקַּשְׁתִּיו וְלֹא מְצָאתִיו

1. On my bed at night,

I sought the one who I love.

I sought him, but I did not find him.

In opening with the words "על-משכבי," "on my bed," Song of Songs Chapter 3 sets a scene which many scholars understand to be the introduction of a dream sequence. The chapter opens with the words of the female lover, a segment of a speech that will continue through verse five. While "בלילות" is a plural construct of the word "לילה," or "night," and would generally be translated as "in the nights," "I translated this word as "at night." Here, as is the case in 3:8, the plural form indicates repeated action. Rather than referring to a specific series of nights, the word refers to events that occur generally at night-time, perhaps night after night.[44]

The verb ב.ק.ש, which I translated as "sought," carries a connotation deeper than the physical act of seeking or looking for. There is also an emotional component of desiring or yearning. In Psalm 27:4,[45] the psalmist employs this verb to express a longing

[44] Pope, 415; Exum, 122; Snaith, 46.

[45] "אַחַת שָׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת-יְהוָה אוֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ
שִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית-יְהוָה כָּל-יְמֵי חַיַּי
לַחֲזוֹת בְּנֹעַם-יְהוָה וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהֵיכָלוֹ"

to live in the Eternal's house, and in Jeremiah 2:33,[46] the prophet relays God's message of discontent, saying that the people "לבקש אהבה," or "seek out love," an action strong enough to distract them from properly worshipping the Eternal. J. Cheryl Exum notes that when the female lover seeks her male counterpart, she could be "seeking him in her heart," and that her nightly seeking "suggests that she has often lain in bed longing for him."[47]

While many translations render "בקשתי את שאהבה נפשי" as "I sought him who my soul loves,[48] I translated the phrase as "I sought the one whom I love." As the construct does not take an explicitly masculine form, I chose to use the neutral "one" rather than "him" to most authentically reflect the particle "את." While the prefix "ש" (of "שאהבה") is generally translated as "that" or "which," I chose to use "who" to better construe with normative English grammar, since the *shin* is referring to a subject not an object. Finally, while the word "נפש" does mean soul, the word can also refer to a person him or herself, particularly when used in poetry or ornate discourse.[49]

It is noteworthy that the final phrase of the verse, " בקשתיו ולא מצאתיו," was not in the original Masoretic Hebrew text, but was added into the Septuagint's version, and has since made its way into standard Hebrew translations.[50] It is possible that this addition was made to further connect the text to its parallel dream sequence in 5:6.[51] The Haller translation goes even further in an attempt to bring this verse into agreement with

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[46] "מה-תֵּיטִבי דּוֹדֵךְ לְבַקֵּשׁ אַהֲבָה לָכֵן גַּם אֶת-הָרָעוֹת למדתי (לִמַּדְתְּ) אֶת-דְּרָכָיִךְ"
[47] Exum, 136.
[48] See NRSV, Murphy, and Pope .
[49] See entry 4 of "נפש" in BDB.
[50] This is true of the JPS translation, which uses the Septuagint text as a source, but Jastrow leaves the phrase out altogether.
[51] Exum, 122; Gordis, 83.

5:6, and adds "קראתיו ולא ענני " to the end of the verse. Robert T. Gordis argues that while the dream sequences in chapters 3 and 5 are similar, they are not identical, and such additions are therefore unnecessary.[52]

2. אָקוּמָה נָּא וַאֲסוֹבְבָה בָּעִיר

בַּשְּׁוָקִים וּבָרְחֹבוֹת

אֲבַקְשָׁה אֵת שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי

בִּקַּשְׁתִּיו וְלֹא מְצָאתִיו

2. "I will rise now and go around in the city,

In the streets and in the squares,

I will seek the one whom I love."

I sought him, but I did not find him.

Verse two moves from a plan of action told in the future tense, to a reflection on the stated action, told in the past tense. As the speaker describes her plan to search for her lover, she uses three verbs in the cohortative form: "אקומה," "אסובבה," and "אבקשה." The BDB notes that "נא" is used as an entreaty or exhortation, and denotes self-deliberation when used with the first person cohortative. This language highlights the female lover's determination. The first three lines of the verse may be read as if they were part of the internal dialogue of the character, thus notifying the reader of the importance

[52] Gordis, 83.

of the moment. I translated the "נא" as "now" to emphasize how the character strongly resolves herself to the decision, and has immediate plans to act on it.

The root ס.ב.ב carries a meaning of circling or going around something. Examined within the greater context of the verse, one can understand that the verb "אסובבה" has to do with going out in the city, an action necessary for the female lover's search. I translated it as "go around" to stay true to the roots circuitous connotations, as well as to add to the feeling that the subject is wandering around. The female lover does not have a direct path laid out before her, rather, she must wander around, circling the city in order to find the one she seeks.

The use of "שוקים" and "רחבות," two fairly synonymous words, further emphasizes the challenge of the subject's search. While both words can mean "street," the double usage makes sure that the reader knows that the female lover wandered through various parts of the city. While the word "שוק" is translated as "marketplace" in modern Hebrew, it's original meaning is "street," because ancient marketplaces, or שוקים, took place out on the streets of the cities.[53] I translated "רחבות" as squares, because the root ר.ח.ב has to do with something that is wide or expansive. A square is simply a wide, open version of a street.

3. מְצָאוּנִי הַשֹּׁמְרִים

הַסֹּבְבִים בָּעִיר

אֵת שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי רְאִיתֶם

[53] Kravitz and Olitzky, 35.

3. The watchmen found me,

The ones who go around in the city.

"Have you seen the one who I love?"

The root ש.מ.ר carries a meaning of guarding, protecting, or keeping. While "השמרים" could be translated as "the guards," I chose the word "watchmen" to convey a sense that these men were not just protecting the city, but were actively watching the female lover, poised to see her wandering and interact with her.

Practically every verse in this chapter draws upon a word or language that was used in the previous verse. In verse 3, ס.ב.ב is the recurring verb, this time in the *qal* form, [54] to indicate that the watchmen are patrolling the city. The repetition of this root also emphasizes the inevitability of the female lover meeting the watchmen; they are walking around in the same streets that she was wandering through. The repetition of the root מ.צ.א creates a sense of poetic irony. While the root is used in verses 1 and 2 to show a failure in finding her lover, in verse 3, the watchmen interrupt her search, further obstructing it, through the use of the same verb.

A more literal translation of "את שאהבה נפשי ראיתם" would be "The one whom I love - have you seen?" I, however, reordered the wording in order to make the translation more idiomatic.

[54] The root ס.ב.ב was seen in verse 2 in the *po'al* form.

4. כִּמְעַט שֶׁעָבַרְתִּי מֵהֶם

עַד שֶׁמָּצָאתִי אֵת שֶׁאָהֲבָה נַפְשִׁי

אֲחַזְתִּיו וְלֹא אַרְפֶּנּוּ

עַד-שֶׁהֲבֵיאתִיו אֶל-בֵּית אִמִּי

וְאֶל-חֶדֶר הוֹרָתִי

4. Scarcely had I passed them,

When I found the one whom I love.

I took hold of him and I would not let him go,

Until I brought him to my mother's house,

And to the room of the one who conceived me.

A more literal translation of "עד שמצאתי" would be "until that I found." The verse clearly means to convey that soon after the female lover meets the guards, she finds the one whom she was seeking. I therefore chose to translate these words in an idiomatic sense that expressed the underlying meaning.

