

THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS

ATTRIBUTED TO R. SAMUEL BEN MEÏR (RASHBAM)¹

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1. Introduction

In 1855, Adolph Jellinek published a commentary on the Song of Songs from MS Hamburg Heb 32 (H32)² that he attributed to Rashbam³ since the manuscript also contains a Koheleth-commentary that is headed – on the upper margin, but possibly by the same hand – by the words *פי' של ר' שמואל*.⁴ The manuscript is described in detail in Steinschneider's catalogue on the Hamburg manuscripts.⁵

Some remarks concerning the manuscript and the text at hand might be added here: The manuscript contains in parts double-pagination in the upper left corner. The commentary on *Shir ha-Shirim* starts fol. 77^r (= Arabic pagination) = 79a (Roman pagination). This (Roman) pagination is obviously the one Steinschneider⁶ refers to.⁷ Unfortunately, the MS does not contain any catchwords on the bottom of the pages. The commentary

¹ I thank Miriamne Fields for amending and shaping my English.

² The catalogue of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, dates the MS to the 13th Century.

³ See *Commentar zu Kohelet und dem Hohen Liede von R. Samuel ben Meïr*. Zum ersten Male, nebst exegetischen Fragmenten des R. Tobia ben Elieser herausgegeben von Adolph Jellinek, Leipzig: Leopold Schnauss, 1855, xi.

⁴ MS H32, fol. 69^v, col. 2.

⁵ Compare M. Steinschneider, *Catalog der hebraeischen Handschriften in der Stadtbibliothek zu Hamburg*, Hamburg: Meissner 1878, 8f.

⁶ See Steinschneider, Catalog 8.

⁷ In the following, I will refer to the more readable pagination in Arabic numbers.

on *Shir ha-Shirim* ends on fol. 83^r (85^r in Roman pagination): הושלמה מגילת שיר השירים (...). There is no further reference to an 'author' of the commentary.⁸ The closing formula⁹ of the Rashi-commentary on the Pentateuch is followed by an introduction to the commentary (with hardly any space and lines left in between), starting: ... ערום יערים המבין. It is clearly an introduction to a *Shir ha-Shirim*-commentary, yet, again, nowhere is there a reference to an 'author'. The heading פתח דבר which is printed in Jellinek's edition is Jellinek's own addition.¹⁰ The heading of the commentary in the manuscript (in magnified letters) reads שיר השירים, followed by the text ... משובח שבכל השירים. Likewise, the commentary on Koheleth closes with: הרי נשלם ספר קהלת, followed by a commentary on Esther,¹¹ starting with: ויהי בימי אחשורוש.

In particular with regard to Rashbam's commentaries on the *Ketuvim* we are faced with an ongoing debate about the question of whether the commentaries that have come to us can be traced back to Rashbam as the 'author', or whether these texts are later compilations

⁸ The commentary on Rut closes with: ורבנא שלמה סליק; Steinschneider (ad loc. 9) refers to it as a compilation of Rashi, R. Yosef Qara, and Rashbam. This commentary, too, was edited by Jellinek in 1855.

⁹ The text reads: ... ברוך המקום שנתן לי לסיים את ספר הזאת (sic!) forbodes the fact that a 'scribe' more than an educated 'copyist' (to take up the distinction made by Beit-Arié) wrote that (part of the) manuscript; cf. Beit-Arié, M., Publication and Reproduction of Literary Texts in Medieval Jewish Civilizations: Jewish Scribality and Its Impact on the Texts Transmitted, in Elman, Y. – Gershoni, I. (Ed.), *Transmitting Jewish Tradition: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion*, New Haven-London: Yale University Press 2000, 225-247, esp. 230-235.

¹⁰ Jellinek had never labeled these additions nor the tacit emendations he undertook regularly.

¹¹ MS H32, fol. 61v, col. 1 – The pagination noted in Steinschneider, Catalog 9 is unclear to me. The manuscript shows clear signs of folio-permutations that might have occurred through a wrong binding (compare already Steinschneider, Catalog 8). From what I could check, the order of the commentaries and the folios is as follows: Fol. 177r (end of a copy of a Rashi commentary on the Pentateuch; follows *Shir ha-Shirim* commentary; fol. 83r end of *Shir ha-Shirim* commentary and beginning of Rut; fol. 69v (!) end of Rut and beginning of Koheleth; fol. 61v end of Koheleth and beginning of Ester.

by a Rashbam-‘school’.¹² Against the background of this discussion, Robert Harris recently stated:

Moreover, it seems likely that the same types of argument that have attended Japhet’s conclusions regarding the commentaries on Koheleth and Job will be rehearsed concerning the authorship of a Song of Songs commentary attributed to Rashbam.¹³

In the preface of his edition, Jellinek offers only a short statement on the question of the authenticity of the commentary and Rashbam’s authorship. Jellinek’s argument arose less from a thorough study of the manuscript and further literary-critical investigations than out of general considerations. He referred to the ‘spirit’ (‘Geist’) of the text,¹⁴ its grammatical notes, as well as exegetical remarks matching Rashbam’s further commentaries, especially his commentary on the Pentateuch. In his study of the Song of Songs-commentaries in the Middle Ages, Siegmund Salfeld followed Jellinek’s opinion without further textual investigation. In recent years, Yaacov Thompson has dealt with the commentary in more detail. Whereas in the beginning of his research on the subject he had introduced the commentary as an anonymous commentary on the Song of Songs,¹⁵ he has modified this view since then, stating that throughout his studies on the manuscripts,¹⁶ Rashbam’s authorship could clearly be demonstrated, a

¹² Compare e.g. Ahrend, M. M., *Le commentaire sur Job de Rabbi Yoséph Quara': étude de méthodes philologiques et exégetiques*, Hildesheim: Gerstenberg 1978; idem, *פירוש ר' יוסף קרא*, *לספר איוב*, Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook 1988; Japhet, S., The Nature and Distribution of Medieval Compilatory Commentaries in the Light of Rabbi Joseph Kara’s Commentary on the book of Job, in Fishbane, M. (ed.), *The Midrashic Imagination. Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1993, 98-130.

¹³ Harris, R. A., The Rashbam Authorship Controversy Redux. On Sara Japhet’s The Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meïr (Rashbam) on the Book of Job (Hebrew), *JQR* 95,1 (2005) 163-181, 169.

¹⁴ See Jellinek, *Commentar zu Kohelet und dem Hohen Liede* x [see note 3].

¹⁵ Compare Thompson, Y., *Le commentaire du Cantique attribué à Samuel ben Méïr*, in *Archives Juives* 23,1-3 (1987) 9-18.

¹⁶ See Thompson, Y., *The Commentary of Samuel ben Meïr on the Song of Songs*, Ph.D. Diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 1989, esp. 107-123, 170-213.

view followed by Harris in his recent book on the Northern-French exegetes.¹⁷

In contrast, David Rosin already denied the authenticity of the commentary, although he admitted ‘Rashbamisms’ here and there in the text.¹⁸ He based his arguments mainly on stylistic observations,¹⁹ and on exegetical notes as regards content,²⁰ stating that this commentary seems to be based on exegetical material collected from Rashbam’s commentary as well as from other – anonymous – commentaries, obviously belonging to the Northern-French exegetical school. In the meantime, additional manuscripts and fragments have been found.²¹ Sara Japhet is currently working on a critical edition that will hopefully enable us to come to a final conclusion.²²

However, at least the text of the Hamburg manuscript H32 that I will refer to in the following shows a number of remarkable details as to the structure and arrangement of the commentary. The exegetical explanations cover the entire text of the Song of Songs from 1:1 to 8:14, opened by a preface that sets out the hermeneutical framework for the commentary. Besides syntactic, grammatical, and lexicological interpretations, the reader finds longer sections that encompass a number of verses, thereby offering narrative, in parts even scenic

¹⁷ Compare Harris, R. A., *Discerning Parallelism. A Study in Northern French Medieval Jewish Biblical Exegesis*, Brown Judaic Studies 341, Providence, RI 2004, 72 incl. note 63.

¹⁸ See Rosin, D. R., *Samuel b. Meir (רשב"ם) als Schrifterklärer*, Breslau: Jahresbericht des Jüdisch-Theologischen Seminars Fraenckel'scher Stiftung, 1880, 17-19.

¹⁹ „Wer möchte eine solche Sprache RSBM zutrauen!“ (Rosin, R. *Samuel b. Meir* 18 incl. note 5).

²⁰ Compare Rosin, R. *Samuel b. Meir* 18 incl. note 5.

²¹ Compare esp. Walfish, B. D., An Annotated Bibliography of Medieval Jewish Commentaries on the Song of Songs, in Japhet, S. (ed.), *The Bible in the Light of Its Interpreters: Sarah Kamin Memorial Volume*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1994, 518-571, esp. 540-42.

