

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA¹

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THE story of the Queen of Sheba, based on the Biblical account of the queen's visit to King Solomon, has undergone extensive Arabian, Ethiopian, Jewish, and other elaborations and has become the subject of one of the most ubiquitous and fertile cycles of legends in the Middle East. Its mythopoeic power persists up to the present time and remains in some areas a favourite formula for literary and artistic inventiveness. In European painting and music the Queen of Sheba legend represents a theme with countless variations (including a recent Hollywood spectacular of rather lurid propensities). On one hand, she is Lilith the seductress and, on the other, the virtuous ancestress of the Ethiopian people. Several places of origin and many different names are ascribed to her, yet from this vast and confused skein of traditions and tales it is possible to disentangle some basic features which are common to all the stories about that famous encounter between the Queen of the South and the greatest of the kings of Israel.

The survey² which I wish to present to you is intended to correlate the various members of this great storehouse of legends; its aims are limited and its claims to any measure of originality even more so.

II

The earliest extant form of the Queen of Sheba narrative is the version preserved in 1 Kings x. 1-13 and 2 Chronicles ix. 1-12. There are some small, but not insignificant, differences between these two Old Testament accounts³ which are of little

¹ A lecture delivered in the library series of public lectures.

² By far the most detailed account of the Queen of Sheba cycle of legends is contained in D. A. Hubbard's "The Literary Sources of the Kebra Nagast" (St. Andrews University Ph.D. thesis, 1956—unhappily still unpublished).

³ Summarized in I.C.C. on Chronicles (Curtis), pp. 357-8.

relevance to the development of the Solomon-Sheba legend but of considerable interest to the methods of text-transmission. Moreover, the dependence of the Ethiopic Bible translation on the Septuagint and the reliance of the *Kebrā Nagast*, the Ethiopian national saga, on this Ethiopic text can here be studied in the most favourable circumstances.¹ The Old Testament story represents, at the same time, the briefest and most concise version, and it is, perhaps, this terseness which has encouraged later elaborations and embellishments. There are two Hebrew expressions in particular which appear to have invited the widespread tale of the union of king and queen in either marriage or at least concubinage: the queen “*came* to Solomon and communed with him of all that was in her heart” (1 Kings x. 2). The Hebrew verb בוא “to come, to enter” is also used as the technical term for coitus.² In verse 13 we are told that “Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire . . .”. Rashi, in his commentary to this verse, emphasizes that this refers exclusively to לימוד חכמה, the teaching of wisdom; but the very fact that Rashi felt impelled to stress this aspect demonstrates quite clearly that he was aware of less innocent embellishments of this verse.³

The salient features of the O.T. narrative⁴ are as follows: The Queen of Sheba had heard of Solomon’s fame and decided to come to Jerusalem to test the king’s wisdom. She brought with her spices, gold and precious stones. Solomon answered all her questions, while the queen inspected the house he had built and all the manifold details of the administration of Solomon’s realm. Finally, the queen was convinced that reality exceeded by far the reports which had reached her. She blessed

¹ Hubbard, *op. cit.* pp. 279-81.

² Cf. Gen. xvi. 2.

³ In fact, there is a bracketed interpolation printed in Rashi’s commentary which is attributed to the sixteenth century Kabbalist R. Isaac Luria:

כל חפצה (בא אליה ונולד ממנה נבוכדנצר והחריב הבית) שעמד ת”י שנים בחלק כל י”ב שבטים בהאר”י ז”ל.

⁴ N. H. Tur-Sinai has expressed the opinion (10, *כרך הספר*, *הלשון והספר*) that it is impossible to understand this story except on the assumption that the sources from which the books of Kings derived their material did, in fact, contain the riddles and their solutions mentioned in verse 1. Some riddles appear in the *Targum sheni* to Esther (see below).

Solomon and his God, rejoiced in the good fortune of the king's subjects, and delivered the rich presents which she had brought. She then returned to her own country together with her retinue.