The root א.ח.ז carries a meaning of seizing. When used in Judges 16:21,[55] 2 Samuel 4:10,[56] and Psalm 56:1,[57] there is a connotation of seizing for political purposes,

[55]The Philistines seize Samson. "...וַיֹּאחֲזוּהוּ פְלִשְׁתִּים וַיְנַקְּרוּ אֶת-עֵינָיו"

[56] David seizes someone who tells that Saul is dead. "כִּי הַמַּגִּיד לִי לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה-מֵת שָׁאוּל וְהוּא-הָיָה כִמְבַשֵּׂר בְּעֵינָיו וָאֹחֲזָה בּוֹ וָאֲהָרְגֵהוּ בְּצִקְלָג-אֲשֶׁר לְתִתִּי-לוֹ בְּשׂרָה"

[57]Mentioning that the Philistines seized someone in Gat. "לַמְנַצֵּחַ עַל-יוֹנַת אִלֶּם רְחֹקִים לְדָוִד מִכְתָּם בֶּאֱחֹז אוֹתוֹ פְלִשְׁתִּים בְּגַת"

and the association is generally negative. In Psalm 73:23[58] however, the psalmist uses the root with a positive connotation when speaking about God taking hold of his hand.

The root ר.פ.ה is associated with withdrawing. In the *pi'el* form, it can mean to loosen or relax. This root also occurs with negative "לא" in front of it in Deuteronomy 31:6 and 31:8[59] where it refers to not forsaking, and Job 7:19[60] in the context of not letting someone be alone. In translating "לא ארפנו" as "I would not let him go," I sought to convey that after searching and finding her lover, the female character takes action to hold onto him in a way that won't allow him to go adrift again. Not only does she take hold of him, but emphasizes that she does not want to be put in a situation of losing him again.

Taking her lover to her mother's house is an action that is repeated in 8:2. That chapter similarly tells of the subject meeting her lover in the public domain and leading him back to the private domain.

5. הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלִַם

בִּצְבָאוֹת אוֹ בְּאַיְלוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה

אִם-תָּעִירוּ וְאִם-תְּעוֹרְרוּ

אֶת-הָאַהֲבָה עַד שֶׁתֶּחְפָּץ {ס}

[58] "וַאֲנִי תָּמִיד עִמָּךְ אָחַזְתָּ בְּיַד-יְמִינִי"

[59] Deut 31:6 - "... כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא הַהֹלֵךְ עִמָּךְ לֹא יַרְפְּךָ וְלֹא יַעַזְבֶךָּ"

Deut 31:8 - "וַיהוָה הוּא הַהֹלֵךְ לְפָנֶיךָ הוּא יִהְיֶה עִמָּךְ--לֹא יַרְפְּךָ וְלֹא יַעַזְבֶךָּ לֹא תִירָא וְלֹא תֵחָת

[60] כַּמָּה לֹא-תִשְׁעֶה מִמֶּנִּי לֹא-תַרְפֵּנִי עַד-בִּלְעִי רֻקִי"

5. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,

By the gazelles or by hinds[61] of the field.

Do not wake and do not rouse

Love until it desires.

This entire verse is a repetition of the text of 2:7. The phrase "השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלם" is what Tremper Longman III identifies as a leitmotif, a phrase that recurs throughout the Song.[62] Along with this verse, and the occurrence in 2:7, one may find the phrase in 5:8 and 8:4. Gordis notes that this refrain is unnecessary, and "often deleted on the ground that it is appropriate to a genuine meeting of the lovers, but not to a dream."[63]

6. מִי זֹאת עֹלָה מִן-הַמִּדְבָּר

כְּתִימְרוֹת עָשָׁן

מְקֻטֶּרֶת מֹר וּלְבוֹנָה

מִכֹּל אַבְקַת רוֹכֵל

6. Who is this who comes up from the wilderness,

Like columns of smoke.

Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,

From all of the powders of the merchant?

[61] Another word for "doe."
[62] Longman, 131.
[63] Gordis, 83.

Verse six begins a new pericope. No longer a dreamlike narrative, this section tells the story of the festivities surrounding a wedding. While the previous pericope focused on the female lover, and was predominantly spoken in her voice, this material, and the verses following in chapter 3 are predominantly spoken by a narrator.

The opening question of "מי זאת?" brings about a series of interpretive issues for the reader. "זאת" is a feminine word, and the question of "מי," or "who" would lead one to believe that the text will proceed by talking about a particular woman. It is possible to understand "זאת" and the feminine participle "עלה" as referring to "מטתו שלשלמה," which appears in verse 7, as "מטה" is a feminine word. This structure however, begs the question of why the writer chose the interrogative "who" rather than "what" or "מה." Perhaps the question of "who" foreshadows the approach of a woman. Roland E. Murphy notes that "the identical question appears again in 8:5a, where the feminine participle (מתרפקת) indicates that the woman is meant, although no answer is given.[64]

Gordis points out that "תימרות" could refer to the dust kicked up in the procession through the desert, but suggests that a better reading might be "בתימרות," "with pillars of smoke," referring to the smoke of incense that is burned in celebration of a bride.[65]

"מקטרת" is the *pu'al* feminine participle of the root ק.ט.ר., of which the active *pi'el* form relates to burning incense. The word therefore has to do with ritually perfuming something through the use of incense, leading to my translation of "perfumed." The use of this word further supports Gordis' suggestion of changing "כתימרות" to "בתימרות."

[64] Murphy, 149.
[65] Gordis, 83.

Othmar Keel notes that the reference to myrrh and frankincense harks back to the spices that the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon in 1 Kings 10:10.[66] Although this pericope has been interpreted by some as a descriptor of King Solomon's wedding to an Egyptian princess, the general understanding amongst scholars is that Solomon's name was inserted into this pericope only because the verses talk about a seemingly royal affair. If one were however, to read this as a description of Solomon's wedding, one could connect the spices of myrrh and frankincense to the spices of which there is evidence that Solomon was presented.

The word "אבקת," meaning "powders," is a hapax legomenon, however, one is able to understand its meaning due to its usage in the masculine form in the Tanakh.[67]

7. הִנֵּה מִטָּתוֹ שֶׁלִּשְׁלֹמֹה

שִׁשִּׁים גִּבֹּרִים סָבִיב לָהּ

מִגִּבֹּרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

7. Behold Solomon's litter,

Sixty mighty men surround it.

Of the mighty men of Israel.

[66] Keel, 126.
1 Kings 10:10 - "... לֹא בָא כַבֹּשֶׂם הַהוּא עוֹד לָרֹב אֲשֶׁר-נָתְנָה מַלְכַּת-שְׁבָא לַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה"
[67] See Deut. 28:26; Exod. 9:9; Ezek. 26:10. In each of these cases, it is paired with "עפר," the word for dust.

The word "מטתו" can be translated as "bed," however in this case, it is identified with the "אפריון," or "palanquin" of verse 9, describing a type of portable couch which served as a means of transportation to members of the upper class in ancient times.[68] In order to distinguish this item from a bed, I translated it as "litter."

Gordis notes that the first two letters in "שלשלמה" could be a dittography, or scribal error in which the letters were mistakenly repeated. It is also possible that this is an Aramaic construction.[69] Again, this usage of Solomon's name is suggested to be an inauthentic gloss which was added to the text.[70]

8. כֻּלָּם אֲחֲזֵי חֶרֶב
מְלֻמְּדֵי מִלְחָמָה
אִישׁ חַרְבּוֹ עַל-יְרֵכוֹ
מִפַּחַד בַּלֵּילוֹת {ס}

8. All of them are skilled with a sword,
Trained in warfare.
Each man with his sword on his thigh,
Because the terror of the night.

While the root א.ח.ז. appeared in verse 4 in the sense of holding onto a lover, JPS notes that in Akkadian, the root means "to learn." Taking the Akkadian into

[68] Kravitz and Olitzky, 37.
[69] Gordis, 83. Note that this construction is also common in Mishnaic Hebrew, which was greatly influenced by Aramaic.
[70] Only in Song of Songs 1:1; 1:5; 8:11; 8:12 is Solomon's name thought to be authentic.

consideration, "אחזי חרב" has to do with being learned or "skilled with a sword." This translation fits particularly well when taken in context with the next phrase: " מלמדי מלחמה," or "trained in warfare." The A section of this verse therefore repeats the same concept, that the mighty men are good fighters, emphasizing the point further.

