

*ANDOR KELENHEGYI*

**COMMENTARIES ON THE SONG OF SONGS – A POSSIBLE  
JEWISH-CHRISTIAN POLEMICS**

*MA THESIS IN MEDIEVAL STUDIES*

May 2011

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by

***ANDOR KELENHEGYI***

(Hungary)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,  
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Master of Arts degree in Medieval Studies

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU

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Examiner

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I, the undersigned, **Andor Kelenhegyi**, candidate for the MA degree in Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 25 May 2010

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***SIGNATURE***

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## ***TABLE OF CONTENTS***

Andor Kelenhegyi.....	i
MA Thesis in Medieval Studies.....	i
Andor Kelenhegyi.....	ii
Signature.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
.....	vii
List of abbreviations.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
1.1 The two ways of reading the Song of Songs.....	1
1.2. The Allegorical understanding.....	3
1.2.1. The allegorical understandings of the Christian tradition.....	4
1.2.2. The Allegorical understanding of the Jewish Tradition.....	8
1.3. State of Research.....	10
1.4. Aim and methodology.....	12
Chapter I. The allegorical couple.....	15
I.I. The female character.....	15
I.II. The male character.....	27
Chapter II. The speeches of the allegorical characters.....	37
II.I. The speech of the female character.....	39
II.II. Speech of the male character.....	50
Chapter III. The allegorical family.....	61
Conclusions.....	77
Bibliography.....	80
Appendix – The text of the Song of Songs’ from its english edition.....	86

## ***LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS***

- ACCS        *Ancient Christain Commentaries on the Scripture, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ed J. Robert Wright and Thomas C. Oden. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005)
- PG        Patrologia Graeca, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1855-1867 )
- PL        Patrologia Latina, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1844-1865)
- PMLA       Proceedings of the Modern Language Association



## *INTRODUCTION*

### *1.1 THE TWO WAYS OF READING THE SONG OF SONGS*

When I first read the Song of Solomon in the quaint and melodious English of the King James Version, I was filled with surprise at the beauty of its rich imagery and astonishingly sensuous language, and even more so at its inclusion in the austere and august Holy Scriptures. How could anyone fail to be affected by the power of such verses?<sup>1</sup>

These words are not mine, but I could have said them as well. Except that I did not encounter the *Song of Songs* in the English of the King James Version for the first time, but the elevated words of the Károli Version in Hungarian. The *Song of Songs* is indeed one of the most perplexing pieces of the Holy Scripture. As part of both the Catholic and the Jewish canon,<sup>2</sup> it has puzzled commentators, interpreters, and mere readers for centuries. The reasons for the peculiarity of the *Song of Songs* are numerous. Firstly, the most well known and most often quoted characteristic of the text, is that on the surface, the *Song of Songs* is a piece of love poetry, filled with erotic images. This eroticism was and still is understood by many as the main characteristic and the major feature of the *Song of Songs*.<sup>3</sup> Nearly two millennia of reading this piece and the tremendous efforts of rabbis and Christian exegetes have made to interpret the *Song of Songs*, however, cannot simply be dismissed with a sardonic smile and the mere claim that “it is the only book in the canon lacking a religious or national theme.”<sup>4</sup>

Although the *Song of Songs* definitely includes erotic images and scenes, there has to be more to its meaning: “If the Song were a continuous allegory of sex, no matter how

<sup>1</sup> Zhang Longxi, “The Letter or the Spirit: the *Song of Songs*, Allegoresis, and the *Book of Poetry*,” *Comparative Literature* 39, No. 3 (1987) 193.

<sup>2</sup> On the questions of the canonicity of the *Song of Songs* and its canonization see Edmée Kingsmill, *The Song of Songs and the Eros of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 12-14.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., M. H. Segal, “The Song of Songs,” *Vetus Testamentum*, 12, No. 4 (1962): 479-481.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations, a Study, Modern Translation and Commentary* (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1954) 1.

ingenious the techniques or subtle the allusions, it would be nothing more than a riddle or a tease.”<sup>5</sup> To be sure, one finds interpretations of the *Song of Songs* that focus only on its erotic, sexual meaning, but one also finds an amazing number of commentaries written on the *Song of Songs* in both the Christian and Jewish traditions. In fact, there are more (allegorical) commentaries written to the *Song of Songs* than on any other individual book of the Scripture.<sup>6</sup> If nothing else, these commentaries and the interpretations they offer make the *Song of Songs* special and more than a mere recollection of a love affair. Thus, the subject of this thesis is not the character or the contents of the *Song of Songs*, but rather the commentaries written on it, the picture they draw of the *Song of Songs*, and – sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly -- of each other. More precisely, the subject matter of this thesis is a certain phase in the development of commentaries dedicated to the interpretation of the *Song of Songs*.

There are numerous ways of interpreting a Biblical book in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. Among the many options, there are two ways which are markedly significant in the history of interpreting the *Song of Songs*. In case of this Biblical book, a commentary can either be literal or allegorical.<sup>7</sup> While there are only a few examples of the first approach before the eighteenth century,<sup>8</sup> the most famous one clearly being Theodore of Mopsuestia,<sup>9</sup> the second one, the allegorical approach, is attested in both the Christian and Jewish traditions from the earliest commentaries.

Thus, due to the (possibly sacred but also) erotic imagery of the *Song of Songs*, there seemed little room for literal exegesis. Therefore, early Jewish and Christian interpreters

<sup>5</sup> Francis Landy, “The Song of Songs,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987) 305.

<sup>6</sup> See *The Targum of Canticles*, 34. Cf. Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs, a Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 21.

<sup>7</sup> Marvin H. Pope, *The Song of Songs, a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 89.

<sup>8</sup> See. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 38-39.

<sup>9</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 119. On the first literal approaches see also Robert T. Clark jr. “Herder, Percy, and the Song of Songs,” *PMLA* 61, no. 4 (1946) 1088-1091.

could only turn to allegorical understandings. For such an understanding the first and foremost question was identifying the characters in the *Song of Songs*. At first sight, there is only one thing that can be excerpted from the Biblical text: a female and a male character often express their love for each other. Due to the fact that the book was accepted in the canon,<sup>10</sup> the primary way in which any Jewish or Christian interpreter would have approached it was to look for other elements, verses or concepts in the already established canon that would help the understanding and offer ways to interpret the text.

### ***1.2. THE ALLEGORICAL UNDERSTANDING***

In the case of the *Song of Songs* a framework for interpretation had long existed. This framework was identifying the community with a female character, a bride or a wife and identifying the male character, a bridegroom or a husband, with God.<sup>11</sup> In the prophetic books there are numerous examples of such understandings of Israel's relationship to its God.<sup>12</sup> Besides offering an interpretative framework, this understanding also solidified the role of God in the interpretation of the *Song of Songs*. By applying a prophetic picture to the *Song of Songs*, Jewish interpreters could kill two birds with one stone. First, they could interpret the *Song of Songs* in a way which validated its sexual imagery. Second, they could bring God into the picture. There was, however, a certain consequence to this approach. Since the identity of the two protagonists was established for good and all, the interpreters had to expound every verse of the *Song of Songs* according to their principle. In my thesis, I will come back to difficulties resulting from this principle. Although it is impossible to date this interpretative approach precisely,<sup>13</sup> it can be correctly assumed that an established and validated allegorical understanding of the *Song of Songs* was necessary for its inclusion in

<sup>10</sup> Hugo Lundhaug, "Canon and Interpretation," in *Canon and Canonicity*, ed. Einar Thomassen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2010) 68-69. Cf. Kingsmill, *The Song of Songs and the Eros of God*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Christian D. Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs* (New York: Ktav, 1970 – reprint from 1857) 108.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Ezek. 54:6-7, Jer. 2:2 Hos. 1-2. etc.

<sup>13</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 14.

canonical literature.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, after quoting the famous notions of Rabbi Akiba,<sup>15</sup> one may correctly say that by the first and second centuries an allegorical understanding of the Song of Songs had already been established in Jewish circles.<sup>16</sup> The establishment of this interpretative approach was so successful in early rabbinic exegesis that the representatives of it<sup>17</sup> literally displaced, or rather suppressed, any other possible understandings for centuries.<sup>18</sup>

### ***1.2.1. THE ALLEGORICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION***

As for the Christian understandings, which will constitute an important element in my argumentation, there are two ways of dealing with the *Song of Songs* in the framework of an allegorical understanding. There was a common element in the two ways Christian allegorical understanding approached the exegesis of the *Song of Songs*. In both concepts the male character is identified with the bridegroom of the New Testament, Christ. This identification was perhaps based on copying and replacing of the Jewish allegorical interpretation (an application of Hellenistic exegetical approaches)<sup>19</sup> or perhaps on some vague New Testament references.<sup>20</sup> The most probable, however, is that a mixture of the two bases was what led Christian interpreters to the idea that the male character was to be identified with Christ.

As for the second protagonist, the female character, there were two possibilities. In line with the typological relationship (assumed by Church Fathers<sup>21</sup>) between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and consequently between Israel and the Church,<sup>22</sup> it is possible to interpret the female character as signifying the Church. However, in accordance

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Kingsmill, *The Song of Songs and the Eros of God*, 12-14.

<sup>15</sup> Mishna Yadaim 3:5.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 92.

<sup>17</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 99-100.

<sup>18</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 28-31.

<sup>19</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 112-114.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Eph. 5:22-32. Cf. Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs*, 108; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 59-61.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Marc Hirschman, *A Rivalry of Genius*, Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity (New York: State University of New York, 1996) 13-22.

with early Church Fathers' preoccupation with the salvation of the individual,<sup>23</sup> there is also a tendency to understand the female character as signifying the soul of the individual Christian.<sup>24</sup>

I believe that the rivalry, or rather the hesitation, between these two ways of interpretation is what characterized the first centuries of Christian interpretation. It is sure that both traditions are attested from the very beginnings of Christian reading of the *Song of Songs*. The first Christian interpreter known to have allegorized the *Song of Songs*, Hippolytus, built his commentary upon identifying the female character with the Church.<sup>25</sup> His commentary, however, only survived in fragments and had little effect on subsequent Christian interpretation.<sup>26</sup> It was, consequently, up to the subsequent church fathers to establish the framework and trends of interpreting the *Song of Songs*. Among them, Origen is without doubt the most important. Although he was writing in Greek, he and his commentaries were widely used and built upon in the Western tradition just as much as among Eastern, Greek-speaking fathers. Origen not only "surpassed himself"<sup>27</sup> in his commentary, but also provided almost all the possible interpretative methods in his rendering of the *Song of Songs*. In his two main works,<sup>28</sup> which are only fragmentarily preserved,<sup>29</sup> the reader encounters several ways of understanding. Among these understandings both possible interpretations of the female character are attested. Although both interpretations can be found in both works, it can be said that while in his *Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum* the tropological understanding is in the forefront, in his *Homiliae in Canticum Canticorum* interpretation of the female character as the Church is more prevalent.<sup>30</sup> The changes between

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Helmut Riedlinger, *Die Makellosigkeit der Kirche in Den Lateinischen Hohenliedkommentaren des Mittelalters* (Muenster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1958) 27-28.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Riedlinger, *Die Makellosigkeit der Kirche*, 20-21.

<sup>27</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 114.

<sup>28</sup> See Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson (New York: Newman Press, 1957) 4-10, 16-21.

<sup>29</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs*, trans. Lawson, 10-11, 14-15.

the two understandings do not contradict each other in the works of Origen, but rather create a coherent unit.<sup>31</sup> The fact that both are attested in the works of Origen, however, was perhaps enough for the ambiguity of subsequent Christian tradition. The followers and successors of Origen seemingly hesitated between the two directions of interpretation. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, chose to focus on the tropological aspect conveyed in the *Song of Songs*,<sup>32</sup> while at the same time Athanasius produced a commentary in which the Church's relation to Christ was highlighted.<sup>33</sup> The ambiguity was so great that as early as the end of the fourth century Theodoret of Cyrrhus felt a need to put some order into the interpretative tradition of the *Song of Songs*.<sup>34</sup> In his commentary, he re-enacted the ecclesiological interpretation. His efforts were further supported by some of the Western Church fathers. Jerome, in his translation of Origen's homilies, re-established the ecclesiological interpretation of the *Song of Songs*,<sup>35</sup> which was spread further by Augustine's efforts.<sup>36</sup>

All in all, by the beginning of the fifth century the interpretative tradition that identified the female character with the Church was the strongest. The reason for this development was perhaps connected to the growing importance of the Church. At the end of the fourth century, the Empire was nominally Christian. But, and it might be parallel to the gradual increase of the ecclesiological concept, it needed one and a half century more to reach its full power.<sup>37</sup> This ecclesiological development of the commentaries was the basis upon which Western Christian interpreters could step further toward a historical interpretation of the whole – alleged – plot of the *Song of Songs*.<sup>38</sup> From the beginning of the fifth century a not-entirely-new, but certainly rearranged Christian tradition appeared in

<sup>31</sup> J. Christopher King, *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture, the Bridegroom's Perfect Marriage-Song* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 14-15.

<sup>32</sup> Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs*, 64.

<sup>33</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 117-118.

<sup>34</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 120-121.

<sup>35</sup> *Origen The Song of Songs*, trans. Lawson, 18-19.

<sup>36</sup> Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs*, 65.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society 200 B.C.E to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 179-180.

<sup>38</sup> Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs*, 67.

which the significance of the individual soul's journey toward God was increasingly replaced by the importance of the Church's role in salvation and its historical value expressed by its relationship to God. As a consequence of this approach, the relationship between the Church and its predecessor, the nation of Israel/the Jewish religion, was increasingly examined.

The Christian sources I will use belong mostly to the Latin tradition, there is however some representatives of the Greek tradition as well. Since these Greek fathers are prior to the almost all the Latin commentaries that I am using it is due that I begin my list with them.

My earliest source, as it is due with any study dealing with the history of interpretation of the *Song of Songs*, is naturally Origen's two interpretations from the end of the second centuries. Although from the Greek original little have survived, but thanks to the efforts of Rufinus and Jerome Origen's commentaries to the first two chapters of the *Song of Songs* were and still are extant in Latin.<sup>39</sup> As a contrast to my analysis of the ecclesiological reading of the *Song of Songs*, the reader will occasionally encounter Greek commentaries from the second half of the fourth century. The authors of these commentaries are Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Elvira and Philo of Carpasius. In order to highlight the transition from the tropological<sup>40</sup> understanding of these Greek fathers to the ecclesiological rendering of subsequent centuries, I used the commentaries of Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Nilus of Ancyra and Cyrill of Alexandria from the first half of the fifth century.

As for the late antique, early medieval Latin tradition, the emphasis is almost always on the ecclesiological reading of the *Song of Songs*. At the same time Gregory of Nyssa is completing his work on the *Song of Songs*, one already encounters the commentary of Ambrose of Milan in the west, which is, not surprisingly less touched by the prevalent ecclesiological understanding of the Biblical tradition, than his successors from the fifth

<sup>39</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs*, trans. Lawson, 4-7.

<sup>40</sup> Meaning the allegory in which the emphasis is on the relationship between God and the individual soul. Cf. "Introduction," in *The Song of Songs*, Berit Olam, Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry, ed. Dianne Bergant et al. (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001) ix-x.

century. The first ardent supporter of an ecclesiological-historical understanding in the west is Apponius, whose commentary, probably dates back to the first half of the fifth century.<sup>41</sup> The subsequent representatives of the Latin tradition, who utilize the concepts of Apponius, originate from the sixth-eighth centuries. The earliest one among them is the commentary of Cassiodorus from the early sixth century, which is followed by that of Gregory the Great<sup>42</sup> and Isidore of Seville. The last Christian sources of my analysis are representatives of the seventh (Bede the Venerable) and the eighth (Alcuin) century. These two authors are usually regarded as belonging to a further step in the interpretative tradition of the *Song of Song*,<sup>43</sup> but, as I will try to show in my analysis they are close to the previously mentioned Latin fathers of the fifth-sixth centuries. In fact Bede's primary source seems to be the commentary of Apponius<sup>44</sup> which, thus, gives a suitable framework to my choice of sources.

### ***1.2.2. THE ALLEGORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE JEWISH TRADITION***

It is more difficult to mark the cornerstones of the development of Jewish tradition concerning the identification of the *Song of Songs*' characters. While one encounters rabbinic interpretations in which elements of the *Song of Songs* are interpreted along the lines of Israel's relation to God as early as in *Talmudic* times,<sup>45</sup> different understandings were also wide-spread in the same corpora. Numerous times in tannaitic literature, verses of the *Song of Songs* are interpreted according to other standards or even understood in their plain meaning.<sup>46</sup> The variety of interpretations seems to match the diversity of early Christian

<sup>41</sup> On the dating of the commentary of Apponius see K. S. Frank, "In Canticum Canticorum Explanatio," *Vigilae Christianae* 39, no. 4 (1985) 371-378.

<sup>42</sup> On the dating of Gregory's commentary see John Moorehead, *Gregory the Great. The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 2005) 16.

<sup>43</sup> See Friedrich Ohly, *Hohenlied-Studien, Grundzüge einer Geschichte der Hohenliedauslegung des Abendlandes bis um 1200* (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1958), 32-92.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Arthur G. Holder "The Patristic Sources of Bede's Commentary on the Song of Songs," in *Studia Patristica XXXIV* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001) 372-373,

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 89.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., Talmud Bavli Niddah 47a, Brakhot 24a, etc.



interpretations. It is difficult to say when and where the rabbinic interpretations changed their course. The reason for this is that in the rabbinic corpus one does not find long commentaries on the *Song of Songs* ascribed to a certain author before the ninth century.<sup>47</sup> The rabbinic sources that are extant from the late antiquity and the early Middle Ages are either compilations of vast numbers of individual commentaries or anonymous works. Nevertheless, it is apparent that at approximately the same time as the change toward the historical approach among Christian commentaries took place, a number of rabbinical works were written or compiled in which a similar interpretative milieu can be perceived. Although the dating of these sources is, at best, vague, it is correct to assume that their redaction took place between the beginning of the sixth and the end of the eighth century. These rabbinical sources, which constitute the major part of my sources here, are mostly composed in Palestine. The earliest sources I use are the *Leviticus Rabba* and the *Pesiqta deRab Kahana*,<sup>48</sup> both dating back to the fifth century.<sup>49</sup> The compilation of the *Canticles Rabba*, similarly from Palestine, dates back to the middle of the sixth century.<sup>50</sup> Finally, the *Targum Canticles*, probably also the work of a rabbi or rabbis of Palestine originates from the seventh or the eighth century.<sup>51</sup> Many of the materials in these commentaries are much earlier than the time of the redaction. Nevertheless, the redaction is revealing about the concept of the editors and, consequently, the historical milieu they were active in.<sup>52</sup> That is to say, the reasons for choosing certain commentaries on certain Biblical verses and organizing them into a certain order can itself be a reflection of the mentality of the editor.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the midrashim and

<sup>47</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs* 101-102.

<sup>48</sup> On the dating of Pesiqta deRab Kahana see Hermann L. Strack, Gunter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991) 321-322.

<sup>49</sup> Strack, Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 316-317. Cf. Burton L. Visotzky, "Anti-Christian Polemic in Leviticus Rabbah," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 56 (1990): 87-88.

<sup>50</sup> On the dating of *Canticles Rabba* see Samuel Tobias Lachs, "Prolegomena to Canticles Rabba," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, NS 55, No. 3. (1965): 246-247.

<sup>51</sup> *The Targum of Canticles*, 55-58.

<sup>52</sup> See Lachs, *Prolegomena to Canticles*, 247-248.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Jacob Neusner, *Midrash in Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993), 70-71.

the translations found in the midrashic compilations and the *Targum* simultaneously manifest the time they were composed and the time they were redacted. One only has to pay attention to their intricacies in order to sort out the different aspects represented in them. In my discussion I will try to show that these rabbinical sources show a striking similarity to their contemporary Christian commentaries, that is to say, Christian commentaries from the fifth to the eighth century.

### 1.3. STATE OF RESEARCH

This topic, the connection and mutual influences between rabbinical and Christian sources concerning the *Song of Songs*, has been amply studied. It is to be noted, however, that most studies focus either on early relations between interpreters of the second and third centuries or on connections between eleventh- and twelfth-century interpretations. The first focus is connected to Origen and the time he spent in Caesarea working on his commentary to the *Song of Songs*. E. Urbach has shown that Origen was influenced by rabbinic interpretations and much of his commentary on the *Song of Songs* is a Christian reinterpretation of prevalent Jewish concepts of his age.<sup>54</sup> The same phenomenon has been studied by a number of scholars in recent years.<sup>55</sup> As a further step, Reuven Kimelman has demonstrated that Origen and his contemporary Jewish exegete, Rabbi Yohanan, were mutually aware of each other's commentaries.<sup>56</sup>

As for the second aspect, the connections between Jewish and Christian interpretations of the *Song of Songs* from the twelfth century onward, different aspects have been studied thoroughly. Arthur Green focused upon the connection between the

<sup>54</sup> See E. Urbach, "דרשות חז"ל ופירושי אוריגניס לשיר השירים והויכוח היהודי-נוצרי" [Interpretations of our sages, let their memory be praised and the interpretations of Origen to the Song of Songs and the Jewish-Christian debate] *Tabriz* 30 (1960/61): esp. 156-157, 169-170.