This narrative appears to be interrupted, in both its versions in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, by two verses which relate to the Ophir fleet which fetched gold, precious stones, and wood which was particularly suitable for the manufacture of musical instruments. This might be either a glossator's interpolation¹ apropos of the queen's gifts which reminded him of similar imports by Solomon assisted by Hiram's sailors or it might well be part of the story referring to additional gifts which the queen had delivered by the Red Sea fleet. In any event, the mention of these commercial and seafaring activities in the area of the southern Red Sea corroborates the historicity of the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon²—shorn, of course, of its more extravagant features. It scarcely matters very greatly whether we have to seek the queen's home in South-West Arabia or in the horn of Africa (the reference to rich forests [vv. 11 and 12] might possibly favour the latter assumption), for the connections between the two shores of the southern Red Sea have at all times been close.³

Again, queens have been attested among the ancient Arabs, and we have therefore no reason to suspect the genuineness of the Biblical tradition. Cuneiform records enumerate many North Arabian queens,⁴ but to assert that there were none in the south would merely be an *argumentum e silentio*. No South Arabian inscriptions have hitherto been discovered which either refer to this queen or indeed to any Sabaeen ruler earlier than about 800 B.C. By the time our records begin to flow, a century and a half after King Solomon's meeting with the Queen of Sheba, the Sabaeans have Mukarribs, i.e. priest-kings. Meanwhile,

¹ Thus Benzinger in Marti's *Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament* (Books of Kings, 1899, p. 72; vv. 11 and 12).

² See C. H. Gordon, *Introduction to Old Testament Times*, pp. 174-5; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, p. 78; W. F. Albright in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (ed. Black and Rowley), 1962, 50 c; cf. also *ibid.* 94 j, 295 e.

³ E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, pp. 47-57.

⁴ Cf. Pritchard, *ANET*, p. 283.

It'amra, the Sabaeen, is mentioned by Sargon (*ANET*, pp. 285-6).

however, we have no reason to doubt the historical reality of the Queen of Sheba, and the day may come when archaeological or epigraphic finds confirm her existence—as has indeed happened to many other Biblical stories. At Marib in South Arabia the remains of the splendid circular *Maḥram Bilqis*, the Sanctuary of Bilqis (the Arabic name of the Queen of Sheba), bear witness to the popularity of the queen, even though she herself has no historical connection with this ancient temple.

III

The Queen of Sheba appears in the New Testament as the “Queen of the South” (Matt. xii. 42; Luke xi. 31), and the Greek *βασιλίσσα νότου* appears to go back to a Semitic idiom.¹ But Ethiopian tradition as embodied in the *Kebrā Nagast* (“Glory of the Kings”) has come to identify “Candace queen of the Ethiopians” (Acts viii. 27) with the Queen of the South and has fused the two queens, belonging to such different periods, into one person. While there can scarcely be any doubt that the eunuch who was baptized by St. Philip must have been the servant of one of the Meroitic queens who bore the name Candace, Abyssinians have, from a very early period, applied this episode to themselves as an essential step in the christianization of Ethiopia’s past.²

It is likely that some versions of the O.T. story about the Queen of Sheba had reached Abyssinia already in pre-Christian times. They were no doubt brought into the country by some of the South Arabian immigrants and were subsequently adapted in such a manner as to contribute in the most effective way to the ennoblement of the Abyssinian nation. With the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia, in the fourth century, a Christian layer was superimposed on the Hebraic-Semitic traditions prevalent at the time. It was thus natural, and even essential, that the national ancestress of the nation, the Queen of Sheba, should be identified with “Candace queen of the

¹ Cf. Black, *Aramaic Approach*, p. 68; Ullendorff, “Candace and the Queen of Sheba” in *New Testament Studies*, ii, 1 (1955), where the N.T. aspects of the Sheba legend are discussed in some detail.

² Details in *New Testament Studies*, ii (1955), 53-56.

Ethiopians", the only express mention of Ethiopia in the New Testament. Parallels are not lacking for the conflation of diverse elements and the acquisition of an ennobled national ancestry: one need only think of the Quraysh genealogies which have been adopted by many converts to Islam who could have had no possible connection with that Meccan family.

The *loci classici* of the blending of the two traditions about the New Testament "Queen of the South" and "Candace Queen of the Ethiopians" are in the 21st and 33rd chapters of the Ethiopic *Kebra Nagast*. Here the great Sheba cycle is introduced by references to Matthew xii. 42 and Luke xi. 31; and we are then informed that "the Queen of the South is the Queen of Ethiopia". At this point a manuscript in the Bodleian Library¹ adds: "the country of birth of this Queen of the South is Aksum [the ancient capital of Abyssinia], for she originates from there". In chapter 33 the conflation goes so far as to assert: Gaza is "the city which King Solomon had given to the Queen of Ethiopia. For in the Acts of the Apostles Luke the Evangelist wrote, saying: 'He is the governor of the whole country of Gaza, a eunuch of Queen Candace'. . . ." ²

Additional colour was lent to the story of Abyssinia as the first Christian nation by the narrative in the seventh book of the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, according to which Matthew baptized the King of Ethiopia. Matthew had arrived at Naddaver, the capital of Ethiopia, where King Aeglippus reigned. Magicians and charmed serpents held sway over the people. Matthew was welcomed by a eunuch named Candacis [sic!], whom Philip had baptized, and succeeded in breaking the spell of magicians and serpents. He baptized king, court, and country, and the people built a large church in thirty days. Aeglippus was succeeded as king by his brother Hyrtacus who killed Matthew because he had refused to sanction Hyrtacus' marriage to Ephigenia, the daughter of Aeglippus.

