

Bathsheba: A Seductress?

A Faithful Reading of 2 Sam 11–12

by Lisa Hui



Introduction

Of all of King David's wives, Bathsheba is perhaps the most remembered. David, having had sexual intercourse with this beautiful woman in a moment of passion, unleashes a chain of disaster upon his house. While the impact of their first sexual encounter as recounted in 2 Sam 11 is indisputable, the interpretations of Bathsheba's role and her character are divergent and always controversial

For example, some commentators regard Bathsheba as a minor character or simply as an object to satisfy David's lust. Bar-Efrat

makes it plain that, in his opinion, Bathsheba plays a completely passive role in the episode. Given that her feelings are never described and that her voice is hardly heard until her conception of *the king's* child, Bar-Efrat is of the view that Bathsheba does not assume any importance in her own right.¹ In *A Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Bathsheba is portrayed as “a lovely pawn in this tragic masculine game of lust and power”.² Berlin goes so far as to state that Bathsheba is “a complete non-person. She is not even a minor character, but simply part of the plot”.³ These interpretations are disregarded in this thesis because of the way they reduce the woman's character.

Fortunately, in most interpretations Bathsheba enjoys the proper status of a person. Kam, for example, understands Bathsheba as a simple and quiet woman who is observing a religious ritual in a secluded corner of her own rooftop when seen by the king; she then has little choice but to obey a royal summons.⁴ Whybray also considers Bathsheba a victim in the affair; but, in describing her as “a good-natured, rather stupid woman who was a natural prey both to

more passionate and to cleverer men”,⁵ this male commentator risks offending rather than defending the female character. Showing genuine pity towards the female character, Garsiel concludes that Bathsheba is “a tragic figure involuntarily caught up in events”.⁶

Still there are commentators who view this female character in yet an *entirely* different manner. Klein declares that Bathsheba is the *initiator* of the sexual adventure who, in the end, succeeds in “seducing King David into ‘seducing’ her”.⁷ Similarly, Nicol perceives Bathsheba as “a clever woman, sufficiently calculating to see every political opportunity and resourceful enough to bring each opportunity to fruition”.⁸ Miller holds fast to the view that Bathsheba knows what she wants and knows how to make use of her own beauty. She allows herself to be like wax in the man's hand, beguiling him with her apparently amenable character. By appearing to be a harmless and naïve woman, she achieves her goals,

¹ Shimon BAR-EFRAT, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSup 70; SBL 17; Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1989), 118-119.

² Leland RYKEN – James C. WILHOIT – Tremper LONGMAN III, ed., “Woman, Images of”, in *A Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Illinois – Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 960.

³ Adele BERLIN, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narratives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 27.

⁴ Rose KAM, *Their Stories, Our Stories: Women of the Bible* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 126.

⁵ Roger Norman WHYBRAY, *The Succession Narrative: A Study of II Samuel 9–20; I Kings 1–2* (SBT 2nd Series 9; London: SCM, 1968), 40.

⁶ Moshe GARSIEL, “The Story of David and Bathsheba: A Different Approach”, *CBQ* 55,2 (1993): 256.

⁷ Lillian R. KLEIN, “Bathsheba Revealed”, in *Samuel and Kings*, ed. Athalya BRENNER (The Feminist Companion to the Bible, Second Series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 53.

⁸ George G. NICOL, “Bathsheba, a Clever Woman?” *ET* 99 (1988): 363. Nicol (*ibid.*, 360-361) is of the opinion that Bathsheba may have manipulated the king, first by seducing him with her naked body, then by informing him of her pregnancy. He explains all this in terms of her intention to become David's wife, which did turn out to become true in the end. Hence in his opinion, it is not entirely clear whether David is using Bathsheba or is being used by her.

employing a feminine strategy which is effective in a society under male domination.⁹

* * *

The above summary, by no means exhaustive, presenting some of the interpretations of Bathsheba, has hopefully given the reader an overview of the topic by differentiating the interpretations into three main types. The first type of interpretation does not take Bathsheba seriously as a real character, but rather treats her as an object. The second type recognizes her as a feminine character, but presents her as dull and secondary amid the masculine biblical characters. Finally, the third type of interpretation presents Bathsheba as a character of flesh and blood, yet all the more a beautiful seductress—a view which has aroused great interest and, at the same time, much controversy.

The present study is an attempt to shed some light on this controversial female character by taking a closer look at the actions she takes and the actions involving her, her words, and, if possible, her inner world—all as presented in the narrative of the adulterous affair in the *Second Book of Samuel*. This is also our rationale behind the outline of this thesis. Respecting Bathsheba as one of the leading characters in the drama, we shall keep a spotlight on her throughout our exploration. The task we set for ourselves is to determine whether a faithful reading of the MT of 2 Sam 11–12 justifies the

⁹ Gabriele MILLER, „Batseba: Eine Frau, die weiß, was sie will“, in *Zwischen Ohnmacht und Befreiung: biblische Frauengestalten*, Hrsg. Karin WALTER (Reihe Frauenforum; Freiburg: Herder, 1988), 87, 90.

interpretation of Bathsheba as a seductress. We shall take a narrative approach, addressing textual problems and the aspects of syntax and linguistics whenever necessary.

I. A Bathing Woman

וַיֵּרָא אִשָּׁה רֹחֶצֶת מֵעַל הַגֶּגֶז וְהָאִשָּׁה מְיֻבָּת מְרָאָה מְאֹד
he [David] saw a woman bathing and the woman was very beautiful”
(2 Sam 11:2). A bathing woman: this is how Bathsheba appears in this narrative for the very first time, and this is where all the controversy of her seduction originates. For this reason, in Section A of this Chapter, we will investigate the nature of her bath. Then in Section B, because Bathsheba was seen bathing from the roof of the palace, we shall discuss the function the roof plays in the narrative.

A. Nature of Her Bath

There are generally three main interpretations regarding the bath Bathsheba was taking when seen by the king. We now examine them one by one.

1. Observance to the Law of Purity?

It is difficult to determine the nature of Bathsheba’s bath by simply reading 2 Sam 11:2 אִשָּׁה רֹחֶצֶת “a woman bathing” on its own. For this reason, the act of bathing רֹחֶצֶת in v 2 has traditionally been interpreted in connection with וְהָיָא מְתַקְדָּשֶׁת מִטְּמֵאתָהּ “she was

purifying from her uncleanness”¹⁰ in v 4. This leads to the conventional conclusion that Bathsheba was bathing in observance of the monthly ablution demanded by the laws of purity.¹¹

It is worth noting, however, that the *Book of Leviticus* does not command that a woman *bathe* רחץ in response to menstruation. According to Lev 15, which deals specifically with genital discharges, the time of uncleanness brought about by menstruation lasts seven days (v 19). When a woman becomes clean from her discharge, she shall count off seven days for purification. Then on the eighth day she shall make sacrifices for her menstrual uncleanness (vv 28-30). But *no ritual bathing* after a woman’s monthly period is demanded in black and white, in contrast to the explicit command to bathe as a ritual practice for anyone who touches the menstruant’s bed or anything upon which she sits (vv 21-22; cf. also v 27).

In one of the most comprehensive studies of the *Book of Leviticus*, Milgrom asserts that “There is no mention of ablutions for the menstruant Still, all statements regarding the duration of

impurity automatically imply that it is terminated by ablutions.”¹² While the merit of Milgrom’s studies is generally acknowledged, his explanation that ablutions are “taken for granted” may not be convincing to everyone. What seems peculiar is the *persistent* absence of the command for ritual bathing for a woman with monthly or chronic discharges. On the contrary, the phrase ורחץ במים “he shall bathe in water” occurs *persistently* in Lev 15 (altogether 12 times, with some irregularities of pattern in 3 cases) for a man with gonorrhoea benign (vv 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13¹³) or seminal emission (vv 16, 18¹⁴), and as mentioned above, for anyone who touches the bed or anything upon which a woman with genital discharges sits (vv 21, 22, 27). The contrast is even more striking if we compare the closely resembling patterns of Lev 15:13-15 and 15:28-30. Hence we hold that such persistent omission of ablutions in response to female genital discharges for the woman herself cannot be explained in terms of avoidance of repetition, but rather that this omission is indeed deliberate, if not also weighty. The reason behind the omission, however, remains unclear.

Hence, we make no pretence to be able to explain the rationale behind this peculiarity. We believe, however, that we have managed

¹⁰ We shall look at this clause in more detail in the next chapter of our work.

¹¹ For example, Henry Preserved SMITH, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1904), 318; and Hans Wilhelm HERTZBERG, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1964), 310.

¹² Refer to his explanation in Jacob MILGROM, *Leviticus 1–16* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 934-935. See also *ibid.*, 667 for the explication of יטמא עד-הערב “he shall be unclean until evening” (Lev 11:24b).

¹³ Lev 15:13 reads ורחץ בשרו במים חיים “he shall bathe his body in running water”.

¹⁴ Lev 15:16 reads ורחץ במים אהכל-בשרו “he shall bathe his whole body in water” and v 18 reads ורחצו במים “they shall bathe in water”.

at least to demonstrate that the traditional interpretation of 2 Sam 11:2, which regards Bathsheba's bath as a ritual bath of purification from her menstrual uncleanness, has no support from the *Book of Leviticus*.

2. A Proactive Bath?

In their recent study, J. D'Ror Chankin-Gould and colleagues put forward the idea that Bathsheba was having a "proactive bath" when David saw her.¹⁵ Taking into account that this idea is quite inventive, it seems worth exploring it here.

Contrary to the traditional assumption, Chankin-Gould et al. uphold that in 2 Sam 11, the participles רָחַץ (v 2) and מוֹקְדֵשֶׁת (v 4) and the noun מִטְמֵאוֹתָהּ (v 4) do not denote menstrual cleansing. They translate the three Hebrew terms as "washing", "self-sanctifying" and "from her uncleanness" correspondingly. It is their discussion on "washing" which interests us here. According to their analysis, the verb רָחַץ "to wash" is found in various conjugations 77 times in the Hebrew Bible, but it is *never* associated with a woman bathing following her menstrual period.¹⁶ Thus our argument in the section above is supported by these findings.

¹⁵ J. D'Ror CHANKIN-GOULD et al., "The Sanctified 'Adulteress' and Her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba's Bath and Self-consecration in 2 Samuel 11", *JOT 32.3* (2008): 339-352. Hereafter referred to as CHANKIN-GOULD et al., "Sanctified 'Adulteress'".

¹⁶ CHANKIN-GOULD et al., "Sanctified 'Adulteress'", 342.

They categorize washing into two forms: i) reactive and ii) proactive. A reactive washing, by definition, is a reaction of washing in response to something in need of cleaning. A proactive washing, on the contrary, is not a reaction to uncleanness or impurity. Reactive washing is further divided into two subcategories: a) washing as a means of making something clean, and b) washing as a response to impurity. רָחַץ is most often employed in a reactive sense.

Concerning the washing conducted to make things clean (Subcategory i a), illustrations are readily found in the Bible: to remove dirt from one's body (Song 5:3; Ezek 16:4), to demonstrate hospitality, i.e., feet washing (Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Judg 19:21; 1 Sam 25:41; 2 Sam 11:8), to cleanse emotions (Gen 43:31; 2 Sam 12:20), and to engage in rites of animal sacrifices (Exod 29:17; 30:18-21; 40:30-32; Lev 8:21; 9:14; 16:24, 28; 2 Chr 4:6).¹⁷

As for the washing conducted in response to impurity (Subcategory i b), examples include: in the case of a leper (Lev 14:8-9; 2 Kgs 5:10), after contact with death (Deut 21:6), after eating carcasses (Lev 17:15-16¹⁸), before eating sacrificial offerings (Lev 22:4-6), a man's running issue and seed (Lev 15:2-18), and some metaphorical passages (Ps 26:6; 58:11; Song 5:12; Isa 1:16; 4:4).

¹⁷ For details, refer to CHANKIN-GOULD et al., "Sanctified 'Adulteress'", 342-343.

¹⁸ Note that the reference which reads Lev 18:15-16 in CHANKIN-GOULD et al., "Sanctified 'Adulteress'", 344 should be understood as a misprint.

Menstruation as a cause of impurity necessitates reactive washing, but only for men—not for women (Lev 15:21-27).¹⁹

Concerning proactive washing, Chankin-Gould et al. notice two unique instances of bathing performed by non-Israelite women who later become essential to the history of Israel: Pharaoh's daughter (Exod 2:5) and Ruth (Ruth 3:3). Their washing is not a reaction to any uncleanness or impurity, hence is proactive. Pharaoh's daughter bathed and found a Hebrew baby, and later became the foster of Moses, the greatest prophet in the Old Testament. Ruth bathed and encountered Boaz, and later became an ancestor of the Davidic line. The commentators, following this line of thought, suggest that Bathsheba—who they think is also probably of non-Israelite origins²⁰—follows this same pattern: bathed, was seen by David, and became the mother of the future leader of Israel, Solomon. In other words, Bathsheba's bath was not just a bath, but a proactive bath. Like the other two non-Israelite women, Bathsheba's washing signifies acceptance of God and importance to Israel.²¹

The commentators conclude that Bathsheba's bathing may be a textual signal revealing her shift from her non-Israelite origins to self-identification with Israel and the Israelite deity, and subsequently her legitimacy to become a mother of a future leader of

¹⁹ Refer to CHANKIN-GOULD et al., "Sanctified 'Adulteress'", 344-345 for the discussion of Subcategory 1 b.

²⁰ For their arguments, see CHANKIN-GOULD et al., "Sanctified 'Adulteress'", 350-351.

²¹ CHANKIN-GOULD et al., "Sanctified 'Adulteress'", 345-347.

Israel.²² While the investigation of Chankin-Gould et al. on the use of בָּטַח is quite thorough and their idea of proactive bath quite original, we find that their conclusion presses too far. What is more, while we agree that Pharaoh's daughter was really simply taking a bath when she found baby Moses, we do not think anyone would agree that Ruth washed herself "without a suggested motive", as Chankin-Gould and his colleagues claim.²³ That is to say, one of the two supporting arguments used in their proposition of the woman's proactive bath seems problematic.

3. A Trap?

Some interpret Bathsheba's bath as her means of seducing the king. Knowing that a woman's naked breasts are most irresistible to a man, Bathsheba set out to exploit King David's weakness by bathing at a place where she could easily come to his attention. Hertzberg expresses this as "the possible element of feminine flirtation".²⁴ Bathsheba was "perhaps even deliberately flaunting her naked body before him", imagines Nicol, who considers Bathsheba's bathing so close to the king's residence to have been deliberately

²² CHANKIN-GOULD et al., "Sanctified 'Adulteress'", 351.

²³ Naomi instructed Ruth to bathe and anoint herself, put on her best clothes, go down to the threshing floor, uncover Boaz's feet and lie down, and Ruth did all that her mother-in-law had instructed her (Ruth 3:3-7). The seductive motivation is crystal clear; cf. on the contrary, CHANKIN-GOULD et al., "Sanctified 'Adulteress'", 345.

²⁴ HERTZBERG, *I & II Samuel*, 309. Hertzberg puts it plain, "We must, however, ask whether Bathsheba did not count on this possibility [being seen bathing by the king]", even though he too believes that the roof of the royal palace was likely to be higher than the house of Uriah, noting already the frequent use of the notion "to go down".

provocative. He adds that even if it was really not a deliberate action, it could hardly be attributable to negligence on her part.²⁵ In a later article, Nicol maintains his argument in a tone equally strong:

If we hold that she did not intend to be seen, perhaps we ought to assume that she was terribly naive to bathe in a place so open to the roof of the royal palace and in such close proximity that she could not only be seen, but could be seen to be very beautiful.²⁶ At the very least we have to say that she took no precaution against being seen and, if that were the case, we must wonder whether it would have been normal for a city-dwelling woman of that time and culture to bathe so openly.²⁷

Mobbs has also addressed the last point quoted above. The scene of bathing, Mobbs notes, was in itself rather surprising, for Eastern women do not let themselves easily be seen bathing. The more beautiful they are the greater care they take so that no one should be *wrongly* attracted to them. (I suppose that no woman [or man] would normally like to be seen bathing. But being a Chinese woman as I am, I agree that Chinese women do take great precautions against being seen or peeped at bathing.) Mobbs thus argues, “It almost seems as

²⁵ NICOL, “Bathsheba, a Clever Woman?”, 360.

²⁶ But in fact no one can say how close the distance really was. Hertzberg (*I & II Samuel*, 310), for example, believes that David evidently saw only Bathsheba’s figure, but it was already enough to arouse his desire.

²⁷ Quoted from George G. NICOL, “The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba: Some Observations on Ambiguity in Biblical Narrative”, *JSOT* 73 (1997): 51-52. Nicol’s two articles have given much inspiration for this thesis, even though there is disagreement between Nicol’s views and ours in many instances.

though Bathsheba was not so averse to the king seeing her as she should have been.”²⁸ Mobbs gives no further comments on Bathsheba; his implication is clear enough.

