The Story of Susanna: Its Versions, Genre, and its Connection to the Heifer Whose Neck is Broken (Deut 21:1-9)

Naama Golan

**Abstract:**

The story of Susanna is one of the three additions to the book of Daniel. It does not appear in the MT but is attested in two primary versions, generally referred to as the Old Greek (OG) and a version attributed to Theodotion (Theod), with large-scale differences between them. In this article, I would like to refer to Michael Segal's article, which deals with the question of the relationship between the different versions of the Susanna story, to offer a proposal regarding the definition of the genre of the story, and finally, to comment on the connection between the story of Susanna and the law of the heifer whose neck is broken (Deut. 21:1-9), while referring to the articles of Orit Malka and Olivier Munnich, as well as standing on the meaning of this affinity.

# Introduction

The story of Susanna is one of the three additions to the book of Daniel. It does not appear in the MT text of Daniel but is attested to in two main versions, generally referred to as the Old Greek (OG) and a version attributed to Theodotion (Theod.), with large-scale differences between them.[[1]](#footnote-1) Scholars disagree regarding whether the story was originally written in a Semitic language (Hebrew or Aramaic) or Greek.[[2]](#footnote-2) Canonized by the Church, the Theodotion version is significantly longer than the OG.[[3]](#footnote-4) The story is found in different locations in the book of Daniel in the different textual witnesses,[[4]](#footnote-5) suggesting that Susanna was added to the book of Daniel at a later stage.

In this article, I will address the relationship between the different versions of the story of Susanna, discussing Michael Segal’s arguments. I will also discuss the genre of the story and the connection between the story of Susanna and the law of the heifer whose neck is broken, and discuss the meaning of that connection.

# 1. Reconstruction of the Original Story of Susanna

Applying the methodology that he employed in his study of the relationship between the different versions of Daniel 4-6,[[5]](#footnote-6) Michael Segal has argued that it is possible to reconstruct the original Susanna story from which the later versions developed.[[6]](#footnote-7) The methodological principle he applies is clear-cut: the narrative core common to all versions constitutes the original literary core of the story. Accordingly, Segal has divided the verses of the story of Susanna into three groups: Verses common to OG and Theodotion versions, including vv. 5b, 6b, 7b, 8b-10, 14a, 19b, 22-23, 28-35, 36a, 37-39, 40-41, 45, 48, 51-62, constitute the ancient narrative core. Verses found in the Theodotion version but not in the OG, including vv. 1-5a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 11-13, 14b-19a, 20-21, 24-27, 46-47, 49-50, are “almost certainly additions to the original core.” In the third group, one would expect Segal to place all the verses that appear in the OG but are absent from Theodotion. These are only a few verses (7, 10b, 12-13, 28, 30b, 51b, 62b), but as will become clear later, they are very important.

Segal, however, does not present the verses that appear in the OG but are missing from Theodotion, specifically vs. 7, 10b, 12-13, 28, 30b, 51b, 62b, as a formal category. Instead, he includes some of these verses under the general rubric of “parts in which OG and Theodotion preserve different readings” and in this context, he mentions the final verses (63-64). The division reflects Segal’s general approach which, in the case of Susanna, regards the ancient core of the story as very similar, or maybe even identical, to the version in the OG. I would like to question this claim.

# The Verses in Theodotion that are not in OG

From among the few verses that are in OG and absent from Theodotion (7, 10b, 12-13, 28, 30b, 51b, 62b), I would like to focus on three (51b, 63-64) and to reevaluate Segal’s claim. As a result of the reevaluation, I claim that these three verses should be included in the narrative core of the story.

**1.1.1 The Closing Homiletical Interpretation**

In an earlier study, Segal points out that the story of Susanna in the OG version opens with a homiletic interpretation. The opening – “In that year, two elders from among the people were appointed as judges, about whom the Lord said: wickedness will come out of Babylon” (5) – is an interpretation of the verse “For out of Zion shall go forth the law” (Isa. 2:3) that emphasizes the contrast between Zion and Babylon, between law (νόμος), and wickedness (ἀνομία).[[7]](#footnote-8) In this article, Segal closes the circle and points to the homiletic interpretation that closes the Susanna story in the OG. The verse – “For this reason youths are beloved by Jacob (or: of Jacob / like Jacob), because of their simplicity. And as for us, let us watch out for young able sons. For youths will be pious, and a spirit of knowledge and understanding shall be with them forever and ever.” (63) – is an interpretation of the biblical description of Jacob and Esau: “And the boys grew up, and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field, and Jacob was a simple man, dwelling in tents: And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his venison, but Rebekah loved Jacob” (Gen 25:27-28). According to Segal four motifs are common to the verses in Susanna and Genesis: Jacob, love, boys, and innocence (*tom*) of their hearts paralleling “simple man.” Segal argues for the significance of this homily and contends that the reference to the story of Jacob and Esau contributes to portraying the elders in a negative light, as characters who cannot control their desires, parallel to Esau’s need for instant gratification. In the story of Jacob and Esau, the preference for the younger son (Jacob) over the older (Esau) is emphasized. This preference is important and meaningful in the story of Susanna, especially in the OG version, and the allusion to the story of Jacob and Esau reinforces this idea. The identification of this homiletical interpretation is of import as the literary genre of opening and closing a literary unit with a homiletical interpretation is also found in Rabbinic literature (such as the Midrash *Tanhuma/Yelamdenu*). This appears to be an early example of the genre.