As was the case in verse 1, the plural construct of "בלילות" is a plural of generalization, not speaking about specific nights, but nighttime in general. As the king is the only character mentioned in this particular section, in mentioning the "terror of the night," perhaps the author is poking fun at the king, who exhibits fear in the face of darkness.

9. אַפִּרְיוֹן עָשָׂה לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה

מֵעֲצֵי הַלְּבָנוֹן

9. King Solomon made himself a palanquin,

From the trees of Lebanon.

Yet another hapax legomenon is present in verse 9 with the word "אפריון." Abundant scholarly debate exists as to the origin of this word, with people citing Persian, Sanskrit, and Greek origins.[71] I prefer the association with the Greek *aphorion*, meaning palanquin, and have based my translation off of that derivation.

[71] See Gordis, 21, note 74 for further discussion.

Keel notes that this verse and the following provide an informative gloss spoken as an objective account by someone who does not have an active role or stake in the narrative, its main purpose being to move the reader along in the text. [72]

10. עַמּוּדָיו עָשָׂה כֶסֶף

רְפִידָתוֹ זָהָב

מֶרְכָּבוֹ אַרְגָּמָן

תּוֹכוֹ רָצוּף אַהֲבָה

מִבְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם

10. He made its pillars of silver,

Its back of gold,

Its seat of purple.

Its interior inlaid with love,

By the daughters of Jerusalem.

Of all verses in chapter 3, verse 10 provides some of the most issues in terms of translation. Murphy attributes these difficulties to unknown nature of "אפריון," thus making the details of its description uncertain and difficult to translate accurately.[73] "רפידה" is another hapax legomenon. The root ר.פ.ד. is used twice in Job[74] in the context of spreading or stretching something out. In Song of Songs 2:5, the same root is used

[72] Keel, 130.
[73] Murphy, 149.
[74] Job 17:13 - "אִם-אֲקַוֶּה שְׁאוֹל בֵּיתִי בַּחֹשֶׁךְ רִפַּדְתִּי יְצוּעָי"
Job 41:22 - "תַּחְתָּיו חַדּוּדֵי חָרֶשׂ יִרְפַּד חָרוּץ עֲלֵי-טִיט"

with the connotation of being supportive. As a noun which is spread out and supportive, I chose the translation of "back."[75]

In Leviticus 15:9,[76] "מרכב" is used to describe a saddle on which a person would be mounted, showing us that the word refers to some sort of a seat. While "ארגמן" does translate to the color "purple," this is most likely talking about a particular luxurious fabric or hue of fabric that was used to decorate the seat of the palanquin.

"רצוף אהבה" is often rendered as "inlaid with love,"[77] however, many scholars take issue with that translation. Graetz suggested the emendation of "הבנים," a word found in Ezekiel 27:15[78] meaning ivory.[79] The root ר.צ.ף is associated with the action of laying firmly. This text could therefore read that the palanquin was "inlaid with ivory," a description of detail that fits with the list of other physical descriptions. Taking Graetz's suggestion and emending the text even further yields:

תוכו רצוף הבנים

בנות ירושלם צאנה

וראינה בנות ציון

Its inside was inlaid with ivory.

Daughters of Jerusalem come out,

And take a look, O daughters of Zion

---

[75] This follows the JPS translation.
[76] "וְכָל-הַמֶּרְכָּב אֲשֶׁר יִרְכַּב עָלָיו הַזָּב יִטְמָא"
[77] See NRSV.
[78] "... קַרְנוֹת שֵׁן והובנים (וְהָבְנִים) הֵשִׁיבוּ אֶשְׁכָּרֵךְ"
[79] See Gordis, 84. JPS also notes this emendation.

This reading combines the end of verse 10 with the beginning of verse 11, and changes the roles of the "בנות ירושלם" from verse 10 and the "בנות ציון" from verse 11. While the original text described the "daughters of Jerusalem" having a role in constructing the palanquin, and the "daughters of Zion" with viewing the King, the new reading notes how both "come out" and "look" at the work of the palanquin.

Another suggested emendation to the text is that the "מ" from the beginning of "מבנות" should be taken off of "מבנות," and added onto the end of the preceding word, making "אהבה" into the plural "אהבם." Such a change would render the B section of this verse "Its interior inlaid with love, O daughters of Jerusalem," changing "מבנות" to the vocative "בנות."

If such changes to the placement of the "מ" were carried out, one final suggested emendation is that instead of reading "אהבם," one might read "אבנים" meaning "precious stones" or jewels.[80] While it seems unlikely that so many changes to the text are necessary or are correct, taking this final revision into account, one is left with the translation "Its interior inlaid with jewels, O daughters of Jerusalem." The large number of the suggested corrections demonstrates just how difficult this verse is to understand properly.

While the original text implies that the daughters of Jerusalem were involved in the crafting of the palanquin's interior, treating the "מ" as an enclitic that is attached to the preceding word sets up the language at the end of verse 10 to be parallel with the opening

[80] Kravitz and Olitzky, 39.

of verse 11 which mentions "daughters of Zion."[81] When the altered 10b and 11a are read together, the resulting text reads:

תוכו רצוף אהבם בנות ירושלם.

צאנה וראינה בנות ציון

Thus, a chiastic structure is created.

11. צְאֶנָה וּרְאֶינָה בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן

בַּמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה

בָּעֲטָרָה שֶׁעִטְּרָה-לּוֹ אִמּוֹ

בְּיוֹם חֲתֻנָּתוֹ

וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחַת לִבּוֹ {ס}

11. Come out and look, O daughters of Zion,

Upon King Solomon.

Upon the crown with which his mother crowned him

On the day of his wedding,

And on the day of his heart's joy.

While a more literal translation of "צאנה" would yield "go out," I chose to translate it as "come out" to reflect the true nature of the request for the girls to leave their house and assemble with the people who are calling to them and from the outside, requesting that the girls come and join them in viewing the king.

[81] Murphy, 150.

Keel suggests that this verse could be read as a direct continuation of the 3:6-8, the word "look" following as an answer to the question of "מי זאת" in verse 6. He would thus regard verses 9 and 10 as additional material, inserted to describe Solomon's litter.[82]

In the last verse of chapter 3, there is one last hapax legomenon: "חתנתו." As the root ח.ת.ן. is used elsewhere throughout the Tanakh to talk about people who are related through marriage[83], we can read this form as "his wedding." Outside of the Tanakh and in modern Hebrew, the word "חתונה" has become the common term for wedding.

[82] Keel, 136.
[83] The root is used in verb form in Gen. 34:9 and Deut. 7:3 to talk about becoming related by marriage. It means to become a son-in-law in 1 Kgs. 3:1; 1 Sam. 18:21, 23, 26; and 2 Chron. 18:1. For more usages, see Holladay 120.

The Song of Songs: Chapter 5

1. בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי

אֲחֹתִי כַלָּה

אָרִיתִי מוֹרִי עִם-בְּשָׂמִי

אָכַלְתִּי יַעְרִי עִם-דִּבְשִׁי

שָׁתִיתִי יֵינִי עִם-חֲלָבִי

אִכְלוּ רֵעִים שְׁתוּ

וְשִׁכְרוּ דּוֹדִים {ס}

1. I came to my garden,

My sister, bride;

I plucked my myrrh along with my spice,

I ate my honeycomb with my honey,

I drank my wine along with my milk.

Eat friends, drink:

Be drunk on love!

