Zwischen Zion und Zaphon

Studien im Gedenken an den Theologen
Oswald Loretz (14.01.1928–12.04.2014)

Herausgegeben
von Ludger Hiepel und Marie-Theres Wacker

Alter Orient und Altes Testament

Veröffentlichungen zur Kultur und Geschichte des Alten Orients
und des Alten Testaments

Band 438

Zwischen Zion und Zaphon

Studien im Gedenken an den Theologen
Oswald Loretz (14.01.1928–12.04.2014)

Herausgegeben
von Ludger Hiepel und Marie-Theres Wacker

Ludger Hiepel und Marie-Theres Wacker (Hrsg.):

Zwischen Zion und Zaphon. Studien im Gedenken an den Theologen
Oswald Loretz (14.01.1928–12.04.2014)

Alter Orient und Altes Testament Band 438

Printed in Germany

Printed on acid-free paper

Oswald Loretz
(14.01.1928 – 12.04.2014)

Inhaltsverzeichnis

Biographisches

Bibelhermeneutik

Hohelied

Psalmen

Metrik und Kolometrie

Religionsgeschichte

Anhänge

Akkadian Love Poetry and the Song of Songs:
A Case of Cultural Interaction

Martti Nissinen, Helsinki[1]

The Song of Songs is the only composition of love poetry in the Hebrew Bible, indeed, the only example of ancient love poetry written in the Hebrew language. The uniqueness of the Song of Songs in its linguistic and literary context does not mean, however, that it is in any way exceptional in its cultural and historical environment. On the contrary, there is ample – if somewhat uneven – evidence of love poetry from the ancient Eastern Mediterranean cultural sphere, and parallels to the Song of Songs have been found in Egyptian, Mesopotamian (both Sumerian and Akkadian), and Greek literature. Such a wide variety of points of comparison has raised the question whether it is due to an Eastern Mediterranean cultural interaction – something that I would like to argue for in this article using the Akkadian love poetry and the Song of Songs as a case study. The objective of my article is a rather traditional one: to gather the available evidence for love poetry in the Akkadian language, observing parallelities with the Song of Songs that could point towards an answer to the question of cultural interaction and help to understand the Song of Songs as another specimen of ancient Near Eastern love poetry.

This essay is divided into three parts. First, I present some basic thoughts concerning comparative methodology essential to the issue of cultural transmission. After that, I will give a brief presentation of the Akkadian source material, and, finally, will argue for its relevance for the study of the Song of Songs.

Comparative Methodology

Professor Oswald Loretz, my German *Doktorvater* to whose memory I would like to devote this essay with much gratitude, had to remind me many times: "Mr. Nissinen, you must always be aware of *what* you are comparing!" Self-

---

evident as it sounds, this should always be the first question of any comparative venture.[2] Comparative studies always happen between two or more entities such as cultures, societies, religions, practices, languages, political systems, and so on. Responsible comparative enterprise requires the best available knowledge of *all* materials brought together for the sake of comparison: their language, provenance, social and historical environment, and afterlife; however, we often have to accept that our knowledge is restricted, whether due to the fragmentary state of the sources or to our personal constraints, for instance, with regard to language proficiency.

Whatever the points of comparison, we always primarily compare *sources* (texts, images, artifacts), and only secondarily *realities* that can only be constructed from the evidence provided by the sources. What we have in front of us when we compare the Song of Songs with the Akkadian love poetry is, on the one hand, a text included in the Hebrew Bible – the result of a long process of transmission, standardization and canonization – and on the other hand, a fragmentary set of disconnected clay tablets from different times and places, discovered in archaeological excavations. In one case, a text with a long and unbroken history of interpretation, and in the other, a few texts discovered only in recent times with no known history of interpretation at all outside the academic community.

This imbalance leads to my second question: Why am I doing this? Am I aiming at a big picture of the ancient Near Eastern cultural sphere? Or am I following a Bible-centered agenda, perhaps highlighting the intrinsic value of the biblical book at the cost of some non-biblical texts, or in a more neutral mode, utilizing the cultural parallels to improve my understanding of the biblical text? Or is it out of sheer curiosity that I compare these abstruse texts only to find out how difficult it is? I would like to paint the big picture in the first place, doing justice to all points of comparison. However, I have to confess that my interest in the Song of Songs and its cultural milieu arose when I was preparing its translation for the new Finnish Bible as a member of the team of translators in 1988–89 and incidentally read a newly published Akkadian text, the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu (SAA 3 14), that I found to be bafflingly similar to the Song of Songs. Ever since I have wanted to know why this is so. Remembering my teacher's admonitions, I have also tried not to rush into the comparison all too early, but to familiarize myself with the Akkadian material independently from the Song of Songs.

Hence my third question is: What is it that we want to know? I see two principal ways of answering that question.

(1) We are interested in origins and influences. This ever-legitimate enterprise attempts to compare the views visible from two distinct keyholes, investi-

---

[2] For problems and principles of comparative studies, see, e.g., Malul: Method; Barstad: Comparare; and especially Smith: Place; Smith: Religion.

gating whether source A and B – in our case, the Song of Songs and the Akkadian love poetry – are connected and how this connection can be best explained. Is it about the *impact* of A on B, the *continuity* from A to B, or just the *similarity* of A and B that may or may not be due to impact or continuity? (2) We can also study how A and B function in their respective contexts and compare them to each other functionally and phenomenologically, whether or not their parallels are due to a historical connection, and whether or not the chain of transmission between them can be reconstructed. Both ways, the problem is how a comparative approach, focusing on morphological and structural elements or clusters of elements, can be historically responsible.[3]

Both in terms of transmission and contextuality, the fourth question is: How can source A be helpful for explaining source B, and vice versa? This entails a set of further questions: How important is it to establish a connection between A and B, and why is it important? What do we gain when the route of transmission can be reconstructed, and what do we lose if this turns out to be impossible? Why is the knowledge obtainable from the Near Eastern sources necessary or even indispensable? What would we not understand without knowing these sources?

When we ask the above questions with regard to sources that derive from a restricted space, that is, from the geographically connected cultural sphere of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, a historical connection should always be considered a distinct possibility that should be neither overlooked nor overinterpreted. A and B may or may not belong to the same historical landscape, but they are never in an isolated space. If they do not resemble each other in every aspect, both of them may resemble C, D, or E, which may indicate a network of cultural interaction instead of a direct genealogy.[4] It is clear that autochtonous phenomena sometimes look very similar, be they drawn from the ancient Mediterranean, South America, or the Pacific Islands, and anthropological comparison often delves into such materials with instructive results. The historical and geographical background of the Song of Songs and Mesopotamian love poetry, however, is restricted enough to increase the probability of cultural interaction.

But what to do with cases where there seems to be a connection between A and B but it cannot be clearly demonstrated? Some of us would perhaps rephrase Wittgenstein and say: "Wovon die Quellen nichts sagen, darüber muß man schweigen."[5] This would mean that if we do not see how the views we see

---

[3] Cf. Smith: Religion, 9.

[4] Cf. Jonathan Z. Smith's "multiterm" expressions "*x* resembles *y* more than *z* with respect to…" and "*x* resembles *y* more than *w* resembles *z* with respect to…" (Religion, 23).

[5] The original phrase, "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen" ("Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent") is the concluding sentence nr. 7 of Wittgenstein: Tractatus, 90.162.

through two distinct keyholes connect, we cannot say anything about their connection: no information obtainable from view A can be extrapolated to view B. If this view is absolutized, it easily leads to listing of features of A and B without saying anything more. Some would perhaps call this a necessary caution, but I would rather call it lack of courage and intuition.

