

An Armenian Perspective on the Search for Noah's Ark

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INTRODUCTION: WHY AN “ARMENIAN PERSPECTIVE”?

The title of this paper, “An Armenian Perspective on the Search for Noah’s Ark,” was chosen because I believe that the case for Mount Cudi as the landing-place of the Ark is built upon data coming exclusively from a single Syro-Mesopotamian historical stream, and is thus self-authenticating. This is an invalid approach to determining truth. An independent perspective, a fundamentally Armenian one, offers a needed corrective to wrong conclusions that have been drawn from it. This need is brought home by the apparently irreconcilable clash between the eyewitness reports pointing to Mount Ararat on the one hand,¹ and the historical data that points to Mount Cudi on the other.²

Attempts to deal with the two approaches have typically taken the form of searching for reasons to disparage one or the other, or finding creative ways to reinterpret otherwise self-explanatory information to force it, however awkwardly, into conformity with a particular model. Efforts were not being made to seek a framework that would allow both approaches to be taken basically at face value. I thought there was a possibility that BOTH approaches might be correct, the difference lying in how the data was being interpreted. I believe I have found a way to reconcile them, and lay out my case in the pages that follow.

SETTING THE STAGE: IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES

I want to begin by emphasizing the seriousness of the collision course these two approaches are on. If you have any familiarity at all with Ark research, you will probably recognize the name of George Hagopian. A native Armenian, he claimed to have twice, as a young boy in the early 1900s, climbed Mount Ararat with his uncle. He claimed to have *actually climbed on top of the Ark*. His testimony has been closely scrutinized by many researchers, and has stood up remarkably well.



[George Hagopian (left) with Alfred Lee.]

The first thing I wish to note is that there is absolutely NO doubt that the mountain he claimed to climb was Mount Ararat. Hagopian demonstrated this certainty in many ways,

including his use of the native Armenian name for Mount Ararat, Massis, and his intimate knowledge of things in the area of Lake Van. From journalist Rene Noorbergen's interview with Hagopian, we glean the following:

I first went there when I was about ten years old. It must have been around 1902. My grandfather was the minister of the big Armenian Orthodox Church in Van, and he always told me stories about the holy ship on the holy mountain. And then one day my uncle said, "Georgie, I'm going to take you to the holy mountain," and he took me with him, packed his supplies on his donkey, and together we started our trek toward Mount Ararat. "Uncle, that's the holy mountain," I said, pointing to what seemed to be our destination up ahead of us. "That's right, Georgie," he said. "Massis is the holy mountain" (1960: 165).

We can therefore immediately rule out the idea that he placed his Ark discovery on any mountain other than Ararat. I also believe we can trust Noorbergen's reporting, as he was a professional journalist, foreign correspondent and photographer who handled magazine and newspaper assignments in more than 80 countries over a period of at least 22 years (1960: dust jacket back flap).

Second, by claiming he actually climbed onto the Ark, his story leaves no room for a misidentification of the Ark itself. This might be claimed against sightings from the air, where rocks and shadows could play tricks on the eyes, but is not a factor here.

Third, Hagopian's story was consistent; he did not vary his story in retelling it. This greatly impressed Bill Crouse, who observed,

Hagopian's story is difficult to falsify. As he told and retold his story he never deviated from his original account (1993).

Fourth, he was credible. In an interview about his experiences working with Hagopian and tape-recording his testimony, Elfred Lee noted:

He was not one who would fabricate or lie. We checked him out as well. He had a very good reputation in town. We verified his bank accounts and income to make sure he was not making anything off of his statement. We also went to Lake Van in Turkey and specific sites he discussed to verify his authenticity (Corbin 1999: 69).

Lee added,

As to his integrity, he [Hagopian] had a PSE test, the lie detector test...and he passed the test. Also, his personal life, his reputation, his friends, and business acquaintances bore witness that he was an honest man who would not lie or fabricate. And he was not looking for any personal gain from it (Corbin 1999: 79).

Taking all of the above into account, one gets the impression that here we have someone worth listening to regarding Noah's Ark. Bill Crouse admitted:

His knowledge of the Ararat area as he describes it is accurate and detailed. Other aspects of his story given to researchers seem to substantiate his credibility (1993).

We conclude that the story is quite believable in every way—EXCEPT for the subject matter! It seems to cry out for SOME reason to fault it. Bill Crouse gave it his best shot:

The fact that he [Hagopian] is no longer with us makes it difficult to render any kind of judgement...The story itself is interesting, but it still provides no empirical evidence, and even if credible, is not helpful in the critical subject of location. Some things that trouble me are the fact that the testimony itself is secondhand...The George Hagopian story remains an interesting, but unverifiable story (1993).

WHAT IS TRUSTWORTHY?

Crouse's comments merit discussion, because they go to a core issue: how we evaluate the trustworthiness of historical sources and eyewitness testimony. Why should Hagopian's death make rendering a judgment about his testimony more difficult than when we evaluate historical documents? Since audio recordings of interviews with Hagopian exist,³ we are much closer to having firsthand testimony here than with virtually anything we have from ancient historians. The transcribed interviews of Noorbergen and Lee confirm and validate each other. These sources are independent witnesses to Hagopian's story, and Deuteronomy 19:15 lays down the principle, reaffirmed by Christ in Matthew 18:16, that "on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed" (NASB). Thus, I am convinced that the real issue is not so much about VERIFYING the Hagopian story, as it is about BELIEVING it.

We face this predicament—being able to only incompletely verify a story, and having to exercise a certain measure of faith that it is true—when we consider the writings of every dead historian of the ages. Yet, we don't let the fact they are long dead stop us from using their data; we just try to make sound judgments about the sources, based largely on three factors: (1) their "reputation"; (2) their internal consistency; and (3) their external coherence with other known facts. The only essential difference between historical documents and eyewitness reports is the patina of antiquity possessed by the former. But that should have no bearing whatsoever on the trustworthiness of a source.

If the historical accounts pointing to Mount Cudi are OBJECTIVELY TRUE, one inescapable fact follows: HAGOPIAN WAS A LIAR. There is no wiggle room here. Since no intimations exist that his sanity was ever questioned, if the Ark was on Mount Cudi or any other peak, there is only one conclusion we can draw: George Hagopian was a masterful liar. But given what was reported about the character of Hagopian, such a

conclusion does not fit him very well. So I decided to ask a question that no one else seems to have raised: are the Mount Cudi reports objectively true?