The ascription by the Abyssinians of this apocryphal narrative to themselves is no doubt due to the ambiguity of the term "Ethiopia" and is thus on a par with their appropriation

¹ MS. Bruce 93 which is no. xxvi in Dillmann's Bodleian Catalogue.

² Cf. Acts viii. 27.

of Candace queen of the Ethiopians. In fact, in this story of the Apocryphal Acts the names alone make it plain that the document cannot have referred to Abyssinia.¹

The confusion of the Queen of Sheba legend with the N.T. story of Candace was not, however, a deliberate forgery on the part of the Abyssinians but was part of the ancient blending of Candace—Sheba and Solomon—Alexander stories. The Syriac and Ethiopic versions of the Alexander romance² contain an account of the meeting of Alexander and Queen Candace which is, in some of its features, reminiscent of the encounter between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Alvares reports³ how Ethiopians believe that “in this town of Aksum was the principal residence of Queen Candace”. The ancient Abyssinian capital Aksum became the repository of the Hebraic traditions and the seat of the Ark of the Covenant (which Menelik I, the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba—according to the Ethiopian legend—is said to have removed from Jerusalem); but Aksum was also the capital of the Christian Queen Candace. Ethiopians are not conscious of any dichotomy here, for the complete blending of Jewish and Christian traditions into one indissoluble whole is one of the most remarkable features of the syncretistic Abyssinian civilization.

IV

Josephus⁴ gives us a slightly expanded and somewhat “smartened up” version of the O.T. story; yet he remains essentially faithful to the Biblical narrative and is entirely innocent of those accretions which later on attached themselves to the queen and her meeting with Solomon. The way in which he tells the story no doubt reflected the state of contemporary

¹ This had already been pointed out by C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d’Etiopia*, p. 145.

² See especially p. 117 of Budge’s edition of the Ethiopic version of the *Life and Exploits of Alexander the Great*, vol. i.

³ Cf. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, i. 148 ff. Ludolf (*Historia Aethiopica*, book II, chap. 4, and book III, chap. 2) was the first scholar, if I am not mistaken, to attack in vigorous terms the fact that “. . . Aethiopum nonnulli [Reginam Candacem] pro sua agnoscunt”.

⁴ *Antiquities*, viii. 6, 5-6.

interpretation, and it is in this light that we shall have to see his interesting reference to Sheba as "the Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia". Even though this is probably intended to cover Nubia-Meroe rather than Abyssinia proper, it does show a concentration on an African, instead of Arabian, origin.

The Talmud contains, strangely enough, only one solitary reference to the Queen of Sheba, but one which is of some significance. The subject of discussion is the date of Job, and Rabbi Nathan declares, on the basis of Job i. 15, that Job lived in the days of Sheba.¹ This causes Rabbi Jonathan to assert that Sheba was not a woman but a Kingdom.² The difference can only be understood by reference to the defective spelling of Hebrew. It is virtually certain that this strange dictum is meant to apply not only to the one verse in Job i but is intended to reveal a general truth.³ If we look at the Targum's rendering of Job i. 15, we find that the seemingly innocuous שבא "Sheba" of the Hebrew original is translated "and suddenly Lilith, the Queen of Smaragd, fell upon . . .". Here then we possess two early indications of the Queen of Sheba's role as temptress, although detailed literary reflections of this legend appear only somewhat later. While there can thus be little doubt that the visit of the Queen of Sheba excited imagination and experienced early Jewish Midrashic exposition, the first attested full-blown version of the Sheba legend is embodied in Islamic sources. When Jews migrated to Arabia, in the early years of the Christian era, they brought with them stories and Midrashim which

¹ *Baba Batra* 15, b.

² *Ibid.* : א"ר שמואל בר נחמני א"ר יונתן כל האומר מלכת שבא אשה היתה אינו אלא טועה מי מלכת שבא מלכותא דשבא.

