

The Seductive Argumentation of the Adulterous Woman in Prov 7:16–17: Invitation to Love or Preparation for Death?

Marcin Chrostowski

The Catholic Academy in Warsaw, Collegium Joanneum

marcinchrostowski@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1974-3923>

ABSTRACT: The Book of Proverbs abounds in characteristic and often very ambivalent vocabulary. Ambiguity of symbolism can also be found in smaller thematic units, a particular example being the passage of Prov 7:16–17, in which a strange, adulterous woman encourages a young man to engage in fornication. The terms used in the text for the bed and its decoration also referred to funerary practices. Myrrh was known as an aphrodisiac, but was also associated with funeral rites. When mixed with aloe and cinnamon, it made an ointment used to anoint the bodies of the dead, among other things. Cinnamon, the third ingredient in the perfume in Prov 7:17, was used to eliminate the odour of bodies at burial. The term used to refer to the bed was also used in the description of a burial site. A young man, tempted by a harlot woman to commit adultery, is actually being prepared for death (Prov 7:22–23, 26–27).

KEYWORDS: Prov 7, אִשָּׁה זָרָה (“adulterous woman”), מְרַבְדִּים (“covers”), עֶרֶשׂ (“bed”), חֲטֻבוֹת (“embroidered fabric”), אֲטוּן (“linen”), מִשְׁקָב (“bedding”), מֵר (“myrrh”), אֶהְלִים (“aloe”), קִנְמוֹן (“cinnamon”)

The Book of Proverbs is one of the wisdom books, which, in order to describe the paths leading to the “fear of God,” which is the “crown of wisdom” (Sir 1:18), or to warn against sin – lack of wisdom and destructive “foolishness” (Prov 14:1, 8, 9) – often made use of specific stylistic and artistic devices such as allegory, metaphor or hyperbole. Some of the phrases in the wisdom books therefore cover a wider range of content and topics than would appear from a cursory reading of the biblical text.

Of particular note are the statements about women present in the Book of Proverbs. Their judgement in the book is ambivalent. On the one hand, the author warns against women whose behaviour is morally reprehensible (Prov 2:16–19; 5:1–14, 20; 6:24–35; 7:1–27; 9:13–18; 21:9, 19; 22:14; 23:27), while on the other, he presents an image of Wisdom, whose symbol is precisely a woman (Prov 8:1–9:12). The admonition to the husband to remain with “the wife of his youth” (5:18–19) is extremely significant, and the so-called *Poem on the Woman of Worth* (31:10–31), whose most beautiful adornment is piety (31:30), is among the masterpieces of biblical poetry praising women.

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Particularly noteworthy are the metaphors related to “women” present in the collection of Prov 1–9, which in the common view of exegetes constitutes an introduction to the seven collections of proverbs. The author of the Book of Proverbs uses this symbolism to describe the right or wrong way of man. Thus, there is Wisdom (personified as a woman), who “walks in the paths of righteousness, in the paths of justice” (8:20), but right next to it there are paths disastrous for man, “evil paths,” into which leads the “adulterous woman,” whose paths lead to “the gate of death” (7:27; cf. 9:18). Four teachings (2:16–19; 5:1–14, 20; 6:24–35; 7:1–27),¹ belonging to the collection of Prov 1–9,² describe her conduct.

The ambivalent symbolism of some images is also found in the smaller thematic units of the book, a particular example being the passage of Prov 7:16–17, in which a “strange,” harlot woman encourages a young man to commit adultery. In doing so, she uses very sophisticated vocabulary implying the preparation of the marital alcove: מְרִבְדִים (“covers”), עֶרְשׁ (“bed”), קַטְבוֹת (“embroidered fabric”), אֶטוּן (“linen”), מְשֻׁכָּב (“bedding”), and scented aphrodisiacs such as: מֵר (“myrrh”), אֶלֶיִם (“aloe”), קַנְמֹן (“cinnamon”). A careful examination of the further context of the words used,³ both in the Masoretic Text (MT)⁴ and in the Septuagint (LXX),⁵ however, makes one consider quite the opposite meaning of the attributes mentioned here, used in other circumstances.⁶ The subject of this paper will be an exegetical and comparative analysis of the meaning of the words used in both language versions (MT and LXX) of Prov 7:16–17.

Prov 7 is the fourth and final climactic argument of the sage-father, intended to protect the young son from אִשָּׁה זָרָה (cf. Prov 2:16–19; 5:1–23; 6:20–33). In comparison, Prov 5 essentially addresses the financial and social losses resulting from adultery and recommends marriage as the natural way to satisfy the human sexual drive. The passage of Prov 6:20–35, while showing the dangers of adultery, focuses at the end on the revenge of the betrayed spouse. The speech in Prov 7, however, is intended to expose the seductive argumentation of the unfaithful wife. It also creates an inclusion with the first speech (Prov 2:16–19) through verbal similarities of both introduction (cf. 2:16 and 7:5) and conclusion (cf. 2:18–19 and 7:26–27). The description of the lamentable consequences of adultery in the fourth speech

1 Cf. also in this context, Prov 9:13–18, where, however, the term “strange/adulterous woman” [אִשָּׁה זָרָה] does not appear and “Woman of Foolishness” [אִשָּׁה כֹּסִילוּת] appears instead.

2 M. Chrostowski, “Ostrzeżenie przed *iššā zārā* w Prz 7,” *Crux ave spes unica. Księga Jubileuszowa dedykowana Księdzu Biskupowi dr. Janowi Tyrawie z okazji 70 rocznicy urodzin oraz 30 rocznicy sakry biskupiej* (ed. G. Barth) (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Pejzaż 2018) 981–982.

3 G. Lisowsky, *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1993).

4 K. Elliger – W. Rudolph (eds.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5 ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1997).

5 A. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta. Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes edidit Alfred Rahlfs. Editio altera, quam recognovit et emendavit Robert Hanhart. Duo volumina in uno* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 2006).

6 The ambivalent meaning of the speech of the harlot woman in Prov 7:16–17 has been pointed out by: S. Potocki, *Księga Przysłów: Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz, eskursy* (PŚST 8/1; Poznań: Pallottinum 2008) 94; R.J. Clifford, *Proverbs. A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 1999) 89.

(7:22–23, 26–27) has parallels in the second (5:4–6, 9–14) and third (6:32–35) speeches.⁷ Passage 7:16–17, however, has no parallels in the other descriptions and warnings. On the one hand, the entire speech of אִשָּׁה זָרָה in 7:14–20 is her only statement in Prov 1–9 (omitting the speech of the Woman of Foolishness in Prov 9:16–17); on the other hand, it is in these verses that the ambivalence of the woman’s speech reaches its peak. Extremely rare expressions that reveal their meaning also in extra-biblical and later literature, i.e. in the LXX and in the New Testament (NT), appear there.

But who is this אִשָּׁה זָרָה against whom the sage’s statements are directed? It is worth choosing a translation variant of this phrase, which will be crucial for further analysis.

1. Who Is the Woman Described as אִשָּׁה זָרָה in the Context of her Argumentation?

The initiator of the actions in Prov 7:5 (and also in Prov 2:16) is the woman referred to as אִשָּׁה זָרָה, which is translated in many ways and depending on the context as “another man’s wife” (MB),⁸ or “forbidden/harlot/strange woman.”⁹ Although the semantic fields of the quoted translations seem to overlap – after all, “another man’s wife” encouraging adultery is both “forbidden” and a “harlot” – it is necessary to choose the most accurate expression possible.

The further context of the adjective זָרָה, which acts as an adjectival attribute in 7:5, suggests a meaning related to “strangeness,” “otherness,” something “forbidden” or “prohibited,” with the context to be taken into account in each case.¹⁰

7 B.K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 1–15* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2004) 365.

8 Some translations will be quoted from the Millennium Bible (= MB): A. Jankowski et al. (eds.), *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu w przekładzie z języków oryginalnych*, 5 ed. (Poznań: Pallottinum 2008).

