Article

Beauty as a Gift and a Call to Goodness

Taras Barščevski

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia; taras.barscevski@kbf.unizg.hr

Abstract: The study delves into terminologies associated with beauty within biblical contexts. Drawing from Dyrness's examination of "Aesthetics in the Old Testament" the focus is primarily on seven Hebrew word groups to understand the multifaceted nuances of beauty. The exploration further extends to two foundational Hebrew terms, *kābôd* and *tôḇ*, essential for grasping the essence of beauty in the Old Testament. Additionally, three Greek terms from the Septuagint—*agathós*, *kalós*, and *chresós*—are explored, bridging the understanding between the deuterocanonical books, the New Testament, and their Hebrew counterparts. It has highlighted that understanding the biblical concept of beauty surpasses mere terminological exploration. Illustratively, the narratives of Judith and Esther are examined to demonstrate how their beauty played a strategic role in the welfare and salvation of the people.

Keywords: beauty; *tôḇ* ("good"); *kāḇôḏ* ("glory"); *yāpâ* ("beautiful"); *agathós* ("good"); *kalós* ("beautiful"); Judith; Esther

1. Introduction

What is beauty, and what purpose does it serve? Anthropological studies reveal that the concept of human beauty varies across cultures and eras. It encompasses not only diverse criteria for natural beauty, such as body structure, hair, skin tone, facial features, and more, where individuals seek to accentuate these traits through makeup, hairstyles, skin drawings, and even permanent methods like tattoos and scarification, involving skin cutting or burning. Clothing, too, reflects not just climatic conditions or material choices but also signifies a group's perception of beauty. Folk costumes, for instance, communicate distinct identities and social classes. Art history provides evidence of ever-evolving beauty standards prevailing in different historical periods and regions. This is evident primarily in fine arts—architecture, painting, sculpture, graphics—and extends to the creation of a wide array of objects: tools, weapons, jewelry, clothing, dishes, furniture, textile art, and interior décor. Beauty remains a subject of discourse in contemporary contexts, spanning fashion, cinematography, gastronomy, tourism, and beyond. It is also a pertinent consideration in industries like automotive and technology (audio-video devices, computers, mobile phones, watches, etc.). Fundamentally, particularly in applied art, an object's beauty is intertwined with its material value and functionality. Moreover, it alludes to its creator, spotlighting their rationale, imagination, skill, and ingenuity, particularly in the realm of artistic works.

Unlike Greek thought, the Bible shows little interest in the concept of beauty (Grundmann and Bertram 1969, p. 544). Nonetheless, the absence of a distinct term for aesthetic beauty does not imply a lack of appreciation for the beauty within the Bible, whether in nature or art (Sisti 1989, p. 161). This can be attributed to the Bible's emphasis on the intrinsic goodness of individuals, actions, and objects over their external aspects (Sisti 1989, pp. 161–62). The biblical author is aware of the aesthetic dimension of cosmic, human, and divine existence so that he can confess that "the things that are seen are beautiful" (Wis 13:7),[1] while simultaneously applying theological insight to interpret this beauty. An exemplar of this perspective can be found in the Book of Wisdom, where a Jewish Greek

sage proclaims: "For from the greatness and beauty [*kallonēs*] of created things comes a corresponding [*analogōs*] perception of their Creator". (Wis 13:5) (Ravasi 2010, p. 128).

This article aims to study the relationship between beauty and goodness in Sacred Scripture. To begin with, we will delve into the study of the primary Hebrew terms related to beauty, as identified and categorized by Dyrness in his article titled "Aesthetics in the Old Testament: Beauty in context" (Dyrness 1985, pp. 423–28): 1. צְבִי (*ṣᵉḇî*, "ornament", "splendor") (Madl 2002); 2. פאר (*pāʾar* "to glorify" or "to beautify") (Hausmann 2001); 3. חמד (*ḥāmaḏ*, vb. "to desire", "to take pleasure in") (Wallis 1980); 4. יפה (*yph*, "to be fair" or "beautiful") (Ringgren 1990); 5. נאה (*n'h*, "comely", "beautiful") (Beyse 1998); 6. נָעֵם (*nāʾēm*, "being pleasant" or "lovely") (Kronholm 1998); 7. הדר (*hādar*, "to honour/glorify", "to adorn") (Warmuth 1978). However, the concept of beauty in the Bible cannot be reduced solely to technical terms, nor can it be construed as a mere summation of their meanings. Indeed, the presence of beauty in the Scriptures can be discerned not only in the words, which encompass a broader significance than a mere "combination of qualities, such as shape, color, or form, that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight" (Online Oxford Dictionary) but also, and most importantly, in concrete examples of beauty. Therefore, we will further explore two essential Hebrew terms crucial for understanding beauty in the Old Testament: כָּבוֹד (*kāḇôd*, "glory", "weight", "heaviness", "gravity", "importance", "honor", "respect", "weightiness") (Bae 2023; Dohmen and Stenmans 2004; Eichrodt 1967; Ferretter 2004; von Rad 1962; Weinfeld 1995) and טוֹב (*tôḇ*, "good", "beautiful", "useful", "true") (Di Sante 1999; Fabris 2000; Ferretter 2004; Höver-Johag 1986; Ravasi 2010; Sisti 1989; Stoebe 1978). Additionally, we will study the three Greek terms with which the LXX translates various Hebrew terms and are also used in the deuterocanonical books and the NT: ἀγαθός ("good") (Beyreuther 1981; Grundmann 1969; Sisti 1989), καλός ("beautiful") (Beyreuther 1981; Grundmann and Bertram 1969; Ravasi 2010) and χρηστός ("useful") (Ravasi 2010; Beyreuther 1981; Weiss 1974). In the end, we will dedicate ourselves to the study of two models of beauty, two beautiful women, Judith and Esther, who, endowed with natural beauty, not only engage in various treatments to make it shine even more but also use it both to charm and receive favor for themselves, as in the case of Esther, or to deceive the enemy, as Judith did, and take their lives. However, the ultimate purpose of the use of their beauty is well-being and shalom, meaning the salvation of the people.

2. Exploring Beauty in the Bible

In the Holy Scriptures, we encounter several terms that are, in one way or another, linked to what we call beautiful in its various meanings. William A. Dyrness delves into this subject in his article "Aesthetics in the Old Testament: Beauty in context" (Dyrness 1985, pp. 422–26), where he examines seven fundamental word groups that pertain to beauty and the experience of beauty within the Old Testament.

2.1. Key Terms of Beauty in the Hebrew Bible

Dyrness commences his study with the noun צְבִי (*ṣᵉḇî*, "ornament", "splendor") which is employed to signify "beauty" or "honor" on eighteen occasions (2 Sam 1:19; Isa 4:2; 13:19; 23:9; 24:16; 28:1, 4–5; Jer 3:19; Ezek 7:20; 20:6, 15; 25:9; 26:20; Dan 8:9; 11:16, 41, 45). This term can also mean "gazelle" (Dyrness 1985, p. 423; Madl 2002, pp. 232–38). It has been used in reference to individuals, such as in 2 Sam 1:19, where upon hearing of Saul and Jonathan's death, David laments, "Your glory [NASB: Your beauty], O Israel, lies slain upon your high places!" In this context, he marries the concept of honor with that of outward splendor (Dyrness 1985, p. 423). More frequently, the term is attributed to nations. For instance, it is applied to Babylon in Isa 13:19: "And Babylon, the glory [NASB: "the beauty"] of kingdoms… will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them" and to Jerusalem in Jer 3:19: "I thought how I would set you… the most beautiful heritage of all the nations". (See also Ezra 10:6, 15; Dan 11:45, "beautiful [RSV: glorious] holy mountain". In Isa. 28:5–6, contrasting the crown of Ephraim's arrogance (vv. 1, 4), the

Lord Himself will emerge as the garland of glory (עֲטֶרֶת צְבִי, ʿᵃṭereṯ ṣᵉḇi, NASB: "beautiful crown"), and in place of a fading flower (vv. 1, 4), a crown of beauty.

The verb פאר (pāʾar) appears in the OT thirteen times (Exod 8:5; Judg 7:2; Isa 10:15; 44:23; 49:3; 55:5; 60:7, 9, 13, 21; 61:3; Ps 149:4; Ezra 7:27), denoting "to glorify" or "to beautify" (Hausmann 2001, p. 464). Dyrness interprets it as "to transform something into an object of adoration or praise or to bestow upon it a place of honor" (Dyrness 1985, p. 423). This verb can allude to the temple, as seen in Ezr 7:27: "Blessed be the LORD… who instilled such a desire in the king's heart to glorify [NASB: "to adorn"] the house of the LORD in Jerusalem" or in Isa 60:13: "The glory of Lebanon shall come to you… to beautify the place of my sanctuary". Yet, it can also relate to individuals striving, though often in vain, for personal honor, as illustrated in Judg 7:2 (RSV): "lest Israel vaunt themselves against me". God vows to exalt His presence among His people, evident in verses like Isa 44:23 and Isa 49:3. The noun תִּפְאָרָה/תִּפְאֶרֶת (tipʾereṯ/tipʾārâ), stemming from the same root, appears 51 times (Hausmann 2001, p. 464) and signifies "ornament", "splendor", or "glory". It often describes that which radiates outward magnificence (see Exod 28:2; Ezek 16:12, 17) (Dyrness 1985, p. 423). Both the noun and the verb pāʾar characterize the temple in passages like 1 Chr 22:5 and Isa 60:7. They highlight the divine sanctuary's essence: "strength and beauty are in his sanctuary" (Ps 96:6). Additionally, they can pertain to the grey hair of an elderly man (Prov 16:31), the vigor of a youth (Ps 71:8), or even a name (1 Chr 29:13). They do not exclusively signify external beauty, which is their most frequent association. In the eschatological context, these terms will uniquely denote the Lord (Isa 28:5) and His chosen people: "Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city (Isa 52:1)" and "I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory" (Isa 46:13).

