

Marriage among the ancient peoples of the East. Brief overview of wedding rituals in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Israel

Ioan-Daniel MANOLACHE¹

Abstract:

Marriage is an important event for people. Throughout history, depending on the historical period and the geographical area where it was celebrated, weddings have taken different forms, with each nation having certain peculiarities regarding marriage, but also certain common elements present in all the peoples around it. This study describes the wedding rituals of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt and Israel, and concludes with a brief comparison between these peoples, highlighting the main similarities and differences in their wedding rituals.

Keywords

Marriage, Antiquity, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel

I. Introduction

Along with birth and death, marriage has always been an important event for people. Since ancient times, it has been celebrated in the midst of the community with great pomp and joy. Historically, anthropologists say that the earliest wedding took place in Egypt, 4300 years before the birth of Christ², and there are also the earliest documented marriage customs.

Whether in Egypt, Persia, Babylon or Israel, marriage marked the moment when a woman passed from her father's property, the *Pater Familias*, into the care of a new man, who was to welcome her into his home, feed her and protect her from danger, in return for her fidelity³. Following this act, the community publicly acknowledged that a

¹ Ioan-Daniel Manolache, PhD Candidate, Doctoral School „Dumitru Stăniloae”, University of Bucharest. Contact: ioandanielmanolache@gmail.com

² Octavian GAIVAS, „Originea obiceiurilor de nuntă”, in *Philologia*, no. 1-2 (2017), p. 106.

³ Octavian GAIVAS, „Originea obiceiurilor de nuntă”, p. 106.

new family had been established in society and that the young girl was no longer waiting for a man⁴.

In general, in ancient times, the wedding had several stages. As it was a commercial exchange, mediation between the two parties was often done by a third party, so that no one would be directly offended by a refusal. We find this practice in Egypt and Mesopotamia as well as in Israel, where we know that Abraham sent one of his servants to bring a bride to Isaac, his son (*Gen 24*).

Once the desired girl was found, an agreement was concluded between the two families, a more precise marriage contract, and as a sign of seriousness a guarantee was paid by the future husband, which was both a reward offered to *Pater Familias* for raising the girl until now, and a compensation for him, for the fact that from now on she would no longer help her old family in the household, but would move to a new house, for which she would also work. This act sealed the engagement of the two young people, giving the guarantee that, in the near future, they will establish a house together.

While the state often did not get involved in the marriages of ordinary people, as this was strictly a family matter, the situation was different for royal marriages, which were often political in nature. For example, in Egypt, Ramses II was to marry the daughter of the Hittite king Hattusilis to seal a peace treaty between the Egyptians and Hittites⁵, and in Israel we recall that King Herod married a Hasmonean woman in order to consolidate his leadership⁶.

In the Ancient East, marriage was not always simply a fruit of love, but often had a political or commercial character. Through this, women received social protection and men established a home and secured their power in the community, being a win-win for both parties.

II. Marriage in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Israel

a) *Marriage in Mesopotamia*

Before describing the actual wedding in Mesopotamia, it should first be pointed out that there has never actually been a country called Mesopotamia in history, but rather this name has meant throughout antiquity a larger territory between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers⁷, inhabited by various peoples, including Sumerians, Akkadians, Chaldeans, Babylonians and Assyrians.

⁴ Matthew J. PERRY, "State and Law", in: *A Cultural History of Marriage in Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. Karen Klaiber Hersch, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, New York, 2020, p. 60.

⁵ M.J. PERRY, "State and Law", p. 60.

⁶ M.J. PERRY, "State and Law", p. 60.

⁷ Hence the name of the region: μέσος = *between*, and ποταμός = *river*.

According to *the Code of Hammurabi*, known throughout Mesopotamia, the Babylonian family ideal was monogamy, but in order to support the birth of children and indirectly the social power of the family, the man could take a second wife, who would be subject to the first wife. In some cases, the number of wives could be even greater, with the proviso that they remained in the shadow of the official wife. Otherwise, according to *the Code of Hammurabi* (art. 145, 147)⁸, they could be sold to another man. At the same time, in Assyria, polygamy was common, with the proviso that the man had only one official wife, who wore a veil over her face, the rest of the women having the status of concubines, and their number varied according to the man's wishes, provided that he could support them all and provide them with the necessities of daily life⁹. In Sumer the situation was similar, and the woman who bore a child with the master of the house, even if she was a slave, became free¹⁰.

Women's virginity was important to the ancient Mesopotamians. If the bride was not a divorced woman or a widowed woman, the groom expected her to be a virgin, and if not, she could be punished by flogging by her husband, to whom she had not been honest. To maintain social order, there is even evidence that women caught in the act of sinning were thrown into the river¹¹, which is not necessarily surprising given that fidelity was very important to Mesopotamian men. Fidelity was the foundation of the family, and marriage was a public sign that young men were committed to this way of life.

