# A Riddle, a Sword, and an Exotic Queen: How the Judgment of Solomon (1Kings 3) Shapes the Reading of the Visit of the Queen of Sheba (1Kings 10)

# Abstract:

The description of the reign of Solomon in the Book of Kings is divided into two parts. The first section is flattering—celebrating Solomon's successes and setting a positive and much-appreciated figure before the reader. The second is critical—condemning Solomon and enumerating his failures. Scholars have debated whether the tenth chapter, the story of the Queen of Sheba, is part of the praise of Solomon or his decline. This article argues that the story of the Queen of Sheba, in its final edited form and full context, shows Solomon as a problematic figure with specific vices. Furthermore, it demonstrates that this narrative mirrors the opening framing story of Solomon’s reign—his judgment of the two prostitutes. This parallelism shows how the story of the Queen of Sheba acts as both the closing narrative of Solomon’s glory—highlighting his decline—and an intermediate point between the two halves of his reign.

# Introduction

The extensive narrative of Solomon’s reign in the book of Kings opens with a positive portrait and concludes with a condemnatory one. The golden age of Solomon begins with a report of the king’s marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter as part of his political activity, “Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt; he took Pharaoh’s daughter and brought her into the city of David” (1 Kgs 3:1).[[1]](#footnote-1) Divine revelation to Solomon in a dream at Gibeon immediately follows. The link between the marriage and the dream is the declaration: “*Solomon loved the Lord*, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places” (1 Kgs 3:3). The context and formulation indicate that Solomon’s marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter neither lead him astray from proper worship of God, nor did it undermine his devotion to God. On the contrary, as part of his worship of God, Solomon went to sacrifice at the high place of Gibeon and God appeared to him there and promised him immense success in his kingship.[[2]](#footnote-2)

However, chapter 11, which depicts Solomon in a decisively negative light, references the king’s marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter as well, but with no political rationale. Instead, the text refers to Solomon’s personal love, “*King Solomon loved many foreign women* along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women… Solomon clung to these in love” (1 Kgs 11:1–2). In the current description, the women led Solomon’s heart astray to the point that “when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the Lord his God… So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (1 Kgs 11:4–6). Consequently, God again makes a pronouncement to Solomon but this time not in praise of his wisdom, wealth, and honor, but rather, the opposite: “…I will surely tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant” (1 Kgs 11:11).[[3]](#footnote-3) Thus, the reign of Solomon ran the gamut of faithfulness to God, from “Solomon loved God” (1 Kgs. 3:3) in the beginning of his reign to “King Solomon loved many foreign women” (I Kgs. 11:1). Can the critical point of Solomon’s decline be determined?

Readers have struggled to identify the point of transition between these two sections, with the debate focusing especially on the evaluation of the story of the Queen of Sheba in ch.10. While ch.11 contains a clear expression of the author’s disapproval (v. 6), negative divine evaluation (v. 11), and negative prophetic evaluation (v. 33), chapter 10 contains certain tropes that may be associated with both periods of Solomon’s reign. However, as the explicit negative portrayal of Solomon’s reign is found in chapter 11, many scholars have proposed categorizing chs. 1–10 as the positive chapters and understanding ch. 11 as the beginning of the negative description.[[4]](#footnote-4) Yet, certain scholars have categorized these chapters differently. Martin Noth suggested that chs. 1–8 are the positive unit, whereas chs. 9–11 constitute the negative critique;[[5]](#footnote-5)

סברן מזהה את נקודת השינוי במל"א ט 4.[[6]](#footnote-6) וולש טען שאף קודם לכן ניתן לראות את השינוי מסיקור חיובי לשלילי. הוא הראה שפרקים א- ח 43 בנויים בצורה כיאסטית, וטען כי השוואה מדוקדקת בין החלקים השונים והאלמנטים הזהים Shows a consistent pattern of positive attitude toward Solomon before the building of the Temple and negative attitude after its dedication.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Amos Frisch noted that there is a discrepancy between the evaluation of Solomon in the surface layer of 1Kgs 9:10 and in an underlying implicit layer;[[8]](#footnote-8) lastly, Marc Brettler offered a complex proposal in which the negative presentation of Solomon begins in 1Kgs 9:25. He claimed that ch. 10 was originally written as a positive chapter, but that in the course of its redaction and incorporation into the narrative sequence, it became negatively charged due to its connection with the law of the king in the book of Deuteronomy.[[9]](#footnote-9) This article expands on and buttresses Brettler’s argument through a literary comparison between the stories of the Queen of Sheba and the judgment of Solomon. Concomitantly, this analysis will also assist in solving the riddle of the significance of the Queen of Sheba narrative itself.

# Chapter 11 as the Beginning of the End

Many have argued, as mentioned above, that the negative evaluation of Solomon only begins in chapter 11. This position relies primarily on explicit statements in ch. 11 that declare that “Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (1 Kgs 11:6). The story of the Queen of Sheba in ch. 10, which—initially—seems to present both Solomon and the queen in a positive light, reinforce this delineation. The queen is impressed by the king and by his wisdom, his people, and even his God. The king, for his part, is an exemplary host and their parting resembles that of two leaders concluding a particularly successful political summit. This view may garner further support from chs. 3–10. These chapters form a unified literary structure that includes detailed description of two different interpersonal encounters with Solomon, one which begins and one which concludes the unit, creating an aesthetically neat narrative frame.[[10]](#footnote-10) The first encounter involves the two prostitutes, who are at the bottom rung of the social ladder. There, Solomon establishes his status as a judge and as a wise, attentive, and beneficent leader of the society for which he is responsible (1 Kgs 3:16–28). The second encounter is with the exotic queen who comes from a distant land to inspect the king, having heard rumors of Solomon’s extraordinary wisdom. On its surface, the aim of this second story appears to be to establish Solomon’s status as a world-renowned leader.[[11]](#footnote-11) In this context, J.T. Walsh demonstrated the appearance of the motifs of wisdom, wealth, and honor—the three gifts that God granted Solomon—in both the opening and closing narratives of the frame. Thus, 1Kgs 3:16–4:34 stands opposite 1Kgs 9:26–10:29. In this way, the Book of Kings arranges a neat frame for the positive period of Solomon’s frame. Walsh placed the chapters in a table as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 9:26–10:29 | 3:16–4:34 | GIFT |
| 10:1–10, 13 | 3:16–28 | A LISTENING MIND |
| 10:14–21  9:26–28; 10:11–12, 22  10:26–29 | 4:1–10  4:21–25  4:26–28 | RICHES  Domestic affairs  International affairs  Chariots and horses |
| 10:23–25 | 4:29–34 | HONOR |

The gift of wisdom is expressed at the beginning of the description of Solomon’s Golden Age by means of the story of the trial of the prostitutes. At the end of the description of the Golden Age, this wisdom is found in the story of the visit of the Queen of Sheba (1Kgs 3:16–28 vis à vis 1Kgs 10:1–10, 13).[[12]](#footnote-12)

The two stories not only share a focus on Solomon’s wisdom but also exhibit a particular concern with riddles. The first story features an unsolvable riddle: how to determine the identity of the mother of the surviving infant. Solomon solves this riddle, of course, and the readers are privy to both the riddle and its solution.[[13]](#footnote-13) The second story contains riddles, as the reader is told that the queen “came to test him with hard questions (*ḥîdôt*)” (1Kgs 10:1), but Scripture does not record their content. In addition, both stories feature unnamed female figures whose primary significance lies in the social status that they represent and in their roles as foils to highlight the figure of King Solomon.[[14]](#footnote-14) Thus, the encounters constitute a literary frame for the unit, unifying its structure, and directing the reader to see ch. 10 as its culmination and conclusion.

