Chapter One
Biographies Correspond

"*He was from the beginning worthy to be a king in this world*
And he shall be worthy in the world to come"
The Second Targum to Esther, II.

When King Solomon emerged from the pages of the Bible, he became the Solomon of legend—one of three figures (together with Moses and David) endowed with biographies in both biblical and post-biblical literature.[61]

Jewish literary culture, which developed under the influence of Hellenistic culture and consequently expanded to adopt new literary genres, was in search of a hero; in Solomon, it found one. Nor was Jewish culture alone in embracing him as a cultural hero: Solomon, mainly on the wings of legend, was destined to transcend borders of culture and of time. But this book deals with a trio, and, indeed, the lives of Aristotle and Jesus would expand similarly over time. Aristotle's status as a scholar and philosopher, his vast bibliography, and his connections with Alexander the Great inspired numerous biographies and pseudo-biographies; and, in apocryphal and pseudo-apocryphal literature, the life of Jesus took on new and varied forms beyond those depicted in the New Testament.[62] This great abundance of legends, and the versatile roles attributed to these three figures, made possible the correspondence that would develop between them.

Solomon's reign lasted between 967 and 928 B.C.E.—a period of nearly forty years[63]—and his biblical biography speaks at length of his greatness, of the richness of international trade with his kingdom under his rule, of the patterns of his reign and administration, and, first and foremost, of his construction of the Temple. It is notable that no contemporaneous extra-biblical sources, however, make mention of his actions or his name.

The Bible provides Solomon with two parallel biographies. The first, and earliest, version of the story is given in 1 Kings 1–11. A second version appears in 1

61 A ruler whose timeless and transcultural renown approaches Solomon's to some extent is Alexander the Great. See, among others Cary (1956); Royce Moore (2018) and Boardman (2019).
62 See, for example, the *Protoevangelium of James* and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (*Infancy Gospel of Matthew*).
63 1 Kings 11:23. According to Biblical historian, his main source was "the book of the acts of Solomon" ("Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, all that he did as well as his wisdom, are they not written in the Book of the Acts of Solomon?", 1 Kings 11:41).

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110677263-003

Chronicles 8 – 29 – 2 Chronicles 1 – 15,[64] focusing on Solomon's glory and on the construction of the Temple while omitting the shadows that "would eclipse his kingdom". Beyond the pages of the Bible, versions of Solomon's life abound.

The profusion of appellations that have accrued to Solomon also attests to his status.[65] The prophet Nathan called Solomon *Yedidiah* ("Friend to the Lord")[66]; the *Midrash* refers to him as *Kohelet*[67], *Etiel* ("God is with me" because the spirit of God lay upon him), and *Yikhat*.[68] Rabbi Simeon ben Yoḥai, a Tannaitic sage, maintained that Solomon was one of three *tzadikim* (righteous ones), together with Isaac and Joshua, whose name was given to them by the Almighty himself ("Of Solomon, what does it say? Here a son has been born unto you, he will be a man of rest, and I have rested from all my enemies around me, for Solomon will be his name, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days").[69] In Christian writings, his Latin name, *Salomon*, was also translated as *Pacificus*—a maker, or bringer, of peace; in Muslim literature, his name is *Suleiman*, and sometimes *Salim*.[70]

Few doubted the veracity of Solomon's biblical biographies prior to the nineteenth century.[71] One of the arguments put forth as evidence of his historicity was that the patterns of rule and administration that characterized his kingdom, as described in great detail in the Bible, were modeled on those of the Egyptian kingdom[72]; some biographers even claimed to know the name of the daughter of Pharaoh that he took as his wife, or the locations of the various lands to which

64 On this matter, see Throntveit (1997) and Frisch (1991).

65 Stamm (1960).

66 2 Samuel 12:24 – 25.

67 *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:1; *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:1.10.

68 *Yik'hat yamim*, Genesis 49:10; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:1.10.

69 *Mekhilta Pisha* 16 (Horovitz–Rabin, Jerusalem, 1960, pp. 59 – 60). According to the *Second Targum of Esther*, Solomon was called *ben* [son] "because he built the temple of the Lord". The translator understood the Aramaic word *ben* not as son but as 'built' [*bana*].

70 As with the names of biblical figures such as Moses, David, Elijah, and more, the name Solomon was not common as a given name among the Sages; like the others, it became more common in Jewish culture only c. 900 C.E.

71 In recent decades, research has emerged questioning the accepted tradition of the Hasmonean Revolt. In this new research, Solomon is described as a "Hebrew-speaking" Alexander the Great; it argues that the biblical tradition regarding Solomon emerged during the Hasmonean period and that his portrayal is based on that of the Macedonian king. T. L. Thompson (1999, pp. 202, 206) claims that the stories about a "Croesus-like" Solomon are not "about history at all, and that to treat them as if they were history is to misunderstand them". This notion may have been inspired by the description of Solomon as a "Hellenistic king" in Josephus' *Antiquities*. See Amir (1968); Feldman (1976, 1997); and Verheyden (2003b).

