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Did Noah's Ark land on this mountain?

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Front cover: Looking south toward the north face of Mount Ararat. The gaping Ahora Gorge, which opened up following an earthquake in 1840 and is nearly a mile deep, dominates this view of the awesome volcanic peak in northeastern Turkey. Photo by Bill Crouse

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BENEATH THE SURFACE:

An Editorial Comment



The Genesis Flood: An Interpretative Key to the Past

By Henry B. Smith, Jr.

In the 600th year of Noah's life, on the 17th day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened (Gn 7:11).

For centuries, the Biblical Flood described in chapters 6–8 in the book of Genesis was considered global, cataclysmic and historical. Since the late 18th century, however, the historicity of the Flood has come under constant attack, and is now rejected as a fable by most people in Western societies. Even some in the Church have rationalized the so-called “evidences” against the Flood, trying to reinterpret it as local event. This has been most unfortunate, because Noah's Flood is one of the most significant events in the history of the world, impacting interpretations in the physical sciences, history, archaeology and Biblical studies. My purpose here is to briefly review the implications on some of these fields of study.

1) Geology.¹ Clearly, if the Flood of Noah's day was a recent and worldwide event, it would have drastically affected the topography and geology of the entire planet. Major geological structures and topography are much better explained by recent catastrophism, not slow processes over eons of time. Mountain formation, ocean floor topography, plate tectonics, river valleys, volcanism, canyon formation, the formation of coal deposits, lakes and a plethora of other geologic features are dramatically impacted by the reality of a recent, cataclysmic Flood. The formation of these and many other structures will be misunderstood if not interpreted via a young earth/Flood model, a framework that the Bible plainly presents in its teaching. The dogma of uniformitarianism dominates all current paradigms, so the Flood is rejected out of hand. Additionally, the Flood is a very plausible triggering mechanism for the Ice Age, which required a set of unique and simultaneous circumstances unexplainable by uniformitarian principles.²

2) Biology. The Bible tells us that God sent two of each kind of land animal to the Ark so that they would be preserved during the Flood (Gn 6:19–20). When the Flood ended, the animals dispersed from “the mountains of Ararat” (Gn 8:4) and began to repopulate the planet. The history of animal habitat and genetic distribution across the planet must be understood in the context of the Flood and its immediate aftermath, or erroneous conclusions will result. The Flood or its subsequent effects serve to explain animal extinctions on a massive scale.³ This includes dinosaurs, which have been hijacked by the evolutionary establishment as a propaganda tool against the Scriptures. Most of the dinosaurs were simply unable to survive the adverse environmental conditions that existed after they left the Ark.

The Flood would also have drastically impacted the entirety of the plant kingdom, which most likely survived via floating mats of vegetation and other mechanisms. Since the Flood lasted for a period of 371 days, the carbon cycle of the entire earth was completely disrupted in a relatively short period of time. This state of affairs would drastically affect the results of C-14 dating methods as one moves back in history closer to the Flood. Rejecting the historicity of the Flood leads to erroneous assumptions built into the C-14/C-12 ratios⁴ needed to calculate dates. Again, ignoring the historicity of the Flood and its consequent effects on the entire planet leads to flawed conclusions.

3) Anthropology and Archaeology.⁵ Almost all current scientific paradigms assert that man evolved from primitive life forms into humans at some point in the distant past. This dogma is so deeply entrenched in the mind of the scientific community that no other paradigm will even be considered. Therefore, when “primitive” remains of ancient human societies are discovered, it is automatically assumed they are from an earlier time when man was less evolved. The Bible, however, plainly teaches that man was created fully formed and with a sophisticated intellect right at the beginning of creation (Mk 10:6, Gn 1:27). When God decided to judge the world because of its great wickedness (Gn 6:7, 2 Pt 2:4–5), Noah and seven others from his family were spared in the Ark. All human beings alive today are descendants of Noah's family. If this fact of history is rejected, once again false conclusions will be drawn.

Noah and his immediate descendants entered a brand new world, a world that had lost most of its technical knowledge and civilization. Although Noah and his sons were certainly quite intelligent, they did not carry the full knowledge of all human society wiped out in the Flood. In a real sense, they were starting over (much like a modern man being stranded on a deserted island, isolated from civilization, yet not a primitive brute), so the technologies and level of civilization of humanity were no doubt more “primitive” in the immediate post-Flood world. Living in caves and using more “primitive” tools to survive would have been perfectly logical for humans living in a new and barren world. Neolithic and other ancient remains predating the explosion of civilization in the third millennium BC therefore need to be reinterpreted in a post-Flood context.

The errors of evolutionary interpretations are further compounded by a rejection of the Tower of Babel incident (Gn 11), which fractured the human community and sent various people groups all across the globe. Genetic distribution in human culture was vastly affected by this event. People groups were separated because they could not communicate with one another and therefore the human gene pool was split apart. Cultural identity began with similarity of language and expanded to include physical fea-

tures such as skin color and various other physical, yet superficial, differences. Modern anthropology and archaeology are entrenched in a paradigm antithetical to the Biblical young earth/Flood/Babel paradigm and therefore have continuously drawn incorrect conclusions from the data in their respective fields.⁶

4) Biblical Studies—The Plain Meaning of the Text. One interesting aspect of the Genesis Flood is the unique use of language⁷ in Scripture when referring to the Flood.

In the Old Testament, the authors utilize a unique Hebrew word, *mabbûl*, when referring to the Flood. This word is used mainly in the Flood narrative, Genesis 6:17; 7:6–7, 10, 17; 9:11, 15. Genesis 9:28; 10:1, 32 and 11:10 utilize *mabbûl* when referring to the Flood as a past event. Psalm 29:10 is the only other passage in the Old Testament where *mabbûl* is found. This psalm of David describes the “voice of the LORD,” referring to His authority and power. In this context, David speaks of the LORD’s power over the mighty waters and the cedars of Lebanon. He continues in verse 10, “The LORD sits enthroned over the flood [*mabbûl*]; the LORD is enthroned as king forever.” The context asserts the great power and majesty of God, which is required to be in control of a cataclysm like Noah’s Flood.⁸

In the New Testament, we find several references to the Noachian Deluge. The unique Greek word used in these passages of Scripture is *kataklysmōs* and its derivatives. Strong’s Concordance defines this word as meaning “to dash, wash down, to deluge, surge of the sea, inundation, flood.”⁹ From this we derive the modern English word “cataclysm.”

Jesus describes the time of His return as analogous to that of the Flood in Matthew 24:38–39:

For in the days before the flood [*kataklysmōs*], people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood [*kataklysmōu*] came and took them all away.¹⁰

The immediate context indicates there will be universal and worldwide ignorance about the time of Jesus’ return, just as there was a universal and worldwide ignorance regarding the coming inundation in Noah’s day. A local flood was not in Jesus’ view.

The Apostle Peter certainly recognized the universal and cataclysmic nature of the Flood when he wrote:

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood [*kataklysmōn*] on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others...¹¹

Of further interest are references to the Flood in the Septuagint, the third century BC Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. In every instance where *mabbûl* appears in the Hebrew text, the Septuagint translators used *kataklysmōs* as the Greek translation. Genesis 7:6, 17; 9:11 are translated as *kataklysmōs*. Genesis 6:17; 9:15, 28; 10:1, 32; 11:10 and Psalm 29:10¹² are translated as *kataklysmōn*. Genesis 7:7, 10 and 9:11 are translated as *kataklysmōu*. In each instance, the Septuagint translators recognized the unique nature of Noah’s Flood and used derivatives of this specific Greek word to communicate that fact.

It appears that the New Testament authors picked up on this usage, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit continued us-

ing it when they authored the New Testament in the first century AD. Jesus Himself verified this usage when speaking of His return in Matthew 24 and Luke 17. For the Christian, there should be no doubt that Jesus verified this usage and its clear meaning (universal and cataclysmic, not local) by virtue of His absolute authority.¹³

This is just a small sampling of the impact of the Flood on Biblical studies and the historical realm of the physical sciences. In this issue of *Bible and Spade*, you will read research regarding the landing place of Noah’s Ark. It is ABR’s position that the Flood in Genesis 6–8 was a recent, global, cataclysmic event and there is no hermeneutical, exegetical or Biblical justification for reinterpreting it as some localized event in Mesopotamia.¹⁴ To do so is to contort the Biblical text in a way that cannot be justified. We must remain true to the plain meaning of Scripture. If we cannot fully understand how a universal, cataclysmic Flood occurred, we *must* still submit ourselves to the authority of Scripture and adopt the attitude of Martin Luther: “if you cannot understand how this was done...then grant the Holy Spirit the honor of being more learned than you are.”¹⁵

Noah’s Flood must be given its proper place in the history of the world and in Biblical history. Ignoring or dismissing its historicity impugns what God has plainly said, a serious sin indeed. The spiritual lessons are obvious as well. God is gracious and merciful, but takes sin very, very seriously. Let us give the Flood its proper place in our Biblical studies and as an important factor in developing a Biblical worldview.



Notes

¹ The most notable work on this subject is by Henry Morris and John Whitcomb in their classic *The Genesis Flood* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1961).

² See Michael Oard, *An Ice Age Caused by the Genesis Flood* (El Cajon, CA: Institute for Creation Research, 1990).

³ Some animals such as the woolly mammoth appear to have been wiped out in catastrophic events after the Flood. For a discussion on the woolly mammoth, see Michael Oard, *Frozen in Time* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004).

⁴ See Don Batten, ed., *The Answers Book* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2000), pp. 75–94.

⁵ “The Sumerian King List records the rulers of ancient Sumer in Mesopotamia prior to and following the flood.” (Genesis 5 and 11b—From Moses or Mesopotamia? *Bible and Spade* 1 [1972]: 84–86.)

⁶ For a detailed study of the Flood in the ANE context, see the four-part series in the 1996 issues of *Bible and Spade* by David T. Tsumura, “Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood” (*Bible and Spade* 9).

⁷ We should be careful about dogmatically asserting the inherent definition of words alone (especially when one **solely** looks at etymology), but in this section we see how references to the Flood are quite unique.

⁸ For further reading on Psalm 29:10 and the Flood, see John Wheeler, “Who Wrote Psalm 29: David or a Canaanite?” (*Bible and Spade* 5 [1992]: 28–33).

⁹ See James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), p. 40.

¹⁰ We find the Synoptic parallel in Luke 17:27, where *kataklysmōs* is once again used.

¹¹ 2 Peter 2:4–5. Peter’s reference to the Flood in 1 Peter 3:20 is undoubtedly universal, but he does not use *kataklysmōs* in that context.

¹² The Septuagint and the Hebrew Psalms differ by one chapter. This passage is found in Psalm 28:10 of the Septuagint.

¹³ Jesus’ absolute authority and supremacy over all existence are indelibly stamped on the pages of the New Testament, notably in Colossians 1:15–20.

¹⁴ Local flood eisegesis has even afflicted the NIV translators, readily apparent in reading the footnotes of the NIV in Genesis 6–8.

¹⁵ See Martin Luther, *What Martin Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), p. 1523. In this quote Luther is referring to the six days of Creation, but Luther’s attitude toward Scripture is my main point.

Mount Cudi— True Mountain of Noah's Ark

By Bill Crouse and Gordon Franz

(A defense of the Cudi Dag site has been published previously by Bill Crouse in *Archaeology and Biblical Research* vol. 5, #3, Summer 1992; *TJ* vol. 15(3); and in *The Explorers of Ararat*, edited by B.J. Corbin, chapter 7.)

For its historical claims the first eleven chapters of Genesis are possibly the most attacked section of the entire Bible, and the story deemed most implausible, without a doubt, is the story of Noah's Ark. That there could be such a great flood, a ship of 450-500 feet in length containing pairs of every air-breathing animal in the land, and only eight survivors, is usually treated by most critics as the equivalent of a nursery tale for children. Hence, it's no secret that theological liberals view the Biblical story of Noah's Ark as "the impossible voyage,"¹ and we suspect, for many evangelicals, the search for Noah's Ark constitutes "the impossible quest."² Though evangelicals fully believe that the Flood was a historical event, the attempt to discover the Ark's remains stretches credulity. The whole issue of the search for Noah's Ark is not helped by the fact that its "discovery" is frequently announced by a press that is not

only gullible, but also enables the spread of sensational stories by indulging those looking for a moment of publicity.

All would agree that the discovery of the Ark's remains would be a find unprecedented in the history of archaeology. Finding an artifact from antediluvian times would be second to none, with the potential to alter the currents of thinking in several disciplines. Nevertheless we do make such a claim, as we believe the German geologist, Dr. Friedrich Bender, discovered remains of Noah's Ark of the Biblical Flood story in 1953. His scientific test results, coupled with other historical studies presented here, give credence to the idea that the final berth of Noah's ship has, in fact, been located. (See the Bender article later in this issue.)

The modern search for Noah's Ark began in 1948 when an alleged eyewitness claimed he stumbled onto the Ark high on the snowcap of Mt. Ararat (Smith 1950: 10). Since then others have made similar claims. Based on these alleged eyewitness accounts, many expeditions have been launched, innumerable hours have been spent in research, and large sums have been spent trying to verify what many critics said was a waste of time.³



Bill Crouse

Mt. Ararat in northeastern Turkey. The Ahora Gorge is clearly seen in this view of the northern side of the mountain. Though this towering volcanic peak, having a permanent snowcap from about 14,000 ft to its summit at 16,945 ft, is the focus of most modern searches for Noah's Ark, it does not have the support of the historical sources we find for Mt. Cudi.



NASA

Location of Mt. Cudi relative to other landmarks in Turkey. Mt. Cudi has been circled in red; Mt. Ararat is the peak circled in blue. Lake Van lies between them, with the Black Sea and Caspian Sea at the top left and right respectively. Note the many snow-capped peaks of the “mountains of Ararat” in the central part of the photo.

For the most part, the search has been confined to the massive 16,945 ft (5165 m) Mt. Ararat in northeastern Turkey. Despite Herculean efforts and countless heroic attempts, no Ark remains have ever been properly verified at this location. We believe there are a number of reasons why these efforts failed.

First, there is the mistaken belief by many that the Bible designates Mt. Ararat as the landing place.⁴ Contrary to this belief, the author of Genesis does not designate a specific mountain. As most of our readers are already aware, the 8:4 passage refers only to a mountainous region, i.e., the mountains of Ararat, הַר אֲרָרָה.⁵ No exact peak is referred to. The earliest reference to this region outside of the Bible is Assyrian in origin, and it referred to the mountainous territory directly north of the Assyrian kingdom.⁶ It is the consensus among scholars that the Urartian state at the time Genesis was written (assuming the authorship of Genesis ca. 13th to 15th centuries) did not extend as far north as the present-day Mt. Ararat.⁷ W.F. Albright, known as the dean of Biblical archaeologists, wrote:

There is no basis either in biblical geography or in later tradition for the claim that Mount Ararat (the mountain bearing this name in modern times) is the location of the settling of the ark. (Genesis 8:4 says the Ark “rested...upon the *mountains* of Ararat.”) (1969: 48).