Song of Songs 5:1 opens with the words of the male lover. While the verse marks a new chapter in Song of Songs, many scholars include this verse as part of a pericope made up of verses 4:1 through 5:1,[84] a division primarily the result of garden imagery that pervades the text. J. Cheryl Exum points out that the man's words of "I came to my garden" in 5:1 are a direct reply to the woman's invitation of "let my beloved come to his

[84] See Exum, Gordis, and Keel.

garden and eat its luscious fruits!" in the preceding verse (4:16).[85] The male lover echoes and accepts the female lover's invitation from 4:16 by using the same verbs that she used (ב.ו.א, "to come" and א.כ.ל, "to eat") and adding to them with א.ר.ה, meaning "to pluck," and ש.ת.ה, "to drink." Each object relating to the male lover's actions is modified with a first person possessive suffix, the Hebrew ending with the letter "י" (גני, מורי, בשמי, יערי, דבשי, ייני, חלבי). Othmar Keel notes that "this suffix does not express pride of ownership... instead it shows the man passionately reciprocates the feeling of belonging signaled by the woman" in 4:16.[86] The strength of the passion is further demonstrated by the three merisms in the verse ("מורי עם בשמי," "יערי עם דבשי," and "ייני עם חלבי"), which demonstrate the almost exhaustive nature of the actions that the lover has taken. The male lover goes out of his way emphasize his connection to and passion for the garden, a possible metaphor for the female lover, with the sequence of first person verbs ("I came," "I plucked," "I ate," and "I drank") and the first person possessive suffix. The verb "אריתי," which I translated as "I plucked," is derived from the root א.ר.ה, which has only one other occurrence: Psalm 80:13. While Pope suggests "I ate" as a possible translation,[87] Exum notes that myrrh is not a substance that a person would eat,[88] leaving "plucked" as a more fitting option.

There is a great deal of scholarly debate surrounding the speaker in the closing stich of 5:1. While the beginning of the verse was certainly in the male lover's voice, Robert Gordis points out that the male lover "is unlikely to invite his friends to enjoy the

[85] Exum, 182.
[86] Keel, 182.
[87] Pope, 501.
[88] Exum, 153.

delights of his beloved." He therefore notes two possible emendations: the first, changing the text to the masculine singular command form ("אכל רעי שתה ושכר דודי"), and the second, changing the text to the feminine singular command form ("אכלו רעיתי שתי ושכרי דודים"). Both of these emendations help the dialogue of the text to remain between the two lovers. With the first alternation, the verse continues a back and forth conversation between the male and female, with the female responding to the male's words. With the second emendation, the text keeps the male lover as the speaker, with his words still directed to the female lover.[89] While these emendations help to make the text clearer, Exum suggests the most likely reading, which does not require any alterations to the Hebrew. Given that the three speaking voices in the Song belong to the male, the female, and the daughters of Jerusalem, she suggests that the final stich is spoken by the daughters of Jerusalem, addressing their "friends" the lovers, and encouraging their "mutual intoxication and satiation."[90]

The word "דודים" is in the abstract plural, and in this case means "love."[91] Rather than referring to "lovers" or "beloveds" as chapter 5 will do in following verses, this usage can be compared to "דודיך" in 2:2 and 2:4, and "דדים" in Proverbs 7:18[92] where the term refers to the general concept of love as well as physical lovemaking, something that one lover experienced from the other.

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[89] Gordis, 86.
[90] Exum, 182.
[91] See Holladay, 68 and BDB on "דוד."
[92] "לְכָה נִרְוֶה דֹדִים עַד-הַבֹּקֶר נִתְעַלְסָה בָּאֲהָבִים"

2. אֲנִי יְשֵׁנָה

וְלִבִּי עֵר

קוֹל דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק

פִּתְחִי-לִי אֲחֹתִי

רַעְיָתִי יוֹנָתִי תַּמָּתִי

שֶׁרֹּאשִׁי נִמְלָא-טָל

קְוֻצּוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי לָיְלָה

2. I was sleeping,

But my heart was awake.

Hark! My beloved knocks.

"Open to me my sister,

My companion, my dove, my perfect one!

For my head is filled with dew,

My locks with the moisture of night."

This verse opens a new pericope, distinguished from that of 4:1 through 5:1 by a clear shift in theme. Whereas previous verses dealt with gardens and relied heavily on imperatives, the female lover now begins a first-person narrative. The lover's assertion of "I was sleeping but my heart was awake" suggests that similar to 3:1-5, the text of 5:1 through 5:8 is a dream sequence. In the Tanakh, the heart is normally the organ from which thoughts originate,[93] so the description of the lover's "heart" being awake during sleep could mean that her thoughts were stirring, another way of saying that she was

[93] See Genesis 6:5 ("וַיַּרְא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וְכָל-יֵצֶר מַחְשְׁבֹת לִבּוֹ רַק רַע כָּל-הַיּוֹם"), in which "לבו," "his heart," is described as the source from which man devises plans.

dreaming. Exum notes that use of the root ע.ו.ר., relating to rousing or awakening, is an allusion to the female's entreaty to the "daughters of Jerusalem" in 3:5 of "do not wake and do not rouse love until it desires."[94]

While "קול" is generally translated as "voice," the word can be used as an exclamation at the beginning of a clause, thus meaning "Hark!" This term is used in a similar manner in Genesis 4:10[95] when God chastises Cain for killing Abel, noting how Abel's blood cries out from the ground. Another example can be found as Isaiah prophesies upheaval coming from the distance in the "Babylon Pronouncement" of 13:4.[96]

The root ד.פ.ק. has only three occurrences in the Tanakh, this verse being one of them. In Genesis 33:13, it is used in the context of excessively driving cattle,[97] and in Judges 19:22, where it shows up in the *hit'pa'el* reflexive form, it refers to men beating on a door.[98] From these two examples, one can understand that the root carries a meaning of pushing or forcing something. While the Hebrew text does not explicitly state that the beloved is standing at a door, I translated "דופק" as "knocks." One interpretation of this scene is that the male lover is asking to be let into the female lover's house. The Septuagint supplies the word door as a subject, and the JPS translation also fills in "I opened the door for my beloved" in verse 6. The lack of explicit reference to a "door," however, allows for the possibility to read the text through as more descriptive of a love

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[94] Exum, 193.

[95] "וַיֹּאמֶר מֶה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן-הָאֲדָמָה"

[96] "קוֹל הָמוֹן בֶּהָרִים דְּמוּת עַם-רָב קוֹל שְׁאוֹן מַמְלְכוֹת גּוֹיִם נֶאֱסָפִים יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְפַקֵּד צְבָא מִלְחָמָה"

[97] "וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אָדֹנִי יֹדֵעַ כִּי-הַיְלָדִים רַכִּים וְהַצֹּאן וְהַבָּקָר עָלוֹת עָלָי וּדְפָקוּם יוֹם אֶחָד וָמֵתוּ כָּל-הַצֹּאן"

[98] "... וְהִנֵּה אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר אַנְשֵׁי בְנֵי-בְלִיַּעַל נָסַבּוּ אֶת-הַבַּיִת מִתְדַּפְּקִים עַל-הַדָּלֶת..."

scene. Exum points out the onomatopoetic nature of the Hebrew "דודי דופק," how the sounds of the words read together resemble the sound of knocking.[99]

The string of endearments that the male lover uses after his appeal of "open to me" are employed throughout the Song of Songs as he addresses the female lover. Each presented with a first person possessive pronoun, (the "י" attached to the end of the words,) "אחתי," "רעיתי," and "יונתי" have each been used before.[100] This verse sees the addition of a fourth term of endearment, "תמתי," meaning "my perfect one," a term which he will elaborate on in 6:9.

