

Medieval Images of "Sacred Love": Jewish and Christian Perceptions

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Scholars of Jewish art strongly emphasize the distinctness of medieval Jewish iconography,¹ despite the numerous affinities between Jewish and Christian illuminations of the 13th and 14th centuries.² This holds true in particular for the iconography of the Song of Songs.³ Although Jewish artists were presumably familiar with Christian presentations of the Song of Songs, Jewish images based on this text reveal, even more than the biblical narrative cycles, the particularity of Jewish iconography. While Jewish and Christian artists alike refer to the poem and its commentaries as the source of their inspiration, each tradition nonetheless attempts to transmit the spiritual sense of its own commentaries. Christian artists present a dynamic image, featuring the passionate relations of the "lover" and his "beloved." Jewish illuminators present a more static and ceremonial picture, in which respect and courtesy take the place of passion and ardency. These differences in approach can be attributed mainly to the different interpretations of the poem as reflected in the respective commentaries, and to the fact that in Jewish art there is a ban on the depiction of God in human form. The present paper examines the nature of Jewish iconography by comparing it to Christian representations of the same subject - the Song of Songs. In Christian art the images appear mainly as an illumination of the initial "O" illustrating the poem or a commentary of the poem. In Jewish art they appear in the *mahzor*, and illuminate a *piyyut*, a prayer which draws its inspiration and several verses from the Song of Songs.⁴

From a very early date, the ardent love expressed in the Song of Songs has been interpreted allegorically by both Jewish and Christian exegetes. In both traditions the intimacy between the lover and his beloved is seen as representing the relations between God and man. For the Christian exegetes, it is the mutual love between Christ the bridegroom and His bride, the Church, or the union of

the Divine Word and the individual soul.⁵ In Jewish expositions, this intimacy is understood in terms of God's bond, or the *Schekinah*, with the people of Israel and His commitment to them.⁶ In a general sense, although these two interpretations of the Scriptures appear to be similar, they differ both in context and in spirit.

Most of the Christian exegetes who describe the relations of the sacred pair, define those relations in terms of a state of mind.⁷ They speak of a nuptial relationship⁸ conjuring up a vision of physical intimacy. The embrace and the kiss are emphasized as signs of God's grace and spiritual enlightenment.⁹

The Jewish commentaries in contrast, interpret the Song of Songs in a historical context - as an allegory describing the relations between God and the people of Israel, beginning with the exodus from Egypt and continuing into present times.¹⁰ The historical analogy between the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and the future salvation of the Jewish people from the Diaspora is a source of comfort; it is an assurance that God is keeping His promise to Abraham, and has not forsaken them. Even in the most desperate situations God's commitment is eternal. For the Jewish exegetes "the couple" is conceived merely as a metaphor. The conjugal relationship is not emphasized: "The day of his marriage" (Cant.3:10) is interpreted as the day the Law was given in Sinai.¹¹ The physical rapports are given allegorical interpretations that avoid implications of actual physical intimacy; e.g. the phrase "kisses of his mouth" is associated with the giving of the Ten Commandments: each Israelite, as he accepts the Law, is kissed on his mouth by an angel.¹² Similarly, the "breasts" are equated with Moses and Aaron.¹³

The different contexts, and consequently the diverse ways of understanding the poem form the basis for the distinct iconographic interpretations by Jewish and Christian artists, and these may also explain why they choose to illustrate different verses from the Canticles.

Christian iconography - "The desire for God"

Christian art presents two major schemes of the *Sponsus-Sponsa* each relying on different verses of the text¹⁴. The first scheme, which relies on Canticles 2:6, appears both in manuscripts and in monumental art and illustrates "Let his left hand be under my head, and his right hand support me." Representations of this verse depict Christ as the bridegroom and the Virgin - Ecclesia as the bride enthroned, both in a frontal, dignified pose. Christ is shown with His right arm around the Virgin's shoulder, a representation exemplified in the mosaic in the apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome (1140-1143).¹⁵ The scroll held by the Virgin reads: "*Leva eius sub capite meo et dex(t)era illius*



Fig. 1: Cambridge, King's College, ms. 19, fol. 21v.
Christ and the Church.

amplesabit(ur) me." (Canticles 2:6)

The second scheme, which appears mainly in manuscripts, illustrates Canticles 1:2 "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." The illustrations generally appear in the initial "O" that begins the word *Osculetur*. These depictions, mainly of the 12th century, present the *Sponsus-Sponsa* in a more intimate embrace, sometimes actually kissing one another. Illustrations of this type are to be found in several manuscripts. In a Cambridge manuscript of Bede's commentary on the Song of Songs,¹⁶ (fig. 1) for example, the bridegroom and the bride are enthroned within the initial "O". The Virgin is seated to Christ's left, His right arm is around her shoulder and His left hand holds her right hand. Their bodies are touching and Christ is kissing the Virgin on her mouth.

