

THE FEMALE LOVER IN THE SONG OF SONGS USHERS IN HER BELOVED AND HER PASSIONATE LOVE OF HIM: SONGS 1, 1-3

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1. This introductory essay into the study of the Song of Songs is meant to have at least two functions: It will show how the author means to approach the text of this biblical book for its exegesis. It will also narrate the history of the Song's translation within the Maltese Translation Tradition.
2. How has the writer arrived to the delimitation of this text? Hypothetically, initially he took the delimitation operated by the Masoretes and the Rabbis, which can still be seen in the text of the Bibbia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. Further analysis showed that while in vv.1-4 the speaker tells of her beloved and his love for her and her deep love for him, with verse 5 she starts talking about herself. Besides, she no longer addresses her beloved as in the previous unit, or speaks to herself in his presence, vv.1-4, but introduces without warning the **בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם** 'the daughters of Jerusalem' which have been nowhere mentioned in the text so far. This means that her statement in verse 5:

שְׁחֹרְרָה אֲנִי וְנֹאֲמָה
I am black and beautiful³

marks the beginning of another literary unit, a new strophe.⁴ At this stage we limit our observations to saying that this introduction to the Song of Songs consists of a poem made up of ten lines or cola. As we go along we shall discover other literary aspects employed by the poet to communicate

Abbreviations of Bible Translations employed in this study: CEI: La Sacra Bibbia, Edizione Conferenza Episcopale Italiana(2008); NBS: La Nouvelle Bible Segond(2002); NRSV: New Revised Standard Version(1989); REB: The Revised English Bible(1989).

1. The present writer allows that in the formulation of the concept 'translation tradition' he was influenced by Carlo Buzzetti especially by his monograph Buzzetti 2001.
2. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 31967/1977.
3. Translation of the NRSV(1989), provisionally accepted before the present writer provides his own translation of the text.
4. For the concepts 'strophe' and 'stanza' the present author relies upon Zogbo & Wendland2000:53-57.

his thoughts through his poem. This also means that we shall proceed through an analysis of the text not verse by verse but line by line, or colon by colon.

3. The female Lover introduces herself, her Lover, and their love-making

And yet she gives away very little about herself in explicit statement. In this ‘beginning without a beginning’ as Bernard of Clairvaux labelled the first line of this initial poem by the female lover⁵, and in the subsequent lines, the woman lover concentrates upon her lover and their love making. We have to wait till the first line of the next stanza (1,5) to learn that the speaker is actually a female, and we are given to believe but not clearly shown, that her lover is a male. She starts with a sentence that may be parsed both as indicative as well as modal. Often the initial verb **יִשָּׁקֵנִי** is rendered by modern translations as a cohortative: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!”(NRSV); “May he smother me with kisses”(REB); “Qu’il me couvre de baisers”(NBS); “Mi baci con i baci della sua bocca”(CEI). In these versions of the translation, the speaker expresses her deep desire for his love. But we cannot exclude that this *yiqtol* simply describes what the lover normally does to the speaker: he overwhelms her with the expressions of his own desire, in this way justifying REB’s and NBS’s renderings which may appear rather strong.

There is in this text one detail which these translations do not reproduce or take account of. The detail is the preposition *min* attached to the nominal **בְּשִׁיקוֹת**, a rare noun normally rendered ‘kisses’, this *min* may be parsed as ‘partitive’(van der Merwe 1999:289); the female Lover is asking her mate to kiss her ‘with some’ of the kisses of his mouth. This would mitigate the sense of extravagance that REB’s and NBS’s renderings suggest.

The feminine Persona gives her motivation in what we are identifying as the second line: **כִּי־טוֹבוֹבִים־דְּדָרְךָ־מֵיָוִי**. The line initial **כִּי** may be parsed both as the causal conjunction introducing whereby the reasons for her deep desire for the lover’s love-making which she describes in this line with the plural **דְּדָרְךָ** or as an emphatic particle⁶. Probably, both nuances may stay together for this second line

5. Cf. Robertson 1987:19

6. This grammatical function of the particle **כִּי** has already been noticed by BDB and some other grammarians of Biblical Hebrew(p.474). Mitchell Dahood (1970) confirmed its use in the Psalter. Cf. also Waltke & O.Connor 1990,§2.1b

is to be seen as an emphatic explanation of the first. The present writer thinks that the poet is preferring the emphatic function of the particle even though when the particle was linked through the maqef the emphasis was put not on the particle itself but on the predicate **טוֹבִים**, a general adjective meaning several things, here it seems to be carrying the meaning of 'good, sweet, intoxicating', especially the last mentioned because of the noun 'wine' to which his love is compared to. While the singular *dōd* may refer to an individual beloved person, the plural *dōdīm* often carries the abstract meaning of 'love' or its expressions, love making (cfr. BDB). In our text it is not referring to abstract love but to the love making she has had with her lover and which intoxicated her in the past. This led her to ask him for these experiences once more. She compares her mate's love making to 'wine' probably for its intoxicating effect. 'Your lovemaking is more intoxicating than wine'.

4. Songs 1,2 in Maltese Translation Tradition

The translation tradition of the Songs in Maltese is rather short. It consists of three translations all worked out during the twentieth century. The earliest translation was that of Mgr Prof Peter Paul Saydon who published it in pamphlet form during the late forties⁷. Next came the translation we find in *Il-Bibbja* which may be described as the official Bible in Maltese first published by the Malta Bible Society in 1984. From the presentation by its first general editor Rev Prof Carmel Sant⁸ we learn that the first draft of this biblical book was prepared by Rev Valent Barbara OP though the text we find in *Il-Bibbja* today, is the outcome of the entire team that worked with Prof Sant on the translation project till its publication. Isolating Barbara's own contribution from that of his colleagues is at this stage impossible. The last entry in this history is that of Karm Zammit who translated the Authorised Version in English into Maltese on behalf of the Trinitarian Bible Society which sponsored his translation and its publication as *Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa*⁹.