9 Barbara Strzałkowska (*Księga Przysłów 1–9 w Septuagincie. Analiza „dodatków” i „braków” w zestawieniu z Tekstem Masoreckim w świetle starożytnych świadectw tekstualnych* [RSB 48; Warszawa: Vocatio 2017] 120, 70, 208) translates the term אִשָּׁה זָרָה as follows: Prov 2:16 – “zakazana kobieta” (forbidden woman); 5:3, 20 – “obca [kobieta]” (strange [woman]); 7:5 – “nierządna kobieta” (harlot woman). In 5:3, 20, the noun אִשָּׁה is the implied subject. It is translated differently by Stanisław Potocki: Prov 2:16 – “cudza żona” (another man’s wife); 5:3, 20 – “obca/cudza” (stranger/another’s); 7:5 – “obca kobieta” (strange woman); 22:14 (זָרוֹת) – “cudze żony” (other men’s wives). Potocki (*Księga Przysłów*, 70, 83, 85, 92, 174) seems to show a lack of consistency between his translation of the text and his commentary. For example, in 2:16 he translates the expression as “another man’s wife,” while in the commentary he refers to her as “a strange woman”; in 7:5 he translates it as “a strange woman,” while in the commentary he refers to her as “another man’s woman”; in 22:14, he translates the expression as “other men’s wives,” while in the commentary he refers to them as “strange women.” However, he correctly describes the proper understanding of these terms.

10 The adjective זָרָה appears 70 times in the MT, the most (14 times) in Prov, slightly less in Isa (9) and Num (8): Exod 29:33; 30:9, 33; Lev 10:1; 22:10, 12–13; Num 1:51; 3:4, 10, 38; 17:5; 18:4, 7; 26:61; Deut 25:5; 32:16; 1 Kgs 3:18; 2 Kgs 19:24; Isa 1:7; 17:10; 25:2, 5; 28:21; 29:5; 43:12; 61:5; Jer 2:25; 3:13; 5:19; 18:14; 30:8; 51:2, 51; Ezek 7:21; 11:9; 16:32; 28:7, 10; 30:12; 31:12; Hos 5:7; 7:9; 8:7, 12; Joel 4:17; Obad 1:11; Ps 44:21; 54:5; 81:10; 109:11; Job 15:19; 19:15, 27; Prov 2:16; 5:3, 10, 17, 20; 6:1; 7:5; 11:15; 14:10; 20:16; 22:14; 23:33; 27:2, 13; Lam 5:2; HALOT I, 279.

This adjective was used in the Old Testament to refer to “strange fire,” the use and offering of which in the Tabernacle was forbidden (cf. Exod 30:9; especially Lev 10:1; Num 3:4; 26:61, where the penalty for offering “strange fire” was death). In relation to a human being, it means a person who is a “stranger,” that is, someone from another country, family, lineage or clan (Lev 22:12; Num 17:5; Deut 25:5; Ps 44:21; 81:10).¹¹

In the Book of Proverbs alone, the warning against something “strange” (נָרְ), which was to be avoided, appears 14 times: 7 times in collection 1–9 (2:16; 5:3, 10, 17, 20; 6:1; 7:5) and 7 times in the other chapters of the book (11:15; 14:10; 20:16; 22:14; 23:33; 27:2, 13).

The phrase אִשָּׁה נָרְ itself can be generally translated as: “foreign/strange/unknown/forbidden woman/wife.” This expression appears 5 times in the Book of Proverbs (Prov 2:16; 5:3, 20; 7:5; 22:14¹²) and suggests a meaning related to a woman’s “strangeness” in the sense of her belonging to another (“strange/foreign”) country or husband. This is particularly clear in two places (Prov 2:16; 7:5), where the phrase אִשָּׁה נָרְ (“strange woman”) is followed by נְכַרְיָהּ (“foreigner”).¹³ The context of the situations described there is marital infidelity, which should be avoided. The reference to “smooth words” found in Prov 2:16; 7:5 (cf. also Prov 5:3; 7:21), suggests a hidden intention to commit adultery by a woman married to another man.¹⁴

Moreover, the woman herself emphasises her marital status by ensuring that her husband will be away for some time and is expected to return at the full moon (7:19–20). This argumentation is intended to reassure the young man and encourage him to indulge in carnal pleasures all night long, since her husband will not find out about anything (cf. *a contrario* Prov 6:32–35). The time of his return has been precisely determined, so the young man has nothing to fear.¹⁵

Therefore, the closer context of the Book of Proverbs, especially the collection of Prov 1–9 (cf. especially: 2:16; 5:20; 7:19–20) suggests the translation “adulterous woman.”¹⁶ The translation “strange woman” is literal; “adulterous woman” is the meaning inferred from the context of Prov 1–9 and the pericope of Prov 7. Thus, in this article, terms related to the context will be used, i.e. those describing the woman as adulterous and therefore “strange” to the young man she is trying to seduce.¹⁷ The phrase “harlot/seductress” is not so much a translation as a descriptive term for this character.

11 Potocki, *Księga Przysłów*, 70.

12 In Prov 22:14, only the adjectival attribute נָרְ appears in the plural, without the subject אִשָּׁה, which is implied.

13 The terms נְכַרְיָהּ and נָרְ have similar meanings (“strange,” “other”), although the adjective נְכַרְיָהּ is more likely to express the idea of “strangeness” in the sense of coming from another country so “foreignness”; *DCHV*, 695.

14 R.E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1998) 13–14.

15 Murphy, *Proverbs*, 43.

16 Strzałkowska, *Księga Przysłów*, 184–185.

17 Analyses of the words “strange” and “someone else’s” and their contexts in Proverbs, support the view that these terms refer to an Israelite woman. A “strange” and “someone else’s” woman, being the wife of another man and committing marital infidelity, resides in an atmosphere of death and leads to it all those who give in to her seductive persuasions; Potocki, *Księga Przysłów*, 70.

In terms of this “strangeness/foreignness,” it is worth considering the idea that the adulterous woman is a foreigner, or the wife of a foreign merchant, persuading the young man to participate in idolatrous cults. This is the interpretation proposed by Gustav Boström,¹⁸ referring to Prov 7:6 from the LXX. The main difference between LXX Prov 7:6 and MT is the subject; it is not the sage but the woman who leans out and looks through the window at the street. Such behaviour was meant to allude to fertility cults and worship of Astarte, the goddess of love in the Canaanite fertility cult, and Ishtar, her counterpart in the Babylonian cult. This goddess, like the “strange/foreign woman,” leans out of the window, wanting to combine intercourse (Prov 7:16–18) with murder (7:22–23);¹⁹ after all, the bed of the harlot woman will soon become the grave of the reckless young man.²⁰

Astarte (Ishtar) was even referred to as “the one leaning out of the window” and “she who stands in the window of the house.” Part of her worship was leaning out of the window of one’s house to ensure good fortune. Both the dress of the “strange woman” and her behaviour were a part of a specific pagan liturgy, which included sacred prostitution.²¹ These claims have not been accepted by most exegetes,²² although some have looked into them and developed them when describing the phenomenon of sacred prostitution in Israel.²³

In light of the cultic argumentation employed by the harlot woman (Prov 7:14–15), it is difficult to see her as a foreigner or a woman of another nationality worshipping her deities. Rather, she uses religious camouflage in case the young man has qualms about giving in to her immoral tempting. In the light of Lev 7:11–18, it would also not be easy to link intercourse, making a person ritually unclean, with the feast offering to which the woman refers.²⁴ Her aim is to persuade an unwitting young man to engage in harlotry with ambiguous and

18 G. Boström, *Proverbia Studien. Die Weisheit und das Fremde Weib in Sprüche 1–9* (LUA 1/30/3; Lund: CWK Gleerup 1935) 103–155.

19 Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 362, n. 6.

20 Noel Robertson (“The Ritual Background of the Dying God in Cyprus and Syro-Palestine,” *HTR* 75 [1982] 324) suggests that Adonis, the lover of Astarte, was to be wrapped in linen cloth and sprinkled with aromatic oils after his death.

21 Boström, *Proverbia Studien*, 104–105.

22 Stanisław Potocki (“Układ literacki Prz 1–9,” *RTK* 18/1 [1971] 80; “Proces formacji mądrościowej w ujęciu Prz 1–9,” *RTK* 35/1 [1988] 52–53), analysing the above-mentioned views, claims that the woman from Prov 7 is not so much a sacred prostitute, but an adulterous Israelite woman, wishing to seduce a young man and committing marital infidelity.

23 Karel van der Toorn (“Female Prostitution in the Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel,” *JBL* 108 [1989] 193–205) argues that Israeli women (especially the poor), in order to fulfil their solemn religious vows or obligations of sacrifice, were often forced into “sacred prostitution,” to which he gives a new meaning. Namely, the author believes that “sacred” prostitution functioned among Israelite women as a form of fundraising for religious sacrifice, which was to be a source of income for the Jerusalem Temple. However, he himself admits that this remains unproven. This author’s views have been criticised by Duane A. Garrett (“Critical Notes, Votive Prostitution Again: A Comparison of Proverbs 7:13–14 and 21:28–29,” *JBL* 109 [1990] 682), who, comparing Prov 7:13–14 with 21:28–29, considered these proposals premature and hasty.