Our own response to Mobbs is to commend his interest in and appreciation of the differences between Eastern and Western cultures.²⁹ His last remark, however, presupposes Bathsheba’s awareness of a voyeur at the scene. We nevertheless do not know if Bathsheba was ever aware that she was seen bathing, for no hint in this direction is provided in the text.

Architectural evidence actually attests the possibility of Bathsheba’s unawareness of being seen in the process of bathing. Disapproving the suggestion of Bathsheba’s bath as a deliberate ploy, commentators like Garsiel suppose Bathsheba was bathing either inside her house or in the unroofed inner courtyard of a typical four-room Israelite house. But since the roof of the elevated royal palace overlooked the neighbouring houses, it was possible that the king might observe life on other roofs and inside neighbouring houses.³⁰ Davidson confirms with his own personal experience that,

²⁸ G. F. MOBBS, “The Eastern Way”, *ET* 68 (1957): 211-212.

²⁹ Mobbs’ article, though it may seem a bit dated, gives a good number of insights into the Eastern way of perceiving and understanding the Old Testament. As Mobbs (“The Eastern Way”, 210) rightly asserts, “The Old Testament is essentially an Eastern Book, and the actions it records are the actions of Eastern men.”

³⁰ GARSIEL, “The Story of David and Bathsheba”, 255. Similarly, A. A. ANDERSON, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 153. For a description of the Israelite house, refer to Philip J. KING – Lawrence E.

in the present day, it is still possible for one standing at the top of the “stepped-stone structure”—which he thinks is probably the “Millo” (2 Sam 5:9)—of the City of David to overlook the dwellings in the modern village of Silwan below. He further remarks that the necessity for Uriah to “go down to his house” *וירד אל-ביתו* from the king’s palace—a notion which is repeated five times in 2 Sam 11:8-13—indicates that Uriah’s house was among those dwellings in the valley below the royal palace.³¹

More importantly, to affirm Bathsheba’s programmed seduction would necessitate two other conditions: i) that it was the king’s habit to walk around on the roof of his palace and look around late afternoons, and ii) that Bathsheba knew that this was the king’s habit, and so bathed awaiting the king’s spotting her. The narrative sequence of 2 Sam 11:2: *וירא ... ויחלהך ... ויקם ... ויהי* “and it was/happened ... and he rose ... and he walked around ... and he

saw”, nonetheless, does not reflect any habitual element.³² This is indeed an *essential* aspect which commentators who favour the view of Bathsheba’s seductive trap often fail to notice however. Reading the Hebrew text attentively, one gets the impression that David’s act of wandering³³ on the roof was rather *ad hoc*. Moreover, the verb *וירד*, the hithpael form of *הלך*, means that David was not following any particular route, nor was he aiming at any destination, he was simply walking back and forth. Therefore, as we have proved, the claim that it was Bathsheba’s intention to attract the king’s attention and to trap him by means of bathing lacks textual evidence.

* * *

Having evaluated the aforesaid different interpretations regarding the nature of Bathsheba’s bath, and basing ourselves on the text itself, we come to our conclusion. Bathsheba’s bath was not a ritual bath of purification from menstrual uncleanness. It was not a proactive bath signalling her legitimacy before the Israelite deity and

STAGER, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 28-35. According to King and Stager, recent evidence from the collapse of the roof indicates that the typical four-room pillared houses were completely roofed, including the so-called courtyard. See also Amihai MAZAR, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000–586 B.C.E.* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1990), 485-489 for the illustration under the heading “Aspects of Israelite Town Planning and Architecture: Dwellings”.

³¹ Richard M. DAVIDSON, “Did King David Rape Bathsheba? A Case Study in Narrative Theology”, *JATS* 17,2 (2006): 83-84. Brueggemann has a very vivid interpretation of the rhetorical stress created by the verb “go down”; see Walter BRUEGGEMANN, *First and Second Samuel* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: Knox, 1990), 274-275.

³² A habitual (non-punctual) narrative sequence would require *ויהי* etc. to be all continued by *wə* + (converted) perfect. To name but some examples, 1 Sam 1:1-3; 2 Kgs 3:4; Job 1:3-4; for details, refer to Thomas O. LAMBDIN, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976), §197; Paul JOÜON – T. MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, rev. English ed. (SubBib 27; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), §119v; Bruce K. WALTKE – M. O’CONNOR, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §32.2.3e.

³³ Herzfeld describes David in 1 Sam 23:13 as “a heroic wanderer” and in 2 Sam 11:2 as “a destructive wanderer”; see Shmuel HERZFELD, “David and Bat-Sheva: A Close Textual Reading”, *Milim Havivin* 1 (2005): 139. While Herzfeld’s comparison might be quite innovative, his comments about David’s choice find no support from the text. Actually David left the city of Keilah and wandered wherever he could go—hence “a heroic wanderer” in Herzfeld’s term—not on the account of the inhabitants of Keilah; rather he was afraid that they would hand him over into the hands of Saul.

her role as queen mother of the Solomonic line. It was not a seductive trap. It was simply a bath—nothing more.

B. Roof of the House

One might, of course, continue to argue about the probability of Bathsheba's seductive bath, but then would risk missing something more noteworthy: the use of the term גג "roof" in the episode.

Where function is concerned, גג "roof" is, on the one hand, a place where relatively private experiences take place, e.g., sleeping (1 Sam 9:25), solitary seclusion (Prov 21:9; cf. 25:24), and hiding (Josh 2:6, 8). On the other hand, and in fact more importantly, גג is a place where public actions transpire, e.g., burning incense and pouring libations (Jer 19:13; 32:29), mourning (Isa 15:3; Jer 48:38), and public festivals (Judg 16:27).³⁴

This Hebrew term גג occurs altogether 30 times in the Bible. The *Books of Samuel* alone have 6 occurrences.³⁵ Firstly in 1 Sam 9:25-26, Saul met with Samuel on the roof before he was appointed leader of Israel (1 Sam 10:1). As Herzfeld reminds us, while at first glance their meeting on the roof might seem to be a trivial piece of

³⁴ For details, refer to RYKEN – WILHOIT – LONGMAN III, ed., "Housetop", in *A Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 406-407; KING – STAGER, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 85.

³⁵ Exod 30:3; 37:26; Deut 22:8; Josh 2:6[2x], 8; Judg 9:51; 16:27; 1 Sam 9:25-26; 2 Sam 11:2[2x]; 16:22; 18:24; 2 Kgs 19:26; 23:12; Neh 8:16; Ps 102:8; 129:6; Prov 21:9; 25:24; Isa 15:3; 22:1; 37:27; Jer 19:13; 32:29; 48:38; Ezek 40:13[2x]; Zeph 1:5.

information, its significance becomes clear when set within the larger context of the rise and fall of the kingship of Israel.³⁶ Then we notice that גג occurs twice in 2 Sam 11:2: on the roof, David wandered; from the roof, he saw a bathing woman.³⁷ The function of the roof in 2 Sam 11 becomes manifest within the broader context of King David's story. On the roof of the house, sin began: David desired the wife of another man, which led him to later take other's wife as his wife. Again on the roof, as a punishment inflicted for David's earlier transgression, sin recurred in the person of his son: Absalom took his father's ten concubines in a tent pitched on the roof as recorded in 2 Sam 16:22.³⁸ Finally, the term גג appears for the last time in King David's story at the coming of the news of the demise of Absalom in 2 Sam 18:24.³⁹

Interestingly, David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12), which marks the turning point of David's reign from success to failure, is found in the middle of the *Second Book of Samuel*, which

³⁶ HERZFELD, "David and Bat-Sheva", 139.

³⁷ The phrase "from the roof" appears in varying positions in MT and LXX^L, but the Syrian text finds no place for it. For this reason, McCarter regards the Syrian version as representing the primitive situation, and opts to omit it in his translation. Such a conclusion, as we see it, is open to dispute; see P. Kyle MCCARTER, Jr., *II Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 277, 279. Anderson (*2 Samuel*, 150-151) keeps the phrase in his translation, while remarking that McCarter's omission is perhaps right.

³⁸ Absalom's action was a demonstration of his supplanting David as king and his asserting of authority. In fact David's concubines' being taken by Absalom had already been prophesied when Nathan confronted David (2 Sam 12:11-12).

³⁹ Absalom's rivalry with his father David and his resultant death had also been prophesied as punishment for David's sin (2 Sam 12:10-11).

contains 24 chapters. Is it a mere coincidence that David’s fall began on a roof? We are of the view that it is rather a carefully constructed chiasmic design.⁴⁰

All the above-mentioned happenings relating to the roof probably have their historical meaning, but their symbolic meaning seems more significant. We might conclude that in the *Books of Samuel*, the roof symbolizes the turning points at which kingship of Israel rises and falls. As a result, if one insists on focusing on Bathsheba’s choice to bathe where she could be spotted from a neighbouring roof, one risks failing to appreciate the significance of the roof in relation to the destiny of David’s kingship.

II. The Encounter

In this chapter, we shall analyze in detail Bathsheba’s encounter with the king as related in 2 Sam 11:4. We break down the encounter into four steps, and we discuss one step in each of the following four sections accordingly.

וּתְבוּאָה אֵלָיו “she came to him”	11:4aα	Section A
וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה “he slept with her”	11:4aβ	Section B
וְהָיָה מִתְקַדְּשָׁתָּהּ מִטְּמֵאתָהּ “she was purifying from her uncleanness”	11:4aβ	Section C
וַתָּשָׁב אֶל־בֵּיתָהּ “she returned to her house”	11:4b	Section D

A. She Came to the King וּתְבוּאָה אֵלָיו

Commentators who favour the view of Bathsheba as a seductress support their argument with her action, rendered by the phrase וּתְבוּאָה אֵלָיו “she came to him”, upon the king’s summons (11:4a).

An explication of this verbal phrase is thus necessary.

1. Textual Problem

There is a textual problem concerning this phrase וּתְבוּאָה אֵלָיו. Taking into account that Bathsheba’s action of coming to the king gives commentators grounds for accusing her of seduction and that the heart of the textual problem lies exactly in this action, we find it right to assign a separate subsection to elucidate this problem. We can then justify ourselves as regards the text we follow.

Both the MT and the Qumran manuscript 4QSam^a read וּתְבוּאָה אֵלָיו “she came to him”, whereas the LXX reads καὶ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτήν, reflecting וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ, which we translate *literally* as “he came to her” for the time being.

⁴⁰ Refer to the diagrams of “The Climactic Structure of Samuel” and discussions in Yehuda T. RADDAY, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. WELCH (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 78-83. Note that Radday includes 1 Kgs 1-2 in David’s reign.

In Van der Bergh's opinion, the LXX reading καὶ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτήν should be interpreted as "he came to her", meaning "he came to *her house*". The commentator explains that πρὸς αὐτήν is an indication of the perspective of the LXX, which presents "Bathsheba as being passive—David being the one who goes to her".⁴¹ Nevertheless the commentator himself also recognizes the difficulty of this interpretation, noticing that the verse ends with a return: εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτῆς "to *her house*", which demands Bathsheba to be the subject of the verb ἀπέστρεψεν "he/she returned" (11:4b). Since Bathsheba was the one who returned to her house afterwards, logically it must have been she who had moved, not David. Hence, the interpretation of "he came to her house" does not work; and neither does the corresponding explanation. Given that the LXX renders the verbal phrase of return as ἀπέστρεψεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτῆς, but not the expected ἀπέστρεψεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ "he returned to *his house*", the argument of attributing passivity to Bathsheba is not flawless. In short, Van der Bergh's interpretation and explanation do not seem to make much sense.

Instead of interpreting καὶ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτήν as referring to a bodily movement of going to a woman's dwelling place (Judg 4:22), we rather believe that, in 2 Sam 11:4, the Greek phrase refers to an act of cohabitation (cf. Gen 16:2). Note that this same Greek phrase

⁴¹ R. H. VAN DER BERGH, "Is Bathsheba Guilty? The Septuagint's Perspective", *JSem* 17,1 (2008): 186-187.

καὶ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτήν is used to translate אֵלַי וַתָּבֹא in Gen 29:23, 30:4⁴²; 38:2, 18; Judg 16:1; Ruth 4:13 (cf. also Gen 16:2; 38:16) to express cohabitation. Now let us compare 2 Sam 11:4 and 12:24:

11:4: καὶ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτήν καὶ ἐκοιμήθη μετ' αὐτῆς

12:24: καὶ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτήν καὶ ἐκοιμήθη μετ' αὐτῆς

They are *exactly* the same. The context of 2 Sam 12:24 compels one to understand the phrase as meaning "he *went in* to her and lay with her". We therefore have reason to believe that the LXX translator might have rendered 2 Sam 11:4 under the influence of 2 Sam 12:24.

Cross and his colleagues offer another explanation, which also seems to be reasonable. They explain that the translator of the LXX may have been influenced by the other three occurrences of third masculine singular *waw* consecutives in the immediate context of 2 Sam 11:4: וישלח ... ויקחה ... וישכב, and hence have read—erroneously?—וַתָּבֹא rather than וַיָּבֹא.⁴³

We conclude that the idea of David's going into Bathsheba as expressed by the LXX text is attributable to the influence of either 2 Sam 12:24 or the three third masculine singular *waw* consecutives in 2 Sam 11:4. In any event, the reading of אֵלַי וַתָּבֹא "she came to him" as attested by the MT and the Qumran text is to be preferred to

⁴² The Greek phrase has some slight variations in terms of conjunction: εἰσῆλθεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτήν.

⁴³ Cf. Frank Moore CROSS – Donald W. PARRY – Richard J. SALEY – Eugene ULRICH, *Qumran Cave 4. XII: 1–2 Samuel* (DJD 17; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 139; MCCARTER, *II Samuel*, 279.

וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו as reflected by the LXX reading καὶ εἰσηλθεν πρὸς αὐτήν. This provides the justification for us to follow the reading of וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו in our paper.

* * *

Having the textual problem settled, we now proceed to discuss the meaning and the function of this verbal phrase describing Bathsheba's coming to the king.

2. Mutual Participation?

Nicol contends that the phrase וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו "she came to him" suggests the sexual encounter of David and Bathsheba as one in which *both* of them played a part. He argues that despite the advantages accruing from David's position of power, there is no evidence to support Bathsheba's unwilling participation in their adulterous union. Quite the opposite, her coming to the king suggests their mutual participation in the adultery.⁴⁴

In line with this view, Klein points out that the arrival of the female sexual partner and her sexual involvement can be readily covered without the phrase "and she came to him". In this sense, such superfluous words only serve to mitigate Bathsheba's passivity.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ NICOL, "Bathsheba, a Clever Woman?", 360; cf. also *idem*, "The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba", 49-50.

⁴⁵ KLEIN, "Bathsheba Revealed", 49.

Miller asks whether Bathsheba went to the king without any scruple, wondering for whom it would be possible to resist the favour of the king.⁴⁶ Hertzberg goes even further and speaks of "the honour of having attracted the king" which, he deems, must have outweighed Bathsheba's consciousness of the danger of adultery (Deut 22:22).⁴⁷

Taking a different position, Garsiel believes Bathsheba did not know why the king called her to the palace. In his words, "Her obedience to the king is hardly a fault."⁴⁸ Similar evaluations do not appeal to commentators like Hertzberg and Miller; who would counter-argue that Bathsheba would seem exceedingly naïve had she not understood the purpose of the king's summons. Yet we are of the view that unless King David was notorious for summoning women to sleep with him—for this, nevertheless, we find no evidence, nor even a single hint in the Bible—there are no grounds for claiming that the motivation of the king's summons must have been apparent to Bathsheba.

* * *

Lest the above comments on Bathsheba's possible willingness to adultery give the impression of pure conjecture, let us now turn our attention to the linguistic aspect of the narration.

⁴⁶ MILLER, „Batseba“, 85.

⁴⁷ HERTZBERG, *I & II Samuel*, 310. He adds though, that in any case Bathsheba's feelings are all unimportant for the narrator.

⁴⁸ GARSIEL, "The Story of David and Bathsheba", 256.

3. Linguistic Evidence

Bailey points out that the verbs depicting Bathsheba's actions in v 4: ותבוא אליו "she came to him" and והשב אל-ביתה "she returned to her house" are both in the *qal* form, but not the *hiph'il* which would suggest her being "caused to act".⁴⁹ We shall explicate the first phrase here and leave the second one until a later section (Section D of this chapter).