Another illustration in the letter "O", in the Alardus Bible of Valenciennes,¹⁷ (fig. 2) shows the couple standing in an embrace: the bridegroom, a young and handsome Christ, is holding the Virgin close against his right side. The upper parts of their bodies are touching, as are their heads which appear under a single crucified halo. Although the kiss itself is not depicted, the union appears to be a perfect one.

In the Capucins Bible,¹⁸ (fig. 3) although illuminating the verses of Canticles 1:2 (the couple is portrayed within the initial "O"), the gestures illustrate



Fig. 2: Valenciennes, Bibl. Mun. ms. 10 fol. 1132., *Christ and the Church*.

Canticles 2:6: Christ is standing to the right of the crowned Virgin, with His right arm around her shoulder and His left hand under her chin. The Virgin holds a church in her hands as an attribute of her typology as Maria Ecclesia.

These illustrations of Christ and the Church, or the Virgin who personifies the Church, depict the hidden meaning of the scriptures as already perceived by the earliest commentators of the Canticles.¹⁹ Christian exegetes unveiled the hidden meaning of the Scriptures. They unmasked the true images and *personae* behind the allegorical account: Christ is the bridegroom and the Church His bride. While unveiling the allegorical meaning within the Song of Songs²⁰ divests the poem of its immanent vitality, however, most of the commentaries do re-create the spirit of the poem by describing the passion and intimacy of the mystical marriage and by emphasizing the bride's yearning to be united with her bridegroom. Commenting on the verse "Let him kiss me," Bernard of Clairvaux emphasizes the passionate nature of this "sacred love." He speaks of the endless desire for God, of the kiss as an endless source of joy: "It is a hidden manna, and only he who eats it still hungers for more. It is a sealed fountain, only he who drinks still thirsts for more."²¹ The illustrations represent the spiritual sense of the commentaries rather than being derived from the primary



Fig.3: Paris, Bibl. Nat. ms. Lat. 16745, fol. 112v., *Christ and the Church*.

text itself - the Song of Songs. Certain verses and words from the poem do figure in the illustrations, however, and through them regain their original vital character: e.g. the scroll held by the Virgin in Santa Maria in Trastevere bears the verse of Canticles 2:6 and the presentation reflects this verse; and the word *osculetur* (Cant. 1:2) is presented both as a word and as an image, and thus achieves prominence as a pivotal element. Consequently, although the intimate relations depicted in the illuminations reveal the content of the commentaries, they also faithfully convey the spirit of the Song of Songs, which is preserved in these exegeses. The illustrations encircled as emblems within the letter "O" can be read as signs:²² the kiss and the embrace are signs of God's grace.

Jewish iconography - a metaphoric dialogue

Jewish illustrations of the verses from the Song of Songs are very different. Most of them illustrate the verse "With me my bride from Lebanon" (Cant. 4:8). Even if some elements may seem to draw their inspiration from Christian art,²³ the Jewish images speak a different language and convey a different message. Jewish illuminators, like their Christian counterparts, illustrate a word drawn from the poem. As in Christian iconography it is a key word, in this

case the word "אִתִּי" (with me), a word that conveys the message that God is *with* His people. Through this word and the emblematic image of a couple the Jewish artist conveys the special relationship between God and the assembly of Israel, without depicting either of them in person.

