

REMEMBERING THE QUEEN OF SHEBA IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM

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Jillian Theresa Stinchcomb

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmothers, Frances Still Stinchcomb and Louise Harper Bovée.

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## ABSTRACT

### REMEMBERING THE QUEEN OF SHEBA IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM

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The Queen of Sheba is a figure known for her meeting with Solomon, first recorded in the biblical texts of 1 Kings 10:1-12 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-13. This dissertation examines the literary dynamics of every extant narrative about the Queen of Sheba which emerged before the end of the first millennium in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Syriac through the frameworks of Memory Studies and Reception History. It argues that there is a marked difference between the ways the episode between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon as described in our surviving sources from the Second Temple period and the ways it is described in extant sources in and after Late Antiquity. While early iterations of the narrative follow a similar pattern, the archive of texts from Late Antiquity witness an explosion of creativity, forming a dynamic complex of stories with shared features among Jews, Muslims, and Christians. These texts show unclear lines of dependence and are difficult to date with precision. Nevertheless, I suggest that it is valuable to examine them synchronically across “religions,” contextualizing them in light of the political, cultural, and ideological frameworks whence they emerged. The Queen of Sheba, as a wealthy, foreign queen who worshipped another god than the one worshipped by Israel, represented multiple forms of alterity inextricably bound up with

one another. Her meeting with Solomon garnered a new significance in Late Antiquity, as Christian hegemonies solidified their rule and Islamic polities emerged, where conflict over material and social power was overlaid with and understood through ideological conflict over the inheritance of monarchical Israel. From the sixth to ninth centuries, one finds new expressions of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim memory-making around Israel's monarchic past, and the Queen of Sheba became a potent site to articulate a range of visions of identity and alterity.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **The Queen of Sheba in Early Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Memory**

The Baptistery of St. John in Florence, Italy, has relatively little in common with Neil Gaiman's 2001 novel *American Gods*, and perhaps still less in common with Rastafarian religious beliefs or Ethiopia's national history. Yet one figure acts as a thread linking these disparate topics: the Queen of Sheba, who famously visited Solomon at the height of his rule. She looks beautiful as she visits Solomon in a copper engraving on the Baptistery's celebrated "Gates of Paradise."<sup>1</sup> She is a sex goddess in Gaiman's novel and its television adaptation. According to the Ethiopian constitution, she is the ancestor of Haillie Selassie, Ras Teferi and emperor of Ethiopia until 1974.<sup>2</sup> There are so many ways to encounter the Queen of Sheba today that one could be forgiven for assuming that multifaceted treatments of her character are a uniquely modern phenomenon,<sup>3</sup> not least because they stand in stark contrast with the laconic stories about the Queen found in 1 Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-12. However, that is not the case: in all but the earliest narratives about the Queen of Sheba, heterogeneity is the rule rather than the

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of these carvings, see Angiola, "'Gates of Paradise' and the Florentine Baptistery," 242-48.

<sup>2</sup> Belcher, "African Rewritings," 441-59; Weitzman, *Solomon*, 137-48.

<sup>3</sup> Modern interpretations of her figure include Yeats, "Solomon to Sheba," and "Solomon and the Witch"; Walcott, *O Babylon!*; the 1930's blues song "She's my Sheba, I'm her Sheik"; Hughes, *Joy to My Soul*; and a number of films, including the now-lost 1921 *The Queen of Sheba*, starring Betty Blythe, of which only stills survive; and *Sheba Baby* from 1975, and two films from 2005 and 1959 which are both titled *Solomon and Sheba*.

exception, and this figure emerges as a nexus of narrative creativity and reflection already in Late Antiquity.<sup>4</sup>

The only extant stories which feature the Queen of Sheba from before the sixth century CE are patterned after the brief account found in 1 Kings 10:1-13. There, the Queen of Sheba visits Solomon with an extravagant train of goods from which she gives him gifts after blessing his house, his rule, and his god. Beginning around the sixth and seventh centuries, by contrast, we find entirely new iterations of her narrative appearing in a number of literary genres and languages in the Arabian peninsula. In plot structure, as well as in major themes and concerns, these late antique narratives about the Queen of Sheba depart from biblical and other early precedents, and their innovations are not readily explained as merely a matter of biblical exegesis. Moreover, late antique memory-making surrounding the Queen of Sheba exhibits significant parallels across religious traditions. The Qur'ān, for instance, tells a story of the Queen's visit to Solomon that explicitly disparages gifts like those described in the book of Kings, and this narrative in the Qur'ān has a number of similarities to an account found in the *Targum Sheni to Esther*.<sup>5</sup> In both, the Queen is visited by a bird from Solomon's court, requests support from her own advisors, and has an initially antagonistic relationship with Solomon. Other writers, like the Muslim polymath Abu Ja'far al-Tabari and the anonymous author of the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, the earliest extant Hebrew parody, suggested that the Queen of

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<sup>4</sup> "Late Antiquity" commonly denotes the period between 200 and 800 CE. In this dissertation, I use this terminology as shorthand for this period but also to include what some designate as "the early Middle Ages," that is, including the ninth and tenth centuries as well and thus including early Islam. For materials about the Queen of Sheba, as we shall see, the period between the sixth and tenth centuries is distinctive, both from earlier materials and from later medieval developments. For an argument for the periodization of the first millennium more broadly, see Fowden, *First Millennium*, as well as Marcone and Sogno, "A Long Late Antiquity?"

<sup>5</sup> I.e., the second Aramaic translation of the book of Esther, on which see Chapter Two.

Sheba was an animalistic or supernatural figure who had extremely hairy legs that required a special concoction to depilate. Many of the tropes first found in these late antique sources come to shape medieval literary and artistic traditions about the Queen of Sheba as well as her reception into modernity. Interestingly, however, such tropes cannot be readily explained either in terms of the exegesis of the biblical accounts or as the extension of historiographical or other traditions found in earlier Jewish and Christian sources.

How, then, should we understand the proliferation of literary creativity around the Queen of Sheba in Late Antiquity? Furthermore, why does this occur when it does, around the same time across different religious traditions? This dissertation explores these questions by considering the rupture between the earliest iterations of the Queen of Sheba and the complex of late antique traditions and by examining the latter across religious traditions with an eye to their broader contexts. To do so, I analyze every major extant narrative about the Queen of Sheba written before the end of the first millennium CE, comparing Jewish, Christian, and Muslim depictions of this figure in Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Aramaic, Arabic, and Syriac. In the process, I use this focus on the Queen of Sheba to reflect upon the dynamics of memory-making surrounding Israel's monarchic past, within and between religions in Late Antiquity. I argue that emergent discourses about sacral kingship and Solomonic authority, shaped by Christian and Islamic hegemonies, led to the profusion of literary creativity in narratives about the Queen of Sheba in middle of the first millennium CE.

Methodologically, this dissertation is a reception history in the sense outlined by Jonathan Roberts. For Roberts, reception history is marked by the articulation of the

interdependent relationship between the practical question of what material is studied and the theoretical question of the justification or ends to which said material is marshalled.<sup>6</sup> Predicated on the philosophical insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer, reception history is built on the observation that the consciousness of a given interpreter is bound by the historical context to which an interpreter belongs; any interpretive act is predicated on a dialogical encounter with the past.<sup>7</sup> Reception histories choose “shards of that infinite wealth of reception material in accordance with the particular interests of the historian concerned”;<sup>8</sup> to encounter the past, according to Roberts, one “must enter a dialogical relationship with it, coming to recognize the alterity of a historical interlocutor.”<sup>9</sup> This recognition and even celebration of alterity and self-reflection on the epistemic contingencies of contemporary scholarship has meant that reception history has been one important strategy for decolonization within the academy. This is particularly true of the fields of Classics and Biblical Studies, which have benefitted from the attendant de-centering of questions of “origins” constructed in a traditional historical-critical framework as well as from conversations across disciplinary boundaries that studies of reception can foster.<sup>10</sup>

The Queen of Sheba is a particularly rich focus for a reception-historical study, in my view, precisely because the late antique materials cannot be explained in terms of any

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<sup>6</sup> Roberts, “Introduction,” 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 276-77.

<sup>8</sup> Roberts, “Introduction,” 1.

<sup>9</sup> Roberts, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>10</sup> The focus on “origins” within a traditional historical-critical framework remains common in Biblical Studies (e.g., Dever, *What did the Biblical Writers Know and When did they Know it?*) as well as in past treatments of the Queen of Sheba more specifically (e.g., Pritchard, *Solomon and Sheba*). The value of reception history is clear, e.g., from Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic Literature*. Klijn there incorporates so-called “gnostic” and other understudied texts, showing that our understanding of even canonical and other well-studied literature benefits from new contextualization and comparison.

simple or singular history of biblical interpretation or as a cluster of exegetical motifs; their relationship to their biblical precedents is marked by as much rupture as continuity. Scholars such as Eva Mroczek have suggested that a history-of-interpretation approach that describes difference as derivation and deviation may be insufficient to capture the many modes of creativity surrounding the biblical past.<sup>11</sup> The decidedly non-exegetical narrative iterations of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon affirm and extend this insight. In the case of the Queen of Sheba, one additional heuristic value is the network of eastern Mediterranean, Arabian, African, and other sources that consider her character, which aid us in seeing the biblical past in broader geographical and cultural context than histories of biblical interpretation that focus on trajectories towards the Latin West and European Christendom.

In addition, I argue, the Queen of Sheba becomes such a site for creative reflection in part because she herself embodies multiple modes of alterity as a foreign, female monarch. The study of the reception of the figure of this queen in premodern narratives thus offers the opportunity not only to consider the alterity of past writers in relation to our present, but also to consider past writers engaging with the alterity of the figure in their own understanding of the past. Accordingly, the goal of this project is not to articulate a singular, historical or otherwise "objective" truth about the figure of the Queen of Sheba, but rather to describe the pattern of evidence for the constellation of varied ways in which this figure was received, remembered, and reworked in different historical contexts.

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<sup>11</sup> Mroczek, *Literary Imagination*.

## 1. The Queen of Sheba in Contemporary Biblical Scholarship

Popular archaeology often uses the lure of “the real Sheba” as an introductory hook to explain the significance of Red Sea trade routes in the Bronze Age, and this same appeal is often used to introduce popularizing histories about the Queen of Sheba.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, within Biblical Studies, scholarly interest in the Queen of Sheba has largely revolved around debates about the historicity of the figure, and research on this figure has tended to be pursued in relation to the history and archaeology of ancient Israel.<sup>13</sup> This tendency is consistent with the scholarly concern with the historicity of Solomon and his reign, which is the major context in which the earliest references to the Queen of Sheba have been studied. Representative, in this regard, are Andre Lemaire’s 2002 and 2015 articles which focus on the historical probability of a trade mission between Jerusalem and Sheba in the tenth century BCE or James Pritchard’s 1974 contributions to an edited volume on *Solomon and Sheba*, which focuses primarily on the archaeology of the southern Arabian peninsula in the tenth and ninth centuries BCE.<sup>14</sup> A 2004 *Journal for Semitics* volume on the Queen similarly opens with an article by Adriaan Lamprecht that first asks where,

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Daum, *Im der Land der Königin von Saba* for a broader, art-historical perspective that is also rooted in archaeological claims. Daum further incorporates textual material alongside archaeological finds in a separate volume titled *Die Königin von Saba*. Examples of archaeological discussions in the press include the cover story of the December 3, 2018 issue of *National Geographic*, “The Search for the Real Queen of Sheba,” as well as “Was there a real Queen of Sheba? Evidence makes her more likely,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 1986; “Archaeologists strike gold in in quest to find Queen of Sheba’s wealth,” *The Guardian*, February 11, 2012; “Did the Queen of Sheba Worship This ‘New’ God From Yemen?” *The Daily Beast*, March 24, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Weitzman, *Solomon*, 133-48 opens with these questions, even as he admits they are unanswerable; similarly Lamprecht, “Solomon and the Queen of Sheba,” 11-34; Coulter-Harris, *Queen of Sheba*; Clapp, *Sheba*; Daum, *Die Königin von Saba*. The Queen of Sheba is also used to broadly anchor the southern Arabian peninsula and attendant trade routes, as in Schippman, *Ancient South Arabia from the Queen of Sheba to the Advent of Islam*. For some exceptions to this tendency see below.

<sup>14</sup> Lemaire, “Queen or Delegation of Saba to Solomon?” 191-6; Lemaire, *La reine de Saba à Jérusalem*,” 43-55. Later chapters of Pritchard’s *Solomon and Sheba* describe the reception of the episode in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim tradition, treated separately, but the major contribution of the book is the collation of archaeological evidence. This theme was picked up by Nicholas Clapp in his travelogue *Sheba*.

precisely, Sheba is located.<sup>15</sup> So too in scholarly commentaries on the references to the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Josephus, and Origen, which generally contextualize this figure with a reference to the ancient city of Saba, located in modern-day Yemen close to the Red Sea, which grew wealthy from trade caravans that connected Red Sea trade across the desert to Mediterranean and Mesopotamian trading hubs.<sup>16</sup>

Such efforts run up against substantial limitations in the surviving evidence.<sup>17</sup>

There is no contemporaneous data for a Queen of Sheba whom we could plausibly connect to the reports in Kings and Chronicles. There was a city-state of Saba, located in southern Yemen, which was famous for its wealth generated at the nexus of several trade routes.<sup>18</sup> Prima facie, it seems reasonable to associate such a location with the queen who came to Israel with a great caravan of gifts, including spices and gold, especially because of the linguistic congruence between the name Saba and שָׁבָא in Hebrew.<sup>19</sup> However, Psalm 72 refers to “the kings of Sheba and rulers of Saba” (שָׁבָא and סַבְעִי) which suggests at the minimum that in the period in which texts like Kings, Chronicles, and the Psalms were written, some people considered Sheba to be a distinct locale from Saba. Ancient

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<sup>15</sup> Lamprecht is unable to answer this question and instead focuses on the semantic fields of Sheba, Solomon, and other aspects of the narrative, arguing that the fundamental ambiguity of the story enables the rich afterlife of interpretation; “Solomon and the Queen of Sheba,” 11-34. A similar point is made by Weitzman, *Solomon*, 138-47. See also below.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Lawson on Origen’s *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 357; Feldman on Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.135; Mulder in his commentary, *1 Kings*, 527; Myers in his commentary, *2 Chronicles*, 56.

<sup>17</sup> The position articulated here largely follows the argument laid out by Weitzman, *Solomon*, 137-38.

<sup>18</sup> One additional difficulty in this position is the fact that Saba flourished in the seventh century BCE and afterwards, but the archaeological record shows it was only a minor outpost in the ninth century BCE, when many scholars believe Solomon would have ruled. This is discussed in Clapp, *Sheba*; Daum, *Im der Land der Königin von Saba*; Schippman, *Ancient South Arabia from the Queen of Sheba to the Advent of Islam*.

<sup>19</sup> Examples of this tendency include Jamme, “Saba (Sheba)”; Bienkowski and Millard, *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East*, 266. Bryce similarly labels a map in the *Routledge Handbook of People and Places of Ancient Western Asia* as “Saba (biblical Sheba).” Note that these examples include a dictionary, an encyclopedia, and a handbook, so the inclination to flatten the potential differences is naturalized in several volumes which serve as introductory texts.



Hebrew texts contain a handful of references to Sheba as a land associated with desert trade and wealth, but no specific concern for its geographic orientation to Israel.<sup>20</sup> In some cases, references to Sheba and its queen may be shaped less by historical memory than by ideas of wealth and distant trade at the times that the texts took shape, in a manner perhaps akin to mid-twentieth-century American references to “Timbuktu.”

However, Biblical Studies has also offered important literary insights into the figure of the Queen of Sheba. Adele Reinhartz, in her 1998 book *Why Ask my Name? Anonymity in the Hebrew Bible* reflects on the function of the Queen of Sheba’s title in her meeting with Solomon.<sup>21</sup> Reinhartz notes that while anonymity can denote a person whose name is not important enough to remember, it can also function to draw attention to the characteristics by which an anonymous figure is identified. In the case of the Queen of Sheba, she is known by her title, because it is in her position as a monarch of a foreign country that her visit is significant. The texts which describe the Queen of Sheba in Kings and Chronicles are not motivated by a desire to show an interpersonal relationship, but to show a successful meeting between two heads of state. Although the Queen’s riddles, gender, and religious practice are important enough to merit mention in biblical texts, they are not the primary focus or concern; her performance of her position is.

Relatedly, Suzanne Gillmayr-Bucher wrote about the Queen of Sheba vis-à-vis Rahab in a 2006 article, where she notes that the factors which might make the Queen of Sheba unimportant or insignificant – namely, her status as a foreigner and as a woman –

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<sup>20</sup> Sheba is referenced in Psalms 72:10 and 15; Isaiah 60:6; Jeremiah 6:20; Job 6:19; and Ezekiel 27:22.

<sup>21</sup> Reinhartz, *Why Ask My Name?* 48, 70-3.

are what make her a useful mirror for Israelite self-reflection.<sup>22</sup> This observation holds true even in later iterations of the story of their visit, as Dina Stein argues with respect to the ninth-century *Midrash Mishlei*.<sup>23</sup> The Otherness of the Queen of Sheba helps to define Israel as a normative state, and Solomon as an admirable figure not just to the inheritors of his Israel but to his contemporaries.

In his 2011 book *Solomon: the Lure of Wisdom*, which offers a broad view of the figure of Solomon from the perspective of Biblical Studies, Steven Weitzman highlights the total anonymity of the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kings 10:1-13: the text describes nothing of her appearance, her background, or her name, nor does it suggest any interest in the geographic locale of Sheba, or any aspect of her life beyond the episode with Solomon.<sup>24</sup> Weitzman argues that the feature that defines the Queen of Sheba over and against other monarchs with whom Solomon engages is her skepticism: the Queen of Sheba needs to see with her own eyes the glory of Solomon before she can believe the accounts which she had heard.<sup>25</sup> Weitzman's account of the Queen of Sheba and the later reception of her figure in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, Rastafarian religious traditions, and Muslim narratives stresses the multivalence of her character enabled by the laconic biblical account of her visit.<sup>26</sup> As Weitzman notes, "it is frustrating not to know who the Queen really was, where she came from, or what transpired between her and Solomon, but reaching such knowledge... might trigger its own destructive backlash."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, precisely because there is no singular, definitive account of the Queen of Sheba, her figure offers a rich site

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<sup>22</sup> Gillmayr-Bucher in "She Came to Test Him with Hard Questions," 135-50.

<sup>23</sup> Stein, *Textual Mirrors*, 33-57; see further Chapter Four.

<sup>24</sup> Weitzman, *Solomon*, 134-37.

<sup>25</sup> Weitzman, *Solomon*, 138.

<sup>26</sup> Weitzman, *Solomon*, 134-38, 141-43.

<sup>27</sup> Weitzman, *Solomon*, 148.

to explore questions of meaning-making across disparate contexts, creativity in new memories about the past, and the interplay between socio-cultural factors and the literature that both reflects and engenders evidence of such cultural attitudes for contemporary scholars to study.

This dissertation follows the lead of Reinhartz, Gillmayr-Bucher, and Weitzman in bracketing historical questions about the Queen of Sheba. Whether or not the evidence of 1 Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-12 enables the reconstruction of specific historical events, traditions about this queen remain significant, especially for illuminating continued creativity surrounding the memory of the biblical past, in general, and Israel's monarchic past, more specifically. Building on these literary insights about the Queen of Sheba from Biblical Studies, my dissertation approaches this figure primarily through literary analysis and cultural history, rather than biblical archaeology, and I draw insights from Biblical Studies but also Jewish Studies, Religious Studies, Comparative Literature, and Memory Studies. In this, I hope to use this example to model a more capacious vision of Biblical Studies, which is oriented not just to recovering "origins" and reconstructing Israelite history, but also encompasses the reception and transformation of the biblical past into Late Antiquity and beyond.

## **2. The Queen of Sheba in Scholarship on Medieval and Early Modern Literature**

In order to model a more expansive portrait of Biblical Studies, I build upon the rich corpus of specialist studies about the Queen of Sheba by scholars of medieval and early modern literature. The most prominent and influential example is Jacob Lassner's 1993 monograph *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, which has largely set the tone for studies of

the later career of this figure from medieval Muslim debates to modern cinema.<sup>28</sup> There, Lassner focuses on explaining the representation and function of the figure of the Queen of Sheba in early medieval Muslim literature, and his interest in tracing how the Queen of Sheba became increasingly demonized therein.<sup>29</sup> For this, he focuses mainly on the internal gendered logics which animate these traditions but also looks to the cultural diffusion of Jewish traditions into Muslim traditions. Lassner argues that the traditions about the Queen of Sheba in medieval Muslim texts, such as al-Thal'abi's *Qisas al-Anbiyya*, reflect an integration of older Jewish motifs into Muslim discourses of world-ordering, particularly in regards to the place of women like the Queen of Sheba, who threatened the natural order of creation through their rulership and obstinacy in the face of Solomon's rule.<sup>30</sup> Although his focus falls on Muslim texts from the early second millennium CE, his book includes treatments of many of the late antique Jewish and early Muslim sources that form the focus of this dissertation. I draw upon many of his insights below. What functions for Lassner as background, however, is here foregrounded and examined on its own terms.<sup>31</sup>

Just as Lassner shows the value of a focus on gender for understanding the reception history of the Queen of Sheba, so scholars such as Aurelia Hetzel have shown the value of literary approaches to the largely narrative form in which this figure occurs.<sup>32</sup> In her 2016 *La Reine de Saba*, Hetzel focuses on early modern French literature and thus

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<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Crowther, Shafaie, Glaser, *Reading the Bible in Islamic Context*; Herzig, *Plucked*; Evans, *Black Passports*; Shepherd, *Bible on Silent Film*; Berkey, "Women and Gender in Islamic Traditions."

<sup>29</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, xii.

<sup>30</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 64-87.

<sup>31</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 126-30.

<sup>32</sup> So too Dina Stein, whose work on the Queen of Sheba in *Midrash Mishlei* is discussed extensively in Chapter Four.

treats late antique materials about the Queen of Sheba only as background to later traditions.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, as a scholar of comparative literature, Hetzel deftly draws attention to the ways in which the Queen of Sheba's character emerges from among the multiple iterations of her story, rather than from any single version – a pattern that, as we shall see below, is already evident within the late antique materials. There, too, it is valuable to take a literary approach, rather than atomizing traditions about the Queen into exegetical motifs or folkloristic tropes and focusing only on their origins, and it is also important to take seriously the multivocality of the extant evidence.

In addition, Fabrizio Pennacchietti has extended Lassner's treatment of Jewish and Islamic sources with an eye to the Queen of Sheba in medieval Christianity, further pointing to the value of analyzing the reception history of this figure across the boundaries of "religions." In his 2002 article with A. Boranian and his 2006 book, for instance, Pennacchietti suggests that there is relatively little Christian interest in the story of the Queen's visit to Solomon before the High Middle Ages.<sup>34</sup> Although Rabbinic Jewish literature reveals a similar disinterest, other Jewish traditions closely converge with Muslim traditions from Late Antiquity onward. He posits that medieval Jewish and Muslim discourses share historical roots in early first millennium discourses, which are distinct from Christian traditions which flourished in the thirteenth century and later.<sup>35</sup> More specifically, in his view, medieval Christian traditions depict the Queen of Sheba mostly on the model of Queen Helena, whereas the shared Jewish and Islamic discourse

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<sup>33</sup> Hetzel, *La Reine de Saba*.

<sup>34</sup> Pennacchietti and Boranian, "La reine de Saba," 23.

<sup>35</sup> Pennacchietti and Boranian, "La reine de Saba," 1-26; Pennacchietti, *Three Mirrors of Two Biblical Ladies*.

is rooted in traditions from before the Edict of Milan, (e.g., the *Testament of Solomon*, which he dates to the first three centuries CE).<sup>36</sup>

This dissertation attenuates some of Pennacchietti's findings. Like Pennacchietti, however, I here consider traditions about the Queen of Sheba across Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources, rather than treating individual "religions" in isolation. But whereas Pennacchietti's approach is largely comparative across Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and whereas Lassner treats Jewish materials largely as background for the Islamic materials that form his focus, this dissertation attempts to decenter "religion" as an analytical category, taking a more synchronic approach and comparing clusters of material that were written in around the same time and place.<sup>37</sup> Our evidence for the Queen of Sheba, as we shall see, does not speak to the differences along the divides between "Judaism," "Christianity," and/or "Islam," as much as it points to the differences between ancient and late antique stages in the history of her reception.

This insight is crucial to understanding the patterns of similarity and difference across the texts studied in this dissertation. Although the texts represent memories of a contested sacred past, the category of "religion" does not usefully explain the pattern of evidence. Both the Qur'ān and the *Targum Shevi to Esther* feature talking birds, which are absent from biblical and other early materials. The Queen of Sheba's hairy legs

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<sup>36</sup> Pennacchietti and Boranain, "La reine de Saba," 24. Note that Pennacchietti's claims are somewhat contentious, and scholars such as Ra'anana Boustani and Michael Beshay have argued that the *Testament of Solomon* dates to the third and fourth centuries CE from Christian circles, rather than Jewish communities of the Second Temple period; "Sealing the Demons, Once and For All," 99-130.

<sup>37</sup> In this, I am following the insights from Religious Studies into the anachronism of projecting any concept of "religion(s)" onto premodern materials. Thus J.Z. Smith's famous "Religion, Religious, Religions" essay argued that the trouble with defining "religion(s)" is not that previous attempts at a definition had not been precise enough, but that as a second-order abstract category, religion is definable in multiple ways (p. 269). See also Asad, *Formation of the Secular*, 12-13, 82; Nongbri, *Before Religion*.

appear in the Jewish *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, *Targum Sheni to Esther*, and Tabari's *Tarikh*. Comparative studies of Judaism, Christianity, and/or Islam have tended to assume that the Jewish material in any such parallel must be earlier, even in cases where the relevant dates are difficult to determine. In this dissertation, however, I set aside questions of dependency between "religions," which in my view have distracted from the analysis of these materials in their literary and cultural settings. Chapters Two, Three, and Four, for instance, treat materials all written in the eastern Mediterranean or on the Arabian peninsula, in the same cluster of centuries, and I suggest that we can confidently treat them as meaningfully intertwined enough to highlight their shared concerns and to show what is distinctive about each by reading them in light of one another. In my view, a narrow focus on tracing "origins" or arguing for dependency is not the best approach to explain either the texts or their relationships. My concern here, rather, is less with the comparison of "religions" and more with illuminating the workings of the biblical past within late antique discourses.

With respect to the Queen of Sheba, Jewish materials have been treated as background to Muslim traditions since the inception of the field of Islamic Studies with the 1833 publication of Abraham Geiger's *Was Hat Muhammed aus den Judenthume Aufgenommen?*; examples about this queen were among the data from which Geiger argued that much Qur'ānic and other early Muslim literature came from local Jewish communities and informants.<sup>38</sup> Even though more recent scholarship does not make the case in such blunt terms, it often remains tacit in the structuring of studies: Lassner treats

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<sup>38</sup> Geiger, *Islam and Judaism*, 147-48. For a discussion of the historical roots of these dynamics and alternative modern approaches, see Pregill, "Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān," 643-59.

biblical, late antique, and medieval Jewish traditions about the Queen of Sheba in one chapter, for instance, and Hetzel similarly separates out material by religious tradition, with the Jewish material set first. This dissertation supplements those studies inasmuch as it focuses on the late antique materials they treat as background. In addition, however, I depart from them by taking a synchronic approach: this dissertation is structured so every single chapter combines materials from across “religions” (i.e., Jewish and Christian materials in Chapters One and Four; Jewish and Muslim materials in Chapters Two and Three).

In this, my interest is in the shifting views of the Queen of Sheba as a window onto the changing meanings of the biblical past in and beyond Late Antiquity. In the texts studied in this dissertation, we see three major modes by which ancient and late antique sources engage with the past: history, exegesis, and memory. Biblical and other ancient materials about the Queen of Sheba exhibit an interest in her as a figure of history and exegesis. Materials from after around 600 CE, which are the main focus of this dissertation, are better understood in terms of memory. This is a model of engaging with the biblical past that has been underappreciated in scholarship in Biblical Studies, in general, and in scholarship on the Queen of Sheba and her visit to Solomon, more specifically. Especially when we analyze traditions about her across the boundaries of “religions” and in a manner that sets aside debates about “origins” and dependence, we are able to draw out the value of this example for understanding how the biblical past – and Israel’s monarchic past in particular – was received and engaged in changing ways in Late Antiquity.



### 3. Memory, Reception History, and Biblical Past

Brennan Breed has recently argued that Biblical Studies, as a field, is “reception history all the way down.”<sup>39</sup> By this, he means that traditional studies of biblical texts are always histories of a received tradition, even when they claim to recover Ur-texts from the degradation of transmission.<sup>40</sup> Given the focus on the Masoretic Text as transmitted in the medieval manuscript tradition, even textual-critical and historical-critical scholarship on biblical texts works fundamentally with medieval manuscripts.<sup>41</sup> Just as a point on a line has no dimension, so there is no pure textual form of biblical texts, only versions which are read and interpreted as authoritative among different communities. Breed thus argues for a more expansive vision of Biblical Studies, which is not limited to the quest for “origins” or a focus on antiquity, but which critically examines the changing place of biblical texts across historical moments and communities into the first millennium.<sup>42</sup> Breed suggests that rather than looking to the purported “origins” of a biblical text, scholars should ask what a text *does* in a given social setting.

In this, Breed’s insights extend a broader trend in Biblical Studies, which has questioned the privileging of “origins” that came with the Protestant Christian lineage of the field and which has made a case for expanding the field to encompass “post-biblical” treatments of the biblical past as no less meaningful or relevant. Influential, in this regard, were the interventions of James Kugel in the late twentieth century. Kugel argued for

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<sup>39</sup> Breed, “What Can a Text Do?” 97.

<sup>40</sup> Breed articulates his argument through a contrast with Emmanuel Tov’s model of the development of biblical texts, which depends on a concept of a tradition that develops until a point at which the Ur-text emerged and which is then constantly threatened by corruption thereafter; *Nomadic Text*, 15-25.

<sup>41</sup> Here we might consider Yii-Jan Lin’s critique of manuscript studies which treat texts as genealogically linked; see *Erotic Life of Manuscripts*, 42-68.

<sup>42</sup> Breed, “What Can a Text Do?” 95-106. Breed here draws insights from the work of Gilles Deleuze, and he posits using what he terms an “ethological approach” modeled off of animal behavioral studies.

shifting the focus away from the putative “origins” of the biblical texts and for including the history of their interpretation as no less significant than textual-critical and historical-critical treatments thereof. In this, Kugel synthesized a broader trend, in the wake of the Dead Sea Scrolls, where Michael E. Stone and others brought fresh attention to the continued production of parabiblical literature into the Middle Ages, tracing the depictions of a variety of biblical figures therein.<sup>43</sup> Whereas Stone focused largely on biblical figures, Kugel sought to try to capture the biblical past around the turn of the Common Era – what he termed “the Bible As It Was” as shared by Jews and Christians and as much broader than just the text of biblical books. To do so, he largely focused on exegesis, such as in his 1997 book of this name that compiles exegetical motifs that emerge and recur in early texts.<sup>44</sup>

Kugel’s work signaled an important move away from the *origins* of biblical texts to one of several possible *beginnings* of an interpretive tradition about the biblical past.<sup>45</sup> His own interest, however, was largely on its exegetical dynamics, and as a result, he has focused on the contexts in which biblical texts were considered authoritative.<sup>46</sup> His insights have been extended by others who have questioned whether the reception of the biblical past is always marked by such a hierarchical separation of an authoritative text from its dependent and derivative interpretations. Hindy Najman, for instance, pointed to

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<sup>43</sup> Stone, ed. *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible*. Stone himself has worked extensively with traditions about Adam and Eve in both Second Temple Jewish literature and later Armenian traditions; see *Adam and Eve in the Armenian Tradition*.

<sup>44</sup> Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> Here too, we might consider the insights articulated by Said in *Beginnings*, especially pp. 1-26, where Said contrasts origins – which he describes as divine moments which explain all that follows – with beginnings, which he describes as mundane moments of emergence which offer plausible links to later phenomena.

<sup>46</sup> See Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, xi.

the authorizing function of the figure of Moses in Second Temple Jewish literature, arguing for a treatment of works like *Jubilees* as no less participants in a Mosaic discourse than Deuteronomy.<sup>47</sup> Relatedly, Mroczek has written about David as a figure who could “colonize more textual territories” in similar ways across biblical and later texts precisely because the *possibility* of discovery remained open, according to numerous premodern sources.<sup>48</sup> Creativity vis-à-vis the biblical past was the norm, not exceptional, predicated on a dynamic literary imagination about a past that was never reducible only to an authoritative text.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, we see some examples of the reception of the Queen of Sheba that make sense as examples of exegesis. The narratives studied in most of this dissertation, however, offer too much variety and difference from the biblical material to be read as a straightforward case of reception of biblical *texts*. More useful, rather, are models like those of Stone who focuess on biblical figures, Najman who seeks to describe discourses around figures, and Mroczek who further considers such figures as potential catalysts for continued literary creativity. As Hetzel shows, moreover, the figure of the Queen of Sheba becomes expounded especially in narratives, and this example is thus especially amenable to literary approaches.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, the Queen of Sheba stands in some contrast to the biblical figures commonly studied in earlier scholarship – such as Adam, Seth, Enoch, Abraham, Moses,

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<sup>47</sup> Najman, *Seconding Sinai*. Najman’s insights are useful, for our purposes, in a way that is similar to the insights offered by Hetzel as noted above. For both, the significance of a figure does not emerge from any one text, but from the variety of traditions about them or ascribed to the character.

<sup>48</sup> Mroczek, *Literary Imagination*, 67.

<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, this dissertation focuses on narratives about the figure and how she is deployed therein, narrowing the scope of inquiry to exclude a number of potential mentions of her character, such as potentially related etymologies or parallels to Egyptian, Babylonian, or other traditions, such as the approach modeled by Coulter Harris in her 2013 book *Queen of Sheba*.

Solomon, and David;<sup>50</sup> most of these characters are bound by an expectation of moral exemplarity. Because each man had God's favor, traditions overwhelmingly emphasize the goodness of these figures. This treatment stands in contrast to the Queen of Sheba who can fill a wider range of roles, from the villainous to the humorous to the demonic.<sup>51</sup> In the process of providing a detailed analysis of a relatively neglected period in her reception history, I thus extend questions of the afterlives of biblical figures through this study of narratives about a figure whose is somewhat more plastic than many of her (male, Israelite, sanctified) counterparts.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4. The Queen of Sheba in Late Antique Memory

In her influential 1999 essay "Remaking the Past," Averil Cameron notes that texts from Late Antiquity are not romantic about the past. In contrast not only with the modern world but also with classical antiquity, "they wished devoutly to connect with a past which they still saw as part of their own experience and their own world," and as a result, "the past was so real that it was the subject of intense competition."<sup>53</sup> Her insights well describe what we see in the discourse about the Queen of Sheba that emerges in Late

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Anderson, *Genesis of Perfection*; Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition*; Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic Literature*; VanderKam, *Enoch*; Alexander, "From the Son of Man to Second God," 87-122; Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham*; Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews*; Ada, *Abraham in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*; Bakhos, *Ishmael on the Border*; Zakovitch, *Jacob*; Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*; Beal, *Illuminating Moses*; Farber, *Images of Joshua*; Mohammed, *David in the Muslim Tradition*; Weitzman, *Solomon*; Kalimi, "King Solomon," 481-99; Verheyden, *Figure of Solomon*.

<sup>51</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 24-35.

<sup>52</sup> Not all traditions about male biblical patriarchs are positive: Noah, for example, has many negative portrayals in the Dead Sea Scrolls; see the discussion in Peters, *Noah Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Women in Israelite history have generally received a more varied reception. See Silverstein, *Veiling Esther, Unveiling her Story*; Low, *Bible, Gender, and Reception History*; Hagar has been explored, most recently by Nyasha Junior in *Reimagining Hagar*, as well as by Yvonne Sherwood in "Hagar and Ishmael," 286-304.

<sup>53</sup> Cameron, "Remaking the Past," 1-2.

Antiquity specifically. After around 600 CE, in particular, we see a shift in the use of the Queen of Sheba in stories about Solomon and kingship, and this shift speaks to the resonance of Israel's monarchic past as a focus for reflection on the political changes of the time. It is difficult to see this shift when the evidence is divided to isolate Jewish, Christian, and Islamic materials, but when we cluster relevant materials chronologically, I suggest that it is possible to identify a distinctive discourse about the Queen of Sheba in Late Antiquity and to consider its expressions within individual texts, examined both on their own literary terms and in their cultural contexts. Attention to the periods in which they were produced, in turn, can help us to contextualize the developing themes about her character.

As noted above, this dissertation is rooted in Biblical Studies and extends the recent turn to an interest in reception within that field. At the same time, it also engages scholarship on Late Antiquity and especially the recent engagement with Memory Studies in that field. I am interested in tracing the shifts in the understanding of the figure of the Queen of Sheba, but I am also interested in asking why certain stories about the Queen of Sheba came to be written *when* and *where* we find them.

In this, I am attending to Cameron's above-noted insights about the different place of the past in the meaning-making of different cultures and times. In addition, my approach is similar to that of Stephen Davis in his 2014 book *Christ Child*, which usefully models the value of Memory Studies when applied to late antique materials in particular.<sup>54</sup> Davis focuses on the figure of Jesus as a child, which has a rich afterlife in Late Antiquity that is not predicated on the reception of a particular text but rather on the

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<sup>54</sup> Davis, *Christ Child*, 3-19.

memory of a figure in a shared history. Davis uses the framework of collective memory, articulated in sociological terms by Maurice Halbwachs in the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> Halbwachs argues that individual memory is structured by social dynamics (of a family, religious group, or nation) and that memory especially in religious groups functions to link the past and the present in a coherent, meaningful structure.<sup>56</sup> Davis takes these insights and elaborates on the development of new memories of the past, specifically noting the lack of scriptural precedent for the robust later traditions about Jesus as a child.<sup>57</sup> Davis argues that narratives about Jesus' childhood reflect Greco-Roman discourses and assumptions, which in turn makes for fruitful comparison between Jewish, Muslim and Christian sources: the collective memorialization of Jesus' childhood reflects not only inter-communal concerns but also a shared cultural milieu.<sup>58</sup>

Like the childhood of Jesus, the narratives about the Queen of Sheba that emerge in Late Antiquity show a stark contrast with the limited ancient evidence of the figure. This rupture, however, invites us to try to understand them in relation to the cultural milieu and concerns of the eras in which they were written. Accordingly, this dissertation aims to bring together a new constellation of material and textual evidence of narratives about the Queen of Sheba. By examining this evidence through the lens of cultural history and literary analysis, I suggest that it is possible to offer a more richly textured

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<sup>55</sup> Davis, *Christ Child*, 14-16.

<sup>56</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. Davis also draws upon Pierre Nora's idea of a *lieu de memoire* to highlight the embodied, material aspects of the textual representations of Jesus' childhood, and how textual themes or moments would have evoked material realities for the audiences of the texts he studies; *Christ Child*, 16; Nora, "Between History and Memory," 7-24.

<sup>57</sup> Davis, *Christ Child*, 3-19.

<sup>58</sup> Davis, *Christ Child*, 10; see also his discussion in the first two chapters.

account not only of the reception of the Queen of Sheba but also of late antique discourses around kingship, power, alterity, and gender.

As Halbwachs persuasively argued, memory is malleable, shaped in response to contemporaneous needs and upheld socially.<sup>59</sup> This plasticity is one of the foremost reasons it is the most useful frame for examining the patterns of evidence treated in this dissertation. In addition, as noted above, memory is also useful in contrast to history and exegesis – two modes of engagement with the past that have tended to garner more attention in the field of Biblical Studies. Certainly, Josephus, Tabari’s *Tarikh*, Chronicles, and Kings are all written in a historiographic genre and discuss the Queen of Sheba as a historical figure; Origen’s *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Tabari’s *Tafsir*, and the Syriac *Gannut Bussame* are all works of scriptural exegesis. However, neither of those models accurately describes the engagement in the *Targum Sheni to Esther*, the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, or the *Midrash Mishlei*, and – as we shall see – even the treatments in the Syriac *Gannut Bussame* and Tabari’s *Tarikh* and *Tafsir* make much more sense when situated within the memory-making around this figure that we see in these writings.

## **5. Chapter Summary and Conclusions**

As noted above, this dissertation is structured chronologically in a manner that resists the isolated treatment of different “religions.” The first chapter surveys material about the Queen of Sheba from before 600 CE, with the aim of establishing what is distinctive about the discourse that later emerged around this figure. Here, I highlight the importance of economics in the narratives about the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. In

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<sup>59</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 37-41.

addition, I consider the treatment of this figure in the late first century, in the *Antiquities* of the Jewish historian Josephus and in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which variously utilize the figure of the Queen of Sheba to act as a non-Jewish witness to the greatness and wisdom of Solomon. In addition, I consider her treatment by Origen as well as the brief reference in the Babylonian Talmud, the latter of which signals the lack of interest in her character in classical Rabbinic literature.

The rest of the chapters consider the distinctive discourse about the Queen of Sheba that emerged in Late Antiquity. In the second chapter, I argue that the Qur'ān and the *Targum Sheni to Esther* both use the Queen of Sheba to articulate Solomon's religious superiority by presenting her as a misled or misinformed idolater. The Qur'ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther* present consonant images of international, interreligious contact that are best contextualized by recourse to the politics of the Arabian peninsula and Palestine in the sixth and seventh centuries CE, with multipolar, hierarchical power dynamics newly marked by inner- and intra-Christian conflict. I focus on the narrative deployment of glass tiled floors in both texts to illumine the material contexts evoked by the narratives. As Christians consolidated power in the Roman Empire and Christian communities emerged across the Arabian peninsula, Solomon no longer needed a special justification, and his status as holy and centrally important could be assumed. Ultimately, although both texts affirm Solomon's superiority, they also present nuanced portraits of the failures of human institutions and power represented by the Queen of Sheba.

In Chapter Three, I focus on ninth-century references to the Queen of Sheba found in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and the writings of Tabari, both of which say that the Queen of Sheba had excessively hairy legs which prompted the invention of a depilatory



solution made of arsenic and lime. I argue that this motif of her hairy legs is not only a “first step” to the eventual full-fledged demonization of the Queen in medieval Islamic sources, but also a dynamic portrait that breaks down binaries between men and women, humans and non-humans, and insiders and outsiders through the possibilities engendered by monstrous figures. Centering the textual focus on the embodiment of the Queen of Sheba, I argue that the Abbasid milieu in which these narratives developed best explains the literary character of the texts. The textual dynamics of the anonymously written *Alphabet of Ben Sira* are illuminated by comparison to Tabari’s fairly well-known biography as well as recent research on Abbasid literary production.

In the fourth and final chapter of the dissertation, I argue that the tradition about the Queen of Sheba preserved in the Syriac Christian *Gannat Bessame*, a homiletic commentary on the Gospels, can be fruitfully read with the *Midrash Mishlei*, the midrash on Proverbs, as both were composed by minority communities living under Islamic rule at the end of the first millennium. These texts have never been studied in tandem before, but both present narratives of the Queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon which explicate in detail the riddles the monarchs exchanged with one another. They portray relatively unique visions of wit or intelligence as performed by Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and in doing so reflect values about monarchy, leadership, and belonging in the historicized setting of Solomon’s rule. *Midrash Mishlei* in particular offers a vision of international collaboration through competition. In my argument, I extend earlier research which views riddles and the Queen of Sheba as a mirror of self-fashioning, offering a more multidimensional view of her literary function.