Going beyond identifying the homiletical interpretation, Segal claims that it belongs to the original literary core of the story. In this regard, Segal deviates from his own classification method, for verses 62a-b do not appear in Theodotion. He justifies the exception with the argument that the criterion does not apply to changes that occurred in the course of updating and rewriting. Consequently, he considers verses 62a-b part of the core because of their thematic compatibility with the narrative. I find it difficult to accept this claim. Examination of the verses conveys a sense of disconnection. “For this reason youths are beloved by Jacob (or: of Jacob / like Jacob), because of their simplicity. And as for us, let us watch out for young able sons. For youths will be pious, and a spirit of knowledge and understanding shall be with them forever and ever.” (47-48). The connection between these final verses and the rest of the story is very weak. It is not even clear which boys are being referred to. Why boys in the plural? In the story, Daniel is the only boy mentioned. This incompatibility suggests that the closing verses may be a later addition.

Furthermore, a comparison of the endings of Theodotion and OG versions suggests that this is a secondary addition.[[8]](#footnote-9) The closure to the Theodotion version of the story is very similar to the classic ending of court tales in which words of praise for God follow upon a rescue (similar to Dan 2:47; 3:28-30; 4:31, 34; 5:2-28) and the hero rises to greatness (“And Daniel became great in the eyes of the people from that day forth”). (Compare Dan 1:21; 2:48; 3:30; 5:29; 6:29). By contrast, the closure to the OG version of Susanna stands out as an exception precisely because it does not include the two common motifs of court stories.

Segal argues that the final verses of the story (OG 62a–b, Theod 63–64) belong to the original core of the story because they emphasize the tension between the elders and the young which is a central theme in OG. However, this theme is particularly emphasized in verses that appear in OG and not in Theodotion.

# 1.1.2 Verse 51:

The words voiced by Daniel in the first part of verse 51 offer a prime example: “Now do not look at them as elders to say they will not lie for I will thoroughly investigate them as it was revealed to me.” Subversively challenging the prevailing assumption that the status of the elders grants them immunity, the young Daniel insists that they too need to be investigated. Again deviating from his classification system, Segal argues that verse 51 belongs to the original core of the story even though it also does not appear in Theodotion. He suggests two possibilities: either the verse was deleted by Theodotion[[9]](#footnote-10) or it is a rewriting, neither of which is particularly convincing.[[10]](#footnote-11) Since the preference for the young over the elderly appearsin the closing verses as well as here (v 51), all unique to the OG, it seems more reasonable to claim, as Segal has argued himself in the past,[[11]](#footnote-12) that these are later editorial additions which sought to paint the classic courtyard story in a different color and emphasize the theme of the elevation of the young.[[12]](#footnote-13) Rofe’s suggestion that the OG underwent editing by circles close to the Qumran sect which stressed this preference for the young may be correct, for the theme of the struggle between the younger and the elder and that the younger are beloved by God is typical of the Qumran sect. It is also found in the Damascus Document and the book of *Jubilees*.[[13]](#footnote-14)

# Verses That Appear in Theodotion and Not in the OG Version

As for the verses that appear in Theodotion but are not mentioned in the OG, Segal argues that “they are almost certainly an addition to the original core.” I question such an absolute claim, not to claim categorically that Theodotion predates OG, but to suggest that in specific instances the OG recognizes and perhaps is based on Theodotion or a similar version. Two prominent aspects of the story support such a possibility.

**1.2.1 The Elders’ Threat**

In verse 14, according to the OG, the elders reveal their desires to one another and make a plan to conquer Susanna together. Thereafter there is a leap and suddenly we hear about Susanna’s response “And the Judean woman said to them, if I do this, I am a daughter of death and if I do not do it, I will not escape from your hands, it is good that I will not do it and fall from your hands from sinning before the Lord” (22). It is not clear what Susanna is responding to. All we have heard is that the elders planned to take advantage of her but the OG does not report that the plan was put into action or that they have threatened her, inspiring this response. The OG version is difficult and appears to be missing something. The two missing elements, however, do appear in Theodotion. Without the threat from the elders that elicits Susanna’s response in the Theodotian text, the OG version seems abrupt. We are not told in the OG about the elders realizing their plan or of them threatening Susanna. All that appears is her response. The OG narrative has narrative gaps, both of which are filled in Theodotion. Rofe rightly suggests that “since both the elders’ threats and Susanna’s response are essential to the story, it seems that at this point the OG version is a shortened form of a longer version such as that of Theodotion.”[[14]](#footnote-15)

**1.2.2 The Location of Susanna’s Prayer**

The location of Susanna’s prayer provides another example. In the Theodotion version, the prayer appears at the climax of the story: the elders have testified falsely before the congregation; they have been believed; and the judges have sentenced Susanna to death. At this point, Susanna’s prayer brings the story to its turning point: the Lord hears her prayer; places His spirit in the young Daniel and he saves Susanna from death. From a plot perspective, the location is particularly suitable and is similar to the location of prayers in other narratives, as we will see below. In contrast, Susanna’s prayer in the OG does not come at a climactic point. Segal argues that both locations seem reasonable and it is difficult to determine which reflects the original location and which is the correction. I, however, find the location of the prayer in the OG strange for it has Susannah addressing God about the men who have accused her (v 25) before the elders have given their false testimony. The awkward placement of the prayer suggests that it was added to the OG at a late stage either under the influence of Theodotion or a similar version.[[15]](#footnote-16)

Support for the claim that the original location of Susanna’s prayer is its position in Theodotion can be found by comparing it to other narratives. Beyond the content/lexical similarity between Susanna’s prayer and Daniel’s prayer,[[16]](#footnote-17) the location of the prayer is also similar: Daniel and the rest of Babylon’s wise men are in danger; Daniel prays; the Lord reveals the content of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream; and Daniel is saved from death.

