

Queen of Sheba

The **Queen of Shebah** *Malkat Shva*, Ge'ez: *Nigiste Saba (Nəgəstā Saba)*, Arabic: سبأ ملكة, was a monarch of the ancient kingdom of Sheba and is referred to in Habeshan history, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an. There is no evidence of her existence outside the texts of these four sources. She is widely assumed to have been a queen regnant, although there is no historical proof of this; in fact, she may have been a queen consort. The location of her historical kingdom most likely included part of modern day Ethiopia and Eritrea, and perhaps Yemen as well.

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Known to the Ethiopian people as **Makeda or Maqueda** (*mākidā*), this queen has been called a variety of names by different peoples in different times. To King Solomon of Israel she was the Queen of Sheba. In Islamic tradition she was called **Balqis** or **Balkis** by the Arabians, who say she came from the city of Sheba, also called Mareb, in Yemen or Arabia Felix. The Roman historian Josephus calls her **Nicaule**. She is thought to have been born on January 5, sometime in the 10th century BC. In the Hebrew Bible, a tradition of the history of nations is preserved in Genesis 10. In Genesis 10:7 there is a reference to Sheba, the son of Raamah, the son of Cush, the son of Ham, son of Noah. In Genesis 10:26-29 there is a reference to another person named Sheba, listed along with Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab as the descendants of Joktan, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Arphaxad, the descendant of Shem, another son of Noah. Aharoni, Avi-Yonah, Rainey, and Safrai placed the Semitic Sheba in Southern Arabia in geographic proximity to the location of the tribes descended from their ancestor, Joktan. In addition to Sheba, Hazarmaveth and Ophir were identified. Semitic Havilah was located in Eastern Africa, modern day Ethiopia. Semitic Havilah (Beresh't 10:29) is to be distinguished from Cushite Havilah (Beresh't 10:7), the descendant of Cush, descendant of Ham; both locations for Havilah are thought by these scholars to have been located in present day Ethiopia.

Hebrew biblical account



Claude Lorrain, *The Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba*

According to the Hebrew Bible, the unnamed queen of the land of Sheba heard of the great wisdom of King Solomon of Israel and journeyed there with gifts of spices, gold, precious stones, and beautiful wood and to test him with questions, as recorded in First Kings 10:1-13 (largely copied in 2 Chronicles 9:1-12).

It is related further that the queen was awed by Solomon's great wisdom and wealth, and pronounced a blessing on Solomon's God. Solomon reciprocated with gifts and "everything she desired," whereupon the queen returned to her country. The queen apparently was quite rich, however, as she brought four and a half tons of gold with her to give to Solomon (1 Kings 10:10). In the biblical passages which refer explicitly to the Queen of Sheba there is no hint of love or sexual attraction between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The two are depicted merely as fellow monarchs engaged in the affairs of state. The biblical text, Song of Solomon (Song of Songs), contains some references, which at various times, have been interpreted as referring to love between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The young woman of the Song of Songs, however, continues to deny the romantic advances of her suitor, whom many commentators identify as King Solomon. In any case, there is little to identify this speaker in the text with the rich and powerful foreign queen depicted in the Book of Kings. The woman of the text of the song clearly does regard "The Daughters of Jerusalem" as her peer group.

Qur'anic Account



The Queen of Sheba, Bilqis, shown reclining in a garden - tinted drawing on paper c. 1595

The Qur'an, the central religious text of Islam, mentions the Queen by name in the 34th Chapter of the Holy Book. Arab sources name her **Balqis** or **Bilqis**. The Qur'anic narrative has Solomon getting reports from the HoodHood bird about the kingdom of Saba (Sheba), ruled by a queen whose people worship the sun instead of God. Solomon sends a letter inviting her to visit him and submit fully to the One God, Allah, Lord of the Worlds according to the Islamic text. The Queen of Sheba is unsure whether to accept his invitation and does not wish to behave as a king would: 'entering a country, despoiling it and making the most honorable of its people its lowest'. So she decides to send Solomon gifts and await his response. He then sends back a response warning her and her people about the power he has. Queen Sheba sends him back gifts. Solomon is unimpressed by the Queen's gifts, stating that the gifts he has received from God are far greater in value. Solomon challenges anyone of his subjects to bring him her throne before she arrives to prove to her the power of God. A jinn under the control of Solomon proposes that he will bring it before Solomon rises from his seat, using strength and ability. Then one who has some knowledge from the *kitāb* proposes to Tay al-Ard and bring him the throne of Sheba in the 'twinkling of an eye' and accomplishes that (27:40). Solomon accepts this as a bounty from God. He then asks that the throne be disguised to test the Queen when she arrives, in order to see if she accepts the throne as her own or rejects it. When the Queen arrives at his court and is shown her throne, she recognizes and accepts it as her own. However, the Queen continues to worship other Gods, so Solomon attempts to divert her from this and invites her to enter his palace. The palace is paved with smooth slabs of glass which the queen mistakes for a pool of water, and she lifts her skirts, revealing her legs. When Solomon corrects her mistake she feels humbled and realizes her wrongs and that her knowledge was lacking. She then declares her submission to the One God, Allah.

