

Two Riddles of the Queen of Sheba

VERA K. OSTOIA

*Curatorial Consultant, Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

THE TAPESTRY known as the Morgan Solomon and Sheba (Figure 1), recently purchased for The Cloisters, is not a newcomer to the Metropolitan Museum. It was exhibited here from 1912 to 1916 as part of the magnificent loan of the Collection of J. Pierpont Morgan. As early as 1906, it was shown in London in the Burlington Fine Arts Club's *Exhibition of Early German Art*, and, after this, it remained for some years on view in the Victoria and Albert (South-Kensington) Museum. When the tariff on the importation of works of art had been lifted, Morgan's collection was brought to the United States, and a great part of it came as a loan to the Metropolitan Museum.

After Morgan died, most of his collection was given by his son to the Museum, while a certain part of the loan was revoked and sold. Solomon and Sheba was among the forty tapestries acquired at that time by the firm of French and Company for the sum of \$2 million. Some of the tapestries included in this sale passed later to such collectors as Joseph Widener (the Mazarin tap-

estry, now in the National Gallery, Washington) and William R. Hearst (the Credo, in the Metropolitan Museum since 1960), while the Solomon and Sheba went to W. Hinckle Smith of Philadelphia, in whose house it remained until his death in 1970. It is mentioned in practically every important publication on tapestries.¹ Although it is possible to follow closely its displacements from 1906 on, its provenance and earlier history have yet to be established.

The tapestry is German, Upper Rhenish, probably Alsatian, and is datable in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, possibly toward its end. Like most of the German tapestries of the period, it is rather small in size. But its design, its colors, certain technical details, and its iconography make it a most welcome and interesting addition to the Museum's already comprehensive collection of medieval tapestries. It is 40 by 31½ inches in size and is woven in wool over a bast-fiber warp, with wool rug pile in Ghiordes (Turkish) knot technique used for part of the clothing, curtains,

1. Burlington Fine Arts Club, *Exhibition of Early German Art* (London, 1906) p. 189, no. 11, pl. LXVIII. W. G. Thomson, *A History of Tapestry* (London, 1906) p. 149. Friedrich von der Leyen, "Zu den Rätseln der Königin von Saba," *Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung* 175 (1907), states that he saw the tapestry in London and thought that "the raised velvet-like pile has been chewed up by moths." Gaston Migeon, *Les Arts du Tissue* (Paris, 1909) pp. 261–263, ill. George Leland Hunter, *Tapestries—Their Origin, History, and Renaissance*, large ed. (New York and London, 1913) p. 226. Pringsheim, report in "Sitzungsberichte der Kunstwissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft," *Münchener Jahrbuch* 9 (1914–1915) p. 246. Hermann Schmitz, *Bildteppiche* (Berlin, 1919) pp. 97–98. Rudolf F. Burck-

hardt, *Gewirkte Bildteppiche des XV. und XVI. Jahrhunderts im Historischen Museum zu Basel* (Leipzig, 1923) p. 51, note 10, fig. 61. George Leland Hunter, *The Practical Book of Tapestries* (Philadelphia and London, 1925) p. 209. Betty Kurth, *Die deutschen Bildteppiche des Mittelalters*, 3 vols. (Vienna, 1926) I, pp. 133–135; II, p. 242, III, pl. 153, calls it: Alsatian, 1470–1490. Eleanor B. Saxe, "Gothic Pile Fabric," *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 1 (1928–1929) pp. 67–70. Heinrich Göbel, *Wandteppiche*, part 3, *Die Germanischen und Slawischen Länder*, I, *Deutschland, . . . Schweiz und Elsass . . .* (Berlin, 1933) pp. 100–101, 193, fig. 76. Betty Kurth, "The Riddles of the Queen of Sheba in Swiss and Alsatian Tapestries," *The Connoisseur* 106 (1940–1941) pp. 234–237, 266, fig. 1.

and Solomon's hair, and with gold and silver threads in crowns and certain other details. (See Technical Notes by Nobuko Kajitani on pages 97–103.) The condition of the tapestry, despite some fading of colors and minor repairs, can be considered excellent.

The subject represented is the visit of the Queen of

Sheba to King Solomon, or more precisely, the moment when she tries the king “with hard questions” (3 Kings 10:1 and 2 Par. 9:1), in this case, riddles, which will be discussed later.

The event takes place in a garden setting, rich in flowers, framed on the sides by rocky landscapes with



FIGURE 1

Two Riddles of the Queen of Sheba. Tapestry, wool, silk, gold and silver threads, German, Upper Rhenish, probably Alsatian (Strasbourg?), last quarter or end of the xv century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, purchase, 1971.43

a castle on one of the mountains, and above by a sky with light clouds. The throne on which King Solomon is seated, to the left, is surmounted by a baldachin with curtains drawn aside; a brocade or damask hanging falls from its back down over the steps of the throne. Solomon is shown as a young man with long curly hair, on which rests a jeweled crown. In his left hand he holds a cruciferous scepter; the fingers of his right hand are composed in a speaking gesture, or, it has been suggested, point to a flying bee. He wears, in the manner of the mid-fifteenth century, a short, dark blue, cut-voided velvet jacket, crimson hose, and blue pointed shoes. To the right, the Queen of Sheba stands before the king. She wears a ceremonial trailing red dress with blue sleeves, also of cut-voided velvet, with a pomegranate or pine-cone pattern, similar to that on the king's jacket. There is ermine fur at the hem of her dress, and long strips of the same fur fall from her shoulders to the ground (these strips are believed by some to be borders of a sleeveless mantle).² The queen's blond hair is held by gold threads in regular waves, possibly meant to represent tresses arranged according to a fifteenth-century German fashion. The points of her crown bear stylized fleurs-de-lis. A bee is approaching two identical red roses that the queen holds in her right hand. With her left hand, she points to two small children, both apparently of the same age, dressed and looking alike, who are gathering apples at her feet. Behind them, in the background, stands a large tree covered with flowers and fruit. According to the inscriptions on two intertwined scrolls in the upper part of the tapestry, the queen asks the king to distinguish between the real and the artificial flower, and to guess the sex of each child: "Bescheyd mich kunig ob blumen und kind Glich an art oder ungleich sind" ("Tell me, king, if flowers and children are like, or unlike in their kind"). To this Solomon replies: "Die bine ein guote blum nit spart das knuwen zoigt die wiplich art" ("The bee does not miss a real flower. Kneeling shows the female sex.") Woven borders define the left and right edges of the tapestry.

The style and the dialect (medieval Alemannic) of the inscriptions indicate the Upper Rhenish provenance of the tapestry, while certain details, such as the fluid and delicate design, and the painterly quality of the representation, are more characteristic of the region of Alsace than of Basel. Several tapestries related in

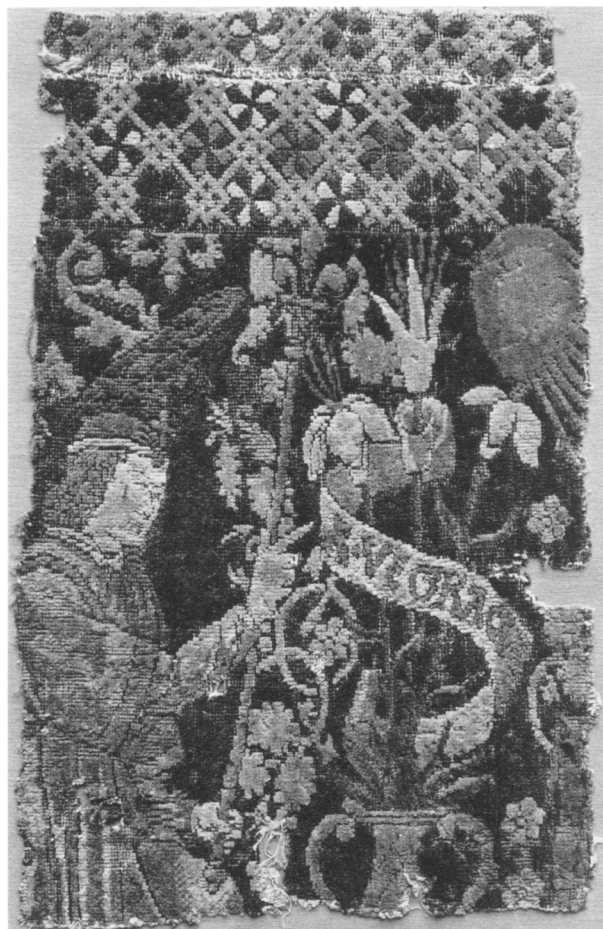


FIGURE 2

Angel Gabriel, part of the scene of the Annunciation to the Virgin. Tapestry fragment, wool, probably German, about 1500 (upper border now reset). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 28.15

style bear coats-of-arms of Alsatian families. The extensive use of Ghiordes knot technique also suggests Strasbourg as the place of manufacture.³ The use of rug-pile technique in German tapestries of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries is infrequent, but not unique. A fragment of a German hanging of c. 1500 with the angel of an Annunciation in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig-

2. Alwin Schultz, *Deutsches Leben im XIV. und XV. Jahrhundert*, Volksausgabe (Vienna, 1892) II, p. 247, ill., I, pl. vi, fig. 5. He quotes from the "Tractatus" of Thomas Šitný, c. 1374, Ms. in Prague.

3. Göbel, *Wandteppiche*, p. 100.

ure 2) and a slightly later hanging of Pyramus and Thisbe in the Victoria and Albert Museum⁴ are worked entirely in this technique, while several other tapestries of the region contain small details in Ghiordes knots, including a black sheep in the Nativity scene on the Life of the Virgin tapestry at The Cloisters, probably made in Basel.⁵

In the design of the tapestry one finds many details related to the engravings of Master E. S., such as the refined design of the hands, the elegance of the figure of the Queen of Sheba, and the many varieties of plants, while the figure of the seated king appears to be an almost exact copy of Solomon in the Judgment of Solomon print by Master E. S. (L.7), of c. 1467 (Figure 3).⁶ The dependence of this figure on the print seems unquestionable, unless one should prefer to look for a common prototype known in southern Germany at that time, because the same figure of an enthroned king was repeated by several late-fifteenth-century artists in this region. The best-known copies (in reverse) were used to illustrate the second printed edition of the *Hungarian Chronicle* by Johann Thwroc (Johannes de Turoczy, or Thuróczy), printed by E. Ratdolt in Augsburg in 1488 (Hain 15518),⁷ and served as hypothetical portraits of the Hungarian kings Louis the Great, son of Charles-Robert of Anjou, and Ladislaus V Posthumus on the occasions of their coronations, in 1340 and 1440 respectively. The Master of the Banderoles copied the same figure in his print *The Wheel of Fortune*, and the throne in *The Seventh Day [of Creation]*. The fig-



FIGURE 3
The Judgment of Solomon. Engraving by Master E. S. (L.7), German, Upper Rhenish, about 1467

4. Saxe, "Gothic Pile Fabric," pp. 67–70. Julius Lessing and Max Creutz, *Wandteppiche und Decken des Mittelalters in Deutschland* (Berlin, n.d.) pp. 4–5, says that the Quedlinburg tapestry shows two kinds of knots: over two and over one warp. (The Quedlinburg "tapestry," of c. 1200, is worked entirely in rug-pile technique, but of a somewhat different variety.) A. F. Kendrick, *Catalogue of Tapestries, Victoria and Albert Museum*, (London, 1924) p. 59, no. 55, pl. xxvii (ill. of one of three fragments). C. F. Wingfield Digby, Keeper of the Department of Textiles, kindly supplied the information that the Ghiordes knots on the Victoria and Albert tapestry are made in wool over two white wool warps, with two shoots of red wool weft. Kurt Erdmann, "Orientalische Tierteppiche auf Bildern des XIV. und XV. Jahrhunderts," *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 50 (1929) p. 266, note 2.

