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Beyond the Textual Gaps of Courtly Intrigues:

The Story of Queen Bathsheba*

Zusammenfassung

Die Rezeptionsgeschichte der Erzählung von David, Batscheba und Urija ist bunt und voller Variationen. Die Mehrdimensionalität der Deutungen – sowohl in der Traditionsbildung als auch in den ikonographischen Darstellungen – zeigt, dass die Ausfüllung der Leerstellen nicht nur auf ihren damaligen rekonstruierbaren Kontext hin ausgeleuchtet werden kann, sondern auch auf deren rezeptionsgeschichtliche Darstellungen und Konsequenzen hin. In der folgenden Studie steht die Frage im Zentrum, wie die Erzählung von 2 Samuel 11,1–12,25 im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit rezipiert wurde, welche gesellschaftlichen Rahmenbedingungen aufgenommen und welche genderspezifischen Attribute und Bewertungskategorien konstruiert wurden, die die Mentalitätsgeschichte der Erzählung für spätere Generationen beeinflusst haben.

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1. Introduction

The figure of Bathsheba – the woman who turned from subject into a queen – has sparked the interest of many; not only theologians, exegetes and historians, but also the artists of different historical periods. She inspired several artworks, novels,[1] dramas,[2] bestsellers[3] and films.[4] Since the historical narrative is only partly retraceable, during the centuries several layers of tradition history, theological explanations, and the additions of art history completed the story of Bathsheba. Her portrait is one of the most elaborately drawn in the Old Testament. She is a beautiful woman, the sight of whom evokes desire in King David. This, at first leads to adultery, then to the killing of her husband, Uriah, and finally to the birth of Solomon. Later, she, entangled in courtly intrigue as queen mother (1 Kings 1:11–31), secures the accession of her son, Solomon. As for cultural memory, she remains in the topoi of male-female love and power struggles, as well as in those of the political intrigues and the bloody wars for control of the House of David.[5] The framework of her Biblical narrative is set by the context of 'war,

aggression and sex'. The struggles between Israel and Ammon provide the background for the adultery committed by David and Bathsheba, with the consequences stretching to the war field. The final episode of the sequel escalates in the struggle for accession in 1 Kings 1–2.

Drawing the portrait of Bathsheba would be impossible without the men in her life. At first, she is presented without a name, as a *well-figured bathing woman*, who turns out to be *the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite* (2 Samuel 11:2). Then she appears as the *wife* of David (2 Samuel 11:27; 12:24), the *mother of Solomon.* Finally, she comes forth in her own right, as *queen mother*, sitting to the right of her son (1 Kings 2:19). This list gives out a life path that shows an unconventional upward mobility both in status and power. This is in contrast with the episodes of 1 Kings 1, which show the image of the aging David who is gradually losing his power. Despite of this fact, Euro-American scholarship has over time read the story of the early kings through the lens of the Deuteronomists, all too often exclusively identifying with their ideology. Although beyond the historical question involved, "[…] there are voices in the story which the One-God's-Chosen-King centred redaction tried to silence in vain."[6] The reason for the text muting these voices was due to the 'narrative agenda' that shaped any further discourse. From Bathsheba's first appearance, a shadow is cast on David's life, which is hard to accommodate in the idealistic image of the man *"Yhwh has sought out […] after his own heart"* (1 Samuel 13:14) and the *"man anointed by the God of Jacob"*.[7] As for reception history, this tension is mirrored by the superscriptions of the Psalms, which do not present David as a great and powerful king, but rather as mourning, confessing, betrayed and ridden, thus offering the opportunity for the reader for identification in all historical periods.[8]

However, the Biblical passages refrain from the evaluation of Bathsheba. The story of her life, which can only be reconstructed from fragments, is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. In the Deuteronomistic History, she becomes a 'stain' on David's life path. She is referred to without a name, objectified: *"For David had done what was right in the eyes of Yhwh and had not failed to keep any of Yhwh's commands all the days of his life—except in the case of Uriah the Hittite."* (1 Kings 15:5)

The Books of Chronicles do not mention Bathsheba's episodes. She is only referred to in 1 Chronicles 3:5–9 as Bathshua, as the mother of her fourth child, Solomon. This does not correspond to the birth order presented in the 'courtly narrative' of the Books of Samuel and the Books of Kings. Thus, this historical discourse apparently wants to blur the negative image of Solomon and his parents. According to these sources, the successor was born as second from the marriage of David and Bathsheba (see 1 Chronicles 14:4). Later, her name appears in the introduction of Psalm 51: *"When the prophet Nathan came to him after David*

had committed adultery with Bathsheba." The latter has irreversibly been attached to the life of David, even though it is only mentioned implicitly in the Psalms.[9]

The name of Bathsheba is mentioned again in the Gospel of Matthew, where, as part of the genealogy of Jesus, she is mentioned as 'Uriah's wife'. In this genealogy (Matthew 1:1–17) four women are next to each other: Bathsheba, Tamar, Rahab and Ruth. Interpreters have pointed out the assemblage of these four women repeatedly, as all their lives, at many points, diverge from the conventional. The beginning of the Gospel of Matthew presents the origin of Jesus as part of the lineage of Israel. It is worth considering why the patrilineal genealogy highlights these marginal women from the Old Testament. Originally, they do not come from Israel, and they are on the margins among the people of Israel. They are also involved in precarious, almost transgressive relationships. Thus, the question emerges: why are *they* presented as part of the genealogy of Jesus and not others, who are of a 'purer origin'? Since they are part of the Gospel's genealogical table, their narratives are complemented with new aspects when they appear in the reception of the New Testament.[10]

