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The Wandering Throne of Solomon: Precious Objects and Legends of Kingship in the Medieval Mediterranean

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A Note on Translation and Romanization

The textual excerpts presented in this dissertation are usually quoted in their original language with an English translation provided in a footnote, usually carried out by myself, unless otherwise stated. In case of lengthy passages, instead, the English text is given first, while the original is found in a foonote. It is omitted for the passages whose original language is Aramaic, Hebrew, Persian and Arabic, for which I present a translation available in one of the most common European languages.

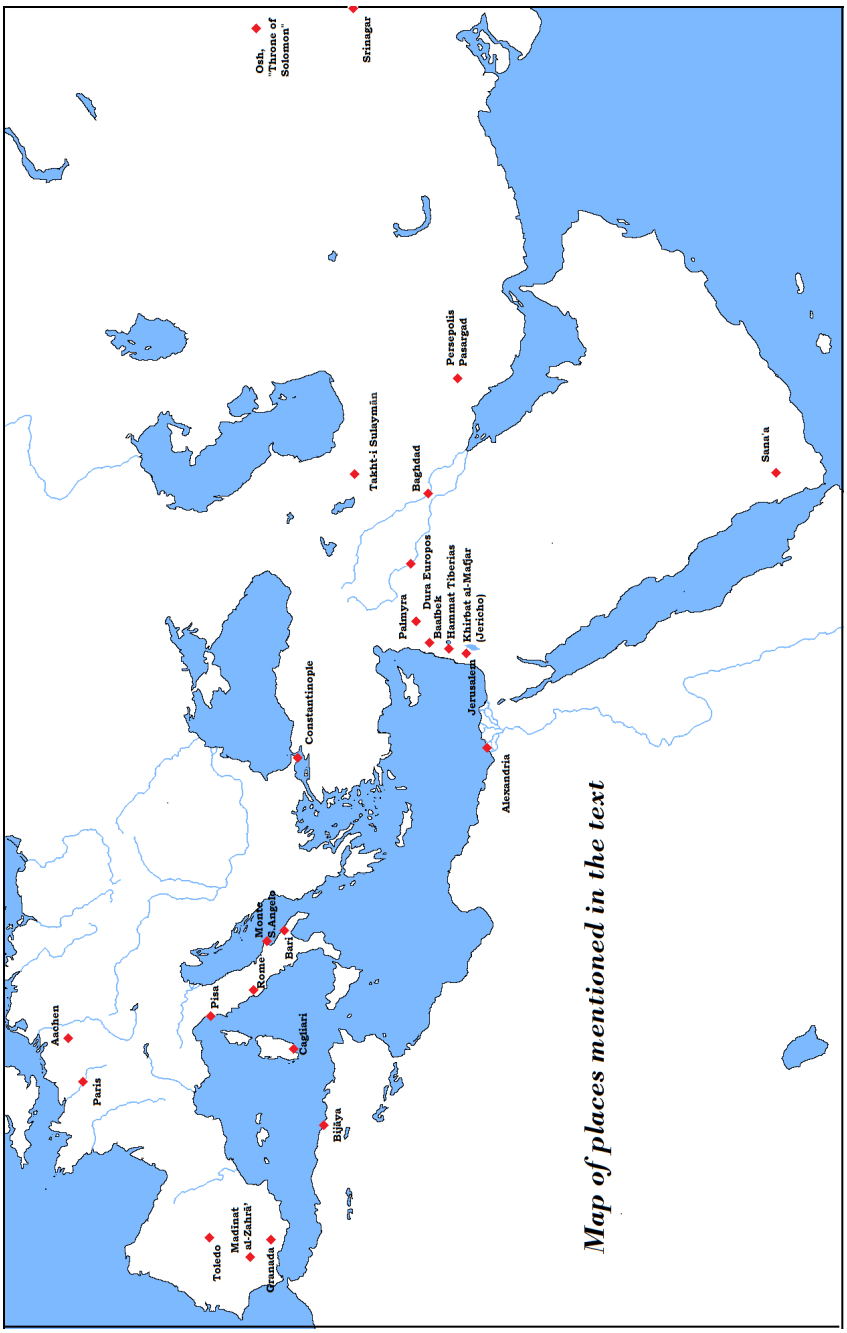
Following chapter III is an appendix of texts regarding the throne of Solomon in rabbinic and para-rabbinic literature. The list is not complete: I have included all those I could find that have been published and translated in a European language (English, German, French). The purpose of this section is to facilitate the reader and to provide the material related to the throne in an accessible way. Throughout the chapter, I often refer to different versions that can be read in their integrity in this appendix. Quoting them in full would have made the body of the text quote cumbersome. My intent here is by no means philological but only practical. For this reason, each text has been transcribed maintaining the graphic features of its specific edition. The disparity of sources collected accounts for such differences, which I liked to maintain, also to mark the work of several editors and translators. They are listed in a tentatively chronological order, even though with rabbinic literature it is quite difficult to be precise and it is even possible that the descriptions of the throne enjoys a specific textual tradition, thus neutralizing the actual order of the larger *midrashim* they are inserted in. Interpolations and contamination of sources is a likely occurrence, particularly with the later texts of this list. For this reason, my collection in its present form is to be considered a working tool, rather than a scholarly statement.

The Bible is usually quoted from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New York-London 1989. Sometimes, however, I also recurred to the Rheims-Douay version (R-D), Baltimore 1989, when it was necessary for textual reasons. The Qur'an is quoted from the English translation by A. Jones, Exeter 2007.

The romanization of Arabic and Persian terms is based on the ALA-LC (Library of Congress) system, with the exception of the *tā' marbūṭah*, which is rendered 'a/at' (instead of 'ah/at'), and of the *alif maqṣūrah*, which is rendered

‘ā’ instead of ‘á’. Moreover, the nexus conjunction + article is transliterated as *wa-l* (and not *wa-al*).
According to the ALA-LC, Turk Ottoman is conformed to modern Turkish: therefore we will have *Süleymānnāme* (Turkish), but *Shāhnāma* (Persian).
Differences in transliteration are maintained for those terms taken from citations of titles or printed books.

In general, common geographical or proper names, frequently employed by Anglo-Saxon scholarship, are given in an anglicized form (like Baalbek, Sana’a, Qur’an and Khosrow); if less known, they are transcribed more precisely. For Hebrew terms, I used the system adopted by the Hebrew Academy (2006).



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Introduction

But now to come to our present purpose. When the king had forbidden to all his people navigation into any part that was not under his crown, he made nevertheless this ordinance; that every twelve years there should be set forth, out of this kingdom two ships, appointed to several voyages; That in either of these ships there should be a mission of three of the Fellows or Brethren of Salomon's House; whose errand was only to give us knowledge of the affairs and state of those countries to which they were designed, and especially of the sciences, arts, manufactures, and inventions of all the world; and withal to bring unto us books, instruments, and patterns in every kind […]

(F. Bacon, *The New Atlantis*)

King Solomon, in his glorious renown, has nourished a long-lasting legend since antiquity. The vast ocean of folklore and learned traditions related to him constitutes a common cultural heritage, shared by the Christian, Jewish and Islamic societies alike during the Middle Ages[1]. The power of his name affected also the objects with which came into contact (and also others that were attached to him later on). This association removed them from the realm of the ordinary, transforming them into symbolic, evocative or magic objects: his ring[2], his seal[3], his knot[4], his temple[5], his pillars[6], his testament[7], his song[8],

[1] *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition, King, Sage and Architect*, ed. by Joseph Verheyden, Leiden 2012.

[2] B. Bagatti, *I giudeo-cristani e l'anello di Salomone*, in «Recherches de science religieuse», 60 (1972), pp. 151-160.

[3] J. MoG. Dawkins, *The Seal of Solomon*, in «Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland», 2 (1944), pp. 145-150.

[4] U. Sansoni, *Il nodo di Salomone: simbolo e archetipo d'Alleanza*, Milano 1998.

[5] *The Temple of Solomon: Archaeological Fact and Medieval Tradition in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Art*, ed. by J. Gutmann, Missoula (MT) 1976.

[6] S. Tuzi, *Le colonne e il Tempio di Salomone: la storia, la leggenda, la fortuna*, Roma 2002.

[7] *The Testament of Solomon: edited from manuscripts at Mount Athos, Bologna, Holkham Hall, Jerusalem, London, Milan, Paris and Vienna*, ed. by C.C. McCown, Leipzig 1922; *Das Testament Salomos: die älteste christliche Dämonologie, kommentiert und in deutscher Erstübersetzung*, ed. by Peter Busch, Berlin 2006.

[8] A. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca (N.Y) 1990.

his key[9], his islands[10], his table[11], his mines[12], just to name a few. And all these objects had long and adventurous afterlives, well beyond the era of the king himself. Some of them exist only as intangible abstractions, especially the various texts that were ascribed to him by later tradition. But others achieved concrete physicality. The present study will focus on perhaps the most extraordinary of these items, the throne of Solomon

In following its wandering during the Middle Ages across a range of cultural contexts, we will deal mostly with oral traditions, legends and few historical sources whose precision and historicity are difficult to verify. In fact, one of the main problems behind this project is the question of how material and visual objects, on the one hand, and written sources, on the other, interact with each other. It is my aim to explore the powerful impact that beautiful objects exert on the human imagination, thereby revealing the continuous effort to match the literary echoes of past wonders by producing things that can be deemed worthy of becoming legendary on their turn.

The result of this project will hopefully show that, beneath the many layers of textual evidence, we are almost always talking about actual recognizable things: this research is in fact full of references to luxury items, technical masterpieces, treasures from booty, gifts worthy of kings, impressive ruins and royal seats. Often we do not have the actual object but only the memory of it, the impression it made; however, some of these marvels (or others similar to them) have survived and can be seen, thus making the written sources resonate with greater strength.

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[9] *The Key of Solomon the king (Clavicula Salomonis): now first translated and edited from ancient mss. in the British Museum*, ed. by S.L. MacGregor Mathers, London 1889; *The greater Key of Solomon, including a clear and precise exposition of King Solomon's secret procedure, its mysteries and magic rites: original plates, seals, charms and talismans: translated from the ancient manuscripts in the British Museum, London*, ed. by L. W. De Laurence, Chicago 1914; *La clavícola del Re Salomone = Clavicula Salomonis: la vera magia nera*, Viareggio 1976; F. Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli: Clavicula Salomonis e libri di magia a Venezia nei secoli XVII e XVIII*, Milano 2002.

[10] C. Jack-Hinton, *The Search for the Islands of Solomon 1567-1838*, Oxford 1969.

[11] M.J. Rubiera Mata, *La mesa de Salomon*, in «Awraq», 3 (1980), pp. 26-27; N. Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia, Medieval Arabic Narratives*, London-New York 2012, particularly pp. 84-101.

[12] B. Rothenberg, *Were these king Solomon's Mines? Timna: Valley of the Biblical Copper Mines*, London 1972.

A Map of the Wanderings

The present work is organized in five chapters that can be read separately and almost independently as a series of case-studies. However, despite the "atomized" quality of this structure, the various traditions treated here are never isolated, but illuminate each other reciprocally. This point is in fact conveyed by the first chapter, which, without dealing directly with the throne, aims to providing a cultural background to the diffusion of a shared Solomonic aesthetic, roughly between the sixth to the thirteenth century, by analyzing the occurrence of the expression *opus Salomonis*, both in written sources and in artistic or monumental contexts. Instead of focusing on the ponderous and already quite known tradition of the temple of Jerusalem, I investigate the figure of Solomon as the king of "small things," so to speak, by showing his heritage and influence within the world of the portable and movable objects. The currents and influences that inform the reconstruction of the story of the *opus Salomonis* have their origin in the reception of certain biblical passages but that are also nurtured by a series of parallel legendary accounts, like the narrative of the circulation of the Temple spoils[13]. It seems therefore an interesting methodological prequel to the story of the throne, which is characterized by a similar biblical origin but it is also shaped by other influences, and whose status is located midway, between the realm of literature and that of art history.

The second chapter focuses on the so-called "Solomonic throne", which, according to the written sources, stood in the Magnaura throne hall in the palace in Constantinople in the tenth century. It was employed during the reception of ambassadors: through a series of mechanical and, probably, hydraulic mechanisms, the seat of the emperor could be raised and lowered, while a series of *automata* emitted sound and moved. The ceremonial, whose different phases were marked by the asserting presence of the organ, had a deep and almost theatrical effect and aimed at representing the sovereign as a new Solomon. The presence of such a throne could work almost as a relic, partaking of the broader narrative of power surrounding the movement of the spoils of Jerusalem's Temple. Interestingly enough, however, the most distinctive features of this throne (tree with singing birds, lions, griffins, elevation) did not

[13] R. Boustan, *The Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple at Rome and Constantinople. Jewish Counter-Geography in a Christianizing Empire*, in *Antiquity in Antiquity. Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. by G.G. Gardner – K. Osterloh, Tübingen 2008, pp. 327-372.

recall, if not faintly, the famous biblical descriptions of the seat of the king of Israel (1 Kings, 10:18–20, 2 Chronicles 9:17–19); this "scriptural" throne was made in gold and ivory, located on a six-storey structure and surrounded by several lions, two on each steps and two more in proximity of the armrests. Rather, it was a combination of exotic elements meant to echo Eastern prototypes of kingship and certainly intended to engage in a dialogue with other Mediterranean sovereigns, who had inherited the cultural language of representation of the Persian Empire. The chapter briefly lists some famous paradigms of cosmic royalty, whose memory will eventually coalesce on the figure of Solomon, who will act as a receptacle for several different traditions of kingship during the Middle Ages.

The third chapter deals mainly with the legendary description of the throne in rabbinic literature. The core of these accounts is, of course, biblical. However, at least from the fourth century onwards, the standard narration is enriched with a series of details that have seemed, for a long time, the product of imagination. To a closer scrutiny, however, it results clear that all these *haggadot* incorporated distinctive visual elements pertaining to the different modes of representations employed by the rulers the Jews came in contact with. In fact, the latest versions of the story, compiled as late as the thirteenth century, could be taken as a veritable repertoire of elements that can oftentimes be recognized as distinctive of a specific historical setting. If it is not easy to arrange these accounts in a strictly philological order, it is however possible to trace the provenance of most of these threads. Unsurprisingly, one finds that the strongest impact was exerted by the customs of the Sasanian Empire and by the ceremonial of the Magnaura, described in the first chapter. Through the veil of the legend it is actually possible to recognize a series of historical elements, although freely combined, and sometimes it is even possible to locate precisely some details that were not related in the Byzantine accounts. Beside the philological interest deriving from the analysis of this process of legend-making, the chapter also focuses on the historical and political reasons of such a procedure. Even though the original bulk of the Jewish legends taken into consideration is much earlier than the specific moments just mentioned, it seems as if all these *realia*, fruit of the artistic, technological and symbolic propaganda of an alien culture, are merged into the extant rabbinic literary tradition in an effort of stating their ownership – effort prompted by the necessity of reclaiming this part of the Jewish cultural heritage (the kingship of Solomon), perceived as dangerously appropriated by a rival power.

If chapters II and III each focus on a single and consistent example (the throne, the body of legends), the fourth one, instead, investigates the broader range of occurrences in the Islamic world. More than in the first two cases, in fact, the treatment of the throne topic in this cultural and religious tradition is a varied and nuanced topic, mostly connected with the *topos* of Solomon as both master of jinns and master builder. Here, we do not have a single case to focus on, but rather a declination of the same semantic knot, so to speak, in different geographical and historical contexts. Moreover, the Islamic world incorporated different extant traditions, creating a synthesis of elements coming from both the Persian and the Semitic heritage. In the description of the throne, for instance, we still see the echoes of the rabbinic legends discussed in chapter II and III, but also a series of new elements deriving from the Persian mythical past. Besides, the throne is usually considered in its larger acceptation, as the symbol of the palace of the monarch, being then associated not just with a royal seat but with buildings of greater scale, particularly with the reception-hall or pavilion where the encounter with the queen of Sheba took place, according to the tradition. For this reason, on the one hand it belongs to the body of Solomonic outstanding architectures, which is part of the Islamic *mirabilia* tradition: the effort of explaining and making familiar the presence on their vast territories of the ruins of ancient or past civilizations. The most notable example of this is, for instance, the great Sasanian complex of Āẕur Gushnasp in modern day Iran, renamed *Takht-i Sulaymān* by the later conquerors (literally "Throne of Solomon" in Persian). On the other hand, the Solomonic heritage is also an active political tool, often employed by the different sovereigns, particularly by the Umayyads, to inscribe their deeds and their building programs within the illustrious wake of the king of Israel. Despite the scattered and polyvalent quality of the Solomonic heritage in the Islamic world, it is interesting to see its pervasiveness in Arabic society, ranging from the Qur'an to the *Arabian Nights*, and the notable consistency of the motifs related to Solomon, especially when compared to the examples considered in the first two chapters.

The fifth chapter, finally, considers the throne of Solomon in medieval Christian art. Special emphasis is placed on the iconography of the Virgin as throne of the New Solomon, which developed at a textual level at the end of the eleventh century, but found full figurative expression from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onwards. This iconography had a powerful impact on a

range of contexts, also on the representations of kings and kinship in the European Middle Ages.

In addition, the chapter also investigates two more examples of thrones that can be considered interesting for our overall analysis; in the first case, namely, a series of papal *cathedrae* built for pontifical visits in various Roman churches, the Solomonic elements seem evident in the very morphology of these thrones, which are decorated with a series of lions, sometimes raised on steps and with a rounded back, in accordance with the biblical description. Such a characterization, typical of a series of seats belonging to popes active during the Investiture Controversy, seem to respond to the imperial claims to power, which often found its celebration in Solomonic terms. Typical of this dynamic is the case of Henry VI, as we shall see. In general, the tradition of recurring to Solomon as a model for perfect or ideal kingship was certainly an imperial feature since both Carolingian and Ottonian times, as several eulogies and the presence of a peculiar throne in Aachen demonstrate. Yet, given the relatively meager repertoire of surviving thrones that could be considered Solomonic, it cannot be stated with precision what actor – either the empire or the papacy – reintroduced this kind of seat in the battle of symbols within the clash for supremacy.

By contrast, the other case under examination relates to a series of episcopal *cathedrae*, which were produced in Apulia between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. They are relevant to our analysis for methodological reasons. Even though these seats do not possess any direct Solomonic element, they do have affinities to the Magnaura throne, although on a minor scale, especially in their effort to present the bishops as truly Mediterranean rulers. By displaying decoration that evokes exotic kingdoms and by recurring to the imitation of textiles, wood and bronzes of Islamic manufacture, these *cathedrae* aim to be taken as imitations of princely seats. They thus display a set of features quite uncommon in the usual representation of episcopal power.

From what stated, the material regarding the throne of Solomon in the Western world would seem to bear no direct connection with the threads presented in the previous chapters. Nevertheless, we will find several hints of the persistence of the memory of the throne hall in Constantinople, with its metal tree and singing birds at a literary level, particularly in the *Jüngere Titurel*, a German chivalric poem composed at the end of the thirteenth century. As we shall see, moreover, the presence of *automata*, known through literature, will be of inspiration for the construction of technical wonders, such as the famous

fountain constructed by a French prisoner for Mangu Khan during the thirteenth century, which was shaped as a gigantic golden tree, certainly reminiscent of literary marvels.

Between Legend and Reality: the place of the Throne

The ongoing grafting of different threads or elements of the throne tradition from one context to another gives the title to my thesis: *The Wandering Throne*. This image is borrowed from one version of the Jewish legends discussed in the third chapter, where we are told that, after the death of the king of Israel, his royal seat was moved from Egypt to Persia, from Babylon to Rome, taken back and forth by several foreign kings, who removed it from Jerusalem and brought it in their land, in the hope of gaining the infallible justice and the power it represented. A similar quality is later on attributed to the throne by the Islamic world, which sees it as a flying object, crossing enormous distances in a short time. Given the broad scope of this research, both from a chronological and a geographical point of view, the notion of the movement of the throne, along with the idea of successive cultural reshaping seemed appropriate. The title is also meant to suggest an idea of continuity – the throne ideally remaining the same – through a continuous change of landscapes and cultures – hence the wandering (and flying) quality of it.

Although the above-mentioned traditions are individually known, at least in part, in specific fields of research and have been sometimes studied, my approach offers a comparative work on the topic, that could also provide a unity of narration for those specific aspects that are, in fact, common to all chapters. I believe that such a research could prove interesting, considering the different results deriving from the manipulation and the evolution of the same symbol, seen from the perspective of a cultural, religious and narrative context which varies both geographically and historically. This dissertation aims at reconsidering each of these tradition first in their specificity and, secondly, in dialogue with each other, to see the actual points of contacts but also their original contexts. In this way, it offers a multi-pronged approach to a material which is shared by the three great cultures of the Mediterranean. As stated above, chapters II-V enjoy a certain amount of formal autonomy and can be read separately. However, taken together, they also represent a fascinating study in the formation and development of a legend, also showing the continuous interplay between reality and scripture, object and literature, and the successive

irradiations of a certain theme through accumulations of material, slight variations and some hyperbolical touches. Texts and objects play an important role in this dissertation and an analysis of their relationship is often proposed throughout the pages of my work. Most of the times, we find that narrations certainly echo the memory of lost wonders, either technical or artistic. Texts, legends or oral accounts are therefore a mirror of a lost reality. However, it is also possible to see the reverse, that is, the construction or conscious evocation through reality of a literary object, realized through a building or decorative programs that imitate (literally or not it does not quite matter) certain famous, precious or sacred contexts. The story of the throne of Solomon shows a continuous shift between these two poles. Its biblical description, for instance, which originally must have depended on an actual piece of furniture (but we do not know if its features had a symbolic value which transcended its physical appearance), becomes a literary object through the Bible; imitated with a certain degree of liberty at a monumental level in Constantinople, it turns into a new piece of reality, whose memory, however, gets once more transfigured by a series of legends. And we will see how the echo of these narrations will constitute the basis and inspiration for new *mirabilia* in the late Middle Ages. In this interplay between description and *realia*, philological adherence to the original is often lost but it is usually not necessary in this process of crafting and re-crafting. What counts is the evocative power of a certain setting or of a certain object.

I my dissertation, I do not intend to propose a single interpretation of such dialectics, but the order of the chapters, which deserves some explanation, is meant to favour a particular reading, adopted for clarity and convenience. Even though the story of the throne owes its features and peculiar traits to each cultural context taken into examination, by analyzing the material at my disposal, I realized that all the case-studies presented were connected by the red thread represented by the memory, often transfigured into literary terms, of the Magnaura throne, originally built in Constantinople. The base of my reasoning proceeded then from that specific reality to the legends building on it. So it is for the Jewish *haggadot* regarding the throne of king Solomon, whose tradition was certainly earlier than the Byzantine monumental example and could have logically been introduced before it, if I had applied a strict chronological criterion for the throne occurrences, except that the most interesting versions of it owe most of their richest details to descriptions of the Magnaura. These legendary accounts are treated after the Byzantine chronicles also because it is

probably through their mediation that they reached the Islamic world, which merges them with several elements coming from the Persian heritage. In this way, I dedicated chapter II to a Christian sovereign, the third to the Jews and the fourth to the Muslim culture, ideally outlining an itinerary according to religious cultures.

But the examples of the throne of Solomon in Christian Western Europe at the end of the thesis seem to be an exception to this general principle. I have chosen to treat this material in a separate chapter for two reasons. First, after having treated the topic of the throne within contexts of royal (or imperial) representations, I turn to a series of examples more directly pertaining to the ecclesiastical or religious sphere. This shift of perspective coincides with a change in themes and iconographies: the throne of Solomon is usually the biblical one and not the fabulous echo of the Magnaura throne. However, a last outstretch of the legends of Byzantine origin does reach the Western world via Constantinople and we find distant echoes of it even in the fifth chapter, but very rarely in official contexts and never in the representations of royal display that, instead, characterized all the examples recorded in the previous chapters. Therefore, for reasons that will become clear in the course of the dissertation, while certain sets of features are common to the treatments of the various thrones described – whether real or legendary – the narratives surrounding the seat of the kings of Israel in the Christian West are substantially different from the other examples. This material is thus treated at the end of the thesis for typological reasons, in order to better stress the difference between these two groups of materials. Such a distinction substantiates a second notion which ends up informing the *dispositio* of this thesis beside our discourse on religious cultures, which we would loosely define as geographical.

Notes on the Mediterranean Circulation of the Throne

The block constituted by chapters II-IV describes a cultural setting where the actors – the Byzantine emperor, the Jews of the eastern Mediterranean, and the Muslim caliphs – repeat a very similar story, one that varies only depending from the peculiar angle of the Mediterranean corner from which is told. Being an object, in fact, the throne can be evoked and described but, most of all, owned. In this sense, it functions almost as a reliquary. In fact, the throne of Solomon is also endowed with a stunning aesthetic value. The visual strength of the throne resides in its refined technical

quality, in the beauty of its constituting elements and in the cleverness of its artifices. As such, it represents, although indirectly, a celebration of craftsmanship and artistic capabilities. Even if it springs from a biblical context, the realm of its glorification is not immediately divine; it is meant to appeal to the human eye, to provoke awe and wonder. The only, effective difference, is that Byzantine and Islamic rulers are active and strong political actors, while the Jews act more as binding agents and vehicles of cultures. For this reason, the former have the power to translate the throne of Solomon and related aesthetic at a monumental and official level—most of the same elements, variously combined participate of a similar discourse on gift exchanges, diplomatic relations, rival strategies of kingly representations, luxury display – while the latter can control a different domain, made of oral traditions and manuscripts that leave traces in a less visible, but certainly no less durable, way.

The reason for this shared cultural horizon depends on several factors. First, there is the common heritage of the Persian Empire and Sasanian art, whose influence merged equally into the repertoire of court display of Constantinople, its historical enemy, and in the reservoir of symbols of the new conquerors, who ended up acquiring most elements of it, both visual and mythical. Second, the technical achievements of Hellenistic times, in our case *automata* and similar engineering devices, had a powerful legacy in the Roman Empire, both in the East and in the West; these technological marvels and the underlying knowledge that made them possible were probably never lost in Constantinople and were rediscovered and perfected in the Muslim world. Finally, the continuity over time and across cultures can be attributed to a common literary tradition, deriving in large measure from the Hebrew Bible but augmented by both post-biblical scriptural interpretation as well as folkloric additions, sometimes of Persian origin. The Persian materials were, in turn, often accretions of material of even greater antiquity, that go back to Achaemenid times or, even earlier, to the Assyrian period or that encompass traditions of Indo-Iranian origins. As we will see, most of these symbolic threads did disappear in the course of time, but either survived in a variety of forms in a host of contexts or were revived throughout the centuries as different groups repurposed them.

The fifth chapter, instead, differs deeply from the scenario just described. The only point of contact consists in the common reference to the biblical throne of Solomon; the way the symbol is appropriated, however, the nature of its attributes and the very declinations of it speak a different language

altogether. The main source of inspiration is the Hebrew Bible, where it lacks the wondrous or magical elements so important for the materials studied in the previous chapters. The throne is never praised for its intrinsic quality, but always considered an attribute of his (or her) owner. Its main feature, at least as far as the Marian iconography is concerned, is to be considered almost an empty structure, a theoretical and theological diagram, to be filled with different elements each time. Nonetheless, it is precisely this difference that makes it interesting within the broader context of our overall discourse. It underlines, in fact, a substantial similarity, if not unity, of the first block of analysis, that I would like to call Mediterranean, as an alternative to a series of different features that characterize, instead, continental Europe. The two term – Mediterranean and continental – will recur during the dissertation quite often. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly explain in what sense I intend to use them and how this discussion relates with the debate on Mediterranean studies.

A Debate of Longue Durée

There has been much discussion about the Mediterranean Sea since Ferdinand Braudel's famous study[14]. Recently, this wave of scholarly interest in the Mediterranean – both its shifting historical definition and meaning and as an analytical tool – has been renewed by the ongoing project of Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell[15], who have reopened the debate about a series of important categories and topics[16]. Their work has prompted renewed scholarly efforts to analyze the geographical, political and economical unity (or disruption) of the sea, several of which have specifically been devoted to the study of cultural encounters in the Mediterranean[17]. I will not discuss here the

[14] F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris 1949.

[15] P. Horden – N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* Oxford 2000.

[16] *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. by W.V. Harris, Oxford 2005.

[17] I list here some recent titles, since it would not be possible to offer a complete survey of all the extant material: *The Meeting of Two Worlds, Cultural Exchange between East and West during the Period of the Crusades*, ed. by V.P. Goss, Kalamazoo (MI) 1986; *The Medieval Mediterranean, Cross-Cultural Contacts*, ed. by M.J. Chiat – K.L. Reyerson, Minneapolis (MN) 1988; *Intercultural Contacts in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. by B. Arbel, – D. Jacoby, London-Portland 1996; *Rapport entre Juifs, Chrétiens et Musulmans, eine Sammlung von Forschungsbeiträgen*, ed. by J. Irmscher, Amsterdam 1999; D. Abulafia, *Mediterranean encounters, economic, religious, political, 1100-1550*, Aldershot 2000; *Mediterraneo medievale, cristiani, musulmani ed eretici tra Europa e Oltremare*, ed. by M. Meschini, Milano 2001; S.

important milestones of Mediterranean historiography over the past several generations.

But I would like to stress that my approach differs in significant ways from the mass of research on the economic and social "connectivity" of the Mediterranean. Rather than draw my orientation from the work of Horden and Purcell and Braudel before them, I consider the problematic identified by Adnan Husain in his introduction to *A Faithful Sea*, where he emphasizes the Mediterranean as a space of interconnected religious cultures:

> what renders the Mediterranean zone unique might be this longue durée of interreligious contact, interchange and even competition among the universal claims about history and confessional identity experienced consequently by Muslims, Christians and Jews during formative periods of their – far from static – late antique to early modern traditions […] The selfconscious experience of inter-religious contact created the conditions in which identity and its formation become crucial to understanding both

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Orvietani Busch, *Medieval Mediterraean Ports: The Catalan and Tuscan Coats, 1100 to 1235*, Leiden-Boston-Köln 2001; *Medieval Cultures in Contact*, ed. by R. Gyug, New York 2003; *Juden, Christen und Muslime, Religionsdialoge im Mittelalter*, ed. by M. Lutz-Bachmann – A. Fidora, Darmstadt 2004; C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800*, Oxford 2005; *The Three Rings, Textual Studies in the Historical Trialogue of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. by B. Roggema – M. Poorthuis – P. Valkenberg, Leuven-Dodley (MA) 2005; *Fedi a confronto, Ebrei, Cristiani e Musulmani fra X e XIII secolo*, ed. by S. Gensini, Firenze 2006; *Interactions, Artistic Interchange between the Eastern and Western Worlds in the Medieval Period*, ed. by C. Hourihane, Princeton (NJ) 2007; *Identities and Allegiances in the Eastern Mediterranean After 1204*, ed. by J. Herrin – G. Saint-Guillain, Farnham 2010; *History As Prelude: Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. by J.V. Montville, Lanham (MD) 2011; R. Rouighi, *The Making of a Mediterranean Emirate: Ifriqiya and Its Andalusis, 1200-1400*, Philadelphia (PA) 2011; *Byzantines, Latins, and Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean World After 1150*, ed. by J. Harris – C. Holmes – E. Russell, Oxford 2012; *Intercultural Transmission in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. by S.L. Hathaway – D.W. Kim, London 2012. Among the series, we should remember *Medieval encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim cultures*, published by Brill between 1995 and 2011. A long list of publications regarding the Mediterranean is also now available. For a good list of them and related discussion, see S.E. Alcock, *Alphabet Soup in the Mediterranean Basin: the Emergence of the Mediterranean Serial*, in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. by W.V. Harris, Oxford 2005, pp. 314-333. Quite useful to navigate this vast material is *Mediterranean: Oxford Bibliographies Online Research Guide*, Oxford 2010.

> historical aspects of the Mediterranean as a space of diversity and unity, that is as a space of interconnected religious cultures[18].

In truth, Husain's point of view must be understood within the long and rich historiographical tradition about the Mediterranean. Even Horden and Purcell's massive study stressed the importance of dedicating part of their study to "perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and symbols" – topics largely neglected by Braudel. Yet they, too, fail to develop this line of inquiry adequately. For them, space is primarily useful as an instrument of analysis insofar as it allows scholars to trace not just a story but also a geography of religion, through the network of sanctuaries and the itineraries of pilgrims[19]. But Husain rightly argues that their analysis is limited to the discussion of mere religious practices, simply adapted to their metaphor of connectivity. He also maintains that a real focus on issues of shared culture is lacking from the scholarly panorama altogether:

> If we are to re-imagine the Mediterranean, we must engage the features that perhaps most uniquely define it – its religious cultures and their shared histories – while inventing the historiographical narratives to represent these histories. Doing this will not mean erasing the differences of traditions or identities or submerging conflicts. Rather one must recognize that this common history was forged out of conflicting universalisms that have nevertheless patterned and shaped one another in particular social and theological encounter[20].

This urgency for a different history of the Mediterranean is also needed, from his point of view, in order to erase the persistence of the two blocks, Christendom and Islam, that, since Pirenne's thesis[21] have tended to be defined in opposition, in a regime of substantial hostility or incompatibility, while history has shown that conflict has certainly not precluded community. Husain's focus is on religion, intended however in a much broader sense,

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[18] A.A. Husain, *Introduction: Approaching Islam and the Religious Cultures of the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean*, in *A Faithful Sea: The Religious Cultures of the Mediterranean, 1200-1700*, ed. by A. .A. Husain and K. E. Fleming, Oxford 2007, 1-26, p. 6.

[19] P. Horden-N. Purcell, *The corrupting sea*, pp. 413-414.

[20] Husain, *Introduction: Approaching Islam and the Religious Cultures of the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean*, p. 6.

[21] H. Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, Paris 1937. The scholar maintained that the unity of the Mediterranean was broken by the Arabic invasion, thus the Carolingians created a different society (in social and political terms).

encompassing a greater range of experiences and practices, not just cultic but also social and cultural.

As Angelos Chaniotis has written in a recent essay, "The Mediterranean sea has more often been a facilitator of communication than a barrier, and communication contributes to the wide diffusion not only of flora, fauna and artefacts, but also of culture"[22]. This idea may seem obvious, but it requires focused analysis to give it proper weight. Most of the publications just mentioned are collections of essays that offer the reader a great variety of approaches and case-studies but also provide him with a somehow overall fragmented picture. Such is the risk and the beauty of the study of the *particularis*. By contrast, I present here a story of a singular stance, which, however, is inflected across a range of cultures in such a way that it offers a broader scope and context.

Flying on the Throne: Chronological and Geographical Span of the Journey

Before dedicating myself to the study of king Solomon during the Middle Ages, I had worked on the tradition of a series of minor divination books, known as *sortes*[23]. My analysis had begun from a Latin manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms. Ashmole 304) where it was possible to find traces of untranslated terms, that showed that in most cases the text had been derived from a model written in either Hebrew, Arabic and some romance language like Occitan, circulating in the Mediterranean. Despite singular variations, between the eleventh and the thirteenth century, peoples from around the Mediterranean asked these books the same questions and obtained the same exact answers. In a way, such a discovery was not entirely surprising, considering that magic is by definition a very conservative subject. However, such a shared circulation, proved fascinating to me; the present study is, in a way, set up along a similar principle. The figure of Solomon is, in fact, familiar to Jews, Christians and Muslim for obvious reasons and his *fortune critique* under this respect is undeniable. More and more studies are dedicated to him in a comparative perspective, aiming at underlining different aspect of the king. This approach, however, favours the centrality of Solomon as a subject of study.

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[22] *Ritual Dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean: case studies in ancient Greece and Asia Minor*, in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, pp. 141-166, p. 148.

[23] A. Iafrate, *"Si sequeris casum, casus frangit tibi nasum": la raccolta delle sorti del ms Ashmole 304*, in «Aevum», 85 (2011), pp. 457-488.

What I tried to achieve in my dissertation, instead, is slightly different; rather than a topic I wanted his figure to be more of a tool.

In this sense, an ideal model for my thesis has been March Bloch's *La vie d'outre-tombe du Roi Solomon*, an essay published in 1925[24], where the scholar began by analyzing a peculiar legend regarding the afterlife of king Solomon, but ended up discussing the problematic question of purgatory and of salvation. In outlining the vicissitudes regarding the son of David, he took on board legends of different provenance, pictorial evidences, historical facts, theological issues, proceeding from a thirteenth century British manuscript to Talmudic interpretations, without being worried of proposing a long ride from his starting point to his ending one. From a methodological point of view, as he himself stated in a review published in 1934, "l'unité de lieu n'est que désordre. Seul l'unité de problème fait centre"[25]. It is with this in mind that I structured my own thesis, which is meant to accompany the reader in a far-reaching journey: there will be digressions and apparent detours, even though the direction is hopefully clear. The throne of Solomon will be employed as a prism through which analyzing some aspects belonging to the different cultures that claim him as part of their religious and, *lato sensu*, cultural heritage.

Even though religion will be present in the background of each chapter, sometimes informing the very twists and turns of the story of the throne, my dissertation is not a study in comparative religion. Rather, it analyzes over a *longue durée* the appropriation of this symbol across a range of historical contexts and within a series of competing religious traditions. Of course, some of the images linked to the throne that will be discussed throughout the dissertation – such as the tree, or the idea of the cosmic king, ruler of sky and stars, or the apotheosis of the sovereign –live longer than the civilizations that first or most successfully employed them. This discourse calls also for some elucidation about the time frame chosen. From a chronological point of view, this dissertation focuses on a period which ideally spans between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. The starting point is justified, as said, by the construction of the Magnaura throne, while the end of it coincides with the invention of the iconography of the Virgin and with the composition of the *Jüngere Titurel*. This period is, of course, just a partial frame of the story of the throne, whose last

[24] M. Bloch, *La vie d'outre-tombe du roi Salomon*, in «Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire», 4 (1925), pp. 349-377.

[25] M. Bloch, *Une étude régionale: géographie ou histoire?*, in «Annales d'histoire économique et sociale», 6 (1934), pp. 81-85, p. 81.

offshoots could be traced in Ottoman Constantinople[26] or Moghul India[27], to name just few striking examples. However, my focus has been on the Middle Ages, because it corresponds to the moment of its major flourishing. However, this three centuries span is sometimes exceeded, when a certain element calls for a digression. Several features can be explained only by looking at rituals, ceremonies or historical events taking place during Late Antiquity, particularly during the sixth century C.E., and some other threads need to be traced further back in time, into the symbolic creations taking place in the Fertile Crescent.

The Limits of the Mediterranean

The throne of Solomon acts like a vessel, a solid raft on which relics of different antiquities circulating in the Mediterranean since immemorial times are taken on board and thus saved from oblivion. Of course, I do not claim that all these traditions possess some intrinsic Mediterranean quality; some of them were developed in distant Eastern lands quite far from the sea, others result from cultural mergings occurred in Yemen or came from India. However, they all found their place as different ingredients in the Mediterranean cauldron, where peoples of various provenance ended up pouring and mixing them, along with their spices. And, of course, the result slightly varied, depending on the intensity of some elements in proximity of certain shores, and sometimes by the presence of certain personal touches, but it retained, nonetheless, a similar flavour, like a family recipe inherited by the same ancestor but interpreted differently by the various aunts or uncles.

It is for this reason that this thesis does not take what might be called an antiquarian approach. From an art historical perspective, I am interested only up to a certain point in ascertaining the formal or iconographic elements of the throne. Instead, I primarily focus in tracing the transformation of the throne – both as a verbal and as a material object – as it changed into a palace, a palanquin, a pavilion, a chariot, a mountain peak and even into a theological diagram. I thus emphasize the metamorphosis of the object, as much as the persistence of some of its constituting or symbolic features.

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[26] Ahmed Bican Yazıcıoğlu, *Dürr-i meknûn*, *kritische Edition mit Kommentar*, ed. by L. Kaptein, Asch 2007.

[27] P. Soucek, *Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath: Model or Metaphor*, in «Ars Orientalis», 23 (1993), pp. 109-134.

So, to come back to the original question, when I use the term Mediterranean as opposed to continental, I am certainly referring to a geographical idea, which is however tempered by a notion of cultural identity, which strongly, but not only, depends on religious belonging: in other words, Mediterranean in this thesis comes to identify a character which is typical, because it is common, to the Jewish and Islamic world and to the Christian East (Constantinople and areas of influence) that are exposed to a series of contacts taking place first and foremost on its shores. Naturally, as said above, this does not mean that the element is necessarily indigenous as we see it, neither that it has to be found only in the Mediterranean (the throne of Solomon, in following the Muslim influence, migrates as far as India and Iran, for instance). At this stage, my dissertation is purposely limited to the Mediterranean, even though I am well aware that at least two new lines of investigation would be possible, if one were to expand the perspective of the present research. It would be certainly useful, for instance, to include a discussion of the Ethiopian tradition, where Solomon and the queen of Sheba play a pivotal role. Furthermore, a natural extension of my work would encompass a study of Slavic folklore, where it would interesting to follow the traces of the Solomonic legends[28]. For now, however, I limited my research to a more narrow field, where it were easier to trace and describe the circulation and the various points of contacts, in a perspective which felt as 'naturally' (even if only apparently) enclosed.

Scipione Guarracino[29] states that the Mediterranean is not a unity in itself but a point of encounter, therefore "Mediteranneism" does not exist until two actors meet. This intrinsic cosmopolitan quality, which is not limited to ports but to shores and entire lands that face the same sea, makes it possible to

[28] In the so-called *Vita Constantini-Cyrilli*, which tells the story of the evangelization of the Slavs, chapter XIII relates how Cyril deciphers an inscription on a cup made by Solomon. On this see for instance M. Capaldo, *Rispetto del testo tràdito o avventura congetturale? Su di una recente interpretazione di VC13*, in «Europa Orientalis», 9 (1990), pp. 541-644; I. Ševčenko, *The Greek Source of the Inscription on Solomon's Chalice in the Vita Constantini*, in *To honor Roman Jacobson: essays on the occasion of his seventieth birthday: 11 October 1966*, The Hague 1967; R. Picchio, *Chapter 13 of* Vita Constantini*: Its Text and Contextual Function*, in «Slavica Hierosolymitana», 7 (133), pp. 133-152; M. Taube, *Solomon's chalice, the Latin Scriptures and the Bogomiles*, in «Slovo» 37 (1987), pp. 161-169 M. Di Salvo, *"Una bella copa salamonata = потирь Соломоня дѣла?"*, in *Italia, Russia e mondo slavo. Studi filologici e letterari*, Firenze 2011, pp. 3-6 (originally published in 2001 in «Russica Romana»).

[29] S. Guarracino, *Mediterraneo. Immagini, storie e teorie da Omero a Braudel*, Milano 2007, pp. 93-99, p. 95.

find familiar things in a place distant from home. Despite the lack of political unity under the same power, due to the disruption of the ancient roman influence, by following the traces of old tales and new wonders, one finds many similarities across the sea. Peoples had a very similar taste in terms of artifacts and enjoyed listening to the same stories.

In his massive work on the story of the Mediterranean, meant as a story of the sea and not of the peoples or lands around it, David Abulafia describes the process by which the sea became integrated within a network. He chose to focus only on the sea (port cities, shores, islands), and not on the hinterland, treating his material in a strictly chronological order and not in an essay-like fashion. For the period between 900 and 1050, for instance, he notes that:

> some degree of economic, cultural and religious unity had been achieved along the line linking Spain to Egypt and Syria. The lands of Islam, despite the sectarian division between Shi'te and Sunni and the political divisions between Umayyads, Fatimids and Abbasids, interacted in trade and culture. This was aided by the constant movement of Muslim pilgrims across the Mediterranean on their way to Mecca, just as much as by the activities of merchants of several faiths. Those who were largely left out were the inhabitants of Christian western Europe[30].

By following the wanderings of the throne, we will find a substantial cultural unity in the lands mentioned by the scholar, certainly favoured by the efforts of Jewish intermediaries[31], because trade was a unifying tool and despite religious diversity it created secular bonds. We will also confirm that western Christian Europe is characterized by its own features and it, therefore, makes sense to employ terms that, no matter how simplistic are or heavily loaded by ideological debate[32], do provide us with a handy definitional tool.

This distinction, however, is not meant to be strictly definitional. Identity is a porous notion, shaped by what is excluded as much as by what is taken on board; more than anything, it is defined by choices rather than inheritances. By underlining the presence of cultural constants in the restricted

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[30] D. Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, Oxford 2011, pp. 258-270, p. 267.

[31] S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean society: the Jewish communities of the Arab World as portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 2 vols., Berkeley-London 1967-1971.

[32] G.W. Bowersock, *The East-West Orientation of Mediterranean Studies and the Meaning of North and South in Antiquity*, in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, pp. 167-178

basin of the Mediterranean, I certainly did not mean to equate all the peoples sharing them and abolish all the differences.

In the already mentioned introduction by Husain, he stated that there are usually two scholarly approaches to the Mediterranean. One, that describes it as a space where interactions take place among different people and where the influence of these people is felt, favours diversity and heterogeneity; it explores trading, military conquests, travel, pilgrimage, etc. and its focus is also on movable objects, as signs of these connections. The second, instead, defines it as a space of unity, in terms of climate, environment and social economy.

However, as Matvejevic[33] has reminded us, the Mediterranean is not merely history or geography. In that spirit, I would claim that it is also what remains of ancient civilizations and is passed on to the next ones in terms of technology, art and literature. In other words, the Mediterranean is, naturally, also culture. Of course, all form of knowledge has been employed – and we will see it clearly in the course of this dissertation – as a weapon of supremacy, either direct of symbolic. Nevertheless, as Michele Bacci tells us, one should not "se laisser bercer à l'excès par les vagues d'une mer perçue, d'une manière un peu trop rhétorique, comme la métaphore de l'interaction transculturelle", since "l'appropriation d'éléments appartenant à d'autres cultures est conditionné par de multiples facteurs, comme la destination d'usage et les modalités de réception de l'œuvre, ses caractéristiques techniques, ses modalités d'exposition dans l'espace, les inclinations et les finalisés de ses commanditaires…"[34].

With this *caveat* in mind, in the next pages I will try to describe some aspects of the fascinating process through which symbols are employed and appropriated within rival political, social, and cultural systems. It is precisely in a context of competition that knowledge and science evolve, that architecture flourishes, and that language finds new ways to say old things.

[33] P. Matvejevic, *Mediterranean, a cultural Landscape*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1999, (ed. or. 1987), pp. 7, 10.

[34] M. Bacci, *Vieux clichés et nouveaux mythes: Constantinople, les icônes et la Méditerranée*, in «Perspective» 2012, pp. 347-364, p. 360.

A King of Small Things

All the fascination of King Solomon's Mines
seems to be behind those g
reat mountains
and this I may add is a bit of advance work for mother,
an entering wedge to my disappearing from sight
for years and years in the Congo.

(R. H. Davies, *Adventures and Letters*)

Although the name of Solomon is usually associated with several domains, from wisdom to magic, from literature to perfect kingship, in the Middle Ages he was also seen as a patron of the arts and artisanry. This connection springs directly from the Hebrew Bible, from the fundamental description of the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem which stands as the basis of a long-living *topos* linking Solomon with architecture (1 Kings 6:1-38). This is, traditionally, the most investigated vein of research, which has generated a great amount of scholarly works over the years[35].

[35] See, for instance, J. de Prado – J. De Villalpando, *Hieronymi Pradi et Ioannis Baptistae Villalpandi e Societate Iesu in Ezechielem explanationes et apparatus vrbis, ac Templi Hierosolymitani: Commentariis et imaginibvs illvstratvs opvs tribvs tomis distinctvm quid vero singulis contineatur, quarta pagina indicabit*, Roma 1596-1604; C.C.W.F. Bähr, *Der salomonische Tempel mit Beschreibung seines Verhältnisses zu heiliger Architektur*, Carlsruhe 1848; A. Kempeneers, *Le type des églises bâties par et depuis l'Empereur Constantin, ou Analogies des anciennes basiliques chrétiennes avec le temple de Salomon et leurs différences avec les basiliques profanes*, Liège 1881; F.O. Paine, *Solomon's Temple and Capital*, London 1886; E.C. Robins, *The Temple of Solomon*, London 1887; O. Wolff, *Tempel von Jerusalem und seine Maasse*, Graz 1887; T. Friedrich, *Tempel und Palast Salamo's: Denkmäler phönikischer Kunst: Rekonstruction, Exegese der Bauberichte, mit Grundrissen und Perspectiven*, Innsbruck 1887; J. Prestel, *Die Baugeschichte des jüdischen Heiligthums und der Tempel Salomons*, Strassburg 1902; K. Möhlenbrink, *Der Tempel Salomos: eine Untersuchung seiner Stellung in der Sakralarchitektur des alten Orients*, Stuttgart 1932; N. Poulssen, *König und Tempel im Glaubenszeugnis des Alten Testamentes*, Stuttgart 1967; Th.A. Busink, *Der Tempel von Jerusalem, von Salomo bis Herodes: eine archäologisch-historische Studie unter Berücksichtigung des westsemitischen Tempelbaus*, Leiden 1970-1980; *The Temple of Solomon: Archaeological Fact*

In my dissertation, however, the memory of the Temple will stand firmly in the background. Rather, I focus more on other Solomonic achievements concerning the realm of the visual. The throne, as stated, is the departure point and also the red thread weaving its way through the dissertation. Nonetheless, as it will hopefully result clear from this chapter, a series of other Solomonic *topoi* were in circulation during the Middle Ages and have quite an impact in the history of art.

The furnishing of the Temple of Jerusalem

The tradition of the throne of Solomon has its roots in the complex account regarding the consecration of the Jerusalem Temple in 1 King and especially its description of the furnishing of the cult. 1 Kings 7:13–51 relates the following[36]:

> And king Solomon sent, and brought Hiram from Tyre, the son of a widow woman of the tribe of Nephtali, whose father was a Tyrian, an artificer in brass, and full of wisdom, and understanding, and skill to work all work in brass. And when he was come to king Solomon, he wrought all his work[37].
> And he cast two pillars in brass […] And he set up the two pillars in the porch of the temple: and when he had set up the pillar on the right hand, he called the name thereof *Jachin*: in like manner he set up the second pillar, and called the name thereof *Booz*. And upon the tops of the pillars

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and Medieval Tradition in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish art, ed. by J. Gutmann, Missoula (MT) 1976; K. Rupprecht, *Der Tempel von Jerusalem: Gründung Salomos oder jebusit. Erbe?*, Berlin-New York 1977; R.J. van Pelt, *Tempel van de wereld: de kosmische symboliek van de tempel van Salomo*, Utrecht 1984; J. Alinder, *Solomon's Temple: the European building-crafts Legacy*, Tucson (AZ) 1996; M. Delcor, *La description du temple de Salomon selon Eupolémos et le problème de ses sources*, in «Revue de Qumran», 13 (1988), pp. 251-271; C.H. Krinsky, *Representations of the Temple of Jerusalem before 1500*, in «The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», 33 (1970), pp. 1-19; see also the issue of «Jewish Art», 23 (1997-1998) dedicated to *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem*; *Gottesstadt und Gottesgarten: zu Geschichte und Theologie des Jerusalemer Tempels*, ed. by O. Keel – E. Zenger, Freiburg 2002; W. W. Hamblin, *Solomon's Temple: Myth and History*, London 2007; A. Balfour, *Solomon's Temple: Myth, Conflict and Faith*, Malden (MA) 2012.

[36] For the whole passage see R-D, 3 Kings 7:13-51.

[37] "Misit quoque rex Salomon, et tulit Hiram de Tyro, filium mulieris viduae de tribu Nephthali, patre Tyrio, artificem aerarium, et plenum sapientia, et intelligentia, et doctrina ad faciendum omne opus ex aere. Qui cum venisset ad regem Salomonem, fecit omne opus ejus".

he made lily work: so the work of the pillars was finished[38].

He made also a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round all about; the height of it was five cubits, and a line of thirty cubits compassed it round about […]

And it stood upon twelve oxen, of which three looked towards the north, and three towards the west, and three towards the south, and three towards the east, and the sea was above upon them, and their hinder parts were all hid within […][39]

And he made ten bases of brass, every base was four cubits in length, and four cubits in breadth, and three cubits high […][40]

He made also ten lavers of brass: one laver contained four bases, and was of four cubits: and upon every base, in all ten, he put as many lavers […][41]

And Hiram made caldrons, and shovels, and basins, and finished all the work of king Solomon in the temple of the Lord.

The two pillars and the two cords of the chapiters, upon the chapiters of the pillars: and the two networks, to cover the two cords, that were upon the top of the pillars. And four hundred pomegranates for the two networks: two rows of pomegranates for each network, to cover the cords of the chapiters, which were upon the tops of the pillars. And the ten bases, and the ten lavers on the bases. And one sea, and twelve oxen under the sea. And the caldrons, and the shovels, and the basins. All the vessels that Hiram made for king Solomon for the house of the Lord, were of fine brass. In the plains of the Jordan did the king cast them in a clay ground, between Socoth and Sartham. And Solomon placed all the vessels: but for exceeding great multitude the brass could not be weighed. And Solomon made all the vessels for the house of the Lord: the altar of gold, and the table of gold, upon which the leaves of proposition should be set: and the golden candlesticks, five on the right hand, and five on the left, over against the oracle, of pure gold: and the flowers like lilies, and the lamps over them of gold: and golden snuffers, and pots, and fleshhooks, and

[38] "Et finxit duas columnas aereas […] Et statuit duas columnas in porticu templi: cumque statuisset columnam dexteram, vocavit eam nomine Jachin: similiter erexit columnam secundam: et vocavit nomen ejus Booz. Et super capita columnarum opus in modum lilii posuit: perfectumque est opus columnarum".

[39] "Fecit quoque mare fusile decem cubitorum a labio usque ad labium, rotundum in circuitu: quinque cubitorum altitudo ejus […] Et stabat super duodecim boves, e quibus tres respiciebant ad aquilonem, et tres ad occidentem, et tres ad meridiem, et tres ad orientem, et mare super eos desuper erat: quorum posteriora universa intrinsecus latitabant".

[40] "Et fecit decem bases aeneas […]".

[41] "Fecit quoque decem luteres aeneos […]".

> bowls, and mortars, and censers, of most pure gold: and the hinges for the doors of the inner house of the holy of holies, and for the doors of the house of the temple were of gold.
> And Solomon finished all the work that he made in the house of the Lord, and brought in the things that David his father had dedicated, the silver and the gold, and the vessels, and laid them up in the treasures of the house of the Lord[42].

Such passage results of particular interest in our discourse. I quoted it almost in full, because it represents a catalogue of Solomon-related objects that we will encounter throughout this dissertation. It is important because it shows that, since the very beginning, the figure of Solomon was not only associated with the construction of the Temple building, but also with its furnishings. Even though this set of specific tasks was materially carried out by Hyram from Tyre, the whole ensemble was rightfully considered the work of king Solomon, who ordered and supervised it. The Temple and its decoration represent then his greatest artistic achievement: pillars and capitals, a basin so wide to be named 'sea'[43], bronze stands, lampstands and all the sacred vessels necessary for the

[42] "Fecit ergo Hiram lebetes, et scutras, et hamulas, et perfecit omne opus regis Salomonis in templo Domini. Columnas duas, et funiculos capitellorum super capitella columnarum duos: et retiacula duo, ut operirent duos funiculos, qui erant super capita columnarum. Et malogranata quadringenta in duobus retiaculis: duos versus malogranatorum in retiaculis singulis, ad operiendos funiculos capitellorum, qui erant super capita columnarum. Et bases decem, et luteres decem super bases. Et mare unum, et boves duodecim subter mare. Et lebetes, et scutras, et hamulas, omnia vasa, quae fecit Hiram regi Salomoni in domo Domini, de auricalco erant.In campestri regione Jordanis fudit ea rex in argillosa terra, inter Sochoth et Sarthan. Et posuit Salomon omnia vasa: propter multitudinem autem nimiam non erat pondus aeris. Fecitque Salomon omnia vasa in domo Domini: altare aureum, et mensam, super quam ponerentur panes propositionis, auream: et candelabra aurea, quinque ad dexteram, et quinque ad sinistram contra oraculum, ex auro puro: et quasi lilii flores, et lucernas desuper aureas: et forcipes aureos, et hydrias, et fuscinulas, et phialas, et mortariola, et thuribula, de auro purissimo: et cardines ostiorum domus interioris Sancti sanctorum, et ostiorum domus templi, ex auro erant. Et perfecit omne opus quod faciebat Salomon in domo Domini, et intulit quae sanctificaverat David pater suus argentum et aurum, et vasa, reposuitque in thesauris domus Domini".

[43] C.C. Wylie, *On King Solomon's Molten Sea*, in «The Biblical Archaeologist», 12 (1949), pp. 86-90; P.L. Garber, *Reconstructing Solomon's Temple*, in «The Biblical Archaeologist», 14 (1951), pp. 1-24; A. Zuidhof, *King Solomon's Molten Sea and (π)*, in «The Biblical Archaeologist», 45 (1982), pp. 179-184; K. Hognesius, *The Capacity of the Molten Sea in 2 Chronicles IV 5: a suggestion*, in «Vetus Testamentum», 24 (1994), pp. 349-358; J. Byl, *On the*

cult. All these items, made in bronze or gold, will never be abandoned in the Christian and the Jewish imaginary, and the myth of the scattered treasure of the Temple will constitute a powerful element of the narrative regarding spoils and legitimacy. Moreover, these objects all partake of the same destiny that will befall on the throne: from literary entities they will be transformed into *realia*. Such a process, as we will see, usually took place in two ways: either by attributing a scriptural aura to an existing object, thus recognizing it almost as a biblical relic, or by crafting a piece *ex novo* in such a way that it could result evocative of a certain context. These two approaches to the object seem to radically differ: the first one is almost pseudo-archaeological in its effort of placing the existing into a certain frame. The other one, instead, is quite opposite: it is a recreation, an imitation that does not need to be stylistically literal but it needs to be faithful to the spirit of the original, as it is perceived in the new context of production[44]. Despite such a difference, the aim of both approaches is quite similar at a deeper level: as we will see, terming a certain item 'Solomonic' is never an act of antiquarianism *per se*. On the contrary, definition implies possession and a certain narrative is usually functional to a specific political discourse. Similarly, crafting an object so that it can immediately evoke a context of power is to find a place within in. If you own a certain treasure, you are like Solomon: in this case, it is possession which implies definition. The two terms of the equation, therefore, remain the same.

The association between Solomon and the Temple, common to both Christians and Jews, migrated however also in the Islamic world, where Solomon was believed the author of marvellous artistic deeds, performed thanks to an army of demons at his orders[45]: the inhuman features of his helpers reinforced the supernatural quality of the work carried out under his responsibility, thus serving indirectly as a *topos* of excellent craftsmanship. As we shall see, the notion of the king of Israel as restless builder will be fully and

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Capacity of Solomon's Molten Sea, in «Vetus Testamentum», 48 (1998), pp. 309-314; A.J. Simoson, *Solomon's Sea and π*, in «The College Mathematics Journal», 40 (2009), pp. 22-32.

[44] On the importance of evocation despite lack of fidelity in the Solomonic tradition, particularly in architecture, see the provocative essay by R.G. Ousterhout, *New Temples and New Solomons: The Rhetoric of Byzantine Architecture*, in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. by P. Magdalino and R. Nelson, Washington (DC) 2010, pp. 223-253.

[45] Such a connection between Solomon and demons was already extant in the Judeo-Christian *milieu* of the first centuries, but mostly in pseudo-epigraphic or apocryphal texts; it then migrated into the Islamic world where, on the contrary, the association between the king of Israel and jinns became a quranic statement, thus being imbued with a strong scriptural value.

richly exploited, but such connection will not be limited to architecture. In the Qur'an it is precisely stated that these demons "worked for him as he desired, (making) arches, images, basins as large as reservoirs, and (cooking) cauldrons" (Qur'an, 34:13), thus reinforcing the idea that he is also the patron of small and crafted items.

It is important to stress this point because, as we will see in the course of this introduction, the domain of artistic or visual references linked to Solomon is a multifaceted universe, applicable to the realm of both the sacred and the profane, and equally meaningful in at least three different cultural contexts. There is a series of similar, yet not fully superimposable occurrences in the domain of the arts in the Middle Ages that imply some sort of 'Solomonic aesthetic', which I would like to present and discuss as a premise to the rest of the dissertation. My aim is to show the degree of ambiguity and the abundance of different nuances that informs the relationship between Solomon and artistic terminology.

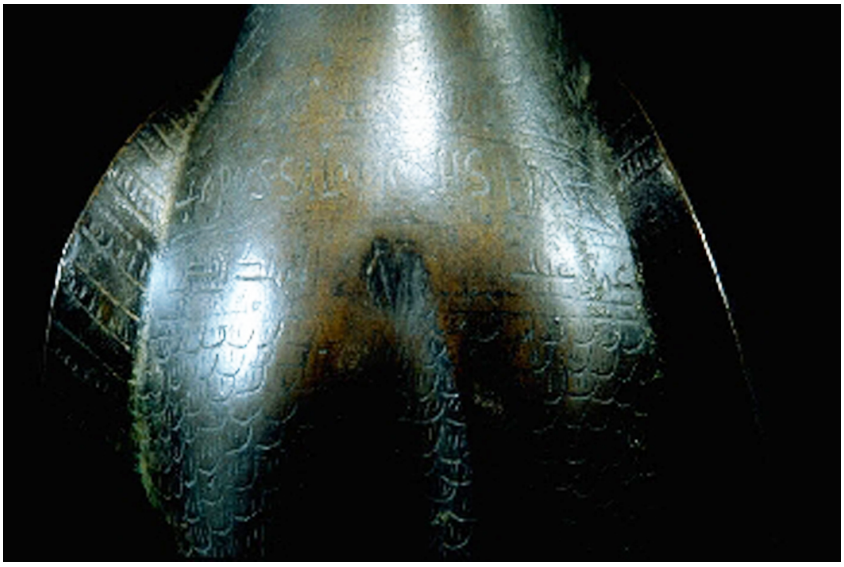
In the following sections, I would in fact like to address such a relationship by proposing two case-studies. The first one regards the label *opus Salomonis*, as it appears on two bronze objects, an aquamanile and an oil lamp, quite possibly produced in Spain. They are both interesting because they introduce us to several topics that will be touched upon in the course of this thesis: the presence of physical objects that are somehow connected to Solomon, a mixed cultural context like Medieval Spain where this connection seems equally appreciated by several actors, the inescapable link between beautiful artifacts and the patronage of Solomon.

Through my analysis I will try to review the hypothesis that have been advanced so far in order to explain such a rare expression and to add my personal perspective to the discussion, by discussing together textual sources and visual evidences, two approaches that have been kept distinct so far. Although rarely found, the formula *opus Salomonis* will prove interesting to us in revealing a peculiar stance of the 'evocative approach' mentioned in the previous section. We will see how two clearly Medieval bronze objects will be inscribed within the Solomonic tradition and how problematic it is for modern scholars to clear their origin, given the context of shared cultural values and common Solomonic heritage in which they originated. I will also discuss the occurrence of *uevre Salomon*, apparently equivalent to our Latin syntagm, in the context of French medieval literature, trying to establish whether there is a possible connection between the two expressions in texts and art or whether

they should be understood as sprouting separately from a common biblical origin.

Vessels of Solomon: Lamp and Peacock

Let us begin by describing our two items. The first one is a well-known bronze vessel, usually identified as an aquamanile, now at the Department of Islamic Arts in the Louvre (MR 1519)[46] [ill. 1]. It is 40 cm high, shaped as a peacock, while the handle represents the neck of another bird. It quite well known, because of the double inscription which runs on the breast of the bird. The first one, in Arabic, says: *ʿamal ʿabd al-malik al-nasrānī*, which could be taken as "work of ʿAbd al-Malik the christian", although the writing is grammatically



[46] A. de Longpérier, *Note sur une aiguière en bronze de travail sicilien conservée au Louvre*, in «Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Letters», 9 (1865), pp. 310-314; A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, *Arts de l'Islam des origines à 1700 dans les collections publiques françaises*, Paris 1971, no. 147; *L'Islam dans les collections nationales*, ed. by J.-P Roux et *al.* (catalogue of the exhibition: Paris, Grand-Palais, 2 May-22 August 1977), Paris 1977, no. 147; *Islamic Works of Art, Carpets and Textiles*, London 1987, p. 128; *Arabesques et jardins de paradis: Collections françaises d'art islamique*, ed. by M. Bernus-Taylor, Paris 1989, no. 119; *Eredità dell'Islam: Arte islamica in Italia*, ed. by G. Curatola, Venezia 1993, pp. 125-126; S. Makariou, *Les paons, aquamaniles ou bouches de fontaine*, in *Les Andalusias, de Damas à Córdoba*, Paris 2000, no. 87, no. 88, no. 89; A. Contadini, *Translocation and Transformation: Some Middle Eastern Objects in Europe*, in *The Power of Things and the Flow of Cutural Transformations. Art and Culture between Europe and Asia*, ed. by L.E. Saurma-Jeltsch and A. Eisenbeiss, Berlin-München 2010, pp. 42-64.

open to other interpretations, the most likely of which being "work of the servant of the Christian king". The second one, preceded by a cross, runs: *Opus Salomonis era T X*[47]. For a long time read as *opus Salomonis erat*, despite one notable exception[48], it has recently been reproposed[49] that T is a peculiar kind of dating notation, used only in Spain, which indicates the year 1000 of the Spanish era, which begins in 38 B.C.[50]. The bird would then result dated 972, likely produced in Spain, during the reign of the Ummayad caliph al-Ḥakam II. However, both the cross and the indication of the religion of ʿAbd al-Malik seem to suggest a Christian destination, while the employment of Arabic as a language in the second inscription would possibly indicate a Mozarab artisan[51]. The peacock is finely decorated: the whole body is engraved and chiseled so as to reproduce the plumage of the animal. Its precise context of use is unknown. However, it is believed that, because of its shape, while pouring water the vessel could produce a sound, thus giving voice to the bird.

The second object is a little bronze oil lamp, now at the Archaeological Museum in Madrid (inv. 50857)[52], 20 cm long and less than 9 cm high, half broken since it lost the handle [ill. 2]. Judging from other extant similar pieces, the handle would have been shaped as the curved neck of an animal. Here there is only one inscription running in Latin, again preceded by a cross, saying: *oc opus Salomonis era T*. Even the precise provenance of this second object is

[47] Therefore the final computus 1000+10-38 would give the date of 972.

[48] R.-H. Bautier, *La datation et la provenance du 'paon aquamanile' du Louvre*, in «Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France», s.n. (1977), pp. 92-101.

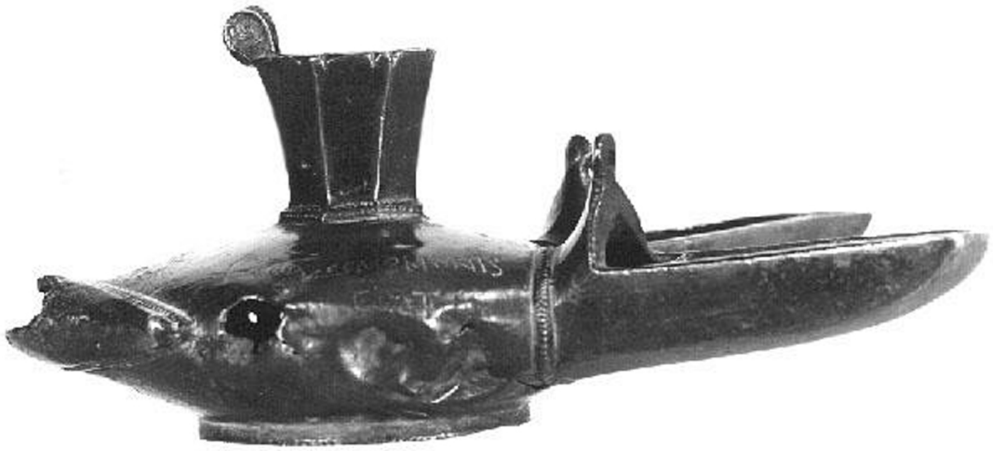
[49] O. Grabar, *About a Bronze Bird*, in *Reading Medieval Images: the Art Historian and the Object*, ed. by E. Sears –T.K. Thomas, Ann Arbor (MI) 2002, pp. 117-125.

[50] P. Augustí Jacinto Voltès-J. Vives, *Manual de Cronología Española y Universal*, Madrid 1951, pp. 11-13.

[51] According to Oleg Grabar, the two inscriptions can be read in several different ways: 1) A work of Solomonic [beauty], year 962, made by Abd al-Malik the Christian; 2) A work by [a man called] Solomon, year 962, made by Abd al-Malik the Christian; 3) A work of Solomonic [beauty], year 962, made by the servant of the Christian king; 4) A work for (or by) [a man called] Solomon, year 962, made by the servant of the Christian king; 5) It was (or could have been) a work [worthy of] Solomon [but or and?] it was made by Abd al-Malik the Christian; 6) It was (or could have been) a work [worthy of] Solomon, [but or and?] it was made by the servant of the Christian king, in O. Grabar, *About a Bronze Bird*, in *Reading Medieval Images: the Art Historian and the Object*, ed. by E. Sears and T.K. Thomas, Ann Arbor (MI) 2002, pp. 117-125.

[52] M.E. Gomez-Moreno, *Ars Hispaniae: Historia Universal del Arte Hispanico*, III (*El Arte Arabe Espanol Hasta los Almohades, Arte Mozarabe*), Madrid 1951, ill. 393a.

unknown, although it is likely Spanish, probably produced in the same *milieu* of the first one, given the specificity of its dating system. In this case, the bronze is plain and not particularly decorated.



The aquamanile of Sulaymān, an Islamic exception

The extant cases known to me where the label *opus Salomonis* appears on specific items are only these two. In the next few paragraphs, however, I will present a third object, this time clearly belonging to an Islamic context, where we find mention of a Sulaymān in relation with a precious object [ill. 3]. If, in this case, the cultural context of production will not need to be clarified, such an example will nevertheless prove difficult to insert within our Solomonic discourse. In other words, the inscription on the object would seem to refer to an historical Sulaymān.

Among the most extraordinary metal objects that have come down to us is a famous bird, now at the Hermitage, a bronze aquamanile inlaid with copper and silver, and it is the earliest known dated example, going back to the year 180, i.e. 796-797 C.E.[53]. All of this information is provided in a Kufic

[53] M.M. Diakonof, *Arabskoia Nadpic na bronzovom orle Ermitazha*, in «Epigrafika Vostoka» 4 (1951), pp. 24-27; A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, *Prunkkanne. Räuchergerät in Gestlat eines Raubvogels*, in B. Spuler – J. Sourdel-Thomine, *Die Kunst des Islam*, Berlin 1973, pp. 186-187; *Masterpieces of Islamic Art in the Hermitage Museum*, Kuwait 1990, no. 1 p. 24; W. Lukonin-A. Iwanow, *Die Kunst Persiens*, Bournemouth-St. Petersburg 1996, no. 84, p. 111. It is however often reproduced and it appears on many other catalogues.

inscription that runs along the neck of the bird. The meaning of this inscription has been discussed several times. Still, because of the difficulties in reading the name of the city, the place of production remains uncertain, although most scholars agree that the object was likely produced in Iraq[54].

The other interesting element in the inscription is the reference to a certain Suleymān, who is said to have had the object made. The verb employed, although not entirely clear, seems to exclude the possibility that this Sulaymān was the actual artisan. It is expressed in a causative form, which would indicate that he had someone make it, thus being the one who commissioned the object and not the artisan. In this specific case, however, it is quite hard to consider it as a mention of the king of Israel and it is more likely an indication of whoever commissioned the piece. Sulaymān is quite common as a name; moreover, from the way the inscription is phrased, it looks as if the aquamanile was one out of many pieces made in a specific year, in a certain city under the responsibility of

[54] See footnote above.

Sulaymān. This element provides us with an historical anchor that would seem to exclude the identification of this Arabic Solomon with the biblical one.

Had we found the direct counterpart to the expression *opus* plus Name – *ʿamal…* (= work of…) in Arabic – which constitutes the standard formula employed to indicate the artisan in Islamic epigraphy, we would have had an interesting parallel occurring in the Muslim world that could be compared to our two Spanish objects. Instead, its remote geographical origin, the distant chronology and the different formulation of the inscription should make us conclude that, however fascinating, the presence of this Sulaymān is not to be taken into account in our analysis. However, a certain ambiguity remains, considering that, in the Islamic tradition, mentions of the craftmanship of king Solomon or Solomon-made objects are frequent[55].

Deciphering the inscription: opus Salomonis

As far as our two Spanish objects are concerned, art historians have long found the label on them quite puzzling. The old hypothesis that it literally indicated the name of the artisan who had made the object is now generally disregarded, despite some notable exceptions[56]. This suggestion could be advanced, at least hypothetically, for the Madrid lamp, where the inscription appears alone and would seem to indicate a signature, expressed as *opus* + name of the artist in genitive form. However, studies on the artist 'signature' in Medieval art show that such a grammatical formulation is extremely rare, not to say non existent[57], until the fourteenth century. This situation makes us

[55] The main evidence of such a connection is represented by the quranic passage. However, it is also possible to find references to the craftmanship of both David and Solomon with metal also in chronicles or poems. See, for instance, the discussion on this point provided by A.S. Melikian Chirvani in *Le Livre des rois, miroir du destin. Takht-e Soleyman et la symbolique du Shah-Name*, in «Studia Iranica», 20 (1991), pp. 33-148, particularly pp. 39-43. I have not done a thorough search: however, an interesting passage is to be found in *La Chronique de Tabari*, ed. and traslated by E. Zotenberg, Paris 1989, 6 vols, III, p. 417, where it is recorded that during the fall of al-Mada'in, the soldiers took away as booty "six cuirasses salomoniennes".

[56] See, for instance, the catalogue entry by Anna Contadini in *Eredità dell'Islam*, pp. 125-126.

[57] In the repertoires of Medieval signatures at our disposal, on the total of more than 800 entries, only one seems to follow this phrasal structure and it is not relevant to our context of analysis. Such an occurrence is therefore utterly marginal. See M.M. Donato, *Memorie degli artisti, memoria dell'antico: intorno alle firme di Giotto, e di altri*, in *Medioevo: il tempo degli antichi*, ed. by A.C. Quintavalle, Parma-Milano 2006, pp. 522-546, n. 124. For the collection of signatures, see *Opere firmate nell'arte italiana / Medioevo*, project carried out under the

conclude that, almost certainly, also the label on our two objects cannot correspond to the the signature of the artisan.

This inference seems supported by the aquamanile. Here, if the actual maker was ʿAbd al-Malik, as the *ʿamal* formula would seem to indicate, the reference to another maker named Solomon would result in a duplication that is difficult to explain. If, however, we follow for an instant the suggestion of Anna Contadini, who considers the Arabic inscription to mean "work of the servant of the Christian king" and Solomon to be the likely translation of the name Sulaymān, we have to face a double set of problems. First of all, it seems hard to imagine why our mozarab artisan, who has just written a whole line in Arabic, would feel the need to translate his name for his potential audience; moreover, it would seem utterly illogical to express his name at all, considering that the second line, if taken in this second acceptation, sounds as a perfect expression of modesty. Why would the artisan who has humbly defined himself the "servant of the Christian king" want to utter his name at all, without mentioning his sovereign? Nothing is impossible, of course, but such an hypothesis is so problematic that I would like to dismiss it in favour of something more easily explainable.

The label *opus Salomonis* is more often generally taken to be a formulaic expression, employed in connection with beautifully crafted objects, mostly taken as a declaration of skill and craft, to be referred to Solomon because of his association with the treasures of the temple of Jerusalem. As much as I agree with this definition – and I believe this is the meaning that should be broadly applied to our two objects – I would also like to problematize it and eventually propose a slightly more precise reading.

An interesting aspect of the question is that it recurs in different contexts: we find it, for instance, in few inventories or chronicles written in Latin mentioning objects "ex opere Salomonis", but we have also a body of French medieval literary texts where *oeuvre Salemon* seems to be employed with a different meaning but always in relation to crafted, decorated objects; finally, there is a series of instances where the name "Solomon" becomes a common noun and it is used as a technical term to indicate some specific items whose features differ from case to case, but can all be explained in light of their relationship to King Solomon.

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supervision of prof. M.M. Donato at the Scuola Superiore in Pisa and also A. Dietl, *Die Sprache der Signatur. Die mittelalterlichen Künstlerinschriften Italiens*, 4 vols, Berlin-München 2009.

I would then like to explore this Solomonic semantic knot by cross-referencing the literary occurrences with the scanty – albeit real – presence of actual artifacts. I show how the application of the expression differs across different contexts. I propose that, given the general polyvalence of the term *opus*, the original meaning of the expression ended up also acquiring a second layer that is similar, but not identical to the first. This shift of meaning, combined with the broad set of references encompassed by the figure of Solomon in the field of visual representation, ended up shaping the eclecticism of the formula and also its fundamental ambiguity. It is possible that, beside the principal meaning understood by a certain audience, the occurrence of this Solomonic references could evoke a broader semantic universe, full of different elements deeply interconnected with each other, which explains why it is then not always easy for modern scholars to clarify the exact nuance of the expression in context or its precise evolution.

Uevre Salemon in Medieval Literature

In 1954, in an article in the «Modern Language Review»[58], G.D. West discussed the actual meaning and the possible origin of the expression *a* (or *de*) *l'uevre Salemon*, which recurred frequently in twelfth and thirteenth century Medieval French literature, to describe precious objects. The scholar analyzed several occurrences of it and concluded that originally it must have indicated an actual technique, quite possibly associated with precious and hard materials, such as gold, ivory or ebony. He also showed that it appeared often in association with *trifoire* or with other analogous terms. Although initially referring to a quite specific connotation, it gradually came to serve as a generic expression of praise. The original, technical meaning was progressively lost during the thirteenth century and was finally completely abandoned. In his article, West listed several examples in order to support his persuasive interpretation. I quote a number of these here:

> En mi la nef trovat un lit
> dunt li pecul e li limun
> furent a l'ovre Salemun,
> tailliez a or, tut a triffure,

[58] G.D. West, *L'uevre Salemon*, in «The Modern Language Review», 49 (1954), pp. 176-182.

de ciprés e de blanc ivoure[59].
(*Guigemar*, vv. 170-174)

La sele ert bone, et li arçon
furent de l'ovre Salemon,
a entaille de blanc ivoire;
l'entaille an ert a or trifoire[60].
(*Eneas*, vv. 4075-4078)

D'or fin furent li esporon,
taillié de l'uevre Salemon[61].
(*Roman de Troie*, vv. 1817-1818)

Une pierre ot desus assise
Que firent orfevre de Frise;
cele pierre qui sus gesoit,
feite de mult fin marbre estoit,
inde, jaune, noir et vermeill;
moult reluisoit contre soleill,
si fu entailliee environ
de la bonne euvre Salemon[62].
(*Floire et Blancheflor*, vv. 550-557)

Devers la cambre vent portant
Une chaire grand d'ivoire,
uvrée de fin or triffoire
en la chäere un oreiller
a fin or broisdé on et cher.
De fin or i ot meint boton
Ovré de l'ovre Salomon[63].

[59] "In the middle of the ship he found a bed / whose posts and sides had been made according to the *opus Salomonis*, / carved in gold, all inlaid, / in cypress and white ivory".
[60] "The saddle was of good quality and cantle and pommel / were made in *opus Salomonis* / with an inlay work in white ivory / and gold".
[61] "The spurs were gold-made, worked in *opus Salomonis*".
[62] "A stone was put on it / which was made by goldsmiths of Frise / a stone which lay there / made of fine marble / indigo, yellow, black and vermillion / it shone greatly in the sun / since it had been carved in excellent *opus Salomonis*".

(*Protheselaus*, vv. 4805-4811)

Li archon sont d'un blanc yvoire taillet a triforee
trestot de l'uevre Salemon mout sotilment ovree.
(*Venus la deesse d'amour*, st. 214)

D'ebenus furent li arçon,
taillié a l'euvre Salemon[64].
(*Rigomer*, vv. 14685-14686)

In all the above mentioned cases, l'*œuvre Salomon* is mentioned along with the terms *entaille* (carving) and *triffoire*, which West glossed as "opus anaglafarium", on the basis of the twelfth-century treatise *De utensilibus* by Alexander Neckam, where the word is employed both in a context of sculpting upon metal and in relation to embroidery. What these two techniques have in common is the idea of relief. Given the contexts where it occurred, West then concluded that *œuvre Salomon*, which he took as a synonimical expression, indicated a particular "method of carving and engraving upon a precious material"[65].

The same issue was touched upon by Constance Davies, who proposed that *opus anaglapharium* implied that the object was overlaid with precious material, such as gold[66]. Even though her examples are drawn from the *Diversarium Artium Schedula* by Theophilus and none of them clearly refers to *anaglypha* or *opus Salomonis*, it is not unlikely that the proceeding described by the goldsmith-monk with the terms *sculpere* and *incisio* does refer to the same technique, given that some of the objects that he mentions as decorated with this method, like saddles and litters, correspond in fact to those described in the above mentioned poems. Davies, however, unsatisfied by the brief gloss provided by Neckam, tried to further clarify the meaning of *trifoire*, suggesting it originally might have been "connected with the arcade pattern"[67], thus corresponding to some "ornamental border". Looking through Du Cange's

[63] "In the chamber it was carried / a great ivory chair / worked in fine gold / on the chair there was a pillow / embroidered with golden and precious lace / in gold were its many buttons / worked in *opus Salomonis*".

[64] "In ebony was the saddle / worked in *opus Salomonis*".

[65] West, *L'uevre Salemon*, p. 177.

[66] C.B. Davies, *L'Uevre Salemun*, in «Medium Aevum», 29 (1960), pp. 173-183.

[67] *Ibid*., p. 178.

series of examples, moreover, the *trifoire* appears often in connection with the insertion of precious stones, being therefore sometimes glossed with *opus inclusorium*.

Now, from all these examples, it is not clear whether *triffoire* should be taken as perfectly synonomous with *œuvre Salomon*, but it is quite likely that this technique implied the employment of hard and precious materials, probably inlaid with gold and maybe even decorated with gems. Given the textual contexts proposed, however, it is hard to be more precise than this. There are also few cases where the expression seems to have lost this connotation. West was convinced that the expression could not long have retained its original technical meaning, which was progressively lost, in favour of a generic expression of praise[68]. This would have explained why in some of the latest occurrences (thirteenth century) the formula seemed to be used in an altogether different way, if compared to those seen above:

> Et Aye la duchoise fu dedens Avignon
> En une chambre painte de l'evre Salemon[69].
> (*Aye d'Avignon*, vv. 2510-2511)

> Quant Godefrois li bers fu entrés el donjon,
> qui estoit painturés à l'ovre Salemon[70].
> (*Godefroi*, vv. 1776-1777)

West's hypothesis is perfectly reasonable. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that we are not familiar with the subtleties of the expression and it may be that even these passages describe a decoration which was enriched with

[68] I would like to add to the scholar's list some late Italian textual occurrences: in an Italian *Bestiary* dated to the end of the thirteenth century we find mention of "una bela copa solomonata", *Il libro della natura degli animali (bestiario toscano)*, in *Bestiari medievali*, ed. by L. Morini, Torino 1996, pp. 425-486, p. 432. Also, in one of the *laudi* belonging to the Confraternita de' Battuti in Modena, Saint Ursula is said to carry: "una bandera ultramarina / cum una cruxe d'oro salamonata" (vv. 27-29), G. Bertoni, *Il laudario dei Battuti di Modena*, Halle 1909, p. 77. It is likely that the adjective employed in both cases indicates the precious quality of the objects, even though the details of the decoration are not specified. It is maybe possible to revise in this usage of "salomonato" a derivation from the examples found in French poetry.

[69] "And Aye the duchess was at Avignon / in a chamber painted in *opus Salomonis*".

[70] "When Godefrois, the handsome one, had entered the inner tower of the castle / which was painted in *opus Salomonis*".

golden leafs, a technique that Theophilus describes in his treaty as applicable also to walls and ceilings.

In sum, it seems beyond doubt that *œuvre Salemon* in Medieval poems indicated an actual technique or a decorative effect which must have been generally known, probably referring to something that had an effective counterpart outside the domain of literature, something known to the cultivated and rich audience of these romances. In fact, these texts seldom explain the expression, and, if they expand on it, it is for poetic effect rather than for reasons of clarification. Moreover, it seems to me that West's conclusion is further supported by the fact that the French formula appears to be a direct translation of a Latin expression, where *uevre* stands for *opus*. This term in both classical and post-classical Latin, if employed in a constructive or decorative context, bears a technical connotation: *opus quadratum*, *opus incertum*, *opus reticolatum*, *opus alexandrinum*, *opus tessellatum*, *opus vermiculatum*, *opus mallei*, *opus anglicanum*, *opus diaperatum* all indicate specific working-methods. *Opus Salomonis* could then properly mean "technique of Solomon" or "Solomon-work".

On the origin of uevre Salemon

I would now like to proceed to a brief discussion of the possible origin of such an expression. Provided that I believe that the formula has a technical meaning within this specific literary context, it would be interesting to understand how it came to be endowed with this connotation. As far as its origin, Nigel Abercrombie[71] maintained that the expression had been invented by Marie de France – whose *Guigemar* is one of the earliest known texts where it occurs – on the basis that a possible source of inspiration for the poet could have been a passage in the biblical Song of Solomon, where the bed of the king of Israel is described (Song of Songs 3:9-10):

> Quae est ista quae ascendit per desertum sicut virgula fumi ex aromatibus myrrhae, et thuris, et universi pulveris pigmentarii? En lectulum Salomonis sexaginta fortes ambiunt ex fortissimis Israel, omnes tenentes gladios, et ad bella doctissimi: uniuscujusque ensis super femur suum propter timores nocturnos. Ferculum fecit sibi rex Salomon de lignis

[71] N. Abercrombie, *A Note on a Passage in "Guigemar"*, in «The Modern Language Review», 30 (1935), p. 353.

> Libani; columnas ejus fecit argenteas, reclinatorium aureum, ascensum purpureum; media caritate constravit, propter filias Jerusalem[72].

The text of the Vulgate mentions first a *lectulus* (III, 7) and later on a *ferculum* (III, 9). Whether the two terms should here be used as synonyms or apply to two different things has been matter of great debate[73]. The question is not simple and I am not dwelling on it here; however, the different words variously employed to translate these two terms – ranging from portable couch/sedan chair, carriage/carriage, bed/chariot, bed/seat, litter/palanquin, conveyance/palanquin=mobile throne, etc. – should give a sense of its complexity. In fact, it is the underlying Hebrew text that makes it difficult to establish with certainty the referents of the two terms. *Mittah*, the word translated by Jerome with *lectulus*, usually refers to stationary beds, couches or portable litters and biers. Conversely, *'appyrion* is a *hapax* and it is also interpreted, given the mention of the pillars, as a 'pavilion' or a 'small palace' under which a throne is located. Moreover, verse 10 says that its interior was "paved with love" and the word 'love' has often been interpreted as a misreading for other terms, such as 'stone' or 'ebony', thus implying the presence of a rich pavement.

Whether or not Mary de France invented the expression *œuvre Salemon*, it is possible, even though not necessary, that the passage in the poem[74] consciously echoes the one in the Scriptures: the bed, *le lit*, could certainly be identified with the *lectulus*. However, even admitting that the *lectulus* and the *ferculum* are the same thing, the points of contact between the *lai* and the passage are limited to the wood, which in one case is cedar in the other is cypress. Marie mentions an ivory structure, while the Bible describes a gold, silver and purple ensemble.

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[72] "Who is she that goeth up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh, and frankincense, and of all the powders of the perfumer? Behold threescore valiant ones of the most valiant of Israel, surrounded the bed of Solomon? All holding swords, and most expert in war: every man' s sword upon his thigh, because of fears in the night. King Solomon hath made him a litter of the wood of Libanus. The pillars thereof he made of silver, the seat of gold, the going up of purple: the midst he covered with charity for the daughters of Jerusalem". The present text and related translation is taken from the R-D, Song of Songs, 3: 9-10.

[73] For a good synthesis on this point, see M. Lillich, *King Solomon in bed*, in «Speculum» 80 (2005), pp. 764-801.

[74] "En mi la nef trovat un lit/ dunt li pecul e li limun/ furent a l'ovre Salemun,/ tailliez a or, tut a triffure, de ciprés e de blanc ivoure".

Yet, despite this evident lack of strict correspondence, I have quoted this passage in full because we will encounter the "pavilion" of Solomon other times in the course of this dissertation and it is important to underline its architectural quality and the richness of its material. I chose to discuss it also because another poem, unknown to West, does seem to show that the memory of this biblical passage certainly acted on the imagery to which French poets recurred during the Middle Ages.
Thus, Herbert de Dammartin, in his thirteenth-century *Folque de Candie*:

"El faudestue de l'uevre Salemon / Se siet li rois dedanz son paveillon"[75].

Here, we have a poet who seems to refer explicitly to something actually built by Solomon: the two verses definitely correspond to the *lectulus/ferculum* couple seen above in the Vulgate, rendered with the translation *faudestue/paveillon*. The biblical "memory" here is evident; indeed, such a description should probably be taken quite literally and evoke the passage in the *Song of Songs*, thus showing that, at least for some authors, the actual source of inspiration for the technique was this specific biblical passage.

In a brief follow-up to West's article, however, H. W. Lawton suggested that *œuvre Salemon* was the direct translation of the Latin expression *opus Salomonis*, employed, from the Vulgate onwards, to indicate the great work of King Solomon, in particular the Temple and its treasures[76]. Lawton referred only to examples derived from Medieval French literature[77], even though there

[75] "The faldstool in *opus* Salomonis / The king sits in his pavilion". Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms fr. 25518 - Notre-Dame 275bis, f. 20r, vers 16, quoted by S., *Opus Salomonis*, in «Bulletin de l'Institut archéologique liégeois», 14 (1878), pp. 265-276, p. 271.
[76] H. W. Lawton, *L'uevre Salemon*, in «The Modern Language Review», 50 (1955), pp. 50-52.
[77] In addition to the case he mentions, I would like to add another one, drawn from *Carmina Burana*, ed. by B.K. Vollman, «Bibliothek des Mittelalters», in 13 (1987): ("In Gideonis area", 37:5), pp. 90-91: "Ve, ve, qui regis filiam / das in manum lenonis! / ve, qui profanas gloriam / tantae devotionis / qui cella pigmentariam / et opus Salemonis / fraude rapis predonis / si certius inspicias / ad rem conditionis". This specific strophe contains the curse toward whoever prophanates a sacred space with the fury of of a plunderer; first is mentioned the *cella pigmentaria* (parfume cell), a Marian epithet coined by Adam of Saint Victor (d. 1146) in a famous sequence dedicated to the Virgin, which express the idea of an enclosed and sacred space (see *The Liturgical Poetry of Adam of St. Victor*, ed. by A. Digby Strangeways Wrangham – L. Gautier, 3 vols, London 1881, II, pp. 218-225). Right after comes *opus Salomonis*, which clearly indicates the inviolable precincts of the Temple.

are few monumental examples that I would like to mention to demonstrate the likelihood of his architectural reading of the expression.

Opus Salomonis in Architectural Contexts

The first one is an inscription appearing in a highly prestigious setting, bordering the mosaics decorating the apse of the Church of San Marco in Rome [ill. 4]. The decorative program was commissioned by Pope Gregory IV who had carried out a complete restoration of the church around 833, by rebuilding almost entirely from its foundations[78].

> Vasta tholi primo sistunt fundamine fulcra,
> quæ Salomoniaco fulgent sub sydere ritu[79]
> Haec tibi, proque tuo perfecit praesul honore
> Gregorius Marce, eximio cui nomine quartus,
> tu quoque posce Deum, vivendi tempora longa
> donet, et ad coeli post funus sydera ducat[80].

[78] On the key role play by this church and its figurative program in the policy of Gregory IV see C. Bolgia, *The Mosaics at S. Marco, Rome: Papal Response to Venice, Byzantium and the Carolingians*, in «Speculum» 81 (2006), pp. 1-34.

[79] E. du Cange *et al.*, *Salomoniacus ritus*, in *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, 1883-1887 (ed. or. 1766), VII, col. 285c.

