



The Culmination of the “Royal Travesty” in the Poetic Imagery of Solomon’s Wedding Procession (Song 3:6–11)

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Abstract: The description of the wedding procession in Song 3:6–11 is distinguished by the culmination of royal features and its climax in the cyclical poetic development of the theme of the king. It is also the only direct reference to weddings in the Song of Songs. Therefore, the following question has been asked about the content of the culmination of royal metaphors in 3:6–11: What is the relationship between the meaning of the pericope and the wisdom conclusion of the entire Canticle (8:5–7)? The article begins with the cultural context (*Sitz im Leben*) of weddings, and then arguments are presented in favour of the interpretation of pericope 3:6–11 as a poetic vision of a wedding procession. The literary device of the royal travesty and its use in the Song of Songs (form criticism) are explained. The basic exegetical analysis is preceded by an analysis of the composition of the pericope. It leads to the conclusion that there is a compositional relationship between the pericope under study 3:6–11 and the punch line of Canticle 8:5–7. They reflect the steps in the progression of the message within the cyclical development of its content, so characteristic for the Song of Songs. The study ends with an intertextual analysis of the studied pericope 3:6–11 and the wisdom conclusion of Canticle 8:5–7. A deeper analysis results in the conclusion that the royal travesty of the wedding procession serves as something more than the praise of the nuptials themselves. The bridegroom’s royal travesty is an attempt at a human response to the experienced mystery of the power and splendour of love (*mysterium fascinosum*) between the bride and bridegroom. The compositional relationship between the pericopes makes it possible to interpret and justify the words of the punch line of Canticle 8:6 as a call to a commitment and oath of nuptial love.

Keywords: nuptials, wedding procession, royal travesty, Solomon, human love, Song 3:6–11, The Song of Songs

^{3 6} Who is she coming up from the desert, as a pillar of smoke,
Rising scent of myrrh, and frankincense,
and of all the fragrant powders of the merchant?

⁷ Behold, it is the litter of Solomon!

With sixty valiant men around it, of the valiant of Israel.

⁸ All of them wearing the sword, all experienced in battle.

Each wears a sword on his thigh because of fear in the night.

⁹ King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon:

¹⁰ he made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple.

Its inside with inlaid with [scenes of] love of the daughters of Jerusalem

¹¹ Go forth, you daughters of Zion, and look at King Solomon wearing the crown, with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding—the day of his heart’s rejoicing.

1. Introduction

The description of the ceremonial procession presented in the third chapter of the Song of Songs is special for several reasons. Even a cursory reading reveals the unique “presence” of King Solomon, decorated with a crown or wreath. The magnificent, richly decorated royal litter and theophanic columns of smoke that open the description intensify the atmosphere of extraordinariness. Moreover, the text speaks directly about the wedding day. Therefore, various questions arise concerning the role of King Solomon in the Song of Songs and the place of this description (3:6–11) in the book’s composition. First of all, the message of this pericope and its reference to the sapiential punta of the Canticle 8:5–7, which Gianni Barbiero calls “The great profession of faith of the Song of Songs” (Barbiero 2011, 456) and is generally accepted as the main message of this biblical book (Barbiero 2011, 453, 507; 2016, 163–80; Assis 2009, 236–37; Fox 1985, 168; Murphy 1990, 62, 195–96; Andruska 2019, 10–14, 113; Dell 2005, 9–16; cf. Heereman 2018, 418–35). The purpose of the study is to answer these research questions, which have been specified below (see 1.3).

1.1. Solomon in the Song of Songs and the Culmination of Royal Characteristics in the Description of the Wedding Procession

The Song of Songs is attributed to King Solomon, as are several other books with wisdom features (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Wisdom).¹ However, in the case of the Song of Songs, Solomon seems to be not only the honorary author of the book but also the actual bridegroom (see Andruska 2019, 5). The name of this monarch appears many times in the Canticle (1:1; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12). Moreover, in several places, there is only a reference to the “king,” which is also associated by commentators with Solomon. Already in the first verses, the call “Let the king bring me into his chambers” (1:4) has a later continuation in the poetic description of the wedding chamber and arbour, with cedar and cypress elements of its finish (1:16–17), where there is the overlapping of two images—the king’s palace chamber finished with noble woods and the “chamber” arbour immersed in vegetation (masterfully combining the wedding motif with garden and royal motifs). The reference to Pharaoh’s

¹ The Song is not a typical wisdom book, but in its long process of formation, the wisdom tradition has also marked it with its features. See Andruska 2019, 94–111, ch. 4; cf. Dell 2012, 8–26.

chariot (1:9) also serves the royal stylization of the message, which culminates in the presentation of the royal wedding procession, the luxurious royal litter (3:6–10), and the wedding “crown” (3:11). There is also a solemn call to the daughters of Jerusalem to come out and look at King Solomon.

At the same time, this pericope has another unique feature, which is a reference to weddings (3:11—התונה). This is the only place in the Song of Songs where weddings are talked about directly. This is significant for the book, the subject of which focuses on the love of two lovers.

1.2. The Wedding Procession in the Composition of Song

Referring the examined pericope to the composition of the entire Song of Songs, one can also notice its significant position in the work. Comparing it to the most basic compositional pattern, on which most exegetes agree (Exum 1973, 47–79; Roberts 2007, 11; Jasnos 2021, 485–86), we get a location in the central section of the chiasmic structure, i.e., 3:6–5:1. It begins with the wedding procession (3:6–11), an important element of customs defining the key stage of the marriage being concluded, and ends with the symbolic, metaphorical consummation of marriage connected with the wedding feast (4:16–5:1).

1.3. Problems and Strategy of Research Proceedings

Two features of pericope 3:6–11 that prove its uniqueness should be indicated. Firstly, it is the culmination of “royal” features; secondly, it is the only place in the Canticle that speaks directly about weddings. Therefore, the main question has been raised: What meaning does the culmination of the royal metaphor serve in 3:6–11? Although the answer seems to be known, a deeper analysis shows that it is about something more than a (royal) wedding celebration. Thus, an additional question concerns the relationship between the meaning of pericope 3:6–11 and the sapiential conclusion of the entire Canticle (8:5–7). What contribution does it make to the message of the book, which is a praise of love? The research aim is to answer the raised questions.

In order to find an in-depth answer to the questions asked, the following steps were planned using the historical-critical method. First, the paper will examine the cultural context (*Sitz im Leben*) of the wedding. Arguments in this regard will be presented in favour of the interpretation of pericope 3:6–11 as a poetic vision of a wedding procession. Then, the literary device of royal travesty and its presence in the Canticle (form criticism) will be explained. In the next step, the composition of the pericope will be analysed, taking into account the elements of the royal travesty. The main focus of the research consists in an exegetical analysis of the pericope. The last stage consists in an intertextual analysis of similar motifs in the description of the wedding procession in 3:6–11 and the Canticle’s sapiential conclusion in 8:5–7.

2. The Nuptial Character of the Procession

What supports the interpretation of 3:6–11 as a wedding procession? The question is justified because the Song is neither dramatic nor narrative, even though many commentators have tried to “reconstruct” a chronological interpretation of the “events.” Therefore, it is difficult to clearly indicate and define previous activities leading to the wedding. It should also be noted that scholars analysing the unit usually focus on the litter itself (vv. 7, 9–10) and the figure of King Solomon (vv. 7, 9, 11), or on trying to compare the description of the procession with ancient cultic processions (v. 6) (see 5.2 below). Rarely do they attempt to read the meaning of the entire song 3:6–11, as a literary whole (see Exum 2003, 312) (“recreates” the poetic episode “the crowning, and the wedding” as a literary travesty).