The detailed discussion of each of these figures will not form part of my analysis. In the following I shall focus on the figure of Bathsheba. Her appearance in Jesus's genealogy as the 'wife of Uriah' doubly evokes the transgressive details of her story: her marriage to the non-Jewish Uriah,[11] as well as the adultery she committed with David.[12]

Despite the rich and paramount inner biblical sources, a common consensus exists in biblical scholarship that "[…] although Bathsheba is undeniably a minor character in the story of David (and the story of the Old Testament), she still functions to make this narrative more emotionally powerful."[13] Furthermore, "[…] although her characterization is complex, it develops, and she […] shows development from Samuel to Kings".[14]

In light of the quoted biblical passages, I argue that the figure of Bathsheba – compared to other female characters in the Bible – is relatively well-portrayed. Moreover, the gaps in her story – where details are left opaque or open to different interpretations – have the function to encourage the recipients' own involvement in constructing meaning of the narrative. Her enigmatic figure and the heavily gapped structure of the text may not be completely filled but only narrated in different versions. By focusing on this ambiguous archetype and its colourful reception history, we will not only learn more about the anthropological and ethical dilemmas of various historical periods, but we may discover insights about ourselves and about the imprinted narratives in our lives.

Furthermore, I will elaborate upon the construction of Bathsheba's story by taking reception history into consideration – the analysis of how the blanks are filled in by the worldview and cultural, social and religious atmosphere of later periods.

2. Gaps in the Story

In this dense Biblical narrative, several gaps *(Leerstellen)* are offered, which can be interpreted according to the reader's own experiences. This stands for the insufficient description of the agents' feelings and motives. It is characteristic of Hebrew narratives that the presupposed traits and emotions are not expressed explicitly. They can only be guessed based on the acts and the communicated words, as well as the changes of location. Therefore, the lack of description of various aspects in the David–Bathsheba story leaves the interpretation open to readers of all historical periods. The gaps in the story can be filled in by using background knowledge, examining the narrative structure of the text, by comparing with other sources of the ancient Near-Eastern World,[15] or by looking carefully at the syntax. Furthermore, other intertextual connections might be made to other places in the biblical narrative.[16] As for the motives and attitudes behind the acts, the reader is given freedom to 'fill in the blanks'. Already the contemporaries – the so-called 'real-fictitious pre-readers'[17] took this opportunity of filling in the gaps.[18]

2.1 Lacunae in the narrative

In reception aesthetics, the theory of gaps was introduced by the German philosopher Wolfgang Iser. In his work *Der Akt des Lesens,*[19] Iser explains that while studying the interactions between the text and the reader, he utilized the concept coined by Roman W. Ingarden in phenomenological aesthetics. According to this theory, the unfilled spaces of a text – its 'uncertainties' *(Unbestimmtheiten)* – are concretized by the secondary intentions of the reader. This way, the concretizations are dependent on the attitudes of the readers, but the original text can be recognised as well, as it sifts through the adequate concretizations.[20]

Wolfgang Iser, elaborating on the phenomenological approach of Ingarden, concludes that the uncertainty of a literary text can be defined either as an offer to the reader, or also as the fundamental condition of creating meaning. Therefore, the meanings of a literary text are created during the process of reading, as a result of the interaction between the reader and the text. The gaps can reveal the text's hidden communicatory networks, to be created by the imagination of the reader. During this process, the reader is given the freedom to imagine; however, the plot is set (though not tied) by the structure of the text.[21] Additionally, gaps can evoke hidden implicit evaluations and commentaries in a text, which belong to the mode of narration *(Erzählhaltung)*, which forms reception. These can often evoke contradictory feelings in the reader, and by this, complement to the process of the creation of meaning.[22]

Wolfgang Iser in his earlier work, *Der implizite Leser* (1972), discusses the notion of gaps with relation to English-language novels. According to his 'model of historical development',

the novels – by presenting more and more gaps – have in fact from the eighteenth century on been offering this way of creative reading. However, the significant role of gaps[23] in the Biblical narrative was pointed out by Meir Sternberg in his *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative. Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading.*[24] Recently, Joachim Vette gave a comprehensive survey about narrative criticism and reader-response criticism by interpreting referring passages of 1 Samuel.[25] Vette in his earlier pioneering work[26] introduces the most basic narrative techniques "[…] which are linked most directly to instances of reader creativity: sequence and narrative speed, point of view, and vacancies in the text."[27] I will analyse these "techniques" that organize fabula elements into a story and arouse the reader's interest and emotional involvement in the plot.

2.2 Filling in the blanks: visual representations

The Bible has been a major source of inspiration for visual artists for centuries, and in return, the works of art have an impact on our interpretation of Biblical texts. J. Cheryl Exum proposes the realisation of a *genuine dialogue* between the Bible and art, in which the verbal and visual narratives can play an equal and critical role in the process of interpretation. This might seem startling at first. On the one hand, authorial freedom does not require the exact philological interpretation of a text. On the other hand, by turning words into images, or literary formations, the author narrows down the possible complexity of meaning according to their own temporal, social and cultural contexts. Visual interpretations, by highlighting certain (problematic) aspects of the texts, which would be either hidden by the text or overlooked by the reader, explain and comment on the narratives. Therefore, Exum proposes to incorporate visual criticism into exegesis, besides historical, literary, rhetoric or form criticism.[28]

By relying on these theories, in this article, I will map the possible gaps of the David–Bathsheba story presented in 2 Samuel 11, and compile the resulting narratives. Furthermore, I will survey the reception history of the best known visual representations of the story's protagonists. My main inquiry is how and which gaps can be filled in with the visual representations of the Biblical narrative, and how the analysis of these representations can complement the understanding of this story with gender-specific aspects.