The verb חמד (ḥāmaḏ, "desire", "take pleasure in") appears in Biblical Hebrew 22 times, distributed as follows: qal—sixteen times, niphal participle—four times, and the piel and hiphil forms (once each) (Wallis 1980, p. 453). The instances can be found in the following passages: Gen 2:9; 3:6; Exod 20:17; 34:24; Deut 5:21; 7:25; Josh 7:21; Isa 1:29; 44:9; 53:2; Mic 2:2; Ps 19:11; 39:12; 68:17; Job 20:20; Prov 1:22; 6:25; 12:12; 21:20; and Song 2:3. Unlike the simple notion of "rejoicing", ḥāmaḏ conveys the idea of "appreciating something for its form and splendor, thus deeming it desirable or precious" (Wallis 1980, pp. 452–53). This term often signifies something appealing to the observer, compelling enough to motivate action or the intent to procure the object (Dyrness 1985, p. 424). While ḥmd can carry positive undertones, like the aesthetic appeal of trees in God's garden (Gen 2:9: "the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight") or the allure of a loved one's shadow (Song 2:3: "With great delight, I sit in his shadow"), it can also denote longing for forbidden items. For instance, the serpent paints the prohibited fruit as desirable (see Gen 3:6: "The tree was to be desired to make one wise"). The term captures moments of avarice and lust, where individuals yearn for things, they should not, resulting in detrimental outcomes (e.g., Achan's "coveting of gold" in Josh 7:21 or the wicked who "covet fields" and exploit the poor in Mic 2:2). The essence of this sentiment is encapsulated in the commandment: "You shall not covet… your neighbor's wife… nor desire… anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21).

Derived nouns from this verb predominantly denote objects or qualities considered beautiful and valuable. The land bequeathed to Israel is characterized as beautiful (Ps 106:24; Isa 32:12), as are esteemed items such as precious stones and vessels (2 Chr 32:27; 36:10). Conversely, this term can allude to coveted entities that incite sinful actions exemplified by harlotry (Ezek 23:6,12, 23). Such entities are foretold to undergo annihilation in God's judgment (Jer 25:34; Hos 13:15). It is salient to recognize that God esteems this intrinsic beauty, as affirmed by the prophecy that on the Day of the Lord, riches from all nations will converge in His sanctuary, bestowing upon it unparalleled splendor (Hag 2:7–8)—a sentiment reciprocated in Revelation 21:24.

The word group stemming from the יפה (yph), which translates to "to be fair" or "beautiful" manifests 8 times as a verb יָפָה, yāpâ (Ps 45:3; Song 4:10; 7:2, 7; Jer 4:30; 10:4; Ezek 16:13; 31:7), 19 times as a noun יֳפִי, yᵒpî (Esth 1:11; Ps 45:12; 50:2; Prov 6:25; 31:30; Isa 3:24; 33:17;

Lam 2:15; Ezek 16:14–15, 25; 27:3–4, 11; 28:7, 12, 17; 31:8; Zech 9:17), and 42 times as an adjective יָפֶה, *yāp̄ê* (Gen 12:11, 14; 29:17; 39:6; 41:2, 4, 18; Deut 21:11; 1 Sam 16:12; 17:42; 25:3; 2 Sam 13:1; 14:25, 27; 1 Kgs 1:3–4; Esth 2:7; Job 42:15; Ps 48:3; Prov 11:22; Eccl 3:11; 5:17; Song 1:8, 15–16; 2:10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:9; 6:1, 4, 10; Jer 11:16; Ezek 31:3, 9; 33:32; Amos 8:13). Typically, these terms correlate with the external beauty of an individual and, on rarer occasions, with an object; however, they are never attributed to God ([Dyrness 1985](), p. 424; [Ringgren 1990](), pp. 218–19). The frequent pairing of our subject word with "form", "appearance" or both underscores that the concept of beauty predominantly pertains to external or visible facets. Several biblical figures, spanning both genders, are lauded for their beauty: Joseph (Gen 39:6), the young David (1 Sam 16:12), Absalom (2 Sam 14:25), the king (Ps 45:3, with further references in Ezek 28:12, 17 regarding the king of Tyre and Isa 33:17 alluding to the messianic king), Sarah (Gen 12:11), Rachel (Gen 29:17), Abigail (1 Sam 25: 3), Tamar, Absalom's sister (2 Sam 13:1), Tamar, Absalom's daughter (2 Sam 14:27), Abishag the Shunammite (1 King 1:3–4), Vashti (Esth 1:11), Esther (Esth 2:7), Job's daughters (Job 42:15), the royal bride (Ps 45:11), women in general (Prov 11:22; Amos 8:13). Metaphorically, the term extends to represent Israel personified as a woman (Ezek 16:13–15, 25) and the "foreign woman" or adulteress (Prov 6:25). Its most recurrent appearance is in the Song of Songs, emphasizing its significance as a descriptor of the beloved: "you are beautiful" (Song 1:15–16; 4:1 et passim).

While physical beauty is conventionally celebrated, it also poses the peril of fostering an arrogant neglect of God. Its darker side emerges when it becomes a precursor to pride, a sequence vividly depicted in Ezekiel 16. Contextually, concerning women, beauty's value amplifies when paired with wisdom and a profound acknowledgment of God's omnipresence, thus embodying the quintessential feminine ideal ([Ringgren 1990](), pp. 219–20): "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (Prov 31:30). Within the wisdom literature, this term cluster often epitomizes the pinnacle of organic perfection within God's orchestrated universe. Such beauty echoes in the equilibrium and consonance of all entities, illustrated by Eccl 3:11: "He has made everything suitable [RSV: beautiful] for its time". The gratification derived from appreciating this beauty mirrors sentiments of delight, particularly in relishing one's professional pursuits and life episodes. Conversely, when misconstrued, beauty can become a trap, exemplified by the proverbial comparison of a beautiful woman lacking good sense to a gold ring in a pig's snout (Prov 11:22).

The word group stemming from the root נאה (*n'h*), which particularly highlights the quality of appropriateness or fittingness, occurs three times as a verb (Isa 52:7; Ps 93:5; Song 1:10) and nine times as an adjective (Ps 33:1; 147:1; Prov 17:7; 19:10; 26:1; Song 1:5; 2:14; 4:3; 6:4) in the Old Testament (OT). While it can allude to physical allure, as illustrated in Song 1:5 ("I am black and beautiful") and 6:4 ("You are… comely as Jerusalem"), it predominantly conveys the sentiment of being agreeable or perfectly apt for a given context. For instance, praise is "fitting" for the righteous (Ps 33:1), holiness "suits" God's house (Ps 93:5), and the feet of an evangelist are described as "beautiful" (Isa 52:7, NASB: "lovely"). On the other hand, elegant speech is not "becoming" of a fool (Prov 17:7). Similarly, neither luxury (19:10) nor honor (26:1) is "fitting" for a fool ([Dyrness 1985](), p. 425; [Beyse 1998](), pp. 108–9).

The word group originating from נָעֵם (*nā'ēm*), conveying the sense of "being pleasant" or "lovely" is presented in diverse forms in the OT (verb נָעֵם *nā'ēm*, "be pleasant, delightful, lovely": Gen 49:15; 2 Sam 1:26; Ps 141:6; Prov 2:10; 9:17; 24:25; Song 7:7; Ezek 32:19; noun נֹעַם, *nō'am*, "delightfulness, pleasantness": Ps 27:4; 90:17; Prov 3:17; 15:26; 16:24; Zech 11:7, 10; and adjective נָעִים, *nā'îm*, "pleasant, delightful": 2 Sam 1:23; 23:1; Job 36:11; Ps 16:6, 11; 81:3; 133:1; 135:3; 147:1; Prov 22:18; 23:8; 24:4; Song 1:16), accumulating to a total of thirty instances ([Kronholm 1998](), p. 468). Ordinarily, this terminology identifies entities or circumstances perceived as agreeable, such as the land (Gen 49:15), the lyre (Ps 81:3), words (Prov 16:24; 23:8), the places the psalmist enjoys (Ps 27:4), and covertly consumed bread (Prov 9:17).

When attributed to individuals, the emphasis appears to lean towards one's disposition rather than physical traits. For example, Jonathan was lauded as being "very pleasant" (NASB) to David (2 Sam 1:26), while David himself earned acclaim as a "sweet psalmist" (23:1, NASB). The term also hints at moral propriety, demonstrated in scenarios like siblings cohabiting harmoniously (Ps 133:1), the righteous culminating their lives in "pleasantness" (Job 36:11), and the trajectory of wisdom (Prov 3:17). Those who admonish the wicked are said to derive "delight" (24:25). Emphasizing this moral aspect, a psalm elucidates that upon facing rebuke, the wicked realize the word of God is "pleasant" (Ps 141:6), with the RSV translating it as "true" signifying its profound aptness and veracity.

