

Bathsheba's Bath and the Seven Deadly Sins: A New Interpretation of a Visual Narrative Strategy in Late Medieval Books of Hours

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Abstract

When the story of Bathsheba's Bath appeared in Late Medieval Books of Hours, it always prefaced the Penitential Psalms in these manuscripts. Traditionally, these Penitential Psalms were associated with the Deadly Sins. This article will explore the visual and textual implications of this iconography in relation to its placement in Books of Hours and it will emphasize the visual narrative strategies that the artists used to prepare the reader-viewer for the appropriate performance of penitence.

Keywords: Christian Iconography; Old Testament; Bathsheba; King David; Seven Deadly Sins; Books of Hours.

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Introduction

“For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness

According to the multitude of Thy mercies do away mine offenses.

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness: and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my faults: and my sin is ever before me.”¹

These are the *tituli* and opening lines to Psalm 51, the *Miserere mei*, where King David expressed his repentance after having committed the sins of envy, pride, covetousness, lust, and anger as narrated in the second book of Samuel chapter 11:2-4. David's transgressions began one afternoon as he was promenading on the roof of his palace. From there he saw a woman bathing and he was taken by her beauty. David asked his attendants who the woman was, and one of them answered: “Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. This was the beginning of the end for King David

¹ Psalm 51 (50) in the Vulgate: “*In finem. Psalmus David, cum venit ad eum Nathan propheta, quando intravit ad Bethsabée. Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam; et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam. Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea, et a peccato meo munda me. Quoniam iniquitatem meam ego cognosco, et peccatum meum contra me est semper.*”

who incurred the wrath of God. David had sinned, and what a great sin that was! He desired and slept with his neighbors' wife, and in a fit of anger he sent Bathsheba's husband to his death when David found out that his indiscretion had begotten a child. For this King David had to do penance, and allegedly, he wrote first Psalm 51 asking for God's forgiveness, followed by the entire Psalter.²

Since the sixth century, this Psalm alongside numbers 6, 32, 38, 102, 130 and 143 (in the Masoretic text numbering) were referred to as the sevenfold means of obtaining forgiveness and they were known as the Seven Penitential Psalms.³ Taking into consideration that the number of these Penitential Psalms was seven, they were immediately connected with the Seven Deadly Sins (Anger Ps. 6, Pride/Vanity Ps. 32, Gluttony Ps. 38, Lust Ps. 51, Covetousness/Avarice Ps. 102, Envy Ps. 130, and Sloth Ps. 143). The concept of the Deadly Sins also had a long-standing tradition. First established in the 5th century by John Cassian and incorporated into official Catholic teaching by Gregory the Great in the 7th century, they became an important part of medieval religiosity⁴. Throughout the Middle Ages, the hierarchy of these sins shifted to accommodate the most prevalent vices afflicting either rural societies or urban societies. At first the Carnal Sins, Gluttony and Lust, were emphasized, then Pride and Envy, and finally, towards the Late Middle Ages, Avarice and Sloth⁵. Regardless of the hierarchical order of these Deadly Sins, they had one thing in common: the ability to land one in hell for all eternity. The Penitential Psalms were then recited to ask for forgiveness for these sins and to avoid them in the first place. These Psalms were part of the Divine Office and they were recited by the clergy and the monks during the Middle Ages. Towards the fourteenth century, the laity, wishing to imitate the prayer life of the monks, followed a shorter version of the devotions performed at the canonical hours. This shorter version of the prayers was combined in a small format codex known as the Book of Hours. The central text of

² Claire L. Costley, "David, Bathsheba and the Penitential Psalms," *Renaissance Quarterly* 57, n. 5 (2004): 1235-1277.

³ Roger S. Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1997), 91.

⁴ Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (Michigan: State College Press, 1952), xiv.

⁵ Ibid.

this prayer book was the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. A liturgical calendar, a litany of the saints, suffrages, the Office of the Dead, the Penitential Psalms, the Gradual Psalms, and other prayers of the patron's choosing were also part of the most conventional content of these codices⁶. Many Books of Hours were lavishly decorated with narrative cycles of the life of the Virgin Mary, the Passion of Christ, iconic representations of the saints, and the labors of the months, just to name a few.⁷ The story of Bathsheba's Bath always prefaced the Penitential Psalms in these manuscripts. This article will explore the visual and textual implications of this iconography in relation to its placement prefacing the Penitential Psalms and it will emphasize the visual narrative strategies that the artists used to prepare the reader-viewer for the appropriate performance of the Penitence.