24 Murphy, *Proverbs*, 44.

seductive words, also referring to Israelite worship,²⁵ hence she can also be generally referred to as “seductress” and “harlot,” but this is not an accurate translation of the term אִשֶּׁה זָרָה.

Prov 7 is peculiar for at least three reasons. First, only in this chapter does the warning against אִשֶּׁה זָרָה appear, including her speech, which is not recorded in the other chapters of Proverbs that mention this character. Second, only in this chapter does the woman give a sacrificial and cultic motivation for adultery: “I was to offer a feast sacrifice; today I have fulfilled my vows” (7:14), which is lacking in other chapters of the book. Third, it is in this chapter, specifically in 7:16–17, that an argument appealing to the listener’s imagination appears, composed of very rare vocabulary that has an ambivalent meaning. This is because the adulterous woman spared no expense in preparing the luxurious decor of the bedroom, which later became a place of harlotry. Of particular note is the description of the bed covered with imported covers and perfumed with costly aromas of myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Similar vocabulary appears in Song 4:14, where it is the colour of carnal union.²⁶ Therefore, it is reasonable to deal with this topic separately, especially in the context of the woman’s specific vocabulary.

In Prov 7:16–17, her argumentation and persuasion to engage in adultery appears in more detail:²⁷

7:16	מְרַבְדִים רְבֹדְתִי עֲרָשִׁי הַטְּבוֹת אֶטוֹן מִצְרַיִם	I covered my bed with patterned fabrics of Egyptian linen.
7:17	נִפְתִּי מִשְׁכָּבִי מֵר אֶהְלִים וְקַנְמוֹן	I sprinkled my bedding with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.

The strange, adulterous woman has thus prepared her home both in terms of furnishings (7:16–17a) and scents (7:17) tempting to indulge in amorous activity. The two aspects will be examined separately in terms of exegetical analysis in order to arrive at theological conclusions at the end.

25 The feast offering of the woman in Prov 7 was a thanksgiving feast offering, for it resulted (at least according to her argumentation) from the vows she had made. In such a case, the meat of the sacrificial victim was eaten on the same day, although some of it could be eaten the next day (Lev 7:16). By offering the sacrifice, the woman “fulfilled her vows” (Prov 7:14), so she could celebrate and invite someone to the feast. Her argumentation was intended to convince the young man that he would be participating in a religious celebration that was seemingly innocent. In fact, the woman’s words were intended to lull the young man’s sensibilities, for her further proposals become increasingly immoral (Prov 7:18); cf. M.V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18A; New Haven, CT – London: Yale University Press 2000) 245.

26 Murphy, *Proverbs*, 44.

27 Own translation. Similarly: Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 238; Strzałkowska, *Księga Przysłów*, 212–213.

2. The Decor of the Woman's House (7:16–17a)

Prov 7:16 is extremely interesting both in terms of the vocabulary and syntax. Most of the terms that appear in that verse are non-specific words (מְרַבְּדִים) or *hapax legomena* (הַטְּבוֹת, אֶטְוֹן). Verse 7:17, containing rare vocabulary (אֶהְלִים, קַנְמִוִן), is similar. A comparative analysis of individual terms in the MT and LXX provides the opportunity to find new translation variants. For this reason, it is useful to first analyse the most important words and how they relate to each other.

2.1. מְרַבְּדִים (“covers”), רָבַד (“to cover”): Their Associations with the Carnal Union, the Restfulness of the Night and the Preparation for Death

The first term used to describe the decoration of the house of the harlot woman is מְרַבְּדִים, meaning “covers.” Apart from this place the noun appears only in Prov 31:22, in the plural form, where it also denotes the splendid covers made by the *woman of worth* from the hymn Prov 31:10–31. The noun appears by itself only in the plural form (the singular form is unconfirmed in the Hebrew Bible [HB]), it occurs rarely and denotes a peculiar material, precious and uncommon. In the opening words of the woman's speech, where the noun appears with a verb following it: מְרַבְּדִים רָבַדְתִּי, i.e. “with covers I have covered” or “with coverings I have covered,”²⁸ it is a syntactic phenomenon of *accusativus cognatus* (cognate accusative). There are two types of this accusative: effective (*effectivus*) and internal (*internus*). This is somewhat similar to the syntactic use of *infinitivus absolutus*, the purpose of which was to express a command or to strengthen the final verb.²⁹ Both Hebrew terms are very rare, but their roots are confirmed by Ugaritic sources from the 14th/18th centuries BC, and appear in the *mrbd* (UT 2050, 9)³⁰ or *mrbd* spelling (UT 1111, 11), indicating its much longer use in West Semitic than in Hebrew.³¹

“Spreading out” the bed was intended to provide more softness and thus more comfort for the person lying down (cf. Prov 31:22).³² The insinuations of carnal union thus become evident, although their deceptiveness remains unclear to the young man.³³ It is already

28 A. Kuśmirek (ed.), *Hebrajsko-polski Stary Testament-Pisma. Przekład interlinearny z kodami gramatycznymi, transliteracją i indeksem słów hebrajskich i aramejskich* (PSB 32; Warszawa: Vocatio 2009) 370.

29 G. Deiana – A. Spreafico, *Guida allo studio dell'ebraico biblico I: Parte teorica*, 4 ed. (Strumenti. Biblica 76.1; Torino: Claudiana 2018, 2019) 60.

30 C.H. Gordon (ed.), *Ugaritic Textbook* (AnOr 38; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute 1965; Revised Reprint 1998) the numeral refers to the number and line of the text.

31 K.A. Kitchen, “Of Bedspreads and Hibernation: From Rio de Janeiro to the Middle Euphrates,” *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (eds. L. Eslinger – G. Taylor) (JSOTSup 67; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1988) 26–27. There, the author gives details about the attribution of the quoted texts according to *KTU*: UT 2050, 9 = *KTU* 4.385.9 and UT 1111, 11 = *KTU* 4.270.11; *KTU* is an abbreviation used for: M. Dietrich – O. Loretz – J. Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places*, 2 Enlarged ed. (ALASP 8; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag 1995).

32 Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 378.

33 Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 247.

hidden in the verb רָבַד, referring to the preparation of a bedding or bed for rest.³⁴ Moreover, the root רבד is a by-form of the root רפד, found in Song 3:10 or Job 17:13; in the second case, it forms the root of the verb רָפַדְתִּי (“to spread out”), which describes Job wishing to “spread out” his bed (רָצוּעַ) in the darkness, since Sheol had become his home.³⁵ It can thus be seen that the verb רָבַד evokes both the associations with the restfulness of the night and the pleasure derived from the softness of the covered bed, as well as the uncertainty of Job preparing the bed for his death.

It is significant in this context to refer to the testimony of the LXX, which translates the noun מְרַבְדִּים as κειρία, which in both the Greek Bible and the NT appears only 1 time. Precisely, κειρία means a band or bandage for wrapping infants or the bodies of the dead. In the NT, it refers exclusively to the dead body of Lazarus (John 11:44).³⁶ Therefore, it can be seen that the Greek Bible here contains vocabulary related to burial and funeral,³⁷ and thus to death. The analysed word מְרַבְדִּים can therefore be understood as “covers” that were used for the greater comfort of the lying person, but in the LXX and NT it takes on a meaning associated with funeral and burial.

2.2. עָרֶשׁ (“bed”): Impression of Splendor as an Important Element of the Seductive Argumentation of the Adulterous Woman

Syntagma עָרֶשִׁי (עָרֶשׁ + suffix 1 pers. singular) means “my bed” (or “my couch”) and comes from the noun עָרֶשׁ (“bed”), appearing 8 times in Hebrew poetry (Amos 3:12; 6:4; Ps 6:7; 41:4; 132:3; Job 7:13; Prov 7:16; Song 1:16), 1 time in prose (Deut 3:11) and 3 times in parallel with the noun מְטָה, which has a similar meaning: “bedding” (Ps 6:7; Amos 3:12; 6:4). Such a bed was used for nightly rest (Ps 132:3), for lying down during meals (Amos 6:4)³⁸ and as a bed intended for the sick (Ps 41:4). It was a place of carnal intercourse (Prov 7:16) and became a symbol of just such activity (Song 1:16).³⁹ The term עָרֶשׁ can therefore in a broader sense mean the alcove, or marital bedroom. In the ancient times to which the Proverbs text refers, only a few people had a bed so richly decorated.⁴⁰ The couch used for resting or sleeping was found in the homes of wealthy people, for in an ordinary house,

34 Some are of the opinion that the verb also appears in 1 Sam 9:25 and Amos 3:12, but in both cases this would be the result of emendation and a different reading of the two verses; *DCH* VII, 395.