Concerning the phrase ותבוא אליו, there is no denying ותבוא is not the causative *hiph'il* form. Yet Bailey may have failed to notice that the cause of this action actually lies right before it: וישלח דוד מלאכים ויקחה. In entering this preceding phrase as "David (then) sent messengers to fetch/get her [emphasis added]", some modern English translations⁵⁰ may give the ambiguous impression that it was the messengers who took Bathsheba. But note that, while David sent מלאכים "messengers" (plural), the following verb ויקחה "took" has a singular masculine subject. The Hebrew unambiguously indicates that it was King David himself (by means of the messengers) who took Bathsheba⁵¹ and the term לקח further makes it clear that "the primary emphasis is on the responsibility of the subject for that act".⁵² In other words, even though ותבוא is in *qal*

⁴⁹ Randall C. BAILEY, *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-12* (JSOTSup 75; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 88.

⁵⁰ For instance, *NIV*, *NJB*, *NRSV* and *TNK*.

⁵¹ I owe this observation to DAVIDSON, "Did King David Rape Bathsheba?", 88.

⁵² H. SEEBASS, "לקח *lāqah*; לקח *leqah*", *TDOT* VIII, 17.

form, Bathsheba's coming can also be regarded as caused by David's sending and taking.

When the king *sent* messengers *and took* her,⁵³ Bathsheba of course was obliged to go. Similarly in 2 Sam 11:7 we find אליו ... ויבא "he came to him". This time it is Uriah coming to David in response to the royal summons.⁵⁴ Hence the action ותבוא אליו "she came to him" was a *response* of obedience to the king's summons. It relates only her movement, without any indication, even implicit, of her feelings. Of course it is taken for granted that Bathsheba walked on her own to go to the king ... or should we expect the king's messengers to gird the woman with ropes or chains (cf. 2 Kgs 25:7 where the *hiph'il* בוא is used)?

In a nutshell, ותבוא אליו is merely a statement which describes Bathsheba's bodily movement, an act *responding* to the royal summons; it does *not* necessarily imply her *willingness* to go.

B. He Lay with Her וישכב עמה

The narration continues quickly. Right after Bathsheba's coming to the king, he lay with her וישכב עמה (11:4aα). How is their sexual intercourse interpreted? Again opinions vary.

⁵³ So *NAB* and *NASB*.

⁵⁴ It is no coincidence that the same expression is used, says Hertzberg (*I & II Samuel*, 306). Davidson ("Did King David Rape Bathsheba?", 87) maintains that both cases display reactions in obedient response to the command of the king.

1. Violence against the Husband

In 2 Sam 11:4, Nicol notices the use of the verbs “send” and “take”. These are the same verbs used in 2 Sam 3:14-15, where David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son, demanding the return of his former wife Michal whom Saul had given to another man (1 Sam 25:44). In order to comply with David’s demand, Ish-bosheth ויקחה ... וישלה “sent and took her” from Paltiel, her husband at the time. Apart from the verbal collocation, there is another point of similarity between 2 Sam 3:14-15 and 2 Sam 11:4: in each case a woman was taken from her then-husband for David’s interests. One must know that, in the ancient world, a man taking a married woman was viewed as violence against the husband, not against the wife.⁵⁵ Hence each case was considered violence against the woman’s husband.

While our modern mentality might look askance at this concept of violence against the husband, this is exactly what Prophet Nathan’s condemnation (2 Sam 12:1-12) meant in invoking the principle of “measure for measure” in the divine judgement:

... because you have despised me by *taking* the wife of Uriah the Hittite and making her your wife I will *take* your wives and give them to your neighbour⁵⁶ before your

⁵⁵ NICOL, “The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba”, 49.

⁵⁶ Hertzberg (*I & II Samuel*, 314) notes that Absalom is identified here as “your neighbour”, just as David is “your neighbour” in relation to Saul in 1 Sam 28:17.

very eyes and he shall lie with your wives under this very sun [emphasis added] (vv 10-11).

In order to make sense of the rationale of God’s judgement, it is necessary to understand the underlying principles of the Old Testament adultery laws. The criminality of the act of adultery is defined not in sexual terms, but in terms of property rights. The male adulterer is wrong, not because he has gained carnal knowledge of a woman but rather because he has availed himself of *another man’s property*.⁵⁷ A woman is but a possession of a man according to the mentality of ancient times (cf. Exod 20:17; Deut 22:22).

Returning to our discussion of the sexual intercourse in 2 Sam 11, certainly the concept of violence *against the husband* of a married woman was not unfamiliar to David. After inquiring about the identity of the beautiful woman (v 3a), it was impossible for David to be unaware of the potential danger of his passionate lust. For now he knew the woman was Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the *wife* of Uriah the Hittite (v 3b). The last designation of Bathsheba is particularly important here. Precisely, in Brueggemann’s words, “David knows who she is—and *whose* she is [emphasis added].”⁵⁸ A very beautiful woman, yet another man’s wife, Bathsheba was the

⁵⁷ See Esther FUCHS, *Sexual Politics in the Bible Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* (JSOTSup 310; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 129.

⁵⁸ BRUEGGEMANN, *First and Second Samuel*, 273.

“forbidden fruit” which David should have resisted ... but he did not.⁵⁹

In summary, according to the biblical mentality, the act of sexual intercourse between David and Bathsheba is regarded as an act of violence which David committed against Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah.

* * *

An interpretation like this of course focuses exclusively on the interests of the men. But if we place the interests of the woman first, a man’s taking of a woman against her will is all the more violence *against the woman*. Can it be regarded as a case of rape?

2. Rape?

In fact Nathan’s rebuke mentioned above provides a hint as to the nature of the first sexual relations between David and Bathsheba. As David’s concubines were later raped by Absalom (2 Sam 16:22), by applying the principle of “measure for measure”, logically we can deduce that Bathsheba was also raped by David. Nonetheless we have to admit, it is the man’s taking and *not* the woman’s being raped, which is the primary concern of the message of Nathan. Note that the verb לקח “take” is repeated 5 times in Nathan’s reprove: 2 Sam 12:4[2x], 9, 10, 11.

⁵⁹ RYKEN – WILHOIT – LONGMAN III, ed., “Bathsheba”, in *A Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 76.

From Bailey’s point of view, the wording for the sexual act in 2 Sam 11:4 וישכב עמה “he lay with her” is used to suggest that Bathsheba is here, and throughout the narrative, a willing and equal partner to the events⁶⁰ (though he does not substantiate his argument). Our own investigation found some cases of וישכב עמה and וישכב עמה in Gen 30:16; Exod 22:15; Deut 22:23; 2 Sam 12:24 where the woman may be understood as a willing sexual partner. At the same time, we also found counter-examples in Deut 22:25, 28 where the contexts clearly show that the woman is forced to have sexual relations.⁶¹ That means “he lay with her” does not *necessarily* denote the woman’s consent to intercourse. Hence Bailey’s argument of Bathsheba’s “co-partnership” does not stand up to linguistic scrutiny.

Some contrast Bathsheba’s silence with Susanna’s determined resistance of the advances of the two wicked elders (Dan 13:22-24a) and Tamar’s equally determined but vain resistance of the rape by her half-brother Amnon (2 Sam 13:12-13). It is true that there is no resistance on the part of Bathsheba. Yet we cannot take this to mean that it is her *will* to have intercourse. We should instead pose the question, who has actually *silenced* Bathsheba? In the case of the concubines’ resisting Absalom’s sexual assault (2 Sam 16:22), we

⁶⁰ BAILEY, *David in Love and War*, 88.

⁶¹ The rape cases of Dinah (Gen 34:2) and Tamar (2 Sam 13:14) are even clearer, though the phrase used is וישכב איתה. As Davidson explains, the use of the direct object איתה (איתה, not איתה) rather than the usual indirect object עמה (hence a prepositional phrase) indicates the brutality of the rape; see DAVIDSON, “Did King David Rape Bathsheba?”, 88, n 25.

never hear that they resisted; yet it would be nonsense to assume that they are willing partners in the rape which unfolds in public. Following the same argument, why should Bathsheba be considered a willing partner when it is actually the narrator who does not voice her resistance?

Exum addresses this issue when she metaphorically describes Bathsheba's treatment at the hands of the androcentric biblical narrator as "rape of Bathsheba".⁶²

[The narrator's] violation of her character consists both in depriving her of voice and in portraying her in an ambiguous light that leaves her vulnerable, not simply to assault by characters in the story but also by later commentators on the story.⁶³

Nicol, however, argues that the ease with which Bathsheba informed David of her pregnancy and later married him prohibits one from interpreting their intercourse as a case of rape.⁶⁴ His argument is not without defects, for it fails to address realistically Bathsheba's

⁶² This is in fact the whole theme of J. Cheryl Exum's "Raped by the Pen", in *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (JSOTSup 163; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 170-201. Exum's work proves itself to be a great source of inspiration for us.

⁶³ Quoted from Exum, "Raped by the Pen", 171. Holding that Bathsheba has been raped by the pen of the narrator, Exum (*ibid.*, 197) criticizes the narrator for being hypocritical. His narrative strategy allows readers to look *guiltlessly* at Bathsheba's naked body and, if one wishes, even to blame her for her nakedness, which the narrator has depicted for his own pleasure and that of other male readers.

⁶⁴ NICOL, "The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba", 53.

situation, or the situation of any woman like her. Her hands were tied; any choice she made would have been determined by the androcentric culture in which she lived. If she had not married David, she would have been obliged to lead her life as a widow—worse still, a pregnant widow, and subsequently a husbandless mother with a fatherless child. We might also ask Nicol to offer a suggestion as to how Bathsheba should have informed David of her pregnancy so that he would evaluate it as accomplished "with difficulty"? Was she supposed to be pondering over 40 days?

Even though David might not have overpowered and violated Bathsheba by mere physical brutality—as explicitly mentioned in the case of Shechem raping Dinah ויקח אהיה וישכב אהיה ויענה "he took her, lay with her and violated her" (Gen 34:2) or in the case of Amnon raping his half-sister Tamar ויענה וישכב אהיה ויחזק ממנה "he overpowered her, violated her and he lay with her" (2 Sam 13:14b)—David's intercourse with Bathsheba must be regarded an adulterous rape if it was not her will to have sexual relations with him. "Sexual extortion can take many forms, and coercion can be exerted subtly, making women feel they must agree to sex," says Exum.⁶⁵ This was very likely to be the case, given David's status as the king. Davidson terms this "power rape" which he defines as:

⁶⁵ EXUM, "Raped by the Pen", 173.

a person in a position of authority abuses that “power” to victimize a subservient and vulnerable person sexually, whether or not the victim appears to give “consent”.⁶⁶

In line with this view of power rape, Sakenfeld believes there is likelihood that Bathsheba may have wanted to say “No” but dared not. She adds:

The power differential between the king and any ordinary woman, including the wife of a foreign military officer, especially if she herself were not Israelite, would have been huge.⁶⁷

* * *

So far we have been exploring the possibility of interpreting David’s adulterous intercourse with Bathsheba as a case of rape, besides an act of violence against the husband. It is true that there is no sufficient evidence for supporting a verdict of rape; but it is equally true that there is no sufficient ground for taking *וישכב עמה* “he lay with her” in 2 Sam 11:4 as an implication of Bathsheba’s consent to intercourse. On the one hand, David is not convicted of raping Bathsheba in the sense of overpowering her by physical force; on the other hand, the possibility of a case of power rape should not

⁶⁶ DAVIDSON, “Did King David Rape Bathsheba?”, 89. Davidson’s article deals specifically with the theme of our discussion. We have already cited several references to his work so far. Although we do not agree with all the eighteen lines of evidence he proposes, his article is quite a comprehensive study.

⁶⁷ Katherine Doob SAKENFELD, *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 73. We do not know whether Bathsheba was an Israelite or a foreigner by birth. For a discussion about the origins of Bathsheba, see, for example, MCCARTER, *II Samuel*, 285; see above, note 20.

be eliminated, given the context of *the king’s* sending messengers and taking the woman.

C. She Was Purifying from Her Uncleanness

והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה

Immediately following *וישכב עמה*, we find a peculiar phrase: *והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה* (11:4aβ). Taking into consideration that this phrase has created certain exegetical problems, an examination of the syntax of this phrase is indispensable.

1. Syntactic Consideration

According to *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*,⁶⁸ the nominal clause connected by the *waw* copulative to the verbal clause describes a state contemporaneous with the principal action. Specifically in the case of 2 Sam 11:4, *והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה* (4aβ) is a circumstantial clause defining the state of Bathsheba (purifying from her uncleanness) at the time David had relations with her *וישכב עמה* (4aα). It is impossible to connect this purification with the uncleanness just brought about by the adultery (cf. Lev 15:18). In order to express anything *subsequent* to the principal action *וישכב עמה*, a finite verb, not a participle, would have been demanded. In other words, to express “*when she was purified* from her uncleanness, she returned to her house [emphasis added]” (so *NASB*), the Hebrew would have been either *והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה ותשב אל ביתה*

⁶⁸ GK, § 141e.

(consecutive imperfect) or היא התקדשה מטמאתה והיא שבה אל-ביתה (cf. Judg 18:3). Thus, as Driver points out, the *athnah* is in its right place.⁶⁹

In rendering והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה as “*though* she was still being purified after her period [emphasis added]”, the translators of *NEB* imply that David had defiled himself in disregarding even the ritual law and lying with a menstruous woman (cf. Lev 15:24; 18:19).⁷⁰ Although it is not impossible to interpret the phrase in this way,⁷¹ we agree with the common judgement of Hertzberg and McCarter that such an interpretation would be improbable.⁷² This circumstantial clause does not seem to function at underlining contradictory ideas, as we shall see in the coming section.

In short, והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה should read: Now then, she *was purifying* from her uncleanness. It functions as a circumstantial clause defining Bathsheba’s state when David lay with her (see *NAB* and *NJB*). Thus it is best interpreted as a clause in parenthesis (so *NIV* and *NRSV*) or set off by dashes (so *TNK*).

⁶⁹ For details, see S. R. DRIVER, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 289; HERTZBERG, *I & II Samuel*, 306.

⁷⁰ Pointed out by Anderson (*2 Samuel*, 153).

⁷¹ The circumstantial clause might indicate at the same time some contradictory fact; see again GK, § 141e.

⁷² HERTZBERG, *I & II Samuel*, 306; MCCARTER, *II Samuel*, 286.

2. Functions of This Clause

The parenthetic note והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה serves two main functions: i) to indicate that Bathsheba was in a state favourable for conception; and ii) to emphasize that Uriah could not have been the father of the child.⁷³ As ovulation normally takes place on the 10th–14th day after the onset of menstruation, a woman is ripe for new life at the time of purification, which takes place on the 8th day after she becomes clean from her discharge (Lev 15:28-29) which normally lasts 3–5 days. Already in ancient experience, there was evidence that people were aware of the relationship between the menstrual cycle and the propitious time for conception. According to the ancient testimony cited by McCarter, if pregnancy is desired, the optimal time for intercourse with a woman is “when she is cleansed from her impurity”.⁷⁴

Davidson, following Sternberg’s opinion, considers this clause והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה in 2 Sam 11:4 as a flashback to Bathsheba’s bathing in verse 2.⁷⁵ By interrupting the whole string of verbal forms (waw consecutives + imperfect), the nominal clause (with the participle) breaks the otherwise chronological line of development in

⁷³ So, HERTZBERG, *I & II Samuel*, 310; MCCARTER, *II Samuel*, 286; ANDERSON, *2 Samuel*, 153.

⁷⁴ MCCARTER, *II Samuel*, 286. The *Talmud* also attests that intercourse as close to the onset of a woman’s period as possible has the best chance of resulting in pregnancy (*Nid* 31b); refer to Michael WEINER – Hillel DANZIGER – Zev EINHORN, ed., *Talmud Bavli. DXXI: Tractate Niddah. I* (The ArtScroll Series; Mesorah Publications, 1996).

⁷⁵ However, this connection between menstrual purification and bathing, as already demonstrated in Chapter I of our paper, finds no support in the *Book of Leviticus*.

the narrative. Thus a “literal gap”⁷⁶ has been created here in verse 4. The audience is naturally prompted to wonder if the text is trying to show that David, despite having slept with another man’s wife, did not transgress the laws of menstrual purity. Only with the announcement of Bathsheba’s pregnancy in verse 5, is the gap filled in, causing the relevance of the clause to emerge.⁷⁷ Quoting Sternberg:

... what was previously taken as an objective and impartial recording of external facts now turns into a covert indictment. Even more ironic, the very detail that might at first have been interpreted as the sole meritorious feature of David’s act (“and he did not transgress the laws of menstrual purity”) twists around to condemn him.⁷⁸

For Nicol, who is convinced that the phrase “she came to him and he lay with her” (11:4a) suggests mutual participation of Bathsheba and David in the adultery, the circumstantial clause “והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה” (11:4aβ)

⁷⁶ See Jean Louis SKA, *“Our Fathers Have Told Us”*: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives (SubBib 13; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 8-9.

⁷⁷ For details, see Meir STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 198-199; DAVIDSON, “Did King David Rape Bathsheba?”, 84-85.

