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Two of a Kind

Twin Language in the Hebrew Bible

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Abstract

This article seeks to understand the relation between form and content of biblical passages including the word תּוֹאמִים – ‘twins.’ First, the six attestations of the word occur in pairs in the books of Genesis, Exodus and Song of Songs. Second, they are highlighted through linguistic devices that in themselves have affinity with duality: geminates, alliteration and (numerical) paronomasia. Moreover, the number ‘two’ occurs in all texts and is evoked through the use of its homophone שְׁנֵי, ‘scarlet’, and through duplication of words. Thus, it is suggested that the language of biblical passages including the twin word exteriorizes and emphasizes the twin concept by means of devices that mimic the twinning formally.

Keywords: twins, wordplay, paronomasia, geminates, duality

Previous studies on twins in the Hebrew Bible have pointed out the ambiguous nature of the concept that incorporates the opposites of love and hatred, union and rivalry. It is proposed that the latter element of conflict often prevails over harmony in the case of biblical twins – contrary to other ancient Near Eastern pairs that are presented as an inseparable unit.¹ While

¹ Raymond Kuntzmann, *Le symbolisme des jumeaux au Proche Orient ancien: naissance, fonction et évolution d'un symbole* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1998); Frederick Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together. The*

the existing scholarship mainly focuses on concept and content of the biblical twin, this article will connect these findings with the formal level of biblical text using the word תּוֹאֲמִים – ‘twins’. It will show that the neighboring language formally emphasizes and externalizes the duality of the twin content. First, I will briefly introduce the six sections of text and their immediate context in which twins are mentioned. Then I will discuss their form and its possible implications for the meaning of the units.² In conclusion, I will formulate an answer to the question: How and in what way does the language matter in passages talking about and using the word ‘twins’?

Six pairs: Twins in the Hebrew Bible

While the Hebrew Bible overflows with brother pairs, the twins among them are rare.³ The mentioning of them as twins is even scarcer.⁴ Esau and Jacob are twins according to Gen. 25.24—however, only once they are named as such. Elsewhere their relationship is expressed in terms of brotherhood, not distinguishing it from ordinary siblings.

The six attestations of תּוֹאֲמִים in the Hebrew Bible appear in pairs: two in Genesis (Gen. 25.24; 38.26), two in Exodus (Exod. 26.24; 36.29) and two in Song of Songs (Song 4.5; 7.4). Each of the pairs deals with a different kind of twins. In Genesis, the twins are human; in

Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Dan Forsyth, ‘Sibling Rivalry, Aesthetic Sensibility, and Social Structure in Genesis’, *Ethos* 19,4 (1991), pp. 453-510.

² Form should be taken here in terms of devices, not in terms of structural elements, such as chiasm or parallelism.

³ Famous brother pairs in the Hebrew Bible are Cain and Abel (Gen. 4), Isaac and Ishmael (Gen. 21), Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25-33), Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48), Aaron and Moses (Exodus). Jacob and Esau and Perez and Zerah are the only twins.

⁴ For male human twins only two references occur in the Hebrew Bible: Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25.24) and Perez and Zerah (Gen. 38.27).

Exodus, they are inanimate—one uses the word to talk about double beams of the Tabernacle; and in Song of Songs, the twins are animals as a metaphor for human body parts. Furthermore, there is a considerable amount of material between the occurrences of תואמים in the respective books, meaning that the occurrences belong to different stories or parts of the story.

In the book of Genesis the word תואמים occurs for the first time at the birth of Esau and Jacob. As was the case with Sara, also Rebecca was initially barren.⁵ When pregnant at last, things do not go unnoticed. The unborn babies are struggling in her womb, leading Rebecca to invoke the Lord.⁶ He answers with an oracle-like answer.⁷ Immediately afterwards the pregnancy ends and twins are born.⁸ The first and second of the pair are described and given a

⁵ See Gen. 16.1 for Sara's bareness: ושרי אשת אברם לא ילדה לו, 'And Sarai, Abram's wife, did not bear him children'; and Gen. 25.21 for Rebecca's: ויעתר יצחק ליהוה לנכח אשתו כי עקרה הוא, 'And Isaac entreated the LORD on behalf of his wife for barren she was'. For discussion on this matter, see James Williams, 'The Beautiful and the Barren: Conventions in Biblical Type Scenes', *JSOT* 17 (1980), pp. 107-119; Athalya Brenner, 'Mother of Great Men', in *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), pp. 99-105; Mary Callaway, *Sing O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash* (SBL Dissertation Series 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); Esther Fuchs, 'The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible', in Miri Amihai, et al. (eds.), *Narrative Research on the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 151-166.