Moreover, this term extends to personify God. Phrases like "Let the favor [or beauty] of the Lord our God be upon us" (Ps 90:17) and "sing to his name, for he is gracious" (Ps 135:3b) exemplify this. As a result, believers can anticipate experiencing the fullness of joy and delightful pleasures when they are in the presence of God (Ps 16:11) (Dyrness 1985, p. 425; Kronholm 1998, pp. 468–74).

The group of words related to the verb הדר (*hādar*), which signifies "to honor/glorify" and "to adorn" is found 31 times in the OT (verb הָדַר, *hādar*, "to honour, to adorn": Exod 23:3; Lev 19:15, 32; Prov 25:6; Isa 45:2; Lam 5:12; noun הָדָר, *hādor*, "ornament, splendour, honour": Lev 23:40; Deut 33:17; 1 Chr 16:27; Job 40:10; Ps 8:6; 21:6; 29:4; 45:4–5; 90:16; 96:6; 104:1; 110:3; 111:3; 145:5, 12; 149:9; Prov 20:29; 31:25; Isa 2:10, 19, 21; 5:14; 35:2; 53:2; Lam 1:6; Ezek 16:14; 27:10; Mic 2:9). The feminine noun הֲדָרָה (*haḏārah*) appears five times (1 Chr 16:29; 2 Chr 20:21; Ps 29:2; 96:9; Prov 14:28) (Warmuth 1978, pp. 335–36). This represents a character of honor that is recognized and openly acknowledged, particularly in reference to God or a king. When referring to God, *hādar* denotes the manifest expression of His power and holiness, serving as a marker of His royal dignity and universal dominion. This majesty, *hādar*, is likened to the garments or "royal robes" that God dons: "You are clothed with honor and majesty" (Ps 104:1; cf. Job 40:10). It becomes a reason to laud Him and to call upon nations to bestow upon Him honor and worship (Ps 96:6ff.). While individuals cannot don this honor themselves, God can confer it, as articulated in Psalms 8:5b: "You have… crowned them [humans] with glory and honor" [NASB: majesty].

Kings, too, manifest this majesty via their regal splendor, but only because God grants it to them (Ps 21:5). However, the king's splendor is but a mirrored reflection of this divine glory (Dan 5:18). Although typically associated with royal magnificence, this term can also be interpreted as "majesty" (Ps 45:3) and is intriguingly employed to characterize a virtuous woman (Prov 31:25). Of all words that signify beauty, this one most fittingly describes God and suits individuals only when they visibly reflect His nature. God's works are infused with His glory (Ps 111:3), which is particularly prominent in His judgments (149:9). Nonetheless, this facet of God can be overwhelming, prompting counsel to seek refuge from "the glory of his majesty" (Isa 2:10, 19, 21). Yet, the psalmist ardently yearns for this "glorious power" to be evident to God's followers (Ps 90:16).

Of particular relevance to aesthetic considerations is the feminine noun *hadharah*, which BDB translates as "holy adornment". This term is connected with contexts of public worship, as evident in Psalms 29:2 and 1 Chronicles 16:29, which state: "Worship the Lord in holy splendor" (NASB: "holy array"). Although the context points towards public worship, 2 Chronicles 20:21 implies that the focus is not solely on the grandeur of temple worship but also on evoking an authentic reverence for God's sanctity. This majestic quality is epitomized in the portrayal of the high priest Simon, son of Onias, in Sirach 50:7, 11: "Like the sun shining on the temple of the Most High… [is the high priest] when he puts on his glorious robe and clothes himself in perfect splendor" (Dyrness 1985, pp. 425–26; Warmuth 1978, pp. 335–41).

2.2. The Significance of כָּבוֹד (kāḇôḏ, "Glory") and טוֹב (ṭôḇ, "Good")

Our investigation into the understanding of beauty in the Holy Scriptures would be incomplete without examining other pivotal words such as כָּבוֹד (*kāḇôḏ*, "glory") and טוֹב (*ṭôḇ*, "good"). These terms illustrate the nexus between the good, the powerful, and the

lovely. Dyrness omits them, arguing that these words seldom equate to "beautiful" in our conventional understanding (Dyrness 1985, p. 422).

However, L. Ferretter posits that "the aesthetic concept most emblematic of the Hebrew Bible is that of *kābôd*, or 'glory'" (Ferretter 2004, p. 126). The word group כבד (*kbd*) has a notoriously wide range of meanings[2] and appears approximately 400 times in the Hebrew Bible (Newman 1992, p. 17). Among these occurrences, the verb כָּבֵד (*kābēd*, "be heavy, weighty, burdensome, honored") appears 114 times, the noun כָּבוֹד (*kābôd*, "abundance, honor, glory") 200 times, and the adjective כָּבֵד (*kābēd*, "heavy") 40 times (Westermann 1978, p. 687). This term fundamentally relates to "weight" (Dohmen and Stenmans 2004, pp. 13–14) signifying "heaviness" in the psychological domain and "gravity" as well as "importance" in the spiritual realm, i.e., "honor" and "respect" (="weightiness") (Weinfeld 1995, pp. 23–24). The term *kābôd* is typically associated with God, His sanctuary, His city, or other sacred entities when referencing "glory" or "splendor" (Weinfeld 1995, p. 27). In the context of "beauty" it can be paired with terms like *hādār*, *hôd*, "splendor" (Ps 8:6; 21:6); *ṣᵉbî*, "beauty" (Isa 23:9); and *tipᵊeret*, "ornament" (Ex 28:2, 40). Rolf Rendtorff characterizes *kābôd* as "that aspect of the activity of Jahweh that could be perceived by men and in which he himself is revealed in his power". (Rendtorff 1969, p. 37). Thus, *kābôd* transforms into the mirrored brilliance of the transcendent God, denoting His benevolent presence (Eichrodt 1967, p. 32).

The phrase כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה (*kᵉbôd YHWH*), "glory of the LORD" which appears 36 times in the Hebrew Bible, emerges as a specialized term alluding to God's revelation to Israel. The phrase shares the same semantic value as [יִשְׂרָאֵל] כְּבוֹד אֱלֹהֵי (*kᵉbôd ᵊlōhē [yiśrāᵊēl]*), which appears six times, and כְּבוֹד־אֵל (*kᵉbôd-ᵊēl*), which appears once. The term כְּבֹד אֱלֹהִים (*kᵉbôd ᵊlōhîm*), which appears only in Prov 25:2, carries the meaning of "advantage" or "benefit" (Newman 1992, pp. 17–19). The term *kᵉbôd YHWH* does not denote, at least initially, a character or an attribute of YHWH. Rather, the collocation *kᵉbôd YHWH* signifies the visible and mobile presence of Yahweh (Newman 1992, p. 24). Within the Priestly text, it manifests as a "fire-like phenomenon… covered by a protecting cloud", visible at Sinai and the Tent of Meeting during Israel's sojourn in the wilderness (von Rad 1962, p. 240). At 1 Kings 8:11, it alights on the Temple in Jerusalem, epitomizing God's presence. Upholding the theophany concept, the Hebrew Bible perceives evidence of God's glory in the natural realm He shaped. Such an understanding is especially pronounced in grand natural phenomena that leave humans in awe of their scale and might. Isaiah's proclamation that "the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa 6:3) suggests that the natural cosmos, especially in its overtly majestic and potent facets, parallels the grandeur and might of its Creator (Ferretter 2004, pp. 126–27). "*kᵉbôd YHWH*—writes Bea— expresses the royal aspect of the deity who requires honor and submission. It evokes an image of a king adorned in his regalia, donning his resplendent robes and armaments" (Bae 2023, pp. 372, 388).

Beyond God, the term *kābôd* may describe various figures such as kings, priests, and sages, but never fools (Prov 26:1,8). Parents, slave owners, and individuals exemplifying decorum, restraint, generosity, and humility may also garner *kābôd*. Yet, Ezek 28:12 stands out, alluding to the primordial man God molded in His צֶלֶם (*ṣelem*, "image", "statue", "a work of plastic art") and דְּמוּת (*dᵉmût*, "likeness", "similarity"), which refer to the splendor of his bodily and endowed him (Ps 8:6) with *hādār* ("grace", "nobility", "majesty") and the *kābôd* ("glory", "honor") speaks still more directly of the "perfect beauty (כְּלִיל יֹפִי, *kᵉlil yōpî*)" (von Rad 1962, pp. 144–45).

In the context of "glory", "beauty" and related concepts, *kābôd* can be paired with terms such as *hādār*, *hôd*, signifying "splendor" (e.g., Ps 8:6: "Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and adorned them with glory [*kābôd*] and honor [*hādār*]"; Ps 8:5; 21:6[5]: "His glory [*kᵉbôdō*] is great through your assistance; splendor [*hôd*] and majesty [*hādor*] you bestow upon him"); *tipᵊeret*, meaning "ornament" (e.g., Exod 28:2, 40: "You shall craft sacred vestments for the glorious [*kābôd*] adornment [*tipᵊāret*] of your brother Aaron… For Aaron's sons, you shall make… them for their glorious [*kābôd*] adornment [*tipᵊāret*]".); *ṣᵉbî*, conveying "beauty" and גָּאוֹן (*gāᵊôn*, representing "pride" as seen in Isa 4:2:

"On that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful [ṣᵉbi] and glorious [kābôd], and the fruit of the land shall be the pride [gāʾôn] and glory [tipʾeret] of the survivors of Israel"; 23:9: "The LORD of hosts has planned it—to defile the pride [gāʾôn] of all glory [ṣᵉbi], to shame all the honored [nikbaddê] of the earth".) (Weinfeld 1995, p. 28). However, it should be noted that in all these references involving kābôd, some aspect of human excellence is described.