Bathsheba's Bath

The story of David watching Bathsheba bathing was well known during the Middle Ages.⁸ Its iconography seems to have been established around the ninth century, but it experienced an unprecedented popularity towards the Late Middle Ages as part of the iconographic repertoire of Books of Hours. A small detail needs to be stressed at this point and that is the inventive interpretation of the text done by the artists who created these miniatures. In the story of David and Bathsheba cited at the beginning, there is no indication of the general situation of Bathsheba. Was she indoors, outdoors, in a pool, in a fountain, in a bathtub, dressed, naked? No information is supplied by the Bible in this respect, so it was the artist's prerogative (or the patron's preferences) to create an appropriate setting for her, hence the differences that can be found in her visual representations. The way

⁶ Michelle P. Brown, *Understanding Illuminated Manuscripts: A Guide to Technical Terms* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum in association with The British Library, 1994), 24. A Book of Hours could also contain other offices such as the Short Office of the Cross, Hours of the Holy Spirit, Hours of the Trinity, and Hours of the Passion.

⁷ John Harthan, *Books of Hours and Their Owners* (Milan: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 17.

⁸ A preliminary study of the iconography of Bathsheba's Bath was done by the author for her M.A. thesis which was published under the title *Bathsheba in Late Medieval Manuscript Illumination: Innocent Object of Desire or Agent of Sin* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008) which was later expanded into her Ph.D. dissertation under the title *La Iconografía de Betsabé en la Miniatura Medieval* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Dissertation, 2013).

that artists chose to represent Bathsheba's bath stirred some controversy already in the sixteenth century, when Erasmus of Rotterdam included it in a list of biblical narratives that were often corrupted when they were represented visually.⁹ He wrote, "These subjects, it is true, are taken from Scripture, but when it comes to the depiction of the females how much naughtiness is there admixed by the artists"¹⁰. Even more contemporary scholars, such as Paul Saenger in his article "Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages," used Bathsheba's Bath as an example of the new type of erotic illuminations that started to appear in Books of Hours at the end of the fifteenth century because of the privacy created by these manuscripts.¹¹ But, is that all there is to it? Is Bathsheba's Bath a visual construction designed only for the visual pleasure of an implied male voyeur in the form of the owner of the manuscript as Michael Camille suggested?¹² Then how can we reconcile the fact that this scene was also frequently represented in Books of Hours commissioned for and by women?¹³

It is true that one cannot deny the erotic nature of the representations of Bathsheba's Bath in these Late Medieval Books of Hours. In many miniatures, Bathsheba occupies the central stage where she appears to the viewer in various stages of nudity according to medieval conventions (Figs. 1, 2). We can see her in her undergarments, covered by drapery and other accessories, or completely nude. Even the setting of the bath in an open garden can relate to ideas of temptation

⁹ Costley, "David, Bathsheba and the Penitential Psalms," 66.

¹⁰ Erasmus 5: col. 719.

¹¹ Paul Saenger, "Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages," in *Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Roger Chartier, 141-176 (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 156. Saenger mentions that the new reading habits of the noblemen and noblewomen, including the new translations into the vernacular, helped shape the content of the Book of Hours.

¹² Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 302-304. I also ascribed to this theory in Monica Ann Walker Vadillo, *Bathsheba in Late Medieval Manuscript Illumination: Innocent Object of Desire or Agent of Sin?* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008) and it is only now that I am revisiting this issue from a different perspective.

¹³ An example of this can be seen in two Book of Hours created for Queen Anne of France (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. Lat. 920 and New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS. M. 677) or the Book of Hours of Marguerite of Coëtivy (Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS. 46).