⁶ Gen. 25.22: ויתרצצו הבנים בקרבה ותאמר אם כן למה זה אנכי ותלך לדרש את יהוה, 'And the children crashed into each other in her and she said: "If it is so, why is it that I?" and she went to ask the LORD'.

⁷ Gen. 25.23: ויאמר יהוה לה שני גיים בבטנך ושני לאמים ממעריך יפרדו ולאם מלאם יאמץ ורב יעבד צעיר, 'And the LORD said to her: "Two people are in your womb and two nations shall be separated from your innards and one nation will be stronger than the other nation and old will serve young"'.

⁸ Gen. 25.24: וימלאו יהיה ללדת והנה תומם בבטנה, 'And when her days to give birth were full, behold, twins in her womb'.

name: Esau—redhead and Jacob—heel grasper (Gen. 25.25–26). It is not until ch. 38 that the second pair of twins is mentioned: Perez and Zerah, sons of Tamar and Judah. They are born after their mother had taken the seed that lawfully was hers. Judah, initially unaware of the fact that his daughter-in-law was carrying his children, was planning on punishing her for her adultery. When he realizes that he and not she is the wrong doer, the confession is sealed with the birth of their sons (Gen. 38.13–30). While Jacob overtakes Esau later on in life, Perez does not postpone and already takes the firstborn place during birth.⁹ In both stories the pregnancies are preceded by a time of waiting and uncertainty—the family line and thus God’s promise is at stake. While the male characters sit on the fence, the female characters take the lead. Rebecca invokes God hoping he will help her; Tamar undertakes action herself.¹⁰ The newborn twins intensify in both stories the sibling rivalry that recurs in many of the patriarchal narratives.¹¹ Their strife has prenatal roots.

Another pair of pairs occurs in the book of Exodus in the chs. 26 and 36.¹² In the former, God gives direction to build the tabernacle. The twin word occurs when describing the beams on top that should be coupled like twins. The passage is technical, with many numbers and measures. In ch. 36 the passage is repeated almost literally when the Israelites actually build the tabernacle following the instructions as given by God to Moses.¹³ This

⁹ As noted by Frederick Greenspahn, the concept of conflict itself was already present in both stories (Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, p. 4).

¹⁰ For Rebecca, see n. 6; for Tamar, see Gen. 38.14-30.

¹¹ Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*; Forsyth, ‘Sibling Rivalry, Aesthetic Sensibility, and Social Structure in Genesis’, pp. 453-510.

¹² Exod. 26.24 and Exod. 36.29.

¹³ Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), pp. 170, 225.

connection between command and execution has also been found in other biblical and extra-biblical accounts of temple building. Hurowitz states that

this seemingly monotonous, repetitious section is not just a superfluous description and listing of the parts of the Tabernacle; rather, it is a step-by-step account of the entire construction process: fabrication, inspection, assembly and furnishing.¹⁴

This account is necessarily closely related to the command given as noted by Walter Houston and Brevard Childs.¹⁵

The word תּוֹאֲמִים is used, finally, in the book Song of Songs. In Song of Songs 4 the male character is describing his beloved comparing her body parts to various elements from the environment. Not the eyes or the hands but the breasts are seen as twins, more specifically twin calves of the roe. The path followed in his description is one that starts on top of the body and ends at the bottom.¹⁶ In Song of Songs 7 the opposite direction is followed. Again we come across the twin breasts. The verses are identical except for the addition in Song 4.5 of the words ‘which feed among the lilies’.¹⁷ Scott Noegel and Gary Rendsburg discuss the verses as a pair that ‘attunes the listener’s ear to the nuances of the text’.¹⁸

¹⁴ Victor Hurowitz, ‘The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle’, *JAOS* 105, 1 (1985), pp. 21-30 (22).

¹⁵ Walter Houston, ‘Exodus,’ in John Barton and John Muddiman (eds), *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 90; Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus, a Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville, KY Westminster Press, 2004), p. 540.

¹⁶ Elie Assis, *Flashes of Fire. A Literary Analysis of the Song of Songs* (New York/London: T&T Clark, 2009), p. 121.

¹⁷ Roland Murphy, *The Song of Songs. A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 182; Assis, *Flashes of Fire*, p. 209.

¹⁸ Scott Noegel and Gary Rendsburg, *Solomon’s Vineyard. Literary and Linguistic Studies in the Song of Songs* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), pp. 122-123.