The placement of Susanna’s prayer is also reminiscent of Tamar’s prayer in the Palestinian Targumim to Gen 38:25. As Segal has pointed out: “Within the rich history of interpretation of that story, worthy of note is the phenomenological parallel of the addition of an extensive prayer in all of the Palestinian Targumim to Gen 38:25. While there is no prayer in Gen 38 itself, the broadly attested interpretive tradition of Tamar’s prayer was perhaps known to a Jewish author or scribe in antiquity.”[[17]](#footnote-18) If we assume that the author of Susanna was aware of (and perhaps influenced by) the tradition of Tamar’s prayer, we have further support for the claim that the original location of Susanna’s prayer is where it is found in Theodotion. Both women were accused of sexual misconduct; both utter a moving prayer at the dramatic moment when she has been sentenced to death; following her prayer each is saved from death and her innocence revealed.

# 1.3 Characteristics of Theodotion Version

A comparison between the OG and Theodotion’s versions shows that the prominent trend in Theodotion translation is to strengthen Susanna’s character. Segal argues that the Theodotion version turns Susanna from a tool in the conflict between the elders and Daniel into the heroine of the story.[[18]](#footnote-20) This trend receives clear expression at the beginning of the story (1-5)[[19]](#footnote-21) and its end (63-64). I believe that this claim should be qualified in two ways.

First, the trend of presenting Susanna as a person of importance is evident in the few verses that appear in the OG and not in Theodotion. Take verse 10 as an example. Both versions report that the two elders lust after Susanna without sharing that fact with one another. However, only in the OG version (10b) does it say explicitly that Susanna was unaware of this. This statement presumably serves to emphasize that Susanna did not try to seduce the elders, as she was unaware of their lust. Second, both versions report how Susanna was ordered to appear in judgment before the elders (v. 10) and she appears together with her parents, children, and relatives. Only the OG version mentions, besides her relatives, Susanna’s servants and maidservants, that the total number of people accompanying her is five hundred, and that she has four sons. These expansions, particularly the use of the typological number five hundred serve to elevate Susanna’s standing.

Besides the presentation of Susanna as an important person that Segal pointed out, there is another feature characteristic of Theodotion. As Moore long ago pointed out,[[20]](#footnote-23) Daniel’s character is developed in the Theodotion version, plays a more significant role and is presented more positively. For example, only in the Theodotion account does Daniel call out “I am innocent of this woman’s blood.”(46-47) Subsequently, all the people turn to him, to clarify his words. Then, in both versions, there is an account of how Daniel stands among the people and rebukes them for not investigating the matter and convicting an Israelite woman. This small addition renders Daniel’s action more admirable and characterizes him as possessing a strong sense of responsibility and leadership.

These two trends (elevating Daniel and Susanna) are emphasized through biblical analogies. In his article, Segal mentions numerous analogies with biblical narrative and law in the Susanna story. Although some of these biblical analogies already appear in the OG version (for Segal, the earlier version), they are most fully developed in the Theodotian with the predominant trend of presenting Susanna in a more positive light. I agree with this claim. However, in my opinion, the purpose of the biblical analogies was not merely to glorify Susanna. Later in the article, I will point to an example in which the analogy to the biblical law already appears in the OG version and is further developed in Theodotion’s version, and its trend is not to glorify Susanna but rather to glorify Daniel while contrasting him with the elders and conveying sharp criticism of their behavior.

# The Literary Genre of the Story of Susanna

Already in ancient times, in the famous correspondence between Origen and Africanus, we find a discussion about the status of the Story of Susanna. Their debate focused on whether it was an “authentic” or a “forged” story.[[21]](#footnote-24) Scholars have never considered it a historical story and have taken different directions regarding its genre. Some have characterized it as a folktale with universal elements such as the wise youth serving as a judge, a common motif that appears in *One Thousand and One Nights* and other cultures.[[22]](#footnote-25) Focusing on the similarities with Daniel 3:6, others have considered Susanna a wisdom tale or martyr legend.[[23]](#footnote-26) Others have described it as a homiletical interpretation and identified the two elders as Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah (Jeremiah 29 21-23).[[24]](#footnote-27) Lawrence Wills has noted that the classification of the story as a homily is particular to the OG version.[[25]](#footnote-28) In this article, Segal, in agreement with Wills regarding the OG, asserts that the original story of Susanna was constructed in the form of a homily.[[26]](#footnote-29) Contrary to these characterizations of the story, I will suggest a different classification of the story of Susanna.

**2.1 Court Contest and Court Conflict Stories**

It is customary to classify the stories of Daniel as belonging to two different genres: Daniel 2, 4, and 5 are accounts of “court contests” while chapters 3 and 6 are accounts of “court conflict.” As early as 1973, Humphreys proposed these classifications and they have since been adopted by other scholars.[[27]](#footnote-30) He argued that the court contest narratives present the wisdom of Daniel as surpassing the wisdom of the Babylonian wise men. While they fail to solve the king's dreams, Daniel possesses divine wisdom and with it, he can interpret the king's dreams (Dan. 2, 4) and the mysterious inscription (Dan. 5). The court conflict narratives highlight the struggle of the Jews living in a Diaspora setting. This tension is expressed, for example, in Nebuchadnezzar's demand to worship the golden image he erected (Dan. 3--:7 ) or in Darius' decree that prohibited the Jews from requesting anything from any man or god (Dan. 6: 8-10--).