This dissertation is fundamentally concerned with the problem of how to describe difference, whether that be the difference between ancient and late antique iterations of Queen of Sheba narratives, or the difference between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon, or the differences within the complex of late antique traditions about the Queen of Sheba. The Queen of Sheba's economic status, religious practice, interrogating wit, and gender are all modes of alterity which inform one another. They are not additive, but reconstitutive, which is to say that each element informs and shapes the whole, just as different ingredients create new chemical effects in a baked good. By drawing attention to the thematic potentialities of the figure of the Queen of Sheba and how they play out historically, I hope to draw a more complex image of literary creativity, self-fashioning, and world-ordering in the memory-making surrounding the biblical past in and beyond Late Antiquity.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Queen of Sheba in Jewish and Christian Literature Before 600 CE

In Late Antiquity, creative reflection on the Queen of Sheba abounds. Narratives about this queen multiply, with many variations, as powerful sites for reflection on gender, identity, alterity, idolatry, and monarchy by Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike. These narratives feature jinn, talking animals, and complex political hierarchies. In some, the Queen of Sheba has a sexual relationship with Solomon; in others, their dalliance is complicated by her refusal to shave her legs. Some recount the riddles with which the Queen of Sheba challenged Solomon; others have a reciprocal riddling or even shift the directionality, emphasizing Solomon's acts of wisdom. The flexibility, creativity, and concerns of this late antique discourse set the tone for much of the reception of the Queen of Sheba thereafter – from medieval Christian art and literature to Ethiopian national ideology to early modern French opera to contemporary television shows.<sup>60</sup>

In the chapters that follow, I analyze this discourse, arguing for its distinctiveness and analyzing its dynamics and cultural contexts in Late Antiquity. To build a foundation for this task, the present chapter surveys what comes before and argues for a difference between the earlier and later traditions about the figure of the Queen. In contrast to the late antique traditions, the earliest material about her seems surprisingly sparse, even

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<sup>60</sup> Operas about the Queen of Sheba include the 1862 *Reine de Saba* by Barbier and Carré; the most recent television show which features a Queen of Sheba narrative is Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*. For more, see the Introduction.

barren. There are parallel narratives about her in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9, but these each span fewer than 15 verses. One finds historical extension of this material by Josephus and exegetical extension of this material by Origen, but little else in the way of elaboration on the Queen. She is mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and the Babylonian Talmud, but only briefly, with no accompanying narrative. There is nothing akin to the detailed and colorful narratives found in Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, and Syriac in Late Antiquity, nor the continuum of creative reflection exhibited therein, which resist reduction simply to biblical exegesis or historical chronicling. They provide a useful contrast to the early materials, which are terse and tend to stick close to 1 Kings 10. In the surviving material from before 600 CE, there is no mention of a marriage between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon, no description of specific riddles attributed to narratives which feature her, and no supernatural connections are drawn, in contrast with later traditions.

Past scholarship on the reception of the Queen of Sheba has engaged the disconnect between early and later materials in a variety of ways. Fabrizio Pennacchietti, for instance, notes that the gap is puzzling and thus speculates about possible intermediary traditions, now lost to our archive.<sup>61</sup> Others, such as Jacob Lassner, have focused on the contrast between Qur'ānic and late antique Jewish materials, on the one hand, and the biblical account, on the other, appealing to exegesis to connect the dots between them: "The biblical text gives rise to many unanswered questions... these questions occasioned discussion among the exegetes."<sup>62</sup> In this, he appeals to the

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<sup>61</sup> Pennacchietti and Boranian, "La reine de Saba," 25.

<sup>62</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 10.

common scholarly practice of explaining any variety of later reflections on the biblical past as motivated by “filling gaps” in the biblical text.<sup>63</sup> Even if this logic helps to make sense of some cases of later interpretations of some biblical figures or passages,<sup>64</sup> it is not clear it fits all examples – and, in my view, the reception of the Queen of Sheba is an example that points to the problems of assuming that it does. The questions and concerns which are reflected in the later “gap-filling” apparently did not animate earlier audiences, and thus should not be naturalized in scholarly accounts.

The early traditions about the Queen of Sheba are relatively consistent, stable, and repetitive, while the later traditions in and after Late Antiquity become far more complex and varied. But the distinction between the pre- and post-600 CE material is both subtler and more fundamental, as we shall see. The early references are comprehensible through the models of Israelite history and scriptural interpretation, while the later traditions are not. In Late Antiquity, the Queen of Sheba overwhelmingly appears in non-historical accounts of the biblical past: we find her in the first known parody in Hebrew literature, and even when she appears in sources dedicated to biblical translation and interpretation,

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<sup>63</sup> Dina Stein, for example, uses this language of gap-filling in her description of the relationship between the biblical narrative and the later *Midrash Mishlei*; e.g., on page 41 of *Textual Mirrors*, she says “The midrashic story seeks to [answer narrative questions]... by filling in the gaps that are typical of biblical poetics.” Similarly, the *Encyclopedia of World Biography* describes the text of Kings and Chronicles as “the basis for later embellishments of the queen’s voyage” (“Queen of Sheba”). These descriptions accurately describe how many later iterations of the Queen of Sheba are presented but does not satisfactorily answer why questions or gaps that were pressing to later audiences did not inspire the same reaction in earlier tradents.

<sup>64</sup> For more on gap-filling in biblical interpretation (specifically midrash, but with implications for other forms of biblical reflection) see Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* 39-59; further, Levison, *Twice-Told Tale*. Robert Alter, of course, argues that biblical gaps – strategic silences – are one of the most salient features of biblical narrative, enabling later reinterpretation and reinvention (*Art of Biblical Narrative*, 1-24, 143-62). For our purposes, however, it is less significant that the text leaves certain gaps which drew later interpreter’s attention – which is certainly true – and more significant that those gaps did not animate discussion or interest in the ancient materials, but stimulated a great deal of interest and literary creativity in Late Antiquity.

it is in narrative rather than exegetical content. Notably, the books of Kings and Chronicles, in which the Queen of Sheba first appears, are not the object of any of the late antique texts which feature her character. Her story is told in a targum to the book of Esther, for instance, and in a late midrash on the book of Proverbs. As we shall see in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, knowledge of the biblical narratives about the Queen of Sheba is insufficient to explain the dynamics of the later texts which feature her character. In the chapters that follow, I will examine these dynamics and suggest that they are best explained, not as biblical exegesis or even history, but rather in terms of a distinctively late antique mode of memory-making around Israel's monarchic past. In order to establish what is new and distinctive about these later traditions, the present chapter will survey the early materials – which, as we shall see, are shaped by more narrowly exegetical and historical concerns. The tradents who shaped the late antique discourse about the Queen of Sheba are certainly in conversation with earlier traditions, but their engagement with the figure is not limited to their interpretation or extension; in this, there is a notable degree of difference between pre- and post-600 CE traditions about the Queen of Sheba.

The aim of this chapter is to establish the salient features of the late antique discourse about the Queen of Sheba by considering its precedents. This chapter thus surveys the relevant material from before 600 CE, as found in 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Josephus' *Antiquities*, the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Luke, Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, and the Babylonian Talmud. Whereas the later material is concerned with her gender, wisdom, and religious practice, I will argue that the most significant features of the Queen of Sheba in these pre-600 materials are her wealth and

economic status. The Queen of Sheba's wealth, moreover, consistently functions as a signifier of Solomon's importance. In the process I show how these early materials can be largely understood through models of interpretation and history that are commonly used by scholars of Biblical Studies to understand most examples of the biblical past – in contrast to the complexity of later materials examined in the rest of this dissertation.

### 1. 1 Kings 10:1-13

The earliest surviving literary reference to the Queen of Sheba is found in 1 Kings, a Hebrew historical work commonly held to contain pre-exilic traditions redacted in the early Second Temple period.<sup>65</sup> The relevant passage, 1 Kings 10:1-13 (cf. 2 Chron 9:1-12, on which see below), reads as follows:

ומלכת-שְׁבָא שְׁמַעַת אֶת-שְׁמַע שְׁלֹמֹה--לְשֵׁם יְהוָה; וַתְּבֹא לְנִסְתּוֹ בְּהִידוּת  
וַתְּבֹא יְרוּשָׁלַיִם בְּחִיל כְּבֹד מְאֹד, גְּמִלִים נִשְׂאִים בְּשָׂמִים וְזָהָב רַב-מְאֹד וְאַבְנֵי יָקָרָה; וַתְּבֹא, אֶל-  
שְׁלֹמֹה, וַתְּדַבֵּר אֵלָיו אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר הָיָה עִם-לִבָּבָהּ  
וַיַּגִּד-לָהּ שְׁלֹמֹה, אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיהָ: לֹא-הָיָה דְבָר נִעְלָם מִן-הַמֶּלֶךְ, אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִגִּיד לָהּ  
וַתֵּרָא מַלְכַת-שְׁבָא, אֶת כָּל-חֲכַמַת שְׁלֹמֹה; וְהַבַּיִת אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה  
וּמֵאֲכָל שְׁלֹחֲנָהּ וּמוֹשָׁב עֲבָדָיו וּמַעְמַד מְשֻׁרְתּוֹ וּמִלְבָּשֵׁיהֶם וּמִשְׁקֵיו וְעֵלְתוֹ, אֲשֶׁר יַעֲלֶה בֵּית יְהוָה  
וְלֹא-הָיָה כֹה עוֹד רוּחַ  
וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ, אֲמַת הָיָה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ-צִי--עַל-דְּבָרֶיךָ וְעַל-חֲכַמְתְּךָ  
וְלֹא-הָאֲמַנְתִּי לְדְבָרִים עַד אֲשֶׁר-בָּאתִי וַתִּרְאֶינִה עֵינַי וְהִנֵּה לֹא-הִגַּד-לִי, הַחֲצִי הַסּוֹפֵת חֲכַמָּה  
וְטוֹב אֶל-הַשְּׂמוּעָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתִּי

<sup>65</sup> For more on the dating of Kings, see Knoppers, “Theories of the Redaction(s) of Kings,” 69-88; he notes that it was likely edited in the Second Temple period, but points to the consensus among scholars that it is largely composed of material from the pre-exilic period, before the sixth century BCE. The precise composition remains debated, as Knoppers notes, but he points to some agreement that it took shape as a complex process of redaction of older material into exilic and post-exilic ordering. Our evidence from Qumran is a bit sparse; there are three Qumran manuscripts of Kings (4Q54, 5Q2, and 6Q4). The fragments of Kings found at Qumran reflect a Proto-Masoretic text-type; see further Schenker, “Septuagint in the Text History of 1–2 Kings,” 14-16, and Trebelle, “Qumran Fragments of the Book of Kgs,” 19-39. Trebelle notes that 4Q54 contains portions of two contiguous columns of 1 Kings 7-8; 5Q2 contains parts of 1 Kgs 1:1, 16-17, 27-37; 6Q4 is a poorly preserved manuscript which contains three more fragments from 1 Kgs 3, 12, and 22, as well as half a dozen more fragments from 2 Kgs, of a handful of verses each (“Qumran Fragments of the Book of Kings,” 20-5). This passage about the Queen of Sheba is not attested among the surviving fragments of 1 Kings at Qumran. Even as LXX Kings contains notable differences from MT Kings, the story of the Queen of Sheba's meeting with Solomon is stable across both.

אֲשֶׁרִי אֲנִישִׁיף אֲשֶׁרִי עֲבָדִיךָ אֱלֹהֵי הַעֲמֻדִים לְפָנֶיךָ תְּמִיד הַשְׁמָעִים אֶת-תְּקֻמָּתְךָ  
יְהִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּרוּךְ, אֲשֶׁר חָפֵץ בְּךָ לְתַתֶּנְךָ עַל-כִּסֵּא יִשְׂרָאֵל--בְּאַהֲבַת יְהוָה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל  
לְעַלְמֵם, וַיִּשְׁימָךָ לְמֶלֶךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וַיְצַדֶּקְךָ  
וַתֵּת לְמֶלֶךְ מֵאָה וַעֲשָׂרִים כֶּפֶר זָהָב וּבִשְׂמִים הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד--וַאֲבֹן יָקָרָה לֹא בָא כִּבְשָׁם הֵוָּא עוֹד  
לְרַב אֲשֶׁר-נִתְּנָה מִלְכַת-שָׁבָא לְמֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה  
וְגַם אָנִי חִירָם אֲשֶׁר-נִשְׂאָ זָהָב מֵאוֹפִיר הֵבִיא מֵאוֹפִיר עֲצֵי אֱלֻמִּים הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד--וַאֲבֹן יָקָרָה  
וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-עֲצֵי הָאֱלֻמִּים מִסְעֵד לְבַיִת-יְהוָה, וּלְבַיִת הַמֶּלֶךְ וְכִנּוֹרוֹת וְנִבְלִים לְשָׂרִים לֹא  
בָּא-כֵן עֲצֵי אֱלֻמִּים וְלֹא נִרְאָה עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה  
וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה נָתַן לְמִלְכַת-שָׁבָא אֶת-כָּל-חֲפָצָהּ אֲשֶׁר שְׁאַלָהּ, מִלְּבַד אֲשֶׁר נָתַן-לָהּ כִּיֵּד הַמֶּלֶךְ  
שְׁלֹמֹה וַתֵּסֵן וַתֵּלֶךְ לְאַרְצָהּ הִיא וְעַבְדֶּיהָ

And the Queen of Sheba heard what was to be heard about Solomon due to the name of the Lord, and she came to test him with riddles. She came to Jerusalem with a very great train, camels bearing spices, and lots of gold and precious stones. She came to Solomon and she told him everything that was in her heart. Solomon answered her, all of her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king, nothing which he did not announce to her. The Queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the house which he built. And the food of his table and the sitting of his servants and the attendance of his ministers and their clothing and his cup-bearers and his whole burnt offerings, which he brought up to the house of the Lord, and there was no spirit left in her. And she spoke to the king: "The report was true which I heard in my land, about your things and about your wisdom. I didn't believe the reports until I came and saw it with my own eyes. Look, not even half of it was reported to me- you have wisdom and prosperity/goodness exceeding that which I was told. Happy are your men, happy are your servants, those standing before you continually hearing your wisdom. May the Lord your God be blessed who delights in you such that he set you upon the throne of Israel. Because the Lord loved Israel eternally, he made you king to do justice and righteousness. She gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold and quite a lot of spices as well as precious stone. So many spices have not come since like those which the Queen of Sheba brought to the king Solomon. And also the navy of Hiram, who carried gold from Ophir, brought from Ophir very much sandal-wood and precious stones; the king made sandalwood pillars for the house of the Lord and for the house of the king, harps and psalteries for his singers. No such sandalwood came nor was seen unto this day. The king Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba all her desires which she asked, beyond that which he gave to her from the hand of the king Solomon. She turned and she went to her land, she and her servants. (1 Kings 10:1-13; translation my own)



The narrative opens with the acts of the Queen of Sheba: she hears reports and comes to see Solomon and to test him with riddles (*hiddot*).<sup>66</sup> Although the content of these riddles is left unstated, Solomon's wisdom is repeatedly emphasized. This feature comes to be central to the image of Solomon in later times (see below on Josephus, Matthew, Luke, and Origen, and see Chapter Four for *Midrash Mishlei* and the *Gannat Bussame*).<sup>67</sup> The focus of the narrative in 1 Kings, however, falls less on wisdom than wealth.

The Queen's wealth is emphasized through her great train bearing spices and through the gifts that she gives Solomon (1 Kgs 10:1-2, 10; cf. 2 Chron 9:1,9). Third-person narrative is used to describe these gifts and to testify to Solomon's ability to hold his own even against the absurdly wealthy queen, whose predilection for material goods are underscored through the attention she pays to the features of his house: his cup-bearers, their food, his drinks, his attendants. These claims, however, are then confirmed through the first-person speech attributed to the queen herself. Solomon's wealth, thus, is established through what the Queen of Sheba saw – that is, “all the wisdom of Solomon and the house which he built, and food of his table, and the sitting of his servants and the attendance of his ministers and their clothing and his cup-bearers and his whole burnt offerings which he brought up to the house of the Lord” (1 Kgs 10:4-5).

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<sup>66</sup> Both LXX 1 Kings 10:1 and LXX 2 Chronicles 9:1 interpret the riddles or hard questions, *hiddot* in Hebrew, as enigmas (ἀίνιγμα).

<sup>67</sup> Solomon's special relationship to wisdom is reported in 1 Kings 3:5-9, when he chooses wisdom as his boon from God and God promises that Solomon's wisdom will be unparalleled (3:12). This is a consistent theme in the reception of Solomon as a figure, seen in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, commonly dated to the first century CE, and *Psalms of Solomon*, commonly dated to the second century BCE. For more on Solomon as a figure of wisdom, see Weitzman, *Solomon*, 16-32. The lack of early interest in Queen of Sheba's wisdom suggests it was not central to the Solomonic wisdom tradition until later, although, as Lemprecht argues, this story opens a wide field of semantic possibilities which were cultivated variously in later traditions. See For a discussion of the semantic range of possibilities left open by this narrative and that of Chronicles, see Lemprecht, “Solomon and the “Queen of Sheba,”” 11-34.

The account in 1 Kings 10 emphasizes the importance of her sight in confirming “the report... which I heard in my land,” which she “did not believe... until I came and saw it with my own eyes” (10:6-7) but also her voice through the words she uses to praise Solomon as having “wisdom and prosperity,” happy men and servants, and the blessing of “the Lord your God... who delights in you such that he set you upon the throne of Israel... to do justice and righteousness” (10:6-9). Even as Solomon’s wealth is elevated through contrast with the Queen, it is her sight and her voice which informs the audience of the greatness of Solomon.

In contrast to later traditions, romantic overtones are here largely absent.<sup>68</sup> The context, in fact, function to distinguish the Queen of Sheba from Solomon’s other involvements with foreign women. In 1 Kings 11, Solomon is accused of betraying God’s covenant by worshipping idols, urged on by his many foreign wives. Significantly, however, the account of the Queen of Sheba occurs prior to this accusation, in 1 Kings 10. The discussion there of Solomon’s diplomatic success with the Queen of Sheba extends the account in 1 Kings 9 of his diplomatic success with King Hiram of Tyre.<sup>69</sup> It

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<sup>68</sup> Traditions which assert a romantic relationship between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon include Origen, who associates the Queen of Sheba with the Shulamite lover of the Song of Songs; see further below. Perhaps most famously, the *Kebra Nagast*, a thirteenth-century chronicle of Ethiopian history, devotes over one hundred chapters to the story of the Queen of Sheba, her sexual encounter with Solomon, and the eventual fate of their son Menelik I, the progenitor of the Solomonic dynasty which ruled in Ethiopia until 1974; for more, see Belcher, “African Rewritings,” 441-59.

<sup>69</sup> There is significant scholarly debate about the structure of the Solomonic narrative in Kings, which follows an imperfectly chiasmic structure and is thematically related to the Deuteronomistic discourse of proper kingship. Berman, for example, argues that 1 Kings 9:26-11:13 engages the law of the king (Deut 17:14-20) to describe Solomon’s downfall (“Law Code as Plot Template,” 37). Williams offers a useful synthesis of previous scholarship, arguing that the structure of Kings is not chiasmic but two parallel narratives (1 Kgs 3-8 and 9-11) which nevertheless show a dense network of interrelated concerns in a sophisticated literary account (“Structure of Solomon’s Reign,” 61-63). This work brings up intriguing literary connections within the text but is most useful for our purposes to note that the Solomonic narrative in Kings is complex and evocative, but also ambiguous, in its treatment of Solomon and Israelite monarchy. One benefit of the study of the figure of the Queen of Sheba is the usefully short focal point to consider broader questions of monarchy and the Solomonic past in ancient texts.

is not her gender that is emphasized, thus, but rather her wealth—and thus also her function as a wealthy monarch whose opinion of Solomon conveys an international sense of his wealth as well.

To be sure, the narrative about the Queen of Sheba ends (1 Kgs 10:13; 2 Chron 9:12) with the assertion that Solomon is able to give her all that she desires (כָּל הַפְּצָה).<sup>70</sup> Given her gender, it might be tempting to read this in romantic or sexualized terms. The same verb, however, is used of Hiram of Tyre as well. Phillip Nam suggests that when Solomon is able to do all that Hiram of Tyre desires in 1 Kings 9:11, the sense is that Solomon is participating in economic trade.<sup>71</sup> Inasmuch as פָּצַח is an Akkadian loan-word used in contracts, Nam argues to “do all that one desires” in the context of 1 Kings 9 means to fulfill all the contractual obligations of one’s trading partners.<sup>72</sup> Nam does not extend this insight to the Queen of Sheba, whom he presumes is presented as Solomon’s inferior.<sup>73</sup> I would suggest, however, that this presumption is not borne out by the text – the Queen who tests Solomon with riddles and who brings more spices than had ever been in Israel is hardly presented as inferior, in my view.

Although we disagree about the nature of the Queen of Sheba’s relationship with Solomon, Nam’s discussion of Hiram of Tyre helps to illuminate the description of the Queen of Sheba. The possibility emerges that rather than an allusion to a physical relationship predicated on desire, the narrative ends on an economic note with the

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<sup>70</sup> The word in LXX 1 Kings 10:13 is ἠθέλησεν, an aorist active third person singular form of θέλω, in contrast to the object form of פָּצַח. The Greek form does not substantively change the meaning of the narrative but does not carry the same association with Akkadian contracts.

<sup>71</sup> Nam, *Portrayals of Economic Exchange in the Book of Kings*, 47. Brueggemann sees this as a type of economic trade; *Kings*, 135.

<sup>72</sup> Nam, *Portrayals of Economic Exchange in the Book of Kings*, 47.

<sup>73</sup> Nam, *Portrayals of Economic Exchange in the Book of Kings*, 87.

fulfillment of contractual obligation: Solomon was able to give her gifts equivalent to the ones she had given him. Such an economic reading also helps us to make sense of two verses that discuss Solomon's trade with Ophir (1 Kgs 10:11-12; cf. 2 Chron 9:10-11), which might otherwise seem to break the flow of the narrative: they function as asides that serve to explain how Solomon had the means to reciprocally exchange with the Queen of Sheba.

As noted in the Introduction, my concern in this dissertation is not with the historicity of the Queen of Sheba or the historical accuracy of 1 Kings, topics that has been amply discussed and debated in past research. For our purposes, however, it is useful to note evidence that points to the plausibility of its depiction of a queen as an economic agent and participant in the monarchic reciprocity of mutual gift-giving in the ancient Near East. In the Amarna archive, a fourteenth-century BCE cache of letters sent to the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten from peers in the Levant and Mediterranean world, rulers – including at least one queen – often ask about the gifts that the Pharaoh will send them in return for their own gifts, pointing to the verisimilitude of the model of gift-giving evoked in 1 Kings 10.<sup>74</sup> Though later tradents (and many modern scholars) have largely taken for granted that the language of “desire” between a queen and a king could only be romantic, sexual, or marital in meaning, this is not the only or most likely interpretation within the earliest known narrative about their interactions as we find it in 1 Kings.

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<sup>74</sup> See Cohen and Westbrook, *Amarna Diplomacy*, 1-41, for more on status anxiety preserved in the correspondence. One notable feature of this gift-giving is that the same material is often sent back and forth, as discussed by Avruch (“Reciprocity, Equality, and Status-Anxiety,” 154-64). Thus, 1 Kings 10:11-12, which asserts that Solomon had gold, precious stones, and wood products in excess from his trade with Ophir, mirrors the goods that the Queen of Sheba brought (gold, precious stones, and spices), meaning he would be able to exchange in reciprocal gift exchange with goods of equivalent value.

## 2. 2 Chronicles 9:1-12

Chronologically, the next surviving reference to the Queen of Sheba occurs in 2

Chronicles, which is commonly dated to the early fourth or late third century BCE.<sup>75</sup> As

in 1 Kings, the context is an account of Israel's history in Hebrew. The account is found

in 2 Chronicles 9:1-12; it is largely parallel to that in 1 Kings 10:1-13 and reads as

follows:

ומלכת-שְׁבָא, שְׁמְעָה אֶת-שְׁמֵעַ שְׁלֹמֹה, וַתָּבֹא לְנִסּוֹת אֶת-שְׁלֹמֹה בְּחִידוֹת בִּירוּשָׁלַם בְּחִיל כְּבֹד  
מְאֹד וּגְמִלִים נְשָׂאִים בְּשָׂמִים וְזָהָב לְרֹב, וְאֶבֶן יָקָרָה; וַתָּבֹא, אֶל-שְׁלֹמֹה, וַתְּדַבֵּר עִמּוֹ, אֶת כָּל-  
אֲשֶׁר הָיָה עִם-לְכָבָהּ.  
וַיִּגְדֵּל-לָהּ שְׁלֹמֹה, אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיהָ; וְלֹא-נִעְלַם דְּבַר מִשְׁלֹמֹה, אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִגִּיד לָהּ  
וַתֵּרָא, מִלְכַת-שְׁבָא, אֶת, חֲכַמַת שְׁלֹמֹה--וְהִבִּיתָ, אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה  
וּמֵאֲכָל שְׁלֶחֶנוּ וּמוֹשָׁב עֲבָדָיו וּמַעֲמַד מְשָׁרְתָיו וּמִלְבוּשֵׁיהֶם, וּמִשְׁקִיו וּמִלְבוּשֵׁיהֶם, וַעֲלִיתוּ, אֲשֶׁר  
יַעֲלֶה בֵּית יְהוָה; וְלֹא-הָיָה עוֹד בָּהּ, רוּחַ  
וַתֵּאמֶר, אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ, אֲמַת הַדָּבָר, אֲשֶׁר שְׁמַעְתִּי בְּאַרְצִי--עַל-דְּבָרֶיךָ, וְעַל-חֲכַמְתֶּךָ  
וְלֹא-הֵאֲמַנְתִּי לְדְבָרֶיהֶם, עַד אֲשֶׁר-בָּאתִי וַתֵּרְאֶינִי עֵינַי, וְהִנֵּה לֹא הִגַּד-לִי, חֲצִי מִרְבִּית  
חֲכַמְתֶּךָ: יִסְפָּת עַל-הַשְּׂמוּעָה אֲשֶׁר שְׁמַעְתִּי  
אֲשֶׁרִי אֲנֹשִׁיךָ, וְאֲשֶׁרִי עֲבָדֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵ--הַעֲלָמִים לְפָנֶיךָ תְּמִיד, וְשָׁמַעִים אֶת-חֲכַמְתֶּךָ  
הִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּרוּךְ, אֲשֶׁר חָפֵץ בָּךְ לַתְּתֶךָ עַל-כִּסְאוֹ לְמֶלֶךְ, לִיהְיוֹת אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּאַהֲבַת אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְהַעֲמִידוֹ לְעוֹלָם, וַיִּתְּנֶךָ עֲלֵיהֶם לְמֶלֶךְ, לַעֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה  
תַּתֵּן לְמֶלֶךְ מֵאֵה וְעֲשָׂרִים כֶּפֶר זָהָב, וּבְשָׂמִים לְרֹב מְאֹד--וְאֶבֶן יָקָרָה; וְלֹא הָיָה כִּבְשָׁם הַהוּא,  
אֲשֶׁר-נִתְּנָה מִלְכַת-שְׁבָא לְמֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה  
וְגַם-עֲבָדֵי חִירָם (חִירָם) וְעֲבָדֵי שְׁלֹמֹה, אֲשֶׁר-הִבִּיאוּ זָהָב מֵאוֹפִיר--הִבִּיאוּ עֲצֵי אֶלְגוּמִים, וְאֶבֶן  
יָקָרָה  
וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-עֲצֵי הָאֶלְגוּמִים מְסֻלוֹת לְבֵית-יְהוָה, וּלְבֵית הַמֶּלֶךְ, וּכְנֹרוֹת וּנְבָלִים, לְשָׂרִים;  
וְלֹא-נִרְאוּ כֵהֶם לְפָנָיִם, בְּאַרְצֵי יְהוּדָה  
וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה נָתַן לְמִלְכַת-שְׁבָא, אֶת-כָּל-חֲפָצָהּ אֲשֶׁר שָׂאָלָהּ, מִלְּבַד, אֲשֶׁר-הִבִּיאָהּ אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ;  
וַתִּסְפֹּךְ וַתִּלְךָ לְאַרְצָהּ, הִיא וְעַבְדֶּיהָ

The Queen of Sheba heard the fame of Solomon, and she came to test  
Solomon with riddles in Jerusalem in a very great train and camels

<sup>75</sup> The precise date of the composition of Chronicles is unclear, but scholarly consensus is that it can be dated to the late fourth or early third century BCE, i.e., written in the early Hellenistic period but with materials from the Persian period; see Grabbe, *History of the Jews*, 98; Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9*, 116-17. Good argues that Alexandrian Jews of the Ptolemaic period (301-198 BCE) translated the text (*Septuagint's Translation*, 18-27). Chronicles is only preserved in one fragment at Qumran, 4Q118, which is dated paleographically to the Hasmonean era, 50-25 BCE. See Trebolle, "Chronicles," who asserts that this is sufficient to attest to the presence of Chronicles in the Qumran library.

bearing spices and very much gold, and precious stones. She came to Solomon and she spoke with him of all which was in her heart. And Solomon answered everything she said and there was nothing from Solomon which he did not announce to her. The Queen of Sheba saw Solomon's wisdom and his house which he built. And the setting of his table and the sitting of his servants and the standing of his ministers and their clothing, his offerings which he sent up to the house of the Lord, and there was no spirit left in her. She said to the king: truly, the report which I heard in my land of your words and of your wisdom, I did not believe their words until I came and my eyes saw, indeed, not half of your abundance of wisdom was told to me; you exceeded the reports which I heard. Blessed are your men, and blessed are your servants, those standing before you continually, hearing your wisdom. Blessed is the Lord your God who desired you to place you upon his throne to rule for the Lord your God; for love of Israel, your god established it forever and set you over them to rule, to do justice and righteousness. She gave to the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold and very many spices and precious stones; there was never such spices as the Queen of Sheba gave to the king Solomon. Also, the servants of Hiram (Hiram) and the servants of Solomon who brought gold from Ophir, thy brought almug wood and precious stones. The king made almug-wood pillars for the house of the Lord and for the house of the King, and harps and psalteries for the singers, and there was not seen such as those before in the land of Judah. The king Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba all her desires which she asked, beside that which she brought to the king, and she turned and went to her land, her and her servants. (2 Chronicles 9:1-12; translation my own)

Here too, the Queen of Sheba hears reports of Solomon, and so comes to visit him with an enormous train to test him with hard riddles (*hiddot*; 2 Chron 9:1; cf. 1 Kgs 10:1-2).

The content of the riddles it not specified, but it is stated that he is able to answer all them (2 Chron 9:2; cf. 1 Kgs 10:3). She examines his home with delight and extravagant praise (2 Chron 9:3-8; cf. 1 Kgs 10:4-9). She gives incomparably generous gifts (2 Chron 9:9; cf. 1 Kgs 10:10), yet he is able to give her all that she desires before she returns home (2 Chron 9:10-12; cf. 1 Kgs 10:11-13).

Given the parallels between the story of the Queen of Sheba as told in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, the two have often been conflated, especially in scholarly research on later traditions about the Queen of Sheba. Aurelia Hetzel, in her monograph on this figure, emphasizes their common witness to a stable “schéma narratif.”<sup>76</sup> Jacob Lassner, in his discussion of the Queen of Sheba in Islamic and Jewish literature, focuses solely on the version in 1 Kings 10, mentioning the account in 2 Chronicles only in passing.<sup>77</sup> Dina Stein, in her discussion of *Midrash Mishlei*, refers to the parallel passages in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9 as a single biblical account.<sup>78</sup>

To be sure, there is a fundamental overlap between the two accounts: the material about the Queen in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles deploys the same basic narrative arc and sequence of actions. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, the details of their differences prove significant as well, speaking to the overarching concerns and the pattern of variation that we see in the early reception of the Queen of Sheba as it differs from the overarching concerns and the patterns of variation that mark the creativity surrounding this figure in Late Antiquity. Most notably, as we shall see, the former is marked by a tendency to use of the Queen to convey ideological arguments about Solomon and his rule from minority groups in the face of an indifferent broader world. We see this already in the two biblical accounts which are set within two distinct portraits of Solomon’s reign.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Mulder, *Kings*, 249; Hetzel, *La Reine de Saba*, 15.

<sup>77</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 14.

<sup>78</sup> Stein, *Textual Mirrors*, 33: “The biblical account (which appears in 1 Kgs 10:1–13; 2 Chron 9:1–12) is short and enigmatic, perhaps concealing earlier traditions and certainly giving rise to later elaborations.”

<sup>79</sup> Boschoff, “The source narrative of a legend,” 35–46; for a discussion of Solomon’s reign more generally, van Keulen, *Two Versions of the Solomonic Narrative*; see also Japhet, *Ideology of Chronicles*.

There are two modes of difference – the scribal shifts and the contextual difference –between the accounts which suggest the value of considering the narrative in Kings and the narrative in Chronicles on their own terms. The narrative about the Queen of Sheba in 2 Chronicles is marked by a number of minor textual differences from the corresponding narrative in 1 Kings; for example, 1 Kings 10:1 and 2 Chronicles 9:1 both convey that the Queen of Sheba went to Jerusalem, but the former uses a locative *heh* while the latter uses the preposition *bet* to indicate where she goes. 2 Chronicles 9:9 suggests the Queen’s gifts were until that point unseen in Israel, while 1 Kings 10:10 suggests that such gifts have never since been seen, in a minor modulation in temporal framing. This pattern fits well with the theory that 1-2 Chronicles reflects a post-exilic Jewish scribal culture that conserves through the transmission and repetition of its historiographical precedents while also introducing innovations through novel redaction. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is thus significant in attesting the inclusion of the Queen of Sheba within a Hebrew historiographical tradition that extends into the Persian period.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The scribal activity is evident also in witnesses to LXX Kings, which is typically dated to around the second century BCE. LXX Kings is well known for preserving a version of the text with a different order for some of the events of Solomon’s reign and the omission of some Deuteronomistic material. In addition, the building of the temple is given a more prominent position in Solomon’s narrative arc. See further Schenker, “Septuagint in the Text History of 1–2 Kings,” 14-16; van Keulen, *Two Versions of the Solomonic Narrative*, 291-95. The Septuagintal form of 1 Kings 10:1-13 or 2 Chronicles 9:1-12 could have plausibly offered an alternative reading of the Queen of Sheba narrative to the ones found in the Masoretic traditions of 1 Kings 10:1-13 or 2 Chronicles 9:1-12, but the Greek shows no dramatic translational changes. While the Septuagint does engage with an alternate literary tradition, one which is possibly older than the tradition represented by the MT, this particular narrative unit shows remarkable stability across the MT and LXX; see Feldman, *Dead Sea Scrolls Rewriting Samuel and Kings*, 5. The Greek text of 2 Chronicles 9:1-12 mirrors the Hebrew text of 2 Chronicles 9:1-12, while LXX 1 Kings 10:1-13 mirrors MT 1 Kings 10:1-13. As in the Masoretic text of the narratives of the Queen of Sheba, we see the convergence of LXX 1 Kings 10:1-13 and LXX 2 Chronicles 9:1-12. The majority of vocabulary converges, and the minor differences do not affect the narrative structure or semantic meaning. A brief overview of three types of minor changes – grammatical shifts, minor excisions, and vocabulary variation across manuscripts – will suffice to illustrate this point. LXX 1 Kings 10:1 understands the name of the Lord and the name of



The precise dating of these two texts proves less relevant, for our purposes here, than their relationship. Whatever the precise form of the Chronicler's source for this story, the lexical parallels with the version in 1 Kings evoke a scribal context for the composition.<sup>81</sup> Here as elsewhere, its distinctive ideological program is built up through the interweaving of received materials from earlier sources, with pre-exilic materials thus brought to bear on post-exilic concerns.<sup>82</sup> It is within this context that the narrative of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon is here preserved, as a story deployed in the chronological arc of the history of Solomon's reign, across the different forms that arc took in the Persian period.

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Solomon as two direct objects, where the corresponding Masoretic text uses the accusative marker *et* with "the name of Solomon" and the prepositional lamed to show that the name of the Lord is subordinated in a prepositional phrase. This shift in grammatical categorization does not significantly alter the force of this verse. Another type of variation emerges in the form of simple excisions. The substance of 1 Kings 10:6-7 are similar in the MT and LXX, but Vaticanus excludes "wisdom" from the Queen of Sheba's description of Solomon's traits at LXX 1 Kings 10:7. LXX 2 Chronicles 9:4 excludes "Solomon" at the opening of the Queen of Sheba's blessing. One of the most common types of translational variation, in vocabulary choices, is largely visible among Greek manuscripts of Kings and also between the Septuagintal Chronicles and Kings. In manuscript witnesses to LXX Kings 10:2, there is some variation in the translation of spices, **בשמים**. Several cursive manuscripts include ἄρωμα (b, i, o, c2, e2) instead of ἡδυσμα. This pattern is repeated in witnesses to LXX 1 Kings 10:10. In 10:5, the manuscripts show variety in their translation of "his cup-bearers" **מְשָׁבְרָיו**. While most manuscripts translate this as οἰνοχοεὺς, one manuscript, i, has a gerundive form of ἡνιοχεύω (chariot-driver) while εὐνοῦχο (eunuch) is used by b, o, c2, e2 in 10:5. The Greek manuscripts show more variation in their translation of LXX 1 Kings 10:9, which show a variety of tenses (past and present, perfect and imperfect) in the blessing of the Queen of Sheba. In witnesses to LXX 1 Kings 10:11, **אֵלֶּמְוֵי** is rendered πελεκητός (hewn wood) (with manuscripts b, o, z, c2, e2 adding an alpha privative to indicate unhewn wood). Between LXX 2 Chronicles 9:1-12 and LXX 1 Kings 10:1-13, we see the LXX 2 Chronicles 9:3 refer to the wisdom, σοφία, of Solomon, where the parallel passage in LXX 1 Kings 10:4 refers to the forethought, φρόνησις, of Solomon; this is repeated in the blessing of the Queen several verses later. 1 Kings 10:7 refers to the **λάλος**, speech, where 2 Chronicles 9:6 refers to λόγος, reports. Altogether, these shifts and changes in the translation of this passage show remarkable narrative fidelity. While normal variations can be seen among the Greek manuscripts of this text, those variations are no different from one another than the shifts seen between Kings and Chronicles in either Hebrew or Greek.

<sup>81</sup> Auld famously (and contentiously) posited that rather than simple dependence, the Chronicler and the redactor of Samuel-Kings had a shared source which explains the overlap and also the divergences of the texts. See Auld, *Kings Without Privilege* and responses to his position in Rezetko, Lim, and Aucker, eds., *Reflection and Refraction*.

<sup>82</sup> For more on scribal culture, see Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*; van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*.

To consider the differences between the representation of the Queen of Sheba in 2 Chronicles and that in 1 Kings, thus, it is important to look to the wider literary context, rather than limiting our analysis to the internal dynamics of the narratives which feature her. The Chronicler is well known for promoting a more idealized, if not sanitized, vision of Solomon's rule.<sup>83</sup> Solomon never has any foreign wives. He only has successful, positive interactions with his fellow kings. Consequently, the reports of his fame and the Queen's desire to see him appear less fraught than in 1 Kings. In 2 Chronicles, her visit therefore functions primarily as a witness to Solomon's wealth, importance, and glory, and it reflects a more straightforward use of the story of the visit in its positive vision of Solomon as a golden age king. The effect, for the representation of the Queen of Sheba, is to underscore the function of her role as monarch in the book of Chronicles, one who trades with Solomon, and this role is far more significant than any personal characteristic of gender, which is tacitly evoked by the narrative context of Kings.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, we can consider the usefulness of the ambiguities engendered by narrative repetition. Gary Knoppers has argued that the Chronicler redescribes Solomon's relationship with Hiram of Tyre as a hierarchical relationship with Solomon on top of the hierarchy, as opposed to the more egalitarian relationship modeled in the book of Kings.<sup>85</sup>

Although Knoppers does not consider the Queen of Sheba in this context, it is possible

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<sup>83</sup> See Japhet, *1 Chronicles*, 15. Note, however, Japhet's contention that Solomon's rule is actually diminished in several important ways by the Chronicler; *Ideology of Chronicles*, 376-79. As Japhet notes, although the problematic aspects of Solomon's rule are diminished in Chronicles, so are his accomplishments, which were attributed to David, and in a more literal sense, more Solomon material was eliminated than added overall.

<sup>84</sup> Reinhartz makes a similar argument when she notes the anonymity of the Queen of Sheba; *Why Ask My Name?* 70-2. Reinhartz argues that the lack of a name for the Queen of Sheba (like the Witch of Endor) functions to highlight her role in the narrative so that it becomes the primary focus of the character, rather than the individuating feature of a name. For more, see the discussion in the Introduction.

<sup>85</sup> Knoppers, "More than Friends?"

that Chronicles signals a similar shift in the relationship between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, from trading partners to interrelated polities akin to those living under Achaemenid or Hellenistic empire. Knoppers highlights the differences between gift-giving in the Achaemenid Persian context in which material from Chronicles was produced, in contrast to the ancient Near Eastern context in which the materials of Kings were developed.<sup>86</sup> We might consider how this figure of the Queen of Sheba in the Second Temple period can be used to evoke gift-giving practices separated by centuries, and the way the Chronicler imported her story in such a way as to mask his own innovations.

### 3. Josephus

The Jewish historiographical appeal to the Queen of Sheba is picked up in the first century CE in the writings of Flavius Josephus, who treats her visit to Solomon in *Antiquities* 8.165-75. Whereas 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles do so in the context of a Hebrew-language writings about Israel's history aimed at Jews, Josephus' *Antiquities* is a Greek-language account of the history of the Jewish people aimed ostensibly at Roman readers; not only does Josephus here retell Israel's history in Greek with the conventions of Hellenistic and Roman historiography, but he appeals to both non-Jewish and Jewish sources to argue for the antiquity and importance of his people.<sup>87</sup> It is in this context that

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<sup>86</sup> Knoppers argues that Kings presents a parity relationship based on a treaty, while Chronicles presents a client-patron relationship between Hiram and Solomon with no treaty between them ("More than Friends?" 52).

<sup>87</sup> I am most persuaded by the account in Mason, "Should One Wish to Inquire Any Further," 64-103; Mason, "Of Despots, Diadems, and Diadochi," 323-49. For more on the debates Mason's work engages, see Thackeray's *Josephus*, which influenced much twentieth century literature on Josephus and the genre of his works, as well as Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition*; Rajak, *Josephus the Historian*; Ribary,

the Queen of Sheba appears, functioning as a foreign monarch who is used to confirm the world-historical significance of Solomon and thus Israel.

Solomon is a significant point of pride for Josephus, and the *Antiquities* depicts him as a philosopher king.<sup>88</sup> He can easily compare Solomon to other hero kings because Solomon's wealth, wise words, and temple-building activities resonated with his audience, especially those raised in the Greco-Roman educational system.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, Josephus accentuates certain aspects of the narrative about Solomon in 1 Kings 10:1-13 and downplays others, so as to balance the positive qualities of wealth, intelligence, and magnanimity attributed to Solomon with qualities of ruthlessness and greed that may mar Solomon's image.<sup>90</sup> Josephus, like the Chronicler, largely valorizes Solomon, but in a distinct moral ecosystem and literary tradition.

The first mention of the Queen of Sheba occurs in *Antiquities* 8.158. In *Antiquities* 8.156-57, in the midst of his discussion of Solomon's rule, Josephus pauses to explain why he consistently calls the Egyptian kings "Pharaoh" in his discussion of Israel's interactions with Egypt while naming the Israelite leaders separately (i.e., Moses, Solomon, etc.). Josephus justifies this practice by reference to Herodotus of

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"Josephus' 'Rewritten Bible,'" 251-54; Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome*.

<sup>88</sup> For a discussion of Solomon that integrates Josephus' work into a broader view of Solomon as a wisdom figure, see Weitzman, *Solomon*, 26 (Solomon as a wise youth), 58 (Josephus suggests Solomon's audience laughed, perhaps nervously, at his judgement of the two women), 70 (Josephus says Solomon learned magic from Eleazar), 142 (Josephus' presentation of riddling contests as a Greco-Roman trope, discussed more below), 164 (Josephus suggests Solomon forgot the law in his old age). Weitzman also integrates Josephus' presentation of the Queen of Sheba episode into his chapter-length discussion of the Queen on pp. 137 and 140, where he argues the queen's skepticism is the most salient feature of her presentation.

<sup>89</sup> Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Solomon," 103-67 argues that Josephus' portrait responded to the charge that Jews had "failed to produce great men," and "hate non-Jews" (p. 103) by offering an exhaustive summary of the different elements of Josephus' presentation, a theme that emerges both in the *Antiquities* and in *Against Apion*, suggesting the importance of this argument to Josephus (p. 109).

<sup>90</sup> Verheyden, "Solomon in Josephus," 103.

Halicarnassus. In the second book of his *Histories*, Herodotus asserts that there were 330 male Pharaohs after the construction of Memphis until a woman came to rule, namely, Nitocris (Hdt 2.100).<sup>91</sup> In *Antiquities* 8.158 Josephus seems to refer to this same Egyptian queen, although he calls her Nikaule. Josephus states that Nikaule came to visit Solomon after she had ruled Egypt and Ethiopia and assures his reader that he will discuss her soon (περὶ μὲν οὖν ταύτης μετ' οὐ πολὺ δηλώσομεν) – suggesting his equation of the Egyptian queen mentioned by Herodotus with the “Queen of Sheba” mentioned in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles.<sup>92</sup> Thus Josephus argues that Solomon is not just a novel figure of interest to Jewish history, but a king with an international profile, who interacted with a monarch known to Herodotus and whose story thus fills out the gaps concerning Israel in earlier Greco-Roman historiography.

