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## **Cherchez la femme.**

### **Women in the Background of Psalm 18//2 Samuel 22\***

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#### Zusammenfassung

Der Text von Psalm 18//2Samuel 22 ist als ein und derselbe Psalm *fast* wortwörtlich sowohl im Buch der Psalmen, als auch im zweiten Samuelbuch zu finden. In diesem Artikel geht die Verfasserin anhand der doppelten Einbettung des Textes und seiner Überschrift der Frage nach, welche Gründe und Folgen diese Tatsache im Hinblick auf die Frauengestalten um David haben kann, die in den Samuelbüchern zwar eine wichtige Rolle spielen, aber im Text des Psalms auf einmal „verschwinden“. Von der Erzählung ausgehend stößt sie in Psalm 18 auf ein Idealbild von David, welches ihn konträr zur Erzählung ohne Frauen präsentiert. Auf der Basis intertextueller Untersuchungen erläutert der vorliegende Artikel die sich daraus ergebenden Konsequenzen und richtet dabei besonderes Augenmerk auf semantische Analysen.

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#### **1. Theoretical Background**

Is there a place for women in the theology of the Psalms? This is a question raised by the South African theologian, Helen Efthimiadis-Keith. In 1999, when part of her article was published, the state of research was not promising – not much had been written on the topic so far.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, her article was meant as an introduction, leading the reader through the Book of Psalms, from a female viewpoint. She laid emphasis on parts of the book, where the female sex, in one form or another, appears, and also highlighted the sometimes striking lack of women in the entire composition. She writes: “*The presence of women in the Psalms is sometimes made all the more conspicuous by their absence. This is especially so when male leaders or victors are mentioned to the exclusion of their female counterparts – contrary to the evidence provided by other sections of the Old Testament.*”<sup>2</sup> She mentions three Psalms, from which significant female actors are missing, even though they are the important characters of the Old Testament narratives evoked by the verses.<sup>3</sup> From the lack of women,

Efthimiadis drew a conclusion regarding textual history: *“For, the omission of the names of these important women from the Psalter – contrary to their presence in the Old Testament narrative and certain prophetic material is far too obvious a fact to be incidental. We are left with little choice but to view this phenomenon as deliberate obscuration of women’s (names and hence) roles at the hand of the later editors of the Bible.”*<sup>4</sup> Whether we agree with this or not, it must be acknowledged that Efthimiadis focuses on a significant phenomenon, especially if we want to read and comprehend the text of the Old Testament – which is painfully androcentric at times – as women. Here we shall consider the consequences, also highlighted by the author: *“The absence of this imagery is more than negative; it effectively vitiates women’s authority and leadership in the (public) religious sphere, denying society the skills which they can bring as persons in their own right.”*<sup>5</sup>

We can change neither the text of the Psalms, nor the history of their interpretation: we can only try and understand these texts as they are. This we can do from a new perspective, and by emphasising and magnifying certain ‘womanless’ passages, a dialogue can be created with those narratives, in which women are given a considerable role. In this article, I will approach Psalm 18 from this perspective. Psalm 18 is present in the Second Book of Samuel in a narrative context of King David’s life story (Psalm 18//2 Samuel 22). In this narrative context, but especially in the context of the Psalms, which are considered of Davidic authorship, Psalm 18 is also embedded in David’s story. Using this as a point of reference in my article, I will analyse the text from the perspective of (the lack of) women; those, who were of central importance in the life of David. To do this, I shall lay out an intertextual network, involving the Psalm’s superscription and the Davidic authorship featured in it. According to the superscription, this is a Psalm of David – and a unique one. If read in the context of the superscription, it is revealed, that it is, genre-wise,<sup>6</sup> a hymn of royal legitimation.<sup>7</sup>

In Psalm 18//2 Samuel 22, the Davidic authorship plays a crucial and multifaceted role. It also enhances our understanding of whether we can read the androcentric text of the Psalm from a female perspective. Jed Wyrick, in his 2004 monograph, *The Ascension of Authorship* examined the concept and function of the author that developed and was transformed from early Jewish and Hellenistic traditions up to the formation of the Christian canon.<sup>8</sup> In his concluding chapter, he writes the following about the Jewish concept of the author, whose central role was to ensure the authority of the text: *“The Psalm headings, which have been dated to the early Second Temple period, provide a case in point. They reveal an early interest in attaching names to anonymously composed texts on the part of biblical editors and scribes.”*<sup>9</sup> However, the redactors of the Second Temple, by indicating authorship, besides canonization and elevating the text to the rank of the Holy Scripture, also evoked an intertextual network, in which the texts – marked by authorship – began to engage in dialogue with other texts. Here, we can speak of a network of Biblical intertextuality, operating between the authors, their texts and their biographies, since readers are inclined to connect the

texts written by the same author one to the other. Consequently, the name ‘David’ marking authorship, functions as an indicator of intertextuality.