³ So also G. Salzberger, *Die Salomo-Sage in der semitischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1907), p. 14. I cannot in this case agree with the arguments adduced by Hubbard, *op. cit.* p. 287. It seems to me obvious that the Rabbis were aware (as the Targum to Job i. 15 proves) of the strange tales about the relationship between Solomon and Sheba and set out to discredit them (cf. also Rösch, *Jahrbücher f. Protest. Theol.* 1880, pp. 547-8). The *Midrash Hagadol* (ed. Schechter, p. 379) states :

אל תקרא מלכת שבא אלא מלכות שבא, שבאה כל מלכות שבא בימי שלמה לשמש את ישראל.

For some further details see my article "The Biblical sources of the Ethiopian national saga" [in Hebrew] in *Sefer Tur-Sinai*, Jerusalem, 1960.

formed part of their oral tradition and subsequently penetrated Islam in Arabia and monophysite Christianity in Abyssinia where these legends received specific Arabian and Ethiopian elaborations and embellishments. It is difficult to decide, however, whether later Midrashic accounts (such as the *Targum sheni* to Esther or the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*—to which I shall return presently) are derived from Arabic sources or are, in fact, remnants from early Midrashic collections which have been lost.

Before I deal with these later aspects of Jewish literature, I must trace the fate of the Queen of Sheba in Islamic documents which chronologically precede those late Midrashic developments.

V

The Sheba story in the Qur'an (Sūra XXVII, 15-45) reflects some of the principal elements of the fully developed legend.¹ It describes the sun-worship of the queen, how a hoopoe (*hudhud*) carries a letter to her from Solomon, the queen's consultation with her nobles, and the dispatch of presents to Solomon. When these are not well received by the king, the Queen of Sheba comes herself and, by a ruse (mistaking the polished floor for a pool of water), is made to uncover her legs. Eventually she surrenders (together with Solomon) to Allah, i.e. she becomes a Muslim.

This Qur'anic account closely resembles the fuller version in the later *Targum sheni* to Esther—except that the Qur'an makes no mention of the reason for the polished floor which is meant to discover whether the queen has hairy legs. Neither the Qur'an nor the *Targum sheni* refers to the queen's marriage to Solomon or even to any tender relations between them. Also the queen's Arabic name Bilqis does not yet appear in the Qur'an.

Muslim commentators and writers² supplement the story at various points: the queen's name is given as Bilqis; the demons at Solomon's Court, afraid that the king may marry Bilqis, spread the rumour that the queen has hairy legs and the

¹ Cf. the entry *Bilqīs* in the Encyclopaedia of Islam (new edition).

See also G. Weil, *Biblische Legenden der Muselmänner* (Frankfort, 1845), pp. 225-79.

² Especially Ṭabarī, Zamahšarī, Bayḍāwī.

foot of an ass. Hence Solomon's stratagem of constructing a glass floor which the queen mistakes for water thus causing her to lift her skirts. Solomon then commands his demons to prepare a special depilatory to remove the disfiguring hair. According to some he then married the queen, while other traditions assert that he gave her in marriage to one of the Tubba's of the tribe of Hamdān.

This picture represents a conglomerate from various Arabic accounts.¹ One of the most convenient versions, comprehensive in its coverage of the more important motifs of the Arabic legend, is that by the early eleventh century Arabic author *at-Ta'labī* and contained in his *qiṣaṣ al-'anbiyā'* "stories of the Prophets".² Although Islamic sources have preserved the earliest literary reflection of the complete Bilqis legend, we still maintain that the principal elements of the narrative are derived from Jewish traditions. This judgement is based not only on intrinsic probability and our knowledge of the general influence of the Midrashic genre on early Islam, but is also supported by the following considerations: (1) the story in the Qur'an represents a curiously abrupt version which clearly presupposes prior development; (2) the Talmudic insistence³ that it was not a woman but a Kingdom of Sheba (based on varying interpretations of Hebrew *mlkt*) that came to Jerusalem makes sense only on the assumption that a highly discreditable version of the Solomon-Sheba story was known to the Rabbis; (3) the Ethiopic loanword *ṣarḥ*⁴ in Sūra XXVII, 44 suggests that the Arabic legend was most probably drawn from some foreign prototype; (4) Bilqis, the Arabic name of the Queen of Sheba, is almost certainly connected with the Hebrew (though non-Semitic) פִּילִגִּישׁ (cf. Greek *παλλακίς*), which would point to the area from which

¹ Cf. Hamdāni, *Iklīl*, 8th book, ed. N. A. Faris (Princeton, 1940), p. 24; Rosenthal's translation of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*, ii. 259; for more detailed references to Mas'udī, Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Aṭīr, Ibn Khaldun, etc., see Rösch, *op. cit.* pp. 526-7. Bayḍāwī's commentary to the relevant portions of Sūra XXVII is concise but embodies most of the important elements of the Sheba cycle.

