Nuptial Motifs in Composition: A Key to the Interpretation of the Song of Songs

RENATA JASNOS
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow
renata.jasnos@ignatianum.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-4954-3634

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore the references to nuptial customs found in the Song of Songs as well as their place in relation to the structure of the text. The first stage of analysis consists of identifying various types of these references, while the second stage involved analysing and evaluating their positioning within the composition of the Song of Songs as an expression of the editorial intent of the biblical writers. The study has used elements of form analysis and lexical analysis as well as a comparative analysis of biblical and non-biblical/sub-biblical texts. The analysis revealed that the most important places in the structure of the Song of Songs are allocated to the so-called "poetic episodes," which have been distinguished earlier, concerning the different stages of nuptials – engagement negotiations, wedding procession, wedding feast and consummation of the marriage. Therefore, they constitute a point of reference for the interpretation of the remaining songs and at the same time the teachings of the sages in the Song of Songs.

Keywords: love, nuptials, wedding songs, mohar, wedding procession, bridesmaids, bride, poetic episode, teachings of sages

To Rev. Professor Tadeusz Brzegowy,
my mentor and the one who revealed the beauty
and depth of the Song of Songs to Polish readers,
on the occasion of his 80th birthday

The Song of Songs has always been of interest to scholars and has raised numerous questions about the way it should be interpreted. In the early Christian tradition, it was part of the current of allegorical interpretation of the relationship between Christ and his people. Yet, a number of arguments suggest that this was not the interpretation of the Songs that was intended by the biblical writers.[1] There is no indication that at the time the New Testament books were written, the Song of Songs was interpreted allegorically. Rabbinic texts from the turn of the first and second centuries

---

[1] Brzegowy, "Ku dosłownej interpretacji," 67–95; Garrett – House, *Song of Songs*, 74–76; Stoop-van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 4.

C.E. testify that in Jewish circles at the time, a naturalistic and literal understanding of the Song was well known.[2]

Disputes concerning the interpretation of the Songs of Solomon resulted in numerous studies and various attempts to read the poem. Also, a number of publications have been written by Polish biblical scholars; these were presented in an article by Waldemar Chrostowski.[3] In turn, Tadeusz Brzegowy made a special contribution to the Polish biblical scholarship on the Song of Songs.[4] His discovery that the literal meaning of the text is rooted in the intentions of the biblical writers paved the way to a search for a deeper meaning of the biblical praise of the mystery of human love.

Petronella W. T. Stoop-van Paridon rightly noted that "the variety of opinions on the way the SofS should be interpreted is exceptionally wide."[5] She pointed out that interpretations of the Song of Songs "range across a wide spectrum, from renderings of a highly spiritual nature on the one hand, to those which on the other hand could perhaps even be described as pornographic."[6] This biblical book inspires exploration, stirs emotions and is even sometimes called erotic.

Its most difficult issue is "problematic love." Firstly, love is presented in a naturalistic manner. Lech Stefaniak wrote over half a century ago that "sanctity and eroticism cannot be absolutely reconciled."[7] This problem has been partially overcome: today it is emphasized that, compared with the love poetry of the ancient Near East, in the Song sensual intimacy is shown in a sublime and discreet manner. "The frequent use of 'hidden language' is striking. Consequently, the erotic/sexual passages are not offensive. On the contrary, a decent respectful reserve is evident here."[8]

The relationship between the lovers seems to be even more problematic. Although there are allusions to weddings in the Song, there are also images of lovers who are clearly not married (7:11–8:3). Jennifer Andruska asks directly: married or

---

2   Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 4.
3   Three parts of the publication present Polish translations, commentaries and various issues concerning the Song. See Chrostowski, "Pieśń nad pieśniami," 7–21. It is impossible to mention them all, but some are worth noting: the comprehensive studies by Tadeusz Brzegowy (*Pisma mądrościowe Starego Testamentu* and *Pieśń nad pieśniami*) and Julian Warzecha ("Miłość potężna jak śmierć") as well as numerous articles by Krzysztof Bardski, who explored symbolism and analysed allegorical interpretation and intertextual influences: "Duchowa interpretacja Pieśni nad Pieśniami" (2008); "Czy Oblubienica rzeczywiście «znalazła pokój»?" (2016), and others.
4   Brzegowy opened a new chapter of Polish expressive interpretation of the Song, publishing a number of scholarly articles under telling titles: "Jak rozumieć Pieśń nad Pieśniami?" (1985); "Ku dosłownej interpretacji Pieśni nad Pieśniami" (1988); "«Miłość mocniejsza niż śmierć». Egzegeza Pnp 8,6–7" (1993–1994); "Miłość małżeńska według Pieśni nad Pieśniami" (1993–1994); "Złożoność i jedność literacka Pieśni nad Pieśniami" (1995) and "Pierwszy poemat opisujący w Pieśni nad pieśniami (4,1–7)" (1996).
5   Stoop-van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 4.
6   Stoop-van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 5; Cf. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 37.
7   Stefaniak, "Pieśni nad Pieśniami," 194.
8   Stoop-van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 9. Barbiero (*Song of Songs*, 505) referred to the work of Giovanni Garbini, who attempted to reconstruct the original versions of the songs and assessed them as more erotic.

unmarried lovers? In her opinion, the allusions to marriage are vague and insufficient, so the thesis that the relationship was a marriage is not supported by the text.[9]

1. Problem and Purpose: Research Method and Strategy

What kind of love, then, is the subject and message of the book? What did the biblical writers intend to teach? What is the didactic purpose of this particular book? André Lemaire argues that the entire Old Testament was used for the purpose of educating.[10] The Song of Songs, attributed to Solomon (1:1), was included in a collection of writings which received sapiential editing. Jenifer Andruska even believes that "like all wisdom literature, the Song is didactic" and treats individual songs as instructions.[11] What, then, was it supposed to instruct about? Why does the Song seem to combine the freedom of customs in (experiencing) love on the one hand and allusions to nuptials on the other? The purpose of this study is to answer two questions. The first one concerns the kind of references to weddings in the text and the customs connected with them. The second is related to the place and role within the Song held by terms, idioms, motifs and other recognized allusions to nuptials.

At the first stage of analysis, various types of references to a wedding are identified. I have looked for terms, phrases, idioms as well as images, motifs and other allusions that refer to customs associated with weddings. Elements of form analysis and lexical analysis as well as a comparative analysis of biblical and extra-biblical texts have been used.

In order to evaluate the arrangement and interrelationship of the contents, it is important to have an understanding of the basic stages of the process of developing literary compositions in the ancient Near East. Therefore, the most important findings in this regard are briefly introduced.

The second step is to examine the layout/position of the identified references (terms, idioms, motifs and others) in relation to the structure of the text. At this point, it is necessary to recall the findings regarding the structure of the Song. Then I will attempt to assess the place of these elements in the text as an expression of the editorial intent of the biblical writers.

---

9   Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*, 5–6. Cf. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 38.
10   According to Lemaire (*Les écoles et la formation de la Bible*, 49–54, 72–85), biblical texts were written for didactic and educational purposes.
11   The author emphasized the didacticism of the Songs, analysing their relationship with the sentences of the Book of Proverbs and looking for their educational dimension (Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*, 35–41).

2. References and Allusions to Nuptials

The first stage of analysis is to determine what references there are to nuptials in the Song. Various references and allusions to weddings and customs associated with them can be found in the poem. Some are explicit, others can be guessed at. They also differ in frequency, some being repeated and others appearing only once in the text. Reading the text of the poem, one can easily recognize the most obvious references, i.e., terms directly connected with marriage and nuptials.