⁷⁸ STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 198.

further insinuates that “Bathsheba would certainly have had reason to suspect the likely outcome of their adultery”.⁷⁹

Bailey points the finger not only at Bathsheba but at David as well. Perceiving the ultimate aim of the David-Bathsheba affair as a “political marriage”, Bailey contends that both the actors in fact knew the probable consequences of their deed. Accordingly, the insertion of the clause “והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה” after the statement of intercourse implies that pregnancy was in truth the desired outcome.⁸⁰ The shortcoming of this interpretation, and indeed of the whole proposition of “political marriage”, is that it is then difficult to explain why David had to try so hard to bring Uriah home, hoping to conceal the adulterous pregnancy (2 Sam 11:6-14).

* * *

Guarding against too much speculation over the motivation behind the sexual intercourse, we find it better to stick to what can be deduced from the objective facts offered in the text. Bathsheba’s

⁷⁹ NICOL, “The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba”, 50; similarly, his “Bathsheba, a Clever Woman?”, 363, n 2. So convinced of the cunning character of Bathsheba is he that Nicol raises an interesting question about what constitutes power: David’s position as the king or Bathsheba’s as one who came to his bed knowing that she was likely to be fertile? Here the narrator shares with the audience information which must be available to Bathsheba, but may or may not be available to David. The extreme measures King David later took trying to cover up the adultery reveals that Bathsheba probably had not informed him about her bodily condition. Although generally speaking, we do not agree with Nicol’s standpoint, we admit that he makes a good observation here as regards the information made available in the narration.

⁸⁰ BAILEY, *David in Love and War*, 88; see pp. 87-90 for his argument on “political marriage”.

purifying herself from menstruating is a literary signal to the audience which indicates that the intercourse took place at a time when she was in a fertile state. At the same time, it nails down David's paternity of the child to be born.

D. She Returned to Her House ותשב אל-ביתה

The scene of adultery finishes with the phrase ותשב אל-ביתה "she returned to her house" (11:4b). A closer look at this act of returning might help determine the role of this female character in the event of adultery.

In Section A of the present chapter, we mentioned Bailey's judgement that the *qal* forms (but not *hiph'il*) of the two actions performed by Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11:4 indicate that she was not "caused to act".⁸¹ His argument does seem fitting with respect to Bathsheba's act of returning to her house.

Unlike ותבוא אליו, which we have discussed earlier, ותשב אל-ביתה was *not* a response to the king's command—there was *no royal command* this time. Bathsheba returned home *on her own initiative*. Had this not been the case, we would expect the text to have read something like "David sent her and she returned to her house" or "David sent her back to her house" (cf. 2 Sam 13:15-17). Bathsheba acted on her own initiative, without being commanded.

⁸¹ Refer again to BAILEY, *David in Love and War*, 88.

Garsiel understands this move on Bathsheba's part as her desire to return to her own home, signifying her status as the wife of Uriah.⁸²

One might charge Garsiel with excessive reading between the lines in his search for a clue to the desire that motivated Bathsheba's action. But if it is true that Bathsheba took the initiative to return to her house, Garsiel's interpretation is well grounded.

Bathsheba's returning to her house on her own initiative is in stark contrast with the formulation "David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him" (11:4aα), and even more so with 2 Sam 13:15-17 where we see Amnon ruthlessly drive Tamar out of his house after raping her. After having his passion gratified, David would naturally have wanted to get rid of the woman by sending her home, because—and especially because—he knew she was a married woman. If this had been the picture in the narrator's mind, he would not have hesitated to repeat the verb "send" and say "David sent her home". Still it is possible, if one wishes, to explain the absence of the king's sending in terms of the narrative technique of "ellipsis".⁸³ But in view of the narrator's peculiar fondness for the verb שלח (as we shall see in the next chapter of our paper), we have sound reason to interpret the absence of a royal command sending Bathsheba home as the narrator's deliberate formulation. That is to say, the narrator wishes to indicate that Bathsheba was *not sent home* by the king; she returned to her house *on her own initiative*.

⁸² GARSIEL, "The Story of David and Bathsheba", 256.

⁸³ For the definition and functions of an "ellipsis" in narratives, refer to SKA, "Our Fathers Have Told Us", 12-14.

* * *

In this Chapter II, we analysed in a stepwise manner Bathsheba's encounter with the king as narrated in 2 Sam 11:4. Let us summarize the main points of this chapter:

- i) The result of textual criticism justifies our decision to follow the MT reading **וַתְּבוֹא אֵלָיו** in preference to the LXX reading *καὶ εἰσηλθεν πρὸς αὐτήν*.
- ii) Bathsheba's act of going to the king ought to be understood as a response to David's sending and taking, and not an expression of her willingness to go.
- iii) David's lying with Bathsheba is clearly violence against the husband. It is probably also violence against the woman in the form of power rape, if not actually a rape case, despite there being no expression of resistance on Bathsheba's part.
- iv) **וְהָיָה מִתְקַדְּשָׁת מִטְּמֵאָהּ** is a parenthetical remark, of which the functions are to signal Bathsheba's fertile state and David's paternity.
- v) The deliberate absence of royal command in the instance of Bathsheba's returning home makes it clear that it was an act of Bathsheba's own initiative.

As far as David was concerned, the liaison with this woman was apparently over after she returned to her house. But beyond his expectation, soon there came the shocking news of the woman's pregnancy, a message of "far-reaching consequences which

influenced many lives and, perhaps, altered the course of Israelite history".⁸⁴

III. She Sent Word to David **וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתַּגֵּד לְדָוִד**

Bathsheba sent word to the king about her pregnancy (2 Sam 11:5). This is the only time we hear Bathsheba speak in the episode, and also in the whole David-Bathsheba affair recorded in the *Second Book of Samuel*.

A. Syntactic Consideration of **הָרָה אֲנִי**

The crucial importance of this message of Bathsheba's pregnancy is reflected in the way the narrator announces it. We thus find it necessary to first of all look at the syntax of the Hebrew clause **הָרָה אֲנִי** "I am pregnant".

In examining the literary features of the Hebrew text of 2 Sam 11, Fischer notices that in verses 2–5, every verse is composed of a series of verbal clauses and ends with a nominal clause.⁸⁵ But there is something special about the nominal clause in verse 5 as attested

⁸⁴ ANDERSON, *2 Samuel*, 154.

⁸⁵ Refer to Alexander FISCHER, „David und Batscha: Ein literarkritischer und motivgeschichtlicher Beitrag zu II Sam 11“, *ZAW* 101,1 (1989): 51. Strictly speaking, verse 4 does not follow this pattern, as the nominal clause is found not in the end but only towards the end.

in the reading of the MT.⁸⁶ The predicate הרה precedes the subject pronoun אנכי, resulting in an alternation of the usual word order (אנכי הרה⁸⁷). This change from the normal order in the MT should be considered intentional. It is justified by the fact that the predicate in this case excites more interest than does the subject pronoun (which clearly refers to Bathsheba). The formulation of this phrase הרה אנכי interrupts the dynamic of the narration and intensifies the tension, thus sharpening the heart of the message: Bathsheba's pregnancy,⁸⁸ the emergence of which constitutes the climax of the drama.

B. Force of Her Word

We have heard no sound from Bathsheba before or during the sexual encounter. However, once she speaks—we may say it is her womb that “speaks”—her word הרה אנכי “I am pregnant” constitutes

⁸⁶ Also LXX^L, *Vetus Latina*, Targum, and the Syriac version; cf. CROSS et al., *Qumran Cave 4*, 139; MCCARTER, *II Samuel*, 280.

⁸⁷ So the Qumran manuscript and the translation reflected in various versions of the LXX. 4QSam^a reads הרה אנכי הרה [הנה], in which הנה is regarded a highly probable reading. The word order הנה אנכי הרה (אנכי הרה) in 4QSam^a can be explained as demanded by the presence of הנה, which accentuates the independent pronoun immediately following it. Cross and his colleagues presume the MT to have lost הנה by haplography and hence suggest that the reading of 4QSam^a is preferable; see CROSS et al., *Qumran Cave 4*, 139; MCCARTER, *II Samuel*, 280. The LXX reads ἐγὼ εἶμι ἐν γαστρὶ ἐξῶ. This means the LXX probably had the same Hebrew *Vorlage* on which the Qumran text was based. We notice that the LXX tends to render אנכי or אני as ἐγὼ εἶμι (instead of simply ἐγὼ) despite the presence of a verb in indicative form in the predicate of the sentence which has ἐγὼ as the subject. To name but some examples from the *Books of Reigns*, 2 Rgns 12:7; 15:28; 20:17; 24:17; 3 Rgns 2:2; 4 Rgns 4:13; 10:9; 22:20.

⁸⁸ FISCHER, „David und Batseba“, 51. See also GK, § 141n for the discussion of the noun-clause.

the very first direct speech in the entire narrative.⁸⁹ Direct speech signifies not only the importance of the contents, but also that of the speaker.⁹⁰ What is more, the addressee of Bathsheba's direct speech is not just anybody, but the king. Therefore even though Bathsheba speaks only once and very little in the narrative, her speech is of indisputable gravity.

Opinions differ with regard to how to interpret the force of her message. From Brueggemann's viewpoint, Bathsheba “makes no demand or threat. Her words say enough and say it all”.

⁸⁹ As for 2 Sam 11:3, הלוֹא־זֹאת בַּת־שֶׁבַע בַּת־אֱלִיָּאם אִשְׁתׁ אֲרִיָּה הַחִתִּי, “Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” Bailey (*David in Love and War*, 85) advances a view different from the one generally accepted. He maintains that these words are not to be considered a direct speech from an anonymous speaker answering David's inquiry; they are in fact David's own speculation. The structure of verse 3 shows that there is no other subject introduced in the verse, and there is no use of the preposition ל to indicate that David has become the indirect object of the verb ויאמר. Thus, syntactically it appears that all three verbs ויאמר ... ויודע ... וישלח have David as the subject. Where formality is concerned, one would not expect a response to *the king's* inquiry to consist of a speculation. We find Bailey's argument justified and we accept it. To further support this argument, while an “interior monologue” is usually signalled by the use of אמר together with the expression “to one's heart” (Gen 8:21; 17:17; 27:41; Deut 7:17; 8:17; 9:4; 18:21; 1 Sam 27:1; 1 Kgs 12:26; Isa 14:13; 47:8, 10b; 49:21; Jer 5:24; 13:22; Hos 7:2; Obad 1:3; Zeph 1:12; 2:15; Zech 12:5; Ps 4:5; 10:6, 11, 13; 14:1; 35:25; 53:2; 74:8; Eccl 2:1, 15; 3:17, 18; Esth 6:6) or “to oneself” (Gen 18:12), it is not a must. Sometimes the verb אמר alone can be translated as “to think” or “to say to oneself” (examples include: Gen 6:7; 20:11aβ; 26:9b; 28:16-17; 38:11aβ; 44:28; Exod 2:14b; 3:3; Num 24:11; Judg 2:20; 15:2; 1 Sam 20:26; 2 Sam 5:6bβ; 12:22b; 2 Kgs 5:11; Isa 47:10a, Jer 3:7, 19; Ps 139:11; Job 1:5; 29:18; Ruth 4:4a; Lam 3:18); cf. SKA, “*Our Fathers Have Told Us*”, 68; BDB, s.v. “אמר”; HALOT, s.v. “אמר”.

⁹⁰ The most obvious example is the use of אמר יהוה (which occurs more than 400 times in the Hebrew Bible) to indicate direct speech in the proclamation of the word of the Lord.

Brueggemann regards Bathsheba's utterance as something truly simple on the part of the speaker, yet her mere two words (הרה אנוכי) are enough to shatter David and his world, and to nullify completely his royal power.⁹¹ Exum's interpretation goes a bit further. Once Bathsheba's body "speaks", she immediately demonstrates command of the situation, because conception gives her voice and power, even power beyond that of the king. "The king must act because he cannot ignore the witness her body provides against him."⁹² This might be the reason why a woman's ability to conceive and bear was considered her most powerful quality in ancient times,⁹³ and still could be, if a woman knew how to harness it.

For those who perceive Bathsheba as a seductress, the force of her word was so threatening to David that it turned out to be a destructive force:

She is required *only* to inform David that she is pregnant to involve him fully in her predicament and to set in motion the powerful chain of events that follows [emphasis added].⁹⁴

By saying this, it is clear that Nicol holds Bathsheba responsible for the disastrous events which ensue, and this commentator certainly

⁹¹ BRUEGGEMANN, *First and Second Samuel*, 274.

⁹² EXUM, "Raped by the Pen", 190-191. Exum continues, "Earlier the female body was exposed to David's voyeuristic gaze; now he risks exposure by that same body because it makes visible a crime that otherwise would have remained hidden."

⁹³ According to RYKEN - WILHOIT - LONGMAN III, ed., "Mother, Motherhood", in *A Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 571.

⁹⁴ NICOL, "The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba", 50.

does not appreciate the manner in which Bathsheba conveyed her message to the king.

C. Too Bold a Step?

Some commentators tend to blame Bathsheba for taking too bold a step in sending a message to the king. Nicol writes in his earlier article, "Bathsheba is hardly reticent in informing the king of her pregnancy".⁹⁵ Bailey says there is no indication of distress on the part of Bathsheba once she learns of her pregnancy.⁹⁶ Klein brings forth the accusation of Bathsheba's bold step in a more elaborate manner. Even though readers cannot discern the tone Bathsheba uses, one can still notice the directness and even boldness of her words. There is not any trace of "hedging or apology or humble appeal to the king". Klein contends that these are not the words of an intimidated woman—supposing that the subordinate woman was intimidated by the power of the king to commit adultery.⁹⁷ It really surprises us how much these commentators can read between the lines. It seems as though they could even see the *unexpressed* facial expressions of the characters in a mime performance.

On the other hand, we must ask: if it was never Bathsheba's desire to get pregnant by the king, to whom could she turn in such a

⁹⁵ NICOL, "Bathsheba, a Clever Woman?", 360.

⁹⁶ BAILEY, *David in Love and War*, 88.

⁹⁷ KLEIN, "Bathsheba Revealed", 51.

desperate situation, if not to the king?⁹⁸ Was she supposed to have sent the news of pregnancy to her husband?

Commentators question why Bathsheba sent the king a message instead of going to speak to him in person. It would have been a different story then, Bailey says.⁹⁹ One must never forget, however, that it is the king who is in question. We do not expect anyone to be able to go directly to the palace to see the king whenever he or she wants. Furthermore, we might speculate that it might have aroused even more attention had Bathsheba gone in person. In any event, it is not the narrator's concern to judge whether or not Bathsheba was taking too bold a step in sending word to the king. We are convinced that the narrator employs the verb *שלח* on purpose, as we shall demonstrate in the following section.

D. Linguistic Consideration of *שלח*

Reading 2 Sam 11–12 closely, one might be intrigued to find that the verb *שלח* (in different forms) actually occurs 15 times in these two chapters alone,¹⁰⁰ indicating the narrator's special fondness for this term.

Seven of these 15 occurrences of *שלח* (that is almost half of the occurrences) refer to David as the subject (11:1, 3, 4, 6, 12, 14, 27);

⁹⁸ As Smith (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 317) puts it, “She relied upon the king to find a way out of the difficulty.”

⁹⁹ BAILEY, *David in Love and War*, 86.

¹⁰⁰ 11:1, 3, 4, 5, 6[3x], 12, 14, 18, 22, 27; 12:1, 25, 27.

added to this is an imperative *שלח* used in the royal command (11:6).¹⁰¹ Four occurrences refer to Joab as the subject (11:6, 18, 22; 12:27), two to the Lord as the subject (12:1, 25), and once to Bathsheba as the subject (11:5). Where the direct objects of sending (usually marked by *את*) are concerned, they include (in order of appearance in the narration): Joab, the servants, all Israel (meaning the army), messengers, Bathsheba (sent for), word, Uriah, a letter, and Nathan.

Exum vividly depicts David as the one “exercising power, controlling people’s movements like pawns on a chessboard” throughout the narrative: He sends Joab and the army of Israel; he sends messengers and takes Bathsheba; he sends word to Joab to send him Uriah; he sends Uriah’s execution letter to Joab by Uriah’s own hand, and so on. But then “the speaking body” of the pregnant Bathsheba gives her power, enabling the female character, not only the king, to send word—and she sends it to *the king*.¹⁰² Similarly, as Bailey puts it, empowered by the voice of her womb, the mother-to-be now has the authority to send a message to the king, who, until now, is the only one who has been repeatedly exercising this power. But taking a step further, Bailey places Bathsheba among the other women within the Deuteronomistic History who are the subject of the verb *והשלח*, namely Rabab (Josh 2:21), Deborah (Judg

¹⁰¹ The imperative further stresses the weight of this verb *שלח*. Note that the verb appears 3 times in this single verse 11:6.

¹⁰² EXUM’s “Raped by the Pen”, 190.

