The Song of Songs

Title/Superscription

1:1 Solomon's Most Excellent Love Song.

1 The preposition ש (hashirim) is translated literally as “song of songs” in the early versions: Greek LXX (σόν οἰκον παντοτοκον, asma asmaton), Latin Vulgate (canticum canticorum) and Syriac Peshitta (w/ib hu wib ha')i', the phrase שיר השירים may be understood in two ways: (1) The noun שיר is plural of number ("songs") and functions as a genitive of composition: "the song composed of several songs," that is, the book is a unified collection (hence the singular "song of songs") composed of individual love songs (see note on the expression “Her Lover” in n. 1). (2) The expression may be a superlative genitive construction denoting par excellence (see IBHS 134 §9.5.3; GKC 491 §133.3; R. J. Williams, Hebrew Syntax, 11. §4.4.17-18). For example, מַעֲשֵׁה יָדֵיהֶם ("mashiyah gashishim", "the holy of holies") means the most holy place (Exod 29:27); קֹדֶשׁ קָדָשִׁים (Hebrew Syntax 24.5.2) means the God of Gods and Lord of Lords. The most high and supreme Lord and Supreme God (Deut 10:17); and "ה captive" (Gen 20:11) means a captive slave (Gen 9:25). The title "the Song of Songs" is an expression of great esteem for the composition. It has been translated variously: “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s” (KJV, NKV, RSV, NRSV, NASB), “Solomon’s Song of Songs” (NIV), “The most beautiful songs, by Solomon” (TEV), “dedicated to,” or “about Solomon” (TEV margin), “Solomon’s most beautiful song” (CEV), “This is Solomon’s song of songs, more wonderful than any other” (NLT).

2 The noun שיר (shir) may refer to a musical song that was sung (Exod 15:1; Num 21:17; Ps 33:3; Isa 42:10) or a poetic composition that was simply read (Deut 31:19, 21, 22; 30:32) (BDB 1010 s.v. шир). Several factors suggest that the Song of Songs was poetry to be read and enjoyed rather than sung: (a) its sheer length, (b) absence of musical notations or instrumental instructions, (c) testimony of Jewish tradition and interpretation, (d) lack of evidence of its musical performance in the history of Israel, and (e) comparison with ancient Egyptian love poetry. The term שיר here probably refers to love poetry (e.g., Isa 5:1) (BDB 1010 s.v. שיר; W. L. Holladay, Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon, 368). The Song appears to be a collection of individual love songs rather than a single multistanza poem. For comparison of the Song of Songs with ancient Egyptian lovesongs, see M. V. Fox, The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs, and J. B. White, Language of Love in the Song of Songs and the Desire for Love

The Beloved to Her Lover:

1:2 Oh, how I wish you would kiss me

Ancient Egyptian Poetry (SBLDS).

sn The superscription “Solomon’s Most Excellent Love Song” appears to be a late addition, just as many superscriptions in the Psalter appear to have been added to the psalms sometime after their original composition. R. E. Murphy, Song of Songs (Hermeneia), 119 notes that the use of the independent relative pronoun ו (hashir) in 1:1 sharply distinguishes the superscription from the body of the Song as a whole where the short form ו (she-) occurs thirty-two times (e.g., 1:6, 12; 6:5). The short form ו also occurs frequently in Ecclesiastes which is traditionally attributed to Solomon. Therefore, it would appear that the superscription is a later addition to the Song. This, of course, raises the question whether or not the attribution of Solomonic authorship of the Song is historically reliable or simply a matter of later Jewish tradition.

tn The introductory headings that identify the speakers of the poems throughout the Song do not appear in the Hebrew text. They are supplied in the translation for the sake of clarity. These notations should not be misinterpreted as suggesting that the Song be interpreted as a drama. Throughout the Song, the notation “The Lover” refers to the young man, while “the Beloved” refers to the young woman. Since the Song of Songs appears to be a collection of individual love songs, the individual love poems within the collection might not have originally referred to the same young man and young woman in each case. Just as the Book of Proverbs contains proverbs composed by Solomon (10:1:22:16; 25:1-29:27) as well as proverbs composed by other wise men (22:17-24:34; 30:1-31:9), so the Song of Songs may contain love poems composed by Solomon or written about Solomon as well as love poems composed by or written about other young couples in love. Nevertheless, the canonical form and compositional presentation of this collection presents a unified picture of idyllic love between one man and one woman in each case. The young man in several of the individual love poems is explicitly identified as Solomon (3:7; 8:11-12), King Solomon (3:9, 11) or the king (1:4; 7:6). Some statements in the Song are consistent with a royal figure such as King Solomon's references to Tyre and Jerusalem (6:4) and to multiple queens and concubines (6:8). It is not so clear, however, whether Solomon is the young man in every individual poem. Nor is it clear that the same young woman is in view in each love poem. In several poems the young woman is a country maiden working in a vineyard (1:5-6; 8:11-12); however, the young woman in another poem is addressed as "O prince's daughter" (7:2). The historian notes, “Solomon loved many women, especially the daughter of Pharaoh” (1 Kgs 11:1). So it would be surprising if the Song devoted itself to only one of Solomon’s many liaisons. The Song may simply be a collection of love poems written at various moments in Solomon’s illustrious career as a lover of many women. It may also include love poems written about other young lovers that were collected into the final form of the book that presents a portrait of idyllic love of young lovers.

tn Heb “May he kiss me...” The shift from 3rd person masculine singular forms (“he” and “his”) in 1:2a to 2nd person masculine singular forms (“your”) in 1:2b-4 has led some to suggest that the Beloved addresses the Friends in 1:2a and then her Lover in 1:2b-4. A better solution is that the shift from the 3rd person masculine singular to 2nd person masculine forms is an example of heterosis of person: a poetic device in which the grammatical person shifts from line to line (M. H. Pope, Song of Songs [AB], 297).
For your lovemaking is more delightful than wine. The fragrance of your colognes is delightful, your name is like the finest perfume.

Jer 6:20.

8 sn The term נקهة (nekêka, “your name”) may be a metonymy of association for her lover. In Hebrew idiom, the name often represents the person (e.g., 1 Sam 25:25).

9 tn The meaning of the phrase שמן תורא (shemen turaq, “your perfumes”) is difficult to determine; several options have been proposed: (1) Traditionally, the phrase נקهة is taken as a verb (Hophal imperfect 3rd person feminine singular from נק, riq, “to pour out”) which functions as an attributive adjective modifying the noun נקهة (“oil, perfume”): “poured out oil.” The phrase is taken this way by LXX ἐκεχυμένον (“oil poured out”) which seems to reflect a Hebrew Vorlage of a passive verb functioning adjectivally. Accordingly, the phrase is traditionally translated “ointment/oil poured forth/poured out” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NIV, RSV, NRSV, NJB), “purified oil” (NASB) or “spreading perfume” (NAB, CEV). However, this is syntactically awkward because: (a) the noun נקهة (“oil”) is masculine (BDB 1032 s.v. נק) but the verb נקهة (“poured out”) is feminine (and the person feminine singular); and (b) this would demand heterosis of the verb for an adjective function. (2) Aquila, who is known for his wooden literal translation technique, reads ἐκεχυμένον (ελαιον εκκηθηθεν, “oil poured out”) which reflects a passive participle functioning adjectivally, perhaps נקهة (mirqakhat: Hophal participle from נק, “to pour out”). This involves simple orthographic confusion between נק and נק. This might be reflected in Qumran because Baillie’s restoration of 60Q Cant reads נקקת מירקא (cited in BHS apparatus “c-”), which would be vocalized נקקת מירקאה (mirqakhat murqah, “perfumed poured out”). However, Baillie’s restoration is questioned by some scholars. (3) The BHS editors suggest emending MT נקهة to the noun נקחת (nakkhat, “purification”), used for oil of purification (e.g., Esth 2:3, 9, 14, 16; 3:11) or נקחת (nakkhat) which is a different form of במחת, “purification” or “purified oil.” (4) A simpler solution is to take נקחת as a previously unrecognized noun that is related to the Ugaritic noun נקח which refers to high grade cosmetic oil (UT 145.20: 19.371). This approach is adopted by one other translation: “your name is like finest oil” (NJP).

10 sn The similar sounding terms שמן (shemem, “perfume”) create a wordplay (paronomasia). Shemen means “smell” in several Hebrew Bible contexts. The term נקחת (nakkhat, “perfume,” “fragrance”) may be used in reference to a young woman who is a virgin, the term itself does not explicitly denote “virgin.” The Hebrew term which explicitly denotes "virgin" is נקחתות (nakkhatoth) which refers to a mature young woman without any sexual experience with men (Gen 24:16; Exod 22:15-16; Lev 21:3; Deut 22:23, 28; 32:25; Judg 12:12; 19:24; 2 Sam 13:2, 18; 1 Kgs 1:2; 2 Chr 36:17; Esth 2:2, 13, 17; Job 31:1; Pss 45:15; 78:63; 148:12; Isa 23:4; 62:5; Jer 2:32; 31:3; 51:22; Lam 1:4, 18; 2:10, 21, 5:11; Ezek 9:6; Joel 1:8; Amos 9:13; Zech 9:17 (HALOT 166-7 s.v. נקחתות; BDB 143 s.v. נקחתות). The related noun נקחת (nakkhatim) means “state of virginity” (Lev 21:13; Judg 11:37-38; Ezek 23:3, 8; Sir 42:10). The root נקחת denotes the basic idea of “youthful, strong, passionate” (HALOT 835 s.v. נקחת). While the term נקחת (young woman) may be used in reference to a young woman who is a virgin, the term itself does not explicitly denote “virgin.” The Hebrew term which explicitly denotes “virgin” is נקחתות (nakkhatoth) which refers to a mature young woman without any sexual experience with men (Gen 24:16; Exod 22:15-16; Lev 21:3; Deut 22:23, 28; 32:25; Judg 12:12; 19:24; 2 Sam 13:2, 18; 1 Kgs 1:2; 2 Chr 36:17; Esth 2:2, 13, 17; Job 31:1; Pss 45:15; 78:63; 148:12; Isa 23:4; 62:5; Jer 2:32; 31:3; 51:22; Lam 1:4, 18; 2:10, 21, 5:11; Ezek 9:6; Joel 1:8; Amos 9:13; Zech 9:17 (HALOT 166-7 s.v. נקחתות; BDB 143 s.v. נקחתות). The related noun נקחת (nakkhatim) means “state of virginity” (Lev 21:13; Judg 11:37-38; Ezek 23:3, 8; Sir 42:10).
The Maidens to the Lover:

14 Draw me4 after you; let us hurry!2
May the king5 bring4 me into
his5 bedroom chambers!6

4 sn The verb Meshakh (mashakh, "draw") is a figurative expression (hypoctastasis) which draws an implied comparison between the physical action of leading a person with the romantic action of leading a person in love. Elsewhere it is used figuratively of a master gently leading an animal with leather cords (Hos 11:4) and of a military victor leading his captives (Jer 31:3). The point of comparison might be that the woman wants to be the writing, 3:4-5, of the love of her beloved, that is, a willing prisoner of his love.

2 tn The three verbs in this line are a good example of hetroeresis of person, that is, a shift from 2nd person masculine singular to 1st person common plural to 3rd person masculine singular. In Hebrew: הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani), "draw me!"; Qal imperative 2nd person masculine singular from סָבַע (sabuʿ), "to draw"; 1st person common singular suffix from בּוֹא (boʿ), "to bring" + 1st person common singular suffix. Heteroresis from second to third person occurs elsewhere in the Song in 1:2-3; 2:6-6 (e.g. Gen 49:4; Deut 32:15; Ps 23:2-5; Isa 14:17; Jer 22:24; Amos 4:1; Micah 7:19; Lam 3:49; 1 Kgs 1:5; 2 Sam 8:17; 2 Kgs 6:12; Eccl 10:20). The syntactical classification of the article is dependent upon: (1) Whether the MT reading of the 3rd person masculine singular suffix on הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani), "your chamber") as reflected in Syriac is retained or whether the text is emended to the 2nd person masculine singular suffix form הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani), "your chamber") as reflected in Syriac (see textual note below). When 1st person common plural or 3rd person common plural verbs or suffixes are present (1:34; 2:15; 5:1b; 8:8-9), it is classified as a perfect of past action ("The king has brought me into his chambers") or a praeceptive perfect ("O king, bring me into your chambers!") (see syntactical note below). Whether the consonantal form הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani) should be vocalized as הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani), Hiphil perfect 3rd person masculine singular from סָבַע (sabuʿ), the 3rd person masculine singular suffix on הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani), "your chamber") as reflected in Symmachus and Syriac. See preceding note on the text-critical significance of these variant readings.

4 tn Or "O king, bring me into your chambers!" The article on the noun הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani), "the king") may be taken in two ways: (1) the particularizing use of the article: "The king" (e.g., NIV: "The king has brought me into his chambers") or (2) the vocative use of the article: "O king!" (NPS: margin: "O king, bring me into your chambers!") (For the vocative use of the article, see GKC 405 §126.e; Jouon 2:506-7 §137f; R. J. Williams, Hebrew Syntax, 19, 589; BHS 247 §13.5.2c). The syntactical classification of the article is dependent upon: (1) Whether the MT reading of the 3rd person masculine singular suffix on הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani), "your chamber") is retained or whether the text is emended to the 2nd person masculine singular suffix form הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani), "your chamber") as reflected in Syriac (see textual note above). When 1st person common plural or 3rd person common plural verbs or suffixes are present (1:34; 2:15; 5:1b; 8:8-9), it is classified as a perfect of past action ("The king has brought me into his chambers") or a praeceptive perfect ("O king, bring me into your chambers!") (see syntactical note below). Whether the consonantal form הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani) should be vocalized as הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani), Hiphil perfect 3rd person masculine singular from סָבַע (sabuʿ), the 3rd person masculine singular suffix on הָבִיאַנִי (hashakhani), "your chamber") as reflected in Symmachus and Syriac (see textual note below).

6 sn Normally in the Song, the person/gender of the pronouns and suffixes makes the identity of the speaker or addressee clear. However, in several places grammatical ambiguity makes it difficult to identify either the speaker or the addressee. For (1) the addressee (e.g., 6:1-11:3), it is possible to determine whether 1st person common plural or 3rd person common plural verbs or suffixes are present (13:4; 2:15; 5:1b; 8:8-9), as is the case in the three lines of 1:38b[4b]. There are four views on the identity of the speaker(s): (1) NASB attributes all three lines to the maidens, (2) NIV attributes the first two lines to the friends and the third line to the Beloved (= woman), (3) NRSV attributes all three lines to the Beloved, spanning throughout 1:2-4, and (4) the first line could be attributed to the young man speaking to his beloved, and the last two lines attributed to the Beloved who returns praise to him. The subjects of the 1st person common plural cohortatives and the 2sg suffixes have been taken as: (1) The maidens of Jerusalem, mentioned in 1:4[5] and possibly referred to as the 3rd person feminine singular in 7:5[6]; (2) the young man, (3) the addressee (we = belo you") in 1:38b[4b], using the 1st person common plural cohortatives in reference to themselves as they address her lover: "We (= maidens) will rejoice in you (= the young man)," (2) The Beloved using 1st person common plural cohortatives in a hortatory sense as she addresses her lover. Let us (= the couple) rejoice in you (= the young man), let us praise your lovingkindness..." (3) The Beloved using 1st person common plural cohortatives in reference to herself – there are examples in ancient Near Eastern love literature of the bride using 1st person common plural forms in reference to herself (S. N. Kramer, The Sacred Marriage Rite, 92, 99) – as she addresses the young man: "We (= I) will rejoice in you (= the young man)." Note: This problem is compounded by the ambiguity of the gender of the 2sg suffix (bakh, "in you") which appears to be 2nd person feminine singular but may be 2nd person masculine singular in pause (see note below).
The Country Maiden and the Daughters of Jerusalem

The Beloved to the Maidens:

1:5 I am dark but lovely, O maidens of Jerusalem,
dark7 like the tents of Qedar,8 lovely,9 like the tent curtains.10 of

The SONG of SONGs 1:5

We will rejoice and delight in you;2 we will praise3 your love more than wine.

The Beloved to Her Lover:

How rightly the young women adore you!

1 tn Alternately, “Let us rejoice and delight in you.” There is debate whether the cohortatives יָשְׁכֶּהָ (nagalah, Qal cohortative 1st person common plural from יִשָּׁכֵה, “to exult”), יָשִׁיקָה (‘nishkim’khah, Qal cohortative 1st person common plural from יָשִׁיק, shamakh, “to rejoice”) and יָשִׁיקָה (nakhirah, Hiphil cohortative 1st person common plural from יָשְׁקֵה, zakhar, “to praise”) should be classified as (1) cohortatives of resolve, expressing the resolution or determination of the speakers to adopt or accomplish a course of action: “We will rejoice…we will delight…we will praise” (e.g., KJV, NASB, NIV) or (2) hypothetical cohortatives, exhorting others to join in doing something: “Let us rejoice…let us delight…let us praise” (e.g., NJPS).

2 tn A shift occurs in 1:4 from 1st person common singular forms to 1st person common plural forms: “Draw me as a lioness, draw me sweetly” (KJV, NASB, “Draw me” [45:17 ET]; 71:16; Isa 26:13; 48:1; 62:6). The Hiphil imperfect 1st person common plural from הָבִיא, “to bring” (Josh 23:7; Pss 45:18 HT 45:17 ET; 71:16; Isa 26:13; 48:1; 62:6). The subject of the 1st person all plural forms may be the “young women” הַנַּשֵּׁי (nashim) previously mentioned in 1:3. This is supported by the fact that these lines come after a repetition of lines 1-2 in which love is defined as the young women’s language: “Let us be glad [ness] [nagilah]…We will remember [ness] [nazkirah]…They love [you]” (אֲהֵבוּךָ, ahevuka, בָּךָ, b’cha; nashim, nazkirah). The translation “Let us rejoice…let us delight…let us praise” for these lines (e.g., NJPS) is motivated by the similar use of the root ע-ל-ב in Pss 45:18 HT 45:17 ET: “Let us rejoice…let us delight…let us praise” (e.g., NJPS). The term “tents of Qedar” is quite fitting for two reasons. First, the name “Qedar” refers to an ancient Arabian tribe of bedouin who lived in tents and inhabited a region in northern Arabia. Their tents were traditionally woven from the wool of black goats. They were not beautiful to look at; they were rough, rustic, rugged, and weather-beaten. Second, the terms יְרִיעֹה (yÿri) and יְרִיעוֹת (yÿriyoth) as synonyms or antonyms. The term יְרִיעֹה (y’hul, “tent”) is often used in reference to an overall tent assembly, with particular emphasis on the external structure (e.g., Gen 4:20; 18:1; 31:33; Exod 26:13; 40:19; Judg 4:17; Isa 54:2; Jer 37:10) (HALOT 1972 s.v. יריעה). The term “tent-curtains” (ניירית) is used to refer to (1) inner hanging curtains, such as decorative hangings or tapestries inside a tent (e.g., Exod 26:1-2, 7; Num 4:25) and (2) a tent as a whole (e.g., 2 Sam 7:2; Jer 4:20; 10:20; Hab 3:7) (HALOT 439 s.v. נירית). The two terms are often used in parallelism as an A-B word pair ( Isa 54:2; Jer 4:20; 10:20; 49:29; Hab 3:7). Like the “tents” (ניירית) of Qedar which were made from the wool of black goats, the term “tent-curtains” (ניירית) also were sometimes made from goat hair (Exod 26:7). If the two are synonymous, the point is that the tents of Qedar and the tent-curtains of Salmah were both black but beautiful. If the two terms are antonyms, the point is that the tents of Qedar are black but the tent-curtains of Salmah are beautiful. In either case, her point is that she is attractive and beautiful. Rabbinic midrash miss the point; it views the metaphor as contrasting her swarthy outward appearance with her inner beauty. “Just as the tents of Qedar which were made from the wool of black goats were both black and beautiful, so the tent-curtains of Salmah are both black and beautiful. In either case, her point is that she is attractive and beautiful. Rabbinic midrash miss the point; it views the metaphor as contrasting her swarthy outward appearance with her inner beauty.” As the tents of Qedar which were made from the wool of black goats were both black and beautiful.
Salmah.  
16 Do not stare at me because I am dark, for the sun has burned my skin. My brothers were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards. Alas, my own vineyard I could not keep!

of Kedar, although from outside they look ugly, black, and ragged, yet inside contain precious stones and pearls, so the disciples of the wise, although they look repulsive and swarthy, in the world, yet have within them the knowledge of the Torah, Scriptures, Mishnah, Midrash, Halachot, Talmud, Toseftas and Haggadah. The MT vocalizes הששה as הששה (sheshhah, “Solomon”); however, the BHS editors suggest the vocalization הששה as השאה (sheshah, “Salmah”), the name of an ancient Arabian tribe mentioned in Assyrian and South Arabic sources, as well as Targum Onqelos (Gen 19:15; Num 24:21; Judg 4:17). Like the tribe of Qedar, Salmah was an Arabian nomadic tribe which inhabited a region in northern Arabia and the region of Petra. The proposed recovocalization produces tighter parallelism between Qedar and Salmah, than Qeedar and Solomon. This also creates a striking wordplay on the name of Solomon (M. H. Pope, Song of Songs [AB], 320).