Yet,

עם זאת ההשוואה בין פרק ג לפרק י מעידה לא רק על דמיון, אלא גם על היפוך. כך למשל בעוד בפרק ג הדמות הנשית האנונימית היא זונה (אפילו שתיים) המייצגת את תחתית הסולם החברתי, בפרק י' היא מלכה ומייצגת את קודקוד הסולם החברתי. כך שניתן לומר שפרק 10

is not only the concluding narrative of Solomon’s glory,

וקשור לתחילת הסיפור, אלא הוא קשור גם לסופו, ומהווה

the intermediate point between his glory and decline. It concludes the first half of Solomon’s reign by mirroring ch. 3, however, as it negatively portrays these parallels it simultaneously acts as the inchoate stage of Solomon’s fall. Thus, ch. 10 serves two purposes—closing and opening. The duality of this narrative link reflects the ambiguity laden throughout Solomon’s encounter with the Queen of Sheba, as the following section will show.

# Implicit Criticism in the Description of the Queen of Sheba’s Visit

The story of the Queen of Sheba stands out as strange and mysterious, curious from the outset, by virtue of the extraordinary fact that it is a story about a foreign woman, a queen, who comes to ply the king with riddles and to form political ties with him. Female figures in the Hebrew Bible are usually involved with childbirth, motherhood, rescue, and giving life or, alternatively, with seduction and prostitution—mothers or harlots. A story about a female diplomatic leader stands out as exceptional as compared to other biblical stories. Moreover, female royalty, when prominently situated in a biblical narrative, is generally depicted negatively, such as stories concerning Jezebel and Athalya. Therefore, when the reader initially meets the figure of the Queen of Sheba, they are struck by the unfamiliar, even exotic nature of the encounter.

Another unusual quality of this figure is how she does not even fit the trope of the exotic, foreign woman. Foreign women in the biblical narrative generally occur in contexts of seduction. They are introduced in order to contrast Israelite identity with their otherness and, thereby, convey the motif of the people of Israel’s uniqueness. The most prominent of these foreign women are Rahab and Ruth. Comparing them with the Queen of Sheba highlights the strangeness of her encounter with Solomon, as Ruth and Rahab after their encounter with their respective Israelite leader eventually join the people of Israel, whereas the Queen of Sheba surprisingly, despite her excited words, returns to her land and remains other.[[15]](#footnote-15)

As the story advances, the expressions of hyperbole accumulate, such as: “With a very great retinue… and very much gold… all her questions [lit. all that was with her heart]… there was nothing hidden from the king” (1Kgs 10:2-3). These exaggerations produce the impression that the narrator takes a somewhat ridiculing view of the royal meeting and its participants.[[16]](#footnote-16) The Queen of Sheba reacts with radical excess to what she sees before her eyes and her words are a pastiche of overstated clichés. Then, following her extreme reaction: “there was no more spirit in her” (1Kgs 10:5), Solomon, too, wildly outdoes himself and gives the queen “every desire that she expressed, as well as what he gave her out of Solomon’s royal bounty” (1Kgs 10:13).

Another element that leads readers to hear undertones of criticism of King Solomon is the text’s description of the things that the Queen of Sheba saw:

When the Queen of Sheba had observed all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his valets, and his burnt offerings (*ôlâ*) that he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her (1Kgs 10:4–5).

As the Queen of Sheba was primarily interested in Solomon’s intellectual capacities—“So she said to the king, ‘The report was true that I heard in my own land […] of your wisdom […] your wisdom and prosperity far surpass the report that I had heard’” (1Kgs 10:6–7)—it would appear that this list proceeds from the most impressive item on the list, which is Solomon’s wisdom, toward gradually detailing additional items in descending order of importance. So, after his wisdom comes ‘the house’ (without clarifying to readers whether this is the Temple that Solomon built or Solomon’s personal palace), Solomon's food, his servants, his servants’ clothes, drinks, and—only as the final item on the list(!)—Solomon’s Temple sacrificial offerings. Consequently, the reader understands that the previously mentioned house was Solomon’s abode. Is the list arranged in order of importance from Solomon’s perspective? From the queen’s perspective? It seems that the narrator conveys implicit criticism of the encounter and its participants—their priorities and the things that they find impressive. Solomon’s food is greater than bringing a burnt offering to God. Solomon’s house is more impressive than visiting the house of God.

ביקורת נוספת ניתן לשמוע באמצעות השוואה בין מלכת שבא לחירם. השוואה כזאת תדגיש, לא במפתיע, שהכתוב מרמז לארוטיקה סמויה במערכת היחסים שבין מלכת שבא לשלמה. עצם ההשוואה בין מלכת שבא לחירם מתבקשת ועולה מאופן כתיבת הסיפור, שכן באמצע רשימת המתנות של מלכת שבא, מופיע לפתע איזכור של חירם:

Then she [the Queen of Sheba] gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, a great quantity of spices, and precious stones; never again did spices come in such quantity as that which the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.Moreover, the fleet of Hiram, which carried gold from Ophir, brought from Ophir a great quantity of almug wood and precious stones. From the almug wood the king made supports for the house of the Lord, and for the king’s house, lyres also and harps for the singers; no such almug wood has come or been seen to this day.Meanwhile King Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba every desire that she expressed. (1Kgs 10:10–13)

Hiram’s placement in this list is unexpected, especially since Solomon is preoccupied with the Queen of Sheba, seemingly. Moreover, the previous chapter enumerated a partial list of Hiram’s gifts, in which he also bestowed upon Solomon one hundred and twenty talents of gold (1Kgs 9:14).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Item | The Queen of Sheba | Hiram |
| Gold - one hundred and twenty talents of Gold | 10:10 | 9:14 |
| Great quantities of local specialties | 10:10 (a great quantity of spices) | 10:11 (a great quantity of almug wood) |
| Precious Stones | 10:10 | 10:11 |
| Record quantities | 10:10 (never again did spices come in such quantity as that which the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon) | 10:12 (no such almug wood has come or been seen to this day) |

A comparison of their respective gifts shows that there is a direct connection between them. Both gave Solomon one hundred and twenty talents of gold, such great quantities ‘never again to be seen’ of their local specialties—Sheba’s perfume and Tyre’s almug wood—and precious stones. The near identical lists, juxtaposed and intertwined, seem to imply that both monarchs were in competition for the king’s favor. However, in the case of Hiram, these gifts were primarily used for first “the house of the Lord’ and after for ‘the king’s house” (1Kgs 9:10), in contradistinction to the Queen of Sheba’s gift—the perfume—which, while its use was unstipulated, it was assuredly not used in the house of God, which does not appear in the narrative, and more plausibly was used by Solomon for personal and intimate purposes. Furthermore, the narrative conveys Hiram’s infatuation with Solomon, giving him “as much as he desired” (1Kgs 9:11)—even after he was offended by Solomon’s gift of twenty worthless cities, he still sent him the one hundred and twenty talents of gold. Whereas concerning the Queen of Sheba, Solomon was infatuated with her—giving her “every desire that she expressed” (1Kgs 10:13).