BEROSSUS: WELLSPRING OF THE SYRO-MESOPOTAMIAN STREAM

Turning now to the historical documents, the information Bill Crouse amassed is very helpful (Crouse 1992; Crouse and Franz 2006). There are clearly a number of ancient sources that can be referenced in support of the Mount Cudi tradition. Looking over the data, we can make a few general observations:

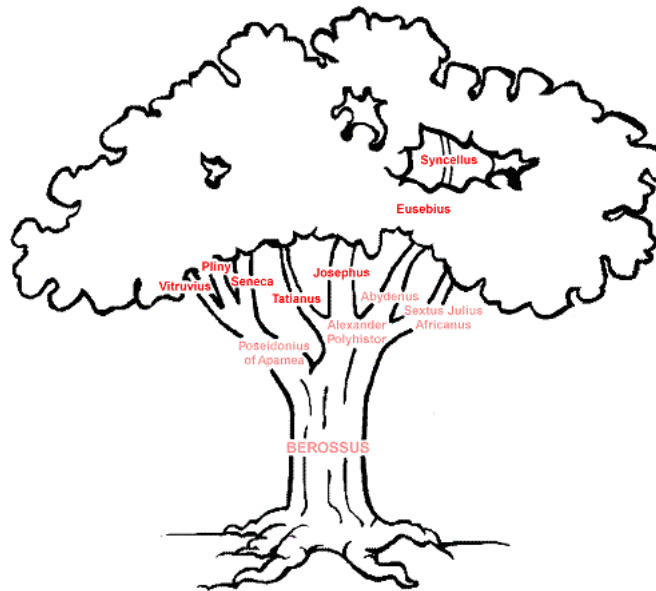
1. The case for Mount Cudi is predicated upon our respect for ancient sources.
2. This respect springs from a high regard for the sources' reputation, which is partly built upon others referencing their works as authoritative.
3. None of the ancient sources claims personal direct observation of the Ark on Mount Cudi (or Ararat, for that matter), but depends on earlier histories and popular tradition.
4. The earliest mention of the Gordyene Mountains location of the Ark landing—also known as Kardu, Cordyaeon, and a few similar variations—is found in Berossus.

Since Berossus lies at the bottom of the pile of historical documents, we should review what we know about him. He provides the earliest mention of the Gordyene site, where Mount Cudi is located. As quoted in Josephus:

Now all the writers of barbarian histories make mention of this flood, and of this ark; among whom is Berossus the Chaldean. For when he was describing the circumstances of the flood, he goes on thus: "It is said, there is still some part of this ship in Armenia, at the mountain of the Cordyaeans; and that some people carry off pieces of the bitumen, which they take away, and use chiefly as amulets, for the averting of mischiefs" (*Antiquities* 1: 3: 6 [LCL 93]).

That mention of Armenia above is somewhat ambiguous, but not important at the moment. Let us focus instead on Berossus. According to the very detailed Wikipedia article about him, Berossus' *Babyloniaca*—History of Babylon—was written around 290–278 BC. The work survives only as fragments recorded in derivative citations in several classical writers, including Pliny, who seems to be a tertiary source dependent on Poseidonius of Apamea (135–50 BC). Christian and Jewish references to his work, such as Josephus, are likewise tertiary sources, relying on citations by Alexander Polyhistor (c. 65 BC) or Juba of Mauretania (c. 50 BC–20 AD), both of whose works are no longer extant. Citations in Eusebius' *Chronicon* (c. 260–340 AD) and Syncellus' *Ecloga Chronigraphica* (c. ca. 800–810 AD) are even less direct, and depend in part on citations from the lost works of Abydenus and Sextus Julius Africanus (Wikipedia, *Berossus*).

I drew up a tree diagram to help us better visualize the main points in the transmission of the information ultimately derived Berossus. It does not include every detail—for example, for simplicity I have ignored Juba of Mauretania—but it includes the important main branches. The rose-colored labels indicate works for which we no longer have the originals.



Now we need to ask, what evidence do we have that the details attributed to Berossus are *objectively true*? Is he a *reputable* source? Let's take a closer look at Berossus from this angle.

BEROSSUS AND HIS ROOTS

The Wikipedia article on Berossus also states,

His account of the Flood (preserved in Syncellus) is extremely similar to versions of the Epic of Gilgamesh that we have today. However, in *Gilgamesh*, the main protagonist is Utnapishtim, while here, Xisouthros (sic) is likely a Greek transliteration of Ziusudra, the protagonist of the Sumerian version of the Flood.

This is an extremely important point. Berossus draws much of his material from the Babylonian culture of his time, including their creation legends and Flood tradition. Bill Crouse noted this, but only in passing:

Berossus' account is basically a version of the Babylonian Flood account (1992).

I believe that not looking closely at the implications of this fact is an important oversight. Not doing so gives us a significantly incomplete picture. When we look at it closely, we find that Berossus' account draws upon legend here, not history. The main character is Xisuthros, a Hellenization of Ziusudra, hero of the Sumerian Flood myth. A pantheon of Greek gods is assumed, headed by Cronus, who can be identified with the Sumerian deity Enki. Unnamed friends of Xisuthros, including a pilot, go along for the trip; there is the Gordyene mountain landing; and the "rapture" of Xisuthros, his wife, a daughter, and the

boat pilot follow the offering of sacrifices at the end of the journey:

With his wife, daughter and the pilot he quitted the ship and having bowed to the earth erected an altar and offered sacrifices. The group thereupon disappeared... (Lovett, worldwide flood.com).

It is quite apparent that there are legendary accretions inextricably tied to this story. Its use as a source of objective truth is seriously compromised. With the above in view, we have to update our tree illustration to reflect what its roots go into:



The entire tree of Berossus thus draws deeply from the well of Sumerian and Babylonian mythology, which has an impact on the objective truth of what Berossus and those who followed him tell us in their histories. Also note, Berossus' mention of the vessel of Xisuthros "in the mountains of the Gordyaeans" cannot be divorced from its context. It is an integral part of Berossus' Flood story, and does not stand on its own. As should be clear now, that story is one that none would ever claim as being objectively true. I must ask why, then, should we assume his location for the Ark is any different? After all, it is part and parcel with the Babylonian Flood myth. The mythological baggage connected with Berossus' version of the Flood story casts a pall of doubt over the validity of his Gordyene mountain location.

THE LOCALIZATION PHENOMENON

These doubts are confirmed when we consider an important "big picture" matter. Recall that at Babel, God confused the languages, fractured the fellowship of humanity, and caused people to scatter over the world. One major result was that the early memories of the Flood event became corrupted when people moved into new lands and broke contact

with others. This is very clear when we survey diverse Flood traditions from around the world.