Another often-expressed caveat concerns the *differences* between A and B: if differences weigh more than similarities, the connection is considered improbable. However, differences as such do not disprove historical connection, since continuity always entails transformation. Every comparison, in fact, is a matter of a methodical manipulation of difference, as Jonathan Z. Smith says, "The questions of comparison are questions of judgment with respect to difference: What differences are to be maintained in the interests of comparative inquiry? What differences can be defensibly relaxed and relativized in light of the intellectual tasks at hand?"[6] Managing differences helps us to come to terms with what we mean by similarity, and differences, rather than similarities, may serve as the key to identifying routes of transmission and the nature of cross-cultural interaction between source A and source B.

If no connection can be established between A and B, this is not the end of the comparative enterprise. Source A may be helpful in explaining source B even without demonstrable links connecting them. I would like to mention my own studies in prophecy as an example. My sources form a triangle consisting of Near Eastern, biblical, and Greek sources, and I can rarely argue for connections between, or even within, these three corpora.[7] Nevertheless, these keyholes seem to yield visions of the same extended landscape, making me convinced that what I see in the sources is different phenotypes of the prophetic phenomenon that speaks the Mediterranean *koinē*. I would like to argue that the same can be said of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, and biblical love literature as well.

Finally, we should never forget that the result of our comparisons – that is, the big picture or the area between keyholes – is *our* construction, a picture drawn by us, while our sources are constructions of their producers. Under such circumstances, our picture will never be complete, and our constructions may turn out to be wrong. But if we are ready to be wrong on a high level, and if there is room for scholarly intuition and even some well-grounded speculation, then the comparison makes sense. We just need to know what we are comparing, why we are doing it and what we want to know.

I have stayed rather long on methodological issues. This is because comparative studies are all too often done in a way that is not equally interested in all points of comparison. Now I try my best not to fall short on my own aims to do justice to both the Song of Songs and the Akkadian texts.

---

[6] Smith: Place, 14.

[7] For the most recent attempt, see Nissinen: Springs, 29–48.

Sources of Akkadian Love Poetry

To date, the corpus of Akkadian love poetry (excluding incantations) comprises eighteen published texts from different periods (see Table 1).[8]

Old Babylonian		
1	Faithful Lover	von Soden 1950/Held 1961–62
2	Nanaya and Muati	Lambert 1966
3	Nanaya and Rim-Sin	van Dijk 1985/Sigrist and Westenholz 2008
4	Kiš Love Song	Westenholz 1987
5	*irtum* Songs	Groneberg 1999
6	Oh Girl, Whoopee!	George 2009
7	I Shall Be a Slave to You	George 2009
8	A Field Full of Salt	George 2009
9	In the Light of the Window	George 2009
Old/Middle Babylonian		
10	*pārum* of Ištar	von Soden and Oelsner 1991
Middle Babylonian		
11	Babylonian Ballad	J. Black 1983
12	Fragment of a Song List	Finkel 1988
Middle Assyrian		
13	Middle Assyrian Song List	Ebeling 1922
14	Ištar and Tammuz	Parpola in Nissinen 2001
15	Royal Love Duet	Frahm 2009
Neo-Babylonian		
16	Banitu and Her Consort	Deller 1983
Neo-Assyrian		
17	Triangle Drama	Lambert 1959/1975
18	Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu	Matsushima 1987/Livingstone 1989

Table 1: Akkadian Love Poetry

Nine texts are of Old Babylonian origin, one is either late Old Babylonian or Middle Babylonian, and two are Middle Babylonian. Three texts originate from the Middle Assyrian Period, while the Neo-Babylonian period is represented by one text only, and the Neo-Assyrian by two compositions. The Akkadian love poetry has come to our knowledge relatively late. Only six of the eighteen texts were published before 1987, another six texts between 1987 and 2001, and the

---

[8] This list includes several poems not discussed in my earlier overview of the material in Nissinen: Akkadian Rituals, 113–127. For other overviews of Akkadian Love poetry, see Westenholz: Song; Hecker: Eros; Long: Song, 756–758.

remaining six texts in 2008–9. Seven further Old Babylonian fragments found at Kiš have been identified as love lyrics by Nathan Wasserman, but they are available as cuneiform copies only, and none of them contains as much as a full sentence. All except the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian texts are now available on the website of the project "Sources of Early Akkadian Literature" (SEAL)[9] of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the University of Leipzig.

The Old Babylonian sources include three poems written as dialogues of a male and female speaker. The "Faithful Lover" (#1) is the first fully preserved Akkadian love poem that came to scholarly attention through the publication by Wolfram von Soden in 1950.[10] The tablet from Sippar, originally containing about 150 lines, was republished by Moshe Held ten years later.[11] The alternating voices belong to a woman who is in love with a man for whom, unfortunately, her love is nothing more than "anxiety and bother." The protagonists in this poem are human, while another amatory dialogue from Babylon (#2) takes place between the goddess Nanaya and her consort Muati, a god who was later identified with Nabû.[12] This tablet celebrates the love-making of the deities, including a blessing for King Abi-ešuḫ (1711–1684 BCE), which suggests a ritual context for the poem. The third dialogue (#3), possibly originating from the library of the Enki Temple in Larsa, mentions King Rim-Sin of Larsa (1758–1699 BCE) and the goddess Nanaya as participants of a sacred marriage.[13] We have in these three dialogues three different combinations of lovers: human-human, divine-divine, and divine-human.

The Old Babylonian love poems with a single voice include a fragment from Kiš (#4) in which a female speaker describes her love to a man and also her own charms.[14] Another damaged and unprovenanced tablet now in Geneva (#5) originally had contained four *irtum* songs belonging to a series of poems called *ēš rāmī šūqur* "Where is my beloved, the precious one?" The word *irtum* means 'breast' and is used as a generic title for love songs. In the preserved part of the tablet a female voice addresses her "beloved of the steppe" (*rāmī ša ṣēri*) and

---

[9] See www.seal.uni-leipzig.de.

[10] von Soden: Zwiegespräch, 168–169 (Si. 57).

[11] Held (1961): Lover; cf. the corrections in Held (1962): Lover. See also Ponchia: Palma, 89–93 (translation), 115–119 (transliteration). Translation also in Hecker: Hymnen, 743–747; Foster: Muses, 155–159; discussion: Groneberg: Lover; Hecker: Eros, 173–174.

[12] Lambert: Lyrics, 48–50 (VAT 17374 = Bab 40294). Translation also in Hecker: Hymnen, 741–743; Foster: Muses, 160–161.

[13] YOS 11 24 = YBC 4643. The tablet was first published in van Dijk/Goetze/Hussey: Incantations, and republished in Sigrist/Westenholz: Poem, 679–683. Translation also in Hecker: Hymnen, 747–750; Foster: Muses, 162–164.

[14] Westenholz: Love Song, 422–423 (PRAK 1 B 472 = Ki. 1063). Translation also in Foster: Muses, 169; discussion: Paul: Plural, 591.

the tablet ends with a blessing of Ištar to Ammiditana (ca. 1683–47 BCE), the king of Babylonia and follower of Abi-ešuḫ.[15]

The most recently published set of Old Babylonian love literature are the five tablets from the Schøyen collection published by Andrew George in 2009. These texts of unknown provenience include a love incantation[16] and a composition beginning with what looks like a nine-line poem spoken partly by a male and partly by a female voice, followed by a list of incipits of about 25 love poems ("In the Light of the Window" #9).[17] Of the remaining three tablets, one, entitled by the publisher as "I Shall Be a Slave to You," is spoken by a female voice who is desperately in love with a man who does not pay attention to her (#7).[18] Two poems of very different kinds have a male speaker. One is dreaming of his favorite girl ("Oh Girl, Whoopee!" #6),[19] while the other is a misogynic outburst of a man who has been abandoned by his lover ("A Field Full of Salt" #8).[20] The scornful tone of the poem is noteworthy enough, but there is another interesting feature to it: it shares two of its eight stanzas with the "Faithful Lover" poem, here embedded in a non-dialogic context.[21]

One tablet (#10) is dated to late Old Babylonian or early Middle Babylonian period, even though it carries a colophon "*Pārum* of Ištar. Year: Ḫammurabi became king."[22] The word *pārum* seems like a generic designation for songs of praise, in this case to Ištar who is described with rather graphic terms as an insatiable lover of a big crowd of men: "The men got tired, Ištar did not get tired."[23] Each line ends with the refrain *rīšātum išdum ana ālim* "Celebration is the foundation for the city" which may refer to the use of the poem in public festivals. Another Middle Babylonian poem is the so-called "Babylonian Ballad" (#11), in which Ištar imagines an amatory encounter with Tammuz, her beloved.[24] Even this poem is designated as being part of a series of love songs, this time called *Māruma rā'imni* "O young man loving me," and belonging to the library of an officer of the temple of Ištar.[25]

The initial words of the "Babylonian Ballad" are also included in the Middle Assyrian Song List (#13), a tablet published by Erich Ebeling already in 1922,

[15] Groneberg: "Brust"(irtum)-Gesänge, 177–181 (MAH 16056). Translation also in Foster: Muses, 165–166; discussion: Nissinen: Rituals, 119–120.