and seduction—especially when compared through visual analogy to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Meanwhile, King David perched on a balcony or window, occupies a reduced corner of the image actively engaged in the act of looking. The results of this act of looking also appeared next to the bath scene in some miniatures by having David and Bathsheba in bed – a visual euphemism for coitus. It seems clear then that the entire scene is meant to portray the carnal sin of lust, and this should not be surprising because as already mentioned, the story is directly connected to Psalm 51 through its *tituli* which was associated with this sin. Yet, if one understands this image not in a reproductive sense, but as a sign to recall something to memory¹⁴, a pattern emerges for a multi-layered reading of this scene. As Mary Carruthers has pointed out in her seminal work, *The Book of Memory*, through *meditatio* (meditation) one can activate the mental process of *reminiscentia* (remembrance) and images could play an important part in this process, for in the same way that words can paint pictures, images can make the words come to life¹⁵. Therefore, through the combination of visual cues and textual remembrance, the iconography of Bathsheba's Bath could also embody the remainder of the Seven Deadly Sins, which would be appropriate as it prefaced the Seven Penitential Psalms, not just Psalm 51. I will now briefly analyze several examples where one can directly or by association see the sins of Vanity-Pride, Anger, Envy, Covetousness-Greed, Gluttony and Sloth.

¹⁴ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 274-315, has demonstrated that throughout the medieval period any intellectual activity seems to have relied on memory to a much higher degree than we do now. This included not only learning and studying, but also the way in which the learned information could be recalled.

¹⁵ See also David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 317-320, for an in-depth analysis of how images can elicit different responses from their audience.



Fig. 1. Book of Hours, France, 15th c. Carpentras,
Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 59, fol. 51v.
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Fig. 2. Book of Hours. 1485-1499. The Free Library of Philadelphia, Ms. Lewis E 97, fol. 68r.
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Fig. 3. The Devil's bottom is reflected in the mirror of the vain.

Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles by Geoffrey de La Tour-Landry (1371-1372). Woodblock from the 1493 edition.

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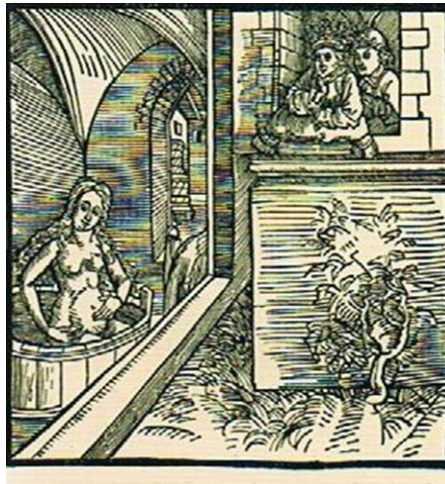


Figure 4. Bathsheba's Bath, Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles by Geoffrey de La Tour-Landry (1371-1372). Woodblock from the 1493 edition.

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Fig. 5. Hours of Louis d'Orleans, Paris, c. 1469. Jean Colombe.
National Library of St. Petersburg, Ms. Lat. Q.v.I.126, fol. 57r.
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Fig. 6. Book of Hours, Tours, early 16th century. Tours, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 2283, fol. 29r.
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Bathsheba's Bath and the Seven Deadly Sins

Vanity is a type of self-idolatry that separates the person from the grace of God.¹⁶ During the Middle Ages, Vanity was represented in different ways, but all the representations had several things in common: the personification was always a woman and she had a comb and/or a mirror. These two objects related to women's hair, which was a source of dangerous temptation.¹⁷ In these examples, Bathsheba appears

¹⁶Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 69.

¹⁷According to Erika Bornay, *La cabellera femenina: Un diálogo entre poesía y pintura* (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1994), 56, it is undisputed that loose long hair has a sexual

combing her hair, or she has her maidservants holding unto the comb and the mirror. The Knight de La Tour-Landry wrote about women's hair and combing in his book of advice to his daughters where he mentions that a "woman should never comb her hair before a man; and even when alone she should not do so for too long, or the devil's bottom might appear in her mirror."¹⁸ The 1493 edition of this book had a woodcut illustrating this passage with a woman combing her hair in front of a mirror where the devil's bottom is reflected (fig. 3). Furthermore, in another passage he connected David's Lust with Bathsheba's Vanity and Pride (fig. 4): "She washed and combed her hair [standing] before a window where the king could see her clearly; she had very beautiful and blond hair. And as a result, the king was tempted by this and sent for her...And so King David sinned doubly by lust and by murder...And all his sinfulness came from her combing her beautiful hair and her pride in it. Every woman should cover herself, and should not take pride in herself, nor display herself so as to please the world with her beautiful hair, nor her neck, nor her bosom, nor anything that should be kept covered."¹⁹

dimension as the studies done in sexology and psychoanalysis has shown. The sex-appeal created by women's hair could be the reason why many religions have prohibited women to show their loose hair in public. An example of this can be seen in the eleventh century when a decree issued by the archbishop of Rouen in a church council that women who showed their hair would be excluded from attending church for all their life and forbidding their family and friends to pray for their souls even after they died.