3. Bathsheba's Way into the Royal Court (2 Samuel 11)

Before I discuss the plot, I will briefly introduce one of the expressive examples of the gap-filling technique: the function of a commonly used word which most often results in a change of perspectives. The story's keyword is the verb שָׁלַח (send/send a message), the double meaning of which is exploited in the text. Its function is to shed light on the perspective of the

protagonists from different angles. Moreover, this introduces and divides the change of locations and therefore helps to map the web of connections and the communication networks of the gaps. The translation of the verb root can either stand for 'sending an object' or 'sending a person'.[29] In the article, I indicate the latter form with cursive.

3.1 Plot

The scene plays in the mid-tenth century, in a war-stricken area: King David *sent* his commander Joab and the whole of Israel against the Ammonites.[30] As the city of Rabbath[31] was being sieged, King David stayed in Jerusalem and while walking on the roof of his palace,[32] he saw a beautiful bathing (רֹחֶצֶת) woman (הָאִשָּׁה טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה מְאֹד) (Verse 2). Thereafter, King David *sent for* the woman and inquired after her. The answer soon arrived: *"Isn't she[33] Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite[34]?"* Then, messengers *were sent* by King David, and *"[…] she came to him, and he slept with her. Now she was purifying herself (קָדַשׁ)[35] from her monthly uncleanness (טָמְאָה).[36] Then she went back home"* (Verse 4). After a while, Bathsheba realised that she was pregnant. She *sent* a message to David: *"I am pregnant"* (Verse 5).

Bathsheba's scandalous way to the royal harem raises many questions, and due to the ambiguity of the story, it has been treated as one of the most mysterious topoi in literature.[37] The dominant male gaze in the narrative emerges through the communicative structure of the text and through the *focalization* as well, regarding the elements that make up the construction of a particular narrative that is presented to the reader.[38]

However, if we consider the typographical structure of story, especially the perspective-changing function of the verb שָׁלַח, it becomes apparent that this story is primarily of King David. His figure is the moving force. He calls and sends his army from the Royal Palace in Jerusalem, as well as Uriah and Bathsheba, and most pieces of information are known to him.

As for the identity of the beautiful bathing woman, we only have fragmented knowledge: according to the messengers, she is the 'daughter of Eliam'. However, it is impossible to tell whether she is the daughter of the Eliam who once took on a key role in Absalom's revolt (2 Samuel 23:24). However, we might presume that she was of noble origin. This is supported by the facts that the name of her father is mentioned; that she lives in the close vicinity of the royal residence; that she is brave enough to send a message to the King (perhaps, via his own messengers); and that King David was eager to conceal their affair. In Biblical genealogies either the father or the husband of the woman is mentioned. Here, both pieces of information are given – this might also suggest that Bathsheba was of noble origin. Her name has multiple meanings: בַּת stands for 'his daughter' and the second part, 'שֶׁבַע' means 'seven', therefore her whole name can stand for 'the daughter of seven' (seven standing for completeness).[39]

At first, Bathsheba appears as a nameless, beautifully-figured woman, as the object of King David's gaze. This opening scene foreshadows the narrative and tunes the readers' expectations. As a result, the novels and film adaptations of the story have put a strong emphasis on the appearance of Bathsheba, even though this trait serves the plot and does not work as the narrative tool of character description as seen in the novels written from the nineteenth century to our day.[40]

As the text does not reveal the processes going on in the protagonists' souls, we can only hypothesise that Bathsheba allows herself to be watched out of neglect, as a passive sufferer goes adrift;[41] or – in the absence of her husband – she wishes to flirt with the King or to draw his attention onto herself.[42] The often-passionate exegetical arguments peaked in Cheryl Exum's theory 'raped by the pen'. According to her thesis, the composition and laconism of the narrative (as for the inner world of the woman) reads critically. When the narrative is presented from David's perspective only, the equivocality of the scene compels the reader to fantasise about the details of the bath and the concealed female body. Due to this, the person of Bathsheba has been the tool of objectification from the beginning.[43]

3.2 The role of iconography beyond the textual gaps
The most effective part of the narration is the sight of the bathing woman, who in the imagination of artists, is most often showing her body in a seductive position. This is an image evoked by codices, different Bible editions, catechetic-pedagogical books and paintings. Therefore, the visual representation of Bathsheba remains in the collective memory as the icon of the seductive, exhibitionist female.[44]

In the Middle Ages, the figure of Bathsheba was dealt with mostly by miniature painters. The first series (tapestries and panel paintings), as well as the individual portrayals of the bathing scene and the handing over of David's letter (or both), by for example, Cranach, Veronese or Rubens, appear first only in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[45]

The art historian, Mónica A. Walker Vadillo, in her book, *Bathsheba in Late Medieval French Manuscript Illumination. Innocent Object of Desire or Agent of Sin*, analyses the first encounter of David and Bathsheba in a gender-theoretical framework, in the mirror of the illustrations of medieval French pious manuscripts[46] (*Bibles Moralisée,*[47] *Psalter,*[48] *Book of Hours,*[49] and the *Great Chronicles*[50]). All of them were written on commission, and adorned either richly or moderately, according to the taste, social standing and generosity of the patron. To possess one of them counted as a status symbol. Especially the textual gaps of the sources gave freedom to the artist: the blanks were often filled in by acting on the

commissioners' wishes. This makes them an invaluable source from the perspective of the history of mentalities, since the reading of the images was complemented by meditative exercises. As for the story of King David and Bathsheba, it is also important to highlight that the empire of David in this period served as a model for the Kingdom of France and the whole aristocracy. This period is considered representative, since the French royal court as a patron of arts, until the civil war (1419) attracted many artists from Flanders, Italy and the Netherlands. Later, they set out from the Parisian court and dispersed around different centres in the countryside. The artists belonging to this school influenced not only each other, but their motives and techniques had an impact both in France and abroad.[51]