2.1. Terminology

a.   Nuptials

The Hebrew word חתנה means "marriage, bridal or wedding,"[12] and is related to the term חתן, meaning "groom, newlywed or son-in-law."[13] The term חתנה is used once in the phrase "the day of the nuptials," in the description of King Solomon's procession: "Go out and look, daughters of Zion, at King Solomon … on the day of his nuptials, on the day of the joy of his heart" (3:11). The phrase חתנתו ביום finds here its parallel, ביום שמחת לבו. For the groom, "the day of the nuptials" is synonymous with "the day of the joy of his heart."[14]

b.   Bride

The word כלה can be translated as "fiancée, bride or newly wedded wife"[15] and hence in connection with the successive stages of getting married. The term is used as many as six times in the poem, all of which appear in one block (4:8.9.10.11.12; 5:1).

2.2. Literary Forms

In addition to the terms that leave no doubt as to their meanings and connections to weddings, literary forms alluding to customs associated with marriage can be recognized in the text of the poem. These include nuptial vows and wedding songs.

a.   The Wedding Oath

The nuptial oath was an oral declaration which confirmed the marriage contract. It was pronounced by the man. Verified in Aramaic wedding contracts found in the Jewish colony in Elephantine, Egypt, the oath was "She is my wife, and I am her

---

12   BDB, 368; KB, 345.
13   BDB, 368.
14   Pope, *Song of Songs*, 448–451; Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 156–157; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 150.
15   Additionally, the term can mean a daughter-in-law, but exegetes generally agree that in the Song it is used in its primary meaning (Zorell, *Lexicon hebraicum*, 359; KB, 438; cf. Garrett – House, *Song of Songs*, 193).

husband from this day forward forever."[16] It emphasized and, as it were, established the bond of marital belonging within the nuptials. The oath is repeated in the Song of Songs; it neither refers to marriage nor informs us of who he and she are to each other, but it is difficult not to notice the allusion to the wedding vow.

The oath emphasizes mutual belonging, and since in the poem the woman is the dominant person, as it were, it is also not surprising that it is her and not him who utters it: דודי לי ואני לו (2:16a). Only one noun, דודי, appears in this phrase, which is matched by the reflexive preposition אני. The phrase is completed by the preposition ל, supported by the possessive prepositions י and ו. The format is very simple: my beloved for me, and I for him, translated as "my beloved is mine, and I am his." In 6:3a, the vows contain the reversed order, and the phrase is somewhat differently expressed: אני לדודי ודודי לי (6:3a; cf. 7:11[10]).

This time the betrothed first affirms their belonging to the other: "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine."[17] Importantly, she also speaks of her belonging to him using the metaphor of a vineyard: "behold, before me is my vineyard, my own," or translated more literally, "my vineyard is mine, before me" (8:12a). This passage will be analysed in the following section.

b. Wedding Songs – *waṣfs*

The Song of Songs, as most exegetes believe, was built upon various love songs. Some of these have been found to have parallels in the Arabic *waṣf* poems, which were used to glorify the beauty of the newlyweds over the course of a multi-day wedding. There is even a theory that interprets the entire Song of Songs in light of the customs associated with the seven days of weddings, called the "wedding week theory."[18]

The songs of the *waṣf* have distinctive features that can be recognized in the selected songs of the Song. Gianni Barbiero calls them a description of the body of the beloved.[19] It is characteristic that this description follows a certain pattern. The woman's body is described from top to bottom or vice versa. Other features are numerous comparisons, drawn from both the natural world, and elaborate images referring to works of art.[20] The characteristics of a *waṣf* are expressed by four of the songs in the poem under analysis. Thus, for example, the *waṣf* of the seventh chapter glorifies, in turn, feet, hips, womb, belly, breasts, neck, eyes, nose, head and hair – "like royal pur-

---

16   de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 32–33.
17   The whole phrase is extremely simple and somewhat reminiscent of the Latin marriage vow, "*ubi tu Gaius, ibi ego Gaia*" [where you Gaius, there I Gaia], cited by Plutarch in *Quaestiones Romanae*, no. 30: "Question 30. Why do the bridemen that bring in the bride require her to say, 'Where thou Caius art, there am I Caia'?"
18   Pope, *Song of Songs*, 141–142; Garret – House, *Song of Songs*, 83; Stoop-van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 7. The custom of praising newlyweds with special songs is still kept alive in some regions of Syria and Egypt.
19   Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 13.
20   Cf. Brzegowy, *Pisma mądrościowe Starego Testamentu*, 128; Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 13.

ple, braided into plaits" (7:5). Biblical scholars especially differ on to which extent the verses can be indicated as belonging to a particular *waṣf* song. This is related to the features of the study of the Song of Songs. Three of the songs praising the newlyweds refer to a woman (4:1–7; 6:4–7; 7:2–8) and one to a man (5:10–16).

2.3. Nuptial Customs in Poetic Episodes

The finding that the nuptial theme appears in the poem based on certain terms (e.g., "bride" or "wedding day") and literary forms (*waṣf* wedding songs) legitimizes a further search for more subtle connotations, images, metaphors and allusions characteristic of the language of poetry. Considering the customs related to marriage in the ancient Near East, one must ask whether references to them in the form of poetic images, metaphors and allusions are discernible in the Song of Songs.

In some, especially the older biblical traditions/texts, marriage between a man and a woman is stated briefly: "he took a wife" (לקח see, e.g., Gen 25:20; 27:46; 28:2.9; 38:2). Others emphasize the element of negotiation which involved *mohar* or "payment and gift" (Gen 34:12) for a wife, among other things. Other texts have affirmed the practice of a more elaborate ceremony to convey a woman from her father's house to her husband's house (see the wedding of Jambri's son: 1 Macc 9:37–39). One may note the separation of the betrothal stage, preceded by negotiations (see Gen 29:18–23), from the bringing in of the wife, often in a ceremonial wedding procession (see 1 Sam 25:42; Ps 45[44]:15), the introduction of the wife into the house, the wedding (see Judg 14:10–12) and the consummation of the marriage (see Tob 8:1–14). Late traditions refer to the writing of a wedding contract (see Tob 7:14).[21]

In the Song of Songs, we can recognize elements of customs concerning marriage in the ancient Near East. The text is poetic and does not contain narrative or dramatic elements, but it does contain descriptions characterized by a certain eventfulness. Therefore, the passages in which we find allusions to certain actions and behaviours related to wedding customs are called "poetic episodes." Three such episodes were identified.

c.   Engagement Negotiations – Poetic Episode in 8:8–12

The negotiation of the marriage terms between the families of the bride and the groom was the first action in preparation for the wedding. In some traditions, including non-biblical ones, the very agreement and transfer of the bride's fee seems to be regarded as tantamount to a marriage (see Gen 34:12).[22] The poetic episode

---

[21]   Cf. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 32–33; Szymik, "Małżeństwo i rodzina w Biblii," 203–225.
[22]   The myth of "The Nuptials of Yarikh and Nikkal" from Ugarit contains a significant scene of the "weighing of the mohar" in which the bride's entire family participates (Cf. Mrozek, "Między umową ślubną a poezją w tekstach z Ugaritu," *437*).

concerning the negotiations and the bride's fee can be found in the final part of the literary composition of the Song of Songs. The isolated episode (8:8–12) contains utterances of different persons; they can be described as the words of the brothers, the woman herself and the bridegroom, who furthermore addresses Solomon. The episode is not fully coherent as the images and metaphors change; the girl is first compared to a wall and gate, then the metaphor of a vineyard is applied to her, and Solomon's vineyard is also mentioned. However, the clear motif of payment for a wife allows us to see here a continuation of the theme. The episode consists of four parts, each of which can be read as a "voice in the discussion."

vv. 8–9: the brothers discuss their sister's maturity (to marry)

v. 10: the girl declares that she is already mature (moreover, in love)

v. 11: the brothers use the metaphor of Solomon's vineyard to speak of a high price (a thousand shekels of silver)

v. 12: the beloved declares that the vineyard is his and pays more than was asked for; the price is extremely high, and so it appears to be symbolic.

b. The Wedding Retinue – Poetic Episode in 3:6–11

The main wedding ceremony consisted of bringing in a wife, which had a ceremonial and social character (the whole community learned that a certain woman became the man's wife). Therefore, there was a ceremonial procession from the father's house to the husband's house, in which the groomsmen and bridesmaids accompanying the bride played an important role.