5. Acc. no. 57.126, The Cloisters Collection. German (Swiss), Upper Rhenish, probably Basel, third quarter of the fifteenth century. Betty Kurth, *Die deutschen Bildteppiche*, calls it Swabian, last quarter of the fifteenth century. Vera K. Ostioia, "A Tapestry Altar Frontal with Scenes from the Life of the Virgin," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* N.S. 24 (1965–1966) pp. 287–303.

6. Max Lehrs, *Geschichte und kritischer Katalog des deutschen, niederländischen und französischen Kupferstiches im XV. Jhdt.*, II (Vienna, 1910) text, "Der Meister E.S.," no. 7, pp. 50–52. Max Geisberg, *Die Anfänge des deutschen Kupferstiches und der Meister E. S.*, Meister der Graphik, II (Leipzig, n.d.) p. 84, pl. 34. Max Geisberg, *Die Kupferstiche des Meisters E. S.* (Berlin, 1924) pl. 8, no. 51 (L.7, Dresden, Kupferstichkabinett). Alan Shestack, *Master E. S.: 500th Anniversary Exhibition*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1967, no. 3, Judgment of Solomon (L.7), lent by the British Museum, London.

7. Josef Fitz, "Die Ausgaben der Thuroczy-Chronik aus dem Jahre 1488," *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* 12 (1937) pp. 97 ff., 106: The so-called short edition, prepared for sale in Germany, leaves out the Austrian coat-of-arms, and the title as Duke of Austria for Matthias Corvinus.

ure appears again in a round stained-glass panel in the ducal palace of the House of Oettingen-Wallerstein, at Maihingen, near Nördlingen, and in a simplified drawing after it of 1647. On the other hand, the structure of the composition, with the Queen of Sheba standing before the king, is quite close to a simpler one in a woodcut, showing the scene in reverse, used to illustrate her visit to Solomon in the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, printed by Peter Drach in Speyer, c. 1478 (fol. CLVIII), where it is accompanied by the text: “Die Künig von Saba kam zu Salomon das sie sine herrschafft sehe” (“The Queen of Sheba came to Solomon to see his dominion”) (Figure 4).⁸ Here the scene serves as an antetype to the Last Judgment, as the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven, of the Lord of the Kings (as King Solomon was also sometimes called), and as the “rejoicing of the Blessed.” King Solomon is shown young and not unlike the king on the print by Master E. S. and on the tapestry. Since the composition of this print, attributed to the Master of the Hausbuch (active in the last quarter of the fifteenth century) could hardly depend on the tapestry, a common prototype for both might be considered.

The text of the Bible does not disclose the contents of the “hard questions” with which the queen tried Solomon. But the images of King Solomon and of the Queen of Sheba, the Queen of the South (of the land of Sheba, or Saba, in southwestern Arabia), created by the text of the Bible,⁹ greatly fascinated its readers and worked on their imagination. In the Orient, where legends, fables, and riddles abounded, and were in great favor, both with the Jews and with the Arabs, and where the solving of riddles was regarded as proof of great sagacity, numerous legends were woven around their names, and the subject of the riddles elaborately developed. The legends probably began as folkloric tales built on older myths of the Near East and went orally to and from the Syrian and Yemenite Jews, from them to the Arabs, and back to the Jews again, from people to people, and from country to country, often beginning with the words “it is told,” so that their exact movements are hard to trace, though Babylonian and

Persian roots for some of them are believed to exist. The legends as well as the queen’s riddles underwent changes to suit the tastes of various peoples.¹⁰

For Islam, Solomon the Peaceful (Shalom or Salem, meaning “peace” in Hebrew), became Suleiman, Soliman, or Selim, a prophet of Allah and forerunner of Muhammad. He is included in the Koran among the prophets. The queen, at a later date, under the name of Bilqīs, was sometimes known as a sorceress, the legends acquiring a fairy-tale quality.¹¹

10. S. Schechter, “The Riddles of Solomon in Rabbinic Literature,” *Folk-Lore* 1 (1890) pp. 349–358. August Wünsche, *Die Rätselweisheit bei den Hebräern* (Leipzig, 1883) pp. 15–17. Von der Leyen, “Zu den Rätseln,” pp. 5 ff. Georg Salzberger, *Die Salomo-Sage in der semitischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1907) p. 28.

11. Koran, Sura XXVII. Gustav Rösch, “Die Königin von Saba als Königin Bilqīs,” *Jahrbücher für Protestantische Theologie* 6 (1880) pp. 524–572. Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Rosenöl*, I (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1813) chap. 6, “Suleimanne,” pp. 147–177.

FIGURE 4

Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Attributed to the Master of the Hausbuch, German, active in the last quarter of the xv century. From *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, printed by Peter Drach, Speyer, c. 1478, fol. CLVIII



8. Hans Neumann, *Die Holzschnitte des Meisters von Amsterdamer Kabinett zum Spiegel menschlicher Behaltis*, Studien zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte, no. 126 (Strasbourg, 1910) pl. 201.

9. 3 Kings; 2 Par.; Psalm 71, “on Solomon”; Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31.



FIGURE 5

The Queen of Sheba bringing gifts to King Solomon. Enamel plaque from the Klosterneuburg altar, by Nicholas of Verdun, Mosan, 1181. Klosterneuburg, Austria (photo: Bildarchiv der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek)

The Hebrews stressed Solomon's great wisdom and success in ruling his land, and his building of the Temple. Their writers, who in the beginning objected to certain aspects of the legends as unworthy of Solomon's greatness, especially the story of his romantic involvement with the Queen of Sheba, still took up some of them with slight variations.

The magnificence and splendor of Solomon's court, his riches, and the prosperity of the land under his rule, were examples to be emulated by any king. The emperor Justinian, moved by his own accomplishments in building the Church of Haghia Sophia in Constantinople, more beautiful than the Temple, exclaimed: "I have surpassed you, Solomon!"

The Christians accepted Solomon not only as a prophet and ancestor of Christ, as he appears on west façades of great churches, but also as a symbolic image of Christ, while the Queen of Sheba became the symbol of the Christian Church, the Ecclesia. Herrad of Landsberg, in her *Hortus Deliciarum*, written in Alsace in

the last third of the twelfth century, says: "Regina Austri Ecclesiam gentium significat" and "Regina Austri id est ecclesia venit audire sapientiam veri Salomonis Jesu Christi" ("The Queen of the South symbolizes the Church" and "The Queen of the South, i.e., the Church, came to hear the wisdom of the true Solomon, Jesus Christ"). The Queen of Sheba was identified with the bride in the Canticle of Canticles (attributed to Solomon) and the Bride of Christ, and was occasionally represented as a black queen, because the bride says: "I am black, but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem" (Cant. 1:4). She can be seen thus in "Bellifortis," by Conrad Kyeser, of 1405,¹² where she also stresses her beauty: "Sum regina Sabba. . . Pulchra sum et casta" ("I am the Queen of Sheba. . . I am beautiful and chaste [or pious]") and is shown as a richly attired queen, with long blond hair, but with the face of an Ethiopian. On the Klosterneuburg enamel plaque by Nicholas of Verdun, of 1181 (Figure 5), she is also shown as a black queen bringing gifts to King Solomon, the scene being an antetype of the Adoration of the Magi. The same parallel is usually stressed in the *Biblia Pauperum*. She was considered to be the ancestress of one of the Three Magi, "Reges Tharsis, Arabum et Sabà" ("Kings of Tharsis, of the Arabians, and of Sheba") (Psalm 71:10, "Deus, iudicium tuum"),¹³ and one of them, either Caspar or Balthasar, the Sabaeen, was represented as black in the later Middle Ages. But the most outstanding characteristics of the Queen of Sheba were that she was beautiful, rich, and wise.

In Byzantine writings, she was referred to as Nicaula the Sibyl, a prophetess who recognized the Tree, or the Wood from which the Cross of Christ's Crucifixion was to be made, and foretold the Redemption of Man. This legend, believed to have originated in the fourth or fifth century in Alexandria, or possibly in Syria, is included in Byzantine chronicles, which usually start with the Creation of the World, repeating earlier traditions. In these chronicles she is referred to as "the

12. Conrad Kyeser of Eichstätt, "Bellifortis," fol. 122. Göttingen University Library, Ms. philos. 63. Facsimile ed. (Düsseldorf, 1967).

13. André Chastel, "La légende de la Reine de Saba," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 120 (1939) p. 164, inscription on a lintel at Notre Dame du Port: "Tres dant tria dona Sabei." André Chastel, "La Rencontre de Salomon et de la Reine de Saba dans l'iconographie médiévale," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 6th period 35 (1949) pp. 102-104.



FIGURE 6
Solomon, his vizier, and the Queen of Sheba. Miniature in a Persian manuscript, Safavid, mid-xv century. Collection Henri Vever

Queen of Sheba, who was called Sibyl by the Greeks.” Therefore she was sometimes confused with the Tiburtine Sibyl.