[16] George: Texts, 67–68 (CUSAS 10 11).

[17] George: Texts, 72–74 (CUSAS 10 12 = MS 3391).

[18] Ibid., 56–57 (CUSAS 10 9 = MS 5111).

[19] Ibid., 51 (CUSAS 10 8 = MS 2866).

[20] Ibid., 62–64 (CUSAS 10 10 = MS 3285).

[21] Lines 1–8 // Faithful Lover ii 10–19; lines 9–16 // Faithful Lover i 1–8.

[22] von Soden/Oelsner: Preislied, 340 (HS 1879). Discussion: Hurowitz: Ballad.

[23] Ibid., line r. 17.

[24] J. Black: Ballads, 30–31 (BM 47507). Translation also in Hecker: Texte, 63–65; discussion: Leick: Sex, 187–189; Nissinen: Rituals, 116–118.

[25] Ibid., lines 40–44.

originally containing some 400 incipits of love songs.[26] This list, together with a fragment of a similar, earlier list including *irtum* songs (#12),[27] provides impressive evidence of the presence and popularity of love songs in Middle Assyrian libraries, proving that the extant evidence of Mesopotamian love poetry is but a tiny scrap of this once-flourishing type of literature. Even though it only lists the first lines of the songs of which only the Babylonian Ballad is otherwise known, these incipits can be linked in multiple ways with the entire corpus of love poetry we have at our disposal at the moment.

Two further Middle Assyrian sources of love poetry come from the archives of Assur. Eckart Frahm has recently published a fragment of a text originally containing 109 lines that he identifies as a *Liebesduett* between the Assyrian king and a "Daughter of Assur" (#15).[28] The text is badly damaged, but the royal context, some imagery typical of love poetry, and the male and female voice are clearly identifiable. A better preserved poem (#14), likewise from Assur, tells about Ištar's love for Tammuz in language reminiscent of the "Babylonian Ballad," however ending with a note on the acceptance of the prayers of King Shalmaneser I (ca. 1265–35 BCE).[29] Both texts, hence, make love poetry appear in a royal context.

The sole Neo-Babylonian piece of love poetry is a tablet from Sultantepe (#16).[30] It first tells about the preparation of two chariots – one for the goddess Banitu (the "Creatrix", another appellative of Ištar) and the other for her consort who is an anonymous male deity – and then describes the goddess's going to the garden. The text has a close affinity with the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu (#18) to be discussed below.

The Neo-Assyrian evidence of love poetry consists of two compositions of very different kind. The first in the order of publication is the large composition of texts that the publisher, W. G. Lambert, gave the title "Divine Love Lyrics" (#17).[31] I would rather call it a Divine Triangle Drama, because its topic is primarily rivalry in love. The main actors of this drama are the god Marduk and his two women – his consort Zarpanitu and Ištar who appears as his girlfriend. The

---

[26] Ebeling: Hymnenkatalog (KAR 158). cf. Loretz: Problem, 196–201; J. Black: Ballads, 25.28–29; Nissinen: Rituals, 121–123; Groneberg: Lyrics; Klein/Sefati: Songs, 619–622.

[27] Finkel: Catalogue (BM 59484); the script is dated by Finkel to the Kassite (Middle Babylonian) period.

[28] Frahm: Texte, 143–144 (KAL 3 75 = VAT 10825).

[29] Simo Parpola's transliteration and translation in Nissinen: Rituals, 118 (LKA 15 = VAT 14039). New edition: Meinhold: Ištar, 301–312. Translation also in Foster: Muses, 1025.

[30] Deller: STT 366, 140–141 (STT 366). Discussion: Nissinen: Rituals, 116.

[31] Lambert: Problem, 102–126 (edition of thirteen Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian manuscripts), completing the first edition in Lambert: Lyrics; cf. the thorough commentary of the ritual tablet in Edzard: Ritualtafel. Discussion: Leick: Sex, 240–246; Nissinen: Rituals, 123–125.

composition as a whole gives a blatant expression to Zarpanitu's jealousy and her hostile attitude to Ištar. It consists of four groups of poems and a ritual tablet that, quite interestingly, gives the poetry a cultic setting. The nearly-pornographic and extremely insulting language of this poetry had no counterpart until the above-mentioned "A Field Full of Salt" was published a few years ago, and as Gwendolyn Leick writes, "[t]o us it seems incredible that such words should be said in a public religious ceremony, but the specific instructions on the tablet leave no doubt that this was indeed the case."[32]

A totally different scenery is provided by the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu (#18), which is arguably the closest parallel to the Song of Songs found thus far.[33] The text forms a poetic composition in which the male and the female deity have a dialogue with each other, with respondes by a chorus. The text begins with the devotion of the chorus to Nabû and Tašmetu, followed by the invitation of Tašmetu to her sanctuary where she then has an amatory encounter with Nabû. A part of the text, seemingly containing a description of a procession of goddesses, is broken away, and after that, Nabû promises a new chariot to Tašmetu, comparing her body parts to a gazelle, to an apple, and to precious stones. The next section is a nocturnal scene: Tašmetu, "looking luxuriant," enters a bedroom where she gets onto the bed and weeps until Nabû appears out of the blue and wipes her tears. The last section is a dialogue of the gods anticipating their pleasures in the garden.

Unlike other extant representatives of Akkadian love poetry, the ritual setting of the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu is well known.[34] The Neo-Assyrian ritual of Nabû and Tašmetu performed in the city of Calah is one of the several theogamies known to us from Neo-Assyrian and Neo- and Late Babylonian sources, and it can be at least partly reconstructed on the basis of the available evidence. It includes processions of the statues of the deities, their dwelling in the divine bedroom situated in the inner parts of the temple, a sacrificial meal, and, finally, Nabû's (and probably also Tašmetu's) coming out from the bedroom and moving to a garden or a game park. There is no doubt about the setting of the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu in this ritual, although we do not know how exactly the poem and the ritual related to each other in practical terms.[35]

---

[32] Leick: Sex, 243.

[33] SAA 3 14 = TIM 9 54 = IM 3233. The text was first edited in Matsushima: Rituel, 143–147, and re-edited in Livingstone: Poetry, 35–37. Transliteration and translation also in Nissinen: Lyrics, 587–592; Gerhards: Hohelied, 101–107; translation in Foster: Muses, 887–88; discussion: Nissinen: Rituals, 114–115; Gerhards: Hohelied, 107–115; Matsushima: Ištar, 8–9.

[34] See Nissinen: Rituals, 97–99; cf. Matsushima: Ištar.

[35] In the opinion of Matsushima: Ištar, 9, the text is the libretto of the marionette drama of the divine statues, recited by persons attached to the temple.

The extant corpus of love poetry in the Akkadian language is not very volu-
minous, but as the song lists indicate, we only know a small part of it. We may
discuss whether this evidence is enough to constitute a unified genre of love
poetry. What the texts share with each other is that they are all about love, albeit
in different ways. They are all written in verse, but not in the same kind of a
verse. Their topic, form, and content vary from text to text. They seem to have
different literary, societal and religious functions, as far as these are in any way
discernible, and their origins span over a period of more than a millennium. All
this makes a generic ascription difficult.

