

**‘He saw her bathing on the roof’: the David and
Bathsheba Narrative in inter-religious
exegetical exchange and cross-cultural character
development (from late antiquity to the Middle Ages)**

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The method of "showing" (indirect description), especially through dialogue and action is typical of ancient Hebrew prose. Direct description of physique, mental or emotional state, as well as detailed backgrounding, also known as "telling" was prominent in classical Greek literature. The ancient Hebrew narrators craft, since Eric Auerbach's *Mimesis* (first published 1946), has been distinguished from that of Homeric literature in its stress on the foreground of the tale, yet in a manner, nonetheless "fraught with background". What is perhaps less known is that biblical characterization is often largely achieved through the contrastive juxtaposition of the major character (in our case, David) and the so-called minor characters in the plot (in our case Bathsheba, but also Nathan the prophet, Uriah, the stillborn child, Solomon), and their interplay. My talk (in the form of a PPP) will concentrate on Bathsheba's characterization in Jewish, Christian and Islamic sources. It will follow the biblical source texts' and their translation and interpretation history, and will serve not only to introduce her character but also to reflect upon the transformations of David's character, in the three religions, through his fatal encounter with Bathsheba. I chose to concentrate on Bathsheba, firstly because she is unduly neglected in the study of biblical exegesis, though her role is central in ancient Jewish and Christian sources. Secondly, since her character enables us to trace some of the central transcultural and interreligious adaptations of the Davidic materials in the comparative Arabic sources, in a contained and focused manner. The talk will offer, therefore, a concentrated

glimpse into the development of Davidic reception exegesis in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and will also attempt to grasp some of its immense potential for the study of biblical characterization in a cross-religious context.