The wedding was a public family event attended by witnesses and witnessed by a wedding contract. This was absolutely obligatory and without it young people were not considered to be married, even if they lived together¹². This contract was the clearest proof of the agreement between families and the consequences of the nuptial union.

It seems that in Babylon young men concluded a pre-nuptial contract called a *zubullu*, where they stipulated the conditions of their future marriage, certainly used in the time of Ur III¹³. The girl's father had absolute power over her and could even sell her

⁸ See O. DRIMBA, *Istoria culturii și civilizației*, vol. 1, p. 90

⁹ Isaac MENDELSON, "The Family in the Ancient Near East", in *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 11, no. 2 (1948), p. 24.

¹⁰ *Code of Hammurabi*, 146; See Ovidiu DRÎMBA, *Istoria culturii și civilizației*, vol. 1, Editura Saeculum I. O. and Editura Vestala, București, 2003, pp. 89-90.

¹¹ Men, however, enjoyed a certain amount of intimate freedom as long as they did not end up raping, incest or having relations with a married woman. Lars NELSON, "When the Mesopotamian Honeymoon Ends: The Code of Hammurabi's Assumptions About the Roles of Spouses and Problem-Solving Approach to Regulating Marriage", in *The John Marshall Law Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (2013), p. 1073.

¹² M.J. PERRY, "State and Law", p. 64

¹³ Samuel GREENGUS, "Old Babylonian Marriage Ceremonies and Rites", in *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, vol. 20, 2 (1966), p. 59.

into slavery for money if he needed to, as the girl was his property. Given this status, the father conducted the negotiations with the girl's suitors and it was also he who chose his daughter's future husband.

Marriages were mostly between people of the same social level, with endogamy being preferred. In Babylon the family of the priests privileged and marriage was an attempt to preserve this status; this was affirmed by those who analysed marital contracts concluded at secular weddings in comparison with marital contracts concluded at priestly weddings¹⁴. Moreover, even among priestly families there were differentiations and it was very rare for girls from a simple priestly family to be married to boys from ruling priestly families.

In Babylon it was customary for young people to cohabit before marriage, and if the young people had children, they were to be listed in the marriage contract¹⁵. This contract in Babylon was called *Rikistum*¹⁶, in Assyria it was called *Risku*, and was not required to be in writing. It seems however that in the later period written form was preferred, as it was the easiest to prove in case of any misunderstandings. Thus quite a number of Mesopotamian nuptial contracts have survived to this day, which archaeologists have analysed over the ages, noting that the bridegrooms' inheritance and the bride price were the most important elements when the marriage was concluded; whether it was of the *Errebu* or *Terhatu* type.

Terahu marriage was the most common type of marriage, when the man took home the young woman he married. In contrast to this, in Mesopotamia there was also the *Errebu* / *Erratu* marriage, where the man stayed in the bride's house after the wedding with the girl's family and was in some way adopted by her.

Regardless of the form chosen, the marriage was preceded by the betrothal, which took place in the girl's home. The groom was obliged to prepare his sweetheart for the wedding, buy her special clothes and ornaments for the house, including food and drink, oils and incense¹⁷. In the town of Nuzi, the bride price was 30 silver¹⁸, but this could vary depending on the context. In any case, the bride price together with the wedding

¹⁴ Bastian STILL, "The Social World of the Babylonian Priest", in *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 103, Brill, Leiden, 2019, pp. 27-63, apud Caroline WAERZEGGERS, "Changing Marriage Practices in Babylonia from the Late Assyrian to the Persian Period", in *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History*, no. 2 (2020), p. 105.

¹⁵ Caroline WAERZEGGERS, "Changing Marriage Practices in Babylonia from the Late Assyrian to the Persian Period", p. 112.

¹⁶ See Samuel GREENGUS, "The Old Babylonian Marriage Contract", in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 89, no. 3 (1969), pp. 505-532.

¹⁷ See Mona EZZ ALI, "Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Egypt and Ancient Iraq (Mesopotamia): A comparative Study", in *International Journal of Heritage, Tourism and Hospitality*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2020), p. 120.

¹⁸ I. MENDELSON, "The Family in the Ancient Near East", p. 26.

gifts was not to cost more than the dowry that the bride was to receive from her father, so that the new family would have a little starting help for the new family life, including money, jewellery and even items of furniture: bed, table and chair¹⁹.