The third chapter of the Song of Songs provides a poetic description of King Solomon's wedding retinue. There are two terms in verses 9–11 that are a sign of trouble for the translation and interpretation of the depiction. The first term is a late *hapax legomenon* of foreign, possibly Greek, origin – אפריון (3:9) – meaning "a litter, stretcher or palanquin," a form of built-in litter.[23] It is sometimes interpreted in translations as a figurative throne. However, since the term מטה (3:7), meaning "a bed, couch or stretcher,"[24] was used earlier, translators are inclined – in view of the wedding context – to favour a special litter, covering the person being carried. According to Keel, it was a special litter made and decorated for the nuptials ("King Solomon made himself a litter").[25] In the context of the wedding procession of a wealthy and significant person, its function is understandable.

The other troublesome term is עטרה, usually translated elsewhere in the Bible as "a crown." However, as Gianni Barbiero notes, according to the testimony of the First Book of Kings – recounting the reign of King Solomon – Solomon's mother did

---

23 BDB, 68; cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 441, 444. See φορεῖον (LXX); Stoop-van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 165.

24 BDB, 641.

25 Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 130; cf. Exum, "Seeing Solomon's Palanquin," 310–311; Garret – House, *Song of Songs*, 180–181; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 444–445.

not crown him king, nor did his wedding coincide with the coronation day. It seems much more convincing to interpret "coronation" as the adornment of the groom's head with a nuptial wreath.[26] The term will be discussed below.

By explaining the issue of the litter and the wreath, one can already easily see the image of a wedding procession in this passage of the text. The royal procession is surrounded by the royal entourage, whose members act as bridesmaids on this day (3:5–8). They are armed (as were the groom's companions in the referenced wedding procession of one of Jambri's sons [1 Macc 9:39]), but in addition to security concerns, weapons are part of the festive attire. Keel calls them a guard of honour.[27]

In the first verses of the passage in question, two processions are presented. Their movements are emphasized, on the one hand, by the phrase "who is she that emerges from the desert" (3:6), and on the other hand, by the description of Solomon carried in the litter (3:7). The scene, described most clearly, represents the moment when the two retinues meet, and the bridesmaids are called upon to be the first to go out to meet the bridegroom's entourage. This role of the bridesmaids was shown in the New Testament: in Jesus's parable, the bridesmaids wait in the bride's house for the bridegroom's procession, and when he finally arrives they are summoned: "The bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" (Matt 25:6). The significance of the entire poetic episode from the Song of Songs analysed here is completed by the direct indication that this happens "on the day of his nuptials" (וביום [3:11]).

> Come out, daughters of Jerusalem, look, daughters of Zion,
> at King Solomon wearing the wreath that his mother has dressed him with
> on the day of his nuptials, on the day of the joy of his heart (3:11).

d. The Wedding Feast and the Consummation of Marriage – Poetic Episode in 4:8–5:1

When the bride was introduced to the groom's house,[28] the feast to which the guests were invited began. In the Song of Songs, the motif of a feast appears twice. It is important that the fiancée is present in both cases although her presence is marked differently. The first chapter presents the image of a king surrounded by people feasting: "When the king is at the feast, my nard spreads its fragrance" (1:12). The Hebrew term מסב signifies a circle, a group of people surrounding a table where one can sit

---

26   Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 161.
27   Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 129.
28   Cf. Song 1:4. Gianfranco Ravasi (*Il Cantico dei Cantici*, 330) argues that in the very first verses of the Song of Songs, the bridegroom – presented as a king – leads the bride into his chambers to complete the marriage act.

in a circle,[29] so the biblical translations interpret the expression applied to the king (במסבו), which consists of a masculine noun preceded by the preposition ב and ending with a singular, masculine possessive pronoun in the third person, as a feast, a royal feast[30] (Gerleman: "der Koenig im festlichen Kreis bleibt").[31] The picture of this feast is completed with an unusual detail – a description of the spreading scent of the bride's expensive perfume.

The feast motif also appears in the poem's central section (5:1). The feast itself does not yet equate to the wedding, but the motif of the feast is connected with the poetic image of the marriage act,[32] which is important in the nuptial ritual and constitutes its completion.[33] It is presented through suggestive images of the happy bridegroom entering the garden – which was closed to him until then (4:12) – eating honey and fruit and drinking wine and milk. Speaking triumphantly, the bridegroom again and again addresses his beloved "bride" (4:8–12; 5:1) (כלה), the term closely associated with weddings, and speaks of his affection and love (4:9–10). The bridegroom, exulting in his good fortune (the consummation of his marriage), simultaneously urges the wedding revellers to rejoice and feast: "Eat, my friends, drink, get drunk, dearest ones!" (5:1b). The final part of verse one, corresponding to the wedding feast, is based on three invocations in the imperative mode. They open with the verb אכל – "to eat," "to consume" – in the imperative *Qal* form of the second person plural. The next two verbs, שתה and שכר, are related to the consumption of drinks and are in the same conjugation and form as the first one. These three verbs are accompanied by only two complements: the companions, רעים and דודים. These are generally parallel terms. Exegetes unanimously identify this place as the chiastic centre of the structure of the Song of Songs.[34]

2.4. Figures and Objects

The other connections to weddings in the Song of Songs can be identified at the level of figures and objects. These include those playing the roles of bridesmaids and groomsmen and the clothing of the newlyweds.

---

29 See also "surroundings," "round table"; KB, 540.

30 Zorell, *Lexicon hebraicum*, 451: "mensa … vel circulus."

31 Gerleman, *Ruth, Das Hohelied*, 9. In post-biblical Hebrew, *mĕsibbā* means "a party" or "a banquet" (Garrett – House, *Song of Songs*, 146).

32 Cf. Garrett – House, *Song of Songs*, 32; Brzegowy, *Pisma mądrościowe Starego Testamentu*, 130; Assis, *Flashes of Fire*, 94–147; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 162.

33 Cf. Gen 29:23.25; Tob 6:14.17–18; 7:11.15–16. The story of Sarah, as told in the Book of Tobias, shows that a marriage that has not been consummated is treated as a failed marriage. Although Sarah was given in marriage, she "received no name" (Tob 3:8b) from any of her husbands, who died on their wedding nights.