Secondly, the searchers proclaim the sheer number of sightings that have been on Mt. Ararat, particularly during WW II. They argue, “Where there is smoke, there must be fire.” However, these numerous eyewitness accounts have not been helpful in locating the lost artifact. The accounts are often contradictory, and under close scrutiny, most are suspect. There exists an incredible amount of lost documents, lost photos, and lost witnesses. Accompany-

ing the missing evidence and contradictory testimony are many implausible *ad hoc* arguments. A few of the sightings have been made by pilots who appear to be of reputable character. However, these sightings, in our opinion, are explainable by the fact that the mountain has an abundance of large blocks of volcanically-produced basalt, and when seen under the right conditions, they can easily resemble a huge barge. Photographs of some of these formations are enough to take your breath away!⁸

Third, the mountain is a volcano with no alluvial evidence. While there is sedimentation on the mountain, it is from volcanic action and not from flooding. This is a very stubborn fact that cannot readily be explained, had a great flood once inundated the mountain.

Fourthly, Mt. Ararat has been thoroughly searched over the last 50 years. Neither fixed-winged aircraft, helicopters, nor satellite imagery have turned up any undeniable evidence.⁹

In this article we would like to propose another site located in the Cudi Mountains in southeast Turkey, just east-northeast of the Turkish city of Cizre.¹⁰ This site is not only well attested by ancient tradition and an abundance of literature, but by some well known authorities in archaeology. We will go so far as to say that the location of the Ark’s ruins was well known in this region up until about the end of the first millennium AD. Ancient chroniclers recount that it was a site for pilgrims and rites of veneration and worship (Ritter 1844: 154). Consequently, over the millennia, pilgrims carried off pieces of the Ark for relics and talismans as would be expected, and by the seventh century AD, according to one account, its final remaining beams were carried off for the construction of a mosque (Komroff, ed. 1989: 284). After this, its secret seems to be remembered only by the local villagers as the scene shifts to Agri Dagh, or Mt. Ararat as it was later to become known. Hence, from about the 13th century, that

majestic, 16,945 ft (5165 m), snow-capped mountain, which many of the ancients said could not be climbed, became the focus of the Noah's Ark traditions.

To the Armenians, present-day Ararat was always called Masis.¹¹ From antiquity to the present, the Turks have called it Agri Dagh. We must, however, note that there is at least one clear exception. The fifth century historian, Philostorgius (c. 368–c. 439), makes the following geographical observation:

The Euphrates, however, to all appearance, takes its rise among the Armenians; in this region stands the Mount of Ararat, so called even to the present day by the Armenians, —the same mount on which the Holy Scripture says that the ark rested. Many fragments of the wood and nails of which the ark was composed are said to be still preserved in those localities. This is the place where the Euphrates takes its rise (Book III, Chapter 8).

If the Armenians called it “Ararat” at this early date, we have no other evidence for it. We believe there is reason to doubt the accuracy of Philostorgius at this point. While he is certainly correct here in his description of the source of the Euphrates being near Mt. Ararat, he is notorious for his inaccurate geography in the corpus of his works (Cross 1974: 1086). It seems rather strange that he would be in disagreement with many others of the same time period. After him we find no other clear references till the middle of the 13th century. When Marco Polo traveled past Ararat in the 13th century on his way east, he was told by the locals that the mountain sheltered the Ark of Noah (Polo 1968: 34). This suggests that the tradition arose some time prior to Polo's trip, and by the end of the 14th century it seems to have become fairly well established.¹² Prior to this time, the ancients argued that the remains of the Ark of Noah could be found on another mountain currently known as Cudi Dagh. Let us now look at the evidence from what we believe are those compelling ancient sources.

Cudi Dagh is located approximately 202 mi (325 km) south of Mt. Ararat in southern Turkey and within 9.3 mi (15 km) east-north-east of Cizre, and within sight of the Syrian and Iraqi borders. The Tigris River flows at its base. The coordinates are 37 degrees, 23 minutes N, and 42 degrees, 26 minutes E. In the literature there are many variant spellings, but all are cognates.

Over the centuries it has been called Mt. Judi, Mt. Cardu, Mt. Quardu, Mt. Kardu, the Gordyene mountains, the Gordian mountains, the Karduchian mountains, the mountains of the Kurds, and to the Assyrians, Mt. Nipur.¹³ It is also important to note that at times this mountain has even been called

Mt. Ararat.¹⁴ At about 6853 ft (2089 m) it is not a terribly high mountain, though it is often snow-capped most of the year.

Cudi Dagh overlooks the all-important Mesopotamian plain and is notable for its many archaeological ruins in and around the mountain. There are also many references to it in ancient history. Sennacherib (late seventh century BC), the powerful Assyrian king, carved rock reliefs of his victories in battle in the vicinity (King 1913).¹⁵ The Nestorians, a sect of Christianity, built several monasteries around the mountain, including one on the summit called the Cloister of the Ark; it was destroyed by lightning in AD 766.¹⁶ The Muslims later built a mosque on the site. In 1910, Gertrude Bell explored the area and found a stone structure still at the summit in the shape of a ship, called by the locals *Sefinet Nebi Nuh*, the Ship of Noah. Bell also reported that annually on September 14, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sabians and Yezidis gathered on the mountain to commemorate Noah's sacrifice (Bell 2002: 289–294).

The evidence for this site as the landing place of Noah's Ark, coupled with the findings of Bender, is compelling. If all we had to go by were the ancient references, the evidence for this site easily outweighs the evidence in the literature for Mt. Ararat. Some of the more important ancient witnesses to this alternate location are the following.

Jewish Literature

The Samaritan Pentateuch

This manuscript contains the first five books of the Old Testament and puts the landing place of Noah's Ark in the Kurdish



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Mt. Cudi, looking east. This rather low peak, at 6853 ft in elevation, overlooks the Mesopotamian plain and has a great deal of support in historical sources as the Mountain of the Ark.

mountains north of Assyria. The Samaritan Pentateuch was the Bible used by the Samaritans, a Jewish sect which separated from the Jews about the fifth century BC. Ancestry-wise they were of mixed blood, dating back to the time the Assyrians deported many from the Northern Kingdom. The Assyrians then colonized the area with citizens from that country. The Samaritans were the result of the intermarriage between the Jews who were not deported and these new Assyrian colonists. Their version of the Pentateuch shows a definite propensity to update geographical places and harmonize difficult passages.¹⁷ There is much evidence that the Samaritan Pentateuch was formulated during the fifth century BC, though the earliest manuscript extant today dates to about the 10th century AD. Even though this reference does not mention a specific mountain, it does narrow it down considerably to a mountain range north of Assyria. There is some evidence that these Hebrew tribesmen from the northern kingdom populated the area in and around Cudi Dagh.¹⁸

The Targums

The targums are paraphrases in Aramaic that were made for the Jews after they returned from the captivity in Babylon (see Neh 8:8). After their long captivity many of the Jews forgot their native tongue (Hebrew), only understanding the Aramaic language



Google Earth
Satellite view of Mt. Cudi, circled in red. It is at the northern edge of the Mesopotamian plain, near Cizre and Silopi.

of their former captors. These paraphrases were originally oral. They were rather loose paraphrases, and in some instances were like running commentaries. The targums later attained a fixed form and were written down and preserved. They give Bible scholars a valuable tool for textual criticism and interpretation. Three of these targums at the Gn 8:4 reference (Onkelos, Neofiti, and pseudo-Jonathan) put the landing place of the Ark in the Qardu (קָרְדָּו, i.e., Kurdish) mountains.¹⁹ It is possible they did not know of the kingdom of Urartu (Ararat) by this time, since it had ceased to exist around the seventh century BC (Lang 1980: 13).

The Book of Jubilees

This book belongs to a group of writings known as the Pseudepigrapha. Scholars date it about the middle of the second century BC (Charlesworth 1985: vol. II, 44). It has been called the “Little Genesis” and is known for its extensive geographical details. Scholars believe it was originally composed in Hebrew, but only fragments of the Hebrew text remain. The English translations were made from a combination of Ethiopic, Syriac (eastern Aramaic), and Latin texts. The author of *Jubilees* men-



Gertrude Bell

Stone structure called by the locals “Sefinet Nebi Nuh,” the Ship of Noah.

tions the landing place of the Ark on several occasions as being on “the top of Lubar (לִּבְרָ) one of the mountains of Ararat” (5:28). In 7:1 he says, “Noah planted a vine on the mountain on which the ark rested, whose name is Lubar, (one) of the mountains of Ararat.”²⁰ Later the author writes that Noah’s three sons built three cities “near Mt. Lubar” (7:17). Finally, the author tells us that when Noah died, he was “buried on Mt. Lubar in the land of Ararat” (10:15). This designation for the landing-place of the Ark is a mystery, and it seems to have originated with the *Book of Jubilees*. If it could be known, the *Genesis Apocryphon*, which is missing the text at Gn. 8:4, might also give Lubar as the site of the Ark’s landing since it names it as the place where Noah planted the vine. Other literature, papyri 4QpsDn and 6Q8, and the Midrashic *Book of Noah*, likewise, give this name. Later, Epiphanius (fourth century) and Syncellus (ninth century) assign this name to the mountain of the Ark. Sayce suggests that the *lu* may come from another ancient name of the Urartian region, which when combined with *baris* yields *lubar* (Sayce 1882: 389). Steiner believes that since some of the documents noted above were in Aramaic, the etymology of the word should be sought there. He notes that there is an Elephantine document of the fifth century BC where the word *lubar* is descriptive of a piece of wood used to repair a boat. He also notes the relationship of *lubar* to *labiru* in Akkadian, probably a cognate word used to describe wood. While there is some uncertainty, *lubar* seems more likely to point to the southern region than to Mt. Ararat (Steiner 1991: 248). Cassuto is also of the opinion that Mount Lubar is possibly identical to the Baris of Nicholas (Cassuto, 1965, 105).

Josephus

His writings date from the late first century AD. Josephus was a man of Jewish birth, but was loyal to the Roman Empire. He was a man of great intellect and a contemporary of the Apostle Paul. As an official historian of the Jews for the Roman Empire, he had access to all the archives and libraries of the day. He mentions the remains of Noah’s Ark, and where it landed, on several occasions.

Then the ark settled on a mountain-top in Armenia...Noah, thus learning that the earth was delivered from the flood, waited yet seven days, and then let the animals out of the ark, went forth himself with his family, sacrificed to God and feasted with his household. The Armenians call that spot the Landing-place, for it was there that the ark came safe to land, and they show the relics of it to this day (*Antiquities* I: 90–92: LCL 4: 43, 45).

It is interesting that Josephus says the remains of the Ark existed in his day, though he himself was not an eyewitness of them. Also, his mention of an unknown Armenian source is intriguing, even the fact that he calls them Armenians. They were first called Armenians by the Greek historian Hecataeus (from Miletus), who wrote of the *Armenoi* in the sixth century BC.²¹ Josephus, who also undoubtedly used the Septuagint (the Greek version of the



Gertrude Bell

Carved rock relief of King Sennacherib, commemorating one of his military victories.

OT, translated about 200 BC), knew that it substituted “Armenia” for “Ararat” where it occurs in the Hebrew original in Is 37:38. At the time Josephus wrote, near the end of the first century AD, the Armenians were officially still a pagan nation. However, there is a tradition that some Armenians had been converted by this time through the missionary efforts of the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus (Lynch 1990: 276–77). The big question is, was Josephus quoting Christian Armenians at this early date, or were these pagan Armenians of which he spoke? The answer could be significant if the Armenians had this tradition before they officially converted to Christianity as a nation in 301.

Concerning the Armenian name for the landing place, William Whiston, in his translation of Josephus, has the following footnote:

This *Apobaterion*, or *Place of Descent*, is the proper rendering of the Armenian name of this very city. It is called in Ptolemy Naxuana, and by Moses Chorenensis, the Armenian historian, *Idsheuan*; but at the place itself *Nachidsheuan*, which signifies *The first place of descent*, and is a lasting monument of the preservation of Noah in the ark, upon the top of that mountain, at whose foot it was built, as the first city or town after the flood. See *Antiq. B. XX. Ch. 2. sect. 3*; and Moses Chorenensis, who also says elsewhere, that another town was related by tradition to have been called Seron, or, *The Place of Dispersion*, on account of the dispersion of Xisuthrus’s or Noah’s sons, from thence first made. Whether any remains of this ark be still preserved, as the people of the country suppose, I cannot certainly tell. Mons. Tournefort had, not very long since, a mind to see the place himself, but met with too great dangers and difficulties to venture through them (Whiston trans. 1998 reprint: 38).

Whiston wants to identify the *apobaterion*, “the place of descent,” with the modern city of Nakhichevan situated about 65 mi (105 km) southeast of Ararat in Azerbaijan. Ark researchers

in the past have used this footnote as a seemingly early (100 AD) evidence for Mt. Ararat being the site for the Ark's landing place. However, we must ask if this is the intent of Josephus, or actually the 19th century (1867) interpretation of Whiston? There seems to be linguistic and other evidence that the latter is the case. First of all, to identify the current Mt. Ararat as the landing place of the Ark, as per the footnote of Whiston, is contrary to Josephus clearly identifying it elsewhere as a mountain in Gordyene. Second, the early Armenian historians identified the Gordyene (Gortuk) mountains as the landing place of Noah's Ark at least up to the 10th century. Thirdly, according to the Armenian language scholar Heinrich Hübschmann, the city of Nakhichavan, which does mean "Place of First Descent" in Armenian, was not known by that name in antiquity. Rather, he says the present-day name evolved to "Nakhichavan" from "Naxcavan." The prefix *Naxc* was a name, and *avan* is Armenian for "town." It was not known as Nakhichavan until the 10th century (Hübschmann 1901: V: 73).²²

The second quote follows right after the first, and is perhaps the most important reference, and is largely from the above-mentioned Chaldean priest, Berossus. We quote here the entire paragraph:

This flood and the ark are mentioned by all who have written histories of the barbarians. Among these is Berosus the Chaldean, who in his description of the events of the flood writes somewhere as follows: 'It is said, moreover, that a portion of the vessel still survives in Armenia on the mountain of the Cordyaeans, and that persons carry off pieces of the bitumen, which they use as talismans.' These matters are mentioned by Hieronymus the Egyptian, author of the ancient history of Phoenicia, by Mnaseas and by many others. Nicolas of Damascus in his ninety-sixth book relates the story as follows: 'There is above Minyas in Armenia a great mountain called Baris, where, as the story goes, many refugees found safety at the time of the flood, and one man transported upon an ark, grounded upon the summit; and relics of the timber were for long preserved; this might well be the same man of whom Moses the Jewish legislator, wrote' (*Antiquities* I: 93–95; LCL 4: 45, 47).

Again, note that Josephus is not an eyewitness, rather he is quoting all the ancient authorities he had access to, most of which are no longer extant, and indeed are known only from his quotations of them.²³ It is impressive to us that Josephus seems to indicate there is a consensus among the historians of his day, not only about the remains of the Ark still existing, but also concerning the location.

