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NOAH AND FAMILY: MYTH, LEGENDS, ANCIENT HISTORY, AND THE BIBLE

By Joe Spears

What do ancient myths tell us about real history? Are myths distorted versions of real people and real events? Can we decode ancient mythology and find out anything about the past? Is there anything in ancient myths linking them with the Bible account?

Editors note: The bulk of the mythology provided herein, unless noted otherwise, is taken from the classic text by Jacob Bryant, A New System, or Analysis of Antient Mythology.¹

Mythology and History

Many people have heard of the famous characters of ancient mythology: Hercules and his strength, Zeus as the head of the gods, and others. Different nations have had their own myths and legends. Rome had their version of Greek god Zeus and called him Jupiter. Norse mythology involved gods Odin, Loki, and Thor, among others, and a place called Asgard. The corresponding abode of the gods in Greek mythology is Mount Olympus. Egypt had its Isis, Osiris, Ra, etc.

These gods were described by ancient authors. But in ancient times and in ancient writings, history is often mixed with myth. Today these are often treated as entirely separate subjects. This is true of many subjects, or areas of study. For example, we often hear of the fields of biochemistry or physical chemistry. But as we go back in time, we see fewer of these divisions. Often we see that one scientist worked in many fields, not just one.

We see also that as we move back in time, history and mythology become more and more blurred. A good example of this is the work of Homer. He wrote of some events in his Iliad and Odyssey that we today would say could never have happened. For example, he wrote of a giant one-eyed creature called a Cyclops, who was the son of the god Poseidon. Odysseus also meets with the spirits of the dead. Gods/goddesses Hermes, Zeus, and



Dagon, a Philistine god who lived before and after the flood.

Athena also play a part in his writing. Circe turned some of his men into swine. There was a multiple-headed monster, Scylla.

But Homer also wrote of a war involving Troy. Though much of what he wrote can be considered myth, is *all* of it myth? Might there have actually been a Troy, and a Trojan war?

Troy was thought to be a myth for a long time, but...

The Ancient Greeks thought the Trojan War was a historical event that had taken place in the 13th or 12th century BC, and believed that Troy was located in modern day Turkey near the Dardanelles. By modern times both the war and the city were widely believed to be non-historical. In 1870, however, the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann excavated a site in this area which he identified as Troy; this claim is now accepted by most scholars.²

¹ Bryant, J. (1807) A New System, or Analysis of Antient Mythology, Vol. III, Available at <<http://www.annomundi.com/history/bryant.pdf>> Accessed 2008 Mar 12

² Trojan War, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trojan_War> Accessed 2008 Mar 20

What we have here is a mixture of a historical place with obviously mythical events.

Euhemerism

Euhemerus lived in the fourth century BC. He said that the ancient Greek myths of gods, such as those described by Homer, were actually distorted accounts of real historical people. One particularly relevant point about this view, is that it is not just something that modern scholars have come up with. Euhemerus was a Greek, and an ancient Greek at that! He was in a good place, and time, to know.

And Euhemerus is not the only person to hold the view that the ancient Greeks distorted their accounts of real historical events and people. In addition to Euhemerus, the following themselves question, or give reason to question, the veracity of Greek accounts:

- Hecataeus of Miletus
- Philo
- Plato
- Jamblichus
- Theophilus
- Tatianus Assyrius
- Strabo
- Flavius Josephus

Athenagoras said that Homer (and others) basically made up or created the Greek gods. This may have been an elevation of real humans to god-like status.

...that the greatest abuses of true knowledge came from them. I insist, says this learned father, that we owe to Orpheus, Homer, and Hesiod, the fictitious names and genealogies of the Pagan Dæmons, whom they are pleased to style Gods: and I can produce Herodotus for a witness to what I assert. He informs us, that Homer and Hesiod were about four hundred years prior to himself; and not more. These, says he, were the persons who first framed the theogony of the Greeks; and gave appellations to their Deities; and distinguished them according to their several ranks and departments. They at the same time described them under different appearances: for till their time there was not in Greece any representation of the Gods, either in sculpture or painting; not any specimen of the statuary's art exhibited: no such substitutes were in those times thought of.¹

Is there any evidence to support the view that ancient mythological gods were just humans who became deified? Let us consider. First we will look into likely candidates for “god-ship” and investigate whether any such candidates existed in ancient times. Secondly, we will check whether the gods of ancient mythology had any characteristics that would indicate their human

characteristics or their human origin. Thirdly, we will consider the testimony of the ancients themselves.