The most frequent iconography is that of a noble couple, clad in rich garments. The man is in most cases a stereotypic figure, always wearing the pointed hat that indicates his Jewish origin. The woman in contrast is not stereotypical but differs in every illustration. Her beauty and noble status are always highlighted, but the attributes chosen by the artists for emphasis differ. These attributes are metaphors drawn from the poem, which the reader, who is familiar with the poem, can easily identify and for whom, well informed as to their exegetic meaning, they serve as signs. In most cases the couple is seated facing one another, with the man turning towards the lady in a gesture of speech, as if in dialogue. In contrast to the close and intimate relations depicted in Christian iconography, in Jewish presentations there is always a fair distance between the two figures. Sometimes this distance is emphasized by a flower -



Fig.4: Leipzig Universitätsbibliothek, ms. 1102/1, fol. 46v., Initial word "אִתִּי"



Fig.5: Hamburg, Levi 37, fol. 169v., Initial word "אתי"

as in the *Mahzor* from Leipzig; sometimes they are separated by the word "אתי" (with me)- as in the *Laud Mahzor* and the *Mahzor* from Darmstadt. This is not to imply that Jewish tradition totally forbids the depiction of intimate relations between historical characters - *vide* the illustrations of Jacob and Rachel.²⁴

In the *Mahzor* from Leipzig, c.1310²⁵ (fig. 4) the couple is depicted in the lush setting of a castle filled with beautiful plants, possibly a reference to the "enclosed garden"(Cant.4:12), or "you who dwell in the garden" (Cant. 8:13).²⁶ They are seated on a *synthronos*,²⁷ with a flower, probably a lily (Cant.2:1)²⁸ separating them. The woman is attired in a long red gown, has a crown on her head and her hands are folded in her lap. She has an air of great dignity. A round buckle like object adorns her breast - a reference to "Thy neck is like a tower of David... a thousand shields are hung upon it, all sorts of bucklers of the Mighty" (Cant.4:5).²⁹ The man is turned toward her, his hands raised in a gesture of speech, as if to say, "אתי כלה" (with me my bride), or perhaps comparing her to the lily (Cant.2:1) depicted next to her.

In the *Laud Mahzor*, c.1250-1260,³⁰ both figures are seated on a bench facing one another, in an unframed space. The pose is very formal, with the word

"וְתָא" separating them. Both are richly attired. The woman is bareheaded and her long tresses fall upon her shoulders in lovely waves, as if to illustrate "Thy hair is like a flock of goats springing down Mount Gilead" (Cant.4:1).³¹ The man is holding his right hand to his heart, as if to express his deep devotion.

In the *Mahzor* from Darmstadt, 1348,³² the man and the woman, framed in a very simple architectural setting, sit facing one another on elaborate chairs in a ceremonial pose. Again the word "וְתָא" separates the couple. The woman is wearing a coronet, and holds a cup of wine, perhaps as if saying: "How much more pleasing is your love than wine." (Cant. 4:10), or "he has brought me to the house of wine" (Cant. 2:4).³³ The man is holding a round object, it looks more like a fruit than a ring.³⁴

In other cases, a closer relationship between the couple is implied, as in the *Levi Mahzor*, c.1350,³⁵ (fig. 5). This *Mahzor* presents a very atypical iconography. Here too, the woman is portrayed as a noble lady: she wears a crown, is seated on a throne and is richly attired in a beautiful dress. In this case, however, her eyes are veiled in a way reminiscent of the presentations of the *Synagoga* in Christian art.³⁶ The man, wearing a robe and a green coat, appears to be kneeling, (although his legs are not actually visible); he is holding her hand in a manner indicative of an act of homage.³⁷ The setting is paradisaical: flowers and plants abound, and two large trees bearing orange coloured fruits are intertwined above the couple, as if to shelter them. A sky dotted with blue and gold stars is depicted above. The contrast between the throne and the open landscape emphasizes remoteness from reality and transforms the picture into a transcendent vision. The intertwined trees seem to illustrate the idyllic secluded nature of the place "Our bower is of cedar arches, our retreat of cypress roof" (Cant. 1:17).³⁸ Framing and overarching the entire scene are two linked birds - again echoing the joined trees and the couple's union. It is hard to accept the hypothesis that in depicting the female figure as veiled, the Jewish artist intended to portray the assembly of Israel in the image of the *Synagoga*,³⁹ The woman in the illustration has none of the attributes of the *Synagoga*, which is usually portrayed as a defeated woman, standing unsteadily, her crown fallen from her head, her spear broken and the veil on her eyes symbolizing her blindness.⁴⁰ In the *Levi Mahzor*, the veil, even if visually inspired by the veil of the *Synagoga*, must have had a different meaning. It is more likely that the artist was illustrating some verses of the poem that include reference to a veil. For example, at the beginning of chapter 4, preceding the words "with me my bride," two verses include such a reference: "You are beautiful... your eyes are doves behind your veil" (Cant.4:1) and "Like a cut of pomegranate, your temple behind your veil" (Cant.4:3).⁴¹ The veil is only one of many other features drawn

from the poem in this illustration: the trees, the garden, the beautiful fruit, all appear in Canticles chapter 4.