The translation of verse 2 in the three versions:

Saydon: *Ha jbusni bil-bews ta' fommu!*
Oħla mhabbtek mill-inbid

7. *Krieb Ghanjet L-Ghanjet*, Il-Kotba Mqaddsa bil-Malti, 20; The Empire Press, Malta 1949.

8. *Il-Bibbja. Il-Kotba Mqaddsa*, Malta Bible Society & Media Centre, Malta 1984, pp. ix-xi.

9. Trinitarian Bible Society. London 1980(?).

Barbara: *Ħa jġi jbusni bil-bewsiet ta' fommu,*
Imħabbtek hija oħla mill-inbid.

Zammit: *Ħa jbusni bil-bews ta' fommu*
Għax imħabbtek oħla mill-inbid

Comments:

a) It is clear that Saydon set the agenda for both exegesis and vocabulary in this translation tradition. Barbara and Zammit attempt to be original by somewhat steering away from Saydon in matters of syntax.

b) The three translations read the initial *yiqtol* verb *יִשָּׁקְנֵי* as cohortative, and in Maltese they employ the same syntactical structure of the imperative of the verb *ħalla*, 'to leave' shortened to *ħa* + the imperfect of the main verb, here the verb *ibus*, the imperfect of the verb *bies* I, 'to kiss'. The verb *ħa* + the imperfect *i/jbus* carries the meaning 'let him kiss' (cfr. Aquilina, MED, I.487). The verb *ibus* then governs the direct object represented in the text by the personal pronominal suffix attached to the verb: *-ni* that refers to the speaker in the text. 'Let him kiss me'.

c) Barbara employs another verb before *ibus*, the verb *jġi* which is actually governed by the verb *ħa*: *ħa jġi jbusni*, 'let him come and kiss me'. Is *jġi* an additional verb or an auxiliary? If it is an additional verb what does it mean and what does it add to the text? *Jġi* is the imperfect of the Maltese verb *ġie* 'to come, to arrive'. Probably it is better to parse it as main verb and not as an auxiliary. It does not mean that it involves some distance which the one who is invited to kiss the female lover has to cover in order to reach the female lover and kiss her. It forms part of the invitation of the female to the male 'to come and kiss her'. The cohortative *יִשָּׁקְנֵי* is rendered more colloquial and concrete by the imperative *ejja* of the verb *ġie* which is here in the third person masculine *ħa jġi*, 'let him come'. Both verbs are governed by the imperative *ħa* and are therefore cohortative. But this does not mean that the male lover lived at some distance when he is being invited by his mate to come and kiss her. It is simply a sign of a more dynamic form of discourse and translation. The use of the verb *ġie* here is rather pleonastic and needs not be translated. It forms part of the invitation in colloquial form. The problem for the translator arose as the Hebrew original employs the indirect speech in the third person and hence the impression of some distance and this led to the invitation 'to come' and kiss her, though here the poet has to use the third person form.

Saydon renders the plural noun *בְּשִׁיקוֹתָי*, kisses, by the plural *bews* which in English is better rendered by the participle 'kissing.' Zammit follows suit. Barbara

preferred the countable *bewsiet* ‘kisses’ which is probably better since the Hebrew noun is governed by the preposition *min* that tends to see the kissing as individual acts of kissing. In this way one may say that Barbara’s is even more literal than that of Saydon’s or Zammit’s. Barbara’s and Saydon’s like many modern translations ignored the presence and the use of the preposition *min* in the text.

What is the relationship of the second line to the first line in Maltese translations? In Hebrew, the particle ׀, however it is parsed, formally links the second line to the first as an explanation. In other words, for the Hebrew poet, that the lover’s *dōdim* are more intoxicating than wine, explains her desire for his sensual kissing. The ׀ is therefore the formal marker of the causal relationship between the two lines.¹⁰ Saydon provided no formal signal that would mark this relationship.¹¹ He defines through the punctuation the statement in line One as an exclamation. The second line is parsed as emphatic as the position of the adjective *ohla* shows. This adjective in the comparative morphological form of the adjective *helu*, sweet, (cfr. Aquilina, MED,I, 513-514) derives from the verb *hela* II, ‘to become sweet’. As Saydon in the second edition of his translation provides no formal link between the two lines in verse 2, the link between them operates only on the semantic level. The stress in the second line is put on the predicate the headword of which is the adjective *ohla* that opens the line.

The clause in line Two is a noun clause in Saydon just as in Hebrew, as the verbal element has been dropped, probably for stylistic reasons. The subject of the clause is the nominal *mhabbtek*, a feminine nominal *imhabba* meaning ‘love, affection’ (Aquilina, MED,I, 467), which is here qualified by the possessive pronoun of the second person singular; in modern Maltese, and in certain contexts

10. Perhaps we have to consider this ׀ in line 2b as a case of anacrusis. Cfr. Wilfred G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry. A Guide to its Techniques*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 2001, 110-111 for this poetic technique in Hebrew.

