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THE QUEEN OF SHEBA AND LILITH – FROM TALMUD TO NOTRE DAME DE PARIS

Mony Almalech (Bulgaria)

GOAL AND QUESTION

I want to find some reasons why the Queen of Sheba, such a positive biblical character, has been denigrated, even demonized, through the ages, and, moreover, without exception – in Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

Visual presentations from Medieval Art, Renaissance, Romanticism from the 19th century, present the identification of the Queen of Sheba with Lilith and Satan – a snake with a beautiful female head in the Garden of Eden.



Fig. 1. Temptation of Adam and Eve. Notre Dame de Paris



Fig. 2. Expulsion of Adam and Eve. Michelangelo (1475–1564). Sistine Chapel

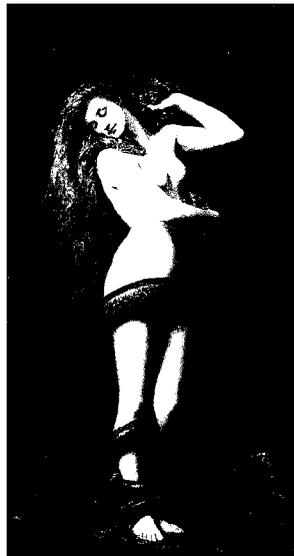


Fig. 3. Lilith. John Collier painting, 1886

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE QUEEN OF SHEBA
AND FROM WHERE DO WE KNOW IT?

I. In the Old Testament

1. From 1 Kings 10:1–13 (3 Цар. 10:1–13) we learn the following important facts:

- The Queen of Sheba is a rich monarch who bestows gifts to King Solomon during her visit to Jerusalem. They fell in love – ‘here was no more spirit in her’; ‘King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire which she requested, besides what he gave her according to his royal bounty’.

- The Queen of Sheba is not one of Solomon's wives – 'she returned, and went to her own country'.
- The Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon after he built the Temple and his castle (home).
- There is a striking equality in the relations between Solomon and Queen of Sheba. This is an equality which is above any diplomatic relations between two monarchs.

2. Song of Solomon

- I prefer the hypothesis that the Queen of Sheba is the beloved Shulamit from Song of Solomon.
 - The Queen of Sheba is a descendant of Cush, i.e. she is a black woman.
- 2.1. The poetic character declares that she is *black* שְׁחֹרָה [shehorà] in Song of Solomon 1:5:

Song of Solomon 1:5

שְׁחֹרָה אֲנִי וְנָאוּה בְּנֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם כַּאֲהֲלֵי קֶדָר פִּירְעוֹת שְׁלֹמֹה:¹

Дъщери иерусалимски! **черна съм**, но съм хубава като шатри кидарски, като Соломонови завеси (Библия 1992).

I am **black**, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon (KJV).

Не смотрите на меня, что я смугла, ибо солнце опалило меня: сыновья матери моей разгневались на меня, поставили меня стеречь виноградники, – моего собственного виноградника я не стерегла (RST).

μέλαινά εἶμι καὶ καλή θυγατέρες Ἱερουσαλήμ ὡς σκηνώματα Κηδάρ ὡς δέρρεις Σαλωμών (LXT)

Song of Solomon 1:4 **nigra** sum sed formosa filiae Hierusalem sicut tabernacula Cedar sicut pelles Salomonis (VUL).

2.2. *Sheba* is a tribe and a state of black people – *Sheba* שְׁבָא corresponds to current Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea. *Sheba* is grandson of *Cush* כּוּשׁ:

Genesis 10:6

וּבְנֵי חָם כּוּשׁ וּמִצְרַיִם וְפּוּט וְכַנְעַן:

Хамови синове: **Хус**, Мицраим, Фут и Ханаан (Библия 1940).

Хамови синове: **Хуш**, Мицраим, Фут и Ханаан (Библия 1992).

Сыны Хама: **Хуш**, Мицраим, Фут и Ханаан (RST).

The sons of Ham were **Cush** and Mizraim and Put and Canaan (NAU).

The sons of Ham: **Cush**, Egypt, Put, and Canaan (RSV).

I figli di Cam: **Etiopia**, Egitto, Put e Canaan (IEP).

Os filhos de Cam são: **Cuxe**, e Mizraim, e Pute, e Canaã (ARC).

¹ All quotes in Hebrew are from WTT (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia).