The *Mahzor* from Worms, 1272⁴² presents an entirely different iconography: the couple is standing under a *talit*, as if under a *hupah*. As in all the other illustrations, the man is wearing the pointed hat and a very rich fur coat. With one hand he holds the cord of the garment in a majestic gesture reminiscent of presentations of King Solomon⁴³ and with the other hand he points to the word "וְתָא" The woman is completely veiled by a large cape, her face invisible, and only her feet can be seen peeping out beneath it. To the right of the couple, a man with a cup of wine in his hand, is looking at the couple, or at the word "וְתָא" which separates him from them. The *chirik* (a punctuation mark) under the word "וְתָא" is shaped like two rosettes, and may also be conceived as a metaphoric element.⁴⁴ More than any other Jewish representation, this image resembles the wedding ceremony and probably derives from such depictions⁴⁵. Although several details contraindicate this identification: they stand frontally, not facing one another, and there is no physical contact between the couple, such as putting the ring on the bride's finger, as there would be in representations of a real wedding ceremony. Showing the woman completely covered does not conform with the traditional depiction of a bride, who usually wears a *hinouma* on her head. Could the woman, being totally covered, be an allusion to "Lest I become as one who covers herself." (Cant.1:7)⁴⁶.

Most of the Jewish presentations do not appear to have drawn their inspiration from nuptial scenes: the woman wears a crown⁴⁷ or a headdress rather than a *hinouma*, and she is not being wed with a ring; the couples do not stand under a *hupah* except in the Worms *Mahzor*; they sit on elaborate chairs with a fair distance separating them. The images seem rather to be inspired by the courtly iconography of the period. An artist wishing to portray a noble, or even a royal couple as described in the poem, could rely on depictions of courtly lovers for guidance in all matters, from the clothing and the gestures to the architectural setting and the background of a beautiful garden. This last element was also encouraged by the text of the Song of Songs.

The Jewish artist attempting to transmit the spiritual essence of the *piyyut* which relies on the commentary, could not actually illustrate the allegorical couple - God and the assembly of Israel,⁴⁸ because he faced the problem of presenting the image of God in a human form - which was inconceivable.⁴⁹ He therefore depicted a noble pair, possibly the "royal pair" of the Song of Songs that figures in the illustrations as a metaphor - as it does in the commentaries and in the *piyyut* that it illustrates. Consequently, the depiction is totally divested of sensual substance - those passionate relations that characterize the poem.

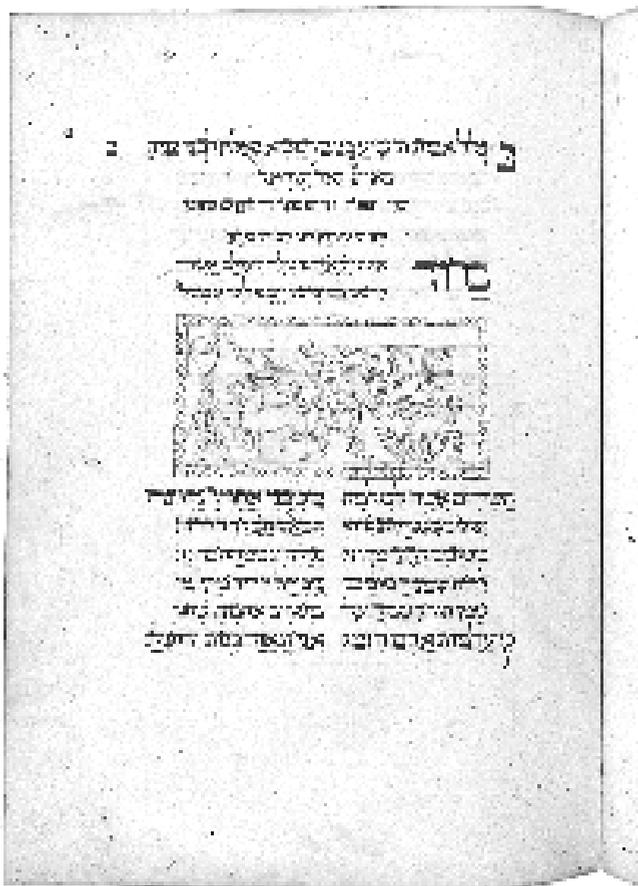


Fig.6: Cambridge University Libr. Add. 1868, fol. 93v., Initial word "שיר"