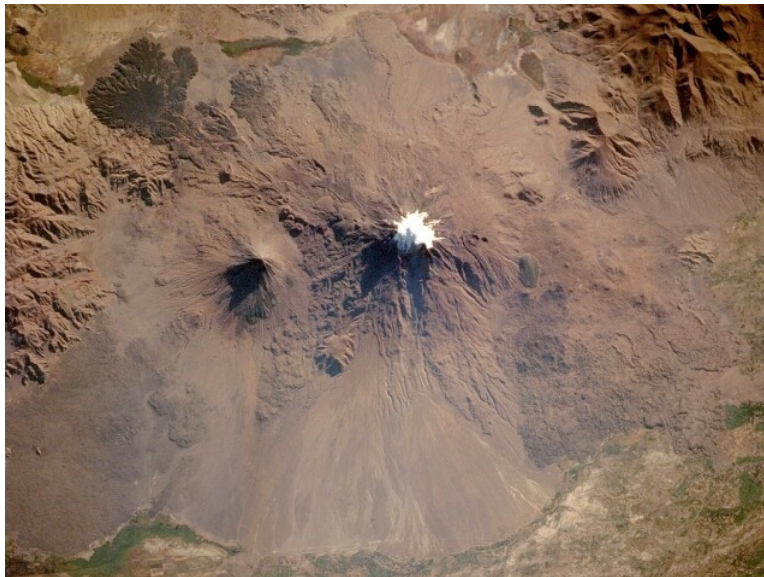
In *The Doorway Papers*, Arthur Custance noted that not only are Flood legends found worldwide, but, when a saving boat is part of the story and comes to rest on a mountain with the survivors, the landing-place is invariably local. In his online book we find:

The “ark” grounds locally. With the exception of the biblical account, this is virtually universal. The Andaman Islanders say that Noah landed near a place called Wotaemi; the people of Sumatra say the ark landed on Mount Marapi; the Fijians on Mount Mbenga; the Greeks either on Mount Parnassus or Mount Othrys; the Tamanakis (a Carib tribe on the banks of the Orinoco) on Mount Tapanacu; the Mexicans on Mount Colhuacan; the Yuin (Australian aborigines) on Mount Dromedary; the northern Maidu (southwestern United States) on Keddie Peak in the Sacramento Valley; and so it goes (2001: ch. 2, 4–5).

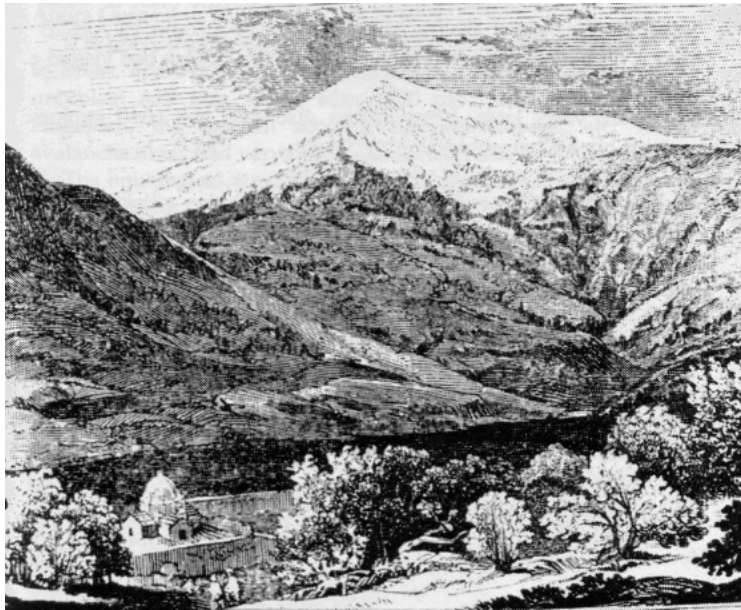
It is obvious that the tale of Berossus perfectly fits this pattern. When one follows the stream of transmission of the historical documentation favoring Mount Cudi back through the ages, we find Berossus at the wellspring. And what information do we find him giving out? A version of the LOCAL Babylonian Flood story that existed at his time! This has a major impact not only on how we interpret what Berossus tells us, but how we should view all of the derivative histories that build upon his foundation as well!

BIRTH OF A LEGEND

This leads us to a consideration of why such localized legends appeared in the first place. One would think that a huge boat on a mountain would be so unique, there would be no chance that it would ever be imagined at any location other than where it really was—rather like wondering where to find the Eiffel Tower. Yet, there is a logical explanation for why the landing-place did not remain clear-cut in everyone’s memory—but ONLY if we consider Mount Ararat, not Mount Cudi. For unlike Mount Cudi, Ararat was a volcano, an active one for the better part of its existence. We can see the evidence of magma flows very clearly in satellite views, and blocks of volcanic basalt litter its slopes.



This volcanic activity was most recently exhibited in a catastrophic, explosive eruption in 1840 that buried the Monastery of St. Jacob and wiped out the original village of Ahora on the northeastern flank of the mountain.



[Detailed sketch by Dr. Friedrich Parrot of St. Jacob Monastery at Ahora and Mount Ararat, 1829.]

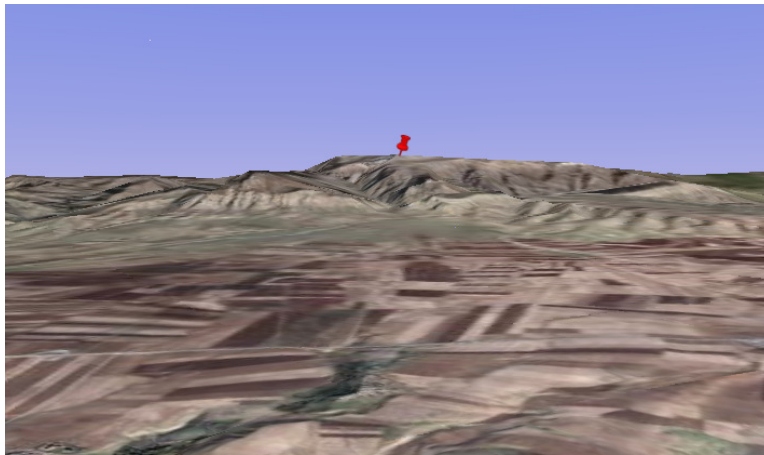
When faced with a volcano in their back yard, people get as far from it as needed in order to feel safe! There is no reason to think Noah and his extended family would have done any differently. We are thus looking, at a very early point in human history, at the Ark being both entirely hidden from sight by volcanic debris, ice and snow, 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 other sites after Babel.

If the Ark was on Mount Cudi, though, where are the factors that would have tended to make the landing-place a legendary thing? It is not a volcano, nor particularly high at under 7000 feet, with relatively little permanent snow. It would not have been terribly difficult to get to by any with sufficient determination. This does not favor the development of legends.

There is also a psychological angle to consider relative to Mount Cudi. Why is there no memorial to the Ark there? Humanity has an innate tendency to memorialize significant happenings. We build shrines and celebrate holidays to commemorate them. But in the case of Mount Cudi, we are expected to believe that the Ark was gradually dismantled by generations of talisman seekers and timber scavengers, and all that remains of it is some bitumen and charcoal. I have trouble swallowing this idea. It makes better sense that the Sumerians or those who followed them, such as the powerful, nationalistic Assyrians, would have promoted the place as a point of national pride, or at least built a lasting stone

memorial on the spot. But they did not, despite every logical reason to have done so. Why not? Because there was actually nothing there! All they had was a local, fictional Flood tradition with no objective truth behind it, which arose because mankind's communications got garbled by God at Babel, and because the real Ark was buried far away in the volcanic ejecta and snow on Massis, where no one would find it for many generations.

