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The Sanctified ‘Adulteress’ and her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba’s Bath and Self-Consecration in 2 Samuel 11

J. D’ROR CHANKIN-GOULD, DEREK HUTCHINSON,
DAVID HILTON JACKSON, TYLER D. MAYFIELD,
LEAH REDIGER SCHULTE, TAMMI J. SCHNEIDER,
E. WINKELMAN

School of Religion, Claremont Graduate University, 831 N. Dartmouth Ave.,
Claremont, CA 91711, USA

Abstract

Bathsheba’s actions in 2 Sam. 11.2-4 identify crucial aspects of her character. Past commentators interpret these words in connection with menstrual purification, stressing the certain paternity of David’s adulterine child. This article demonstrates that the participles *rôḥešet* and *miṭqaddešet* and the noun *miṭtum’ātāh* do not denote menstrual cleansing. Bathsheba’s washing is an innocent bath. She is the only individual human to self-sanctify, placing her in the company of the Israelite deity. The syntax of the verse necessitates that her action of self-sanctifying occurs simultaneously as David lies with her. The three focal terms highlight the important legitimacy of Bathsheba before the Israelite deity, her identity as a non-Israelite, her role as queen mother of the Solomonic line, and her full participation in the narrative.

Keywords: David, Bathsheba, purity or purification, uncleanness, menstruation, sanctification, adultery, deity.

Bathsheba: Seductive nudist? Post-menstruant? Innocent bather? Bathsheba has been depicted as everything from a traditional Israelite woman bathing to a seductress luring David into her bed. The root of the question surrounds Bathsheba's action of bathing in 2 Samuel 11, which has traditionally been understood in connection with menstrual purification, thereby opening the door for numerous interpretations about Bathsheba and her character.¹ The focus here is on three words closely connected to Bathsheba: *rōḥešet* ('washing'), *mitqaddešet* ('self-sanctifying'), and *miṭṭum'ātāh* ('from her uncleanness'). A detailed analysis reveals that these words are not associated with menstruation; instead, they highlight the legitimacy of Bathsheba before the Israelite deity,² her identity as a non-Israelite, her role as (queen) mother of the Solomonic line, and her full participation in the narrative.³ The present study will review past methods of translating and understanding the words *rōḥešet*, *mitqaddešet*, and *miṭṭum'ātāh*, and will examine each word within the context of the Hebrew Bible; this will ultimately result in a new translation and interpretation.

The Problem of Bathsheba's Past

Past scholarship on 2 Samuel 11 focuses on David, his adultery and the certain paternity of the adulterine child.⁴ This limited purview makes the common translation of the text little more than a signal of David's indictment: if Bathsheba is fertile, then David is going to be in trouble. Both *rōḥešet* and *mitqaddešet* are translated in reference to ritual cleansing

1. See Peter Ackroyd, 'The Second Book of Samuel', in *The Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 99-101; Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 310; P. Kyle McCarter, Jr, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (AB, 9; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), p. 286; Antony F. Campbell, *2 Samuel* (FOTL, 8; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 115.

2. For all references to the God of Israel, we will use the term 'deity'. See Tammi Schneider, *Sarah: Mother of Nations* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 6 n. 16.

3. For further reading on the importance of the queen mother in the history of Judah, see Elna K. Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House: Royal Women of Judah and their Involvement in the House of David* (JSOTSup, 349; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), pp. 78-85.

4. Note that Adele Berlin argues Bathsheba is 'a complete non-person'; she is simply part of the plot because adultery requires a married woman, and Bathsheba satisfies that function for David. Adele Berlin, 'Bathsheba', in Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer (eds.), *Women in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 57-58.

concerning the menstrual cycle. Most assume *mitqaddešet* (v. 4) must refer back to *rōḥešet* (v. 2), identifying David as the father.

