



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE PLOT OF THE SONG OF SONGS.

“Is not my word, saith the Lord, as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer. xxiii. 29). “And produces,” adds the Midrash, “numberless sparks of various forms and colours by one and the same stroke.” For many lessons are taught from one text; many interpretations are given of the same verse, all springing from the same source—the desire to understand the words of the Holy Scriptures. One such spark is the following attempt to describe the plot of the Song of Songs. This attempt does not stand isolated; it has many fellow-sparks, which in some points it resembles and differs from in others.

It is generally assumed that a shepherdess, who loves a shepherd friend, is taken against her will to the king’s palace in Jerusalem, where the daughters of Jerusalem try to persuade her to give up the shepherd and to enter the king’s harem. The attempts fail; the shepherd comes and rescues her from the prison. Her virtue finds ample reward in the fulfilment of her hopes. It is, however, most unlikely that an Israelitish woman should have been forcibly taken away from her home and detained in the royal palace against her will for the purpose of winning her for the harem. Such was not the custom in Israel; no instance of this kind is found in the Bible. The careful reading of the Song convinces us of the superior and dignified position of the woman in Israel. The poem contains nothing that could remind us of a king’s palace or harem; nothing that reminds us of Jerusalem with the Temple; but from beginning to end we breathe the fresh air of the country, and find ourselves among the vineyards, between trees, flowers, flocks of sheep and goats, roes and hinds, hills and valleys. There is no mention, not the least indication, of a

forced detention, nor is there any account of a brave rescue.

In order to form a correct idea with regard to the place and time of the dialogue in the Song we have to bear in mind that the maiden has been appointed by her brother "keeper of the vineyard" which did not belong to her; there is no passage in the book that represents her in a different situation; even in the end, when she discontinues keeping other people's vineyards, she still keeps her own, which till then she had to neglect. If, in addition to this, we consider that King Solomon offered to take her away from the Lebanon and the other mountains in the north of Palestine, the dangerous dens of lions and leopards, we arrive at the following result:—Shulamith had her home in the north of Palestine; King Solomon, who had a summer palace in the Lebanon, probably had there also gardens and vineyards. One of these vineyards was entrusted to Shulamith to keep; it was perhaps not far from her own home and that of her shepherd friend. The king with his court, including some of the daughters of Jerusalem, has come to the royal vineyards, where they feasted in the splendid tents covered with the bright curtains of Solomon (*yerioth Shelomoh*). It may have been the season of the annual rejoicings in the vineyards mentioned in the Mishnah (*Taanith* 4, 8) as having taken place in the month of Ab. The tents in the neighbouring vineyards, in that of Shulamith and her friends, were plain and simple. They were the common tents of Kedar. Shulamith is in love with a shepherd, her companion and friend from childhood, but is tempted by the daughters of Jerusalem, with whom she now comes in contact through her position as keeper of one of the king's vineyards, to forget the poor shepherd and to join the royal court, with the luxurious tents of Solomon, which in their view must be preferred by every one to the ordinary and plain tents of Kedar. It is morning time; the maiden looks out for her friend, whom she expects to pass with his flock along the road,

not far from the spot where the daughters of Jerusalem converse with her. At this moment the dialogue of our Song begins. Shulamith, heedless of what the court ladies said to her or advised her, joyfully exclaims, perhaps pointing in the direction from which the shepherd was approaching, "He will kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (i. 1); and addressing the shepherd, who meanwhile had come nearer, she assures him that his love was better than wine, than the wine of the banqueting parties in the king's tents; that she preferred him to the king: if he were to call her to follow him she would run; but if she were brought into the king's palace, in the midst of all luxury, she would only think of the shepherd friend, and rejoice only in him (i. 4).