²² In a private email correspondence, Sara Japhet rejected some of my considerations concerning the structure and the possible literary history of the commentary. To her, this commentary “is a unified work, as far from a ‘compilation’ as one can think of. In fact, it is the most structurally unified commentary of all the works of the French Peshat school.” I thank Sara Japhet for her important remarks.

descriptions. In addition, ‘allegorical’ interpretations²³ are placed between these narrative sections. Typically, these allegorical interpretations do not refer to a certain verse in the biblical text or even to single words alone, yet are related to a broader textual context. In contrary to Rashi’s commentary on the Song of Songs that offers allegorical explanations on almost every single verse, thereby using the term *dūgmā* throughout, our commentary at all times introduces its ‘allegorical’ interpretations with the expression *dimyôn*²⁴ (דימיון לכנסת) (דימיון ... שהק', דימיון זה על האומות ... , ישראל ...).²⁵

However, next to this alteration of *peshat*-interpretations with allegorical interpretations, Rosin had already drawn attention to a feature characteristic of this commentary, yet not found in Rashbam’s other exegetical works: the persistent reduplication of exegetical comments on the same phrase/*lemma*. Rosin pointed out that nowhere in Rashbam’s commentaries does one find longer explanatory sections paraphrasing a couple of verses at once that are followed by a detailed word-for-word analysis.²⁶ This observation seems to be one of Rosin’s strongest arguments to deny the authenticity of the commentary. Different from Rashi’s commentary, which again and again offers two different explanations for a phrase/word, this feature cannot be outlined in Rashbam’s other commentaries, neither in his commentary on the Pentateuch nor in the commentaries on Koheleth and Job.²⁷

This characteristic trait of a two-fold explanation can already be seen in the very beginning of the commentary, the explanation (and

²³ See below esp. section 2.

²⁴ *Dimyôn* appears always in *scriptio plena*.

²⁵ The term *dūgmā* appears only five times; compare MS H32, fol. 77r; 81r; 82v.

²⁶ Compare Rosin, *R. Samuel b. Meir* 18 [see note 18].

²⁷ Rosin’s view is supported also by Japhet-Salters in their edition of the Koheleth-Commentary (*The Commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir Rashbam on Qobeleth*, Edited and Translated by Sara Japhet and Robert Salters, Jerusalem-Leiden: Magnes Press 1985, 61f.): “Thus the practice which is so common in Jewish exegetical tradition, including medieval commentators, of suggesting several possibilities for interpreting a given text, is completely absent from Rashbam’s works (...) there can never be two correct interpretations of one text.”

interpretation) of the phrase אשר לשלמה (Cant 1:1) that is given two explanations.²⁸ The *second* explanation seems quite typical for Rashbam. It is a short remark explaining the use of the *Lamed* in this phrase, reading: 'כמ' תפלה למשה תהלה לדוד (this phrase) is like (the phrase) 'Prayer of Moses'²⁹ (or) Praise of David.³⁰ This comment refers to Solomon's authorship on the basis of the linguistic expression, with no further clarification needed. However, the *first* explanation already deals with Solomon as the author of the Song of Songs, yet, in a completely different manner:

אשר לשלמה, שלמה המלך יסדו ברוח הקוד' כי ראה שעתידין ישר' להתאונן בגלותן על
הק' שנתרחק מהם כחתן אשר נפרד מאהובתו והתחיל לשורר את שירו במקום כנסת ישר'
שהיא ככלה לפניו.³¹ TP

(*The Song*) of Solomon: (A Song) King Solomon had composed by means of the Holy Spirit, since he had already forecasted that in future times Israel was destined to mourn during her exile about the Holy One who had left them like a groom who had parted with his beloved. Therefore, he (Solomon) began to sing his song in place of Israel standing before him like a bride.

At first sight, this passage seems very similar to Rashi's commentary, in which also the motif of Solomon's prophetic vision plays a prominent role. However, whereas in Rashi's commentary this explanation is already found in his *introduction* to the Song of Songs, thereby functioning as the *hermeneutical* outline for the exegesis of the entire song,³² our author does not take up any of the other motives presented in Rashi's introduction, and the reference to Solomon's prophetic inspiration at this place of the text appears to be isolated and out-of-place. In addition, our commentator introduces a motif that is not found in Rashi's commentary, and which goes far beyond the statement that Solomon wrote a special love poem for Israel: It is

²⁸ MS H32, fol. 77r, col. 2.

²⁹ Ps 90:1.

³⁰ Ps 145:1.

³¹ MS H32, fol. 77r, col. 2.

³² See below.

the account that Solomon had sung this Song in place of Israel (והתחיל (לשורר את שירו במקום כנסת ישראל). This comment is remarkable since it does not simply place the compositional beginning of this love-poem ‘Song of Songs’ into Israel’s ‘classical and glorious’ past – he also leaves it there: Solomon sang the song *instead of* Israel, not Israel herself: neither the ancient one nor the contemporary one. We will return to that point later.

Similarly, the commentaries on Cant 2:10-13³³, 4:1-6³⁴, 4:7-11³⁵ und 7:1-11³⁶ show analogous doublings of the interpretation. In all places the commentator at first lays out a scenic description by paraphrasing³⁷ a number of biblical verses, this paraphrase is then followed by an explanation starting with *dimyôn* ..., followed by a detailed word-for-word explanation of single biblical *lemmata*.

For the time being, suffice it to say that this commentary shows a number of key-terms as well as stylistic features that are typical for Rashbam’s exegetical work, yet, at the same time demonstrates clear signs for what might be called a ‘compilatory commentary.’ As Rosin had already noted, there can be no doubt that this commentary leads back to the Northern-French exegetical school.³⁸ Since we do not

³³ MS H32, fol. 78v. For the textual problems regarding the explanations Cant 1:15-17 see below.

³⁴ MS H32, fol. 79r, col. 2 – 79v, col. 2. The phrase ...יפה רעיתי... appears twice, followed by two different commentaries on *lemmata* from vv 1-6 that are interrupted by a *dimyôn*-phrase (...דימיון על יופי מלאכת המקדש ...).

³⁵ MS H32, fol. 80r.

³⁶ MS H32, fol. 81v – 82r.

³⁷ I will leave out here the discussion on the important issue brought up by Harris, R. A., *The Literary Hermeneutic of Rabbi Eliezer of Beaugency*, Ph.D. Diss., Jewish Theological Seminary 1997 (UMI Dissertation Services) 127 on the hermeneutical function of ‘paraphrases’/‘paraphrasing’, and deal with it in more detail in my book currently in preparation: *‘Creating Fictional Worlds’: Pesbat Exegesis and Narrativity in the Commentaries of Rashbam and his School* (to be published in *Studies in Jewish History and Culture*, Brill Publisher).

³⁸ Cf. Rosin, R. *Samuel b. Meir* 19 [see note 18]; Poznanski, S., *Kommentar zu Ezechiel und den XII Kleinen Propheten von Eliezer aus Beaugency. Zum ersten Male herausgegeben und mit einer Abhandlung über die nordfranzösischen Exegeten eingeleitet*, Schriften des Vereins Mekize Nirdamim: 3. Folge; 15, Warschau 1913 (heb.), 40.

know whether Rashbam himself established a ‘*peshat*-school,’ we must leave the question open until further textual comparisons have been undertaken. In any case, as already noted by Thompson,³⁹ with regard to its hermeneutics, this commentary is by and large dedicated to a profane, secular reading of the Song of Songs. For the present, we might, therefore, call our assumed author or compiler ‘Ps.-Rashbam’.

2. *dûgmâ* vs. *dimyôn*: The Emancipation of Typology

Our starting point is the ‘allegorical’ explanations that are introduced by the term *dimyôn*. They form a decisive element for the formal structure of this commentary. The late Sarah Kamin, who discussed the use of the expression *dûgmâ* in Rashi’s commentary extensively⁴⁰, regarded the use of the idiom *dimyôn* in our commentary as a mere terminological shift and, therefore, attached only minor significance to this observation.⁴¹ To her, both *dûgmâ* as well as *dimyôn* function as Hebrew equivalents to the corresponding Latin idioms (i.e. *exemplum*; *figura*; *similitudo* a.o.⁴²), *dimyôn* thus encompassing no other meaning than *dûgmâ*.

Kamin’s explanation leaves some questions open. Problems occur especially concerning two important considerations: First, why did Ps.-Rashbam modify the term? The idiomatic and persistent revision from *dûgmâ* to *dimyôn* suggests that he might have had good reasons

³⁹ Thompson, Y., *Le commentaire du Cantique*, esp. 12-15 [see note 15].