34 Garrett – House, *Song of Songs*, 32; Dorsey, "Literary Structuring in the Song of Songs," 81–96; Cf. Johnston, "The Enigmatic Genre," 39.

a. Bridesmaids and Groomsmen

In the episode concerning the wedding procession, there are bridesmaids and groomsmen. They are not referred to by any specific terms, but the description clearly places them in such a role. King Solomon's wedding procession includes, in the roles of bridesmaids, the groomsmen, surrounding the royal coach – as described above – and the royal entourage, or the guard of honour (3:7–8).

The bridesmaids, according to accepted custom, also make up the retinue. Abigail's following consisted of five girls (cf. 1 Sam 25:42); the retinue of the king's daughter consisted of virgins who "follow her" and "introduce her to" the king (cf. Ps 45[44]:15). In the Song of Songs, the bride's retinue is the proudly named "daughters of Jerusalem,"[35] also called "daughters of Zion" (3:11). It is them who, in the context of King Solomon's wedding procession, are unambiguously presented in the roles of bridesmaids, called to go out and greet the bridegroom.[36] This allows us to see their roles in this perspective elsewhere in the poem as well (1:5; 2:7; 3:5.11; 5:8.16; 8:4).

b. The Dress of the Newlyweds and the Nuptial Wreath

The dress of the newlyweds was festive, but it is difficult to treat the praised beauty of their appearance and ornamentation in the Song of Songs as exclusively having to do with nuptials because they are a characteristic feature of love poetry in general. In those passages where a wedding is mentioned, it can be assumed that the description of the bride and groom has to do with the ceremony. In *waṣf* songs, however, the descriptions are full of elaborate symbols and imagery, so it is difficult to treat them as actual descriptions of the bride and groom's appearance. The wafting scent of the bride's expensive perfume in has a slightly different character in the context of a feast that may bear the characteristics of a wedding.[37] Perfume also created the festive nature of the feast and emphasized the grandeur and uniqueness of the bride. "When the king is at the feast, my nard spreads its fragrance" (1:12). Similarly, precious fragrances surround the bride arriving in retinue (3:6), and the climactic image of the union of the spouses is surrounded by the unusual scents of the bride's precious scents (4:10–5:1).

A characteristic feature of the bride's clothing was a veil covering her face[38] (cf. Gen 29:23–25). In the Song of Songs, the bridegroom longs to see the face of his

---

35   The two phrases, "daughter of Jerusalem" and "daughters of Zion," belong to different phrases. However, the text of 3:10–11 is inconsistent and creates difficulties in interpreting. As Roberts argues: "The removal of the מ from [מבנות ירושלם] detaches בנות ירושלם from the description of the אפריון and allows it to be attached instead to the following invitation to the daughters of Zion to come out and see the spectacle of Solomon's wedding day. בנות ירושלם is thus taken as a vocative with the imperative צאינה [go forth] and the whole […] is recast as a chiastic bicolon" (Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 154–155; cf. Garret – House, *Song of Songs*, 181; cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 446; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 150–152).

36   Cf. Garret – House, *Song of Songs*, 182–183; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 446–447.

37   Cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 348–349. Cf. 4:14.16; 5:1.

38   de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 33–34.

betrothed, which is hidden behind a veil: "Your eyes like doves behind your veil" (4:1; cf. 4:3; 6:7). "My dove, …, let me see your face" (2:14).

A unique element of the groom's attire was the nuptial wreath, which is indicated in the description of Solomon's wedding retinue (3:11). The word עטרה can mean "a crown, wreath or diadem."[39] The term is understood broadly; in the sapiential writings it is used figuratively (a wreath of glory, dignity, glory, adornment; cf. Job 19:9, Prov 4:9; 12:4; 14:24; 16:31). The analogous Akkadian term *eṭru* means "a head-band" or a head ornament with the upper part uncovered.[40] As Gianfranco Ravasi and Gianni Barbiero argued, the nuptial wreath may already have been in use in Israel. It emphasized the extraordinary nature of weddings. The bridegroom became "the king of the nuptial ceremony."[41]

c. Conclusions

To summarize the first stage of the analysis, we can say that the poem has various kinds of references and allusions to weddings themselves (terminology) and to nuptial customs. Some are more explicit, such as the wedding procession, while others can be guessed at, as is the case with the wedding feast and the consummation of the marriage. Some of these references seem to be arranged in the form of more developed units, herein called poetic episodes. Others appear in various places singly – in contexts that do not seem to have a direct connection to weddings, in descriptions of a love that seems independent and uninhibited.

Therefore, the question arises as to how these (here isolated) various terms, phrases, and units referring to nuptials are situated in the structure of the poem. The next part of the analysis is an attempt to place them within the structure of the book and in relation to the other songs of the poem. This will help elucidate the compositional intent of the writers and determine their possible roles in the message of the poem. This is a difficult task, especially since the analysis of the structure of the poem itself causes problems for biblical scholars, as evidenced by its diverse readings.

3. The Arrangement of References and Allusions to Weddings in Relation to the Structure of the Poem

Before attempting to interpret the place and significance of the identified references and allusions to weddings in the structure of the Song of Songs, one must understand the process through which literary works were created in the ancient Near East.

---

39   Stoop-van Paridon, *The Song of Songs*, 171.
40   KB, 698.
41   Ravasi, *Il Cantico dei Cantici*, 330; Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 161–163; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 33–34.

This is important because this process led to the formation of specific features that distinguish the pieces from modern literary works (as well as the assumptions often made by biblical scholars). Understanding this process allows for a slightly different perspective on the literary and compositional features of the Song, which is crucial to the next stage of our analysis.

3.1. The Process of Creating Literary Works in the Ancient Near East

The way literary works were developed in the ancient Near East is the subject of ongoing discussions, especially in the last twenty years. Studies have been published on the processes of structuring oral messages and developing compositions through various procedures, including new introductions and endings.[42]

Jeffrey Tigay, who published a monograph in 1982 that focused on a detailed analysis of the stages of development of the Gilgamesh text throughout the centuries – from the Sumerian sources (the story of the legendary king of Uruk), through the Old Babylonian version, to the so-called standardized version of the epic from about 1100 (1200) B.C.E. – has contributed the most to illuminating these works, especially the literary process and the resulting textual features that can be discerned in many ancient works, including the books of the Bible.[43]

To describe this process in the shortest possible terms, due to the limitations of this paper, it is necessary to indicate several essential stages in the writing process, which usually span generations of writers.[44] The first stage consists of composing a new work on the basis of existing, smaller literary pieces, which, once incorporated into a new work, serve new purposes and form a new whole that is applied to the writers' aims.[45] Further work consists of unifying and developing this composition, by including both new units, adding, for example, new, "second" introductions and/or endings, and more "precise" work, adding new phrases or terms to develop the language or vocabulary. At the level of content and message, there are reinterpretations that broaden the message. The text becomes its own testimony to the inner development of the tradition. It is worth noting that at the final stage of the work the treatments tend to be less and less intrusive, of a lesser scope.[46] The dates of the "final" edits, understood as the time of decisive and effective operations on the text,

---

[42]   See, e.g., Milstein, *Reworking Ancient Texts*, 305–308; Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*; van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*; Van Seters, "The Redactor in Biblical Studies"; Van Seters, "The Role of the Scribe"; Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*.

[43]   Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*. Cf. George, "Gilgamesh and the Literary Traditions," 448–452.

[44]   See Jasnos, "Kształtowanie przekazu biblijnego," 87–99; Jasnos, "The Consequences of Early Literacy," 91–103.

[45]   This is well illustrated in Deuteronomy, built largely from the speeches of Moses, at the centre of which, however, is a separate literary form of the Deuteronomic Code; Chapter 28 is a separate literary form of a collection of curses; at the end of the book are two hymnic works (Chapters 32 and 33).