The male speaker uses a great deal of repetition in this verse to emphasize his message and desire. After using four separate terms of endearment to get the female lover's attention, he seems to state the same thing twice in his reasoning to be "let in." He speaks of both his "head" and "locks" being wet. Two different words are used to express that dew was on his head: "טל," which directly translates as "dew" and "...רסיסי," which means "drops (of dew)" In order not to be redundant, I translated "רסיס" as "moisture" because the verb form of ר.ס.ס. means "to moisten."[101]

3. פָּשַׁטְתִּי אֶת-כֻּתָּנְתִּי
אֵיכָכָה אֶלְבָּשֶׁנָּה
רָחַצְתִּי אֶת-רַגְלַי
אֵיכָכָה אֲטַנְּפֵם

[99] Exum, 193.
[100] For "אחתי" see 4:9-10, 12; 5:1. For "רעיתי" see1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7. For "יונתי" see 2:14.
[101] See BDB, 944.

3. I had stripped off my tunic.

How can I put it on?

I washed my feet.

How can I soil them?

It is unclear whether this verse is a direct response to the male lover or whether it is an aside to the woman's audience, the daughters of Jerusalem, whose voices were heard in 5:1. Either way, this verse provides an explanation as to why the female did not let her lover in.

The word "איככה" is an interrogative participle derived from a combination of the words "אי" and "ככה," and is somewhat stronger than "איך," also "how."[102] This particular form is an Aramaism, only showing up here and in Esther 8:6 (also twice in the same verse), and Exum points out that is used to introduce rhetorical questions.[103] In this case, the female lover is saying that she had already made preparations for sleep by taking off her tunic and washing her feet, and poses the rhetorical questions to convey her thoughts of "what a shame that I have to get dressed again."

4. דּוֹדִי שָׁלַח יָדוֹ מִן-הַחֹר

וּמֵעַי הָמוּ עָלָיו

4. My beloved sent his hand in through the hole,

And my insides thrilled for him.

[102] See BDB, 32.
[103] Exum, 185.

Whereas the previous verse seemed to be an aside, explaining the female lover's thinking, this verse brings the reader back into the narrative retelling of events as the male lover knocked at the door. This verse certainly seems to be a double entendre for sexual relations. The word "יד," meaning "hand," shows up in the Tanakh and extra-biblical Hebrew sources as a euphemism for the penis.[104] If one reads "יד" as a phallus, it follows to understand "חר," meaning "hole" as a euphemism for the vagina.

While "מן" can generally be translated as "from," Exum notes that here it "has the sense of 'in through,'" and "represents the perspective of one who is inside, i.e., 'in from outside.'"[105] If one was to read this verse as a scene of the male lover standing at the door, it could be understood that the "hole" is some sort of opening in the door through which the male lover was trying to put his hand inside the female lover's house or room. Leonard S. Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky note that "חר" "may refer to something on the door, perhaps a latch - as in the door to a bedroom."[106] Keel elaborates that "Above the door bolt was apparently a barely fist-sized hole... this hole permitted the person inside, before opening the door, to view someone who wanted to enter."[107] The usage of "חר" in 2 Kings 12:10,[108] in which a hole is created in the top of an offering chest so that people can deposit money into it, supports the notion that this type of hole is small in size. Finally, Robert Gordis, who vehemently disagrees with reading this verse as sexual innuendo, suggests that the hole "probably refers to an aperture through which the door

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[104] See Isa 57:8, 10; 1QIsa 65:3; 1QS 7:13.
[105] Exum, 185.
[106] Leonard S. Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky, 61.
[107] Keel, 190.
[108] "וַיִּתֵּן אֹתוֹ אֵצֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ בימין (מִיָּמִין) בְּבוֹא-אִישׁ; וְיִקַּח יְהוֹיָדָע הַכֹּהֵן אֲרוֹן אֶחָד וַיִּקֹּב חֹר בְּדַלְתּוֹ אֶת-כָּל-הַכֶּסֶף הַמּוּבָא בֵּית-יְהוָה בֵּית יְהוָה וְנָתְנוּ-שָׁמָּה הַכֹּהֲנִים שֹׁמְרֵי הַסַּף"

can be opened from the outside." Remarking that the hole was clearly large enough for a hand to fit through, he dismissed the notion that it was a "peering-hole."[109] While an interesting theory, poetry, especially the Song of Songs, often draws upon ambivalence and double entendre. It is therefore unrealistic for Gordis to wholly dismiss multi-layered readings of a sexual nature.

The word "מעים," translated here as "insides," refers to the body's inner organs. While the word generally refers to the bowels or intestines, it is used specifically throughout the Tanakh to refer to both male and female reproductive organs. In Genesis 25:23, the term is used to note that two nations will issue from Rebekah's womb and in Isaiah 49:1, the prophet notes that he was appointed by God while "ממעי אמי," while in his mother's womb.[110] Keel notes that biblical descriptions of emotions are often described in relation to particular body parts and points to Isaiah 63:15 in which "מעיך" is likened to a yearning, noting passion and desire.[111]

Some scholars suggest that the word "עליו" ("for him") be emended to "עלי" ("within me"),[112] a reading that would focus the text more on the woman's personal experience of her lover. This seems to be an unnecessary emendation.

5. קַמְתִּי אֲנִי לִפְתֹּחַ לְדוֹדִי

וְיָדַי נָטְפוּ-מוֹר

וְאֶצְבְּעֹתַי מוֹר עֹבֵר

עַל כַּפּוֹת הַמַּנְעוּל

[109] Gordis, 88.
[110] See also Num 5:22; Ps 71:6; Ruth 1:11.
[111] Keel, 190.
[112] See Kravitz and Olitzky, 61; Exum, 185.

5. I rose to open to my beloved;

And my hands dripped myrrh,

And my fingers, flowing myrrh,

Upon the handles of the bolt.

The root ע.ב.ר, generally meaning "to pass over," is difficult to translate in this verse. Kravitz and Olitzky as well as Keel suggest that "מור עבר" could be translated to reflect the use of ע.ב.ר in Genesis 26:16 in which "עבר לסחר" is the expression used for "going merchant's rate" or "acceptable to the merchant." The usage in Genesis therefore relates to being "choice," "favorable," or genuine," rendering a possible translation of "choice myrrh" or "genuine myrrh," the translation which Keel favors.[113] Although Kravitz and Olitzky mention the possible translation of "choice myrrh," they nonetheless translate the phrase as "drops of myrrh."[114] This translation follows the root's usage in Job 6:15[115] and 11:16[116] as referring to water draining and flowing away. In keeping with this meaning of ע.ב.ר, I have translated the phrase as "flowing myrrh." This translation follows the repetitive style of stating the same thing in two different ways seen in verse two with "For my head is filled with dew, my locks with the moisture of night."

This verse, as well as the next, seems to be a response to the male lover's pleas of "open to me" in verse two. Kravitz and Olitzky comment on the innuendo inherent in the verse and say that "the imagery of 'opening up' is clearly more than the opening of a door.

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[113] Keel, 192.
[114] Kravitz and Olitzky, 62.
[115] "אַחַי בָּגְדוּ כְמוֹ-נָחַל כַּאֲפִיק נְחָלִים יַעֲבֹרוּ"
[116] "כִּי-אַתָּה עָמָל תִּשְׁכָּח כְּמַיִם עָבְרוּ תִזְכֹּר "

Perhaps she readied herself for him by lubricating herself either manually or with the use of herbs."[117] A more literal reading of the verse, takes into consideration that the "handles of the bolt" could suggest that in preparing to meet her lover, the woman perfumed herself with myrrh and brushes her hand against the door that the lover had knocked on, leaving traces of the myrrh behind.

6. פָּתַחְתִּי אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי

וְדוֹדִי חָמַק עָבָר

נַפְשִׁי יָצְאָה בְדַבְּרוֹ

בִּקַּשְׁתִּיהוּ וְלֹא מְצָאתִיהוּ

קְרָאתִיו וְלֹא עָנָנִי

6. I myself opened (the door) to my beloved,

But my beloved had turned and gone.

