

## **The Case for Ağrı Dağı/Masis as Biblical Mt. Ararat**

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### **Abstract**

While there have been several proposals for the location of the ark of Noah's landing place, the two most widely accepted have been Mt. Judi and Ağrı Dağı/Masis.<sup>1</sup> Of these two, Mt. Judi has received the greater support among scholars. One of the main arguments in support of Mt. Judi is that it is the older tradition (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.), while the tradition that Ağrı Dağı/Masis is the Biblical Mt. Ararat is said to have originated late—only in the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. or there about.

In this paper we will make the case that the tradition for Ağrı Dağı/Masis is actually the older tradition and is in the region of Ararat the Biblical author of Genesis 8:4 had in mind. We will use two main arguments. First, the tradition that Ağrı Dağı/Masis is a sacred, cosmic mountain is very ancient, going back to at least the 22<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Second, that by looking at the flood accounts of Mesopotamia in tandem with the Hebrew account, it can be seen that while not naming the specific location, the Hebrews understood the ark to have landed in the vicinity of Ağrı Dağı/Masis—not in the region of Mt. Judi (or other proposed sites). This is because the term “mountains of Ararat” (Urartu) had a more restricted geographic range at the time the Biblical writer wrote.

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<sup>1</sup> Ağrı Dağı is the Turkish name for the mountain, often translated as “mountain of pain,” while Masis is the Armenian name, apparently derived from the word for “twin,” a reference to the two peaks.

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**Introduction—The Mountains of Ararat vs. Mount Ararat**

One of the great stories of western civilization is the story of the Great Flood and how Noah and his family survived the flood in a large vessel known as the Ark. The story appears in Genesis chapters 6-8 in the Bible. According to this sacred text, the ark came to rest on the mountains (Heb. הָרֵי, *hārê*) of Ararat (Heb. אֲרָרָת, *ārārāt*). In Hebrew, the word *hārê* has been interpreted either as a plural noun, (“mountains”) or an adjective (“mountainous”).<sup>2</sup> Technically, הָרֵי is a common masculine noun in plural construct so “mountains” is the more common translation. Speiser translates it as the “Ararat range”<sup>3</sup> which would still support the idea of a plurality of mountains named Ararat.

However, some scholars believe that *hārê ’arārāt* may be a nuanced expression that still points to a particular mountain. For example, Keil and Delitzsch understood the plural form “mountains of Ararat”—to refer to the two peaks of today’s Ağrı Dağı/Masis in eastern Turkey—often referred to as Greater Ararat and Lesser Ararat.<sup>4</sup> If they are correct in their proposal, then the candidates for the Ark’s landing place (below, next section) are greatly reduced with Ağrı Dağı and its dominant double peaks being the most obvious choice.

Victor Hamilton is another commentator who sees the expression *hārê ’arārāt* as referring to a single mountain. Hamilton acknowledges that the straightforward, literal reading of the Hebrew *hārê ’arārāt* is commonly understood as “the mountains of Ararat”<sup>5</sup>—a point that is

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<sup>2</sup> There are some scholars (below) who believe that the Akkadian cognate for Ararat, itself, may mean “mountains,” which would heighten the emphasis on the mountainous characteristic of these particular mountains—perhaps suggestive of their dramatic appearance and height.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that a similar interpretation (of mountain range) was made for Mt. Māšu/Masis in the Gilgamesh Epic by Hildegard and Julius Lewy. They take as a plural rather than dual (twin) and thus translate Tablet IX line 38 as the Māšu mountain range. Most scholars understand this not to be mountains plural, but twin mountains or the two peaks of Mt. Ararat. See Andrew R. George, trans. & edit (1999), *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (reprinted with corrections 2003 ed., Penguin Books), 71.

<sup>4</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 148.

<sup>5</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 301. Claus Westermann attributes the reading of the distributive plural in Genesis 8:4 to the tendency of interpreters and commentators through the centuries of wanting to name or identify a particular mountain as the place where the ark landed, Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 443.

regularly emphasized by most commentators.<sup>6</sup> However, Hamilton argues that it is possible that the expression could be understood as a distributive plural, such as found in 21:7, where “sons” refers to only one son, Isaac. If so, then the plural could be used as an indefinite singular which would read, “[one of] the mountains of Ararat.”<sup>7</sup> This would still not provide the proper name of the mountain, but could indicate the Hebrew author was aware that other ancient traditions such as Gilgamesh had designated a specific mountain. Indeed, the fact that the Genesis Flood narrative follows that of the Tablet XI of the Gilgamesh Epic so closely makes it difficult to conceive that the Hebrew author was unaware of the names of the two significant mountains associated with the flood hero and the flood mentioned in the Gilgamesh narrative—**Māšu** and **Niṣir**. More on that below.

Regardless of whether the term *hārê 'arārāt* can be understood as a single mountain, scholars have long recognized that the Hebrew name “Ararat” and its Akkadian cognate, “Urartu,” is a *geographical* term for a mountainous area in what would later be known as the Anatolian or Armenian Highlands in southeast Turkey. Thus, even if the actual mountain is not named, the Hebrew writer understood that the Ark landed somewhere within this mountainous area.

### **The Name of the Mountain of the Ark’s Landing**

The fact that the Biblical account does not actually name a single, specific mountain (but see Keil and Delitzsch above) has led different individuals through the ages to propose various candidates for the mountain where Noah’s Ark actually landed. Lloyd R. Bailey lists over half a dozen of the better-known candidates for the biblical landing place of the Ark.<sup>8</sup> However, of these proposals, two have emerged in recent times as the more popular among western scholars. These are: (1) the mountain in the province of Corduena/Gordyae known as Jebel Djudi

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<sup>6</sup> E.g., E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Doubleday, NY: Anchor, 1964), 55. J. Doukhan, *Genesis: SDA International Bible Commentary*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2016), 152.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* For additional support Hamilton cites M. Greenberg (Ezekiel 1-20, 68) on Ezek. 3:6 as an illustration: “not to [one of] many peoples . . .” versus “not too many peoples” (RSV).