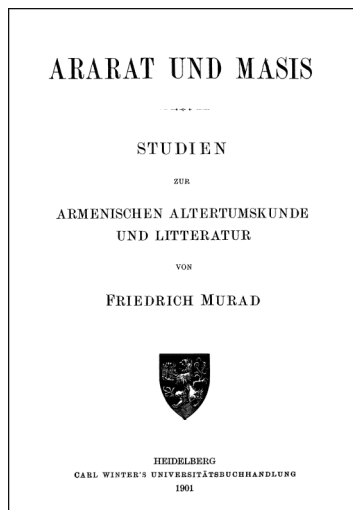
These considerations allow us to make a reasonable conjecture as to how an Ark tradition became attached to Mount Cudi. Since no clear-cut Ark landing-place could be demonstrated anywhere, each culture was free to develop its own way of memorializing the event. With the establishment of civilization in Shinar, it is no real stretch to say that just as Gilgamesh replaced Noah in the Sumerian version, so Mount Cudi replaced the inaccessible Mount Ararat as the site of the Ark. Mount Cudi is, after all, directly north of the plain of Shinar, and would have provided a convenient nearby locale to connect with the tradition. Following is a Google Earth picture that helps us see this:



[Mount Cudi, looking north. Notice its proximity to the northern edge of the Mesopotamian valley, with the Tigris River flowing on the right.]

INTRODUCING FRIEDRICH MURAD

It is now time to discuss some insights provided by a valuable reference that many modern scholars are unfamiliar with: Friedrich Murad's *Ararat und Masis*.⁴



This little-known German work presents the most complete single compilation of information I have yet found that focuses on the historical data from an Armenian perspective. In his review (in English) of this book, Frederick C. Conybeare remarked:

This book, written soberly and with learning, explores the origin and literary history of that part of the Noachian legend which relates to Mount Ararat. Incidentally is given a good resume of all we know both from the cuneiform inscriptions and from ancient writers of the earliest history of the Armenian race (1901: 335).

He also observes that Murad demonstrated a “complete mastery of the old Armenian literature.” Conybeare’s qualifications to make this judgment are worth noting: he was a Fellow of University College, Oxford, and Professor of Theology at the University of Oxford. An authority on the Armenian Church, he wrote several books covering Armenian history and theology (Wikipedia, *Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare*).

MURAD ON THE SYRO-MESOPOTAMIAN STREAM

Murad has a great deal to say about the idea of a distinctive Syro-Mesopotamian stream of tradition. For brevity, I will simply summarize some key points:

1. Though the etymology of the name *Ararat* is unclear, it is certain that the term describes the region occupied by the Armenians from the beginning of their history (1901: chap. 1).
2. He observes that Josephus, Eustathius of Antioch, Eusebius, Epiphanius, Chrysostom, Hieronymus, and Theodoritus all identify Ararat with Armenia. He terms this the Christian tradition (1901: chap. 3).
3. In contrast, a later Jewish tradition from the second century onward equates—though not unanimously—Ararat with Kardu, also known as Cordayene or Kurdistan (1901: chap. 4).
 - a. Syrian Christians adopted the Kardu interpretation.
 - b. The Muslims in turn received the Kardu Mountains tradition, transferred it to the Bohtan mountain range south of Lake Van and west of the Tigris, and recorded the location in the Koran as *Jebel Cudi*.
 - c. The exact location of this Mount Cudi, however, is not clear to Muslim chroniclers. Though they mention a small town, *Kariet Themanin* (near the modern city of *Cizre*), which reportedly was founded by Noah, several other landing-site locations also circulated among the residents of the Kurdish mountains.
4. Murad agrees with Dillmann (1892: 147), who suggested that this late Jewish exegesis arose by their interpreting the biblical Ararat as the land of Kardu; *and the specific Mount Cudi location was the result of familiarity with the Babylonian flood epic, which, according to the version transmitted by Berossus, places the landing site of its hero Xisuthros explicitly into the region of Kardu* (1901: 42, emphasis mine).

There you have it, my friends: a scholar well versed in all of the pertinent literature, explicitly connecting the Mount Cudi tradition with Berossus and his version of the Babylonian Flood epic!

Murad has much more to say on this subject, but for now, we will simply present Conybeare's succinct summary of Murad's detailed observations:

The Syrians of the east Tigris had floating among them, independently of the Jewish legend, a native story of a flood and of an ark which rested on the Djudi mountain in the land of Kardu. Under the influence of this Syrian form of the legend, especially in the second and later centuries, Armenia and Ararat, Djudi and the land of Kardu (i.e., Gordyene), were all confused together; and this confusion is met with in Josephus, in Berossus (as cited in the Armenian form of Eusebius' Chronicon), and in the Jewish Aramaic Targums. The confusion, however, is relatively late, and does not represent the earlier form of the biblical myth, which clearly centered around a peak in Ararat and not in Gordyene, which lies far away to the southeast (1901: 336).

One last direct quote from Murad should be noted:

Even the form of the name Ararat [in Genesis]...is clearly an Armenian spelling and pronunciation. The specific designation of the mountains of Ararat as the landing place of the ark, as well as the point of departure of the new population of the earth, which is also contained in the Berossus version, suggests that the Armenian region of Ayrarat [a specific area within which Mount Ararat is found] is the original source of the flood story, as well as the locale of the events themselves (1901: 42).

Altogether, Murad shows us that Berossus is the ultimate source of the historically documented Syro-Mesopotamian tradition that points to Mount Cudi, and Mount Cudi is the local peak in Berossus' version of the Babylonian Flood tradition. In other words, Berossus is passing along legend, not objective truth. This applies to the landing-place of his Ark as well. It cannot be considered on its own merits, divorced from its context as an integral part of a larger Flood story.

We also observe that Berossus is the fountainhead from which all the written histories draw that are considered evidence for the Mount Cudi location. The Syro-Mesopotamian stream courses through the ages and is tapped into by Josephus, Eusebius, the Targums and the Moslems, etc., and all of these historical sources trace back to Berossus for their support for the Kardu Mountains—that is, to Mount Cudi.

Thus, when we examine the historical documents that support the Gordyene mountains where Mount Cudi is found, we wind up staying within the narrow confines of a single Syro-Mesopotamian stream of tradition. It began with Berossus, was picked up by the early, influential Syrian church, and was in turn picked up and promulgated by the Moslems. It is a uniquely Syro-Mesopotamian perspective, rather consistent internally

and having a certain reputation in scholarly circles (particularly in the West). But it is only one of many streams of tradition concerning the Flood and its survivors.