11. We have to add that in the first edition of Saydon’s translation, which the present writer acquired only later, line Two reads as follows: *Għax ohla mhabbtek mill-inbid* just as we find the text in Zammit’s with slight variations, as we shall see. This means that in the first edition of his translation, that of 1949, Saydon formally reproduced the Hebrew particle ׀. Whether the second edition of the translation published in the second volume of *Bibbja Saydon* (1990) where the conjunction is dropped and the line starts with the comparative adjective *ohla*, which thus receives a huge stress, was corrected on the notes of the translator or on the initiative of the general editor Rev Carmel Attard cannot be established for the time being. The present writer would like to heartily thank Mr Joe Agius of Marsascala for his splendid gift he made him in making available to him the entire set of the pamphlet edition of the Saydon’s version.

such as here, the lexeme may mean ‘sensual love’ and ‘love making’. In this Maltese translation, *mhabbtek* renders the nominal הַיְיָיִךְ which is possibly meant to parallel the nominal נְשִׂיקוֹת in line One, but must be seen as being wider.

The two words נְשִׂיקוֹת and הַיְיָיִךְ seem to refer to love making between the woman and the man even though the two personalities do not yet emerge completely from the text covered so far. The concluding lexeme in the Hebrew line Two is the comparative phrase מִיַּיִן ‘than wine’ thus stating that their lovemaking has been more intoxicating than wine drinking. Saydon’s version has line Two end with the comparative phrase *mill-inbid*, ‘than wine’. This version of the translation is thus formal equivalent, including word order; as we have seen, the only element in the Hebrew text which in the second edition of Saydon’s translation remains unreproduced is the line initial כִּי . In the first edition this is reproduced in the conjunction *ghax* as it appears then in Zammit’s translation. In the second edition this causal link remains covert though it is semantically understood.¹²

If Saydon in the second edition of his translation of line Two stressed the intoxicating nature of the lover’s lovemaking by putting the adjective *ohla* at the beginning of the line, Barbara has put the stress on the concept *mhabbtek*, ‘your love’ or ‘your lovemaking’, which is the subject of the clause. Barbara built a normal clause with the subject, verb, and complement; the predicate in this clause includes a verbal element which is the existential *hija*, the pronoun that serves as copula whenever the speaker chooses to use it in this way. The rest of the clause’s elements in Barbara are the same though in different word order than in Saydon’s version. The second edition of Saydon’s version is more poetical than Barbara’s which is more prosaic. The relationship between line One and Two in Barbara remains vague as the equivalence between *bewsiet* and *imhabbtek* is not rendered explicit and the parallelism of the two words in either of the translations as in the source text is not sure.

While in Saydon’s second version we understand that the woman’s desire for his kisses is to be explained by the intoxicating nature of his love-making which makes her desire for more, in Barbara’s line Two we find another statement which at face value has nothing to do with the statement in line One. One final remark: One should note that in the second edition of Saydon’s version, line One is a

12. This may be taken as a proof that these changes were suggested by Saydon himself given the deep knowledge of the text which they require in the people who monitored the final form of the text.

poetical and syntactical unit on its own with the Second line being the opening line of the first strophe that comprises vv.2-3. For Barbara the two lines form part of the first strophe just as in the first edition of Saydon. In this translation, line One forms a poetic unit on its own, separated from the following lines by the fullstop.

Zammit's translation differs from its predecessors on a number of points. While he follows Saydon verbatim for the first line, in line Two he introduces a number of innovations. He makes explicit the causal relationship between the two lines by introducing the clause in line Two through the adverb *ghax*, 'because'. It would seem that Zammit took this adverb not from Saydon or Barbara, but from his source text, the Authorised Version: 'for thy love is better than wine'.¹³ This explicit link between line One and line Two, necessarily narrows down the semantic range of the clause subject *mhabbtek* which must be seen as being somewhat parallel to the phrase *bews ta' fommu* 'kissing of his mouth', so that *mhabbtek* has to refer to sensual love making of the male partner with his mate who is the speaker in the text. Zammit took from Barbara the syntax of the second clause which in Zammit is a normal clause with normal word order though the verbal element which Barbara introduced Zammit left out so that his clause is also nominal as in Saydon. It is clear that Lady Lover in line One desires at least some of her mate's kisses, because his love-making is thoroughly intoxicating. In Barbara the two lines construct one semantic unit. In Saydon and Barbara they constitute two vaguely free units that are somewhat related

5.2 Songs 1,3

Exegesis In verse 3 Lady Lover proceeds with her address to her male mate. This verse consists of three cola or lines which in many ways have a number of common features with the second line in verse 2. Line Three of the poem (the first colon in verse 3) stands in a concentric structure with line Two (the second colon of verse 2). We are labelling the central elements of this structure, the clusters מִיִּין and לְרֵיָא , as C/C¹. These two clusters are prepositional phrases where the nouns are both governed by prepositions, מִן and לְ . These two prepositions are made to play by the poet similar syntactical functions. The preposition מִן plays a role that is natural for it. It is being used in a context where the subject of the clause is being compared with another that is distinct from it. BDB (p. 582) cites Jgs 14,18 which

13. *Holy Bible, King James Version*, Standard Text Edition, Cambridge University Press (1980?).

provides one such comparison: ‘what is sweeter than honey?’ מִדֶּ֫חַיִּים מִדְּבַשׁ. In our text the comparative phrase is being governed by the adjective טוֹבִים that in the context assumes the meaning of ‘intoxicating’. According to Mitchell Dahood the preposition לְ is made to play here a similar role as מִן in a comparative phrase or clause.¹⁴ Dahood would call such לְ ‘lamedt comparativum’.