The Ethiopian Kings claimed that they descended from the son of the Queen of Sheba (whom they called Makeda) and Solomon, and that they thus were heirs

to the greatness of the Kingdom of Israel. “Kebra-Negast” (“Glory of the Kings”), a royal Abyssinian manuscript written in ancient Geez dialect, probably in the thirteenth century (translated into French by Hugues Le Roux in 1904), says that this young Ethiopian king “was crowned as if he were King David,” and he is referred to as Baina-Hekem (“Son of the Wise”). The confusion of the land of Saba (Sheba in Hebrew), in southwestern Arabia, with Ethiopia (Kush) or Abyssinia, on the opposite shore of the Red Sea, is old. The apocryphal book *The Wisdom of Solomon* (7:20) says: “Sabaei natio sunt Aethiopica . . . eorum regina fuit admirabilis ille Sibylla . . .” (“Sabaeans are an Ethiopian nation . . . their queen was that admirable Sibyl . . .”).

Islamic miniatures show the queen’s visit to Solomon in a sumptuous oriental setting. The king and the queen are usually seated together on a throne, surrounded by jinnis, over whom Solomon ruled, and animals and birds, whose language he understood. Solomon, as occasionally also Bilqis, has the flame halo of a prophet, and is attended by his grand vizier Asaf (Figure 6). There is no reference to the riddles.

The oriental splendor of the queen’s procession, bearing gifts on the way to meet Solomon, appealed to Italians. On the Door of Paradise to the Baptistry in Florence, Ghiberti used restraint in representing the meeting of the king and the queen. But on fifteenth-century cassoni, the magnificent processions show the influence of the Orient (Figure 7), probably transmit-

FIGURE 7
Visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon. Panel from a cassone. Tempera on wood, Workshop of the Virgil Master, Italian, Florentine school, about 1450. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, James Jackson Jarves Collection, acc. no. 1871.36 (photo: courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery)



FIGURE 8

The Queen of Sheba and Solomon. Tapestry, wool and silk, German, Upper Rhenish, Alsatian, dated 1561. Historisches Museum, Basel, acc. no. 1870.999 (photo: courtesy of the Historisches Museum, Basel)



ted through Byzantium, as well as national taste. The young people of the riddle of sexes might be among the Queen's retinue.

The subject of the riddles seemed to attract the attention of the German artists, along with that of the Judgment of Solomon, the latter found especially suitable to decorate town halls and other buildings or places used for the administration of justice.

Six German tapestries, and possibly a fragment of a seventh, are known to depict the same subject of the two riddles propounded by the Queen of Sheba; all of them date from the late fifteenth to early seventeenth centuries. These tapestries differ little, mostly in details, in the number of attendants, in costumes influenced by the changes in fashions from one century to the other, and in slight variations in the text of the inscriptions. The Cloisters tapestry, of the late fifteenth century, is the earliest of all.

A tapestry, known only by description (whereabouts unknown), with the date 1506 on a scroll, was seen by Carl Becker in 1878 in the Boasberg Antiquarian Museum in Amsterdam, as reported in 1879 by Müllen-

hoff.¹⁴ It has been said that it passed later to the former Collection Spitzer in Paris, but there is nothing to substantiate this. The size is given as "about one meter square," and the description notes a female attendant behind the queen, and two children "plucking flowers"—which must be a misunderstanding of Becker. The scroll "winds through a large rose tree." The inscription differs from that of the Cloisters tapestry in that it has "rechte blum" instead of "guote blüm," and "diser kind zeigt" instead of "das Knuwen zoigt" ("right flower" instead of "good flower," and "this child shows" instead of "the kneeling shows"). It is also stated that the question and answer are "given in wrong sequence."

Pringsheim reported in 1915 that he had a tapestry

14. Müllenhoff, "Notiz des Herrn Karl Becker," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 23 (1879) p. 48. Wilhelm Hertz, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, ed. Friedrich von der Leyen (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1905) pp. 413–455. Franz Julius Delitzsch, *Iris: Studies in Colour and Talks about Flowers*, trans. A. Cusin (Edinburgh, 1889), pp. 156–157: "The flower-riddle of the Queen of Sheba." Pringsheim, in "Sitzungsberichte," p. 246.

with riddles, with the date 1541, formerly owned by Prince Arenberg. Sometime between 1915 and 1940 it was in the Collection Nemecs, in Munich.¹⁵ The composition here is closely related to that of the other tapestries of the sixteenth century and includes an attendant behind the queen, and a parrot on the arm of the king's throne.¹⁶

The tapestry in the Historisches Museum, Basel (Figure 8), bears the date 1561. The queen here too has a female attendant, and there are several male attendants behind the king's throne, one of whom, kneeling, holds a bowl of fruit. The king's crown is placed over a turban, in "à la turque" fashion.¹⁷ Much silk was used in the weaving; the size is 80 by 100 cm. (32 by 40 inches). The inscriptions show the same variations as those on the 1506 piece, with slight changes in spelling. The tapestry was found in 1868, in Klein-Basel, but

Rudolf Burckhardt was of the opinion that, though Upper Rhenish, it is not Basel work. And indeed one of the coats-of-arms on the tapestry belongs to an Alsatian family (the other was not identified).

Another tapestry came to the princes of Reuss, J. L., in Schleiz, from the parish church at Kirschkau, where it served originally as an altar cloth (*Altardecke*). It is dated 1566. The scene here is reversed, with the king sitting to the right. There are two male attendants behind the throne, and three female ones behind the queen, one of them carrying the queen's train. Various animals and birds have been added to the usual garden setting, including a parrot (see note 16) on the arm of the throne. The inscriptions read like those on the three preceding tapestries, but they are restored.¹⁸

The last complete tapestry (Figure 9) is in a New York collection. It is of almost the same size as the one

15. Pringsheim, in "Sitzungsberichte," p. 246. Kurth, "The Riddles," pp. 236-237, no. LV, ill., reads the date as 1544 and says: "formerly in the Collection Nemecs, Munich; much restored."

16. The parrot may represent the hoopoe, the bird that was, according to legend, in service to King Solomon and was the first to tell the king about the land of Sheba and its queen.

17. Göbel, *Wandteppiche*, III, p. 183, fig. 152: "Basel 1590." Burchardt, *Gewirkte Bildteppiche*, p. 49, fig. 60. Pringsheim, in "Sitzungsberichte," p. 246. Kurth, "The Riddles," p. 235, no. II, ill. For oriental influence in costume, see note 22.

18. P. Lehfeldt, *Fürstentum Reuss jüngere Linie*, I, *Bezirk Gera*, Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler Thüringens (Jena, 1896) pp. 11, 83-85, ill., says, "Lower Rhenish, after Flemish cartoon, or Flemish." Kurth, *Die deutschen Bildteppiche*, I, p. 135, fig. 60, reads the date as 1560. Göbel, *Wandteppiche*, III, p. 184, fig. 156, reads the date as 1560 and says that it was "formerly owned by Reuss." Pringsheim, in "Sitzungsberichte," p. 246. Delitzsch, *Iris*, pp. 157-159, reads the date as "1560 or 1566" and gives the inscriptions. Hertz, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, p. 450. Kurth, "The Riddles," p. 235, no. III, ill.

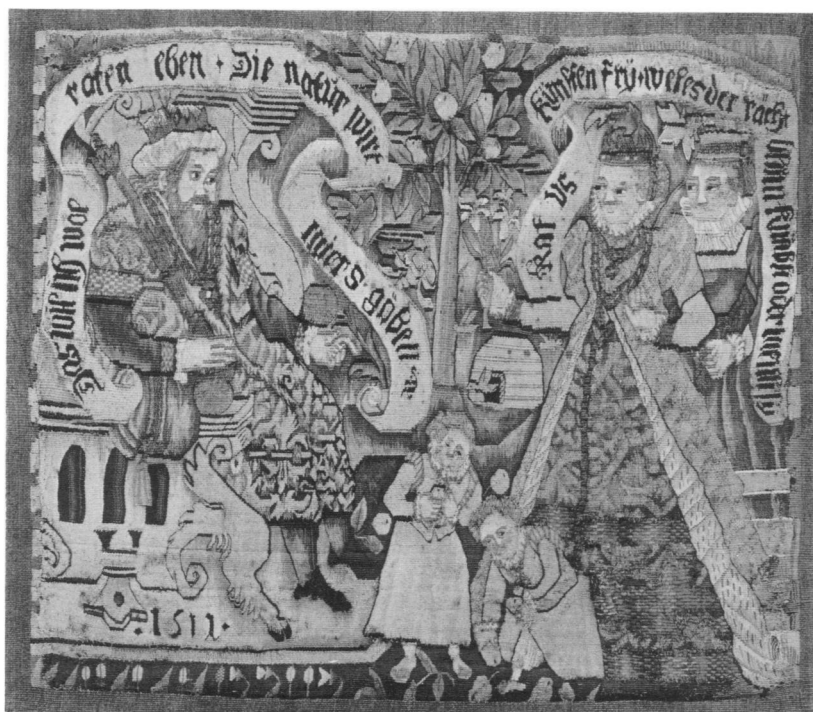


FIGURE 9
King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Tapestry, wool, German, late XVI or early XVII century. New York collection



FIGURE 10

The Queen of Sheba before Solomon. Engraving after a wall painting by Johann Mathias Kager, Augsburg, about 1612. François Collignon, French (Nancy), 1631. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 62.602.656

seen in Amsterdam by Becker. It shows several repairs, including a poorly restored date on the scroll, which has been variously read and could be 1611, the last number being not original. By style it could be late sixteenth or early seventeenth century.¹⁹ The inscriptions on the scrolls are unusual. They read: “Rat us Künsten fry weles der rächt blüm Knäbli oder meitli sy” (“Guess freely out of your arts which one might be the right flower, and which boy or girl”); and “Das wil ich wol raten eben. Die natur wirt miers gäben” (“Surely this I will guess well. The nature [of things] will give it to me”). Whether the last part is a paraphrase from Prov. 2:8 (attributed to Solomon), “Because the Lord giveth wisdom,” is anybody’s guess. I thank Helmut Nickel for his assistance in deciphering the text. If it were not for the difference in the inscriptions and the location of the scrolls, which here do not “wind through a large rose tree,” one could think that this was the tapestry seen in Amsterdam in 1878.

Heinrich Göbel published a tapestry fragment of the second quarter of the sixteenth century on which only the two children remain. He saw it at a Berlin antique dealer’s.²⁰

A sixteenth-century automaton, which represented the meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, was to be seen in the old Labyrinth (Doolhof) in Amsterdam, destroyed in 1850. Automata were fashionable in the sixteenth century, as they were in the fourteenth,²¹ and this one included the riddle of the chil-

dren’s sexes. A text of 1850, known to me only in a quotation and not available for verification, gives the explanation of the riddle performed and its solution by Solomon: He had water brought in for washing and the boys washed their faces “like men without more ado,” but the girls, “with characteristic prudery, scarcely touched the water with the tips of their fingers.” This is a solution different from that seen on the tapestries. The number of children is also evidently more than two, but the question must have been the same.