Josephus' account of the visit of the queen to Solomon in *Antiquities* 8.165-73 largely parallels the accounts of 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9, which were most likely among his sources. For instance, the Queen of Sheba comes because she has heard reports, and she gives an enormous amount of gold. She sees the same cup bearers and

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<sup>91</sup> For more on Josephus' use of Herodotus, see Almagor, “This is What Herodotus Relates,” 83-100. Herodotus asserts that Nitocris was a Babylonian princess whose brother had established her to rule in Egypt after he was killed by his people; she invited his killers to a feast and flooded the room in which they were eating to kill them in revenge (Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.100). This story of Nitocris is intriguingly evocative of later Muslim traditions of the Queen of Sheba's revenge on the usurper of her father's throne; for more on these later Muslim traditions, see Powers, “Demonizing Zenobia,” 127-82. Baert argues that the Queen of Sheba legends might also be connected to Assyrian tales of Semiramis, who “is given a prominent place on the pillars of the kings of Assur” (*Heritage of Holy Wood*, 337); their late antique reception, in particular, shares a number of features, including tales of conversion (to the god of Assur, in Semiramis' case) and an association with Ethiopia, hybrid features, and Nebuchadnezzar (*Heritage of Holy Wood*, 337-38).

<sup>92</sup> This is the only place where Josephus names the queen whom he discusses in *Antiquities* 8.165-73; she is otherwise completely anonymous, particularly in the account of her visit to Solomon. This mirrors the characterization of the Queen of Sheba in the 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, where she is an anonymous character, identified only by her status as queen and the land that she rules. Her title and office become the signifier of her as an actor and speaker in the text, as argued by Reinhartz, *Why Ask My Name?* 48, 70-3.

objects which elicit the same formula of a blessing. In short, although with further elaboration, this iteration of the Queen of Sheba is deployed in the same plot.

Although the plot is fundamentally unchanged, there are several important details introduced in Josephus' account. Josephus emphasizes that the Queen of Sheba was amazed (ἐκπλήσσω) and astonished (θαυμάζω) at Solomon's house and particularly at the temple cultic practices of the Levitical priests (8.168); Solomon "easily" understands the Queen of Sheba's questions and concerns even faster than anyone could have anticipated. In Josephus' telling, the Queen stays for many days observing the order and rhythms of Solomon's household and temple, a detail that is absent from Kings and Chronicles. She gives many gifts, including 20 talents of gold and an immense quantity of spices and stones. Note that Josephus pares back the description of her gifts in 1 Kings 10:10, making no mention of their superlative quality in Israelite history and decreasing the amount of gold given to one-sixth of the amount Kings boasted about (i.e., 120 talents versus 20). Instead, Josephus focuses on the largesse of Solomon which is seen through his extreme generosity to the Queen of Sheba, presenting her with whatever she asked. Significantly here and in a marked difference to some later iterations of this narrative, Josephus does not describe any physical characteristics and never expounds on the difficult questions the Queen asks of Solomon. In the following chapters, we will see how these major areas were ripe for expansion in the eyes of later authors. In the *Antiquities*, however, Josephus left them entirely unexplored.

Much research on the *Antiquities* has approached it as a "biblical retelling" and thus focused on the question of what specific version(s) of biblical texts Josephus used and what he "expands" and "omits" in relation to these sources; representative in this

regard is the first article-length study of this episode by Christopher Begg, published in 2004, which primarily asked which biblical account (i.e., 1 Kings 10:1-13 or 2 Chronicles 9:1-12) Josephus most adhered to and what rewriting techniques he used.<sup>93</sup> Étienne Nodet suggests that Josephus utilized Hebrew versions of Jewish scriptures, which he translated into Greek as needed for his work (cf. *Ant.* 1.5, 9.208, 10.218, where he specifically references Hebrew writings).<sup>94</sup> Although Josephus' histories agree with the Masoretic Text over the LXX in many places, Nodet notes that Josephus seems aware of disparate textual versions of the LXX and other sources, and he argues that Josephus' paraphrase tends toward the preservation of multiple, discrepant sources, even at the cost of complicating his narrative.<sup>95</sup> Inasmuch as MT 1 Kings 10:1-13 and LXX 1 Kings 10:1-13 are largely consistent,<sup>96</sup> the question of the precise language of Josephus' biblical sources is less pressing. It is notable that Josephus' account of the Queen of Sheba is not marked by any changes to the action or the dialogue as found in Kings and Chronicles. He even utilizes the same term of "desire" as found in LXX 1 Kings 10:13 and LXX 2 Chronicles 9:12 but here in relation to knowledge and expertise.

Just as it is useful to treat the account of 2 Chronicles on its own terms, however, it is also useful to consider Josephus' account on its own terms. Seen from this perspective, it is significant that Josephus includes more specification of the reasons for

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<sup>93</sup> Begg, "The Visit of the Queen of Sheba According to Josephus," 107-27. Begg argues that Josephus is most consonant with traditions of Vaticanus and Lucianic traditions (pp. 118, 124), but notes that the overlap between Septuagintal and Masoretic traditions forestalls much precision along this line of questioning (i.e., which source Josephus used). Begg usefully points out that although the changes Josephus makes are more subtle than those found in later Jewish, Christian, and Muslim accounts, he nevertheless carefully crafted his presentation of Solomon to his audience (p. 127).

<sup>94</sup> Nodet, "Josephus and Discrepant Sources," 260.

<sup>95</sup> Nodet, "Josephus and Discrepant Sources," 275.

<sup>96</sup> See footnote 80 above.

the Queen's visit in the daily reports she received, while also articulating details that help the narrative fit into his larger authorial goals in the *Antiquities*. In a manner akin to what we have seen in 2 Chronicles, Josephus stays close to the account of the Queen's visit in 1 Kings. At the same time, however, Josephus remaps Israel's past in terms that make sense within the Roman Empire of his own time.

Consistent with Josephus' emphasis on Solomon's wisdom,<sup>97</sup> his account of the Queen of Sheba begins with an emphasis on her wisdom as well:

165 Τὴν δὲ τῆς Ἀγύπτου καὶ τῆς Ἄθιοπίας τότε βασιλεύουσιν γυναῖκα σοφία διαπεπονημένη καὶ τᾶ θαυμαστὴν ἀκούουσιν τὴν Σολόμωνος ἀρετὴν καὶ φρόνησιν ἐπιθυμία τῆς ὄψεως αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν ὁσημέραι περὶ τῶν ἐκεῖ λεγομένων πρὸς αὐτὸν ἤγαγε·

166 πεισθῆναι γὰρ ὑπὸ τῆς πείρας ἀ47 οὐχ ὑπὸ τῆς ἀκοῆς, ἣν εἰκὸς ἐστὶ καὶ ψευδεῖ δόξῃ συγκατατίθεσθαι καὶ μεταπεῖσαι πάλιν, ὅλη γὰρ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀπαέουσι κεῖται, θέλουσα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐλθεῖν διέγνω, μάλιστα καὶ τῆς σοφίας αὐτοῦ βουλομένη λαβεῖν πεῖραν αὐτῆ προτείνασα καὶ λῦσαι τὸ ἄπορον τῆς διανοίας δεηθεῖσα ἤκεν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα μετὰ ποῆς δόξης καὶ πλούτου παρασκευῆς·

The woman who then ruled over Egypt and Ethiopia was an eager student of wisdom. She heard of the marvelous virtue and intelligence of Solomon. It was her desire to see him, based on what was said day after day of matters there, that brought her to him. For, wishing to be convinced by experience rather than by hearsay (which tends to give its assent to false appearances and then again to convince one of something else, for it is entirely dependent on those making the report), she decided to come to him, desiring above all to test his wisdom for herself by propounding questions and asking him to resolve the mental confusion. She came then to Jerusalem with much glory and costly pomp.<sup>98</sup> (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.165-66)

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<sup>97</sup> See the discussion in Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Solomon," especially 108-24, 164-67. Feldman builds off the less comprehensive treatments of Sarow, *Quellen-kritische Untersuchungen zur Geschichte König Salomos*, 44-8, Feldman, "Josephus as an Apologist," 69-98, and van der Meulen, *Das Salomo-Bild*. Feldman there argues that the Queen of Sheba narrative offers a romantic veneer to the Solomonic story (pp. 122, 165), but I do not agree with his characterization; the Queen discussed here is an external and reliable witness to Solomon's best qualities, and Josephus does not evince so much interest in their relationship as much as he does in Solomon's generosity and wisdom, which are well represented by their encounter.

<sup>98</sup> The translations used in this chapter are adapted from the translation of Begg and Spilsbury, *Judean*



Like 1 Kings, Josephus uses her sight to witness Solomon's greatness, albeit here explicitly calling upon Hellenistic historiographical privileging of eyewitnesses over hearsay.<sup>99</sup> Josephus lingers over the psychological motivations for Solomon and the Queen of Sheba's actions. He explains that the Queen of Sheba cultivated wisdom habitually (σοφία διαπεπονημένην, *Ant.* 8.166) and received daily reports about Solomon which eventually convinced her to visit him (8.166-67). Josephus highlights the curiosity that prompted the Queen of Sheba to go abroad.<sup>100</sup> The value of her visit lies in her desire to see (ὄραω) rather than merely hear (ἀκουάζομαι), in order to derive definitive evidence or proof (πεῖρα). In defense of her position, Josephus notes (perhaps with a shade of irony) that secondhand reports lack reliability, depending as they do on what Begg and Spillbury translate as the "substance of the messenger," ἀπαγγελία.<sup>101</sup> Josephus, then, uses this moment in the story of the Queen of Sheba to offer a non-Jewish witness to Jewish history, one known from the reliable history of Herodotus, not unlike the dynamics seen in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and discussed below.<sup>102</sup>

The beginning of Josephus' account of the Queen's visit follows the same structure as 1 Kings 10:1-5, but with more material on Solomon's wisdom and the Queen of Sheba's emotional response to Solomon:

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*Antiquities.*

<sup>99</sup> See Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, 165-67; note, however, Marincola's argument that as early as the author Timaeus, cited by Polybius, there existed arguments that books were more significant than personal experience as resources; Josephus' argument thus fits into a simmering Greco-Roman historiographical debate.

<sup>100</sup> This is the quality highlighted by Weitzman, *Solomon*, 140.

<sup>101</sup> Begg and Spillbury, trans., *Judean Antiquities*, 8.166.

<sup>102</sup> This would answer some of the concerns to which Josephus explicitly responds in *Against Apion*. He may also, in the process, reflect subtly on his own position as an eye-witness historian of a major event (i.e., to the Jewish Revolt and destruction of the Temple; see *War* 6.403-21).

167 ἐπηγάγετο γὰρ καμήλους χρυσοῦ μεστὰς καὶ ἀρωμάτων ποικίλων καὶ λίθων πολυτελῶν. ὡς δ' ἀφικομένην αὐτὴν ἠδέως ὁ βασιλεὺς προσεδέξατο. τὰ τε ἅα περὶ αὐτὴν φιλότιμος ἦν καὶ τὰ προβαόμενα σοφίσματα ῥαδίως τῆ συνέσει καταλαμβάνομενος θᾶπτον ἢ προσεδόκα τις ἐπελύετο.

168 ἡ δ' ἐξεπλήσσετο μὲν καὶ τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ Σολόμωνος οὕτως ὑπερβάουσαν αὐτὴν καὶ τῆς ἀκουομένης τῆ πείρα κρείττω καταμαθοῦσα, μάλιστα δὲ θαύμαζε τὰ βασιλεία τοῦ τε κά ους καὶ τοῦ μεγέθους οὐχ ἦττον δὲ τῆς διατάξεως τῶν οἰκοδομημάτων·

169 καὶ γὰρ ἐν ταύτῃ ποὴν τοῦ βασιλέως καθεώρα φρόνησιν. ὑπερεξέπληττε δ' αὐτὴν ὅ τε οἶκος ὁ δρυμῶν ἐπικαλούμενος Λιβάνου καὶ ἡ τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν δεῖπνων πολυτέλεια καὶ τὰ τῆς παρασκευῆς αὐτοῦ καὶ διακονίας ἢ τε τῶν ὑπηρετούντων ἐσθῆς καὶ τὸ μετ' ἐπιστήμης αὐτῶν περὶ τὴν διακονίαν εὐπρεπές, οὐχ ἦκιστα δὲ καὶ αἱ καθ' ἡμέραν ἐπιτελούμεναι τῷ θεῷ θυσίαι καὶ τὸ τῶν ἱερέων καὶ Λευιτῶν περὶ αὐτὰς ἐπιμελές.

170 ταῦθ' ὀρῶσα καθ' ἡμέραν ὑπερεθαύμαζε, καὶ κατασχεῖν οὐ δυναθεῖσα τὴν ἔκπληξιν τῶν βλεπομένων φανερὰν ἐποίησεν αὐτὴν θαυμαστικῶς διακειμένην· πρὸς γὰρ τὸν βασιλέα προήχθη λόγους εἰπεῖν, ὑφ' ὧν ἠλέγχθη σφόδρα τὴν διάνοιαν ἐπὶ τοῖς προειρημένοις ἡττημένη·

For she brought camels laden with gold, as well as various perfumes and precious stones. When she arrived, the king received her gladly and was solicitous for her in all respects. By means of his sagacity, he readily apprehended the riddles that were proposed to him and solved these more quickly than anyone expected. She was filled with amazement at the wisdom of Solomon, that it was so outstanding, and when she realized that it was greater, when put to the test, than she had heard. She especially marveled at the palace, at its beauty and size no less than the arrangement of its edifices, for in this she perceived the king's great intelligence. But it was the building called the "Forest of Liban" and the costliness of the daily banquets that astonished her immeasurably, as did his furnishings and his body of servants, the clothing of his retainers, and their decorum coupled with skill. Most of all, though, it was the sacrifices that were offered daily to God and the priests and Levites' attentiveness to these. Seeing these things each day, she greatly marveled, and, unable to restrain her amazement at what she saw, she made clear her sense of wonderment. For she was led to speak to the king by the things she was shown, her mind being completely overwhelmed by what we have mentioned. (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.167-70)

In this passage and what follows, we see how Josephus' account of the Queen of Sheba's visit is not always more expansive than those of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles; by separating

the categories of food, furnishing, and clothing from the wisdom and the daily offerings of Solomon, Josephus lessens the impact of the list of aspects of Solomon's household that the Queen of Sheba finds impressive found in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9; rather, the Queen of Sheba is largely impressed by Solomon's wisdom and daily offerings, and only impressed by the richness of his household and servants to a lesser extent (*Ant.* 8.165-73). Relatedly, Josephus' account lacks any reference to Ophir (cf. 1 Kings 10:11-12, i.e., the verses which so many modern commentators consider an insertion).

In account of their conversation, Josephus emphasizes the superlative nature of the Queen's surprise and joy at the management of Solomon's household, servants, and temple, the same qualities the Queen noted in 1 Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-12:

171 “πάντα μὲν γάρ, εἶπεν, ὃ βασιλεῦ, τὰ διάκοῆς εἰς γινῶσιν ἐρχόμενα μετ' ἀπιστίας παραγίνεται, τῶν δὲ σῶν ἀγαθῶν, ὧν αὐτός τε ἔχεις ἐν αὐτῷ, λέγω δὲ τὴν σοφίαν καὶ τὴν φρόνησιν, καὶ ὧν ἡ βασιλεία σοι δίδωσιν, οὐ ψευδῆς ἄρα ἡ φήμη πρὸς ἡμᾶς διήλθεν, ἀ οὕσα ἀληθῆς πολὺ  
172 καταδεεστέραν τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν ἀπέφηνεν ἥς ὁρῶ νῦν παρούσα τὰς μὲν γὰρ ἀκοὰς πείθειν ἐπεχείρει μόνον, τὸ δὲ ἀξίωμα τῶν πραγμάτων οὐχ οὕτως ἐποίει γινώριμον, ὡς ἡ ὄψις αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ παρ' αὐτοῖς εἶναι συνίστησιν. ἐγὼ γοῦν οὐδὲ τοῖς ἀπαεομένοις διὰ πλῆθος καὶ μέγεθος ὧν ἐπυνθανόμην πιστεύουσα ποῦ πλείω τούτων ἰστόρηκα.

173 καὶ μακάριόν τε τὸν Ἑβραίων λαὸν εἶναι κρίνω δούλους τε τοὺς σοὺς καὶ φίλους, οἱ καθ' ἡμέραν τῆς σῆς ἀπολαύουσιν ὄψεως καὶ τῆς σῆς σοφίας ἀκροώμενοι διατελοῦσιν. εὐλογῆσειεν ἂν τις τὸν θεὸν ἀγαπήσαντα τὴν δε τὴν χώραν καὶ τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ κατοικοῦντας οὕτως, ὥστε σὲ ποιῆσαι βασιλέα.”

174 Παραστήσασα δὲ καὶ διὰ τῶν λόγων, πῶς αὐτὴν διέθηκεν ὁ βασιλεύς, ἔτι καὶ ταῖς δωρεαῖς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῆς ἐποίησε φανεράν· εἴκοσι μὲν γὰρ αὐτῷ τάλαντα ἔδωκε χρυσοῦ ἀρωμάτων τε πλῆθος ἀσυόγιστον καὶ λίθον πολυτελεῖ· λέγουσιν δὲ ὅτι καὶ τὴν τοῦ ὀποβαλσάμου ρίζαν, ἣν ἔτι νῦν ἡμῶν ἡ χώρα φέρει, δούσης ταύτης τῆς γυναικὸς ἔχομεν.

175 ἀντεδωρήσατο δ' αὐτὴν καὶ Σολόμων ποῖς ἀγαθοῖς καὶ μάλισθ' ὧν κατ' ἐπιθυμίαν ἐξελέξατο· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἦν, ὃ τι δεηθείη λαβεῖν οὐ παρέσχεν, ἀ ἐτοιμότερον ὧν αὐτὸς κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἐχαρίζετο προαίρεσιν ἄπερ ἐκεῖνη τυχεῖν ἡξίου προῖεμένος τὴν μεγαλοφροσύνην ἐπεδείκνυτο. καὶ ἡ μὲν τῶν Ἀγυπτίων καὶ τῆς Ἀθιοπίας βασίλισσα ὧν προειρήκαμεν τυχοῦσα καὶ μεταδοῦσα πάλιν τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν παρ' αὐτῆς εἰς τὴν οἰκείαν ὑπέστρεψε.

“For indeed all those things,” she said, “O king, that come to one’s knowledge by way of hearsay meet with disbelief. Nonetheless, the report that reached us concerning the good things you have within yourself—I speak of your wisdom and intelligence—as also concerning the things that kingship gives you, was no lie. But although true, it [the report] indicated a well-being on your part that is much inferior to what I now see when present. For the reports were only trying to persuade but did not make evident the status of your affairs, the way the actual sight of them and being present to them brings home. For whereas I did not actually believe my informants, due to the quantity and magnitude of the things I was finding out, I have experienced much more than these. And I judge the Hebrew people to be a blessed one, as also your slaves and friends, who daily enjoy the sight of you and continue to hear your wisdom. Let each one praise God, who so loved this country and those living in it, that he made you king.” Having shown by these words how much the king had impressed her, she made her state of mind clear by her gifts. For she gave him twenty talents of gold, plus countless quantities of perfumes and precious stones. For they say that we also have the root of the balsam bush—which our country still produces—as a gift from this woman. Solomon, for his part, gifted her with many good things in return, especially those she selected in accordance with her desire. For there was nothing that she asked to receive that he did not award her. Rather, he displayed his magnanimity by giving up more readily what she requested to obtain than by presenting her things in accordance with his own choice. And the queen of the Egyptians and Ethiopia, of whom we spoke previously, having obtained both a portion from the king and given him a share of what was hers, returned to her own country. (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.171-75)

While utilizing the same narrative structure as these earlier Hebrew historiographical texts, Josephus’ account is more concerned with *how* the Queen articulates her praise. Josephus affirms that Solomon’s generosity motivated his gift-giving to the Queen of Sheba, and he side-steps the implication, found in 1 Kings 10:11-12, that the material from Ophir was part of Solomon’s gift-giving process; instead Josephus includes a reference to that process after he closes the Queen of Sheba narrative.

Josephus affirms that the Queen rules over Egypt and Ethiopia three separate times in the *Antiquities* (8.159, 165, 175). Josephus' assertion is the earliest example of a tradition that garnered wide traction in later centuries.<sup>103</sup> Significantly for our purposes, Egypt and Ethiopia are two regions with deep resonance in the Roman geographical imagination. Egypt, like Judea, had an ancient history that Greco-Roman writers respected precisely for its antiquity (i.e., an intellectual tradition with roots stretching back to Herodotus).<sup>104</sup> It was annexed as a province in the early Roman imperial era and was one of the richest regions, in terms of taxes and trade, in the entirety of the empire.<sup>105</sup>

Although Josephus does not call her "Queen of Sheba" (cf. 1 Kings 10:1), his emphasis on her rulership of Ethiopia seems to reflect his treatment of "Saba" earlier in the work: in *Ant.* 2.249 he asserts that Saba is the royal city of Ethiopia (εις Σαβάν πόλιν βασίλειον οὗσαν τῆς Ἰθιοπίας) which was renamed Meroe by Cambyses. Whereas Egypt was under Roman control at the time, Ethiopia was never within Roman control.<sup>106</sup> Ethiopia's independence may explain the contradictory accounts of its location which pepper classical geographic literature. In fact, classical authors consistently show a lack of care about the distinction between Ethiopia and India, despite a developed Greco-Roman geographic literary tradition from the period of Alexander onwards.<sup>107</sup> Schneider argues that this is actually a form of ancient knowledge, one which defined the southern

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<sup>103</sup> I.e., in Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, discussed below, as well as the fourteenth-century *Kebra Nagast*, which famously associates the Queen of Sheba with Ethiopia; for more on the *Kebra Nagast*, see Belcher, "African Rewritings," 441-59.

<sup>104</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 2. 34-7, 50, 64-5, 82-3.

<sup>105</sup> Schneider, "So-called Confusion between India and Ethiopia," 192.

<sup>106</sup> George Hatke's recent work on Nubia and Ethiopia in antiquity suggests that Josephus may have named "Ethiopia" the area that today would be recognized as the kingdom of Nubia. Nubia in the first century CE had close trading ties to Egypt, in contrast to the Aksumite empire, which traded via the Arabian gulf with southern Arabian polities and in the centuries after the national fourth-century conversion would claim an ancestral connection with the Queen of Sheba and the name Ethiopia; *Aksum and Nubia*, 8.

<sup>107</sup> Schneider, "So-called Confusion between India and Ethiopia," 193.

and eastern edges of the *oikumene* in common terms in order to render the world legible.<sup>108</sup> What seems clear from his overview is that Ethiopia was the fuzzy southern edge of the known world, beyond the reach of the Roman empire, only sometimes accessible by trade. Thus, the Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia, in Josephus' terms, is the monarch of the edge of the known world and the extremely wealthy better-known neighbor to Solomon's court, who praises him and his knowledge and brings new trade opportunities to Israel.

In another connection between his world and the accounts in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9, Josephus describes the balsam plant that the Queen of Sheba brought to Solomon, thereby connecting the visit to his contemporary Judean economy.<sup>109</sup> Josephus avers that the plant is present in his own time. Whereas the account in 1 Kings 10:10 specified that nothing like the Queen of Sheba's goods had been seen since her visit, Josephus testifies to a presence of a material good in the contemporary world of his primary audience, updating the story of her visit with familiar items.<sup>110</sup>

The figure of the Queen of Sheba is used by Josephus to introduce the motif of riddles which are proffered by the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, as in 1 Kings 10:1 and 2 Chronicles 9:1. Later sources, as we shall see in Chapter Four, describe the content of the riddles. By contrast, Josephus uses the reference to riddling as a framing device for his

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<sup>108</sup> Schneider, "So-called Confusion between India and Ethiopia," 195.

<sup>109</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 8.174. For more on the Judean economy in Galilee, see Ramos, *Torah, Temple, and Transaction*.

<sup>110</sup> This hearkens to the long tradition of Solomonic artifacts which litter the landscape of late antique and medieval accounts of royal investiture. One of the most famous versions of this is the throne of Solomon, supposedly found in the tenth-century Byzantine Magnaurum. This elaborate manifestation of the throne described in Kings and Chronicles, the throne and its mythology had by the time of its construction built up considerably. Iafate's work on the wandering throne of Solomon and other items – including his ring – offers a sustained look at the interplay between evocation and materialization in the material goods deemed to have been from Solomon and his reign; see Iafate, *Wandering Throne of Solomon*, especially 1-54.

wider discussion of Solomon's interaction with other monarchs. These thematic considerations show Josephus' rhetorical work to present Solomon as a global rather than a regional figure, thus enhancing the image of Israel for his Roman audience. In *Antiquities* 8.158, Josephus sets up his later chapters by saying that he will tell the story of the Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia who visited Solomon, but before he can do so he must make a larger argument about the agreement of the writings from other traditions with the sacred writings of the Jews. Josephus then introduces into his Solomonic account a story of a riddle contest between Hiram and Solomon. The story of the Queen of Sheba is here the impetus for telling the stories of Hiram and Ophir, correlating them with other textual archives, which, as Weitzman notes, puts them squarely in the genre of Greek riddle contests from the same period.<sup>111</sup>

Carol Dougherty notes that riddles presented in this way act as a localized stand-in for conflict in a variety of literary genres.<sup>112</sup> In Greek literature, the riddles posed are impossible to answer, because they depend on a context or wordplay that is not legible at the time the riddle is presented. Josephus marks the point at which the Queen of Sheba story begins to converge with the impossible riddle theme inherited from Greek literature. The Queen's riddles frame these other contests, and the contests in turn confirm the likelihood of a visit from the Queen of Sheba oriented towards just such queries. The theme of the riddles is picked up often in later literature, and indeed this story is associated with the question-and-answer genre which flourished in the early Middle Ages

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<sup>111</sup> Weitzman, *Solomon*, 142.

<sup>112</sup> Dougherty, *Poetics of Colonization*, 49. Josephus uses the same term, *ainigmasin*, to describe the riddles both monarchs asked Solomon, which is the term used in LXX 1 Kings 10:1 and LXX 2 Chronicles 9:1. This term is the most common word for riddle in Greek, and Aristotle refers to it in the *Poetics* (22.5), saying "The essence of a riddle is this: to combine things which are impossibly true. It is not possible to do this by the arrangement of words, but it requires the use of a metaphor."

in the scholastic cultures of the Mediterranean, including Byzantine Greek texts, Jewish Hebrew texts, and Arabic texts.<sup>113</sup> In the context of Josephus, however, we see the riddle contest used not to explain existing colonial systems from the viewpoint of a dominant society, but rather as proof of the importance of a marginalized Jewish group within a dominant Roman society.

#### **4. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke and Other Second Temple Jewish Literature**

The Queen of Sheba is not a prominent figure in the rest of Jewish literature from the Second Temple period. To be sure, this may reflect in part the focus of much of the parabiblical literature of Second Temple Judaism, which intensively engages with the biblical past in a manner that tends to focus on pre-Sinaitic figures and eras.<sup>114</sup> What is striking, however, is her absence even in the literature that engages with Israel's monarchic past and the Davidic monarchy. Eupolemos, writing in Greek in the second century BCE, evinced a sharp interest in Solomon as a monarchical figure, but the surviving fragments of his writings make no mention of the Queen.<sup>115</sup> Even though 1 Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-12 use her to highlight Solomon's wisdom, she is not linked to Solomon in those Second Temple Jewish texts that expound upon his wisdom; neither the Psalms of Solomon nor the Wisdom of Solomon make any mention of the Queen of Sheba.<sup>116</sup> Nor does she feature in the writings of Philo of Alexandria.<sup>117</sup> We

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<sup>113</sup> Burke, "On Byzantine Apocrypha and Eratopokriseis Literature."

<sup>114</sup> For an overview of the literature of this period, see Stone, ed., *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*; DiTommaso, Henze, Adler, eds., *Embroidered Bible*.

<sup>115</sup> Eusebius' quote in BNJ 723 F 2b is an excerpt of the *Preparatio evangelica*. There, Eusebius offers a long summary of Eupolemos' letters between Solomon and other local kings. This is related to but distinct from Josephus' vision of Solomon having multiple riddle contests with local kings.

<sup>116</sup> For a critical edition of the Psalms, see Wright, ed., *Psalms of Solomon*; for a literary and historical



might speculate about traditions that did not survive into our current archive of Second Temple literature, but it remains striking that she is not a widely deployed figure in our extant sources. She is certainly not yet what she becomes in Late Antiquity, as we shall see in Chapters Two, Three, and Four.

We do, however, find brief allusions to this figure in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, written in Greek at the end of the first century, contemporaneous with the writings of Josephus.<sup>118</sup> These references stand as a partial exception to the pattern of her neglect in Second Temple Jewish writings about Solomon's wisdom. For both Matthew and Luke, however, she is cited as a part of a broader appeal to a specifically Davidic past to evoke the messianic future.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the context is an account of Jesus plucking grains in the field on the Sabbath. In response to a critique from Pharisees, he first justifies his act by reference to Davidic precedent (Mt 12:1-4). The chapter continues with a series of questions and statements about the Sabbath and the proper relationship between a distinct temporal sphere and the actions of an individual.<sup>119</sup> In the process, Jesus is depicted

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analysis, see Bons and Pouchelle, *Psalms of Solomon*; Gordley, "Psalms of Solomon as Resistance Poetry," 366-85.

<sup>117</sup> Philo only quotes King and Chronicles sparingly, three verses total, and these do not cover the Queen of Sheba narratives. See Yonge, *Works of Philo*, 918.

<sup>118</sup> For an overview of the dating of the gospel accounts, see Perkins, *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels* 18-23, 166-250.

<sup>119</sup> Moore argues that the Queen of the South is here deployed as an ambivalently powerful woman to articulate Jesus' superiority to the Pharisees through a figure who evokes both the Solomonic golden age of Israel and also contemporaneous Roman power structures. "Matthew's Decolonial Desire," 1-14. Scholtz, for his part, argues that this is part of a chiasmic structure embedded within Matthew, from 11:2-17:13 ("One Messiah, two advents, three forerunners," 1). Boerman argues instead that the Matthean chiasmus is chapters 11-12; see "Chiasmic structure of Matthew 11-12," 313-25. For our purposes, it is notable that the figure of the Queen of the South anchors these chapters in a specific and unique example that is not readily paralleled in other parts of the story.

appealing to a series of figures, including eschatological and supernatural figures like the Son of Man (12:8, 40,) Beelzebub (12:24), and Satan (12:25, 27), but also figures from the biblical past, including David (12:3), Isaiah (12:17), and Jonah (12:39, 40). The Queen of the South is cast among these figures in a dense network of statements about not only the Sabbath, but about the time of eschatological judgement.

It is within Jesus' statement about Jonah as a sign to his generation that one finds the passing reference to the "Queen of the South":<sup>120</sup>

βασιλισσα νότου ἐγερθήσεται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινεῖ αὐτήν· ὅτι ἦλθεν ἐκ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς ἀκοῦσαι τὴν σοφίαν Σολομῶνος, καὶ ἰδοὺ πλεῖον Σολομῶνος ὧδε.

The Queen of the South will come in the judgement of this generation and will condemn it; (she) who came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and look! One greater than Solomon is here. (Gospel of Matthew 12:42; translation my own)

On the one hand, the Queen is here adduced as a witness to Solomon's wisdom, as in 1 Kings 10:1-2. On the other hand, her significance becomes reinterpreted to speak to the eschatological judgement here predicted. She points to Solomon, who in turn as is cited as pointing to someone even wiser (i.e, presumably Jesus himself).

William F. Albright and C.S. Mann, in their Yale Anchor Bible commentary to the Gospel of Matthew, identify the "Queen of the South" with the queen of South Arabia.<sup>121</sup> This is among the rare exceptions to a broader consensus: despite the shift in nomenclature, virtually all modern scholarly commentaries on the Gospels as well as premodern Christian interpreters like the Syriac tradents preserved in the *Gannat*

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<sup>120</sup> The concern with the sign of Jonah has been discussed extensively in scholarship. See Kowalski, "Meaning and Function of the Sign of Jonah in Matthew," 35-40; Chow, *Sign of Jonah Reconsidered*.

<sup>121</sup> Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 938.

*Bussame* understand this to be a reference to the Queen of Sheba.<sup>122</sup> That the “Queen of the South” is the Queen of Sheba is suggested by what is said of her relationship to Solomon. More specifically, Solomon is described as an exemplar of wisdom, pointing forward to the messianic age, and the Queen of Sheba who recognized Solomon’s wisdom is said also to judge the very generation to which Jesus speaks, condemning those who reject him.

The parallel in Luke has only minor differences in its reference to the Queen:

Βασίλισσα νότου ἐγερθήσεται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῶν ἀνδρῶν τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης, καὶ κατακρινεῖ αὐτούς ὅτι ἦλθεν ἐκ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς ἀκοῦσαι τὴν σοφίαν Σολομῶνος, καὶ ἰδοῦ, πλεῖον Σολομῶνος ὧδε.

The Queen of the South will rise in the judgement over this generation of men and condemn them, (she) that came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and look! One greater than Solomon is here.  
(Gospel of Luke 11:31; translation my own)

While Matthew deploys the figure of the Queen who came to hear Solomon’s wisdom in a larger unit that focused on good behavior in the proper temporal frame, Luke discusses the Queen of the South in a more limited cast which includes Beelzebub (11:15, 18-19), Satan (11:18), Jonah (11:29-30), and the Son of Man (11:30). The text compares Jonah, the Son of Man, and Solomon, each as a sign (σημεῖα) to their generation.<sup>123</sup> Where Matthew places the Queen of the South reference in a larger context of temporal reasoning – what constitutes appropriate Sabbath behavior as well as what to expect at the time of judgement – Luke places it in a more extended discussion of the period of judgement with more specific parallels to earlier generations.

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<sup>122</sup> See Luz, *Matthew*, 220; Bovon, *Luke* 2, 135-43; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 936-7.

<sup>123</sup> For more on the Lukan tradition about the sign of Jonah, see Landes, “Jonah in Luke,” 133-63; Soulen, “Sign of Jonah,” 331-43.

The congruence of the traditions in Luke and Matthew suggests that this might be an early tradition, perhaps even pre-70 CE.<sup>124</sup> However, the brevity of the reference and general disinterest in this figure in early Christian apocalypse, most significantly Revelation, makes it difficult to speak more specifically about the deployment of this figure. Nonetheless, the evocation of the Queen of Sheba does have a particular resonance in the Gospel of Matthew, which is well known for integrating many references to non-Jewish women from Israel's past (e.g., Pilate's wife in Mt 27:19; Ruth in Mt 1:5). Jean Moore has recently suggested that these references function to construct the subjectivity of his community between Roman and Jewish authority.<sup>125</sup> Moore contends that Matthew utilizes the figure of the Queen of Sheba to contest Pharisaic authority, as here symbolized through Solomon.<sup>126</sup> If so, we may already see a precedent for what we find later and more extensively in Origen (on whom see below) – namely, a positive understanding of her foreignness.

Moore further argues that the Queen of Sheba, as a female monarch, represents masculine power in a colonial context (over the feminized male subjects).<sup>127</sup> Moore's

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<sup>124</sup> Despite this potential, this is not widely discussed in Q studies; for example, Catchpole only mentions the Queen of the South to articulate what he sees as the pattern of matching male and female figures common to both Luke and Matthew; see *Quest for Q*, 190-92. In Sisson's discussion of this passage in Q discourses, he largely discusses the Queen to disambiguate the tradition evoked by Jesus against the narrative of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles; Sisson, "Beelzebul, Solomon, and Jonah," 92-108. Kloppenborg mentions her five times total (three of these are quotations), most significantly to argue that "signs of the kingdom" were more than miracles; *Q, the Earliest Gospel* 32-3, 71, 81, 134. Goodacre does not mention this parallel at all in *Case Against Q*. Shellard briefly discusses this quote as an example of Luke "muddling" a reference that is clearer in Matthew; *New Light on Luke*, 75. The brevity of the reference, it seems, renders it an opaque data point for an argument either for or against the existence of Q. Scholars who reject the Q hypothesis, especially those who follow the Farrer/Goodacre theory, would argue that this is an example of Matthean influence on Luke (for an overview of this position and its implications, see Goodacre and Perrin, eds., *Questioning Q*), in which case it need not be a pre-70 tradition.

<sup>125</sup> Moore, "Matthew's Decolonial Desire."

<sup>126</sup> Moore, "Matthew's Decolonial Desire."

<sup>127</sup> Moore, "Matthew's Decolonial Desire."

account of the work this figure does in the Gospel of Matthew is particularly intriguing in light of Matthew's genealogy (1:1-16), which contrasts with the genealogy of Luke (3:23-38) most strongly through its focus on Israelite history and his inclusion of women into Jesus' lineage. Matthew's interest in women, then, shows this figure deployed alongside other figures from the biblical past – and the period of the Davidic monarchy more particularly – in order to imagine the messianic age and eschatological future.

The Queen of Sheba, of course, is not the only foreign queen from Israel's monarchic past who is projected into the eschatological future within New Testament literature. The most famous case is that of Jezebel in the Book of Revelation (Rev 2:20-23; cf. 1 Kings 16:31, 18:4-21:25). A useful contrast can be drawn between the Gospels' positive positioning of the Queen of the South as eschatological judge and Revelation's strikingly violent presentation of Jezebel. Olivia Lester Stewart notes that the figure of Jezebel in the book of Revelation is closely related to the female prophetic figures of the *Sibylline Oracles*.<sup>128</sup> Although later Christian traditions would relate the Sibyl to the Queen of Sheba,<sup>129</sup> their first-century uses seem to be contrasting. In fact, the treatment of the Queen of the South in Matthew and Luke otherwise departs from what Lester Stewart shows to be the role of gender in eschatological discourses in the first century.<sup>130</sup>

Lester Stewart draws attention to the ways in which the language of prophecy could be

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<sup>128</sup> Lester Stewart, *Prophetic Rivalry*, 5-12.

<sup>129</sup> Pausanias, in his list of named sibyls, included Sabba among the list (*Description of Greece* 10.12.19), and when this tradition garnered wide circulation in Europe in the Middle Ages, this figure was associated with the Queen of Sheba, most notably in the *Livre de Sibille* by Philippe de Thaun, the earliest extant Anglo-Norman poet. See Momigliano and de la Tóree, "Sibylline Oracles," for an overview; see further Schields, ed., *Le Livre de Sibille by Philippe of Thaun*. Baert notes that this association is first made in Christian texts in the ninth century, by George Monachos, although it was not a prevalent tradition in Byzantine texts after the twelfth century, when it becomes popular in Western Christian texts; *Heritage of Holy Wood*, 347.

<sup>130</sup> Lester Stewart, *Prophetic Rivalry*, especially 51-70.

deployed violently, whether against wealthy female figures like Jezebel or prophetic female figures like the Sibyl. Like the Queen of Sheba, Jezebel is an Israelite queen deployed in a prediction of an eschatological future. In this tradition in the Gospels, however, this queen is praised and valued as a witness to wisdom. What we noted above in 1 Kings 10 as the importance of her sight and voice in witnessing to Solomon's greatness is here extended to her role as a witness to the messiah and judge of the generations in which he comes. In this, the Gospels also deploy her in a manner akin to what we have seen in Josephus' *Antiquities*, where she functions as a trustworthy non-Jewish eyewitness to Jewish history.

For our purposes, the references to the Queen of Sheba in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are also significant for their influence on the Christian reception of this figure, including the *Testament of Solomon*, which mentions the Queen of the South in passing as a witch.<sup>131</sup> Significantly for the purposes of this dissertation, the version in Matthew is the basis for one of the narratives studied in the final chapter of the dissertation, which is preserved in a Syriac commentary on Matthew 12:42. It is also critical for understanding why this Queen comes to have a place in the interpretation of the Song of Songs by Origen of Alexandria, to which we will now turn.

## 5. Origen of Alexandria

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<sup>131</sup> The *Testament of Solomon*, a pseudepigraphical composition written in Greek, describes Solomon's magical abilities, including his ability to conscript demons into helping him build the Temple. The composition is of a variable date, but Boustán and Beshay persuasively argue that it is a Christian composition which emerged between the third and fourth centuries; see "Sealing the Demons, Once and for All," 99. In the *Testament of Solomon*, the figure of the Queen of the South is one among many royal and supernatural figures which praise and pay obeisance to Solomon. I view this text as a narrative of Solomon's magical ability which incorporates the Matthean figure among a broader cast, and thus do not incorporate it into my analysis of the reception of the visit of the Queen of Sheba.

As David Stern notes, “No biblical book’s ancient interpretation is more extensively documented than that of the Song of Songs. Nor is there another biblical book that has so clearly been subjected to so many different exegetical approaches.”<sup>132</sup> The differences between Rabbinic Jewish and early Christian interpretations of the Song of Songs have long fascinated scholars, not least because their competing claims are among the most salient evidence for Jewish and Christian contestation over biblical interpretation in the first centuries of the Common Era.<sup>133</sup> Among the main points of difference concerns the precise identity of the speakers of the Song of Songs, who are unmarked. Does the text feature a man speaking lovingly to God, or two lovers speaking to one another, or two would-be lovers arguing over a third? Among the answers found in Jewish literature is that the speakers are God and God’s beloved Israel.<sup>134</sup> Among early Christian answers is the equation of the beloved instead with the Church – a move that is significant, for our purposes, inasmuch as Origen of Alexandria drew this connection with appeal to the Queen of Sheba.<sup>135</sup>

Origen of Alexandria, in the third century CE, wrote extensively about the Song of Songs in both homiletic form and in a ten-book commentary (the latter now largely lost); he attributed the Song of Songs to Solomon and identified the Queen of Sheba with

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<sup>132</sup> Stern, “Ancient Jewish Interpretation of the Song of Songs,” 87.

<sup>133</sup> See especially Hirshman, *Rivalry of Genius*, 90-4. Stern has astutely noted, however, that reading this text as a battleground for different interpretations risks reinscribing the same assumptions of a “true” textual meaning as the ancient interpreters make; “Ancient Jewish Interpretation of the Song of Songs,” 107.

<sup>134</sup> This, argues Stern, is the position of the Aramaic Targum of the Song of Songs; “Ancient Jewish Interpretations of the Song of Songs,” 88-9, 107.

<sup>135</sup> For the significance of the Song of Songs in early Christian communities, see Shuve, *Song of Songs and the Fashioning of Self-Identity*.

the beloved Shulamite woman.<sup>136</sup> In the process, Origen casts the figure of the Queen of Sheba into a more expansive role than is granted by the texts of Kings and Chronicles. Origen presents much of the poem of the Song of Songs as the voice of the Queen of Sheba, who is in a dialogue with her lover Solomon. In this, Origen makes explicit a romantic relationship that is absent in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, but he also extends the seemingly positive reading of her foreignness in the Gospel of Matthew. By associating the nameless woman in the Song of Songs with the Queen of Sheba, he is able to deploy her as a type or metaphor for the Gentile Church.<sup>137</sup> Just as Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke predicted that the Queen would come in the messianic age in order to witness the wisdom of Davidic scions and to judge men, so Origen seems to read the predictions about this foreign Queen in terms of what he knows as the Gentile Church. The alterity of the Queen of Sheba is here cast in a positive light.

Origen mentions the Queen of Sheba twice in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. The context and argumentation are explicitly and self-consciously exegetical in character, expounding the Song of Songs in light of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, on the one hand, and Matthew and Luke, on the other – while also interpreting them in terms of one another. The first reference makes the case for an allegorical approach with reference to her wonder for Solomon’s table and cup bearers in 1 Kings 10:5:

I doubt if we may think that the queen, who had come from the ends of the earth with the intention of hearing Solomon’s wisdom (cf. Mt 12:42) was

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<sup>136</sup> We do not have the Greek original of Origen’s work; instead, we have a fourth-century translation by Rufinus of Aquileia. Rufinus translated the first three books (of ten) of Origen’s *Comm. Song of Songs*, which is the sum of our extant archive of this text. See the introduction to Origen, *Comm. Song of Songs*, 12. For more on Origen’s life and writings, see Twigg, *Origen*.