In my doctoral work, I adopted these categories but suggested a different conception of the conflict stories (Daniel 3, 6).[[28]](#footnote-31) Whereas Humphreys highlighted the central conflict as the relationship between the Jew and the non-Jew, I argued that these stories are centered on an identity conflict in which a court Jew must prefer his loyalty to God over his loyalty to the earthly king, at the risk of his life: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow to the golden image erected by Nebuchadnezzar, under the threat of execution (Dan 3:18-17) and Daniel violates the king’s command that he not pray to his god (Dan 6:11). In both these narratives, the threat to the heroes’ lives are overcome through a miraculous intervention that saves them. Daniel is saved from the lion’s den (6:24) and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego survive the fiery furnace unharmed (3:25-27). Understanding these conflict stories as expressing the hero’s internal conflict has implications for how we classify Daniel 1. It is not just an introductory story but should also be understood as an identity conflict story.[[29]](#footnote-32) In this story, Daniel has to decide whether to obey the king's command and eat the king's food and drink his wine or to stay loyal to God, risking his life. Daniel decides in favor of loyalty to God (Dan. 1:8), and miraculously succeeds and is saved as he and his friends look better and healthier than the boys who ate the king's food (Dan. 1:15).

In my opinion, unlike the Daniel narratives (1-6), which can be classified distinctly as either court contest (2, 4, 5) or court conflict (1, 3, 6) narratives, the story of Susanna (in both the OG and Theodotion versions) combines both motifs.

**2.1.1 A Court Contest Story:**

In the court contest narratives in Daniel (2,4,5), Daniel prevails in his wisdom over the other Babylonian wise men and succeeds in solving the king's dreams, following the spirit of God in him (Dan. 4:5; Dan. 5:14). In chapter 2, Daniel even explicitly tells King Nebuchadnezzar that only the revealer of mysteries knows his dream (Dan. 2:28), and Daniel's ability to tell the king his dream and interpret it does not testify to his wisdom but to God's revelation to him (Dan. 2:30).

In the story of Susanna, Daniel outsmarts the elder judges, thanks to divine intervention. According to the Theodotion version, this is due to direct divine intervention, while according to the Septuagint version, the divine intervention is mediated by an angel. The Lord gives His Holy Spirit / Spirit of Understanding, which reveals Daniel's wisdom through which he disproves the false testimony of the elders by interrogating each of them separately, delving into details (under which tree the event occurred), and thus proving Susanna's innocence. Daniel's wisdom is revealed to everyone and the entire congregation cheers him. Unlike the stories of Daniel, where the contrast is between the wisdom of the Jewish Daniel and that of the Babylonian wise men, here the contrast is internally Jewish – between the elder judges and Daniel.

**2.1.2 An Identity Conflict Story**

In the stories of identity conflict in Daniel, the court Jew must decide whether to obey the king's command or God's word. Not obeying the king's word may put the hero's life at risk. In all cases, the hero chooses his faith in God: Daniel decides not to defile himself with the king's food or drink (1:8); Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow down to the golden image set up by Nebuchadnezzar (3:17-18); Daniel continues to pray three times a day towards Jerusalem when the windows of his house are open wide (6:11). In all these cases, a life-threatening danger hovers over the heroes' heads, however, thanks to their decision in favor of their loyalty to God, there is divine intervention leading to miraculous salvation. In both versions (OG and Theodotion) of the story of Susanna, Susanna finds herself in a similar identity conflict: the two elders ask Susanna to sleep with them, threatening that if she does not respond to their request they will testify that they saw her with a young man and thus seal her fate. Susanna understands that she has no way out, and in any possibility she chooses, danger hovers: If she capitulates, she is liable to receive the death penalty as an adulteress, and if she does not, she will not be able to escape their accusation. She chooses loyalty to God, and says this explicitly (according to both versions): “It is better that I do not do it and fall into your hands than to sin before the Lord” (v. 24). This explicit statement, expressing Susanna’s decision to prefer the risk of death over sinning against God recalls the words of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who are aware that it is not certain that God will save them from the furnace and say that whether they will be saved or not – they refuse to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image (Daniel 3:8 -17).

The two elements – the court contest highlighting Daniel’s wisdom, and the identity conflict emphasizing Susanna’s loyalty to God – are present in the OG version[[30]](#footnote-33) and expanded and developed within the Theodotion version. It should be noted that while the stories are similar, the story of Susann is unique in that both the contest and the conflict are not between a Jew and a non-Jew, but express an internal Jewish conflict: between the leadership of the Babylonian elder judges and young Daniel, and between loyalty to God's laws and Torah and violation of Torah laws (with the one representing the sin is not the foreign king, but the corrupt judges).