As for the wedding itself, in Mesopotamia it was celebrated religiously, with the bride and groom going together to the Temple, where they pledged their love and sang hymns in honour of love. On the morning of the wedding, the bride was ritually bathed, and in Assyria she was anointed with perfumed oils after bathing²⁰, as was the practice throughout Mesopotamia²¹. In particular, as part of this ritual, the groom poured wine on the girl's feet, showing everyone that from now on he would take care of the bride he had chosen²².

An important element of the Mesopotamian wedding was the nuptial procession²³. Whether the bride moved into her husband's house or the man was received into the bride's house, the wedding procession consisted of family and friends, accompanying the young couple to their future home. Among the bridegroom's grooms, the most important place was occupied by *the groom's friend* (in Akkadian *susapinnu*, in Summerian *nigir*)²⁴, who always sat next to the groom and had access to everything²⁵.

The most awaited moment of the wedding was the party, called *Kirrum*, where people consumed cakes and beer²⁶. Most often that night the bride and groom consummated their marriage; an act without which the wedding was considered invalid²⁷. The groom's friend would bring food, milk and drink to the bridal chamber so

¹⁹ M.J. PERRY, "State and Law", p. 65.

²⁰ S. GREENGUS, "Old Babylonian Marriage Ceremonies and Rites", p. 61.

²¹ In Summer and Assyria in particular, the anointing of brides was practised. Samuel GREENGUS, "Old Babylonian Marriage Ceremonies and Rites", in *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, vol. 20, 2 (1966), p. 72.

²² Mona EZZ ALI, "Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Egypt and Ancient Iraq (Mesopotamia): A comparative Study", p. 120. An interesting point here is that the Code of Hammurabi forbade a man to leave his wife if she was ill. See Lars NELSON, "When the Mesopotamian Honeymoon Ends: The Code of Hammurabi's Assumptions About the Roles of Spouses and Problem-Solving Approach to Regulating Marriage", in *The John Marshall Law Review*, Vol. 46, no. 4 (2013), p. 1082.

²³ M.L. SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 172.

²⁴ S. GREENGUS, "Old Babylonian Marriage Ceremonies and Rites", p. 68; Meir MALUL, "Susapinnu: The Mesopotamian Paranymp and His Role", in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 32, no. 3 (oct., 1989), pp. 241-278.

²⁵ Meir MALUL, "Susapinnu: The Mesopotamian Paranymp and His Role", pp. 254-247.

²⁶ S. GREENGUS, "Old Babylonian Marriage Ceremonies and Rites", p. 63.

²⁷ Lars NELSON, "When the Mesopotamian Honeymoon Ends: The Code of Hammurabi's Assumptions About the Roles of Spouses and Problem-Solving Approach to Regulating Marriage," in *The John Marshall Law Review*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2013), p. 1073; Meir MALUL, "Susapinnu: The Mesopotamian Paranymp and His Role", pp. 254-247.

that the newlyweds would not lack anything, resembling two kings on their wedding day. In this way the marriage fully achieved its purpose, giving the young people not just a home together, but also offspring, so that their name would live on in the community for as long as possible.

Finally, as far as marriage in Mesopotamia is concerned, we are left with the idea that it was a very important social event. The wedding was preceded by the betrothal, and on this occasion the groom (re)bought his bride with various gifts. Later, in the first phase, the wedding took place at the temple, where the bride and groom affirmed their love for each other and sang love hymns; the groom poured wine on the bride's feet to show publicly that he would take care of her from now on. Afterwards, the wedding continued at home, where the bride and groom would have a party in honour of the newlyweds, eating cakes and drinking beer. Meanwhile, the bride and groom retired to their private room, where they consummated their marriage, thus completing their nuptial union and hoping that through the birth of sons their name would live long in the world.

b) Marriage in Ancient Egypt

Surprisingly or not, arranged marriages were rarely practiced in ancient Egypt, with young people generally free to choose whom they wanted to marry²⁸. Moreover, in Egypt women were allowed to be temple priestesses and to hold public and even leadership positions in society, Cleopatra being a famous case in point²⁹. Divorce was not accompanied by public opprobrium, and pre-marital relations and abortion were not legally regulated in any way³⁰.

²⁸ On the other hand, in order to maintain political power, Egyptian royal families sometimes practised family marriages: brother-sister/father-daughter. See Russell MIDDLETON, "Brother-Sister and Father-Daughter Marriage in Ancient Egypt", in *American Sociological Review*, vol. 27, no. 5 (oct., 1962), pp. 603-611. Apparently, even Ramses II, the pharaoh who oppressed the Israelites in Egypt, married several of his daughters. See Panos D. BARDIS, "Marriage and Family Customs in Ancient Egypt: An Interdisciplinary Study: Part II", in *Social Science*, vol. 42, no. 2 (1967), p. 106. Some authors believe, however, that the marriage of pharaohs to their daughters was only a ritual, not involving sexual relations, evidence that Akethanon did not even have grandchildren. See John FRANDSEN, *Incestuous and close-kin marriage in Ancient Egypt and Persia*, Museum Tusculanum Press and CNI Publications, 2009, p. 39.