72 Ash (1999); Brueggemann (2005); Weitzman (2011).

his fleet sailed. Another, more skeptical group, believed that these were simply various historical traditions that had, over the course of generations, undergone various stages of composition, compilation, and editing until their eventual collation into a single unit, perhaps after the destruction of the Temple.[73] Who, then, were the creators and composers of those traditions, and what guided them? One theory is that Solomon's biography in 1 Kings was composed in two main stages, in each case with entirely different goals. The early version, composed in the ninth century B.C.E., or before the end of the seventh, idealizes Solomon as a ruler and depicts his reign as the golden age of a great kingdom—of an empire, really—its capital large and fortified with a magnificent temple at its heart. The other version, written while Judah was weakened or after its destruction, presents Solomon as the *topos* of a sinful king, personally responsible for the destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the Temple. This version, then, was the creation of opponents of the renewed kingdom.[74] This hypothesis assumes an early text written as royal propaganda, to which a later author—or authors—added their own subversive, anti-monarchic take; it assumes further that readers of the new version could distinguish between it and its predecessor, and understand the subtext and its message.

Regardless of the course of its development, Solomon's biblical biography, at least part of which is itself legend, is the fertile soil from which numerous and varied legendary traditions have sprung forth, evolved, and merged, traveling tirelessly across cultures and across eras. This phenomenon raises several issues fundamental to the history of traditions as a field of study (*Traditionsgeschichte*): the identity of the primary sources of these legends; in what context and for what purposes they were created; in what manner they were disseminated; why and how they were absorbed in such disparate environments; and what roles and significance they assumed in the receiving environments and within the frameworks of various literary genres.

No wars or momentous upheavals marked Solomon's lengthy reign. In their absence, his biblical biography describes his supreme wisdom, his marriage to a thousand women, the famous "Judgment of Solomon" in which the fate of a child hung in the balance, and the no less famous visit of the Queen of Sheba; these evocative narratives proved fertile soil for the eventual emergence

73 Torijano (2002, pp. 8–25).

74 See van Keulen (2004); Isaac Kalimi (2012, 2019); Frisch (1991); Finkelstein (2006; pp. 121–150, 175–208). This analysis of the two-stage composition of Solomon's biography raises the question as to why the editor or editors retained the earlier version. A discussion of this point, however, is beyond the purview of this book. On the hypothesis that the story developed in various stages, see Nadav Na'aman (2017, 2018).

of Solomon's legendary biography. At the same time, his biblical biography comprises not only his life story but also the books of the Bible he is said to have authored: The Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, and Psalms 72 and 127. The very first words of the Song of Songs are "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's"; Proverbs opens with "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel"[75]; and Ecclesiastes offers "the words of the Preacher (*Kohelet*), son of David, king in Jerusalem", later proclaiming "I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem".[76] The attribution of these three texts to Solomon made it possible to embroider upon his biography and his persona, and to endow him with a variety of opinions on the nature of life and the relationship between humanity and God. A vast exegetical and *midrashic* literature took shape around the theme, expanding and sculpting his biography with new detail and revolving primarily around the "autobiographical" accounts found in Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. His literary output was similarly augmented: countless additional books were ascribed to his putative authorship, including *Sapientia Salomonis* (The Wisdom of Solomon), the *Psalms of Solomon*, the *Odes of Solomon*,[77] and others that have been lost over the centuries.

Solomon's biblical and legendary biographies became a *topos* of an ideal king—a *rex optimus*[78]—and simultaneously that of a king truly worthy of condemnation. These two conflicting aspects were summed up circa 180 B.C.E. by Ben Sira[79]:

> *Solomon, king in days of peace [[ ]] because God granted this to him by making the surrounding nations quiet.*
> *who established a house for his name [[ ]] and founded a sanctuary forever.*
> *How wise you were in your youth [ ] For you overflowed as the Nile with instructions.*
> *The earth [-] your [life] and you sang a heavenly song of pra[ise].*
> *in song, [parab]le, riddle, and proverb [[ ]] you astounded all peoples.*
> *You were called by the name of the glorious one, [[ ]] by which Israel was called and you amassed gold like iron [[ ]] and multiplied silver like lead.*
> *But you gave yourself in lust to women [[ ]] and handed over to them the rule of your body.*
> *And you [brou]ght corruption upon your glory [[ ]] and profaned your wedding bed wrath*

75 Proverbs 1:1.

76 Ecclesiastes 1:1, 1:12.

77 The *Psalms of Solomon* date from the first century B.C.E., while the *Odes* consist of forty-two psalms from the turn of the second century; though like the Davidic psalms, they are attributed to Solomon. The literature on the subject is vast and I will mention only: Charlesworth (1985); Harris and Mingana (1916–1920); and R. B. Wright (2007).

