

Solomon's Gold

Introduction

This piece on Solomon's gold is a perfect example of an encyclopaedic note inasmuch as it answers a question on biblical trivia. In this case the answer derives from information given in 1 Kings 10:14, though the answer there given (666 talents annually) is here woefully misrepresented. The note manages to rise above the level of trivia by including a moral lesson at the end.

The wisdom attributed to King Solomon particularly in 1 Kings won him the attribution of the wisdom books Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and the deuterocanonical Book of Wisdom. PR-aware rulers of the early Middle Ages, such as Charlemagne and Alfred of Wessex, made sure to style themselves in his image e.g. by associating themselves with the production of learned literature. The former did not make the connection too obvious, however, inasmuch as he used the pen name King David, perhaps employing the humility topos to acknowledge he had not won God's favour through a flawless record.

MS Harley 3271 contains a range of encyclopaedic material in many different hands, but it is headlined by Ælfric's *Grammar*, one of the most widely disseminated OE texts, which was used in monastic and cathedral schools. It is accordingly plausible that the various notes in the volume were entered by students and/or teachers.

Manuscript

London, British Library MS Harley 3271, fol 92v (s. xi¹)

Text

(1) Hu micel goldes wæs Salomone broht æghwylce dæge? (2) Þæt wæs feower ðusenda and syx and syxtig talentana. (3) On ælcre talentan wæs lxxx punda. (4) Swa micel wæs gebroht on ðam temple, (5) butan þam þe him fram cypemannum com, and fram cyningum, (6) and fram ealre worulde ealdormannum broht wæs.

(7) On Salomones tide wæs gold swa genihtsum and seolfor on Hierusalem swa stanas ofer eorðan. (8) Hu nyt bið þæt ðeah þu ðe ealne middaneard and ealle eorðan wille gestrynan, (9) gif þu þinre sawle unfreme and forlorenesse gewyrcst?

(1 Kgs 10:14–15: Erat autem pondus auri quod adferebatur Salomoni per annos singulos sescentorum sexaginta sex talentorum auri, excepto eo quod offerebant viri qui super vectigalia erant, et negotiatores universique scruta vendentes, et omnes reges Arabiae ducesque terrae.)

Notes

4 on ðam temple: This use of the dative is uncharacteristic; as a boundary is crossed, we would expect the accusative (*on þæt tempel*).

7 wæs gold swa genihtsum and seolfor: Don't be thrown off by the “afterthought” word order; the subject of this sentence is “gold and seolfor.”

Lessons Learned

- Quantified substances are expressed in the genitive (this much *of* something).
- Time at which may be expressed using the dative of time (*æghwylce dæge*).