לאוירה הארוטית המרומזת לעיל, ניתן להוסיף את הופעת החידות בביקורה של מלכת שבא.

At the center of the story are unknown riddles (*ḥîdôt*)—not only are their solutions hidden, but their very questions as well.

מדוע הן נזכרות? האם רק כדי להזכיר את חכמתו של שלמה?

A contrast with the relationship between Solomon and Hiram of Tyre emphasizes the erotic nature of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba’s relationship.[[17]](#footnote-17)Riddles, or “dark sayings,” by their very nature are involved in erotic sequence: concealed in their disclosure; they are only ultimately unveiled by the worthy respondent.

החידה קוראת תיגר על המציאות, גבולותיה וסדריה, ברמה האנתולוגית, ההכרתית, המינית והחברתית. החידה עצמה היא אירוטית. היא בנויה לחבר את הבלתי מחובר, סופה בסיפוק ובהקלה של התואם לרגע.[[18]](#footnote-18) חידות מאפשרות שיחה לא ישירה, מתח בין כיסוי וגילוי, ציפייה ופירוקה, אי מובנות שמובילה להבנה משותפת. חידות הם ז'אנר של שחוק ושעשועים אך יש בהם גם יסוד מתגרה, לא רק בעצם ההתמודדות עם הפתרון אלא גם ביכולת של החידה לתאר את העולם המוכר באופן בלתי מוכר החושף את הפן האבסורדי שלו והיחסיות הרופפת של ידעתנו. בשל כך, כפי שאנו רואים ממחקר תרבותי משווה ורחב, החידות מילאו תפקיד בולט במסיבות חתונה.[[19]](#footnote-19) גם במקרא

riddles are known to have played a prominent role at wedding parties and in courtship, as is seen in the Song of Songs and in Samson’s riddle.[[20]](#footnote-20)

שמחת האהבה משמשת מקדמת דנא זירה לשעשועי חידות המרמזות על מסתרי הארוס , שרק לאוהבים חלק בסודו . ההוויה טרופת הגדרים וההגדרות המוצגת בחידות מקראיות היא המודל העתיק המתגלה בחידות האהבה. חידות אלו יוצרות מתח בין המשמעויות השונות של המושג "ידיעה , " כי הן קושרות בין ידיעת הפתרון לבין הידיעה האינטימית , שכן רק זה שיודע אהבה יודע את הפתרון והוא חד את חידתו מתוך תחום היחיד של האהבה המתקיימת בשיאה "כאן ועכשיו" רק בו , ולרבים אין חלק בה אף אם הם נמצאים בקרבתה . המקום הרחוק במרחב או כזמן , שממנו בא הדובר אל עמיתיו , הוא מטונימיה לסוג הידיעה והחוויה הזרה להם

החידות מאפשרות לרמוז רמיזות ארוטיות לחתן ולכלה, בדרך שחוק ושעשוע. עוד ניתן לומר שהחידה מועלית בחתונה, המחברת בין בני הזוג ומשפחותיהם, ומכייון שהיא מועלית שם בגבולות ברורים של משחק, יש באפשרותה לתת פורקן למתח הפסיכולוגי התרבותי, ואולי אף הכלכלי, שבין המשפחות וכן למתח המיני שבין בני הזוג.[[21]](#footnote-21)

נראה אם כן, שאזכור החידות דווקא בהופעת מלכת שבא, האישה הזרה האקזוטית, מעצים את המימד האירוטי של המפגש. הקורא, שמתרשם מכל מה שהסברנו לעיל, לגבי אופן תיאור המפגש בין מלכת שבא לבין שלמה, ונתקל במונח ה"חידה" בתוך הסיפור, מקבל את הרושם שרב הנסתר על הגלוי, ויש מתח מיני סמוי ולא ראוי בין שלמה ובין מלכת שבא.

To understand the reason for this critical tone and what essential problem the story posed, I will compare the two framing stories: The Judgment of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

כדי להשוות ביניהם אדון כעת בסיפור משפט שלמה כשלעצמו תוך שימת לב למוטיב חשבו המופיע בו - דיכוטומיה.

# The Judgment of the Prostitutes—A Dichotomous World

Most readers of the story of ‘Solomon’s Judgment’ have understood it as glorifying Solomon’s name. At the center of this story stand Solomon’s wisdom, discerning mind, and proper use of the gift he received from God, “Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you” (1Kgs 3:12).[[22]](#footnote-22) The entire story is comprised of dichotomies, clear disagreements, and sharp divisions. The story sets the highest role—‘the king’ (Solomon, throughout the story, is designated solely by the epithet, ‘the king’)—opposite the lowest status in society: the “female prostitutes” (*zônôt*), who live in a single home and remain anonymous; the reader knows nothing about them other than their social stratum.[[23]](#footnote-23) Through this stark contrast, the story highlights both the power and reach of the king, who—even from his elevated status—is willing to hear a case from those at the bottom of the social ladder and provide aid to those in distress.

However, the narrative does not limit polarity to social class alone. It is clear that one of the seemingly identical two women is telling the truth and one of them is lying. One is the mother of the living son, and one is the mother of the dead son. Dichotomies appear over and again: between truth and falsehood; between life and death; between dawn and dusk; between men and women;[[24]](#footnote-24) and between the divinely-endowed ability of the judge-king to understand reality and the inability of the commoners.[[25]](#footnote-25) These numerous binaries reflect a perception of reality in which the world is clearly defined and demarcated, with stable and rigid boundaries between oneself and others—between identity and otherness.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The great tension in the story is that it presents a woman as both being a prostitute—representing a sexuality that is not under the control of a husband or father—and being a mother, who cares for the child’s well-being. This combination of unbridled sexuality and maternal tenderness challenges the ostensible, well-ordered reality of the world, in which a woman must be one or the other. As Esther Fuchs has argued, an aim of the story is to reinforce the patriarchal institution of motherhood and to show that extramarital childbearing is a situation fraught with hazards, liable to endanger the life of the child.[[27]](#footnote-27) Thus, the woman’s public judicial appeal blurs social boundaries and the stability that they provide for those within them. The plaintiff claimed:

This woman’s son died in the night, because she lay on him. She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your servant slept. She laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast.[…]But the other woman said, “No, the living son is mine, and the dead son is yours.” The first said, “No, the dead son is yours, and the living son is mine.” (1Kgs 3:19–22)

The happy conclusion of the incident is the restoration of harmony and the establishment of a renewed order out of the chaos threatening society. The narrative leaves the reader, who witnessed the entrance of two women—both prostitutes and mothers—with two separate women, who neatly divide the roles of sexuality and maternity. This is accomplished through the anonymity of these women, the reader does not know which one stated: “Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!” and which one stated, “It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it” (1Kgs 3:26)—they only know that one is given “the living boy,” for “She is his mother” (1Kgs 3:27). Thus, one woman is elevated to motherhood, while the other remains a prostitute—resolving the ambiguous reality. In this way, the story of the trial is of course a fitting continuation of Solomon’s request in the dream at Gibeon, “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern *between good and evil*” (1Kgs 3:9). Solomon, by structuring reality in a dichotomous form and resting his judgment on the plaintiff and defendant’s reactions to his proposal, “rejected complexity and ambiguity.”[[28]](#footnote-28)

One of the literary techniques that demonstrates this unordered world is the lack of an omniscient narrator. It is solely the quotations of the characters dialogue that convey the plot, while the narrator’s intervention is limited to introductory phrases like “she said” and “he said” and the only action that appears is “and they brought a sword before the king” (1Kgs 3:24). The only one who can resolve the ambiguous nature of these events is Solomon, gifted with divine wisdom—not even the narrator appears to know the truth.

This narrative style has many implications for reading the story, of which one is drawing attention to the act of bringing the sword. This is a dramatic pivotal moment at the center of the narrative. The sword draws the focus of all watching: to what does it portend? Will it be determinative of truth? It bifurcates the story as it would the infant.[[29]](#footnote-29) The sword symbolizes the possibility of cutting the Gordian knot of the riddling reality—sharply dividing between right and wrong, as the narrative has presented reality until this point. The story emphasizes that this is the most stable, reliable, and effective way to look at the world and to relate to it.

This point is essential for understanding the story. The cruel and grotesque verdict chosen by Solomon reflects a world based purely on cold dichotomous logic. In a literary sense, this is so striking that Ann Althouse criticizes the king’s sharp unequivocal judgment, bifurcated view of the world, unwillingness to listen empathetically to these women in their distress, and insistence to violently impose his own values upon the unfortunate women. Her criticism may extend beyond what the text warrants by the text, but it effectively demonstrates that the story reflects a world of black-and-white reality and of unambiguous separations and divisions. [[30]](#footnote-30)

Following the successful identification of the true mother through the bringing the sword, the people saw that a wise and understanding king, who posed an extraordinary solution to an unsolvable case, led them. The king knew how to distinguish between two seemingly identical options, detect the subtle differences in the content and intonation of the women’s speeches or elicit these differences, through the revealing of the sword, and, thereby, recognize which woman was the mother of the living child. Moreover, the sword test proved that there is a correlation aligning the biological mother, the truth-teller, with the sort of mother who is worthy of raising the child, in that his welfare is the highest priority for her. In parallel, a correlation is created between the other woman, the falsifier, with the sort of woman who is not worthy to raise the child, since his well-being does not concern her at all. Thus, the conclusion of the story has rearranged reality entirely according to clear and sharp categories. Nature and nurture come together and create clear interrelated connections.[[31]](#footnote-31)

The reader emerges from the experience with an unobstructed vision of reality. For one moment it had seemed as though reality was deceptive and that the two women were so similar to one another that it would be impossible to distinguish between them. Then, the judicial proceedings proved beyond a doubt there are clear boundaries that separate and distinguish between falsehood and truth, between good and bad, between wisdom and malice, and between life and death. It is unsurprising to discover that this sort of world is a zero-sum game. Either “It shall be neither mine nor yours” or “give her the living boy” (1Kgs 3:26). There is no attempt to reach a compromise because no such thing exists.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Though the reader finds it difficult to keep track of the real mother and is left confused at the end of the women’s narrative, King Solomon himself chooses the sword test and thereby endeavors to re-organize reality afresh for himself and for his subjects. The reader remains in a fog, but is amazed by the figure of Solomon, who is presented as somebody who understands the importance of a clearly defined and organized world and is determined to resolve the complex situation no matter what happens. [[33]](#footnote-33)

כעת ניתן לשוב ולהשוות בין סיפור זה לבין סיפור מלכת שבא ולעמוד על הפערים ביניהם

# The Visit of the Queen of Sheba—Blurred Boundaries

Opposite this story stands the story of the encounter between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. While the story of the prostitutes is built around unembodied speech and the one visual of brandishing the sword, in the story of the queen of Sheba, conversely, the narrative focuses almost exclusively on actions performed by the figures involved. This fact is quite noteworthy, for even when the figures do engage in dialogue, the narrator does not quote what they said, and readers are left with many questions about the content of the conversations between the queen and the king. For example:

She came to test him with hard questions… when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her… King Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba every desire that she expressed. (1Kgs 10: 1–3, 13).

Lots of talk, lots of riddles, lots of mysterious heart-to-heart conversations, but no direct quotations of what exactly was said there.[[34]](#footnote-34) While in the story of the trial, the reader had to pay close attention to the testimonies in order to arrive at a verdict derived from the women’s own words, in ch. 10 there is no way for the reader to even attempt to solve the riddle as Solomon does. We, rather, find ourselves faced with a riddle wrapped in a mystery: What was said there? What sort of riddles did the queen ask the king and would the reader have known their solutions?[[35]](#footnote-35) The sole quotation in the narrative is one speech by the Queen of Sheba. The center of the story cites these words and as such they become the focus of the description and the defining moment in the entire story:

The report was true that I heard in my own land of your accomplishments and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. Not even half had been told me; your wisdom and prosperity far surpass the report that I had heard. Happy are your men![[36]](#footnote-36) Happy are these your servants, who continually attend you and hear your wisdom!Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel forever, he has made you king—to execute justice and righteousness. (1Kgs 10:6–9)

Four consecutive verses are devoted to the astonishment of the queen of Sheba, while the actual wise and impressive words of the king remain shrouded in darkness, and we do not know how exactly he succeeded in eliciting the admiration of the exotic queen. The queen’s sentences thus become the central axis around which the story revolves, and they attest more than anything else to that which is absent from the story. They underscore the fact that other than these words, there is no information about the content of the leaders’ verbal exchanges. If we add to this the literary fact that exaggerated expressions suffuse the queen’s speech, then the proposed purpose of the story—to demonstrate Solomon’s world-renowned wisdom—becomes problematic and the reader questions its credibility. An inversion of the sword showcased to the audience, which convincingly demonstrated Solomon’s wisdom to the world.

The story of the Queen of Sheba stands as the antithesis to the story of Solomon’s judgment, not only with respect to the relationship between speech and action, but also in its attitude to the accepted social order and to its binaries. The Queen of Sheba, similar to the prostitutes, also threatens the conventional social order. She resists placement within the normative distinctions in social and cultural categories.[[37]](#footnote-37) She is a woman whose marital and maternal status do not define her. Her words revolve around wisdom and there is no discernible act of seduction or other stereotypically female practices.[[38]](#footnote-38) She does glorify God but there is no indication that she joined the people of Israel, or that she becomes part of the family, and so she remains a foreigner. It can even be said that she is “a stranger among strangers” since, of the many rulers who came to Solomon to see his wisdom (1Kgs 5:10–14), she is the only woman. Furthermore, she functions in the public sphere in a leadership role, usually reserved for men, and is the only one who came not only to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but also to test it. In all these points, the Queen of Sheba challenges that which is familiar and known.

The relationship between the queen and Solomon is also not truly clear and remains shrouded in obscurity. It is true that the Queen of Sheba does not openly and explicitly seduce Solomon, but she tells him “All that was on her mind (*lǝbābāh*).” Solomon does not take her, but ‘there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her’ (1Kgs 10:2–3)., and at the end of the meeting he ‘gave to the Queen of Sheba every desire that she expressed, as well as what he gave her out of Solomon’s royal bounty.’ (1Kgs 10:13) כפי שהראנו קודם לכן, The reader senses an intimacy, perhaps even erotic in nature, between them that goes beyond a matter-of-fact diplomatic connection, but finds no explicit indication that any such thing took place.[[39]](#footnote-39)

אזכור החידות, כפי שטענו קודם, מוסיף אף הוא לרושם זה

Lastly, it should be noted that the words “for the name of the Lord” (1Kgs 10:1) neither appear in the version of the story attested to in Chronicles, nor in the Targum of Kings. This conspicuous absence in these sources seemingly suggests that the original story did not emphasize the role of God and that the redacted narrative in Kings added it to possibly blur the original context of the encounter between the sexes and monarchs.

We see that the capacity for separation and decisive division that characterized the stories of the beginning of Solomon’s reign have given way to blurring and ambiguity with respect to the purpose of the encounter, its nature, and the character of its protagonists. If we join these insights to the points raised earlier about the narrative’s critique of Solomon, we can conclude that the narrative of the visit of the Queen of Sheba suggests an answer to why Solomon, who began his journey by walking in the ways of God, fell into decline and veered from the proper path. From the literary analysis it emerges that at first Solomon knew how to distinguish and categorize, to cut and divide. The more time passed, and the more his network of ties with neighboring and distant countries branched out and deepened—so, accordingly, did the cultural gaps separating him from them begin to erode. Too many points of interface and connection emerged. The reciprocal ambiguity that developed in Solomon’s diplomatic ties inevitably spilled over to the personal, cultural, and theological domains as well.

בהקשר זה כדאי לחזור ולעיין בהופעת החידות בסיפור מלכת שבא ולהוסיף דבר מה נוסף – כיון שחידות נושאות בתוכן בו זמנית מטענים רב משמעיים, בספרו על שמשון, מביא Crenshaw את הטענה המרתקת כי

"Essential to riddled is the setting of a trap. They endeavor to mislead by offering special language that masquerades as common language. Riddles therefore function to reinforce esoteric lore: Special groups or clans retain their uniqueness by use of ciphers known only to them. It follows that riddles establish worth or identity rather than native intelligence."[[40]](#footnote-40)בעקבות הבחנה זו, ניתן לטעון כי העובדה שמלכת שבא ושלמה חולקים אפשרות ל"שיחת חידות" מרמזת על שיתוף תרבותי זהותי שמתרחש ביניהם. יש ביניהם הרבה מן המשותף, עד כדי הבנת קודים סמויים שעוברים דרך צופנים לשוניים בחידות. בקונטקס של הסיפור, יש כאן אמירה מרומזת (ואף חידתית...) למבינים בצופן המקראי והקשובים להקשר בו זה מסופר, לכך ששלמה ומלכת שבא התקרבו יתר על המידה והרבה מעבר לרצוי. הם מבינים זה את זו ברבדים עמוקים של שפה, תרבות, עולם רגשי ואסוציאטיבי.

Solomon’s reign began with a clear distinction between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, between male and female roles. Borders were not breached. The social order was maintained and the narrative at once preserved and affirmed it. The prostitutes came to the king only in order to get his ruling, and of course they accepted his decree and his verdict.

פתרון החידה המשפטית שנעשה ע"י שלמה, השיב את הסדר על כנו.

Whereas, in the story of the Queen of Sheba is permeated by a vague feeling, which gradually intensifies, that the poles are being drawn toward one another and compromising the binary structure.[[41]](#footnote-41) This is a dangerous situation in terms of identity formation, and the narrator presents it to us gently, when the first steps are taken.

Although the narrative of the Queen of Sheba seems to be a story of political success, other voices are audible immediately below the surface. These voices place a question mark on King Solomon’s ability to protect the social boundaries that prevailed up until this time. The story criticizes the king by describing how the pursuit of diplomatic ties, which began as political, can spin off in other dangerous directions, personal, cultural, and emotional.[[42]](#footnote-42)

This reality will is intensified in the subsequent chapter in which we once again meet Pharaoh’s daughter, but this time with an explicitly negative connotation, since Solomon is confronted with the cultural challenge that she poses, and he does not meet it successfully. King Solomon symbolizes the danger that lies in exogamous relations, in blurring separate domains. He models, and even embodies, how this matter takes place in a gradual process, escaping notice. There is an elusive moment that is hard to pinpoint. The reader considers the visit of the Queen of Sheba and does not understand what might be problematic about it, but after reading ch. 11, in retrospect, it is detectable that the inchoate erosion began with her visit and the beguiling riddles left unsaid.

Thus, the story of the Queen of Sheba concluded the framing of the golden age of Solomon’s reign, which began with the story of Solomon’s Judgment. The conclusion of the literary unit hints at the decline, which the introduction foreshadows, and particularly to the factors that brought Solomon toward his downfall. It may therefore be surmised that ch. 10, in its current editorial form and its placement in the sequence of chapters in the book of Kings, concludes the narrative of Solomon’s glory years, while also functioning as a literary transition point between this period and the era of his fall. On the surface, it seemingly belongs to the positive depiction of the king, but a deeper analysis reveals many ambiguities and problems. These countercurrents may also have given rise to the negative attitudes towards the Queen of Sheba and what she represents found in later exegesis. With her visit, the sensitive reader begins to feel the erosion of the well-established binary structure and the eventual disintegration of Solomon’s kingdom.

This reading grants deeper meaning to the fact that the turning points of this plot are unclear. This is the central axis that runs through Solomon’s stories. It is impossible to clearly detect the change when it occurs. It is only in retrospect that is possible to read ch. 10 and understand that the seeds of calamity were already planted there; even in that seemingly impressive and positive encounter, the question of religious-national-cultural-gender identity was put to the test and failed. It is for this reason that the final redactor of this set of stories saw this encounter as so threatening.[[43]](#footnote-43)

זוהי דוגמא יפה לאמנות העריכה. האפשרות הספרותית שנקודת המעבר בין הסיקור החיובי לסיקור השלילי, נעלמת – בה עצמה גלום הרעיון שטשטוש הגבולות לא התרחש באבחת חרב, ברגע מובחן, אלא הוא נקודה עמומה על הרצף. כל שנותר הוא לסמן את נקודת ההתחלה ואת נקודת הסיום. מתי היה הרגע הקריטי של ההדרדרות – קשה לומר. זהו רגע חמקמק, כמעט כמו זהותו האבודה של שלמה המלך..

1. Biblical quotations are based on the NRSV translation with minor adjustments. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Grossman has suggested that through repeated readings a reader might be able to sense implicit judgment beneath the surface of these verses. See Jonathan Grossman, *Ambiguity in the Biblical Narrative and its Contribution to the Literary Formation*, PhD diss. (Bar-Ilan University, 2006), 252–257. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Amos Frisch *The Narrative of Solomon’s Reign in the Book of Kings*, PhD diss. (Bar Ilan University, 1986), 237–238. Frisch posits a contrastive purpose to the connection between the verses at the beginning of Solomon’s reign and the description of its conclusion. He emphasizes that this “points to difference and not to similarity… The likeness in the motifs serves to create the associative link and the parallelism that connects them, but regarding content, it indicates the clear contrast between them.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Michael V. Fox, “The Uses of Indeterminacy,” *Semeia* 71 (1994); Amos Frisch, *Narrative*, 72; idem., “Structure and its Significance: The Narrative of Solomon’s Reign (1 Kings 1:1–12:24),” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 51 (1991); Henry S. Gehman and James A. Montgomery, *The Book of Kings* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1951), 231; David Jobling, “‘Forced labor’: Solomon’s golden age and the question of literary representation,” *Semeia* 54 (1991); Bezalel Porten, “The Structure and Theme of the Solomon Narrative (1 Kings 3–11),” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 38 (1967), 97, 128; Pauline A. Viviano, “Glory Lost: The Reign of Solomon in the Deuteronomistic History,” in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium,* edited by Lowell K. Handy (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 336–347. Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 144-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981). Additional scholars who take ch. 10 as anti-Solomon include Stuart Lasine, “The King of Desire: Indeterminacy, Audience, and the Solomon Narrative,” *Semeia* 71 (1995), and Kim Ian Parker, “Repetition as a Structuring Device in 1 Kings 1-11”, *JSOT* 42 (1988), pp. 19-27, Kim Ian Parker, *Wisdom and Law in the Reign of Solomon* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. George Savran, “1 and 2 Kings”, in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 146-64 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Jerome T. Walsh, “Symmetry and the Sin of Solomon”, *Shofar* Fall 1993 Vol.12 No. 1, pp. 11-27 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Frisch, *Narrative*, 55. This is an especially key point, to which I will return at the end of the discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Marc Brettler “The Structure of 1 Kings 1–11,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 49 (1991). See also the engagement with his lengthy and important discussion proposal in Claudia Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000). Camp’s proposal is based upon an intertextual and sociohistorical reading (see ch. 4). She suggests reading the story of the Queen of Sheba from an intertextual perspective between the Book of Proverbs and the Solomonic narrative. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Contrast, for example, the case of Hiram, the king of Tyre, who sends messengers to Solomon but does not personally meet with the king himself. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This is so whether the focus of the story is upon Solomon’s wisdom (as maintained by Porten, “Structure,” for example) or upon his wealth (as per, for example, Brettler, “Structure”). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Jerome T. Walsh, “Symmetry and the Sin of Solomon,” *Shofar* 12, No. 1 (1993); idem., *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry: 1 Kings* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996): 130-32. Walsh maintains that the dissimilarity between the two stories is striking. In the first part, in the story of the judgment, Solomon uses his knowledge and wisdom in order to benefit his people and, indeed, all the people appreciate him for this and understand that they stand to gain considerably from the generous application of his wisdom in their daily lives. In the second section, a moment before the decline, the outcome of Solomon’s wisdom is simply increased gold. There is strong emphasis on the possessions that Solomon amasses thanks to the queen of Sheba’s visit. The abundance of gold and the rest of the treasures do not contribute at all to the welfare of the people and the improvement of their lives. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. אודות סיפורי בית משפט והמוטיב החידתי שבהם עיינו

    James L. Crenshaw, *Samsom -A Secret betrayed, a vow ignored*, John Knox Press 1978

    עמ' 105 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. It is important to bear in mind that demonstrating parallels between the two stories will not necessarily answer the question as to whether the comparison indicates similarity (i.e., that both stories are laudatory of Solomon, such as Reinhartz’s claim that the two stories should be read side by side because both reflect positively upon Solomon’s character. See Adele Reinhartz, “Anonymous Women and the Collapse of the Monarchy: A Study in Narrative Technique,” in *A* *Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings*, edited by Athalya Brenner [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994], 53), or contrast, as Walsh argues (i.e., that the story of the Queen of Sheba reflects criticism of Solomon, in contrast to his judgment of the prostitutes. See Walsh, “Symmetry”). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. On the fascinating comparison between Rahab and the queen of Sheba, see Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, “She Came to Test Him with Hard Questions: Foreign Women and their View on Israel,” *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. It should be noted that the repeated use of the word “much” (*rav*) is reminiscent of the Deuteronomy 17:16–17, which warns the king to not amass too many horses, wives, or gold. Thus, we may detect a clandestine critique of Solomon in this passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. על אף שמערכת היחסים בין חירם לבין שלמה נזכרת במהלך הפרקים לא פעם, ובהקשרים שונים, החידות בולטות בהיעדרם. עד כמה זה היה חסר ועד כמה היה נסיון לטשטש את הופעת החידות דווקא אצל מלכת שבא, ניתן לראות מאזכור החידות אצל חירם בדבריו של יוסף בן מתיתיהו:

    לפי א . שליט , כרך א , עמ' 281 – אם ניתן למצוא את הדברים בתרגום לאנגלית, זה עדיף מאוד: "מלך הצורים שלח לשלמה גם דברי חכמה וחידה וביקש ממנו לפתרם לו...ושלמה היה איש חריף השכל ובעל תבונה , שלא נבצר ממנו דבר מאלה , ופתר בשכלו את כל ( הבעיות )."

    החידות בסיפור חירם מופיעות גם אצל מיננדרוס , שתירגם את תעודות הצורים מלשון פיניקית ללשון ההלנית וגם אצל דיאוס. עיינו על כל נ"ה טור סיני, **הלשון והספר: בעיות יסוד במדע הלשון ובמקורותיה הספרותיים - כרך הספר,** מוסד ביאליק ירושלים 1950, עמ' 59 (עברית) .  
     [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. ראו ג' חזן-רוקם, "'איכה... איכה?' – על חידות בסיפורים במדרש איכה רבה", מחקרי ירושלים בספרות עברית, י-יא (1988), עמ' 531-547 (עברית) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Crenshaw עמ' 102-105

    וכן ראו ד' נוי, "חידות בסעודות חתונה", מחניים ,ג (תשכ"ג), עמ' 64-71 (עברית) וכן ד' שטיין, "מלכת שבא מול שלמה – חידות ופרשנות במדרש משלי א", [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Azzan Yadin, Samson’s *Ḥîdâ*, *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (2002); Yair Zakovitch, *‘I Will Utter Riddles from Ancient Times’: Riddles and Dream-Riddles in Biblical Narrative* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2005), 14–18, 212–221. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. ראו ד' נוי, "חידות בסעודות חתונה", מחניים ,ג (תשכ"ג), עמ' 64-71 (עברית) וכן ד' שטיין, "מלכת שבא מול שלמה – חידות ופרשנות במדרש משלי א", [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Karel A. Deurloo, “The King’s Wisdom in Judgment: Narration as Example (1 kings iii).” *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament* 25, edited by Adam S. van der Woude (Leiden: Brill, 1989). He emphasizes that the judgment story proves that Solomon was completely dependent upon God—his wisdom being divine wisdom—hence, the story’s importance. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See Anne Althouse, “Beyond King Solomon’s Harlots: Women in Evidence,” 65 *S. Cal. L. Rev*. 1265 (1992). She writes, “Our male character is so famous that he needs no name. Our female characters are such nonentities that they too need no names” (ibid., 2). Furthermore, they are presented as almost identical women, who work in the same profession, and have identical children. This would extend the argument, ultimately derived from folklore, that both women are widows of the same man. See Carole Fontaine “The Bearing of Wisdom on the Shape of 2 Samuel 11–12 and 1 Kings 3,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34 (1986), 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The Solomon problem juxtaposes male power and female behavior: man as the judge and woman as the judged. The female behavior seen here sets up two distinct and familiar stereotypes of the good and bad woman: the self-sacrificing, honest woman and the self-interested, lying woman. See Althouse, “Beyond,” 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Stuart Lasine, “Solomon, Daniel, and the Detective Story: the Social Function of a Literary Genre,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 11 (1987). Lasine emphasizes that the purpose of the story is to show Solomon’s understanding of human nature, and this is the focus of the story in front of us. He states that ‘[t]he boundary explored in the judgment story is that which separates immediate divine knowledge of the human heart, from the inability of ordinary human beings to fathom the true character of their fellows’ (ibid., 247). So too, in Stuart Lasine, “The Riddle of Solomon’s Judgment and the Riddle of Human Nature in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45 (1989). Likewise, see Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 167–169. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Camp puts forth a sophisticated reading of this story. She states that while the prostitute threatens the social order, she simultaneously affirms it in that she clearly outlines how it is proper to behave in this framework. The prostitute thereby becomes an important liminal figure. See Camp, *Wise*, 166. Bird adds that the complexity is even greater in our story. See Phyllis A. Bird, “The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts,” *Semeia* 46 (1989). According to Bird, Solomon’s judicial task is complicated precisely because the plaintiffs are both mothers *and* harlots. Since the ruling stereotype of a harlot is “a Woman of smooth and self-serving speech” from whom one does not “expect truth,” the audience also expects these harlots to be self-motivated liars. But, Bird argues, the audience also expects mothers to be women who are connected “by the deepest emotional bonds” to the fruit of their womb. Since the account concludes with a lying harlot and a selfless mother, the resolution of Solomon’s judicial dilemma reinforces—rather than challenges—both stereotypes. See also Linda S. Schearing, “A Wealth of Women: Looking Behind, Within, and Beyond Solomon’s Story,” in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, edited by Lowell K. Handy (Leiden: Brill, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Esther Fuchs, “The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, edited by Adela Yabro Collins (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 131. Furthermore, in accordance with patriarchal ideology, the only individual who can resolve the knotty problem and imposing order upon the messed-up world of the two women is a man—in this case, King Solomon, who stands in for the role of the husband. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Marie Ashe, “Abortion of Narrative: A Reading of the Judgment of Solomon,” *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 4, no. 2 (1991), 87. Also, see Willem A. M. Beuken, “No Wise King Without a Wise Woman (1 Kings iii 16-28),” *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament* 25, edited by Adam S. van der Woude (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 6, in which the role of the wise woman is emphasized: “In this paroxysm of mortal danger, life prevails after all, and that through the power of a mother’s affection. When the real mother takes the step to give up her son to the other woman, she offers him in fact to life. This gesture is so convincing that the king no longer needs a witness. Motherhood and life bear witness for one another.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Bringing the sword at a critical moment raises the question of whether the king needed the sword in order to arrive at the answer to the riddle, or whether he had already solved it and bringing the sword was intended to serve as a public performance that would prove to everyone, all the spectators and all who would hear about the incident later—that the king was right in his verdict. In Abarbanel’s commentary in 1 Kgs. 3, he claims that the plaintiff who speaks at length is the true mother. Other commentators have followed Abarbanel and thought that Solomon identified the true mother even before the test of the sword. In their view, the test of the sword was meaningful only for the audience, see Levin, “The Judgment of Solomon;” Leibowitz and Leibowitz, “The Judgment of Solomon.” In contrast, other commentators claim that the sword assisted Solomon in solving the riddle. Solomon arrives at his solution by executing the trick of the sword test, and this is the proof of his wisdom. This is the direction taken by Lasine, “Solomon, Daniel;” Lasine, “The Riddle;” Reinhartz, “Anonymous Women;” Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Guilty Party in 1 Kings III 16–8.” *Vetus Testamentum* 48 (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Althouse, “Beyond.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. “The ‘true mother’ reveals herself in her biology as well as in her comporting words—she is ‘mother’ by nature as well as by culture… She is the ‘natural,’ the ‘real,’ the ‘true’ mother. And, by implication, in a culture in which motherhood was the obligation of every woman, she is the true ‘woman’” (Ashe, “Abortion of Narrative,” 86–87). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Ashe, “Abortion of Narrative,” 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. A large group of scholars hold the view that neither the reader (nor Solomon), have any way of assessing who the real mother is. There is a good deal of confusion in the presentation of the story, which makes it impossible to consistently follow one of the women and mark her as the mother of the living child. A variation of this view is adopted by Sternberg, *Poetics*, 166–70 and Van Wolde, “Who Guides Whom?.” They argue that the author does not at any stage intend to provide readers with the ability to discern who the real mother is since the focus of the story is the wisdom of Solomon. Garsiel goes even further, explaining how the author disrupts and confounds our assumptions and conclusions at every stage of the story up to its conclusion. See Moshe Garsiel, “Revealing and Concealing as a Narrative Strategy in Solomon’s Judgment (1Kings 3:16–28),” *Catholic Biblical* *Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (2002); idem., “Two Harlot Mothers and One Living Infant—Three Riddles in Solomon’s Judgment” (Hebrew), *Beit Mikra* 49, no. 3 (2003). Also, concerning Solomon’s abilities, see Theodore Anthony Perry, *Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible: Exploring God’s Twilight Zone* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2014), 92–108. He writes: “But if his ability is to be explained as intuition or skill in questioning witnesses, he may qualify as a good judge but one hardly worth a trip from the Queen of Sheba” (ibid., 99). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Furthermore, the few quotations that do occur in the story give a sense of equality between the queen of Sheba and Solomon. The narrator sets the voice of the queen opposite the narrator’s voice rather than in relation to explicit quotations of Solomon’s words. See Gillmayr-Bucher, “She Came to Test Him,” 128, 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Perhaps because of this, many legends have been associated with the relationship between Solomon and the Queen, and most of them deal with sexual tension and seduction rather than wisdom and in-depth conversations. In this way, the riddles were viewed as a code for the tension that typifies intimate relationships, see Edward Ullendorff, “The Queen of Sheba,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 45, No. 2 (1963).

    So, for example, in 1Kgs 10:8, the text of the LXX has the queen of Sheba say, “happy are your wives” rather than “happy are your men” as in MT. This is a hint that the queen of Sheba found King Solomon attractive in the manner that went beyond his wisdom and wealth. The reference to the queen of Sheba in the New Testament can also be seen to imply ties and relationships that extend beyond diplomacy, though differently. She appears in both Matthew and Luke, and the context is most likely her conversion. See also Alice Ogden Bellis, “The Queen of Sheba: A Gender-Sensitive Reading,” *The Journal of Religious Thought* 51, no. 2 (1994–1995), 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. NRSV reads “your wives,” following LXX. See previous footnote. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1994). In his view, the threat that her impressive and unusual appearance entail led later traditions to paint the queen of Sheba in negative colors. An interesting discussion about the story of the queen of Sheba as a power struggle between “insiders” and “outsiders” can be found in Bellis (1994–1995). She claims, following Warner, that “…When female gender is defined as other than normal, women are forced into an impossible choice: to be female or to be normal” (Bellis, “The Queen of Sheba,” 25) [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Also, as noted by Gillmayr-Bucher (“She Came to Test Him,” 136), 1Kgs 10:1–10, 13 belongs to the wisdom stories in the Solomon tradition. Like King Solomon, the queen of Sheba is shown as a wise monarch. As wisdom was considered to be an ideal feature for a monarch, the portrait of the queen of Sheba follows a well-known representation. Setting riddles is a genre in the wisdom tradition. See Camp, *Wise*. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See Camp, *Wise*, 176; Gillmayr-Bucher, “She Came to Test Him,” 138. On the various traditions in Jewish, Arabic, and Ethiopian traditions, see Fabrizio Angelo Pennacchietti, “The Queen of Sheba, the Glass Floor and the Floating Tree-Trunk,” *Henoch* 22 (2000); Ullendorff, “The Queen of Sheba.” [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. עמ' 100

    וראו גם אצל Perdue עמ' 534, וכן בעמ 535

    : The wise man conceives of his task as one of comparingnand relating in order to discover one common feature which will give what appear to be incomparable subjects an essence of unity or sameness. such a quest for unity is apparent in riddle formulation [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. The possibility of this interpretation, which sees the described reality moving into a state of undefined boundaries, explains and illuminates several prominent directions in post-biblical traditions about the significance of the visit of the queen of Sheba. Thus, for example, this possibility explains the Muslim tradition that tells of the queen of Sheba exposing her thighs, so that Solomon saw that her legs were hairy, for she was the queen of the demons. This tradition, which sees the queen of Sheba as a demoness, or a mysterious figure with hairy legs, expresses the liminal nature of the figure of the queen and the covert threat that she posed to the natural order. Is she a woman or a demoness? In the Second Targum of Esther (dated to c. 500 C.E), Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, after Solomon sends the Queen a depilatory substance to remove the hair from her body, engage in sexual intercourse, thereby, conceiving Nebuchadnezzar. For a comprehensive discussion, see Lassner, *Demonizing*, 9–35, 161–67; Bellis, “The Queen of Sheba,” 18–20.

    This proposal also explains the tradition that the Queen of Sheba became pregnant by King Solomon and returned home with their common fetus in her womb, thereby representing the dangerous cultural connection that was formed, for example, in the Ethiopian national epic, *Kebra Nagast* (*Glory of the Kings*). Along these lines, there is an additional implied link inviting comparison between the story of the queen of Sheba and the judgment of Solomon. In both, Solomon bestows life and gives a woman a child. Bellis asks, “Why is it so hard for us to imagine a man and a woman intellectually sparring without turning the woman into a demon or a sex object or into one who is converted to the man’s way of worship?” (Bellis, “The Queen of Sheba, 27).

    גם המדרשים השונים והספרות המאוחרת שפרטו את תוכן החידות, מתקשרים לתימה של איתגור הגבולות והזהויות. עיינו על כך במאמרה של שטיין. ניתן להבחין יפה כיצד תוכן החידות, על המסורות האגדתיות השונות מהווים קריאת תיגר על הסדר של חלוקת העולם לקטגוריות מובחנות, וכיצד פתרונו של שלמה, כך לפי המדרש, מנסה להחזיר את העולם לסדר התרבותי הקיים בו (כפי שפרשנו שהוא עושה בפסק הדין במשפט הנשים הזונות). עיינו על כך גם אצל מיכל רוזנברג, **תאומים מתרוצצים ביצירותיו של ח"נ ביאליק לילדים ולאחרים**, מכון מופת 2008, עמ' ..61-68 (עברית) [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. These observations follow the interpretive line suggested by Gillmayr-Bucher, “She Came to Test Him,” and reinforce it by means of the comparison with the story of the judgment of the prostitutes and through the investigation of the critical stance towards Solomon. Gillmayr-Bucher argues that the entire story of the queen of Sheba is a dualistic story, with the chief and fundamental duality inhering in the figure of the queen of Sheba. She writes: “The queen of Sheba is portrayed as an iridescent person in a vivid dialogue of different images. On the one hand, she remains the foreign queen and she alludes to the strange woman. On the other hand, she is presented as a wise woman, who can evaluate Solomon’s kingdom not only according to secular matters, but also with reference to Solomon’s deity” (Gillmayr-Bucher, “She Came to Test Him,” 141). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. It is of interest to note that in the Chronicles version of these events, Solomon’s Judgments is not found, while the story of the Queen of Sheba is interpreted in a more positive and much less threatening manner. Likewise, the decline of Solomon is not mentioned at all. It is possible to suggest that after the exile, at least by the school of those who wrote Chronicles, the encounter with a different culture is not perceived as a threat, but rather as an opportunity for growth and opportunity. Concerning the universal element in Chronicles, see Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)