Josephus, in order to more specifically locate the Ark's remains, quotes the work of Nicholas of Damascus, friend and biographer of Herod the Great and the Roman Emperor Augustus. Nicholas claimed that he put great labor into his historical studies and apparently had access to many resources. It is possible he was one of Josephus' main sources. His story of the Flood, however, does deviate from the Biblical account in that he has some surviving the Flood outside the Ark. His location for the final resting place of the Ark seems to be in harmony with the Gordyene, i.e., the Cudi site. He claims the Ark landed above Minyas on a great mountain in Armenia. According to ancient geographers, Minyas (same as Mannea, or Minni) was a country slightly below and to the east of Armenia, below present day Lake Urmia. Louis Levine says the land of Mannea

...extended from Parsua in the south to Urartu in the north, and that it bordered Zamua and Assyria in the west. The eastern extent of the Mannea is indeterminable. In terms of the modern map, Mannea extended from the shores of Lake Urmia in the north to the Lake Zeribar region in the south, and the *chaîne magistrale* of the Zagros probably acted as its western frontier (Levine 1973: 116).

The name Nicholas gives this mountain, Baris, however, is a mystery. According to Lloyd Bailey, the Greek word *baris* means "height" or "tower," and even "boat" (Bailey 1989: 216)! Others identify Baris with Lubar, as mentioned earlier.

The third reference to the remains of the Ark is found in *Antiquities* 20: 24, 25:

Monobazus, being now old and seeing that he had not long to live, desired to lay eyes on his son before he died. He therefore sent for him, gave him the warmest of welcomes and presented him with a district called Carron. The land there has excellent soil for the production of amomum in the greatest of abundance; It also possesses the remains of the ark in which report has it that Noah was saved from the flood—remains which to this day are shown to those who are curious to see them (LCL 10: 15).

The context of this incidental citation of the Ark's remains has to do with a certain royal family in the Kingdom of Adiabene, of which the King and Queen were converts to Judaism. The capital of this kingdom was at Arbela (modern-day Erbil in Iraq). In the immediate context of the above citation, Monobazus, the man who converted, gives his son Izates the land of Carron. The clues given as to the location of the Ark's remains in this passage are not unequivocal. The remains are said to be somewhere in a country called Carron, which must be found in the greater country of Adiabene. Why? Because the king could not have given what was not his, Carron must be found within the kingdom of Adiabene.

It is fairly certain that Adiabene is bounded by the Tigris on the west and the Upper (north) and Lower (south) Zab Rivers. Today this would be largely northeastern Iraq but would include the Cudi Mountain range. The land of Carron presents some difficulties. It is mentioned only by Josephus. There does seem to be some doubt about the text here since the Loeb edition emends the text to read "Gordyene." Note how easy it would have been for someone reading a hand-written Hebrew text (assuming he was) to make a mistake: קרדו = *kardou*. Here is what the Greek word *kar rwn* (*Carron*) would look like in Hebrew: קררר. Notice the subtle difference of the *daleth* and the *resh*. If Josephus did misread these two similar letters in the Hebrew alphabet, then he is not giving us a second location for the remains of Noah's Ark. He may have associated Adiabene with Gordyene since they were next to each other. Bailey believes there is precedent for this (Bailey 1989: 66). Pliny, the Elder, a Roman author and contemporary of Josephus, places the city of Nisibis in Adiabene when it is actually located to the west of Gordyene (Pliny 6.16). It is interesting to note also that Hippolytus (second century AD) agrees. He says, "The relics of the Ark are...shown to this day in the mountains called Ararat, which are situated in the direction of the country of Adiabene." This would be correct since he wrote from Rome (Hippolytus, second-third century: 149).

A fourth reference in Josephus is found in *Against Apion* (1.20:

130), where he reiterates his earlier reference to Berossus. He notes that

This author, following the most ancient records, has, like Moses, described the flood and the destruction of mankind thereby, and told of the ark in which Noah, the founder of our race, was saved when it landed on the heights of the mountains of Armenia (LCL 1: 215).

We find it interesting that in this passage Josephus believes he was quoting from “some ancient records,” and, that he corrects Berossus by changing the name of the hero from Xisuthrus to Noah.

From the above references, there seem to be grounds for arguing that Josephus pinpoints the Gordyene site (Cudi Dagh) as the landing place of Noah’s Ark. While we cannot say this with absolute certainty, we feel we can conclude that *nowhere* does Josephus say anything definitive that might lead us to assume that present-day Mt. Ararat is in view. We also disagree with Bailey, who believes that Josephus gives three different locations for the Ark’s final resting place (Bailey 1989: 66).

Benjamin of Tudela

Writing in the 12th century, he says he traveled two days to Jezireh Ben Omar, an island in the Tigris on the foot of Mt. Ararat...on which the ark of Noah rested. Omar Ben al-Khatib removed the Ark from the summit of the two mountains and made a mosque of it (Komroff ed. 1989: 284). The ruins of this city, Jezireh Ben Omar, are located at the foot of Cudi Dagh, now the modern Turkish city of Cizre. Here also is evidence that this mountain was also called Mt. Ararat. What he could mean by the “two mountains” is somewhat problematic. The Cudi Mountain range does have two higher peaks that are of similar altitude, though the reference still is uncertain.

Pagan

Berossus

A Chaldean priest of Bel and historian writing in the third century BC, Berossus shows the influence of a Hellenistic Mesopotamia. His major work, *Babyloniaca*,²⁴ was published about 275–280 BC, but only survived insofar as it was quoted (mostly third-hand) by others—by Alexander Polyhistor, a first century BC Greek historian and native of Miletus, and by Josephus at the end of the first century AD, as already noted. He is also quoted by a few others as late as the ninth century AD (Syncellus). He wrote in Greek, but according to Komoroczy, he knew Akkadian. If he was priest of the Esagila, he also had to know some Sumerian. And in the Marduk temple of Babylon he could also study the texts in cuneiform writing (Komoroczy 1973: 127–128). Berossus’ account borrows heavily from the Babylonian version of the Flood account as one would expect. He notes that a portion of the ship which came to rest in Armenia still remains in the mountains of the Korduaians of Armenia, and some of the people, scraping off pieces of bitumen from the ship, bring them back and use them as talismans (Burstein 1978: 21). Some believe that Berossus was acquainted with both the Hebrew version, which puts the Ark in Armenia (Urartu), and a Babylonian text that puts the Ark in the Gordyean Mountains. They conclude the reason he mentions both

territories is that he is trying to reconcile the two accounts (Parrot 1953: 61). This may be true, but it is an argument from silence. The fact is, this location, Cudi Dagh, is both in the Gordyean Mountains *and* within the borders of ancient Armenia (Urartu).²⁵ It may be that Berossus is just trying to be precise!

The very fact that he narrows the location to Armenia, in light of the Babylonian Flood story that locates the landing place on Mt. Nisir, is an intriguing thing to consider. To clarify the point, Berossus, who had the Babylonian account in front of him, knows that his Babylonian text says “on the mountain of Nisir the boat held fast” (Gilgamesh 1972: 111), but does not in his own account write that the Ark’s landing was on Nisir!²⁶

Christian Sources

Theophilus of Antioch of Syria

He was the Bishop at Antioch, a city not too far removed from the Cudi site. He does not mention it by name, but notes that “the remains are to this day to be seen in the Arabian mountains” (*ad Autolyicum*, lib. iii, c. 91). It is not likely that the great Bishop is referring to the mountains of Saudi Arabia. The Greek word *arabia*, in the strict sense of the term, means “desert” or “wilderness,” and during the early second century it often referred to the desert areas east of Syria (Arndt and Gingrich 1957: 103). Cudi Dagh is not directly east of Syria, but if you go east from the northernmost tip of Syria you would be right at Cudi Dagh. It is not a positive directive, but most certainly does not refer to Saudi Arabia or Mt. Ararat.

Julius Africanus

He lived in the first half of the third century. He may have been born in Jerusalem. His major work was a history of the world in five volumes, some of which survived in the writings of Eusebius, and later in Syncellus. In the section describing the deluge in the extant writings of Julius, he states: And Noe was 600 years old when the flood came on. And when the water abated, the ark settled on the mountains of Ararat, which we *know* [emphasis ours] to be in Parthia; but some say that they are at Celanena of Phrygia, and I have seen both places (1994:6:131). Some are quick to say Africanus was mistaken, but in fact, the Parthian Empire lasted into the first part of the third century and did extend eastward into the area of Cudi Dagh.

Eusebius

Bishop of Caesarea in the third century AD, he was the first great historian of the church, and in his two-volume work *Chronicle*, he notes that a small part of the Ark still remains in the Gordian Mountains (Eusebius 1818 : 1: 36–37). This seems to be a clear reference to this southern mountain range.

The Peshitta

The Peshitta is a version of the entire Bible made for the Syrian Christians. Scholars are not sure exactly when it was translated, but it shows up for the first time around the beginning of the fifth century AD; however, Syriac versions of the Pentateuch may have been circulating as early as the middle of the first century (Harrison 241: 1969). In Genesis 8:4 it reads “mountains of Qardu”

for the resting place of Noah's Ark. This version also shows a definite influence by the targums mentioned above.

Faustus of Byzantium

Faustus was a historian of the fourth century AD. Very little is known about him except that he was one of the early historians of Armenia, though he was of Greek origin. His original work is lost but has survived through translations. It is from Faustus that we first hear the story of St. Jacob (Hagop) of Nisibis, the godly monk who asks God to see the Ark (Garsoian, Book III, Chap. XIV, 87: 1989). After repeatedly failing to climb the mountain, an angel rewards him with a piece of wood from the Ark. It is this story that is oft-quoted in succeeding centuries, and the location given for the event in these later sources is the Mt. Ararat of the north. However, please note, Faustus, the one who presumably originated the story, puts this event not on Mt. Ararat of the north, but in the canton of Gordukh in southern Armenia. The St. Jacob of the story was the Bishop of Nisibis (modern Nusaybin), a city which is only about 75 mi (120 km) from Cudi Dagh.²⁷

Mt. Ararat, to the bishop, was a mountain far to the north. If Faustus had meant this mountain, he undoubtedly would have called it by its Armenian name of Massis, as he does elsewhere in his work (Garsoian, Book III, Chap. XX, 96: 1989). As noted earlier, Armenian historians are in agreement that the early Armenian traditions indicated the southern location as the landing place of the Ark (Thompson 1985: 81). From the 13th century, however, all Armenian sources support the northern location as the landing place of the Ark.

Wouldn't it be strange for the Syrian bishop to ignore what his own Syrian Bible told him was the landing place of Noah's Ark? Also, St. Jacob's own student, St. Ephraem, refers to the site of the landing as "the mountains of Qardu." It is hard to believe that one of his intimates could be that confused! The natives of the area, even as late as the beginning of the 20th century, tell the story of St. Jacob the Bishop and similar traditions associated with Mt. Ararat, i.e. the city built by Noah and his grave, etc. (Bell 2002: 293).

Epiphanius

The Bishop of Salamis, Epiphanius was born in Palestine and was a fierce opponent of heresy in the fourth century AD. On two occasions he mentions that the Ark landed "in the mountains of Ararat in the midst of Armenia and Gordyene on a mountain called Lubar" (*Panarion* I.i.4). In fact, he says the remains are still shown, and that if one looks diligently he can still find the altar of Noah. He seems to be acquainted with the Jewish writings, notably the tradition of *Jubilees* (noted earlier), in that he puts the Ark specifically on a mountain called Lubar. What he adds here is a slight measure of exactness when he comments that it is in the "midst," "middle," or "between" Armenia and Gordyene.

Chrysostom

He was known for his oratory and was the patriarch of Constantinople in the fourth century. While he does not get very specific, it is notable that he says you can still go there and view the remains. He writes in one of his sermons:

Let us therefore ask them (the unbelieving): Have you heard

of the Flood—of that universal destruction? That was not a threat, was it? Did it not really come to pass—was not this mighty work carried out? Do not the mountains of Armenia testify to it, where the Ark rested? And are not the remains of the Ark preserved there to this very day for our admonition? (Sermon, "On Perfect Charity," trans. John W. Montgomery, *The Quest For Noah's Ark*, p. 73.)

Chrysostom seems to be saying, "If you don't believe God will judge again, you can still go and see the evidence for his judgment in the past."

Isidore of Seville

He was the Archbishop of Seville, Spain. He wrote in the sixth and seventh centuries, and was known as a very careful scholar of the Middle Ages. In his compilation of all knowledge (*summa*) he writes: "Ararat is a mountain in Armenia, where historians testify that the Ark came to rest after the Flood. So even to this day wood remains of it are to be seen there" (Lindsey 1911: 14, 8, 5).

Eutychius

Patriarch of Alexandria in the ninth and 10th centuries and of Arabic origin, he had a background in medicine before he became a leader in the church. His most important work is *Nazm al-Gewahir* (Chaplet of Pearls), a history of the world from Adam to 938. He says, "The Ark rested on the mountains of Ararat, that is Jabal Judi near Mosul" (Eutychius, 41). Mosul is a city near ancient Ninevah about 81 mi (130 km) south of Cudi Dagh. This is a very precise geographical reference. He may have been influenced by the Quran, but he specifically adds the referent "Mosul."

As noted earlier, sometime around the 10th and 13th centuries, Christian sources begin to point more specifically to Mt. Ararat of the north as the landing place.

Muslim Sources

The Quran

The Quran, dating from the seventh century, says: "The Ark came to rest upon Jebel al Judi..." (Houd 11:44). The modern *Muslim Encyclopedia* is familiar with the early traditions that the Ark came to rest on Cudi Dagh. However, the writer of the article under *Jebel Judi* believes Mohammed was referring to the Judi Mountains in Saudi Arabia. This is not certain. Mohammed was very familiar with Christian and Jewish traditions, not to mention the fact that he may well have traveled to this area during his days as a merchant. In the English translation of the Quran made by George Sale in 1734, a footnote concerning the landing place of the Ark states that the Quran is following an ancient tradition (Sale 1734: 195, 496; Weil 1846: 54). At least the following Muslim sources seem to agree.

Al-Mas'udi

A 10th century Muslim scholar and native of Baghdad, he was known for his travels. "...[T]he ark stood on the mount el-Judi. El-Judi is a mountain in the country Masur, and extends to Jezirah Ibn 'Omar which belongs to the territory of el-Mausil. The

mountain is eight farasangs [about 30 mi (48 km) - ed.]²⁸ from the Tigris. The place where the ship stopped, which is on the top of this mountain, is still seen” (Young 32). This puts one right on Cudi Dagh! Remains were still seen in the 10th century, and notice his precision about the location.

Ibn Haukal

He was also a 10th century native of Baghdad, and an early Muslim geographer. He places Cudi near the town of Nesbin (modern Nusaybin) and mentions that Noah built a village at the foot of the mountain. As earlier noted, Nusaybin is about 75 mi (120 km) west of the site.

