
SONG 4: 1 Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is as a flock of goats, that descend from Mount Gilead.

The bridegroom's description of his bride, her person, her accomplishments, her chastity, and her general excellence, vv. 1-16.

Verse 1

Thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks - Perhaps this refers rather to a sort of veil worn by many of the Eastern women, but especially in Egypt. It is a species of black cloth made of the hair of some animal, probably the black goat; is suspended from the head by silken cords, one of which comes from the crown of the head, down the forehead, to the upper part of the nose, just under the eyes, at which place the veil begins; for the forehead and the eyes are uncovered, except the cord above mentioned, which is ornamented with gold, silver, and precious stones, according to the circumstances of the wearer. This partial veil not only covers all the face, the eyes and forehead excepted, but the neck also, and hangs loosely down over the bosom. One of them, lately brought from Egypt, now lies before me.

But the clause, within thy locks, מבעד למתך *mibbaad letsammathech*, is not well translated, either by ourselves or by the versions. Jerome's translation is an indication of the meaning: *Absque eo quod intrinsecus latet; without that, or independently of that, which lies hidden within.* The Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic have, besides thy silence. Calmet contends that none of these gives the true meaning, and that the word *tmu tsemath* has not the meaning of hair or locks wherever it occurs, and has quite a different meaning in Isa 47:2. St. Jerome on this place expresses himself thus: *Nolentibus qui interpretati sunt transferre nomen quod in Sancta Scriptura sonat turpitudinem - Ergo Ktmu tsammathech, quod Aquila posuit, verenda mulieris appellatur cujus etymologia apud eos sonat sitiens tuus.* Calmet translates: *Vous etes toute belle, won amie; vous etes toute belle: vos yeux sont des yeux de colombe; sans ce que la pudeur et la modestie tiennent cache.* I leave the translation of these to the learned reader. See another description under Sol 4:7 (note).

As a flock of goats - Because it was black and sleek, as the hair of the goats of Arabia and Palestine is known to be; which, with its fine undulation, is supposed to bear some resemblance to the curls or plaits of a woman's tresses. The mountains of Gilead were beyond Jordan, on the frontiers of Arabia Deserta.

SONG 4: 2 Your teeth are like a newly shorn flock, which have come up from the washing, where every one of them has twins. None is bereaved among them.

Verse 2

Thy teeth are like a flock - This comparison appears to be founded on the evenness, neatness, and whiteness of the newly shorn and newly washed sheep.

SONG 4: 3 Your lips are like scarlet thread. Your mouth is lovely. Your temples are like a piece of a pomegranate behind your veil.

Verse 3

Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet - Both lips and cheeks were ruddy; sicut fragmen mali punici - Vulgate. Like the section of a pomegranate, that side cut off on which is the finest blush. This is a good and apt metaphor. But the inside may be referred to, as it is finely streaked with red and white melting into each other. She had beautiful hair, beautiful eyes, beautiful cheeks and lips, and a most pleasing and dulcet voice.

Within thy locks - See on Sol 4:1 (note), and Sol 4:7 (note).

SONG 4: 4 Your neck is like David's tower built for an armoury, whereon a thousand shields hang, all the shields of the mighty men.

Verse 4

Thy neck is like the tower of David - It is certain that bucklers were frequently hung about towers, both for their ornaments, and to have them at hand when their use was required; see Eze 27:10. But the allusion here may be to those pillars which are often seen in armouries on which weapons of various kinds are hung, formed into a great variety of shapes and very splendid. Whoever has seen the armoury in the tower of London, or such like places, has most probably seen something very similar to that of which the poet speaks.

SONG 4: 5 Your two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a roe, which feed among the lilies.

Verse 5

Thy two breasts are like two young roes - I have met with many attempts to support this similitude, or rather to show that there is a similitude; but I judge them unworthy of citation. The poet speaks the language of nature; and in a case of this kind, where the impassioned lover attempts to describe the different perfections of his bride, language often fails him, and his comparisons and similitudes are often without strict correctness. In love songs we have heard ladies' necks compared to that of the swan, not only for its whiteness, but also for its length! The description here shows more of nature than of art, which I consider a high recommendation.

Feed among the lilies - It may be the nipples especially, which the poet compares to the two young roes; and the lilies may refer to the whiteness of the breasts themselves.

SONG 4: 6 Until the day is cool, and the shadows flee away, I will go to the mountain of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense.

Verse 6

Until the day break - Until the morning breeze. See Sol 2:17.

The shadows flee away - Till the sun sets.

Mountain of myrrh - Probably the same as the mountains of Bether, Sol 2:17. Mountains where the trees grew from which myrrh and incense were extracted.

SONG 4: 7 You are all beautiful, my love. There is no spot in you.