To summarize, the well Berossus drew from was polluted at the source, using a localized Flood story that reflected many corruptions and legendary accretions. It logically follows that all that depended on him downstream were likewise tainted, and no matter where you jump into the stream, you are going to get dirty. To use my earlier metaphor, I believe that the Mount Cudi advocates have been so concerned with finding all of the interrelationships among the branches of the tree of historical documentation, it has completely escaped their notice that the roots are drawing from a polluted well.

THE SILENCE OF THE ARMENIAN HISTORIES

To escape the stream tainted by Berossus, we need to jump into a different stream that originates from a different fountainhead—an Armenian one. But is this possible? The earliest Armenian records are apparently silent on anything connected with Mount Ararat. References tying Mount Ararat to Flood traditions are hard to come by until Thomas Artsruni arrived on the scene in the 10th century (Thomson 1985: 81). Thereafter, Mount Cudi appears to have been supplanted by Mount Ararat in the Armenian tradition. Two important questions need to be answered: If Mount Ararat is indeed the Mountain of the Ark, why are the Armenian historical records silent about it for centuries? And second, what finally prompted the change of the Armenian traditions to Mount Ararat?

Part of the answer for the silence lies in what was discussed earlier—the Ark was out of sight and out of mind, in the ice, snow and ash of an angry volcano. But we would still expect SOME memory to be maintained, if only in the form of oral traditions, which hopefully at some point were transcribed into written histories.

Fortunately, Murad was able to poke a small hole in this veil of silence. He observed:

Is there an indigenous flood story among the Armenians? There is only a single example in the printed Armenian literature. *Moses Chorenatsi*, in his History of Armenia I, 6, tells of oral traditions containing stories of a flood, of Xisuthros and his voyage to, and landing in, Armenia, as well as the areas where his sons settled. At the end he adds (p. 39): “But the ancients mention these things of the descendants of Aram in songs of the lyre, dances, and festivals” (1901: 43).

Moses Chorenatsi—also known as Moses of Chorene—lived in the 5th century AD, and is traditionally regarded as the author of the most significant mediaeval Armenian history.⁵ From this single brief passage, Murad had the insight to see that the ancient Armenians (which, as evidenced in other chapters of his History, is what Chorenatsi meant by the “descendants of Aram”), told and sang about the Flood and its hero. Murad explains that there are no other indigenous written sources because all pre-Christian monuments, books, etc. were thoroughly eradicated by Gregory, the founder of the Armenian Church, and his followers. In their zeal to purge the nation of all connections with its pagan past, they wiped out our means of better documenting this.

Murad concluded,

It cannot be denied that the Armenians had an indigenous flood lore, connected with Masis, even though we do not know its details (1901: chap. 9, page not noted by translator).

THE ARMENIAN TRADITION CHANGE

What about the second question—why did the transfer of the Armenian tradition from Cudi to Ararat occur? In the absence of more complete ancient records there are no easy answers, but a reasonable hypothesis can be made.

Since the Armenians were Christianized through missionaries from Edessa in Syria, they were trained in the traditions of their benefactors. This included the Gordyene location of the Ark. Conybeare, summarizing Murad, observed,

The Armenians themselves never identified the mountain on which the ark of Noah rested with their own Masis before the eleventh century. They located it instead, no doubt under Syrian influence, in Gordyene. In their fifth-century writers we have many descriptions of the province of Ararat, but no allusion to Noah and his ark. A passage of Faustus, the historian (about 450 A. D.), relating that the ark rested on the mountain of Ararat in the land of Kardu, is an interpolation (1901: 336).

Yet, beginning with the writings of Thomas Artsruni in the 10th century AD (Thomson 1985: 81), we find the Armenians dropping this remnant of the Syro-Mesopotamian stream and embracing their holy mountain, Massis, as the mountain of the Ark. What prompted this change? On this question Murad is not very helpful, but Conybeare fills the gap with a very reasonable explanation:

Nor does he [Murad] suggest a reason which appears to me to be plausible why the Armenians, after they had been Christianized, abstained from the identification, hinted at in Josephus and accepted by Jerome, of Noah's mountain with their own Masis. Their reason, I believe, was this, that Masis was already the scene of a similar and native Armenian legend, with which on religious grounds they scrupled to identify the story they now read in the Scriptures. Masis was anyhow a center and focus of pagan myths and cults, which the author enumerates; and it was only in the eleventh century, after these had vanished from the popular mind, that the Armenian theologians ventured to locate on its eternal snows the resting-place of Noah's ark (1901: 337).

Conybeare's above comments are built upon Murad's detailed discussion of the many early pagan stories that attached themselves to Massis, so that it was treated like the Greek Mount Olympus, the home of the gods. The Christianized Armenians' hesitancy to identify Massis with the biblical mountain is thus understandable.

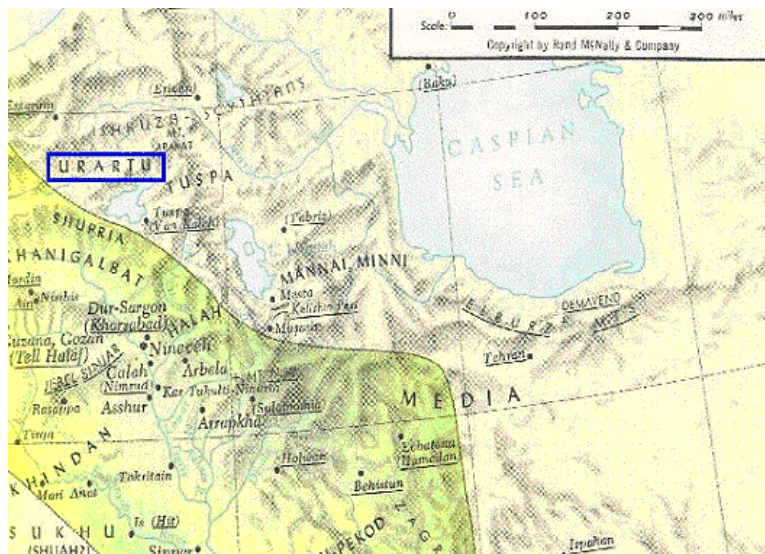
It is also interesting to consider that the Armenians' readiness to receive the Gospel so early—they officially accepted Christianity in 301, even before the Roman Empire—had to be in part because their earlier traditions had already planted the seed. For the Armenians, the designation of Massis as the landing site of Noah was a natural conclusion from the Genesis account, helping them to immediately respond to it.