4:6), Delilah (Judg 16:18) and Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:2; 21:8). He then arrives at the conclusion that Bathsheba, like the other powerful and/or devious women cited, is the “prime mover”.¹⁰³ Nicol says Bathsheba’s pregnancy brings about a shift in the balance of power. Her pregnancy, which was once her weakness, has now become her strength.¹⁰⁴ This has enabled her to send word with an authority equal to that of the king when he sent for her.¹⁰⁵

For the above commentators, Bathsheba’s act of sending a message to David is a bold act, an apparent assertion of power. But we find this argument questionable. Compare verses 5 and 18 of 2 Sam 11. There is a very similar pattern: והשלח ותגר לדרור “she sent [word] and told David” (v 5) and וישלח יואב ויגר לדרור “Joab sent [word] and told David” (v 18). If Bathsheba’s act of sending word to the king were an act by which she asserted authority, then the same conclusion should be applied also to Joab. But the context of Joab’s execution of the king’s command (vv 16-17) and his report to the king (vv 18-21) undoubtedly proves such a conclusion invalid, unless of course one understands Joab’s sending word to David to be an assertion of his authority in front of *the king*.

By now we hope we have clarified the nature of this act of sending. Bathsheba’s sending word to the king should not be understood as an act of assertion of power on her part. The use of the

¹⁰³ See BAILEY, *David in Love and War*, 86.

¹⁰⁴ NICOL, “The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba”, 50.

¹⁰⁵ NICOL, “The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba”, 53.

verb שלח is actually a linguistic device employed by the narrator to create cohesiveness in his narration.

E. “The Story about Messengers”

Dorn gives quite a unique interpretation of the story of David and Bathsheba. It is a story about messengers going back and forth between the king and other people.¹⁰⁶

First of all, Dorn asserts that המלאכים in 2 Sam 11:1 as attested by the MT should be rendered “messengers”. The common Hebrew script of “kings” should instead read המלכים.¹⁰⁷ In Dorn’s opinion, the MT reading is not a scribal error, but a manifestation of the author’s skill as a story-teller. The term “messengers” appears as early as the very first verse: ויהי לחשובת השנה לעת צאת המלאכים, which Dorn translates as “And it was at the turning of the year, at the time of the going-out of *messengers*.” This same term then appears in singular form in 11:19, 22, 23, 25 and in plural form in 11:1, 4; 12:27. The king sends and receives messages in 11:3, 4, 5, 6, 14, 18-24, 25, 27; 12:1, 25, 27. Because the term “messenger(s)” occurs so frequently in the narrative, and the story involves so many

¹⁰⁶ Refer to Louis O. DORN, “Untranslatable Features in the David and Bathsheba Story (2 Samuel 11–12)”, *BT* 50,4 (1999): 409-410.

¹⁰⁷ The common translations follow the reading of some 40 manuscripts—which read המלכים—and the versions of the LXX, *Vetus Latina* (no. 115, 117, 93, 94), Targum, Vulgate, and 1 Chr 20:1. But Smith prefers the reading המלאכים; cf. SMITH, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 317-318. See also DRIVER, *Notes on the Hebrew Text*, 289; MCCARTER, *II Samuel*, 279.

messages, Dorn suggests labelling 2 Sam 11–12 “The Story about Messengers”. He even makes a sarcastic yet fitting remark about King David:

All the occurrences in chapter 11 relate to his sin of adultery as he sent and received messages related to it, yet somehow this foolish king seems to think he has a secret.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless the weakness of Dorn’s proposal may be that it pays no attention to the verb “send” which, as we have already demonstrated, also plays a crucial function in the narrative. In our opinion, the two terms “send” and “messenger(s)” work hand in hand. Accordingly, we offer the following suggestion to modify Dorn’s proposal, making it “The Story about Sending Messengers”.

* * *

After sending the message to the king (11:5), Bathsheba disappears completely from the narrative, while David in the meantime attempts to conceal their adultery. When all his attempts of concealment fail, he plots the death of Uriah (vv 6-25). Bathsheba reappears only at the announcement of her husband’s death (v 26) and her marriage to the king (v 27). Nicol concludes that “the outcome might not have been entirely alien to her intention”.¹⁰⁹ By “her intention”, Nicol means her manipulation of the king. Once again, this brings us back to the theme of seduction.

¹⁰⁸ DORN, “Untranslatable Features”, 409-410.

¹⁰⁹ NICOL, “Bathsheba, a Clever Woman?”, 360.

But in order to answer the question whether Bathsheba is a seductress, we need to know about her feelings and motives. So now let us try to penetrate the inner world of the character.

IV. Bathsheba’s Inner World

No sooner have we started our attempt to speak of Bathsheba’s inner world than we find ourselves confronted by what may seem an insurmountable obstacle. Even a casual reader cannot fail to notice the narrator’s remarkable silence regarding the sensations, thoughts and motives of the female character in the David-Bathsheba story,¹¹⁰ even though powerful and deep emotions actually play a crucial role in it.¹¹¹ At most, we have managed to identify only two occasions where feelings might be ascribed to Bathsheba: first when she mourned for her husband (11:26) and then at the death of her child (12:24). We shall start with the less complicated issue, looking first at the scene of the child’s death.

¹¹⁰ As Hertzberg (*I & II Samuel*, 310) sees it, all this is unimportant for the biblical narrator.

¹¹¹ Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art in the Bible*, 22) lists a few examples: How did Bathsheba feel towards David? What did she think when she was summoned to appear before the king? What was her reaction when she discovered that she was pregnant by the king? STERNBERG’s *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* has one of the most comprehensive and inspiring discussions on the inner worlds of David and Uriah (but that of Bathsheba is missing). See especially Chapter 6: Gaps, Ambiguity and the Reading Process.

A. She Grieved for Her Child?

There is no text explicitly mentioning Bathsheba's grief at the death of the child born of the adulterous union. It might be said to have been hinted at only indirectly in the following text: "then David consoled his wife Bathsheba" (12:24a).¹¹²

While the passages which describe David's fasting and weeping before the child's death and his reaction to the news of his demise are long (12:16-23), it seems strange that we hear *nothing at all* about the feelings or reaction of Bathsheba *who also* has lost her child. Nicol therefore argues that the narrator's noticeable silence concerning Bathsheba's reaction and his reticence to explore the mother's grief may suggest that Bathsheba, in her marriage to the king, has already gained what she wanted and thus now cares little about the life or death of one child.¹¹³

We feel impelled to say, however, we find Nicol's comments both biased and illogical. Bathsheba grieves for the child beyond any doubt, for it is a mother's nature. Besides, the status of a woman in Hebrew society rests heavily on her children, sons in particular.¹¹⁴ If

¹¹² Noted by Berlin (*Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narratives*, 27).

¹¹³ NICOL, "Bathsheba, a Clever Woman?", 361.

¹¹⁴ In the Bible, a fertile woman is an image of God's blessedness of life; a barrenness in a woman, on the contrary, is regarded as a consequence of sin: she is punished by having her womb closed by God. In other words, a barren wife is an object of shame, e.g., Sarah (Gen 11:30; 16:1-6), Rebecca (Gen 25:21), Rachel (Gen 29:31-30:24), the classic case of Hannah (1 Sam 1:1-11), and Elizabeth (Luke 1:25). In wisdom literature, one of the four which are never satisfied is the barren womb (Prov 30:16). To have a barren

her son dies, we take for granted that the mother is grieved. In the case of Bathsheba, David did not lie with her again until after the death of the infant (12:24aβ). Whether or not Bathsheba had already borne Uriah any child, we have no idea.¹¹⁵ But unquestionably the infant conceived by the adulterous union was the *only* child she had with David by that time, and it was a son. That implies that the new-born son was not only a symbol of God's blessing for her as a mother, but more importantly, he was an offspring of the Davidic dynasty. If we believe Nicol and presume that Bathsheba's sole concern was to become the wife of the king, then she would have grieved *all the more* at losing the king's son, who would secure her status in the harem. We cannot assume that Bathsheba foresaw that she would bear David another child—the future Solomon (12:24a).

Still, one might wonder, why is there not a single word about Bathsheba's grief? A possible answer is that the narrator does not present her perspective. In a narrative, it is the narrator (cast as "filmmaker") who controls "the eye of the camera" and decides from which angle of vision he presents the story, and when, and where to

womb is the greatest curse a woman could know. Only by conceiving can a woman remove the stigma of her barrenness, for motherhood is considered the primary role of every single woman in the Israelite culture, and the birth of a son is the greatest blessing of all for a mother; cf. multiple entries in RYKEN – WILHOIT – LONGMAN III, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*: "Baby", 67; "Barrenness", 75; "Mother, Motherhood", 571.

¹¹⁵ According to Deut 24:5, "When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army or be assigned to it for any purpose; he shall be exempt one year for the sake of his household, to give happiness to the woman he has married." Uriah's assignment in the army indicates that he must have been married for at least one year. It is possible that they might have had children, but we do not know.

shift from one perspective to another.¹¹⁶ In the episode of the death of the child, the narrator has chosen not to focus the camera on Bathsheba, but rather on David.¹¹⁷ Yet one cannot thus draw the conclusion that Bathsheba did not grieve simply owing to no sighting of her grief.

To illustrate our argument further, at the birth of the new-born baby Solomon, there is no articulation of joy, a natural reaction expected on the part of David and even more so of Bathsheba (12:24b α). Does it mean that David and Bathsheba were not joyful? Of course not. The real explanation is, again, to be found in the narrator's choice of focal point. On the occasion of Solomon's birth, the narrator is using his privilege of omniscience. With his camera adjusted to "zero focalization", he communicates to the audience that which he considers more important: וַיְהוָה אֹהֵב אֹתוֹ "the Lord loved him" (12:24b β), a comment of theological weight in the succession narratives in 1 Kgs 1–2.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Three major perspectives have been identified: "zero focalization" (the narrator's point of view), "internal focalization" (the character's point of view) and "external focalization" (the reader's point of view). For details, refer to SKA, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 66–75; see especially pp. 69–75 for the biblical illustrations.

¹¹⁷ Leneman sees this as an express choice of the narrator to indicate that the death of the infant was a divine punishment inflicted on David, not Bathsheba; see Helen LENEMAN, "Portrayals of Power in the Stories of Delilah and Bathsheba: Seduction in Song", in *Culture, Entertainment and the Bible*, ed. George AICHELE (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 141.

¹¹⁸ Just as 2 Sam 11:27b prepares the ground for the following chapter of Nathan's mission to David, 2 Sam 12:24b β functions as preparing the path for Solomon's reappearance in the story of David and his successful

In a nutshell, the fact that the text does not express either grief at the death of her child or joy at the birth of Solomon does not reflect on Bathsheba, but rather should be taken as outcomes of the way in which the narrator focuses his camera.

* * *

On the basis of the cultural background of the Israelites, we can presume—with certainty indeed—Bathsheba's grief at the death of her son, even though it is not depicted in an explicit manner in the text. The narrator simply does not choose to focus on Bathsheba's perspective. However, we have to admit that this presumed reaction of the mother over the death of her son does not serve as an argument for or against the possibility of Bathsheba's seduction (for she will grieve in any case). So let us now turn to the scene of Bathsheba's mourning for her husband to see if there are any clues.

B. She Mourned for Her Husband על-בעלה ותספר

1. A Performance of Duty?

When Bathsheba learnt of the news of her husband's death, she mourned (11:26). As usual, the narration gives a bare description of her actions and does not allow us to penetrate her innermost feelings. Was she deeply grieved? Berhalter casts doubt on the sincerity of Bathsheba's mourning: "Ob sie *wirklich* trauert um ihn [emphasis added], können wir nicht beurteilen." Or was the lamentation simply

enthronement in 1 Kgs 1–2. This is an insight we gain reading Ska's interpretation of 2 Sam 11; refer to SKA, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 74.

an act performed according to the demand of custom, hence a performance of duty?¹¹⁹ These are the questions often raised by commentators who view Bathsheba as one who, having succeeded in seducing the king, now only performed her mourning duty without any feelings of grief.

In order to answer these questions, we must first understand what the term סָפַד really means.¹²⁰ In the Hebrew Bible, the verb סָפַד and the noun מִסְפָּד refer to a custom or rite attached primarily to lament for the dead and secondarily to lament at a great misfortune.¹²¹ It is usually accompanied by other expressions of suffering: weeping¹²² (Gen 23:2; 2 Sam 1:12; Isa 22:12; Ezek 24:16, 23), fasting (2 Sam 1:12; Joel 2:12; Zech 7:5), rending of clothing and putting on sackcloth (2 Sam 3:31; Esth 4:1), crying out or wailing (Jer 4:8; 49:3; Mic 1:8), and raising a lamentation, קִינָה “a dirge” (Ezek 27:32).

¹¹⁹ Karin BERHALTER, „Mißhandelte Frau oder ‚verschlagenes‘ Weib? Batscha (2 Samuel 11f; 1 Könige 1f)“, in *Und sie tanzen aus der Reihe: Frauen im Alten Testament*, Hrsg. Angelika MEISSNER (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1992), 122; similarly, MILLER, „Bathscha“, 86. Berlin also regards Bathsheba’s mourning as a perfunctory act but explains it in terms of the narrator’s ignoring the character’s feelings; see BERLIN, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 26-27.

¹²⁰ The following exposition is based mainly on J. SCHARBERT, “סָפַד *sāpad*; מִסְפָּד *mispēd*”, *TDOT* X, 299-303; Arnulf BAUMANN, “אָבַל *’ābhal*; אָבַל *’ābhēl*; אָבַל *’ēbhel*”, *TDOT* I, 44-48; and Mayer Irwin GRUBER, “Mourning”, *EncJud* XIV, 585-586.

¹²¹ Gen 23:2; 50:10; Esth 4:3; 1 Sam 25:1; 28:3; 2 Sam 1:12; 3:31; 11:26; 1 Kgs 13:29-30; 14:13, 18; Ps 30:12; Eccl 3:4; 12:5; Isa 22:12; 32:12; Jer 4:8; 6:26; 16:4-6; 22:18; 25:33; 34:5; 48:38; 49:3; Ezek 24:16, 23; 27:31; Joel 1:13; 2:12; Amos 5:16-17; Mic 1:8, 11; Zech 7:5; 12:10-12.

¹²² Refer to Vinzenz HAMP, “בָּכָה *bākhāh*”, *TDOT* II, 116-120 for details.

The most frequent parallels to סָפַד and מִסְפָּד are the verb אָבַל and its noun form אָבַל. In fact the term אָבַל occurs also in the event of Bathsheba’s mourning: 2 Sam 11:27 states the cessation of her mourning period. However סָפַד and אָבַל are not simply synonyms. Gen 50:10 serves as a good example to illustrate the difference. סָפַד is the ritual lamentation which lasts apparently only one single day, and is described as “very great and sorrowful”; אָבַל refers to the attitude or disposition of mourning which extends over the entire period of mourning of seven days.¹²³

Both סָפַד and אָבַל in themselves carry strong ritual overtones and it is the outward behaviour, not the inner feelings of the mourner, which is their primary concern. Given that, as in many other cases, there are no additional depictions of the mourner’s feelings at the mourning rite in 2 Sam 11:26-27, it is admittedly difficult to prove (or disprove) that Bathsheba grieved genuinely over the death of her husband. Yet it must be emphasized that, while the terms סָפַד and אָבַל primarily denote external behaviour connected to the actual mourning ritual and during the mourning period, nevertheless the feelings of grief are not to be left out. As Baumann affirms “In no way does this [state of mourning] exclude the inner feeling” (cf. Job

¹²³ SCHARBERT, “סָפַד *sāpad*; מִסְפָּד *mispēd*”, 300. For the discussion on the various lengths and the cessation of the mourning period, see BAUMANN, “אָבַל *’ābhal*; אָבַל *’ābhēl*; אָבַל *’ēbhel*”, 45-46; see also GRUBER, “Mourning”, 586-587.

29:25 speaks of comforting the mourners).¹²⁴ A further example: Gen 37:35 relates that the sons and daughters of Jacob tried to comfort their father when he was in mourning for Joseph but he refused to be comforted. So our position is that absence of any description of Bathsheba's grief while observing the mourning customs cannot serve as a supporting argument for her being a seductress.

2. Her Complicity in the Plot?

For some commentators, Bathsheba mourned for Uriah only out of a sense of duty and not out of any genuine feeling of grief. Others go even further and contend that her husband's death was in reality her desired outcome, for she had actually conspired with David to plot Uriah's death.