The use of the word תּוֹאֲמִים in the three books mentioned shows some differences besides the remarkable similarities that will be discussed later on. The human twin in Genesis, as is the case in other ancient Near Eastern stories, introduces the concept of rivalry as well as of brotherhood. The twins hate and love each other at the same time.¹⁹ When the word is used in its metaphorical sense, the element of strife disappears. The doubling of the beams of the tabernacle stands for a firm construction with solid joints. The same counts for the breasts of the beloved that are in perfect harmony. In these cases the root underlying the noun seems to connect with the paronomastically related root תָּמַם, ‘to be complete’.²⁰

Twisting and Twirling Twins

In what follows, the focus will be on the form of the text of the passages and the question whether it is meaningful.

First, there is the fact that the word תּוֹאֲמִים appears pairwise in three books of the Hebrew Bible. The most obvious connection can be found in the book of Exodus. In the first passage God gives instructions to build the tabernacle; in the second passage these are repeated during the implementation. The two passages relate to one another as the parts of a parallelism in which there is structural and semantic correspondence.²¹ In Song of Songs the two attestations also show close affinity. There is again a semantic overlap; however, structurally a chiasm is used. The initial order of description from top to bottom has been

¹⁹ Other famous twins are Osiris and Seth in Egyptian literature, the *dioscuroi* Kastor and Polydeuces in Greece, and Romulus and Remus in Latin tradition.

²⁰ HALOT, 10204, s.v. תָּמַם and HALOT, 10018, s.v. תָּאֵם. Although the word תּוֹאֲמִים etymologically derives from the latter, the former is easily evoked especially when using the *scriptio defectiva* of the word, i.e. תּוֹמִים.

²¹ For an in-depth study on parallelism and the possible relations between the parts see Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

reversed. The birth of the twin brothers in Genesis is related as well. The exact wording differs more than in the case of the metaphorical examples, but the circumstances and motives of a leading female character, brotherly strife and reversal are present in both. Therefore, we can rightfully consider the two passages a pair as well. By doubling the passages in which the word ‘twin’ is used, emphasis is put on these passages in general and more specifically on the twins mentioned in them.²²

Secondly, three devices occur in the passages that add to the emphasis on the twins: geminates, alliterations, and (numerical) paronomasia.

Before continuing, I would like to make a note about the distinction between the consonant as letter and as sound with regard to the above-mentioned features. While in ancient civilizations such as that of the Greco-Roman world or the ancient Near East an alliterative effect was primarily meant as aural, one cannot exclude the visual aspect as soon as the text was written down.²³ Therefore, the alliteration works visually as well. For biblical Hebrew this is of importance with regard to its use of *matres lectionis*. That these were considered meaningful can be seen in rabbinical commentaries that do discuss the choice for either *scriptio plena* or *defectiva*, of which I will give examples later on.

²² On doubling/repetition and emphasis see Thomas McCreesh, *Biblical Sound and Sense: Poetic Sound Patterns in Proverbs 10-29* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); Wilfred Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: a Guide to its Techniques* (JSOT Sup 26; Sheffield: 1984).

²³ Holly Hearon, ‘Implications of Orality for Studies of the Biblical Text’, in Richard Horsley, Jonathan Draper, and John Foley (eds.), *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Memory and Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), pp. 3-20; Immanuel Casonowicz, ‘Paronomasia in the Old Testament’, *JBL* 12,2 (1893), p. 106; Gary Rendsburg, “Word play in Biblical Hebrew: An Eclectic Collection,” in Scott Noegel (ed.), *Puns and Pundits. Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2000), pp. 137-162 (esp. pp. 156-162).

Genesis 25 and 38

In Gen 25.22–25 the twins Esau and Jacob are born.

ויתרצצו הבנים בקרבה ותאמר אם כן למה זה אנכי ותלך לדרש את יהוה
ויאמר יהוה לה שני גיים בבטנך ושני לאמים ממעיך יפרדו ולאם מלאם יאמץ ורב יעבד צעיר
וימלאו ימיה ללדת והנה תומם בבטנה
ויצא הראשון אדמוני כלו כאדרת שער ויקראו שמו עשו

²²And the children crashed into each other in her and she said: “If it is so, why is it that I?” and she went to ask the LORD. ²³And the LORD said to her: “Two people are in your womb and two nations shall be separated from your innards and one nation will be stronger than the other nation and old will serve young. ²⁴And when her days to give birth were full, behold, twins in her womb. ²⁵And the first came out red all over like a garment of hair and they called his name Esau.