# The Story of Susanna and the Laws of Testimony

The story of Susanna contains an abundance of references to various aspects of the laws of testimony.[[31]](#footnote-34) In her article, Malka argues that the legal aspect is not just an embellishment of the story but its central purpose.[[32]](#footnote-35) According to her, the story should be read as an etiological narrative, intended to establish a new legal approach to witness testimony – one that marks a radical departure from the ancient approach to the modern one.[[33]](#footnote-36) Even though the idea of examining witnesses may seem trivial to us today, in ancient thinking, the role of witnesses was different. According to her, the examination of witnesses is first mentioned in the story of Susanna and constitutes a true revolution. To support this claim, Malka enumerates various aspects of witness laws mentioned in the story of Susanna, such as the requirement for two witnesses to establish guilt, the formula of testimony that appears at the end of the elders’ testimonies (according to two versions): “We bear witness to this” (41),[[34]](#footnote-37) and the laying on of hands by the elders on Susanna’s head.[[35]](#footnote-38)

By comparing the description of the laying on of hands by the elders on Susanna’s head in the context of their testimony ( 34) with the laying on of hands on the head of the blasphemer (Lev. 24:14), Malka argues that the laying of hands on the head of the defendant is part of the testimony ritual.[[36]](#footnote-39) This claim can be strengthened by the fact that in the case of the blasphemer, those who laid their hands on him are all those who heard him, whereas it is the whole congregation who stone him. This difference may be related to this point: those who did not hear the blasphemer cannot testify against him, and therefore, they do not lay their hands on him.

Alongside the analogy suggested by Malka, I would like to suggest another one, which sheds new light on the laying of hands on Susanna’s head. The Susanna narrative can be read through the lens of the biblical law of the heifer whose neck is broken (Deut 21:1-9). Although this law mentions the washing of hands rather than the laying of hands, there are numerous connections between this text and the story of Susanna that do not appear to be coincidental. I will first describe the connections and then explain their meaning.

# 3.1 The Story of Susanna and the Law of the Heifer Whose Neck is Broken (Deut 21:1-9).

**3.1.1 The Elders and the Judges**

First, “your elders and your judges” are commanded to measure the distance of the corpse to nearby towns (Deut 21:2). Subsequently, only the elders are mentioned without the judges, and in verse 5, priests are also mentioned.[[37]](#footnote-40) In any case, the combination of elders and judges corresponds to the reference to the elders of the people being appointed judges at the beginning of the Susanna story (v. 5). Note that in both places there is no reference to a single leader but to a group.

**3.1.2 Laying of Hands / Washing Hands on the Head**

In addition, in both the OG and Theodotion versions of Susanna, there is a scene where the elders lay their hands upon Susanna’s head (34). I would suggest a parallel with the command that elders of the town nearest the corpse: “shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the wadi” (Deut 21:6). The connection between the two texts is even closer in the LXX where the elders are: νίψονται τὰς χεῖρας ἐπὶ τὴν **κεφαλὴν** τῆς δαμάλεως τῆς νενευροκοπημένης “wash their hands on the heifer’s head” (LXX Deut 21:6). The act of washing hands over or on the head of the heifer has a symbolic meaning that is revealed by the elders’ subsequent proclamation “Our hands did not spill this blood, and our eyes did not see” (Deut 21:7). The physical act of washing expresses a moral cleansing such as found in Isaiah 1:16: “Wash, purify yourselves, remove your evil deeds from before my eyes, stop doing evil.”

This connection sharpens the significance of the laying on of hands.

When the elders lay their hands on the head of Susanna, they convey outwardly the acceptance of responsibility and the desire to cleanse themselves of guilt, similar to the elders washing their hands over the heifer’s head. However, we, the readers, know that not only are the elders in the story of Susanna not accepting responsibility for the wrongdoing of others, but they are the wrongdoers themselves. Their hands are not cleansed of guilt; rather, their hands are “full of blood.”

The phrase “innocent blood” is mentioned in both texts. In the story of Susanna, in both versions, the phrase “innocent blood was spared that day” is mentioned (62). However, in Theodotion’s version, there is a broader connection, as it is told that when Susanna was found guilty, the Lord gave His Holy Spirit to a young man named Daniel. In verse 46, it is told that Daniel cried out loudly “I am innocent of the blood of this woman”. Following this, all the people turned to him and asked him what he meant, and then Daniel reproached them for not properly investigating the witnesses, and falsely accusing the innocent. The phrase “innocent blood” is repeated twice in the law of the heifer whose neck is broken: “[8] Atonement shall be made for your people Israel whom you, Lord, have redeemed: do not set the guilt of innocent blood among your people Israel, and they shall be absolved of bloodguilt. [9] You shall purge the innocent blood from your midst; do the right in the sight of the Lord” (once it appears as a prayer to God, asking Him to forgive His people and not to set innocent blood among His people, and the second time the verse is directed to the people – you shall purge the innocent blood).

**3.1.4 Body Dissection**

The motif of body dissection appears in both places: in the story of Susanna, after Daniel separates the elders, he questions the first elder and reveals that he lied, he informs him that the angel of the Lord will tear him in two (55). According to Theodotion’s version, this is also the fate of the second elder (59). Similarly, according to the law in Deut.. 21 – the heifer’s neck is to be broken in the stream (Deut. 21:4). The breaking of the heifer’s neck serves as atonement for the innocent blood spilled and it is not known who spilled it. In Susanna and Daniel, being torn in two is a punishment while in the case of the heifer, it is part of the ritual. Nevertheless, there is still room to connect the two in light of the interpretation of several scholars that the ritual breaking of the heifer’s neck serves as a symbolic replacement for the punishment of the unknown murderer.[[38]](#footnote-41)

**3.1.5 An *Eytan* (Perrenial) Stream/ Bathing in the Orchard**

According to Theodotion’s version, the action of the elders occurred while Susanna was bathing in the orchard in the heat of the day. She asked her maidens to bring her cosmetics and emphasized that they should close the doors of the orchard. She did not know that the two elders were hiding at that hour in the orchard. The law of the heifer whose neck is broken also mentions “an *eytan* stream which has not been worked and has not been sown” (Deut. 21:8). The elders are commanded to take the heifer down and break it there. The meaning of the phrase “*eytan* stream” is disputed.[[39]](#footnote-42) If we accept the meaning of the phrase as a flowing stream, we can also point to this similarity.