Verse 7

Thou art all fair - there is no spot in thee - "My beloved, every part of thee is beautiful; thou hast not a single defect." The description given of the beauties of Daphne, by Ovid, *Metam. lib. 1: ver. 497*, has some similarity to the above verses: -

Spectat inornatos collo pend ere capillos.

Et, quid si comantur? ait. Videt igne micantes

Sideribus similes oculos; videt oscula, quae non

Est vidisse satis. Laudat digitosque, manusque,

Brachiaque, et nudos media plus parte lacertos.

Si qua latent meliora putat.

Her well-turn'd neck he view'd, (her neck was bare),

And on her shoulders her disheveled hair.

O, were it comb'd, said he, with what a grace

Would every waving curl become her face!

He view'd her eyes, like heavenly lamps that shone,

He view'd her lips, too sweet to view alone;

Her taper fingers, and her panting breast.

He praises all he sees; and, for the rest,

Believes the beauties yet unseen the best.

Dryden.

Jayadeva describes the beauty of Radha in nearly the same imagery: "Thy lips, O thou most beautiful among women, are a bandhujiva flower; the lustre of the madhuca beams upon thy cheek; thine eye outshines the blue lotos; thy nose is a bud of the tila; the cunda blossom yields to thy teeth. Surely thou descendedst from heaven, O slender damsel! attended by a company of youthful goddesses; and all their beauties are collected in thee." See these poems, and the short notes at the end.

The same poet has a parallel thought to that in Sol 4:5, "Thy two breasts," etc. The companions of Radha thus address her: "Ask those two round hillocks which receive pure dew drops from the garland playing on thy neck, and the buds on whose tops start aloft with the thought of thy beloved."

SONG 4: 8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, with me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.

Verse 8

My spouse - The כלה callah which we translate spouse, seems to have a peculiar meaning. Mr. Harmer thinks the Jewish princess is intended by it; and this seems to receive confirmation from the bridegroom calling her sister, Sol 4:9, that is, one of the same stock and country; and thus different from the Egyptian bride.

Mr. Harmer's opinion is very probable, that Two Queens are mentioned in this song: one Pharaoh's daughter, the other a Jewess. See his outlines. But I contend for no system relative to this song.

Look from the top of Amana, etc. - Solomon, says Calmet, by an admirable poetic fiction, represents his beloved as a mountain nymph, wholly occupied in hunting the lion and the leopard on the mountains of Lebanon, Amana, Shenir, and Hermon. As a bold and undisciplined virgin, who is unwilling to leave her wild and rural retreats, he invites her to come from those hills; and promises to deck her with a crown and to make her his bride. Thus the poets represent their goddess Diana, and even Venus herself: -

Per juga, per sylvas, dumosaque saxa vagatur

Nuda genu, vestem ritu succincta Dianae;

Hortaturque canes; tutaeque animalia praedae,

Aut pronos lepores, aut celsum in cornua cervum,

Aut agitat damas: at fortibus abstinet apris.

MET. lib. x., ver. 535.

Now buskin'd like the virgin huntress goes

Through woods, and pathless wilds, and mountain snows.

With her own tuneful voice she joys to cheer

The panting hounds that chase the flying deer.

She runs the labyrinth of the fearful hares,

But fearless beasts and dangerous prey forbears.

Mount Libanus separates Phoenicia from Syria. Amanus is between Syria and Silicia. Shenir and Hermon are beyond Jordan, to the south of Damascus and Mount Libanus, and northward of the mountains of Gilead. Hermon and Shenir are but different parts of the same chain of mountains

which separates Trachonitis, or the country of Manasses, from Arabia Deserta. For these places, see 2Kgs 5:12, and Deu 3:9, where they are probably meant.

SONG 4: 9 You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride. You have ravished my heart with one of your eyes, with one chain of your neck.

Verse 9

Thou hast ravished my heart - לבבתני libbabtini, "Thou hast hearted me," i.e., taken away my heart; as we say, "He has barked the tree," i.e., he has stripped it of its bark; "He has fleeced the flock," i.e., deprived them of their wool.

With one of thine eyes - באצד מעיניך beachad meeynayich. This has been thought a harsh expression, and various emendations have been sought. The Masoretes have put באצת beachath, "at once," in the margin; and this is confirmed by twenty of Kennicott's MSS. but De Rossi does not notice it. It is scarcely necessary; the sense to me is clear and good without it. "Even one of thine eyes, or one glance of thine eyes, has been sufficient to deprive me of all power; it has completely overcome me;" for glance may be understood, and such forms of speech are common in all languages, when speaking on such subjects. If even taken literally, the sense is good; for the poet may refer to a side glance, shot in passing by or turning away, where only one eye could be seen. I think this a better sense than that which is obtained from the Masoretic emendation.

