

Jonah and the Qu'ran



Unknown artist.....Jonah and the Fish
Persian, ca. 1400

Jonah is understandably unwell after being spewed forth out of the fish, and he is cold. An angel brings him a garment to wear, and a gourd vine begins to grow above him, so that he might have rest in its shade.

The Qu'ran is the holy book of Islam, but it contains many verses and stories that testify to the commonality of the three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Here is the Muslim version of the story of Jonah.

"So also was Jonah among those sent (by Us).
When he ran away (like a slave from captivity) to the ship (fully) laden,
He (agreed to) cast lots, and he was condemned:
Then the big Fish did swallow him, and he had done acts worthy of blame.
Had it not been that he (repented and) glorified Allah,
He would certainly have remained inside the Fish till the Day of Resurrection."

But We cast him forth on the naked shore in a state of sickness,
And We caused to grow, over him, a spreading plant of the gourd kind.
And We sent him (on a mission) to a hundred thousand (men) or more.
And they believed; so We permitted them to enjoy (their life) for a while.
— Qur'an, chapter 37 (As-Saaffat), verse 139–148

Jonah is more important among both Muslims and Christians in the Persian world than he is in the west. The traditional site of his tomb was a destination for pilgrims until it was destroyed by ISIS in 2014. He is the only one of the minor prophets in our bible to be mentioned in the Qu'ran.

This image is from the *Jami' al-tawarikh* (Compendium of Chronicles), first written in Persian and then in Arabic, by Rashid-al-Din Hamadani in the early 14th century. Its broad scope has caused it to be called "the first world history". It describes cultures and major events in world history from China to Europe and presents Mongol history, as a way of establishing their cultural legacy. Rashid-al-Din was a Mongol vizier, an office somewhat like that of a prime minister. The king declared that two copies were to be made each year -- no mean feat -- and distributed to schools cities throughout the empire. While Rashid al-Din lived, the project continued, and about twenty were made. The project was so ambitious that many fragments survive, and the *Jami' al-tawarikh* is our largest source of Persian art.