

Lexicons insist that the peculiar sense of حَوْر is that it means the contrast of the black and white in the eye, particularly in the eye of a gazelle or a cow (cf. *LA*, v, 298; and *TA*, iii, 160). Some, however, insist equally on the whiteness of the body being the reference of the word, e.g. al-Azhari in *TA*, "a woman is not called حوراء unless along with the whiteness of the eye there is whiteness of body." One gathers from the discussion of the Lexicographers that they were somewhat uncertain as to the actual meaning of the word, and in fact both *LA*. and *TA*. quote the statement of so great an authority as al-Aṣma'i that he did not know what was the meaning of حور as connected with the eye.

The Commentators give us no help with the word as they merely set forth the same material as we find in the Lexicons. They prefer the meaning which refers it to the eye as more suited to the Qur'ānic passages, and their general opinion is well summarized in as-Sijistānī, 117.

Fortunately, the use of the word can be illustrated from the old poetry, for it was apparently in quite common use in pre-Islamic Arabia. Thus in 'Abid b. al-Abrāṣ, vii, 24 (ed. Lyall) we find the verse—

واوانس مثل الدمي حور العيون قد استينا

"And maidens like ivory statues,<sup>1</sup> white of eyes, did we capture" and again in 'Adī b. Zaid.

هَبَّحَ الداءُ في فؤادك حورٌ ناعماتٌ بجانب الملطاط

"They have touched your heart, these tender white maidens, beside the river bank."

and so in a verse of Qa'nab in the *Mukhtārāt*, viii, 7, we read—

وفي الخدور لوان الدار جامعة حور اوانس في اصواتها غنن

"And in the women's chamber when the house is full, are white maidens with charming voices."

In all these cases we are dealing with human women, and except in the verse of 'Abid the word حور could quite well mean white-

<sup>1</sup> So in al-A'shā we find حور كمثل الدمي, cf. Geyer, *Zwei Gedichte*, i, 196 = *Diwān*, xxxiii, 11.