<sup>137</sup> See the comments by Lawson in his translation of Origen, *Comm. Song of Songs*, 12.



so lacking in sense as to marvel at bodily meats and that ordinary wine and the cup-bearers in the king's employment (cf. 1 Kgs 10:5).<sup>138</sup>

The Queen of Sheba is first evoked as an example for Origen's larger argument that the text uses metaphorical statements in his commentary on Song of Songs 1:2b, "Your breasts are better than wine."<sup>139</sup> Thus, Origen takes the report of what Queen of Sheba sees and says as an indication that she did not literally mean what she had said, laying the groundwork for further allegorical interpretation. The breasts are anything but the breasts of an actual human woman, just like the food and drink of Solomon's table must be metaphors for Solomon's wisdom and judgement, because regular food would not impress the Queen of Sheba. By reading 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles through the lens of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Origen is able to argue that what is mentioned in the former as a sign of the economic might of the monarchs must be taken not only as a sign, but an obvious one, of the allegorical meanings of scriptural text.

In Origen's longer comments on the Queen of Sheba, she is treated as exemplary of the divine mystery that is the scriptural foreshadowing of the black and beautiful Church of the Gentiles. Origen weaves together metaphorical and literal readings of biblical texts to argue for his highly allegorical understanding of the Song of Songs:

Now, however, since we are on the subject of the Church that comes of the Gentiles and calls herself black yet beautiful, though it may seem a long and toilsome matter to collect from the Divine Scriptures the passages containing types foreshadowing this mystery, and to consider in what way they so foreshadow it, it seems to me that we should not entirely omit the task, but should refer to it as briefly as may be.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Origen, *Comm. Song of Songs*, 67. The English translations are taken from the edition by Lawson of Origen, *Comm. Song of Songs*, 94-7. The translation is based on the critical edition of Rufinus' Latin translation found in Baehrens, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller*.

<sup>139</sup> Origen, *Comm. Song of Songs*, 67.

<sup>140</sup> Origen, *Comm. Song of Songs*, 93; n.b. I have replaced "advert" with "refer" in this citation for ease of reading.

Origen first cites Numbers 12:1 and links the Ethiopian woman whom Moses married to the Queen of Sheba, whom he identifies via citation of Matthew 12:42 and Luke 11:31 as the Queen of Sheba “who came to visit Solomon to hear his wisdom.” He then cites 1 Kings 10:1-12 to produce a dense citational network to justify his reading of the text as a love song between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. His treatment of the Queen of Sheba, in other words, is shaped by biblical exegesis on every level.

Even as Origen exemplifies the exegetical principle of interpreting scripture from scripture, he also uses Josephus and cites him explicitly. In particular, Origen repeatedly associates the Queen of Sheba with Ethiopia with reference to Josephus’ *Antiquities*. The relationship between Origen and Josephus is intriguing. Origen uses Josephus’ assertion that the Queen of Sheba was the ruler of Ethiopia and Egypt to buttress his own reading of the beloved in the Song of Songs. Both authors use the narrative about her familiar from Kings and Chronicles. As we have seen, Josephus extends the historical discourse of these sources, using the story of the Queen’s visit to Solomon to frame his own larger historical argument about the relevance of Solomon and Israel, going so far as to model his accounts of Solomon’s interactions with other monarchs on the story of his riddle contests with the Queen of Sheba in Kings or Chronicles. Origen, however, approaches the accounts in Kings and Chronicles in exegetical rather than historical terms, building up a network of allegorical, intertextual signification that, like the references to the “Queen of the South” in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, are no less about the past than the present and future.

## 6. Babylonian Talmud: Bava Batra 15b

The last significant reference to the Queen of Sheba in the pre-600CE era emerges from the Babylonian Talmud, edited between the fourth and sixth centuries. The relevant passage is found in B. Bava Batra 15b, and it is somewhat debatable if it counts as a reference to the Queen of Sheba *per se*. The context is the famous Talmudic passage that is the first Jewish source to list the precise contents and order of the Tanakh (B. Bava Batra 14b-16b), which includes various discussions of who wrote certain books and when precisely certain books were set.

The relevant reference occurs in the midst of a broader discussion of Job and the era in which he lived. Rabbi Nathan is credited with the suggestion that Job lived in the days of the Queen of Sheba due to the reference to “Sheba” in Job 1:15. Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani, an Amoraic sage, then speaks in the name of Yonatan to assert that anyone who says that the Queen of Sheba was a woman is mistaken because “מלכת שבא” (better translated or understood as) “מלכותא דשבא”:

רבי נתן אומר איוב בימי מלכות שבא היה שנאמר (איוב א, טו) ותפל שבא ותקחם וחכמים  
אומרים איוב בימי כשדים היה שנאמר (איוב א, יז) כשדים שמו שלשה ראשים...  
א"ר שמואל בר נחמני א"ר יונתן כל האומר מלכת שבא אשה היתה אינו אלא טועה מאי  
מלכת שבא מלכותא דשבא

Rabbi Nathan said that Job lived in the days of the Queen of Sheba, as it is written: “Sheba fell upon (them) and took them away” (Job 1:15).

But the sages say Job lived in the days of the Chaldeans, as it is written, “Chaldeans formed three bands...” (Job 1:17).

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani says that Rabbi Yonatan said that anyone who says “*malkat Sheba*” (cf. 1 Kings 10:1, 2 Chronicles 9:1) is a woman is nothing more than mistaken; what is *malkat Sheba*? It is the kingdom of Sheba. (B. Bava Batra 15b; translation my own)

In other words, Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani translates the reference *malkat sheba* in 1 Kings 10:1 into Aramaic that reflects his understanding that Solomon was visited not by Queen of Sheba but the kingdom of Sheba (a metonym for representatives of the kingdom).

In this space, then, the Queen of Sheba first functions as a possible historical anchor for Job, but then as an absence, a potential misunderstanding that might confuse people. This clarifying note is added to a larger discussion not only of the era in which Job lived, but of the order and authorship of books of Tanakh more generally. This is an unusual and provocative site in Rabbinic literature which explicitly theorizes not just the proper order of scriptural texts but also their authorship, editing, and inclusion into the canon.<sup>141</sup> The inclusion of the questioning of the very existence of a *queen* of Sheba is especially intriguing because the entire discussion revolves around the historicization of biblical texts – when they were written and by whom – and it is this historical discourse in which the figure of the Queen was rejected, despite the fact that in ancient Jewish literature she is otherwise found precisely in historical texts (i.e., Kings; Chronicles; Josephus).

Most significantly, for our purposes, Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachamni's statement can be read as a capstone of Rabbinic disinterest in her character prior to and inclusive of the Talmud: Rabbinic Jewish texts are otherwise totally silent about the Queen of Sheba. This is perhaps the strongest evidence yet that the Jewish interest in the Queen of Sheba that we see beginning around the sixth and seventh centuries CE did not develop out of already-extant discourses about her in early Rabbinic tradition. The contrast is striking:

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<sup>141</sup> For more on this, see Brandes, "Sages as Biblical Critics," 216.

whereas the Talmud includes a denial of her very existence, the Jewish sources that we will consider in Chapters Two, Three, and Four include extensive and detailed narratives about the Queen of Sheba with little connection to accounts in 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, or Josephus' *Antiquities*, speaking to a notable shift in her symbolic capital, as first attested with the *Targum Sheni to Esther*.

## **7. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I surveyed the ancient materials which discuss the Queen of Sheba, with the aim of setting the stage for my argument in the following chapters for the distinctiveness of the discourse about her that develops between the sixth and ninth centuries CE. Early materials show a relatively narrow range of interests regarding her figure that – as we shall see – contrasts sharply with the complex of narrative traditions about her character that later develops.

To be sure, the early materials do display differences. As we have seen, the book of Kings and the book of Chronicles cast her visit in different terms, even though they deploy the same narrative sequence. The book of Kings presents Solomon as an ambiguous character, attributing both good and bad behavior throughout his reign, and the narrative of his successful trade partnership with the Queen of Sheba acts as a hinge between his economic successes with Hiram and the foreign wives which tempt him into idolatry. In contrast, the book of Chronicles portrays Solomon as an entirely successful figure whose kingdom broke apart due to the youthful indiscretion of Rehoboam, Solomon's heir (2 Chron 10:1-18). The Queen of Sheba's visit, in this context, acts as a verification of Solomon's wealth and greatness. A focus on the function of the character

of the Queen of Sheba allows us to see the practices of elite gift-giving implied by the text and contextualized by the archaeological data, which helps to explain the royal practices in the narrative. Such differences, however, are subtle and play out within a stable narrative sequence.

The narrative sequence remained virtually unchanged in Josephus' *Antiquities* as well, even as he expanded on the psychological motives of the Queen and of Solomon. Josephus most significantly used the Queen of Sheba and the riddles associated with her to expand his portrayal of Hiram of Tyre, incorporating a riddle contest that is absent from the account in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. This contest puts Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, as well as Hiram and Solomon, in conversation with a much larger Greco-Roman literary tradition, where again the Queen of Sheba acts as a far distant – and therefore objective – verification of Solomon's stature in the world, enhanced by the special place of Egypt and Ethiopia in Roman imagination. In turn, Josephus is quoted approvingly by Origen, who uses the historical narratives of the Queen of Sheba to articulate an interpretation of the Song of Songs that intertextually engages 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

After Origen, references to the Queen of Sheba in Christian tradition are sparse until the Middle Ages;<sup>142</sup> it is notable, however, that one treatment that may date from the ninth century is framed as an interpretation of the reference to the “Queen of the South”

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<sup>142</sup> This may be related to the view that Solomon's association with foreign women was a less than ideal characteristic; Julian the Apostate, in *Against the Galileans* 224 C-D, argues that Solomon could not have been wise because he was led astray by the arguments of a foreign woman. This may be a reference to Solomon's wives, but it points to the ambiguity of the presentation of Solomon in Kings: just as the Queen is a symbol of Solomon's economic success, she also foreshadows his eventual disastrous relationships with his foreign wives. See the discussion in Feldman, “Josephus' Portrait of Solomon,” 113. Julian's position, and the wider traction it may have gained, may be related to the relative silence among Christians about the Queen of Sheba in the centuries thereafter.

in Matthew. Even in this case, as we shall see in Chapter Four, it has more in common with the concerns of the Jewish and Muslim traditions of its own time. Likewise, the tradition in b. Bava Batra, in which Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani translates the Hebrew *malkat sheba* to the Aramaic *malkuta d-sheba*, points foremost to the rupture within the Jewish reception of the Queen of Sheba. If anything, the position attributed to Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani is implicitly rejected by those later Jewish traditions in which narratives about the Queen of Sheba are richly elaborated.

The evidence considered in this chapter suggests that traditions about the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon remained relatively constant for over half a millennium – that is, between the period of the redaction and compilation of Kings to the third century, when Origen wrote his commentary on the Song of Songs. This pattern is notable, for our purposes, because of the contrast with the rich variety of narratives which would proliferate in the much shorter period that forms the focus of this dissertation (i.e., between the sixth through ninth centuries). The account of the Queen of Sheba in Kings, Chronicles, and Josephus features the same plot woven into distinct contexts. The authors and compilers of these works show just a few examples of differentiated reflection on the reign of Solomon, paradoxically revealing a remarkable stability in the plot of the episode over half a millennium. The character of Solomon and the significance of the Queen may shift, but the actions of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba remain the same. It is possible to speak of the reception of this figure as offering nuanced reflections on power, wealth, and gender dynamics through repetition and subtle changes of framing and detail.

In 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Josephus, the two monarchs are comparable inasmuch as Solomon is able to engage in trade that fulfills all of her desires. In each

case, her validation is valuable because it is external, coming from an extremely wealthy monarch from a far-off land. This narrative force of external validation is drawn into sharpest focus in the story of Josephus. By presenting the Queen of Sheba's riddles as a parallel to those of Hiram of Tyre, Josephus makes clear that Solomon is in competition with those monarchs. He ultimately bests them, as the hero of the story, but the persuasive force of this account aims to show that Solomon was as powerful as Jewish traditions had attested. Not only is the Queen of Sheba a guarantor of his status, she is the rhetorical hook by which Josephus introduces still more evidence of Solomon's historical importance not just for Israel but also in the eyes of others. It is this same dynamic – her value as an external witness – that enables her deployment by Matthew, Luke, and Origen in relation to a positive image of foreignness/non-Jewishness as well.

In the materials surveyed in this chapter, Solomon's affiliation is clear: he is the king of Israel, and though there was certainly internal competition and conversation about his significance and weight in Israelite history to later Judean writers and their audiences, the claimants to Solomon's historical legacy were a relatively small group within a wider world. In contrast, as we shall see in the following chapters, late antique and early medieval versions of the narrative of the Queen of Sheba's visit assume that Solomon's status as given by God is incomparably high and secure. It is his affiliation that becomes much more contested – claimed by Jewish, Christian, and eventually Muslim sources as well. The changes to be examined in the following chapters are more radical than those discussed in the present chapter. The negotiation of the biblical past between Jews, Christians, and Muslims entailed many restagings of the monarchical encounter that move far afield from the laconic biblical accounts or even Josephus' more expansive



version. In the process, the figure of the Queen of Sheba moves well beyond what we have seen as her early reception in Jewish historiography and Christian eschatology and exegesis, moving beyond narrative stability and contextual change.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Idolatry and the Queen of Sheba in the Qur’ān and the *Targum Sheni to Esther***

The conquest and reconquest of Jerusalem in the early seventh century sent shockwaves through Jewish and Christian communities which believed the control of Jerusalem was a crucial aspect of the beginning of the eschaton. The rivalry between the Roman empire and Sasanian Persia reached new heights in 614 CE, when the Persians conquered Jerusalem and wrested control from Rome. As Guy Stroumsa, John C. Reeves, and others have noted, this event produced messianic and eschatological speculation among both Christians and Jews, as reflected in sources from the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* to *Sefer Zerubbabel* and *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer*.<sup>143</sup> Just as some Christians viewed the loss of Jerusalem to non-Christians as a sign of the coming of the Antichrist, some Jews – as Martha Himmelfarb has shown from *Sefer Zerubbabel* – seemed to see this as a more positive sign of the beginning of God’s end-time redemption of his people.<sup>144</sup> Among the results was a debate, echoing concerns from Second Temple texts and traditions but distinctive in its forms, about how the end of the world would unfold,<sup>145</sup> and this debate would shape both the rise of Islam and reactions to Islam and the Arab conquests by Jews and Christians in the Near East and beyond.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Stroumsa, “False Prophet and False Messiah,” 1-15.

<sup>144</sup> See Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire*, especially 35-60.

<sup>145</sup> Reeves, however, warns against the “unexamined premise that underlies almost all modern study of apocalyptic texts; namely, that apocalypses can be read most profitably as a species of historiography”; *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 3.

<sup>146</sup> For more on the eschatological expectations that shaped the rise of Islam, see Shoemaker, *Death of a*

What is distinctive about this period, however, is not merely the emergence of a newly shared complex of eschatological concerns among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. As Greg Fisher has shown, the middle of the first millennium was also marked by the multiplicity of political powers at play in the Arabian peninsula. Already in the sixth century, the kingdom of Himyar, centered in what is now modern-day Yemen, extended its power in the Arabian peninsula against Roman and Sasanian control of the western and northern parts of the peninsula. What followed was a complex interplay of interests and alignments between empires, kingdoms, and dynasties; the pro-Sasanian Nasrids, as well as the Hujrids, who were wooed by both the Romans and the Himyarite kingdom, while the Tha'labites are mentioned as fighters for the Romans by Joshua the Stylite.<sup>147</sup> Kingship, in this political climate, was not simple or straightforward, reflecting instead a multipolar, shifting network of alliances between powers that had varying levels of material resources to commit to political endeavors at any given time.

In this chapter, I argue for a distinctive discourse about the Queen of Sheba which first takes shape during these centuries and which is best understood against the background of the realignment of both religious and political dynamics in the late antique Near East. As noted above, past research by Jacob Lassner and others has done much to highlight how Islamic traditions about the Queen of Sheba, beginning already with the

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*Prophet*, 118-96; *Apocalypse of Empire*, 11-37, 65-89.

<sup>147</sup> Fisher, "Kingdoms or Dynasties?" 257. The Nasrids, for example, held significantly less sway than the Romans, Sasanians, or even the Himyarites. It might be tempting to explain their influence in terms of a kingdom (as, indeed, Irfan Shahîd argued), to easily analogize to the larger empires around them, but they were actually a family dynasty that had economic power and control of manpower within the region, but players on the larger world scale and examples of northern Arabian family dynasties. The question of terminology is less pressing for my purposes, but see Shahîd, *Rome and the Arabs*, for the Ghassanids and Lakhmids were pre-Islamic Arabic kingdoms with relatively stable political identities, and contrast Fisher, "Kingdoms or Dynasties."

Qur'ān, exhibit significant overlaps with “post-biblical” Jewish traditions about this figure.<sup>148</sup> What has been underappreciated, however, is the synchronic nature of the development of Jewish and Islamic traditions. Inasmuch as Lassner considers all the relevant ancient, late antique, and medieval Jewish materials together, as background for Islamic traditions, he elides the relationship between specific Jewish and specific Islamic accounts that took form around the same time.<sup>149</sup>

In this chapter, and the two that follow, I take a more synchronic approach, examining clusters of Jewish, Islamic, and Christian narratives about the Queen of Sheba that exhibit shared concerns, which depart from the concerns of the ancient materials considered in Chapter One. By taking a synchronic approach, which reads across the boundaries of what we now call “religions” rather than casting the Jewish materials as “background,” I suggest that we see a distinctive late antique discourse about the Queen of Sheba that resonates with the context noted above. The Queen of Sheba may emerge as a figure whose meaning is made by her gender, as Lassner shows,<sup>150</sup> but I suggest that the late antique memory-making surrounding her encounter with King Solomon may be no less concerned with issues of monarchy, kingship, and the negotiation of political power.

Scholars like Angelika Neuwirth and Gabriel Said Reynolds have done important work reconsidering the relationship of the Bible to the Qur'ān, arguing that the Qur'ān is a vital reflection on a wider culture of religious disputation and debate about the biblical

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<sup>148</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 5.

<sup>149</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 9-35, 112-35. Lassner is deliberate in this choice because, as he notes on p. 122, the relevant Jewish texts and early Muslim materials are difficult to date in relation to one another. Thus, he structures his study to sidestep the historical problems which emerge from the material from Late Antiquity, focusing the core of the book (chapters 3-5) on medieval Muslim material – that of Tha'labi alongside related traditions – which antedates (most of) the Jewish texts he studies.

<sup>150</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 2-7.

past in Late Antiquity.<sup>151</sup> Following their lead, this chapter considers the representation of the Queen of Sheba in the Qur'ān's Surah al Naml (27:15-43) alongside the narrative about her in the Jewish *Targum Sheni to Esther* – approaching them as the two earliest surviving narratives about Solomon and the Queen of Sheba from Late Antiquity.

Both texts emerged around the sixth and seventh centuries CE, at least half a millennium after Josephus wrote about the Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia, and three or four centuries after Origen wrote about the beloved of the Song of Songs. I argue for approaching them as two late antique narratives about the Queen of Sheba's meeting with Solomon that mark a key shift from earlier discussion. The structure and content of both narratives differs radically enough from 1 Kings 10 that neither can be explained as merely the products of biblical exegesis or even the extension of biblical historiography. They do, however, share themes and concerns with one another. In the narratives in Q 27:15-43 and the *Targum Sheni to Esther* on 1:2, one finds the following shared themes, none of which has precedents in earlier traditions (see Chapter One):

- Solomon can speak to birds and demons.
- Solomon notices that he is missing a bird from his employ.
- When the bird comes back around, it informs Solomon of Sheba and its Queen.
- Solomon writes a letter to the Queen asking her to show deference to him.
- She consults with her advisors about the letter and decides to visit him.
- Solomon's palace has a room with glass tiled floors, and she mistakes this floor for water.
- She lifts her skirts to avoid the "water," making her mistake obvious to those around her, including Solomon, who explains that it is a feature of the palace architecture.

In addition, as we shall see, both focus on the common claim – also unprecedented – that

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<sup>151</sup> Neuwirth, *Qur'ān in Late Antiquity*; Reynolds, *Bible and Qur'ān*. See further Neuwirth, "Qur'ānic-Biblical Figures"; Reynolds, *Qur'ān in its Historical Context*; Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān*, especially part V on "The Qur'ān and Biblical Literature"; Reeves, *Qur'ān and Bible*.

the Queen practiced idolatry, worshipping the sun or the sea.

Scholars since Abraham Geiger have noted these parallels between the Qur'ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther* on the Queen of Sheba, typically citing them as evidence for the dependence of Islam on Judaism.<sup>152</sup> This is also the context in which these parallels are noted by Lassner, who has written the most extensive and influential analysis of Jewish and Islamic traditions about the Queen in past research.<sup>153</sup> Lassner's main interest is in the later trajectory of interpretation of the narrative in medieval Muslim texts, and accordingly he treats both the Qur'ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther* as background.<sup>154</sup> The somewhat confusing Qur'ānic narrative, like the Jewish materials, are discussed in the early chapters of Lassner's study to establish the storehouse of motifs upon which later Muslim exegetes creatively elaborated.<sup>155</sup>

Lassner shows how later exegetes of the Qur'ān consistently viewed these narratives as a “contest of will and intellect between a crafty woman wishing to retain her independence and a privileged monarch anxious to subject her to his own authority.”<sup>156</sup> Accordingly, Lassner's analysis of their Targumic and Qur'ānic precedents tends to focus on gender. He concedes that on its surface the Qur'ānic narrative is more concerned with unbelief than with the Queen of Sheba's gender, but he asks if “the relevant passages of Surah xxvii reflect also broad-ranging themes of confused gender and a disturbed cosmic order.”<sup>157</sup> I concur with Lassner in seeing gender as an important characteristic in the narrative. In this chapter, however, I argue that it is not nearly so significant as the

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<sup>152</sup> See Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 147-49.

<sup>153</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 9-35, 102-36.

<sup>154</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 64-87.

<sup>155</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 9-46.

<sup>156</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, x.

<sup>157</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 41.

contrast and conflict between her improper worship and Solomon's role as king and prophet. Particularly when we read the Qur'ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther* synchronically, we see an ambivalent portrayal of fallible human institutions, even (or perhaps especially) when a figure as universally revered as Solomon is deployed.

In both the Qur'ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther*, moreover, gender is less prominent a theme than idolatry, which serves as the main marker of the Queen of Sheba's categorical difference from Solomon. To be sure, her alterity is developed with reference to bodily differences – such as leg hair – but it is initially signaled through her inappropriate worship. Among the results is an emphasis on her difference from Solomon, in contrast to what we have seen in the early traditions about the Queen in 1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Josephus' *Antiquities* where the Queen of Sheba was portrayed as comparable to Solomon and thus as a monarch whose wealth can serve to validate his greatness. It is not just that the content of the depictions of the Queen in the Qur'ān is largely paralleled in the *Targum Sheni to Esther*; she also serves a similar function, which contrasts with what we know from earlier depictions.

The similarity in the treatment of the Queen of Sheba is especially striking in light of their differences of language and genre.<sup>158</sup> The Qur'ān, of course, is the first and longest Arabic literary text in our historical record.<sup>159</sup> *Targum Sheni to Esther* is the most

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<sup>158</sup> Stetkevych argues that the Qur'ān's "primary goal is not to inform, but to persuade"; "Solomon and Mythic Kingship," 2. The Targum, in contrast, is an object of study, but also a multiplication of narrative meant to engage and entertain within a synagogue setting (see Mikva, "Attenuation of Targum") in an earlier period, and perhaps in an academic setting (see Iafate, *Wandering Throne of Solomon*) in a later period.

<sup>159</sup> See Donner, "The historian, the believer, and the Qur'ān," 25-37. There is evidence of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and epigraphic inscriptions which give some evidence for the development of the script, but there is no evidence in our record of long-form Arabic texts before the Qur'an. This makes it difficult to compare to later texts which inevitably are derived from or are modelled off of the Qur'ān. Angelika

expansive of all Aramaic translations of the Jewish scriptures, to the degree that Alexander Sperber asked if its title was a misnomer for what should properly be termed a midrash.<sup>160</sup> Despite debates about the specific dating of both, however, they can generally be placed in the context of the seventh century CE.<sup>161</sup> Rather than asking whether one is dependent on the other, I here suggest it is more useful to see both as broadly representative of the same period. Comparison of the two, in my view, is useful for showing their common departure from earlier traditions, drawing out their respective concerns, and establishing a sense of the distinctiveness of the late antique discourse around the Queen of Sheba that I will further examine in Chapters Three and Four.

In the following pages, I first consider the thematic overlap between the two texts, noting the ways that these moments resonate with other late antique texts. Then I will turn to consider what is distinctive about each. I argue that the Qur'ānic story of the Queen of Sheba and her visit to Solomon, when read in context, suggests the ability of the Qur'ān to convert non-believers is superior to the means available to earlier prophets, like Solomon and Moses. The chapter will then turn to the *Targum Sheni to Esther*, reading its narrative about the Queen of Sheba in light of the polyphonic exuberance of the rest of the text. Finally, by means of conclusion, I reflect on the discourses of kingship and prophecy which shape the presentation of Solomon, and the ways the Queen

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Neuwirth has emphasized the oral-recitational context of the Qur'ān as a crucial feature of its late antique development, but as she notes, the text itself is the only contemporary source of its historical context; *The Qur'ān and Late Antiquity*, 12-14.

<sup>160</sup> See the table of contents for Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic*; see also the discussion of this in Hayward, "Targum misnomer for Midrash?" 47-63.

<sup>161</sup> See Reynolds, *Qur'ān in Historical Context*; Neuwirth, *Qur'ān and Late Antiquity*; Donner, *Muhammed and the Believers*.



of Sheba's memory is deployed to both valorize and subvert the authority and institutions which Solomon represents.

*Targum Sheni to Esther* and the Qur'ān exhibit strong affinities in their narrative elaborations of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon, and I suggest that this overlap may point to a matrix of common discourses about the Israelite monarchic past in the Arabian peninsula and Byzantine Near East in the sixth and seventh centuries. The renewed interest in this queen's encounter with Solomon, after all, emerged in a world where the Aksumite empire put up inscriptions suggesting descent from the House of David,<sup>162</sup> and Chalcedonian Christians (i.e., those aligned with the imperial authority of Constantinople) were increasingly utilizing the rhetoric of the Israelite monarchy to understand, model, and explain their own rule as well.<sup>163</sup> In addition, as noted above, the Levant and the Arabian peninsula, particularly the southern Red Sea coast, was in the sixth and seventh centuries the site of proxy wars between the powerful Sasanian Persians sponsoring the Jewish Himyarite state on the one hand, and Chalcedonian Romans sponsoring the Monophysite kingdom of Aksum (centered in what is in modern-day Ethiopia), on the other.<sup>164</sup> In the new assemblages of religious and political affiliations that marked these centuries, the Queen of Sheba emerged as a figure of renewed concern, as reflected in the narratives in the Qur'ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther*, each of which use her to articulate their own visions of international and interreligious

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<sup>162</sup> See Bowersock, *Throne of Adulis*, 64.

<sup>163</sup> See Boustán, "Israelite Kingship," 170

<sup>164</sup> See Bowersock, *Throne of Adulis*. The Monophysite Christian kingdom from Aksum had, in the first years of the sixth century, buttressed an uprising of local Christian nobles against the Jewish Himyarite king and eventually in 525 the Aksumite king Kaleb (Ella Asbeha) deposed King Yusuf, installing a weak Christian monarch in his stead. This ruler was deposed a short two years later, and the Ethiopian Abraha was king in Himyar for the next nearly forty years (527-565 CE).

imperial contact.

### **1. Targumic and Qur'anic Traditions about the Queen of Sheba**

Traditionally, a targum is an Aramaic translation meant to enable Jews to understand weekly Tanakh readings in synagogue. The translator, known as a meturgeman, would translate alongside a cantor during synagogue services. Crucially, the meturgeman was to translate without any written text as a guide during services in order to delineate the difference between the biblical text and the translation to any onlookers.<sup>165</sup> This prohibition on written guides during services did not prevent the eventual textualization of targumim in Late Antiquity, where they were used in private devotional settings as well as in schools alongside the Hebrew Bible.<sup>166</sup> Targumim are often expansive translations, including exegetical traditions also found in Rabbinic midrashim, but without characteristically Rabbinic phrases, citation of specific Rabbis by name, or the inclusion of multiple or contradictory accounts. Targumim thus exhibit some overlap with classical Rabbinic literature, while differing enough to raise the possibility of their formation in other or related Jewish settings. As noted above, however, *Targum Sheni Esther* is not straightforwardly a “targum.” It does feature an incomplete translation of the book of Esther, but it is also the most expansive surviving example of a targum, meandering and often long-winded. Here, the Aramaic translation of the text of Esther is

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<sup>165</sup> See further Alexander, “Targumim and the Rabbinic Rules for the Delivery of the Targum,” 14-28; Alexander, “Jewish Aramaic Translations,” 217-54.

<sup>166</sup> Today, Targum Studies is a rich field that often focuses on recovering early readings of biblical texts along with a focus on early reception in Jewish circles. For a useful overview, see Lasair, “Current Trends in Targum Research.”

often buried in excurses and tangents that move far afield from the biblical text itself.<sup>167</sup>

The earliest full manuscript of *Targum Sheni* is MS Sassoon 282,<sup>168</sup> which has a colophon that dates it to 1189. It is written in square German script and consists of sixty-eight pages, each of which has three columns of about 40 lines, which have Tiberian vocalization with interlined Hebrew. There are fourteen other manuscripts ranging in date from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, of Ashkenazic, Italian, and Yemenite provenance.<sup>169</sup> The manuscript evidence attests its broad diffusion as well as textual fluidity and pluriformity.

*Targum Sheni to Esther* is commonly dated on linguistic grounds: it contains some Eastern Aramaic vocabulary but primarily uses Western Galilean Aramaic grammar and vocabulary, consistent with a Palestinian provenance, and it has a preponderance of Greek loan words consistent with a Byzantine-era date. Recently, Kaufman has argued that the spread of Syriac loan-words in the text place it squarely within the realm of Late Jewish Literary Aramaic, and, with Beate Ego and Allegra Iafate, he thus argues for a late Byzantine date.<sup>170</sup> However, earlier scholarship, especially the text-critical work of Bernard Grossman, has focused on the lack of Arabic loan words to suggest a seventh-century Byzantine Palestinian context for its initial formation, prior to the Arabic

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<sup>167</sup> Its expansiveness led Alexander Sperber to question whether it is a targum at all; in *The Bible in Aramaic* he discusses this text under the heading “Targum Misnomer for Midrash?” (p. 35). More recent developments in the field of translation studies, as well as qualitative work by Targum Studies scholars, have now laid that question to rest, in part by establishing that some seventy percent of the text of Esther is embedded in the text of *Targum Sheni to Esther* and that translation need not be limited to word-for-word dependence. See now Hayward, “Targum a Misnomer for Midrash?” 47-63.

<sup>168</sup> This manuscript is the basis for Bernard Grossfeld’s critical edition, *Two Targums of Esther*. Grossfeld here discusses the Eastern Aramaic vocabulary that has led to some disputation of the origins of the text, but he ultimately concludes that the text was originally composed in Palestine.

<sup>169</sup> Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to Talmud and Midrash*, 334-35.

<sup>170</sup> Kaufman, “The Dialectology of Late Jewish Literary Aramaic,” 145; Iafate, *Wandering Throne of Solomon*, 147-51; Ego, *Targum Scheni zu Ester*, 8-9.

rhetorical and literary dominance that later came to characterize the Jewish literature of the region.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, in the list of the ten great kings of history, “Ishmael” is not listed, although this detail is not dispositive.<sup>172</sup> The data suggests Targum Sheni Esther took form between the seventh and ninth centuries, the period which, Aaron Koller argues, saw a complex set of Jewish engagements with the text of Esther.<sup>173</sup> The parallels in Queen of Sheba narratives with the Qur’ān are notable, plausibly reflecting something of the late antique context in which the Qur’ān also took form.

The Qur’ān, according to Islamic tradition, is the collection of revelations received by Muhammed during his lifetime from God through the angel Gabriel, the most sacred and central text of Islamic tradition.<sup>174</sup> There is consensus that its written form was not codified and finalized until after Muhammed’s death in 631 CE,<sup>175</sup> but the precise date of this development remains debated. Tradition holds that Uthmann, the third rightly guided caliph, gathered together a variety of traditions in order to make the Uthmanic codex, which contained the consonantal skeleton (*rasm*) of the text.<sup>176</sup> This consonantal skeleton did not ensure that all of the vowels of the text were pronounced in the same way, and tradition relates that the Six, later Ten, and finally Fourteen reciters were the source for the authoritative vowing of the Qur’ānic text.<sup>177</sup> Most of our manuscripts of the Qur’ān come from the medieval period.

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<sup>171</sup> Grossfeld, *Two Targums of Esther*, 19-25.

<sup>172</sup> Grossfeld, *Two Targums of Esther*, 28; for a discussion of the “ten kings of history” motif, see Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiah in a Christian Empire*, 16, 150. The lack of reference to Ishmael or Islam as a great kingdom is not uncommon in post-Islamic texts, like Pseudo-Methodius, which emerge from a Byzantine context, but

<sup>173</sup> Koller, *Esther in Ancient Jewish Thought*, 167-8, 185, 225.

<sup>174</sup> See Neuwirth, *Qur’ān and Late Antiquity*; Donner, *Muhammed and the Believers*.

<sup>175</sup> See Donner, “Historical context,” 23-40; Neuwirth, “Structural, linguistic, and literary features,” 97-114.

<sup>176</sup> Discussed by Sells, *Approaching the Qur’ān*, 22; see also Gilliot, “Creation of a fixed text,” 41-58.

<sup>177</sup> Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur’ān Manuscripts*; Donner, “The historical context,” 23-40.

Some scholars largely accept the contours of this traditionalist timeline, albeit within a historical-critical framework, while others have argued that the Qur'ān took form much later, positing that the Muslim community did not form until a century after Muhammed's death.<sup>178</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, it suffices to note the plausibility of situating traditions therein broadly in the seventh century CE. Through a study of Qu'ranic manuscripts, for instance, Keith Small has concluded that the text largely stabilized at an early period, even as variations in the manuscripts (e.g., vocalization) continued until relatively late; accordingly, the Qur'ān is a relatively good, if imperfect, witness to the seventh century.<sup>179</sup> On this basis, scholars like Neuwirth thus read the Qur'ān as evidence for the development of the earliest Muslim community.<sup>180</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, precise dating is less pressing than the basis to establish traditions therein as generally contemporaneous with those in *Targum Sheni to Esther*. They are likely close enough in time, in other words, that their parallels cannot be simply reduced to a line of dependence or framed in terms of the Jewish "background" to Islam.

This section will closely examine several points of intersection between the narratives in the Qur'ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther*. In doing so, I hope to draw attention to the ways the texts suggest an intricate political hierarchy surrounding and suffusing Solomon's court. This hierarchy is marked by modes of dominance, miscommunication, and subversion of certain social roles, ultimately suggesting a degree of mistrust in the social structure of kingship. While Solomon's greatness and status as a

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<sup>178</sup> See the variety of perspectives in, for example, Reynolds, ed., *Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*.

<sup>179</sup> Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, especially Part Four.

<sup>180</sup> Neuwirth, *Qur'ān and Late Antiquity*, especially chapter I.

chosen holy man of God is undeniable, it is easy to level a critique at Solomon's actions at several points, such as when he threatens to murder the bird who is missing, or when he demands submission of the Queen of Sheba in his first communication with her, or when, confusingly and with no explanation, he sits in a glass or crystal palace to meet her, perhaps purposefully to trick her into embarrassing herself. Between these moments and the variety of categories of characters that make up the world of Solomon's court, the communal memory of Solomon's world represented by these texts is arguably much more dynamic than their ancient precedents.

### *Avian Intermediaries*

The avian intermediaries in both narratives offer compelling evidence that they are closely related to one another, even if a model of direct dependence does not fit the evidence. In the Qur'ān, Solomon's legions of birds are under his command as a part of his gifts from God, namely, his ability to speak the language of animals and understand the logic of birds. Solomon reviews his legions, specifically counting them out to ensure that all of his armies are present, when he discovers that the hoopoe, الهدد or *hudhud* in Arabic, is missing (Q 27:20). The Qur'ān gives no social context for Solomon's review of his troops; it merely specifies that it was in the course of reviewing those under his command that he realized the bird was missing. In the Targum, in contrast, Solomon notices the bird is missing because he cannot show it to his friends.<sup>181</sup> The Targum tells us twice: the heart of the king Solomon was cheerful from wine, and so he invited his friends to his palace; again, his heart was cheerful with wine (a doubling technique

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<sup>181</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Shevi*, 31.

common to this portion of the Targum) when he realized that the wild rooster (תרנגל), was missing. Although the text could be read as several discrete scenes – one where Solomon invites his friends over, another where he inspects his birds – the overlapping language of the scene seems to indicate that Solomon was mad at the rooster because he was embarrassed in front of his peers that the bird was missing in the first place.

In *Targum Sheni to Esther*, the bird tells Solomon that in the land of Sheba, there is a city called Qitor, whose dust is precious and whose silver and gold sit like dung in the streets (עפרא מאן יקיר ודהבא וכספי כזביל בשוקין), and who know nothing of war or how to draw a bow; in other words, their land is topsy-turvy, proven by the fact that they are ruled by a woman, the Queen of Sheba.<sup>182</sup> The bird offers to contact the Queen of Sheba for Solomon, because, unlike the many other lands surveyed by the bird, she is not subservient to Solomon. Solomon sends her a letter, which she receives as she worships the sun in the morning, when Solomon's birds blot out the sun as they come to her to give her his letter.<sup>183</sup>

In Q 27:20, Solomon reviews his roster of birds and questions the absence of the hoopoe. In the Targum, he is presenting his birds to fellow kings who have come to do him honor; no such context is given in the Qur'ān, and the verb used instead suggests an internal review so as to make sure nothing is missing (وَتَفَقَّدَ). The hoopoe, upon his return in verse 22, reports that he has news of Sheba, a land ruled by a woman where people worship the sun because Satan has decorated their deeds (وَرَزَيْنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانَ), misleading

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<sup>182</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 31. Translations my own, made with reference to Grossfeld, *Two Targums to Esther*.

<sup>183</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 31-2.

them (27:23-24).<sup>184</sup> Despite this, the hoopoe speaks in high praise of the Queen of Sheba. He notes that she has been given of all things and has a great throne (إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ ) (Q 27:23). These two attributes are not unique to the Queen, and in fact are mentioned in relation to other characters within Surah 27. In verse 15, Solomon himself says that we (in reference to himself and David) had been given of all things. Furthermore, some three verses after the hoopoe says that the Queen of Sheba has a great throne (Q 27: 23), the hoopoe praises God as the Lord of the Great Throne (Q 27:26). Solomon considers in verse 27 whether the hoopoe is acting good, a verb, or is among [the category of] liars, a participle (قَالَ سَتَنظُرُ أَصَدَقْتَ أَمْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ). The Qur’ān does not elaborate on either the significance of these parallels or how they are nuanced – even inverted – by her improper worship. The avian figure acts as a bridge between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in both texts, but its presence merely underscores the disconnect between the monarchs.

### *Emotional Monarchs*

Another thematic overlap between the texts is Solomon’s anger in response to the bird’s absence and the Queen’s embarrassment at lifting her skirts. Anger does not feature in Solomon’s encounter with the Queen of Sheba as described in 1 Kings or any of the other ancient traditions that we surveyed in Chapter One; in 1 Kings 10:2, for instance, the only emotion described is the Queen’s wonder and amazement. In both the *Targum* and the Qur’ān, however, there is a somewhat surprising language of anger. The Qur’ān specifies that Solomon was furious in response to this missing bird; he threatens not only to kill but

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<sup>184</sup> My translations are based on the readings of Arberry, *Koran*, and Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *Holy Qur’ān*.



to slaughter (لَاذْبَحْتَهُ) the hoopoe if the bird does not have a clear authorization or excuse for his absence (Q 27:21). In the Targum, Solomon uses standard language of killing, but he speaks in anger (ברגזא) about the bird, similarly demanding information about where it had gone.<sup>185</sup>

In the Qur’ān, the Queen fears Solomon for the threat she reads in his letter. The text never names the Queen of Sheba, nor does it even call her a queen. Q 27:29 reads, “She said: O advisors!” asking for advice before putting the account of the letter in her words. Solomon’s letter demands that she and her people come to him either “as Muslims” or “in submission” (وَأَتُونِي مُسْلِمِينَ) an ambivalence in meaning due to the semantic ambiguity of the gerund form of *muslimān*. In the context of the Qur’ān, his demand clearly appears to be a religious request that the Queen of Sheba and her people submit to God (i.e., “as Muslims”). However, she seems to read it as a political request, and she states in verse 34 that when kings enter a city or walled town, they generally humiliate its elite. Here, she echoes the Antess (the namesake of the chapter, discussed further below) of verse 18, intuitively fearing Solomon’s destructive power as a king. She decides to send a gift in verse 35, but the monarchs misunderstand one another once again. Solomon rejects her gift as an attempt to bribe him by giving him wealth and threatens to do the very thing she had feared – drive them out in humiliation.

In the Targum, the queen makes a series of embarrassing errors in perception or judgement. When the Queen of Sheba arrives at Solomon’s court, she sees Benyahu bar Yehuda, whose beauty is so superlative that it merits several poetic asides from the meturgeman. ( ודמי לשפרפרא דנפיק בעידן צפרא ודמי לכוכבא דמזהיר וקאי ביני כוכביא ודמי לשושנא )

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<sup>185</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Shevi*, 31.

(דקאי על פרצידי דמיא).<sup>186</sup> He is so beautiful that the Queen of Sheba descends her chariot under the assumption that he is Solomon. Benyahu is confused by her actions, asking what she's doing, and when she learns that she is not in the presence of Solomon, she tells her advisors that "If you do not see the lion, you see his lair; though you do not see King Solomon, you do see a handsome man who stands before him" (אי לא חזית לכון אריא ) (אתון חזון לכון מדבעותיה ואין לא חזיתון מלי שלמי אתון חזון שפר דגבר דקאי קדמוי);<sup>187</sup> even if she is presented as somewhat foolish, here and immediately afterwards, she nevertheless speaks in proverbs to her advisors.

Both texts exhibit a new emotional valence between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon. After the Queen of Sheba mistakes Benyahu bar Yehuda for Solomon, she then mistakes the palace floors for water and reveals extremely hairy legs (on which see further Chapter Three) before asking Solomon a series of riddles he is able to solve readily (on which see further Chapter Four). There is no recovery from the embarrassment of her mistakes. In the Qur'ān, the *hudhud* notes that the people of Sheba worship the sun instead of God because Satan has "decorated their deeds for them," persuading them that they are worshipping properly when that is not the case at all. Thus, when the Queen realizes that she has been mistaken about Solomon's glass floors, she simultaneously declares her allegiance to God, apparently discerning her more significant mistake (i.e., her worship of the sun) through the realization of her minor mistake (i.e., the glass floors).<sup>188</sup> In both of these cases, we see the Queen showing a weakness that

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<sup>186</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 32.

<sup>187</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 32.

<sup>188</sup> For more on this moment of conversion and the potential exegetical problem it creates, see Mir, "The Queen of Sheba's Conversion," 43-56.

reveals Solomon's importance through contrast. The contrast between the Queen and Solomon, however, is only one among many comparisons and parallels suggested by the Qur'ān and Targum.

### *Water Test*

One of the most significant realms of overlap between these two stories is that the Queen of Sheba's inferiority to Solomon is indicated by her failure of a "water test," where she shows confusion at the architecture of Solomon's palace, assuming that a smooth, reflective tiled floor is a pool of water. In both *Targum Sheni to Esther* and the Qur'ān, the Queen of Sheba lifts her skirts on the threshold of Solomon's throne room because of this mistaken assumption, albeit to different results. In the Qur'ān, the Queen of Sheba recognizes her error and decides to worship properly as a result of her meeting with Solomon, the best possible outcome under Qur'ānic logic. The Targum, in contrast, shows no interest in correcting the Queen of Sheba's practices of worship, instead inserting a detail about the hairiness of her legs, which Solomon comments upon before she asks him a series of riddles.<sup>189</sup>

In *Targum Sheni Esther*, when the Queen of Sheba finally goes to meet Solomon, Solomon had moved to a בית זוגיתא, a house or building made of glass or crystal. The Queen assumed that Solomon was in water.<sup>190</sup> The next part is worth quoting in full:

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<sup>189</sup> The Targum's narrative about the Queen of Sheba ends at this point; the Queen of Sheba's gifts are contextualized as one set of gifts given by a variety of monarchs to Solomon. The narrative ends with the suggestion that the Queen is Solomon's inferior, not a corroborating witness to Solomon's greatness. This rejection of partnership implicitly extends to the sexual realm. Her feminine beauty, according to Solomon, stands in contrast to the manliness of her hairy legs, suggesting the consideration and ultimately the rejection of a romantic relationship between the monarchs.