In the illustrations of the manuscripts, the bathing woman – conforming to the commissioners' wishes – was dressed, covered and uncovered, in numerous ways. The nudity of the female was partly presented as the medieval symbol of innocence and purity *(nuditas virtualis)*, and partly as the embodiment of sin, guilt and shame.[52] As a common characteristic of such illustrations, eye contact between David and Bathsheba, and in most cases, between Bathsheba and the viewers, is missing. The woman becomes the object of the inquiring gaze, and her body is presented to David and the readers without confrontation.[53]

Due to this medieval exercise in image meditation, the presentation of Bathsheba became a catechetic paradigm as the illustration of the Penitential Psalms.[54] In fifteenth-century school manuals it was connected to the first line of Ps 6 in Latin: *"Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me" ("Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger")*.[55] Furthermore, from the visual representations from the fifteenth century on, the figure of King David is confined to the background, his contours are blurred and the figure of Bathsheba shifts into our focus.[56]

Clare Costley reconstructed the reception history of Bathsheba's story from the illustrations of ninth-century bibles and pious manuscripts to the catechetical-pedagogical literature disseminated in the New World. She concluded, that in pious literature it was the result of a lengthy process during which the focus shifted towards the scene of David and Bathsheba's first encounter.[57] From the early sixteenth century, it became customary in the different manuscript versions of the Book of Hours to illustrate the Penitential Psalms with the image of David gazing at Bathsheba. This can be considered as the beginning of a tradition, in which the narrative of 2 Samuel 11–12 step by step becomes the primary context of first Psalm 51, then the Penitential Psalms and finally the whole of the Book of Psalms.[58] It is also worth highlighting that until the end of the fifteenth century, in the case of the Penitential Psalms, the illustrations emphasise the penitence of David (praying on his knees), whereas the Renaissance illustrations focus mostly on Bathsheba. For example, in the first complete English Bible translation by Miles Coverdale (1540),[59] the image of the young bathing Bathsheba and the aging king watching her figure did not only appear as the illustration of 2

Samuel 11, but it was attached (as its metonymy) to the introductory part of the Book of Psalms, recommended in a side note specifically to the reading of the Penitential Psalms.

In other words, the focus of the Biblical narrative shifted from David's inappropriate gaze towards its object, the figure of Bathsheba. This is mirrored in the growing proportion of its representations: David is confined to the margins as a miniature, whereas Bathsheba comes to the fore, enlarged and the contours of her body emphasised. This question is marked by the criticism of Erasmus (1466/9–1536), when he, in his work entitled *Christiani Matrimonii Institutio* (1526), compares the iconography of ancient religions to his own age: *"Thanking God that his Christian faith involves 'nothing which is not chaste and modest,' he goes on to denounce those artists who 'inject shamelessness into subjects that are chaste by nature. Why,' he asks, 'is it necessary to depict ... in the churches,' among other things, 'David looking from a window at Bathsheba and luring her into adultery?'"*[60]
 The criticism of Erasmus is considerable, because at the end of the sixteenth century it was uncustomary to find fault with the comprehensive application of the scene in catechetical and meditative illustrations. These images were popular in the reception history of both Catholicism and Protestantism.[61] This theme was also transmitted to the New World, where this motif was used as a learning aid for children in the so-called *New England Primer*. They used the associative technique to teach the letter 'U' with the image of Uriah's wife sighted by King David: *"Uriah's beauteous wife / Made David seek his life"*.[62]

Distanced in time from medieval pious-meditative visual and textual meditation, the scene, due to its aesthetic value, found its way into the canon of visual arts. Rembrandt in the seventeenth century, on his painting from 1654, has already abandoned the perspective of King David. The painting, apart from one of the maids, portrays only a thoughtful Bathsheba, with David's letter in her hands. From this point on, there is no turning back; her fate is sealed. Her still figure is characterised by silent gloom, implying that whatever her decision will be, she shall face grave consequences. One of the most magnificent examples of the gap-filling technique came to light due to an X-ray examination: it was revealed that the head of Bathsheba, turned down on the known version of the painting, was originally in an upright position, radiating pride. This image was softened by Rembrandt into a contemplative figure, which speaks to the onlooker: this version does not imply pride and victory. Here, a woman in need turns to the viewer.[63]

3.3 The hermeneutics of changing spaces
King David therefore is not satisfied with the view of the beautiful woman. He *sends* for her, to her house and the woman goes into his house. The changing spaces and the perspective are also articulated here by the verb שָׁלַח (send/send a message). Several articles[64] focus on the

hermeneutics of space in Biblical narratives, which are not only static settings, but mirror the dynamics of interpersonal and intergroup relations. Therefore, the relations are articulated by the different spaces and the movements between them. In this, structural power relations could be mirrored, and these dynamics can add to our knowledge of the function of different characters. Thus, it is worth examining the symbolic layers of meaning in literary spaces, in our case, the spatial movement of Bathsheba and David.

Ilse Müllner in her hermeneutic explains that in cultural history, always new connotations and associations can be related to different Biblical spaces and spatial relations.[65] And the further we are in time, the more difficult it is to unravel the different intertextual layers. The connotations of given spaces can be lost, and others can be complemented with new aspects, thus creating new meanings. This way, certain texts, spaces and reference points can be connected in an intertextual network in the conscience of the reader and they can even create an ambiguous unity.[66]

As for our examined narrative: house (בַּיִת) has a variety of meanings, from the rudimental dwellings of the common folk to the most luxurious royal residences and the church buildings. The word itself entails the meaning of a social complex, from the familial and dynastic relations to the servants and personnel.[67] Further analysing the image of the house, the story can also be supplemented with gender aspects: while Bathsheba remains in her house, she can enjoy the safety of the private sphere, which cannot be entered by intruders. However, this private sphere was already transgressed when the messengers arrived at her house, even though their behaviour and the tone of their conversation is not recorded in any of the sources.[68] Furthermore, when she left the house alone or accompanied by the king's men, she also left her traditional social role, since in this period. For a woman to leave the private sphere of the family home alone without an armed guard meant the stepping out of the social setting that secured her safety. At the same time, she also jeopardized the reputation of her house. Based on the narrative, it is not clear whether it was the voluntary decision of Bathsheba to leave the house, a transgression to rise on the social scale or the forced change of roles. The reader is also free to imagine whether it was possible for Bathsheba to object, but it is without doubt that she was under intense pressure.