Exploration into the intertextual network of the Book of Psalms inspired many interesting articles.<sup>10</sup> It is true –with reference to Julia Kristeva, the ‘foremother’ of intertextuality<sup>11</sup> – that the Book of Psalms has immense potential in this field. The feminist approach has also inspired many works in the field. LaNeel Tanner<sup>12</sup> devoted an entire monograph to the questions of intertextuality and Psalms, while Ulrike Bail’s book explores the relations between Lamentations and violence, using intertextual analysis.<sup>13</sup>

In recent psalm research, the approach that emphasizes the examination and analysis of the Book of Psalms as an edited and finalized book has gained significance. In his 2005 article, Rolf Rendtorff examined the psalms connected to David, in a collection of essays that aimed to synthesize the new directions of research.<sup>14</sup> He and Brevard Childs,<sup>15</sup> who examined the relations of the exegesis of Psalm superscriptions and the midrash, emphasized that not only does the Hebrew Bible connect 73 of the 150 Psalms to the person of David, but that these superscriptions can also be linked to events of David’s life presented in the Second Book of Samuel. *“The references make it clear that the psalms in their given shape are to be read in the larger framework of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is thus possible to understand these psalm titles as a kind of inner-biblical exegesis. They provide insight into a way that David’s personality was viewed by later generations of readers and writers of biblical texts.”*<sup>16</sup>

Dorothea Erbele-Küster goes further, when she approaches the role of the superscription(s) from the reader’s point of view. She writes the following: *“Der Psalm, obgleich er nicht den Erzählstrang der Samuelbücher weiterschreibt, ist durch vielfältige Wortfelder mit seinem Kontext verknüpft. Die Einbindung von Ps 18 an dieser Stelle innerhalb der Samuelbücher wurde daher als ein erster Schritt innertestamentlicher Schriftauslegung beschrieben. [...] Die Erfahrungen des Beters waren durch die Verknüpfung mit Situationen aus dem Leben Davids gedeutet, und umgekehrt erhalten die Erzählungen in den Samuelbüchern durch die Psalmen einen neuen Interpretationsrahmen. Dieser rezeptionsästhetische Lesevorgang läßt sich mit dem Begriff der Intertextualität erfassen.”*<sup>17</sup>

As this quote shows, the text of Psalm 18//2 Samuel 22 is intriguing in that it is present not only in the Book of Psalms, but also in the Second Book of Samuel – as a conclusion to the life and reign of King David. This raises several questions and holds numerous possibilities of interpretation, not only from the point of view of women.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the monographs and articles discussing the Psalm examine the version in the Book of Psalms, and textual analysis mostly considers the version of the historical book. The books of James Watts and Steven Weitzman are exceptional in this sense. They examine the poetic texts from the point of view of narrative embeddedness, and devote a separate chapter to this Psalm.<sup>19</sup> Weitzman argues compellingly that this embeddedness in a narrative context is due to redactional work on the canon. His thesis is that it is no accident that the poetic texts he also discusses are present in

the historical books: „*What is new here is my proposal that the addition of these songs represents a kind of scripturalizing revision, a reshaping of biblical narrative triggered by its emergence as part of Israel’s sacred scripture.*”<sup>20</sup> Weitzman comes to the conclusion, that upon canon formation and the final recording of the text, the poetic texts were inserted into the historical books while searching for new answers in a new era, to underpin or modify the content or message of the narrative. In the case of our text, it means that David’s role is clarified at the end of his life. In other words, it attempts to present the king – who is not at all blameless – in a light expected by the readers. With reference to earlier articles, Watts proposes the same idea: „*The psalm serves as a theological commentary on David’s life, and characterizing David is its primary function.*”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it seems fairly obvious, that, whenever this poem was fitted into its present place, the aim was the rehabilitation of David from the moral vices assigned to him in 2 Sam.

If we decide – as the double embeddedness or the authorial references of the superscription allow us – to read the psalm in the context of David’s life story, either in the Book of Psalms or in 2 Samuel, it might be possible that certain words and expressions in the text (independent of authorial or redactional intention, only at the level of the reader/receiver), become emphatic and function as indicators of the absence of women who, otherwise, play an important part in David’s life. If we consider the problem from the perspective of the Books of Samuel, we find that while women are featured in most of its narratives, in the so-called appendix, where the Psalm in question is found (2 Samuel 21–24), women disappear without a trace.<sup>22</sup> Since this article approaches the problem from the perspective of women, and reads the verses with a ‘female eye’,<sup>23</sup> I would argue that, in some instances, the absent women step forward,<sup>24</sup> and paradoxically, linguistic phenomena direct our attention to this problem.<sup>25</sup> Thus, to quote Ulrike Bail: *“Im Vordergrund stehen nicht identifikatorische oder assoziative intertextuelle Verknüpfungen, sondern Verknüpfungen aufgrund von Wortfeldanalysen, Gattungsreferenzen, Struktur- und Themaparallelen etc. Doch muß betont werden, daß es nicht um den Nachweis von literarischen Abhängigkeiten und deren Richtung geht. Die Plausibilität intertextueller Bezüge wird sich nicht am Kriterium historischer Textproduktion orientieren, sondern an einer Leseposition.”*<sup>26</sup>

Reading the text in the knowledge of the David-figure presented in the historical books – and even reading the Psalms without this knowledge – the end of 2 Samuel leaves the reader no choice but to adopt an idealised image of David, from which women (and all related problems) are removed. This completely overturns the image of David we know from the narrative books. My aim, however, is to apply an intertextual analysis of Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22 against each other, and thus to call forth the women of David’ story.

## 2. Psalm 18:1–2//2 Samuel 22:1 in the light of Samuel’s narrative

### 2.1 David and his missing emotions towards women

If we read the Samuel narrative, we do not need a specific ‘female eye’ to notice that in David’s story several women are present. Women, and especially strong ones, had an important role to play in each moment of David’s life: Michal, Abigail, Bathsheba and Abishag – just to mention the best known. Many others appear beside them in the Davidic narrative. Yet, however carefully we examine the text, we cannot find traces of David’s emotions towards these women. As Thomas Naumann and others concluded, David does not love any of them. According to the available texts, the moving drive behind David’s actions was his own political interest, as well as physical desire.<sup>27</sup> Naumann argues that it is no accident that David is always the object of the verb אהב (to love), but never its subject. Upon his arrival at the court of Saul, he is loved by Saul, Michal and Jonathan, and as the story progresses, he is always the one who receives love and is surrounded by positive emotions, but the text keeps silent about his emotions. Or does it? The lament over Jonathan is a turning point, where the reader gains an insight into David’s feelings: *“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.”* (2 Samuel 1:26).<sup>28</sup> However, the verb אהב (to love) refers only to the love of Jonathan to David. We learn here that David sees the love of Jonathan and the love of women in a hierarchy. Also, while communicating strong emotions, David is only capable of saying: אהבתך לי (you were dear to me), but fails to actually mention love.<sup>29</sup>