<sup>190</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 32.

והחליזת חילוזה דתעיבר וחזא ליה סערא ברגלה: “She lifted her garments as if to cross over (the floor she assumed was water) and he (Solomon) saw that she had hair on her legs/feet.” Solomon comments: “your beauty is the beauty of women, but your hair is the hair of men, and hair on men is beautiful, but on women it is shameful.” The Queen responds: if you can answer my three riddles, I will know you are a great man; but if you cannot, I will know that you are just like all other men (מרי מלכא אמתיל לך גי מתלין דאין תפשר יתהון לי לדעא אנא דגברא חכים את ואין ).<sup>191</sup> Solomon is able to answer her three riddles, and so she proclaims him wise. In this proclamation, the Targum echoes the language of 1 Kings 10:6-7. However, her praise here is diminished in the context of her perceptual errors, as are her gifts, which are linked to the many gifts given to Solomon by the kings in his network.

The Qur’ān offers very little set up for the reflective floors or the Queen’s response. In Q 27: 43, the Queen is told (a passive form of *qalla* is used) to enter the palace, where she is completely fooled by the glass floor of the palace: she sees it and assumes it is a pool of water (رَأَتْهُ حَسِبَتْهُ لُجَّةً). She lifts her skirts as if to wade through a body of water (وَكشفت عن ساقَيْهَا), just like the Targumic account. Upon realizing her mistake, she submits not to Solomon but with him to God (Q 27:44). The text offers several verses on the efforts by Solomon and his jinn to fool the Queen of Sheba by disguising her throne (27:38-41), but the Queen of Sheba is able to see that the throne is “as if it was” her own (27:42). When she realizes that she has been unable to discern something, however, which is to say when she realizes her mistake with the floor (27:43),

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<sup>191</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 32.

she discerns the reality of her other failure, her inability to see that she should be worshipping the one God.<sup>192</sup>

Some seventh- through ninth-century mystical Jewish texts, in recounting the efforts of an adept to enter heaven, describe a similar test which must be endured before one is allowed to enter God's palace.<sup>193</sup> References to the water test in Heikhalot literature are limited primarily to Heikhalot Rabbati and Heikhalot Zutarti, and they are not present in every manuscript. Examples occur some half a dozen times, but two of those instances only occur in MS N8128.<sup>194</sup> Although this is not an especially widespread tradition, it nevertheless reflects an intriguing parallel to the Queen of Sheba stories in the Qur'ān and Targum in late antique Jewish literature.

It is worthwhile to quote section 259 of Heikhalot Zutarti in full here: Because the guardians of the entrance to the sixth palace throw and cast thousands upon thousands of waves of water upon him- although there is not even a single drop there - if he says: "What is the nature of this water?" They immediately run after him in order to stone him, saying: "Good for nothing, perhaps you are from the seed of those who kissed the calf, so that you are not worthy to see the king and his throne?" If that is the case, a heavenly voice goes forth from the "*aravot raquia*" and says: "You have spoken well! His from the seed of those who kissed the calf and is not worthy to see the king and his throne!" He does not move from there until they throw thousands upon thousands of iron bars upon him. (*Heikhalot Zutarti* § 259; trans. Boustan)<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Interestingly, the hoopoe says that it is Satan who is decorating the deeds of the people of Sheba, but Solomon indicates in verse 40 that it is the deity whom she worships that deceived her.

<sup>193</sup> See, for example, Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 52-53, 103; Urbach, "Ha-Mesorot 'al Torat-ha-Sod be-Teqfat ha-Tannaim"; Reichman, "Die 'Wasser Episode';" Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien*, 239-48; Boustan, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 278-80; Dan, "The Entrance to the Sixth Gate."

<sup>194</sup> The relevant sections as found in Schäfer, ed. *Synopse*, §§ 224-28, 258-29, 345, 407-8, 672 (two of these, 345 and 672, are only found in MS N8128).

<sup>195</sup> Translation from Boustan, *From Martyr to Mystic*, 279. Boustan argues that the water test in Heikhalot Rabbati is a danger to the mystic, one which can be negotiated with prior knowledge of the nature of the dangers associated with the entrance to the sixth palace. Prior knowledge enables a mystic's entrance into heaven. He argues, contra Reichman, that in mystical literature this test separates Aaronid lineage from those without, with Dan. He sees the water test as an anti-priestly polemic, which differentiates it from the Story of the Ten Martyrs, the Heikhalot apocalypses, and various other strands of the Heikhalot corpus.

In Heikhalot Zutarti, the visionary passes the test if he refrains from asking about the nature of the water. Importantly, it is not merely the condition of ignorance that condemns the visionary. The text offers a conditional: “If he says ‘what is the nature of this water,’” then he is punished by the angels. If he does not ask – even if he is ignorant – the text gives no indications that the angels would have any cause to reject or punish him. Arguably, then, the problem of ignorance-versus-knowledge in this setting is not ignorance of the nature of the water, but ignorance with respect to how one should act at the heavenly gates. In other words, this scene can be understood as presenting a question of etiquette. Knowledge of proper etiquette certainly falls in the sphere of “proper” or complete knowledge, but it can also be usefully disambiguated from the realm of esoteric knowledge, particularly since the very act of textualization renders this particular piece of knowledge – that there is no water at the sixth gate – somewhat public (to whatever degree one might consider the Heikhalot corpus public). The Queen of Sheba, in the Qur’ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther*, does not necessarily break any rules of etiquette, but just like humans can prove themselves unworthy of the heavenly palace by failing this test, so she underscores her inferiority to Solomon by mistaking the floor for water.

The Heikhalot narrative shows many affinities to the Talmudic tale of the four who enter the *pardes* (heaven) in B. Hagigah 14b:

ת"ר ארבעה נכנסו בפרדס ואלו הן בן עזאי ובן זומא אחר ורבי עקיבא אמר להם ר"ע כשאתם מגיעין אצל אבני שיש טהור אל תאמרו מים מים משום שנאמר (תהלים קא, ז) דובר שקרים לא יכון לנגד עיני

The Sages taught: Four entered the orchard [*pardes*]: Ben Azzai and ben Zoma; Aher; and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva said to them: When, upon your arrival in the upper worlds, you reach pure marble stones, do not say: Water, water, although they appear to be water, because it is stated: “He who speaks falsehood shall not be established before My eyes” (Psalm 101:7). (B. Hagigah 14b; translation my

own)

Rabbi Akiva warns the other three sages against misnaming the polished stones “water” because saying as such would signal their unfitness to enter the heavenly realm. The mistake the sages might make is speaking improperly, not in misunderstanding the nature of the polished stone. The citation of Psalm 101, which decries falsehood (not ignorance) seems to support such a conclusion.

These four narratives display some of the varieties of ways that water tests can manifest. The palace which is being breached can belong to God or to God’s chosen king. Water tests can occur deliberately, at the behest of angels who disapprove of human interlopers in the divine realm, or they can occur incidentally, as a result of transmundane stone or merely unfamiliar glass tilework. These tests can keep out interlopers and humble the proud, but they can also be anticipated and rendered neutral. The variety at play here shows that the specifics of who, what, and where are less important than the test itself, which functions as an apparently cross-cultural trope.<sup>196</sup> The Qur’ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther* use this trope to describe the relationship between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, which is not unlike the relationship between the angels and humankind or Israel and the foreign nations: each is ordered according to a particular and immutable hierarchy. Following Lassner, we can see gender is part of this hierarchy.<sup>197</sup> In my view, however, gender is only one mode of difference between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and this difference is interspersed with a series of connections between various

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<sup>196</sup> See Barry, “Walking on Water,” 627-56 for a discussion of the architectural trends in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages which are related to this complex of ideas.

<sup>197</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 79-86.

figures in this hierarchy.

### *Solomonic Court*

The final point of thematic overlap to mention is the variety of figures at the court of Solomon. Both texts note that Solomon controlled demons (*Shaddai, shaytan*) and birds; the Qur'ān specifies that he controlled jinni as well, while the Targum discusses the wild beasts, screeching owls or liliths (*lilin*, in Aramaic), and spirits (*ruach*) under Solomon's control.

Solomon in *Targum Sheni to Esther* is much more playful than Solomon in the Qur'ān. We are told that “the heart of the king Solomon was cheerful from wine” (כד שפיר (ליביה דמלכי שלמה בחמרא), and so he invited all of the local kings to his palace.<sup>198</sup> Again, the text informs us that his heart was happy from wine, and so he called forth the wild animals, birds, and reptiles to be brought out, along with various musical instruments, so that they could perform in front of the kings who were in his presence. The absence of the wild rooster makes Solomon extremely angry, and he threatens to kill it. Solomon tells her that many kings come to inquire after his well-being and that if she does not, he will send his armies of birds, spirits, and demons against her. After a discussion with her advisors, wherein she refuses their advice, she sends a group of young men and women, of the same stature and visage and age, to Solomon; she then follows, some three years later, in a visit to his court, acquiescing to his demands.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 31.

<sup>199</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 31-2.



*Targum Sheni to Esther* specifies multiple times, at the beginning and then at the end of this narrative, that Solomon had several monarchical peers who came to his court, both as drinking buddies or peers and as subordinates bringing him gifts in recognition of his greatness. In the Qur’ān, Solomon commands that the hoopoe bring a letter to the land of Sheba, and the scene shifts abruptly to the Queen (who, as noted above, is never named but specified with the feminine form of the verb “she said,” قَالَتْ); her court is also filled with subordinates (Q 27:29). She consults with the council of chiefs (or the public, مَلَأَ). The context suggests that “council of elders” is the meaning implied here, but the word commonly means the public, and that meaning contrasts intriguingly with the singular dictates so far put forward by Solomon. The Queen of Sheba specifies that she is not someone who decides affairs without their presence. Unlike the advisors featured in the Targum, the Qur’ānic public refuses to give her political advice, citing their strength in contrast to her command (27:33). Solomon instead asks his own council of elders or public (مَلَأْنَا) to bring the throne of the Queen of Sheba to his court and disguise it (27:38). This episode and Solomon’s reaction to her gift has no counterpart in the Targumic account. The Targum also shows no interest in the Queen of Sheba’s throne, occupied as it is with Solomon’s. In the Qur’ān, the Queen of Sheba partially recognizes her throne in verse 42, suggesting that it is “as though it was” (كَأَنَّهُ هُوَ) her own. She has the ability, then, to perceive the truth (albeit, perhaps, to a limited extent) despite the jinn’s magic.

The Qur’ān, though laconic, does note the jinn in his court, whom Solomon asks to trick the Queen of Sheba by moving and disguising her throne. A strong one agrees to do it, but one with a knowledge of scripture (which may or may not be the same figure as

the strong *ifreet*) is the one who is able to move the throne; even so, the jinni magic is not fully effective against the Queen of Sheba, who can discern that the throne is (like) her own. Solomon, in both texts, is surrounded by a variety of peers, subordinates, and courtiers, who come to his court to witness and participate in his powers. Sometimes they come through fear, sometimes because they are called. Yet the political scene imagined by both is intricate. Solomon is the most powerful and beloved by God, but even the animals in his armies are able to disobey him; he does not rule by absolute fiat or with an iron fist, even despite the fierceness of his temper.

Both the Qur'ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther* suggest dynamic political interactions between a variety of factions. The narratives involve figures of competing and overlapping spheres of power, whose interactions with one another and notably with Solomon are fundamentally unpredictable. That makes it all the more intriguing, in my view, that both narratives took form in the seventh century, in an era shaped by the political *realia* noted at the beginning of this chapter. Before turning to consider this context, it is useful first to consider how the comparison of these two texts also points to the concerns that are distinctive to each.

## **2. Differences between the Targumic and Qur'ānic Narratives**

In the Qur'ān, the context of the Queen of Sheba's meeting with Solomon is Surah al-Naml (27), which opens with a reflection on the Qur'ān as a clear or obvious writing (كِتَابٌ مُّبِينٌ), in other words, clear proof of God's oneness and existence. The clarity of evidence presented by the prophets is the central theme of this chapter. Verses 2-14 detail Moses' attempt to show the Egyptians the error of their ways, but they assert that his

miracles are clear or obvious magic (سحرٌ مُبين) and reject his religion, despite bearing witness to his prophetic miracles. This narrative is followed by reference to a number of other prophets: Solomon (and David) in 27:15-44; Thamud and Salih in 27:45-53, and Lot in 27:54-58. The chapter ends with several verses which praise God, enumerate the insufficiencies of men, and describe the events of the eschaton (27:65-93). Surah al-Naml wrestles with the tension between God's incomparability and the perfection of the prophets sent by God with the stubbornness of nonbelievers, who regularly reject God's message through the earlier prophets. The opening assertion of the clarity of the Qur'ān seems to attest to the Qur'ānic ability to persuade with clarity, in contrast to Moses whose miracles are viewed as magic (27:13), or Lot who was unable to save Sodom and Gomorrah (27:54-58).

What is unusual, in this chapter, is that the Queen of Sheba *does* convert, despite the lack of a Qur'ān and, indeed, despite the consistent miscommunications that occur between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon. These miscommunications are particularly ironic in light of the assertion, made in Q 27:15-16, that prophetic status of Solomon and David was in part visible through their ability to speak the logic or language (منطق) of birds.<sup>200</sup> Notably, this power is also the premise of the Targumic story; there, too, birds, alongside jinn, demons, and men act as Solomon's soldiers. The Qur'ān uses this information to introduce the ants of the valley who are intimidated by this legion and who are the namesake of the surah (al-Naml). The ant, gendered female and foreshadowing

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<sup>200</sup> Elias, "Prophecy, Power and Propriety," 57-74 suggests that the laconic character of this narrative means that it is most easily read against a backdrop of thematically similar stories about Solomon and the Queen from later Islamic literature. Elias utilizes ibn Munabbih, al-Tha'labi, and al-Tabari alongside later writers to present a wide, if partial, reading of the story as understood in classical Islamic writing. Here, my interest is in the comparison with *Targum Sheni Esther*.

the Queen of Sheba, intuitively fears Solomon’s destructive abilities, and warns her countrymen to retreat lest they be harmed, knowingly or not (27:18). In response to this, Solomon laughs and praises God with a request that God ensures Solomon always shows appropriate gratitude. However, Solomon never directly replies to the ant or her concern (27:19). The scene shifts immediately to Solomon realizing that one of his birds was missing and expressing rage at this fact. Significantly, Solomon’s ability to communicate with animals does not actually lead to effective communication with them: the Antess fears him, while the hoopoe goes missing without his permission. When the hoopoe does return, (27:22), Solomon sends him with a letter to the Queen of Sheba, which, perhaps unsurprisingly at this point, she misunderstands. Solomon requests that the Queen of Sheba and her men visit him مُسْلِمِينَ (27:31) which can be translated variously as “in submission” or “as Muslims.” She clearly understands his letter to be a threat, and tells her advisors as such in a famous proverb in 27:34: إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَجَعَلُوا أَعْرَءَ أَهْلِهَا أَدْنَىٰ أَدْنَىٰ وَكَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ: “Indeed, kings, when they enter a city, despoil it, and make the most noble of its inhabitants the lowest; thus they always do.” This concern echoes the fear of the Antess that Solomon and his men would bring ruin upon her kingdom. Both figures anticipate that Solomon will be destructive like other kings, clearly unaware that Solomon is set apart (not least by his ability to speak to birds, as asserted in 27:14). But they are not the only ones who misunderstand others. Before the Queen of Sheba comes to Solomon, she sends him gifts to appease his apparent wrath, but Solomon misunderstands her motivations. He understands her to be offering him a bribe (27:35-27), which he rejects because, as the beloved of God, he has been given much more than any mortal monarch could offer him.

Scholarship on the Qur'ānic narrative provides a range of interpretations, from Jamal Elias' assertion that its focus is on Solomon and the negotiation of his role as prophet and ruler, to Lassner's argument that Solomon and the Queen of Sheba are foils to one another with respect to gender, political leadership, and religious worship.<sup>201</sup> Both Lassner and Elias emphasize the gendered nature of their interaction, especially in later exegetical texts but also in the Qur'ānic narrative itself. I argue that her gender is only one mode of difference that the Queen of Sheba embodies, and the sparse but suggestive text, which has spawned such a variety of readings, also suggests multiple linkages to the animals, supernatural creatures, and even, arguably, God. These links ground the ephemeral figure of the Queen of Sheba. The audience is never informed of her name or her heritage or even her royal status – strictly speaking, the text only informs the audience that she rules over the land. Yet the Qur'ān shows that the Queen of Sheba has significant capabilities: she can see through the magic of jinn, has the same concerns as the leader of the Ants, and has a great throne linguistically similar to the throne of God. She may be a foil to Solomon, but she is also paired with a series of other beings, and this literary context colors the overall effect of the story.

I am not trying to suggest that the Qur'ān is presenting Solomon as anything less than a prophet beloved and blessed by God, but I do want to suggest that this status does not confer infallibility to Solomon. Just like Moses, who, even when performing miracles sanctioned by God, can still fail to persuade the Egyptians to follow him, Solomon, even when utilizing his ability to communicate as granted by God, can fail to communicate

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<sup>201</sup> Elias, "Prophecy, Propriety, and Power," 57-74; Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 4. Further discussion can be found in Toy, "The Queen of Sheba"; Pirenne, "La Reine de Saba dans le Coran et la Bible."

effectively. When the Queen of Sheba does eventually come to worship God properly (27:44), she does so in response to learning that she had mistaken a glass tiled floor for a pool of water. The Qur'ān is completely silent as to whether or not Solomon intended for her to make such a mistake, but it is clear, nonetheless, that it is not Solomon's persuasive power that leads her to worship God, but rather her shift in perception about her surroundings. Thus, I would contend that the figure of the Queen of Sheba in this section speaks to the rarity of effective conversion efforts in the pre-Qur'ānic past, which redounds to God and God's word in the Qur'ān even more than it speaks to Solomon's undoubtedly high status. This contrasts sharply with the narrative in the *Targum Sheni to Esther*, which offers a stronger critique of the Queen of Sheba, Solomon, and the monarchical institutions they inhabit.

Unlike the Qur'ān, the Targum does not offer much in the way of introductory notices, and the commentary on the first chapter of Esther, in particular, is linked by associative words or thematic motifs rather than a clearly articulated structure. The setup for the Queen of Sheba's visit begins well before she is introduced as a character. In its commentary on Esther 1:2, the text discusses the ten great kings of history.<sup>202</sup> The excursus on this verse goes on for many pages and introduces a variety of topics, losing the thread of the book of Esther in the process. The Targum is an elaborate staging of knowledge on the part of the writer/speaker of this midrash – a wildly encyclopedic instinct for narratives about kingship, linked via intertextual reading of Daniel to the understanding of Ahashverosh in Esther. *Targum Sheni to Esther* displays a multifaceted and multidirectional sense of narrative both in terms of its temporal structure as well as

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<sup>202</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 26.

the connections between characters. Commentary on this verse ties Ahashverosh to the treasures of the Israelite temple which (according to the Targum) he inherited, including Solomon's throne, described in detail in the book of Kings.<sup>203</sup> The Targum describes the throne moving from Nebuchadnezzar to Shishank the lame Pharaoh and others, none of whom are truly deserving of this magnificent symbol.

In a discussion of Solomon's throne, the one which had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar, the Targum cites 1 Kings 5:13 as proof of Solomon's rule and subsequent ability to speak to wild beasts, birds of the sky, demons, spirits, and screeching owls or female demons ( על חיות ברא ועל עופי שמיא ועל כל ארעא ועל שידין ועל רוחין ) ( ועל לילי ( ועל לילי ).<sup>204</sup> The Targum cites 1 Kings 5:13, playing on the ambiguity of the preposition אל in a statement which says that Solomon "spoke to (or of) trees" (וידבר אל עצים), moving somewhat beyond any explicit biblical statements of Solomon's linguistic acuity in the Targumic assertion that Solomon could speak to animals and spirits in his employ. Again, it is Solomon's ability to speak to birds that engenders his frustration when the rooster is not present in his roll call; however, the text does not offer an especially flattering portrait of Solomon.

Although *Targum Sheni to Esther* asserts that Solomon was one of the ten great kings of history, it also asserts that his interaction with the Queen of Sheba began when his heart was warm with wine (שפיר לביה דמלכא שלמה בחמר') – in other words, that he was drunk – when he decided to invite the local kings to his palace and again when he offered

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<sup>203</sup> 1 Kings 10:18-20; Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 26-7.

<sup>204</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 31.

to show his ranks of birds to said kings.<sup>205</sup> Beyond this, he has a reasonably passive role in his interaction with the Queen of Sheba. The narrative focuses on her reception of his letter, her trip to visit him, and her experience at his house. When they interact, he largely responds to what she does (stepping onto a glass tiled floor, asking him riddles), in contrast to the extremely active figure of Solomon in the Qur'ānic story.

Where the Qur'ān has a hoopoe (*hudhud*), the Targum has a wild rooster (*tarnagel*).<sup>206</sup> In the Qur'ān, the Queen is subjected to a trick where Solomon's jinn disguise her throne and move it Solomon's throne room before she visits the glass palace; in the Targum, there is also a notable throne, but it belongs to Solomon and is only moved in the conquest of Jerusalem centuries after Solomon's death. In the Targum, when the Queen lifts her skirts, Solomon comments on her legs, saying she's mannish and too hairy. In the Qur'ān, when she lifts her skirts and realizes she is mistaken, the Queen of submits to God, effectively converting to Islam (although strictly speaking this is anachronistic, both in terms of Solomon's era and the time in which the Qur'ān was written). The Targum concludes the story by noting the gifts the Queen gave Solomon; in the Qur'ān, Solomon explicitly rejects those gifts as an attempt at a bribe. In short, though the Qur'ān and the Targum Sheni to Esther show significant overlap, they also reveal enough differences that it is impossible to say which came before the other, as neither is clearly derivative of the other. It is more fruitful to consider them as part of a matrix of discourses in late antique Arabia, presenting two different iterations of the

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<sup>205</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni*, 31.

<sup>206</sup> Note, however, that Jews are called "*al hud*" once in the Qur'ān, and so the tantalizing possibility exists that this might be a reference to the Jewish origins of this story. See Donner "The historian, the believer, and the Qur'ān," 25-37.



monarchical encounter as they were remembered by related but separate communities.

The Targumic Solomon is associated with Ahashverosh and Nebuchadnezzar. Yet he is also associated with the messiah to come and God's own self as one of the great kings of history.<sup>207</sup> There is a fundamental ambiguity to his role with which the text wrestles from several angles, not least in its suggestion that precisely when Solomon attempts to showcase his holistic knowledge of birds, he learns of an entirely new realm (Sheba) of which he was apparently ignorant before that point. For its part, the Qur'ān does not undermine the role of prophets as a whole, for obvious theological reasons, but it does allow for prophetic failure, which has happened numerous times in world history.<sup>208</sup> Such a failure usually happens because people outright reject the truth of the prophetic message, but the Solomonic narratives suggest that failure can emerge from gaps in communication rather than willful rejection.

### **3. Solomon the Prophet, Solomon the King**

So far, we have seen how these two late antique sources share much with one another; even when they express their distinctive concerns, it is within a framework and through common themes that differ dramatically from the earlier materials that we surveyed in Chapter One. Reading the two together, and taking a synchronic approach, is thus more useful for understanding them – in my view – than trying to explain each as the product of biblical interpretation. To the degree they share much with one another, they speak to

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<sup>207</sup> For more discussion of the great kings of history, see Boustan, "Israelite Kingship"; Himmelfarb, *Jewish Messiahs in a Christian Empire*, 3, 15-17, 20, 28, 130. This schema is another example of the ten-kings schema common in late antique discourses. Note that the final great king being Rome suggests that this portion of the text, at the very least, does not see "Ishmael" as a great king of history; this further supports the conclusion that this is a pre-Islamic text.

<sup>208</sup> See Donner, "Historian, the believer, and the Qur'ān," 25-37.

the distinctive memory-making around the Queen of Sheba in Late Antiquity, which the following two chapters will further explore.

Is it possible to make sense of the timing of what seems to be a renewed interest in this figure? For this, I suggest that it is useful to consider the shifting discourse about kingship as it shapes the late antique image of Solomon as well. The description in *Targum Sheni to Esther* of Solomon's throne – and, although discussed to a lesser extent, arguably the Qur'ānic interest in the Queen of Sheba's throne – are part of a wider discourse about kingship and thrones which emerged through Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Increasingly, Christian leaders modeled themselves off of the House of David. Fourth-century Aksumite inscriptions prefigure later Ethiopian claims to the House of David, and King Solomon increasingly became a significant figure in Byzantine imperial ideology.<sup>209</sup> The Macedonian dynasty (867-1056) laid increasing claim to “relics” (like the throne of Solomon) which lent authority to claims of continuity with Israelite kingship and its attendant sacral authority, as discussed by Allegra Iafraite.<sup>210</sup>

“The image of the throne indexes the wider Jewish response to the rise of Christianized notions of kingship,” according to Ra'anana Boustán, who argues that throne traditions follow a “subordinated” or “sacral” model of kingship, which either places strict limits on kingship or “explores the modalities of royal participation in divine kingship.”<sup>211</sup> Boustán follows Yair Lorberbaum in understanding the development of Jewish discourse of kingship.<sup>212</sup> This appropriation of the Jewish past, Boustán argues,

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<sup>209</sup> See Bowersock, *Throne of Adulis*, 161.

<sup>210</sup> Iafraite, *Wandering Throne of Solomon*, 20.

<sup>211</sup> Boustán, “Israelite Kingship,” 167-82.

<sup>212</sup> In *Disempowered King*, Lorberbaum notes that the Rabbinic imagination posited themselves as advisors to a king, which makes this particular detail of some interest: the Queen of Sheba, goes against her own

places it squarely in the genealogy of traditions of Israelite kingship in later Christian discourses.<sup>213</sup> Boustan argues that *Targum Sheni to Esther* is the earliest example of the Jewish throne tradition extant in our sources.

As we have seen, *Targum Sheni to Esther* presents a schema of ten great kings in history, which begins with God and ends with God and God's messiah and includes Solomon, Ahashverosh, and Nebuchadnezzar. Seen against the background of its time, this may reflect anxieties around competing idioms of power in Byzantine and Sasanian cultural competition in the sixth and seventh centuries. It would be easy to assume that the great kings of history can be either good or bad, and to group Solomon with the messiah to come. However, the story of the Queen of Sheba meeting Solomon undermines some of the *gravitas* one might expect of a king described in parallel to the future messiah. After all, Solomon is described as "merry with wine" twice in one paragraph in an echo of Ahashverosh's drunkenness. In his drunkenness, Solomon attempts to show off his holistic collection of birds, but he is thwarted by the rooster, who is not in his palace. Solomon is angry with the bird for messing with the show he wanted

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advisors, who haven't heard of Solomon, in her choice to fill her ships and visit him with gifts, effectively obeying his threatening letter over the objections of her advisors, who do not know or esteem Solomon- the motif of knowledge, and who knows what limiting interactions and offering opportunities for new interactions.

<sup>213</sup> It also fits within the political discourses of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles as we see them, embedding the Queen of Sheba in a wider network of international actors who highlight the importance of Solomon. More than his importance, it ties the kingship of Ahashverosh, Alexander the Great, Nebuchadnezzar, Solomon, and more. In fact, the whole Targum begins by citing Daniel as an intertext, referring to Ahashverosh as one of the ten kings who rule the world. These ten kingdoms are the Kingdom of Kingdoms, Nimrod, Pharaoh, Israel, Nebuchadnezzar/Babylon, Ahashverosh, Greece, Rome, Messianic King, king of Kings. Another strong reason to date this before the rise of any Islamic empire is that it assumes that Rome is the last kingdom before the Messiah. It uses these ten kingships as a springboard to discuss the death of Nebuchadnezzar. The text directly links the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar to Ahashverosh, since the father of Ahashverosh (Darius) 'received' the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's son 'Evil-Merodach.' The Targum first mentions Solomon in a comparison of biblical language about Solomon and Ahashverosh's respective geographic range.

to put on for his friends. This is a fairly outrageous association, if one considers the fact that this man's throne will eventually be a sign of the coming of the Davidic messiah. Nevertheless, the text praises Solomon as the pride of Israel, and though this is in some tension with the other descriptors of Solomon, it seems sincere nevertheless.

Thus I argue that the Targumic presentation of kingship is polyphonous. Though the *Targum Sheni to Esther* is clear that the movement of world empires moves inexorably from Jerusalem to Persia to Rome, the past is never fully past in this text, as it interweaves narratives about the future coming of the Messiah with stories of Ahashverosh, Shishank the lame Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Solomon, perhaps in a reflection of the vibrant, interconnected sense of the past in late antique writing in the sense discussed by Averil Cameron.<sup>214</sup> On the one hand, Solomon's throne is a legitimating tool for the kings criticized in the text. On the other hand, by presenting Solomon's throne as one of the actualizers or signifiers of royal authority, the text subordinates those later kings to a Solomonic authority. That authority is conferred by dint of being earlier in the ten-kings schema and (presumably) because Solomon is favored by God. However, the narrative cost of this move is that the throne functions as a floating signifier that can be repurposed in new situations.<sup>215</sup>

The perhaps more surprising ambiguity emerges in the Qur'ānic presentation of Solomon as a prophet. The Qur'ān is not ambivalent about Solomon; as a messenger of God bestowed with many divinely ordained gifts, he is an exemplar of behavior, and

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<sup>214</sup> Cameron, "Remaking the Past," 1-21.

<sup>215</sup> The messianic framing of the text implies an eventual return, but the text embraces the reality of the power of other groups. Section three again brings up messianic expectations (fitting in with nigh-contemporary *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* and the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*).

people who reject the message of a messenger (*rasul*) are generally painted as foolish, willfully evil, or both. It is in light of the foolishness of non-believers, however, that the Qur'ān suggests that prophetic communication might be ineffective. Moses performs a miracle with God's power, but the Egyptians assume it is obvious magic (27:14). When Solomon and his troops, consisting of humans, jinn, demons, and birds, march through the valley, Solomon hears the Antess warn her countrymen to hide from his troops, "lest they crush you without you even being aware of it." In response to this, Solomon thanks God for his position and asks God to make sure he remains grateful to God. The sentiment redounds to Solomon, in that he is showing appropriate gratitude for the gifts given, but the text leaves a noticeable gap: Solomon never responds to the Antess. He never reassures her, nor does he tell his troops to take any particular care. Instead, the Qur'ān records Solomon's somewhat tangential response to the Antess, an interaction which echoes his interaction with the Queen of Sheba, who similarly fears Solomon's destructive capabilities and never receives any reassurance from him in space of the text. Before introducing the Queen of Sheba, though, the Qur'ān shows Solomon in a state of fury at his missing hoopoe. He threatens to slaughter it unless it has a good excuse for its absence, which, luckily for the hoopoe, it does. In this episode, we see the communication between Solomon and the hoopoe completely break down, so much so that Solomon ultimately wonders if the bird is "of the liars," a habitual, intrinsic liar. Solomon decides to send a letter to the land of Sheba and the Queen about whom the hoopoe had spoken. The letter asks the Queen of Sheba to come in submission which is reasonably translated as either "as a Muslim" or in (political) submission (i.e., a threat), a semantic ambiguity never clarified by Solomon.

In this series of vignettes about God’s messengers, including Moses, Solomon, and Lot, Surah 27 does not suggest that they are anything less than absolutely exemplary in terms of their morals or in terms of their relationship with God. However, that does not mean that they are entirely successful in disseminating a message of God’s unity or compassion. This fits with larger Qur’ānic themes, where a prophet is not accepted in his own time or by his own people, and God’s message is sent through prophets numerous times but only “sticks” with the final communication, with Muhammed and the Qur’ān.<sup>216</sup> The portrait of Solomon in the Qur’ān is much more positive than that of the Targum, but both use the Queen of Sheba to present a (more or less) ambivalent portrait about Solomon’s interaction with mundane figures. Leadership (whether as prophet or king) is an unstable enterprise, and even with God’s support it can fail.

One major historical event might shed light on these discourses of kingship and religious affiliation visible in these texts. The massacre of Christians by Yusuf at Najran in the early sixth century has recently received renewed scholarly attention due to epigraphic and archaeological evidence uncovered in the late twentieth century. These events, which occurred in the Himyarite empire, ultimately destabilized the region and led to a host of martyrological texts, particularly in the Syriac tradition, which have been discussed by Shahîd, and later Christian Robin, Muriel Debié, and Glen Bowersock.<sup>217</sup> The Himyarite kingdom, located in the southern Arabian peninsula, expanded and contracted at several different points, but epigraphic evidence suggests that the polity of Saba (a city on the coast of the gulf of Aden) was annexed by Himyar in the latter part of

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<sup>216</sup> See Donner, “The historian, the believer, and the Qur’ān,” 25-37.

<sup>217</sup> Shahîd, *The Martyrs of Najran*; Robin, *Juifs et Chrétiens*; Debié, “La Kebra Negast éthiopien,” 32; Bowersock, *Throne of Adulis*.

the third century CE. This was followed by a period of Himyarite dominance in southern Arabia.<sup>218</sup> This dominance extended to the establishment and support of at least two dynastic lineages, the Kindas and Mudars, in the mid sixth century.<sup>219</sup>

Aksum and Himyar both had complicated relationships with Rome and Sasania, and the two kingdoms are seen in our sources alternately working with and against the two empires. Through the account of Cosmas Indicopleustes and archaeological and epigraphic evidence, Bowersock argues that Aksumite tumult intersected with Himyarite politics in this period.<sup>220</sup> The elites in Himyar converted to Judaism in the fourth century.<sup>221</sup> It is in this fraught political sphere that Yusuf, the Jewish king of Himyar, entered into a political fray with his rival Aksum, which resulted in a massacre at Najran of all of the Christian inhabitants of this town, to the shock and horror of contemporaneous Christian rulers.<sup>222</sup> The snapshot of international politics engendered by reports of this event – Yusuf was ousted by Aksum and replaced by an Aksumite, and Aksumites ruled variously in the Arabian peninsula for the rest of the century – shows that even lesser powers could have major effects on world politics. This analysis is not meant to suggest that the politics of the Arabian peninsula and Palestine directly map on to the Solomonic world of *Targum Sheni to Esther* or the Qur’ān. Rather, it’s to suggest that it may be useful to read the politics of their memory-making with Israel’s monarchic past against the background of the politics of their time, in no small part because this

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<sup>218</sup> Fisher, “Kingdoms or Dynasties?” 11.

<sup>219</sup> Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 42.

<sup>220</sup> Bowersock, *Throne of Adulis*, 78-105.

<sup>221</sup> Most scholars of the mid-twentieth century had assumed the Jewish King Yusuf of Syriac hagiography was a mere fiction, but epigraphic evidence shows monotheistic commitments from the fourth century onward, which has persuaded scholars like Robin to lend credence to these accounts. See Robin, “Nagrān vers l’*époque du massacre*,” 39-106.

<sup>222</sup> Bowersock narrates this historical episode in an interesting and compelling way; see *Throne of Adulis*.

would have been the available model for large-scale international, interreligious contact.<sup>223</sup> It is in this context that Solomon's encounter with the Queen of Sheba seems to have attracted renewed attention as a focus for creative expansion. Through this historical lens, moreover, it may be possible to understand the textual ambivalence about the human institutions of kingship and prophecy that we see in these narratives.

The Queen of Sheba's idolatry would mark her as categorically different from many of the actors discussed in terms of the Aksumite-Himyarite conflicts of the 520s and 30s discussed above. The Syriac, Greek, and Ethiopic sources which discuss the events at Najran and the martyrdom of Arethas each have their own biases, whether for certain polities or for certain theological positions, but they consistently condemn the non-Christian Yusuf.<sup>224</sup> The Queen of Sheba, like Yusuf, presents a categorical difference from Solomon. In these spaces, is her idolatry meant to be understood, or should it be understood, as a swipe at Christianity, particularly the imperial Christianity of Aksum? The Qur'ānic narrative of the Queen of Sheba suggests the possibility that even those who have been deceived by Satan might discern God's rulership. The Targum is not so willing to concede this point. The Queen of Sheba is rejected by Solomon for her hairiness. For many scriptural texts—1 Kings, 2 Chronicles, the Qur'ān—a silence would not necessarily indicate that there was no sexual relationship between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. However, the Targum is not a laconic text; the silence seems pointed. It may very well be a strategic silence: Suzanne Stetkevych has argued that Solomon was a

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<sup>223</sup> Indeed, as Reeves warns in his discussion of apocalypses, it is not fruitful to discuss these texts as a genre of historiography. See *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, 29. However, note that Reeves highlights how post-70 apocalypses are concerned with exegesis; here, the use of the ten kings motif is used for decidedly non-exegetical purposes.

<sup>224</sup> For a discussion of Yusuf in Syriac conceptions of kingship, see Wood, *We Have No King but Christ*, especially Chapter Seven.



prototypical mythical king, part of a larger Ancient Near Eastern inheritance of oral-literate myths suffused with popular, mythloric stories.<sup>225</sup> The multiple iterations of this story in the Targum and Qur'ān suggest the Queen of Sheba was increasingly part of this broader Solomonic negotiation.

#### 4. Conclusion

As argued in Chapter One, the ancient narratives make an argument about Solomon's significance through positive comparison with the Queen of Sheba. In contrast, the texts examined in this chapter are predicated on a categorical difference between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and the assumption of his superiority. Surah 27 of the Qur'ān and the passage in *Targum Sheni to Esther*, both seventh-century texts, do not need to make an argument that Solomon is a preeminent figure, or that he is superior to the idolatrous Queen of Sheba. Instead, the texts use the assumed fact of Solomon's superiority as an occasion to articulate Solomon's supremacy in terms that are particular to developing late antique religio-political discourses. In the course of describing the interaction between the two monarchs, however, the Qur'ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther* both present intricate portraits of prophecy and kingship which stand in some tension with the textual praise of Solomon. The *Targum Sheni to Esther* places Solomon in a universal schema that includes villainous characters, while the Qur'ān shows Solomon's communication with other leaders fail or fall short, despite his unique ability to speak the language of animals. These portraits of kingship and prophecy are more legible in light of the political history of the Arabian peninsula and Palestine at the end of Late Antiquity.

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<sup>225</sup> Stetkevych, "Solomon and Mythic Kingship," 2, 25.

This chapter did not attempt to precisely date either of these texts and instead grappled with them as seventh-century productions which would have been read or experienced in light of the political and social conditions of that era. While a more precise dating might allow a different range of questions about the specific historical circumstances that shaped various portions of the texts, the evocative cadence of both suggests that the oral dimensions – which Lassner, for example, uses to explain the laconic and sometimes loosely associative aspects of the texts – encouraged a flexibility of reading and responding to these memories of the Solomonic past.<sup>226</sup> I argue that the points of thematic overlap between the Qur’ān and the Targum suggest a complex assemblage of powers in and around Solomon’s court, one which suggests a fundamental distrust in the relationship between rulers and the rest of the world, even those most blessed by God, like Solomon.

The Arabian peninsula and the Levant in the sixth through eighth centuries has been studied in terms of binaries: Roman Christians and Sasanian Persians; Jews and Christians; Jews and early Muslim communities; pre-Islamic Arabian groups and the Romans.<sup>227</sup> The visit between the Queen of Sheba and Solomon should not be made to map onto the binary oppositions that supposedly characterized late antique Arabia, between a queen and a king, a believer and an idolater, a right ruler and a symbol of the forces of chaos. This series of binaries is far too reductive. Instead, *Targum Sheni Esther* and the Qur’ān reflect the dynamic processes of self-definition that characterized this world which intersect at skew angles to processes of canonization. In these stories,

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<sup>226</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 42-3.

<sup>227</sup> See, for example, Bowersock, *Throne of Adulis*, 6; Donner, *Muhammed and the Believers*, 15.

gender and ethnicity intersect to mark the boundary between self and other. Somewhat ironically, this strategy of social and religious differentiation was shared by multiple communities and thus can be seen as a reflection of a multipolar but shared religious landscape, from the many monarchs who offer Solomon tribute in the *Targum* to the ants and jinn who parallel the Queen in the Qur'ān. This chapter has attempted to counter this binary habit of thought by attending to the multiple intersections and parallels of the Queen of Sheba's character to other figures, considered against the broad background of the international, interreligious disputes of the late antique Arabian peninsula and the Levant.

The *Targum* and the Qur'ān both show an ambivalent relationship to political power in these texts, an ambivalence articulated through the meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and the literary context that frames each iteration of the story. Solomon successfully converts the Queen of Sheba, but his communication with the Antess, with his hoopoe, and with his jinn all ultimately fail in one way or another. In the *Targum*, Solomon's throne is stolen and its power appropriated by some of the worst villains in history, legitimating their rule to tie together the threads of history, but at the cost of yoking Solomonic and messianic rule to Nebuchadnezzar and Ahashverosh.

Both the Qur'ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther* show complex attitudes towards authority, even the authority of canonical texts. Qur'ānic pronouncements were, of course, eventually collected into a canonical collection which seems to have stabilized quite early; nevertheless, genres like *adab* literature and *tafsir* sprung up in the following centuries to explain the newness of the Qur'ān, to explain what could be a bug as a feature of the finality of the pronouncement. Just like the institution of prophethood is

precarious and rife with failure in Surah 27, so earlier divine communications are fraught with errors and in need of the ultimate corrective, the Qur'ān, which simultaneously insists on the greatness and also the inadequacies of the past. So too, the Targum buttresses the book of Esther's status through its translation process, but it also uses it as an opportunity to introduce difference and novelty into the late antique Jewish remembrance of the biblical past, tying Esther to Solomonic history. While both of these texts are important in our understanding of the shift in meanings of the biblical past in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, they show that a variety of collective memories could coexist with the authority of textualized biblical accounts. "The Bible" as a stable textual object is only somewhat relevant to how the biblical past functions in these texts.

This chapter does not reflect much on Queen of Sheba's hairy legs, which would be beautiful on a man but are shameful on a woman, according to Solomon, nor did I go into detail on the riddles by which she tested Solomon in *Targum Sheni to Esther*. These are features first found in the texts considered in this chapter, which also speak to the distinctiveness of the late antique discourse surrounding the Queen of Sheba, not least because they are picked up and developed in other late antique materials. Chapter Three will feature an in-depth discussion of the gender politics of the Queen of Sheba, including her hairy legs, while Chapter Four will focus on the clever riddles attributed to the Queen of Sheba in the Targum in light of the ninth-century *Midrash Mishlei*. Note, however, that both of those pieces of the presentation of the Queen of Sheba also contribute to the picture of her fundamental difference from Solomon, which has been discussed in this chapter in terms of her idolatry.

Lassner argues that these texts are a starting point for trajectory of the figure of the Queen of Sheba, into full dehumanization in medieval literature which culminates with an association between the Queen of Sheba and female demons, lilitis, and eventually with the queen of all demons, Lilith herself.<sup>228</sup> In the seventh century, however, we do not have evidence that she was associated with any of these supernatural features, and in fact it is Solomon who has power over supernatural beings. The Queen's visit is an opportunity to articulate a dynamic image of politics, power, and religion centered on Solomon's greatness, with her gendered difference one among many modes of difference articulated through the narratives. In the texts examined in Chapter One, politics validated Solomon; in the seventh-century texts considered in this chapter, Solomon's association with politics casts a shadow of doubt more than anything else. The Queen's dangerous tendencies as a woman who exceeds the bound of her gender are a part of this general ambivalence, to which I will now turn.

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<sup>228</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 4, 21-9.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Queen of Sheba's Hairy Legs in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and the Work of Tabari

How does the Queen of Sheba, depicted as a wealthy monarch in 1 Kings 10 and other early sources, come to be understood as a demon by Muslim and Jewish writers in the Middle Ages? This is the question that Jacob Lassner poses in his 1993 book about the Queen of Sheba, which includes the most extensive past study of this figure's late antique reception. For Lassner, the key is gender: he argues that the Queen of Sheba was eventually understood to be a type of monster, a demon, in part because she transgressed the bounds of her gender through her political and economic power.<sup>229</sup> In the previous chapter, I suggested that gender is not the only or most significant mode by which this figure should be understood. Gender is certainly significant to the reception to the Queen of Sheba – perhaps even core to the rich complex of late antique memory-making around her – but it functions alongside and in tandem with other axes of difference, including her religious commitments and her foreignness. In this chapter, I explore this point further through comparative analysis of a second pair of Jewish and Islamic sources – the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and the *Tarikh* and *Tafsir* of Abu Ja'far al-Tabari – which speak to the further development of the late antique discourse about the Queen of Sheba examined in Chapter Two.