The eyes of Shulamith follow her friend as he is passing along with his flock, and she begs him to tell her where he would rest at noon (i. 7); but he seems already too far away to hear her or to be heard by her, and, instead of his answer, she must hear the taunts of the daughters of Jerusalem, who laugh at her preference of the life of a poor shepherdess to the luxuries offered to her by the court. "If thou hast no knowledge," they say to her, "then continue to feed thy flock by the dwellings of the shepherds" (i. 8). The taunts remain without effect, as also the tempting prospects of a Pharaoh's (Egyptian) carriage and horses, and gold and silver ornaments (i. 9, *sq.*). To all this Shulamith repeats the plain and simple answer:—"Before the king and his company appeared, my spikenard had already given forth the smell thereof (i. 12), my heart was already given to my friend." The shepherd, now out of sight, is the sole object of her thought and mind, and she entreats the daughters of Jerusalem to desist from further attempts to awaken in her the feeling of love for the king (ii. 7). She then turns to the daughters of Jerusalem and tells them two simple and plain reasons, repeated several times in the course of the Song, why they should desist from attempting to win her for the king. "I am

black," she says, "and unfit for the position; and, secondly, I am desired by another, by my beloved; and as to the splendour of the court, there is no difference to me between the tents of Solomon and those of Kedar" (i. 5, 6).

Shulamith now relates (ii. 7, *sq.*) how the shepherd, her friend, once surprised her, and how pleasantly they conversed with each other; she repeats the very words which he then addressed to her; she then adds a renewed declaration of her love, and expresses her hope to see him return over the mountains that at present separate them, even before the day cools, and before the shadows flee (ii. 17).

In addition to this actual incident, she relates a dream (iii. 1, *sq.*) she once had; that she was for some time seeking her friend without finding him; that in spite of failure and trouble she persevered in her attempts, till at last she succeeded; she found him and brought him home to the house her mother. Thus she makes it clear to the daughters of Jerusalem that her thoughts, even in her dream, are always with her friend, and entreats them a second time to desist from interfering with the affairs of her heart.

The daughters of Jerusalem, in order to combat the sentiments of true and sincere love to which Shulamith gave expression, picture to her (iii. 6, *sq.*) the grandeur of the position of one chosen by king Solomon to be his wife. They describe a splendid canopy which the king had made of the most costly material and adorned in most exquisite manner, to be occupied by his beloved (iii. 10)—pointing perhaps by looks and gestures to Shulamith. Shulamith, however, indignantly hastens to add: "by one of the daughters of Jerusalem," and ironically tells them to go and wonder at such display of splendour, as it would more gratify their desires than hers (iii. 11).

The king having hitherto remained comparatively silent or at a distance, comes now forward, and, in a rather passionate manner, expresses his admiration of the beauty

of Shulamith, praising her eyes, her hair, her teeth, her lips and speech as most perfect (iv. 1). But Shulamith, either out of modesty or because her mind is with her absent friend, takes no notice whatever of the fact that the king addresses her, and as if she never heard what he said, she suddenly exclaims (iv. 6), "Before the day cools and the shadows flee away, I shall go to the mount of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense": *scil.* to meet my friend.

The king by no means discouraged, invites Shulamith to come rather with him, away from Lebanon (iii. 8), away from the high mountains in the north, the rough and dangerous dwellings of lions and leopards, to the milder country in the south, to Jerusalem. She possesses, he assures her, all the charms of beauty; all the loveliness of a garden filled with the choicest flowers and spices, he only wished that the north wind would come, and the south wind, and blow upon his garden that its fragrance may flow forth and spread about (iv. 16 *a*).

Shulamith joins in the king's wish, and continues in the same figure, the seemingly ambiguous words (iv. 16 *b*), "let my friend come into his garden and enjoy its delicious fruit."

The king, who anticipated as a matter of course her consent, uses the term *khallah*, "bride;" and "my garden." No wonder that he interprets her words in his own favour, applies the term *dodi*, "my friend," employed by her, to himself and feels already the complete realisation of his hope; his feeling is expressed in the words (v. 1): "I have come into my garden; I have gathered my myrrh with my spices; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey. I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends, drink of love when your turn cometh, drink abundantly." His happiness he anticipates so vividly, that he already wishes equal happiness to his friends.