78 Throntveit (1997).

79 Ben Sira lived in Jerusalem and wrote in Hebrew; his grandson would later translate his work into Greek.

upon your descendants [[ ]] and regret to your deathbed.
[ ] into two tribes [[ ]] and from Ephraim a kingdom of violence.[80]

In contrast, *2 Baruch*—written around the turn of the second century C.E.—was lavish in its account of the grandeur and glory of Solomon's reign, which it regarded as a model for the days of the Messiah:

And the bright sixth waters which thru did see,
This is the time [[in] which David and Solomon were born.
And there was at that time the building of Zion,
And the dedication of the sanctuary,
And the shedding of much blood of the nations that sinned then,
And many offerings which were offered then in the dedication of the sanctuary.
And peace and tranquility existed at that time,
And wisdom was heard in the assembly:
And riches of understanding were magnified in the congregations,
And the holy festivals were fulfilled in blessedness and in much joy.
And the judgment of the rulers was then seen to be guile,
And the righteousness of the Mighty One was accomplished with truth.
And the land [which] was beloved by the Lord,
And because its inhabitants sinned not, it was glorified beyond all land,
And the city Zion ruled then over all lands and regions.
These are the bright waters which you have seen.[81]

To affirm Solomon's greatness as a statesman, Eupolemus, a Jewish Hellenistic historian and diplomat who headed Judah Maccabee's delegation to Rome in 161 B.C.E.,[82] cited "authentic" exchanges of letters between Solomon and Vaphres (King of Egypt), and between Solomon and Souron (King of Tyre, identified with the biblical Hiram). In these letters Solomon demands that the King of Egypt immediately send him 80,000 laborers to build the Temple; his demand is met at once. He makes the same demand of the King of Tyre, who likewise accedes immediately and writes that he will furthermore contribute an architect to the undertaking.[83] Josephus, too, expanded Solomon's biography, adding

80 The existing Hebrew text of Ben Sira is fragmentary; instances where the translators have been obliged to guess at missing content remain unmarked in the quote above for legibility. See an original translation by Benjamin H. Parker and Martin G. Abegg: https://www.bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=B&PageNum=33 (visited on October 1st 2019). See also M. Segal (1953); B. G. Wright (2013).
81 2 Baruch 61:1–8. See Charles (1982 [1896]).
82 1 Maccabees 8:17.
83 Eusebius (2002, pp. 476–478), *Praeparatio Evangelica* IX, 30:5, 30:8); Josephus (1963, Vol. 8, pp. 50–57); Wacholder (1974, pp. 156–157); Bartlett (1985, pp. 65–69).

new details.[84] He described Solomon as an "Oriental" king whose scores of horses were sprinkled with gold dust so that they might glitter on the Sabbath, and who rode in his carriage dressed all in white. Josephus compiled a long list of Solomon's sins—sins that would bring disaster upon Israel—and wrote: "But although Solomon was become the most glorious of kings, and the best beloved by God, and had exceeded in wisdom and riches [...]; yet did not he persevere in this happy state till he died. Nay, he forsook the observation of the laws of his fathers and came to an end no way suitable to our foregoing history of him. He grew mad in his love of women, and laid no restraint on himself in his lusts [...] and he transgressed the laws of Moses [...] He also began to worship [foreign] gods, which he did in order to the gratification of his wives [...]. Nay before this happened, he sinned, and fell into an error about the observation of the laws".[85]

Within the entire vast literary corpus of which Solomon is the protagonist there exist poems,[86] songs, and plays, but no *epos*; nor have I been able to locate more than one historical novel, which is in Yiddish.[87] This may be because Solomon's reign, relatively free of dramatic events, provided only a few motifs to inspire development; storytellers throughout the ages thus turned to the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes in order to supply an inner world and a love story for his biography. The Sages dealt at length with Solomon's life,[88] but his legendary biography is scattered among many Aggadic *midrashim*; the only source that comes near to being a full biography is *Song of Songs Rabbah*.[89] Throughout the generations, Solomon appeared in various forms in the literature of the Sages, who employed him (and quoted from writings attributed to him) to convey their opinions on diverse matters. It is possible to view this invocation of "Solomon" as an indirect means adopted by the Sages to obscure their positions for and against various cultural and social phenomena and modes of behavior, including, for example,

84 Thus, for example, Josephus wrote that Egyptian sources "confirmed" the fact that Solomon married a daughter of the Pharaoh (*Antiquities* VIII, 159).

85 *Ant*. VIII:7; See Verheyden (2013b, pp. 85–106); Feldman (1995).

86 *Tragische Könige*, for example, relates Solomon's life story in poetry and prose. Written by the Austrian poet Ludwig August Frankl Ritter von Hochwart (1810–1894) and published in Vienna 1876, it was translated into Hebrew by Shimon Bachrach in Budapest, 1881.

87 Sapir (1931).

88 Seligsohn (1925).

89 Neusner (1989, pp. 53–56).

their own status in Jewish society, their attitude towards Hellenistic-Roman culture, and their reactions to Solomon's portrayal in Christian literature.[90]

The Aggadic literature was dazzled by biblical descriptions of Solomon's wealth ("Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy"[91]; Solomon had "four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen",[92] in addition to a large fleet of ships that traded for valuable goods with far-off lands such as Ophir and Tarshish).[93] The legends seem to compete with each other as to which can add the most "color" to descriptions of Solomon's wealth. *Pesiqta deRab Kahana* reports that ten fat cattle and a large handsome fowl were placed daily upon his table,[94] while *The Second Targum of the Book of Esther (Chapter One)* relates that "demons and evil spirits were delivered under his control. Imps brought him all kind of fish from the sea and the fowl of the heavens together with the cattle and the wild beasts up to the slaugtherhouse".[95] *Yalkut Shimoni* assures us that "Solomon had forty thousand stables"[96]; according to the *Tales of the Prophets* (a collection of Muslim legends from the Middle Ages) "Solomon's tables stretched for one mile, and he had a thousand cooks each of whom had a demon to help him slaughter cows and sheep, break up firewood and wash pots and pans. He had a thousand bakers, and in his kitchen were slaughtered every day thirty thousand head of camel, cattle, and sheep. The ascetics were seated on cushions of green silk, the genii on iron benches and the demons on benches of brass. The latter consumed nothing but aromas; and the birds

90 Sasson (2003); Shimoff (1997).

91 1 Kings 4:20.