P. Kyle McCarter, Jr does not treat *rōḥešet* as significant, but places great emphasis on *mitqaddešet*. He argues *wēhî mitqaddešet miṭṭum'ātāh* is a circumstantial clause which must be 'describing Bathsheba's condition at the time of her intercourse with David'.⁵ McCarter translates the phrase in 11.4 literally as 'and she was purifying herself', but in light of his argument for the circumstantial clause, he suggests it should be translated 'it was the time of her purification'.⁶ Furthermore, McCarter claims the alleged addition of *miṭṭum'ātāh*, which he translates as 'from her uncleanness', must be in reference to her condition of menstruation. McCarter further argues this timeline suggests 'her intercourse with David took place at a propitious time for conception', meaning 'Uriah could not have been the father of the child'.⁷

Scholars focusing on feminist topics follow the same reasoning provided by McCarter. Although the arguments differ, the initial assumption remains the same. J. Cheryl Exum argues that the encounter between David and Bathsheba is a 'narrative necessity' required to 'establish paternity' of Bathsheba's child.⁸ Bathsheba must be purifying herself from menstruating as a literary signal to the reader, indicating she is ripe for new life. Exum claims Bathsheba's story is not all about sex; she is the mother of David's child: 'Otherwise the scene is the biblical equivalent of "wham, bam, thank you, ma'am": he sent, he took, she came, he lay, she returned'.⁹ Exum shifts the focus from lust to motherhood of the future king, which lends Bathsheba more agency.

However, more recent scholarship moves away from these traditional translations. Tikva Frymer-Kensky separates *rōḥešet* and *mitqaddešet* so that bathing and purification are two separate events, not necessarily pertaining to each other or even Bathsheba's menstrual cycle. She suggests the concept that a biblical woman bathes after menstruation is 'anachronistically based on later rabbinic law, and is improbable for the

5. McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 286.

6. McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 286.

7. McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 286.

8. J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (JSOTSup, 163; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 175.

9. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 175. See also Jo Ann Hackett, '1 and 2 Samuel', in Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (eds.), *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998), p. 98.

time of David'.¹⁰ Furthermore, she adds that 'in the Bible—women do not seem to wash after menstruation', clarifying that time, not water, brings an end to menstruation.¹¹

Lillian Klein also separates Bathsheba's actions in washing and purifying herself. She moves the point further, suggesting that *miṭṭum'ātāh* usually refers to 'sexual or to ethical and religious uncleanness. These encompass a range of ritual uncleanness of men and women's uncleanness resulting from copulation and menstruation.'¹² She denies that *rōhešet* and *mitqaddēšet* refer to washing or purification from menstruation, and she also suggests that the purification may be ethical rather than simply compliance with the law concerning menstruation.

Although recent discussions of Bathsheba move away from the menstruation assumption, scholarship has yet to offer a plausible alternative explanation for these three terms. The terms in question must be examined as they appear in the entirety of the Hebrew Bible. Only with such a thorough exploration can Bathsheba's particular context and character be accurately defined.

***rhš*: Sometimes a Bath is Just a Bath**

The verb *rhš* ('to wash') is found in various conjugations a total of 77 times throughout the Hebrew Bible. Despite its frequent use in the text, *rhš* is never associated with a woman bathing following her menstrual period. Washing occurs only in two forms, reactive and proactive. *rhš* is most often employed in its reactive sense, as a response to something that is in need of cleaning. This can be further broken down into two sub-categories: (1) washing as a means of making something clean; (2) washing as a response to impurity, a means of restoring something to its original state.

Washing as a means of cleansing takes place in a number of contexts within the Hebrew Bible. Washing occurs in the colloquial sense of bathing for the hygienic purpose of removing dirt from one's body (Song 5.3; Ezek. 16.4). Washing is a means to offer hospitality, cleanse emotions, and cleanse the hands and feet of priests and their sacrifices. An offer to wash feet often occurs in the context of a hospitality demonstration

10. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), p. 147.

11. Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, p. 147.

12. Lillian R. Klein, *Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 57.

whereby the host makes him/herself more hospitable by washing his/her guest. Abraham (Gen. 18.4), Lot (Gen. 19.2), Laban (Gen. 24.32), Joseph (Gen. 43.24), Abigail (1 Sam. 25.41), and David (2 Sam. 11.8) all offer to wash their guests' feet (either directly or through servants) in the context of a hospitality demonstration.¹³ Another key example of cleansing in this manner occurs in Judges 19, where the old man of Gibeah offers hospitality by washing a Levite traveler's feet.¹⁴ Washing feet in the Hebrew Bible exists as a clearly understood offer of safety and hospitality—nothing more, nothing less.