35 Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 247.

36 *CWSD-NT*, 885.

37 Bandages, referred to by the noun κειρία, were used as binding material to prepare bodies for burial; *BDAG*, 538.

38 This conclusion is reached by B.K. Waltke (*The Book of Proverbs*, 378), who argues that it is difficult to point out the exact difference in meaning between מְטָה and עָרֶשׁ in Amos 3:12; 6:4. He gives the example of a large relief from Assyria in which King Ashurbanipal rests on a cushioned dining couch and raises a bowl of wine to his lips. Michael V. Fox (*Proverbs 1–9*, 247), who suggests a semantic difference between עָרֶשׁ and מְטָה, is of a different opinion: he translates עָרֶשׁ as “bed” and מְטָה as “couch,” used for example for meals eaten in a reclining position. The bridegroom and bride in the Song of Songs use the term עָרֶשׁ to describe their “bed” of greenery (Song 1:16).

39 W.C. Williams, “עָרֶשׁ,” *NIDOTTE* III, 542.

40 L. Alonso Schökel – J. Vilchez Lіндеz, *I Proverbi* (Commenti Biblici; Roma: Borla 1988) 265.

the place of rest was a mat lying on the floor.⁴¹ Thus, one of the elements of the adulterous woman's seductive argumentation was to evoke in the listener the impression of splendor and affluence of her house, which was to result in persuading the young man to stay there longer in order to indulge in the pleasures of an amorous union.

The Greek Bible translates the noun שָׁרָץ as κλίνη, which also appears in reference to the bed on which the sick and dying rested (e.g. Gen 48:2; 49:33; 2 Sam 4:7; 1 Kgs 17:19). It has a similar meaning in the NT, where the noun κλίνη is in the vast majority of cases⁴² used to refer to the “bed of sickness” for people in pain (Mark 7:30; Rev 2:22), or a bed on which they were carried (Matt 9:2, 6; Luke 5:18; Acts 5:15), which rather implies that the translation should be “a stretcher” e.g. for paralytics.⁴³ A more appropriate Greek term to describe the bed on which the amorous union of two lovers was to take place, would certainly be the noun κοίτη, which appears in the LXX more times than κλίνη (73 times against 45 instances) and is more closely associated with a bed intended for sleep and rest or a marital bed.⁴⁴

2.3. תְּבִיטָה (“embroidered fabric”): Its Egyptian Provenance Gives an Oriental Color to the Seductive Argumentation

In the next stich (Prov 7:16b), the adulterous woman's argumentation continues: from the description of the bed she moves on to talk about its aesthetic qualities. The following nouns appear: תְּבִיטָה, meaning “embroidery,” or “embroidered fabric,”⁴⁵ and אֶשְׁרָץ, meaning “linen,” probably dyed red or purple.⁴⁶ The following adverbial of place, מִצְרַיִם, refers to Egypt, from where the noun אֶשְׁרָץ may have been borrowed. The two Hebrew terms, תְּבִיטָה and אֶשְׁרָץ, appear exclusively in this place in the HB, constituting *hapax legomena*, which led Michael V. Fox to argue that such fabrics were rare in Israel.⁴⁷ A different opinion is held

41 W.D. Reyburn – E.McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Proverbs* (UBS Handbook Series; New York: United Bible Societies 2000) 167.

42 In total, the noun appears 9 times in the NT: 3 times in reference to the bed of the paralytic (Matt 9:2, 6; Luke 5:18); 1 time in the description of the bed of the child from whom the evil spirit came out (Mark 7:30); 1 time when explaining the “bedding” on which two people will rest on the day of the Son of Man (Luke 17:34); 1 time to describe the “bed of sickness” on which Jezebel was thrown (Rev 2:22). Of the remaining instances, 2 times the noun κλίνη appears in the description of a bed under which no light is hidden (Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16) and 1 time to describe a bed which was to be washed by the Pharisees and Jews in general (Mark 7:4), but this last instance is uncertain, for it does not appear in important manuscripts. Most appearances of the noun therefore refer to the bed of the sick, the suffering and the afflicted.

43 *CWSD-NT*, 870.

44 In the NT, the term means a place of rest, a bed (Luke 11:7), a marital bed, or metaphorically even marriage itself (Heb 13:4). It also refers to cohabitation, whether or not it is in accordance with the Law (Rom 13:13, and in the LXX: Lev 18:22; Num 31:17; 18:35). It also means the seed necessary for conception (Rom 9:10, and in the LXX: Lev 15:16, 32; 18:20, 23; 22:4; Num 5:20); *CWSD-NT*, 873.

45 *HALOT I*, 306.

46 “אֶשְׁרָץ,” J.R. Kohlenberger III – W.D. Mounce, *Kohlenberger/Mounce Concise Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Accordance Bible Software: *KM Hebrew Dictionary*, version 3.3, 2012). In Egyptian it is referred to as *idmy*, which literally means “red linen”; *HALOT I*, 37.

47 Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 247.

by Bruce K. Waltke, who supports the Egyptian provenance of both terms, which explains the low frequency of their occurrence; for they are borrowings from the Egyptian language,⁴⁸ which is more likely.

The noun *הַטְּבוֹת* is a *hapax legomenon*; moreover, it appears only in the plural form, being the *plurale tantum*. It means “multicoloured embroidered fabric” and constitutes a parallel to the noun *מְרַבְּדִים* (“covers”), which appears at the beginning of Prov 7:16.⁴⁹ The noun *הַטְּבוֹת* LXX translates as *ἀμφιτάποις*, which apart from this verse appears only in LXX 2 Sam 17:28 and means “bed cover,” which in the Greek Bible is probably a neologism.⁵⁰

2.4. *אַטוֹן* (“linen”): An Atmosphere of Comfort and Wealth Invites the Young Man to Enjoy the Delightful Benefits of Housing of the Adulterous Woman

Immediately after *הַטְּבוֹת* appears the noun *אַטוֹן*, forming a logical continuity with the previous word:⁵¹ *הַטְּבוֹת אַטוֹן*, which means “multicoloured fabrics (made of) linen,”⁵² originating, as seen further on in the text, from Egypt. This locative is very important for the interpretation of the whole phrase. On the one hand, because of the Egyptian provenance of the noun *אַטוֹן* (“linen”), and on the other hand, because Egypt was the main exporter of the luxurious red linen, known there as “royal linen.”⁵³ Similar material appears in Prov 31:22 (*אֶרְגָּמֶן*) and in Prov 31:13 (*פְּשֵׁת*). Douglas R. Edwards aptly observes that both the colour and quality of clothing were often signs of social status, hence dyeing was an important industry, as evidenced by the large number of institutions engaged in this craft in ancient Israel. The purple dye industry was particularly significant.⁵⁴ The woman thus creates both an atmosphere of comfort (a soft bed with spread out covers) and wealth (fabrics from Egypt), painting before the young man a picture inviting him to enjoy the delightful benefits of her home.

The LXX does not translate the noun *אַטוֹן*, using in its place the verb *ἔστρωκα*, derived from the verb *στρωώνω/στρώννυμι*, i.e. “to spread out/stretch,” which only adds to the peculiarity and rarity of the Hebrew term *אַטוֹן*. John P. Brown argues that it is a borrowing

48 Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 364, 379.

49 HALOT I, 306.

50 Strzałkowska, *Księga Przysłów*, 212, n. LXXV.

51 There are, however, contrary opinions: B.K. Waltke (*The Book of Proverbs*, 364, n. 18), referring to the fact that in the noun *הַטְּבוֹת* a Masoretic disjunctive accent appears, argues for a separation of the meanings and translations of the two words, translating them not so much as: “patterned fabrics of Egyptian linen,” but disjunctively: “patterned fabrics, linen from Egypt.” In the noun *הַטְּבוֹת* there is indeed a disjunctive accent *R^cbhî^c mu-grāš*, i.e. *R^cbhî^c* with *Gēreš* in the same word, but this does not imply the necessity of separating the meanings in the case of Prov 7:16. On accents more broadly: W. Gesenius, *Gesenius–Kautzsch’s Hebrew Grammar*, 2 ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1910) 61, § 15h. It addresses accents present in the books referred to as *תְּהִלִּים*, a word derived from combining the first vowels of the Books of Psalms (*תְּהִלִּים*), Proverbs (*מִשְׁלֵי*) and Job (*אִיּוֹב*); *ibidem*, 58, § 15d.