[46]   Tigay, *The Evolution of Gilgamesh Epic*, 246.

are inadequate in relation to the (thus understood) process of creating the work.[47] The result of this process is a work that has repetitions and is not fully literarily coherent in the way we expect from contemporary works. Yet paradoxically, there are many means of building a composition. The text may also have different, independent structures, which are not mutually exclusive.[48]

Considering the process through which a work is developed and the characteristics of the resulting text will help us come closer to understand the specific composition and, consequently, the spirit of the Song of Songs.

3.2. Research on the Structure of the Song of Songs

The second stage of the study aims to determining the place and role of the references and allusions to weddings within the text. It will consist of an analysis of the arrangement of such content in relation to the structure of the poem, and then an attempt to decode the editorial intention of the writers. This is not an easy task in view of the fact that the very structure of the Song raises many questions.[49]

Gianni Barbiero assumes that the Song is an anthology of diverse, disparate forms of love poems, which were originally independent of one another and set in different social contexts, but combined in the Song by associating ideas or unifying the theme.[50] At the same time, Barbiero recognized an "unmistakable personality: the refined literary artifice, the play of the metaphors, the repetition of terms and themes, coherent from beginning to end."[51] The poem is dominated by lovers' monologues, directed to the betrothed, or by words of the betrothed directed towards other people (e.g., to the daughters of Jerusalem, the guards of the city, or Solomon). Sometimes these monologues appear to merge into a dialogue (see 4:12–16; 8:8–10). In addition, there are shorter units, interjections, refrains and repeated invocations. Sometimes these seem to break up the continuity, but more often they unify the composition. Even so, the overall composition is to some extent a riddle, exacerbated by numerous *hapax legomena* that make it difficult to understand the separate passages of the text.

Many biblical scholars have examined the structure of the book. However, their studies of the composition and structuring of the Song of Songs have not yielded unequivocal answers.[52] The composition of the poem is not only based on songs, but

---

47 This is well illustrated by the conflicting conclusions regarding the dates the Song was edited. Some have pointed to the era of Solomon or even earlier, while others have suggested the Persian period or later. Cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Late Linguistic Feature in the Song of Songs," 73.

48 An example of this is the Book of Deuteronomy, which from the point of view of composition has structural features of different forms. Therefore, biblical scholars see either a collection of Moses' speeches, a Deuteronomistic code or a covenant treaty in it.

49 Cf. Johnston, "The Enigmatic Genre," 36–52.

50 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 17–18. Cf. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 62–64; Luzarraga, *Cantar de los Cantares*, 121.

51 Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 18.

52 See: R.M. Davidson, "The Literary Structure," 44–65.

it also contains connecting elements – short expansions – which effectively make it difficult for biblical scholars to unambiguously relate the units to a particular song. The scholars' conclusions were evaluated by Phillip Roberts, the author of a study devoted to various ways the text was structured and giving a thorough analysis of the micro- and macro-structures in the Song.[53]

Despite the multitude of studies and assumptions put forward concerning the structure of the poem, Roberts noted that certain conclusions can be drawn. Biblical scholars have presented three main options of interpreting the structure. The first one assumes that the poem is a "relatively unstructured anthology" (up to 30 units have been singled out). The second option assumes that the poem has "a literary unity independently of whether or not it has a structure" (unified but unstructured). The unifying role of repetition is emphasized and so are the images (or themes), such as the garden, the vineyard as well as searching and finding. The third option assumes that the poem is a structured unity. Although within the last option there are various proposals for reading the structure, there are some generally accepted conclusions.[54]

Biblical scholars, analysing the structure of the Song of Songs, agree on its fundamental division into six units and their boundaries (differences occur within the scope of one verse). They could also discern repeated efforts to achieve a chiastic pattern (widely used in biblical literature) and accepted that the unit ending in 5:1 is the main one in the poem, while the last unit can be seen as a form of conclusion.[55] Roberts further points out that an analogous division of the Song into six units (parts) is also found in the older conception of reading the Song as a drama, as well as in the treatment of the Song as an anthology.[56] This confirms the validity of this fundamental division, regardless of how the structure of the Song is interpreted. The problematic nature of the details of the composition may be evidenced by the fact that even Cheryl Exum, the author of the commonly accepted division of the text into six units, came closer to an assessment of a "unified but unstructured" work in her later studies.[57]

Meanwhile, considering the process of literary composition in the ancient Near East outlined above, some features of the text of the Song can be shown. Although the incomplete compositional coherence is explicable, there are structuring elements resulting from the long process of gradual writing. Barbiero, who emphasized that the unity of the text is not narrative but lyrical, concluded that the arrangement of the individual songs is not accidental.[58] Taking into account the findings of biblical

---

53   Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*.
54   Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 13; Cf. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 62–64; Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 17–18.
55   Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 13; Davidson, "The Literary Structure," 44–65.
56   Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 13.
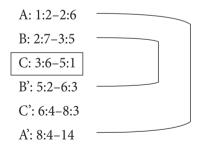57   Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 12.
58   Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 505.

scholars concerning the features of the text, it can be assumed that the poem was probably based on the various kinds of love songs in use and continued to be developed gradually. One can assume that some elements were added: units expanding the theme and interpretive elements, which also reinterpreted the meaning of the whole piece (e.g., the late sapiential conclusion about the power of love in verse 8). Also, linking elements were introduced to unify the composition of the poem (e.g., through repetitions, refrains or the "chorus" of the daughters of Jerusalem). Roberts believes that two structural devices, inclusion and chiasm, played a key role in shaping the text of the Song.[59]

3.3. The Arrangement of the Units Referring to Weddings in Relation to the Structure of the Poem

In order to establish the place and role of the references to weddings (poetic episodes, idioms, and terms), it is necessary to relate them to the structure of the Song. The analysis should begin with the commonly accepted findings about the structure. Analysing the text of the Song of Songs, it is easy to notice a fairly clear similarity, a certain schematicity and repetition, which is analogous in two sections of the composition: 2:7–3:5 and 5:2–6:3 (B and B'). This observation was the basis for reading the structure of the whole. Firstly, these two parts embrace the central part of the composition, and secondly, they separate the remaining, external parts. On this basis, Exum distinguished six units in the text of the Song which build the structural chiasm.[60]

The chiastic structure of the Song of Songs

A: 1:2–2:6
B: 2:7–3:5
C: 3:6–5:1
B': 5:2–6:3
C': 6:4–8:3
A': 8:4–14

---

59   Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 43.

60   Brzegowy, *Pieśń nad pieśniami*, 40–41; Exum, "A Literary and Structural Analysis," 47–79; Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 11. Barbiero (*Song of Songs*, 19–20) distinguishes two parts in the structure of the "almost symmetrical" poem: 2:8–5:1 and 5:2–8:4. He divides the second one into a chiastic "alternation" between the songs of the woman (5:2–6:3 and 7:12–8:4) and of the man (6:4–7:11). These two sections correspond to Exum's separated sections B–C and B'–C'.

The peculiarities of such a literary construction include exposing the content in the centre of the chiasm and marking the connections between the content of the individual members. In the structure of the Song, analogies and connections are also present in the other members of the chiasm, but they are no longer so pronounced as in B and B'. In the case of C and C', one can also see analogies and efforts to link these units. The weakest related members seem to be A and A'.[61] These features are indicative of the stages in the process by which the biblical writers developed the work.