Another form of reactive cleansing concerns washing away an emotion. Both Joseph (Gen. 43.31) and David (2 Sam. 12.20) engage in this form of washing. Joseph washes his face (the only person in the Hebrew Bible to do so) after glimpsing his brothers for the first time in years. He seeks a private location to weep, then washes his face (implied: of tears) before returning to public view. David washes after Bathsheba's child dies. While he had been fasting and lying upon the earth during the child's illness, after his death, David 'washes', changes his clothes, and resumes his life. As in the case of the hospitality demonstrations, Joseph and David wash in response to something that is in need of cleansing.

Priests also engage in reactive washing as a means of cleansing. Priests wash both their hands and their feet in a laver before entering the Tent of Meeting, as commanded by the deity through the spokesperson of Moses (Exod. 40.30-32). Aaron and his sons are told that this washing is necessary not only as a means of respect but also as a means of avoiding death itself (Exod. 30.18-21). Priests wash the sacrifices that are offered; specifically, it is often the innards and the legs that are to be washed (Lev. 8.21; 9.14, Exod. 29.17; 2 Chron. 4.6). Here, reactive cleansing of dirtiness is for a holy purpose. In addition, the priests are commanded to wash themselves (or to be washed) in their entirety before entering the Tabernacle (Exod. 40.12; Lev. 16.24) and after completing the sacrificial offering (Lev. 16.28). In all these instances, washing is a command to the priests as a means of cleansing themselves and the sacrifices in order properly to engage in the holy sacrifice rituals proscribed by the deity. Washing is employed in the Hebrew Bible as a reaction to uncleanness to demonstrate hospitality, to cleanse emotions, and properly to engage in the rites of animal sacrifice.

13. Note that Uriah declines David's offer to have his feet washed.

14. See Tammi Schneider, *Judges* (ed. David W. Cotter; Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), pp. 245-69.

rhš appears in a second form of reactive cleansing where washing is conducted as a response to impurity. Washing is used here as a means of restoration to a state of purity. One example of this form of cleansing involves the case of a leper. A man afflicted with leprosy must wash himself before entering the camp (Lev. 14.8) and must again wash after seven days sleeping outside his tent (Lev. 14.9) in order to return to a state of purity (*thr*). The idea that washing is an appropriate action for cleansing leprosy's impurity is rearticulated by Elisha in his advice to Naaman, who tells him to wash seven times in the Jordan River in order to rid himself of the impurity (2 Kgs 5.10). Though Naaman originally attempts to defy Elisha's advice, he eventually complies, and his dip into the Jordan proves fruitful, restoring him to purity (*thr*) (2 Sam. 11-14).

Contact with death is another situation that requires washing away impurity. The elders of a city where a slain man has been discovered are told, after engaging in the ritual murder of a red heifer, to wash their hands over the heifer in order to rid themselves of the moral impurity of the blood-guilt (Deut. 21.6). Furthermore, any *neṣeš* who eats the flesh of an animal that either died of its own accord or that was torn apart by other beasts must wash in water in order to eradicate the impurity (Lev. 18.15-16). Any person who comes into contact with impurity, whether it be through means of 'the dead or a man whose seed goes from him' (Lev. 22.4), can only be restored to purity through washing of the flesh in water (Lev. 22.6).

Another category of restorative purity involves the case of a man who has a 'running issue out of his flesh, because of his issue, he is unclean' (Lev. 15.2). The uncleanness of the man, furthermore, extends to all that he touches: his bed, his clothes, and anyone with whom he comes in contact (Lev. 15.4-5). In all cases, for the man himself, and for others who come in contact with his impurity, washing is the reactive response proscribed to restore a person to a state of purity (Lev. 15.5-13). A man's seed can also be a cause for impurity when, in the context of copulation, it is lost (Lev. 15.16). Again, everything the man comes into contact with becomes impure, and the stated response is washing for the purpose of regaining purity (Lev. 15.16-18).

A woman becomes impure if she comes into contact with a man who has spilled his seed.¹⁵ It is in this context alone—to regain purity—that a woman is commanded to wash. If she comes into contact with her

15. For further discussion, see Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, p. 147.

husband's seed of copulation, then they both must wash (Lev. 15.18). Never is a woman told to wash in response to menstruation.