A particularly intriguing, albeit contentious, passage can be found in Exodus 33:18–23. The passage begins with Moses' invocation, "Show me your glory [kābôd, gr. δόξα]" (v. 18), to which God replies, "I will make all my goodness [tôb, gr. δόξα] pass before you" and concludes with, "while my glory [kābôd, gr. δόξα] passes by" (Westermann 1978, p. 698). This would be the only place in the entire Bible where the Lord's kābôd, His presence, would be made visible through His goodness (cf. tôb, Gr. ἀγαθός: Jer 31:14; Hos 3:5; gr. χρηστότης: Ps 25:7; 31:20[19]; 145:7), expressed as benevolence, His goods, and the beauty of His works. This leads us to recognize God's presence, His kābôd, in creation, which not only reflects His wisdom and goodness but also His beauty. This will become even more explicit in our subsequent analysis of the term tôb.

G. Ravasi, in agreement with several authors (Sisti 1989, p. 162; Di Sante 1999; Fabris 2000; Ferretter 2004, pp. 126–27), highlights that "the primary biblical aesthetic term, besides yāpah, is indeed טוב, tôb. This term appears 741 times (738 in Hebrew and 3 times in Aramaic), showcasing an extensive semantic spectrum ranging from "good" to "beautiful", to "useful" and "true". Consequently, the Septuagint employs at least three different Greek adjectives to translate this word: ἀγαθός ("good"), καλός ("beautiful"), and χρηστός ("useful") (Ravasi 2010, p. 127). Owing to the expansive reach of tôb, which spans nearly all spheres of existence—from God to objects, and humans with their deeds and ethical conduct—the English translation necessitates multiple adjectives beyond "good", adapted to various contexts. These include terms like "agreeable, pleasant, satisfying, satisfactory, favorable, useful, purposeful, right, beneficial, ample, pretty, well-formed, fragrant, friendly, benevolent, joyous, worthy, valiant, true" and so forth (Stoebe 1978, p. 162).

Höver-Johag notes, "The most common meaning of tôb in the OT is utilitarian. When considering the aptness of an object or person, emphasis lies on the functional facet, being in correct order or fit for a purpose. Essentially, it pertains to a specific 'goodness for something', anchored in a tangible context" (Höver-Johag 1986, p. 304). In this perspective, the symbolic account of creation in Gen 1 is significant. As is widely acknowledged, following each of the distinct creative acts, there is the recurring "approval formula": "God saw that it was tôb". Notably, in the case of the human creature, this affirmation evolves into a superlative: טוב מְאֹד (tôb mᵉʾōd, Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31) (Ravasi 2005, p. 329). The widely accepted English rendition is "God saw that it was good/very good". Yet, given its association with divine "seeing", an alternative translation might be equally (if not more) fitting: "God saw that it was a beautiful thing" or "God saw: it was beautiful!". While the inherent positivity of the created entity remains (cf. Wis 11,24), the aesthetic quality is intrinsically tied to creation's very essence and structure (Ravasi 2010, p. 130).

Thus, the admiration extends beyond mere functionality or morality to also encompass the aesthetic, akin to the wonder felt when observing a mesmerizing landscape. Such sentiment, although infrequent in the Bible, can be discerned in the exquisite hymn from Sirach 42:15–43:33. This passage depicts the sun, moon, stars, lightning, hail, winds, thunder, snow, frost, ice, scorching summer, and sea, culminating in the acknowledgment that "one thing complements the excellence of another" (Sir 42:25, New Jerusalem Bible) (Ravasi 2005, pp. 333–34). Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that the fundamental meaning of tôb is "good", representing good in contrast to evil. This dichotomy is evident at the dawn of humanity in Genesis 2–3, where man and woman stand under the symbolic tree of "knowledge of good (tôb) and evil". The deceiving serpent tempts them, suggesting that consuming the fruit would open their eyes, making them "like God, knowing good (tôb) and evil" (3:5). This sentiment echoes in the stern warning from the prophet Isaiah: "Woe to those who call evil good (tôb) and good (tôb) evil" (5:20). This inversion of values not only undermines morality in contemporary times but also skews the perception of

beauty. Often, beauty is assessed solely by its exterior and tangible elements, neglecting the internal and truthful facets.

According to Höver-Johag, "essential to the interpretation of טוֹב (*ṭôb*) is its use with רָאָה (*rāʾâ*), which means "see" in the sense of "regard", "examine" or even "think proper" and concludes by referring to Schmidt (1967, p. 62) and Westermann (1971, p. 88) that this would highlight the usefulness or functionality of the works of creation, which would be good for the purpose for which they are made, without any objective judgment behind it, reaffirming that the world created in this way by God is "in good order" (Höver-Johag 1986, p. 304).

However, it seems that the Greek translation of the Septuagint (LXX) conceives in Gen 1 the *ṭôb* of creation differently. Translating *ṭôb* with καλός in the expression "God saw (*rāʾâ*) that it was *ṭôb*" the LXX appears to emphasize the aesthetic aspect of creation, not just the qualitative or functional one. In fact, in all cases where the LXX translates *ṭôb* with καλός as the object of seeing,[3] the Greek text highlights the aesthetic aspect of what is seen, namely its beauty. This can also be confirmed by the fact that the LXX renders the phrase "see + *ṭôb*" in other cases with ἀγαθός (Deut 1:35; 3:25; 30:15; Judg 18:9; 2 Sam 15:3; 1 Kgs 10:7; 2 Kgs 2:19; 20:13; 2 Chr 7:3; Job 7:7; Ps 4:7; Eccl 2:3, 24; 11:7; Isa 39:2; Jer 6:16; 17:6; 29:32; Amos 6:2), or even χρηστός (Ps 34:9; Jer 24:3), ἀγαθύνω (2 Sam 13:28), ἀστεῖος (Exod 2:2), ὀρθῶς (Gen 40:16), showing diligence in selecting the most precise Greek term to convey the most appropriate meaning of the Hebrew term *ṭôb*.

In any case, the created world would be *ṭôb* both in the sense of being a perfect realization of God's plan, but also in the sense of beauty and harmony of creation through which one can perceive the wisdom of the creator (cf. Wis 8:22–31).

2.3. Examining ἀγαθός ("Good"), καλός ("Beautiful"), and χρηστός ("Useful")

In both Greek and Hebrew, much like in modern languages, the concept of "beautiful" is frequently intertwined with that of "good", and at times, equated with it. This overlap is particularly evident in judgments of both ethical and aesthetic kinds, encompassing varied facets (Sisti 1989, p. 162). In both the Old and New Testaments, three distinct word-groups emerge, each emphasizing a unique nuance of the concept of "good". The Hebrew term *tôb* is predominantly translated as ἀγαθός or τό ἀγαθόν (Grundmann 1969, p. 13; Beyreuther 1981, p. 99), which conveys the value or merit of an entity or individual (Grundmann 1969, p. 10). These terms are generally reserved for describing what is both morally good and useful, particularly in reference to the divine perfection of God (Beyreuther 1981, p. 98). Grundmann notes, "The idea of the good in the Greek and Hellenistic sense is not present. The basic confession which constantly recurs and corresponds to the personal concept of God is as follows: 'O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good' (1 Chr 16,34; 2 Chr 5,13; 7,3; Ps 118:1 etc.)" (Grundmann 1969, pp. 13–14). This divine goodness is evident through God's salvific interactions with His chosen people, exemplified in the bestowal of the law (Deut 30:15) and historical events such as the Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan (Exod 18:9; Num 10:29 ff.) (Beyreuther 1981, p. 99). In the New Testament, the Old Testament's assertion of God's inherent goodness is intensified in Jesus' teachings: "No one is ἀγαθός [good] but God alone" (Mark 10:18) (Beyreuther 1981, p. 100). Moreover, Jesus, in referencing both good and evil—highlighting how God makes His sun rise (Matt 5:45)—delineates between the two (Matt 12:34) and recognizes adherence to commandments as ἀγαθόν, insofar as they unveil God's benevolent intent (Grundmann 1969, p. 16). Christ's salvific revelation empowers believers to perform good deeds (Eph 2:10) and yield results in all virtuous endeavors (Col 1:10). Hence, goodness transcends mere internal inclinations or adherence to doctrines. It materializes in Christian love, which embodies the law's core intent. Thus, achieving goodness is realized in tangible I–Thou interactions (Grundmann 1969, p. 16).

The notion of "visible goodness" finds its expression in Greek through the adjective καλός, which can sometimes serve as a synonym for ἀγαθός. Beyreuther (1981, p. 103) elucidates, "It means good, not so much in the sense of an ethical evaluation as in that of

pleasant, enjoyable, beneficial. *Kalos*, as opposed to *agathos*, is what is pleasing to Yahweh, what he likes or what gives him joy, whereas *agathos* suggests more the application of an ethical standard". In the Septuagint (LXX), καλός typically translates the Hebrew word *yāpâ* (e.g., Gen 12:14; 29:17; 39:6; 4:2), implying "beauty in outward appearance". Though it occasionally translates *tôb* as "useful" or "serviceable" (e.g., Gen 2:9), it more often denotes "morally good" (e.g., Prov 17:26; 18:5, etc.). As an aesthetic quality, καλός does not appear at all, possibly reflecting the low valuation of art in the biblical religion (Grundmann and Bertram 1969, pp. 543–44). Notably, in the priestly account of creation in Gen 1:31, which summarizes the judgments in 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, the LXX renders Heb. *tôb* explicitly as καλός: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good (καλὰ λίαν)".