² Printed in A. Socin's *Arabic Grammar*, pp. 49-71. See also M. Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sagenkunde*, pp. 216-20.

³ *Baba Batra*, 15, b.

⁴ Cf. Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, p. 51.

the basic features of the tale originated. I shall return later on to the subject of the Queen's names.

Arab authors deal also with other features of the Sheba cycle : there is considerable speculation as well as a fair measure of conflicting evidence as to the identity of the Queen's father ;¹ her mother's person is equally shrouded in mystery (was she some spirit [*jinn*], demon, serpent, or other animal ?).² After her father's death, Bilqis is said to have succeeded him as queen. Her reign was, however, challenged by one of her subjects whom she removed by a ruse.³ The description of Bilqis as Solomon's wife⁴ is fairly widespread among Arab writers, and so is the motif of the birth of a son to the queen.

VI

Chronology now takes us back to Jewish sources, and here it is Midrashic material to which we have to turn. The early Midrashim refer to the Queen of Sheba only in the most conventional terms, and if they were aware of any scandal attached to her relations with King Solomon, they were certainly most assiduous in suppressing all mention of it. The most important Jewish source is the *Targum sheni* ("the second Targum") to the book of Esther.⁵ Its date is uncertain and is variously thought to range between A.D. 500 and 1000. The gist of this version is as follows :

Solomon was in the habit of summoning all the beasts, birds, reptiles, and spirits⁶ to perform in front of him and his fellow-kings from neighbouring countries. They all came of their own accord. On one occasion the hoopoe⁷ was missing ; when finally it was found, it reported to the king that it had been in search of a country anywhere in the world that might not be subject to the authority of Solomon. Eventually the hoopoe had found the city of Qiṭor in the East, full of gold and silver

¹ Rösch, *op. cit.* pp. 528-34.

² *Ibid.* pp. 534-9.

³ Ta'labī (ed. Socin), pp. 54-55.

⁴ بلقيس زوجة سليمان, *ibid.* p. 71.

⁵ Cf. מקראות גדולות ; and for part-translations see Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, iv. 142 ff. Cf. also Grünbaum, *op. cit.* pp. 209 ff.

⁶ שדין ורוחץ וליליץ.

⁷ חרנגלא ברא.

and trees watered from the Garden of Eden ; its ruler was the Queen of Sheba. Solomon then commanded his scribes to tie a letter to the hoopoe's wing which it delivered to the queen. This missive contained a somewhat peremptory invitation to present herself before the king. The queen thought it prudent to comply and arrived accompanied by vast quantities of precious gifts. Meanwhile, Solomon sat in a house of glass¹ to receive her ; Sheba thought the king was sitting in water and, as she crossed the floor, she lifted her cloak² and thus revealed her hairy legs. Whereupon the king remarked, somewhat unchivalrously : " Thy beauty is the beauty of women, but thy hair is the hair of man ; while hair is an ornament to a man, it is a disfigurement to a woman." ³ The queen, as befits a lady, seems to have pretended not to have heard and, instead, proceeded to recite her riddles and questions.

Here, then, we have most of the essential ingredients of the non-Ethiopian Sheba legend. Two important elements are, however, still missing : (1) a mention of the queen's name ; and (2) a reference to either marriage or concubinage between Solomon and Sheba. The first Jewish document in which the nature of these relations is expressly, rather than covertly, stated appears to be the eleventh century *Alphabet of Ben Sira* in which Nebuchadnezzar is described as a son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.⁴ The union of king and queen occurred as soon as the depilatory had removed the disfiguring hair.

We have now pieced together most of the principal elements which make up the Sheba legend as it appears outside Abyssinia.

VII

In turning to the Ethiopian version, we become at once conscious of a fundamental change of atmosphere : the emphasis

¹ בית זוגיתא.

² חליצת חילוזה.

³ שופרך שופרא דנשי וסערך סער דגברא וסער לגברא שפר ולארתא גאי.

⁴ See also n. 3, p. 487. *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, ed. M. Steinschneider (Berlin, 1858), fol. 21b :

כשבאה מלכת שבא אל שלמה והביאה לו דורון לראות חכמתו ישרה בעיניו
ובקש לשכב עמה ומצאה כולה שער והביא סיד חרניך ובא עליה
באותה שעה.

is no longer on Solomon and his wisdom but on the Queen of Sheba and her nobility; no longer is Solomon exposed to the wiles of the seductress, Lilith, the earthy demon, but he himself assumes the role of seducer and, by a ruse, takes the virgin queen who—and this is the culmination and purpose of the entire Ethiopian saga—gives birth to a son, Menelik,¹ the founder of the Ethiopian dynasty. From him are descended all the kings of Ethiopia down to the present day, to Haile Sellassie—as is embodied in Article 2 of the 1955 Ethiopian Constitution (“the Imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line . . . [which] descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of the Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem”). Here, in the cold terms of legal phraseology, we find the continued insistence on the *mystique* of a direct descent from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, a powerful reminder of the enduring efficacy of the Old Testament story and its wide ramifications.