In order to talk about Israeli (Jewish) weddings at all, one must know the basic socio-cultural context related to wedding customs.

The first stage leading to marriage was engagement. The agreement between the families of the future spouses was legally binding on the engaged couple. Later texts attested to the custom of writing a wedding contract (see Tob 4:16). The groom’s family paid the woman’s family a wedding fee, the so-called *mohar* (see Gen 34:12). This state of affairs, i.e., the betrothal period, could last about a year. Then the second stage of marriage took place. This involved the ceremonial bringing of the bride, i.e., moving her from her father’s house to her husband’s house. Then the groom recited the wedding formula (known from later Aramaic wedding contracts from the Jewish colony in Elephantine, Egypt). Finally, the wedding feast began, and on the wedding night, the newlyweds were led to the marriage chamber, where the marriage was consummated (de Vaux 1988, 32–33).

Therefore, two distinct stages can be identified: the engagement and the bringing of the bride, the latter of which was usually a ceremonial event. According to Israeli customs, this is a key moment in marriage ceremonies. There are different versions of this custom. There could only be one procession—such a situation seems to have occurred in the case of Jesus’ parable about the foolish virgins (bridesmaids) who were not prepared to participate in the ceremony. However, there may have been two processions that met on the way, as in the situation mentioned in 1 Macc 9:37, 39.

The first fundamental clue that the examined pericope depicts a wedding procession is the direct statement that it is “the day of his [Solomon’s] wedding” (חֲתונה—a marriage, wedding), “the day of his heart’s rejoicing.” This term is used in the call to the Daughters of Zion.

The custom of women, bridesmaids, and young girls going out in front of the wedding procession, especially in front of the groom, is confirmed by biblical texts (“Daughters of kings come out to meet you”—Ps 45:10; “The bridegroom is coming, go out to meet him!”—Matt 25:6). In their light, the call becomes very clear:

"Go forth, you daughters of Zion, and look at King Solomon wearing the crown, [...] on the day of his wedding—the day of his heart's rejoicing" (Song 3:11).

Pericope 3:5–11 builds a narrative line through a combination of dynamic images and indicating activities. The description presents images that seem to have been captured in motion—the litter surrounded by the "king's guard," the road from the desert to Jerusalem ("Movement Arrested in Time and Space") (Exum 2003, 211). There are also activities that determine movement: "coming up from the desert," "rising scent," "go forth ... and look at" (vv. 6, 11). The entire procession is surrounded by an aura of mystery. The question of "who is coming up from the desert?" does not find an adequate answer. The description of Solomon's litter presents it as unusual, festive, and surrounded by a special guard. However, the description becomes clear in the context of the final call to the Daughters of Zion to come out and look at the king "on the day of his wedding—the day of his heart's rejoicing" (v. 11). The last sentence and call have the character of an interpretative key. The direct reference to the wedding leaves no more doubt. In this context, it can be stated without any major reservations that the description depicts a wedding procession known from marriage customs. The mysterious woman "coming up from the desert" is the bride being led to the wedding. Othmar Keel, well aware of wedding customs, also comes to a similar conclusion that there must be a bride in the litter, whom the procession leads to the wedding venue. Therefore, the description of the litter appears in response to a question about the woman (Keel 1994, 139).

Therefore, if the description of 3:6–11 depicts a wedding procession, its significance in the Canticle is unique because, according to the custom of marriage, this was a key stage in the celebration of marriage. Next to the betrothal, which was associated with the formal and legal aspect, moving from the father's house to the husband's house was a crucial event that began the realization of the relationship—entering into marriage.

3. The Character of the "Royal" Literary Stylization

If we want to answer the question about the content of the royal metaphoric and its culmination in the description of the wedding procession, we must first consider the nature of the "royal" stylization of the poem. It is usually called royal fiction or travesty. This term refers to the way in which the characters (the bride and the groom in the Canticle) are presented—in a royal convention, as if they were a king and a queen/princess. Literary travesty is a kind of fantasy disguise (travesty) that allows one to abandon an ordinary situation by identifying with an outside character. The bridegroom is given the title "king"; in the poem, it is a literary device that puts the lovers into a different social situation. The characters perform a specific social

role, different from the one they perform on a daily basis (Fox 1985, 293; Barbiero 2011, 57).

In his research on the motifs and the way of presenting characters in Egyptian love songs, Alfred Hermann (1959) distinguished three groups of motifs and schemes of love songs. The concept itself comes from André Jolles (1932), who dealt with travesty (“costume change”) in literature. In Egyptian songs, travesty was a form of transfer from one’s social situation to the imaginary world of higher classes (royal/noble travesty) or, on the contrary, to a lower social group (servant’s travesty) or the social periphery (shepherd’s travesty) (Fox 1985, 292). Hermann’s theory also had a major influence on the study of the Song of Songs. His categories were used to classify the themes in the Canticle by Gillis Gerleman (1965) and John B. White (1978).

The theory has been critically approached by Manfred Görg (1983, 101–15), who however represents an allegorical interpretation and sees a messiah or Yhwh himself behind the figure of Solomon. Meanwhile, Annette Schellenberg (2020, 178) believes, on the contrary, that the description of Solomon contains critical irony. Nina-Sophie Heereman, on the other hand, develops a symbolic interpretation and accepts the ancient royal ideology as the key to reading the entire Song of Songs (Heereman 2021; 2016, 181–219; cf. Vollmer 2018, 93–121).

An important argument in the criticism of the travesty theory is the complexity of the image of the bridegroom in the Canticle and the occurrence of royal stylization only in selected songs. As Michael Fox had already noted, Hermann, who analysed the Egyptian love songs, did not apply the travesty theory faithfully, which Jolles applied to the description of the entire work. Hermann applied it to motifs and patterns (Fox 1985, 292). Also in the case of the Canticle, the travesty does not apply to the entire book but to selected songs and fragments of the text. However, the Song of Songs is a complex literary composition, formed on the basis of many different love songs (with a various metaphorical content). Their variability is also a feature of the Song. The Hebrew Bible is characterized by the creative use of literary forms. The long process of shaping biblical works is the path to such transformations. Heereman’s critique relies on artificial distinctions and seems to argue that the only possible cultural influences lie in the faithful, unaltered adoption of a pattern. Nonetheless, nothing prevents a poet from applying in the Song of Songs the royal stylization only in selected songs and alluding to it in others. This does not undermine the royal travesty of selected songs or certain passages. Many scholars today accept the theory of travesty or role-playing as convincing and valuable, combining it also with a symbolic interpretation (Barbiero 2011, 14, 45; Andruska 2019, 156–57; Exum 2003, 312; Murphy 1990, 152; Heinevetter 1988, 173; cf. Müller 1997, 555–74). In Egyptian songs, whose function is entertainment, such travesty is only a love fantasy. Meanwhile, in the Song of Songs, it has a greater significance and is a carrier of deeper content.