As for the description of how Bathsheba was sent for, called to and treated in the harem, we step out from the internal focalisation and enter an external perspective, which provides a condense recollection of the events in the harem.[69] After this interval, the perspective shifts again: as soon as Bathsheba comes to the fore, she is ready to disappear from the public eye and go back to the private sphere of her home. The only time when Bathsheba initiates communication with the king happens when she *sends* a message to him: *"I am pregnant"*.

This act is reflected by direct speech. However, this short sentence can evoke several gap-filling interpretations, from the 'indirect call for help' to a 'victorious announcement'.[70]

3.4 In the web of diffuse emotions and passions

So far, I have not yet touched upon the theme of emotions: what could this passionate affair mean to David and Bathsheba? Was it a one-night stand? Love at first sight? The gratification of royal power and desire? Or a trap designed along the lines of dynastic-political interests, which had irreversible moral consequences?[71] It is apparent that in the chapter there is no mention of the verb אָהַב (love). In a broader context, Thomas Naumann explained that David is always the object of the verb, but never the subject. Therefore, he is the one who is loved, and the love of people is flowing towards him: *"he was much loved by Saul"* (1 Samuel 16:21); moreover, he was loved by the whole nation, even by the courtiers (18:5.22). After his victorious military campaigns, he was greeted by singing and dancing women (18:6–7). His wife Michal loved him, as well as his friend, Jonathan. But David is never described to be loving anybody. Based on this, the image of an emotionless ruler can be drawn: he only allows his emotions to flow freely when he experiences loss or pain.[72]

The tragic encounter between David and Uriah is in the centre of the narrative. It takes places within three days, and this part of the story contains the most dialogues, as well as those lines of rupture, which will forever (or at least in the Bible) connect the figures of David, Bathsheba and Uriah.

To the dynamics of the dialogue between Uriah and David, ironically, the word שָׁלוֹם ('peace, wholeness, welfare')[73] opens a window: David inquires the שְׁלוֹם of Uriah, of the nation and the war (Verse 7). Uriah, visiting home, is presented as the counterpart[74] of David, and the embodiment of the 'warrior-ethos'. The genius of narrative lies in the direct speech that implies how the narrator sees certain events but also how various characters in the story see each other.[75] Uriah is shown as remaining loyal to his fellow soldiers till the end. He also rejects to live with the royal privileges: he refuses to set foot in the royal residence. Looking back from this point, an interesting dynamic is revealed on the level of spatial movement: the clash of interests is mirrored in the movement of the protagonists in different directions. When Bathsheba physically enters the royal residence, she gives up her loyalty to his husband morally, even though she later returns to their home. At this point, Uriah arrives to the same entrance. He will be loyal to the king in his behaviour until the end, but he never returns to the family home. As for the power structures in the narrative, it is symbolic that the foreign soldier is settling down in front of the royal residence repeatedly (2 Samuel 11:9.13): he is on the doorstep, on a threshold between the public and the private sphere. By mapping the web of gaps in the text, several questions might emerge: can this stubborn steadfastness be explained with the ascetic morals of a battle-tested soldier?

A possible reading of the gaps is that Uriah is holding a mirror up to the king, who indulged in his palace and impregnated his wife while he had been fighting against the Ammonites. From this point, there is no way back: Uriah must "march to death". David reacts indifferently to the death of Uriah and their fellow soldiers: *"Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another"* (Verse 25).

After the death of her husband, Bathsheba mourned him, but besides this, no more details are revealed in the text concerning their relationship. The quality of their relationship, the feelings of intimacy and sympathy are mentioned indirectly by Nathan the Prophet in his parable on the poor man's ewe (2 Samuel 12:1–13), ruined by the rich man's greed and desire for power.[76]

Afterwards, the story accelerates: David takes the widow home, marries her and she gives birth to a son. In the narrative, this is the first occasion when the negative evaluation of David's acts surfaces, showing that there is an absolute system of values, which is binding even to the King of Israel: *"But the thing David had done displeased YHWH"* (2 Samuel 11:27).

It was David who was contested, however. The consequences had an impact on his whole family and even on his household.[77] The Lord sent Nathan the Prophet to David, who in his parable (2 Samuel 12:1–13) reproached him for desiring the wife of his neighbour (2 Samuel 11:2–3). He had committed adultery (2 Samuel 11:4), murdered a man (2 Samuel 11:14) and had taken the wife of his commander (2 Samuel 11:2–3.27). In the dialogue between the King and the Prophet, the responsibility of Bathsheba is not mentioned. However, the death of the son foreshadows ominous events. Bathsheba is not included in her new husband's penance, fasting, prayer, wake, and guilt (Verses 15–23). A sense of intimacy between husband and wife is mentioned only once: *"then David comforted his wife, Bathsheba"* (2 Samuel 12:24). Here, the name of Bathsheba is mentioned again, and the narrative is being continued as the story of David and Bathsheba (Cf. 11:5.26; 12:10.15). This is shown by the agents' change of direction in movement: whereas earlier Bathsheba went to David and was at his service, now David approaches his wife and enters her room (Verse 24).[78] Even though it is mentioned that Bathsheba mourned his husband, Uriah, the verb נָחַם (to comfort) is the only word that sheds light on *her* internal world. In the remaining part of the narrative, she is presented as a suffering partner to Uriah, when *he* is stricken by woes. This hiatus in the text was filled by a series of illustrations in the Psalter of John of Gaunt from the fourteenth century. This is one of the authentic, less known visual representations, when the face of the mourning, woe-stricken Bathsheba is shown.[79]