Menstruation is a cause of impurity that necessitates reactive washing in the Hebrew Bible, but only for men. A woman, after her issue and her blood, is not told to wash, but must be separated for seven days (Lev. 15.19) and upon her return must bring sacrifices to be offered by the priest (Lev. 15.28-30). However, if a man comes into contact with a woman while she is in her menstrual period, or if he comes in contact with anything that she touches while in that state, he is commanded to wash (Lev. 15.21-27).¹⁶

The category of reactive washing includes a number of cases employing metaphorical passages which convey a slightly different nuance. One example concerns washing hands in innocence (Ps. 26.6). In another verse, a righteous man rejoices by bathing his feet in the blood of the wicked (Ps. 58.11) while the protagonist in a similar verse bathes in milk (Song 5.12). Two other references involve a group instructed to wash, such as the people of Israel who are directed to wash themselves clean (Isa. 1.16), or the deity washing away filth (Isa. 4.4). None of the metaphorical passages refer to bathing as a response to menstruation.

In two unique cases, characters wash (*rḥṣ*), not as a reaction to uncleanness or impurity, but simply to bathe. In Exod. 2.5, Pharaoh's daughter comes down to bathe in the river. She finds a baby and, although she sees that he is a Hebrew child, she adopts him as her own and names him Moses (Exod. 2.10). In the second case, Naomi recommends Ruth wash herself before going to meet Boaz (Ruth 3.3). Ruth promises to do all that Naomi has requested. After Boaz clears the match with Ruth's closer relative, she becomes his wife and the deity favors her with a child who becomes an ancestor of the Davidic line.

These two instances of washing, without a suggested motive, are performed by non-Israelite women who become essential to Israel's story: Pharaoh's daughter rescues the greatest prophet and Ruth becomes a mother of the Davidic line. From these cases, we conclude that washing can be proactive, though rare, and only carried out by non-Israelite women.

16. For further discussion on female blood and impurity in the Hebrew Bible, see Kristin De Troyer, 'Blood: A Threat to Holiness or Toward (Another) Holiness?', and Deborah Ellens, 'Menstrual Impurity and Innovation in Leviticus 15', in Kristin De Troyer et al. (eds.), *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood: A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), pp. 29-64.

Ezekiel provides the final reference to a foreign female washing proactively (Ezek. 16.9). The text recounts how the deity washes Jerusalem in water, washes the blood from her, and anoints her with oil. This action could be considered regular reactive bathing in an effort to make something clean. The reference is the closest to 2 Sam. 11.4 in the metaphorical grouping and so the context of the passage is critical. This chapter in Ezekiel personifies Jerusalem, as usual, as female. Here Jerusalem's origin is Canaanite, with an Amorite father and a Hittite mother (Ezek. 16.2). Only later, when Jerusalem is ready for love (Ezek. 6.8),¹⁷ does the deity cover her nakedness and declare she belongs to the deity (Ezek. 16.8). It is in preparing Jerusalem for the deity that she is bathed. The question, then, is: What is the blood on Jerusalem? Earlier in this chapter, when discussing Jerusalem's birth, she is not bathed in water (Ezek. 16.4). In fact, the deity passes by and sees her wallowing in her blood and even tells her to live in spite of it (Ezek. 16.6).¹⁸ Between that reference and her bath from the blood there is no other reference to blood, even though Jerusalem's growing into womanhood is mentioned (Ezek. 16.7). The blood of Jerusalem here must not refer to menstrual blood but that remaining from her birth.¹⁹ As the blood is not menstrual blood, it is not menstrual blood that prohibits Jerusalem from entering into a covenant with the deity, and menstrual blood is not the reason for the washing; the entering into a covenant is the reason for the washing.

Although it is unclear whether this is reactive, because Jerusalem still has her birth blood on her, or non-reactive, simply a gesture on the part of the deity, the relevance here is that the term again refers to a woman, who is not born Israelite, washing (metaphorical Jerusalem but still female). There is only one difference between this example and those of Pharaoh's daughter and Ruth. Here, the deity proactively washes Jerusalem; in the other cases, the women proactively wash. All three occurrences of proactive washing signify more than just a bath: the narratives depict

17. Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 22; New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 276. Greenberg claims the reference is specific to sexual lovemaking.

18. Greenberg points out that 'the plural *damayik* "your blood"' used in this verse also appears in priestly laws that deal with bloody body issues. One of these verses is Lev. 15.19, which, as noted earlier, deals with contact with a woman in her impurity. See Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 276.