In the Song of Songs, the dominant travesty is royal (1:4, 12–14; 3:6–11; 7:6; 8:10–12), while the pastoral travesty is only marked (1:5–8; 2:7). The royal travesty has a major impact on the entire poem, which already has a reference to Solomon in its title. The king’s name appears in it many times, as already noted in the introduction. At the same time, it must clearly be noted that King Solomon is not present in the poem; he is not the hero of the Song of Songs. Solomon’s name and image were invoked (ch. 3) because he was a type of a great, admired ruler and lover (on the wealth and splendour of Solomon’s kingdom, his marriage to an Egyptian princess, and his large harem) (see 1 Kgs 3:1, 7–8). However, Solomon’s symbols have their limitations (Zakovitch 2018, 23–32). In some places in the Canticle, for instance, his figure seems ambivalent (8:11–12) (see Birnbaum 2017, 233–64).

The royal travesty appears in the Canticle to a limited extent. In many places, the beloved is not “a king” but “is” alternately a shepherd and a resident of the city (his beloved finds him searching for her in the city at night), and he is also compared to a running deer and a gazelle. “Solomon” is only a lyrical motif, like the deer, the vineyard, or the shepherd. He is a symbol of royal dignity in which every groom participates. As Duane Garrett (Garret and House 2004, 181–82) emphasizes, it is not the groom who plays the role of Solomon but Solomon who functions as the metaphorical figure of the bridegroom.

The wedding of two lovers in the Song of Songs is presented as a royal wedding following the example of Solomon and the Egyptian princess (Ravasi 1992, 84). The typical figure of Solomon adds splendour on the wedding day. It is worth noting that the royal model began to be used in wedding customs practiced among Jews—the groom became the king of the wedding ceremony, and the bride became a princess introduced to the palace, to the royal marriage chamber (a custom probably practiced in the period of Judaism until the destruction of the Temple; in the Syro-Palestinian environment, this custom is still upheld) (Ravasi 1992, 47; Barbiero 2011, 57; Pope 1977, 303).

4. The Literary Composition of Pericope 3:6–11

The boundaries of the pericope are determined by the change in place and circumstance; it is no longer the city or night (3:1–5). The presentation of the characters in love changes (royal travesty). The pericope is surrounded by the utterances of lovers, which dominate the entire Canticle (they take the form of monologues that sometimes intertwine into dialogic lines) (see 1:15–2:3). This style is suspended in 3:6–11. Exegetes have trouble determining who is now the speaker/utterer of the words. It cannot be either he (the bridegroom) or she (the bride) because they are described

characters (*contra*) (Assiss 2009, 103). These cannot be the Daughters of Jerusalem (as Fox 1985, 119 wanted), who speak in many other places in the Canticle, because this time they are called to admire the king. Rather, an external narrator or an additional chorus seems to be involved (Roberts 2007, 148).

The Song bears the features of an epithalamium known from Hellenistic poetry (Barbiero 2011, 143), i.e., a poem of praise in honour of the newlyweds performed by the choir (see Ps 45, especially v. 10: “Daughters of kings come out to meet you”). The clearly majestic tone of this epithalamium distinguishes it from all the poetic units in the Song of Songs (Elliott 1989, 83). This majestic passage has enormous expressive power. First, an exclamation and a question direct attention to one unique figure, approaching as if in a cloud, among wonderful scents. And then the whole company “appears,” comprising 60 armed heroes.

The structure of the pericope is determined by four stanzas and a symmetrical arrangement (Roberts 2007, 146; Barbiero 2011, 143). One can notice the compositional frame, which is formed by calls to admire the bride and groom. It begins with a rhetorical question and, at the same time, an exclamation: “Who is she coming up from the desert?!” (v. 6) and ends with a call to “come out and see King Solomon! ... on the day of his wedding, on the day of his heart’s rejoicing!” (v. 11). The inner pair of corresponding pairs are verses 7–8 and 9–10.²

- v. 6 Who is she?
- vv. 7–8 Solomon’s litter—description of the surroundings
- vv. 9–10 Solomon’s litter—description of the interior
- v. 11 Look at him!

The text is difficult. The pericope contains many secrets and raises many questions and perceived problems. It may even be challenging to determine where the text still refers to the bride and where to the bridegroom. The beginning of verse 7 (“Behold, it is the litter of Solomon!”) is treated by some researchers as a reconstruction or a later addition (Rudolph 1962, 36). If we omit it, the “60 heroes” can be interpreted as the “surroundings” of the one who is “coming up from the desert.”

Also, an attempt to “narratively” or logically determine the hypothetical course of the ceremony does not help to solve the difficulties for several reasons. The customs in the Song have eclectic features (e.g., a woman talks about “bringing a man into her mother’s house”) (Song 3:4). Wedding customs may also have varied locally, as explained above. Moreover, we are dealing with poetry with a metaphorical depth that “does not care” about realism.

The question in the form “Who is she coming up from the desert” appears only in two places, in the analyzed pericope and in the line summarizing the Canticle (8:5)

² Some separate verse 6 as a independent song (see Heinevetter 1988; Roberts 2007, 147). Heinevetter further considers that verses 6–8 constitute an older layer. Numerous other ideas for interpreting the composition are discussed by Roberts (2007, 146–49).

(Barbiero 2016, 163–80). The question seems to be a continuation of 3:6, as it is supplemented with "... leaning on her beloved?" In this way, the pericope on the marriage 3:6–11 received its continuation in the form of a wisdom summary of the entire Book of Song of Songs.

An analysis of the relationship between the distant pericopes of the Canticle has a convincing rationale. The Song of Songs has a special composition marked by a huge number of connections. Phillip D. Roberts, who analysed the remote connections between the units of the Canticle, described their number as staggering (Roberts 2007, 395). Rhetorical analyses, uncovering the literary procedures that link individual poetic units, demonstrate a deliberate composition that encompasses the entire work (cf. Murphy 1979, 436–43; Johnson 2009, 289; Andruska 2019, 33; Fox 1985, 209–24; Exum 2003, 33–37). Jennifer Andruska estimates that the final form of the text of the Song of Songs "is woven together so thoroughly that it should be viewed as a unified work." (Andruska 2019, 33) Authors inclined to this assessment indicate the factors of literary unity, including thematic coherence, repetitions, and the so-called associative sequences (Fox 1985, 209; Exum 2003, 3, 33–37; Andruska 2019, 33–34; Pope 1977, 40; Barbiero 2011, 21). Refrains and repetitions are particularly important compositional elements. Barbiero distinguishes the repetitions of words and themes. Basing on Timothea Elliott's findings, he draws up a list of as many as eight different refrains and recurring motifs that act to structure the text. Among them is also the "refrain of ascent" (3:6; 6:10; 8:5).³

The repetitions and recurring themes relate to another feature of the work, namely the cyclical development of the content (Exum 1973, 55; Fischer 2010, 56–82). Due to this feature, we should look for a kind of continuation and development of content in units with similar phrases and motifs. Such is the wisdom punchline of 8:5–7. The connection with it is clearly indicated by the opening significant phrase "Who is she coming up from the desert" and the continuation of the nuptial theme, as will be justified in intertextual analysis 5.3.

³ a) Embrace, 2:6; 8:3.
 b) Awakening, 2:7; 3:5; 8:4.
 c) Mutual belonging, 2:16; 6:3; 7:11.
 d) Passage of the day, 2:17; 4:6.
 e) The young stag on the mountains, 2:17; 4:5–6; 8:14.
 f) Grazing among the lotus flowers, 2:16; 4:5; 6:3.
 g) Ascent, 3:6; 6:10; 8:5.
 h) Sick with love, 2:5; 5:8." (Barbiero 2011, 21; cf. Elliott 1989, 38; Murphy 1990, 76–78)

5. Exegetical Analysis of Pericope 3:6–11

Due to limitations of space, only the more important elements of the analysis will be presented in this article. The study aims to answer the following questions: What content does the culmination of the royal metaphor serve? What is the relationship between the meaning of the analysed pericope and the wisdom conclusion of the entire Canticle (8:5–7)?