Miller goes so far as to claim that David could not have plotted to kill Uriah without Bathsheba knowing about it.¹²⁵ Similarly, Berhalter raises the question whether Bathsheba knew about the plan, seemingly suggesting that it was the case.¹²⁶ Nonetheless, such a position, arguing conspiracy on Bathsheba's part, seems rather groundless. Certainly David the king could have managed the whole trap in the name of a military affair without informing the woman, for the personnel involved in executing the military action were only

Joab and Uriah—the latter actually carried the letter containing the command to bring about his own death (2 Sam 11:14-15).¹²⁷

What is more, if Bathsheba were the one who actually aimed at creating history, we would expect to see her keeping a close eye on the events as they unfolded. If we were now watching this drama on the stage, we would probably see Bathsheba peeking in to ensure that everything was going according to her plan, or listening in to reports on how events proceeded (so David, 11:10). The fact remains that she simply disappears from the stage after sending David the message of her pregnancy (11:5). She does not show up in any of the following acts in the drama which depicts David's assiduous attempts to bring Uriah back to his house (11:6-13) and at the end plots his death (11:14-25). We only see Bathsheba again when she hears of the news of the death of her husband and mourns for him (11:26).

Where narrative techniques are concerned, the announcement of Bathsheba's pregnancy in 2 Sam 11:5, like the clause *והיא מתקדשת מטמאתה* in the previous verse, which we have discussed above (Chapter II, Section C), can be understood as a "literal gap" employed by the narrator to create suspense in the drama. Here the gap in verse 5 is followed immediately by another gap, in verse 6,

¹²⁴ BAHMANN, "אֲבָהָל; אֲבָהַל; אֲבָהֵל", 46.

¹²⁵ MILLER, „Batscha“, 86.

¹²⁶ Cf. BERHALTER, „Mißhandelte Frau oder ‚verschlagenes‘ Weib?“, 121.

¹²⁷ We cannot be sure whether or not Uriah might have speculated about the existence of a plot; refer to Sternberg's explication of "Does Uriah Know about His Wife's Doings? The Twofold Hypothesis" in STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 201-209.

when David summoned Uriah. The latter gap is immediately filled in with David's continuous efforts to persuade Uriah to go home to sleep (11:8-13). The earlier gap, on one hand, can be said to be filled in with David's reactions and actions which ultimately lead to Uriah's innocent death; on the other hand, this gap remains unfilled with any reaction on the part of Bathsheba. As a result, her reaction following the pregnancy announcement is a *complete* silence throughout the narrative. Any attempt to accuse Bathsheba for conspiracy in the plot of her husband's death would be to draw unfair inferences from a silence of the text on issues which it does not treat. Thus we regard such an attempt as a groundless and unjustified accusation.

3. Clues Offered by the Designations

A closer look at the Hebrew text will shed some light on Bathsheba's mourning for her husband.

The Hebrew text of 2 Sam 11:26 reads:

וּתְשֻׁמַע אִשָּׁת אֻרִיָּה כִּי־יָמַת אֻרִיָּה אִיֶּשֶׁה וְתִסְפַּד עַל־בַּעֲלָהּ

which we translate literally as: "When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her lord." Rather clumsy as it sounds,¹²⁸ one might wonder why the narrator did not put it in a more concise fashion. For instance, "When the wife of

Uriah¹²⁹ heard that Uriah was dead, she mourned for him." Compare Gen 23:2; 37:34-35; 50:10, all of which share the common context of mourning observed by close relatives,¹³⁰ but none of them is as clumsy as 2 Sam 11:26 with respect to how the relationship between the mourner and the dead person is presented. Yet a representation with compact wording like the one we propose here is not the way the narrator wanted his audience to perceive Bathsheba's lamentation. As we shall see, the apparent "clumsiness" of the Hebrew text is not without due motivation.

* * *

Before we explicate the "clumsiness", we need to say something about designations. In the Hebrew Bible, the use of designations is of tremendous significance. How an individual is designated reveals not only the narrator's point of view but also the viewpoint of the character presented in the narrative. In the following we shall focus our attention on the female character of our story and see how she is designated in the narration.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Instead of putting it simply as "Bathsheba" as we would prefer, we have decided to keep it as "the wife of Uriah" here, in order to preserve the apparent intention of the narrator to avoid articulating the name "Bathsheba" in his narration. As Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art in the Bible*, 37) notices, even after Bathsheba's name has been disclosed in 11:3b, she is still subsequently referred to by the third person pronouns "she" and "her", or as "the woman", or "the wife of Uriah". Her name does not appear again until 12:24, the very end of the drama.

¹³⁰ A mourning custom is decreed for the death of one of the seven relatives: father, mother, children, brother, sister, husband, and wife; see Arnost Zvi EHRMAN, "Keri'ah", *EncJud* XII, 84-85. See also Lev 21:1-5; Ezek 44:25.

¹³¹ Interested readers are invited to consult E. J. REVELL, *The Designations of the Individuals: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996); Donna PETTER, "Foregrounding of the

¹²⁸ This "clumsiness", reflecting the original sense of the Hebrew text, has unfortunately been eliminated to various degrees in some modern English translations, e.g., *NAB*, *NIV* and *NRSV*.

Petter identifies 3 different designations used for Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11–12:¹³²

- i) the proper name בת־שבע “Bathsheba” (11:3; 12:24);
- ii) her kinship tie as בת־אליעם “daughter of Eliam”¹³³ (11:3);
and
- iii) the common female designation אשה “woman” or “wife”,
altogether 14 times:
 - a) 4 times in absolute form (11:2[2x]; 11:3; 11:5);
 - b) 4 times in construct form (החתי) אשת אוריה¹³⁴ “the wife of Uriah (the Hittite)” (11:3; 11:26; 12:10; 12:15); and
 - c) 6 times with a possessive pronoun (11:11; 11:27; 12:9[2x]; 12:10; 12:24).¹³⁵

Designation ‘ēšet ‘ūriyyā haḥittī in II Samuel XI–XII”, *VT* 54,3 (2004): 403-407; DORN, “Untranslatable Features”, 407-408.

¹³² The following categorization is constructed (with modifications) based on Petter’s discussion in her “Foregrounding of the Designation”, 403.

¹³³ McCarter (*II Samuel*, 285) points out that it is unusual for Bathsheba’s patronymic to be given, especially when here she is also identified by her husband’s name. This probably suggests significance of Eliam’s identity and/or status. Bailey is convinced that the ordering actually indicates that as far as David is concerned, the woman’s patronymic relationship takes precedence over her marital one. Bailey further supports his argument with the examples of Deborah (Judg 4:4), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14) and Michal (2 Sam 3:13-14; 6:16, 20); see BAILEY, *David in Love and War*, 87 for details. Anderson (*2 Samuel*, 153) also finds the patronymic identification unusual, but concludes that such identification is rather tenuous.

¹³⁴ In fact, the phrase אשת אוריה החתי occurs only in 11:3 and 12:10. The other two verses read אשת אוריה. Petter pays no attention to these differences.

¹³⁵ To the list we might add: iv) the independent feminine pronoun היא “she” (11:4).

Petter notices that 10 out of the 14 אשה designations of Bathsheba (i.e., Categories iii b and iii c above) express the woman’s intimate relationship with men, especially Uriah.¹³⁶ In addition to the designation “the wife of Uriah”, we highlight two other examples: she is referred to as “my wife” (11:11) when Uriah replies—sarcastically?—to David, and as “his [Uriah’s] wife” (12:9) when Nathan rebukes David.¹³⁷

On the contrary, when Bathsheba is associated relationally to David, the context often shows God’s disapproval. “She became his wife But the thing which David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord” (11:27). Nathan confronts David, “you have taken his wife to be your wife” (12:9; similarly 12:10). More striking is the sentence “the Lord smote the child which *Uriah’s wife* bore to *David*” (12:15). No contemporary reader would have failed to notice such a disharmony here. It was only after the death of the child and after David had put aside his mourning that we see a change in God’s attitude. “Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba ... and she gave birth to a son Now the Lord loved him” (12:24). Only now is the proper name of Bathsheba articulated again, subsequent to its first appearance in 11:3. What is more, only once, in 12:24, is Bathsheba identified as David’s wife without any negative connotation.¹³⁸ Thus

¹³⁶ See PETTER, “Foregrounding of the Designation”, 403.

¹³⁷ I owe this observation to DORN, “Untranslatable Features”, 408.

¹³⁸ DORN, “Untranslatable Features”, 408. A further remark: in the genealogy of Jesus according to the Gospel of Matthew, Bathsheba is still identified as τῆς τοῦ Οὐρῖου “the one [who had been the wife] of Uriah” (Matt 1:6). See,

it is evident that the designations are not simply a matter of writing style; they are in fact weighty expressions.

* * *

Let us return to our explication of the “clumsy” sentence of 2 Sam 11:26: “When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her lord.” Bathsheba is referred to neither by her name (like v 3), nor as “the woman” (like vv 2, 3, 5), but as אִשְׁתּוֹ אֻרִיָּה “the wife of Uriah”; and Uriah is designated firstly as אִישָׁהּ “her husband” and then בַּעֲלָהּ “her lord”. Given that their husband-and-wife relationship is no new information, these designations are not here to serve an informative purpose. They are relationship terms of expressive choice.

By means of this deliberately chosen relationship term אִשְׁתּוֹ אֻרִיָּה, the narrator makes it crystal clear to his audience that, at the announcement of the death of Uriah, Bathsheba is no longer merely “a/the woman”, an object for satisfying David’s lust;¹³⁹ she is אִשְׁתּוֹ אֻרִיָּה “the wife of Uriah”, and rightly so. The narrator wants to keep Bathsheba’s relationship to Uriah in the mind of his audience, and this is how he wants the audience to regard her.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, the awkward clumsiness created by בַּעֲלָהּ ... אִישָׁהּ “Uriah her husband ... her lord” boldly manifests Uriah’s

¹³⁹ For example, Edwin D. FREED, “The Women in Matthews Genealogy”, *JSNAT* 9 (1987): 3-19.

¹⁴⁰ An idea advocated by Bar-Efrat (*Narrative Art in the Bible*, 37).

So, REVELL, *The Designations of the Individuals*, 173; BRUEGGEMANN, *First and Second Samuel*, 278.

relationship to Bathsheba as her husband and her lord.¹⁴¹ In Garsiel’s words, “the wife of Uriah” is “a title expressive of fidelity to her husband even after his death”. Then Uriah is “her husband” and “her lord” in token of her attitude towards him.¹⁴²

To conclude, given the designations which the narrator uses for the characters, we feel justified in asserting a bond between Bathsheba and her husband which persists even after Uriah’s death. It is fair to say, this is the picture the narrator is presenting to his audience. If it were the narrator’s intention to present Bathsheba as a seductress, it would be hard to explain otherwise the purpose of these relational designations so expressively assigned to Bathsheba and her husband Uriah.

* * *

Let us now tie the loose ends together. Sternberg classifies the inner life throughout the Bathsheba affair in 2 Sam 11 as “permanent ambiguity”.¹⁴³ While we fundamentally agree with him, we have, nevertheless, attempted to peer into Bathsheba’s inner world, and we

¹⁴¹ Apart from 2 Sam 11:26, the term בַּעֲלָהּ is found only in Deut 24:4; Prov 12:4; 31:11, 23, 28. In the *Book of Deuteronomy*, בַּעֲלָהּ “her former husband” is used in contrast to הָאִישׁ הַאֲחֵרִי “the latter husband” (Deut 24:3). In the *Book of Proverbs*, בַּעֲלָהּ appears in the context of giving praise to a good wife.

¹⁴² GARSIEL, “The Story of David and Bathsheba”, 256; Garsiel translates אִישָׁהּ and בַּעֲלָהּ as “her man” and “her husband” respectively. Petter has a different explanation for this “clumsiness”. In her opinion, “the awkward redundancy of Uriah’s name subsequent to *’ēšet ’ūriyyā haḥittī* [*haḥittī* being an extra word in Petter’s original transliteration]” and the narrator’s twice repeated association of *’išā* and *ba’ēlā* keep David’s adultery relentlessly in focus; see PETER, “Foregrounding of the Designation”, 404.

¹⁴³ See STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 239.

believe we have found some convincing clues. First of all, we believe we have convinced our readers of Bathsheba's grief over the death of her son, though we hear no word of sorrow from the mother. We attribute this to the narrator's choice of focalization. As regards her grief for her husband at his death, though again not expressed openly, there is no reason to single her out as a case (as some commentators do) and eliminate the very element of grief from her mourning. To accuse Bathsheba of complicity in plotting her husband's death is a groundless inference from the silence of the text. Lastly, but most importantly, the designations carefully assigned to Bathsheba, especially those with respect to her relations to the male characters in the story, give us the impression that the relational bond between Bathsheba and her husband remains even after his death. These clues to the inner world of Bathsheba are not to be overlooked.

V. Is Bathsheba a Seductress?

Finally we come to the question we set out to investigate in this thesis. Is the female character of the illicit affair in 2 Sam 11 a seductress? To begin with, let us look at how Bathsheba is evaluated in the biblical text.

A. Evaluation of the Bible

1. Some Observations

First of all, while the omniscient narrator of the *Book of Samuel* exposes David's gross misconduct and undeniable sin without any

reservation, he does not ascribe any guilt at all to Bathsheba. Secondly, it would seem that if *both* parties were equally guilty of adultery,¹⁴⁴ *both* should have incurred God's wrath. The plain fact remains, however, that the divine verdict as declared by the narrator points solely to David, and *not* to David and Bathsheba: וידע הדבר אשר-עשה דוד בעיני יהוה¹⁴⁵ "but the thing which *David* had done was evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Sam 11:27b).¹⁴⁵ It follows that David was rebuked relentlessly by Nathan (12:1-14) whereas Bathsheba was not condemned at all.¹⁴⁶ Davidson rightly remarks that, throughout Nathan's speech, singular pronouns (we make it more precise: masculine singular pronouns) are utilized consistently

¹⁴⁴ In laying down the punishment of adultery, Deut 22:22-27 clearly defines the guilty party.

¹⁴⁵ 2 Sam 11:27b is in reality the first official statement of evaluation of all the events recorded in the whole chapter. But it says nothing about how these events, as crucial as they are in the life of any woman, have affected Bathsheba; see BERLIN, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narratives*, 26.

¹⁴⁶ While there is no explicit mention of the name Bathsheba בַּת-שֶׁבַע in Nathan's message, Coxon draws our attention to the possible word-plays involving her name. They are linguistic pointers employed by the prophet to enmesh David. In 12:6, the Septuagint supposes the reading שבעתים ("sevenfold"; note the consonants שבע) instead of the reading ארבעתים ("fourfold") in the Hebrew Text. Coxon regards ארבעתים as resulting from the correction of a later redactor who noted the discrepancy with the Pentateuchal code (cf. Exod 21:37). In verse 3 we hear the word בת ("a daughter") and then in verse 18 ביום השביעי ("on the seventh day"). Is it not peculiar that the infant should die ביום השביעי "on the seventh day"? Refer to Peter W. COXON, "A Note on 'Bathsheba' in 2 Samuel 12,1-6", *Bib* 62,2 (1981): 247-250 for the exposition on the richness of the use of linguistic pointers in the parable. See especially *ibid.*, 249-250 for the attempted word plays on the name בַּת-שֶׁבַע. Dorn ("Untranslatable Features", 409) also makes a bold remark concerning 12:3: "The king hears Nathan utter the word *bath*, "daughter," which is the first syllable of the name of Bathsheba, and the dumb king doesn't recognize the connection!"

whenever the idea of sin is involved, e.g., אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ “you [masculine singular and emphatic] have done” (v 12), הַטַּאתָךְ “your [masculine singular] sin” (v 13), נֶאֱמַרְתָּ “you [masculine singular] indeed have spurned” (v 14). Nathan could have easily used the plural forms had it been his intention to convict *both* the man and the woman of adultery (cf. Deut 22:22, 24). But not one single instance of the plural forms is observed.¹⁴⁷ Thirdly, Ps 51 is traditionally attributed to David’s contrition after the adultery; yet there is no mention of Bathsheba’s sin in the *entire* Bible.

In stark contrast to the rebukes which David receives, Bathsheba is blessed by bearing a son who, in the end, becomes the divinely appointed heir to David’s throne, Solomon—one whom the Lord loves וַיְהוֹה אֹהֲבֹו (2 Sam 12:24b). Being Solomon’s mother, she is subsequently included in the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah (though designated with some peculiarity: τῆς τοῦ Οὐρῴου “the one [who had been the wife] of Uriah”) in Matt 1:6.

* * *

Naturally one might wonder, what the reason might be for the disparity between the way David and Bathsheba are treated by the biblical text. We have identified some possible explanations.

2. Some Possible Explanations

Berlin approaches the text from a literary perspective in order to explain Bathsheba’s exoneration from all blame. Bathsheba is not an

¹⁴⁷ Cf. DAVIDSON, “Did King David Rape Bathsheba?”, 92.

equal party to the adultery; she is only the means, the agent, whereby the plot of the story was achieved: “The plot (in 2 Sam 11) calls for adultery, and adultery requires a married woman. Bathsheba fills that function.”¹⁴⁸ Bathsheba is thus reduced to a literary device.

