Solomon’s Song of Songs

Preface

Translation: Song of Solomon

This translation of the poem is a combination taken from three sources: the NRS (New Revised Standard); the translation found in the book, Song of Songs¹, and a some of my own (though limited).

The poem is arranged in two columns: the column on the left contains the words spoken by the young woman, those spoken by her lover are in the right-hand column. Words spoken by the daughters of Jerusalem are in bold and offset from the margin. Finally, I’ve inserted commentary (colored in orange) where I thought it could help.

Chapter 1

(2) Kiss me, make me drunk with your kisses!
Your sweet loving
Is better than wine
(3) You are fragrant,
You are myrrh and aloes.
All the young women want you.
(4) Take me by the hand, let us run together!
My lover, my king, has brought me into his chambers.
We will laugh, you and I, and count
Each kiss,
Better than win.

Every one of them wants you
(5) I am dark, daughters of Jerusalem,
And I am beautiful!
Dark as the tents of Kedar, lavish
As Solomon’s tapestries.

¹ See on Amazon, Bloch, Chana and Bloch, Ariel, “Song of Songs”
(6) Do not see me only as dark:
The sun has stared at me.

My brothers were angry with me,
They made me guard the vineyards,
I have not guarded my own.

(7) Tell me, my only love,
Where do you pasture your sheep,
Where will you let them rest
In the heat of noon?
Why should I lose my way among the flocks
Of your companions?

(8) Loveliest of women,
If you lose your way,
Follow in the tracks of the sheep,
Graze your goats in the shade
Of the shepherds’ tents

(9) My lover, I dreamed of you
As a mare, my very own,
Among Pharaoh’s chariots

(10) Your cheekbones,
Those looped earrings,
That string of beads at your throat!

(11) I will make you golden earrings
With silver filigree.

(12) My king lay down beside me
And my fragrance
Wakened the night.

(13) All night between my breasts
My lover is a cluster of myrrh,
A sheaf of henna blossoms
In the vineyards of Ein Gedi.

(15) And you, my lover, how beautiful you are!
Your eyes are doves.

(16) You are beautiful, my king,
And gentle. Where ever we lie
Our bed is green.

(17) Our roof beams are cedar,
Our rafters are fir.

Chapter 2
(1) I am the rose of Sharon
The wild lily of the valleys.

(2) Like a lily in a field
Of thistles,
Such is my lover
Among the young women

(3) And my lover among the young men
Is a branching apricot tree in the wood.
In that shade I have often lingered,
Tasking the fruit

(4) Now he has brought me to the house of wine
And his flag over me is love.

(5) Let me lie among vine blossoms,
In a bed of apricots!
I am in the fever of love.

(6) His left hand beneath my head,
His right arm
Holding me close

(7) Daughters of Jerusalem, swear to me
By the gazelles, but the deer in the field,
That you will never awaken love
Until it is ripe.

(8) The voice of my lover: listen!
Bounding over the mountains
Toward me, across the hills.

(9) My lover is a gazelle, a wild stag.
There he stands on the other side
Of our wall, gazing
Between the stones.

(10) And he calls to me, saying,
    “Hurry, my lover,
    my friend,
    and come away!

(11) Look, winter is over,
The rains are done,

(12) Wildflowers spring up in the fields.
Now is the time of the nightingale.
In every meadow you hear
The song of the turtledove.

(13) The fig tree has sweetened
Its new green fruit
And the young budded vines smell spicy.
Hurry, my lover, my friend
Come away.

(14) My dove in the clefts of the rock,
In the shadow of the cliff,
Let me see you, all of you!
Let me hear your voice,
Your delicious song.
I love to look at you”.

(15) Catch us the foxes,
The quick little foxes
That raid our vineyards
Now, when the vines are in blossom.

My lover is mine and I am his.
He feasts
In a field of lilies.
Before day breathes,
Before the shadows of night are gone,
Run away, my lover!
Be like a gazelle, a wild stag
On the jagged mountains.