Besides the tapestries and the automaton, there are some wall paintings of the seventeenth century dealing with the same riddles.

The meeting of the king and the queen, painted by

19. Göbel, *Wandteppiche*, III, p. 183, fig. 151 b. Kurth, “The Riddles,” p. 236, no. v, ill.

20. Göbel, *Wandteppiche*, III, p. 193, fig. 182.

21. Delitzsch, *Iris*, pp. 161–169. Hertz, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, p. 440. Another automaton, with scenes of the Nativity and the Passion, using wooden figures with mechanical movement, is described by Cristobal de Villalón, “Comparacion entre los Sabios Antiquos y Presentes, en la qual se disputa quando uno mas en todas las sciencias y artes . . .,” Ms., written in 1539, British Museum, published by Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles (Madrid, 1898) pp. 174–175: “Y que cosa pueda ser mas subtil que un retablo que trayan unos estrangeros el año pasado en el qual, siendo todas las ymages de madera se representavan por arteficio de un reloj marevillosamente . . . tal al natural que parecia ver lo que passó.” N. D. Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage* (Oxford, 1967) p. 39, refers to the same manuscript of 1539.

Mattheus Kager c. 1610–1612 on the wall of the prison behind the Town Hall of Augsburg (destroyed) is recorded in an engraving of 1631 by François Collignon (Figure 10). The sumptuous scene does include young children, but it is not clear whether it contained the riddle of the children. The inscription, “For wisdom is better than all the most precious things, and whatsoever may be desired cannot be compared to it” (Prov. 8:11), does not refer to riddles.

The subject of the flower riddle alone is found in a wall painting by Franz Geiger, of about 1679, in the so-called throne room of the Castle Trausnitz, near Landshut. It is the Visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon (Figure 11). The caption says: “Sapiens oculator Argo” (“The wise can see more than Argus”). In the center, Solomon sits on his throne flanked by

lions, under a baldachin bearing a shield with blue and white diamonds of the Bavarian coat-of-arms. His courtier wears a Turkish kaftan and a turban.²² To the right kneels the queen, while a young girl behind her

22. Hermann Goetz, “Oriental Types and Scenes in Renaissance and Baroque paintings,” *Burlington Magazine* 73 (1938) part I, pp. 50 ff., and part II, pp. 105 ff. Trade and political relations promoted oriental influence in Western Europe, from Ottoman Turkey directly, or through Byzantium; the Turkish danger to Constantinople, and its fall, caused refugees to flee westward; Prince Djem, brother of Sultan Bajazet II, fled Turkey, and spent 1481–1489 in France, Austria, and Italy. Voyagers to the East, like Breydenbach, author of *Iter in terram sanctam* (Utrecht, 1484), and Gentile Bellini, who worked for the sultan, brought oriental fashions to the West. Invasions of Ottoman Turks in Europe provided knowledge of oriental costumes. The Jewish Old Testament figures, seen as heathens like Muhammedans, were given the same costumes.

FIGURE 11

The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon. Wall painting by Fritz Geiger, about 1679 (destroyed). Castle Trausnitz, near Landshut (photo: Bayerische Verwaltung der staatl. Schlösser, Gärten und Seen, Munich)



holds up the queen's train. Attendants carry gifts. Solomon holds in his left hand a bunch of fake flowers, which the queen brought to him in order to see whether he would be induced into smelling them. But Solomon orders bees let out of beehives into the hall, and their lack of interest shows him that the flowers are artificial. In a manuscript of 1761, J. B. Fassmann describes the scene only as the Visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon. E. Bassermann-Jordan says that this painting, and another with the scene of the Judgment of Solomon on the opposite wall (both now destroyed?), were made to replace tapestries previously hanging there. Speaking of some smaller, unrelated wall paintings in another room of the castle, he says that they show scenes from Italian comedies actually performed by Italian actors at Trausnitz.²³

Both riddles are represented in the chapter house of the Benedictine abbey at Kremsmünster, Austria, in two small wall paintings of 1685 by the Italian painter Antonio Galliardi. One of them shows "the two children," the other, "the real and the artificial roses." King Solomon here wears classical armor.²⁴

The old text, which would have served as a direct source for the flower riddle propounded by the Queen of Sheba, cannot be located, although it is quoted by the French poet Clément Marot in his "Prologue" to the *Roman de la Rose*, written in defense of the morality of this thirteenth-century poem for its revised edition of 1527.²⁵

The rose in the Romance can be compared . . . to that which the noble Queen of Sheba, the Ethiopian, presented to the wise King Solomon, as we read in the

book of problems, riddles, and questions she asked him to try his wisdom. . . . She took two roses, one of which came from a rosebush . . . and the other was an imitation, made by her to resemble the natural rose. . . . Here, said she, are two roses . . . tell me, Sire, which is the natural rose. . . . Solomon ordered some bees brought in . . . deducing from his knowledge of nature that the bees will go to the real rose. . . . Thus he pointed out to the queen the true rose . . . different from the other, with fake fragrance. . . .

Marot spurns those who take the poem's meaning literally, and explains that the real rose may, mystically, represent the true, heavenly, glory, as compared with the worldly glory, which is not real.

A somewhat related text exists in Pliny's *Natural History*, 11.8., where it is said that the bees "do not settle even on dead flowers," and although Pliny speaks of dead, and not artificial flowers, there might be some connection between the two. A similar statement exists in the *Buch der Natur* by Konrad von Megenberg, printed in Augsburg in 1475. In *Horus Apollo*, a bee collecting nectar and making honey is compared to a just king who rules well, and to the subjects who obey their king.²⁶

The riddle of the children's sexes, on the other hand, is encountered in many writings, which can be divided into two groups by the manner in which Solomon solves it: the Islamic version, in which Solomon guesses the sex of the children (or young people) by the way in which they use water in washing their hands and faces; and the Hebrew, in which Solomon guesses their sex by the way they gather delicacies thrown to them.

William Hertz²⁷ says that the oldest Arabic text on riddles is found in the writings by a Jew, Wahb ibn Munabbih, converted to Islam in the first century A.H. In the Koran (Sura XXVII) there is only a general mention of gifts the queen sent ahead with her ambassadors to Solomon. But various commentaries on the Koran explain that these presents included "five hundred young slaves of each sex, all dressed in the same manner," or that "Bilqîs, to try whether Solomon was a prophet or not," dressed boys like girls, and girls like boys, and that "Solomon distinguished the boys from

23. Felix Mader, *Stadt Landshut mit Einschluss der Trausnitz, Kunstdenkmäler von Bayern*, part 4, Regierungsbezirk Niederbayern, XVI (Munich, 1923) p. 352, refers to Fassmann's description: "Beschreibung deren in dem Churfürstlichen Residenz-Schloss zu Trausnitz ob Landshut vorhandenen Gemälden und Plafonds-, dann fresco-gemalten Zimmern, wie solche anno 1761 befunden worden seind," Staatsarchiv München, HR 279/17a, fols. 5-5 verso. E. Von Bassermann-Jordan, *Die dekorative Malerei der Renaissance am Bayerischen Hof* (Munich, 1900) p. 75, including note 3, and p. 165.

24. Theodor Ehrenstein, *Das Alte Testament im Bilde* (Vienna, 1923) p. 265, figs. 27, 28.

25. Guillaume de Lorris and Jehan de Meung, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Clément Marot, new ed., I (Paris, 1814) pp. 44-45. Alexander N. Veselovskiy, *Collected Works*, VIII, *Legends of the Talmud* (Petrograd, 1921) p. 382, esp. p. 383, note 1, and pp. 387-388 (in Russian).

26. *Horus Apollo de Aegypte, de la signification des notes hieroglyphiques des Aegyptiens . . .*, I (Paris, 1543) fol. ciiii verso. Delitzsch, *Iris*, pp. 153-167.

27. Hertz, *Abhandlungen*, pp. 422-423.

the girls by the different manner of their taking water” brought to them for washing their hands and faces, “the boys lifting the hand onto which the water had been poured immediately to their faces, whereas the girls first filled the right hand with the water falling on the left, and then washed the face with both hands at once.” In another Muslim version “the girls received the water in the palm, the boys on the back of their hands.”²⁸

In still another version, in the Abyssinian legend “Tigre,”²⁹ it is the queen herself and several of her female attendants who are disguised by clothing. And elsewhere it says that all her attendants wore female dress.

It is believed that the core of the riddle, with the switching of clothing, is based on myths about Semiramis, the queen of Babylon, and that the earliest Arabic-Persian versions depend on Jewish sources. The number of boys and girls thus transvested varies, but it always remains high.

The Byzantine chroniclers Georgios Monachos, Hamartolos (tenth century), Georgios Cedrenos (mid-eleventh century), and Michael Glykas (mid-twelfth century) tell about the riddle with the solution in which Solomon tests the boys’ and girls’ manner of washing their faces and hands.³⁰ From which earlier sources they copied this legend has not been established.

This riddle is also mentioned in certain Rabbinic writings.³¹ While it does not appear in the Book of Esther, it does, without solution, appear among three other riddles in the *Second Targum* (“Aramaic paraphrase”) of the *Book of Esther* (probably tenth century): the queen sent six thousand boys and girls, all born in the same year, month, and date, and all dressed in

purple. It is believed that, originally, the story was included in the Book of Esther, too, in the part of the text that is lost. But in the *Midrasch Mischle* (“exposition,” or “allegorical commentary”) on the *Proverbs of Solomon*, possibly written in the tenth or eleventh century in southern Italy, and later in the *Yalkut* (“gleaning”) *Schimoni on the First Book of Chronicles*, variously dated from the fourth to thirteenth century, it is told that the queen sent a hundred boys and a hundred girls, all of the same appearance and size, and dressed alike, and asked Solomon to distinguish the males from the females. Solomon beckoned to his servants, and they brought nuts and confections, which he distributed among the children. The boys stuffed them into their pockets without hesitation, but the girls modestly put them in their kerchiefs. Those, exclaimed Solomon, are the males and these, the females. Another author says that “the boys removed their cloaks, spread them out, and filled them with the delicacies. . . .” The *Yemen Midrasch*, in which various sections begin with: “Rabbi Ishmael related” or “Rabbi Jeremiah said,” and which contains nineteen riddles of the queen, the third riddle is that of the children. Solomon makes a sign to the eunuchs, who bring him a quantity of nuts and roasted ears of corn (or roasted grains, or cakes). The *Yemen Midrasch*, by Yachya Ben Suleiman, in Berlin, is dated 1430. None of the Hebrew texts speaks of only two children present.