52 DCH III, 201.

53 Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 379; F.C. Fensham, “linen,” *New Bible Dictionary* 3 ed. (ed. D.R.W. Wood) (Leicester – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 1996) 702; R.H. O’Connell, “Proverbs VII 16–17: A Case of Fatal Deception in a ‘Woman and the Window’ Type-Scene,” *VT* 41/2 (1991) 239.

54 D.R. Edwards, “Dress and Ornamentation,” *ABD* II, 235.

from Egyptian vocabulary and the most fitting Greek equivalent here would be the noun ὀθόνη.⁵⁵ This noun in the feminine gender (ὀθόνη) is not found in the LXX, but appears twice in the NT (Acts 10:11; 11:5) to denote the cloth that Peter saw in a vision during prayer. The more accurate translation of the Hebrew original, however, is the same noun in the neuter gender, ὀθόνιον, which is, moreover, the diminutive of ὀθόνη⁵⁶: in the LXX it appears twice, only in Hos (2:7, 11) to denote “linen,” while in the NT, where it appears four times (Luke 24:12; John 19:40; 20:5, 6, 7), it always means the cloth in which the dead body of Jesus was wrapped for burial. The noun ὀθόνιον, being a derivative of the Greek ὀθόνη, fits into a funeral context.⁵⁷ In both parts of the Bible, both in the LXX and in the NT, the noun ὀθόνιον appears only in the plural form, so it is *plurale tantum*.

The broader context of the translation and interpretation of the Hebrew term מִטָּה makes it necessary to take into account the funerary aspect of it evident in the Greek translation, which clearly appears later in the NT. One can speak at this point of a reinterpretation of the MT by the LXX and the NT. However, these are later meanings.

2.5. מִטָּה (“bedding”) and the Play on Words between “bedding” and “copulation”

The next element in the decor of the bedroom of the harlot woman (Prov 7:17a) is again “bedding,” but this time referred to with the term מִטָּה, which in LXX Prov 7:17a, as noted earlier, is translated using the noun κοίτη, which suits the atmosphere of carnal union between the two lovers more. This atmosphere is even more evident in the original language, where there is a play on words between the noun מִטָּה (“bedding”) used here and the term תַּכְּבֹּשׁ (“copulation”). Both terms are derived from the verb כָּבַשׁ (appearing usually in the Qal conjugation in the HB), which means both “to lie down” (for intercourse) and “to rest” (in the sense: “to die”).⁵⁸ Whenever forms derived from כָּבַשׁ are used in the context of sexual relations, they denote forbidden or improper intercourse (Gen 30:15, 16; 2 Sam 11:11), sinful, forbidden by the Law or resulting directly in the death penalty.⁵⁹ This

⁵⁵ J.P. Brown, “Literary Contexts of the Common Hebrew-Greek Vocabulary,” *JSS* 13 (1968) 171; as cited in Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 364, n. 19.

⁵⁶ *CWSD-NT*, 870. The author of the dictionary, in his analysis of the Greek word ὀθόνιον, claims that in the LXX this noun appears in LXX Judg 14:13, however, the word that can be found there is σινδών, which is its synonym.

⁵⁷ A. Rambiert-Kwaśniewska, *Tekstylija w Nowym Testamencie* (Bibliotheca Biblica; Wrocław: Papieski Wydział Teologiczny 2022) 91–93.

⁵⁸ V.P. Hamilton, “כָּבַשׁ,” *TWOT* II, 921.

⁵⁹ Similar references and meanings of the verb כָּבַשׁ are found in legal texts, for example in Exod 22:15, where carnal intercourse with a virgin who is not betrothed is forbidden. Deut 22:22 recommends the death penalty for those caught committing adultery. Lev 18:22; 20:13 uses the word כָּבַשׁ in a statement prohibiting homosexual relations. Finally, Deut 27:21 uses this verb to denote intercourse with animals, strictly forbidden by the Law. The death penalty was usually prescribed for these sexual aberrations. In addition to legal texts, כָּבַשׁ appears in narrative sections describing instances of sexual misconduct. An example is the transgression of Lot’s daughters, who got their father drunk and then “lay down” beside him (Gen 19:32 ff.). One of Abimelech’s subjects almost committed adultery with Rebecca (Gen 26:10). The verb כָּבַשׁ is used to describe the rape of Dinah, Jacob’s daughter, by Shechem (Gen 34:2, 7). Ruben “united” with Bilhah, the concubine of his father Jacob, during his absence (Gen 35:22). The sons of Eli “lay” with the women serving at the entrance to the Tent

raises the question of why Scripture is so extremely against inappropriate sexual relations? One answer is suggested by Victor P. Hamilton, who notes that in cultures neighbouring Israel such practices were the norm, both on a “human” and “divine” level, since intercourse was part of non-Israelite sacred worships. One of the most degrading features of pagan beliefs was the way in which religious and sexual expression were realised in the same way. However, this was not a sacralisation of sexual relations, but rather a realisation of the Canaanite myth of *hieros gamos* and an imitation of Canaanite deities.⁶⁰

The term מִשְׁכָּב is used in the HB to denote both a place of sleep (2 Sam 17:28; Job 33:15) and healing after injury (Exod 21:18), but also a bed intended for intercourse, usually forbidden (Isa 57:7–8; Prov 7:17; Gen 49:4; the first two mentions in the context of fornication, the last in the context of incest), or the place of burial (Isa 57:2; Ezek 32:25; 2 Chr 16:14).⁶¹ Verse 2 Chr 16:14 not only refers to the bedding (מִשְׁכָּב) as “bier,”⁶² i.e., the resting place of the dead body of King Asa, but also gives an interesting description of his burial; namely, he was laid (וַיִּשְׁכְּבֵהוּ) on the bier (בַּמִּשְׁכָּב), which was covered with fragrances (בְּשִׂמִּים); fragrant herbs (מְרִקְחִים) were prepared according to the art of herbalism (בַּמְרִקְחֵת מִעֵשָׂה) and a great fire was lit for him (וַיִּשְׂרְפוּ-לוֹ שָׁרְפָה).⁶³ Therefore, sophisticated aromas accompanied kings, rulers and wealthy people both during life and after death. This brings to mind the refined aromas described in more detail later in Prov 7:17.

The term מִשְׁכָּב, used to describe a burial site, is also present in non-biblical texts, for example, the Phoenician inscription located on the sarcophagus of the Sidonian king Tabnit I dating back to the 5th century BC, which is reported in *KAI* 13 in line 8.⁶⁴ The word *ומשכב* appears there to denote a “resting place,” i.e. the place of death.⁶⁵

The description of the temptation of a young man by a deceptive woman in the Book of Proverbs (2:16–19; 5; 6:20–35; 7; cf. also 9:13–18) may be a transposition of a typical

of Meeting (1 Sam 2:22). Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar (2 Sam 13:11, 14), in a way imitating his father’s adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:4). In contrast to acts forbidden by the Law and improper sexual relations, referred to with the verb שָׁכַב, when the Bible refers to healthy sexual relations within the bounds of God’s will, it usually uses the expression “to know” (יָדַע), used for example in Gen 4:1, 17, when Adam “got to know” his wife and she conceived, or בָּוֵא (“to come near/enter into”) which refers to Abraham and Hagar in Gen 16:4. The latter phrase is used even in Gen 38:18 in reference to Judah and Tamar, i.e. the father-in-law who “came near” his daughter-in-law; Hamilton, “שָׁכַב,” *TWOT* II, 921–922.

60 Hamilton, “שָׁכַב,” *TWOT* II, 921.

61 BDB, 1012; Hamilton, “שָׁכַב,” *TWOT* II, 922.

62 For this reason, it will be more reasonable to translate the noun מִשְׁכָּב as “bedding,” as opposed to שָׁרְפָה, meaning “bed.” Although the ranges of meaning of the two nouns overlap and both can be successfully translated as “bed,” as most translations and commentaries do, for the sake of clarity in this discourse the second one will be translated as “bedding” (“posłanie” in Polish). It is much easier to say that the deceased was laid or buried on a “bedding” than on a “bed.”

63 Own translation based on: Kuśmirek, *Hebrajsko-polski Stary Testament*, 893.

64 H. Donner – W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 5 ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2002) I, 3.