NICHOLAS OF DAMASCUS AND THE BARIS PROBLEM

We will now look at a few other indications of a distinct Armenian stream of tradition. One of these is the Baris problem. I believe Nicholas of Damascus, with his mention of Baris and Minni (also called Minyas), draws from the Armenian perspective as well. Josephus records the pertinent information:

Nicholas of Damascus, in his ninety-sixth book, hath a particular relation about them; where he speaks thus: "There is a great mountain in Armenia, over Minyas, called Baris, upon which it is reported, that many who fled at the time of the deluge were saved; and that one who was carried in an ark, came on shore upon the top of it; and that the remains of the timber were a great while preserved. This might be the man about whom Moses the legislator of the Jews wrote" (*Antiquities* 1: 3: 6 [LCL 94, 95]).

Nicholas, who lived in the first century BC, identifies the mountain of the Ark with the rather obscure name "Baris," which he places it in "Armenia." The land of Urartu (another name for the land of Ararat, or Armenia) is, as Nicholas described it, "above" the land of Minni. But it is a stretch to consider the area where Mount Cudi is found as being "above" Minni, that is, north of it. It is more accurate to describe it as lying to the west. This can be seen in this map (Geissler, Ancient Kingdom of Urartu):

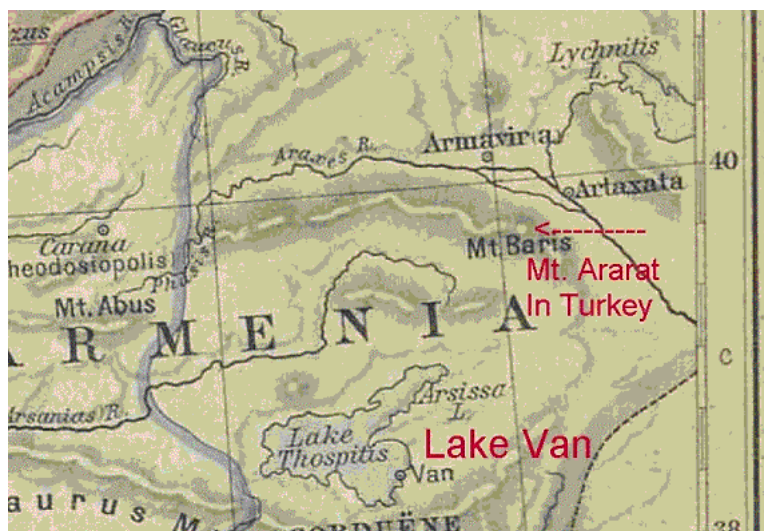


Murad also is helpful in understanding the significance of the mention of Baris:

According to Nicholas himself, mount Baris is in Armenia, above the region of Minyas (i.e. the land of the Mannai). This description fits the area of Ayrarat [a province of old Armenia that included Mount Ararat]: here we find the “big mountain called Baris.” It is clear that this refers to the highest mountain of the referenced country, i.e. Massis. Indeed, one of the various attributes with which the Armenians describe this mountain is *bardsr* (=high, height) which coincides with the meaning of *bares* (barez, height; barezant, high). From this we deduce that the Armenians’ neighbors knew the mountain only as Bardsr (Bares, Baris), the “high one,” which became known, most likely, through the Persians, for whom the name coincided with their divine mountain Hara-berezaiti, also called Bares. The principal indigenous name for the mountain, in contrast, did not catch on outside of Armenia. Even today Massis is known by foreign peoples with different names: the Persians say “Kuhi-Nuh,” the Turks “Agher Dagh,” the Tatars “Dagher-Dagh,” the Europeans, erroneously, “Ararat” (1901: 49).

This indicates that “Baris” was simply a generic name in Nicholas’ time by which Mount Ararat was known to the surrounding nations. Only the Armenians used the name Massis; everyone else knew the peak as the “high one,” a quite appropriate description for it. (Incidentally, it takes a considerable stretch of the imagination to apply this label to humble Mount Cudi, some 10,000 feet lower than Mount Ararat.)

Apparently with the above considerations in mind, a well-regarded cartographer from Columbia University, William R. Shepherd, did not hesitate to identify Baris with Mount Ararat in his *Historical Atlas* (1923: 20).



“FROM THE EAST” IN GENESIS 11:2

Now, let us consider something else. Mount Cudi is the highest point visible from the northern Mesopotamian plain, so if it was the Mountain of the Ark, we would expect Noah’s family to have headed due south and immediately entered the valley of Shinar.

But there is a problem. The clearest sense of Genesis 11:2 does not support this. 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 [emphasis mine].

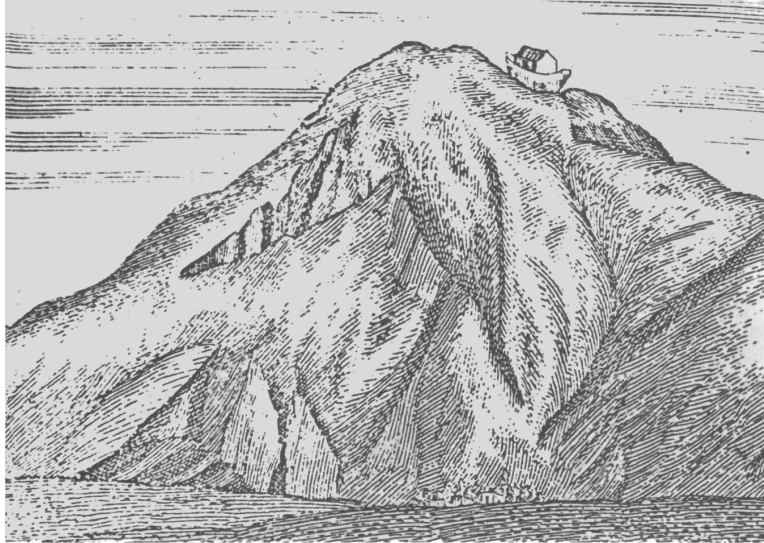
This translation of the Hebrew as “from the east” seems to be the most straightforward rendering, treating the Hebrew word *miqqedem* as a combination of the preposition *min*, “out of, away from,” with *qedem*, “front, east.” The ancient Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate translations likewise opt for the “from the east” translation, providing a historical precedent indicating it is accurate.

Other grammatically acceptable ways of translating *miqqedem* do exist. The NIV renders it as “eastward,” making the migration into Shinar from the west. The NEB chooses an indefinite yet still possible alternative, “in the east,” painting a picture of people moving to and fro, with no definite direction, prior to entering Shinar. Emil Kraeling, however, considers this indeterminate “in the east” translation to be “inadmissible in 11.2 because wherever *miqqedem* is found in that sense a general localization is implied from which it is to be understood...” (1947: 162).

