

# Bernd Rohrmann Essay about Queen Sheba

Tale ~~ Myth ~~ Validity





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# Who was the mysterious "Queen Sheba"?

The tale is that Sheba was indeed a queen. Alternative names include: Bilqis, Makeda, Saba. Sheba and Saba are also names of an historic realm. So, the main conviction is that this very mysterious queen has actually ruled a kingdom, namely Sheba.

# Where did she reign?

The author has faced 4 theories.

/1/ When traveling in Yemen, the dominant view was that there has been a kingdom "Sheba", also named "Saba", and its capital was Marib (east of Sanaa). This realm also had several large dams, utilized for watering meadows.



Ruins of the city and of some temples have remained. One of the rulers was supposedly - Queen Sheba.







/2/ However, when traveling in Ethiopia, the prevailing perspective was firstly that a Queen Sheba has existed, and secondly that her kingdom was in the region of Aksum, actually north-east of Aksum where Jeha is located - the assumed capital of the kingdom "d'm't" ~ Damot (980-400 BC).



Yet there are no historic remains linking to Queen Sheba, neither in Aksum nor in Jeha.

/3/ Not much is known about the kingdom "d'm't". But several historians assume that during this sovereignty, as ewell as during the following Aksum sovereignty, the western part of Yemen - then Sheba - and the north-eastern part of Ethiopia - then Damot - belonged together, across the Red Sea!



And this means that queen Sheba did reside in each of these, that is, in both of them. The proof of this is thin though - more records point at Marib.

/4/ The fourth theory is the hardest and wildest one, put forward by a few historians - - there was no "Queen Sheba", queen Sheba is just a fable of the bible and related tomes. If that were true, the question "where did she reign" is pointless...

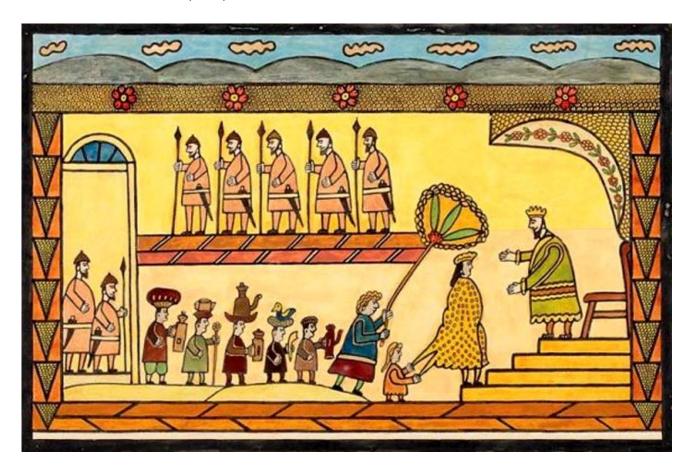
## Did she visit king Solomon?

Of course this is a crucial question - Queen Sheba's famous visit of King Solomon of the Israel state in the 10th century BC has been described countless times.





Furthermore, an incredible number of artists have painted this rather legendary meeting, either the whole scenery or just the two.













## Which sources feed the views of Queen Sheba?

Here are brief summaries of the pertinent text passages, ordered by religions:

#### CHRISTIAN, Bible, Old Testament

The Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem "with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones" (I Kings 10:2). The Book of Kings is rated as finalized around 550 BC. "Never again came such an abundance of spices" (10:10; II Chron. 9:1–9) as those she gave to Solomon.

#### CHRISTIAN, Bible, New Testament

Christian scriptures mention a "queen of the South" (Latin: *Regina austri*), who "came from the uttermost parts of the earth", i.e. from the extremities of the then known (Christian) world, to hear the wisdom of Solomon (Mt. 12:42; Lk. 11:31).

#### JEWISH, Talmud & Bible sections

According to Josephus (Ant. 8:165–73), the queen of Sheba was the queen of Egypt and Ethiopia, and brought to Israel the first specimens of the balsam. Josephus affirms that the Queen of Sheba or Saba came from this region, and that it bore the name of Saba before it was known by that of Meroe.

The Talmud (Bava Batra 15b) insists that it was not a woman but a kingdom of Sheba (based on varying interpretations of Hebrew *mlkt*) that came to Jerusalem, obviously intended to discredit existing stories about the relations between Solomon and the Queen. Baba Bathra 15b: "Whoever says *malkath Sheba* (I Kings X, 1) means a woman is mistaken; ... it means the kingdom of Sheba".

The most elaborate account of the queen's visit to Solomon is given in the 8th century "Targum Sheni to Esther) (or Colloquy of the Queen of Sheba). The weirdest words are that Solomon informed her of her hairy legs...

The text from Yemen "Midrash ha-Hefez" also refers repeatedly to Sheba, similar to the Talmud.

Finally, the Queen of Sheba was labeled In the Kabbalah as one of the queens of the demons.

#### ISLAM, Quran

The messages are to some degree analogous to those in the bible. Some say that Solomon married Sheba, others that she was given to a different man. She was named Bilqis (this name may be linked to concubine). Bilkis a legend on its own.



## COPTIC (in Egypt)

Some fragments of texts on papyrus refer to Queen Sheba, and her links to king Solomon as well.