65 The hypothetical vocalisation of the *KAI* 13 text in line 8 is: *wemiškob 'ét rapa 'im*, which can be translated as “neither resting place with shadows”; J.-C. Haelewyck, “L’inscription phénicienne de Tabnit (*KAI* 13). Essai de vocalization,” *Res Antiquae* 8 (2011) 4; justification for selecting such a translation: *ibidem*, 10.

scene in ancient epics, in which a goddess uses seductive words to offer the protagonist (usually a young man) love or marriage, but it results in death, a downfall or a radical transformation of the man's life defeated by the woman's anger or revenge. Examples of such deceptive women and their victims are Ishtar and Gilgamesh in the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (VI 1–79),⁶⁶ Anat and Aqhat in the Ugaritic *Epic of Aqhat* (KTU 1.17 VI 2–15),⁶⁷ as well as Calypso, Circe and Odysseus in *the Odyssey* (V 202–213, X 469–574).⁶⁸ The descriptions included in the ancient sources are sufficiently similar to the quoted passages from the Book of Proverbs that they can be called typographical scenes.⁶⁹

In this context, the situation described on plate VI of the Gilgamesh story is emblematic.⁷⁰ The initial scene takes place in a bathhouse where Gilgamesh went to perform a ritual bath and change his worn-out clothes into festive ones. During this process, he is watched by goddess Ishtar who longs for intimate intercourse with the man. She wishes to taste the sweet “fruit” that Gilgamesh's love could give her, which is why she proposes to him (l. 7–9). Ishtar's deceptive words represent a reversed traditional marriage formula spoken by the man. As in Prov 7:16–17, the seductress attempts to win his heart with promises of gifts and a description of the decor of the house in which the lovers will experience carnal pleasures. Ishtar invites Gilgamesh to a magnificent palace that smells of cedar (l. 13; cf. Song 8:9). This detail also brings to mind the old Sumerian songs in which the bride sprinkles fragrant oils on the floor of the family home to welcome the groom.⁷¹ However, Gilgamesh refuses, being aware that marriage to Ishtar would not be a true one (l. 24–28). What follows is a highly critical assessment of the goddess, who is famous for her unsteadiness, deceit and vindictiveness (l. 33–41). There is a distant reference to Prov 7:25–27, which contains a warning that the crossing of the paths of the adulterous woman ends in death. Admittedly, these words in Prov are not uttered by a young man, but rather by

66 A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003) I–II; Polish trans. A. Tronina: *Epos o Gilgameszu. Wersja standardowa z Niniwy (ša naqba imuru). Wprowadzenie, przekład i komentarz* (Teksty Starożytnej Palestyny, Syrii i Mezopotamii 2; Kraków – Mogilany: Enigma Press 2017). The Roman figure VI indicates the number of the tablet, while the Arabic figures 1–79 refer to the lines of text.

67 Dietrich – Loretz – Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places*. Polish trans. A. Tronina: “Eposy ugaryckie o Kerecie i Aqhacie”, *Ewangelia o Królestwie* (ed. A. Paciorek) (Scripturae Lumen 1; Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2009) 571–621. The KTU numbers 1.17 VI 2–15 indicate the following parts of the text: 1 – text type (1 being myths and legends, i.e. religious texts); 17 – plate number (in category 1); VI – column number on the plate; 2–15 – lines (not verses) in the column.

68 Greek text with an English translation A.T. Murray: Homer, *The Odyssey*. I. *Books 1–12*. II. *Books 13–24* (LCL 104–105; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press – London: Heinemann 1919, 1945); a critical analysis of the Greek text of *Books V–VIII*: B. Perrin, *Homer's Odyssey Books V–VIII* (Boston, MA – London: Ginn & Company 1894); Polish trans. R.R. Chodkowski, *Odyseja* (Źródła i Monografie; Lublin: TN KUL 2020); the Roman figure denotes the number of the book (in the Polish translation: *pieśni* [songs]), while the Arabic figure denotes the line of the text. The references cited refer to the Polish translation of *Book V* and *X*.

69 Clifford, *Proverbs. A Commentary*, 27.

70 Tronina, *Epos o Gilgameszu*, 154–155.

71 Y. Sefati, *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature. Critical Edition of the Dumuzi-Inanna Songs* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press 1998) 193; as cited: Tronina, *Epos o Gilgameszu*, 155.

the sage-narrator watching the whole scene, yet the sober and simultaneously harsh judgement of the seducing woman constitutes a link between the two stories.

A thematically similar story can be seen in the *Epic of Aqhat*.⁷² The narrative begins with the description of a miraculous conception of Aqhat, born as a result extraordinary intervention of his father, Danel, with the god El through the special intercession of Baal. When Aqhat grows up, he is given a miraculous bow, regarded as a unique weapon. However, it arouses the jealousy of goddess Anath, who spares no effort to deprive Aqhat of his bow. The woman resorts to various verbal tricks, including a promise of eternal life, but the young man refuses. Angered Anath orders the execution of Aqhat, but soon after that happens, she regrets her decision. Although the following section of the text is damaged, it is clear from the context that the precious bow is lost, while the goddess mourns the young man's death. The ambiguous argumentation of Anath resembles the seductive words of the adulteress in Prov 7:14–20, while the sad end of Aqhat, who admittedly did not succumb to the deceptive persuasion like the young man in Prov 7:21–23, resembles the death of a biblical hero (Prov 7:22–23, 26–27).

A similar meaning is found in the scene described in *Book V* (202–213) of *the Odyssey*, which is the last, out of three, and decisive speech of the goddess Calypso (l. 149–227 f.).⁷³ By using ambiguous words, she wants to seduce Odysseus into not returning to his homeland but staying with her forever. She resorts to two arguments to convince the man. Firstly, she assures him that if he leaves, sorrow will await him, whereas if he stays with her, he will become immortal (l. 206–210). Secondly, she claims her divine beauty surpasses that of his mortal wife (l. 211–213). Her most convincing bargaining chip is the immortality she offers Odysseus. Although the introduction to the dialogue is neutral and describes the ordinary beginning of a conversation, Calypso's speech later becomes extremely emotional. In his refusal (l. 215–224), Odysseus addresses Calypso's arguments in reverse order. Initially, he diplomatically acknowledges the reasoning regarding her greater beauty, but he emphasises his desire to travel to his homeland, tactfully treating "Penelope" as his "home" and also the destination of his return journey (l. 215–220), regardless of dangers he may encounter on his way (l. 221–224). In other words, Odysseus rejects immortality and embraces mortality, allowing his true inner transformation to take place.

The theme of mortality and voyage to the land of the dead under the command of a goddess is taken up in *Book X* (l. 469–574), where Circe is the female protagonist.⁷⁴ The adventures of Circe and Calypso are also linked thematically and sometimes interpreted as duplicates.⁷⁵ The travel companions urge Odysseus to think about returning home (l. 471–475), which he announces to goddess Circe (l. 482–486). At first, she agrees to this scenario, but immediately afterwards announces that the protagonist must descend into

72 Tronina, "Eposy ugaryckie o Kerecie i Aqhacie," 594.

73 I.J.F. de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004) 136.

74 de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary on the Odyssey*, 267–268.

75 D. Roessel, "The Stag on Circe's Island: An Exegesis of a Homeric Digression," *TAPA* 119 (1989) 35.

the Underworld (l. 487–495). This shows how ambiguous their conversations are. What is interesting in this context is the scene when Odysseus waits to talk to Circe until sunset, that is, until all his companions have gone to bed. In fact, Odysseus aims to meet the goddess in private (l. 475–495). This also means that he is the only one who initially hears the news of his obligatory visit to the Underworld, which he then gradually relays to his companions (cf. l. 469–574 f.). The separation of Odysseus and his beloved Circe reminds her of her earlier promise to send him home, which is why she must allow the protagonist to return to his homeland. Even though the situation described in *Book X* does not end as tragically as in Prov 7:26–27, the atmosphere of the night meeting, full of mystery and hiding from the eyes of strangers, is similar to the situation described in Prov 7:16–18.

3. Aromas in the House of the Adulterous Woman (7:17)

Equally ambivalent in their meaning and significance are terms used to describe the aromas found in the house of the harlot woman and described in the second part of Prov 7:17. These include: מֵרֵ אֶזְהָלִים וְקַנְזָמוֹן, that is: “myrrh, aloe and cinnamon” with which the seductress “sprinkled” (נָרַף) her bed, the pronunciation of which is described above. In Greek, the term διαρραίνω is used to denote “sprinkling/perfuming” (נָרַף), which constitutes a *hapax legomenon* and is referred to as a neologism.⁷⁶ The purpose of preparing a fragrant decoration of the dwelling, or rather the bed, was to encourage people to stay there longer and to unite in love. At the beginning of this paragraph, a general description of these scents will be outlined, then each one will be analysed in more detail.