92 2 Chronicles 9:25–26.

93 1 Kings 9:26–28, 10:1–11. Such words captured the imaginations of many who attempted to identify Ophir and Tarshish. Thus, for example, Spanish sailors dubbed an archipelago they reached in the Pacific in 1568 the "Solomon Islands".

94 *Pesiqta deRab Kahana* 6,1 (Mandelbaum 1962, pp. 113–114).

95 Grossfeld (1991). Also see p. 70 of *The Second Targum to Esther: The Zvi Cohen Edition*, 1991. See also Cassel (1888), which is a translation from Aramaic of a collection of Aggadic *midrashim*; and Ego (2001). Solomon was also "rich and powerful and acquired possessions, silver and gold in great abundance".

96 *Yalkut Shimoni on Kohelet*, § 967, 413. R. Hamah bar Haninah is quoted therein as saying: "Solomon's table was not lacking with beets in the summer and with cucumbers in the winter" (the *Yalkut* takes this quote from *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 2,5 [Hirshman 2016, pp. 130, and Cohen (1939) for the translated edition], Ecclesiastes 5:6, and *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 1, 5, trans. J. Rabinowitz (1939)). In other words, costly, out-of-season vegetables were also served at Solomon's table.

ate wheat, barley, rice, beans, corn, millet, and lentils".[97] Even when Ibn Khaldūn, the great Muslim historian of the fourteenth century, expressed doubt on the veracity of the biblical accounts, he agreed that "in the days of Solomon, the Israelite state saw its greatest flourishing and their realm its widest extension". He was critical, however, of what he termed "nonsensical statements and untrue reports" that exaggerated Solomon's power and wealth (his army, for example, is described in 1 Kings 10:26 as numbering only 12,000 men, and his horses "only" 1,400).[98]

Solomon's life and deeds in these legendary traditions clashed with the image of the ideal king described in Deuteronomy: "... you may indeed set over you a king whom the LORD your God will choose. [...] And he must not acquire wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself".[99] On the contrary, the legendary tradition represented the very opposite ideal; it glorified Solomon's extravagant wealth and his royal conduct. Yet it was impossible for the creators of these legends to altogether overlook the negative aspects of his biography. As a result, his role in messianic prophecies was referred to indirectly under the general term "the house of David"; Solomon was not the *topos* of the ideal king, nor did he occupy an overt place in Jews' messianic hopes.

The Sages portrayed Solomon as an example of a great ruler's rise and fall; he, who once ruled over the earthly world and sat upon the "throne of God" would ultimately reign only over the "earthly realm". His fall occurred in stages: first, he reigned over the entire world, then over Jerusalem alone, and finally only over his own bed and his own scepter; even over his bed he was not truly a king, for "he feared the spirits". After his death, the power of the king in Israel waned, as the moon does after waxing.[100] Solomon, the Sages held, was "commoner and king, wise man and fool, prosperous and poor".[101] Due to this ambivalent attitude, the references in messianic visions are, as we have seen, to "the house of David" (*sukkat David*) and "a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch [...] out of his roots",[102] rather than to Solomon; in the pronouncement that "whoever contends against the sovereignty of the

97 Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Kisāʾi (1997, p. 303); Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Thaʾlabī (2002, p. 512).
98 Ibn Khaldūn (1958, Vol. 1, p. 19).
99 Deuteronomy 17:15–17.
100 *Exodus Rabbah* 15,26 on Exodus 12:2.
101 *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah* 1,12. See Hirshman (2016, p. 100). Also see Sasson (2003, pp. 163–173).
102 Isaiah 11:1.

House of David deserves to be bitten by a snake",[103] it is unsurprising that David, rather than Solomon, represents an unimpeachable king.

Solomon's life of luxury is worlds away from Jesus' reply to a man who asked if he could inherit eternal life by observing only the first five commandments: "go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven [...]".[104] It is no wonder that Augustine believed that Solomon's "prosperity, in fact, [...] did him more damage than his wisdom brought him profit".[105]

Christian theology would deal at length with Solomon's sins. It was true, St. Ambrose wrote, that a king was above the law, but Solomon sinned not only against the people but against God himself—a sin not forgiven to a king anointed by divine grace.[106] Solomon became a *topos* of a sinful king, and the question that resulted was whether he ultimately atoned for his sin, repented, and was absolved. John of Salisbury (c. 1115–1180), a theologian and philosopher who rose in 1176 to become bishop of Chartres, wrote in his book *Policraticus*—which dealt with the question of when a ruler might be regarded as a tyrant and justifiably be killed—that Solomon exemplified an upright king; his son Rehoboam, in straying from the straight path, strayed likewise from his father's teaching: "My child, if sinners entice you, do not consent".[107] John did not hold Solomon's great wealth against him; rulers were not forbidden riches but only avarice.[108] The Dutch poet and playwright Joost van Vondel (1587–1679) suggested a different take on the question in a five-act play titled "Salomon" (1648). In that play, Solomon is married to Sidonia, daughter of King Hiram of Tyre; he accedes to her request to build a temple to the goddess Astarte outside the walls of Jerusalem. Despite the protests of the people, he participates in the inauguration of the pagan temple and, in response to that sin, a great flood descends upon Jerusalem, causing the prophet Nathan to foresee the fracturing of the kingdom, the destruction of the Temple, and the exile to Babylonia. The play sees Solomon end his life an enfeebled and miserable king. Other works depicted him negatively as a king who became a limb of the Devil (*de magis curialium*), and the iconoclastic Protestant Reformation employed him as the *topos* of an idolatrous king (while Hezekiah and Josiah were *topoi* of virtuous kings who de-