However, if we respect this female character as a real human person, not simply a means to a literary end, then the fact that Bathsheba is not indicted might suggest that she is actually a victim of the adultery, probably a victim of power rape as we have tried to demonstrate. Leneman confirms our view: “The text, and later commentaries, never blame [*sic*] Bathsheba for adultery, implying she was coerced, if not actually raped.”¹⁴⁹ In this case, it would be totally unjustified to call her a seductress.

The assignation of Bathsheba in the genealogy of Jesus as τῆς τοῦ Οὐρῴου (Matt 1:6) seems to suggest her *lasting* connection with her husband Uriah—not only in 2 Sam 11–12, but even in the New Testament. Because reference to Bathsheba is not essential to the flow of Matthew’s genealogy, her inclusion might be understood as the Evangelist’s way to rank her among the other four women of honour in the Messiah’s genealogy, namely Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Mary (Matt 1:3, 5, 16).¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Quoting BERLIN, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narratives*, 27. Berlin (*ibid.*, 143, n 5) holds that the text is simply not at all interested in the possibility of Bathsheba’s sharing the responsibility of adultery.

¹⁴⁹ LENEMAN, “Portrayals of Power”, 144.

¹⁵⁰ Davidson (“Did King David Rape Bathsheba?”, 93, n 34) comments, “Interestingly, all of these women were misunderstood, maligned,

* * *

Before we draw our final conclusion, however, there are still some other arguments related to the theme of our thesis which require treatment. We now address ourselves to these arguments related to how it is possible that Bathsheba be *accused of seduction*.

B. Accusation of Seduction

1. Influence of Other Narratives

Bathsheba plays a part in three biblical narratives, namely 2 Sam 11, 1 Kgs 1 and 1 Kgs 2. Because of this, some commentators choose to examine her character from a wider literary context, emphasizing the difference between her portrayals from the *Book of Samuel* to the *Book of Kings*. In the *Book of Kings*, Bathsheba enjoys an active and articulate role in the drama. In 1 Kgs 1, in particular, she is presented as a determined, resourceful and even forceful woman who plays a pivotal role for the future of the house of David. This portrayal is very different from the one we see in 2 Sam 11.¹⁵¹ Admitting the greater degree of ambiguity with which Bathsheba's personality is portrayed in both 2 Sam 11 and 1 Kgs 2, Nicol prefers to interpret Bathsheba's character based on the less ambiguous narrative of 1 Kgs 1. This leads him to arrive at the conclusion that Bathsheba is a clever and resourceful woman, not just in 1 Kgs 1, but *in all three*

mistreated, or denigrated in some way: Tamar was wronged by Judah; Rahab was despised as a prostitute; Ruth the Moabitess was seen as a foreigner; Bathsheba has often been accused of seducing David; and Mary was suspected of marital unfaithfulness to Joseph.”

¹⁵¹ Berhalter („Mißhandelte Frau oder ‚verschlagenes‘ Weib?“, 125) describes Bathsheba as an ambivalent character of many faces.

narratives.¹⁵² If then, Bathsheba is a resourceful woman in all three narratives, it becomes the work of the commentator to uncover the way she manifested her resourcefulness in the adulterous relationship with David.

No one would deny that reading from a wider literary context has its merits, and that in many cases it aids in the comprehensive understanding of a character. This might even be especially true in the case of Bathsheba's character, given that the differences between her representation in the *Book of Samuel* and that in the *Book of Kings* are simply too obvious to escape notice. Such a discrepancy naturally leads to many questions: What has changed Bathsheba to such a degree? Is it her life at court? Competition within the harem? A mother's instinct to secure the prize for her son? The age factor?¹⁵³ Or, if Bathsheba is substantially the same person in all three texts, does it mean that she is, in reality, *never* as simple as she appears in 2 Sam 11?¹⁵⁴ These questions lie beyond the scope of our thesis and will have to constitute another study of its own. They are relevant to our work in that they raise the question of whether the representation given in the *Kings* narratives should substantially affect the interpretation of Bathsheba's character in the *Book of Samuel*. As far

¹⁵² For details, see NICOL, “Bathsheba, a Clever Woman?”, 360-363.

¹⁵³ Cf. Alice BACH, “Signs of the Flesh: Observations on Characterization in the Bible”, *Semeia* 63 (1993): 74.

¹⁵⁴ Bellis makes a distinction between Bathsheba's “flat” character in the *Book of Samuel* and her “developed” character in the *Book of Kings*; Alice Ogden BELLIS, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster – John Knox Press, 1994).

as we know, a number of interpretations of Bathsheba as a seductress show signs that they are influenced by the *Kings* narratives (apart from Nicol, we can name also Klein, Miller, and Berhalter).

We are convinced that, in order to achieve a faithful reading of the text, it is not legitimate to permit the reading of one story to influence or determine the reading of another. The fundamental point of our argument is this: had the narrator of the *Book of Samuel* wished to depict Bathsheba in the same way as she is depicted in the *Book of Kings*, he could have done so. The fact remains that he did not. Therefore one ought not permit one's interpretation of Bathsheba's character in 2 Sam 11 to be determined by the way she is represented in other narratives. The narrative presented in 2 Sam 11 ought to be respected *in its own right*.

2. Whose Responsibility?

Exum questions why commentators (particularly male commentators) are so quick to blame Bathsheba for appearing on the scene in some state of undress. She further questions the narrator's responsibility in choosing to give a picture of Bathsheba in the process of bathing.¹⁵⁵ After all, quoting Bar-Efrat, "in a work of literature it is the portrayal which creates the character".¹⁵⁶ Bathsheba was portrayed as a bathing woman at her *very first*

appearance in the narrative—and this woman was *very* beautiful. Scholz points out that, in androcentric cultures, a woman's nakedness is a *symbol* for her willingness to participate in the scheme of sexual encounter. Accordingly, this would mean that Bathsheba, in *exposing* her naked body, should be interpreted as a willing participant in the plot. This, in turn, would imply that she is the one causing the trouble between David and Uriah. This interpretation, which turns Bathsheba's bathing into an accusation against her, is deeply rooted in the mind of many commentators—again, male in particular.¹⁵⁷

It is, however, *not* necessary that Bathsheba be portrayed as bathing. The narrator could have simply said: "David saw a woman, and the woman was very beautiful." Compare this with the case of Samson who found a Philistine woman pleasurable to his eyes—that woman was *not* bathing (Judg 14:1-3). In Exum's opinion, the male narrator presents Bathsheba as naked, because he *enjoys* seeing a naked woman. While the narrator implies culpability on Bathsheba's part, he is at the same time "hypocritical—morally condemning her for the nakedness which he depicted for his pleasure, David's, and that of his ideal readers".¹⁵⁸

Not only does Exum charge the narrator of making Bathsheba the object of the male gaze, using David as his agent, she also points

¹⁵⁵ J. Cheryl EXUM, "Bathsheba Plotted, Shot, and Painted", *Semeia* 74 (1996): 52.

¹⁵⁶ BAR-EFRAT, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 48.

¹⁵⁷ Refer to Susanne SCHOLZ, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible* (Introductions in Feminist Theology 13; London – New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 72-73.

¹⁵⁸ EXUM, "Raped by the Pen", 197.

to the responsibility that biblical commentators and different renditions of the story bear in directing unjust accusations against Bathsheba. In her judgement, when commentators imply that Bathsheba desired the king's attention, or when popular renditions attribute such motivation to Bathsheba, they let the narrator off the hook at the woman's expense.¹⁵⁹

3. Man's Perspective

The scene of 2 Sam 11 was portrayed fundamentally from David's perceptual and psychological point of view. As Fuchs puts it:¹⁶⁰

The woman he sees is not only naked, but in the process of bathing herself. Not only is the object of desire *fully exposed*, her *bathing motions* are probably as seductive as her nakedness as she makes herself cleaner and even more appealing to our *voyeuristic protagonist* [emphasis added] This compact description makes it amply clear how great was David's temptation [*sic*], and how difficult it must have been for him to overcome his passion.¹⁶¹

The story was set against the background of a patriarchal perspective. By describing David as he sees a beautiful woman bathing, the narrator is trying to explain why it might have been that

¹⁵⁹ EXUM, "Bathsheba Plotted, Shot, and Painted", 52. These are also the assertions Exum makes in her earlier article, "Raped by the Pen".

¹⁶⁰ By "perceptual point of view", Fuchs means one's visual perception; see FUCHS, *Sexual Politics in the Bible Narrative*, 127.

¹⁶¹ FUCHS, *Sexual Politics in the Bible Narrative*, 128.

the great and celebrated King David, God's elect, could have committed such serious crimes. Notwithstanding the fact that he was God's anointed, David was, after all, an ordinary and fallible man, vulnerable as *any man* would be to a woman's temptation. By depicting Bathsheba in her nakedness, the *male* narrator leads the audience to "sympathize with the man, David, who understandably cannot resist the temptation".¹⁶²

Against this patriarchal background, David and Bathsheba's encounter further serves as a type-story to explain why it is that many successful and powerful men become entangled in a downward spiral after encountering women who use seductive tricks to bring about their downfall.¹⁶³ For men, women represent "the seductive and dangerous other".¹⁶⁴ In his article about conventions of a seductive theme, Sluijter tells us that, ever since the late Middle Ages, when stories from the Old Testament began to be read as moral examples, Bathsheba has been presented as "an example of the dangerous seductress against whom all men—even King David—stood powerless". The message of the story is that women are "the provokers of all lasciviousness of which men are the helpless victims".¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² SCHOLZ, *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*, 72.

¹⁶³ Another example is the story of Samson and Delilah (Judg 16).

¹⁶⁴ EXUM, "Raped by the Pen", 192.

¹⁶⁵ Eric Jan SLUIJTER, "Rembrandt's Bathsheba and the Conventions of a Seductive Theme", in *Rembrandt's "Bathsheba Reading King David's Letter"*, ed. Ann Jensen ADAMS (Masterpieces of Western Painting; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 83.

4. Restraint of Woman's Perspective

As already mentioned in earlier chapters of our work, the audience is never given direct access to Bathsheba's perspective throughout the David-Bathsheba account, in sharp contrast to the male characters' perspectives which are readily accessible. This inaccessibility of the woman's viewpoint, as Bach indicates, can be disastrous. Because Bathsheba's reactions to the king's sexual demands and to her own involvement in the adulterous act have been withheld, the narrator has eliminated a direct route for *any possible* sympathy between the audience and the female character.¹⁶⁶ Exum makes the following very pointed, but well-justified, remark regarding the literary practice of restraining the woman's perspective: "by withholding her point of view, he [the narrator] presents an ambiguous portrayal that leaves her *vulnerable* to the charge of seduction [emphasis added]".¹⁶⁷ This issue, we affirm, is at the heart of Bathsheba being accused of seduction.

In an androcentric context, the male victimizer is always allowed to express his point of view in cases of adultery or other forms of sexual aggression.¹⁶⁸ This is not always the case, however, for the

¹⁶⁶ BACH, "Signs of the Flesh", 71.

¹⁶⁷ EXUM, "Raped by the Pen", 174.

¹⁶⁸ Apart from David, we can name the examples of Shechem (Gen 34:2-4), Amnon (2 Sam 13:1-17) and the two wicked elders who desired Susanna (Dan 13:7-41).

female victim.¹⁶⁹ Perhaps, Tamar and Susanna could be regarded as *relatively* more "fortunate" sexual victims—"fortunate" in the sense that they, at least, were given the chance to voice their resistance (2 Sam 13:12-13; Dan 13:22-24a), thus making them *invulnerable* to any possible subsequent accusation of seduction. Nevertheless, Bathsheba, together with David's concubines who suffered Absalom's sexual assault (2 Sam 16:22), was not so "fortunate" a female victim.

In addition to the male victimizer being allowed to express his point of view, so also is the *male victim* given this opportunity—the husband in the case of adultery. Uriah clearly had much more chance to express his views (2 Sam 11:7-13) than his wife did (2 Sam 11:5?). Throughout the *Book of Genesis*, Fuchs identified different husbands who were "victimized" by powerful kings in various adultery type-scenes. For example, Abram was victimized by Pharaoh (12:10-20); Abraham was later victimized by the potential adulterer Abimelech, the king of Gerar (20:1-18); and Isaac was victimized by potential adulterers represented by Abimelech, the king of Gerar (26:1-12).¹⁷⁰ By contrast, the perspective of their wives, the female victims in these accounts, is presented in only one single instance;¹⁷¹ their perspective is otherwise completely absent

¹⁶⁹ For instance, we hear no word at all from Dinah in the whole story about her in Gen 34.

¹⁷⁰ For the discussion on the adultery type-scenes, see FUCHS, *Sexual Politics in the Bible Narrative*, 129.

¹⁷¹ We only hear Sarah's words once (Gen 20:5) and no more, and nothing from any of the other female victims.

in all three *Genesis* accounts. Fuchs attributes such sexually discriminative suppression of the female perspective to the fact that only a male's aspiration and action have meaning from a patriarchal perspective.¹⁷²

5. Gender Difference

We cannot ignore that gender is an important factor here. The sight of a bathing woman is provocative, but only because what is being provoked is *male* desire; the sight of a man bathing would not raise the same question of provocativeness. This explains why Bathsheba's *bathing* being *seen* by David (2 Sam 11:2) is readily interpreted as sexually suggestive: a woman is *doing* it and a man *affected by it*. A counter-example to this argument can be found in the same person of David in 2 Sam 6, who, this time, plays the opposite role. David exposed himself in public, at least partially, when he danced before the ark of the Lord (v 14). But he did not find it shameful at all, even if the scene aroused his wife Michal's criticism (vv 20-22).¹⁷³ In the eyes of David and his contemporary people, not only was a male in the nude *not* shamed, he was *even* gloried—as David himself affirmed (v 22).

¹⁷² FUCHS, *Sexual Politics in the Bible Narrative*, 129.

¹⁷³ EXUM, "Raped by the Pen", 188. Our own remark: the verse the narrator uses to conclude the episode further sharpens the gender difference. Michal, because of her contempt for her husband's uncovering himself in public, was punished by having no child to the day of her death (2 Sam 6:23).

Exum reminds us, just as representation is gender-determined, so too is interpretation.¹⁷⁴ We summarize our listing of the arguments for accusing Bathsheba of seduction using Exum's words, which give a picture of how Bathsheba is conventionally framed and interpreted:

It is thus the woman's fault that the man's desire is aroused. Bathsheba is guilty of being desired, but the text hints that she asked for it: she *allows* herself to be seen David may be a voyeur, but Bathsheba is an exhibitionist.¹⁷⁵

As a personal remark, being a woman, I do find it unfair that often times, in cases of sexual aggression, women—especially beautiful and/or sensual ones—are the ones to blame for enflaming male lust, when they are in fact the victims.

Conclusion

Many of the commentators we mentioned in our work base their accusation of Bathsheba's seduction on the inner motivations which they *themselves* ascribe to the character: her seductive bath, her willingness to go to the king, her readiness for conception by the king, her assertion of power in sending word to the king, her complicity in removing her husband, her insincerity in mourning Uriah's death, and so on. The fact remains, however, that, *none* of

¹⁷⁴ EXUM, "Bathsheba Plotted, Shot, and Painted", 70.

¹⁷⁵ EXUM, "Bathsheba Plotted, Shot, and Painted", 67.

these feelings, thoughts or motives are *ever indicated* in the narrative. It is our concern to guard against the practice of reading too much between the lines. Faithfulness to the text is what we value and emphasize.

Perceiving Bathsheba as a seductress, some commentators maintain that she was the one who planned the entire encounter with David, with the ultimate goal of becoming the king's wife. By bathing at a place where she could easily catch the king's attention, Bathsheba successfully seduced the king into lying with her, she successfully got pregnant by the king, and finally, she successfully married the king. This kind of interpretation, nevertheless, rests heavily on the underlying assumption that Bathsheba could foretell *every* detail in the unfolding of future events: David's summons to cohabitation, her own pregnancy (?), Uriah's refusal to return to their home, David's successful plotting of Uriah's death, and finally, David's proposal to marry her. This interpretation obviously does not do justice to the female character, given that the events involved were completely out of her control. Underscoring her pregnancy, which is absolutely crucial for the way the entire David-Bathsheba affair develops, we stress that a woman's knowledge regarding her state of fertility is *no guarantee* to her conception. After all, Bathsheba does not play the role of a prophet in the narrative of 2 Sam 11-12; she does not prophesy as Nathan does. Nonetheless, commentators who favour seeing a woman's seductive programme in these events tend to base their reading of the narrative on historically

posterior information, rather than on the *existing* information provided by the narrative.