19. Greenberg notes that the washing, anointing, and covering 'parallel the deprivations of vs. 4' so that the woman here receives the care she lacked when she was born. See Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 278.

these non-Israelite women washing to signify their acceptance of and importance to the deity and Israel.

A review of all references to *rhš* shows that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does the term refer to a woman washing as a response to menstruation. The uses of the verb fall into clear categories: reactive bathing (including washing to make something clean and washing as a response to impurity) and three cases of proactive bathing. The two references to women washing (Pharaoh's daughter and Ruth) are unique, since neither of the women reacts to anything, and neither is a native Israelite. Even though they are both outsiders, they are now considered clean and acceptable for Israel, in the eyes of the text, to become future mothers of important leaders.²⁰ Jerusalem in Ezekiel fits this pattern with the exception that the deity proactively washes her. Bathsheba's ethnicity is addressed later, but note Bathsheba washes and becomes a mother of Israel, exactly like Pharaoh's daughter and Ruth.

***Mitqaddešet*: Bathsheba's Self-Sanctification and Association with the Deity**

The author of 2 Samuel uses *mitqaddešet*, the second term under consideration, to describe Bathsheba's state during her encounter with King David, when, in 11.4, the narrator describes Bathsheba as 'purifying herself' or 'consecrating herself'. This state occurs directly following David's sexual activity with her while her husband, Uriah the Hittite, is away fighting the Ammonites with the Israelite army. However, several English translations link her self-consecration with what they assume is her attempt to purify herself after her period,²¹ which neither the Masoretic text (MT) nor the Septuagint (LXX) mention. The text of 11.4 simply says Bathsheba is in a state of sanctifying herself.

This use of *mitqaddešet* is unusual; it is the only place in the MT where this root appears in the reflexive for an individual human. Bathsheba is the only individual human to make herself holy; the only other individual

20. Note that neither Pharaoh's daughter nor Bathsheba are commanded to wash. Ruth's case is unique because while she is instructed to wash, no imperatives are used and the instructor, Naomi, has no authority to command. See Edward F. Campbell, Jr, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (AB, 7; New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 119.

21. Translations that assume Bathsheba's self-consecration is post-menstrual purification include the NRSV, RSV, REB, NAB, NJB, NJPS, KJV, and NIV.

linked to the single participial form is the deity (Ezek. 38.23). Others who take the reflexive participial form of the word include the official ritualistic groups of the priests and Levites, who by virtue of their religious offices have the authority to consecrate themselves (Exod. 19.22). In addition, there are many commands made upon the people of Israel to consecrate themselves, but these commands are given through the official channels of such spokespersons as Moses, Aaron, Joshua, the prophet Samuel, and kings such as David, Hezekiah, and Josiah who instruct the priests to have the people sanctify themselves (Lev. 11.44; 20.7; Num. 11.18; Josh. 3.5; 7.13; 1 Sam. 16.5; 1 Chron. 15.12-14; 2 Chron. 5.11; 29.5, 15, 34; 30.3, 15, 17, 24; 31.18; 35.6). In other words, Bathsheba is the only individual human to sanctify herself of her own volition.

In addition, the Greek equivalent in the LXX of *mitqaddešet* is intriguing, since *hagiazomenē* derives from the verb *hagiazō* ('to sanctify'). This verb appears only three times in the whole of the LXX as a participle: where priests set apart holy objects as offerings (Num. 5.9), the deity sanctifies the temple (Esd. 1.47), and Bathsheba sanctifies herself (2 Sam. 11.4). Thus, both the MT and LXX indicate that Bathsheba is the only individual to sanctify herself without recourse to official function (priests, Levites, or kings) or to the deity.

***Mittum'ātāh*: No Period Here**

Despite assumptions to the contrary, the third term under consideration, *mittum'ātāh*, also does not address menstruation.²² The issues here concern interpretive assumptions overriding the meaning of the word *mittum'ātāh* based on its context in the Hebrew Bible.