Ethiopian account



An Ethiopian fresco of the Queen of Sheba, travelling to Solomon.

The imperial family of Ethiopia claims its origin directly from the offspring of the Queen of Sheba by King Solomon. The Queen of Sheba (*nigísta Šab'a*), is named **Makedain** in the Ethiopian account (which from the Ethiopic languages translates literally to English as "*pillow*"). The etymology of her name is uncertain, but there are two principal opinions about its Ethiopian source. One group, which includes the British scholar Edward Ullendorff, holds that it is a corruption of "Candace", the Ethiopian queen mentioned in the New Testament Acts; the other group connects the name with Macedonia, and relates this story to the later Ethiopian legends about Alexander the Great and the era of 330 B.C.E.

The Italian scholar Carlo Conti Rossini, however, was unconvinced by either of these theories and, in 1954 stated that he believed the matter unresolved. An ancient compilation of Ethiopian legends, *Kebrá Negast* ('the Glory of Kings'), is dated to seven hundred years ago and relates a history of **Makeda** and her descendants. In this account King Solomon is said to have seduced the Queen of Sheba and sired her son, Menelik I, who would become the first Emperor of Ethiopia. The narrative given in the *Kebrá Negast* - which has no parallel in the Hebrew Biblical story - is that King Solomon invited the Queen of Sheba to a banquet, serving spicy food to induce her thirst, and inviting her to stay in his palace overnight. The Queen asked him to swear that he would not take her by force. He accepted upon the condition that she, in turn, would not take anything from his house by force. The Queen assured that she would not, slightly offended by the implication that she, a rich and powerful monarch, would engage in stealing. However, as she woke up in the middle of the night, she was very thirsty. Just as she reached for a jar of water placed close to her bed, King Solomon appeared, warning her that she was breaking her oath, water being the most valuable of all material possessions. Thus, while quenching her thirst, she set the king free from his promise and they spent the night together. Other Ethiopian accounts make her the daughter of a king named Agabo or Agabos, in some legends said to have become king after slaying the mythological serpent Arwe; in others, to have been the 28th ruler of the Agazyán tribe. In either event, he is said to have extended his Empire to both sides of the Red Sea. The tradition that the Biblical Queen of Sheba was a ruler of Ethiopia who visited King Solomon in Jerusalem, in ancient Israel, is supported by the first century C.E. Roman (of Jewish origin) historian Flavius Josephus, who identified Solomon's visitor as a "Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia".

While there are no known traditions of matriarchal rule in Yemen during the early first millennium BC, the earliest inscriptions of the rulers of D'mt in northern Ethiopia and Eritrea mention queens of very high status, possibly equal to their kings.

Possible Egyptian derivation

Josephus says in his *Antiquity of the Jews*, book 8 chapter 6, that it was the "queen of Egypt and Ethiopia" who visited King Solomon. Also, Jesus refers to her as the "queen of the south" in Matthew 12:42. Daniel 11:5 and 8 identify the South as Egypt. There also have been claims that the ancient Egyptian name Hatshepsut translates as "Queen of Sheba". Hatshepsut was a pharaoh of Egypt, born c. 1508 and died 1458 B.C., who revived active trade with neighboring kingdoms and created a flourishing and prosperous economy for her eighteenth dynasty kingdom. Solar deities are most closely associated with her dynasty, the one founded by her grandfather and credited to the patron deity of Thebes, Amoun. She is recorded as going on a famous journey to the land of Punt, though no one knows for sure where Punt is. Some scholars believe that Hatshepsut's journey to Punt and