Nevertheless, the very topic of love and the ways love is expressed justifies
the examination of these texts as a group. There are plenty of features common
to the texts: they share a lot of common imagery, many of them are dialogues
(##1, 2, 3, 9, 15, 18), have indications of ritual use (##2, 3, 5, 10, 14, 17, 18),
present a goddess as a protagonist (##2, 3, 5?, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18), and men-
tion a king either as a protagonist or as the receiver of divine blessings (##2, 3,
9, 14, 15, 18). Two poems express negative feelings (##8, 17), and two poems,
"A Field Full of Salt" (#8) and "Faithful Lover" (#1), even share a few verses.

Akkadian Love Poetry and the Song of Songs

How, then, can the Akkadian love poetry help to understand the Song of Songs?
I have collected my observations under the following three rubrics: "Stream of
Tradition," "Scribal Culture," and "Sacred or Secular?"

(1) *Stream of Tradition.* The Song of Songs is arguably part of the ancient
Near Eastern tradition of love poetry, and studying it in splendid isolation would
be quite as foolish as doing the same with biblical law, wisdom, history, and
prophecy. This can be argued on the basis of the Akkadian poems alone, and if
we widen the scope to comprise Sumerian, Egyptian, and Greek sources, there is
good reason to talk about an ancient Eastern Mediterranean stream of tradition,[36]
which should not be understood as a sweeping metaphor that leaves little room
for the characteristics of individual sources but, rather, as a process evolving
through times and places, informing and being informed by local circumstanc-
es.[37]

The last three decades of research on the Song of Song's parallels have
demonstrated its belonging to the Near Eastern literary culture. The Song of
Song's similarity, if not indebtedness, to Egyptian Love Songs was demonstrat-
ed by Michael Fox three decades ago, and the Egyptian influence has ever since

---

[36] In A. Leo Oppenheim's classical definition, the stream of tradition is "what can
loosely be termed the corpus of literary texts maintained, controlled, and carefully kept
alive by a tradition served by successive generations of learned and well-trained scribes"
(Oppenheim: Mesopotamia, 29).
[37] Cf. Veldhuis: Culture, 12.

been justly taken for granted.[38] The Mesopotamian counterparts of the Song of Songs are mostly quoted from Sumerian sources, while the Akkadian literature has attracted much less attention as a parallel to the Song of Songs.[39]

Nevertheless, the growing number of pertinent sources has clearly increased the significance of the Akkadian love poetry, both as a cultural parallel to the Song of Songs and as a further representative of the common Eastern Mediterranean tradition. While direct impact of Akkadian love poems on the Song of Songs is undemonstrable and even improbable, continuity explains the similarity far better than autochthonous developments. The route of transmission between these textual corpora cannot be exactly demonstrated, but its existence can be seriously imagined, given the overall influence of Mesopotamian culture on the Hebrew Bible and even to early Jewish literature.

I have earlier argued for the existence of a reservoir of metaphors and symbols circulating around the Eastern Mediterranean area and crossing cultural boundaries over more than two millennia.[40] With the 'reservoir' I do not mean a stagnant pool but rather, to use a biblical phrase, "a fountain of living water" welling out from an ever-renewing source. These metaphors and symbols are the verbal, formal, and even pictorial particles that the stream of tradition carries with itself from one place to another. This cross-cultural imagery is constantly recontextualized and modified according to the needs and preconditions of its users, but it never seems to lose its common substance altogether. There are differences, for sure, even big ones; but as I argued earlier in this essay, differences do not disprove historical connection but, rather, mark the points where recontextualization and modification has taken place.

The amount of imagery and topics common to ancient Eastern Mediterranean love literature is huge and cannot be discussed here in its entirety. Let me just take a few examples of cases where I think the Akkadian love poetry has some added value in explaining the Song of Songs.

The first thing that catches the eye as a common structural element between the Song of Songs and the Akkadian love poetry is the predilection for *dialogue*—whether true dialogue or a series of monologues where the speakers alternate without always actually responding to each other. The best specimens of this form are the three Old Babylonian love dialogues (##1–3) and the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu (#18), but there are dialogic elements in other po-

---

[38] See especially Fox: Song and cf., e.g., Keel: Hohelied. Murphy: Song, 41–48; Carr: Word, 100–4; Garrett: Song, 49–57; Loprieno: Background; Gerhards: Hohelied, 87–100.

[39] See Murphy: Song, 56–57; Carr: Word, 95–100; Gerhards: Hohelied, 100–115; my own contributions include Nissinen: Lyrics; Rituals; Song.

[40] This is what I call the "Eastern Mediterranean erotic lyric tradition"; see Nissinen: Love Lyrics, 624; Song of Songs, 205–212.

ems too, for instance, in "In the Light of the Window" (#9) and in what remains of the Middle Assyrian Royal Love Duet (#15).

Another structural feature that deserves attention is the use of *parallelistic verse*, typical of the Song of Songs (as of Hebrew poetry in general) but sometimes employed even in Akkadian love poetry. This is noteworthy because parallelism is not nearly as widely used in Mesopotamian poetry as in Ugaritic or Hebrew poetry. The verses of the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu (#18) are predominantly based on parallelism, for example:[41]

bēlī anṣabtum šuknannima	My lord, put an earring on me,
qereb kirî lulallīka	let me give you pleasure in the garden!
[*Nabû bēl*]*ī anṣabtum šuknannima*	[Nabû,]my [lo]rd, put an earring on me,
[*qereb bēt ṭu*]*ppi luḫaddīka*	let me make you happy [in the ta]blet [house]!

Systematic use of parallelism of this kind is uncharacteristic of Mesopotamian poetry, hence such a thoroughgoing parallelistic structure could be traced back to a Western influence on Akkadian poetry. However, parallelism is not unknown to Old Babylonian poetry,[42] and even love poems, such as "O Girl, Whoopee!" (#6) occasionally use this stylistic device:[43]

mārti alāli libbī iṣīk	O girl, whoopee! my heart laughed,
ṣiḫāt ālittim itbal kabtatī	my mood took away the mother's smiles.
išalli libbam muḫattitam	It plunges into the heart that "infests,"
dāduša râmu muḫattitu	making love to her is a love that "infests."
kīma dišpim ṭābat ana appim	Sweet she is as syrup to the nose,
kīma karānim eššiet inbi kabtatu	like wine fresh of fruit is (her) mood.

The presence of parallelistic verse in Akkadian love poetry may not provide any specific help in reading the Song of Songs, but it demonstrates that even structural elements belonged to the stream of tradition.

There is yet another formal feature that deserves special attention, namely the *description of the body* of the beloved by equating its parts with different non-bodily substances, deriving its designation *waṣf* from Arabic poetry.[44] This pattern is well known not only from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, but also from

---

[41] SAA 3 14:13–16; for more examples, see Nissinen: Lyrics, 621–623.

[42] See Streck: Parallelismus, whose collection of 27 occurrences in hymns shows that such parallelism is not very common in Old Babylonian poetry, even though it does belong to its structural elements.

[43] CUSAS 10 8:1–9 (George: Texts, 51).

[44] *Waṣf* is a term for a mimetic feature in Arabic Poetry, "characterized by the minute, thorough description of certain objects" (Sumi: Poetry, 4).

later Jewish texts.[45] The Akkadian love poetry provides two further examples, one preserved as part of the Kiš Love Song (#4)[46] and the other in the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu (#18):[47]

> [Let me pro]vide a new chariot for you [……]
> [whose] thighs are a gazelle in the plain,
> [whose] ankle bones are an apple of Siman,
> whose heels are obsidian,
> whose whole being is a tablet of lapiz lazuli!