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<sup>229</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, x.

In the *Targum Sheni to Esther*, discussed in Chapter Two, Solomon comments on the Queen of Sheba's legs in the last of a series of humiliations which undercuts her authority just before she asks him a series of riddles. For Lassner, this is one of the key interventions in the traditions surrounding the Queen of Sheba, which led to the tradition in the Middle Ages that the Queen of Sheba was a demon: where the *Targum* notes that her leg hair is mannish, medieval tradents suggested that she had donkey legs underneath her skirts, signifying her demonic nature.<sup>230</sup> The texts considered in this chapter speak to her gender-bending character in a manner that further helps to explain her eventual alignment with nonhuman and supernatural forces. According to the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, the Queen of Sheba is the mother of Nebuchadnezzar, the king who destroyed the First Jerusalem Temple, and the only thing more shocking than this is the implication that Solomon is Nebuchadnezzar's father. Tabari goes so far as to inform his audience that the Queen of Sheba's mother was a jinn, and she herself had to partake in a sham marriage and bloody honeymoon to garner control of her throne as the daughter of the king.

One explanatory model to enrich our analysis of these texts and to extend Lassner's consideration of the demonization of the Queen of Sheba is a theory articulated by Jeffrey Cohen a few years after the publication of Lassner's monograph: monster theory.<sup>231</sup> Monster theory is a body of scholarly literature developed to explain phenomena as disparate as horror movies to medieval marginalia in terms of their depiction of the monstrous, and more specifically what values and fears these depictions

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<sup>230</sup> The *Kebra Nagast*, for example, suggests that she had one goat leg underneath her skirt, which was healed by the wood of the True Cross. See further Pennacchietti and Boranian, "La reine de Saba," 13, and for a fuller discussion of the *Kebra Nagast*, see Belcher, "African Rewritings," 441-59.

<sup>231</sup> First articulated in Cohen, *Monster Theory*, published in 1996, and recently expanded in the 2020 volume edited by Weinstock, *Monster Theory Reader*.

encode. Cohen, in the essay that named the field, argued that monsters are cultural artifacts of specific times and spaces which engage with borders and categorization by constantly threatening their coherence; they both encode the limits of the possible and, through their existence, point to that which is beyond what is currently thinkable.<sup>232</sup> Cohen usefully suggests that the fear of monsters can also reflect a desire to transgress the forbidden represented by the monstrous creature.<sup>233</sup>

Donna Haraway, building off the final thesis of Cohen's essay, further argues that monsters offer a field of possibilities that goes beyond structural binaries of male/female, self/other, abject/subject.<sup>234</sup> It is this range of possibilities – I argue – that are articulated in the texts under study in this chapter, the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and the writings of Tabari, through a focus on the gender performance of the figure of the Queen of Sheba. The description of the Queen of Sheba and her body in these texts extends the alterity of her improper worship through a discussion of her hairy legs and Solomon's reaction to them. As in the treatment of idolatry in the texts considered in Chapter Two, gender does not operate in isolation.

As in Chapter Two, moreover, this chapter suggests that we can see the dynamics of their representation of the Queen of Sheba more clearly when we consider Jewish and Islamic sources in concert, rather than treating Jewish sources as “background” for Islamic sources. The texts at the heart of this chapter are ninth-century Abbasid productions that pick up the motif of hairy legs and utilize it in playful restagings of the

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<sup>232</sup> Cohen, “Monster Theory,” 37-52. Cohen's essay was influential enough in the wake of its initial 1996 production to be utilized (and reprinted) as a starting point for a 2020 anthology edited by Jeffrey Weinstock. See Weinstock, “Genealogy of Monster Theory,” 2.

<sup>233</sup> Cohen, “Monster Theory,” 49.

<sup>234</sup> Haraway, “Promises of Monsters,” 514.



Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon's court. The Jewish *Alphabet of Ben Sira* is the earliest parody in classical Hebrew literature, an anthology of folk tales and aphorisms presented in a larger frame story of the life of the sage, ben Sira. This text was widely circulated in the Middle Ages, popular for its comedic content but also quoted approvingly at times.<sup>235</sup> The *Alphabet of Ben Sira* stands in some contrast to the other texts under study, the *tafsir* (Qur'ānic exegesis) and *tarikh* (history) of Muslim polymath Tabari. The *Tarikh al-Rasul wa al-Muluk*, otherwise known as *Tarikh al-Tabari*, is a well-known work; in it, Tabari is encyclopedic, including wide ranging and often conflicting sources in an effort to present a totalizing and capacious picture of world history. The *Jami' al-bayan 'an ta'wil ay al-Qur'an* (collection of sayings about the Qur'ān) is one of the earliest and most authoritative sources of early Muslim thought about the Qur'ān and is religiously authoritative for Sunnis.

It is perhaps not surprising that the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and the works of Tabari have not been studied in light of one another in previous scholarship: they have disparate literary contexts, separated not only by language but by genre and epistemic claims.<sup>236</sup> Nevertheless, these polyphonic texts present remarkably similar stories of the Queen of Sheba visiting Solomon in his court, which, I argue, makes them apt comparanda for the purposes of this dissertation, especially in light of their contemporaneous related milieux. In each, the Queen of Sheba lifts up her skirts and reveals hairy legs, causing Solomon to

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<sup>235</sup> Dan describes the thirteenth-century Ashkenazi Hasidim who associate material from the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* with Joseph b. Uzziel. See "Ben Sira, Alphabet of," 375-76.

<sup>236</sup> Lassner, Elias, and other scholars have brought together these texts into a wider constellation of sources which discuss the Queen of Sheba, including the Qur'ān, Targum, later historians and tafsirists like ibn Kathir and al Tha'labi; Elias, "Prophecy, Power, and Propriety," 57-74; Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 47-87. To my knowledge, however, this dissertation is the first scholarship to engage the implications of the similar time frame in which these texts were created.

comment upon them. In each, the invention of a depilatory, a cream which removes the hair from her leg without the use of a razor, enables the possibility of a romantic relationship between the two monarchs. Neither text expresses any concern with the Queen of Sheba's consent to a sexual relationship, instead portraying her sexual desirability as a force to be reckoned with by Solomon. Finally, each narrative presents the Queen of Sheba crossing boundaries of her gender, failing in her performance of womanhood and femininity before the king Solomon. Solomon is able to right this wrong and retrieve her alluring womanhood from the barrier of her manly hair through his God-given supernatural (even demonic) sources of knowledge. On a broader scale, I will argue in this chapter that each reflects a specifically Abbasid-era concern with recovering ancient literature and traditions through a wide-ranging pastiche of knowledge.

In the following pages, I will first discuss the Queen of Sheba narrative embedded in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, which is a relatively brief text, in light of the broader literary context, the absurdities of which explain the narrative moves made within the Queen of Sheba story. I analyze the depiction of her gender-bending body in light of earlier Jewish intertexts, particularly the *Targum Sheni to Esther* as well as tractate Sanhedrin of the Babylonian Talmud. I then turn to the writings of Tabari, offering a detailed analysis of his traditions about the Queen of Sheba in the *Tarikh* and a briefer discussion of the parallel material in the *Tafsir* before directly comparing the three textual traditions. Finally, I compare the texts in light of the Abbasid context of both, suggesting that the literary culture of Baghdad in the ninth century may help to explain the extension of the traditions studied in Chapter Two. I conclude with a reflection on the gendered concerns of these stories, which both differs from ancient materials discussed in Chapter One and

resonates with the concerns of the *Targum Sheeni to Esther* discussed in Chapter Two and also evokes the riddling questions tradition to be discussed more fully in Chapter Four. The memory of the Queen of Sheba's gender in these texts is unsettled by her hairy legs, just as her unbelief and questions for Solomon unsettle his authority in the late antique texts studied in the rest of this dissertation.

### **1. The Queen of Sheba in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira***

The *Alphabet of Ben Sira* treats the Queen of Sheba in a relatively short story that ties together several major themes of the text, which I will first discuss in order to explain both the frame and the significance of the Queen of Sheba narrative. The *Alphabet* is a multi-part anthological collection of stories presented under the overarching narrative of the early life of ben Sira. The figure of ben Sira is now most famous from the Wisdom of ben Sira, which was composed in Hebrew in the second century BCE and translated into Greek by his grandson; the latter was received as part of Christian Scripture, collected within many of the Old Testaments of Christian churches prior to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and thereafter, read as "Old Testament Apocrypha" or deuterocanonical literature. For Jews at the time of the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, however, this figure may have been more familiar from the quotations attributed to him in the Talmud and other Rabbinic sources.<sup>237</sup> Fragments of the Wisdom of ben Sira in Hebrew from the Cairo Genizah are found in six separate manuscripts, dating from as early as the

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<sup>237</sup> Tannaitic quotations include m. Avot 4:4, which is unattributed, and t. Yadayim 2:13, which is the only Tannaitic source to mention ben Sira by name. See also y. Hag 2:1 (77c); y. Berakhot 7:2 (11b); y. Nazir 5:3 (54b); b. Ber. 48a; b. Hag 13a; b. Ketubot 110b; b. Baba Batra 98b; b. Nidah 16b; Vayikra Rabba, *Behar*, par. 33:1. See the discussion of these passages in Labendz, "Book of Ben Sira in Rabbinic Literature," 347-92. For more on ben Sira as a Rabbinic-esque figure, see Noam, "Ben Sira: A Rabbinic Perspective," 201-18.

ninth century, suggesting that some Jews may have been familiar with the figure from this Second Temple text as well.<sup>238</sup>

The *Alphabet* begins with ben Sira's conception and birth, and this is followed by a description of his education, a meeting with Nebuchadnezzar, and a final alphabetic acrostic of wisdom sayings attributed to the sage. In these four parts of the story, the text cites a wide range of Talmudic and other Rabbinic sources, as well as biblical traditions and various folk tales also known from Arabic popular literature. All this is to suggest that the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* is a polyphonic text, mixing motifs from high Jewish literary culture with jokes about masturbation and body hair in the first parody of Hebrew literature.<sup>239</sup>

Although the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* was not incorporated into the traditional program of *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* as laid out by Leopold Zunz, it has been studied occasionally in the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century, and more recently in detail by folklorists like Eli Yassif and Dan Ben Amos.<sup>240</sup> Only in the last twenty years have scholars like David Stern, Shamma Boyarin, Dagmar Borner-Klein and Lennart

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<sup>238</sup> Because some Hebrew fragments of the Wisdom of ben Sira were found at Qumran, there is a significant debate about the transmission of the Hebrew text between the Second Temple period and the medieval period when the Genizah fragments attest the circulation of the text. For more on ben Sira at Qumran, see Wright, *Praise Israel for Wisdom*, 3-24, 49-70. For more on the Genizah fragments of ben Sira and their history of interpretation, see Aitken, Egger-Wenzel, and Reif, eds., *Discovering, Deciphering, and Dissenting*. See also the index of passages on <http://bensira.org> compiled by Joshua Blachorsky. In at least one of these manuscripts (BXXIIv) we have evidence of the "Hymn to the Ancestors," the end of the book of ben Sira, which includes Simeon the Righteous among the listed ancestors – from which its Second Temple provenance might be possibly inferred even by a medieval reader unaware of the dating of the text.

<sup>239</sup> Stern, "The Alphabet of Ben Sira' and the Early History of Parody in Jewish Literature," 440; Boyarin, "Changing the Order of Creation," 348.

<sup>240</sup> Zunz, "Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur"; Epstein, "Alpha Beta de-Ben Sira," 119-24 wrote about the text in 1887; Lévi, "La Nativité de Ben Sira," 23, 197-205 wrote about the text in 1892 and again in 1907, "Les deux Alphabets de Ben Sira," 62-6; more recent discussions of the text include Ben-Amos, "Jewish Folk Literature," 140-274; Yassif, "Pseudo Ben Sira and the 'Wisdom Questions' Tradition," 48-63; Yassif, *Sippure Ben Sira*; Yassif and Teitelbaum, "Hebrew Narrative Anthology," 153-75; Yassif, "Traces of Folk Traditions," 228-29.

Lehmhaus seriously considered the comedic significance of this playful yet deeply scholastic text.<sup>241</sup> Joseph Dan argues that it is impossible to discern the precise *Sitz im Leben* of the text, but its hyper-scholastic posture is unmistakable.<sup>242</sup> Yassif's persuasive historical reconstruction of the text offers the best dating schema. The terminus ad quem is its quotation in the eleventh century by Moshe ha-Darshan. One of the folktales recounted in the final portion of the *Alphabet* is a story about a fox and a weasel which appears to be a version of the Arabic fox fable Calila and Dimna, which emerges in the eighth century, thus giving a persuasive *terminus a quo*. It is attested in eleventh-century manuscripts and a twelfth-translation into Latin as well. Accordingly, Yassif suggests that the Toledot section can be dated to the last decades of the ninth century and first decades of the tenth century in Iraq, probably in the area around Baghdad, while an irregular section of the text, which he calls the Aramaic Alphabet, can be dated to the end of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh century.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Yassif, *Sippure Ben Sira*; Yassif, "Pseudo-ben Sira and the 'Wisdom Questions' Tradition"; Stern, "'The Alphabet of Ben Sira' and the Early History of Parody"; Borner-Klein, *Das Alphabet des Ben Sira*; Lehmhaus, "The Alphabet of Ben Sira." Yassif and Borner-Klein are the only modern scholars to treat the Alphabet in a systemic, holistic manner.

<sup>242</sup> I.e., the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* refers to the gematria equivalent of the names Ben Sira and Jeremiah, saying, "If you consider the letters of Jeremiah to the letters of (ben) Sira, they are the same," ואם תחשבו אותיות של ירמיהו לאותן של סירא אחת הן; Dan, "Ben Sira, Alphabet of." One aspect of this scholasticism is the reflection of the hyper-masculine academic spaces in comedic misogyny, similar to the dynamics described by Fishman in "Medieval Parody of Misogyny," 89-111 about Judah ibn Shabbetai.

<sup>243</sup> We have manuscripts from as early as the eleventh century which appear in two major recensions: the Ashkenazic recension, which was popular in Germany as well as France, and the Italian/"Oriental" recension, which was popular in the Italian peninsula and further east. The Italian recension lacks the entire section of Aramaic proverbs but includes questions from Nebuchadnezzar that the Ashkenazic recension does not include. Strack and Stemberger suggest that the Italian recension is probably closer to the original text, while the Ashkenazic recension was transmitted in an "inherently inconsistent form" (*Introduction to Talmud and Midrash*, 334-35). We have more than fifty extant manuscripts, but many contain different versions, additional parts, or are missing sections of the text. The language contemporary scholars use about the pluriformity and variety is striking. Joseph Dan argues that the variety in manuscripts seems to reflect "varying degrees of censorship on the parts of editors and copyists," an assertion very much in line with an idea of an original Ur-text from which manuscripts might stray, which fits with his argument that the Alphabet was written by a single author ("Ben Sira, Alphabet of," 375). He also argues that "the author

The brief reference to the Queen of Sheba occurs in the section in which Nebuchadnezzar asks ben Sira a series of questions. Ben Sira, the *Alphabet* explains, was born from the seed of Jeremiah, after the prophet was forced to masturbate in a bathhouse later used by his daughter.<sup>244</sup> When he was born, it was with a full mouth of teeth and the ability to speak;<sup>245</sup> the baby ben Sira informs his mother that the gematria value of the names “ben Sira” and “Jeremiah” are equivalent to one another, offering an explanation for the text linking them together.<sup>246</sup> After an account of his education, it is said that ben Sira’s reputation came to the attention of the wise men of Nebuchadnezzar in court in

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did not belong to any organized group or definable ideological movement but was merely a writer with an anarchistic tendency who used satire to ridicule all the institutions of established religion in his day... the anarchistic and heretical elements in the work went unrecognized, probably because of the censorship exercised by copyists, who prevented the full version from being known to readers” (“Ben Sira, Alphabet of, 375). It was a well-known enough book that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Haside Ashkenaz attributed some of their mystical compilations to works and theories received from Joseph b. Uzziel, who inherited the wisdom of “Ben Sira and Jeremiah.” Despite Dan’s claim, the heretical character certainly did not always go unnoticed – Maimonides rails against the use of ben Sira in his Mishnah commentary on Sanhederin x. 1. There is a lot of variety in manuscripts, but I suspect Dan Ben Amos is being a bit ungenerous to medieval readers, who may well have recognized and enjoyed the so-called heretical character of the work. The text was first printed in Constantinople in 1519, and then in Venice in 1544. Steinschneider published his *Alphabet Syracidis* in Berlin in 1858. Two alternate versions were printed in the first half of the twentieth century, one by Eisenstein in 1915 and another printed in Budapest in 1926 by Friedman and Lowinger; this was reprinted in Jerusalem in 1972. Haberman published a “third version” in 1957, while Hopkins published a version from the Cambridge Geniza fragments in 1978 (Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to Talmud and Midrash*, 374-75).

<sup>244</sup> Yassif, *Sippure Ben Sira*, 197-99. The *Alphabet of Ben Sira* sets up the premise of men in history who were born to virgins, who are Rav Zima, Rav Pappa, and ben Sira. The text asks: *האך ילדתם בלא בעילה? פעם* , אחת הלכו לבית ימרחץ ונכנס בקיביהם זרע יהודים ולא נודע ממי היה הזרע וילדו אילו אבל לבן סיאש נודע מי אביו , which can be translated: “How did they [the mothers of Rav Zima, Rav Pappa, and ben Sira] give birth without husbands? One time they went to the bath house and Jewish semen entered their vaginas and they did not know whose semen it was, and they gave birth. Only ben Sira knew who his father was.” See Yassif, *Sippure Ben Sira*, 198. The artificial insemination via bath evokes a discussion in b. Hagigah 14b-15a, which reads: *שאלו את בן זומא בתולה שעיברה מהו לכ"ג מי חיישינן לדשמואל דאמר שמואל יכול אני לבעול כמה בעילות בלא דם או דלמא דשמואל לא שכיחא אמר להו דשמואל לא שכיחא וחיישינן שמא באמבטי עיברה והאמר שמואל כל שכבת זרע שאינו יורה כחץ אינו מזרעת מעיקרא נמי יורה כחץ הוה* “They asked ben Zoma: If a virgin is pregnant, what (is the halakha)? A high priest (can only marry a virgin). Are we concerned for the opinion of Shmuel? Shmuel said to them: I am able to engage in intercourse several times without blood. Or perhaps one like Shmuel is not common; he said to them, one like Shmuel is not common, and we are concerned that she may have conceived in a bath? Didn’t Shmuel say “Any semen shot like an arrow cannot fertilize? If initially it was shot like an arrow, it also (can fertilize).”

<sup>245</sup> Yassif, *Sippure Ben Sira*, 199.

<sup>246</sup> Yassif, *Sippure Ben Sira*, 201-2.

Babylonia.<sup>247</sup> The interaction between ben Sira and the Babylonian sages sets the stage for Nebuchadnezzar to ask him a series of twenty-four questions, largely concerning animals and mostly quite bawdy (i.e., “Why does a donkey pee where other donkeys have peed?” and “Why do crows copulate through oral sex?”). The response to most of them consist of ben Sira’s retelling of folktales. For one such question, however – concerning how to shave the head of a rabbit – ben Sira answers with the story of the Queen of Sheba, who is revealed to be none other than Nebuchadnezzar’s mother.

The narrative of the Queen of Sheba in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* is relatively brief, and the two extant versions, which exhibit minor differences, read as follows:<sup>248</sup>

אלף: שאל לו ארנבת היאך נטפת ראשה. א"ל נס בסיד. א"ל מהו נס בסיד א"ל תגלחת שמרטים את השער ועושין אותו כך נוסכין סיד (בזרזיר) [בזרניך] והוא היה נס בסיד ואם תרצה לידע שאל אמך והיא תודיעך היאך נעשה. א"ל אמי אנא. א"ל כשבאת מלכת שבא אמך במנחה לשמוע חכמת שלמה ראה אותה יפה. ורצה לבא עליה. ומצאה מלאה שער ובאותו זמן לא היה לאחת מבנות ישראל שער תחת בגדיה. פתח שלמה ואמר לעבדיו הביאו לי סיד (וזרזיר) [הזרניך] ולקחו הסיד ובררו הסיד בנפה ושחקו (הזרזיר) [הזרניך] וערבו יחד ועשו כן שסכה בו אמך ונטהרה כל בשרה וניטף השער ועשה בה כרצונו. מיד פתחה פיה ואמרה [לא] האמנתי לדברים עד אשר באתי ותראינה עיני והנה לא הוגד לי החצי הוספת חכמה וטוב אל השמועה אשר שמעתי (מל"א י:ז). מיד אמר לבן סירא מי הגיד לך דבר זה. א"ל ידעתי בעצמי כי נביא וכן נביא אנכי.

Alef: he (Nebuchadnezzar) asked him (ben Sira): (the) rabbit – how did you shave its head? He (ben Sira) said: a miracle of lime. He said to him: what is a miracle of lime? He said to him: it’s a shaving [thing] which plucks the hair, and they make it thus: they add lime (to arsenic) and it is a miracle of lime, and if you want to know, ask your mother, and she will tell you how it is done. He said to him: *My* mother? He (ben Sira) said: when the queen of Sheba, your mother, came with a train to hear the wisdom of Solomon, he saw that she was beautiful. He wanted to have sex with her, and discovered she was exceedingly hairy. At that time there was not among the daughters of Israel hair under their clothing, [so] Solomon began and said to his servants, bring to me a lime (and arsenic) and take

<sup>247</sup> Yassif, *Sippure Ben Sira*, 214.

<sup>248</sup> Translations here my own, based on the Hebrew of Yassif’s critical edition (*Sippure Ben Sira*, 216-18) with reference to the translation found in Mirsky and Stern, eds., *Rabbinic Fantasies* 179. What Yassif names tradition B is more explicit than tradition A about Solomon’s sexuality and the inclusion of arsenic in the depilatory, but both have the same basic narrative structure.

the lime and sift the lime in a sieve and grind (the arsenic) and mix it together; and they did thus, she looked at it, and they cleansed all her flesh and wiped off the hair and thus he did to her according to his will. Immediately she opened her mouth and she said, "I did not believe the reports before now, (but) I saw with my eyes and look! It was not announced to me the half of your portion of wisdom and goodness, according to the reports which I heard. Immediately he (Nebuchadnezzar) said to ben Sira: who announced this thing to you? And he said: I know through myself, because I am a prophet and the son of a prophet am I. (Manuscript family A)

(ב) א"ל ארנבת זו היאך נתפת שיער ראשו. א"ל כנס בסיד. א"ל היאך יעשו נס בסיד זה שאתה אומ' א"ל נס בסיד עם זרניך. והרי לך נס בסיד ואם תרצה שאל אמך והיא אומרת לך היאך עושין אותו. א"ל ומהיכן יודעת דבר זה. א"ל מפני כשבאת מלכא שבא אמך אצל שלמה המלך לראות חכמתו. כיון שרצ' שלמה לבוא עליה מצאה כולה מליאה שער. ובאותו זמן לא היה אד' מישראל שהיה מלא שער דכתי' ואנכי איש חלק (בר' כז:יא). מיד שלמה בחכמתו אמי לעבדיו לכו והביאו לי סיד וזרנך מיד הביאו לו וכברו את הסיד בנפה. ושחק הזרנך ברעף. ועירב אותו ועשה מהם נס בסיד ועשה לאמך מלכת שבא ורחצה עצמה יפה וניטלה ממנה כל שערה. באותה שעה פתחה מלכת שבא ואמרה לא האמנתי לדברים עד אשר באתי ותרא עיני. א"ל ומי אמי לך דבר זה. א"ל אני בעצמי שכן נביא אנכי.

He said to him: this rabbit, how did you shave the hair of its head? He said to him: It's like a miracle in lime. He said to him: How did you make this miracle in lime that you're discussing? He said to him, a miracle in lime is made with arsenic. And after all, if you want a miracle in lime, ask your mom and she will tell you how they make it. He said to him: From what do you know this thing? He said: from before, when the Queen of Sheba, your mother, brought herself to Solomon the king to see his wisdom. When Solomon wanted to have sex with her, he realized all of her was hairy. In that time there was no one among the people of Israel who was hairy, as it is written "I am a smooth man," (Gen. 97:11). Immediately Solomon in his wisdom said to his servants, "Go and bring to me lime and arsenic;" immediately they brought (it) to him and shifted the lime in a sieve and crushed the arsenic with flint. He mixed it and made from them a miracle in lime and he made it for your mother the Queen of Sheba and she washed her beautiful self and it removed all the hair from her. At that time the Queen of Sheba opened (up) and said "I did not believe the reports until now, when my eyes saw." He (Nebuchadnezzar) said to him: and who told you this thing? He (ben Sira) said to him: I myself, because I am a prophet. (Manuscript family B)

The claim that the Queen of Sheba is Nebuchadnezzar's mother, who had sex with Solomon after he invented a depilatory to remove her body hair, is fascinating for



several reasons germane to our purposes here. Firstly, it suggests his birth is exogamous, in contrast to the extreme endogamy of ben Sira's birth, which Ephraim Nissan argues is reflective of a scheme of sin and retribution endemic to the text.<sup>249</sup> Moreover, it offers another link to *Targum Sheni Esther*, in its schema of kings as well as their similar presentation of a hairy-legged Queen of Sheba. In addition, the connection between Nebuchadnezzar and the Queen of Sheba moves the character of the Queen of Sheba from the anthological collection to the larger frame of the story, raising questions about the Rabbinic-style compression of time visible in the story.<sup>250</sup>

Ben Sira, whose father Jeremiah's "holy seed" was preserved in a public bath and later impregnated his own daughter, is a product of extreme endogamy. By contrast, according to the *Alphabet*, Nebuchadnezzar, the legendary king of Babylonia who destroyed the First Jerusalem Temple in 586/7 BCE, was born to the Queen of Sheba. David Stern has argued that the text strongly implies the Queen of Sheba is the Queen of Egypt through a multilingual pun: the Ptolemies, rulers of Egypt, were known as the Lagai, while rabbits in Greek are *lagoi*.<sup>251</sup> The Queen of Sheba is equated with the hairless rabbit on which ben Sira inscribed his first letter to Nebuchadnezzar, in that Solomon's depilatory of arsenic and lime was used on both to render them hairless. Thus, the Queen of Sheba is a *lagoi* or rabbit, and also a Lagai, a ruler of Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia, is the product of a union between two entirely other nations. Though this is an outrageous assertion, Nebuchadnezzar does not deny it,

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<sup>249</sup> Nissan, "Importance of Being Hairy," 273-74.

<sup>250</sup> Amram Tropper has made this argument, for instance, with respect to the Rabbinic treatment of Simeon the Righteous and the Second Temple past more broadly in *Simeon the Righteous in Rabbinic Literature*.

<sup>251</sup> Stern, personal correspondence, December 12, 2015. For more, see Hasan-Rokem, "Almost Invisible Presence," 222-40.

and in fact asks ben Sira how he could know such a thing.<sup>252</sup> If Stern's instincts are correct, and this is a coded reference to the Ptolemies, who only ruled after the collapse of Alexander the Great's empire, then the text is identifying a contemporary of Solomon with a family that ruled in Egypt some six centuries later – at the time of ben Sira himself but long after the reign of Solomon.

Such an assertion, however, would be in keeping with the chronological compression of the *Alphabet*. It is unclear whether the text treats ben Sira as a late Second Temple historical figure, who thus could not come to the attention of the wise men of Nebuchadnezzar in court in Babylonia.<sup>253</sup> What is clear, however, is that ben Sira here tells Nebuchadnezzar a story of Nebuchadnezzar's own parents (apparently: Solomon and the Queen of Sheba) suggesting that the Israelite king who built the First Temple may have been the father of the very foreign king who destroyed it.<sup>254</sup> The concern with Israel's past is less historiographical or even exegetical, then, than playful or symbolic.<sup>255</sup> What is significant, for our purposes, is that the figure of the Queen of Sheba thus exemplifies a broader pattern of temporal flattening, which is a prominent and perhaps intentionally comedic element in the *Alphabet*. Her inclusion ties together the building of the First Temple by Solomon, its destruction in the figures of Jeremiah and Nebuchadnezzar, and perhaps also the Second Temple period of the Ptolemies and/or ben Sira himself.

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<sup>252</sup> Yassif, *Sippure Ben Sira*, 217-18.

<sup>253</sup> Yassif, *Sippure Ben Sira*, 212-15.

<sup>254</sup> Yassif, *Sippure Ben Sira*, 216.

<sup>255</sup> The textual compression or flattening of disparate eras and times is of a piece with earlier Rabbinic approaches to the past, as most famously discussed in Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 1-27.

Especially in light of its scholasticism, one would assume that those responsible for the *Alphabet* and their audience are familiar with the books of Kings and Chronicles. Not only does its chronology depart from the histories therein, but its treatment of the Queen of Sheba exhibits little connection with the account of her in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. One key quote – the Queen of Sheba’s speech that “I had not believed all these things until I saw them with my own eyes,” etc. (1 Kgs 10:7) – is integrated into the narratives (as also in the *Midrash Mishlei*, discussed in Chapter Four). But it is here in response to a quite different circumstance than described in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9 – that is: not Solomon’s wealthy kingdom but rather his invention and deployment of a depilatory in service of his desire to have sex with her.<sup>256</sup>

The concern for body hair, however, does draw upon late antique Jewish traditions, ranging from the Talmud to *Targum Sheni to Esther*. In its account of Solomon’s surprise at the Queen’s hairy legs, the *Alphabet* seems to assume knowledge of b. Sanhedrin 21a or related Talmudic traditions (e.g. b. Gittin 6b) about the relative lack of body hair on Jewish women before the time of Isaiah.<sup>257</sup> B. Sanhedrin 21a reads:

איני והא דרש רבא מאי דכתיב ויצא לך שם בגוים ביפוך שאין להן לבנות ישראל לא שער בית  
השחי ולא בית הערוה שאני תמר דבת יפת תואר הוא (In response to an assertion that  
Tamar had used her hair to disfigure Ammon’s penis) Is that so? But didn’t Rava  
interpret what is written, “Your renown went forth among the nations about your  
beauty,” that among the daughters of Israel there wasn’t armpit hair or pubic hair?  
Tamar was different as the daughter of a beautiful (gentile).

<sup>256</sup>See Yassif, *Sippure Ben Sira*, 218. There is some variation between manuscripts A and B of the exact order by which Solomon discerned that he wanted to have sex with her, discovered she was hairy, and invented the depilatory, but ultimately the text is concerned to show that Solomon’s ingenuity overcame the problem of her excessive hair, a sign of her (secretly) failed gender performance.

<sup>257</sup>B. Sanhedrin 21a reads: איני והא דרש רבא מאי דכתיב ויצא לך שם בגוים ביפוך שאין להן לבנות ישראל לא שער בית  
השחי ולא בית הערוה שאני תמר דבת יפת תואר הוא (In response to an assertion that Tamar had used her hair to  
disfigure Ammon’s penis) Is that so? But didn’t Rava interpret what is written, “Your renown went forth  
among the nations about your beauty,” that among the daughters of Israel there wasn’t armpit hair or pubic  
hair? Tamar was different as the daughter of a beautiful (gentile).

Like Tamar, the Queen of Sheba is a beautiful gentile woman whose body hair was different from what was considered normal among the Israelites of her day. The motif of her hairy legs, moreover, suggests that the his story of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon and her hairy legs is playing with the tale of the Queen as we know it from *Targum Sheni to Esther* (i.e., whether from that text or from a tradition closely related to it). As noted in Chapter Two, the Targum is the earliest surviving Jewish text which mentions this detail about the Queen of Sheba's body hair, and it does so in a larger context where Nebuchadnezzar and Solomon are explicitly linked together through the motif of ten great kingdoms of the world; furthermore, the *Targum Sheni to Esther* follows its narrative of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon with a story about Jeremiah. Thus, we see through the lens of the Queen of Sheba a matrix of characters linked associatively in *Targum Sheni Esther* and brought together narratively in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*. In the *Alphabet's* brief narrative, however, we see the sexual desirability of the Queen of Sheba despite her hairy legs; where the *Targum* suggested that Solomon found her beautiful but her legs repulsive, the *Alphabet* suggests that Solomon saw her hairy legs as a challenge. Where the *Targum* wrestles with the implication that Solomon's throne could act as a legitimating tool for unjust kings, the *Alphabet* uses the Queen to posit a familial connection between the man who built the Temple and the man who destroyed it.

## **2. Abu Ja'far al-Tabari**

In addition to a diachronic consideration of the *Alphabet* in light of late antique Jewish texts, it is also useful to consider its depiction of the Queen of Sheba as a part of a wider literary milieu that includes Muslim literature written in Arabic in the same place and century. Most relevant in this regard is the Muslim historian and polymath Tabari, who also wrote in the ninth century. At first sight, this comparison may seem strange. Tabari, after all, was the preeminent polymath of Abbasid Baghdad, credited with writings from the disciplines of fiqh, tafsir, hadith, usul al-din, and ta'rikh, as well as ethics, dream interpretation, Arabic grammar, poetry, and medicine,<sup>258</sup> he is studied as an intellectual figure far more serious and consequential than the strange, bawdy, and often marginalized *Alphabet of Ben Sira*. What they share, however, is their scholasticism, and in Tabari's case, an encyclopedism that is expansive and well-known for including traditions paralleled in Jewish traditions of his time.

Tabari deals with the Queen of Sheba not just in his tafsir but also in the course of his universal history, both of which are marked by the inclusion of multiple and sometimes contradictory traditions.<sup>259</sup> Martensson has argued that he utilizes an empirical methodology in the *khabar* genre, which narrates a story constructed through citation of multiple and sometimes contradictory traditions,<sup>260</sup> stressing that he is not just a transmitter of information but rather uses these reports to shape a narrative of governmental change, which can be understood in terms of the Abbasid empire's

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<sup>258</sup> Martensson, "al-Tabari." Abu Ja'far al-Tabari was born in the Caspian region of an Arab family, and he lived from c. 224 AH/839 CE-310 AH/923 CE.

<sup>259</sup> Tabari, *Tarikh*, sections 853-54 describe Solomon's encounter with Bilquis' hairiness and invention of the depilatory.

<sup>260</sup> Martensson, "Discourse and Historical Analysis," 287-331. He wrote his history after he finished his tafsir, and it is the most researched of his works in contemporary English scholarship, at least in part because the thirty-nine-volume work was translated into English at the end of the twentieth century. The thirty-nine volumes of the translation were published from 1985-2007 under various translators.

crumbling empire and inadequate system of taxation.<sup>261</sup> For our purposes, it is significant that his work is contemporaneous with the *Alphabet* and similarly interweaves Jewish and Arabic traditions, while also exhibiting notable parallels of content and concern: Tabari's report of the visit to Solomon of the Queen of Sheba, here named Bilqis, also involves an account of her setting challenges for Solomon and a reference to a depilatory paste – elements entirely absent from the Qur'ānic report and earlier Muslim sources.<sup>262</sup>

Tabari wrote about the Queen of Sheba in both of his major works, the *Tarikh* (History) and the *Jami'* (Collection [of sayings about the Qur'ān]), commonly called *Tafsir Tabari* (hereafter called *Tafsir* and cited as *Jami'*). These two iterations of the story can be triangulated against the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*. Tabari's tale of Solomon and Bilqis is the subject of a full chapter of the third volume of his thirty-nine-part *Tarikh*.<sup>263</sup> The material is extensive, but for our purposes, it suffices to focus on the modes by which Tabari presents the Queen of Sheba and her monstrous body, which offer a useful point of comparison and contrast to the presentation of the Queen in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*.

The Qur'ān is the core of Tabari's discussion of the Queen of Sheba, but he re-orders much material in order to fit the narrative frame of his history. He explains that Solomon was angry at missing the hoopoe because it was the hoopoe's skill and duty to find water in the desert when his other humans, jinn, and demons were unable to do so,

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<sup>261</sup> Martensson, "Discourse and Historical Analysis," 287-331; Leder, "Literary Use of the *Khabar*," 277-315.

<sup>262</sup> Tabari also mentions the depilatory paste, which suggests to me this is a popular tradition whose textualization survives only from the ninth century; it is interesting to note that both Tabari's writings and the *Alphabet* show an extremely scholastic sensibility that is not diminished by the inclusion of salacious details like Solomon's efforts to have sex with the Queen.

<sup>263</sup> Tabari, *Jami'* 3:576-89.

and the hoopoe's absence meant it was remiss in that duty.<sup>264</sup> The contrast between the rooster and the hoopoe in the Qur'ān and the *Targum Sheni to Esther* seemed incidental in the comparison made in Chapter Two, but al-Tabari and later Muslim commentators draw out the significance of the hoopoe as the creature with whom Solomon is angry, perhaps reflecting the contrast between Solomon's murderous rage and the hoopoe's fault.<sup>265</sup> Tabari thus works to justify Solomon's anger, linking it to his position as the leader of armies of birds, jinn, and demons.

After justifying Solomon's anger, Tabari explains that the Queen of Sheba also had a hoopoe, one which was in her garden when the hoopoe came to that land. The hoopoe that praises the Queen of Sheba, in Tabari's explanation, is not the missing hoopoe (which is the only hoopoe explicitly mentioned in Surah 27) but rather the hoopoe who knew the Queen of Sheba. This choice undermines the Qur'ānic praise of the "great throne" of Sheba. Whereas in the Qur'ān, it looks like Solomon's hoopoe describes the Queen of Sheba's throne in the same terms it uses to praise God, Lord of the Great Throne several verses later, Tabari places that praise in the mouth of the hoopoe who did not even know Solomon.<sup>266</sup>

Tabari also clarifies the Qur'ānic narrative so that there is no doubt that Solomon's actions are based on a proper understanding of the Queen of Sheba's intentions.<sup>267</sup> The Qur'ān, in its brevity, has the Queen respond to Solomon's letter with a gift; Solomon reacts quite angrily, suggesting that she attempted to bribe him, a prophet

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<sup>264</sup> In contemporary discussions of the Muslim traditions about this story, this is a prominent motif, building off of Ibn Kathir's expansion of this tradition in his tafsir.

<sup>265</sup> See Tabari, *Tarikh*, section 576.

<sup>266</sup> Tabari, *Tarikh*, section 578.

<sup>267</sup> Tabari, *Tarikh*, sections 576-86.

avored by God. Tabari informs the reader that this was precisely the reason she had sent him a gift – that is, to see if he would react like other kings, or if he would reject the gift and prove himself to be someone of God. In short, in the *Tarikh*, the Qur’ānic praise of the Queen of Sheba is downplayed, and the Qur’ānic portrait of Solomon’s rage is rendered reasonable.

However, Tabari does not only improve Solomon’s image; he also shows Solomon to be highly dependent on the figures in his employ by describing a series of tests proffered by the Queen of Sheba. She does not riddle him in a manner akin to what is described in the *Midrash Mishlei* (on which see Chapter Four); instead the Queen of Sheba set three challenges. First, the Queen sent Solomon an unpierced gem and demanded that he pierce it; he is unable to do so but asks his humans, jinni, and demons in his employ for advice, and his demons tell him to ask a termite.<sup>268</sup> When they met in person, she asked him to bring her sweet water from neither heaven nor earth (أخبر في عن (ماء رواء، لا من سهاء ولا من أرض)، and it is through the figures in his employ, specifically the demons, that he is able to answer her challenge by filling containers with horse sweat.<sup>269</sup> In these, Tabari grants Solomon a wide degree of agency, but in narrative elaboration, Tabari also presents the demons and jinn in Solomon’s employ as crafty workers in their own right.

However, Tabari also presents the Queen of Sheba as a somewhat monstrous figure in this passage. Her final challenge to Solomon is a question about “the color of the Lord” (أجبر في عن لون الرب), which causes Solomon to faint in response. When he

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<sup>268</sup> Tabari, *Tarikh*, section 579.

<sup>269</sup> The one exception to this is when she asked about the color of God and caused him to faint, which was so traumatic that no one was able to remember it afterwards; see section 581.



wakes up from the shock and asks her what happened, she lies and says the last thing that she asked him was about the sweet waters – implicitly denying that she had asked a question about a physical attribute of God. In response to this, Solomon has his demons build a palace for the Queen of Sheba to enter, but the implication that he will marry the Queen makes the demons nervous, fearing that they will have a male child who will enslave the demons forever.<sup>270</sup> The demons deliberately build a castle with glass floors that have sea creatures in the tile, looking marvelously like water, so that she reveals her hairy legs (here following the Qur’ānic assertion that she lifted her skirts).<sup>271</sup> Note that here Tabari simply asserts that the Queen had hairy legs (وكانت امرأة شعراء الساقين), without any verification by chain of transmission or any opposing positions presented. Her hairy legs are revealed as a result of wider Solomonic as well as demonic agency in the narrative presented by Tabari where the Queen is presented as outside the bounds of propriety in her intellectual curiosity as well as her bodily comportment.

Rather than outright rejecting her, however, Solomon asks for a suggestion to remove the hair from her legs. The humans and jinn can only suggest a razor, a suggestion which Solomon rejects lest the razor cut her, in a move that Jamal Elias suggests is a metaphor for her losing her virginity.<sup>272</sup> The demons, Solomon’s most useful advisors, finally invent a depilatory paste for him to use, and Tabari cites ibn Abbas in asserting that this was the first deployment of such a depilatory and resulted in Solomon marrying her – a tradition quite close to what we have seen in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*.

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<sup>270</sup> Tabari, *Tarikh*, sections 582-3.

<sup>271</sup> Tabari, *Tarikh*, section 583.

<sup>272</sup> Elias, “Prophecy, Power, and Propriety,” 57-74.

Then, however, utilizing a traditional *khabar* form, Tabari cites a competing tradition from Wahb ibn Munabbih, through Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hmayd, that her visit prompted her sincere conversion to Islam and that Solomon set her up with a king to marry, over her protests; Dhu Tubba', king of Hamdan, was given reign over Yemen with her. As a reward for their acquiescence, Solomon established that Zawba'ah, prince of the jinni of Yemen, should do what they asked.<sup>273</sup> Interestingly, rather than phrase it as a requirement that Bilqis marry under Islam, Solomon overrides her objections to marriage (and sharing her rule with a man) by saying that she could not forbid what Islam allowed, under her sincere conversion. Solomon twists the logic of her objection – that she happily ruled alone – to a rejection of her ability to outlaw certain outcomes for herself. The Queen who confounded Solomon, jinn, and all but his demons multiple times is reduced, in Wahb ibn Munabbih's formulation, to total subservience to Solomon's will as God's representative. The text is quite explicit that the rule of Bilqis and Dhu Tubba (and the cooperation of the jinn) lasted as long as Solomon's reign did and ended upon his death.

Thus in the *Tarikh*, we see the Queen of Sheba remembered as a figure from the known world who threatens the order represented by Solomon but ultimately submits to it.<sup>274</sup> Solomon himself is presented both as more capable than the Qur'anic story suggests (at least explicitly) as well as more dependent on his servants. Tabari spends some seven

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<sup>273</sup> Al-Hamdani, a fellow ninth-century writer most famous for his geographic and historical account of Yemen, also repeats the claim that Bilqis was a member of the Yemeni royal family. See the *Ikhlil* 1:132, 136, 152.

<sup>274</sup> In this, we see a microcosm of the moralizing, allegorical dynamics which play out more generally in Tabari's history, as argued by El-Hibri, "The Unity of Tabari's Chronicle," 1-3; El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History*; cf. Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography*, in which it is argued that although moralization and allegory are important components of Tabari's historical practice, the attention to accurate description of location, places, and eyewitness testimony speak to the multiple and sometimes competing ideological commitments at play within the monumental work.

pages of Arabic on Solomon's campaigns and his interaction with Bilqis, and in retelling the Qur'ānic narrative he freely mixes up the order of the verses in order to tell a clear story about Solomon's interactions with the Queen of Sheba. In the *Tafsir*, Tabari spends many more pages on this section of the Qur'ān, possibly in response to the confusing structure of the verses as given by the Qur'ān in addition to his commitment to providing the sayings and stories about the Qur'ān in proper order, a major organizing principle of the *Tafsir*.<sup>275</sup> One of the most notable differences between these accounts is that the *Tafsir* reports that the Queen of Sheba had one parent who was a jinn, her mother, and she garnered rule over her father's kingdom through a brief marriage and bloody honeymoon with the usurper of the throne.<sup>276</sup> Here, Tabari extends the monstrous qualities ascribed to Bilqis but does so through an account that offers more conflicting citations than the shortened version of the narrative found in the earlier *Tarikh*.<sup>277</sup>

Tabari clearly has different goals for each of these works: his history was a reflection on the various forms of political organization, and scholars like Martensson have argued that this is related to a subtle reflection on contemporaneous Abbasid politics.<sup>278</sup> The *Tafsir*, in contrast, is a commentary meant to record a variety of traditions collected into one massive work within a synthetic frame that, as Shah argues, "surpassed all previous efforts in the field, bringing comprehensiveness and a broader context to the

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<sup>275</sup> Tabari, *Jami'* 19:141-168 discusses the Queen of Sheba.