the Queen of Sheba's journey to Israel may be the same. *Sheba* may be derived from the ancient Egyptian word for star. The Kingdom of Kush was also located in southern Egypt. According to the eleventh century geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi, the star-worshippers of Harran in Turkey and those from Yemen, went on special pilgrimages to the pyramids of Giza. The "Queen of Sheba" may have referred to the title of the Kandake when acting as the chief astronomer or high priestess of a star-venerating religion that was centered in Africa, with satellite centers in Arabia, Asia, and Europe. The "star-worshippers" also studied or venerated the sun and moon. The roots of star veneration or star study date back to well before 5000 B.C. Evidence for a level of sophistication and knowledge of astronomy has been found at several archaeological sites in Africa, including the complex at Nabta Playa in southern Egypt. The structure at Nabta is almost 7,000 years old, and is the oldest astronomical complex in the world. Other astronomical sites in Africa include: Namoratunga II, near Lake Turkana, in Kenya, which was in use around 300 B.C.; the Senegambian stone circles; and the Bouar megaliths in what is now the Central African Republic.

Nubia - another possible location

The tradition of the **Candaces** is well documented in Nubia, where the rule of its many queens recedes into prehistoric times and there the title *Kentakes* is a term used to describe the long tradition of leadership in Nubia by warrior queens. Nubia was south of Ancient Egypt, also divided by the Nile River and bordered by the Red Sea and, it is another candidate for the location of Sheba and the famous queen. The history of Nubia provides examples of a tradition and a wealthy kingdom that could be the original kingdom of the Queen of Sheba. The economics of the culture was based upon trade. David Jones, in *Women Warriors: a History*, relates that in 332 BC Alexander the Great attempted to lead his army into Nubia. At its border, he was confronted by the brilliant military formations devised by their warrior queen, Candace of Meroë. She led her army on the opposite side of the border from atop an elephant. Alexander withdrew and redirected his forces to enter Egypt instead. It should be noted that this story is thought by scholars to be legendary, and Alexander appears never to have attacked Nubia. That was the beginning of the Greek rule of Egypt that would last for three hundred years until the Roman occupation in 30 B.C. Strabo also describes a similar clash with the Romans, in which the Roman army was defeated by Nubian archers under the leadership of another queen of Nubia. This queen was described as "one-eyed", being blind in one eye or represented only in profile. The strategic formations used by this second queen are well documented in Strabo's description of her victory.

Old Kingdom Egyptian accounts of trade missions first mentioned Nubia in 2300 BC. Egyptians imported gold, incense, ebony, ivory, and exotic animals from tropical Africa through Nubia. Aswan, right above the First Cataract, marked the southern limit of Egyptian control. As trade between Egypt and Nubia increased, so did wealth and stability. By the sixth dynasty of Egypt, Nubia was divided into a series of small kingdoms. Scholars debate whether these peoples, who flourished from c. 2240 BC to c. 2150 BC, were the result of another internal evolution, wars, or invaders. The Sahara Desert was becoming too arid to support human beings. During the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1640 BC), Egypt began expanding into Nubia to gain more control over the trade routes in Northern Nubia and direct access to trade with southern Nubia. They erected a chain of forts down the Nile below the Second Cataract in the river. These garrisons seemed to have had peaceful relations with the local Nubian people, but little interaction during the period.

A contemporaneous, but distinct, culture was the Pan Grave culture, so called because of their shallow graves. Shallow graves produced mummies naturally. The Pan Graves are associated with the eastern bank of the Nile, but the Pan Graves and western groups definitely interacted. The Kingdom of Kerma arose as the first kingdom to unify much of the region. It was named for its presumed capital at Kerma, one of the earliest urban centers in tropical Africa. By 1750 BC, the rulers of Kerma were powerful enough to organize the labor for monumental walls and structures of mud brick. They created rich tombs with possessions for the afterlife and large human sacrifices. The craftsmen were skilled in metalworking and the quality of their pottery surpassed that of Egypt. Excavated sites at Kerma yielded large tombs and a palace-like structure ('Deffufa'), alluding to the early stability in the region. The early tradition of astronomical observations in Nubia is reflected by the presence of megaliths discovered at Nabta Playa that are examples of what may be the world's first Archaeoastronomy devices, predating Stonehenge by at least 1000 years. According to one authority, the complexity observed at Nabta Playa, likely formed the basis for the structure of both the Neolithic society at Nabta and the Old

Kingdom of Egypt. Hence the long tradition of studying the stars and the sun such as the references in the Old Testament, and the knowledge of new phenomena provoking the travel of the Magi.