In this passage, *tôb* conveys a sense of successful completion, akin to "well done" emphasizing the utilitarian aspect of the term. However, by translating *tôb* as καλός rather than ἀγαθός, the LXX infuses the narrative with a sense of the world's beauty. This aesthetic interpretation is echoed in the Wisdom literature at Wis 13:7: "the things that are seen are beautiful" (gr. καλὰ τὰ βλεπόμενα) (Grundmann and Bertram 1969, p. 544). In this context, the aesthetic interpretation should be given equal, if not greater, weight because it seems that the biblical author prefers to emphasize the greatness of God's work, both by praising the Creator and admiring the creation, rather than highlighting its functionality.

In the New Testament Greek, the term καλός appears 100 times and is generally equated with ἀγαθός. An exception is found in Luke 21:5, where it is mentioned that, observing the Herodian temple in Jerusalem, "some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful (καλός) stones". Typically, the word accentuates the moral attributes of a deed or an individual, or the functionality. For instance, there are references to καλὰ ἔργα ("good works", Matt 5:16; Mark 14:6; John 10:33; 1 Tim 3:1; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14; Heb 10:24; 1 Pet 2:12), καλή ἀναστροφή ("good life" or "conduct", Jas 3:13; 2 Macc 6:23), and καλή συνείδησις ("good conscience", Heb 13:18, though in 1 Tim 1:5, 19 and 1 Pet 3:21, it is ἀγαθή συνείδησις) (Ravasi 2010, p. 128). Christ even describes Himself as ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός, literally the "beautiful shepherd" (John 10:11). This adjective's application is consistent in other instances: καλὴς διάκονος (good/beautiful minister [NASB: servant], 1 Tim 4:6); καλὸς στρατιώτης (good/beautiful soldier, 2 Tim 2:3); καλοὶ οἰκονόμοι (good/beautiful stewards, 1 Pet 4:10). The acclaim from the masses upon witnessing Jesus' miracles is evocative: "He has done everything καλός" (Mark 7:37). Here, it is evident that καλός aligns with the adverbial sense of "well" or "goodly" (Ravasi 2010, p. 128).

In addition to the two adjectives, ἀγαθός and καλός, the LXX introduces a third adjective, χρηστός. This term encapsulates the material utility of items in relation to their goodness, pleasantness, and softness (Beyreuther 1981, p. 98). Initially, χρηστός signified utility, and by extension, anything deemed useful, apt, and fitting (for instance, a mild wine). In the OT, it embodies the profusion of benevolence that God, in adherence to his covenant, bestows upon his people and all humans as his creations (Beyreuther 1981, p. 105). In the NT, in addition to its secular usage to indicate the quality of items (such as in Luke 5:39 for good wine), it further illustrates God's magnanimity, which encompasses even the ungrateful and the obstinate sinners. It also urges believers to accept Jesus' easy (χρηστός) burden, and having experienced his kindness firsthand, they are to emulate this benevolence towards others (Matt 11:30) (Beyreuther 1981, p. 106). The Apostle Paul employs this term to convey the unfathomable kindness of God who seeks not the sinner's demise, but their salvation (Rom 11:22; Eph 2:7; Titus 3:4). Kindness (χρηστότης) is recognized as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22) and a definitive and intrinsic trait of love (1 Cor 13:4).

To encapsulate our examination of biblical terminology concerning beauty, we refer to Beyreuther's summation: "This completes the circle from the original kindness of God who created the world and men, separated a people for himself, and remains kind despite sin and wickedness, to the revelation of his incomprehensible kindness in Jesus Christ in the fullness of time. Here God's saving activity reaches its goal. In Jesus Christ God's fatherly kindness can be seen as in a mirror. Moreover, the members of the Christian community,

the church, have to choose as their path in the world the way of kindness which they must show to all men. At the same time they have to choose it in a world which often betrays little sign of it" ([Beyreuther 1981](), p. 106).

3. Biblical Examples of Beauty: Judith and Esther

Our exploration of the terminology associated with beauty in the Holy Scriptures, spanning both the Old and New Testaments, has revealed its intimate ties to the concept of the "good". This is inherently linked to God, who is the embodiment of goodness and whose actions are universally good. We have also underscored the tangible nature of beauty—it is not a mere abstraction or a figment of the imagination. Rather, beauty is palpable; it is something that can be both seen and felt. It elicits joy and demands active appreciation and engagement.

To further elucidate this notion, we turn to the Biblical descriptions of two women renowned for their beauty. We aim to delve into the essence of their beauty, its origins, and the indelible mark it left on their respective destinies. The books of Esther and Judith provide our point of reference, spotlighting the eponymous heroines, Esther and Judith. Both women wielded their beauty and sagacity as tools to shield their people from impending doom.

In these two heroines, with their beauty, one can also compare the bride in the Song of Songs, the book that offers the most detailed portrayal of the qualities for which men and women are judged beautiful in the Hebrew Bible ([Ferretter 2004](), p. 128). Twice we hear the beloved exclaim, "Ah, you are beautiful [הִנָּךְ יָפָה, *hinnāḵ yāpâ*], my love; ah, you are beautiful [הִנָּךְ יָפָה, *hinnāḵ yāpâ*]" (Song 1:15; 4:1), expressing admiration for the beauty of his bride, whom he tenderly calls "my love [רַעְיָתִי, *raʿyāti̱*]". She is described as "fairest [הַיָּפָה, *hayyāpâ*] among women" (1:8, 6:1), "beautiful [*yāpâ*] as Tirzah…, comely [*nāʾwâ*] as Jerusalem" (6:4), "fair [*yāpâ*] as the moon" (6:10), and "there is no flaw" in her (4:7). The bridegroom is captivated by her eyes, described as "doves" (1:15; 4:1), and continues to praise her hair "like a flock of goats" (4:1), her teeth "like a flock of shorn ewes" (4:2), her lips "like a crimson thread" (4:3), her "lovely" mouth (4:3), her cheeks "like halves of a pomegranate" (4:3), her neck "like the tower of David" (4:4), and her two breasts "like two fawns" (4:5). However, the praise of the "perfect one in beauty" (5:2) does not end here. She is also described as "bright as the sun" (6:10) and "terrible as an army with banners" (6:4, 10). Her "love" is "better [*tôḇim*, NLT: 'sweeter'] than wine" (1:2) and her "anointing oils" are "fragrant [*tôḇim*, NLT: 'fragrance is pleasing']" (1:3).

Not only is the bride's beauty praised, but she also extols the beauty of her "beloved [דּוֹדִי, *dôḏî*]" who is "beautiful [יָפֶה, *yāpê*]" and "truly lovely [נָּעִים, *nāʿim*]" (Song 1:16). He is likened to "a rose of Sharon and a lily of the valleys" (2:1), "beloved more than another beloved" (5:9). He is described as "radiant and ruddy" (5:10), with a "head of the finest gold" (5:11), "wavy locks" (5:11), "eyes like doves" (5:12), "cheeks like beds of spices" (5:13), a "lovely" mouth (5:13), "arms of rounded gold" (5:14), an "ivory work" body (5:14), "legs like alabaster columns" and an appearance "like Lebanon, choice as the cedars" (5:15).

Their bodies, both male and female, depicted on boards overflowing with eros, constitute the pinnacle of beauty ([Ravasi 2010](), p. 130). However, this beauty does not confine itself to self-praise or veneration alone; it extends to the surrounding nature and rediscovers "paradise" (heb. פַּרְדֵּס, *pardēs*; gr, παράδεισος) (Song 4:13). It is as if to say that love has the strength to rediscover the lost beauty of paradise and reveal it in its entirety. The beloved in the Song finds herself enveloped in the beauty of a love "strong as death" (Song 8:6), while Judith and Esther must contend with their beauty to overcome death.

3.1. Judith

The Book of Judith narrates the story of a Jewish heroine in the period following the Babylonian exile[4] who saved her city by assassinating the general of the besieging Gentile army ([Bergsma and Pitre 2018](), p. 507). According to Engel, the story seems to allude to the events of 516 B.C., ultimately linking to the occurrences of 164 B.C.: the occupation of the

temple area and the city by Judas Maccabee, the purification of the temple, and the introduction of the feast of Dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem (*ḥănukāh*) (cf. 1 Macc 4,36–59; 2 Macc 10:1–10) (Engel 2013, p. 503).

The narrative in chapters 4–16 situates "the Israelites who dwell in Judea" on the hilly region stretching from Jerusalem to the plain of Jizreel. Adjacent to the coast are the non-Jews (2:28–3:8) (Engel 2013, p. 503). This is indicative of the political climate at the close of the second century B.C. (Engel 2013, p. 503), allowing us to associate the inception of this book with the Maccabean era around the conclusion of the second century B.C. (Heriban 2005b, p. 452).

It is essential to note that the book does not chronicle a historical incident but is a didactic tale (Heriban 2005b, p. 452). More aptly described as a "novelistic" text, it is a crafted, fictional narrative. The book lacks precise geographical markers, and it does not anchor itself in a genuinely existing city. Instead, it mentions Betulia—a fictional city. The writer is not an uninformed individual lacking historical and geographical knowledge. He is a cultured individual, adeptly manipulating information. Consequently, he fabricates a city and a geography to discuss an authentic scenario. The protagonist's name, "Judith", bears symbolic significance. It is the feminine form of "Judas" and aligns with the term "Judea", embodying the personified image of the Jewish nation (Doglio 2004, p. 39).