¹⁸ Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry, "Le XXXIe chappitre", in *Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles* (1371-1372) (Paris: P. Jannet, 1854), 70.

¹⁹ Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry, "Le LXXVIe chappitre", in *Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles* (1371-1372) (Paris: P. Jannet, 1854), 154-155. The text reads: "Un autre exemple vous diray de Bersabée, la femme Uries, qui demouroit devant le palais du roy David. Si se lavoit et pingnoit à une fenestre dont le roy la povoit bien veoir; sy avoit moult beau chief et blont. Et par cela le roy en fut tempté et la manda, et fist tant que il pecha avecques elle, et, par le faulx delit, il commanda à Jacob, qui estoit chevetoine de son ost, que il meist Uries en tel lieu de la bataille que il fust occis. Sy porta Uries les lectres de sa mort, car ainsy fust faict. Et ainsi pecha le roy David doublement, en luxure et en homicide, dont Dieu s'en corroça moult à lui, et en vint moult de maulx a luy et a son royaume, dont le compte seroit long à escouter. Et tout ce pechié vint pour soy pingnier et soy orgueillir de son beau chief, dont maint mal en vint. Sy se doit toute femme cachier et célement soy pingner et s'atourner, ne ne se doit pas orgueillir, ne monstrier, pour plaire au monde, son bel chief, ne sa gorge, ne sa poitrine, ne riens qui se doit tenir couvert."

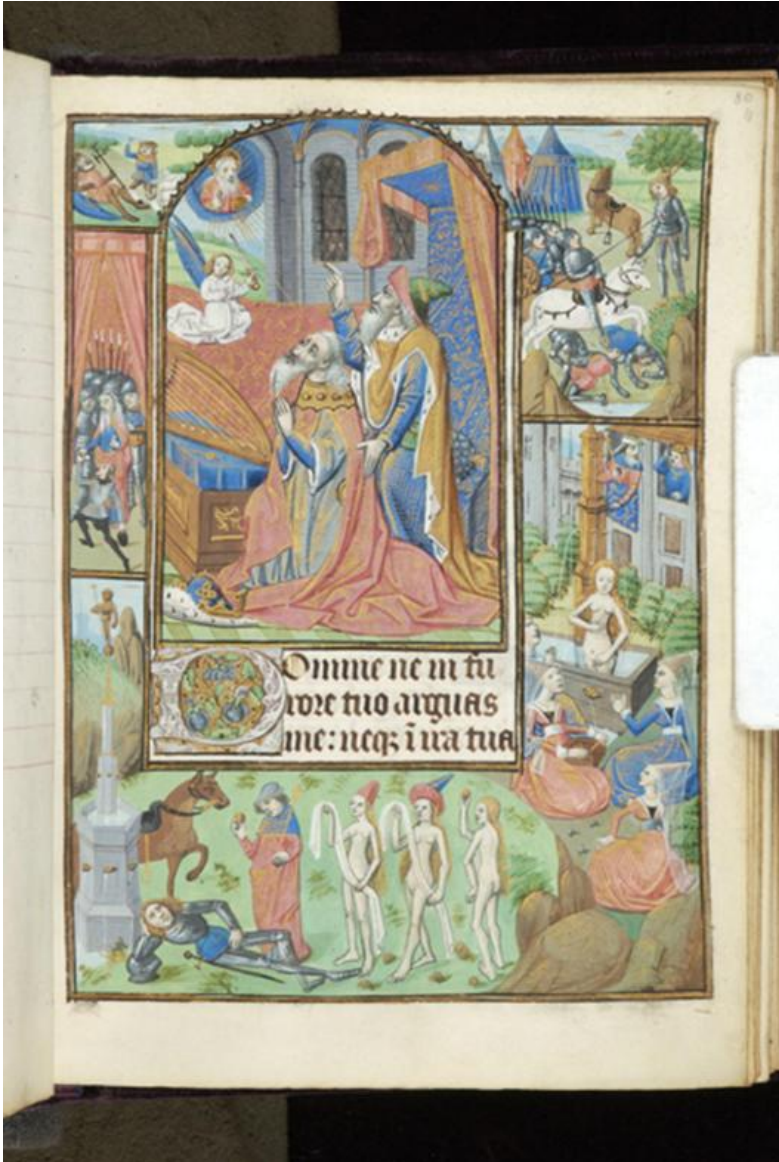


Fig. 7. Book of Hours. Rouen, France. Ca. 1470-1480.
Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. M. 312, fol. 80r.