Following the death of the unnamed son, a new chapter begins in the relationship of David

and Bathsheba: *"She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon and YHWH loved him. And he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah."* (2 Samuel 12:24–25) *"YHWH loved him"*: this sentence sets the tone of the sequel, which is even reflected by the name of the new-born son: *"the one favoured by the Lord"*. Later, they place him in the care of Nathan the Prophet. The divine legitimation and favourable reception of the child implies that the sinful relationship of David and Bathsheba will not cast a shadow on Solomon. Later, it is not mentioned how the growing son would come to terms with the burden of his parents' transgression. The narration seems to have forgotten about the education, character and growing ambitions of Solomon. He is shown again as a grown adult, at the ceremonious moment of the coronation.[80] This important albeit neglected period is revived in Romanesque and Gothic Manuscript Bible illustrations: on these, Bathsheba is also present when David is being reproached by Nathan. Furthermore, their wedding and the birth of Solomon are also illustrated.[81]

The favourable reception of the child (he is loved by the Lord; Nathan is appointed as his tutor) will have an impact on Solomon's life. Bathsheba gains significant political power and becomes queen mother. Based on the narrative, we cannot reconstruct this political and spatial transformation, we are only faced with the results in 1 Kings 1.[82]

4. Conclusion

The David–Bathsheba–Uriah story is one of the best-known and most adapted love triangles of the Old Testament, which was re-worked and presented in codices, paintings and films using various visual imagery and tones. Due to the modesty, laconism, ambiguity, plasticity and dramatic power of the narrative, it inspired several textual and visual representations, which is revealed by my survey of the story's impact and reception history. In this article, I have collected these paradigmatic narratives, all of them pertaining to one point of origin: the 'case of Uriah, the Hittite' as a turning point in David's story. It is a moral transgression, which points at the imminent conflicts and lines of rupture in the fate of King David, and in a broader perspective, in the fate of his family, dynasty and the subsequent generations of Israel. Therefore, the analysed narratives focus on the origin of all the woes David was stricken with. For centuries, the visual representations of Bathsheba anchored around the bathing scene, while the figure of David was gradually blurred and confined to the background. The other aspects of the story, for instance, the tragic figure of the foreigner Uriah and his family drama were underrepresented in the visual narratives, the same way as his murder was rendered insignificant next to his wife's sexual transgression.

In reception history, the visual imagery 'filled in the gaps' on the horizon of reception and comprehension, and gained almost as much significance as the textual narrative itself. The medieval and modern representations of Bathsheba were created on commission by men, adjusting the perspective to the social status of the commissioner. However, not only the members of the ruling elites encountered the narrative of David and Bathsheba. It was also available for the poor and uneducated classes, mostly in the different versions of the Bible and on church paintings. The story was then transformed into an individual paradigm in religious education. Its significance in the history of mentalities and in reception history still has an impact on today's interpretation practices.

First, the feminist exegesis at the end of the twentieth century became sensitive to and critical towards these visual representations. Their main argument was that the possible readings and the visual representations of the David–Bathsheba story bequeathed in collective memory still has an impact on the social discourse on the issues of gender and power, as well as gender and violence. The aspects of the narrative that imply suffering, and the drama evolving along the lines of structural-power relations, as well as the narrative of 'war, sex and aggression' in the background is still a delicate matter in those cultural contexts, where the marginalised women have lesser control of their sexuality and fertility. Monica Jyotsna Melanchton, an Indian Biblical theologian, points out the dangers of the gap-filling technique: in a milieu where victim-blaming is all-pervasive, Biblical theology must highlight the importance of giving a voice to those on the peripheries, so that the perspectives and interpretations of the blamed and accused women can also be heard.[83]

However, this 'critical sensitisation' was never without emotional overtones, and during the process of gap-filling, many one-sided interpretations were born that aimed to recuperate, or at least 'rehabilitate' Bathsheba. These controversies can hardly be solved due to the typical characteristics of form and content in Hebrew narratives.

Therefore, in this article I have highlighted the risks of one of the gap-filling interpretations gaining overt dominance in impact history, and rendering the complexity of meanings and interpretations of the Biblical narrative into one possible reading. The story of Bathsheba, characterized by multiple transgressions, was even worked into the genealogy of Jesus as the 'wife of Uriah, the Hittite'. What is more, the Bible holds a mirror up to the readers, and they are all free to choose from among one of the existing representations, or to create their own narrative.

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1 HEYM 1972; LINDGREN 1984; MERKEL 2008; BROOKS 2015. See the literary adaptations of the twentieth century in: MOTTÉ 2003, 128–132.

2 ZWEIG 1984.

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[3] HELLER 1984.

[4] ZANUCK-KING 1951; ELFAND-BERESFORD 1985.

[5] In redaction history, this is focussed on as part of the question, whether we can speak of a unified narrative concept with relation to the House of David, or if there exist more separate stories by different narrators. Leonhard Rost, in his now classical article published in 1926, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids*, presupposes a more or less unified literary complex woven around the story of accession with regards to 2 Samuel 6:16.20–23; 2 Samuel 7:11b.16; 2 Samuel 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2. This literary complex has three main sources: the story of the dynasty's rise (1 Samuel 15 [16] – 2 Samuel 5[8]), the story of accession (2 Samuel 6; 9–20; 1 Kings 1f.) and the story of the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 4–6; 2 Samuel 6). The concept of a unified court history was shared by many, among them Walter Dietrich, presupposing a courtly narrative work *(Höfisches Erzählwerk)* and Ina Willi-Plein describing a cohesive story of the House of David *(Davidshausgeschichte)*. These texts apply a critical approach to the House of David, as well as to the person of David. Cf. DIETRICH 2000, 38–69; WILLI-PLEIN 2004, 138–171.

