



Introduction

The Black Sea Flood: An Interdisciplinary Investigation

Joan Marler and Harald Haarmann

In 1998, marine geologists William Ryan and Walter Pitman published an exciting and controversial book *Noah's Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries About the Event that Changed History*. According to their hypothesis, an enormous catastrophe took place around 5600 BCE in which marine water, under pressure from rising ocean levels, broke through the Bosphorus, and poured into the Black Sea basin, transforming the previously smaller fresh water Euxine lake to its present dimensions as the Black Sea.

Ryan and Pitman's reconstruction of geological history generated a great deal of discussion among scientists as well as the public at large. A PBS program, *The Quest for Noah's Flood*, broadcast in the US on October 9, 2001, explored "evidence of a cataclysmic flood that may have inspired biblical tales of a deluge" (*National Geographic* October 2001). This TV special, sponsored and documented by National Geographic, followed "Explorer-in-Residence" Robert Ballard in his deep sea search for "lost history."

Scholars interested in the development of Neolithic societies in Eurasia began to realize that a cataclysmic flood of the Black Sea during the mid-sixth millennium BC may have exerted significant influence on the early societies of the circum-Pontic region. With this in mind, the Institute of Archaeomythology, in collaboration with the Bogliasco Foundation, co-sponsored "The First International Symposium on the Interdisciplinary Significance of the Black Sea Flood," held at the Liguria Study Center, Bogliasco, Italy, June 3-7, 2002. An interdisciplinary group of scholars, as

well as visual and performing artists, came together from Eastern and Western Europe, Australia and the United States to explore this fascinating subject.

During the first session, Bill Ryan announced that the published date of the flood had been pushed back 1100 years earlier, due to more recent data, to approximately 6700 BC. It became immediately clear that a flood event that early could not have been the direct cause of such events as the "formation of the Vinča Culture" (the subject of the paper by Bogdan Brukner (revised and included in this issue).

The theme of the Black Sea flood, subsequent environmental changes, and their effects on human ecology in the Pontic region continue to remain on the scientific agenda. So far, the biggest enterprise of coordinating teamwork among scientists who concentrate their research on the history of the Black Sea is sponsored by UNESCO.¹ This research project on the "Black Sea-Mediterranean Corridor during the last 30 ky: Sea level change and human adaptation," initiated in 2005, is conceived as a long-term program that is intended to continue until 2009. The first Plenary Meeting was held in Istanbul (October 8-15, 2005), and future conferences are being organized in Ukraine (2006), Russia (2007), Bulgaria and Romania (2008), and in Greece (2009). Numerous scientists from various disciplines (Earth, Exact, Atmospheric and Historical Sciences and the Humanities) and dozens of research institutes from many countries (Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria,

¹ UNESCO IGCP, 521 project—International Global Correlation Program; website: <http://www.avalon-institute.org/IGCP>.

Canada, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iran, Israel, Romania, Russia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and the USA) participate. It is the intention of this project to strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation and to strive for the reconciliation of insights and findings from the natural sciences and the humanities. Among the institutes that are affiliated through the participation of their representatives is the Institute of Archaeomythology.

The Institute of Archaeomythology encourages interdisciplinary research on the early cultural history of the circum-Pontic region. Archaeomythological studies will continue to highlight the repercussions of environmental changes on human ecology, and pertinent issues such as population movements, the development of settlements, cultural institutions, technologies, social structures and belief systems in Southeastern Europe, Anatolia and in the regions north of the Black Sea.

The first article in this second issue of the *Journal of Archaeomythology*, "Late Quaternary Sea-level and Environmental Changes in the Black Sea: A Brief Review of Published Data," is authored by Romanian marine geologists Nicolae Panin and Claudia Strehie who took part in the October 2005 UNESCO conference in Istanbul. Their offering provides a necessary overview of the geological history of the Black Sea region and introduces various considerations in determining the veracity of the flood hypothesis.

The other articles in this issue were originally presented during the 2002 Bogliasco symposium. Archaeologist Bogdan Brukner (Serbia and Montenegro), to whom this issue is dedicated, inquires into environmental influences on the genesis, lifespan and demise of Neolithic cultures in Southeast Europe and Anatolia; Linguist/archaeomythologist Harald Haarmann (Finland) explores the complex cultural history of the circum-Pontic region in the pre- and post deluge eras in his article "On the Fabric of Old World Civilizations: Human Response to the Black Sea Flood and Subsequent Climatic Change"; Indo-Europeanist/folklorist Adrian Poruciu (Romania), discusses the preservation of archaic references to the flood in

"The Sea and the Sea-Flood Motif in Romanian Folklore"; Mythologist/Thracian specialist Ivan Marazov (Bulgaria) explores the semiotic significance of the flood motif in "The Flood of Orpheus"; while Walter Brenneman (USA), scholar of comparative religion, discusses the mythological significance of the flood for Western civilization in "Submerged City and Ark: Contrasting Meanings of Flood Symbolism in Celtic and Middle Eastern Myth and Their Implications for Contemporary Self Understanding."

While ancient stories of mythic floods may or may not be attributable to specific flood events, it is clear that catastrophic experiences have enormous repercussions in the human psyche. The devastating Tsunami that recently took the lives of thousands of people in Southeast Asia, and the widespread threat of flooding due to global warming bring the devastating reality of floods into contemporary focus. Catastrophes of such magnitude often trigger mythic explanations that conform to locally accepted concepts. It is interesting to note that the flood tales described by Marazov and Brenneman concern divine retribution for human wrongdoing, whereas the Romanian motifs discussed by Poruciu concern the mysterious activities of a non-punitive cosmic reality.

We anticipate that the concerted efforts of a broad range of researchers who are exploring the history of the Black Sea region will, one day, result in the elaboration of a comprehensive study, anchored in the databases of interdisciplinary investigations, to highlight the crucial stages of early cultural development in the Old World. For such a study to be most comprehensive, the sciences and the humanities must surely be wed.

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