⁴⁰ See Kamin, S., ‘דוגמא’ in Rashi’s Commentary on the Song of Songs, in *Jews and Christians Interpret the Bible*, Jerusalem: Magnus Press 1991, 13-30 (hebr.); see also idem, Rashi’s Commentary on the Song of Songs and Jewish-Christian Polemic, in *Jews and Christians Interpret the Bible*, Jerusalem: Magnus Press 1991, 31-61 (hebr.).

⁴¹ Compare Kamin, ‘דוגמא’ in Rashi’s Commentary 22 [see note 40]: אין בידינו להסביר מה טעם בחר פרשן זה במונח ‘דמיון’ ולא במונח ‘דוגמא’. מכל מקום, אף הוא, כרש"י, ראה צורך להקדים מונח לפירוש האליגורי והמונח שבהר בו מקבילה עברית אפשרית נוספת למינוח הלטיני המגוון. According to Kamin (ibid. 15) Rashi uses the term *dûgmâ* equivalent to *dimyôn* in the sense of ‘like ...’ (‘כזה’) in his commentary on the Talmud.

⁴² Compare Kamin, ‘דוגמא’ in Rashi’s Commentary, esp. 19-22 [see note 40].

for this terminological alteration. Secondly, why did he decide to choose *dimyôn*? It is most likely that the terminological modification from *dûgmâ* to *dimyôn* was grounded in the use of the term *dimyôn* in Rashi's commentaries. Ps.-Rashbam might have taken the word *dimyôn* quite consciously in order to take up some of the implications bound to that word in Rashi's commentaries.

In Rashi's commentaries the term דמיון 'analogy' (*similitudo*) is applied in particular to grammatical explanations,⁴³ typically when Rashi expounds unusual grammatical features or explicates a *hapaxlegomenon* (... במקרא אין לו דמיון and similar phrases⁴⁴). It is only in RASHI Ezek 19:10 that *dimyôn* is used to explain figurative language (לשון דמיון ומשל). On the other hand, Rashi uses the term דוגמא (pl. דוגמאות; דוגמות), *exemplum*, extensively in his commentaries (in particular the *Shir ha-Shirim* commentary) to convey an allegorical reading of a biblical verse, a phrase or a whole paragraph. One can assume that in Rashi's commentary the distinction between *dûgmâ* and *dimyôn* is based on the differentiation made between 'analogy' (*dimyôn* referring to *similitudo*) und 'allegory' (*dûgmâ* referring to *exemplum*, *figura*): The underlying concept of the allegory and the allegorical reading is the idea of 'integumentum', the veil behind which the theological truth is hidden. Theological assertions and their truth(s) come to light only by means of an allegorical interpretation. For the medieval church, the allegorical interpretation forms an important tool to justify the reading of profane, secular texts, e.g. ancient Latin treatises. Within the context of the Christian-Jewish debate, for Christian as well as for Jewish exegesis the allegorical reading enabled them to read the Song of Songs as an allusion to the relationship between God (as the groom) and the people of Israel as his bride, or God/Christ (as a groom) and the church as his bride. In Jewish exegetical tradition, having started already with the Targum on *Shir ha-Shirim*, the Song of

⁴³ Cf. RASHI Gen 41:45; 49:11; Exod 7:11; 31:10; Lev 19:20; Judg 16:16; 1 Sam 4:19 a.fr.

⁴⁴ Compare RASHI Job 21:20 ... ואיני יכול למצוא לו דמיון... (see also RASHI Job 6:10 a. fr.).

Songs becomes a symbol for the historical and enduring relationship between God and Israel as a 'marriage' (cf. Hos 2:21f.⁴⁵) that is grounded in the election (*bechira*) of the Fathers and the covenant as well as in the giving of the Torah:

The Jewish commentaries (...) interpret the Song of Songs in a historical context – as an allegory describing the relations between God and the people of Israel (...) For the Jewish exegetes 'the couple' is conceived merely as a metaphor. The conjugal relationship is not emphasized: 'The day of his marriage' (Cant 3:10) is interpreted as the day the law was given in Sinai.⁴⁶

In this manner, Rashi's presents the hermeneutical outline in his introduction to ensure the contemporary reader that the relationship between God and Israel is still enduring, the 'marital covenant' still being valid in his own days:

(...) ואומר אני שראה שלמה ברוח הקדש שעתידין ישראל לגלות גולה אחר גולה חורבן אחר חורבן ולהתאונן בגלות זה⁴⁷PT על כבודם הראשון, ולזכור חבה ראשונה אשר היו סגולה לו מכל העמים לאמר אלכה ואשובה אל אישי הראשון כי טוב לי אז מעתה ויזכרו את חסדיו ואת מעלם אשר מעלו ואת הטובות אשר אמר לתת להם באחרית הימים. ויסד ספר הזה ברוח הקדש בלשון אשה צרורה אלמנות חיות משתוקקת על בעלה מתרפקת על דודה מזכרת אהבת נעורים אליו ומודה על פשעה אף דודה צר לו בצרתה ומזכיר חסדי נעוריה ונוי יופיה וכשרון פעליה בהם נקשר עמה באהבה עזה להודיעם כי לא מלבו ענה ולא שילוחיה שילוחין כי עוד היא אשתו והוא אישה והוא עתיד לשוב אליה:

I maintain that King Solomon had forecasted by means of the Holy Spirit that Israel was destined to endure one exile after another, and one destruction after another, and that Israel (was destined) to mourn during this (current) exile about her first (earlier) honor, and to remember God's initial love that made her his treasured possession from among all peoples, saying: *I will go and return to my first husband, for*

⁴⁵ Compare Rashi's Introduction into his commentary on the Song of Songs (*פירוש רש"י*) על שיר השירים, ed. J. Rosenthal, Shemuel K. Mirsky Jubilee Volume, New York: Balshon, 1958, 130-188, 136).

⁴⁶ Bartal, R., Medieval Images of 'Sacred Love': Jewish and Christian Perceptions, in *Assaph. Studies in Art History*, Section B. No. 2, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1996, 93-110, 94; see also *ibid.* 104 incl. note 10; Bartal, however draws no distinction between *Shir ha-Shirim Rabba*, Rashi, or Rashbam.

⁴⁷ Kamin, 'דוגמא' in Rashi's Commentary 18 [see note 40] emends to זו.

it was better for me then than now.⁴⁸ (Solomon had also foreseen) that they would remember (God's) steadfast love and their dealing treacherously with him, and (all) the good things that (God) had guaranteed them for the end of the days. (Solomon) composed this book by means of the Holy Spirit in a *cantus* of a 'bound' woman (living) as if in widowhood⁴⁹, (a woman) pining for her husband,⁵⁰ depending on her beloved, remembering her youthful love for him, and confessing her transgression. Her beloved also took pity upon her distress, remembering the love of her youth, her splendor and beauty, and the aptness of her deeds that had bound him to her in great love. (He takes pity upon her) to let her know *that he does not willingly afflict anyone*,⁵¹ and that she will not be expelled forever, for she remains his wife, and he remains her husband, and he will return to her in the (near) future⁵².

According to Rashi, Solomon as the biblical 'mastersinger' processes one *leitmotif* as the essence in his *chant*: the love and relationship between God and Israel. In addition, Rashi provides his readers with further information on the authorship of Solomon. The *leitmotif* of the *chant* arises from Solomon's particular position within Israel's history allowing him a twofold view: onwards, towards the historical events still to come, encompassing exile(s) and destruction(s), yet, at the same time backwards, towards the time of their first love (PT⁵³ חבה; אהבה עזה).⁵⁴ According to Rashi, even the *genre* of the song as the form in which this essential *leitmotif* is poured, is predefined. It had to be a

⁴⁸ Hos 2:9.

⁴⁹ Cf. 2 Sam 20:3: ותהיינה צרות עד יום מתן אלמנות חיות ...; compare also the Targum *ad loc.* Signer, M. A., God's Love for Israel: Apologetic and Hermeneutical Strategies in Twelfth-Century Biblical Exegesis, in Signer, M. A. – van Engen, J. (Ed.), *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 2001, 123-149, 132 interprets the expression with regard to the later halachic *Aguna*-Laws: "He structured this book (...) about a woman abandoned by her husband without a bill of divorcement."

⁵⁰ Compare also RASHI Cant 5:6.

⁵¹ Lam 3:33.

⁵² RASHI, הקדמה (ed. Rosenthal 136).

⁵³ On the important term *chibbā* in Rashi's commentary compare e.g. RASHI Gen 18:19; 46:2; Exod 16:7; Ezek. 14:14 a.fr.

⁵⁴ See also RASHI Cant 1:4.