The stem (C) in this chiastic composition, surrounded by love songs of the B–B' members, contains poetic episodes which are crucial from the point of view of the wedding. Moreover, this core consists of as many as two poetic episodes, which, joined by the wedding song *waṣf*, build the whole of the central segment of the poem.

The central part of the Song of Songs (the core of the chiasm) – 3:6–5:1

1. **The wedding retinue**, a poetic episode – 3:6–11
2. The Wedding Song *wafs* – 4:1–7
3. **Wedding feast and** consummation of marriage, a poetic episode – 4:8–5:1.

The core of the composition consists of descriptions (episodes) of the wedding procession, the feast and the consummation, i.e. the most important customs concerning a wedding.[62] Moreover, with regard to the references to nuptials that were isolated earlier in the text, one can see that there is a concentration of them in this central section of the poem. The word "wedding" is used once in the poem (התנח [3:11]), while the word "bride" is used many times (כלה [4:8.9.10.11.12; 5:1]). The daughters of Jerusalem (already identified as bridesmaids in the first part of the analysis) are also featured here. In this single occurrence, they are given special prominence – they are called twice and given another title: "daughters of Zion" (בנות ציון [3:11]).

Thus, from the point of view of wedding customs, the most important poetic episodes and terms that have been distinguished – the wedding procession, the wedding feast and the consummation of the marriage – and the accumulated terms related to weddings have been placed in a central and structurally prominent place in the Song.[63] This demonstrates the clear intention of the biblical writers.

Moreover, the central section (C) has its compositional and poetic parallel in section C'. The two sections C–C' are thus in a compositional and literary relationship. Member C' provides a "parallel" for member C. In the second parallel section, C', an analogous dynamic is conveyed, but here the elements of nuptial customs are not the theme. However, the institutional elements of wedding customs are "no longer visible" in it; instead, there is a meeting of two desires, of two wills (4:16–5:1). These

---

61 However, these analogies are distant, and there are exegetes who do not recognize them (Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 17; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 40). The details of the relationships between the various members are analysed: Davidson, "The Literary Structure," 50–53; Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 12; Brzegowy, *Pieśń nad pieśniami*, 40–41; Dorsey, "Literary Structuring in the Song of Songs," 82.
62 Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 63.
63 Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 63.

are the will and the consummation, which – from the point of view of the praise of love presented in the Song – complete, as it were, the image of love.[64]

The two previously distinguished segments, opening and closing the composition (A and A'), have been identified by Timothea Elliot as the Prologue (1:2–2:7) and the Epilogue (8:5–14). She separates the units similarly to Exum (with a shift in terms of one verse).[65]

The segment of the composition identified as the epilogue contains significant verses about love being as powerful as death (8:6–7). Biblical scholars unanimously regard them as a sapiential conclusion to the entire poem, concerning the power of love.[66] The Epilogue also contains the poetic episode relating to the betrothal negotiations (8:8–12) described in the first section of this paper. Moreover, the motif of "payment for a wife" is present in these two units. This motif connects the wisdom conclusion with the poetic episode about betrothal negotiations. Although the structure of these units of text does not attest to their original connection; they were apparently linked in the course of the scribal works, and so was the characteristic of the scribal process of developing ancient literary compositions.

The Epilogue of the Song of Songs (member C') – 8:5–14:

8:5 – In love in the wilderness and under the apple tree [unclear passage]
8:6–7 – **The power of love, a sapiential conclusion**
8:8–12 – **Negotiating the engagement, a poetic episode** ⎤ the "bride's fee" motif
8:13–14 – An exhortation to the beloved (her), an exhortation to the beloved (him)

Roberts, who analysed the elements of continuity and microstructure in the text of the Song of Songs, treated 8:5–7 as a whole, despite the discontinuities that occur there. He emphasized that "there are structural indicators that these verses are intended to be read together."[67] Verse 7 is considered a prosaic intrusion, while it is generally accepted as an integral part of the sapiential conclusion. Although it differs in form, its sense and meaning are consistent and connected with the entire conclusion. Even if the final lines are written in prose, this does not undermine the message of the whole.[68]

---

64 Cf. Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 11–12.
65 The difference regarding the boundaries of the isolated members concerns the bridegroom's repeated call in the poem (cf. 2:7; 3:5; 8:4) to the daughters of Jerusalem not to awaken the beloved. This exhortation (in verses 2:7 and 8:4), not closely related to the text, has been variously attributed to the isolated members by Exum and by Elliot (Elliott, *The Literary Unity of the Canticle*).
66 Cf. Brzegowy, *Pisma mądrościowe Starego Testamentu*, 154; Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*, 177.
67 Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 318.
68 Especially the second part of verse 7 betrays the poem's lack of typical characteristics; it completely lacks all literary devices and imagery, parallelism, and phonological features typical for the Song. Biblical scholars treat the entire subsequent passage 8:7–14 as a later reworking (Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 328–329).

Verses 8–12 constitute a new unit. This is the poetic episode identified in the first part of the analysis concerning the engagement negotiations. From this point on, the persons and the subject change. The brothers are talking to themselves and to their sister. Then (verse 11) they change the subject and use a metaphor about the lease of Solomon's vineyard and the high price. Hearing these words the betrothed speaks up and announces that the vineyard is his, and he pays even more than was demanded (verse 12). As Roberts states,

> there seems to be no structural or poetic basis at all for connecting this segment with the preceding segment of 8:5–7. […] There is no apparent dialogical continuity, nor does the mood of the two segments seem at all the same. Indeed, there seems to be somewhat of a 'come down' from the high and serious praise of love in verses 6–7.[69]

Other authors also assume such a textual continuity, even though "such a thematic connection would be entirely lacking structural support."[70]

The bride price, the motif that linked the two key units that make up the epilogue, is not an accidental link. Moreover, both units speak of a price that is absolutely extraordinary. In the episode dealing with the engagement negotiations, the brothers, as if unwilling to marry off their sister, first say that she is not yet mature and point to visible physical features ("she has no breasts"). But when she herself denies it, they speak, using the language of metaphor, of the enormous price to be paid for the lease of the vineyard. The vineyard in the Song symbolizes the betrothed. The price of 1,000 shekels of silver is prohibitive and unrealistic.[71] It seems to be a symbolic price, especially since a parallel can be found in the Ugaritic myth of the *Nuptials of Yarikh and Nikkal*. *Yarikh* declares that he will pay his fiancée's father "a thousand (shekels) of silver and ten thousand of gold."[72] The fiancé in the Song declares something very similar.

The text of 8:12a has a specific composition. In the first phrase, two nouns: "vineyard" and "face," appear, accompanied by the possessive pronoun י, referring to the first person singular. Moreover, the same pronoun accompanies the relative preposition שׁ and the preposition לֹ. In this syntactic construction, the verb is missing, and there is a repetition of the pronoun י (my vineyard, my face, which is for me). The second part of the phrase concerning Solomon (8:12b) is a kind of parallelism:

> A thousand for thee, Solomon,
> two hundred for those who guard its fruit.

---

69   Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 351–352.
70   Roberts, *Let Me See Your Form*, 352; cf. Krinetzki, *Kommentar zum Hohenlied*, 227.
71   By comparison, slave prices were up to 30–50 shekels of silver, as the Book of Deuteronomy and Leviticus attest. In the biblical texts, such a high price of mohar does not appear anywhere in the context of nuptials.
72   *KTU* 1:24; translated by A. Mrozek, "Między umową ślubną a poezją w tekstach z Ugaritu," *437*.