Verse 22 opens with the geminate form ויתרצצו, ‘and they crashed’.²⁴ The plural confirms that Rebecca is pregnant with twins. The action of bumping into each other is further emphasized by the use of the fricative צ. Just as the sound is formed by a friction, a collision of phonemes in language, so the boys collide and will collide into each other.²⁵

In what follows no more ‘real’ geminates occur, i.e., as defined by grammar in terms of root consonants.²⁶ However, a remarkable pile up of alliterations is used, in which the

²⁴ According to some scholars, such as Benno Jacob, this form is not derived from רצץ but from a different root, i.e., רוצ, ‘they lay against each other’, and therefore it would make the form a pseudo-geminate root (Benno Jacob, *Das Erste Buch der Tora, Genesis* [Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1934], p. 542). Rabbinic sources do mention the idea of running as well, though without leaving the struggle out of the interpretation (Rashi on Gen. 25.22, Gen. Rab. 63.6). For the current study the form as it occurs in the text with a double צ matters, not the underlying grammatical, hence hypothetical root.

²⁵ Bruce Waltke and Cathi Fredricks, *Genesis. A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), p. 357; Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), p. 176; Benno Jacob, *Das Erste Buch*, p. 542. Many a commentator has read the verb as a prediction of the future conflicts between the brothers, but also between other characters in the story, such as Rebecca and Isaac (Gen. 27.1-46), Jacob and his wives (Gen. 30.1-24), or Jacob and Laban (Gen. 29.14b-31.55).

²⁶ GKC, §66, pp. 175-83.

repeated consonants occur inside a single word and not, as usual, in successive words.²⁷ Although the new feature does not fit the grammatical definition of geminates, it at least seems to mimic the geminate form.

The alliteration might explain the exceptional spelling of גִּיִּם in the MT instead of גוֹיִם. The variant, as it appears here, is not present elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.²⁸ Being surrounded by other forms with similar characteristics, such as מִמַּעֵיד, מִלֵּאם, יְהוּה, וּבְבִטְנָךְ, לְאֲמִים, it supports the hypothesis that the author deliberately chose words and combinations in which two identical consonants occurred. Rather than a scribal error we might have to deal with a remarkable linguistic feature that in itself highlights something else. The repetition of signs reaches its climax in v. 24, in which all words contain a repeated consonant. Although not all of them have retained their consonantal value and thus can be heard, the gemination

²⁷ Alliteration according to *Ad Herennium* IV.XII.18: 'eiusdem litterae nimiam adsiduitatem,' 'the excessive recurrence of the same letter'. As the example following the definition shows, this letter recurs predominantly in successive words: 'O Tite, tute, Tati, tibi tanta, tyranne, tulisti'.

²⁸ The Masoretes have corrected the form into גוֹיִם (ק), which is also the form that can be found in the Samaritan Pentateuch. None of the Dead Sea Scroll fragments includes this passage so that it is not clear which reading should be preferred. However, two elements are in favor of the form with double י. First, there is the general acknowledgment that the Masoretic text of Genesis preserves an old tradition predating any of the other Hebrew and non-Hebrew textual witnesses including the Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch (Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* [WBC 1; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987], pp. XXIV-XXV; James VanderKam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus and Christianity* [San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2002], pp. 104-105). Secondly, later commentators such as Rashi base their interpretation on the כְּתִיב form of the word. Rashi vocalizes the word differently reading גִּיִּם also גִּיִּים which would refer to Antoninus and Judah ha-Nasi, 'lofty ones.' While the interpretation itself is not of much help with regards to the birth of Jacob and Esau, the fact that Rashi starts from a form with double י is (Rashi on Gen. 25.23).

fully works on the visual level.²⁹ It also works on the semantic level; it is exactly in v.24 that the twins Esau and Jacob are born. This observation concerning alliteration concurs with Scott Noegel and Wilfred Watson's suggestion with regards to geminates that 'the device [i.e., geminate clustering] may function to denote reiterated action (e.g., Ps 12:7) or multiplicity of object (e.g., Isa 7:19)'.³⁰

In the second passage in Genesis, Gen. 38.26-29, no geminate roots occur. In the verse of the birth itself, v. 27, a high number of alliterations can be found. Some of them are audible; all of them are visually perceptible:

ויהי בעת לדתה והנה תאומים בבטנה
ויהי בלדתה ויתן יד ותקח המילדת ותקשר על ידו שני לאמר זה ראשונה

²⁷ And it was at the time of her birth giving, and behold, twins in her womb. ²⁸ And it was when she gave birth and he put out a hand and the midwife took and bound around his hand a red thread saying, "This one came out first."

In comparison to Genesis 25, the pair in Genesis 38 gets less emphasis through alliteration. Jacob and Esau are indeed primary characters in the book of Genesis and for many chapters their life is the main focus of the book. Moreover, besides their unity, conflict is far more present in their lives than in that of the later twins.³¹ According to Rashi and other rabbinical sources, the brothers Perez and Zerah, born in Genesis 38, are both righteous, hence the

²⁹ The so-called *matres lectionis*, for example, the second ך in וימלאו, no longer function as consonants which means that at least on an aural level they cannot be detected as doubled. On the visual level, however, they regain their status and can be perceived as creating a geminated alliteration.