But an anonymous Latin manuscript, “*Tractatus de Diversis Historiis Romanorum et Quibusdam Aliis*,” written in Bologna in 1326 (Herzog-August Library, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Gudianus 200), includes among other stories taken from various sources the following version of the riddle (Figure 12) (repeated here in a

28. Von Hammer-Purgstall, *Rosenöl*, I, pp. 159–160.

29. Enno Littman, ed., *The Legend of the Queen of Sheba in the Tradition of Axum*, Bibliotheca Abessinica, I (Princeton, 1904) p. 33.

30. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, CX: Georgios Monachos, *Chronicon Breve*, book 2, chap. 42 (“De Regis Salomonis”), chap. 43 (“De Regina Aethiopia Sibylla”). Migne, *PG*, CXXI: Georgios Cedrenos, *Compendium Historiarum a mundo condito . . . ex diversis libris collectum*, chaps. 166–168. Migne, *PG*, CLVIII: Michael Glykas, *Annalium Pars II*, cols. 351–352, “Sabaei natio sunt Aethiopica. Eorum regina fuit admiranda illa Sibylla.”

31. Paul Cassel, *Das Buch Esther* (Berlin, 1878) pp. 240–252, mentions three other riddles only. But in the supplement—a translation of the *Second Targum*, or *Targum Scheni*—one finds the story of six thousand boys and girls, all born in the same year, month, day, and hour, looking alike and all dressed in purple, sent by the

queen to Solomon. The story is told in connection with the statement that Ahasuerus was seated on Solomon’s throne. Schechter, “The Riddles of Solomon,” pp. 351–357. Delitzsch, *Iris*, pp. 156–167. Hertz, *Abhandlungen* pp. 416–417. Max Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur Semitischen Sagenkunde* (Leiden, 1893) pp. 217–221. Louis Ginsberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, IV (Philadelphia, 1947) pp. 125 ff., Solomon; pp. 142 ff., Queen of Sheba. August Wünsche, *Die Rätselweisheit bei den Hebräern* (Leipzig, 1883) pp. 15–24. Samuel Krauss, “Die Königin von Saba in den Byzantinischen Chroniken,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 11 (1902) pp. 129–130. *Midrasch Mischle on the Proverbs of Solomon*, Bibliotheca Rabbinica, XII (Leipzig, 1885). “Yemen Midrasch” (Hachepez), Ms. Or. 2382, British Museum. “Yachya Ben Suleiman, “Yemen Midrasch,” Ms. 1430, Berlin. *Yalkut Schimoni*, ed Simon von Kahira.

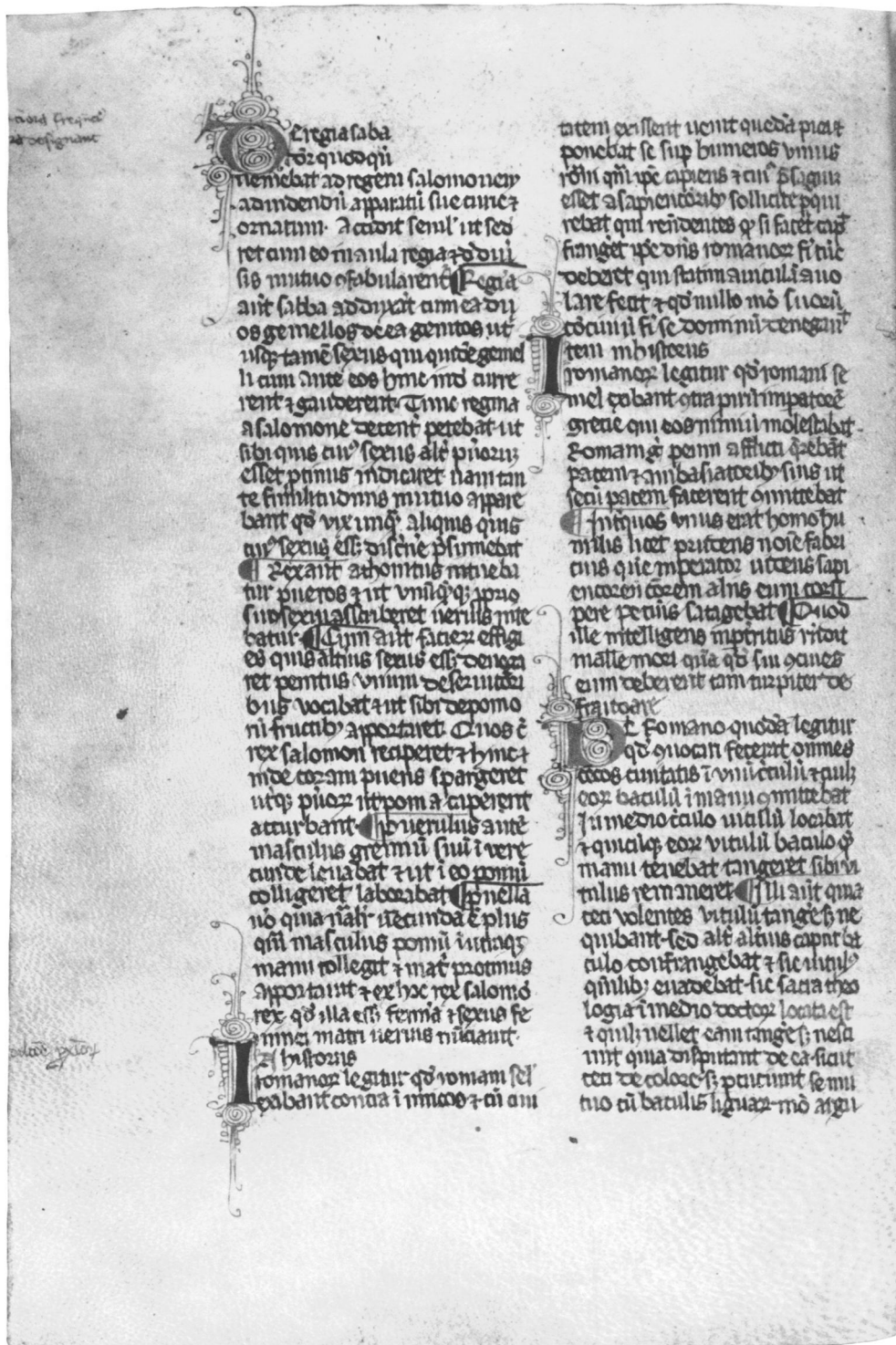


FIGURE 12

"De Regia Saba." From "Tractatus de Diversis Historiis Romanorum et Quibusdam Allis," fol. 184 verso, Bologna, 1326. Herzog-August Library, Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Gudianus 200 (photo: courtesy of Herzog-August Library)

summary translation): It has been said about the Queen of Sheba that when she came to Solomon to see his palace [or kingdom], they sat together in the *Aula Regia* and discussed various matters. With her the queen brought two twins of different sexes born to her; and while these twins ran and played before them, she asked Solomon to tell her the sex of each child. But they looked too much alike for Solomon to guess. Then he called one of his servants and gave orders to bring apples to him. When this was done, Solomon threw the apples to the children and called them to pick these up. The boy lifted the skirt of his dress and placed the apples into it, while the girl, being more modest, collected the apples in her hands and immediately proffered them to her mother. Thus Solomon was able to point out to the queen which of the two was of female sex.³²

In the above story one finds the two children and the apples seen on the tapestry at The Cloisters, and Solomon points out the behavior characteristic of the female child. The servant bringing fruit in a bowl appears on the tapestry in Basel. One is inclined to believe that this, or a related text, could be the source for the iconography of the riddle of the children on German tapestries. But even if this were so, it is not the final solution, because one does not know from where the writer of the "Tractatus" borrowed this particular legend. Some of the stories in his compendium correspond to those found in the *Gesta Romanorum* (where one finds the story of Esther [tale 177], but not the story of the Queen of Sheba), others to those in the "Liber Philosophorum," another medieval collection of edifying and moralizing stories.

The "Liber Philosophorum" itself is believed to have been written in Greek, possibly not as a single volume, and was translated into Arabic in the eleventh century, on orders of the Arab emir Abul Wefa; from Arabic it was translated into Spanish in the thirteenth century, and became known as "Bocados de Oro" ("Golden

Sayings"); from Spanish it was translated into Latin in the second half of the thirteenth century by John of Procida, an Italian born in Salerno, who, after spending almost thirty years at the court of the Hohenstaufen in Palermo as the medic and adviser of Emperor Frederick II, went in 1268 to the court of the kings of Aragon in Spain. There he made the Latin translation (with some changes) of the "Bocados de Oro." Several other sources have been considered for the "Tractatus" of 1326, but only one tentative suggestion for a direct derivation of the story of the Queen of Sheba from a Rabbinic text of a *Midrash* has been made.³³ The slight differences—in the number of children and in having apples replace nuts and confections—would not necessarily contradict such a suggestion.

The choice of a Hebrew, rather than an Arabic version of the legend for the iconography of the tapestry's riddle can be explained by the fact that it was the Crusaders returning from the East, and not the Arabs settled in Spain, who brought to Western Europe the taste of the Solomonic legends. Another consideration is that in the Middle Ages, especially in the thirteenth century, many Jews, proficient both in Hebrew and in Arabic, as well as in other languages, were employed at royal and ducal courts as counselors and translators. In Apulia, the son of Frederick II Hohenstaufen, Manfred, himself knew Hebrew. The philosopher Jehuda ben Salomon Cohen, from Toledo, was attached to the court of Frederick II on the invitation of the emperor after a lengthy correspondence between the two men on philosophical and other matters. At the same time, Walter von der Vogelweide stayed for several years in Frederick's service, doubtlessly meeting several Jewish scholars and acquiring knowledge of various Hebrew writings. Duke Frederick II the Quarrelsome (1211–1246) of Austria, the last of the House of Babenberg, had at his court two Jewish brothers as financial advisers on whom he conferred the title of *Kammergrafen*.³⁴

32. Salomon Herzstein, ed., "Tractatus de Diversis Historiis Romanorum and Quibusdam Aliis, Codex Gudianus Lat. 200, Herzog-August Library, Wolfenbüttel," *Erlanger Beiträge zur Englischen Philologie und Vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte* 14 (1893) pp. xi–xiii, 32–33, chap. 65, "De Regina Saba," and p. 58.

33. Remigio Sabbadini, "Il traduttore Latino del Liber Philosophorum," *Atti del Real Istituto Veneto di scienza, lettere et arti* 92, part 2 (1932–1933).