‘love-poem’, portraying the time when their initial love had already vanished for the first time.⁵⁵ Rashi refers to it by means of the quotation from Hos 2:9, the illustration of Israel’s punishment (‘her ways hedged up with thorns’: Hos 2:8) and (v9) her return to her first husband, interestingly enough a biblical quotation that is never referred to in *Shir ha-Shirim Rabba*.⁵⁶ The reference to Hos 2 clearly communicates the message for Rashi’s contemporaries that Israel in her current exile will certainly be redeemed as will ‘the wife of whoredom’ (cf. Hos 1) or the ‘mother with adultery between her breasts’ (Hos 2:2). Rashi’s commentary reminds the reader who finds himself in the midst of the events predicted by Solomon and, therefore, yearns for the final redemption that God had not expelled them forever, for ‘she remains his wife, and he remains her husband, and he will return to her in the (near) future.’ Rashi’s commentary claims the identity between the chosen Israel (in the desert; from the day the Law was given onwards) to contemporary Israel (in exile)⁵⁷. The motif of the PT ^{אשה צרורה אלמנות היות}⁵⁸TP that is not found in the biblical text conveys the decisive link between the idea of an expelled wife and a nevertheless continual marital bond. In this case, the allegorical reading actually determines the *peshat*.

In this, the entire text of the Song of Songs becomes a *dūgmā*. Moreover, it is no longer Solomon who sings (sang!) this song, but rather contemporary *knesset Yisrael*, since only by means of the allegorical reading can the continuity from Solomon’s time to the contemporary moment in time be upheld. Therefore, in Rashi’s commentary the single elements of the text refer to a deeper meaning, an *extra-textual truth*. The text on its semantic level does not remain

⁵⁵ Compare also RASHI Hos 3:3: ואומר אליה ימים רבים תשבי לי – ימים שנים רבים שלשה הרי חמשה אלו נ' יום שבין פסח לעצרת בו ביום נתתי להם התורה ובה הזהרתיה. לא תזני ולא תהיי לאיש – לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים. וגם אני אליך – אנכי ה' אלהיך (...)

⁵⁶ The Midrash prefers biblical quotations from Hos 14.

⁵⁷ Compare also Kamin, Rashi’s Commentary 50 [see note 40].

⁵⁸ Compare also RASHI Cant 1:4.

independent, thereby gaining a quality and dignity of its own. The allegory destroys the text's semantic level. What is *said* is not necessarily identical with what is *meant*. Rashi, therefore, pays no attention to the picturesque descriptions of biblical 'love poetry' since they serve only as a vehicle for the typological exegesis: "The physical rapports are given allegorical interpretations that avoid implications of actual physical intimacy."⁵⁹

The Ps.-Rashbam commentary shows an entirely different arrangement as regards the formal structure as well as its content. Ps.-Rashbam often enough does not explain the *sensus litteralis* elucidating single words or phrases, yet creates an imaginative narrative of a detailed love-scenery ('where'; 'in what manner' etc.), thereby garnishing the biblical wording with his own illustrations. The Song of Songs remains in its profane dimensions a love poem. Unlike the allegorical explanations in Rashi's commentary (regardless of whether they are explicitly introduced as *dûgmâ* or not), the *dimyôn*-explanations in Ps.-Rashbam do not offer an allegory in its proper meaning, but rather a comparison, a similarity (*similitudo*). Compare for example his comments on Cant 1:9: The biblical verse that already contains a comparison⁶⁰ is bound to a continuous paraphrase (presented as direct speech of the beloved⁶¹). Ps.-Rashbam interprets the 'ornaments,' the 'strings of jewels,' the 'golden ribbons' and the 'silver beads' as comparable to the booty that the people of Israel took along when they left Egypt:⁶² דִּמְיוֹן לְבִיזַת מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לָקְחָה כְּנַסְתָּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל הַיָּם.⁶³ Here, the *dimyôn*-phrase compares the value of the booty⁶⁴ with the value of the jewelry of the beloved. This is not an allegorical explanation, because

⁵⁹ Bartal, *Medieval Images* 94 [see note 46].

⁶⁰ דְּמִיתִיךְ לְשׁוֹן דְּמִיתִיךְ רַעֲיָתִי; לְסַסְתִּי בְּרַכְבִּי פְּרָעָה דְּמִיתִיךְ רַעֲיָתִי (MS H32, fol. 77v, col. 2 [bottom]) where the text reads: דְּמִיתִיךְ לְשׁוֹן דְּמִיתִיךְ.

⁶¹ MS H32, fol. 77v, col. 2/l. 16: ... עֲכָשִׁיו הוּא מִשְׁבַּח אוֹתָהּ. These figures of speech occur very frequently.

⁶² Cf. Exod 12:35.

⁶³ MS H32, fol. 77v, col. 2/l. 24.

⁶⁴ Cf. Exod 12:35: כָּלִי כֶסֶף וְכָלִי זָהָב וְשִׁמְלוֹ ...

the comparison does not exceed the semantic level: It starts at the level of the *sensus literalis* (jewelry) and remains there.

As to the question whether the *dimyôn*-explanations belong to the original (Rashbam) commentary, things get even more complicated. The *dimyôn*-phrases appear often enough to be interpolated and not related to a specific *peshat*-expression in the text, if one does not wish to make the claim that they have been added to the text at a later date. As an example, let us take a look at the *dimyôn*-phrase placed into the paraphrase of Cant 2:3. It seems quite isolated here, and clear signs of textual disarrangement can be observed. First of all, this *dimyôn*-phrase is placed into the exegesis of v3 (starting with PT⁶⁵היער בעצי TP), although it follows an explanation of the term חוהים from v2. Secondly, it is generally not clear to which of the preceding and subsequent words and phrases it is addressed, and it is difficult to mark the precise point in the text where the comparison is finished, and the paraphrase continues⁶⁶:

(...) חוהים, לש' קימשונים, דימיון להק' וכנסת ישר' שנחבבו TP⁶⁷ זה על זה במתן תורה והשרה הק' את שכינתו בתוך המשכן בין שני הכרובים באהבתו את ישר' אהבת עולם כחבת זכר ונקבה וכנסת ישר' בנתה לו את המשכן ממובחר מיני ארזים הם עצי שטים למען ישכבון TP⁶⁸ הק' בתוכו להשרות שם שכינתו ושם נתרצו ונתפייסו יחד כאילו שניהם נחבקים ונדבקים על מיטה אחת באהבת נעורים.

(...) *thistles* synonymous to '*thorns*'⁶⁹. This resembles the Holy One and Israel when they fell in love one with each other (on the day) when the Torah was given. And the Holy One let his *Shekhinah* rest in the tabernacle between the (two) cherubs, as he loved Israel in an enduring love, like the affection between a male and a female.⁷⁰ And Israel erected him the tabernacle from the finest choice of cedar trees, i.e. acacia wood, that he might dwell in it to let his *Shekhinah* rest

⁶⁵ MS H32, fol. 78r, col. 1/l. 28.

⁶⁶ MS H32, fol. 78r, col. 1/l. 34.

⁶⁷ Read שנתחבבו.

⁶⁸ Read ישכב.

⁶⁹ Prov 24:31.

⁷⁰ Ps.-Rashbam even avoids using 'theological' terminology like בעל or איש, and insteads choose the grammatical terms זכר ונקבה; compare however RASHI Jer 31:22.

there. There it was, that they found pleasure in one another, saying words of appeasement to each other, like those two (in the Song of Songs) when they adhere to one another, hugging each other on the divan in young love.

One can see that Ps.-Rashbam (or even former ‘glossator?’) evidently does not refer to Rashi’s commentary *ad loc.*⁷¹ Instead, he offers a kind of rhetorical ‘sweeping blow’ which destroys any allegory, making it impossible to establish any correspondence between the biblical text and its allegorical meaning. Furthermore, the allusion to the motif of the *miškan* as the dwelling-place for the *Shekhinah* clearly demonstrates that the *dimyôn*-phrase takes up Rashi’s commentary on Cant 1:15-17, a further indication that it is misplaced in the context at hand. It should have been connected to the comments on Cant 1:13-17 where we do not find any *dimyôn*-explanation.

