In the East during the Middle Ages, artists' conceptions of a thorny crown took a variety of patterns. One example is this "Crown of Thorns and Mocking of Christ", where the thorns sprout like young plants in a box. A manuscript illumination in the Vyšehrad *Coronation Gospels* (1085-86), Prague. Reproduced by permission of the University Library, Prague.

QUESTIONS IN A QUANDARY

Monsignore Paleotto tells us: *Many who have seen the crown in France report that it forms a sort of helmet.*

But where in France, during the XVIth century, was such a crown to be seen? The Crown of Thorns, which King Saint Louis redeemed from the Venetians in 1239, for which the Sainte-Chapelle was erected, and which is still conserved in the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris, is a mere bandeau of rushes, innocent of thorns. Hardly a "crown", for with a diameter of 21 cm (8¼ inches), it would slip over a man's head to rest on his shoulders. Yet Louis IX was satisfied that the relic was authentic.

As Paleotto observed by direct examination of the Holy Shroud, puncture wounds appear in every part of the Lord's head; wounds and bloodflows typical of thorn punctures. Only a mass of thorn branches affixed to the head could have caused these injuries.

What became of this cruel bonnet, tinged with the blood of Christ? Weaving our way through many writings, we find a few that might possibly be significant:

IVth century — "There was a colony of judeo-christians living on Mount Sion until the byzantine-christians took over in the IVth century. These gathered into their immense basilica, Saint-Sion, a great quantity of souvenirs and relics:... the lance of Longinus, the stones that killed Stephen, the lamp of the Last Supper, the Crown of Thorns...."
AMÉDÉE BRUNOT: in *Le Monde de la Bible*, 1978.

867 — "There is another church in the city, on Mount Sion, which is called the Church of St. Simeon, ... and in which is suspended Our Lord's crown of thorns."
BERNARD THE WISE, *Early Travels in Palestine*. (Arculf, VIth c., and Saewulf, XIIth c., mention St. Simeon Church, but not the crown).

450 — *Coronam de spinis capiti ejus imposuerunt, nam erat ad modum pilei, ita quod undique caput tegeret et tangeret....*

The words are from the writings of St. Vincent de Lérins, quoted by Paleotto and by Barbet, who translates: They put a crown of thorns on his head; it was, in fact, shaped like a *pileus*, so that it covered and touched every part of his head. (French edition p. 126; English edition, p. 93.)

St. Vincent de Lérins was of Gaulish extraction; an officer in the army; bustling with military life....
BUTLER, *Lives of the Saints*.

VI c. — "Various pilgrims tell us the Crown was in the Basilica of Mount Sion; the *Breviarius* of 530, the Piacenza pilgrim of 570, an Armenian description, VIIth c. The crown is mentioned by St. Paulinus of Nola, 409; Germanus of Autun, 576; and others."
ALFRED O'RAHILLY: *The Crucified*.

801 — "In 783, Charlemagne sent Isaac the Jew as interpreter to Harun-ar-Rashid, King of the Persians, with Sigismond and Lanfred. The two monks died but in 801 Isaac returned to France, bringing the gifts the King of the Persians had sent him."
EGINHARD OF FRANCONIA, biographer of Charlemagne.
Haroun-al-Rashid (765-809) was Caliph of Baghdad. In friendly relations with the Frankish monarch, he sent him many relics.

XIII c. — The French arrived to Jerusalem where the Patriarch declares: "In all the world there are no better relics than these [he starts a long list]... and the holy crown that God had on his head." Charlemagne begs to have some relics, and the Patriarch says: "I will give you such relics as you will not find in all the world ... a little bit of the sudarium that Jesus had over his head in the tomb ... and the holy crown he had on his head."
Il Viaggio di Carlomagno in Oriente, a medieval romance, valuable only for the belief that Charlemagne received the Crown of Thorns from the Orient.