The same David, in one of the variants of the text analysed here (the one found in the Psalms) is made to say the following: *“I admire you O YHWH, my strength”*<sup>30</sup> (Psalm 18:2). Here again, the verb אהב is not used, and instead we find אהב. Nevertheless, the verb describes genuinely deep emotions, and, most importantly, David is not its object, but the active agent/subject. Interestingly, this part of the Psalm is not present in the text of 2 Samuel 22.<sup>31</sup> As long as we focus only on the narratives of Samuel, we perceive David’s figure as divinely chosen and a beloved ruler, who himself was cold and almost incapable of deep feelings. However, the verbalisation of his love towards God in the parallel Psalm verse amends this perception: his devotion to God overshadows all other feelings which he communicates to his fellows. Therefore, no women, however deeply they loved David and whatever they did for him in the name of love, deserved his love, which all flowed towards YHWH. It is also important, that this psalm begins in such a peculiar way, in which the implied author (identified with the king) enlists all the things David received from YHWH which are – *everything*.<sup>32</sup> This is only strengthened by the psalm’s ending, which frames the work: *“Therefore I will give you thanks, YHWH, among the nations/and sing praises to your name [...]”*

## 2.2 David as a singer of songs

In the first verse of the psalm, another small detail may be noticed. Though the word *song* (שִׁיר) in many psalms denotes *verse*, in the context of David and Saul's flight from the enemy, this word evokes the moment when David first came to the fore. To be exact, both moments, as stories portraying the same events were set in the First Book of Samuel in two versions. In the first (1 Samuel 16:14–23), David overcomes the evil spirit tormenting Saul with the help of music, and consequently is received into the inner circle of the king. In the second (1 Samuel 17:12–18:5), David gains free entrance to the family of Saul by defeating Goliath, and through Jonathan, whose armour he receives (1 Samuel 18:4).

At this instance, dancing women come forward, and their song elevates David even higher than the reigning king, foreshadowing his persecution, and (being aware of his chosenness), his escape (1 Samuel 18:6–9). Here a song, sung by the choir of women, becomes the turning point of the events. This is where David gains power over Saul, immediately provoking Saul's jealousy and his subsequent persecution. Hereby, the opponents in the narrative (primarily Saul) and the readers (who already know that YHWH dismissed Saul and anointed David in 1 Samuel 16) are faced with the fact that the moment is ripe for David to fulfil his mission.

Thus, a song sets off the story of Saul's long decline, and Psalm 18//2 Samuel 22 is nothing less than a parallel song, in which David celebrates the fall of Saul and his enemies, and at the same time reaches his own omnipotence.

## 3. The agents of escape

The psalm – like David's life story – is characterized by the triple war-escape-glorious victory. However, while similar triumphal songs provide more detailed, at times 'cinematic' images of the rescue, this piece of poetry remains abstract. It does not describe a historical event; rather, it focuses on the general account of David's complete lifework: the moment of rescue is emphatic, and it surfaces in several verses (1–4:20.33.44.49.) illustrated by different synonyms.

Conversely, the triumphal song of Moses at the Red Sea, which like 2 Samuel 22, is a lyrical text embedded in a narrative, is sealed by the song of a woman (Miriam). It does not present the escape as an abstract notion, but rather as a historical fact. The Song of Moses is related to Moses' last-song (Deuteronomy 32), which also has parallels to Psalm 18.<sup>33</sup> In the latter, the emphasis is not on Moses' rescue as an individual, but rather on the relation between YHWH and the people. Here, Moses – instead of David's narrative self, who positions himself in the foreground – transfers the divine message by "*completely withdrawing himself in favour of YHWH's relationship to Israel and in v20–42 he allows predominantly YHWH to profess.*"<sup>34</sup> Despite the differences, Moses' thanksgiving verses and Psalm 18 have a common feature,

namely, that they attribute escape to YHWH. However, it is probably no accident, that in Psalm 18 no historical details are mentioned, as David's life, escape, victories and reign depended on women at several occasions. Let us have a look at these.

### 3.1 Michal or YHWH?

Still in the first verse of the psalm, we notice a striking detail: *“A Psalm of David the servant of the Lord, who addressed the words of this song to the Lord on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.”* (Psalm 18:1)

*“David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.”* (2 Samuel 22:1) This sentence

displays a striking similarity to the sentence, spoken by Abner in 2 Samuel 3:18, in order to persuade the elders of Israel to make David their king, which would also mean the unification of Israel and Judea: *“For the Lord promised David, ‘By my servant David I will rescue my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.’”* What is intriguing here, is that this argument and the idea of unification can only be presented before the elders of Israel, after Saul is already dead, and David has gained back the wife, who connects him to the House of Saul. Only thus can he lay a legitimate claim to the throne, which is, at the time, occupied by Saul's son. In brief, the last obstacle is overcome only when the key to the kingdom, Michal, is brought to David by Abner in 2 Samuel 3:14–16.<sup>35</sup>

However, this is not the first instance, when the name of Michal and escape are linked. The first ‘grand scene’ in which Michal ‘stars’ is at the time of David's first escape. According to 1 Samuel 19:11–17, the future wife of David rescues him from her father King Saul, by using the age-old trick of disguise and replacement. Upon learning that her father plans to kill David, she smuggles him out of the house at night. Furthermore, she replaces David with the teraphim, a household idol under the covers, and this enables David to gain a head start. When Saul interrogates her, she covers up the deceit with lies, claiming that David had forced her to do these things. From the perspective of the later kingdom, Michal's act is indispensable.