The text does not explicitly make use of the expression *opus Salomonis*. Yet it seems clear that it praises the domed structure (*tholus*, *sydus*) and its decoration, that shine "salomoniaco ritu", an expression which translates literally as 'in a Solomonic way', therefore in a way typical of his constructions. Even though we do not find our formula expressed clearly, here the reference to Solomon is doubtlessly architectural and decorative. Such a fact does not seem coincidental, given the importance of Gregory as a builder. In the course of his life, in fact, the pontiff restored, intervened or actually built a great number of churches and other structures: his interventions are recorded for S. Adriano on the via Sacra, S. Giorgio in Velabro, S. Saba on the Aventine, S. Maria in Trastevere, the monastery dedicated to the saints Calixtus and Cornelius close to that church, S. Saturnino, S. Pietro, the Sabatin aqueduct, two domus in the area of Ostia and the of fortified hamlet of Gregoriopolis in ancient Ostia[81]. This list of projects places him in a distinctively Solomonic tradition, at least if we consider the widespread identification of the king of Israel as master builder. The text is, in general, quite carefully constructed; it plays, for instance, on the fact that *sydus* is both the domed architecture of the apse and the sky. The inscription wishes him to reach "sydera coeli" after he dies, while the mosaic already represents him on the "sydus" of the dome. It is then certain that the author of the inscription was subtly creating a parallel, The mention of the king of Israel is certainly well chosen and creates a subtle parallel, never explicit but evocative, between the achievements of the pontiff and those of the king of Israel.

The second example of a context where a building is clearly put in connection with Solomon comes from a context which could not be more far removed, in terms of geography and scale, from the one just mentioned. It is a dedicatory inscription, transcribed and translated by Jules Helbig in an article issued in 1878[82].

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[80] "The mighty footings of the vault rise upon the prime foundation / and gleam in Solomonic wise beneath the heavens. / It is for thee, Mark, and thy honor that the bishop / Gregory – fourth in that distinguished name – / brought this to completion. / Do thou, in turn, beseech God that he may grant him a long life / and conduct him to the stars of heaven", translation in T. Lansford, *The Latin Inscriptions of Rome: a Walking Guide*, Baltimore 2009, pp. 300-301.

[81] I. Bonaccorsi, *Gregorio IV*, in *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, (online ed.), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/papa-gregorio-iv_(Dizionario-Biografico)], Roma 2000.

[82] J. Helbig, *L'Inscription de l'ancienne chapelle de Faime*, in «Bulletin de l'Institut archéologique liégeois», 14 (1878), pp. 169-184.

† Libertus miles, non ultimus inter heriles,
non modicis donis, hoc egit opus Salomonis.
Cui pia, sana, rata coninx fuit Hazca vocata.
Fidelium liquerat universitatique, pro patre suo Humberto cuius est obitus
VI idus februarii, et matre eius Gudila cuius est obitus V kalendas Maii
iuger tumbe indulsit ecclesie, ad usus vini et hostie, additis
pro eorum anniversariis IIII denariis †[83].

The text was incised on the stone lintel of a small chapel, to which the words "hoc egit opus Salomonis" doubtlessly refer. The building is located in the territory of Celles, a small village in Belgium, also known as Faime or Ferme. The commemorative inscription was still in place when Helbig made his reconnaissance trip, even though the chapel, State property since 1797, had been successively sold to a local inhabitant, which had made it into an *atelier de charron*. Therefore, no trace of the original burial place was left, except of the *linteau* on the door.

The scholar suggested that given the literary quality of the text, written in leonine verses, it might have been possibly composed by one of the Benedictine monks living in the Saint-Jacques monastery in Liège. Documentary traces about Libert state that he had a son who deceased in 1263, and therefore it is likely that the chapel had been built during the twelfth century, as the metric choice, the style of the letters and of the abbreviations seem to suggest. Even though the tone of the inscription might seem hyperbolic and exceedingly emphatic, considering the scale and relevance of a small family tomb, there is no doubt that the building – however modest to our eyes – was credited with the greatest compliment possible, i.e. its relationship with a Solomonic construction. This fact itself is quite telling: if a reference to the *opus Salomonis* appears in an isolated chapel, erected for private use in a rural area of no particular religious or political relevance, it is a positive evidence of its status as a literary *topos*, probably proudly employed by a local clerk, eager to show off

[83] Translated as: "Libert, chevalier, qui n'est pas le dernier entre les seigneurs, par des dons considérables érigea cette œuvre de Salomon. Il eut une épouse, pieuse, pure, constante, nommée Hazca. Il légua aussi à la communauté des fidèles, pour son père Humbert mort le sixième jour des Ides de février, er pour sa grandmère Gudila morte le cinquième jour des kalendes de mai, la terre de la tombe qu'il donna à l'église pour l'usage du Saint Sacrifice, ajoutant quatre deniers pour leurs anniversaires", *ibid*., p. 176.

his erudition and talent, recurring to the most powerful images in his repertoire in order celebrate his provincial glories.

It is possible that a thorough research would provide us with further examples. However, what I want to demonstrate is that Lawton's hypothesis seems to be substantiated by material (and not just textual) evidence. Even though he praised the work conducted by West on the expression in literary texts, he seemed altogether doubtful of the actual technical nuance of the expression and concluded that given "the atmosphere which surrounds both *œuvre Salemon* and *trifoire* […] we should be naïve to expect to find specimens of such work, since they were the imaginary products of fabulous craftsmen endowed with a skill to be found only in such wondrous works as Solomon's Temple"[84].

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the naïve quest for actual artifacts has yielded, over the years, two objects carrying the inscription *opus Salomonis*, that were unknown to the two scholars, because they fell outside the domain of literature. The question to be determined, then, is whether the label on the items bears the same meaning as the technical expression and, if not, what is the relationship between these two different occurrences.

Opus Salomonis and Uevre Salemon: a correspondence?

Let us now return to the aquamanile and oil-lamp with which we began this discussion of the semantic uses to which terminology associated with Solomon could be put, as well as the origins of this terminology. If we assume that *opus Salomonis* is an equivalent of the *œuvre Salemon* analyzed by West in Medieval French examples, we should expect to recognize a special carving technique on both our aquamanile and oil-lamp. This element certainly seems to be confirmed by the material evidence provided by our bronze peacock, which is quite elaborately carved over most of its surface. But our second example is quite disappointing in this respect: as we have seen, its decoration is absolutely plain. We could still somehow posit that the exquisite decoration was on the part that broke off but, it seems that even the missing neck would have been smooth and not carved. Material evidence, then, seems to dismiss West's hypothesis.

[84] Lawton, *L'uevre Salemon*, p. 52.

Moreover, one wonders what would be the reason to label an object with the indication of its technique: it would not seem entirely logical and I do not know any case of an object where an inscription specifies it. Nevertheless, West's textual analysis seems quite rigorous and it is hard to state that in all the occurrences he lists, the formula is merely employed to generically hint at the overall quality of the work. Redundant phrases such as "ovré de l'ovre" or "taillié à l'euvre" would seem to exclude this interpretation. As I posited above, then, I am actually convinced that the meaning of *opus Salomonis* shifted over time, a change which was due not only to the polysemic quality of the term *opus*, but also to the dense universe of references that tended to coalesce around the figure of Solomon, even in the relatively restricted the realm of the visual.

In my view, as it turns out, both West and Lawton are right in their own respect, even if it is important to distinguish between the origins of these various meanings. Some hints can be gathered through the analysis of other and indeed earlier textual references to Solomon and precious objects, which are listed by Du Cange[85]. The most ancient text refers to the year 531, when, according to the chronicles, the Frankish king Childebert (ca. 497-558 C.E.), after having defeated the Visigothic king Amalaric (502-531 C.E.), brought back from the expedition "ex opere Salomonis ut fertur, triginta calices, quindecim patenas, viginti quoque Evangeliorum capsas"[86]. In this specific textual context, the expression could describe both the technique and their provenance; however, the chronicler gives us a slight clue. From the way the sentence is phrased, it seems that he was quite sure about the number of items and their typology, the only doubtful statement ("ut fertur") refers to "ex opere Salomonis". What seems in question here, then, is their provenance, not their technique. The chronicler is saying that it was reported that these objects were part of the work of king Solomon. Naturally, as everything related to the arts in the Middle Ages, the craft does not have to be the physical work of king Solomon: artistic paternity is ultimately a question of responsibility. Medieval 'signatures' are rare and even when they are explicit they often indicate the headmaster running the workshop, even if the work was physically carried out

[85] These examples are drawn from the article written by Longpérier on the Louvre peacock. He listed all these occurrences, in trying to assess the meaning of the inscription on the vase, to which he was one of the first to dedicate a scholarly contribution, probably basing his examples on the entry *Salomon*, by du Cange, see above n. 79.

[86] "From the Temple of Solomon, as they relate, thirty chalices, fifteen patens and also fifteen Gospel cases".

by one of his apprentices. This interpretation, then, would take us back to the context of the temple of Jerusalem, where, under the jurisdiction of Solomon, beautiful things were made by his artisans. Whether in this context *opus* means 'building' or 'work' the difference is not fundamental: the precious pieces were probably originally thought to be part of the treasure of the Temple.

Such a claim was not entirely unjustified from an historical point of view – or at least from a well-credited pseudo-epigraphical narrative: the Visigoths of Amalaric were in fact the heirs of Alaric, the one who had sacked Rome in 410 C.E., carrying away a great booty, included some of the things that Titus had brought back from Jerusalem. This notion certainly supported the claim that several items coming from the treasure of the Temple could be found along this routeway, thus explaining several Solomonic references that would fit within this chain of historical events.

It seems then perfectly understandable why Procopius of Caesarea (ca 500-ca. 565 C.E.) relates that after the siege of Carcassonne, the Franks acquired several spoils of king Solomon (Σαλόμωνος κειμήλια) that had been stolen from the Romans by Alaric: the city had been under the control of the Visigoths since 436 C.E. Their heritage seems to have nurtured in Spain a tradition of items related to king Solomon which seems quite well established throughout the centuries: we find mentions of "vasos Salomoniegos" in a document dated 781, referring to a donation made by the sons of Silo, king of Oviedo (d. 783 C.E.), and again of "vasos vel forteras Salomonaticas" in the testament of Stephanie of Barcelone (1015-1034 C.E.), wife of Garcia IV Sanchez, king of Navarre. The adjective implies some sort of "Solomonic" quality. This second set of items seems to be made "in imitation of" something which used to be Solomon's. It seems clear that between the earliest mentions, that ascribed a certain piece to the actual treasure of king Solomon, and these latest examples, there is a shift of meaning, exemplified by the use of the derivative adjective.

So widespread and appealing must have been this idea of the objects of the Temple, that *salomon* itself seems to have become a common noun by the ninth century, probably indicating a particular kind of vase. The specific features of such a vessel are unknown to us, but must have been clear to a certain audience: "contulit ibidem cantharam exauratam unam, salomonem unum, regnum aureum unum cum gemmis pretiosissimis, et vestem unam cum

auro et gemmis albis, atque sermonum librum unum […]"[87]. Here we have a list of precious vessels and various *paraphernalia*: there is also a "salomonem" for which no other specification is provided, but it probably corresponds to another vase, since it is listed after the "cantharam", in an inventory which seems to follow a typological list. The text does not specify any single detail of it, while all the other items are somehow described.

The Spanish context

As we shall see in the course of the thesis, mentions of the spoils of the Jerusalem treasure are not uncommon in other places, but it seems likely, from most of the excerpts above quoted, that Spain was thought to host quite a bulk of them. We cannot be positive, but the relatively high concentration of mentions of things *ex opere Salomonis* seems quite revealing. It does not matter whether these accounts are entirely pseudo-epigraphical, what counts is that there was a rich narrative surrounding them. This early tradition never really disappeared and was at the origin also of the famous story of the table of Solomon in Toledo, known to have come from Alaric's booty – probably a precious altar piece, which eventually was ransacked by Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād (d. 720 C.E.) during the Ummayyad conquest of Iberia, as Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm relates in his History of the Conquest of Spain[88].

This episode could be at the origin of the tradition that sees Hārūn al-Rashīd gifting this very table to Emperor Charlemagne and makes it likely for later chroniclers to ascribe to Solomon precious objects found in the treasures of churches and manuscripts, as it will be the case with a famous cup mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis. This spin-off, which builds upon a tradition which seems quite deeply rooted in Spain, indirectly tells us that even the Muslim rulers, later on, were interested in the Solomonic heritage, not just because it was precious but because Solomon was a powerful figure in the Islamic world as well, particularly related, as we shall see in the fourth chapter, to the realm of craft and metal-working.

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[87] "He also brought one golden vase with handles, one solomon, one crown with extremely precious gems and a robe with gold and white gems and one book of sermons"; *Guillelmus Bibliothecarius in Stephano VI*, p. 237, see entry *Salomon*, by du Cange, see above n. 79.

[88] M.J. Rubiera Mata, *La mesa de Salómon*, in «Awrâq», 3 (1980), pp. 26-31; N. Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia: Medieval Arabic Narratives*, London-New York 2012, V chapter, *The Table of Solomon, a historiographical motif and its functions*, pp. 84-101.

It does not seem to be a coincidence, then, that our aquamanile and oil-lamp were produced in Spain, in a culturally mixed context, since it was a place which had been nurturing a tradition of Solomonic treasures ever since the sack of the Visigoths, which had then passed, almost unaltered to the Muslim conquerors who praised Solomon as being in charge of demonic entities, able to construct vessels and basins. It is then likely that the label on our two items was precisely meant to evoke and reinforce this local tradition. We do not know how many more objects with that label were in circulation, whether that was the product of a single workshop or of many, if it was sponsored in some official way, for whom it was meant, but it seems clear that the heritage it claimed could be appreciated in a multicultural environment that certainly shared the same Solomonic interest.

The notion of 'signing' (or of recognizing the paternity of) these works must have been common in Spain. Benjamin (1130-1173 C.E.), who came from Tudela, a village on the Ebro valley, in describing the two pillars that he saw in the Lateran during his famous journey, says they were inscribed[89]: "There are in the church of St. John in the Lateran two bronze columns, which had been in the Temple from among the handiwork of King Solomon, peace be upon him; and on both is carved "Solomon son of David". The Jews is Rome reported (to me) that every year on the Ninth of Av[90] they found sweat running down them like water"[91].

These pillars constitute a particular case in itself, located at a crossroad of several narrative threads. On the one hand, the rabbis had been fostering a tradition of Temple *mirabilia* related to the city of Rome. The notion that some of the spoils of the Temple of Jerusalem had often been seen there by a rabbi visiting the city was common in midrashic literature[92]. Therefore, one could see the mention of the two pillars in Benjamin of Tudela's narration as a direct

[89] Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela, Critical Text, Translation and Commentary*, by M.N. Adler, London 1907, p. 7.

[90] A date corresponding to the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem.

[91] M.-T. Champagne – R. Boustan, *Walking in the Shadows of the Past: The Jewish Experience of Rome in the Twelfth Century*, in «Medieval Encounters», 17 (2011), pp. 462-492, p. 477.

[92] Moreover, it seems that pictorial echoes of the tradition of the spoils left an impact on the Jewish manuscript tradition of Spain. On the ilustrations of the vessels see, for instance, J. Gutmann, *The Messianic Temple in Spanish Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts*, in *The Temple of Solomon: archaeological fact and medieval tradition in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish art*, ed. by J. Gutmann, Missoula (MT) 1976, pp. 125-145 and J. Gutmann, *Hebrew Manuscript Painting*, London 1979.

response to the expectation of seeing part of these famous *spolia* in Rome, as a way to reinforce this tradition and to remark an identity. Benjamin's interpretation was not the only one; in general, the Lateran pillars looked quite impressive and other, parallel accounts, tried to ascertain their provenance[93].
Benjamin's claim was strongly supported by the Biblical passage above quoted, that mentions the two gigantic bronze pillars, Jachim and Boaz, which ornated the Temple of Jerusalem[94]. Now, since the columns he mentions likely correspond to two of the still extant bronze columns that make up the altar of the S. Sacrament in the Lateran[95], one wonders if it wasn't the habit of seeing inscriptions of this kind in Spain which prompted rabbi Tudela to extend the label to the columns in Rome. On the other hand, however, Benjamin's identification was also strongly supported by a local Christian tradition prompted by the priesthood of the Lateran, which connected, at least since Constantinian times, the church with biblical Judaism. Evidences of the continuity of such an association are strong throughout the tenth, twelfth and thirteenth century: inscriptions in the church record that several biblical relics, such as the Ark of the Covenant, the tablets of the Law, the staff of Moses and Aaron, were concealed or kept in St. John[96]. The identification of the pillars with the columns of the Temple, therefore, was quite likely shared also by the Lateran élite.

[93] An alternative twelfth-century tradition, based on a passage from Servius's commentary to Virgil III *Georgica*, for instance, related that they came from the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus and they were the four pillars made by Augustus with the bronze taken away from the rostra of Cleopatra's ships and then put on the Capitol by Domitianus.

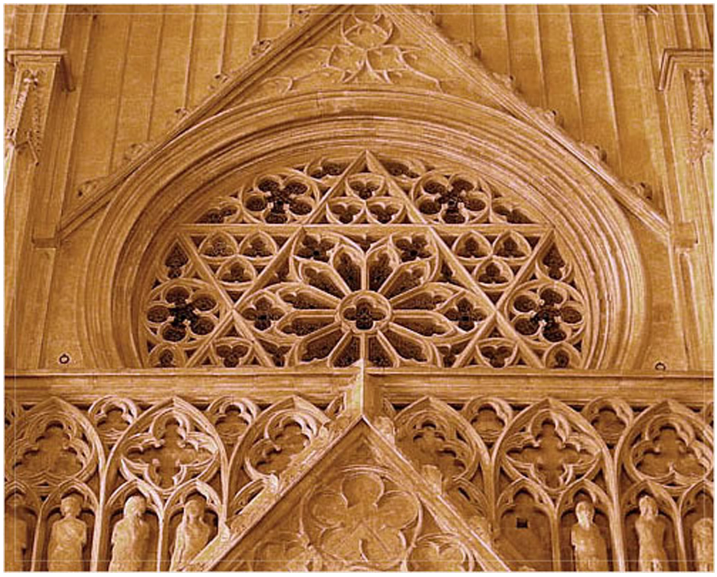
[94] In general, the two-columns motif is a decorative and symbolic element which will exert a strong influence, both in Christian and Jewish contexts. We find a variety of pillars in churches and synagogues that were supposed to represent or evoke those in Solomon's Temple. The declination of this symbol varied greatly: they could be represented as spiraling columns, as covered in phytomorphs decorations, or as a free-standing, out of scale pillars in façade, or even knotted. Despite this lack of uniformity, they were all recognized as Solomonic symbols. See S. Luzi, *Le colonne e il Tempio di Salomone. La storia, la leggenda, la fortuna*, Roma 2002, particularly pp. 29-74.

[95] P. Liverani, *Le colonne e il capitello in bronzo d'età romana dell'altare del SS. Sacramento in Laterano. Analisi archeologica e problematica storica*, in «Atti della Pontificia Accademia», rendiconti, serie III, LXIV-LXV (1991-93), pp. 75-99.

[96] Champagne – Boustan, *Walking in the Shadows of the Past*, pp. 476-481.

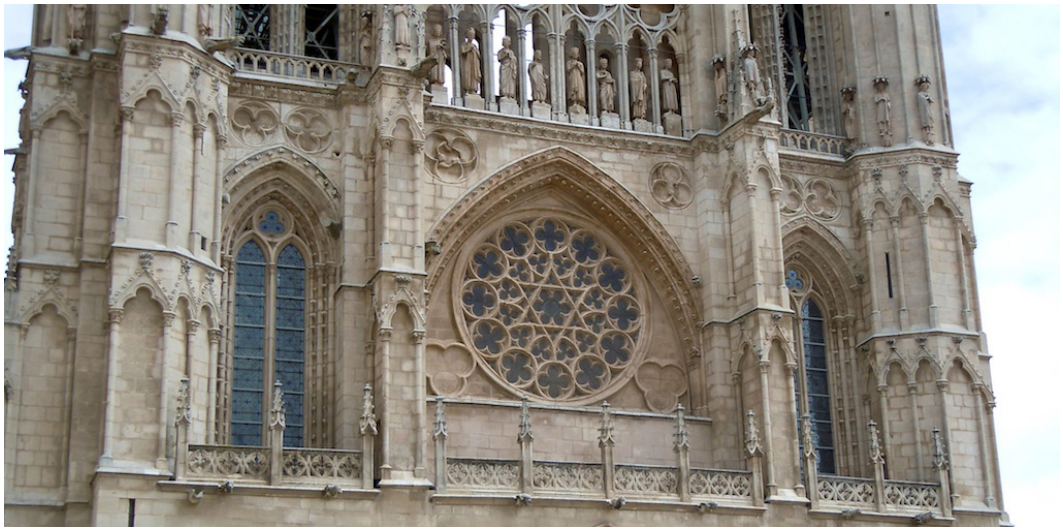
Other Solomonic references in church contexts

The case of the pillars is not the only one where a Solomonic element is adapted to a church context. The scholar Millás Vallicrosa, in an article very scarcely known[97] mentioned the case of the rose window above the Puerta de los Apóstoles in Valencia's cathedral (began in 1262 C.E.), which was referred to as "el Salomó" in various thirteenth and fourteenth century documents. The reason of this name, as the scholar suggested, depended on the fact that the circle of the window was inscribed with the hexagram, or six-pointed star, which was known as seal of Solomon (or shield of David in a culturally Jewish context)[98]. A similar decorative motif appears in one of the arches of the cloister of Lérida's old Cathedral and I should add that, just to limit ourselves to a Spanish context, also in the rose window of Valencia [ill. 5], Burgos cathedral [ill. 6]

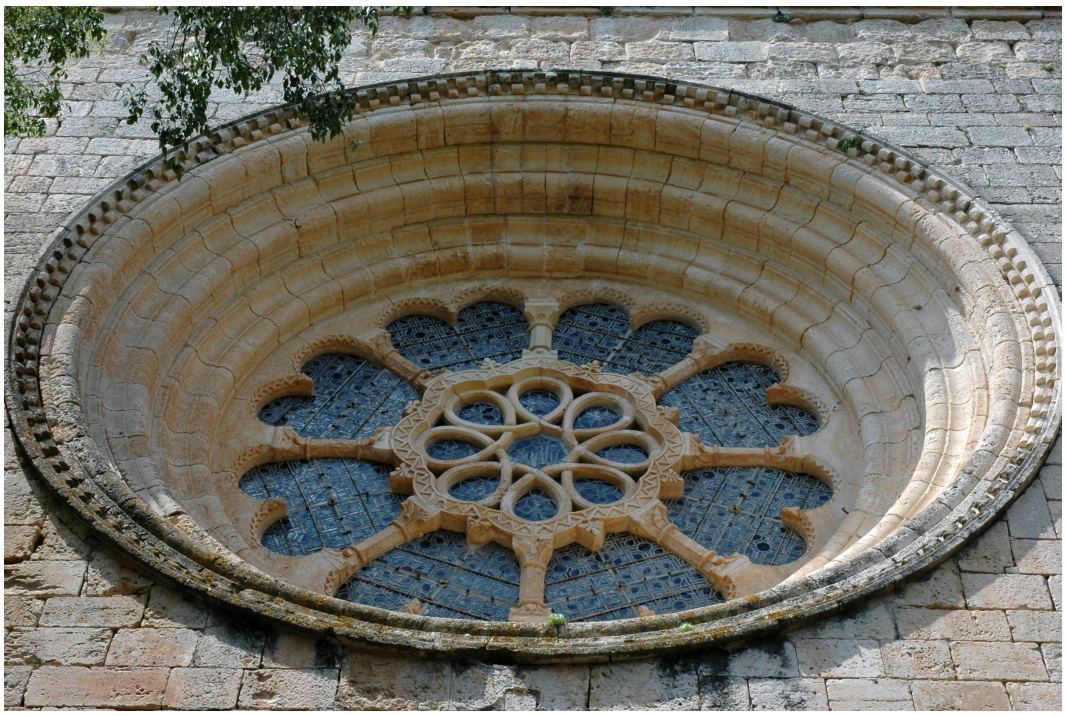


[97] J.M. Millás Vallicrosa, *Sobre la Terminologia artistica de "Salomo"*, in «Sefarad», 17 (1957), pp. 375-378.

[98] For the seal of Solomon in the Spanish context, see E. Fernández Medina, *The Seal of Solomon: from Magic to Messianic Device*, in *Seals and Sealing Practises in the Near East, Developments in Administration and Magic from Prehistory to the Islamic Period*, ed. by I. Regulski – K. Duistermaat – P. Verkinderen, Leuven-Paris-Walpole (MA), pp. 175-188.



or, varied in shape, in the Catalan monastery-church of Santes Creus [ill. 7]. It could certainly be taken only as a geometric pattern reminding of the famous seal.



I wonder whether the clear reference to Solomon might have indicated a more specific apotropaic function. Being the symbol usually associated with the ring of king Solomon, which, according to an early Judeo-Christian tradition, shared later on also by the Islamic world, gave him control over demons, it might have been built on a large scale and in a sacred context in order to keep away the evil

spirits. The six-pointed star or the pentacle are in fact variants of the so-called knot of Solomon – in its basic shape constituted by two closed loops, interlaced in such a way as to form a cruciform pattern – a geometrical pattern recurring in at least a dozen ways in so many different cultural and chronological contexts that it is considered an archetypical symbol *par excellence*[99]. The high number of variants and its multiple appearances should not, however, prevent us from attributing a precise meaning, where possible, to its occurrence[100]. Interpreted as a symbol of alliance, of the *continuum* which symbolizes eternal regeneration, and therefore the mystery of infinity and life itself, the interpretation of its function is often made difficult by its decorative effect. Traditionally, knots are endowed with the power of ambiguity which is so typical of magical devices: capable to block and imprison if tied, but also symbols of a strong bond. Through their shapes, knots also evoke labyrinth-patterns, visual nets meant to distract and confuse the demonic entities that hover, invisible, above any human activity.

As Ruth Mellinkoff has recently argued[101], most of the monstruous, grotesque and puzzling elements like mazes, which make up the decorative programs of church façades are not necessarily intended as the visualization of the fight between Good and Evil or as the allegorical representations of human vices or as meaningless *drôleries*; they should be rather taken as guardians of those liminal spaces, like thresholds, partition walls, and hems[102], that mark the traditionally fragile boundary between safe and dangerous spaces.

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[99] U. Sansoni, *Il nodo di Salomone: simbolo e archetipo d'Alleanza*, Milano 1998.

[100] The knot of Solomon, yet with another meaning, is found also in literature, particularly in the famous poetic *tenzone* between Forese Donati and Dante Alighieri; on such a topic, see for instance G. Meacci, *Il nodo Salamone: una figura biblica nella scrittura comica*, in *Il mito nel testo* monograph of the series «Studi e testi italiani. Semestrale del Dipartimento di Italianistica e Spettacolo dell'Università di Roma "La Sapienza"», 19 (2007), pp. 25-39, particularly n. 1 for bibliography on the topic.

[101] R. Mellinkoff, *Break a Leg!*, in *Tributes to J.J.G. Alexander, The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, Art and Architecture*, ed. by S. l'Engle – G. Guest, London 2006, pp. 233-245.

[102] C.D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic incantation bowls*, Missoula (MT) 1975; J. Naveh, S. Shaked, *Amulets and magic bowls: Aramaic incantations of late antiquity*, Jerusalem-Leiden 1985; D. Levene, *A corpus of magic bowls: incantation texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity*, London 2003.

When the knot of Solomon appears in a sacred context, it most often serves an apotropaic function[103]. The Solomonic knots appearing in the scene of fight represented on the twelfth-century mosaic of Ganagobie [ill. 8], for instance, are generically interpreted by Righetti Tosti Croce as the symbols of the "forza inscindibile dell'ininterrotta alleanza salvifica che sostiene il cavaliere, l'uomo, nella sua lotta"[104].

I would instead suggest that they should be read in a more strictly Solomonic tradition: that of apotropaic amulets, well known ever since the third-fourth century C.E., where the king was represented as a soldier knight, fighting against a snake, a dragon, or a woman-demon [ill. 9], but whose exorcistic tradition goes back at least as far as the I century B.C.E.[105]. And even if the knight represented in the French mosaic is a generic soldier, the knots that accompany him should be certainly taken almost as a visual formula of a Solomonic exorcism. Similarly, if the rose-window was overtly associated to name of Solomon in contemporary textual sources, I would imagine that it was intended to have a this kind of symbolic resonance at a monumental level.

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[103] M. Righetti Tosti-Croce, *Spolia e modelli altomedievali nella scultura cistercense con una nota sul nodo di Salomone*, in *Medioevo: Immagini e Ideologie*, ed. by A.C. Quintavalle, Milano 2005, pp. 644-656.

[104] *Ibid*., p. 651.

[105] See, for instance, C. Walter, *The intaglio of Solomon in the Benaki Museum and the origins of the iconography of the warrior saints*, in «Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaiologikēs Etaireias», 4 (1989-1990), pp. 32-42; P.A. Torijano, *From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition*, Leiden 2002; P.A. Torijano, *Solomon and magic*, in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition, King, Sage and Architect*, ed. by J. Verheyden, Leiden 2012, pp. 107-125.

Conclusion

To go back to our original question: given this cultural *milieu*, it seems fair to view the earlier textual mentions of the expression *opus Salomonis* as literal indications that the object in question could be taken as belonging to the Temple's treasure. A piece like the bronze peacock, however, could not really be taken as coming from Jerusalem, if its artisan signed his name and put a date on it. The scanty number of samples we have is not sufficient to determine precisely why and when the label began to be applied, how the custom started and how widespread it was. If we had to imagine that *opus Salomonis* was inscribed on certain objects to certify, so to speak, their beauty – as the current scholarly vulgate has – we would be partly disappointed by the small *corpus* provided by our two examples. If the peacock is a work of outstanding beauty, the lamp is quite plain and it has no decoration that could seem worthy of such a praise. So, even the stance of excellent craftsmanship that is usually employed to explain the label, does not seem exempt from problems.

The association with the Temple of Solomon could nonetheless still be valid, if taken in a slightly different way. We will remember that, among the bronze items commissioned by Solomon to Hiram were the objects necessary for the cult, a category encompassing both vessels and lamps. Seen in this light, then, our aquamanile and our oil-lamp gain a possible destination: both of them could have been intended for the supply of a Spanish church: their inscription would have identified them as precious counterparts or imitations of the Solomonic body of sacred vessels described in the Hebrew Bible, maybe not too dissimilar from those *solomones* or *vasos salomoniegos* mentioned in the inventories previously quoted. The first part of the inscription, then, could act as a mark of destination, as a way of indicating their intended function. This would also help explain the presence of a cross on both items as a sign of usage within a religious context. At this point, it is the signature, extant in one case but obviously absent in the other, which marks the superior quality of the object and not the expression. What is interesting is that the craftsmanship, at least in the peacock's case, is certainly Islamic in style, even though the artisan is probably a Christian. The exotic-looking aspect of the piece could thus be ideally inscribed in that aesthetic discourse, so typical of Mediaeval religious contexts, where the evidence of 'otherness' is not problematic but, on the contrary, praised, as long as it is subordinated to the cult: it is the same environment where relics are held in precious Persian (or Persian looking) silks and Muslim *spolia* are incorporated in the very architecture of the churches[106]. Analyzing the details of cult and rituals in the Spanish context during the tenth century could possibly yield further results in this direction. It would be interesting to investigate, for instance, whether the influence exerted by the Lateran tradition, particularly strong in Catalonia, could have possibly contributed to the commission of church vessels evoking those of the Temple of Jerusalem[107]. Such a cultic tradition could help explain why the reference to Solomonic vases is to be found only in Spanish and Roman texts, the two main poles of influence of the Lateran tradition.

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[106] See for instance G. Berti – L. Tongiorgi, *I bacini ceramici medievali delle chiese di Pisa*, Roma 1981. The use of vessels of Islamic production in church façades was probably mostly aesthetic and chromatic than symbolic. However, there were several other objects, such as oliphants, silks or precious vessels that retained a such a meaning. On the oliphants, see A. Shalem, *The Oliphant: Islamic objects in historical context*, Leiden 2004. For the other items mentions, see above the discussion in chapter III (silks) and IV (bronze objects).

[107] I owe this suggestion to the kindness of prof. Michele Bacci, whom I would like to thank.

What to make, finally, of the literary expression found in French literature? It is hard to establish whether it depends on the presence of actual objects labeled in that way. The lack of other, similar, material makes it difficult to clarify the successive twist in the story of the expression, namely the use of *œuvre Salemon* as it appears most of the time in French Medieval literature. It could have been the very presence of several objects with similar features labeled *opus Salomonis*, originally depending on the biblical notion of the burnished bronze Temple vessels, that originated the literary use of it. This possibility, however suggestive, seems problematic. The scantiness of our findings could certainly depend on a series of historical accidents, but it is also quite likely that we have few surviving objects of this kind because this tradition was limited both geographically and chronologically; in other words, we could really imagine that this custom was episodic, occurring only in a certain phase of Spanish history, maybe related to a specific church; therefore we should be cautious in stating the dependence of quite a widespread literary expression – which has, to my knowledge, no actual counterpart in Spanish Mediaeval poems – from our two items.

In my view, *œuvre Salemon* is likely influenced by a literary context. I believe that an actual technique, maybe the *opus anaglapharium* or the *triphoire* or something similar, ended up being termed or defined 'Solomon-work', because it reminded the audience of the biblical descriptions of fabulous objects, like the famous *ferculum*, made in wood and ivory and inlaid with precious materials, which probably echoed the manufacture of actual, contemporary luxury artifacts produced with that technique. Through the literary usage, it crystallized and became standard. Eventually, it lost its original technical meaning, since it is easy for an author who works with a certain formulaic repertoire to borrow an expression and to employ it in a new context without really knowing what it meant.

If the two tentative reconstructions I proposed are correct, it would mean that rich imagery provided by the biblical context related to king Solomon produced two different, yet similar, results, acting in parallel, one in the literary realm, the other at an artistic level. The expression on our two Spanish objects should then not be confused with the one mentioned by French poets, even though it sprang from the same textual *milieu*.

If we had to sum up the history of the expression *opus Salomonis* in relation to precious or beautiful objects, both in literature and in actual historical contexts, then, I think it could be summarized as follows: it began as

an indication of the supposed actual provenance, i.e. the Temple of Jerusalem and it then became, particularly in Spain, a way to assess their destination of use.

On the other hand, the similarity between the craft of some luxury items (such as saddles, litters, spurs, etc.) and the biblical evocation of similar wealth caused that very technique to be renamed *œuvre Salemon* and enter the literary world. The general ambiguity of interpretation is justified by the broad range of meanings the term *opus* can take on, ranging from the idea of work, which encompasses the literary and the constructive field, to the technical and also manual acceptation and to the strong influence exerted at a symbolic level by the name of king Solomon.

Ὁ θρόνος Σολομώντειος: the Case of Constantinople

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

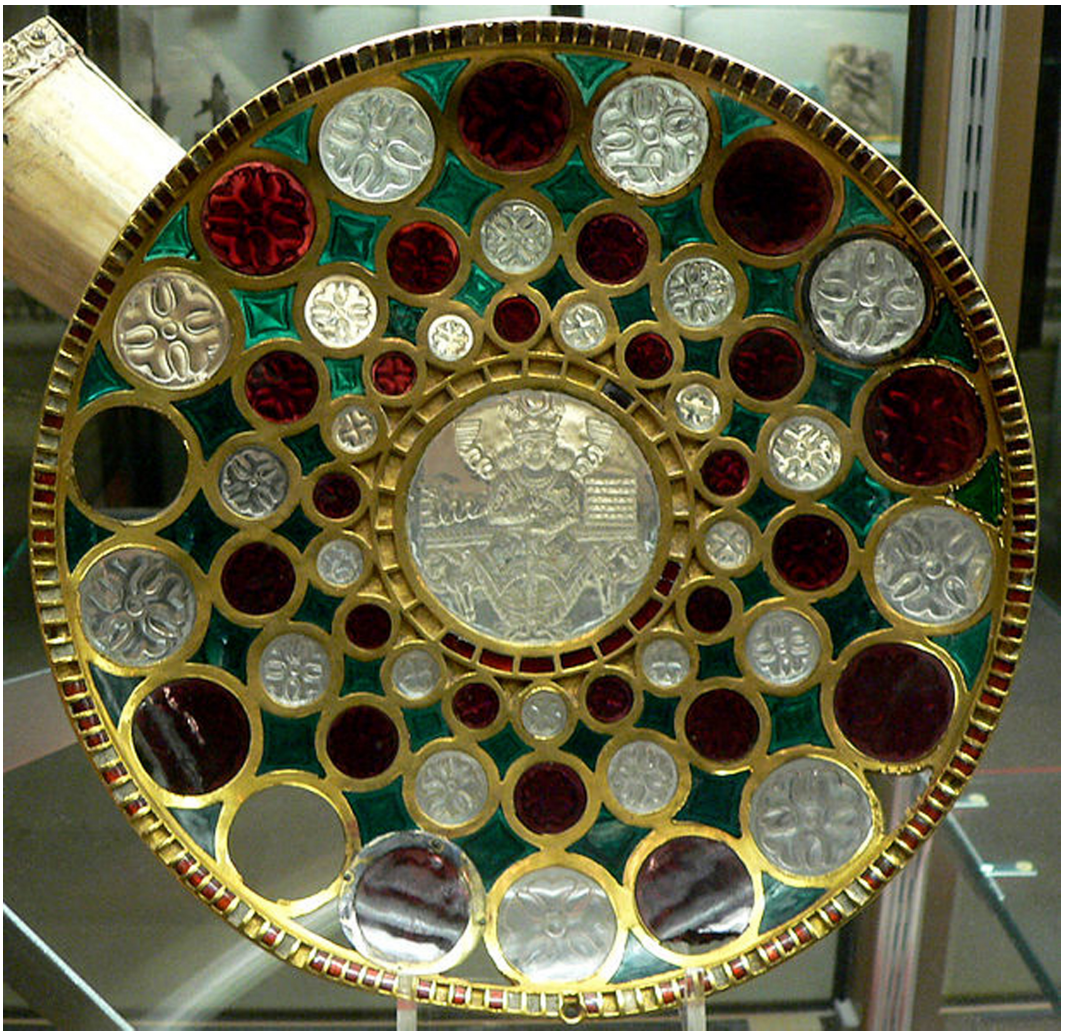
(from R. Yeats, *Sailing to Byzantium*)

Among the treasures that French churches have preserved for centuries, there are also pieces coming from afar. In his famous account, describing the riches of Saint Denis, abbot Suger noted:

> We also offered to the blessed Denis, together with some flowers from the crown of the Empress, another most precious vessel of prase, carved into the form of a boat, which King Louis, son of Philip, had left in pawn for nearly ten years; we had purchased it with the King's permission for sixty marks of silver when it had been offered to us for inspection. It is an established fact that this vessel, admirable for the quality of the precious stone as well as for the latter's unimpaired quantity, is adorned with "verroterie cloisonné" work by St. Eloy which is held to be most precious in the judgment of all goldsmiths[108].

[108] "Aliud etiam vas pretiosissimum de lapide prasio ad formam navis exsculptum, quod rex Ludovicus Philippi per decennium fere vadimonio amiserat, cum nobis ad videndum oblatum fuisset, ejusdem regis concessione sexaginta marcis argenti comparatum, cum quibusdam floribus coronae Imperatricis beato Dionysio obtulimus. Quod videlicet vas, tam pro preciosi lapidis qualitate, quam integra sui quantitate mirificum, incluso sancti Eligii opere constat ornatum, quod omnium judicio pretiosissimum aestimatur"; *Abbot Suger on the Abbey church of St. Denis and its Art Treasures*, edited, translated and annotated by E. Panofsky, Princeton (NJ) 1979, pp. 77-79.

The vessel described as part of the treasure of Saint-Denis is held at the Cabinet de Médailles de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France since 1791[109] [ill. 10].



According to a tradition which originated no later than the thirteenth century, this beautiful vessel was donated by Charles the Bald to the abbey of Saint Denis and it has long been known as Solomon's cup[110]. It is probably the oldest

[109] Bibliothèque Nationale, acc. no. 379. Diam.: 28,2 cm; h.: 5 cm; diam. of the central cameo: 7,4 cm (gold, garnet, rock crystal, glass).

[110] The earliest mention dates back to the beginning of the thirteenth century and it is found in *Les grandes Chroniques de Saint-Denis*, where the vessel, apparently made of gold, emeralds and granats, is referred to as the "hanap Salomon". The fabulous attribution is repeated through various seventeenth century inventories of the abbey treasure, until Mongez, in 1786, stated that the figure represented was a Parthian king belonging to a Sasanian dynasty. See E. Babelon, *Catalogue des camées antiques et modernes de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris 1897, pp. 213-

surviving example of Persian glass making. "It consists in a gold frame, set with plaques of rock crystal, the central one engraved […], and ruby red and emerald green glass, which is moulded with a rosette pattern" [111]. The technique St. Eloy was famous for[112] was, in fact, a Persian speciality (although not an invention), particularly between the sixth and the seventh centuries C.E. – the period to which the cup is ascribed – and it is a specific kind of *cloisonné* where glass and stones are employed for filling the cells, instead of enamel. The ensemble then results in a precious multicolored reticulation where red and white alternate and the interstices among the gold circlets are filled with green[113]. This is probably why Suger refers to prase, that is chrysoprase, a green variety of chalcedony, here probably meant to indicate the color, not the actual material.

Attributions of precious objects to King Solomon are frequent in the Middle Ages, as they were believed to come from his fabulous treasure[114] or to be worthy of a great sovereign. Although the attribution to the king of Israel is clearly legendary, the object in question was indeed made for a monarch, as the carving on the rock crystal shows: the gem is engraved with the figure of a Sassanid king enthroned on a flat-topped bench carried on winged horses. It goes also by the name of Cup of Khosrow (r. 531-579 C.E.), one of the great rulers of Sasanian Persia, although the actual attribution is debated. Moreover, it is not certain whether it corresponds to the "drinking crystal bowl, made of

219. Moreover, Charles De Linas advanced the unsupported hypothesis that Charles the Bold had inherited the cup from Charlemagne who, in turn, had received it from Hārūn al-Rashīd, *Les origines de l'orfèvrerie cloisonnée: recherches sur les divers genres d'incrustation, la joaillerie et l'art des métaux précieux*, 3 vols, Paris 1877-1887, I, p. 230. This fact, in turn, depends on a widespread legend in the Middle Ages, stating that the Abbasid caliph had gifted other rulers with costly objects that had belonged to the king of Israel. For instance, as it is narrated during the seventh voyage of Sinbad the saylor, Hārūn gave to Serendib the table (or food-tray) once belonged to Solomon. However, the fact that Charlemagne had received precious gifts from the Abbasid caliph is not a sheer invention and we find admired mentions of such an embassy in the chronicles of Eginard, see for instance G. Musca, *Carlo Magno e Harun al-Rashid*, Bari 1963.

[111] C.J. Lamm, *Glass and hard stone vessels*, in A. Pope, *A Survey of Persian Art from prehistoric times to present*, ed. by P. Ackermann, 6 vols, London-New York 1938 <1968>, III, pp. 2592-2606, p. 2595.

[112] C. De Linas, *Orfèvrerie mérovingienne. Les oeuvres de Saint-Eloi et la verroterie cloisonnée*, Paris-Arras 1864, p. 2.

[113] P. Ackermann, *Sasanian Jewelry*, in *A Survey of Persian Art*, I, pp. 771-778, p. 771.

[114] It is possible that the memory of such a cup was behind an interesting narration circulating in the Slavic world. A cup said to have been Solomon's and inscribed with a mysterious text was deciphered by St. Cyril. The episode is recounted in chapter XIII of the *Vita Constantini-Cyrilli*. For the bibliography on this point, see above n. 28.

gold, silver and glass on which the portrait of the Sasanian king Shapur was carved", seen by Ibn Ẓafar (1104-1170 C.E.) in the treasury of Constantinople and described in his account[115]. It is likely, however, that our cup left Persia and found its way westwards through the Byzantine empire, as many other costly objects did, although it seems unreasonable to conclude, as it has been proposed, that it was part of the booty resulting from the sack of Constantinople (1202-1204 C.E.)[116].

The tradition surrounding the cup, as uncertain and legendary as it is, helps to call attention to the issues taken up in the course of this chapter: the penetration of Eastern elements into Europe, their christianization through biblical lore, the role of Constantinople as a cultural bridge between East and West, the mediation of the Islamic culture, and the strategies of power – particularly kingly – representation. I begin by describing the so-called throne of Solomon, recorded in Constantinople for the first time during the tenth century, during the formal reception of foreign ambassadors. By comparing the written sources at our disposal, I analyze the visual and technical elements of this peculiar setting, by trying to establish their symbolic value and to understand them within the broader tradition of court ceremonies. In so doing, I take into account what is known of similar cases recorded for the Islamic world but I also trace their origin back to the Sasanian empire. This analysis will allow us to discuss this Solomonic throne not just against its biblical background, but in dialogue with contemporary strategies of royal representation in the Mediterranean.

The Magnaura Throne

Let us then begin by consider one of the most significant of the "Solomonic" objects from the medieval period. A *θρόνος Σολομώντειος*[117] is mentioned several times throughout the *De Ceremoniis aulae byzantine*, the account of the

[115] C.J. Lamm, *Mittelalterliche Gläser*, 2 vols, Berlin 1930, I, p. 499, n. 95.

[116] A. Shalem, *The Fall of al-mada'in: some Literary References concerning Sasanian Spoils of War in Medieval Islamic Treasures*, in «Iran», 32 (1994), pp. 77-81, p. 77. It would be chronologically impossible since Suger died in 1151. Moreover, he recounts that he acquired the vessel from king Louis VI (1081-1137), son of Philip I (1052-1108), who had been keeping it for almost ten years.

[117] On the different kind of thrones and related terminological differences, see G. Dagron, *Trônes pour un emperor*, in *Byzantium: State and Society, in Memory of Nikos Oikonomides*, ed. by A. Avramea *et al.*, Athens 2003, pp. 179-203.

ceremonial protocol, written during the reign of Constantine VII 'Porphyrogennetos' (905-959 C.E.). The fullest description of it occurs in a long passage regarding the visit of foreign legates to the emperor in the Magnaura[118], a ceremonial hall in the great palace of Constantinople, during which, a complex, almost theatrical, machine was set in motion in order to strike visitors with awe[119]. This hall had a basilical shape with apses, two lateral aisles supporting galleries, and the west side opening onto a courtyard. It probably coincided with the Senate house of Justinian. Such was the setting for the events narrated:

> And they enter the great triclinium in which the Throne of Solomon is set up […] When the foreigner enters, he falls to the floor in reverence to the emperors, and forthwith the organs sound; then he comes in and stands at a distance from the imperial throne, and forthwith the organs cease. Note that when the foreign legate comes forward toward the emperor, the élite of his retainers enter, and having prostrated themselves they take their places this side of the movable curtains. Whilst the Logothete asks the customary questions of the legate, the lions begin to roar and the birds, those on the throne as well as those in the trees, begin to sing harmoniously; and the animals on the throne rise from their places on the steps. Whilst this is happening, the foreigner's gift is brought in by the

[118] See the corresponding entry in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. by A.P. Kazhdan, Oxford 1991, 3 vols, II, p. 1628 and also J. Kostenec, *Studies on the Great Palace in Constantinople II: The Magnaura*, in «Byzantinoslavica», 60 (1999), pp. 161-182; J. Bardill, *Visualizing the Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors at Constantinople, Archaeology, text and Topograhy*, in *Visualisierung von Herrschaft, Frümittelalterliche Residenzen Gestalt und Zeremoniell*, ed. by F.A. Bauer, in «Byzas», 5 (2006), pp. 5-45.

[119] The last extensive work on the *De Cerimoniis* has been carried out at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The only full commentary is the one that accompanies the Latin translation by J. Rieske in the *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn 1829-1830). There is a partial French translation by A. Vogt, *Constantin Porpphyrogénète, Le Livre de Cérémonies*, 4 vols, Paris 1935-1939. On its compilation process, see J.B. Bury, *The Ceremonial Book of Constantine Porphyrogennetos*, in «English Historical Review», 22 (1907), pp. 209-227 and 417-439; M. McCormick, *Analyzing Imperial Ceremonies*, in «Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik», 35 (1985), pp. 1-20; A. Cameron, *The Construction of Court Ritual: the Byzantine Book of Ceremonies*, in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. by D. Cannadine – S. Price, Cambridge 1987, pp. 106-136; M. McCormick, *De Ceremoniis*, in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. by A.P. Kazhdan, Oxford 1991, 3 vols, I, pp. 595-597; A. Moffatt, *The Master of Ceremonies' Bottom Drawer: the Unfininished State of the De Ceremoniis of Constantine Porphyrogennetos*, in «Byzantinoslavica», 56 (1995), pp. 377-388.

> Protonotarios of the Course. And again after a short time the organs cease, and the lions are silent, the birds stop singing and the animals on the throne resume their usual places. After the gift has been presented, the foreigner, when so bidden by the Logothete, prostrates himself and withdraws; and as he goes out the organs sound and the lions and the birds all utter their own voices, and all the animals rise from their places on the steps. And when the foreigner goes out through the curtain, the organs and the birds cease, and the animals resume their usual places[120].

This passage describes a fascinating set of *automata* or mechanical devices (including roaring lions, moving beasts, singing birds on a tree and on the

[120] Here I quote the English translation of chapter II, 15, carried out by J.M. Feathersone, *ΔΙ' ΕΝΔΕΙΞΙΝ: Display in Court Ceremonial (De Cerimoniis II, 15)*, in *The Material and the Ideal: Essays in Mediaeval Art and Archaeology in Honour of Jean-Michael Spieser*, ed. by A. Cutler – A. Papaconstantinou, Leiden 2008, pp. 75-112, which provides also a good bibliography on this specific section of the book: Καὶ εἰσέρχονται εἰς τὸν μέγαν τρίκλινον, ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὁ Σολομώντειος ἵδρυται θρόνος [...] καὶ δὴ τούτου εἰσελθόντος, πίπτει ἐπ' ἐδάφους προσκυνῶν τοὺς δεσπότας, καὶ εὐθέως αὐλοῦσι τὰ ὄργανα εἶτα εἰσέρχεται καὶ ἵσταται ἀπὸ διαστήματος τοῦ βασιλικοῦ θρόνου, καὶ εὐθέως παίουσι τὰ ὄργανα. ἰστέον, ὅτι, τοῦ φίλου ἀποκινοῦντος πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα, εἰσέρχονται οἱ προκριτώτεροι τούτου ἄνθρωποι, καὶ προσκυνοῦντες ἵστανται ἔνδον τῶν δύο συρτῶν βήλων. καὶ ποιοῦντος τοῦ λογοθέτου τὰς συνήθεις <ἐρωτήσεις> εἰς αὐτὸν, ἄρχονται βρυχᾶσθαι οἱ λέοντες καὶ τὰ ὄρνεα τὰ ἐν τῳ σέντζῳ, ὁμοίως καὶ τὰ ἐν τοῖς δένδρεσι, ᾄδειν ἐναρμονίως. Τὰ δέ ζῶα τὰ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ ἀπὸ τῶν ἰδίων βαθμῶν ἀνορθοῦνται. καὶ ἐν τῳ ταῦτα οὕτως τελεῖσθαι εἰσάγεται τὸ τοῦ ἐθνικοῦ κανίσκιον ὑπὸ τοῦ πρωτονοταρίου τοῦ δρόμου, καὶ πάλιν μετ' ὀλίγον παίουσι τὰ ὄργανα, καὶ οἱ λέοντες ἠρεμοῦσι, καὶ τὰ ὄρνεα τοῦ ᾄδειν παύονται, τά τε θηρία τοῖς ἰδίοις τόποις ἐγκαθέζονται. καὶ δὴ μετὰ τὴν συμπλήρωσιν τοῦ κανισκίου ὑπὸ τοῦ λογοθέτου προτραπεὶς ὁ ἐθνικὸς προσκυνήσας ἐξέρχεται, καὶ ἐν τῷ τοῦτον ἀποκινῆσαι ἔξελθεῖν τὰ τε ὄργανα αὐλοῦσιν καὶ οἱ λέοντες καὶ τὰ ὄρνεα τὴν ἰδίαν ἕκαστον ἀποπληροῦσι φωνὴν, καὶ τὰ θηρία πάντα τῶν ἰδίων βαθμίδων διανίστανται. καὶ ἐν τῷ ἐξιέναι τὸν ἐθνικὸν τοῦ βήλου παίουσι τὰ τε ὄργανα, καὶ τὰ ὄρνεα καὶ τὰ θηρία τοῖς ἰδίοις τόποις ἐγκαθέζονται. *Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris de cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, *CSHB*, XII, ed. by J. Reiske, Bonn 1829-1830, pp. 567-569. Here I propose the Greek text from the traditional edition by Reiske, even though the translation proposed by the scholar is not exempt from errors. In the account we read in the *De cerimoniis*, for instance, he translates "organa pulsatilia" and "organa flatilia", in rendering the two Greek verbs παίουσι (strike, hit) and αὐλοῦσιν (play the flute, emit a flute-like sound). He takes the term ὄργανα in its more generical sense and imagines a series of different music instruments, alternatively playing. In this way, the whole ceremonial would be left, according to this reconstruction, with no actual organs. However – as it has more convincingly proposed – the correct translation should be "the organs cease to play" (παίουσι) and "the organs play" (αὐλοῦσιν), this latter verb being employed to describe the sound of organs produced by the air passing through its reed pipes, not very dissimilar from those of the *aulos*, a sort of hoboe.

throne) that were placed around the seat. The apparatus made use of organs, whose sounds and silence marked the different phases of the ceremony.
This whole setting is confirmed by an almost contemporary and independent account related by Liudprand from Cremona (ca. 922-ca.972 C.E.), who witnessed the throne in action when he came to the court in 949 as an envoy of Berengar II of Italy.

> For at Constantinople there is a palace next to the Great Palace, of wondrous beauty and size, that is called Magnaura by the Greeks, having inserted a "u" in the place of the digamma, as if it were *magna aura*. And so Constantine ordered this mansion to be prepared in due fashion both because of the messengers of the Spaniards, who then were coming there for the first time, and because of Liutefred and me. In front of the emperor's throne there stood a certain tree of gilt bronze, whose branches, similarly gilt bronze, were filled with birds of different sizes, which emitted the songs of the different birds corresponding to their species. The throne of the emperor was built with skill in such a way that at one instant it was low, then higher, and quicky it appeared most lofty; and lions of immense size (though it was unclear if they were of wood or brass, they certainly were coated with gold) seemed to guard him, and, striking the ground with their tails, they emitted a roar with mouths open and tongues flickering. Leaning on the shoulders of two eunuchs, I was led into this space, before the emperor's presence. And when, upon my entry, the lions emitted their roar and the birds called out, each according to its species, I was not filled with special fear or admiration, since I had been told about all these things by one of those who knew them well. Thus, prostrated for a third time in adoration before the emperor, I lifted my head; and the person whom earlier I had seen sitting elevated to a modest degree above the ground, I suddenly spied wearing different clothes and sitting almost level with the ceiling of the mansion. I could not understand how he did this, unless perchance he was lifted up there by a pulley of the kind by which tree trunks are lifted. Then, however, he did not speak at all for himself, since, even if he wished to, the great space between us would render it unseemly, so he asked about the life of Berengar and his family through a minister […][121].

[121] For an accurate edition of Liudprand's work, see *Liudprandi Cremonensis Opera Omnia*, ed. by P. Chiesa (*Corpus Christianorum Scriptorum Latinorum*, vol. 94), Turnhout 1998. For the translation I refer to *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona (Medieval Texts in Translation)*, translated by P. Squatriti, Washington (DC) 2007, pp. 197-198; "Est

To the information provided in the *De Cerimoniis*, Liudprand adds several significant details. Of particular note are his observations regarding the material of the *automata* – gilt bronze – and the fact that the level of the throne could be moved up and down, allowing the emperor to rise above the bewildered ambassadors. Although the chronicler is eager to state that he responded with neither fear nor admiration – having learned in advance what to expect – such an *excusatio non petita* sounds more like a confirmation rather than a disclaimer of the effectiveness of the spectacle of the Magnaura. It is fascinating to think about the Magnaura like a stage, rather than a simple throne hall, where an actual *mise en scène* took place. Along with the official figures we would expect, like the emperor himself, the logothete, the eunuchs, the ambassadors, and the people of the party – that is, the actors and the spectators – there must have been several people in charge of the theatrical effects, almost like stagehands: some responsible for of the organs, someone (either there or in a room below or behind) to set in motion the throne mechanism and also activate the other *automata*. The Magnaura could become an illusionistic space where things happened in a wondrous way. Visitors were lured to participate in what they saw, almost believe it, with the same attitude which naturally occurs during a performance[122]. Liudprand tries to break the suspension of disbelief

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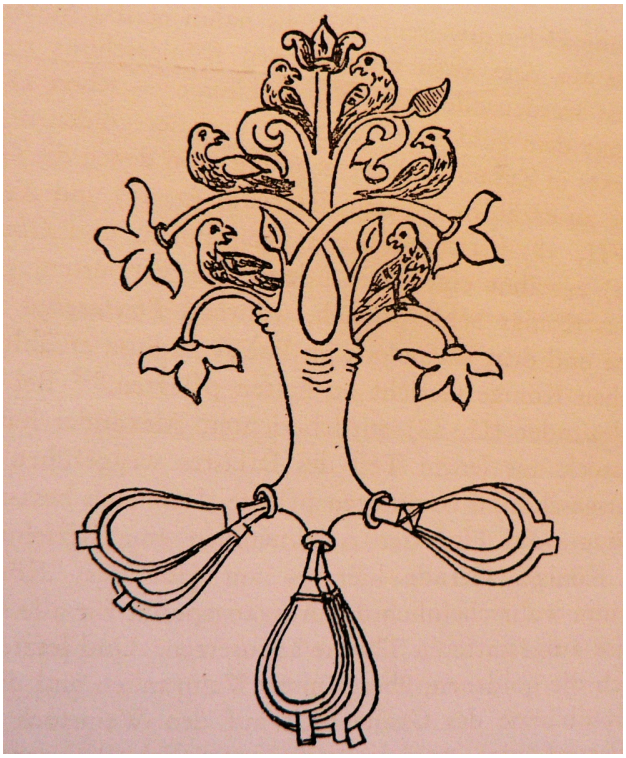
Costantinopoli domus palatio contigua mirae magnitudinis, quae a Graecis per V loco digammae posita Megaura, quasi magna aura, pro aula dicitur. Hanc itaque Costantinus, tum ob Hispanorum nuncios, qui tunc noviter eo venerant, tum ob me, et Liuthefredum hoc modo parari iussit. Aerea, sed deaurata quaedam arbor ante Imperatororis oculos stabat; cuius ramos itidem aereae diversis generis, deauratae volucres replebant, quae secundum species suas diversarum avium voces emittebant. In primis vero solium hujusmodi erat arte compositum, ut in momento humile, excelsius modo, quam mox videretur sublime. Sed sedile, quod erat immensa magnitudinis, incertum utrum cerei, an lignei, verum auro tecti leonis quasi custodiebant. In hac igitur duorum eunuchorum humeris incumbens ante Imperatoris praesentiam sua sum deductus. Cumque in adventu meo leones rugitum emitterent, aves secundum species suas perstreperent, nullo sum terrore, nulla admiratione commotus; quoniam quidem ex his omnibus eos, qui bene noveram, fueram percontatus. Tertio itaque imperatorem pronus adorans, caput sustuli: et quem prius moderata mensura a terra elevatum sedere vidi, mox aliis indutum vestibus penes domus laquear sedere prospexi. Quod qualiter fieret cogitare non potui, nisi forte eo sit subvectus ergalio, quo torcularium arbores subvehuntur. Per se autem tunc nihil locutus; quoniam et si vellet, et intercapedo maxima indecorum faceret, de vita Berengarii et sospitate per logothetam est percontatus", *Antapodosis*, VI, 5; *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, II, pp. 469-470.

[122] It is all the more interesting to see that devices that were traditionally employed for theatrical stages are here employed in a court setting, especially considering that performances in

that was expected of him as a spectator: he looks for the explanation of the mechanism, without finding it [ill. 11]. In his rational approach, he tries to show that the whole ceremony is just a trick, just a display of special effects. Yet he is unable to explain the mechanisms at work behind the throne[123].



Constantinople during the period under examination were very limited. For some discussion on the problems related to the Byzantine theatre see A. Vogt, *Le Theatre à Byzance et dans l'Empire du IVeme au XIIeme siécle*, in «Revue des Questions Historiques», 1931; V. Cottas, *Le Théatre à Byzance*, Paris 1931; L. Brehier, *Le théatre à Byzance*, in «Journal des Savants», 30 (1932), pp. 249-261; G. La Piana, *The Byzantine Theater*, in «Speculum», (11) 1936, pp. 171-211; W. Puchnan, *Acting in the Byzantine periode: evidence and problems*, in *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, ed. by P. Easterlin – E. Hall, Cambridge 2002, pp. 304-326; K. Neiiendam, *The art of acting in antiquity*, Herning (Denmark) 1992, particularly the chapter dedicated to *Byzantine profane theatre*, pp. 94-127; A.W. White, *The Artifice of Eternity: A Study of Liturgical and Theatrical Practices in Byzantium*, dissertation, 2006.

[123] According to J. Trilling, *Daedalus and the Nightingale: Art and Technology in the Myth of the Byzantine Court*, in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. by H. Maguire, Wasghington (DC) 1997, pp. 217-230, this ignorance is a crucial point in the audience ceremonial. The ability to baffle and to create psychological advantage are keys to the relationship between the emperor and the ambassadors. According to Trilling, this display was employed to subtly convey the idea that technology could be used in more harmful ways, if needed.

These two accounts complement each other, as they reflect internal and external perspectives, respectively. One of the key differences between them is the overt reference to Solomon in the *Book of Ceremonies*, which is notably absent in Liudprand's account. It is possible that the ambassador was simply unaware of this designation. Or perhaps he might have decided to skip such a detail, in keeping with his attempt to scale down the importance and the impact of the whole machinery. Whatever the case, it is clear that it was a Byzantine claim, a specific element of imperial propaganda that aimed at underlining the connection with the king of Israel.

It should be noted, however, that, even in the *Book of Ceremonies*, the throne is never literally described as the throne of Solomon (*θρόνος Σολομώντος*), using the genitive form. Instead, the text employs an adjective form (*Σολομώντειος*), which seems to lay stress on the "Solomonic" quality of the throne, rather than on identifying it with the specific royal seat that once belonged to the historical son of David. In fact, if we compare the medieval Byzantine throne of the Magnaura with the two biblical references to the throne of Solomon[124], we notice important divergences between the two:

> Fecit etiam rex Salomon thronum de ebore grandem: et vestivit eum auro fulvo nimis, qui habebat sex gradus: et summitas throni rotunda erat in parte posteriori: et duae manus hinc atque inde tenentes sedile: et duo leones stabant juxta manus singulas. Et duodecim leunculi stantes super sex gradus hinc atque inde: non est factum tale opus in universis regnis[125].

[124] The first book of Kings constitutes the textual source for the second version, probably written between 300 and 250 B.C.E.: the excerpt is, in fact, reported almost *verbatim*, except for one difference. The *Chronicles* replace the back of the seat and its rounded top with a precious footstool, a discrepancy which, quite possibly, has a philological explanation. Several information regarding king Solomon and his reign found in the *Books of Kings* were drawn from a lost source, openly mentioned, referred to as the *Book of the Acts of Solomon*, probably a lost collection of annals (1 Kings, 11: 41).

[125] "King Solomon also made a great throne of ivory: and overlaid it with the finest gold. It had six steps: and the top of the throne was round behind: and there were two hands on either side holding the seat: and two lions stood, one at each hand. And twelve little lions stood upon the six steps on the one side and on the other: there was no such work made in any kingdom", D-R, 3 Kings 10: 18-20.

> Fecit quoque rex solium eburneum grande, et vestivit illud auro mundissimo. Sex quoque gradus, quibus ascendebatur ad solium, et scabellum aureum, et brachiola duo altrinsecus, et duos leones stantes juxta brachiola, sed et alios duodecim leunculos stantes super sex gradus ex utraque parte: non fuit tale solium in universis regnis[126].

Of course, the two thrones share a general resemblance, in particular the golden material of with both are made and the presence of the lions. But this does not account for the tree, the singing birds, the other beasts, the overall differences in structure, and the capacity for movement and sound displayed by the Magnaura one.

We should, therefore, consider *Σολομώντειος* as something either worthy of King Solomon or endowed with qualities typical of him. As we have already briefly mentioned in relation to the cup described at the beginning, these two layers of meaning often superimposed and end up coinciding. It is then possible that the Solomonic quality of the throne in the Magnaura resided in its complex mechanisms, in the craftsmanship required in order to produce the theatrical effects that moved the seat and the *automata* and created their sounds[127]. However, the presence of the lions could easily serve as a *trait d'union* with the biblical description, although the original model for this set of objects cannot certainly be ascribed to the Bible but only adjusted to it *a posteriori*.

The Throne in the Byzantine Chronicles

The question of the model of the Magnaura throne has already been the focus of some investigation[128]. It has been shown convincingly that Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos was not the first to possess such a throne, which apparently has a history reaching back at least into the ninth century[129].

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[126] "The king also made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. And six steps to go up to the throne, and a footstool of gold, and two arms one on either side, and two lions standing by the arms: moreover twelve other little lions standing upon the steps on both sides: there was not such a throne in any kingdom", D-R, 2 Chronicles 9: 17-19.

[127] On this point, see also the commentary to the *De Cerimoniis* by Reiske, *CSHB*, XIII, pp. 641-645.

[128] For a complete list of sources see, O. Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestallung im Höfischen Zeremoniell*, Darmstadt 1956, pp. 134-135.

[129] G. Brett, *The automata in the Byzantine 'throne of Solomon'*, in «Speculum», 29 (1954), pp. 477-487; C. Canavas, *Automaten in Byzanz. Der Thron von Magnaura*, in *Automaten in Kunst*

Chronicles relate, for instance, that a set of peculiar objects made by an excellent goldsmith during the reign of emperor Theophilus (829-842 C.E.) were held in the *Pentapyrgium*, a display cabinet where they could be viewed[130]. Some of the accounts also report that his son, Michael III (842-867 C.E.), in desperate need of money, had them melted down. Georgius Monachus, writing in the ninth century, recounts:

> And since Theophilus was a lover of beauty, through the best of goldsmiths, a man of great erudition and a relative of the patriarch Anthony, he created the Pentapyrgium, as they call it, two enormous organs in solid gold, adorned with many precious gems and stones. And also a golden tree, in which little birds, by virtue of some machinery, sang sweetly[131].

Symeon Magister, adds to the information given by the earlier chroniclers two main details: that the Pentapyrgium was entirely (ἔξ ἀρχῆς, "from the beginning") a commission by Theophilus and that the mechanisms responsible for the sounds emitted by the birds were of pneumatic nature (διὰ μηχανῆς τινὸς μουσικῶς ἐκελάδουν, τοῦ πνεύματος διὰ κρυφίων πόρων εἰσπεμπομένου)[132].

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und Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, ed. by K. Grubmüller – M. Stock Band, Wiesbaden 2003, pp. 49-72.

[130] Literally, the *pentapyrgion* would indicate a a five-domes or five-towers structure, both full-scale or miniaturized (like a reliquiary). In this case, it was probably a cupboard of great dimensions. See *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, III, p. 1625. However, it has also been proposed that it was an actual building, "a triconch or tetraconch with a central dome and four added ancillary corner towers", Kostenec, *Studies on the Great Palace*, p. 171.

[131] Φιλόκοσμος δὲ ὢν ὁ αὐτὸς Θεόφιλος κατεσκεύασε διὰ τοῦ ἄρχοντος τοῦ Χρυσοχόου λογιωτάτου πάνυ ὄντος καὶ συγγενοῦς Ἀντωνίου πατριάρχου τό τε Πενταπύργιον καὶ τὰ δύο μέγιστα ὄργανα ὁλόχρυσα, διαφόροις λίθοις καὶ ἐλίοις καλλύνας αὐτά, δένδρον δὲ χρυσοῦν, ἐν ᾧ στρουθοὶ ἐφεζόμενοι διὰ μηχανῆς τινὸς μουσικῶς ἐκελάδουν. ἐκαινούργησε δὲ καὶ τὰς βασιλικὰς στολὰς ὁ βασιλεύς, ἀνανεώσας καὶ χρυσοϋφάντους κατασκευάσας τοὺς λεγομένους λώρους καὶ λοιπὰ πάντα, *CSHB*, XLV, ed. by I. Bekker, p. 793. The version of Symeon Logothete, known as Leo Grammaticus, composed during the tenth century, is almost identical to that of Symeon, see *CSHB*, XXXI, ed. by I. Bekker, p. 215.

[132] Ὁ τοίνυν βασιλεὺς Θεόφιλοσ φιλόκοσμος ὢν κατασκευάζει ἔξ ἀρχῆς τὸ Πενταπύργιον, καὶ τὰ δύο μέγιστα ὄργανα ὁλόχρυσα μετὰ διαφόρων λίθων, καὶ δένδρον χρύσεον, ἐν ᾧ στρουθοὶ ἐφεζόμενοι διὰ μηχανῆς τινὸς μουσικῶς ἐκελάδουν, τοῦ πνεύματος διὰ κρυφίων πόρων εἰσπεμπομένου, *CSHB*, XLV, ed. by I. Bekker, p. 627.

In the tenth century collection of texts known as *Theophanes continuatus*, instead, the main focus of the narration is emperor Michael III who, in need of money, ordered the destruction of the Pentapyrgium content:

> Being a perverted lover of the circus and having squandered, in a very short time, a lot of money in theatrical performances and obsecene exhibitions, and since the days fixed for the imperial largitions approached and he lacked a way to collect the sum of money for the soldiers that had strenuously fought in battle and defended the empire, melting down the famous golden plane, the two lions and the two griffins, that were made in solid gold as well, the organ made in gold and also the rest of the magnificent imperial vestments, weighting no less than two hundreds *kentenaria*, he ordered the gold from these objects to be put in the treasure[133].

To this account, however, John Skylitzes, a twelfth century writer, adds an interesting detail: "These [vestments] he gave to the *eidikos* to melt down too, but they did not get melted down before he departed from the world of men, whereupon Basil became ruler and he recalled [the vestments]"[134].

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[133] ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐντὸς ὀλίγου καιροῦ τὸν τοσοῦτον πλοῦτον ταῖς τοιαύταις σκενικαῖς καὶ ἀθέσμοις κατανάλωσε πράξεσι, δεινὸς ἐραραστὴς ὢν ἱπποδρομίας, ἦλθεν δὲ ὁ τῆς διανομῆς τῶν βασιλικῶν δωρεῶν καιρός, καὶ χρημάτων πόρος οὐκ ἦν δι᾽ ὧν τὰ στρατεύματα φιλοτιμούμενα τὰς τῶν ἐχθρῶν παρατάξεις ἀμύνονται, τήν τε χρυσῆν ἐκείνην καὶ πολυθρύλητον πλάτανον καὶ τοὺς δύο χρυσοῦς λέοντας, πρὸς δὲ καὶ τοὺς δύο γρῦπας ὁλοχρύσους ὄντας καὶ σφυρηλάτους, καὶ τὸ ὁλόχρυσον ὄργανον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἕτερα ἔργα τῆς βασιλικῆς ἐκθέσεως, ὁλκὴν ἔχοντα τῶν διακοσίων οὐκ ἔλαττον κεντηναρίων, χωνεύσας χαράξαι δέδωκεν ἐν τῳ βασιλεικῳ ταμίειῳ, *CSHB*, XLV, ed. by I. Bekker, p. 173.

[134] "Within a short time, he had distributed so much wealth by this kind of inappropriate behaviour that when came the time for the distribution of imperial bonuses and salaries there was no money available. So he melted down the famous golden plane tree, the two golden lions and the two griffins (which were also of beaten gold); the solid gold organ and other works of art which the Roman empire was cause of admiration, weighing no less than two hundred *kentenaria*. All these he melted them down and gave [the gold] to be minted in the imperial treasury. He did likewise with the imperial vestments of which some were of solid gold, others embroidered with gold", *John Skylitzes*: *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057: Translation and Notes*, translated by J. Wortley, with an introduction by B. Flusin and notes by J.-C. Cheynet, Cambridge 2010, pp. 64-65.

George Kedrenos, in his twelfth-century chronicle, substantially repeats what said by his predecessors about Michael[135] and so does John Zonaras (d. 1159 C.E.)[136].

An interesting insertion is made by Michael Glycas, who specifies that not only the birds sang but also that the lions emitted a roar (ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τοὺς λέοντας, ἃ πρὸς ἔκπληξιν τῶν ἐθνῶν μεμηχάνηται)[137].

Finally, Constantine Manasses (ca. 1130-ca. 1187 C.E.) who also writes late in the twelfth century, adds to the previous accounts a detail of general interest regarding Theophilus's set of *automata*. Leo 'philosophus', the maker, had also made a clock for the emperor:

> Master of all philosophers, well versed in all disciplines, Leo had made for Theophilus, Michael's father, a mechanical clock, through which the emperor, while staying in the palace, could see at every hour of the day the novelties that had been experimented by the Arabs and by the Syrians[138].

For brevity, I give here a synthetic table with all the elements mentioned by the various texts. They are listed in a tentatively chronological order and for each of the source it is indicated which set the chronicler is describing: whether it is the one ascribed to Theophilus, that was melted under his son Michael, or the one

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[135] Οὕτως ἐκεῖνος εἰς οὐδὲν δέον τὰ δημόσια κατεδαπάνα τε καὶ ἀνήλισκεν. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐντὸς ὀλίγου ταῖς τοιαύταις ἀθέσμοις πράξεσι τὸν τοσοῦτον κατεδαπάνησε πλοῦτον, ἦλθε δὲ ὁ τῆς διανομῆς βασιλικῶν δωρεῶν καιρὸς καὶ χρημάτων πόρος οὐκ ἦν, τήν τε χρυσῆν ἐκείνην καὶ πολυθρύλητον πλάτανον καὶ τοὺς δύο λέοντας καὶ τοὺς δύο γρῦπας, χρυσοῦς καὶ αὐτοὺς σφυρηλάτους ὄντας, καὶ τὰ ὁλόχρυσα ὄργανα καὶ ἕτερα ἔργα, δι᾽ ὧν ἡ Ῥωμαίων ἐθαυμάζετο βασιλεία, ὁλκὴν ἔχοντα διακοσίων οὐκ ἔλαττον κεντηναρίων, χωνεύσας χαράξαι δέδωκεν ἐν τῷ βασιλικῷ ταμιείῳ, *CSHB*, IX, ed. by I. Bekker, p. 160; "And so he squandered the public money. Having dissipated it in a very short time in a series of terrible actions and since the day fixed for imperial donations approached and he lacked a way to recover the money, he ordered to have melted down that famous golden tree and the two golden lions and griffins, in beaten gold as well, source of admiration for the Roman emperor, and to put the money obtained from these in the treasury".

[136] *CSHB*, XLIX, ed. by M. Pinder, p. 393.

[137] Οὗτος ὁ Μιχαὴλ χρημάτων ἀπορήσας καὶ τὰς χρυσᾶς ἐκείνας πλατάνους, ἃς ὁ φιλόσοφος κατεσέυασε Λέων, ὡς ἄνωθεν ἔφημεν, ἐν αἷς στρουθοὶ καθήμενοι διὰ μηχανῆς ἐκελάδουν, ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τοὺς λέοντας, ἃ πρὸς ἔκπληξιν τῶν ἐθνῶν μεμηχάνηται (καὶ οὗτοι γὰρ ἔστιν ὅτε βρυχώμενοι ἐθαυμάζοντο), κατακόψας ἀνάλωσεν, *CSHB*, XCIV, ed. by I. Bekker, p. 543.

[138] ὁ μυριομαθέστατος ἐν φιλοσόφοις Λέων / τῷ φιλοκάλῳ βασιλεῖ τῷ Μιχαὴλ γενέτῃ / ἐξαίσιον εἰργάσατο σκεῦος ὡρονομίου, / δι᾽ οὗ παρεῖχε καθορᾶν τῷ βασιλεῖ καθ᾽ ὥρον, / ἐν μέσοις διατρίβοντι τοῖς βασιλείοις οἴκοις, / εἴ που τολμᾶταί τι καινὸν ἐν Ἄραψιν, ἐν Σύροις, *CSHB*, XXXIII, ed. by B.G. Niebuhr, pp. 224-225.

seen much later in the Magnaura. It will be interesting to notice that, even though we should recognize two independent and distinct phases, the texts under examination are often partially contradictory.

Georgius Monachus (IX century) [Teophilus]	two golden organs, ornamented with precious stones	a golden tree	singing birds on tree (some mechanism)		
Leo Grammaticus (X century) [Theophilus]	two golden organs, ornamented with precious stones	a golden tree	singing birds on tree (some mechanism)		
Symeon Magister (X century) [Theophilus]	two golden organs, ornamented with precious stones	a golden tree	singing birds on tree (channeled air)		
De cerimoniis (X century) [Magnaura]	organs playing	a golden tree; other trees	singing golden birds on golden trees and on the throne	roaring lions	moving beasts
Liudprand of Cremona (X century) [Magnaura]		bronze gilted tree	singing birds on a tree	two golden roaring lions in proximity of a movable throne	
Theophanes continuatus (X century) [Michael III]	a golden organ	the famous golden plane		two golden lions	two golden griffins
John Skylitzes (XI/XII century) [Michael III]	a golden organ	the famous golden plane		two golden lions	two golden griffins

John Cedrenus (XI/XII century) [Michael III]		the famous golden plane		two golden lions	two golden griffins
John Zonaras (XII century) [Michael III]	two golden organs	a golden plane		two golden lions	two golden griffins
Constantine Manasses (ca. 1130-1180) [Michael III]		plane	singing birds on tree (some mechanism)		golden griffins
Michael Glycas (XII century) [Michael III]		golden planes	singing birds on trees (some mechanism)	golden roaring lions	

If we were to take these sources literally, we would have to believe that there were at least two sets of *automata*, one made under Theophilus and destroyed by his son, and a second one, produced later, to which the account in the *De Ceremoniis* refers[139]. It is nonetheless legitimate to doubt whether the order issued by Michael III was really or completely executed. The news could have been reported to shed a bad light on the emperor but the objects might have survived, at least partially[140]. However, the similarity of the two sets would seem to imply either a conscious revival or, possibly, the fact that they were the same one. It is even possible that only the golden parts of the organs and of the tree – that is, their external plating – were melted down, while the internal mechanisms were saved. The set recorded in the *De Cerimoniis* might still have been the one fabricated under Theophilus, although with a new, less expensive, coating[141], as the sources never relate of a new construction.

Yet, whether or not the earlier throne was destroyed, we would still need to mark two different phases in this history. Once removed from the cabinet where they were normally held on display, the different items were situated in such a way so as to create the theatrical scenography described by Liudprand.

[139] As both Brett and Canavas believed.

[140] *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057: Translation and Notes*, cit., p. 98, n. 66.

[141] N. Maliaras, *Die Orgel im byzantinischen Hofzeremoniell des 9 und des 10 Jahrhunderts, eine Quellenuntersuchung*, München 1991, pp. 157-167.

We might go as far as to hypothesize that, in the course of this process, the original set of *automata* was actually enriched with new elements.

Some circumstantial support for this view comes from the silence of the early sources about the lions and the griffins. It is always difficult to draw any conclusion *e silentio*. However, since Georgius Monachus was almost contemporary with emperor Theophilus, one would think he would have probably mentioned the animals. Similarly, a peculiar device as the roaring lions could have prompted Symeon Magister to add few details, as he did for the birds. Curiously, instead, lions and griffins appear for the first time in the continuation of Theophanes, a source compiled under Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, like the *De Cerimoniis*. Here, the generic golden tree of the earlier accounts – whether it is the original one or a later copy of it – is recorded as a "famous plane", a clear sign that, in the meantime, the presence of the tree had earned a certain popularity, probably due to its new role in public ceremonies. It is then possible that the setting prepared in the Magnaura during the tenth century worked as an interference for the later chroniclers who described the pieces Michael III wanted melted down in the ninth century, partially superimposing their knowledge of earlier sources with the later description of the throne hall. In Michael Glycas' account, for instance, one finds both the reference to the roaring lions, an element that can be ascribed to the Magnaura and not to Theophilus' ancient set.

The risk of such a projection makes our sources difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, if we base our tentative reconstruction on those sources that are less likely to have an influence on each other (Georgius Monachus, *De Cerimoniis*, Liuthprand), several facts can be established with a higher degree of plausibility: the original set of precious objects made under Theophilus (two organs and a tree with singing birds) was removed from the Pentapyrgium under Michael III in order to be melted. Whether it survived or not, a similar ensemble was rearranged in the thronehall, with the possible addition of other elements, such as the roaring lions and the griffins and, possibly, of some more trees.

The Use of *Automata* between Hellenistic and Islamic science

Having advanced this hypothesis, I would now like to move into a different section of my analysis, trying to underline some of the technical aspects of our setting and the implication of the use of such an engineerical

knowledge. I will consider what is known about the contemporary employment of *automata* for court purposes, but I will also mention the long Hellenistic scientific tradition of Constantinople, thus arguing that it is not really a question of which political actor possessed a certain knowledge first but, rather, of how such expertise was declined for political purposes.

The origin of different mechanisms and the use of *automata* has been connected to the renovated interest in the body of works of Heron of Alexandria (I century C.E.). The reasons of this revival, however, have been prompted – according to the scholars who studied the topic so far – also by an arising interest demonstrated in ninth-century Baghdad, matched less than a century later in Costantinople, by the publications of the so-called Heron of Byzantium[142]. The main Arabic translation of the *Mechanica*, for instance, was carried out by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā of Baalbek for Abbasid caliph al-Muʿtaṣim (862-866 C.E.). This and other earlier works, such as the famous ninth-century *Book of Ingenious Devices* by Aḥmad ibn Mūsā, one of the three famous "brother scientists," reflect Heronian knowledge as well[143]. However, even before this text, which is largely (but not entirely) a consequence of the massive translation-work of hellenistic knowledge, prompted by Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813-833 C.E.) to enrich the *Bayt al-Ḥikma,* the great library of Baghdad which hosted works on geometry, astronomy, math, physics, music, etc., the Abbasids under Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786-809 C.E.) had enough competence on hydraulics and pneumatics to build a mechanical clock and gift it to Charles the Great in 807[144].

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[142] Particularly Brett, *The Automata in the Byzantine "Throne of Solomon"*.

[143] D. Hill, *A History of Engineering in Classical and Medieval Times*, Sydney 1984, particularly pp. 199-247; D. Hill –

D.A. King, *Studies in Medieval Islamic Technology, from Philo to al-Jazari-from Alexandria to Diyar Bakr*, Ashgate (UK) 1995; see also *The book of knowledge of ingenious mechanical* devices, translated and annotated by D. Hill, Dordrecht, 1974; *The book of ingenious devices by the Banu (sons of) Musa bin Shakir*, translated and annotated by D. Hill, Dordrecht 1979.

[144] *Annales regni francorum*, (*MGH SS rer. German. In usum schol.* VI, ed. G.H. Perttz, rec. F. Kurze, Hannover 1895) anno 807, pp. 123-124: "Necnon et horologium ex auricalco arte mechanica mirifice compositum, in quo duodecim horarum cursus ad clepsidram vertebatur, cum totidem aereis pilulis, quae ad completionem horarum decidebant et casu suo subiectum sibi cimbalum tinnire faciebant, additis in eodem eiusdem numeri equitibus, qui per duodecim finestras completis horis exiebant et inpulsu egressionis suae totidem fenestras, quae prius erant apertae, claudebant"; (And also a clock wonderfully made by the goldsmith with engineerical knowledge, in which the passage of the twelve hours was marked by the hourglass, with twelve little golden balls, that fell at the end of each hour and by their fall they made the cymbal set

The scholarly approach employed so far in relation to the Magnaura has focused primarily on the question of technological preeminence. The automatic set in the throne hall, in fact, has been studied mostly as a reflection of the body of mechanical knowledge known in a certain cultural context, with the idea of stating which court was the first to achieve the most astounding results.
According to this line of interpretation, Emperor Theophilus, for instance, eager to emulate Abbasid achievements, in 835 had a place built in the outskirts of Costantinople, at Bryas, which meant to imitate the caliph palace in Baghdad[145] and it is believed that he could very well have exported the *automata*, too[146].

It is often taken for granted that it was in Muslim palaces like those in Baghdad or in Cairo[147] that lions were frequently installed in front of the throne, and singing mechanical birds crowded metal trees[148]. But we should not be too precipitous in accepting this assumption. On the occasion of the visit of Byzantine envoys to Caliph al-Muqtadir in 917 C.E., the ambassadors could see a golden and silver tree with eighteen main branches and several small ones, full of singing mechanical birds[149]. It stood in the middle of a circular pool and there are no references to lions or griffins. However, from the description it is possible that the envoyees saw a series of mechanical knights. It must have been

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underneath chink, and in the clock there were also twelve knights who came out through little windows upon the striking of the hour and, given the counter-push caused by their exit, all the windows, that were open before, shut).

[145] Theoph. Continuatus, p. 98; S. Runciman, *The Country and Suburban Palaces of the Emperors*, in *Charanis Studies*, ed. by A.E. Laiou-Thomadakis, New Brunswick (N.J.) 1980, pp. 219-228 ; S. Eyice, *Bryas Sarayi*, in «Belleten», 23 (1959), pp. 79-111; H. Keshani, *The 'Abbasid Palace of Theophilus: Byzantine Taste for the Arts of Islam*, in «al-Masaq», 16 (2004), pp. 75-91.

[146] P. Soucek, *Byzantium and the Islamic East*, in *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843– 1261*, ed. by H.C. Evans, W.D. Wixom, New York 1997, pp. 402-433.

[147] E. Quatrème, *Mémoires géographiques sur l'Egypte et sur quelques voisines: Recueillis et extraits des manuscrits coptes, arabes, etc., de la Bibliothèque impériale*, 2 vols, Paris 1811, II, p. 375.

[148] A. Grabar, *Le succès des arts orientaux à la cour byzantine sous les macédoniens*, in «Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst», 2 (1951), pp. 32-60, p. 56.

[149] Reiske quotes this episode from the *Chronicles of Albufedae* in his commentary to the *De Cerimoniis*, *CSHB*, XIII, pp. 642-644. In addition to this, several scholars state that an *automaton*-tree in Baghdad is mentioned under the reign of Caliph al Ma'mun in 827. The source is to J.J. Reiske, *Annales Moslemici*, 5 vols, Copenhagen 1789-1794, but the reference is usually incomplete. I have tried to find the passage in the *Annales* but I was not able to find it.

highly valued, since the palace itself was known as the *Dar al-Shajara*, that is, Palace of the Tree[150].

An earlier Arabic source gives us a different insight on the relationship between the two courts. The episode is related by ʻUmāra ibn Ḥamza, sent as a legate to Constantinople on a diplomatic mission on behalf of caliph al-Mansur, probably in 775 C.E., that is, during the reign of Constantine V Copronymos. He described how dancing swords, green and red clouds that hid the emperor, and mechanical lions were all part of the ritual of the audience[151].

> I was taken into a hall, and lo! In my path were two lions, on both sides of the way which I must needs pass, I said to myself: I must surely die, but I shall not die weakly! So I took heart and when I passed between them, they became calm and I went on my way. I entered another hall, and behold! Two swords played across my path and I thought that if so much as a fly passed between them, it would be cut in half. But I said: He who preserved me from the lions will preserve me also from the swords! So I committed my case to God and passed on, and when I came between them, they ceased to play […][152].

Although the event described in this account dates back to the last quarter of the eighth century, the text itself was composed in the beginning of the tenth. Canavas, who quotes this source, does not exclude that some later elements could have been projected onto the past. Nevertheless, this evidence is precious because it clearly states that *automata* and special effects were employed in Byzantine courtly ceremonial much before the Heronian revival of ninth/tenth century; it also shows that the question of the derivation from Islamic models is

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[150] G. Le Strange, *Description of Mesopotamia and Baghdad, Written about the Year 900 A.D. by Ibn Serapion. The Arabic Text edited from a MS. in the British Museum Library, with Translation and Notes*, in «Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland», [s.n.] 1895, pp. 1-76; G. Le Strange, A *Greek Embassy to Baghdad in 917 a.d. Translated from the Arabic ms of Al-Khatub, in the British Museum Library*, in «Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society», 3 (1897), pp. 35-47; G. Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate*, Oxford 1900.

[151] The story is related by Ibn al-Faqīh in his *Kitāb al-Aʻlāq al-nafīsah* and the episode quoted by C. Canavas, *Automaten in Byzanz der Thron von Magnaura*, in *Automaten in Kunst und Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, hrsg. von Klaus Grubmüller und Markus Stock, Wiesbaden 2003, pp. 49-72, pp. 52-53.

[152] The English translation comes from D.M. Dunlop, *Arab Civilization to A.D. 1500*, New York 1971, pp. 217-218.

far less linear than one would think and it should not be posed in terms of a sheer temporal perspective.

Some Automata of Late Antiquity

An interesting piece of evidence in this sense, although indirect, is provided by a letter sent in 507 by Theodoric the Great (454-526 C.E.) to Boethius (480-524/525 C.E.), in response to a request made by the king of the Burgundians. Boethius, who is said to have "drunk from the very spring of science", is asked to construct a water-clock. The letter, however, becomes almost a pretext to praise technology and its wonders and so we end up learning what were the possibilities of mechanics applied to art, instruments of different kinds, war machineries and so on at the time of Theodoric and what he thought the aim of science was.

> Now the lord of Burgundians has earnestly asked me to send him one time-piece which is regulated by a measured flow of water, and one whose nature it is to receive the light of the mighty sun, together with those who can operate them. So, by obtaining and enjoying these pleasures, they will experience a wonder which to me is a common-place. It is very proper that they should long to see something which has astonished them throught the reports of their ambassadors […] it is your purpose to demonstrate its wonders. It [science] labours to display events that men may wonder at; altering the course of nature in a wonderful way, it takes away the belief in the facts, despite displaying images to the eyes. It causes water to rise from the deep and fall headlong, a fire to move by weights; it makes organs swell with alien notes and supplies their pipes with air from outside, so that they resound with great subtlety […] Objects of metal give out sounds: a bronze statue of Diomedes blows a deep note on the trumpet; a bronze snake hisses; model birds chatter, and those that had no natural voice are found to sing sweetly […] Since you are adorned by your glorious acquaintance with such matters, send me, therefore, the time-pieces, at public expenses, without cost to yourself […] The engineer, if it is proper to say so, is almost a partner of nature, unlocking her secrets, changing what she reveals, playing with wonders, and making such exquisite counterfeits that we take for truth what is certainly artificial[153].

[153] *The* Variae *of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator*, translated with notes and introduction by S.J.B. Barnish, Liverpool 1992, pp. 20-23; "Burgundionum itaque dominus a nobis

It should result clear from this description that *automata* often served as *topoi* within accounts of the practice of gift-giving. As we have already noted, through the exchange between the Abbasid and the Byzantine court a few centuries later, they served as a public display of technological power, an indirect statement of superiority. Theodoric says explicitly, almost with disdain, that he could see the clocks on a daily basis. We do not know if he possessed also the other *automata* he mentions. It is clear, however, that they must have been very familiar to him and that they kindled his enthusiasm. Among his list, we find almost all the objects we have already encountered, few centuries later, in the Magnaura. It should not be forgotten, in fact, that, as a hostage, he was raised by Emperor Leo I (r. 457-474 C.E.), spending ten years at the emperor's court in Constantinople, where he received the most excellent education. It is not to be doubted, then, that all these mechanisms, still unknown to provincial sovereigns like the king of the Burgundians, were certainly available at the emperor's court as early as the mid-fifth century and they were part of an almost continuous tradition of use.