The original Hebrew text of Judith has not been preserved. Instead, there are three Greek recensions and a subsequent Hebrew adaptation of the text (Heriban 2005b, p. 452). The Book of Judith is categorized as deuterocanonical, meaning it is recognized as inspired predominantly by the Greek-speaking Jewish tradition. While it was incorporated into the Alexandrian canon and accepted within the Christian tradition, it was not embraced by the Hebrew-speaking Jewish community, primarily because it was not composed in Hebrew, and only the Greek version remains extant (Doglio 2004, p. 39).

Judith is first mentioned in the book in 8:1, where her genealogy is delineated: "she was the daughter of Merari son of Ox son of Joseph son of Oziel son of Elkiah son of Ananias son of Gideon son of Raphain son of Ahitub son of Elijah son of Hilkiah son of Eliab son of Nathanael son of Salamiel son of Sarasadai son of Israel". Following this, her husband Manasseh is mentioned, having died "by the burning heat" (Jdt 8:3) three years and four months (8:4) prior to the events described in the Book of Judith. In her widowhood, Judith observes fasting every day "except the day before the sabbath and the sabbath itself, the day before the new moon and the day of the new moon, and the festivals and days of rejoicing of the house of Israel" (8:6). Judith's introduction concludes with a portrayal of her beauty: "She was beautiful in appearance [*kalē tō eidei*], and was very lovely to behold [*hōraia tē opsei sphodra*] (8:7)", as well as the wealth she inherited from her husband—which she manages adeptly. The author of the book finalizes by stating, "No one spoke ill of her, for she feared God with great devotion [*ephobeito ton theon sphodra*] (8:8)".

These attributes appear to position Judith, upon learning that Uzziah had agreed to the disheartened populace's proposal to surrender the city to the Assyrians—if God did not act within five days—to summon the elders and reprimand them severely, alleging they were testing God Himself, and attempting to usurp His role: "Who are you to put God to the test today, and to set yourselves up in the place of God in human affairs? (8:12)". Uzziah concedes to Judith's reproach to a degree but redirects the fault to the people, and implores Judith to pray for God to send rain to alleviate the crisis instigated by the water scarcity (cf. 8:28–31). However, Judith counters that she will undertake "something that will go down through all generations of our descendants (8:32)". Opting for discretion regarding her plans, she merely requests permission to exit the city accompanied by her maid (8:33).

The implementation of Judith's plan begins with a prayer (chap. 9) and continues with meticulous preparation "for going out" which entails personal hygiene practices and adornment described in detail in the text:

-　　She called her maid and descended to the house in which she resided on sabbaths and festive days (10:2).

- She shed the sackcloth and removed her widow's garments (10:3a).
- She bathed her body with water, anointed herself with precious ointment, and combed her hair (10:3b).
- This is followed by dressing, which initiates with placing the tiara on her head and donning her festive attire (10:3c).
- Concluding with her sandals, she adorned herself with anklets, bracelets, rings, earrings, and all her other jewelry (Jdt 10:4).

Through meticulous personal hygiene, dressing, and adornment, Judith "made herself very beautiful [*ekallōpsiato*]" (10:4). This mirrors Tamar, who "wrapped herself [*attiṯ'allāp̄*, LXX: "ornamented her face", *ekallōpsiato*]" (Gen 38:14) to remain unrecognizable to Judah, thereby achieving the "righteousness" (*ṣāḏqāh*) which Judah denied her (Gen 38:26). This beautification also serves a clear purpose: "to allure [gr. *eis apatēsin*] the eyes of all men who would see her" (Jdt 10:4). As the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that Judith's transformation achieves its intended effect. Her changed appearance and attire cause Uzziah and the town elders, Chabris and Charmis, to marvel "at her beauty very greatly" (10:6). When the Assyrian patrol heard her speak and saw her face, they were astounded by her beauty (10:14). Similarly, the people, gathering around her as she stood outside Holofernes' tent, were filled with wonder at her beauty, leading them to admire the beauty of the Israelites (10:19). Holofernes and his servants, too, were captivated by the allure of her face (10:23).

Judith's conduct during her initial encounter with Holofernes, where she elucidates the reason for her visit, finds favor with Holofernes and his servants. They particularly admire her wisdom, intertwining it with her beauty: "No other woman from one end of the earth to the other looks so beautiful or speaks so wisely!" (11:21). This admiration is underscored by Holofernes himself when he addresses Judith: "You are not only beautiful [gr. *asteia*] in appearance [*en tō eidei*], but wise in speech" promising her global renown (11:23). When inviting Judith to his feast, he states that it would be a "disgrace if we let such a woman go without enjoying her company [*homilēsantes*]" (RSV: 12:12; NRSV: "have intercourse with her"). Bagoas, the eunuch overseeing Holofernes' personal affairs, addresses her as a "pretty girl" using terms not only indicative of beauty, *kalē* ("beautiful") but also youth, *paidiskē* (young girl). In response, Judith asserts that she will promptly do "whatever pleases him" (12:14, litt.: "pleases to his eyes"). She then adorns herself with "all her woman's finery" (12:15) and attends the feast. At the feast, she partakes only of what her maid had prepared, whereas Holofernes, besotted and harboring an intense desire for Judith, "drank a great quantity of wine, much more than he had ever drunk in any one day since he was born" (12:16–20). As the narrative progresses, once Holofernes succumbs to inebriation and falls asleep, Judith seizes his sword. With unwavering resolve, she strikes Holofernes twice on the neck, beheading him (13:2, 6, 8). This act precipitated the Israelites' monumental victory over the Assyrian forces. Consequently, "the high priest Joakim and the elders of the Israelites residing in Jerusalem" (15:8) journey to behold the "good things [*ta agatha*]" the Lord had manifested for Israel. Upon encountering her, they collectively offer blessings, proclaiming, "You have done all this with your own hand; you have done great good [*ta agatha*] to Israel, and God is well pleased [*eudokēsen*] with it" (15:10).

In her eulogy, wherein she implores to glorify God and exalt His name, noting that "the Lord is a God who crushes wars (16:2)", Judith distinctly underscores her beauty as the instrument that procured victory for the people of Israel: "Judith daughter of Merari with the beauty [*en kallei*] of her countenance [*prosōpou autēs*, litt. 'face'] undid him. For she discarded her widow's clothing to uplift the oppressed in Israel. She anointed her face with perfume; she adorned her hair with a tiara and donned a linen gown to beguile him. Her sandal caught his eyes, her beauty [*to kallos*] ensnared his mind, and the sword severed his neck! (16:6–9)".

Judith essentially "paralyzes" (gr. *paralyō*) her foe with her beauty, rendering him feeble. However, this beauty, along with the affluence and societal stature she inherited from her deceased husband, was not merely bestowed upon her; she cultivated it. Judith

meticulously preened, enhancing every facet of her visage, from bathing herself to applying exquisite ointment, styling her hair and affixing a tiara, to draping herself in formal attire, wearing sandals, and embellishing with anklets, bracelets, rings, earrings, and all her other ornaments. She undertakes every measure to deceive him, diverting his gaze and ensnaring his mind (gr. *psychēn*) or soul (New Vulgate: anima; Syriac Peshitta: *npsh*) with her allure. Judith wielded her beauty and sagacity to infiltrate the Assyrian encampment and approach Holofernes. She exploited her beauty and "feminine wiles" to distract Holofernes, enchant him, and ultimately decapitate him. Hence, "with her own hand" she delivered immense good (*ta agatha*) to Israel, a benevolence reflective of the good things (*ta agatha*) the Lord had enacted for Israel.

3.2. Esther

Like Judith, Esther also stands out for her beauty and virtue. And she, too, saves her people from slaughter. However, while Judith adopts the roles of a warrior and strategist, Esther embodies tenderness and femininity. She achieves her aim not by wielding a sword, but through the persuasive power of her intercession (Bosetti 2013). Leveraging her beauty, wisdom, and intercession with King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I, 486–465 BC), she thwarted the impending threat of persecution and extermination of the Jews in the Persian Empire (Heriban 2005a, p. 358).

The narrative, on the one hand, exhibits a thorough understanding of the Persian context wherein the primary action unfolds. Numerous Persian terms further highlight the narrative's Persian ambiance. Yet, its playful and imaginative interaction with historical events (analogous to the book of Judith) suggests that one should not surmise it is rooted in a "historical story" (Zenger 2013, p. 518). Xerxes never had a first wife by the name of Vashti nor a second by the name of Esther: in Greek, the name of his wife was Atossa. In the seventh year of his reign (Esth 2:16) he had other things to think about: the battle of Salamis in fact took place in 480. Finally, by that time Mordecai, deported by Nebuchadnezzar along with Jehoiakim in 597, will have been about 120, and his niece is hardly likely to have been very beautiful! (Soggin 1989, p. 470). However, it is unequivocally evident that Esther is not a factual recounting but rather a historical romance (Kaiser and Sturdy 1975, p. 201). Scholars contend that it is an etiological legend, penned in the guise of a historical novel, which possesses a historical backdrop, albeit non-historical content (Heriban 2005a, p. 359). Given this fanciful rendering of a "universal-historical" context, interlaced with myriad narrative strands, and considering the diverse incorporation of themes from Israel's distinct historical tradition, the book is best characterized, from a literary perspective, not so much as a short story—a "diaspora story"—or a "historicized sapiential tale", but more as a fictional narrative (akin to the Book of Judith) from the Hellenistic era, likely originating in the third century BC (Zenger 2013, pp. 518–19). It was perhaps authored by a Jew residing in the eastern diaspora, well-acquainted with life at the Persian royal court and in Susa (Heriban 2005a, p. 359).