²⁹ See O. DRIMBA, *Istoria culturii si civilizatiei*, pp. 174-177.

³⁰ Joshua J. MARK, "Love, Sex, and Marriage in Ancient Egypt", 26.9.2016, article accessed online at <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/934/love-sex-and-marriage-in-ancient-egypt/>, on 6.6.2022.

Marriage among the ancient peoples of the East

The Egyptians had no special word for marriage, usually using the verb *meni*³¹, which means to anchor/found a house. Boys were married at around the age of 20 and girls at 12-13, not an exceptional event. Basically, unless it was an arranged marriage, young people could meet anywhere for the first time, in the market or on the street, and if they liked each other, they would just move in together and announce their families, without a special ceremony, sacred or profane³².

As in most Eastern countries, in Ancient Egypt, during the wedding, the two families concluded a nuptial contract, stipulating the goods that the young people were to receive from the family. For the ancient Egyptians, this dowry did not represent an actual



purchase price, but was rather a financial support for the family³³. The agreement was important and very carefully written because in most cases, if a divorce was granted – which was accepted in Egypt but not encouraged – the woman would receive one third of the estate³⁴, and in the case of a trial marriage – if after a year the marriage broke up because the two young people could not live together – then the entire dowry would revert to the girl and her family, with no further implications³⁵. Precisely for this reason, because the marriage involved economic transfers between families, we specify that this nuptial contract had to be approved by the *Jati*, i.e. by the Pharaoh's representative³⁶, in order to have some legal weight. It should also be noted that in order to keep wealth and

³¹ On Egyptian marital vocabulary see Mona EZZ ALI, "Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Egypt and Ancient Iraq (Mesopotamia): A comparative Study", in *International Journal of Heritage, Tourism and Hospitality*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2020), p. 114.

³² Mona EZZ ALI, "Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Egypt and Ancient Iraq", p. 117.

³³ Aurelia NEACȘU (alias GIDRO), *Condițiile de fond pentru încheierea căsătoriei în legislația română*, PhD thesis defended at the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Faculty of Law, under coord. Prof. Univ. Dr. Teodor Bodoașcă, Sibiu, 2016, p. 22.

³⁴ Ph. D. Robert GARLAND, "Marriage in Ancient Egypt: Egyptian Family System", 6.07.2020, accessed online: <https://www.wondriumdaily.com/marriage-in-ancient-egypt-egyptian-family-system/>, on 7.6.2022.

³⁵ Aurelia NEACȘU (alias GIDRO), *Condițiile de fond pentru încheierea căsătoriei în legislația română*, p. 22.

³⁶ Octavian GAIVAS, "Originea obiceiurilor de nuntă", in *Philologia*, no. 1-2 (2017), p. 106.

power in the family, the Egyptians practised endogamy, preferring marriage with close relatives to the detriment of strangers³⁷.

Fig. 1 – Egyptian marriage contract, Late Period, ca. 380-343 BC, now in the *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 35.4.1a, b. Public Domain, CCO³⁸.

There are documents from the Late Period, from the time of the Ptolemies, which attest that in Egypt the bridegroom offered the bride on her wedding day a gift called *sep en sehemet*³⁹. This moment was part of the Egyptian marital ritual, and was also present among neighbouring peoples.

Another marriage custom known in Egypt refers to engagement rings. These were generally woven from flowers grown in the Nile area, and their circular shape was very important to the Egyptians, signifying infinity. Young men wore them on the third finger of the left hand, believing that the vein running through this finger reached the heart⁴⁰.

The pictures painted on the pyramids suggest that the Egyptians partied at important life events⁴¹, which leads us to believe that on the wedding day there must have been a family party or at least a festive meal, but we have not found any mention or concrete description of this subject, at least so far.

The fact remains that for the ancient Egyptians, marriage was a *rite of passage* through which a woman joined her chosen man, founding a new home together. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Egyptians used the wedding ring as part of this event; an element later found among the Greeks and Romans and still used today in the marriage ritual as a sign of infinite love. There is no evidence that the ancient Egyptians celebrated their wedding with a special religious event, as archaeologists have not found any inscriptions or paintings to this effect, but we do know that the bride and groom concluded a marriage contract, first verbal and then binding in written form, officially sealing their union, together with all the rights and obligations arising from the marriage, and even stipulating how the estate would be divided in the event of divorce.

c) *Marriage in Israel*

As in Egypt and Mesopotamia, in Israel weddings were very often arranged by the parents of young people. This ritual was called *Shiddukhin* and we can see it in the Old Testament, for example in the case of Isaac, for whom Abraham sent one of his servants

³⁷ Mona EZZ ALI, "Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Egypt and Ancient Iraq (Mesopotamia): A comparative Study", p. 115.