The analysis will focus on fragments constituting the compositional parts of the pericope, primarily the verses concerning Solomon and his litter (vv. 7–11), and then the description of the figure “coming up from the desert” (v. 6) will be considered. Its presentation is combined with the royal metaphor and complements/deepens the meaning and message of the whole pericope (3:6–11).

5.1. The Litter, Love, and the Bridegroom (vv. 7–10)

The presentation of King Solomon’s unusual litter is associated with rich symbolism, which particularly inspired the authors of the symbolic-allegorical interpretation (see Bardski 2011, 130–219).

5.1.1. The Litter and Its Construction

The presentation of the king’s litter begins in verse 7: “Behold, it is the litter of Solomon!” This appears instead of the expected continuation of the description of the bride begun in verse 6. Some have therefore wondered whether this sentence could have been added (cf. Keel 1994, 139; Pope 1977, 432). However, the particle indicating the deictic particle הנה may indicate that it is an answer to a question (Roberts 2007, 151).

Considering that the woman was brought in a ceremonial procession during ceremonial weddings, it can be assumed that such a situation is presented in the Song—the bride is carried in a litter, secured by a select escort, as befits a royal bride. The description would reflect the image that appears to the observer: first, a puff of dust, then armed soldiers surrounding Solomon’s litter, and upon their approach, the details of the lectern’s appearance can be seen (Barbiero 2011, 147). Two different Hebrew terms were used to define the litter, causing difficulties for exegetes. The first of them, מטה (v. 7), means a bed or a sofa intended for sleeping, resting, or feasting (it is worth noting that in the context of carnal love, another term is usually used: משכב) (BDB 4296; Pope 1977, 431). The second term, אפריון (v. 9), appears only once in the Hebrew Bible. Its precise definition is not easy; it may be a chair, a litter, or a chariot (BDB 68). Its origin is uncertain; it may be a borrowing from the Greek *phoreion* (sedan chair; see LXX), Sanskrit (*paryanka*; cf. see palanquin), Persian (*upari-yana*), or even Egyptian (*pr-house*) (Murphy 1990, 149; Barbiero 2011, 153; Pope 1977, 441).

Some exegetes are of the opinion that these two terms do not designate one and the same litter but that verse 9 refers to a different, second object. There have also been attempts to correct the second term and interpret/read it as a throne (Langkammer 2016, 77), the base of a royal throne, a throne room, or even a royal palace (Gerleman 1965, 139–40; Exum 2003, 310). These interpretations alluded to the “crowning” of Solomon suggested in verse 11. However, this action must be understood symbolically, more broadly, as will be explained below.

Most researchers treat the terms synonymously and translate them as “litter.” This is also consistent with the tradition of interpretation attested by the LXX and Vlg. Both Hebrew terms include the concept of a litter as a type of armchair or bed with a canopy and poles for carrying by porters.

Verses 9–10 describe the details of the construction and decoration of the litter (אפריון in v. 9). Remarkably, the text notes that King Solomon made the litter לו (“for himself”). This is a clear reference to the magnificent buildings built by Solomon: the palace, the temple, and other buildings attested in 1 Kgs (7:1–12) (Garrett and House 2004, 181).

The description of the litter lists the elements of its construction and decoration as well as the materials used. However, the multitude of terms does not make it easy to identify the technical details of the litter’s construction with certainty: “King Solomon made himself a palanquin [of] the wood of Lebanon: he made its posts [of] silver, its back [of] gold, its seat [of] purple.” It is not certain whether the wood of the cedar of Lebanon was the basic building material of the litter or whether it was used to make עמודים (“columns”) (Garrett and House 2004, 179).

Egyptian litters, open (a type of portable throne) or covered, were made of wood with selected parts fitted with silver and gold sheets, as evidenced by the drawings. In the Hellenistic era, Antiochus IV Epiphanes had a penchant for sedan chairs. Athenaios Naukratites described how, during competitions organized by the ruler, there were to be several hundred litters in which rich women were carried (which may seem an exaggerated number). These litters had gold or silver legs (Keel 1994, 141).

The term רפידה (*hapax legomenon*) presents difficulties. The verb from which the term may derive, i.e., רפד, means “to spread,” “to stretch,” but also “to support.” The term itself can mean a covering, a canopy, or a support or backrest (BDB 7507; Garrett and House 2004, 179–80). Roland E. Murphy (1990, 149) translates it as: “roof,” Elie Assis (2009, 109) translates it as: “bolster.” This backrest would be golden.

The term מרכב is also not clear; it could refer to carrying poles (rods for carrying the litter) (BDB 4817). However, the מרכב is made of purple (ארגמן), so it is more likely to be a seat covered with (expensive) dyed fabric (see Exod 26:1, 31–36; 28:5–8, 15; Num 4:6–13, etc.).

Purple dye was prepared on the basis of the secretion of a special type of snail commonly called purple snails or scarlet snails (which, depending on the species,

gave purple, dark red, or blue dye) in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. The main places where purple was produced were Tyre (hence the term “Tyrian purple”) and Sidon. The dye had special properties; it was extremely durable, and the sun did not cause it to fade but, on the contrary, deepened the colour. It was very expensive because it took thousands of molluscs to collect enough secretion to dye one piece of clothing. Therefore, materials dyed purple indicated the status of the person using them (Garrett and House 2004, 180). The name “purple” was used to describe either the dye itself or the dyed material (Wajda 2012, 126–28; Frangié-Joly 2016, 171–81).

5.1.2. The Litter’s Equipment and Decoration

The litter’s equipment and decoration are important aspects of its presentation. They consist of the material of the seat (*chaise longue*), which was a purple-plum or dark red colour (blue purple was cheaper, so it was probably not intended), and decorations defined by a phrase that is not easy to interpret: “Its interior is inlaid with the love [sic] of the daughters of Jerusalem” (v. 10).

After a detailed and precise list of materials used for construction and decoration (cedar wood, silver, gold, purple), a term is given that sounds abstract in this context and constitutes a *crux interpretum*. Moreover, the poet’s attention stops at the “interior” of the litter, to which an entire separate section is devoted. This interior is decorated in a specific way: the decorating “matter” is literally “love” (אהבה), and the verb used is ambiguous. The verb רצף refers to matching/combining and reflects the work of a decorator who creates, e.g., mosaics and marquetry. The participle רצוּף can be translated as “laid out,” “decorated,” “joined together,” or “well-fitted.” (BDB 7528; Murphy 1990, 149)

Instead of the term “love,” certified by MT, some propose to “correct” the text because of the verb used. In this way, an attempt is made to indicate the material used for decoration: *‘ābānīm* (“stones”—semi-precious stones used for mosaics and decorations) (see Müller et al. 1992, 36; Fox 1985, 126) or *hābenīm* (“ebony”) (Langkammer 2016, 77). Yet another attempt to read the Hebrew term proposes the word “skin,” based on the Arabic term (Murphy 1990, 149–50). However, neither change is convincing (Garrett and House 2004, 180; Barbiero 2011, 155).

