

**QUEEN  
OF  
SHEBA  
AND  
ISRAEL**

**BERNARD LEE MAN**

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*Cover:* The Queen of Sheba's Bath at Aksum, Ethiopia

Professional archaeology in the Holy Land dates from the 1920s and has been characterized by Jewish and Christian attempts to substantiate the Biblical record. While evidence has been unearthed that supports the account of the post-Babylonian captivity, renown archaeologists such as Kenyon, Pritchard, Thompson, Glock, Hertzog, Silberman, and Finkelstein have concluded that the *Old Testament* is either a fantasy or highly exaggerated. Joshua's invasion of Canaan has been reinterpreted as a peaceful migration and no traces have been found of the massive public works allegedly contracted in Jerusalem by Solomon or in Samaria by Omri. If these monarchs existed, they would have been little more than petty village headmen with imaginative publicists. This so-called *minimalist* outlook is fiercely challenged by others who believe that the evidence to support the *Old Testament* has literally yet to be uncovered.

This book examines evidence connected with the life of Queen of Sheba, including Sabaeen inscriptions on the Ethiopian plateau, aspects of the Ancient West Arabian language, and geographical references in Ge'ez *Kebra Nagast* to offer a third alternative. It argues that the *Old Testament* is an accurate account but its events prior to 586 BCE took place not in Palestine but in *West Arabia*, , and to a lesser extent in Ethiopia and Eritrea. It suggests that scholars are unwilling to consider such a strong possibility because, if true, it would not only completely undermine the *raison d'être* of the State of Israel but also force a total reassessment of Biblical, Arabian, and North East African history.

By accepting African traditions in providing a solution to the bitter division in Biblical scholarship, this book ranks with Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* in its degree of controversy and presenting evidence that most scholars should address.

## **The Author**

Bernard Leeman holds Bachelor and Doctorate degrees in African History from London and Bremen Universities, and a Masters in Applied Linguistics from the University of the Northern Territory, Australia. He began his academic career teaching at Asmara University, Eritrea. In 2001 he was Visiting Fellow at Oxford University, and from 2002 to 2004 taught at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies.

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## Introduction

This book is designed to introduce college-level students to Old Testament history and to show that in western Arabia and in the Horn of Africa evidence relating to the Queen of Sheba indicates that the Promised Land was most likely in western Arabia, not in Palestine.

My research on the Queen of Sheba was originally inspired by the legend in my home region of Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, that Menelik, son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, was buried in the crater of Kibo, the highest of Kilimanjaro's three peaks. The local Chagga word for God is *Ruwa/Looa*, adopted from a Cushitic people who settled there around 1000 years B.C.E. These Cushitic speakers, although later absorbed by Bantu-speaking settlers, nevertheless maintained their own, separate Mbulu identity south of Arusha. *Ruwa/Looa* is a feminine noun and phonetically identical to the Hebrew word for *Holy Spirit*, also a feminine noun.

My research produced nothing more than legends that long ago a great king was buried on the mountain and that a sacred book had been placed in the crater. My interest did however lead me to the *Kebrā Nagast*, the ancient Ge'ez manuscript, which, from ca. A.D. 1314 until 1974, served as one of the most important documents in Ethiopian constitutional history. The *Kebrā Nagast* is a combination of three ancient manuscripts, written at different times, and finally intertwined in a single document, edited in the first years of the fourteenth century A.D. The oldest section of the *Kebrā Nagast* is the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle*, which tells the story of the meeting, ca. 950 B.C.E., of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the birth of their son

Menelik, and the establishment of an Israelite state in Ethiopia. The second part of the *Kebra Nagast* is the *Caleb Cycle*, which deals with sixth-century A.D. Byzantine, southern Arabian and Aksumite (early Ethiopian) political and religious issues. The third part is a brief account of how the *Kebra Nagast* was finally edited in Aksum, ca. A.D. 1314.

After reading the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle*, my initial reaction was one of disappointment, for its geographical references made no sense. Consequently, I rejected it as having no historical merit.

From 1974 to 1975, I taught in Jizan in southwestern Saudi Arabia and was puzzled by the remains of substantial but uninvestigated ancient urban settlements scattered about that region. I found that there is very little literature on the pre-Christian history of the region between Jeddah and the Yemen. Arab legends about an ancient Israelite presence in the region were not at that time taken seriously by Western academics.

My interest in the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* revived following the 1985 publication of Kamal Salibi's *The Bible Came from Arabia*. I sent Professor Salibi the list of locations mentioned in the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle*. He replied, confessing he was not conversant with the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle's* content; nevertheless he provided a map marking the place names. This map convinced me that the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* was a true story, for its narrative matched Old Testament locations in western Arabia not Palestine.