If Bathsheba had been the one to programme a seductive plot, she would have certainly been aware that her marital status was the biggest obstacle to her final goal of becoming the king's wife. Yet she could not have possibly presumed from the *ouset* that the king would have her husband killed so as to marry her (2 Sam 11:27).¹⁷⁶ Such a merciless plot against Uriah, though it did occur in the end (vv 14-15), was, in reality, David's *very last* resort after all his desperate but vain attempts to ensure that Uriah would go down to his house (vv 6-13). In fact, from this it is unmistakable that David did not want Bathsheba for himself. He rather desired to conceal his adulterous relationship with another man's wife by sending her husband home so that paternity would be ascribed to the husband. The way in which the event itself unfolded clearly proves that it was never David's *original* intent to put Uriah (a member of the elite Thirty, 2 Sam 23:39) to death in order to marry his wife. Consequently, it is illegitimate, if not impossible, to attribute the plot of removing Uriah (by whatever means) to Bathsheba's so-called seductive programme.

Another defect in the argument which favours Bathsheba's seductive programme is manifested by the very fact that it was *not* the king's *habit* to walk around and look around on the palace roof

¹⁷⁶ So, convincingly, GARSIEL, "The Story of David and Bathsheba", 254.

late afternoons. We have already demonstrated this in our syntactical analysis of the narrative sequence in 2 Sam 11:2: וירא ... ויחלהך ... ויקם ... ויהי ... David's walking around on the roof was not a step which Bathsheba could have programmed. Hence she could not have possibly programmed in advance a bath to seduce the king.

Having appraised all these arguments, we arrive at the conclusion that the accusation against Bathsheba of being a seductress is an accusation full of flaws.

* * *

If we respect the way in which this female character is presented in 2 Sam 11–12 in its own right, then we must accept the fact that the narrator gives us the barest notice of Bathsheba's actions and inner motivations throughout the narrative. By saying this, we by no means diminish the female character's subjectivity, nor do we regard her simply as an "extra" in the drama. Rather, we are simply stating the way Bathsheba is presented in the narrative *as it is*. Some commentators have chosen to *highlight* Bathsheba's subjectivity in such a way as to transform her into a shining character, at times a star brighter than King David himself. It might have been that commentators were well-intentioned, wanting to give life and colour to this female character, wanting to "save" her from remaining an object or an extra in the drama. Perhaps they even want to give her the "honour" of achieving her aspirations in an androcentric society. However, restoring the subjectivity of the female character does not

necessarily imply that she be portrayed as an opportunist or a cunning woman who makes use of her enticing beauty to achieve her goals. The conclusion (which we draw from the text itself and our linguistic examination of the frequently used verb (שָׁלַח) that Bathsheba returned to her house *on her own initiative* and was *not sent* back by the king, is also an argument which affirms Bathsheba's subjectivity.

Anyone reading the narrative attentively is obliged to admit that the text is largely silent¹⁷⁷ regarding Bathsheba. We are convinced that the narrator himself deliberately *silenced* this female character because it was David the king who was his primary interest and concern. Given that the Bible was written by men, and was read primarily (if not exclusively) by men, and not women, it is fair to say that the primary interest in King David was shared by the narrator's contemporary audience. Unavoidably, representation in the Bible is thus, in many cases, gender-determined. The narrative of David and Bathsheba, so brilliantly told that it constitutes a masterpiece of story-telling in the Old Testament, does not, however, present Bathsheba in a favourable light. It is not without grounds, therefore, that one holds the narrator responsible for restraining Bathsheba's perspective, thus presenting an ambiguous portrayal of the female character. It is this ambiguous portrayal by the narrator that is

¹⁷⁷ Moore describes the text of 2 Samuel as "conspicuously silent" about Bathsheba; Michael S. MOORE, "Bathsheba's Silence (1 Kings 1.11-31)", in *Inspired Speech* (JSOTSup 378; London: T & T Clark, 2004), 337.

ultimately the reason of Bathsheba's vulnerability to the charge of seduction.

* * *

Interestingly enough, in stark contrast to the biblical narrative, artists and painters have very often portrayed Bathsheba as the dominant figure, making her the central focus of their portrayals. In these visual images, the nude or half-nude Bathsheba is usually placed under a blazing spotlight, standing out sharply against the darkness. The figure of David, who spies Bathsheba, on the contrary, is often "reduced to no more than a tiny figure in the background, functioning primarily as an attribute of Bathsheba, in order to identify the subject".¹⁷⁸ He is hardly seen. No wonder Exum declares that Bathsheba has become the quintessential object of gaze—especially the male gaze—in literature and art through the ages.¹⁷⁹ But one should ask why.

We wonder how much this conventional practice should be attributed to cultural and artistic "appropriations" of biblical women. In her article on portrayals of power in the stories of Delilah and Bathsheba, Leneman contends that the stories were not true seductions, but rather they were *misrepresented* as such by the popular media.¹⁸⁰ Her conclusion deserves attention:

¹⁷⁸ SLUIJTER, "Rembrandt's Bathsheba", 49. See also EXUM, "Bathsheba Plotted, Shot, and Painted", 47-73 which offers an inspiring discussion on this issue.

¹⁷⁹ EXUM, "Raped by the Pen", 195.

¹⁸⁰ LENEMAN, "Portrayals of Power", 139. Leneman explored her theme of study as presented in media like post-biblical retelling, music, drama, poetry

The arts have done a great deal to popularize biblical stories, but this popularization has not resolved the ambiguities of the original stories in a *favourable* way for the female characters [emphasis added].¹⁸¹

Along with this idea, Sakenfeld reminds readers of the Bible to be alert to the possibility that the negative portrayals of Bathsheba which are *familiar* to us are not necessarily supported by the biblical text.¹⁸² Once again, we emphasize the importance of fidelity to the text as it is. It is this essential element of fidelity we have been striving to advocate and attain in our reading.

* * *

In conclusion, we believe that we have achieved a faithful reading in our investigation into the interpretation of Bathsheba as a seductress in 2 Sam 11–12, and that we have justified ourselves in concluding that Bathsheba is NOT a seductress.

and novels, etc. Leneman did not include films in her study. To get a good picture of how Bathsheba is treated in films, read, for example, David M. GUNN, "Bathsheba Goes Bathing in Hollywood: Words, Images, and Social Locations", *Semeia* 74 (1996): 75-101, and EXUM, "Bathsheba Plotted, Shot, and Painted", 48-51; both offer interesting discussions on the 1951 film *David and Bathsheba* (Twentieth Century Fox) and the 1985 film *King David* (Paramount Pictures).

¹⁸¹ LENEMAN, "Portrayals of Power", 153-154.

¹⁸² SAKENFELD, *Just Wives?*, 75.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BDB	Francis BROWN – S. R. DRIVER – Charles A. BRIGGS, ed., <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907 [1966 printing])
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
<i>EncJud</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i> , 2 nd ed.
<i>ET</i>	<i>The Expository Times</i>
GK	E. KAUTZSCH, ed., <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , 2 nd English ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1910)
<i>HALOT</i>	Ludwig KOEHLER – Walter BAUMGARTNER, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (2 vols.; Leiden – Boston – Köln: Brill, 2001)
<i>JATS</i>	<i>Journal of the Adventist Theological Society</i>
<i>JSem</i>	<i>Journal for Semitics</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>

JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series
LXX	Septuagint
LXX ^L	Lucian recension of the Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
<i>NAB</i>	<i>New American Bible</i>
<i>NASB</i>	<i>New American Standard Bible</i>
<i>NEB</i>	<i>New English Bible</i>
<i>Nid</i>	<i>Tractate Niddah</i>
<i>NIV</i>	<i>New International Version</i>
<i>NJB</i>	<i>New Jerusalem Bible</i>
<i>NRSV</i>	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBT 2 nd Series	Studies in Biblical Theology, 2 nd Series
SubBib	Subsidia Biblica
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , rev. ed.
<i>TNK</i>	<i>The Jewish Publication Society Tanakh</i> , 1985
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Bibliography

- ANDERSON, A. A. *2 Samuel*. WBC 11. Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989.
- BACH, Alice. "Signs of the Flesh: Observations on Characterization in the Bible". *Semeia* 63 (1993): 61-79.
- BAILEY, Randall C. *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-12*. JSOTSup 75. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990.
- BAR-EFRAT, Shimon. *Narrative Art in the Bible*. JSOTSup 70; SBL 17. Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1989.
- BAUMANN, Arnulf. "אַבְחַל 'ābhāl; אַבְחֵל 'ābhēl; אַבְחֵל 'ēbhel". *TDOT* I, 44-48.
- BELLIS, Alice Ogden. *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible*. Louisville, KY: Westminster – John Knox Press, 1994.
- VAN DER BERGH, R. H. "Is Bathsheba Guilty? The Septuagint's Perspective". *JSem* 17,1 (2008): 182-193.
- BERHALTER, Karin. „Mißhandelte Frau oder ‚verschlagenes‘ Weib? Batseba (2 Samuel 11f; 1 Könige 1f)“. In *Und sie tanzen aus der Reihe: Frauen im Alten Testament*, Hrsg. Angelika MEISSNER, 120-128. Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1992.
- BERLIN, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narratives*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994.
- BRUEGGEMANN, Walter. *First and Second Samuel*. Interpretation. Louisville, KY: Knox, 1990.
- CHANKIN-GOULD, J. D'Ror et al. "The Sanctified 'Adulteress' and Her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba's Bath and Self-consecration in 2 Samuel 11". *JSOT* 32,3 (2008): 339-352.
- COXON, Peter W. "A Note on 'Bathsheba' in 2 Samuel 12,1-6". *Bib* 62,2 (1981): 247-250.
- CROSS, Frank Moore – Donald W. PARRY – Richard J. SALEY – Eugene ULRICH. *Qumran Cave 4. XII: 1-2 Samuel*. DJD 17. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.
- DAVIDSON, Richard M. "Did King David Rape Bathsheba? A Case Study in Narrative Theology". *JATS* 17,2 (2006): 81-95.
- DORN, Louis O. "Untranslatable Features in the David and Bathsheba Story (2 Samuel 11-12)". *BT* 50,4 (1999): 406-411.
- DRIVER, S. R. *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*. 2nd rev. and enl. ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913.
- EHRMAN, Arnost Zvi. "Keri'ah". *EncJud* XII, 84-85.
- EXUM, J. Cheryl. "Bathsheba Plotted, Shot, and Painted". *Semeia* 74 (1996): 47-73.
- _____. "Raped by the Pen". In *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, 170-201. JSOTSup 163. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993.
- FISCHER, Alexander. „David und Batseba: Ein literarkritischer und motivgeschichtlicher Beitrag zu II Sam 11“. *ZAW* 101,1 (1989): 50-59.
- FREED, Edwin D. "The Women in Matthew's Genealogy". *JSNT* 9 (1987): 3-19.

- FUCHS, Esther. *Sexual Politics in the Bible Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman*. JSOTSup 310. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.
- GARSIEL, Moshe. "The Story of David and Bathsheba: A Different Approach". *CBQ* 55,2 (1993): 244-262.
- GRUBER, Mayer Irwin. "Mourning". *EncJud* XIV, 585-587.
- GUNN, David M. "Bathsheba Goes Bathing in Hollywood: Words, Images, and Social Locations". *Semeia* 74 (1996): 75-101.
- HAMP, Vinzenz. "בָּכָה *bākhāh*". *TDOT* II, 116-120.
- HERTZBERG, Hans Wilhelm. *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*. OTL. London: SCM Press, 1964.
- HERZFELD, Shmuel. "David and Bat-Sheva: A Close Textual Reading". *Milim Havivin* 1 (2005): 138-148.
- JOÜON, Paul – T. MURAOKA. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Rev. English ed. SubBib 27. Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006.
- KAM, Rose. *Their Stories, Our Stories: Women of the Bible*. New York: Continuum, 1995.
- KAUTZSCH, E., ed. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. 2nd English ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1910.
- KING, Philip J. – Lawrence E. STAGER. *Life in Biblical Israel*. Library of Ancient Israel. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- KLEIN, Lillian R. "Bathsheba Revealed". In *Samuel and Kings*, ed. Athalya BRENNER, 47-64. *The Feminist Companion to the Bible*, Second Series. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

- LAMBDIN, Thomas O. *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976.
- LENEMAN, Helen. "Portrayals of Power in the Stories of Delilah and Bathsheba: Seduction in Song". In *Culture, Entertainment and the Bible*, ed. George AICHELE, 139-155. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.
- MAZAR, Amihai. *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000–586 B.C.E.* ABRL. New York: Doubleday, 1990.
- MCCARTER, P. Kyle, Jr. *II Samuel*. AB 9. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984.
- MILGROM, Jacob. *Leviticus 1–16*. AB 3. New York: Doubleday, 1991.
- MILLER, Gabriele. „Batseba: Eine Frau, die weiß, was sie will“. In *Zwischen Ohnmacht und Befreiung: biblische Frauengestalten*, Hrsg. Karin WALTER, 81-91. Reihe Frauenforum. Freiburg: Herder, 1988.
- MOBBS, G. F. "The Eastern Way". *ET* 68 (1957): 210-212.
- MOORE, Michael S. "Bathsheba's Silence (1 Kings 1.11-31)". In *Inspired Speech*, 336-346. JSOTSup 378. London: T & T Clark, 2004.
- NICOL, George G. "Bathsheba, a Clever Woman?" *ET* 99 (1988): 360-363.
- _____. "The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba: Some Observations on Ambiguity in Biblical Narrative". *JSOT* 73 (1997): 43-54.
- PETTER, Donna. "Foregrounding of the Designation 'ēšet 'ūriyyā *hahittî* in II Samuel XI–XII". *VT* 54,3 (2004): 403-407.

- RADDAY, Yehuda T. "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative". In *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. WELCH, 50-117. Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981.
- REVELL, E. J. *The Designations of the Individuals: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative*. CBET 14. Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996.
- RYKEN, Leland – James C. WILHOIT – Tremper LONGMAN III, ed. *A Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, Illinois – Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1998, multiple entries.
- SAKENFELD, Katherine Doob. *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003.
- SCHARBERT, J. "סָפֵד *sāpad*; מִסְפֵּד *mispēd*". *TDOT* X, 299-303.
- SCHOLZ, Susanne. *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible*. Introductions in Feminist Theology 13. London – New York: T & T Clark, 2007.
- SEEBASS, H. "לָקַח *lāqah*; לֶקַח *leqah*". *TDOT* VIII, 16-21.
- SKA, Jean Louis. "Our Fathers Have Told Us": *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*. SubBib 13. Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000.
- SLUIJTER, Eric Jan. "Rembrandt's Bathsheba and the Conventions of a Seductive Theme". In *Rembrandt's "Bathsheba Reading King David's Letter"*, ed. Ann Jensen ADAMS, 48-99. Masterpieces of Western Painting. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- SMITH, Henry Preserved. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*. ICC. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1904.

- STERNBERG, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- WALTKE, Bruce K. – M. O'CONNOR. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
- WEINER, Michael – Hillel DANZIGER – Moshe Zev EINHORN, ed. *Talmud Bavli. DXXI: Tractate Niddah. I*. The ArtScroll Series. Mesorah Publications, 1996.
- WHYBRAY, Roger Norman. *The Succession Narrative: A Study of II Samuel 9–20; I Kings 1–2*. SBT 2nd Series 9. London: SCM, 1968.

1 摘要 1

〈巴特舍巴——勾引者？細讀撒下11-12章〉

巴特舍巴在撒慕爾紀中扮演的角色常是一個富爭議性的問題，背後的原因是，女性在雖然在短短幾個月內經歷了各種教一個女性終身難忘的遭遇：被君王寵召、懷孕、喪夫、喪子、成為王妃，然而敘述者 (narrator) 對她的個性、思想和感情則隻字不提。於是有些釋經學者一口咬定是她蓄意以沐浴的誘人姿態迷惑達味，並在可孕期與君王同寢，好能母憑子貴，晉身後宮。

本文以「敘述學」 (narratology) 的釋經方法剖析撒下11-12章女主角的每一個行動，並從字裡行間尋找她的心理世界，以探討巴特舍巴是否一個勾引者。

作者分析撒下11:2「連車被連 (narrative sequence) 之句法，指出達味在宮殿房頂上漫步賞景並無任何罪責的解釋，說明撒下11:2-4有模式，證明有關巴特舍巴精心佈局以出浴勾引君王之說不能成立。綜合敘述者對“קָלָה”「派人/打發」一詞的運用，作者斷定撒下11:4巴特舍巴來到君王那裡，並不代表女方在姦淫事件中自願參與；反觀她回家之舉卻是一個自主的行動。有指巴特舍巴對達味的淫行沒有反抗，即表示願意；又有指她對丈夫的死訊沒有表現悲傷，為他舉哀不過是例行公事；有的更聲稱烏黎雅之死是她意料中事。作者強調整個敘述中女主角的感受並非鏡頭的焦點所在，並且抨擊在經文空白的地方加以註釋的不當做法。作者進而點出撒下11:26聽起來相當累贅的句子，當中人物稱號的選擇和運用，正正反映巴特舍巴與她丈夫的親密關係。

細讀撒下11-12章，作者的結論是，種種對巴特舍巴的指控，都不能在經文中找到證據。最後作者提醒讀者要批判長久以來指控巴特舍巴勾引達味之論說背後的因由。