All aromas listed here were imported from outside Israel, usually from Arabia⁷⁷ due to their sensory stimulating properties. Myrrh, cinnamon and amomum⁷⁸ were mixed together to create a strong-smelling ointment or oil, known for its beautiful aroma and high price, which is why it was used by wealthy people and associated with wealth.⁷⁹ A mixture of cinnamon, myrrh and frankincense was used to produce spices used in the temple (Exod 30:34). The Romans burned them in honour of gods and used them in large quantities during

⁷⁶ J. Lust – E. Eynikel – K. Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 3 ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 2015) 144.

⁷⁷ “Arabia” is the name given to a vast region in what is now south-west Asia. On the west, it borders the Isthmus of Suez and the Red Sea, on the south the Indian Ocean, and on the east the Persian Gulf and the Euphrates. It extends far to the north, stretching into the Syrian desert; “Arabia,” M.G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Accordance Bible Software: *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*, 3 ed., version 3.5, 1897).

⁷⁸ The name of this spice appears only in Rev 18:13 and is a *hapax legomenon*.

⁷⁹ One Roman inscription describes wealthy people reclining on comfortable couches, applying perfume and wearing lavish clothes, as illustrated by the quote: “wash, anoint yourself with perfume, live in comfort and enjoy yourself, spend what you can – for whom are you keeping it?”; G.H.R. Horsley – S.R. Llewelyn (eds.), *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (North Ryde: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre 1981) IV, 130–131; as cit. C.R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 38A; New Haven, CT – London: Yale University Press 2014) 704.

funerals,⁸⁰ eliminating the unpleasant smell of a dead body, both before burial and during cremation,⁸¹ yet this is much later in relation to the composition of Prov 7.

The use of spices for funeral purposes, already mentioned in 2 Chr 16:14, is also described in the NT. During the burial of Jesus, his body was covered with spices (ἀρωμάτων) and wrapped in linen (ὀθονίσις) according to the Jewish method of burial (John 19:40). After the Sabbath, the women purchased or prepared “spices” (ἀρώματα; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1) or “spices and oils” (ἀρώματα καὶ ὑἄρα; Luke 23:56) to anoint the body.⁸²

Fragrant oils, myrrh and aloe are royal aromas (Ps 45:8–9), the description of which evokes the sensation of luxury,⁸³ while in the argumentation of the adulterous woman (Prov 7:16–17), this impression is intensified by the atmosphere of joy and cheerfulness.⁸⁴

The very initial analysis of the meaning of scents described by the harlot woman (and the aromas created by mixing various ingredients) provides a sense of richness, sensuality, sacrality and mystery. The woman appeals to the sensual (“olfactory”⁸⁵) imagination of the listener in order to stimulate it in a flirtatious and seductive manner. Aromatic spices constitute an important motif concerning bridal union in Song (1:13; 3:6; 4:6, 11, 14–16; 5:5, 13), which is also present in Egyptian love songs⁸⁶ that evoke the pleasures of the carnal union. The three spices referred to by the stranger belong to the fragrances of the “garden,” which is a metaphor for the body of the bride in Song 4:14. Myrrh, aloe and cinnamon were imported from Arabia and, therefore, very expensive. Due to their value, such spices were kept in the royal treasury (2 Kgs 20:13) and distributed in small quantities on the royal bed. A literal sprinkling of spices on the bed, as described by the harlot woman, would therefore be an act of extraordinary extravagance, a sophisticated exaggeration, or an outright lie.⁸⁷ However, an attentive reader will perceive not only the seductive but also the ambiguous nature of the woman’s statement. The use of spices for funeral purposes, both during and after the burial, attracts attention also to the dimension and meaning of symbols and references evoked there. By preparing spices and a bed for an amorous union (Prov 7:17), the harlot woman is, in fact, preparing a place of death for the young man (Prov 7:22–23).

However, it is necessary to take a closer look at each of the spices mentioned in order to read their meaning.

80 Gaius Plinius Secundus, *Hist. Nat.*, 12.51–63 (Łukaszewicz, IV, 445–463).

81 M. Erasmo, *Reading Death in Ancient Rome* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press 2008) 90.

82 In the NT, the Greek term ἄρωμα is always used in the plural form (*plurale tantum*) and each time associated with the burial of Jesus (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56; 24:1; John 19:40); K.A. Burton, “Spices,” *EDB*, 1247.

83 S.J. Floor, “Poetic Fronting in a Wisdom Poetry Text: The Information Structures of Proverbs 7,” *JNSL* 31/1 (2005), 46.

84 This meaning of the aromas is present even in Song 3:6; 4:14 and Ps 45:8, where the expression יַיִשׁוּבֵי יְהוָה, i.e. “oil of joy” occurs; Alonso Schökel – Vilchez Líndez, *I Proverbi*, 265.

85 Such a term is used by M.V. Fox (*Proverbs 1–9*, 247).

86 M.V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press 1985) no. 8, 9, 20F; as cited: Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 247.

87 Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 247–248.

3.1. מֵר (‘‘myrrh’’): The Aroma of a Loving Union and a Funeral

Myrrh (מֵר/מֹר), or fragrant resin, was associated with the aroma of love, which is particularly evident in Song, where it occurs most frequently (1:13; 3:6; 4:6, 14; 5:1, 5, 13).⁸⁸ Sometimes it was used together with frankincense (Song 3:6) or kept in a pouch and worn around the neck as a fragrance (Song 1:13) or mixed with oil and used as a perfume for clothing (Ps 45:9), bedding (Prov 7:17) or for anointing and beauty treatments (Esth 2:12).⁸⁹ Myrrh was extracted from trees found in southern Arabia and Somalia, as well as imported into Israel not only as a perfume ingredient but also as a component of medicines, frankincense and various balms (Exod 30:23–25; LXX Ezek 27:17).⁹⁰

The translator of the LXX has translated the term under analysis as κρόκος, which outside this place occurs only in Song 4:14, where it indicates the term ‘‘saffron.’’ Interestingly, myrrh also appears in this verse of the Song, but expressed by the Greek word σμύρνα, which is more commonly used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew term for myrrh (מֵר).⁹¹ It was a fragrant gum extracted from trees, in particular from *Balsamodendron myrrha*. Furthermore, myrrh was one of the components of the sacred ‘‘anointing oil’’ (Exod 30:23–25), which was made from the most precious ingredients. Myrrh (Song 4:14; 5:5; cf. also 4:16) was an aroma valued by merchants both within and outside Israel.⁹² Due to its fragrant qualities, it was used within cults. The holy oil must have been used abundantly since, during Aaron’s consecration, it flowed from his beard to the edge of his robe (cf. Ps 133:2).⁹³ It is worth emphasising that the holy oil could not be used for ‘‘secular’’ purposes, i.e. not related to worship, under the threat of exclusion from the community of Israel (Exod 30:25–33). Anointing with holy oil constituted the act of consecrating a person or an object to sacred functions or for sacred use.⁹⁴

The Greek term σμύρνα, used to denote myrrh, appears twice in the NT – the first time in reference to the Wise Men from the East who gave myrrh to the newborn Jesus (Matt 2:11) and the second time to indicate myrrh with which Jesus’ body was anointed after his death (John 19:39). Myrrh was therefore also used to embalm dead bodies.⁹⁵ In the latter sense, the NT more commonly applies the noun μύρον, which translates as

88 Out of 52 appearances of this noun, 8 take place in Song, 6 in Isa and Num, 4 in Job, Prov and Ezek, and successively less in subsequent books.

89 DCHV, 473.

90 Koester, *Revelation*, 704. In Ezek 27:17 from the LXX, the word μύρον is used to refer to perfume.

91 In the LXX, it occurs 10 times, most of which (6 times) in Song, where it generally translates the Hebrew term מֵר/מֹר.

92 M. Carasik (trans.), *The Commentators’ Bible – The JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot: Exodus* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society 2005) (Accordance Bible Software: CB-Exodus, version 1.4): a commentary on Exod 20:23.

93 G. Ashby, *Go Out and Meet God. A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (ITC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1998) 127.

94 S. Łach, *Księga Wjścia. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz* (PŚST 1/2; Poznań: Pallottinum 1964) 269.

95 W.E. Shewell-Cooper, ‘‘myrrh,’’ *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible* (eds. M.C. Tenney – M. Silva) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2009) IV, 358.