Apart from this totally different atmosphere, the Ethiopian *Kebra Nagast* (which contains the Sheba cycle in chap. xxi ff.) exhibits other significant changes of detail: nothing is said about the queen's hairy limbs, nothing about the glass floor or Sheba's descent from demons. The tale of the hoopoe is replaced by the realistic story of Tamrin, the head of Sheba's caravans, who is engaged in large-scale trading operations with Solomon and is impressed with the king's wisdom and might. On his return to his own country he reports to the queen in such enthusiastic terms that she decides to go and see for herself. The following chapters in the *Kebra Nagast* do not deviate substantially from the Biblical account but simply supply many details on which the concise story in the Old Testament is silent. One of the more important embellishments is the queen's decision to abandon the worship of the sun and to worship, instead, the Creator of the sun, the God of Israel (chap. 28).

¹Probably corrupted from ابن الحكيم (cf. Praetorius, *Fabula de regina Sabaea apud Aethiopes* [Halle, 1870], p. viii) or ابن الملك. Cf. also S. Strelcyn's attractive Polish book which embodies fragments from the *Kebra Nagast* (*Kebra Nagast czyli Chwala Krolow Abisynii*, Warsaw, 1956).

The centre-piece and, at the same time, the original contribution of the Ethiopian version lie in the events leading up to the birth of Menelik : When Solomon gave a banquet in the queen's honour he had the meat specially seasoned. At the end of the evening the king invited the queen to spend the night in his chambers. The queen agreed on condition that Solomon swore to her that he would not take her by force. The king complied with this request—provided Sheba promised not to take anything in the king's house. Solomon then mounted his bed on one side of the chamber and had the queen's bed prepared at the other end. Near her bed he placed a bowl of water. Sheba soon awoke, for the seasoned food had made her very thirsty. She rose and drank of the water, but Solomon seized her hand and accused her of having broken her oath. He then worked his will with her. The king dreamt that a great light of brilliance, the *shekhina*, the divine presence, had left Israel and moved to Ethiopia. The queen departed and returned to her country where, nine months and five days later, she gave birth to a son. When the boy had grown up he went to visit his father who received him with great honour and splendour. After some time at Solomon's Court he determined to return to his mother's realm. Thereupon the king assembled the elders of Israel and commanded them to send their first-born sons with Menelik, in order to found a kind of Israelite colony. Before the young men departed they abducted the Ark of the Covenant and took it with them to Ethiopia which now became the second Zion.

The veneration of the Queen of Sheba and her appropriation as the national ancestress of the Ethiopian people are of considerable antiquity and certainly precede the medieval *Kebra Nagast*. An interesting piece of evidence is furnished by the Ethiopian Bible translation which usually adheres fairly closely to the text of the Septuagint, but in 1 Kings x. 1 ותבא לנסותו בהידות " she came to prove him with hard questions " the Ethiopic version interprets the Greek ἐν αἰνίγμασι as " with wisdom ".¹ This deliberate alteration is, perhaps, the earliest indication of the Ethiopian attitude towards the Queen of Sheba, for in this read-

¹ ምስላ : ጥበብ ።

ing the quality of wisdom is related not to King Solomon but to the queen.¹

The main components of the story must have had a very long period of gestation in Ethiopia and elsewhere and have possessed all the elements of a gigantic conflation of legendary cycles. When it was committed to writing, early in the fourteenth century, its purpose no doubt was to lend support to the claims and aspirations of the recently established "Solomonic" dynasty in Ethiopia. Its author, the *nebura ed* Yeshaq of Aksum, was thus principally redactor and interpreter of material which had long been familiar, but had not until then found a co-ordinating hand, an expository mind, and a great national need. The Solomon-Sheba story, within the general setting of the *Kebra Nagast*, is not merely a literary work but is the repository of Ethiopian national and religious feelings.