So the fiancé "breaks the price" and pays extra to his betrothed's guardians himself. But before that, he declares emphatically "she is mine," as if emphasizing the existence of a bond already stronger than the one sealed by the "bride's fee" (cf. 8:12a).

His words dovetail perfectly with the final statement of *sapiential puenta* in 8:7. The second part of the verse (8:7b) is a conditional sentence in which the *protasis* is elaborate, while the *apodosis* is very laconic.

> If anyone gives all the wealth of his house for love,
> no doubt they will despise him.

The essential terms in this sentence are love (אהבה) preceded by the preposition ב and the phrase יבוזו בוז. The phrase, based on the same stem, expresses the intensity of the action twice, in this case despising. The word love (אהבה) is closely related to the verb נתן (to give) and forms the phrase נתן באהבה. Thus, in this relative sentence, two phrases correspond to each other:

> נתן באהבה - בוז יבוזו = "give for love" and "will despise with scorn"
> Love cannot be bought, not with 1,000 shekels of silver or with "all the wealth of the house."

In the Song of Songs, this was the lesson taught by the Old Testament sages. What good is a man to "have a wife" if he has no love? The greatest value is love (see Sir 7:19). But love cannot be bought. Love cannot be forced. The Song repeatedly emphasizes the freedom of choice given to the girl; the beloved (he) repeatedly incants the bridesmaids not to wake the beloved (her) "until she herself is willing" (2:7; 3:5; 8:4).

The sentence with which the beloved addresses the daughters of Jerusalem opens with an imprecation expressed by the verb שבע in the *hifil* conjugation. The second part of the sentence directly concerning love is built on the basis of the conjunction אם, which is hypothetical in nature and means "if." It is related to the verb of imprecation to form the phrase שבע אם (I incant that you do not). The complement of this call, or even conjuring, is the noun "love" preceded by the genitive האהבה. The phrase of conjuring or imprecation, שבע אם, has a second part which opens with the conjunction עד preceding the verb חפץ in the *Qal* imperfect form of the third person singular: "until she desires, until it please (of love)."[73] This phrase is repeated three times, but in 8:4 the interrogative preposition מה appears instead of the Hebrew אם.

Read in this context, the epilogue expresses its message even more profoundly: payment for a wife undermines her dignity and the value of love itself, which is priceless. That is why the fiancé does not bargain, but gives the girl's brothers – who

---

73 Cf. BDB, 342.

are demanding a staggering price – even more. But first he declares that his beloved already belongs to him.

The remaining nuptial vows and phrases identified in the first part of the analysis are found in many different places in the poem and clearly serve to bind or connect the whole. They therefore have an important function in terms of the composition of the poem. Moreover, they "bring in" the nuptial theme even in those songs that did not have such connotations. These are idioms of belonging, taking various forms, which are found in all the structural parts of the Song – except the prologue (2:16; 6:3; 7:11; cf. 4:16–5:1; 8:12).

The phrase "daughters of Jerusalem" plays an unusual role in the text. From a structural point of view, it also has the function of linking the composition. It is customary and traditional to ascribe to it the role of the chorus, but it refers to the now rejected attempts to read the Song as a drama. Meanwhile, in the central, most important section of the poem, the daughters of Jerusalem act as bridesmaids. It would not be an over-interpretation to assume that they play the same role, albeit metaphorically, throughout the poem. The bridesmaids "run around" the poem, accompany the betrothed, support them and mediate in their desire to be together. They are confidants and intermediaries between the two lovers, supporting both in their dilemmas. It is to the daughters of Jerusalem that the two partners repeatedly turn, asking about each other (1:5–8, 5:8–9, 5:16–6:1, 6:9b-10), asking for help in their search or chanting them not to wake the beloved (2:7; 3:5; 8:4).

Conclusion

To sum up, the analysis was to determine the type of references to weddings and nuptial customs as well as their place and role in the text of the Song. The references to nuptials identified in the first part of the analysis were examined with the structure of the text. An attempt was made to evaluate their arrangement in the structure of the text as an expression of the editorial intention of the biblical writers.

When it comes to the structure of the whole poem, the most important places are occupied by poetic episodes concerning different stages of a wedding. Therefore, they are the point of reference for the interpretation of the work, for reading its essential meaning. The wedding, located in the central part of the composition, constitute the climax (literally – see 5:1) of the love experienced by the couple. The betrothal customs referred to in the epilogue of the work (8:5–14), on the other hand, provide a reference point for the conclusion of the entire book – expressed in the form of a praise of the power of human love and a lesson about its pricelessness, as a protest against the commercialization of marriage.

The second issue concerns the relationship between the various forms of love songs in the Song of Songs. A partial answer was given: since the nuptial songs and episodes are found at the most important places in the structure of the Song, they provide a reference point for interpreting the other songs. However, it is necessary to ask about the function of the other non-wedding songs in the poem. It can certainly be assumed that they serve the purpose of praising love, but this general statement should be deepened by a more detailed study. It is worth repeating the parallel study, already undertaken by many biblical scholars, of analogies from the treasury of ancient Near Eastern literature, which trained writers readily used as a cultural reservoir of motifs and analogies (and transmitted in various languages and records). Taking into account both the specific process of developing the text of the Song and its didactic dimension, it is necessary to rethink these connections and, above all, the function of ancient Near Eastern love songs taken and used in the composition of the Song. However, this is already a new and demanding research task.

Returning to the initial question regarding the relationship between nuptial love and "free" love, one must answer that there are no different "loves" in the Song. There are different songs, from which the inspired sages of the Bible wove the Song of Songs.

At the very beginning a question was posed about the kind of love that is the subject of the message of the book. Does the Song praise free love? The answer to this question is that it does not, just as the Book of Genesis, focused on God's creative plan for man, does not deal with it. It deals with the mystery of the relationship between a man and woman; it does not mention marriage. Like the Song of Songs, the Book of Genesis (2:18–24) teaches the power of love between a man and woman. A man leaves his father and mother and joins with a woman so closely that they become as one.

However, some ask the question of whether he and she are already married in the various songs of the poem. There is no chronological order in the Song. The unity of the text is not narrative, but lyrical.[74] The images overlap and intermingle, for example, falling in love and nuptials interrelate and coincide in many respects throughout the poem. The entire work focuses on the dynamic representation of love being experienced. Reality in the Bible is usually presented in its dynamics, and speaking of physical intimacy did not trouble the ancient writers.

According to Andruska, "the influence of the sapiential genre on the Song was pervasive, running throughout the book."[75] What then was the lesson that the sages left in the Song of Songs? Just as the sapiential poet marvelled at the mystery of love between a man and woman in the Book of Proverbs (Prov 30:18–19), so in the Song of Songs the sapiential writers taught this mystery through images and metaphors.

---

74   Cf. Barbiero, *Song of Songs*, 505.
75   Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*, 177.

Perhaps the perspective has changed, as the reality is presented from the woman's point of view.

The power of love and not the wedding itself is what the poem is dedicated to, and yet the motifs of nuptial are very explicit in the Song. The wedding ceremony is shown through the prism of love. The institutional framework of the nuptials is overshadowed (*mohar* – love cannot be bought) by the love of the betrothed, those who love and are loved, brought to the fore.

The teaching of the biblical writers, full of images and songs as well as sapiential sentences, is explicit and fathomable. The theology of love in the Song can briefly be expressed in several theses: love is a powerful and invincible force in human life, and its source is in God (the flame of the Lord); mutual belonging and love are built on the will of both spouses ("until she desires, until it please of love"); it is not the payment of a wife ("they will despise him"), but the care of love that is paramount when getting married; a deep relationship of love is among the most precious things in a person's life.