However, there is a valid argument for treating the original term “love” as the correct one and not correcting it. The term אהבה in the Canticle has an important meaning: it appears many times (2:4, 5–7; 3:5; 5:8; 7:7; 8:4, 6–7), including in an abstract sense (2:4; 8:6–7). Therefore, one should not try to avoid and, as it were, “weaken” the meaning of such a fundamental term for this book.

Another proposal to explain the text is to translate “inlaid with love.” (Murphy 1990, 150) In this reading, “love” is not a decoration but a feeling and commitment that accompanied the decoration of the litter. It would be the love of the daughters of Jerusalem. However, this interpretation has weaknesses (Exum 2003, 305).

The weaknesses of such an interpretation are both the structure of the sentence and the fact that such a description would end with an indication of the people decorating the interior of the litter without explaining the type of decorations. Meanwhile, the previous description detailed the design and materials used.

There is another explanation that may arise in connection with the discovery in 2021 in the archaeological park of Pompeii of a unique ceremonial chariot, previously unknown to archaeologists in the region of Italy and Greece, which could have been used for parades, processions and especially for wedding celebrations. The website of the Archaeological Park of Pompeii reports both the documentation of the discovery of the ceremonial chariot (Pompeii Sites, 2021) and its reconstruction (Pompeii Sites, 2023). The oval decorative medallions on its exterior, made of bronze and silver, depict love scenes. Without a doubt, it can be said that the vehicle was “inlaid with [scenes of] love.” Fragments of a royal bed inlaid with ivory plates, also with the image of a pair of lovers, were found in geographically closer Ugarit (Keel 1994, 144; Ravasi 1992, 86). It is therefore very likely that the writer had this type of decoration depicting “the love of the daughters of Jerusalem” in mind. They could also be located inside the litter. If the detail of “making a litter for himself” (v. 9a) meant that it was prepared especially for a special wedding, then these scenes would be an appropriate decoration for a wedding litter. Thus, the recent discovery in Pompeii provides a key argument for this interpretation of the problematic phrase, which is crucial for the interpretation of the entire pericope.

The materials used to create the artistic inlays are not mentioned. This is probably because the way of presenting the wedding litter has an even deeper dimension, and additional materials would disturb this symbolic message. Nevertheless, Barbiero drew attention to the order of the materials mentioned, which is not accidental—they are listed from least to most valuable: cedar (wood), silver, gold, purple (it was more expensive than gold). The last element of such a “ranking” of what is valuable is love (Barbiero 2011, 157; Elliott 1989, 88). In the context of the sapiential conclusion of the Song (8:7), the purposefulness of this unusual play of meanings in the description of Solomon’s palanquin is even more convincing. Love surpasses everything that is valuable to man.

5.1.3. Armed Litter Guard

The text does not only focus on the interior. The dynamics of the description leads from the outside (vv. 6–8) to the inside (vv. 9–10) before finally referring to the whole (v. 11). The litter is surrounded by armed “heroes,” who are skilled in weapons (v. 7b) and constitute a kind of “honour guard,” as Keel (1994, 139) calls them. These heroes are “from among the heroes of Israel.” The same term גִּבּוֹרִים (“heroes”) is used to describe David’s chosen soldiers in 2 Sam 23:8–39. The text also mentions 30 of the most outstanding heroes who were famous for their deeds (vv. 19, 22–23). In the case of Solomon, there are 60 heroes. The model is analogous—these are the best of

the best soldiers of the king. The heroes are also armed: “Each wears a sword on his thigh because of fear in the night” (v. 7).

The sword or saber plays an important role in wedding ceremonies (Assiss 2009, 116–17). Swords have a similar meaning in the description of the procession; not only do they serve to protect people traveling the dangerous route from the Judean Desert (Luke 10:30), but they are also a guarding symbol: in the Book of Genesis, a sword guards the access to the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:24), and in Tellal-Rimah in northwest Iraq, two swords guarded the Temple of Hadad (Keel 1994, 140). The weapons of the bodyguard seem more ceremonial, but at the same time, the text indicates a potential danger: “fear/terror of the night” (פחד בלילות). Interestingly, this fear/terror also appears in the Book of Psalms as an example of the threat at night from which God protects (Ps 91:5; see also Job 24:17).

Numerous representations of demons in the ancient Near East prove that people feared them and tried to protect themselves against them. According to folk beliefs, demons threatened people, and their action was intensified in specific situations, such as weddings and especially the marriage bed (see the story of Sarah: Tob 3:17; 6:14), as well as the related mysteries of conception and new life, the birth of a child. Various symbolic practices were intended to ward off evil spirits (cutting the air with a saber, shooting arrows) (Barbiero 2011, 85). These included the sword dance, known in Palestine and Syria. When performed by the bride, it has a protective (apotropaic) value. It combines elements of dance and saber movements to drive away evil spirits.

The meaning of the guard is more symbolic than real (Garrett and House 2004, 179). When interpreting a text, one must shift the emphasis from trying to read the dramatic narrative to trying to read the lyrical symbols (Stoop-van Paridon 2005, 164; Fox 1985, 121). If we assume that the armed men were protecting the bride carried in the litter from the threat of the wilderness and night, then that was where she was looking for her beloved—first on the steppe, looking for pastures (1:7–8), and then at night on the city streets (3:2–4)! The sword and heroes are symbolic signs of protection of what is both beautiful and weak—women—and, at the same time, strong—love. They are a symbolic shield of love, which is the material with the highest value (8:7b).

5.1.4. The Groom and the Wedding Day

The description of the magnificent guarded litter ends with the invocation: “Go forth, you daughters of Zion, and look” (v. 11). It contains the clearest and most direct reference to weddings. The phrase “Daughters of Zion” was used synonymously and in parallel with the term “Daughters of Jerusalem.” Because it is not used elsewhere in the Bible, Marvin H. Pope believes this phrase is unique (only the title “Sons of Zion” appears in Lam 4:2) (Pope 1977, 447). Zion is the most important part of Jerusalem, containing the royal palace and the temple. Therefore, this may mean that

the young women from the king's entourage, royal court ladies, and ladies-in-waiting who were acting as bridesmaids are being summoned. These bridesmaids are being called to admire the crowned king on his wedding day.

However, the description of Solomon's royal enthronement in the first chapter of 1 Kgs makes no mention of a wedding or the mother's role in the coronation or enthronement. Therefore, it is difficult to accept a literal and historical reference to the Israelite ruler (Murphy 1990, 152). Schellenberg, who is critical of the literary concept of royal travesty, attempts to indicate ironic elements in the description of Solomon's retinue. According to her, the image of the king who is crowned by his mother is a mocking image, showing "Solomon as a mama's boy." (Schellenberg 2020, 182) Nevertheless, such an interpretation completely disregards the solemn and festive nature of the description. Such "mockery" would be out of context. If any note of irony is echoed in Solomon's detailed description of the litter, it does not alter the overall festive nature of the nuptials described in the song. In the Cantic, the mother of the bridegroom participates in her son's nuptial rites, just as earlier, the mother of the bride was invoked in a similar context of marriage (see 3:4–5). This "coronation" corresponds to the royal travesty of the newlyweds in the Cantic and is, in fact, its main, culminating moment.