Chapter 3
At night in my bed I longed
For my only love.
I sought him, but did not find him
I must rise and go about the city,
The narrow streets and squares, till I find my only love.
I sought him everywhere
But I could not find him.
Then the watchmen found me
As they went about the city.
"Have you seen him? Have you seen the one I love?"
I had just passed them when I found
My only love.
I held him, I would not let him go
Until I brought him to my mother’s house,
Into my mother’s room.
Daughters of Jerusalem, swear to me
By the gazelles, by the deer in the field,
That you will never awaken love
Until it is ripe
Who is that rising from the desert
Like a pillar of smoke,
More fragrant with myrrh and frankincense
Than all the spices of the merchant!
Oh the splendors of King Solomon!
The bravest of Israel surround his bed,
Threescore warriors
Each of them skilled in battle,
Each with his sword on his thigh
Against the terror of night.
King Solomon built a pavilion
From the cedars of Lebanon.
Its pillars he made of silver,
Cushions of gold,
Couches of purple linen,
And the daughters of Jerusalem
Paved it with love.
(10)Come out, O daughters of Zion,
And gaze at Solomon the King!
See the crown his mother set on his head
On the day of his wedding
The day of his heart’s great joy.

Chapter 4

(1)How beautiful you are, my lover,
My friend! The doves of your eyes
Looking out
From the thicket of your hair.

Your hair
Like a flock of goats
Bounding down Mount Gilead.
(2)Your teeth white ewes,
All alike,
That come up fresh from the pond.
(3)A crimson ribbon your lips —
how I listen for your voice!

The curve of your cheek
A pomegranate
In the thicket of your hair
(4)Your neck is a tower of David
Raised in splendor,
A thousand bucklers hand upon it,
All the shields of the warriors.
(5)Your breasts are like fawns,
Twins of a gazelle,
Grazing in a field of lilies.

(6)Before day breathes,
Before the shadows fo night are gone,
I will hurry to the mountain of myrrh,
The hell of frankincense.
(7)You are all beautiful, my lover,
My perfect one.
(8)Oh come with me, my bride,
Come down with me from Lebanon.
Look down from the peak of Amana,
Look down from Senir and Hermon,
From the mountains of the leopards,  
The lions’ dens.  
(9) You have ravished my heart,  
My sister, my bride,  
Ravished me with one glance of your eyes,  
On link of your necklace.  
(10) And oh, your sweet loving,  
My sister, my bride.  
The wind of your kisses, the spice  
Of your fragrant oils.  
(11) Your lips are honey, honey and milk  
Are under your tongue,  
Your clothes hold the scent of Lebanon.  
(12) An enclosed garden is my sister, my bride,  
A hidden well, a sealed spring.  
(13) Your branches are an orchard  
Of pomegranate trees heavy with fruit,  
Flowing henna and spikenard,  
(14) Spikenard and saffron, cane and cinnamon,  
With every tree of frankincense,  
Myrrh and aloes,  
All the rare spices.  
(15) You are a fountain in the garden,  
A wall of living waters  
That stream from Lebanon.

(16) Awake, north wind! O south wind, come,  
Breather upon my garden,  
Let its spices stream out.  
Let my lover come into his garden  
And taste its delicious fruit.

Chapter 5

(1) I have come into my garden,  
My sister, my bride,  
I have gathered my myrrh and my spices,  
I have eaten from the honeycomb,  
I have drunk the milk and the wine.  
Feast, friends, and drink  
Till you are drunk with love!

(2) I was asleep but my heart stayed awake.  
Listen!  
My lover knocking:  
“Open, my sister, my friend,  
My dove, my perfect one!  
My hair is wet, drenched  
With the dew of the night.”
(3) But I have taken off my clothes,
    How can I dress again?
I have bathed my feet,
    Must I dirty them?
(4) My lover reached in for the latch
    And my heart
Beat wild
(5) I rose to open to my lover,
    My fingers wet with myrrh,
    Sweet flowing myrrh
    On the doorbolt.
(6) I opened to my lover
    But he had slipped away.
    How I wanted him when he spoke!