However, this unified theme is challenged by some, often by referring to the lack of a definite beginning, the stylistic differences and the cross-references alluding to other textual correspondences, as well as doublets. The picture is complemented by the presupposition of a narrative work detailing the early kingdom between 1 Samuel 1 – 1 Kings 1–2, before Deuteronomy. Into this, supposedly different, strings of narration and short stories, thus the David–Bathsheba story, were woven. This was later evened by the prophetic redaction of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work. DIETRICH 2006.

[6] See in KNAUF 2002, cf. AHUIS 2007. According to these reticent voices KNAUF comes to the conclusion that the bulk of 1 Samuel 1 – 1 Kings 16 was a "historical narrative", a living text of the Beth-David until its literary fixation in the 7th century. Even though this narrative discourse itself also remained an object of history, conditioned and affected by its immediate historical context but this discourse, respectively "Historia" about David and his successor(s) was no longer directly connected to the historical context of the subject matter contained in it. The foundational myth of the dynasty, the "historical narrative" can be treated as "oral literature" that reacted flexible to changing political constellations and power structures of the royal court, both within and outside Judah.

From this perspective, the Beth-David is the collective author or narrative community ("Erzählgemeinschaft") of the "Historia". Furthermore, the key issue of this narrative discourse revolves around the question that "who shall sit on the throne of the Lord the king after him?" (1 Kings 1:13.17.20.24.27.30.35.46.48). Consequently, this discourse highlights the position of the Queen Mother, the mother of Solomon, in perceiving and narrating the "Historia" through the eyes of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11f; 1 Kings 1f). KNAUF 2016, 121–127.

[7] Quotations from the Hebrew Bible are my own translations (N.M.).

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[8] HOSSFELD 2010, 243–255.

[9] Cf. VEREBICS 2015.

[10] CLEMENTS 2014, 21–40.

[11] According to the text, Uriah was a Hittite, therefore not of Judean origin.

[12] MÜLLNER 2007.

[13] KOENIG 2011, 7.

[14] KOENIG 2011, 11.

[15] KOENIG 2011, 27–77.

[16] KOENIG 2011, 11–17.

[17] MÜLLNER 2005, 8.

[18] See the sustained early versions of 2 Samuel 11–12 and 1 Kings 1 in the Septuagint, Peshitta, Targum and early Jewish interpretations in: KOENIG 2011, 105–161.

[19] ISER 1994.

[20] ISER 1994, 267–280.

[21] ISER 1994, 301–315.

[22] ISER 1994, 284.

[23] In English usage, the term 'Leerstelle' is translated as 'gap'. Therefore, in the following, I will use the two versions (Leerstelle/gap) interchangeably.

[24] STERNBERG 1985.

[25] VETTE 2010, 19–63.

[26] VETTE 1999.

[27] VETTE, ibid, 7.

[28] EXUM-NUTU 2009, 1–11; EXUM 2012, 473–503.

[29] See the etymology in: KŐSZEGHY 2010, 8–9.

[30] The Ancient Ammon today is near Amman, Jordan.

[31] Rabbath, sieged by the soldiers, is today's Amman.

[32] הָלַךְ in the hitpael stem is in frequentative mode and stands for 'walking about'.

[33] The clauses introduced by the interrogative הֲלוֹא in most cases serve as means of affirmation of the already known facts and persons. Cf. WILLIAMS 1967, 68. The interrogative particle 'isn't it' might mean that the origin of Bathsheba, as well as her marriage to his loyal soldier, might have been known to King David and was only confirmed by the messengers. As for the interrogative used in the affirmative mode, see: Genesis 4:9; Psalm 94:9–10; Jonah 4:4.

[34] The Hittites' place of origin was today's Turkey. The powerful empire was dissolved around 200 years before the reign of King David, giving way to the new Hittite kingdoms in Northern Aram (Syria).

[35] The hitpael form of purification is to be understood from the perspective of cult: it could refer to a woman's bath after a sexual act. The next (טְמְאָה) refers clearly to the cultic unclean state caused by menstruation. Cf. Leviticus 15:25–30; 18:19. KOEHLER–BAUMGARTNER 1974,

2:360.

[36] According to Leviticus 15:19–24, menstruation rendered a woman unclean for seven days, therefore Verse 2 probably referred to a ritual bath, mentioned also in Verse 4, affirming that Bathsheba's period was over before she slept with King David. The question, whether this regulation existed in the period, is not detailed here. KOEHLER–BAUMGARTNER-STAMM 1983, 3:1003–1005.

[37] In the David–Bathsheba story, a number of Ancient Near Eastern topoi and literary parallels surface. A detailed comparative analysis is provided by KUNZ 2004, 152–228.

[38] HOGAN 2013, 54–55. Furthermore, the author argues that the 'women around David', respectively Michal (1 Samuel 19:11–17; 1 Samuel 18:22–25; 2 Samuel 6:15–23) Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11–12) and Tamar (2 Samuel 13) share an affinity with one another in the narrative construction of 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel. Namely, the destructive events that happen to these women function as catalysts through which the continuation of the greater narrative of the House of David may be promoted. Three shared elements are representative in the narratives of these women: the dominant 'gaze' from which they are presented, their 'location and transition' in the various scenes and the 'violence' that they are exposed to.