No other book of Sacred Scripture elicits as many questions about its text as the Book of Esther (Vilchez Lindez 2004, p. 132). Several complexities relate to the text of the book itself. Among them are a version in Hebrew—the Masoretic Text—and several in Greek and Latin. The Greek versions are notably the LXX (or Text B) and Text A, whereas the Latin iterations comprise the Vetus Latina (VL) and the Vulgate (Vg), the latter also recognized as Jerome's version. The disparities between these versions and the TM are striking: even though they do not always align, the former significantly expands upon the Hebrew text (Vilchez Lindez 2004, p. 131).

The writing is entirely secular, so much so that the name of God is absent, and no explicit references to distinctively Israelite institutions like the Torah, the covenant, or the Temple are present. Yet, it remains a pivotal book for comprehending the essence of Judaism (Vilchez Lindez 2004, p. 131). The book's inclusion in OT can be attributed to its explanation of the institution of an annual feast, which enjoyed significant popularity among Jews, rather than its intrinsic content (Soggin 1989, pp. 470–71).

The Book of Esther has been preserved in both Hebrew and Greek. The Greek version (LXX) introduces passages absent in the Hebrew text, yet these additions are acknowledged as inspired by the Catholic Church (Bosetti 2013). The Hebrew text is more concise, and in contrast to the other versions, it is notable for its "silence about God". This means that God is not directly referenced, neither within the narrative framework nor through the protagonists' dialogues. In contrast, the two Greek text variants—a longer version (LXX) and a shorter version (often referred to as the Lucian version, now commonly termed the Alpha-text or A)—feature substantial additions. These are labeled with Latin alphabet letters and present an explicit "theology" (Zenger 2013, pp. 512–13).

Regarding the dating of the Book of Esther, two reliable reference points exist: 2 Macc 15:36 and the Greek colophon of East F,11 (=11,1) (Vilchez Lindez 2004, p. 144), which span the timeframe from 114/113 BC to 48 BC. Some scholars, advocating for the Hellenistic era as the composition period of the Hebrew Esther, pinpoint the time of the Maccabees, before the Palestinian crisis under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–163 BC). Others, however, suggest the period following this crisis (circa 160 BC) as the more likely timeframe (Vilchez Lindez 2004, p. 145). The most probable date for the composition of the Greek Esther is 114 BC (Vilchez Lindez 2004, p. 146).

The beautiful Esther-Hadassah, an orphan taken in by her uncle Mordecai after the loss of her parents, does not immediately feature in the book. Her story commences only after the departure of King Ahasuerus' first wife, Vashti, who was dethroned because she defied the king. After a genuine beauty contest, Esther ascends to the role of queen. Concurrently, her uncle thwarts a plot against the king. The narrative, at this juncture, seems poised for a happy conclusion. However, a twist ensues with the introduction of a royal minister named Haman. Incensed by Mordecai, a Jew, he resolves to annihilate the entire Jewish population. Urged by Mordecai to intercede, Esther musters the courage to approach the king. Subsequently, with astute strategy, she unveils Haman's malevolence and denounces him. The king then mandates Haman's execution, ensuring the salvation of the Jewish people.

Esther is not the sole figure described as "beautiful" in the narrative of the book. Immediately at the outset, the beautiful (Heb. *ṭôḇaṯ*; Gr. *kale*) Queen Vashti, whose beauty (Heb. *yᵉpî*, Gr. *to kallos*) King Ahasuerus wished to display to the peoples and officials, is mentioned (Esth 1:11). Vashti's refusal to appear resulted in the king's wrath, leading to her being divested of her royal title and denied any future presence before the king (Fratel 2014, p. 98). Her successor should be "another who is better [Heb. *ṭôḇāh*, Gr. *kreittoni*, comparative of *agathos*] than she (1:19)". Thus begins the kingdom's quest for "beautiful [Heb. *ṭôḇôṯ marʾeh*; Gr. *kala tō eidei*; litt. beautiful in appearance] young virgins for the king (2:2)" and that "all the beautiful [Heb. *ṭôḇôṯ marʾeh*; Gr. *kala tō eidei*] young virgins be assembled in the harem at the citadel of Susa (2:3)". Among the many young women brought to the fortress in Susa's royal palace (2:8) was a girl described as "beautiful in form and appearance" (Heb. *yᵉpaṯ-tōʾar wᵉṭôḇaṯ marʾeh*, Gr. *kalon tō eidei*), named Esther-Hadassah (2:7). The Greek text (Gr.) is more succinct, referring solely to the "beautiful or good [Gr. *kala*; Hebr. *ṭôḇ*] face or appearance [*tō eidei*]", while the Hebrew version elaborates further, also mentioning "beautiful [Hebr. *yᵉpaṯ*] form [*tōʾar*]".

After the Hebrew text informs us that Esther "was taken into the king's palace and put in the custody of Hegai" (2:8), her beauty is no longer the focus. Instead, it mentions that she pleased (*yāṭaḇ*) Hegai and found favor in his eyes, leading him to provide her with cosmetic treatments and her portion of food (2:9). Esther seems to enjoy privileges over the other girls, all of whom underwent a twelve-month beautification regimen: "six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics for women" (2:12). Furthermore, each girl had the liberty to take with her from the harem to the king's palace anything she desired (2:13). When it was Esther's turn to approach the king, she did not request anything beyond what Hegai had suggested, possibly due to her inherent beauty, which required no additional adornment (Vilchez Lindez 2004, p. 207). It is noted that

King Ahasuerus loved Esther more than any other woman, placing the royal crown upon her head, and elevating her to the position of queen in Vashti's stead (2:17).

Having ascended to queenship and adorned with the crown, Esther seems to have attained the zenith of her journey as a captivating young woman. She not only won the affection of Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the women (2:9) but also the king's love above all other women, finding favor beyond all the virgins (2:17). The narrative plays out as though it were a beauty pageant, with the ultimate prize being the royal crown and marriage to the king—a contest in which Esther emerges as the victor, surpassing all competitors. However, the true essence of Esther's mission only becomes evident following her coronation, Mordecai's uncovering of a conspiracy against the king, and Esther's subsequent disclosure to the king on Mordecai's behalf (2:23). This series of events is succeeded by the unforeseen elevation of Haman (3:1), who, irate that Mordecai neither bowed nor paid him homage (3:5–6), resolved to annihilate all Jews. At this juncture, Mordecai urges Esther to intercede with the king "to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people" (4:8). He solemnly advises her: "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews" (4:13). Mordecai's stark warning: "For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter" (4:14) subtly hints at the divine presence in this ostensibly secular text. He provocatively questions if perhaps her beauty, which won her the royal crown, was in reality purposed for a greater good—the salvation of her people: "Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this" (4:14).

The Greek text once again highlights Esther's beauty, particularly in the context of her intercession before the king to counteract Haman's edict that called for the annihilation of the Jewish people. Following Mordecai's prayer (4:17a–l) the LXX presents Esther's prayer (4:17k–z) which concludes with a plea to God to "hear the voice of the desperate" and rescue His people "from the hands of evildoers". She also prays, "save me from my fear!" (4:17z). When Esther's prayer concluded, on the third day, she discarded (gr. *exedysato*) the garments of her worship (gr. *ta himatia tēs therapeias*, litt.: garments of service or healing) and adorned herself "in her glory" (gr. *doxa*) (5:1). In contrast to Judith, Esther did not "anoint herself with precious ointment, nor donned a tiara, sandals, anklets, bracelets, rings, earrings, or any other adornments meant to entice the gaze of men who might behold her" (Jdt 10:4). She became *epiphanēs*, that is, "radiant" (NJB), "majestically adorned" (NRSV), or as awe-inspiring as the angel of the Lord who appeared to the barren wife of Manoah announcing the birth of their son, Samson (Judg 13:6). The author depicts Esther, accompanied by two maidservants, as she progresses toward the king. As she passes through all the gates and finally stands before the king, her demeanor is described with a challenging phrase: "She was radiant with perfect beauty" (RSV, 15:1b; gr. *autē erythriōsa akmē kallous autēs*, lit. "she flushed at the height of her beauty") (Vilchez Lindez 2004, p. 254). Vilchez Lindez observes that Esther's face subtly conveys her internal turmoil: "she was blushed"; concurrently, she embodies peace, joy, equilibrium, and amicability. Her trepidation, stemming from uncertainty about the king's reaction, is also palpable. These juxtapositions amplify her tranquil beauty, leading some to be overwhelmed (Vilchez Lindez 2004, p. 254). In essence, Esther approaches the king not to allure but to persuade. Her beauty is gentle, markedly less "aggressive" than that of Judith, who had to confront Holofernes and sever his head on her own.