However, the story endows Michal with several negative aspects: misleading her father (and the reigning king) and the use of teraphim for deceit. To describe this scene, in five verses out of seven (1 Samuel 19:10.11.12.17.18), the text uses only one verb root for escape: *גלט*. The root has a threefold meaning: to escape, to sneak out and to secure. If we employ Michal's method and a simple ‘trick’ mirroring this scene by changing one consonant in the verb-root, we find ourselves amid the self-glorification of David at the zenith of his power. In 2 Samuel 22 (|| Psalm 18) the root *גלט* is not used but *פלט* is, and it is etymologically very close. It too denotes the word *escape*.<sup>36</sup> However, *פלט*, as opposed to *גלט*, is only used in poetic texts: it appears 18 times in the Psalms, but in the historical books it is found nowhere else except in 2 Samuel 22:2.44. This tendency prevails in our case as well: while in Psalm 18:49 the root *פלט* is used to express escape, 2 Samuel 22:49 uses the root *יצא*. However, when the root *פלט* is

used in it twice (or three times), and in emphatic places, escape is always attributed to YHWH. As Michal kept silent about the whereabouts of David, the verse conceals the (possible) primary actor of the rescue. In this way, instead of sneaking out, we interpret this action as an escape, executed upon the wish and for the glorification of YHWH. Thus, David not only escapes shame, but he can even feel pride over being rescued.

### 3.2 *The relation between delight and escape*

Verse 20 is also about rescue: “*He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me*” (כִּי־רָצָה בִּי). It is interesting that, while in David’s life story – in the earthly political context – the consequence of using the verb רָצָה to express delight ‘enmeshes’ the narrowing of space and opportunities, in the Psalm it becomes the condition of escape. Naturally, the subject here is not a person, but YHWH. It is not surprising, though, that the word evokes several stories, in which flesh and blood persons find pleasure and delight in David.

One such story to be mentioned is also connected to Michal: Saul already feels threatened by David, when he seeks his alliance, in order to eradicate him. Michal comes to like David, and Saul exploits this development. He does not conceal his intention to murder David. “*Saul commanded his servants, ‘Speak to David in private and say, »See, the king is delighted with you [רָצָה בְּךָ הַמֶּלֶךְ], and all his servants love you; now then, become the king’s son-in-law.«*” (1 Samuel 18:22) Three verses later: “*Then Saul said, ‘Thus shall you say to David, »The king desires no [אֵין־רָצָה לְמִלְחָה] marriage present except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged by the king’s enemies.«*’ Now Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.” (1 Samuel 18:25) The contrast is obvious: whereas in David’s biography רָצָה evokes negative connotations, the same word in the psalm – in connection with YHWH – is ‘cleared of’ human narrow-mindedness and infamy. It is transformed into its counterpart: here, the consequences of delight will be the escape and the possibility to move forward.

### 3.3 *A tool of moral escape: Abigail (1 Samuel 25:1–42)*

David’s second important wife is, like Michal, a tool of escape, this time in a moral sense. Abigail is not a naïve and deceitful princess, but a reasonable and caring woman. She is probably by far the most mature of David wives. True, she may be interpreted as being grateful to David for (indirectly) putting an end to an unhappy marriage. If we twist the perspective a little, it becomes clear that Abigail takes on the role of the murderer in order to spare the ‘purity of David’s hands’. With words spoken at the right moment, she takes an active part in the death of her husband, Nabal.<sup>37</sup> The woman, by her own account, went to David and his men to protect them from unnecessary bloodshed. She brought to them what her husband refused to give, ‘protection’-money in the form of vast amounts of food. Abigail in her lengthy soliloquy, clarifies at this point (verses 24–31) that it is not David



whose life is in danger any more. Here, we are faced with the chosen future king, fleeing later predicaments: “*When the Lord has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself*” – says the woman in verses 30–31. Today, we would call this ‘biographic responsibility.’ It is interesting to note that – as opposed to the Psalm – this is not achieved by YHWH in the form of thunder and lightning, but through the mediation of a woman. However, the narrative about the encounter reassures the reader in each verse, that YHWH is the driving force behind the events. The same applies to the psalm, in which the verses 29–46 offer the reader a glimpse into the infinite of possibilities open to those – in our case, to the king – ruled by YHWH. Verses 35–36 read as follows:

<sup>35</sup> He trains my hands for war [לְמַלְחָמָה לְיָדַי לְמַלְחָמָה], my hands can bend a bow of ore,

<sup>36</sup> You have given me your shield of protection, your right hand supports me, and you have bent down to me many times. (Psalm) || You have given me your shield of protection, and listened to me many times.<sup>38</sup>

These verses are in line with 1 Samuel 25:28, where Abigail says: “*For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord [לְמַלְחָמוֹת יְהוָה]; and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live.*” At the same time, parallel to verse 36 in the Psalm, there is someone in the narrative, who elevates David by humbling herself: “*When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. She fell at his feet and said: ‘Pardon your servant, my lord, and let me speak to you; hear what your servant has to say.’*” (1 Samuel 25:23–24)

#### 4. Politics and theology or David’s “purity of hands”

Though the question of moral implacability has been mentioned previously, in the following, I shall focus specifically on this issue. According to certain scholars, Psalm 18/2 Samuel 22 is meant to exculpate the David, whose figure and acts do not always conform to the expectations of his idealized figure in later periods. As mentioned earlier, Steven Weitzman claims that due to a ‘scripturalizing revision’, the poem was appended to the end of the Second Book of Samuel. This addition was meant to ‘mend’ the not unequivocally positive image of David presented in the Books of Samuel: “*What I am now suggesting is that earlier readers of the Bible who lived at the time when it had not yet developed into its final canonical form behaved in a similar way, imposing upon the Bible the literary norms and categories of their world. The biblical text as we now have it bears the mark of their efforts to*