103 *Sanhedrin* 110a.

104 Mark 10:21, Matthew 19:16–30, Luke 18:18–30.

105 *City of God* XVII:20, in Augustine (1984, p. 754). And see Chapter Four.

106 *Apologia prophetae David*, X.

107 Proverbs 1:10; Books III and V in John of Salisbury (2007). John refers to Aristotle as the "Prince of the Peripatetics".

108 Book IV in John of Salisbury (2007).

stroyed the cults of idols and shrines).[109] In the anti-clerical and radical political views that prevailed in seventeenth-century England, Solomon was the model of a sinful king—a tyrant who inspired rebellion—and his marriages to foreign women were useful as a case in point for those opposed to the unions of English kings with foreign princesses.[110]

At the same time, both Christian cultures—whether in the Catholic West, in Byzantium,[111] or in Czarist Russia[112]—and the Muslim world[113] perceived Solomon as an exemplar of good ruler—a *rex optimus*, ruling with wisdom over a stable regime, a peacemaker, and a fair judge[114] (though David, and at times Hosea, were generally more esteemed). His kingdom was a model for the absence of the separation between Church and State (*sacerdotium* and *regnum*). Spinoza wrote that Solomon not only built the Temple but also established the rituals performed therein; he ruled absolute, in other words, on matters both sacred and civic.[115] Writings attributed to Solomon (and Aristotle) would inspire future conceptions of proper political conduct, the violation of which was held to constitute a breach of the covenant with the people. When Locke, in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1679 – 1681), weighed the legitimacy of monarchy by inheritance,

109 Aston (1993, p. 202).

110 Hill (1994, p. 69).

111 See Ville-Patlagean (1962).

112 Solomon was depicted as a model of supreme authority in Russian Orthodox religious literature, and as a hero in legendary tales that drew motifs from the Talmud. The sixteenth-century czar Boris Godunov supposedly wished to rebuild the Kremlin according to a model of Solomon's temple. See Raba (2014).

113 Muslim rulers associated themselves with Solomon and his throne, and their construction projects with his. Solomon, furthermore, appears frequently in Muslim iconography.

114 See Bose (1996) and Aston (1993, p. 38). The monk Notker Balbulus of St. Gall describes Solomon in his book *Gesta Karoli Magni* (884) as a wise king who served as a model for Charlemagne. He is furthermore lauded mainly as a great builder (such is his portrayal among the Freemasons). The bishop Isidore of Seville, in his *Historia Gothorum*, likened Sisebut, the seventh-century Visigoth king, to Solomon "the monarch, conqueror, and sage, who secured Israel's borders, united the twelve tribes, built a temple to God, and was known by his wisdom and eloquence". See J. Cohen (1999, p. 108). In the sixteenth century, Edward IV and Henry VII of England were depicted in paintings as Solomon, as was Philip II of France; the latter two were portrayed welcoming the Queen of Sheba (Henry by Hans Holbein and Philip by Lucas de Heere). A woodcut in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1583) shows Henry VIII in the guise of Solomon using Pope Clement as a footstool (See Brotton 2017, pp. 164 – 165). A book written in honor of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II ("The Conqueror") relates that the Topkapi palace in Istanbul once boasted a garden planted by the prophet Solomon. All these are only a sample of Solomon's extensive "appropriation" in many cultures.

115 Spinoza, Benedict (Baruch), *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* (1677, trans. Elwes [1883], pp. 245 – 257).

as well as the right of resistance to such rule, he referred not only to Aristotle's political philosophy but also to Solomon's personal example: "If Solomon," he wrote, "had a right to succeed his father, it must be by some other title than that of primogeniture."[116] Historical images, often passed down through literature, memorialized Solomon's reign as the golden age of the Israelite people. The Dutch philologist and jurist Petrus Cunaeus (1586 – 1638), for example, wrote in his book *De Republica Hebraeorum* (1617) that in the days of David and Solomon the Hebrew republic was at the height of its wealth; only after Solomon's death did it begin to decline.[117]

These ambivalent attitudes towards Solomon carried over into the modern age, as a few examples of his depictions in modern Hebrew literature will demonstrate. The first, dating from 1858, is "The Vision", a panegyric by the Jewish-Russian *maskil* Abraham Baer Gottlober (1810 – 1899) that expressed the Russian Jewish intelligentsia's attitude towards Czar Alexander II Solomon, in the poem, appears at Alexander's coronation and bestows the crown upon the new Czar's head; before doing so, he delivers a few words acknowledging the Jews living in Czarist Russia and their hopes for the new ruler. The poet foresees that the Czar will follow in Solomon's path:

Now you go his crown[118] *to inherit*
And to fortify your kingdom on land and at sea
You shall rush forth to the north, the south, the east, and the west
You shall subdue and defeat all your opponents
Every enemy and avenger shall you overthrow
And banish from your land all conflict and war
Affliction and evil will be ousted from your borders
Only justice and peace shall dwell together

Your people come to bow before you
As they go, take heed to your way
To do justice and act righteously...[119]

In 1834, the *maskil* Wolf Meir published a German translation of Proverbs (but transliterated to Hebrew for Jewish readers). In the introduction, he wrote that Solomon, though spoiled since childhood, had erected marvelous structures and fashioned himself a throne of gold-coated ivory. Lacking the ability to be content with little, he had built his kingdom not on a foundation of integrity

116 Locke (1993, p. 67).
117 Cumaenus (2006, pp. 61 – 62).
118 The predecessor in question is Nicholas I.
119 Free translation of A. Gottlober (1858, p. 15).

and justice but on exploitation and marble columns. Solomon violated God's negative commandments ("thou shall not"); still, after all was said and done, "he studied and inquired into the traits of the finest of God's creations and in his wisdom fathomed the hearts of men, to know the secrets of their thoughts and their innermost passions". Solomon's reign is also extolled in the nineteenth-century book *Aseh pele:* "His kingdom grew more powerful than all the others and his wisdom was greater than that of all the sons of Machol".[120] The *maskil* Yudel Rosenberg (1860 – 1936) wrote in *Sefer Divrei haYamim asher leShlomo Alav haShalom* (The Chronicles of the Life of Solomon, Peace Be Upon Him, 1914): "When Solomon ascended to the throne of his kingdom he instituted some fine measures in the land. He divided his kingdom into twelve regions in keeping with the number of the tribes of Israel [...] He raised high the prestige of Israel and removed his people from poverty and disgrace, taking them to a life of glory and splendor [...] the trumpet of war was not heard in the land and he amassed much wealth and luxury, until silver was as naught in the days of Solomon".[121] Legends and folktales continued to glorify his great wealth, but at the same time Jewish ethical (*musar*) literature pointed to his negative side; the *maskilic* worldview found Solomon a far from ideal king.[122] Wolf Meir, for example, criticized not only Solomon's arrogance but also the fact that he "made images of copper oxen under the sacred place of offering,[123] and figures of the lion around his throne" in violation of the commandment against idolatry. Moreover, Solomon relied too much upon his wisdom; hence, "the light of his mind grew dim, and he permitted his wives to raise shrines for their gods and allowed his ministers to oppress the people, and at the end of his life became a sick, angry man, so that the people did not mourn his death".

A further, significant part of Solomon's biography consists of those books and psalms he is purported to have written. According to one early account, the Holy Spirit rested upon Solomon in his old age when he was close to death and "he spoke three books—Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes".[124] However, these three books are generally thought to represent three distinct periods in his life—as a young king, a mature king, and an elderly king—or else three stages in the development of his *sophia* (wisdom), or of his decline: "in his old age, he spoke vanities". In a poem by Micah Joseph Lebensohn (1828 – 1852), "Solomon-Ecclesiastes" appears as an aged and weary king, living out

120 Yassif (2004, pp. 237 – 253).
121 Rosenberg (1914, p. 9).
122 Nonetheless, Solomon does appear in *maskilic* pastoral literature.
123 A reference to I Kings 7:23 – 26.
124 *Yalkut Kings 1*, § 172.

his days in a "palace overlaid with the finest gold, gleaming cedar and glowing capitals, among marble pillars pleasing to the eye, precious stones and rare treasures"—a monarch searching in vain for answers to existential questions:

Then he searched and probed the laws of the earth
From the hyssop on the wall to lofty cedars
From the beasts of the forest to insects and vermin
From the astute he learned as well, inquired of the wise

And of the ancients, of the wise men of Egypt
Of the idols their false knowledge
He lent his ears to the secrets of their priests
Perhaps to find light in the depths of the shadow of death

In vain he sought of them wisdom and intellect
They too knew how to ask, but to reply they knew not
Hence his soul yearned to discover
He sought words of truth, but concealed they remained

Weary of his fruitless inquiries, Solomon had a revelation:

At once the king's eyes were opened
He called forth: At last, you must all hear!
Fear God, and keep his commandments
For this is the whole duty of man! [125]

We have seen that the Jewish Sages' messianic visions made no direct reference to Solomon, referring to the "house of David" rather than to the infamous sinful king. A similar approach exists in the Christian gospel. In Luke's account of the annunciation of the birth of Jesus, the angel Gabriel informs Mary: "And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end".[126] Here, too, the reference is to the throne of David, not the throne of Solomon; David's immediate successor is not mentioned. As we shall see, however, this did not prevent Christian tradition from identifying in Solomon the prefiguration of Jesus.

125 Lebensohn (1972, pp. 57–74); free translation by C. Naor. The poem "Hingegangen in den Wind", by the German poet and Indologist Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866) also ends on a pessimistic note. Rückert (1841, p. 370).
126 See Luke 1:31–33.