**3.1.6 The Verb ‘.R.P**

In addition to these similarities, I would add Munnich's hypothesis regarding the Greek verb ἔρριψαν. There is a debate in the scholarship about the original language of the story of Susanna whether it was written in Greek or Semitic (Hebrew or Aramaic). One reason in favor of the claim that the story was originally written in Greek is related to the wordplay regarding the identity of the trees. The mastic tree (σχῖνον) creates a link to the punishment of the first elder: the angel will split you in two (σχίσει) and the answer of the second elder - under the oak (πρῖνον) creates a link to the punishment of the second elder, the angel with his sword will cut you (καταπρίσῃ) into pieces.[[40]](#footnote-43) This wordplay received special attention, from an early period.[[41]](#footnote-44) The wordplay has led some scholars to claim a Greek origin for Susanna whereas others have viewed it as a later addition to a Greek translation of the Semitic original.[[42]](#footnote-46) Arguing that the focus on the wordplay regarding the identity of the trees in Greek misses “the forest for the trees,” Munich claims that through lexical and syntactic analyses it is possible to prove that Susanna was originally written in a Semitic language and translated into Greek in the OG version. The Theodotian version, he claims, is a reworking of the OG version.[[43]](#footnote-47) As for the wordplay, although in his opinion it is not part of the original story, Munnich claims that the atmosphere of the wordplay probably originated in the Semitic source.[[44]](#footnote-48) He claims that homonyms can be reconstructed in the surmised Hebrew original and demonstrates this claim with the verb ἔρριψαν, which is often repeated at the end of the story in the OG version.[[45]](#footnote-49) The source of this verb can be reconstructed as the Hebrew verb *‘.r.f*,[[46]](#footnote-50) which has two meanings: to drip/ trickle and to break the neck of an animal.[[47]](#footnote-51) According to Munnich, it is possible to identify the use of both meanings in verse 62 of the OG version. If we accept Munnich’s suggestion, we have another link between the story of Susanna and the law of the heifer whose neck is broken.

# 3.2 The Meaning of the Connection to the Heifer Whose Neck Is Broken

The link between the story of Susanna and the law of the heifer whose neck is broken (Deuteronomy 21: 1-9) is meant, in my opinion, to criticize the elders’ actions. According to biblical law, the elder judges are expected to take responsibility for injustices occurring in society. Even if they did not commit the crime, it is forbidden for leaders to be indifferent. They must take responsibility for what happens in their environment. They must perform the ceremony of breaking the heifer’s neck so they can wash their hands and say that their hands did not spill this blood. This is the moral norm required of the elders and judges.

In Susanna, in stark contrast, not only do the elders not take responsibility for society’s injustices, but they are the cause of injustices, exploiting their position and role to sexually exploit Susanna, and are presented as hypocrites who cannot control their instincts. While the comparison between the laying of hands on Susanna’s head and doing the same to the blasphemer (Lev. 24:14) suggests that this action is part of the testimony ritual, the comparison to the heifer whose neck is broken gives symbolic meaning to this action and underscores the elders’ scheming wickedness.

# Conclusion

In summary, this article addresses the versions of the story of Susanna, its literary genre, and the link between it and the law of the heifer whose neck is broken (Deut. 21: 1-9). Restoring the original version of the story of Susanna is a complex task, and is done by comparing the OG version to the Theodotion version and finding the verses common to both. Although the OG version is significantly shorter than the Theodotion version, we cannot ignore the isolated verses that appear in the OG version and are missing from the Theodotion version. In this article, I explained why it is difficult for me to accept Segal’s claim that these verses, especially verses 51, 63-64, belong to the original literary core of the story of Susanna. Furthermore, contrary to the categorical assumption that all verses that appear in the Theodotion version and are not found in OG “are almost certainly additions to the original core”[[48]](#footnote-52) (p.3).

I showed two examples of places where, based on content considerations, there is room to suspect that certain verses in the Septuagint version are based on the Theodotion version or a similar one.

Regarding the definition of its literary genre in the story of Susanna, I suggested categorizing Susanna as a story that combines the two sub-genres of Daniel’s stories: a court contest and a court identity conflict. Characterizing the story of Susanna as a court contest puts Daniel’s character at the center while viewing it as a court conflict of identity emphasizes Susanna’s character. Contrary to the claim that the OG version emphasizes Daniel’s character and the Theodotion version emphasizes Susanna’s character, I showed that both elements already exist in the OG version, even while both are developed more in the Theodotion version. The analogies between the story of Susanna and biblical narratives and laws are more developed in the Theodotion version. However, it seems that the trend of these analogies is not only to elevate Susanna but also to elevate Daniel. We saw an example of this by pointing out the link between Susanna and the law of the heifer whose neck is broken (Deut. 21: 1-9). This analogy taught us about the meaning of the act of placing hands on Susanna’s head. But beyond that, we saw that this analogy contributes to the glorification of Daniel’s character, and presents him as someone who takes responsibility and behaves in a way we would expect the elders to behave. This is in contrast to the corrupt and disgraceful behavior of the elders.