I sought him everywhere
    But could not find him.
I called his name
    But he did not answer.
(7) Then the watchmen found me
    As they went about the city.
    They beat me, they bruised me,
    They tore the shawl from my shoulders,
Those watchmen of the walls.
(8) Swear to me, daughters of Jerusalem!
    If you see him
    You must tell him
    I am in the fever of love.

(9) How is your lover different
    From any other, O beautiful woman?
    Who is your lover
    That we must swear to you?

(10) My lover is milk and wine,
    He towers
    Above ten thousand.
(11) His head is burnished gold,
    The mane of his hair
Black as the raven
(12) His eyes like doves
    By the rivers
Of milk and plenty
(13) His cheeks a bed of spices,
    A treasure
Of precious scents, his lips
Red lilies wet with myrrh
(14) His arm a golden scepter with gems of topas,
    His loins the ivory of thrones
Inlaid with sapphire,

(15) His thighs like marble pillars
On pedestals of gold.

Tall as Mount Lebanon,
A man like a cedar!
(16) His mouth is sweet wine, he is all delight.

This is my lover
And this is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

Chapter 6

(1) Where has your lover gone,
O beautiful one?
Say where he is
And we will seek him with you

(2) My lover has gone down to
His garden, to the beds of spices,
To graze and to gather lilies.

(3) My lover is mine and I am his.
He feasts
In a field of lilies

(4) You are beautiful, my lover, as Tirzah,
Majestic as Jerusalem,
Daunting
As the stars in their courses.

(5) Your eyes! Turn them away
For they dazzle me.

Your hair is like a flock of goats
Bounding down Mount Gilead.

(6) Your teeth white ewes,
All alike,
That come up fresh from the pond.

(7) The curve of your cheek
A pomegranate
In your thicket of hair.

(8) Threescore are the queens,
Fourscore the king’s women,
And maidens, maidens without number.

(9) One alone is my dove,
My perfect, my only one,
Love of her mother, light
Of her mother’s eyes.
Every maiden calls her happy,
Queens praise her,  
And all the king’s women say:

(10) “Who is that rising like the morning star,  
Clear as the moon,  
Bright as the blazing sun,  
Daunting as the stars in their courses!”

(11) Then I went down to the walnut grove  
To see the new green by the brook,  
To see if the vine had budded,  
If the pomegranate trees were in flower  
(12) And oh! Before I was aware,  
She sat me in the most lavish of chariots.

Chapter 7

(1) Again, O Shulamite,  
Dance again,  
That we may watch you dancing!  

Why do you gaze at the Shulamite  
As she whirls  
Down the roes of dancers?

(2) How graceful your steps in those sandals,  
O nobleman’s daughter.

The gold of your thigh  
Shaped by a master craftsman.  
(3) Your navel is the moon’s  
Bright drinking cup.  
May it brim with wine!  
(4) Below your naval lies a mound of wheat  
Edged with lilies.  
Your breasts are two fawns,  
Twins of a gazelle.

“Below your naval” – translated from יָּבֵן (heten)  
literally refers to the lower abdomen, womb, or body.

As for the fawns see commentary on 4:5

(5) Your neck is a tower of ivory.  
Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, at the gates  
Of that city of lords.  
Your proud nose the tower of Lebanon  
That looks toward Damascus.  
(6) Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel,  
The hair of your head  
Like royal purple. A king  
Is caught in the thicket.  
(7) How wonderful you are, O Love,
How much sweeter
Than all other pleasures!
(8) That day you seemed to me a tall palm tree
And your breasts
The clusters of its fruit.
(9) I said in my heart,
Let me climb into that palm tree
And take hold of its branches.