The couple is depicted in a formal pose that suggests their mutual respect and commitment rather than the passionate love described in the Canticles. Their gestures represent a dialogue. Thus the artist, without concretely depicting the allegorical couple, faithfully conveys the nature of their relationship according to the exegesis. The stereotypic figure of the man and the metaphoric representations of the lady reinforce the symbolic meaning of these images. The artist's use of a metaphoric language is in fact appropriate, since both the poem and the *piyyut* make very extensive use of metaphors.

An excellent illustration of the above point can be found in the *Mahzor* from Cambridge, c.1300-1340⁵⁰ (fig. 6), in which the artist chose to depict literally the metaphors found in Canticles 2:9-16, "My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. See, he stands behind our wall, looking through the windows,

peeping through the lattices... My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the recesses of the cliff... Catch us the foxes the little foxes that damage the vineyards..." (the text appears on folio 94r). The illustration illuminates the initial word "שיר" (Song), the beginning of the verse "The Song of Songs by Solomon" (Cant.1:1) The young hind springs lightly over the hills toward a dove depicted to his right. The dove perches in a nest on a high cliff, here depicted as a column. Small foxes, for whom the dove represents possible prey, are portrayed beneath the cliff. Even the words "looking through the windows peeping through lattices" are represented by two human heads peeping through the first letter.

The stag as a metaphor for God can be found again in the *Mahzor* from Darmstadt, (fol. 129v), in which, to illustrate the word "אנוכי" (I am your God), the artist depicted a beautiful stag.

Rashi, in the prologue to his commentary says that the Song of Songs is a dialogue between the Almighty and the assembly of Israel throughout all their exiles.⁵¹ On the verse "With me from Lebanon, O bride with me from Lebanon shall you come" he comments: "And when you will come from the diaspora, I will come back with you, and all the days in exile when you suffer I suffer with you, and this is the reason that he wrote 'with me from Lebanon you will come'." According to most of the Jewish exegetes, this verse is a reminder to the people of Israel of the Lord's commitment and His promise that in the same way that He delivered them from Egypt, He will rescue them and free them from the diaspora. Similarly the metaphoric description of the dove and the stag in Canticles 2:9-17, which are constant metaphors for God and the assembly of Israel,⁵² is related, according to Rashi, to the deliverance of the Jewish people from exile: "I thought [the woman says] that I will stay alone for many days, yet he stood and watched me through the windows of heaven, and said to me, come I will rescue you from the sufferings of Egypt". "looking through the windows..." is understood as the permanent guardianship of God over his people.

The images illustrate a *piyyut* for the *Shabbat ha-Gadol* (the "Great Sabbath,") before Passover, and it is well known that the Passover rites were ordained as a permanent reminder of God's deliverance of His people from Egyptian bondage. In all the depictions the visual metaphors drawn from the poem illustrate allusions, found in the commentaries, to God's promise that the Jewish people would be rescued from the diaspora and would return to their Land.⁵³

To conclude, in their attempts to transform the allegorical meaning of the Song of Songs into a visual portrait, Jewish and Christian artists alike were faithful to the spiritual sense of their respective commentaries. Christian iconography, by presenting the sacred love between the *Sponsus-Sponsa* as a

couple in an intimate embrace, reveals the content of the exegesis and the spirit of the poem as retained in the Christian commentaries. Jewish artists chose a metaphoric imagery for their portrayals, which though heavily relying on the metaphors of the poem, is far removed from the spirit of the Song of Songs. They do not present ardent lovers, but rather a metaphor of the respectful relationship that characterizes the Jewish exegesis. They use the metaphoric language of the Song of Songs and of the *piyyut*, and leave the interpretation to the reader (in this case the person at prayer), who is familiar with the metaphors and their exegetic meaning. The choice of verse for illustration serves the same purpose: most of the Christian artists selected the word "osculetur" a word that expresses intimacy between the bride and the groom; while the Jewish artists illustrated the word "אִתִּי" (with me) expressing the idea that God is always *with* His people, as guardian and saviour, a highly relevant and important notion under the prevalent condition of the Jewish people in exile.⁵⁴