1. By contrast, there are minimal differences between the various versions of the other additions to Daniel (“The Prayer of Azariah and The Song of the Three Young Men,” and “Bel and the Dragon”). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Olivier Munnich. “From a Septuagint Connection to a Masoretic Rejection: the Septuagint Susanna-text and the Question of the Greek ‘Additions’ to Daniel.” *JAJ* (2023). Munnich

   argues that lexical and syntactic considerations indicate that the story of Susanna was originally written in a Semitic language. It was translated into Greek in the OG and Theodotion version was a later Greek adaptation of the OG story. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Moore claims that only twenty-three percent of the sixty verses are common to the two versions. See Moore, *Daniel*, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. In MS 88 and the Syro-Hexapla and the Vulgate, it is found immediately after Daniel 1 and prior to “Bel and the Dragon.” In Papyrus 967 it is found after “Bel and the Dragon.” On its location, see: Collins, *Daniel*, p. 426. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Segal, Michael, *Dreams, Riddles, and Visions: Textual, Contextual, and Intertextual Approaches to the Book of Daniel* (BZAW 455; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), pp. 94-131; Daniel 5: “Daniel 5”; Daniel 6: “Old Greek Version”; “Harmonization.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Michael Segal, " *From Homily to Origin Story: The Textual and Literary Development of Susanna", JAJ--, 2023, pp. ---* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Segal, *Dreams*, p.180-199; Michael Segal, “‘For From Zion Shall Come Forth Torah...‘ (Isaiah 2:3): Biblical Paraphrase and the Exegetical Background of Susanna,” in *New Approaches to the Study of Biblical Interpretation in Judaism of the Second Temple Period and in Early Christianity: Proceedings of the Eleventh International Symposium of the Orion Center* (eds. G. Anderson, D. Satran, and R. Clements; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 21-39 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Expressing himself delicately, Collins claims that the prologue appears to be external to the story (John J., Daniel Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], p. 435). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Like Moore’s claim: that it was omitted "due to its undermining of authority” . Moore, *Additions,* 109, [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Cases of deletion indeed exist, but these are rare and an explanation for the deletion would be expected.. In my opinion, it is also difficult to accept the possibility that this is a rewrite, since these are no parallel elements in the story. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. On vv. 63-64 as an editorial addition, see: Segal, “‘For From Zion,’” 37, n. 34; *Dreams*, 197, n. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Collins argues that both the OG Theod versions underwent an editing process that highlighted the differences between them. Whereas Theodotion‘s editing emphasizes Susanna‘s character and status, the OG‘s editing emphasizes the tension between the elders and the young. Collins, Daniel, p. 427. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Alexander Rofe, *Introduction to the Historical Literature in the Bible*, Jerusalem 2001, pp. 85-89. See: Damascus Document VII 7-10. See: M. Broshi (ed.), *The Damascus Document Reconsidered,* Jerusalem 1992, pp. 28-29 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Rofe, p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Rofe argues that the OG was expanded here under the influence of Theodotion‘s version, and that the phenomenon is termed “contamination” (Rofe, *Introduction*, p. 87). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Daniel‘s prayer specifically links to Theodotion version: “He reveals deep and *hidden* things; He *knows* what lies in darkness (and light) and light dwells with Him” (Daniel 2:22). In Theodotion‘s version of Susanna’s prayer: “God of the world *knows* the *hidden*, *knows* all before it happens.” In the OG shorter version we find: “Lord, God of the world, Who *knows* everything before it happens.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Segal, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Segal, p. 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
19. “The new introduction and conclusion point to the transformation of Susanna as a character, from an instrument in the conflict between the Daniel and the elders in OG, to a full-fledged heroine whose righteousness is praised” (p. 20). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
20. Moore, Carey A., *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah: The Additions. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 44; Garden City: Doubleday, 1977). p. 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
21. For Africanus, this question was related to the original language of the text. “The mime Philistion” (contemporary of Augustus), *Letter from Africanus to Origen* § 4, p 516, l. 16 and *Origen, Letter to Africanus*, 3, 2, p 524, l. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
22. Gedeon Huet, “Daniel and Susanna: Note on comparative literature”, RHR 65 (1912), pp. 277-284: 76 (1917) 129-130. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
23. R. A. F. McKenzie, “The Meaning of the Susanna Story,” CJT 3 (1957), pp. 211-218. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
24. . See: Moore, Carey A., *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah: The Additions.* *A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 44; Garden City: Doubleday, 1977). p. 96. In the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 93a) there is a fascinating reworking of the story of Susanna where the assailants are Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, but there the intended victim is Nebuchadnezzar’s daughter. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
25. Lawrence Wills, “The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity,” HTR 77, 3-4 [1984]: 277-299, at pp. 293-294; Lawrence M. Wills *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends* (HDR 26; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), p. 293-294. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
26. Segal, Michael Segal, " *From Homily to Origin Story: The Textual and Literary Development of Susanna", JAJ--, 2023, pp. --* [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
27. W. L. Humphreys, “Life Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel”, JBL 92 (1973), pp. 211-223. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
28. N. Golan, The Daniel Narratives: A Literary Analysis of Daniel 1-6 (Ph.D. Thesis, Bar Ilan University), Ramat Gan 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
29. For reasons for this see: Golan, Daniel, pp. 16-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