Ibn al-Amid or al-Macin

In his 13th century history of the Saracens, he informs us that the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius, climbed Mount Judi to see the site in the seventh century after he conquered the Persians. He does not mention whether or not he was giving an eyewitness account (Erpenius 1625).

Zakariya ibn Muhammad al Qazvini

He was a Muslim geographer of the 13th century from modern Qazvin, Iran. He was not a traveler, but compiled his two major works from the writings of others. He reports that wood from the Ark was still seen on Cudi Dagh as late as the Abbasid period (eighth and ninth centuries AD) (Hamd-Allah Mustawfi, 1340, trans. by G. Le Strange, 1919, 184). He reports that wood was removed and used to construct a monastery (others say a “mosque”).

The ancient references cited above—pagan, Jewish, Christian and Islamic—seem to clearly point to a long and old tradition that the Ark of Noah landed in a mountain range north of Assyria, a site that was both within the ancient region and kingdom of Urartu, as noted in Gn 8:4, and within the land of Armenia and Kurdistan. While it may not be conclusive in itself, it certainly is more compelling than the rather late and questionable evidence in support of present-day Mt. Ararat.

Along with these ancient voices are numerous historians and archaeologists who achieved some authority for the quality of their work. As an example, Claudius James Rich, a scholar and traveler who visited the area early in the 19th century, wrote in a footnote:

The Mahometans universally maintain that it was on Mount Judi the ark first rested, and that *it* is Ararat, and not the mountain to which that name is given in Armenia. Don Calmet, *Storia del Nuovo Testamento*, p. 275, says, “Monobazes, King of Adiabene, gave his younger son Izates the government of Keron or Kairoun, a country where they showed the remains of the ark.” Calmet supposes from this that the country must have been near Mount Ararat in Armenia: —he is not aware of this tradition, which places the ark on Mount Judi, or Cardoo, which is evidently the Keron here mentioned. Hussein Aga maintained to me that he has with his own eyes seen the remains of Noah’s Ark. He went to a Christian village, whence he ascended by a steep road of an hour to the summit, on which he saw the remains of a very large vessel of wood almost entirely rotted, with nails of a foot long still remaining. In the third volume of

Assemanni, p. 214, occurs the following expression: “There is a monastery on the summit of Mount Cardu, or Ararat. St. Epiphanius attests that, in his time, remains of the ark still existed, and speaks of relics of Noah’s Ark being found in ‘Cardiaerum Regiones’” (Rich 1836: 2: 123–124 footnote).

Please note that Rich cites an eyewitness who saw remains as late as the 19th century.

Israel Joseph Benjamin was a Jewish scholar and traveler who adopted the name “Benjamin the Second” after the famous Jewish traveler, Benjamin of Tudela, who lived in the 12th century AD. He traveled throughout the Ottoman Empire looking for Jewish communities. While visiting Kurdistan in the 19th century, he wrote:

Six hours’ journey from the town rises the summit of a great mountain, which joins the chain of mountains of Kurdistan. The Jews believe that this is Ararat, and that here the Ark of Noah rested after the Deluge. If this really be true the place is very remarkable for its ancient associations. We find in the Bible the word Ararat, which the Targum Onkelos translates by Touri Kardu (mountain of Kurdistan); from which the country received its name. The mountain is very steep, almost perpendicular, and it takes six hours to reach the summit from the bottom. Wonderful things are here related of the Deluge. One of the Kurdish tribes annually towards the end of June, ascends the mountain, and spends there the whole day in devotional exercises, they use on the occasion large lighted torches. They believe themselves descended from the royal house of Sennacherib; and retain the tradition that King Sennacherib himself had divine service performed in memory of the Ark. On descending the mountain they bring with them some remains of the Ark, which according to their assertion, is still deeply buried in the earth. The little pieces received are in the form of planks; some whitish grey; some black and pierced with holes. It is not possible for me to give a more accurate account of this Kurdish ceremony; for it did not take place during my stay; and I can only repeat what I heard in answer to my questions.

At the base of the mountain stand four stone pillars, which, according to the people residing here, formerly belonged to an ancient altar. This altar is believed to be that which Noah built on coming out of the Ark. They likewise assert that his remains are buried in this vicinity; they do not however specify the exact spot. I myself obtained several fragments of the Ark which appeared to be covered with a kind of substance resembling tar; but of these, as well as of many other things, I was robbed between Bagdad and Constantinople...(Benjamin 1863: 93–94).

Benjamin himself was given a piece of the ruins from the site, which he said had the appearance of tar on it.

W.A. Wigram, author of numerous histories of the area around Cudi Dagh and the Assyrian Church, wrote in 1914:

Still, of all survivals from early ages in this land, whether monumental, superstitious, or religious, none is more remarkable than the “Sacrifice of Noah.” It must be understood that

no people here, save the Armenians, look on the great cone which we call Ararat, but which is locally known as Aghri Dagh, as the spot where the ark rested. The biblical term is “the mountains of Ararat” or Urartu, and the term includes the whole of the Hakkari range. A relatively insignificant ridge, known as Judi Dagh, is regarded as the authentic spot by all the folk in this land; and it must be owned that the identification has something to say for itself. It is one of the first ranges that rise over the level of the great plain; and if all Mesopotamia (which to its inhabitants was the world) were submerged by some great cataclysm, it is just the spot where a drifting vessel might strand.

Whatever the facts, the tradition goes back to the year AD 300 at least. That date is, of course, a thing of yesterday in this country; but the tale was of unknown antiquity then, and is firmly rooted in the social consciousness now. In consequence, Noah’s sacrifice is still commemorated year by year on the place where tradition says the ark rested—a *ziaret* which is not the actual summit of the mountain but a spot on its ridge. On that day (which, strange to say, is the first day of Ilul, or September 14 of our calendar, and not May 27 mentioned in the account in Genesis) all faiths and all nations come together, letting all feuds sleep on that occasion, to commemorate an event which is older than any of their divisions.

Christians of all nations and confessions, Mussulmans of both *Shiah* and *Sunni* type, Sabaeans, Jews, and even the furtive timid Yezidis are there, each group bringing a sheep or kid for sacrifice; and for one day there is a “truce of God” even in turbulent Kurdistan, and the smoke of a hundred offerings goes up once more on the ancient altar. Lower down on the hillside, and hard by the Nestorian village of Hasana, men still point out Noah’s tomb and Noah’s vineyard, though this last, strange to say, produces no wine now. The grapes from it are used exclusively for *nipukhta* or grape treacle, possibly in memory of the disaster that once befell the Patriarch (Wigram 1914: 335–36).

And finally, Sir Henry Rawlinson asserts his opinion after a lecture given by James Bryce to the Royal Geographical Society of London. It was at this lecture that Bryce relates the story of his ascent to the summit of Mt. Ararat in 1876, and his subsequent discovery of a piece of wood. In this lecture, Bryce had made the case that Mt. Ararat was the Biblical Ararat and the landing place of Noah’s Ark. Rawlinson, great scholar that he was, disagrees. Whoever kept the minutes of the meeting summarized his remarks:

The mountain in question [Agri Dagh], however, had nothing whatever to do with biblical Ararat. No one who had really gone into the question could doubt that the popular notion was a fallacy. The mountain had never been called Ararat in the country from the remotest times to the present day. The name Aghri-Dagh, and Ararat did not apply to that part of Armenia at all. The history of those countries from the earliest antiquity, was now, owing to the decipherment of the cuneiform inscriptions, almost as well known as that of Greece or Rome. There were contemporary annals of Assyria, dating two thousand years before Christ, in all of which Ararat was as often spoken of and marked geographically as was Ninevah or Babylon. It was the

name of a province which might be called Southern Armenia. It never extended further north than Lake Van, but included what was now called Persian Kurdistan, being the country east of Ninevah, and between the valley of the Tigris and the Persian plateau. In the Chaldean legend of the Flood, made known by the late Mr. George Smith, the Ark was made to rest upon Mount Nizer, which was explained to be another name for the range of Judi. It was immediately east of the basin of the Tigris, in the very centre of the province called Ararat—so called, it must be observed, not in one or two solitary instances, but throughout Assyrian history; the name, moreover, having been taken up by the Greeks, and passed on the Armenians. Even in the geography of Moses of Chorene, the province of Ararat had nothing to do with the Northern Armenia. The mountain north-east of Mosul, which, at the present day, concentrated in itself all the biblical traditions referring to Ararat, was still called Jebel Judi, and was visited by thousands of pilgrims annually in search of relics of the Ark, who bore away with them amulets made of small portions of wood which they found at the top of the mountain, no doubt supplied periodically by the priests. The practice had been going on for centuries, and was mentioned over and over again in history. He had himself seen troops of pilgrims going to the mountain of Judi from all parts of the East (Bryce 1877–1878: 184–85).

That Rawlinson knew his geography and his Assyrian history is well attested. While he himself had never seen the ruins, he was certainly acquainted with the tradition.

Conclusion

We are well aware of the fact that most religious relics should be viewed with a great deal of skepticism. However, with regard to possible remains of the Ark of Noah, we would like to postulate that remains of the Ark would be a different kind of relic. Consider hypothetically: if such an Ark vessel once really existed, with the Scriptural dimensions of nearly 500 feet in length and being built of a durable wood and coated with a preservative such as tar, wouldn’t it make sense that it would have taken centuries, even millennia, to decay, and that everyone in the general vicinity would know where such a hulk would lie? We are not talking about a small relic that cannot be readily seen by the general populace. Over the centuries, indeed millennia, people would know about it; it would be a topic of conversation and people would want to see it. In other words, in the case of the Ark of Noah, it is easy to imagine that a piece of wood from the Ark would be highly venerated and a prized possession, resulting in its being gradually dismantled by the faithful. At some time during the first millennium it seems the final large pieces of the Ark disappeared. As we noted earlier, one writer claimed that as Islam moved into the area, beams were removed to put into a mosque. Currently it is our assumption, as Bender discovered, that the only remains to be found would require some excavation.

We believe the traditions regarding Cudi Dagh are reliable. Bender’s tests proved the remains are ancient, and to confirm the thesis that they are remains of the Ark of the Biblical Flood, we believe core holes should be drilled, and with positive results, then latitudinal and longitudinal trenches should be dug using proper archaeological protocol. Hopefully, at some point, the Turkish government will grant the permits for such a project.

Thanks

We would like to thank the following people for their help in various ways in our research. Some knew what we were working on, other did not. Some will agree with our conclusions, others will not. However, we thank all of them for their contributions, big or small, in making our research project a success: Dr. Hagop Aynedjian, Dr. John Baumgardner, Dr. Helene Dallaire, Eric Engleman, Dr. Tom Finley, an anonymous geologist, Kathleen Hurley, Dr. Gordon Johnston, Dr. Charles A. Kennedy, Dr. David Livingston, Nancy Kandoian, David Nazarian, Robert Nedswick, Walter Pasedag, Dr. Elaine Phillips, Ivan Reynoso, Nate Schmolze, Dr. Halvor Rennings, Brad Sparks, Dr. Mark Wilson. The librarians at the Fair Lawn (New Jersey) Public Library and New York Public Library, as well as the libraries at the Austrian National Library, Columbia University (Avery, Burke, Butler and Lamont libraries), Drew University, Princeton University, Princeton Theological Seminary, University of Vienna, and Western Michigan University.



Notes

¹For examples, see: Robert A. Moore, "The Impossible Voyage of Noah's Ark," *Creation/Evolution* XI (Winter, 1983); Robert A. Moore, "Arkeology: A New Science in Support of Creation?" *Creation/Evolution* IV (Fall 1981); Howard M. Teeple, *The Noah's Ark Nonsense* (Evanston, IL: Religion and Ethics Institute, 1978); Robert S. Dietz, "Ark-Eology: A Frightening Example of Pseudo-Science," *Geotimes*, (September, 1993); William H. Steibing, Jr., "A Futile Quest: The Search for Noah's Ark," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 2:21:1: 13–20.

²Some evangelical skepticism about searching for Noah's Ark was voiced in *Eternity*, Feb. 1978. See also the video by Hugh Ross, *The Universal Flood* in the Genesis and Science series, Part 6, 1993, distributed by Reasons to Believe.

³For the most complete history of the search for Noah's Ark, see: B.J. Corbin, ed., *The Explorers of Ararat* (Long Beach, CA: Great Commission Illustrated Books, 1999).

⁴The writer of the excellent article in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (M. Streck) believes Europeans were responsible for the Armenian tradition that led to Mt. Ararat becoming the landing place of the Ark. He thinks, and we agree, that they mistakenly transferred the name of the Armenian district of Ayrarat to the mountain named Massis through a misinterpretation of Gn 8:4. This belief was undoubtedly solidified by the fact that it was the highest mountain in Armenia. Why wouldn't the Ark land on the highest mountain?

⁵One writer believes Ararat-Urartu means mountainous country or land. Oktay Belli believes Urartu is not an ethnic term but a geographical one meaning mountainous terrain. See his *The Capital of Urartu: Van*, 20.

⁶Paul Zimansky, *Ecology And Empire: The Structure of the Urartian State* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1982), 4; Boris B. Piotrovsky, *The Ancient Civilization of Urartu* (New York: Cowles, 1969), 43.

⁷According to scholars, the Mt. Ararat area did not come under the Urartian kingdom until the ninth century BC under the leadership of Menua (810–786 BC). See: Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Foes from the Northern Frontier* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), 34. See also: Piotrovsky, 65.

⁸Bill Crouse, "Phantom Arks on Ararat," *Ararat Report*, 14 (Feb.–Mar. 1990), pp. 1–4.

⁹One man, Porcher Taylor, a former employee of the CIA, using the Freedom of Information Act, has obtained high-resolution satellite photos. He believes a certain object on the west side of Ararat near the summit is man-made, though it has been thoroughly examined by explorers. See: Timothy W. Maier, "CIA Releases New Noah's Ark Photos," *Insight*, 13 November 2002.

¹⁰Edwin M. Yamauchi suggested this site as early as 1978 ("Is That an Ark on Ararat?" *Eternity*, Feb. 1978). Lee A. Spencer and Jean-Luc Lienard were also early advocates of this site in an unpublished paper dated 1985. It can now be found on the Internet at <http://origins.swau.edu/papers/global/noah/default.html>.

¹¹According to Armenian tradition, Massis was named after a certain Amasia, a grandson of Haik, a descendant of Japheth. Amasia supposedly settled at the foot of the mountain and named the mountain after himself. S. Eprikian, *Penashkharhik Pararan* (Venice: 1903). This work is in Armenian.

¹²Another early traveler in the area of Ararat in the 13th century who mentions the tradition of the Ark on Ararat is William of Rubruck. See: Manuel Komroff, ed., *Contemporaries of Marco Polo* (New York: Dorset Press, 1989), 202. Vincent of Beauvais, an encyclopedist, also wrote of the traditions of Ararat in the same century.

¹³L.W. King translated the cuneiform on the several rock reliefs carved by Sennacherib, and proves that this mountain was once known as *Nipur*. L.W. King, *Studies of Some Rock Sculptures and Rock Inscriptions of Western Asia*, *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* XXXV (1913). This should not be confused with the Sumerian city of Nippur.