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., Y. Baer, "Israel, the Christian Church, and the Roman Empire from the Time of Septimius Severus to the Edict of Toleration of 313," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 7 (1961): 79-149, Nicholas Robert Michael de Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>56</sup> Reuven Kimelman, "Rabbi Yohanan and Origen on the Song of Songs: A Third-Century Jewish Christian Disputation," *Harvard Theological Review* 73, No 3-4. (1980).

Mariological interpretation of eleventh-century Christian interpreters and the Kabbalistic female symbolism of Jewish tradition.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Sarah Kamin has emphasized the connections between Rashi's commentaries on the *Song of Songs* and that of his Christian contemporaries.<sup>58</sup> On questions of the polemical arguments presented in the *Targum Canticles* the first fundamental source was Raphael Loewe's study,<sup>59</sup> in which he argued that the *Targum* was formulated in a way so that it would polemicize against the present esoteric tradition of Judaism and the Christian interpretation of the text in general. Loewe's bold statements has been doubted – among others – by Philip S. Alexander. Alexander argued that the *Targum*'s historical understanding of the *Song of Songs* is unique and apart from a few examples cannot be matched in Christian tradition up until the eleventh century.<sup>60</sup> A somewhat restrained statement is made by Esther M. Menn, who claims that the uniqueness of the *Targum*'s concept lies in its moving from particular historical events toward large-scale historical allegory.<sup>61</sup> The *Canticles Rabba*'s rendering as a not too well organized compilation, however, prevented large-scale studies of its relations (as a coherent work) to Christian interpretations.<sup>62</sup>

As is visible from this brief summary, many comparisons of the Jewish and Christian interpretations of the *Song of Songs* have been made. These studies, however, do not focus on the continuous interrelation of the two traditions, but rather emphasize the polemical

<sup>57</sup> Arthur Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs, Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in its Historical Context," *Association for Jewish Studies Review*, 26, No. 1 (2002): 1-52.

<sup>58</sup> Sarah Kamin, *בין יהודים לנוצרים בפרשנות המקרא* [Between Jews and Christians in the interpretation of the Scripture] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), esp. 22-58.

<sup>59</sup> Raphael Loewe, "Apologetic Motifs in the Targum to the Song of Songs," in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966): 173-193. esp. 170-173, 178.

<sup>60</sup> Philip S. Alexander, "The Song of Songs as Historical Allegory: Notes on the Development of an Exegetical Tradition," in: *Targumic and Cognate Studies: Essays in Honor of Martin McNamara*, ed. Kevin J. Cathcart (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 24-29.

<sup>61</sup> Esther M. Menn, "Targum of the *Song of Songs* and the Dynamics of Historical Allegory," in *The Interpretation of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Craig A. Evans (London: T&T Clark, 2000) 426.

<sup>62</sup> A somewhat recent exception from this tendency is: Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990) 105-117.

arguments and argumentation from the point of view of one participant.<sup>63</sup> The continuous comparison of the two interpretative traditions from the same ages has been superseded lately by the focus on only one of the two traditions.<sup>64</sup> As Green said: “While many of the facts presented in this first section are well-known to scholars of one tradition or the other, their juxtaposition is new and essential”<sup>65</sup>

#### ***1.4. AIM AND METHODOLOGY***

My aim in this thesis is to give a continuous and parallel comparison and analysis of Jewish and Christian interpretations to a number of texts of the *Song of Songs*. As far as Old Testament exegesis is concerned, the discovery of an extant Christian-Jewish polemics usually needs the continuous analysis of the two traditions. I would like to examine whether the interpretations of the two traditions show signs of mutual awareness and a desire to deny the statements of the other. Following the concept of Edward Kessler, I believe that there can be four signs pointing to the existence of a Jewish-Christian polemics on a shared book of the Holy Scripture. The first sign is that the representatives of the two traditions use the same scriptural references in their argumentation. The second sign is that the same literary form is used. The third sign is that the interpreters reach apparently similar or apparently contradicting conclusions. The fourth is that the topic introduced to the interpretation is considered a well-known, controversial theme of Jewish-Christian interrelation.<sup>66</sup> If I can show that the majority of the Christian and Jewish commentaries from the analyzed era are indeed show these signs or a significant number of them, I will consider my work successful.

<sup>63</sup> There are a few examples, most importantly the amazing effort of Littledale and Pope to collect the relevant Jewish and Christian understandings of individual verses of the *Song of Songs*, these renderings, however, only rarely deal with the polemical aspects of the verses in question. See Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 291-703, Richard Frederick Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs from Ancient and Medieval Sources* (London: Joseph Masters, 1869), 1-382.

<sup>64</sup> A few recent examples are *The Song of Songs Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, trans. Richard A. Norris Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: publisher, 2003), and Meir Zlotowitz, Nosson Scherman, *Sir haShirim, an Allegorical Translation Based upon Rashi with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1988).

<sup>65</sup> Green, “Shekhinah, The Virgin Mary and the Song of Songs,” 2.

<sup>66</sup> Edward Kessler, “The Exegetical Encounter between the Greek Church Fathers and the Palestinian Rabbis,” In *Studi Patristica XXXIV* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001) 402-404.

Furthermore, I will consider my statement about the polemical interaction of the two traditions proven.

In my thesis, I will focus on the way the characters and their interrelation are depicted in the fifth- to eighth-century Christian and Jewish traditions. Furthermore, I will point out that these traditions mark a certain development in the interrelation of the Jewish and Christian interpretative traditions. While up to this age connections can only be discerned in a few commentaries, the firm establishment of the ecclesiological reading of the *Song of Songs* brought a difference into the relationship between the Jewish and the Christian traditions, which finally resulted in a strong interconnection and the beginning of a constant polemical tradition of the interpretation of the *Song of Songs*.

This polemical tendency was, clearly, not an invention related only to the interpretation of the *Song of Songs*. In fact, I believe that the polemical nature of compilations and commentaries in this period is a result of the polemics in the basic principles of Jewish-Christian interrelations. This polemics between the Jewish and Christian traditions has a long and elaborate story; moreover, it has been aptly studied by a great number of scholars. Therefore, I do not want to engage into a detailed analysis of its topics and phases, but will only recount the most important aspects.

The history of Christian polemics against the Jews is as old as the New Testament tradition.<sup>67</sup> Although the references and the relation to the Jewish religion in the New Testament are not without contradictions,<sup>68</sup> the claims of the Pauline tradition about the replacement of the old covenant with the new and, consequently, of the Jews with the congregation of the Christians, are apparent. With the development of the topic, a concept arose in the writings of the Church Fathers which emphasized the excellence of the Church at

<sup>67</sup> See Edward Kessler, *An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 25-45.

<sup>68</sup> See Kurt Schubert, *Christentum und Judentum im Wandel der Zeiten* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), 32-33, 37-38.

the expense of the downfall of the Jews in general. This concept, the *Adversos Judaeos* tradition, manifested itself in a number of genres.<sup>69</sup> Besides the dialogues, sermons, and theological treatises, one of the key elements in the expression of such a Christian tradition was through Biblical, more precisely Old Testament, exegesis.

On the other hand, the rabbinical tradition also developed a polemical tendency against Christian claims. This polemical tendency can already be traced in the vast literature of the *Talmud*,<sup>70</sup> but reaches one of its peaks with the elaborate interpretations of the Holy Scripture in the Midrashim.<sup>71</sup> The interpretation of the Old Testament seems to have been a field in Jewish-Christian literature which not only gave an opportunity for arguments against the respective other, but – due to the shared nature of many of the sacred scriptures – also for the exchange of ideas. This exchange, however, was not without conflicts and disputations. In this thesis, I will examine how polemics between Jews and Christians affected the interpretation of the *Song of Songs* to such an extent that by the end of the eighth century the major aim of both interpretative traditions was to, first, defend its own understanding of the *Song of Songs*, and, second, to disprove the interpretation of the others. According to this twofold nature of the commentaries, I will discern and discuss two separate aims of the interpreters in their commentaries. The first and most important one is to identify the characters in the *Song of Songs*, and, through their commentaries, to defend this identification with the help of interpreting the plot of the text as their own relationship with God. I will refer to this as polemics by implication. The second, additional, aim of the interpreters was to disprove the arguments of the other. This aspect I will denote as direct polemics.

<sup>69</sup> Rosemary Radford Reuther, “The *Adversos Judaeos* Tradition in the Church Fathers: The Exegesis of Christian Anti-Judaism,” in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict, from Late Antiquity to the Reformation*, ed. Jeremy Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 175.

<sup>70</sup> Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity*, 68-71.

<sup>71</sup> Schubert, *Christentum und Judentum*, 49-50.

## ***CHAPTER I. THE ALLEGORICAL COUPLE***

### ***I.I. THE FEMALE CHARACTER***

As I have put forth in my introduction, the *Song of Songs* recounts the mutual love between a male and a female character. The male character is identified with God in both Jewish and Christian traditions. As for the female character, however, a variety of possibilities for arose over time. One possibility in both traditions was to identify the female character with the congregation of the faithful (i.e., the Church and the Jewish community, respectively). This is the identification followed by almost all Jewish commentaries up to the eleventh century, and many of the Christian ones. In this chapter I will deal with Jewish and Christian commentaries which regarded the female character as referring to the congregation.

In order to understand clearly how both traditions regarded the relationship between the male and the female characters, it is necessary to investigate how these characters are described and envisaged in the two traditions based on the text of the *Song of Songs*. In this chapter, I will focus on Jewish and Christian conceptions about the female and the male characters on the basis of commentaries written on the fourth and the fifth chapters of the *Song of Songs*.

Chapter four of the *Song of Songs* is a distinct sequence of verses<sup>72</sup> praising the beauties of the female character. The epithets attributed to her originate from the description of her external appearance and – as Marvin Pope shows several times in his work<sup>73</sup> – recall ancient Near Eastern parallels, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian cultic and love songs. Seemingly, however, this apparently physical description did not prevent Christian and

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<sup>72</sup> The topic and situation of chapter four is clearly visible from the preceding and the subsequent chapter in the difference in form and speaker (See Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 158).

<sup>73</sup> Pope, *The Song of the Songs*, 462, 472 passim.

Jewish interpreters from abandoning a literal interpretation and placing the understanding of the poem into an entirely metaphysical reality.<sup>74</sup> In their understanding, the poem describes either the internal attributes of their respective community or historical events that are related to this community. Due to the descriptive nature of the text and to the fact that, in contrast with most of the texts analyzed in this thesis, the fourth chapter speaks about one character almost exclusively,<sup>75</sup> it would be difficult to point to directly polemical aspects of the individual commentaries. Instead, I will try to show that both Jewish and Christian traditions focus on explaining the physical attributes of the character in relation to their respective communities. I believe that this way of interpretation is polemical in itself. These commentaries serve two aims at the same time. Firstly, these explanations corroborate the respective community's belief that the female protagonist of the text is indeed symbolizing them. Secondly, by invoking elements which are characteristics of only the respective community, these commentaries also tell the reader that only their reading of the *Song of Songs* is correct. By inserting symbols that represent their excellence, the rabbis and Christian interpreters, thus, "parachute" elements into their commentaries which, by implication, also weaken the other's claim of understanding and the other's interpretation itself. I believe this strategy is exactly what I have denoted in my introduction as indirect/implicated polemics.

I have two reasons for analyzing this part of the text as thoroughly as other parts which point directly at the polemical nature of the commentaries. Firstly, this analysis is designed to provide an insight into the Christian and Jewish understandings of the relation between God and their communities, without the averting elements of constant polemic. Secondly, I expect to demonstrate that even in these seemingly "neutral" parts of the commentaries there are deep and thorough structural connections between the Jewish and

<sup>74</sup> The task of distancing the interpretation of the text of the *Song of Songs* from a possible plain reading is itself a constant of the history of its interpretation (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 11 cf.).

<sup>75</sup> Oswald Loretz, *Studien zur althebräischen Poesie 1, Das althebräische Liebeslied* (Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1971) 26.



Christian interpretations. These similarities are, moreover, present in spite of serious differences among the texts upon which the different interpreters reflect.<sup>76</sup>

In the first three verses of the chapter the male character praises the beauty of the female character's head and face.<sup>77</sup> These parts of this description led Christian interpreters to emphasize both the members of the Church and its actions. Concerning the first verse, Apponius says:

Christ the Lord praises the twofold beauty – of soul and body alike – that belongs to the Church of the Gentiles once the ways of the flesh, that is to say, the ways of all the vices, have been stripped away, and she has been converted from the service of many base deities to the one true God...After that come the adornments of beauty, which are to desist from evil deeds and to do good ones.<sup>78</sup>

Regarding verse two, Cassiodorus said:

*Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing.* As by curls of hair the numerous multitude of the faithful of the Church is to be understood, similarly, by teeth the doctors of the Church are to be understood. Since we grind the food with teeth, the holy doctors of the Church are rightfully described as teeth. For – in a certain way that is explained – they break into pieces the spiritual nutriment that the simple people cannot grasp.<sup>79</sup>

These examples mark the major direction of Christian tradition regarding the first verses of the chapter in the sixth to eighth centuries. The major concepts were, thus, that every part of a woman's head represented a certain component of the Church's role or were due to the fact that the Church consisted of numerous elements similar to the part mentioned. The beauty of the Church is its acts and teachings, while the hair represents the great numbers of simple, faithful people. In turn, the teeth signify the leaders of the Church, the preachers and doctors. The scarlet lips stand for their sermons in relation to the redemption the Church and/or its members have experienced. As I will try to show, these interpretations are

<sup>76</sup> On the differences between the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew textual traditions of *Song of Songs* 4-5, see Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 457-550.

<sup>77</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs, a Commentary* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2005) 155-156.

<sup>78</sup> Apponius, CCSL 19, *Interpretatio* 7:1-15; translation from *The Song of Songs*, ed. Norris, 158.

<sup>79</sup> Cassiodorus, PL 70, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, 1072d-1073a. (Whenever my own translations are given, I use the Douay-Rheims editions English text of the respective verse of the Song of Songs. The base texts are in this case italicized.)

strikingly similar to many Jewish concepts that were formulated or included into commentary compilations such as the *Canticles Rabba* at roughly the same time. Regarding the first two verses, the *Targum* of Song of Songs says:

A *bat qol* went forth from the heavens and thus, ‘How beautiful are you, Assembly of Israel, and how beautiful are the leaders of the Assembly and the Sages sitting in the Sanhedrin, who enlighten the people of the House of Israel and who are like fledglings, the young of the dove. And even the rest of the members of your assembly and the ordinary people are as righteous as the sons of Jacob, who gathered stones and made a memorial on Mount Gilead. How beautiful are the Priests and Levites who offer up your offerings and eat the holy flesh, tithe, and heave-offering, which are pure from any violence or robbery, just as Jacob’s flock of sheep was pure, when they were shorn and had come up from the brook Jabbok; and none of them was acquired by violence or robbery. All of them were alike one to the other, and bearing twins every time, and none of them was barren or miscarried.’<sup>80</sup>

I would like to call attention to the following elements: firstly, the locks of hair, although not mentioned specifically, are clearly taken as being the large numbers of the congregation of Israel, while the beauty of the people overall is praised through the sages and their community, the Sanhedrin.<sup>81</sup> Secondly, the teeth are understood as being the priests and the Levites, responsible for offerings. The *Targum* seems to render motifs and elements of the description with the Jewish equivalents of those elements which are highlighted by Christian commentators. In both traditions, the locks of hair represent the community, the doves represent the intellect from which the community gains its guidance, and the teeth signify the clerics who connect members of the community to God.

A similar understanding of the elements of the description is, nevertheless, not a peculiarity of the first two verses. The third verse marks the end of the description of the female character’s head. Isidore comments upon it briefly:

*Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your speech is lovely.*<sup>82</sup> Scarlet thread is understood as the doctrine of truth. The lips of the bride are compared to scarlet, since the Church does not cease to preach about the divine blood,

<sup>80</sup> *Targum Canticles*, 4:1-2; translation from: *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 130-132

<sup>81</sup> On the importance of the Sanhedrin in the concept of the Targum see *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Philip S. Alexander (London: T&T Clark, 2003.) 23.

<sup>82</sup> On the Latin difference between the Latin and Hebrew version of Cant. 4:3 see Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 463.

through which she was redeemed, or since holy preaching sets the flame of charity on fire.<sup>83</sup>

Meanwhile, in relation to the second part of the verse, the commentary of Bede the Venerable is revealing:

It is not to be neglected that one slice of pomegranate contains a great number of seeds. Therefore, it is called a pomegranate, the contents of which is impossible to see as long as the pomegranate is untouched. But when it is dismantled to pieces, it becomes evident how innumerable (its content) are.<sup>84</sup>

The major idea of these commentaries is that the contents of verse three are connected to the excellence of the Church, especially because of the great number of members. More importantly, Isidore expresses the idea that this excellence is connected to the redemption of the faithful by the Messiah. This concept, the idea that the mention of the pomegranate denotes the great numbers of the faithful and their redemption from sins, is also attested in Jewish tradition, as the following two examples will show. *Canticles Rabba* contains the following commentary:

*Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.* The emptiest in your midst is as full of religious deeds as a pomegranate is with seeds.<sup>85</sup>

The *Targum* of Canticles bears an even closer relevance to the Christian sources quoted above:

The lips of the High Priest were making intercession in prayer before the Lord on the Day of Atonement, and his words were turning back the sins of Israel, which are like a thread of scarlet, and making them as white as clean wool. And the king who was their head, was full of precepts like as a pomegranate, not to mention the counselors and magistrates who were close to the King, who were righteous and in whom was no iniquity.<sup>86</sup>

In verse five, chapter four, the male character praises the breasts of his loved one, emphasizing their perfect similarity.<sup>87</sup> In Biblical imagery elsewhere in the Scripture breasts are often connected to nourishment,<sup>88</sup> it is perhaps due to this overall phenomenon that both

<sup>83</sup> Isidore, PL 83, *Expositio in Canticum Cantorum Salomonis*, 1123b.

<sup>84</sup> Bede, PL 91, *In Cantica Cantorum Allegorica Expositio*, 1133c-d.

<sup>85</sup> *Canticles Rabba*, 4:3; translation from Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah II*, 28.

<sup>86</sup> *Targum Canticles* 4:3; translation from: *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 133.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 470.

<sup>88</sup> See Lk. 11:27, Hos. 9:13, Is. 66:10-11, 16, and elsewhere.

in the Jewish and in the Christian tradition there is a significant trend according to which the two breasts represent the spiritual sources of the congregation. While this notion may stem from a general observation, the structural similarity between the commentaries of the two traditions is, nevertheless, striking. In line with the *Talmudic* idea that the *Song of Songs* partly recounts the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt, the notion arises that the two breasts represent the two leaders of the Jews. *Canticles Rabba* contains the following explanation:

Your two breasts are like two fawns. This refers to Moses and Aaron. Just as a woman's breasts are her glory and her ornament, so Moses and Aaron are the glory and the ornament of Israel. Just as a woman's breasts are her charm, so Moses and Aaron are the charm of Israel...Just as a woman's breasts are full of milk, so Moses and Aaron are full of Torah. Just as whatever a woman eats the infant eats and sucks, so all the Torah that our lord, Moses, learned he taught to Aaron...Just as one breast is not larger than the other, so Moses and Aaron were the same...so that in knowledge of the Torah Moses was not greater than Aaron, and Aaron was not greater than Moses<sup>89</sup>

In Jewish tradition Moses and Aaron represent the two sources from which the spiritual nourishment of the Jews comes forth. While Aaron was the first high priest and, according to the plot of Exodus 28-29 the forefather of the priestly family of Judaism, Moses, although he also had prophetic talents, was the lawgiver and military leader of the Jews during the formative period of their history. Therefore, by evoking the names and characters of Moses and Aaron the author of the Midrash also recalls the two major pillars upon which Judaism is centered: the laws of the Torah and the connection between God and his chosen nation through the sacrifices of the priests. A similar dual concept is also apparent in a number of Christian commentaries. Apponius expresses this concept concisely:

He says two breasts...like two twin offspring of a she-goat so that these people who offer themselves to the Church as breasts may learn to present to their hearers...in the milk of their doctrine, the equality and similarity of the two covenants – to teach to whatever the Old Covenant asserts in prophetic types will come about for human salvation is achieved in the New Covenant through the incarnation of our Lord. Through him the Trinity, which in the law of Moses shimmered not openly but through an image, now glows like the sun

<sup>89</sup> *Canticles Rabba*, 4:5; translation from Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah II*, 48.

in the face of the whole cosmos by the grace of the Word, as God said through Moses<sup>90</sup>

The idea conveyed in the commentary of Apponius is, in my view, similar to that preserved in the *Canticles Rabba*. Apponius believes that the two breasts represent the two parts that comprise the Christian Church. On the one hand, Christian tradition is based on the Old Testament. On the other hand, it is based on the inclusion of the gentiles in the convent of God, and on the scripture that represents it, the New Testament. It is important to realize that – when compared to any Jewish interpretation – Apponius’ explanation is no longer mere commentary. He and the rest of the Christian interpreters who express the same idea could have leave the Old Testament out of the picture, or – as Gregory of Nyssa did – understood the two fawns as referring to the inward and outward parts of the individual.<sup>91</sup> Still, they speak of the twofold origin of the Church, and – structurally similarly to the Midrashic tradition – they emphasize the equality of the two parts. This equality of the two parts – in contrast with its Jewish counterpart – is not simply directed to their own congregation, but – by mentioning the Synagogue – also refers to the rivalry of Christianity with the Jews.