The fact that only a few manuscripts from the early period of the Northern French exegesis have survived represents one of the main problems in this field. Like MS Hamburg heb. 32, the manuscripts left tell only little about a commentary’s literal history. With regard to the example at hand on the incorporation of the *dimyôn*-phrase in Cant 2:3 more than one scenario can be visualized. It could have been an original part of a *pesbat*-commentary (of whatever length), and we are simply faced with the problem that the text had got mixed up in the course of its literal tradition. Alternatively, we can as well imagine that an ‘original’ *pesbat*-commentary abstained from any ‘allegorical’ allusions or (*dimyôn*-)comparisons,⁷² and that at some later point in the literary history of this commentary a reader (or even a copyist) in the role of a ‘super-commentator’ (Hand I) added the *dimyôn*-phrases – on the basis of Rashi’s commentary, yet with a different exegetical-hermeneutical intention – as marginal comments, thereby referring to a number of verses

⁷¹ Compare RASHI Cant 2:2: מפנות אותה, כן רעיתי בין הבנות, שמנקבין אותה (...) ‘As a lily among thistles: in that that they scorn her (...) so is my beloved among the maidens. They entice her (to go astray) and to follow them, whoring like them and (worshipping) other Gods, but she adheres steadfastly to her faith.’

⁷² Compare the anonymous commentary edited by H. J. Mathews (Anonymous Commentary on the Song of Songs. Edited from a unique manuscript in the Bodleian Library Oxford, *Festschrift zum Achtzigsten Geburtstage Moritz Steinschneiders תהלה למשה*, Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz 1896, 238-240, Hebrew part: 164-185).

more than to one particular turn of phrase. These glosses might in turn have amalgamated with the rest of the text (Hand II).⁷³

Regardless of whether or not the *dimyôn*-explanation belongs originally to the commentary, the disparity between both commentaries is eye-catching. RASHI Cant 1:15-17 presents a classical allegorical interpretation, in which every single element in the text is unambiguously assigned to a specific issue on the topic of Israel's history:

(שהש' א,טו) הנך יפה רעיתי – אני הייתי בושה בקלקולי והוא חזקני בדברי רצויים לומר סלחתי כדברך (...) והדוגמא זו היא מחלתי לך על עונך והרי (...) יפה במעשה אבות יפה במעשיך. כי עיניך יונים – צדיקים יש בידך שדבקו בי כיונה (...) ויאספו אליו כל בני לוי ולא טעו בעגל ועוד הנך יפה במלאכת המשכן שנאמר והנה עשו אותה וגו' ויברך אותם משה הרי שקילסם על כך. (טז) הנך יפה דודי אף נעים – לא היופי שלי אלא שלך אתה הוא היפה. אף נעים – שעברת על פשעי והשרית שכינתך בתוכי (...) אף ערשנו רעננה – ע"י נעימותיך הנה רעננה ערשנו בבנינו ובבנותינו שהם כולם נקבצים אליך פה (...) המשכן קרוי מטה שנאמר הנה מטתו שלשלמה וכן המקדש קרוי מטה שנאמר ביואש בחדר המטות אשר בבית ה' על שהם פריין ורביין של ישראל. (יז) קרות בתינו ארזים – שבח המשכן הוא זה.⁷⁴TP

(15) *Ah, you are beautiful, my love*: I have become a disgrace by my malicious deeds, and he has encouraged me with words of appeasement, saying: *I do forgive, just as you have asked*.⁷⁵ (...) 'This is an allegory,⁷⁶ meaning: I have forgiven you for your transgressions – behold (...), you are beautiful by the deeds of the fathers, and you are beautiful by your own deeds.⁷⁷ *Truly, your eyes are doves*: Righteous men are along with you who adhere to me like a dove (...) *And all the sons of Levi gathered around him*,⁷⁸ these were not mislead by the calf. You are beautiful by your work and craft on the tabernacle, as it is written: (...) *they had done all the work asf. (...) he blessed them*.⁷⁹ (...) (16) *Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved (...) truly lovely*, for you have overlooked my offenses,⁸⁰ and had your Shekhina dwell with me (...). *Our couch is green*

⁷³ See also the example in Harris, *The Literary Hermeneutic of Rabbi Eliezer of Beaugency* 135 incl. note 5 [see note 37].

⁷⁴ RASHI Cant 1:16-17 (Ed. Rosenthal 144).

⁷⁵ Num 14:20.

⁷⁶ *Dûgmâ* (*exemplum*).

⁷⁷ Cf. Exod 24:7: נעשה ונשמע (see also Exod 24:3).

⁷⁸ Exod 32:26.

⁷⁹ Exod 39:43.

⁸⁰ Cf. Prov 19:11.

(...) ‘sprouting’ in our sons and daughters who were all gathered around you (...) And the tabernacle is called ‘sedan,’ as it is written: *Behold! It is the sedan of Solomon!*⁸¹ The Temple is called ‘bedding-chamber,’ as it is written concerning Joash: *(she put him and his nurse) in a bedding-chamber,*⁸² which was located in the temple building⁸³ – for the sake of Israel’s proliferation (17) *The beams of our house are cedar.* This is a hymn of praise on the tabernacle (...).

Without analyzing every single *figura* in this comment one can say that Rashi’s commentary is concerned with Israel’s relationship with God in (ancient) history, and Israel’s behaviour in the course of history. His starting point is God’s remission and forgiveness, and Rashi elucidates it by a number of exceptional examples from Israel’s past (in chronological order!): the merits of the fathers,⁸⁴ the righteous behavior of the Levites on the subject of the sin of the calf, the erection of the tabernacle up to the heroic deed of Ahaziah’s sister, who did a service for Israel’s proliferation, i.e. the continuity of the Davidic kingdom (see graph. 1, next page). Rashi mentions all these events from Israel’s past to assure his contemporaries that although Israel has stumbled again and again, she is still God’s people and still his (only!) beloved. Rashi’s commentary indeed expounds the *Shir ha-Shirim* as a ‘sacred narrative’.⁸⁵

In contrary, in Ps.-Rashbam the differentiation between analogy (*dimyôn* referring to *similitudo*) and allegory (*dûgmâ* referring to *exemplum*; *figura*) appears at this point.⁸⁶ Here, the description remains in the

⁸¹ Cant 3:7.

⁸² 2 Kgs 11:2; 2 Chr 22,11.

⁸³ Compare RASHI 2 Kgs 11:2: בחדר המטות בעליית בית קדשי הקדשים.

⁸⁴ Compare also RASHI Cant 1:5: שחורה אני ונאווה וגו'. אתם רעיותי אל אקל בעיניכם אף אם עזבני אישי מפני שחרות שבי כי שחורה אני, על ידי שזיפת השמש ונאווה אני בחיתוך איברים נאים (...) דוגמא היא זו, אומרת כנסת ישראל לאומות שחורה אני במעשי ונאווה אני במעשה אבותי ואף במעשי יש מהם נאים, אם יש בי (...) עון העגל, יש בי כנגדו זכות קבלת התורה (RASHI Cant 5:8).

⁸⁵ Marcus, I. G., The Song of Songs in German Hasidism and the School of Rashi: A Preliminary Comparison, in Walfish, B. (Ed.), *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, 2 Volumes, Haifa: Haifa University Press 1992/93, 181-189, 184.

⁸⁶ Likewise, Ramban used *dimyôn* in the sense of *similitudo*; compare Funkenstein, A., פרשנותו הטיפולוגית של הרמב"ן, in *Zion* 45 (1980) 35-59, 50.

image of the two lovers in the arbor as a kind of illustrating ‘snapshot’ of the scene described immediately ahead of the *dimyôn*-phrase (see graph. 2). In any case: a static image. Therefore, by means of the expression ‘There it was that they found pleasure in one another, saying words of appeasement to each other (...)’ the illustration switches immediately from the *dimyôn* (God and Israel) to the two lovers depicted in the Song of Songs. There is no further reference to Israel’s history, and, even more important, no allusion to a continuity of this relationship (and its ‘ups and downs’) in history until his own days. This *dimyôn*-phrase has an eye only for a single state of ‘affair’ from Israel’s past.

Biblical Phrase (Song of Songs)	Explanatory Level I: Contemporary Israel	Subordinated Level II: Israel’s Past
(15) Ah, you are beautiful, my love	Self-awareness of Israel: “I have become a disgrace by my malicious deeds.” God: “I have forgiven you for your transgressions. You are beautiful by the deeds of the fathers, and you are beautiful by your own deeds.”	<i>I do forgive</i> (report of the spies and the rebellion of the people)
Truly, your eyes are doves: (...)	Israel: Righteous men are along with you who adhere to me like a dove.	<i>And all the sons of Levi gathered around him</i> (cf. Exod 32:26) You are beautiful by your work and craft on the tabernacle (cf. Exod 39:43)
(16) Ah, you are beautiful (...)	Israel (towards God): “ <i>You are beautiful</i> (...) for you have overlooked my offenses”	God had his Shekhina dwell with them
Our couch is green (...)	‘sprouting’ in our sons and daughters (...)	The tabernacle as ‘sedan’ (cf. Cant 3:7) The Temple as ‘bedding-chamber’ (cf. 2Kgs 11:2)

Graph. 1

Biblical Phrase (Song of Songs)	Explanatory Level I: Resemblance of the Scene	Subordinated Level II: Explanation of the similarities between the two scenes, referring to one event in Israel’s past
(15) Ah, you are beautiful, my love Truly, your eyes are doves: (...) (16) Ah, you are beautiful (...)	Holy One and Israel when they fell in love with each other (on the day) when the Torah was given.	And the Holy One let his Shekhinah rest in the tabernacle between the (two) cherubs, as he loved Israel in an enduring love, like the affection between a male and a female
(17) The beams of our house are cedar:	There it was that they found pleasure in one another, saying words of appeasement to each other (...)	And Israel erected him the tabernacle from the finest choice of cedar trees, i.e. acacia wood, that he might dwell in it to let his Shekhinah rest there.