34. Otto Hartwig, "Die Übersetzungsliteratur Unteritaliens," *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen* 3 (1886) pp. 178–189. Arthur-Ernest

Cowley, "Hebrew Literature," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., XIII (Cambridge, 1910) pp. 169–175. Siegmund Gelbhaus, *Mittelhochdeutsche Dichtung in ihrer Beziehung zur biblisch-rabbinischen Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main, 1893), pp. 1–73, discusses the influence of Rabbinic writings on German medieval poets, with references; on p. 13, he quotes Freidank's "Bescheidenheit" and also finds parallels between the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and an episode in *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach. M. Steinschreiber, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin, 1895) p. 935.



FIGURE 13
Esther before King
Ahasuerus. Tapestry,
German, 1590. Cluny
Museum, Paris (photo:
Musées Nationaux,
France)

In the Middle Ages, cultural relations between German Christian scholars and theologians and their Jewish counterparts were close. Although they did disagree with the rabbis in religious matters and in the interpretation of the Old Testament, Christian theologians often sought advice from their Jewish colleagues, who had the advantage of being able to read the Scriptures in the original Hebrew. In fact, St. Augustine as early as c. 400 advised students of the Bible to learn Hebrew. Thus, German artists of the fifteenth century could feel that the Hebrew version of the Solomonic legends, accepted as historical facts, was more reliable than the Islamic.

The reason why the subject of the queen's riddles became popular for tapestries in southern Germany in the second half of the fifteenth century, taking its place among the more usual representations of royal couples (often very similar in composition), such as David and Bathsheba, or Ahasuerus and Esther (Figure 13), or the queen's visit to Solomon,³⁵ without the riddles, could be manifold. The interest could have been aroused by a text, or a successful sermon with exempla and moralities, possibly in Latin or medieval Upper

Rhenish dialect (*Mittelhochdeutsch*), or a mystery play or pageant performed on some special occasion, such as a visit of an important person, or some festivities, possibly in connection with a marriage, most likely royal. Documented performances of this kind *did* take place in various countries around this time, some even featuring King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, but none is recorded as having included the queen's riddles.³⁶

One hypothesis regarding a suitable occasion for a pageant including Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

35. A. Pigler, *Barockthemen*, I (Budapest and Berlin, 1950) pp. 158–159, 165, 190.

36. Gustave Cohen, *Histoire de la Mise en Scène dans le Theatre Religieux français du moyen âge* (Paris, 1926); he speaks on p. 120 of the entry of Anne of Brittany into Tours in 1491, where the *Mystery of the Sibyls* was performed; he thinks (p. 118) that the print of the Virgin of Einsiedeln, by Master E. S. (1466) was inspired by mysteries. Laura Hibbard-Loomis, "Secular Dramatics in the Royal Palace in Paris 1378, 1389 . . ." *Speculum* 33 (1958) frontispiece, *The First Crusade*, enacted in 1378, in Paris, Royal Palace ("Chronique de Charles V," Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Fr. 2813, fol. 472 verso); 1445, entry into London of Margaret, queen of Henry VI of England, great pageant; mid-fifteenth century, Glorification of Charles VII (1422–1461), performance of the *History of Troy*,

could be put forth. Festivities and pageants might have taken place, or been planned, at the time of the engagement of the young Hungarian king Ladislaus Posthumus to Madeleine, daughter of King Charles VII of France, even though existing records only confirm the fact that an embassy was sent to Paris to ask for the hand of the French princess. It was the most splendid embassy ever seen in France, and the count of Foix gave a magnificent reception.³⁷ A pageant or play might have been planned for the wedding, but the marriage never took place because of the sudden death of the young king.

In favor of this hypothesis it could be said that Solomon on the print (L.7) by the Master E. S. and on the tapestry at The Cloisters, as well as the kings' portraits in the *Hungarian Chronicle*, shows features related to those of Ladislaus on the double portrait of him and his promised bride, a painting of c. 1500 by an Austrian artist (National Museum, Budapest). The latter, in turn, is dependent on the young king's portrait by an Austrian, or a Nuremberg, artist, made about 1457 (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).³⁸

It is possible that Master E. S. was either asked to do designs for a pageant, or that he made sketches after having seen an actual pageant, and repeated the subject later in engravings. This would explain the heraldry on his Judgment of Solomon print: the lilies for Madeleine of France; the Austrian shield as a reflection of the wish of Emperor Frederick III of Austria to secure for his ward Ladislaus the Austrian throne; and the lion (in reverse) as a possible reference to the pre-

with the name of Charles VII rising on the Wheel of Fortune (the French kings claimed descent from the kings of Troy). Bamber Gascoigne, *World Theatre* (London, 1968) pp. 84–89, pl. xi. N. D. Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, p. 127, refers to the celebration of the fourteenth birthday of Prince Alfonso, brother of Henry IV of Castille, at Arévalo, Spain, in 1467, with a play in which his sister, the future Isabel the Catholic, took part. Joseph Chartrou, *Les Entrées solennelles et triomphales à la Renaissance (1484–1551)* (Paris, 1928) pp. 22–24. In 1485, at Rouen, at the “Unction de rois,” Charles VIII represented King Solomon, whom King David crowned; at the reception in 1486 in Paris of the new queen, Anne of Brittany, the marriage of Solomon and the judgment of Solomon were performed; when King Louis XII, after the death of Queen Anne, married Mary of England, the sister of Henry VIII, “Solomon coming to meet the Queen of Sheba” was represented at her reception in Paris.

37. Asztrik Gabriel, *Les rapports dynastiques franco-hongrois au Moyen-Age* (Budapest, 1944) pp. 72–75.

38. Ernst Buchner, *Das deutsche Bildnis der Spätgotik und der frühen Dürerzeit* (Berlin, 1953) fig. 202, cat. no. 203, p. 220, and

heraldic emblem—a black lion on a yellow ground—of the House of the Arpads, whose blood Ladislaus had in his veins. If pageants or plays were planned for his wedding, the choice of Solomon to personify Ladislaus could be easily explained. The Hungarian kings claimed their descent from the kings of the Old Testament; the two sons of King Andrew the White (mid-eleventh century) were named David and Solomon. The *Hungarian Chronicle* begins with a quotation from the Proverbs of Solomon (8:15): “By me Kings reign, says the Lord God by the mouth of the wise Solomon,” and continues, “and thus shall reign the Kings of the Hungarians.” There is also a parallel in the lives of the two kings, Solomon and Ladislaus. Just as Solomon, the youngest son of King David, was crowned at the age of twelve through the efforts of his mother, Bathsheba, so also Ladislaus Posthumus received the Holy Crown of Hungary on the insistence of his widowed mother, despite his tender age of four months and the opposition of an older pretender. The choice of the Queen of Sheba, praised for her riches, beauty, and wisdom, in which she was second only to King Solomon, to represent the princess, would be only natural.

Master E. S.'s interest in a pageant or play seems to be proven by the existence of a copy after his lost engraving, made by his pupil and follower Israel van Meckenem, usually referred to as the Cantic of Canticles, the Feast of Flowers, or the Feast of Roses. The only known colored print of this copy was found in Schwäbisch-Hall (Collection of Edmond de Rothschild, Louvre, Paris).³⁹ Both its composition and the

fig. 124, cat. no. 123, p. 205. *Ausstellung Friedrich III, Kaiserresidenz Wiener-Neustadt*, 1966, cat. no. 61, p. 327, fig. 29, and cat. no. 62, p. 328; Hanna Dornik here attributes to Meister von Maria am Gestade (?), c. 1460, both paintings (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Inv. No. 1739, and Historische Bildergalerie im Museum der Bildenden Künste, Budapest, No. 6960). Clément Marot, *Oeuvres*, II (Paris, n.d.) pp. 76–78, in the poem “A la royne de Hongrie venue en France,” addresses her as “Saba, Royne prudente & meure, Qui a laissé ton peuple . . . Pour venir voir . . . Le Salomon de France, nostre Roy. . .”

39. Lehrs, *Geschichte und Kritischer Katalog*, IX (Vienna, 1934) plates, p. 251, no. 599, text, pp. 6 ff., item 7: “Das Hohelied Salomons,” copy by Israel van Meckenem of an engraving by Master E. S.; found by O. Weigel in Schwäbisch-Hall; colored in red, blue, cobalt, yellow, green, and brown. J. D. Passavant, *Le Peintre-Graveur*, II (Leipzig, 1860) p. 97, no. 77: “La Fête de Fleurs.” Max Geisberg, *Die Kupferstiche des Meisters E. S.* (Berlin, 1924) pl. 237, fig. 10 a: copy after a lost engraving of Master E. S. by Israel van Meckenem, “Das Rosenfest,” coll. von Rothschild, Paris. T. O. Weigel and Ad. Zestermann, *Die Anfänge der Druck-*

