

"The oldest known flood story is that of Noah. . .

"The Babylonian version is virtually identical except that the name of the chief character is Utnapishtim. The story of Utnapishtim is incorporated in the Gilgamesh epic, recorded in tablets unearthed at Nineveh in the library of Ashurbanipal (668-633 B.C.). Enough bits and pieces of older versions have been found in different places to prove that Ashurbanipal's version in turn is based on a Sumerian story which goes back to about 3400 B.C., in which the hero is called Ziusuddu or Xisuthrus. Utnapishtim was a good man who was warned by the sea god Ea that the world was destined to be destroyed by a flood in punishment for the wickedness of mankind. As instructed, he built a boat into which he repaired with his family, skilled artisans, and animals. After seven days of tempest their vessel grounded on 'Mount Nisir.' Utnapishtim sent out a dove, which found no land and returned; then a swallow, which also returned; and finally a raven, which did not come back. Upon disembarking Utnapishtim sacrificed to the gods, who 'smelt the sweet savor,' promised that there would be no repetition of the deluge, and ultimately took Utnapishtim to dwell among them. . .

"Attempts have been made to discredit Mesopotamia as the source of the biblical flood tradition, on the grounds that the rainfall is not heavy enough there to cause floods. However, the rains that cause a river to flood in its lower course can fall anywhere in its catchment area, and the Tigris and Euphrates are very long rivers indeed; there is also archeological evidence that floods have occurred there not once, but many times. A ten-foot layer of flood silt has been found at Ur in the Obeid level, indicating a flood during the fourth millennium B.C.; at Kish there is evidence of a flood which occurred considerably after 3,000 B.C.; at Fara there is a two-foot layer of alluvium representing a flood which came some time after the one at Ur but before the one at Kish; and at Nineveh there is a layer six to seven feet thick which could be of the same age as the one at Ur, or nearly so. These layers constitute a record of perfectly expectable, more or less local floods of the Tigris or Euphrates or both at once.

"Best known to most of us after the Babylonian-Hebrew flood tradition is that of classical mythology, Deukalion's deluge. Of the several Greek flood traditions, it is the only one in which the flood is said to have been worldwide Ogyges' flood, the best known Greek flood tradition after Deukalion's, was not as widespread or as serious as Deukalion's The third greatest flood in Greek tradition is the one associated with a king Dandanos of Arcadia. . . . There are many other Greek flood traditions concerning purely local floods. . . .

"Outside of Greece, flood legends are surprisingly rare in Europe. There is one from Wales, one from Lithuania, two in Norse mythology; a gypsy legend from Transylvania involving a fish, which may have been derived from the Indian legend; and one from the Voguls, a tribe living on both sides of the Ural Mountains. . . .

"The flood traditions of Asia are very diversified. The Persian myth from the Bundahish. . . the Hindu flood tradition. . Kashmir. . .