Elements B/B¹ are the subjects in the two clauses and lines. In line Two(verse 2b) the subject of the comparative clause is דְּדִיִּי (It would seem that the LXX translator parsed the consonantal text differently: instead of דְּדִיִּי from the root דוד he read דְּדִיִּי from דד a rare word that carries the meaning of ‘breast’. LXX actually read ‘for thy breasts are better than wine’¹⁵)while in line Three(verse 3a) the subject is שְׁמֵנֶיךָ. A few words of comment: Why has the poet chosen the plural שְׁמֵנִים instead of the singular שֶׁמֶן? Did he mean by this word unguents the male lover could have applied to his body, or his natural scent? Probably, the plural form of the noun שֶׁמֶן has been chosen because of the chiasm that has been adopted as the overall structure of lines Two and Three. This was meant to make שְׁמֵנֶיךָ lexically correspond to דְּדִיִּי and possibly, grammatically to the adjective טוֹבִים equally present in the two clauses, and which is the visible element of the chiasitic structure. But this does not necessarily entail that the poet was referring to the perfumes that the male lover could have applied to his body. The Lady Lover is speaking of the natural qualities of her mate, so that she is probably commenting upon the natural scent of her lover. For the female lover in the poem, her mate’s natural bodily scent was enough to attract her (and all girls) to him.¹⁶ The male lover’s natural scent is emphatically compared to רִיחַ a noun derived from the root רוּחַ, and it means ‘scent, odour’; in Gen 27,27 it is attributed to fields and plants. It is used other times in the Canticle with the same meaning(1,13;4,10). It is found with the meaning of personal odour in a number of texts: Cant 4,11;7,9. In our text it seems to carry the meaning of ‘fragrance’. For the female lover who is speaking and addressing her darling, possibly in his presence though this is not explicitly stated, the natural odour of her lover is stronger than fragrance. This presumes lovemaking. ‘Stronger than fragrance is your scent’.

14. *Ugaritic-Hebrew Philology*, Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome 1965,30,

15. For this translation cf. Lancelot C.L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Greek and English*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1851.1980.

16. Tremper Longman III in his commentary seems to think otherwise, though he does not exclude this interpretation.

5.2.1. Songs 1,3a

Exegesis As the poet has chosen to construct the concentric structure present in verses 2b-3a with the instances of the plural adjective **טובים** being its visible elements, the noun **שמן** had therefore to be plural, as it appeared then throughout its textual history; the Qumran manuscripts and the Vulgate version prove this point. At the same time, the concentric structure indicates that verse 3a forms part of the **כי** syntactical structure. Lady Lover desires the kisses of her mate(verse 2) also because his bodily scent resembles for her a strong fragrance. The subject of the clause in verse 3a is the plural **שמונים**, in this context being qualified by the possessive pronouns of the second person masculine singular referring to the male lover who in the text is the one who is being addressed. This nominal derives from the root **שמן** II with the meaning ‘to grow fat’ (BDB, 1032). As a noun it often means ‘fat, oil’, meaning olive oil which was then employed for many uses. Probably mixed with other substances, it was also used as unguent and as bodily ointment(Amos 6,6; Dt 28,40;Est 2,12).

While the subject is the male lover’s bodily odour which the female lover experiences as a pleasant event, the predicate is the adjective **טובים**, in the plural, to mark the presence of chiasm, and corresponds to the **טובים** of verse 2 where the chiasm starts. Longman III parses the adjective in verse 2 as comparative while that in verse 3a he parses as emphatic, and translates: ‘How wonderful is the scent of your oils!’¹⁷ While the male lover is lovemaking with his girlfriend, his bodily odour is perceived by her who is speaking as very strong. With Mitchell Dahood we are parsing the initial lamedt of this line as lamedt comparativum.

The bodily scent of the male lover is being experienced as being stronger than **ריח**. The nominal derives from the root **רוח** (BDB,924-926) and means ‘scent, odour’. Often it refers to natural scents like the scent of flowers of the fields(Gen 27,27). In the Canticle it often refers to scent of ointment; so ‘fragrance’ will be a correct translation. ‘Your odour is stronger than fragrance’.

In the next line which forms part also of verse 3 and of the **כי** clause that starts in verse 2 as the initially placed **שמן** hints, while the subject is **שמהך**, ‘your name’. In other words, in this line we find explained another reason why the female lover, the speaker, hotly desires the kisses of her mate(v,2a). This line has two features to comment about, and a problem. The first feature is the repetition from the previous

17. *Song of Songs*, 90.

line of the element שֶׁמֶן, qualified only by a genitival structure, that in this line plays the syntactical role of predicate. In its place as line initial, it carries huge emphasis. One should note that this occurrence of שֶׁמֶן is not qualified as its occurrence in the previous line by pronominal suffixes, so that ‘ointments’ here in line Four does not necessarily mean as in line Three, the male lover’s bodily scent, but scent in general. Given its place in the clause and line, it should be accorded an emphatic rendering, ‘strong scent’. The emphasis is carried also by the alliteration between the subject שְׁמֶךָ, ‘your name’ and שֶׁמֶן, ‘scent’: ‘Strong scent indeed is your name’.

While the subject in the second colon of verse 3 is שְׁמֶךָ and the predicate includes the nominal שֶׁמֶן, this latter stands in some syntactical relationship to a lexeme that has always created difficulties for understanding and exegesis. Its morphological form is strange, תִּנְרַק, so also is its root. It seems to be derived from the root יִרַק; but no noun or verb from this root (BDB, 438-439) seems to fit our text. The lexeme seems to be intended as adjectival qualifying the nominal שֶׁמֶן; apparently the two words שֶׁמֶן תִּנְרַק stand within a genitival construction. But this is not certain. The masoretic vocalisation seems to show that the lexeme was parsed as some passive participle. But this would mean that the ת is radical which cannot be.