*rewrite the Bible in the image of their own literary presuppositions. Ultimately, that is why I believe that the songs in biblical narrative deserve the attention of anyone interested in the Bible's form and compositional history, for they help us to recognize its present literary shape.*"<sup>39</sup>

In the light of this observation, the five stanzas in the middle of the poem stand out from the rest of the Psalm. They not only transmit the idealized image of a moral David, but by connecting him to the royal law of Deuteronomy, he is presented as the perfect king. If we read the text knowing the figure and moral attitude of David in the Books of Samuel, it seems plausible that the text of the Psalm was used as a tool for re-positioning David morally. In the following, I will show the five verses, and highlight the stories of two women to exemplify the contrast.

21<sup>a</sup> YHWH has awarded me for my rightness (Psalm),  
/ YHWH has awarded me according to my righteousness (2 Samuel),  
21<sup>b</sup> and recompensed me according to the purity of my hands.

22<sup>a</sup> For I have kept the ways of the Lord  
22<sup>b</sup> and turned not wickedly against my God.

23<sup>a</sup> For all his laws/ordinances [טִפְסוּת] are before me,  
23<sup>b</sup> And I did not turn aside from his orders/prescriptions [הִקְדָּוָה].

24<sup>a</sup> I was complete/flawless/uncorrupted with him (Psalm) / before him (2 Samuel)  
24<sup>b</sup> and I preserved myself from my mistakes.

25<sup>a</sup> YHWH recompensed me for my sincere self,  
25<sup>b</sup> according to the purity of my hands before his eyes. (Psalm)  
/25<sup>a</sup> YHWH recompensed me according to my righteousness,  
25<sup>b</sup> according to my purity before his eyes. (2 Samuel)<sup>40</sup>

This is how an ideal king should behave – at least according to Deuteronomy's Kingship Law. Considering that Psalm 18, in its Second Samuel form, forms part of the Deuteronomistic History, a comparison between Deuteronomy 17:14–20 and the verse is unavoidable.<sup>41</sup> In the passage quoted earlier, David proves that he is the ideal subject of this law. This was noted, among others, by Jamie A. Grant, who examined the relationship between the Kingship Law and the Book of Psalms. He wrote: *“The idea of a kingly figure who devotes his life to Yahweh through the study and application of his Word is expressed twice in this second psalm grouping. Firstly, central to Ps 18 is the stanza in which the king declares his righteousness*

*before God (vv 21–25), and central to the chiasmic structure of that stanza is the king’s declaration of the importance of Yahweh’s Torah in his life. In these verses, again we see a clear reflection of the Kingship Law upon the lips of the psalmist-king.”*<sup>42</sup>

Moral integrity and the observation and the enforcement of laws are of fundamental importance. The words in Verse 23 – *הַקֶּה* and *מִשְׁפָּט* – lead us back to the Torah. For example, chapter 4 of the Book of Deuteronomy provides us with a long list of ‘laws and regulations’ – as the English-translation of the words goes – however, in this case, they are combined with the words *מִצְוָה* and *תּוֹרָה* in several places.<sup>43</sup> From this perspective, David is the pure (i.e. *ideal*) king, who observes the laws of the Torah, and in his person, fulfils them, being able to enforce them among his folks, who are the people of YHWH. Apparently, everything is in harmony, as this is the only way a king who unified Israel and Judea and is the predecessor of the Messiah, can be imagined. However, the Books of Samuel clearly refute this ideal, as two women testify.

#### 4.1 Michal

As is clear from the Samuel narrative, David stops at nothing when it comes to fulfilling his political ambitions. One of the most spectacular examples is the way he ‘deals’ with his first wife, in the final scene in 2 Samuel 6:15–23. At the zenith of his power, David brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, wishing to stabilize his rule for all eternity by performing cultic acts. At this very moment, Michal speaks against his unworthy behaviour and dance: *“How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!”* (2 Samuel 6:20) David’s answer is cruel and to the point: *“It was before the Lord, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord, that I have danced before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased [הִיָּיתִי שְׁפֵל] in my own eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honour”* (2 Samuel 6:21–22). The consequence of Michal’s critique is lethal: She does not give birth to children till she dies, and the House of Saul is doomed to disappear.

If we glimpse beyond this marital conflict, as we are faced with the end of a marriage which was made, on the one hand, of love, and on the other hand, of political interests. David reinterprets the notions of humiliation and pride. It is no accident, then, that Verse 28 refers unanimously to the above-mentioned dance-scene and to its morale: *“For you save a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down.”* (Psalm 18:28) *“You deliver a humble people, but your eyes are upon the haughty to bring them down [תִּשְׁפֹּלֵם]”* (2 Samuel 22:28). For ‘humiliation,’ the same root is used here as in the story of Michal, *שְׁפֵל*.<sup>44</sup> David, with this sentence, lays the foundation for the political and religious historical career of his own house. He turns even the most embarrassing situations into something promising, at the same time repudiating his own (irksome) wife and ridding himself of one of his oldest political enemy.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.2 Bathsheba

In light of all this, if we turn back to verses 21–25, the contradiction between the Psalm’s message and the Samuel-narrative is clear. This is shown best in the (in)famous Bathsheba-episode, and more specifically, in the circumstances of their meeting and subsequent marriage.<sup>46</sup> Psalm 18 surfaces in Sam 22, 10 chapters after the events described in 2 Samuel 11–12, and their proximity in the biblical composition enables collation.