Bibliography

Andruska, J.L., *Wise and Foolish Love in the Song of Songs* (Oudtestamentische Studiën. Old Testament Studies 75; Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2019).

Assis, E., *Flashes of Fire. A Literary Analysis of the Song of Songs* (The Library of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies 503; London: Clark 2009).

Barbiero, G., *Song of Songs. A Close Reading* (Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2011).

Bardski, K., "Czy Oblubienica rzeczywiście «znalazła pokój»? Dylematy translacyjne Pnp 8,10b," *Verbum Vitae* 30 (2016) 43–51.

Bardski, K., "Duchowa interpretacja Pieśni nad Pieśniami w tradycji żydowskiej i chrześcijańskiej," *Collectanea Theologica* 78/4 (2008) 105–111.

Brown, F., Driver, S.R., Briggs, Ch.A., *The Brown – Driver – Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. With an appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 1996) (= BDB).

Brzegowy, T., "Jak rozumieć Pieśń nad Pieśniami," *Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny* 38/3 (1985) 185–199.

Brzegowy, T., "Ku dosłownej interpretacji Pieśni nad Pieśniami," *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* 26/1 (1988) 67–95.

Brzegowy, T., "Miłość małżeńska według Pieśni nad Pieśniami," *Currenda* 1 (1994) 87–107.

Brzegowy T., "«Miłość mocniejsza niż śmierć». Egzegeza Pnp 8,6–7," *Biuletyn Papieskiej Akademii Teologicznej w Krakowie* 12 (1993–1994) 49–57.

Brzegowy, T., "Pierwszy poemat opisujący w Pieśni nad pieśniami (4,1–7)," *Tarnowskie Studia Teologiczne* 14 (1995–1996) 169–195.

Brzegowy, T., *Pieśń nad Pieśniami* (Nowy Komentarz Biblijny. Stary Testament; Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła) (forthcoming).

Brzegowy, T., *Pisma mądrościowe Starego Testamentu* (Academica 68; Tarnów: Biblos 2007).

Brzegowy, T., "Złożoność i jedność literacka Pieśni nad Pieśniami," *Tarnowskie Studia Teologiczne* 13 (1994) 159–183.

Carr, D.M., *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible. A New Reconstruction* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press 2011).

Chrostowski, W., "Pieśń nad pieśniami we współczesnym polskim piśmiennictwie biblijnym," *Collectanea Theologica* 78/4 (2008) 7–21.

Davidson, R.M., "The Literary Structure of the Song of Songs *Redivivus*," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14/2 (2003) 44–65.

Dobbs-Allsopp, F.W., "Late Linguistic Feature in the Song of Songs," *Perspectives on the Song of Songs. Perspektiven der Hoheliedauslegung* (ed. A.C. Hagedorn) (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 346) (Berlin – New York: De Gruyter 2005) 27–77.

Dorsey, D.A., "Literary Structuring in the Song of Songs," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 46 (1990) 81–96.

Elliott, M.T., *The Literary Unity of the Canticle* (Europäische Hochschulschriften European University Studies 23/371; Frankfurt am Main – Bern – New York: Lang 1989).

Exum, J.Ch., "A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 85 (1973) 47–79.

Exum, J.Ch., "Seeing Solomon's palanquin (Song of Songs 3,6–11)," *Biblical Interpretation* 11/3 (2003) 301–316.

Garrett, D.A. – House, P.R., *Song of Songs, Lamentations* (Word Biblical Commentary 23B; Nashville, TN: Nelson 2004).

George, A.R., "Gilgamesh and the Literary Traditions of Ancient Mesopotamia," *The Babylonian World* (ed. G. Leick) (New York – London: Routledge 2007) 447–459.

Gerleman, G., *Ruth, Das Hohelied* (Biblischer Kommentar. Altes Testament 18; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 1965).

Jasnos, R., "The consequences of early literacy for the discursive transmission in the Old Testament," *Dialogue and Universalism* 23/1 (2013) 91–103.

Jasnos, R., "Kształtowanie przekazu biblijnego w kulturze wczesnej piśmienności," *Wiara i jej przekaz w Piśmie Świętym* (ed. R. Bogacz) (Z Badań nad Biblią 18; Kraków: i-Press 2014) 87–99.

Johnston, G.H., "The Enigmatic Genre and Structure of the Song of Songs, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (2009) 36–52.

Koehler, L. – Baumgartner, W., *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: Brill 1989) (=KB).

Keel, O., *The Song of Songs* (A Continental Commentary Series; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1994).

Krinetzki, G., *Kommentar zum Hohenlied. Bildsprache und theologische Botschaft* (Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie 16) (Frankfurt am Main – Bern: Lang 1981).

Lemaire, A., *Les écoles et la formation de la Bible dans l'ancien Israël* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 39; Fribourg, Suisse: Editions Universitaires – Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1981).

Luzarraga, J., *Cantar de los Cantares. Sendas del Amor* (Estella: Verbo Divino 2005).

Milstein, S.J., *Reworking Ancient Texts. Revision through Introduction in Biblical and Mesopotamian Literature* (Diss. New York University; New York 2010).

Mrozek, A., "Między umową ślubną a poezją w tekstach z Ugaritu," *Człowiek w poszukiwaniu prawdy. Prace dedykowane Profesorowi Stanisławowi Głazowi SJ z okazji 70-lecia urodzin i 50-lecia życia zakonnego* (ed. M. Jabłoński) (Kraków: WN AIK 2021) 430–448.

Murphy, R.E., *The Song of Songs. A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1990).

Pope, M., *Song of Songs. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 7c; Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1977).

Ravasi, G., *Il Cantico dei Cantici. Commento e attualizzazione* (Testi e Commenti 4; Bologna: Dehoniane 1992).

Roberts, P.D., *Let Me See Your Form. Seeking Poetic Structure in the Song of Songs* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD: University Press of America 2007).

Schniedewind, W.M., *How the Bible Became a Book. The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (New York – Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2004).

Stefaniak, L., "Pieśń nad Pieśniami, która jest Salomona. Wstęp – Komentarz," Znak 12/2–3 (1960) 192–195.

Stoop-van Paridon, P.W.T., *The Song of Songs. A Philological Analysis of the Hebrew Book* (Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement Series 17; Louvain – Paris – Dudley, MA: Peeters 2005).

Szymik, S., "Małżeństwo i rodzina w Biblii," *Życie społeczne w Biblii* (ed. G. Witaszek) (Lublin: RW KUL 1997) 203–225.

Tigay, J.H., *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania 1982).

van der Toorn, K., *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2007).

Van Seters, J., "The Redactor in Biblical Studies. A Nineteenth Century Anachronism," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 29 (2003) 1–19.

Van Seters, J., "The Role of the Scribe in the Making of the Hebrew Bible," Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions 8 (2008) 99–129.

de Vaux, R., *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions* (trans. J. McHugh) (London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1988).

Warzecha, J., "Miłość potężna jak śmierć (Pieśń nad pieśniami)," Pieśni Izraela (ed. J. Frankowski) (Wprowadzenie w Myśl i Wezwanie Ksiąg Biblijnych 7; Warszawa: ATK 1988) 153–175.

Zorell, F., *Lexicon hebraicum Veteris Testamenti* (Roma: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum 1989).