כּוּשׁ [куш] – a proper name that appears in the Bible translations in various forms – *Хус* (Библия 1940; Библия 1992), *Хуш* (RST), *Χους* (LXT), *Etiopia* (IEP), *Cush* (KJV, NAU, RSV, NKJ), *Cuxe* (ARC), *Cusch* (LSG), *Chus* (BKR), *Kusz* (BTP), *Chus* (VUL).

Genesis 10:7

וּבְנֵי כּוּשׁ סֶבֶא וְחוּיִלָּה וְסַבְתָּה וְרַעְמָה וְסַבְתְּכָא וּבְנֵי רַעְמָה שֶׁבַא וְדֶדָן:

А Хусови синове: Сева, Евила, Савта, Раама и Савтека; а Раамови синове: Шева и Дедан (Библия 1940).

Хушови синове: Сева, Хавила, Савта, Раама и Савтеха. Раамови синове: Шева и Дедан (Библия 1992).

Сыны Хуша: Сева, Хавила, Савта, Раама и Савтеха. Сыны Раамы: Шева и Дедан (RST).

The **sons of Cush** were Seba and Havilah and Saptah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan (NAU).

Conclusions for the Old Testament: 1. The Queen of Sheba has extraordinary positive features; 2. The Queen of Sheba is a black woman.

II. In the New Testament

The queen of the south – Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31. She represents a Jewish female as who has more good sense than Jewish men.

Matthew 12:42

The **queen of the south** shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

Conclusion for the New Testament: The Queen of Sheba has extraordinary positive features.

III. In the Koran

Sura 27, names Ants. ‘Queen of south’ confesses polytheism. Solomon forced her to accept monotheism and to become a vassal of his kingdom. Actually Muhammad had come across Jewish midrashic stories.

Conclusion for Koran: Not very positive but coloured with the doctrine of monotheism.

IV. In the traditional Ethiopian chronic *Kēbra Nagast*

- Accounts of how the *Queen of Sheba/Queen Makeda of Ethiopia met King Solomon*. Their son, Menyelek I, is the founder of the Solomonic dynasty of all Ethiopian kings.

• Kēbra Nagast claims that Menyelek I took the Ark of Covenant and it is in Ethiopia. It also discusses the conversion of the Ethiopians from the worship of the Sun, Moon and stars to that of the ‘Lord God of Israel’. The Coptic (Ethiopian) Church adopted the idea that the Ethiopian kings were descendants of the royal couple of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Conclusion for Kēbra Nagast: Very positive as regards the Queen of Sheba.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THIS POSITIVE CHARACTER OF THE SACRED BOOKS?

The Queen of Sheba is incredibly knowledgeable. This was recorded in a sacred book of Koran 17 centuries after she visited Solomon.

Even today, obviously, she has engaged people’s minds for more than 30 centuries after her meeting with Solomon – we can visit the luxury hotel of ‘Queen of Sheba’ in Eilat, Israel.

IDENTIFICATION OF *LILITH* WITH THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

WHO IS *LILITH*? WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT *LILITH* AND WHERE DO WE KNOW IT FROM?

I. In the Bible. There is only one reference to Lilith - Isaiah 34:14. Lilith is a common noun – *screech owl* (*Liliths* International Standard Version) – and is mentioned among the forces represented as animals, destroying Edom.

II. In the Talmud Lilith is described as a female demon with long hair and wings (Eruvin 100b; Niddah 24b). The text advises: “A man who sleeps alone can be hijacked by Lilith” (Shabat 151b). *Hormiz* demon is mentioned as one of the sons of Lilith (Bava Batra 73b).

The fact that the Talmud gives a recipe for protection against Lilith shows that Lilith’s demonology is well known in folklore.

III. Targum of Job, ch. 1 – middle of 1st Century AD – from Qumran Cave 11. In three Aramaic versions: 1. From Qumran Cave 11. (HQtgJob) 10; 2. The official Targum of Job, and the Peshitta of Job; 3. Syriac translation has appeared in several printed editions, the earliest of which is the so-called Paris Polyglot of 1645. For the translation of Q11 see Patai (Patai 1990: 221, 244, 331; Scholem 1948).

‘The Queen of Sheba, who was considered one of the queens of the demons and is sometimes identified with Lilith – for the first time in the Targum of Job, ch. 1, and later in the Zohar and the subsequent literature’ (Scholem 1974: 325; EJ 5: Scholem).

Job 1:15

Lilith, the Queen of Zemargad, launched an attack and seized [the sons of Job] and killed the young men.... (Qumran Cave 11).

[...] **and the Sabceans** attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you! (NIV).