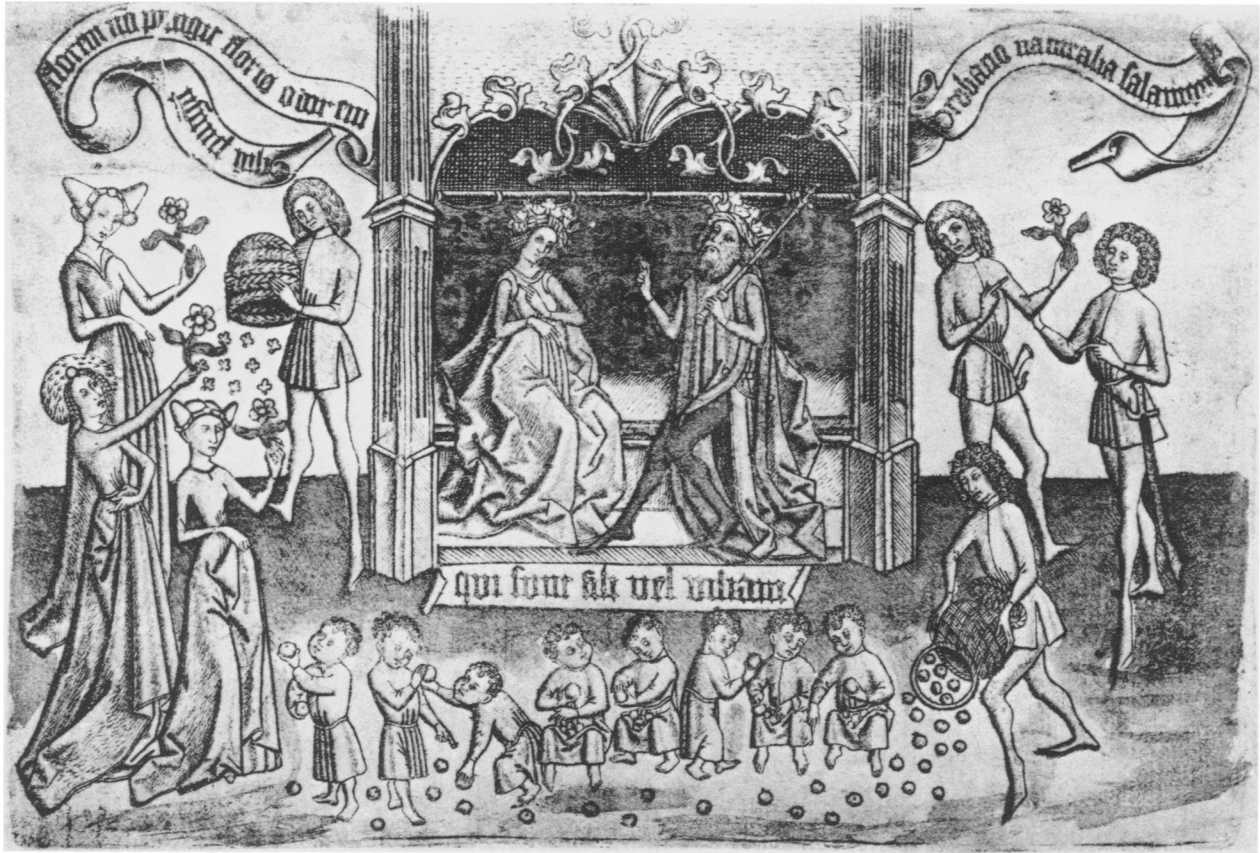


FIGURE 14

Two Riddles of the Queen of Sheba. Engraving, colored, by Israhel van Meckenem, copy after Master E. S., German, late xv century. Original in the Collection Edmond de Rothschild, Musée du Louvre, Paris

inscriptions reveal that it represents the Two Riddles of the Queen of Sheba (Figure 14). A king and a queen are seated on a wide throne. To the right are two guards or courtiers with swords at their sides and a flower, while a third attendant shakes apples out of a basket, and eight children, sitting or standing in the center front, gather and carry them in various ways. To the left, a male servant shakes bees out of a beehive that he holds upside down. The bees swarm over the flowers held by two female attendants nearby. Three banderoles bear Latin inscriptions. On the right: “*Probatio naturalia Salomonis*” (“Test of Solomon’s natural gifts,” i.e., wisdom). On the left: “*Qui pingit florem non pingit floris odorem*” (“He who painted the flower did not paint the flower’s fragrance”). Under the throne, above the children: “*Qui sunt filii vel viliam* [probably for *filiae*]” (“These are boys or girls”). The king and the queen, similarly seated on a wide throne

and attended by a military guard with a sword drawn, are seen in Herrad of Landsberg’s *Hortus Deliciarum* (Figure 15);⁴⁰ the general arrangement of the stage setting reminds one of that used for plays in Spain, where the actors performed on a podium facing the enthroned royal patrons, while the audience looked on from below the podium.⁴¹

kunst in Bild und Schrift . . . in der Weigelschen Sammlung, II (Leipzig, 1886) no. 423, engraving of 1460–1470, pp. 352–355, suggest that it is in the style of Berthold Furthmeyer, Swabian, second half of the fifteenth century. Anni Warburg, *Israel van Meckenem, sein Leben und seine Bedeutung für die Kunst des ausgehenden XV. Jhdts.* (Bonn, 1930), especially pp. 66–78.

40. Herrad von Landsberg, *Hortus Deliciarum*, ed. A. Straub and G. Keller, Alsatian Ms. written in the last quarter of the twelfth century (Strasbourg, 1901) pl. LII bis: Solomon conversing with the Queen of Sheba (Queen of Sheba as Ecclesia, King Solomon as Christ).

41. Shergold, *A History of the Spanish Stage*, pp. 452–478, uses information recorded by Antoine de Brumel in 1655.

The text quoted by Clément Marot in 1527 could be used easily to describe the representation of the flower riddle on the print, as well as on the wall painting at Trausnitz, while the text of the children's riddle in the 1326 manuscript includes the apples found on the print, as well as on the series of tapestries discussed in this article. Although the garden setting of the tapestries is missing in the print and is not mentioned in the manuscript, there probably would have been potted trees and plants in the *Aula Regia* in the Orient. It is difficult at this point to decide whether the Latin text of the manuscript and the quotation in French by Marot depend on a common source.

One must add that the flower riddle is found in two *Autos Sacramentales* (morality plays) by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, in one of which the Queen of Sheba appears under the name of Sibyl. In *La Sibila del Oriente*, "whose correct name should be not the Queen of Sheba, but Nicaula Maqueda,"⁴² Solomon answers the question as to how he could distinguish the artificial flower from a real one by saying: "Because a bee that circled it never settled on it, it must be artificial . . . it does not appeal to the bee, and is of no use to her. . . ." And in the play *El Árbol de mejor fruto*, to the question "tell me which . . . of the flowers you see from afar are real and which artificial" Solomon answers, "Proficient

bees fly above these flowers in loving circles, while above those others, only dirty flies; the first from beautiful calyxes collect nectar of which they make honey by their great art, while the flies only dirty the other flowers."

Although it is said often that Calderón based many of his plays on the writings of Johannes de Pineda, such as the treatise *Salomon praeuius, id est de Rebus Salomonis Regis*, there is no flower riddle in Pineda's writings, and Pineda's riddle of the children, based on the version by the Byzantine chronicler Georgios Cedrenos, does not appear in Calderón's plays. In *La Sibila del Oriente* he speaks of flowers in a picture ("de este quadro"), while the text on the print with the two riddles, copied by Israel van Meckenem from Master E. S., reads, "Who painted the flowers did not paint their fragrance" (a saying found in a number of medieval manuscripts), and in Marot's quotation one finds a mention of "fake fragrance." All versions, though not identical, are related and must have a common root.

Calderón, in the seventeenth century, must have taken his subject from a source known in Germany to Master E. S. and the Alsatian tapestry weavers in the second half of the fifteenth century, to Marot in France in the early sixteenth, and to the painters Franz Geiger and Antonio Galliardi in the seventeenth. The lost text possibly spoke of the "lush garden setting" mentioned by Calderón and found in every one of the tapestries. The two riddles, known in all probability before the second half of the fifteenth century, could have been used in a play or pageant planned for the marriage of Ladislaus and Madeleine.

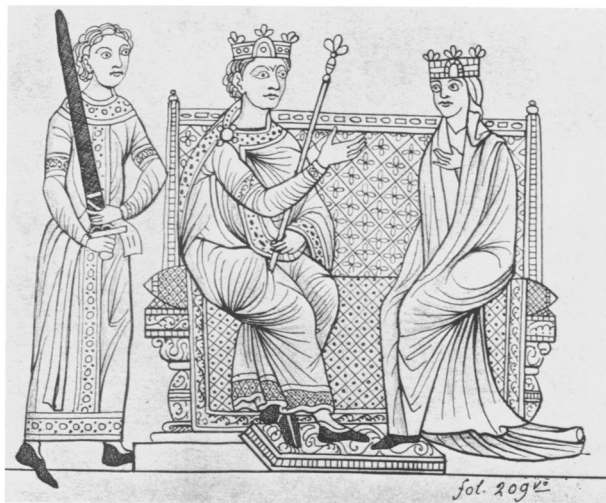
To end the complicated listing of possibilities for the derivation of the iconography of the riddles on the tapestry at The Cloisters, there exists an irresistible temptation to bring in a much later story. The interest in the problem of the riddles shown by the scholars in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the first of the tapestries with this subject were published, must have spread among the general public. The following event is reported in the *Folk-Lore Journal* of 1889:⁴³ An

42. Edward Glaser, "Calderón de la Barca's 'La Sibila del Oriente y Gran Reina de Saba,'" *Romanische Forschungen* 72 (1960) p. 400; Solomon is asked to tell which of the two seemingly identical flowers is merely an imitation; to which the King answers: "De criar es de criador / No de criatura" ("To create can only the Creator, not the creature").

43. *Folk-Lore Journal* 7 (1889) pp. 315-316.

FIGURE 15

King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. *Hortus Deliciarum*, by Herrad of Landsberg, fol. 209 verso, ed. A. Straub and J. Keller, Strasbourg, 1901, pl. LII bis



English soldier, in Derbyshire, was taken before the mayor of the town for handling some playing cards in church during the divine service. The soldier pleaded his case by stating that the cards suggested to him “serious thoughts”: “When I see the queen, I am reminded of the Queen of Sheba, who came to hear the wisdom of King Solomon. She brought fifty boys and fifty girls, all clothed in boys’ apparel, for him to

see which were boys and which—girls.” Solomon called for water. The girls washed up to their elbows, and the boys only up to their wrists.

Postscript: Edmond Fleg, *Salomon raconté par les peuples* (Paris, 1959) pp. 125–126, gives another version for the Riddle of the Flowers. The Queen of Sheba, opening “a coffret containing an emerald, two bouquets, and a cup,” says “One [bouquet] is made of false, the other of real flowers.” However, Fleg notes in his introduction that he is freely interpreting various legends.

Appendix: More about Solomon and Sheba



FIGURE 16

King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (?). Clasp, gilt bronze, Mosan, about 1200. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 47.101.48

THE MATERIAL presented here, concerning a gilt-bronze clasp, is only indirectly connected with the iconography of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon seen on the tapestry with the queen’s riddles. Nevertheless, the representation on the clasp, possibly based also on the legends woven around these fascinating Old

Testament personages, is related, and of sufficient interest to be discussed in connection with the tapestry.

Among the numerous objects purchased for The Cloisters in 1947 from the estate of Joseph Brummer, there is a gilt-bronze clasp of Mosan workmanship of about 1200, attributed to a follower of Nicholas of

Verdun (Figure 16).¹ On the clasp two seated figures are represented in high relief: a bearded man wearing a crown, evidently a king, and, to his right, a woman whose head is covered with a long scarf. The feet of the king rest on a lion, those of the woman, on a basilisk. The king holds in his left hand an unidentified rounded object; his right hand rests firmly on his right knee. The woman's hands are empty, unless there is something in her left hand hidden under the end of her scarf. Her right hand is pressed to her chest, expressing emotion. The king is facing his companion, but the woman, with a trace of a smile on her face, looks into the distance. Two smaller figures accompany the seated pair: a bearded man close to the king places his right hand on the latter's shoulder, as if trying to attract his attention, while a young girl crouches at the elbow of the woman.