As a further example for this, see the commentary of Bede:

It is not in vain that there is an addition of number, he says *two breasts*, since none of the women tend to have more or less than two breasts. He says, therefore, two breasts, to signify the two children of nation, the Jews and the gentiles, who long after the nourishment of faith.<sup>92</sup>

The next verse of the chapter is somewhat problematic because it is not obvious how the ever-recurring but hardly understandable stanza of the “breathing day” is connected to the bridegroom’s praise of his beloved.<sup>93</sup> Both Jewish and Christian authors made great efforts to explain the meaning of this verse in accordance with their previous understandings of the text. My reason for including the commentaries on this rather separate part of the text is that

<sup>90</sup> Apponius, CCSL 19, *Expositio* 6:26-27; translation from *The Song of Songs*, ed. Norris, 165.

<sup>91</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 471 Cf. *Gregorii Nysseni In Canticum Canticorum*, ed. Hermann Langerbeck (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 242-243.

<sup>92</sup> Bede, PL 91, *In Cantica Canticorum Allegorica Expositio*, 1133d-1134c.

<sup>93</sup> For a great variety of ideas see Othmar Keel, *Das Hohelied* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992), 140-142.

Jewish and Christian commentaries, again, show a striking similarity in their ways of understanding. The *Targum Canticles* contains the following translation:

So long as the people of the House of Israel were holding in their hands the instrument of their righteous fathers, malicious demons – harmful spirits that walk at night, in the morning, and at noon – were fleeing from them, because the Shekhinah of the Glory of the Lord was dwelling in the Temple that was built on Mount Moriah. All the malicious demons and harmful spirits were fleeing from the smell of the incense of the spices.<sup>94</sup>

The bleak visions of the author of the *Targum* seem to recur in a number of Christian commentaries from the seventh-eighth century.<sup>95</sup> The most palpable example it is perhaps that of Alcuin which shows the most similarity:

But those who run with love pass over all the obstacles of the world. Those who breed among lilies, that is, in the sweetest examples of the holy fathers, until we pass the shadows of this present mortality when the eternal day commences.<sup>96</sup>

From verse eight the bridegroom continues praising his lover on a further level. It is no longer a simple description of the beauty of the female character, but rather the story of their mutual desire.<sup>97</sup> The male character recounts how the beauties of the bride grasped him and, exaggerating his words even further, he finally reaches a level which is barely understandable for the reader.

Following the description of the beginning of chapter four, in which the male character focuses on giving a detailed inventory of the features and beauties of his lover, is rather an erotic plot in which the female character is not only addressed as the subject of the male's description, but she is invited to take part in his life.<sup>98</sup> Consequently, the commentaries attached to this part of chapter four no longer deal with recounting how the limbs and beauties of the female character are excellent, but rather engage in a broader recounting of the importance of the female character.

<sup>94</sup> *Targum Canticles* 4:6; translation from: *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 136.

<sup>95</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 472-473.

<sup>96</sup> Alcuin, PL 100, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum*, 651d-652a.

<sup>97</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 168-169. Cf. Keel, *Das Hohelied*, 145.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 157.

At the beginning of this second part, the male character calls his companion. In his invitation, the male character names a number of geographic locations from which the female character is expected to come. At this point, it is clear that both rabbis and Christian commentators wanted to emphasize where the – metaphysical<sup>99</sup> – location lies from which the female character is coming. This notion, in turn, gave way to a series of ideas which involve the respective other in the picture. It is reasonable to draw a comparison here between the commentaries of the Christian tradition and some of the rabbinic notions concerning the text. An example of this concept is to be found in the commentary of Theodoret:

*From the dens of the lions, from the mountains of the leopards.* He calls the reckless and insane Jews the lion of the den, while the leopards are the wise men of the gentiles, who – by the great number of their orations and by the craft of their speeches conceal their falsehood, and mislead the uneducated and simple-minded people.<sup>100</sup>

It is possible that the idea of Theodoret is the one that later Latin tradition develops into an argument of the final victory of the Church. A representative of this concept is Cassiodorus:

But he calls her to come, that is, to exceed in virtues. When God draws the soul, the one that is free of mundane chains, to heavenly rewards, he also urges her through inward inspiration to exceed in virtues... And thirdly, he says: Come! He wants her to be perfect in thoughts, speech and acts. Or he calls her, first, to come to him through faith, then he calls her, second, to accept the best heavenly reward, when she is already free from her body...and he calls her third to rejoice on the day of general resurrection, when she – crowned with the dress of dual eternity - picks up her body again...*You shall be crowned from the head of Amana, and from the peak of Sanir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards...*but Sanir and Hermon are mountains of Judea in which – they say – lions and panthers live. Through these mountains worldly powers, that is to say kings and princes are to be understood...the souls of lions are called evil because of pride, and those of panthers because of fierceness...And it is from these mountains that the Church is crowned, when the worldly princes will convert to Christianity.<sup>101</sup>

I believe that Cassiodorus' text contains two important implications for my analysis. Firstly, it exemplifies the prevalent idea of Christian interpreters from the seventh and eighth

<sup>99</sup> Keel, *Das Hohelied*, 145-148.

<sup>100</sup> Theodoret of Cyrrhus, PG 81, *Interpretatio* 138c

<sup>101</sup> Cassiodorus, PL 70, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, 1076a.

century<sup>102</sup> that the three mountains of the text refer to three stages through which the female character must go to arrive at its final destination, the heavenly world. Secondly, it presents the idea that the hills of the verse represent worldly evil powers which will – finally – turn and respect the truth that is embedded in the Church.

Both of these ideas (the return in an eschatological history, and the repentance of the respective others) are represented in Jewish tradition as well but, of course, with an inversion of the characters. In rabbinical tradition, it is the nations of the world signified by the mountains who will finally revere the truth of the Jews. And – in accordance with Jewish concepts concerning the final days<sup>103</sup> – it is not the heavenly kingdom that the female character will approach at the end of days, but the Holy Land. The *Canticles Rabba* contains an exemplary commentary for the latter concept.<sup>104</sup>

*Depart from the peak of Amana.* Said R. Huna in the name of R. Justus, When the exiles return to Zion, when the Messiah brings them back, reach Taurus Munus, they are going to say a Song. And the nations of the world are going to bring them like princes to the Messiah.<sup>105</sup>

While the *Targum Canticles* contains a more direct reference to the remorse of nations at the end of days:

The heads of the people who dwell by the River Amana, the inhabitants who dwell on the top of the Mountain of Snow, and the nations that are on Hermon shall bring you gifts. Those who dwell in fortified cities, which are mighty as lions, shall bring you tribute, and offerings from the towns of the mountains, which are stronger than leopards.<sup>106</sup>

In their description, the *Targum* and the *Canticles Rabba* are inversions of the thoughts represented in the commentary of Cassiodorus. They explain how the savage nations, at the end of days will repent their sins and realize the election of Israel.

<sup>102</sup> Littledale, *The Song of Songs*, 166-168.

<sup>103</sup> John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalypics. A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 202-206.

<sup>104</sup> On further ideas concerning the connection between proselytizing heathens and the Messianic era see Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb, Perceptions of Jews and Christians in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006) 109-110.

<sup>105</sup> *Canticles Rabba*, 4:8; translation from Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah II*, 59.

<sup>106</sup> *Targum Canticles* 4:8; translation from *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 138.



In my understanding, the subsequent point where Jewish and Christian interpretations of this material coincide again comes only in verses ten and eleven. After the male character recounts how the female character has charmed him with “one of her eyes,” he engages in a comparison in which an image arises that is already known from the first chapter of the *Song of Songs*.<sup>107</sup> This comparison was – apparently – regarded by both parties as an opportunity for comparing their own status with that of the respective other. The *Targum* translates the verse as the following:

How beautiful to Me is your love, O My sister, Assembly of Israel, who is compared to a chaste bride! How much better to me is your love than that of the seventy nations! The good name of your righteous ones is more fragrant than all their spices.<sup>108</sup>

The *Targum*’s comparison is straightforward. The nations – the rest of the world<sup>109</sup> – are depicted as less important for God than his chosen nation. This serious statement is not without its equivalent in Christian tradition. Bede the Venerable for example, writes:

*Your breasts are more beautiful than wine.* This verse is already explained in the beginning of the same song, where it is said: *For your breasts are better than wine.*<sup>110</sup> And it should be understood the same way here, so that through its words the beginnings of the faith of the Gospels surpass the virtue of the Mosaic law. For it did not lead anyone to perfection, inasmuch as not even the most outstanding of those who cultivate it did manage to enter the kingdom of heavenly life.<sup>111</sup>

This commentary evokes the idea of the *Targum* in a reverse order; it is not Israel that exceeds the nations. On the contrary, it is the Church (that comprises gentiles as well) that is better than Israel, since it has surpassed Israel’s understanding of the divine will and realized that after the advent of Christ the Mosaic laws should be left aside for the sake of the Gospels.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 172.

<sup>108</sup> *Targum Canticles* 4:10; translation from: *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 139.

<sup>109</sup> Schubert, *Christentum und Judentum*, 23-24.

<sup>110</sup> Cant. 1:2.

<sup>111</sup> Bede, PL 91, *In Cantica Canticorum Allegorica Expositio*, 1140d.

<sup>112</sup> Reuther, “The *Adversos Judaeos* Tradition,” 175-176, 184-185.

As to the following verse of the *Song of Songs*, in which the male character returns to praise his female companion with words of “dense metaphorical image,”<sup>113</sup> one again will find that many Christian and Jewish commentaries surprisingly turn to similar ideas. Alcuin writes:

*Your lips are a dripping honeycomb, o Bride...* the lips of the spirit are the doctors, who surmise various meanings exist in the holy letters.<sup>114</sup>

Alcuin’s idea that the flowing honey of the verse refers to the Holy Scripture in general recurs in various aspects in the writings of Cassiodorus and Isidore<sup>115</sup> A corresponding idea, however, exists in rabbinic literature. It is – in contrast with the bulk of my sources – a possible late compilation,<sup>116</sup> the *Deuteronomium Rabba*, which explains the idea in the clearest way:<sup>117</sup>

Whence to oil? For it is said, Thy name is an ointment poured forth. Just as oil is at first bitter but in the end sweet, so too are the words of the Torah: at first man has to labour in them, but in the end he benefits by them...<sup>118</sup>

At the end of the fourth chapter the interests of Jewish and Christian commentators divide and go separately. While some Jewish commentaries remain with the topic of Israel’s excellence,<sup>119</sup> Christian interpreters from the sixth to eighth centuries turned toward ideas concerning the spread of Christian faith in the world and the sources of Christianity in Jesus’ words.<sup>120</sup> It seems that despite the apparent urge for polemical arguments throughout the fourth chapter the words “water”, “fountain”, “myrrh”, etc. had such strong implications that Christian authors could not let them go unmentioned.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 173.

<sup>114</sup> Isidore, PL 83, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum Salomonis*, 1124b.

<sup>115</sup> Littledale, *The Song of Songs*, 174-175.

<sup>116</sup> On the dating of *Deuteronomium Rabba* see Strack, Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 335.

<sup>117</sup> However, traces of it can also be found in *Canticles Rabba* 4:11.

<sup>118</sup> *Deuteronomium Rabba* 7:3; translation from *Midrash Rabba, Deuteronomy*, ed. H. Freedman, Simon Maurice London: Soncino, 1983) 134.

<sup>119</sup> See particularly *Exodus Rabba* 20:5, *Targum Canticles* 4:15, and *Leviticus Rabba* 9:6.

<sup>120</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 490, 492-3, 497-8.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Littledale, *The Song of Songs*, 191-192.

While there is a separation in the tendencies of the two commentary traditions at the end of chapter four, there is, again, an increase in similarities from the beginning of chapter five, as it recounts what the other protagonist of the text, the male character, looks like. In the following sub-chapter I will show how these understandings are, in turn, reflexive.

### ***I.II. THE MALE CHARACTER***

Following the praises of the male character concerning his beloved in chapter four, it is the female character in chapter five who – taking the lead<sup>122</sup> – commences a speech about her companion. This utterance – as far as its structure is concerned – is the reverse of the one in chapter four, since here the plot of the meeting of the characters precedes the description of the physical attributes of the male character.<sup>123</sup>

The plot of chapter (5:2-16) can be summarized as follows: First the female character describes herself lying asleep when she suddenly hears the voice of her beloved speaking to her and urging her to wake. After a moment of hesitation during which she complains of the difficulty of rising again, she opens the door to find her beloved absent (5:2-6).<sup>124</sup> She leaves her home to search for her beloved, but before she can find him, the watchmen of the city grasp and rebuke her.<sup>125</sup> She then asks the daughters of Jerusalem to recount her love to her lover (5:7-8).<sup>126</sup> What follows is a discussion (5:8) in which – answering the question of the daughters of Jerusalem<sup>127</sup> – the female character describes the beauties of her beloved. (5:9-16).<sup>128</sup>

<sup>122</sup> On the identity of the speaker at the beginning of chapter five see Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 168-169.

<sup>123</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 186.

<sup>124</sup> While Murphy argues that the present part of chapter three is rather a description of a dream, I would like to keep to a plot-like interpretation as it matches those of the rabbinical and Christian commentators. Cf. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 168-170.

<sup>125</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 171.

<sup>126</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 197-201.

<sup>127</sup> Gordis, *The Song of Songs*, 89.

<sup>128</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 168.

As for my analysis concerning late-antique and early medieval Christian and Jewish interpretations, two aspects of chapter five are important to highlight. Similarly to chapter four, interpreters separated the text of chapter five into two parts. The first part was seen as a plot, as the story of the female character's desperate search for her lover. This half of chapter five was, thus, seen by both Jewish and Christian interpreters as a narrative.<sup>129</sup> Since this story recounted the relationship between the male and the female characters, both traditions felt obliged to relate the plot of the story to a certain period in history. The only real question for the interpreters of both traditions was to decide which historical period suits the plot of chapter five the best. In the first part of the present chapter I will deal with the possibilities offered by the historical set-up of chapter five of the *Song of Songs*, but – due to the separate ways of Jews and Christians of interpreting this plot – I will not engage in a thorough analysis of the first part of the chapter. The second half of the chapter and the second aspect, on which I will elaborate, is a taxonomy of the male character's beauties. In the second part of my analysis, I will reflect upon the interpretations which were brought to the description of the male character by the Christian and Jewish interpretative traditions.

In chapter five the stake of exegesis is high. If both rabbis and Christian interpreters were indeed – as I am trying to demonstrate – in a struggle of interpretations, how they dealt with the problems of verses two to eight was crucially important. I believe there were two problems for the interpreters to tackle here. Firstly, in line with the conviction that the speaker of the text is the female character, it should be seen that the interpreters risked a great deal by ascribing any sort of sluggishness to her (“I sleep, but my heart waketh... I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on?”<sup>130</sup>). Secondly, admitting that the female character is in a certain phase of being flawed by sleeping while her male counterpart is awake (“I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying”), any exegete allows a

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 513-4.

<sup>130</sup> Cant. 5:1-2.

possibility for his or her rival to pose a counter-argument. In the grip of such restrictions, both rabbis and Christian interpreters had to make thorough efforts to escape invoking the image of a historical situation in which the respective other could propose a solid counter-argument regarding one of the ultimate questions of their debate, the question whether the male character of the text represents a messiah that has already arrived (Christ) or a God that has never departed (the Jewish concept about God).

As a consequence, rabbis had to relate the historical situation of the text to a period when the threat of any Christian counter-argument would become – by definition – irrelevant. That is to say, if the rabbis had an eye open for such concerns, they had to choose a historical narrative in which there could be no dispute with any Christian. I believe that the interpretations that one encounters in the Jewish tradition concerning the historical setting of chapter five, are reflecting exactly these concerns. By transferring the situation of the male character abandoning the female character to the long-gone past of Israel, the authors of the *Targum* could deprive their Christian contemporaries of the chance to interpret the chapter as an indication that God had forsaken the Jews in his new covenant with the Church. The *Targum*'s interpretation is as follows:

After all these things the people of the House of Israel sinned, and the Lord gave them over into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he carried them off into exile, and in their exile they were like a man asleep, who cannot be roused from his slumber. But the voice of the Holy Spirit was admonishing them through the prophets, and was rousing them from the slumber of their hearts. The Lord of all the Worlds, spoke and thus said: Return in repentance: open your mouths in prayer and praise to Me, My Sister, My Love, Assembly of Israel, who are compared to the dove in the perfection of your deeds.<sup>131</sup>

The *Targum*'s understanding is clearly put into an age when there was no rival for the Jewish religion. Even if Israel sinned and was sent into exile,<sup>132</sup> where members of the congregation would repent and cry for God,<sup>133</sup> God would finally return to them. After he

<sup>131</sup> *Targum Canticles*, 5:2; translation from *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 147-148.

<sup>132</sup> *Targum Canticles*, 5:3-4.

<sup>133</sup> *Targum Canticles*, 5:5.

listens to Israel's desperate description of its God in captivity, he forgives them, as evidenced by the *Targum*'s reference:

The Sovereign of the World received their prayer with favor. He went down to Babylon, to the Sanhedrin of the Sages, and He gave respite to His people, and, at the hand of Cyrus, Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, and the elders of the Jews, He brought them out from their exile.<sup>134</sup>

While rabbinic commentaries placed the plot of chapter five into the long-gone past, Christian interpreters may have felt they needed a similar escape from a possible Jewish counter-argument. Similarly to the concern of the rabbis, if Christian exegetes interpreted the plot of chapter five in a historical period when the fate of Jewish-Christian rivalry was yet undecided, they would have risked the rabbis inserting the reply that the Church was abandoned by God, who returned to his chosen nation.<sup>135</sup> In order to evade this possible Jewish argumentation against their understanding of the plot, they had to place the interpretative situation into an era in which Jewish arguments could no longer find support. The only solution for Christian interpreters of the late antiquity and early middle ages seemed to be a future age, when the rivalry with the Jewish religion would have finally been resolved.<sup>136</sup> Cassiodorus says:

*I sleep*, since I am resting in the peace given by my bridegroom, not distressed even by the pressures that the early Church (suffered). *But my heart waketh*. Since it is more secure for me to stick to the peace of the love of my bridegroom than to leave... But since this is not the time of resting, but rather the time of labor and struggle, the Bridegroom, again, incites the Church to work and encourages her to the struggle of preaching.<sup>137</sup>

Isidore, in line with the interpretation of Cassiodorus, continues the understanding of chapter five as follows:

*I rose up to open to my beloved*. That is, to preach the words of God. And my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh. In the hands works are to be understood, in fingers the discernment... I opened to my beloved. I opened the door to my beloved... But my beloved had withdrawn

<sup>134</sup> *Targum Canticles*, 6:2; translation from *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 164.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Schubert, *Christentum und Judentum*, 49-50.

<sup>136</sup> On the concept of the final defeat of Judaism by Christianity in the future see Reuther, "The *Adversos Judaeos* Tradition," 180-182.

<sup>137</sup> Cassiodorus, PL 70, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, 1081d.[whose italics]

himself, and was gone. Since nobody is allowed the full vision of God in this life, as in the future. Therefore, the beloved is said to be departed. That is, he will be much better seen and enjoyed in the future<sup>138</sup>

I believe that the words of Isidore (and his contemporaries)<sup>139</sup> can only be understood as an endeavor to place the plot of chapter five in the future, (at an indirect level even in messianic times) so that no one can argue that these events will not take place or that they will take place in a way different from the understanding of the Church Fathers.

Since in the first part of the chapter both the rabbis and the church fathers of the analyzed era distanced their understandings into historical periods where legitimization could no longer be questioned by the respective other they enjoyed great freedom of interpretation, which they used to further underline their claims for the excellence of their concept of God. It is noteworthy, however, that both traditions use verse nine to further support the concept of this excellence.

An early rabbinic collection,<sup>140</sup> *Mekhilta deRabi Ishmael* explains the context of the verse in the following line:

R. Aqiba says, ‘Before the nations of the world I shall proclaim the prophecies and praises of the One who spoke and brought the world into being. Thus the nations of the world ask Israel, saying to them, ‘What is your beloved more than another beloved’<sup>141</sup>

In line with this understanding, but chronologically closer to the period analyzed in the present essay, *Canticles Rabba* explains the meaning of verse nine thus:

‘What is your beloved more than another beloved, o fairest among women?’ The nations of the world say to Israel, ‘What is your beloved more than another beloved? What is God more than other divinities? That patron more than other patrons?’<sup>142</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Isidore, PL 83, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum Salomonis*, 1125d-1126a.

<sup>139</sup> Littledale, *The Song of Songs*, 226-228.

<sup>140</sup> On the dating of *Mekhilta deRabi Ishmael* see Strack, Stemmerger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 278-9, which dates the collection to the end of the third century CE.

<sup>141</sup> *Mekhilta deRabi Ishmael*, Shirata, 3; translation from *Mekhilta According to Rabbi Ishmael, An Analytical Translation I*, trans. Jacob Neusner (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988) 190.

<sup>142</sup> *Canticles Rabba*, 5:9; translation from Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah II*, 108.