[...] **савшите** нападнаха та ги откараха, още избиха слугите с острото на ножа; и само аз се отървах да ти известя (Библия 1940).

[...] когато **савейци** нападнаха и ги откараха, а момците с остър меч погубиха; и отървах се само аз, за да ти обадя (Библия 1992).

IV. Testament of Solomon (about the third century).

Testament of Solomon (about the third century). A Greek work, a Christian version based on Judeo-Hellenistic magic—a female demon who is said to be known by tens of thousands of names and moves about the world at night, visiting women in childbirth and endeavoring to strangle their newborn babes (Scholem 1974: 356).

V. Alphabet of Ben Sira, an anonymous medieval text (700 и 1000)

Two lists of proverbs, 22 in Aramaic and 22 in Hebrew; Lilith is identified with the ‘first Eve’, who was created from the earth at the same time as Adam, and who, unwilling to forgo her equality, disputed with him the manner of their intercourse.

Scholem informs us:

Here the legend concerning the wife of Adam who preceded the creation of Eve (Genesis 2) merges with the earlier legend of Lilith as a demon who kills infants and endangers women in childbirth. This later version of the myth has many parallels in Christian literature from Byzantine (which probably preceded it) and later periods. The female demon is known by different names, many of which reappear in the same or in slightly altered forms in the literature of practical Kabbalah (as, for example, the name Obizoth from the Testament of Solomon), and the place of the angels is taken by three saints – Sines, Sisinnios, and Synodoros. The legend also found its way into Arabic demonology, where Lilith is known as Karina, Tabi’a, or “the mother of the infants”. The personification of Lilith as a strangler of babies is already clear in Jewish incantations, written in Babylonian Aramaic, which predate the Alphabet of Ben Sira. [...] Midrashic literature expands the legend that Adam, having parted from his wife after it had been ordained that they should die, begat demons from spirits that had attached themselves to him (Scholem 1974: 357).

VI. Jewish Mysticism

Midrashic literature before Zohar. In the generation before *Zohar*: Isaac b. Jacob ha-Kohen, Moses b. Solomon b. Simeon of Burgos – the demonology and myth of Lilith have developed their full paradigm. Rashba – Shlomo ben Aderet – 13th century. Lilith is the first woman of Adam, Lilith is the permanent partner of Samael, queen of the realm of the forces of evil, etc. See: Hurwitz 1992.

Zohar – the whole paradigm of demonizing.

‘In *Livnat ha-Sappir* Joseph Angelino maintains that the riddles which the Queen of Sheba posed to Solomon are a repetition of the words of seduction which the first Lilith spoke to Adam. In Ashkenazi folklore, this figure coalesced with the popular one in the age of Helen of Troy or the Frau Venus of German mythology. Until recent generations the Queen of Sheba was popularly pictured as a snatcher of children and a demonic witch. It is probable that there is a residue of the image of Lilith as Satan’s partner in popular late medieval European notions of Satan’s concubine, or wife in English folklore – “the Devil’s Dame” – and of Satan’s grandmother in German folklore’ (Scholem 1974: 358).

ANSWERS

Answer 1 Abraham Melamed gives one possible explanation

In I Kings 1:10 and II Chronicles 9, she is presented not only as a rich woman with excellent abilities as a ruler and [a] diplomat, but a wise woman who tries Solomon with riddles. In short, she contradicts all the gender and skin-colour stereotypes that would develop later. Perhaps it was no wonder, then, that the Sages had trouble relating to her, and so ignored her almost completely. The only time they confronted the problem (*BT Baba Batra* 15b) they denied the possibility that she was a woman, while later sources negatively identified her with the figure of the she-demon Lilith. Such a combination of an independent, clever woman who tested King Solomon, crossing the accepted gender boundaries, and a daughter of Sheba son of Cush besides, necessarily aroused in the Sages such overwhelmingly negative associations that they identified her with Lilith, though there is no basis whatever for such an identity in the two biblical versions of the encounter. Such associations belong to another, later cultural mentality (Melamed 2003: 56).

The legend of the Queen of Sheba in which Solomon found her legs were hairy when he raised her skirts, cited by Micah Ben-Gurion (Berdichevsky) in *Me-Makor Israel* (Tel Aviv, 1966: 61). The story later serves as a basis for identifying the Queen of Sheba with Lilith, Satan's wife, who lures innocent men into her net, a physical example of violating the accepted boundaries of gender. However, it does not refer to the Queen's skin colour, despite the biblical statement that she is the daughter of Sheba son of Cush. Perhaps her violation of gender barriers so preoccupied scholars that they ignored her complexion, though their perceptions linked the two. At the same time, identifying her with Lilith in itself relates to skin colour, because Lilith derives from the Hebrew *lilah* (night), and the Queen of Sheba was a descendant of Cush (Melamed 2003: 239).