Place names, Arabian traditions, and the lack of archaeological remains in Palestine/Israel did not offer sufficient proof to argue the case of a western Arabian location for the Old Testament, and it would take much more research to uncover more convincing evidence. I had already spent several years in the most unpromising circumstances undertaking research for a Ph.D. in

modern southern African politics. I had never received any financial assistance for my doctoral research, and much of my work was undertaken clandestinely in Southern Africa during military service against the apartheid regime. Research on the *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* presented similar problems, mostly because of the Saudi government's hostile attitude, the Ethiopian civil war, and the Eritrean war of independence.

I eventually immigrated to Australia and was fortunately able to utilize the excellent facilities of the Australian National University during my service in Canberra for the Australian Army, the Commonwealth Department of Education, and as Australian Capital Territory representative of the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP). In 1994, I presented my views at the AFSAAP Conference at La Trobe University, Australia. As a consequence Professor Ashenafi Kebede of Florida State University invited me to join the Ethiopian Research Council. In 1996, I went to the Asmara University, Eritrea, as assistant professor and deputy head of the History section, as well as a lecturer in phonetics and phonology in the English Department. During my stay at Asmara I copied out the entire Ge'ez text of the *Kebra Nagast* and also checked Bezold's German translation against Wallis Budge's English version. I shall always be grateful to all those who encouraged my work, particularly students at Asmara University who asked for repeat lectures; and Dr Desmond Thomas of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, for using a 2003 video of my lecture on the Queen of Sheba as part of the academic oral presentation training course.

This book evolved from the AFSAAP conference paper, and lectures I gave at Asmara and at universities, schools, and public meetings in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Australia, the USA, South Korea, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Morocco, and England. In my

continuous work on this project, what strikes me most is how the story of the Queen of Sheba evokes enthusiasm even in societies with little or no Biblical tradition. She was young, beautiful, loved learning more than position and wealth, and symbolizes a long lost gentler more tolerant world that continues to inspire idealists today.

*MAP 1*



**Major locations mentioned in the text**

**MAP 2**



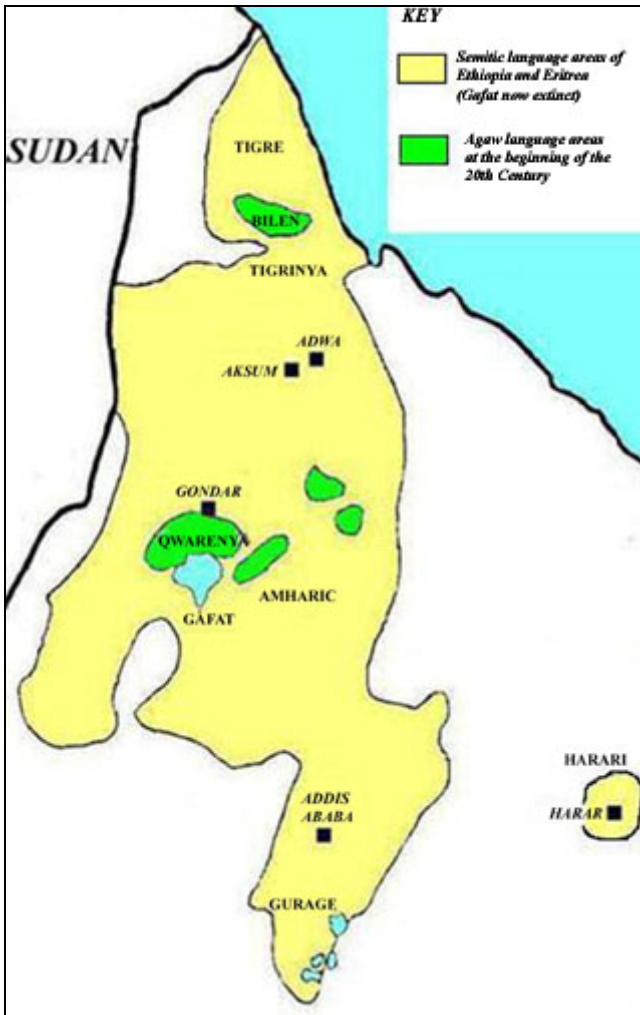
**The Promised Land according to the Salibi Hypothesis**

**MAP 3**



*The marked area is the region that contains the “Hebrewisms” recorded by Rabin in Ancient West Arabian, the Old Testament place names noted by Salibi, iron deposits, and an ancient Ark culture. It also straddles the lucrative incense, gold, precious stones, and luxury goods trade routes from Sabaea (Sheba). This area was temporarily abandoned by Egyptian and Assyrian imperial control ca. 1000-920 BCE, the same years as the zenith of the Israelite states under David and Solomon.*

MAP 4



The Semitic Languages of Ethiopia and Agaw (Central Cushitic) remnant isolates