Just as beauty aided Esther in becoming queen, it now assists her as she stands before the king at a pivotal juncture for her people. However, beauty alone, even taking into account Esther's delicate allure, is insufficient to save the people. Wisdom (and indeed cunning) coupled with patience are also necessary. And Esther possesses these qualities. She does not immediately confront Haman but discerns the opportune moment (one might say, the *ṭôḇ* moment, meaning good or beautiful) to persuade King Ahasuerus of the malice Haman intends, thereby altering the fate of her people.

In many ways, Esther may seem like a character playing a secondary role, first in the shadow of her uncle Mordecai and later of her husband Ahasuerus. Her life appears to be

determined by others, especially by Mordecai, who dominates the scene from beginning to end, to the extent that the Book of Esther might more accurately be called the Book/Scroll of Mordecai (Fratel 2014, p. 20). He had raised her (Est 2:7), brought her to the king's harem (2:8–9), and ordered her not to speak of her people (2:10). Meanwhile, he watched over her (cf. 2:11) and used her to reveal the news of the conspiracy to the king (2:22). When Haman initiated his plan to annihilate the Jewish people, Mordecai sent a copy of the edict regarding the destruction of the Jewish people to Esther and instructed her to intercede with the king on behalf of her people (4:8), exerting pressure on her. Even in her interactions with her husband, Esther demonstrates a certain distance and fear, especially when she must appear before him. Even at the end of the story with Haman, after accusing him before the king (7:6), Esther no longer speaks on his behalf. Her attempts to revoke the king's order are futile, and it takes a sealed letter with the royal signet ring delivered to Mordecai and his commitment to save the people. However, to understand Esther's role in a society dominated by intrigue, extravagance, arrogance, injustice, and a shallow and irresponsible king, unaware of what is happening around him and indifferent to others' lives, one must turn to the interpretation offered by the author of the Greek version of the book.

In his dream, Mordecai sees two great dragons that cause a great disturbance on earth. The nation of the righteous (=Jews) prepares for death and raises its cry to God, from which, "as from a little spring, there grew a great river, a flood of water" (NJB: Esth 1:1i = 11:10). This "little spring that became a river, the light that shone, the sun, the flood of water" (NJB: Esth 10:3c) is indeed our Esther, as explained at the end of the book by Mordecai himself. Therefore, it is not he who saves the people, but rather the little Esther who, with her beauty and, even more so, her intelligence, almost imperceptibly influences her royal husband (Rand 2002, p. 214), forcing him to take responsibility and make the right choices.

The Book of Esther is not a demonstration of antagonism toward a degrading and objectifying society that seeks to subjugate the weak and eliminate those who hold onto their dignity. Instead, it aims to showcase the power of tenderness, capable of overturning the fate of nations and bringing salvation to those who place their trust in God.

4. Conclusions

As various authors have noted, the Hebrew language lacks an appropriate term to express the concept of beauty in an aesthetic sense (Sisti 1989, p. 161), and the issue of beauty does not significantly engage the interest of biblical thought (Grundmann and Bertram 1969, p. 543). As early as 1957, Von Rad wrote: "No aesthetic of the Old Testament… has as yet been written" (von Rad 1962, p. 364), and Ferretter, 45 years later in 2004, observed that "only four articles examine the Biblical understanding of beauty, and each of these focuses only on certain aspects of this understanding" further noting the near absence of discussion on the Biblical concept of art (Ferretter 2004, p. 123).

While the Bible lacks a single term to express the aesthetic aspect of beauty and does not demonstrate a significant interest in the concept of beauty, it offers us a rich terminology capable of describing the various aspects through which beauty is perceived. The seven Hebrew terms we have studied (*ṣᵉbî*, *pāʾar*, *ḥāmad*, *yph*, *nʾh*, *nāʾēm*, *hādar*) have shown us a breadth of the perception of beauty. However, it is not always possible to determine the precise meaning and practical usage of each of them. Additionally, biblical authors like Job, Sirach, the author of the Song of Songs, or the Psalmist provide us with beautiful passages that express not only their wonder at the wonders of God's work but also their ability to perceive the beauty of creation in its smallest details and as part of a grand divine design. The diversity of terms, as well as specific authorial choices, such as the non-use of "yāpâ" for God, demonstrate that biblical authors have a clear understanding of objective beauty and its subjective perceptions.

However, the concept of beauty cannot be reduced solely to technical terms, nor can it be construed as a mere summation of their meanings. Other terms, such as *kābôd* and *ṭôb*, which have a wide range of meanings, can also signify beauty. Thus, *kābôd* ("glory"),

whose fundamental meaning is "weight" can indicate the inner solidity, precisely the "weight" of an external manifestation perceived as "glory" including in aesthetic terms. The term *ṭôḇ* also covers a broad spectrum of meanings, ranging from "good" to "beautiful", "useful" and "true". The Greek translation of the LXX employs at least three different Greek adjectives to translate it: ἀγαθός ("good"), καλός ("beautiful"), and χρηστός ("useful"). The connection between the term *ṭôḇ* and the verb "see" (*rāʾâ*) prompts us to recognize, precisely to see, behind the external aesthetic appearance, the inner goodness of the contemplated work. However, the most significant choice is the LXX's decision to translate *ṭôḇ* as καλός, instead of the more common ἀγαθός in the phrase "God saw that it was *ṭôḇ*, meaning "beautiful" (καλός) in Genesis 1, emphasizing the aesthetic aspect of creation, not just the qualitative or functional one.

The two lovers in the Song of Songs, while exalting their love through the aesthetic and ecstatic contemplation of their corporeality, which also allows them to experience the concrete beauty (*ṭôḇ*) of God's creative work in the "paradise" already celebrate the experience of eternal love (Ravasi 2010, pp. 130–31). Their mutual love, therefore, compels and assists them in recognizing the beauty and goodness of creation. However, beauty is not only to be recognized or contemplated as something external to the person but also as an inherent part of their being. Beauty must also be nurtured and developed.

In the cases of Judith and Esther, we perceive in their feminine beauty both the gentleness of love and the glory (*kāḇôd*) of goodness. They are exceedingly beautiful, yet their beauty is a gift inherent within them. However, this beauty should also be regarded as a "mission" bestowed upon them by God, revealing His goodness and the beauty of His plan for salvation. Consequently, beauty becomes a responsibility that should not be taken lightly. Indeed, we observe both of them nurturing their beauty, albeit in distinct ways. Judith adorns herself to divert and seduce with the aim of achieving her mission, which is to eliminate wickedness and cruelty. Conversely, Esther adorns herself to attract and gain the strength to act justly, ultimately bringing goodness and salvation to her people.

Without these stories of Judith and Esther, the understanding of beauty in the Bible would remain incomplete. Beauty cannot merely be equated with goodness; instead, it serves as a powerful tool employed by these exceptional women to achieve goodness and justice, namely, salvation and peace for their own people.

Beauty, therefore, not only reveals the goodness of the Creator and His eternal love but also invites us to collaborate with Him for the good of all.

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Notes

[1]　Bible quotation will be taken mainly from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (=NRSV).

[2]　C. Newman takes the example set by de Waard and Nida on the root *kbd* (de Waard and Nida 1998, pp. 163–65) as a starting point and goes on to propose a more extensive range of meanings for the term. While de Waard and Nida identify only fourteen meanings (heavy, much, many, slow, abundant, burdensome, difficult, grievous, sluggish, dull, riches, respect, honor, and great), Newman's work introduces a more nuanced understanding. He incorporates modifications and additional interpretations, as demonstrated in the table of the semantic range of kbd, where he offers 23 different meanings for the noun, 21 for the verb, and 11 for the adjective (Newman 1992, p. 19). In the table, he also offers "beauty" as a translation for the noun כָּבוֹד (*kāḇôd*) and "distinguish" for the verb כָּבֵד (*kāḇēd*), but unfortunately, he does not specify the concrete reference to which these terms apply.

[3]　In Gen 3:6, "the woman saw (*tēreʾ*) that the tree was good (*ṭôḇ*) [for food]" beyond the utilitarian meaning (for food), it can also be understood in the aesthetic sense, as in the translations of the Common English Bible of 2019 ("The woman saw that the tree was beautiful with delicious food") and the New Living Translation, Second Edition of 2015 ("The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious"). This can also be found in the interconfessional current language

reading of the Alleanza Biblica Universale of 1985 ("La donna osservò l'albero: i suoi frutti erano certo buoni da mangiare; era una delizia per gli occhi". Engl.translation: "The woman observed the tree: its fruits were certainly good to eat; it was a delight to the eyes") which attempts to combine the two aspects of utility for eating and delight for the eyes.Other occurrences highlight primarily the aesthetic aspect: Gen 6:2, "the sons of God saw (*yirʾû*) that they [=daughters of men] were fair (*ṭōḇōt*)"; Gen 41:22, Pharaoh says, "I saw (*ʾēreʾ*) in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good (*ṭōḇôt*)"; Gen 49:15, "He saw (*yarʾ*) that a resting place was good (*ṭôḇ*)"; Josh 7:21, "when I saw (*ʾerʾê*) among the spoil a beautiful (*ṭôḇâ*) mantle from Shinar"; 2 Sam 11:2, "he [David] saw (*yarʾ*) from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful (*ṭôḇat*)"; Esth 1:11, "for she [Vashti] was fair (*ṭôḇat*) to behold".; Dan 1:15, "At the end of ten days, it was observed (*nirʾâ*) that they appeared (*marʾêhem*) better (*ṭôḇ*).

4 According to Soggin, the author evidently aims to depict events which he places between the eighth and the sixth century B.C. (Soggin 1989, p. 509).

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