Answer 2 Blackness

Answer 2 is located in the area of the subconscious colour theory and prototypes (Rosch 1973; Rosch 1977; Wierzbicka 1990; Almalech 2011: 335). The prototype of black is darkness, night. The link between the Queen of Sheba and Lilith is the black color and its prototype, the *night* when female night demon acts. Evidence of such relationship is the folk etymology of the name *Lilith*, which in mass consciousness and culture is bound to the Hebrew word *night* while the scientific etymology of the word is associated with demon *Lil*, meaning *air*.

Lilith is a female demon assigned a central position in Jewish demonology. The figure may be traced to Babylonian (possibly even Sumerian) demonology, which identifies similar male and female spirits – *Lilu* and *Lilitu* respectively which are etymologically unrelated to the Hebrew word *laylah* ("night"). These *mazikim* ("harmful spirits") have various roles: one of them – the *Ardat-Lilith* – preys on males, while others imperil women in childbirth and their children. An example of the latter kind is *Lamashtu* (first deciphered as *Labartu*), against whom incantation formulas have been preserved in Assyrian (Scholem 1974: 356).

Answer 3 combines 1 & 2:

My explanation for the demonization of the Queen of Sheba is as follows:

In fact, all believe that the Queen of Sheba is equal to Solomon, as emerges from the Old Testament. That causes envy, hatred and disbelief. And if Solomon and the Queen of Sheba are partnering, as it happens between equals, this means she has similar qualities and abilities. The qualities of Solomon are:

- Rich and successful king;
- Wisest judge;

- Prophet. The description of the *windows* and *window bars* in his home (3 Kings 7:4–5) show him as a prophet (Алмалех 2010: 237–239; Almalech 2012);
- The magical abilities of Solomon – a person having authority over all “jinn”;
- One who speaks the language of animals;
- Since the most commonly used symbolism of darkness and night is negative, it is easy to transfer to the black Queen of Sheba the negative semantization of night that is associated with Lilith.

Conclusion from the answers:

A black woman, equal in everything to Solomon – which cannot be.

BUT....there are still possible positive emotions for the Queen of Sheba, if we can visit the five star hotel “Queen of Sheba” in the modern Israeli resort Eilat, which is located in the ancient area of Esav/Edom (the ‘red one’ brother of Jacob/Israel)...

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- BTP The Polish Millennium Bible (Polish Biblia Tysiąclecia). 4th ed. Poznań, 1997.
- IEP The Italian Nuovissima Versione della Bibbia. Roma, 1995–1996.
- KJV King James Version of the English Bible. Authorized Version, 1769. Blayney Edition of the 1611; ASCII version 1988–1997 by the Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship of Ontario, Canada. Licensed from the Institute for Creation Research.
- LSG The French Louis Segond Version 1910. ASCII version, 1988–1997. Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship of Ontario, Canada. Licensed from the Institute for Creation Research.
- LXT Septuaginta. Ed. A. Rahlfs. Stuttgart, 1935.
- NAU The New American Standard Bible. 1995. The Lockman Foundation.
- NIV New International Version International Bible Society. Zondervan Publishing House, 1984.

NKJ	The New King James Version. Nashville, 1982.
RST	The Russian Synodal Text of the Bible (Edition 1917), 1996.
RSV	Revised Standard Version. Churches of Christ in the USA. 1952.
VUL	Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem, Vulgate Latin Bible. Ed. R. Weber, B. Fischer, J. Gribomont, H.F.D. Sparks, W. Thiele. Stuttgart, 1983.
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САВСКАТА ЦАРИЦА И ЛИЛИТ – ОТ ТАЛМУДА ДО ПАРИЖКАТА СВЕТА БОГОРОДИЦА

(Резюме)

Обект на статията е позитивният библейски персонаж на Савската царица (3 Цар. 10:1–13; Песен на песните, от Соломон). Целта е да се открият причините, поради които Савската царица е принижавана, дори демонизирана през вековете – в юдаизма, християнството и исляма. Средновековното изкуство, Ренесансът, Романтизмът на XIX век идентифицират Савската царица като Лилит и Сатаната – змия с красива женска глава в райската градина.

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