I swooned because of his departure.

I sought him, but I did not find him;

I called to him, but he did not answer me.

Once again, the root ע.ב.ר. is used, however with a very different meaning than that of the previous verse. The word pair "חמק עבר" describes the actions of the male lover and his seemingly instantaneous departure. The root ח.מ.ק only shows up one other place in the Tanakh, in Jeremiah 31:22,[118] where it refers to a woman turning away.

[117] Kravitz and Olitzky, 62.

[118] "עַד-מָתַי תִּתְחַמָּקִין הַבַּת הַשּׁוֹבֵבָה כִּי-בָרָא יְהוָה חֲדָשָׁה בָּאָרֶץ נְקֵבָה תְּסוֹבֵב גָּבֶר"

Exum notes that the Septuagint text lacks this word.[119] While "עבר" is most accurately translated as "passed," I translated it as "gone" to make the text more idiomatic, capturing the intention that the male lover had departed.

When "נפש," meaning "soul," is paired with the verb י.צ.א, meaning "go out," it suggests a weakened or diminished state. In Genesis 35:18,[120] when Rachel is in the process of dying, just before her final moments, the words "בצאת נפשה" are used to describe her state of being. While clearly not dying, the female lover in this verse is sent into a state of shock by her lover's departure, causing her to become faint. While the direct translation of "נפשי יצאה" is "my soul departed," I chose a translation that more clearly relayed the physical and emotional effects experienced by the female lover. While JPS translates the phrase as "I was faint," I followed the suggestion of Exum who notes that "I swooned" conveys the ideas of both bewilderment and ecstasy" and that this translation "provides a double entendre in English well suited to the sexually suggestive Hebrew context."[121]

While many translations render "בדברו" as linked to the male lover's words,[122] understanding the root ד.ב.ר as relating to words or speech, the root in this instance could mean "to turn" as in "to turn away" or "depart."[123] The root ד.ב.ר can also mean "to chase," rendering "נפשי יצאה בדבריו" as "I went chasing after him." [124] With this reading, the woman notes that in her dream, she chased after her lover, but as the next phrase will

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[119] Exum, 185.
[120] "וַיְהִי בְּצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ כִּי מֵתָה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶּן-אוֹנִי וְאָבִיו קָרָא-לוֹ בִנְיָמִין"
[121] Exum, 196.
[122] See JPS, NRSV, Kravitz and Olitzky, Gordis, and others.
[123] see HALOT, 209b.
[124] While "נפש" translates directly to "soul," it can also be read in the context of a person, so "my 'נפש'" can be read as "I."

show, that chase was a failure. Another possibility for understanding "בדברו"is to change to vocalization from ***b'dab'ro*** to ***bidbaro***, or "because of him."[125]

The phrase "בקשתיהו ולא מצאתיהו," "I sought him, but I did not find him," appears in the parallel dream sequence in 3:2. While in chapter 3, that line is followed directly by "מצאוני השמרים הסבבים בעיר," "The watchmen found me, the ones who go around in the city," in this verse, there is an intermediary line of "I called to him, but he did not answer me." The Septuagint added this line in to the text of 3:2, likely because of the clear parallel, however it is much better suited to the verse in question. Whereas in chapter 5, there is dialogue between the lovers, making it likely that the female would call out to the male, no such dialogue exists in chapter 3.

7. מְצָאַנִי הַשֹּׁמְרִים
הַסֹּבְבִים בָּעִיר
הִכּוּנִי פְצָעוּנִי
נָשְׂאוּ אֶת-רְדִידִי מֵעָלַי
שֹׁמְרֵי הַחֹמוֹת

7. The watchmen found me,
the ones who go around in the city;
They struck me, bruised me,
Took my veil from me,
The guards of the walls.

[125] See Fox, 141; JPS, 1734.

For analysis of "מצאני השמרים הסבבים בעיר," see verse 3 of the annotated translation of Chapter 3. While it does not alter the meaning or vocalization, it is notable that the Hebrew spelling of "found me" varies between 3:3 ("מצאוני") and here ("מצאני"). Chapter 3 uses ***k'tiv male***, spelling including the vowel "ו," while the word in this verse is written in ***k'tiv hacer***, spelling lacking the vowel.

The root מ.צ.א, which was used in the previous verse in the context of the woman seeking her lover, is brought back in this verse. In this case, however, instead of being the one who is seeking, she is the one who is found (by the watchmen). Unlike the parallel account in chapter 3, the lover in this verse does not explicitly state that she is going out to roam the streets and squares of city. Perhaps this is implied in her seeking in verse 6. While she spoke to the guards, asking after her lover in 3:2, there is no mention of dialogue between her and the guards in this verse, making their reaction all the more shocking. In both cases, the guards serve as a force that further keeps the lovers from meeting one another. Keel notes that "whereas the woman of chapter 3 treats the patrols as colleagues from whom she can request information, this scene proceeds much more realistically" and that "guards would treat a woman wandering the streets at night as a roving adulteress... or as a prostitute."[126] Proverbs 7:5-12 warns against forbidden women dressed as harlots, who are in the streets and the squares, the same language used to describe the activities of the female lover in 3:3, noting that they will bring only death.

The word "רדיד" only has two occurrences in the Tanakh, the other being in Isaiah 3:23, the "Catalogue of Finery" that lists garments which would be worn by the daughters of Jerusalem. Exum points out that the Septuagint translates "רדיד" into the Greek

[126] Keel, 195.

theristron, a light summer garment or a veil. She notes that the same Greek word is used as a translation for "צעיף," a word meaning "veil" that appears in Genesis 24:65 as well as 38:14, 19.[127] The BDB also renders this garment as "veil," and it is from these sources that I arrived at my translation.

8. הִשְׁבַּעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם
אִם-תִּמְצְאוּ אֶת-דּוֹדִי מַה-תַּגִּידוּ לוֹ
שֶׁחוֹלַת אַהֲבָה אָנִי

8. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
If you find my beloved, what will you tell him?
That I am sick with love.

As in 2:7 and 3:5, the woman begins this verse by addressing the "daughters of Jerusalem" with the phrase "השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלם." If one read the end of verse 1 as the speech of the daughters of Jerusalem to the lovers, this group of women may be viewed as a type of audience of the female lover. The sudden address to this group seems to break up the flow of the text. While the previous verses seemed like an account of the past, this verse seems to speak to the daughters of Jerusalem in the present time, carrying a sense of immediacy. The dream sequence has ended, and the text has reached a transitional moment. In the same way that she sought assistance to find her lover in

[127] Exum, 197.

chapter 3[128] from the guards, the female lover is once again seeking help from others, help which she will not actually need in either case.

While "מה" translates directly as "what?," Gordis notes that when rhetorically used, the word is equivalent to "that."[129] Koehler-Baumgartner, Fox, and Kravitz and Olitzky all translate "מה" as a negative participle meaning "don't," thus reading the text as a request not to tell the male lover that the female lover is "sick with love."[130] In translating "מה-תגידו לו," I chose to stick to a literal translation, especially given that it does not detract from the intention of the text.

9. מַה-דּוֹדֵךְ מִדּוֹד

הַיָּפָה בַּנָּשִׁים

מַה-דּוֹדֵךְ מִדּוֹד

שֶׁכָּכָה הִשְׁבַּעְתָּנוּ

9. What is your beloved over another beloved,

O fairest of women?

What is your beloved over another beloved,

That you adjure us in this manner ?