Graph. 2

In sum, the *dimyôn*-phrases cannot conceal the fact that Ps.-Rashbam obviously insists on reading the Song of Songs as a profane love-poem. Ps.-Rashbam does not correlate the words of the biblical text to an episode from Israel's past to render a meaning for the presence. Instead Ps.-Rashbam outlines a scene on the basis of the dialogues in the Song of Songs and correlates this scene (which is actually *his* scene) to an example from the past. In this case, the example selected shows clear influences of Rashi's *dûgmâ'ot*, yet the song itself remains in its historical context: Solomon sang the song in place of Israel. It is no longer a song sung by Ps.-Rashbam's coeval community.

3. The *ars poetica* of Solomon and the narrative imagination of the Northern-French exegetes

To conclude, we shall present Ps.-Rashbam on Cant 1:13-14. This paragraph does not convey any single reference to figurative speech and allegorical reading:

צרור המור דודי לי. עכשיו שניהם שוכבים על מטתם ומדברים יחד דברי ריצוי ופיוס
שבח זה לזה מתוק וערב דודי לי שהוא שוכב ולן עמי ומניח ראשו בין שתי שדיי כצנור
של מור ובשמים שריחו טוב ומבוסם עלי וכאשכול בושם של כופר חביב ונעים לי דודי
(...) הנך יפה רעיתי והוא משיב לה הן את יפה רעיתי ועיניך יונים של אהבה כעיני יונים
הנך יפה דודי והיא משיבתו הנך יפה וגם נעים אף ערשנו רעננה והגונה וקורות של בתינו
שאנו שוכבים בתוכם בנויים ועשויים מארזים משובחים TP⁸⁷PT(...)

My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh: Lying with each other on their divan they now hold an intimate dialogue with words of appeasement and comfort, praising one another. (She says): 'Sweet and lovely is my beloved who lies with me and spends the night with me, bedding his head down *between my breasts* chests like *a bag of myrrh* and spices, and his fragrance is pleasant and sweet-smelling to me. Like *cluster of henna blossoms* – charming and refreshing is my beloved.' 'Ah, you are beautiful, my love' he then answers, 'ah, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves of love'⁸⁸

⁸⁷ MS H32, fol. 77v, col. 2/l. 40.

⁸⁸ *Zenaida asiatica*(?).

– like⁸⁹ the eyes of a dove’. ‘*Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved*’ she returns (the compliment), ‘*truly lovely. Our couch is green*’ – a rank alcove⁹⁰ – and comfortable, and *the beams of our house*, in which we are lying with one another, are built and made of excellent *cedars* (...)

Ps.-Rashbam takes the text exclusively on its semantic level, i.e. in the way it was probably meant when it was composed – as a *tête-à-tête* dialogue between two lovers who declare their love to one another, whispering words of love in each other’s ear. However, whereas the biblical expression concedes only a description of the upper parts of her body (face and neck; Cant 1:10), Ps.-Rashbam sets the entire stanza into a narrative scene. In his description of the scene, her longing for copulation⁹¹ as expressed in the Biblical text has already become reality.⁹² The commentary’s unique feature lies in the formal and semantic enhancement of the sophisticated biblical text. Ps.-Rashbam generates a love-scene in which his imagination and illustrations are artistically woven into the biblical source. This commentary shows a strong ‘narrative ambition’ for creating a new literary composition. The scenes, which Ps.-Rashbam arranges, go considerably beyond the text, thereby conveying a dramatic design of the Song of Songs. In his depiction of the two lovers ‘on their green divan’ Ps.-Rashbam takes

⁸⁹ In Cant 5:12 the woman compares her lover’s eyes to doves (*‘doves beside springs of water’*). Zakovitch points rightly to the fact that this image does not come to say that his/her eyes have the shape of pigeons’ eyes (‘beady eyes!’); cf. Zakovitch, Y., *Das Hohelied*, Freiburg-Basel: Herder 2004 [German Translation from the Hebrew], 133 incl. note 42. – Likewise, Cant 4:1 does not describe her body to look like doves or goats; rather, the particular members of her body are illustrated in single comparisons (compare also bTaan 24 where it is stated that one can suggest the beauty of a woman’s body from her eyes: If her eyes are beautiful, one can expect the rest of her body to be beautiful as well).

⁹⁰ The noun ערש in biblical Hebrew does not only connote ‘bed’ (cf. Amos 3:12; Ps 132:3), but also ‘couch’ (for making love; cf. Prov 7:16); compare also mKel VI,1; mErub II,4, (cf. Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied* 134 [see note 89]). Likewise, the idiom עץ רענן ‘green tree’ (cf. Jer 2:20; 3:6.13) is always linked to sexual intercourse (outdoors).

⁹¹ MT: ילין, ‘he shall lie with me’.

⁹² בתינו שאנו; שוכב ולן עמי; ‘my beloved who lies with me and spends the night with me’; שוכבים בתוכם; ‘the house, in which we are lying with one another.’

up the ‘sweet melody under the shady trees’ (*dous chans per l’ombrage*⁹³) of the contemporary (courtly) love poetry, the *chants l’amour* as well as the so-called *chansons de femmes*⁹⁴. Ps.-Rashbam focuses attentively on the idiomatic peculiarity of this *chant* and its artistic composition. Sensitive, he points out the pun⁹⁵ that he calls her *ššannâ* ‘Lily’ (noun fem.), and she calls him *tapuach* ‘fruit of the apple tree’ (noun masc.). This commentary is limited to the pattern of contemporary love lyrics and does not refer to anything else. As regards content *He* and *She* remain in their literary roles as lovers.

By transforming the Song of Songs into a piece of secular literature, perhaps into *the* archetype of love poetry, Ps.-Rashbam gives the Song of Songs a new hermeneutical outline. In this, Ps.-Rashbam’s commentary resembles Messer Leon’s treatise on *ars rhetorica* (*Nofet Zufim*) more than three hundred years later, in which Messer Leon fathomed the Hebrew Bible⁹⁶ as the masterpiece of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, as the one source that encompasses both ‘holy’ and ‘secular’ knowledge.⁹⁷ Scholars have often suggested a possible influence of the so-

⁹³ Compare Gruber, J., *Die Dialektik des Trobar. Untersuchungen zur Struktur und Entwicklung des occitanischen und französischen Minnesangs des 12. Jahrhunderts*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie 194, Tübingen: Niemeyer 1983, 133.

⁹⁴ See already Thompson, *Le commentaire du Cantique 13* [see note 15]; Thompson, *The Commentary of Samuel ben Meïr on the Song of Songs* [see note 16] 134, 136.

⁹⁵ PS.-RASHBAM Cant 2:3: הוא קורא אותה שושנה לשון נקיבה והיא קורא אותו כך נופל הלשון זה על זה, הוא קורא אותה שושנה לשון נקיבה והיא קורא אותו כך נופל הלשון זה על זה, תפוח לשון זכר. On the use of the expression ‘the terms coincide with one another’ in Rabbinic literature and in Northern-French exegesis compare also Harris, *The Literary Hermeneutic of Rabbi Eliezer of Beaugency* 221-251 [see note 37].

⁹⁶ Especially the prophetic books and the Hebrew Poetry.