[39] GARDNER 2005, 521–535.

[40] MÜLLNER 2005, 12.

[41] WHYBRAY 1968; MELANCHTON–RASCHZOK 2011, 77–100.

[42] NICOLE 1988, 360–363.

[43] EXUM 1993, 170–202.

[44] A grand survey of its reception history is provided by EXUM 1996, 19–54 and NOORT 2014, 46–76.

[45] SEIBERT 1986, 48.

[46] VADILLO 2008.

[47] It was written in Paris in 1350 and was disseminated in different versions: in the form of short Biblical passages, commentaries, moralising texts and images. The text was written for the personal use of the French kings, queens and their closest relatives. (Vadillo, ibid; 7–8.)

[48] It belongs to the genre of pious literature: it consists of the Book of Psalms and is complemented by prayers, liturgical calendars, odes, confessions and the litany of the saints. (VADILLO, ibid, 8–9.)

[49] Pious literature, flourishing in the late Middle Ages, was written *en masse* at the end of the fifteenth century. First it was read and recited by monks, then it was gradually being disseminated among the lay folk. (VADILLO, ibid, 9–10.)

[50] It is the official chronicle of French history until 1380, which combines historical, Biblical and mythological stories. It is a collection of medieval history books, legends and romances. (VADILLO, ibid, 10.)

[51] VADILLO, ibid, 47–49.

[52] VADILLO, ibid, 53.

[53] VADILLO, ibid, 52.

[54] Lat. *septem psalmi poenitentiales*: based on the Masoretic Text, these are Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 113 and 143, the central thought of which is penitence.

[55] KIRSCHBAUM 1994, 254.

[56] KIRSCHBAUM, ibid, 255.

[57] COSTLEY 2004, 1235–1277.

[58] COSTLEY, ibid, 1240–1241.

[59] COSTLEY, ibid, 1235–1237.

[60] COSTLEY, ibid, 1263.

[61] COSTLEY, ibid, 1264.

[62] COSTLEY, ibid, 1235.

[63] HOEKSTRA 1984, 54–55.

[64] The so-called spatial turn first appeared in English theoretical literature and gradually gained significance in the German areas as well. See the most comprehensive articles of the subject in GEIGER 2012.

[65] MÜLLNER 2005.

[66] See a comprehensive survey on intertextuality in literary theory in: BROICH-PFISTER 1985. On its application in Bible studies see: DRAISMA 1989 and MARKL 2004, 99–108.

[67] On the spatial dynamics of the house: MÜLLNER – THÖNE 2012.

[68] One of the most popular interpretations of the royal call is summarized by Louis Réau, who speaks about the 'handing over of David's love letter'. He collects and recollects the works of art focussing on this motif. RÉAU 1956, 274.

[69] MÜLLNER 2005, 14.

[70] BLENKINSOPP 1966, 52; KLEIN 2000, 51.

[71] Whether Bathsheba was persuaded by her broader family to go to the royal harem to enable upward social mobility, is not supported by textual evidence. However, we shall not forget, that the marriages of David before and after Bathsheba revolved around political pursuits. Through Bathsheba, who became the most precious in the royal harem, the king would have found a connection to the elites of Jerusalem. The positioning of the narrative in the middle of the war against the Ammonites points in this direction as well. One of the most emphatic verbs in the narrative, לָקַח (to take), does not simply mean that David took Bathsheba as his wife (2 Samuel 11:4), but also to the moment of taking over the power, by why David receives the crown of the Ammonite king (2 Samuel 11:4). By conquering Bathsheba and the city of Rabbah, David reaches the zenith of his political and sexual power, and following 2 Samuel 13, only those moments are shown when the power of David turns fragile. Cf. MÜLLNER 1999, 114–129.

[72] NAUMANN 2003, 51–83. Cf. 2 Samuel 1:17–27: David in his lament commemorates the

fallen heroes, especially Saul and his son, Jonathan*: "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; / you were very dear to me. / Your love for me was wonderful / more wonderful than that of women"* (Verse 26). In 2 Samuel 12:16–23, he grieves, fasts and wakes for the boy born from his marriage to Bathsheba; and he voices his fatherly pain when his son Ammon dies (2 Samuel 13:31.37); then he mourns the death when he learns the news of the death of his son Absalom so much, that the closest counsellors have to warn David to the responsibility he must take for his nation. (2 Samuel 19:1–9).

[73] ILLMAN 1995, 94–101.

[74] BAR-EFRAT 1996, 105.

[75] As VETTE 1999, 10, points out: "Each time the narrator uses direct speech, he confronts the reader with the point of view of the speaking character. Each character will interpret events and people with their all too human bias and slanted evaluation."

[76] BAR-EFRAT, ibid, 112–113.

[77] After 2 Samuel 12:15, the house of David is stricken by woes. Following the death of the unnamed son, David's sons struggle for the throne, and Absalom during his rebellion takes possession of the harem of his father's concubines on the roof of the royal residence. (2 Samuel 16:21–22). The rivalry between the possible successors of David reaches its peak in 1 Kings 12.

[78] BAR-EFRAT, ibid, 121.

[79] KIRSCHBAUM, ibid, 256.

[80] KŐSZEGHY 2005, 29–44.

[81] ROSS, 1996, 31–32.

[82] The article does not focus either on the relations of the Davidian harem or Bathsheba's role and power as queen mother (גְּבִירָה) in 1 Kings 1–2. See a detailed analysis in KNAUF 2002 and CUSHMAN 2005.

[83] MELANCHTON ibid. She analyses the renewed status of Bathsheba; her transformation from a sexual object to queen mother is presented as part of a post-rape survival strategy and is paralleled to an Indian story, *The Prison (Anuradha Ramaman: Sirai*, 1984).

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