Being directly north of the Mesopotamian plain, Mount Cudi demands a southward migration. It requires one to reject the Septuagint, Vulgate and KJV rendering, “from the east.” Normally, the support from ancient translations would suffice for interpreters to feel they correctly understood the passage, but this is an instance where I feel efforts have been made to seek alternative meanings of Scripture driven by a need to make it fit into a predetermined framework. Scripture itself thus indicates the Mount Cudi understanding is wrong. Mount Ararat, in contrast, presents no such problems, because the initial migration of the earliest descendants of Noah would have been south and east into the Araxes Valley, followed by a subsequent entry in Shinar “from the east.”

STAYING NEAR THE WATER

Such an initial migration into the Araxes Valley should be evident from a few considerations. One is that the vast majority of the alleged eyewitnesses place their Ark sightings on the northeast side of the mountain, just above the gaping Ahora Gorge. Even back in the 17th century, Sir John Chardin reported that the natives of the area told that the Ark was situated on the northeast side of the mountain. Chardin drew the following sketch, reproduced in Cummings’ book (1973: 44).



A crude sketch by Chardin in 1686 showing Ark located on northeastern side of Ararat as described to him by the natives at that time.

Even given the crudeness of the sketch and the fact that the Ahora Gorge had not yet blown open in Chardin's time, the outline of the mountain clearly indicates that the sketch was drawn from the northeast. Compare it to the following photograph of the northeast side of Mount Ararat; the outlines of Chardin's sketch readily match up with it.



Now, consider for a moment the situation Noah found himself in when he left the Ark. He had been drifting along for a year and has no clear idea where he now is, and besides, the topography has been radically reworked by the churning waters of the Flood. He and his family are pioneers, going out into unknown virgin territory, not knowing what they will find. Their supplies have dwindled to almost nothing from their year-long voyage, so they will need to live off the land. What will they do? I submit that, looking down from the northeastern slopes of the mountain and seeing the Araxes River valley spread out

below them, they would have instinctively followed that life-sustaining stream. The headwaters of the Euphrates arise some distance away, out of sight in the mountainous country west of Mount Ararat, so it is highly unlikely they would have first plunged into the unknown mountains, stumbled upon the headwaters of that river, and followed its gradually widening path into Mesopotamia, from whence they could have migrated “eastward,” per the NIV. No, the most likely route he and his family would have taken—as well as the animals, which would have immediately needed grazing land and water—would be down into the Araxes valley. It makes a lot of sense that this is what happened, and at least one Armenian artist came to this conclusion (Gallery.am).



[Hovhannes Aivazovsky, *Descent of Noah from Mount Ararat*, 1889. National Gallery of Armenia, Yerevan.]

We would therefore expect the Araxes River valley to have become the immediate home of Noah and his family, their base to re-establish life and become familiar with the brave new world God had bid them take hold of. After all, Genesis 9:20 tells us that early on, Noah became a farmer and raised grapes. Pursuing agriculture is not compatible with either living in a rugged mountain area, or staying on the slopes of an active volcano while a whole new world beckoned. It makes perfect sense that Farmer Noah would have set up shop in the valley of the Araxes. Do we find any indications that this occurred?

NEARBY PLACE NAMES AND TRADITIONS

Absolutely. This is seen in the meanings attached to several place names in the immediate vicinity—in particular, the city of Nakhichevan. It lies some 60 miles southeast of Ararat down the Araxes River. Another Google Earth image helps us see the relationship of Nakhichevan to Mount Ararat.



Josephus refers to this place thus:

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 [literally, *Apobaterion*], for it was there that the ark came safe to land, and they show the relics of it to this day (*Antiquities* 1: 3: 5).

In a letter published in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Constantinople-based American missionary H.G.O. Dwight observed about Nakhichevan,

In the Armenian, this name is composed of two words, *nakh*, first, and *ichevan*, descent, or resting-place, i.e. “the first descent” or “the first resting place,” which they say is the first place of abode built by Noah and his sons after the flood (1855: 190).⁷

Dwight goes to further pains to point out that other ancient authorities other than the Armenians attested to the significance of the name “Nakhichevan.” He makes it clear that it cannot

be accounted for on the ground that the Armenians devised this name in order to give strength to their tradition about Mount Ararat and the ark; for it is proved by ancient historians of other nations, that both the name and the tradition existed hundreds of years before the Armenians embraced Christianity (1855: 190)

...and he mentions Josephus and Ptolemy as examples.

Murad concurs. In chapter 9 of his book, he says Josephus’ declaration about the *Apobaterion* in Armenia clearly indicates that the spot—which in the Armenians’ own language means “Landing place”—is to be found in Armenia, and he asserts that *it has nothing to do with the Kardu Mountains*. The local tradition confirms this memory of the *Apobaterion* in the city of Nakhichevan. Here, it is said, Noah settled after the Flood and died, and from at least the 13th century, a monument marked his grave there. The

significance of the name is that it means the place where one first disembarks, or the First Settlement.

Dwight elaborates,

But the most singular of all these traditional etymologies is that of the well known town of *Nakhchevan*, or more properly *Nakhichevan*. In the Armenian, this name is composed of two words, *nakh*, first, and *ichevan*, descent, or resting-place, i.e. “the first descent” or “the first resting place,” which they say is the first place of abode built by Noah and his sons after the flood (1855: 190).

I am aware that the nineteenth-century language scholar, Heinrich Hubschmann, while agreeing that the name “Nakhichevan” in Armenian literally means “the place of descent,” goes on to state that it was not known by that name in antiquity (Hubschmann, pp. 69–79). Instead, he claimed the present-day name evolved from “Naxcavan,” where the prefix “Naxc” was a name, and “avan” is Armenian for “town.” It may be that “Nakhichevan” thus reflects a renaming, similar to New Amsterdam becoming New York. But the fact remains: Josephus, as early as the first century, noted that the Armenians tied the Noah tradition to the site prior to any significant Jewish or Christian influences from outside. And noting the similarity of “Naxc” to “nakh,” if Dwight’s derivation of the etymology of “nakh” is correct, the original name may well have signified “First Town.”

A 100-year-old photograph of the reputed Tomb of Noah in Nakhichevan (Aivazian 1990) exists. Indications are that it is no longer extant, having been destroyed by the Soviets.



Conybeare summarizes Murad’s information thus:

The Armenians had their own native legend of a flood and of an ark which rested on Masis—this at least as early as the first century of our era, long centuries

before they adopted Christianity. Their neighbors equated this Armenian legend with the biblical one, and Josephus, *Antiq. Jud.*, I, 90 ff. (1, 3, 5) even asserts that the Armenians themselves called the place where the navigator of their ark-whom he identifies with Noah-stepped out by the name *apobaterion*, a true rendering of Nachidschewan [Nakhichevan], Ptolemy's Naxouava, which lies southeast of Masis, about sixty miles from the summit. Jewish influence cannot possibly have led the Armenians at so remote a date to invent such a place-name, and give such an interpretation of it (1901: 336).