The prevalent understanding among Church Fathers of the era is different. Here, there is not much sign of a polemic or even the recognition of the rabbinical understanding of the verse. While the earlier, Greek tradition focused on the mysteries of the godhead,<sup>143</sup> later Latin tradition dealt with the Christological aspects of the male character.<sup>144</sup>

As for the rest of the chapter, both the Church Fathers and rabbis engaged in a detailed commentary of the signs of beauty mentioned in the female character's long answer to the question about the beauties of her beloved. Since I do not think that these elements in Christian and Jewish tradition are as closely related in the two commentary traditions as they were in the commentaries about the female character, I will not list them verse by verse. Instead, I will call the reader's attention to the ways in which both traditions tried desperately to highlight elements which were characteristics of only their own concept of God. While both traditions could have leaned upon a well-organized and otherwise widely used Old Testament tradition about God's merits and attributes, strangely, both the Christian and the Jewish interpreters listed elements that highlight only characteristics of their own religions.

*Targum* translates verse ten the following way:

Then Israel began to speak in praise of the Sovereign of the World, and thus she said: "My pleasure is to worship that God who, wrapped by day in a robe white as snow, engages in the Twenty Four Books, the Torah, the words of the Prophets, and the Writings, and by night engages in the Six Orders of the Mishnah, and the radiance of the glory of whose face shines like fire on account of the greatness of the wisdom and reasoning with which He discloses new meanings all day long: and He will publish these to His people on the great day."<sup>145</sup>

By adding these elements to the translation of verse ten, the *Targum* not only suits the meaning of the verse to the historical situation established in connection with verses two to seven. These elements, I believe, also serve as corroborations of the identity of the God of Israel.<sup>146</sup> Following a question about God's identity and (as a consequence) his character, the

<sup>143</sup> Cf. e.g., Theodoret of Cyrrhus, PG 81, *Interpretatio*, 155a-b.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. e.g., Cassiodorus, PL 70, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, 1084c-1085a

<sup>145</sup> *Targum* Canticles, 5:10; translation from *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 155-156.

<sup>146</sup> On the importance of the rabbinic canon in Judaism see Jack N. Lightstone, "The Rabbi's Bible: The Canon of the Hebrew Bible and the Early Rabbinic Guild," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald, James A.



*Targum* lists the most important elements which comprise Judaic-rabbinic belief: the Jewish Canon and – necessarily – the *Mishnah*, from which the everyday routine of Judaism, the *Halakhah*, stems. This tendency is also palpable in the midrashic tradition. To verses eleven-twelve the *Canticles Rabbah* adds the following explanation:

‘His head’ This refers to the Torah... ‘Is the finest gold’ This refers to the teachings of the Torah... ‘His eyes’ – this refers to the Sanhedrin, which is the eyes of the congregation... ‘Beside springs of water:’ For (the Israelites) are strengthened... by the water of the Torah... ‘bathed in milk:’ This refers to the laws, which people clean their teeth with until they make them as spotless as milk... ‘fitly set:’ On the fulness [sic] of the Torah.<sup>147</sup>

The concept of the midrash is that the elements of the female character’s praise of her beloved represent elements of Jewish tradition in general. It has to be noted, however, that these elements are not only regular signs of religiosity, but they implicitly also represent the continuity of Jewish religion after the advent of Christianity.<sup>148</sup> By understanding the “eyes” of the beloved as members of the Sanhedrin who guide Israel in the right direction according to the Torah (“springs of water”)<sup>149</sup> the midrash perhaps also tries to convey the idea that despite the advent of Christianity and its claim to a new covenant, the Mosaic laws are still in force. This concept is even more clearly represented in the commentary on verse fourteen:

‘His arms are rounded gold:’ This refers to the tablets of the covenant... ‘rounded gold:’ this refers to the words of the Torah... ‘set with jewels:’ This refers to the *Talmud*.<sup>150</sup>

All in all, the mention of the *Torah*, the *Mishnah*, and the *Talmud* encapsulates the bases of the worldview of rabbinical Judaism’s conception of their relation to God and the special stance they held among the nations.<sup>151</sup> As a keystone to this point, let me quote the revealing text of the *Targum* on the same (fifteenth) verse of the female character’s description about God:

Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 165-166.

<sup>147</sup> *Canticles Rabbah*, 5:11-12; translation from Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah*, II, 117.

<sup>148</sup> Sacha Stern, *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 73-76.

<sup>149</sup> See “Introduction,” in *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Philip S. Alexander (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 22.

<sup>150</sup> *Canticles Rabbah*: 5:14; translation from Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah*, II, 120, 121.

<sup>151</sup> Stern, *Jewish Identity* 200-204.

His righteous ones are the pillars of the world, set upon sockets of fine gold, that is, the words of the Torah, which they study, admonishing the people of the House of Israel to do His will. He is filled with mercy toward them, like an elder, and He makes the sins of the House of Israel as white as snow. And in the future He will wage victorious war on the nations that transgress against His Word, like a young man, strong and sturdy as cedars.<sup>152</sup>

The message of the *Targum* could not be any clearer. Israel maintains its election with God exactly because its acts are in accordance with the laws given to it by God. The nations of the world, in turn, which fail to act pursuant to the laws and their rabbinical interpretation, will be destroyed in the future.

I believe these interpretations are rightfully compared to the commentaries of sixth to eighth century Christian authors, who also identified and praised the beauties of God in a way that would only refer to their own concept of God, Christ. On the meaning of verse ten, Alcuin says:

*My beloved is white and ruddy the chiefest among ten thousand. White, because he is sinless. Ruddy, because of the blood of the passion. Chiefest among ten thousand, because he is the only intermediary between God and humans.*<sup>153</sup>

Thus, Alcuin commences his commentary on the female character's description of God by saying that Christ is the only way through which humankind can strive toward God. I believe that his words convey the same meaning as the rabbinical tradition, only with a different focus. Instead of highlighting the importance of the Torah, as the rabbinic tradition does, Alcuin points to Christ's passion, by which the nations have been included in the history of salvation.<sup>154</sup> This concept is further evidenced in Isidore's interpretation of verse twelve:

*His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters.* His eyes are the doctors, by whom the Church sees what is right. They are rightfully compared to doves because of their simplicity and to rivers of waters because of divine grace. Washed with milk, and living by satiating waters... The erudition of the

<sup>152</sup> *Targum Canticles*, 5:15; translation from *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 161-162.

<sup>153</sup> Alcuin, PL 100, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum*, 655d.

<sup>154</sup> Reuther, "The *Adversos Judaeos* Tradition," 175-6.

old law is to be understood by rivers of waters, while satiating waters signify the completion of the gospel's doctrines<sup>155</sup>

Isidore boils the whole picture down into one statement. The eyes of God are the doctors of the Church who guide it by two principles: the Old and the New Testaments. This concept is, firstly, similar to the rabbinic understanding of the same verses. Secondly, it substitutes the New Testament for the rabbinic concept of the oral law and its compilations, which is in itself a polemical statement. One finds the same idea echoed in Cyril of Alexandria's commentary on verse fifteen:

His legs are pillars of marble. These are clearly foundations, for whoever builds does so upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. He aptly praises the legs after the belly, who says that marble is set upon bases of gold. Peter and John are pillars of the church, for example, who had Christ, called by a golden name, as their foundation. And they are marble, for Paul also calls them a pillar, surely on account of their stability and consistency, sustaining and supporting the common body of the church...<sup>156</sup>

With this, Cyril adds a final focus to the concept presented similarly by Alcuin, Isidore, and Cassiodorus. The strong legs upon which God relies are the apostles, those who dispersed the faith of Christ. This idea, again, is directly comparable to the rabbinical concept in which the legs are identified with the righteous of the nation of Israel. Although one will not find harsh words corresponding to those of the *Targum* at the end of the verse, Alcuin's commentary on the final verse of chapter five corroborates the concept so far presented with clear words:

*Yea, he is altogether lovely.* What more do you search for? He is altogether lovely, since he is perfect God and perfect man, whom the angels observe and like. He is God in the majesty of the father, and human in the virginity of the mother. In the first one he is Creator, in the second one he is Redeemer.<sup>157</sup>

In his final words about the chapter, Alcuin once more calls the reader's attention to the point which he emphasized at the beginning of his commentary on the description, which

<sup>155</sup> Isidore, PL 83, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum Salomonis*, 1126c.

<sup>156</sup> Cyrill of Alexandria, PG 69, *Fragmenta in Cantica Canticorum* 1290; translation from *Ancient Christian Commentaries on the Scripture*, ed. Wright, 350.

<sup>157</sup> Alcuin, PL 100, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum*, 657a.

was similarly highlighted by other Christian interpreters as well.<sup>158</sup> Christ stems from two worlds. He belongs to the divine realm, but he also partakes in the human dimension. Therefore, he is capable, and he is the only one capable, of mediating between the two realms.

The Christian interpretations are structurally similar to the Jewish ones. It seems that both traditions tried to interpret the second part of chapter five in a way that it would fit their picture of God and, at the same time, would deny the concept of the other. These tendencies shed light on the role the interpretation of the Song of Songs had acquired by the time the ecclesiological reading became prevalent in Christian tradition.

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<sup>158</sup> Littledale, *The Song of Songs*, 261-262.

## CHAPTER II. THE SPEECHES OF THE ALLEGORICAL CHARACTERS

The second chapter of the Song of Songs, particularly its second part is imbued with robust tension.<sup>159</sup> Besides the vivid imagery depicting young animals and the revival and blossoming of plants in springtime<sup>160</sup> the reader encounters a heavy air of excitement. This mood results from the mutual approach of the lovers that is – side by side with the spring imagery – recounted in the second chapter. As is apparent from the middle of the chapter and as it was apparent to its interpreters,<sup>161</sup> these lovers desire each other so much that they can barely manage their feelings. However, they are separated. It is, therefore, the topic of separation which governs the verses of chapter two. This feeling increases with an ever growing tension, until, finally, in verse four of chapter three, the two lovers meet.<sup>162</sup>

Similarly to modern readers, rabbis, and Church fathers, medieval interpreters of the Song of Songs were touched by this air of excitement. Additional to this feeling of excitement and to the plot of the mutual approach of the lovers in the second chapter, there is a vivid spring imagery, a scenery of rejuvenation, rebirth and all that come with it. One should add to these feelings and aspects of chapter two those allegorical concepts of Jewish and Christian interpretative traditions in which the male character is identified with Christ/God and the female character signifies the Church/Congregation of Israel. Seeing all these elements together, it is no surprise that in both traditions the inclusion of some sort of messianic hope and expectation during the interpretation of chapter two was almost inevitable. In accordance with this observation, one will find that the analyzed commentaries of chapter two are indeed dealing with the figure and importance of the Messiah, be it Christ or the Son of David.

<sup>159</sup> See Exum, *Song of Songs*, 123.

<sup>160</sup> (Enciclopedia Olam haTana'ch Megilot Shir haSirim, Rut, Echa) , אנציקלופדיה עולם התנ"ך מגילות שיר השירים, רות , איכה, ed Yickah Navon (Jerusalem: Revivim, 1987) 35-36.

<sup>161</sup> Littledale, *The Song of Songs*, 84-85.

<sup>162</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 146.

This understanding of the plot of the second chapter, however, as noted before, is not only a solution to the apparent tension between the desires and their unfulfilment, but also raises its own set of problems. While it was certainly a good way to establish a historical or rather narrativist understanding to certain parts of the text so that it keeps the reader far from the diversion resulting from a plain understanding<sup>163</sup> it also finalized the concepts concerning the identification of the protagonists in the text. Up to a certain point in the interpretation of chapter one, the reader might have believed that the difference between the Jewish and the Christian understanding was not insurmountable. However, with the inclusion of the topic of the messiah, there remained no further place for hesitation. The question of the messiah is a straight and important question that needs immediate clarification, especially in case of a shared Biblical literature, where the stake of interpretation might well be the validity of the theological message of the Jewish or the Christian religions.<sup>164</sup> Is it a messiah who has already appeared once (in accordance with the Christian understanding) or one that has still has to be manifest for the first time (which is basically the Jewish concept.)<sup>165</sup> *Tertium non datur*.

It can be rightfully said, therefore, that this insertion of a messianic figure is the point of interpretation of the Song of Songs where the two understandings finally and irreversibly start to contradict each other. In the present chapter, I will deal with the implementation and the implications of this concept, which I am going to denote hence as “the messianic arrival.”

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<sup>163</sup> I believe the threat posed by a possibly secular-plain reading of the Song of Songs was strong from the beginning of the history of interpretation and – perhaps due to the efforts of Theodore of Mopsuestia – remained strong up until the sixth century. (Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 119-120.) Just to show how great this threat was – or rather – how great a threat the interpreters felt during their works, let me quote the words of Origen, who says: For this reason, then, I admonish and advise everyone who is not yet rid of the vexations of the flesh and blood and has not withdrawn from the solicitations of our material nature to renounce entirely the reading of this book and the things said in it. For they say that among the Jews care is taken that no one who has not attained full maturity be allowed so much as to hold this book in his hands. (Origen, GCS 33, *Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum*; Translation from *The Song of Songs*, ed. Norris, 2.)

<sup>164</sup> See Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity*, 181-182.

<sup>165</sup> See Yuval, *Two Nations*, 33-36.

## II.I. THE SPEECH OF THE FEMALE CHARACTER

Chapter two begins with a short discussion between the female and male characters.<sup>166</sup>

In this speech, first the male character is describing her beloved as the most excellent flower of the field, then her companion takes the lead and compares her lover to an apple tree.<sup>167</sup> Following this, the female character commences a somewhat chaotic description<sup>168</sup> of her meeting with the lover, to which the conclusion is her desperate invocation of the lover. From this point the picture is again clearer. In verse eight-nine the reader may encounter the story of the arrival of the male character,<sup>169</sup> which leads to his answer to his beloved's plea (this part of chapter two is analyzed in the subsequent sub-chapter).

Despite the fact that at the beginning of chapter two the female character's self description seems neutral, one will find that rabbinic commentaries have two separate ways of treating the meaning of the verse. One part of this tradition treats the description with neutrality, merely relocating the scene into a historical setting. The other part of the rabbinic tradition explains the scene in harsh words, even inserting a clear reference to the antagonist of their understanding. The first, neutral tradition is upheld in the *Targum*'s translation:

The Congregation of Israel says: When the Master of the World causes His Shekhinah to dwell in the midst of me I may be compared to a fresh narcissus from the Garden of Eden, and my deeds are as fair as the rose that is in the plain of the Garden of Eden.<sup>170</sup>

The *Canticles Rabba*, however, contains a more polemic commentary:

I am a rose of Sharon, Said the Community of Israel, I am the one, and I am beloved. I am the one whom the Holy One, blessed be He, loved more than the seventy nations...I am the one who was hidden and downtrodden in the shadow of the kingdoms. But tomorrow, when the Holy One, blessed be He, redeems me from the shadow of the kingdoms, I shall blossom forth like a lily and say before him a new song.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 113-4.

<sup>167</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 136.

<sup>168</sup> To which Murphy applied the idea that the whole scene is nothing else than the female character's fantasy or dream (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 137.)

<sup>169</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 126.

<sup>170</sup> *Targum Canticles* 2:1; translation from *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 96.

<sup>171</sup> *Canticles Rabba*, 2:1; translation from *Song of Songs Rabbah*, ed. Neusner, 147-148.

The two rabbinic explanations, although somewhat different, seem to take the text similarly as a literary reference to the excellence of Israel. However, it is also apparent that both the *Targum* and the *Canticles Rabba*, which offer the best known and most widely accepted explanation of the text in Jewish circles,<sup>172</sup> are primarily concerned with the picture of a flower in dangerous, perhaps dark circumstances.

Similarly to the rabbinic tradition, Christian commentaries can also be distributed according to their way of treating the picture of the solitary flower. On the one hand, one will not find understandings similar to that of the Midrash among Christian commentaries of the sixth-seventh century. Instead, Christian interpretations from this era seem to reverberate the one that was presented in the *Targum*. On the other hand, there are comparisons to the *Canticles*' understanding in earlier Christian tradition. Origen writes:

Now field refers to flat land that farmers tend and cultivate, while hollows refer rather to places that are rocky and untilled. For this reason, we are justified in understanding by field the people that was tended by the Law and the Prophets, but by hollows the rocky and untilled place of the Gentiles. This Bridegroom then was a flower set in the midst of that people; but since the law brings no one to perfection<sup>173</sup>, the Word of God was unable in that setting to progress from the status of a blossom and achieve the perfection of bearing fruit, So it was that he became a lily in the vale of the Gentiles.<sup>174</sup>

Origen was not the only Christian commentator to feel the need for a detailed explanation of the terms that are attested in this verse. His commentary fit in well with an established tradition of understanding the verse. Origen apparently felt a need for explaining what exactly is to be understood by the terms “field”, “flower”, “lily”, and “valleys”. This fact seems to imply that the mood of the verse in the Greek version was not self-explanatory, as it seemed to be in the Hebrew version.<sup>175</sup> The Jewish exegetes – even though their understandings showed significant differences – could easily deal with the structural meaning of the passage and leave the wording without comment.<sup>176</sup> While, as the commentary of Nilus of Ancyra

<sup>172</sup> See Marvin Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 93-95.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Hebr. 7:19

<sup>174</sup> Origen, *Commentarium 3* – translation from *The Song of Songs*, ed. Norris, 91.

<sup>175</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 367.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 113-114.



further evidences, Christian interpreters felt it necessary to provide their readers with an explanation of the basic concepts of the verse. Besides corroborating the Christian need for explanation, the commentary of Nilus also gives further evidence to a not too-mild tradition commenced by Origen:

And she is further said to be a flower of the field. Perhaps – if the hollows, being low down and uncultivated and spoken of in the plural, denote the Gentiles who have come to knowledge out of the depths of impiety – the field denotes Israel made level by the teachings of the Law and the Prophets so as to be ready for cultivation. Moreover, it is right that she is not called their fruit but their flower; for as yet the plow of the cross has not opened the earth, the plow to which the Lord affixed the apostles like so many oxen when he sent them out in pairs to cultivate it, nor has it yet been watered by the Lord's blood. For this reason it was fruitless and sterile, with only one flower blooming in the whole field, that is, the Christ, of whom it is written: 'a flower shall sprout up from the root'<sup>177,178</sup>

In Christian commentaries from the sixth-seventh centuries, only the element of self-proclaimed excellence can be traced. The harsh explanation of Origen and Nilus is not prevalent anymore. Exemplifying this understanding, Isidore says:

I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys. I am the ornament of the world, and the glory of the humble.<sup>179</sup>

So it seems that this midrashic tradition of the *Canticles Rabba* was much closer to the early Christian interpretative convention of understanding the verse than to the western understanding of the sixth-seventh centuries. The rendering of the *Targum* on the other hand, and the fact that the author of its text excluded the interpretation of the *Canticles Rabba* point to the fact that the *Targum* interpreter did not feel the need to contradict Christian interpretations of his time.

As I explained earlier, the second chapter of the Song of Songs mainly conveys the discussion of two characters, a male and a female speaker. However, from the different versions of the text, it is not obvious, which of these two characters is speaking at certain

<sup>177</sup> Isa, 11:1

<sup>178</sup> Nilus of Ancyra, *Commentarium* 1:40 – translation from *The Song of Songs*, ed. Norris, 94.

<sup>179</sup> Isidorus, PL 83, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum Salomonis*, 1120b.

points. In the second verse of the chapter, for example, all versions refer to the object of the sentence as a female character. This reference, in retrospect, may also affect the determination of the gender of the speaker of the first verse. Still, it seems that different interpreters worked with different principles. The attribute “lily” is mentioned in both verses. While in verse one it refers to the speaker, in verse two it is attributed to the (inactive) object of the utterance by the speaker. It is also clear in verse two that this object is female. Consequently, it is only possible that the utterer is a male. At least, this is what Origen thought:

I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys; as the lily among the thorns, so is my neighbour among the daughters. It seems that He, who is at once the Bridegroom and Word and Wisdom, says these words about Himself and the Bride to His friends and companions. But according to the kind of interpretation that we have proposed to follow, Christ is to be understood as speaking in this way with reference to the Church, and to be calling Himself ‘the Flower of the field and the Lily of the valleys’.<sup>180</sup>

However, Nilus of Ancyra argued differently. He was apparently convinced that both verses refer to the same (female) character:

For in distinguishing herself in the midst of that which is called “hollow” by reason of actions or thoughts that are base, she who is adorned magnificently stands resplendent among them as a lily...<sup>181</sup>

While Origen imagined the situation as a discussion between a male and female protagonist exchanging statements about each other, in the mind of Nilus the beginning of the verse is uttered by the male character. The relevance of this observation is that this differentiation may shed light on one of the possible reasons for Origen’s deep conviction that the Song of Songs was a drama.<sup>182</sup> More importantly, if credence is given to Origen’s conception, and the first statement is read as referring to the male character, it clearly meant, that the “flower of the field” was Christ. This, finally, is a significant claim concerning the interpretation of the beginning of the chapter, and also a relevant factor in mapping the

<sup>180</sup> Origen, *Commentarius in Canticum Canticorum*, 3:4; translation from Origen, ed. Lawson, 176.

<sup>181</sup> Nilus of Ancyra, *Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum* 1:39-41.; translation from *Ancient Christian Commentaries on the Scripture*, ed. Wright, 310.