Therefore, the origin of this dialectic interchange between Byzantium and Baghdad, this battle for technological supremacy embodied by *automata*, reaches far back in time and it should be followed thus, without limiting our perspective to the narrow window provided only by Byzantine-Abbasid relations. Moreover, it is certain, at least from a technological point of view, that these creations stemmed – either in a straight line or with few detours – from the body oh Heronic knowledge. Clearly, trees and peculiar engineering devices were part of a diplomatic strategy that aimed at impressing the ambassadors. It

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magnopere postulavit, ut horologium, quod aquis sub modulo fluentibus temperatur et quod solis immensi comprehensa illuminatione distinguitur, cum magistris rerum ei transmittere deberemus: quatenus impetratis delectationibus perfruendo, quod nobis cottidianum, illis videatur esse miraculum. Merito siquidem respicere cupiunt, quod legatorum suorum relationibus obstupescunt […] miracula monstrare propositum est. Molitur ostendere, quod obstupescant homines evenisse miroque modo naturis conversis facti detrahit fidem, cum ostentet et oculis visionem. Facit aquas ex imo surgentes praecipites cadere, ignem ponderibus currere, organa extraneis vocibus insonare, et peregrinis flatibus Calamos complet, ut minuta possint arte cantare […] Metalla mugiunt, Diomedes in aere gravius bucinat, aenus anguis insibilat, aves simulatae fritinniunt et quae vocem propriam nesciunt habere, dulcedinem probantur emittere cantilenae. […] Cum vos ornet talium rerum praedicanda notitia, horologia nobis publicis expensis sine vestro dispendio destinate […] Mechanicus, si fas est dicere, paene socius est naturae, occulta reserans, manifesta convertens, miraculis ludens, ita pulchre simulans, ut quod compositum non ambigitur, veritas aestimetur", *MGH*, XII, pp. 39-42.

is possible that new or renewed sets were built or reintroduced in response to a specific occurrence in the neighbor's court but we have hints that, at least in Costantinople, *automata* were part of a tradition which obviously remounts to a much earlier period, when the Abbasids were not yet a political counterpart to be feared. Certainly, the level of competence required in order to construct these devices fluctuated overtime and it is possible to hypothesize phases of reciprocal influences. Nevertheless, this kind of research would not add much to the aspect we are interested the most, that is, the symbolic side of the question.

The technological aspect was certainly not all. It seems equally apparent that in giving a mechanical device as a gift to another monarch was not the best way to preserve the secret of its mechanism, if there was even a secret to be kept in the first place. Similarly, showing a peculiar device to ambassadors was probably the best way to have it imitated. The instance of superiority is then only punctual in time and it can be applied exclusively to those brief moments when an absolute novelty penetrates a culture which did not know it before. This, however, is true mostly in relation to those courts that, for historical reasons results marginal or provincial from a scientific point of view, either because they never had such a tradition or because they lost track of it (the Burgundians, Charles the Great). The real aim of all these displays was, in fact, direct emulation. We should then assume, as far as Byzantine and Abbasid rulers are concerned, that the technological knowledge applied to the devices described during the tenth century (the tree in Baghdad, the throne hall in Constantinople) had been shared by both parties at least for a century. However, it is quite likely that the Arabs, having conquered some of the most advanced lands in terms of culture and science, had been aware of these mechanisms ever since the mid-seventh century[154].

Now, a case in point to show this shared body of knowledge, although certainly garbled with much imaginative details, can be traced in one of the most famous stories collected in the *Arabian Nights*[155], namely the *Ebony Horse*, which is set in Persia:

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[154] E. de Lacy O' Leary, *How Greek Science passed to the Arabs*, London 1949; E. Goodman, *The Translation of Greek Materials into Arabic*, in *Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period*, ed. by M.J.L. Young – J.D. Latham – R.B. Serjeant, Cambridge 1990, pp. 477-497.

[155] Of course, the tale in the *Nights* cannot be taken as a positive historical evidence. However, even if it was written later than the facts we are analyzing and it is a piece of fiction narrative, it

There was once in times of yore and ages long gone before, a great and puissant King, of the kings of the Persians, Sabur by name, who was the richest of all the kings in store of wealth and dominion and surpassed each and every in wit and wisdom. […] Now he loved science and geometry, and one festival day as he sat on his kingly throne there came in to him three wise men, cunning artificers and past masters in all manner of craft and inventions, skilled in making things curious and rare, such as confound the wit, and versed in the knowledge of occult truths and perfect in mysteries and subtleties. And they were of three different tongues and countries: the first a Hindi or Indian, the second a Roumi or Greek, and the third a Farsi or Persian. The Indian came forward and, prostrating himself before the King, wished him joy of the festival and laid before him a present befitting his dignity; that is to say, a man of gold, set with precious gems and jewels of price and hending in hand a golden trumpet. When Sabur saw this, he asked, "O sage, what is the virtue of this figure?" and the Indian answered: "O my lord, if this figure be set at the gate of thy city, it will be a guardian over it; for if an enemy enter the place, it will blow this clarion against him and he will be seized with a palsy and drop down dead". Much the King marveled at this and cried, "By Allah, O sage, an this thy word be true, I will grant thee thy wish and thy desire".

Then came forward the Greek and, prostrating himself before the King, presented him with a basin of silver in whose midst was a peacock of gold, surrounded by four and twenty chicks of the same metal. Sabur looked at them and turning to the Greek, said to him, "O sage, what is the virtue of this peacock?" "O my lord," answered he, "as often as an hour of the day or night passeth, it pecketh one of its young and crieth out and flappeth its wing, till the four and twenty hours are accomplished. And when the month cometh to an end, it will open its mouth and thou shalt see the crescent therein". And the King said, "An thou speak sooth, I will bring thee to thy wish and thy desire".

Then came forward the Persian sage and, prostrating himself before the King, presented him with a horse of the blackest ebony wood inlaid with gold and jewels, and ready harnessed with saddle, bridle, and stirrups such as befit kings, which when Sabur saw, he marveled with exceeding marvel and was confounded at the beauty of its form and the ingenuity of its fashion. So he asked, "What is the use of this horse of wood, and what is its virtue and what the secret of its movement?" and the Persian answered, "O

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is useful to our argument, because the projection, even if *a posteriori*, of a certain set of knowledge on the Byzantine engineers, shows the Islamic perspective of the question.

> my lord, the virtue of this horse is that if one mount him, it will carry him whither he will and fare with its rider through the air and cover the space of a year in a single day"[156].

Neither the provenance of the three sages nor the description of their gifts is far-fetched[157]. It is easy to recognize in the trumpeter a musical *automaton*, a water-clock in the basin with birds and a mechanical robot in the horse, probably further influenced by the literary motif of the flying Pegasus of Greek origin[158]. None of these items is unrealistic in itself and it could be built according to the principles of Hellenistic science; the beginning of the very narration, moreover, does not present us with an unlikely historical occurrence.

We know, for instance, from an account provided in the *Kitab al-maḥāsin wa'l-aḍdad,* the list of some of the gifts exchanged between Byzantine emperor Maurice (r. 582-602 C.E.) and Khosrow II (r. 590-628 C.E.). The latter sent, "amongst others – a golden palm-tree, with leaves made of emerald, fruits – of pearls, branches – of red ruby, the roots of the branches – of onyx". In return, on the occasion of Nawrūz festival, Maurice sent to Khosrow

> a gold horseman riding on a silver charger whose eyes were of white onyx containing black pupils, and the forelock, the mane and the tail (were) of black hair. The rider held in his hand a golden polo bat (*ṣawlajān*) and alongside of him was installed a silver polo field (*meydān*) in the middle of which was placed a ball of red carnelian. The field was borne by a pair of silver bulls. The horse discharged water and when the water was flowing, the polo bat hit the ball, driving it back to the edge of the field. At the same time, the bulls were set in motion, and the field moved and the horseman appeared to be swiftly galloping[159].

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[156] *The Ebony Horse*, from *The Arabian Nights*, translated and edited by sir Richard Burton, 10 vols, [s.l.] 1885-1888, V, pp. 1-31.

[157] On *automata* in the Indian tradition, see V. Raghavan, *Yantras or Mechanical Contrivances in Ancient India*, in «Transactions», 10 (1952), pp. 1-31. For evidences of a clock with peacocks, see for instance A. Chapuis-E. Gélis, *Le Monde des Automates, Etude historique et technique*, Paris 1928, p. 52.

[158] C. Tuczay, *Motifs in "The Arabian Nights" and in Ancient and Medieval European Literature: a Comparison*, in «Folklore», 116 (2005), pp. 272-291.

[159] C.A. Inostrancev, *Sasanian Military Theory*, translated by L. Bogdanov, in «Journal of the Cama Oriental Institute», 7 (1926), pp. 7-52, pp. 47.

The question of *automata*, then, is not really who displayed them first but, rather, *how* and *why* the monarchs decided to show them. The arrangement in tenth-century Constantinople, for instance, follows a project of great scope, where all the objects are employed for the creation of the Solomonic throne hall, more similar to the ceremonial prompted during the reign of Constantine V, of which, however, we do not know much more than what the Arabic source tells us.

The Throne of Khosrow II

Having considered the relationship between these two actors and having established that the roots of such visual and technical rivalry go back to an earlier phase, namely to the political opposition between the Roman and the Sasanian empire, I would now like to consider more closely the formalization of the Constantinople ceremony, in light of such cultural heritage. Byzantine courtly rituals began to be strictly formalized and described in detail, particularly between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century, when political exchanges between the Roman and the Sasanian Empire became tighter. Their relationship was reinforced by constant embassies, whose ceremonial was shaped through the shrewd staging of massive spectacles, often taking place and dialoguing with urban architectural landmarks (city gates, hippodromes, palaces), intermingled with other strategies employed to empress the envoys, such as costly gifts, entertainment activities, luxurious banquets. Obviously, the throne hall ritual, always performed to receive a foreign ambassador, constituted the *climax* of such a complex dramatization.

One of the peak moments in Roman-Sasanian political relationships was reached during the reign of Justinian (ca. 482-565 C.E.) and Khosrow I (r. 531-579 C.E.)[160]. We possess a quite detailed account of the different phases taking place during the audience of Sasanian envoys, written by Peter the Patrician between 552 and 563 and later on incorporated as chapters of the *De cerimoniis*. Despite the impressive ritual, no mention is made of any mechanical device. Unfortunately, there are no direct, official sources from the Sasanian counterparts, even if we can gather some information through the *Kitāb al-Tāj*

[160] For a detailed analysis of the symbolic relations between the two empires, see M. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran*, Berkeley 2009. For a good bibliographical overview, see also the entry *Byzantine-Iranian relations*, by A. Shapur Shahbazi in *Encyclopædia Iranica* (online ed.).

or *Book of the crown*, allegedly by al-Jāḥiẓ (ca. 776-879 C.E.)[161] and from the later (and often legend-encrusted) accounts related in the *Shāhnāma*, or *Book of the Kings*, the Persian epic poem composed during the tenth century by Firdawsī, who narrated the history of Persia from its mythical origins up to the Muslim conquest. It is told that Roman ambassadors, on their way to the audience hall, would have encountered wild beasts, like lions and elephants, and plaster statues of riding soldiers that were still there when the Muslim soldiers took the city[162]. However, we have no much archaeological information about the palaces in Ctesiphon or about the throne hall of Khosrow I. What we know is filtered through literary sources. One of the most striking details we have to account for, however, is the presence, at the fire sanctuary in Āz̲ur Gushnasp – one of the sacred spots in Sasanian Persia – of particular devices employed during the audience of Khosrow I that allowed him to fake rain and thunder[163].

Similar machineries were said to be used also during the reign of Khosrow II (r. 590-628 C.E.) who built on the same site a throne hall, known as *Takht-i Ṭāqdīs*, which became legendary[164]. Nothing is left of it and we can only imagine it through written, almost mythical accounts. It was destroyed in the course of the military campaigns of emperor Heraclius, officially aiming at the recovery of the Holy Cross that Khosrow II had removed from Jerusalem and brought back home, after a series of victories that seriously imperiled the Byzantine empire and brought the Persian army very close to taking Constantinople. The Byzantine-Sasanian war had broken out in 602, when emperor Maurice was murdered by one of his generals, Phocas. Given the subtle dialectic of protection and brotherhood which had characterized the two empires ever since the time of Justinian, Khosrow II felt entitled to show outraged and used the political conjunction in his favour, to declare war to the usurper. This brought him an incredibly successful string of military victories, interrupted only by Heraclius who succeeded Phocas in 610 and slowly pushed the Persian forces back in their territory. The battle of Nineveh in 627, which

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[161] A. de Jong, Sub specie maiestatis*: Reflections on Sasanian Court Rituals*, in *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*, ed. by M. Stausberg, Leiden 2004, pp. 345-366.

[162] Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth*, p. 139.

[163] The precise location of the site has been discussed and it is now supposed that *Takht-i Ṭāqdīs* was probably built in nowadays *Takht-i Sulaymān.* For bibliographical references see the entry *Takht-e Solayman* by D. Huff in *Encyclopædia Iranica* 2002, (online ed.) and also further discussion below in chapter IV and V.

[164] On the impression exerted over time by the treasures of the kingdom of Persia, see for instance P. Citati, *La primavera di Cosroe*, Milano 2006.

followed shortly after the taking of Ganzhak, where the throne hall was said to be, dealt a fatal blow to the Persian Empire, which was destined to fall at the hands of the Arab armies[165].

The echoes of these events resonated with particular intensity in the Western world, not only for political and military reasons, but also because of the deeply symbolic consequences related to the presence of the Holy Cross in the heart of a 'heathen' empire[166]. The recovery of the precious relic became almost a Crusade *ante litteram*. It is during this period that the figure of Khosrow II came to be enshrouded with iniquity and wickedness.

Several factors contributed to this metamorphosis. Perhaps most important among these was the deep impact that the visual symbolism of his audience hall carried. Descriptions handed down to us derive from both Arabic, Greek and Latin sources and they have been variously interpreted. Given the lack of any archaeological trace and the somehow lore-garbed quality of the written accounts, some scholars have tried to corroborate their hypothetical reconstruction, basing them on the details provided by two silver plates [ill. 12-13], that were believed to represent the interior of the throne hall[167].

Nevertheless, the *corpus* of vessels representing enthronement scenes in Sasanian art is quite small and the overall five plates that have come down to us are all relatively late in date (two of them dating to the sixth and seventh century and the other three probably of Islamic manufacture). They show a typology of throne which differs from the Sasanian one preserved on coins and rock reliefs; moreover, the two plates of Qazvin and Klimova on which the above-mentioned reconstructions are partially based were not produced by Sasanian workshops but were, more likely, later provincial imitations. Any

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[165] For a good outline on the period, see C. Foss, *The Persians in the Roman near East (602-630 AD)*, in «Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society», 13 (2003), pp. 149-170.

[166] B. Baer, *A Heritage Of Holy Wood: The Legend Of The True Cross In Text And Image*, Leiden 2004.

[167] E. Herzfeld, *Der Thron des Khosro: Quellenkritische und ikonographiseche Studien über Grenzgebeite der Kunstegeschichte des Morgen- und Abendlandes*, in «Jahrbuch der königlich Preuszischen Kunstsammlungen», 41 (1920), pp. 1-24; F. Saxl, *Frühes Christentum und spätes Heidentum in ihren künstlerischen Ausdrucksformen*, in «Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte», 16 (1923), pp. 63-121; P. Ackermann, *The Throne of Khusraw (The Takt-i Taqdis)*, in «Bulletin of the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology», 5 (1937), pp. 106-109; K. Lehmann, *The Dome of Heaven*, in «The Art Bulletin», 27 (1945), pp. 1-27; A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, Paris 1936, p. 466; A. Alföldi, *Die Geschichte des Throntabernakels*, in «La Nouvelle Clio», 10 (1950), pp. 537-566.

conclusion based on them, than, can be only tentative and it should be advanced with great caution[168].

According to Harper, who has studied the enthronement scenes in detail, the question of the reconstruction of the throne-hall of Khosrow "belongs entirely to literary tradition, as there are no images of it on works of Sasanian date and manufacture that illustrate this subject […] The most that can be said is that the silver plates from Qazvin and Klimova reflect one aspect of the literary tradition concerning the *Takht-i Ṭāqdīs* in that there appears on both a

[168] P.O. Harper, *Thrones and Enthronement Scenes in Sasanian Art*, in «Iran», 17 (1979), pp. 49-64; P.O. Harper – P. Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period* I: *The Royal Imagery,* New York 1981.

throne which is part of a larger architectural setting, incorporating a crescent moon as part of the design"[169].

A similar operation has been carried out with a famous salver, nowadays in Berlin [ill. 14], which was positively – although quite boldly – credited as the representation of the external appearance of the throne hall of Khosrow II, because it represented the façade of a beautiful pavilion (or small palace) that has been identified as his because through the door it was possible to see a fire temple[170].

[169] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[170] Ackermann, *The Throne of Khusraw*; L.I. Ringbom, *Graltempel und Paradies: Beziehungen zwischen Iran und Europa im Mittelalter*, Stockholm 1951. On this latter publication, see below, chapter V.

Literary Sources and Scholarly Interpretations

No less problematic are the literary sources we have, which were all written much later. Scholars who have analyzed them in the past, particularly between the 1920s and the 1950s, have showed open skepticism toward what they relate, trying to read behind the veil of the legendary elements. The only shared conclusion they have reached is that the throne hall of Khosrow II displayed a figurative program which represented cosmic kingship, achieved through the representation of the universe, with stars and planets. But the details of this building – its actual shape, the technique and iconography of its decoration, whether it was open or closed, the nature and the likelihood of the mechanical devices employed in it – were once intensely debated, although this issue has not be taken up in more recent scholarship.

I begin by listing the main features of the structure, as it they are known through extant sources. I then summarize the main conclusions reached in previous scholarship, to which I add few observations regarding the historicity of the mechanisms described. The most striking and most complete description I certainly the one in the *Shāhnāma* by Firdawsī (940-1020 C.E.), of which I present here an abridged version, which includes all the fundamental details[171]:

> Taq dis was its name. Its origin is almost mythical. Djahn of Demawend made it, filled it with precious gems, for Faridun. Each successive king implemented its decoration. Djamasp had the sky with all constellations represented, from Saturn to Moon, so that one could read the horoscope. Alexander, in his foolhardiness, destroyed the work. However, the notables of Iran saved its fragments. After the fall of the Arsacids even its name was forgotten. Ardashir and his successors collected the fragments. Khosrow II began its reconstruction. Carpenters from Costantinople, from China and Makran, from Baghdad and from Iran came here, 1120 masters, each with 30 workers. Its height was of 170 royal spans, 120 its length; a royal span corresponds to 5 ordinary ones. Each morning new carpets were laid upon it. On the external part there were 140000 golden ornaments with tourquoises; all the material was of the most precious. It stood with the back side toward the desert, with the frontal part toward the gardens, so that the sun lingered longer in Aries and Leo, even during the spring. In June and in the fall it overlooked the fruits of the garden; during the winter it was covered by a tent made of beaver and sable, it was maintained warm with hot braziers.
>
> Realized with jewels were the twelve signs of the Zodiac, the seven planets and the moon, which passed through all of its phases, and the fixed stars. One could tell what time of night it was and how far from the earth the sky was. There were three sitting positions on the steps of the throne, from one to the other 4 intermediate steps. The lowest, *mish sar*, or ram head, so called because of the ram-shaped ornament, for the ranks of the decans; the second one, ladjwar, blue, because of its decoration in lapislazuli, for the knights; the highest one, all in tourquoise, for the dastur, responsible for the business of the kingdom. And on the king's seat there was a Chinese brocade with jewels, 57 spans long, on which the seven planets were represented, along with the seven *kishawar* of the earth, the notables

[171] The complete passage of the *Shāhnāma* by Firdawsī, translated into English from Persian can be found in a short appendix at the end of this chapter. The excerpt presented here is derives from the abridged version presented in German in the article by Herzfeld, *Der Thron des Kosro*.

> of Iran and Costantinople, the portraits of the 48 great kings with their crowns and thrones.

The account reported by al-Thaʿālibī (961-1038 C.E.) is similar, although not perfectly identical:

> To the treasures of Khosrow II belongs the throne of Taqdis; this was a throne made in ivory and teak wood, whose nails and clamps were in silver and gold. Its length was of 180 cubits, its height of 15, on its steps were thrones in chestnut wood and ebony encrusted in gold. Above this throne there was a dome-shaped roof in gold and lapislazuli on which one could see the sky and the stars, the signs of the Zodiac and the seven climates and also the king, represented in several scenes, sitting, engaged in battle, hunting. The mechanism indicated the hours of the day. The throne was covered by 4 carpets, weaved in golden thread and rubies and embroidered with golden brocade, each of them representing a season[172].

The presence of the king's representation, whether only embroidered on the carpets or also on the vault, as the *Book of the Crown* reports, was marked with disdain by Christian chroniclers, writing both in Greek[173] and in Latin. What follows, for instance, is the account by Ado of Vienne (800-875 C.E.):

> He made for himself also a silver tower where he had had built a golden throne with precious stones, where he had set the sun-chariot and the moon and the representations of the stars and, through hidden pipes he led the course of water, and like a god he was seen effusing rain, and while in a subterranean cave some horses pulled one could see the structure of the tower, being turned, move, and in this manner the sound of thunder

[172] *Kitāb al-Tāj* or *Book of the Crown*, attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ (ca. 776-879 C.E.), reported by al-Thaʿālibī (961-1038); for this and the other sources see the article by Herzfeld, *Der Thron des Kosro*.

[173] "And entering in it, he found the impious image of Khosrow, his representation on the vaulted ceiling of the palace, as enthroned in the sky and around him the sun, the moon and the stars, that he superstitiously adores as gods, and the angels holding the skeptre were around him. There, the enemy of God had staged machineries that released rain-drops and faked the sound of thunder", for the Greek text see *CSHB*, IX, pp. 720-721. For other sources, see Saxl, *Frühes Christentum und spätes Heidentum*, p. 106.

was imitated, thank to this device. So, in this place, he had prepared a seat and, beside it, as if he were like God, he had put the Cross of God [174].

Ernst Herzfeld, after analyzing several different Near Eastern throne-typologies, concluded that the two Muslim chroniclers might have been describing a throne, made in precious material and jewels-encrusted, set on a platform with a balustrade, located a series of steps, under a baldachin or a vault, decorated with carpets and brocades. On the steps there would have been room for the main officers and dignitaries. But this reconstruction did not account for the detail of the planetary representation and of the mechanism that set in motion the constellations and indicated the time of day and night and showed the moon's phases. Herzfeld thus concluded that the description referred to a clock, which probably resembled the famous one once extant in Gaza that had been built according to the principles of Hellenistic science. The presence of this mechanism is additionally supported by the Latin sources, which mention, among other details of Khosrow's palace, a machine that could simulate rain and thunder; this report could be taken as a further evidence of the clock itself. According to Herzfeld, this piece, with its figurative program and astrological decoration, had been superimposed by later chroniclers on the idea of the throne himself, while it was in actual fact an enormous time-keeping device, probably set in motion by water, as the account in the *Exaltatio* somehow suggests. The final piece of his argument is based on the visual reconstruction of one of the silver vessels already mentioned, allegedly illustrating the "pointer" of the clock, which took the form of an arrow.

Herzfeld's hypothesis was heavily criticized by Fritz Saxl, who noted imprecision in the translation of several of the Greek sources mentioned. In addition, Saxl stressed the fact that Herzfeld had made incorrect assumptions

[174] "Fecerat namque sibi turrem argenteam, in qua interlucentibus gemmis thronum exstruxerat aureum, ubi solis quadrigam et lumen vel stellarum imagines collocaverat, atque per occultas fistulas aquae meatus adduxerat, et quasi deus pluviam desuper videretur infundi, et dum subterraneo specu equis in circuitu trahentibus, circumacta turris fabrica movere videbatur, quasi quodammodo rugitum tonitrui juxta possibilitatem artificis mentiebatur. In hoc itaque loco sedem sibi paraverat, atque juxta ea, quasi collega Deo, crucem Dominicam posuerat. Filio suo regno tradito, ipse in fanum hujuscemodi residebat". The text is to be found among the writings of Rabanus Maurus: *Beati Rabani Mauri Fuldensis Abbatis et Moguntini Archiepiscopi operum omnium pars secunda sive scripta ab ipso edita post relictam abbatialem curam*, (*Homilia LXX*, *Reversio Sanctae atque gloriosissimae Crucis Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*) in *PL*, 110, cols 131-132. For the legend of the Holy Cross, see Baer, *A Heritage Of Holy Wood.*

regarding the literary relationship among the sources, had wrongly postulated "confusion" in the chronicles concerning the identification of the clock with the throne, and, finally, had offered an unsustainable iconographical interpretation of the silver vessel. Curiously enough, just as Herzfeld had doubted the actual presence of the throne, Saxl raised questions concerning the sound effects generated by the mechanism and its movement (i.e., rain, thunder and revolving ceiling). He stated that mastering the elements as part of celestial kingship was a literary motif, which was equally found in several traditions. In support of his claim, he quoted from the Qur'an, the Ethiopic description of the throne of Enoch, and the throne of God in the Christian Apocalypse. He also pointed out that rain and thunder should have not been necessarily related to the time-keeping mechanism and, therefore, no Byzantine or Latin source could support the Muslim accounts on this score. Instead, he argued that the interpretation of the description of the throne should be found in the tradition of domed ceilings with the representation of the sovereign among the stars, like the one described by Philostratos (ca. 172-ca. 247 C.E.) in the life of Apollonius of Tyana (ca. 15-ca. 100 C.E.); the "divine man" was said to have seen such a ceiling while visiting Babylon: it was "covered with sapphire stone – this stone being intensely blue and of the color of the sky – and in the heights are the images of the gods in whom they believe and they appear golden as if it were from the ether"[175].

Expanding on Saxl's hypothesis but giving at least partial credit to Herzfeld intuition, Karl Lehmann in his now classical work on celestial canopies listed other occurrences of domed ceilings representing the universe, towering above kingly thrones. As an example of moving or revolving dome, he mentioned the case of emperor's Nero cosmic hall, in the *Domus Aurea*, as described by Suetonius[176]:

> laqueatae tabulis eburneis versatilibus, ut flores, fistulatis, ut unguenta desuper spargerentur; praecipua cenationum rotunda, quae perpetuo diebus ac noctibus vice mundi circumageretur[177]

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[175] R. Eisler, *Weltenmantel und Himmelszelt: Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Urgeschichte des Antiken Weltbildes*, 2 vols, München 1910, II, p. 614.

[176] Lehmann, *The Dome of Heaven*, pp. 24-26.

[177] *De Vita Caesarum* (*Nero*), XXXI: "There were dining-rooms with fretted ceils of ivory, whose panels could turn and shower down flowers and were fitted with pipes for sprinkling the guests with perfumes. The main banquet hall was circular and constantly revolved day and night, like

Suetonius' report would seem to be confirmed indirectly by a remark made by Seneca:

> hodie utrum tandem sapientiorem putas, qui invenit quemadmodum in inmensam altitudinem crocum latentibus fistulis exprimat, qui euripos subito aquarum impetu implet aut siccat et versatilia cenationum laquearia ita coagmentat, ut subinde alia facies atque alia succedat et totiens tecta quotiens fericula mutentur[178].

Lehmann also called attention to a somewhat smaller time-keeping device described by Varro in his *De re rustica*, which decorated an aviary in a rustic villa[179]: "On the inside of the dome in the lower half of the hemisphere Lucifer revolves by day and Hesperus by night, moving in such a way that they give the hour of the day or night"[180].

Although these two examples are particularly relevant as far as the tradition of sky-ceilings is concerned, we should nonetheless point out some important differences regarding some technical aspects which would help

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the heavens", C. Svetonius Tranquillus, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, English translation by J.C. Rolfe, (Loeb Classical Edition) 1913-1914.

[178] Seneca, *Ep. Ad Lucilium*, 90, 15; "In these our own times, which man, pray, do you deem the wiser – the one who invents a process for spraying saffron perfumes to a tremendous height from hidden pipes, who fills or empties canals by a sudden rush of waters, who so cleverly constructs a dining-room with a ceiling of movable panels that it presents one pattern after another, the roof changing as often as the courses", *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, translated by R.M. Gummere, 3 vols, (Loeb Classical Edition) 1917-1925. It is possible that Martialis is referring to the same structure in one of his epigrams: Mart., *Epigr*. II, 59, 2: "Mica vocor: quid sim cernis, cenatio parva/ ex me Caesareum prospicis ecce tholum"; ("I am called Mica 'the crumble': what I am you see, a small dining room / from my position, you see, you look at the dome of the Caesars").

[179] Few years later, L'Orange, in a study dedicated to the iconography of cosmic kingship in the ancient world, independently proposed the same examples as Lehmann and he stated that it would have been difficult to imagine the throne room itself in movement while he could, instead, envisage an artificial planetarium, moving against a fixed background, H.P. L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World*, Oslo-Cambridge 1953, p. 22.

[180] Varro, *De agricoltura*, III, 5, 17: "intrinsecus sub tholo stella lucifer interdiu, noctu hesperus, ita circumeunt ad infimum hemisphaerium ac mouentur, ut indicent, quot sint horae"; M.T. Varro, *On Farming*, translated, with introduction, commentary and excursus by L. Storr-Best, London 1912, pp. 265-266.

understand the throne hall of the king of Persia as a building with a degree of sophistication, complexity and grandeur so far unreached in Roman examples. To this day, for instance, one of the most credited hypothesis regarding the *Domus Aurea* suggests that there might have been a wooden structure, possibly a lantern, covering the *oculus* of the octagonal dining room, powered by pulleys or driven thanks to hydraulic machineries[181]. It would have been relatively small and it would have simply rotated, imitating the movements of the sky, without further complications.

The mechanism employed in Varro's *tholus*, instead, seems to be a water clock, which made a device representing the sun rotate during the day and a similar one representing a star during the night, possibly operated by a stream which set a wheel in operation[182]. The aviary was in fact built on a little island in a pond. The only other moving device was an anemometer, explicitly compared to the one on the top of the famous tower of the winds in Athens[183], which also hosted a water clock[184].

But, according to the sources, the *Takht-i Ṭāqdīs* of Khosrow II seems to be a rotating, circular planetarium of great scale. Its very name, as it has been pointed out, means "similar to a vault" or "canopied, vaulted throne". The name thus appears to confirm the view that this architectural space must have had a domed roof. The king of kings would sit on his throne right under it and would be literally surrounded by the representation of the whole universe. Given the description involving precious stones and gold, it was not meant as a scientific tool, rather, as a costly display of cosmic symbolic value. Even if we do not need to fully credit the mythical story of the throne of Faridun, we know

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[181] See bibliography summed up in E. Moorman, "*Vivere come un uomo". L'uso dello spazio nella Domus Aurea*, in *Horti Romani. Ideologia e autorappresentazione*, Roma 1998, pp. 345-362, pp. 354-355; D. Hemsoll, *Reconstructing the Octagonal Dining Room of Nero's Golden House*, in «Architectural History», 32 (1989), pp 1-17, p. 10.

[182] Lehmann, *The Dome of Heaven*, pp. 19-20.

[183] "In eodem hemisphaerio medio circum cardinem est orbis uentorum octo, ut Athenis in horologio, quod fecit Cyrrestes; ibi que eminens radius a cardine ad orbem ita mouetur, ut eum tangat uentum, qui flet, ut intus scire possis"; ("In the middle of the same hemisphere, around the axis there is a compass of the eight winds, like the one in the clock in Athens, which was constructed by Andronicus Cyrrestes; and a pointer, projecting from the central axis, runs about the compass so that the blowing wind touches it, so that you can tell from inside which it is").

[184] J. Noble – D.J. de Solla Price, *The Water Clock in the Tower of the Winds*, in «American Journal of Archaeology», 72 (1968), pp. 345-355.

that there must have been a tradition in the region concerning large-scale representations of the cosmos.

Imagining the Dome

The *Book of the Crown* reports that the throne area – *takht* being not necessarily just the seat but the whole setting – was 180 cubits in length, 130 in widths and 15 in height. A cubit, that is the length of a human arm, roughly corresponds to 5 spans, therefore the "royal span" in Firdawsī equals the measurement in cubits by al-Thaʿālibī. For this reason, the height related by Firdawsī seems excessive and it seems more likely that we should substitute height with length. Similarly, it would make more sense to invert the length/width numerical references. In this way, the two texts would be perfectly consistent with one another, thus describing a building of the following and likely dimensions:

length: 170 royal spans/180 cubits (136/144 meters)
width: 120 royal spans/130 cubits (96/104 meters)
height: 15 cubits (12 meters)

Such a broad platform for a building that does not exceed the 12 meters in height makes sense if we believe that at an underground level there were horses pulling ropes. It was, therefore, necessary for the covered surface to be wide enough to allow the horses enough space to move steadily in circle and also to have an path that was not immediately visible to the audience. This movement, in theory, would not have been too dissimilar to the use of animals for moving a millstone[185].

The presence of the large number of carpenters mentioned in the sources would then be well accounted for: the dome must have been almost completely made in wood and also the underground rotating structure, particularly the circular tracks on which the tower itself must have been sliding, otherwise it would have been almost impossible to move it. It is not far-fetched

[185] If the structure was really meant to obtain precise calculations, we should probably also posit that the planetarium-tower had to be slightly tilted in order to be aligned with the latitude of the place, a factor which would have made the whole operation more complicated. However, such a detail is just speculation, since we have no way to ascertain any specific detail of the building, except for those given in the sources.

to imagine that a similar complex device had been realized with the actual help of specialists, possibly coming from neighbouring regions, even though the reference to Baghdad is a clear anachronism[186].

The two Islamic sources either say that the mechanism displayed the hour of the night and how much the sky moved around the earth, or that it showed the hour of the day. These three statements are equivalent. How the hour of the day was represented could be achieved substantially in two ways: it was either possible to represent faithfully the celestial map and, setting it in phase with the latitude of the place, one could then read the hour or, possibly, there must have been a clock (what kind is hard to tell) in the throne hall.

In general, given the reference to a moving structure, it is possible that such a planetarium-dome could be arranged in a way as to indicate any hour of any given day, by setting the sky in the right position. In such a courtly ad magniloquent context, in fact, knowing the time would have been particularly relevant for casting horoscopes and predictions, knowing the alignment of the stars and of the planets and not to keep track of it. We could then imagine a wooden dome, insisting on a vertical structure – hence the "tower" in Ado's account – in which the constellations had been realized with precious stones applied to the vault covered in gold and lapis lazuli. As for the planets, the sun and the moon in its phases, they could have been semi-fixed icons, since their position would change in relation with the rest of the sky, and they probably had to be moved and newly located by hand every day, according to their course. The ceiling must have perforated in some specific places, in order to allocate them. Clearly, however, such a tentative reconstruction would account for a mechanism that could be set in motion only at specific moments and, whenever that happened – probably during special ceremonies or peculiar events – the ceiling must have been perfectly regulated, that is, in phase, with the actual astronomical situation of the day. The dome probably represented half of the hemisphere, thus showing the stars normally visible on the sky at that latitude.

Such a mechanism is impressive but not practical and it could have certainly not be employed to mark the passing of time. Therefore, I am inclined to think that if the domed structure could rotate – and I see no reason to doubt the sources – there probably must have been also some actual clock. From a technological point of view, that would have not been hard.

[186] In keeping with this hypothesis, it seems unreasonable to posit a pavilion moving on wheels, as P. Ackermann, *Survey of Persian Art*, II, pp. 775-778.

The movement of the tower, as one of the Byzantine chroniclers points out, was likely the cause of the thundering sound that could be heard. There would be no reason to doubt that also dripping water had been channeled through a set of pipes embedded in the ceiling in order to fake rain. We know that a similar system had been employed by Nero centuries earlier.

Such a vertical structure was probably open to the sides, since Firdawsī says it had to be covered with warm animal skins during the cold season and that Khosrow could see the fruits of the garden from where he was sitting. The fact that he saw always the garden side, both in spring and during the fall, while the back of the throne faced the desert, seems to confirm that the actual seat of the king and those of his dignitaries remained fixed on the platform, while the sustaining skeleton of the dome rotated.

A final remark should be made about the apparent inconsistency of the sources on what regards the decoration. Firdawsī mentions both the dome and a 45 meters long carpet, on which the seven planets, the seven climates of Ptolemaic ascendance, along with the series of kings were represented. From the description of al-Thaʿālibī it would seem that all these details were on the dome as well. However, it would make more sense to imagine that these details, too many to fit on the ceiling, constituted the decoration of a canopy over the throne or of a large carpet covering it, and, given the double recurrence of some astrological elements, like the seven planets (extant both on the ceiling and on the brocade), the account probably erroneously referred the whole decoration of this cloth to the domed vault.

It would not be farfetched to imagine that the scene of the king, flanked by the two angel-like creature[187], which is so typical of Persian art throughout the centuries, were represented on the ceiling as well, which is where all the Western sources report it to be. This conception of sovereignty as embodiment of the divinity was widespread in both the east and the west, even if it could be expressed in various ways. Khosrow was enthroned at the centre of the universe, in all his power; such an accumulation was meant to celebrate his cosmic kingship. He was master of both time and weather. He was himself a god.

As it should result clear from the excerpts quoted thus far, technology, in its various forms, was regularly employed to serve the representation of power in Late Antiquity. The hall of the king of Persia combined together

[187] On the Byzantine iconographical influence for this specific kind of motif, see, for instance M.C. Mackintosh, *Taq-i-Bustan and Byzantine Art: A Case of Early Byzantine Influence of Taq-i-Bustan*, in «Iranica Antiqua», 13 (1978), pp. 149-177.

elements that had been part of a long stretching tradition of cosmic representation, shared, at least from the time of Alexander the Great, from both Eastern and Western sovereigns. What is interesting, though, is the declination of these devices with a precise political message and not simply as a sign of private luxury. In describing the *Takht-i Ṭāqdīs*, I have applied the category of mechanical devices in the service of power although, arguably, none of the techniques seen so far (revolving ceiling, thunder and rain) finds an exact counterpart in the Solomonic throne our analysis departed from. However, it seems to me that it is precisely in the tradition of these demonstrations of royal or imperial power that we should inscribe the throne in the Magnaura, given both the scope and the scale of these settings.

The destruction of the hall of Khosrow II probably constituted a point of no return in the tradition of cosmic representation of sovereigns. Starred domes, where both Eastern and Western monarchs had comfortably dwelled for centuries, could no longer be employed. In Christian Constantinople, they began to be occupied, instead, by the image of Christ Pantocrator who took the place that once belonged to the emperor, true image of God on earth.

Yet, despite the progressive demonization of Khosrow II, his throne hall must have been truly impressive. Although burnt down by Heraclius' troops, its memory, altered by fantastic recollections, lived long and travelled far, thus taking unpredictable detours[188]. Forced out of official spaces like in this case – it crept into the realm of fantasy where, in disguise under a cloak of lore and legend, it can still perpetuate the proud memory of its deeds.

The Literary Transfiguration of the Throne of Khosrow II

The description of the pavilion of the king of Persia travelled far and wide. The reason I indulged on its description is because I found it methodologically relevant to the case of the Solomonic throne, since it represents another example of how a technical wonder was transfigured into a literary *topos*. The effort of channeling scientific knowledge in order to shape a specific image of power is not always successful. There is an underlying and pervasive ambiguity in the way technical wonders were perceived during the Middle Ages. If it is true, as I am arguing, that the Solomonic throne of Constantinople aimed at finding a substitute model of kingship through a

[188] H. Koller, *Der Thron Khosraus II: zu den Chorgemälden in der Kirche von Wiesendangen*, in «Zeitschrift für schweizerische Archäeologie und Kunstgeschichte», 27 (1970), pp. 93-100.

specific employment and display of refined technical skills, it is nonetheless almost impossible for the political power in charge to exercise a complete control of the impression these ancient mechanisms must have created.

A distinct echo of Khosrow's throne hall can be traced, for instance, in the fabulous description of one of the palaces of Prester John, which is said to be revolving like a wheel ("potest volvi ad modum rotae"). Similarly, the chapel of the Holy Trinity described in the famous letter had a high dome which represented the sky and it moved like it: "est rotonda ad modum coeli stellati et transit circumeundo ad modum firmamenti". The same motif appears again when it comes to the description of Prester John's *dormitorium* "of surpassing beauty and large, vaulted, and star-sprangled like the firmament; and there is a Sun and a Moon with seven planetary spheres each pursuing its course as in heaven and this is cunningly contrived". Finally, even the twenty three rooms that crown his last palace were said to "circumvolvi ad modum rotae"[189].

Another quite meaningful example of the circulation of these seemingly fantastic elements is embedded at the core of probably the most powerful and widespread legend of the Western Middle Ages, that of the Holy Grail. In the poem *Der Jüngere Titurel*, composed during the last quarter of the thirteenth century by Albrecht, there is a long section which describes the temple on Mont Salvat where the Grail was held. It is characterized, needless to say, by a high dome, encrusted with blue sapphires to represent the sky and glittering carbuncles for the stars. A golden sun and a silver moon were said to move through the dome, along the Zodiac, while the sound of cymbals struck the hours of the day[190].

Now, it might seem contradictory that some of the elements that had characterized the throne hall of a figure who was perceived as one of the fiercest enemies of late-antique Christianity ended up as peculiar features of the legendary accounts gravitating around Prester John and the Holy Grail, some of the most revered symbols of medieval religious imagery. Instead, it is important to underline a constant degree of ambiguity when it comes to wonders and *mirabilia*. A scientific achievement or an engineering device turns immediately into a magical object, when it is recorded outside the official sources. *Automata*, for instance, enjoy a great popularity throughout mediaeval romances, often becoming metallic, movable guardians of enchanted palaces or magical devices

[189] Examples quoted from H.P. L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World*, Oslo-Cambridge 1953, p. 19.

[190] For a more detailed discussion of this occurrence, see below, chapter V.

encountered by courageous knights[191]. Their role, whether positive or negative, often becomes a question of literary tradition or of narrative convenience. The freedom *automata* enjoy in this dimension is acceptable only because it is a fictional context. Instead, whenever scientific excellence, combined with powerful symbolical meaning is employed in a political way, it requires a certain degree of control because the impression it exerts can transcend the original meaning it was intended for.

At an official level, then, we may suppose that the iconographical shift, which invested pervasively the tradition of Western art during Late Antiquity – by reshaping traditional images of power in light of a completely different ideology – brought some changes indirectly also to the rituals of kingship. If, for the Byzantine emperors, the element of comparison in terms of political counterpart had been, for a few centuries, the Sasanian Empire, both its fall and the new models of representations called for a change of imagery.

In the end, I believe that the Solomonic throne in the Magnaura represents a response to the hall of Khosrow II, although not necessarily in an immediate or direct fashion. As we have seen, several centuries separate the two thrones and the main political counterpart had changed in the meantime. Still, it constitutes the most effective strategy for the representation of power since the collapse of the Sasanian Empire. Whoever devised the whole setting in the Magnaura did something new. One important innovation regarding it was the conscious effort of putting science and technical skills that had been in Constantinople for centuries in relation with the imperial seat.

The Bath of Leo VI

Now that I have traced the historical and symbolic background of impressive court ritual back to the Sasanian empire, I will go back to the Magnaura setting, trying to better describe the actual context in which it was

[191] J.D. Bruce, *Human Automata in Classical Tradition and Mediaeval Romance*, in «Modern Philology», 10 (1913), pp. 511-526; C. Cupane, *Bisanzio e la letteratura della Romania. Peregrinazioni del romanzo medievale*, in *Medioevo Romanzo e Orientale, Il Viaggio dei testi*, ed. by A. Pioletti and F. Rizzo Nervo, Catania 1999, pp. 31-49; J. Richard, *La vogue d'Orient dans la littérature occidentale du moyen age*, in *Mélanges R. Crozet*, Paris 1966, pp. 557-561; H. Legros, *Connaissance, reception et perceptions des automates orientaux au XII siècle*, in *Le Merveilleux et la Magie dans la Littérature*, ed. by G. Chandes, Amsterdam-Atlanta (GA) 1992, pp. 103-136. See also, the publications issued in occasion of the cycles of seminars *Machines et mécanismes spectaculaires* organized between 2009 and 2012 by the CETM/CELLAM.

likely fashioned and to establish the relevance it might hold for the emperor which decided to create such a peculiar arrangement in his throne hall, choosing to make the wonders of his *cabinet de merveilles* into a specific display of power. It has been proposed with a good degree of probability, that the setting in the Magnaura was established with the new (or renewed) ensemble of *automata* by Leo VI, known as the Wise (886-912 C.E.)[192]. It is in fact recorded in the *De cerimoniis* that, during a formal reception, this emperor is said to be seated on a "newly built" throne[193]. This remark alone would not be sufficient to prove that it was Leo who had ordered its reconstruction, although this might in fact be the implication of this phrase, especially in light of Leo's interest in *automata* shown in other contexts. Indeed, the poet Leo Choirosphaktes, in a long *ekphrasis* passage of a poem in anacreontic verses dedicated to the palace bath built for emperor Leo VI – possibly composed to be sung at the opening ceremony – seems to describe the employment of a series of moving statues and devices[194].

The poem is particularly interesting because it gives us a hint, although sometimes in a vague way, of the complex representation displayed in the bath. There was the emperor with a sword, the empress in the act of strewing flowers, river gods, fishing scenes, banquets on islands, female representation of a spring, and other fluvial themes which well suited an aquatic context. It is not always easy to understand in which *medium* these scenes were represented (mosaics, paintings, reliefs, stucco, statues, etc), but it is pretty safe to conclude that at least few elements were moving *automata*, set in motion by the presence of running water.

> The noise of the doors with artful contrivance sends out a musical song […] At the lord's feet, among green fronds, bathes a sweet warbling bird, murmuring lyrical songs […] The flow of countless waters sends forth the melody of instruments, imperceptibly, without any players, weaving the emperor's praise. The serpent creeps up in his wisdom, the lion roars loudly, the sapphire-coloured crane delights the ear with its cry. Then a tall young

[192] Maliaras, *Die Orgel im byzantinischen Hofzeremoniell des 9 und des 10 Jahrhunderts*, pp. 157, 162-164.

[193] *De Ceremoniis*, I, p. 33.

[194] P. Magdalino, *The Bath of Leo the Wise*, in *Maistor. Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, ed. by A. Moffatt, Canberra 1984, pp. 225-40. Magdalino, who has studied it, indicates it as a tentative hypothesis, while it is almost certain that this is actually what the poem talks about.

> sapling bears a melodious crop, gracefully tinkling among golden leaves. Under the centre glitters a hot, hot swelling current of waters in an octaconch, no small cure for the sick […] O friends, it is an awesome sight. A griffin's breath projects a blazing jet, terrifying the mortal nature of those present.

This passage has been discussed at some length in two different occasions by Paul Magdalino who has tried to devise an interpretation[195], describing this aquatic circle as an allegory of kingly wisdom, and trying to analyze the collective symbolism of the songbird, the lion, the snake, the crane, the tree, and the griffin. The crane is seen "as a symbol to Leo as a stargazer, according to the Hieroglyphica of Horapollo", the lion "is unmistakably Leo's own personal emblem", the "snake [is] explicitly identified as a symbol of wisdom", "the tree is a potent Christian symbol […] not only the Garden of Eden but also the rod of Moses […] and the cross by which the fall was redeemed" would also be a sign of the "propaganda of the Macedonian dynasty", given the "apparition to Basil's mother of a great tree which stood from her and stood in her courtyard"; finally, the griffin should be taken as "a cryptic allusion to the prophet Elias" [196].

Now, given the absence of precise references in the poem to any kind of symbolism and its praise of mechanical wonders in general, it seems risky to look for a unifying explanation. Instead, the passage is particularly revealing because it is almost a complete repertoire of automatic devices derived from Heron's *Pneumatics*, where we find a set of inventions that could all easily have been employed in this context: a bird made to whistle by flowing water, birds made to sing and be silent alternately by flowing water, sound produced on the opening of a temple door, an *automaton* which drinks at certain times, on a liquid being presented to it, an *automaton* which may be made to drink at any time, an *automaton* which will drink any quantity that may be presented to it, an apple being lifted, Hercules shooting a dragon which then hisses, notes from a bird produced at intervals by an intermittent stream of water, notes produced from several birds in succession, by a stream of water, a steam-boiler from

[195] P. Magdalino, *The Bath of Leo the Wise and the "Macedonian Renaissance" Revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremonial Ideology*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», 42 (1988), pp. 97-118.

[196] *Ibid.*, pp. 107-109.

which either a hot blast may be driven into the fire, a blackbird made to sing or a triton to blow a horn[197].

In a way, the description of the poem does not differ much from the list provided by Theodoric several centuries earlier. What it tells us is that *automata* were broadly employed, sometimes even all together, displaying the full potential of such catalogue of items. Looking for a distinctive interpretation for each machine, in this case, seems pointless. The aquatic setting is one of playful and convivial activities and more probably, the effect aimed at in the bath of Leo the Wise was wonder through accumulation. Obviously, single pieces could resonate with specific symbolic values but they do not seem displayed or described in a way that allows us to be too precise.

Whether or not it accurately describes the imperial bath, the poem of Leo Choirosphaktes provides us with a sense of the full range of automated mechanical devices in use at the Byzantine court in a period not much distant (or even contemporary) to the setting of our throne. Given the broad repertoire at the emperor's disposal, his rather specific choice of pieces made to accompany the audience ceremony in the Magnaura is significant. In other words, in contrast to the bath of Leo VI, which does not sustain a precise interpretation in light of the great number and diversity of pieces employed there, the one in the throne hall does call for one because the pieces have been carefully selected.

A Throne for a New Solomon? Emperor Leo VI and the Magnaura

It was common in Constantinople to identify emperors with Old Testament rulers or characters, particularly David and Moses[198]. However, even Solomon enjoyed a certain popularity, given the continuous reference to the

[197] A. Carra de Vaux, *Le livre des appereils pneumatiques et de machines hydrauliques, par Philon de Byzance*, Paris 1902; A.G. Drachmann, *Ktesibios, Philon and Heron: A Study in Ancient Pneumatics*, Copenhagen 1948.

[198] B. Rapp, *Old Testament Models for Emperors in Early Byzantium*, in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. by P. Magdalino – R. Nelson, Washington (DC) 2010, pp. 175-197; H. Maguire, *Davidic Virtue: The Crown of Constantine Monomachos and Its Images*, in *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art*, ed. by B. Kuehnel, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 117-123; also S. Spain Alexander, *Heraclius, Byzantine Imperial Ideology and the David Plates*, in «Speculum», 52 (1977), pp. 217-237.

treasures of his Temple and other similar "relics"[199]. His throne, even in the Bible, was clearly identified with that of God: "So Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king in place of his father David"[200].

The political use of Solomon as a source of comparison is definitely not surprising in imperial imagery, and we know it began to flourish at least since the time of Justinian, but probably even earlier. It is in fact reported that, in presenting the world the new building of Haghia Sophia, he allegedly exclaimed: "Solomon, I have outdone thee!"[201], with direct reference to the construction of the temple[202] but, probably, also in opposition to the church built by the noblewoman Anicia Juliana in Constantinople, with overt Solomonic emulation[203].

As has been tentatively proposed on the basis of written sources[204], the Magnaura throne was quite likely arranged under Leo VI, known as the Wise. Shaun Tougher, in his study of the figure of this ruler, has dedicated a whole chapter to the question of the relevance of the epithet applied to him.[205] The scholar has convincingly demonstrated that it does not refer to a generic wisdom, but instead plays on his identification with the figure of Solomon, which extends the role as new David claimed by his father Basil a generation earlier[206]. Therefore, a throne defined Solomonic in official records seems the mirror of what the sovereign wanted it to represent, the impression it wanted to

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[199] In addition to Boustan's article, see also R.M. Harrison, *From Jerusalem and Back Again: the Fate of the Treasures of Solomon*, in *Churches Built in Ancient Times: Recent Studies in Early Christian Archaeology*, ed. by K.S. Painter London 1994, pp. 239-248.

[200] 1 *Chronicles*, 29, 23; see also *Ps*. 45, 6-7.

[201] R. Ousterhout, *New Temples and New Solomons, The Rhetoric of Byzantine Architecture*, in *The Old Testament Testament in Byzantium*, ed. by P. Magdalino – R. Nelson, Washington (DC) 2010, pp. 223-253.

[202] Whether or not the famous anecdote reported is true, the church itself is a monument to this statement, being, after all, a temple dedicated to Divine Wisdom, that oftentimes tended to be superimposed to the wisdom of the king of Israel.

[203] R.M. Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium: the Discovery of Anicia Juliana's Palace-Church in Istanbul*, London 1989; J. Bardill, *A New Temple for Byzantium: Anicia Juliana, King Solomon and the Gilded Ceiling of the Church of St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople*, in *Social and Political Life in Late Antiquity*, ed. by W. Bowden – A. Gutteridge – C. Machado, Leiden 2006, pp. 339-370.

[204] G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire. Études sur le recueil des Patria*, Paris 1984, pp. 303-309.

[205] S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI 886-912, Politics and People*, Leiden-New York-Köln, 1997, particularly chapter V, *The Reality of Leo the Wise*, pp. 110-132.

[206] The scholar briefly refers also to the throne, p. 125, n. 104.

convey, the declared manifesto of his personal *propaganda*. Moreover, it is possible that the Solomonic quality of the seat was also prompted by the very context in which it was placed. Among its functions, the Magnaura was probably also used as a hall of justice. Therefore, Leo VI, while sitting on the throne, would have embodied the king of Israel in his role as perfect judge.

Elements of Kingship: the Organ

The throne would then perfectly fit within the paradigm of Leo VI as new Solomon, in keeping with a tradition, often employed in Constantinople, which made constant use of comparisons with biblical figures for political or eulogetic reasons. However, nobody seems to have noticed that the Solomonic throne in the Magnaura is far from faithful to the biblical description. What is interesting to underline, at this point, is that we find elements that are utterly alien to it, like the tree and the griffins. It claims Solomonic ascendance, it stress Leo's identification with the king of Israel, but it does not follow closely the description provided in the Scriptures All the details displayed in the Magnaura, instead, bear a very specific connotation, being cultural elements that can help us trace their own origin. We will then try to analyze them, in order to see whether it is possible to devise a symbolic unity in this ensemble or if we should instead hypothesize a series of almost casual, successive accretions, reinterpreted *a posteriori*.

The first element we need to focus on are the organs[207]. The invention of the organ – originally a *hydraulis* or water-organ – is attributed to Ktesibios of Alexandria, lived during the third century B.C.E., between the reigns of Ptolemy Philadelphus and Ptolemy III Euergetes[208]. No extant works of his remains but the body of knowledge on pneumatics and mechanics he wrote is transmitted through the encyclopedic work of Philo of Byzantium, probably living a generation after him. More importantly, however, his inventions, particularly those involving pneumatic mechanisms, were also discussed by Hero of Alexandria, who handed them down very faithfully[209], thus becoming an *auctoritas* in the field and one of the few direct sources in our possession on

[207] J. Perrot, *The Organ from its Invention in the Hellenistic Period to the end of the Thirteenth Century*, New York-Toronto 1971.

[208] *Ibid*., p. 14.

[209] See also the Drachmann, *Ktesibios, Philon and Heron*.

the subject[210]. The invention – at the beginning simply a mechanical application of a device that could compress air by way of water – turned into a musical instrument; it is also described in a similar account, which however refers to a slightly more modern model of *hydraulis*, in Vitruvius's *De Architectura*[211]. The invention, then, was familiar in the Roman world at least from the middle of the first century B.C.E.

The organ was particularly dear to Emperor Nero who possessed one and was extremely interested in the mechanical novelties related to the instrument[212]. It seems that, already in this period, it was employed both in theatres and in gladiatorial fights, in order to mark some of the phases of the show[213]. It was probably Nero himself that stressed the importance of it in these contexts, as the presence of special medals issued by him would demonstrate.

The active role played by the organ during these public ceremonies made it familiar to a vast audience in relation not only to games and races but also to the process of symbolic staging of imperial values. It became part of both the visual and of the sound collective imagery, thus being deeply connected with the moment of imperial self-representation, expressed as a metaphor of cosmic-solar power, represented by the sacred space of the *ludi*, where the chariot of the emperor, moving in the circular space, made it evident the correspondence between the emperor and the Sun-god and the strict class-hierarchy regulating the seating places in the *cavea*. By looking down, the slave sitting on the top seats, could visualize the whole social structure of his society: at his level the women, right underneath the plebeians, then the knights, further down the senatorial class and finally the emperor. Unsurprisingly, this process took full shape during the time of emperor Nero, who made the metaphor clear by openly identifying himself as Helios riding his sun-chariot and staging in the amphitheatre a detailed representation of his cosmic dominion. The theatre and the hippodrome would have become a definite image of a well-regulated microcosm. In this scenario, the sound of the organ was not a mere corollary of the political and religious meaning but it became deeply embedded in these spaces as a fundamental detail of the representation.

This early association between the organ and the emperor is particularly relevant as background for understanding its later uses, particularly those

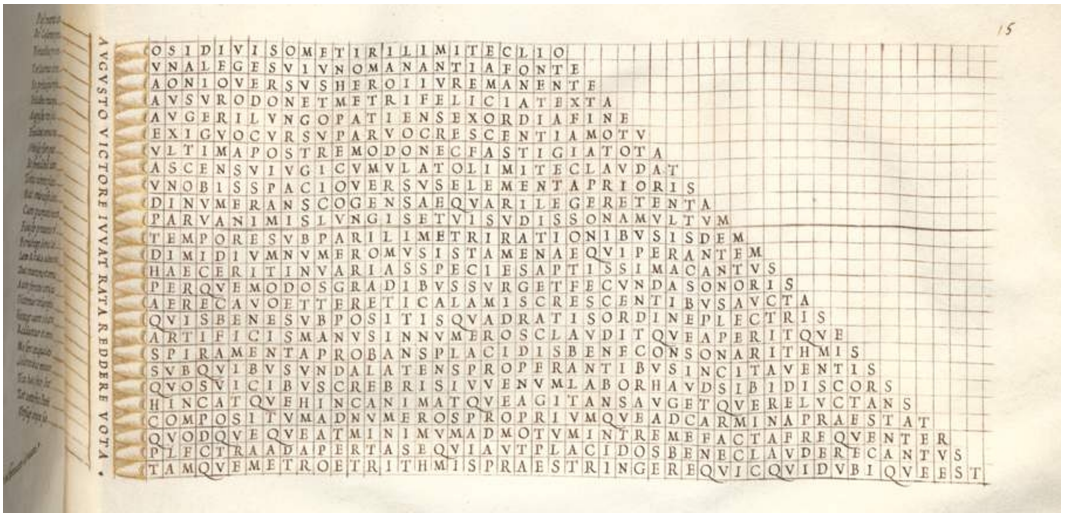
[210] Hero of Alexandria, *Pneumatica*, I, 42.

[211] Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, X, 8.

[212] Svetonius, *De Vita Caesaris*, (*Nero*), XLI; Cassius Dio, *Historia Romanae*, LXIII, 26.

[213] Petronius, *Satyricon*, XXXVI.

described in the official or public ceremonials of Constantinople. Their importance as courtly objects, strongly associated with imperial power, is also indirectly shown by one of the carmina realized by Publilius Optatianus Porfirius (260/270-333/337 C.E.), with the technique of the *versus intexti*, that is, acrostic compositions with letters in different colors (depending on the direction one reads them), composed in order to obtain forgiveness from emperor Constantine and the return from exile. Among this collection, there are few *technopaegnia*, pictorial poems that represent, through a special disposition of the words, the actual subject described by the poetic work. Number XX represents the organ [ill. 15].

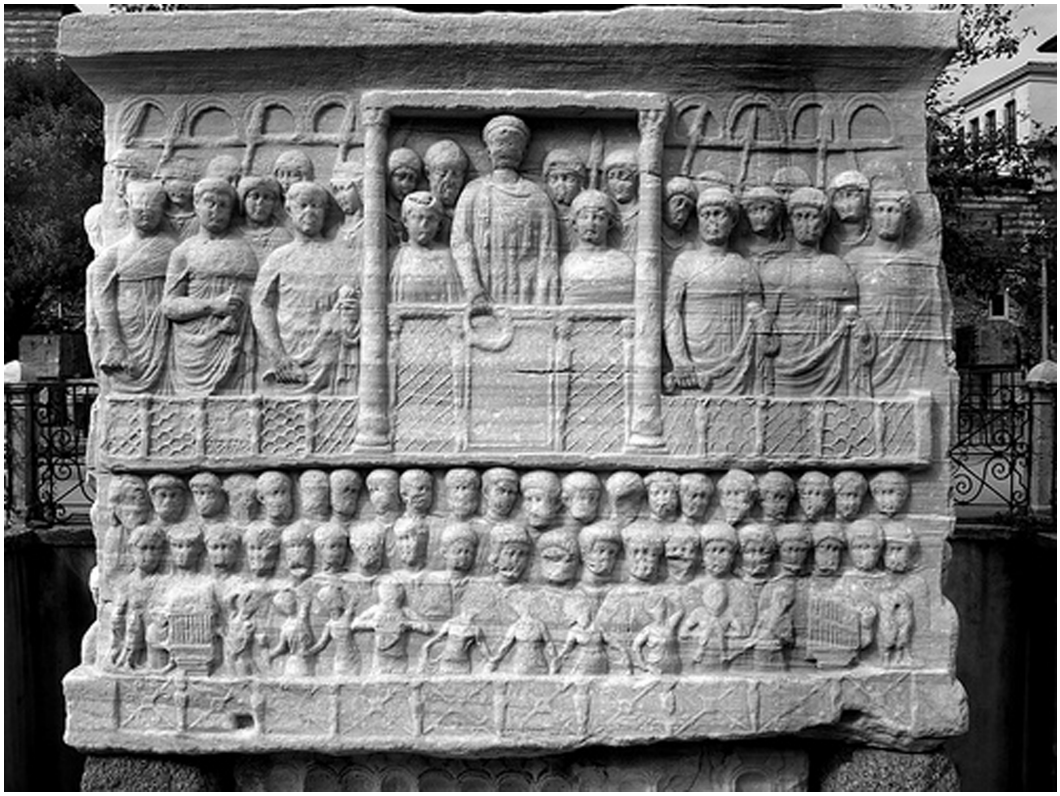


The choice of such an element is not accidental – being it moreover coupled with that of the other *technopaegnion* of the collection, that is the *ara*, n. XXVI – and it underlines the triumphal dimension of Constantine's military victories, which, even in reality, would have been accompanied in the streets by the assertive sound of the very instrument[214].

The transition from paganism to Christianity will not imply an immediate change in the use of the instrument; indeed, the shift toward a liturgical setting, in which we are now accustomed to the use of the organ, will happen much later and especially in the Western world. In the Byzantine Empire, the instrument remained the voice of victory and of courtly solemnities. It was in fact represented on basement of the Egyptian obelisk Theodosius (r.

[214] P. Dessì, *Organi, orologi e automi musicali: oggetti sonori per il potere*, «Acta Musicologica», 82 (2010), pp. 21-47; P. Dessì, *L'organo tardoantico. Storie di sovranità e diplomazia*, Padova 2008, pp. 63-75.

379-395 C.E.) had relocated in the new built hippodrome of Constantinople (between 388 and 392 C.E.). Its pictorial program, a fully developed political message, addressed a different audience, according to the position one was sitting in the *stadium*, and was meant to show the triumphal quality of the new Christian sovereign (the *Chi-Rho* is depicted) to the people, the factions of the city, the visiting ambassadors. Among the details of the representation, two organs with their *magistri* accompany the narration, evoking the ever present sound dimension of the ceremony [ill. 16][215].



The presence of organs during Byzantine court and public ceremonials is widely attested[216]. The use of these instruments can largely be accounted for during some of the *proeleuseis*, the processions held on religious festive days from the palace to a church of the city, the *dexima*, secular ceremonies during which the Emperor met the representatives of the *demoi*, the city factions. In these occasions, the organs played briefly and in correspondence with pivotal

[215] For a detailed analysis of the political implications of the obelisk, see Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth*, pp. 100-121 and also Dessì, *L'organo tardoantico*, pp. 75-84. For a description of the organ and its technical details, Perrot, *The Organ*, p. 80.

[216] Maliaras, *Die Orgel im byzantinischen Hofzeremoniell*, pp. 183-189.

phases, accompanying, for instance, the moment of imperial acclamation. They were also largely employed during banquets, to entertain the party, or during marriages, not during the liturgy, however, but right after the ceremony, when the new couple was hailed by the crowd. Finally, they were mostly in use in the hippodrome, where they marked the beginning of the cart races, they signaled the arrival of the emperor in the *kathisma* and they accompanied the celebration of a triumphal pomp. It must be noted that the organs in question were not exclusively imperial instruments: in some of these occasions it were the silver organs belonging to the city factions that sounded.

The only difference in respect with the first Ktesibian invention – which is a technical and not a symbolic detail – is the progressive substitution of the water organ by a bellows-organ, by replacing the pistons and the water cistern once in use by a simple bellows[217]. That would have solved much of the problems normally related to rust, leaks and frost caused by the presence of the water and it would have made the whole device more portable and easily movable, better meeting the demands required of an instrument that had to follow processions and be as much as possible where the emperor was.

This transition probably happened around the second century C.E., as we can infer from the account by Emperor Julian[218]. By the fifth century C.E., the more recent model had surpassed the older, although the term *hydraulis* tended to be still erroneously employed, in force of an old habit, to indicate the new kind[219]. The organ depicted on the obelisk of Theodosius is, in fact, a bellows one. Similarly, the organs in use in the Magnaura must have been of this kind. The recently discovered frescoes in the cathedral of S. Sophia in Kiev, depicting the meeting of Princess Olga, great-grandmother of Yaroslav the Wise, and emperor Constantine Porphyrogennetos, which took place in Constantinople in 954, seem to confirm this evidence, in showing, among other instruments, the organ of the palace, played by its *magister*, accompanied by two helpers who were supposed to set in motion the bellows [ill. 17a-17b]. The difficulty, in fact, was to accumulate a certain pressure within the internal chamber and maintain it, throughout the melody, in order to make the sound even. We should always bear in mind this fact – despite the silence of the sources about these figures – when we imagine the ceremonies described.

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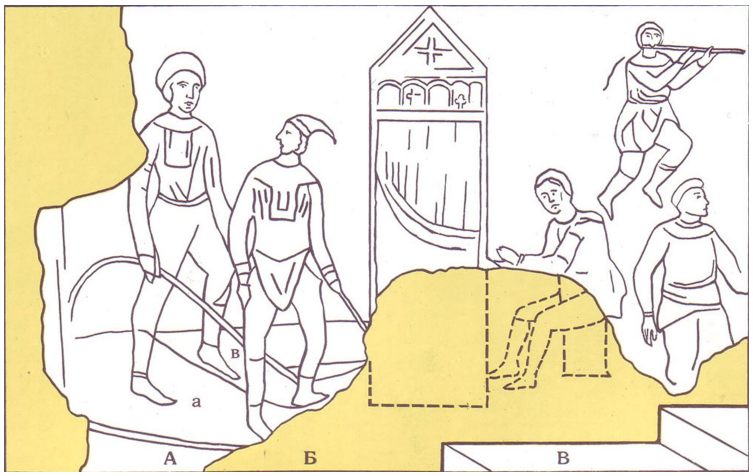
[217] Perrot, *The Organ*, p. 54.

[218] *Ant. Pal.*, IX, 365.

[219] Perrot, *The Organ*, p. 64.

The organs in the Magnaura, then, were part of a long-extant tradition deeply embedded in Roman culture, having they been for a long time the actual soundtrack of the empire, at least in late Antiquity[220]. They constituted a source of surprise and marvel for the Muslim people who still didn't know them well, as it emerges from the account of Hārūn ibn Yaḥyā, prisoner in Constantinople around 880 and 890, who saw an organ playing during a banquet and described it[221].



[220] On the acustic dimension of the Magnaura reception, see also A. Berger, *Die akustische Dimensiondes Kaiserzeremoniells. Gesang, Orgelspiel und Automaten*, in *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft. Frühmittelalterliche Residenzen Gestalt und Zeremoniell*, ed. by F.A. Bauer, Istanbul 2006, pp. 63-77.

[221] A. Vasilev, *Harun-Ibn-Yahya and his Description of Constantinople*, in «Seminarium Kondakovianum», 5 (1932), pp. 149-163.

Conversely, the golden tree can certainly be identified as a *motif* of oriental origin. In the next few paragraphs, I would like to present and discuss some of the material related to tree symbolism, particularly some elements specifically related to planes or to golden trees in general, because they help clarifying the presence of our metal plane as part of a royal setting. My idea, in fact, is that the setting in Constantinople was devised through the insertion of elements belonging to a common vocabulary, which could be understood and recognized by other sovereigns. As such, such a 'luxury code' did not mean or imply any form of uniformity; instead, the actual possibility of a shared visual language allowed the sovereigns to deliver specific messages by adapting some of these elements in a peculiarly framed way. During the tenth century, Byzantine, Fatimids and Abbasids court all shared a taste for 'exotic' objects that implied luxury and grandeur. Figurative patterns found on portable objects hinting at their culturally remote origin could be valued precisely for this reason, because they were evocative of a lost realm of fabulous wealth[222]. I am convinced that the golden tree can be interpreted within the context of shared symbols of power.

The earlier mentions in the Byzantine sources refer to it as a simple tree, later on identified with a plane. This fact is significant, particularly in relation with the importance attributed to this arboreal species in antiquity. In the Greek world[223], planes were held in great consideration in virtue of their great longevity[224], because of their size[225] and of their shade[226]. They were often

[222] On the carachterization of the Byzantine emperors according to 'foreign' or 'exotic' fashion, see also A. Walker, *The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.*, Cambridge 2012, particulary chapter III, *Crafting a Byzantine-Islamic Community of Kings*, pp. 80-107.

[223] Homer, *Il.* II, 307; Theognis, v. 882; Plato, *Phaedrus*, 230b-d; "shady planes" are also often mentioned in the *Greek Anthology*.

[224] Pausanias, VIII, 23, 4, see *Pausanias's Description of Greece*, translation with a commentary by J. G. Frazer, London 1898, IV, p. 279. See also Pliny, *Nat. Hist*., XII, 6-13. Theofr., *Hist. Plant*., IV, 13, 2, refers of a plane tree planted by Agamennon before leaving for Troy and still extant. See also Pliny, *Nat. Hist*., XVI, 238.

[225] Some plane trees develop a gigantic hollow trunk. Pliny, *Nat. Hist*., XII, 9 related of the banquet held within one of it in Lycia, organized by the Roman governor Licinius Mucianus, with seventeen guests on *triclinia*. Also emperor Caligula used to spend some time in a big plane near Velitrae which called his nest. See also Frazer, *Pausania's Description*, III, pp- 446-448, IV, p. 152.

associated with spring waters because they normally grow along streams and oftentimes water came out of their hollow trunk or flowed from under their roots[227].

Similarly, in the Persian culture, the plane, named *chinār*, is often mentioned with the greatest reverence[228], often used to ornate gardens and city streets because it grew rapidly, reaching a great height. Its importance can be indirectly understood by the great number of toponyms which bear a reference to it. Some great exemplars made a strong impression on foreign travelers throughout the centuries: it is the case, for instance, of Marco Polo narrating of a huge tree in the province of Tonocain (the two cities of Tūn and Qā'en in Southern Persia), which he refers to as the *Arbre Sol*, and which it has been identified as a plane tree, and of Italian diplomat Pietro della Valle who, still in the seventeenth century, mentions the numerous and wonderful Persian *chinār* trees. The appreciation of plane trees turned often in actual veneration, because it was believed that trees of particular antiquity hosted the souls of deceased. Moreover, divinatory practices are recorded in connection with them[229].

We have thus far mentioned actual, natural trees. However, we do have evidence regarding metal plane trees in written sources. Herodotus' *Histories* (484-425 B.C.E.) is the earliest extant source to mention such objects. The first one refers to a golden plane, gifted to Darius (550-486 B.C.E.), along with a golden vine-tree, by Pythios – allegedly the nephew of Crese[230]. Later on, the historian tells us that Xerxes (486-465 B.C.E.), passing by a place named Callatebus in Asia Minor, decorated with golden ornaments a beautiful tree he had found, placing it under the care of one of his Immortals[231]. Even Xenophon relates, on the basis of Antiochus of Arcadia, of a golden tree made object of reverence at the Achaemenid court, which was embellished with precious

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[226] Alexander sleeps under a plane tree with two nemeses standing beside him who order him to found Smyrna, the scene is to be found on coins, *Pausania's Description*, VII, 5, 2.

[227] Pausanias mentions them often: II, 37, 1; II, 37, 4; III, 11, 2; III, 14, 8; III, 15, 1; III, 20, 8; IV, 34, 4; V, 27, 2; VII, 5, 2; VII, 22, 1; VIII, 19, 2; VIII, 23, 4; IX, 19, 7.

[228] See also the entries *čenār* and *derak̲t* by H. Aʿlam in the *Encyclopædia Iranica* (online ed.).

[229] A practice widely attested, if we consider that Anushavan, grandson of Ara, a legendary king of Armenia, was nicknamed "devoted to the plane tree" because he employed a divination method based on the leaves-soughing of the sacred grove of plane trees in the capital of Armavir, see the entry *Anušawan* by J.R. Russell, in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 15 vols, II (1986), p. 138.

[230] Herodotus, *Hist*., VII, 27.

[231] Herodotus, *Hist*., VII, 31.

stones and beside which royal audiences were held. During the sack of Persepolis, the Macedonians saw a golden plane and a golden vine in the royal bedchamber[232]. A golden plane was also mentioned during the sack of Susa in 316 B.C.E., perpetrated by the Seleucids of Antigonus Monophtalmos[233]. At this point, it should result clear that the presence of a golden plane in Constantinople is far from being coincidental. Although we cannot properly trace all the steps of this story, what it seems to be delineating is really a symbolic tradition which is probably rooted, at least originally, in some symbolic practice that we cannot fully explain on the scanty basis of these sources.

But before proceeding further in our analysis, we should briefly mention another branch of the story of the golden tree, which resonates with interesting echoes, although it can be compared to the plane tree occurrences with some caution. During the fall of Ctesiphon in 637, taken place few years before the death of the last Sasanian sovereign in 651, we find the mention of another golden tree, a palm this time, described as part of the booty assembled by the Arabs who were ransacking Persia. Yazdagird III left his capital and flew to the Khorasan region where he was eventually killed. He brought with him part of his treasures, among which – as al-Qāḍī al-Rashīd tells us – the governors of Khorasan found a golden palm tree encrusted with precious stones, whose value was fixed to two million *dinars*[234]. It might correspond to – or fall in the same tradition of – the golden tree recorded as extant in the royal hall of Khosrow I[235]. Another palm tree with fruits made of precious stones, not necessarily the same one, was recorded to be among the Fatimid treasures[236].

The presence of artificial metal palm trees in the region in particularly interesting if compared to what we know about the so called 'Assyrian sacred tree', which characterizes Assyrian art, particularly between the ninth to seventh centuries B.C.E. The most famous example is depicted on the relief at the British Museum [ill. 18]. This tree has been the object of much debate,

[232] Xenophon, *Hellenica*, VII, 1, 38.

[233] H.C. Rawlinson, *The History of Herodotus. A new English version, edited with copious notes and appendices*, 4 vols, London 1862, IV, p. 170.

[234] Shalem, *The fall of al-mada'in*, p. 79.

[235] *Ibid*., p. 79.

[236] *Ibid*., p. 79.

which began at the end of the nineteenth century and has been recently well summarized and discussed[237].

Although alternatively identified with the tree of life or with the stylized representation of a date palm tree, the figure would seem to represent a cult object, consisting of an actual tree trunk or a pole (sometimes made of cedar), encased in bronze (or gold) sheaths, on which other movable parts (like branches and leaves) were inserted, in order to represent a palm tree. Archaeological evidences, particularly during excavations made at Nimrud and Khorsabad (in front of the Shin temple of the palace of Sargon's II), have yielded bronze sheathing embossed with the design of a palm tree trunk scales or imbrications, the remains of the poles (9 meters long and 5 meters in diameter). Bronze leaves and branches were also found during excavations at Inshushinak temple in Susa. Several other traces of representations of artificial palm trees have been found in a broad range of media (round, relief, mosaic, engaged columns) and in a wide chronological span[238]. The actual symbolic

[237] M. Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree: a History of Interpretations*, Friburg-Göttingen 2007, the author discusses the main lines of debatedealing with this symbol.

[238] At temple entrances or across the façade, it is a tradition extending from the III millennium B.C.E. in Mesopotamia: mosaic tesserae mimicking palm trunks were found, for instance, at the Ninhursag temple at Tell al-'Ubaid, four miles west of Ur, also in the Eanna precinct at Uruk, c. 3200-2900 B.C.E.; on ziggurat dedicated to Inana, there were cone mosaic decorations.

meaning of these objects is far from being clarified[239]. It is certain, however, that these are to be put in relation with sacred spaces and that they are strongly associated with the role of the kings. Monarchs offered artificial trees to the divinity, as it is attested for Gungunum, who reigned over Larsa (ca. 1932-1906 B.C.E.) and gifted bronze trees to the temple of Shamash[240]. The parade held in Alexandria centuries later during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (ca. 284-246 B.C.E.), during which seven gilded palm trees were drawn on carts around the city and offered to Dionysus[241] seems, in a way, the far reaching extension of a custom of the utter antiquity.

We cannot directly connect the Assyrian occurrences of metal palm trees with those of other artificial metal trees (planes, vines and palms) mentioned in the Persian territory. Evidences are scanty and patchy, however evocative. What we can say, in any case, is that there certainly was a sure connection between royalty and artificial, metal, trees, whether the plants constituted an offering made from a king to a divinity or from someone to the king himself.

So far we have disregarded the technological aspect of these trees – of which nothing is known – focusing mostly on the symbolic relevance of the recurrence. None of these early trees should be identified with an *automaton*. However, given the presence of a strong tradition of artificial tree-making, it is quite likely that at some point in time, probably after the Muslim conquest, the symbolic and the technological aspects merged. In the *Pneumatics* of Hero an artificial tree is really never described, although there are several chapters dedicated to the singing birds. The mechanical competence deriving from Heronic knowledge could be however easily applied to the well-known golden trees, thus producing a synthesis with new potential. At this point, it should result clear that the above mentioned tree, admired by Byzantine ambassadors in the palace in Baghdad at the time of al-Muqtadir (r. 908-932 C.E.) – falls precisely in this line. We do not know whether it was a palm tree or a plane but it is reasonable to think that it was reminiscent of the one once extant in one of the Persian throne halls. The Persian *spolia* and the palaces inherited by the

[239] Much of the debate has focused mainly on the pre-iconographic level of the question. It is still uncertain whether it might have represented an actual tree, or if it can represent the *kishkanus*, tree or wooden objec found in cuneiform sources.

[240] Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree*, pp. 177-190.

[241] E.E. Rice, *The grand procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus*, Oxford 1983, pp. 22-23.

Muslim invaders prompted the new rulers to imitate and consciously perpetuate the traditions of the land just conquered.
As much as this element is concerned, we do not know whether the grafting of Hellenistic science on the symbolic tree happened because of Arabic influence and arrived in Constantinople as a result of direct imitation or viceversa but, again, this is not really the question under examination here.
What matters the most, rather, is the combined presence of a tree, flanked by lions and griffins. This setting is not coincidental but it strongly reminds of the widespread iconography of the so-called tree of life, guarded by two sacred animals. As a figurative motif, it is an ancient and lasting one, which would go back at least to the cultural heritage of the Achaemenids. The Sasanians, whose rule began in 224, after overthrowing the Parthian Arsacids, and ended in 651 with the Arabic conquest, had always claimed continuity with the ancient Achaemenid heritage: their political message was achieved also by merging several cultural trends of the Near East, particularly through the appropriation of some of their symbols. In this way, ancient iconographies of royal power (hunts, struggles, representative animals) migrated effortlessly into the new Sasanian empire, which in turn propagated them through easily movable objects, such as silver vessels or costly garments, into the whole Mediterranean basin.

Sharing Elements of Kingship: Silks and Precious Objects in Circulation

Not many actual Sasanian silks are left to us but their decoration survived through the several central Asiatic imitations, the copies made by the Byzantine weavers and, later on, thanks to the Arabic conquerors. In this way, most of these motifs lost their initial specific connotation, yet retaining an almost decorative, 'heraldic' quality, which still signified royalty, power and exoticism without necessarily implying a Sasanian ascendance anymore[242]. These cloths

[242] O. von Falke, *Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei*, 2 vols, Berlin 1913; R. Lopez, *Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire*, in «Speculum», 20 (1945), pp. 1-42; G. Wiet, *Soieries Persanes*, Cairo 1947; N. Oikonomidès, *Silk Trade and Production in Byzantium from the Sixth to the Ninth Century: the Seals of Kommerkiarioi*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», 40 (1986), pp. 33-53; U. Scerrato, *Stoffe sasanidi*, in *La seta e la sua via*, ed. by M.T. Lucidi, Roma 1994, pp. 75-82 and, in the same collection, also the articles of F. De' Maffei, *La seta a Bisanzio*, pp. 89-98; G. Fauro, *I costumi di corte a Bisanzio*, pp. 99-102 and the section dedicated to the iconographic motifs, pp. 135-252; A. Muthesius, *Studies in Byzantine and Islamic silk weaving*, London 1995; *Byzantine silk weaving AD 400 to AD 1200*, ed. by E. Kislinger – J. Koder, Wien 1997; E. Piltz, *Middle*

and their decoration had become legitimate appropriations of new political actors which used them to promote themselves. For the Byzantine empire, particularly between the reign of Justinian and the fourth Crusade (1204 C.E.), the silk business was a central one, a state monopoly, directly controlled by the Emperor's officers.

Even when, from the tenth century onwards, part of the work was taken care by some specialized silk guilds in Constantinople, it was still done under a strict court control.

Byzantine Court Costume, in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. by H. Maguire, Washington (DC) 1997, pp. 39-52; G. Maniatis, *Organization, Market Structure and Modus Operandi of the Private Silk Industry in Tenth-Century Byzantium*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», 53 (1999), pp. 263-332; A. Muthesius, *Studies in Byzantine, Islamic and Near Eastern Silk Weaving*, London 2008; D. Jacoby, *Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World and the Christian West*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», 58 (2004), pp. 197-240; A. Muthesius, *Studies in Silk in Byzantium*, London 2004.

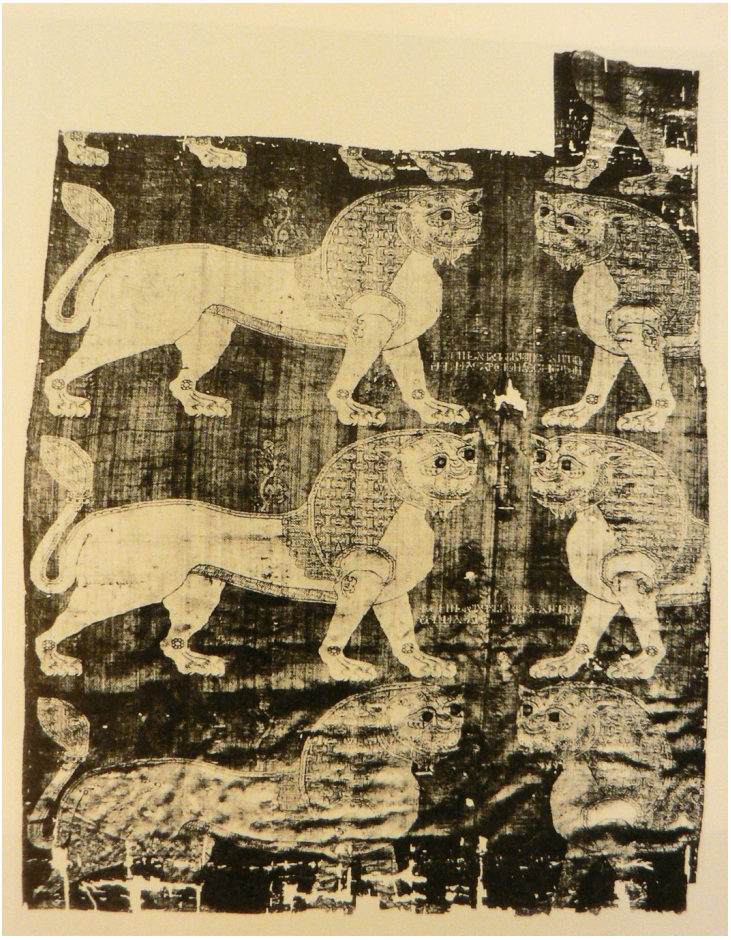
The whole process was moreover regulated by a series of specific legislations and by several decrees, recorded in the Theodosian and Justinian codes, in a *Novel* of Leo the Wise, in the *Basilicas* and in the economic legislation of the *Book of Prefect*[243]. The fabric was in fact used during imperial ceremonial, as a diplomatic gift, as a true sign of hierarchical splendor[244]. It was pervasive at all level of high society and it indicated social status. It was an equivalent of gold and its value could always be described in monetary terms.

Some of the most magnificent Byzantine textiles extant [ill. 19-21], often exchanged as diplomatic gifts, have come down to us because they were used in

[243] A. Muthesius, *Silken Diplomacy*, in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. by J. Shepard, S. Franklin, Aldershot 1992, pp. 237-248.

[244] Silk was pervasive in the ceremonial, imperial garments are attested and described, see for instance emperor Alexios V (Vienna, Nat. Library, Cod. Hist. gr. 53, fol. 219v), wearing a purple robe with woven griffins on it.

Europe as cloth to enwrap holy relics[245]. Few of these silks, particularly those displaying great lions and characterized by imperial inscriptions[246] , were meant to be recognizable signs of what Anna Muthesius calls the "silken diplomacy", true vehicles of the expression of imperial authority[247]. According to André Grabar, who studied the origin of some of the oriental motifs which pervasively characterized the so-called Macedonian Renaissance, the presence of the imperial inscription on these textiles, known only from the ninth century onwards, could depend on the Arabic tradition of making *tiraz*, pieces of cloth of great dimensions produced by the caliph and accompanied by a kufic inscription which stated his name and his faith.



[245] Muthesius, *Silken Diplomacy*, pp. 165-172.

[246] Muthesius, *Byzantine Silk Weaving*, pp. 55-76.

[247] However, the scholar does not say much on the symbol, except that "the Lion motiv itself, with small background tree form, found a classical precedent on ancient Greek vases and on Roman pavements, including one at Horkstow in Linconlshire. The use of a purple ground for the lion motivs in conjunction with the names of Byzantine rulers underlined imperial authority. Murex purple was the dye traditionally reserved for Imperial use", *ibid.*, p. 168.

For the scholar, some of the more impressive and more complexes textiles made by Byzantine ateliers[248] should be considered not as the fruit of direct imitation of Persian garments – although that would have been chronologically possible[249] – but, rather, as the effect of a new wave of circulation prompted by the Islamic rulers.

In a recent contribution, Eva Hoffman has tackled the whole question of recognizability of patterns, focusing primarily on the interchange between the Islamic and Christian world in the Mediterranean, from the tenth through the twelfh century. Interestingly enough, one of the examples she makes regards the image of the tree of life flanked by lions, as it appears in the twelfth century mantle of Roger II of Sicily [ill. 22][250].

In general, given the reciprocal imitation of motifs, it is particularly difficult to understand the provenance of some items, which could be variously attributed to different centers without certainty. One of the cases mentioned is the famous bronze griffin in Pisa, which could have easily been produced anywhere from

[248] A. Grabar, *Le succès des arts orientaux à la cour byzantine sous les macédoniens*, in «Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst», 2 (1951), pp. 32-60.

[249] The evidence in the *Liber Pontificalis* seems to tell us that there were already silk ateliers producing them in cost during the eighth but the scholar thinks they were really in use only since the tenth century.

[250] E. Hoffman, *Pathways of Portability: Islamic and Christian Interchange from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century*, in *Late Antique and Medieval Art of the Mediterranean World*, ed. by E. Hoffman, Malden (MA)-Oxford-Carlton Australia 1997, pp. 317-349.

North Africa to Egypt, Sicily or Spain. The same issue applies to all easily movable objects, particularly silverware, ivories and textiles.

The main argument of her thesis is that the portability of an object, which translates as its actual circulation, ends up shaping a shared culture of symbolic values, where it is more important to recognize the meaning of an object within a context of similar others, rather than understanding where it comes from: "identity and meaning were informed through circulation and networks of connection, rather than singular sources of origin or singular identification"[251]. All these objects become part of a net of interchange and it was not too important to recognize their origin, as long as their meaning or cultural ascendance was clear[252]. What really mattered, however, was who was displaying it and why. In general, recent scholarhip is abandoning the old perspective of strict reciprocal influences, quite distinctive from a cultural point of view, in favor of a broader context of shared visual values, where the priority of a certain innovation (both technological and visual) is not necessarily the only focus of investigation. The interesting element becomes, then, the choice of adopting a certain set of 'foreign' or 'exotic' values in order to appropriate and reshape them from within[253].

Conclusion

The presence of the automatic lions, griffins and tree in the Magnaura, then, probably acted in a way not dissimilar from the same patterns found on textiles, ivory boxes, silverware. They stood there as visual metaphor of royal power and privilege, of guardianship and sacredness, but they were, moreover, alive. The effect must have been even more striking if we consider that, during

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[251] *Ibid*., p. 320.

[252] The scene embroidered on the famous mantle of Roger II, for instance, then, with the affronted lions killing a camel, on the two sides of a tree of life, is a direct, if varied, reminiscence of one Persian *motif* that, as we have seen, had been in circulation thanks to Sasanian trade route.

[253] On this point, see also O. Grabar, *The Shared Culture of Objects*, in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. by H. Maguire, Washington D.C. 1997, pp. 115-130; *ibid*., W. Tronzo, *Byzantine Court Culture from the point of View of Norman Sicily: The Case of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. by H. Maguire, Wasghington D.C. 1997, pp. 101-114.
pp. 101-114; A. Cutler, *Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab and Related Economies*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», 55 (2001), pp. 247-278.

formal audiences, one of the key aspects was also the full display of precious textiles, not just as ceremonial garments but also as banners or carpets. From the accounts in the *De cerimoniis*, in fact, we know the hall was covered in precious silks and every officer and the emperor used to wear a specific garment [ill. 23]; on the occasion of the audiences given in honor of the ambassadors Amerumma, Amida and princess Olga, for instance, we know there were animals like peacocks, eagles, griffins and all sort of beasts displayed around the throne, along the steps of the *bema* and on banners and standards[254]. If we have to imagine the Magnaura during one of these embassies, then, we would probably have to picture an outstanding duplication of patterns, carried out through several media. Lions, griffins, trees and birds would be moving on cloths, shining because of the golden thread they were made of, and visually echo the glimpse of the gilded surface of the automatic machinery surrounding the throne and the person of the emperor.

[254] De' Maffei, *La seta a Bisanzio*, pp. 89-98.

We could wonder whether this duplication was achieved simply in order to create an overwhelming sensation, or whether it was also a way of enlivening the symbols and petrifying them on a more solid *medium*, an effort to eternize them in something less fragile than simple cloth. Whatever the case, the final message of the throne hall was one of royal power, shining in its glory. The throne itself was guarded and protected by the wild beasts, exactly as the sacred tree was, and this association must have been far from coincidental: it implied and reaffirmed the sacredness of the person of the emperor.

There is one final element to be underlined in the whole ceremony. If what Liudprand says is accurate, the emperor was also lifted from his initial position and raised to a position closer to the ceiling. Such a movement, probably made possible by a seat located on a movable platform, certainly created an impressive effect and made the emperor seem utterly unreachable, by stressing his distance by the common people. However, it is also possible that in such a movement were embedded a more symbolic stance and the sudden ascent toward the sky of the emperor were meant to signify an apotheosis or a similar celestial journey. It is well known, for instance, that the figure of the prophet Elija, retained a certain importance for the Macedonian dynasty, particularly for Basil, Leo VI's father[255]. However, the presence of the griffins, in this context, would seem quite revealing and possibly suggest a relation with the story of the flight of Alexander the Great on a basket/chariot/throne actually driven by two of these mythical beasts[256], a well known story in tenth century Constantinople. An echo of Alexandrian wonders would seem all the more out of place in a Solomonic context, but, as we will see in chapter IV, these two characters had several elements in common, particularly in the Islamic tradition, and flight was one of them. Both Solomon and Alexander represented paradigms of kingship in both cultures. It is not a coincidence, for instance, that in the already mentioned *Books of Gifts and Rarities*, we find that the Byzantine emperor had gifted the Fatimid ruler around 969 with as precious saddle, which was said to have belonged to

[255] See for instance, L. Brubaker, *Byzantium, Images as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nanzianzus*, Cambridge 1999, particularly the IV chapter, *Basil I and visual panegyric*, pp. 147-200.

[256] C. Frugoni, *Historia Alexandri elevati per griphos ad aerem, origine, iconografia e fortuna di un tema*, Roma 1973.

Alexander[257], and centuries later, the Seljuk ruler Tughrul Beg had presented the emperor with a precious vest with the seal of Solomon on it[258].

What is interesting, then, is that, despite a blatant and insisted identification with the throne of king Solomon, the imagery employed was in strict dialogue with the idea of kingship of other courts and not directly or wholly dependent upon the biblical description. In this case, the 'Solomonic' quality of the throne was dictated by the emperor himself, it was a reflection of him as a new Solomon. In this sense, it is also important to remember that the Magnaura probably corresponded to the hall of justice. Thus, its throne resonated all the more in that context, as the seat of the perfect and wisest of judges, Solomon.