³⁰ Scott Noegel, 'Geminate Ballast and Clustering: An Unrecognized Literary Feature in Ancient Semitic Poetry', *JHS* 5 (2004), pp. 1-18 (18 n. 12).

³¹ Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Isa. 63.1-8) Edom/Esau is also used for its thematic duality. He is a brother and thus friend on the one hand, but also symbolizes the enemy on the other hand (Sonya Kostamo, 'Integral Imagery: Reading Isaiah 63:1-6 within the Discourse of Trito-Isaiah' [paper presented in the joint session with the University of Alberta at the EABS Graduate and Post Graduate Symposium, Drongen, 24 April, 2010]).

scriptio plena; while in the case of Jacob and Esau only one was, as the defective writing shows.³²

In addition to the true geminate and a geminated kind of alliteration, a third and last formal element draws attention to the passages in Genesis. In Gen. 25.23 the word שני, 'two', is mentioned twice, the first time right before גיים and a second time between בבטנך and לאמים. The repetition of what turns out to be the key concept of the passage, twinning, is in itself meaningful. However, it is only part of what the form שני accomplishes in the text. Its double occurrence no more than attracts attention to make us aware of the possibility of more sophisticated wordplay.³³ In order to fully understand this, one has to read the birth of Esau and Jacob together with the other twin birth in Genesis, that of Perez and Zerah.³⁴ In Gen. 38.28 the form שני, 'red (thread)', recalls the double mentioning of שני, 'two', in Gen. 25.23. The numerical paronomasia is supported by the use of the word ראשנה in the same verse.³⁵ The word also occurs in Gen. 25.25. Moreover, the red thread is indeed bound upon the hand

³² According to Rashi, a defective writing occurred in the case of Jacob and Esau because אחד צדיק ואחד רשע, 'one was righteous, and one was wicked'. The full spelling in Gen. 38 symbolized two righteous brothers (Rashi on Gen. 25.24 and 38.27).

³³ James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond", *JBL* 88 (1969), pp. 1-18 (17); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 88-113; Wilfred Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, pp. 274-299; Ronald Bergey, 'The Rhetorical Role of Reiteration in the Suffering Servant Poem (Isa 52:13-53:12)', *JETS* 40,2 (1997), pp. 117-188.

³⁴ The rabbis have read these two passages together as well. They were merely interested in why the word תומם had been spelled differently in both chapters (Rashi on Gen. 25.24; Gen. Rab. 63.8). However, the present concern consists of the similarities between the passages that go beyond the use of the twin word itself.

³⁵ Scott Noegel, "'Wordplay' in Qoheleth," *JHS* 7 (2007), pp. 1-28 (p. 27). Similar number games appear in e.g. Egyptian literature, using numbers in combination with words that are the same or alike. See Jan Zandee, *De Hymnen aan Ammon van Papyrus Leiden 1350* (Leiden: RMO, 1947), pp. 129-130.

of the second son, as this paronomasia suggests, even though he put out his hand first. Also in the case of Jacob and Esau, Esau came out first, but Jacob will twice take his place as firstborn son—showing that brotherly strife is inherent to twin births.³⁶ This idea is not unique to the Hebrew Bible, as a closer look at the role of twins in the ancient Near East reveals. As Victor Matthews notices, ‘twins came into the world not only bringing twice the life of a single birth, but also the death brought on by sibling rivalry’.³⁷ The ancient literature has brought forth many stories featuring two brothers, often but not necessarily twins, in conflict.³⁸ According to Raymond Kuntzmann in his work on twins in the ancient Near East

the record of a twin birth has become an element of language, a symbol, a structural component of the text. This is undoubtedly the primary function of the twin symbolism to present interchangeable characters because they are issued from the same broken unity, yet different.³⁹

³⁶ Claus Westerman, *Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament Genesis 12-36 Teil 2* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003), p. 505; Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 355. References on Jacob and Esau: Gen. 25.29-34 (Esau trades firstborn right for food); Genesis 27 (Jacob steals Esau’s blessing); Genesis 32-33 (meeting of Jacob and Esau).

³⁷ Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Law and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), p. 61.

³⁸ In the Hebrew Bible: Cain and Abel (Gen. 4 – brothers), Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25 – twins), Perez and Zerah (Gen. 38 – twins), Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 41 – brothers); in Egypt: Seth and Osiris (twins), Bata and Anubis (brothers); in Phoenicia: Ousoos and Hypsouranios (brothers); in Greece: Polyneikes and Etiokles (brothers), Kastor and Polydeukes (twins).