¹⁴Faustus refers to the mountain as Ararat but puts it in the canton of Gortouk. Benjamin of Tudela likewise refers to it as Ararat.

¹⁵L.W. King, "Studies of Some Rock Sculptures and Rock Inscriptions of Western Asia."

¹⁶According to the chronicle of Zuqnin there were many who lost their lives in the conflagration. "A huge and dense gathering of Nestorians took place in the monastery of Beth Kewala (the Ark) on the mountains of Qardu. They celebrated a feast as they had custom to in the place where the ark (of Noah) came to rest. As a huge crowd gathered there in the middle of Later *Tisri* (November), lightning occurred in the sky and fire came down from high and consumed that shrine and burned it, together with the people inside. Fire turned its stones into lime and even the people who were outside it did not survive this conflagration. It consumed all of them and no one escaped." The historian goes on to say that 700 or 800 people perished along with many animals. The account really sounds extreme but the writer seems to indicate that the event was a punishment from God for venerating the site. See Part IV, pp. 204–205.

¹⁷According more information about the characteristics of the Samaritan Pentateuch see: Bruce Waltke, "The Samaritan Pentateuch and the text of the Old Testament" in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne (Waco, TX: Word, 1970).

¹⁸The Turkish city of Cizre, which lies at the foot of the Cudi Mountains, was known to contain a large contingent of Jews in antiquity. See: Dickson 1910: 361.

¹⁹Where Isaiah 37:38 notes that the sons of Sennacherib's sons escaped to Ararat, the Isaiah Targum has *Kardu* for *Ararat* in the Masoretic text.

²⁰The *Genesis Apocryphon* also names "Lubar" as the site where Noah planted the vine. Since the manuscript is fragmentary, it is not known whether or not it names "Lubar" as the landing place of the Ark. Charlesworth believes there is definite evidence of the influence of *Jubilees* in the *Genesis Apocryphon*. Charlesworth, p. 43.

²¹The Armenians seemed to emerge after the collapse of the Urartians in the late sixth century BC.

²²V. Kurkjian, *A History of Armenia*. (New York: Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1959). 1–2. Hübschmann notes that Armenian literature from the fifth to the 10th centuries knows nothing of Massis being the mountain of the Ark. Heinrich Hübschmann, "Armeniaca," in *Strassburger Festschrift zur XLVI Versammlung Deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner* (Strassburg: Verlag von Karl Taubner, 1901), Section V. An English translation of this passage is available in Bailey, *Noah*, pp. 190–195.

²³Hieronymus the Egyptian is not known. Mnaseas was a Greek writer at the end of the third century.

²⁴For the complete reconstruction of the text of Berossus see: Stanley Mayer Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus* (Malibu, CA: Udena Publications, 1978).

²⁵It is important to note that during the time that Berossus wrote, the Armenian Kingdom covered this area. See: *Historical Atlas of Armenia* (New York: Armenian National Education Committee, 1987), 10ff.

²⁶The mention of *Nisir* as the landing place for the Ark in the Babylonian flood story is apparently the only time it occurs. Speiser is confident that it is to be identified with Pir Omar Gudrun in the Zagros Mountains (Speiser 1928).

²⁷Jacob of Nisibis was one of the prominent figures at the Council of Nicea in 325. He was known for his ability to perform miracles and was known as the Moses of Mesopotamia. He was also a figure in the evangelization of Armenia.

²⁸An ancient Persian unit of measuring length: One farasang (parasang) equals about 6 kilometers.

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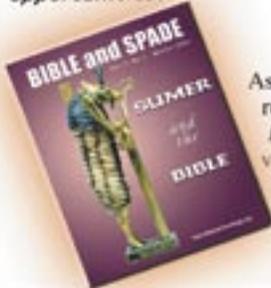
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Wood Remains from the “Landing Site of Noah’s Ark” Nearly 6500 Years Old

By Friedrich Bender

(Reprinted by permission from *UMSCHAU-Kurzberichte aus Wissenschaft und Technik*, vol. 72, no. 1. Translated from the original German by W. Pasedag, ABR.)

Tectonic Lifting of the Taurus Mountains of Turkey

Wood remains from Cudidag, a mountain range at the northern rim of Mesopotamia, were dated with the ¹⁴C method; they are 6500 years old, i.e. pre-Sumerian. According to archaeological findings, parts of Mesopotamia were flooded at that time. Compelling geologic and morphologic reasons limit this flooding to this region,² and exclude the high peaks of Ararat, located about 300 km [186 mi] further north, the landing site of the ark according to Biblical tradition. The wood remains were found in a location called the “landing site of the ship” according to the Gilgamesh Epic and the Koran. If the find is considered to be the remains of a ship, it is difficult to explain the altitude of its location, about 750 m [2460 ft] above the rubble terraces of the plain. There are some observations, however, which point to a geologically very young tectonic lift in the region of the southern rim of the Taurus Mountains and southeastern Turkey.

According to the Gilgamesh Epic, the “landing place of the ship,” and hence the northernmost range of the Flood, is to be found between the rivers Tigris and Zab (at the mountain of Nisir). The Old Testament locates it on the “mountains of Ararat.” The Koran (XI. Sura, 44) mentions the mountain Cudi (Cudidag, Al-Jûdî) as the landing place of the Ark of Noah. The Cudidag is a massif of the southernmost Taurus ranges in Eastern Turkey, between the Tigris and Zab, which is covered by the region mentioned in the Gilgamesh Epic. From geologic and geomorphologic considerations, the northern limit of the proven (Wooley 1955) pre-Sumerian flood covering Mesopotamia is more likely to be found at the first mountain range on the northern rim of the plain, rather than Ararat (5165 m [16945 ft]), 300 km [186 mi] further north.

In the spring of 1953, I was able to climb Cudidag, despite the difficulties in reaching this location in eastern Turkey in those days, and to recover a sample of asphalt-bound wood remains (Bender 1956). The primary motivation for this endeavor was

reports of Kurdish Muslims that the Cudidag was a pilgrim destination where “pieces of wood from Noah’s Ark,” relics of great value, could be dug up. My guides’ constraints during this climb did not permit me to obtain detailed records of the geologic-Quaternary stratigraphy. The Cudidag is a southern-oriented anticlinal (geologic saddle with a steep southern flank) of Jurassic and Cretaceous limestone with a west-southwest to east-southeast oriented axis. The spine of the mountain reaches about 1800 m [5905 ft] above sea level. Two parallel fault lines, with heavily faulted and displaced middle-Eocene limes between them, accompany the steep southern flank. Further south, Neogene (young Tertiary), presumably Pliocene, land and river sediments are covered by large terraces of rubble (L. Benda, U. Staesche, verbal communication). They cover the substrate in obliquely oriented layers (i.e. diagonal to the substrate orientation), and are tectonically displaced themselves. At least three (at the Tigris five?) distinct terrace levels are discernable, declining towards the south from the edge of the mountains (1000 m [3280 ft]) to 500 m [1640 ft] above sea level. Their relative ages are unclear. West of Cizre, similar rubble lies between quaternary basalt (Altinli 1963). The wood remains were found in an open syncline (basin) at the upper southern slope of the Cudidag, about 3000 m [9843 ft] northeast of the Kurdish village of Kericulya, at about 1700 m [5577 ft] above sea level (exact altitude uncertain), which is about 750 m [2460 ft] above the highest of the rubble terraces. The shallow basin, open towards the south, is surrounded by the thickly banked, massive limestones and dolomites of the “Cudi Group” (Altinli 1963). On the 6th of April, 1953, it was largely snow covered. Underneath the snow cover was a loamy silt sediment, which turned to a dark brown to black color at 0.80 to 1.00 m [2.6 to 3.3 ft] depth, and contained crumbly, up to pea-sized decayed wood remains. Many of the small wood fragments were bound together by an asphalt- or tar-like substance. My Kurdish guides did not permit any further digging or detailed examination. They considered the location a holy place.

Following a thorough dissolution of the asphalt with carbon tetrachloride, the wood fragments were radiocarbon dated by the Bureau for Earth Sciences of Lower Saxony in Hannover. A theoretical age of 6635 +/- 280 years BP (before 1950) was determined. A second measurement, which consumed all of the remaining material, confirmed the result. The only conceivable source of error is a potentially incomplete removal of the asphalt binder, whose age surely exceeded 50,000 years.³ In this case, assuming that the carbon contamination was up to 5% (which is considered unlikely), the maximum increase in the apparent age would be 400 years.



Mrs. Friedrich Bender

Dr. Friedrich Bender investigating the “landing place of the ship” on Mt. Cudi in southeastern Turkey in 1953.

If the analyzed wood was in fact carried to the location where it was found by a Mesopotamian flood, it is difficult to explain the altitude of the locus, at approximately 750 m [2461 ft] above the rubble terraces. Several observations, however, let us conclude that there was a significant uplift of the southern rim of the Taurus and eastern Turkey in geologically recent times. The local Neogene, for example, in the vicinity of the Taurus Mountains, is in a nearly vertical position. In an epirogenic rise (large area-wide uplift), even younger strata were included, e.g. in the foreland of the Cudidag, where Pleistocene sediments dive under younger alluvia (U. Staesche, verbal communication). The observations of Bobek (1941) also indicate a substantial uplift of the Taurus in this region. He suggests values up to 1500 m [4920 ft] for the lift in the region of the Bitlis Cay since the older Pliocene. Geologically young uplifts could have occurred at the main fault lines on the southern Cudidag.

Thanks to Dr. M.A. Geyh for the ¹⁴C analysis and supplemental annotations, and to Dr. L. Benda for important textual advice. Both are at the Bureau of Earth Sciences of Lower Saxony, Hannover.

Summary

The age of wooden residues found on the Cudidag in the southernmost Taurus Ranges is about 6500 years according to radiocarbon dating. Remains of a ship may be discerned here. Their location could be explained by a strong uplifting of this mountain area.

Notes



¹Friedrich Bender received his PhD in geology from the University of Heidelberg in 1949. He became one of the most prominent geologists in Europe, as he

published numerous books and journal articles in his field. In the 1950s he was hired as a petroleum geologist by a Turkish firm searching for oil in eastern Turkey. He spent five years in this region, based in Camp Raman near Baturan. Upon his return to Germany, Dr. Bender worked as a professor and director in the Federal Institute for Soil Research (now the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources) in Hannover, Germany. This article was published during Dr. Bender's tenure at the Institute. The Institute's website is at <http://www.bgr.bund.de>.

²This suggestion by the author that the flood was local, not universal, is one with which ABR does not agree. Further, we disagree with the proposed dates for the Flood and the >50,000-year age for the asphalt. That said, the primary point of the article—the finding of ancient wood remains and bitumen on Mt. Cudi—is one that stands on its own merits, and warrants inclusion of the article in this issue.

³See note 2 above.

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The Case for Ararat

By Richard Lanser

The accompanying article by Crouse and Franz is a fascinating compilation of historical data regarding proposed locations for Noah's Ark. Taken together, those records present a reasonable case for giving credence to the Mt. Cudi site near Cizre, Turkey. However, not all agree it is a "compelling" one. In the interest of completeness, it is appropriate to mention some of the difficulties with the Mt. Cudi idea that do not appear to have yet been resolved, and which point to a continuing need to consider that the remains of the Ark are on Mt. Ararat in Turkey.

The Eyewitnesses

All agree that the most obvious point in favor of Mt. Ararat is the eyewitness testimonies. In contrast, the historical material we have from antiquity supporting the Mt. Cudi site is, at best, secondhand, and should not be given the same weight as the firsthand testimonies we have regarding Mt. Ararat. While admitting the force of the argument that many of the alleged Ararat eyewitness stories are open to serious doubt—whether due to the questionable reliability of the witnesses, their stories being plagued, as Crouse and Franz put it, by "lost documents, lost photos, and lost witnesses," or the possibility they saw "phantom arks" from aircraft which were nothing but rock formations—it must be pointed out that, according to Scripture, it only takes two or three trustworthy witnesses to make a case (Dt 17:6, Dt 19:15, Mt 18:16, 2 Cor 13:1). In the testimonies of Armenian George Hagopian (c. 1904–1906) and American Sergeant Ed Davis (1943) this requirement is met.¹ They did not know each other and were widely separated by time and cultural background, so the amazing similarities between their stories buttress their credibility. In rejecting many alleged eyewitnesses for various reasons, we must not be guilty of "throwing out the baby with the bathwater" by lumping the more solid stories with the dubious.

These men made their sightings on the ground, hence are not open to the charge of merely seeing rocks from the air and misinterpreting them. Hagopian not only claimed to have seen the Ark twice in the early 1900s, but to even have climbed onto it! Davis likewise claimed to have been in such close proximity to the Ark that it is not plausible to say he only saw a huge rock structure. There is no middle ground that allows anyone to claim

Mount Ararat from space. Note the clear evidence of volcanic activity, a reason to consider the Ark was buried in ash for centuries, and helping to explain the silence of the historical record.



NASA

these men simply made a mistake. We have only two options: either they saw the Ark, or they were lying.

The problem with the latter option is that their reputations were checked out by Ark researchers concerned with the possibility of fraud, and they were found to be sober, apparently honest men who were not "out to make a buck." In the case of Davis, he passed a lie detector test that closely scrutinized the details of his Ark sighting (Corbin 1999: 108–110). Notwithstanding this, some suppose that a few seeming inconsistencies that came out during multiple retellings of his story point to its fundamental unreliability. I disagree. With the passage of time or under stress, people remember or forget various minor details or emphasize them differently, without thereby changing their fundamental story. I believe this is the case with Ed Davis. Though we can nitpick at some of the details, his central story, which allowed him to pass the lie detector test, remained the rock-solid core that we cannot ignore.

It is worth reviewing the Davis lie detector test in some detail. The following is a quote regarding the polygraph test administered to Ed Davis (Corbin 1999: 109):

Subject was asked to recall in detail what his recollection of the incident was. His answer was as follows: While this subject was in the U.S. Army and assigned to engineering duties between Iran, Turkey and USSR he met a male later identified as Abas-Abas. Subject stated that Abas' son was working for the government at the time of this meeting. As the subject related the story, Mr. Davis did a great favor for Abas and his tribe.

As a result of this favor Abas was asked by Davis to tell him (Davis) about the Ark or structure that was located somewhere around Mt. Ararat. Davis was told that if the weather was right he (Abas) would take him to see this structure. Some time later Abas and seven (7) of his sons escorted Davis to the site of the structure.

In trying to solicit the information from Mr. Davis the following questions were asked:

1. Are you lying when you state that you were taken to Mt. Ararat by Abas and his seven sons?
2. Are you lying when you state that you climbed Mt. Ararat on horseback and on foot?
3. Are you lying when you state that the object you saw was broken in half?
4. Are you lying when you state that the structure was exposed between 100 and 200 feet?
5. Are you lying when you state that you saw a large wooden structure high on Mount Ararat?
6. Are you lying when you state that no one ever told you about the Ark other than Abas and the Bible?