Shulamith feels pangs of remorse that through any utter-

ance of hers the king should have been encouraged in his hopes. She relates a dream she once dreamt (v. 2, *sq.*) how she had to suffer for having neglected her friend though only for a moment. She therefore entreats the daughters of Jerusalem to tell her friend when meeting him, that her attachment to him is still as strong as ever (v. 8). They ask, Why dost thou entreat us thus? What extraordinary merits has thy friend? (v. 9). This question gives Shulamith an occasion to sing of the attractions of her beloved, and she concludes her song with the words, "His palate is sweetness, and he is altogether loveliness; such is my beloved, such is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (v. 16).

The shepherd may have tarried longer than was expected. The daughters of Jerusalem sarcastically offer to go with her and seek her friend (vi. 1). Shulamith does not accept the offer; she knows that he has gone to his garden to the bed of spices, to feed his flock by the gardens, and to gather roses, *scil.* for her (vi. 2). She is convinced that he continues to be as faithful to her as she is to him (vi. 3).

The king nevertheless, prompted by his passion, renews his attempts to win her heart. He repeats almost the same words of praise which he has been singing before, without being listened to by her, and adds to them new expressions of admiration (vi. 4, *sqq.*). "There are sixty fit for the rank of a queen, and eighty for that of a king's concubine, and numberless is the host of those fit to serve as court ladies (vi. 8). But only one is she who is my dove, my spotless one; she, the only one to her mother, the spotless one to her who bare her, is extolled by all who see her as being bright as aurora, beautiful as the moon, spotless as the sun, powerful as whole hosts of women" (vi. 9, 10).

Shulamith in her simplicity declares that her occupation has always been to go to the nut-garden to look at the produce of the valley, whether the vine budded, the pomegranates be in flower; but it never occurred to her mind that she was fit for so high a position among her people as is now proposed to her (vi. 11, *sqq.*).

Shulamith now turns away to look out for her friend ; it is now late in the afternoon, and she expects that he must pass again on his way home. The daughters of Jerusalem call her back : Return, return, O Shulamith, we will look upon thee. She modestly replies, "What will you see in Shulamith that could be compared to the dance of the two camps (queens and concubines) ?" (vii. 1.) The king considering her superior to all other women, is full of her praises also in this respect : he describes (vii. 2, *sqq.*) how perfect her figure must be in the dance, how exquisite her movements, how comely her whole appearance ; but just when he compares her palate or her words to the best wine (vii. 10), Shulamith, espying the shepherd, finishes the sentence by adding : "that flows rightly only for my friend, that causeth the lips of those that are asleep to speak. I am for my friend, and his longing is for me" (vii. 11).

With those words she probably greeted the shepherd when he came nearer. Shulamith and her friend meet, and she invites him to join her in strolling through the fields and gardens that surround her mother's house, where many goodly things, old and new, are kept by her in store for him (vii. 12, *sqq.*). She wishes in that moment that he were her brother (viii. 1), that she could kiss him without exposing herself to reproach. Now she implores the daughters of Jerusalem to learn how futile must be all attempts to stir up a feeling of love where it does not come of itself" (viii. 4).

The daughters of Jerusalem, as well as king Solomon, can now picture to themselves, in contrast to the grandeur and luxury of the royal court, the happiness that awaits Shulamith and her friend as the fruit of true and sincere love. They have now learnt the lesson, and they must confess that many waters can not put out the flame of true love, and that such love cannot be acquired by any kind or amount of material wealth (viii. 7).

Shulamith triumphantly relates (viii. 8), how her brothers were doubtful whether she was "an open door" or "a



fenced wall," and joyfully exclaims, I have proved a fenced wall (viii. 10). She is no longer keeper of another's vineyard, of one of those vineyards which king Solomon had in Baal-hamon, and the care of which he had to entrust to hired workers. "I keep now my own vineyard," she says, "and leave to the king both the thousand pieces of silver, given to him for the fruit, and the two hundred which the keeper received" (viii. 12). The king finally asks Shulamith to let her voice be heard in song, the friends being anxious to listen (viii. 13). Shulamith complies with his wish, but what does she sing? "Flee, O my friend (the king), as quickly as a roe or gazellé, over the mountains of spices."

M. FRIEDLÄNDER.

---