There also exist a Christian Arabic² and a Coptic³ version of our legend. The former is almost certainly dependent on the Ethiopian type of the story and thus constitutes a process of borrowing in a direction opposite to the usual flow.⁴ This Arabic legend is of a composite nature: it omits all mention of an intermediary (hoopoe or merchant) between king and queen, restores the tale of the polished floor, and, to heal the queen's affliction, it introduces a piece of wood which was later used for the Cross. The details of Sheba's seduction by Solomon tally very largely with the Ethiopic prototype. The Coptic version offers little of special interest, but it seems to have been current throughout the Christian Church in Africa.

A modern form of the legend, which yet embraces many archaic elements as well as comparatively recent folkloristic accretions, has been preserved among the Tigre in the North.⁵

¹ Oddly enough, in the parallel verse in 2 Chron. ix. 1 the Ethiopic version does follow the reading of the Septuagint.

² Published by Bezold (*Abh. d. Königl. Bayer. Akad. d. Wissensch.*, xxiii, Munich, 1909), pp. xlv-li.

³ Published by A. Erman (*Abh. d. Königl. Preuss. Akad. d. Wissensch.*, 1897). See also Bezold, *op. cit.* p. xli.

⁴ Cf. Cerulli, *Storia della letteratura etiopica*, p. 47.

⁵ Edited by E. Littmann, *The Legend of the Queen of Sheba in the tradition of Axum* (Leyden, 1904).

A Tigre girl by the name of *Eteye Azeb* (i.e. "Queen of the South") seeks a cure for her deformed foot which had turned into an ass's heel. When she hears of King Solomon's powers she departs for Jerusalem together with a companion. They appear disguised as men, but the king's suspicions are aroused. At night he has a skin with honey suspended in the room, and when the two girls believe him to be asleep they get up and start licking the honey. Solomon then finds his suspicions confirmed and he takes the two women by force. The remainder of the story follows the *Kebra Nagast* version fairly closely: the birth of the son, his visit to his father, and the removal of the Ark from Jerusalem to Aksum.

The ass's heel is, of course, the counterpart of the deformed or hairy foot, but it is remarkable that this feature, so carefully avoided in the classic account of the *Kebra Nagast*, was allowed to survive in this North-Ethiopian tale. Otherwise there is —*mutatis mutandis*—broad agreement, and the bed-chamber scene reveals a close connection in all essential matters.

Finally, a word about the queen's names: In the Old Testament she is, of course, the "Queen of Sheba",¹ while in the New Testament she appears as the "Queen of the South".² This latter idiom goes back to a Semitic *mlkt ymyn* or *mlkt tymn*³ (for south is on the right hand side when you stand facing the rising sun). I have already mentioned that the Arabic *Bilqis* is almost certainly related to Hebrew *pilegish* and Greek *παλλακίς*. In the *Kebra Nagast* the queen's name is given as *Makeda* which has no obvious explanation: some have thought it might be connected with (Alexander) the "Macedonian", while I myself would not exclude the possibility that *Makeda* might reveal a popular identification with *Candace*.⁴

¹ מלכת שבא.

² βασίλισσα νότου.

³ Thus in the Arabic version ملكة التيمن (Bezold, op. cit. p. xlv). In the Ethiopic ታላቅ ሰላም : አዲስ : the possibility cannot be excluded that አዲስ : might be a metathetical approximation to ሰላም (*sb'*). The Arabic ازیب is, of course, a loan-word from Ethiopic (Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge*, pp. 62-63).

⁴ So already Socin, privately, as reported by Rösch, op. cit. p. 557. *Candace* is almost certainly the Meroitic *Katake* (cf. Budge, *History of Ethiopia*, i. 112), while the Syriac form is ܩܘܕܝܫܐ and the Ethiopic forms ቅንደኔ (Budge, *Life*

VIII

Echoes of the Sheba legend can be heard in European literature and art, though in the former they are not as plentiful as I was at first inclined to suppose.¹ Cranmer in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*² speaks of the queen in these terms: "Saba was never more covetous of wisdom and fair virtue than this pure soul shall be." George Wither (1588–1667) in a love sonnet:

I loved a lass, a fair one
As fair as e'er was seen;
She was indeed a rare one,
Another Sheba queen.

Lascelles Abercrombie, in a poem on Judith,³ includes a long love song ascribed to Bilqis from which I quote a few lines from the beginning and the end:

Balkis was in her marble town,
And shadow over the world came down. . . .
"Is there no man, is there none,
In whom my beauty will but move
The lust of a delighted love;
In whom some spirit of God so thrives
That we may wed our lonely lives?
Is there no man, is there none?"—
She said, "I will go to Solomon."

and Exploits of Alexander, i. 106, line 19) as well as አንደኛ and ሀንደኛ. The name of the Queen of Sheba in the Ethiopian tradition is ማከዳ or ማከዳ. This name has hitherto defied all attempts at an explanation (see Conti Rossini, *Storia*, p. 254), but I do not consider it impossible that Makeda is, in fact, a corruption of Candace (Kandake). One must not try to discover any phonetic reasons behind this corruption. If my conjecture is correct, then we have in the mixture of the names a complete parallel to the conflation of the stories. The fact that the name Hendake continues to co-exist does not invalidate this assumption, as we possess respectable parallels for the co-existence of original and corrupt forms. The popular etymology, adduced by the *Kebrä Nagast* (chap. 91), explaining Makeda as derived from كذا ما, must, of course, be rejected.