In the Song of Songs, the *waṣf* type of body description has often been interpreted rather straightforwardly, paying the main attention to the visual effect of the points of comparison. Some scholars have interpreted this way of description as intentionally "grotesque,"[48] while others have heard echos of ancient Near Eastern mythology between and behind the lines.[49] I think this line of interpretation can be validated by body descriptions in Akkadian love poetry, especially because the same kind of description is known from the so-called god description texts that belong to mystical and cultic explanatory works and mention items having a cultic function and symbolizing the presence of the divine.[50] What matters here is the mystical and mythological rather than the visual effect; in other words, the body of the beloved is not compared with the outer appearance of the items but with their *meaning*, however the audience may have perceived of it.

There is much more imagery common to the Song of Songs and the Akkadian love poetry than what can be waded through within the limits of this essay: flora and fauna, birds and gazelles, gemstones and other minerals, adornments and clothing, mothers, sisters and rivals, all kinds of sensory perceptions, and so on. I will only take two examples where I think the Akkadian poems indeed help to widen the interpretative window of the Song of Songs. First, the chariot mentioned above in Nabû and Tašmetu, and also in Banitu and Her Consort (#16):[51]

---

[45] For Egyptian texts, see Fox: Song, 269–271; for Mesopotamian god description texts, see Livingstone: Works, 92–112. The Jewish examples include the Genesis Apocryphon (1Q20 xx 2–8) and Joseph and Aseneth 18:9.

[46] Ki. 1063 i 9–12: "O by the crown of our head, the rings of our ears, the mountains of our shoulders, and the charms of our chest (– –)"; see Westenholz: Song, 422–423. This sequence itemizes body parts but does not compare them to the crown, rings, mountains, and charms in the way the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu does.

[47] SAA 3 14 r. 4–8, refrains omitted (Livingstone: Poetry, 36).

[48] Especially F. Black: Beauty; Artifice.

[49] E.g., Keel: Hohelied, 31–33.

[50] SAA 3 38 r. 9–17; SAA 3 39:1–18; CBS 6060 r. 1–5; BM 34035:41–42; see Livingstone: Works, 92–112.

[51] STT 366: 1–4 (Deller: STT 366, 4–5).

> Banitu [wanted] to harness (herself) from the house of her allure to the gar-
> den of junipers. (So) they brought out the *maširu* chariot of silver, they har-
> nessed the *madnanu* chariot of go[ld]. They brought (it) out and laid over it
> red wool, blue purple wool and red purple wool.

This is reminiscent of the lines of the choir in Nabû and Tašmetu, "Bind and
harness (yourself) thither! Bind your days to the garden and to the Lord!",[52] but
also brings to mind the enigmatic "chariots of Amminadib" in Cant 6:12 which,
against this background, could be imagined as the vehicle of the spiritual jour-
ney of the woman from the garden of nuts to a divine garden.

My second example of the imagery common to the biblical and Akkadian
love poetry is the combination of cedar and juniper, which in the Song of Songs
is attached to the venue of love-making (1:17):

> The beams of our house are cedars,
> our rafters are junipers (*běrôtîm*).

Interpreters of the Song of Songs often take these lines as a description of luxu-
ry, the allure of nature, and the utmost beauty of Lebanon where cedars are
known to grow. The Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu (#18) provide this im-
agery with a royal-religious aura. In this poem, the "shade" of the cedar, the
cypress and the juniper serves as the shelter for the king and his magnates, and
also "for my Nabû and my games":[53]

> The shade of the cedar, the shade of the cedar!
> The shade of the cedar, the king's shelter!
> The shade of cypress, (the shelter of) his magnates!
> The shade of a sprig of juniper (*burāšu*)
> is shelter for my Nabû and my games!

It becomes clear from the context that this shelter is nothing else but the sanctu-
ary where the love-making of the gods takes place: "Let the (scent of) pure juni-
per fill the sanctuary (*parakku*)."[54] Hence, the cedar, the juniper and the cypress
evoke the idea of divine love under the shelter of which even the king is brought
together with his administration. The simultaneously royal and cultic association
is, in fact, present in the Akkadian love poetry. As we have seen, some love
poems include blessings for the king (##2, 5, 14), and the king sometimes ap-
pears as the protagonist of the poem (##3, 15). Most importantly, the Neo-
Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian rituals of divine love are, more than anything
else, royal rituals. The primary purpose of the divine love-making was to estab-
lish the kingship, support the king and through him the people who also benefit-

---

[52] SAA 3 14 r. 22–23 (Livingstone: Poetry, 36).
[53] SAA 3 14:9–11 (ibid.: 35).
[54] SAA 3 14:8 (ibid.).

ed from the divine love.[55] Might this royal ideology so strongly attached to love poetry have something to do with the centrality of the figure of Solomon in the Song of Songs?

(2) *Scribal culture*. All ancient texts come to us from the studios of the ancient scribes. Whatever the social or religious context, function, and purpose of each text may have been, the first material context of every text is the workshop of the scribe. This is where the stream of tradition keeps flowing – besides oral transmisson, of course, which most probably was not unknown to well-educated scribes but, rather, contributed to their scribal production.[56]

The scribe's workshop is sometimes the only context of a cuneiform tablet we can be sure about, especially in the case of unprovenanced texts such as those included in the Schøyen collection (##6–9). The song lists (##12, 13) indicate that tablets containing love poetry were part of organized libraries, and as the three colophons demonstrate, love songs were sometimes compiled in thematic collections such as *Māruma rā'imni* (#11), the *irtum* songs (#5, 12) and the *pārum* songs (#10).[57]

The scribal origin of every cuneiform texts may sound like a matter of course, but we may not take it seriously enough when we think about the role of the texts in scribal culture and textual production, which is at the same time scribal education.[58] We tend to see the work of the scribes as mainly copying texts originally authored by others, but more attention should be paid on the agency of the scribes as the authors and promoters of the texts they wrote. This, again, has implications on the questions of authorial or editorial intention, audience, and the use of the texts. The lists of love songs now available from the Old Babylonian and Middle Assyrian periods are indicative of an intensive scribal interest in this kind of literature. That editing actually took place can be seen from the verses shared by "Faithful Lover" (#1) and "A Field Full of Salt" (#8), and evidence of such a creative reorganizing of poetic elements is interesting also with regard to the prehistory of the composition of the Song of Songs.

---

[55] See, e.g., Cooper: Marriage. Pongratz-Leisten: Marriage.

[56] Orality and writtenness should not be understood as exclusive alternatives in transmission of texts and traditions; Carr (Writing, 44) talks about a "complex oral-written matrix, where scribes were taught not just to copy but to memorize and produce texts," which meant that "every manuscript was truly an 'Einheit für sich,' a new scribal performance of an authoritative, sacred tradition."

[57] The latter designations are both used also in the Middle Assyrian Song List (#13) as classificatory words: *irtum* in KAR 158 vii 6, 24; viii 45–51, and *pārum* in viii 16; see Groneberg: Lyrics, 63.

[58] For Mesopotamian scribal education, see, e.g., Gesche.: Schulunterricht; Carr: Writing, 20–45; Veldhuis: Cuneiform; van der Toorn: Culture, 51–74. Kleinermann: Education.