The relative pronoun she (she is turned “her”) functions in a causal sense, as in the following colon (BDB 980 s.v. 3 b) (e.g., Song 5:2; Eccl 2:18).

The relative pronoun she (she is turned “her”) on סכת (sheshhazaf) functions in a causal sense, as in the preceding colon (BDB 980 s.v. 3 b) (e.g., Song 5:2; Eccl 2:18).

Heb “the sun has burned at me.” The verb נרה (nirah) means “to look at, catch sight of, glance at” (e.g., Job 20:9, 28:7) (HALOT 1456 s.v. נרה; 1004 s.v. נרה). The Beloved personifies the sun (תשהות, hashshamesh) as having looked at her too long, that is, it burned her skin.

Heb “the sons of my mother.”

The verb נרה (nirah, “to burn in anger, to be angry”) creates an interesting wordplay on the preceding colon or line. “The sun burned me (my skin).” The burned skin her, because her brothers had burned (niham, “hurt”) in anger against her. This is an example of a polysemantic wordplay which explains the two basic meanings of נרה (“to burn, to be angry”) (W. G. E. Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry [JSOTSup, 241:42]).

The noun כרמי (kerem, “vineyard”) is used figuratively in this line (see following note on the wordplays in this verse). Some suggest that her “vineyard” refers to her virginity, that is, she lost her virginity. However, this runs contrary to the moral purity accorded to the Beloved throughout the Song (e.g., 4:12; 8:8-10). It is better to take the “vineyard” imagery as a reference to her ability to take care of her physical appearance which had been thwarted by being forced to work outside where her skin had been darkened by the scorching rays of the sun, as alluded to throughout 1:4-5(6).

The repetition of the noun כרמי (kerem, “vineyard”) and the verb נרה (nirah, “to keep, maintain”) creates a series of eloquent wordplays. The first occurrence of כרמי (“vineyard”) and נרה (“to keep”) is literal, the second occurrence of both is figurative (hypocatastasis). Her brothers forced her to work outside in the sun, taking care of the vineyards; as a result, she was not able to take care of her appearance (“my own vineyard I could not keep”).

The Beloved and the Shepherdess

The Beloved to Her Lover:

1:7 Tell me, O you whom my heart loves, where do you pasture your sheep? Where do you rest your sheep during the midday heat?

Tell me lest I wander around

9 tn Heb “soul.”

10 tn The causal relative pronoun she (she, “because”): BDB 980 s.v. 3 b) is prefixed to the interrogative particle מאה (la-mah, “why?”); BDB 554 s.v. 4.d) to form the idiom מאה מאה (shallamah, “lest”; BDB 554 s.v. 4.d) (she, “because”); BDB notes that מאה is used with an imperfect – as is the case here with הבטחת (beych, Qal imperfect 1st person common singular from הבטחת, haya, “to be”) – to deprecate a situation and for rhetorical emphasis to introduce the reason why something should, or should not, be done: “Why should?” (e.g., Gen 27:45; 47:19; Exod 32:12; 1 Sam 19:5, 17; 20:8, 32; 2 Sam 2:22; 13:26; 16:9; 20:19; 2 Kings 14:10; 2 Chr 25:16; Neh 6:3; Pss 79:10; 115:2; Eccl 5:5; 7:16-17; Jer 40:15; Joel 2:17) (BDB 554 s.v. 4.d)). When connected with a foregoing sentence by the causal relative pronoun she “because,” the idiom תועשает (beych) “notes” (literally, “because why should?”) (BDB 554 s.v. 4.d)). The meaning of הבטחת is identical to the parallel constructions הבטחת (beych) (asher lammah, “lest”): Dan 1:10 and הבטחת (dari, “lest”); Ezra 7:23). In Song 6:7 the causal relative pronoun she connects it to the preceding lines, and our idiom assumes the elided phrase השלחה (hagglah l, “Tell me!”) which occurred earlier: “Tell me lest I …!”

11 tn The meaning of MT תועשאת (torah, Qal active participle from תועשאת, atah, “to veil oneself”) is debated; several options have been proposed: (1) Some scholars attempt to explain this in light of ancient Israelite culture or customs. The term תועשאת describes a person wrapping oneself in a garment or with a veil (HALOT 813 s.v. תועשאת) as (a) a sign of grief or mourning (Ezek 24:17, 22) (ununcleanliness (Lev 13:45), or shame (Lev 3:7)), and as (b) the clothing of the deceased (1 Sam 28:14) and veiled cult-prostitutes (Gen 28:14). The term is rendered “one who veils herself” (NASB), “one who is veiled” (NRSV, KJV margin) and “like a veiled woman” (ASV, NIV). BDB suggests that she veiled herself in mourning (BDB 741 s.v. 1 תועשאת). Rashī suggested that she veiled herself in mourning because she did not know where to find her beloved (Canticles Rab 1:6). Many commentators connect this with the veiled cult-prostitute soliciting business among shepherds. She wished to avoid what Tamar tried to do: to be mistaken as a harlot looking for business among the shepherds (Gen 38:14-23). If her beloved would not declare whereabouts, she would be reduced to looking for him among the shepherds – an action that could be easily misunderstood. This is reflected in the CEV paraphrase: “Don’t let the other shepherds think badly of me.” R. E. Murphy (Song of Songs [Hermeneia, 131) writes: “Commentators have interpreted the covering as a sign of mourning (2 Sam 15:30) or as the sign of a harlot (Gen 38:14-15). These references are not helpful in explaining the context of v 7, and in neither of the instances is the word תועשאת used. She seems rather to refer to some kind of covering or disguise she will be forced to use unless she knows where to find him. One can infer that the disguise will enable her to avoid being identified by his ‘companions,’ but no reason is given (perhaps she does not want them to know about the rendezvous?)” (2) Other scholars resort to comparative lexicography. For example, S. R. Driver suggested that תועשאת is not derived from תועשל (torah), but from the Arabic root qth that came into Hebrew as the homonymous root קת (to pick lice) (lsa 22:17; Jer 43:12) (HALOT 814 s.v. קת). Driver rendered the line, “lest I be left picking lice,” that is, while away the siesta-time grooming herself. Most scholars reject this proposal; it seems strange in the context and unnecessarily creates a homonym for a well-known term that makes adequate sense contextually. Nevertheless, Driver’s proposal was adopted by the NEB: “that I may not be left picking lice.” See D. R. Driver, “Lice in the Old Testament,” PEQ 106 (1974):
beside the flocks of your companions!

The Lover to His Beloved:

1:8 If you do not know, O most beautiful of women, simply follow the tracks of my flock, and pasture your little lambs beside the tents of the shepherds.

The Beautiful Mare and the Fragrant Myrrh

The Lover to His Beloved:

1:9 O my beloved, you are like a mare among Pharaoh’s stallions. 

1:10 Your cheeks are beautiful with ornaments; your neck is lovely with strings of jewels.

1:11 We will make for you gold ornaments studded with silver.

The Beloved about Her Lover:

1:12 While the king was at his banqueting table, my nard gave forth its fragrance.

1:13 My beloved is like a fragrant pouch of myrrh.
spending the night⁶ between my breasts.  

I:14 My beloved is like a cluster of henna blossoms⁵ in the vineyards of En-Gedi.³

Mutual Praise and Admiration

The Lover to His Beloved:  

I:15 Oh,⁴ how beautiful you are, my beloved!⁵

The Beloved to Her Lover:  

I:16 Oh, how handsome you are, my lover!⁸

Oh,⁹ how delightful¹⁰ you are!

with fat and shaped into cones and as the fat melted from the body heat, the aroma of myrrh and the anointing oil would perfume a woman’s body. Because it had a very strong aroma which would last for long periods of time, women often wore it to bed to perfume themselves for the next day. Because of its beautiful fragrance, it is associated with romance (e.g., Isa 28:2). Myrrh, an aromatic shrub with upward pointing blossoms, that have sweet smelling white flowers that grow in thick clusters (Song 4:13; 7:12). Like myrrh, the henna plant (H. kofer, “henna”; HALOT 495 s.v. III) is an inflorescent shrub with upward pointing blossoms, that have sweet smelling whitish flowers that grow in thick clusters (Song 4:13; 7:12). Like myrrh, the henna plant was used to make sweet smelling perfume. Its flowers were used to dye hair, nails, fingers, and toes orange. A related shrub is an inflorescent shrub with upward pointing blossoms, that have sweet smelling white flowers that grow in thick clusters (Song 4:13; 7:12). Like myrrh, the henna plant (H. kofer, “henna”; HALOT 495 s.v. III) is an inflorescent shrub with upward pointing blossoms, that have sweet smelling whitish flowers that grow in thick clusters (Song 4:13; 7:12). Like myrrh, the henna plant was used to make sweet smelling perfume. Its flowers were used to dye hair, nails, fingers, and toes orange.

The term אֵפֶּם (‘enepem, “how”) is used to: (1) introduce additional information; (2) to emphasize a point; (3) to enhance a statement; (4) to create an antithesis (HALOT 76 s.v. נאם). The usage here is to enhance “how pleasant” or “certainly pleasant” (“HALOT 76). The particle נאם is often used in Hebrew poetry to emphatically introduce a thought in the second colon which is a step beyond what was said in the first colon (e.g., Deut 33:3, 20, 28; 1 Sam 2:7; Pss 16:6, 7, 9; 18:49 HT [18:48 ET]; 65:14 HT [65:13 ET]; 68:9, 17 HT [68:8, 16 ET]; 74:16; 89:28 HT [89:27 ET]; 93:1; Prov 22:19; 23:28) (BBB 64 s.v. נאם). Sometimes, נאם is used to introduce a surprise or something unexpected (e.g., Job 14:3; 15:4) (BBB 65 s.v. נאם). The particle נאם (‘enepem, “how”) is often used in Hebrew poetry to emphatically introduce a new thought and indicates that this is an addition to the previous statement; it is something far greater.

The term נאם (‘enepem, “pleasant, delightful”) can refer to physical attractiveness or to personal character (BBB 653 נאם; HALOT 705 s.v. נאם). Some suggest that it refers to the pleasantness of his character and personality; however, it is better to take this as a reference to his handsome physical appearance for several reasons: (1) the term נאם (‘enepem, “handsome”) and נאם (‘enepem, “delightful”) are probably used in synonymous rather than synthetic parallelism. (2) The expression in 1:15-16 is on physical beauty as the repetition of the term “beautiful, handsome” (נאם) suggests. (3) The related verb נאם (‘enarm, “to be delightful”) is used in Song 1:7 in synonymous parallelism with נאם (‘enepem, “to be beautiful”) in the description of the Beloved’s beauty (Song 1:13). (4) Hebrew grammarians classify this usage of נאם in Song 1:16 in terms of physical beauty rather than personal character (BBB 653 s.v. 2).
The lush foliage² is our canopied bed;²
1:17 the cedars are the beams of our bed-
room chamber;
the pines are the rafters of our bedroom.

The Lily among the Thorns and the Apple Tree in
The Beloved to Her Lover:
The Lover to His Beloved:
2:2 Like⁷ a lily among the thorns,⁸
so is my darling among the maidens.

The Beloved about Her Lover:
The Lover to His Beloved:
2:3 Like⁹ an apple tree¹⁰ among the trees
of the forest,
so is my beloved among the young men.

² tn The term הֵרֶשׂ (n’ananah, “lush, verdant”) refers to the
color “green” and is often used in reference to luxuriant
foilage or trees (Pss 37:35; 52:8; Jer 11:16; Hos 14:8).
The impression 1:16c-17 gives is that the young man and young
woman are lying down together on the grass in the woods
enjoying the delights of their caresses. They liken the grass
below and the green leaves above to a marriage couch or
bedroom.
² tn Or “The lush foliage is our marriage couch.” The term
הָרֶשׂ (’erev, “bed”) describes a canopied bed (Pss 6:7; 41:4;
132:2; Prov 7:16) or marriage couch (Song 1:16) (BDB 793
s.v. הָרֶשׂ).
³ tn “the rose of Sharon…the lily of the valleys.” There is
debate whether the expressions תֶּרֶשׁ הָעֲמָקִים
(ḥokhet ḥеbāṣeṣṭ ḥashšaron) and תֶּרֶשׁ הָעֲמָקִים
(šoshannat ha’amagim) are
definite (“the rose of Sharon…the lily of the valleys”) or indefi-
nite (“a rose of Sharon…a lily”). Some translations adopt
the definite sense (KJV, NKJV, NASB, NAU, NJB, NLT); others
the indefinite sense (ASV, RSV, NRSlV, NIV, NID, NAB, NPS, CEV).
⁴ tn Heb “meadow-saffron” or “crocus.” The noun חֲבַצֶּלֶת
(ḥokhet ḥеbāṣeṣṭ) traditionally has been translated “rose” (KJV,
NKJV, NASB, RSV, NRSlV, NIV, NPS, NLT, CEV); however,
recent translations suggest “crocus” (NIrV margin, NPS margin),
“narcissus” (DBY) or simply “flower” (DRA, NAB). The LXX
translated it with the generic term αὐθός (anthos, “flower,
blossom”). Early English translators knew that it referred to
some kind of flower but were unsure exactly which type, so
they arbitrarily chose “rose” because it was a well-known and
beautiful flower. In the light of comparative Semitics, modern
Hebrew lexicographers have settled on “asphodel,”¹¹ “mea-
dow-saffron,” “narcissus,” or “crocus” (BDB 287 s.v. חֲבַצֶּלֶת;
HALOT 287 s.v. חֲבַצֶּלֶת; DCH 3:153 s.v. חֲבַצֶּלֶת).
The Hebrew term is related to Akkadian ḥaṣṣaratu (lit. “crocus”),
and Akkadian habassilatu (“flower-stalk, marsh plant, reed”). Lexi-
cographers and botanists suggest that the Hebrew term refers
to Ashdothel (lily family). Narcissus tazetta (narcissus or
daffodil), or Colchicum autumnale (meadow-saffron or crocus).
The location of this flower in Sharon suggests that a
common wild flower would be more consonant than a rose.
The term appears elsewhere only in Isa 35:1 where it refers
to some kind of desert flower – erroneously translated “rose”
(KJV, NPS) but probably “crocus” (NASB, NIV, NPS margin).
Appropriately, the rustic maiden who grew up in the simplicity
of rural life compares herself to a simple, common flower
of the field (M. H. Pope, Song of Songs [AB], 367).
⁵ sn Sharon is a low coastal plain stretching south from
Mount Carmel. It is well watered due to the Kurkar ridges
running parallel to the shore which trapped the water run-off
from the Samarian hills. The combination of low sandy hills
and swampy lowlands produced heavy vegetation and an
abundance of wild flowers in the area (M. H. Pope, Song of
Songs [AB], 367).
⁶ tn There is debate about the referent of חָוָה
(šoshannat, “lily”) because there are many different species of the
lily family. Botanists note that among the many different species
doing the lily only one grows in Palestine. This species may be
identified as the striped lily, or Lycoris radiata. The combination
of low sandy hills and swampy lowlands produced heavy vegetation and an
abundance of wild flowers in the area (M. H. Pope, Song of
Songs [AB], 367).
⁷ sn This is an example of emblematic parallelism. An illust-
trative simile appears in the A-line and the subject of the compar-
ision is in the B-line. The particles כָּנָה (c’c’‘ken, “like…so”) form an emphatic comparative construction (e.g., Ps 123:2), see
IBHS 641-42 §38.5a.
⁸ tn Alternately, “thorn bushes.” The term חָוָה
(hahokhim) is probably derived from חָוָה (hokh, “thorn-bush, briars,
thistles, thorns”): HALOT 296 s.v. חָוָה; BDB 296 s.v. חָוָה rath-
er than חָוָה (hokh, “crevice”); HALOT 296 s.v. חָוָה: “Like a
lily among the thorns” rather than “Like a lily among the
rock crevices.” The picture is of a beautiful flower growing in
the midst of thorn bushes (1 Sam 14:11; 2 Kgs 14:19; 2 Chr
25:18; Job 31:40; Prov 26:9; Isa 34:13; Hos 9:6) rather than a
beautiful flower growing in the midst of rocky outcroppings
(1 Sam 13:6; 2 Chr 33:11). The Hebrew term is related to Ak-
kadian hahu and haiahu “thorn” and haminhu “thorny plants”
(AHW 1:308) and Aramaic hahu (HALOT 296). The “thorn
bush” is a thistle plant (Poterium spinosum) which has prickly
spines covered with thistles, but also sprouts beautiful small
red flowers (Fauna and Flora of the Bible, 184-85).
⁹ tn The Lover accommodates her self-denigrating compari-
son, but heightens it to praise her: If she insisted that she was
nothing more than a common flower of the field, then he in-
sisted that all other women were like thorns by comparison.
The term חָוָה (hokh, “thorn”) is often used as a figure for
utter desolation and the cause of pain; it is the antithesis of
fertility and beautiful luxuriat growth (Job 31:40; Isa 34:13;
Hos 9:6).
¹⁰ tn Like the preceding line, this is a case of emblematic
parallelism. An illustrative simile appears in the A-line (object of
the comparison) and the subject of comparison appears
in the B-line. The particles כָּנָה (c’c’‘ken, “like…so”) form an emphatic comparative construction (e.g., Ps 123:2); cf.
IBHS 641-42 §38.5a.
¹¹ sn Apple trees were not native to Palestine and had to be
imported and cultivated. To find a cultivated apple tree grow-
ing in the forest among other wild trees would be quite un-
usual; the apple tree would stand out and be a delightful sur-
prise. Like a cultivated apple tree, the Lover was unique and
stood out among all other men. In ancient Near Eastern love
literature, the apple tree was a common symbol for romantic
love and sexual fertility (S. N. Kramer, The Sacred Marriage
Rite, 100-103). The “apple tree” motif is used in the Song in
a similar manner (e.g., Song 2:3; 8:5). Likewise, the motif of
“apples” is used as a symbol of fertility (Joel 1:12) and sexual
desire (Song 2:5, 7, 9).
I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste.