⁹⁷ The book was written between 1454 and 1474 (printed c. 1476-80); Rabinowitz, I., *The Book of the Honeycomb’s Flow. Sefer Nopheth Suphim by Judah Messer Leon. A Critical Edition and Translation*, Ithaca – London: Cornell University Press 1983; compare also Altmann, A., *Ars Rhetorica as Reflected in Some Jewish Figures of the Italian Renaissance*, in Ruderman, D. B. (Ed.), *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, New York – London: New York University Press 1992, 63-84, 67; Bonfil, R. (Ed.), *Yehuda Messer Leon, Sefer Nofet Zufim* [Facsimile-Edition of the first print Mantua 1475], Jerusalem: Jewish National and University Library Press 1981, hebr. Introduction; idem, *The Book of the Honeycomb’s Flow by Judah Messer Leon: The Rhetorical Dimension of Jewish Humanism in Fifteenth Century Italy*, in: Walfish, B., (Ed.), *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume* [see note 85], II 21-33.

called '12th-century Renaissance' in the writings of the Northern French exegetes. One of the key notions of this later (Jewish and non-Jewish) intellectual movement in Italy in the 15th century was that the *aetas aurea*, the 'Golden Age' of erudition, goes back to Antiquity. In the great days of the (Greco-Roman) orators and the biblical Prophets, human erudition and educational culture reached its peak, and has been dimmed since then. The task of intellectuals, therefore, was to put this knowledge back on the map.

If we assumed a kind of 're-naissance' even in 12th-century Northern France, Ps.-Rashbam would represent the most brilliant example for it. He shows a very similar approach to Messer Leon's notion on the composition of the Bible. Ps.-Rashbam's introduction can be read in the way that he understood the 'great days' as the time of Solomon when the Song of Songs was composed in poetic perfection, thus functioning as a prime example for (Hebrew and non-Hebrew) poetry:

ערום יערים המבין ואת ליבו יתן להבין לשון מליצת הספר ללמד ולספר את פשוטו
בשיטתו ומלתו כאשר יתכן על מכונו בלשונו. כי אמר⁹⁸TP⁹⁸TP אשר אגר החכמה מכל בני
קדם⁹⁹TP⁹⁹TP כתב ספרו ותיקן שירו לפני¹⁰⁰TP¹⁰⁰TP דברו. וחמתו משובח
ומופלא¹⁰¹TP¹⁰¹TP בנוהג בעולם כבתולה הומה ומתאוננת על אוהבה שפירש ממנה והלך
למרחקים והיא מזכרת אותו באהבתה אותו אהבת עולם (S3S?) ומשוררת ואומרת אהבה
עזה כזאת הראה לי ידידי בעירו¹⁰²TP¹⁰²TP עמדי ומדברת ומספרת לחברותיה ונערותיה כך
וכך אמר לי דודי כך השיבותיו. TP¹⁰³TP¹⁰³TP

⁹⁸ Cf. Jellinek's emendation to אחר; see also Thompson, *The Commentary of Samuel ben Meir on the Song of Songs* [see note 16] 305. As to the syntax of the sentence, this emendation from אמר to אחר (hardly readable in the manuscript) seems more suitable. Sara Japhet (private email-correspondence) emends to אגור on the basis of other manuscripts (cf. Koh 1:1; see also note 99).

⁹⁹ Compare RASHBAM Koh 1:1 (ed. Japhet-Salters 91): שלמה נקרא קהלת על שם שקיהל חכמות: (ed. Japhet-Salters 91): ונקרא אגור מפני שאגר חכמות מכל בני קדם (...) (cf. Prov 30:1).

¹⁰⁰ Read לפני instead of לפי?

¹⁰¹ Jellinek emends to מופלאה ומפלאה.

¹⁰² בעירו does not make sense here (esp. when syntactically connected to עמדי); Jellinek emends into בעודו.

¹⁰³ PS.-RASHBAM Cant Introduction (MS H32, fol. 77r, col. 1).

May he who understands be astute¹⁰⁴, and may he use his intellect to understand¹⁰⁵ the book's poetic language to teach you and to acquaint (you) with its literal sense (as it is to be made out) by its line of reasoning¹⁰⁶ and its wording, (every phrase) in its expression being in its appropriate place. After having gathered the wisdom of all the sons of the East,¹⁰⁷ he (in) his admirable and marvelous wisdom wrote his book and arranged his *chant* according to the chants as they are customary in the (non-Jewish) world, meaning the Song of Songs to be like (a chant of) a young woman sighing and mourning for her lover who parted with her and went to the distance, and she, then, remembers him and her eternal love of him. And she chants, saying: 'It was such a powerful love that my lover demonstrated to me when he was still¹⁰⁸ together with me.' (In this song) she is speaking to her young girlfriends, telling them: 'In this way my lover talked to me, and in that way I answered him.'

According to Ps.-Rashbam the Song of Songs belongs to the *genre* of the *chansons de femmes*.¹⁰⁹ It is *She* who speaks to the young maidens about her love. Conflicting with the exegetical remarks in Ps.-RASHBAM Cant 1:1, this introduction refers merely by implication to

¹⁰⁴ 1 Sam 23:22.

¹⁰⁵ Compare RASHI Exod 31:3 where Rashi explains the different levels of knowledge: ובתבונה, מבין דבר מלבו, מתוך דברים שלמד. ובדעת, רוח הקדש; נבונים, מבינים דבר מתוך דבר. זו היא ששאל אריס את רבי יוסי, מה בין חכמים לנבונים. חכם דומה לשולחני עשיר, כשמביאין לו דינרין לראות רואה, וכשאינן מביאין לו יושב ותוהא. נבון דומה לשולחני תגר, כשמביאין לו מעות לראות רואה, וכשאינן מביאין לו מחזר ומביא משלו: In contrary to Rashi's explication, Rashbam explains in Gen 41:39 that the נבון is a man who understands the future and foresees the upcoming events: מבין עתידות ורואה הנולד. חכם, קיבץ חכמה ממה שראה ושמע.

¹⁰⁶ *שיטה* could also be understood as '(literary) context'; compare e.g. RASHBAM Gen 49:9; Koh 1:3; however, *שיטה* as 'line of reasoning; system', *שיחה* 'linguistic usage' and *ענין* 'literary context' occur frequently in the commentaries of R. Eliezer of Beaugency (cf. ELI'EZER Ezek 1:2; 1:4; 1:24; 16:15 a.fr.). Unfortunately, until now no systematic investigation of the terms describing the literary activity of the medieval scribes, redactors, and authors has been undertaken.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. 1 Kgs 5:10.

¹⁰⁸ See Jellinek's emendation from בעירו (which does not make sense here) to בעודו.

¹⁰⁹ See also his commentary on Cant 3:5 (MS H32, fol. 78v/col. 2; 79r, col. 1): וכן דרך הילוך: שיר זה שהיא משוררת ומתאוננת בכולן (...) וכן מוכיח שהיא מספרת הכל את דבריה ואת דברי האובה (...).

Salomo as the author of the song¹¹⁰. However, the ‘composer’s art’, i.e. the poetry of the Song of Songs with reference to its composition as well as regarding its content, are not due to the Holy Spirit, but due to the inspirations of (foreign) secular wisdom (and their literatures?), i.e. the ‘wisdom of the sons of the East.’ Whereas Rashi had drawn the arrangement of an antiphonal song from the history and literature of Ancient Israel (i.e. the marital covenant between God and Israel), Ps.-Rashbam describes how the author had collected the finest pieces of the other cultures’ wisdom literature.

4. Conclusion

In comparing the scene in the ‘love arbor’ described by Ps.-Rashbam with Rashi’s commentary *ad loc.* one can see very clearly that Ps.-Rashbam’s commentary is at odds with Rashi’s explanations. One might wonder how the Grandseigneur of Northern French Biblical exegesis might have taken such a commentary. The secular trait of Ps.-Rashbam’s commentary turns out not only in that it remains merely on the level of the *sensus litteralis*. Rather, it is ‘worldly’ since Ps.-Rashbam explains the literary characters described in the song to convey a self-addressed love poetry that does not go beyond this love relation in any way. By introducing *Him* and *Her* as individuals (like in the biblical Song of Songs) Ps.-Rashbam rejects the idea that the ‘arbor’ can take more than those two people, not to mention a whole nation.

For today’s Bible scholars the Song of Songs represents a classic example of Ancient Near Eastern love lyrics,¹¹¹ since it tells the reader nothing about God, his relationship towards Israel, or the Law. Ps.-Rashbam (in his comments on Cant 3:5) presents it as a biblical

¹¹⁰ Inversely, RASHBAM Koh 1:1 (ed. Japhet-Salters 91) does not show any reference to the Song of Songs. This, too, corroborates the theory that (at least) single parts of the Song of Songs-commentary do not originate from Rashbam’s hand.

¹¹¹ Compare e.g. Zakovitch, *Das Hohelied*, esp. 38-64 [see note 89].

counterpart (if not an archetype!) for the contemporary *chants de trouvères*:¹¹²

ועוד היום דרך המשוררים לשורר שיר שהוא מספר מעשה אהבה על שניהם בשירי אהבה
במנהג העולם.