³⁸ M.J. PERRY, "State and Law", p. 64.

³⁹ Gay ROBINS, *Woman in Ancient Egypt*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1993, p. 60.

⁴⁰ Octavian GAIVAS, "Originea obiceiuilor de nunță", p. 107.

⁴¹ Ilene SPRINGER, "Party Time in Ancient Egypt", accessed online at <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/partytime.htm>, on 11.6.2022.

to choose his bride. Other times young men chose their own future wives, as Jacob did when he fell in love with Rachel and eventually married her.

Once the bride-to-be was chosen, the wedding had two stages: *the betrothal* (*Exod* 21, 9; *Deut* 20, 7), when the man promised to marry the bride he had chosen, after which he returned home alone to prepare the wedding preparations. When everything was ready, the man would return for his beloved, as he had promised, and then the second stage, b) *the actual wedding*.

Engagement (יְדוּת – *erushin* or קִדּוּשֵׁין – *kiddushin*)

There are no clear sources from the Second Temple period on the ritual of betrothal, but rabbinic literature recalls that the proposal of marriage, once accepted by the girl's family, was celebrated with a meal in the girl's home, attended by family members, and the "blessing of the bride and groom" was recited⁴². In the Babylonian Talmud, however, we find information that on the day of the betrothal, the girl's house was open and everyone in the community came to congratulate the new couple; this tradition is probably a parallel practice to the Palestinian one⁴³.

In Israel, the engagement was based on the agreement between the two families that the young man would soon return for his beloved and take her home, establishing a new home with her. A covenant between the two families, called *Ketubbah*, was thus made, and as a sign of this agreement, the groom-to-be offered the bride-to-be a ring.

From the Old Testament we learn that if a woman sinned before the wedding, being betrothed, she could be stoned to death (*Deut* 22, 23-24), because her act was a stain on her father's honour and on the family's wealth, inasmuch as the girl was not only in the care of the master of the house, but also in his property⁴⁴, having to be ransomed by her future husband for a special price called *mohar*⁴⁵.

⁴² M.L. SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 163. In the Palestinian tradition of the Jews, this blessing contained sexual allusions, and is tempered in the Babylonian tradition, where it is mentioned only that YHWH blessed the betrothal and the nuptial chamber.

⁴³ M.L. SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 164.

⁴⁴ On woman as property of man, see Diac. Dr. Cătălin VATAMANU, "«Un bărbat și-a luat femeie...» (Deut 22, 13). Semnificații teologice ale metaforei femeii ca proprietate", in *Familia în societatea contemporană*, coord. Pr. Prof. dr. Viorel Sava and Pr. Lect. Dr. Ilie Melniciuc-Puică, Doxologia, Iași, 2011, pp. 475-231.

⁴⁵ Josephus Flavius says that a man who has slept with an un betrothed woman must pay his father 50 shekels for the damage done, and that a man who has slept with an betrothed girl may be put to death together with her, if he has consented, or alone if she has resisted, according to the law of Deuteronomy. See VEZI JOSEPH FLAVIUS, *Antichități Iudaice*, vol. 1, translated by Ion Acsan, Hasefer, București, 2000. The bride price – in the town of Nuzi, 30 silver coins (see I. MENDELSON, "The Family in the Ancient Near East", p. 26) together with the wedding gifts was not to cost more than the dowry the bride was to receive from her father, precisely so that the new

Redemption in the Old Testament was practiced both for slaves (*Deut* 7, 8) and for some relatives (*Exod* 6, 6; 15, 3)⁴⁶, being an objective way for a man to receive someone new under the roof of his house, and in the case of marriage, the suitor had to negotiate this price⁴⁷ (*Exod* 22, 16; *3 Kg* 18, 25).

The *mohar* paid by the groom was intended both to prove his esteem for the chosen one and to balance the girl's family economically, since once she left the parental home, her family was left without a helper in the household⁴⁸. In this sense, we see in the episode in which Jacob asked Rachel to marry him that his future father-in-law, Laban, asked him to work for him for seven years, in order to receive the girl he desired (*Gen* 29).

Marriage proper (יִשׁוּבִין – *nissuin*)

Between engagement and marriage there was a period of time, sometimes shorter and sometimes longer. It seems that during this period the Galileans kept their virginity holy, in contrast to the Judeans, who began their intimate life immediately after betrothal; as the *Mishnah* and *Tosefta*⁴⁹ suggest.