Solomon's popularity in folk literature and folklore inspired a wealth of fantastic tales, many of which featured him as a magician and exorcist possessed of a complex relationship with demons and the devil. The twelfth-century story *Solomon and Morolf*,[127] for example, relates how Solomon abducted and married Salma, a pagan queen. The king of the pagans, her father, is able to rescue her; Solomon, disguised as a pilgrim, attempts again to abduct her and is instead captured and sentenced to the gallows. But he blows into a magic horn three times and his army hastens to rescue him.[128] Another fantastic tale is cited in a Russian work from the latter half of the seventeenth century, which achieved a significant amount of popularity. *A Tale of King Solomon's Birth and Exploits* follows two plots: the first tells of Solomon's expulsion from the palace and his wanderings, and the second of the abduction of his wife by the King of Cyprus.[129]

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As with Solomon, Jesus' biography recurs throughout the four Gospels in several, and at times inconsistent, versions. For example, the story of Jesus' conception and birth by Mary through the Holy Spirit appears only in Matthew and Luke.[130] Similarly, the story of the holy family's flight to Egypt appears only in Matthew.[131] No wonder that in his *Against the Galileans*, the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate considered the Christians unable to invent a plausible genealogy, and saw Matthew and Luke as refuted by their disagreement concerning Jesus' genealogy. Furthermore, "Isaiah's prophecy that 'The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a leader from his loins' was most certainly not said of the son of Mary, but of the royal house of David".[132] Alternative biographies of Jesus appear in the apocryphal Gospels, which were not included in the Christian canon; these tell a different story about his life from his birth to his crucifixion.[133]

127 See in Chapter Seven.

128 Kartschoke (1990) and Brunner (2003, p. 165). See Chapter Seven.

129 Lur'e (1964).

130 Matthew 1:1–25; Luke 1:26–38; 2:1–21. See Eusebius' (c. 260–449 A.D.) response to "the alleged discrepancy in the Gospels as to Christ genealogy" (1989; pp. 7–12, 20–22). Mani, the Manichaean (216–276), claimed that the two contradictory genealogies of Jesus are evidence of "Jewish padding". See Fox (2016, p. 127).

131 Matthew 2:13–15.

132 Julian (1980, Vol. 3, pp. 395–197). See also Schäfer (2008).

133 See Grabbe (2019); White et al. (2018); Pagels and King (2007).

The "pagan" philosopher Celsus had a "Jewish" character[134] claim that Jesus had falsified his birth to a virgin mother [*parthenos*] and that, in fact, "the mother of Jesus was turned out by the carpenter who was betrothed to her, as she had been convicted of adultery and had a child by a certain soldier named Panthera".[135] Like Celsus, the Sages maintained that Mary was an adulteress who secretly gave birth to Jesus and similarly identified his father as a soldier named Panthera; according to R. Eliezer,[136] Jesus "brought forth witchcraft from Egypt by means of charms scratched into his flesh". Counter-biographies of this sort also appear in *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest* and in the book *Toldot Yeshu*. The *Polemic* was written in Judeo-Arabic in the mid-ninth century and its author, or editor, is presented as a Christian priest who converted to Judaism and lived in an Arab environment; a Hebrew translation appeared in twelfth-century Spain or Provence and contains mainly anti-Christian claims.[137] *Toldot Yeshu*, on the other hand, is an anonymous, apparently ninth-century work that was circulated in many manuscripts and relates alternative biographies of Jesus.[138] The Quran and medieval Muslim literature[139] present additional counter-narratives to the life of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels. Much modern literature has been inspired by such alternative narratives, producing results that might be described as "counter-history"[140] or even "wild" history, and various genres of popular literature borrow content from apocryphal and pseudo-apocryphal literature on Jesus' life.[141]

What the "real" Jesus and the "real" Solomon have in common is that both spoke in parables. Yet, the parables in the Book of Proverbs differ significantly

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134 See A. Baumgarten (2016). Baumgarten maintains that Celsus relied on Jewish polemical texts from before the second century C.E.; however, it is more probable that he was exposed to Jewish oral polemics against the Christians. Also see Pick (1911).

135 Origen (1965, p. 31). See also Celsus (1987, p. 57); Rokeah (1969); and Abel (1969). Peter Schäfer's book *Jesus in the Talmud* (2007) supplies a comprehensive survey of Talmudic references to the life of Jesus.

136 *b.Shabbat* 104b; *y.Shabbat* 12:4 13d [both texts attribute the pronouncement to R. Eliezer!].

137 Lasker and Stroumsa (1996). See also Limor (1995). In the texts examined therein, Jesus is depicted as a chronic drunkard, a glutton, and a wastrel.

138 See Deutsch (1997, 2011).

139 See Introduction, note 45.

140 Among others: Aron (1990); Chen (1993); Arnheim (1984); Potter (1962); Aslan (2014). There is furthermore a rather bizarre book that evoked enthusiastic reactions and even inspired a film version: Strobel (2013); and Meggit (2015).