<sup>8</sup> For various candidates for Mt. Ararat see Lloyd R. Bailey, *Noah: The Person and the Story in History and Tradition* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 53-81.

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(Mt. Judi)<sup>9</sup> southwest of Lake Van, and (2) Ağrı Dağı/Masis in the Armenian Highlands northeast of Lake Van. Of these two locations, it seems the current consensus of scholarship favors the identification of biblical Ararat with Mt. Judi.<sup>10</sup>

#### Jebel Djudi (Mt. Judi) as Biblical Ararat

The Jebel Djudi (Mt. Judi) option is thought to be the older tradition, going back to at least the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. Babylonian Bel-Marduk priest, Berossus. In the second book of his *Babyloniaca*,<sup>11</sup> Berossus recounts the story of the Flood. His flood story identifies the hero who builds the ark and survives the Flood as Xisuthros, a Greek translation of the Sumerian Flood hero, Ziusudra. This would indicate that the principle ancient source used by Berossus was some version of the Sumerian Creation-Flood story (also known as the Eridu Genesis) rather than the Atrahasis Epic/Gilgamesh Epic, where the hero is called Atrahasis or Utnapishtim.<sup>12</sup> It is Berossus who first claims that the Ark landed on the “Gordyaean mountains of Armenia,” that is, Mt. Judi.<sup>13</sup>

It seems, then, that it was Berossus’ 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. version of the Flood, written in *koine* Greek, that would be picked up by Greek

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<sup>9</sup> Mt. Judi, sometimes called Qardu [from the Aramaic], is a peak near the town of Jazirat ibn Umar (modern Cizre), at the headwaters of the Tigris, near the modern Syrian–Turkish border. According to the 18<sup>th</sup> century English scholar George Sale, “This mountain [al-Judi] is one of those that divide Armenia on the south, from Mesopotamia, and that part of Assyria which is inhabited by the Curds, from whom the mountains took the name Cardu, or Gardu, by the Greeks turned into Gordyae, and other names. . . . Mount Al-Judi (which seems to be a corruption, though it be constantly so written by the Arabs, for Jordi, or Giordi) is also called Thamanin . . . , probably from a town at the foot of it,” *The Koran*, translated into English, with explanatory notes from the most approved commentators, (1734). Mt. Djudi/Judi appears as *al-Ġūdiyy* (الْجُودِيّ, Arabic), *Cūdi*, (Kurdish): *Cudi* (Turkish), also known as *Qardū* (קַרְדּוּ, Aramaic), ܩܪܕܘܐ (Classical Syriac).

<sup>10</sup> For example, see Lloyd R. Bailey *op.cit.*, Bill Crouse, Gordan Franz, “Mt. Cudi—True Mountain of Noah’s Ark,” *Bible and Spade* 19:4 (2006), 99-111; Hamlet Petrosyan, “The Sacred Mountain,” in Levon Abrahamian and Nancy Sweezy (eds.) *Armenian Folk Arts, Culture and Identity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 33-39; Armen Petrosyan, “Biblical Mt. Ararat: Two Identifications,” *Comparative Mythology*, December 2016, Volume 2, Issue 1, 68-71.

<sup>11</sup> *Babyloniaca*, was a history of Babylon written by Berossus for the Greeks, who were fond of origin or *ktisis* stories. The original work of Berossus is lost, but quotes of it survived in works by Alexander Polyhistor and (later) Josephus and Eusebius.

<sup>12</sup> Atrahasis means “exceedingly wise;” Utnapishtim means, “he who saw life.”

<sup>13</sup> See Richard D. Lanser, Jr., “An Armenian Perspective on the Search for Noah’s Ark,” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Near East Archaeological Society, November 14-16, 2007, San Diego, CA.

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speaking Syrian Jews and later, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Syrian and other eastern Christians, all of whom allowed Berossus' 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. Flood story to inform them as to the location of the Ark's landing place on Mt. Judi.<sup>14</sup> Hence, we see numerous Jewish and Christian writers such as Flavius Josephus and Eusebius citing the Berossus version of the Flood as a parallel for Genesis.

The Syrian and Eastern Jewish and Christian tradition of Mt. Judi, in turn, would be picked up and adapted by the Muslims where it appears in the Qur'an, 11:44.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the Mt. Judi (alternately spelled Cudi) identification as the landing place of the Ark came to dominate Jewish and Christian understanding until the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. when Mt. Ağrı Dağı/Masis became increasingly more acceptable (see below). Yet even with the increasing popularity of Mt. Ağrı Dağı/Masis as the biblical Mt. Ararat, Mt. Judi remains the favorite candidate for Mt. Ararat among scholars.<sup>16</sup>

The tradition, then, for Mt. Judi is no older than the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. It can be traced to Berossus, whose own work is based on the Sumerian Flood account. However, the name Judi, itself, does not appear in the early accounts of Sumer; rather, it is a later addition by Berossus; it is important to note that the name "Judu" simply means "great" mountain.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> According to Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare, "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 . . .," in "Reviewed Work: Ararat und Masis. Studien zur armenischen Altertumskunde und Litteratur," by Friedrich Murad, *The American Journal of Theology*, (April 1901), 336. Similarly, August Dillman, in his Genesis commentary (1892: 147) suggests 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." See also, J. P. Lewis, *Noah and the Flood: In Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Tradition*, The Biblical Archaeologist, (December, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> According to the Qur'an, 11:44, "Then the word went forth: "O earth! swallow up thy water, and O sky! Withhold (thy rain)!" and the water abated, and the matter was ended. The Ark rested on Mount Judi, and the word went forth: "Away with those who do wrong!" For a convenient translation see online <https://quran.com/11/44>.

<sup>16</sup> See Bill Crouse and Gordon Franz, "Mt. Cudi, True Mountain of Noah's Ark," *Bible and Spade* 19.4 (2006), 99-111.

<sup>17</sup> See Gabriel Sawma, *The Qur'an, Misinterpreted, Mistranslated, and Misread: The Aramaic Language* (Plainsboro, NJ: Adi Books, 2006), 293.