30. Like Collins’s claim: “The motifs of the innocent young woman in distress and of the wise young judge are central to both versions” (Collins, *Daniel*. p. 427). According to him, despite identifying the differences between Theodotion‘s version and the OG version, it should be noted that the motif of the young innocent woman in distress and the motif of the young wise judge are both central in the two stories. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
31. As early as the nineteenth century, Nehemiah Brüll addressed aspects of the laws of testimony found in the story of Susanna. He noted the resemblance between the story of Susanna and the dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees mentioned in the Mishnah in Makkot 1:6. Consequently, he argued that the story of Susanna is a Pharisaic narrative and should be dated to the period of the emergence of these sects, in the first century BCE (Nehemiah Brüll, “Das apokryphische Susanna-Buch,” JJGL 3 (1877): 1-69, 2:842, n. 75). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
32. Similar to Daube’s claim that “The purpose of the story was to secure acceptance of a new method of hearing witnesses, namely, in the absence of one another” D. Daube, “Texts and interpretation in Roman and Jewish law”, *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 111, (1961) pp. 3-28: 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
33. O. Malka, “Witness Interrogation and The Story of Susanna” JAJ--, 2023. Pp-- [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
34. A similar formulation appears in several biblical narratives, including: Joshua 24:22; 1 Samuel 12:5; Ruth 4:9-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
35. Bernard S. Jackson specifically highlighted significant differences between the rules of testimony in the story of Susanna and those in Rabbinic literature. First, according to the Rabbis’, the process of “examination and investigation” alone cannot lead to the punishment of witnesses; only a process of *hazamah* (testimony that those witnesses could not possibly have seen what they claim to have seen) can lead to such an outcome. Inconsistencies in the details between the versions of the testimony provided by the two witnesses would render their testimony inadmissible, but it would never lead to their punishment. Furthermore, to reject the testimony, the difference must be substantial and not a minor one. See, for example, b.Sanhedrin 41a, where if one witness testifies that the accused used a sword, and another witness testifies that the accused used a dagger, their testimonies are not accepted. However, if one witness testifies that the accused was wearing black clothes, and the other testifies that the accused was wearing white clothes, their testimonies are accepted as credible. In this regard, the testimony of the elders regarding the identity of the tree under which the alleged incident occurred could indeed be considered admissible testimony. B.S. Jackson, “Susanna and the singular history of singular witnesses.” *Acta Juridica* (1977), pp. 37-54: 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
36. Heller mentions this argument in his notes: Bernhard Heller, “The Additions to the Book of Daniel,” in Abraham Kahana (ed.), *The Apocryphal Books* (2 vols.; Tel-Aviv: Masada, 1936–1937) pp. 554–575 (in Heb.). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
37. The exact role of the priests is not mentioned. It may be that the presence of additional priests was added at a later stage. See Tigay, Deuteronomy, pp. 526-529. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
38. See E. Merz, *Die Blutrache bei Israeliten*, Leipzig 1916, f. 48-50; A. Roifer. “The Breaking of the Heifer’s Neck,” *Tarbiz* 31,2 (1961): 119–43. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23591041. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
39. Ancient interpreters explain *eytan* as meaning “hard” (Rashi) or “strong” (Ibn Ezra). Some have interpreted it as it means in modern Hebrew: as a river whose waters flow continuously. This meaning was based by scholars on the Arabic verb “*wtn*”, which is interpreted in medieval Arabic dictionaries as meaning “continuous,” and appears in the context of water, for example, a continually flowing spring. However, this interpretation raises various issues. The Hebrew lexicographers from the Middle Ages who worked in Arabic-speaking countries do not mention this word. In addition, there are not many continuously flowing streams in the land of Israel (roughly eighteen west of the Jordan). According to this interpretation, it would be difficult to perform the ceremony and remove the blood guilt in most parts of the country. (See: J. Tigay, , (Mikra Le-israel) Tel Aviv 2016, p. 523). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
40. vv. 54-55 “And the impious one said ‘under a mastich.” vv. 58-59 “Then, he said, “Under an evergreen oak.” (πρῖνον) And Daniel said, ‘Sinner! Now, the angel of the Lord stands with the sword until the people destroy you so that he may saw you in pieces’” (καταπρίσῃ). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
41. Africanus wrote to Origen that the celebrated wordplay between the names of the trees and the punishment (54-55, 58-59), has no parallel in Hebrew. Porphyry, a Neo-Platonic Christian philosopher, used this wordplay to prove that the entire book of Daniel was a Greek invention. “The mime Philistion” (contemporary of Augustus), *Letter from Africanus to Origen* § 4, p 516, l. 16 and Origen, *Letter to Africanus*, 3, 2, p 524, l. 9. Jerome, Prologue to the Commentary on Daniel, ed. and transl. R. Courtray, Sources chrétiennes 602, Paris, 2019, p. 128, l. 50-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
42. S. T. T. Lachs, “A Note on the Original Language of Susanna”, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 69, 2 (1978), p. 52-54; A. Bludau, op. cit., p. 186, C. A. A. Moore, op. cit., p. 84; M. Henze, op. cit. on n. 3, p. 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
43. Olivier Munnich, “From a Septuagint connection to a Masoretic rejection: the Septuagint Susanna-text and the question of the Greek ‘Additions’ to Daniel” [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
44. Olivier Munnich, “From a Septuagint connection to a Masoretic rejection: the Septuagint Susanna-text and the question of the Greek ‘Additions’ to Daniel” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
45. Munnich, p. 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
46. So wrote Munnich in the draft version of his lecture given at the Orion Center at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I thank Prof. Munnich for sending me his lecture. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
47. In the sense of dripping or dropping (drip, drop): Deuteronomy 33:28; Deuteronomy 32:2 and in the sense of breaking the neck of an animal; Is 66:3, Ex 13:13; 34:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
48. Segal, p. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-52)