And even today it is the way of the *Trouvères* to perform a song that tells about the love affair of two people in the *chants d'amour*¹¹³, as customary in the (non-Jewish) World.¹¹⁴

Elsewhere Rashbam refers to the contemporary custom to keep the memory of a beloved person by treasuring a ringlet.¹¹⁵ Whereas Rashi passes over the biblical dialogues of the two lovers to the *Shekhina* and Israel and, thereby renders a voice to his contemporary community, Ps.-Rashbam forces the characters to remain within their literary roles designated by the genre at hand.¹¹⁶ Whereas Rashi struggles with the desperate situation of his contemporaries and even conveys the justification of Jewish martyrdom,¹¹⁷ this commentary seems to ignore

¹¹² The *Trouvères* are poets (bards) who sing their chants in the Old French dialect (Anglo-Norman-tradition). Modern scholarship distinguishes between a *Trouvère* (Anglo-Norman chant) and a *trobador* (i.e. a poet whose chants were composed in Provençal/Occitan); compare e.g. Gruber, *Die Dialektik* [see note 93]. See also above note 109.

¹¹³ Regarding the differentiation in popular and courtly love-lyrics (in German: 'gehobene Register') as well as in *chanson de femme* and *chant d'amour* compare Mölk, U. (Ed.), *Romanische Frauenlieder. Eingeleitet, herausgegeben, übersetzt und kommentiert*, Klassische Texte des Romanischen Mittelalters Bd. 28, München 1989, 13-25.

¹¹⁴ MS H32, fol. 79r, col. 1/l. 12ff.

¹¹⁵ MS H32, fol. 81v, col. 2/l. 11ff.

¹¹⁶ See also RASHI Cant 6:11f (Ed. Rosenthal 175): (יא) אל גנת אגוז ירדתי. עוד זה מדברי שכינה: הנה באתי אל מקדש שני זה אליך. לראות באבי הנחל. מה לחלוחית מעשים טובים אראה בך. (...) (יב) לא ידעתי. כנסת ישראל מתאוננת לא ידעתי להזהר מן החטא שאעמוד בגדולתי בכבודי ונכשלתי בשנאת חנם ומחלוקת שגבר במלכי בית חשמונאי הורקנוס ואריסטובלוס עד שהביא אחד מהם את מלך רומי וקבל מידו עכשיו הוא מפס: (...) (compare with PS.-RASHBAM *ad loc.*: MS H32, fol. 77r, col. 2: המלוכה); והוא תבוא אליו ותטייל עמו בתוך הפרדס תחת עצי אגוז שריחן נודף (...) והיא משיבתו לא ידעתי ללכת שם ולא אלך ועלה בנפשי ובדעתי לרכוב על מרכבותיו ולשוב לעמי שהוא נדיב כי בת מלך אני, והוא משיב לה שובי שובי השולמית (...).

¹¹⁷ Compare RASHI Cant 4:1: שחטאו. עד שיפוח היום. קילסן וריצן וערבו עליו קרבנותיהן. עד שיפוח היום. שחטאו. לפני בימי חפני ופינחס. עיניך יונים. גווייך ומראיתך ודוגמתך כיונה הזאת שדבקה בבן זוגה וכששוחטין אותה לפניה מפרכסת אלא פושטת צואר כך את נתת שכם לסבול עולי ומוראי. אינה מפרכסת אלא פושטת צואר כך את נתת שכם לסבול עולי ומוראי. the motif of the martyrs who stretch their necks willingly is an expression for the innocence of the victims (cf. Cant 3:21; 4:1). It is found also in the chronicle of Eliezer bar Nathan (chronicle II): (...) And in the chronicle of Salomo bar Simson (chronicle III); compare Haverkamp, E. (Ed.), *Hebräische Berichte*

Rashi's endeavor *in toto*. Furthermore, Ps.-Rashbam undertakes the task to acquit himself (and his contemporary readers) from the pattern of salvation and calamity. Ps.-Rashbam's commentary simply evades the paradigm of centuries-old Jewish-Christian debates: the Christian theological charge just like the Jewish apologetic defense. Ps.-Rashbam's commentary is provocative since he does not allow the reader to even glance at Israel's exegetical tradition, and he lets the literary characters have an eye only for each other, remaining within the *hic et nunc* of their love affair. The biblical protagonists don't have a history (not even with regard to their possible offspring) – Ps.-Rashbam consequently removes (the plot of) this story from Israel's history and exegetical tradition.

Further investigations will have to show that the Northern-French *maskilim* like Rashbam and his school read and understood not only the Song of Songs, but the Hebrew Bible *in toto* as a kind of 'vernacular-literature of the Jews,' i.e. as profane, secular literature. Ps.-Rashbam's characteristic exegetical technique for instance does not merely comprise of a description of a love-scene or what we call a 'paraphrase' of the text: It is the attempt to open up new fictional realms and to create an old-new fictional narrative on the basis of the *,matière des Hebreux'*, comparable to the almost contemporary endeavor of Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1140-1190) who in his romances and courtly novels¹¹⁸ did not simply present the *âventiures* of a knightly hero, but

über die Judenverfolgungen während des Ersten Kreuzzugs, Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Hebräische Texte aus dem Mittelalterlichen Deutschland, Hannover: Hahn 2005, 417; on Rashi's use of the Midrash compare Kamin, 'דוגמא' in Rashi's Commentary on the Song of Songs 17; Kamin, Rashi's Commentary on the Song of Songs 41 incl. note 40.

¹¹⁸ *Érec et Énide* (c. 1170); *Cligés* (c. 1176), *Lancelot and Yvain* (c. 1177-81); *Perceval* (before 1190); compare in particular Haug, W., *Die Wahrheit der Fiktion. Studien zur weltlichen und geistlichen Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, Tübingen: Niemeyer 2003, e.g. 1-15; 115-144; idem, Chrétien's der Troyes »Erec«-Prolog und das arthurische Strukturmödel, in Haug, W. (Ed.), *Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1992, 91-107; idem, *Brechungen auf dem Weg zur Individualität. Kleine Schriften zur Erzählliteratur des Mittelalters*, Tübingen: Niemeyer 1995, e.g. 3-16; 45-71; 233-248; idem, „Das Land, von welchem niemand wiederkehrt“. *Mythos, Fiktion und Wahrheit in Chrétien's ,Chevalier de la*

created a *,bele conjointure'*, in which the heroes of the *matière de Bretagne*¹¹⁹ (King Arthur and the knights of the round table) gained their literary roles within this early new type of fictional literature.

This shift of paradigms yields a completely different picture as to the motivation and endeavor of the second and third generation after Rashi. These intellectuals encountered an environment in which a break-up gradually took place from the early 12th century onwards that split the Christian Latin (spiritual) literature from the Anglo-Norman (profane) literature. The Jews in Zarfat took up this break-up of languages and genres only in the 13th century.¹²⁰ However, in the Early 12th Century the *maskilim* met the cultural challenge with the distinction between Bible exegesis in a 'religious context',¹²¹ and 'profane' Biblical exegesis, reading the Bible as narrative literature¹²².

Charrette', im 'Lanzelet' Ulrichs von Zatzikhoven und im 'Lancelot'-Prosaroman, Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte 21, Tübingen: Niemeyer 1978.

¹¹⁹ Compare e.g. Trachsler, R., Art. *matière de Bretagne*, in *LexMA* Vol. 6, Sp. 395.

¹²⁰ Compare Einbinder, S. L., *Beautiful Death. Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World*, Princeton, NJ.-Oxford 2002; idem, The Troyes Laments: Jewish Martyrology in Hebrew and Old French, in: *Viator* 30 (1999) 201-230; idem, Pucellina of Blois: Romantic Myths and Narrative Conventions, in: *Jewish History* 12 (1998) 29-46; compare in particular the comparison she worked on between *Amis et Amiloun* [c. 1090] of Radulfus Tortarius (1063-after 1122) with the legend of Rachel and her four children [see Haberman, A., *ספר גיירות, אשכנז וצרפת*, Jerusalem: Tarshish 1946, 34], published as: Signs of Romance: Hebrew Prose and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance, in Signer, M. A. – Engen, J. van (Eds.), *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies; 10, Notre Dame, IN 2001, 221-233, e.g. 224-227.

¹²¹ Compare RASHBAM Ex 40:35 as well as his introduction to Lev 1.

¹²² I am, therefore, not convinced that one should look for a 'religious' motivation as to the development of the *pesbat* exegesis as Touitou postulates, compare Touitou, E., *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion. Studies in the Pentateuchal Commentary of Rabbi Samuel ben Meïr*, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press 2003 (hebr.), 18: על רקע זה יש לשוב ולשאול: איזו? משמעות דתית ראו רבותינו הצרפתים בעיסוק בפשט? This question will be dealt with in detail in my book on *Pesbat Exegesis and Narrativity* (in preparation).