**The History of Mount Masis/Ağrı Dağı and Māšu.**

Mount Masis (Turkish Ağrı Dağı), on the other hand, is thought by most scholars to have not been a serious candidate for Biblical Mt. Ararat until around the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.<sup>18</sup> However, the name, Mt. Masis, seems to have an ancient history—much older than Mt. Judi. Masis is an Armenian name whose earliest appearance in written form is probably by Movses Khorenatsi—the same 5<sup>th</sup> century Armenian historian who names Mt. Judi as the landing place of the Ark (above).<sup>19</sup> However, while there are different opinions about Masis’ etymology and origin,<sup>20</sup> there seems to be general agreement that the Armenian Masis is linguistically related to (if not derived from) the much older Akkadian name for this same mountain, Māšu (which means “twin”—clearly a reference to the two peaks of the mountain).<sup>21</sup> Māšu is, of course, the name of the mountain to which, according to the Gilgamesh Epic Tablet IX (ca. 13<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.), Gilgamesh travels to meet the flood hero, Utnapishtim, in hopes of learning the secret of eternal life. Many other details related to the Flood story are included in Gilgamesh. Moreover,

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<sup>18</sup> See Armen Petrosyan, “Biblical Mt. Ararat: Two Identifications,” *Comparative Mythology*, December 2016, Volume 2, Issue 1, 73 and references there.

<sup>19</sup> Movses Khorenaci, *The History of Armenia*, Yerevan, 1981, 50-51.

<sup>20</sup> In his *History of Armenia*, Movses Khorenaci derives the name from king *Amasia*, the great-grandson of the Armenian patriarch Hayk, who is said to have called the mountain *Masis* after his own name.

<sup>21</sup> See E. Lipinski, “El’s Abode: Mythological Traditions Related to Mount Hermon and to the Mountains of Armenia,” *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* II, (Leuven, 1971, 49 n. 184), 13-69. W. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 96, 97, n. 3 and A. Petrosyan (*opus cit.* n. 18). There are many reasons given for equating Masis with Māšu: (1) the names sound and are spelled similarly, (see E. Lipinski, and W. Horowitz, above) and A. Petrosyan who writes, “In the Assyrian version of the Akkadian language, Māšu sounded Māsu.”; (2) both mountains have similar traditions—again, according to A. Petrosyan, 72, “In Armenian folklore, Masis is referred to as “the Black mountain” and “the Dark land,” which could obviously be put in parallel with Gilgamesh’ journey in darkness after reaching Mt. Māšu and “the mountain/land of the dark” in other ancient Semitic sources. Also, both mountains have a tradition of being associated with the sun; and both are cosmic or “world mountains” that reach the heavens and the underworld below. (3) linguistic arguments (see A. Petrosyan); (4) both mountains have a connection with the idea of “twin” which obviously evokes the two distinctive peaks of Masis. In early Akkadian glyptic art, several cylinder seals dating to ca. 2200 B.C. have been found that show a double peaked mountain—often with one peak higher than the other—with the sun god Shamash emerging between the peaks. These cylinder seals are almost universally thought to be depicting the Akkadian Mt. Māšu (see Lipinski, 49, n. 182; Horowitz, 97, n. 3).

there is no question that the Flood story that appears in the Gilgamesh Epic (Tablet XI, lines 1-203) was derived from the Flood story that appears in the earlier Atrahasis Epic (Tablet III), which is dated to ca. 1600 B.C.<sup>22</sup> So, Mt. Ağrı Dağı/Māšu/Masis has an ancient tradition connected with the Flood.

### **Mountains of Ararat**

The Hebrew Scripture, as noted above, mentions the landing place of the Ark as being on the mountains (plural) of Ararat (הַרְי אֲרָרָט) (Genesis 8:4) (or one of the mountains of Ararat if Hamilton is correct—see above). The Hebrew Scriptures provide no additional information about Ararat other than it was a land north of Assyria (2 Kgs 19:37; Isa 37:38; Jer 51:27).<sup>23</sup> Since, as noted above, Ararat/Urartu is predominately, if not entirely, a mountainous geographic region, the expression “mountains of Ararat” is not much help in locating the actual landing place of the Ark, the expression being too generalized.

However, there is an indirect way of isolating within the mountains of Ararat the approximate location where the Hebrew writer understood the Ark to have landed when one realizes that the spatial parameters of Ararat/Urartu changed through time and that early Ararat/Urartu was relatively restricted geographically at the time it first appears in extra-biblical written sources; it then expanded through time to eventually encompass a fairly large region. Thus, if one can date the time when the Hebrew expression, “mountains of Ararat” was written then one can correlate that expression with the actual geographic boundaries for Urartu that existed at that same time.

### **The Changing Boundaries of Urartu**

Urartu<sup>24</sup> is an Assyrian derived exonym for a geographic region originally centered on the mountainous area northeast of Lake Van in

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<sup>22</sup>Tilgay, 216. Unfortunately, the Atrahasis Flood story is damaged and that section where the reference to Māšu might be expected to appear is missing.

<sup>23</sup> 2 Kings 19:37: And it came about as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place; Jeremiah 51:27: “Lift up a signal in the land, Blow a trumpet among the nations! Consecrate the nations against her, Summon against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz; Appoint a marshal against her, Bring up the horses like bristly locusts.”

<sup>24</sup> In addition to being a cognate with the Hebrew Ararat, it appears in Akkadian as *Urastu*, and in Armenian as *Ayrarat*. See David Marshall Lang, *Armenia: Cradle of*

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what would be later known as the Armenian Highlands and is today known as eastern Anatolia.

The fact is, the boundaries of Urartu were not static. Rather, they changed through time, as did the meaning of Urartu; the term Urartu changed from being a merely *geographic* reference to the high mountainous region northeast of Lake Van to a broader, *geo-political* entity completely surrounding Van. The more restricted boundaries of the early Kingdom of Urartu are reflected in archaeological discoveries and ancient literary references. As Mack Chahin notes, “Urartian territory was at first confined between the banks of the River Arsianias (*Murad su* [= east Euphrates]) and the northern and eastern shores of Lake Van.”<sup>25</sup> This included the mountainous region that overlooked the *Murad su* to the north and east of Van. This mountainous area, which forms an irregular U-shaped band of mountains, is distinguished by possessing the highest mountains in Turkey having well over a dozen peaks rising more than over 3000 meters in height with Ağrı Dağı rising above them all at 5165 m.<sup>26</sup> It was within this restricted mountainous region that the tribal chiefdoms of “geographic” Urartu (while they were still part of the Nairi confederation of the Late Bronze Age) began to consolidate.