NOTES

- 1 Narkiss, 1984, 17,21,30. Sed-Rajna, 1985, 166,193-204.
- 2 Narkiss, 1982, vol.1, 14-15, considers the close stylistic similarities as the result of similar working methods. On the possible Christian iconographic sources for the Jewish illuminations of the Song of Songs see: Sed-Rajna, 1983, 46-47. Narkiss, 1984, 52-53, Fig. 49. Narkiss-Cohen Mushlin, 83 ns. 26-28.
- 3 Sed-Rajna, 1983, 21.
- 4 Fleischer, 1985, 39-40. Sed Rajna, 1983, 19-21.
- 5 Murphy - Carm, 1990, 11-40. Pope, 1977, 112-132, 183-192. Meek, 1956, 89-148.
- 6 Ginsburg, 1970, 27-47. Murphy - Carm, 1990, 28-32 ; Pope, 1977, 89-112, 153-179; on the Kabbalistic tradition see: Grad, 1970, 29-42.
- 7 Leclercq, 1974, 107. Perella 1969, 42-50. Lawson 1957, 58-62, 200-203. Walsh-Edmonds, 1971-1980, 10-11, sermon 21, 9, Astell, 1990, 25-41.
- 8 Scheper, 1971. Lawson, 1957, 21-22, 58-61. Walsh, 1971, Vol. 1, 39, sermon 7,2, Matter, 1990, 20-48.
- 9 All Christian exegetes refer to the kiss and to the embrace as a symbol of the spiritual union of Christ and his Church. Perella, 1969, 42-50. Lawson, 1957, 58-59, 200-203. Walsh, 1971, vol.1, 8-24, sermon 2, 3, 4; on the embrace, *ibid.*, vol. 3, 44-45, sermon 51.
- 10 Lowe 1966, 156-196. The *Targum's* view of the Song as an elaborate historical allegory is supported by most of the well known Jewish commentators of the tenth through the twelfth centuries, Rashi (1105) and Rashbam (1155). see also: Pope, 1967, 102-103. On the interpretation of the Canticles Rabba, see: Lachs, 1964-65, 235-255. Lachs, 1965-66, 225-239. On the possible influence of Jewish commentaries on Christian exegesis, see: Urbach, 1971, 247-258.

