



Sheba: Through the Desert in Search of the Legendary Queen

Nicholas Clapp

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Three thousand years ago, a dusky queen swept into the court of King Solomon, and from that time to the present day, her tale has been told and retold. Who was this queen? Did she really exist? In a quixotic odyssey that takes him to Ethiopia, Arabia, Israel, and even a village in France, Nicholas Clapp seeks the underlying truth behind the multifaceted myth of the queen of Sheba.

It's an eventful journey. In Israel, he learns of a living queen of Sheba -- a pilgrim suffering from "Jerusalem Syndrome" -- and in Syria he tracks down the queen's tomb, as described in the Arabian Nights. Clapp investigates the Ethiopian shrine where Menelik, said to be the son of Solomon and the mysterious queen, may have hidden the Ark of the Covenant. Then the "worst train in the world" (according to the conductor) takes Clapp to the Red Sea, where he sets sail for Yemen in an ancient dhow and comes perilously close to being shipwrecked.

As in his search for the lost city of Ubar, Clapp uses satellite images, this time to track an ancient caravan route that leads to the queen's winter capital in present-day Yemen. The quest is bolstered by new carbon-14 datings and by the discovery of an Arabian Stonehenge in the sands of the Rub' al-Khali. Finally, at the romantic and haunting ruins of Sirwah, the pieces of the queen of Sheba puzzle fall into place.

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