This verse lays the groundwork for the pericope to follow in which the woman will praise the many attributes of her lover, a process which results in his long-awaited

[128] See 3:3.
[129] Gordis, 89. Note that JPS also uses "that" in their translation.
[130] See Koehler-Baumgartner, 155; Fox, 146; Kravitz and Olitzky, 64.

appearance to her. The passion of the female lover's adjuration in the previous verse leads to curiosity on the part of the daughters of Jerusalem. The phrase "מה-דודך מדוד" translates literally to "what is your beloved more that a beloved." The "מ" carries a meaning of "greater than," rendering the question one of "what makes your beloved so special?" When addressing the lover, the daughters of Jerusalem refer to her with the superlative form "היפה בנשים," a title that has been used previously in 1:8, and will occur again in 6:1.[131]

10. דּוֹדִי צַח וְאָדוֹם

דָּגוּל מֵרְבָבָה

10. My beloved is radiant and ruddy,

Standing out among ten thousand.

The adjective "צח" is used in Isaiah 18:4 to describe a "glowing heat," and Jeremiah 4:11 employs the word to describe his people as "searing wind" or "glowing wind." In both examples, the word describes heat with a glistening quality perceivable by the human eye. The next occurrence of "צח " is Isaiah 32:4, talking about "clear" or "fluent" speech. Finally, as in this verse, "צח" is paired with "א.ד.ם." in Lamentations 4:7. People are described as "צחו מחלב אדמו עצם מפנינים," which is often translated as "whiter than milk, redder than coral."[132] A better translation might render "brighter than milk." Keel asserts that "the rare word (צח) does not mean 'white' (that would be לבן)... Lam 4:7

[131] For another example of the superlative formula ("ה" followed by an adjective, plus "ב" followed by a noun), see Judges 6:15 ("הצעיר בבית").
[132] See JPS, 1761; Gordis, 89.

is also thinking more about something shiny than something white." He also notes that a biblical connection seems to exist between "shiny" and "red," and that the pair is likely an example of hendiadys, where the a single description ("shiny red") is described by way of two descriptions ("shiny and red").[133] Exum further notes that "צח" "indicates a radiant or glowing complexion rather than the color white" when used in describing skin.

The word "דגול" has been translated in a variety of ways, but there is consensus that the term is used to emphasize how the male lover stands out as compared to other people. The root ד.ג.ל in noun form renders "flag" or "banner," something that people look upon, acting as a marker, and is derived from the Akkadian *dagalu,* meaning "see" or "look upon." The root is used in 6:4 and 6:10 with the word "נדגלות," when the male lover describes the female lover as awesome compared to other beautiful sights.

11. רֹאשׁוֹ כֶּתֶם פָּז
קְוֻצּוֹתָיו תַּלְתַּלִּים
שְׁחֹרוֹת כָּעוֹרֵב

11. His head is finest gold,
His locks wavy,
Black as a raven.

In describing the male lover's head, two terms for "gold" are used: "כתם" and "פז." Through descriptions of her lover, which continue through the end of this pericope,

[133] Keel, 198.

it becomes clear that the female lover sees the male as precious and "golden." The word "זהב," also "gold," will be used to describe the lover's hands in verse 14, and "פז" will recur in verse 15, describing his legs. In this case of "כתם פז," the synonymous terms one after the other are employed to emphasize the extraordinary golden quality of the male lover's head; not just "gold" but the "goldest of gold," the "finest gold." Gordis notes that "כתם" could be changed to "כתר," rendering a translation "his head, a golden crown." While this alteration would create consistency in that the other occasions where a description of "golden" appearance are used, there is only one term used, Gordis notes that this change is not necessary.[134]

"תלתלים" is a hapax legomenon, appearing only here in the Tanakh. Exum notes that the term utilizes the same pattern as three other hapax legomena having to do with branches or the shoots of a plant.[135] There is debate whether this particular plant is a palm spathe or a date panicle. If it is a date panicle, Keel believes the image describes hair that is wild or unruly.[136] In Akkadian, *taltallu* is a word for the cluster of flowers atop a palm, the branches of which are black on the outside, thus focusing on the color of the hair rather than the texture.[137] The dark color of the palm branches would fit with the next description that the hair is "black as a raven," and perhaps two synonyms having to do with dark color are placed next to each other in describing the lover's locks, just as two words for "gold" were used in describing his head. The common line breaks of the text however, do not support such a reading. "תלתלים" could stem from "תל" meaning a

[134] Gordis, 89.
[135] Exum, 204. These three are "סנסינים" from the Song 7:9, "זלזלים" from Isaiah 18:5, and "סלסלות" from Jeremiah 6:9.
[136] Keel, 199.
[137] See Gordis, 89; Exum, 204.

"heap" or "mound," thereby rendering "heaped up" or "piled." While in modern Hebrew, "תלתלים" are generally understood as "curls," I translated the word as "wavy," in keeping with its branchlike origins, describing something wild. While the raven-like blackness of his hair seems to contrast with the golden nature of his head, Kravitz and Olitzky point out that the woman is recounting a description of her lover from her dream, and it therefore does not need to make rational sense.[138]

12. עֵינָיו כְּיוֹנִים
עַל-אֲפִיקֵי מָיִם
רֹחֲצוֹת בֶּחָלָב
יֹשְׁבוֹת עַל-מִלֵּאת

12. His eyes, like doves
By streambeds of water;
Bathed in milk,
Sitting on a brimming pool.

The description of "eyes like doves" is used by the male lover to describe the female in 1:15 and 4:1. Keel asserts that this phrase describes "eyes that radiantly exhibit love."[139] He also notes that "streambeds of water" harks back to memories of abundance and happiness because "most streambeds in Palestine/Israel are dry and empty for almost

[138] Kravitz and Olitzky, 65.
[139] Keel, 199.

the entire year; they are filled with water for only a short time during the rainy season."[140] In Joel 4:18, the prophet's vision of a better time includes streambeds that flow with water.[141]

The image of doves bathed in milk once again describes the male lovers with contrasting features; the whiteness of doves to describe his eyes as compared to the blackness of the raven in describing his hair.

While "ישבות על-מלאת" is often translated as "fitly set,"[142] a translation denoting some sort of pool or place of water is fitting within the context of the verse. The root מ.ל.א often refers to precious stones which are "fitly set."[143] While such a description could refer to the male lover's eyes, his eyes are compared to doves, not precious stones, an image that will be utilized later in the pericope. In Aramaic, *m'lita* is the place from which people draw water. Given that the beginning of the verse mentions streambeds of water, if "מלאת" is also understood as a body of water, this phrase presents a description parallel to "אפיקי מים."

13. לְחָיָו כַּעֲרוּגַת הַבֹּשֶׂם

מִגְדְּלוֹת מֶרְקָחִים

שִׂפְתוֹתָיו שׁוֹשַׁנִּים

נֹטְפוֹת מוֹר עֹבֵר

[140] Ibid.

[141] "וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִטְפוּ הֶהָרִים עָסִיס וְהַגְּבָעוֹת תֵּלַכְנָה חָלָב וְכָל-אֲפִיקֵי יְהוּדָה יֵלְכוּ מָיִם וּמַעְיָן מִבֵּית יְהוָה יֵצֵא וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת-נַחַל הַשִּׁטִּים"

[142] See NRSV; NIV; JPS 1917 edition; Murphy.

[143] See Exod. 25:7; 28:17; 35:9, 27; 39:13; 1 Chr 29:2.

13. His cheeks, like beds of spice,

Producing perfumes.

His lips crocuses,

Dripping flowing myrrh.