Bathsheba occupies a peculiar position among David’s women. What does she add to the story of David? In my view, she adds moral deceit. True, Michal also tricked her father, and Abigail was probably not innocent of the death of her husband, Nabal. However, these acts did not cast a shadow on David’s figure. What is more, these women sacrificed themselves and their own moral integrity, so that David could stay morally pure. However, nothing of this sort happens in the Bathsheba story. In 2 Samuel 11, we read about David and Bathsheba’s first encounter and their adultery, in which – however positively or negatively we might perceive her role – Bathsheba is not acting to protect David’s morality. Interestingly, in the earlier narratives, David was only a pretender to the throne; nevertheless, he was respected as king by women. In the present case, however, David is already an anointed king. It is also the first case, where he is forced to find his own way out of the ‘moral trap’ into which he has fallen. Therefore, it is the king himself, who decides to call Bathsheba’s husband home, in order to foist the unwanted child on him. However, when he fails, Uriah is sentenced to death. The king, fighting the impossible, makes repeated mistakes, and though this (seemingly) leads to a solution, his acts do not remain unnoticed and unpunished.<sup>47</sup>

In order to understand the depth of David’s moral transgression, we need to examine the laws he violated in greater detail, and attempt to establish links between these and the psalm. In this article, I will try to give a glimpse into the profundity of David’s violation of moral norms by comparing the psalm with the Decalogue. Four of the ten commandments are clearly violated by David: “*You shall not murder.*” (Cf. 2 Samuel 11:14); “*You shall not commit adultery.*” (Cf. 2 Samuel 11:4); “*You shall not steal.*” (Cf. 2 Samuel 12:4.7–10); “*You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife*” (Cf. 2 Samuel 11:2–3).

One of the climaxes of the episode is when Nathan the Prophet reproaches the king for his sin, and envisages God’s punishment: “*You are the man! This says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul.*” This latter half-sentence is quoted in Psalm 18:1 word by word. However, interestingly the Psalm keeps silent about this entire episode, which is so central in terms of David’s life and Salvation History. The Psalm communicates only that David is a model king, who keeps the rules and observes compulsively the ‘purity of his hands.’<sup>48</sup>

This is not as true for the queen. Bathsheba is not exceptional because she is chosen to be queen mother in later succession. Rather, it is the other way around. She is exceptional,

because she is ‘biologically determined’ to mould the story: by bathing on the roof, she manifested herself to the male gaze.<sup>49</sup> Whether it led to disadvantages, or undue gain of advantages, or probably to both, is a matter of interpretation. However, later, she clearly surpasses this biological determinacy. She helps David fulfil the socially and culturally prescribed rules, consequently providing the nation with a leader capable of living up to the expected norms. Even though by this she bows to the social roles expected of women, she is still able—through an outrageous scandal—to present herself as indispensable. She becomes one of the most important, memorable figures of the Old Testament by not bowing to social conventions, even though seemingly she is the most humiliated and defenceless of all of David’s women. From beginning to end, she does not act as an individual, determined only by biology, whatever the price may be. Paradoxically, this particular trait makes her eligible to take on the dubious roles of the Queen and Queen Mother, as opposed to the other women, who think merely within the social-political context of patriarchy.

## 5. Conclusion

Above, I emphasised that it is possible to catch a glimpse of some of the female figures from the David-narrative in the song/Psalm of 2 Samuel 22 and Psalms 18. These women were probably intentionally left out from the psalm. The basis of our analysis was the assumption, that this psalm is a text, that is forestalled by a linguistic culture subsistent in texts.

Consequently, it can be read in the context of a metanarrative. That is, the life story of David: the poor shepherd-boy rising to be a great king, the most outstanding figure of his age, one who fulfils all laws and past prophecies, and in eschatological perspectives is the forefather of the saviour. The linguistic elements of the Psalm also enable the identification of a secondary narrative within the psalm, which would be impossible without the preceding narrative. As Edit Zsadányi writes: “*Unexpressedness in itself refers to unexpressedness, as the articulation of the difficulties of the speaker’s position outside of narratives.*”<sup>50</sup> “*Literary concealment is only comprehensible in the context of language, as it is a category of absence that belongs to language, whereas the phenomenon of omission can only supervene in the presence of and correlated to other linguistic signs.*”<sup>51</sup> As a consequence, women are absent from Psalm 18. But this absence makes them present, through linguistic signs and in the metanarrative.

To return to where we began: the superscription of the Psalm is as follows: “*A Psalm of David, who addressed the words of this song to the Lord on the day, when the Lord delivered him from the hands of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul/from the claws of Sheol.*” As proposed by Dahood, the word שָׁאוּל can be read as *Sheol*, instead of the traditional Saul.<sup>52</sup> This is intriguing for two reasons. On the one hand, with this differing reading, the Psalm

invites the reader at the beginning to find various contexts, since one of the readings places the text within the David-narrative, while the other, equally legitimate reading, situates the David-narrative in a general mythological context.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, it is of equal importance that the word שָׁאִיל – while it offers the opportunity of a double-contextualization – refers to silence and omission. Cf. Psalm 115:17: “*It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to the place of silence...*”, and Psalm 94, “*If the Lord had not been my help, I would already live in the land of silence.*”<sup>54</sup> Consequently, the variety of readings, offered by the differing contexts, applies to women as well – and this enables us to read the text from this perspective. Such a reading makes the reference to those women apparent, who are otherwise confined to silence, muteness and omission in the royal hymn.

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\* This text is a thoroughly reworked version of the article published in HAUSMANN, Jutta et al. (Eds.): *NEMek között. Társadalmi nemek sokszínű vallási megközelítésben*, Luther Kiadó, Budapest, 2016. Translation by Janka Kovács.