<sup>182</sup> King, *Origen on the Song of Songs*, 31-35.

provenance of certain exegetical traditions. I believe that these small signs may be of use in discovering which later commentators were aware of Origen's understanding.<sup>183</sup> It seems that this understanding is not entirely accepted in the Greek tradition. Among the Greek commentators I have surveyed, only Theodoret<sup>184</sup> has a similar understanding to that of Origen. While, beside Nilus of Ancyra, both Philo of Carpasius<sup>185</sup> and Gregory of Nyssa<sup>186</sup> seem to regard the speaker as a female character. It is important to note, however, that there is a certain prosperity of Origen's idea in the Latin exegetical tradition. Ambrose,<sup>187</sup> Bede,<sup>188</sup> Alcuin,<sup>189</sup> and others assert that the utterer of the first verse is the Bridegroom himself, which is to say, Christ. From this outline it seems correct to assume that Origen's understanding of the verse was upheld and transferred into the Latin tradition by the only Greek father in whose writing it shows up, Theodoret.

Since the basic aim of this chapter is to present antagonistic Jewish and Christian messianic interpretations, I must move on to the description of the subsequent verses of the second chapter of the Song of Songs. It is beyond doubt that the Hebrew, the Latin, and the Greek versions imply that – latest – from the third verse the speaker is the female character.<sup>190</sup> Besides describing her beloved, the female character also envisages an imaginary meeting with her lover where his “left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.”<sup>191</sup> It is not surprising that the vivid picture of the female speaker's expecting the arrival of her “beloved” led both Jewish and Christian thinkers to evolve their explanation of a messianic arrival.

<sup>183</sup> This question is prevalent in scholarship dealing with the *Song of Songs*. See King, *Origen on the Song of Songs*, 3-6.

<sup>184</sup> See Theodoret of Cyrrihus, PG 81, *Interpretatio* 85b-c

<sup>185</sup> Philo of Carpasius, PG 40, *Enarratio* 60b-c

<sup>186</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, GNO 6, *Oratio IV* 844m.

<sup>187</sup> Ambrosius, PL 16, *De Virginitate*, 279c-d.

<sup>188</sup> Bede, PL 91, *In Cantica Canticorum Allegorica Expositio*, 1101c-d.

<sup>189</sup> Alcuin, PL 100, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum*, 646a

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 114.

<sup>191</sup> Cant. 2:6

Let me briefly outline the alleged plot of chapter two, and more importantly, those elements of it that will be of importance for my analysis: after the mutual (or self-describing) portrayal of the lover(s), the female character starts to speak. In verse three she compares her lover to an apple tree, which (either due to the fruit or to its odor when blossoming) exceeds other types of tree. Then, in verse four, she recounts a past event in which her lover introduced her to a winery.<sup>192</sup> It is apparent already from these two verses that besides the excitement resulting from the eventual meeting of the lovers, there is a further poetic element adding to the tension of chapter two. This element is signalled primarily by the recurring references to nature, the growing of plants and – in general – to a springtime change. This picture is further corroborated in the second part of the second chapter, where the arriving lover reassuringly says to the female character that: “For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.”<sup>193</sup> To this aspect of spring imagery I will come back in the following sub-chapter.

In verse five the female character asks a plural person to support her with “flagons and apples.”<sup>194</sup> While the exact meaning of the objects of support is dubious,<sup>195</sup> it is certain that the female character is asking her companions to provide her with something that eases her yearning for the male character.<sup>196</sup> Then, in the following verse it is mentioned in the future tense that the male character will embrace his lover with his hands. This vision is followed by a verse that has puzzled scholars for a long time. Since it is not my intention here to formulate my own statement concerning this “poem of yearning,”<sup>197</sup> I confine myself merely to state that the oath form of verse seven only contributes to the tension of the verses.<sup>198</sup> Without discussing who the daughters of Jerusalem are, or what is asked of them,<sup>199</sup>

<sup>192</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 371-373.

<sup>193</sup> Cant. 2:11

<sup>194</sup> Cant. 2:5

<sup>195</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 378-380.

<sup>196</sup> Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 132.

<sup>197</sup> See Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 61.

<sup>198</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 117.

<sup>199</sup> For a number of theories on the identity of the Daughters of Jerusalem see Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 318.

it can be said that the verse somehow repeats the female character's previous begging for ease of the love that rips her heart apart. Finally, at the end of her utterance, the female protagonist begins to hear the sound of her arriving lover "leaping upon the mountains."<sup>200</sup> This recognition, in turn, incites her to formulate one final statement about her lover,<sup>201</sup> in which he is compared to a deer, a prevalent picture of unquenched love in Biblical poetry.<sup>202</sup>

From verse three to nine the reader encounters a symbolic depiction with the most important elements of: 1. an apple, whose scent and taste are a sign of the sweetness of the male character,<sup>203</sup> 2. the dual picture expressed by the left and right hand of the lover,<sup>204</sup> 3. the voice of the masculine character during his approach, 4. the fact that the lover is approaching by leaping through the mountains.<sup>205</sup> Since it is the commentaries to these three verses that reveal the polemical arguments of both Christian and Jewish tradition most clearly, in the following part of my chapter I will focus mostly on these verses.

Representing the midrashic Jewish tradition, *Pesiqta deRabKahana* contains the following explanation to verse three:

R. Huna, R. Aha in the name of R. Yose b. Zimra, Just as in the case of an apricot tree, everyone avoids it, because it yields no shade, so the nations of the world fled before the Holy One, blessed be He, on the day of the giving of the Torah.<sup>206</sup>

In a similar spirit the *Targum* says:

Just as the citron is fair and praised among the wild trees, and all the world acknowledges it, so the Lord of the World was fair and praised among the angels at the time that He was revealed on Mount Sinai, when He gave His Torah to His people. At that hour I longed to sit in the shade of His Shekhinah, and the words of His Torah were sweet to my palate, and the reward for the keeping of His commandments is stored up for me in the world to come.<sup>207</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Cant. 2:8

<sup>201</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 125-126.

<sup>202</sup> See Prov. 5:19, Ps. 42:1, Jer. 14:5.

<sup>203</sup> Cant. 2:3

<sup>204</sup> Cant. 2:6

<sup>205</sup> Cant. 2:8

<sup>206</sup> *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 12:10; translation from *Pesiqta*, ed. Neusner, 184.

<sup>207</sup> *Targum Canticles*. 2:3; translation from: *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 98.

As can be judged from these texts, the Jewish tradition (the gist of the *Midrash Rabba* is in accordance with these explanations) uses the concept of the apple tree's excellence to emphasize its own eminence among the nations. By highlighting the importance of the Torah and its connections to the final redemption of the Jews,<sup>208</sup> the rabbinic tradition produces a twofold statement. Firstly, it establishes the understanding, that the Torah is the mark of Jewish excellence over the nations, and thus, the nations (including the Christians as well) are excluded from God's favors because of their negligence of the *Torah*. Secondly it connects the learning of the Torah with the fate of the Jews in the end of days on a primary level.<sup>209</sup> Therefore, the understanding of the *Targum* has a twofold meaning. It eliminates the validity of those who do not read *Torah* and observe its laws, and it also corroborates the self-legitimization of rabbinical Judaism's understanding of its duties.<sup>210</sup>

As far as Christian commentaries are concerned, one should consider first the words of Alcuin, who exemplified the traditional Latin Christian approach (a similar concept can be observed in the Commentary of Origen,<sup>211</sup> Cassiodorus<sup>212</sup> and Gregory the Great<sup>213</sup>) toward the apple tree:

As the apple tree exceeds the other trees of the forest both in its appearance, its odor and the taste of its fruit, so does Christ exceeds all the saints.<sup>214</sup>

It seems that the usual Christian argumentation, again following the tradition established by Origen, and rejected by many of his followers,<sup>215</sup> matches the Jewish tradition, except for the fact that instead the excellence of the Mosaic laws and their observation, the figure of Christ and his merits is highlighted.

<sup>208</sup> Stern, *Jewish Identity*, 74-75.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Schubert, *Christentum und Judentum*, 48-49.

<sup>210</sup> Cf. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 241-243.

<sup>211</sup> Origen, GCS 33, *Commentarium* 3:181-184

<sup>212</sup> Cassiodorus, PL 70, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, 1062c.

<sup>213</sup> Gregory the Great, PL 79, *Super Cantica Canticorum Expositio*, 495a-b.

<sup>214</sup> Alcuin, PL 100, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum*, 646a-b.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Littledale, *The Song of Songs*, 65-67.

The next relevant element of chapter two to my analysis is the duality expressed by the left and right arm of the male character embracing the female protagonist. In relation to this element of chapter two the interpretative traditions among Christian exegetes seem to be heading two very distinct directions. Origen establishes an explanation which sees in the right and left hand spiritual attributes of Christ.<sup>216</sup> This tradition is again followed by Theodoret<sup>217</sup> and a number of representatives of the Latin fathers of the sixth-eighth centuries.<sup>218</sup> This tradition could possibly be matched to the irenic interpretation of the *Targum*.<sup>219</sup> The second way of understanding the two hands is explained in a directly polemical way. Emphasizing the importance of the fact that the female character (the Church) is supported by the left hand from below and embraced by the right hand from above, Gregory of Elvira writes:

These two hands are the two covenants of the old law and the gospel. When it refers to his left hand, it indicates the old covenant, but the right hand is the preaching of the gospel. The old covenant is inferior because it is placed beneath the head of the church, who is Christ, whereas the right hand embraced the church, meaning that old sins were covered by the sacraments of the gospel.<sup>220</sup>

The commentary of Gregory serves two purposes. Firstly, it makes good use of the fact that by mentioning the two hands, one of the bases of Christian faith, the duality of the Scripture (Old Testament and New Testament) can be expressed. Secondly, by attributing both Testaments to a covenant and to a hand at the same time, he can also show that the Old Testament, and consequently, the old covenant, is inferior to the New Testament and to the new covenant. His concept is shared, among others, by Cyril of Alexandria, who also gives a reason for this kind of attribution:

The law is said to be in his left hand, the gospel in his right. Or, the left hand is to be understood as the present life and the right hand as the future life... Thus, his right hand is the knowledge of divine realities, from which comes eternal

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Origen, *Commentarius in Canticum Cantorum*, 3:9.

<sup>217</sup> Theodoret of Cyrrhus, PG 81, *Explanatio in Canticum Cantorum*, 90d-91d.

<sup>218</sup> E.g., Cassiodorus, PL 70, *Expositio in Canticum Cantorum*, 1063c.

<sup>219</sup> *Targum Canticles*, 2:6.

<sup>220</sup> Gregory of Elvira, CCSL 69, *In Canticum Cantorum*, 3.29; translation from: *Ancient Christian Commentary on the Scripture*, ed. Bulhart, 314.

life, but his left hand is the knowledge of human realities, from which come riches and glory.<sup>221</sup>

These Christian commentaries, which express a strong argument concerning the validity of the Jewish understanding, are matched by an equally strong self-legitimization from the *Canticles Rabba*:

O that his left hand were under my head: this refers to the first tablets, and that his right hand embraced me: this refers to the second tablets. Another interpretation of the verse: O that his left hand were under my head: this refers to the show-fringes. And that his right hand embraced me: this refers to the phylacteries. Another interpretation of the verse: O that his left hand were under my head: this refers to the recitation of the Shema. And that his right hand embraced me: this refers to the Amida. Another interpretation of the verse: O that his left hand were under my head: this refers to the tabernacle. And that his right hand embraced me: this refers to the cloud of the Presence of God in the world to come...<sup>222</sup>

At the beginning the Midrash only mentions the equivalent of the Gospel, the written *differentia specifica* of Christianity. However, at the second level of the Midrash, the reader finds all the defining elements and objects of traditional rabbinic Judaism.<sup>223</sup> Since it is difficult to attribute clear hierarchical relations to these elements, I am under the impression that the connection between the *Shema*, the Prayer, etc., and the two hands are not a result of any argument, but are only there due to the fact that the rabbis felt it was necessary to quote the pillars of their faith in relation to this verse. It seems that the rabbis have to list the elements of Jewish religion in order to weaken the argumentative force of the respective Christian interpretation of the passage.

The final element of the utterance of the female speaker is the arrival of her lover. At this point the commentary of the *Canticles Rabba* reaches a certain level of culmination:

R. Hunia in the name of R. Eliezer b. Jacob say, ‘The voice of my beloved!’”Behold he comes: this refers to the royal messiah. When he says to the Israelites, In this month you are to be redeemed, they will say to him, How

<sup>221</sup> Cyrill of Alexandria, *Fragmenta Commentarium Cantica Canticorum* 2:6; translation from: *Ancient Christian Commentaries on the Scripture*, 314.

<sup>222</sup> *Midrash Rabba* 2:6.; translation from: *Song of Songs Rabbah*, ed. Neusner, 170.

<sup>223</sup> Stern, *Jewish Identity*, 63-65, 69-70.



are we going to be redeemed? And has not the Holy One, blessed be He, taken an oath that he would subjugate us among the seventy nations.<sup>224</sup>

The *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana*, on the other hand, contains a more outright statement:

He said to them: Since he wants to redeem you, he does not pay attention to your accounts. But bounding over the mountains, leaping over the hills means that he is skipping over foreordained calculations of the end and over all reckonings and times... The time for the wicked kingdom to be uprooted from the world has come. The time for the revelation of the kingdom of heaven has come... the voice of the good guide is heard in our Land. This refers to the Messiah-king.<sup>225</sup>

This concept in itself is a clear message to the representatives of the Christian tradition. Perhaps the Jews are oppressed under the sway of the evil kingdom (which is, as a matter of fact, denoted as Rome<sup>226</sup>) presently, but in the future a Messiah King will come, who, at the end of time, will free them and restore their previous ideal state.<sup>227</sup>

At the same time, some representatives of the early, Greek Christian tradition seem to lack the force that is attested in the commentary of Gregory of Elvira, although structurally they still oppose the Jewish concept. Gregory of Nyssa says:

The voice of the bridegroom was heard when God spoke through the prophets. After the voice of the Word came leaping over the mountains that stood in his way, and by bounding over the hills, he made every rebellious power subject to himself, both the inferior powers and those that are greater.<sup>228</sup>

Gregory's comparison between Christ and the mountains over which he leaps is peaceful. Gregory of Nyssa does not engage in explaining exactly what he means by the rebellious powers of Christ's advent. However, with the help of the commentary of Gregory of Elvira one might be able to unfold the underlying meaning of the Christian point of view:

The mountains are patriarchs, vast with holiness, robust in faith, founded upon a mass of charity, but the hills are prophets, established for seeing. He is said therefore to be raised higher than every mountain, or patriarch, and to leap

<sup>224</sup> *Canticles Rabba* 2:8; translation from: *Song of Songs Rabba*, ed. Neusner, 177.

<sup>225</sup> *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana*, 5.5.; translation from *Pesiqta*, ed. Neusner, 74

<sup>226</sup> *Canticles Rabba* 2:7; translation from: *Song of Songs Rabba*, ed. Neusner, 172.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. Yuval, *Two Nations*, 93-97.

<sup>228</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Homiliae*, 5; translation taken from *Ancient Christian Commentaries on the Scripture IX*, ed. J. Robert Wright, 318.

over every hill, or prophet, because he is Lord over all, with all things being put under his feet.<sup>229</sup>

The words of Gregory of Elvira are clear. He believes that the approaching Christ is leaping over the representatives of the Jewish religion, the patriarchs, and the prophets. By claiming this, he puts the explanation of the verse in direct opposition to the Jewish understanding of the Messiah coming at the end of times.

Although in relation to the first part of the chapter most Christian sources of the sixth-eighth centuries are seemingly reluctant to engage in a heated polemic, the situation will be significantly different in relation to the second part of the chapter. As I was trying to show a possible reason for this apparent irenic tendency is that the Latin fathers of this era were relying on a tradition established by Origen and transmitted to them by Theodoret and those who follow the footsteps of Origen from close on.

In the second part of chapter two the male character starts to speak to his female lover. He recounts that spring has arrived, the new fruits are ripe, and the time has come to cut off the rotten branches of the plants. It should not surprise the reader that these concepts were well utilized by both the representatives of the Christian and the Jewish tradition of the period in question in order to further prove the legitimacy of their concepts. These arguments and their interpretations are portrayed in the next sub-chapter.

## ***II.II. SPEECH OF THE MALE CHARACTER***

Following the female character's words announcing the arrival of the male character, he commences a speech. It is noteworthy that this is the first time in the alleged plot of the Song of Songs that the male character gives an altogether coherent speech. Apart from a number of short statements about the female character's beauty at the beginning of chapter

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<sup>229</sup> In *Canticum Canticorum*, 4.4; translation taken from *Ancient Christian Commentaries on the Scripture IX*, ed. J. Robert Wright, 318.

two, the reader has not yet encountered any coherent speech from the male character.<sup>230</sup> His speech in the second part of chapter two is, therefore, distinctive. Moreover, this speech replies to the speech of the female character<sup>231</sup> with a heightened level of spring imagery.<sup>232</sup> Nevertheless, despite the coherence, and the plot-like nature of their discussion, there are distinct topics in these verses which can be analyzed as separate elements of interpretation.

In the present sub-chapter, I provide a short list of the elements in the imagery of verses ten to seventeen. Then, I will show how Christian and Jewish interpreters dealt with these elements. I will show again that despite their different understanding of the importance of the male character's arrival, the two traditions, again, are set against each other and meet each other at the battlefield of interpretation.

The speech of the male character begins with an invitation, to addressing the female character, to cease resting and join him (2:10).<sup>233</sup> The reason for this invitation is that the time of winter is past and the signs of spring are apparent in the land (2:11-13).<sup>234</sup> Following a further description of the female character (2:14), the male speaker asks the female character to help him catching the foxes, who would otherwise destroy the vineyards.<sup>235</sup> The scene concludes<sup>236</sup> with the female character's answer to the praises of her beloved and a further corroboration of their connectedness (2:16).<sup>237</sup>

This imagery offers many possibilities for interpretation. Firstly, with the concept of decay and revival is introduced with the notion of passing seasons. Secondly, the mention of winter and spring offers an opportunity for the insertion of a historical perspective in the

<sup>230</sup> Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 134-135.

<sup>231</sup> Keel, *Das Hohelied*, 97-100.

<sup>232</sup> Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 140.

<sup>233</sup> Cf. Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 393-394.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 127.

<sup>235</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 127-128.

<sup>236</sup> Verse seventeen, although it belongs to the scene structurally, is a separate entity from my topic here. In contrast with verses ten-sixteen, in which the arrival of the male character is recounted, verse seventeen is already depicting the urgent address to the male character to flee from the presence of his female companion (Cf. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 131.)

<sup>237</sup> Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 142.

interpretation. Both rabbis and Christian interpreters took this opportunity to relate the plot of this part of the Song of Songs to an era that would, in turn, justify their understanding. Thirdly, together with the concept of passing winter, the vivid spring imagery evokes the notion of rebirth and rejuvenation which will again serves as a tool for the Jewish and Christian self-legitimization. Fourthly, the mention of the perilous foxes is a way to introduce the respective picture of enemy into the commentary. Finally, the concluding line of the plot in verse sixteen provides another chance to emphasize the connection between the female and the male characters. As I will try to show in the following discussion, the commentaries by rabbis and Christian interpreters from the era show striking similarities and parallels in their interpretations. These similarities, however, are again manifest on the level of structure. That is to say, the Christian and Jewish commentaries, although they say different things altogether (sometimes even completely opposing ideas), are similar in the way the interpreters treat and structure their commentaries. The contents of the commentaries are, however, different, since the representatives of both tradition have to express concepts by which they can define and legitimize themselves and their understandings, and, at the same time, invalidate that of the other. Consequently, the dissimilarity in the content and the similarity in the structure can be a sign of polemical interrelation of commentaries.

To the first two notions of the male character's speech (the historical element and the idea of rejuvenation) the two traditions gave different answers. In commentaries of the Christian tradition there are two main trends. The first is, in line with the early Christian interpretative tradition, focuses on the level of the individual soul. Origen says:

Each one of the blessed will first be obliged to travel the narrow and hard way in winter to show what knowledge he has acquired for guiding his life, so that afterwards there may take place what is said in the Song of Songs to the bride when she has safely passed through the winter...And you must keep in mind that you cannot hear "the winter is past" any other way than by entering the contest of this present winter with all your strength and might...<sup>238</sup>

<sup>238</sup> Origen, *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*, 31; translation from *Ancient Christian Commentary on the Scripture*, ed. Wright, 320)

This tradition remains apparent in Latin tradition with a slight change of focus, which, as the words of Cassiodorus testify, rather turns to the role of the individual in spreading the word of God:

Behold my beloved speaketh to me, He urges me to preach saying: Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. This is the voice of the bridegroom, who incites to zealously concerning the work for the public...Arise, from your sweetest bed, that is to say, from the calmness in which you would only like to give pleasure to me in psalms, hymns and sermons. Hurry and come, this is, hurry to the advantage of your neighbors. So that you will make them copy you, that you will lead them with yourself to salvation, with the help of the office of preaching and the example of good works.<sup>239</sup>

The words of Cassiodorus – naturally – relate the plot of the male character's invitation to the advent of Christ. By understanding the words of the male character as an invitation to the commence preaching, however, Cassiodorus also implies that the age in which the discussion takes place is an age when the major duty of the individual is to draw its neighbors to the faith of Christ. I believe that there is another meaning lying beneath the ornamented words of Cassiodorus. He is also trying to imply that it is the major aim of the Christian individual to convert its neighbors (possibly the members of the Synagogue) to Christianity. And this, already, is not a simple understanding of the historical situation, but a message in which polemics is implicated. My assumption is evidenced by the successor to the tradition represented by Cassiodorus, such as Gregory the Great, who says about verses eleven and twelve:

What should be understood by winter, if not the harshness of the laws? As long as the people of the old ages were keeping (the laws) with real offerings, they did not cherish his spiritual understandings and celestial observations. The flowers have appeared in our land. It is said that flowers appear on the ground, since the saintly spirits are accepted in the heavens after they abandon the body. The time of pruning is come. For the greater number of chosen is gathered, the swifter the cutting down of the useless branches from the Church will be, so that the earthly world will cease sooner.<sup>240</sup>

<sup>239</sup> Cassiodorus, PL 70, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, 1065a.