Mr. Davis answered all of the above questions with NO. After careful analysis of all this subject's Polygrams it is the opinion of the examiner that he answered without showing any stress to questions 1-5. Regarding question 6, the subject did show



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George Hagopian and Elfred Lee with painting done by Lee.

stress and answered that he has talked to a number of people about the Ark. He also stated that not one of the people that he has spoken to have ever seen or known the exact location of where the Ark is.

My point in quoting the above passage is to make clear that there were six distinct questions asked during the polygraph, and fully half of them specifically mentioned Mt. Ararat. The only question Davis displayed any tension in answering was the last one. This is a patently insufficient reason for disregarding the entire testimony. Davis knew where he went and what he had seen and experienced, regardless of any apparent ambiguity that may have arisen as he retold his story at different times.

George Hagopian likewise was found to be a reliable witness. Elfred Lee, a researcher who later also interviewed Davis and marveled at the many points of contact between the two accounts, personally checked out Hagopian's story and found that obscure details about his childhood around Lake Van in Armenia held up, greatly enhancing the credibility of his admittedly incredible Ark tale (Corbin 1999: 69, 72). Lee also affirmed that Hagopian, like Davis, took and passed a lie detector test (Corbin 1999: 79).

These two testimonies, at the very least, cannot be lumped with the less well-attested ones and rejected out of hand. They are important parts of the overall picture of the search for the Ark, and can be neither ignored nor easily explained away.

Hidden from the Air

If we do have some reliable eyewitnesses, then how do we deal with the valid observation of Crouse and Franz, "no 'undeniable evidence' for the Ark on Ararat has been turned up over the past 50 years of air searches?" Based on geographic clues in their testimonies, it appears that if the Ark is on Mt. Ararat, it is in a high, inaccessible location on the north side above the Ahora Gorge, most likely nestled in a small valley within the "saddle" between the two peaks of Greater Ararat and generally blanketed

in snow and ice.² Hagopian's first sighting came after four years of drought conditions in the Ararat region (Corbin 1999: 67, 79), a fact attested to by climate records (Corbin 1999: 372; Shockey 1986: 33–34). Moreover, Hagopian indicated it was only exposed every 20 years or so (Corbin 1999: 75, 370). Further, even granting adequate meltback, the Ark's visibility from the air is dependent on such conditions as the angle of the sun and cloud cover; a little shadow or cloudiness goes a long way toward obscuring things when air searches are attempted. All of these are reasonable explanations for the lack of success in spotting the Ark on Ararat from the air during the past 50 years.

The Big Switch

The principle reason historians tend to reject Mt. Ararat as the Mountain of the Ark lies in the silence of the early historical records. As Crouse and Franz have abundantly documented, in contrast to the early records apparently supporting Mt. Cudi as the Ark site, there appear

to be no extant writings prior to Philostorgius (fifth century AD) clearly tying Mt. Ararat to the Ark. Unambiguous references to Ararat remain hard to come by until about the 13th century, when Mt. Cudi appears to basically have been supplanted by Mt. Ararat in the tradition. The big question to ask is, why did this transfer take place at all? If the Ark was ever on Mt. Cudi, what prompted the switch to Ararat? In the absence of more complete ancient records there are no easy answers, but certain facts can be adduced to explain such a change.

The first is that Mt. Ararat is a volcanic peak. Satellite photos show the magma flows that form its base very clearly, and blocks of volcanic basalt are all over its slopes. Armenian scholar Robert Bedrosian (1993) notes that during the third through first millennia BC, Mt. Ararat was "among the more prominent volcanoes spewing molten lava and rocks into the night sky." This means it is likely in the extreme that had the Ark landed there, it would rather quickly have been covered in volcanic ash. If we make the entirely reasonable assumption that Noah and his family would not long have stayed in the vicinity of an active volcano but would have moved off to friendlier environs, we are looking, at a very early point in human history, at the Ark being both entirely hidden from sight by snow and ice and/or volcanic ash, and in an area away from where people would want to live. The story of the Ark and its location would logically have quickly entered the realm of legend, because none would have been able to simply climb the peak and check it out. The power of the legend, however, would have sufficed to ensure its survival, with the story being passed down from one generation to another while the location eventually morphed in the retelling to another site. This observation also accounts for the phenomenon of multiple Mt. Cudis (Geissler n.d.)—the one near Cizre that Dr. Bender investigated, another near Sanli Urfa, yet a third in Arabia, one of the peaks of Ararat itself (Cummings 1973: 167–79), and even the Durupinar site popularized by Ron Wyatt.

An additional factor to consider is the post-Flood climate. Meteorologist Michael Oard constructed an eminently logical



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Ed Davis and Elfred Lee drawing his account at the New Mexico “Ark-a-thon” in 1986.

case for the Ice Age being tied to warmer oceans after the Flood, resulting in copious snowfalls in the more northern and southern latitudes, with associated rapid formation of glaciers and deep icepacks in the mountains (Oard 1990). Ararat today has a permanent snowline beginning at about 14,000 ft, and it makes sense that during the Ice Age the snowline would have been much lower. The Ark would thus have been hidden under deep snowdrifts as well as ash. It is therefore not surprising that there are no surviving writings from hoary antiquity tying the Ark to Mt. Ararat; by the time people developed the degree of civilization required to write lasting records about it, it was deeply buried, out of sight and out of mind.

These two considerations allow us to make a reasonable conjecture as to how the Ark landing tradition became attached to Mt. Cudi. With the establishment of civilization in Shinar—the same civilization, we note, that gave us the Gilgamesh Epic, a corrupted version of the Flood story—it is no real stretch to say that just as Gilgamesh replaced Noah in the Sumerian version, so Mt. Cudi replaced the inaccessible Mt. Ararat as the site of the Ark. Mt. Cudi is, after all, directly north of the plain of Shinar, and would have provided a convenient nearby locale to connect with the tradition.

The flip side of the above scenario is that it can also explain why Mt. Ararat had the power to supplant the Mt. Cudi tradition around the 13th century, after the former had already had hundreds of years to take root: it was based on demonstrable fact, not mere tradition. Facts trump “just-so” stories anytime! Just a few visits to the Real Thing, confirmed by others who could check it out for themselves, would quickly have solidified the claims of the relative “newcomer” to being the genuine location.

Geological Considerations

One point Crouse and Franz make in rejecting Mt. Ararat as the location of the Ark is the alleged lack of water-borne sedimentary rock, indicating a post-Flood origin of the volcano. If Ararat did not exist during the Flood, it follows that it could not have provided an anchorage for the Ark. However, the old saw, “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence,” needs to be considered here.

If Ararat existed **before** the Flood, it must be recognized that its steep-sloped form, subjected to erosion by rainstorms and melting snow over the centuries, cannot be expected to have retained sedimentary deposits on its slopes to the same degree as less inclined areas. (Think of the catastrophic mudslides in Honduras and Nicaragua due to Hurricane Mitch in 1998.) Unconsolidated sediments would be expected to wash off the slopes in heavy rains; mudslides would have taken place. The immediate area around Mt. Ararat is not a friendly one for the development of deep-rooted grasses, brush and protective trees that would aid in retaining soil. And if one further considers that there were magma flows at various times—particularly evident when one looks at satellite pictures of Mt. Ararat—there is also the distinct possibility that sedimentary rock layers could have been buried under volcanic material.

Another option is that Mt. Ararat initially arose **during** the Flood itself, and did not exist during the antediluvian age. In a letter published in *TJ*, Max Hunter pointed out that

If Mount Ararat was erected as a submarine stratovolcano then it would be highly unlikely that conditions on the sloping sides of the active volcano would be conducive to the preservation of ‘diluvium’ (‘coarse superficial accumulations...glacial and fluvio-glacial deposits of the Ice Age’) or fossils (Hunter 2003: 62).

Hunter further noted that “basaltic lavas, the most common lithology in the Ararat area, commonly occur in sub-aqueous environments...” and went on to list several specific rock types that demonstrate why the geology around Mount Ararat fits well with a submarine origin of the volcano.

Although it is clear that further research needs to be done, at least one credentialed geologist, Dr. Clifford Burdick, concluded that there were sufficient indications to conclude that Ararat had been under water at some point in its history (Burdick 1967).³ He made observations as a consulting geologist on exploratory expeditions to Mount Ararat in 1966 and 1969, and reported that every sample of volcanic rock he examined on the mountain evidenced high glass content, indicating that Mt. Ararat was submerged in water at least up to the 14,000-foot level. He also claimed to have found deposits of sedimentary rocks at 13,500 ft, and evidence of water-formed “pillow lava” at around 14,000 ft. The last observation is somewhat controversial because magma released under ice and snow will have the same characteristics as that extruded underwater, so this should not be given undue weight. However, Burdick also found cube-shaped salt clusters “as large as grapefruit” near 7,000 ft, which he attributed to “dense, lingering ocean waters,” as well as what are called “conglomerate cones” near 13,000 ft, formed under pressure and a greater than normal degree of water agitation. The waters must also have remained for a long enough time for these structures to cool and fuse, consistent with the mountain having been submerged for a significant amount of time.

For the above reasons we cannot quickly dismiss Mt. Ararat on the basis that it lacks evidence of sedimentary rocks. While acknowledging the need for further fieldwork, there appear to be a sufficient variety of clues to say with reasonable confidence that Mt. Ararat could indeed have been submerged during the time of the Flood.



Richard Lanser

French lithograph from 1848 showing the reputed Tomb of Noah at Nakhichevan. It apparently no longer exists.

Nearby Place Names and Traditions

A further reason for considering Mt. Ararat as the true Ark landing site is the meanings attached to place names in the immediate vicinity. For example, the city of Nakhichevan lies just a short distance away in the foothills of Ararat as one follows the Araxes River eastward. There are varying interpretations of what the name means. Some say it means, in the Armenian language, “the place of first descent,” and connects to Noah as the place where he first went after descending from the Ark on Ararat’s slopes (Kojian 2006); I personally find this interpretation makes the most sense. Others say the name comes from *Nukhtchikhan*, meaning “colony of Noah,” and a third opinion is that it refers to the Ark itself “descending” in the water and glancing off the submerged summit of Nakhichevan’s Ilan-dag (“Snake Mountain”) prior to finally coming to rest atop Turkey’s Mt. Ararat (Azerbaijan24.com, n.d.). Regardless of the precise meaning, this city has a clear and ancient tradition connecting it to Noah, and when one considers that a reputed Tomb of Noah existed there as recently as the 19th century, it presents a tantalizing hint about which direction Noah may have taken after leaving the Ark.

Other significant locations include the original village of Arghuri (Ahor) at the foot of Ararat, the name of which means “where Noah planted the grapevine” (cf. Gn 9:20).⁴ Near Nakhichevan in neighboring Iran is Marand—the Marunda of Ptolemy (in Armenian = “the mother is there”)—where tradition has it that Noah’s wife died and her bones were buried under a mosque. Granted that similar sites are said to exist near Mt. Cudi, it would be very troublesome to consider Mt. Ararat as a

candidate if they did not exist nearby. That they do gives reason to continue to seriously consider the Ararat option.

Dealing with “From the East”

Genesis 11:2 can be interpreted in multiple ways. In the KJV it reads,

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

This seems to be the most straightforward translation, rendering the Hebrew word *miqqedem* as a combination of the Hebrew preposition *min*, “out of, away from,” with *qedem*, “front, east.” The ancient Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate translations opt for the “from the east” translation as well, increasing its credibility. Robert Cornuke adopts this translation likewise—but in his case, it seems to be an attempt to justify searching for the Ark on an Iranian mountain (Lanser 2006). Some would go so far as to say this verse indicates the Ark **landed** east of Shinar, but this is reading too much into the passage. It does not say that Noah and his family disembarked there and stayed put for a few hundred years. All we can safely draw from it is that the descendants of Noah, at some point in time, from wherever they may have gone in their journeyings earlier, at length moved from the east, from what today is Iran, into Mesopotamia.

There are other ways of translating *miqqedem*. The NIV chooses to render it as “eastward,” making the migration into Shinar from the west. The NEB chooses an indefinite yet still grammatically possible alternative, “in the east,” painting a picture of people moving to and fro, with no definite direction, prior to entering Shinar (although how such directionless movement can be said to be “journeying” anywhere—to take a journey seems to demand a destination—is unclear). Given that Mt. Cudi is directly north of the Mesopotamian plain and presents a location incompatible with either a westward or eastward migration, those holding to Mt. Cudi as the Mountain of the Ark appear to be forced to adopt the NEB’s indefinite directional translation of *miqqedem*, leaving them with little flexibility to accept the longstanding Septuagint, Vulgate and KJV translation, “from the east.”

The Bender Discovery

It remains to consider what to make of the discovery by Dr. Friedrich Bender of decayed wood and bitumen on Mt. Cudi. (see his article in this issue). Despite the erroneous dating assumption expressed in Bender’s article, this is a very significant find if it holds up and carries with it the potential to discredit Mt. Ararat as the real Ark site, despite all that has been said above. However, we must remember that Bender’s research was very limited, and further work such as core drilling must be done to bolster the case enough to overcome all of the factors that still favor Mt. Ararat. It is also not wise to place too much stock in the alleged 6500-year radiocarbon age of the wood remains found by Bender. The method was invented by Willard Libby in 1947, only a short time before Bender put the technology to use, and its limitations were not yet fully appreciated. For some of the limits of radiocarbon as a dating method, the reader is referred to Brown 2006.



Phyllis Watson - www.noahsarksearch.com

Violet Cummings in Marand, Iran near Nakhichevan, at the mosque where the bones of Noah's wife are said to be buried. Cummings was the wife of pioneering Ark researcher Eryl Cummings, and an accomplished researcher in her own right.

There are two alternative explanations I see to account for Bender's findings apart from supposing it to be evidence of the Ark's landing place. One is that since Mt. Cudi, at around 7000 ft in elevation, is not a very high mountain, there could have been ordinary structures built upon it in the past. Moreover, Bender's wood remains were found only 750 m (2460 ft) above the rubble terraces of the plain, making it difficult to reconcile this location with Gn 8:4–5, that it took three full month after the Ark rested before "the top of the mountain became visible" (NASB). The wood remains may thus not indicate the former presence of the Ark, but rather a shrine—with its proximity to the Mesopotamian plain, Mt. Cudi could have been a "high place" of Nimrod/Semiramis cult worship—or some other structure, such as a defensive outpost. Since bitumen is common around Mesopotamia, its presence does not require us to imagine that it was necessarily derived from the Ark; it could have been used simply to waterproof walls or a roof. All things considered, we do not yet know enough to evaluate the significance of the Bender find.

In conclusion, while acknowledging the strength for the historical case in favor of Mt. Cudi, we must also admit that there are many observations that it does not satisfactorily explain, and which are more easily reconciled with Mt. Ararat in Turkey being the Mountain of the Ark.

Notes

¹ See *The Explorers of Ararat* for details about the testimonies of Hagopian, Davis and many of the other known alleged eyewitnesses to the Ark on Mt. Ararat. *Agri-Dagh, Mount Ararat: The Painful Mountain* gives many more details about Ed Davis and his testimony.