“fragrance” or “oil” with which Jesus was anointed while still alive as an anticipation of his burial (Matt 26:7, 12).⁹⁶

3.2. יִלְהָנֹחַ (“aloe”): A Stunning Fragrance as a Way to Seduce

The argumentation of the adulterous woman also includes the word יִלְהָנֹחַ, or aloe. In this spelling, indicating the plural form of the masculine gender, the noun occurs twice in the Hebrew Bible,⁹⁷ and is, therefore, *plurale tantum* and a very rare term. The word is of foreign origin and refers to an aloe tree exuding a beautiful fragrance.⁹⁸ The Hebrew term יִלְהָנֹחַ has no equivalent in LXX Prov. Perhaps the translator was unfamiliar with some of the Hebrew names of fragrant herbs and omitted the word, leaving only the commonly known cinnamon.⁹⁹

The Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term יִלְהָנֹחַ (or its feminine form: תִּלְהָנֹחַ) is ἀλώθ, which is a *hapax legomenon* and appears exclusively in Song 4:14, where it translates the term תִּלְהָנֹחַ. In the NT, it appears as ἀλόη and constitutes an exception in New Testament Greek, since the only verse that contains it is the aforementioned John 19:39, which cites the description of the anointment of Jesus’ body with myrrh (σμύρνα) and aloe (ἀλόη).¹⁰⁰ The aloe vera (*Aloe succotrina*) was used primarily by the Egyptians. It was usually mixed with myrrh (Ps 45:9; Prov 7:17; Song 4:14; John 19:39) and spread on the body during the anointment, either to perfume it or to embalm it after death in order to remove the unpleasant smell of the corpse. Since aloe vera was imported, the purchase of one hundred pounds of this mixture used by Nicodemus to embalm Jesus’ body was a considerable expense. Due to the hot climate, large quantities of strongly scented spices were used to embalm bodies in countries such as Israel, since they decomposed quickly.¹⁰¹ The noun יִלְהָנֹחַ occurring in Prov 7:17 has an ambivalent pronunciation, encompassing both an element of love play and an allusion to death. The latter is evident in later times. Therefore, it is possible to see the evolution of the meaning of this term, which was addressed in the LXX and NT.

⁹⁶ In the NT, the noun μύρον occurs 14 times, generally to denote the oil used to anoint Jesus in various circumstances. In Rev 18:13, it is mentioned among other spices to describe the wealth of the fallen Babylon; W.D. Mounce – R.D. Bennett Jr., *Mounce Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Accordance Bible Software: *Mounce Greek Dictionary*, version 4.5, 2011).

⁹⁷ Apart from Prov 7:17, it also appears in Num 24:6. In the feminine gender, i.e. תִּלְהָנֹחַ, the noun appears twice (Ps 45:9; Song 4:14), also in the plural form and, as in Prov 7:17, in connection with myrrh. T. Gilbrant – G.A. Lint (eds.), *The Complete Biblical Library. The Old Testament Hebrew-English Dictionary* (Accordance Bible Software: *CBL Hebrew Dictionary*, version 1.1, 1998) states, rather imprecisely, that the noun יִלְהָנֹחַ is the plural form of תִּלְהָנֹחַ and occurs only once, in Prov 7:17.

⁹⁸ J. Strong (ed.), *Strong’s Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Accordance Bible Software: *Hebrew Strong’s Dictionary*, version 3.2).

⁹⁹ Strzałkowska, *Księga Przysłów*, 213.

¹⁰⁰ When describing the use of myrrh and aloe in burial practices, apart from John 19:39, Richard J. Clifford (*Proverbs. A Commentary*, 89) also refers to Mark 16:1, but in the case of the latter, the word μύρον is used to denote “spices.” However, even though the spices were made from myrrh and aloe, neither the term σμύρνα nor ἀλόη occurs in this verse.

¹⁰¹ W.E. Shewell-Cooper, “aloes,” *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible* (eds. M.C. Tenney – M. Silva) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2009) I, 128.

The funereal and mournful significance of aloe was also highlighted in early Christian times. Ambrose of Milan (c. 333–397) in his commentary on Gen 43:11 writes that frankincense is a sign of prayer (Ps 141:2), while cassia and aloe are signs of burial, as taught by the psalmist David: “all thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia.”¹⁰²

3.3. קִנְמֹן (“cinnamon”): One of the Most Expensive Perfumes That Facilitate a Loving Union

The third ingredient of perfume with which the bed of the foreign woman was sprinkled is cinnamon (קִנְמֹן), which appears 3 times in the Hebrew Bible (Prov 7:17; Song 4:14; Exod 30:23), thus very rarely. The cinnamon (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*) mentioned, extracted from the inner bark of small trees grown in Ceylon and India, was highly valued in biblical times primarily for its unique fragrance. It is mentioned as an ingredient of the “anointing oil” (Exod 30:23) and is included in the list of expensive perfumes listed by the groom in his loving speech to the bride (Song 4:14).¹⁰³ Sometimes the Hebrew word קִנְמֹן, which is also very rare (Exod 30:24; Ezek 27:19) and indicates “cassia,” a variety of cinnamon, is translated as “cinnamon.” Both cassia and cinnamon appear together with myrrh and aloe in the description of elaborate perfumes and as ingredients of anointing oil, not only the holy one (Exod 30:24; Ezek 27:19; Ps 45:9).¹⁰⁴

The LXX translates קִנְמֹן as κιννάμωμον, which, in addition to the above verses, appears in Sir 24:15 and LXX Jer 6:20, where it denotes a descriptive expression: קִנְמֹן הַטּוֹב מֵאַרְץ מִדְּרָוֹן, meaning “a delicious reed root from a distant land.” In the NT, the term κιννάμωμον is a *hapax legomenon* and occurs only in Rev 18:13 as a part of the wealth of “Great Babylon” whose fall is described.

Cinnamon, similarly to cassia wood, which comes from the same plant, was sold for its fragrant properties (Exod 30:23–24; Ezek 27:19). The Romans believed that it came from Arabia, North-East Africa or India since they purchased it from Arab and Indian merchants. Both cinnamon and an aroma called amomum, which is mentioned in Rev 18:13, were abundantly used by the Romans at funerals¹⁰⁵ as a spice to offset the odour of dead bodies.

Conclusions

The analysis of the statement of the adulterous woman (הַזֵּנָה הַזָּרָה) in Prov 7:16–17 demonstrates the wide-ranging ambiguity of metaphors used in the text, which refer to the decor of her dwelling, both ornaments of the marriage bed and aromas used on it. The ambivalence

¹⁰² Ambrosius, *De Joseph*, 9.46 (CSEL 32/2, 105). Ambrose provides the numbering of the psalms after the LXX (Ps 44:9). In the Hebrew Bible, these scents are mentioned in Ps 45:9.

¹⁰³ M.G. Abegg Jr., “קִנְמֹן,” *NIDOTTE* III, 940.

¹⁰⁴ M.H. Pope, *Job. Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 15; New Haven, CT – London: Yale University Press 1974) 353.

¹⁰⁵ Koester, *Revelation*, 704.

of the symbolism on the one hand consists in evoking pleasure of the lovers' amorous union in the imagination, while on the other, certain phrases present there are associated with funerary practices, which an attentive reader may notice. Both verses of the Book of Proverbs are rich in very rare and unique vocabulary, often of foreign origin, usually Egyptian.¹⁰⁶ The *hapax legomena* present in that passage appear both in the original Hebrew language (MT) and Greek translation (LXX). The comparative analysis of the words used in the Hebrew and Greek versions revealed a deepening of this ambivalence.

The phrases, words and expressions used in the text, including the noun מַרְבְּדִים ("covers"), verb רָבַד ("to cover"), noun עֶרֶשׂ ("bed"), noun אֶטוֹן ("linen"), noun מִשְׁכָּב ("bedding"), and the aromas described in Prov 7:17: מֵר אֶהְלִים וְקַנְמֹן, i.e.: "myrrh, aloe and cinnamon" involve connotations with love, death and funeral alike. The latter aspect is brought into focus with particular force in the NT.

The young and reckless man, who is tempted by the adulterous woman describing the qualities of her bed, is virtually led to death (Prov 7:22–23, 26–27), and the place of short rest is to become a site of his eternal rest (Prov 7:27). The words of the harlot woman resemble a snare into which the ignorant and naive young man falls (Prov 7:22–23). The tragic finale of this carelessness can be seen only when it is too late to escape from the fatal consequences of the wrong choice (Prov 7:26–27)¹⁰⁷ since in the seductive argumentation of the adulterous woman, the deceptive words have an ambivalent meaning of love and death at the same time.

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