

## Love in the Garden

**The Song of Songs:  
The Honeybee in the  
Garden**, illuminations  
and commentary by  
Debra Band. (Jewish  
Publication Society, 114  
pp. \$75)

Art lovers will appreciate the 65 illuminated works in this oversized *Song of Songs*; they are richly colored and complex. Using micography, papercuts and iconography, the symmetry and symbolism are rooted in Judaism, archaeology and history.

And that's just the art! The text is printed in calligraphy; there are two translations, including a contemporary one by David Band, husband of artist-interpreter Debra Band.

Tradition attributes authorship of the 117 verses to King Solomon; scholar Robert Gordis proposed they may be wedding songs between the 9th and 6th centuries B.C.E. But there has always been controversy over the *megilla's* canonization. If one reads the pas-



sionate words of the book's two lovers—"As an apricot among the trees of the forest / so is my love among the youth"—one may well wonder why it was called "the holiest of the holy." As explanation, Debra Band gives the traditional view that sees the lovers as representing God and Israel, with each expressing love for the other.

Band's art is meant to be appreciated on many levels: The pictures depict the literal text, while her commentary is traditional. For instance, the art for "I am the rose (*havatselet*) of Sharon, the lily of the valleys" (left, from 2:1) is a tree with branches that are heavy with apricots; there are climbing roses and lilies of the valley are at the roots—all the things that remind the woman of the pleasure she finds in her lover's presence. In her interpretation, Band quotes a rabbinical source who says that *havatselet*, derived from the word that means beloved (*habiba*), shows Israel's confidence in its love from God: "said the Community of Israel: I am the one, and beloved am I."

Band's great accomplishment has been to create art—skilled, erudite and sensual—and commentary that give us the bigger picture. —Zelda Shluker