

Solomon

The son of the biblical king David (q.v.) and heir to his throne. Solomon (Ar. Sulayman) is presented in the Quran as playing three important roles. although they are often interwoven in its narrative (see Narratives). He was a ruler who inherited his father's knowledge as well as his kingdom (see KINGS AND RULERS; KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING: POWER AND IMPORTANCE); a prophet (SEE PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD) who despite occasional lapses in devotional practice (SEE PIETY; WORSHIP; RITUAL AND THE QURAN), enjoyed divine protection (q.v.) and was assured an honored place in paradise (q.v.): a person who possessed wide - ranging magical and esoteric powers which he used with divine sanction (see Magic)

Solomon's life and accomplishments are described in Q 21:78 - 82, 27: ;15 - 44, 34: 10 - 14 and 38: 30 - 40 but many of these passages are written in a laconic and allusive style that stimulated the composition of glosses, commentaries and stories (See Myths and Legends in the Quran; Exegesis of the Quran: Classical and Medieval). These sources often supply colorful details about him and his associates not mentioned in the Quran. Solomon's unusual mixture of skills and characteristics also encouraged symbolic interpretations of his life and accomplishments (see Symbolic Imagery).

Solomon in quranic exegesis and the stories of the prophets

Muslim commentators provide anecdotes which demonstrate Solomon's wisdom and piety but they also delight in his regal pomp and magical powers. Stories about his magical levitating throne, his retinue of birds, animals, demons and men and his connection with the Queen of Sheba, identified as Bilqis in Muslim sources, captured popular imagination. Solomon's temporal, religious and esoteric powers made him a

model for both religious and secular personages (Melikian - Chirvani, Royaume). His mobility led Muslim commentators to link him with far - flung places; rulers distant from Jerusalem (q.v.) invoked his memory in the construction and decoration of their residences (Soucek, Throne; Koch, Jahangir). On a more popular level, his attributes and accomplishments are described in stories and depicted in paintings (Bagic, Divan; Milstein, Ruhrdanz and Schmitz, Stories of the Prophets).

Solomon in the Quran

As a ruler Solomon was noted for his possession of knowledge (ilm) and wisdom (q.v.); hikma), characteristics that he inherited from his father, David, but in which he was believed to have surpassed him (Q 21: 78 - 9; Tabari, Tafsir, xvii, 50 - 4; id., Tarikh, i, 573; Thalabi, Qisas, 257 - 9). Another area in which the son was more accomplished than the father was a builder: The Quran alludes to the various objects and structures which were made for him, including mihrabs (maharib), images or sculptures (tamathil) and watering troughs (jifan, Q 34: 12 - 13; Tabari, Tafsir, xxiii, 70 - 1; see art and architecture and the Quran; Mosque; Idols and Images). Another passage mentions the palace with a glass floor where he received the Queen of Sheba (q.v.; Q 27: 44; Tabari, Tafsir, xix, 168 - 70; id., Tarikh, i, 583; Thalabi, Qisas, 271, 272 - 6; see Bilqis).

Descriptions of the structures and objects made for Solomon present them primarily as a demonstration of his power to force men, birds (see Animal Life), jinn (q.v.) and shaytans to do his bidding (Q 21: 82; 38: 37 - 8). Both Solomon and David are said to have had the ability to communicate with birds and animals (See Language, concept of), David charmed them with his mellifluous voice whereas Solomon was able to affect their behavior through his understanding of their speech (q.v.). His power to communicate with both ants and birds is specifically mentioned by the Quran (Q 27: 16 - 18); Tabari, Tafsir, xix, 141 - 2).

Solomon's ability to command the wind (see air and wind) and to make it transport him wherever he pleased is another manifestation of his special powers. This ability is referred to in three different quranic passages affirming its importance as an aspect of Solomon's status (Q 21: 81; 34:12; 38:36; Tabari, Tafsir, xvii, 55 - 6; xxiii, 68 - 9, 160 - 1, id, Tarikh, i, 563 - 5; Thalabi Qisas, 260 - 1). A similar ability to travel miraculously is attributed to the Jinn under his command because they are able to seize a throne belonging to the Queen of Sheba and bring it to Solomon in an instant (Q 26: 23, 38 - 42; Tabari, Tafsir xix, 148, 159 - 68; id., Tarikh , i, 580 - 1; Thalabi. Qisas, 279, 283 - 4; see Trips and Voyages; Journey).