Notably, the term used for the crown (עטרה) is not used in the Bible to refer to the coronation of rulers but has a broader meaning of "wreath, diadem." (Stoop-van Paridon 2005, 171) The Akkadian term *eṭru* also means a headband, a head decoration with an uncovered upper part (KB 698). The problem with interpreting the scene as Solomon's royal coronation also stems from the fact that it used to be the mother who would crown the heir to the throne (Barbiero 2011, 162). This is also an argument for the nuptial nature of the mother's activity of apparently decorating her son's head with a wedding crown or a wedding wreath. Meanwhile, the bridesmaids are called to look with admiration "at King Solomon wearing the crown, with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding—the day of his heart's rejoicing!" (v. 11). The balancing act at the level of two complementary meanings, typical of the Cantic, makes us see here, on the one hand, a wedding wreath and, on the other, a symbolic "crowning" of the groom, the "king of the celebration."

Some also refer to a symbolic interpretation in which the woman herself is the crown (see Prov 12:4). In the wisdom writings, the term עטרה is used in this figurative sense ("wreath of glory, ornament, dignity") (Job 19:9; Prov 4:9; 12:4; 14:24; 16:31; Sir 1:18). The Book of Proverbs says directly that the wife is the husband's crown (Prov 12:4). The woman is also called the husband's crown in the prophetic writings, in which Israel the Bride is the beautiful crown of God the Bridegroom himself: "You will be a crown of splendour in YHWH's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God" (Isa 62:3; see also 28:5).

It is known that in the period of Judaism, crowns were placed on the heads of newlyweds until the destruction of the temple (70 AD). Nevertheless, it is not known

since when this practice took place. This custom is maintained in Orthodox culture (Ravasi 1992, 86; Falk 1990, 180). In the Byzantine liturgy, the wedding formula is called the bride as the groom's crown and vice versa (Keel 1994, 163). This is not proof in the strict sense, but a noteworthy example of the treatment of "disguise" not for the sake of grotesqueness (as in Egyptian love songs) but to emphasize the importance of the nuptial event. According to Gianfranco Ravasi and Barbiero, the wedding wreath may have already been used in Israel at that time as it emphasized the extraordinary nature of the wedding, whereby the groom became "the king of the wedding ceremony." (Ravasi 1992, 47; Barbiero 2011, 161; see also de Vaux 1988, 44; Jasnos 2021, 481) The wedding wreath, i.e., the bride, would be a sign of his belonging to her (in the Canticle, the sign of his "conquest" and the bride's belonging to him is his "banner of love" over the beloved) (2:4). Moreover, such an interpretation of the bride as the groom's crown would open up another dimension of the Song. In this context, the Daughters of Zion are called to admire not only Solomon the bridegroom but also his crown-bride (Barbiero 2011, 162–63).

The term חתנה is a hapax legomenon. It comes from the term חתן, which indicates a relationship between two families and can be translated as groom, newlywed, or son-in-law. The term חתנה can be translated as nuptials, wedding, or marriage (BDB 2861; KB 345). What is expressed by this term is primarily the institutional aspect of love, an aspect that is not specific to the Song but is certainly not omitted by it, both in its positive and negative aspects.

The day of Solomon's wedding is called "the day of his heart's rejoicing." There are two parallel terms in the text; for the groom, "the day of his wedding" is equivalent to "the day of his heart's rejoicing." This expression is also known in Egyptian love songs (Barbiero 2011, 163).

An analysis of the description of Solomon's litter and his figure as the "crowned" king-bridegroom would be incomplete if a key reference to the bride were missing. Within the description of the litter and the figure of the ruler, which belong to the literary convention/form of royal travesty, there are only symbolic allusions to the bride. These can be seen in the "love" with which the litter is "lined," in the precious contents of the litter protected by the "60 heroes of Israel," and in the symbolism of the wedding wreath-crown on the head of the newlywed.

The image of the mysterious figure of the arriving bride opens the entire composition of the unit. However, it is not written in the convention of a royal travesty but is based on cult motifs and mythical reminiscences. It is also a crucial element in building the meaning and meaning of the entire unit/song (3:6–11).

5.2. The Mystery of the Person of the Bride (v. 6)

The unit of the Song analysed here opens with the rhetorical question, "Who is she coming up from the desert?" (v. 6). Some interpret the text by impersonally

explaining "Who is she?" as "What is it?," adapting the question to the answer (a description of Solomon's litter—no straightforward answer regarding the woman) (Stoop-van Paridon 2005, 157–58). However, there is an analogous question in two parallel places (6:10 and 8:5), where it remains consistently unanswered (Barbiero 2011, 146). In the last chapter of the Canticle, the question has a developed form and leaves no doubt that it is about the bride: "Who is she coming up from the desert, leaning on her beloved?" (8:5). The analysed text itself (3:6) does not allow for simplifications. The interrogative pronoun *מי* ("who") indicates a person, not an object, and the demonstrative pronoun *זוֹת* is feminine, just like the participle used *עֹלָה* ("enters") (KB 783).

The person is said to be coming "from the desert." The term *מדבר* has several meanings (desert, wilderness, steppe). The desert is a symbol of innocence, of what is untouched by human hands. A wasteland or steppe indicates an uninhabited, poorly accessible, sometimes dangerous place; it was believed to be a place where ghosts and demons lived. In Mesopotamian and Ugaritic myths, the desert or steppe may mean the underworld (Pope 1977, 424).

The association of the desert with "ascending" suggests that it is about Jerusalem and the entry into the city up from the Judean Desert. The phrase has theological meaning and brings to mind the Pilgrim Psalms, also known as the "Psalms of Ascent" (to Zion). Another argument for the procession heading to Jerusalem is the call addressed to the Daughters of Jerusalem and the Daughters of Zion, who are told to go out to meet it (v. 11).

The unusual description does not indicate the appearance of the woman herself but the phenomena surrounding her. The view that appears to the observer's eyes brings to mind associations: "like a column of smoke" (*כְּתִימֵרוֹת עֶשֶׁן*) (lit. "like columns of smoke"—plural of generalizations) (Murphy 1990, 149). Such a view has cultic connotations. Columns of smoke are a typical motif in the description of the theophany (see Exod 19; Joel 3:3). The image of the coming is presented in terms of wonder.

There have been various attempts to read the mysterious verse with reference to both Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultic inspirations. Ravasi, e.g., compares the image of the bride being carried to the image of Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love and fertility (Ravasi 1992, 85). Connections were also sought with the spring festival and the New Year's procession in Babylon. Perhaps the image of the ceremonial procession is an echo of the ancient rite of Ishtar and Tammuz that was associated with his return from the underworld (hence the armed heroes and the aforementioned "terror of the night"). The great Egyptian processions in which the god Amun was carried through the Theban desert during the Opet festival have also been considered as having inspired the Hebrew writer (Ravasi 1992, 84; Murphy 1990, 152; Fox 1985, 120). Nevertheless, these are only assumptions, too general to be of any help in the interpretation of the mysterious image in 3:6 (see Pope 1977, 428–29).

The description of the theophoric pillars of smoke is further enhanced by another unusual element: the column of smoke is characterized as having “the scent of myrrh and frankincense and all kinds of delicious fragrances.”

Fragrances appear frequently in the Song. The rising smoke carries the scent of myrrh and “frankincense”—these two are specified by name. In addition to myrrh (1:13; 3:6; 4:6, 14; 5:1), frankincense is specified in the analyzed unit (3:6; 4:6, 14). These are two resins well known in antiquity, with many uses in medicine, perfumery, and worship.