With regard to the wedding, in the case of virgins and widows, it took place on Tuesday or Thursday, because the Sanhedrin met on those days, and in case of a problem it could be quickly referred⁵⁰. Once the day was set, the first important moment was the *mikvah*, the bathing of the bride. She was ritually purified so that on the wedding day she herself would be a blameless gift to her husband. The young woman was then

family would have a help in their new life, including money, jewellery and including items of furniture, bed, table and chair. See Matthew J. PERRY, "State and Law", in *A Cultural History of Marriage in Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. Karen Klaiber Hersch, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, New York, 2020, p. 65.

⁴⁶ COMISIA BIBILICĂ PONTIFICALĂ, *Poporul evreu și sfintele sale Scripturi în Biblia Creștină*, second edition, translated from Italian by Sebastian Lucaciu, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice de București, București, 2020, p. 65.

⁴⁷ In Babylon she was called *Zubullu*. There are also documents from Egypt, from the Late Period, from the time of the Ptolemies, which attest that here the groom offered the bride a gift called *sep en sehemet*. See Gay ROBINS, *Woman in Ancient Egypt*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1993, p. 60.

⁴⁸ Pr.Dr.I.-L. RADU, „Te vei logodi cu mine pe vecie”. *Metafora căsătoriei lui Dumnezeu cu omul la Profetul Osea*, p. 37.

⁴⁹Some authors justify this practice by saying that at the time of Bar Kokhba's revolt the Romans practised *Jus Primae Noctis against the virgins of Judea*; or, in order that their husband should be their first husband and not another, this custom would have been allowed and practised. M.L. SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 167. On the other hand, we know that the Jews valued virginity, including a blessing for virgins called *birkat betulim*.

⁵⁰ M.L. SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 169.

dressed in special clothes, anointed with perfumed oils and prepared for the celebration⁵¹.

After the bride had prepared to leave and spent the last hours in her parents' home, the wedding procession followed. The bride, together with her loved ones, family, friends and the groom, was to leave the house where she had grown up and make her way to the home of her new husband⁵². This ceremony was a much-loved moment in Israel. The bride and groom wore special wedding clothes and crowns on their heads, and the participants carried candles or candles in their hands along the way and blessed the young⁵³; this procession often took place in the evening.

Once they were all in the groom's house, there was a big feast called a *seudat mitzvah*, with food and drink blessed by the master of the house. The wedding traditionally lasted seven days (*Gen* 29:27; *Jdg* 14:12) and there is evidence that this custom was also followed in the Second Temple period. During this feast people rejoiced, sang, recited love poems and some exegetes believe that small plays were even performed in honour of love, following the model of *the Song of Songs*⁵⁴.

In general, in the Eastern world, women covered themselves in daily life with a veil, as we see even in the scene of the encounter between Isaac and Rebecca (*Gen* 26, 65), as a sign of humility and seriousness, in contrast to prostitutes, who often walked around unveiled. Thus, the wedding was the occasion for the wrapping of the bride, called *Badekin*, which the bridegroom himself took care of, so that Jacob's mistake, who married Leah, mistaking her for Rachel, would never be repeated.

As in Mesopotamia, in Israel an important character throughout the entire wedding ritual was the groom's friend (יְשִׁיבֵי – *shosh 'vin*). He would talk to the bride before the young people got along with each other, and on the wedding night he would prepare the bridal chamber, where the bride and groom would retire and begin their intimate life, this moment being central to Jewish thought, without which the wedding was not considered completely fulfilled.

Regarding the nuptial chamber, it is called חֻפּוּת (*chuppa^h*). It is mentioned in the Old Testament by the prophet Joel (2:16), in the Psalms (18:5) and in the story of Tobit (7, 15-17), where we are told that the women prepared Sarah's bed on her wedding day. In this way, the two young people consummated their nuptial union by giving

⁵¹ M.L. SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 171; Victor H. MATTHEWS, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, Hendrickson, Peabody, 1988, p. 225.

⁵² M.L. SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, p. 170.

⁵³ Today, a set of seven blessings spoken over young people, known as *sheva brachot* or *birkot nissuin*, has been preserved.

⁵⁴ Mircea ELIADE, *Morfologia religilor*, second edition, Jurnalul literar, București, 1993, pp. 54-56.

themselves completely to each other, thus remaining together forever, and through their children carrying on their names through time.