- 11 *Canticles Rabbah*: "at Sinai when they were like bridegrooms," according to the *Targum* this refers to the day of the dedication of the Temple, see: Pope, 1977, 450. Rashi: "On the day when the *Torah* was given, and the day of the dedication of the Temple." There are, however scholars who consider that the notion of matrimonial relationship between God and Israel is rooted in the biblical tradition, see: Buzy, 1944, 77-90.
- 12 *Canticles Rabbah*, Urbach, 1971, 253-257
- 13 *Canticles Rabbah*, Murphy, 1990, 29-30
- 14 In Christian art there are several schemes of illustrations of the Song of Songs. In this article I refer only to the scheme that presents the *Sponsus-Sponsa*. For other iconographic schemes see: Wechsler, 1975, 75-93.
- 15 Wellen, 1966, 148-159. Kitzinger, 1980, 6-19.
- 16 Cambridge, Kings College, Ms. 19, fol. 21v. Kauffmann, 1975, 34-38, Fig.40.
- 17 Valenciennes, Bibliotheque Municipal, Ms. 10, fol. 113, see: Cahn, 1982, 112-113, Fig.70.
- 18 Paris, Bibl. Nat., Ms. lat. 16745, fol. 112v, *Ibid.*, 220, Fig 184.
- 19 St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentarius in Cantica Cantorum*, PL. 15, col. 1851-1962; St. Jerome, *Interpretatio Homiliarum Duarum Origenis in Canticum Cantorum*, PL 23, col. 1173-1196; Gregory the Great, *Expositio Super Cantica Cantorum*, PL 79, col. 471-547; Bede the Venerable, *Cantica Cantorum Allegorica Expositio*, PL 91, col. 471-547; Isidore of Seville, *Expositio in Cantica Cantorum Salomonis*, PL 83, col. 1119-1132; see also: Bardy, 1954, 32-41. Verdier, 1976, 227-235 esp. 230.
- 20 All Christian exegetes refer to the hidden meaning of the Song of Songs: Origen discerns the spiritual reality both hidden by and revealed through the mundane images, see: Lawson, 1957, 216-228. According to St. Augustine the Canticle of Canticles is the spiritual joy of saintly souls at the nuptials of the King and Queen of the City, of Christ and his Church. This joy, however, is hidden under a veil of allegory in order to render the desire more ardent and the discovery more delightful at the apparition of the bridegroom... *City of God*, book XVII chapter. 20.
- 21 Perella, 1969, 44, 48, 56. Walsh, 1971, vol.1, 16, sermon 3
- 22 On the letter "O" as a sign, see: Hanssens, 1950, 40.
- 23 Sed Rajna, 1983, 46-47.
- 24 See: The meeting of Jacob and Rachel in the *Sister Haggadah* fol.5r, Narkiss, 1982, vol. 1 Pl. XLVII, Fig 162.
- 25 Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, ms.1102/1, fol. 64v., Narkiss - Katz, 1964, 106-107. Sed Rajna, 1983, 16.
- 26 On the various interpretations of the garden, see: Pope 1977, 488-489 and 695-696. Most commentaries on Canticles 8.13 relate this passage to the assembly of Israel spread among the nations.
- 27 For the origin of the synthronos see: Kantorowicz, 1953, 65-70. Kantorowicz, 1947, 73-89. Verdier, 1976, 230, and n. 25.
- 28 The lily and the rose are metaphors for the Jewish people, see: Pope, 1977, 367-371, quotes the *Targum* " When He removes His Holy Presence from me, I am like the rose that blooms among thorns which pierce and tear her petals, even as I am

- pierced and torn by the evil decrees in the exile among the Nations."; Urbach, 1971, 266-267.
- 29 The verses refer to God as the shield of Israel see: Pope, 1977, 468-469; according to Rashi, the *Torah* is the shield for Israel.
- 30 Oxford, Bodl., Libr., ms. Laud Or. 321, fol. 61v. Sed Rajna, 1983, 14
- 31 The *Targum* related this verse to the dedication of the Temple. In the *Canticles Rabba*, her beauty is related to Israel's devotion to the Law, see: Pope, 1977, 460.
- 32 Darmstadt, Heissische Landes und Hochshulbibliothek, Cod. Or. 13, fol. 65v. Sed Rajna, 1983, 17-18.
- 33 "He has brought me to the house of wine" according to Rashi: "He has brought me to the Tabernacle." See also, Pope, 1977, 374.
- 34 At a later stage in the same *Mahzor* fol. 349v, an almost identical image appears, illustrating a different prayer. Here the man also holds a round object, which is quite obviously a fruit.
- 35 Hamburg, Levi 37, fol. 169v. Narkiss, 1984, 52, Fig 49.
- 36 Schlauch, 1939, 448-646; Blumenkranz, 1966, 61-66. Seiferth 1970. Verdier, 1976, Verdier, 230, n. 29.
- 37 Garnier 1982, fig I (168) Besançon, bibl. mun., ms. 677, fol. 93. Kirschbaum, 1968, s.v. 'Brautigam u. Braut', Fig. 3.
- 38 The *Targum* prophesies that the Temple, where the beams will be of Cedars from the Garden of Eden, will be built by the Messaiah, see: Pope, 1977, 362. Rashi also interpreted this verse as referring to the praises of the Temple.
- 39 Narkiss, 1984, 52-53, Fig. 49; Narkiss, 1985, 83, n. 26. If such an assumption is accepted, we must consider that it was a Christian illuminator who conceived this image; in this case he translated the words "כנסת ישראל" (Assembly of Israel) as *Synagoga*.
- 40 Seiferth 1963, 446-464.
- 41 The word "צמה" (zama) derives from "צמם", "צמצם" - to bind to twine and means a woman's veil, see: Brown - Driver Briggs, 1907, s.v. "צמה" 855. Ibn Janah (11th. century) in his *Sefer ha-Shorashim* translates the hebrew word "צמה" as a cover or a veil. Rashi and Rashbam accepted this interpretation, Rashi says, it is a veil to hold the hair, Rashbam also explains it as a cover or a veil. RaDaK, Rabi David Kimhi, (1160-1235), although quoting Ibn Janah's explanation, brings his own view which is closer to the modern meaning of the word, and says that it means a fringe of hair, in provencal - crignes. TaMaKH probably followed RaDaK's interpretation in his commentary to the Song of Songs, see: Feldman 1970, 106-107. It is possible that the latter was preferred in Spain and in the southern regions of France, while in the German regions (which are more relevant for our illumination) they considered the word as meaning a veil. The veil is a symbol of female chastity. On other allegorical meanings of the veil see: Pope, 1977, 457-458;
- 42 Jerusalem, National Library, ms. 781/1 fol. 72v. Narkiss, 1985, 83-84; Roth, 1961, 217-228.
- 43 See: the Judgment of Solomon, in: London, British Lib., Add. 11639, fol. 114, Narkiss, 1984, 113, pl. 23.

