

WASFS outside the Bible

Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen 20.7), where Sarah is described:

. . . how irresistible and beautiful is the image of her face; how lovely h[er] foreh[ead, and] soft the hair of her head! How graceful are her eyes, and how precious her nose; every feature of her face is radiating beauty! How lovely is her breast, and how beautiful her white complexion! As for her arms, how beautiful they are! And her hands, how perfect they are! Every view of her hands is stimulating! How graceful are her palms, and how long and thin all the fingers of her hands! Her legs are of such beauty, and her thighs so perfectly apportioned! There is not a virgin or bride who enters the bridal chamber more beautiful than she. Her beauty surpasses that of all women, since the height of her beauty soars above them all! And along-side all this beauty she possesses great wisdom. Everything about her is lovely!

From the Akkadian Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu:

[Let me pro]vide a new chariot for you [.....]
[whose] thighs are a gazelle in the plain,
[whose] ankle bones are an apple of Siman,
whose heels are obsidian,
whose whole being is a tablet of lapis lazuli!

Joseph and Aseneth 18:9:

Aseneth . . . saw her face in the water. And it was like the sun and her eyes (were) like a rising morning star, and her cheeks like fields of the Most High, and on her cheeks (there was) red (color) like the son of man's blood, and her lips (were) like a rose of life coming out of its foliage, and her teeth like fighting men lined up for a fight, and the hair of her head (was) like a vine in the paradise of God prospering in its fruits, and her neck like an all-variegated cypress, and her breasts (were) like the mountains of the Most High God.

A Greek example is *Anacreontea* 16, an ekphrastic description of a woman:

“Come, best of painters! Paint, best of painters, master of the Rhodian art! Paint my absent girl according to my instructions. First paint her soft black hair; and if the wax [on which encaustic painting was done] is able, make it smell of perfume. Paint her whole cheek and then her ivory brow beneath her dark hair. Do not part her eyebrows nor run them together, but let her keep, as in real life, the black rims of her eyes meeting imperceptibly. Now make her eyes as they are, from fire, both flashing, like Athena's, and moist, like Cythere's [Aphrodite's]. Paint her nose and her cheeks, mingling roses and cream. Paint her lips like Persuasion's, provoking kisses. Under her soft chin let all the Graces fly around her marble-white neck. Dress the rest of her in robes of light purple, but let her skin show

through a little to prove the quality of her body. Enough—I can see her! Soon, wax, you will be talking too.” (LCL 143: 182–185)

From “The Story of the Porter and the Ladies of Baghdad” in *A Thousand and One Nights*.

The young lady stopped at this door, and knocked gently: whereupon both its leaves were opened, and the porter, looking to see who opened it, found it to be a damsel of tall stature, highbomed, fair and beautiful, and of elegant form, with a forehead like the bright new moon, eyes like those of gazelles, eyebrows like the new moon of Ramadan, cheeks resembling anemones, and a mouth like the seal of Suleyman: her countenance was like the full moon in its splendour, and the forms of her bosom resembled two pomegranates of equal size. When the porter beheld her, she captivated his reason, . . .

The Body Description is so well-worn that Shakespeare pokes fun at it in his Sonnet 130.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

from Dolly Parton's song, “Jolene”:

Your beauty is beyond compare
With flaming locks of auburn hair
With ivory skin and eyes of emerald green
Your smile is like a breath of spring
Your voice is soft like summer rain
And I cannot compete with you
Jolene

The description of the high priest Simon as he came out of the Temple (Sir 50:5–12). Included are radiant celestial images, flowers, gold and precious stones, and several types of trees.

How glorious he was, surrounded by the people,
 as he came out of the house of the curtain.
⁶ Like the morning star among the clouds,
 like the full moon at the festal season;
⁷ like the sun shining on the temple of the Most High,
 like the rainbow gleaming in splendid clouds;
⁸ like roses in the days of first fruits,
 like lilies by a spring of water,
 like a green shoot on Lebanon on a summer day;
⁹ like fire and incense in the censer,
 like a vessel of hammered gold
 studded with all kinds of precious stones;
¹⁰ like an olive tree laden with fruit,
 and like a cypress towering in the clouds.
¹¹ When he put on his glorious robe
 and clothed himself in perfect splendor,
 when he went up to the holy altar,
 he made the court of the sanctuary glorious.

¹² When he received the portions from the hands of the priests,
 as he stood by the hearth of the altar
 with a garland of brothers around him,
 he was like a young cedar on Lebanon
 surrounded by the trunks of palm trees.

Paint my beloved Bathyllus according to my prescription: make his hair shine, dark beneath but with the ends lightened by the sun; add curling locks falling freely in disorder and let them lie where they wish. Let his soft dewy forehead be garlanded with eyebrows darker than snakes. Let his black eyes be a mixture of ferocity and serenity, taking their ferocity from Ares, their serenity from beautiful Cythere [Aphrodite], so that he may inspire terror and also hopeful suspense. Make his downy cheek as rosy as an apple, and, if possible, add a blush like that of Modesty. I do not yet know how you are to make his lip soft and full of persuasion: but let the wax [on which encaustic painting was done] itself have everything, talking silently. After his face make an ivory neck finer than that of Adonis. Give him the chest and two hands of Hermes, the thighs of Polydeuces, the belly of Dionysus¹; above his soft thighs, thighs with raging fire in them, put a simple member that

¹ Adonis, the type of youthful beauty; Hermes, the ideal young athlete of the sculptors; Polydeuces (or Pollux), the boxer; Dionysus, the youthful god of later Greek art.

already desires the Paphian [Aphrodite]. But your art is grudging: you cannot show his back; that would have been better. Why should I describe the feet? Take your fee, as much as you ask. Take down this [picture of] Apollo and create Bathyllus; and if ever you come to Samos, paint Phoebus from Bathyllus.² (*Anacreontea* 17; LCL 143: 184–187).

² The poet is jokingly telling the painter to replace the picture of Apollo, the most beautiful of the gods, with the picture of Bathyllus, and that Bathyllus should be the model for a future portrait of Phoebus = Apollo.