The LXX’s rendering of the text may be revealing: μύρον ἔκκενωθὲν ὄνομά σου. “Thy name is ointment poured forth” (Brenton). In this rendering, the verbal ἔκκενωθὲν has been parsed as the aorist participle passive of the verb ἐκκενώω ‘to empty out, pour out’¹⁸ and hence the word in the text has been translated as ‘poured out’.¹⁹ The male’s name is like poured out fragrance. It reaches the onlookers before one sees it because of its strong scent. This LXX rendition involves parsing the lexeme תִּנְרַק as passive participle but of a word which is still unknown because as it is represented to date it does not exist in the Hebrew vocabulary. The LXX translator must have resorted to an emendation of the text; instead of the ת of the lexeme תִּנְרַק the translator may read נ in order to parse the cluster as a passive participle of the verb יִרַק which basically meant ‘to spit’ (cfr Num 12,14). There are though two considerations to make: a) According to BDB, there were two roots composed of the same above radicals (BDB, 438-439); one is supposed to lie behind a number of words connected with the concept ‘to spit’, and another

18. Johan Lust et alii, *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart²2003, 181-182.

19. Lust, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 179-180.

which is behind a number of words connected with the meaning ‘green, greenage, herbs, herbage’.²⁰ Although dictionaries normally give them as two separate roots, it is not so clear that they are such, and they were not perceived as intimately connected, semantically.

Maltese Translation Tradition There exist at least two editions of Saydon’s translation of these two lines or cola; the first was the one that was published in pamphlet format in 1949 when the book appeared as *Ktieb Għanjet l-Għanjet*²¹ and the second edition was the one that appeared in 1990 in the second volume of the elegant three volume *Bibbja Saydon*.²² The differences between the two editions are few and slight though not unimportant. Saydon himself is reputed to have been the author not only of the 1949 text but also of the changes that appeared posthumously forty years later in the second edition under the editorship of Rev Carmel Attard. Rev Attard is reputed to have prepared the second edition having in hand a number of suggestions for change prepared by Saydon himself. This list of changes has never been produced so far whenever request for it was made. The main difference between the first and the second edition of the translation of Songs 1,3a concerns the parsing and the rendering of the adverbial phrase in the Hebrew text לְרִיחָהּ . In the 1949 edition which was strictly a formal translation, Saydon rendered this phrase by another adverbial phrase: *għar-riħa tagħha*, ‘for its fragrance’. This means that he parsed the *lamedt* as indicating a case of *casus pendens* (cfr. Longman III). In the second edition, the same word becomes the subject of the entire clause: *Ir-riħa ta’ fweħatek ħelwa*, ‘the fragrance of your scent is sweet’. While in the second edition the same vocabulary is employed that was used in the first edition, the two translations are not saying the same thing. The subject of the first edition is as in the Hebrew text *fweħatek* which rendered Hebrew שִׁמְנֵיךָ , ‘your odours’, which is also the subject of the colon. The predicate is made up mainly of the adjective *ħelwin*, ‘sweet’ which becomes *ħelwa* in the second edition since there the subject is the feminine *ir-riħa*. What is the difference between the two editions? In the first edition the poet makes a statement upon the bodily scents of the male lover while in the second edition the statement concerns the fragrance of the lover. In the context, the first edition fits better than the translation of the second edition as the statement is more directly upon the lover himself whom the female speaker is addressing.

20. Koehler-Baumgartner, *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1995, 440-441

21. The Empire Press, Malta 1949.

22. Edizzjoni Societas Doctrinae Christianae, Malta 1990.

Having been involved in lovemaking before, she experiences closely his bodily scents which she compares to a strong but sweet fragrance. This is the language of love that is capable of transforming everything.

In this line, the subject, as we have seen, is *fwiehatek*, the plural of the feminine noun *fwieħa*, ‘good smell’ (Aquilina, MED, I, 297). This noun derives from the root FWH, the root beneath the verb *fah*, ‘to be fragrant, smell sweet’. Aquilina cites the saying *Mhux il-ward kollu ifuħ* ‘Not all roses are fragrant’ (Ibid., 296). *Fwieħatek* in this text denotes the natural odours of the lover who is being addressed directly. The predicate in the clause is made up of the adjectival *helwin*, ‘sweet smelling’, that renders the Hebrew טוֹבֵיחַיִם, while the other element in the predicate is the phrase *ghar-riħa* which may be translated ‘for (its) fragrance’. This translation is based upon traditional parsing of the Hebrew text as one may see from Longman III’s commentary²³ and Ogden and Zogbo’s ‘Handbook’ on the Song of Songs²⁴, which parsing often reads the phrase as a case of ‘casus pendens’.²⁵ Modern exegesis though tends either to ignore in translation the ^ל, as is the case of RSV: ‘your anointing oils are fragrant’ or as we have seen it is taken as a marker of comparison: ‘your scents are like fragrance’.

In the second edition of Saydon’s translation, *Ir-riħa ta’ fweħatek helwa*, ‘the fragrance of your scents is sweet’, the headword of the adverbial phrase *ghar-riħa* ‘for, as regards, its fragrance’ becomes the subject of the entire line: *Ir-riħa ta’ fweħatek helwa*. This structural and syntactical change involved the adaptation of the predicate, the adjectival *helwa*, to the new morphological reality: the subject is no longer the feminine plural *fweħatek* ‘your (bodily) odours’ but the feminine singular *ir-riħa*, and hence the predicate *helwin* had to change to *helwa*. One should perhaps add that while in the 1949 edition vv.1-3 are taken to form part of one strophe that comprises vv1-4, in the second edition (1990), verse 3 with its three cola are seen as forming one strophe together with line 2b.

In the translation tradition we are studying, Barbara’s translation published in 1984 comes next, though we cannot be sure yet when precisely the translation of

23. Temper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, The New International Commentary of the Old Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2001, 90.