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The connection between Lust and Vanity and Bathsheba is made even more evident when Bathsheba's Bath appears on the same folio as the Dream of Paris in several late fifteenth century Books of Hours created in Rouen in the workshop of the Master of Éichevinage (fig. 7). The earliest reference we have on the Judgment of Paris is given by Homer in *The Iliad*, Book 24 (22-30). Authors such as Ovid, Lucian, or Euripides incorporated this scene into the repertoire of the epic poets. In no time this myth was the subject of numerous artistic representations, from the Archaic period in Greece until today. During the Middle Ages this story was not lost because of the efforts of the monks, who copied the manuscripts of this text which existed in the Latin version. The story of Troy was a very popular topic in epic romances, starting with that of Benoît de Sainte-More in the twelfth century²⁰. These romances were not intended to copy Homer, but to give his version of the events of the Trojan War. On numerous occasions the authors changed the story to be more responsive to the ideals of courtly love and the deeds of chivalry. Among all the stories of the Trojan cycle, the Judgment of Paris was one of the most popular. This story was not only represented in numerous illuminated manuscripts and in other objects from the minor arts, but also it was represented in actual plays next to the triumphal entries in the cities²¹. There were several versions of the story, however the one that concerns this study the most is the version from 1287 written by Guido delle Colonne, an Italian jurist²². In his *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, Paris fell asleep in the woods after getting lost while hunting and tying his horse to a tree. While sleeping, Hermes and the three goddesses appeared in his dreams. The goddesses tried to convince the young judge to give them the golden apple. Hera offered Paris all the power he could want or even the title of Emperor of Asia. Athena offered wisdom and the ability to triumph over all the battles that he might fight. Aphrodite offered him the love of the most beautiful woman in

²⁰ Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, edited by Léopold Constans, Société des Anciens Textes Français (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1904–1912). This is a collection of six volumes containing all the writings of Benoît de Sainte-Maure.

²¹ Nanette Rodney, "The Judgement of Paris", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (1952): 57-67.

²² James Simpson, "The Other Book of Troy: Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century England," *Speculum* 73, n. 2 (1998): 397-423.

the world. In the end, the golden apple was given to Aphrodite, a decision that later precipitated the Trojan War. This story was the origin of the iconography of the Dream of Paris, which was very popular in England, Germany, and France, and this is the scene that is being represented in the Books of Hours of Rouen. This type of dream-vision was used extensively in medieval literature as it was related to the idea that decision-making must be an internal process, which could have an exemplary Christian meaning if interpreted correctly. The moral of this story was given by the hand of Christine de Pisan in her *Épître d'Othea à Hector* written in 1400, which was consistent with the ideology of chivalry and courtly love²³. According to Christine de Pisan, knights should possess good judgment and not act like Paris, who ignored Athena, goddess of chivalry and knowledge, and Hera, the goddess of possessions and status, but who chose Aphrodite who using sweet words of love promised him instruction in her art and the love of Helen of Troy. Therefore, according to Christine de Pisan, Paris was neither a good knight, nor was he wise, nor a good role model because he chose the desire for a woman instead of knowledge or power—just like King David. In response to this moralizing interpretation of the story, the presence of the Dream of Paris in the pictorial cycle of King David next to Bathsheba's Bath in the Penitential Psalms emphasizes this connection between Vanity and Lust.