The noun *mittum'ātāh* has a wide semantic range, mostly unrelated to menstruation. *mittum'ātāh*, the feminine noun, actually encompasses the broader concept of ceremonial uncleanness related to its verb *tm'*. For example, if a male touches a dead body and does not purify himself, 'his uncleanness' remains upon him (Num. 19.13). This example along with others (Lev. 5.3, 15.13) show that the noun does not always refer to women but can refer to men, Gentiles, food, and objects, which indicates its meaning is not limited to a menstrual period.

Seven verses use the noun in reference to a woman (Lev. 15.25, 30; 18.19; Num. 5.19; 2 Sam. 11.4; Ezek. 36.17; Lam. 1.9). Of those verses,

22. Anthony Campbell translates the noun 'after her period'. See Campbell, *2 Samuel*, p. 115.

only two seem to refer to menstruation and both of those verses connect the word *ṭām'āh* with another term, *niddāh*, in order to convey the concept of menstrual uncleanness (Lev. 18.19; Ezek. 36.17). When these two words are linked, an interpretation associated with menstruation is valid; when the focal word *miṭṭum'ātāh* is used alone, it does not indicate the specific uncleanness associated with menstruation.

Furthermore, several verses concerned with uncleanness and women clearly do not assign the meaning of menstruation to the term *ṭām'āh*. For example, Lev. 15.25-30 designates *niddāh* as the time of a woman's period and describes a woman who has a discharge of blood that is *not* her period as *ṭām'āh*. Another verse speaks of uncleanness as a result of sleeping with a man who is not a woman's husband (Num. 5.19).

Clearly, the word *miṭṭum'ātāh* as it appears in 2 Sam. 11.4 lacks the precision of the meaning of menstruation. A better denotation like 'uncleanness' remains faithful to the usage of the word elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as it relates to women.

Translation of 2 Samuel 11.4: Bathsheba's Circumstantial Clause

Following the examination of these three terms in the Hebrew Bible, the meaning of the terms must be reconsidered in the particular context of 2 Samuel 11. Since it is clear that the terms cannot be interpreted as Bathsheba's washing after her period, and consequently a signal of fertility, then what do Bathsheba's actions mean? The translation of 11.4 is grammatically problematic on a number of levels.

One problem with translating 11.4 has to do with the relationship between David's action of *šākaḥ* ('laying') and Bathsheba's action of self-sanctification. As McCarter points out, the construction in the verse is a circumstantial clause, raising the question: What is the relationship and the timing between Bathsheba's self-sanctification and a preceding action? Those following McCarter have traditionally seen the preceding action as the *rhš* from v. 2. According to Gesenius, *mitqaddešet* must be 'contemporaneous with the principal action' of the preceding verb.²³ Therefore *mitqaddešet* cannot be referring back to *rhš* (which is not about menstruation anyway). It must and can only refer to David's laying with her.

23. E. Kautzsch (ed.), *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1910), p. 453.

A second problem involves the participle *mitqaddešet*, which is consistently translated as an active verb. It is not an active verb; it is a participle that is part of a nominal clause and is therefore, in Hebrew, a noun. This is reinforced by the LXX reading, which translates the word *mitqaddešet* as a present participle (*hagiazomenē*). A problem with standard translations is that it is very difficult to translate into English a participle following a series of past-tense verbs without making the participle a verb—but grammatically, *mitqaddešet* is not a verb. A smooth translation is difficult, but in order to keep the meaning of the phrase in the context of the Hebrew grammar, it must read:

David lay with her while simultaneously she is in a state of self-sanctifying.
(2 Sam. 11.4)

It is unclear what the uncleanness is. The uncleanness cannot be menstruation; it must relate to David's action, which could include everything from unwanted sexual activity to the emission that results from the sexual activity (Lev. 15.16-18).

Bathsheba Sanctified

A thorough investigation of *rōḥešet*, *mitqaddešet* and *miṭṭum'ātāh* reveals that, contrary to past scholarship, none of the three terms have anything to do with menstruation. Period. Therefore, these terms do not focus on David and his role in the child's paternity, but reflect Bathsheba, her actions and her character.²⁴

Since these words must be about Bathsheba, what do they tell us?

First, the participle *rōḥešet* identifies three characteristics of Bathsheba—her action on the roof, her ethnic identity and her character. The use of *rōḥešet* in Bathsheba's story is identical to its use in the stories of Pharaoh's daughter and Ruth in that a woman simply takes a bath. Like Pharaoh's daughter and Ruth, Bathsheba's actions on the roof are limited to taking a bath.