Finally, with regard to the ancient Jewish wedding we note that it was an important event for the whole community and celebrated as such. After the wedding had been prearranged, either by the young man's family or by the future bride and groom themselves, the young man was to redeem his bride and enter into a marriage contract with his beloved's family, giving her a ring as a token of his love. This was how the betrothal took place, which took place in the girl's house, and after a certain period of time, after the groom had prepared the girl's arrival in his house, he would return after her and claim her. Then the actual wedding, *nissuin*, would take place, and among the important ritual moments of the wedding are the bathing of the bride, the dressing of the bride and groom in beautiful clothes, the wedding procession, the wedding feast, the blessing of the bride and groom and, last but not least, the retreat of the couple into the bridal chamber, henceforth forming a new family in all aspects of life.

III. Instead of conclusions: similarities and differences in wedding rituals between Mesopotamians, Egyptians and Jews

Beyond the fact that marriage has always been, for all the peoples of the world, the way in which young people established a family of their own, celebrating this event through various rituals⁵⁵, examining marriage in the ancient oriental world, especially among the Mesopotamians, Egyptians and Hebrews, we have noticed that certain practices are common to all peoples, while others are unique, in that each people is different in some way. Thus, with regard to marital rituals, in what follows we will briefly present the main similarities and differences between the Mesopotamians, Egyptians and Jews.

a) Similarities

As far as similarities are concerned, we can say that in all the cases we have analysed, the wedding is part of the so-called *rites of passage*. In concrete terms, the bride-to-be was bought by her future husband, who paid a price for her, and then passed from her father's property to that of her new husband. Depending on the culture, this price had different names, but it was always laid down in the *marriage contract*, which we find present without exception among all peoples, first in verbal form and then necessarily in written form.

In principle, marriage was celebrated in two stages among all peoples. The first was the betrothal, which took place in the bride's home and focused on the groom's promise that he would soon take her home with him, and the second stage was the actual wedding, when the young woman actually moved into her new home. Exceptionally, we

⁵⁵ Ion CĂLIMAN, *Ceremonialul riturilor de trecere*, Excelsior Art, Timișoara, 2010, p. 94.

also find cases where the man stayed in the bride's home, the groom being adopted by the bride's family, but this was not usual.

Last but not least, with regard to similarities, we have noted that in all the cultures analysed the wedding was accompanied by a feast, and an important moment in the feast was the retreat of the bride and groom to the nuptial room and the consummation of the marriage; this marked the full union of the two young people, opening their relationship to eternity through the birth of offspring to carry on their names.

b) Differences

In terms of differences, the Mesopotamians had the most developed ceremonial in terms of marriage ceremonies, singing love hymns in the presence of the gods and the community, as opposed to the Jews and Egyptians, who did not celebrate weddings in the temple, generally confining themselves to negotiation and betrothal, the wedding contract and the home feast.

While the Jews had a certain religious dimension to the wedding, with God being mentioned in the blessings pronounced by the master of the house over the bride and groom, in Egypt the wedding had exclusively social and commercial values.

Compared to the ancient Egyptians, the Jews have the ritual called *mikvah*, or the bathing of the bride, who is then dressed in special wedding clothes, just like her groom. Also, unusual compared to Egypt, in Israel and Mesopotamia a *wedding procession* was organised as part of the wedding, which took place between the bride's and groom's homes, attended by relatives, friends and acquaintances, and ended with a festive feast of food and drink. The *groom's friend* had an important place in the whole ritual, both in Israel and in Mesopotamia, but was completely absent from the Egyptian tradition.

A unique element in Egypt compared to the other two cultures analysed is the fact that here the marriage contract had to be ratified by *Jati*, the Pharaoh's representative, thus giving the marital agreement a solemn value. Beyond this, however, it seems that the Egyptian wedding was not something spectacular, but rather a natural event that every young man went through in order to establish a home and have a family.

Finally, whether we are talking about similarities or differences, about Egypt, Mesopotamia or Israel, we are left with the idea that marriage must certainly have been an important event in the ancient East, as evidenced by the ritual complexity of the wedding in each of the peoples analysed.

Bibliography

1. ***, *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2013.
2. ALEXANDRESCO, Dimitrie, *Explicațiunea teoretică și practică a dreptului civil român*, vol. VIII, Part I, Atelierele Grafice Socec&Co., București, 1916.