² This is a conclusion arrived at by the author from his personal study of the eyewitness testimonies recorded in several references, but particularly in *Explorers of Ararat*. See, for example, White Russian Army Col. Alexander Koor's statement on p. 379, "Lieutenant Leslin admitted he had also heard about the discovery of Noah's Ark, not as a rumor, but as news, from the Senior Adjutant of his division, who had told him that Noah's Ark was found in the saddle of two peaks of Mount Ararat" (emphasis added). Although not himself

an eyewitness, Koor vouched for the veracity of the details given about the alleged Russian discovery of Noah's Ark on Mt. Ararat in 1917. Investigated by pioneering Ark researcher Eryl Cummings, Koor was found to be a distinguished, scholarly man of immense personal accomplishment, such that fraud on his part seemed unlikely in the extreme.

³ An abstract of Burdick's *CRSQ* article can be found at http://creationresearch.org/crsq/abstracts/sum4_1.html. References to other Burdick observations for which original citations could not be found are online at http://www.parentcompany.com/creation_explanation/cx3e.htm, at http://pharyngula.org/index/weblog/comments/ark_expedition (blog entry #1970 by Paul Shunamon), and at <http://home.kc.rr.com/hightech/evolution/evolution205.html> (all three accessed November 29, 2006). The latter notes, "Both Lake Van and Lake Urmia are surrounded by high volcanic mountains with no outlet to the sea, so that they remain salty as they were 5,000 years ago."

⁴ In *Transcaucasia and Ararat*, James Bryce gives much valuable background information on place names in the Ararat area.

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Why Not Nabatea? The Flight of Joseph's Family from Bethlehem to Egypt and Migration to the Town of Nazareth in Galilee

By Bruce R. Crew

Introduction

An earlier article focused upon the possible routes taken by the Magi from their homeland to worship the Christ-Child in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, as well as their escape from King Herod via the land of the Nabateans (Crew 2005c: 102–113). The article supports the view that the town of Bethlehem in Judea comprises the site where this event transpired rather than the town of Bethlehem in the northern Israelite tribal territory belonging to Naphtali, situated near the town of Nazareth in Lower Galilee. In addition, the article maintains that following their visit to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the Magi most likely traveled eastward, passing by Herod's Herodium fortress near the town of Tekoa, located about 2.5 miles from Bethlehem. The Magi then proceeded to cross the Judean desert via the wilderness of Jeruel to the ascent of Ziz above the Dead Sea's western shore where they descended into the town of Ein-Gedi. From the harbor at Ein-Gedi, the Magi traversed the Dead Sea by boat and landed safely somewhere in Nabatean territory along the Dead Sea's southeastern shore.

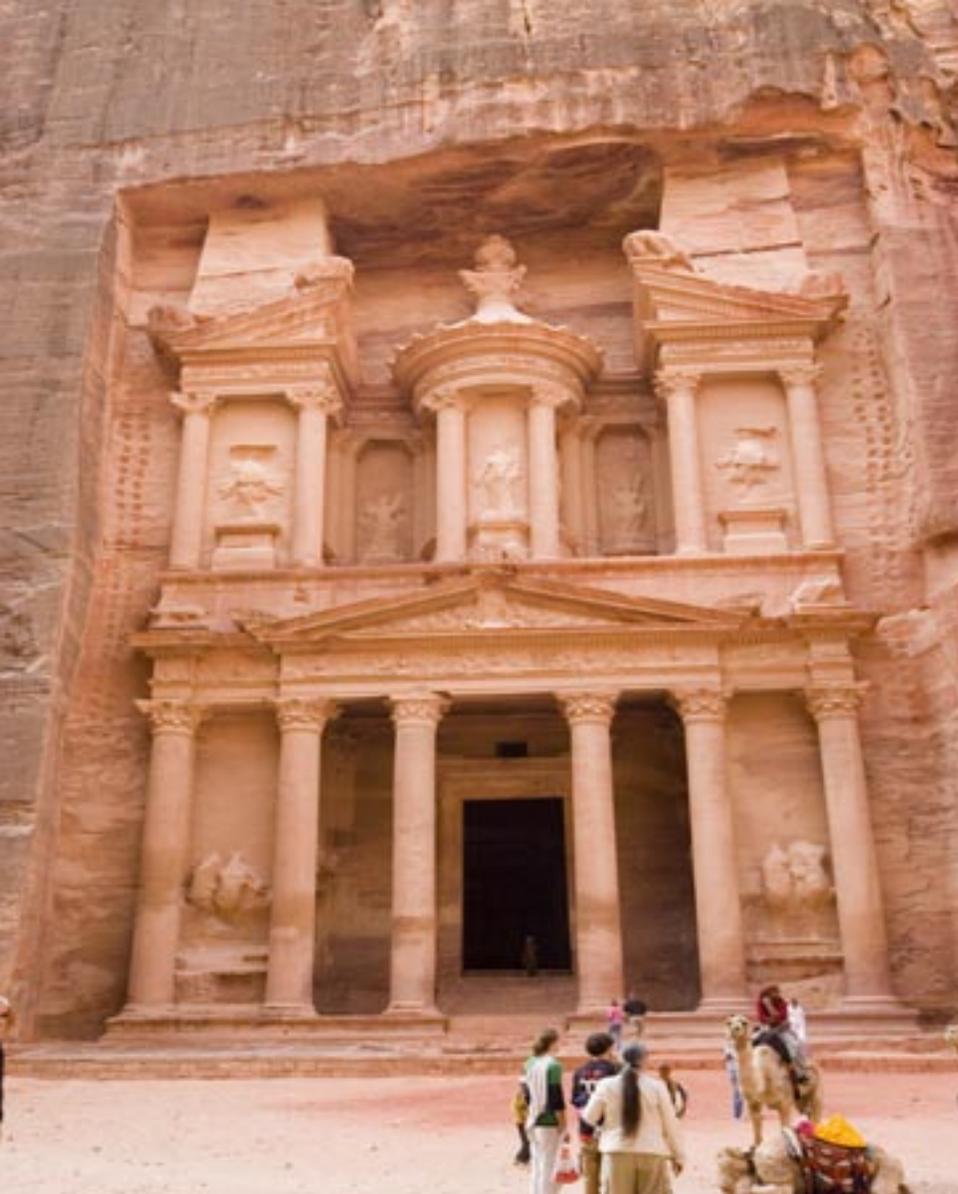
This proposed route enabled the Magi to avoid Herod's fortress at Machaerus along the Dead Sea's northeastern shore in the territory of Perea, as well as Herod's fortress at Masada along the Dead Sea's southwestern corner in his home territory of Idumea.

The main focus of this article will be a geographical-historical examination of the Nabateans in the context of events surrounding the flight of Joseph's family from the town of Bethlehem in Judea to Egypt and their eventual decision to migrate to the town of Nazareth in Lower Galilee after their return from Egypt (Mt 2:13–23). It will also look at why the geographical domain of the Nabateans would have provided an attractive alternative to which Joseph and his family could have fled to escape Herod's forces. Finally, it will examine why the angel who appeared in Joseph's dreams likely directed him to flee instead with his family to Egypt, as well as migrate to the town of Nazareth in Lower Galilee rather than return to the town of Bethlehem in the Judean hill country.¹



Todd Bolen

Bethlehem with Shepherds Field, at the turn of the last century. The Church of the Nativity is on the left.



Michael Luddeni

The Treasury at Petra, the capital city of ancient Nabatea.

Nabatean-Judean-Idumean Relations in Written Sources

There is little evidence in Ancient Near Eastern texts that can pinpoint the identification and location of the Nabateans' original homeland with exact certainty. However, a more recent linguistic study suggests that the Nabateans may in fact be the same people as the *Nebaioth* from Old Testament (OT) texts and the *Nebaiate* who appear in the annals of Assyrian kings (Broome 1973: 1–16; Crew 2005b: 83–85). In particular, two OT texts state that Jacob's son Esau married Mahalath, the daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael, who was a sister of Nabaioth (Gn 28:9; 36:3). Another OT text also indicates that the relatives of Ishmael probably settled in an area somewhere to the east of Egypt as one travels toward the land of Assyria, situated in northern Mesopotamia (Gn 25:18).

In addition, the available geographical information from additional OT texts shows that Ishmael's relatives most likely settled in an area located somewhere between the Sinai and Arabian Peninsulas. A satisfactory resolution of the linguistics question that equates the *Nebaioth* in OT texts with the

Nebaiate from the Assyrian annals and the Nabateans in New Testament (NT) times, then, points to a probable location for the Nabateans' original homeland somewhere next to southern Transjordan's mountains of Edom in the Arabian Peninsula's northwest portion (Bartlett 1979: 53–66; Broome 1973: 1–16; Crew 2005b: 79–87). This would have placed the Nabateans in an ideal position from which they could have migrated into ancient Edom's former geographical domain sometime during the sixth century BC following its destruction by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (Broome 1973: 1–16). The remaining Edomite remnant then proceeded to move westward into the northern Negev and southern portion of the Judean hill country, areas previously controlled by ancient Israel's southern kingdom of Judah. This Edomite remnant later emerged as the Idumeans during NT times, a people who were later conquered and absorbed into the Hasmonean kingdom of Judea sometime by John Hyrcanus I in 132 BC.

Written sources do not specifically mention the existence of cultural-political ties between the Nabateans and Judeans prior to the Hasmonean revolt that transpired in the second century BC. However, this does not mean that the two peoples lacked prior contacts. The adjacent position of their two geographical domains next to one another placed them at a critical juncture along the sedentary and desert portions of the Ancient Near East. Thus it would have been relatively easy for these two peoples to have developed direct cultural and political links in earlier times, especially in light of the fact that the Nabateans controlled the spice and incense trade supplying religious structures such as the Judean temple at Jerusalem. In addition, the geographical information contained in another

OT text mentions a number of returning Judean exiles from Babylon who resettled the northern portion of the Negev near the main trade route that linked the Nabatean capital at Petra with the Mediterranean port of Gaza via the Negev's Central Highlands (Neh 11:25–30).

Written sources further indicate that the Nabateans and Judeans enjoyed friendly relations with one another prior to the rise of Alexander Jannaeus to power in Judea-Idumea in 102 BC (2 Mc 5:24–37; 1 Mc 9:32–42; Flavius Josephus *Antiquities*, the Loeb Classical Library [hereafter designated as *Antiq.*]: 7.233). Based upon the assumption, then, that the Nabateans are the same people as the *Nebaioth* from OT texts and the *Nebaiate* who appear in annals of the Assyrian kings, it is likely that ancestral ties between the Nabateans and Idumeans originated from as far back in time as the period of the OT patriarchs. OT texts also point to the beginning of ancestral ties between the Nabateans and Idumeans via Abraham's son Ishmael and Jacob's son Esau (Gn 25:13; 28:9; 36:1–3; 1 Chr 1:29). In addition, these texts suggest that the Nabateans and Idumeans shared a common origin as nomadic desert peoples, one due largely to the geographical location of their respective homelands located next to one another along the Ancient Near East's sedentary and desert portions.

Moreover, a written source late in the first century BC depicts the Idumeans as a sedentary people who migrated earlier into the southern portion of Judea from the Arabian Peninsula (Strabo, *Geography* 16.2.34). According to this written source, the Idumeans had acquired sedentary and nomadic elements in their cultural traits by late in the first century BC. Thus the Idumeans somehow managed to forge a cultural bridge between the Nabateans, a nomadic desert people, and the Judeans, a sedentary farming people, by NT times via processes of acculturation and assimilation.

Written sources also attest to friendly ties between the Nabateans, Judeans and Idumeans following the death of John Hyrcanus I in 102 BC. This included the presence of large numbers of foreign residents living in the Nabatean capital at Petra late in the first century BC (Strabo, *Geography* 16.4.21). In all likelihood, these foreign residents consisted of diplomats from other kingdoms, as well as merchants involved in the handling of international trade passing through the Nabatean capital and individuals who served as technical advisors to the Nabateans in a period of economic growth that peaked in Nabatea during the reign of Aretas IV (9 BC–40 AD). The presence of a similar economic boom in Judea-Idumea during the reign of Herod the Great from 37–4 BC, together with the geographical location of Judea-Idumea next to the land of the Nabateans, makes it hard to believe that large numbers of Judeans and Idumeans would not have been included amongst these foreign residents living at Petra, as well as in other parts of the Nabateans' geographical domain (Goitein 1975: 125, 200–202; Hirschberg 1975: 123, 142–48).

Written sources also attest to the identification of Judea and Idumea as a single geographical-political entity during every historical period after the reign of John Hyrcanus I that extended well into the first century AD. This includes the following political leaders who ruled over Judea-Idumea from the second century BC to the first century AD:

- Alexander Jannaeus (Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.395–97).
- Hyrcanus II/Antipater (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.73–79; *Jewish War* 1.199–200).
- Herod the Great (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.325–330; 15.216, 253–56; *Jewish War* 1.244).
- Direct Roman rule over Judea and Idumea (Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.354–55).
- Archelaus, son of Herod the Great (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.640–46, 664–68; 2.1ff; 2.14ff.; *Jewish War* 2.96).
- Herod Agrippa I (Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.274–75).



Coin of Herod the Great.

Michael Luddeni

Bible and Spade 19.4 (2006)

The Flight of Joseph and His Family to Egypt

The previous article in *Bible and Spade* sought to show that the NT account of the Magi's visit to Bethlehem of Judea to worship the Christ-Child as described in Matthew 2 can be better understood when viewed in the geographical-historical context of the Nabateans' rise as a major geo-political power in the Ancient Near East (Crew 2005c: 102–113). In like manner, the account of the flight from Bethlehem of Judea by Joseph and his wife Mary together with the Child Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod's grasp in Matthew 2 becomes more intelligible when it is examined within this same framework. At first glance, it appears that the geographical domain of the Nabateans would have provided an attractive haven to which Joseph and his family could have fled with the Christ-Child from Herod's forces. In addition to its closer proximity, the trip from the town of Bethlehem to Nabatea from Judea-Idumea would have taken less time for them to traverse as opposed to a long and arduous trip across the desert sands of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt.



Michael Luddeni

Coin of Herod Archelaus.

Moreover, the geographical information contained in written sources and the archaeological evidence shows that the Nabateans, Judeans and Idumeans maintained strong cultural and commercial ties, one that likely resulted from their geographical location in proximity to one another along the sedentary and desert portions of the Ancient Near East (Crew 2005c: 108–110). In addition, the presence of large numbers of Judeans and Idumeans living in Nabatea could have provided a strong economic base that would have enabled Joseph's family to survive a prolonged period of exile from their native homeland located in Judea-Idumea. This likely included Judeans and Idumeans living amongst the large number of foreigners at Petra and in other locations of the Nabateans' geographical domain where they had earlier sought refuge in order to escape Herod's brutal, oppressive regime. This would have allowed these Judean and Idumean refugees living in Nabatea to take advantage of an economic boom that transpired following a similar period of economic growth that earlier transpired during Herod the Great's reign in Judea-Idumea (Crew 1981: 265–271).