The elements displayed on the throne would have not been uncommon or very characteristic *per se*. Rather, these elements acquired their meaning because they were placed within a specific 'semantic' system of symbols. As we have seen, the organs were the natural soundtrack of the late empire, naturally evoking ceremonial or official display. However, they were also the instruments strictly related to most spectacles and one wonders whether their sound would have prompted some sort of indirect reaction, suggesting a dimension of spectacularization. As such, they were certainly an indigenous and quite typical element to the Byzantine culture. The idea of ascent could be placed in between East and West, therefore common cultural and symbolic patrimony. The griffins, the golden tree and also the lions were, instead, part of that shared vocabulary of luxury, wealth and exoticism that could have been appropriate in several courtly contexts, both in the Mediterranean and in Persia. And precisely because they could have been found anywhere, from caskets to silks, that it was important to render these elements unique. The ensemble was then arranged in such a way that none of the composing elements stood by itself but each of them became part of a more complex sequence and staging. The sounds of the *automata* responded to the organs, the movement of the throne to that of the statues. Everything was so cleverly arranged and devised that it could rightfully be called Solomonic.

[257] Walker, *The Emperor and the World*, p. 93.

[258] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Appendix I

When Farídún
Bestowed Írán upon Íraj—the youngest
Of his illustrious sons—he gave withal
Three things—this very throne, the ox-head mace
To serve as his memorial in the world,
And thirdly what the just Sháh used to term
"The Seven Founts"—a jewel. When Íraj
Departed these were left and Minúchihr
Had joy thereof. Each wearer of the crown
Made some addition to that throne, and when
It came to Kai Khusrau, the fortunate,
He added greatly to its height. It passed
In due succession to Luhrásp and so
On to Gushtásp who, when he saw it, cried:—
"The work of mighty men must not be hidden,"
And to Jámásp that man of worship said:—
What canst thou add to this achievement? Scan
It everywhere and see what supplement
Thereto will win us praises after death."
Jámásp beheld the throne and saw therein
A key wherewith to open wisdom's door.
Upon it he inscribed the heavenly host,
Which hold the secrets of futurity,
And there portrayed by order of the Sháh
The planet-forms from Saturn to the moon.
The throne thus reached the era of Sikandar,
Each Sháh that looked upon it adding somewhat—
Gold, silver, ivory, and ebony—
Until through ignorance at one fell swoop
Sikandar broke it up; howbeit the nobles
Concealed and handed down full many a shard.
Thus was it till Ardshír began his reign,
And then the name e'en had grown obsolete.
He found no traces and so made another,
Not as he would, and had small joy therein.
He died and left it as thereafter did
Those that succeeded. When Khusrau Parwíz
Sat on the throne and all the chiefs were loyal
They spake about that other royal throne,
And its past history. Thus said the Sháh:—
"Ye chiefs! I ask a favour of my lieges
So that I may remake that throne renowned

To keep my name in mind. I need the plan
Drawn by Jámásp—the favourite of the sky—
The one adopted by Gushtásp, the Sháh,
Assisted by Jámásp's advice and skill."
An archimagus reproduced the plan
Whereat the exalt Khusrau Parwíz was glad,
And, this obtained, made haste to reconstruct
With joy the throne, brought forth that of Ardshír,
And gathered all the craftsmen of Írán.
So in the days of that victorious Sháh
They reconstructed that resplendent throne.
The artificers came out of Rúm and Chín,
Makrán, Baghdád, and from Írán itself.
Of craftsmen there were one and sixty score,
Intent upon the fashioning thereof,
And each had thirty workers under him—
Men out of Rúm, Párs, and Baghdád. The Sháh
Commanded all to labour earnestly
To have the throne completed in two years,
And when it was set up high fortune shone.
The height thereof was five score royal cubits
If thou wilt add thereto three score and ten;
The breadth six score for 'twas less broad than high.
A different carpet was laid down each morning
Throughout the month, and seven score thousand plaques
Of gold with patterns fashioned of turquoise
Were set upon the throne, while every nail
And clamp were solid silver; each of them
Weighed sixty-six miskáls. When Sol displayed
Its lamp in Aries the desert lay
Behind the throne which fronted garden-wards,
But when Sol raged in Leo then the back
Was turned toward it; in the month of Tír—
The time for fruit and festival—the throne
Stood fronting toward the garden and the fruits
To catch their scents; in Winter, in the days
Of wind and wet, none felt them seated thus;
The top was all shut in right royally
With beaver-skins and sables. A thousand balls
Withal of gold and silver glowed like brands
Upon the fire, each five and twenty score
Miskáls in weight and coral-hued with heat.
One half was in the fire, the other half

Was turned towards the noble warriors[259].
The host of heaven, planets, Zodiac,
The bright moon in whatever Sign soe'er,
And all the bodies, fixed or wandering,
Were visible to the astronomer,
Who saw what portion of dark night had passed,
And how much sky had moved athwart the earth.
Among these tables some were made of gold,
And what a wealth of jewels was therein!
Not e'en an expert could compute their tale.
The cheapest ran to some three score dínárs
And ten; seven hundred would not purchase some,
So strike an average. Full many a ruby
Was there whose value none could estimate:
They lit the night like Venus in the sky.
Upon the throne-steps were three rows of seats
Enriched with gems. From one row to the next
There were four steps of gold inlaid with jewels.
One row, whose ornaments were shaped like heads
Of rams, took thence its name; the next above
Was known as "Lapis-lazuli" as higher
Than wind or dust-clouds, while the third was all
Turquoise, and every one that saw it burned
With longing. Rural chiefs and underlings
Sat on the Rams' Heads' row while cavaliers—
Men un-affeared upon the day of battle—
Sat on the cirque of lapis-lazuli.
The turquoise seat was for the minister
That was engaged in governing the realm,
And he that sat there must be wise and loyal.
A fabric was spread out of cloth of gold
Two score and seventeen cubits long, its fringe
All strung with jewels held by golden threads.
A map of heaven was inscribed thereon
Where Saturn, Mars, Sol, Jupiter, and Venus,
With Mercury and shining Luna, showed
The fortunes of the Sháh; there too appeared
The Seven Climes, and peers of Párs and Rúm;
The seven and forty Sháhs, their faces, thrones,
And crowns, were shown, those of the kings of kings,
Of woven gold. The fabric was unique.

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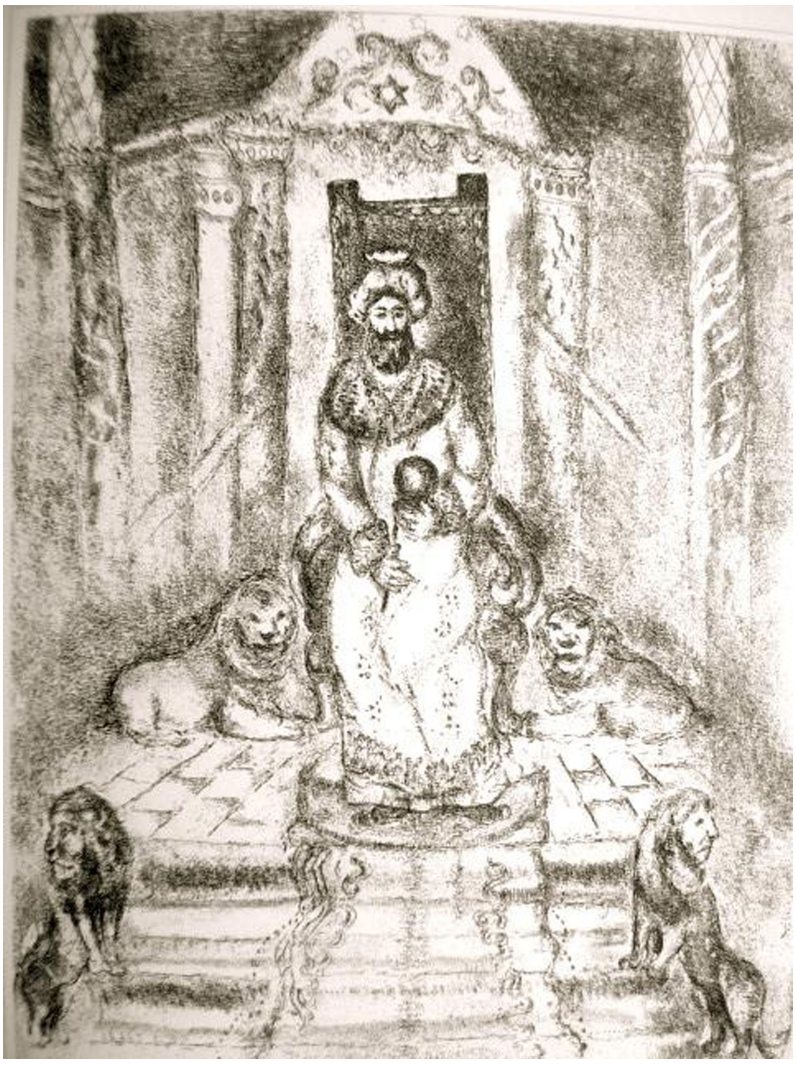
[259] *The Sháhnáma of Firdausí*, translated and edited by A. G. Warner – E. Warner, London 1905–1925, cc. 2005-2007.

Kise Shlomo: The haggadic Throne of Solomon



Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
In glory of changeless metal
Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood.

(from R. Yeats, *Byzantium*)

The throne of Solomon in the Jewish tradition is known not only through the Scriptures, but also thanks to a series of rabbinic texts where its description is enriched with several extra-biblical details [ill. 24] that result of particular interest to us, since they often mirror recognizable historical settings. This body of legends is not uniform and each rabbinic version is characterized by its own elements. In this chapter I will analyze them, by showing the way history and legend intermingle and how they reciprocally shape each other. My aim is trying to establish the cultural origin of most of these details, whether possible, and then to understand at what point and why they were inserted in the tradition of the throne of Solomon. The following excerpts are drawn from the so-called *Targum Sheni* to the book of Esther, which includes a long and quite detailed description of the throne.

> In those days, the king Ahashveros sat upon his throne, which was prepared for him in Shushan the capital. This throne was neither his own nor that of his father's, but it was the throne of Solomon, which Hiram, the son of a widow of Tyre, had made with great skill.
> […] he made a great royal throne, covered with fine gold from Ophir, overlaid with beryl stones and inlaid with marble stones; it was overlaid with smaragds, carbuncle, diamonds and pearls and all kinds of precious stones. For no king's throne was made like it, or were any of the kings able to produce one similar to it. Now this was the workmanship of his throne: twelve lions of gold stood upon it, and opposite them were twelve eagles of gold; a lion opposite an eagle and an eagle opposite a lion, they were

arranged opposite each other. The right paw of the golden lion opposite the left wing of the golden eagle; and the right wing of the golden eagle opposite the left paw of the golden lion. The sum of all the lions was seventy-two and that of the eagles was seventy-two. Now, the top of the throne, where the king's seat was located, was round. It had six steps, for thus it is written: "Then the king made a great throne of ivory, the throne having six steps" (1 Kings 10:18). Thus on the first step lay a golden ox and opposite it a golden lion. On the second step lay a golden bear and opposite it lay a golden lamb. On the third step lay a golden panther and opposite it lay a golden suckling kid. On the fourth step lay a golden eagle and opposite it a golden peacock. On the fifth step lay a golden cat and opposite it a golden hen. On the sixth step lay a golden hawk and opposite it a golden bird. Now on the top of the throne stood a golden dove, grasping a golden hawk in its claw. So likewise will all the nations and (speakers of all) languages in the future be delivered into the hand of Israel. Now at the top of the throne was located a gold lampstand set in proper order in its arrangement with its lamps, and with its pomegranates and with its ornaments, and with its ash pans and with its cups and with its lilies. Now at one side of the lampstand were standing seven golden branches, upon which were portrayed the seven Patriarchs of the world, and these are their names: the first man (=Adam), Noah and the great Shem; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Job among them. Now at the other side of the lampstand were standing seven other branches, upon which were portrayed the seven pious ones of the world, and these are their names: Levi, Qehat, Amram, Moses, Aaron, Eldad and Medad, as well as the prophet Haggai among them. Now at the top of the lampstand was set a golden vessel filled with pure olive oil, whose oil supplied the lights of the lampstand and upon it was portrayed the high priest. From the large basin proceeded two golden clusters, upon which were depicted the two sons of Eli – Hophni and Pinchas. Now within the two golden clusters there proceeded from the large basin upon which were portrayed the two sons of Aaron – Nadab and Abihu – as well as two golden seats, one for the high priest and one for the deputy high priest. Towards the top of the throne were set seventy golden thrones, upon which sat the seventy (members of the) Sanhedrin, dispensing justice before King Solomon. Now two sirens were on either side of King Solomon's two ears in order that he should not become frightened. Above the top of the throne were set twenty-four golden vines, which provided shade for King Solomon. Now wherever Solomon wished to go, the throne with its foundation moved beneath him; and placing his foot on the first step, the silver ox

stretched forth its hand onto the second step, and from the second to the third, and from the third to the fourth, and from the fourth to the fifth, and from the fifth to the sixth. Then from the sixth the eagles descended and grasped him, and raising him, seated him upon the top of the throne. There was a silver serpent upon its foundation. Now when kings heard about the fame of the king's throne, they assembled themselves and all of them came together, prostrating themselves and throwing themselves before him, they said: "Such a throne was never made for any king, and no nation or people could design one like it". Now when the kings beheld the excellence of the throne, they paid respect to the One who created the whole world. When the king ascended and sat down upon the royal throne, the great eagle would go around and take the royal crown and place the crown upon King Solomon's head. Thereafter a great serpent would wind itself around the machinery: then the lions and eagles would ascend the machinery and thus provide shade for King Solomon's head. Thereupon a golden dove would descend from a pillar and would open the Ark, take out the Book of the Law and place it into the hand of King Solomon in fulfillment of what Moses said: "And it shall be with him, and he should read from it all the days of his life in order that the days of his life may be prolonged during his kingdom, he and his descendants within Israel" (Deut. 17:20). When the high priest came to inquire of Solomon's welfare, and all the elders sat to the right of the throne and to its left judging the cases of his people, and the witnesses who were to testify would ascend before the king, the wheel of the machinery was set in motion – the oxen lowed, the lions roared, the bears growled, the lambs bleated, the panthers screamed, the owls hooted, the cats mewed, the peacocks shrieked, the roosters crowed, the hawks screamed, and the birds chirped to frighten the hearts of the witnesses so that they not offer false testimony; so the witnesses said to themselves: "We must offer honest testimony or else the world will be destroyed on account of us". The lions would sprinkle spices whenever King Solomon would ascend to sit on the king's throne, and such a throne none of the kings possessed. When Israel's enemies were deserving of destruction, Nebuchadnezzar the evil king of Babylonia fortified himself and rose up against them destroyed the Land of Israel, plundered the city of Jerusalem, burned the Temple with fire, banished the people of the House of Israel and brought them to Ribla, which is in the land of Hamat, and drove out with them the throne of King Solomon. Now when the evil Nebuchadnezzar wanted to ascend and sit upon it, he was not aware that the machineries would be set in motion for him. So when he spread out his foot onto the first step a golden lion stretched out

> his right paw and struck him on his left flank. Thus he limped on it until the day of his death. Then after Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylonia came Alexander and captured the throne of King Solomon, hauling it to Egypt. Now when Sheshonq, king of Egypt, beheld the excellence of the throne, which was more praiseworthy than any of the thrones of (other) kings, he longed to ascend and sit upon it. He (too) was not aware that the machineries would be set in motion for him. So when he spread out his foot onto the first step, a golden lion stretched out the right paw and struck him on his left flank. Thus he was called 'the lame Pharaoh' until the day of his death. Thereafter when Anipranis, son of King Antiochus, came up against the land of Egypt and destroyed it, he captured King Solomon's throne and brought it in his ships. There the leg of the throne with the golden chain slipped off, and all the artists of the world, as well as all the goldsmiths, came to repair the leg, but were unable to repair it to this day. Then, after his reign came to an end, and the Persian Cyrus succeeded him, he was occupied with (the rebuilding of) the Temple, thus meriting to sit on it. This is the throne of King Solomon, the like of which did not exist in all the kingdoms.

Similar excerpts can also be found in the famous book *The Legends of the Jews*, published in 1909 by the great talmudist Louis Ginzberg[260] (1873-1953) or in other collections, such as *The Book of Legends* by H.N. Bialik and Y.H. Ravnitzky[261]. These works assemble a great number of sources derived from rabbinic literature, tied together and rearranged in a new, continuous narrative by their modern editors[262]. In the course of this chapter we will see that even the rabbinic material is often reworked and a single narrative nucleus is enriched with details coming from other parallel or earlier versions. In the excerpt just quoted, for instance, we find most of the elements that the rabbinic tradition ascribed to the seat of king Solomon, but these were, by no means, the only ones in circulation. In addition to those recorded in the *Targum Sheni*, in fact,

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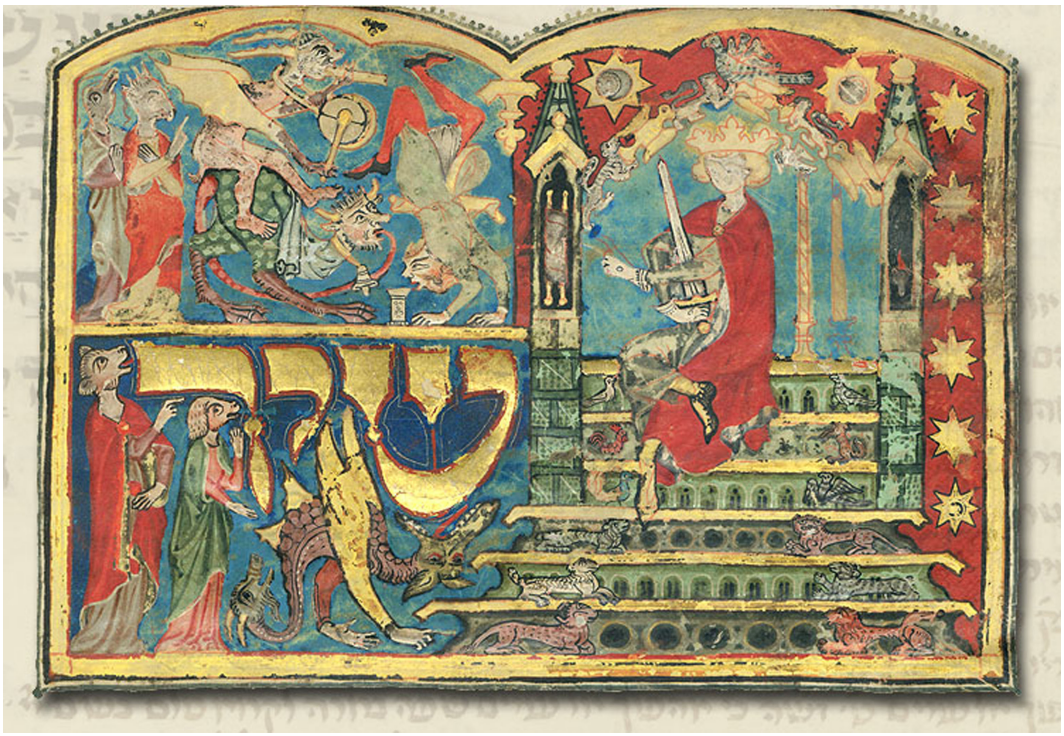
[260] L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Philadelphia (PA) 1954 (or. ed. 1909), 7 vols, IV, pp. 157-160.

[261] *The Book of Legends, Sefer ha-Aggadah*, ed. by H.N. Bialik – Y.H. Ravnitzky, translated by W.G. Braude, New York 1992 (or. ed. Odessa 1908-1911), pp. 126-127.

[262] They are usually not to be found *verbatim* in any written account but they constitute a combination of several historical ones. In a way, Ginzberg and Bialik's narrations almost partake of the literary genre they describe, since most of rabbinic stories depended and were tied to each other, yet often constituting an expansion on some known material. In so doing, these editors made a choice and selected some legends regarding the throne of Solomon.

we should also add few more that partake of the same tradition and that we find in other texts: the presence of twenty-four golden vines rising at both sides of the throne providing shade for the king and palms canopied with white linen, and all kinds of dyed cloth hanging from cords of fine linen and purple wool. Also, golden bells, tied to the edges of the multicolored covering, ringing whenever the wind blew through them. On the treetops some texts describe ivory peacocks and ivory eagles.



I have chosen to begin from this specific account – although it does not include all the possible features of the throne – because it nonetheless provides the best synthesis on the main points regarding the seat of Solomon, as they developed in rabbinic literature. It might be useful, for the time being and at an introductory level, to present the material in its richest form, in order to get acquainted to it, so that it will be possible to break down the narration and follow some of the threads proposed. In the appendix to this chapter, I list the primary extant accounts[263] of the throne and provide them in translation, so that each version can be read in its singularity[264].

[263] Those I refer to are the versions for which I could find a translation in a common European language, since the original language of these works is either Hebrew or Aramaic. There are other texts, some still not printed, see M.B. Lerner, *The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim*, in *The Literature of the Sages*, *Second Part: Midrash and Targum, Liturgy,*

It should be clear, from the two passages cited above, that the description of the throne of Solomon in rabbinic and para-rabbinic literatures is not entirely independent of the Byzantine tradition[265]. At the same time, as we shall see, the extent to which reality influences legend and vice-versa requires careful assessment. The scholarship that will be mentioned in this chapter has equally accepted the hypothesis that either the throne in the Magnaura was the enactment of a series of rabbinic legends or that the legends we have depended on the imperial setting. From a strictly theoretical point of view, both scenarios are possible. I think, however, that the texts provide us with a better answer, one that avoids this overly stark dichotomy.

Some of the very details, particularly the smallest and less forgeable ones, (purple cloth, sirens[266], lion exhaling perfumes) are clearly the transposition of reality into fiction and not *vice versa* and definitely seem to echo the description of the Magnaura throne we have been discussing in the previous chapter. So, it is certainly true, from my point of view, that reality predates fiction in this case.

Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature, ed. by S. Safrai – P.J. Tomson, Assen 2006, pp. 133-229, p. 194.

[264] Since there is no single study on all the different *midrashim*, the appendix is composed of texts in English, German and French. In addition to the translation, for each text is provided the most likely dating, based on the data provided in *The Literature of the Sages*, *Second Part: Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature*.

[265] For an historical contextualization about the Jews in Constantinople, see J. Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641–1204*, Berlin-Amsterdam 1939; S. Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium, 1204-1453*, Toscaloosa (AL) 1985; S. Bowman, *From Hellenization to Graecization: Byzantine-Jewish Synthesis*, in *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation and Accommodation, Past Traditions, Current Issues, and Future Prospects,* ed. by M. Mor, Lanham (MD)-Omaha (NE) 1992, pp. 38-53; A. Cameron, *Byzantines and Jews: Recent Work on Early Byzantium*, in «Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies», 20 (1996), pp. 249-274. On rabbinic culture as mirroring pressing political issues see the examples provided by G. Bohak, *The Hellenization of Biblical History in Rabbinic Literature*, in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. by P. Schäfer, 3 vols, Tübingen 2002, III, pp. 10-15. On Solomon and the relationship between Jewish and Byzantine culture, see S.R. Shimoff, *Hellenization among the Rabbis: Some Evidence from Early Aggadot Concerning David and Solomon*, in «Journal for the study of Judaism», 18 (1988), pp. 168-187; S.R. Shimoff, *The Hellenization of Solomon in Rabbinic Texts*, in *The Age of Solomon, Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. by L.K. Handy, Leiden-Köln 1997.

[266] See below, pp. 170-176.

However, some of the midrashic accounts we have were in circulation before the creation of the imperial hall, as we know it. One of them, namely the *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, either dated between the fifth and sixth but also between the seventh and ninth centuries, says: "When he [pharaoh Necho] sought to sit on Solomon's throne, he did not know its workings, so that a part of its mechanism, made in the semblance of a lion, sprang up and mutilated him. […] And he died a cripple"[267]. In this case, there is no much doubt that the text is describing a lion, openly recognized as mechanical device; and the Hebrew word employed here is *manganon*[268], a detail that seems to certify not just a linguistic loan from Greek, but also a technical influence from science of Hellenistic matrix. In this specific case, a later interpolation seems unlikely, so we are left with three main possibilities:

- that the Magnaura setting was partly inspired by a Jewish legend, already in circulation
- that the author of this (or other similar) haggadic account made up the presence of the lion-*automaton*, since this kind of technology was known, and it ended up corresponding to the later setting by coincidence
- that the *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana* (or similar texts) was describing a real *automaton*, preceding however the one in the throne-hall, and that later accounts, actually based on the Magnaura, ended up perfectly superimposing because of the continuity of use of this kind of technology

It is difficult to decide which option is true. I personally believe the third one to be more likely. In the previous chapter we have seen, by limiting our view mainly to the Byzantine court, that mechanical lions were said to guard the path to the throne of Constantine V. However, it is certainly not necessary to evoke a precise setting, since these devices were certainly known throughout the empire; in any case, it seems clear to me that, even positing a Jewish-Byzantine

[267] See appendix, text no. 4.

[268] C. du Fresne du Cange, *Glossarium ad Scriptores Mediae and Infimae Graecitatis*, 2 vols, London 1688, I, pp. 840-841, the term is usually employed to indicate various kind of machineries and also war equipment. It is notable, however, that the term can also signify, certainly as a secondary acceptation, something wondrous or magic. Such a nuance clearly reflects the deep impression made by technology on people.

trajectory, whoever composed the *Pesikta* had something real in mind and was not making it up.

In my view, the various *midrashim* should not simply be viewed as an ensemble of folkloric material, but as individual case studies in the ongoing construction of a legend. The description of the throne is not repeated in the same way in each account – some mentioning only a partial series of elements, not necessarily arranged in the same order. Here is a synthetic list of them:

- the description of the throne's material*
- the symbolic meaning of the steps*
- the heralds
- presence of lions and eagles
- the hanging crown, suspended on Solomon's head
- a complex machinery, consisting of a series of animals moving and making sounds
- the lampstand and the oil basin
- the seventy chairs for the members of the Senhachedrin
- the dove of the Torah
- vines (sometimes mentioned along with date palms)
- lions exhaling perfumes
- the presence of sirens singing in Solomon's ears
- purple cloths hanging from trees with bells
- the breaking of the throne and the attempt to restore it
- the injury of one or more of the kings*
- the wandering of the throne*
- the fabrication of a copy of the throne

It is possible to note that some elements – those indicated with the asterisk – often recur but with variations. It will be seen, by analyzing these visual details, that not all of them belong to the same figurative or cultural tradition but, rather, that they have been accumulating, layer after layer, on the steps of the throne, so to speak. By looking closely at these elements, I will try to show that the narrative material related to the throne of Solomon has acted as a repository for some of the models of kingly visual representations that Jewish people encountered through the centuries.

These traditions were handed down to us in different accounts, in *midrashim* and *targumim*[269]. Some of the material was assembled in a chronological arc, beginning in the third and fourth centuries and continuing through the redaction of rabbinic texts from the fifth century onwards; this literary process continued until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as further material was incorporated into the legend. This laborious process implied several layers of transmissions; as far as the throne of Solomon is concerned, for instance, we will see that a consistent portion of the legend probably was added only after the second half of the tenth century and it is therefore relatively late. However, these more recent additions coexist with a bulk of narrative material, which is much earlier.

The term *midrash*, which comes from the Hebrew root *d-r-sh*, meaning "to search, to seek", indicates an investigation of the Scriptures. From a formal point of view, each *midrash* usually departs from the Bible, and the exegesis or the study of the passage includes a direct reference to it, in form of quotations (but such reference can also just alluded to). These midrashic interpretations have traditionally broadly distinguished in halakich and haggadic, according to the main focus of their exposition. Most of the material related to the throne of King Solomon is to be found in exegetical *midrashim* (*haggadah*, from *h-g-d*, "to announce, to tell"). In providing explanations of the meaning of the sacred texts, by describing every single meaningful detail and in trying to expand on the passage, by going beyond its obvious meaning, the Midrash ends up including a great deal of narrative material that is independent of the biblical

[269] For a good introduction on rabbinic literature, see H.L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *The Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, Philadelphia (PA) 1991 (or. ed. 1931); the entries *Midrash Haggadah*, *Midrash Halakah*, *Mishnah*, *Talmud* and *Targum* in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (online ed.) and, for more updated bibliography, J.T. Townsend, *Rabbinic Sources*, in *The Study of Judaism: Bibliographical Essays*, New York 1972, pp. 35-80. Also J. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature. An Introduction to Jewish Interpretations of Scripture*, Cambridge 1969; G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction*, Philadelphia (PA) 1981; A.J. Saldarini, *Reconstructions of Rabbinic Judaism*, in *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters*, ed. by R.A. Kraft – George W.E. Nickelsburg, Atlanta (GA) 1986, pp. 437-477. See also P.S. Alexander, *Retelling the Old Testament*, in *It is written: Scripture citing Scripture. Essays in honour of Barnabas Lindars*, ed. by D.A. Carson – H.G.M. Williamson, Cambridge 1988, pp. 99-121.

narration, such as proverbs, legends, anecdotes from the lives of the rabbis, and anything that could make the interpretation compelling.

Originally, it was meant as a form of recitation of the scriptures in order to make a specific point; during the Tannaitic period (ca. 10-220 C.E.) it could broadly refer to something entertaining and persuasive, somehow close to rhetoric, while in Amoraic times (ca. 230-500 C.E.) it then became a separate branch, related to mysticism and theology. It can refer both to subject matter and to a manner of study. Haggadic *midrashim* are generally accepted to be mostly a product of the rabbis of the latter period, during which haggadic preaching was particularly popular. The process of talking about the Scriptures, explaining them and making them familiar to the audience, was in fact an activity that often took place in homiletic contexts. It is then not a coincidence that most haggadic *midrashim* belong to the Amoraic period, since in this phase there is a strong interest in preaching.

The rabbis were not equally interested in all parts of the Hebrew Bible. Some books, like the Mosaic Pentateuch – *Genesis*, *Numbers*, *Leviticus*, *Exodus*, *Deuteronomy* – and the so-called five *megillot* (=scrolls) – *Lamentations*, *Song of Songs*, *Ruth*, *Esther* and *Ecclesiastes* – were privileged and continuously studied, while most of the other texts were often taken into account in relation to the ones just mentioned[270]. The great amount of sermons produced throughout the year prompted the rabbis to start collecting this material in a written form, certainly as early as the mid-third century C.E. and possibly even before. However, this process was carried out quite informally at the beginning and mostly for practical reasons, without ever reaching the form of a specific canon. This probably also explains why – in contrast with other parts of rabbinic literature (*Mishna*, *Tosefta*, *Talmud*, etc.) whose structure and components are well known – the haggadic *midrashim* were never formally collected and thus remain a fluid ensemble; therefore we ignore their exact number and we find it hard to reconstruct those works that were certainly extant but are, for some reasons, fell into oblivion. Nowadays, the standard *corpus* of major *midrashim* amounts to thirty-five texts, that have traditionally been divided up – although somehow misleadingly – according to their function, either exegetical or

[270] Possibly, such an uneven tradition depends on liturgical reasons: most exegetical work was carried out in order to comment the actual reading of the Bible in the synagogues, which certainly focused on the Torah. It is not really known when this custom began, whether it was already established during the first Temple phase or whether it started during the exile. It is not even actually known whether there were synagogues in Palestine before the first century C.E.

homiletical (sometimes narrative). In other words, some of these accounts comment upon a whole book of the Scriptures, others are basically connected with only one passage of the Bible, read in a specific occasion, often a festivity. For our discourse, the destination is not particularly relevant, but I introduce it in order to clarify the applications of this genre. The titles of these works are often not original but they have become part of the tradition, therefore I will refer to them, as they are mostly known.

In general, in fact, when it comes to this typology of texts, scholarship tends to either focus on the exegetical process behind them or to emphasize their historical context of production. However, here I focus on the way a certain kind of material is inserted and, more in general, transmitted. My analysis is based on these *midrashim* as a key for better understanding a specific thread of the cultural history of the Mediterranean. In a way, my approach is transversal, since it employs texts that have a declared theological intent for an entirely different purpose. For this reason, I will not dwell in the subtleties informing the various definitions of *midrashim* typology, since the material I discuss can all be generically termed legendary or folkloric. Moreover, some of the anecdotes or stories can often circulate independently, as separate tales, and then being interpolated. Such an aspect is also crucial for dating purposes. Whenever we can fix *a terminus post quem*, based on the correspondence with recognizable historical contexts, we need to be careful in applying it for the whole *midrash*.

Extant *midrashim* have been tentatively dated, using macro-periodizations[271]. However, the reciprocal textual relationship of these works and their chronology is often complicated and difficult to assess: successive interpolations have sometimes been added to earlier compilations. In particular, as far as our analysis is concerned, it seems that the account of the throne of Solomon has enjoyed his own tradition and should, therefore, be studied separately[272].

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[271] Phase I (400-600): *Leviticus Rabbah*, first part of *Esther Rabbah*, *Exodus Rabbah*; Phase II (600-700): *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, *Panim Aḥerot II*, *Abba Gurion*; Phase III (700-900): *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*; IV phase (1000-1200): *Numbers Rabbah*, *Deuteronomy Rabbah*. This periodization is based on M.B. Lerner, *The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim*, in *The Literature of the Sages*. In general, the question is highly debated and this syntesis needs to be considered provisional.

[272] Lerner, *The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim*, in *The Literature of the Sages*, pp. 194, 223-225.

This discourse applies also to a series of fragmentary works that, in addition to the major texts above mentioned, have come down to us only as part of larger collections, usually connected to the Esther *midrash*. It is in fact this book that, for reasons that we will see, prompts the richest narrative tradition regarding the throne of Solomon. In comparison, the passages related to it in the *midrashim* to *Leviticus*, *Exodus*, *Numbers*, *Deuteronomy*, *Ecclesiastes* and in the *Pesikta de Rav-Kahana*[273], are relatively simpler and certainly much shorter, dealing with only few aspects of the royal seat.

The accounts that expand on *Esther*'s narration, particularly *Esther Rabbah*, *Midrash Abba Gurion*, *Panim Aḥerot* and several other texts, constitute the source of the most detailed and visually rich descriptions. The reading of *Esther*[274], in fact, had a strong liturgical value because it was connected with the festivity of *Purim*, which evoked the deliverance from the murderous plot set up by Haman, vizier of the Persian king Ahasuerus (possibly to be identified with Xerxes)[275]. The book was subject to a particularly rich wave of midrashic commentary and it is this body of texts that mostly make up the tradition of the throne of Solomon in rabbinic literature. It is in fact mentioned right at the beginning of the retelling of Esther's story – even though in the biblical book we find no reference to Solomon – in commenting the following excerpt: "In those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his officials and ministers" (Esther, 1:2-3). This biblical verse triggers the later descriptions in rabbinic literature. Commentators tried to understand what was the textual need of

[273] This work belongs to the category of so-called homiletic *midrashim*, a collection of synagogue sermons that accompanied the reading of the Scriptures throughout the liturgical year. The Torah was read in its entirety over a period which could vary, depending on the length of sections, known as *sedarim*, into which the text had been divided. We know that there were different lectionaries: the old Palestinian one was constituted of 154 *sedarim*, to be read over a period of three years; there was also a second one, made of 175 sections. The Babylonian one, still used today, was divided in 48-54 *sedarim*, and it could be completed in one year.

[274] The bibliography on the book of Esther is quite extensive, see for instance S.B. Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes and Structure*, Missoula (MT) 1979; E. Lubetski – M. Lubetski, *The book of Esther: a classified bibliography*, Sheffield 2008; for a peculiar reading of the book of Esther in the context of Jewish diaspora, see E. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, Cambridge 2002.

[275] A liturgical value which was shared by the other texts of the five *Megillot*. The *Canticles* was read during Passover, Ruth on *Shavuot* (the festivity of the weeks), *Lamentations* of the Ninth of *Av* and *Ecclesiastes* for *Sukkot*, which is probably also one of the reasons why all these texts were included in the Hebrew canon, despite the debate that surrounded some of them.

specifying that Ahasuerus was sitting on the throne. From the narration, in fact, it resulted clear that he had been reigning already for three years. What appeared as sheer redundancy had to be explained, so the verb 'sat' was interpreted in the light of the relationship between the king and his seat. Something had changed that had to be accounted for: the rabbis commented that Ahasuerus had finally sat on the throne that was Solomon's, or better, on a copy of it that was prepared to him[276].

The notion that Ahasuerus desired to appropriate the seat of the king of Israel was then inserted by the commentators: at stake there was the problematic relationship between the Jewish people and a foreign monarch. After all, the book of Esther tells the story of a Jewish girl who becomes wife of a Persian king. At the core of the rabbinic tradition of the throne of Solomon, then, lies a contraposition. It is evoked with no apparent reference to the text, in order to oppose, polemically, the threatening literary presence of the throne of Ahasuerus[277]. Such a tradition, which saw Ahasuerus sitting on a throne akin to

[276] E. Segal, *The Babylonian Esther Midrash. A critical Commentary*, 3 vols, Atlanta (GA) 1994, I, p. 158.

[277] For a detailed explanation on the presence of the long account on Solomon's throne and other Solomon-related insertions in the *Targum*, see B. Ego, *All kingdoms and kings trembled Before Him: the Image of King Solomon in Targum Sheni on Megillat Esther*, in «Journal for the

that of king Solomon [ill. 25], was certainly in circulation as early as the third century C.E. An evidence of this fact is constituted by the presence of frescoes in the synagogue of Dura Europos, dating to that period, that clearly depict the two monarchs on similar thrones.

Interestingly, however, what might seem like a metaphorical statement – taking the place of Solomon as sovereign – becomes a literal one: Ahasuerus physically needs to sit on the throne, which represents in concrete form the very notion of kingship. It could be stated, then, that most of these *midrashim* deal with the strategies of royal representations and often try to unveil them or to show their inner mechanisms. The *midrashim* to Esther are particularly interesting because they show the conscious effort, operated by the commentators, to overturn a certain set of values.

The other major works related to the throne are two *targumim* to the book of Esther. The word *targum* (pl. *targumim*), from the root (*r-g-m*, 'to read aloud') is mostly – but certainly not only – employed to indicate the Aramaic versions of the Hebrew Bible. Since Aramaic was the spoken language of most of the Jews, the public reading of the passages of the Scriptures (written in Hebrew) was accompanied, quite early, by a sort of consecutive translation of it, which followed, verse by verse, the recitation of the Bible. However, this operation was carried out with the idea of rendering the text not just understandable to the audience but also accessible in terms of general meaning, therefore the *targum* was not necessarily a literal translation, but rather a creative paraphrase of the text itself, which could include glosses and explanations along the way. The *targeman* or *meturgeman*, the man in charge of this operation, could then operate, up to a certain extent, a free retelling of the Bible. *Targumim* typology, then, ranges from strictly literal to works that insert whole midrashic accounts with great freedom. The texts we are concerned with – respectively known as *targum rishon* (=first) and *targum sheni* (=second) to the book of Esther[278] – certainly belong to this latter category, since they include extensive extra-biblical material and are in fact considered almost actual

Aramaic Bible», 3 (2001), pp. 57-73; B. Ego, *Targumization as theologization, aggadic additions in the Targum Sheni of Esther*, in *The Aramaic Bible, Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. by D.R.G. Beattie – M.J. McNamara, Sheffield 1994, pp. 354-359.

[278] L. Munk, *Targum sheni zum Buche Esther*, Berlin 1876; *Targum Scheni zu Ester: Übersetzung, Kommentar und theologische Deutung*, ed. by B. Ego, Tübingen 1996; R. Kasher – M.L. Klein, *New Fragments of Targum to Esther from the Cairo Genizah*, in «Hebrew Union College Annual», 61 (1990), pp. 89-129; A. Tenami, *A Genizah Fragment of the Legend of King Solomon's Throne*, in «Ginze Kedem», 6 (2010), pp. 207-233.

midrashim. The only strong formal difference to the genre above described is constituted by the fact that they are indeed written in Aramaic[279]. As far as my analysis is concerned there will be no actual difference between these *targumim* and the above-mentioned *midrashim*: both typologies of texts act as repositories of legendary material in a very similar way. Once more, their formal distinction is not really important when it comes to the transmission of the story of the throne.

The Scholarship on the Throne

Most of the sources extant in rabbinic literature related to the throne of Solomon have been quoted at length and discussed by several scholars who dealt with or touched upon this theme, bringing together a complete series of sources which mentioned or described it, both in Hebrew and in Aramaic[280]. However, despite the great amount of erudition displayed in these works, most of this material – being the focus of mainly late nineteenth-century analysis – has been investigated leaving aside some questions that appear relevant to modern scholarship or with methods that are no longer accepted, therefore some issues have remained partially unanswered despite a renewed wave of interest into the matter.

The first one to call attention to some of this material was Joseph Perles who discussed an account related by a sixteenth-century manuscript (München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, cod. hebr. 222, ff. 50r-56v), consisting in a series of

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[279] We have three Aramaic version of the book of Esther. For complete bibliography and introduction on these *targumim*, see the works of Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum to the five megillot*, edited with an introduction by B. Grossfeld, New York 1973; *The first Targum to Esther: according to the MS Paris Hebrew 110 of the Bibliothèque Nationale*, New York 1983; *The two Targums of Esther*, translated, with apparatus and notes by B. Grossfeld, Collegville (MN) 1991; *The Targum sheni to the book of Esther: A critical edition based on MS. Sassoon 282 with critical apparatus*, New York 1994; D. Börner – Klein, *Der Ester-Midrash in Megilla 10b-17a; eine literarische Einheit*, in «Judaica», 49 (1993), pp. 220-227.

[280] J. Perles, *Thron und Circus des Königs Salomo*, in «Monatsschrift für Geschichte über Wissenschaft der Judentums», 21 (1872), pp. 122-139; P. Cassel, *Kaiser und Königsthrone in Geschichte*, Leipzig 1974; P. Cassel, *Der goldene Thron Salomo's*, Erfurt 1853; A. Wünsche, *Salomos Thron und Hippodrom: Abbilder des babylonischen Himmelsbildes*, Leipzig 1906; G. Salzberger, *Salomos Tempelbau und Thron in der semitischen Sagenliteratur*, Berlin 1912; R. Eisler, *Weltmantel und Himmelszelt. Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Urgeschichte des antiken Weltbildes*, 2 vols, München 1910.

juxtaposed excerpts[281] describing Solomon-related material both in Hebrew and in Aramaic, put under the rubric of *The Throne and Hippodrome of King Solomon*. Along with a description of the royal seat, in fact, there was also a section mentioning the races taking place in his hippodrome, the length of it, its decoration, the time of the special ceremonies, the presence of organs and flutes playing and the colors of the different factions. Perles's study focused mainly on this second section, recognizing that the whole passage contained clear terminological and historical references to the Byzantine world, but without attempting a precise dating. No particular interest was devoted to the throne and its description, which contained several references to some sort of machinery and to moving and sounding animals.

His essay was followed a few years later by a comparative work on thrones as symbols of kingship, carried out by Paul Cassel. The study is particularly rich in examples, and it displays an astonishing erudition, ranging from the ancient Near East to nineteenth-century Germany, although the material is seldom described following a strictly philological or chronological order of filiation. It is more often presented by simple juxtaposition of themes that resonate by way of analogy, not always pertinent to each other, generally built within a frame of Indo-European unity that is nowadays unsustainable. Most of Cassel's intuitions, however, cannot simply be dismissed for methodological reasons or because the general historical premise is no more accepted. In relation to the Jewish legendary tradition of the throne of Solomon, for instance, he was never doubtful of the realistic quality of the *automata* of the throne, a fact that, instead, was usually regarded by scholars as a clear proof of folkloric exaggeration[282]. Instead, he listed several cases of automatic devices, including the Byzantine throne and the tree of Baghdad and other examples quoted in the previous chapter, without making a direct connection, but simply presenting them as a proof of the likelihood of the description. Some years later, the same scholar issued a second monograph, this time specifically concerning the throne of Solomon. Once more, he gave proof of great erudition and his footnotes are extremely rich in suggestions and bibliography; however his work is strongly oriented toward an Indo-Iranian approach, and the scholar tends to analyze any cultural element he encounters

[281] The scholar distinguished a text A, describing the throne, and a text B, which also mentions the hippodrome.

[282] Cassel, *Kaiser und Königsthrone in Geschichte*, pp. 62-72.

in light of an "Aryan" influence, a fact that, as we will see, is often not supported by any evidence.

In 1906, August Wünsche dedicated a book to the traditions about the throne and hippodrome to which Perles had called attention. His approach was much more systematic and the scholar quoted five different haggadic traditions that dealt with the throne. He was convinced that he could read each of them – despite the broad chronological and geographical span they covered and the different contexts they came from – as mirroring the ancient cosmic beliefs of Babylonian times, which he saw in every detail concerning the royal seat. If this hypothesis could certainly be advanced up to a certain extent, his overall approach suffered from significant methodological flaws and drew some wholly unwarranted conclusions. Obviously, it was not hard to read a cosmological interpretation in the hippodrome either – since it was meant to be seen that way in Byzantine times – but, again, ascribing everything to Babylonian cultural influence was certainly problematic.

Not long after the publication of Wünsche's monograph, another German scholar, Georg Salzberger, offered yet another contribution to the study of legends related to king Solomon. This time, the focus was on the temple and on the throne, and, quite interestingly, from the more comprehensive perspective of Semitic literature in general: in addition to the targumic and midrashic stories we are now familiar with, the catalogue was also supplemented with a variety of other sources in Arabic and some references derived from the *Kebra Nagast*, the Ethiopic royal saga, which sees Solomon and the Queen of Sheba as the main protagonists. The material was arranged thematically and fell in the following categories: reproduction of the throne of God, the throne of Ahasuerus, the wandering and the wonders of it. Following Cassel, Salzberger confirmed that behind the descriptions provided by the sources, one should recognize the iconography of the decorations and general imagery of the models provided by Persian thrones.

The throne of Solomon had understandably become inextricably connected to the study of cosmic kingship and its representations. Thus, Robert Eisler, in his 1910 work on the celestial and cosmic representations appearing on the mantles and on the baldachins of sovereigns, devoted an appendix to objects that were believed to be Solomon's and circulated in the Mediterranean world[283]. He seemed to suggest, for instance, that the throne which, according

[283] Eisler, *Weltmantel und Himmelszelt*, I, p. 36.

to rabbinic legends, was transported back and forth, probably came from the Herodian treasure – which would have explained the baroque Hellenistic machinery – and was the same that the rabbis saw in Rome. It had possibly found its way to Constantinople, along with the rest of Vandal booty later on[284].

Even Andreas Alföldi advanced the hypothesis that the throne of Solomon of rabbinic legends ought to be studied in relation to the Solomonic throne of Constantinople[285]. He claimed, although *en passant*, that the creation in the Magnaura, with its automatic animals, depended on the body of Jewish folklore[286]. Interestingly enough, this relation was not investigated any further and remained almost an opening statement at the beginning of the article, which instead dealt more thoroughly with the question of the throne tabernacle and the origin of its iconography[287]. The intuition of such a relationship between the rabbinic literary throne and the Byzantine actual one was accepted without questions[288], until the whole matter was given renewed interest, becoming the actual focus of a specific study in 1962[289].

It was Evelyne Ville-Patlagean who dealt with the texts previously studied by Perles and Wünsches. Her thesis, conversely, stated that most of the details, particularly the description of the moving and sounding animals adorning the steps of the royal seat, and that of the ceremonies taking place in the hippodrome, were a reflection of *realia*, that could be dated to tenth-century Constantinople. The only methodological problem of her approach is that she treated her texts as a whole, without acknowledging the composite nature of her material, certainly compiled through successive additions over time. Her perspective acknowledged Alföldi's idea of a relation between the Jewish accounts and the imperial court, but overturned it in favor of a chronology that saw history predating legend. As far as the throne was

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[284] *Ibid*., pp. 45-48.

[285] A. Alföldi, *Die Geschichte des Throntabernakels*, in «La Nouvelle Clio», 1-2 (1949/50), pp. 537-566.

[286] Alföldi, *Die Geschichte des Throntabernakels*, pp. 539-541.

[287] Unfortunately, Alföldi's article is written without footnotes or references to sources. A revised and complete version of it was supposed to be published on the Dumbarton Oaks Papers, but the project, for what I could see, was never carried out. For this reason, some of the author's assertions are difficult to ascertain.

[288] K.H. Bernhardt, *Das Problem der altorientalischen Königsideologie im Alten Testament*, in «Vetus Testamentum», supplement VIII, Leiden 1961, pp. 67-90, p. 86, n. 5.

[289] E. Ville-Patlagean, *Une image de Salomon en basileus Byzantin*, in «Revue des études juives», 121 (1962), pp. 9-33.

concerned, she suggested that, along with the lions and the beasts we already know from Byzantine sources, the series of animals described on the steps could possibly be a reflection of the series of statues, standing on a series of pillars and holding a famous basin in the palace complex of Constantinople, as described by Hārūn ibn Yaḥyā, a Muslim prisoner who stayed at the Byzantine court after 881 C.E., who in his description mentioned a hawk, a lamb, a bull, a rooster, a lion, a lioness, a wolf, a partridge, a peacock, a horse, an elephant and an angel [290]. Her point of view remained virtually unknown to Byzantine scholarship and stayed so until recent times[291].

However, the throne of Solomon, seen from a comparative perspective, is somehow problematic as far as bibliography is concerned, since it is relatively easy to miss out some of the threads and to refer only to a partial share of the studies. Ville-Patlaegan's work was not mentioned, for instance, by the interesting and otherwise quite rich article by Canciani and Pettinato[292], which compared the biblical description – by moreover discussing some philological discrepancies occurring between the books of *Kings* and the books of *Chronicles* in reference to it – with known archaeological evidences, in order to provide the plausible model on which the actual throne of king Solomon of the Scriptures could have been based upon[293].

More surprising still, especially given the focus of their studies, neither Gerard Brett's work on the *automata* nor the recent essay by Constantin Canavas (both discussed in the previous chapter) [294] mention the Jewish tradition in relation to the machinery. Indeed, both scholars ignored all the studies concerning the throne of Khosrow II, which, although not directly connected, help to illuminate the spectacle of royal audience halls, where sound, iconography, and movement all played key roles. Similarly, the work on

[290] A. Vasilev, *Harun-Ibn-Yahya and his Description of Constantinople*, in «Seminarium Kondakovianum», 5 (1932), pp. 149-163, pp. 156-157.

[291] Her article is quoted in S. Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: toward a new Jewish Archaeology*, New York, 2005, pp. 103-108, 232, nn. 175-183.

[292] F. Canciani – G. Pettinato, *Salomos Thron, philologische und archäologische Erwängungen*, in «Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins», 81 (1965), pp. 88-108;

[293] *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. by L.K. Handy, Leiden-Köln 1997; J.B. Pritchard, *Solomon and Sheba*, London 1974.

[294] Brett, *The automata in the Byzantine 'throne of Solomon'* ; Canavas, *Automaten in Byzanz. Der Thron von Magnaura*.

automata by R. Hammerstein[295], whose thesis, with respect to the Byzantine throne of Solomon, is fully based on Alföldi's assumptions, ignores the Jewish materials, even failing to mention the work of Ville-Patlagean.

The piece of evidence on which Hammerstein's whole argument depends is predicated on a false chronological assumption. One of the frescoes found in the synagogue of Dura Europos (ca. 245 C.E.) depicts the throne of Ahasuerus, with eagles and lions on the steps, a detail that stemmed necessarily from the haggadic tradition and not from the biblical one[296]. For this reason, the legend must have clearly predated the historical occurrence of the throne in Constantinople. Hammerstein also claimed that it was possible to devise in the position of the depicted animals in the fresco a trace of their actual motion, thus reasserting not only that the rabbinic legend must have prompted the model for the throne in Constantinople but also that the actual, ancient biblical throne of king Solomon must have been adorned with moving robots[297]. Nevertheless, it is possible to see how this chronological evidence can be discarded, as I will explain below.

Only recently have scholars in both Byzantine and Jewish studies returned with fresh eyes to the problems raised by the various sources in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic and begun to consider the cultural and literary processes at work across these *corpora*[298]. In this context the throne bears important implications even if, as Ra'anan Boustan has recently argued, one should not read it simply as a sheer reflection of Byzantine practices[299]. It is important to acknowledge that the history of the throne of Solomon in the Jewish *haggadot* stretches far back in time, a fact which demonstrates a constant interest in the matter. The throne with automatic beasts, which so clearly evokes the one in the Magnaura, is simply the last addition to a quite rich and differentiated *corpus.* According to the scholar, one can follow the Jewish legendary tradition of the

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[295] R. Hammerstein, *Macht und Klang, Tönende Automaten als Realität und Fiktion in der alten und mittelalterlichen Welt*, Bern 1986, pp. 33-39.

[296] K. Weitzmann – H.L. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*, Washington (DC) 1990.

[297] For the general discussion of the Byzantine throne, see also *ibid*., pp. 43-58.

[298] See, for instance, A. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial ideology in Late Antiquity*, New York 2011, particularly pp. 21-29. This work does not focus primarily on the throne, but it is quite useful in framing the more general question hinted at in the title.

[299] R. Boustan, *Israelite Kingship, Christian Rome and the Jewish Imperial Imagination: Midrashic Precursors to the Medieval "Throne of Solomon"*, in *Poetics of Power: Jews, Christians and the Roman Empire*, ed. by N. Dohrmann –A.Y. Reed, Philadelphia (PA) 2013, pp. 1-30.

throne of Solomon and interpret it as "a response to the Christianized notions of kingship"[300], a way to respond to the pervasive process of self-appropriation of biblical material, operated by Christian rulers in order to reshape their identity. As we shall see, Boustan is quite right in emphasizing the process of accretion undergone by the theme of the throne, from a narrative and literary point of view.

In general, the throne in the Jewish tradition would still require a more in-depth work, which should study the philological transmission of the various excerpts regarding the story of it, taken as part of a tradition which could be considered separate from of the macro-texts in which it is often inserted. In other words, it would be interesting to reconstruct the description of the throne in itself first, and then to better understand the way it was interpolated into the various rabbinic texts.

The textual materials regarding the throne are enormously complicated. While I attend closely to the interrelationships among the different versions, my analysis focuses on the visual elements of the royal seat. I demonstrate that some of the additions or variants to the legend mirror the aspects of actual thrones the Jewish writers might have had in mind. I believe that most of the visual and symbolic elements that merge into the descriptions of the throne of Solomon are a distant echo of actually occurring historical objects, particularly within monumental settings that would have had a vivid impact on the imaginations of contemporaries. In other words, these legends are sources in their own respect, but they are particularly difficult to handle when it comes to the actual reconstruction of the original contexts, since they tend to be easily altered for narrative reasons and, once they are detached from the source which originated them, they become literary material. For this reason, it is hard to verify every single detail if one does not have specific *realia* to match. Distortions occur frequently: elements easily multiply, get displaced and become slightly more amazing than they actually were. Naturally, later elements ended up coexisting with earlier ones and some of the accounts we read are a patchwork of different visual traditions that could not have been occurred synchronically. The idea is to strip off, so to speak, some of the most visible layers, in order to isolate the different *nuclei* of the legends and then to proceed to a closer comparison within each thematic line.

[300] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Proper attention to these issues impresses on the historian just how much closer to reality these descriptions suddenly appear. During the course of this analysis I will not attempt to clarify every single detail. I will dwell mostly on those that bear a strong visual quality. I am utterly convinced that sheer inventions are scanty and usually quite recognizable. The impossibility of proposing a precise match depends on the fact that we have lost much of the original settings.

I realize that this approach risks being seen as overly positivistic. Ultimately, however, my interest is not just to pinpoint all the actual sources, but to show how the different visual elements of this long discourse on kingship took final shape and interacted with each other, by bringing together a focus on iconography, material culture and the circulation of *realia*. By studying the elements that seem more strongly characterized, I intend to show how the legend came to acquire its most prominent tracts, but I am perfectly aware that the accretions deposited over time, through a mechanism which, in the end, owes more to orality than to *realia*. In other words, although most of these descriptions sprung from reactions to specific settings, the crafting of the legend might have taken place over time, possibly far from the original context, and the elements available were no more distorted mirrors of some distant reality but simple narrative bricks. The long chronological span over which this process took place is also a factor to take into consideration.

Ascending the Steps: the Elements of the Throne

Due to the textual stratification of the various *midrashim*, in fact, even the visual description of the throne shows a conflation of entirely different conceptions. The most distinctive one is the one based on the Bible, which describes it as a seat at the top of a six-story structure[301]. As Wünsche posited in

[301] The six steps are often quoted also in contexts that are not strictly or immediately related to king Solomon. In fact, in the *midrashim* to the books of *Numbers*, *Deuteronomy* and in the *Pesikta de Rab Kahana* (which actually comments upon Numbers, 7:3), the throne is mentioned in relation to the symbolism of number six, which primarily refers to the wagons of offerings brought to God, as described in the biblical book. It is linked to other relevant Biblical six-series. One of the most interesting aspects of the recurring symbolism of this number is also linked to a series of commandaments, laws that should limit the monarch, and imply an ideal of constrained kingship in opposition to the concept of the universal ruler, which is also displayed in relation to the throne. B.M. Levinson, *The Reconceptualization of Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History's Transformation of Torah*, in «Vetus Testamentum», 61

his work, it is quite likely that this number had a cosmological value and alluded to the order of the Babylonian firmament, divided up in six skies, being the visual representation of God's cosmic order on earth. It is not far-fetched, at least in this case, to see here some sort of reminiscence of the great Babylonian ziggurats[302]. However, one the *midrashim* also evokes a direct comparison with "the Chariot of Him at whose word the world came into being"[303]. It is the Bible itself, which provides such a parallel, by creating a parallel between God's throne and Solomon's (1 Chronicles, 28:5; 1 Chronicles 29:23; 2 Chronicles 9:8; etc.). Visually, the conception lying behind the description of God's throne-chariot, the so-called *merkavah*, altogether recalls an entirely different model. Nevertheless, this identification of the throne of Solomon with God's chariot will remain a minority version in these texts[304].

Other hints of different ways the throne was pictured are to be found in some of Esther *midrashim*. In *Esther Rabbah*, for instance, there is no indication of the throne's appearance. But, interestingly enough, the text records that, in order to make a copy of the throne, it was necessary to call in specialists from Alexandria, the capital of engineering knowledge. It is also somehow implied that it is not simply a seat but some sort of architectural structure which took two years to construct and it was not as good as the original one. This notion seems however to contradict the idea that it could be easily moved. In fact, the first part of the account seems to refer to an actual seat, while the second to some sort of building, or throne-hall.

(2001), pp. 511-534. On the so-called Torah of the King, see S. Fraade, *The Torah of the King (Deut. 17:14-20) in the Temple Scroll and Early Rabbinic Law*, in *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. by J.R. Davila, Leiden 2003, pp. 25-60; on the different conceptions of kingship in the Bible and in rabbinic texts, see Y. Lorberbaum, *Disempowered King: Monarchy in Classical Jewish Literature*, London 2011. These laws seem to be associated to the steps in order to evoke a sort of progression which is almost a mnemotechnical ritual. Most of the times they are enounced by heralds and they follow the progression of the king up the steps of the throne. Sometimes, however, in later accounts, we find them engraved on the feet of the lions. Another detail that should be noted is that the sources diverge and that, sometimes, even the sequence is altered. There are, moreover, series with an alternative content, that probably mirror the different rabbinic approaches to the matter and the message they wanted to deliver.

[302] C.L. Woolley, *The Ziggurat and Its Surroundings*, London-Philadelphia (PA) 1939.

[303] See textual appendix II.

[304] In this dissertation I will not touch upon the 'mystic' branch of the tradition of the throne, because I am more concerned with its art historical aspects, rather than with its philosophical or religious value.

In the following table I have collected the main elements described in our sources. In general, the absence of a descriptive detail from a specific text does not necessarily mean that it was unknown to the writer. However, there are some clusters of elements that do not recur in all *midrashim* because they are later in date; these are relatively easier to be established, since they can be ascribed with a good degree of plausibility to the Byzantine setting.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Lev.					X											
Esth.	X	X	X	X		X	X	X								
Ex.		X														
P.R.K.	X*	X	X	X	X											
Eccl.					X			X								
Tg.I						X	X	X								
P.A. II								X								
A.G.	X	X*	X*		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	
Tg.II	X			X*	X	X		X	X	X				X		X
Dt.			X													
Nb.		X	X	X												
Leq.						X	X	X								
P.A. I					X	X		X								
Hor.					X	X	X	X								
Jalq.	X				X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X	
Gen.	X*		X	X						X			X			
Münich ms	X	X	X							X	X			X	X	X*

Legend
1: lions and eagles
2: step meanings
3: presence of heralds
4: hanging crown
5: laming of the Pharaoh
6: obstacles to the Pharaoh
7: imitation of the throne
8: wandering of the throne
9: breaking of the throne
10: presence of *automata*
11: golden trees
12: perfumes and spices
13: Torah

14: lamp
15: Sanhedrin
16: sirens

I will now proceed with the analysis of some of these elements, trying to establish what is the cultural background they come from.

The Hanging Crown:

A peculiar element I would like to discuss is the detail of the crown and scepter, somehow suspended on the king's head.

> By the seat itself there was a golden scepter behind, at the top of which was a dove with a golden crown in its mouth, so that the king should be seated on the throne with the golden crown just barely resting on his head[305].

> A golden scepter was suspended behind it, and on the top of the scepter was a dove. In the dove's mouth there was a crown of gold, and when the king sat under it on the seat of the throne, the crown all but touched his head[306].

> When the king ascended and sat down upon the royal throne, the great eagle would go around and take the royal crown and place the crown upon King Solomon's head[307].

These three brief excerpts show several discrepancies that bear witness to some degree of reworking. It is therefore difficult to extract some certain detail. The only constant element is that the crown somehow hovers over Solomon's head. The eagle insertion seems altogether a later and imaginative variation, which however still retains the original component of the crown being suspended in the air. This crown element sometimes appears by itself, in accounts that do not include the most distinctive Byzantine section, and sometimes it is not even mentioned in them. For this reason, it seems to me that it should be treated as an independent element, not to be referred to the bulk of the Magnaura material which will be discussed below. The sources, moreover, say nothing about a hanging crown and, for what we actually know of the audience

[305] *Esther Rabbah*, see appendix, text no. 2.

[306] *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, see appendix, text no. 4.

[307] *Targum Sheni*, see appendix, text no. 8.

ceremonial, it would not seem reasonable to have it there: the whole point of it is that it barely rests on the monarch's head as if he were, in fact, carrying it. The Magnaura throne, instead, was often lifted and lowered, a fact that would have made it difficult for the emperor to be always sitting underneath it at the same distance

It is more likely that this description echoes the practice of the hanging crown, which was originally employed by Sasanians rulers[308]. Historically, a "hanging crown" is mentioned in the sources from the time of the Sasanian king Khosrow I[309]. It was suspended from a chain and rested just above the head of the monarch sitting in his throne hall in Ctesiphon[310]. It probably became customary during this period, since this element is noted again in relation to later Sasanian monarchs. Various sources mention this element; the first one is Ibn Isḥāq (704-767 C.E.) as reported by contemporary historian al-Ṭabarī in his *Sirat an-Nabi* (*The Life of the Prophet*):

> the Kisra-Khosrow I Anoshirvan used to sit in his audience-hall where was his crown, like a mighty bowl […] set with rubies, emeralds and pearls, with gold and silver, suspended by a chain of gold from the top of an arch in his audience hall, and his neck could not support the crown, but he was veiled by draperies till he had taken his seat in his audience-hall, and had introduced his head within his crown, and had settled himself in his place, whereupon the draperies were withdrawn. And no one who had not previously seen him looked upon him without kneeling in reverence before him[311].

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[308] R. Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World. Three Modes of Artistic Influence*, Leiden 1972. On the relationship between Sasanian rulers and their subject see S. McDonough, *The Legs of the Throne: Kings, Elites and Subjects in Sasanian Iran*, in *The Roman Empire in Context, Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by J.P. Arnason – K.A. Raaflaub, Malden (MA)-Oxford 2011, pp. 290-321.

[309] K. Erdmann, *Die Entwicklung der sasanidischen Krone*, in «Ars Islamica», 15/16 (1951), pp. 87-123, particularly the excursus on the "hanging crown" pp. 114-117.

[310] It is however possible that this symbol was introduced even earlier, when the king child Shapur II (309-379) ascended to the throne, see *Histoire des rois de Perse de la dynastie des Sassanides*, translated by Mirkhond, Paris 1793, p. 306.

[311] *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden*, Aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari übersetzt und mit ausführlichen Erläuterungen und Ergänzungen versehn von T. Nöldeke, Leiden 1879, pp. 221-222; the English translation of this and the following passages is taken from Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World*, pp. 28-29.

Al-Ṭabarī himself (839-923 C.E.) describes a similar custom, happening under the reign of Khosrow II: "This throne vault was superbly built that no one had seen anything like it elsewhere. In it his crown was suspended and he sat there when he gave an audience to people"[312].

And so does al-Thaʿālibī (961-1038 C.E.):

> The crown of Khosrow II was of 60 mann of pure gold, studded with pearls as big as sparrow eggs and with garnet-colored rubies […] and emeralds […] A golden chain, 70 cubits long, hung from the vault of the palace on which the crown was fastened, so that it touched the head of the king without troubling him or being a load on him[313].

Even Firdawsī mentions the suspended crown, in relation with four Sasanian monarchs and five mythical Iranian kings, possibly extending to that fabulous past a tradition which was likely introduced only later[314].

None of the extant sources talks about a scepter and I have not been able to trace any parallel. However, the notion of the crown barely touching the head of the sovereign seems definitely to spring from a Sasanian cultural environment and it provides the closest parallel to the legendary element described in the throne of Solomon. It should be noted, however, that this custom migrated also in the Islamic culture and was adopted by some of the Byzantine rulers later on. Manuel Komnenos (1143-1180 C.E.) – Benjamin of Tudela says – had a suspend gold, jewel-encrusted crown hanging from a golden chain in the newly built Blachernes Palace.

> The emperor had built for himself a palace at the shores of the sea, to which he gave the name of Blachernes. The walls and columns he had covered with gold and silver and the paintings represented former wars, as well as those which he had conducted himself. His throne was of gold, incrusted with jewels, and above it hung on a golden chain the golden,

[312] See also *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 304.

[313] See also *Histoire des rois des Perses par Aboû Mansoûr ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Moḥammad ibn Ismàʿîl al-Thaʿâlibî* (*Ghurar akhbār mulūk al-Furs wa-siyarihim*), Arabic text edited and translated by H. Zotenberg, Paris 1900, pp. 698-700.

[314] See Erdmann, *Die Entwicklung der sasanidischen Krone*, pp. 115-116.

> jewel-studded crown whose value is unaccountable, as its luster makes one dispense with light at night[315].

Even if the source had quite unlikely seen the crown himself and was therefore relating something through hearsay, what is relevant for us is that twelfth-century Byzantine rulers had possibly appropriated this tradition.
Evidence of a shared interest toward this custom comes also from the Umayyads. It has been suggested, in fact, that the hanging chain found above the throne apse, located in one of the *exedrae* of Khirbat al-Mafjar, the great bath-hall complex began near Jericho under the caliph Hisham (724-743 C.E.), was possibly used to hang a special cone-shaped ceremonial hat of Sasanian origins (the *qalansuwa ṭawīla*), thus echoing Sasanian royal practices[316].

Now, given this situation, which implies a widespread employment of it, it would be hard to pinpoint when exactly and from which visual context this idea of the hanging crown entered the rabbinic legends. In this case, however, it seems more likely to posit a direct Sasanian influence, since both Umayyad and Byzantine cultural loans result relatively late. It is of course a consideration entirely based on the sources we have, that were by no means the only ones, therefore our conclusions are only tentative. Nevertheless, it seems fair to state that the ultimate cultural origin of this legendary element is firmly rooted in Sasanian models of kingly representations.

Lions and eagles

In the Bible, only lions occupy the steps of the throne of king Solomon. Overall there are fourteen, two standing by the armrests, the other twelve disposed on the six steps, each one guarding an extremity of this almost pyramidal structure. Among our written descriptions, the eagles appear for the first time in *Midrash Esther Rabbah* and they are distinctive only of the *Esther*-accounts. They are said to help the king reach his seat: "As he ascended the first step, a lion stretched out an arm to him; at the second an eagle stretched out an arm"[317], so it is fair to admit they are endowed with a certain movement. However, this

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[315] *Die Reiseschreibung des R. Benjamin von Tudela*, edited and translated by L. Grünhut – M.N. Adler, Frankfurt-Jerusalem, 2 vols, 1903-1904, II, p. 17. In the English edition referred to in chapter one, the same passage is at p. 13.

[316] R. Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium*, pp. 17-65

[317] See appendix, text no. 2.

notion is not necessarily too striking: in fact, since it is never declared, the animals here could very well be living creatures, helping Solomon and guarding his throne. This idea could very well mirror the ancient custom of keeping real ferocious beasts chained to the throne, in order to frighten the visitors and protect the king. Even the biblical description could be interpreted this way. At some point, naturally, the living lions were substituted with *simulacra* but they still retained that original meaning.

It is important to stress the fact that the notion of moving animals is strictly related to the throne from this very first occurrence in *Esther Rabbah*. As a matter of fact, it appears even earlier in *Leviticus Rabbah*, where the eagles are not mentioned, but one of the lions is said to spring and maim the pharaoh. Nothing clarifies whether it was a statue or a real lion[318].

It is also noteworthy that in *Esther Rabbah*, there is no reference to the other animals (ox, lion, bear, lamb, etc.) that will appear only in later accounts. This new series of animals is distinctively characterized as being silver or golden made. It is important to mark this difference because, as we shall see, this latter set has a very different genesis, even though in the latest description, also the eagles and the lions will become golden statues, moving mechanically[319]. However, I am persuaded that this narrative twist, related to metal animals in the accounts of the throne, occurred only because of the incredible visual strength exerted by the Byzantine *automata* and should be ascribed to the sensation created by them. The powerful notion of mechanical movement reflected backwards and encompassed an earlier element, which was already moving: the lions and eagles mentioned in *Esther Rabbah* ended up being superimposed with the lions and griffins[320] in the Magnaura. This visual short-circuit happened even more easily because, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Byzantine emperors employed elements that had been traditionally defining Oriental kingship. In parallel, *midrashim* built on the biblical narrative, by inserting details that mirrored similar iconographic conventions. When these two lines met, they naturally superimposed. It is sure, however, that lions and eagles of the *Esther Midrash* sprang from a different chronological

[318] *Midrash Leviticus Rabbah*, see appendix, text no. 1.

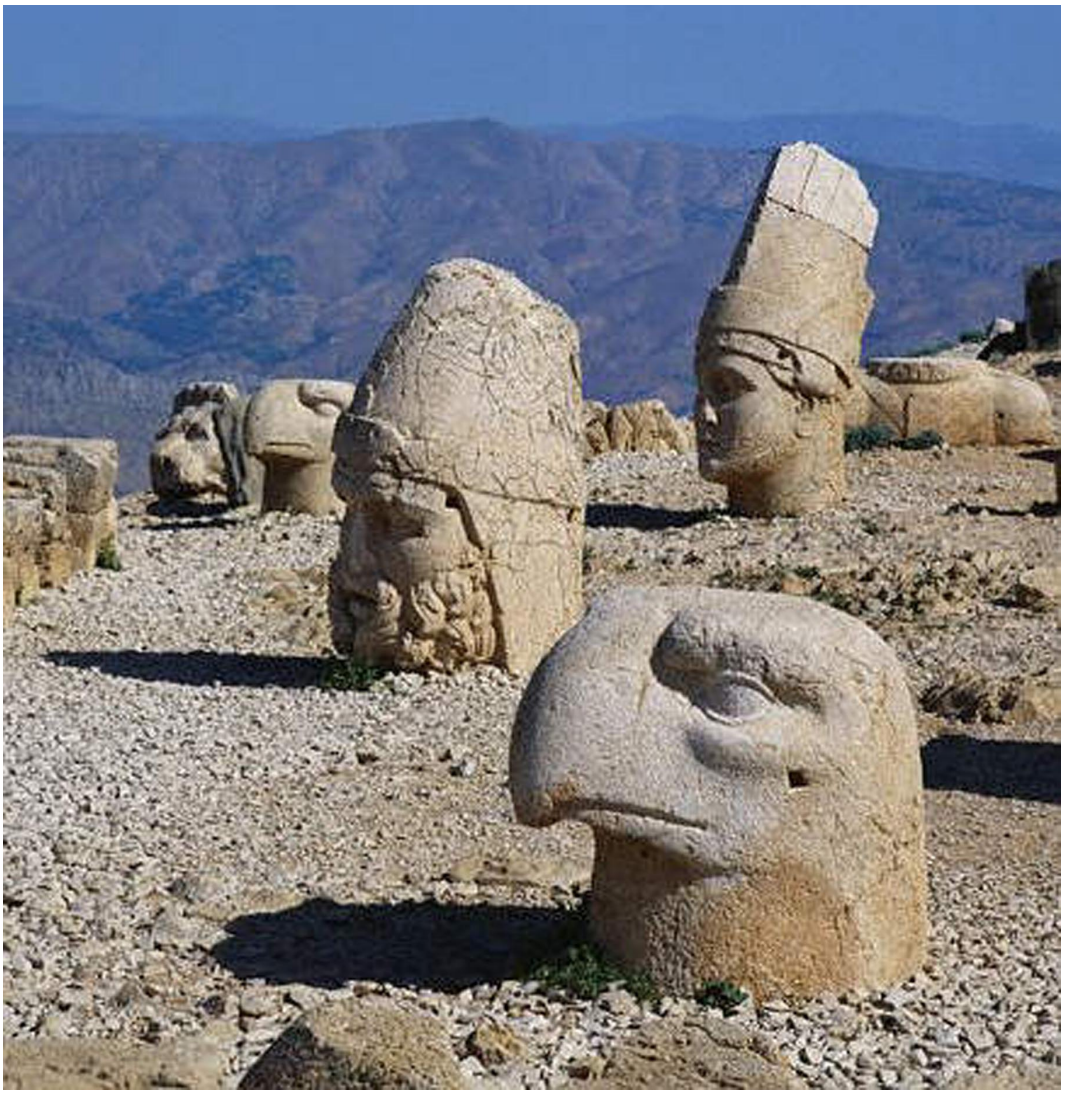
[319] Moreover, in this reworking phase they will end up amounting to 72. This number, quite certainly embedded with some meaningful value, was caused by the multiplication also of the set of steps, occurring in some versions, where appeared six sets of staircases.

[320] A passage which must have been all the more easy to do, since griffins are winged animals, actually half eagles.

phase. As early as the third century C.E., as we have seen, a version of the description of the throne of Solomon with two animals was in circulation and must have been well known, since the frescoes in the synagogue in Dura Europos (ca. 245 C.E.) clearly display this iconography, for both the throne of Solomon and the copy made for Ahasuerus [see above ill. 25]. Given these details, the fresco certainly reflects a knowledge of the narrative material related to the *Esther Midrash*[321]. As we have stated, the *corpus* of legends related to the throne of the king of Israel grew by successive accretions in a long chronological span and there are accounts where both eagles and lions are mentioned on the throne steps without any reference to their moving aspect. The argument of Alföldi and Hammerstein, which maintained that the Magnaura setting directly depended on the body of Jewish folklore because of the evidence provided by the frescoes, would have had a different weight if the animals depicted on the steps corresponded to the series including the goat, the lamb, the leopard, the wolf, etc. described in the longer (and later) account that are strictly related to their moving *automata* in the Magnaura. It is evident, instead, that the Dura Europos frescoes certainly depended on an earlier and much shorter version of the legend. If this occurrence confirms that the tradition was much more ancient and certainly independent from the second series of animals, it does not tell us why the eagles were added to the original biblical description. Both eagles and lions are royal animals, quite widespread in Oriental art, and they could have easily found their way on the step of Solomon's throne thanks to some sort of loose association. However, precisely because eagles and lions are both royal animals, it would seem like a gratuitous duplication. As I argued at the beginning, I believe that things were seldom added without a reason; the insertion of the eagles, on the contrary, looks all the more meaningful, because it seems to suggest that it was prompted by a striking visual context where both animals were present together.

[321] Interestingly enough, however, the depiction seems to share the narrative material of the *midrash* but not its critical approach toward Ahasuerus. A close reading of the fresco and of its iconographic schemes shows instead a glorification of the role of the Persian king, a fact which is possibly explained by a specific historical situation, on this see D. Levit-Tawil, *The Enthroned King Ahasuerus at Dura in Light of the Iconography of Kingship in Iran*, in «Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research», 250 (1983), pp. 57-78.

Given the broad employment of these beasts in most royal contexts involving



Oriental kingly representation, I will not propose any specific match. However, just for speculation's sake, I will venture into a tentative hypothesis, in order to make clear what I mean by striking monumental setting. It is not too far fetched to imagine, for instance, that pilgrims coming back from the sanctuary of Antiochus I of Commagenes (ca. 69-34 B.C.E.), located on the top of Nemrud Dagh, one of the highest mountains in southeastern Turkey (m. 2150), related of its wonders [ill. 26][322]. The site had been chosen as his royal tomb and

[322] T. Goell, *The Excavation of the "Hierothesion" of Antiochus I of Commagene on Nemrud Dagh (1953-1956)*, in «Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research», 147 (1957), pp. 4-22.

celebrations of his cult as deified king were to be held there every year. People, therefore, climbed on the mountain to pay homage to the *hierothesion* and were certainly impressed by its majestic look. The place embraces more than two hectares of land, a 50m high and 150m wide stone tumulus stands in the center. Rock terraces flank it from three sides. Those facing east and west were occupied by series of colossal limestone statues (7-8 m high), representing Antiochus enthroned along with a series of Iranian-Greek deities. At the two extremities of these series were guardian lions and eagles. Nowadays most of the statues are in fragments but we can still get a sense of the powerful impression they must have exerted on the viewers. We clearly cannot be conclusive on this point. However, it does not seem utterly far-fetched to imagine that a detail such as the throne guarding statues settled in people's imagination and, through orality, later on migrated into the body of legends related to the throne.

The Byzantine court: automata, beasts, trees and perfumes

The most impressive and recognizable bulk of material is the one related to the Magnaura's throne. It would be more correct to say, however, that this account conflates several details that were present (or likely to be) at the court of Constantinople, even though not all necessarily extant in the audience room. We know, for instance, that mechanical snakes, metal animals exhaling perfumes (or jets of waters)[323] and moving or roaring beasts were in the technological repertoire of the Byzantine court, as well as the lifting throne. It is in fact possible, but this is just a suggestion, that the general ascent of Solomon and, more specifically, his being grasped by some eagles and put on his seat, as related in few versions[324], could mirror the idea of his sudden raising.

None of the historical sources seen in the first chapter, however, mentions other animals except for the lions and the griffins around the throne and the birds on the tree. Therefore, the series of beasts that crowd the steps in the later accounts would seem completely invented. Ville-Patlagean has proposed that their origin has to be found in the series of statues raised on columns that adorned the Nea Ekklesia, built in Constantinople by Basil I (ca. 830-886 C.E.) between 876 and 870. An account by Hārūn ibn Yaḥyā lists a hawk, a lamb, a bull, a rooster, a lion, a lioness, a wolf, a partridge, a peacock, a

[323] Ville-Patlagean, *Une image de Salomon*, p. 19. See also chapter II, pp. 111-112-

[324] See appendix, texts no. 9, 16 and 17b.

horse, an elephant and an angel. The hypothesis seems quite suggestive. The fact that the series does not perfectly match the animals mentioned in the various legends is not too problematic. The substantial inconsistency among the various versions regarding the exact series of animals and their reciprocal position on the steps seems to suggest that this passage has changed over time[325]. We cannot exclude episodes of textual corruptions or variants due to orality or different interpretations depending on each translator, but this would require advanced philological competences both in Aramaic and in Hebrew.
Besides this, however, it would not be unlikely to posit that some literary interference, such as the famous biblical passage: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Is. 11:6-7)[326]. Such a textual precedent could have played a role in altering the series.

The great absent of this description is the famous plane that we have discussed in the previous chapter. In its place, some legends say that twenty-four vines shaded the king; others mention a canopy made of vines, dates and precious cloth, whose purple hue is a revealing clue of its Byzantine courtly origin. Leaving aside the number of the plants, which seems excessive and clearly symbolic, it is however possible that some of these trees were in the audience room. Although we cannot be sure, we have to remember that some of the Byzantine sources we have analyzed in the first chapter mentioned a plurality of trees in the Magnaura. The presence of purple cloth hanging on the branches and the overall impression of dazzling brightness seems to suggest that these details belong to the imperial Byzantine context, where, as we have seen, precious and costly tissues played a key role in the official display.

Nevertheless, if we did not know of this specific setting, the first historical occurrence that would come to mind, particularly as far as golden vines are concerned, is another court, that of Achaemenid sovereigns. In the second chapter, dealing with the idea of sacred Oriental trees, we have already encountered both a golden plane and a golden vine in the Persian empire,

[325] See, for instance, the difference between texts 8, 9, 16, 17 (a and b) in the appendix.

[326] On this see also Ego, *All kingdoms and kings trembled Before Him*, p. 65.

mentioned in Herodotus. The vine tree was said to be still in possession of Antigonos in 316 B.C.E. and Xenophon again mentions the plane tree[327].

This detail of the vines shading Solomon's throne, then, could very well represent a literary interference and not strictly belong to the Magnaura setting. However, it is not impossible to imagine that both plane and vines constituted a cultural loan the Byzantine rulers appropriated, in pursuing that idea of exotic kingship I explained in the second chapter. Scholars have noted that vines and planes occur together in the Persian context[328], but the symbolic reasons have hardly been clarified. I have no better suggestion on this aspect, but I believe that the presence of one tree easily called for the other for a reason that, much before being symbolic, must have been practical.

Ever since the time of Galen – but this notion must have been known much earlier – agriculture and horticulture treatises report that the grapevine could not be grafted on any tree but the plane. This operation turned out to be particularly successful, given the compatibility of the woods, and it was known to yield a lot of grapes[329]. Planes and vines, then, enjoyed a mutual and exclusive relationship. I am convinced that this natural combination later on acquired a ritual and symbolic value, whose implications we are not familiar with. However, I believe that, as much as they could be found together in agricultural settings, so they could be transplanted together in symbolically charged situations. For this reason, I would acknowledge that this specific element mentioned in Solomon's legend has a meaningful historical precedence, which ultimately goes back to Achaemenid Persia and strongly indicates a royal context. The same symbolic value is similarly conveyed in the throne saga by the mention of palm dates that, as we have seen, were strongly tied to the person of the Mesopotamian king from remote times.

This accumulation of 'royal' trees, then, seems like a stereotypical catalogue, reinforcing the *topos* of kingship, rather than a series of realistic details. In this case, then, it is not possible to be conclusive, although the

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[327] Herodotus, *Historiae*, VII, 27; Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 612 H; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XII, 514; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*, XIX, 48; Xenophon, *Hellenica*, VII, 1, 38. For these sources, see M. Hadas, *On the Golden Vine of the Persian Throne*, in «The Classical Journal», 23 (1928), pp. 702-703.

[328] *Ibid.*

[329] Qāsim ibn Yūsuf Abū Naṣrī, in his sixteenth-century treatise on agriculture in the Herat area (*Irshād al-zirāʿa*, ed. by M. Mushīrī, Teheran 1967) quotes Galen (*Jālīnūs-i Ḥakīm*) in support of this practice, pp. 198-199: see the entry *čenār* by H. Aʿlam in *Enciclopædia Iranica* (online ed.).

presence of a golden plane might have very well prompted that of some vines in the Magnaura. The literary discourse of the legend is not precise in giving us the plane tree, which we know would have been there, but it still conveys the idea of kingship through a series of trees that would strongly imply it. Although varied, the spirit of the text is quite faithful to the idea that the audience hall wanted to suggest.

Yet, against the background of the real setting in Constantinople, a second element belonging to the Jewish culture should be mentioned. In Rabbinic literature there are other cases where trees are connected to Solomon and the Temple[330]. Some other accounts relate:

> Every detail of the equipment and ornamentation of the Temple testifies to Solomon's rare wisdom. Next to the required furniture, he planted golden trees, which bore fruit all the time the building stood. When the enemy entered the Temple, the fruit dropped from the trees, but they will put forth blossoms again when it is rebuilt in the days of the Messiah[331].

It is possible that echoes of such accounts, that will penetrate, as we will see, also in the Islamic culture, derive ultimately from the Bible and from the fact that Solomon was said to have decorated the interior of the Temple with palm trees and open flower, often covered in gold (1 Kings 6:29; 32; 35). Whatever the actual evolution of the story, it is certain that the connection between golden trees and the king of Israel was already biblical[332].

One final comment should be added to the question of the tree. Several versions of our descriptions, including that in the *Targum Sheni*, mention a silver serpent in connection with the machinery of the throne. Some later texts[333] explain its presence through an allegory; however, I believe the metal snake must have be part of the *automaton*. We know, in fact, from a series of technical descriptions, it was common to find a snake in connection with trees:

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[330] G. Vajda, *La description du Temple de Jérusalem d'après le K. Al-masalik wal-mamalik d'al Muhallabi: ses éléments bibliques et rabbiniques*, in «Journal Asiatique», 247 (1959), pp. 193-202, pp. 195-196. In the Talmud (Yoma 21b), Solomon is said to be planting trees in the Temple, however they are real plants and not golden ones.

[331] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, IV, p. 154.

[332] On the historical connection between a tree and the Temple, see L. Yarden, *The Spoils of Jerusalem on the Arch of Titus: A Re-Investigation*, Stockholm 1991, p. 39.

[333] See, for instance, texts no. 16 and 17 in the appendix.

> We will now describe how a tree is made, upon whose branches are birds […] when an hour elapses then a snake emerges from a hole in the mountain's foot. The hole is inside the floor of the tree opposite the birds that are on the branches of the tree. When the two snakes emerge, the birds shriek and whistle as long as the snakes are visible. Then the snakes go back inside their holes and the shrieking and whistling of the birds ceases[334].

This specific excerpt is referred to a water clock attributed to Archimedes but in reality composed much later in Arabic. I quoted it here because I believe it constitutes an interesting parallel for our case. However, the snake was a classic device, employed in a variety of vases described in the *Pneumatics* by Philo, for instance and it is clear, by reading these descriptions, that its presence is not simply a decorative element. Instead, it certainly has a technical value and it is fundamental in all water mechanisms as a counterweight[335]. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the Magnaura tree was a water clock – although such an hypothesis would be suggestive, considering what Constantine Manasses recounts[336] – but it is sure that whoever inserted the detail of the snake in the description was describing a precise water mechanism and not a sheer invention.

Hovering Sirens

Few legends also mention the presence of two sirens[337] singing sweetly in the king's ear. The detail is a peculiar one and it recurs only in late *midrashim*. For this reason, it is likely to belong to the nucleus of Byzantine features. The hypothesis I would like to advance is that this specific element represents the narrative metamorphosis of another real object, which could be seen in the court of Constantinople. Among the ornaments the emperor could wear, in fact, there were cloisonné enamel temple pendants, also known as *kolti* through the

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[334] *On the Construction of Water-Clocks, the so called Book of Archimedes*, ed. and translated by D.R. Hill, London 1976, pp. 30-31.

[335] *Le livre des appareils pneumatiques et des machines hydrauliques par Philon de Byzance*, edited and translated by A. Carra de Vaux, Paris 1902, pp. 152-153.

[336] See chapter II, p. 81.

[337] Termed 'dolphins' in some translations.

Rus' tradition[338], because most surviving example were produced in Kiev for the local nobility between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, even though the original models of inspiration for the Russian court originated in Constantinople at an earlier date, possibly already in Middle Byzantine period[339]. They were usually attached through gold or silver chains to headgear like crowns, headbands and hair knots and were worn both by men and women. Usually hollow, they often contained small pieces of cloth soaked in perfume for aromatic purpose. The set of designs appearing on these jewels is quite limited and it includes birds, busts, saints, sovereigns, decorative patterns of various kinds and, quite interestingly for us, sirens, often guarding a tree of life [ill. 27].

[338] T. Makarova, *Peregorodchatye emali drevnei Rusi* (*Cloisonné Enamels of Medieval Russia*), Moscow 1975; K.R. Brown, *Russo-Byzantine Jewellery in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, in «Apollo», 111 (1980), pp. 6-9; P. Griffin, Jewellery from Kiev, in «Jewellery Studies», 6 (1993), pp. 5-18; *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Mediaeval Antiquities in the Dumbarton*, ed. by M.C. Ross, pp. 222-223; *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, ed. by H.C. Evans – W.D. Wixom, New York 1997, pp. 309-312.

[339] See, for instance, the case studied by W.D. Wixom, *Two cloisonné Enamel Pendants: The New York Temple Pendant and the Cleveland Enkolpion*, in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. by C. Moss – K. Kiefer, Princeton 1995, pp. 659-665. See also M.C. Ross – G. Downey, *An Emperor's Gift, and Notes on Byzantine Silver Jewelry of the Middle Period*, in «The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery», 19/20 (1956/1957), pp. 22-33; V. Rousseau, *Emblem of an Empire: the Development of the Byzantine Empress's Crown*, in «al-Masaq», 16 (2004), pp. 5-16.

It has been proposed, although the pictorial evidences are scanty, that high-ranked people of the court regularly used these pendants, possibly part of imperial *regalia*. At this point, I would posit that this is how this element was inserted in the legend: a pair of *kolti* displaying this specific iconography, worn as decorations of the emperor's headgear, would have quite literally hanged by the sovereign's ears, thus prompting the later development of the haggadic motif. Although a minority thread, handed down only by few sources, this, too, seems to be a faithful record of a distinctive object employed in the imperial court of Constantinople and it seems to confirm its direct usage by the emperor himself.

The Wandering of the throne and its reproduction

One of the recurring themes in our *midrashim* is the wandering of the throne, that is its displacement from a place to the other, due to historical causes. Eight out of the seventeen accounts we have taken into consideration describe, in a longer or shorter form, how the throne was brought away from Jerusalem and carried along by successive sovereigns that stole it from each other.
Even though the stories never perfectly coincide, they do not contradict each other[340] and they all mostly follow an actual chronological order[341].

	Esther	Tg I	P.A. II	Ab. Gur.	P.A. I	Horovitz	Jalqut
(Age of Rehoboam) 926-910 B.C.E.	Shishak, pharaoh **Egypt**	Shishak **Egypt**		Shishak **Egypt**	Shishak		
906-878 B.C.E.	Zarah the Ethiopian						
906-878 B.C.E.	Asah, king of Judah **Jerusalem**						

[340] The only version that displays some blatant anachronisms is the one in *Targum Sheni*, which mentions Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, Shishak, Epiphanes, and Cyrus in this order. Ginzberg, however, proposed to correct the sequence, which according to him had been corrupted, *Legends of the Jews*, VI, p. 453.

[341] I based this table for the chronology of the kings of Israel on J.H. Hayes – P.K. Hooker, *A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah, and its Implications for Biblical History and Literature*, Atlanta (GA) 1988.

704-681 B.C.E.		Senn. **Assyria**		Senn. **Assyria**			
727-699 B.C.E.		Hezekiah **Jerusalem**		Hezekiah **Jerusalem**			
641-610 B.C.E.				Josiah **Jerusalem**			
610-595 B.C.E.				Necho II **Egypt**		Necho II **Egypt**	Necho II **Egypt**
596-586 B.C.E.			Zedekiah **Jerusalem**	Zedekiah **Jerusalem**			Zedekiah **Jerusalem**
604-562 B.C.E.	Nebuchadnezzar II **Babylonia**	Nebuchadnezzar II **Babylonia**	Nebuchadnezzar II **Babylonia**	Nebuchadnezzar II **Babylonia**		Nebuchadnezzar II **Babylonia**	Nebuchadnezzar II **Babylonia**
590-529 B.C.E.	Cyrus **Media (=Elam)**	Cyrus **Elam**					
550-486 B.C.E.				Darius **Elam**			Darius **Elam**
519-465 B.C.E.		Ahasuerus **Susa (Elam?)**		Ahasuerus **Susa**			Ahasuerus **Susa**
	Syria						
	Edom (Roman empire/Byzantium)						

In general, the throne route always mirrors quite faithfully some of the relevant phases of the story of the people of Israel. In particular, it shows some of the main protagonists of the political scene of the moment. From an historical point of view, despite some leaps, the passages are never far-fetched and they usually echo actual military clashes registered in the Bible, usually in the books of Kings, Chronicles and Jeremiah. Pharaoh Shishak, possibly Sheshonk I, is mentioned in the Scriptures (1 Kings 14:25, 2 Chronicles 12: 1-12, 2 Chronicles 16:2) as having helped Jeroboam, king of Israel, against Rehoboam, Solomon's son, who ruled over Judah. As a consequence, the Pharaoh brought away (or was given as a token for peace) precious things from the king's house, including the shields of gold made by Solomon. It is then easy to see how such an historical conjunction might have prompted the first seed for the throne's legendary wandering.