<sup>276</sup> Tabari, *Jami'* 19:141-153.

<sup>277</sup> See Tabari, *Jami'* 19:152 and the discussion in Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 229, in light of the later, extended traditions found in Tha'labi discussed on pp. 51-2. Tayob, "Tabari on the Companions of the Prophet," argues that Tabari used the *khbar* genre to balance between competing positions held in scholarly circles in ninth-century Baghdad, particularly between Hanbali and Abbasid views of such issues as the moral exemplarity of the companions of the Prophet, as Tayob discusses.

<sup>278</sup> Martensson, "Discourse and Historical Analysis," 287-331.

discipline of exegesis.”<sup>279</sup> The structure responds to the form of the Qur’ān, only rarely re-ordering Qur’ānic material in his reports on the explanations given by earlier sources. Claude Gilliot has consistently argued that one of the major differences between Tabari’s *Tafsir* and his *Tarikh* is the way the two texts use evidence. Gilliot has compared the treatment of the legends of Alexander the Great in both, and notes in particular the specific citations (mostly of Ibn Abbas and Wahb ibn Munnabih) in the *Tafsir*, which are often represented in the *Tarikh* as “some say... others say.”<sup>280</sup> Indeed, this is one characteristic that makes the shift to the citation of Wahb ibn Munnabih and ibn Abbas more noticeable at the end of Tabari’s discussion of Bilqis in the *Tarikh*. Gilliot argues that this has to do with Tabari’s goals, which are in the *Tarikh* to create a universal history that rivals the Iranians, as opposed to a precise collection of information that can be evaluated by the reader as authoritative religious transmission, in the *Tafsir*.

Tabari’s discussion of Bilqis in his *Tafsir* is extensive, covering 30 pages of the 2014 edition of his *Tafsir*,<sup>281</sup> explaining the *hudhud* and his place in Solomon’s court, the personal history of Bilqis, and much more. The history presents a holistic narrative of that past, a series of interconnected stories that can be slotted into the story of Solomon’s life in Tabari’s history of the Israelite kings. The Queen of Sheba functions there to show Solomon as a cosmopolitan figure with an entirely unique, complex court system. The *Tarikh* features extensive citation of Qur’ānic verses, but not necessarily in order. In the *Tafsir*, Tabari performs his knowledge as holistic. He moves steadily through the verses

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<sup>279</sup> Shah, “Al-Tabarī and the Dynamics of tafsīr,” 83.

<sup>280</sup> Gilliot, “Mythe, récit, histoire,” 237-79; for more on Ibn Abbas in Tabari and ibn Kathir, see Jaffer, “The asānid of Ibn’ Abbās,” 449-70.

<sup>281</sup> Tabari, *Jami’*, 32-61.

of the Qur'ān, piling up precise chains of transmission to authenticate the knowledge he preserves and presents. There, the Queen of Sheba and her conversion function as a site to link numerous, competing traditions, all of which ultimately point to the glory of God. The *Tafsir*, to a much greater degree than the *Tarikh*, piles up material for the reader. In both, however, the Queen of Sheba acts as a marginal figure whose potential bodily aberrations do not diminish her sexual power. In this again we see the possibilities of monsters articulated by Haraway. The Queen of Sheba here acts as a particularly rich site of reflection and memorialization of the past, a site to articulate anxieties about gender norms, as Lassner argues, but also a site to consider a world beyond (but compatible with) the hegemonic ordering of Solomon.<sup>282</sup>

### **3. Remembering the Queen of Sheba in the Abbasid Era**

In bringing Tabari together with the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, my aim is not to argue for any direct relationship of dependence linking these texts. Rather, I approach them as examples of similar iterations of a story about the Queen of Sheba plausibly dated to the same century. What, then, is the point or value of bringing them together in a comparison? First of all, I suggest they contribute to our picture of the emergence of a distinctive late antique discourse about the Queen of Sheba across Jewish and Islamic traditions, as discussed in Chapter Two. Just as the Qur'ān participates in this discourse, so too Tabari, and Jewish comparanda are no less significant for understanding the latter. It might be tempting to treat Jewish traditions about this figure as “background” to the

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<sup>282</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 102, 225-51, mentions Tabari's work, but in pp. 225-51 discusses Tabari only intermittently and in terms of his use by later exegetes, particularly Tha'labi and al-Kisa'i.

exegesis and extension of the Qur'ān; as we have seen, however, Tabari's accounts find parallels of both content and concern with Jewish traditions of his own time, as reflected in the *Alphabet*. Their parallels speak to what continues to be a shared vision of Israel's monarchic past among Jews and Muslims. As in Chapter Two, it might be useful to consider the specific political and intellectual context that shaped its articulation.

In 750 CE the Abbasids, buttressing their claims to legitimacy by familial ties to Muhammed via Ali, succeeded in wresting control from the Umayyads.<sup>283</sup> Although the power of the caliphs waxed and waned in this period, they ruled, at least nominally, until 1258. One of the major shifts of the Abbasids in this period is the designation of Baghdad as the new capital, a shift from the Umayyad capital Damascus.<sup>284</sup> Baghdad became a hotbed of cultural production, where new literary and visual forms were created and disseminated. For example, in this period elaborately artistic pottery styles emerged, as did the *maqama* genre of literature. Artistic styles, especially in pottery and stucco, that originated in Baghdad became paradigmatic as far away as Spain. Paper was introduced to the Abbasid world by al-Mahdi, the second caliph, at the end of the eighth century.<sup>285</sup>

Writerly culture flourished in the ninth and tenth centuries, which saw polymaths like al-Tabari write extensive histories, commentaries, and legal texts under the patronage of wealthy elites, moving freely between genres and literary forms.<sup>286</sup> Yet the high demand for books also created an economy that supported less wealthy writers, such as

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<sup>283</sup> Yücesoy, "Translation as Self-Consciousness," 523-57, discusses this transitional period and its aftereffects.

<sup>284</sup> For more on this transitional period, see Khalek, *Damascus After the Muslim Conquest*.

<sup>285</sup> For an overview of the far-reaching economic and social effects of the introduction of paper to the Abbasid world, see Shatzmiller, "Adoption of Paper in the Middle East, 700-1300," 461-90. Toorawa similarly argues that the availability of cheap paper fundamentally altered the economics of book circulation in the Abbasid era; see *Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur*, 2-13, 125-35.

<sup>286</sup> See Kennedy, ed., *Al Tabari*, 1-11; Toorawa, *Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur*, 14, 42, 58-62.

Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, a Baghdadi bookseller who copied books to sell and also wrote his own works, which gained modest circulation.<sup>287</sup> His is a particularly instructive example, as Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur was of modest means, and the circulation of his works suggests a high demand in Baghdad for a wide variety of texts, beyond famous “bestsellers” like Tabari.

How much interplay would educated Jewish writers have had with contemporaneous Arabic literary production? Furthermore, how much circulation would an individual’s writing have gotten? How would one have accessed various writing – through networks of loans, or through public readings? Marina Rustow has written about Jewish culture in the middle Abbasid period until the Fatimid era, and she notes the Rabbanite and Qaraite institutional response to evolving Islamic governments.<sup>288</sup> This might give us a grip on the context in which the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* might have been written. This highly scholastic text was clearly put together by someone with an encyclopedic knowledge of a variety of texts and traditions, including Rabbinic and other Jewish sources, folktales, and other etiological stories about animals, and narratives that evoke popular and high Muslim cultural production and Jewish material from a variety of social strata as well. If the scholasticism of the era helps us to make sense of the encyclopedism of Tabari, it might also help us to make sense of the satire of scholasticism in the *Alphabet*. It may also help us to make sense of the encyclopedism or anthological impulse that we see in both – the scope of which, in both, includes historical oddities or bodily monstrosities like the Queen of Sheba.

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<sup>287</sup> See Toorawa, *Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur*, 32-8.

<sup>288</sup> Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community*, xv-xxxiii.

In Abbasid literary culture, there was a widespread interest in antiquarian literature and in the recovery of a distant past.<sup>289</sup> This interest in older texts and materials can be linked to the overall increase in demand and trade of books during this period. Yassif argues that it was precisely this multicultural milieu that produced the *Alphabet*, which is one of the first folk anthologies in Jewish literature in the Middle Ages.<sup>290</sup> Dan Ben Amos similarly discusses the *Alphabet* in the context of a trend which emerged after the Arab conquest, of the textualization of oral traditions that seems related to the scribal culture of the period.<sup>291</sup> This position is closely related to the argument made by Hatterin Yücesoy that Abbasid literary culture emphasized translation across languages and also eras, with a pronounced antiquarian interest.<sup>292</sup>

Unlike Tabari and Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, the author of the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* is anonymous and unknown. Like them, however, the author experimented with creative, new generic forms, bringing together a wide variety of tales. Both the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and the writings of Tabari say that the Queen of Sheba had hairy legs, and Solomon (or the jinn under his control) invented a depilatory made of arsenic to remove the hair from her legs.<sup>293</sup> This tradition is only attested in the *Targum Sheni to Esther*, suggesting an overlap between Muslim and Jewish traditions about the Queen of Sheba.

Furthermore, the author uses the figure of ben Sira to perform the literary experiment of the *Alphabet*, in a seemingly antiquarian mode – whether hailing back to Rabbinic

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<sup>289</sup> See Yücesoy, “Translation as Self-Consciousness,” 523-57; Stetkevych, “Solomon and Mythic Kingship,” 1-37.

<sup>290</sup> Yassif and Teitelbaum, “Hebrew Narrative Anthology,” 153-75.

<sup>291</sup> Amos, “Jewish Folk Literature,” 171-73.

<sup>292</sup> Yücesoy, “Translation as Self-Consciousness,” 523-57.

<sup>293</sup> See Tabari, *Tārīkh*, 241; Yassif, *Sippure* 215. Tabari’s tafsir has similar traditions, attributed to ibn Abbas and Wahb ibn Munabbih (see Tabari, *Jami*’ 3:33-42).



quotations attributed to ben Sira and/or to the Wisdom of ben Sira. These similarities in form and content suggest that the anonymous author who seems extremely versed in Rabbinic and related Jewish literature also knew of Muslim and other non-Jewish traditions, aspects of which are scattered throughout the text.

The *Alphabet of Ben Sira* uses Rabbinic-style intertextual reference to signal an encyclopedic knowledge of Rabbinic, folklorish, and other forms of knowledge. It creates a pastiche, redescribing and recasting some of the most absurd moments in Rabbinic literature to comedic effect in this wide-ranging anthological collection. In so doing, it implies a deep enculturation within Rabbinic scholastic paradigms in tandem with wider Arabic writerly culture. The *Alphabet* uses Rabbinic idioms as well as narrative content to discuss the lifetime of a character who is rarely discussed in Rabbinic literature, one who is lived in a period often foreshortened in Rabbinic literature. In this context, the Queen of Sheba is deployed to bring together disparate historical eras and link the anthological frame story to its content, showing the value of such a malleable character.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Queen of Sheba is not a monster in this chapter, but she is somewhat monstrous. Following Haraway,<sup>294</sup> we might say that her monstrousness points to an attendant field of possibilities, which are textually enacted in the complex works of the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, Tabari's *Tarikh*, and Tabari's *Tafsir*. In each, the memory of the Queen of Sheba is recast as a gender-bending, beautiful figure, whose sexual power must be channeled through a relationship with Solomon or a marriage to another appropriate figure. For our

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<sup>294</sup> Haraway, "Promises of Monsters," 487-94.

purposes, this facet of late antique memory of the Queen of Sheba offers an opportunity to consider the fundamental resonance of the Queen of Sheba's gender across other modes of difference. Precisely where the Queen of Sheba's gender performance fails in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and the *Tarikh* and *Tafsir* of Tabari, her status as a normal or normative human being is questioned and narratively undermined.

In this chapter, we have seen that the Queen of Sheba's gender performance is one among many modes of difference enacted through her character; she offers the threat of the monstrous in her hairiness, but none of the terror. In the biblical and other ancient sources considered in Chapter One, we have seen how the Queen's womanhood acts as a mark of difference and foreignness, and in Chapter Two, we have seen how it works similarly in the Qur'an and *Targum Sheni to Esther*: the land ruled by the woman is the land or political entity that exists outside the bounds of normative practice, and as such, it offers extra space for the texts to work with the ambiguity of Solomon's position as prophet and king. Solomon's position is entirely respectable and yet limited by the failures inherent to the institutions.

The *Alphabet* and Tabari further play with the memory of the Queen of Sheba. The Queen's gender is a marker of her categorical difference, but it also indexes to other modes of difference at play in the text. It is odd, in Tabari's history and commentary, that the land of Sheba has a queen, but it is an odd place: it has many jinn, who interact with Bilqis' male progenitors and the people of the land of Sheba, resulting in Bilqis herself. The *Alphabet* ties the Queen to Nebuchadnezzar, insistently linking all forms of non-Israelite monarchy to one another; the text refuses to differentiate between these various enactments of power, portraying them as literally genetically related to one another. In

Tabari's writings and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, the Queen of Sheba is extraordinary. Both traditions sit with the ambiguity of that fact, refusing to dismiss the desire of her character in response to a potential fear of her difference.

The Jewish and Muslim tradition of the Queen of Sheba's hairy legs is the only relevant extant evidence that predates the complex and widespread European Christian tradition that the Queen of Sheba had a webbed foot that was healed by the wood of the True Cross (i.e., the cross upon which Jesus was crucified) in Solomon's court; a webbed foot becomes part of her iconography in medieval Christian art.<sup>295</sup> This medieval European Christian tradition has no basis in the account of 1 Kings or 2 Chronicles, let alone in the brief references found in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. The Legend of the Wood of the Cross integrated the Queen of Sheba in a typological fashion beginning with John Beleth's *Rationale divinarum officiorum* (ca. 1170), Petrus Comestor's *Historia scholastica* (before 1178), and Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon* (1180).<sup>296</sup> In these and later traditions, the Queen of Sheba comes to figure Mary, while Solomon represents Jesus. Her alterity, as a foreign queen who witnesses the greatness of Solomon, is portrayed as a positive trait that enables her to recognize the significance of the True Cross, which she worships when she encounters it in Solomon's Temple or palace.<sup>297</sup> The traditions, which often encompass an anti-Jewish polemic in the presentation of Solomon as a flawed king, are predicated on the Jewish and Muslim tradition of the Queen of Sheba's visit which developed in Late Antiquity. We see, then, the complex of traditions

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<sup>295</sup> For an overview of the Queen of Sheba in Christian art, see "Sheba, Queen of," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art and Architecture*.

<sup>296</sup> Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood*, 289-349, especially 343. Godfrey of Verbo specifically associates the Queen of Sheba with the name Nikaule, familiar from Josephus.

<sup>297</sup> Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood*, 306.

about the Queen of Sheba from Late Antiquity not only represents a radical shift from the ancient evidence, but also lays the groundwork for new trajectories in later centuries.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Riddles and the Queen of Sheba in *Midrash Mishlei* and the *Gannat Bussame*

Within scholarship on folklore studies and comparative literature, much attention has been given to riddles. For some scholars, riddles should be narrowly defined in formal terms as comprising a “riddle image and the solution to which the image refers,” as Dina Stein has suggested.<sup>298</sup> Others expand the analysis of riddles to a more broad characterization of any bipartite situation in which an unlikely, paradoxical scenario provides set-up that “ultimately, once... solved, will be reclassified or interpreted in a more likely fashion,” as Carol Dougherty has argued.<sup>299</sup> In either case, such research has shown how riddles can have important functions within the narratives in which they are embedded. At times, as Stein shows from Rabbinic Jewish examples, riddles can function as “mirrors” for the articulation of identity. Yet, as Dougherty notes from Greek and Roman examples, riddles can also have a legitimizing and classificatory force that goes beyond mirroring. Particularly if a riddle was given by an oracle, its solution can not only subordinate the logic of the riddle itself but it can also license the colonization of a particular geographical and/or epistemic area. Even when riddles are not a part of an explicit competition – as, for example, when colonists would visit an oracle for advice – their solution can potentially open up an opportunity for domination.

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<sup>298</sup> Stein, *Textual Mirrors*, 38. For more on riddles, see Hasan-Rokem and Shulman, eds., *Untying the Knot*, especially 3-10, 81-108.

<sup>299</sup> Dougherty, *Poetics of Colonization* 49.

Even as stories predicated on riddles come in a huge variety, they tend to follow some common patterns. Some feature reciprocal questioning, as for instance when Bilbo and Gollum trade riddles in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, while others feature unidirectional questions, as when the Sphinx unidirectionally riddles Oedipus in Greek myth. Some narratives make explicit the content of a riddle, while others focus on the act and leave the content unexplained. Following Dougherty, we might look to the specific choices in the narrativization of riddles to consider what is conveyed in terms of intellectual dominance, which is both valuable in its own right and also symbolically translatable to other forms of dominance. After all, by their very nature, riddles involve a type of contest or competition between two parties: one formulates a conundrum, and another attempts to resolve it. Even as such patterns are cross-cultural, their expression can convey cultural concerns specific to historical contexts since – as Dougherty notes – “the success of a riddle depends upon its ability to manipulate a given culture’s classification system.”<sup>300</sup>

Such insights into riddles from folklore studies and comparative literature prove useful, for our purposes, to highlight patterns within premodern reflection on the Queen of Sheba, further pointing to the difference between early and late antique periods. According to 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9, the Queen of Sheba came to test Solomon with *hiddot* (הִידוֹת, i.e. hard questions or riddles). Both Kings and Chronicles are fairly explicit that the Queen of Sheba is more like the Sphinx than Gollum.<sup>301</sup> When she learns of Solomon’s fame, she comes to test him with *hiddot* (תָּבֵא לְנִסְתּוֹ בְּהִידוֹת). Solomon is able

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<sup>300</sup> Dougherty, *Poetics of Colonization*, 38.

<sup>301</sup> Feldman argues that in Josephus, Solomon is presented as an Oedipal figure, who can resolve impossible riddles; “Josephus’ Presentation of Solomon,” 114-31.

to answer everything that she asks ( וַיִּגְדֹּל לָהּ וְשָׁלְמוֹהַ, אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֶיהָ לֹא-הָיָה דָבָר נֶעְלָם מִן-הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר (לא הגיד לה) and speak of hidden things. The early reception of this figure is marked by some variance around whether the questioning was reciprocal or unidirectional. Josephus suggests the Queen of Sheba and Solomon reciprocally riddle one another (*Ant.* 8.165) while Origen repeats the biblical language that the Queen of Sheba tested Solomon (*Comm. Song of Songs* 4:1).

What those questions or riddles were, however, was left unstated by the biblical texts, which instead devote the bulk of the verses which narrate her visit to what the Queen of Sheba sees in Solomon's home and how she blesses him. So too in other treatments of this figure prior to 600 CE, which variously describe the riddling between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba but refrain from detailing the specific riddles and solutions. Josephus, in his *Antiquities*, introduces his iteration of the biblical Queen of Sheba narrative (8.165-75) with parallel stories of riddle contests between Solomon and other monarchs. Such stories find no precedent in biblical traditions but form part of Josephus' effort to render Solomon legible to his elite Roman audience. Josephus describes a riddle contest between Solomon and Hiram of Tyre (*Ant.* 8.143) as the reason for Hiram's generosity with Temple materials. However, Josephus does not specify any riddles that the Queen herself asked of Solomon or vice versa. Likewise, in the New Testament, when the Gospels of Matthew and Luke attribute to Jesus a proverbial statement about "The Queen of the South who came to hear this wisdom of Solomon" (Mt 12:42, Lk 11:31), as an apocalyptic figure, neither detail the wisdom which passed between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Her conversation with Solomon is among the characteristics which enable identification of these references to the "Queen of the South"

with the Queen of Sheba as described in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles.<sup>302</sup> As in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, the content of their conversation remains unspecified.

The earliest Jewish text in which we see specific riddles attributed to the Queen of Sheba is the *Targum Sheni to Esther*, in which the Queen of Sheba first sends Solomon a suite of ambiguously gendered youths and later tests him with three brief riddles. Much more extensive, however, is the riddling narrative in the *Midrash Mishlei*, a collection of midrashim commenting on the book of Proverbs dated from around the eighth or ninth century CE. The riddles of the Queen of Sheba in the *Midrash Mishlei* have been extensively treated by Stein in her 2012 book *Textual Mirrors*.<sup>303</sup> This chapter builds upon Stein's insights into the meaning and function of the riddles in *Midrash Mishlei*. Here, however, I focus less on the riddles themselves than on what they tell us about the representation of the Queen of Sheba in *Midrash Mishlei* as it relates to the broader late antique engagement with this figure within and beyond Jewish tradition. Accordingly, I consider its narrativization of her riddling in relation to what it communicates about power and domination, further exploring how the discourse surrounding the Queen of Sheba was used to articulate ideals of kingship.

Whereas Stein focuses wholly on Jewish precedents and parallels, this chapter thus looks to non-Jewish comparanda as well. In the previous chapters, we noted the importance of Islamic comparanda for understanding late antique Jewish sources on the Queen of Sheba in an extension of the insights of Jacob Lassner.<sup>304</sup> In this chapter, I

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<sup>302</sup> The nearly identical passages in Matthew and Luke are reproduced in full and discussed in Chapter One above.

<sup>303</sup> Stein, *Textual Mirrors*, 33-57.

<sup>304</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 9-35, 88-136.



further this work by introducing a Syriac Christian source that has yet to be brought into conversation with research on the Queen of Sheba. In a roughly contemporaneous tradition preserved in a medieval gospel commentary from the Syriac tradition, called the *Gannat Bussame* (literally, the Garden of Delights), one also finds a claimed record of the riddles between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, albeit there attributed to Solomon rather than the Queen.<sup>305</sup> Inasmuch as Christian sources are absent from Lassner's characterization of the Jewish and Islamic discourse about the Queen of Sheba in Late Antiquity, attention to the *Gannat Bussame* can illumine the broader cultural context that saw the intensification of interest in the encounter between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, in general, and in the precise content of their riddling, more specifically.

The most extensive treatment of this phenomenon in scholarship so far is Stein's analysis of the riddling in *Midrash Mishlei* from the perspective of folklore studies and literary criticism. As noted above, Stein takes a narrow definition of riddles. By her definition, riddles are rare in Rabbinic Jewish literature, and the riddles in *Midrash Mishlei* are largely unprecedented; they thus offer a textual site to consider Rabbinic midrashic self-reflexivity, which she contrasts with visual and other non-linguistic moments of Rabbinic identity formation.<sup>306</sup> The only appearances of riddles which fit her definition are in *Lamentations Rabbah*, which features eleven tales of riddles between the people of Jerusalem and Athens, and these evoke one example of a riddle found in the

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<sup>305</sup> The *Gannat Bussame* is a much later collection, from the thirteenth century, but the Queen of Sheba narrative preserved therein is attributed to Sharbokht bar Msargis, a ninth-century tradent. See discussion further below as well as Reinink, "Seharbokht, ein nestorianischer Lehrer der islamischen Zeit," 73-98.

<sup>306</sup> Stein, *Textual Mirrors*, 1-17.

biblical Samson story; by her reading, the novelty of *Midrash Mishlei* thus functions to reveal the process of Rabbinic self-reflection rather than a stable identity.<sup>307</sup>

More recently, Christine Hayes has posited that riddling should be considered more broadly so as to include the numerous contests of wit contained within the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>308</sup> Hayes thus draws attention to the ways such narratives depict the testing of Rabbinic wit and intelligence, especially against outsiders, in acts of Rabbinic self-definition. Significantly, for our purposes, Hayes points to Talmudic narratives with a riddle-like sensibility involving not just Athenian sages but also rulers like emperors and emperors' daughters (e.g., B. Hullin 59b-60a).<sup>309</sup>

In a similar vein, Richard Kalmin has also taken a broader approach to riddles, looking to Rabbinic narratives about riddling contests that feature an impossible demand posed by the opponent to the wise protagonist.<sup>310</sup> This broader approach enables a more comparative horizon. Kalmin, for instance, argues that the riddling contests in B. Bekharot correspond to traditions in the *Ahiqar*, an ancient Aramaic set of sapiential traditions which can be traced to at least the fifth century BCE and which circulated widely in the Near East (including in Syriac).<sup>311</sup> Kalmin's work highlights the importance of riddle contests and riddling interactions in the Near East into Late Antiquity in what he calls the "common store-house of tradition" of the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>312</sup>

For our purposes, the insights of Hayes and Kalmin prove useful in drawing out the broader Jewish and non-Jewish contexts in which we can understand the

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<sup>307</sup> Stein, *Textual Mirrors* 42.

<sup>308</sup> Hayes, "Rabbis as Jesters."

<sup>309</sup> Hayes, "Rabbis as Jesters."

<sup>310</sup> Kalmin, "Ahiqar and Rabbinic Literature," 373-88.

<sup>311</sup> Kalmin, "Ahiqar and Rabbinic Literature," 378.

<sup>312</sup> Kalmin, "Ahiqar and Rabbinic Literature," 374.

representation of the Queen of Sheba in *Midrash Mishlei* and the place of riddles therein. As we shall see, the iterations of Queen of Sheba narrative that utilize this riddling motif may be new in their invocation of the Queen of Sheba, but they stand in a Rabbinic tradition of narrativizing riddle contests between Jewish and non-Jewish figures, which itself draws on older cosmopolitan sapiental traditions from across the Near East. What Kalmin notes of this Near Eastern context, moreover, can be pushed further. In this chapter, I argue for a similar interplay between *Midrash Mishlei* and the *Gannat Bussame*: the two are likely not connected by any relationship of direct dependence, but they speak to common concerns of their time, and the ways that the Queen of Sheba was deployed to speak to them.

This chapter thus focuses on the materials about the Queen of Sheba and riddles in *Midrash Mishlei* and the *Gannat Bussame*, considered in their own literary contexts, in comparison with one another and in light of interreligious concerns of the post-Islamic conquest period. To my knowledge, these two traditions – despite being roughly contemporaneous and rare in their detailed treatment of the riddling of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba – have never been examined in concert. Syriac Christian sources, in fact, have yet to be brought into the scholarly conversation about the late antique reception of the Queen of Sheba, which has instead focused on parallels between Jewish and Islamic materials.<sup>313</sup> In what follows, I will begin by considering the relevant materials in

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<sup>313</sup> Brock has examined later Queen of Sheba traditions (“The Queen of Sheba’s Questions to Solomon,” 331–45) in light of parallel traditions in Armenian, which show significant overlap with one another and marked divergence from both Ethiopic and Jewish traditions about the Queen of Sheba. The Syriac manuscripts (which date from the fourteenth century, 1712/13, and 1899) in total preserve 13 questions and riddles from the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, which are fully preserved in the 1712/13 manuscript, Mingana Syr 480 f. 298<sup>a-b</sup>. The Armenian tradition, in independent collections as well as in insertions found in Armenian translations of Michael the Syrian’s *Chronicle*, preserve eleven virtually identical questions (p.

*Midrash Mishlei*, including in relation to its precedents in the *Targum Sheni to Esther*.

Then I will turn to analysis and comparison with the relevant materials in *Gannat*

*Bussame*. In *Midrash Mishlei* and *Gannat Bussame* alike, I suggest that the Queen is used to sketch an exemplary scene of mutual interdependence between foreign entities who model the translation of cultural meaning through the riddles of the texts. By means of conclusion, I ask why the lists of riddles were attached to the Queen of Sheba narratives when and where they were, and I reflect on the textual vision of monarchical interaction in light of the relationship between Muslim ruling classes and non-Muslim Islamicate subjects.

### **1. *Midrash Mishlei***

In form, *Midrash Mishlei* is somewhere between a traditional midrash and a

commentary.<sup>314</sup> Burton Visotzky situates this work between the late eighth and late tenth

century based on the texts which it quotes – most notably, *Avot de R. Natan* – and the

texts which quote it, including the *Mahor Vitry*.<sup>315</sup> Because the text quotes a mixture of

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332). In contrast, Ethiopic traditions do not preserve such a developed question tradition, and examples of such a tradition in Jewish texts like *Midrash Mishlei* share at most thematic content, rather than the similarities of form found in the Armenian and Syriac traditions.

<sup>314</sup> See Visotzky, *Midrash on Proverbs*, 2-8, for the issues around dating the text. Visotzky argues that the text represents a shift from midrashic exegesis to commentary, which has all the hallmarks of a relatively late midrashic collection, lacking proems and introductory words. It shows overlap with material from the Mishnah, Tosefta, Mekhilta, and Sifrei; it also shares characteristics with Heikhalot literature and a number of other early Jewish sources, although there is not much textual overlap, noticeably, with the Jerusalem Talmud. The Babylonian Talmud is quoted sparingly. Visotzky buttresses his argument that it is a ninth-century text by pointing to the overlap with ninth-century Shi'ur Qomah and Heikhalot literature and what he argues is the way the text reflects concerns of ninth-century Karaite leader Daniel al-Qumisi, including the contextual reading of biblical verses. It is most often studied by scholars of Jewish mysticism because of its schema for the study of mystical literature.

<sup>315</sup> See Visotzky, *Midrash on Proverbs*, 8-12. This argument is somewhat tricky: Visotzky argues for this date based on a reference to “Haggadat Mishle” in the eleventh-century Hebrew dictionary composed by

Babylonian and Palestinian material, Visotzky argues that the geographic origins, although indeterminate, lay within the provenance of Rabbanite scholastic culture in Babylon and Palestine.

As noted above, Stein has written an extensive analysis of the riddles therein.<sup>316</sup> Stein's aim there is to explore the erotic and linguistic aspects of Rabbinic self-reflexivity. For Stein, this material in *Midrash Mishlei* proves significant because it offers a scene of explicit competition between Solomon as a Rabbinic exemplar and the Queen of Sheba as a paradigmatic other, ideal for the verbal articulation of the Rabbinic self. Here, my concern is more to draw out the function of these riddles in relation to the Queen of Sheba. Accordingly, I follow Stein's analysis for drawing out the meaning of the riddles, but I also consider the literary framing thereof, not least to lay the groundwork for comparing *Midrash Mishlei* not just to Jewish precedents but also to Syriac Christian counterparts.

*Midrash Mishlei* explains that the Queen of Sheba had tested Solomon by means of four riddles. Two are based on verbal ambiguity, while two are visual tests which require the disaggregation of groups of people. All reflect an interest in gender performance, genitalia, and reproduction.<sup>317</sup> The four riddles are as follows:

- (1) Seven exit and nine enter, two pour and one drinks. He said to her: Surely, seven days of menstruation exit and nine months of pregnancy enter, two breasts pour and the baby drinks. He said to her: Seven days of menstrual

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Nathan ben Jehiel and another reference to Shohar Tob in the *Mahor Vitry*, both of which also cite passages from the text known from other manuscripts. Thus, he argues for the beginning of the eleventh century as the *terminus ante quem*.

<sup>316</sup> Stein, *Textual Mirrors*, 33-57.

<sup>317</sup> This follows Visotzky's translation as found in *Midrash Mishle*, 18-19.

impurity (נִידָה/*niddah*) go out, nine months of pregnancy enter; two breasts pour and the baby drinks.

- (2) What is a woman who says to her son: Your father is my father, your grandfather my husband, you are my son, and I am your sister? He said to her, Surely, the daughters of Lot say to their sons: Your father is my father, your grandfather is my husband, you are my son, and I am your sister.
- (3) She performed yet another test in front of him. She brought before him boys and girls, all of the same appearance, all of the same height, all wearing the same clothing. She said to him, Separate the males from the females. He immediately signaled his eunuchs, who brought him parched grain and nuts. He began to distribute them. The boys, who were not ashamed, gathered them up in their clothing. The girls, who were ashamed, gathered them up in their kerchiefs. He said to her: Those are the males and those are the females. She said to him, My son, you are a great sage.
- (4) She performed yet another test in front of him. She brought circumcised and uncircumcised (men) before him, all of the same height and all wearing the same clothing. She said to him: Separate the circumcised from the uncircumcised. He immediately signaled to the high priest, and he opened the ark of the covenant. The circumcised among them bowed to half their height, and not only that but their faces were filled with the radiance of the *Shekhinah*. The uncircumcised among them immediately fell prostrate. He said to her: these are circumcised and those are not. She said, “From where do you know? He said to her: from Balaam, is it not written, “Who beholds visions from the almighty [prostrate but with eyes unveiled]”? (Num 24:4)

In Stein’s deft literary analysis of these four riddles, she argues that they act as a textual mirror for the Rabbinic authors, who identified with Solomon and see in him their own ability to discern the salient differences between categories of people.<sup>318</sup> The riddles reflect the ability to see through ambiguous language or clothing, to separate men from women and Jews from gentiles, showing a wide variety of types of knowledge or wisdom. Because riddles are explicitly wit-testing devices, Stein argues that the text

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<sup>318</sup> Stein, *Textual Mirrors*, 36.

displays a self-conscious reflexivity to utilizing them as narrative devices. Stein argues that Solomon in this narrative is a rabbi *par excellence* and the Queen of Sheba is his discursive Other, by means of her gender and her foreignness, which holds up the mirror and allows Solomon (and thus, the rabbis who identify with him) to define himself. Yet Stein argues further that the very nature of riddles as the device by which Solomon demonstrates his knowledge subverts the stability of his discursive position.<sup>319</sup>

Stein's analysis aptly highlights the function of riddling and alterity in relation to the representation of Solomon, but how might *Midrash Mishlei* contribute to our understanding of the discussion of the Queen of Sheba that we have examined in Chapter Two and Chapter Three above? Before turning to compare this material with *Targum Sheni to Esther* and *Gannat Bussame*, I suggest it is useful to address this question by considering how these riddles are framed within *Midrash Mishlei* itself. When we focus on the Queen and expand our analysis beyond the riddles themselves to include their literary framing, I suggest that we can glimpse more ambivalence at play in the representation of the Queen of Sheba, who emerges as more than just an "Other" or mirror of Solomon.

The material on the Queen of Sheba in *Midrash Mishlei* is more extensive than the specification of her riddles, and this non-riddling material resonates with the riddles themselves. The text opens with a quote of Proverbs 1:1, "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel," and presents a *petihta* by Rabbi Tanhum ben Hanilai, who quotes Job 28:12: "But where can wisdom be found?"<sup>320</sup> This phrase is repeated four

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<sup>319</sup> Stein, *Textual Mirrors*, 47.

<sup>320</sup> This is a classical *petihta* format; on which see Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 159.

times, engendering several responses that redound to Solomon's wisdom,<sup>321</sup> including an iteration of the story of Solomon's encounter with the Queen in 1 Kings 10. The commentary on Proverbs 1:1 in *Midrash Mishlei* is structured around four repetitions of the question of Job 28:12, each of which is followed by an answer and related traditions:

Rabbi Tanhum ben Hanilai – Where can wisdom be found? (Job 28:12)  
Anonymous – This refers to Solomon (1 Kings 3:5 and 2 Chronicles 1:12)  
Wisdom precedes Torah, as it is written in a Mishnah → R. Eliezar b. Azariah says Solomon's wisdom was given (2 Chronicles 1:12)

Where is the source of understanding? (Job 28:12)  
Simeon ben Yohai – they are synonyms (1 Kings 5:9-10) and Solomon's wisdom and understanding were given because Solomon fasted for 30 days. Solomon is the wisest of men (1 Kings 5:11) wiser than the patriarchs Adam, Moses, and Abraham.  
R Ishmael reports that Solomon's wisdom was famous.

Where can wisdom be found? (Job 28:12)  
This refers to the Queen of Sheba, who heard of Solomon's wisdom (1 Kings 10:1). R. Jeremiah – *hiddot* are parables (*meshalim*).  
The Queen of Sheba presents two verbal riddles and two visual tests  
Solomon explains his reasoning – Num 24:4, Job 12:3  
The Queen of Sheba praises Solomon– 1 Kings 10:7-9  
Comparison of David and Solomon, stressing equality

Where can wisdom be found? (Job 28:12)  
R. Joshua said “in the heart” while R. Eliezer says “in the head”; Solomon agrees with R. Joshua while David agreed with R. Eliezer.

Significantly for our purposes, even the engagement with 1 Kings is framed, not in historical terms or exegesis of 1 Kings or 2 Chronicles, but rather as midrashic reflection on Job 28:12. On the one hand, such framing makes sense in relation to the function of riddling, more broadly, as a contest over knowledge and thus a matter of wisdom. On the other hand, however, it resonates with earlier Rabbinic tradition:

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<sup>321</sup> It is possible to view the structure of the midrash on Proverbs 1:1 as having either 3 or four parts, as the text repeats the initial question twice more, but also introduces a new formulation. The text asks, “Where is the source of understanding?” in a quote of the same verse of Job (28:12).



inasmuch as *Midrash Mishlei* here associates Job and the Queen of Sheba, it recalls the only mention of this queen in the Babylonian Talmud. As noted in Chapter One, this reference occurs within a discussion of Job and the era in which he lived found in B. Bava Batra 15b. There, Rabbi Natan says that Job lived in the days of the kingdom of Sheba, based on reports in Job 1:15 that people from Sheba raided Job's livestock. Several lines later, the text reports that Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani, in the name of Yonatan, says that anyone who says that the Queen of Sheba was a woman is mistaken because מלכת שבא is (best understood as) מלכותא;<sup>322</sup> in other words, *malkat sheba* is not Queen of Sheba but the kingdom of Sheba. As we have seen above in Chapter One, early Rabbinic sources are notoriously silent on the Queen of Sheba, such that this Talmudic example stands out. Accordingly, it seems more than coincidental that *Midrash Mishlei* makes the connection with Job as well. Whether or not the Talmudic connection of Job and Sheba is here presumed, however, the association remains significant, particularly in light of Kalmin's suggestion that late antique Jewish riddling traditions should be read as part of the broader Near Eastern sapiential tradition. Seen from this perspective, it is perhaps unsurprising that in a commentary on the wisdom text of Proverbs, a quote from Job is used to introduce a story about the Queen of Sheba's riddles for Solomon.

Furthermore, before introducing the riddles that the Queen of Sheba asked Solomon, the text anonymously presents an extremely relevant question which explicitly connects the narrative in Kings and Chronicles both to the wisdom tradition and to earlier Rabbinic tradition. What are *hiddot*? Rabbi Jeremiah has an answer: They are

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<sup>322</sup> B. Baba Batra 13b: כל האומר מלכת שבא אשה היתה אינו אלא טועה.

*meshalim*!<sup>323</sup> Thus, even before presenting the riddles by which the Queen of Sheba tested Solomon, the text emphasizes that his answers (and his ability to answer) are examples of wisdom, both as an abstract virtue and as a verbal production. More intriguing still is what his pronouncement does to the rhetorical structure of the texts. As David Stern has argued, the mashal represents a specifically Rabbinic literary form of self-reflective discourse, that, over time, both regularized and also became more expansive.<sup>324</sup> *Midrash Mishlei*, as a post-Amoraic textual collection, displays characteristics that Stern associates with the comparably late *Sefer haBahir*, namely, an expansive tendency to develop and extend the mashal into a narrative rather than using it to underscore a single message.<sup>325</sup> In this case, the mashal is deployed as an element in a narrative about the book of Proverbs, creating an ouroboros effect of a mashal in a midrash on *meshalim*. In this layered literary performance, the history of the book of Kings is utilized as a witness for the claims of Proverbs to create a Rabbinized vision of the past through the deployment of the memory of the Queen of Sheba.

Even more intriguing for our purposes is the role that Rabbi Jeremiah's verdict gives to the Queen of Sheba. By attributing the means by which she tested Solomon to *meshalim*, the text makes her a co-participant in the very wisdom tradition that is represented by the book of Proverbs, upon which the midrash comments. Even if this

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<sup>323</sup> For more on the Rabbinic sense of *mashal*, see Stern, "Rhetoric and Midrash." In *Targum Sheni to Esther* and both the Targum to 2 Chronicles (*ad* 9:1) and the Targum to 1 Kings (*ad* 10:1), the Queen of Sheba's *hiddot* as described as *mathalim*. This is intriguing because *mathal* is a fairly straightforward Aramaicization of Hebrew *mashal*.

<sup>324</sup> Stern, "Rhetoric and Midrash," 274.

<sup>325</sup> Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 213. Note too that the mashal becomes less prominent in Jewish literature in the eighth and ninth centuries, the era in which this text developed (p. 224).

implication is not of equality *per se*, it arguably points to her as more than simply a mirrored “Other” of Solomon. What is evoked, rather, is at least partnership.

This sense of partnership resonates with the way the text presents the Queen of Sheba’s riddles in the following lines. According to *Midrash Mishlei*, the Queen of Sheba asks Solomon if he is the person of whose reputation and wisdom she had heard; he affirms that this is the case. She goes on to ask: If I asked you one thing, would you respond to me? (אם אני שואלת אותך דבר אחד אתה משבני) Solomon assents twice to this before each of the first two riddles.<sup>326</sup> The riddles are not some sort of pop quiz visited upon Solomon by a nosy, far-off queen, but a collaborative project between the two of them which displays their participation in the Rabbinic performance of wisdom jointly.

In the context of analyzing tropes of riddling in relation to Greek foundation oracles, Dougherty stresses that they are not “simple mirrors of historical reality but representative of a coherent system of cultural meaning.”<sup>327</sup> With Dougherty, I contend that riddles can be more than a mirror; they often reflect a coherent system of cultural value. The cultural values in these riddles associated with the Queen of Sheba – and by extension Solomon – include the differentiability of genders and religious groups. However, they also suggest the ambiguities between these categories, the possibility for confusion which requires wisdom and discernment to settle. It is clear in this exchange that Solomon is superior to the Queen of Sheba, not least through his ability to answer her riddles. However, the text is surprisingly deferent to the Queen of Sheba, giving her

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<sup>326</sup> Visotzky, *Midrash Mishle*, 4 (lines 25-29).

<sup>327</sup> Dougherty, *Poetics of Colonization*, 38.

credit for the elaborate staging and complexity of her riddles (which, were they not difficult, would not showcase Solomon's wisdom).

*Midrash Mishlei* paints a portrait of monarchical competition, but both figures benefit from the interaction, not least in that the ambiguity of disparate cultural systems is resolved through the riddles. The first riddle relies on knowledge of the human body. Like the widely attested legend of the Sphinx who asks Oedipus about the creature who walks on four legs in the morning, two during the day, and three in the evening,<sup>328</sup> the riddle that the Queen of Sheba offers Solomon requires knowledge of the cycles experienced by (some) human bodies. Unlike the riddle of the Sphinx, however, which is broadly applicable to any person, the Queen of Sheba's question centered on female bodies and gendered aspects of human reproduction. By stripping the cycle of reproduction – menstruation, pregnancy, and breastfeeding – to a series of numbers, the riddle of Queen of Sheba demands a specific verbal answer out of a series of context-less numbers. Solomon is able to supply the appropriate context that renders the numerical sequence comprehensible. If we read this in light of Stein's contention that Solomon is a paradigmatic rabbi,<sup>329</sup> the ability to discern the most adequate general answer to a specific and tricky situation is quite similar to halakhic reasoning, which likewise takes a specific situation of various cases and examples and attempts to delineate the most general possible rule for such situations. Solomon here shows a solution-oriented mindset, and both he and the Queen of Sheba display a sensitivity to the cycles of female

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<sup>328</sup> Apollodorus, *Library Apollod.* 3.5.8.

<sup>329</sup> Stein, *Textual Mirrors*, 36, 56-7.

embodiment. Furthermore, this first riddle sets the stage for the next three, which all hinge on embodied difference.

The second riddle quotes a woman describing an impossibly complex web of family relations, including a grandfather who is the husband to the mother and a mother who is a sister to her son. Of course, Solomon is able to recognize the story of Lot and his daughters. The difficulty of the reference lies in the fact that the voice in the riddle is of the perspective of one of Lot's anonymous daughters, whose viewpoints are hardly represented at all in Genesis (Gen. 19:1-38). The Queen of Sheba, a foreign woman from the biblical past, recreates the perspective of a foremother to a foreign nation from the biblical past, and Solomon is able to decode the reference. The Queen of Sheba challenges Solomon's knowledge of the prehistory of Israel via recourse to a non-Israelite woman and the complex web of incestuous reproductive relationship she represents. This perspectival shift from the biblical narrative – and the voicing of both the Queen of Sheba character and Lot's daughter – is nevertheless managed competently by Solomon. I see two nonexclusive narrative possibilities with this riddle. One is that the Queen of Sheba shares Solomon's sense of the biblical past, i.e., that the sacred past of Solomon was shared by the Queen of Sheba, perhaps in a manner akin to the shared biblical past of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities at the time of *Midrash Mishlei*. Another possibility is that the Queen of Sheba deliberately utilized the perspective of a woman who is related to but not a part of Israel in order to offer an accessible challenge to Solomon. These possibilities together suggest a mutual rapprochement between the monarchs.