<sup>1</sup> EFTHIMIADIS-KEITH 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>3</sup> These are Psalm 83:10, in which Sisera is mentioned, but Deborah and Jael are forgotten;



Psalm 99, which focuses on the role of male leaders, but conceals the existence of women, and Ps 105:26, which, like Psalm 99 mentions Moses and Aaron, but leaves Miriam out.

<sup>4</sup> EFTHIMIADIS-KEITH 1999, 46.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>6</sup> The genre and the superscription itself are subjects of heated debates; however, it appears that most approaches examine the text either in its own historicity or consider its meaning as fixed. CROSS/FREEDMAN 1953 termed the verse a ‘royal song of thanksgiving’, taken by DAHOOD 1966 without question or reference. KRAUS 1978 argues for a unified genre and considers the text a royal paean: „*Danklied des Königs nach siegreichem Kampf.*” Hossfeld (HOSSFELD-ZENGER 1993) holds that this Psalm complicates the debate over the genre of Psalms: they can be considered the paeans of an individual, songs of victory with hymnic elements, or “*spätes, komplexes und nichtdestoweniger zusammengehöriges messianisches Danklied der nachexilischen Synagoge mit eingebauten weisheitlichen Reflexionen*” (Ibid, 118.). Hossfeld agrees with the latter. However the ‘title’ of the Psalm in his commentary is as follows: “*Gebet des verfolgten, gerechten und siegreichen Königs David.*” GERSTENBERGER 1988, after a thorough form analysis, concludes that the psalm consists of two generically differing parts: “*Its reflective air and communal liturgical orientation, the influences of wisdom and universalistic hope, and its linguistic peculiarities make Psalm 18 a song of early Jewish congregations, although older traditions also have clearly been worked into the text (e. g., theophany in vv. 8–16; reminiscences of monarchy in vv. 32–46).*” Consequently, he proposes that we consider the Psalm the ‘messianistic thanksgiving song’ of the Jewish community.

<sup>7</sup> I am aware that upon reading the text, I am faced with the result of the age-long work of authors and redactors. However, I consider it important that these authors did not create a text with a singular meaning. While attempting to interpret the verse, my aim is neither the reconstruction of the authorial intentions, nor the demonstration that the creators were conscious of all the possible interpretations the text offers. While examining the *Endtext*, I focus on the whole, and consider each part as integral, without predetermined meanings and functions. Unlike e.g. Alison Ruth Gray, who, examining Psalm 18 just recently, wrote: “*The psalm title will be treated here as an independent »frame«, rather than as an integral part of the psalm.*” (GRAY 2014, 56.)

<sup>8</sup> WYRICK 2004.

<sup>9</sup> WYRICK 2004, 382–383.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Phil Botha’s articles on the intertextual networks of certain psalms. On the possibilities of intertextuality in Old Testament research, see for example MILLER 2011. The article surveys the outcomes of the explorations into the intersections of the Old Testament and intertextuality and publishes a 5-page bibliography related to the topic.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. KRISTEVA 1984, 60, referred to by LANEEL TANNER 2001, 18.

<sup>12</sup> LANEEL TANNER 2001.

<sup>13</sup> BAIL 1998.

<sup>14</sup> RENDTORFF 2005.

<sup>15</sup> CHILDS 1971.

<sup>16</sup> RENDTORFF 2005, 55. Similarly LANEEL TANNER 2001, 56: “*These superscriptions ask the reader to make an intertextual connection between the psalms and an incident in David’s life [...].*” On this theme see for example: CHILDS 1971, SLOMOVIC 1979, BAIL 88–94.

<sup>17</sup> ERBELE-KÜSTER 2001, 51–85, here: 85. “*Even though the Psalm does not rewrite the narrative thread of the Books of Samuel, through the semantic fields, it is connected to them in multiple ways. Therefore, the insertion of Psalm 18 in the Books of Samuel at this point is to be seen as a first step of biblical exegesis within the Old Testament. [...] The experiences of the prayer are explained by the situations from David’s life, and the other way around, the Books of Samuel gain new frameworks of interpretation through the Psalms. As for reception aesthetics, this reading process can be described with the notion of intertextuality.*” Transl. Janka Kovács.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. VEREBICS 2015. Here I shall mention only a few new articles on the topic, some of them dealing with this psalm: BOTHA 2011; BOTHA/WEBER 2008a; BOTHA/WEBER 2008b; WEBER 2014; WEBER 2015; WEBER 2016.

<sup>19</sup> WATTS 1993, 99–117; WEITZMAN 1997.

<sup>20</sup> WEITZMAN 1997, 13.

<sup>21</sup> WATTS 1993, 108.

<sup>22</sup> On this, see a detailed table in: KUNZ 2004, 24–27, in which the incidence of female-related motifs is examined in the Books of Samuel. The ‘appendix-column’ of the table is practically empty.

<sup>23</sup> Here, by ‘female eye’ I do not mean the *reading woman* (though, in this case, it is true). Rather, I focus on the figure of the female and read the two texts by searching for the instances where women might play/have played a role.

<sup>24</sup> However, this does not mean that here I am following the method of ‘gendering texts’, that is, reading them from the point of view of female experience. Cf. BRENNER/VAN DIJK-HEMMES 1996.

<sup>25</sup> This is called by CHILDS 1971, 144f. „Sprachliche Parallele”. Similarly: SLOMOVIC 1979, 354f.