I do not know of any source that explains how Zarah the Ethiopian[342] attacked Shishak, but it is again biblical text (2 Chronicles 14:9-14) that confirms that Asah, third king of Judah, defeated Zarah in battle and took from him much booty. Even the accounts that mention Sennacherib as attacking Egypt and the victory by Hezekiah are again narrated in the Bible (2 Kings, 18: 19; 2 Chronicles 32:1-33). Josiah was killed (or deadly wounded according to the second version) at Megiddo by the troops of Necho (2 Kings 23:29, 2 Chronicles 35:20-27). The successive passage, that is the defeat of Necho by Nebuchadnezzar, is also narrated in the Bible (Jeremiah, 46:2-12), and so is the installation of Zedekiah as king by the very Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah, 37:1). Zedekiah however rebelled against the Babylonian ruler and was captured and brought to Ribla (Jeremiah, 39:1-7). The episode put an end to the kingdom of Jerusalem and corresponds to the second phase of the deportation to Babylon. Finally, even Babylon fell in the hand of the Persians under Cyrus the Great in 539 B.C.E. and the capital of the new empire was moved to Susa, which was eventually taken by Alexander the Great (ca. 324 B.C.E.). It is then interesting to see how these historical phases are condensed in the narrative around the throne, which ends up signifying legitimate kingship.

In another one of the legends related to king Solomon, which expands on his encounter with the queen of Sheba, and finds its way in the Qur'an, it is narrated how the king had the jinns fetch her throne and bring it to him before her arrival[343]. Here, again, the question of the displacement of the throne recurs almost as a folkloric motif, but it is nonetheless a testimony of the strong symbolic value that the seat of the monarch had. Much before the metaphor, however, this idea must have depended on the custom of actually taking the insignia of power of a different sovereign and transfer them somewhere else as part of the booty. The story might have not been precise, but it was quite certainly faithful to the overall historical development.

In *Midrash Esther Rabbah*, the ending point of the wandering is said to be Edom, a term broadly employed in rabbinic literature to indicate the Roman Empire. Here it seems to refer directly to the city of Rome, where rabbi Eliazar

[342] It is actually believed that Zarah should be identified with pharaoh Osorkon II, who actually passed through Israel on his way to a military campaign against Assyria; as an Egyptian monarch he would have then inherited the treasures of Shishak.

[343] Qur'an, 27:40.

said to have seen some of the fragments of the throne, in a way not dissimilar to what was believed to have happened to the Temple vessels[344].
One might wonder whether these *midrashim*, that carefully build the chain of displacement through a series of Biblical occurrences and set it far back in time, are not, in fact, telling a much more recent story. When Titus conquered Jerusalem, for instance, many of its treasures were brought to Rome [ill. 28].

The fact that one of the rabbis was said to have seen the fragments of the throne there is not unreasonable and the likelihood of this statement is rooted in the general awareness that precious objects coming from Jerusalem were kept in Rome. It is reported that they were then carried to Carthage, after Gaiseric sacked the city in 455 C.E.[345] and they finally came to Constantinople in 534 C.E. after Belisarius' victory over the Vandals[346].

This part of the story is not told in our chain but some details of it seem to strangely echo it. It is curious to notice, for instance, that chroniclers refer that Gaiseric was lame, exactly as the famous Necho[347]. Now, the lameness of

[344] H. Lewy, *A note on the Fate of the Sacred Vessels of the Second Temple*, in «Kedem», 2 (1945), pp. 123-125; L. Yarden, *The Spoils of Jerusalem on the Arch of Titus: A Re-Investigation*, Stockholm 1991.

[345] Procopius, *De bellis*, III, 5, 4.

[346] *Ibid.*, IV, 9, 5-10.

[347] Jordanes, *De origine actibusque Getarum*, XXXIII, 168: "Erat namque Gyzericus iam Romanorum clade in urbe notissimus, statura mediocris et equi casu claudicans, animo profundus, sermone rarus, luxoriae contemptor, ira turbidus, habendi cupidus, ad sollicitandas

the pharaoh is due to the etymology derived from the transliteration of Nekau, his Egyptian name, which became Necho (*n-k-h*), 'lame' in Hebrew. Although he is a Biblical character, his lameness is explained and described only in rabbinic literature, as originating from the maiming caused by the lions guarding the throne of Solomon[348]. Is it by any chance possible that the rabbinic accounts of the wandering of the throne were projecting backwards contemporary events such as the sack of Rome, thus shaping them through a biblical filter? Given the difficulty of dating these accounts, and the fact that they must have been part of an oral tradition originating much earlier, it seems difficult to be conclusive on this point. Nevertheless, the suggestion remains.

In fact, among the treasures Belisarius was said to have carried back from Africa to Constantinople, there were several objects believed to be Solomon's, among them a famous cup and a table, which the Byzantine emperors highly valued. At this point, it should result clear that the throne setting in the Magnaura is the point where legend and reality met. For few centuries, folkloric accounts had been telling the story of the wandering throne, which perfectly mirrored the way kingship was subverted and recreated, particularly through the use of significant visual objects, and how strong an impact these foreign objects had in terms of symbolic value. When the throne of Solomon was devised in the Magnaura, it ended up embodying on a grand scale the concept rabbis had been telling over and over in their *midrashim*: after long peregrinations, the heritage of the greatest king had finally reached Constantinople where it had then become the seat of the legitimate heir to Solomon's wisdom.

Ra'anan Boustan has recently argued that the account of *Esther Rabbah* should be read in terms of cultural and political opposition between Edom (=Rome) and Israel. The movement of these objects as narrated in our *midrashim* constitutes a "Jewish counter-discourse" opposed to the dominant Christian-Byzantine culture, that aimed, instead, at appropriating the sacred

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gentes providentissimus, semina contentionum iacere, odia miscere paratus"; ("Gaiseric, still famous in the City for the disaster of the Romans, was a man of moderate height and lame in consequence of a fall from his horse. He was a man of deep thought and few words, holding luxury in disdain, furious in his anger, greedy for gain, shrewd in winning over the barbarians and skilled in sowing the seeds of dissension to arouse enmity"), Jordanes, *The Gothic History of Jordanes*, English version with an introduction and a commentary by C.Ch. Mierow, London-Oxford 1915, p. 98.

[348] R. Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons in Midrash*, Berlin 2009, pp. 32-35.

vessels as new relics[349]. This kind of narration was also a way to create "continuity in the face of spatial dislocation"[350] for the Jewish community. Moreover, the presence of the sacred piece in the hands of the heathens is to be inscribed within a broader eschatological discourse, where the throne, or one of the holy vessels, is a sign that God has once more punished Israel, it acts as a reminder of better times to come. These 'relics' – and it does not matter whether their essence is only literary – tell us much of the way different narratives of power were shaped, between the fifth and the seventh centuries.

One might wonder whether the legend of the stolen throne was known and widespread outside the Jewish *milieu*. If this were the case, the Byzantine emperor was not simply using the object but also the narrative behind it and twisting it in his own favor, making himself the last link of the chain which had began with pharaoh Necho. It is hard to know, however, and it might very well be possible that history and legends met here by coincidence, perfectly overlapping, since this specific legend was a not even too imaginative account of this very process of visual appropriation.

Finally, it is interesting to note that in parallel with the migration of the throne, basically all the *midrashim* also tell the story of its reproduction. In fact, they all agree on the fact that Ahasuerus could not sit on the throne of Solomon and had his artisans make one that looked similar.

Only the *Targum sheni* tells a different version of the story, in which the throne was not copied but was broken during transportation and no artist or goldsmith was able to fix it. As different as these two kind of accounts might be, they both seem to imply that the there was something imperfect in the throne, once it was carried away by a foreign king. This idea is clearly expressed in some of our texts. The compiler of *Esther Rabbah*, for instance, gives us a reason why Ahasuerus was not allowed on the throne, which is quite revealing. His kingdom was "defective": quite literally, he was not a ruler of the entire world (*pantokrator*). This statement about the political grandeur of Ahasuerus is literally reflected by the notion that the king could not sit on the throne. This

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[349] R. Boustan, *The Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple at Rome and Constantinople. Jewish Counter-Geography in a Christianizing Empire*, in *Antiquity in Antiquity. Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. by G. Gardner – K. Osterloh, pp. 327-372, pp. 362-363. The scholar suggests, for instance, that the mention of the sacred vessels in Constantinple made by Procopius (openly contradictory in different passages) is an invention, prompted by the broader rhetorical effort aiming at making Constantinople into a new Jerusalem.

[350] *Ibid.*, p. 370.

is a clear case of interpretative short-circuit: the fact that he was not worth of it is enough to state that he could not physically mount on it. Never a metaphor was stronger. The irony of the text is even more blatant: the king has a copy made for him and he has to pay for it. This realistic detail sheds light on the artificial quality of Ahasuerus's kingship: the throne was not given to him according to natural law, he had to have it constructed. The polemical attack does not end there; in this whole narration it is implied that the copy is not simply a *replica* but a counterfeit of the original one. In other words, Ahasuerus is paying to have a fake.

This whole description is probably not just a literary expedient, a perfect parody aimed at criticizing the Persian king, a way to undermine his legitimacy as monarch. The text reflects actual historical occurrences, by polemically setting up a story of appropriation of visual and cultural elements. Usually, there were two options for a newly established king in claiming his accession: either stating a perfect continuity with the recent past or stressing the breaking point, by demonizing the previous ruler. The most efficient method, in order to achieve this goal, was usually a choice that invested the iconographies of power: maintaining or substituting them with a new model. The visual aspect was the most striking, both because of its monumental scale and also because it could be intuitively understood by people that did not read, that is, the vast majority of the community. In this sense, the strategy employed by Ahasuerus in this narration could be seen in a line of continuity. Through their open critique, however, the rabbis showed their full awareness of this effort. If considered from the internal point of view, that is, from the audience's, Ahasuerus' visual propaganda is a failure, it is a construction where the joints and the mechanisms are fully visible.

The Defended Throne: Preventing the Usurper

Another interesting aspect reported in some versions of the story is the partial maiming or other accidents caused by the animation of the throne itself. Remembering the description reported by ʿUmāra ibn Ḥamza in the second chapter[351], we could conclude that this idea might depend on the fact that *automata* were sometimes perceived as dangerous and possible cause of harm. They often appear so, both in fiction narrations and in actual historical

[351] See chapter II, p. 87.

accounts. It is quite common, for instance, to see them employed as silent guardians of a treasure, a fortress or any other protected place, usually coming to life in order to reject the trespasser[352]. This role of invincible defenders is, after all, part of their very nature: as robotic beings they cannot be defeated or injured, but, at the same time, they are endowed of the power of movement, that makes them able to fight actively.

Our throne, with its *automata*, is therefore well inserted in a rich and established tradition. It is within this context that I would like to discuss another element, pointed out by early scholarship on the throne. This wave of studies generally stressed "l'influence aryenne"[353] on the rabbinic account of the throne, ascribing several elements to the Indo-Iranian tradition. In his study on the Indian hero Vickramaditya, for instance, Francis Wiltford[354] noted that he, like Solomon, had a powerful throne with lions, the *sinhásana*, who could move and speak. Cassel[355] believed that this specific element might have penetrated within the Jewish culture via the Persian empire[356]. In the Indian story known as *Sinhásanadvátrincika*, or *The thirty-two Tales of the Throne*, in fact, one could read the efforts made by rajah Bhodja to climb on the throne of Vikramaditya, usually prevented by the thirty-two statues adorning it, that entertained him with a series of tales, narrating the traits of the dead king, in order to prove him that he was unworthy of his throne. In other versions of the story, the genies protecting the seat also take the shape of bumblebees.

R. Basset believed the story could have been devised for Bhodja of Malava, during the fifth century C.E., and therefore some of the legends regarding the throne of Solomon must have dated to that period.

However, more recent publications on this story suggest that, as it is, this compilation was certainly written after the eleventh century C.E., and maybe

[352] Medieval literature is full of these examples. See chapter II, n. 191, and also some other interesting occurrences presented and discussed in chapter IV, p. 244.

[353] Most of the early bibliography on this point is summarized in R. Basset, *Salomon dans les légendes*, in «Revue des traditions populaires», 4 (1888), pp. 389-391, p. 390.

[354] F. Wilford, *Vicramaditya and Salivahana, their respective Eras*, in «Asiatic Researches», 9 (1809), pp. 117-245, p. 119.

[355] P. Cassel, *Der goldene Thron Salomo's*, Erfurt 1853, pp. 56-133.

[356] The tale was translated from Persian into French by the baron M. de Lescallier, *Le trône enchanté, conte indien traduit du persan*, New York 1917.

even around the thirteenth C.E.[357] and the hero it refers should be king Bhoja (1018-1060 C.E.). In this case, then, the Indian tale would not be a source, but rather a piece of evidence of the diffusion of the Jewish legend, likely to have occurred through the Islamic influence.

The Jewish Elements: Lamp, Dove, Sanhedrin

Given the striking appearance of the throne in Constantinople, and the blatant appropriation by the Byzantine emperor, the legend had somehow to be updated, not only because there was enough extraordinary material to do so, but also because the rabbis had to reclaim the share of their own heritage which risked to go out of control. As long as the stories remained confined within the literary realm, it was possible to insert or remove details, to decide which sovereign could mount on the throne and to indicate whether his claims to universal power were justified. Within this frame, it is then possible to understand why the accounts do not always agree on who actually sat on the throne: discrepancies probably mirror different historical judgment on specific kings or a diversified overall approach. Yet, the presence of a Solomonic throne in Constantinople must have prompted the rabbis to tie it into the already existing narrative. As such, the overall description of the throne was enriched with visual elements derived from foreign contexts, particularly Achaemenid, Sasanian, and Byzantine.

Beside the details that were originally in the Bible and these that we have analyzed above, there are only few that openly hint at a more specific Jewish context: the seat for the members of the Sanhedrin, the dove of the Torah and the golden lamp. I would argue that all these insertions belong to the last phase of the formation of the legend. They in fact only appear in the latest *midrashim*. My idea is that they were probably meant to counteract the progressive byzantinization of the looking of the throne and they were needed to reinforce its Jewish identity.

A typical Jewish element of these descriptions is the hint to the seats of the Sanhedrin members. By the time the legends were shaped, this institution was no longer in use, having ceased to exist during the fifth century C.E. The great assembly was usually made up of high priests acting as judges, and never

[357] *Encyclopaedia of Indian Folk Literature, Vikrama's Adventures or The Thirty-two Tales of the Throne. A Collection of Stories about King Vikram, as told by the Thirty-two Statuettes that supported his Throne*, edited and translated by F. Edgerton, New Delhi 2000, pp. lii-lviii.

included the king. It is interesting to note that here, instead, the king is probably meant to be formally part of it. In fact, the number of seats indicated is of 70, and we know from the *Talmud* (*Sanhedrin* tractate, in the *Seder Nezikin* section), that in its full display, the so-called Great Sanhedrin was composed of 71 people. The correct number, then, would be reached only by counting in the seat of the king. This specific element is interesting to us not in terms of visual representation – because it is clear that it is a plain literary addition – but rather for its political implications. The whole description of the throne room is here clearly reshaped in terms of a hall of justice; it is stated that the animals roared in presence of a false witness and that the people summoned felt compelled to tell the truth. If Solomon was naturally associated with the idea of the perfect judge, it is also true that the Sanhedrin had traditionally worked as a court of justice. What this description evokes, then, is a mixed context, never occurred in reality, where Solomon is not the only one who can exert his power. This whole insertion does not add to the kingship of the sovereign, rather it seems to undermine it, to regulate it.

Even the presence of the dove opening the Ark and taking out the scroll of the Torah to hand it to the king is quite meaningful. In this case, too, the element is a plain narrative invention, which bears no resemblance with any real historical occurrence. However, its symbolic value is no less effective for this reason. The king is again reminded that his power descends from the Torah, it is not absolute. The presence of the dove seems also to indicate an even more specific level of interpretation. A famous passage in the *midrash* to the book of *Genesis* compares the people of Israel to the dove appearing at the end of the deluge and hovering on the waters[358]. That the dove should be here taken as a metaphor for the Jewish people seems moreover supported by the fact that some of the *midrashim* to the throne make explicit this parallel: "Now on the top of the throne stood a golden dove, grasping a golden hawk in its claw. So likewise will all the nations and (speakers of all) languages in the future be delivered into the hand of Israel"[359]. Both of these elements, the dove and the Sanhedrin, seem to convey the same idea: they enrich the description of the throne of Solomon with distinctive Jewish features but they also limit the power of the king.

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[358] *Midrash Rabbah*, translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of Rabbi dr. H. Freedman – M. Simon, 10 vols, London 1983 (or. ed. 1939), I, *Genesis* (33:6), pp. 265-266.

[359] *Targum Sheni*, see appendix, text no. 9.

In the case of the golden lamp, this item should be understood as an symbolic representation of a *menorah*. Its branches are said to be decorated with portraits, a fact that is not supported by archaeological evidences[360], but nevertheless signals its cultural origin. The characters represented on it, in fact, basically constitute a sort of condensed biblical genealogy for the people of Israel.

However, several other elements provided in the account can be easily ascribed to an actual, standard, *menorah*. The main hints in this direction are linguistic[361].

> Now at the top of the throne was located a gold lampstand set in proper order in its arrangement with its lamps, and with its pomegranates and with its ornaments, and with its ash pans and with its cups and with its lilies. Now at one side of the lampstand were standing seven golden branches, upon which were portrayed the seven Patriarchs of the world, and these are their names: the first man (=Adam), Noah and the great Shem; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Job among them. Now at the other side of the lampstand were standing seven other branches, upon which were portrayed the seven pious ones of the world, and these are their names: Levi, Qehat, Amram, Moses, Aaron, Eldad and Medad, as well as the prophet Haggai among them. Now at the top of the lampstand was set a golden vessel filled with pure olive oil, whose oil supplied the lights of the lampstand and upon it was portrayed the high priest. From the large basin proceeded two golden clusters, upon which were depicted the two sons of Eli – Hophni and Pinchas. Now within the two golden clusters there proceeded from the large basin upon which were portrayed the two sons of Aaron – Nadab and Abihu – as well as two golden seats, one for the high priest and one for the deputy high priest[362].

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[360] In general, the standard number of branches, at least from the Hasmonean time, is seven. Most of them have been found in Israel and in the area of the Golan. The reason of this variety has been explained in terms of regional variety or as a way to avoid the talmudic prohibition, which forbade to reproduce the *menorah* as it was, outside its ritual context: *Babylonian Talmud*, *Menahot* 28b, '*Abodah Zarah* 43a, *Rosh ha-Shanah* 24 a,b, see R. Hachilili, *The Menorah, the Ancient Seven-Armed Candelabrum. Origin, Form and Significance*, Leiden-Koln 2001, pp. 200-202.

[361] For a thorough philological discussion about the terms employed to describe the *menorah* in the Bible, see C. Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: a Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult*, Piscataway (NJ) 2003, pp. 17-40.

[362] *Targum Sheni*, see appendix, text no. 9.

The passage regarding the *menorah* in Exodus, 25: 31-40 describes the shape that had become standard and provides us with some specific terminological parallel, particularly with the terms that in our *midrash* are translated as 'lilies' and 'cups'[363]. The first one corresponds to the Hebrew *perah*, which the *Targum*, the *Peshitta* and the *Vulgate* translate with 'lily', although the term can also broadly indicate the flower in general. The lily was combined with the 'cup', created an ensemble made of a torus-like lower section crowned with a flower. Together cup and lily formed a sort of floral capital that marked the branches and the shaft of the lamp in several points. The recurrence of this couple is quite specific and tells us that who wrote the passage was employing highly connoted terms.

The other revealing detail is that of the 'pomegranates'. Although not mentioned in the Bible, it is known from archaeological remains and from written sources, such as the fourth/fifth century stone *menorah* from the Hamat Tiberias [ill. 29] or from the references found in Josephus[364], that this element, often employed as a symbol of fertility and still broadly used in Jewish contexts nowadays, could be part of the lamp decoration. It is actually possible that the stylized circles that look like generic knobs on the branches originally represented pomegranates[365].

It is legitimate to ask whether the lampstand described in these *midrashim* was a sheer invention, a free combination of several realistic details, which only served to better characterize the Jewish context surrounding the throne[366], as the dove and the Sanhedrin. The question of the golden lamp looks

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[363] Originally, in fact, the lampstand was likely composed only of a single shaft opening up in a bowl-shaped vase, supported by a floral capital, not dissimilar from other near Eastern *thymiateria*. Probably those were the lampstands extant in the Temple of Solomon (1 Kings 7:49). A second, successive shape of the *menorah* is the one described in Zachariah's vision (4:2-3), possibly a stand supporting several oil-containers. Only later, probably around the second half of the I century B.C.E., after the profanation of the Temple made by Antiochus Epiphanes, the lampstand began to have the seven-branches shape which then became customary.

[364] Josephus, *Antiquitates*, III, 6-7; *De bello judaico*, VII, 5, 5.

[365] C. Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: a Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult*, Piscataway (NJ) 2003, pp. 37, 54, n. 124.

[366] The *menorah* became a strongly characterized Jewish symbol particularly after the destruction of the second Temple. Historically, its presence recurred in the Tabernacle, in the Temple of Solomon, in the second Temple, in the synagogues and, later on, in burial contexts, often to mark the presence of a Jewish defunct. Given the quite problematic description of the one described in our account, it seems difficult to assign it a definite meaning. Here, it does not seem to hold any specific ritual relevance. Nevertheless, it appears in combination with the

more problematic to me, compared to the other two, because of some historical facts that have to be taken into account.

presence of the Ark containing the scroll of the Torah, which was certainly the case in most synagogues.

A passage in the *De Cerimoniis* states, for instance, a Heptalychnos, that is, a seven-flames lamp, used to be lit at festive processions in the Byzantine palace[367] and it seems that it was kept in a palace named after it[368]. I doubt that this were one of the actual *menorot* once extant in the Temple of Jerusalem, eventually arrived in Constantinople after Belisarius' campaigns. However, it is possible that it was purported to be. It could as well have been a copy of it[369]: we have seen what kind of symbolic importance the Temple vessels retained in Constantinople. Its shape, therefore, unmistakably recalled the biblical one and was almost certainly meant to symbolize it. It is then possible that the presence of a *menorah*-shaped lamp in the Byzantine palace, probably there until the fourth Crusade, triggered this specific description in some of our *midrashim*. The fact that it was decorated with famous figures of the history of Israel seems a literary addition, even though, sometimes, the foot of the lampstand was actually decorated, but mostly with animals and certainly not at the top but on the base[370]. The portraits of these prophets and patriarchs are probably utterly fictional and they seem to be inserted to claim and underline the 'Jewishness' of the lamp. Versions handing down different lists of people suggest, even in this case, a certain degree of reworking, justified by specific apologetic reasons. Such a mechanism of reappropriation could have certainly be prompted by the presence of a real *menorah*, held in the palace and part of the imperial Byzantine ceremonial: the compilers of these *midrashim* were trying their best in reassessing its true origin[371].

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[367] On the history of the Temple *menorah* and its circulation after the destruction of the second Temple, see H. Lewy, *A note on the Fate of the Sacred Vessels of the Second Temple*, in «Kedem», 2 (1945), pp. 123-125; H. Strauss, *The Candlestick of the Hasmonean Kings*, in «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», 22 (1959), pp. 6-16; D. Sperber, *The History of the* Menorah, in «Journal of Jewish Studies», 16, (1965), pp. 135-159; Yarden, *The Spoils of Jerusalem*, Stockholm 1991, pp. 38-65.

[368] The whole question about this palace, its dating and the presence of the lamp is debated. For a possible reconstruction of the place, see R. Guilland. *Études de Topographie de Constantinople Byzantine*, Berlin-Amsterdam 1969, pp. 27-29.

[369] Seven-armed *candelabra* became more and more popular during the Middle Ages and we know of several examples circulating both in monasteries and court contexts, see P. Bloch, *Siebenarmige Leuchter in christlichen Kirchen*, in «Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch», 23 (1961), pp. 55-190.

[370] See the discussion on the base of the lamp represented on the arch of Titus in the articles above.

[371] E. Gruen in his *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition. Hellenistic Culture and Society*, Berkeley 1998, argues that "fictive creations can in fact provide the

Conclusion

The analysis of the various elements mentioned in the rabbinic literature shows that the process of accretion developed through a long arch of centuries and was deeply influenced by the political situation encountered by the Jews during their history. Most of the features of the throne find a correspondence, or at least, a likelihood, with several real historical situations. Some of them, like the hanging crown, mirrors a custom of Sasanian origin, which was later on employed both by the Byzantine and by the Islamic rulers. Others, like the presence of lions and eagles, is more difficult to trace, being a typical symbol of kingship, broadly widespread, both in the East and in the West, even if these animals were certainly linked to the Solomonic legend since the third century C.E. The most vivid elements of the description (*automata*, lions exhaling perfumes, golden trees, sirens), however, certainly depend on the setting created in Constantinople during the tenth century, which constitutes a *terminus post quem* for this section of the rabbinic material. Through my analysis I have established that entire portions of these accounts depend on the Magnaura; nonetheless, the relationship between the audience room and the Jewish *midrashim* is certainly more complicated, since it is clear that few legends mentioning some sort of engineering device were earlier than the Byzantine throne hall. It is difficult to imagine a simple coincidence; rather, it is interesting to posit a continuous and reciprocal attention of the various actors – in this case Byzantine and Jews – to the material regarding a shared and important figure, like that of king Solomon. If the Byzantine setting was possibly inspired by some rabbinic legend, it seems also likely that some of the latest elements inserted in this tradition (the *menorah*, the dove of the Torah, etc.) were meant to consciously respond to the effort of appropriation of the royal figure, carried out by the Byzantine emperor. Symbols and texts, then, become battlegrounds for cultural and religious supremacy.

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historian with the best insights into the self-perception of Hellenistic Jews striving to articulate their own identity", pp. xvi-xvii. Even though his discourse refers to an earlier period, I think his methodological approach is still valid for our own case-study.

Appendix II

1) *Midrash Rabbah*, *Leviticus*[372]:

AFTER THE DEATH OF THE TWO SONS OF AARON (XVI, 1), R. Simeon opened his discourse with the text, All things come alike to all; *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked* (Eccl. 9:2). […] R. Joḥanan observed in the name of R. Eliezer, the son of R. Jose the Galilean […] *And to the wicked* applies to Pharaoh Necho. When he sought to sit upon the throne of Solomon he did not know its workings, so a lion struck him and maimed him.

2) *Midrash Rabbah*, *Esther*[373]:

ON THE THRONE OF HIS KINGDOM.
R. Cohen said in the name of R. 'Azariah: The word MALKUTHO (his kingdom) is written defectively: he wanted to sit on the throne of Solomon, but was not permitted. They said to him: 'No king who is not ruler of the world can sit on it'. He thereupon made himself a throne of his own like it. Hence it says, ON THE THRONE OF HIS KINGDOM, the word MALKUTHO being written defectively. What then was [the greatness of] that throne, of which it says, *Moreover the king* [Solomon] *made a great throne of ivory* (II Chron. 9:17)? For R. Acha observed: Surely it is written, *Now Achab had seventy sons in Samaria* (II Kings 10:1) and R. Hoshaia said that as he had seventy sons in Samaria so he had seventy in Jezreel, and each had two palaces, one for winter and one for summer, as it says, *And I will smite the winter-house with the summer-house* (Amos 3:15), while R. Judah b. R. Simon says that each had four, as it says, *And the houses of ivory shall perish* (*ibid.*) – the Rabbis say that each had six, as it says, *And the great houses shall have an end* (ibid.) – and here it [merely] says *A*

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[372] *Midrash Rabbah*, translated into English with notes, glossary and indices under the editorship of H. Freedman – M. Simon; with a foreword by I. Epstein, 10 vols, London 1983, (or. ed. 1939), IV *Leviticus* (22:1), p. 250. This *midrash* probably dates to the sixth century C.E.

[373] *Midrash Rabbah*, IX, *Esther* (1:12), pp. 26-29. The first part of *Esther Rabbah* (sections 1-5) was probably one of the earliest *midrashim* to be written, between the fifth and the seventh centuries C.E., while sections 6-10 have been added as late as the tenth century C.E., and the final editing process was probably completed by the twelfth century C.E.

great throne of ivory? R. Hoshaia Rabbah explained that it was made like the Chariot of Him at whose word the world came into being, the Holy one, blessed be He; and so it says, *There were six steps to the throne* (II Chron. 9:18) – six corresponding to the six firmaments. But are there not seven? R. Abun said: The one in which the King abides is specially reserved. There were six corresponding to the six earths, viz. *eretz*, *adamah*, *arka*, *ge*, *ẓiah*, *neshiah*. There is also a *tebel*, but [this is not counted] because it is written, *And he will judge the world* (tebel) in righteousness (Ps. 9:9). There were six corresponding to the six orders of the Mishnah – *Zer'aim*, *Mo'ed*, *Nashim*, *Nezikin*, *Kodeshim*, and *Tohoroth*. There were six corresponding to the six matriarchs – Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. R. Huna said: There were six corresponding to the six precepts which the king was specially admonished to keep, as it is written, (i) *He shall not multiply wives to himself*, (ii) *he shall not multiply horses to himself*, (iii) *neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold* (Deut. 17:16ff.); and further, (iv) *Thou shalt not wrest judgement*; (v) *thou shalt not respect persons*; (vi) *neither shalt thou take a gift* (*ibid*., 16:9). As he ascended the first step the herald proclaimed, addressing to him, '*He shall not multiply wives to himself*'. At the second he proclaimed '*He shall not multiply horses to himself*'. At the third he proclaimed, '*Neither shall he multiply to himself silver and gold*'. At the fourth '*Thou shalt not wrest judgement*'; at the fifth, '*Thou shalt not respect persons*'; at the sixth, '*Thou shalt not take a gift*'. Similarly it says, And arms on either side by the place of the seat (II Chron. 9:18). As he went to take his seat, the herald said to him: 'Know before thou sittest – before Him at whose word the world came into being'. It is related that when Solomon died, Shishak, king of Egypt, came up and took it from them. R. Samuel b. Naḥman said: Shishak is the same as Pharao. And why was he called Shishak? Because he came impelled by greed (she<u>k</u>i<u>k</u>uth) against Israel, saying 'I am taking it in lieu of my daughter's marriage settlement'. He made war with Zerah the Ethiopian, who took it from him (II chron 14:8). Then Asa made war with Zerah the Ethiopian and he conquered him and took it from him. It has been thaught: Asa and all the kings of Judah sat upon it, and when Nebuchadnezzar came up and sacked Jerusalem he carried it off to Babylon. From Babylon it was taken to Media and from Media to Greece [Syria], and from Greece to Edom [Rome]. R. Eleazar b. R. Jose said: I have seen its fragments in Rome. Nebuchadnezzar sat on it; Cyrus sat on it; Ahasuerus wanted to sit on it but was not permitted. They said to him 'No one who is not ruler over the whole world can sit on it'. He accordingly made one for himself

which he paid for; hence it is written ON THE THRONE OF HIS KINGDOM, the word MALKUTHO (KINGDOM) being written defectively. *And the top of the throne was round behind* (1 Kings 10:19): R. Acha said: like an arm-chair with a footstool. *And there were arms on either side* (*ibid.*). As he ascended the first step, a lion stretched out an arm to him; at the second an eagle stretched out an arm. *By the place of the seat* (*ibid.*): so they received him. By the seat itself there was a golden sceptre behind, at the top of which was a dove with a golden crown in its mouth, so that the king should be seated on the throne with the golden crown just barely resting on his head.

3) *Midrash Rabbah*, *Exodus*[374]:

When Solomon appeared, the moon's disc was full, for it says: *And Solomon sat upon the throne of the Lord as king* (I Chron. 29: 23). Is it then possible for man to sit on the throne of God, of which it says: *His throne was a flame of fire* (Dan. 7:9)? No; but just as God rules from one end of the world to the other and also has a dominion over all kings, as it is said: *All the kings of the earth shall give Thee thanks* (Ps. 138:4), so did Solomon reign over the whole earth, as it says: *And the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon…And they brought every man his present* (II Chron. 9:23-24). For this reason does it say: *'And Solomon sat upon the throne of the Lord as king'*. God is cloaked in splendour and glory and He gave unto Solomon the splendour of royalty, as it says: *And the Lord bestowed upon him such royal mayesty* (I Chron. 29:25). Concerning God's throne it is written: *As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion* (Ezek. 1:10), and of Solomon it says: *And on the borders that were between the stays were lions, oxen*, etc. (I Kings 7:29), and another verse adds: *Like the work of a chariot wheel* (*ibid.* 33). No evil can touch the throne of God, for it says: *Evil shall not sojourn with Thee* (Ps. 5:5), and of Solomon, too, it says: *There is neither adversary nor evil occurrence* (I Kings 5:18). God made six heavens and resides in the seventh and of the throne of Solomon we read: *There were six steps to the throne* (*ibid.* 10:19), while he himself sat on the seventh – thus the disc of the moon was at its fullest.

[374] *Midrash Rabbah*, III, *Exodus* (15: 26), pp. 197-198. This work is composed by two parts, belonging to two distinct traditions: sections 1-14 and 15-52. The latter, which contains our excerpt, depends from a series of texts (Tanhuma-Yelammedenu family), probably already extant at the end of the seventh century C.E.

4) *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*[375]:

Piska 26.1

R. Simeon bar R. Abin began his discourse with the verse *All things come alike to all: like things befall the righteous and the wicked* (Eccles. 9:2). […] The words *like things befall…the wicked* (Eccles. 9:2) apply to Pharaoh-Necoh. When he sought to sit on Solomon's throne, he did not know its workings, so that a part of its mechanism, made in the semblance of a lion, sprang up and mutilated him. […] and he died a cripple[376].

Piska 1.7

And [the princes] brought their offering before the Lord, six wagons, etc. (Num. 7:3), corresponding to the six days of creation; six corresponding to the six orders of the Mishnah; six corresponding to the six Matriarchs: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. According to R. Johannan, the six correspond to the six commandments which a king is bound to obey: He shall not multiply wives to himself (Deut. 17:17); he shall not multiply horses to himself (Deut. 17:16); neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold (Deut. 17:17); thou shalt not wrest judgement; thou shalt not respect persons; neither shalt thou take a gift (Deut. 16:19). In further comment, the six correspond to the six steps of the king's throne. What significance did each step have? When the king set foot on the first step as he was going up to his seat, a herald came forth and cried: He shall not multiply horses to himself. When the king set foot on the third step, a herald came forth and cried: Neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. When he set foot on the fourth step, a herald came forth and cried: Thou shalt not wrest judgement. When he set foot on the fifth step, a herald came forth and cried: Neither shalt thou take a gift. And when he was about to sit down, after having set foot on the seventh step, he was told: Know before Whom you are about to sit down. *And the top of the throne was round*

[375] *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana. R. Kahana's Compilation of Discourses for sabbaths and Festal Days*, translated from Hebrew and Aramaic by W.G. Braude – I.J. Kapstein, London 1975, p. 393 and pp. 16-17. This work should probably be dated between the seventh and the eighth centuris C.E., even though it contains portions of earlier *midrashim* and some of its sections have been borrowed quite openly from *Leviticus Rabbah*.

[376] *N-k-h* = 'spring upon'.

behind (1 Kings 10:19) means, according to R. Acha, that the throne resembled the seat of Moses: *And there were arms on either side of the throne by the place of the seat.* How was the throne decorated? A golden sceptre was suspended behind it, and on the top of the sceptre was a dove. In the dove's mouth there was a crown of gold, and when the king sat under it on the seat of the throne, the crown all but touched his head. Finally, the six wagons are taken to correspond to the six firmaments. But are there not seven firmaments? [The seventh firmament], R. Abin explained, is where the King resides and as a royal property [is not to be counted with this world's property].

5) *Midrash Rabbah*, *Ecclesiastes*[377]:

Simeon b. Abba opened his discourse thus: ALL THINGS COME ALIKE TO ALL; THERE IS ONE EVENT TO THE RIGHTTEOUS (IX, 2): this alludes to Noah, as it is said, *In his generations a man righteous and whole-hearted* (Gen. 6:9). It is reported that when he came out of the ark, a lion attacked and injured him so that he limped. AND TO THE WICKED: this alludes to Pharaoh [Neco]. It is reported that when Pharaoh came to sit upon Solomon's throne, which he had taken with his daughter's *kethubah*, he did not understand its mechanism, and a lion attacked and injured him so that he limped. They both died with a limp, hence THERE IS ONE EVENT TO THE RIGHTEOUS AND TO THE WICKED.

6) *Targum rishon Esther*[378]:

It was on those days that King Xerses wished to sit on the royal throne of Solomon, which was captured from Jerusalem by Shishak, king of Egypt, and from Egypt it was conquered by Sennacherib. From Sennacherib it was captured by Hezekiah and returned to Jerusalem, and then again captured from

[377] *Midrash Rabbah*, VIII, *Ecclesiastes* (9:2), p. 226. Due to a series of formal, stylistic and linguistic features, this *midrash* is considered to have been written between the eighth and tenth centuries C.E.

[378] *The two Targums of Esther*, translated, with apparatus and notes by B. Grossfeld, Iowa 1991, pp. 29-30. The dating of this *targum* is quite difficult to ascertain, it has been proposed the beginning of the seventh but also the eighth C.E. century.

Jerusalem by Nebukhadnezzar[379] and brought down to Babylonia. When Cyrus the Mede conquered Babylonia, he brought it down to Elam. Thereafter Xerxes ruled, and wished to sit upon it but was not able to, so he ordered that architects be brought from Alexandria to produce one like it but they were unable; instead they made another one inferior to it. They were busy for two years with it. In the third year of his reign he sat on it, on that very throne of his kingdom which the architects designed for him in the fortress of Susa.

7) *Panim aḥerot II*[380]:

In jenen Tagen.

Als Nebukadnezar heraufkam und den Tempel verwüstete und Zedekia und Israel nach Babel deportierte, brachte er den Thron herauf, den Salomo, der König, in seiner Weisheit gemacht hatte, wie gesagt ist:
Und der König machte einen grossen Elfenbein-Thron (1 Kg 10:18)

Belegt mit Edelsteinen und Perlen.
Sechs Stufen hatte der Thron (1 Kg 10:19)
Und jede Stufe
-usw. wie oben[381].

[379] Some manuscripts have pharaoh Necho.

[380] *Rabbinische Kommentare zum Buch Ester*, translated by D. Börner-Klein – E. Hollender, Leiden 2000, II, p. 89. The final redaction of this text probably took place between the seventh and the eighth centuries C.E. However, it contains a lengthy section on the throne of Solomon, quite similar to the one in midrash *Abba Gurion*. Since the latter text is certainly later, such a coincidence is probably due to the parallel borrowing from a lost source, another *midrash* to the book of Esther.

[381] The rest is omitted by the copyist who in his manuscript must had a complete version to which he referred.

8) *Midrash Abba Gurion*[382]:

In jenen Tagen, als er sich setzte
Als sich Achaschwerosch auf den Thron Salomons setzen wolle, <uber den es heisst: Da setzte sich Salomo aud den Thron des HERRn (1 *Chron*. 29:23)> sprach die Gemeinde Israels vor dem Heiligen, gepriesen sei er: Herr der Welt <auf dem Platze, auf dem ein heiliger Körper sass, soll dieser Frevler sitzen?>
Lass nicht den Thron deiner Herrlichkeit zuschanden werden (Jer. 14, 21)
Wie kam dieser Thron in seine Hand?
Nach dem Tod Salomos ging Schischak, der König Ägyptens, und zog herauf [nach Jerusalem] und nahm ihn als Hochzeitsverschreibung seiner Tochter, wie geschrieben ist:
Und es geschah im 5. Jahr des Königs Rechabeam: Schischak, König von Ägypten, kam herauf nach Jerusalem (2 Ch. 12:2).
Sanherib kam und nahm ihn [fort] aus Ägypten und brachte ihn mit sich im Land Israel, als er kam, um gegen Jerusalem Krieg zu führen.
In diesem [Zeit] Abschnitt fiel Sanherib. Die Israeliten aber zogen hinaus und raubten sein Vermögen. Sie nahmen den Thron und brachten ihn an seinen Platz zurück. Dann setzte Hiskia auf ihn und nahm Herrlichkeit [an sich], die in Jerusalem [vorher nur] in der Hand Salomos gewesen war. Und er war während seiner gesamten Herrschaft erfolgreich, wie gesagt ist:
Und Hiskia war erfolgreich in all seinem Tun (2 Ch. 32:30)
Über Salomo steht geschrieben:
Und alle Könige der Erde suchten das Angesichts Salomos. Und ein jeder brachte sein Geschenk (2 Ch. 9: 23-24).
Und über Hiskia steht geschrieben:
Und viele brachten dem HERRn ein Geschenk [nach Jerusalem] und Kostbarkeiten für Hiskia, den König Judas (2 Ch. 32:23).
Und über Hiskia steht geschrieben:
Zu jener Zeit sandte Merodach [Sohn Baladans, König von Babel, Briefe und ein Geschenk zu Hiskia] (2 Kg 20:12)
Als aber Hiskia den Thron sah, sagte er: Was sah Salomo, mein Vater, darin, dass er sechs Stufen zum Thron machte?

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[382] *Rabbinische Kommentare zum Buch Ester*, II, p. 27. This *midrash* is certainly dependendent on *Esther Rabbah* and on *Panim Aḥerot II*, even though the section on the throne of Solomon comes from a different, lost, source. It is not considered an original work but a compilation of several extant texts, probably composed no later than the tenth century C.E.

Vielmehr [ist es so zu verstehen]: [Sie stehen symbolisch] für sechs Söhne, die zukünftig aus dem Samen Davids hervorgehen, in denen sechs Eigenschaften sind. Und diese [sechs] sind es: Salomo, Joschiahu, Daniel, Chananja, Mischael und Asarja.
Und er machte ihn vom Geist des Heiligtums [inspiriert] für sechs Könige, die zukünftig aud ihm sitzen werden, und diese [sechs] sind es: Salomo, Rechobeam, Hiskia, Amon, Manasse, Joschiahu.
Und Pharao Necho zog hinauf [nach Jerusalem] und führte Krieg gegen Joschiau, und nahm ihn [den Thron], um darauf zu sitzen. Aber er kannte seinen Mechanismus nicht, und der Löwe schlug ihn auf die Hüfte und er wurde verkrüppelt. Deswegen wird er Pharao Necho genannt, und man übersetzt es 'Pharao der Hinkende'.
Und als Nebukadnezar nach Ägypten kam, den Thron fand und ihn nach Babel brachte, und sich darauf setzen und Zedekia in Ribla richten wollte, da sprach die Gemeinde Israel vor dem Heiligen, *Unsere Feinde sind Herren (Dtn 32:31).*
Auch er kannte die Art des Mechanismus nicht, und der Löwe schlug ihn auf seine rechte Seite und er fiel hinunter [vom Thron]. Über ihn sagt die Schrift:
Wie bist du vom Himmel gefallen, Glanzstern, Sohn des Morgenrots! (Jes 14:12).
Ist er denn [wirklich] vom Himmel gefallen?
Vielmehr ist er vom Thron gefallen, über den gesagt ist:
Und Salomo sass auf dem Thron des HERRn (1 Ch. 29:23).
Und als Darius regierte und Babel verwüstete, nahm er ihn [den Thron] und führte ihn nach Elam, das in Medien ist.
Und als Achaschwerosch, sein Sohn, heraufzog, holte er Weise um etwas ihm Ähnliches zu machen, aber sie vermochten es nicht, [etwas] ihm Ähnliches machen.
Und wie war er gemacht?
Er war mit Edelstein und Perlen bedeckt.
Etwas ihm Ähnliches war nie für einen König gemacht worden. Er hatte sechs Stufen, und über den sechs Stufen ragte er auf, und er hatte sechs Wege, aud jedem Weg sechs/Stufen, und auf jeder Stufe zwei Löwen, und mit einem Mechanismus stieg man auf.
Wenn der König auftrat, strecken die Löwen von beiden Seiten ihre Pfoten aus, und auf ihren Pfoten war Geschriebenes eingraviert. Er wandte sich nach rechts und las: Kenne kein [unterschiedliches] Ansehen im Gericht! Er wandte sich nach links und las: Nimm keine Bestechung an! Und so war auf allen zwölf Löwen jenen Versen Entsprechendes geschrieben.

Jede Stufe war mit Edelsteinen bedeckt, darunter weisse und grünliche und rötliche und Kristalle. Dattelbäume umgaben den Thron, eingehüllt in Linnengewander. Und Pfauen aus Elfenbein waren gegen die Flügel der Adler gerichtet, und [es gab] zwei Alabastersäulen auf den Köpfen der Löwen und zwei hohle Löwen aus Gold auf den beiden Seiten des Throns, die waren mit allen Arten von Spezereien gefüllt.
Zwei Sessel standen an den beiden Seiten des Throns, einer/für Gad, den Seher, und einer für Natan den Propheten. Und 70 Sessel umgaben den Thron, für die 70 Ältesten. Und auf jedem einzelnen Weg stehen zwei Löwen und zwei Adler auf ihren [Hinter-]Beinen einander gegenüber.
Wenn der König auf den Thron stieg, stellte er sein Bein auf die erste Stufe, dann drehte sich das Rad im Mechanismus und der Löwe streckte seine rechte Pfote aus und der Adler seinen linken Flügel, und der König stützte sich auf sie und stieg hinauf auf die zweite Stufe.
Wenn er auf der Stufe stand, drehte sich das Rad, der Adler streckte seinen rechten Flügel aus und der Löwe seine Linke Pfote, und der König stützte sich auf sie und stieg hinauf, und so jede einzelne Stufe.
Es war [dort] ein silberner Pfau, bestückt mit einem Mechanismus, <und der Mechanismus liess ihn sich verbeugen > vor dem König und setzte ihn auf den Thron. Dann breiteten die Adler ihre Flügel aus und stiegen mittels eines Mechanismus auf und bedeckten von oben sein Haupt. Eine goldene Taube kam von der Säule herab, öffnete den Schrein, nahm die Tora und legte sie auf seine Knie, um zu erfüllen, was gesagt ist:
Und sie soll bei ihm sein und er soll in ihr lesen alle Tage seines Lebens (Dtn. 17:19)
Ein Löwe streckte seine Pfote aus, nahm die Krone und setzte sie auf seinem [des Königs] kopf. Und die Säulen dort sagten: Die Königsherrschaft des Hauses David soll in Ewigkeit bestehen!
Und auf jedereinzelnen Stufe waren reine Tiere gegenüber unreinen [Tieren]:
Auf der ersten Stufe ein Stier und ihm gegenüber ein Löwe.
Auf der zweiten ein Lamm [und ihm gegenüber] ein Wolf.
Auf der dritten ein Lamm [und ihm gegenüber] ein Leopard.
Auf der vierten eine Gazelle [und ihr gegenüber] eine Taube.
Auf der sechsten ein Falke [und ihm gegenüber] ein [Sing]Vogel.
Und er [der König] stieg hinauf und schloss Frieden zwischen ihnen, [indem] er auf jeder einzelnen Stufe einen [Bibel-]Vers zu lesen pflegte.
Auf der erste Stufe sagte er:

Die Lehre des HERRn ist untadelig, seelenerquickend (Ps. 19:8)
Auf der zweiten:
Das Zeugnis des HERRn ist bewährt, macht Toren weise (Ps. 19:8)
Auf der dritten:
Die Befehle des HERRn sind recht, herzerfreuend (Ps. 19:9)
Auf der vierten:.
Das Gebot des HERRn ist lauter, erleuchtet die Augen (Ps. 19:9)
Auf der fünften:
Die Furcht des HERRn ist rein, bestehet ewig (Ps. 19:10)
Auf der sechsten:
Die Aussprüche des HERRn sind wahr, sind gerecht allzumal (Ps. 19:10)
Und danach:
Setzte sich Salomo auf dem Thron des HERRn (1 Ch. 29:23)
Der Hohepriester und der Sanhedrin kamen und entboten dem König den Frieden [sgruss]. Und sie sassen zu seiner Rechten und seiner Linken und sprachen mit ihm Recht. Und wenn die Zeugen vor der König kamen, so krachten die Mechanismen, die Räder drehten sich, die Löwen brüllten, die Adler flogen, die Pfauen fauchten.
Und warum all das? Um ihr Herz zu ergreifen, damit sie [die] Wahrheit bezeugten.
Und als Achaschwerosch ihn [den Thron] sah, wollte er auf ihm sitzen, aber er konnte [es] nicht. Er sandte aus und holte Kunsthandwerker aus Tyrus und Alexandria, aber sie machten nichts ihm Ähnliches. Und sie machten ihm einen [anderen] Thron, und er setzte sich auf ihn. Drei Jahre beschäftigten sie sich damit, um zu erfüllen, was gesagt ist:
In jenen Tagen, als sich der König Achaschwerosch auf den Thron seines Königreiches setzte. (Est. 1:2)

9) *Targum sheni Esther*[383]:

In those days, when the king Ahashveros sat upon his throne, which was prepared for him in Shushan the capital. This throne was neither his own nor that of his father's, but it was the throne of Solomon, which Hiram, the son of a widow of Tyre, had made with great skill.
[…] he made a great royal throne, covered with fine gold from Ophir, overlaid with beryl stones and inlaid with marble stones; it was overlaid with samaragel, carbuncle, diamonds and pearls and all kinds of precious stones. For no king's throne was made like it, or were any of the kings able to produce one similar to it. Now this was the workmanship of his throne: twelve lions of gold stood upon it, and opposite them were twelve eagles of gold; a lion opposite an eagle and an eagle opposite a lion, they were arranged opposite each other. The right paw of the golden lion opposite the left wing of the golden eagle; and the right wing of the golden eagle opposite the left paw of the golden lion. The sum of all the lions was seventy-two and that of the eagles was seventy-two. Now, the top of the throne, where the king's seat was located, was round. It had six steps, for thus it is written: "Then the king made a great throne of ivory, the throne having six steps" (1 Kings 10:18). Thus on the first step lay a golden ox and opposite it a golden lion. On the second step lay a golden bear and opposite it lay a golden lamb. On the third step lay a golden panther and opposite it lay a golden suckling kid. On the fourth step lay a golden eagle and opposite it a golden peacock. On the fifth step lay a golden cat and opposite it a golden hen. On the sixth step lay a golden hawk and opposite it a golden bird. Now on the top of the throne stood a golden dove, grasping a golden hawk in its claw. So likewise will all the nations and (speakers of all) languages in the future be delivered into the hand of Israel. Now at the top of the throne was located a gold lampstand set in proper order in its arrangement with its lamps, and with its pomegranates and with its ornaments, and with its snuffers/ashpans and with its cups and with its lilies. Now at one side of the lampstand were standing seven golden branches, upon which were portrayed the seven Patriarchs of the

[383] *The Targum sheni to the book of Esther: A critical edition based on MS. Sassoon 282 with critical apparatus*, New York 1994, p. 104. This work is a collection of several sources, reworked by one author, probably put together around the XI century. Its dating is much discussed but, as far as the throne is concerned, it seems reasonable to posit a tenth century C.E. date. The overall text includes midrashic sources that we have already mentioned, as *Esther Rabbah* and *Abba Gurion*, and others like *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, *Seder Olam* and *Pesikta Rabbati*.

world, and these are their names: the first man (=Adam), Noah and the great Shem; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Job among them. Now at the other side of the lampstand were standing seven other branches, upon which were portrayed the seven pious ones of the world, and these are their names: Levi, Qehat, Amram, Moses, Aaron, Eldad and Medad, as well as the prophet Haggai among them. Now at the top of the lampstand was set a golden vessel filled with pure olive oil, whose oil supplied the lights of the lampstand and upon it was portrayed the high priest. From the large basin proceeded two golden clusters, upon which were depicted the two sons of Eli – Hophni and Pinchas. Now within the two golden clusters there proceeded from the large basin upon which were portrayed the two sons of Aaron – Nadab and Abihu – as well as two golden seats, one for the high priest and one for the deputy high priest. Towards the top of the throne were set seventy golden thrones, upon which sat the seventy (members of the) Sanhedrin, dispensing justice before King Solomon. Now two sirens were on either side of King Solomon's two ears in order that he should not become frightened. Above the top of the throne were set twenty-four golden vines, which provided shade for King Solomon. Now wherever Solomon wished to go, the throne with its foundation moved beneath him, and placing his foot on the first step; the silver ox stretched forth its hand onto the second step, and from the second to the third, and from the third to the fourth, and from the fourth to the fifth, and from the fifth to the sixth. Then from the sixth the eagles descended and grasped him, and raising him, seated him upon the top of the throne. There was a silver serpent upon its foundation. Now when kings heard about the fame of the king's throne, they assembled themselves and all of them came together, prostrating themselves and throwing themselves before him, they said: 'Such a throne was never made for any king, and no nation or people could design one like it'. Now when the kings beheld the excellence of the throne, they paid respect to the One who created the whole world. When the king ascended and sat down upon the royal throne, the great eagle would go around and take the royal crown and place the crown upon King Solomon's head. Thereafter a great serpent would wind itself around the machinery: then the lions and eagles would ascend the machinery and thus provide shade for King Solomon's head. Thereupon a golden dove would descend from a pillar and would open the Ark, take out the Book of the Law and place it into the hand of King Solomon in fulfillment of what Moses said: "And it shall be with him, and he should read from it all the days of his life in order that the days of his life may be prolonged during his kingdom, he and his

descendants within Israel" (Deut. 17:20). When the high priest came to inquire of Solomon's welfare, and all the elders sat to the right of the throne and to its left judging the cases of his people, and the witnesses who were to testify would ascend before the king, the wheel of the machinery was set in motion – the oxen lowed, the lions roared, the bears growled, the lambs bleated, the panthers screamed, the owls hooted, the cats mewed, the peacocks shrieked, the roosters crowed, the hawks screamed, and the birds chirped to frighten the hearts of the witnesses so that they not offer false testimony; so the witnesses said to themselves: We must offer honest testimony or else the world will be destroyed on account of us. The lions would sprinkle spices whenever King Solomon would ascend to sit on the king's throne, and such a throne none of the kings possessed. When Israel's enemies were deserving of destruction, Nebukhadnezzar the evil king of Babylonia fortified himself and rose up against them destroyed the Land of Israel, plundered the city of Jerusalem, burned the Temple with fire, banished the people of the House of Israel and brought them to Ribla, which is in the land of Hamat, and drove out with them the throne of King Solomon. Now when the evil Nebukhadnezzar wanted to ascend and sit upon it, he was not aware that the machineries would be set in motion for him. So when he spread out his foot onto the first step a golden lion stretched out his right paw and struck him on his left flank. Thus he limped on it until the day of his death. Then after Nebukhadnezzar king of Babylonia came Alexander and captured the throne of King Solomon, hauling it to Egypt. Now when Sheshonq, king of Egypt, beheld the excellence of the throne which was more praiseworthy than any of the thrones of (other) kings, he longed to ascend and sit upon it. He (too) was not aware that the machineries would be set in motion for him. So when he spread out his foot onto the first step, a golden lion stretched out the right paw and struck him on his left flank. Thus he was called "the lame Pharaoh" until the day of his death. Thereafter when Anipranis, son of King Antiochus, came up against the land of Egypt and destroyed it, he captured King Solomon's throne and brought it in ships. There the leg of the throne with the golden chain slipped off, and all the artists of the world, as well as all the goldsmiths, came to repair the leg, but were unable to repair it to this day. Then, after his reign came to an end, and the Persian Cyrus succeeded him, he was occupied with (the rebuilding of) the Temple, thus meriting to sit on it. This is the throne of King Solomon, the like of which did not exist in all the kingdoms.

10) *Midrash Rabbah*, *Deuteronomy*[384]:

Another explanation: JUDGES AND OFFICERS. R. Aḥa said: come and see. Solomon's throne had six steps. Whence this? For it is said, *There were six steps to the throne* (I Kings 10:19). And in our section there are six precepts in the form of negative commandments, and these are, *Thou shalt not wrest judgement*; *Thou shalt not respect persons*; *neither shalt thou take a gift* (*Deut*. 16:19); *Thou shalt not plant thee on Asherah* (*ibid*. 21); *Neither shalt thou set up a pillar* (*ibid*. 22); *Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the Lord thy God an ox or a sheep* (*ibid*. 17:1). [These are] six. A herald stood in front of Solomon's throne; as soon as he [Solomon] ascended the first step he called out, 'Thou shalt not wrest judgement'; at the second, he called out 'Thou shalt not respect persons'; at the third step, he called out 'Neither shalt thou take a gift'; at the fourth 'Thou shalt not plant thee an Asherah'; at the fifth 'Neither shalt thou set up a pillar'; at the sixth 'Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the Lord thy God'.

11) *Midrash Rabbah*, *Numbers*[385]:

AND THEY BROUGHT THEIR OFFERING BEFORE THE LORD, SIX COVERED WAGONS, etc. (7:3). Six corresponding to the six days of creation. Six corresponding to the six orders of the Mishnah. Six corresponding to the Matriarchs, namely Sarah and Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. Six, said R. Huna, corresponding to the six commandments which are enjoined upon the king daily. They are as follows: *Neither shall he multiply wives to himself* (*Deut*. 17:17); *And he shall not multiply horses to himself* (*ibid*. 16); *Neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold* (*ibid*. 17); *Thou shalt not wrest judgement* (*ibid*. 16:19); *Thou shalt not respect persons* (*ibid*.); *Neither shalt thou take a gift* (*ibid*.). Six corresponding to the six steps of Solomon's throne, as it says, *And there were six steps to the throne* (II *Chron*. 9:18). On

[384] *Midrash Rabbah*, VII, *Deuteronomy* (5:6), pp. 106-107. Probably composed around the beginning of the tenth century C.E.; to the text were made several additions (the so-called 'Spanish' version) in Medievale Europe, between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries C.E.

[385] *Midrash Rabbah*, VI, *Numbers* (12:17), p. 490. The first part of this work (sections 1-14) is recognized as work of Provençal rabbis, to be dated probably between the tenth and the eleventh centuries C.E., while its overall editing process was completed by the twelfth century C.E.

what side were the steps? On the side by which he ascended and sat down. When he came up to sit on the first step a herald went forth and exorted him: *Neither shall he multiply wives to himself*. When he ascended to sit down on the second step the herald went forth and exhorted him: *he shall not multiply horses to himself*. On going up to sit upon the third step the herald would go forth and declare: *Neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold*. When he went up to sit on the fourth step the herald came forth and declared: *Thou shalt not wrest judgement*. Upon his ascending to sit down on the fifth step the herald went forth and declared: *Thou shalt not respect persons*. When he came up to sit down on the sixth step, the herald went forth and declared: *Neither shalt thou take a gift*. Then he came to sit down on his throne and where there were arms on either side reaching to the place of the seat. How was the golden sceptre placed? It was suspended behind the throne, and on the top of it there was a dove. There was a golden crown in the mouth of this dove, and when he sat under it on the seat of the crown, it all but touched his head. The six wagons correspond to the six skies. But are there not seven? R. Abin answered: Where the king resides is crown property.

12) *Leqach tov*[386]:

Auf den Thron seines Königreiches, in Susa, der Festung
Das lehrt, dass er auf dem Thron des Königs Salomo sitzen wollte und es nicht vermochte. Er schickte und brachte Künstler aus Ägypten und Alexandria, und man machte ihm in 3 Jahren einen Thron, und er setze sich darauf.

13) *Panim aḥerot I*[387]:

In jenen Tagen, als sich der König Achascherosch auf den Thron seines Königsreiches [in Susa, der Festung] setze
Die Weisen sagten:

[386] *Rabbinische Kommentare zum Buch Ester*, II, p. 365. This compilation was probably assembled around 1100 C.E.

[387] *Rabbinische Kommentare zum Buch Ester*, II, pp. 66-67. This compilation is considered to have been composed during the XII century.

Als Achaschwerosch König wurde, wollte er auf dem Thron Salomos sitzen, über den geschrieben steht
Da setzte sich Salomo auf den Thron des HERRn (1 Ch. 29:23)
Israel sprach vor dem Heiligen, gepriesen sei er: Herr der Welt! Auf den Thron, über den geschrieben steht, *Thron des HERRn*, setz sich dieser Frevler. Handle um deines Namens willen: Nicht mögest du den Thron deiner Ehre zu Schanden warten lassen!

Und wie [so] wird dieser Thron in Medien gefunden?

Nach dem Tod Salomos ging Schischak, König Ägyptens, hinauf [nach Jerusalem] und nahm ihn als Heiratsverschreibung seiner Tochter.
Das is est, was geschrieben steht:
Und es geschah im fünften Jahr [Rechobeams]. Schischal, König Ägyptens, kam herauf nach Jerusalem. (2 Ch. 12:2)
-usw. wie unten, bis: Und im dritten Jahr sass er auf ihm[388].

14) *Megillat Esther* (Horovitz)[389]:

Als sich der König Achaschwerosch setzte.

Die Weisen sagten:
Als sich Achaschwerosch auf den Thron Salomos setzen wollte, sprach Israel vor dem Heiligen, gepriesen sei er: Auf dem Platze, auf dem Salomo sass und wahrhaftiges Recht sprach, soll dieser Frevler sitzen?
Tue es um deines grossen Namens wille und
lass nicht den Thron deiner Herrlichkeit zuschanden werden (Jer. 14:21)
Und er konnte sich nicht auf ihn setzen.

Wie kam dieser Thron nach Medien?
Nach dem Tod Salomos ging Schischank, der König Ägyptens, und nahm ihn als Hochzeitsverschreibung und brachte ihn nach Ägypten.

[388] Here the copyst is referring to other versions of the story on the same manuscript, like AG, PA II, ER, Tg I, Tg II and Jalkut, therefore he did not feel the need to add another one.
[389] *Ibid*., II, pp. 327-328. This text was republished by Ch. M. Horovitz in 1882, after an initial edition in 1519; he attributed the compilation to the first part of the thirteenth century C.E.

Und danach kam Sanherib und nahm ihn und brachte ihn ins Land Israel, als er kam, um gegen Jerusalem Krieg zu führen.

Und als der Engel des HERRn auszog und das Lager Aschurs schlug, zogen die Israeliten hinaus und plünderten sein Lager und all sein Silber und Gold. Sie fanden den Thron und brachten ihn an seinen Platz zurück. Dann setze sich Hiskia auf ihn und nahm die Herrlichkeit [auf sich], die in der Hand Salomos gewesen war. Und seine Herrschaft erhob sich nach oben, wie geschrieben steht:
Und Hiskia war erfolgreich in all seinem Tun (2 Ch. 32:30)

Über Salomo steht geschrieben:
[Und alle Könige der Erde suchten das Angesicht Salomos.] Und ein jeder brachte sein Geschenk (2 Ch. 9:23-24)

Und über Hiskia steht geschrieben:
Zu jener Zeit sandte Medorach [Sohn Baladans…2 Kg, 20:12]
Und auf diesem Thron sassen Hiskia und Menasse und Amon und Joschiau, und vor ihnen sassen darauf Salomo und Rechobeam.

Und in den Tagen des Joschiahu zog Pharao, der König Ägyptens, hinauf [nach jerusalem] und führte Krieg gegen Joschiahu, und nahm den Thron und brachte inh nach Ägypten. Er wollte sich auf ihn setzen, aber er kannte seinen Mechanismus nicht, und der Löwe schlug ihn auf die Hüfte, und er wurde verkrüppelt. Deswegen wird er Pharao Necho genannt.

Und als Nebukadnezar gegen Pharao, den König Ägyptens, Krieg führte, und sein Land einnahm, nahm er den Thron und brachte ihn ins Land Elam.
Und [als Beweis] haben wir das, das geschrieben steht:
Und ich setzte meinen Thron nach Elam (Jer. 49:38)

Und er konnte sich nicht auf ihn setzen, und als er das sah, schickte er in den Alexandrien und liess sich Magier kommen. Und sie machten ihm einen Thron entsprechend seinem Verstand. Aber der war nicht wie der Thron Salomos, denn dieser war durch den Geist des Heligtums gemacht worden, wie gesagt ist:
Und Salomo sass auf dem Thron des HERRn (1 ch. 29:23)

15) *Jalkut Schimoni*[390]:

In jenen Tagen, als sich der König Achaschwerosch setzte.

Sie [die Weisen] sagen:
Als Nebukadnezar, der Frevler, heraufzog [nach Jerusalem] und den Tempel verwüstete, deportierte er Zedekia und Israel nach Babel und brachte [auch] den Thron hinaus, den König Salomo in seiner Weisheit gemacht hatte, denn es ist gesagt:
Und der König machte einen grossen Thron aus Elfenbein. (1 Kg 10:18).
Überzogen mit Edelsteinen und Perlen.
Sechs Stufen waren an dem Thron. (1 Kg 10:19)
Jede einzelne Stufe war belegt mit Edelsteinen und Perlen und sie waren weiss, grün und rot. Und es gab unter ihnen [solche] aus schönem Glas [und] Kristall.
Und Palmen umgaben den Thron, drapiert mit weissem Leinen und auf ihren Häuptern Pfauen aus Elfenbein, gerichtet auf die Körper der Adler.
Und zwei Löwen aus Gold standen auf der ersten Stufe. Und zwei Säulen aus Alabaster standen auf dem Kopf der Löwen. Und zwei Weinstöcke aus Gold standen auf beiden Seiten des Throns. Und Glocken waren auf dem Kapitell der Säulen.
Und zwei hohle Löwen aud Gold standen dem ersten gegenüber und waren gefüllt mit allen Arten von Spezereien. Sie sprühten Spezereien, wenn der König Salomo hinaufging.
Und zwei Lehnstühle aus Gold standen zu beiden Seiten des Throns. Einer für den Hohenpriester und einer für den Fürsten.

<Anderer Text: einer für Gad, den Seher, und einer für Natan, den Propheten.>

Und 70 Lehnstühle der 70 Ältesten des Sanhedrins Israels umgaben den Thron.
Und wenn der König Salomo zum Thron hinaufstieg und er mit seinem Fuss auf eine Stufe trat, drehte sich ein Rad im Mechanismus. Der Löwe streckte seine Tatze zur Rechten, der Adler streckte seinen Flügel zur Linken aus, und der König lehnte sich gegen sie und wurde emporgehoben.
Dies vollzog sich Stufe um Stufe.

[390] *Ibid.*, II, p. 434-435. This text is probably an early thirteenth century C.E. compilation, which draws on a great variety of earlier sources.

Und wenn er zu Spitze seines Throns hinaufgekommen war, breiteten die Adler ihre Flügel aus und stiegen durch einem Mechanismus auf. Und sie drapierten sich oben über dem Haupt des Königs. Und eine Taube aus Gold stieg herab von der Säule durch einen Mechanismus und öffnete die Lade und nahm das Buch der Tora heraus und gab es in die Hand des Königs, um zu bestätigen, was gesagt ist:
Sie sei mit ihm, und er lese in ihr alle Tage seine Lebens. (Dtn. 17:19)
Und wenn der Hohepriester und die Ältesten dem König den Friedensgruss entboten, sassen sie zu seiner Rechten und zu seiner Linken und hielten mit ihm Gericht.
Und wenn sie den Zeugen vor Salomo hinaufliessen, knarrten die Mechanismen, die Räder drehten sich, die Löwen knurrten, die Adler flogen, die Pfauen liefen. Und warum? Um die Herzen der Zeugen zu erschüttern, damit sie die Wahrheit bezeugen.
Und als Nebukadnezar ihn deportiert hatte, wollte er sich auf ihn setzen und Zedekia in Riblata richten.
In dieser Stunde sagte Israel:
Er bestätigt sich für uns, was gesagt ist:
Und unsere Feinde sind Richter. (Dtn. 32:31)
Er kannte den Mechanismus aber nicht. Er setzte seinen Fuss auf, ein silberner Drache, der sich inmitten des Mechanismus drehte, knarrte und schlug ihn auf seine linke Hüfte. Und er wurde davon gequält bis zum Tage seines Todes.
Und manche sagen:
Pharao nahm ihn aus Jerusalem gefangen und brachte ihn nach Ägypten zu unterjochen, fand er den Thron dort. Und er nahm ihn und brachte ihn nach Babel, um sich dort [auf ihn] zu setzten. Und der Löwe schlug ihn und er fiel von ihm [herab]. Und daher sagt [der Bibelvers]:
Wie bist du vom Himmel gefallen. (Jes 14:12)
Ist er denn von Himmel gefallen?
Vielmehr, er verlangte auf dem Thron dessen zu sitzen, dem Weisheit vom Himmel gegeben worden war.
Und als Darius König wurde und Babel verwüstete, nahm er den Thron und brachte ihn nach Medien. Kein Mensch aber setzte sich auf ihn.
Und als Achaschwerosch König wurde, sandte er aus und brachte Weise aus Ägypten, um eine Kopie des Throns anfertigen zu lassen. Aber sie vermochten sie nicht anzufertigen. Sie fertigen unter seinem Namen einen anderen Thron an. Daher is gesagt:

Als sich der König Achaschwerosch auf den Thron [seines Königreiches] setzte. (Est 1:2)
<Und in Midrasch Abba Gurion und im Targum Scheni ist etwas hinzugefügt>

16) *Targum Genizah* (Cambridge University Library T-S B 12.32)[391]

[when] the palm of his foor [touched] the first step, a golden ox would extend
its foreleg and lift him on the second step; and from the second step to the
third; and from the third to the fourth; and from the fourth to the fifth; and from
the fifth to the sixth; until the eagles would descend and grasp King
Solomon, and lift him up and seat him upon his throne.
And a silver serpent rejoced in seating him (?). Kings
and nations heard the reputation of King Solomon's throne.
They gathered and came as one. When they saw all of these
mighty acts, they were astounded. They prostrated themselves and fell upon [their faces]
and said to him, no king has commissioned [such a throne]
and no nation [can produce anything like it. And when]
kings viewed the glory of the thr[one they offered praise to the One]
Who created the entire world. [And when King Solomon ascended]
and sat on his throne […] would ascend […]
the bears would growl, the sheep would bleat, the leopards would rumble (?), the young ones (?)
would cry out, and the eagles would fly, the peacocks would murmur (?)
and the cats would howl, the roosters would cackle and the hawks
would […]. And when witnesses would hear, they would say
"Beware when you testify, lest on our account the world
be uprooted". And when Solomon was seated upon his throne
the herald would go forth and announce: "*He shall not have many wives*;
he shall not have many horses; *he shall not amass silver and gold*
[*in excess; lest*] *his heart* [*go astray*"] [Deut. 17:17, 16]. And there was a dove, in whose mouth

[391] This excerpt comes from a fragment found in the Cairo Genizah and it is dated between the tenth and the fifteenth centuries C.E., see R. Kasher-M.L. Klein, *New Fragments of Targum to Esther from the Cairo Genizah*, in «Hebrew Union College Annual», 61 (1990), pp. 89-124.

[…] at night […] the explicit [divine] name
[…] placed the crown on his head
[…] a Torah scroll in his lap
[…] the makings of the throne.

17) Münich ms[392]:

text A

Le trône qu'a ouvré le roi Salomon avec de la dent d'éléphant; ses jointures étaient en or, de l'*or d'Ophir*, comme il est dit: *Le roi fit un siège d'ivoire*, il l'incrusta de pierreries et le clouta de béryls entièrement. Il avait des incrustations d'émeraudes, de perles et de toutes espèces de pierres précieuses. On n'a exécutée pour aucun roi une oeuvre semblable, et toutes les nations n'ont pu le refaire pour instaurer un trône sur le modèle de celui-ci. Dès que ce trône fut fabriqué, soixante-douze aigles d'or se dressèrent au-dessus de lui, et soixante-douze lions d'or; les aigles doivent rencontrer la patte des lions d'or, la droite pour rencontrer l'aile des aigles d'or de gauche, et l'aile des aigles d'or de droite pour recevoir la patte des lions d'or de gauche; ainsi ils se font face un à un.
Il y a six degrés au siège. Sur le premier est couché un boeuf d'or et en face un lion d'or; sur le second un ours d'or et en face un agneau d'or; sur le troisième un léopard d'or et en face un petit à la mamelle, sur le quatrième un aigle d'or et en face un paon d'or; sur le cinquième un chat d'or et face à lui un coq d'or; sur le sixième un faucon et face à lui une colombe d'or. Et au-dessus du trône se dresse une colombe d'or qui tient un faucon dans ses pattes, de même que tous les peuples sont destinés à être livrés entre les mains d'Israël qui est comparé à une colombe; et au-dessus du trône de cela il y a une lampe d'or qui est arrangée avec des accessoiress, des bougies, des pommes, des glands, des plats à braise, et du cloutage; face au second côté de la lampe, il y a sept images placées en arrière, où sont représentés les sept hommes pieux du monde, Kehat, Amram, Moïse, Aron, Eldad et Medad, et Hor et, au-dessus, au sommet de la lampe, est fixé un vase d'or empli d'huile d'olive pure transmise, qu'on allume

[392] E. Ville-Patlagean, *Une image de Salomon en Basileus Byzantin*, in «Revue des études Juives», 71 (1962), pp. 9-33, pp. 24-33. This text is certainly a late compilatio, which combines together several sources of different provenances. It is probably as late as the thirteenth century C.E.

dans le Temple, et au-dessous de lui est fixé un bassin d'or empli d'huile d'olive pure dont on tire l'huile pour les mèches de la lampe; le grand-prêtre y est représenté et deux bouffettes sont disposées autour du grand bassin; on y voit représentés les deux fils de Eli, Hofni et Pinchas; à l'intérieur des deux bouffettes sont deux tubes d'or où sont représentés les deux fils d'Aron, Nadab et Avihou; tous deux siégeaient là, l'un comme prêtre, l'autre comme coadjuteur. Au-dessus du sommet du trône sont fixés soixante-dix trônes d'or où siègent soixante-dix anciens du conseil qui rendent la justice devant le roi Salomon, et deux préposés siègent aux deux oreilles de Salomon pour qu'il ne conçoive pas d'audace. Au-dessus du trône sont fixées vingt-quatre grappes d'or, ouvrées comme un arbre pour le roi.

Et lorsque le roi veut aller à chacun des endroits qu'il désire, le trône sur sa base bougeait sous lui; mettant son pied sur le premier degré, une tourterelle d'or se déploie, il gagne le second degré, du second le troisième, du troisième le quatrième, il va jusqu'à ce que les aigles descendent et le saisissent, l'élèvent et le placent au sommet du trône. Un second trône d'argent couronne le premier. Aussitôt que le roi Salomon s'est élevé et placé sur le trône, les tourterelles bougeaient, les lions s'agitaient (rugissaient); les ours tentent de déchirer, les agneaux bêlent, les tigres mugissent et les lézards pleurent, les aigles cherchent une proie, les paons vocifèrent, les chats miaulent, les coqs poussent leur cri, les faucons croassent, les oiseaux crient. Tel était le travail de ce trône. Et lorsque les rois entendaient ce que ce trône faisait entendre, tous venaient comme un seul et se prosternaient devant lui, et ils disaient: Aucun roi ne peut faire exécuter une oeuvre comme celle-ci, aucun parmi tous les peuples ne peut instaurer une chose semblable. Et alors les rois voyaient la grandeur et la glorification qu'il y avait dans le trône, et ils apportaient louange et aveu au roi des rois qui a créé l'univers, que son nom soit loué, amen. Et ils apportaient leur sacrifice devant le Seigneur, six chariots de différentes couleurs, six comme les six jours du commencement, les jours de la création, les six ailes, les six univers, les six ordres de la Mishna, les six justes (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moïse, Aron et Samuel), les mères (Sara, Rébecca, Rachel, Léa, Bilha, Zilpa), les six prophétesses (Miriam, Débora, Hannah, Hulda, Abigail, Esther), les six commandements qui ont été faits à un roi et que voici: *il doit se garder d'entretenir beaucoup des chevaux, il ne doit pas non plus avoir beaucoup des femmes, même de l'argent ou de l'or il n'en amassera pas outre mesure; ne fais pas fléchir le droit, n'aie pas égard à la personne et n'accepte point de présent corrupteur*, six comme les six degrés du trône que Salomon fit avec l'Esprit Saint.

text B

Les sages ont dit: Salomon régna sur le domaine d'en haut et celui d'en bas, puisqu'il est dit: Salomon siégea sur le siège de D. R. Yochanan dit: Il siégea sur le siège de D. signifie seulement que le Saint, béni soit-Il, le fit siéger et régner sur le monde d'en bas à l'image du siège de gloire qui se trouve dans le monde d'en haut; qu'y a-t-il sur le siège du monde d'en haut? L'image de quatre créatures, un homme, un lion, un boeuf, un aigle: de même aussi sur le siège de Salomon il y avait l'image d'un homme, d'un lion, d'un boeuf, d'un aigle. R. Chiya enseigne: C'est l'image du siège de gloire que Salomon fit le sien avec l'aide de l'Esprit Saint; l'image de la sphère céleste et des chérubins se trouve derrière le siège; et des images de bêtes et d'oiseaux sont fixées devant. Soixante vaillants sont dressés là, et il y avait sur leur front les soixante lettres de la bénédiction sacerdotale. R. El'azar dit: Également avec des pierres précieuses et des perles, ils se sont revêtus des cieux sur fond d'or. Il y a aussi des animaux domestiques, des bêtes sauvages, des oiseaux pressés ensemble sur le trône, pur contre impur, le lion à côté du boeuf. R. El'azar dit: L'image d'une face de lion se dressait dans sa puissance; ses deux pattes s'élevaient face aux cornes du boeuf, et les cornes du boeuf s'avançaient à sa rencontre comme deux noeuds de cordes croisées. R Yochanan dit: Le roi les dresse auprès du trône, l'un à droite, l'autre à gauche: après tous il mit l'homme et en face le démon; tout en haut il mit l'oiseau Ziz, et en face de lui l'aigle, il plaça la colombe et en face d'elle il installa le faucon [texte douteux] il cisela le serpent. Il l'a mis au bout d'une hampe. R. Yochanan dit: De quelle façon Salomon s'asseyait-il sur son trône? Le boeuf le prend sur ses cornes, il le passait au lion et invoquait son attention en disant: Fais attention au roi Salomon a fin qu'il ne lui arrive rien de mal. Le lion le passe au bélier, le bélier au tigre, le tigre au mouton, le mouton au loup, le loup au cerf, le cerf à l'ours, l'ours à l'âne, l'âne à l'éléphant, l'éléphant au bison, le bison au griffon, le griffon à l'homme. Et ils lui disaient à voix retentissante: Nous avons accompli l'hommage, ô roi accompli, tu es un témoin parmi nous. L'homme le donne au démon, le démon le place et s'envole avec lui, et il le fait voyager entre ciel et terre; après il l'emmène à sa place et le fait asseoir dans la chaire d'or, toute incrustée de pierres précieuses et de perles. Le démon montait au firmament et apportait une brique de saphir, qu'il plaçait sous ses pieds. Les disciples de R. Yochanan lui demandèrent: Si grande était la puissance du démon pour monter au firmament? Il leur dit: N'avons-nous pas

un enseignement de faits se rapportant au démons: quatre caractères comme les anges, et quatre comme les hommes. Ils mangents et boivent comme les hommes, ils ont des relations conjugales comme eux, ils se multiplient comme eux et ils meurent comme eux; et quatre caractères comme les messagers du Très-Haut: ils ont des ailes comme eux, ils voient sans être vus comme eux, ils se transportent comme eux d'une extrémité du monde à l'autre, et ils connaissent comme eux ce qui se passe dans les régions supérieures et inférieures. Au même moment, la colombe étincelante apporte au roi le livre de la répétition de la Loi, elle le pose sur son genou, et il lit dedans pour accomplir ce qui est écrit: *Il sera avec lui et il lira dedans tous les jours de sa vie.* R. El'azar dit: Voici les animaux sauvages et domestiques qui étaient gravés sur le trône; la moitié étaient des bêtes à cornes, la moitié des bêtes de proie, patte et dents, ceux-ci en détruisant, ceux-là en déchirant; et le Saint béni soit-Il les a incrustés sur le trône de Salomon uniquement pour montre à Israël l'exemple de l'avenir messianique, à savoir qu'ils vivront alors à l'unisson, comme il est dit: *Le loup et l'agneau paîtront ensemble, le loup habitera avec le mouton, le tigre demeurera avec les agneaux, la génisse et l'ours paîtront*. R Yochanan dit: Ils élevaient tous la voix et il ébranlait le monde entier; le boeuf mugit, le lion rugit, le bélier hennit, le tigre gronde, le mouton, le loup, le cerf (poussent le cri de leur espèce), l'ours grogne, l'âne braît, l'éléphant clame, le bison résonne, le griffon crie, l'homme entonne un chant, le démon un hymne, l'oiseau fabuleux appelait et sa voix montait jusqu'aux cieux, l'aigle crie avec une voix comme les eaux profondes, la colombe murmure, le faucon pousse un cri perçant et sa voix éveillait tous les endormies de Jérusalem, le serpent sifflait de sa bouche et sa voix guérissait les malades des Jérusalem. R. El'azar dit: Ce serpent est celui qu'a fait Moïse dans le désert, c'est celui qu'a écrasé Ezekias roi de Judah. Les disciples de R. Yochanan lui demandèrent: Pouvait-on donc attendre qu'Ezekias roi de Judah écrasât le serpent que Moïse a fait pour Israël dans le désert, pour qu'il se guérît par lui, puisqu'il est écrit: *Il écrasa le serpent de bronze*. Il leur dit: Ce n'était pas lui qui écrasait mais Israël qui se sentait en sécurité en ce temps-là et ne demandait plus merci devant le Saint béni soit-Il. Ainsi l'a-t-il écrasé afin qu'ils demandent merci devant le Très-Haut comme il est écrit: *J'ai lancé le trait et c'est moi qui guérirai*.

R. El'azar dit: Comment faisait Salomon pour s'asseoir sur son trône, prendre le rouleau de la Loi, y fixer son attention, et commencer à rendre la justice pour Israël. A ce moment le lion proclamait: *N'ayez pas égard à la personne pour la justice*; le boeuf réplique en son langage: *Ne favorise pas le pauvre dans son*

procès; le bélier répond: *Car la justice est l'apanage de D.* Le léopard dit à son tour: *C'est la justice que tu rechercheras*. Le mouton élève la voix et dit: *Rendez au peuple une justice équitable.* Le loup crie: *En matière de promesse et pour toute question de transgression.* Le cerf proclame: *Véridiquement; et jugez le peuple avec une sentence juste à tout moment.* L'ours proclamait de sa voix: *Jugez selon la justice.* Le daim tremble et dit: *Ne fais pas pencher la justice.* L'éléphant attirait l'attention sur la louange de Moïse: *Il exécuta la justice de D., sa juste décision envers Israël*. Le bison proclamait: *Voici les ordonnances*. Le griffon disait: *Vous jugerez entre un homme et son voisin. Et toi le roi, juge entre l'homme et son voisin.* Et après eux tous, l'homme et le démon étaient debout et répondaient d'une seule voix: *Des juges et des officiers de justice. Et toi, le roi, D. t'a mis comme roi justicier pour juger et légiférer son peuple Israël; juge selon la justice et légifère selon la vérité.* Afin que D. augmente ta paix et celle de son peuple Israël, car le monde ne substiste que par trois choses, la loi juste, la vérité et la paix.

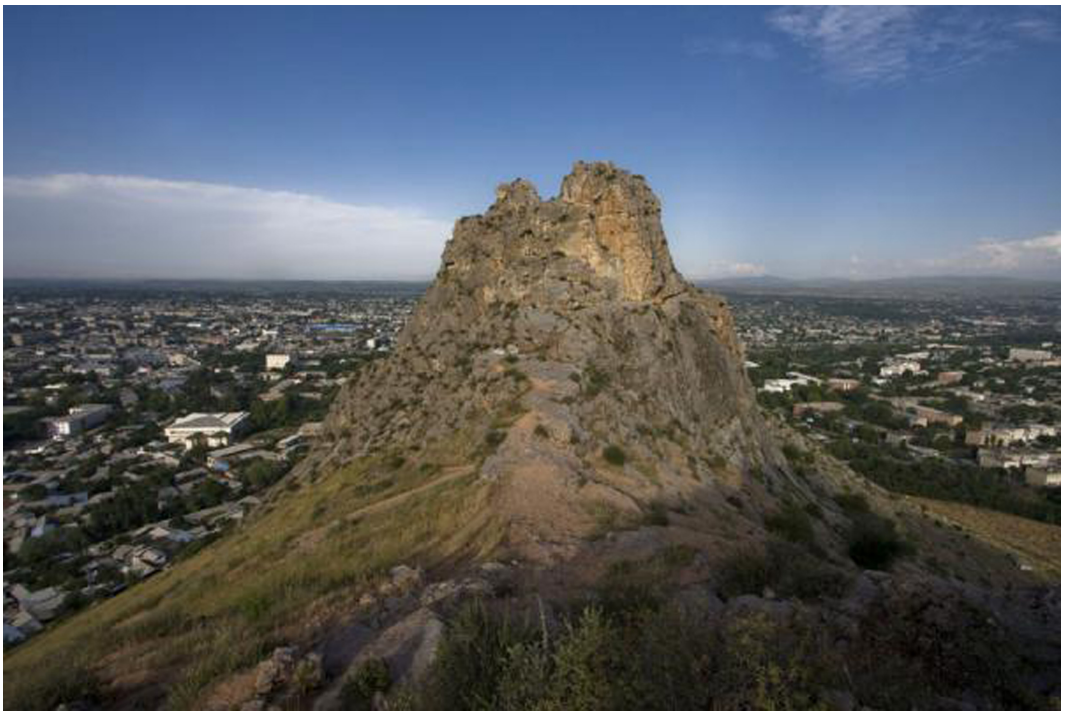
Les rabbins enseignent: Salomon montait sur son trône par trois voies d'accès; chacune comportait six marches, et chacune de celles-ci douze marches petites; il montait sur son trône par une machinerie, et sur chaque voie d'accès il y avait des grilles et des estrades et à chaque voûte se tiennent douze lions de ce côté et de cet autre, comme il est écrit: *Douze lions.* Deux lions se tiennent auprès du trône.

R. El'azar dit: Les divisions entre les pierres étaient entièrement en cristal de roche et il y avait des palmiers enveloppés d'étoffes de lin. Les disciples de R. Yochanan lui demandèrent: Pourquoi y avait-t-il des palmiers enveloppés de lin? Il leur dit: C'étaient des arbres qui dominaient le trône, plantés à chaque voûte. Des cordons de lin et de pourpre étaient suspendus à sa tête. Sur les arbres il y avait des tissus de lin de toute espèce, et toutes sortes d'étoffes teintes leur faisaient des rideaux. Le souffle de l'air y passait. Ils couvraient le trône. Ceux qui entouraient le trône étaient de cent coudées. Et ils semblaient comme le spectacle de la foudre, de l'éclair, des traits de feu, de l'arc-en-ciel. Il y avait des clochettes en or attachées à leur sommet. Le vent y pénétrait et elles tintaient. R. Chiya enseigne: Soixante-dix mille chaires d'or entouraient le trône où siégeaient les sages et leurs disciples, les prêtres et les lévites, et les princes d'Israël, et il y avait soixante-dix chaires à l'opposé du trône où siégeaient soixante-dix anciens, deux chaires vis-à-vis de lui, l'une pour Gad le voyant et l'autre pour Nathan le prophète, et une chaire à sa droite pour Bethsabée sa mère, afin qu'elle entende sa sagesse, comme il est écrit: *Il offrit un siège à la*

mère du roi. Et il est écrit: *Il en a deux à portée de ses mains.* Que signifie 'à portée de ses mains?' Ce sont les deux lions que se tenaient l'un à sa droit, l'autre à sa gauche. Le roi arrive pour s'asseoir, le lion de gauche étend la patte, prend la couronne et la pose sur la tête du roi. Le lion de droite prend et met dans la main du roi le sceptre d'or; le dragon d'argent se précipite par une mécanique et s'incline devant le roi, les aigles étendent leurs ailes. Le roi vient pour trancher le droit. Les lions ouvraient leur gueule à son approche et cela faisait comme une lumière de torches, les lions grinçaient des dents, et se déplaçaient face au roi dans la grande salle de la porte. Le roi éprouvait une crainte à rendre la justice, car peut être il n'y suffirait pas, et il regardait vers Gad le voyant et Nathan le prophète, et ils prononçaient la loi dans l'esprit de la prophétie. Le roi s'appuyait sur eux en sagesse, et ils se faisaient entendre des soixante-dix anciens, les anciens des chefs d'Israël, les envoyés du tribunal, et ils envoyaient un homme vers la vie ou vers la mort. Et voici la raison pour laquelle deux valent mieux qu'un: c'est à leur sujet que Salomon a dit dans sa sagesse: *Etre à deux vaux mieux que chacun seul*; et il est écrit: *Et si l'un le saisit*. Un seul, c'est le roi Salomon; deux, ce sont Nathan et Gad; et *le triple fil* est ce group de trois.

On demanda à R. Yochanan: Pour quelle raison le lions et les animaux crient-ils devant lui? Il leur dit: En ce temps-là il eut les quatre peines de mort du tribunal, afin qu'un homme ne mourût pas sans raison valable. Le roi prononça la décision et les lions léchaient les pieds du roi, et l'Esprit Saint jetait son éclat et disait: Le roi Salomon est béni. Et les assistants répondaient comme un seul et disaient: Que soit affermie *la royauté de la maison de David*.

Takht-i Sulaymān: the Islamic World



Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone
Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home.

(Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*)

The present chapter will deal with the throne of Solomon, as it is known in the Islamic world. If in the first part of the dissertation, the topic has had a more distinctive monographic approach, in focusing on the specific description of the Magnaura seat or on the varied but consistent question of the versions handed down in rabbinic and para-rabbinic literature, here we see the impact of the throne (and related legends) in the realm of political architecture, sumptuary art, and literature.

By way of introduction, let us consider the epigram cited at the head of this chapter from Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon*, published in 1977. The novel revolves around the figure of 'Milkman Dead', an African-American man from Michigan in search of his identity. Throughout a long journey from the north to the south of the country, looking for the roots of his family, he will become aware of the shamanic power his ancestors had and in the end he will learn to fly like his great-grandfather Solomon, who had set himself free from the cotton fields. This moment of recognition occurs in the small village where his family had been kept in slavery, while he's listening to a children tune. This melody, which is referenced in the very title to the book, is not just a folksong but the story of his ancestor[393].

In Morrison's novel, the theme of Solomon's flight stands as a metaphor for the power of freedom and symbolizes at the same time the never-forgotten

[393] "*O Solomon don't leave me here / Cotton balls to choke me / O Solomon don't leave me here / Buckra's arms to yoke me / Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone / Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home*"; the whole song appears for the first time in the book in chapter XII, see T. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, New York 1977.

connections with Africa. It is usually recognized by critics as depending on the 'myth of flying Africans', a legend that we can see already developing in 1803, when a group of Igbo slaves from Nigeria, bought in Savannah, took command of the ship that was bringing them to their plantation and landed on the coast of St. Simons, where – official accounts say – they committed suicide in the swamps in order to escape slavery. Beside this story, however, other oral versions developed in parallel, stating that the Igbos had suddenly risen up to the sky and flown back home[394].

I would argue, however, that the myth of the flying man did not simply originate as the powerful image of freedom, but was already known in African folktales, particularly through their Islamic heritage. It is not a coincidence that Morrison's novel evokes, right from the title, a figure named Solomon. What we see in her book, in fact, is the *longue durée* of a legend involving King Solomon and his throne, here reduced to its essential core: the flight of the protagonist.

The motif of flight is well developed in the Islamic tradition and, as such, was certainly extant in Africa[395]. The occurrence of such an element in twentieth-century American literature is particularly revealing of the broad and enduring vitality of this specific branch of the Solomonic legend. Unlike the examples presented in the first two chapters, which are relatively limited in time and space, the idea of the throne in the Islamic world is far more complex and varied, thus encompassing a broad geographical and chronological span.

For this reason, I devote the first part of the chapter to the introduction of some of the most relevant *nuclei* related to the throne in textual sources, by showing how the description of the throne is Islamic culture develops in contact with Jewish and Christian culture. I here present texts from the Qur'an, its commentaries, some chronicles, and this section of the chapter will be concluded by a discussion of several Solomon-related threads that can be traced in *City of Brass*, a tale now included in the collection of the *Arabian Nights*, where it is possible to see the peculiar declination of a series of Solomonic *topoi*.