#### ETHIOPIA ~ Abessinia

This is by far the most detailled story, as outlined in a special chapter below, it is about Sheba named Makeda.

All the tales mentioned here are full of details and provide a very rich picture of Queen Sheba, however - while the sources are confirmed, their content is not!

## How is Sheba seen in portraits?

Given that Queen Sheba may be just a legend, a fable, a myth, it is truly stunning how many artists created portraits of her, from about 1000AD (?) to our time. None of them have ever seen her!

The following galleries present twentyfour of these images.

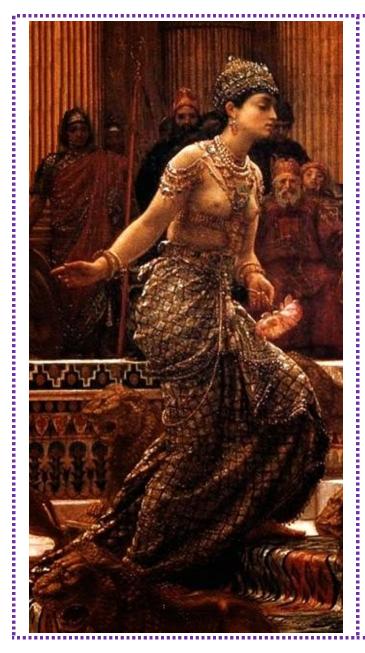




















Almost all pictures of Sheba or models in Sheba style are focussed on her beauty and her slim appearance, only a few deviate in this regard.















In some distinctive pictures mystical aspects are included. It is also obvious that erotic body features get by and large significant notice.









Beside presenting an attractive figure of the Sheba, mainly sexiness, a segment of images also highlight 'martial' attributes. Japanese artists, not bound to the traditions within the Sheba context, like to give both features significance.









Not surprisingly, the Sheba topic has also occurred in a dozen films or television crafts - here are just two pictures.







These are two impressive film stars - Betty Butterfly, from 1921 and, yes Gina Lollobrigida, from 1959.

Finally, dress designers use about every subject they see or read about, so, no wonder that there are lots of "sheba" costumes as well!





# What was/is the impact of Ethiopia?

What's behind this 3000 years old realm begins with a legend, with a myth, with a saga. Almost all Ethiopians believe, or at least like to believe, that their very first king, Menelik, labeled "king of kings", was the son of king Solomon of the israel state and queen Makeda of the Sheba kingdom, and ruled at about 960 BC. This refers to the first Ethiopian kingdom, "d'm't", 980–400 BC. Historians mostly assume that it connected east Africa with south Arabia. Yet there is no convincing proof yet whether the (mystic) Queen Sheba did reside in Ethiopia (in or near Jeha) or in Yemen (in Marib) or both. The dynasty, supposedly beginning with Menelik, ended in 1975, 225 generations later, with the death of the last Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie.



While the Queen of Sheba, called Makeba in Ethiopia, is mentioned in both the bible and the quran, this is not a proof in scientific terms. Unfortunately no evidence has been found in northern Ethiopia about Menelik's regime.

And even worse, as already mentioned above, some historians actually doubt that Queen Sheba~Makeba actually visited king Solomon, or that she existed at all!





However such disbeliefs hardly exists in Ethiopia. So, here are pieces of art showing them.



## How do current resesarcher think?

Historians have to separate two crucial matters, the realm "Sheba" and the "Queen Sheba".

Most researchers agree that Sheba existed, and the preferred view is that it was situated in Yemen. Whether the Ethiopian area around Jeha was part of it is accepted by some yet not fully proven.

Re Queen Sheba – yes there is immense information in the bibles – however, this is not scientific information. What's queried are not all the tales as such, rather, their validity. While king Solomon is not doubted, Queen Sheba is, genuinely by some authors.

# Why is Sheba ~ Saba such a famous figure?

Sheba has been a topic of grand interest for many centuries. Why? One may say, that's because she has been presented intensely in essential books like the bible. Yet that's to simple.

The concepts behind the figure of Sheba are multifaceted. What the stories describe about this woman, and what one can perceive when looking at all the images of her, that varies wildly - - so, here are 99 attributes which may get attached to "Sheba":

active, affective, attractive, austere, beautiful, bodily, bold, brainy, brave, callous, captivating, chaotic, charming, chic, chivalrous, classy, clever, complex, confusing, cool, craven, crazy, cultivated, dancing, daring, decadent, decent, demanding, difficult, disturbing, dynamic, eccentric, elegant, emotional, exciting, exquisite, fascinating, fearless, foolish, forceful, harsh, hectic, honest, horny, immoral, indecent, intriguing, idiosyncratic, intelligent, intense, irrational, laid-back, luring, luscious, lustful, mad, modest, moral, mystifying, natural, naughty, nippy, obidient, obsessive, optimistic, perplexing, powerful, pretty, risk-seeking, rough, rude, sexy, sharp, silly, smart, spicy, striking, stubborn, stylish, tempting, tender, thorny, thoughtful, tough, tricky, understanding, vigorous, wayward, weary, wicked, wild

Obviously "Sheba" is inviting all sorts of concepts, ideas, symbolisms and so on, as well as appraisals and even critiques of this woman.

And given that no-one knows the 'real' Sheba (if there ever was one), phantasies have a free go to play with this frank famous fortright figure!