Bathsheba's connection with these two women raises the question of ethnicity, since only non-Israelite women proactively bathe. Nowhere does the text identify Bathsheba as an Israelite; she is the daughter of Eliam (2 Sam. 23.39; 1 Chron. 3.5),²⁵ who is listed as one of David's

24. This is not problematic, since the child dies; it is the child who is irrelevant to the story.

25. Note the Chronicler's problem with this story; in Chronicles, Bathsheba becomes Bathshua, daughter of Amiel. See McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 279.

mighty men, a list that includes many non-Israelites.²⁶ Eliam, Bathsheba's father, is identified as the son of Ahitophel of Gilo(h). According to McCarter, the '-*tophel*' part of the name functions something like the '-*boshet*' element of a name substituting for an original Ba'al. Thus, Bathsheba's grandfather's name suggests he is of non-Israelite origin and possibly a Ba'al supporter. Even after Bathsheba marries David, she is called the wife of Uriah the Hittite, who is clearly a non-Israelite (2 Sam. 11.3, 26; 12.10, 15). Thus, like Tamar in Genesis, Bathsheba's ethnicity is not named, but the text hints she is not an Israelite (Gen. 38).²⁷ The only other women who proactively bathe are non-Israelite.²⁸ The participle *rōḥešet* may be a textual signal revealing Bathsheba's shift from her non-Israelite origins to self-identification with Israel and the Israelite deity.

In addition, *rōḥešet* signals Bathsheba's legitimacy to become a mother of a future leader of Israel. The three women who share this participle are instrumental in the survival of Israel's future key leaders: Moses, David, and Solomon.²⁹

The second term *mitqaddešet* forms part of a nominal clause describing Bathsheba's simultaneous state while David is doing something to her, namely laying with her. *Mitqaddešet* is syntactically linked to David's action. Thus, *mitqaddešet* defines Bathsheba in contrast to David's action. As the only individual human to self-sanctify herself in the biblical text, this term places Bathsheba in a category occupied only by the Israelite deity while simultaneously David, the king of Israel, is sleeping with the wife of one of his soldiers in the field. This is yet another example where the text signifies Bathsheba's acceptability as a mother of a future leader of Israel.

Finally, the noun *miṭṭum'ātāh* completes the *mitqaddešet* clause and addresses why Bathsheba must sanctify herself. *miṭṭum'ātāh* by itself includes a semantic range covering everything from physical filth to religious impurity. Thus, Bathsheba could be reacting to the physical contact with David, any possible seed spilled in this encounter (see Lev. 15.18), or the adulterous copulation (see Lev. 20.10). Any of these impurities require reactive washing, with the exception of adultery.

26. McCarter, *II Samuel*, pp. 500-501.

27. E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 1; New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 300.

28. See above; female characters include Pharaoh's daughter (Exod. 2.5), Ruth (Ruth 3.3), and Jerusalem (Ezek. 16.9).

29. The deity chooses the mothers; see Schneider, *Sarah*, p. 129.

At least two later traditions understood the passage in this manner. The LXX translation of 2 Sam. 11.2, 4 indicates later audiences understood these terms as they are presented in the MT. When Ezekiel refers to the deity washing Jerusalem, the way he uses *rḥš* is in keeping with the connection between Pharaoh's daughter, Ruth, and Bathsheba. This means that Ezekiel too understood the term *rḥš* as presented here.³⁰

Clarifying the meaning of the three terms *rōḥešet*, *mitqaddešet*, and *miṭṭum'ātāh* changes the approach discussions of Bathsheba must now take. Scholars depict Bathsheba as everything from a whore to a rape victim. Not only are these not accurate; it is not even the point. These terms are not about David and the timing of his encounter with Bathsheba's fertility cycle, but rather are about the character of Bathsheba. The text later reinforces Bathsheba as central, not her menstrual cycle, because the child conceived in this union dies. The author of Kings ultimately proves Bathsheba's status as a clean, sanctified, legitimate mother of Israel (see 1 Kgs 1.15-40); it is she, at the instigation of Nathan, who successfully enthrones her son, the next Israelite king.

30. Dating of the Ezekiel text is fluid; the only point here is it is a post-exilic text that understands *rḥš* the same way.