In the second part of the chapter, then, I analyze several notable examples of monumental settings or sumptuary objects, where the relation with

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[394] Savannah Unit, Georgia Writers' Project, Work Projects Administration, *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies among the Georgia Coastal Negroes*, Athens (GA) 1986, (or. ed. 1940), particularly chapter XVIII dedicated to St. Simons.

[395] During my stay at the American Academy in Rome during the fall of 2012, I had the chance to meet Toni Morrison and to ask her directly whether the legend related to king Solomon and his magic flights had constituted a source of inspiration for her book and she confirmed it.

the throne of Solomon is evoked or imitated. One of the most interesting examples I will dwell on regards medieval Spain, which constitutes a peculiar case-study: among other things, we will analyze some Spanish items, possibly dating between the tenth and the twelfth century, that fit in the time-frame taken in consideration for the Byzantine and Jewish examples and their symbolic nuances nicely echo some of the topics previously discussed in this dissertation.

The Throne in Islamic Culture: its Main Sources

Within the Islamic tradition, information about Solomon is first found in the Qur'an, but was also gathered over time in a series of commentaries, compendia, and other learned works. Most relevant in this case are the compilations called *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā* or *The Tales of the Prophets*[396]. One of the

[396] For a synthetical list of entries on Solomon, drawn from these sources, see for instance B. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: an Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis*, London-New York 2002, pp. 266-279. In general, on the various cultural and literary influences on the Qur'an, see A. Geiger, *Was hat Muhammad aus dem Judenthum aufgenommen?*, Bonn 1833; G. Weil, *The Bible, the Koran and the Talmud*, London 1846; J.M. Arnold, *The Koran and the Bible, or, Islam and Christianity*, London 1866; H. Hirschfeld, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Korans*, Leipzig 1886; H. Hirschfeld, *Jüdische Elemente im Koran: ein Beitrag zur Koranforschung*, Berlin 1878; H. Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Koran*, London 1901; M. Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sagenkunde*, Leiden 1893; I. Shapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente im erzählenden Teil des Korans*, Leipzig 1907; W. Rudolph, *Die Abhangigkeit des Qorans von Judenthum und Christentum*, Stuttgart 1922; R. Bell, *The Origin of Islam and Its Christian Environment*, London 1926; B. Heller, *Récits et personages bibliques dans la légende Mahométane*, in «Revue des Etudes Juives», 85 (1928), pp. 113-136; H. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, Gräfenhainichen 1931; J. Walker, *Bible Characters in the Koran*, Paisley 1931; J. Finkel, J*ewish, Christian and Samaritan Influences on Arabia*, in *The Macdonald Presentation Volume*, ed. by W.G. Shellabear – E.E. Calverlev – E.C. Lane – R.S. Mackensen (NJ), Princeton 1933, pp. 145-166; D. Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran et dans les vies des prophètes*, Paris 1933; C.C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, New York 1967 (or. ed. 1933); J.W. Hirshberg, *Jüdische und christliche lehren im vor- und frühislamischen Arabien*, Krakow 1939; A.I. Katsch, *Judaism and Islam. Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Koran and its commentaries. Suras II and III*, New York 1954; D. Masson, *Le Coran et la révélation judéo-chrétienne*, Paris 1958; J. Henninger, *L'influence du christianisme oriental sur l'islam naissante*, in *Atti del convegno internazionale Oriente cristiano nella storia della civiltà (Roma 31 marzo- 3 aprile 1963, Firenze 4 aprile 1963)*, Roma 1964, pp. 379-410; J. Bowman, *The Debt of Islam to Monophysite Syrian Christianity*, in *Essays in Honour of Griffithes Wheeler Thatcher*, ed. by E.C.B. MacLaurin, Sydney 1967, pp. 191-216; H.T. Norris, *Qisas elements in the Qur'an*, in *Arabic Literature to the End of the*

most famous collections of this kind is by the twelfth-century scholar Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Kisāʾī[397]. These works, which are organized in a biographical and encyclopedic fashion, served a pedagogical function, as basis for sermons and homilies[398]. Since the Islamic sacred text does not proceed according to a chronological or thematic order, rearranging part of this material in themes and enriching it with details or stories drawn from oral tradition (often including rabbinical, Biblical, Christian or pre-Islamic elements) made it simpler to be taught. Even historians such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Yaʿqūbī, and Ibn al-Athīr included biographies of prophets in their chronicles. The variety of sources[399] employed by these compilers and authors explains why the Islamic tradition represents a combination of several elements; it is a rich repository of themes, some of them already known to us from a variety of literary sources from the Roman-Byzantine sphere, while others appear to be of Persian origin.

The most distinctive feature of the throne of Solomon in the Islamic tradition is that it can fly.[400] This legendary outcome depends on the notion, supported by several excerpts in the Qur'an, that Solomon could control jinns and *shayāṭīn* – demonic entities of various types[401] – often taking the form or being in control of breezes and winds:

Umayyad Period, ed. by A.F. L. Beeston *et al*, Cambridge 1983, pp. 246-259; H. Busse, *Die theologische Beziehungen des Islams zu Judentum und Christentum*, Darmstadt 1988; C.M. Guzzetti, *Bibbia e Corano. Un confronto sinottico*, Cinisello Balsamo 1995. See also, R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*, New York 2002.

[397] al-Kisāʾī, *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i*, translated by W.M. Thackston Jr., Chicago (IL) 1997 (or. ed. 1978).

[398] On quranic commentaries and their tradition, see in general M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, 2 vols, Albany (NY) 1984.

[399] In this chapter I will quote only some sources, particularly those I could read in some European translation; however, accounts of Solomon's adventures can be found also in al-Jazāʾirī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*; al-Balkhī, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa-l-Ta'rīkh*; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*; al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān li-ʿUlūm al-Qur'ān*; al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr*; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*; al-Diyārbakrī, *Ta'rīkh al-Khamīs*; al-Balʿamī, *Ta'rīkh-i Ṭabarī* (persian translation of al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-Rusūl wa-l-Mulūk*).

[400] P.P. Soucek, *Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath: Model or Metaphor?*, in «Ars Orientalis», 23 (1993), pp. 109-134. See also G. Salzberger, *Die Salomosage in der semitischen Literatur: ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Sagenkunden*, Berlin 1907.

[401] On the nature of jinns and their relationship with Solomon, see J. Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des Tribus. L'Islam de Mahomet*, Paris 1997, pp. 185-211, bibliography at n. 272, p. 530. See also S. Shalev-Eyni, *Solomon, his Demons and Jongleurs: the Meeting of Islamic, Judaic and Christian Culture*, in «al-Masaq», 18 (2006), pp. 145-160.

To Solomon [We subjected] the wind as it blew strongly,
running at his command to the land that We have blessed.
We are aware of everything (21:81).

And [We gave] to Solomon the wind:
its morning course was a month's journey (34:12).

So We made the wind subject to him,
running at his command, gently,
wherever he decided (38:36)

This connection between Solomon and the demons is not solely or originally Islamic; it in fact began to develop during the first few centuries C.E. among Jews and Christians and enjoyed a long afterlife in Eastern as well as Western medieval demonology[402]. This tradition centered around Solomon's magic ring[403], which not only allowed him to understand the language of birds and animals, but was also used to seal the openings of bottles, ampoules or amphorae in which he constrained the demons after having tamed them. The fact that these creatures take the form of winds and breezes and are often imprisoned in sealed containers that should not be opened is reminiscent of such classical tales as Aeolus' bag of winds, which itself contributed to the idea of a genie imprisoned in a lamp [ill. 30].

[402] P.A. Torijano, *From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition*, Leiden 2002; T.E. Klutz, *The Archer and the Cross: Chrolographic Astrology and Literary Design in the Testament of Solomon*, in *Magic in the Biblical world: from the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, ed. by T.E. Klutz, London 2003, pp. 219-244; P. Busch, *Das Testament Salomos: die älteste christliche Dämonologie*, kommentiert und in deutscher Erstübersetzung, Berlin 2006; on the Latin circulation of some Solomon-related magic books, see for instance J. Veronèse, *L'Ars notoria au Moyen Âge: introduction et édition critique*, Firenze 2007; J. Veronèse, *L'Almandal et l'Almadel latins au Moyen Âge: introduction et éditions critiques*, Firenze 2012.

[403] B. Bagatti, *I giudeo-cristani e l'anello di Salomone*, in «Recherches de science religieuse», 60 (1972), pp. 151-160.

Although no mention is made of the flying throne in the Qur'an, the notion that Solomon could travel through air was quite widespread and it is actually known through a series of variants, both in commentaries, legends or

historical accounts, equally penetrating Jewish, Persian and Arabic lore; it is thus difficult to reconstruct the precise filiation of this idea.
Sometimes, as we have seen in the Qur'an, Solomon flew alone, supported by the jinns, who were identified as winds. Elsewhere in the Islamic tradition, Solomon was conveyed by a vehicle, which took the form of a gigantic platform with a throne and palace and endowed with all the pleasures of the court:

> He had a mat made of wood on which he would place all the equipment of his kingship; horses, camels, tents and troops, then he would command the wind to carry it, and he would go underneath it and it would carry him aloft, shading him and protecting him from the heat, until it reached wherever he wanted to go in the land. Then it would come down and deposit his equipment and entourage[404].

In still other traditions, the platform took the form of a flying carpet[405]:

> When Solomon wished to ride the wind, he would call for the four winds. He would spread his carpet, one side of which was red and the other green; no one except God knows how long or wide it was, but it is said that it was six hundred and sixty cubits long. Then he would sit on his throne, borne aloft on a carpet from Paradise. The learned men also rode with him, borne with the winds and shaded by the birds. Solomon held the reins of the winds in his hands as one holds the reins of a horse. He would lunch after crossing a distance that would normally have taken a month and would dine after another month's journey[406].

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[404] *Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Abridged)*, by a group of scholars under the supervision of S.S.R. Al-Mubarakpuri, Houston-New York-London-Lahore 2000, 10 vols, VI, pp. 476-477.

[405] The theme of the carpet deeply permeates our imagery when it comes to the Islamic world, see for instance: M. Werner, *Riding the Carpet: The Vehicle of Stories in the Arabian Nights*, in *The Power of Things and the Flow of Cultural Transformations, Art and Culture between Europe and Asia*, ed. by L.E. Saurma-Jeltsch – A. Eisenbeiss, Berlin-München 2010, pp. 248-265; G. May, *D'où vient le tapis magique? Fantaisie et érudition dans "Les Mille et une nuits" de Galland*, in *Studies in French Fiction in honour of Vivienne Mylne*, ed. by R. Gibson, London 1988, pp. 191-207.

[406] al-Kisā'ī, *Tales of the Prophets*, p. 308. Other chroniclers describe the throne as a flying carpet, see for instance: "On raconte que Salomon avait un tapis long de cinq cents parasanges. Chaque fois qu'on étendait ce tapis, on y plaçait trois cents trônes d'or et d'argent et Salomon ordonnait aux oiseaux de joindre leurs ailes ensemble pour l'abriter, lui et sa suite, du soleil. On raconte aussi que Salomon avait mille maison de crystal très-beau et établissait ses femmes dans ces maisons. Il avait mille femmes, trois cents femmes légitimes et sept cents concubines. Puis il

As we can see, the core of the legend is the flight of a character on some kind of object or structure. This image probably evokes long-standing traditions concerning imperial apotheosis or a solar image, here filtered through early Islamic narrative traditions[407]. In the second chapter, we saw that the idea of the chariot of the sun recurred even in the figurative programs of Sasanian rulers and the apotheosis motif had deeply permeated the Eastern world thanks to the association with Alexander the Great. In other words, it is possible that the original inspiration could have originated through the memory (or the iconography) of episodes such as the flight of Alexander on the griffins [ill. 31], the Sun riding his chariot, or the soul of an emperor, being brought up to heaven by an eagle[408]. Further variations, such as the throne, the platform or the carpet, are natural developments of the same image at a literary level with a distinctive Sasanian flavor. For this reason, even though the demonological tradition predates the Islamic Solomon, the distinct correlation between the jinns, the king and the flying throne is fully exploited by Islamic authors and finds an important place in their imaginary, as a consequence of the grafting of Iranian elements onto an earlier body of literary threads.

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ordonnait au vent d'enlever ce tapis, avec tout ce qui s'y trouvait, dans l'air, à la distance d'un mille, tantôt plus, tantôt moins. Partout où il arrivait, il couvrait le soleil dans une étendue de cent parasanges, et les yeux des hommes étaient entièrement occupés de lui. Il restait un certain temps à Damas et un certain temps à Jérusalem; le matin il étail dans une ville et le soir dans une autre"; al-Ṭabarī, *Mohammed, sceau des prophètes: une biographie traditionnelle extraite de la "Chronique" de Tabari*, translated by H. Zotenberg, Paris 1980, 5 vols, II, p. 13. This recent edition is based on the classical publication of Zotenberg which, in turn, was a translation from the Persian version of al-Ṭabarī written by al-Balʿamī (a translation with some modifications). A very similar account is found also in a late *midrash*: "When God appointed Solomon king over every created thing, He gave him a large carpet sixty miles long and sixty miles wide, made of green silk interwoven with pure gold and ornamented with figured decorations […] when Solomon sat upon the carpet he was caught up by the wind and sailed through the air so quickly that he breakfasted at Damascus and supped in Media", A. Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, 6 vols, Leipzig 1853-1878, V, p. 22. The translation is from the entry *Solomon* (under Solomon's Throne) in the Jewish Enclyclopedia (online ed.).

[407] P. Soucek, *Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath: Model or Metaphor*, p. 116.

[408] Late Jewish sources, for instance, describe Solomon flying on an eagle, or on a throne mounted on a gigantic bird, reminiscent of the imperial bird. On the sources mentioning the eagle in the Jewish tradition, see the entry *Solomon* (under *Solomon's Eagle*) in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (online ed.)

In some cases, the description of the specific features of the throne are borrowed either from the Bible, but, more often, directly from the haggadic material already analyzed in the previous chapter[409]. In the following paragraphs I will show the cultural debt from the rabbinic tradition, by comparing some of the known Islamic versions with the texts discussed previously. We will notice that the Islamic texts borrow almost literally entire sections of the Jewish tales, as happens, for instance, in the chronicles of al-Ṭabarī (839-923 C.E.)[410], in the *Lives of the Prophets* written by at-Thaʿlabi (d.

[409] In the account related by al-Thaʿlabī, for instance, even the Torah is mentioned. The main difference, probably due to a different rendering in translation, occurs for some of the animals. The eagles become vultures and the dove a pigeon. It is not impossible, however, that such a change, particularly eagles=vultures, might have been favoured by a conscious adaptation. On the importance of vultures on the Islamic culture, see, for instance, H.T. Norris, *Fables and Legends in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times*, in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. by A.F.L. Beeston *et al.*, Cambridge 1983, pp. 376-386, pp. 378-379.

[410] "Le trône de Salomon avait quatre pieds. Il était de rubis rouge et on avait travailé le rubis de façon à en faire quatre lions. Au-dessus de la tête de Salomon étaient quatre vautours, auxquels on avait fait des ailes étendues, afinde faire l'ombre à Salomon, quand il donnait audience. Quand il n'était pas sur son trône, les ailes de ces oiseaux se fermaient. Les quatre lions formaient également un talisman. Nul autre que Salomon ne pouvait s'asseoir sur son trône. Lorsque Nabucchodonosor vint à Jérusalem et qu'il voulut s'asseoir sur ce trône, il ne savait pas de quelle façon Salomon avait coutume de le faire. Or, quand il mit le pied sur le trône, les lions au pied du trône jetèrent chacun un griffe sur ses jambes et les lui broyèrent, et il tomba en bas du trône sans connaissance. On lui donna des remèdes, on le traita et on lui remit la jambe. Après lui, nul autre ne tenta plus de s'asseoir sur le trône"; al-Ṭabarī, *Muhammed, sceau des prophètes*, II, p. 23.

1035 C.E., not to be confused with the contemporary and already mentioned al-Thaʿālibī)[411] or in the *Tales of the Prophets* by al-Kisāʾī, (ca. 1100 C.E.)[412], thus

[411] "It is related that the Prophet of God, Solomon, had ordered the devils to make this for him to sit upon when he gave judgement; he ordered them to make it something dreadful, so that if a trifler or a perjurer saw it he would be struck dumb with astonishement. The story goes that they made for him a throne of ivory and studded it with sapphire, pearl, chrysolite and various kinds of gems, and encompassed it with four golden palm trees, with date clusters of red rubies and green emeralds. At the top of two of the palms were two gold peacocks, while at the top of the other two two were two golden vultures – all facing each other. At the side of the throne they placed two golden lions, on the head of which was a column of green emerald. To the palms they had bound grapevines of red gold, with clusters of red rubies, so that the throne would be shaded by the trellis of the vines and the palms. When Solomon wished to ascend to the throne, he stood upon the lowest step and the throne, with his foot on it, revolved like a hand-mill turning rapidly. Then those vultures and peacocks spread their wings and the two lions thrust out their paws and struck the ground with their tails. The same took place with every step that Solomon ascended. When he sat down on the upper part of the throne, the two vultures on the palms took musk and ambergris and sprinkled them over it. Then a golden pigeon, standing on a column pf precious stone, one of the columns of the throne, took the Book of the Torah and opened it for Solomon and he read it to the people, and called them to the rendering of judgement. It is said that the great men of the Israelites sat upon his right hand, upon a thousand chairs of gold and silver studded with jewels. The chief of the *jinn* came and sat upon a thousand chairs of silver at his left, all of them honoring him. The birds shaded them and the people approached him for his judgement. When he called for evidence and the witnesses came forward, the throne, with everything on it and around it, revolved like a rapidly moving hand-mill. Muʿawiyah said to Wahb b. Munabbih: "What made the throne turn?" He replied: "Two golden nightingales. And the throne was among the things fashioned by Sakhr the *Jinni*". They say that when this happened, the two lions extended their forepaws and beat the ground with their tails and the vultures and the peacocks spread their wings and the witnesses were seized with terror and bore witness only to the truth. When Solomon died, Nebchadnezzar sent and had the throne taken and carried to Antioch. He wished to ascend it, but he did not know how, nor did he know his properties. When he placed his feet on the lowest step, the lion raised its right forepaw and struck Nebuchadnezzar's leg a mighty blow, which broke the leg and threw Nebuchadnezzar down. Nebuchadnezzar was carried away; he walked limping and moaning from this injury until he died. The throne remained at Antioch until a certain king called Kadash b. Sadas raided them, put the successor of Nebuchadnezzar to rout, and returned the throne to Solomon's temple. Not one of the kings, however, was able to sit upon it or to enjoy the use of it. Finally it was placed beneath the Rock and disappeared and nothing further is known of its story or its whereabouts. But God is All-knowing"; Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī, *'Arā'is al-Majālis fī Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā', or Lives of the Prophets*, translated and annotated by W. Brinner, Leiden-Boston, Leiden 2002, pp. 512-513.

[412] For Solomon, Sakhr made a throne of ivory with pedestals of gold and on it he put statues of the birds and beasts. It was also studded with pearls the size of ostrich eggs. On the first step was a grapevine wrought of gold, with leaves of emerald and bunches of gems to look like grapes; to

confirming that the haggadic Jewish tradition had found its way in the Islamic world and with it the transfigured memory of the Magnaura[413].

Such a penetration, however, is not just interesting in terms of circulation, but also in terms of chronology. Al-Ṭabarī's description of the throne could very well be based on some version akin to the *Esther Midrash*. In fact, it does not include the most elaborate details that we know pertaining to the *Targum Sheni* or similar versions, that, in turn, depend on the Magnaura. However, al-Thaʿlabī certainly knew them, which means they were fully in circulation before his death, therefore providing us with a good *terminus ante quem* for their compilation date. Al-Ṭabarī (839-923 C.E.) was almost contemporary with emperor Leo VI (866-912 C.E.) and if it is true, as it seems likely, that the throne was fashioned for the latter, the echoes of the enriched version of the legend could not reach the Muslim historian during his lifetime. We do not know, in fact, how soon these versions were compiled. However, it must not have been too long after the throne was built, since it took them less than a century to leave Constantinople and be included in the later text.

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the right and left of the seat he fixed a palm-tree of gold, on each of which were peacocks, birds and hawks that were hollow and studded with jewels. When the wind blew through the hollow cavities, they would sing songs, the likes of which no one had ever heard. On the second step he installed two great lions, and on the third, birds, peacocks and eagles. When Solomon ascended the first step, the eagles and birds flapped their wings and scattered musk over him. When he ascended the second step, the beasts roared and voices could be heard from behind, saying "Oh son of David, thank God for the great dominion which He has given you!" When he ascended the fifth step he heard a cry saying "*God seeth that which ye do*". At the seventh step the throne itself revolved with all that was upon it and came to rest for Solomon to seat himself. And the birds perfumed him with musk and ambergris. Whenever litigants came for Solomon's judgement, the lions would stare at them as though speaking, the birds would rustle and the genii would murmur. The litigants would be struck with such umbearable awe that they could not utter a word other than the truth", *Tales of the Prophets*, p. 306.

[413] Even in the *Süleymānnāme*, a late version by the Ottoman poet Uzun Firdevsī (b. 1453 C.E.), composed for Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512 C.E.), the main features of the throne still echo those of the rabbinic tradition. In the description, full of colors and precious gems and fantastic details that were not in the original but owe much to the poetic invention of the author, we can still recognize artificial trees made in precious materials, a throne located on a multi-steps structure, singing mechanical birds, golden lions and silver dragons moving their tail and opening their mouth, roaring furiously to keep people away, see S. Bagči, *A New Theme of the Shirazi Frontispiece Miniatures: the Divan of Solomon*, in «Muqarnas», 12 (1995), pp. 101-111, pp. 102-104.

Supernatural helpers for a kingdom of mirabilia: the Temple

In general, the 'supernatural' features of the haggadic throne fall well within the tradition which puts king Solomon in relation with the jinns. In this section, I will list some of the most notable examples where we see the throne in connection with Solomon and his servants, particularly within art and architecture. As we have said earlier in the introduction, the Qur'an reports that the jinns put their skill and craft to Solomon's service, making all sorts of artifacts, particularly in metal[414]:

> They made for him what he wished:
> sanctuaries, statues,
> basins like cisterns, and cooking-pots fixed firmly to the ground […]
> (34:13)

Even though this excerpt is not linked to the throne in any direct way, it was sometimes explained by commentators in relation to its iconography. A problematic aspect of this passage refers to the 'images', literally translated as 'likenesses' (but rendered with 'statues' here), glossed as a reference to the statues of lions and vultures decorating his seat[415].

Besides these relatively small items, however, in the Islamic tradition the jinns were also largely responsible for the construction of impressive buildings. This relation between architecture, Solomon and the jinns stems from the same Judeo-Christian context that associated him with demonology, dating as early as the first century C.E. It is the same cultural *milieu* in which the *Testament of Solomon* was composed and circulated. This pseudo-epigraphical Greek text, a veritable manual of demonology, narrated how the king had subjugated all the

[414] On this see also chapter I and the issure regarding *opus Salomonis*.

[415] See, for instance, al-Ṭabarī, *Muhammed, sceau des prophètes*, II, pp. 12-13: " 'Ils faisaient pour lui ce qu'il voulait, des temples, des figures, des plats comme des bassins, etc.' " (34, 12). Ce sont là les temples que les Dîvs ont contruits et les figures qu'ils ont faite du temps de Salomon, des images colorées. La première chose, en fait de représentation de quadrupèdes, était son trône de rubis. Au-dessus du trône étaient représentés deux vautours qui abritaient Salomon de leur ombre. Et 'les plats comme des bassins' étaient de large réservoires, des bassins et des chaudrons solides comme des montagnes […] Et Dieu lui avait donné une fontaine de cuivre et d'airain, comme il est rapporté dans le Coran (34:11). Le mot *qatar*, qui se trouve dans le texte du Coran, signifie du cuivre liquide".

demons, thanks to a ring on which a magic seal was carved, which had been brought to him by the Archangel Michael[416].

> Now when I Solomon heard this, I entered the Temple of God, and prayed with all my soul, night and day, that the demon might be delivered into my hands, and that I might gain authority over him. And it came about through my prayer that grace was given to me from the Lord *Sabaoth* by Michael his archangel. [He brought me] a little ring, having a seal consisting of an engraved stone, and said to me: "Take, O Solomon, king, son of David, the gift which the Lord God has sent thee, the highest Sabaoth. With it thou shalt lock up all demons of the earth, male and female; and with their help thou shalt build up Jerusalem"[417].

This narrative frame, within the context of the *Testament*, served as a literary pretext, as a way to describe every demonic entity and his features.
This narration is inscribed within the story of the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem, where the jinns worked according to Solomon's desires. Some legends report that Solomon deceived the demons so that they worked for him well after his death; his corpse would still stand on the throne, leaning on a wooden staff, giving the demons the illusion that he was alive; only when the staff eventually broke off, gnawed by a worm, thus making the body fall from the throne, did the jinns realized they had been tricked.[418] The story is noteworthy because it is echoed by another folkloric account, which relates a similar episode with a reversed perspective: in rabbinic sources, Solomon was

[416] The same tradition was then appropriated by the Islamic world; see, for instance, al-Kisā'ī, *Tales of the Prophets*, p. 301, where however it is a different Archangel who acts as a messenger: "Gabriel brought from Paradise the seal of viceregency, which shone and glistened like the milky way. It had four points, on the first of which was written: There is no God but God. On the second was written: Everything will perish, except His face. On the third was written: His is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory. And on the fourth was written: Blessed be God the Best Creator. Every point of the ring was for one kind of creature: the first for the rebellious genii, the second for the birds and beasts, the third for the kings on earth and the fourth for those who inhabit the seas and the mountains. Gabriel gave the ring to Solomon, saying: "This is the gift of dominion, the adornment of the prophets and the symbol of obedience of mankind, the genii, the beasts and all the rest of creation". […] This seal was Adam's while he was in Paradise; but, when he was expelled, the ring flew from his finger and returned to Paradise, where it remained until Gabriel brought it down to Solomon".

[417] F.C. Conybeare, *The Testament of Solomon*, in «Jewish Quarterly Review», 11 (1898), pp. 1-46, p. 15.

[418] See, for instance, al-Ṭabarī, *Muhammed, sceau des prophètes*, II, pp. 23-30.

said to have been exiled by God as punishment for his unfaithfulness to the true Faith. The king is forced to wander in humble disguise, unrecognized and alone, while on his throne ruled a demon, which had taken up his appearance[419].
The Qur'an bears traces of this tradition (38:34): "We tried Solomon and set on his throne a figure. Then he repented". Common to both accounts is the motif of a fake or deceitful body sitting on Solomon's throne and we shall see how this notion is recognized as strictly related to Solomon and recurs also in other contexts.

The connection between the son of David and the construction of the Temple operated by the jinns is at the core of Solomon's fame as an architect, a notion absolutely pervasive in the Islamic world. The idea of something built by supernatural powers is a well-known *topos* for praising excellent craftsmanship: the Temple was an enterprise so impressive and so perfect that no human being could have really accomplished it. Some of the descriptions regarding the decoration of the building depend on the biblical account; others, however, like that of al-Dīnawarī, tell that the place was realized with white, yellow and green marble, and columns in rock crystal, covered with a roof in slabs made of jewels, and a floor paved with turquoise; the whole thing was so bright it shone in the night[420]. This account is not too dissimilar from the description of the fabulous golden throne, full of precious stones. The same degree of lavishness is also attributed to the garden of Solomon: al-Muhallabī, for instance, relates that it had artificial trees made of gold capable of bearing actual fruit; according to al-Ṭabarī, trees also grew within the Temple of the king. As we have seen in the previous chapters, this evolution might have been prompted by the development of Talmudic or biblical sources.

The construction and destruction of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem was central to Arabic writers as to Jewish ones. In his *Kitāb al-Buldān*, the writer Ibn al-Faqīh relates under the section *Bayt al-Muqaddas*, that the area around the Temple was strongly associated with several miracles and important religious events, such as the dream of Jacob, the announcement of the birth of Isaac, that of John the Baptist to his father Zakariah, and the

[419] For the sources on this topic, see the entry Solomon (under Solomon and Asmodeus) in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (online ed.).

[420] For this and the other sources on the Temple, according to Muslim authors, see P. Soucek, in *The Temple of Solomon in Islamic Legends and Art*, in *The Temple of Solomon: Archaeological Fact and Medieval Tradition in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Art*, ed. by J. Gutmann, Missoula (MT) 1976, pp. 73-123, pp. 85-87.

encounter between David and the angels[421]. Moreover, some later accounts in the Arabic tradition[422] and some pictorial representations established a direct relationship – or, better, an identification – between al-Aqṣā, the mosque from which the Prophet had begun his night journey, and the Temple of Jerusalem[423].

The Solomonic complex is referred to as *maḥārīb* in the Qur'an. This word is the plural form of the term *miḥrāb*, which originally indicated the throne hall in royal palaces, but is normally used to "designate the recess in the wall of a mosque which faces Mekka"[424]. The terminological choice is interesting both because it is the only plural occurrence in the sacred text, but also because it is relatively rare in this acceptation, being here employed to indicate an ensemble of structures endowed with some striking features, indefinable in strict architectural terms but, rather, having in common a strong symbolic power. I underline this point now, since the word recurs in the sources in the description of some real architectures, thus creating several parallels worth noting. First and foremost is in fact the Dome of the Rock, a highly revered Muslim architecture, built under ʿAbd al-Malik, the great Umayyad ruler, who, in recognizing the intrinsic importance of the place, had it constructed around the rock which was considered to the spot on which Solomon's Temple had been built[425]. The great mosque was certainly meant to be in strong continuity with the Solomonic past, since it was defined as a *miḥrāb*, a term carrying, as we have seen, strong and precise connotations.

Moreover, even the decoration of its interior was probably meant to evoke and suggest some elements of the Solomon-related legend: in the mosaic decoration of the interior, particularly those preserved in the octagonal zone, and others on the short side of the piers, is a figurative program showing trees

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[421] Soucek, *The Temple of Solomon*, p. 80.

[422] Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, d. 1273 C.E. or also Ḥamd Allāh Mustawfī , d.c. 1340 C.E.

[423] *Ibid*., pp. 103-104.

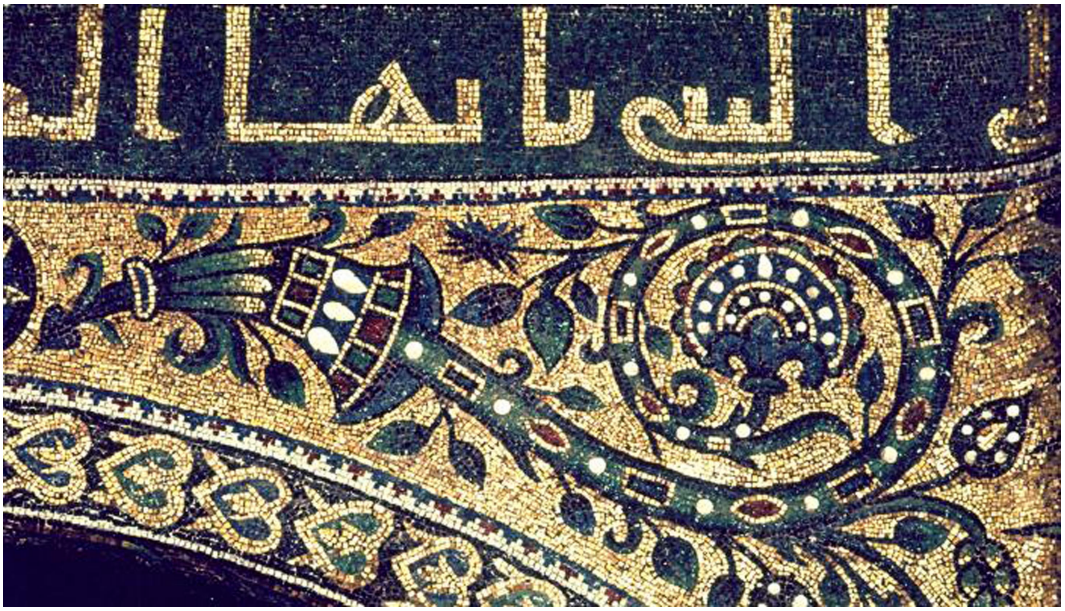
[424] *Ibid.*, p. 83. The *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, famous Sunni commentary, indicated that the *miḥrāb* is "the most honorable location of kings" and "the master of locations, the front and the most honorable. On the basis of various scholars' opinions, *miḥrāb* had in fact originally signified a throne room, see entry by G. Fehérvári, *Miḥrāb*, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (2nd ed.), ed. by O.J. Bearman – T. Bianquis – C.E. Bosworth – E. van Donzel – W.P. Heinrichs, 12 vols, Leiden 1960-2005, VII, 1993, pp. 7-15. It is interesting to note, moreover, that in most mosques it is usually inscribed the so-called verse of the Throne of God (2:255). T.J. O' Shaughnessy, *God's Throne and the Biblical Symbolism of the Qur'an*, in «Numen», 20 (1973), pp. 202-221.

[425] O. Grabar, *The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem*, in «Ars Orientalis», 3 (1959), pp. 33-62; N. Rabbat, *The Meaning of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock*, in «Muqarnas», 6 (1989), pp. 12-21.

with multi-colored trunks producing fruit, especially grapes, trees with jeweled trunks, and other trees with golden and jeweled bases, that seem to purposefully recall the description made by al-Muhallabī [ill. 32a-32b].

The decoration of the Dome of the Rock in general, with jewels and mother of pearl chips, definitely seems to evoke the description of the Temple of Jerusalem as it is recorded by Islamic sources, and which must have been known in the Umayyad period[426].

[426] On the strong appropriation of the Solomonic heritage by the Umayyad dynasty through a deep architectural program see S. Tamari, *Iconotextual Studies in the Muslim Ideology of Umayyad Architecture*, Wiesbaden 1996.



Supernatural helpers for a kingdom of mirabilia: Royal Baths

There is a second episode regarding king Solomon and his architect-jinns, quite relevant in order to underline another strong narrative knot related to the throne-palace, namely his association with baths. This particular branch of the story stems from the legendary encounter between king Solomon and the queen of Sheba, known as Bilqis in the Islamic tradition[427]. The story holds that the king finds out about the kingdom of the queen from a hoopoe. Solomon then

[427] On Solomon and Sheba see, among others, F. Fresnel, *Remarques*, in «Journal Asiatique», 24 (1845), pp. 194-237; J.B. Pritchard, *Solomon and Sheba*, London 1974; G. Stiegner, *Die Königin von Saba und ihre Namen*, Graz 1979; K H. Kamsler, *Solomon and Sheba: aggadic roots of the Koran Story*, in «Dor le dor», 18 (1989), pp. 172-175; M. Adriani, *La Regina di Saba, Storia e leggenda*, in «Atti e memoria della Accademia Petrarca di lettere, arti e scienze», 45 (1982), pp. 143-160; R.A. Beyer, *Die Königin von Saba: Engel und Dämon: der Mythos einer Fraue*, Lübbe 1987; E. Däniken, *Sulle orme della regina di Saba*, Milano 1988; *Die Königin von Saba: Kunst, Legende und Archäeologie zwischen Morgenland und Abendland*, ed. by W. Daum, Stuttgart-Zurich 1988; C. Gilliot, *Bilqis ou la soumission à Salomon*, in «Le Monde de la Bible», 95 (1995), pp. 24-29; J. Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, Chicago (IL) 1993; M. Delcor, *La Reine de Saba et Salomon. Quelques aspects de l'origine de la légende et de sa formation, principalement dans le mondee juife et éthiopien, à partir des textes bibliques*, in *Tradició i Traducció de la Paraula*, ed. by R. Frederic, Montserrat 1993, pp. 307-324; S. Rebershak, *La Regina di Saba*, Milano 1995; V. Gonzalez, *Le piège de Salomon, La Pensée de l'art dans le Coran*, Paris 2002; F.A. Pennacchietti, *Legends of the Queen of Sheba*, in *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen*, London 2002, pp. 31-38; *Il Trono della Regina di Saba. Cultura e diplomazia tra Italia e Yemen*, ed. by S. Antonini de Maigret – P. D'Amore – M. Jung, Roma 2012.

decides to have her visit him, and therefore sends the bird to steal her throne and alters it, in order to assess Bilqis' judgment, by seeing whether she would recognize it even under a different appearance. Finally he proceeds to convert the queen to the true faith and to seduce her afterwards. This encounter occurs in a special pavilion of Solomon's palace; at the end of which is his famous precious throne, guarded by the jinns; however, the whole place has been devised by the demons in such a way that the floor seems transparent as water, so that, when Bilqis enters, tricked by the illusory quality of the surface, she raises the hem of her dress, revealing her hairy legs.

> When Bilqis drew near in search of him, Solomon ordered the satans to build him a court. That was a palace of glass resembling white waters in which they placed water stocked with fish beneath [the floor]. Following that, he had his throne placed along the central axis. Then he sat, the birds, jinn, and humans arrayed about him. […] When Bilqis arrived, she was told: Enter the court! When she saw it, she reckoned it to be a pool most of which was filled with water. And so, she uncovered her ankles (Qur'an 27:44) to wade through the water on her way to Solomon. Solomon gazed at her. Behold! She had the most beautiful ankles and feet that any human could have, but her ankles were most certainly hairy[428].

In some of the sequels of the legend, Solomon, compelled by such a lack of femininity, orders his supernatural attendants to invent some sort of shaving cream, which the queen could apply[429].

> When Bilqis became a Muslim, Solomon wished to marry her. But, when he mulled over the idea, he became disenchanted; that was because of her thick ankle hair. "How disgusting this is", he said. Then he asked the humans "How is [ankle] hair removed?" "With a razor", they answered. The woman protested "No blade has ever touched me" […] Finally, he asked the satans who feigned ignorance […] When pressed by Solomon, however, they said: "We'll employ a technique for you that will make her

[428] For a discussion of all the sources, both Jewish and Islamic, see Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, who also provides a detailed appendix with all the texts in English translation, pp. 161-214. The excerpt quoted is from the version of al-Thaʿlabī, in Lassner, p. 200.
[429] See also al-Ṭabarī, *Muhammed, sceau des prophètes*, II, pp.18.

ankles appear like highly polished silver". And so, they prepared her depilatory and bath[430].

An early trace of this story in a much simpler version and without the depilatory episode, is found even in the Qur'an (27:44), where an unnamed queen is described:

It was said to her, "Enter the hall".
When she saw it, she taught it was a pool
And she bared her legs.
He said "It is a polished hall, made of glass".
She said "My Lord, I have wronged myself.
Together with Solomon, I surrender myself to God,
Lord of created beings".

Even though the general meaning of the passage is clear, there are few terms that maintain a certain degree of ambiguity. The first one is *ṣarḥ*, which is here translated as 'palace', a word recurring overall four times in the Qur'an, twice in this *sura* and again in 28:38 and 40:36, in relation to two Pharaonic buildings, usually recognized as towers. The word, however, is slightly more ambiguous in our context, since it could indicate both a flat, bi-dimensional surface and full building, considered in its elevation. Therefore, the main interpreters of quranic exegesis have variously translated this term with 'pavilion', 'tower-palace', but also with 'pavement' or 'court'.
The second problematic stance regards the word *qawārīr*, which indicates the transparent glass covering the *ṣarḥ*. It is a transparent glass, which has been worked in a special way, thus conferring the surface in question a peculiar effect, which is however not precisely explained. The word is strongly characterized in a Solomonic way, since it also recurs elsewhere in the exegetical tradition to describe the material constituting the habitations for the thousands of

[430] Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, pp. 200-201. This detail, apparently trivial, and not always related, is actually a hint of the demonic (un-human) quality of the queen of Sheba. Some traditions, in fact, identify the queen with the famous night female-demon, known as Lilith, a figure that penetrated into Semitic culture through Assyrian influence, who functions almost as an anti-Eve. In the story, the act of shaving the legs works as a neutralization of the powers of the demon. See the entry *Lilith* in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (online ed.) However, in this episode are at stake also several gender-power issues, well discussed by Lassner in his monograph.

concubines transported on the flying throne-estrade of the king. The word is also quite specific, since it is neither the common one employed for 'glass' (*zujāj*), nor that indicating crystal (*ballūr*) and certainly stresses the refined quality of the working technique. The glass seen by Bilqis has been altered in such a sophisticated way as to perfectly imitate the surface of the water, slightly rippled, which is the reason why the queen is tricked into Solomon's trap[431]. Her naive and unaware approach and her lack of capability in recognizing this artistic *trompe l'oeil*, stand as a metaphor for her blindness toward the true Faith. The moment of conversion occurs immediately after the realization of her own defective judgment: the moral lesson is learnt through an aesthetic recognition.

The impression exerted by this Solomonic construction becomes topical and it is one of the recurring themes in the poetic genre known as *quṣuriya* (from *qaṣr*, palace)[432], which praises the excellence of architecture, by evoking illustrious precedents. As we shall see, several elements of the Solomonic aesthetic springing from this episode, namely the connection with a water-like environment, the illusionistic quality of the material, its transparency and brightness, will all be exploited throughout the centuries, not only in literature, but also in their conscious reprise, which finds actual examples both in art and in architecture[433].

A notable example is the bath complex of Khirbat al-Mafjar (known also as Hishām's Palace)[434], which Priscilla Soucek, on the basis of archaeological evidence has linked to a Solomonic iconography. Begun under 'Abd al-Malik (724-43 C.E.), the same ruler responsible for the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, the buildings were however probably decorated, according to Hamilton's study of the site, during the epoch of al-Walīd after his accession in 743. However, the ensemble was heavily damaged by an earthquake, which possibly occurred in 749. The complex consisted of a palace, a mosque, a bath and a courtyard with a domed fountain; the bath probably was the only part really in use, while the rest had remained unfinished. It was richly decorated with mosaics, stucco and

[431] For all this analysis, see Gonzalez, *Le piège de Salomon*, pp. 26-30.

[432] *Ibid*., p. 37.

[433] To this topic, namely the relationship between "myth, metaphor and architecture", with specific Solomonic associations, D.B. Flood has dedicated a paper in 1994, during the annual conference of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) at the University of Manchester. His paper, *Thrones in Glass houses: Solomon and the Islamic Palace*, was not fully published and in the proceedings there is only a short abstract, p. 189.

[434] R. Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar: an Arabian Mansion in the Jordan Valley*, Oxford 1959.

stonework. We have already mentioned this site in the second chapter, with reference to the custom of the suspended crown. Richard Ettinghausen had in fact stated that one of the exedrae of the bath-complex must have been used as a throne-hall – which would have explained the presence of a huge chain still hanging from the ceiling, as an element of Sasanian kingship of Iranian origins[435].

Soucek has instead closely analyzed the remaining decoration of the place including geometric or vegetal ornaments in low relief and scenes in high relief or in the round still extant in the bath-hall façade, in the domed vestibule and in the northwest chamber, trying to make sense of the iconographic program of the site. The conclusions of the scholar are particularly relevant to us. She has in fact convincingly argued that the bearded man surrounded by animals, in the central niche above the portal, traditionally labeled as the caliph, is none other than king Solomon enthroned [ill. 33].

[435] R. Hamilton, *Khirbat al-Mafjar: the Bath Hall Reconsidered*, in «Levand», 10 (1978), pp. 128-130; R. Ettinghausen, *The Throne and Banquet Hall of Khirbat al-Mafjar*, chapter in *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World*, Leiden 1972, pp. 17-65; S. Shaked, *From Iran to Islam: on some Symbols of Royalty*, in «Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam», 7 (1986), pp. 82-85. And despite Ettinghausen's hypothesis has been questioned by Hamilton who as studied the rest of the site, Soucek, *Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath*, adds elements in support of the former, see n. 34.

The entire sculptural ensemble of the façade is, in fact, a figurative program mirroring Solomon's legends related to the throne. As we have seen, the throne of the king was located at the far end of a special pavilion, where the king had received Bilqis. By seeing the image of the king enthroned in the bath-context of Khirbat al-Mafjar, one would have been reminded of the royal encounter. An interesting aspect of this figurative choice is the insertion of a legendary element in an official and royal context. Soucek explains this interest on the basis of a literary genre widely appreciated during the Umayyad period, which is the quranic exegesis or *tafsīr*, not dissimilar, in certain respects, to the process of haggadic accretion described in the previous chapter. This body of exegetical material, glosses and commentary included, as noted at the beginning of the chapter, several elements that did not belong to the sacred text. Some of these tales were in circulation at a popular or folkloric level, often known through the cultural exchange with other peoples. Much of this material, unified in a singular narrative, often penetrated chronicles or historical accounts[436].

Two texts that help understand the figurative program of the bath are the *Kitāb al-Tijān fī Mulūk Ḥimyar* by Wahb ibn Munabbih (654-729/732 C.E.)[437] and the *tafsīr* by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767 C.E.)[438]. Wahb was of Persian origins, since his family had been sent to Yemen as part of the cavalry against the Abyssinians, but he knew both Hebrew and Aramaic. He represents well the synthesis between his own cultural heritage – the knowledge of the Qur'an – but also the Jewish traditions, typical of sixth-seventh century Yemen[439]. He was appointed *qāḍī* in Sanaʿa and was a skilled *qāṣṣ*, a reciter of quranic tales; al-Thaʿlabī relates in his *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* that Wahb was consulted about the throne of Solomon and its features by the caliph Muʿāwiya[440]. Ibn Munabbih describes the throne and its relation to Solomon's flight in various passages, by collecting together material from sura 21, 27, 34 and 38[441]. He is also one of the first to make the relationship between Solomon, Bilqis and the construction of baths quite explicit. As we have seen, the quranic passage is evocative but it never really refers to a bath complex[442]; some chroniclers credit the king with

[436] H.T. Norris, *Fables and Legends in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times*, pp. 376-386.

[437] Soucek, *Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath*, p. 111, n. 39.

[438] *Ibid*., p. 111, nn. 40-41.

[439] *Ibid*., p. 111, n. 45.

[440] *Ibid*., p. 111, n. 47.

[441] *Ibid*., p. 112, n. 49.

[442] In general, on baths in the Islamic culture, see H. Grotzfeld, *Das Bad im arabisch-islamischen Mittelalter: Eine kulturgeschichtliche Studie*, Wiesbaden 1970.

the invention of various depilatory devices. Al-Muqaddasī identifies a bath of Solomon in Persepolis and other sources mention some also in Yemen and Syria[443] or in the area of the Roman city of Tiberias, whose bath was said to have been built by Solomon himself[444]. The proximity of this latter site to Khirbat al-Mafjar makes it likely to imagine that the figurative program decorating the façade was meant to evoke and strengthen the Solomonic allure of the area, also given the fact that the Umayyad family had historically been quite tied to the territory of Tiberias and might, therefore, have been well aware of this connection.

If it is true that the complex of Khirbat al-Mafjar was begun under ʿAbd al-Malik and decorated by his successor al-Walīd with a highly evocative iconographical program, after the decoration of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, this would be the second striking example of an architectural endeavor carried out by the Umayyad dynasty with strong Solomonic implications. These examples are particularly relevant because they constitute an interesting case-study in the appropriation of literary material related to king Solomon and their employment for the creation of a decorative program for the monumental counterpart of mythical buildings (Temple/mosque, *ṣarḥ* /bath).

The City of Brass

As we have seen through these two examples, the throne of Solomon – or, more broadly, the complex of his architecture – is an aesthetic and literary tool appropriated by Islamic rulers who employed it to charge the present with a specific political value (eulogistic, dynastic, etc.).

This symbolic heritage would continue to be exploited for centuries – even reaching the throne halls of Mughal sovereigns in India well into the seventeenth century[445] – thanks to the strong appeal exerted by the positive

[443] Soucek, *Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath*, p. 116, n. 96.

[444] Also the large stone platform in the middle of the lake bore Solomic associations; apparently he used to stop there with his flying throne, R.P. Mottahedeh, *The Eastern Travels of Solomon: Reimagining Persepolis and the Iranian Past*, in *Law and Tradition in Classic Islamic Thought*, ed. by M. Cook *et al.*, New York 2013, pp. 247-267, p. 249. According to other sources there was also Solomon's tomb in Tiberias, see Ibn Gubayr, *Viaggio in Ispagna, Sicilia, Siria e Palestina, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egitto*, translated by C. Schiapparelli, Roma 1906, p. 306.

[445] See, for instance, E. Koch, *Shah Jahan and Orpheus: the Pietre Dure Decoration and Programme of the Throne Hall of Public Audiences at the Red Forth of Delhi*, Graz 1988; Soucek,

model represented by Solomon in the construction of a powerful paradigm of triumphant royalty: great wealth, ambitious building projects, luxurious display of artistry and ornamentation, not to mention the notion of perfect judgment and justice.

The Islamic world, however, provides us also with an interesting example of anti-Solomonic rhetoric, made explicit in the famous tale of *The City of Brass*, entered in the collection of the *Arabian Nights* only during the eighteenth century, but broadly circulating in various versions during the Middle Ages. It was finally included in the *Nights* because it displayed some of the most prominent features shared by other stories being part of the so-called 'Maghrebi collection'[446]. What is particularly interesting to us is that it is built, as we shall see, upon a series of reversed Solomonic *topoi*. Such a process is not coincidental. On the contrary, the whole narration is intelligently crafted in such a way as to incorporate all the major Solomonic themes and reveal the other side of the story, so to speak, thus exposing the implicit ambiguity of the figure of Solomon.

The tale begins at Damascus, during the reign of the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (685-705 C.E.). During a courtly conversation, the sovereign is told of the presence, in some distant land of the West, of a series of bottles, sealed with brass, containing the jinns imprisoned by king Solomon, and asks his men to organize an expedition under the responsibility of Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr to fetch them. The group departs and during the journey makes several encounters. First the caliph's men come across a black castle in the desert full of gold and silver but completely inhabited. It is decorated by a series of inscriptions in a foreign language that, once translated, remind the audience of the vanishing quality of all worldly riches: only God is everlasting. Having left this first place, the party wanders in the desert, finding a brass horseman and then a demon imprisoned in a stone pillar as a punishment for having tried to stir a rebellion against king Solomon. Finally they reach the *City of Brass*, whose

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Solomon's Throne/Solomon's Bath, pp. 119-122; L.E. Parodi, *Solomon, the Messenger and the Throne. Themes from a Mughal Tomb*, in «East and West», 51 (2001), pp. 127-142.

[446] On the tale, its sources, context and commentaries see M.I. Gerhardt, *The Art of Story-telling: A Literary Study of The Thousand and One Nights*, Leiden 1963; A. Hamori, *An Allegory from the Arabian Nights: the City of Brass*, in «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London», 34 (1971), pp. 9-19; A. Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*, Princeton (NJ) 1974; D. Pinault, *Story-telling techniques in the Arabian Nights*, Leiden 1992; B. Fudge, *Signs of Scripture in 'The City of Brass'*, in «Journal of Quranic Studies», 8 (2006), pp. 87-118.

walls are without gates and whose surroundings are full of tablets inscribed with a series of messages similar to those found in the black castle. Several efforts made in order to enter the city prove unsuccessful, resulting in the death of several men, until a pious character recommends his soul to Allah and reaches the other side of the wall without injury, allowing the rest of the group to enter. Inside the city walls they find a devastating scene: although the place is full of riches, all the inhabitants that still people the shops, the bazar and the streets are dead. In the innermost chamber, whose pavement in polished marble looks like a water-surface, a similar scene awaits them: they find the queen of the city, wearing her best cloths and jewels, still sitting on her throne, protected by two metal statues. However, she is dead like everybody else: despite its wealth, the city and her queen Tadmura have succumbed to famine, as an inscription written on a tablet reveals, along with a warning which forbids touching the jewels on her body. The message is ignored and the sacrilegious act is punished with the beheading of the trespasser, killed by one of the suddenly animated copper statues. Finally, the party leaves the city and finds the bottles of Solomon that are brought back to Damascus. Upon hearing the account of the adventures, the caliph decides to retire to lead a life of prayer, far from any temptation of mundane glory.

Even though the story told in the *Arabian Nights* is set between Damascus and an unknown land generically located in North Africa, a more ancient version of it, going back at least to the ninth century C.E., describes the core of the episode – namely the recovery of trunks full of jinns sealed by Solomon and the discovery of a fortress of brass – as taking place in Spain, around the area of Toledo. This account is in fact related by the Andalusian scholar Ibn Habib (d. 853 C.E.) and it must have been known also to al-Masʿūdī (d. 956 C.E.)[447]. A closer version to the one in the *Nights* appears in the *Kitāb al-Buldān* by Ibn al-Faqīh, quoted quite faithfully by Yāqūt[448].

Whatever the variants, the original nucleus betrays an historical origin: Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr (d. 716/717 C.E.) was in fact sent by ʿAbd al-Malik on an expedition and he conquered both North Africa and Spain, taking Toledo, the capital of the Visigoths' reign. It is then possible that this famous historical

[447] al-Masʿūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, text and translation by C. Barbier de Menard, 9 vols, Paris 1861-1873, I, p. 369.

[448] Another, later version, related by al-Gharnāṭī (d. 1169-70 C.E.) enriches the story with the detail of the attacks of some ferocious ants. On the various sources, see Gerhardt, *The Art of Story-telling*.

account prompted a further elaboration, resulting in the story we have summarized. Mūsā's historical expedition, in fact, already contained a series of elements capable of arising attention in the audience of the time. As we have seen in the first chapter, in fact, the Spanish city boasted a strong Solomonic heritage, claiming the possession of the table of the king, as a result of the circulation of the Temple's spoils after the sack of Rome[449]. As a result of the Umayyad expedition, it was reported that Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād, envoy of Mūsā, had found the table in the city and took it[450]. Even though parallel versions exist, such as that of the archbishop of the city Roderic Ximénès, who claimed that the table was in fact not in Toledo, but rather in a city known as *Madīnat al-Mā'ida* (city of the table), in the proximity of a mountain known as the mountain of Solomon, close to St. Just[451], this does not change the substance of the story. The expedition had not only resulted in the conquest of a vast territory, but also in the recovery of an important Solomonic piece.

The version of the *Nights* differs from the more ancient ones in several respects; the setting is moved from Spain to Africa (Toledo being replace with *Labtayt*, possibly Leptis Magna), in the *Nights* Mūsā enters the last castle, while in the earlier accounts nobody succeeded in that, and, in general, the whole story is largely enriched with a series of details. Most of these elements, some quite evidently, others in a more allusive way, were certainly meant to create a network of references that would resonate with the audience, evoking and strengthening a distinctive Solomonic setting, which, as we have seen, was part of the original nucleus of the narration. From the very beginning of the story, the expedition opens in the name of Solomon, being organized with the almost archaeological purpose of recovering the famous bottles. Moreover, the whole story is set as a narrative counterpart to an historical event, whose main characters had been protagonists of the fall of Toledo, with its Solomonic allure. Nor is the reference to brass coincidental. The word employed here, that is *nuḥās*, can be translated both with copper and brass[452] and the city was also said

[449] Procopius, *De bello gothico* I, 12; Procopius, *De bello vandalico* II, 9.

[450] See, for instance, Ibn Khordādba, *Le livre des routes et des provinces*, ed. by B. de Meynard, Paris 1865, pp. 118, 517; al-Ṭabarī, *Muhammed, sceau des prophètes*, I, pp. 52-56; Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm, *History of the conquest of Spain*, ed. by J.H. Jones, Göttingen 1858, p. 4.

[451] R. Jiménez de Rada, *Historia Arabum*, introduction and critical edition by J. Lozano Sánchez, Seville 1993 (or. ed. Leiden 1625), ch. IX, pp. 16-18; *Histoire de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne*, ed. by R.P.A. Dozy, Leiden 1859-61, 2 vols, II, p. 14.

[452] The French title of the story is, in fact, *La ville de cuivre*, while in Italian it is known both as *La città di bronzo* and *La città di rame*.

to be made in bronze in some versions. Metallurgic terminology in Arabic is dominated by a strong and persistent ambiguity, since a single word could be used to indicate different materials and, despite the great expertise in metal-working typical of the Islamic world, there was often a scarce degree of precision and attention to the actual components of them, when it came to their description[453].

The reference to brass, however, is all the more interesting, since it is meant to evoke a quranic reference. In the English translation, the passage, already quoted earlier in the chapter, says that the jinns built for Solomon a fountain of liquid copper (*'ayn al-qiṭr*, 34:12), which probably echoes the biblical reference to the 'sea'. The word used in this context, however, is *qiṭr*[454], which does not correspond to *nuḥās* 'brass'; despite this discrepancy, early commentators of the Qur'an and various lexicographers (such as al-Baydawi or ibn-Manzur) established a correspondence between the two terms[455]. This connection must have therefore been quite widespread, which explains why one of the poems recorded in one of the versions of the story mentioned above contains a clear reference to the quranic passage (*qiṭr*) and makes a parallel with the city of brass (*nuḥās*)[456].

> So that the man of glory and power and he who seeks immortality / may know, nothing that lives is eternal. / If any creature could have achieved it at ease / it would have been Solomon son of David / For him flowed the fount of brass / in it a great and generous gift / he said to the *jinn*, 'Build from it a monument / to last till the Judgment and not dwindle or decay' / So they made of it a slab, then tilted it / to the sky, making it firm and good / and they poured out the molten brass down over the wall / and it became hard and solid, like unyielding rock / He put together there the treasures of the earth / and it will be manifest, on a day unspecified / nothing of kingship remains after it / so that the depths of the ditch hold a tomb / He has come to lie on his side in the depths of the earth / enclosed

[453] M. Aga-Oglu, *A Brief Note on Islamic Terminology for Bronze and Brass*, in «Journal of the American Oriental Society», 64 (1944), pp. 218-223.

[454] The semitic root *q-ṭ/ṭ-r* usually expresses the concept of 'incense', 'odoriferous smoke' and 'fumigation', see G. Banti – R. Contini, *Names of Aromata in Semitic and Cushitic Languages*, in *Profumi d'Arabia*, ed. by A. Avanzini, Roma 1997, pp. 169-192, p. 173.

[455] Tamari, *Iconotextual Studies*, p. 83.

[456] al-Ṭabarī, *Muhammed, sceau des prophètes*, I, p. 52-56.

> by slabs of stone / This is so that you learn that royalty is transitory / except what is from God, the Awesome, the Magnanimous[457].

Here the network of references is dense; brass is not only the material of the city but also that employed to seal the bottles containing the demons. Among the multiple semantic implications, the use of the material must also have evoked a shining complex of buildings, thus making the appearance of the city quite a spectacular view, perfectly in line with the *topos* of brightness that we have underlined above.

Another strong element of parallelism is the presence of these castles with no entrance, lost in time and characterized by a series of almost unintelligible inscriptions that, when interpreted, always convey a message of *memento mori*, reminding the audience of the deep precariousness of existence. This feature is also present in a rich body of material related to king Solomon, usually narrated through a series of encounters he made during his travels on the flying carpets. The *leit-motiv* of these episodes is always a meditation on the vanity of things and on the deceptive quality of power. Once, in dialogue with an ant, he asked her whether there was anybody on earth greater than him and was given a great lesson of humility by the insect, which replied to him that she must have been much greater, otherwise God would have not sent him there, to place her on Solomon's palm. The continuation of the episode bears a similar moral value:

> Flying further, Solomon noticed a magnificent palace to which there appeared to be no entrance. He ordered the demons to climb to the roof and see if they could discover any living being within the building. The demons found there only an eagle, which they took before Solomon. Being asked whether it knew of an entrance to the palace, the eagle said that it was 700 years old, but that it had never seen such an entrance. An elder brother of the eagle, 900 years old was then found but it also did not know the entrance. The eldest brother of these two birds, which was 1300 years old then declared it had been informed by its father that the door was on the west side but that it had become hidden by sand drifted by the wind. Having discovered the entrance, Solomon found many inscriptions on the doors. In the interior of the palace was an idol having in its mouth a silver tablet which bore the following inscription in Greek: "I, Shaddad, the son of 'Ad, reigned over a million cities, rode on a million horses, had under

[457] Passage quoted by Fudges, *Signs of Scripture*, pp. 94-95.

me a million vassals and slew a million warriors, yet I could not resist the angel of death"[458].

This story, related in a late *midrash*, must have certainly be known also to the Islamic audience[459] and it shows another similarity shared by the narration of the *City of Brass*, notably a palace with no entrance, the presence of a dead realm and the series of inscriptions.

Also quite evocative is Tadmura, the name of the dead queen, who, as we will see later on in the chapter, closely recalls the Arabic name of Palmyra, a city whose founding was attributed to Solomon himself. The image of the corpse of the queen, still sitting on her throne as if she were alive certainly depends, at least in part, on the historical fact that the body of the last queen of Palmyra had in fact been found in the city. In the historical account, however, she was not sitting on the throne, and it is therefore possible that the changes made to the actual story are instead meant to evoke another known Solomonic feature, that is the presence of the deceptive body on the throne, a *topos* that we have seen declined in two different ways in connection with the son of David earlier on in this chapter[460]. In general, *The City of Brass* is full of elements preparing the encounter with this deceptive body, which is described as a veritable *automaton*, capable of moving the eyes and surrounded by a series of objects, like birds and beasts that seem real but are actually made of metal. Much before this encounter, however, the members of the expedition had met a horseman in brass that, by swiveling, could indicate the direction to take. At the origin of this episode is probably another tradition, usually associated with Mūsā's expedition. The brass horseman seems in fact the magic transfiguration of the so-called idol of Cadiz, probably a Roman statue, still standing on a pillar and pointing toward Cadiz[461]. In the *Nights*, it becomes a copper automatic archer encountered in the proximity of the Atlantic coast, which kills some of Mūsā's men.

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[458] Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, V, p. 22, see the translation in the entry *Solomon* (under *Solomon's carpet*) in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (online ed.).

[459] A trace of this story, in fact, seems to be Qur'an 27:18, where an encounter between Solomon and an ant takes place (the sura itself is named after the episode).

[460] See above, p. 230.

[461] A. Huici Miranda, *Kadis*, in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Leiden 1978, ed. by P.J. Bearman – T. Bianquis – C.E. Bosworth – E. van Donzel – W.P. Heinrichs, 12 vols, Leiden 1960-2005, IV (1978), p. 400. See also Dozy, *Recherches sur l'Histoire et la Littérature*, II, pp. xcii-xcvii and appendix, p. XXXV; Pinault, *Story-telling Techniques*, p. 185.

Its ominous presence is, in its own respect, a prefiguration of the magic and illusionistic dimension which will inform the rest of the narration, and which, in turn stands as a powerful metaphor for the deceitful quality of things, that like wealth and power, are usually considered important by human beings but are doomed to fail in front of death that destroys everything.

The City of Brass has been thoroughly studied and it has in fact been underlined how one of the main threads unifying the whole narration is a meditation on the vanity of mundane things; the journey, began as a pseudo-archaeological quest, turns into a spiritual pilgrimage. The various episodes offer a reason to meditate on the transient quality of power and glory[462] and the various inscriptions always convey this message: "do not let the world deceive you with its adornment", words echoing several passages in the Sacred text, such as Qur'an 31:33, 18:47 and 28:60.

This moral lesson is all the more interesting because it is weaved in such a way as to resonate in contrast with the story of king Solomon, taken here as the epitome of the greatest sovereign, perfect in his wealth and glory, and yet a mortal, falling from grace because of his human sins and destined to succumb to death like the humblest of men.

It is interesting to note that the most recognizable historical or realistic details in the story are characterized by a general process of transfiguration. From our perspective, those *realia*, such as the statue in Cadiz or the precious objects in Tadmura's throne room, or the actual body of the queen, bear a special significance, because they take the shape of *automata*: the two knights guarding the dead queen, for instance, strongly recall the mechanical lions in the Magnaura hall, exactly as the fake birds and trees seem to echo the rest of the decoration of the audience room.

All the material objects encountered during the journey – these very *automata* that we have admired elsewhere as luxury objects, denoting royal contexts – are nothing but scary *simulacra*. If the usual strategy is to present these items by stressing the life-like quality of their mechanisms, here the proceeding is exactly the opposite: their movement is the only thing left in a dead world, it is a pale (and fake) imitation of real life, a useless surrogate that makes the inanity of the scene even more apparent. The ambiguous balance which always pervades the relationship between reality and imitation, between nature and art, is here altered to highlight its the negative side.

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[462] Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*, pp. 146-149; Pinault, *Story-telling Techniques*, pp. 148-239.

Mapping Solomon's Kingdom

In this section, I will proceed to describing the relation between Solomon and some impressive ruins, scattered around the Muslim territory, but I will also mention some standing cities whose origins are considered reaching back as far as the king of Israel. The reason of such a survey is to show the afterlife of the realm of Solomon and to underline the reasons why and how later rulers claimed such a heritage.

All the aspects I have been pointing out during the course of this survey (the flight, the jinns, the palaces, the association with baths, the shining surfaces) are in fact deeply related to a series of sites, variously scattered in Africa, Spain and the Middle East, that ever since the Middle Ages were strongly associated with the figure of Solomon: much of this process is strictly related to his fame as an architect and to the legend of his flying throne. In fact, if it is true that he could have breakfast in Damascus and supper in Medina, it was certainly possible for him to reach the four corners of the world and leave a sign of his passage even in places very distant from each other or normally quite unreachable. In general, it is true, as Yāqūt states, that there was the tendency to ascribe almost every astonishing structure to him[463]. Sometimes a strong Solomonic tie was favored by a biblical quotation; other times, the heritage of the king of Israel is like a layer of varnish applied to an older stratum, already dense with meaning. Popular interpretations intermingle and superimpose with sophisticated readings. Overall, this network of references make up a dense

[463] See A. Miquel, *La géographie humaine dans le monde musulman jusqu'au XIe siècle*, 4 vols, Paris 1967, I, pp. 165-166 for the places he supposedly built, accordingly to al-Faqih and Yaqut. Other traditions relate also of the city of Ecbatana and Kabul. Another famous case regards the city of Istanbul, which we will mention only briefly, since it exceeds the time frame of this dissertation. In the fifteenth-century cosmographical Ottoman Turkish compilation known as *Dürr-i meknūn*,'The Hidden Pearl', usually attributed to author Ahmed Bican (d. 1466 C.E.), the image of the throne recurs in general in the first chapter, as a cosmological image of order, but to the throne of Solomon is specifically dedicated the ninth, see A. Bican Yazıcıoğlu, *Dürr-i meknūn*, ed. by L. Kaptein, Asch 2007; S. Yerasimos, *Légendes d'empire. La fondation de Constantinople et de Sainte-Sophie dans les traditions turques*, Paris 1990. In general, it is difficult to limitate this Solomonic geography: al-Hayṣām ibn Muḥammad Būshanjī (X-XI century C.E.), in his *Qiṣāṣ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, related that the whole earth was Solomon's kingdom, as it had been before only for Alexander the Great, Nimrod and Nebuchadnezzar, see Mottahedeh, *The Eastern Travels of Solomon*, p. 248.

Solomonic geography, encompassing a territory as extended as the Muslim world itself.

The lands conquered by the new Islamic rulers, in fact, were full of the remains built by previous civilizations[464]. These impressive ruins rose in the middle of deserts, with their forgotten columns and pillars, adorned with the figures of foreign gods. Yet, despite the decay due to the passing of time and their abandonment, they must have filled the newcomers with a sense of awe and respect, probably alike to the sensation the modern viewer still gets in front of them by thinking about their lost grandeur. All these sites became the object of marveled speculation and originated a tradition of *mirabilia*, in a way not dissimilar to what happened to the ruins of Rome. The Christian pilgrims, coming in contact with the wonders of pagan times, oscillated between wonder and repulsion. Muslim travelers, too, needed to make sense of the traces of the past on their territory, a heritage which was both fascinating and problematic, since it was not their own. By ascribing it to Solomon and his demons, they could then acknowledge its powerful, almost inhuman quality, yet neutralize its negative charge. Moreover, the figure of Solomon allowed Muslim people to claim, although indirectly, the territories and their archaeological wonders, without having to state the 'otherness' of these remains[465].

The theme of ruins is almost topical in *adab* literature, since it does not only provide the writer with an excuse to describe the land, allowing him to display his erudition, but also to meditate on the transient quality of human beings and their doings. Not even the greatest palaces built by king Solomon exist forever; a saddened *ubi sunt* often recurs in the writings of many Arabic geographers,

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[464] C. Picard, *Description des sites antiques dans le cadre urbain d'al-Andalus par les écrivains arabes du Moyen-Âge: l'exemple de Mérida*, in *Sites et monuments disparus d'après les témoignages de voyageurs*, ed. by R. Gyselen, Bures-sur-Yvette 1996, pp. 105-117; *Senso delle rovine e riuso dell'antico*, ed. by W. Cupperi, Pisa 2002; G. Calasso, *Esperienze e scritture di viaggio nell'Islam medievale: il mondo degli altri e il mondo dell'Islam*, in *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo*, *3. Le culture circostanti*, 3 vols, II: *La cultura arabo-islamica*, ed. by B. Scarcia Amoretti, Roma 2003, pp. 379-408; F. Roldan Castro, *El Viaje en el Mundo Araboislámico Durante la Edad Media: la Peregrinación y la Búsqueda del Saber*, in *Al-Andalus y el Norte Al-Andalus y el Norte de África: Relaciones e Influencias*, ed. by P. Beneito – F. Roldan Castro, Sevilla 2004, pp. 223-250; *Relitti riletti, Metamorfosi delle rovine e identità culturale*, ed. by M. Barbanera, Torino 2009; H. Touati, *Islam et voyage au Moyen Âge. Histoire et anthropologie d'une pratique lettrée*, Paris 2000; M. Greenhalgh, *Marble Past, Monumental Present. Building with Antiquities in the Mediaeval Mediterranean*, Leiden Boston 2009.

[465] A good survey on some of these sources is to be found in Mottahedeh, *The Eastern Travels of Solomon.*

but even the most melancholic consideration on the frailty of men turns into a reason for a deep moral meditation: Allah is greater than anything on earth.

Ghumdān (Yemen)

One of the most astounding Solomonic buildings is the palace of Ghumdān in Yemen, erected, according the tradition referred by Ibn al-Faqīh in his *Kitāb al-Buldān* (tenth century C.E.)[466], for the queen Bilqis, along with two more buildings, reported to be in Salhayn and Baynun, but whose actual whereabouts are unknown. The main features of the royal residence in Ghumdān, however, are described in detail: the palace was exceedingly high and it was bright with colors (white, yellow, green and red)[467]. During the night lamps were lit and their lights glittered through the alabaster walls, being seen even from a distance. In some descriptions, the roof is made of alabaster, allowing the people in the palace to see the birds fly. It should be noted that this description strongly echoes that of the Temple of Solomon according to Islamic sources and it is no coincidence that the Ghumdān complex is even identified by the term *miḥrāb*. On each corner of the building, moreover, there was a gigantic statue of a bronze lion, roaring whenever the wind flew through[468]. This last detail is particularly interesting to us because it reinforces once more the relationship between Solomon and sounding statues that is so dear to the Byzantine and Jewish culture.

The palace, now in ruin, is still standing in Sana'a, an area strongly related with the queen of Sheba, whose kingdom was in fact probably located in the southern part of the Arabian peninsula. Its construction predates Islamic times but it was highly praised for its beauty and for its incredible height – being a 20-storey high tower according to some versions – and its fame penetrated poems and legends of Islam thoroughly. Given this widespread renown and the link with the kingdom of Sheba, it is no wonder, then, that it is one of the sites related to king Solomon.

In general, Yemen is a key territory for the shaping of the legends related to Solomon: it is mostly here, in fact, that the Jewish, Persian and Arabic cultural

[466] Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*, pp. 161-162.

[467] N.N.N. Khoury, *The Dome of the Rock, the Ka'ba, and Ghumdan: Arab Myths and Umayyad Monuments*, in «Muqarnas», 10 (1993), pp. 57-65; J.M. Bloom, *The "Qubbat al-Khadra" and the Iconography of Height in Early Islamic Architecture*, in «Ars Orientalis», 23 (1993), pp. 135-141.

[468] J.M. Rubiera Mata, *Arquitectura en la literatura arabe*, Madrid 1981, pp. 27-44 and 45-54.

threads met, favoring the cross-pollination of the various elements that constitute its rich body. It is no coincidence, for instance, that al-Qazwīnī, in his *Āthar al-Bilād*, related that Solomon's amphorae, those containing the imprisoned jinns, were hidden somewhere in the region[469].

Palmyra (Syria)

Another important site ascribed to Solomon is the Syrian city of Palmyra [ill. 34], or Tadmur in Arabic[470], whose association with the king of Israel springs directly from the Bible: "So Solomon rebuilt Gezer, Lower Beth Horon, Baalath, Tamar in the wilderness" (1 Kings 9:17-18; see also 2 Chronicles, 8:4).

Among others, the erudite Yāqūt (d. 1229 C.E.) in his *Mu'jam al-Buldān* relates the construction of the city by Solomon. He also recounts an interesting story that happened several centuries earlier, which would have brought misfortune and eventually caused the end of the Umayyad dynasty, according to the

[469] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31, but also Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, Rubiera Mata, pp. 65-67.

[470] From the original Aramaic Tadmor means 'palm-tree'.

legend[471]. He narrates the arrival of an expedition in the ghost-city of Tadmur, which led to the violation of the corpse of the last dead queen, found still wearing her jewels and precious cloths. This detail, which seems utterly unrelated to Solomon, will however be included among other interesting Solomonic material, as we have seen earlier on in the chapter.

Baalbek, Lydda and Alexandria

Not far from Palmyra was another site, whose ruins deeply impressed the visitors, and which was reported to be part of the work of Solomon and his jinns, notably the city of Baalbek in Lebanon [ill. 35].

With its imposing remains of the great Roman temples, it inspired awe and admiration in the travelers and also a sense of deep meditation upon the ruins and the frailty of human beings, as al-Harawi tells us[472].

Ibn al-Faqīh, in his *Kitāb al-Buldān*[473], besides the other known places, also mentions Lydda[474], a few miles away from the city of Rama, which,

[471] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, Beirut 1957, 7 vols, II, pp. 17-19.

[472] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Harawī, *Guide des lieux de pèlerinage*, translated with notes by J. Sourdel-Thomine, Damascus 1953, pp. 24, 104.

[473] To be precise, to the question made by Ibn al-Faqīh, whether the city had been built by the king of Israel, the inhabitants replied: "all you city people attribute impressive old buildings to

according to a tradition reported also by St. Jerome, had been built by Solomon himself[475]. It is possible that Lydda had become part of the Solomonic geography, because the ruler ʿAbd al-Malik had given the government of that region to his brother Sulaymān, who lived there, thus probably favoring a superimposition between the two figures.

The historian al-Ṭabarī relates that Solomon had built a city in lower Mesopotamia, called al-Zandaward, and he had ordered the demons to make the iron gates for it; they were transported in Wāsiṭ by al-Ḥajjāj, viceroy of Iraq, when the city was already in ruin. Later on, the caliph al-Manṣūr had them removed and placed in Baghdad and the chronicler says they were still in place during his lifetime and he could have seen them[476]. Here, it is interesting to see that, beside the now familiar theme of the mythical founding by the king of Israel, there is also a hint to his tight relationship with crafty metalwork.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnatī, a twelfth century Arab writer of Spanish origins, instead, narrates that Solomon had built an extraordinary room with pillars in Alexandria, whose material was so pure one could see his reflection in them[477]. Here we are in the presence of another Solomonic *topos*, that is the shining or extraordinary quality of the material.

Persepolis and Pasargadae

Among the most important sites of the Solomonic geography, however, are a few Iranian places, namely Persepolis [ill. 36], Pasargadae [ill. 37] and the Sasanian fire-sanctuary of Āz̲ur Gushnasp. All these sites are particularly relevant, because their association with Solomon was not simply limited to a brief mention in an *adab* account or in the entry of an encyclopedic work,

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jinn and demons but Ludd is far older than Solomon", quoted by Mottahedeh, *The Eastern Travels of Solomon*, p. 249.

[474] Miquel, *La géographie humaine*, IV, p. 98.

[475] *S. Eusebii Hieronymi Stridonensis presbyteri, Commentariorum in Sophoniam prophetam liber unus*, in *PL*, 25, col. 1534a; see also E.D. Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa*, 6 vols, New York 1814, II, p. 388.

[476] Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 20-21.

[477] G. Ferrand, *Les monuments de l'Egypte au XIIe siècle d'après Abu Hamid Al-Andalusi*, in «Mélanges Maspéro», III, Cairo 1935-40, pp. 57-66; al-Gharnāti, *De Grenade à Bagdad. La relation de voyage d'Abu Hamid al-Gharnati (1080 –1168)*, edited and translated by J.-C. Ducène, Paris 2006, pp. 56-58.

demonstrating the popular belief of the time, but they show signs of the lasting interest of the sovereigns for this connection at an official level.

Persepolis and its surrounding[478], sacred sites of the Achaemenids, remained, throughout the Islamic period, a place of frequent visits and intervention. The site of Persepolis was variously connected with Jamshīd, the mythical Persian hero, with Solomon or with the Sasanian monarch Khosrow II, through a process of adaptation of earlier legends to the extant and impressive ruins of the city[479].

Famous was, for instance, the question of Jamshīd's cup, known through poetic references as having magical properties, including predicting the future. ʿAḍud al-Dawla, tenth-century ruler of Fars, for instance, had a famous collection of vessels and when the Seljuk leader Alp Arslān conquered the city in 1067 C.E., he was given a cup, a large turquoise vessel, inscribed with the name of Jamshīd the king, a clear sign that the Jamshīd connection was recognized and exploited as a political tool[480].

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[478] A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, *Le royaume de Salomon: Les Inscriptions persanes des sites achéménides*, in *Le Monde Iranien et l'Islam*, 2 vols, Geneve-Paris 1971, I, pp. 1-41.

[479] P. Soucek, *The influence of Persepolis*, in *Actes du XXIX Congrès des Orientalistes, Études arabes et islamiques*, 4 vols, Paris 1975, I: *Histoire et civilisation*, pp. 195-200.

[480] A story not too dissimilar from that of the cup of Solomon seen in the second chapter.

The Persian hero shared with Solomon an ability to tame demonic entities and to construct marvelous things. The arrival of Jamshīd on his fabulous throne in Babil marked the festival of Nawrūz, the vernal equinox of Persian tradition and, certainly, the description of his seat constituted another similarity between him and Solomon, a further element that ended up favoring a superimposition between them. Here's what al-Ṭabarī says, in describing Jamshīd's reign on the basis of what he calls "Persian sources":

> From the year 150 to the year 250, he fought the demons and *jinn*, causing great slaughter among them and humiliating them. They were subjected [to doing forces labor for him] and to follow his orders. From the year 250 to the year 316, he charged the demons with cutting stones and rocks from the mountains and making marble, gypsum and chalk. They also were directed to erect buildings and baths with [these materials] and with clay. He also charged them with producing depilatories and with transporting, from the oceans, mountains, mines and deserts, everything useful for mankind, such as gold, silver and all other meltable precious metals, as well as different kinds of perfumes and medicines. They carried out all those orders of his. Jamshīd then ordered the manufacture of a glass chariot. He harnessed the demons to it, mounted it, and went on it through the air from his home in Dunbawand to Babil in one day. That was the day Hurmuzruz of Fawardin Mah. Because of the miracle people saw him perform on that occasion, they established the day as New Year's Day. He ordered them to establish this day and the following five as a festival[481].

We recognize in this passage a series of features that are typical of Solomon. The establishment of Nawrūz is all the more interesting, because, in the *Shāhnāma*, the festival is strongly associated with the making of the throne of Jamshīd:

> He used his *farr* to fashion a jeweled / throne, decreeing the demons should raise it / high in the sky, where he sat shining / like the sun, and the world's creatures gathered / around him, standing in awe, scattering / gems at his feet. It was the first of Farvadin, / and Jamshid set that day aside, / naming it Norooz, "new day", / the day he rested, the first of the

[481] Soucek, *The influence of Persepolis*, p. 116, n. 90.

year. / His nobles declared a feast, a festival of wine and song we still celebrate in Jamshid's memory[482].

A solar association is made evident, since the hero is said to be "shining like it" and it is even more meaningful if we consider that this throne is made in correspondence with the festival that has always been associated with the end of the winter and the beginning of spring. It should then be clear why the city of Persepolis, the religious capital of the Achaemenids, where Nawrūz was usually celebrated, has long been known at a popular level in the Islamic world as *Takht-i Jamshīd*, that is 'Throne of Jamshīd'. The Islamic conception, in fact, inherits the Persian idea that 'throne' can indicate both the royal seat, but also, as a *pars pro toto* figure, the entire courtly complex where the king dwells, where his court and his throne is[483].

We know that a clear association between the two characters had already been made by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 759 C.E.). Moreover, some of the visual themes recurring in the very decoration of Persepolis – such as the fight between the king and the animals, possibly seen as embodiments of evil spirits, or the throne supported by the subject peoples, that could be easily read as the levitating throne of the legends – certainly helped strengthen this association.
The earliest traditions putting the site in relation with Solomon date back also to the eighth century C.E., when it was claimed that the site was a place where the king had been on a visit. By the tenth century, however, it was common knowledge that he had actually built the city – the name being *Masjid Sulaymān* or 'Solomon's Mosque'. Moreover, there are several examples of Solomon-related inscriptions in Persepolis. The most ancient was left by shayk Abū Isḥāq ibn Maḥmūd, Injuyid ruler, in 738 (1360 C.E.) in a meditation on the vanity of things, an *ubi sunt* referred to the great kings of the past, culminating with a clear reference to the flying throne of Solomon, which, despite his greatness, disappeared in the wind like every other earthly thing[484]. The same idea will be

[482] Online translation from the *Shāhnāma* by R.J. Newman, available at www.richardjnewman.com/2010/03/21/norouz-pirouz-eid-moborak-happy-iranian-new-year (last consulted 13 September 2013).

[483] In this, the concept perfectly mirrors the Sasanian notion of the royal palace as 'seat' of the king. In the second chapter, for instance, we have seen this concept applied to the *Takht-i Ṭāqdīs* of Khosrow II. I.J. Winter, *"Seat of Kingship"/ "A Wonder to Behold": The Palace as Construct in the Ancient near East*, in «Ars Orientalis», 23 (1993), pp. 27-55.

[484] Melikian-Chirvani, *Le royaume de Salomon*, pp. 20-21. On this point, see also Mottahedeh, *The Eastern Travels of Solomon*, pp. 254-265.

repeated again in a later inscription dated 1423 C.E. by the Timurid prince Ibrāhīm Sulṭān ibn Shāhrukh, who copied part of the older one, and again, in others composed in the following centuries, thus making it a theme of reflection linked to the site for at least three hundred years[485].

The interest toward the association between the site and king Solomon had begun to appear, at an official level, during the thirteenth century C.E. and cannot be considered as the simple outcome of a widespread popular belief; it rather represents an actual exploitation of this extant tradition, almost certainly depending on an interest nurtured at an official level among the ruling élite, in the whole area of Fars. Traces of this deep interaction are constituted by an interesting body of inscriptions, thoroughly investigated by Melikian-Chirvani, whose results I am here summarizing.

Among them, are three series of fragmentary inscriptions (both in Arabic and Persian) found in the area of Cyrus' tomb at Pasargadae [ill. 37]. In one of them, written in Persian, there is a clear reference to the Salghurid *atabeg* Sa'd ibn Zanjī[486], mentioned as "heir to the kingdom of Solomon". The text is

[485] *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25, 29-30, 35.

[486] The Salghurids were an Iranian dynasty that ruled in the area of Fars, acting as vassals of Seljuk, Khwarazmian and Ilkhanid sovereigns (1148–1282 C.E.). The *atabegs* were the notables acting as tutors of the Seljuk princes.

likely dated 1215/1216 C.E.[487]. The first question to ask is whether this eulogistic expression has an historical, geographical or spiritual meaning, what was, in other words, this Solomonic heritage claimed by the ruler. Given the recurrence of this title in an Arabic dedication text and also in Ibn Zanjī's *ṭuğrā*, it is clear that it must have had a monumental, official character and not only a literary one, thus making the connection between Solomon and the rulers of Fars current and the expression "heir to Solomon's kingdom" an actual dynastic title from the thirteenth century onwards[488].

At a popular level, as we have seen, the explanation could have been provided by the superimposition between Solomon and Jamshīd. However, several authors, like al-Thaʿālibī (eleventh century C.E.) and Yāqūt (thirteenth century C.E.) reject this identification between the two figures, therefore it seems difficult to justify this Solomonic heritage in geographical terms, on the basis of this widespread popular belief, if scholars and elites did not approve of it.

The scholar then claims that the origin of the expression has to be found in the themes of Sufi mystique, particularly through the poetry of the time, such as that of Saʿdī, who explicitly mentions Solomon as "king of esoteric knowledge" and his throne as "court of secret" and praises the Salghurid ruler through this initiated language, thus putting him in relation with the spiritual heritage of Solomon[489]. The king of Israel embodies the perfect kind of knowledge, since he can understand the language of animals, key to the exoteric knowledge of Sufism, and he is mentioned by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī in his poem as the perfect man[490].

This necessity of claiming this spiritual heritage, then, probably explains why the interior of Cyrus's tomb was transformed into a *miḥrāb*, quite likely by the same Ibn Zanjī, and it is still known, at a popular level, as the burial place of Solomon's mother or also her throne (*Takht-i Mādar-i Sulaymān*), a notion which was recounted even by Ibn al-Balkhī in his *Fārsnāma*[491].

The fact that the "heir to Solomon's kingdom" was a title unrelated with a strict geographical idea but depending on the pervasive power of Sufi ideas seems moreover confirmed by its usage in India, where it is found in several

[487] Melikian-Chirvani, *Le royaume de Salomon*, p. 5.

[488] *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

[489] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[490] *Ibid.*, pp. 10-13.

[491] Melikian-Chirvani, *Le royaume de Salomon*, p. 18.

epigraphical monumental contexts, twelve years after its first apparition in Fars, in an area where the mystic influence of Sufism is well attested[492].
This strong association lasted long, encompassing several other media, not simply the field of monumental epigraphy. Particularly during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries C.E. – but this custom might have begun already in the fourteenth – the image of king Solomon surrounded by his court of demons and faithful attendants, usually receiving the queen Bilqis, was used to preface beautiful illuminated manuscripts, a custom limited to the school of miniatures of Shiraz, which is by no coincidence in the heart of the Fars region[493].

Takht-i Sulaymān

The other major Iranian site to be taken into account is the one nowadays known as *Takht-i Sulaymān*, literally 'Throne of Solomon' [ill. 38a-38b]. It very likely corresponds, as Minorsky demonstrated[494], to the ancient Āz̲ur Gushnasp, the great fire temple in the area of Shīz, where the Sasanian sovereigns went after having been crowned in Ctesiphon for praying. The place is also likely to have corresponded to the site of the famous *Takht-i Ṭāqdīs* of Khosrow II, where the revolving-throne of the king was located, before emperor Heraclius partially destroyed it. The polygraph al-Masʿūdī, in fact, describes the site by mentioning the representations of the sky and stars, and its account clearly echoes the stories told by Firdawsī and al-Thaʿālibī of Nīshāpūr discussed in the second chapter[495].

The site, even today, is particularly fascinating; the ruins lie in a volcanic area 30 km northeast of Takāb, at 2200 meters above sea, on a 60 meter hill, formed through the sediments carried by the water overflowing from the nearby lake, whose thermal waters, rich in calcium, have created a sort of natural oval platform (ca. 350x550 meters). The geological situation has created

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[492] *Ibid*., pp. 16-17.

[493] Bagči, *A New Theme of the Shirazi Frontispiece Miniatures: the Divan of Solomon*.

[494] V. Minorsky, *Roman and Byzantine Campaigns in Atropatene*, in «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Asian Studies, University of London», 11 (1944), pp. 243-265. For a good summary see A. Mousavi – T. Daryaee, *The Sasanian Empire: An Archaeological Survey, c. 220-AD 640*, in *A Companion to the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, ed. by D.T. Potts, 2 vols, London 2012, II, pp. 1076-1094, particularly pp. 1085-1089.

[495] For a detailed study of the place with sources see A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, *Le Livre des rois, miroir du destin. Takht-e Soleyman et la symbolique du Shah-Name*, in «Studia Iranica», 20 (1991), pp. 33-148.

a lake 120 m deep, whose temperature is a warm 21° C, a factor which has certainly contributed to the sacralization of the site over time.

It came to be occupied at a monumental level in the second half of the fifth century C.E., thus being chosen for the fire temple of Āz̲ur Gushnasp (literally, 'the fire of the stallion'), one of the main fire sanctuaries of Sasanian times. The place, already quite central, became even more important under Khosrow II, who made it mandatory for the kings to receive a sacral investiture there, after the political one in Ctesiphon.
The Sasanians had surrounded the lake with a massive circular wall (13m high) with 38 towers, including the vast sanctuary, with its temples but also the royal residences. The ruins of this impressive complex were known during the Middle Ages and they were often described by travelers, a fact, as we will see in the next chapter, which might have originated fascinating legends[496].

[496] U. Monneret de Villard, *Le leggende orientali sui Magi evangelici*, Città del Vaticano 1952.

The first modern expedition occurred in 1818, when sir Robert Ker Porter visited it[497]; after his was the account of H.C. Rawlinson, who however, thought the ruins belonged to Ecbatana[498]. A detailed study, including a collection of ancient sources mentioning it, was undertaken by Williams Jackson in 1906[499]. Then followed the archaeological surveys of Urham Pope[500] and finally a series

[497] R. Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Bablylonia*, 2 vols, London 1822, I, pp. 556-562.

[498] H.C. Rawlinson, *Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Persian Kurdistan, to the Ruins of Takht-i Soleïmán, and from Thence by Zenján and Tárom, to Gílán, in October and November 1838, with a Memoir on the Site of the Atropateian Ecbatana*, in «Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London», 10 (1840), pp. 1-64.

[499] A.V. Williams Jackson, *Persia, Past and Present*, New York 1906, pp. 124-143, whose description is particularly evocative.

[500] A.U. Pope – M. Crane – D.N. Wilber, *The Institute's Survey of Persian architecture, preliminary report on Takht-e Suleiman*, in «Bulletin of the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology», 7 (1937), pp. 71-105.

of excavations done by the German Archaeological Institute in Tehran[501], which established that the site corresponded to the Sasanian Ganzak and not to the Parthian Phraaspa, as Minorsky believed[502].

It has long been questioned whether its actual, modern name, is a popular, relatively recent addition, made at some point during the Mongol era, since the site was mentioned as Soghurluq, both by the historian Rashīd al-Dīn and by Ḥamd Allāh Mustawfī during the fourteenth century C.E. However, Melikian-Chirvani has convincingly argued that the toponym *Takht-i Sulaymān* must have been in use already during the eleventh century C.E., as the poet Qaṭrān-i Tabrīzī (1009-1072 C.E.) employs it in a poem dedicated to Abū al-Khalīl Ja'far, small ruler of that area. After the fall of the Sasanian rulers, in fact, the site, partly destroyed, was visited by the locals and revived; the palace was probably restored during the twelfth century and well into the thirteenth, under Abaqa Khan, who ascended the throne in 1265 C.E.[503]. According to the scholar, the strong correlation between the site and king Solomon was prompted, in a way not dissimilar from what had happened in the area of Persepolis, by a series of elements linked with Sufi mystique. Whether that is the case, it remained the place for the sovereigns of the region until the Safavids in the sixteenth century[504] and several complexes of ruins nearby still retain a Solomonic toponymy: *Zandān-i Sulaymān* ('Prison of Solomon'), *Tawīla-yi Sulaymān* ('Stable of Solomon') and *Takht-i Bilqis* ('Throne of Bilqis'). The so-called prison was a 100 m deep crater where it was believed he kept his jinns prisoners. It is true, in general, that the Solomonic allure of the site was further enhanced by its topographic features. It should not be forgotten, as we have seen in the second chapter, that the ruins of the fire temple stood in front of a volcanic lake, located on a majestic *plateau*. It is very likely that this morphological element evoked the encounter between Solomon and the queen of Sheba, thus making the association between the site and the king's famous *ṣarḥ* even more powerful.

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[501] R. Naumann, *Die Ruinen von Tacht-e Suleiman und Zendan-e Suleiman und Umgebung*, Berlin 1977; D. Huff, *Recherches archéologiques à Takht-i Suleiman (Iran), centre religieux royal sassanide*, in «Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres de Paris», 4 (1978), pp. 774-789; D. Huff, *Takht-i Suleiman: Sasanian Fire sanctuary and Mongolian Palace*, in *Persiens antike Pracht*, ed. by T. Stöllner *et al.*, Bochum 2004, pp. 462-471.

[502] Minorsky, *Roman and Byzantine Campaigns in Atropatene*.

[503] *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54, 73.