24. Graham S. Ogden & Lynell Zogbo, *A Handbook on the Song of Songs*, United Bible Societies, New York 1998, 20-21.

25. Cfr. Paul Joüon & T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma 2006, §156.

Karm Zammit was published as no date is furnished in the volume itself though it appeared in the early eighties. These two translations were almost contemporaneous although one may see influences from *Il-Bibbja* on Karm Zammit's *Il-Bibbja Mqaddsa*. One should remember that before the publication of the entire Bible in one volume in 1984, the Malta Bible Society had already translated and published all the texts that were being read in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church (1967-1978).²⁶ Hence a substantial part of the Song of Songs was available to Zammit though this cannot yet be proven.

Barbara restructured the text of both lines. He introduced at least one change of vocabulary from Saydon's translation. Barbara kept the same subject of Saydon's 1949 rendering, *fwehatek* with a slight perhaps dialectical variation, *fwiħatek*²⁷: *fwiħatek fihom ġħaxqa ġħar-riħa tagħhom* 'your odours are pleasant for their fragrance'. In this rendering, all members of the predicate in Saydon's translation undergo change. The noun clause in Saydon becomes a verbal clause in Barbara with the verbal element being the phrase *fihom ġħaxqa*. This verbal phrase is made up of the preposition *fi* qualified by the personal pronoun of the third person plural; followed by a noun the preposition *fi* roughly conveys the idea of 'there is.....in him/it' (Aquilina MED,1 333). When the morphological object of the construction *fihom* happens to be the noun *ġħaxqa*, the new formation carries the meaning 'to be pleasant'. Aquilina provides some examples of idiomatic uses of this construction: *din il-familja fiħa ġħaxqa*, 'it is a joy to see a family like this' (Aquilina, MED,2,989). With this in mind, one may say that Barbara's rendering is saying that the male lover's body odours are really pleasant *ġħar-riħa tagħhom* 'for their fragrance'. In other words, Barbara renders in the same manner as Saydon's the Hebrew phrase לְרִיחֵךָ; but while Saydon like the Hebrew text puts emphasis on the phrase *ġħar-riħa* by putting the phrase at the beginning of the line, Barbara adds the possessive pronoun *tagħhom* to better identify that the fragrance belongs to his bodily odours, but does not put the emphasis on this phrase; rather the emphasis is put on the bodily odours of the male lover as the phrase *ġħar-riħa tagħhom* is put in its place within the clause, just after the verbal element within the predicate.

Karm Zammit's strategy in his translation of these two lines seems to have included two decisions: a) He decided to disregard completely the Authorised Version as the only source for his translation, and to follow Saydon, and possibly

26. Cfr. the presentation to the *Il-Bibbja* by its general editor Mgr Prof Carmel Sant on p. 10.

27. Aquilina gives the plural of the nominal *fwieħa*, fragrance, as *fwejġah* or *fwiħat*

Barbara. The AV translation reads: 'Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth'.²⁸ One significant difference between this translation of AV and Saydon is that in AV there is explicitly expressed the link between lines 3a and 3b. Zammit follows Saydon in this:

Zammit: *il-fwejjah tieghek għandhom riħa li tgħaxxaq*
Your perfumes have a pleasurable scent

Saydon: *għar-riħa fwieħatek helwin*
For (their)fragrance your scents are sweet.

Barbara: *fwieħatek fihom għaxxaq għar-riħa tagħhom*
Your scents are pleasant for their fragrance.

Comments: a) One may perhaps say that Zammit's version is Saydon's, adopted to a prose format. Following AV, Zammit translated the Song of Songs as if it were prose, which is an initial mistake. Saydon's subject *fweħatek* becomes *il-fwejjah tieghek* (your scents) in Zammit. This means that the one word in Saydon becomes two in Zammit. b) On the other hand, like Barbara, Zammit changes Saydon's nominal clause into a 'verbal clause', though strictly speaking no verb is used in either translation, but two prepositional components; this verbal element in the two translations, as well as the syntactical structure the two translators employ differ. Barbara employs the preposition *fi* qualified by the pronominal suffix referring back to the subject *fwieħatek* 'your scents' probably meaning also for Barbara the bodily odours of the male lover; this *fi* structure substitutes the verbal element in the predicate. In Zammit another preposition is used to cover the same grammatical function, the preposition *għand* qualified by the pronominal suffix that refers back to *il-fwejjah tieghek* that substitutes Saydon's *fweħatek* 'your scents' again denoting bodily scents.

b) The adjective טוֹבִים in the clause's predicate has been rendered differently in the three translations though not completely such. Saydon preferred the sobriety of the Hebrew text and rendered the adjective by another adjective: *helwin*. Barbara has maintained *fwieħatek* as the subject of the clause but rendered טוֹבִים by the prepositional phrase *fihom għaxxaq* that consists of the preposition *fi* qualified by the pronominal suffix of the third person plural referring back to the subject

28. Holy Bible. King James Version. Standard Text Edition. Cum Privilegio. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985(?)

fwihatek, and the nominal *ghaxqa* that functions as object of the preposition *fi* that governs it. Literally Barbara says ‘your scents, there is in them a pleasure for their fragrance’. The nominal *ghaxqa* derives from the root *ghaxaq* which is not found as such in Maltese but it is under the verb of the second form *ghaxxaq* ‘to delight, make one very happy’. Aquilina cites the expression *ghaxqet lil kulhadd bi gmielha* ‘with her good looks she delighted everyone’ (MED, 2, 989). Zammit employs another construction. He uses the preposition *ghand*; among the many uses listed by Aquilina (MED, 2, 967-968) of this preposition we find that that it expresses possession when it is qualified by the possessive pronominal suffixes: *ghandi ktieb li inti m’ghandekx bhalu*, ‘I have got a book the like of which you do not have’. This seems to be the meaning of preposition in Zammit’s text: *ghandhom riha li tghaxxaq*, your scents have a fragrance. The characteristics of the fragrance and hence of the scents are given in the relative clause that qualifies the nominal *riha*, so the predicate of the clause is feminine singular to agree with the relative pronoun *li* that refers to *riha*, so *tghaxxaq*, ‘delights, makes happy’ (Aquilina, MED, 2, 989). This lover’s personal odours have a fragrance in them that gives pleasure and delight to anyone who scents it. His presence then was delightful.