And oh, may your breasts be like clusters
Of grapes on a vine, the scent
Of your breath like apricots,
(10) Your mouth good wine –

That pleased my lover, rousing him
Even from sleep)

I am my lover’s,
He longs for me,
Only for me
(12) Come, my lover,
Let us go out into the fields
And lie all night among the flowering henna.
(13) Let us go early to the vineyards
To see if the vine has budded,
If the blossoms have opened
And the pomegranate is in flower.

There I will make love to you.

The air is filled with the scent of
lovemaking.
And at our doors
Rare fruit of every kind, my lover,
I have hid away for you.

Alternatively,

The air is filled with the scent of mandrakes
And at our doors
Rare fruit of every kind, my lover,
I have stored away for you.

(14a) In this verse the phrase “scent of
lovemaking” is rendered in Hebrew as
הַדּוּדָאִים
נָתְנוּ־רֵיחַ
(ha-dudaim nat’nu reiyach) “the
mandrakes give odor”. Note that the mandrake was
thought to be an aphrodisiac with fertility
enhancing powers (c.f., Gen 30:14-16)

Boring, I know, but the Hebrew word for
mandrake דּוּדָ (duda) derives from the same root as
the Hebrew word for physical sex, dod. Thus, the
ancient Hebrew audience would have interpreted
this stanza as a rather lascivious depiction of what
she plans to do once they are alone in the field.

(14b) is the translation found in the book.
Chapter 8

(1) If only you were a brother
Who nursed at my mother’s breast!
I would kiss you in the streets
And no one would scorn me.

(2) I would bring you to the house of my mother
And she would teach me.
I would give you spiced wine to drink,
My pomegranate wine.

(3) His left hand beneath my head,
His right arm
Holding me close.

The meaning here is not one of incest. Rather, the verse reflects her desire to be able to express her love publicly. Kissing a family member would not bring condemnation.

A picture is worth a thousand words.

(4) Daughters of Jerusalem, swear to me
That you will never awaken love
Until it is ripe.

(5a) Who is that
Rising from the desert,
Her head on her lover’s shoulder!

(5b) Probably refers to where they first had sex?

(6) Bind me as a seal upon your heart,
A sign upon your arm,
For love is as fierce as death,
Its jealousy bitter as the grave.
Even its sparks are a raging fire,
A devouring flame.

(7) Great seas cannot extinguish love,
No river can sweep it away.

If a man tried to buy love
With all the wealth of his house,
He would be despised.

(8) We have a little sister
And she has no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister
When suitors besiege her?

(9) If she is a wall, we will build
A silver turret over her.
If she is a door, we will bolt her
With beams of cedarwood.

The use of ‘tower’ to render the Hebrew word מִגְדָּלוֹת (mig’dalot) is literally correct. However, I would argue that a more figurative, poetic rendering would recognize that the root of mig’dalot connotes grown-up, great, full, heavy, important, manifest. Obviously, she disagrees with the assessments of her brothers.

In this verse ‘complete’ is translated from the Hebrew word שלום (shalom). Often translated as ‘peace’, shalom has a much wider semantic range that includes tranquility, completeness, self-actualization, and fulfillment.

(10) I am a wall
And my breasts are towers
But for my lover, I am
A city of peace

Alternatively,

I am a wall,
And my breasts are visible to all.
Then, as now, I am in his eyes, complete.

(11) King Solomon had a vineyard
On the Hill of Plenty.
He gave that vineyard to watchmen
And each would earn for its fruit
One thousand pieces of silver

(12) My vineyard is all my own.
Keep your thousand, Solomon! And pay
Two hundred to those
Who must guard the fruit.

(13) O woman in the garden,
All our friends listen for your voice.
Let me hear it now.

(14) Hurry, my lover! Run away,
My gazelle, my wild stag
On the hills of cinnamon.