[504] *Ibid.*, p. 147. See also A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, *Les frises du Shâh Nâme dans l'architecture iranienne sous les Ilkhân*, in «Studia Iranica», 18 (1996), pp. 1-127.

The Spanish Kingdom of Solomon: Cordova

The last example I want to mention in this survey is the case of Spain, which is particularly interesting because it is an area claiming a strong Solomonic heritage ever since Late Antiquity. As we have seen in the first chapter, the memory of the spoils of the Temple was still present and prompted the production of a series of bronze objects whose manufacture, was carried out by Arab-speaking artisans, and whose destination could have equally appreciated both in a Christian and in a Muslim context. After Toledo and its fabulous table, other cities boasted Solomonic bonds, particularly in the Muslim context of al-Andalus.

The earliest case is probably that of Cordova, which became the seat of the last Umayyad ruler, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muʿāwiya, escaped from certain death in 750 C.E. after the rise to power of the ʻAbbasid dynasty in Syria. We have already seen that his family had exploited the Solomonic imagery in various ways, in Jerusalem and in the bath area of Khirbat al-Mafjar. Cordova seems no exception, since the site of its main mosque, as it appears, had been for a long time the garbage pit of the city, until Solomon had ordered his jinns to clean it, since "here will be constructed a house in which God is worshipped"[505]. And this, of course, had happened under the Umayyads. The author who refers this kind of self-fulfilling prophecy lived during the twelfth century C.E., therefore one would imagine that his account was simply written *a posteriori*. However, the story of the construction of this building and its legendary aura recalls another ʻUmayyad architectural precedent, namely the mosque of Damascus[506], which, like the one in Spain, had allegedly[507] been built on the site of a church (St. John in Syria, St. Vincent in Spain). Apparently, in order to build his mosque, al-Walīd had destroyed the Christian church of St. John, causing the irate reaction of the Byzantine emperor. Supposedly, during an encounter occurred between him and al-Farazdaq, al-Walīd's poet would

[505] Ibn Bashkuwāl (XII century), quoted by al-Maqqarī, see N.N. Khoury, *The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the Tenth Century*, in «Muqarnas» 13 (1996), pp. 80-98, p. 84.

[506] On the shared sacred topography of the city of Damascus see for instance J.W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*, Oxford-New York 2002, pp. 29-47.

[507] However it is not really sure whether the account is authentic; there are no actual traces of St. Vincent. Such a story could have been fabricated in order to make it resonate with the illustrious precedent of Damascus.

have told him that his caliph had been endowed with the wisdom of Solomon and David. The Solomonic allure of the episode, quite evidently apocryphal, is further enhanced by the finding of a tablet with strange characters on the site of the mosque, which turned out during the age of king Solomon himself[508]. It seems therefore possible to revise a parallelism between the case of Cordova and that of Damask.

Granada: the Sea and the Palanquin of Solomon

Another quite striking example of this tendency in Spain, however, regards the city of Granada. This time, as we will see, the connection between the heritage of the king of Israel and the ruler of the city, does not depend on the political usage of Solomon made by the Umayyad dynasty, but it will be prompted by the famous Hebrew poet and philosopher Solomon ibn Gabirol, also known as Avicebron (ca. 1021-1058 C.E.), thoroughly studied by Frederick Bargebuhr[509]. His whole poetic *corpus* is inspired by the biblical books ascribed to Solomon; moreover, the poet names himself 'Solomon minor', and calls king Solomon his ancestor. He recurs to this insisted Solomonic imagery, particularly in several poems dedicated to Isma'il ibn Naghrālla and his son Yūsuf, both serving as chancellors of the Zirid kings of Granada, probably with the idea of praising the artistic patronage of the two, by inscribing it in a sort of 'Solomonic Renaissance'.

In a poem dedicated to a fabulous palace allegedly constructed by Yūsuf, for instance, there is an interesting passage, worth noting:

> The dome is like the Palanquin of Solomon / hanging above the room's splendours, / that rotates in its circumference, shining like / bidellium and

[508] "[…] lorsque Wélid commença la construction de la mosquée de Damas, on trouva dans le mur de cet édifice une table de pierre avec une inscription grecque. Plusieurs chrétiens et juifs à qui on la montra n'ayant pu la déchiffrer, elle fut envoyée à Wehb, fils de Mounebbih, qui la reconnut pour une inscription de l'époque de Salomon, fils de David"; al-Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, V, pp. 361-362. The content of the tablet is a *memento mori* and a reminder of the transience of things.

[509] The scholar first dedicated an article to the question (see following footnote), and then issued a monograph, F.P. Bargebuhr, *The Alhambra: a Cycle of Studies on the Eleventh Century in Moorish Spain*, Berlin 1968.

sapphire and pearls. / Thus it is in the daytime, while at dusk it looks like the sky whose stars form constellations[510].

This famous dome, notable because it is said to be a revolving cupola, is compared to the palanquin of Solomon, which we have already mentioned in the in the first chapter, while discussing the possible origin of the expression *uevre Salemon* in the work of Marie de France[511]. In this case, the idea of a sky-effect is strongly connected with a tradition extant in the territory, because it immediately recalls the basin, built in Madīnat al-Zahrā' (beautiful caliphal residence built by 'Abd al-Raḥmān II)[512], and filled with quicksilver, whose glittering and flashing effect was said to imitate the sky[513].

Even more meaningful, however, would be the insertion of this element in the long and flourishing tradition of rotating domes and sky-like cupolas that we have described in the second chapter, from Nero to Khosrow II. In the same tradition is Quṣayr ʿAmra, the famous desert palace of al-Walīd, with its domed ceilings, representing skies and constellations. Probably begun as a simple decorative borrowing deriving from Roman models, this kind of depiction later on became a conscious symbolic choice[514], echoing the tradition of universal and cosmic kingship; this figurative program calls for and therefore found its way into celebrative poetry.

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[510] F.P. Bargebuhr, *The Alhambra Palace of the Eleventh Century*, in «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», 19 (1956), pp. 192-258, p. 199.

[511] See above, pp. 48-49.

[512] K. Krüger, *Die Palaststadt Madinat al-Zahra bei Cordoba als Zentrum kalifaler Machtausübung*, in *Visualisierung von Herrsachft*, ed. by F.A. Bauer, in «Byzas», 5 (2006), pp. 233-271.

[513] The account is given by Bargebhur according to the version of al-Maqqarī, Bargebuhr, *The Alhambra Palace of the Eleventh Century*, pp. 228-229: "In the middle of this *majlis* was a huge cistern filled with quicksilver. On each side of this *majlis* were 8 doors joined to (vaulting) arches of ivory and ebony, encrusted with gold and various kinds of jewels, and which rested upon columns of coloured alabaster and clear beryl. Whenever the sun entered these doors, and whenever its rays struck the ceiling and the walls of the *majlis*, then a light would be created which would suspend eyesight. Whenever an-Nasir wished to awe a man present in his company, he would signal one of his Slav slaves to put in motion that quicksilver, thereby light would be produced like lightning flashes which would arrest the hearts of those assembled, until it would appear to all in the *majlis*, as long as the quicksilver was in motion, that the place was rotating about them. It was said that this *majlis* circled and oriented toward the sun […]".

[514] O. Grabar, *The Alhambra*, London 1978, pp. 148-152.

It is in fact interesting to note that the association between the palanquin and the rotating dome implies a logic gap: nowhere in the Bible it is stated that Solomon's covered litter had a cupola similar to the one mentioned here: it is only renown for the beauty of its ornaments, material and decoration. We either have to suppose the existence of a parallel tradition that expanded on the biblical description or, more likely, we have to imagine that these elements, strongly associated with the idea of cosmic kingship, naturally clustered around the figure of Solomon. After all, it is a process that we have already seen happening: the whole imagery in the Magnaura attributed to the king an iconography of distinctively Eastern origins, where Iranian elements merged effortlessly with the biblical heritage.
In the same poem, however, there is also a second strong reference to Solomon:

> […] And there is a full "sea", matching Solomon's Sea / yet not resting on ox; /but there are lions, in phalanx on its rim / seeming to roar for pray – these whelps, / whose bosom are like wells that gush / spurts up from their mouths like streams. / And there are hinds embedded in the channels / hollowed out as water spouts, / to sprinkle the plants in the beds / and to shed on the lawns clear waters […][515]

The fountain stood in the middle of a marvelous palace, which, behind the poetic veil, could have echoed some actual elements of eleventh century Alhambra, partly restored by the Ibn Naghrālla family; the image of the basin, then, would result quite important not only for the Solomonic imagery displayed but for the disclosure of the possible recipient of the whole poem, probably Ibn Naghrālla himself, as suggested by the following strong panegyrical passage, where the royal imagery is clearly evoked through the simile of the lion-whelp: "They have raised him to be like their king so that he became / a lion-whelp among them, and they became like oxen".
As Bargebuhr rightly puts it "with the insertion of the twelve lions into his fountain Yūsuf ibn Naghrālla achieved a unification of the royal Solomonic throne insignia, as described in the first book of Kings […] with the Solomonic Temple basin pattern" [516].

It is then now agreed that the lions of the famous fountain of the lions in the Alhambra of Granada [ill. 39] had been made already during the eleventh

[515] Bargebuhr, *The Alhambra Palace of the Eleventh Century*, p. 199
[516] *Ibid*., p. 208. For the passage on the basin, see the full passage quoted in chapter I, p. 32-34.

century C.E., while the basin was not part of the original composition and was added three centuries later, as the inscription on it demonstrates[517]. The reason to predate the statues seems to be supported by the description made in the poem.

An interesting and direct precedent for this fountain is probably the famous basin imported to Cordova from Constantinople and adorned with a series of statues produced from the local workshop that were certainly meant to imitate an illustrious model, wanted by the emperor Justinian in the portico of Haghia Sophia:

> [The caliph] an-Naṣīr placed this [the basin] in the sleeping quarters of his eastern mansion, known al-Mūnis [or better, al-Mu'nis]. He placed in the main basin twelve fountain niches in a circle and lions to spout the water from ablutions of the common people. On the right side of the Gynsiyikis he made a "sea" with the water one span in depth and one stair above the "sea" so that the priests would pass through. He also placed opposite the basin cisterns for rain water, and he formed twelve lions, twelve panthers, twelve deer, eagles, hares, claves and crows, all in twelve, so that water spouted from their mouth for the ablutions of the priests alone. He also named the place Leontarion […][518]

[517] It refers to the reign of Muhammad V (1354-1359 and 1362-1391 C.E.).

[518] Bargebuhr, *The Alhambra Palace of the Eleventh Century*, pp. 217-218.

The open reference to a "sea" is, again, quite revealing and it is no coincidence that this fountain stood right outside the church of Divine Wisdom, which possibly constituted Justinian's direct response to the Temple of Solomon.

> [The caliph] an-Nasir placed this [the basin] in the sleeping quarters of his eastern mansion, known al al-Munis. He placed it upon twelve red-gold statues, encrusted with precious pearls, coming from among those statues manufactured in the [royal] workshop in Cordova. (Among these 12 statues were found): a lion, flanked on his right by a gazelle, on his left by a crocodile; on the opposite site was (a group consisting of) a dragon, an eagle and an elephant. On the remaining two sides were first a dove together with a falcon and a peacock and a hen with a cock and a vulture. All these statues consisted of gold encrusted with precious jewels, and water poured from their mouths[519].

Even the idea of a set of twelve animals decorating a fountain should sound familiar. It will be remembered that Ville-Patlagean, in discussing the possible sources of inspiration for the twelve animals sitting on the steps of the throne of Solomon in rabbinic literature, proposed a series of statues, erected on pillars and supporting a basin in the palace complex of Constantinople[520].

Such an association is all the more significant if we read the description of another basin made by the Byzantine writer Eustathius Macrembolites (XI-XII century C.E.) in his novel *Hysminia and Hysmine*.

> And upon that basin was a gilt eagle receiving the water. The eagle stretched forth his wings as if he desired to be let loose. A newly born goat, kneeling on her forelegs, drinks the water; and the goatherd, sitting by the goat, strokes her udder; the goat, however, is not water-tight, so that the water runs out through holes and fails to keep the outflow of the goat. A hare, sitting together with the others on the circumference, to the right of the goat's forefeet, digs out a spring of water in proportion to his body and wets his entire face. There also sits on the edge a swallow and a peacock and a dove and a rooster, all of which Hephaestus made and the hand of Daedalus fashioned. From their lips run forth water and the outflow of this water endows the birds with voices[521].

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[519] The passage is again reported by al-Maqqarī, see *ibid*., pp. 214-215.

[520] See above, p. 171.

[521] Bargebuhr, *The Alhambra Palace of the Eleventh Century*, p. 219.

The excerpt is quite detailed and precise in explaining the water-discharging mechanisms and it makes it clear that the fountain described is made by a series of *automata*, given their metallic and technical nature ("gilt", "which Hephaestus made", "the hand of Daedalus fashioned", "holes", etc.). Even though the context is literary and probably later than our throne setting in Constantinople, it once more bears witness to the engineering tradition of the city, to the point that one is tempted to take this account as an accurate description of an actual basin. The moving animals on the steps of the rabbinic legend, then, gain even more strength considering this possibility. They do not seem a sheer invention but, once more, the transfiguration of *realia*.

To go back to Spain, however, there is another context of comparison worth mentioning, both for its geographical and chronological proximity to Granada, that is the city of Bijāya, on the Maghrebi coast[522]. Two poems composed by ʿAbd al-Jabbār ibn Muḥammad ibn Hamdīs (d. 1135 C.E.) record that that al-Manṣūr (r. 1088-1105 C.E.), one of the Hammadid rulers, had a fine palace, whose interior marble courts resembled crystal, with a pool surrounded by crouching marble lions, through which flew the water, as did from gold and silver trees around, or from the birds among the branches. Apparently, the palace was the work of masters coming from al-Qalʿa, the capital of the Hammamid dynasty. Once more, we have a literary work as a source; it could be possible that the description is purely evocative. However, what matters in this case is not really the likelihood of the verses, rather, the continuity of a tradition of royal display.

Such a setting cannot but remind of the Palace of the Tree in Baghdad, described in the famous account of the visit of the ambassadors occurred in 917, and already mentioned in the second chapter, as the possible model for Theophilus' tree[523]. The only notable difference is that in Baghdad the lions were alive and kept chained, while in Bijāya they are simply statues. Also, the Iraqi setting was much more elaborate, since on either side of the palace, to the right and left of the water tank, were also life-sized figure in two rows, 15 horsemen mounted upon their mares, armed with javelins, giving the impression to be attacking each other. It is not clear from the description

[522] See also M. Jenkins, *Al-Andalus, Crucible of the Mediterranean*, in *The Art of Medieval Spain: A. D. 500 – 1200*, New York 1994, pp. 73-86.

[523] Le Strange, *A Greek Embassy to Baghdad in 917 a.d.*, pp. 35-47.

whether they were actual *automata* or simple statues, but the ensemble must have been highly impressive.

Lions and Griffins: a Lost Solomonic Throne?

In the body of poems describing the Spanish fountains, there is no extant record, to my knowledge, of automatic mechanism, even though the images evoked by the poets in describing the statues always focus on the illusionistic effects of animation and life-like quality. In general, fountains and water-games played a fundamental role in the aesthetic of Mediaeval Spanish garden and palaces, as the body of extant poetry clearly shows[524]. So widespread and pervasive is this idea that several famous hollow bronze statues, some of them found in Spain, have traditionally been interpreted as fountain-pieces or fountainheads.

Among them is the famous Pisa griffin [ill. 40], a piece 107 cm high, 90 cm long and 46 cm wide, located on the top of the cathedral at least from the beginning of the fifteenth century, but probably even much earlier[525]. It is now generally accepted that it arrived in the city as part of the material ransacked by the Pisan fleet after one of the battles won in the Mediterranean against the Muslims, sometimes between the eleventh and the twelfth century C.E. The provenance of the griffin has long being discussed and several hypothesis have been put forward, including southern Italy, Fatimid Egypt, Khorasan (Iran) and Spain, with a proposal for dating ranging from the late tenth century to the twelfth C.E. Nowadays the most credited hypothesis, based on stylistic comparison, is that it came from Spain, since it closely resembles similar bronze objects, like the Monzón lion [ill. 41] found among the ruins of the Islamic fortress near Palencia, or the deer of Madīnat al-Zahrā' [ill. 42], given the similar treatment of the decoration of these animals, that seems to reproduce a rich textile, and the way spatial partitions are underlined.

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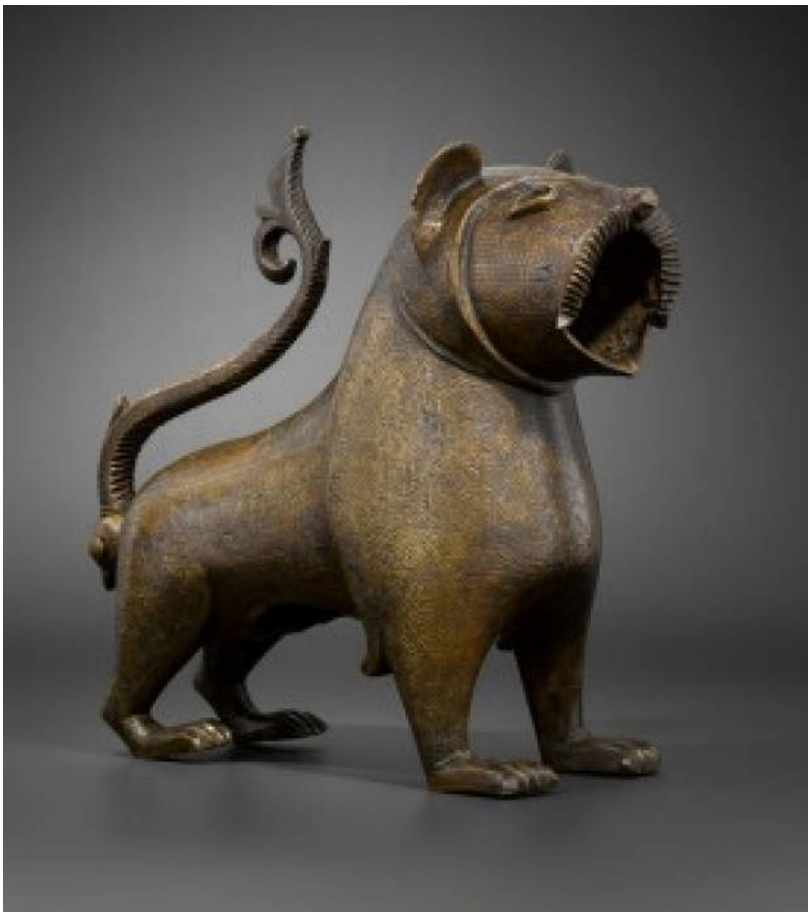
[524] See for instance the appendix of texts in Bargebuhr, *The Alhambra Palace of the Eleventh Century*, pp. 233-236.

[525] For a full bibliography on the subject, see A. Contadini – R. Camber – P. Northover, *Beasts that roared: the Pisa Griffin and the New York Lion*, in *Cairo to Kabul. Afghan and Islamic Studies presented to Ralph Pinder-Wilson*, ed. by W. Ball – L. Harrow, London 2002, pp. 65-83. On the presence of the griffin on the Pisa cathedral and its influence on Tuscan art during the Middle Ages, see V. Ascani, *Prede-reliquie-memorie d'Oltremare e la loro ricezione nella Toscana romanica*, in *l'Occidente, Bisanzio e l'Islam*, ed. by A.C. Quintavalle, Milano 2007, pp. 637-657.

Other bronze objects of Spanish origin, like the Louvre peacock [pl. 1], the Cagliari aquamanile [ill. 43], the quadruped in Bargello display common similarities, even though not necessarily the same function. Moreover, the textile-like decorations can to be found on actual thirteenth century Spanish fabrics, while the Kufic characters of the inscription find correspondence with others found on Spanish objects. It would then seem plausible that the griffin

reached Tuscany after one of the military victories of the Pisans against Muslim Spain, possibly after the Balearic conquest of 1114 C.E.

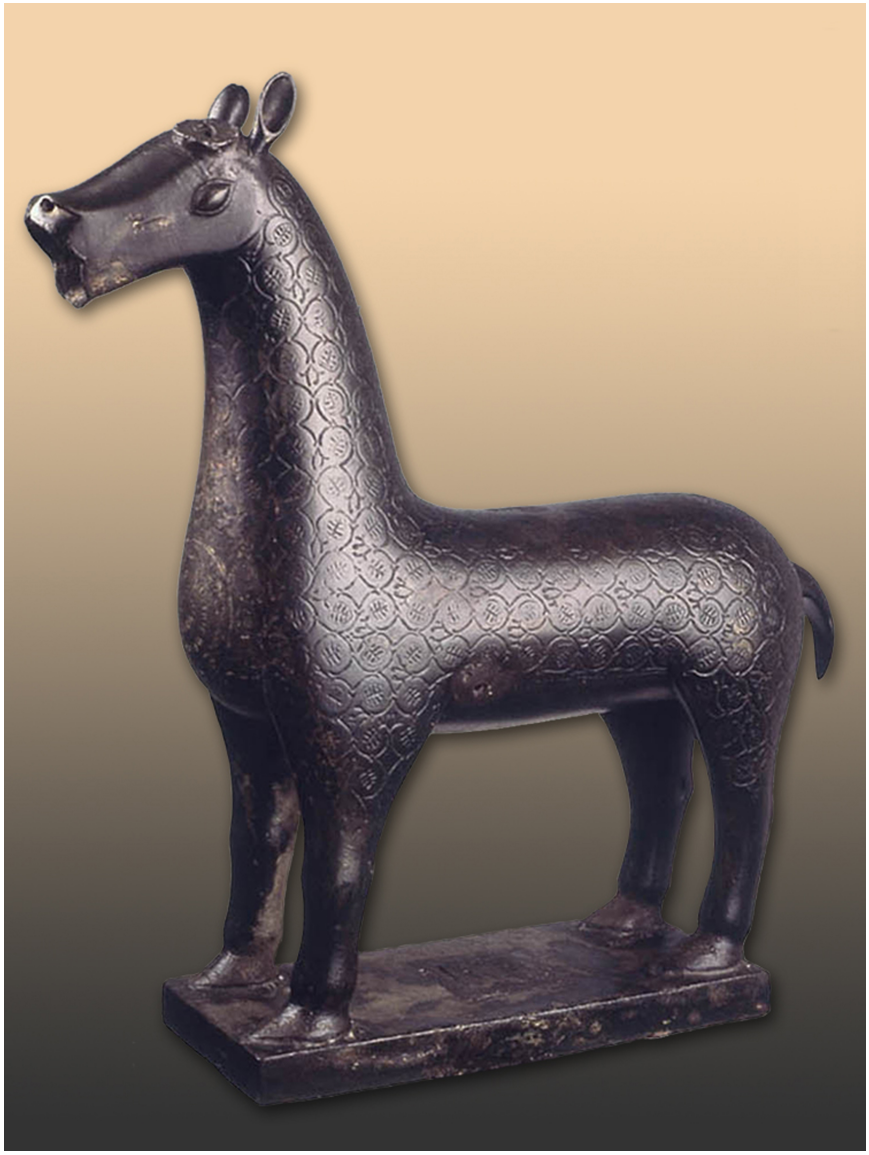


It is finely engraved with beautiful decorations and there is also an inscription written in Arabic, variously dated between the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century C.E.

What is particularly interesting is that, after the careful study carried out by Anna Contadini, it has been shown that it is hollow inside or, more precisely, "inside [it] and attached to the rear is a bowl-shaped vessel with slightly everted rims opening towards the front of the animal"[526]. A similar feature has been discovered in the so-called New York lion [ill. 44], another piece, which is clearly to be connected to the griffin for stylistic, material and functional reasons. They are both constructed with the indirect lost wax casting, have

[526] Contadini, *Beasts that roared*, p. 65; A. Contadini, *Translocation and Transformation: Some Middle Eastern Objects in Europe*, in *The Power of Things and the Flow of Cultural Transformations, Art and Culture between Europe and Asia*, ed. by L.E. Saurma – Jeltsch and A. Eisenbeiss, Berlin-München 2010, pp. 42-65.

similar proportions, the body parts were cast separately and they are supported by a similar square-section rod. The incised decoration and the Kufic inscriptions are very close in both content and style, and the inner hollow structure corresponds quite nicely.



The two pieces have been studied in close comparison, in order to advance an hypothesis which could account for this feature; from the analysis carried out on these objects, in fact, it has resulted clear that they were not meant to be part of a fountain, or, if they were, there is no trace of a hydraulic system, which could channel the water and spit it outside, thus accounting for this function. It has been proposed, instead, that they were meant to emit sounds, produced by inserting bellows that could pump air through the back opening into the hollow

rear cavity, which, acting almost as a bag-pipe, would have allowed the sound to come out of the mouth of the animals.

Although the actual context of provenance of these two animals is not ascertained, and it is not even possible to state with certainty whether it was the same one for both objects, the symbolic relevance of a lion and of a griffin, both capable of emitting sounds, cannot be underestimated. We will remember that hollow lions standing as guardians of Solomonic palaces, like those roaring in the Yemenite palace of Ghumdān, were part of the cultural heritage of Islam. This notion must have been utterly reinforced by the Byzantine use of Oriental animal-imagery in the celebrated display in the Magnaura. We can be sure that

the tales of the Byzantine wonders had reached the Spanish reigns, both Christian and Muslims, given the intense diplomatic relationship between the two courts, continuously reinforced by gifts, importation of material and models, as we have seen for the case of the Byzantine basin, not to mention the presence of Jewish intermediaries. But even without that, the Islamic legends related to king Solomon had incorporated, as we have seen, the haggadic material regarding the throne.

Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the Islamic technology was particularly advanced in this field. In the second chapter we have mentioned the most famous and renowned treatises about *automata*, in discussing the

knowledge and the expertise of Islamic engineers in Baghdad. However, very seldom quoted but quite important in this specific context, is the eleventh century work of Ibn Khalaf al-Murādī, the *Kitāb al-asrār fī natā'ij al-afkār* (*Book of the secrets resulting from the thoughts*) surviving only in a partial thirteenth century copy (Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. or. 152), which collects together the projects of 31 elaborated automatic machines, almost all of his own invention[527]. What is interesting for us is that the author was active in Al-Andalus and, even though we do not have any specific detail about his life and career, it is not unlikely to imagine that he was employed by some of the sovereigns of the time. The quality of his surviving projects and drawings, that include war machines and other automatic devices, makes it easy to imagine that he could have easily devised and constructed also an imitation of the Byzantine throne. Of course, I am not suggesting that the two bronze statues have to be ascribed to the context of his production – since we do not even know whether his projects were actually ever realized and for whom – but it is certain that from a strictly technological point of view, Andalusian Spain could accomplish highly refined results when it came to *automata*.

Unfortunately, we do not have enough elements to recreate a specific context of pertinence. Nevertheless, it should also be noted and stressed as an interesting fact that most of the latest version of the rabbinic accounts discussed earlier, those indulging on the spectacular effects of the mechanisms of throne of Solomon, were, in fact, compiled in Spain. Maybe it is a simple coincidence, depending on the presence of a strong Jewish community on the territory, interested in these *haggadot*; however, this fact could also be taken as an indirect sign of the vitality, success and circulation of such material, which maybe resonated with particular strength within a certain environment. Spain, after all, reunited together the heritage of his Christian, Jewish and Muslim inhabitants, which shared in equal measure a strong interest toward the king of Israel.

[527] The manuscript has been recently studied and reproduced in *facsimile*, *Il libro dei segreti risultanti dai pensieri*, Milano 2008, thanks to the emir of Qatar, Hamad ibn Khālifa al-Thānī, who financed the project. Some of the *automata* and devices have also been reconstructed.

Appendix III
Solomon and the Mountains

The widespread notion of Solomon's ability to fly in Islamic culture helps to explain the association between impressive geographical landmarks, such as mountains and high peaks, and the legends of the king of Israel. In this short appendix, I will mention few examples of this branch of the story, which I did not insert in the chapter, because it would have taken my analysis too far in time and space.

The most impressive and highly venerated of these places is the sacred rock that raises (ca. 130 m) in the middle of the surrounding plains in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, which is called 'Throne of Solomon'[528], often mentioned in Kyrgyz legends. It is a sacred area, still hosting hundreds of pilgrims every year, often Sufis.

The reasons for such a toponym could certainly depend on the Islamic influence of the place. We know, for instance, that the rulers who passed through Osh (traditionally a commercial hub in central Asia), erected buildings there. Babur himself, founder of the Moghul dynasty, built there a pavilion, which is still there nowadays:

> To the southeast of the walled town lies a symmetrical mountain, known as the Bara Koh; on the top of this, Sultan Mahmud Khan built a retreat (*hajira*) and lower down, on its shoulder, I, in 902 A.H. (1496 C.E.) built another, having a porch. Though his lies the higher, mine is better placed, the whole of town and the suburbs being at its foot[529].

Nowadays, the place retains its connections with the king of Israel and some oral accounts relate that the place corresponded to Solomon's own tomb[530]. However, it is possible that the presence of legends related to king Solomon were to be attributed to the strong Jewish presence, attested in the area ever since the VI century for trading reasons. The term *dzeet* (Jew) appears for the first time in the epic poem of Kyrgyzstan (*Manas*), during the tenth century, and it is interesting to note that a whole section of this work was dedicated to

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[528] M.Y. Liu, *Under Solomon's Throne, Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh*, Pittsburgh (PA) 2012, pp. 36-37, 210 n. 30.

[529] *The Babur-Nama in English*, translated from the original Turkish text by A.S. Beveridge, 2 vols, London 1922, I, p. 5 and n. 2.

[530] C. Thubron, *The Lost Heart of Asia*, London 1994, p. 262.

king Solomon's times[531]. It is therefore possible that the Muslim influence built upon an existing cultural *substratum*.

The second mountain related to Solomon is the highest peak (3374m) in the Sulaymān chain of mountains, which borders the west bank of river Indus in modern day Pakistan. Ibn Baṭūṭah, the famous fourteenth-century traveller, relates such a story:

> We travelled on to Kabul, formerly a vast town, the site of which is now occupied by a village inhabited by a tribe of Persians called Afghans. They hold mountains and defiles and possess considerable strengths and are mostly highwaymen. It is told that the prophet Solomon ascended this mountain and having looked over India which was covered with darkness, returned without entering it[532].

Other traditions narrate that Solomon visited Hindustan in order to marry Bilqis and while he was taking her back, she suddenly asked if she could look back onto her land. The king stopped with the flying throne on a hollow, still recognizable today on the southern extremity of the mountain, considered a place of pilgrimage for both Muslims and Hindus[533].

The third 'throne of Solomon' is a hill – and also the temple on it [ill. 45], even though it is more commonly associated with the Hindu philosopher Shankaracharya[534] – in the city of Srinagar, in Kashmir, a region which is sometimes itself called the 'Garden of Solomon'. Apparently, the king of Israel was said to have visited the country and to have divided the mountain Barehmooleh, so that water could flow in the fissure and reach lake Dal. The spot was however important also for the Buddhists of Ladakh, according to whom the site had been the abode of Padmasambhava, who had introduced Mahayana Buddhism into Tibet[535].

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[531] M.A. Ehrlich, *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora*, 3 vols, Santa Barbara (CA)-Denver (CO)-Oxford 2009, I, p. 1137.

[532] Passage quoted in A. Wink, Al-Hind, *The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, Leiden 1990, p. 197, but see also *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah*, texte arabe, accompagné d'une traduction par C. Defrémery et le Dr. B.R. Sanguinetti, Paris 1883-1888, 4 vols, III, pp. 89-90.

[533] See the entry *Suliman Hills*, in *Enciclopedia Britannica*, 29 vols, London 1911 (11th ed.), XXVI, pp. 53-54.

[534] H.H. Cole, *Illustrations of Ancient Buildings in Kashmir*, London 1869, pp. 7-11.

[535] M.A. Pandit, *From Burzahom to Solomon's Throne*, in *Heritage of Kashmir*, ed. by F.M. Hassan, Srinagar 1980, pp. 54-62; H. Kersten, *Jesus Lived in India*, New Delhi 2001, pp. 56-58.

This place is mentioned a few times in Salman Rushdie's novel, *Midnight Children*, because it is where the grandfather of the main character eventually goes to die.

> […] He set his face towards the hill which Muslims erroneously called the Takht e Sulaiman, Solomon's seat, at which stood a radio mast, but also the back blister of the temple of the Acharya Sankara[536].

Such a passage is not as innocuous as it might seem. The book deals with the problematic notion of identity, and throughout the novel one sees the creation of Pakistan as experienced by Saleem Sinai, whose Muslim family, originally from Kashmir, first moves to India and then, during the war, is forced to reach Pakistan. The battle over the name of a place, here only hinted at through the

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This book does not seem a particularly reliable source in general, however the author is keen in picking up oral traditon, even without historical fundaments. For this reason, since we are dealing with legends, I refer to it.

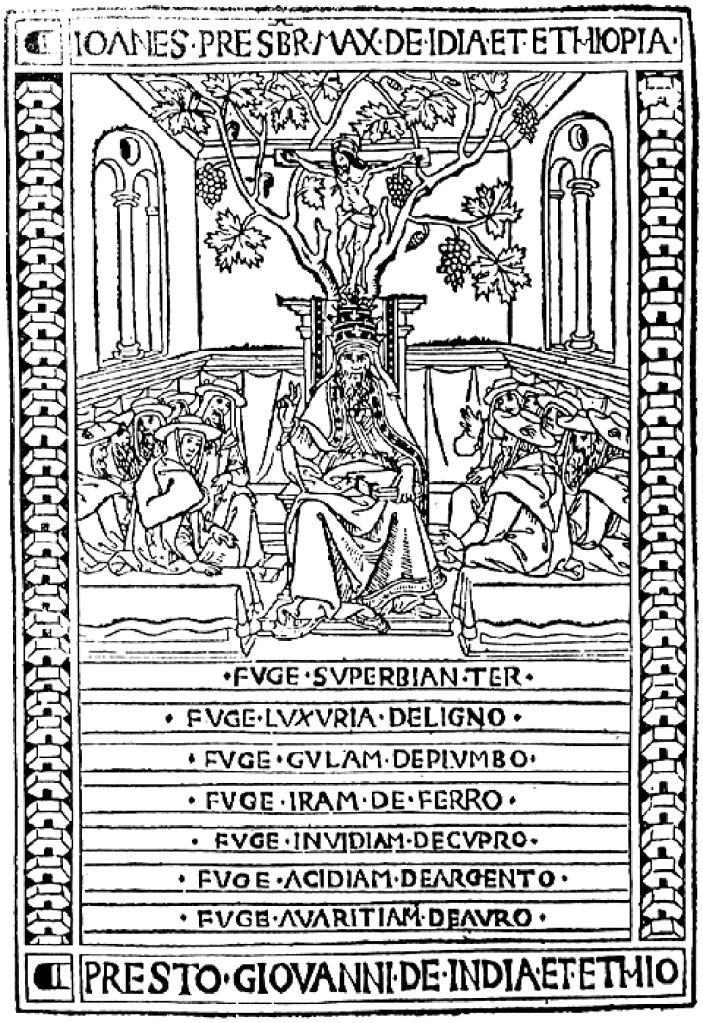
[536] S. Rushdie, *Midnight Children*, London 1981, p. 64.

use of an adverb "erroneously" and a noun "blister" mirrors a much deeper cultural, religious and political clash. As we have seen in chapter IV, naming a place (or renaming it) after Solomon was a political tool, often employed throughout Muslim history.

Although all these three cases differ and are not certainly related to each other, it is remarkable to see how the relation between a high ground and Solomon was established. In general, the connection between a high mountain and a throne belongs to Semitic culture in general; we find strong traces of this association also in the book of Enoch[537], but given several examples outside the Semitic context, we could actually speak almost of an anthropological constant.
It is hard to precisely date the beginning of the traditions above mentioned, however it seems likely that in all these cases the notion of the legendary flying throne, given the strong presence of Muslim conquerors, might have helped establish or support them.

[537] R.J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, Cambridge (MA) 1972; see also K. Coblentz Bautch, *A Study of the Geography of 1 Enoch 17-19: "No One has seen what I have seen"*, Leiden 2003, particularly pp. 39-69 and 109-126.

Sedes Sapientiae: the Christian Context



There was the garden of the gods;
all round him stood bushes bearing gems.
Seeing it he went down at once,
for there was fruit of carnelian
with the vine hanging from it, beautiful to look at;
lapis lazuli leaves hung thick with fruit, sweet to see.
For thorns and thisles there were haematite
and rare stones, agate, and pearls from out of the sea.

(from *The Saga of Gilgamesh*)

The story of the throne of Solomon as it has unfolded over the previous chapters is primarily a Mediterranean tale. In spite of a series of peculiar elements, typical of each cultural tradition taken into examination, most of the material, as we have seen, was common heritage variously exploited by Byzantine and Arabic sovereigns or reclaimed by the rabbis, but always as a means for legitimately representing the ruler. The cases presented so far constitute a series of variations on the same theme, part of an official and shared discourse of power, which began at least with Justinian and whose vocabulary was in use well into the twelfth century along the Mediterranean coasts. The occurrences of the throne have been investigated in contexts that

differ, as far as religious identity is concerned, but share common elements of the Solomonic imagery in political and ideological terms.

This last chapter will focus mainly on how the heritage of the throne develops in representing religious or spiritual authority in the Christian world. I will therefore present three typological case studies. First, I consider a series of eleventh- and twelfth-century episcopal *cathedrae* from Southern Italy, then a number of twelfth- and thirteenth-century papal thrones, and finally the peculiar iconography of the Virgin Mary as throne of Solomon from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. I show how the same idea of the throne can be declined, depending on its context of reference. We will see that the Apulian thrones still owe much to the dialogue among Mediterranean powers, thus reminding us, at least typologically, of the Byzantine model. Instead, the papal thrones engage in visual rivalry with the imperial seats, fully resorting to the biblical imagery, demonstrating that the traditions employed for hinting at Solomon are quite different from those seen at play so far. The analysis of the specific depiction of the Virgin sitting on the lions throne, instead, will show yet another way to use the seat of Solomon, transformed into a theological and didactic tool, useful for preaching. The chapter will be concluded by the analysis of few examples that demonstrate the knowledge of Solomon-related topics that owe more to the folkloric tradition than to the canonical one. We will see how these threads play a part in defining some peculiar figurative examples and we will also trace the memory of the Magnaura in the realm of medieval western literature and its afterlife, so that we can conclude in circular fashion this dissertation and its wanderings.

The Episcopal Thrones of Apulia

In 1954, André Grabar published a study on five episcopal thrones, four in marble and a wooden one, located in Apulia (Monte Gargano, Canosa, Bari [ill. 46-48]) and Campania (Calvi, Montevergine) that he dated between the second half of the eleventh and the twelfth century[538]. Even though they were not all strictly related to one another, Grabar grouped them together because of a series of common features: all of them displayed a figurative program which was not explicitly ecclesiastical, but drew on a tradition of "trônes princiers",

[538]A. Grabar, *Trônes épiscopaux du XI*ème *et XII*ème *siècle en Italie méridionale*, in «Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch», 16 (1954), pp. 7-52. See also T. Garton, *Early Romanesque Sculpture in Apulia*, New York 1984, pp. 113-119.

known since antiquity and typical of the eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds.

Since Grabar's study, the initial catalogue of these seats has been expanded. First was the discovery of a series of fragments of an elephant, almost certainly belonging to a lost throne from Trani, most likely from the eleventh century, which bore similarities to that of Canosa[539]. Second was the addition of a lion, which originally belonged to the episcopal seat of the church of S. Maria of Siponto, served by Leone, bishop from 1023 to 1050 C.E.

Despite the importance of Grabar's study, his chronology has been challenged and often dismissed[540]. The wooden throne of Montevergine, for instance, is now considered a product of thirteenth-century Frederician Capitanata – if not the throne of Frederick II himself, according to some[541] – thus belonging to a cultural and political context quite different from the one initially imagined by Grabar. Given this peculiarity, I exclude it from consideration here and instead focus on the episcopal seats, particularly the Apulian examples, which more obviously belong to the same cultural and geographical tradition. And, even though they were not *per se* products of the same workshop or expressions of the same political impulse, they belong typologically to the same category of objects, sharing a similar language in representing power; this, despite the chronological span of almost a century separating the earliest and latest examples.

The Cathedra in Canosa

The throne of Canosa [ill. 46], as we now see it, was assembled between 1078 and 1089 under bishop Urso. The seat and back, however, were likely already extant and belonged to an earlier *sedes*, which was then reworked through the addition of other elements. The quality of the marble in the two sections is obviously different, as is the more refined working style of the lower part of the seat, as well as of the eagles. The throne, as it appears today, is supported by a pair of standing elephants, whose backs are adorned with carpets bordered with pearls, thereby evoking more a moving palanquin than a

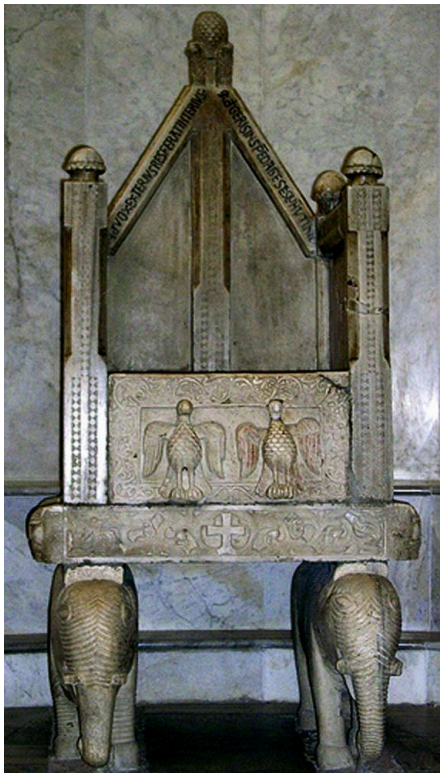
[539] P. Belli d'Elia, *Postille canosine e tranesi*, in *Forme e Storia*, ed. by W. Angelelli – F. Pomarici, Roma 2011, pp. 105-118.

[540] *Alle sorgenti del Romanico: Puglia XI secolo*, ed. by P. Belli d'Elia, Bari 1975; Garton, *Early Romanesque Sculpture*.

[541] L. Capaldo, *Il trono di Federico II*, in «Atti dell'Accademia Pontaniana», 47 (1998), pp. 71-90.

fixed seat.

The great height of the seat, coupled with the absence of steps, would have made it impossible for someone to sit on it easily; moreover, the beaks of the eagles, which protrude right at the level of the sitter's calves, would also have been an impediment to sitting. It has, therefore, been proposed that the seat was meant to be empty much of the time and that its imposing ensemble would have given expression to the symbolic presence of bishop Urso, who was often away with Boemond I of Antioch (1058–1111 C.E.), commander during the first Crusade. It is also possible that the static function of the elephants also retained a heraldic nuance, as elephants were not common in Western Europe and were considered a rarity and a gift worth of kings well into the sixteenth century. They, therefore, evoked alterity, being the symbols of Eastern sovereigns[542].



It is not farfetched to imagine that Urso intended thereby to communicate the superiority of his *sedes*, both literally and metaphorically, over the Muslim rulers against whom he was actively fighting. Indeed, it is likely significant that

[542] Local founders often got inspiration from works of Islamic tradition, which would explain why also the elephants of the throne look like metalwork, see P. Toesca, *Storia dell'arte italiana, Il Medioevo*, 2 vols, Torino 1965, II, p. 868.

his throne was supported by a pair of subjugated 'oriental' beasts. The whole ensemble appears to have been carefully calibrated in order to deliver a specific message. The only recognizable Christian symbol is the Cross located at the center of the front panel, right above the elephants, which indicated to the viewer the religious affiliation of the seat. Right above the Cross, almost flanking it, are a pair of eagles. These birds, which traditionally carry strong imperial associations, dominate the entire composition, in a manner similar to the eagle standing above the pulpit of the church, reinforcing the triumphal quality of the power of the Gospel. In occupying a frontal position, they were likely meant to suggest the presence of the absent bishop, whose name was invoked almost magically by the inscription running along the upper surface of the seat and of the armrests, where he would have sat[543]. The lateral crossbeams of the seat, which end with two stylized lions' masks, carry a pair of griffins on one side and winged quadrupeds with female heads on the other. These 'monstrous' figures probably represent these demonic entities that are kept under restraint by the seat and thus serve an apotropaic function.

S. Michele at Monte Sant'Angelo

The seat of S. Michele at Monte Sant'Angelo (Gargano) [ill. 47] stands on two crouching lions. Its crossbeam is decorated by a series of astral motif and flanked by two bestial masks. The throne-posts are characterized by an ornament of lozenges, stars and stylized acanthus leaves, while the actual back is decorated by knots and by a twisting pattern of clear Islamic type. Part of these decorations is reminiscent of Islamic furniture as well as the grille of windows in mosques. This overall intaglio-effect was probably meant to reproduce and evoke a wooden structure; originally, the marble was richly decorated, with colored mastic and turtle paste, used to fill the surface around flat ornaments in order to better show the outlines, in imitation of an Oriental technique. The archangel Michael, to whom the sanctuary is dedicated, occupies the right panel, where he is pictured spearing the dragon.

[543] "Urso preceptor Romoaldus ad hec fuit actor"; (Ursus was the commissioner and Romualdus the artisan).

Given its style, Grabar doubted that this relief panel dated to the same period as the rest of the ensemble[544]. By contrast, Tessa Garton has argued that the decorations running along the border of the stone plate are similar to those on the rest of the seat; she suggests that the model of the figuration derives from an ivory carving, which would explain the difference in style[545]. This suggestion is all the more interesting in light of the fact that the whole structure was meant to imitate a wooden chair, though transferring its features to the medium of marble. In keeping with this model, the imitation of an ivory carving would possibly have acted as the insertion of a precious applique. In general, since the studies of Pina Belli d'Elia, it has been acknowledged that the ensemble is not constituted by a single marble block, but is a combination of various different pieces. Now in bad conditions, it has been attached to a wall in order to preserve it, thereby obscuring one of the extant inscriptions, which runs along the back.

Two main theories exist regarding the dating of the seat. On the one hand, Grabar thought it had been made before 1050 for Bishop Leone

[544] Grabar, *Trônes épiscopaux*, p. 8.

[545] Garton, *Early Romanesque Sculpture*, p. 90.

(responsible for the fragmentary *sedes* in Siponto as well), basing himself on a lost inscription that apparently made reference to him[546]. On the other hand, Emile Bertaux believed the whole throne had been constructed as a counterfeit, in order to lend support to Monte Sant'Angelo claims of power over against those associated with the seat of Siponto[547]. If he is correct, it would be possible to hypothesize a date after 1066, when the Garganic seat began to claim its independence, or possibly even later, in parallel with a *bulla* by Alexander III, which officially equated the two seats. Such a scenario would be supported by the second inscription, which openly asserts the equality of the two seats: *Sedes hec nu(mero) differt a sede Siponti ius et honor se(dis) que sunt sibi sunt quoque Monti*[548].

Whichever scenario is correct, it is certain that the throne is not of a single piece, but was significantly reworked. The two lions are in stone and not marble, and they are more roughly sculpted than the rest of the seat. They may thus have belonged to a different phase of construction altogether, probably adapted to a new location and function. Even their crouching pose differs from the position of the single standing lion from the lost throne of Siponto[549]. It is, of course, unfortunate that we only have fragmentary evidence for that throne, as it is probably that the one in Monte Sant'Angelo was meant to respond visually to it. Indeed, the inscription makes it clear that the throne in Monte was literally like the other, just as the two seats were said to be equivalent from a political and juridical point of view.

The episcopal seat in Bari

The last notable example is that of the so-called throne of Elias in S. Nicola in Bari [ill. 48]. Here we have a piece carved out a single block of marble. The seat was probably meant to be seen from all directions. It is supported by three slaves, two of them naked, the third one characterized by a peculiar headgear and by what seems to be the baton of a chief. On the back, two lionesses are devouring two screaming figures, possibly two Africans, given their notably curly hair. The throne is also endowed with a little step, supported

[546] Grabar, *Trônes épiscopaux*, pp. 8-10.

[547] E. Bertaux, *L'art dans l'Italie méridionale*, Paris 1904, II, pp. 448-450.

[548] "This seat differs from that of Siponto only in its exterior aspect; the rights and the privileges enjoyed by Siponto are the same (granted) to Monte (Gargano)".

[549] Garton, *Early Romanesque Sculpures in Apulia*, pp. 81-86.

by two lions.

The famous inscription that runs along the lower external border of the seat, reading *Inclitus atque bonus sedet hac in sede patronus presul barinus Helias et canusinus*[550], has traditionally been employed to date the seat between 1089 and 1105 C.E.; this period corresponds to the phase when Elias was in charge and brought together the great artistry of the sculptures with contemporary examples from Modena or southern France. But, given the high quality of the piece and the lack of direct artistic relationship with the previous examples of the region, scholars have suggested dating the piece to the 1130s, during Roger II's reign, or, more likely still, during the second half of the twelfth century[551]. Such a chronology would seem to be supported by a series of possible comparisons with other sculptures in S. Nicola that are dated to the period of Bishop Eustatio, who was responsible, among other things, for Elias's tomb. In 1156, Bari had been severely damaged by William I, for having supported the revolt by Baron Roberto of Loritello. It has thus been proposed that the throne was built in memory of Elias, in order to reinforce the power of the seat, which had temporarily become vacant[552].

[550] "Great and famous sits on this throne Elias, the patron, bishop of Bari and Canosa".

[551] Garton, *Early Romanesque Sculpures in Apulia*, pp. 199-214.

[552] Belli d'Elia, *Alle sorgenti del Romanico*, p. 306; also P. Belli d'Elia, *La Basilica di san Nicola a Bari*, Lecce 1985, pp. 100-116.

From what we know, none of these thrones explicitly claims a Solomonic ancestry in any of its inscriptions[553]. They usually name the commissioner, thus making explicit a political claim. From an iconographical point of view, the presence of lions does not seem particularly telling, as these can easily be explained as a variation on the repertoire of beasts guarding the throne or seat. The example in Siponto probably depended on the fact that the bishop himself was named Leone and the seat in Monte Sant'Angelo would then be an imitation of it.

In his typological study, Grabar notes the significant difference between these *cathedrae* and the more strictly ecclesiastical iconography used in many episcopal seats. He, therefore, investigated the tradition of thrones with *zodia*, tracing it from the earliest examples in Mesopotamia, to their migration in Hellenistic Rome and Sasanian Persia. He also mentioned the case of the frescoes from Dura Europos showing the thrones of Ahasuerus and Solomon, already discussed in chapter III [ill. 25][554], finally concluding his itinerary with the Magnaura throne. Given the political ties between southern Italy, particularly Apulia, and Constantinople, convincingly locating a trace of a connection between these earlier models and our episcopal seats would have helped explain their distinctive figural programs and established clear cultural filiation to the Byzantine sphere. Nevertheless, while pointing to a series of similar elements, Grabar concluded that the seats did not owe anything to that tradition. The Magnaura throne had never been imitated, remaining an isolated occurrence, and there were no extant Byzantine episcopal seats that could be compared to those under examination. Instead, he stated that it was possible to recognize in the figural programs of the Italian thrones a combination of two main threads: first, a visual debt to the Islamic tradition and, second, motifs, such as the elephants and the slaves-telamons, from the Roman iconography of triumphal chariots or barbarian subjugations decorating *sediae curules*.

As much as I agree with Grabar in not considering the episcopal seats to be created in imitation of the Solomonic throne in Constantinople, I include these seats in this study, because they help illuminating a point which has been

[553] However, see C.V. Bornstein, *Portals and Politics in the Early Italian City-State: The Sculpture of Nicholaus in Context*, Parma 1993, p. 45 and n. 14, who suggests that the presence of lions in this and other monumental church settings could be read in this sense.

[554] See chapter III, pp. 150, 152, 168.

raised in chapter II. I have stressed the presence of a Mediterranean dialogue among the various rulers, which prompts them to resort to a common dialogue, based on similar elements. Alice Walkers, for instance, has argued in favor of a solution of mixed influences for the strategies of imperial representations in Constantinople, his image being shaped in an eclectic way, resorting not only to the elements more typical of his own visual tradition, but also to some more exotic elements. Similarly, Eva Baer has discussed the various "paths of portability" of objects around the Mediterranean, describing the way taste is shaped according to a common paradigm, owing to a series of different influences. Even Anthony Cutler has described a similar situation in discussing the practice of courtly gift giving. In this scenario, the details pertaining to the Apulian *cathedrae* can be inscribed within this Mediterranean dialectic of power. These episcopal seats are not characterized by their religious belonging (or not only): instead, they rightfully inscribe their owners within a Mediterranean political discourse.

Indeed, the conscious deployment of a vocabulary of luxury and exotic kingship for these thrones is quite similar to the choice of representing the throne of Solomon as a combination of traditionally Persian or oriental elements, in order to visually respond to other sovereigns on the Mediterranean coasts. The tenants of these cathedrals – ever since the beginning of the eleventh century, as a series of manuscript illustrations demonstrate[555], but even more consciously during the Norman period, under Roger II – limited the employment of Christian symbols but preferred the rich and long established catalogue of courtly luxury items. In particular, they incorporated into their seats images that could appear on precious silks, either in Byzantium or in Baghdad; they stylistically imitated the bronze, ivory, and wood techniques typical of the Islamic world but broadly circulating in the Mediterranean; and, as we have seen, it was customary of ecclesiastical contexts to often appropriate elements of foreign manufacture (or consciously imitating it), such as bronze aquamaniles of Islamic manufacture, silks for wrapping relics[556], and *spolia*, like the famous griffin relocated on the top of Pisa cathedral[557]. All of these objects or materials retained their exotic value, while at the same time being rightfully incorporated within a Christian context. The foreign essence of these objects is

[555] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. lat. 5411, ff. 185r, 248r; Montecassino, Archives, regesto of Sant'Angelo in Formis, f. 21, in Grabar, *Trônes épiscopaux*, p. 51.

[556] See chapter II, pp. 126-131.

[557] See chapter IV, pp. 270-271.

not problematic in itself; however, their origin and function need to be neutralized. It is actually important that their 'otherness' is acknowledged and emphasized, so that it can be effectively appropriated, played with, and indeed tamed. A message is better delivered if the language employed is shared.

In this regard, the Apulian seats have in common with the Magnaura throne the same communication style, which is why I have inserted them in my discussion. It is for this reason that I do not consider the interpretation of Grabar utterly convincing, as far as the original inspiration of these seats is concerned. Positing a direct influence deriving from Roman art is, of course, not impossible. Formally, the singular elements can of course be traced back to that cultural area. However, my interpretation is not concerned with a strict formal analysis; the idea is to understand the declination of traditionally known iconographic features within a more specific context, which endows them with a more powerful meaning. Therefore, I find that a certain set of elements, such as those described in our Apulian *cathedrae*, find their full communicative potential only if imagined in dialogue and opposition with contemporary rulers, and not devised in terms of generically antiquarian models.

My kingdom for a Lion: Papal and Imperial Seats

The second case I present relates to a series of thrones or *cathedrae* created between the eleventh to thirteenth centuries for papal visits. In his study of the symbolic value of these papal thrones, which are still extant in several churches in Rome and other Italian cities, Francesco Gandolfo interpreted some of the figurative elements peculiar to these seats as visual statements meant to strengthen the role of the Pope during the investitures controversy, but also, in some cases, as a direct response to the strategy of imperial representation employed by Frederick II.[558] I follow Gandolfo's lead in his analysis of these thrones, in keeping with the idea that they were elements of a battle of symbols, which mirrored the clash for political supremacy. However, I build on his argument, by proposing that some of the papal thrones in examination were meant to directly evoke that of Solomon and not just

[558] F. Gandolfo, *La cattedra papale in età federiciana*, in *Federico II e l'arte del Duecento italiano. Atti della III Settimana di studi di storia dell'arte medievale dell'Università di Roma, 15-20 maggio 1978*, 2 vols, ed. by A.M. Romanini, Galatina 1980, I, pp. 339-366. For a general view on the visual battle between papacy and empire, see also F. Gandolfo, *I segni del potere*, in *Medioevo: la Chiesa e il Palazzo*, ed. by A.C. Quintavalle, Milano 2007, pp. 316-326.

counteract the seats of temporal rulers by employing generically "imperial" features.

In tracing the development of the peculiar features of these thrones, Gandolfo began his analysis from the *cathedra* located in the apse of the abbot-church of San Saba in Rome (ca. 1205 C.E.) and proceeded from it. The throne in San Saba [ill. 49] is the product of a series of nineteenth-century restorations that were not strictly philological.

The two lions supporting the seat, for instance, were not pertinent to the

original configuration. The only likely extant original element is the seatback, constituted by a marble disc decorated by a refined polychromatic marble inlay representing a cross, probably produced around 1205 by Jacopo di Lorenzo and his workshop and it is possible that it was commissioned by Innocence III.

The first round-backed throne that can be put in relation with that of San Saba and that probably represents a direct visual model is the one in Santa Maria in Cosmedin, made for Calixtus II, right after the council of Worms in 1123 C.E. [ill. 50].

According to Gandolfo, the porphyry slab that surrounded the head of the sitter like a halo was employed to restate the *sanctitas* of the pontiff, at the end of the period characterized by the investiture controversy. The backseat of *cathedra* of San Saba, made later on, would therefore represent an intensification of a symbol already employed with strong political and theological implications, certainly reinforced by Innocence III's conception of his own role as *vicarius Christi*. The "generic nimbus" of *sanctitas* seen in Santa Maria in Cosmedin would constitute in San Saba an even stronger assertion, now that it contained the cross: it implied divinity and confirmed the divine origin of the temporal power of the Pope and his superiority with regard to the emperor.
Moreover, it should not be forgotten that in his *Dictatus papae*, Gregory VII had sustained that only the Pope could make use of the traditional imperial insignia and Gandolfo believes that a revealing element of this statement is to be found "nelle protomi leonine dei braccioli"[559] that support the seat in Santa Maria in Cosmedin. As said, those in San Saba are not pertinent to the original composition and we have no sure elements to posit that even that throne was conceived with a couple of *zodia*. However, considering the extant contemporary examples, according to me such a hypothesis would seem tempting.

Moreover, Innocence III had a second *cathedra* made under his reign, the one in Santa Maria in Trastevere [ill. 51], probably in the occasion of the consecration of the church in 1215 C.E., by the Pope himself, which coincided with a renewal of the liturgical supply. The throne was located on the top of six steps, nowadays partially reworked by the restorations, but certainly part of the original setting. The throne is made out of a single marble block, out of which it is carved a white round back and a pair of winged and horned lions that support the actual seat. According to Gandolfo, this throne might have suggested the notion of flight, an idea of glorification through apotheosis that we have already described as widespread in the Persian and, later on, Islamic world; such an idea penetrated in the Western world thanks to the broad circulation of the flight of Alexander the Great with the griffins. The throne should have then corresponded to the theocratic statement, dear to Innocence, which situated the pontiff in a position between heaven and earth, literally below God but above men.

[559] Gandolfo, *La cattedra papale in età federiciana*, p. 342.

The ensemble is really peculiar and strongly reminiscent of classical prototypes, as far as the iconographical model is concerned, even though the stylistic treatment of the piece is probably to be ascribed to the same Jacopo di Lorenzo already active in San Saba. Despite the unity of the piece, there are few anomalies, probably due to the fact that the actual sitting platform is not original but was inserted later in the composition, thus partially altering the sculpted *facies* of the lions. It is not unprecedented to have a throne without its seat, since it was possible to insert a wooden *faldistorium* or a light ivory throne, which could be transported from church to church, in occasion of the papal visits.

An illustrious precedent of this typology is represented by the *cathedra* in Salerno, probably made in for Gregory VII, who consecrated the cathedral in 1085 C.E.; in this case there is no seat but only a space between the armrests, where it would be possible to locate a movable piece of furniture. This, however, is not the only interesting element in Salerno. Gandolfo observes, in fact, that the two armrests are constituted by a couple of lions – classical pieces reemployed and partially reworked during the eleventh century – which he reads as a typical imperial element, probably inserted because of the presence of the very author of the *Dictatus papae* in town. The backseat is constituted by a porphyry disc – "un tipo di dossale in cui la ruota di porfido già attribuisce al sedente l'idea di *sanctitas*, anche se la struttura circolare non si distacca ancora nettamente dal riquadro sottostante per assurgere ad una consistenza autonoma, come avviene sempre nella cattedra di Santa Maria in Cosmedin"[560].

Finally, Gandolfo also takes into examination the written description of the imperial *faldistorium* belonged to Frederick II[561], as a possible visual parallel accounting for the development of new typologies of papal thrones, considered in direct opposition to it, particularly the one in san Lorenzo fuori le Mura, quite similar to the throne in Santa Balbina, dated to the period of pope Innocence IV, the last opponent of the emperor. This time, the lions are not included in the throne, which is represented more as a bi-dimensional canopied seat, or *Throntabernakel*, a typical representation of royal or imperial lay power.

To sum up: the first extant structure with a rounded back and a couple of lions is the one made in 1085 in Salerno for Gregory VII, author of the *Dictatus Papae*. Then follows the one for Calixtus II in Santa Maria in Cosmedin with its separated porphyry disc, which seems to constitute a direct visual precedent for the one in San Saba, whose fragmentary state, however, does not allow us to conclude with certainty that it was originally supported by lions. Such an hypothesis would however seem reasonable, considering the

[560] Gandolfo, *La cattedra papale*, p. 351.

[561] The kings of Sicily had certainly been employing *faldistoria* at least since the time of Roger II. In the mosaics of Monreale, on the scene which depicts the thirds temptation of Christ, are shown the tangible symbols of kingly power: crown, sceptre, globe, chalices, money and a *faldistorium* with leonine protomes, quite similar to the one on which king Solomon is depicted in the cathedrals of Trani and Otranto; in general, there were spaces in the churches of Monreale and Cefalù, clearly conceived to allocate the movable thrones of the sovereign, see P. Belli d'Elia, *Liturgie del potere:i segni visivo-oggettuali*, in *Nascita di un regno. Poteri signorili, istituzioni feudali e strutture sociali nel Mezzogiorno normanno (1130-1194)*, ed. by R. Licionio – F. Violante, Bari 2008, pp. 367-394, pp. 372-373.

strong imperial connotations of the animals, clearly appreciated by the political view of Innocence III, who went as far as having a second majestic throne constructed in Santa Maria in Trastevere, supported by a couple of winged and horned lions.

In his interesting analysis, Gandolfo quite convincingly describes the papal thrones in terms of visual dialectic between papacy and empire; the two recurring elements characterizing these seats, at least before the canopied structures appearing under Innocence IV, are the lions and the rounded back, the former being interpreted by the scholar as an imperial prerogative and the latter as a representation of a halo, sign of sanctity.

While maintaining Gandolfo's overall thesis, I wonder whether it would not be possible to interpret the visual features of these thrones otherwise. We will remember, in fact, that the throne of Solomon as described in the Bible was defined, among other things, by the presence of lions as armrests and a round back. In order to have a perfect correspondence with the biblical passage, it should also have been made in ivory, covered in gold and placed on six steps, occupied by twelve lions. It is however true that not many representations of the throne of Solomon in the Western world display all these elements: it is more common to present it in an abbreviated form, with only few distinctive tracts, such as the steps and the lions, or only the lions, often just two of them. It seems to me, instead, that the rounded back of these papal seats should not be taken, at least in the origin, as a sheer attribute of sanctity, rather as a biblical quotation evoking, along with the couple of lions, the throne of Solomon. A possible hint in this direction is given by the fact that the earliest combination of these two elements appears in the throne made for Gregory VII in Salerno, where the back is not yet represented as a separated disc. According to Gandolfo, who is tracing the precedents to his thirteenth-century examples, this is "un tipo di dossale in cui la ruota di porfido già attribuisce al sedente l'idea di *sanctitas*, anche se la struttura circolare non si distacca ancora dal riguadro sottostante per assurgere ad una consistenza autonoma, come avviene nella cattedra di Santa Maria in Cosmedin"[562]. To me, instead, such a lack of separation shows that it is not possible to determine with certainty whether the porphyry disc, both in this example and in the later ones, should be necessarily read as a halo. One could in fact conclude that the curved shape or disc of these thrones is nothing but the rounded back of biblical memory: after all the

[562] Gandolfo, *La cattedra papale*, p. 351.

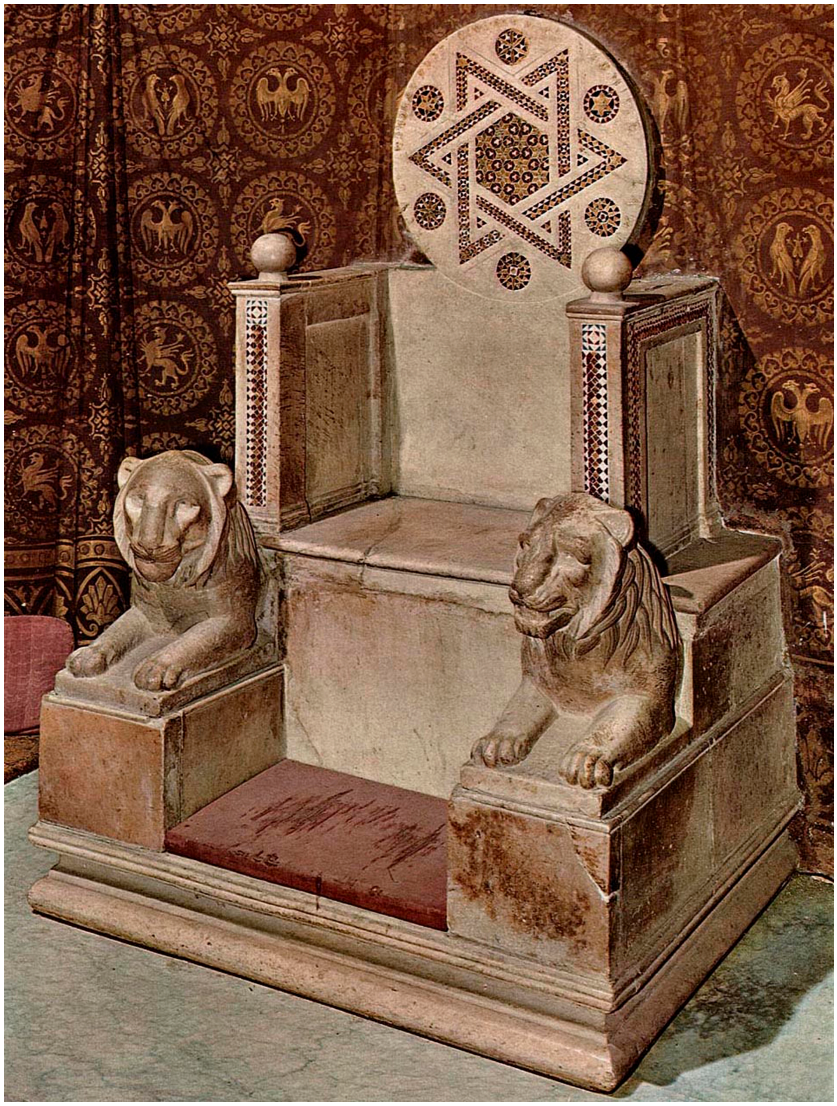
Scriptures are not too precise in defining this part of the structure, leaving much space to interpretation in terms of visual representations. There are, in fact, notable differences even in the small repertoire presented so far, with backs entirely or partially separated, but also obtained by the same marble block.

A further hint of a possible Solomonic reading comes from the spatial arrangement of at least one of these seats. The powerful throne of Innocence III in Santa Maria in Trastevere, in fact, is not only characterized by lions and rounded back but was also raised on six steps, a detail which does not seem coincidental but, once more, a direct reference to the Bible. From Innocence's perspective, Solomon, a royal figure with divine endorsement, would have constituted a perfect model to imitate.

If the Solomonic references in the throne of Santa Maria in Trastevere seem too precise to be coincidental, it is however interesting to note that they are also multi-faceted. The lions are sculpted according to an unusual typology, which recalls Oriental prototypes. The winged and horned lion, in fact, is mythical creature common to Indo-Iranian cultures, which probably combines the features of the lion, the stag or the bull, animals with a strong solar significance, usually depicted while engaging in a mortal fight with the royal hero, particularly in Achaemenid Persia and subsequently into Sasanian art, finally permeating also the Roman world [ill. 52]. The figurative choice of Innocence III seems therefore doubly evocative: the motif of biblical ascendancy is in fact

garbed in classical cloths.

In keeping with this Solomonic interpretation, one cannot but mention the example of the Anagni *cathedra* [ill. 53].



Considering the strong ties between the city and the papacy[563], particularly during the Investitures Controversy[564], the presence of a seat characterized by a couple of lions, a rounded back and, furthermore, by the presence of the six-

[563] Innocence III (1198-1216), Gregory IX (1227-1241), Alexander IV (1254-1261), Bononiface VIII (1294-1303) were all originary of Anagni.

[564] Several papal edicts were issued from the city: the excommunication against Frederick 'Barbarossa' in 1160, that against Frederick II in 1127, and that against Manfredi in 1254. See I. Lydholm, *The Cosmati and the Cathedral at Anagni*, in «Analecta Romana Instituti Danici», 10 (1982), pp. 7-22.

pointed star on it, would seem all the more telling. However, several scholars[565] agree on the fact that the *cathedra* is the fruit of a twentieth-century rearrangement. If the rounded back with the six-pointed star is certainly the work of Vassalletto, and its chronology can be fixed around 1262 for documentary reasons[566], the lions were quite likely part of a presbytery fence, dating to an earlier chronological phase. We cannot therefore ascribe to the original commission of this *cathedra* any direct reference to the throne of the son of David, since we do not really know how it was composed[567]. However, the six-pointed star, "probably inspired by Islamic decorative art via Sicily and Southern Italy" [568], certainly resonates, although indirectly, of a certain Solomonic allure.

Henry VI and the Sedes Sapientiae

The hypothesis that this series of thrones visually claimed Solomonic ascendancy does not invalidate Gandolfo's thesis: on the contrary, I believe it actually strengthens it. As we have seen, in fact, the employment of the throne of Solomon in lay and royal contexts is absolutely typical around the Mediterranean and it has traditionally been a prerogative of rulers and monarchs. The earliest example of this symbolic exploitation in continental Europe is that of Charles the Great, who had been referred to as "New Moses", "New David" but also "New Solomon" from his court poet Theodulph. Similar epithets were reserved by Amalar of Metz to his successor Luis the Pious and a phase of Solomonic peace had been referred to Lothar in a laud by Sedulius Scottus[569]. From what stated, Solomon was mentioned, along with other worthy figures, to exalt the sovereign of the Carolingian dynasty. However, it would seem that, at least in the case of Charles the Great, the Solomonic imagery was more than a literary *topos*. A marble throne with a rounded back located on six

[565] Gandolfo, *La cattedra papale*, pp. 361-362; M. Gianandrea, *La scena del sacro: l'arredo liturgico nel basso Lazio tra XI e XIV secolo*, Roma 2006, pp. 126-127.

[566] P. Claussen, *Magistri Doctissimi Romani: die romischen Marmorkunstler des Mittelalters*, Stuttgart 1987, pp. 123-124.

[567] While it is not impossible that the twentieth-century creation might have tried to evoke it.

[568] Lydholm, *The Cosmati and the Cathedral at Anagni*, p. 17; G. Matthiae, *Componenti del Gusto Decorativo Cosmatesco*, in «Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale d'Archeologia e Storia dell'arte», 1 (1952), pp. 249-279.

[569] I.H. Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom: Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France*, Princeton (NJ) 1972, p. 89.

steps is still extant in the palatine chapel in Aachen and it has been proposed that it was specifically meant to evoke the biblical one[570] [ill. 54].

[570] On the throne, see H. Beumann, *Grab und Thron Karls des Grossen zu Aachen*, in *Karl der Grosse, Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, IV (*Das Nachleben*), ed. by W. Braunfels – P.E. Schramm, Düsseldorf 1967, pp. 9-38; P.E. Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik: Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte vom dritten bis zum sechzehnten Jahrhundert*, 3 vols, Stuttgart 1954, I, pp. 336-345; *Karl der Grosse: Werk und Wirkung*, Düsseldorf 1965, p. 29, n. 5, plate 2; E.E. Grimme, *Der Dom zu Aachen: Architektur und Ausstattung*, Aachen 1994, pp. 52-55.

Even if the likelihood of such a hypothesis has been challenged in recent times[571], by stating that the rounded-back was not its original shape, I believe that the presence of the six steps is nevertheless too precise to be coincidental. Some scholars also believe that the throne might be a later creation, since it seems to be attested in written sources only during the Ottonian period[572]. Even this objection – impossible to disprove given its character *e silentio* – would simply postpone the establishment of such a seat but, from our perspective, would not deny its symbolic importance, in connection with the imperial figure. Solomonic imagery, then, connoted the Holy Roman Empire at least since the tenth century C.E. and possibly even earlier.

To go back to our papal seats, then, it would seem all the more logical that the papacy, engaged in a battle for the supremacy of its role over that of the emperors, recurred to one of the most obvious visual symbols of kingship at his disposal to counteract their push. The scarcity of actual artifacts, like imperial thrones or *faldistoria* dating from the period taken into examination, makes it difficult to precise whether the papal strategy was responding directly to extant Solomonic examples or if it was restating its power through a convenient model.

However, a twelfth-century manuscript has preserved us an interesting example of a Solomonic appropriation made by a Mediaeval ruler in a chronological phase that can be considered pertinent to the one that we have been considering so far: it is the famous miniature of Henry VI Hohenstaufen (1165-1197 C.E.), father of Frederick II, depicted in the *Liber Honorem Augusti*, an encomiastic work in verses on the conquest of Sicily, dedicated to the emperor by Peter of Eboli, chronicler, poet and possibly clerk, living at the Swebian court[573]. The presentation copy of the text (Berne, Municipal Library, ms. 120 II) is a richly illustrated manuscript, and one of the images (f. 147r) shows the emperor while sitting on a throne, located on six steps full of lions [ill. 55]. The reference to the throne of Solomon is made all the more clear by a *titulus* running under the throne labeling it as *sedes sapientiae*[574]. Henry himself

[571] H. Appuhn, *Zum Thron Karls des Grossen*, in «Aachener Kunstblätter», 24/25 (1962-1963), pp. 127-136.

[572] Beumann, *Grab und Thron*, pp. 25-26.

[573] *Liber ad honorem Augusti sive De rebus Siculis carmen*, ed. by T. Kölzer – M. Stähli, Sigmaringen 1994.

[574] Mentioned for the first time in a study by F. Wormald, *The throne of Solomon and St. Edward's chair*, in *De artibus opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. by M. Meiss, New York 1961, pp. 532-539, p. 537.

is depicted on it, with its crown, a scepter and the globe, while Wisdom, personified as a woman with a crown, stands behind the back of his seat and shows her favor to him. Moreover, she points toward the spokes of a wheel, where Henry's main political opponent Tancred of Lecce is being crushed; the figure of a dejected Fortune, garbed in poor cloths, presides over the scene, hopeless.

The whole depiction clearly shows the victory of wisdom over fortune, a classical allegorical pair that is often mentioned in the tradition of the *specula principis* and, in general, in treatises about the rule of the state, well into the sixteenth century[575].

[575] C. Heck, *L'échelle céleste dans l'art du Moyen Age, une image de la quête du ciel*, Paris 1997, for a series of other representations of the opposition between virtue/fortune, pp. 207-208.

Here, the throne of Solomon is employed as a visual vehicle for such an allegory, almost as an attribute of *Sapientia*, as much as the wheel characterizes *Fortuna*. The didactic message is, in fact, quite clear: fortune is unreliable and only a monarch who can prove virtuous and wise will succeed in ruling. Of course, the throne of Solomon is also an attribute of Henry himself, who is depicted on it, as a perfect sovereign. It is interesting to note that it is preceded by a similar depiction, showing him on a throne, surrounded by the personifications of the seven virtues (f. 146r) [see above ill. 56].
The illustration with the lions throne is the last one of the text and represents Henry at the apex of his glorification: the sum of all virtues showed in the previous page results in his ascent to the throne of maximum distinction, that of Solomon.

Peter's encomiastic text is also quite clear in evoking a precise correspondence. Throughout his work we find celebratory verses that create a parallel between Henry VI and the biblical king:

> Under our Solomon, peace returns to life,
> that peace which before had remained dead under the rule of Tancredi[576].
>
> Neither Solomon, nor Julius Cesar, not even Alexander
> obtained what the days of you rule obtained[577].
>
> And indeed what Solomon, the sun of mankind, the glorious progeny of David,
> earned and deserved is believed to be yours[578].
>
> Blessed is our time, neither is a happier era, nor has been a more fortunate and richer one since the times of Solomon[579].

[576] "Integra sub nostro pax Salomone redit: / que sub Tancredo dudum defuncta manebat", (II, vv. 1312-1313).
[577] "Nec Salomon nec Alexander nec Iulius ipse /promeruit, vestri quod meruere dies", (II, vv. 1451-1452).
[578] "Nam quod sol hominum, Salomon, David inclita proles, / sensit seu meruit, creditur esse tuum", (III, vv. 1483-1484).
[579] "Felix nostra dies, nec ea felicior ulla, / lecior aut locuplex a Salomone fuit", (III, vv. 1523-1524).

However, the greatest eulogistic moment is naturally the one paralleled by the illustration that we have described above. On verse 1607, Peter states that Henry is the son of Wisdom, who generously endowed him with many gifts. The evocation of such mother-son relationship could be a direct echo of another biblical passage (Canticles 3:11), where Solomon is said to be crowned by his mother[580]. Few lines below, the poet describes the emperor's throne:

> My dear Henry sat on his mother's throne, / in which the mighty Solomon had sat. / And such was his throne: / ivory covered in gold, this work surpassed man's imagination. / It had twelve steps: six in gold, six made of stone, / where shine quiet lions. / These, disposed in ranks, should execute the orders of the sitter! / Come forth from the throne, oh difficult task, griffins! / Come forth eagle and boar from Nocera! Come forth strong lions of our throne! Come phoenix, bird messenger of peace![581].

The first part of the description corresponds faithfully to the biblical passage. However, the second part of it moves away from the familiar text and introduces a series of novelty; Henry's throne is in fact characterized by the presence of griffins, eagles, a boar, lions and a phoenix. According to Fulvio delle Donne, it is possible to recognize in these animals some of Henry's closest allies and counselors: the eagle would be Marcowald of Anweiler, the boar Dipold of Schweinspeunt, the griffin Conrad of Hildesheim[582]. This thesis is confirmed both by pictorial and textual evidences. On Dipold of Schweinspeunt's shield, for instance, we see a boar, probably a direct heraldic reference to the name of his family (f.130r), while a clear textual reference supports the identification of Conrad ("Quam tua, Corrade, griphea signat avis" III, 1566).

Another revealing textual moment which seems to indicate a positive

[580] The Scriptures, of course, intend Betshaeba, but for Peter's eulogetic purpose, it is important to reinforce the parallelism between Henry-Wisdom and Solomon with his mother.

[581] "Nam meus Henricus materna sede sedebit, /in qua rex Salomon sedit in orbe potens. / Talis erit sedes: ebur uxorabit in auro; / hoc hominum sensus exuperabit opus. / Bis senos habitura gradus Henricia sedes, / ex auro sex, sex ex adhamante gradus, / per quos fulvescent civili more leones: / ordine suppositi iussa sedentis agant. / Procedant de sede throni, res ardua, grifes, / procedant aquile seu Nucerinus aper, / procedant rigidi nostra de sede leones, / procedat fenix, nuncia pacis avis", (III, vv. 1657-1668).

[582] F. delle Donne, *Alle origini della letteratura propagandistica. A proposito di una nuova edizione di Pietro da Eboli, Liber ad Honorem Augusti*, in «Rassegna Storica Salernitana», 24 (1995), pp. 299-310, pp. 309-310.

correspondence between this animal symbolism and actual political actors occurs when Peter praises the phase of harmony reached thanks to Henry VI. He plays on the famous biblical passage, where the prophet Isaiah described the kingdom of peace originating from the stump of Jesse:

> The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox (Is. 11, 6-9).

Peter seems to propose an analogous situation, simply substituting the beasts:

> The sheep fears neither the clanging-feet griffins, / nor the familiar jaws of the wolves; / like a sheep stays the wolf among sheep. / Ox, crane, lion, eagle, pig, dog, bear and boar / drink from the same spring and graze from the same pastures[583].

The animal symbolism displayed on the throne of Solomon is therefore certainly political and heraldic, but it resonates even more within the context of the biblical hypo text, which seems to create for Henry VI an aura of prophetical expectation. Even though Isaiah's passage is usually interpreted in Christological terms, Solomon was often considered his Old Testament prefiguration. He shared with Christ the lineage of Jesse and was the perfect embodiment of a just judge, whose peaceful reign was the model for any other sovereign.

We do not have any element to state whether this insisted Solomonic eulogy created by Peter of Eboli was simply a textual invention or whether it found any correspondence in the actual imperial ceremonial of Henry VI. We do not know whether he had a throne that could directly evoke that of Solomon but such a hypothesis would not be at all unreasonable.

It is possible, in fact, that the throne depicted in Peter from Eboli's manuscript meant to reproduce or to hint at the throne in the Palatine chapel, built under Roger II (1095-1154 C.E.). His actual throne is lost, however we still have the original throne platform, and the wall decoration that was meant to be a

[583] "Nec sonipes griphes nec oves assueta luporum / ora timent: ut ovis stat lupus inter oves. / Uno fonte bibunt, eadem pascuntur et arva / bos, leo, grus, aquila, sus, canis, ursus, aper", (III, vv. 1527-1530).

backdrop for the sovereign. Interestingly, such *fastigium* is flanked by two lions enclosed in medallions and the platform itself is raised above the floor of the nave by five steps, so that, counting the level of the seat, it would have corresponded to the famous six steps [ill. 57][584].

Several studies have moreover underlined a series of parallel elements between the Palatine Chapel and the imperial palace in Constantinople[585] and it is not impossible to imagine that even the throne in Palermo could be a distant echo of the Magnaura one.

Whether the case, the choice of alluding to the emperor in this way is a

[584] W. Tronzo, *The Cultures of his kingdom. Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, Princeton (NJ)-Chichester 1997, pp. 68-69, pp. 130-133.

[585] S. Curcic, *Some Palatine Aspects of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», 41 (1987), pp. 125-144; W. Tronzo, *Il palazzo dei Normanni di Palermo come esibizione*, in *Nobiles officinae. Perle, filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo*, Catalogo della mostra (Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, 17 dicembre 2003-10 marzo 2004), 2 vols, ed. by M. Andaloro, Palermo-Catania 2006, II, pp. 25-34; W. Tronzo, *Byzantine Court Culture from the point of View of Norman Sicily: The Case of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. by H. Maguire, Wasghington (DC) 1997, pp. 101-114.

clear demonstration that such Solomonic imagery was actively employed in the context of the imperial court. It is therefore possible to reinforce the hypothesis that the choice, made by several popes, to have their thrones fashioned with a rounded-back and a series of lions, could have directly responded to the imperial claim to the Solomonic throne. Gandolfo was certainly right in pointing out that the lions were generic symbols of royalty, which the papacy could have claimed, along with others, in its fight for temporal supremacy, but in a case like that of Henry VI we know that their presence was very specifically connoted.

Sedes Sapientiae and Divine Wisdom

Having presented the throne of Henry VI – and its likely monumental counterpart – in opposition to similar papal examples, I would now like to discuss a detail of the miniature that has never been underlined, which will show that whoever devised the illustration for the manuscript was unconsciously influenced by another typology of Solomonic throne, pertaining to a context which could not have been more distant from that of the court. The revealing detail is the rubric, which identifies the throne as *sedes sapientiae*. It would be easy to instinctively associate it with the throne of Solomon, given his proverbial wisdom, but this label never directly connotes the seat of the king of Israel in the Bible and, as it is, never occurs in the Scriptures, neither in the *Septuaginta* nor in the Vulgate that we read today. The expression *sedes sapientiae*, however, must have been of biblical origin, and it was discussed thoroughly in the works of saint Augustine[586], within the proverbial form *anima justi sedes sapientiae*. Several editors refer this sentence to a passage of the book of Wisdom or Psalms, but this seems to be an enduring mistake with no actual textual support. Instead, it is possible that the proverb derived from an unknown *Septuaginta* translation of a passage of Proverbs 12, 23[587], which in other extant Latin versions runs as: "vir sapiens sedes est intellectus", "vir astutus sedes est sensuum" or "vir callidus thronus est sensus". Whether the

[586] For a full commentary on the passages where Augustine mentions the sedes sapientiae, see A.M La Bonnardière, Anima Iusti Sedes Sapientiae *dans l'oeuvre de saint Augustin*, in *Epektasis, Mélanges patristiques offerts au cardinal Jean Daniélou*, ed. by J. Fontaine – C. Kannengiesser, Paris 1972, pp. 111-120.

[587] J. Denk, *Wo steht* Anima iusti sedes sapientiae?, in «Theologie und Glaube», 9 (1917), pp. 649-650.

case, after Augustine the same sentence was often recalled by the fathers of the Church in several occasions and some of them referred the saying to Solomon. This is actually the only direct link between Solomon and *sedes sapientiae*, because the meaning of the expression was always glossed by commentators otherwise[588], usually referring wisdom to God:

> Not because man sits in throne in the same way as God does: rather, if you want God to set his throne in you, if you are righteous, you will be the seat of God; it is in fact written: "The throne of wisdom is the soul of the righteous man". 'Throne' is 'sedes' in Latin"[589],

to Christ:

> In the *Proverbs* of Solomon it is written: "the soul of the righteous man is the throne of wisdom". God's wisdom is in fact Christ, who is said to dwell in the souls of the righteous ones[590],

> And then it follows: "and he who sits in throne dwelled in them. The soul of the righteous one is the throne of God. Wisdom is Christ, Christ, then, is God"[591],

or to the kingdom of Heaven as image of *Ecclesia*:

> I remember that I have often been told that the kingdom of Heavens is oftentimes termed 'Church' in the Holy Gospel. The assembly of the righteous ones is named kingdom of Heavens. Through the prophet, in

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[588] The list of of authors commenting upon the expression would be much longer; here, I propose only a brief overview.

[589] "Non quia sic sedet Deus, quomodo homo: sed tu si vis ut sedeat in te Deus, si bonus eris, sedes Dei eris; sic enim scriptum est, "Sedes sapientiae, anima justi". Thronus enim, latine sedes dicitur", *Opera Omnia Augustini Hipponensis. Enarrationes in Psalmos. In Psalmum XCVIII Enarratio*, in *PL* 37, cols 1258-1271, col. 1259.

[590] "In Proverbiis quippe Salomonis scriptum est, "Anima ejus sedes sapientiae"; sapientia vero Dei Patris Christus est (I Cor. 1:24), qui in animis sanctorum dicitur sedere", *Sancti Eucherii lugdunensis episcopi formularum spiritalis intelligentiae ad uranium, liber unus*, in *PL* 50, Paris 1846, cols 727-772, col. 734d.

[591] "Sequitur denique: Et is qui sedit in throno, inhabitavit in eis. Anima enim justi, sedes sapientiae. Sapientia autem Christus, Christus vero Deus", *Primasii commentariorum super Apocalypsim b. Joannis libri quinque,* in *PL* 68, Paris 1847, cols 793-936, col. 854a.

> fact, God says: "heaven is my throne"; and Solomon says: "The throne of wisdom is the soul of the righteous man". Paul also says: "Christ is God's virtue and God's wisdom"; we clearly have to make a connection, so that, if God is wisdom, the soul of the righteous man is the throne of God, Heaven moreover is said to be the throne of God, then the soul of the righteous man corresponds to Heaven. The kingdom of Heavens then is the assembly of the righteous men, it is the Church[592].
>
> The city of God in the sacred Scriptures sometimes figuratively corresponds to the soul of man, which is inhabited by God, since the Scriptures say: "I will inhabit them" and also "The soul of the righteous man is the throne of God" and sometimes "Church on earth[593].

This series of different textual interpretations mirrors closely the question of representing divine Wisdom, a quality which, since its first appearance as dedicatee of the church of Hagia Sophia, will lack uniformity at an iconographical level, resenting a pictorial tradition which from classical times depicted it as a female figure, a series of textual biblical passages that personified it as a woman and the substantial interference with the original

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[592] "Saepe autem jam me dixisse memini quod plerumque in sancto Evangelio regnum coelorum praesens Ecclesia nominatur. Congregatio quippe justorum regnum coelorum dicitur. Quia enim per prophetam Dominus dicit: "Coelum mihi sedes est" (Is. 46:1); et Salomon ait: "Anima justi sedes est sapientiae" (Sap. 7:27); Paulus etiam dicit: "Christum Dei virtutem et Dei sapientiam" (1 Cor. 1:24); liquido colligere debemus quia si Deus sapientia, anima autem justi sedes sapientiae, dum coelum dicitur sedes Dei, coelum ergo est anima justi. […] Regnum ergo coelorum est Ecclesia justorum […]", *Sancti Gregorii Magni romani pontificis XL homiliarum in evangelia libri duo*, lib. II, hom. XXXVIII, in *PL* 76, Paris 1849, cols 1281-1293, col. 1283a.

[593] "Civitas Dei figuraliter in sacris litteris interdum anima hominis, quae a Deo inhabitatur, dicente Scriptura: "Habitabo in eis", et iterum, "Anima justi sedes sapientiae" (Psal. 5), accipitur; interdum praesentis temporis Ecclesia […]", *Opus illustrissimi et excellentissimi seu spectabilis viri Caroli, nutu Dei regis Francorum, Gallias, Germaniam Italiamque sive harum finitimas provincias, domino opitulante, regentis, contra synodum quae in partibus Graeciae pro adorandis imaginibus stolide sive arroganter gesta*, lib. II, cap. III, in *PL* 98, Paris 1851, cols 1068-1069, col. 1068d. A similar view was also expressed by bishop Haimo of Halbertstadt, friend of Rabanus Maurus: *Haymonis Halberstatensis episcopi expositionis in Apocalypsin b. Joannis libri septem*, (juxta editionem datam coloniae anno 1531, apud Eucharium, procurante Godefrido Hittorpio), lib. II, cap. IV, in *PL* 117, Paris 1852, cols 1002-1013, col. 1003a, and *Beati Rabani Mauri Fuldensis abbatis et Moguntini archiepiscopi commentariorum in Matthaeum libri octo*, lib. VI, cap. XXII (*De homine rege qui fecit nuptias; de censu Caesaris; de muliere qui septem fratres habuit; et cujus filius sit Christus*), in *PL* 107, Paris 1851, cols 1053-1064.

theological identification, according to which it was an attribute of God[594]. Such an ambiguity will also lead to the partial superimposition, never accepted from a theological point of view but quite widespread at a popular level, of the figure of the Virgin with Divine Wisdom[595].
Anyway, as we have seen, none of the authors quoted so far makes any reference to the *sedes sapientiae* as that of king Solomon. Such a superimposition, which will take place during the twelfth century, through the mediation of another figure, constitutes the aim of our third case-study: that of the Virgin Mary as Throne of Solomon.

A Seat for the Virgin

The idea that the Virgin was the throne of God, is as early as Athanasius (296-373 C.E.); also John of Damascus (676-749 C.E.) defines the Virgin as "living throne, representing in thyself the throne of God"[596], however, the full identification of her figure with the throne of Solomon will occur fully only during the eleventh century.

Such a topic is quite familiar to the scholars of Western Christian art, at least since 1872, when Ferdinand Piper presented a substantial study on one of the iconographies of the Virgin by analyzing three German Medieval paintings and showing how some of the features employed for representing her seat had be drawn from the biblical throne of the king of Israel in order to present Mary

[594] J. Meyendorff, *Wisdom-Sophia: contrasting approaches to a complex theme*, in «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», 41 (1987), pp. 391-401; D.M. Fiene, *What is the Appearance of Divine Sophia?*, in «Slavic review», 48 (1989), pp. 449-476; A. Grabar, *Iconographie de la Sagesse Divine et de la Vierge*, in «Cahiers archéologiques», in 8 (1956), pp. 255-257; J. Meyendorff, *L'iconographie de la Sagesse Divine dans la Tradition Byzantine*, in «Cahiers archéologiques», 10 (1959), pp. 262-263; P. Balcarek, *The image of Sophia in Medieval Russian Iconography and its Sources*, in «Byzantinoslavica», 60 (1999), pp. 593-610; G. Florovsky, *The Hagia Sophia Churches*, in *Aspects of Church History*, Usa 1987, pp. 131-135; P. Hunt, *Hesychasm and the Iconography of Divine Wisdom*, unpublished paper of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies convention 2003.