<sup>240</sup> Gregory the Great, PL 79, *Super Cantica Canticorum Expositio*, 498c-d.

Gregory's words shed light on the somewhat unclear concept of Cassiodorus. It is the advent of Christianity that abolished the authority of the Old Testament, which will finally lead to the end of worldly issues and to the advent of the Kingdom of Heaven. The commentary of Theodoret of Cyrrhus, although it belongs to a somewhat different tradition, is – in its akin historical concept – similar to that represented by Cassiodorus and Gregory:

For winter is now past. He calls winter the times before his advent, and he calls spring the time which is after (his advent). The summer is the future, the age that is expected. And he says that the winter is now past, the rain is over, the threats of the laws and the punishments of sin.<sup>241</sup>

Despite the differences, all the interpretations of the Christian tradition are heading in the same direction. Moreover, all these commentaries are coping with the same problem, striving for a historical concept. Their solution was to relate the plot of chapter two to either the near or the far future. In contrast, the Jewish tradition placed the plot of chapter two in the past. The *Targum*'s translation of verses ten and eleven says:

And when it was morning my Beloved answered and said to me, "Rise up, Congregation of Israel, My Darling from of old, fair in deeds! Come, depart forth from the slavery of the Egyptians. For lo, the time of servitude, which is likened to winter, has ended, and the years about which I spoke to Abraham between the pieces have been cut short, and the tyranny of the Egyptians, which is compared to the (period of) incessant rain has passed and gone. You shall not see them ever again."<sup>242</sup>

At first sight, this *Targumic* quotation seems far from the concept of the Christian tradition. By placing the discussion at the beginning of the Jewish Exodus from Egypt, however, rabbis invoked an idea that can, and was extended to the future.<sup>243</sup> Obviously relying on the same idea of deliverance, *Pesiqta deRab Kahana* says the following:

My beloved answered, he said to me...Said R. Azariah, "Is not 'answering' the same thing as 'saying'? He answered me through Moses, and said to me, through Aaron. What did he say to me? Rise up: bestir yourself... For now the winter is past: this refers to the four hundred years that were decreed for our fathers to spend in Egypt...the flowers appear in the countryside: this refers to Moses and Aaron...The time for the Egyptians to be cut off has come. The

<sup>241</sup> Theodoret of Cyrrhus, PG 81, *Explanatio in Canticum Canticorum*, 104d-105a.

<sup>242</sup> *Targum Canticles 2:10-11*; translation from: *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 107-108).

<sup>243</sup> On the typological importance of the Exodus from Egypt as a model for all the exiles and redemptions (and consequently, the final redemption) of the Jews see Yuval, *Two Nations*, 57-59.

time for the idolatry to be removed from the world has come... He answered me through Joshua, and said to me, through Eleazar...For now the winter is past: this refers to the forty years that the Israelites spent in the wilderness...the flowers appear in the countryside: this refers to the spies...The time for the Canaanites to be cut off has come... He answered me through Daniel, and said to me, through Ezra...For now the winter is past: this refers to the seventy years of the dominion of Babylonia... The time for Babylonians to be removed has come... He answered me through Elijah, and said to me, through the messiah-king...For now the winter is past...This refers to the wicked kingdom which misled people. That is in line with the following: When your brother, son of your mother, misleads you<sup>244</sup>...The time for the wicked kingdom to be uprooted from the world has come. The time for the revelation of the kingdom of heaven has come.<sup>245</sup>

The construction of the *Pesiqta* is clear. It connects the Exodus from Egypt to the history and the future of the Jewish nation. Starting from the departure from Egypt it evokes those elements of Jewish history, where divine interaction is revealed. From the deliverance from Egypt, the reader arrives to the deliverance from under the sway of the present evil king in the course of the messianic advent.<sup>246</sup> This messianic advent, in turn, will redeem the Jews from under the rule of their enemies, and finally conclude with the complete freedom of the Jewish nation. This understanding, first of all, provides the reader with a concept structurally similar to that of the Church fathers. Secondly, it provides its readers with a clear-idea of redemption that, at the same time, refutes the validity of the structurally similar, but by its content different, Christian concept. Consequently, it is correct to say that as far as historicity and rejuvenation are concerned Jewish and Christian interpretations of the male character's speech, again, oppose each other.

As for the two remaining aspects, the motif of the respective enemy and the concluding element of the plot emphasizing the connectedness of the male and the female speaker, verses fourteen to sixteen should be surveyed. While the motif of destructive foxes comes up only in verse fifteen, both Christian and Jewish interpreters had already engaged

<sup>244</sup> Deut. 13:7

<sup>245</sup> *Pesiqta deRab Kahana* 5:9; translation from, *Pesiqta deRab Kahana*, ed. Neusner, 83-87.

<sup>246</sup> On the connection between the concepts of the evil empire (that is Rome) and the Christians in general see Yuval, *Two Nations*, 12-13.

with the motif of a cornered protagonist already in connection with verse fourteen (“My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, shew me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears: for thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely”<sup>247</sup>). Since this concept is not conveyed in the *Song of Songs* proper,<sup>248</sup> the mere fact that the interpreters of both traditions used the same symbol in their commentaries is sufficient for the inclusion of this verse into my analysis.

The *Canticles Rabba* interprets this scene as:

What is the meaning of “my dove, in the clefts of the rock”? Said R. Yohanan, “Said the Holy One, blessed be He, ‘I call Israel a dove’...“To me they are like a dove, but to the nations of the world they are like wild beasts...For the nations of the world make war on Israel and say to Israel, ‘What do you want with the Sabbath and with circumcision?’ And the Holy One, blessed be He, strengthens Israel and before the nations of the world they become like wild beasts so as to subdue them before the Holy One, blessed be He, and before Israel. But as to the Holy One, blessed be He, they are like a dove that is without guile, and they obey him...”<sup>249</sup>

It seems that the concept by its mere appearance, invokes the idea of an enemy. It is not enough for the author of the midrash to call Israel a dove, he also has to stress that the people of God are capable of defending themselves. A somewhat similar concept is expressed in the *Targum*. Here, it is not Israel’s fierceness that is emphasized but the fact that the dove in the clefts of rocks is surrounded by enemies:

When wicked Pharaoh pursued after the people of the House of Israel, the Congregation of Israel resembled a dove shut up in the clefts of the rock, with a serpent threatening her from within, and a hawk threatening her from without. So the Congregation of Israel was shut up from the four points of the compass: in front of them was the sea; behind them pursued the enemy; and on their two flanks were deserts full of fiery serpents that bite and kill men with their venom.<sup>250</sup>

Although the *Targum*’s concept is clear and it results naturally from the previously presented understanding that the plot of chapter two is interpreted as Israel’s exodus from

<sup>247</sup> Cant. 2:14

<sup>248</sup> Pope remarks that the scene rather points to the inaccessability of the female character’s location than to the distresses she has to suffer from her enemies. (Cf. Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 400-401.)

<sup>249</sup> *Canticles Rabba*, 2:14; translation from Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah I*, 192.

<sup>250</sup> *Targum Canticles* 2:14 ; translation from: *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 111.



Egypt, there is good reason to deal with it here since it shows a structural similarity with the Christian commentaries of the sixth and seventh centuries. Cassiodorus, for example, says: “*In the hollow places of the wall*. Walls are usually made of solid rocks for protecting the vineyard, for driving away the foxes and other harmful creatures.”<sup>251</sup>

This commentary is building upon a concept that is similar to the understanding of the *Targum*. Here it is also alleged that the dove represents the female character for it is hiding in the protection of the walls against harmful beasts. The commentary of Alcuin, furthermore, is perhaps more revealing for its similarity with the words of the *Targum*:

In the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall. In the clefts of the rock the sitting dove is building a nest, while the Church is putting her faith in the passion of the Lord, in the sacrament of his death, she trust him to protect her from the ambushes of the enemy, for example the raid of the hawk.<sup>252</sup>

While the dove of the text merely represents one building a nest in a wall, both Jewish and Christian interpreters seemed to have been influenced by the proximity of verse fifteen. Moreover, this influence seems to have turned their attention in the same direction, the dove’s defenselessness against its enemies, most importantly the hawk. The structural similarity between the two traditions continues to show up in the interpretations of the subsequent verse. Although the complete meaning of verse sixteen is not clear either,<sup>253</sup> the authors of the rabbinic tradition did not hesitate to include all possible concepts of enemy. In *Canticles Rabba*:

Catch us the foxes, the little foxes...The Egyptians were clever, so they are given the metaphors of foxes...R. Yudan said, the little foxes are Esau and his generals...R. Berekhiah said, the little foxes: these are the four kingdoms...<sup>254</sup>

Once again, the reader finds in the interpretation of the *Canticles Rabba* a similar interpretation to that given in *Pesiqta deRab Kahana* on verse ten. Despite the fact that the Jewish nation had experienced much since the exile in Egypt, the rabbinic picture of enemies

<sup>251</sup> Cassiodorus, PL 70, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, 1066a.

<sup>252</sup> Alcuin, PL 100, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum*, 647d.

<sup>253</sup> On more possible interpretations of the scene cf. Anselm C. Hagedorn, “Of Foxes and Vineyards: Greek Perspectives on the Song of Songs,” *Vetus Testamentum*, 53, No. 3 (2003), 339-340, 351.

<sup>254</sup> *Canticles Rabba*, 2:15; translation from Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah I*, 199, 201-202.

seems to be standing still. Consequently, it is not the Biblical quotations that are changed, but their interpretations.<sup>255</sup> The Egyptian exile was surely a strong element in Biblical tradition, but by the time when the *Canticles Rabba* was compiled it was not historical reality anymore. Therefore, based on historical typology, the rabbis interpreted to the verse in which the allegorical enemy is depicted as being current in their age.

Similarly to this rabbinic tendency, one finds a constancy in Christian commentaries as well. Isidore writes:

“Catch us little foxes that destroy the vines. That is to say bind the heretics, schismatics, those with a crooked faith and those with crooked words.”<sup>256</sup>

In order to show how Christian commentaries, similarly to rabbinic understandings, change with the course of time, I will quote Bede, who gives an similar commentary except for a tiny element that marks the difference:

This animal, which is very shrewd with respect to deceit and craftiness, represents the Jews, Gentiles and heretics, who are always plotting against the church of God, and, as it were, continuously making a racket with their babbling voices. Concerning them the command is given to the guardians of the church: ‘Catch for us the tiny foxes which are wrecking the vineyards.’<sup>257</sup>

Bede’s interpretation, although it is not presented in his proper commentary on the Song of Songs, builds on the same idea as Isidore.<sup>258</sup> I think that this use of the same topic of enemy, presented in both Jewish and the Christian traditions, is an element in chapter two that shows the connectedness of the two interpretative milieus.

Finally, I will briefly reflect upon Christian and Jewish concepts concerning verse sixteen of chapter two. As I have recounted earlier, it is the mutual love of the female and the male characters that is emphasized in verse sixteen of the second chapter. Although it is not infrequent in the *Song of Songs* that both characters or one of them expresses his or her desire

<sup>255</sup> Cf. Yuval, *Two Nations*, 3, 9-10.

<sup>256</sup> Isidorus, PL 83, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum Salomonis*, 1121c.

<sup>257</sup> Bede, *In Acta Apostolorum*, 19.14; translation from *Ancient Christian Commentaries on the Scripture*, 322.

<sup>258</sup> Cf. Littledale, *The Song of Songs*, 101.

and love for the other one,<sup>259</sup> nevertheless this verse (and those where it is repeated)<sup>260</sup> bear a special significance. The reason for this significance is embedded in the way the verse is formulated. By saying “My beloved to me, and I to him,” the male character implicitly conveys a meaning of exclusivity. Together with the shared idea of both interpretative traditions that the male character represents God and the female character signifies the community, this statement and the reciprocity expressed through the verse was enough for the rabbis and the Christian interpreters to include the notion of exclusive excellence in their interpretations. In line with this observation, the *Canticles Rabba* explains verse sixteen (and verse seventeen) as:

‘My beloved is mine and I am his’ To me he is God, and to him I am the nation...To me he is father, and to him I am son...To me he is shepherd...To him I am flock...To me he is guard...To him I am vineyard...He is for my against those who challenge me, and I am for him against those who spite him...Until the day breathes...Until I bring a breathing space into the night of the kingdoms...It is so that the kingdoms will receive the punishment for their rapacity.<sup>261</sup>

The concept of this midrash connects verses sixteen and seventeen. The reciprocity of love between God and his chosen nation is understood to express the exclusivity of their relationship through the addition of the commentary on verse seventeen. Israel is God’s chosen nation and God is the only God for Israel, therefore, at the end of days, God will free Israel from under the yoke of nations. Since one does not find any similar argument in the text of the *Targum*,<sup>262</sup> it is reasonable to assume that this midrash is an early invention, probably related to the much earlier compilation of *Mekhilta deRabi Ishmael*, in which one finds:

<sup>259</sup> See e.g., Cant. 1:7, 3:2,

<sup>260</sup> Cant. 6:3, 7:11

<sup>261</sup> *Canticles Rabba* 2:16-17; translation from Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah I*, 203-208.

<sup>262</sup> Although at the remaining two similar locations the Targum gives a translation that is similar to the midrashic concept. The Targum translates verse 7:3 as: “So long as I walk in the ways of the Lord of the World, He causes His Shekhinah to dwell among me, and His desire is toward me. But when I deviate from His ways He removes His Shekhinah from me, and makes me wander among the nations, and they rule over me as a husband rules over his wife.” (*Targum Canticles* 7:3; translation from *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 185.

When the nations of the world hear about the beauty and praiseworthy quality of the Holy One, blessed be He, they say to them, ‘Let us come with you.’ For it is said, ‘Where has your beloved gone, O you fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?’ What do the Israelites answer them? ‘You have no share in him: ‘I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine, who feeds among the lilies’<sup>263</sup>

Christian interpretations of the sixth and seventh centuries expressed the concept similarly to the rabbinic tradition. Isidore – perhaps as a way of continuing of his understanding of the previous verse – says:

My beloved to me, and I to him. That is, he is beloved only to me and he is supporter only to me. And I am the only one beloved, since no one else loves him correctly but the Church, and he loves no one else but the Church.<sup>264</sup>

His interpretation is similar to that of Bede and Alcuin, who both saw the verse as conveying the meaning of exclusivity. Jewish and Christian interpreters also showed striking similarities in interpreting the two remaining aspects of the plot of chapter two, the concept of the enemy and the concept of reciprocal, yet exclusive, love between the male and the female characters. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the interpretative traditions that are most importantly represented, on the one hand, by the *Canticles Rabba* and the *Targum Canticles*, and, on the other hand, by Cassiodorus, Isidorus, Bede the Venerable and Alcuin are connected.

<sup>263</sup> *Mekhilta deRabi Ishmael* Shirata 3; translation from *Mekhilta*, ed. Neusner, 190.

<sup>264</sup> Isidorus, PL 83, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum Salomonis*, 1121c-d.

### CHAPTER III. THE ALLEGORICAL FAMILY

Following the logic of the allegorical exegesis that both the rabbis and the Christian interpreters implemented, discussed in previous chapters, readers might ask themselves what the final chapter of the *Song of Songs* will contain. This chapter is not only the final chapter of the Biblical book, but – according to the historical point of view of the *Targum*<sup>265</sup> – it is the end of history as well, and, as a consequence, it contains the plot of the salvation of the community. Since the final chapter is considered in many Jewish and some Christian commentaries as recounting the elements of the end of days, it is of paramount importance how the characters, appearing in chapter eight are understood in the two traditions.

An outline of this final chapter shows that the protagonists and the narratives are pinned with expressions of familial love. Due to the haphazard nature of the texts,<sup>266</sup> I will focus on individual motifs and their understandings here rather than on a supposed plot of the entire chapter. Occasionally, however, I will follow the historical or thematic logic of the commentaries that I analyze, which will eventually lead to conclusions on the plot of the whole chapter.

The eighth chapter commences with the exclamation of a female speaker: “Who shall give thee to me for my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother”<sup>267</sup> In the middle of the chapter, however, a yet-unmentioned, plural speaker introduces a new character:<sup>268</sup> “Our sister is little, and hath no breasts. What shall we do to our sister in the day when she is to be spoken to?”<sup>269</sup> According to the understanding of most of the Jewish and Christian

<sup>265</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 94-95.

<sup>266</sup> Even if there is a way of understanding the verses of chapter eight as constituting a continuous plot (see Christian D. Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs and Coheleth (Commonly Called The Book of Ecclesiastes)* (New York: Ktav, 1970), 186; Michael Friedländer, “The Plot of the Song of Songs,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 6, No. 4 (1894), 654-655 I will rather accept the concept of Murphy, who says: “The continuity and coherence of the text seem to break down in 8:5-14, which may be a collection of disparate poems or fragments of poems...” (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 195), and treat the contents of these verses accordingly.

<sup>267</sup> Cant. 8:1.

<sup>268</sup> Due to differences among the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew versions of the texts there are different views of how this character’s identity can be revealed, cf. Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 366, cf. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 192.

<sup>269</sup> Cant. 8:8.

commentaries, the introduction of the “little sister” introduces a third character into the discussion of the female and male characters.

This chapter of my thesis is dedicated to examining the ways in which the family relations described in the *Song of Songs* are understood by the exegetes. Also, I will try to match their understandings with my previous observations concerning the polemical milieu of the Christian and Jewish exegetical traditions. In addition, I will give a brief outline of the eschatological aspects of the interpretation of the concluding chapter of the *Song of Songs* and show how these understandings, in turn, oppose each other.

The focal points of my understanding and subsequent analysis of this chapter are, thus, the following: In verses one and two, the female speaker wishes that her lover would be a brother to her so that they could express their mutual desire without disdain from their surroundings.<sup>270</sup> In verses five to seven a female [!] speaker is mentioned as coming up from the desert, then, taking the initiative, she wishes she was with her lover again.<sup>271</sup> Following this, the little sister is mentioned in verses eight to nine, which conclude with the exclamation of a female speaker describing herself.<sup>272</sup> As is visible from my outline, the final chapter of the *Song of Songs* is again marked significantly by the monologues of female speakers, which – in turn – will also be discussed in the commentaries.

In previous chapters I tried showed that the ecclesiological reading of Theodoret of Cyrillus might be connected to the similar later tradition of Latin fathers represented by Cassiodorus, Apponius, Bede the Venerable, Alcuin and Isidore. This connection was sometimes clearly visible in contrast of other Greek fathers who have followed the tropological reading of the Song of Songs. The present chapter, however, is an example of ample differences even between the interpretative tradition of Theodoret and the Latin

<sup>270</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 246.

<sup>271</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 249.

<sup>272</sup> This part is often seen in commentaries and in recent philological works as being told by the younger sister. See Exum, *Song of Songs*, 255-256, cf. Littledale, *The Song of Songs*, 371.

fathers. The reason for this difference perhaps lies in the different approach toward salvation and redemption. While Theodoret was writing at an age when the Church's rule over the Roman Empire has just been established the representatives of the later, Latin tradition are writing in a religiously more or less secured oecumene. This difference might have brought about the more irenic standpoint toward Judaism of the earlier interpreters and the tradition of Latin fathers, which show a particular obsession with the "responsibility of Jews" in withholding the fulfillment of salvation history.<sup>273</sup> Representing this early, but more importantly irenic tradition, Theodoret says:

But you, in your great love of humanity, and taking on my nature, purposed to suckle at the same breasts as I, in order to demonstrate, in this respect too, that we are brother and sister...The reason why you came forward to be baptized was not to wipe off the dirt of your sins...but you show me what the gifts of baptism are and in what manner to suck the grace of the Spirit.<sup>274</sup>

A century and a half later, one comes across a tougher explanation in the commentary of Apponius. His commentary already deals with the concept that the deliverance from the yoke of the Old Testament is the way to achieve the situation described in verse one:

*Who shall give thee to me for my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother.* This is wishful speaking...She (the Church) is, while watching the coming together of the souls of the previously mentioned gentiles to eternal life, asks only the last remaining, incredulous nation, the Jews, which is her mother by the flesh... *That I may find thee without.* Up until today the words of God were enclosed in the letters of the laws, by the Old Testament of the Jewish nation. These appeared plainly to the faithful in the incarnation...And he was sent from the father for the sake of the salvation of everybody<sup>275</sup>

The transition, already marked in the commentary of Apponius, becomes even clearer in Christian texts from later periods, such as the commentary of Alcuin:

O that you were like a brother to me. This is the voice of the just of the old times, those who were looking forward to the incarnation of Christ. That nursed at my mother's breast. This is: in the Synagogue I was born and fed, by the nature of human conditions.<sup>276</sup>

<sup>273</sup> See John Bright, *The Kingdom of God The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for The Church* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952) 255-257.