³⁹ Kuntzmann, *Le symbolisme des jumeaux au Proche Orient ancien*, p. 48: ‘la notice d’une naissance gémellaire est devenue un élément de langage, un symbole, un facteur structurant du texte. C’est sans doute la première fonction de la symbolique des jumeaux que de mettre en place des personnages interchangeables, parce qu’issus d’une même unité rompue, et pourtant différents’.

This assumption renders it more plausible that various devices based on repetition of consonants occur to support and highlight the meaning of the text. While the twin concept allows telling a double tale which develops on two different often opposite tracks, the above mentioned formal features underscore this by means of gemination of consonants, words and meaning.

Exodus 26 and 36

In Exod. 26.24 and 36.29 the building of the Tabernacle is described:

ויהיו תאמים מלמטה ויחדו יהיו תמים על ראשו אל הטבעת האחת
כן יהיה לשני המקצעת יהיו

והיו תואמים מלמטה ויחדו יהיו תמים אל ראשו אל הטבעת האחת
כן עשה לשניהם לשני המקצעת

Exod. 26.24 And they shall be twins from downwards and together they will be complete above the head of it into one ring; thus shall it be for them both, for the two corners they will be.

Exod. 36.29 And they shall be twins from downwards and together they will be complete to the head of it into one ring; thus he did to them both, for the two corners.

None of the passages consists of geminate forms. However, alliterations within the word boundaries as well as across occur as was the case in the Genesis fragments. The most frequently repeated consonants are ו, י, ש, ת and מ. Notice that the consonants of the twin word are among them. In the case of the ו the alliteration only works on the visual level since some of them are *matres lectionis*. Besides the twin word in a dissimilar spelling, two words differ in each half of the verses. In each half the verbs differ in aspect. The imperfect is used for the command while the execution is expressed in the perfect tense.⁴⁰ In the second half the verb היה has been replaced by a form of עשה. Other minor differences are a change in

⁴⁰ A comparable change in tense has been found in another temple building story, the bilingual 'B' inscription of Samsuiluna, king of Babylon (1749-1712 B.C.E.) (Viktor Hurowitz, 'The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle', pp. 21-30 [26-27]).

preposition and an additional suffix or verb. This feature has been called *polyprosopon* by Noegel and Rendsburg.⁴¹

Furthermore the word ‘two’ occurs once in Exodus 26, two times in Exodus 36. The twin word appears twice in each verse.

Before turning to the numerical paronomasia that occurs in the larger context of Exodus 26 and 36, I want to draw attention to a paronomasia in the verses itself. The words תאמים and תמים show such close resemblance that they are more than mere alliteration.⁴² They create an impression of etymological relationship connecting twins with completeness.⁴³ The hasty reader would mistakenly see two twins in the verses.

The numerical paronomasia occurs in the larger context. In Exod. 26.1, 26.31 and 26.36 the word שני, ‘scarlet’, is used to describe the color of the curtain of the Tabernacle.

⁴¹ Noegel and Rendsburg, *Solomon's vineyard*, pp. 108-109. The authors define the feature as a kind of polyptoton for stories in which ‘(1) the passages typically do not occur in close proximity to one another and (2) the differences frequently are in the realm of syntax, word order, and lexis (not just morphology) (p. 109).’ Two of the three pairs under discussion are mentioned by them as *polyprosopon*, i.e., the Genesis pair and the Song of Songs pair. They seem to have overlooked the remaining passages where the word תאמים is used, again as a pair, in Exodus 26 and 36.

⁴² While it is not the aim of this article to unravel the difficulties of wordplay terminology, I do want to point out the difference between alliteration and paronomasia as it adds to the argument developed. The two features are situated on the same continuum of which one end is marked by identical words and the other by completely different words. Alliteration can be considered to be closer to the latter end since more elements of the words differ compared to what is alike. Paronomasia shows more similarities than differences and situates itself closer to the identity end.

⁴³ Notice in the case of Genesis the occurrence of the following in Gen. 25.27: עשו איש ידע ציד איש שדה ויעקב איש תם, ‘and Esau was a man knowing the game, a man of the field while Jacob was complete, staying by the tents.’ Wordplay between תאמים and תם appears here as well, though more remotely than in Exodus.

Also in Exod. 36.8, 36.35, and 36.37 this word occurs. In combination with שני, 'two,' which appears in respectively Exod. 26.19, 21, and 26 and Exod. 36.24, 26 and 30 (twice), the scarlet forms a wordplay on the number 'two'. Notice that these are exactly the same words that generate the paronomasia in Genesis between the two parts of the pair. The feature in Exodus is slightly different, having the full wordplay in both parts rather than as a connection between the separate parts.