With one chain of thy neck - Probably referring to the play of the cervical muscles, rather than to necklaces, or ringlets of hair.

SONG 4: 10 How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine! The fragrance of your perfumes than all kinds of spices!

Verse 10

How much better is thy love - דודיך dodayich; Hebrew. mastoi sou; Septuagint. Ubera tua; Vulgate. "Thy breasts." And so all the versions, except the Chaldee.

Smell of thine ointments - Perfumes.

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

Verse 11

Thy lips - drop as the honey-comb - Thy words are as delicious to my heart as the first droppings of the honey-comb are to the palate.

Honey and milk are under thy tongue - Eloquence and persuasive speech were compared among the ancients to honey and milk.

Thus Homer, Iliad, lib. i., ver. 247: - Τοισι δε Νεστωρ Ηδυεπτης ανορουσε, λιγυς Πυλιων αγορητης. Του και απο γλωσσης μελιτος γλυκιων ρεεν αυδη.

Experienced Nestor, in persuasion skill'd,

Words sweet as honey from his lips distill'd.

But the figure is common to all writers and languages. A similar expression will be seen in the Gitagovinda.

SONG 4: 12 A locked up garden is my sister, my bride; a locked up spring, a sealed fountain.

Verse 12

A garden enclosed - a spring shut up, a fountain sealed - Different expressions to point out the fidelity of the bride, or of the Jewish queen. See the outlines. She is unsullied, a chaste, pure virgin. None has ever entered into this garden; none has yet tasted of this spring; the seal of this fountain has never been broken. Among the Athenians, the interior part of the house, called the women's apartment, was not only locked but sealed; so Aristophan., Thesmoph. ver. 422: - Ειτα δια τουτον ταις γυναικωνι τ ι σ ι ν Σφραγιδας εμβαλλουσιν ηδη και μοχλους.

And on this account, to the women's apartment

They place seals as well as bolts.

And seal, as applicable to chaste conduct, is a phrase well known to the Greeks. Aeschylus, in the Agamemnon, praises a woman, σημαντη ριον ουδεν διαψειρασαν, who had not violated her seal of conjugal faith. But Nonnus, lib. ii., uses the form of speech exactly as Solomon does with reference to a pure virgin; he says, Αψαυστον εης σφρηγιδα κορειης; "She had preserved the seal of her virginity untouched." All this is plain; but how many will make metaphors out of metaphors!

SONG 4: 13 Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates, with precious fruits: henna with spikenard plants,

Verse 13

Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates - This seems to refer to the fecundity of the bride or Jewish queen; to the former it would be a prediction; to the latter, a statement of what had already taken place. The word פֶּרְדִּים parden, which we translate an orchard, is the same which has given birth to our paradise, a garden of pleasure. The other expressions, in this and the following verse, seem to refer wholly to matters of a connubial nature.

SONG 4: 14 spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree; myrrh and aloes, with all the best spices,

SONG 4: 15 a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, flowing streams from Lebanon. Beloved.

SONG 4: 16 Awake, north wind; and come, you south! Blow on my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and taste his precious fruits.

Verse 16

A fountain of gardens - Perhaps גַּנִּים gannim, "gardens," was originally צַיִם chaiyim, "lives," a living fountain, a continual spring. See Houbigant. But this is expressed afterwards; though there would be nothing improper in saying, "a living fountain, a well of living waters, and streams from Mount Lebanon." A fountain of gardens may mean one so abundant as to be sufficient to supply many gardens, to water many plots of ground, an exuberant fountain. This is the allusion; the reference is plain enough.

Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south - It is granted that the south wind in Palestine, in the summer, is extremely hot and troublesome; therefore, another interpretation of this passage has been proposed by Mr. Harmer; who thinks בּוֹי boi, which we render come, signifies enter into thy repositories; and, therefore, supposes the true interpretation of the words to be as follows: "Arise, thou north wind, (and retire, thou south), blow upon my garden; let the spices thereof flow forth, that my beloved may come into his garden, invited by the coolness and fragrancy of the air, and may eat his pleasant fruits; for, if the south wind blow, the excessive heat will forbid his taking the air, and oblige him to shut close the doors and windows of his apartments." Others think that he wishes the winds from all directions to carry throughout the land the fume of his spices, virtue, and perfections.

Let my beloved come into his garden - This is the invitation of the bride: and if we look not for far-fetched meanings, the sense is sufficiently evident. But commentators on this song sometimes take a literal sense where the metaphor is evident; at other times they build an allegory upon a metaphor. The Gitagovinda has an elegant passage similar to this. See the place, Part VII, beginning with Enter, sweet Radha.

The whole of this chapter is considered to be unconnected with any particular time of the marriage ceremonies.