5.2.3 Songs 1,3b

a) **Exegesis** This second colon in verse 3 continues the **קִי** structure that was opened in verse 2b. On the literary level it picks up at least two features from the previous colon in the same verse: the nominal **שְׂמֵנֶיךָ** is repeated though here it is not qualified by the pronominal suffixes as in line 3a so that one presumes that it denotes in this colon something different than the **שְׂמֵנֶיךָ** does in the previous colon, where it means the bodily odours of the male lover. In this colon the word seems to carry a wider meaning and probably it refers to scents in general. The subject in this colon is the nominal **שְׂמֵנֶיךָ**, ‘your name’, which again refers to the male lover, just like the subject **שְׂמֵנֶיךָ** in line 3a. The male lover’s name is **תִּנְרֶק** **שְׂמֵן**. The clause is nominal so that the verbal element, the existential ‘is’ has to be supplied by the reader. From the context, we know that the female lover is not saying what her mate has been in the past but what he is now for her. It is not completely clear what the relationship between the two lexemes in the predicate is. From its position in the phrase, **תִּנְרֶק** may be taken as an adjective qualifying **שְׂמֵן**; in the textual tradition, ever since vocalization was introduced into the consonantal text, it has been taken as a passive participle. This would mean that the initial **ת** is parsed as being a radical and not a morphological element. Unfortunately, no word with the radicals **תִּרֶק** exists except this word here. From the time of the Septuagint

translation, then, scholars accepted a slight emendation of the text where the initial ת is emended to מ and thus the unparsable תוֹרֵךְ becomes מוֹרֵךְ: a passive participle of a verb identified as רִיק, 'make empty, empty out' (BDB, 937-938), found only in the hiphil form. Actually our text has been parsed as the imperfect hophal with the emendation changing to perfect participle.²⁹

b) *Translation Tradition* There has been no change between the first and the second edition of Saydon's translation of Songs 1,3b: *fwieħa msawwba hu ismek*. The only variation in the 1990 edition from that of the 1949 edition touches the orthography of the word *msawwba* which in the second edition becomes *msawba*. This change was done not by Saydon but by the *Kummissjoni Bibbja Saydon* that was responsible for preparing the text of this second edition for publication. For orthographical issues this commission felt the need to abandon Saydon and follow that of the *Akkademja tal-Malti* which in the meantime had assumed the role of 'the authority' although no one had given this institution such authority.³⁰ The present writer thinks that this decision was mistaken because for Saydon the issue of the orthography of his translation was not a secondary one.

In Saydon's translation as in the Hebrew, the emphasis was put on the predicate *fwieħa msawwba* which is thus anteposed within the clause, with the subject, *ismek*, being put at the end of the clause. However, contrary to Hebrew, Saydon felt the need to add the existential *hu* to link the predicate to the subject. This constitutes the verbal element in the predicate. Especially the third person pronouns may be used as existential verbs and substitute what in English is done by the verbs 'is and are'.³¹ Why Saydon felt this need is difficult to tell since as a nominal clause *fwieħa msawwba ismek* would have been grammatical and would have made good sense. Perhaps for Saydon the line would have been slightly shorter than the other lines in the strophe.

Barbara's rendering of this line differs from Saydon's in several ways: *ismek żejt li jifterragh*, 'your name is oil that is/may be poured'. A few comments: a)

29. *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brill, Leiden 1996, 1227-1228. For a fuller discussion the reader is referred to Longman III, *Song of Songs*, 90.

30. This situation changed when the Government in 2004 established *Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti* which started studying orthographical issues and publishing its *Deċiżjonijiet* in the *Gazzetta tal-Gvern* hence becoming public and official. See *Deċiżjonijiet*, 1 issued on 25th July 2008. For the decision of the *Kummissjoni Bibbja Saydon* one may consult 'Kelmejn Qabel' *Bibbja Saydon*, vol 1, Edizzjoni Societas Doctrinae Christianae, Malta 1977, p.1.

31. Cfr. A Cremona, *Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, II, Lux Press, Malta 1962, §§514-517

This version is much probably closer to prose than to poetry. This statement is based on the word order used and on the use of the relative clause, both syntactical features very much used in prose, though they may be used in poetry as well. b) The translation of the Hebrew term שָׁמֶן by the word *zejt*, literally ‘oil’ may not have been very fortunate because *zejt* has to be qualified by the phrase *tal-fwieħa* in order to render the concept of ‘scent or perfume’ (Aquilina, MED, II,1606). He could have rendered the Hebrew phrase מוֹרֵק שָׁמֶן *zejt il-fwieħa mferragh* and he would have avoided most or at least some of the problems mentioned. The rendering of מוֹרֵק by the relative clause *li jiferragh* was again not fortunate as the use of the imperfect would mean that the oil is being poured out or may be poured out³² not that it is already poured out, as the passive participle hophal would imply. The male lover’s name was seen by the female lover as annoying oil that has been poured out, and one would encounter his name before one meets the lover in person. His fame moves ahead of him. But if this is the meaning of the passive participle מוֹרֵק, as the text is now emended, Barbara’s rendering is not altogether precise. c) The verb *jiferragh* seems to derive from the root FRGH and from the verb *forogh* (Vassalli) or *feragh* (Vincenzo Mifsud Bonnici) ‘to become empty, to ebb’.³³ Barbara may have perhaps preferred the imperfect *jiferragh* because the passive participle *mifruħ* of the verb *feragh* is rather strange and unusual. But the weaknesses of this translation strategy have not been avoided by this move.