The term first appears<sup>27</sup> in records from Assyrian King Shalmanesser I (1275–1245 BC) in which he describes a military campaign to the territory *northeast* of Lake Van where he encountered the lands of eight ununited tribes. Shalmanesser I describes the collective territory of these eight tribes as “Uruatri,”<sup>28</sup> an early form of Urartu:

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*Civilization* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970), 114; and Anna Elizabeth Redgate, *The Armenians* (Cornwall: Blackwell, 1998), 16–19, 23, 25, 26 (map), 30–32, 38, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Mack Chahin, *The Kingdom of Armenia: A History* (Routledge Curzon: Abingdon, Oxon, second revised edition, 2001), 54.

<sup>26</sup> Some of these peaks include Suphan Dagi (4058 m), Tendurek Dagi (3584 m), Pirrisit Dagi (3109 m), Kucukagri (3896 m), Agri Dagi (5165 m), Hudavendiger Dagi (3421 m).

<sup>27</sup> Archibald H. Sayce suggested that as early as the sixteenth or seventeenth century B.C. the Babylonians knew of the Armenian highlands as *Urdhu* (probably the contracted form of *Urardhu*). A. H. Sayce, “The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Van,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Studies*, (1882), 412. This idea has been repeated by Chahin, 53.

<sup>28</sup> Horace Abram Rigg, Jr., “A Note on the Names Armânum and Urartu,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 57/4 (Dec., 1937), 416–418; Paul E. Zimansky, *Ancient Ararat: A Handbook of Urartian Studies* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1998.), 28.



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At that time, at the beginning of my viceregency, the land Uruatri rebelled against me. I prayed to the god Aššur and the great gods, my lords. I mustered my troops (and) marched up to the mass of their mighty mountains. I conquered Himme, Uatqun, Mašgun (or Bargun), Salua, Halila, Luhu, Nilipahri (or Zallipahri) and Zingun - eight lands and their fighting forces; fifty-one of their cities I destroyed, burnt, (and) carried off their cities people and property. I subdued all of the land Uruatri in three days at the feet of Aššur, my lord. I took a selection of their young men (and) I chose them to enter my service. I imposed upon them (the conquered regions) heavy tribute of the mountains forever.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Urartu tribes seem to have consolidated, their unified territory seems to have remained a part or sub-set of a larger tribal confederation known as Nairi. The precise size and boundaries of Nairi are difficult to determine—probably because membership in the confederation changed through time resulting in changing boundaries. On the whole, however, those Nairi boundaries tended to expand. Its name is thought to be derived from the northwest Semitic word for “rivers” (e.g. Heb. נָהָר, *nahar*)<sup>30</sup> which fits both the mountainous region of the Armenian plateau that includes the mountains of Ararat where rivers flow through the mountains’ valleys, but also the lower lands surrounding the mountains that are bisected by the rivers that run out of the mountains. Thus, Nairi included the low plains that surrounded and drained the Urartu mountains. Regardless of its precise size and boundaries, the lands of the Nairi confederation were obviously larger than those of its constituent members which included the Urartu alliance.

Urartu’s subordinate political and geographic position *vis-a-vis* Nairi seems to have been maintained until the 9<sup>th</sup> century when the Urartu king, Arame, became king over the entire Nairi confederation. It was during the late 9<sup>th</sup> century that Urartu began expanding under a single king.<sup>31</sup> It began to absorb Nairi territories into its new kingdom.<sup>32</sup> Initially the Urartu kings—and the Assyrians—referred to their new kingdom as Nairi, maintaining the name of the “parent” confederation. Eventually, however, the Urartu kings adopted a new name for their

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<sup>29</sup> A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1991), 183.

<sup>30</sup> For example, see Chahin, 55, refers to Nairi as meaning “Riverlands.”

<sup>31</sup> See Paul Zimansky, *Ecology and Empire*, 49.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

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kingdom (Bianili)<sup>33</sup> while the Assyrians continued to refer to their expanded kingdom as Urartu.

Arame, himself, seems to have initially made his capital to the west of the Urartu heartland at Sugunia. However, forced to retreat eastward before the advancing Assyrians, Arame relocated at Arsaskun, and then to the city of Tushpa (Van) on the east side of Lake Van. Thus, by the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. the kings of Urartu had formed a single polity known as the Kingdom of Urartu.<sup>34</sup> It would reach its maximum territorial extent in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>35</sup>

**Shalmaneser III's Ururtu/Ararat Was Smaller**

The more restricted boundaries of the early Kingdom of Urartu are illustrated by the itinerary of Shalmaneser III's campaign against Urartu in 856 B.C. as recorded in the Kurkh monolith and interpreted by Henry F. Russell.<sup>36</sup> Following Russell's reading of Shalmaneser III's itinerary, as Shalmaneser moved against the Nairi coalition, now ruled by the first known Urartu king, Aramu, Shalmaneser crossed over the East Tarsus mountain range (which separates the upper Mesopotamia river valley from the East-west branch of the Euphrates River) using the Lice-Genç pass and entered the east-west valley of the Murad Su (the east branch of the Euphrates River). (This pass is upstream, just beyond what the Assyrians considered to be the source of the Tigris River—the Tigris Tunnel). Moving eastward up the Murad Su, Shalmaneser III apparently passes the territories of Sumei and Dayaeni (the land of the Diauehi), north of the east Euphrates and Urartu),<sup>37</sup> and reaches the sources of the Euphrates (west and east of modern Agri); he then reaches the region of Urartu proper (south and east of Lake Van).

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Zimansky, "Urartian Material Culture as State Assemblage: An Anomaly in the Archaeology of Empire," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, (1995), 103-105 of 103-115.

<sup>34</sup> Mack Chahin, *The Kingdom of Armenia: A History* (Routledge Curzon: Abingdon, Oxon, second revised edition, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> Zimansky, *Ecology and Empire*, 50.

<sup>36</sup> See H. F. Russell, "Shalmaneser's Campaign to Urartu in 856 B.C. and the Historical Geography of Eastern Anatolia according to the Assyrian Sources," *Anatolian Studies*, 34, (1984), 171-201.

<sup>37</sup> According to Russell: "If Dayaeni is in the area occupied by the Diauehe, all the essential conditions for its location in the Assyrian evidence are met: the Diauehe occupied land near possible sources of the Euphrates, close to Urartu," 187. Russell places Dayaeni north-west of Urartu on his map.

Again, this itinerary, shown on Russell's map, locates Urartu north, northeast, and east of Lake Van. Urartu, in this context of Shalmaneser III's itinerary, is likely referring to the original heartland of Urartu proper, and does not include the surrounding territories of Nairi that would become part of Urartu as these territories fell under the expanding hegemony of the Urartu kings beginning in the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. into the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

This transition from the Urartu that refers to the original heartland to its displacement of the term Nairi of the surrounding territories is reflected in the fact that for a period of time after the Urartu kings came to be kings over all of Nairi, the Urartu kings referred to their expanded kingdom as Nairi. However, later references show that the expanded kingdom that included the former lands of Nairi were now identified as Urartu—at least by the Assyrians.<sup>38</sup> Chahin describes the ultimate extent of Urartu in the eighth century: “During the first half of the eighth century B.C., Ararat's generals could discuss strategy at the frontiers of an empire stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean and River Orontes, and from the River Kura in the north to the southern foothills of the Armenian Alps, and the highlands east and south of Lake Urmia.”<sup>39</sup>

Chahin illustrates the assumption by many scholars that the eighth century Urartu—with its expanded territorial gains—is the Urartu/Ararat that the biblical writer had in mind while writing Genesis 8:4.<sup>40</sup> However, as will be seen below, a more critical analysis of the Genesis Flood pericope points to an *earlier* composition of the Hebrew story when the boundaries of Urartu were geographically much more limited and the expanded Kingdom of Urartu had not yet emerged.

### **Only Ağrı Dağı is in Early Urartu**

For the purposes of our study, it is important to note that the original heartland of Urartu included Ağrı Dağı—one of the candidates for the Landing Place of the Ark. However, this Urartu heartland did *not* include the location of Mt. Judi (or Mt. Nişir!). Mt. Judi was located southwest of Lake Van—within the broader territory of Nairi, but not within the

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<sup>38</sup> The Assyrians seem to have continued to refer to Nairi as a distinct entity for decades after the establishment of Urartu, until Nairi was totally absorbed by Urartu (with some southern parts taken over by Assyria) in the 8th century BCE. See Paul Zimansky, *Ecology and Empire: The Structure of the Urartian State*, 49-50.

<sup>39</sup> Chahin, 54-55.

<sup>40</sup> Chahin, 54.

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heartland of Urartu. (The same can be said of Mt. Nişir/Nimush which, if identified with Pir Omar Gudrun in northern Iraq is located southeast—and outside even the territory of Nairi. Rather Mt. Nişir/Nimush was located in the northern region of Assyria.<sup>41</sup> It would not fall within the territory of Urartu until after the expansion of the Urartu kingdom in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>42</sup>)

**Dating the Hebrew Flood Story**

This realization that the boundaries of Urartu changed through time, expanding from a more limited territory northeast of Lake Van to one that was quite expansive by the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., raises the question as to what Urartu meant when the Hebrew writer refers to the landing place of the Ark as occurring within the mountains of Ararat? The Hebrew writer's understanding, in turn would be based upon the period of time in which he wrote. Traditional dating of Genesis 8:4 would place the reference to the "mountains of Ararat" to the 15<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.—the time of Moses—and a time when Urartu/Ararat would refer only to the original heartland of Urartu prior to its expansion in the 9<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.<sup>43</sup> However, historical critical opinion on the dating of this passage would assign it to the so-called P source which would mean it was written during the 7<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. This would mean the expression "Mountains of Ararat" could refer to the expanded meaning of Urartu after it became a Kingdom in the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C.—this would include Mt. Judi. (It is doubtful the Hebrew writer would have ever understood Mt. Nişir as being part of the "mountains of Ararat"—Mt. Nişir would be too far south in Assyria.) And, as noted above, Mt. Nişir may not have been understood as an actual place name—rather, it was a reference to a mythical place shrouded in secrecy and could refer to most any mountain.) So, what is the likely date of the Hebrew Flood story?

In determining the age of the Hebrew Flood story, it is first important to understand how and when it came to be put in written form. Among most biblical scholars, the Bible's "primeval history," that is, Genesis 1-11 (which includes the Flood narrative), was composed from two

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<sup>41</sup> Mt. Nişir/Nimush is, of course, mentioned explicitly in the Gilgamesh Epic as the mountain where Utnapishtim's ark landed. While some identify this mountain with Pir Omar Gudrun in northern Iraq, some scholars believe the name is a secret or hidden name and not the actual name of the physical mountain upon which the ark landed.

<sup>42</sup> See Chahin, 54.

<sup>43</sup> See Davies, G. I., "Introduction to the Pentateuch," 19-20 in Barton, John; Muddiman, John (eds.). *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

different ancient documents or sources, known as “J” and “P.” The “J” source (called the Yahwist because of a preference to refer to the Hebrew God as Yahweh) has been thought to have been composed around the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C. by an individual or group of individuals who lived in the southern part of Israel—that is, Judah—probably at Jerusalem. The “P” document, (called the Priestly document because it was thought to be composed by a priest or group of priests) around the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

However, while the Documentary Hypothesis is still widely accepted in some form or another by many, if not most, biblical scholars, there have been a growing number of scholars—especially those studying ancient Mesopotamian literature—who have seriously questioned the traditional document hypothesis, especially for the first 11 chapters of Genesis and particularly for the Flood account in Genesis 6-9.<sup>44</sup> This is because comparative analysis between Mesopotamian primeval histories (specifically the Sumerian “Eridu Genesis” and the Akkadian Atrahāsīs Epic) and Genesis 1-11 shows a remarkable correlation with the overall themes and structures.<sup>45</sup> As a result, many ANE scholars believe that the Genesis 1-11 primeval history, including the Flood pericope of Genesis 6-9, was composed as a single literary unit using the earlier 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Mesopotamian versions—especially Atrahāsīs—as a model.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, some of the details of the Hebrew Flood story track

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<sup>44</sup> Examples of such scholars and their studies include I. M. Kikawada, “Literary Convention of the Primeval History,” *Annual of Japanese Biblical Literature* 1 (1975) 3-21; Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible and Its World* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 31; G. Wenham, “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,” *Vetus Testamentum* 28: 336-48; William Shea, “A Comparison of Narrative Elements in Ancient Mesopotamian Creation-Flood Stories with Genesis 1-9,” *Origins* 11 (1984): 9-29; David Toshio Tsumura, “Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories,” in Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura eds., *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 27-57; Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Biblical Flood Story in the Light of the Gilgameš Flood Account,” in Joseph Azize and Noel Weeks, eds., *Gilgameš and the World of Assyria*, (eds. Joseph Azize and Noel Weeks), Proceedings of the Conference held at Mandelbaum House, The University of Sydney, 21-23 July 2004, Leuven: Peeters (2007), 115-127.

<sup>45</sup> See especially Shea, above, n. 20; Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker, 1991), 185-187; Kenneth A. Kitchen *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 426, 427; the studies by Wenham, Rendsburg (note 1 above) and Jared Pfof, “A Literary Analysis of the Flood Story as a Semitic Type-Scene,” *Studia Antiqua* 13, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>46</sup> See Rendsburg above, n. 20.

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closely with details in the Gilgamesh Epic (whose Flood story in Gilgamesh Tablet XI clearly borrowed from the earlier Atrahasis Epic Tablet III).<sup>47</sup> So it seems the greatest influence on the Hebrew Flood story in Genesis 6-9 was the Atrahasis and Gilgamesh epics. Jared Pfof's study illustrates the newer view:

The account in *Gilgamesh* has the most similarity to the biblical account in details but *Atrahasis* has much more in common with Genesis in theme and structure. *Atrahasis* (as well as the *Eridu Genesis*) and Gen 1–9 share the same tripartite structure: creation, antediluvian life, and the flood. This suggests that the author(s) of the Genesis flood narrative may have used this tripartite structure as a model with which to create the narrative of the primeval history and then used the *Gilgamesh* version to craft many of the details of the flood story itself. . . . The nature of the biblical polemics strongly suggest that it was heavily borrowing from the traditions, if not the actual texts, of both *Atrahasis* and *Gilgamesh*.<sup>48</sup>

This more recent understanding of how the Hebrew Flood story came about directly impacts the question as to *when* the Hebrew Flood account was composed. This is important because of its specific reference to the “mountains of Ararat.” As noted above, the geographic boundaries of the land of Urarat/Ararat *changed* through time and those boundaries provide a check on the viability of the various proposals for where the biblical mountains of Ararat are located and where the Ark landed.

The actual Gilgamesh Flood story (taken from Atrahasis ) was only added to the standard version sometime between 1300-1000 B.C.<sup>49</sup> This means the reference to Mt. Nimus only appears in the Standard Version of Gilgamesh.

The question remains as to when did the Hebrews become aware of, and interact with, the Mesopotamian traditions. As Lambert notes, “. . . if

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<sup>47</sup> So Rendsburg and Pfof (notes 1 and 2 above).

<sup>48</sup> Jared Pfof, 6.

<sup>49</sup> According to Tigay, “various considerations arising from the study of Akkadian literature as a whole have led scholars to the conclusion that the late, standardized versions of most Akkadian literary texts, including The Gilgamesh Epic, were produced during the last half or quarter of the second millennium. As a rough approximation of the date, 1250 is sometimes given, but it should be kept in mind that the date is conjectural,” 131.

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the case for borrowing is to be established, at least a suggestion of the manner and time of transference must be made.”<sup>50</sup> In Lambert’s opinion,

The exile and the latter part of the Monarchy [10<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.] are out of the question, since this was the time when the Hebrew traditions of creation and the early history of mankind were being put in the form in which they were canonized. That the matters spoken of were included in Genesis is proof that they were long established among the Hebrews. Kaufmann has rightly argued that the prophetic use of the traditions of Yahweh’s battle with the sea implies that these traditions were therefore long established on Hebrew soil. Thus, one is forced back at least to the time of the Judges [1200-1000 B.C.] and even this may be too late.

Lambert continues,

only the Amarna period [14<sup>th</sup> century B.C.] has any real claim to be the period when this material moved westwards. This is the period when the Babylonian language and cuneiform script were the normal means of international communication between countries from Egypt to the Persian Gulf. From within this period, the Hittite capital in Asia Minor has yielded a large quantity of fragments of Mesopotamian literature, both Sumerian and Babylonian, including the Gilgamesh Epic. A smaller quantity of similar material has been yielded by Ras Shamra, including a piece of the Atrahasis Epic. Megiddo has given up a piece of the Gilgamesh Epic, and Amarna itself several pieces of Babylonian literary texts.

Thus, Lambert believes that the Hebrews would not likely have “borrowed” or interacted with the Mesopotamian literary materials before 1500 B.C., because Genesis shows no knowledge of Mesopotamian matters prior to that time.

However, Kenneth A. Kitchen sees the possibility of an even earlier historical context for when Mesopotamian literary traditions moved west.

It is logical to suggest that the framework and basic content of Gen. 11 goes back to the Patriarchal period, and came as a tradition with the patriarchs westward from Mesopotamia. This would be no isolated

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<sup>50</sup> See W. G. Lambert, “A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis,” 96-113 in *I studies Inscriptions from Before the Flood* (Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura eds., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 108.

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happening. In the early second millennium, “cuneiform culture” in terms of scribal use of cuneiform script spread not only to Syria and Anatolia but round and south into Canaan, to Hazor and even as far south as Hebron, with its seventeenth-century administrative tablet of livestock, offerings, and a king. Wherever cuneiform script and learning went, so did its literary traditions, as many other and later finds amply show. So, no objection can be taken to the essence of Gen. 1-11 going westward at this epoch; its written formulation in early Hebrew may then have followed later and independently. The patriarchal tradition would have been passed down in Egypt (as family tradition) to the fourteenth/thirteenth century, possibly then first put into writing, then to the monarchy period and beyond as part of the larger whole with the accounts of the patriarchs to form part of the book that we call Genesis. It is part of the oldest levels of Hebrew tradition as were the Mesopotamian accounts in their culture.<sup>51</sup>

Both Lambert and Kitchen’s arguments would support the writing of the biblical flood account, including the reference to the Ark landing on the “mountains of Ararat” at a time *prior* to the emergence of the Kingdom of Urartu in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC.

More recently Gary A. Rendsburg has made additional arguments for an earlier composition of the Genesis Flood account.<sup>52</sup> As noted above, there is little doubt that the Gilgamesh Flood story was adapted from the Atrahāsīs Flood story. But, certain details from Atrahāsīs were not carried over into the Gilgamesh Flood story. For example, a Late Babylonian fragment of Atrahāsīs includes the following couplet presenting Ea’s promise at the end of the Flood:

From this day no Deluge shall take place,  
And the human race [shall] endure forever!

This Divine promise of no future floods is clearly echoed in Genesis 9:11:

And I will establish my covenant with you,  
And never again shall all flesh be cut-off by the waters of the flood,  
And never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.

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<sup>51</sup> Kenneth A. Kitchen, 426-427.

<sup>52</sup> See above, n. 38.



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The Bible writer seems to be following a hybrid version of Atrahāsīs and Gilgamesh. This might point to an early version of the standard edition of Gilgamesh (1300 B.C. or earlier).

Thus, in determining the date for the composition of the Hebrew Flood story (and its reference to the mountains of Ararat), the dating of the Hebrew account's principle source materials that influenced it and with which its author interacted—the Atrahāsīs and Gilgamesh epics, must be considered. As noted above, it is generally believed that the Akkadian Atrahāsīs Epic was composed ca. 1600 B.C.,<sup>53</sup> the Akkadian Old Babylonian version of Gilgamesh dates between 2000-1500 B.C.,<sup>54</sup> and the Standard Version of the Gilgamesh Epic sometime between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.<sup>55</sup> It would seem the Hebrew writer was familiar with these Mesopotamian Flood traditions and was responding to them.

The idea that the Hebrew writer could possibly have had access to both of the early Atrahāsīs Epic and the Gilgamesh Epic as he wrote the biblical account of Creation and the Flood is supported by archaeological evidence which indicates that both Atrahāsīs and the Epic of Gilgamesh had become part of the literary culture of the Syro-Palestine region no later than the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 B.C.). This is established by three archaeological finds in this region: (1) a fragment of the Gilgamesh Epic (Tablet VII) dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was found at Megiddo in the 1950's;<sup>56</sup> a fragment of the Atrahāsīs Epic flood account was found in the Late Bronze Age archives of ancient Ugarit (Ras Shamra);<sup>57</sup> also, a Gilgamesh text was found at Ugarit in 1994.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the West Semitic peoples (including the Hebrews) were apparently quite familiar with both the Atrahāsīs and the Gilgamesh Epic's Flood stories no later than the beginning of the first millennium (10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) and possibly as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C.<sup>59</sup> Based on the similarity of

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<sup>53</sup> William G. Lambert and Alan R. Millard, *Atrahāsīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 14.

<sup>54</sup> Andrew R. George, trans. & edit, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (reprinted with corrections, 2003 ed., Penguin Books, 1999), 101.

<sup>55</sup> Andrew George, xxiv-xxv. The most complete version of the Standard Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh Epic is a 7<sup>th</sup> century copy found in Nineveh at the library of Ashurbanipal.

<sup>56</sup> See Tigay, 1982, 123-29, 185-86; George, 2003, 339-47.

<sup>57</sup> Lambert and Millard, 1969, 131-33.

<sup>58</sup> George, 139-40.

<sup>59</sup> Kitchen and Rendsburg, 122, (although Rendsburg prefers a composition of the Hebrew story in the early Iron Age).

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the literary structure of Genesis 1-11 with those of Atraḥasīs and the Eridu (Sumerian) Genesis (see below), the Genesis Flood story (and its reference to the mountains of Ararat) likely achieved its written form no later than ca. 1000 B.C. and even as early as ca. 1400 B.C. as long advocated by conservative and traditional biblical scholars.

**Literary Structure**

One final argument that the Hebrew Flood account was written prior to the establishment of the Kingdom of Urartu is seen in the literary structure of the Hebrew text. This argument has been proposed by William H. Shea and Kenneth Kitchen.<sup>60</sup> Specifically, Shea notes that the structure of the Genesis primeval history (Genesis 1-11) is in a tripartite form: creation—antediluvian history—Flood. This same structure—creation—antediluvian history—flood, appears in both Atraḥasīs and the Sumerian Eridu Genesis which each date as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The traditional date for the composition of Genesis is the 15<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

On the other hand, later Mesopotamian stories tend to lack the creation—antediluvian history—flood structure. For example, Enuma Elish (10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) is a creation story without a flood—and the Gilgamesh Epic (13<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) is a flood story without a creation. Again, these later stories (Enuma Elish and Gilgamesh) lack the creation—pre-flood history—flood structure, and are more popular and common in later periods after the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Thus, Shea would argue that the Hebrew account with its creation-flood structure—and its reference to the Ark landing in the mountains or Urartu/Ararat—dates *prior* to the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

A similar argument has been made by Kenneth Kitchen: “The creation-stories in Mesopotamia from c. 1100 B.C. onwards diverge from what we find in Genesis. The grouped themes of creation, flood, primeval history, ceased to inspire new writers and new works.” “During the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, king-lists in Assyria and Babylonia never normally bothered to go back to either the flood or creation.” “By the time of the Babylonian exile and after, the forms of history-writing had changed. In a *real* post-exilic book like Chronicles, the whole of primeval antiquity down to Abraham’s grandson Jacob/Israel is covered

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<sup>60</sup> William Shea, “A Comparison of Narrative Elements in Ancient Mesopotamian Creation-Flood Stories with Genesis 1–9,” *Origins* 11 (1984): 9–29. Shea is followed by Kitchen (op. cit. n.21, 422-424).

in just one initial chapter (1 Chron. 1:1-52), almost entirely of genealogies, in which neither the creation nor the flood are even mentioned, let alone any other ‘primeval’ details.” “Thus, whenever it reached its present [written] form within the entire book of Genesis, the unit Gen. 1-11 best finds its literary origins in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.”<sup>61</sup> (It is important to remember that this is well before the emergence of the Kingdom of Urartu in the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C.).

In summary, based on the evidence above, it was likely the Hebrew Flood story with its reference to the Ark landing on the “mountains of Ararat” (Genesis 8:4) was composed *before* the rise of the Kingdom of Urartu in the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>62</sup> when the term Urartu/Ararat was used *only* as a geographic term (16<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.). That means the expression in Genesis 8:4, the “mountains of Ararat/Urartu” refers to the more limited *geographical region* of Urartu, not the later Kingdom of Urartu. This earlier limited region of Urartu excludes Mt. Judi as being within the mountains of Ararat from the Hebrew writer’s view (as well as Mt. Nişir if it is identified with Pir Omar Gudrun)—but it does include Ağrı Dağı/Masis/Māšu.

### **Why the Hebrew Story Doesn’t Name the Mountain of the Ark**

Finally, it is interesting to address an important question as to *why* the Hebrew writer avoided naming the precise location of the landing place of the Ark—the specific mountain? This was not an accidental omission—rather it was likely deliberate. The fact that the Hebrew writer was following Atrahāsīs and Gilgamesh so closely while composing his own Flood narrative (Genesis 6-9),<sup>63</sup> makes it virtually impossible that he was unaware of either Mt. Masu nor Mt. Nişir, both of which appear in the Gilgamesh Epic in association with either the flood hero or the ark. The answer for the omission lies in the demonstrable practice of the Hebrew writer to avoid any Mesopotamian mythological overtones in his own work.<sup>64</sup> This has been illustrated by numerous comparative studies of the Hebrew primeval history with those from Mesopotamia—including the Sumerian “Eridu Genesis” and the Atrahāsīs Epic. Both

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<sup>61</sup> Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today* (Downer’s Grove, IL: International Varsity Press, 1977), 35.

<sup>62</sup> For a convenient summary of the history of the Kingdom of Urartu see Paul E. Zimansky, *Ancient Ararat: A Handbook of Urartian Studies* (Ann Arbor, MI: Caravan Books, 1998), 25-100.

<sup>63</sup> Pfof, 6.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

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Mt. Masu and Nişir, which are each viewed as “cosmic” and holy mountains, are replete with mythological elements that would have been in direct contradiction to Hebrew theological concepts and beliefs. Thus, in his account, the Hebrew writer “demythologized” the Atraḥasīs and Gilgamesh stories by omitting the mythological elements of those stories when writing the Hebrew version of the Flood story. Therefore, rather than referring to either of these “cosmic” mountains and risking an apparent endorsement of their mythological (and anti-Yahwist) attributes and associations, the Hebrew writer avoided referencing them at all. Rather, he simply states, rather vaguely—yet deliberately—that the ark landed in the “mountains of Ararat” (Heb. הַרְי אֲרָרָט) (*hārê ārārāt*). Yet the non-mythological common elements, along with the dating of his Flood account necessarily places the Ark’s landing place within the territory of the pre-monarchal Kingdom of Urartu (mountains of Ararat)—that is, in the region northeast of Lake Van. The narrower geographical parameters of early Urartu would, therefore, necessarily preclude the possibility that the Hebrew writer—writing before the formation of the Kingdom of Urartu—had in mind Mt. Judi or any other candidate (such as Pir Omar Gudrun) that lies outside this region of early Urartu as the place where the ark landed. These other candidates lay *outside* what the Hebrew writer would have understood to be the “mountains of Ararat.”

### Conclusion

While there have been several proposals for the location of the ark of Noah’s landing place, the two most widely accepted have been Mt. Judi and Ağrı Dağı/Masis. Of these two, Mt. Judi has received the greater support among scholars. One of the main arguments in support of Mt. Judi is that it is the older tradition (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.), while the tradition that Ağrı Dağı/Masis is the biblical Mt. Ararat is said to have originated late—only in the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. or there about.

In this paper we have argued that the tradition for Ağrı Dağı/Masis/Māšu is actually the older tradition. First, the tradition that Ağrı Dağı/Masis/Māšu is a sacred, cosmic mountain is very ancient, going back to at least the 22<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Second, that by looking at the Mesopotamian accounts with the Hebrew account in tandem, it can be seen that while not naming the specific location, the Hebrews understood the Ark to have landed in the vicinity of Ağrı Dağı/Masis/Māšu—not in the region of Mt. Judi (or other proposed sites). Third, the fact that the

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Hebrew term “mountains of Ararat” pre-dates the rise of the Kingdom of Urartu with its expanded borders, means that the writer of the Hebrew account of the landing of the ark envisioned the region of Ararat to correspond with the more limited boundaries of Urartu as they were before the rise of the Urartu Kingdom; that is, biblical Ararat was more restricted to the northeast of Lake Van. This, therefore, precludes other candidates for Ararat because they lay outside the boundaries of what the Hebrews understood to be the mountains of Ararat. This leaves Ağrı Dağı/Masis/Māšu, with its flood related traditions as depicted in the Atrahasis and Gilgamesh epics, as the most viable candidate for the biblical landing place of the Ark.

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