Scholars are more or less in agreement on the dating and attribution of the piece, but not on the subject represented. At the time of the acquisition of the clasp, the late James J. Rorimer suggested, orally, that the seated figures might represent King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, an idea accepted by Erich Steingraber and, conditionally, by Hanns Swarzenski.² Alternate suggestions submitted at various times will not be discussed here, because the present note serves only to refute an objection to Rorimer's idea. In the text of the catalogue for the exhibition *The Year 1200*, by Konrad Hoffmann, one reads: "The absence of a crown on the female figure prevents the identification of the couple as Solomon and the Queen of Sheba."³ Such a categorical "negative" statement challenges an answer: The absence of a crown on the head of the seated woman does *not* prevent her identification as the Queen of Sheba. She is shown not wearing her crown in at



FIGURE 17

King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, illustration from the Bible from Sant Pere de Roda, Catalonian, late x–late xi century, fol. 129 verso. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Lat. 6

least two other medieval representations of approximately the same period.

The first of these can be seen in the Bible of Roda, (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Lat. 6) (Figure 17).⁴ The Queen of Sheba is greeted by the enthroned Solomon. In his left hand the king holds a scepter; with his right hand he grasps the raised left hand of the approaching queen, as if trying to lift her to his throne. The head and the shoulders of the queen are swathed in a scarf, while her crown is carried by one of her

1. Acc. no. 47.101.48. 2 by 3 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, purchase.

2. *Arts of the Middle Ages, 1000–1400*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1940, no. 218. James J. Rorimer, "A Treasury at The Cloisters," *Bulletin of The Metropolitan Museum of Art* N.S. 6 (1947–1948) p. 239, ill. on p. 238: "In the style of Nicholas of Verdun, from the region of the Meuse, about 1200." Hanns Swarzenski, *Monuments of Romanesque Art* (London, 1953) no. 235, fig. 536: Buckle, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (?), 54 by 76 mm. Bronze gilt ajouré, Lorraine, early thirteenth century. Erich Steingraber, *Alter Schmuck* (Munich, 1956) p. 32, fig. 28: "belt buckle, King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Lotharingian, beginning of the thirteenth century: owes its style to the monumental sculpture of North French cathedrals, and to the

contemporary art of Nicholas of Verdun." Jean Evans, *A History of Jewellery* (New York and London, 1953) p. 45, pl. 4 a. James J. Rorimer, *The Cloisters: The Building and the Collection of Medieval Art in Fort Tryon Park* (New York, 1963) p. 144, fig. 72: "made in the region of the Meuse about 1200. . . . The clasp may reflect the text, 'Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet' (Psalm 91:13)."

3. Konrad Hoffmann, *The Year 1200: A Centennial Exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1970) cat. no. 102: Mosan, workshop of Nicholas of Verdun, around 1210.

4. Wilhelm Neuss, *Die katalanischen Bibelillustration um die Wende des ersten Jahrtausends und die Spanische Buchmalerei* (Bonn and Leipzig, 1922) pp. 10–15, pl. 25, fig. 83.



FIGURE 18
King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Stone, French, about 1230. Amiens Cathedral, west façade, Portal of the Virgin, north side (photo: Marburg)

attendants behind her. The queen and her three attendants bring presents for the king. The date of the Bible of Roda is given variously as from late tenth to late eleventh century.

The second representation of the Queen of Sheba with her crown removed before King Solomon appears on the north side of the portal of the Virgin on the west façade of Amiens Cathedral (Figure 18). The queen, standing next to King Solomon, holds her crown in her right hand, while Solomon, to judge from his gesture, is proving something to her. The artist evidently had a purpose in representing her bareheaded, because in one of the small reliefs below the statues, the queen, listening to Solomon's explanations, does wear her crown. The date of the Amiens Cathedral sculptures is about 1230.

Thus, the queen does not wear a crown on two works of art, one somewhat earlier, the other slightly later, than the bronze clasp, even if in both cases the crown remains in evidence. The queen had removed her crown to acknowledge the presence of a greater and mightier ruler. There could have been no doubt in the minds of medieval artists that the greater of the two rulers was King Solomon, about whom it is said in the Scriptures, "And King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches, and wisdom" (3 Kings 10:23), and who was included among the ancestors of Christ.

The wearing of a crown had a deep symbolic meaning in the Middle Ages,⁵ and removing it before a mightier king was understandable behavior. Thus, in the scene of the Adoration of the Magi on the Klosterneuburg altar (1181), the oldest of the Three Kings is shown with his crown taken off, as he kneels before the Virgin and Child.

A description of similar procedures can be found in the *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae* by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, written in the tenth century.⁶ In codifying the established ceremonial, based on older traditions of the court of Constantinople, he describes the custom of having sovereigns remove their crowns or diadems before entering from the narthex the nave of the church (Hagia Sophia). An emperor could not display his omnipotence—implied by his crown—in the House of the True King, *rex regum et dominum dominantium*.⁷ It is further stated that the emperor always remains "bareheaded" and "without a crown" while in the church. Similar statements had been made at the time of the Council of Ephesus (431) by the emperors Theodosius II and Valentinianus III: "when entering a church . . . we take off the diadem [crown]."

Johann Jakob Reiske, in his commentary (1751) to the *De Cerimoniis*, quoted by Migne (note 26, cols. 151–152) states that since early times there existed the custom of a person of inferior rank baring his head in the presence of a more worthy and illustrious (*dignior ac*

5. Percy Ernst Schramm, "Vom Kronenbrauch des Mittelalters," *Festschrift für Will-Erich Peuckert* (Berlin and Munich, 1955) pp. 68–78. Percy Ernst Schramm, "Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik," *Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae historica*, no. 13, III, (Stuttgart, 1956) pp. 909–919, especially pp. 916–918.

6. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, CXII, Constantini Porphyrogeniti, *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, 9, cols. 151–155 and note 26; 11, col. 167 and note 48.

7. Schramm, "Vom Kronenbrauch," p. 78.

illustrior) one, in order to demonstrate his humility and his respect. Reiske also refers to the text of Nicetas Choniates, who relates in his history *De Isaacio Angelo* (1180–1206), Book I: “The emperor, seated on a golden throne, and clothed in bejeweled purple . . . ordered the captive dukes [commanders of the army] of Sicily, Baldwin and Richard, to be brought before him. These, having removed their caps (*pileis depositis*), demonstrated in a humble manner their respect before the emperor.”⁸

A similar idea of “homage” is expressed in several medieval illustrations to the text of the Apocalypse, (4:4, 10): “the four and twenty ancients . . . on their heads crowns of gold . . . adored Him [the Saviour] and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honour, and power.” One finds this scene represented, for example, in the mosaic in S. Paolo Fuori le Mura (mid-fifth century), in the Codex Aureus from St. Emmeram, of the eleventh–twelfth century, and in what used to be the mosaic decoration in the dome of the Münster in Aix-la-Chapelle, of the early ninth century.⁹

Should Solomon and the Queen of Sheba actually be represented on the clasp, what specific event is shown still would remain a problem. A somewhat similar composition is seen on a Persian lacquer-painted box of about 1816. The family group of the then reigning shah of Persia, Fath 'Alt Shah Qajar (1797–1834), surrounded by courtiers, is framed by a series of Persian historical subjects. One of these, in the space above the shah's head, represents King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (Figure 19).¹⁰ (The author of the description of this box, Hammer-Purgstall, was living at the time the box was decorated and had every opportunity to identify the scene correctly.) Occupying two adjoining hexagonal seats, that of the crowned Solomon definitely a throne with a high back, they are surrounded by numerous servants, jinnis, birds, and animals—their

usual following in Islamic paintings. Grand Vizier Asaf, a constant adviser to Solomon in the Islamic tradition, is at the king's side, and a maid is visible behind the queen, both very much like the two smaller figures on the clasp; the posture of the king, with his hand resting on his knee, is also comparable. The queen (the Islamic Bilqis) does not wear a crown, but she holds in her left hand a beaker.

The presence of the beaker brings to mind a Coptic folktale. Its Coptic text, known only in fragments,¹¹ has been interpreted as follows: King Solomon took a beaker with wine, dropped his magic ring into it, and



FIGURE 19

King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Detail of the decoration on a lacquer-painted box, Persian, c. 1816. Present location unknown

offered it to the Queen of Sheba. The queen said to the king: “If I should drink the wine from this beaker, oh Solomon, my Lord the King, then I will humble myself before you [submit to you].”

This tale corresponds to the general trend of the legends about Solomon's surreptitious strategies to overcome the queen's resistance to his advances, and is in accordance with the Ethiopian tradition about the

8. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, CXXXIX, Nicetae Choniatae, *De Isaacio Angelo*, book 1, col. 726 C.

9. Paul Clemen, *Die Romanische Monumentalmalerei in den Rheinlanden* (Düsseldorf, 1916) pp. 59–69 and fig. 45, with bibliography.

10. Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, “Beschreibung der merkwürdigen Gemälde auf einer persischen Schachtel im Besitze seiner Durchlaucht des Herrn Fürsten von Metternich,” *Fundgruben des Orients*, V (Vienna, 1816) pp. 103–108, ill. facing p. 108.

11. Adolf Ermann, “Bruchstücke koptischer Volksliteratur,” part 2, *Abhandlungen der königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (1897) pp. 23–26, especially p. 25. Oskar von Lemm, “Bemerkungen zu Ermanns ‘Bruchstücke koptischer Volksliteratur,’ 2. Ein Märchen von Salomo,” *Kleine Koptische Studien*, I, (St. Petersburg, 1907) pp. 128–135, especially pp. 129–131.

descent of their ruling house from the son of Solomon and of the Queen of Sheba (named here Makêda).

Whether in the twelfth century there existed any illustrations of this legend cannot be said at this time. The Spaniard Don Luis de Urreta, a Dominican, said in his writings about his travels in the Near East (published in 1610) that he had seen in Ethiopia a painting showing two magnificent royal thrones, with King Solomon seated majestically on one of them and the Queen of Sheba on the other.¹² But the travel descriptions of this author are sometimes considered unreliable, and no such painting seems to exist in Ethiopia at present.

To decide whether any specific event is illustrated

on the clasp is beside the point here. The above information is intended only to suggest a possible source from the Near East (Islamic?, Coptic?, Ethiopian?) for the composition on the clasp. If the crowned King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba wearing no crown should be meant to be represented on it, one wonders whether the object held by the king on the clasp might not be a covered cup. The text of the Psalm 91, quoted by Rorimer in the 1963 publication (see note 2), would explain the presence of the lion and the basilisk under the feet of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, who, in homiletic writings, are often identified symbolically with Christ and his Bride, the Ecclesia.

12. Glaser, "Calderón de la Barca's 'La Sibila del Oriente y Gran Reina de Saba,'" pp. 381-403, especially pp. 388-390.