The third riddle is reminiscent of the legendary means by which Odysseus recruited Achilles to the Trojan War against the will of Achilles' mother. As recorded in Hygnus' *Fabulae* 96, Odysseus came to Phthia to bring Achilles to war, but Thetis had dressed young Achilles as a girl to avoid his fated death. Odysseus, dressed as a merchant, set out a cart of goods with jewelry as well as weapons; Achilles, unlike the young women in his party, showed an immediate interest in the weapons and revealed himself to Odysseus in the process. In *Midrash Mishlei*, the Queen of Sheba sets up a situation where young men and women are dressed the same as one another and challenges Solomon to differentiate between the two. Solomon solves this problem by relying on the different socialization of boys and girls, throwing out dried fruits and nuts for them to gather and noting the different ways they utilized their clothing to gather the food.

The first three riddles focus on female embodiment, a particular woman's perspective, and the differentiation of women from men. In the fourth and final riddle, Solomon is asked to differentiate between circumcised and uncircumcised men, signifying Jews and non-Jews.<sup>330</sup> Solomon brings the Ark to the room and opens it, causing the circumcised Jewish men to fall on their knees in prostration in front of the Ark. Solomon's solution shows that the circumcision itself is less relevant than its symbolic significance as religious difference inscribed on male bodies. The Ark of the Covenant, the ultimate sign of God's favor and presence in biblical Israel, acts as a definitive testing device between men who live under the law of Moses, as shown by their circumcision and prostration to the Ark. This riddle is particularly intriguing

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<sup>330</sup> For more on the contested significance of circumcision, see Tong, "Given as a Sign."

because the Queen of Sheba does not have the same commitments to the God of Israel that Solomon has; even in her praise of Solomon, she refers to “your god” (אלוהיך; 1 Kgs 10:9, 2 Chron 9:8). She asks him how he is able to discern this, and he cites Job and the words of Balaam the prophet, another figure of wisdom literature known from ancient Near Eastern traditions.<sup>331</sup> Thus, the text quite literally puts the Queen of Sheba into a wisdom lineage of Job, Solomon, and Balaam through its series of textual citations, which underscores Rabbi Jeremiah’s assertion that she performed *meshalim*. Rabbi Jeremiah and the *Midrash Mishlei* present a broad conception of *meshalim* that includes other forms of speech, like *hiddot*, as well as actions like the visual tests which the Queen of Sheba presents to Solomon.<sup>332</sup>

## **2. *Midrash Mishlei* and *Targum Sheni to Esther***

What is distinctive about *Midrash Mishlei* comes especially clear when we compare the riddling associated with the Queen of Sheba in *Targum Sheni to Esther*. As noted above, the two share the trope of ungended youths. In *Midrash Mishlei*, however, the Queen of Sheba is pleased with Solomon’s performance, calling him “my son” and a great sage in an evocation of the language used elsewhere in Proverbs. In evoking this language, she casts herself in the role of a sage as well as Lady Wisdom herself, who treats those who earnestly seek her like sons. Although *Midrash Mishlei* utilizes a similar plot point as *Targum Sheni to Esther*, they deploy them in different ways. Solomon’s ability to solve

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<sup>331</sup> Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*.

<sup>332</sup> The concept of *meshalim* in *Midrash Mishlei* can thus be put into a longer lineage of the *mashal* genre, i.e., as discussed by Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality* in biblical and ancient texts, or by Stern, “Rhetoric and Midrash” on Rabbinic literature, or by Neuwirth, *Qur’ān in Late Antiquity*, 306-9, on the *mathal* in early Muslim literature.

the Queen's riddle in the Targum is a sign of her inferiority. Here, affirmation of Solomon's wisdom does not come at the expense of the Queen of Sheba's status.

Beyond the motif of ungendered youths, the text of *Midrash Mishlei* also reflects language from the *Targum Sheni to Esther* in its introduction of the figure of the Queen of Sheba. *Midrash Mishlei* reads:

והחכמה מאיין תמצא? (איוב כח:יב) זו מלכת שבא ששמעה בחכמתו של שלמה אמרה אלך ואראה אם חכם הוא ואם לאו. ומניין ששמעה בחכמתו של שלמה שני' ...

Where is wisdom found? This is [a reference to] the Queen of Sheba, who heard of Solomon's wisdom. She said: I will go and I will see if he is wise or not. And from what is "She heard of Solomon's wisdom?" As it is written...

The text quotes 1 Kings 10:1 to justify this Aramaic explanation of who the Queen of Sheba was. The formulation of "I will see if [Solomon] is wise or not" is absent from the biblical narrative but it is the same sentiment the Queen of Sheba directs towards Solomon in the *Targum Sheni to Esther*. There, the Queen of Sheba tells Solomon to his face that she will test his wisdom, by means of three riddles, to see if he is truly a wise man or if he is just like all other men.

מרי מלכא אמתיל לך ג' מתלין דאין תפשר יתהון לי ידעא אנא דגברא חכם את ואין לא צשאר בני אינש'

She says this after she has made several faux pas, casting her statement in an ironic light, which is emphasized by the immediacy with which Solomon is able to answer her riddles. The questions she asks of Solomon do not require any knowledge of Jewish scripture, but rather describe various objects in ambiguous terms that Solomon must differentiate.<sup>333</sup> She asks about a "wooden well, an iron pale which draws up stones

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<sup>333</sup> One riddle, for instance, asks "What has berries of wood, buckets of iron, which draws out stone and



and brings forth worth,” which Solomon recognizes as a makeup box; she next asks about the substance which emerges as dust and is fed with dust, but pours out as water and sticks, which is naphtha, the organic flammable compound. Finally, she describes what Solomon recognizes as flax as a contradictory object which causes praise to the free and the dead.<sup>334</sup> The interest in a makeup box suggests a continued interest in gender, an extension of the dynamics discussed in Chapter Three. The choice of the other two objects is more obscure. Overall, these riddles are most similar to the first, numerical riddle presented in *Midrash Mishlei* as verbally ambiguous riddle images, but unlike the riddles in *Midrash Mishlei*, the texts in *Targum Sheni to Esther* resolve around objects with contradictory qualities, rather than human characteristic. They thus display distinct orientations towards the types of riddles which are appropriate vehicles for Solomonic knowledge.

Although there is overlap in material between *Midrash Mishlei* and *Targum Sheni to Esther*, they differ sharply in their respective presentations of the Queen of Sheba. The *Second Targum to Esther* presents an extended dialogue in letters between Israel and Sheba, after which the Queen sends Solomon a troop of young men and women who look exactly the same as one another.<sup>335</sup> Unexpectedly, when the Queen of Sheba arrives in Jerusalem, she mistakes one of Solomon’s beautiful young attendants for Solomon himself, believing only a king could be so beautiful.<sup>336</sup> This seems to undercut the

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pours out water?” and the answer is “paint.” See Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni to the Book of Esther*, 32.

<sup>334</sup> Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni to the Book of Esther* 31-2; see the English translation in Grossfeld, *Two Targums of Esther*, 116-17.

<sup>335</sup> See Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni to the Book of Esther*, 31-2.

<sup>336</sup> See Grossfeld, *Targum Sheni to the Book of Esther*, 32.

authority she arrogates to herself when she proceeds to ask Solomon three *hiddot* to confirm his wisdom. Between the shared motif of ambiguously gendered youths and the articulated *hiddot*, *Midrash Mishlei* offers a total remix of the Targumic narrative, using several similar elements while omitting any part of the narrative that might make the Queen of Sheba look less prestigious.

Comparison with riddles in earlier Jewish literature further underlines the degree to which the Queen of Sheba is granted wisdom and agency within *Midrash Mishlei*. The riddles here offer a site of wisdom questioning that is far less agonistic than other wisdom questions in late antique Jewish literature. The riddle questions that Hayes and Kalmin examine, for instance, are established in order to undermine the epistemological position of the opponents of the rabbis. The *Alphabet of Ben Sira* as well as *Targum Sheni* are centered on similar wisdom questioning, associated with Nebuchadnezzar and the Queen of Sheba respectively.<sup>337</sup> In both it is important that the non-Israelite monarch is humiliated and totally undermined in order to showcase Solomon's complete superiority. In *Midrash Mishlei*, by contrast, the Queen of Sheba is credited with testing Solomon via *meshalim*. Of course, Solomon has to be able to answer her questions, but he does not undermine the premise of the questions in doing so. Rather, he shows a deep and flexible

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<sup>337</sup> Shinan has argued that the production of aggadic midrashic collections is closely linked to targumim. I believe that these texts are a specific example of literary connections made legible through attention to the Queen of Sheba. See Shinan, "Late Midrashic, Paytanic, and Targumic Literature," 693-94. If the argument that these texts are related is true, it opens the possibility that *Targum Sheni to Esther* (and/or traditions related to it) may have experienced a surge in popularity in the scholastic literary culture that flourished in the ninth-century Abbasid empire. This might be related to the resurgence of popularity of Second Temple literary material, an expansive sensibility surely encouraged by the manufacturing breakthroughs in paper production and explicit valuation of ancient knowledge in the early Abbasid period, which influenced a wide range of minority cultures including Rabbanite and Syriac elite literary circles. On the resurgence of Second Temple literary material in medieval Judaism, see Adelman, *Return of the Repressed*, 133-35; Reeves, "Exploring the Afterlife." On Abbasid theories of translation, in particular as a means to preserve ancient knowledge, abetted by local paper production, see Yücesoy, "Translation as Self Consciousness," 523-57, especially 525.

knowledge of humanistic as well as culturally specific categories. What we see in *Midrash Mishlei*, rather, is less akin to the mirrored “Other” posited by Stein and more akin to the dynamics highlighted by Dougherty. Riddle contests often have stakes and a clear winner or loser, but the benefit of this display of wisdom is sometimes the display of wisdom for its own sake.

### 3. Syriac Christian Tradition in the *Gannat Bussame*

As noted above, research on late antique traditions about the Queen of Sheba has richly explored parallels between Jewish and Islamic traditions (most significantly by Lassner) but has less frequently attended to parallels within Christian traditions. This is perhaps because of the dearth of such traditions within Christian literature in Late Antiquity in Greek and Latin.<sup>338</sup> Pennacchietti and Boranian, in a rare scholarly attempt to grapple with the Christian materials, explain the lack of Christian material as an early, underdeveloped era, with little connection to contemporaneous Jewish and Muslim traditions: “les versions chrétiennes, aussi bien la copte que la latine, qui ont trouvé avec la *Legenda Aurea* leur expression la plus accomplie seulement au XIIIe siècle.”<sup>339</sup> Interestingly, however, Syriac Christian literature yields useful comparanda that

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<sup>338</sup> See Pennacchietti and Boranian, “La reine de Saba,” 1-26 for a discussion of the relative dearth of Christian interest in the Queen of Sheba until the thirteenth century. Baert notes that George Hamartolos (sometimes referred to as George Monachos) represented the Queen of Sheba as the Sybil in his ninth-century world chronicle, a tradition which was intermittently represented in Byzantine chronicles until the twelfth century (*Heritage of Holy Wood*, 347). From the twelfth century onwards, Western Christian tradition not only associates the Queen of Sheba with the Sibyl, but also makes her a key player in some versions of the Legend of the True Cross; for a fuller discussion of these Christian dynamics, see the discussion in Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood*, 289-348.

<sup>339</sup> Pennacchietti and Boranian, “La reine de Saba,” 23. They do not incorporate the tradition from the *Gannat Bussame* in their analysis, but they offer a useful, if brief, introduction to the *Kebrā Nagast* in light of other Christian traditions.

potentially speak to more culturally proximate communities to the one which produced *Midrash Mishlei*: Christians living under Islamic rule.

Promising in this regard is the narrative about the Queen of Sheba within the *Gannat Bussame*, a compendium of commentary on biblical readings in the East Syriac Lectionary.<sup>340</sup> Although the *Gannat Bussame* as a collection dates from the thirteenth century, the Queen of Sheba narrative is attributed to the ninth-century tradent Sharbokht bar Msargis, who, Reinink argues, was “an exponent of the important cultural developments emanating from the ninth-century Arab-Islamic milieu in Bagdad.”<sup>341</sup> Reinink thus dates this tradition to the ninth century and considers its inclusion of Greek medicinal traditions indicative of an Abbasid milieu.<sup>342</sup> This tradition may thus open up the possibility of broadening the scholarly conversation about the late antique Jewish and Islamic discourse about the Queen of Sheba to include some Syriac Christian comparanda as well.<sup>343</sup>

As in the above chapters, my concern is not to argue for any direct lines of literary dependence, but rather to ask why we find similar concerns arising contemporaneously

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<sup>340</sup> Reinink, “A Syriac Legend of the Queen of Sheba,” 257. The *Gannat Bussame* has been sporadically studied in the twentieth century, notably by Macomber, “The Chaldean Lectionary System,” 483-516; Vosté, “Le Gannat Bussame” 221-32, 386-419; Vosté, “À propos de la date du Gannat Bussame,” 82. Reinink has most intensively studied this text; see also his edited edition in *Gannat Bussame*, as well as “Theology and Medicine in Jundishapur,” 163-74, and *Studien zur Quellen- und Traditionsgeschichte*.

<sup>341</sup> Reinink, “A Syriac Legend of the Queen of Sheba,” 263.

<sup>342</sup> Reinink, “A Syriac Legend of the Queen of Sheba,” 263-64. This can also be considered in light of *adab* literature, which flourished in the ninth century in Baghdad and beyond.

<sup>343</sup> Brock, “The Queen of Sheba’s Questions,” discusses the later Syriac and Armenian tradition of the Queen of Sheba’s questions to Solomon in manuscripts from the fourteenth century, 1712/3, and 1899 (p. 332). This tradition closely overlaps with some Armenian witnesses, including several copies of Michael the Syrian’s *Chronicle*, which Brock argues are based on a Syriac original. The later Syriac and Armenian questions share some overlap with *Midrash Mishlei*, an intriguing line of inquiry beyond the scope of the current chapter. This has been discussed more recently by Busch, *Das Testament Salomos*, 10, 242-44, 253, 283; Stone, “Biblical Figures in the Armenian Tradition”; Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Biblical Heroes*, 132, 167.

and thus to reconsider memory-making surrounding the biblical past in Late Antiquity between and beyond the divides of different “religions.” I suggest that this tradition in the *Gannat Bussame* is a useful tradition to compare with *Midrash Mishlei* for several reasons. Both focus on the wisdom performed during the Queen of Sheba’s visit, rather than on any romantic relationship between the two monarchs, prioritizing her cleverness as the significant factor of her relationship with Solomon. Both texts, relatively marginal, show a particular vision of wisdom associated with Solomon, such that his wisdom outshines and overpowers that of the Queen of Sheba. Yet, the riddles are only legible because of both characters; a riddle collapses without an “Other” to answer. Both are produced by minority communities living in the Abbasid caliphate, utilizing the *mashal* genre to present a story of international contact about a king whose legacy was widely contested even before the emergence of Muslim polities.

The relevant tradition therein is found in one manuscript (Rylands syr. MS 41) of the *Gannat Bussame*. In a comment on Matthew 12:42, this Ryland copy of Urmia 180 preserves a tradition from Sliba Zkha Sharbokht, one of the most important sources of exegesis of the Gospels in the East Syriac tradition, who lived in the ninth century in Gondeshapur.<sup>344</sup> In an exegesis of Matthew 12:42, which refers to the Queen of the South who came to hear Solomon’s wisdom, this passage takes an interesting twist in comparison to *Targum Sheni to Esther* and the *Midrash Mishlei*: it does not actually discuss any tests the Queen of Sheba put forward to Solomon. Instead, the text portrays

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<sup>344</sup> Gondeshapur is also known as Beit Lapat; cf. Brock, “Beth Lapat”; Richter-Bernberg, “Gondeshapur,” 133-35; Reinink, “A Syriac Legend of the Queen of Sheba,” 257. Here in the text (and only here) Sharbokht is called a *maslmana* (transmitter) of tradition. Sliba Zkha Sharbokht equates the Queen of the South of Matt 12:42 with the Queen of Aden and Abyan, two cities in the region of Ethiopia, explicitly linking her to the Horn of Africa and South Arabia.

several scenarios which can be allegorized to a wisdom statement. The reader, like the Queen of Sheba, does not know this when the scenes are described; the text reveals information to the reader in the order it is revealed to the Queen of Sheba, and so the reader experiences a reflection of the Queen's frustration as she comes upon four baffling scenes and her confusion that Solomon, said to be wise, could order such foolish tasks. Solomon explains his actions, but the scene ends rather abruptly, with no comment on the Queen of Sheba's reactions to Solomon, nor with any statements as to the riddles by which she supposedly tested him according to Kings and Chronicles. The text explicitly cites the "sons of the Hebrews" as a source for this tradition, but the tradition itself has many unique moments unparalleled in our extant archive from the first millennium.

Reinink translates the ninth-century Queen of Sheba narrative riddles as follows:<sup>345</sup>

And when she came to Jerusalem, the royal capital of Solomon, her attention was caught and her mind was disturbed through some incidents which he had ordered to arrange on her way. And when she saw and did not understand [them], she was carried away by amazement, confusion and consternation.

(1) She first came across (so the sons of the Hebrews say) a big cistern, which was built on the bank of a river, [a cistern] of which the end was broken and the bottom was perforated. And its water was poured into the depth [of it], which usually would prevent its passage. Still proceeding, according to the parable, [she came across] men who hurried to draw water in leathern bottles from a deep waterway and to pour [it] in it, in order to fill it. And at that very moment that it was poured out, it ran down and was dispersed immediately, a toilsome activity which was done utterly in vain with futile trouble.

(2) After these [men] she saw other [men] standing together at the bank of the river, who were assiduously washing a black haircloth, another activity which [is] still more toilsome and useless.

(3) When she came near the city, she saw watchmen with rods in their hands, who in vain wanted to bend their tops in order to build a guard post from them without [using] water and fire.

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<sup>345</sup> Translation taken from Reinink, "A Syriac Legend of the Queen of Sheba," 266-68.

(4) When she entered the city, she saw two standing and one beam, which was long and very heavy, the extremities of which they carried on their shoulders, i.e. the ends of it. And while they were pulling [the beam] away from each other, they got into big trouble, and [then] they completely yielded to each other, and they did not want to abandon the bearing of the beam.

And when she approached them [and] asked: “Why [are you doing] these [things]?” they all answered her unanimously: “Our king has put in charge us of these [things], that we should perform [them] assiduously and without delay.”

And then she was very much depressed about the trouble of the journey, which she had suffered, and she judged for herself: this man is a fool and deprived of any understanding. And when they had brought her into the royal fortress, and when she saw the amazing buildings... after she had adored and blessed him very much, she asked him that she should learn the reasons for [the things] upon which she had happened on the way and which she did not understand. And he answered her (1) regarding the broken cistern, that it bears a type of men who without understanding disperse their possessions through idle things, who, although they abundantly amass [possessions] through assiduous and toilsome efforts, inevitably grow poor, since they are not successfully engaged in watching over [their possessions] and do not fear tomorrow and what it may bring, but rely upon their [own] day, if it is only quiet and a time of ease for them.

(2) And the reason for the haircloth which was washed without any hope that it would ever become white, [is] that it bears an allegory of men who foolishly carry out idle works and in their ignorance strive for incomprehensible things, [wanting to change] brass into gold through drugs and herbs, which is plain nonsense and complete ignorance. (3) Now the reason for the rods, he said, [is] that they bear a symbol of foolish men, who do not accept instruction, and as much as one will make an effort for them to purify them, more and more, being stupefied and dismayed, foolishness and not the power of the discerning will be added to them. And this resembles the words of the skillful physician Hippocrates: “The more you nourish impure bodies, the more you hurt them,” and [it resembles] the able philosophy of Plato, who, imitating him said: “The more you instruct impure souls more, the more you will add to their ignorance.

(4) Concerning the heavy beam, the source of all contentions, he said to her: it shows that two adversaries in law will be [involved] in contentions with each other at every occasion; unless either of them gives way to the other, they will suffer unceasingly torments and pains, taking trouble and suffering loss and being hostile towards each other, and their enmity will increase through the course of time.

The tradition preserved in the *Gannat Bussame* does not denigrate the Queen of Sheba, but it noticeably offers a less positive vision than the *Midrash Mishlei*, particularly in the way it forces her into the position of passive observer rather than active

participant.<sup>346</sup> In fact, the Syriac legend undercuts the Queen of Sheba's praise of Solomon by having her offer that praise while she still thinks he is foolish for enacting his visual parables. Her praise is of his beautiful house, not of his wisdom, and because the text ends the story with Solomon's explanation, the reader is left to assume that the Queen of Sheba is impressed by Solomon's wisdom (if one wishes to assume that). Further complicating our reading of this scene, Judith Newman has recently argued that one of the most significant aspects of wisdom literature is *timing* – a proverb or wise statement is only useful if it is deployed in the appropriate context.<sup>347</sup> Thus, while both Solomon and the Queen of Sheba are participants in the tradition of wisdom, it is the visit of the Queen of Sheba which gives Solomon the appropriate context to deploy his wisdom. Between these two traditions, we see contrasting visions of monarchical encounter, but in both, the performance of competency is enabled by the ambiguity of the riddles.

The visual parables that Solomon sets up are notably oriented towards the proper relationship between self and others. This is similar to but distinct from the second riddle in *Midrash Mishlei*, in which the Queen of Sheba voices the relationships connecting Lot's daughter and her son. That riddle is predicated on detangling a dense web of relational references, and thus is more concerned with finding the proper referent among category confusion than on the nature of relationships themselves. In contrast, the *Gannat*

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<sup>346</sup> This contrasts not only with the tradition in *Midrash Mishlei* but also within the context of other medieval Christian traditions, which tend to elevate the Queen of Sheba, such as the Byzantine association between the Queen of Sheba and the Sybil, first found in George Monachos and intermittently represented in Byzantine historiography until the twelfth century, and from there picked up in Western Christian traditions which positively represent her as a witness to the True Cross, in works by writers such as Isadore of Seville, Godfrey of Viterbo, John Belet, and Petrus Comestor. These traditions are discussed extensively in Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood*, 289-349.

<sup>347</sup> Newman, *Before the Bible*, 46.



*Bussame* portrays several instances of moral failure in the way men relate to one another or to objects. The final visual riddle, in which two men strain against a single heavy beam and effectively cancel out each other's efforts, mostly clearly reflects a concern with proper relationships, in this case between legal opponents whose refusal to concede render their efforts fruitless. Similarly, the third riddle, which analogizes people who are not properly prepared for instruction to untreated building materials, hinges on fruitless interaction (between a teacher and a student) which can only be successful through a radical re-orientation of one party's attitude. Finally, the first riddle, a meditation on a man who wastes his money through foolish spending habits, is a reflection on the proper relationship a person ought to have with their possessions. These are all classic tropes of Wisdom literature, familiar from Proverbs (i.e., 5:12; 31:9; 13:11) but notably focused on the way an individual should orient oneself towards various relationships, rather than on the disambiguation of categories like gender (i.e., the focus of *Midrash Mishlei*).

The scenes Solomon sets up act as visual proverbs, enigmatic, even paradoxical on first glance, but profound and useful with the proper interpretation. Solomon's proverbial statements reflect nonspecific wisdom and general warnings against poor learning habits, legalism, and idleness. Yet these warnings are enacted in extremely specific ways: cisterns, described in enough detail for the reader to picture the water flowing out from their broken bottom or a man scrubbing a black hide or two men, straining at a large post. For all that they are allegorized as abstract, intellectual habits that ultimately harm the actor, they are displayed via bodily enactment, visually encountered by the Queen of Sheba. We might further consider the ways that this overlaps with and differs from the presentation in Tabari's *Tarikh* (discussed in Chapter Three), wherein the Queen of

Sheba asks Solomon to pierce a gem, to present her with “sweet waters,” and finally, about the color of God; these are less riddles *per se* than challenges which Solomon can only meet with the help of the demons in his employ, or not at all, in the case of the final question, which causes Solomon to faint. These interactions, too, are marked by their materiality.<sup>348</sup>

Reading these texts sharpens our sense of the literary choices made by the authors and editors of *Midrash Mishlei*. The tradition in the *Gannat Bussame* is bereft of the concerns that underlie the riddles of *Midrash Mishlei*: there is no question of gender, or bodies, or religious difference at play in these challenges. Instead, these performances of aphorisms show Solomon as an unparalleled wise man. Indeed, this scene shows the Queen of Sheba as a singular woman in an otherwise all-male space of Jerusalem. Only men perform the scenes and the only voices which appear in the story are the voices of Solomon and his workers who report that Solomon told them to perform their tasks. The questions asked by the Queen of Sheba are explained in the narrative, but not as reported speech. The closest the story comes to reporting her voice directly is the statement of her negative opinion on Solomon, which is either figuratively or literally said to herself. The text reports no questions or riddles from the Queen of Sheba, and instead associates the performance of wisdom with Solomon. Contrast this with *Midrash Mishlei* and its report of the Queen of Sheba’s multiple riddles, to which Solomon assents clearly, multiple times, in a dialogue between the monarchs. In sum, the *Gannat Bussame* tradition highlights the interest in gendered embodiment emphasized in *Midrash Mishlei*, while the *Midrash Mishlei* throws into relief the androcentrism of the *Gannat Bussame*.

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<sup>348</sup> Tabari, *Tarikh*, sections 579-81.

The two texts, however, also have much in common, and these commonalities may speak to the common cultural contexts and concerns that shaped their interests in the Queen of Sheba. Both are portraits of verbal competition between monarchs which stage successful mutual dependence, even as they also subordinate the Queen of Sheba to Solomon. In both, moreover, we see a pattern similar to what Dougherty observes whereby narratives with riddles, more than reflecting a desire for symbolic power, can also showcase an “ambiguity [which] allows contrasting systems of classification to coexist within a single framework.”<sup>349</sup> The riddle scenes we see in *Midrash Mishlei* and the *Gannat Bussame* present two systems – Israel, metonymically represented by Solomon, and non-Israel, represented by the Queen of Sheba. The two systems coexist within the single framework of the narrative and are forced into conversation with one another, and the ambiguity of their interaction is resolved through the process of riddling. *Midrash Mishlei* and *Gannat Bussame* do so in different ways, but each thus deploys the memory of the Queen of Sheba to speak to their own cultural concerns in the wake of Islamic conquests.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have seen cases in which the Queen of Sheba is remembered for and through her cleverness. She comes to test Solomon with riddles, and it is through riddles that the Queen of Sheba is amazed by Solomon’s wisdom and discernment. Yet her presence provides the condition for the possibility of this memory of the biblical past. She is foreign and female, but she is not merely “othered.”

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<sup>349</sup> Dougherty, *Poetics of Colonization*, 46.

By attending to the potential function of riddles as vehicles for the translation of different cultural values, I have argued in this chapter for understanding the representation of the Queen of Sheba in *Midrash Mishlei* both in terms of the literary function of the riddles and in relation to broader wisdom discourses in Rabbinic and other Near Eastern literary traditions. Comparison with *Gannat Bussame*, moreover, suggests that Jewish memory-making around this figure had some counterparts in Syriac Christian tradition as well. In *Midrash Mishlei* and *Gannat Bussame*, we find the vision of two monarchs competing via riddles offered a symbolically potent site of cultural translation.

Even as this use of riddling resonates with broader cross-cultural patterns, it marks a notable development from the late antique traditions examined above. Thus, we may connect the literary analysis of the different riddling traditions to historical questions about the use of the biblical past in the late first millennium. By means of conclusion, then, we might reflect on its timing. Why might it appear when, where, and how it does?

One possibility relates to the broader context of Islamic rule shared by Jews and Christians in the eighth and ninth centuries CE. One of the major shifts which mark these centuries is the emergence of a coherent Muslim doctrine about non-Muslims living under Muslim rule.<sup>350</sup> Between the seventh and ninth centuries, Muslim rulers engaged with a number of different polities and societies and negotiated specific terms of surrender in a patchwork, localized manner before developing the coherent doctrine represented by the *Shurut Umar*, which affirmed the rights of Christians and Jews and

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<sup>350</sup> Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*, 2. The Muslim conquests are generally understood to be the end of Late Antiquity by most reckonings, although, like all periodization, there is scholarly debate about when, precisely, one era ends and another begins. See, for example, Marcone and Sogno, “A Long Late Antiquity?” and Fowden, *Before and After Muhammed*.

also the difference between Muslim and non-Muslim communities.<sup>351</sup> Milka Levy-Rubin emphasizes that while the Shurut Umar affirmed a hierarchy between Muslims and non-Muslims, it also laid a framework for peaceful coexistence. Both Rabbinic Jewish and Syriac Christian communities had elite liaisons with local Islamic rule (like the Sasanian government in centuries before) who competed with other minority cultures for the favor of the ruler.<sup>352</sup> Unfortunately, the phenomenon of riddles in early Islamic literature remains understudied, and further triangulation is not yet possible. The texts studied in this chapter, however, represent traditions from highly educated, elite circles within two minority communities under Islamic rule, who might see a hopeful reflection of their own sociopolitical reality in a story of two biblical monarchs who have different religious commitments but mutually comprehensible political systems performing wit and cleverness with one another.

*Midrash Mishlei* and the tradition preserved in *Gannat Bussame* seemingly mark the end of this phenomenon that forms the focus of this dissertation – that is, the new creativity vis-à-vis the Queen of Sheba’s character in Late Antiquity. These two works contain the last major extant narratives about the Queen of Sheba known from the first millennium CE. As such, they can also be read as a sort of culmination of the late antique trends examined above, especially attesting the increasing importance of gender and religious difference. Intriguingly, during the same century in Byzantium, George Hamartolos (sometimes known as George Monachos) identified the Queen of Sheba with the Sibyl, a tradition which would continue among Byzantine chroniclers into the twelfth

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<sup>351</sup> Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*, 166.

<sup>352</sup> Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*; Brody, *Geonim of Babylonia and Medieval Jewish Culture*; Brock, *Introduction to Syriac Literature*.

century, when the association became more widespread in Christian Europe and is no longer attested in Greek Orthodox texts.<sup>353</sup> For our purposes, we might say that the culmination of the late antique trends found in the Syriac *Gannat Bussame* and the Jewish *Midrash Mishlei* coincided with the beginning of a new era of Christian interpretation of the figure of the Queen of Sheba.

The period of transition between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages is fraught in Jewish historiography, usually explained through recourse to the writings of Sherira Gaon (882-942) who delineates between the generations of rabbis (Amoraim, Tannaim, etc.) to present a coherent chain of tradition. To be sure, recent scholarship has questioned the reliability of Sherira Gaon's schema, particularly the central place he ascribes to the historical Rabbis.<sup>354</sup> The touchstones of Rabbinic literature, the Yerushalmi and the Bavli, were written in the middle of Late Antiquity, but much Rabbinic culture developed as a hegemonic discourse in later centuries. Marina Rustow richly illustrates this point in her 2008 book *Heresy and the Politics of Community*, where she argues that Rabbanite (the inheritors of Rabbinic tradition) and Karaite discourses reflect a rivalry between schools located in Babylon and Palestine, institutions which were established but not yet hegemonic in Late Antiquity.<sup>355</sup> Meanwhile Syriac Christian culture, although deeply affected by the Muslim conquests, nevertheless shows a high

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<sup>353</sup> Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood*, 347. Baert notes, however, that this tradition was not uniformly picked up amongst later Byzantine chroniclers; although Johannes Malalas bases his *Chronicle* on Monachos, he “does not adopt the identification of the Queen of Sheba[. n]or does the *Chronicon paschale*.” In the West, she came to “monopolize the predictions of the Cross of Christ” (p. 347).

<sup>354</sup> See, for example, Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud* and more recently Gross, “When the Jews Greeted Ali,” 122-44.

<sup>355</sup> Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community*, 3-6.

degree of continuity from the mid-seventh century to the Middle Ages.<sup>356</sup> The narratives about the Queen of Sheba in *Midrash Mishlei* and the tradition in the *Gannat Bussame* offer a different sort of window onto this tradition – both are in many ways products of late antique forces and thus offer a concrete example of the results of the dynamic range of possibilities cultivated in the previous centuries. But they also speak to what begins to emerge in the eighth and ninth centuries as a new situation for Jews and Christians under Islamic rule in the Middle Ages. Perhaps most significantly, for our purposes, to the degree that they speak to some such shift, they do so with and through the biblical past: if the minority elite literary cultures that produced these portraits of international contact reflected a vision of positive collaboration across difference that simultaneously affirms difference and social hierarchies as well as the potential ambiguity around difference and partnership within hierarchies, they do so in part by remaking the memory of the Queen of Sheba.

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<sup>356</sup> For an overview of Syriac history, see Brock, *Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*; Ruzer and Kofsky, *Syriac Idiosyncrasies*, 3-6.

## CONCLUSION

### Difference and development in the Queen of Sheba

This dissertation has pointed to a cluster of sources that reflect a rise of literary creativity and renewed attention to the figure of the Queen of Sheba across Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions that emerged between the sixth and ninth centuries. The material reflects what I have termed a late antique discourse of memory-making surrounding this figure. It does not seem coincidental, in my view, that when Abrahamic religions gained a large-scale monarchical character, the Queen of Sheba became a far more prominent figure.

In Chapter One, I surveyed the traditions prior to the emergence of this discourse, which stand in some contrast to the materials that form the focus of the rest of this dissertation, not least in their historical and exegetical orientation toward Israel's monarchic past. The biblical and other ancient materials about the Queen of Sheba show a stark difference from the late antique complex of narratives, and their own concerns are relatively consistent. In particular, the figure of the Queen of Sheba is used as a non-Israelite/non-Jewish eyewitness to the wealth and wisdom of Solomon, not only in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, but also in the *Antiquities* of Josephus as well as the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. It is on this basis, moreover, that Origen of Alexandria in the third century presented the alterity of the Queen of Sheba as a positive trait that enabled his identification of the Queen of Sheba with the Church of the Gentiles.



The later sources contain the earliest known references to a number of themes that become commonly associated with this figure in the Middle Ages and beyond – such as her abnormal legs, her association with the demonic, her reaction to a floor of glass, and the listing of the riddles that she asks Solomon. In Chapter Two, I compared the narratives about the Queen of Sheba and her visit to Solomon in the Qur’ānic Surah al-Naml and the *Targum Sheni to Esther*, pointing to their views of kingship as one possible clue to what makes this figure a focus of fresh interest. In both, we see a complex relationship to human structures of authority, including kingship and prophethood: Solomon is an exemplary but fallible character, valorized as the chosen representative of God while simultaneously shown as an imperfect communicator in Q 27:13-43 and a drunken king in the *Targum Sheni to Esther*. The presentation of the jinn, demons, and animals under Solomon’s control in both narratives evokes the complex political hierarchies of the Arabian peninsula and Palestine in the sixth and seventh centuries. The Queen of Sheba is not placed in a binary opposition to Solomon; she is one among many different nodes of power in the social network evoked by the texts as part of the biblical past that might resonate with a late antique present.

That this late antique discourse is marked by more complex views of this queen’s alterity became clearer in Chapter Three, which put the Jewish *Alphabet of Ben Sira* in conversation with the writings of Muslim polymath Tabari. Both of these present the Queen of Sheba as a hairy-legged figure who held significant sexual power. I argue there that monster theory helps to explain the ambivalent textual attitude towards the Queen of Sheba, who is presented as simultaneously boundary-crossing and desirable. With Donna Haraway, I see possibilities in her monstrous qualities, which move well beyond binaries

of dominant/subordinate or good/bad and further extend the tendencies seen in the Qur'ān and *Targum Sheni to Esther*.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I compared for the first time the *Midrash Mishlei* with a Queen of Sheba tradition preserved in the Syriac *Gannat Bussame*, which both present contests of wit between Solomon and the visiting queen. The contrast between the two narratives, both of which emerged from elite minority cultures from an Abbasid milieu, makes clear the possibility of collaboration visible in the *Midrash Mishlei*. Riddles and contests of wit are particularly poignant sites of cultural interaction and engagement, and the passive posture of the Queen of Sheba in the *Gannat Bussame* underscores the active engagement of the Queen of Sheba with Solomon in the *Midrash Mishlei*, where she is presented as a co-creator of proverbs and a Rabbinic-style discursive partner to Solomon. These texts, I argue, can be viewed as a culmination of the late antique trends discussed in Chapters Two and Three, displacing the alterity of the Queen of Sheba onto the riddling discourse between the two monarchs.

The interest in the Queen of Sheba that we see in these late antique materials contrasts with the relative lack of interest in her in the first half of the first millennium, at least after Josephus and the Gospels of Matthew and Luke: the only references to her in the classical Rabbinic literature is a tradition in the Babylonian Talmud that seemingly negates her very existence, and as Fabrizio Pennacchietti notes, Christian interest is similarly sparse, after and apart from Origen.<sup>357</sup> What is interesting about the cluster of materials here discussed, moreover, is its largely narrative character, especially in Jewish sources. Her prominence is not evenly spread across our archive, and she is not deployed

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<sup>357</sup> Pennacchietti, “La reine de Saba,” 23.

in all genres of Jewish literature, even where she might be relevant. There is a particularly loud silence in Jewish historiography. Islamic historians writing in Arabic, such as Tabari and al-Hamdani, use the Queen of Sheba to anchor ancient Israelite history to Yemenite history (see Chapter Three). Yet the most important Jewish chronicle of the Middle Ages, *Sefer Yosippon*, emerged in the tenth century but makes no narrative use of the Queen of Sheba.<sup>358</sup> Likewise, there are no significant expansions found in the targumim of Kings and Chronicles, despite the prominence of this figure in the *Targum Sheni to Esther*.<sup>359</sup> For ancient Jews like Josephus, she was of historical interest and the expansion of her story formed part of the exegesis and extension of 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, but this does not seem to be the case for late antique and early medieval Jews. In this period, her story seems to be of interest more as memory than as history or exegesis, and the creativity around her that we see in *Targum Sheni to Esther*, *Midrash Mishlei*, and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* thus differs significantly from what we see in Josephus.

As we have seen, however, this complex of Jewish traditions is best contextualized by contemporaneous Muslim and Christian texts which show thematic parallels as well as some common concerns. In light of the lack of Jewish historical interest in the Queen of Sheba in the extant evidence and the seeming lack of exegetical interest in the accounts about her in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, it is particularly intriguing that interest in this figure is in a targum and a midrash on two texts of the Writings and a

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<sup>358</sup> For more on *Sefer Yosippon*, see Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption des Sefer Yosippon*; Börner-Klein and Zuber, *Josippon*.

<sup>359</sup> For more on Targum Kings, see Dray, *Translation and Interpretation of the Targum to the book of Kings* although note the contentious, albeit cautious, assertion that the Targum could be a pre-70 composition. For more on Targum Chronicles, see *Targum shel Divre ha-yamim* and the discussion of the dating of Targum Chronicles in Kaufman, "The Dialectology of Late Jewish Literary Aramaic," 145-48.

parody of a figure of Second Temple Jewish sapiential literature. As discussed, *Midrash Mishlei* and *Targum Sheni to Esther* represent closely linked traditions about the Queen of Sheba, with several important similarities. I do not posit a model of dependency between them, but they clearly represent related traditions. Likewise, the *Targum Sheni to Esther* and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* also share a tradition about the Queen of Sheba having hairy legs revealed as she lifted her skirts after misapprehending glass tile. I have delineated this late ancient network of tradition in an attempt to contribute to the growing corpus of studies about the reception of biblical figures as a phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the reception and interpretation of biblical texts. The patterns in the evidence surrounding the Queen of Sheba suggest that more can also be done to consider the choice of genres in which we find different sorts of materials about the biblical past developed in different ways.

This dissertation has showcased a late antique cluster of traditions about the Queen of Sheba that is distinct from our extant archive from antiquity and highly influential in medieval as well as modern conceptions about the Queen of Sheba. Further research might tell us whether the shift in the memory-making activity around the Queen of Sheba is related to the increased interest in the symbolic and exemplary role of Solomon's kingship and how this dynamic might relate to Christian claims to an inheritance of the Israelite monarchic past through the Queen of Sheba, as medieval Ethiopians did in the *Kebra Nagast*. Rather than studying material about the Queen of Sheba as examples of biblical exegesis or fodder for historicizing discourses, future research can look at the dynamic memories of the Queen of Sheba and how they interact with other reflections on the biblical past.

Jacob Lassner explains the title of his book *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba* with a gesture towards ancient and medieval associations between Lilith, female demons, and powerful female biblical figures like Jael and Deborah to suggest that the Queen of Sheba became a composite symbol of all that Jewish and later Muslim men feared about women.<sup>360</sup> Similarly, Joseph Dan notes that the thirteenth-century Hasidei Ashkenaz understood the Queen of Sheba to be a figure not just with hairy legs (about which they read in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*) but identifiable with Lilith herself, the queen of all demons.<sup>361</sup> Lassner points to this constellation of evidence to sharpen his point about the tendency to view the Queen of Sheba in negative terms in “postbiblical” Muslim and Jewish literature. We have seen how the treatment of the Queen of Sheba is not quite so simple in the first millennium CE, and I would suggest that this is also the case in what follows. One could just as easily point to the fourteenth-century Ge’ez text (translated from Arabic and from Coptic) of the *Kebra Nagast*,<sup>362</sup> which is from the same era as the Hasidei Ashkenaz and which apparently had circulation throughout the world of the Alexandrian Patriarch around the turn of the first millennium. Nor is interest in this figure limited to Abyssinian Christians; from the thirteenth century onward, European Christian art and literature depicts her as a witness to the True Cross, sometimes even depicting the

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<sup>360</sup> Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 33.

<sup>361</sup> Dan, “Ben Sira, the Alphabet of,” 375.

<sup>362</sup> The earliest manuscripts of the *Kebra Nagast* have a colophon stating it was translated from Arabic into Ethiopic under the direction of the earliest patriarch/bishop under the Solomonic dynasty. This colophon further states that the Arabic text was translated from Coptic in the twelfth century. Stuart Munro-Hay has insisted on the fundamentally medieval character of the evidence from Ethiopia (*Quest for the Ark of the Covenant*), but Wendy Belcher has pointed to the high likelihood that important aspects of the narrative of the *Kebra Nagast* emerge from a much earlier period, as well as the relatively sparse textual records from the wet highlands of Ethiopia before the Solomonic era (i.e., twelfth century onwards; “African Rewritings,” 441-59). Scholars like Muriel Debié have pointed to the focus on the sixth century king Ezana and the mention of the martyrs at Najran as evidence that at least that section of the *Kebra Nagast* emerged in the sixth or seventh centuries, in the era of Aksumite rulers in the Ethiopian highlands; “Le Kebra Negast éthiopien,” 255-78.

Queen of Sheba positively while denigrating Solomon, and these depictions often integrate with themes that we first find within the late antique complex of traditions discussed in this dissertation.<sup>363</sup> The vitality and pluriformity of traditions about the Queen of Sheba which I have explored in this dissertation set the stage for continued creativity around this figure, and this creativity retains its multivalence. She acts as a stage for writers to project their sense of the biblical past, with all the attendant complexities and contradictions that entails.

Audre Lorde notes how “much of Western European history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior,” and she thus asks

How do we redefine difference for all women? It is not our differences which separate women, but our reluctance to recognize those differences and to deal effectively with the distortions which have resulted from the ignoring and misnaming of those differences.<sup>364</sup>

It is not possible or desirable to describe every modality of difference visible in the figure of the Queen of Sheba, but in the preceding pages I have made an effort not to subordinate the material under a homogenizing or singular model, taking seriously the ruptures and complexity in the evidence. If the creativity surrounding the memory of this queen extends in part from her alterity, it is not just to demonize or denigrate her because of her gender and foreignness. Rather, in a manner akin to what Lorde notes, her difference is productive. The Queen of Sheba is not merely an embodiment of structures

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<sup>363</sup> Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood*, 289-349 discusses the rich complex of traditions, which emerge in the thirteenth century, which link the Queen of Sheba to the wood of the cross upon which Jesus was crucified.

<sup>364</sup> Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex,” 281-85.

of dominance, and attention to the history of her reception thus opens fields of possibility in our reading of ancient texts which present various memories of the biblical past.

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