



BELQĪS

BELQĪS, the queen of Sheba (Sabā) whose meetings with Solomon (Solaymān) are a favorite theme in Persian and Arabic literature. Accounts of the meetings appear in the Old Testament and the Qur'ān, but in neither is the queen's name, Belqīs, mentioned.

The Old Testament account in I Kings 10:1-10 and II Chronicles 9:1-12 is in summary as follows. The queen of Sheba, having heard of Solomon's fame and wisdom, resolves to test his worth. She travels to Jerusalem, is interviewed by Solomon, and is convinced of his wisdom and greatness. She presents to him the gifts that she has brought and he grants to her all that she requests. She and her companions then return to their own country.

In the Koranic account (27:20-44), Solomon is told by the hoopoe that it has seen people of the land of Sheba who are ruled by a woman possessing great wealth and a mighty throne, but the woman and the people worship the sun instead of the One God. Curious, Solomon sends the hoopoe with a letter to the queen of Sheba, demanding the submission of herself and her people. After conferring with her counselors, she decides to send envoys to Solomon with a gift. Solomon refuses the gift and sends a threatening reply. Then, at Solomon's command, agents using knowledge and wisdom bring the queen's throne to him, and he has it altered to find out whether she will still recognize it. After receiving Solomon's message, the queen quickly sets out to visit him, and, when she arrives, she is asked whether her throne is like that one. She answers that it looks the same. Then she is bidden to enter the palace. The floor of the palace is so highly polished and shiny that she takes it to be an



expanse of water and bares her legs. On learning that the palace is floored with glass, she is seized with such wonder that she believes and submits to God.

The Qur'ān commentators, in their explanations and translations of these verses, give the queen of Sheba's name as Belqīs, and some even give names of her parents and ancestors (e.g., Ṭabarī, *Jāme' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qor'ān*, Cairo, 1373/1954, XIX, pp. 152-54; 'Abd-Allāh b. 'Omar Bayzāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta'wīl*, Hyderabad, 1305/1887-88, p. 502; Maqdesī, *Bad'* III, p. 108). Some commentators add that Solomon was told by demons (who according to Ṭabarī feared that he might marry Belqīs) that she was an unintelligent woman, had hairy legs, and her feet resembled the hooves of an ass; it was to check her intelligence that he altered her throne (*Tafsīr-e Qor'ān-e majīd*, anonymous ms. at Cambridge, ed. J. Matīnī, Tehran, 1349 Š./1970, I, p. 359; Bayzāwī, loc. cit.; Abū Eshāq Nišābūrī, *Qeşaş al-anbīā'*, ed. Ḥ. Yağmā'ī, Tehran, 1340 Š./1961, p. 300). When Belqīs was brought into the palace, Solomon saw her legs and feet and judged them better than most (Cambridge *Tafsīr* I, pp. 360-61); but Solomon is also said to have ordered the concoction of a depilatory to remove Belqīs's leg and foot hair (Ṭabarī, XIX, pp. 169-70; Maqdesī, loc. cit.; Nišābūrī, p. 302). The author of the *Qeşaş al-anbīā'* states (p. 308) that Solomon married Belqīs and was fond of her and that she bore him four children, three daughters and one son, but other authors, including Bayzāwī, Maqdesī, and Yāqūt (*Boldān* III, p. 115, s.v. Salḥīn) state that Solomon gave her in marriage to one of the Tobba's (the Dū Tobba', king of the Hamdān tribe). Another story is that some Himyarites digging in the royal cemetery found a woman's corpse, wrapped in robes of gold brocade, in a cavity under a marble slab on which verses showing it to be Belqīs's tomb were inscribed (Cambridge *Tafsīr* I, pp. 361-62); according to Zereklī (II, p. 51), the discovery of Belqīs's mortal remains took place in the reign of the caliph Walīd b. 'Abd-al-Malek, at whose command they were reinterred in the same grave.

Treatment of the Belqīs legend in Persian literature varies. In the fourth book (*daftar*) of Rūmī's *Maṭnawī* (ed. Nicholson, IV, pp. 311-43) a detailed account is given, but in many other works only a reference to an episode or to her throne appears (see Dehḵodā, s.v. Belqīs). Sometimes words are put into Belqīs's mouth, e.g., the story of a conversation between her and Solomon about her son's sickness and the reasons for his recovery in Neẓāmī's *Haft peykar* (Neẓāmī Ganja'ī, *Kollīyāt*, ed. Ḥ. Waḥīd Dastgerdī, Tehran, 1335 Š./1956, pp. 719-21).



Belqīs is a component of a few Persian compounds and constructs (e.g., *Belqīs-e dawrān*, *Belqīs-e rūzgār*, *būy-e . . . belqīsī*; see, e.g., Kāqānī, *Dīvān*, p. 151; idem, *Monša'āt*, ed. M. Rowšan, Tehran, 1349 Š./1970, pp. 41, 56, 122, 339; Manūčherī Dāmḡānī, *Dīvān*, ed. M. Dabīrsiāqī, Tehran, 1356 Š./1977, p. 201). Among the Arabs the throne of Belqīs has long been proverbial (see Abū Maṣṣūr 'Abd-al-Malek Ṭa'ālebī, *Ṭemār al-qolūb fi'l-możāf wa'l mansūb*, Cairo, 1326/1918, p. 245). Until quite recent times pictures of Solomon and Belqīs were popular in Iran and could often be seen in paintings and textile prints.

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