¹ I am indebted to Mrs. Kelly and Mrs. Ottewell for helping me in tracing modern literary references.

² Act v, scene 4.

³ *Emblems of Love*, London, 1912.

And Kipling :

There was never a Queen like Balkis,
From here to the wide world's end ;
But Balkis talked to a butterfly
As you would talk to a friend.

There was never a King like Solomon,
Not since the world began ;
But Solomon talked to a butterfly
As a man would talk to a man.

She was Queen of Sabaea—
And *he* was Asia's Lord—
But they both of 'em talked to butterflies
When they took their walks abroad !

Professor J. F. Kermode¹ has very kindly drawn my attention to two Yeats poems "Solomon to Sheba" and "Solomon and the Witch" which reflect several facets of the oriental legend. Professor Kermode says that "the second poem is loaded with doctrine. It stems partly from Arthur Symons's 'The Lover of the Queen of Sheba' (published in 1900) and partly from Mme Blavatsky's *The Key of Solomon the King*".

"In Symons the Queen of Sheba is a learned occultist. Yeats seems to interpret the lovemaking as imitating the action of the Divine Parents (Creator and 'celestial matrix'). The Cock is Hermetic, also perhaps Cabbalistic like so much else. The point is that the sexual act figures the perfect renewal which will undo the work of the 'brigand apple', I think. They are platonic in hoping to find themselves replaced by their platonic forms. I suppose we are to believe that when they achieve perfect sexual union Choice and Chance will be one and the world will end."

See also the detailed discussion in F. A. C. Wilson, *Yeats's Iconography* (1960), pp. 276 ff.

¹ I am greatly indebted to him for his very helpful observations.

Handel deals with the Sheba theme in his Oratorio *Solomon*, and especially in Act III whose introductory "symphony" is generally referred to as "The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba".¹ Karl Goldmark (1830-1915) has written an opera "Die Königin von Saba" which I have, unfortunately, never seen performed.

The Queen of Sheba has experienced her greatest and most far-flung development in the area of painting. In Persian art she may often be seen standing in water before King Solomon. In Ethiopian traditional art this theme has had an enduring influence to the present day: its conventional tableau form divides the story into forty-four pictures, arranged in four rows of eleven. It tells the legend as embodied in the *Kebrā Nagast* and includes most realistic representations of the royal bed-chamber scenes (the removal men who recently handled my large Sheba canvas described the picture as a strip-cartoon).

There is a window in King's College Chapel, Cambridge, which depicts the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon: the king is seated on his throne and between him and the queen is an area of blue glass representing the pool of the Muslim legend.² In European art the queen has often become web-footed and can thus be seen in the company of apostles, prophets, patriarchs, and kings in groups of symbolic statuary over church doors, at Chartres or Dijon or Le Mans. On the other hand, she has become *La reine pédauque* ("Queen Goosefoot") to adorn the signboards of restaurants and taverns. Lorenzo Ghiberti, Piero della Francesca, Tintoretto, and many others have painted magnificent pictures of the Queen of Sheba arriving at King Solomon's Court, and some young Ethiopian artists have recently endeavoured to represent an amalgam of the Byzantine and Western traditions.³

¹ Cf. Winton Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* (O.U.P., 1959), p. 523.

² An exceptionally learned article on this subject appeared in *The Times* of 28 June 1954.

³ A charming cartoon of King Solomon in an aeroplane and the Queen of Sheba with a transistor radio set (by Sprod) appears in Sir Leonard Woolley's *As I seem to remember*. This is accompanied by a somewhat modernized version of the story (pp. 64-67).

Many features and details of the Sheba legend remain elusive, and the queen's provenance, person, and character will be shrouded in the twilight of mystery. "Behold, the half was not told me", she said in taking leave of Solomon. Had his answer been recorded, he might well have said: "Nor to me, Madam, about you." But most probably he said nothing. "As the wisest of men and the husband of 700 wives he must surely have known where the last word belongs."¹

¹ *The Times*, 28 June 1954.