The Banquet Hall for the Love-Sick

The Beloved about Her Lover:

2:4 He brought me into the banquet hall,
The Song of Songs 2:5

and he looked at me lovingly.  

2:5 Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love.

The Double Refrain: Embracing and Adjuration

2:6 His left hand caresses my head,
The beloved song of songs:

2:1 I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and by the young does of the open fields:

The ancient Near Eastern love songs frequently portray the embrace of the lover as the only cure for the speaker’s love-sickness. For example, one Egyptian love song reads: “She will make the doctors unnecessary, because she knows my sickness” (Papyrus Harris 4:11). Similarly, “My salvation is her coming in from outside; when I see her, I will be healthy. When she opens her eye, my body is young; when she speaks, I will be strong. When I embrace her, she exorcises evil from me” (Papyrus Chester Beatty, C5:1-2).

The verb עיר (khaqqav) has a two-fold range of meanings in the Piel stem: (1) to embrace or hug someone (Gen 29:13; 33:4; 48:10; Job 24:8; Prov 4:8; Eccl 3:5; Lam 4:5) and (2) to fondle or sexually stimulate a lover (Prov 5:20; Song 2:6; 8:3) (HALOT 287 s.v. כהָאֹב). The verb designates an expression of love by the position or action of one’s hands (Song 4:125). The term is probably used here as a euphemism. The function of the prefixed verbal form be_tyy (’khabbapyeni, “embrace me”) may be classified several ways: (1) ingestive: “His right hand is beginning to stimulate me,” (2) instantaneous: “His right hand is stimulating me [right now],” (3) progressive: “His right hand stimulates me,” (4) jurisactive: “May his right hand stimulate me” (5) injunctive: “His right hand may stimulate me.” Based upon their view that the couple is not yet married, some scholars argue for an imperative of desire (“May his right hand stimulate me”). For a striking parallel, see S. N. Kramer, (“His right hand stimulates me”). For a parallel, see N. Kramer, (“His right hand stimulates me.”) or (6) permission: “His right hand may stimulate me.” Based upon their view that the object does not refer to a person (her lover) but to an emotional state (“love”), the Hebrew root עיר has two basic meanings: (1) to wake up and (2) to excite (HALOT 802 s.v. II יר). These two nuances are paralleled in the related Semitic roots: Ugaritic ʾr ʾn “to be excited” (UT 19.1849; 19.1926; WUS 2052) and Akkadian eru “to awaken” (Fridell 1:247) (HALOT 803 s.v. עיר). The verb has a four-fold range of meanings: (1) to wake up someone/ something, (2) to excite, put into motion, start to work, (3) to summon, (4) to disturb (HALOT 802-803 s.v. II). When used literally, the Hiphil describes waking up a sleeper (Zech 4:1) or stirring up a fire (Hos 7:4). When used figuratively, it describes stirring up (isa 50:4; Pss 57:9; 108:3) (Laurie 11.25; anger/wrath (Prov 7:18-38), jealousy/zeal (Isa 4:1-13), and loving sexual passion (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). The Polil stem has a three-fold range of meanings: (1) to awaken, start to move, (2) to agitate, disturb, (3) to set in motion (HALOT 802-803 s.v. II). The expression “awaken or awaken love” is figurative (hypoctastatis). It draws an implied comparison between the literal action of arousing a person from sleep and stirring him/her sexually, and the figurative picture of a lover sexually stirring up, arousing and exciting the sexual passions of his beloved.

Sn what does the expression “arouse or awaken love” mean? There are three major views: (1) to force a love relationship to develop prematurely rather than to allow it to develop naturally; (2) to interfere with the experience of passion: to stir up sexual passion; or (3) to interfere with the experience of passion to agitate, disturb, with the figurative picture of a lover sexually active. As noted above, עיר (“love-sickness”) in 2:5 suggests that the use of עיר (“love”) is not used as a sexual passion (DCH 1:141 s.v. עיר) and HALOT 18 s.v. עיר and (עיר, “awaken…arouse”) probably denotes “to stir up, excite” (HALOT 802-803 s.v. II). Likewise, the verb עיר (“awake”) is used in Song 4:16 and Hosea 7:4 in reference to stirring up sexual passion to excitement.

3 tn The root עיר, traditionally, “hinds.” A hind is a female deer, generally less than three years old.

4 tn Heb “of the field.” The Hebrew term refers to open fields or open countrysides as the home of wild animals; if taken adjectively this could modify the previous term: “wild young does” (cf. NRSV).

The “gazelles” and “does of the fields” are probably zoomorphisms for love personified. In other words, the witness of this oath is “love” itself. Should the daughters violate this vow which they are asked to make, “love” itself would hold them accountable. Gazelles were often figures in Hebrew, Akkadian, and Ugaritic literature for mighty warriors or virile young men (e.g., 2 Sam 1:19; 2:18; Isa 14:9; Zech 10:3).

Do not awaken or arouse love until it pleases!

6 tn Alternately, “arouse…awaken….” The root עיר (“ur”) is repeated twice in 2:7 for rhetorical emphasis. The first is the Hiphil imperative (“do not awake/excite...”) and the second is the Polil imperative (“do not awake/start to move...”). The Hiphil depicts a causal action (causing love to initially awaken) and the Polil depicts an intensive action (repeated efforts to awaken love or to set love into motion). On the other hand, G. L. Carr (Song of Solomon (TOTC), 94) writes: “The meaning is not stir up, i.e., a repetition of the same act, but is rather first the act of awakening or summoning something, and then doing what is necessary to sustain the activity already begun, i.e., being so fully awakened that sleep becomes impossible (e.g., 5:2).” The terms עיר, ”arouse”; עיר, “awaken”; Hiphil imperative from עיר and 아ַהֲבָה, “awaken”; Polil imperative from עיר are probably figative expressions (hypoctastatis) rather than literal, because the object does not refer to a person (her lover) but to an emotional state (“love”). The Hebrew root עיר has two basic meanings: (1) to wake up and (2) to excite (HALOT 802 s.v. II יר). These two nuances are paralleled in the related Semitic roots: Ugaritic ʾr ʾn “to be excited” (UT 19.1849; 19.1926; WUS 2052) and Akkadian eru “to awaken” (Fridell 1:247) (HALOT 803 s.v. עיר). The verb has a four-fold range of meanings: (1) to wake up someone/ something, (2) to excite, put into motion, start to work, (3) to summon, (4) to disturb (HALOT 802-803 s.v. II). When used literally, the Hiphil describes waking up a sleeper (Zech 4:1) or stirring up a fire (Hos 7:4). When used figuratively, it describes stirring up (isa 50:4; Pss 57:9; 108:3) (Laurie 11.25; anger/wrath (Prov 7:18-38), jealousy/zeal (Isa 4:1-13), and loving sexual passion (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). The Polil stem has a three-fold range of meanings: (1) to awaken, start to move, (2) to agitate, disturb, (3) to set in motion (HALOT 802-803 s.v. II). The expression “arouse or awaken love” is figurative (hypoctastatis). It draws an implied comparison between the literal action of arousing a person from sleep and stirring him/her sexually, and the figurative picture of a lover sexually stirring up, arousing and exciting the sexual passions of his beloved.

Sn what does the expression “arouse or awaken love” mean? There are three major views: (1) to force a love relationship to develop prematurely rather than to allow it to develop naturally; (2) to interfere with the experience of passion: to stir up sexual passion; or (3) to interfere with the experience of passion to agitate, disturb, with the figurative picture of a lover sexually active. As noted above, עיר (“love-sickness”) in 2:5 suggests that the use of עיר (“love”) is not used as a sexual passion (DCH 1:141 s.v. עיר) and HALOT 18 s.v. עיר and (עיר, “awaken…arouse”) probably denotes “to stir up, excite” (HALOT 802-803 s.v. II). Likewise, the verb עיר (“awake”) is used in Song 4:16 and Hosea 7:4 in reference to stirring up sexual passion to excitement.

7 tn Heb “If you arouse or if you awaken love before it pleases...” Paraphrase: “Promise that you will not arouse or awaken love until it pleases!” This line is a typical Hebrew negative oath formula in which the speaker utters his/her audience to take a vow to not do something that would have destructive consequences: (1) The expression הבאה ירה (hisbah ti, “I adjure...
The Arrival of the Lover

The Beloved about Her Lover:

2:8 Listen! My lover is approaching! Here he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills!

2:9 My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag.

Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the window, peering through the lattice.

The Season of Love and the Song of the Turtle-Dove

The Lover to His Beloved:

2:10 My lover spoke to me, saying: “Arise, my darling; My beautiful one, come away with me!”

2:11 Look! The winter has passed, the winter rains are over and gone.

2:12 The pomegranates have appeared in the land, the time for pruning and singing has come; the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

2:13 The fig tree has budded, the vines have blossomed and give off their fragrance. Arise, come away my darling; my beautiful one, come away with me!”

The Dove in the Clefts of En-Gedi

The Lover to His Beloved:

2:14 O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places of the mountain crags, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.
The Foxes in the Vineyard

The Beloved to Her Lover:
2:15 Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes, — for our vineyard is in bloom.

Poetic Refrain: Mutual Possession

The Beloved about Her Lover:
2:16 My lover is mine and I am his; he grazes among the lilies.

The Gazelle and the Rugged Mountains

The Beloved to Her Lover:
2:17 Until the dawn arrives and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved — be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountain gorges.

\[\text{tn} \] Heb “until the day breathes,” which is figurative (personification) for the morning, that is, the time when the day begins its “life” (e.g., Song 4:6). Likewise, “the shadows flee” is figurative (personification) for the dawn, i.e., the time when the dark shadows of the night disappear, or the shadows of the evening which lengthen and are just as fleeting.

[\text{tn}] The exact meaning of בָּתֶר (bôth, “mountains of Bethar”) is difficult because there is no known mountain-range which was ever called by this name. The meaning of the noun בָּתֶר (bôter) is uncertain. DCH distinguishes between three homoronic nouns: (1) בָּתֶר I noun “part, piece” (Gen 15:10; Jer 34:19) related to the verb בָּתָה (bâta, “to cut in two” (Gen 15:10); (2) בָּתֶר II noun “gorge” (Song 2:17); and (3) בָּתֶר III place name “Bethar” in Judah and 6.5 miles (11 km) SW of Jerusalem (Josh 15:59; 1 Chr 6:44; perhaps Song 2:17) (DCH 2:291 s.v. bôter). Thus, בָּתֶר might mean “mountains of gorge[s]” or “mountains of Bethar” (DCH 2:291 s.v. III). The Hebrew root בָּתָה (bâta, “cut in pieces, cut in half”) is related to Arabic bartara “to cut off” (HALOT 167 s.v. bâter: BDB 144 s.v. bâter). This word does not appear in Ugaritic, Akkadian, or Syriac. Aramaic בָּתָה (bâter, “after, behind”) was used frequently in Northwest Semitic (DISO 45:46) and Late Hebrew (Jastrow 201 s.v. bâter): however, it offers little to this problem. Many scholars take בָּתֶר as a genitive of description functioning as an attributive adjective. For example, BDB suggests that בָּתֶר means “mountains of cutting,” that is, “cleft mountains” (BDB 144 s.v. bâter), while Koehler posits “ravin,” that is, mountains with a ravine (HALOT 167 s.v. II bâter). This is reflected in the LXX’s κοιλῳματων (koilōmatōn, “hollow places, basin, cavity”): κοιλῳματων (koilōmatōn) “mountains with many ravines.” This approach is adopted by several translations, e.g., “rugged mountains” (NLT). On the other hand, Vulgate, Aquila, and Symmachus took it as a place name referring to the town of Bethar (LXX Βαθήρ = Mishnaic Hebrew בָּתְר) located 6.5 miles (11 km) southwest of Jerusalem (Josh 15:59; 1 Chr 6:44). This approach is adopted by several translations: “mountains of Bethar” (KJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV margin, TEV). Theodotion takes it as a figurative expression, reading θημιαματων (thumiamatōn, “incense”) which reflects a variant Hebrew reading of בָּתְר (bâter) (KJV, BDB 144, AV). This also appears in Song 8:14. This approach is taken in a Jewish-English translation: “hills of spice” (NIPS). The botanist Löw connects Hebrew בָּתְר to Greek μαλαβάθρον (malabathron) which was an Indian spice plant imported to Judah. See I. Low, Die Flora der Juden, 2:117-118. The expression “cleft mountains” (בָּתְר) might refer simply to a rugged and jagged mountain-range (NLT “rugged mountains”; NIV “rugged hills”). However, this may be a figurative description of the woman’s cleavage because similar imagery is used in Song 4:6 to describe her
The Lost Lover is Found

The Beloved about Her Lover:

3:1 All night long⁴ on my bed²

I longed for³ my lover.⁴
I longed for³ him but he never appeared.⁶

The term נפשׁ (nafshi, “my soul”) is a synecdoche of part for the whole (= the woman). The expression נפשו (nafsho, “soul”) is used as independent personal pronoun. It often expresses personal preference, such as love or hatred (e.g., Gen 27:4, 25; Lev 26:11, 30; Judg 5:24; Isa 1:14) (HALOT 112 s.v. נפשו). However, it is clear in 3:1 that this “search” took place upon her bed. It does not make sense in the context that the Beloved was looking around in her bed to find her lover – how big could her bed be that she had lost him? Rather, נפשׁ (”to seek”) is used metonymically to reference to her longing for her absent lover, that is, seeking in the sense of anticipation. The perfect tense should be classified as a past constative action, describing a past action which covered an extended period of time, as indicated by the phrase בַּלֵּילוֹת (ballelot, plural of extension, “all night long”) in 3:1. This continual action is emphasized by the four-fold repetition of נפשׁ (”seek”) in 3:1-2.

tn Heb “I sought….” The verb בַּקַּשׁ (baqash, “to seek”) denotes the attempt to physically find someone (e.g., 1 Sam 13:14; 16:16; 28:7; 1 Kgs 1:2-3; Isa 40:20; Ezek 22:30; Esth 2:2; Job 10:6; Prov 18:1) (HALOT 152 s.v. בַּקַּשׁ). However, it is clear in 3:1 that this “search” took place upon her bed. It does not make sense in the context that the Beloved was looking around in her bed to find her lover – how big could her bed be that she had lost him? Rather, בַּקַּשׁ (”to seek”) is used metonymically to reference to her longing for her absent lover, that is, seeking in the sense of anticipation. The perfect tense should be classified as a past constative action, describing a past action which covered an extended period of time, as indicated by the phrase בַּלֵּילוֹת (ballelot, plural of extension, “all night long”) in 3:1. This continual action is emphasized by the four-fold repetition of בַּקַּשׁ (”seek”) in 3:1-2.

tn Heb “I did not find my soul loves.” The expression נפשו (nafsho, “soul”) is a synecdoche of part for the whole (= the woman). The expression נפשו (”soul”) is used as independent personal pronoun. It often expresses personal preference, such as love or hatred (e.g., Gen 27:4, 25; Lev 26:11, 30; Judg 5:24; Isa 1:14) (HALOT 112 s.v. נפשו). However, it is clear in 3:1 that this “search” took place upon her bed. It does not make sense in the context that the Beloved was looking around in her bed to find her lover – how big could her bed be that she had lost him? Rather, נפשו (”to seek”) is used metonymically to reference to her longing for her absent lover, that is, seeking in the sense of anticipation. The perfect tense should be classified as a past constative action, describing a past action which covered an extended period of time, as indicated by the phrase בַּלֵּילוֹת (ballelot, plural of extension, “all night long”) in 3:1. This continual action is emphasized by the four-fold repetition of נפשו (”seek”) in 3:1-2.

tn The verb נפשו (nafsho, “my soul”) is often used in reference to the love between a man and woman, particularly in reference to emotional, romantic, or sexual love (2 Sam 1:26; 13:15; Prov 5:17; 7:1, 24; 24:15; 24:36, 25:1, 32; 35:2; 6:4; 7:5-6; Jer 2:2, 33). Likewise, the verb נפשו (nafsho, “love”) often refers to emotional, romantic, or sexual love between a man and woman (e.g., Gen 24:67; 29:20, 30, 32, 34; Deut 21:15, 16; Judg 14:16; 16:4, 15; 1 Sam 1:5; 18:20; 2 Sam 13:1, 4, 15; 1 Kgs 11:1-2; 2 Chr 11:21; Neh 13:26; Esth 2:17; Ecc 9:9; Song 1:3, 4, 7, 3:1-4; Jer 22:20, 22; Ezek 16:33, 36-37; 23:5, 9, 22; Hos 1:2-7; 13:1; Lam 2:17).

tn Heb “I sought him” (see note study above).

tc The LXX adds “I called him but he did not answer me” (ἐκάλεσα αὐτόν καὶ οὐχ ὑπήκουσέν μου, ekalesa auton kai ouch haphekouen) to 3:2d on the basis of its appearance in the parallel expressions in Song 5:6. There is no textual support for its inclusion here, however (see note to the LXX).

tn Heb “but I did not find my soul loves.” The verb נפשו (nafsho, “to find”) normally describes discovering the whereabouts of something/someone who is lost or whose presence is not known. It is clear in 3:1 that the Beloved was not taking a physical active role in looking all around for him, because she stayed in her bed all night long during this time. Therefore, the verb נפשו (”to find”) must be nuanced metonymically in terms of him appearing to her. It does not denote “finding” him physically, but visually; that is, if and when he would arrive at her bedside, she would “find” him. This might allude to her request in 2:17 for him to rendezvous with her to make love to her all night long (“until the day breathes and the shadows flee”). Despite the fact that she was waiting for him all night long, he never appeared (3:1). The verb נפשו (”to find”) is repeated four times in 3:1-4, paralleling the four-fold repetition of נפשו (”seek”). This antithetical word-pair creates a strong and dramatic contrast.
3:2 “I will arise⁴ and look all around⁵ throughout the town, and throughout the streets⁶ and squares; I will search for my beloved.”⁷

I searched for him but I did not find him.⁸

3:3 The night watchmen found me – the ones who guard the city walls.⁹ “Have you seen my beloved?”⁹

3:4 Scarcely¹⁰ had I passed them by when I found my beloved!

The Adoration Refrain

The Beloved to the Maidens:

3:5a I admonish you, O maidens of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and by the young does of the open fields:

I held onto him¹¹ tightly and would not let him go¹² until I brought him to my mother’s house,¹³ to the bedroom chamber¹⁴ of the one who conceived me.