In verse 13, the woman continues describing her lover, moving from visual attributes to qualities of scent. In accordance with Gordis' suggestion,[144] and most standard translations,[145] I translated "כערוגת" ("like a bed") in the plural ("like beds") in order to supply the participle with a fitting subject. While the vocalization of "מגדלות" in this verse translates directly to "towers," there is widespread scholarly agreement that the word should be read with an alternative vocalization corresponding to the *pi'el* participle of the root ג.ד.ל.[146] This alteration renders ***m'gad'lot*** ("producing" or "growing") as opposed to ***mig'd'lot*** ("towers"). Such a revocalization is supported by the translations that appear in the Septuagint and the Targum, translating "מגדלות" as *phyousai*, and *marb'yan* respectively, both meaning "producing." Such a reading creates a better parallel to the second section of the verse which talks about "dripping flowing myrrh." This image of "dripping flowing myrrh," now used to describe the male lover, was seen in verse 5 when the female lover's hands dripped myrrh as she went to the door where her lover had been knocking.

[144] Gordis, 90.
[145] See JPS; NRSV; Pope; Exum; Kravitz and Olitzky; and others.
[146] See Koehler-Baumgartner 544; Exum 185, 205; Gordis 90; Keel 201; etc.

14. יָדָיו גְּלִילֵי זָהָב

מְמֻלָּאִים בַּתַּרְשִׁישׁ

מֵעָיו עֶשֶׁת שֵׁן

מְעֻלֶּפֶת סַפִּירִים

14. His hands, rods of gold,

Studded with precious stones;

His abdomen worked ivory,

Encrusted with lapis lazuli.

In this verse, the woman's description of her lover moves from features of his head to those of the rest of his body. As in verse 11, she will describe her lover as having golden features, and continue by describing him in terms of other precious materials.

The word "גלילי" comes from the root ג.ל.ל, meaning "roll," suggesting that the term is related to something of a rounded nature. "גלילים" appears in 1 Kings 6:34 describing a feature, possibly pivots, on the doors of Solomon's temple. In Esther 1:6, the word refers to rods or rings from which curtains are hung. The Esther verse focuses less on the shape that the "גלילים" take, and more on their conspicuous extravagance, being set with precious stones. Keel suggests that "perhaps the poet is thinking of the bracelets that sometimes completely covered the arms of high-ranking people in the ancient Near East. These bracelets were set with a stone known in Hebrew as תרשיש."[147] It is unclear exactly what kind of stone "תרשיש" is. While Keel notes that the Greek translation

[147] Keel, 204.

renders "garnet,"[148] JPS translates it as "beryl." Gordis notes that the stone has also been identified as "topaz" and "rubies."[149] Due to the lack of clarity on what exact stone "תרשיש" is, I have left the translation open by using "precious stones."

As seen in Verse 4, "מעים" can mean internal organs, particularly those relevant to reproduction. In this verse however, the term refers to the abdominal region. A similar usage is seen in Daniel 2:32 in the description of a statuesque body.[150] With "עשת," the text introduces another hapax legomenon. While not found anywhere else in the Tanakh, Exum points out that the word shows up in the Qumran "Copper Scroll"[151] and in Mishnaic Hebrew, both carrying the meaning "bar."[152]

15. שׁוֹקָיו עַמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ

מְיֻסָּדִים עַל-אַדְנֵי-פָז

מַרְאֵהוּ כַּלְּבָנוֹן

בָּחוּר כָּאֲרָזִים

15. His legs, pillars of marble,

Set on pedestals of gold.

His appearance, like Lebanon,

Choice as the cedars.

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[148] Ibid.
[149] Gordis, 90.
[150] "הוּא צַלְמָא רֵאשֵׁהּ דִּי-דְהַב טָב חֲדוֹהִי וּדְרָעוֹהִי דִּי כְסַף מְעוֹהִי וְיַרְכָתֵהּ דִּי נְחָשׁ"
[151] 3QTr 1:5; 2:4.
[152] Exum, 208.

This verse continues describing the male lover's body, furthering the description down to his feet. Once again, the word "פז," or "gold" is used. While it described his head in verse 11, the term now describes his feet, painting an image that the lover has "golden" qualities from head to toe. The comparison of the lover to "Lebanon" demonstrates his great stature, with the highest mountains in Lebanon reaching up to ten thousand feet.[153] "Cedars" are trees associated with Lebanon which was the major source of lumber in the Middle East for millennia. For another example of "cedars" and "Lebanon" being used together, see Psalm 29:5, which talks about "ארזי הלבנון,"[154] the "cedars of Lebanon."

16. חִכּוֹ מַמְתַקִּים

וְכֻלּוֹ מַחֲמַדִּים

זֶה דוֹדִי

וְזֶה רֵעִי

בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם

16. His mouth, sweet

And all of him desirable.

This is my beloved,

And this is my friend,

O daughters of Jerusalem!

[153] Keel, 205.

[154] "קוֹל יְהוָה שֹׁבֵר אֲרָזִים וַיְשַׁבֵּר יְהוָה אֶת-אַרְזֵי הַלְּבָנוֹן"

This verse closes the pericope which describes the male lover's body, a section which is framed by the daughters of Jerusalem. In verse 9, they prompt the female lover's speech by asking why her beloved is so special ("What is your beloved over another beloved?"). By directly addressing the daughters of Jerusalem, the woman sends the message that she has answered their questions and said why her lover is so special. If this were the only reason that the direct speech to the daughters of Jerusalem was included, it would seem unnecessary, as it was clear that the woman was answering their question within the text. This response, however, works as a device to invite the daughters of Jerusalem back into dialogue with the woman, something that will be necessary as chapter 6 begins, and they offer to help the woman in her search.

This section is written with a chiastic structure, a literary technique used to emphasize corresponding aspects of the text in a symmetrical manner. A basic chiasm has a structure where two or more ideas (A, B...) are expressed with related phrases (A', B'...), that present in text as A, B, B', A'. Within this structure, the A' completes the message of the A. The chiastic structure of verses 8 through 16 is diagrammed below:

A. "O daughters of Jerusalem" (8)

B. "What is your beloved ...?" (9)

C. Standing out among..." (10)

D. "His head is finest gold" (11)

D'. "Pedestals of gold" (15)

C'. "Choice as..." (15)

B'. "This is my beloved" (16)

A'. "O daughters of Jerusalem" (16)

Within this structure, the text is clearly shown to be framed (with A and A') by the daughters of Jerusalem, as discussed above. B' completes the question posed in B, C and C' show just how outstanding the male lover is, and in the middle of the structure, D and D' emphasize how golden he is. If read together, perhaps D and D' set up a type of merism, where the lover's head and feet are gold, meaning that he is golden from head to toe.

Overall, when viewing chapter 5 as compared to chapter 3, the dream sequences of 3:1-5 and 5:2-8 stand out as parallel. Both pericopes open with mention of nighttime: "On my bed at night" in 3:1 and "My locks with the moisture of night" in 5:2, setting the scenes as opportune times to be having dreams. In both dreams, the woman is seeking her lover. While the male lover does appear in chapter 5, asking to be let in by the woman,[155] the male lover in chapter 3 is neither seen nor heard. While chapter 5 describes how the woman seemingly lost her lover, him being at her door one moment and gone the next, leading for her to search for him, chapter 3 begins with the search.

In both dreams, while seeking her lover, the woman encounters watchmen. In 3:3 and 5:7, she uses the phrase "מצא(ו)ני השמרים הסבבים בעיר," "the watchmen found me, the ones who go around in the city." The events of chapter 5, however, unfold in a much darker way when the watchmen explicitly beat her and strip off her clothes. While the woman finds her lover immediately after meeting the watchmen in chapter 3, she has no such luck in chapter 5, where no mention of finding him is ever made.

Both sequences end with the woman speaking the words " השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלם" ("I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem"), however these adjurations serve

[155] 5:2.

different functions. Exum points out that while finding her lover leads to an oath placed on the daughters of Jerusalem in chapter 3, it is the opposite in chapter 5. Not until the woman addresses the daughters of Jerusalem can she find her lover, which she does in part through conjuring him with her description of his traits.[156]

[156] Exum, 187.

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