Christian interpretations

The Queen of Sheba is mentioned as the Queen of the South in Matthew 12:42 and Luke 11:31 in the New Testament, where Jesus indicates that she and the Ninevites will judge the generation of Jesus' contemporaries who rejected him. Christian interpretations of the scriptures mentioning the Queen of Sheba in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, typically have emphasized both the historical and metaphorical values in the story. The account of the Queen of Sheba is thereby interpreted by Christians as being both a metaphor and an analogy: the Queen's visit to Solomon has been compared to the metaphorical marriage of the Church to Christ where Solomon is the anointed one or the messiah and Sheba represents a Gentile population submitting to the messiah; the Queen of Sheba's chastity has also been depicted as a foreshadowing of the Virgin Mary; and the three gifts that she brought (gold, spices, and stones) have been seen as analogous to the gifts of the Magi (gold, frankincense, and myrrh). The latter is emphasized as being consistent with a passage from Isaiah 60:6; *And they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring forth gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord*. This last connection is interpreted as relating to the Magi, the learned astronomers of Sheba who saw a new star and set off on a journey to find a new ruler connected to the new star, that led them to Bethlehem.

Medieval depictions

Art in the Middle Ages depicting the visit of the Queen of Sheba includes the Portal of the Mother of God at the 13th century Amiens Cathedral, which is included as an analogy as part of a larger depiction of the gifts of the Magi. The 12th century cathedrals at Strasbourg, Chartres, Rochester and Canterbury include artistic renditions in such elements as stained glass windows and door jamb decorations.

Renaissance depictions



Renaissance relief of the Queen of Sheba meeting Solomon - gate of Florence Baptistry

Boccaccio's *On Famous Women* (Latin: *De Mulieribus Claris*) follows Josephus in calling the Queen of Sheba, **Nicaula**. Boccaccio goes on to explain that not only was she the Queen of Ethiopia and Egypt, but also the queen of Arabia. She also is related to have had a grand palace on "a very large island" called Meroe, located someplace near the Nile river, "practically on the other side of the world." From there Nicaula crossed the deserts of Arabia, through Ethiopia and Egypt, and up the coast of the Red Sea, to come to Jerusalem to see "the great King Solomon". Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* continues the convention of calling the Queen of Sheba, Nicaula. Piero della Francesca's frescoes in Arezzo (ca 1466) on the *Legend of the True Cross*, contain two panels on the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon. The legend links the beams of Solomon's palace (adored by Queen of Sheba) to the wood of the crucifixion. The Renaissance continuation of

the metaphorical view of the Queen of Sheba as an analogy to the gifts of the Magi also is clearly evident in the Triptych of the Adoration of the Magi (c. 1510), by Hieronymus Bosch. Bosch chooses to depict a scene of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon in an ornately decorated collar worn by one of the Magi. Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus refers to the Queen of Sheba as **Saba**, when Mephistopheles is trying to persuade Faustus of the wisdom of the women with whom he supposedly shall be presented every morning.

Modern Arab academic view

Some modern Arab academics have placed the Queen of Sheba as a ruler of a trading colony in Northwest Arabia, established by South Arabian kingdoms¹. Modern archaeological finds do confirm the fact that such colonies existed with South Arabian script and artifacts, although nothing specific to **Balqis** or **Bilqis**, the Queen of Sheba, has been uncovered.

Recent archaeological discoveries



The Bar'an temple in Ma'rib - built in the eighth century BC and functioning for nearly 1000 years

Recent archaeological discoveries in Mareb, Yemen support the view that the Queen of Sheba ruled over southern Arabia, with evidence suggesting that the area was the capital of the Kingdom of Sheba.

A team of researchers funded by the American Foundation for the Study of Man (AFSM) and led by University of Calgary archaeology professor, Dr. Bill Glanzman, has been working to "unlock the secrets of a 3,000-year-old temple in Yemen." "We have an enormous job ahead of us," said Glanzman in 2007. "Our first task is to wrest the sanctuary from the desert sands, documenting our findings as we go. We're trying to determine how the temple was associated with the Queen of Sheba, how the sanctuary was used throughout history, and how it came to play such an important role in Arab folklore."

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia