



## A Review of the Search for Noah's Ark

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### Abstract

There have been many alleged sightings of the Ark and numerous attempts to find it, mainly on Mount Ararat, but search attempts so far have been without success. In the light of history, geology, and archaeology, we need to consider that the Ark probably landed elsewhere, and that there may be little of it left.

### Keywords

Noah's Ark, Search for Noah's Ark, Mount Ararat, Mount Cudi (Judi), Urartu

### Introduction

For Bible believers, locating the Ark that Noah built to survive the biblical worldwide Flood would be without a doubt the greatest archaeological triumph of all time. It would lend considerable support to the veracity of Scripture and would cause many skeptics to reevaluate their outlook. But if Noah's vessel was so large, why then have we not found it?

Since the 1800s, many alleged sightings of the Ark, most often on Greater Mount Ararat in eastern Turkey, have kept alive the hope that the Ark still exists in fairly intact condition. But in spite of many determined search expeditions, much aerial photography and application of modern satellite imaging and other technology, objective confirmation of the Ark's existence on Mount Ararat continues to elude us. Although discouraged by this ongoing lack of success, Ararat believers nevertheless continue to search for the Ark on this mountain.

Because the Ark has not been found on Ararat—at least, not yet—there are increasingly insistent voices offering reasons why the Ark has not been found there. It is, they say, because the Ark is somewhere else. At Durupinar near Mount Ararat, perhaps. Or possibly on Mount Cudi near Cizre, Turkey. Or maybe on a mountain in Iran. Or at one of several other lesser-known sites.

In support of casting the net more widely for the Ark, some geologists argue that the volcanic Mount Ararat did not erupt until after the Flood and therefore the Ark could not have landed there. There are scholars of history and geography who say that the mountain we call Ararat today was not yet included in the kingdom of Urartu (Ararat) at the time that Genesis was written. If this is true, we have been wasting our time and financial resources searching for the Ark on Mount Ararat at all. There are still other voices who contend that not much of the Ark will

have survived after thousands of years, and there is actually little of it left to find. Most Ark searchers do not wish to hear these voices.

Given this background, it seems appropriate to step back and take a thinking look at the entire subject of the search for the Ark. Because of length constraints, it is not possible within the scope of this paper to cover in depth all the relevant aspects of the Ark search: complete accounts of all visits to, sightings of, or searches for, the supposed Ark; comprehensive geography and geology of every location where someone thinks the Ark is; discussion of the merits of dissenting views; other various topics such as the nature of the Ark itself; plus the difficulties of ever proving definitively that someone has actually found the Ark. An exhaustive treatment of all this could fill a very thick book indeed, and perhaps someone will write that book some day. Meanwhile, all that this author can do here is attempt a brief review of the whole subject, point to sources of further information, try to keep the various aspects of this subject reasonably within balance, and perhaps shed light on where the Ark search finds itself today.

### Biblical Clues to Where the Ark Landed

The only authoritative source of information that we have as to where the Ark grounded is in the Genesis account, where we find three clues. The first is in Genesis 8:4: "And the ark rested . . . upon the mountains of Ararat." The original ancient written Hebrew had no vowel indications, as these were introduced only around 600AD (Parsons, 2007; Remsburg, 1903), and so "Ararat" was originally written "rrt" in the Genesis manuscript. Another rendition of "rrt" is Urartu, which was the name of the ancient kingdom later called Armenia (earliest Armenia covered about the same territory as late Urartu, although later Armenia was quite a bit larger) (Bailey, 1989, pp.58–60). We will

call this kingdom Urartu in this paper, to distinguish it from Mount Ararat, although Ararat and Urartu can be used interchangeably. Urartu, located to the northeast of the Mesopotamian plain (Iraq), was a very mountainous region (University Atlas, 1962, p.85), which means that the exact geographical place where the Ark landed is not indicated very precisely in the biblical account.

Although the southern border of the ancient kingdom of Urartu is fairly well agreed upon by scholars, there is not total agreement on where the northern border was at the time that Genesis took its final form. There is general agreement that Moses wrote most of Genesis, and most likely put some of it together from previous documents written by others (particularly the early chapters); plus there had to be some editing and place name changes in the final manuscript of the Pentateuch later on after Moses' time. Scholars vary greatly in their opinions on who did this final editing and when; some even place this final editing of the Pentateuch as late as Ezra in the sixth century BC (for example, see Paige, 2007). The problem is that the very earliest known area of Urartu (in Moses' time) was small, with a northern border that was well south of Mount Ararat. Urartu then rapidly increased in size around the ninth century BC to well north of Mount Ararat, where it would have been in Ezra's time. (Sources for this early history of Urartu: Piotrovsky, 1969; Yamauchi, 1982; Zimansky, 1982, 1998.) This northern Urartu border discussion is significant, as it would eliminate Mount Ararat as a possible location for the Ark if the kingdom of Urartu of the Genesis narrative did not extend to its northern limit at the time of writing. Bailey places the northern border of Urartu well above Mount Ararat (1989, pp.56–57). Crouse and Franz, however, believe that

It is the consensus among scholars that the Urartian state at the time Genesis was written ... did not extend as far north as the present-day Mount Ararat (Crouse & Franz, 2006, p.100).

This author contends that this matter is not conclusive, as it is unlikely that we can ever know for certain whether "Urartu" was the geographical word used in the original Genesis account. (See the map in Figure 1 for the boundaries of early and later Urartu.)

The second biblical clue is that the Ark landed near the top of a mountain, or on a plateau high in the mountains, because on the first day of the 10th month, it was the tops of the surrounding mountains that became visible to those in the Ark (Genesis 8:5). Most commentators appear to believe that the tops of these mountains around the Ark became visible because of the dropping Flood water level. However, this view presents a practical problem because we



**Figure 1.** Map showing Urartu superimposed on modern country boundaries. The smaller dotted area is most likely what ancient Urartu looked like at the time of Moses. The larger dotted area is the size of Urartu at its greatest extent, from about the ninth to the sixth centuries BC. Also shown are supposed Ark locations and a proposed location for Shinar.

then have to say that all the tops of the mountains suddenly became visible from a dropping water level on the same day. This doesn't make sense, as these mountains would have to be almost exactly the same height for this (which seems quite unlikely) and only a tiny bit of these peaks would suddenly become visible on that day (because the Flood water would have dropped only a certain amount in one day). This author takes the view that the logical explanation is that there was a thick mist that prevented the inhabitants of the Ark from seeing anything until the mist cleared on this day. This is backed up by *The New Bible Commentary* which says that "were ... seen" in Genesis 8:5 means "became distinctly visible," so that the mountains, which until then had been hidden from view, now could be seen (Davidson, 1967, p.84).

The third clue is that after Noah's family left the Ark and multiplied, this group of people travelled westward to the plain of Shinar, where they built the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:2–4). Although most writers today believe that Babel and Babylon are the same place, this presents problems. For one thing, Babylon is geographically located directly south of the three most popular locations believed to contain the Ark (Greater Ararat, Durupinar, and Mount Cudi on the Iraqi border—see Figure 1), not west. Also, Babel and Babylon are words that have quite different meanings. Babel is a Hebrew word that means "confusion" according to Genesis 11:9: "Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there

confound the language of all the earth.” Babylon is the Greek form of an ancient Semitic word that means “Gate of the god” (*Classic Encyclopedia*, n.d.). Indeed, to make Babel/Shinar synonymous with Babylon, we have to claim that Noah’s descendants travelled in a clockwise circular path, first eastward after leaving the Ark, then southward through present-day Iran, and then westward to Babylon. This author believes that this scenario is incorrect, inserting a meaning into Scripture beyond what it says; and that Shinar was actually a country located west and perhaps somewhat south, of Mount Cudi (the Sinjar mountains of northern Iraq appear to retain the ancient Shinar name) (see Figure 1). It should also be considered a possibility that “Babel” is an early manuscript corruption of “balal,” the Hebrew word for confusion. The widespread belief in scholarly circles that “Babel” and “Babylon” form a play on words does not strike as a satisfactory explanation.

This author believes that any proposed locations for the Ark must fit these three biblical clues. However, it is understood that there are many who will not agree with the third clue above, because they erroneously believe that Shinar is the area around the city of Babylon.

Many writers on the subject of the Flood give equal weight, right alongside the biblical record, to the hundreds of flood legends from around the world, or even claim that certain legends preceded the biblical story, and influenced it. For instance, Cohn opens chapter one of his book with the statement, “The story of the Flood, which we know from Genesis and associate with Noah, originated in Mesopotamia” (1999, p.1). He does not even bother to offer a reference for this apparently obvious “fact”; he merely goes on to discuss various ancient mid-eastern flood stories that, chased around by respectable-sounding prose, are supposed to lead the reader to think that Cohn has proven the original statement (he has not). This author will discount all legends with respect to the Flood and the Ark on the basis that, by virtue of being a legend, a story carries information that is not reliable. However, the traditions of others (for example, Muslims, below) with respect to the Ark may affect their beliefs as to where they think it is.

### Early Historical References to the Location of the Ark

Going back through more than two thousand years of history, there have been many references in the surviving literature to the location where the Ark supposedly grounded. Up until about the thirteenth century, writers did not locate the Ark on the mountain that is called Mount Ararat today; instead they referred to a mountain that is about 320km south of Ararat, almost down on the Iraqi border

near the town of Cizre in southeastern Turkey, today called Mount Cudi (pronounced “Judy”) or Jabel Judi. Although these writings appear at first sight to locate the Ark in many different places because of variations in this mountain’s name, when examined critically they almost all appear to boil down to being this same Mount Cudi. Other names for Mount Cudi: Cudi Dag(h), Mt. Cardu, Mt. Quardu, Mt. Kardu, the Gordyene mountains, the Gordian mountains, the Karduchian mountains, mountains of the Kurds, Mt. Nipur, and even (to help keep things confused) Mount Ararat. Crouse and Franz (2006, pp.99–111) discuss this at length in their excellent article in *Bible and Spade* magazine. Like Crouse and Franz, this author does not agree with Bailey (1989, p.66) that Josephus gives three different locations for the Ark. Mount Cashgar (Kitto, 1904, p.82) would appear to be an exception, and could possibly be a different mountain located further east than this Mount Cudi.

There are, however, four other Cudi or Judi mountains with Ark traditions. Because all alleged Ark locations lie in Muslim countries, Muslim beliefs enter into traditions of where the Ark grounded. Those beliefs are based on their holy book, the Quran (written 8th century AD), which says that the Ark landed on Mount Al-Judi (or Cudi) (Quran chapter and verse: Sura Hood 11:44). This is an apparently simple statement that does not, however, simplify things at all. Because most of the world at that time believed that the Ark was on Mount Cudi on the Iraqi border, this should seemingly have clinched that location for all Muslims. But there are Al-Judi mountains in central Saudi Arabia, and some Muslims believe the Ark landed there. Indeed, there are Muslim traditions that the Ark first sailed around the holy Kaaba structure in Mecca (some say seven times) before heading northward to whichever Al-Judi to settle. (Muslims apparently do not notice any chronological difficulties, even though they believe that Abraham built the Kaaba) (Bailey, 1989, p.63; Herner, n.d.; Wikipedia, 2007c). Because of the Durupinar “Ark site” near Lesser Mount Ararat, the Turkish government renamed that hill Mount Judi (probably around 1985, date not substantiated), presumably because of the Quran statement. Many Muslims in eastern Turkey believe that the Ark is on Greater Mount Ararat; one peak or ridge on Ararat is named Judi, and this fact has been used by some writers to harmonize Mount Judi with Mount Ararat (for example, Cummings, 1973, pp.170–179). There is also a mountain near Haran (where Abraham was born), which is claimed by area residents to hold the Ark (Geissler, 2007). Clearly, Muslims are somewhat splintered as to where they think their Quran’s Al-Judi is.

A related issue is that Muslims hold traditions

that in the end times a light will shine from heaven on the Ark, which will be miraculously restored. The prophet Mohammed will return to earth, the faithful will get into the Ark with him, and they will all sail away to heaven (for one version of this belief, see Simmons, 1999, p. 145). It logically follows that Muslims consider the Ark to be theirs, and infidels (everyone else) had better keep their hands off it, wherever it is. This is pointed out by Corbin (1999, p. 17): “An often overlooked hindrance (to the Ark searchers) is the fact that a Christian searching for evidences of the Bible in an Islamic country often faces stiff opposition.”

Some reading sources of known references to the Ark in the historical literature are listed in Appendix A.

### **Relocation of the Ark From Mount Cudi to Mount Ararat**

The Ark moved northward from Mount Cudi (Iraqi border) to Mount Ararat in the popular belief some time around the twelfth or thirteenth century, and has stayed there ever since. Some possible “educated guesses” why this happened are put forth by Bailey; these include the shrinking of the ancient kingdom of Urartu, later called Armenia, to only its northern part, which no longer included Mount Cudi, but was instead overshadowed by the majestic Mount Ararat. A telling consideration is the duplication of specific traditions between the two mountains: there is a “village of the eighty,” earlier called the “village of the eight,” supposedly founded by Noah himself, at both places. Both have a tradition that the Ark temporarily touched down on another mountain first, before going on to its final resting place at Mount Cudi or Mount Ararat, respectively. Both mountains have two peaks, a greater and a lesser. Other duplicated traditions: St. Jacob’s monastery, Noah’s vineyard, and Noah’s grave. These all exist on or near both mountains today (Bailey, 1989, pp. 78–79).

One somewhat unusual interpretation of history is offered by Lanser, who claims that the Ark was originally believed to be on Mount Ararat from the time of the Ark’s landing until some time during the first millennium BC. Because the Ark eventually got buried by volcanic ash, ice, snow, or all three, it was forgotten and the traditions about the Ark’s location moved southward to Mount Cudi (supposedly because this mountain was conveniently close to the homeland of the flood tale in the Sumerian Gilgamesh Epic), where the Ark stayed until about the thirteenth century. However, since then the Ark apparently has been uncovered and is being seen again on Mount Ararat; Lanser says that this is why the Ark traditions have moved back north (Lanser, 2006, pp. 115–116).

### **Alleged Sightings of the Ark on Mount Ararat in Recent Times**

The majority of people today appear to believe that the Ark is on Mount Ararat, a belief grounded in the numerous “sightings” of it all over this mountain since 1800. These “arks” are whole or broken up, perfectly smooth or made of visible wood planks, with or without a huge door in the side, with or without a catwalk, flat front or boat-shaped bow, black or various other colors. (Eyewitness descriptions of color, however, cannot be considered accurate unless the witness has had a color vision test, as at least 8% of all European males have some degree of defective color vision.) (Judd & Wyszecki, 1963, p. 78).

Typical of these alleged Ark stories is this one, chosen by this author pretty well at random. The “sighting” account is by Chuck Aaron (1999, p. 192), a pilot who has made a great number of helicopter flights around Mount Ararat. He and some friends flew within 30 m of an object believed to be the Ark; he writes, “After close inspection we all agreed that it was not the Ark after all. We also agreed that from a distance of 500 ft (150 m) or more, most people would swear that it was.” The sightings of this sort have all lost their credibility sooner or later for many diverse reasons. These include: the object was examined up close, as in this case, and shown not to be the Ark; or the object could not be found again by either air or ground search; or the photographs were lost; or the person who claimed to have seen the Ark was not a solid witness; or newspaper clippings could not be found; or witnesses disappeared or died; or the object turned out to be an ice or rock formation. (This is not an exhaustive list.) Ark searchers know these discouraging reasons all too well.

Rock formations are a frequent source of alleged Ark sightings. Mount Ararat, being a volcano, has “an abundance of large blocks of basalt, and when seen under the right conditions, they can easily resemble a huge barge,” according to Crouse (1999, pp. 150–151). He goes on to say that he has in his possession a collection of photos of these “phantom arks” and some are “heart stoppers.”

However, the many reported sightings of wooden “arks” on Mount Ararat need to be addressed. If these structures are not volcanic basaltic rocks or ice formations, then either a lot of people are totally mistaken, or are making their stories up, or else there really are wooden structures of some sort high on this mountain. This author considers it quite possible that wooden structures could have been built as high as the reported 4,300 m or higher on Mount Ararat during the period of warmer temperatures known in meteorological circles as the “Medieval Warm Period” that lasted roughly from 900 to 1300 AD (Wikipedia, 2007b). One of the effects of this warmer weather

throughout much of the northern hemisphere was that mountain snow-and-ice caps were smaller than they are now, and tree lines were higher as well. Although many sources claim that treeless Mount Ararat never had trees growing on it, this is probably not true; Bailey quotes medieval (tenth century) Arab geographers who say that Mount Ararat was heavily forested and that nearby villagers cut wood on its slopes (1989, p.112). Also, Armenian-born Arthur Chuchian stated that the “ark” he saw was located just above the ancient timberline on Mount Ararat, a claim which is viewed with skepticism by Crouse (1999, p.367) but which would fit the idea of a high tree line from the Medieval Warm Period. The date of Navarra’s wood samples, if they truly originated on Ararat (there is some doubt about the provenance of at least some of his wood) would also fit into this period (Bailey, 1989, p.114). This would seem to indicate that during this Medieval Warm Period wooden buildings could have been built above the present-day 4,300m ice line with wood cut on the mountain itself. During the “Little Ice Age” that followed (starting approximately 1400 and ending around 1850), the Ararat ice cap would have advanced and covered these buildings, forcing them to be abandoned; the latter would now be visible only in years when the snow and ice melted back exceptionally far (Wikipedia, 2007a).

Mount Ararat has been regarded by Armenians as a holy mountain since ancient times (Nazaryan, 1998). Structures built on it could have been monasteries, such as those founded in Armenia in the tenth century (Etch, n.d.). We know certainly that the eleventh-century St. Jacob Monastery (sometimes called St. James), located in the Ahora Gorge, was destroyed in the great 1840 earthquake (LaHaye & Morris, 1977, pp.31–33). It should be noted that high-altitude religious and other structures are not unknown in other places; for instance, the highest monastery in the world is the Rongbuk (Tibetan Buddhist) Monastery at an altitude of 5,100m (Wikipedia, 2007e). We can therefore conclude that a wooden structure high on Mount Ararat does not necessarily have to be a boat that floated there.

Because Mount Ararat may not been in the kingdom of ancient Urartu when the Ark grounded, as discussed above, and quite probably did not yet exist as a mountain at that time (see more on this further on), this author considers that it could be argued that all supposed sightings of the Ark on Mount Ararat are the results of circular reasoning which runs like this: “Because this is Mount Ararat, and we believe that the Ark is on Mount Ararat, then if it looks anything like the Ark, it must be the Ark.” It is also insisted by some that if there is so much smoke, there must be fire somewhere (for example,

Burdick quoted in LaHaye & Morris, 1977, p.214); this is faulty logic because it is entirely possible that none of the sightings are valid and the Ark is not up on Mount Ararat at all.

What is especially interesting is how many of the Ark hunters merely state that they saw the Ark, as an a priori assumption, even though they offer no proof of any kind that what they saw actually was the Ark. “The picture of the Ark must have been taken from quite a distance away ...” (Cummings, 1973, p.147). “... six Turkish soldiers ... had climbed the mountain and spotted the Ark” (LaHaye & Morris, 1977, p.97). “... accounts of their sightings of the Ark on Ararat” (Montgomery, 1975, p.251). Navarra is really up front on this—it is right on the cover of his book: *Noah's Ark: I Touched It* (1974). This is merely a small sampling of the many Ark-without-proof declarations to be found in the Ark literature. As Faulkner says, “Often, we see what we wish to see ... It is an easy matter to interpret data in terms of one’s assumptions, but it is very difficult to entertain other ideas” (Faulkner, 2007, p. 3). Nowhere does this seem more true than when alleged sightings of the Ark on Mount Ararat are the subject at hand.

Worse, these Ark enthusiasts have too often trumpeted their “Ark find” to the world press, who eventually got tired of Ark hunters crying wolf, and became skeptical of these never-ending announcements. Typical of these is a story with the heading, “Is Noah’s Ark Buried in Lake?” about an ICR Search team that was planning to look in a lake on Mount Ararat where Navarra had found wood some years previously (*Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 1974). Another carries the title, “Explorers Think They’ve Found Site of Noah’s Ark Wreck.” This UPI/AP story, which names the late astronaut James Irwin, ICR and Marvin Steffins of International Expeditions in it, is so thoroughly mixed up (perhaps because it’s a combination of two wire stories) that, although it claims this find is on a southern slope of Mount Ararat, it actually appears to be about the Durupinar site (there is no photo included) (*Sunday Democrat and Chronicle*, 1984).

One of the understandable problems that now looms is that such enormous amounts of money, time and energy have been expended by so many people over so many years in searching for the Ark on Mount Ararat, that now those who have pursued the Ararat dream are reluctant to admit that their efforts may have been in vain. This threatens to be a stumbling block with regard to searching for the Ark elsewhere and poses an irony: those who have pursued the Ark the most ardently could in the end turn out to be the most skeptical of finding the Ark anywhere else.

Appendix A lists some sources of accounts of these many “ark” stories over the years.

### An Examination of Claimed Ark Locations

The sites that are currently most in the news are, in alphabetical order: Mount Ararat (multiple alleged locations on this peak), Mount Cudi (Iraqi border), Durupinar, and the Elborz mountains of Iran. (See Figure 1 for a map showing these locations.)

#### Mount Ararat

This massive ice-capped stratovolcano, 5,165 m high, located in eastern Turkey close to the Russian and Iranian borders, has been the subject of a great deal of Ark interest over the past 700 years. Other names for it are Greater Ararat (to distinguish it from a smaller volcano sitting right beside it, called Lesser Ararat), Masis (Armenian), Agri Dagi (Turkish, “Mountain of Pain”), Koh-i-Nuh (Persian, “Mountain of Noah”), and Ciyaye Agiri (Kurdish, “Fiery Mountain”) (Wikipedia, 2008; Villari, 1906). Although currently dormant, Mount Ararat has erupted periodically throughout its history; in 1840 it blew its top in a major volcanic tantrum that greatly enlarged the Ahora Gorge where, unaccountably, many Ark hunters continue to look for the Ark (LaHaye & Morris, 1977, pp. 28–42).

Up to 1966, little geological information on Mount Ararat had been readily available, although two German geologists, H. Abich (1845) and M. Blumental (1958), had published geological observations of the Ararat area, and the official geologic map of Turkey had appeared in 1961 (MTA, 1961). However, that year a team of scientists, including creationist geologist Clifford Burdick, studied the mountain, and his report (1967) provided the main information available to Ark searchers for many years. Burdick believed that the original Mount Ararat had already existed before the Flood, perhaps even from the time of creation, and that lava layers extruded over it during the Flood had raised it to a maximum height of 6,100m, with subsequent erosion reducing it to its present 5,165 m high. To Burdick, evidences like sedimentation and pillow lava on the mountain proved that Ararat had been under the Flood waters, at least up to the 4,300m level. Nobody appears to have doubted this assessment which, in any case, served to reinforce the widespread belief that the Ark had landed on this mountain.

Unfortunately, there were some hidden problems for Ark searchers who depended on Burdick’s 1967 geological report to support their views that the Ark was on Mount Ararat. One of these was that all of Burdick’s claimed academic degrees were bogus (Numbers, 1992, pp. 261–265; also private communications). It was therefore reasonable to put Burdick’s geological competence in question.

In more recent times various writers had been disagreeing with Burdick’s conclusions about Ararat.

With respect to the supposed evidences that Ararat was once under water, Crouse and Franz claimed that the sedimentation on Mount Ararat was from volcanic action and not from flooding (2006, p. 100). Burdick did not mention in his report that pillow lava, while most commonly formed by lava that extrudes and cools under water, could also form under ice (Bullard, 1984, p. 303); this meant that the relatively small amounts of pillow lava found on Ararat could have been formed under ice long after the Flood. The rock salt and marine fossils claimed by some to have been found on Mount Ararat appeared to be actually located some kilometers away (Burdick, 1967, pp. 322, 327) and there did not seem to be definitive proof of their existence on Mount Ararat itself.

While everyone was busily debating these issues, nobody seemed to notice something that would have been fairly obvious to any volcanologist: when lava erupts under water, the resulting volcano has a composition and structure that are quite different from those of a volcano that erupts on land. If Mount Ararat had risen under water during the Flood, as many people seemed willing to believe, it would have shown clear signs of being a submarine volcano, and would be composed of various kinds of pillow lava and volcanic sediments (depending on water depth) resulting from the interaction between the hot lava and the cold water (Smith, Lowe, & Wright, 2007). In fact, Mount Ararat is a typical stratovolcano that formed on land in the same way as other famous volcanoes such as Mount Fuji, Mount Vesuvius, and Mount St. Helens (Pidwirny, 2007). (Burdick, by the way, had pronounced Mount Ararat to be a shield volcano, a different type and shape, in his report, p. 321).

In addition to its having formed entirely on land, there was also the matter of the type of ground surface Mount Ararat sat on. Groebli (1999, p. 313) flatly stated that Mount Ararat was a volcano that broke through fossilized sedimentary flood layers and therefore was a post-Flood mountain. Hill concurred: “... Mount Ararat itself cuts across sedimentary rock, and so must be younger than this rock” (Hill, 2002, p. 177).

Baumgardner (personal communication, 2008) points out that, based on a paper by Keskin (2005),

the **oldest** radioisotope age for the volcanic rocks from which Mt. Ararat constructed is 1.7 million years. If we apply the results of the RATE research that strongly indicates accelerated nuclear decay during (and also immediately after) the Flood, a radioisotope age of 1.7 million years falls during the Ice Age and therefore during the interval of a few centuries after the Flood. I consider this to be a solidly defensible piece of evidence that the onset of the massive volcanic eruption which produced Mt. Ararat occurred after

the Flood by at least a hundred years. The maps in this paper also indicate that the volcanic eruptions associated with those that formed Mt. Ararat cover the Eastern Anatolia Accretionary Complex (EAAC) rocks and, apart from local alluvium, are the most recent geological features in the area. Moreover, they are subareal, which means these eruptions occurred after the area had been uplifted above sea level. All these lines of evidence support the conclusion that Mt. Ararat is a volcanic mountain that formed in its entirety after the Flood had ended.

Snelling (personal communication, 2007) sums this whole question up: "There is agreement among the leading creation geologists that it (Ararat) is a post-Flood mountain that sits on late Flood/post-Flood limestone."

In addition to the geologic certainty that this mountain did not yet exist at the end of the Flood, Mount Ararat does seem altogether a most unlikely place for any large wooden structure to have survived intact for thousands of years. What has kept it in the foreground of the Ark search is basically the persistence of "sightings" of the Ark on it, and nothing else, a point conceded by most Ararat believers. Geissler (1999, pp. 7–9) says this clearly: "... if it were not for the purported sightings and its name, Mount Ararat would have very little to link it with the biblical account. The only major reason to consider Mount Ararat is because of the few documented eyewitnesses." He then lists 16 eyewitnesses whom he believes are the most credible. It is possible that future debate about Mount Ararat will be framed as "the believers versus the geologists."

### Mount Cudi

This is the mountain described in this paper as being on the Iraqi border (to distinguish it from the other Mount Cudis). It is located about 40km east of the Turkish town of Cizre on the Tigris River, directly east of a plain that borders the Iraqi Sinjar Mountains, the area where this author believes the Tower of Babel was most likely built. Only 2,089m high, nonvolcanic, with a snow cap most of the time (Bell, 1924), it is a twin-peaked mountain, which has probably helped to confuse it at times with Mount Ararat in Ark histories. It is a great deal more accessible than Mount Ararat, and would have been far more likely to be the mountain mentioned in the literature where pilgrims could go up to the Ark and scrape off pitch for amulets (tourists of the past do not seem to have been much different from those of today) (Bailey, 1989, p.66). Nestorian Christians built several monasteries on this mountain; one located at the summit, called the Cloister of the Ark, was destroyed by lightning in 766AD (Bailey, pp.66–67). This site entered the annals of

modern Ark literature with a visit by the archaeologist Gertrude Bell in 1910; she wrote a detailed description of the mountain and her 3½-hour climb up to a spot where there was a ship-shaped stone formation which she considered to be of recent date (Bell, pp.289–295). According to Bell's local guide, Christians, Muslims and Jews all considered this mountain to be where the Ark landed, and still visited the site annually to "offer their oblations to the prophet Noah."

Some scholars believe that many of the alleged sightings of the Ark on Mount Ararat have actually been on Mount Cudi, and that these witnesses have been mistaken as to what mountain they were talking about (Spencer & Lienard, 2005).

An issue raised by those on both sides of the Mount Cudi question is the meaning of the word "Cudi." According to Berlitz (1987, p.163) Mount Al-Judi (as it is referred to in the Quran) means "highest" or "the heights" in Arabic "and for this reason a number of people in Eastern Turkey, including some Islamic scholars, think *Al Judi* refers to *Ararat*." However, there are many who consider that Judi actually is a corruption of Gordyene (or other similar variations) and means "Mountain of the Kurds." This idea appears to have been first advanced by Sale (1734) in a footnote to his English translation of the Quran. For the most telling connection of the Kurds to Mount Cudi, we go back in time over 4,000 years to a powerful people called the Guti, who occupied the territory known as modern Kurdistan. According to Abbas (2005) and Izady (1995), there can be no doubt that modern Mount Cudi preserves the ancient Guti name.

### Durupinar Site

This boat-shaped formation, now usually called the Durupinar site, is located about 30km south of the summit of Greater Ararat. It was allegedly first seen by a Turkish farmer in 1948 and brought to the world's attention in 1959 by Ilhan Durupinar (Noorbergen, 2004, p.118). Enthusiastically embraced as Noah's Ark, most notably by the late Ron Wyatt and the late David Fasold, it is still promoted as the true Ark site by Wyatt followers. This site carries some status as being declared the official Ark site by the Turkish government, which built a visitors' center now maintained by the Wyatt foundation as a Noah's Ark museum (Fasold, 1988, pp.330–331; Turkish news article, 1987). However, it is unclear whether the Turkish government currently considers the Durupinar formation to be anything more than a good tourist destination.

Whatever, Durupinar has now been debunked as the site of the Ark quite thoroughly by geologists; one of the best-known writings on this is the piece by Snelling (1992, pp.26–38). The main objection to the

Durupinar “ark” is that it appears to be a naturally occurring geological formation, and is only one of several in the area; the reason that this particular one attracted attention as a possible Ark is that it is about the right length (155 m, using an ancient longer cubit). The so-called drogoue stones in the area, touted by Fasold as having been attached to the Ark with lines and cut by Noah before the Ark grounded (1988, pp. 167–187), appear to be ancient Turkish standing stones that have calendrical and astronomical purposes. These also exist in other parts of eastern Turkey (Historic monuments of Syunik region, n.d.) and astronomers consider them to be far older than those in Britain and continental Europe. The drilled holes close to the top edge, a distinctive feature of Turkish standing stones, were used for sighting (Bochkarev, n.d.). The historian Josephus notes that Abraham was “skillful in the celestial science” and also that “Abram ... came with an army out of the land above Babylon, called the land of the Chaldeans” (Josephus, p. 38). This author considers it possible that Abraham used standing stones like these in his astronomical calculations; and that eastern Turkey would have been the area of Ur where he lived. (Ur of southern Iraq is discounted as Abraham’s Ur, as the Chaldeans moved down into southern Iraq a thousand years after Abraham. See Mariottini, 2006). In any case, Durupinar is not seriously considered to be a contender for the Ark’s location these days by most people.

### **Elborz Mountains (Iran)**

Mount Suleiman, north of Tehran in the Elborz mountains of Iran, is currently being heavily promoted by Bob Cornuke as the most likely Ark landing place (Cornuke’s BASE Institute web site avoids appearing too dogmatic these days). Since he believes that the Tower of Babel was built in the area of the city of Babylon, he reasonably believes that the Ark must have landed somewhere east of Babylon, based on Genesis 11:2. There is a slight problem in that Mount Suleiman is actually quite a distance northeast of Babylon, but he gets around that by arguing that “east” refers to the whole country that lies to the east of Babylon, and therefore includes pretty well all of Iran. Also, Mount Suleiman is not within the boundaries of ancient Urartu as delineated in Figure 1, being much too far east, but Cornuke argues that Urartu should extend eastward to include this mountain (BASE Institute, 2007; Walker, 2005). The “evidence” that he has brought back (photos, samples of alleged petrified wood) does not impress geologists, who believe his “ark” is nothing but a natural basaltic rock formation (Morris, 2006).

There are other sites that are considered by some to be Ark possibilities. Al Judi in Saudi Arabia and

Mount Judi near Haran have already been mentioned; there is little known about these, and this author could not find information about any Ark search expeditions that have been made in either location. Groebli believes that the Ark landed in the central plateau of Iran in the Dasht-e-Kavir desert and is hidden under sand dunes there; he bases this belief on his chosen criteria that the Ark should be located east of Babylon and on a pre-Flood mountain (1999, pp. 313–314). For a truly bizarre interpretation of the Bible and Quran, there is a writer who places the Ark under the desert sands of Saudi Arabia, sitting atop a pre-Flood city built by Cain (Brian, n.d.). We are assured that, if only someone would dig in either of these under-sand places, we would find the Ark, and the whole never-ending search would be over.

### **The Ark Searchers:**

#### **Why They Do It and the Difficulties They Deal With**

The history of Ark exploration is largely the story of people who stopped the routines of their normal life and set off to look for the Ark because they believed that the biblical story of Noah and the Flood was literally true, and that the Ark was still out there somewhere to be found. What separated them from everyone else with similar beliefs was that they were totally consumed by the quest, an affliction known in their circles as Ark fever, with no known cure (other than actually finding the Ark). By their own admission, these Ark searchers were addicted to the hunt and to Mount Ararat itself. Typical of these is John Morris who says, “The Ark search gets into your blood ... I’ll always be hooked” (Morris, 1999, p. 218). John Warwick Montgomery calls himself a relatively sane and sedate professor who “got bitten by this bug” (Montgomery, 1975, p. 247).

These Ark searchers clearly are an intrepid lot. At home they first prepared themselves with rigorous physical training, including high-altitude rock and ice mountain climbing. They put a lot of work into organizing their trips and raising money for what were incredibly expensive expeditions. They got needed climbing and research permissions from the complicated bureaucracies of foreign governments, no small matter. These Ark explorers then travelled to Turkey and often suffered the discouragement of having to wait interminably for more permissions, only to suddenly find all earlier permissions revoked (Corbin, 1999, pp. 16–17). At times there were so many groups applying for permission to climb Mount Ararat that there was a tendency for the Turkish government to say no to them all (Geissler, 1999, p. 11; also LaHaye & Morris, 1977, p. 184). Sometimes internal Turkish politics (revolutions, for example) got in the way (Noorbergen, 2004, p. 124), as well as friction between the Kurds of eastern Turkey and the



Turkish government. Further problems were caused by the politics of adjoining countries such as Russia (for example, spying accusations during the cold war).

Mount Ararat always poses many kinds of danger for climbers: sudden violent snowstorms, lightning, high wind, severe cold, avalanches, loose boulders, wild animals, deep hidden crevasses, lack of water, altitude sickness, gun-happy thieving locals and more. Charles Berlitz, one of many Ark explorers writing on this topic, devotes a whole chapter to these dangers in his book, and it is enough to put sane people off the notion of climbing Ararat for any reason (Berlitz, 1987, pp.63–84). It is perhaps amazing that any of these brave (reckless?) Ark searchers have lived to tell their stories, let alone go back again and again. Their desire to find the Ark must have burned with a very hot flame indeed, a fire that did not seem to get quenched by any amount of difficulty encountered along the way. One can feel only admiration for their zeal.

Less publicly known are other facets of some (not all!) of these Ark enthusiasts, as described by Geissler (Geissler, 1999, p.11): "... an entire book could be written about the consistent desire by Ark explorers for excitement, glory, and money, which has caused a tangled web of intrigue, deceit, and false or premature Ark 'sightings.'"

Because of the incredible difficulties involved in mountain climbing, plus the obvious fact that in spite of extensive searching the Ark has not yet been found, climbing expeditions have fallen rather out of favor most recently; and other means, such as satellite remote imaging, have come into vogue (Hays, 1999, pp.300–312). Modern technology does seem like a prudent and attractive alternative to good old-fashioned arduous and dangerous climbing. Not that surface expeditions are totally out of fashion: Cornuke has been climbing his mountain in Iran (BASE Institute, 2007) and Charles Willis and his expedition are setting their sights on surface exploration of Mount Cudi (Willis, n.d.). Furthermore, it is understood that any Ark-looking object located by means of technology still needs to be studied by a ground team of professionals.

### **The Ark Itself: or, What Ark Searchers Are Looking For**

Everyone agrees that the original Ark was a very large wooden floating vessel. However, there is uncertainty as to its exact size because the biblical account gives the Ark's dimensions in cubits: 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide and 30 cubits high (Genesis 6:15). Assuming that the size of the Ark given in Scripture is the original measure from God because of the round numbers, we then have to consider what length the

cubit was in Noah's day, not a simple task because of the number of different cubit lengths that have been used in various cultures throughout history. Lovett offers a comprehensive list of 31 known historical cubits that vary from a very short Greek cubit of 356mm (14 inches) to a very long Northern Europe cubit of 676mm (26.6 inches) (Lovett, 2004b). It is logical to consider that the ancient cubit in Mesopotamia might have been closest in size to Noah's cubit, because Mesopotamia is geographically close to where the Ark probably landed (Lovett, 2004a). This might be true, but because of the confusion of languages, and therefore changes in culture, after Babel, this author believes that there is no guarantee that the cubit would have remained the same anywhere. There are also statements made by various writers that can't really be proven: for instance, that when Noah came out of the Ark there was only one cubit size in existence. Although this sounds logical, we don't really know this, because there are instances of later cultures that used more than one cubit at the same time (Lovett, 2004b). Hodge (2007) argues for an ancient cubit of around 518mm (20.4 inches) for the Ark, which would make the Ark about 155m (510ft) long. Discussion of cubit sizes alone could take up half of this paper and there does not seem to be conclusive evidence on this; when all is said and done, it would appear that only if enough of the Ark is ever found to determine its original dimensions will we be able to arrive at the length of Noah's cubit.

The Bible has bequeathed us fewer than 100 words of design description of this seagoing vessel (Genesis 6:14–16), so that, although we have a general idea of its dimensions, we know little else. The Hebrew word for "ark" used in Genesis, *tebah*, is used only for Noah's Ark and Moses' ark and appears nowhere else in the Old Testament; all Hebrew words translated "boat" and "ship" are different (Strong, 1890). The word "tebah" is given a meaning of "box" by Strong and others, but this is disputed by claims that "tebah" is actually a very ancient Hebrew word whose true meaning is not known (Lovett, 2004c). Because both Noah's Ark and Moses' ark were used for keeping their occupants safe, this author joins in the speculation that the word "tebah" has a meaning of giving protection, and that this meaning overrides the fact that Noah's Ark functioned as a ship.

Over the past thousand years, artists have produced an amazing variety of Ark renditions based on the current popular art styles of their time (see the many Ark drawings in Allen, 1963; Cohn, 1999). A rather unexpected version (to us today) is a pyramid-shaped Ark; Allen, however, remarks that "all of the earlier (Renaissance) writers thought of it (Ark) as pyramidal in shape" (Allen, 1963, p.71). More recently, artists have started to base their drawings

on supposed eyewitness accounts of the Ark, and we are all familiar with the barge-like drawings of Lee (1999, pp.67–69), John Morris (LaHaye & Morris, 1977, p.272) and Hoover (Meyer, 1977, cover art) of the 70s and 80s. Very recently we have some new Ark designers who are quite innovative. The best known of these is now Tim Lovett, because of his association with the Answers in Genesis organization, who purports to think “outside the box” (the pun appears to be intended) (Lovett, 2007, p.25). In any case, when all is said on this subject, we cannot be sure what Noah’s vessel looked like.

The type of wood of which the Ark was built is also an issue for which there are no certain conclusions. There is no known wood called gopher wood (as is stated in Genesis 6:14) in the world today, leaving interpretation of the word “gopher” wide open. Some claim that gopher was either laminated wood (Hinton, n.d., p.6), bundles of reeds (Fasold, 1988, pp.274–277), or hardened wood (Woodmorappe, 1996, p.51), and not an actual kind of tree at all. Others believe that it was a kind of wood that bled resin, such as cypress (Hinton, n.d., p.7). Woodmorappe also suggests that teak or other rare Indian woods would have been likely candidates because of their known durability (1996, p.51). Others wonder whether there has been no such wood around since the Flood (Hinton, n.d., p.7).

There is also the question of how much of the original Ark may have survived to the present day. Based on a combination of alleged Ark sightings and literature references, the available choices appear to be five in number: a more or less whole vessel, large broken pieces of the vessel, a few broken planks, little more than tiny bits of wood and pitch, or none of it has survived at all. There are supporters for all of these.

First, those who argue for a largely intact Ark usually do so on the basis of air photos, satellite images or eyewitness accounts, such as that of Hagopian, that suggest a nearly complete structure (LaHaye & Morris, 1977, pp.71–76). It is generally believed by these people that a combination of the Ark’s pitch covering plus encasement in ice, or petrification, would make it possible for the Ark to have been preserved largely intact down to the present day. We need to look carefully at these assumptions to see whether they hold up.

Coating the Ark inside and out with pitch would have served the purpose of keeping the vessel watertight during its voyage, a practice that has been carried on by builders of wooden boats around the world from ancient times to the present. According to Walker (1984), the pitch used in boatbuilding has always been pine tree resin, either in its natural form, or with varying quantities of ground charcoal mixed in to give the pitch various desired properties.

Hinton (n.d.), in his lengthy discussion of pitch, takes the view that Noah most likely would have used a form of tree resin, especially because there would not yet have been petroleum products available until after the Flood. Woodmorappe, on the other hand, quotes various sources that argue that there could have been naturally occurring bitumin before the Flood (Woodmorappe, 1996, p.51). It is difficult to see, however, that the pitch, whatever it was, would have prevented the wood from decaying over several thousand years, especially if souvenir hunters and builders of structures carried pieces of the wood away, as the literature references suggest (Crouse & Franz, 2006, p.100), leaving broken wood open to the elements.

For the Ark to have been preserved for millennia by ice, it is necessary to believe that somehow the normal movement of ice downhill on a sloped mountain would not have destroyed the structure. Meyer, therefore, believes the Ark must be sitting in a stationary ice pack on a ledge near the Parrott Glacier on Mount Ararat, overlooking a gorge, protected by an overhang (Meyer, 1977, pp.92–95). LaHaye and Morris, among others, suggest that the survival of the Ark on Ararat is a miracle, thus circumventing the whole ice movement problem (LaHaye & Morris, 1977, p.43).

However, because the rest of Mount Ararat has been so thoroughly examined over the years, it has been the belief of various searchers that if the Ark is to be found anywhere on this mountain, it must be located under the ice cap (for example, Geissler, 2008). This possibility now seems doubtful in the light of recent remote satellite imaging work by Holroyd (personal communication, 2008), who found two volcanic vents (bowl-shaped depressions) on the mountain summit where the ice would remain stationary for thousands of years. He says,

I consider these vents to be the only places where the Ark could have survived ... I do not see anything in the volcanic vents that can be interpreted as Noah’s Ark or a large fragment thereof ... I am also coming into agreement that Mt. Ararat is not the mountain on which Noah’s Ark landed. The Ark is not outside the ice on the surface, in spite of so many false alarm reports of seeing it. My radar analysis shows that it is not under the ice either.

Some of the eyewitnesses claim that the object they saw was made of petrified wood (for example, Hagopian in Geissler & Crouse, 1999, p.374). This is unlikely in view of the conditions needed for petrification, as pointed out by Walker (2006):

To petrify, the timber would need to be surrounded by a mineral-rich solution and absorb it into its pore structure. It is difficult to conceive of how that could happen for a timber structure sitting on the side of the mountain. If the Ark still existed high in a mountain

somewhere, it is more likely its timber would be exposed to rain and snow which would not contain the minerals to petrify it.

Also, in the case of an intact "Ark," the pitch coating would have prevented the water solution from infiltrating the wood. It seems likely that, rather than being made of petrified wood, the structures in these alleged sightings actually consist of basaltic rock, which can look surprisingly like wood grain (Walker, 2006).

Second, some believe that the Ark, although still pretty well complete, has been broken into several large pieces over time, presumably by ice movement. Indeed, certain of the sightings would appear to back up this idea. Ed Davis, one of the well-known and extensively interviewed visitors to the alleged Ark, claims that he saw at least two pieces in 1943 (Geissler & Crouse, 1999, pp. 393–398). It is believed by some that the supposedly whole Ark visited by Hagopian when he was a boy in the early 1900s was broken up some time between then and the later Davis sighting, and was the same structure (Geissler & Crouse, 1999, pp. 368–374).

Third, there are various ancient literature references to the Ark that refer to it as "the remains," which would indicate that perhaps not too much of it was left, even 2,000 years ago (Crouse & Franz quote Berossus and Epiphanius in 2006, pp. 105–106; Josephus, 1987, p. 526). There are reports that, over the millennia, many pilgrims to the Ark site took small pieces of it away as mementos; and that by the seventh century AD, the last beams of wood from the Ark were used to build a mosque (Crouse & Franz, 2006, p. 100). Simple logic would dictate that a good deal of the Ark would have disappeared over the years with all this scavenging going on.

Fourth, there may be only tiny bits of the Ark left to find. In April of 1953 a German geologist by the name of Friedrich Bender climbed Mount Cudi to a location about a thousand feet below the summit where his Kurdish guides said that pieces of wood from Noah's Ark could be dug up. Bender dug down a meter or so beneath the snow and found "crumbly, up to pea-sized decayed wood remains. Many of the small wood fragments were bound together by an asphalt- or tar-like substance" (Bender, 1971?). According to this theory, there is very little left of the Ark there, but if further excavation is done, enough bits of wood will probably be found to prove that this was the true Ark landing site. Crouse (personal communication, 2008) believes this to be the same spot that Bell had visited, although Bender does not mention the stone boat formation, possibly because there was so much snow that this structure was covered, or perhaps because it is no longer there. (See below re carbon dating of the bits found by Bender.)

Fifth and finally, there are those who think that

probably none of the Ark has survived at all. For example, it is claimed that Ron Wyatt eventually took the view that the "ark" at Durupinar, rather than being the actual canoe-shaped formation, had later deteriorated or was scavenged or destroyed, but left only its imprint behind. In other words, the Ark was originally there, but none of it is now left, which is why there is an Ark-looking formation, but no Ark (see [noahsarksearch.com/durupinar.htm](http://noahsarksearch.com/durupinar.htm)). This seems unlikely, as the visible formation is convex, not concave as would be expected if this were really the Ark's imprint. In any case, the logic of this claim escapes this writer.

### How Can We Know With Certainty Whether Anyone Finds the Ark?

Some factors that we might reasonably expect to be considered in determining whether a structure is the actual Ark include: size of structure, material it is made of, and dating of its wood. Since it is possible that not much of the Ark exists today, we cannot count on finding a complete enough skeleton of it to prove the biblical dimensions of length, width and height. After thousands of years, we do not know whether its materials might be still recognizable. And in any case, we don't know what the gopher wood is.

This leaves us with the possibility of  $^{14}\text{C}$  dating of the Ark's wood, which at first glance would seem to be a fairly good test, even if the precision of the method on samples that are thousands of years old is not as good as we might like. After all, people have been carbon dating wood ever since the method was first developed in 1949 (Wikipedia, 2007d), and it would seem obvious that we merely need to look for an age of 4,300 years or somewhat more (depending on whether the Masoretic or Septuagint timeline is preferred) in any alleged Ark wood sample.

But  $^{14}\text{C}$  dating of Ark wood turns out to be less simple than it first appears, because the Ark was built from trees that grew before the Flood. The ICR RATE team and other researchers believe that the  $^{14}\text{C}$  content of organic matter was considerably less before the Flood than it is now—less than 1% of current levels. The scientific thinking that went into this figure could take up a great deal of space here (see Baumgardner, 2005; Baumgardner, Snelling, Humphreys, & Austin, 2003; Giem, 2001; Sewell, 2004). What this means, briefly, is that any  $^{14}\text{C}$  dating that is done on wood samples from before the Flood should show abnormally ancient ages if current mainline dating methods are used without taking this low pre-Flood  $^{14}\text{C}$  level into account. To complicate things, however, there is a possibility of contamination of the Ark with  $^{14}\text{C}$  after the Flood. The RATE team believes that there were potentially lethal levels of radiation generated in the earth's crust during the Flood, but that God

protected the Ark's occupants from this by the water that the Ark floated on. After the Flood, however,  $^{14}\text{C}$  produced by this radiation in crustal rocks during the Flood would have escaped to the atmosphere, mainly in the form of  $\text{CO}_2$ , raising the post-Flood atmospheric  $^{14}\text{C}$  content rapidly to near what it is today (Baumgardner, 2005; personal communication, 2007). If the extant Ark remains are well decayed, and the wood has been exposed to roots of living plants and soil bacteria for a long time, this would introduce  $^{14}\text{C}$  from the modern atmosphere and somewhat reduce the tested date of any samples. As Baumgardner says, "Just what the  $^{14}\text{C}$  level might be in any wood from the Ark that might be found today is up for grabs" (Baumgardner, personal communication, 2007).

This brings us back to the bits of wood mentioned earlier, gathered in 1953 by Dr. Bender from Mount Cudi, and carbon dated at 6,500 years (Bender, 1971?). If his samples really were from the Ark, and were pre-Flood wood, then they should have dated far earlier than that, according to Sewell (2004), who calculates a range of 33,500 to 61,500 years old, depending on what assumptions of pre-Flood atmosphere are used. If contaminated over the years by post-Flood  $^{14}\text{C}$ , however, the Ark wood could well date significantly younger than this. So what does the 6,500 figure mean? It may well be reflecting the actual level of  $^{14}\text{C}$  presently in this wood material, which would imply considerable contamination. That would not be surprising, given the amount of vegetation growing over the site and the rich soil there. However, since carbon dating was a fairly new science in Bender's time, it was far less accurate than it is today. Therefore, new determinations of the  $^{14}\text{C}$  level in the decaying wood might yield somewhat different values, either higher or lower. It would be more interesting to measure the  $^{14}\text{C}$  levels in any pitch that might still be present, since pitch, because it tends to repel water, is less subject to contamination. The pitch therefore should yield a  $^{14}\text{C}$  level more in line with the pre-Flood values and different from those of the wood. More wood samples are expected from the planned future Mount Cudi excavations, and we will have to wait for those carbon dating results.

At the moment it does not seem that there is a good probability of being able to prove that a given find is or is not from the Ark.

### What Continues To Maintain Interest in Searching for the Ark

Interest in the Ark does not seem to have diminished at all in our society, whether within the Bible-believing Christian community as an actual vessel that really existed, in the secular world at large as a powerful myth, or simply as a recurring always-attention-getting media theme.

A never-ending stream of Ark news stories from the 1970s onward can be found any time by an internet search. These can include such varied stories as satellite photos of anomalies on Mount Ararat, Ark searches on mountains in Iran, one businessman's quest for an expedition to Mount Ararat permit denied, and so forth (for example, Adamski, 2004). Two documentaries that were widely seen were *In Search Of Noah's Ark* (1976) and its 1983 update, *The Incredible Discovery of Noah's Ark*. A more recent filming of the Ark story was *Noah's Ark* (1999)—first the television version and then the movie version, both of which were a travesty of the Ark story in this author's opinion. Disney's *Fantasia 2000* included a segment on the Ark story with Donald Duck as an assistant to Noah, all orchestrated to Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March* (Silver, 2000).

Last year, 2007, was a banner year for unveiling arks. A Dutchman who had been building a half-size ark over the previous two years opened it for visitors (he had had a dream that Holland would be flooded); Europeans have been flocking to see it (BBC News, 2007). A thorn in the side of evolutionists was the opening of the US\$27 million Answers in Genesis Creation Museum complex complete with a fullsize Ark segment displayed under construction (the media stories on this are numerous; see, for example, Biggest Creation ...). A couple of days later an unlikely focus on Noah's Ark hit the news when Greenpeace, the well-known liberal environmental organization, built a 10-meter-long model ark at an altitude of 2,500 m on Mount Ararat in Turkey for the purpose of highlighting the dangers of coming global warming disasters as Greenpeace envisions them. Oddly, the many news articles around the world largely reported the Greenpeace caper as if Noah's Flood had really occurred and the Ark had truly existed—there seemed to be amazingly little skepticism displayed when the biblical story was invoked for a good liberal cause (Greenpeace, 2007). A few weeks later, the most expensive comedy movie in history, *Evan Almighty*, was released, with a modern-day Noah building a complete 137 m (450 ft) ark in Virginia. An Ark replica is being built (as of this writing) in Hong Kong, to serve as a creation museum (Morris, 2001; Turkish Daily News, 2007). More to come: an Ark replica planned by the Ancient World Foundation, presumably on Mount Cudi (their web site does not specify the location); this will be a museum/tourist facility/religious convention center. Another Ark replica is planned for Dogubayazit, Turkey, according to the Turkish Daily News (2007).

As an art subject, the Ark seems to be always popular: sculptures, fabric designs, ceramic miniatures in boxes of tea, jewelry, framed artwork, toys, children's books and many more items sport

Ark motifs. Dan Lietha (2007, p.75) calls the Ark “a modern marketing extravaganza” with good reason. Whether these Ark-related materials seem to propagate the view that the Flood story is a myth or support the idea that there really was an Ark (Lietha is quite negative about this), they do, however, help to maintain the memory of the Flood story and the importance of the Ark itself. This author prefers to take a positive view of Ark depictions. In any case, because it remains an icon of our popular culture, the Ark will surely never die.

This author has been surprised at how many writers indicate a belief that the location of the Ark has been withheld by God until the last times, when He will reveal the Ark to an unbelieving world as proof of the Bible's veracity. As an example, Nathan M. Meyer's book, *Noah's Ark, Pitched and Parked*, states right on the front cover, “Noah pitched it, God parked it, to preserve it for posterity” (Meyer, 1977). Dr. Ralph E. Crawford, founder of Search Foundation, was certain that God would reveal the Ark just before the second coming of Christ (Meyer, pp.92–94). LaHaye and Morris (1977, pp.272–275) also suggest this, as do others. Because all these writers understand Scripture to indicate that we are now rapidly approaching the end times, they believe that the finding of the Ark must be imminent; indeed, this widespread idea continues to provide a powerful incentive to continuing the Ark search. The problem is that there is absolutely no support in the Bible for this belief. Jesus' words in Luke 17:26 are often quoted: “And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.” It is unfortunate that this verse is used to promote the idea that the Ark is still around and will be revealed at the end time, as examination of the context shows that this is not what Jesus is saying. (For a discussion of context, see Habermehl, 1995, pp. 19–38).

Appendix B gives information on some of the known organizations that are engaging in searching for the Ark as of this writing, or are planning to do so.

## Conclusions

This author offers the following conclusions:

(1) It would appear that the Ark cannot have landed on Mount Ararat, because scientists have shown that this mountain did not exist until some time after the Flood had ended. (Also, the area that Mount Ararat occupies was probably not yet included in Urartu at that time.)

(2) In light of historical and geographical considerations, Mount Cudi near Cizre, Turkey, is the most likely place where the Ark landed.

(3) It seems doubtful that anyone has actually seen the Ark anywhere in modern times. The alleged sightings all seem to evaporate on careful

examination.

(4) It is unlikely that very much of the Ark exists today; it is probable that over the millennia it has decayed, and various scavengers have taken most of it away.

(5) Because of <sup>14</sup>C dating problems, it may not be possible to prove that any given samples are or are not the right age to have come from the Ark.

(6) More archaeological work needs to be done if we are ever to reasonably prove the Ark's landing spot anywhere.

(7) It is probable that no matter what is found in any location, there are those who will remain unconvinced.

(8) Interest in finding the Ark is unabated, and the Ark search will go on.

At the end of the day, we have to face the reality that it may be difficult, or even impossible, ever to prove where the Ark landed. This author would have liked to end on an optimistic note for soon recovery of a largely intact, proven Ark, but this seems unlikely; and this paper therefore ends, in the words of T.S. Eliot (1925): “Not with a bang but a whimper.”

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## Appendix A

### Some Sources for Details of Literature References, Ark "Sightings" and Past Search Expeditions

Ark literature references, alleged sightings and exploratory expeditions are not exactly the same thing; however they overlap and an attempt to divide them into separate groups was unsuccessful.

Taken altogether, the books listed below do not constitute an exhaustive source of Ark search information, nor are they a complete list of all the books available; they are ones that this author owns and may be of interest to those who wish to read further on this subject. These books cover a rather wide range of views, and this author does not by any means agree with all of them.

For an extensive listing of other materials related both to the Ark search and the relevant geographical area of the Middle East, see the compilation of 71 sources on pp. 478–481 of *The explorers of Ararat* (see 1 below). Another listing of 70 sources is the "Selected Bibliography" of Lloyd R. Bailey on pp. 232–235 of *Noah: The person and the story in history and tradition* (see 6 below).

1. *The explorers of Ararat* by B.J. Corbin (Ed.) (1999). The chapter titled, "Noah's Ark sources and alleged sightings," contains information compiled by Rex Geissler and Bill Crouse, pp. 337–467. These pages include descriptions of purported Ark sightings, starting with Berossus in 275BC and working through the ages right up to the twentieth century. The ones from the thirteenth century on are those that Geissler considers the most significant, including some hoaxes and some expeditions that did not sight anything. Alleged sightings are mostly on Mount Ararat, but include some on Mount Cudi and the Durupinar site; plus there is discussion as to whether some alleged sightings were actually in Iran. The summary chart on p. 468 is difficult to read because a large original chart was reduced to one book page.
2. *The ark on Ararat* by T. F. LaHaye and J. D. Morris (1977). There is description of early sightings in ancient times, and then sightings in the middle ages. A good part of the rest of this book is dedicated to details of expeditions in more modern times, including, of course, those of ICR teams that included Dr. John Morris, now president of ICR.
3. *Noah's ark: Pitched and parked* by N.M. Meyer (1977). For an abbreviated history of Ark expeditions and sightings throughout history see pp. 77–83. On p. 76 Meyer quotes K. Segraves (from *The great dinosaur mistake*, 1975, San Diego, California: Beta Books) that the Ark has been seen by 186 different people on 17 different expeditions since 1856 on Mt Ararat.
4. *Noah's ark: Fable or fact?* by V. Cummings (1973). Detailed description of many of the "sightings" of the Ark from the 1800s on, in narrative style.
5. *The quest for Noah's ark* by J. W. Montgomery (1975). This book reviews at length the history of survival of the Ark (pp. 61–138), explorations of Ararat (pp. 141–243) plus the author's own experiences in climbing Mount Ararat in the 1970s. See also this book's Appendix B, pp. 328–330, titled "Complete list of successful ascents of Mt Ararat 1829 to 1910."
6. *Noah: The person and the story in history and tradition* by L.R. Bailey (1989). His scholarly discussion of the history of ark searching from earliest times onward is in the context of his chapter on the Ark's survival (pp. 66–108).
7. *Noah's ark: I touched it* by F. Navarra (1974). This book covers mainly Navarra's own climbs. It should be noted that Navarra's claims with respect to finding ancient wood are not all considered to be true.
8. *The lost ship of Noah* by C. Berlitz (1987). The famous founder of the Berlitz language schools made several climbs on Mount Ararat. His book covers quite a bit of other ark-related material, including the stories of various climbers who have allegedly seen the Ark.
9. *The ark file* by R. Noorbergen (2004). This book, which relates the story of a veteran newsman's pursuit of the Ark, is often mentioned in Ark literature. The author debunks various stories of seeing and finding the Ark.
10. *The ark of Noah* by D. Fasold (1988). The author touts this book on the front cover as "The true story behind the actual discovery of the world's greatest archeological treasure." Enthusiastic about the Durupinar formation as the Ark, Fasold expands this idea along with a lot of other material about his version of the Ark's construction, drogue stones, sacred eggs (!) and other material.



## Appendix B

### Organizations With An Active Interest in Ark Exploration

*The information given for the organizations listed alphabetically below is to the best of this writer's knowledge at time of writing, and could change without notice.*

#### **Anchor Stone International.**

Bill Fry, President. This organization carries on the work of the late Ron Wyatt. Technically, they are not searching for the Ark, because this group believes they have already found it in the Durupinar boat-shaped formation near Mount Ararat in Turkey. According to their website, they are planning to conduct a thorough examination at Durupinar to determine exactly what is there. In addition, at the time of this writing, they have announced plans to build a seagoing full-scale model of Noah's Ark in an as-yet-undetermined location; the ship is to travel from seaport to seaport around the world, advertising Ron Wyatt's discoveries. Website: <http://www.anchorstone.com>.

#### **Ancient World Foundation.**

Charles Willis, Director and President. This organization is devoted to searching for the Ark, and other evidences of Noah, on Mount Cudi (Iraqi border). They believe that they have found the actual Ark landing site, probably the site visited by Gertrude Bell and possibly German geologist Friedrich Bender, and are planning a 2008 or 2009 expedition to excavate there, depending on permits. Website: <http://www.ancientworldfoundation.org>.

#### **Archaeological Imaging Research Consortium, also called ArcImaging.**

Rex Geissler, president. According to their web site, their mission is to use "the latest remote sensing technologies and traditional archaeological sciences to search for the remains of biblical and historical artifacts." ArcImaging claim their web site to be a clearinghouse of information on the Ark search, and they do include material on all known Ark-related mountains. However, the greatest part is devoted to Mount Ararat, and it would appear that they believe that the Ark is most likely to be found on Mount Ararat under the ice cap. Currently their research plans await necessary permits from Turkey. B.J. Corbin, editor of *The explorers of Ararat and the search for Noah's ark*, originated the group's extensive ark-related website that Geissler now manages. Web site: <http://www.noahsarksearch.com>.

#### **Ark Research Project (ARP).**

James Hall, Director (former professor at Liberty University). According to their website, <http://www.arkresearchproject.org/>, "Ark Research Project is a non-profit organization dedicated to locating and documenting the Ark of Noah." They claim to have in

hand a qualified team of men and detailed plans for a serious expedition that will study "select areas of the mountain that have not been thoroughly studied to date." No date for this project is listed, as they are waiting for permits and other matters to allow this plan to go forward.

#### **Associates for Biblical Research (ABR).**

Gary Byers, President of Board of Directors; Scott Lanser, Executive Director. With respect to Ark search, ABR maintains a close working relationship with ArcImaging (see above) and anticipates further collaboration between the two organizations in the future. ABR is a Christian archaeological organization with professional staff archaeologists doing research and fieldwork. Creation/evolution issues are included in their mission statement along with dissemination of biblical archaeological information, especially through their publication, *Bible and Spade*. Their website is <http://abr.christiananswers.net/home.html>.

#### **Bible Archaeology Search and Exploration Institute (B.A.S.E).**

Bob Cornuke, President. This organization says it is "dedicated to the quest for archaeological evidence to help validate to the world that the Bible is true." Cornuke believes that the Ark landed in the Elborz Mountains in Iran; he has made two expeditions to this site and is planning more research there. Website: <http://www.baseinstitute.org>.

#### **Institute for Creation Research (ICR).**

John Morris, President. Historically, ICR has sponsored Ark search expeditions going back to 1972, and Morris himself has been on 13 of them (*Acts and Facts*, Passing the mantle, n.d.). ICR does not have any near or future plans to seek the Ark, according to their Public Information Office: "However, ICR President Dr. John Morris still acts as a consultant for serious individuals or groups who want his advice." Website: <http://www.icr.org>.

#### **Noah's Ark Ministries International.**

This group, based in Hong Kong, describe themselves as an international organization comprising Ark researchers, scientists and Bible scholars who seek the truth of the Ark from a faith-based yet objective, scientific perspective. In August of 2007 a team found what they claim is Noah's Ark in a cave on Mount Ararat. They plan further expeditions to this site in 2008. Their English-language website is <http://www.thenoahark.com/index.asp?pg=3a>.

#### **Palego Ark Search Group.**

Located in Italy, this group continues the controversial work of Angelo Palego, who started searching for the Ark in 1985 and claims to have made 11 expeditions to Mount Ararat. Pelago devotes a web page to calculating the exact spot where the Ark is resting under the ice cap on Ararat, based on his interpretation of what the Bible says. Website: <http://www.noahsark.it/>.