This point cannot be overemphasized: Noah-connected place-names existed in Armenia BEFORE there was a significant Jewish or Christian presence in country to attribute them to. They were native traditions going back to earliest times. Dwight discussed this thus:

1. ...it is a highly improbable thing that a comparatively small body of Jewish emigrants should have given an Armenian name to an Armenian town, where they happened to be living, in order to give currency to a mere tradition connected with their own religion, and that diametrically opposed to the religion of the country. Probably a parallel case cannot be found in the world.
2. It is still more improbable that the Armenians, while still heathens, should so generally have adopted this name, and connected with it a belief that it commemorated the event referred to, and that the remains of the ark were still preserved in the immediate neighborhood (as Josephus says they did), merely on the dictum of a band of stranger Jews that had come to settle among them.
3. And even if this very improbable supposition were true, then it very naturally follows that the Jews in question really believed that Mount Ararat was the mountain upon which the ark rested, which certainly must be regarded as a much earlier tradition than any that can be brought in favor of Mount Joodi [sic], in Koordistan, the only other locality which has any substantial claims (1855: 191).

Another significant place name is the original village of Arghuri (also spelled Agouri or Ahora), which prior to its 1840 destruction was located at the foot of Ararat. The name is said to mean "where Noah planted the grapevine" (cf. Gn 9:20). Noorbergen documents the following about it:

It is said that Agouri is the spot where Noah planted the first vineyards. Sahag Kaleidjan, librarian of the Gulbenkian Library [in the Jerusalem Armenian Convent], commented that he grew up with the knowledge that Agouri is a place worthy of special attention and veneration. He told me, "It was built on hallowed ground and became the starting point of all post-Deluge civilizations."

He also subscribes to the church-held tradition that the sanctuary of Agouri is built on the site where Noah erected his altar of burnt offering after disembarking from the ark (1980: 53).

Finally, mention must be made of the town of Marand, not far from Ararat and Nakhichevan in northern Iran. It is the Marunda of Ptolemy, where tradition has it that Noah's wife died and her bones were buried under a mosque. The following photo is of Ark researcher Violet Cummings visiting that mosque.



Dwight observed,

Farther to the East, towards Tabriz, is the town of *Marant* [Marand], a name which the Armenians derive from two words, *mair*, mother, and *ant*, there, i.e. “the mother is there,” the current tradition being that the wife of Noah was interred in that place (1855: 190).

INTERDISCIPLINARY WITNESSES TO ARMENIAN ANTIQUITY

One last consideration to very briefly mention is that, wherever the landing-place of the Ark was, in that area is where we would expect to find the earliest indications of human civilization. The bulk of the evidence indicates that the Armenian Highlands are the original cradle of humanity, NOT Mesopotamia. Some of the evidence includes:

Agriculture

The findings of Nikolai I. Vavilov, who according to the www.vir.nw.ru/history/vavilov.htm website is “recognized as the foremost plant geographer of contemporary times,” support the idea that the Armenian Highlands were the cradle of civilization. He writes:

There is no doubt that Armenia is the chief home of cultivated wheat. Asia Minor and Trans-Caucasia gave origin to rye...the home of alfalfa, the world's most important forage crop, is located in Trans-Caucasia and Iran.... (1937: 113).⁶

Ancient sites in the area

Many very ancient sites have been documented in the area around Ararat. Map 9 in Hewsen's *Historical Atlas* shows sites of early archaeological finds. In the notes written on the map, he observes that "skulls of the earliest human ancestors were found at Dmanisi in 2000" and, "Kavoukjian [an Armenian historian] identifies the large prehistoric complex at Metsamor with the important city of Aratta mentioned in Sumerian epics (c. 3000 B.C.)." Metsamor lies along the Araxes River to the north-northeast of Mount Ararat.



The above map shows that the Araxes River valley was home to a number of Fourth Millennium/Early Bronze sites. When we look to the area around Mount Cudi (just north of the Tigris River), however, we find but a single Early Transcaucasian site nearby. It seems clear that the Armenian Highlands, right around Mount Ararat, have a much greater claim to being the birthplace of civilization, in keeping with Ararat being the point from which the first post-Flood families scattered over the world.

CONCLUSIONS

The historical data the Mount Cudi case is built on, though having both antiquity and a large measure of internal consistency that makes it attractive to historians, is not objectively true. This is seen in the important role the Babylonian Flood story plays in Berossus' writings. When we further appreciate the clear indications that Berossus influenced most historians in the Syro-Mesopotamian stream in their identification of Mount Cudi as the Ark landing-place, we see the case in favor of Mount Cudi is greatly, if not fatally, undermined. A strong case is made that the historical data amassed so far in favor of Mount Cudi, while superficially "true," is incomplete on a deeper level, and has led many to wrong conclusions.

When we get the more complete view of the histories that takes into account the influence of Berossus, the apparent conflicts with accepting the genuineness at least the

most well-attested testimonies, such as that of George Hagopian, fall away. The need to consider “mysterious” certain historical data that does not easily fit into the Mount Cudi framework likewise no longer exists, as is a sense that one must seek overly creative ways to reconcile certain Scriptures with the historical framework. Everything falls neatly into place—although the exact location of the Ark on Mount Ararat still remains an open question!

Rather than being content with pruning branches of the Mount Cudi tree, I believe we need to lay an axe at its roots. It has been drawing sustenance from the polluted wellspring of Berossus, and needs to be cut down to allow the full sunlight to again shine on Mount Ararat and help us focus our limited resources on uncovering the Ark under its snows. By presenting this study, I hope I have helped to make this happen.

NOTES

1. Rex Geissler, on his website at www.noahsarksearch.com/Eyewitnesses.htm, has compiled a lengthy list of eyewitness testimonies which almost unanimously point to Turkey’s Mount Ararat as the location of the Ark.
2. Bill Crouse has been a longtime advocate of Mount Cudi. Articles on it have been published in *Archaeology and Biblical Research* 5(3), pp. 66–77, and *Bible and Spade* 19(4), pp. 99–111.
3. Elfred Lee has extensive audiotapes of his interviews with Hagopian. John Warwick Montgomery also has an independent audiotaped interview in his possession. Although the Hagopian interview transcript in chapter 8 of Montgomery’s book bears every appearance of being derived from Lee, Montgomery states (personal correspondence) it came from someone else, now deceased.
4. I am indebted to Gordon Franz, on the ABR staff, for locating for me a microfilm copy of this work, and to Walter Pasedag, Associates for Biblical Research volunteer, for translating the bulk of it from the original German.
5. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses_of_Chorene. The work is accessible to the English reader through Robert W. Thomson (ed.), *The History of the Armenians / Moses Khorenatsi*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.
6. See also his 1931 paper, *The Problem of the Origin of the World’s Agriculture in the Light of the Latest Investigations*.
7. Armenian words in the ancient script were also included in the original article, but for simplicity have been left out of the quotation in this paper.

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