The flow of economic development from Judea-Idumea to Nabatea that took place during the reign of the Nabatean king Aretas IV also displays a geographical pattern that is consistent with historical links between adjacent desert and sedentary por-



Bruce R. Crew

Sunset from the top of the Hussan Ridge overlooking the Elah Valley from the Judean hill country.

tions of the Ancient Near East, as well as at other world locations. This pattern shows that the direction and flow of economic development is more likely to move from a sedentary to a desert location rather than vice versa (Nir 1974: 84). Moreover, the internal evidence as revealed in OT passages shows that people who

lived in the land of Judah during earlier times often sought refuge in neighboring locations such as Moab and Edom whenever there was a prolonged period of famine caused by military invasions and/or persecutions in ancient Israel that affected their respective homelands (i.e. Jgs 6:1–5; Ru 1:1–6).

The NT account in Matthew 2 also indicates that following the departure of the Magi from the town of Bethlehem in Judea in order to return to their home country via another route, an angel appeared in a dream to Joseph and instructed him to flee with his family to the land of Egypt where they were to remain until further notice since Herod planned to search for the Christ-Child in order to destroy him (Mt 2:13). While it is likely that Joseph and his family were fully aware of

Herod's ruthless tactics employed against his subjects in Judea-Idumea and possessed an accurate knowledge of the best possible escape route from the town of Bethlehem in Judea to the land of the Nabateans via the Judean desert, it is highly unlikely that they would have known the exact location and concentration of



Bruce R. Crew

The Elah Valley, looking southwest. It is part of the Shephelah, a region of low hills between Israel's central mountain range and the coastal plains of Philistia. The latter included such towns as Ashdod, Ascalon and Gath.



Moody Press

Map of the routes likely taken by the family of Jesus during their flight to Egypt and their return to Israel.

Herod's forces that were stationed inside Judea-Idumea.

Moreover, due to the Magi's probable escape eastward into the land of the Nabateans, there was likely little or no time left in terms of a fast-closing window of opportunity for Joseph and his family to mount a successful escape from Herod's forces in Judea-Idumea (Crew 2005c: 112). Thus it is likely that Joseph's family would have encountered serious problems if they had chosen to follow the route of the Magi's successful escape from Judea-Idumea into Nabatea. The fact that Joseph and his family were traveling together with the Child Jesus would have made it relatively easy for them to stand out from the other travelers who were moving between these two locations. In addition, the NT account in Matthew 2 specifically states that Herod's forces proceeded to kill all of the male children two years of age and under who were living in Bethlehem, as well as the surrounding environs, according to the information that Herod had gleaned from the Magi's earlier visit to Jerusalem while en route to Bethlehem to worship the Christ-Child (Mt 2:16).

Finally, even if efforts by Joseph and his family to escape from Judea-Idumea into Nabatea would have proved successful, Herod still retained links with the Nabateans via his mother's family from the royal court at Petra, despite the fact that the Nabateans comprised one of Herod's most feared political enemies (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.574–77; 14.73–79, 370–75;

15.110–145; 16.271–285, 343–350; 17.296; *Jewish War* 1.274–286; 2.76–77). Thus it is likely that Joseph's family would not have been completely safe from Herod's grasp even if they had fled to the land of the Nabateans. It would have been relatively easy for Herod to alert any of his possible secret contacts living in Nabatea to be on the lookout for a couple with a small child approximately two years of age or under who had recently arrived from Judea-Idumea. Thus the specific instructions given by to Joseph in his first dream to "take the Child and his mother and flee to Egypt" becomes even more intelligible in light of the available information from archaeological and written sources that pertain to the Nabateans' geographical domain.

As a result, then, it is likely that in as little as 10–12 hours following the Magi's departure from the town of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod quickly reached the conclusion that the Magi did not intend to report back to him on the exact location and identity of this newly born 'King of the Jews' (Crew 2005c: 112). As a result, Herod then became enraged that he had been tricked by the Magi and proceeded to alert his forces to seal off every possible escape route leading out of Judea-Idumea and into Nabatea before Joseph's family could manage to successfully escape from the town of Bethlehem and its surrounding environs in Judea-Idumea. Thus it is likely that the initial focus of Herod's search for the Child Jesus would have been in and around the

town of Bethlehem in Judea-Idumea, particularly the areas located towards his geographical borders with the Nabateans to the east of the town.

Hence the instructions given by the angel in Joseph's first dream to flee with the Christ-Child and his mother to Egypt as opposed to the land of the Nabateans most likely provided them with barely enough time for an escape from the town of Bethlehem in the Judean hill country. Thus it is likely that Joseph and his family fled away from the town of Bethlehem by night and proceeded to travel westward along a well-constructed Roman road that descended into the Elah Valley portion of the Shephelah lowlands via the Hussan Ridge away from Nabatea and the direction of Herod's initial search.

The distance into the Elah Valley from the town of Bethlehem in Judea-Idumea would have taken Joseph and his family approximately four–five hours to traverse on foot, thereby permitting them to successfully escape before Herod and his forces managed to seal off all of the escape routes leading out of the Judean hill country.²

Once Joseph's family passed through the Elah Valley via Beit Guvrim to the city of Eletherapolis, they proceeded to enter the Mediterranean coastal plain and link up with one of the large trading caravans traveling south along the main international route in this portion of the Ancient Near East. Joseph and his family then turned westward again, moving towards Egypt along either one of two possible routes. First, they could have stopped at the port of Ascalon (modern-day Ashkelon) along the southwestern part of the Mediterranean coast, an area that was not under Herod's direct political jurisdiction. From the port of Ascalon, they could have used some of the gold earlier given to them by the Magi to board a boat that sailed directly to the port of Alexandria in Egypt, a city that contained the largest Jewish population in the Diaspora outside their ancient homeland (Mt 2:11). Or, Joseph and his family could have continued their travels on land along the northernmost route across the Sinai Peninsula's desert sands into Egypt (Aharoni and Avi-Yonah 1993: 227). Once they reached Egypt, then it would have been relatively easy for Joseph and his family to quietly blend into the hustle and bustle of Egypt's large Jewish community without attracting any undue attention from the local authorities, since Herod wielded no political influence in this portion of the Near East (Aharoni and Avi-Yonah 1993: 243).

Following Herod's death, the angel appeared once again to Joseph in a second dream and instructed him to return together with his family to the "land of Israel" (Mt 2:19–22). However, in a third dream after they entered the "land of Israel," the angel warned Joseph against returning to the town of Bethlehem in the Judean hill country since Herod's son Archelaus now ruled in the place of his late father. While this seems to be a seemingly insignificant piece of information, nevertheless it is important in light of the new instructions given by the angel to Joseph and his family. These new instructions given to Joseph by the angel suggest that prior to his death, Herod likely informed his son Archelaus about the reasons behind his decision to slaughter all of the male children approximately two years of age and under who were living in the town of Bethlehem in Judea and its surrounding environs. While this event described in Biblical texts is found nowhere else in written sources, other written sources indicate that Herod slaughtered large numbers of innocent people on numerous occasions during his reign as king over Judea-Idumea (Crew 205c: 106–108). Thus the account

in Matthew 2 would corroborate the lengths to which Herod was willing to go in order to destroy any perceived threat to his rule.

Therefore, it is likely that a return by Joseph and his family to the town of Bethlehem in Judea would have once again endangered the Christ-Child's life because He would have undoubtedly been highly visible amongst the local population at a location where there were no other living male children even close to his age. Hence the structure of the population in Bethlehem and its surrounding environs as a result of earlier events in Matthew 2 comprises an example of an indented pyramid where a significant portion of the population from a certain age group has died off due to human or natural catastrophes such as wars, genocides, famines or disease epidemics. Thus Joseph heeded the warning given by the angel in his third dream and proceeded instead to migrate with his family to the town of Nazareth in Lower Galilee, a location where he and his wife Mary had lived prior to Jesus' birth. Jesus then proceeded to grow up as a normal child in the town of Nazareth in Galilee overlooking the international trade route in a location situated away from the town of Bethlehem in Judea and the watchful eyes of Herod's remaining family members prior to the time that he began his public ministry at approximately 30 years of age.

Summary and Conclusions

Unlike the direction taken by the Magi eastward from the town of Bethlehem in Judea to the land of the Nabateans in order to escape from Herod's grasp, then, the angel that appeared in Joseph's first dream shortly afterwards instructed him to flee with the Christ-Child and his mother to Egypt to elude Herod's forces. Thus these instructions by the angel went directly against what would have likely been Joseph's natural inclination to flee with the Christ-Child and his family to Nabatea. In addition to its closer location to Judea-Idumea, the land of the Nabateans contained large numbers of Judeans and Idumeans, political refugees who had earlier fled there to escape Herod's brutal and repressive regime. Moreover, the direction likely taken by Joseph's family to escape from King Herod would have been the same as the one traversed in earlier times by people from Judea-Idumea into neighboring Moab and Edom to escape prolonged famines or military invasions that affected this portion of ancient Israel. Finally, the presence of a slowly developing economic boom that had already begun to take place in Nabatea likely could have sustained Joseph and his family, together with the Child Jesus, during any prolonged period of exile from Judea-Idumea.

However, the angel that appeared to Joseph instructed him instead to flee westward to Egypt with the Christ-Child and his mother. These directions were exactly the opposite of the ones given to the Magi to facilitate their earlier escape eastward from the town of Bethlehem in Judea across the Judean desert and into Nabatea. Thus the events surrounding the flight by Joseph and his family with the Christ-Child to Egypt resulted in the fulfillment of an earlier OT prophecy in a pattern similar to the Israelites' earlier descent into Egypt and later return during the period of the Exodus (Hos 11:1).

After Herod's death, the angel appeared once again to Joseph in another dream and instructed Joseph to return together with the Christ-Child and his family to "the land of Israel" (Mt 2:20). However, once Joseph and his family reached "the land

of Israel,” the angel appeared to Joseph in yet another dream warning him against returning to the town of Bethlehem in Judea since Herod’s son Archelaus now ruled in the place of his late father (Mt 2:22). As a result, Joseph took the Christ-Child with his family to the town of Nazareth in lower Galilee, thereby fulfilling the words of the prophets who foretold that the Christ-Child would also be called a Nazarene (Mt 2:23; Mk 10:47; 14:67; 16:6; Lk 24:19; Jn 18:5, 7; 19:19).

Therefore, even though the area of Nabatea provided an attractive alternative to which Joseph’s family could have fled, it is highly unlikely that the OT prophecies pertaining to the multiple origins of the Christ-Child would have been fulfilled in Jesus’ life. Moreover, since Herod maintained strong ancestral links with the Nabateans via the prominent position that his mother’s family held in the royal court at Petra even though the Nabateans comprised one of Herod’s most feared enemies, there is the question of whether Joseph and his family could have remained safe from Herod’s grasp while living in Nabatea even if a possible flight from Judea-Idumea would have proved successful in their escape from Herod’s forces. Finally, there is the question as to whether Joseph and his family could have completely avoided the possible dangers posed by a return from Nabatea to Judea-Idumea in regards to the notoriety and attention that the Child Jesus might have attracted prior to the beginning of His public ministry at approximately thirty years of age.

The first article in this series focused upon the possible routes taken by the Magi from their homeland to worship the Christ-Child in the town of Bethlehem in Judea-Idumea, as well as their subsequent escape from King Herod into the land of the Nabateans. This article has sought to provide a better geographical-historical understanding of the Nabateans within the context of their role as a geo-political power in the Ancient Near East during NT times in relation to the flight by Joseph and his wife Mary to Egypt with the Child Jesus, as well as the subsequent decision to migrate to the town of Nazareth in Lower Galilee following their return to “the land of Israel.” An additional study is now needed to examine the impact of the Nabateans upon Jesus’ public ministry during his later years and the subsequent development of early Christianity in the Ancient Near East following His death, burial and resurrection in human history.



Notes

¹ Like the earlier article, “Which Way Did They Go? The Magi’s Escape from King Herod,” published by *Bible and Spade* in December 2005, the sources of information for this article were developed as a result of studies conducted by the author during his M.A. thesis research at the Institute of Holy Land Studies (now known as Jerusalem University College) in Jerusalem, Israel. A good portion of the information contained in this article further comprises part of an earlier article, “Geographical Dimensions of the Nabateans and the Birth of Early Christianity in the Ancient Near East.” This article appears as part of a monograph entitled *Geography of the Holy Land: Perspectives*, assembled and put together by the “Bible Geography” specialty group of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) and was published in October 2005 by Holy Light Theological Seminary Press in Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

² The ancient route leading from the Judean town of Bethlehem into the Elah Valley section of the Shephelah lowlands takes only a few hours to traverse on foot. This was confirmed during a hiking trip taken by the author in conjunction with other students from Jerusalem University College during an organized field trip led by the school’s geography instructor, Mr. James Monson, in February 1981.

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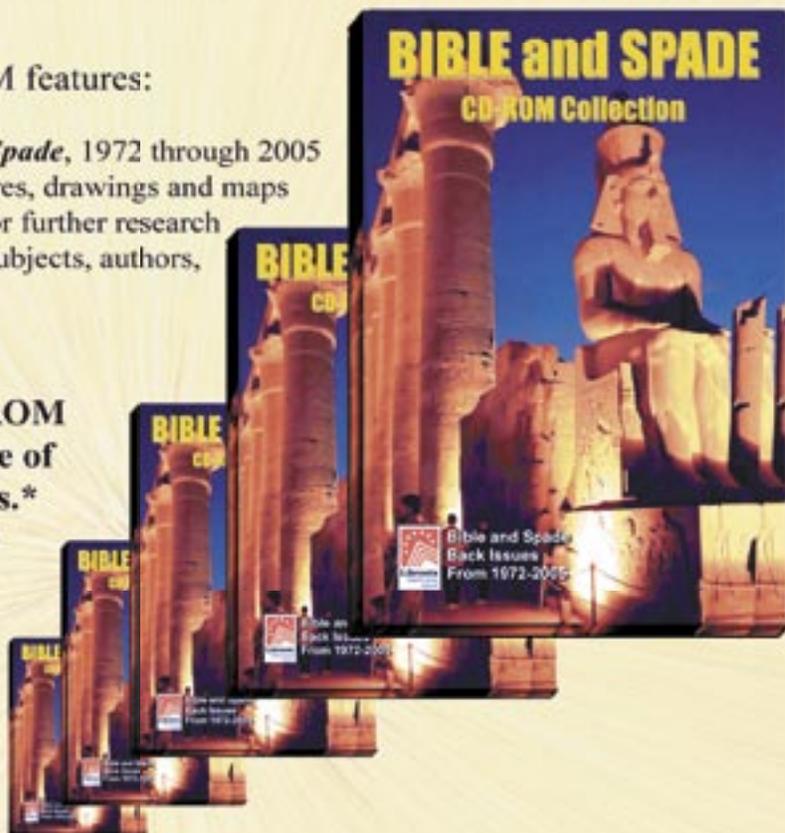
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