Zammit translated Songs 1,3b in this way: *Ismek hu bħal fwieħa msawba*. When this version of the translation is compared to that of Saydon, one can easily see that Zammit copied Saydon, or rather gave a prose copy of Saydon’s poetic text. Saydon had translated this line as *Fwieħa msawwba hu ismek*. In Zammit, Saydon’s metaphor becomes a simile through the use of the comparative preposition *bħal* (Aquilina, MED, I, 112-113). Zammit employs syntactical features that belong to prose rather than to poetry; these features include word order (cfr. Cremona, *Tagħlim*, 233 § 578), the use of the pronoun *hu* (Cremona, *Tagħlim*, 234, §584), and the use of the comparative preposition in the phrase *bħal fwieħa* within the predicate. The passive participle מוֹרֵק resulting from the change of the initial ך to ך to make the cluster agree with the LXX parsing and translation as ἐκκενωθεν,³⁴ ‘poured’, Zammit rendered exactly like Saydon though for the orthography he followed the writing of the Akkademja tal-Malti, *msawba*.

32. Cfr. Cremona, *Tagħlim*, §§697-699.

33. Aquilina, MED, I, 356.

34. Cfr. J.Lust & E.Eynikel & K. Hauspie, *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 2003, 181-182

5.2.4 Songs 1,3c

a) **Exegesis** The poet immediately shows his mind that with verse 1,3c a first part of his poem comes to a close. With this line, actually, the first strophe comes to a close. The linguistic sign for this textual division is the line initial composite adverb, **עַל־כֵּן** ‘therefore’, which intuitively links this line to what went before it in the poem. According to BDB(p. 487), the use of this adverb implies that the cause is being inferred from the effect; that the male lover is very popular with the female population of the place where the female lover lives because of what she says about him in the previous lines. The texts of Is 26,14; 61,7; Jer 2,33;5,2 are given as other examples where this morphological structure is employed in this sense. On the other hand, the **כִּי** structure which starts at verse 2b and controls the three lines of verse 3, implies that the female lover that is speaking in the text, asks for his lovemaking in verse 1a for the same reasons given in the **כִּי** clauses in vv.2b-3. She is one of the girls, **עַלְמֹת**, that fell (we have still to discuss how to understand and translate the verb (**אַהֲבִינֶה**) in love with him. Verse 1,3c has to be seen as the concluding line of the first strophe and as containing the logical conclusion of the previous lines, and the adverb **עַל־כֵּן** should be translated as ‘therefore’.

Besides the adverbial **עַל־כֵּן**, the clause in Songs 1,3c is made up of the nominal **עַלְמֹת** and the verbal cluster **אַהֲבִינֶה** which consists of the qatal form of the verb **אַהַב** qualified by the pronominal suffix of the second person singular masculine which in this context indicates the object of the verb ‘to love’. Abraham’s servant in Gen 24 expected to meet an **עַלְמָה** who was supposed to draw water by herself from the well and would draw for the servant himself and for his beasts (Gen 24,43), while Moses’s sister was a young lass who was thought by her mother to be able to keep watch over baby Moses whom the mother had to abandon, and who eventually was smart enough to suggest to Pharaoh’s daughter that she finds for her a Jewish woman capable of giving suck to the crying baby(Ex 2,8). Both ladies are depicted as being smart and capable young women; the servant of Abraham expected the woman to be able of drawing water from the well by herself and of servicing his animals without being asked to do so. Pharaoh’s daughter had no doubt that the young woman who addressed her could find the woman who would give suck to her newly found ‘son’ whom she had just adopted. The term **עַלְמָה** denotes a young woman; in our text this woman is capable of falling in love with a young man. Of course, lady Lover is not saying that her male lover was in love with other young women; she is simply saying that he is so smart that young

women fall in love with him; this means that if she herself lost her wits for him, she is not the only one. The statement is supposed to be a treat for the male lover. Given his many good qualities, described in the previous lines, the female lover speaker fell in love with this young man as did all the girls of her neighbourhood.

The concluding lexeme in the line is the verb אָהַבְתִּיָּהּ which actually is a cluster made up of qatal form of the verb אָהַב qualified by the morphological suffixes of the third person plural and by pronominal suffix of the second person masculine singular. The verb אָהַב actually means 'to love' and it may be used in various contexts (cfr. BDB, 12-13). In the OT corpus it is found applied also for the love between man and woman, with either the man being the subject (Gen 24, 67; 29, 20.30; Dt 21, 15-16; Hos 3, 1) or the woman (1 Sam 18, 20; Cant 1, 3.4.7; 3, 1, 2, 3, 4). It would seem that in 2 Sam 13, 1.4.15 the verb refers to sexual desire. In our text, Lady Lover can only mean by the verb 'love between man and woman in general'. She cannot mean sexual love. She would not conceive the girls in her neighbourhood waiting up for their turn to have sexual intercourse with her own lover! She is actually complimenting herself for having fallen in love and won the most handsome man in her neighbourhood!

With this statement about the popularity of her lover in the world of the young females in the writer/speaker's neighbourhood, the first strophe (Songs 1, 1-3) comes to a close. In the strophe, the female lover presents her lover, his beauty, the pleasantness of his body and his personality, and his popularity among the womenfolk of her neighbourhood. One may say that while the lines in verses 2b and 3 give the reasons for her deep desire of him expressed in verse 2a, verse 3c expresses the effect upon the womenfolk of the speaker's neighbourhood, of which the lady lover forms part. This young man is too smart and beautiful not to be noticed and loved by all the women who knew him.

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