One important purpose for writing a text is educational. While practicing their profession, the scribes learned not only how to write but also how to think, how to run their business, how to live their lives, even how to love. Love poetry can be imagined to have been attractive material for such learning, and one love song, "Banitu and Her Consort" (#16) is actually written on a school tablet,[59] indicating that they belonged to the curriculum of apprentices. Andrew George surmises that the purpose of the poem "A Field Full of Salt" (#8) was "perhaps satirical, but it may have become a copy book for the sake of its abusive language, which no doubt appealed to the adolescent minds of apprentice scribes."[60]

To judge from the available evidence, positive language of love appealed to the scribes even more, although the small number of extant texts is conspicuous enough to raise the question about the reason for their paucity. Oral transmission of popular poetry may be part of the explanation, but the hundreds of incipits in the Middle Assyrian Song List (#13) testify to hundreds of copies of love poetry in archives and libraries that have to date not been uncovered.[61]

Even the Song of Songs can be viewed from the perspective of scribal work and education "within a comparatively narrow circle that was adequately familiar with reading and writing and existed within a largely illiterate society."[62] To all appearances, it belonged to the repertoire of Ben Sira's *bēt midrāš*; at least Ben Sira himself applies the imagery of the Song of Songs creatively to the figure of Lady Wisdom in Sirach 24.[63] David Carr has opted for the educational use of the Song of Songs, influenced by both the Egyptian and the Sumero-Akkadian educational-scribal systems: "we should not be surprised to find loci like the Song of Songs where the lines of sharing, common dependence on folk-loristic motifs, and potential influence are impossible to untangle completely."[64] Folklore or not, the intriguing question here is whether the educational context of the Song of Songs, or Akkadian love poems is secondary to another "primary" setting of the text – such as worship or entertainment in communal feasts – or whether the scribe's workshop was rather the source and center of dissemination of this poetry, conveyed to different environments by the educated scribes.

---

[59] See Deller: STT 366, 139.

[60] George: Texts, 61.

[61] According to Klein/Sefati (Songs, 624), "the scribes did not deem it worthy or important to copy and transmit to future generations popular and 'secular' love songs, which were no doubt circulating orally and were commonly sung at weddings and banquets." In their opinion, "*all* Akkadian *irtu*-type love songs, including the songs listed in col. vii of KAR 158 [scil. #13], were cultic in nature, were composed originally for temple liturgy, and were connected in some way or another to the fertility cult" (ibid., p. 622).

[62] Schmid: Testament, 32.

[63] See my arguments to this effect in Nissinen: Wisdom.

[64] Carr: Tablet, 90.

In the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu (#18), the workshop of Nabû the scribe god and the patron of all scribes (*bēt ṭuppi* /É.DUB.BA) is itself the venue of love-making, equated with the garden of pleasure.[65] This places love poetry in the close vicinity of the wisdom genre, if not part of it, and revives the question of possible connections between the Song of Songs and wisdom.[66]

(3) *Sacred or Secular*? The small corpus of Akkadian love poetry includes both poems that are overtly "religious," mentioning gods and rituals, and others that neither mention divine beings nor bear any witness to worship of any kind. Should we, then, divide the material between "sacred" and "secular" poetry and apply the same division in comparison with the Song of Songs?[67] This has turned out to be difficult, because the texts do not easily succumb to this dichotomy.[68] I have opposed it in my earlier publications, and the Akkadian poetry makes me even more convinced that this is not the way to go.

In his book *To Take Place,* Jonathan Z. Smith highlights sacrality as a category of emplacement. "A ritual object or action becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way. From such a point of view, there is nothing that is inherently sacred or profane. These are not substantive categories, but rather situational ones."[69] A text's religiosity, hence, cannot be determined on the basis of how many times it mentions deities or how spiritual it sounds to us. A poem like the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu (#18) has divine protagonists and, as we happen to know, even a ritual setting, but this does not make it substantially different from Akkadian love poems where no gods are mentioned and no ritual background is apparent. On the other hand, had the Triangle Drama (#17) no ritual tablet attached to it, it would be hard to imagine a religious use for such an outburst of jealousy.

The secular vs. sacred divide is not what matters in determining a text's "religiosity," that is, its potential to religious reading or its spiritual capacity. What matters is rather the *use* of the text within or outside a ritual. The Song of Songs itself was prime example of this already to Rabbi Akiba, whose famous statement on those who sing the "Holy of the Holiest" in a banquet implies its use for more or less holy purposes (*m. Yad.* 3:5). As Smith aptly comments, "[t]he issue here is not the content of this collection of erotic ditties, but their place. When chanted in the Temple (or its surrogate), they are, perforce, sacred; when chant-

---

[65] SAA 3 14:13–15.

[66] See Dell: Song.

[67] In many publications, the poems in which the protagonists are clearly human and there are no traces of cultic use are labelled as "secular," or non-cultic; thus already Loretz: Problem; cf., e.g., J. Black: Ballads; Klein/Sefati: Songs; Long: Song, 756.

[68] Cf. Groneberg: Lyrics, 69: "Whether the *irātu*-songs are meant to be used in a secular or in a cultic setting or if some of them are cultic an others belong to court-poetry remains unanswered."

[69] Smith: Place, 104.

ed in a tavern, they are not. It is not their symbolism or their meaning that is determinitive [sic.]; the songs are sacred or profane sheerly by virtue of their location. A sacred text is one that is used in a sacred place – nothing more is required."[70]

So where were the texts used, then? Some Akkadian poems have clearly been used in a ritual context. The ritual of Nabû and Tašmetu is well known, the Triangle Drama has a ritual tablet attached to it, and several songs with Ištar or one of her manifestations as the main protagonist have good chances of having had a ritual use (##2, 3, 5, 10, 14, 16). What about the songs that sing about falling in love (#6) or express the anxiety of the dumped one (#8)? We do not really know, but if Smith is right about sacrality as a category of emplacement, there is no need to regard religiosity, or non-religiosity, as an essentialist quality of a poem, neither do we need to define whether the texts were "originally" designed for cultic or non-cultic use. On the contrary, any text can be allowed multiple readings and uses, and it is the community that uses the texts rather than the text itself that determines its spiritual faculties.

In final analysis, then, the much-discussed questions of whether the Song of Songs was originally meant to be read in an allegorical way, or whether the Akkadian love songs were originally designed for cultic or non-cultic use, is not primarily about the authorial intention but about the use of the texts by their audiences. Textual production is not all about *intentio auctoris*, but should be understood as what Jason Silverman presents as a "quadralectic" of background, creation, product, and reception, all four layers coinciding but not conflating.[71] "This quadralectic makes explicit that the work in question, be it film or text, exists independently of an author, despite its emergence only because of that author. It also shows the space that is available for communication, miscommunication, and societal background, without descending into a nebulous void of unmeaning."[72] The reception begins immediately when the textual product is created and the product is no longer in the author's control, but the author becomes part of the background.[73]

As no documentation of the earliest use of the Song of Songs has been preserved to us, it is not only the first author but also its first use and audience that remain in the dark. There is no evidence of any kind of ritual comparable to, for instance, that of Nabû and Tašmetu, in the Hellenistic Jewish milieu of the Song of Songs,[74] but as I have argued earlier,[75] it can well be considered another off-

---

[70] Ibid.

[71] Silverman: Pseudepigraphy, 538–540.

[72] Ibid., 539.

[73] Cf. also Exum: Song, 82–83.

[74] I subscribe to the Hellenistic dating of the Song of Songs, as argued by, e.g., Müller in Müller/Kaiser/Loader: Hohelied; Hagedorn: Foxes; Gerhards: Hohelied, 29–60; cf. Dobbs-Allsopp: Late Linguistic Features. (Persian or possibly later).

shoot of the stream of tradition of sacred marriage ideology, which made it prone to religious use and reading. At the very latest, the ritual aspect to the Song of Songs emerged from its inclusion among texts that enjoyed a status authoritative enough to appear among the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Septuagint. The early debates on the canonicity of the Song of Songs concerned its inclusion among the scrolls that "defile hands," and as John Barton has argued, this points towards the ritual status of the text.[76] The very first audience is probably impossible to detect; but if already Ben Sira read the Song of Songs as reflecting the character of Lady Wisdom, the text had a religious reading already in the early second century BCE, and the idea that the allegorical interpretation was invented only to make the book fit the canon of sacred writings can finally be abandoned.

Conclusion

It is time to attempt to answer the four questions I posed to myself earlier in this essay.