- 44 On the meaning of the *shoshan* see: Urbach, 1971, 266-267; Pope, 1977, 368-371; see also: Sed Rajna, 1983, 20-21. The *shoshan* also appears as an autonomous ornament in most of the manuscripts in the form of a decorative rosette.
- 45 A depiction of a wedding ceremony, see: in the Schocken Haggada, Nuremberg II, fol. 12 v. Metzger, 1982, fig. 344. The reason that in the Mahzor from Worms the depiction is more reminiscent of a wedding ceremony, could be in the *piyyut* that it illustrates, which has more references to the "bride and "bridegroom" see: Fleischer, 1985, 39-40, it is worth noting that in this *piyyut* the bridegroom recalls the promise given to Abraham, the "ברית", and the bride asks to be rescued soon from her enemies.
- 46 The *Targum* related the verse to Moses: Moses said to God that it had been revealed to him that Israel would sin and be carried off into exile, and he asked God how they would survive and live among the Nations, see: Pope, 1977, 330-332. Rashi also reads these verses as anticipating the dangers that await Israel when dispersed among the Nations.
- 47 Cohen Mushlin, 1987, 213-224.
- 48 The question of the identity of the illustrated couple has been raised by all scholars; on the basis that the presentation of God in a human form was unthinkable, R. Wischnitzer suggested that in the depictions of a couple illustrating the Song of Songs the bridegroom represents Israel and the bride the *Torah*, Wischnitzer, 1935, 50. Narkiss, however, brings evidence from a fourteenth century commentary on the Ashkenazi *mahzor* and its *piyyutim*, (Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, Ms. Hedenheim 139, fol 2) in which the poet compared the Almighty to the bridegroom and the community of Israel to a bride, Narkiss - Katz, *Lipsiae* 92, n.2; *ibid.*, 1985, 83, n. 28; Sed Rajna, 1983, 21.
- 49 The presence of God in Jewish art was usually indicated in the symbolic form of the hand of God, which was inappropriate for the iconography of the Song of Songs.
- 50 Cambridge, University Library, Add. 1868 fol. 93v.
- 51 Rashi's commentaries are the most relevant for our research, as he was the most influential exegete in the regions where the prayer books studied in this article were illustrated. Rashi's commentaries were also known in Christian circles, see: Kamin, 1985-86, 381-411; Smalley, 1952, 103-104.
- 52 The *Targum* equated the dove in the clefts of the rock, with Israel's predicament at the Red Sea: "And as the wicked Pharaoh pursued the people of Israel the Assembly of Israel was likened to the dove shut up in the clefts of the rock, with the snake threatening it from within, and the hawk threatening it from above. Thus was the Assembly of Israel shut in on four sides of the world: in front of them was the sea, behind them the enemy pursued, and on two sides the deserts full of serpents which wound and kill men with their sting. Then immediately Israel prayed, and the voice came from heaven, You, O Assembly of Israel resembling the dove, clean and hiding in the covert of the clefts of the rocks," see: Pope, 1977, 401. *Canticles Rabbah* interpreted the foxes as various enemies of Israel, *ibid.*, 403.

53 See, above, nn. 25, 27, 28, 30, 32, 36, 44, 49.

54 See: Rashi's prologue to his commentary; see also: Robert, 1944, 192-213.

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