To conclude, the order of describing the building of the Tabernacle has been reversed in the second passage. Instead of going from furnishings (Exod. 25) to the structure of the Ark (Exod. 26), the actual construction starts with the structure (Exod. 36) to end with the furnishings (Exod. 37). Nahum Sarna has interpreted this in the following way:

By presenting the building of the Ark first, the former injunctions highlight the symbol of the covenant as the focal point of the entire enterprise and place it at the apex of a hierarchy of values.⁴⁴

This element of reversal reminds of the struggle of the twin brothers in Genesis who try to reverse the order of birth. In the case of Jacob and Esau, this is only realized later on in life, whereas Perez takes the lead already during birth.⁴⁵ In Exodus the reversal happens between the A and B part of the pair; in Genesis an additional reversal is located in each part of the pair, that is, one twin brother changes places with the other twin brother.

Song of Songs 4 and 7

The last pair is formed by Song 4.5 and 7.4.

⁴⁴ Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 225.

⁴⁵ Strictly speaking, the order in the Genesis pair does not change as the firstborn inevitably comes out first. However, in Gen. 25 the intended order firstborn (Esau)—second born (Jacob) remains after birth, at least for a while, whereas in Gen. 38 the intended order first (Zerah)—second (Perez) is reversed into second born (Perez)—firstborn (Zerah).

שני שדיך כשני עפרים תאומי צביה
 הרועים בשושנים
 שני שדיך כשני עפרים תאומי צביה

Song 4.5 Your two breasts are like two young deer, twins of a gazelle that graze among the lilies.
 Song 7.4 Your two breast are like two young deer, twins of a gazelle.

In ch. 4 geminate roots are used in the proximity of the twin word: in v. 5 the word שושנים, in v. 6 the word צללים. In ch. 7, the geminate roots occur in v. 3 with שררך and again שושנים. These words alliterate due to their grammatical structure. They add up to the manifold alliterations elsewhere in the verses. The first three words of both Song 4.5 and 7.4 share the consonants ש and י. Notice that the ש sound occurs in all of the geminates as well, except for one where another sibilant, the צ, is used.⁴⁶ In two cases the sibilant even is the double consonant. Furthermore as was the case in the other examples, the word ‘two’ appears here as well, twice in each verse.⁴⁷

The numerical paronomasia involving the number two is built on the words שני, ‘two’, שניך, ‘your teeth’, שני, ‘scarlet’, and שושנים, ‘lilies’.⁴⁸ In Song 4.3 the scarlet meaning is used.

⁴⁶ As noticed by Casanowicz in one of the first treatises on sound devices in the Hebrew Bible, alliteration in Hebrew goes beyond identical sounds. Also similar sounds create a connection, e.g. sibilants or voiced versus voiceless. Noegel and Rendsburg add the criterion of phonology, which eliminates Casanowicz’ alliteration of ע and ס (Casanowicz, ‘Paronomasia in the Old Testament’, pp. 105-169; Immanuel Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament* [Boston: Nowood, 1894]; Noegel and Rendsburg, *Solomon’s Vineyard*, pp. 66-7) .

⁴⁷ As noted by Francis Landy this repetition of the word שני is redundant. He concludes that ‘the tautology reinforces the duality of breasts, of twins; “two” as an underlying motif in the sentence. By an odd regress, it is reflected in the structure: a twofold repetition of two: “Your two breasts like two fawns...(Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise. Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* [Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983], pp.92-93).’

⁴⁸ Landy discusses the sound effects in these lines as ‘the strangest alliteration’ creating ‘an interesting pattern of correlation and contrast’ in the song. While his argument is built on structural correspondence between words in the verses, the current article defends a correlation beyond or perhaps despite structure. Each of the above

Also, the form of שן, 'tooth', occurring in Song 4.2 forms a numerical paronomasia with these words. The third element evoking a connection with the number two is שושנים, 'lilies', in Song 4.5. Two remarks can be made based on these observations. First, it is obvious that the linguistic possibilities to play upon the form שני and upon the theme of twinning are explored extensively in this passage, beyond what one finds in the prosaic passages of Genesis and Exodus. We can ascribe this to the genre of poetry that tends to densify language and its features.⁴⁹ Second, the passage in Song 4 shows that the paronomasia on the number two could and has been achieved with words other than שני, 'scarlet'. This makes the consistent use of the word in the six passages under discussion less of a necessity but more of a deliberate choice.