<sup>274</sup> Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *In Canticum Canticorum*, PG 81 200b-201a (Translation from *The Song of Songs*, ed. Norris, 274.)

<sup>275</sup> Apponius, CCSL 19, *In Canticum Canticorum Exposito*, 11:16-17.

<sup>276</sup> Alcuin, PL 100, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum*, 681c

The tendency I would like to emphasize consists of the growth of a gradual preponderance in identifying the “sister” with the Jews. Although, from an eschatological point of view, this concept could, to a certain extent, point to the acceptance of the Jews as being close to Christians, I believe the most important feature of the concept is rather that it renders the Jews as being culpable for not realizing that the advent of Christ nullifies the strictures of the written law.<sup>277</sup>

In order to trace a parallel development in Jewish exegesis, one needs to take into account early midrashic elements and *Targumic* sources as well. The general line of rabbinic argumentation is concerned with discovering the nature of the familial love explained in the first verse. Since, as far as I am concerned, there is no rabbinic commentary that would pre-date the fifth century concerning this verse, it is impossible to outline a continuous development similar to that presented briefly in relation to Christian commentaries.<sup>278</sup> The first available rabbinic commentaries for this verse date back to the fifth-sixth-seventh centuries. And although one may not be able to observe the development of the polemical argumentation in them, the argumentation itself is indeed ostentatious. It is worthy of notice that almost all the rabbinical sources draw back to a concept in which the verse is compared to the different examples of brotherly relationships of the patriarchal age. The *Canticles Rabba* contains the following commentary:

*O that thou wert as my brother.* Like what sort of brother? Like Cain with Abel? Cain killed Abel...Like Ishmael with Isaac? Ismael hated Isaac. Like Esau and Jacob? Lo, it is said, And Esau hated Jacob. Like the brothers of Joseph with Joseph? They hated him... Then like what brother? It is one that nursed at my mother’s breast, namely Joseph with Benjamin, who loved him with all his heart.<sup>279</sup>

Moreover, in *Pesiqta deRab Kahana* one finds the following explanation of the same verse:

<sup>277</sup> See Ronald E. Heine, *Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.) chapter 2.

<sup>278</sup> As for the only possible exception, the dating of the Tanhuma, see the “Introduction” in *Midrash Tanhuma, Translated into English with Introduction, Indices and Brief Notes*, trans. John T. Townsend (Hoboken: Ktav, 1989), xii.

<sup>279</sup> *Song of Songs Rabba*, 8:1; translation in: Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabba*, 211.



O that you were like a brother to me. Like what sort of brother? As Cain was to Abel? Cain killed Abel. As Ishmael was to Isaac? Ishmael hated Isaac. As Esau was to Jacob? Esau hated Jacob. As were the brothers of Joseph to Joseph? The brothers of Joseph hated Joseph. But rather, as Joseph was to his brothers. Now the matter yields an argument a fortiori: if Joseph, who spoke mild words to the hearts of his brothers and thereby comforted them, when the Holy One, blessed be He, comes to comfort Jerusalem, how much the more so: Comfort, comfort my people.<sup>280</sup>

Even if one sees the important difference in the two rabbinical conceptions (namely, that in the first example love is *par excellence* between Joseph and Benjamin, while in the second one Joseph expresses love towards all of his brothers), it is easy to perceive the common aim shared by both rabbinical arguments. The relationship between the first patriarchs and their brothers exemplifies the relationship of the Jews towards the nations.<sup>281</sup> The idea behind the interpretation is that Cain, Ishmael, and Esau represent foreign nations already in the Biblical tradition, but more importantly, in rabbinical exegesis in general.<sup>282</sup> Consequently, the emphasis on the brotherly love of Joseph toward his brothers equals the integrity and cohesion of the Jews, since Joseph and his brothers together express the whole nation of Israel.<sup>283</sup> I believe that by highlighting the stability and solidarity of the Jewish congregation, the rabbis could have been offering an alternative to the contemporarily developing Christian exegetical tradition which represented them as the younger sister ignorant of the importance of the advent of Christ. The importance of the love between Joseph and his brothers bore a crucial relevance for rabbis who interpret a text to a nation in diaspora. The concept that ultimately the twelve tribes will hold together is similarly echoed during the interpretation of the final verses of chapter eight.

<sup>280</sup> *Pesiqta deRab Kahana*, 16:5; translation from: Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash*, 167-168.

<sup>281</sup> This argument is, as a matter of fact, also implemented by Christian commentaries from the fourth century. See Reuther, "The *Adversus Judaeos* Tradition," 179-180.

<sup>282</sup> See Yuval, *Two Nations*, 3-4, 10-11.

<sup>283</sup> On the dubious interpretation of Joseph's character and his importance in the rabbinic tradition see Isaac Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy, Studies in Scriptures in the Shadow of Internal and External Controversies* (Nijmegen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2002), 77-79, 97-98.

Concerning the identification of characters, the next focal point of my analysis is the rabbinical and Christian exegesis of verse five. Here the arrival of a female character is described and was understood generally in both traditions as referring to the community (that is, the Church in Christian tradition and the congregation of Israel in rabbinic interpretations).<sup>284</sup> The word “wilderness”<sup>285</sup> was enough for the rabbis to connect the verse to the exodus. Taking into account the strategy of the *Targumic* tradition to connect the whole song to Israel’s redemption from Egypt, this tendency already seems evident. Not surprisingly, possibly relying on a *Talmudic* source,<sup>286</sup> Midrashic collections<sup>287</sup> understand the one “coming up from the desert” as the congregation of Israel fleeing from Egypt.

As far as Christian commentaries are concerned, there is a distinctive line of argumentation – particularly prevalent among Western Church fathers – which, while identifying the “one coming up from the desert” as the Church, finds an opportunity to fault Jewish religion for its stubbornness. Cassiodorus says:

*Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness.* The voice of the admiring Synagogue (*speaks about*) the Church assembling from among the nations... And it is worthy of notice that she says: *upon her beloved*. Since the Synagogue thought that she was the only one who had cognition of God, thinking that the other nations are lost in ignorance... *I raised thee up under the apple tree*. We have to understand it as the divine cross, beneath which the Synagogue is awakened. *There thy mother brought thee forth, there she brought thee forth that bare thee*. It is the Synagogue, the greater and principal part of Jews who are called mother.<sup>288</sup>

Alcuin even adds a further eschatological edge to his – otherwise similar – understanding, when he says:

*Under the apple tree I raised thee up.* The bridegroom himself is responding to the bride instead of the Synagogue. *I raised thee up*. That means, I recalled you from perpetual death under the tree of the cross, like the apostles and the rest of the elected from Judea. *There thy mother was corrupted*. That is to say

<sup>284</sup> Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 349-351.

<sup>285</sup> On the interchangeability of the words “wilderness” and “desert” see Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 661-662.

<sup>286</sup> See Talmud Bavli Sota 11b

<sup>287</sup> See, e.g., The Song of Songs Rabba 8:5, Exodus Rabba 20:5, Midrash Zuta 8:5.

<sup>288</sup> Cassiodorus, PL 70, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum* 1101d-1102a.

the major part of the (Jewish) nation saying no to Christ chose Barabbas, while he (Christ) was condemned to the cross.<sup>289</sup>

Finally, in order to prove that these Christian commentaries, or rather, the tradition they represent, were reflecting on the Jewish understandings, or that the two interpretative traditions stemmed from the same interpretative milieu, let me quote the rendering of the *Targum* for verse eight:

When the dead revive, the Mount of Anointing will split apart and all the dead of Israel will issue from beneath it; and even the righteous who have died in exile will come by way of tunnels below the ground and issue from beneath the Mount of Anointing. And the wicked who have died and been buried in the land of Israel will be cast out as a man casts a stone from a sling. Then all the inhabitants of the earth will say, ‘What was the merit of this people that comes up from the earth, in myriads upon myriads, as on the day when she came up from the Wilderness to the Land of Israel, and (that) delights in the love of her Lord, as on the day when she appeared beneath Mount Sinai to receive the Torah?’<sup>290</sup>

The opposition between the two interpretative traditions is again striking. At exactly the same verse, certain representatives of the Jewish and Christian interpreters felt the need to legitimize their understanding of the *Song of Songs* at the expense of the respective other. The direct opposition in the *Targum* between the men of Israel and those of the nations is highlighted even more seriously by Jewish commentaries in relation to the subsequent verses of the *Song of Songs*. One might even consider the possibility that the argumentation of the Christian tradition of understanding was somehow recognized by the redactors of the *Targum*.

The verse: “For love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave”<sup>291</sup> induced a notion of opposition in the minds of the rabbis. The Canticles Rabba contains the following

<sup>289</sup> Alcuin, PL 100, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum*, 682a.

<sup>290</sup> Targum 8:5; translation from: *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 195.

<sup>291</sup> Cant. 8.6.

explanation (mind the pun on the duality in the usage of the Hebrew word *חַמְדָּה* – expressing both the negative aspect of jealousy<sup>292</sup> and its positive variation<sup>293</sup>):

As strong as death is the love with which Isaac loved Esau: *Now Isaac loved Esau*.<sup>294</sup> Jealousy is cruel as the grave. The jealousy that Esau held against Jacob: *And Esau hated Jacob*.<sup>295</sup> ... As strong as death is the love with which the generation that suffered the repression loved the Holy One, blessed be He... The jealousy that the Holy One blessed be He, will hold for Zion, that is a great zealousness.<sup>296</sup>

This midrash contains references to Biblical passages where both unquenchable love and jealousy would refer to Jews (e.g., it quotes the problematic triangle of David, Saul, Jonathan). It is noteworthy, however, that the first and the final element of the list, that is to say the framework of the concept, relate the discrepancy between the feelings of Jacob and Esau (on a symbolical level: the Jews and the Gentiles/Rome) and the unbreakable love and jealousy (or rather, zealousness) of God toward Israel. This structure shows that the author of this midrash wanted to emphasize that although the nations dislike the Jews, the relationship of the Jews with God is as strong as it ever was.<sup>297</sup> Consequently, the analysis of verses five and six again shows that whenever Christian commentaries from the sixth to eighth centuries start to revile Jewish religion as such, one always finds in the background a more-or-less similar rabbinical concept of reverse order.

It is but an easy step from midrashic to the *Targumic* notion which contrasts the love between Israel and God with jealousy and the hatred between the nations:

For the love of your Divinity is as strong as death, and the jealousy which the nations bear us is as harsh as Gehinnom, and the enmity which they harbor against us is like the blazing coals of Gehinnom, which the Lord created on the second day of the Creation of the World to burn therein idolaters.” The Lord of the World said to His people, the House of Israel, “Even if all the nations which are likened to the waters of the sea, which are many, should gather together, they would not be able to quench My love for you. And if all the kings of the earth, who are likened to the waters of a river that flow

<sup>292</sup> Cf., e.g., Num. 5:14

<sup>293</sup> Cf., e.g., Ez. 5:13.

<sup>294</sup> Gen. 25:28.

<sup>295</sup> Gen. 27:41.

<sup>296</sup> *Canticles Rabba*, 8:6; translation from Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah II*, 223-224.

<sup>297</sup> Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah II*, 224.

strongly, should assemble, they would not be able to blot you out from the world.<sup>298</sup>

This text of the *Targum*, however, is also very close to a widespread Christian exegetical tradition that, in reference to the sixth verse, analyses Jewish-Christian relationship the following way:

Jealousy is cruel as the grave. My love for you, O Synagogue, is so strong that I would die for it (lit. strong until the death) but your jealousy was cruel upon me like hell. But turn your jealousy into love and be my bride and my sister and my friend!<sup>299</sup>

Although, the text of Alcuin is difficult to understand, since it needs the reader's recognition of the fact that the speaker is Christ on the cross, one only needs to look into earlier commentaries, particularly that of Cassiodorus, to understand clearly what "jealousy of the Synagogue" is:

Cruel as the grave. This refers particularly to the Synagogue, which was jealous of the nations and envied their salvation. Christ is reminding them by saying this, to cease from envy and rejoice for the salvation of the Church.<sup>300</sup>

The concept expressed in the words of Alcuin and Cassiodorus<sup>301</sup> is clear. The Church, or representing the Church, Christ expressed his love toward the Synagogue, but he encountered a bitter refusal, which was manifested in the fact that the Jews chose to remain with their customs instead of accepting the reformulation of the law through the advent of Christianity. The important part of this concept, however, is that it also includes an eschatological possibility of a peaceful outcome to the discrepancy between Jews and Christians. By saying "turn your jealousy into love and be my bride and my sister," Alcuin

<sup>298</sup> Translation from: *The Targum of Canticles*, ed. Alexander, 196-198.

<sup>299</sup> Alcuin, PL 100, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum*, 662c.

<sup>300</sup> Cassiodorus, PL 70, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum* 1102d

<sup>301</sup> And further echoed in the works of Bede, Isidorus and others. For a general survey cf. Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 358-363.

sets forth the Christian eschatological concept<sup>302</sup> in which the Synagogue will finally realize her mistake and join the Church.

While the interpretation of the *Targum* is structurally similar to the Christian understanding quoted above, one cannot find this similarity in the eschatological message. It seems that at the time of the formation of the text of the *Targum*, Christianity could no longer be regarded as a sister, a possible ally, but only as one of the nations, and in particular a perilous enemy against which the polemics should be directed.<sup>303</sup>

The treatment of verses five and six by the rabbis and the church fathers of the sixth to eighth centuries again show that there was a particularly strong polemical situation between rival commentaries. The same elements: God's love for the female character, the corruption and wickedness of the enemy which contributed to the election of the respective community are, again, present in both traditions.

The rabbinical tradition, which is connected to the following verse, unfolds the root of the concept of love between God and his chosen nation by defining the basis of this situation. Relying on a *Talmudic* reference,<sup>304</sup> the *Leviticus Rabba* gives the following story and explanation:

R. Johanan was once walking along on the way from Tiberias to Sepphoris, R. Hiyya son of Abba supporting him. They came to a certain country-house and R. Johanan said: 'This country-house was mine and I sold it in order to acquire the Torah.' They came to a certain vineyard-dwelling and he said: 'This

<sup>302</sup> Although this concept only became full-fledged in the eleventh century, it was, as evidenced by Alcuin's commentary, already present in the Carolingian age. Since the bases for such a concept are included in New Testament tradition, it is no surprise that, despite the existence of concepts in which Jews are presented as the supporters of the Antichrist (see Paul Magdalino, "The End of Time in Byzantium," in *Endzeiten, Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008] 121), there is a version in which the salvation of the Jewish people is granted through their conversion. On the connections of this concept and the Song of Songs in general see Jeremy Cohen, "Synagoga Conversa: Honorius Augustodunensis, the Song of Songs, and Christianity's "Eschatological Jew," *Speculum* 79, No. 2 (2004): 309-340.

<sup>303</sup> As far as eschatology was concerned, both religions needed more than ever to nullify and disregard the opinion of the "other". Since here the most crucial debate between Jews and Christians is at stake (if Christ was the Messiah) none of the parties could take a step backward. Therefore, the argument applies here: "the veracity of one religion depends on the negation of the other." See Yuval, *Two Nations*, 25, fn. 39. The rabbis, considering the weight of the eschatological aspect of the *Targum*, must have felt obliged to give the clearest and most ruthless answer to the concept represented by the commentary of Alcuin.

<sup>304</sup> *Talmud Bavli, Sotah* 21a.

vineyard-dwelling was mine and I sold it in order to acquire the Torah.’ They came to a certain dwelling in an olive-grove and he said: ‘This dwelling in the olive-grove was mine and I sold it in order to acquire the Torah.’ R. Hiyya began weeping. ‘Why are you weeping?’ asked R. Johanan. He answered him: ‘Because you have left nothing for your old age.’ He said to him: ‘Is it a light thing in your eyes what I have done? That I have sold a thing which was created in six days and acquired a thing that was given after forty days: as it says: *And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights.*’<sup>305</sup> ... When R. Johanan died, his generation applied to him the text, *If a man would give all the substance of his house for the love with which R. Johanan loved the Torah, He would utterly be contemned.* When R. Hoshaya of Tiriya died, his bier was seen to soar in the air, and his generation applied to him the text, *If a man would give all the substance of his house for the love with which the Holy One, blessed be He, loved Abba Hoshaya of Tiriya, He would be utterly contemned.*<sup>306</sup>

The idea presented here is based on the concept that studying the Torah exceeds every item of worldly wealth but still it cannot be bought by worldly means. The Midrashic compilation of emblematic rabbinical figures who were so highly esteemed that their contemporaries quoted this reference from the *Song of Songs* in relation to them shows that love for Torah equals God’s love for Israel.<sup>307</sup> That is to say, the seventh verse of *Song of Songs* expresses the excellence of Israel and its strong relationship with God.

According to my observations, the turning point in the exegesis of chapter eight comes at verse eight. Here yet another character is introduced, which, complicating the already intricate set of characters even more, apparently troubled the identifications of both Christian and Jewish interpreters. The appearance of a younger sister offers numerous possibilities for explanation. In what follows I will try to outline two possible ways of interpretation. The first is a structural reconstruction which follows the basic concept of both interpretative traditions (namely, that the male speaker represents God and the female signifies the community). The second concept is a historical interpretation, namely, that it is in line with most of the understandings of the commentaries analyzed in this thesis.

<sup>305</sup> Ex. 34:28.

<sup>306</sup> *Leviticus Rabba* 30:1. Translation from *Leviticus Rabba*, trans. H. Freedman, Maurice Simon (London: Soncino, 1983) 380-381.

<sup>307</sup> As far as eschatological concepts are concerned it is important to note here that the Torah in rabbinical Judaism is intricately connected to the redemption of those who study it meticulously; see Jacob Neusner, *Torah, from Scroll to Symbol in Formative Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 26-7, 118-124.

The first, structural, way of identification offered a simple way for both traditions to deal with the identity of the younger sister. Both from a rabbinical and from a Christian perspective this character can be understood as the other.<sup>308</sup> On the one hand, rabbis could claim that – according to a historical view – the Christian Church is the younger sister of Jewish religion.<sup>309</sup> Moreover, from a historical point of view the statement that the younger sister as yet has no breasts (that is to say, it has not yet reached the age of fertility) could mean that Christians still fail to understand the importance of the Mosaic Law.<sup>310</sup> On the other hand, Christian interpreters could assert that – from an eschatological point of view – the Jewish religion is their younger sister, who does not yet realize that the Messiah has already arrived.<sup>311</sup> Even though this understanding seems to be in accordance with the basic rule of interpretation in both traditions, implemented previously by both exegetical traditions, it appears only rarely in commentaries.<sup>312</sup>

The second historical way of understanding the identity of the younger sister is different. Bede, for example, relies upon this understanding in his commentary, when he, says that the speaker of the passage is God, who – addressing the Jews – reveals that their younger sister – the Church – is still weak, but will eventually grow stronger.<sup>313</sup> The only apparent difficulty in both ways of interpretation is the contradiction between the plurality of the speakers and the fact that both the Christians and Jews have identified themselves with a singular, feminine speaker in previous chapters of the *Song of Songs*. However, both traditions could overcome this difficulty in their interpretation of verse ten, in which there is a

<sup>308</sup> Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 679.

<sup>309</sup> See. Yuval, *Two Nations*, 26.

<sup>310</sup> On connections between the end of days and the proselytizing of the Gentiles in the first millennium Jewish tradition see Yuval, *Two Nations*, 112-113; cf. Schubert, *Christentum und Judentum*, 48-49.

<sup>311</sup> Since this concept stems from Pauline tradition concerning the interchangeability of the law with the advent of Christ, it seems correct to surmise that it has appeared as a reasonable solution to any exegete of the Old Testament in relation to eschatology. See Kessler, *An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations*, 42; cf. Reuther, “The *Adversos Judaeos* Tradition,” 176.

<sup>312</sup> Cf. Littledale, *A Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 367-368.

<sup>313</sup> See Bede, PL 91, *In Cantica Canticorum Allegorica Expositio*, 1214d-1215a.



possibility of connecting the younger sister to the female speaker: “I am a wall, and my breasts like towers: then was I in his eyes as one that found favor.”<sup>314</sup>

This sister, about whom a plural speaker (either the “daughters of Jerusalem” or the “sons of my mother” from chapter one)<sup>315</sup> speaks is said to be young, not revealing the signs of adolescence yet, and it seems that the speakers want to guard her.<sup>316</sup> She, however, taking the lead in verse ten, says that she is indeed a wall and she has breasts, and she is perfectly capable of delighting her lover.<sup>317</sup>

As I have mentioned earlier, family relations in the *Song of Songs* were of crucial importance for both the Jewish and the Christian interpreters. Following the mutual awareness of both Jews and Christians of their shared past and connectedness,<sup>318</sup> family ties were particularly likely to be interpreted as referring to the relationship between them. As the reader can see here, the term “younger sister” is not an exception to this way of interpretation. However, despite the self-evident direction of interpretation (namely, that the “little sister” represents the other), the term posed several problems for both commentary traditions.