1. First, what have we been comparing? The simple answer "the Song of Songs (A) and the Akkadian love poetry (B)" becomes more complicated when we realize that A is a single product and B consists of eighteen different texts from different times and places, hence it would be more appropriate to talk about a comparison between A and B_1, B_2, …B_{18}. The simple polarization of A and B makes B look much more uniform than it is. Within the bounds of this article, it has not been possible to make comparisons between the texts from B_1 to B_{18}, and this causes a serious imbalance lamentably typical of studies comparing biblical and Near Eastern texts – including this essay, as I am afraid.

2. The reason for the imbalance is not only the lack of space but also the answer to the second question: "Why am I doing this?" This highly personal question concerns the scholar's intellectual interests which inevitably set the interpretative agenda, serving as a cornerstone of the comparative construct.[77] As a religio-historically oriented biblical scholar, my initial question concerned the Song of Songs; however, having a strong inclination towards Assyriology, I have done my best not to be driven by a Bible-centered agenda, reading the Akkadian texts first as if the Song of Songs did not exist.

3. Nonetheless, the focus on the Song of Songs informs the answer to the question of what I want to know, which is: if and how the Song of Songs can be shown to be part of the Near Eastern stream of tradition, if and how the historical and geographical proximity of the Song of Songs to the Akkadian love poetry shows itself in the texts. I hope to have succeeded in arguing on the basis of

---

[75] See Nissinen: Wisdom.
[76] See Barton: Canonicity.
[77] Cf. Smith: Religion, 24.

the comparison of some morphological and structural elements that the Song of Songs and the Akkadian love poetry indeed belong to the same large cultural landscape. Furthermore, continuity through the stream of tradition is probably the best way to describe their relationship, which is much more than accidental similarity but much less than direct impact.

I have chosen not to discuss the differences between the points of comparison in this essay, which does not mean that I do not recognize the points in the Song of songs that are indeed different from the Akkadian material, the most important of which relating to language, religion, geographical location, socio-cultural milieu, and literary context – no minor issues, indeed. Certainly, there are also differences in the contents and the use of the common imagery, which deserve a thorough investigation.[78] Studying the differences would reveal many things concerning the process of transmission.

4. How, then has the Akkadian love poetry turned out to be helpful in understanding the Song of Songs? First, the conviction that the Song of Songs forms part of the Eastern Mediterranean erotic-lyric tradition implies that the Akkadian keyholes (together with the Egyptian and Greek ones not discussed in this essay) complement the view we see through the biblical keyhole. This helps us to contextualize the biblical part of the landscape, and sometimes it even broadens our understanding of the biblical imagery.

The second major issue to which the comparison can bring some light is the question of the "sacred" or "secular" nature of the original Song of Songs. The sacred vs. secular divide appears to be quite inappropriate with regard to Akkadian texts, some of which may never have had a ritual use, but the majority of them have at least the potential for religious reading and use. Such a practical polyvalence of a text raises the question whether the *intentio* of the scribes preparing the first and subsequent copies of the text primarily controlled the use of the text, or whether it was first and foremost determined by the patrons, performers, and users of the scribal product.[79]

Bibliography

Barstad, Hans M.: Comparare necesse est? Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy in a Comparative Perspective. In: Nissinen, Martti [Ed.]: Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context. Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives (SBL Symposium Series 13), Atlanta 2000, 1–11.

---

[78] According to my observation, opinions expressed on such differences are, unfortunately, often wholesale statements based on a very superficial reading of the Akkadian sources.

[79] On "privileging the reader," whether ancient or modern, see Exum: Song, 82–86.

Barton, John: The Canonicity of the Song of Songs. In: Hagedorn, Anselm [Ed.]: Perspectives on the Song of Songs/Perspektiven der Hoheliedauslegung (BZAW 346), Berlin 2005, 1–7.

Black, Fiona C.: The Artifice of Love. Grotesque Bodies and the Song of Songs (LHB/OTS 392), New York 2009.

——: Beauty or the Beast? The Grotesque Body in the Song of Songs. In: Biblical Interpretation 8 (2000), 302–323.

Black, Jeremy A.: Babylonian Ballads: A New Genre. JAOS 103 (1983), 25–34.

Carr, David M.: Writing on the Tablet of the Heart. Origins of Scripture and Literature, Oxford 2005.

——: The Erotic Word. Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible, Oxford 2003.

Cooper, Jerrold S.: Sacred Marriage and Popular Cult in Early Mesopotamia. In: Matsushima, Eiko [Ed.]: Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East. Papers of the First Colloquium on the Ancient Near East – The City and Its Life, Held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo, March 20–22, 1992), Heidelberg 1993, 81–96.

Dell, Katherine J.: Does the Song of Songs Have Any Connections to Wisdom? In: Hagedorn, Anselm [Ed.]: Perspectives on the Song of Songs/Perspektiven der Hoheliedauslegung (BZAW 346), Berlin 2005, 8–26.

Deller, Karlheinz: STT 366. Deutungsversuch 1982. In: Assur 3 (1983), 139–153.

Dijk, Jan van/Goetze, Albrecht/Hussey, Mary I.: Early Mesopotamian Incantations and Rituals (YOS 11), New Haven 1985.

Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W.: Late Linguistic Features in the Song of Songs. In: Hagedorn, Anselm [Ed.]: Perspectives on the Song of Songs/Perspektiven der Hoheliedauslegung (BZAW 346), Berlin 2005, 27–77.

Ebeling, Erich: Ein Hymnenkatalog aus Assur (BBKF 1/3), Berlin 1922.

Edzard, Dietz-O.: Zur Ritualtafel der sog. "Love Lyrics". In: Rochberg-Halton, Francesca [Ed.]: Language, Literature, and History. Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner (AOS 67), New Haven 1987, 57–69.

Exum, J. Cheryl: Song of Songs. A Commentary (OTL), Louisville 2005.

Finkel, Irving L.: A Fragmentary Catalogue of Love Songs. In: ASJ 10 (1988), 17–18.

Foster, Benjamin R.: Before the Muses. An Anthology of Akkadian Literature, Bethesda ³2005.

Fox, Michael V.: The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs, Madison 1985.

Frahm, Eckart: Historische und historisch-literarische Texte (WVDOG 121/KAL 3), Wiesbaden 2009.

Garrett, Duane: Song of Songs. In: Garrett, Duane/House, Paul R.: Song of Songs, Lamentations (WBC 23B), Nashville 2004, 1–265.

George, Andrew R.: Babylonian Literary Texts in the Schøyen Collection (CUSAS 10), Bethesda 2009.

Gerhards, Meik: Das Hohelied. Studien zu seiner literarischen Gestalt und theologischen Bedeutung (ABG 35), Leipzig 2010.

Gesche, Petra D.: Schulunterricht in Babylonien im ersten Jahrtausend v. Chr. (AOAT 275), Münster 2000.

Groneberg, Brigitte: Searching for Akkadian Lyrics. From Old Babylonian to the "Liederkatalog" KAR 158. In: JCS 55 (2003), 55–74.

——: The "Faithful Lover" Reconsidered. Towards Establishing a New Genre. In: Parpola, Simo/Whiting, Robert M. [Ed.]: Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East. Proceedings of the 47th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001 (Vol. 1; CRRAI 47/2), Helsinki 2002, 165–183.

——: "Brust"(*irtum*)-Gesänge. In: Böck, Barbara/Cancik-Kirschbaum, Eva/Richter, Thomas [Ed.]: Munuscula Mesopotamica. Festschrift für Johannes Renger (AOAT 267), Münster 1999, 169–195.

Hagedorn, Anselm: Of Foxes and Vineyards: Greek Perspectives on the Song of Songs. In: VT 53 (2003), 337–352.

Hecker, Karl: Texte aus Mesopotamien: 2. Ištars Geliebter. In: TUAT.NF 7 (2013), 63–65.

——: "Kundbar werde mich deine Sehnsucht…" Eros und Liebe im alten Orient. In: Hagedorn, Anselm [Ed.]: Perspectives on the Song of Songs/Perspektiven der Hoheliedauslegung (BZAW 346), Berlin 2005, 163–179.