3. ALLEN, Troy D., *The Ancient Egyptian Family: Kinship and Social Structure*, New York, 2009.
4. BABER, Ray Erwin, *Marriage and Family Life in Ancient Egypt*, în *Social Forces*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1935), pp. 409-414.
5. BARDIS, Panos D., "Marriage and Family Customs in Ancient Egypt: An Interdisciplinary Study: Part II", în *Social Science*, Vol. 42, Nr. 2 (1967), pp. 104-119.
6. CĂLIMAN, Ion, *Ceremonialul riturilor de trecere*, Editura Excelsior Art, Timișoara, 2010.
7. COMISIA BIBLICĂ PONTIFICALĂ, *Poporul evreu și sfințele sale Scripturi în Biblia Creștină*, second edition, translated by Sebastian Lucaciu, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice de București, București, 2020.
8. DRIMBA, Ovidiu, *Istoria culturii și civilizației*, vol. I, editura Saeculum IO, București, 1997.
9. ELIADE, Mircea, *Morfologia religiilor*, second edition, Jurnalul literar, București, 1993.
10. EZZ ALI, Mona, "Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Egypt and Ancient Iraq (Mesopotamia): A comparative Study", în *International Journal of Heritage, Tourism and Hospitality* Vol. 14, no. 1 (2020), pp. 113-126.
11. FRANDBSEN, John, *Incestuous and close-kin marriage in Ancient Egypt and Persia*, Museum Tusulanum Press and CNI Publications, 2009.
12. GAIVAS, Octavian, „Originea obiceiurilor de nuntă”, în *Philologia*, nr. 1-2 (2017), pp. 105-112.
13. GENNEP, Arnold Van, *Riturile de trecere*, Polirom, Iași, 1996.
14. GREENGUS, Samuel, "Old Babylonian Marriage Ceremonies and Rites", în: *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, vol. 20, 2 (1966), pp. 55-72.
15. GREENGUS, Samuel, "The Old Babylonian Marriage Contract", în: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 89, nr. 3 (1969), pp. 505-532.
16. JOSEPH FLAVIUS, *Antichități Iudaice*, vol. 1, translated by Ion Acsan, Hasefer, București, 2000.
17. LINGURARU (căs. Bodai), Ana-Maria, *Femeia în tradiția și cultura biblică*, coord. Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Petre Semen, Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă din Iași, Iași, 2019.
18. MALUL, Meir, "Susapinnu: The Mesopotamian Paranymp and His Role", în *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 32, Nr. 3 (Oct., 1989), pp. 241-278.
19. MENDELSON, Isaac, "The Family in the Ancient Near East", în: *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 11, nr. 2 (1948), pp. 24-40.
20. MIDDLETON, Russell, "Brother-Sister and Father-Daughter Marriage in Ancient Egypt", în *American Sociological Review* Vol. 27, nr. 5 (Oct., 1962), pp. 603-611.

21. NEACȘU (alias GIDRO), Aurelia, *Condițiile de fond pentru încheierea căsătoriei în legislația română*, PhD thesis defended at the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Faculty of Law, under coord. Prof. Univ. Dr. Teodor Bodoașcă, Sibiu, 2016.

22. NELSON, Lars, "When the Mesopotamian Honeymoon Ends: The Code of Hammurabi's Assumptions About the Roles of Spouses and Problem-Solving Approach to Regulating Marriage", in *The John Marshall Law Review*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2013) pp. 1056-1088.

23. PERRY, Matthew J., "State and Law", in: *A Cultural History of Marriage in Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. Karen Klaiber Hersch, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, New York, 2020, pp. 59-76.

24. RADU, Pr. Dr. Ioan-Lucian, „*Te vei logodi cu mine pe vecie*”. *Metafora căsătoriei lui Dumnezeu cu omul la Profetul Osea*, Doxologia, Iași, 2020.

25. ROBINS, Gay, *Woman in Ancient Egypt*, Harvard University Press, Massachussetts, 1993.

26. SATLOW, Michael L., *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, Oxford, 2001.

27. STILL, Bastian, "The Social World of the Babylonian Priest", în *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 103, Brill, Leiden, 2019, pp. 27-63.

28. VATAMANU, Diac. Dr. Cătălin, „Un bărbat și-a luat femeie...» (Deut 22, 13). Semnificații teologice ale metaforei femeii ca proprietate”, in *Familia în societatea contemporană*, coord. Pr. Prof. dr. Viorel Sava and Pr. Lect. Dr. Ilie Melniciuc-Puică, Doxologia, Iași, 2011, pp. 475-231.

29. WAERZEGGERS, Caroline, "Changing Marriage Practices in Babylonia from the Late Assyrian to the Persian Period", in *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History*, no. 2 (2020), pp. 101–131.

Online Sources

1. MARK, Joshua J., "Love, Sex, and Marriage in Ancient Mesopotamia", 2014, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/688/love-sex-and-marriage-in-ancient-mesopotamia/>.

2. GARLAND, Ph. D. Robert, "Marriage in Ancient Egypt: Egyptian Family System", 2020, <https://www.wondriumdaily.com/marriage-in-ancient-egypt-egyptian-family-system/>.

3. SPRINGER, Ilene, "Party Time in Ancient Egypt", <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/partytime.htm>.