141 The best-known and most successful of these is Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2006). I will not delve here into the subject of Hebrew- and Yiddish-language literature about Jesus but will only mention Sholem Asch's book *The Nazarene* (1939), *Der man fun Natseres*, in the German edition,which provoked harsh criticism.

from those attributed to Jesus in the Gospels.[142] The "direct" correspondences drawn between Jesus and Solomon were inspired by several verses in the Gospels, and they developed in different directions first within Christian theology and, later, in medieval Jewish literature. Chief among these correspondences is, of course, the prefiguration of several events of Jesus' life in the life of Solomon and, beginning in early Christianity, in Jewish-Christian polemic literature. That literature focused on the question "Who is the true Solomon?"—and the centrality of that question shows how prominently Solomon figured in the world of Christianity.

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The main biographies we have of Aristotle appear in *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laërtius of the third century C.E.; in the *Vita Aristotelis* by Ptolemy of Chennos (known in Arabic as *al-Gharīb*—"the foreigner")[143]; and in the writings of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c.60—c.7 BCE).[144] His private life and connections with Alexander the Great led to depictions of Aristotle at once favorable and disparaging.[145] Various pseudo-Aristotelian works also came into existence, including a treatise, the *Secretum Secretorum*, ostensibly written for his pupil Alexander; similarly there emerged poems and legendary traditions about alleged links between Aristotle and Solomon (see Chapter 8). One story that stands out among these is "Aristotle and Phyllis": here, Aristotle, like Solomon, is not only seduced by a woman—Alexander the Great's wife—but is also humiliated at her hands.[146] This popular fable "corresponds" with the

142 "Jesus' Parables and the Parables in the Literature of the Sages", in Flusser (1979), in Hebrew; Flusser (1981) for the German edition. It is important to note that Jesus does not quote from the Book of Proverbs.

143 This was Ptolemy the Unknown, a cataloguer whose work was preserved in Arabic.

144 See Düring (1957, pp. 464–467); Chroust (1964, 1973); Natali (2013); Gutas (1986). See Chapter Seven.

145 Eusebius (2002), Book XV: Preface, Chap. II, p. 848. Eusebius writes that the names and books of Aristotle's detractors, during and after his lifetime, are deader than their bodies.

146 The research literature dealing with the evolution of this fable and its popularity, in France and Germany in particular, is extensive. See, for example, Sarton (1930). Sarton sees the story as an expression of the opposition to the "popular Aristotelianism" that arose in the Christian West in the thirteenth century, and Highet (below) writes that the fact that the story was popular during the period when Aristotelian philosophy attained a high status in universities is an example of the gulf between scholars and the public in the Middle Ages. See Matthews (2010); Highet (1970, p. 57). The scene in which Phyllis rides Aristotle is depicted with grotesque figures in several Gothic cathedrals in France. The story is mentioned in the book *Me'irat Einayim*, written by

biblical story in which Solomon's wives lead him to sin, as well as with the Sages' descriptions of his trespasses, punishment, and humiliation.

The legendary biographies of Aristotle and Solomon correspond primarily in that both Jewish and Christian traditions dubiously attribute to each figure the authorship of numerous books. Both supposedly destroyed their writings; Solomon, according to an Armenian legend, ordered, before his death, that all his books be burned because: "The great number of my books is the cause that many people are lost, for they lose their faith in God, and cease to do good works". His servants fulfilled his commandment—but one hid in his bosom a book that the Church later preserved in three parts.[147] In a second version, Solomon ordered the destruction only of his books of magic, but two of these survived (*The Key of Solomon* and *The Testament of Solomon*); in yet another, he ordered all of his books to be burned, but the flames refused to consume Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes.[148]

It is said of Aristotle that his theory of the stars as "beings of superhuman intelligence, incorporate deities" who influenced life on earth, "provided for far later demonology".[149] In the Jewish legendary tradition that developed during the Middle Ages, Aristotle, who accompanied Alexander the Great on his visit to Jerusalem, took with him all of Solomon's books; having read them, he burned nearly all his own writings, leaving only his *Metaphysics* for posterity.

R. Yitzhak ben Shmuel of Acre (1250 – 1340), a commentator and Kabbalist who lived first in Acre and later in Navarre. See Ashkenazi (2000). In its Jewish form, the story is anti-Aristotelian and directed against the influence of Aristotelian philosophy. In fact, only the Hebrew version addresses his philosophy; in Christian texts, Aristotle is the personification of knowledge and wisdom, and the fact that he was tempted by a woman to the point of offering himself on all fours to be ridden upon bespeaks the weakness of rationalism. See Shavit (2018). In contrast, *Gesta Romanorum*, a fourteen-century collection of anecdotes, contains one anecdote (No. XXII) relating how Aristotle saved Alexander from death. The Queen of the North fed her daughter poison from infancy; Alexander fell in love with the daughter when she had grown into a beautiful maiden and was about to kiss her. Aristotle stopped him and suggested that she first kiss another young man; she did, and the man died immediately. Thus, did the wise philosopher save Alexander's life. The moral of the story is that a reasonable person knows how to restrain an arrogant person who knows no bounds and may teach him to choose the "middle path". In Russian popular literature, Phyllis was referred to as "the German woman riding the old man". According to W.F. Ryan, the story is "evidently a traditionalist attack on the westernizing policies of Peter the Great and his 'German' wife" (Ryan 1986). And see Chapter Eight.

147 Cited in Seymour (1924, p. 59).

148 Butler (1993. p 42).

149 Cited in Thorndike (1964, Vol. 1, p. 26).