David's sins can also be associated with Lust, but it is through the act of looking at Bathsheba that he commits the first sin in the story, that of covetousness. In this context seeing is the means through which his desire to possess Bathsheba comes from—his envy of another man's wife and his pride in his own position as king leads him to satisfy those desires. Visually, the cues used to represent this idea show King David looking and gesturing towards Bathsheba. Furthermore, the rubric on the Hours of Louis d'Orleans identifies the scene as David covets Bathsheba (fig. 5). Yet, these are not the only deadly sins committed by the king. Part of the textual narrative indicates that after Bathsheba had informed David that she was with child, David concocted an elaborate plan to have Uriah the Hittite, a commander in his army, come back from the battlefield and have him sleep with Bathsheba to pass the child as his. Uriah unaware of the machinations

²³ Jane Chance, ed. *Christine de Pizan's Letter of Othea to Hector* (Suffolk: D.S. Suffolk, 1997).

of King David, refused his wife's bed on account of his men who were still in the battlefield and who could not enjoy the comforts of their homes. In a fit of anger David sent Uriah back to the battlefield with a letter for General Joab that ordered him to place Uriah in the most dangerous part of the battle so that he will surely be killed. King David's anger made him commit yet another sin: murder. In many instances, King David sending Uriah to his death or the death of Uriah in the battlefield accompanied the image of Bathsheba's Bath as seen in the Book of Hours from the Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. M. 356, fol. 30v or in the background of the Book of Hours housed at Birmingham University Library. This image then stands for the representation of the sin of Wrath or Anger. While not directly associated with the textual narrative of Bathsheba, Gluttony and Sloth may also appear in the visual representations of Bathsheba's Bath. Gluttony is associated with an overindulge or over consumption of food. Medieval commentators, like Thomas Aquinas, argued that this sin also included an obsessive anticipation of meals, and the constant eating of delicacies and excessively costly foods. In many Books of Hours, the iconography of Bathsheba includes a plate with fruit. In some cases, the fruit is being offered by a lady-in-waiting, and Bathsheba either makes a gesture as to grab the fruit or already holds it in her hand, as we can see in the Book of Hours from the Free Library of Philadelphia, Ms. Lewis E 97, fol. 68r, in the Book of Hours the *Bibliothèque Municipale* of Tours, Ms. 2283, fol. 29r (fig. 6), and others (figs. 8, 9, 10). In addition, the introduction of Bathsheba's clothing scattered all around the ground might indicate a connection with the sin of sloth, related, of course, to a physical laziness that also reflects a similar spiritual condition (figs. 8, 9, 10, 12). The way in which these elements have been introduced, leaves no doubt in my mind that these two sins were being portrayed as well.



Fig. 8. Book of Hours, Paris, c. 1500.
Birmingham University Library. N/S.
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Fig. 9. Book of Hours. Early 16th century.
Hunterian Library, HM 1171, fol. 97v.
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Fig. 10. Book of Hours. Early 16th century.
The Free Library of Philadelphia, Ms. Lewis EM 11:10A.
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Narrative Strategy

The significance of these details in the construction of a visual narrative that emphasizes the Seven Deadly sins condensed into the episode of Bathsheba's Bath before the Seven Penitential Psalms cannot be overestimated. The preachers in the fourteenth century and onwards used the Deadly Sins very often in their message to lay people, which helped in a way to popularize the concept²⁴. In fact, they and the confessors impressed these sins so deeply in the popular mind that the sins came to occupy a much more prominent place in lay conception of religiosity that their position merited in theology. These Deadly Sins became a vivid concept, much more vivid than the virtues or any other list of sins. Artists then found a new way to represent these Seven Deadly Sins in relation to the Seven Penitential Psalms through the addition of several layers of symbolic elements to the scene of Bathsheba's Bath. This new visual treatment of the absorbing concept of sin must be understood in the context of the devotional practices associated with the Penitential Psalms in the Book of Hours. And this in turn could shed some light regarding the use of this kind of imagery for either a male or a female audience.

The Penitential Psalms were meant to be read during the major canonical hours starting with *laudes*, around three a.m. Usually, these prayers allowed for an examination of conscience to prepare the soul for its passage to eternal life. That was the main *raison d'être* of the Penitential Psalms after all: they were designed to inspire a pious response of repentance and contrition. Uttered in the first person, these psalms led the individual to appropriate the words and the sentiment behind their narrative by assuming the persona of the Psalmist as it were—which in this context is that of King David himself²⁵. In that position, David and Bathsheba's sins stand in symbolically for the reader's sins as well. To fulfill their intended function of reconciling the individual with God, these Psalms required a penitent engagement in which the text is not only voiced out loud,

²⁴ Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 93.