In Song 7 a shorter version of the verse in Song 4 has been repeated. The שושנים, 'lilies,' are now mentioned before instead of after the metaphor of the breasts.⁵⁰ As such the geminates, alliteration and numerical paronomasia are retained. The word שני, 'scarlet', does not occur in the passage. Instead the 'ivory tower', מגדל השן, recalls the number 'two' as well as the homophonous teeth mentioned in Song 4. Both being white—the tower and the teeth, the latter had been contrasted with the red of the lips before. As a result, though absent, the word שני, 'scarlet', is here understood as well.⁵¹

mentioned words emphasizes the idea of twinning through paronomasia and regardless their correlation with the word שני, 'two' (Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, 94-95).

⁴⁹ Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, pp. 46-57; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books: 1985), pp. 61-84.

⁵⁰ This might be an explanation for the shortening of the verse compared to the other part in the pair which has an additional הרועים בשושנים, 'that graze among the lilies'.' In light of the reversal of order it also makes sense that the lilies now precede the breasts (Murphy, *Song of Songs*, p.182; Assis, *Flashes of Fire*, p.209).

⁵¹ Such an implied paronomasia comes close to Hunt's subtle or concealed paronomasia in which a third word not mentioned connects two other words. This word is a homophone of one of the words in the text and a

As was the case in the previous examples reversal is apparent in the Song passages as well. While in Song 4 the body of the beloved is described top to bottom, this description is reversed in Song 7. The reversal only takes place between the A and B part of the pair, not among the twins in each of the parts.

Crimson Couples: The Coining of Twins and Color

It is remarkable that every time the word תּוֹאֲמִים occurs a numerical paronomasia on the number two can be found in its proximity. Even more striking is the fact that the word שְׁנִי, ‘scarlet,’ is used every time as well, notwithstanding the possibility of paronomastic alternatives such as שֵׁן, ‘tooth’, or a form of שְׁנִי, ‘different’.

The consonantal form שְׁנִי is used 205 times throughout the Hebrew Bible, of which 25 are vocalized as שְׁנִי, ‘scarlet’.⁵² Out of them eight occur in passages where the word תּוֹאֲמִים is used as well. In the remaining passages without twins in the book of Exodus and in Num. 4.8, one describes the curtains of the tabernacle as was the case in Exodus 26 and 36. The example in 2 Samuel occurs in the lament of David after Jonathan’s death. Although they are not twins, they are a famous pair willing to be joined like the beams of the Ark and the breasts of the beloved but destined to be separated by conflict like the twin brothers in Genesis. The last occurrence of שְׁנִי fits the marital metaphor that spans the first chapters of Jeremiah. The

synonym of another. In this particular example the feature is built on three homophones: the expressed שֵׁן, ‘ivory’ and שְׁנִי, ‘two’ and the suppressed שְׁנִי, ‘scarlet.’ Moreover, the ivory tower of Song 7 and the teeth of Song 4 are metonymically linked through their color. It is exactly this aspect that evokes the unmentioned color (the ‘synonymic’ part in the construction) and the homophone of the number two (Patrick Hunt, *Poetry in the Song of Songs: a Literary Analysis* [Studies in Biblical Literature 96; New York: Peter Lang, 2008], pp. 53-54).

⁵² Gen. 38.28,30; Exod. 25.4; Exod. 26.1,36; Exod. 27.16; Exod. 28.6,8,15,33; Exod. 35.6,23; Exod. 36.8,35,37; Exod. 38.18; Exod. 39.2,5,8,24,29; Num. 4.8; 2 Sam. 1.24; Jer. 4.30; Song 4.3.

adulterous wife and her beauty are spurned.⁵³ The passage shares thematic concerns with the discussed units of Song of Songs. While the latter praises the love of two people, the former forms the negative counterpart depicting a failing marriage. Again, the idea of twoness is present in the story.

Do ‘Twins’ Matter?

Summing up, all occurrences of the word תּוֹאֲמִים come along with play on the number ‘two’. The most obvious way to do so is through use of the number itself. In addition, differences and similarities in the verse and between the verse and its counterpart in the same book highlight the twoness by their occurrence in pairs. Moreover, in all verses or their close proximity geminate forms (except for the Exodus example), alliterations and (numerical) paronomasia occur. In the case of numerical paronomasia the words שְׁנִי, ‘two’, and שְׁנִי, ‘scarlet’, are used in all passages, as such combining the rare word תּוֹאֲמִים, its near synonym שְׁנִי, ‘two’, and the latter’s homophone שְׁנִי, ‘scarlet’. Thus, an affirmative answer can be given to the question of whether language matters in the biblical sections using the word תּוֹאֲמִים, since it reveals a deliberate formal accentuation of the semantics of the twin concept.

⁵³ Pete Diamond and Kathleen O’Connor, ‘Unfaithful Passions: Coding Women Coding Men in Jeremiah 2-3 (4:2)’, *BibInt* 4 (1996), pp. 288-310.