<sup>26</sup> BAIL 1998, 116. “*In the foreground, there are no identificatory or associative intertextual relations, but semantic field analysis, references and relations between genres, as well as structural and thematic parallels. What is more, it must be highlighted that the matter at hand here is not the proving of literary interdependencies, but their directions. The plausibility of intertextual references does not depend on historical text production, but the position of the reader.*” Transl. Janka Kovács.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. NAUMANN 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Where it is not indicated otherwise, the New International Version is used for English-language translations.

<sup>29</sup> In the present article, the erotic connotations of this passage will not be examined. Reading this root in the Song of Songs, an erotic interpretation is fairly obvious. The root נעם that appears in the Song of Songs 7:7 does not speak about love as an emotion. This is described in detail in SCHROER-STAUBLI 1996 and has been researched extensively. For a comprehensive treatment of the topic, see NISSINEN 1998, esp. 53–56. On page 56 he writes: *“The relationship of David and Jonathan can be taken as an example of ancient oriental homosociability, which permits even intimate feelings to be expressed. In this sense, it can be compared to the love of Achilles and Patroclus (in Homer’s Iliad) or the love of Gilgameš and Enkidu.”*

<sup>30</sup> Where it is not indicated otherwise, the English version of the psalm’s text is taken from Alison Ruth Gray’s translation. Cf. GRAY 2014.

<sup>31</sup> This problem surfaces in commentaries as well. In 2 Samuel 22, this half-verse is absent, and, the root רחם in this form is a hapax. Based on these, in the historical paradigm it is argued, that this part did not originally belong to the verse.

<sup>32</sup> Though I cannot elaborate on this in the article, I shall mention that the links to Deuteronomy are obvious, and therefore the problem of the royal law (Deuteronomy 17:14–20) cannot be avoided. However, the verb used for love (רחם) is not found in the royal law (this passage, as others in Deuteronomy, commands the king to fear [ירא] YHWH), or in any other parts of Deuteronomy. The other significant emotion, expected by YHWH of the people and the ruler alike – is the feeling that David is the least capable of love (אהב). (On the correspondences between the last two roots see MARKL 2012, 57–61.). However, the verb רחם is found twice in the Book of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 13:18; 30:3), and at both passages it expresses YHWH’s relation to the people. (Additionally, it is absent in the Books of Samuel, whereas in the Psalms it denotes the ‘mercy’ of YHWH.)

<sup>33</sup> On the correspondences between Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 18//2 Samuel 22, see, besides the already mentioned works of James Watts and Steven Weitzman; OTTO 2012, 175, and in more detail: MARKL 2012, 253–258.

<sup>34</sup> MARKL 2012, 257. Transl. Janka Kovács.

<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to note that both the king and the tradition seem to forget the ‘mild nuisance’ that the second husband of Michal leaves the scene in tears.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. for example: “פלט plt. pi. retten” In. JENNI-WESTERMANN 1976, 419.; *“Mit plt. pi./hi. ist mlt. pi./hi. in der Bedeutung und in der Konstruktion so ähnlich, daß eine gemeinsame Behandlung beider Verben gerechtfertigt ist.”*

<sup>37</sup> See 1 Samuel 25:36–38: *“When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So, she told him nothing at*

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*all until daybreak. Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died.”*

<sup>38</sup> Here, as in other cases, when I use quotations from the Psalm, I present both variants of the texts, as the primacy of neither can be confirmed. In the article, this question is not discussed. However, the minute differences between the two versions of the text are of great significance. In detail see VEREBICS 2015, and VEREBICS 2017.

<sup>39</sup> WEITZMAN 1997, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Trans. Janka Kovács and Petra Verebics.

<sup>41</sup> What is more, not only the Samuel narrative, but also the Psalms can be connected to Deuteronomy. On this, see: MARTTILA 2012.

<sup>42</sup> GRANT 2004.

<sup>43</sup> The words *מִצְוָה*, *תְּקַה*, *מִשְׁפָּט* and *תּוֹרָה* appear several times in the Book of Deuteronomy, denoting the spoken and observable laws. A non-exhaustive list of these is 4:1.45; 5:1.31; 6:1.20; 7:11; 11:32; 12:1; 17:19.

<sup>44</sup> Here the statement, later attributed to Jesus, which will become one of the foundations of Christianity, appears: “*For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted*” (Luke 14:11). It is intriguing, though by no means surprising, that several Hebrew New Testaments translate the word for humiliation with the same root in Luke 14:11.

<sup>45</sup> I must add, that in this case, through the Psalm allusion, we hear the last cry for help of a woman who was lured into a trap by her own emotions, and is incapable of escaping familial and political intrigues.

<sup>46</sup> On whether Bathsheba can be held responsible see: NAUMANN 2003, 64–75; and the contradicting opinions of EXUM (for example, EXUM 1993), NICOL 1997 and NICOL 1988.

<sup>47</sup> See the exhaustive comparative analysis of the Abigail and Bathsheba-episodes (with results, highlighting the positive role of Abigail) in KUNZ 2004, 281–300.

<sup>48</sup> In this case, it does not mean purity in the cultic sense, but refers to moral integrity.

<sup>49</sup> On the bathing scene as an erotically charged act, see: *Ibid*, 157–162.

<sup>50</sup> ZSADÁNYI 2002, 140. (Transl. Janka Kovács)

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>52</sup> DAHOOD 1996. As a parallel, he cites an unpublished Psalm in Akkadian, the beginning of which is: “*Since the day you delivered me from the mouth of Death.*” As an objection, it is often argued that this is unparalleled in the Old Testament. However, this reading is affirmed by a word appearing in verse 6, to be read as *Sheol*, as well as the phrase *מִיַּד שְׁאוֹל* in Hosea 13:14, Psalm 49:16 and Psalm 89:19.

<sup>53</sup> The Psalm contains various mythological allusions.

<sup>54</sup> On the relations between Sheol and silence see: RIEDE 2014.

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