——: Akkadische Hymnen und Gebete. A. Texte der altbabylonischen Zeit. In: Kaiser, Otto [Hg.]: Lieder und Gebete I (TUAT II/5), Gütersloh 1989, 718–752.

Held, Moshe: A Faithful Lover in an Old Babylonian Dialogue (JCS 15 1–26). Addenda et Corrigenda. In: JCS 16 (1962), 37–39.

——: A Faithful Lover in an Old Babylonian Dialogue. In: JCS 15 (1961), 1–26.

Hurowitz, Victor A.: An Old Babylonian Bawdy Ballad. In: Zevit, Ziony/Gitin, Seymour/Sokoloff, Michael [Ed.]: Solving Riddles and Untying Knots. Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield, Winona Lake 1995, 543–558.

Keel, Othmar: Das Hohelied (ZBK.AT 18). Zürich 1986.

Klein, Jacob/Sefati, Yitschak: "Secular" Love Songs in Mesopotamian Literature. In: Cohen, Chaim/et al [Ed.]: Birkat Shalom. Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday (Vol. 2). Winona Lake 2008, 613–626.

Kleinermann, Alexandra: Education in Early 2nd Millennium BC Babylonia (CM 42). Leiden 2011.

Lambert, Wilfred G.: The Problem of Love Lyrics. In: Goedicke, Hans/Roberts, J. J. M. [Ed.]: Unity and Diversity. Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East, Baltimore 1975, 98–135.

——: Divine Love Lyrics from the Reign of Abi-ešuh. In: MIO 12 (1966), 41–51.

——: Divine Love Lyrics from Babylon. In: JSS 4 (1959), 1–15.

Leick, Gwendolyn: Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature, London 1994.

Livingstone, Alasdair: Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea (SAA 3), Helsinki 1989.

——: Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars, Oxford 1986.

Long, G. A.: Song of Songs 2: Ancient Near Eastern Background. In: Longman, Tremper III/Enns, Peter [Ed.]: Dictionary of the Old Testament. Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings, Nottingham 2008, 749–760.

Loprieno, Antonio: Searching for a Common Background. Egyptian Love Poetry and the Biblical Song of Songs. In: Hagedorn, Anselm [Ed.]: Perspectives on the Song of Songs/Perspektiven der Hoheliedauslegung (BZAW 346), Berlin 2005, 105–135.

Loretz, Oswald: Zum Problem des Eros im Hohenlied. In: BZ.NF 8 (1964), 191–216.

Malul, Meir: The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies (AOAT 227), Kevelaer 1990.

Matsushima, Eiko: Ištar and Other Goddesses of the So-Called "Sacred Marriage" in Mesopotamia. In: Sugimoto, David T. [Ed.]: Transformation of a Goddess. Ishtar – Astarte – Aphrodite (OBO 263), Fribourg 2014, 1–14.

——: Le rituel hiérogamique de Nabû. In: ASJ 9 (1987), 131–175.

Meinhold, Wiebke: Ištar in Aššur. Untersuchung eines Lokalkultes von ca. 2500 bis 614 v. Chr. (AOAT 367), Münster 2009.

Murphy, Roland E.: The Song of Songs (Hermeneia), Minneapolis 1990.

Müller, Hans-Peter/Kaiser, Otto/Loader, James A.: Das Hohelied, Klagelieder, Das Buch Esther (ATD 16/2), Göttingen 1992.

Nissinen, Martti: Sacred Springs and Liminal Rivers. Water and Prophecy in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean. In: Zvi, Ehud Ben/Levin, Christoph [Ed.]: Thinking of Water in Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Period in Judah (BZAW 461), Berlin 2014, 29–48.

——: Wisdom as Mediatrix in Sirach 24. Ben Sira, Love Lyrics, and Prophecy. In: Luukko, Mikko/Svärd, Saana/Mattila, Raija [Ed.]: Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars. Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola (StOr 106), Helsinki 2009, 377–390.

——: Song of Songs and Sacred Marriage. In: Nissinen, Martti/Uro, Risto [Ed.]: Sacred Marriages. The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity, Winona Lake 2008, 173–218.

——: Akkadian Rituals and Poetry of Divine Love. In: Whiting, Robert [Ed.]: Mythology and Mythologies. Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences (MeSym 2), Helsinki 2001, 93–136.

——: Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu: An Assyrian Song of Songs? In: Dietrich, Manfried/Kottsieper, Ingo [Ed.]: "Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf". Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient. Festschrift für Oswald Loretz zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres mit Beiträgen von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen (AOAT 250), Münster 1998, 585–634.

Oppenheim, A. Leo: Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization. Revised edition by Erica Reiner, Chicago ²1977.

Paul, Shalom M.: The "Plural of Ecstasy" in Mesopotamian and Biblical Love Poetry. In: Cogan, Mordecai/Eichler, Barry L./Tigay, Jeffrey H. [Ed.]: Tehillat le-Moshe. Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg, Winona Lake 1997, 585–597.

Ponchia, Simonetta: La palma e il tamarisco e altri dialoghi mesopotamici, Venice 1996.

Pongratz-Leisten, Beate: Sacred Marriage and the Transfer of Divine Knowledge. Alliances between the Gods and the King in Ancient Mesopotamia. In: Nissinen, Martti/Uro, Risto [Ed.]: Sacred Marriages. The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity, Winona Lake 2008, 43–73.

Schmid, Konrad: The Old Testament. A Literary History, Minneapolis 2012.

Sigrist, Marcel/Westenholz, Joan Goodnick: The Love Poem of Rīm-Sîn and Na-naya. In: Cohen, Chaim/et al [Ed.]: Birkat Shalom. Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday (Vol. 2), Winona Lake 2008, 667–704.

Silverman, Jason M.: Pseudepigraphy, Anonymity, and Auteur Theory. In: Religion and the Arts 15 (2011), 520–555.

Smith, Jonathan Z.: Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion, Chicago 2004.

——: To Take Place. Toward Theory in Ritual, Chicago 1987.

——/Oelsner, Joachim: Ein spät-altbabylonisches *pārum*-Preislied für Ištar. In: Or.NS 60 (1991), 339–343.

Streck, Michael P.: Der Parallelismus membrorum in den altbabylonischen Hymnen. In: Wagner, Andreas [Ed.]: Parallelismus membrorum (OBO 224), Fribourg 2007, 167–181.

Sumi, Akiko Motoyoshi: Description in Classical Arabic Poetry. Waṣf, Ekphrasis, and Interarts Theory (Brill Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures 25), Leiden 2003.

van der Toorn, Karel: Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible, Cambridge, Mass. 2007.

von Soden, Wolfram: Ein Zwiegespräch Ḫammurabis mit einer Frau. In: ZA 49 (1950), 151–194.

Veldhuis, Niek: Domesticating Babylonian Scribal Culture in Assyria. Transformation by Preservation. In: van Egmond, Wolfert S./van Soldt, Wilfred H. [Ed.]: Theory and Practice of Knowledge Transfer. Studies in School Eduation in the Ancient Near East and Beyond (PIHANS 121), Leiden 2012, 11–24.

——: How Did They Learn Cuneiform? Tribute/Word List C as an Elementary Exercise. In: Michalowski, Piotr/Veldhuis, Niek [Ed.]: Approaches to Sumerian Literature in Honour of Stip (H. L. J. Vanstiphout) (CM 35), Leiden 2006, 181–200.

Westenholz, Joan Goodnick: Love Lyrics from the Ancient Near East. In: Sasson, Jack M. [Ed.]: Civilizations of the Ancient Near East, Peabody 2005, 2471–2484.

——: A Forgotten Love Song. In: Rochberg-Halton, Francesca [Ed.]: Language, Literature, and History. Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner (AOS 67), New Haven 1987, 415–425.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig: Tractatus logico-philosophicus. With an Introduction by Bertrand Russell, London 1922.