Myrrh (Hebrew: *mōr*; Akkadian: *murru*; Greek: *murra*, *smyrna*, *stakle*) appears 12 times in the Hebrew Bible, including as many as eight times in the Song of Songs (Exod 30:23; Ps 45:9; Prov 7:17; Esth 2:12; Song 1:13; 3:6; 4:6, 14; 5:1, 5 [twice], 13). This fragrant resin saturated with essential oils was obtained from the myrrh balsam tree (*Commiphora abyssinica*) in Arabia, Ethiopia, Somalia, and India. It had many uses as incense, an ingredient of holy anointing oil (Exod 30:23), embalming (John 19:39), and a sweet-smelling perfume. Heating it enhances the scent, so women carried it in a pouch around their necks as a perfume and also as a kind of amulet (Frangié-Joly 2016, 171–81; Szczepanowicz 2003, 133; Van Beek 1960, 71–86).

Incense (לִבְנוֹה) comes from the Hebrew לָבַן (Akkadian: *labanatu*; Arabic: *al-lubban*; Greek: *libanos*), meaning “white.” It is known today as *olibanum*. The white color was powdered resin imported from South Arabia (from Sheba) (see 1 Kgs 10:1–2; Isa 60:6; Jer 6:20), where it grew naturally. It was obtained from a low tree or shrub (*Boswellia carteri* or another variety of the *Boswellia* species) and was known in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, and throughout the ancient East. The many medicinal uses of this bitter-tasting resin have been known since ancient times to treat various health problems, from colds and fevers, through liver diseases, to joint pain and skin diseases, as well as to stop bleeding. It was (and still is) an ingredient of many medicines and was also used as an antidote to some poisons. It is no wonder, therefore, that the smoke of the powerful frankincense incense was used in cultic (sacrifices) and magical and mystical practices. The Bible attests that it was offered as a burnt offering either alone or as an ingredient in the so-called incense offering (Exod 30:7, 34–36; Lev 2:1; Num 5:15; 1 Chr 9:29; Matt 2:11; Rev 18:13) (see Van Beek 1960, 81–83; Szczepanowicz 2003, 122).

The column of smoke to which the mysterious arriving figure is compared is characterized as a “rising scent of myrrh, and frankincense.” The verb used, קָטַר (מִקְטָר Pual participle), is unusual. It is a cultic term referring to burning offerings. It describes the burning of an animal sacrifice or an incense offering to “send it up” in smoke (Exod 30–31; Num 7) (BDB 6999; KB 1022). This is not the same as spraying perfume (Garrett and House 2004, 177; Stoop-van Paridon 2005, 161–62; cf. LXX *tethu-miamene*, i.e., “perfumed”). As Pope (1977, 426) notes, the passive form of the active verb used is unique (literally “raising a scent” or “turned into smoke”).

Therefore, the unified image combines, on the one hand, the theophanic symbol of a column of smoke and, on the other, the motif of incense burned as a sacrifice. The image of the uniqueness of the bride in the Song of Songs is built on a double connotation. The one who comes "rises" from the desert, probably the Judean Desert, up to Jerusalem. The person is compared to a theophanic column of smoke and enters, as if in a procession, among the "ascending" scents of the incense offering.

The question "Who is she?" remains seemingly unanswered. The writer does not continue this image and does not want to describe the goddess at all. The impression of the extraordinary, the fascination of the observer, is suspended. Faced with the mystery, the narrator falls silent, and the next verses continue the description of Solomon's litter. However, this exaltation of the bride in the image of some deity dominates the royal travesty of the bridegroom (Müller et al. 1992, 37–38). Pillars of smoke in the desert are rightly associated with the presence of God, but the text does not describe a theophany but a wedding (Garrett and House 2004, 177).

This presentation of the bride in the Canticle may be surprising. However, in this biblical book, there are discreet connotations of human love for God as its source. This puts the epiphanic visions of the bride in a new light. In the so-called "Song of Lebanon" (4:8–15), a man calls on his beloved, his "bride" (כלה) (Zorell 1989, 359; KB 438). He uses the metaphor of a garden and a well: "My sister, my bride, you are a garden locked up, a spring enclosed, a fountain sealed!" (4:12). In verse 4:15, he seems to call upon her again: "[You are] a spring that waters the gardens."

v. 12: גל ("well"), מעין ("spring")

v. 15: מעין ("spring"), באר ("well"), מים חיים ונזלים ("living water, gushing")

But this time, the spring flows all the way from Lebanon; moreover, it irrigates not just one garden but many gardens: "[You are] a spring that waters the gardens, a well of living water flowing down from Lebanon!"

Therefore, commentators see an analogy here to the paradise source from the Book of Genesis, which gives rise to four rivers: "The garden is not able to contain the abundance of water, which overflows and waters the whole earth [...]. The myth of the rivers of paradise is widespread throughout the Orient." (Barbiero 2011, 228; see also Landy 1983, 194–98)

The garden metaphor takes on a deeper meaning this time. Barbiero notes that in the Book of Jeremiah, Lebanon was associated with God (Jer 18:14), and water itself is also a symbol of life in the Bible and a metaphor for God ("a well of living water": Jer 2:13; 17:13). Lebanon does not appear in the Song as a random image, but it is consistently repeated. In verse 8, the bride is called to come down from Lebanon (from God?), and in verse 11, the beloved states that even her "dresses smell of Lebanon," which brings to mind the promised land (Hos 14:7) (Barbiero 2011, 212; Garrett and House 2004, 195). Then she is a "closed" garden (see Gen 3:24). Finally, the bridegroom exclaims that she is "the spring that waters the gardens, a well of living water flowing down from Lebanon!" (v. 15). The bridegroom directs his words

and eyes to the source of the gardens and immediately calls on the winds—not the bride—to blow through his garden (he calls the north wind צפון and the south wind תימן). In the Cantic, there is often a discreet play on words and meanings, and the message has two levels. That seems to be the case this time as well. It can be considered that there is an allusion and a call to God—the source of the love shared by lovers. Just as snow cannot fail on the peaks of Lebanon (see Jer 18:14) and its springs cannot dry up, so true love, whose sources are in God, cannot be exhausted or annihilated (see 8:6–7). According to Barbiero (2011, 229–30), the theological dimension of love comes into play here.

The exclamation and question regarding the bride that opens unit 3:6–11 (“Who is she...?”) appears three times in the Cantic. It appears for the second time in 6:10, where the theophanic motifs are even more pronounced, and in the punchline of the Cantic, in its full form, “Who is she coming up from the desert?” The relationship of the two pericopes is displayed above under compositional analysis. The message of the line ending the Cantic seems to be closer to the one analyzed in this study.

5.3. Similar Motifs in the Description of the Wedding Procession and the Wisdom Conclusion of the Song of Songs

Although these two units differ at first glance in the form and content (the description of the procession from the perspective of an external observer—the love dialogue of the bride and groom), similar motifs and “continuity” can be found in them. Such juxtaposition and comparison of distant entities is not irrelevant. It may seem that a lot “happened” between verses 3:11 and 8:6. Nonetheless, the text of the Song is not narrative in nature and the content of this poetry cannot be interpreted in chronological order. The development of the content is cyclical in nature, as explained above (Exum 1973, 55; Fischer 2010, 56–82). The description of the wedding procession (3:6–11) plays a significant role in the Cantic, as has been shown. It can therefore be assumed that it will be in relation to the wisdom conclusion of the entire Book (8:5–7). The relationship between the texts is signalled by the repetition of the opening question at the beginning of both units (3:6; 8:5) (see above: compositional analysis).