1 sn Three 1st person common singular cohortatives appear in verse 2: יַחֲזְקִי (‘aqumah, “I will arise”), יַנְשִׁקֶּם (‘asovyah, “I will seek”), and יַצָּאת (‘ahuqmah, “I will seek”). These cohortatives have been taken in two basic senses: (1) resolve: “I will arise...I will go about...I will seek” (KJV, NIV) or (2) necessity: “I must arise...I must go about...I must seek” (NASB, NJPS). There is no ethical or moral obligation/necessity, but the context emphasizes her intense determination (e.g., 3:4b). Therefore, they should be classified as cohortatives of resolve, expressing the speaker’s determination to pursue a course of action. The three-fold repetition of the cohortative form emphasizes the intensity of her determination.

2 tn The emphatic particle of exhortation נָא (‘nah) appears in the expression אֶלָּה הַסֹּבְבִים (‘asovyah, “I will arise...”). This particle is used with 1st person common singular cohortatives to emphasize size determination and a determined resolve to act (BDB 609 s.v. נָא). (e.g., Gen 18:21; Exod 3:3; 2 Sam 14:15; Isa 5:1; Job 32:21).

3 tn The root תָּשָׁקַי (savav) in the Qal stem means “to go around, to do a circuit” (1 Sam 7:16; 2 Chr 17:9; 23:2; Eccl 12:5; Song 3:3; Isa 23:16; Hab 2:16), while the Polal stem means “to prowl around” (Ps 59:7, 15; Song 3:2) (HALOT 739 s.v. ‘savav). The idea here is that the Beloved is determined to “look all around” until she finds her beloved.

4 tn There is a consonantal wordplay in 3:2 between the roots עָשֶּׂק and וָשְׂק, that is, between יַחֲזְקִי (‘ahuqmah, “I will seek”) and וָשְׂק (‘ashshuqwaq, “streets”). The wordplay emphasizes that she searched in every nook and cranny.

5 tn The statement יָצָאת נְאֶל (‘ahuqmah) appears twice in 3:1-2. In both cases it concludes a set of cola. The repetition depicts her mounting disappointment in her failure to locate her beloved. It stands in strong contrast with 3:4.

6 tn Heb “those who go around the city” or “those who go around in the city.” The expression יָצָאת נְאֶל בֵּית מִסְאָר (hassas‘vim ba‘ir, “those who go around the city”) probably refers to the watchmen of the city walls rather than night city street patrol (e.g., Ps 127:1; Song 5:7; Isa 21:11; 62:6). The Israelite night watchmen of the walls is paralleled by the Akkadian sahir duri (“one who goes around the wall”) which appears in a lexical text as the equivalent of ma-sar musi (“night watchman”) (CAD 4:192). See M. H. Pope, Song of Songs (AB), 419. There is a wordplay in 3:2-3 between the verb יָצָאת נְאֶל (‘ahuqmah, “I will go about”) and the verb יָצָאת (‘ahuqmah, “those who go around”). This wordplay draws attention to the ironic similarity between the woman’s action and the action of the city’s watchmen. Ironically, she failed to find her beloved as she went around in the city, but the city watchmen found her. Rather than finding the one she was looking for, she was found.

7 tn Heb “the one whom my soul loves – have you seen [him]?” The normal Hebrew word-order (verb-subject-direct object) is reversed in 3:3 (direct object-verb-subject) to emphasize the object of her search: הוא הוא יַצָּאת נְאֶל נָא (‘et she’ahuqmah nafshi r’item, “the one whom my soul loves – have you seen [him]?”)

8 tn Heb “like a little.” The term בֹּא (kim), which is composed of the comparative preposition בּ (“like”) prefixed to the noun בָּה (‘ahuqmah, “the small, the little, the few”), is an idiom that means “within a little” or “scarcely” (BDB 590 s.v. בֹּא b.2.a).

9 tn Heb “I held him” (ayyên, ‘akhazitiv). The term אָבָקָשָׁה (‘avakshah, “grasp”) denotes to forcefully seize someone to avoid losing hold of him (BDB 28 s.v. אָבָקָשָׁה). The verb רַפְּה (rafah, “to let go”) means to relax one’s grip on an object or a person (HALOT 1397 s.v. רַפְּה; BDB 717 s.v. רַפְּה). The Hiphil stem means “to let loose” (Job 7:19; 27:6; Song 3:4; Sir 6:27) or “to release from one’s hands” (Deut 9:14; Josh 10:6; Ps 37:8). The negative expression רַפְּה אל (“rafah, “to not let [someone or something] go”) denotes an intense desire or effort to not lose possession of someone or something (Job 27:6; Prov 4:13). Here the expression רַפְּה אל וְלֹא אַרְפֶּנּו (“rafah and I would not let him go”) pictures her determination to hold on to him so she would not lose him again. The shift from a suffix-conjugation (perfect) רַפְּה政府采购 (‘avakshah, “I grasped him”) to a prefix-conjugation (imperfect רַפְּה政府采购 (“I would not let him go”) pictures a shift from a completed/consummative action (perfect: she took hold of his hand) to an ongoing/progressive action (imperfect: she would not let go of it). A basic distinction between the perfect and imperfect tenses is that of consummative versus progressive action. The literary/syntactical structure of רַפְּה政府采购 (“I would not let him go”) in 3:4 mirrors that of יָצָאת נְאֶל (‘ahuqmah) in 3:2.

10 tn There is debate about the reason why the woman brought her beloved to her mother’s house. Campbell notes that the mother’s house is sometimes referred to as the place where marital plans were made (Gen 24:28; Ruth 1:8). Some suggest, then, that the woman here was unusually bold and took the lead in proposing marriage plans with her beloved. This approach emphasizes that the marriage plans in 3:4 are followed by the royal wedding procession (3:6-11) and the wedding night (4:1-5). On the other hand, others suggest that the parallelism of “house of my mother” and “chamber of her where she herself was conceived, to complete the cycle of life/love. If this is the idea, it would provide a striking parallel to a similar picture in 8:5 in which the woman exults that they had made love to her beloved in the very location where her beloved had been conceived: “Under the apple tree I aroused you; it was there your mother conceived you, there she bore you conceived you.”

11 tn The term נְאֶל (kheder, “chamber”) literally means “dark room” (HALOT s.v. נְאֶל 293) and often refers to a bedroom (Gen 44:30; Exod 7:28 HT [8:3 ET]; Judg 3:24; 15:1, 16:9, 12; 2 Sam 4:7; 13:10; 1Kgs 1:15; 2 Kgs 6:12; 9:2; Eccl 10:20; Isa 26:20; Joel 2:16; Prov 24:4; Song 1:4; 3:4).

12 tn See the notes on these lines at 2:7.
The Royal Wedding Procession

The Speaker:

3:6 Who is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke, like a fragrant billow of myrrh and frankincense, every kind of fragrant powder of the traveling merchants?

3:7 Look! It is Solomon’s portable couch!
Each has his sword at his side, to guard against the terrors of the night.

3:9 King Solomon made a sedan chair for himself of wood imported from Lebanon. Its posts were made of silver.

6 The noun אַפִּרְיוֹן (afiryon) is a hapax legomenon variously rendered “sedan-chair” (HALOT 80 s.v. וּסְדָּן, “seadan, litter, palanquin”) (BDB 68 s.v. וּסְדָּן). It occurs in Mishnaic Hebrew וּסְדָּן and Judean Aramaic וּסְדָּן. It is also used in Syriac syncryvriu (litter).

6 The noun אַפִּרְיוֹן (afiryon) is a hapax legomenon whose meaning is uncertain. It may be related to the masculine noun רֶדֶף (radaf, “camping place, station”) referring to a stopping point in the wilderness march of Israel (Exod 17:1, 8; 19:2; Num 33:14); however, what any semantic connection might be is difficult to discern. The versions have translated אַפִּרְיוֹן variously: LXX οὐκάλικον (anakliton, “chair for reclining”), Vulgate reclinatorium (“support, back-rest of a chair”) Peshitta teshwītah dahba (“golden cover, throne sheathed in gold leaf”). Modern translators have taken three basic approaches: (1) Following the LXX and Vulgate (“support, rest, back of a chair”), BDB suggests “support,” referring to the back or arm of the chair (BDB 951 s.v. רדף). Several translations take this view, e.g., NRSV: “its back,” NEB/REB: “its headrest,” and NIV: “its back.” (3) G. Gerleman suggests the meaning “cover,” as proposed by Peshitta. The first two approaches are more likely than the third. The titles of the parts of the sedan-chair are given in the Mishnah (Av. 11:11-12), the sedan-chair of the palanquin or (2) the foundation/base of the saddle/litter upon which the palanquin rested (HALOT 1276 s.v. רדף).

6 The Hebrew noun וּסְדָּן (usdan, “purple fabric”) is a loanword from Hittite argamun “tribute,” which is reflected in Akkadian argammanna “purple” (also “tribute” under Hittite influence), Hittite argamanu “tribute,” as early as the third millennium B.C., as is testified by the one belonging to Queen Hetepheres, the mother of the Pharaoh Khufu (Cheops), which was found at Gaza. This litter is made of wood and inlaid in various places with gold decorations. Its total length is 6 ft. 10 in., and the length of the seat inside is 3 ft. 3 in. An inscription on the litter, of gold set in ebony, lists the queen’s titles.3

6 The participle רַטָּסְע (ratsus) probably functions verbally: “its interior was fitted out with love/lovingly.” Taking it adjectival would demand that the root רַטָּסְע (ratsus, “love”) function as a predicate nominative and given an unusual metonymous connotation: “Its inlaid interior [was] a [gift of] love.”

6 The accusative noun רַטָּסְע (ratsus) “love” or “leather” functions either as an accusative of material out of which the interior was made (“inlaid with leather”) or an accusative of manner describing how the interior was made (“inlaid lovingly,” that is, “inlaid with love”). The term רַטָּסְע is a homonymic noun therefore, there is an interesting little debate whether רַטָּסְע in 3:10 is from the root רַטָּסְע (ratsus, “love”) (BDB 13 s.v. וּסְדָּן: DCH: “tribute, base.”) or נוּעַ (nu’ah, “purple”) (BDB 13276 s.v. הלם). The homonymic root נוּעַ (nu’ah, “leather”) is related to Arabic իհֲב (ibah “leather” or “untanned skin.” It probably occurs in Hos 11:4 and may also appear in Song 3:10 (HALOT 18 s.v. הַלָּם). Traditionally, scholars and translations have rendered this term as “love” or “lovingly.” The reference to the “daughters of Jerusalem” suggests “love” because they had “loved” Solomon (1:4). However, the context describes “materials out of which the palanquin was made (3:9-10) thus, an interior made out of leather would certainly make sense. Perhaps the best solution is to see this as an example of intentional ambiguity in a homoronic wordplay: “Its interior was inlaid with leather/love by the maidens of Jerusalem.” See G. R. Driver, “Supposed Arabisms in the Old Testament,” JBL 55 (1936): 171-72; S. E. Loewenstein, Thesaurus of the Language of the Old Testament, 1:139; D. Grossberg, “Canticles 3:10 in The Light of a Homeric Analogue and Biblical Poetics,” BTB 11 (1981): 75-76.
maidsens of Jerusalem.
3:11 Come out, O maidens of Zion, and gaze upon King Solomon!
He is wearing the crown with which his mother crowned him on his wedding day, on the most joyous day of his life!

The Wedding Night: Praise of the Bride*

The Lover to His Beloved:

4:1 Oh, you are beautiful, my darling!  
Oh, you are beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are like doves.  

Your hair is like a flock of female goats descending from Mount Gilead.
4:2 Your teeth are like a flock of newly-shorn sheep coming up from the washing place, each of them has a twin, and not one of them is missing.
4:3 Your lips are like a scarlet thread, your mouth is lovely.
Your forehead behind your veil is like a slice of pomegranate.
4:4 Your neck is like the tower of David built with courses of stones;  

---

1 tn Heb “daughters” (also in the following line).
2 tn Heb “the day of the joy of his heart.” In the genitive construct phrase יָפָה רַעְיָתִי (yafah ra‘iyati, “the day of joy”) the noun רַעְיָתִי (ra‘iyati, “joy”) is a descriptive genitive of attribute (attributive genitive), that is, the genitive identifies the outstanding quality of the construct noun: “the joyous day” or “the day characterized by joy.” In the second genitive construct phraseATIONS in the Song of Songs 3:11

3 sn Song 4:1-7 is often compared to ancient Near Eastern wasfs songs sung by the groom to his new bride, praising her beauty from head to foot. Examples have been found in Egyptian, Syrian, Sumerian, and Arabic love literature. The wasfs song is a poetic celebration by the groom of his bride’s physical beauty, and (3) the groom’s poetic comparative praise of his bride’s beauty from head to foot — comprising the bulk of the song. The groom’s praise typically is characterized by three movements: (1) introductory summary praise of his bride’s beauty, (2) lengthy and detailed presentation of her physical beauty, and (3) concluding summary praise which reiterates the introductory words of the song. Although the introductory words of the wedding guests and the invitation by the bride are absent, the form of the Lover’s praise of his bride is identical, as are the types of comparative praise. His song falls into the following elements:

---

6 sn The expression “your eyes [are] doves” is a metaphor (implied comparison). Like most of the other metaphors in 4:1-7, this is probably a comparison of sight rather than sense: (1) the shape of a woman’s eyes, especially in Egyptian art, resemble the shape of a dove, and (2) the white color of the eyeballs resemble the white color of a dove’s body. On the other hand, many Jewish and Christian interpreters have suggested that this is a comparison of sense, usually suggesting that the eyes are the windows of their soul or character, that is, the bride has a pure character as can be seen through her eyes.

---

7 tn Heb “flowing down” or “descending.” The verb הָלַּלֶּה (halalah, “flowing down”) may be nuanced “descending.” The most recent lexicons define מַעֲרָב (ma‘arav) as “to flow, leap” (DCH 2:357 s.v. מַעֲרָב); “to hop, move down” (HALOT 195 s.v. מַעֲרָב); and “to go down, glide down” (E. Klein, Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language, 102). Earlier lexicons suggested the meanings “to sit, sit up, recline” (BDB 167 s.v. מַעֲרָב). The Hebrew root is related to Arabic jala‘a “to go up, to go down, sit up” (HALOT 195).
8 tn Alternately, “the watering-hole” or “watering-place.” The noun מַעֲרָב (ma‘arav) may be nuanced “washing-place” (BDB 934 s.v. מַעֲרָב) or “watering-hole, watering-place” (HALOT 1221 s.v. מַעֲרָב). The related verb מָעַרַב (ma‘arab) means “to wash, bathe, rinse off” (BDB 934 s.v. מָעַרַב; HALOT 1220-21 s.v. מָעַרַב). The metaphor describing the beautiful teeth of the bride probably pictures freshly washed up sheep with freshly watered sheep. He praises his bride’s teeth by comparing them to freshly washed sheep. In the ancient Near East it was customary to wash sheep before shearing them. The picture of freshly washed sheep depicts the whiteness of the bride’s teeth.
9 tn The phrase נָפַלָה (napalah, “thread of scarlet”) is a genitive construct with the genitive functioning adjectively. This phrase is used three times in classical Hebrew to denote a scarlet colored “thread” or “cord” (Josh 2:18; Song 4:3; 11 QT 49:3) (HALOT 296-97 s.v. נפה; DCH 3:170-71 s.v. נפה). This is a comparison of sight, describing the color and shape of her lips.
10 tn Alternately, “cheek,” or “temples” (see Judg 4:21).
11 tn The term מִשְׁגָּל ( mishgal, “tower”) refers to a military structure, such as a stronghold, arsenal, or defensive tower on the walls of a city (e.g., Judg 8:9, 17; 9:51; 2 Kgs 9:17; 17:9; 18:2; 2 Chr 14:6; 26:15; 27:4; 32:5).
12 tn The feminine noun_nominal pattern from the root shockal (“thread”). The form נָפַלָה (napalah, “thread of scarlet”) is a hapax lege-mon of uncertain etymology. Various attempts have been made to find the origin of this word, but they are all uncertain. LXX εἰς ἐπάλξεις (eis epalxeis) simply transliterated the word, taking it as a proper name of a locality (Tel Pivoth). Similarly, Dom Calmet treated שֶׁגָּלְשׁוּ (shegalshu) as a compound word (שֶׁ, shet, “of” or “with,” and הָלַּל (halalah, “flowing down”) as a synonym for “perishing” or “to perish”) in a metonymical sense: “a cause of perishing,” i.e., a weapon. The Hebrew root is related to Akkadian كم propugnaculis. Ibn Ezra redidivided פֶּרֶשָׁה (pereshah) as פֶּרֶשָה חַּיָּה (for “suspending weapons”) by taking פֶּרֶשָה (“mouths” = edge of swords) as a reference to weaponry. This is reflected in several translations: “armoury” (KJV, AV, ASV), “arsenal” (RSV), and “fortress” (JB). The noun may be related to the Arabic root tip (“to perish”) in a metonymical sense: “a cause of perishing,” i.e., a weapon. The Hebrew Piel verb תִּלֵּף (t l p, “to hang up”) means “to hang up for display,” thus NEB suggests that it is derived from tiphah which means “to arrange in courses.” It may be the root tip (“to perish”) in a metonymical sense: “a cause of perishing,” i.e., a weapon. The verb תִּלֵּף (t l p, “to hang up”) means “to hang up for display,” thus NEB suggests that it is derived from tiphah which means “to arrange in courses.” The noun כֶּפֶלֶף (kephalef) means “a cause of perishing,” i.e., a weapon. The noun כֶּפֶלֶף (kephalef) is a femi-nine plural noun of the taqtilat nominal pattern from the root לָל which means “to arrange in courses.” HALOT notes that
The Wedding Night: Beautiful as Lebanon

4:8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come with me from Lebanon. Descend from the crest of Amana, from the top of Senir, the summit of Hermon, from the lions’ dens and the mountain haunts of the leopards.

4:5 Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of the gazelle grazing among the lilies. 46 Until the dawn arrives and the shadows flee, I will go up to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.

4:7 You are altogether beautiful, my darling! There is no blemish in you!
4:9 You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride! You have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.

4:10 How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine; the fragrance of your perfume is better than any spice!

4:11 Your lips drip sweetness like the honeycomb, my bride, honey and milk are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

The Wedding Night: The Delightful Garden

The Lover to His Beloved:

4:12 You are a locked garden, my sister, my bride; you are an enclosed spring, a sealed-up fountain.

4:13 Your shoots are a royal garden full of pomegranates with choice fruits: henna with nard, 4:14 nard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon with every kind of spice, myrrh and aloes with all the finest spices.

4:15 You are a garden spring.

The twin themes of the enclosed garden and sealed spring are highlighted by the wordplay (paronomasia) between the Hebrew expressions גַּן נָעוּל (‘garden, parkland, forest’) and a fountain ( Song of Songs 4:13; Ecc 2:5; Neh 2:8). The original Old Persian ( Avestan) term pairidaeza designated the enclosed parks and pleasure-grounds which were the exclusive domain of the Persian kings and nobility in the Achaemenid period ( HALOT 963 s.v. паридейа, LJS 1308). The Babylonian term pardesu means ‘marvelous garden,’ in reference to the enclosed parks of the kings ( AHw 2:89a and 3:1582a). The term passed into Greek as παραδίκαιος (pairadeisos, “enclosed park, pleasure-ground”), referring to the enclosed parks and gardens of the Persian kings (LJS 1308). The Greek term was transliterated into English as “paradise.”

Or “with all the finest balsam trees.” The Hebrew term בְּשֵׁם (beshem) can refer either to the balsam tree, the spice associated with it, or by extension any fragrant aroma used as perfuming oil or incense.

4sn The twin themes of the enclosed garden and sealed spring are highlighted by the wordplay (paronomasia) between the Hebrew expressions גַּן נָעוּל (‘garden, parkland, forest’) and a fountain ( Song of Songs 4:13; Ecc 2:5; Neh 2:8). The original Old Persian ( Avestan) term pairidaeza designated the enclosed parks and pleasure-grounds which were the exclusive domain of the Persian kings and nobility in the Achaemenid period ( HALOT 963 s.v. паридейа, LJS 1308). The Babylonian term pardesu means ‘marvelous garden,’ in reference to the enclosed parks of the kings ( AHw 2:89a and 3:1582a). The term passed into Greek as παραδίκαιος (pairadeisos, “enclosed park, pleasure-ground”), referring to the enclosed parks and gardens of the Persian kings (LJS 1308). The Greek term was transliterated into English as “paradise.”

6sn The noun בִּשְׁמֵהֶם (beshem) can refer either to the balsam tree, the spice associated with it, or by extension any fragrant aroma used as perfuming oil or incense.

7tn Heb “a fountain of gardens” or “a headwaters for gardens.” The term יָם (m’yan, “fountain”) denotes “source, headwaters” as the place of origin of streams ( HALOT 612 s.v. ים). The term does not refer to a water fountain such as commonly found in modern cultivated gardens or parks; rather, it refers to the headwaters of streams and rivers, such as the headwaters of the Jordan. The genitive construct יָם יָמִים (m’yan gymmim, “a fountain of gardens”) is an unusual expression that has been treated in various ways: (1) “a garden fountain,” that is, a fountain located in a garden ( HALOT 198 s.v. ים); (2) “a fountain of gardens,” that is, the headwaters of many spring-watered gardens. The latter is preferred. In Song 4:12-14 the bride is figuratively described as a garden with exotic plants, however, in 4:15 the metaphor shifts to the source of the water for the garden: יָם (“headwaters”) and בְּשֵׁמֵהֶם (beshem, “well”) of fresh water flowing down from Lebanon.
a well1 of fresh water2 flowing down from Lebanon.

The Beloved to Her Lover:

4:16 Awake, O north wind; come, O south wind!

Blow on my garden so that its fragrant spices may send out their sweet smell.3

May my beloved come into his garden and eat its delightful fruit!

The Lover to His Beloved:

5:1 I have entered my garden, O my sister, my bride;

I have gathered my myrrh with my bal-sam spice.

I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey;

I have drunk my wine and my milk!

1 tn Heb “a watering place” or “a well of underground water.” The term רֵאֵר (hârer, “well”) refers to an underground well that is dug in the ground to provide fresh water for humans and beasts (e.g., Gen 21:19, 25, 30; 26:15, 18, 19, 22, 32) (HALOT 106 s.v. רֵאֵר; DCH 2:87 s.v. רֵאֵר). The term is often used in parallelism with Akb (kor, “cistern”), מַיִם חַיִּים (mayim khayyim, “living water”) refers to flowing, fresh water in contrast to standing, stagnant water (Gen 26:19; Lev 14:5-6; 50:52; 15:13; Num 19:17; Jer 2:13; 17:13; Zech 14:8; Song 4:15; 10:4; 8:7, 16; 4Q418 103.2:6; 4QDihHam 1.5:2; 11Q1 45:16) (DCH 2:202 s.v. רֵאֵר 1; HALOT 308 s.v. רֵאֵר; BDB 312 s.v. רֵאֵר). The adjective life (living) frequently refers to what is fresh (Gen 26:19), healthy (Sir 30:14), or thriving (Gen 43:7, 27). Fresh, flowing water is pictured as pure (Lev 14:5-6, 50:52; 15:13) and a source of refreshment (Gen 26:19). See P. Reymond, L’eau, sa vie, et sa signification dans l’Ancien Testament (VTSup), 136.

2 tn Heb “living water.” The phrase רֵאֵר עַיִן (re‘er eyn, “water-hole”) functions verbally, describing a past ingressive state: “was awake.” The line could be nuanced, “I was asleep or was just about to fall asleep when I was suddenly awakened.” 

3 sn There is no simple debate about the identity of the speaker(s) and the audience addressed in 5:1b. There are five options: (1) He is addressing his bride. (2) The bride is addressing him. (3) The wedding guests are addressing him and his bride. (4) He and his bride are addressing the wedding guests. (5) The poet is addressing him and his bride. When dealing with this issue, the following factors should be considered: (1) the form of both the exhortations and the address to the speaker(s) and the audience addressed in 5:1b. There are several factors indicating that the speaker is the bride or that his bride is addressing the wedding guests – an orgy is quite out of the question! (3) The wedding guests are addressing him and his bride. (4) The exhortation has an implicitly sexual connotation because the motif of “eating” and “drinking” refers to sexual consummation in 5:1a. This makes it unlikely that he is addressing his bride or that his bride is addressing him. (2) The exhortation refers to intoxication, that is, it compares becoming drunk on wine with enjoying the physical love of one’s spouse (e.g., Prov 5:19-20).

4 tn Heb “may flow.”

5 sn There is no simple debate about the identity of the speaker(s) and the audience addressed in 5:1b. There are five options: (1) He is addressing his bride. (2) The bride is addressing him. (3) The wedding guests are addressing him and his bride. (4) He and his bride are addressing the wedding guests. (5) The poet is addressing him and his bride. When dealing with this issue, the following factors should be considered: (1) the form of both the exhortations and the address to the speaker(s) and the audience addressed in 5:1b. There are several factors indicating that the speaker is the bride or that his bride is addressing the wedding guests – an orgy is quite out of the question! (3) The wedding guests are addressing him and his bride. (4) The exhortation has an implicitly sexual connotation because the motif of “eating” and “drinking” refers to sexual consummation in 5:1a. This makes it unlikely that he is addressing his bride or that his bride is addressing him. (2) The exhortation refers to intoxication, that is, it compares becoming drunk on wine with enjoying the physical love of one’s spouse (e.g., Prov 5:19-20).

6 sn The physical love of the couple is compared to eating and drinking at a wedding feast. This is an appropriate figure of comparison because it would have been issued during the feast which followed the wedding and the consummation. The term ‘drink’ refers to intoxication, that is, it compares becoming drunk on wine with enjoying the physical love of one’s spouse (e.g., Prov 5:19-20).

7 tn Heb “but my heart was awake.” Scholars have interpreted 5:2a in two basic ways: (1) The Beloved had been asleep or was just about to fall asleep when she was awakened and the sound of him knocking on the door of her bedroom chambers. The term רְחֵל (rechel, “my heart”) is a synecdoche of part for the whole: “my heart” = “I.” The particle רְחֵל (rechel) functions verbally, describing a past progressive state: “was awakened.” The line would be rendered: “I was sleeping when I (= my heart) was awakened.” (2) The Beloved was sleeping, but her mind was dreaming (in her dream she heard him knocking on her door). In this case, רְחֵל (rechel) ("my heart") is a metonymy of association for the thoughts (e.g., Ps 90:12; Prov 18:15) or a synecdoche of part for the whole. If this verse is introducing a dream sequence in 5:2-8, this is a metonymy for the Beloved’s thoughts in her dream: “I was sleeping but my mind was dreaming.” If this verse depicts the Beloved beginning to doze off to sleep – only to be awakened by his knocking at her door – then it is a synecdoche of part for the whole: “I was about to fall asleep when I was suddenly awakened.”

8 niv The physical love of the couple is compared to eating and drinking at a wedding feast. This is an appropriate figure of comparison because it would have been issued during the feast which followed the wedding and the consummation. The term ‘drink’ refers to intoxication, that is, it compares becoming drunk on wine with enjoying the physical love of one’s spouse (e.g., Prov 5:19-20).
The Lover to His Beloved:
“Open6 for me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one! My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night.”

The Beloved to Her Lover:
5:3 “I have already taken off my robe – must I put it on again? I have already washed my feet – must I soil them again?”
5:4 My lover thrust his hand through7 the hole,8

6 tn Possibly a euphemism (double entendre). The term يָרָה (yarah; “hand”) normally refers simply to the physical hand (HALOT 386 s.v. יָרָה 1; BDB 388 s.v. יָרָה 1). There are, however, at least three occasions when يָרָה refers to tall stone pillars (translated “monument” or “pillar”), such as those used in Canaanite fertility-cults in the form of phallic representations (1 Sam 15:12; 2 Sam 18:18; Isa 56:5). It is clearly used as a euphemism for the male copulatory organ in Isa 57:8, 10. It is treated as a proper name in the Old Testament proper, e.g., “Nahum, the beloved one,” a name that may have a double reference to the literal and metaphorical usage of يָרָה (HALOT note no. 52:33-35) (UT 1072). The noun يָרָה is also used in the Qumran literature in this sense in a list of penalties for indecent exposure (Manual of Discipline 7:12-15). Thus, several scholars suggest that a subtle double entendre in 5:4-6. The imagery of the man thrusting his hand through the hole (5:3) is prominent in several Hebrew texts. For example, BDB 1018 s.v. יָרָה 3.a proposes that יָרָה + מִן (shalakh + min) means “to stretch out (his hand) from the outside, inward.” He was attempting to open the door from the outside by extending his hand inside the door through some kind of latch-opening: “he put in his hand by the opening of the door” (KJV), “he extended his hand through the opening of the door” (NASB), and “he extended his hand through the latch-opening” (NRSV). Others, however, suggest that the construction יָרָה + מִן denotes “to withdraw from” (e.g., 1 Kgs 13:4). The preposition מִן is taken to mean, not “through,” but “away from.” Thus, he was withdrawing his hand from the latch-opening, that is, he had given up and was leaving. This approach is adopted by NJPS. “My beloved took his hand off the latch—clearly stronger in 5:6, “I opened the [door] for my beloved, but my beloved had already turned and gone away; my heart sank at his departure!” (see study notes below on 5:6).

7 tn Heb “hole.” Probably “latch-hole” or “key-hole,” but possibly a euphemism (double entendre). The noun יָרָה (yarah; “hand”) is used in OT in a literal and metaphorical sense: (1) literal sense: hole bored in the lid of a chest (2 Kgs 12:10); hole in a wall (Ezek 8:7); hole in the ground or used as a hiding places for men (1 Sam 13:6; 14:11; Isa 42:23); hole in the ground, as the dwelling place of an asp (Isa 11:8); and a hole in a mountain, as the den of lions (Nah 2:13); and (2) figurative sense: hole of an eye (metonymy of association), that is, eyeocket (Zech 14:12) (HALOT 348 s.v. יָרָה; BDB 359 s.v. מִן); while the meaning of יָרָה in Song 5:4 is clear (the “hole” – there is no debate when the term refers to some kind of opening associated with the latch of the bedroom door); however, NIPUS nuances it well: “Let me in!”

8 tn “to open.” Alternately, “let me in!” The imperative form of יָרָה (yarah) connotes a polite, but earnest request. The verb יָרָה (yarah) refers to the action of opening various objects, e.g., sack (Gen 42:27), skin bottle (Judg 4:19), hamper (Exod 2:6), pit (Exod 21:33), mouth of a cave (Josh 10:22), grave (Ezek 37:12, 13), city gates (Neh 13:19; Isa 45:1), gate of a land (Nah 3:13), window (2 Kgs 13:17), the sheepfold (Joel 2:8), and the nouns יָרָה “door” (dor, “door”), יָרָה “to open” (haloth), יָרָה “to open a door” (HALOT 986-87 s.v. יָרָה; BDB 835 s.v. יָרָה) clearly suggests that he is at the Bedroom’s door.”

9 tn “to open” alternately, “let me in!” The imperative form of יָרָה (yarah) connotes a polite, but earnest request. The verb יָרָה (yarah) refers to the action of opening various objects, e.g., sack (Gen 42:27), skin bottle (Judg 4:19), hamper (Exod 2:6), pit (Exod 21:33), mouth of a cave (Josh 10:22), grave (Ezek 37:12, 13), city gates (Neh 13:19; Isa 45:1), gate of a land (Nah 3:13), window (2 Kgs 13:17), the sheepfold (Joel 2:8), and the nouns יָרָה “door” (dor, “door”), יָרָה “to open” (haloth), יָרָה “to open a door” (HALOT 986-87 s.v. יָרָה; BDB 835 s.v. יָרָה) clearly suggests that he is at the Bedroom’s door.”
and my feelings were stirred for him.

I arose to open for my beloved; my hands dripped with myrrh and my fingers flowed with myrrh on the handles of the lock.

I opened for my beloved, but my lover had already turned and gone away.

I fell into despair when he departed.

5:5 I arose to open for my beloved; my hands dripped with myrrh — my fingers flowed with myrrh on the handles of the lock.
5:6 I opened for my beloved, but my lover had already turned and gone away.

I fell into despair when he departed.

The phrase is used similarly elsewhere in OT, rousing the subject to action.

The verb קְהָמַע (khamaq) occurs only in Song 5:6 (Qal: “to turn away, go leave”) and in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”). It is found in cognate languages for “to go, to go away” (e.g., Pss 57:12; 71:13; Prov 19:13). The phrase is used of the departure of a beloved from the speaker, which is also the case in Song 5:6. The phrase is used in a similar context in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”), where it is used of a person leaving a place.

5:5 I arose to open for my beloved; my hands dripped with myrrh and my fingers flowed with myrrh on the handles of the lock.

I opened for my beloved, but my lover had already turned and gone away.

I fell into despair when he departed.

The phrase is used similarly elsewhere in OT, rousing the subject to action.

The verb קְהָמַע (khamaq) occurs only in Song 5:6 (Qal: “to turn away, go leave”) and in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”). It is found in cognate languages for “to go, to go away” (e.g., Pss 57:12; 71:13; Prov 19:13). The phrase is used of the departure of a beloved from the speaker, which is also the case in Song 5:6. The phrase is used in a similar context in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”), where it is used of a person leaving a place.

I fell into despair when he departed.

The phrase is used similarly elsewhere in OT, rousing the subject to action.

The verb קְהָמַע (khamaq) occurs only in Song 5:6 (Qal: “to turn away, go leave”) and in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”). It is found in cognate languages for “to go, to go away” (e.g., Pss 57:12; 71:13; Prov 19:13). The phrase is used of the departure of a beloved from the speaker, which is also the case in Song 5:6. The phrase is used in a similar context in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”), where it is used of a person leaving a place.

5:5 I arose to open for my beloved; my hands dripped with myrrh and my fingers flowed with myrrh on the handles of the lock.

I opened for my beloved, but my lover had already turned and gone away.

I fell into despair when he departed.

The phrase is used similarly elsewhere in OT, rousing the subject to action.

The verb קְהָמַע (khamaq) occurs only in Song 5:6 (Qal: “to turn away, go leave”) and in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”). It is found in cognate languages for “to go, to go away” (e.g., Pss 57:12; 71:13; Prov 19:13). The phrase is used of the departure of a beloved from the speaker, which is also the case in Song 5:6. The phrase is used in a similar context in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”), where it is used of a person leaving a place.

5:5 I arose to open for my beloved; my hands dripped with myrrh and my fingers flowed with myrrh on the handles of the lock.

I opened for my beloved, but my lover had already turned and gone away.

I fell into despair when he departed.

The phrase is used similarly elsewhere in OT, rousing the subject to action.

The verb קְהָמַע (khamaq) occurs only in Song 5:6 (Qal: “to turn away, go leave”) and in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”). It is found in cognate languages for “to go, to go away” (e.g., Pss 57:12; 71:13; Prov 19:13). The phrase is used of the departure of a beloved from the speaker, which is also the case in Song 5:6. The phrase is used in a similar context in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”), where it is used of a person leaving a place.

I fell into despair when he departed.

The phrase is used similarly elsewhere in OT, rousing the subject to action.

The verb קְהָמַע (khamaq) occurs only in Song 5:6 (Qal: “to turn away, go leave”) and in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”). It is found in cognate languages for “to go, to go away” (e.g., Pss 57:12; 71:13; Prov 19:13). The phrase is used of the departure of a beloved from the speaker, which is also the case in Song 5:6. The phrase is used in a similar context in Jer 31:22 (Hitpael: “to turn hither and thither”), where it is used of a person leaving a place.
I looked for him but did not find him; I called him but he did not answer me.  

5:7 The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. They beat me, they bruised me; they took away my cloak, those watchmen on the walls!

The Triumph of Love: The Beloved Praises Her Lover

The Beloved to the Maidens:

5:8 O maidens of Jerusalem, I command you – If you find my beloved, what will you tell him? Tell him that I am lovesick!

The Maidens to The Beloved:

5:9 Why is your beloved better than others? O most beautiful of women?

5:10 My beloved is dazzling and ruddy; he stands out in comparison to all other men.  

5:11 His head is like the purest gold. His hair is curly – black like a raven.  

5:12 His eyes are like doves by streams of water, washed in milk, mounted like jewels.  

5:13 His cheeks are like garden beds full of flowers, his mouth like oranges

Footnotes:
1. The genitive construct הַצְּחָת אָהֳבָה (kholat ‘ahavah, “sick of love”) denotes “lovesick.” This is an example of a genitive of cause, that is, the Beloved was (physically/emotionally) sick because of her unrequited love for him. See study note on Song 2:5.
2. Heb: “How is your beloved [better] than [another] lover?”
3. The Beloved’s praise of his appearance follows the typical literary structure of the ancient Near Eastern swafS song: (1) introductory summary praise (5:10), (2) detailed descriptive praise from head to foot (5:11-16a), and (3) concluding summary praise (5:16b). There are several striking features about this song that are unique from the typical swafSs. (1) The ordinary setting of the ancient Near Eastern swafS songs was the wedding night. (2) They were ordinarily sung only by a man in praise of his bride. (3) Normally, the swafS song will conclude with the feet after the legs; however, the Beloved concludes by praising his mouth after his legs.
4. The term צָח (tsakh, “dazzling”) is ordinarily used to describe the shining surface of jewelry or of smoothed rocks (Ezek 24:7-8; 26:4, 14; Neh 4:7). Likewise, אָדֹם (adom, “rudy”) can describe the redness of rubies (Lam 4:7). Throughout 5:11-15 she compares his appearance to valuable jewels, gems, and precious metals.
5. The adjective צְחָת אָדָם (tsaxah adom) denotes either “manly” or “ruddy,” depending upon whether it is derived from צָח (tsax, “man”); HALOT 14 s.v. ל צָח ("red"); HALOT 14 s.v. ל צָח. If it is “manly,” the idea is that he is the epitome of masculinity and virility. On the other hand, the emphasis would be upon his health and virility, evidenced by his ruddy complexion, or it could be a comparison between his ruddy coloring and the redness of rubies (Lam 4:7).
6. tn Heb “outstanding.” The participle יֵצָח (tsaxah) functions as a predicate adjective: “My beloved is . . . outstanding among ten thousand.” The verb יָצָח (tsax) is relatively rare, being derived from the noun צָח (tsax, “banner”) which often refers to a military standard which, when lifted up, was conspicuous for all to see (Num 2:3:4; 10:14-15). The verb יָצָח only occurs three other times, all referring to raising military banners for all to see (Ps 20:6; Song 6:4, 10). Song 5:10 uses the term figuratively (hypocatastasis) to denote “outstanding” (HALOT 213 s.v. ל צָח). This sense is closely related to the cognate Akkadian verb dagalu “to look, contemplate” and the noun daglu “eyesight, view (what is looked at).” Like a banner lifted high, he attracted the attention of all who looked at him.
7. tn Heb “among.” The preposition ל (lamed) prefixed to יָצָח (Ytschah, “ten thousand”) is taken in a comparative, locative sense: “outstanding among ten thousand” (e.g., KJV, RSV, NASB, NIV, NJPS).
8. tn Heb “among ten thousand.” The numeral “ten thousand” is the highest number used in comparisons in Hebrew poetry (1 Sam 18:7-8; 21:12; 29:5; Ps 91:7). It is not used to mark out a specific number, but to denote an indefinite number of persons of the largest possible proportions (Gen 24:60; Num 10:14-15). Her point is simply this: no other man could possibly compare to him in appearance, even if he were in a group of an infinite number of men.
9. tn Heb “his head is gold of pure gold.” In the genitive construct phrase יִצְחָת אֲדֹם (tsaxah adom) is used as a predicate nominative in a metaphorical statement: “his head is (like) the purest gold.” In the OT gold is frequently used in comparisons to emphasize the idea of beauty, value, or rarity (Job 28:12-19; Prov 3:7). It is not used to mark out a specific number, but to denote an indefinite number of persons of the largest possible proportions (Gen 24:60; Num 10:14-15). Her point is simply this: no other man could possibly compare to him in appearance, even if he were in a group of an infinite number of men.
10. tn Literally “his locks [of hair] are curls.” The Hebrew adjective צְחָת אֲדֹם (tsaxah adom) is a hapax legomenon whose meaning is somewhat unclear. BDB suggests that צְחָת אֲדֹם is from the root צָח (mound, hill) (BDB 1068 s.v. צָח) which is related to Arabic القاح (mound, hill, top) (E. W. Lane, Arabic English Dictionary, 311) and Akkadian dagal “hill, mountain” (AHw 3:1358). On the other hand, HALOT suggests that צְחָת אֲדֹם means “date-panicle” and that it is related to the Akkadian noun taltalu “pollen of date-palm” (HALOT 1741 s.v. תַּלְתָּל). The term occurs in Mishnaic Hebrew as ל צְחָת אֲדֹם ("curls, locks") (Jastrow 1674 s.v. צְחָת אֲדֹם). It is used in the same way in the Song. The form צְחָת אֲדֹם is a reduplicated pattern used for adjectives denoting an intense characteristic (S. Moncati, Comparative Grammar, 75-79, §12.9-13). It functions as a predicate adjective to the subjective nominative צְחָת אֲדֹם ("locks of hair").
balsam trees\(^4\) yielding\(^2\) perfume. His lips are like lilies dripping with drops of myrrh.

5:14 His arms are like rods of gold set with chrysoloite. His abdomen\(^3\) is like polished ivory inlaid with sapphires.

5:15 His legs are like pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as its cedars.

5:16 His mouth is very sweet;\(^4\) he is totally desirable.\(^5\)

---

\(^4\) sn in the genitive construct phrase מַמְתַקִּים (mamtaqqim, literally, “beds of balsam”) the term מַמְתַקִּים (mamtaqqim) is a noun of composition, identifying what these gardens were composed of. The term מַחֲמַד (makhmad) (“garden-beds”) refers to a private garden terrace or garden bed, a rare luxury in Palestine and very expensive to own (Ezek 17:7, 10; (DBB 788 s.v. מַחֲמַד). The term בֹּשֶׂם (bosem, “balsam”) refers to balsam trees which yielded sweet-smelling oils from which perfumes were produced. The balsam trees should be identified either as Astragalus tragacantha which grew everywhere in Palestine and exude resin from its thorns, or as Commiphora opobalsamum which was not native to Israel but to South Arabia from whence it had to be imported at great cost (2 Chr 9:1) (Fauna and Flora of the Bible, 177-78). She is comparing the beautiful scent of his cognezed cheeks to fragrant beds of spice.

\(^5\) tn The verb נָבַקְשָׁנּוּ (navekhnu) as “to desire” (NAB, NIV), “to want” (NASB) or “to desire” (NLT) appears eight times in the Song. The phrase “to desire” is used figuratively as descriptions of a woman or women (2:1, 2, 16; 4:5; 6:3; 7:2). One of these uses may be literal or figurative with a woman (2:1, 4, 5, 6; 4:10, 14, 16; 6:16). The phrase “to desire” is used in the Song of Songs for sexual love. The term נַעֲרוּגָה (na'urogah) (“flowerbeds of balsam”) is used elsewhere in the Song only in 5:13 where it is a simile comparing his cheeks to a flower-bed of balsam yielding perfumed spices. The term נֵאָרְוֹ (ne'orow) (“balsam-scent”) by itself appears five times in the Song, each time as a figure for sexual love (4:10, 14, 16; 5:1; 8:14). Thus, the two options are: (1) the term refers to a real flower-bed of balsam to which Solomon had gone or (2) this term is a figure for sexual love.

---

\(^6\) tn The verb לִרְעוֹת (lir'oth, “to browse”); so NAB, NIV is from the root נָעַר (na'ah, “to feed, graze”) which is used seven times in the Song (1:7, 8a, 8b; 2:16; 4:5; 6:2, 3). All its uses appear to be either literal or figurative descriptions of sheep grazing. The verb is used twice in reference to sheep grazing (“to graze”) in a pastoral context (1:7, 8). It is used to designate “shepherds” (1:8), once in reference to two fawns which “which graze among the lilies” as a figurative description of her breasts (4:5), and twice as a figurative description of Solomon as “the one who grazes among the lilies which is probably also a comparison of Solomon to a grazing sheep (2:16; 6:3). Therefore, it is likely that the usage of the term לִרְעוֹת (lir'oth, “to graze”) in 6:2 is a figurative comparison of Solomon to a sheep grazing among garden flowers. Thus, there are two options: (1) nuance the term לִרְעוֹת (lir'oth) as “to browse” (NAB, NIV) and take this as a literal action of Solomon walking through a real garden or (2) nuance the term לִרְעוֹת (lir'oth) as “to graze” (NLT) and add the phrase “gathering” which makes the image of Solomon as a gazelle grazing on the flowers in a garden clear.

---

\(^7\) tn The term מַמְתַקִּים (mamtaqqim) is used six other times in the Song, in five cases, it is used figuratively (hypocatastasis) to describe her body or the sexual love of the couple (4:12, 15, 16a, 16b; 5:1). There is only one usage in which it might refer to a real garden (5:13). Thus, this usage of “garden” might be figurative or literal: (1) He went to a real garden for repose. Solomon did, in fact, own a great many gardens (Eccl 2:4-7; 1 Chr 27:27), (2) the garden is a figurative description referring either to: (a) the young woman, (b) their sexual love, or (c) Solomon’s harem.

---

\(^8\) tn The phrase מַמְתַקִּים (mamtaqqim) (ka'aragat havvoosem, “flowerbeds of balsam”) is used elsewhere in the Song only in 5:13 where it is a simile comparing his cheeks to a flower-bed of balsam yielding perfumed spices. The term בֹּשֶׂם (bosem, “balsam”) is never used in OT in association with a flower garden. The LXX reads מַגְדְּלוֹת (migdëlot, “towers”) which yields the awkward “towers of perfume.” The MT reads מִגְדְּלוֹת (migdëlot) which yields the awkward “towers of perfume.” The term מַמְתַקִּים (mamtaqqim) is normally used in reference to (1) watch-towers, defended towers along the city wall, and individual towers in the countryside to protect the borders, (2) storehouses, and (3) a tower in a vineyard (HALOT 543-44 s.v. מִגְדָּל). It is never used in OT in association with a flower garden. Luke (5:21; Rev 14:13) uses the term מִגְדָּל (migdal, “tower”) normally in reference to: (1) individual towers in the countryside to protect the borders, (2) storehouses, and (3) a tower in a vineyard (HALOT 544 s.v. מִגְדָּל). Several translations follow LXX and re-vocalize the text (RSV, NIV, NJPS margin): “His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume” (NIV) and “His cheeks are like beds of spice producing perfume” (NJS margin). The other translators struggle to make sense of the MT, but are forced to abandon a literal rendering of מַמְתַקִּים (mamtaqqim) (“towers”: “banks sacred to him” (ASV), “banks sweet scented” (BDB 152 s.v. מַמְתַקִּים), “to increase, produce.” This makes good sense contextually because the Piel stem of מַמְתַקִּים means “to grow” plants and trees (Isa 44:14; Ezek 31:4-6; Jonah 4:10) (HALOT 179 s.v. מַמְתַקִּים). This re-vocalization is suggested by BHS editors, as well as other grammarians. The participle מַמְתַקִּים is used once to designate “shepherds” (1:8), once in reference to two fawns which “which graze among the lilies” as a figurative description of her breasts (4:5), and twice as a figurative description of Solomon as “the one who grazes among the lilies” which is probably also a comparison of Solomon to a grazing sheep (2:16; 6:3). Therefore, it is likely that the usage of the term מַמְתַקִּים (mamtaqqim) in 6:2 is a figurative comparison of Solomon to a grazing sheep (2:16; 6:3) which is a figurative expression comparing his countenance to a grazing sheep (2:16; 6:3) which is a comparative description of Solomon to a grazing sheep among garden flowers. Thus, there are two options: (1) nuance the term מַמְתַקִּים (mamtaqqim) as “to browse” (NAB, NIV) and take this as a literal action of Solomon walking through a real garden or (2) nuance the term מַמְתַקִּים (mamtaqqim) as “to graze” (NLT) and add the phrase “gathering” which makes the image of Solomon as a gazelle grazing on the flowers in a garden clear. This is my beloved! This is my companion, O maidens of Jerusalem!

The Lost Lover Found

The Maidens to the Beloved:

6:1 Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned? Tell us,\(^6\) that we may seek him with you.\(^7\)

The Beloved to the Maidens:

6:2 My beloved has gone down to his garden,\(^8\) to the flowerbeds of balsam spices,\(^9\) and to gather lilies.\(^10\)
**The Beloved about Her Lover:**

6:3 I am my lover’s and my lover is mine; he grazes among the lilies.

**The Renewal of Love**

6:4 My darling, you are as beautiful as Tirzah, as lovely as Jerusalem, as awe-inspiring as Bannered Armies!

6:5 Turn your eyes away from me – they overwhelm me!
Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead.
6:6 Your teeth are like a flock of sheep coming up from the washing; each has its twin; not one of them is missing.
6:7 Like a slice of pomegranate is your forehead behind your veil.
6:8 There may be sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and young women without number.
6:9 But she is unique! My dove, my perfect one! She is the special daughter of her mother,
she is the favorite of the one who bore her. The maidens saw her and complimented her; the queens and concubines praised her:

6:10 Who is this who appears like the dawn? She is more beautiful than the sun, awe-inspiring as the stars in procession.**

The Return to the Vineyards

The Lover to His Beloved:

6:11 I went down to the orchard of walnut trees, to look for the blossoms of the valley, to see if the vines had budded or if the pomegranates were in bloom.  

6:12 I was beside myself with joy, gleaming in glorious clouds.” (See G. Gerleman, Ruth, Das Hoelder [BKAT], 171.)

** A variant text of Song of Songs 6:12 is theיָפָה (yapha) literally means “the one who is fair,” while נָאוָה (na’ah) means “the one who is bright” in 6:10, it should be noted in the light of its parallelism with as “bannered armies.” The term נָאוָה (na’ah, “as bannered armies”) is used figuratively (hypocatastasis) in reference to stars which are often compared to the heavenly armies. This nuance is clear in the light of the parallelism with the dawn, moon, and sun.

6:13 Alternately, “Before I realized it, my soul placed me among the chariots of my noble people,” as the LXX takes the Hebrew text of 6:12: the most esclusive in the entire Song. The syntax is enigmatic and the textual reading is uncertain. The difficulty of this verse has generated a plethora of different translations: “Or ever I was aware, my soul made me [like] the chariots of Ammi-nadib” (KJV), “Before I knew it, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib” (AV), “Before I knew it, my fancy set me among the chariots of my noble people” (NASB), “Before I was aware, my soul set me amid the chariots of Ammi-nadib” (JPSV), “I did not know myself, she made me feel more than a prince reigning over the myriads of his people” (NEB), “Before I knew it, my heart had made me the blessed one of my kins-women” (NAB), “Before I knew it, my desire set me among the chariots of my people, as their prince” (JB), “Before I knew it, my desire set me amid the chariots of Ammi-nadib” (JSV), “I did not know myself, she made me feel more than a prince reigning over the myriads of his people” (NEB), “Before I knew it, my heart had made me the blessed one of my kins-women” (NAB), “Before I was aware, my soul set me [over] the chariots of my noble people” (NASB), “Before I realized it, my desire set me among the royal chariots of my people” (NIV), “...among the chariots of Amminadab” (NIV marginal), “...among the chariots of the prince of my people” (NIV marginal), and “Before I realized it, I was stricken with a terrible homesickness and wanted to be back among my own people” (NLT). For discussion, see R. Gordis, Song of Songs and Lamentations, 95; R. Tounay, “Les Chariots d’Aminadab” (Cant. VI.12); Israel. People Theophore,” VT 19 (1959): 288-309; M. H. Pope, Songs of Songs (AB), 584-92; R. E. Murphy, “Towards a Commentary on the Song of Songs,” CBQ 39 (1977): 491-92; S. M. Paul, “Unrecognized Medical Idiom in Canticles 6.12 and Job 9.21,” Bib 59 (1978): 545-47; G. L. Carr, Song of Solomon [TOTC], 151-53.

6:14 Alternately, “Before I realized it, my soul placed me among the chariots of my prince people.” There is debate whether whether וָשֵׂד (woshed, “my soul”) belongs with the first or second colon. The MT accentuation connects it with the second colon; thus, the first colon introduces indirect discourse: רָאְתִּי (lo’ yada’ti “I did not know” or “Before I realized it...” According to MT accentuation, the.fs noun וָשֵׂד (my soul) is the subject of רָאְתִּי (lo’ yada’ti). This approach is followed by several translations (KJV, NASB, AV, AT, JB, JPSV, NAB, NIV). On the other hand, the LXX takes וָשֵׂד (my soul)
There please give me your myrrh, ¹

O daughter of my princely people. ²

The Love Song and Dance

The Lover to His Beloved:

6:13 (7:1) Turn ³, turn, O ³Perfect One! ⁴

¹ In my imagination I was suddenly riding on a glorious chariot (CEV).
² tc MT vocalizes and divides the text as בַּת עַמִּי־נָדִיב (Amminadib), "my princely people"); however, several other mss read בַּת עַמִּי נָדִיב, "Amminadab"). This alternate textual tradition is also reflected in the LXX (Ἀμμιναδάβ, Amminadab) and Vulgate.
³ sn The chapter division comes one verse earlier in the Hebrew text (BHS) than in the English Bible; 6:13 ET = 7:1 HT, 7:1 ET = 7:2 HT. Beginning with 8:1 the verse numbers in the Hebrew Bible and the English Bible are again the same.
⁴ tn Alternately, Return…Return…! The imperative הַשָּׁבְּטִי "return" (shavi, "Turn!") is used four times for emphasis. There are two basic interpretations to the meaning/referee of the imperative הַשָּׁבְּטִי ("Turn"): (1) The villagers of Shunem are beckoning her to return to the garden of her childhood; (2) She is beckoned to return to the garden of her love (see note 2). This is supported by several factors: (a) But in my imagination I was suddenly riding on a glorious chariot (CEV); (b) She was stricken with a terrible homesickness (DRA); (c) I found myself in my princely bed with my kins-women (NAB); (d) My desire set me among the chariots of my people, [as their] prince (JB); (e) My desire set me among the chariots of the people of the prince (NIV margin); (f) My desire set me like the chariots of Amminadab (KJV, AV); (g) My desire set me among the chariots of my people (NIV margin); (h) My desire set me amid the chariots of Amminadab, [the] prince (NASB); (i) My desire set me among the chariots of Amminadab (NRSV, NJPS). This approach is reflected in rabbinic exegesis of the Song. They are arranged, as follows: (a) The article on הַשָּׁבְּטִי ("Return") but the Masoretic tradition reads תִּפְאַר ("Perfect One") and the prefixed article in 6:12: "Come back! Return!" R. Gordis nuances these uses of הַשָּׁבְּטִי as "halt" or "stay" (Some Hitherto Unrecognized Meanings of the Verb ShUB, JBL 52 (1933): 153-62); (b) In the light of the allusion to her dancing in 7:1 (Heb 7:2), several scholars see a reference to an Arabic bridal dance. Budde emends the MT's הַשָּׁבְּטִי to בָשְׁבַר ("shake, revolve, spin") from בָשָׁבַר ("to shake, spin around"). M. Paul, “An Unrecognized Medical Idiom in Canticles 6,12 (7:1)”. Nebr. Acad. 38 (1957): 93-104 (7:12). See also R. Gordis, Song of Songs and Lamentations, 95. (7:1) See R. Gordis, Song of Songs and Lamentations, 95. (7:12) The reference of הַשָּׁבְּטִי is to the interchange between lateral dental ³ and nasal dental ⁴.
⁵ The article on הַשָּׁבְּטִי (hashshulummit) functions as a vocative ("O Shulamite") rather than in a definite sense ("the Shulamite"). The article is often used to mark a definite addressee who is addressed in the vocative (e.g., 1 Sam 17:55, 58; 24:9; 2 Kgs 6:26; 9:5; Prov 6:6; Eccl 11:9; Zech 3:8). For the vocative use of the article, see GKC 405 §126. (7:12) The Modern Hebrew Bible reads the plural הַשָּׁלְמִית (hashshulummit) but the Masoretic tradition reads הַשָּׁלַמִית (hashshulammit), which the versions confirm. Eight major views have emerged in the history of interpretation of the Song. They are arranged, as follows, in order from most likely (views 1-2), plausible (views 3-5), unlikely (view 6), to bizarre (views 7-8): (1) הַשָּׁלְמִית is a substantive use of the adjectival form qatal לָשֵׁם (shalem, "perfection") with the genitive suffix יִשָּלְמֵה from the root שָׁלֵם (shalem), to be completed, to be perfect (see M. Paul, JBL 52: 153-62); (2) הַשָּׁלְמִית is a participle with the feminine adjectival suffix יִשָּלְמֵה from the root שָׁלֵם ("peaceful") (Fox). This approach is reflected in rabbinic exegesis of the 12th century: "The meaning of the Shulamite is 'perfect, without spot'" (Midrash Rabbah). (2) הַשָּׁלְמִית is Qal passive participle with the feminine adjectival suffix יִשָּלְמֵה from the root שָׁלֵם ("peaceful") (Fox). This approach is reflected in rabbinic exegesis of the 12th century: "The meaning of the Shulamite is 'perfect, without spot'" (Midrash Rabbah). (2) הַשָּׁלְמִית is Qal passive participle with the feminine adjectival suffix יִשָּלְמֵה from the root שָׁלֵם ("peaceful") (Fox). This approach is reflected in rabbinic exegesis of the 12th century: "The meaning of the Shulamite is 'perfect, without spot'" (Midrash Rabbah). (3) הַשָּׁלְמִית is Qal passive participle with the feminine adjectival suffix יִשָּלְמֵה from the root שָׁלֵם ("peaceful") (Fox). This approach is reflected in rabbinic exegesis of the 12th century: "The meaning of the Shulamite is 'perfect, without spot'" (Midrash Rabbah).
Like the dance of the Mahanaim? 3

The Lover to His Beloved:
7:1 (7:2) How beautiful are your sandaled feet,
O nobleman’s daughter! 8
The curves of your thighs are like jewels,
the work of the hands of a master craftsman.

(n) is common in the Semitic languages (S. Moscati, Comparative Grammar, 32, §8,26); (c) the town of Shunem was also known as Shulem, due to the common interchange between (n) and (c) in Hebrew (Aharoni, 123), as seen in Eusebius’ Onomasticon in which Shunem = Shulem and (d) later revisions of the LXX read ἡ Σουλαμωτί ("the Shulamite") instead of the Old Greek ἡ Σούναμωτί ("the Shulamite"). Shunem was a town in the Jezreel Valley at the foot of Mount Moreh near Mount Tabor and situated about nine miles east of Megiddo, fifteen miles northwest of Beth-shean, and five miles north of Jezreel (Josh 19:18; 1 Sam 28:4; 2 Kgs 4:8). During the Roman period, the town was called Shulem. See Y. Aharoni, The Land of the Bible, 54, 152, 172, 442, 308. Some scholars suggest that "Shul/nammite" refers to Abishag, the beautiful virgin from the village of Shunem who warmed elderly King David and was sought by Adonijah (1 Kgs 2:13-25). Other scholars argue that Abishag has been imported into the Song on too slender grounds. (4) מְחֹלַת (mÿkholah), "Solomon’s," just as Judith is the feminine of Judah: "Shulmanith" or "Solomonette" (Lowth, Goodspeed, Rowley). The feminizing article in the phrase ending תּי may be suffixed to masculine personal names to transform them to feminine names. A similar form occurs in the Ugaritic designation of Daniel’s wife as Lady Daniel (e.g., mitt dirty). An anonymous Jewish commentator of the 12th century wrote: "The Shulamnnite was beloved of Solomon, for she was the daughter of the other, of Shulem" (157). The 16th century commentator Joseph Ibn Yahya wrote: "And the calling of her 'Shulamnite' was determined by reason of her devotion to the Holy One (Blessed be He) who is called Shelomoh." (5) As a combination of views 1-2, מְחֹלָה (mÿkhollah) is a wordplay formed by the combination of the feminine name מְחֹלָת (mÿkhallah) and the gentilic name מַיִם (mīm), "Solomon’s" (Lowth, Goodspeed, Rowley). The feminine of the name or epithet of the Canaanite moon goddess Ishtar, designated by the feminine form of the name Shulem (T. J. Meek), (8) An alternate cletic interpretation takes מְחֹלָה (mÿkhollah) as a conflation of the name of the Assyrian war-goddess "Shulmanith" (Ishtar) and the gentilic name "the Shulamite" (Ishtar) and the gentilic name "the Shulamite" (Ishtar). Some scholars argue that Abishag has been imported in the Song, perhaps as a conflation of the name of the Assyrian war-god Sulman-Esmun and Related Figures," (Exod 15:20; 32:19; Judg 11:34; 21:1; 1 Sam 21:12; 29:5) (HALOT 569 s.v. "halo"). The noun מַיִם (mikhoel) denotes "of the thigh from the hip down (Exod 32:27; Judg 3:16, 21; Ps 45:4; Song 3:8). The first usage is usually restricted to a figure "[thigh] joints" (KJV, "rounded [thighs]" (RSV), "curves [of thighs]" (NASB), "graceful [thighs]" (NIV)). The term here has been translated in various ways: "[thigh] joints" (KJV), "rounded [thighs]" (RSV), “curves [of thighs]” (NASB), “graceful [thighs]” (NIV).

3 to The MT reads מְחֹלָת הַמַּחֲנָיִם (mÿkhollah hamakhanayim), “like the dance”), while other Hebrew MSS read מְחֹלַת הַמַּחֲנָיִם (mÿkholah, “in the dance”). The LXX’s ὠ χοροὶ τῶν παρεμβολῶν (ō koroi tōn parembolōn, "as at the dance of the two armies") (KJV, “as at the dance of the two companies") (NASB), “as at the dance of Mahanaim” (NIV), “in the Mahanaim dance” (NJP). The meaning of the individual terms is clear: The noun מְחֹלָת (mikhoel) denotes “dance in a ring” (Exod 15:20; 32:19; Judg 11:34; 21:1; 1 Sam 21:12; 29:5) (HALOT 569 s.v. "halo"). The noun מַיִם (mikhoel) denotes “of the thigh from the hip down (Exod 32:27; Judg 3:16, 21; Ps 45:4; Song 3:8). The first usage is usually restricted to a figure "[thigh] joints" (KJV, "rounded [thighs]" (RSV), “curves [of thighs]” (NASB), “graceful [thighs]” (NIV)). The term here has been translated in various ways: "[thigh] joints" (KJV), "rounded [thighs]" (RSV), “curves [of thighs]” (NASB), “graceful [thighs]” (NIV).

6 tn Solomon calls attention to the sandals of the "noble daughter," was sheen. While it was common for "noble daughters" in aristocratic circles in the ancient Near East to wear sandals, women of the lower classes usually went barefoot (e.g., Ezek 16:10).


**The Song of Songs (7:2)**

Turn, turn, that I may stare at you! **The Beloved to Her Lover:**

Why? do you gaze upon the Perfect One like the dance of the Mahanaim? 3

The Lover to His Beloved:

7:1 (7:2) How beautiful are your sandaled feet,
O nobleman’s daughter? 8
The curves of your thighs are like jewels,
the work of the hands of a master craftsman.
7:2 Your navel is a round mixing bowl.\(^1\)

\(^1\) The noun נַבֵּל (nabell) is a napak legenomenon, appearing in the OT only here. There is debate whether it means “navel” or “vulva.” The former would suggest that נַבֵּל is related to Arabic ضر (‘ substring, pudenda, cotten, fornication’). They suggest that this is contextually supported by three factors: (a) His descriptive praise of her is in ascending order, beginning with her feet and concluding with her hair. The mention of her thighs (7:1b), to her vulva (7:2a), and then to her waist (7:2b) would fit this. (b) The descriptive comparison to a glass of wine would be grotesque if her navel were in view — her navel was moist or filled with liquid — but appropriate if her vulva were in view. (c) The navel would be a somewhat synonymous reference to the belly which is already denoted by בִּטְנֵךְ (bitekh, ‘belly’) in the following line. Because 7:1-7 does not use synonymous parallelism, the term נַבֵּל would have to refer to something other than the belly. (2) The term נַבֵּל denotes ‘navel’. (a) It may be related to the biblical derivative נַבֵּל (navel, umbilical cord) (Prov 3:8; Ezek 16:4). (b) Mishnaic Hebrew נַבֵּל (nabell) denotes ‘navel, umbilical cord’ (Jastrow 1634 s.v. nabell). For example, in a midrash on the Book of Numbers, the navel נַבֵּל appears in an allusion to Song 7:3 to justify the seating of the Sanhedrin in the middle of the synagogue: ‘As the navel (נַבֵּל) of the body, so are the Sanhedrin…” (Num. Rab. 1:4). On the other hand, the meaning ‘vulva’ never appears in Mishnaic Hebrew. Therefore, apart from this disputed usage there is no evidence that this term was ever used in this manner in Hebrew. (c) Rather than נַבֵּל being related to Arabic ضر (‘ substring’), it could just as easily be related to the Arabic noun ضر (‘ substring’) (‘abdomen’) which follows may be viewed as both above and below the navel. The figurative association of the נַבֵּל as a mixing bowl filled with wine does not imply that this bodily part must actually be moist or filled with liquid as Pope suggests. The point of comparison is not physical or visual but one of function, i.e., it is intoxicating. The comparison of the navel to a mixing bowl of wine is no more out of line than the comparison of the belly to a heap of wheat in the next line. In fact, the two go together — she is both the ‘drink’ and “food” for Solomon. The shape of the navel is as consistent with the metaphor of the ‘round bowl’ as the vulva; both are round and receding. (3) Since both terms are derived from the same germative root — Hebrew נַבֵּל and Arabic ضر — it is prudent to take the term as a synecdochic reference to a woman’s abdominal region rather than her hips (Prov 13:25; 18:20; Ezek 3:3). The comparison of her belly to a heap of wheat is visibly appropriate because of the similarity of their symmetrical shape and tannish color. The primary point of comparison, however, is based upon the commonplace association of wheat in Israel, namely, wheat being the main food source of the people. In ancient Near Eastern love literature, the term נַבֵּל is used as a metaphor of a wife’s sexual love to intoxicating wine is common in the Mediterranean Vocabulary of Wine,” VT 19 (1969): 154. The comparison of a wife’s sexual love to intoxicating wine is common in ancient Near Eastern love literature. For example, in the midrash on the Book of Numbers a comparison of a wife’s sexual love to intoxicating wine is made.”

may it never lack\(^3\) mixed wine!\(^4\)

\(^3\) The phrase מָזֶג (mazeg, ‘mixed wine’) does not refer to wine mixed with water to dilute its potency, but to strong wine mixed with weaker wine. The practice of mixing wine with water is not attested in the Hebrew Bible. Both מָזֶג and מָזֶג (meschekh) refer to strong wine mixed with weaker wine. The rabbis later distinguished between the two, stating that מָזֶג was strong wine mixed with weak wine, while מָזֶג was wine mixed with water (Aboda Zara 58b). However, both types of wine were intoxicating. Mixed wine was the most intoxicating type of wine. In a midrash on the Book of Numbers a comment is made about the practice of mixing strong wine with weaker wine (e.g., Is 5:22; Prov 23:30), stating its purpose: ‘They used to mix strong wine with weak wine so as to get drunk with it’ (Num. Rab. 10:8). See J. P. Brown, “The Mediterranean Vocabulary of Wine,” VT 19 (1969): 154. The comparison of a wife’s sexual love to intoxicating wine is common in ancient Near Eastern love literature. For example, in the midrash on the Book of Numbers a comparison of a wife’s sexual love to intoxicating wine is made.”

Your belly is a mound of wheat, encircled\(^6\) by lilies.

\(^6\) The word hashshen (hashshen, ‘ivy’) is a genitive of composition, that is, a tower made out of ivy. Solomon had previously compared her neck to a tower (Song 4:4). In both cases the most obvious point of comparison has to do with size and shape, that is, her neck was long and symmetrical. Archaeology has never found a tower overlaid with ivy in the ancient Near East and it is doubt-
Your eyes are the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-Rabbim. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon overlooking Damascus.

7:5 Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel. The locks of your hair are like royal tassels — the king is held captive in its tresses!

ful that there ever was such a tower. The point of comparison might simply be that the shape of her neck looks like a tower, while the color and smoothness of her neck was like ivory. Solomon is mixing metaphors: her neck was long and symmetrical like a tower; but also elegant, smooth, and beautiful and part of a woman’s beauty and authority of her hair. In a word, he was the prisoner of the binding power of her hair. In a word, he was the prisoner of Solomon was captivated by the spell of authority of his captor, Solomon was captivated by the spell binding a prisoner with cords and fetters (Gen 42:34; Judg 15:10-12; 16-15:22; 2 Kgs 17:4; 23:33; 25:7; 2 Chr 33:20; HALET 75 s.v. קומתך). It is frequently used as a figure to depict absolute authority over a person (Ps 105:22). The passive participle פָּרָה means “to be bound, held captive, imprisoned” (2 Sam 3:34; Jer 40:1; Job 36:8). Like a prisoner bound in cords and fetters and held under the complete control and authority of his captor, Solomon was captivated by the spell-binding power of her hair. In a word, he was the prisoner of love and she was his captor. Similar imagery appears in an ancient Egyptian love song: “With her hair she throws lassoes at me, with her eyes she catches me, with her necklace she entangles me, and with her seal ring she brands me” (Song 43 in the Chester Beatty Cycle, translated by W. K. Simpson, ed., The Literature of Ancient Egypt, 324). J. S. Deere suggests, “The concluding part of the metaphor, ‘The king is held captive by your tresses,’ is a beautiful expression of the powerful effect of love. A strong monarch was held prisoner by the beauty of his Beloved” (“Song of Solomon,” BCKOT, 206-207). This is a startling statement because Solomon emphasizes that the one who was being held captive like a prisoner in bonds was the “king!” At this point in world history, Solomon was the ruler of the most powerful and wealthy nation in the world (1 Kgs 3:13; 10:23-29). And yet he was held totally captive and subject to the beauty of this country maiden!

The Song of Songs

7:6 How beautiful you are! How lovely, O love, with your delights!

The Lover to His Beloved:

7:7 Your stature is like a palm tree, at me, with her eyes she catches me, with her necklace she entangles me, and with her seal ring she brands me” (Song 43 in the Chester Beatty Cycle, translated by W. K. Simpson, ed., The Literature of Ancient Egypt, 324). J. S. Deere suggests, “The concluding part of the metaphor, ‘The king is held captive by your tresses,’ is a beautiful expression of the powerful effect of love. A strong monarch was held prisoner by the beauty of his Beloved” (“Song of Solomon,” BCKOT, 206-207). This is a startling statement because Solomon emphasizes that the one who was being held captive like a prisoner in bonds was the “king!” At this point in world history, Solomon was the ruler of the most powerful and wealthy nation in the world (1 Kgs 3:13; 10:23-29). And yet he was held totally captive and subject to the beauty of this country maiden!

The Tree of Life

The Hebrew noun is a loanword from Hittite argamannu (‘tax, purple’) which is reflected in Akkadian argamanni and Aramaic argaman (‘purple’) that it refers to purple hair-dye. The comparison is to hair “like purple” or “like purple fabric.” The term קומתך (‘lock, hair’) refers to dangling curls or loose hair that hangs down from one’s head (HAEOT 222-23 s.v. קומתך). The Hebrew term is from a common Semitic root meaning “to hang down,” and is related to Arabic taladadla “dangle” and Ethiopic delul “dangling curls.”

Solomon is mixing metaphors: her neck was long and symmetrical like a tower; but also elegant, smooth, and beautiful and part of a woman’s beauty and authority of her hair. In a word, he was the prisoner of Solomon was captivated by the spell binding a prisoner with cords and fetters (Gen 42:34; Judg 15:10-12; 16-15:22; 2 Kgs 17:4; 23:33; 25:7; 2 Chr 33:20; HALET 75 s.v. קומתך). It is frequently used as a figure to depict absolute authority over a person (Ps 105:22). The passive participle פָּרָה means “to be bound, held captive, imprisoned” (2 Sam 3:34; Jer 40:1; Job 36:8). Like a prisoner bound in cords and fetters and held under the complete control and authority of his captor, Solomon was captivated by the spell-binding power of her hair. In a word, he was the prisoner of love and she was his captor. Similar imagery appears in an ancient Egyptian love song: “With her hair she throws lassoes
and your breasts are like clusters of grapes.

7:8 I want to climb the palm tree, and take hold of its fruit stalks. May your breasts be like the clusters of grapes, and may the fragrance of your breath be like apples!

Poetic Refrain: Mutual Possession

The Beloved about Her Lover:

7:10 I am my beloved’s, and he desires me!

The Journey to the Countryside

The Beloved to Her Lover:

7:11 Come, my beloved, let us go to the countryside; let us spend the night in the villages.

7:12 Let us rise early to go to the vineyards, to see if the vines have budded, to see if their blossoms have opened, to see if the vines have budded, and if the pomegranates are in bloom – 
to see if the vines have budded, and if the pomegranates are in bloom – there I will give you my love.

7:13 The mandrakes send out their fragrance; over our door is every delicacy.

7:9 May your mouth be like the best wine, flowing smoothly for my beloved, gliding gently over our lips as we sleep together.

The term קְהֵךְ (khék, “palate, mouth”) is often used as a metonymy for ‘what the mouth produces, e.g., the mouth is the organ of taste (Ps 119:103; Job 12:11; 20:13; 34:3; Prov 6:20; 31:30; 32:2; Prov 5:8; 8:7), sound (Hos 8:1), and kisses (Song 5:16; 7:10) (HALOT 331 s.v. קְהֵךְ). The metonymical association of her palate/mouth and her kisses is made explicit by RSV which translated the term as “kisses.”

The MT reads בֵּין יָפִי (bīn yi’pi, “lips of those who sleep”). However, an alternate Hebrew reading of יַפִּי (yaphi, “my lips and my teeth”) is suggested by the Greek translation (LXX, Aquila, Symmachus: χειλεσίων μου και οξύων (cheilesioun mou kai okousin, “my lips and teeth”). This alternate reading, with minor variations, is followed by NAB, NIV, NRSV, TEV, NLT.

Or “his lips as he falls asleep.” Heb “the lips of sleepers.” Alternately, “over lips and teeth” (so NIV, NRSV, NLT).

The Song of Songs [AB], 650.

See M. H. Pope, The Song of Songs [AB], 650.
both new and old, which I have stored up for you, my lover.

The Beloved's Wish Song

The Beloved to Her Lover:

8:1 Oh, how I wish you were my little brother, nursing at my mother's breasts; if I saw you outside, I could kiss you — surely no one would despise me!

1 In the imperfect יִתֶּנְךָ (yittenka) may denote a desire or wish of the subject, e.g., Gen 24:58; Exod 21:36; 1 Sam 21:10 (BHS 509 §31.4h). The optative particle יִתְּנֶה (mi) with an imperfect expresses an unreal wish, e.g., Judg 9:29; 2 Sam 15:4; Mal 1:10. The construction יִתְּנֶה יִתֶּנְךָ (mi yittenka) is an idiom expressing an unreal wish in the optative mood (HALOT 575 s.v. יִתְּנֶה), e.g., “Would that it were evening...Would that it were morning!” (KJV) or “If only it were evening...If only it were morning!” (NIV) (Deut 28:67); “Oh that I knew where I might find him!” (KJV, NASB, NUPS), “I wish I had known,” “If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling” (Job 23:3); “I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets!” (NIV). “Would that all the LORD's people were prophets” (NAB) (Num 11:29). Evidently, the LXX did not understand the idiom; it rendered the line in wooden literalness: Τις διὸς σε αἰδελφίδον μου (Tis dōse se adelphidon mou, “Who might give/make you as my brother?”).

2 In Heb “you were to me like a brother.”

3 In Heb “found” or “met.” The juxtaposition of the two imperfects without an adjoining vav forms a conditional clause denoting a real condition (GKC 493 §159.b). The first imperfect is the protasis; the second is the apodosis: “If I found you (emtsa'aka) outside, I would kiss you (yipenna, 'eshshaykha).” The imperfects are used to express a condition and consequence which are regarded as being capable of fulfillment in the present or future time (GKC 493 §159.b). The simple juxtaposition of two verbal clauses without any grammatical indicator, such as vav or a conditional particle, is rather rare: “If you rebel (yipenna, tim'alh), I will disperse you (yenn, 'afis) among the nations” (Neh 1:8); “If I counted them (heesem, 'egyren), they would be more numerous (beyn, 'irban) than the sand!” (Ps 139:18); “If a man has found a wife (wehmeta, 'evet), he has found (yerag, 'e'em) a good thing!” (Prov 1:26). The English translation tradition generally adopts the conditional nuance: “If I found you outside, I would kiss you” (NASB), “Then, if I found you outside, I would kiss you” (NIV). However, a few translations adopt the temporal nuance: “When I should find thee without, I would kiss thee” (KJV), “Then I could kiss you when I met you in the street” (NUPS).

4 In the particle יִתְּנֶה (mi, “surely”) is used with יִתֶּןְךָ (lo, “no one”) for emphasis: “yeva, none” (HALOT 195 s.v. יִתְּנֶה). Similar examples: יִתְּנֶה יִתְּנֶה לא (lo ‘yenn ‘ekhad, “not even one”; 2 Sam 17:12); יִתְּנֶה יִתְּנֶה (yet there is none); 48:1.)

5 Song 8:1-2 may be classified as a “a lover’s wish song” that is similar in content and structure to an ancient Egyptian love song in which the lover longs for greater intimacy with his beloved. “I wish I were her Negro maid who follows at her feet; then the skin of all her limbs would be revealed to me. I wish I were her washerwoman; if only for a month; then I would be [encrusted], washing out the Moringa oils in her diaphanous garments. I wish I were the seal ring, the guardian of her [fingers]; then [...]” (The Cairo Love Songs, 25-27, in W. K. Simpson, ed., The Literature of Ancient Egypt, 311). The Egyptian and Hebrew parallel texts display a similar structure: (1) introductory expression of the lover’s wish to be something/someone in a position of physical closeness with the Beloved; (2) description of the person/thing that is physically close to the Beloved; and (3) concluding description of the resultant greater degree of intimacy with the Beloved. In the Egyptian parallel it is the man who longs for greater closeness; in the Hebrew song it is the woman. The Egyptian love song borders on the sensual; the Hebrew love song is simply romantic. The Beloved expresses her desire for greater freedom to display her affection for Solomon. In ancient Near Eastern cultures the public display of affection between a man and woman was frowned upon — sometimes even punished. For example, in Assyrian laws the punishment for a man kissing a woman in public was to cut off his upper lip. On the other hand, public displays of affection between children and between family members were allowed. Accordingly, the Beloved hyperbolically wished that she and Solomon were children from the same family so she could kiss him anytime she wished without fear of punishment or censure.

6 In the MT reads יָתְנִי אֵלֶּה אֱחֶלֶת אַחֶלֶת (enhagakha' el-bet 'immari flamm'mdeni, “I would bring you to the house of my mother who taught me”). On the other hand, the LXX reads εἰς τὸ ὠπὸν τοῦ μητρὸς μου καὶ εἰς τὸ τοιοῦτος τοῦ μαθημάτος (eis to opoûn toû mhtpos mou kai eis to toioûtos toû mathemátos) which reflects a Hebrew reading of יָתְנִי אֵלֶּה אֱחֶלֶת אַחֶלֶת (enhagakha' el-bet 'immari v'el khedari horati, “I would bring you to the house of my mother, to the chamber of the one who bore me”), followed by NRSV. The LXX variant probably arose due to: (1) the syntactical awkwardness of יָתְנִי אֵלֶּה אֱחֶלֶת אַחֶלֶת (‘ytynn el-bet ‘immari), “she who would instruct me”) rather than 3rd person feminine singular יָתְנִי אֵלֶּה אֱחֶלֶת אַחֶלֶת (‘ytynn el-bet ‘immari), “she who used to instruct me” (NASB), “she who has taught me” (KJV), “who used to instruct me” (NASB), “she who has taught me” (KJV), “who used to instruct me” (NASB); (2) the perceived need for a parallel to יָתְנִי אֵלֶּה אֱחֶלֶת אַחֶלֶת (‘ytynn el-bet ‘immari v'el khedari horati), “she who has taught me” (NIV); (3) the variation of Song 3:4 which reads: יָתְנִי אֵלֶּה אֱחֶלֶת אַחֶלֶת (‘ytynn el-bet ‘immari v'el khedari horati, “until I brought him to the house of my mother, to the chamber of the one who bore me”). The MT reading should be adopted because (1) it is the more difficult reading, (2) it best explains the origin of the LXX variant, and (3) the origin of the LXX variant is easily understood in the light of Song 3:4.

7 In the verb יָתְנִי אֵלֶּה אֱחֶלֶת אַחֶלֶת (flamm'mdeni) may be rendered in two basic ways: (1) future action: “she will teach me” or more likely as (2) past customary action: “who would instruct me” (KJV), “who used to instruct me” (NASB), “she who has taught me” (NIV), “who taught me” (NUPS). This is an example of casus pendens in which the subject of the verb serves as a relative pronoun to the antecedent noun (“my mother”). The JPS parses יָתְנִי אֵלֶּה אֱחֶלֶת אַחֶלֶת as 2nd person masculine singular (“that you might instruct me”) rather than 3rd person feminine singular (“she would teach me”). However, this would obscure the imagery: The Beloved wished that Solomon was her little brother still nursing on her mother’s breast. The Beloved, who had learned from her mother’s example, would bring him inside her home and she would give him her breast: “I would give you spiced wine to drink, the nectar of my pomegranates.”
The Song of Songs 8:3

1258

I would give you 4 spiced wine 2 to drink, 3 the nectar of my pomegranates. 4

Double Refrain: Embracing and Adjuration

The Beloved about Her Lover:

8:3 His left hand caresses my head, and his right hand stimulates me. 5

The Beloved to the Maidens:

8:4 I admonish you, O maidens 6 of Jerusalem:

“Do not arouse or awaken love until it pleases!”

The Awakening of Love

The Maidens about His Beloved:

8:5 Who is this coming up from the desert, leaning on her beloved?

The Beloved to Her Lover:

Under the apple tree I aroused you; 8 there your mother conceived you, there she who bore you was in labor of childbirth. 9

The Nature of True Love

The Beloved to Her Lover:

8:6 Set me like a cylinder seal 10 over your heart. 11

---

1 sn Continuing the little brother/older sister imagery of 8:1, the Beloved suggests that if she had been an older sister and he had been her little brother, she would have been able to nurse Solomon. This is a euphemism for her sensual desire to offer her breasts to Solomon in marital lovemaking.

2 tn The phrase “the nectar of my pomegranates” (meshiḥn ha-lekerākhi) suggests that nērin (spiced mixture) stands in apposition to yiḥaš (“wine”): “wine, that is, spiced mixture.” However, several Hebrew MSS read the genitive-construction vocalization rīm (spiced wine). This alternate vocalization tradition is reflected in the Targum and other versions, such as the LXX. The genitive noun nērin (“spices, spiced mixture”) functions as an adjective modifying the preceding construct noun yiḥaš (“wine”).

3 tn Alternately “wine, that is, spiced mixture.” The term nērin (spice mixture, spices) refers to ground herbs that were tasty additives to wine (HALOT 1290 s.v. nērin).

4 sn There is a phonetic wordplay (paronomasia) between nērin (spices) and nēron (pomegranates). However, LXX ῥοῖς μου (my pomegranates), which is also reflected in the Aramaic Targum. This alternate vocalization tradition is reflected in the Targum and other versions, such as the LXX. The genitive noun nērin (“spices, spiced mixture”) functions as an adjective modifying the preceding construct noun yiḥaš (“wine”).

5 sn There was a phonetic wordplay (paronomasia) between nērin (spices) and nēron (pomegranates). However, LXX ῥοῖς μου (my pomegranates), which is also reflected in the Aramaic Targum. This alternate vocalization tradition is reflected in the Targum and other versions, such as the LXX. The genitive noun nērin (“spices, spiced mixture”) functions as an adjective modifying the preceding construct noun yiḥaš (“wine”).

6 sn There was a phonetic wordplay (paronomasia) between nērin (spices) and nēron (pomegranates). However, LXX ῥοῖς μου (my pomegranates), which is also reflected in the Aramaic Targum. This alternate vocalization tradition is reflected in the Targum and other versions, such as the LXX. The genitive noun nērin (“spices, spiced mixture”) functions as an adjective modifying the preceding construct noun yiḥaš (“wine”).

7 tn Heb “daughters of Jerusalem.”

8 sn The imagery of v. 6 is romantic: (1) His mother originally conceived him with his father under the apple tree, (2) his mother gave birth to him under the apple tree, and (3) the Beloved had now awakened him to love under the same apple tree. The cycle of life and love had come around full circle under the apple tree. While his mother had awakened his eyes to life, the Beloved awakened him to love. His parents had made love under the apple tree to conceive him in love, and now Solomon and his Beloved were making love under the same apple tree of love.

9 tn Or “went into labor.” The verb ḫāvā (khavel, “become pregnant”) is repeated in 8:5b and 8:5c, and it has a two-fold range of meaning: (1) transitive: “to conceive [a child]” and (2) intransitive: “to be in travail [of childbirth]” (HALOT 286 s.v. ḫāvā). In 8:5b it denotes “to conceive,” and in 8:5c it is “to be in travail [of childbirth].”

10 sn In the ancient Near East ṣāḥa (seal), “seal” was used to denote ownership and was thus very valuable (Jer 22:24; Hag 2:23). Seals were used to make a stamp impression to identify the object as the property of the seal’s owner (HALOT 300 s.v. ṣāḥa). Seals were made of semi-precious stone and were engraved with a design and an inscription, e.g., LMLK [PN] “belonging to king [...]”. The impression could be placed upon wet clay of a jar or on a writing tablet by rolling the seal across the clay. Because it was a valuable possession its owner would take careful precautions to not lose it and would keep it close to him at all times.

11 tn The term ʾēvev (heḥer, “heart”) is used figuratively here as (1) a metonymy (container for the thing contained) for his chest over which the cylinder seal was hung or (2) a metonymy (concrete body part for the abstract emotions with which it is associated) for his emotions, such as love and loyalty to the Beloved (e.g., Judg 16:25; Ruth 3:7; 1 Sam 25:26; 2 Sam 13:28; 1 Kgs 8:66) (HALOT 514-15 s.v. ʾēvev) (see H. W. Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament, 40-58).

sn There were two kinds of cylinder seals in the ancient Near East, namely, those worn around one’s neck and those worn around one’s wrist. The typical Mesopotamian seal was mounted on a pin and hung on a string or necklace around one’s neck. The cylinder seal hung around one’s neck would, figuratively speaking, rest over the heart (metonymy of association). The Beloved wished to be to Solomon like a cylinder seal worn over his heart. She wanted to be as intimate with her lover as the seal worn by him (W. W. Hallo, “As the Seal Upon Thy Heart”: Glyptic Roles in the Biblical World,” BRev 2 [1985]: 26).
like a signet⁴ on your arm.² For love is as strong as death,³
passion⁵ is as unrelenting⁶ as Sheol. Its flames burst forth,⁷
it is a blazing flame.⁸

The Brother’s Plan and the Sister’s Reward

The Beloved’s Brothers: ⁸:8 We have a little sister, and as yet she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for?¹³ ⁸:9 If she is a wall,¹⁴ we will build on her a battlement¹⁵ of silver;

8:7 Surfing waters cannot quench love; floodwaters⁸ cannot overflow it. If someone were to offer all his possessions⁸ to buy love,¹⁰ the offer¹¹ would be utterly despised.¹²

The Song of Songs 8:9

1 tn Literally “cylinder-seal” or “seal.” The term חותם (qhotam, “cylinder-seal”) is repeated in 8:6 for emphasis. The translation above uses the terms “cylinder-seal” and “cylinder seal,” simply for the sake of poetic variation. The Beloved wanted to be as safe and secure as a cylinder seal worn on the arm or around the neck, hanging down over the heart. She also wanted to be placed on his heart (emotions), like the impression of a cylinder seal is written on a document. She wanted to be “written” on his heart like the impression of a cylinder seal, and kept secure in his love as a signet ring is worn around his arm/hand to keep it safe.
2 tn Alternately, “wrist.” In Palestine cylinder seals were often hung on a bracelet worn around one’s wrist. The cylinder seal was mounted on a pin hanging from a bracelet. The cylinder seal in view in Song 8:6 could be a stamp seal hung from a bracelet of a type known from excavations in Israel. See W. W. Hallo, “As the Seal Upon Thy Heart”: Glptic Roles in the Biblical World,” BRev 2 (1985): 26.
3 tn It was a common practice in the ancient world to compare intense feelings to death. The point of the expression “love is as strong as death” means that love is extremely strong. The expression “love is as cruel as Sheol” may simply mean that love can be profoundly cruel. For example: “His soul was vexed to death,” means that he could not stand it any longer (Judg 16:16); “I do well to be angry to death,” means that he was extremely angry (Jonah 4:9); “My soul is sorrowful to death,” means that he was exceedingly sorrowful (Matt 26:38 = Mark 14:34) (D. W. Thomas, “A Consideration of Some Unusual Ways of Expressing the Superlative in Hebrew,” VT 3 (1953): 220-21).
tival suffix, similar to –לָו and –י and –יו in Aramaic, Akka-
dian, and Arabic: “a most vehement flame” (“kiv”), “a mighty flame” (RSV, NIV), and “a blazing flame” (NPS). This also best explains “darkest gloom” (Jer 2:31), and “mighty deeds” (Jer 32:19) (see S. Moscati, Comparative Grammar, B1, §12.18, and B3, §12.23).
5 tn Heb “rivers.”
6 tn Heb “all the wealth of his house.”
7 tn Heb “for love.” The preposition ב (b) on אתָבָה (‘ahavah, “for love”) indicates the price or exchange in trade (HALOT 105 s.v. ב 17), e.g., “Give me your vineyard in exchange for silver [בּיתוֹ, בּהוֹקְסֶה]” (1 Kgs 21:6).
8 tn In Heb “he/she of it.” The referent (the offer of possessions) has been specified in the translation for clarity. Some English versions take the referent to be the man himself (ASV “He would utterly be condemned”; NAB “he would be roundly mocked”). Others take the offer as the referent (cf. KJv, NIV, NRSV “h”), “his sisters.”
9 tn The root בּז (buz, “to despise”) is repeated for emphasis: בּזֶה (buz vehu), “its sisters.” The infinitive absolute frequency is used with the imperfect of the same root for emphasis. The point is simply that love cannot be purchased; it is infinitely more valuable than any and all wealth. Love such as this is priceless; no price tag can be put on love.
10 tn The Beloved’s brothers knew that once a couple is betrothed, sexual temptations would be at their greatest. Thus, “If someone were to offer all his possessions to buy love,” means that he could not stand the temptation.
11 tn The root כֶּסֶף (beykhesef) is unusual in a poetic context with a preposition (for love). The preposition ב (b) on אתָבָה (‘ahavah, “for love”) indicates the price or exchange in trade (HALOT 105 s.v. ב 17), e.g., “Give me your vineyard in exchange for silver [בּיתוֹ, בּהוֹקְסֶה]” (1 Kgs 21:6).
12 tn The root כֹּס (khesec, “to keep”) is repeated for emphasis: כֹּסֶה (khesi), “its sisters.” The infinitive absolute frequency is used with the imperfect of the same root for emphasis. The point is simply that love cannot be purchased; it is infinitely more valuable than any and all wealth. Love such as this is priceless; no price tag can be put on love.
13 tn The simile if she is a wall draws a comparison between the impregnable stability of a city fortified with a strong outer wall and a virtuous young woman who successfully resists any assaults against her virginity. The term חומָה (khomah, “wall”) often refers to an outside fortress wall that protects the city from enemy military attacks (e.g., Lev 25:29-30; Josh 6:5; 1 Kgs 3:1; Neh 2:8; 12:27; Jer 1:8; 15:20).
14 tn The root צִיר (tirah, “battlement, turret”) refers to the row of stones along the top of a fortress wall, set for the defense and stability of the wall (Ezek 46:23; cf. HALOT 374 s.v. צִיר). This structure is connected with military operations set in defense of the wall.
15 tn The term כְּסֶפֶת (beykhesef) is repeated for emphasis: כְּסֶפֶה (beykhesa), “its sisters.” The infinitive absolute frequency is used with the imperfect of the same root for emphasis. The point is simply that love cannot be purchased; it is infinitely more valuable than any and all wealth. Love such as this is priceless; no price tag can be put on love.

1259
but if she is a door, we will barricade her with boards of cedar.

The Beloved:
8:10 I was a wall, and my breasts were like fortress towers. Then I found favor in his eyes.

Solomon’s Vineyard and the Beloved’s Vineyard

The Beloved to Her Lover:
8:11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-Hamon; he leased out the vineyard to those who maintained it. Each was to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit.

8:12 My vineyard, which belongs to me, is at my disposal alone. The thousand shekels belong to you, O Solomon, and two hundred shekels belong to those who maintain it for its fruit.

Epilogue: The Lover’s Request and His Beloved’s Invitation

The Lover to His Beloved:
8:13 O you who stay in the gardens, my companions are listening attentively for your voice; let me be the one to hear it!

The Beloved to Her Lover:
8:14 Make haste, my beloved! Be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices.

---

1 The verb anus (asur, “to surround, encircle, enclose”) is often used in military contexts in reference to the siege or defense of a fortress city: (1) setting up military positions (siegewalls) to surround a besieged city (e.g., Isa 29:3); (2) encircling and laying siege to a city (e.g., Deut 20:12; 19; 2 Sam 11:1; 1 Kgs 19:15; 2 Kgs 17:5; 17:6; 19:9; 24:11; 1 Chr 20:1; Isa 21:2; 29:3; Jer 21:4; 9; 32:2; 37:5; 39:1; Ezek 43; Dan 1:3); (3) enclosing a city with sentries (e.g., Isa 29:3); (4) shutting a person within a city (1 Sam 23:8; 2 Sam 20:15; 2 Kgs 16:5); and (5) barricading a city door shut to prevent the city from being broken into and conquered (e.g., Song 8:7) (HALOT 1015 s.v. anus).

2 Heb “a board.” The singular noun lôkha, “board, plank”) may denote a singular number or a collective.

3 An interesting semantic parallel involving the “door/bar” motif in ancient Near Eastern texts comes from an Assyrian charm against an enemy: “If he is a door, I will open your mouth; but if he is a bar, I will open your tongue.” Obviously, the line in the Song is not an incantation; the formula is used in a love motive. Cited by J. Ebeling, “Aus dem Tagewerk eines assyrischen Zauberpredigers,” MAOG 5 (1931): 19.

4 The noun nîgilâd (“towers,” “towers” or “fortress” towers along a city wall) is used literally in 8:11 in reference to Solomon’s physical vineyard, but in 8:12 it is used figuratively (hypocatastasis) in reference to the Beloved: migdâl (karmi, “my vineyard”). Throughout the Song, the term migdâl (“towers,” “towers”) is used figuratively (Song 1:6; 2:15; 8:12). In 8:12 it is used in reference to either (1) herself, (2) her choice of whom to give herself to in love, or (3) her physical body. In contrast to Solomon’s physical vineyard, whose fruit can be bought and sold (8:11), she is not for sale: She will only give herself freely to the one whom she chooses to love.

5 Heb “peace.” An eloquent wordplay is created by the use of the noun shâlim (shalom, “peace, favor”) in 8:10b and the name shôlôm (“Solomon”) in 8:11a. The Beloved found “favor” in the eyes of Solomon. She won his heart because she was not only a beautiful young woman (“my breasts were like fortress towers”), but a virtuous woman (“I was a wall”).

6 Heb “Then I became in his eyes as one who finds peace.”

7 Heb “gave.”