²⁵ Annie Sutherland, "Performing the Penitential Psalms in the Middle Ages," in *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, edited by Manuele Gagnolati and Almut Suerbaum, 15-69 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010). See also Michael S. Discroll, "The Seven Penitential Psalms: Their Designation and Usage from the Middle Ages Onwards," *Ecclesia Orans* 17 (2000): 153-201.

but also performed by approaching the reading after fully understanding the sinful state of the individual's soul. Through a process of meditative contemplation focused on the image of Bathsheba's Bath prior to the reading of the Seven Penitential Psalms, the reader-viewer is involved in a process of self-evaluation by analogy with the narrative presented in the image itself²⁶. It would be relevant to point out again that visual representations were not understood in a merely objective sense, as Mary Carruthers mentioned in her study on memory in the Middle Ages already referred to, but as a means for knowing, memorizing, and recollecting the stories associated with them. To profit from these images then, the reader-viewer needed to understand them as directly referencing a narrative, in this case the story of how King David fell from Grace and the sins that were committed in the process. The image of Bathsheba's Bath could trigger the recollection of the full textual narrative where the sins of Pride, Vanity, Envy, Covetousness, Lust, and Anger would have come to mind through the process of meditation—even if not all of them were visually represented. It seems then that it was only a matter of extending the visual imagery to include the two additional Deadly Sins of Gluttony and Sloth through introduction of food and the scattered clothes to focus the message on these spiritual and carnal transgressions.

The possible success of this performative process of internal identification between the reader-viewer with the sins of King David could be measured in some of the individual reactions to the image of Bathsheba especially regarding the sins of Lust and Vanity. In some instances, the quality of vividness and naturalism of Bathsheba's nude body seems to have provoked a strong emotional response from the reader-viewer (figs. 11, 12, 13, 14). In a situation of meditative contemplation, the eyes could linger over the surfaces of the object, and by looking and gazing at it, it might create a kind of sexual interest capable of arousing the spectator, which would make the sin of Lust not just present in memory. On the other hand, the addition of the beautiful long blond hair and the introduction of the mirror and comb in her iconography, presented Bathsheba as the personification of Vanity as we have already seen. During the Late Medieval period

²⁶ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 275.

many commentators had warned women against the dangers of beautification. This practice, in which the mirror and the comb were involved, was part of a woman's power to foment her sex-appeal. In this way a woman's moral imperfection was made even more evident by her lack of shame in presenting her naked body and her loose hair as the ultimate weapons of seduction²⁷. The acknowledgement of these two sins for either a male or a female reader-viewer could create anxiety and fear for the salvation of the individual's soul. This fear could turn into iconoclastic tendencies by defacing Bathsheba's body including her face! (fig. 12), or having her conventional nudity later covered by a veil (fig. 11). This would have been a way to physically reject the nature of the feelings evoked by the image that in a way were discovered through the meditation process before the performance of the psalms. Under these conditions, it is possible to understand the reasons behind the commissioning of Bathsheba's Bath for either male or female patrons. The image itself functioned as a trigger for the recollection of the textual referent that the reader already knew related to the sins associated to the narrative of King David and Bathsheba, and those that were not part of the narrative, the artists included visually by means of conventional symbolism. This process of meditation and remembrance, of identification and self-reflection, was undertaken in preparation for the reader-viewer to perform the reading of Psalms. The reader then would have begun the recitation of the Penitential Psalms in abject self-consciousness and ended them in the acceptance of God's forgiveness. And so, the artists purposefully created an image that tried to either made ever present or elicit the sinful feelings associated with the Seven Deadly Sins for which penance was required. And so, when the reader reached Psalm 51: 4, he or she could perform with deeper feeling and emotion the words: "For I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me."

²⁷ Manuel Núñez Rodríguez, *Casa, Calle, Convento: Iconografía de la mujer bajomedieval* (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1997), 265-267.



Fig. 11. Book of Hours. France. End of the 15th century.
Clermont-Ferrand, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 1508, fol. 146r.
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Fig. 12. Book of Hours. France. End of 15th century.
Carpentras, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 80, fol. 59r.
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Fig. 13. Book of Hours. Normandy, France. c. 1495-1503.
Besançon, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 136, fol. 54r.
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Fig. 14. Book of Hours. France. 15th century.
Autun, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 99 A, fol. 80r.
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