For a Christian interpreter, it could have been, on the one hand, just natural to identify the younger sister with the Church. On the other hand, it would mean that the interpreter has to explain why the Church, which was up to this point depicted as mature and worthy of the grace and attention of its bridegroom, is suddenly described as a young and still immature woman. Jewish commentators faced the inverse of this problem: if the congregation of the Jews is to be understood to be the younger sister, what is the older group to which she is compared? Most of the Christian commentaries seem to corroborate my assumption concerning the connectedness of Jews and Christians in regard to the family relations mentioned in the text. Most of the Christian interpreters from the era understand verse eight

<sup>314</sup> Cant. 8:10

<sup>315</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 256.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> See Keel, *Das Hohelied*, 253

<sup>318</sup> An example of how family relations can be introduced in both Jewish and Christian thinking about their connectedness is presented in Yuval, *Two Nations*, 11-14.

as referring to the young Church, which is still in the shadow of the Synagogue. Alcuin, for example, says:

It represents the early Church when it was born out of the gentiles. When it was still small, as far as numbers are concerned, and when it was less suitable for preaching the Word. He talks about it as the Bridegroom of the Synagogue: What shall we do for our sister, on the day when she is spoken for? As if he was plainly saying: certainly the Church of the gentiles is still small in numbers and it is not capable of assuming the mysteries of the Logos: what seems to you, o Synagogue, right to be done with our sister, when she is spoken for? When she is led to the faith through the mystery of the Word. Since the Synagogue is silent, the Bridegroom answers, telling what should be done.<sup>319</sup>

Alcuin's words are in harmony with the previous Christian tradition (expressed, among others, by Bede and Cassiodorus) and represent the idea that during the infancy of the Church the bridegroom (i.e., Christ) asked for the help of the Synagogue in defending and educating the young disciples of the Church of the gentiles.<sup>320</sup> The Synagogue, however, refused to get involved in the matter, which resulted in the formation of the Church on individual principles (i.e., based on principles of the Holy Scripture but, in contrast to Jewish religion, including elements different from the Jewish scriptural tradition). The words of Isidore testify to a similar understanding:

If she (that is the Church) is a wall, we will build upon her a battlement of silver: As if it would have been said: even if some in it have firm faith and pure nature, or if there are (people in it) instructed in philosophy, let us add to it battlements of silver, this is, the knowledge of the divine Scriptures, so that it will be easier for them to guard the weak and the unlearned.<sup>321</sup>

Under this whole concept lies a serious statement, namely, that it was the Synagogue's refusal to recognize that the time was ripe for the gentiles to enter the covenant and, consequently, to recognize Christ's messianic nature, that led to the establishment of the Church as a separate entity from that of Judaism.<sup>322</sup> This idea, on a further level, implies that the Church is not simply different from the Synagogue, but also superior to the Synagogue

<sup>319</sup> Alcuin, PL 100, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum*, 662d-663a.

<sup>320</sup> Cf. Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 679.

<sup>321</sup> Isidorus, PL 83, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum Salomonis*, 1131c.

<sup>322</sup> Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, 257.

insofar as it encompasses members of philosophical instruction and inward beauty (charity and gentleness) inherited from the instructions of Christ, which the Synagogue lacks.

The prevalent Jewish interpretation in the midrashic literature is similar to the Christian interpretation since it also identifies its own community (the Jews) with the younger sister of the text. It is important to note, however, that most of the interpretations, particularly those from a relatively early period, understand the younger sister as referring in some way to the Babylonian Jews in general. Based upon a prevalent *Talmudic* idea which connects the supposed poverty of Babylonian Jews, their excellence in learning, and the younger sister of the *Song of Songs* together,<sup>323</sup> an interpretation of the text developed which understood the plot of verses 8-10 as referring to the excellence of Jews in learning the Torah and partaking in the blessings of divine guidance. The first element of this understanding is already represented in the *Talmud*. In *Baba Batra* it is said:

When he came before R. Yohanan, he said to him: “But why not derive the same fact from the following: ‘I am a wall and my breasts are like towers.’ I am a wall refers to the Torah and my breasts are like towers, refers to disciples of the sages. But R. Simeon b. Laqish interprets the verse in line with the manner in which Raba explained it: ‘I am a wall’ the community of Israel, and ‘my breasts are like towers’ are like towers, refers to houses of assembly and houses of study.”<sup>324</sup>

The gist of the concept is encapsulated in this brief *Talmudic* reference. The interpretations of both R. Yohanan and R. Simeon b. Laqish recount the excellence of Israel based on its relation to the Mosaic laws and their continuous study. The later compilation of the *Canticles Rabba* from the post-*Talmudic* period musters the same idea with some important additions. Besides emphasizing the excellence and the chosen nature of Israel, it also tells how and why this privileged status is upheld:

*We have a little sister.* This refers to Israel. R. Azariah in the name of R. Judah b. R. Simon: All the angelic princes who watch over the nations of the world in the coming age are going to come and make the case against Israel before

<sup>323</sup> See *Talmud Bavli*, *Pesahim* 87a, *Kiddushin* 49b, *Sanhedrin* 24a.

<sup>324</sup> *Talmud Bavli*, *Baba Bathra* 7b-8a; translation from *The Talmud of Babylonia, an American Translation*, Vol. 12. *A Tractate Baba Batra Chapters 1-2*, trans. Jacob Neusner (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 42.

the Holy One, blessed be He, saying: Lord of the world, these have worshipped idols, and those have worshipped idols. These have fornicated and those have fornicated. These have shed blood and those have shed blood. How come these go down to Gehenna, while those do not go? The Holy One, blessed be He, will say to them: *We have a little sister*. Just as in the case of a child, whatever he does, people do not stop him – why? Because he is a child, so in the case of however the Israelites soil themselves all the days of the year through their transgressions, when the Day of Atonement comes, it effects atonement in their behalf...It has been taught on Tannaite authority: Once the final prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi had died, the Holy Spirit ceased from Israel. Even so, they would make use of the echo. There was the case of sages voting in the upper room of the house of Gedia in Jericho. An echo came forth and said to them, There is among you one man who is worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit, but his generation is not suitable for such to happen. They set their eyes upon Hillel the Elder <sup>325</sup>

The claim of this midrash is clear. Israel, the younger sister, retains its privileged status by divine will. This status is, in turn, preserved through the echo of the *bath kol*. Even though the era of prophets ended with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (and not even by chance with Jesus), the will of God is still expressed to the Jews and the rabbinic sages, the leaders of the community. This historical framework points to a polemical situation. The concept of this midrash seems to offer an alternative to an argument, perhaps even a threat, in which the singularity of the Jewish religion was questioned. If one takes into account that the Christian religion itself, but more importantly the contemporary Christian commentaries, as I have shown, argue for the transition of God's love for the Jewish congregation to the Church, it seems possible to surmise that this midrash was included in the compilation of commentaries as a polemical answer to the challenge to the Christian point of view.

Moreover, the *Canticles Rabba* gives yet another explanation for the verse, in which the previously mentioned element of the Babylonian identification is connected to the historical framework:

Rabbis interpret the verses to speak of those who came up from the Exile: We have a little sister: this refers to those who came up from the Exile. Little: because they were few in numbers...Said R. Abba b. R. Kahana: If you have seen the benches in the Land of Israel filled with Babylonians, look forward

<sup>325</sup> *Song of Songs Rabba*, 8:8-10; translation from: Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah II*, 232.

for the coming of the Messiah. How come? He has spread a net for my feet.<sup>326</sup>  
The presence of Babylonians is a net to draw the Messiah.<sup>327</sup>

In other words, it is the reunion of the Jews of Palestine with the Jews of Babylonia, the reunion of the twelve tribes, which brings about the advent of the Messiah.<sup>328</sup> In summary, the concept of the Midrashic compilation seems to oppose the Christian tradition at every focal point. The younger sister is not the Church but Israel, the walls and the towers are not the Christian teachings, but the process of studying the Mosaic laws and the places where this study is done. This concept does not deal with the Temple or offerings. Instead, the eschatological stance of the Church as the way through which the nations are redeemed, the election of Israel and her constant connection with God, is highlighted. This concept is ultimately also connected to redemption, only in the way in which the individual observes the laws of the Torah. This ultimately shows how much the rabbinical concept and the Christian tradition of the sixth to eighth centuries were interrelated and depended upon each other's argumentation concerning the final chapter of the *Song of Songs*.

## CONCLUSIONS

In my thesis, I focused my attention on the interrelation between Christian and Jewish commentaries from the late antiquity and early middle ages. From the vast pool of Christian interpretations I chose those that understand the *Song of Songs* in an ecclesiological way, that is they interpret the female character as signifying the Christian Church. The correspondent Jewish commentaries understand the female character as representing the Jewish nation. Since both traditions understood the male protagonist of the Biblical book as an allegorical figure for God, and, consequently, the whole text of the *Song of Songs* as representing God's relation to their respective communities, the ecclesiological understanding of the Christian tradition and the Jewish tradition are by definition in contradiction. While a similar

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<sup>326</sup> Lam. 1:13

<sup>327</sup> *Song of Songs Rabba*, 8:10; translation from: Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah II*, 233.

<sup>328</sup> Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalypics*, 201-204.

contradiction and its implicated message is evident in many aspects of Jewish-Christian relations, its appearance in the Biblical exegesis was not always present. Early Christian interpretations, particularly those of the eastern church fathers show that in the first centuries of Christianity a non-ecclesiological, but tropological understanding was as prevalent as the one that understood the relationship of the Church and Christ in the text of the *Song of Songs*. Furthermore, not even rabbinical interpreters were always occupied with understandings of the *Song of Songs* that correspond to the ecclesiological tradition of the Christians.

It follows that the ecclesiological tendency clearly visible among Christian interpreters of the fifth-eighth centuries and the corresponding rabbinical understanding of commentary-compilations from the same era, are resulting from a certain development. My theory was that this development is most likely a consequence of an altogether polemical milieu ensuing from the institutionalization of the Christian Church and its recognition of the theological threat of Judaism and the Jewish counter-reaction in turn.

By comparing commentaries from the given period, I wanted to show that Christian and Jewish understanding are not only accidentally matching each other and that their structural similarity and contradicting message is a result of a certain level of awareness of the other's argument and a desire to answer this argument with the help of self-legitimization and direct polemics. Throughout the analysis I tried to show that at certain points of their interpretations Jewish and Christian exegetes use similar structures, implement the same metaphors, draw structurally similar (but in terms of content often directly contradicting) conclusions. I wanted to show that these elements – albeit one by one they would not count much – together point to a connection, mutual awareness and polemicizing tendency against each other's commentaries.

For me it seems certain that from the fifth century onward the exegesis of the *Song of Songs* was increasingly seen in both traditions as a possible way of expressing self-supporting

claims concerning eschatology and historical role and also direct polemics aiming at the respective enemy. Furthermore, when the amount of such interpretations reach a certain proportion, they start to rule the interpretative traditions entirely and soon the exegesis of the *Song of Songs* would be nothing else but clear ground for polemics.

I believe that the commentary-traditions I have presented in my thesis, their connections (both similarities and oppositions) was the first step toward the establishment of the clearly polemical exegetical traditions of later centuries. Thus, the study of this late-antique, early-medieval corpus is of crucial importance in understanding the workings of high-medieval Jewish-Christian polemics expressed in relation to the *Song of Songs*.

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## APPENDIX – THE TEXT OF THE SONG OF SONGS' FROM ITS ENGLISH EDITION<sup>329</sup>

### Chapter 1

[1] Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth: for thy breasts are better than wine, [2] Smelling sweet of the best ointments. Thy name is as oil poured out: therefore young maidens have loved thee. [3] Draw me: we will run after thee to the odour of thy ointments. The king hath brought me into his storerooms: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, remembering thy breasts more than wine: the righteous love thee. [4] I am black but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Cedar, as the curtains of Solomon. [5] Do not consider me that I am brown, because the sun hath altered my colour: the sons of my mother have fought against me, they have made me the keeper in the vineyards: my vineyard I have not kept. [6] shew me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou liest in the midday, lest I begin to wander after the flocks of thy companions. [7] If thou know not thyself, O fairest among women, go forth, and follow after the steps of the flocks, and feed thy kids beside the tents of the shepherds. [8] To my company of horsemen, in Pharaoh's chariots, have I likened thee, O my love. [9] Thy cheeks are beautiful as the turtledove's, thy neck as jewels. [10] We will make thee chains of gold, inlaid with silver. [11] While the king was at his repose, my spikenard sent forth the odour thereof. [12] A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, he shall abide between my breasts. [13] A cluster of cypress my love is to me, in the vineyards of Engaddi. [14] Behold thou art fair, O my love, behold thou art fair, thy eyes are as those of doves. [15] Behold thou art fair, my beloved, and comely. Our bed is flourishing. [16] The beams of our houses are of cedar, our rafters of cypress trees.

### Chapter 2

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<sup>329</sup> *Holy Bible Douay Rheims Version* (Saint Benedict Pr, 2009).

[1] I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys. [2] As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. [3] As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow, whom I desired: and his fruit was sweet to my palate. [4] He brought me into the cellar of wine, he set in order charity in me. [5] Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples: because I languish with love. [6] His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me. [7] I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and the harts of the, fields, that you stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she please. [8] The voice of my beloved, behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills. [9] My beloved is like a roe, or a young hart. Behold he standeth behind our wall, looking through the windows, looking through the lattices. [10] Behold my beloved speaketh to me: Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. [11] For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. [12] The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come: the voice of the turtle is heard in our land: [13] The fig tree hath put forth her green figs: the vines in flower yield their sweet smell. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come: [14] My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, shew me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears: for thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely. [15] Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vines: for our vineyard hath flourished. [16] My beloved to me, and I to him who feedeth among the lilies, [17] Till the day break, and the shadows retire. Return: be like, my beloved, to a roe, or to a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.

### Chapter 3

[1] In my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, and found him not. [2] I will rise, and will go about the city: in the streets and the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, and I found him not. [3] The watchmen who keep the city, found me: Have you seen him, whom my soul loveth? [4] When I had a little passed by them, I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him: and I will not let him go, till I bring him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that bore me. [5] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the harts of the fields, that you stir not up, nor awake my beloved, till she please. [6] Who is she that goeth up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh, and frankincense, and of all the powders of the perfumer? [7] Behold threescore valiant ones of the most valiant of Israel, surrounded the bed of Solomon? [8] All holding swords, and most expert in war: every man's sword upon his thigh, because of fears in the night. [9] King Solomon hath made him a litter of the wood of Libanus: [10] The pillars thereof he made of silver, the seat of gold, the going up of purple: the midst he covered with charity for the daughters of Jerusalem. [11] Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see king Solomon in the diadem, wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the joy of his heart.

## Chapter 4

[1] How beautiful art thou, my love, how beautiful art thou! thy eyes are doves' eyes, besides what is hid within. Thy hair is as flocks of goats, which Come up from mount Galaad. [2] Thy teeth as flocks of sheep, that are shorn which come up from the washing, all with twins, and there is none barren among them. [3] Thy lips are as a scarlet lace: and thy speech sweet. Thy cheeks are as a piece of a pomegranate, besides that which lieth hid within. [4] Thy neck,



is as the tower of David, which is built with bulwarks: a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the armour of valiant men. [5] Thy two breasts like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies. [6] Till the day break, and the shadows retire, I will go to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. [7] Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee. [8] Come from Libanus, my spouse, come from Libanus, come: thou shalt be crowned from the top of Amana, from the top of Sanir and Hermon, from the dens of the lions, from the mountains of the leopards. [9] Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, thou hast wounded my heart with one of thy eyes, and with one hair of thy neck. [10] How beautiful are thy breasts, my sister, my spouse! thy breasts are more beautiful than wine, and the sweet smell of thy ointments above all aromatical spices. [11] Thy lips, my spouse, are as a dropping honeycomb, honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments, as the smell of frankincense. [12] My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up. [13] Thy plants are a paradise of pomegranates with the fruits of the orchard. Cypress with spikenard. [14] Spikenard and saffron, sweet cane and cinnamon, with all the trees of Libanus, myrrh and aloes with all the chief perfumes. [15] The fountain of gardens: the well of living waters, which run with a strong stream from Libanus. [16] Arise, O north wind, and come, O south wind, blow through my garden, and let the aromatical spices thereof flow.

## Chapter 5

[1] Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat the fruit of his apple trees. I am come into my garden, O my sister, my spouse, I have gathered my myrrh, with my aromatical spices: I have eaten the honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved. [2] I sleep, and my heart watcheth;

the voice of my beloved knocking: Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is full of dew, and my locks of the drops of the nights. [3] I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them? [4] My beloved put his hand through the key hole, and my bowels were moved at his touch. [5] I arose up to open to my beloved: my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers were full of the choicest myrrh. [6] I opened the bolt of my door to my beloved: but he had turned aside, and was gone. My soul melted when he spoke: I sought him, and found him not: I called, and he did not answer me. [7] The keepers that go about the city found me: they struck me: and wounded me: the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. [8] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I languish with love. [9] What manner of one is thy beloved of the beloved, O thou most beautiful among women? what manner of one is thy beloved of the beloved, that thou hast so adjured us? [10] My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands. [11] His head is as the finest gold: his locks as branches of palm trees, black as a raven. [12] His eyes as doves upon brooks of waters, which are washed with milk, and sit beside the plentiful streams. [13] His cheeks are as beds of aromatical spices set by the perfumers. His lips are as lilies dropping choice myrrh. [14] His hands are turned and as of gold, full of hyacinths. His belly as of ivory, set with sapphires. [15] His legs as pillars of marble, that are set upon bases of gold. His form as of Libanus, excellent as the cedars. [16] His throat most sweet, and he is all lovely: such is my beloved, and he is my friend, O ye daughters of Jerusalem. [17] Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou most beautiful among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside, and we will seek him with thee?

## Chapter 6

[1] My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the bed of aromatical spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. [2] I to my beloved, and my beloved to me, who feedeth among the lilies. [3] Thou art beautiful, O my love, sweet and comely as Jerusalem: terrible as an army set in array. [4] Turn away thy eyes from me, for they have made me flee away. Thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from Galaad. [5] Thy teeth as a flock of sheep, which come up from the washing, all with twins, and there is none barren among them. [6] Thy cheeks are as the bark of a pomegranate, beside what is hidden within thee. [7] There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and young maidens without number. [8] One is my dove, my perfect one is but one, she is the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her. The daughters saw her, and declared her most blessed: the queens and concubines, and they praised her. [9] Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array? [10] I went down into the garden of nuts, to see the fruits of the valleys, and to look if the vineyard had flourished, and the pomegranates budded. [11] I knew not: my soul troubled me for the chariots of Aminadab. [12] Return, return, O Sulamitess: return, return that we may behold thee.

## Chapter 7

[1] What shalt thou see in the Sulamitess but the companies of camps? How beautiful are thy steps in shoes, O prince's daughter! The joints of thy thighs are like jewels, that are made by the hand of a skillful workman. [2] Thy navel is like a round bowl never wanting cups. Thy belly is like a heap of wheat, set about with lilies. [3] Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins. [4] Thy neck as a tower of ivory. Thy eyes like the fishpools in Hesebon, which are in the gate of the daughter of the multitude. Thy nose is as the tower of Libanus, that looketh toward Damascus. [5] Thy head is like Carmel: and the hairs of thy head as the

purple of the king bound in the channels. [6] How beautiful art thou, and how comely, my dearest, in delights! [7] Thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes. [8] I said: I will go up into the palm tree, and will take hold of the fruit thereof: and thy breasts shall be as the clusters of the vine: and the odour of thy mouth like apples. [9] Thy throat like the best wine, worthy for my beloved to drink, and for his lips and his teeth to ruminate. [10] I to my beloved, and his turning is towards me. [11] Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field, let us abide in the villages. [12] Let us get up early to the vineyards, let us see if the vineyard flourish, if the flowers be ready to bring forth fruits, if the pomegranates flourish: there will I give thee my breasts. [13] The mandrakes give a smell. In our gates are all fruits: the new and the old, my beloved, I have kept for thee.

## Chapter 8

[1] Who shall give thee to me for my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother, that I may find thee without, and kiss thee, and now no man may despise me? [2] I will take hold of thee, and bring thee Into my mother's house: there thou shalt teach me, and I will give thee a cup of spiced wine and new wine of my pomegranates. [3] His left hand under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me. [4] I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up, nor awake my love till she please. [5] Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved? Under the apple tree I raised thee up: there thy mother was corrupted, there she was defloured that bore thee. [6] Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy as hard as hell, the lamps thereof are fire and flames. [7] Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it: if a man should give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing. [8] Our sister is little, and hath no breasts. What shall we do to our sister in the day

when she is to be spoken to? [9] If she be a wall: let us build upon it bulwarks of silver: if she be a door, let us join it together with boards of cedar. [10] I am a wall: and my breasts are as a tower since I am become in his presence as one finding peace. [11] The peaceable had a vineyard, in that which hath people: he let out the same to keepers, every man bringeth for the fruit thereof a thousand pieces of silver. [12] My vineyard is before me. A thousand are for thee, the peaceable, and two hundred for them that keep the fruit thereof. [13] Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the friends hearken: make me hear thy voice. [14] Flee away, O my beloved, and be like to the roe, and to the young hart upon the mountains of aromatical spices.