[595] A similar process occurs in the Jewish exegetical tradition, when it comes to the identification of God's divine presence or *Shekhinah*; on this, see A. Green, *Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary and the Songs of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in its Historical Context*, in «Association for Jewish Studies Review», 26 (2002), pp. 1-52.

[596] For the sources, see Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom*, p. 24.

as mother of the "New Solomon" [597]. Such a visual and allegorical superimposition had been prompted by a rich exegetical tradition, which developed first at a textual level but eventually influenced the mode of depicting (or sculpting) the Virgin. It had always been quite usual, at least from the fourth century C.E., to define Solomon as a *figura* of Christ, because of his wisdom, his peaceful attitude and his role as a king and judge. A passage from a homily of the Venerable Bede sums it up well:

> With no doubt, all those things that – as the Apostle teaches: "occurred as examples for us" and were also certainly written for us – should be more carefully examined with a spiritual method. Even king Solomon, who is explained as a pacific character, designates the very type of our Redeemer, of whom Isaiah says, "His authority shall grow continually and there shall be endless peace". The temple which he built corresponds to the universal Church, which gathers together the believers from all around the world, as if they were living stones, assembling them in one structure made of the same faith and of the same love[598].

It followed, as a consequence, that the Virgin, in whose womb Christ had incarnated, could be interpreted or visualized as an actual receptacle of these features. At first, then, the throne of Solomon was an allegorical representation of the Incarnation theme, being originally a Christological statement and, only at a second stage, it became a more definite Marian attribute.
The complex of elements characterizing her in this role, as we will see, may vary according to the textual source employed or on the complexity and subtlety of the message intended for the audience, but the presence of a six-stepped throne and a certain number of lions is usually constant and peculiar to this kind of representation. Even though the earliest known examples date back to the

[597] F. Piper, *Maria als Thron Salomos und ihre Tugenden bei der Verkündigung*, in «Jahrbücher für Kunstwissenschaft», 5 (1872), pp. 97-137.

[598] "Quae profecto omnia, sicut Apostolus docet, "in figura facta sunt nostri" (1 Cor. 10:6), et propter nos utique scripta, ideoque nobis solertius spiritali ratione discutienda. Salomon quippe rex, qui interpretatur pacificus, ipsum Redemptorem nostrum typice designat, de quo Isaias ait: "Multiplicabitur ejus imperium, et pacis non erit finis" (Is. 9:7). Templum quod aedificavit, catholica ejus Ecclesia est, quam de universis per orbem credentibus, quasi de vivis lapidibus in unam suae fidei et charitatis compaginem aggregat", *Bedae Venerabilis Anglo-Saxonis opera paraenetica, sive omnium ejus operum pars tertia, sectio prima: Homiliae*, lib. II, *Homilia XXI. In dedicatione ecclesiae*, in *PL* 94, Paris 1850, cols 244-249, col. 248d.

twelfth century, this kind of iconography began to stand out and to spread particularly from the thirteenth century onward.

Rabanus Maurus

The earliest allegorical explanation of the throne of Solomon among Christian commentators, however, did not refer to the Virgin. It is due to the Carolingian archbishop Rabanus Maurus (ca. 780-856 C.E.), known as *praeceptor Germaniae* for the homiletic, preaching and didactic efforts carried out throughout all his life. He is the first author to comment extensively on the Biblical passage dedicated to the throne in his *Commentary on the four books of Kings*. The parallel he creates is between the seat of the king and *Ecclesia*.

> "King Solomon also made a great throne of ivory: and overlaid it with the finest gold. It had six steps: and the top of the throne was round behind him; and there were two hands on either side holding the seat, one at each end; and two lions stood, one at each hand. And twelve little lions stood upon the six steps on the one side and on the other; there was no such work made in any kingdom". The throne which king Solomon made, then, is interpreted as being the Holy Church, where the Peaceful one who reign upon us is known to emit his judgments. This, because the soul of the righteous man is the throne of God. It is told that it was beautifully made in ivory, not because we understand it only as enriched with ornaments, but because the elephant, whose tusks are constitute the ornaments, is considered an animal of extraordinary chastity, who among the quadrupeds and – more broadly speaking – breeds with its female in a continent way and does not go to its second female. This rightly applies to the souls of chaste men, because they know what the ivory of the throne is, so that the precepts of Christ God are followed through a chaste behavior. "And overlaid it with the finest gold": for he made the splendor of his glory shine in that, when he showed the power of his majesty through miraculous signs. "It had six steps". What is designated with the number six, if not the perfection of good deeds? "In six days, God made the world and on the seventh he rested from the work he had done". Number six, then, is the first number recognized perfect on the basis of its parts. Its half is three, its third is two, its sixth is one; one and two and three make six. Therefore, since even the world itself is divided in six epochs, in which it is possible to make an effort, whoever wants to reach the kingdom of Heaven should hurry to reach it by making good deeds, since, without them it is

not possible to ascend. Otherwise it is hardly possible to arrive there. Then it follows: and the top of the throne was round behind him". What else does the roundness of the throne mean if not the eternal peace, which after this life is promised to the saints, a condition in which who has well behaved is given a reward for his good deeds and enjoys an everlasting peace? And also in the *Song of Songs* this throne is mentioned with another example, there where it is written: "King Solomon hath made him a litter of the wood of Lebanon. The pillars thereof he made of silver, the seat of gold, the going up of purple: the midst he covered with charity" [599].

It is quite possible that such a series of connections was first prompted by the identification of the throne of God (*sedes sapientiae*) with *Ecclesia* – circulating, as we have seen, in the same years and quite widespread in his own cultural circle – and then extended by analogy to the throne of Solomon[600]. In the

[599] "Fecit etiam rex Salomon thronum de ebore grandem, et vestivit eum auro fulvo nimis, qui habebat sex gradus. Et summitas throni rotunda erat in parte posteriore, et duae manus hinc atque inde tenentes sedile, et duo leones stabant juxta manus singulas, et duodecim leunculi stantes super sex gradus hinc atque inde, etc». Solium ergo quod rex Salomon fecit bene Ecclesia sancta esse intelligitur, in qua Pacificus noster regnans judicia sua facere dignoscitur. Quia anima justi sedes est sapientiae. Et bene de ebore illud factum esse memoratur, quod non ad solas divitias intelligamus aptatum, sed quoniam elephas, cujus haec ossa sunt, nimiae castitatis asseritur, qui inter quadrupedia et sensu plurimo valet, et temperanter miscetur feminae suae, et conjuge secunda non utitur. Hoc pudicis animabus decenter aptatum est, quia illae ebur fuisse noscuntur, quae per castitatem Christi Domini praecepta secutae sunt."Hanc vestivit auro fulvo nimis". Quia splendorem gloriae suae in ea clarescere fecit, cum per signa miracula majestatis suae potentiam ostendit. "Habebat autem thronus iste sex gradus". Quid per senarium numerum, nisi bonorum operum perfectio designatur? "Sex diebus perfecit Deus mundi ornatum, et septimo requievit ab operibus suis" (Gen. 2:2). Siquidem et senarius primus est numerus, qui suis partibus perfectus esse dignoscitur. Habet enim medietatem tria, tertiam partem duo, sextam unum; unum vero, duo et tria sex fiunt. Igitur quia et sex aetatibus mundus constat, in quibus licet operari, quisquis ad coelestem patriam pervenire desiderat, bonis operibus ascendere festinet, quia, nisi bonis actibus ascendatur. Illuc minime pervenitur. Sequitur: "Et summitas throni rotunda erat in parte posteriore". Quid enim rotunditas throni in parte posteriore nisi requiem aeternam, quae post hanc vitam futura est sanctis, significat, ubi quisquis his bene laborat, mercede operis sui remuneratur, perenni quiete perfruetur? Unde et in Cantico canticorum de hoc ipso throno sub alio exemplo commemoratur, ubi dicitur: "Ferculum fecit sibi rex Salomon de lignis Libani. Columnas ejus fecit argenteas; reclinatorium aureum, ascensum purpureum media charitate constravit" (Cant. 3:9-10)", *Beati Rabani Mauri Fuldensis Abbatis et Moguntini Archiepiscopi Commentaria in Libros IV Regum*, in *PL*, cols 195d-199a.

[600] See above, n. 593, Haimo of Halbertstadt. Considering the lack of a previous literary (or theological) tradition in this sense, it would be fascinating to imagine that the idea was

excerpt quoted his reasoning clearly follows the various elements of the throne as they were *loci*, associating a different concept to each of them. The throne is the Church (and therefore the soul of every righteous person), the ivory of the seat represents Christ's purity and chastity, the gold is the splendor of his glory, the six steps signify utter perfection, while the round back is eternal peace.
In his commentary, Rabanus also expands on the given material, by adding, for instance, another scriptural reference, namely that of *ferculum*, mentioned in the *Songs of Songs*. We will remember from the first chapter that the identification and the explanation of what the *ferculum* was has proven oftentimes problematic and also provided some free association in the exegetic tradition. Rabanus, for instance, takes it as another image of the throne[601].

His commentary represented a novelty in the imagery of the throne of Solomon. His allegory, however, did not prove particularly successful – *Ecclesia* disappearing in favor of the Virgin – while, on the contrary, his method did. After him, in fact, other authors began to exploit the same passage in sermons and homilies, yet ascribing to the throne a series of different Marian features. It is actually possible that such a transition, from the identification of the throne with *Ecclesia* first, and with the Virgin later, depended on the progressive superimposition of the figure of the Virgin with the Church itself, a parallelism that had certainly been firmly established by the twelfth century[602]. It would have therefore been natural for later authors to expand on Rabanus Maurus's comparison in the light of a newly established imagery.

Guibert de Nogent

The Benedictine historian and theologian Guibert de Nogent (ca. 1055-1124 C.E.), for instance, in his *Liber de laude sanctae Mariae*[603], glossed the ivory as a symbol of chastity and purity ("Elephas enim, cujus ossa sunt ebur,

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prompted by the actual presence in Aachen of a throne with Solomonic features. Such an association would be not at all surprising for an author who wrote *De laudibus sanctae crucis*, the collection of visual poems inscribed in the ancient tradition of the *carmina figurata*, and who devoted his life to find effective ways of teaching and commenting upon the Scriptures, even through controversial texts like the *Coena Cypriani*.

[601] The passage of the commentary regarding the *ferculum* is much longer and provides a detailed comparison between its structure and function and *Ecclesia*.

[602] On this, see for instance H. Coathalem, *Le parallelisme entre la Sainte Vierge et l'Eglise dans la tradition latine jusqu'à la fin du XII^e siècle*, (Analecta Gregoriana LXXIV), Roma 1954.

[603] Guibert of Nogent, *Liber de laude sanctae Mariae*, in *PL* 156, Paris 1853, cols 537-577.

continentis ac mundae naturae est"), the golden parts as signs of her divinity ("sed ipsa substantialiter propria divinitate interius exteriusque interfecit"). Quite interesting, according to the view of the abbot, is the reading of the six steps as a series of virtues ("timor et pietas, scientia et fortitudo, consilium et intellectus") representing the almost complete catalogue of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The first one is in fact missing and the author therefore elegantly solved the problem by stating that through them she had reached Christ who, himself, presided over wisdom ("quibus pervenit ipsa ad eum qui sibi specialiter praesedit sapientiam Christum"). The elevated position of the throne represents her position of eminence among men.

The two armrests, variously translated with some degree of confusion either as *brachiola* or *manus*, were often intended and therefore represented quite literally as two hands. Guibert explains the "duae manus" as the human and divine nature of Christ. The two lions close to the armrests would be two orders of the Church ("sunt praelatorum et subditorum seipsos regentium ordines Ecclesiae"), those devoted to active and to contemplative life, while the "leonculi", namely the twelve lions on the steps are the innocents, strenghtened by the virtues represented by the steps ("innocentes [sunt] et sui ipsorum rectores super sex gradus stant, cum sese sex virtutibus praedictis roborant").

Nicholas de Clairvaux

After him, we have to mention the *Sermo in Nativitate S. Mariae*, traditionally ascribed to Peter Damian[604] but probably composed by Nicholas of Clairvaux, secretary of Bernard of Clairvaux, founder of the Cistercians and particularly devoted to the Virgin, who was made the patron of the order. It is not unimaginable to posit an exegetical interest toward the figure of Mary, running through the Benedictine to the Cistercian, thanks to the mediation of Nicholas, moreover fostered by Bernard's special devotion. As we will see, however, despite few points of contact, the later commentary does not seem to strictly depend on that of Guibert and it is clear that if Nicholas knew it, he did not follow it closely. It opens with a long section on the throne, quoting several other passages in the Scriptures, in order to create a net of textual cross-references for it; he then proceeds in explaining more in detail the symbolism of that of Solomon. The ivory is characterized in terms of its brightness

[604] *B. Petri Damiani S. R. E. cardinalis, episcopi Ostiensis, O.S.B., Sermones ordine mensium servato,* sermo XLIV (*In nativitate B. V. Mariae*), in *PL* 144, Paris 1853, cols 736-740.

("candor"), its solidity ("fortitudo") and its cold quality ("frigidus"), three features that also apply to the Virgin, whose virginity shines in radiance, who has been chosen for her strength. Gold stands for her holiness and the author specifies that its color ("fulvus") is a sign of her uniqueness: human beings are in fact defined in four ways, depending on how the balance between good and evil act on their souls. The Virgin, however, is on a category on her own ("quarto modo inest uni creaturae, videlicet Mariae Virgini, identitate, quia idem est quod illa") because she is inhabited by the very presence of God. The six steps are taken as a veritable gradual ascension, almost as a spiritual pilgrimage toward God. To each step corresponds an act: meditating, speaking rightly, performing good deeds, showing the way through an exemplar conduct and comforting the afflicted, leaving the world and its temptations behind and persevering in this path: all this will lead on the top of the throne. The peculiar shape of the back of the throne, instead, is compared to eternal life. The roundness, in fact, comes to represent the perfection of the circle, where there is no beginning and no end, which becomes a symbol for the life of the Virgin herself, who went to Heaven without experiencing death. Such a statement should not surprise us, since a tradition regarding the Assumption of Mary was known at least from the end of the fourth century C.E., even though it was proclaimed as a dogma only in 1950. The twelve lions are the Apostles, while the two 'hands' are signs of the active and contemplative life, two qualities that the Virgin equally possessed. The two lions guarding the armrests are the Archangel Gabriel and John the Evangelist, who were to protect her ("Gabriel enim mentem, Joannes carnem pervigili sollicitudine servaverunt") and who can rightly considered as lions, given the power of their words. Finally, Nicholas comments upon the uniqueness of the throne, which corresponds to the special condition enjoyed by the Virgin, in virtue of Divine Grace.

Richard of St. Laurent

The last and most notable textual source for the exegesis of the throne in relationship with the Virgin is the long treaty *De laudibus Beatae Mariae*, traditionally attributed to various authors, among them Jacob from Varagine, Hugh Panziera, Bernardino de Busti and Albert the Great but probably written by Richard of St. Laurent[605], French theologian and possibly canon at Rouen. It

[605] For a full bibliography, see *Testi mariani del secondo millennio*, 8 vols, IV: *Autori medievali dell' Occidente: secoli XIII-XV*, ed. by L. Gambero, Roma 1996, p. 154.

appears that he wrote the ponderous work, a veritable theological summa on what was known about the Virgin, on request of some friends belonging to the Cistercian *milieu*, where, as we have seen, a peculiar interest toward the figure of Mary was nurtured.

One of the sections of this impressive work is dedicated to the similarities between Mary and biblical architectures, such as the Ark, but the tenth chapter includes a detailed treatment of the throne symbolism. The literary effort of Richard resulted of particular relevance, because the explanation of the biblical passage according to his version enjoyed an incredible success, particularly at a figurative level, probably because the circulation of the work under the name of Albert the Great allowed his interpretation to be widely known through the predication of the Dominicans.

We are by now familiar with the scheme of the treatise; in this case, however, the author presents his interpretation but often quotes also that of other commentators, when it differs from his, usually introducing it with the standard formula "vel aliter". The throne is presented as outstanding, given its beautiful manufacture, its durability, and its majestic look. The ivory is a sign of the Virgin's chastity, while the gold which coats it is the humbleness which envelops her; the series of virtues she is endowed with, in fact, make her special, exactly like gold stands out among metals[606]. The six steps seem to have a double correspondence: on the one hand, they represent the "operationes" or faculties, four typical of the body ("carnis assumende purgatio", "decisio", "formatio", "unio"), two of the soul ("intellectus" et "affectus", to which "veritas" and "gratia" are connected), but they also correspond to the Virgin's virtues ("verecundia", "prudentia", "modestia", "castitas", "humilitas", "magnanimitas")[607]. The top of the throne is mentioned as a sign of her greatness, since she is the mother of God. The circular shape of the back represents, as we have seen elsewhere, eternity. The author, however, also adds that the front and the back of the throne signify the two moments, before and after she gave birth. This observation prompts a discourse on her virginity, identifying the throne with Christ' own flesh and the whole shape of the seat as a sign of her eternal virginity. However, Richard introduces also a second

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[606] *Opus insigne de laudibus beate Marie Virginis, alias Mariale appellatum*, Argentine [Strasbourg] 1493, f. 157r. The subject is treated in book X (*de edificiis quibus Maria figuratur in Biblia*), titulus II under the entry *Maria Thronus veri Salomonis*, held in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, available online in an electronic edition.

[607] *Ibid.*, f. 157v.

interpretation, according to which, this "summitas" is "intellectus Marie", while the round shape hints at her participation in the divine quality of God. He even comments on the actual seat, which is "tranquillitas" and "pax mentis Virginis"[608].

For the two hands he offers several explanations: among them, the two "operationes" according to John of Damask, one which "purgavit illam a fomite", the other which "reparavit potentiam verbi deitatis receptivam simul et generativam", but also "conceptio sine culpa et partus sine pena", according to the French theologian Philippus Cancellarius (1165-1236 C.E.)[609]. The two lions are equated to John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, who lived like lions in the desert, the former in that of Judaea, the latter in a spiritual desert ("quod deseruit angelus"), and whose powerful words were like roars. The twelve lions, instead, are the tribes of Israel, Jesus himself being a lion coming from Judah. In presenting these last two similarities, Richard also mentions Nicholas' interpretation – the two lions being John the Evangelist and the Archangel Gabriel and the other twelve the Apostles, standing on the steps and trying to imitate the Virgin's virtues[610].

The Sedes Sapientiae as the Throne of Solomon: a Marian interference

What is interesting to note is that all the writers who exploit this visual theme differ from one another. Despite a series of similar elements, none of the texts known explains the details of the throne in the exact same way, which could be seen as an indirect sign of their primarily homiletic and didactic intent; had it been strictly dogmatic, we would have expected (and probably found) a greater uniformity. Instead, it is clear that the image of the throne evoked in the biblical passage is subsidiary to the explanation of other concepts. The mnemotechnical strategy of associating an element of the seat, either its shape, material or visual feature, to a Marian characteristic became, in fact, standard practice, being part of the methodology of preaching.

This body of commentaries made the superimposition between the figure of the Virgin and the throne of Solomon accepted and widespread, particularly during the twelfth century C.E. and thanks to the Cistercian efforts. If we had to sum up, then, we could say that the expression *sedes sapientiae*, was

[608] *Ibid*., f. 158r.

[609] *Ibid*., f. 158v.

[610] *Ibid*., f. 158v.

originally employed in direct reference to God, Christ or *Ecclesia*; the throne of Solomon, in turn, was presented as figure of the Church by Rabanus Maurus; probably thanks to the superimposition between *Ecclesia* and the Virgin, the elements normally referred to the throne of Solomon came to be interpreted as attributes of Mary. Such a passage could have also been favored by the identification between Christ and Solomon and of Mary as the 'vessel', the 'receptacle' of the New Solomon. The Virgin began to receive the appellation of *sedes sapientiae*, particularly in a series of texts, written by monks belonging to St. Bernard's circle. This does not mean that Mary was equated with Divine Wisdom, but that she was understood as the receptacle for it. The expression occurs, for instance, in the first sermon of Guerricus, disciple of Bernard, "Quod Mariae duplici titulo sit mater, quodque recte dicatur thronus Dei"[611]. The correspondence is all the more evident in a commentary to the *Salve Regina* prayer, always produced in the same cultural *milieu*, where *sedes sapientiae* is employed as one of her epithets:

> And there is nothing worth excusing us, since it is not you but Eve whom we imitate in all things and for this reason "to thee do we send up our sighs". And we send up our sighs because of the absence of such good Mother, wishing to come close to you, our Lady: to thee we send up our sighs with the hope to see your Son. This extraordinary love, then, through which we feel like intimately inebriated in front of you, forces us to send up our sighs to you, our Lady. You are always lovely, always kind, always pleasant; seat of wisdom, river of mercy, ray of deity; nor is anybody who can hide from your warmth[612].

It is therefore the mediation of the Virgin, which makes the equation between the *sedes sapientiae* and the throne of Solomon right, because, as we have seen,

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[611] *Guerrici abbatis Igniacensis discipuli s. Bernardi sermones per annum. In assumptione b. Mariae*, Sermo I (*Quod Mariae duplici titulo sit mater, quodque recte dicatur thronus Dei*), in *PL* 185, Paris 1855, cols 187-190.

[612] "Nec est quod nos valeat excusare, qui non te, sed Evam in omnibus imitamur, ac per hoc, "Ad te suspiramus". Suspiramus autem de tam bonae Matris absentia, venire ad te, Domina, cupientes: "suspiramus ad te", videre Filium tuum affectantes. Nimius ergo amor, quo erga te sumus inebriati intrinsecus, cogit nos ad te, Domina, suspirare. Omnibus es amabilis, omnibus affabilis, omnibus delectabilis; sedes sapientiae, fluvius clementiae, radius Deitatis: nec est qui se abscondat a calore tuo", *Sancti Bernardi abbatis Clarae-vallensis operum tomus quintus, complectens opera supposititia et aliena, Sermones varii in quaedam festa et dominicas anni*, Auctor incertus: *Meditatio in Salve Regina*, in *PL* 184, Paris 1854, cols 1077-1080, col. 1079c.

the expression had never directly indicated the seat of the king of Israel, neither in the Scriptures nor in the commentaries. This long demonstration takes us back to our starting point: the rubric running under Henry VI in the *Liber ad Honorem Augusti*. In labeling the illustration, the scribe employed an expression which, in its connection with Solomon, had been taking shape in a religious context, directly pertaining to the Virgin Mary. It is an interesting interference, which shows that the superimposition was absolute and *sedes sapientiae* had become a synonimic expression. It is also another example of the efforts made by various political and religious actors to appropriate the symbol.

If the reconstruction I proposed is correct, during the twelfth century the throne of Solomon was simultaneously employed by the empire, by the papacy and by monastic theologians (particularly Benedictines, Cistercians and Dominicans) who wanted to emphasize the role of the Virgin, whose centrality characterized the particular devotion of all their orders, as it results clear also from the first occurrences of the new iconography[613]. If Mary Mother of God enthroned, or in *maiestate*, was in fact widespread in Europe at least since the tenth century[614], her visual apparition on the lions throne seems to circulate broadly in this monastic *milieu*: we find this new representation in the apse fresco of the Benedictine nun's convent of Goslar[615]; few years later, we find another representation of the Virgin as throne of Solomon is a Cistercian psalter (Besançon, Bibliothèque Municipale, ms. 54, f. 9r) produced around 1260-1270 C.E. for a monastery in the diocese of Basel; again, on another codex, this time a Dominican graduale made for the convent of St. Katharinenthal around 1312 (nowadays in Zurich, Sweizerische Landesmuseum). Examples multiply in different media (glass windows, portal sculptures, panel paintings, etc.) and in different religious contexts, but it results clear that its first diffusion was prompted by the orders.

[613] A.D. Mackenzie, *The Virgin Mary as the Throne of Solomon in Medieval Art* (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University 1965).

[614] Forsyth, *The throne of wisdom*, p. 31.

[615] The first extant is one of the window glass of Strasbourg's cathedral (ca. 1230). Beside the lions, the original scheme included the personifications of the six virtues of Mary. Thirty years later, the throne of Solomon was also sculpted on the portal of the cathedral. It is no coincidence that this happened: the church was dedicated to Notre-Dame, therefore it includes the last novelties in terms of Marian iconography.

A figuration which is particularly interesting to discuss is the throne structure as it appears in the frescoes realized in the bishop's chapel in Gurk's cathedral, probably at the beginning of the thirteenth century [ill. 58].

The throne here is occupied by the Virgin, surrounded by six virtues, standing on the steps but located under a canopied arcade. I mention this detail because it has recently been put in connection with another similar architectural

structure, discussed by Weiss in an article on the Sainte-Chapelle[616]. In parallel with the circulation of this iconography, in fact, other sovereigns in Europe consciously exploited the imagery of Solomon in order to celebrate their own rule. It has recently been advanced, for instance, that the original design for the tribune and baldachin of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, quite similar to the one depicted in Gurk, were meant to evoke the Hall of Justice, described in the Bible (1 Kings, 7:6-7) as a porch consisting in a row of pillars behind a canopy. It is depicted like that, for instance, in the Proverbs frontispiece of a Bible produced in Reims between 866 and 875, following Byzantine prototypes (Roma, S. Paolo fuori le Mura), a figurative model which will often be combined, later on, with the actual depiction of the throne of Solomon. It would seem all the more logical to imagine the seat of the king in the Hall of Justice and it is quite possible that the union of the six-story structure with a baldachin with arcades, such as that characterizing the throne of the Virgin in the Gurk's fresco, represents the conflation of these two existing figurative models. Weiss'hypothesis, with regard to the Sainte-Chapelle, is that the "grande chasse" containing the relics of the Passion of Christ, located at the center of the baldachin flanked on both sides by a triple arcade, would have recalled the structure of the Hall of Justice/throne, yet symbolically replacing the figure of the Virgin sitting on it. Such a substitution would have made all the more sense, considering that the Passion relics would have constituted the material evidence for Christ's Incarnation, which is usually one of the main allegorical meanings of the *sedes sapientiae*. Such a symbolic architecture would have fit well within the narrative of Louis IX as a New Solomon, dear to the king. In building the Sainte Chapelle, a veritable "house for God", in fact, he would have indirectly confirmed what his own propaganda was suggesting.

What I find quite interesting, beside the reading of the architectural setting, is that we see another sovereign, after the case of the manuscript for Henry VI, who plays on the extant iconographical tradition related to the figure of the Virgin, and adapt it to the means of his own figurative program.

[616] D.H. Weiss, *The Three Solomon Portraits in the Arsenal Old Testament and the Construction of Meaning in Crusader Painting*, in «Arte Medievale», 6 (1992), pp. 15-38, p. 27; D.H. Weiss, *Architectural Symbolism and the Decoration of the Ste.–Chapelle*, in «The Art Bulletin», 77 (1995), pp. 308-320.

It seems, therefore, that some rulers, particularly during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries C.E.[617], were influenced by the image of Mary enthroned and chose sometimes to consciously rival it.

The Throne of Solomon as Spiritual Ladder

The last offshoot of the Solomonic throne in Christian Europe is a late and perhaps marginal case, but it is nonetheless worth mentioning, because it shows the circulation and reception of the symbol in lay contexts, thanks to the mediation of the Franciscan order, in a way which is quite different from the examples seen above. The case I am going to mention, in fact, freely built upon the image of the Virgin as throne of Solomon, thus implying its figurative and exegetical tradition, but it represents an original outcome of the merging of that illustrative and exegetical line with another quite strong monastic tradition: that of the ladder[618]. This notion appears for the first time during the fourth century C.E., as an allegorical image of Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:10-22), but it develops into a diagram of both spiritual cosmology and topography, the embodiment of the separation between heaven and earth and therefore the visual itinerary which every man should undertake in order to reach God. The idea of a spiritual ladder, which takes the shape of a series of steps, is also supported by some other biblical occurrences, like the fifteen gradual psalms (119-133), the vision of prophet Ezekiel with its 15 steps (Ez., 40:2-48), the three heavens of Saint Paul (2 Cor. 12:2) and it belongs to the heritage of the monastic orders. The idea of the ladder as a spiritual journey toward perfection, in fact, is mentioned in the rule of St. Benedict (VII chapter) but it is also widespread in the Eastern world, thanks to the treatise on the *Scala Paradisi*, written by the monk John, later on nicknamed 'Climacus' at the end of the sixth century C.E., describing a ladder with thirty steps, corresponding to the years of Christ's life,

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[617] See, for instance, the chair of Edward I for which a series of leopards (two on each side) were made (ca. 1297-1301), Wormald, *The Throne of Solomon*, p. 538, in the English coronation order, since the tenth century there was a passage which recalled the anointing made by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet ("unxerunt Salomonem"). See also the case of Robert of Naples, S. Kelly, *The New Solomon. Robert of Naples (1309-1343) and Fourteenth-Century Kingship*, Leiden 2003), pp. 259-263, for praises of princes in Solomonic terms.

[618] C. Heck, *L'iconographie de l'ascension spirituelle et la dévotion des laïcs: le "Trône de charité" dans le "Psautier de Bonne de Luxembourg" et les "Petites Heures du duc de Berry"*, in «Revue de l'Art», 110 (1995), pp. 9-22; C. Heck, *L'échelle céleste dans l'art du moyen age*, Paris 1997, particularly pp. 134-137.

imagined as a handbook for spiritual and practical progress, which enjoyed a wide circulation and was often illustrated.

A similar principle was applied to a series of treatises conceived during the twelfth century, this time, for a lay audience, that were very popular in Western Europe: works like the *Speculum virginum*, the *Hortus deliciarum* or the *Speculum Theologie* presented, both visually and textually, a series of theological and devotional diagrams that clarified a gradual path toward improvement. It is on this typological line that we can insert our two late examples: two illustrations, the first one in Bona of Luxembourg's Psalter [ill. 59] (New York, Metropolitan Museum, The Cloisters, Inv. 69.88, f. 315r) and the second in the manuscript of the *Petites Heures* belonging to the Duke of Berry (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale ms. lat. 18014, f. 278v), that depict a *trône de charité*, a structure composed of six steps that take up to Heaven, through a progression of good deeds. In the Psalter, there is a collection of seven treatises, the third of which is introduced by the illustration above mentioned, explained as "the six steps of charity according to the figure of the throne of Solomon".

They represent, in a diagrammatical way, a practical and spiritual path, which should take up to God's perfect love. The Duke's manuscript is a detailed copy of that of his mother, except that, as far as our topic is concerned, the actual throne on the top of the ramp is not depicted, neither is the man ascending on it. In his place, we find the representation of the six virtues that are a literal transposition of the six steps of love described in the treatise.

Even though the structure of the throne reminds of that of Solomon only in the number of steps, it has been demonstrated that such a connection was based on the reflections of Bonaventura from Bagno Regio, the Franciscan philosopher. The throne of charity is, in fact, based on the *resumé* of one of the chapters of his *De triplici via*, which institutes a direct parallel between the six steps of Solomon's throne and the six stages of the spiritual itinerary. The image of the throne steps, however, recurs also in other passages of the work of the Franciscan philosopher, particularly in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. The idea of the steps as symbols of a series of good deeds was already extant in the exegetical tradition: it appeared for the first time in Rabanus Maurus's commentary to the biblical throne of Solomon but was also proposed again in the writings about the image of the throne of Solomon as the Virgin Mary by some of the other authors discussed above.

At an iconographical level, the possibility of reaching the throne of Solomon, which represented a divine space, had already been applied to the

illustration of the treatise on the *Spera* by John Peckham, pupil of Bonaventura, probably written between 1250 and 1270 C.E. in response to John of Sacrobosco's work; it was a cosmological treatise which could be illustrated as a geometric scheme, composed by 15 concentric circles encompassing the earth and all the outer spheres; in the *empireum*, in the very space of God, was located the throne of Solomon[619].

[619] Heck, *L'iconographie de l'ascensione*, p. 105.

The presence of virtues on the steps of our two manuscripts, instead, probably derived from the most elaborated figurations of the Virgin enthroned surrounded by the personifications of her own virtues, that we have already mentioned. The throne of Charity, therefore, is a new formulation, depending on all these iconographical precedents, combining elements of the exegesis of the throne of Solomon with the diagrams of the moral and didactic tradition, applied to the old theme of the ladder which, through the predication of the mendicant orders, became central for the devotional practices of the lay class. Such an original creation, as marginal as it can seem, is nonetheless quite interesting to us because it represents the natural outcome of a tendency which was evident in the story of the throne of Solomon since the beginning of its exegesis during the ninth century C.E.

The seat of the king of Israel, in fact, plays out in two different and parallel ways in Christian Europe: on the one hand it represents the throne of a sovereign (either an emperor, a pope or the Virgin in Majesty). What matters, in all these cases, is its actual appearance, its physicality, its very presence which speaks and signifies power. Despite its varied and subtle declinations, the throne of Solomon is here just a symbol of kingship. However, there is also a second possibility: the throne can also be used as an empty structure, a diagram, a frame, which can be filled with a philosophical, moral, theological or exegetical system. What counts, this time, is the skeleton, which can sustain any allegorical reading; in this way, the throne becomes an intellectual and theoretical tool, whose meaning depend on the context of its usage.

A non-canonical Solomon

The approach of extant scholarship to the throne of Solomon in Western art has focused mainly on the iconography of the Virgin, by searching the rich patrimony of homilies and sermons of Christian writers, thus tracing the textual sources that could explain, from case to case, the visual representation under examination. Research in the field has therefore yielded, over the years, a great number of cases displaying this typology of representation throughout Europe (particularly in Germany, Austria, France and Italy), most still extant in monumental contexts, like paintings and sculptures, but also at a manuscript level.

More recently, Isa Ragusa has also underlined that it is possible to expand the usual range of symbolic associations provided by the lions throne,

by investigating the judicial component emerging from some peculiar depictions: she explained how the inscription "terror demonum" and "terror inimicorum" appearing sometimes on the two leaves of a door opening at the foot of the throne, guarded by the two usual lions – however displayed for the occasion beside the gate and not close to the seat – were not meant to represent the usual Incarnation symbolism but that proper of Solomon as dispenser of justice, prefiguring the role of Christ on the Last Judgment's day.

In general, however, regardless of the various distinctions or visual acceptations of this iconography, from the way the material has been presented, it looks as if the throne were mostly a prerogative of the Virgin or of Christ. It is in fact true that the preponderance of Solomonic thrones provided by religious contexts has oriented scholarship toward an analysis that gives chronological and symbolic precedence to them. The other cases, namely those found in the secular sphere, are usually treated in parallel of what results the standard iconography of the Virgin enthroned, but never in opposition to it.

Nevertheless, we know that, historically, the throne of Solomon had been equally exploited throughout the Mediterranean by sovereigns of different cultures and religions and the very first occurrence seen so far in the Christian world (Constantinople) was actually an imperial one. My idea, in presenting this material, was to consider the issue of the development of the iconography of the Virgin in Christian art as growing in parallel but somehow also in opposition to the secular tradition. Although older and well established among rulers, the tradition of the throne of Solomon had to confront the diffusion of the Marian iconography and was influenced by it. In general, my approach meant to show that, despite the polygenesis of the motif, the actual declination of the symbol was often imagined as direct response to another Solomonic occurrence or depended on a previous formulation of it.

The analysis of the throne of Solomon in Christian Europe, however, has also shown a drastic change in the features characterizing this symbol, if compared to the examples of the first four chapters. As we have seen, the very figure of Solomon in the Mediterranean world was defined by a set of traits encompassing not only his proverbial wisdom but also his ability as an architect or patron of crafty things and his familiarity with demons. From the body of canonical texts and legends analyzed, it has emerged a nuanced and complex character whose ambivalence and fundamental ambiguity was never completely dismissed. None of his more obscure or controversial qualities, however, had prevented the various political powers from exploiting his figure as a paradigm

of positive kingship. In Christian Europe, however, the highly technological or magical quality of the throne and its exotic characterization have disappeared completely.
With this I do not mean to state that Solomon is never represented in throne in the tradition of Western Christian art, but the imagery employed and the set of iconographical schemes is usually the official, Biblical one[620]. The rich material combining canonical and apocryphal sources, scriptures and legends, official and folkloric threads that characterizes the Mediterranean Solomonic tradition is simply not part of the standard language of visual representation of continental Europe[621].
The few exceptions that are known to me can be considered marginal, both because scanty in number and also because sometimes problematic iconographically.

The Otranto Case

The first case is represented by the figuration of king Solomon and of the queen of Sheba [ill. 60] appearing in two roundels on the floor of the Otranto cathedral in Apulia. The pavement is in fact covered by a complex and rich mosaic, carried out between 1163 and 1165 C.E., under the supervision (or, possibly, direct expertise) of the presbyter Pantaleon, whose name is recorded on a series of inscriptions, along with that of the commissioner bishop Jonathas, during the reign of the Norman king William the Wicked. On the overall meaning of the mosaic, which develops along the branches and tendrils of a tree, displaying scenes of the Old Testament, monstrous creatures, episodes of lay literature, representations of the Zodiac signs and labors of the months, much has been written, even though the incredible variety of its representations and its spatial disposition defy a strict definition and can be assimilated to a large geographical map, to a rich textile, to a mnemotechnical device employed for homiletic or ritual reasons, yet also evoking famous literary *ekphrasis* such as those described in the cycle of the *roman d'Alexandre*. It seems likely,

[620] M.R. Rickard, *The Iconography of the Virgin Portal at Amiens*, in «Gesta», 22 (1983), pp. 147-157.
[621] Some apocryphal versions will find their way into the illustrations of the *Bible moralisée*, but they usually are episodes demonstrating Solomon's wisdom. Elements betraying an exoterical or magical component are never included: see, for instance, British Library, ms. Royal 19 D II, f. 1r.

however, as stated by Chiara Frugoni[622], that the work was part of a broader figurative program – fragments of similar mosaics being still visible in Trani, Taranto and Brindisi – carried out in order to celebrate the military and political victory of William against the revolting barons, who had been supported by the Byzantine emperor Manuel Comnenos I. One of the main themes of the figuration is in fact the *hybris* of Alexander the Great, symbolized here by the iconography of the flight with the griffins[623]. It would then seem reasonable that the Norman propaganda would exploit the traditional association between the king of Macedonia and the Comnene dynasty, by reversing it, thus showing the famous episode in a negative light, visually paired up with the tower of Babel. A key of reading the program of the mosaic is then through the lens of positive and negative kingship and king Solomon is shown here as a positive counterpart to Alexander. Around the roundel, where the king of Israel is represented sitting on his wooden *faldistorium*, in fact, it is possible to read one of the dedicatory inscriptions extant in the church, and it is certainly not a coincidence that the archbishop chose to be remembered in close association with the figure of Solomon: *Ionatas humilis servus Chr[ist]i idrontin[us] archiepiscopus iussit hoc op[us] fieri*[624].

What interests us here, however, is not the general meaning of the mosaic but the way Solomon and the queen of Sheba – *regina Austri* as she is labeled according to the Gospel of Matthew – are represented. It is in fact a detail in the iconography of the queen that results particularly revealing to us[625]. She is shown with a bare foot and holding one of her shoes in her hand [ill. 61]. Between the two roundels with the monarchs, a small hoopoe is also depicted. These details should remind us of the famous encounter as known through the Islamic tradition: the king of Israel sent the bird to fetch the queen and, upon her arrival, she was compelled to remove her footwear, tricked by the illusion of

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[622] C. Frugoni, *Per una lettura del mosaico pavimentale della Cattedrale di Otranto*, in «Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo e Archivio Muratoriano», 80 (1968), pp. 213-256; see also M.A. Castiñeiras González, *L'Oriente immaginato nel mosaico di Otranto*, in *Medioevo Mediterraneo: l'Occidente, Bisanzio e l'Islam*, ed. by A.C. Quintavalle, Milano 2007, pp. 590-603.

[623] C. Frugoni, *Historia Alexandri elevati per griphos ad aerem, origine, iconografia e fortuna di un tema*, Roma 1973.

[624] "Jonathan, humble servant of Christ and archbishop of Otranto, commissioned this work".

[625] L. Pasquini, *Una nuova lettura iconografica del presbiterio di Otranto alla luce delle fonti scritte: notizie preliminari*, in *Atti del IX colloquio dell'associazione italiana per lo studio e la conservazione del mosaico*, ed. by C. Angelelli, Ravenna 2003, pp. 529-544.

the famous water-like pavement. This small yet telling detail is an interesting evidence of the fact that Pantaleon somehow knew the legendary account and, in devising the program for the floor, chose it over the canonical one. This fact itself is not surprising, if we consider the incredible cultural complexity of Apulia, a land which, among other things, housed a flourishing community of Jews and had been traditionally open to Eastern influences, being the departure point for crusaders and a long time Byzantine territory.

Palazzo Steri

The second example known to me of an non-canonical depiction of Solomon at a monumental level, which shows traces of the knowledge of an heterodox tradition, is to be found in Sicily, in the decoration of the ceiling of the Grand Hall (sala magna) of palazzo Chiaromonte-Steri in Palermo, built at the beginning of the fourteenth century by Manfredi III Chiaramonte (d. 1391 C.E.), powerful Sicilian nobleman[626]. The painted program, realized between

[626] E. Gabrici-E. Levi, *Lo Steri di Palermo e le sue pitture*, Milano 1932; E. Levi, *L'epopea medievale nelle pitture dello Steri di Palermo*, Napoli 1933; G. Spatrisano, *Lo Steri di Palermo e l'achitettura siciliana del Trecento*, Palermo 1972; F. Bologna, *Il soffitto della Sala Magna allo Steri di Palermo e la cultura feudale siciliana nell'autunno del Medioevo*, Palermo 1975; M. Bendinelli Predelli, *La storia di Alessandro Magno nel palazzo Chiaromonte di Palermo*, in «Prospettiva», 46 (1986), pp. 13-21; M. Bendinelli Predelli, *La storia di Alessandro Magno nel*

1377 and 1380 by Cecco di Naro, Simone from Corleone and Pellegrino Darena from Palermo, interests the whole wooden ceiling, whose beams have been covered in all their faces by an impressive number of scenes, ranging from chivalric themes like duels or episodes of famous romances, to fantastic creatures, framed by a series of Islamic-looking decorations. The gaze of the viewer, not dissimilarly from what happens in Otranto, wanders through the multitude of stories and tries to recognize the source of the narration, nowadays made sometimes difficult by the fragmentary state of conservation of some of the depictions (and by the continuous state of restoration). The figurative program, however, is readable thanks to a detailed photographic campaign of reproduction recently carried out by the region of Sicily[627], which allows us to consider the scenes at a close distance, even though the scholarly quality of the work accompanying the volume is not always satisfactory[628].

Traditionally, given the great number of episodes related to virtuous or unfaithful behaviors, and, more in general, on feminine vices and merits, the ceiling has been interpreted as commissioned on the occasion of the marriage of Manfredi Chiaramonte and Eufemia Ventimiglia in 1377 C.E., with the intent of providing an entertaining yet moral program, which could remind the new couple of their reciprocal duties. However, more recently, a different interpretation has also been advanced, which aims at demonstrating that the program of the hall, at least some if its principal scenes, should be read in relation with Manfredi in his role of *dominus*, as a judge and head of his household, whose virtues guarantee and restate his power on the island[629].

The judgment of Solomon finds place on one of the beams, and right beside it is depicted a fight between two knights [ill. 59]. Ferdinando Bologna,

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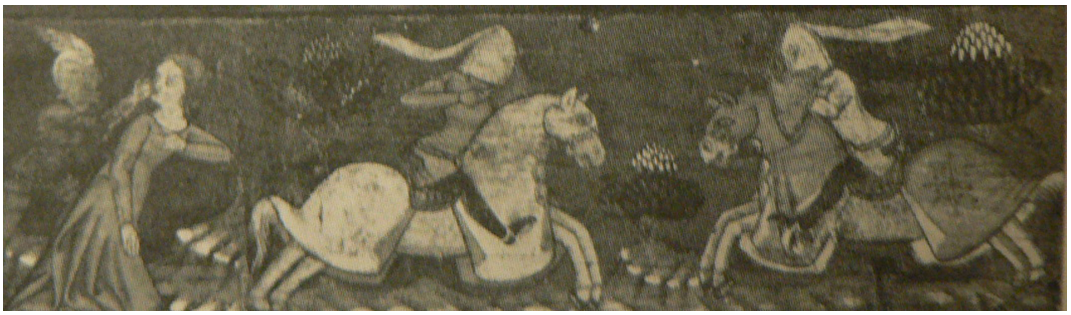
palazzo Chiaromonte di Palermo, in «Letteratura italiana e arti figurative», 1 (1988), pp. 357-368.

[627] *Il soffitto dello Steri di Palermo, rilievo fotogrammetrico digitale*, ed. by F. Vergara Caffarelli, Palermo 2009.

[628] The publication, for instance, ignores the article of M. Bendinelli Predelli which rightly interprets a doubtful cycle as part of the Alexander roman; instead, it reproposes the old and wrong interpretations advanced by the earlier scholarship without an upgrade. It would have been advisable, given the effort of the photographic campaign, to reconsider also the scholarly work with critical eye.

[629] L. Buttà, *Storie per Governare: Iconografia giuridica e del potere nel soffitto dipinto della Sala Magna del Palazzo Chiaromonte Steri di Palermo*, in *Narrazione, exempla, retorica. Studi sull'iconografia dei soffitti dipinti nel Medioevo Mediterraneo*, ed. by L. Buttà, Palermo 2013, pp. 69-126.

in the work dedicated to the Steri, agreed with the opinion of Levi[630] that there must have been a connection between the two contiguous scenes, and actually posited that one of the knights represented the king himself engaged in battle. On the caparison of the horse belonging to the knight fighting on the right of the scene, in fact, a peculiar star-pattern is visible, possibly a stylization of the seal of Solomon, which, as we have seen had apotropaic functions. Bologna suggested that such a peculiar figurative choice might have found its place on the ceiling of the hall through the contacts with Hebrew or Islamic sources of some kind.



I believe the hypothesis of the scholar is quite suggestive, because it draws from the basin of traditions that consider Solomon as a demon fighter. We have already encountered a similar iconography on a series of Byzantine amulets, where the king is shown as a warrior saint, even though he is usually spearing a serpent or a woman and also in the Ganagobie mosaics. It is therefore possible that, given the general program of the hall, with its exquisite taste for chivalric episodes, highly appreciated by a lay and noble audience, even the iconographic choice regarding king Solomon was decided accordingly[631].

A Literary Abode for the Throne of Solomon

Both these examples represent an exception to the standard iconographies of the king and indirectly attest the knowledge of literary traditions parallel to the Bible. These two cases are marginal in their scantiness but quite revealing under other respects. On the one hand, both Apulia and Sicily are contexts of cultural exchange, where the presence of Jewish and

[630] Levi, *Lo Steri*, p. 119

[631] Bologna, *Il soffitto della Sala Magna*, pp. 171-172 (ill. 5).

Islamic traditions both literary and textual, has always been incorporated within the articulations of local art.

A case like the Otranto mosaic, then, ideally continues the Mediterranean dialogue on Solomon, it is part of the same dialectic which we have seen displayed between Constantinople, Spain, Egypt and so on. Without forcing the evidences, it is easy to notice a geographical characterization of a certain set of motifs and also a social one. It might be coincidental but it is interesting to note that the two cases just mentioned have in common a context of production which is not only culturally various but whose figurative choices is heavily depending on a commission which seems to reflect more the taste of a lay audience, rather than that of a strictly religious one. Not just the program of the Grand Hall but even the Otranto mosaic, which was made for the floor of the cathedral – apparently a highly charged space, then – betrays a strong influence exerted from the Norman court, not just in terms of the political message delivered but also as far as the content of the work is concerned. The mix of sacred and profane, a repertoire of scenes which owes equally to the Old Testament, to the bestiaries and to contemporary French literature suggests an audience of learned lay noblemen, immersed in a culture certainly not so strictly formalized in theological terms, but owing more to literature and orality. In this sense, the two cases presented are both geographically and 'ideologically' liminal to the occurrences of the Virgin enthroned or of the other European sovereigns described, clearly partaking of an entirely different cultural horizon.

The question, however, is also partly chronological because, as we have seen, the popularity of the new iconography of the throne is a relatively late phenomenon, if compared with most of the cases discussed in the previous chapters. The combined effect of this chronological, cultural and geographical shift results in the evident rupture with a tradition that had been lively and flourishing for centuries. In Western Christian art, Solomon is most of the time presented only in his most official and straightforward aspect, without his most distinctive Mediterranean character. As a result, he gains in authority, but he loses in expressive potential: he remains the wise and rich ruler and expert architect, but he certainly never goes around in his flying or automatic throne, building fabulous palaces with the help of demonic entities.

What I would like to show now is that, despite the separation of the various literary and visual threads constituting the nucleus coalesced around

Solomon, this material did not really disappear but continued to live in other realms, so to speak.

This example, briefly mentioned in the first chapter, is drawn from *The Younger Titurel*, a poem in Middle German probably completed by 1272 C.E. by a certain Albrecht, who narrated the adventures of the Grail king when young. In providing a sort of prequel to Wolfram from Eschenbach's famous romance *Titurel*, Albrecht described in a lengthy section the Temple in the land of Salvaterre where the cup was held[632]. Among the distinctive features of this place, above the western portal, there was an organ, which seems devised as a golden tree with birds, singing according to the organist's will[633]. The whole structure was covered by a dome meant to reproduce the sky with stars, sun and moon in precious stones; a clockwork mechanism kept in constant movement the constellations of the ceiling and golden cymbals struck the time[634]. The whole place was openly compared to the architectural wonders God had helped Solomon with[635]. There was also a crystal floor, under which images of fish and other sea wonders were said to be moving as if they were real. The whole

[632] Albrecht, *Der jüngere Titurel*, ed. by K.A. Hahn, Leipzig 1842; E. Droysen, *Der Tempel des heiligen Gral nach Albrecht von Scharffenberg jüngerer Titurel Str. 319-410*, Bromberg 1872; F. Zarncke, *Der Graltempel: Vorstudie zu einer Ausgabe des Jüngern Titurel*, Leipzig 1876; W. Wolf, *Grundsätzliches zu einer Ausgabe des Jüngeren Titurel*, in «Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur», 79 (1942), pp. 4-248.

[633] "Vil hoch ob einer porte gen occidente schone / daz man vil gerne horte, was ein werk in hellem su^{e}zem do^{e}ne, / ein orgelsank, da man ze hochgeziten / daz ampt mit florieret, als man noch pfligt in kristenheit der witen. / Ein boum uz rotem golde, mit loube, zwie und esten / besetzet, als man wolde; vógel vól uber ál der aller besten / di man an suzer stimme lobt zu prise; / uz balgen gie dar in ein wint, daz igelich vogel sanc in siner wise. / Einer hoch, der andere nidere ie nach der sluzzels leite / der don zu berge widere was in den boum gewiset mit arbeite, / swelcherleie vogel er wolde stungen, / der meister wol bekante den slu^{e}zzel, ie dar nach die vogel sungen", Wolf, *Grundsätzliches zu einer Ausgabe des Jüngeren Titurel*, 64-65, p. 97.

[634] "Uber ál daz gewelbe obene mit saphíere was geblæwet, /der heilikeit zu lobene mit keim anderm stein niht under strewet / wan luter liht gestirnet mit karvunkel, / diu sam die sunne luchten, iz wer diu nacht trube oder tunkel. / Der richeit uber wunne was man da niht ane. / Die goltvarwe sunne vnd dazu der silber gebnde mane / den beiden warn exempel da gerichet. / Mit edelkeit der steine. Die art an varwe in beden wart gelichet. / Sie zugten ane sorgen or o̧rolei mit kunst der richen / mit listen se verborgen, daz ougȩ nie kunde erkiesȩn ir umbeslichen, / die siben tage zite/ zimbal uz goldȩ in kunten wol mit done", *ibid.*, 46-49, p. 90.

[635] "Got reiner gier ie gebende was mer dann si was gernde, / do dirre kunic so lebende nach wirde was, got was in stiure wernde, / diu sich gelichte wol der Salomones, / do ér z̧e Jérusaléme stífte 'templum domini' des trones", *ibid.*, 38, p. 87.

mechanism was put in action through pipes and conducts hidden in the floor, that conveyed air pressure like bellows[636].

Albrecht's creation is a concoction of various themes. From his point of view, they probably represented the literary memories of ancient and exotic wonders, but for us they constitute a veritable distillation of elements symbolizing cosmic (and therefore Solomonic) kingship between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, a series of features mostly derived from far-Eastern traditions which equally migrated in the Roman imperial world and, later on, to the Islamic rulers via the Persian *shahs*. These motifs, now in their literary disguise, are nothing but the trace of actual architectural, technical or artistic masterworks, undisputed sign of excellent royal patronage.

We are by now familiar with all these features, that we have encountered throughout the Mediterranean in direct relation with king Solomon's legends or with his projection in the various courts. The poet's description echoes some real contexts, as it results clear, for instance, from the tree-organ-birds combination, which is another sign of the enduring influence of the Magnaura throne. The domed ceiling and the mechanism marking time remind us of the fabulous throne hall of Khosrow, which, in turn provided the model for the literary palaces of Prester John. And the crystal pavement cannot but evoke Solomon's pavilion and his encounter with the queen of Sheba or other peculiar courtly *automata*.

There is another Solomonic twist in the story of the reception of Albrecht's poem, interesting both in terms of history of scholarship but also as a sign of what we could call the symbolic vitality of certain places. In *Graltempel und Paradies. Beziehung zwischen Iran und Europa im Mittelalter*, a monograph issued in 1951 by Lars Ivar Ringbom[637], the scholar tried to identify what could have been the actual site, which served as model for Albrecht's Grail shrine on the basis of the description provided by the poem itself. He was interested in the

[636] "Ein kost von zierde michel da sunder was zu schowen / unden der onichel; dar inne was ergraben und erhowen / víschę unda ál der mérwúnder bílde / ieclichęz in siner forme, und furen recht als ob si wæren wilde. / Wan ror alumben giengen von uzen war mit lufte / den estrich uber viengen, cristallen clar, dar unter wol mit gufte / si wegten sich sams in dem wage lebten. / wintmu^{e}l von uzen verre mit balgen dar den selben bradem gebten. / Ses estriches kunde gap liecht den iugen wise / als ob ein se mit unde sich unden wegt und wer bedacht mit ise / und doch daz man iz gar durch luhtie sehe, / daz da von vischen, tieren und merwundern sturmes vil geschehe", 109-111, *ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

[637] L.I. Ringbom, *Graltempel und Paradies: Beziehungen zwischen Iran und Europa im Mittelalter*, Stockholm 1951.

actual geographical location and not only in the architectural features of the building. The place was described as a domed structure with twenty-two radial chapels, protected by an external wall and set on elevated ground onto an onyx *plateau*, bright as the moon. Ringbom therefore proceeded in the difficult quest for the land of *Salvaterre* thanks to a bronze Sasanian vessel [ill. 14] on which he thought he could recognize some of the elements mentioned by Albrecht, particularly the prospect of the building, and through the series of textual clues just mentioned. This set of elements, combined with the features displayed on the vessel, brought Ringbom to identify the place as the site of the ancient Āẕur Gushnasp, where Khosrow II had built his *Takht-i Ṭāqdīs*, the building with a revolving domed throne hall – which, according to the scholar was in fact represented on the bronze artifact – the site partly destroyed by Heraclius but still in use during the Islamic rule, finally renamed, as we have seen, *Takht e-*Sulaymān. It will be remembered that the ruins of the site are in fact still standing on an elevated volcanic *plateau* – the crater being occupied by a lake which reminded the scholar of the crystal-like pavement – whose geo-morphological features could indeed recall the "onyxplatte" of the poem. Despite the doubtful correspondence between the text and the vessel (and even the actual reliability of such a methodology), the hypothesis that *Takht e-*Sulaymān might have provided the poet with the main inspiration for his description remains suggestive. It is in fact undisputed that the place, with its many lives and layers, nurtured a series of fascinating legends and it is well possible that some of them had reached the ears of a receptive poet during the thirteenth century. The memory of the astounding Sasanian palace, made in wood and gold, with its domed structure, the celestial figuration, the mechanism to mark time had struck the imagination of Western conquerors, as we have seen in the second chapter, and it had reached German chronicles as early as the ninth century C.E.

The conflation of elements provided by Albrecht is particularly interesting, because it illustrates a series of principles that we have been noticing during the course of this dissertation: it is relatively easy for a site or for an object charged with strong visual or symbolic impact to act as a magnet for the accretion of other similar material in a different phase of its history; and it should not surprise us to see several threads of the Solomonic tale interweaving densely, since Solomon and his throne were considered the repository of ideal kingship for several centuries.

This literary example, almost contemporary with the diffusion of the *sedes sapientiae*, has shown that the material analyzed in the first four chapters continued to circulate in Europe, only in different contexts: literature, in fact, provides shelter for the uncommon, the outdated and the outcast[638]: a revolving palace with android statues playing in it was visited by Charles the Great in *Le Voyage de Charlemagne* (ca. 1140 C.E.)[639], for instance. Moreover, some scholars assert that an *automaton* tree seems to be known in Mediaeval literature[640], at least in two different examples, in *Le chevalier au lion* (1170s)[641] and in *La prise d'Orange* (XII century)[642]. In the latter case, the tree, (a pine-tree), is mentioned within a palace; a possible hint of its artificial nature is the description of its flowers and leaves, fantastic and inconsistent with a real plant of that kind. The text moreover seems to suggest it is some sort of technical wonder through the usage of the word "esperiment"[643]:

> A une part de la chambre leanz
> avoit un pin par tel esperiment
> com voz orroiz se voiz vient a talent
> longue est la branche et la fueille en est grant

[638] F. Orlando, *Gli oggetti desueti nelle immagini della letteratura: rovine, reliquie, rarità, robaccia, luoghi inabitati e tesori nascost*i, Torino 1993.

[639] P. Trannoy, *De la technique à la magie: enjeux des automates dans Le Voyage de Charlemagne à Jerusalem et à Constantinople*, in *Le Merveilleux et la Magie dans la Littérature*, ed. by G. Chandes, Amsterdam-Atlanta (GA), pp. 227-252. The idea of the palace of Khosrow, already encountered several times during the course of this dissertation, enjoyed a great circulation; it was also described by Jacopo of Varazze (1228-1298 C.E.) in his famous *Golden Legend*.

[640] H. Legros, *Connaissance, reception et perceptions des automates orientaux au XII siècle*, in *Le Merveilleux et la Magie dans la Littérature*, ed. by G. Chandes, Amsterdam-Atlanta (GA) 1992, pp. 103-136, p. 105.

[641] The description occurs at vv. 370-394, however, it does not seem to necessarily pertain to an *automaton*. On this see S. Méjan, *A propos de l'arbre aux oiseaux d'Yvain*, in «Romania», 91 (1970), pp. 392-399.

[642] See the description in the different versions reported in C. Régnier, *Les Rédactions en vers de la Prise d'Orange*, Paris 1966, vv. 651-656 (redaction AB), vv. 632-634 (redaction CE), vv. 524-531 (manuscript D).

[643] A. Labbé, *L'architecture des palais et des jardins dans les Chansons de Geste*, Paris-Genève 1987, particularly the chapter titled *La prise d'Orange ou l'Arbre dans le Jardin*, pp. 235-329, especially pp. 306-329.

la flor qu'en ist par est si avenant
blanche est et inde et so est vermeillant[644].

Alain Labbé, in an essay about this description, suggested that the *Palais de la Gloriette*, where the tree was found, could possibly echo some of the architectures of Roger II in Sicily, particularly the Zisa (from *el Aziz*, 'the Victorious', hence "la Gloriette"), known for its beautiful *patios* and gardens. In general, the taste for *automata* or Oriental taste in king Roger II's reign is known: mechanical birds were said to be in a pavilion in Hasdin[645] and other devices are recorded by Islamic travelers from Malta[646].

Whether the source – and sometimes a tale can be transmitted orally – it seems anyway certain that the image of the metal tree was present to the mind of the Europeans of that period.

made […] a great silver tree, and at its roots are four lions of silver, each with a conduit through it, and all belching forth white milk of mare. And four conduits are led inside the tree to its tops, which are bent downward, and on each of these is also a gilded serpent, whose tails twine round the tree[647].

Such a wonder was described by friar William of Rubruck[648] who met Master Guillaume (Boucher) the Parisian, a goldsmith taken prisoner in Belgrade in 1242 C.E. to whom the Mangu Khan had requested a peculiar fountain, which he built not far from Karakorum. The only novelty of such a composition is

[644] "There, on one side of the chamber, / there was a pine tree deviced in such an ingenious way, / as you will hear if you like / the branch is long and its leaf is broad / the flower that sprouts from it equally so beautiful, / it is white and indigo and so vermillion".

[645] *Ibid*., p. 325.

[646] A.F. Schack, *Poesie und Kunst der Araber in Spanien und Sicilien*, 2 vols, Stuttgart 1872, II, p. 41.

[647] Translation in L. Olschki, *Guillaume Boucher: A French Artist at the Court of the Kahns*, Baltimore (MD) 1946, p. 63. "Fecit ei [Mangu Khan] Willelmus Parisiensis unam magnam arborem argenteam, ad cuius radices sunt quatuor leones argentei habentes unum cannale et uomentes omnes lac album iumenti. Et ducuntur intro arborem quatuor cannalia usque ad summitatem arboris, quorum summitates repanse sunt deorsum et super quolibet eorum serpens unus deauratus, quorum caude inuolunt truncum arboris", see *Guglielmo di Rubruck, Viaggio in Mongolia*, ed. by P. Chiesa, Milano 2011, XXX, 11-18, pp. 210-212.

[648] J. Richard, *La vogue d'Orient dans la littérature occidentale du moyen age*, in *Melanges offerts à René Crozet*, 2 vols, ed. by P. Gallais – Y.J. Rious, Paris 1966, I, pp. 557-561.

constituted by an angel with a trumpet[649] on the top of the tree, which seems a personal touch of the artisan to a composition otherwise quite standardized. Olschki, who dedicated a monograph to the goldsmith, mentioned the Magnaura but doubted it could represent a direct model for the fountain of the Khan. He was convinced, probably rightly so, that the source of inspiration and the technology came from the West this time. In other words, it was the French goldsmith who was responsible for such a marvel. A possible source of inspiration could have been found in literary examples. It is certain, for instance, that the Magnaura description had reached Europe, since the report of Liudprand. Moreover, *Automata*, as we have seen above, were often mentioned in chivalric poems. However, the most striking example of all is probably the account of the artificial tree described by Alexander the Great to Aristotle in the pseudoepigraphical *Letter to Aristotle* concerning the marvels of India[650], and particularly the palace of king Porus in the city of Fasiace[651]:

> "There was a golden vine, with golden leaves, hanging between the columns: its branches were of crystal, studded with rubies and emeralds […] Outside the palace there were […] golden plane trees and in their branches were many kinds of birds of various colours, with golden beaks and claws and small and large pearls in their ears"[652].

No need to pinpoint the recurrence of elements encountered throughout this dissertation. It is however interesting to conclude this work with yet another example of the fruitful interplay between reality and literature, imagination and *mirabilia*.

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[649] In the same years in France, Villard de Honnecourt, who partook of the same culture of Guillame Boucher, sketched a similar angel-trumpeteer in his note-book.

[650] Olschki, *Guillaume Boucher*, p. 77.

[651] The city of Fasiace, capital of king Porus, is likely a Greek translitteration of the Sanskrit term *prachyaka*, meaning "the eastern realm"; the place is probably to be located in upper Punjab, see *The Legends of Alexander the Great*, ed. by R. Stoneman, New York 2012, p. 116, n. 2.

[652] Translation in *The Legends of Alexander the Great*, pp. 4-5. "Vineam quoque solidam auream argenteamque inter columpnas pendentem miratus sum, in qua folia erant aurea racemique cristallini et lignitis erant interpositi distinguentibus smaragdis. […] Fores in domus pariete innumerabilia genera avium variis coloribus aberrabant inter aureas platanos unguibusque rostrisque inauratis pro inauribus torqibusque quae margaritas et uniones gerentia", see *Epistola Alexandri Magni ad Aristotelem*, vv. 74-90.

Appendix IV

Solomon in Disguise? The Case of the *Orlando Furioso*

The case I would like to propose in this appendix comes from a work of poetry much later than those analyzed in the chapter, but shows, in my opinion, the far-reaching circulation of what seems to have in the meantime crystallized into a solid literary *topos*. The passage below is drawn from Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and refers to the first palace built by the magician Atlante:

> II, 41-44.
> Sei giorni me n'andai matina e sera
> per balze e per pendici orride e strane,
> dove non via, dove sentier non era,
> dove né segno di vestigie umane;
> poi giunsi in una valle inculta e fiera,
> di ripe cinta e spaventose tane,
> che nel mezzo s'un sasso avea un castello
> forte e ben posto, a maraviglia bello.
>
> Da lungi par che come fiamma lustri,
> né sia di terra cotta, né di marmi.
> Come più m'avicino ai muri illustri,
> l'opra più bella e più mirabil parmi.
> E seppi poi, come i demoni industri,
> da suffumigi tratti e sacri carmi,
> tutto d'acciaio avean cinto il bel loco,
> temprato all'onda ed allo stigio foco.
>
> […]
>
> Ah lasso! che poss'io più che mirare
> la rocca lungi, ove il mio ben m'è chiuso?
> come la volpe, che 'l figlio gridare
> nel nido oda de l'aquila di giuso,
> s'aggira intorno, e non sa che si fare,
> poi che l'ali non ha da gir là suso.
> Erto è quel sasso sì, tale è il castello,

che non vi può salir chi non è augello.

The importance of the role of magic in this genre of poems has been thoroughly investigated and well acknowledged as a synthesis of elements deriving both from classical texts and Medieval chivalric cycles, often revisited in light of the interest shown by Renaissance's philosophers and writers toward the topic. The specific passage on the castle, as Pio Rajna noticed[653], owed much to a similar description in Mattia Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*, which had certainly provided Ariosto with a direct model:

III, 27
Questo ha un giardino al monte edificato,
Quale ha di vetro tutto intorno il muro,
Sopra un sasso tanto alto e rilevato
Che senza tema vi può star sicuro.
Tutto d'incerco è quel sasso tagliato;
Benché sia grande a maraviglia e duro,
Da gli spirti de inferno tutto quanto
Fu in un sol giorno fatto per incanto.

The same elements recur only with a slight difference: a reference to a bright palace (here it's glass and not steel), located on a high ground, built by a series of demonic entities. In this case, the textual loan from Boiardo is quite precise. However, it is easy to see how, in general, this literary genre exploits the correlation between magic architectures and demonic entities: even the second palace built by Atlante in Ariosto's description is made by a spirit imprisoned under the threshold.

XXII, 18
Del palazzo incantato era difuso
scritto nel libro; e v'eran scritti i modi
di fare il mago rimaner confuso,
e a tutti quei prigion di sciorre i nodi.
Sotto la soglia era uno spirto chiuso,
che facea questi inganni e queste frodi:
e levata la pietra ov'è sepolto,
per lui sarà il palazzo in fumo sciolto.

[653] P. Rajna, *Le fonti dell'Orlando Furioso*, Firenze 1876, pp. 117-121.

The fact that magic is performed by demons is quite understandable in the logic of the genre. Nevertheless, the context in which demons are employed is always very specific, showing a clear relationship between spirits obeying to a master and the building of impressive or deceitful structures[654]. The palaces described by our two Renaissance poets, moreover, would seem to evoke the *City of Brass* of Islamic memory, and it is certainly not impossible that elements from the *Arabian Nights* might have influenced sixteenth-century poets or writers, since they were in circulation much before[655]. I would therefore like to posit that this strong association goes back to the idea of Solomon great architect and master of jinns, whose textual precedent, as we have seen, was originally set in the *Testament of Solomon* and related texts, but became a literary motif circulating well beyond the field of demonology and angelology tracts.

[654] *Orlando Furioso*, XXXIII, 4: Ma di saperlo far non si dia vanto / pittore antico né pittor moderno; / e ceda pur quest'arte al solo incanto, / del qual trieman gli spirti de lo 'nferno. / La sala ch'io dicea ne l'altro canto, / Merlin col libro, o fosse al lago Averno, / o fosse sacro alle Nursine grotte, / fece far dai demonii in una notte.

[655] See, for instance, A. Saly, *Les Milles et une Nuits au XIII siècle. Conte orientale et matière de Bretagne*, in «Travaux de littérature», 3 (1990), pp. 15-24; K.L. Lynch, *East meets West in Chaucher's Squire's and Franklin's Tales*, in «Speculum», 70 (1995), pp. 530-551; M. Spampinato Beretta, *La cornice delle Mille e una notte ed il canto XXVIII dell'Orlando Furioso*, in *Medioevo Romanzo e Orientale, Il Viaggio dei testi*, ed. by A. Pioletti and F. Rizzo Nervo, Catania 1999, pp. 229-249.

Conclusions

Kai and Kawus to the winds are gone:
And where is Solomon's high-splendoured throne?

(from Hafiz, ghazal 101)

In an essay about the Alhambra written in 1978, Oleg Grabar wrote:

> What seems clear is that a certain moment various themes – memories of ancient monuments and ceremonies, folk imagination around standing ruins and other remains from old, practical ceremonies, types of design – all coalesced in a more or less coherent form around Solomon. They appear in Jewish legends which are impossible to date, just as it is still impossible to know whether the phenomenon was first an Islamic one, seeking to adapt to its own symbolic system a newly discovered life of princely luxury and newly acquired memories of ancient kings, or whether it is another instance of the impact of Medieval Jewish ideas on the dominant Muslim culture, or whether the theme of Solomon as the perfect king was already in existence in Justinian's time[656].

[656] O. Grabar, *The Alhambra*, London 1978, p. 150.

In a nutshell, the scholar listed several elements and threads that I have presented and discussed more at length in the course of this dissertation. Even though he was broadly referring to the figure of Solomon, while I chose to focus on a specific aspect of the tradition related to him, most of the questions briefly raised by the scholar have found a place and a context in the present work and, hopefully, even a partial answer.

One of the aims of the present dissertation was to show how some of the material under examination was consciously appropriated or how it migrated from a cultural context to another in the Mediterranean area during the Middle Ages, both from a narrative and from an art historical point of view. What I also intended to underline was the continuous interplay between the materiality of objects – always deeply connected to a specific time and place or commission – and what we could call the universal level – in this case the legend of king Solomon.

We have noted that the so-called Solomonic aesthetic, whenever recreated and proposed by a ruler, was usually a narrative of power. However, we have also seen few hints of a divergent response in some of the cases under examination. In the second chapter, for instance, Liudprand recalled how the attempt made by the emperor in the effort to surprise him had failed, at least in his words. The mechanism of "awe and wonder", which should have been triggered by the view of the *automata*, resulted useless because the envoy was prepared to what was coming. He even went as far as trying to deconstruct the machines and their working, revealing the logic behind the trick. In this game of rival rhetorical strategies, Liudprand chose the rationalistic approach: he removed the *automata* from the supposed realm of wonder where they had been located, and tried to put them back into the world of technique, where they could be understood and made innocuous.

In the third chapter, we have seen two different examples of clashing narratives. The first one was made evident from the two different conceptions of kingship that were described through the legends, one more permissive, which shaped the image of an absolute monarch, the other, more restrictive, that described a king limited in his powers by a set of rules (exemplified by the inscribed steps or by the series of commandments announced by the herald). These two opposite models of kingship, however, belonged to a period far removed in time, and they reflected issues that must have been central much before the story was crafted the way we now read it; therefore both models

coexist in most of the version of the legend looking as simple narrative variants, not as indication of active conflicts of power.

There was, however, a second and more recent problematic stance in the set of rabbinic legends that we have analyzed. As I have suggested, in fact, the insertion of emblematic and highly recognizable Jewish elements (like the Torah, the dove and the *menorah*) in the decoration of the throne hall of the king served to reinforce the identity of these stories, strengthening its belonging to a Jewish cultural *milieu*; such a step was necessary if we consider that a Jewish element as distinctive as the throne of Solomon had been monumentally appropriated by the Byzantine emperor. In this case, then, the strategy to respond to this cultural and political claim was to act almost within the same mode, through the manipulation and subtle relocation of common elements. The Jews, in fact, could not have built a throne on the example of the one in the Magnaura; such a monumental effort could have not been accomplished for obvious reasons. Nevertheless, they could incorporate the physical presence of this actual throne within their long literary tradition, thus re-making it their own.

In the fourth chapter, the reaction to the pervasive Solomonic rhetoric of power was carried out in a particularly refined way. The whole narration of *The City of Brass* was, in fact, meant to strongly counteract all the positive *topoi* related to Solomon. The moralistic intent of the story, delivered through a homiletic and didactic method, proved particularly successful in altering the perspective, thus completely changing the usual point of view. This was done thoroughly and in a subtle way: the story was meant to be a journey toward inner conversion, proceeding, therefore, through a slow progression. It opened with the glorification of Solomon and his power and the whole expedition aimed at recovering the king's bottles. However, the reader (or listener) was slowly brought toward the deep realization of the vanity of things. If in the third chapter, two similar narratives were fighting to obtain a different result, in this case the usual set of *topoi* was crumbled from within, by changing the context and not the content of the action. In this latter case, then, we saw how the exact same set of elements key to the Solomonic aesthetic (wondrous cities, display of skillful artistry, magic/crafty objects) came to be considered under a negative point of view.

Even the fifth chapter offered several examples of clashing narratives, the most striking being the fight for supremacy engaged by the various occurrences of Solomonic thrones displayed by papacy and empire. Here, the two main

political actors were equivalent in terms of power; in fact they exploited the symbol in a substantially similar way, by directly opposing each other in a dialectic made of identical visual efforts. In this case, the reaction to the employment of the Solomonic throne was not constituted by an effort at diminishing its value or moral legitimacy, like in chapters II and IV; it was, instead, an attempt toward political appropriation, more similar to the case seen in the Jewish context, where, however, at stance was also an issue of cultural and religious heritage.

What this analysis has proven is that, whether undermined or appropriated, the throne of Solomon is therefore never really obliterated; on the contrary, it can be found in contexts very far away from each other, an indirect sign of its vitality and persistence. The picture we are confronted with at the end of this analysis is a situation where Jewish rabbis are subjected to the fascination of Byzantine rulers, who, in turn, are in dialogue both with Christian and Muslim ambassadors, where Christian bishops are inspired by Muslim caliphs, whose courtly tales are very similar to certain Jewish legends. We cannot therefore deny a certain unity or, at least, a continuity of symbols through time and space, broadly shared for several centuries in the Mediterranean world. The acknowledgement of such a fact, however, does not necessarily imply a political unity. On the contrary, it is often the clash between foreign or opposed powers, that helps creating such common ground for the sharing of these traditions. In other words, a certain degree of cultural unity is achieved during the Middle Ages, thanks to strong political rivalry. We can therefore recognize a certain set of Mediterranean features, despite the political disruption of its geopolitical uniformity.

This brings us to what has been a second element of relevance for our discussion, namely the importance of story telling, the means through which most of these traditions have been passed on. If the throne of Solomon is, for obvious reasons, a symbol appreciated by sovereigns – thus calling for an analytical discourse that mostly describe groups composed by members of the leading *élite* (emperors, ambassadors, caliphs, bishops, popes, and so on) – I would like to emphasize a certain level of orality, deeply informing the societies that we have described during this dissertation. In my reconstruction I presented both artifacts and texts – mostly products or reflections of this rich and specific *milieu* – but what I could not trace I must necessarily evoke. If the historian is necessarily obliged to confront factual evidences and written sources – and he is obviously bound to base his conclusions on these elements –

it is clear that many links remain unexplained or obscure and sometimes it is only possible to posit them. Beside the world of courtly luxury, we need to imagine a deep level of interactions occurring at the market place, among artisans producing for the local cathedral, at corners of roads where people met, in the caravans travelling in the deserts, through the sermons of preachers or the tales of minstrels. It is also through the amazed words of people that it is possible to perpetuate the memory of beautiful things.

There is one last element that needs to be singled out before concluding, namely the intrinsic quality of artistic objects or notable buildings and their enhanced power, whenever they become part of a recognizable story. Some of the pieces described in this thesis, in fact, do not belong to the usual categories taken into consideration by scholars. As Michael Camille said in his work on the Gothic Idol[657], in a chapter dedicated to art and the marvelous, "*automata* are a forgotten genre in the history of medieval art"[658] but they are certainly part of that genre[659].

They are problematic from the perspective of most of their medieval viewers because they display an "artifice whose sole function was to be enjoyed as mischievous duplicity"[660]. Moreover they were conceived to hide their workings, therefore they seem to be moving against nature[661]. For this reason, the knowledge of the mechanisms behind them borders oftentimes, at least in the Medieval West, into idolatry and necromancy[662] or into the catalogue of the courtliest frivolities[663]. They are also problematic from the point of view of modern art historical scholarship, since they have been traditionally classified as technological devices, rather than objects worth of the discipline, and only

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[657] M. Camille, *The Gothic Idol. Ideology and Image-making in* Medieval Art, Cambridge 1989, pp. 242-258.

[658] *Ibid*., p. 244

[659] Villard de Honnecourt draws models of a bird drinking from a fountain and of an angel rotating with the sun, *ibid*., p. 248.

[660] *Ibid*., p. 248.

[661] U. Ernst, *Zauber - Technik - Imagination, zur Darstellung von Automaten in der Erzählliteratur des Mittelalters*, in *Automaten in Kunst und Literatur des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by K. Grubmüller – M. Stock, Wiesbaden 2003, pp. 115-172;

[662] Albertus Magnus knew how to make a fire-blower, which probably explains the myth of the talking head.

[663] Through Norman Sicily, for instance, *automata* reached also Frederick II's court and were in general a favourite subject in many late Medieval European contexts, see, for instance, S. Lightsey, *Manmade Marvels in Medieval Culture and Literature*, Basingstoke 2007; W.B. Hyman, *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature*, Farnham-Ashgate 2011.

recently there have been exceptions to this general trend of study[664]. Beside the *automata*, that are extraordinary almost by definition, we have seen objects or constructions, whose beauty or impressive quality has rendered them exceptional. Even though they are produced for a specific context, usually either a church or a palace, they also partake of the afterlife of the heritage of king Solomon, because they are meant to evoke him, in a way or in the other. In is for this reason that most of the pieces described or mentioned are pertinent to a narration about the throne of the son of David, even if we are not always talking about an actual seat. As it should result clear from the cases we analyzed, the possession of the throne does not necessarily convey an ideal of sheer sacrality: this is true mostly for the Christian reading of it, but in all the other cases, its symbolic strength depends on other features. It is as an example of undisputed technical and esthetic excellence, that the throne mostly dwells in the sphere of wonder. And it is in the same perspective that most of the works of art, presented throughout this dissertation, should be read and interpreted.

[664] See for instance the proceedings of the seminar on *The Pisa Griffin and the Mari-Cha Lion*, organized by professor Anna Contadini, held at the SOAS in London in February 2013, whose proceedings are in course of publication.

Appendix V

The Proverbial Throne of Solomon

In this final appendix, I would like to present one last occurrence of the throne of Solomon, which I have decided to discuss separately, rather than within the text, because it is difficult to ascertain its precise date of origin; therefore it is not sure whether it can be rightfully considered a medieval example. It is a small but interesting *corpus*[665] of proverbs that, as far as I could see, appears to be specifically Italian. However, it seemed interesting to present this material within the context of this dissertation, since the proverbs all expressly mention the seat of the king of Israel, in a context of folk wisdom. The saying is widespread in several Italian regions, and I am listing it here according to a geographical order, proceeding from north to south:

Lombardia (Valtellina):
I tre acqui de agóst cu la bóna stagión
i val püsé che 'l tròno de Salomón[666].

Lombardia (Bergamo):
Ol frec de Xenér, ol ma e Febrér
I ventù de Marz, le pioisine d'Avril,
Ol sguas de Mas, ol bü racolt de Zögn,
Ol bat de Löi e i Sanc aquaröi
Tone, Piero e Jacom,
E d'Agost la buna stagiù
I val piö del trono del re Salomù[667].

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[665] The sample is not necessarily complete, although it looks representative of a certain diffusion.

[666] "The three rains of Agust with a good season are worth more than Solomon's throne" *Almanacco di agosto*, available online at www.paesidivaltellina.it/calendario/almanaccoagosto (last access 13 September 2013).

[667] "A cold January, / a stormy February, / a windy March, / a showery April, / a dewy May, / a good harvest in June, / threshing in July, / the three Saints Anthony, Peter and James rainy, / and a fine August, / are worth more than King Solomon's throne", C. Swainson, *A Handbook of Weather Folk Lore*, Edinburgh-London 1873, p. 18.

Emilia Romagna:
El trée achev d'agast, cun la bòuna stagiòun,
el vèlen pió dal tròun ed Salomòun[668].

Tuscany:
Il gran freddo di gennaio,
il maltempo di febbraio,
il vento di marzo,
le acque dolci d'aprile,
le guazze di maggio,
il buon mieter di giugno,
il buon batter di luglio,
le tre acque d'agosto con la buona
stagione,
valgon più del trono di Salomone[669].

Sicily:
Li tri acqui di l'Assunzioni
pigghiatilli, chì su' boni
vannu cchiossà di lu tronu di re Salamuni[670].

Lu friddu di Innaru,
lu malu tempu di frivaru,
lu ventu di marzu,
l'acqui d'aprili,
l'acquazzina di maju,
lu bonu metiri di giugnu,
lu bonu pisari di lugliu,
li tri acqui d'austu cu la bona staggiuni,
valunu cchiù di lu tronu di Salamuni[671].

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[668] "The three rains of Agust with a good season are worth more than Solomon's throne", *Riscopriamo la saggezza antica: atti del Convegno sui dialetti di Modena e dell'Emilia-Romagna*, Modena 1982, p. 81.

[669] "The great cold of January / the bad weather of February / the wind of March / the sweet rains of April / the dews of May / the good harvest of June / the good threshing of July / the three rains of August with a good season / are worth more than Solomon's throne", C. Lapucci, A.M. Antoni, *I proverbi del mese*, Firenze 1985, pp. 101-102.

[670] G. Pitrè, *Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari siciliane*, 10 vols, Palermo 1880, III, p. 34

[671] *Ibid*., p. 34.

Despite some variants, the general pattern is always the same: a certain favorable weather condition in the right moment of the year is deemed far more important than the throne of Solomon. The presence of rain in August was crucial for agriculture and such hyperbolic importance is here underlined by the throne of Solomon as a second term of comparison, meant as a sign of fabulous wealth. It is in fact quite likely that the throne is here taken just a generic symbol of richness and not as a specific reference, since other less diffuse versions of the same proverb, instead of the throne it is mentioned Solomon's gold[672]. If the throne or the gold of Solomon find specific reference in the Bible (1 Kings 10:18 and 9:28), and therefore it could be possible to invoke some scriptural ascendance, there is another example which is, instead, quite puzzling, because it finds no specific textual support. In a version diffused in the area of Bergamo, in fact, we have Solomon's cart or chariot:

Marz polverent, Avril piöent, Mas la so sesu
Empienes el car del re Salamù[673].

This last sentence is similar to those mentioned above but not identical. Here, in fact, the month association is different: not just August or all the yearly sequence of good weather, as in the cases presented above, but just March, April and May. It is therefore possible that this specific proverb derives from a different branch. It should be added that Solomon is not the only Biblical figure, whose cart is mentioned in relation with rain or adequate weather.
In Sardinia, for instance, there is a version not too dissimilar from our Bergamo sample:

S'acqua de Mrazu e de Abribi
bali' prus de su cocciu
de su Rey Davidi[674].

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[672] V. Boggione-L. Massobrio, *Dizionario dei poverbi. I proverbi italiani organizzati per temi*, Milano 2004, p. 55 (n. I.6.2.12.22 the version has 'gold' instead of 'throne'.)

[673] "A dusty March, a showery April and a seasonable May / would fill the chariot of King Solomon", G. Rosa, *Dialetti, costumi e tradizioni delle provincie di Bergamo e di Brescia*, Brescia 1870, p. 124; Swainson, *A Handbook of Weather Folklore*, p. 59.

[674] "The rain of March and April / is worth more than the chariot / of king David", S. Loi, *Proverbi Sardi*, Firenze-Milano 2010, p. 66.

And what is more interesting is that the connection between David and his cart is not only Italian, but it is broadly widespread in several regions of Spain, a fact which probably speaks in favor of the greater antiquity of this version:

Val más un truenu ente Marzu y Abril
que los gües y el carru del Rey David[675].

As escarabanas de marzo i as augas de abril
valen máis có carro do rei David[676].

Más valen las aguas de abril,
que los bueyes y el carro de David[677].

Valen máis as augas de abril
có carro do rei David[678].

It would not be impossible, then, to imagine a certain diffusion from Spain to Sardinia – given also their particular historical connections – for this particular version of the saying. A cart of David is in fact mentioned in one of the Sard legends of Sant'Andrea[679], particularly venerated in the village of Sant'Andrea Frius, in the vicinity of Cagliari, an area which fell in the hands of the Aragonese in 1326 and which corresponds also to the area of linguistic diffusion of the saying.

The reason why the cart was associated with David, beside this legend, is possibly biblical. In a famous passage, in fact, the king of Israel dances before a new-made chariot, that transports the Ark (2 Sam, 6:1-5) and further references to his cart appear to a folkloric level[680]. Whether the origin, it seems clear that such an association is quite ancient.

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[675] "A thunder in March and April / is worth more than the chariot and oxen of King David", L. Castañón, *Diputación de Oviedo*, Instituto de Estudios Asturianos (CSIC), Oviedo 1962, p. 303.

[676] "The cold winds of March and the showers of April / are worth more than the chariot of King David", *Atlas Lingüístico Galego*, ed. by C. Garcia – A Santamarina, 5 vols, A Coruña 2003, IV, p. 462.

[677] "The showers of April, are worth more than the chariot with oxen of King David", J.M. Pejenaute Goñi, *Los Refranes del Tiempo de Navarra*, Pamplona 1999, p. 176.

[678] "The showers of April / are worth more than the chariot of king David", *Atlas Lingüístico Galego*, p. 462.

[679] Lapucci, Antoni, *I proverbi del mese*, pp. 101-102.

[680] In Ireland, for instance, the constellation of the Big Dipper was called king David's chariot.

However, at a proverbial level, the version of the chariot of David might represent a 'mutating link' in the chain of transmission, deriving from an older and simpler form. It is in fact possible that, at least originally, the second term of comparison in this specific class of rain proverbs were constituted simply by the mention of a chariot. We do find, in fact, a series of other sayings where the rain is considered more important than the possession of an oxcart[681].

Val più un'acqua tra aprile e maggio
che i buoi col carro[682].

Such an image, certainly more familiar to a folk audience than any biblical reference, could have corresponded to a more primitive form of the saying[683]. Quite popular and widespread is also the reference to a cart with a golden shaft[684]. It means, of course, a great quantity of money, since the shaft of the vehicle corresponded to its more weighty part. We could therefore imagine a process of successive variations – cart, oxcart, golden cart, cart of king David – also including the substitution of one biblical figure with another equivalent[685].

Moreover, considering the privileged connection between Solomon and the tradition of proverbs, it is quite easy to see how he could find a place in such

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Some authors indicate that such an association depended on the fact that David was one of the earliest, mythical kings of the island, D.R.K. Allen, *Star Names and Their Meanings*, New York 1899, p. 426. However, I was not able to find a direct source to confirm this association and I am not sure such an hypothsis is reliable.

[681] In general, for a thorough research, a very useful tool is the online database provided by the University of Barcellona, *ParemioRom, Romance Paremiology: Weather Proverbs and Territory*.

[682] "It is worth more a shower between April and May, than a chariot with ox", C. Lapucci, A. Antoni, *30 dì conta novembre... I proverbi dei mesi*, Milano 1993, p. 108.

[683] There are also several versions, particularly in Portugal, that reverse the perspective: if it does not rain, the king (or the peasant) is forced to sell his oxcart. See, for instance, "Se não chove entre Março e Abril / venderá El-rei o carro e o carril", or "Se não chove em Abril, [/] Perde o lavrador o carro e o carril", in A. Moreira, *Provérbios portugueses*, Lisbon 2003, p. 285.

[684] "La prim'acqua d'aprile vale un carro d'oro con tutto l'assile", Lapucci, Antoni, *30 dì conta novembre... I proverbi dei mesi*, p. 108.

[685] The two following Spanish versions, for instance, resemble more closely the Tuscan proverb of the throne of Solomon: "As catro escarchas de xaneiro, / as catro nevadas de febreiro / e as doces augas de abril, / valen máis que o coche do Santo Rei David; Heladas de enero, / nieves de febrero, / mollinas de marzo, / lluvias de abril, / aires de mayo, / sacan hermoso el año", F. Vázquez Saco, *Refraneiro galego e outros materiais de tradición oral*, Santiago de Compostela 2003, p. 87.

a context. However, in the series briefly mentioned, Solomon appears as a rich and powerful king, whose wealth and attributes immediately evoke a paradigm of greatness, even though his splendor is immediately undermined by the comparison with the importance of something apparently humbler, but actually more fundamental, like the good weather for the peasant. Such a perspective is already evangelical. It is Christ himself who, in addressing his disciples, associates the passing glory of the world to the king of Israel: "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these". (Matthew 6: 28-29)

Moreover, throughout the Middle Ages, Solomon is seen from a double point of view, when it comes to wisdom. On the one hand, there is the positive model of the king made wise by God himself, the author of several biblical books, according to the tradition, but there is also a reversed perspective, typical of the Medieval carnivalesque inversion of values, usually incarnated by the figure of Marcolph[686] – or Bertoldo in the Italian tradition[687] – the rough peasant, whose practical wisdom ends up surpassing that of the king of Israel.

It is with this in mind that, after several months spent wandering on the glittering traces of the throne of Solomon, I would like to stop and enjoy the rest of the season, rain or shine.

[686] The tradition of this kind of texts is really broad and there are countless versions in different languages; here I only mention J.M. Ziolkowski, *Solomon and Marcolf*, Cambridge (Ma)-London 2008.

[687] G.C. Croce, *Le astuzie di Bertoldo e le semplicità di Bertoldino: seguite dai Dialoghi salomonici*, ed. by P. Camporesi, Firenze 1993.

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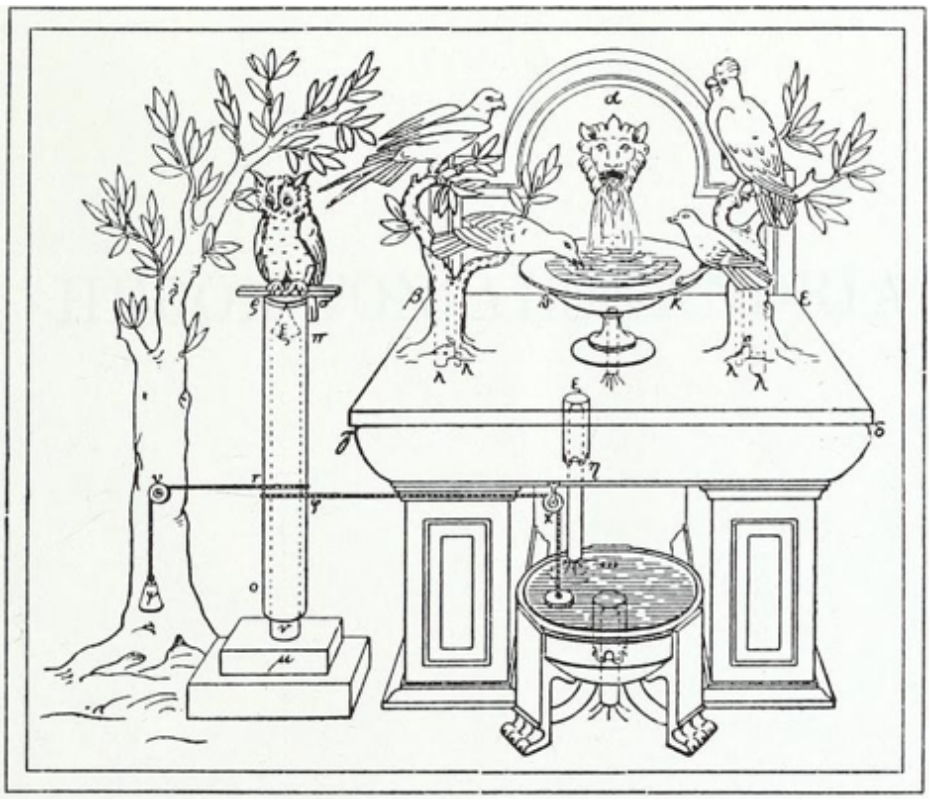

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Ho detto, ho detto
E adesso prendo fiato!

(G. Rossini, *Cenerentola*)