And perhaps he did, for there are numerous references to his distribution of single thorns. No church or chapel could be erected except upon a holy relic; and one example, among many others of gifts Charlemagne made to religious institutions, records that in 798 he sent a silver reliquary containing "relics from the Tomb of the Savior" to Egilon, Abbot of Flavigny.
DOM URBAIN PLANCHER: *Histoire de la Bourgogne*, 1741.

IX c. — From Charlemagne's treasury in the Sainte-Chapelle at Aachen, his grandson, King Charles the Bald (823-877) removed the Crown of Thorns and placed it in the Cathedral of Saint-Denis. Before the departure for the 1270 crusade, King Louis IX went to Saint-Denis to kneel and pray at the shrine of the Crown acquired and venerated by his ancestors.
SOPHIE DE SEDE: *La Sainte-Chapelle et la Politique de la Fin des Temps*.

Joinville relates (*Histoire de Saint Louis*) that he dreamed he saw the King kneeling before an altar; he was wearing a chasuble of twill cloth, color of vermillion. The vermillion signified a crusade, for "vermillion was the blood of God that he shed from his side, his hands and his feet". Joinville went to the Sainte-Chapelle [Paris] where he found Louis in prayer before the "Great Relics" of the Passion; there, Louis confided that he was undertaking a second crusade.

1092 — Having made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1086, Robert I, Count of Flanders, spent some time with Emperor Alexis I Comnenus, in Constantinople. The two remained in touch, and in a letter to the Count, Alexis lists the crown among the relics in the imperial chapels.
SAVIO: *Ricerche Storiche sulla Santa Sindone*, p. 85, 91.

1171 — The Emperor Amaury of Constantinople shows a crown to the King of Jerusalem and William of Tyre.
Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum, cited by Savio, p. 93.

1201 — "First then, we venerate the holy crown of thorns, which is still verdant and flowering, and remains intact because it took on incorruptibility from touching the sacred head of the Lord Jesus.... There are no thorns to be seen, and to the touch it is not injurious, but it is flowering and when one touches it, it is smooth."
NICHOLAS MESARITES: *The Palace Revolution of John Comnenus*. Mesarites was custodian of the treasury in the churches of the Grand Palace.

1322 — "And one part of the crown of Our Lord, wherewith he was crowned ... and many other relics, are in France, in the King's Chapel [the Sainte-Chapelle], the crown being placed in a vessel of crystal richly worked. For a king of France bought these relics of the Jews, to whom the emperor [Baudouin II] had given them in pledge for a great sum of silver. And if it be so, as men say, that this crown is of thorns, you shall understand that it was of rushes of the sea, which prick as sharply as thorns; for I have seen and beheld many times that of Paris and that of Constantinople; for they were both one, made of rushes of the sea. But men had divided them into two parts; of which one part is at Paris, and the other part is at Constantinople. And I have one of these precious thorns, which appears to be aubespine, or white thorn; and it was given to me as a great favour; for there are many of them broken and fallen into the vessel that the crown lieth in; they break for dryness, when men move it, to show it to great lords that come thither.... Half of this crown is at Paris, and the other half at Constantinople."
JEAN DE BOURGOGNE, called Sir John Mandeville: *Relations*. A Belgian, Mandeville traveled for 33 years, in Palestine, Egypt, China and the western kingdoms. He died in 1372.

Oh Sir John! Why did you not describe the "part of the crown which was at Constantinople"? That the crown was in two parts was readily deduced by Barbet (p. 94) in his study of the head wounds. One part, still conserved in the Treasury of Notre-Dame de Paris, is believed to be the circlet of rushes that was bound tightly around the "cap" of thorns to keep it on Christ's head. And we know how this part came to France:

1239 — Baudouin II, emperor of the Latin Empire, needs money. In 1237, the Crown of Thorns was pledged, not to the Jews, as Sir John Mandeville supposes, but to the Christian hands of the Venetians. These master-financiers were custodians of the Convent of the Pantocrator in Constantinople, and it was probably there that the crown was deposited. The transaction took place while Baudouin was in France; dismayed, he "gives" the crown to his cousin Louis, King of France, a gift which did not dispense the King from paying the enormous ransom. Two Dominicans were sent to Constantinople in December 1238 to fetch the crown in its reliquary. On 10 August 1239, Louis, his brother Robert d'Artois, his mother Blanche of Castille, his wife Margaret of Provence, with prelates and lords go to meet the delegation at Villeneuve l'Archeveque. The first stop is the Cathedral of Sens; from there they take a boat to Paris, and a procession is formed to carry the relic to Notre-Dame, and afterwards to the royal cathedral of Saint-Denis. The king (and all his followers) goes bareheaded, barefooted, wearing a simple chemise; the same, no doubt, that was burned to the tune of the *Carmagnole*.

In 1248, the Sainte-Chapelle was dedicated and there the Crown rested until its very existence was imperiled by the lurid Revolutionary rays of the "nocturnal sunburst".
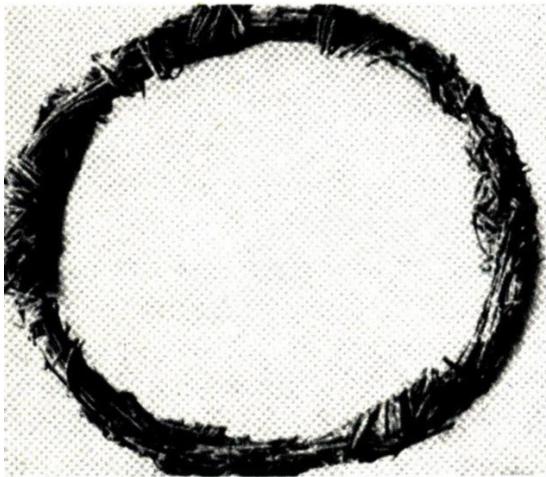
The thornless crown that King Saint Louis ransomed from the Venetians for a sum of 135,000 livres and for which he engaged the architect Pierre de Montreuil to build the Sainte-Chapelle. The cost of this peerless creation: 40,000 livres. Inside diameter of the circlet: 21 cm. (8¼").

XIII — In the church of Notre-Dame de Senlis, "in the chapel dedicated to Saint Louis, there is a statue of the sainted king discovered in 1846 in the cemetery of Saint-Rieul, where it had been hidden in the earth during the Revolution. Saint Louis is standing, bareheaded, beardless, dressed in a long robe belted by a cord; over his shoulders is the great royal mantle, covered with fleurs-de-lys. In his right hand he holds his sceptre and in his left the Holy Crown. His feet are bare. This statue must have been executed shortly after the death and beatification of the king."

MARCEL AUBERT: *Senlis*. Louis IX was canonized in 1297, 27 years after his death before Tunis. The king was a Third Order Franciscan, and is so represented in the statue.

1380 — Charles V, king of France, lies at death's door. "After these things, he requested that the crown of thorns of Our Lord be brought to him by the Bishop of Paris, and also that the Abbot of Saint-Denis should bring him the coronation crown of the kings."

DELACHENAL: in his *Histoire de Charles V*, quotes these lines from Christine de Pisan, biographer of the Scholar King.

1599 — "Many who have seen the crown in France report that it has many coils, forming a sort of helmet...."

1793 — "At Saint-Denis Town, no longer Saint-Denis but *Franciade*, Patriotism has been down among the Tombs, rummaging: the Revolutionary Army has taken spoil."

THOMAS CARLYLE: *The French Revolution*, Vol. II Book V. The date of this unholy madness in the crypt of crowned kings fell upon the Tenth of November, 1793.

On the cover:

An early representation of the Crowning of Christ? Critics are not unanimous. But Rev. Umberto Fasola, of the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archeology, Rome, who kindly provided this illustration through the good graces of artist/sindonologist Maria Delfina Fusina, maintains that this fresco, in the Praetextatus catacomb, and dated to the first years of the IIIrd century, does represent the Mocking of Christ. The figure at the right wears a purple robe; on his head are twiggy branches which the soldiers seem to be hitting with sticks. The representation of a Passion scene is unique in the dormitories, where the prevailing themes, represented