The question, posed for the third time in the Cantic, “Who is she...?” no longer introduces any elements of description of the extraordinary nature of the woman herself, nor any praise of her (and the subsequent praise (vv. 6b–7a) concerns love itself, strong and priceless). The text states, however, that she comes “from the desert, leaning on her beloved,” which clearly refers to the description of the wedding procession in 3:6–11. According to Wilhelm Rudolph (1962, 181), the poet introduced this motif to indicate that the two persons in love are already married.

Since the development of content in the Canticle is poetic and cyclical in nature (as presented above), when analysing an individual song it is necessary to take into account the context of analogous motifs, images and formulations creating intertextual connections.

The motif of the priceless value of love, which cannot be bought (even for "all the wealth of the house") (8:7b), corresponds to the symbolic emphasis on the value of love, which exceeds the value of the precious materials used to build and decorate the litter (3:9–10). The theme of the threat to which love is exposed is shown in the first text as the demonic "terror of the night" (3:8) from which the heroes of Israel protect themselves and, in the second text, as "great waters" (of chaos) that "will not drown it" (8:7a).

The words "Put me like a seal on your heart" (8:6a) can be interpreted as a call for a vow of love, which completes the nuptial ceremony. In an ancient Egyptian love song, the beloved says: "If only I were her little seal-ring, the keeper of her finger!" (Cairo Love Songs, Group B: 21C) (Fox 1985, 38, 169). The seal was used to mark ownership (Garrett and House 2004, 254; Stoop-van Paridon 2005, 431). Garrett (2004, 254) describes the seal sign in 8:6 as "a sign of covenant commitment to marriage." In the Bible, the metaphor of the signet ring on God's finger expresses even more than the desire for intimacy—it is linked to the idea of choice and a deeper relationship, the union: "and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts" (Hag 2, 23; cf. Jer 22, 24). Although the phrase כחותם שימיני used does not indicate the act of sealing itself, the wearing of a jewel on the neck or arm with a seal symbolizing one's beloved expresses a relationship of exclusive belonging (Stoop-van Paridon 2005, 431). Such mutual affiliation is emphasised elsewhere by both the bride and the groom elsewhere in the Canticle (2:16; 6:3; 7:11; 8:12).

The verb שים, שום (Qal, imperativ) which opens the verse under analysis has different meanings: "to put, to place, to set, to establish, to determine, to make." (BDB 7760) It is also used in the prologue—the brothers "establish" (1, 6) the sister as the keeper of her own vineyard (the vineyard is also a metaphor for herself). Now (in the epilogue) the beloved wants him to be only for her too—and the seal is herself. Make me your personal seal—she urges. The woman's words are a call for commitment. This poetic form of the oath call can be considered as a complementary element to the description of the wedding procession (3:6–11).

Although the bride is shown in an aura of extraordinary nature similar to epiphanic images in 3:6–11, other units of the Canticle by various allusions (see above) testify to the connection of the love presented with God as its source. The sapiential conclusion of the Canticle, which corresponds to the description of the wedding procession (3:6–11), also contains such a reference to God. The phrase where the "ardor of love" is likened to the "flame of YHWH" (שלהבתיה 8:6b) has been interpreted by some commentators as emphasizing only the power of the ardor of love,

without actually referring to the person of God. Many commentators, however, tend to favor the interpretation pointing to God as the source of human love, also referring to the interpretation of ancient translations of the LXX and Peshitta (Elliott 1989, 196–97; Murphy 1990, 197; Ravasi 1992, 129; Kręciński 2008, 60–62 and others). Taking into account the poetic features of the Canticle, the multitude of literary devices, stylistic figures, the wealth of connections and allusions, as well as the very frequent double meaning, it must be assumed that in the sapiential conclusion of the Canticle, God's own name in relation to human love appears not only to strengthen the adjective but was used on purpose.

Conclusion

A closer look at the socio-cultural context of the nuptials allowed to observe in the analysed pericope arguments in favor of interpreting 3:6–11 as a wedding procession (*retinue*), therefore a key moment in the realization of the union. The analysis of the composition of the pericope made it possible to distinguish its units of meaning. The exegetical analysis of the content of 3:6–11 and comparative analysis (intertextual) with 8:5–7 in terms of similar motifs allowed to indicate similarities and connections. Consequently, answers to the research problems posed were obtained.

What is the meaning of the culmination of the royal metaphor in 3:6–11? The royal travesty of the bridegroom is an attempt at a human response to the experienced mystery of the power and magnificence of love between betrothed couples. The most important royal nuptials between Solomon and the princess (1 Kgs 3:1) are used in the Song to elevate the royal travesty. The splendor and dignity, happiness and joy of the royal nuptials lend a particularly celebratory character to the nuptial festivities. The travesty was therefore adopted as a cultural custom associated with wedding rites. The nuptial day became a “royal” festival, a day of joy for the newlyweds. The royal symbolism seems to have served to highlight and praise the institution of marriage. However, this interpretation, which stops at royalty, only partially brings out the meaning and the message of the Song of Songs.

The culmination of the royal travesty occurs in the poetic presentation of the wedding procession and the festively crowned Solomon. A deeper analysis of the text shows that, in fact, various aspects of this royal representation of the wedding procession serve to expose and reveal its greatest mystery and value—love itself personified in the bride. The description focuses on three elements: firstly, on the litter, which holds the greatest value—love itself; secondly, on the mystery of the bride coming in a procession (in a litter), which is presented with cultic and sacred terminology; and thirdly, the love that unites a woman and a man being a mystery, the source of which lies in God Himself.

Various poetic images in the Song of Songs reflect different faces/aspects of the experienced mystery of love. The description of the wedding procession shows its new dimension. The bride is no longer a lost shepherdess running among the shepherds (1:7–8), nor a girl who lurks on the city streets at night (3:2–3). Loving and beloved, she arrives at her royal wedding, beautiful, proud, arousing amazement and admiration. This suddenly changed image of the beloved, who comes from the wilderness as if in a procession, in columns of smoke of myrrh and incense, reveals the truth about the nature of human love, which elevates and reveals the dignity of a person in the eyes of the beloved, experiencing the mystery, the *mysterium fascinosum*. The letter is surrounded by theophanic signs because love personified in the bride is hidden there. The opening question of the analyzed song (v. 6a) finds its true answer.

How does the meaning of the pericope 3:6–11 relate to the sapiential conclusion of the entire Canticle (8:5–7)? What contribution does it make to the message of the book, which is a praise of love? The meaning of the analysed pericope is integrally connected with the meaning of the wisdom conclusion of the Canticle about love being stronger than death, its value exceeding all human possessions, and its power and impending dangers. Faith in the origin of love from God, as a gift of the One who is love, reveals a higher dimension of love, its mystery. This love requires protection, and this aspect of the love depicted is expressed through the royal guard composed of Israel's most valiant heroes who surround the litter and protect against all evil forces. The terror of the night symbolizes evil, misfortune, violence, death, stupidity, and disease. This symbolic meaning of protecting the most precious love in a person's life brings to mind its threats: deprecation, humiliation, materialization, and vulgarization.

Talking about the value of love between a woman and a man is difficult because cultural forms of expression are easily distorted, degraded, and primitivized. It is also difficult to talk about human love with reference to God without exposing ourselves to numerous dangers—the conflict of the sacred and the profane, erroneous concepts of the cult of fertility, and a fascination with depersonalized sexuality. The Song of Songs takes this risk and reveals that love is worth making the effort to talk about. It is impossible not to talk about such love, about the power and splendor of human love and its mystery in relation to God—the giver and source from which human love draws.

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