First, in ancient times, who, i.e., what real people, would most likely be transformed into gods? (By transformed into gods, we mean the stories of these people would become “embellished”, and exaggerated descriptions of the people would be made to the point that the real people were described as gods.)

I submit the following possibilities:

- Kings and rulers
- ancestors
- powerful, mighty warriors
- long-lived people

In mythology, gods ruled over the realm of men. It thus seems likely that rulers would be the ones to be portrayed as gods. This is confirmed in the well-known case of the Egyptian Pharaohs, who were considered at least semi-divine.

One interesting psychological observation: a person who gained a position of power in the ancient world through war(s) of aggression is a person who may have a desire for power. Indeed, some would say this is blatantly obvious. If this is the case, it is within the realm of possibility that this desire for power might manifest itself in the ruler himself claiming his deity. As an example, some Roman emperors (Caligula, etc.) claimed divinity.

Ancestors have been worshiped in different cultures, including cultures in India, Africa, China, Egypt, and others.

Powerful and mighty men such as Heracles (Hercules) could be thought to be gods, or accounts of their deeds may have become exaggerated with time to the point that those deeds became superhuman in nature, and thus, the performer of the deeds also became superhuman. In fact, Zeus is described by ancient writer Euhemerus as a mighty warrior, but a man.

What about long-lived people? What would someone living in the ancient world think if there was a 500 year old king ruling their country? This king would easily seem immortal. The ancients did believe such people existed—at least, they claimed that they did. Josephus mentions this in *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 1, Chapter 3, section 9. He also says that other ancient writers also claimed great longevity – Manetho, Berosus, Mochus, Hestieus, Hieronymus, etc. The Bible also gives accounts of people in ancient times who lived hundreds of years. Some ancient accounts claim that some kings lived thousands of years. Regardless of how long such people

actually lived, the written accounts do mention very long lives in ancient times. Some might say we are gullible for believing these accounts, but whether people really lived that long is not so much the point, as it is that others who lived long ago *believed* the accounts. We should bear in mind that it is their attitude toward real people that would cause them to deify such people, not the actual age.

The people who live a long time might be considered immortal—possessing a god-like quality. One question: wouldn't everyone at that time also live to the about same age? To understand this question, let's examine the lifespans of people as found in Genesis.

Before the flood, people—at least the people that Genesis tells us about—lived 800 or 900 plus years. After the flood, there is a gradual decrease in the lifespans of individuals. A plot of this shows an exponential decay in the lifespans. Why would ancient writers make up numbers in such a way as to fit a pattern that would not be described until centuries afterward? Many processes and phenomena in nature exhibit exponential patterns in their behavior. This gradual decrease in lifespan is seen from one generation to the next. But remember, that the original older ancestors would still be around for many generations.

So, we see a gradual decrease in the lifespan of men after the flood. It seems to level off somewhere near 100 years. It seems that some might think of Noah and others who were extremely long-lived as apparently immortal, and therefore gods. Some might question, why would ancient people say some are gods, since *all* people had approximately the same lifespan? To explain this, we must realize there would be a mix of people of various lifespans all living at the same time. The long-lived would still be around while their multiple-great-grandchildren would be alive. And the long-lived would be few in number, while the short-lived would be much larger in number. It appears that each succeeding generation had shorter average lifespans than the previous (check the ages given in the Old Testament to see this). So, by the time the ancient ones were really old, there could easily exist a large number of relatively short-lived descendants. This is because the number of people in each succeeding generation would typically get larger, while the lifespan would get smaller.

So, there can be many generations during the lifetime of one long-lived ancient member of Noah's family, each succeeding generation making up a proportionally larger part of the population than the preceding generation. Thus, the population could be very large and consist mostly of short-lived people, while a long-lived ancestor still existed. The vast majority could easily view such a one as immortal, or as a god. Thus, within a few

hundred years after the flood, assuming the ages given in Genesis to be accurate, there could easily have existed a handful or a few dozen extremely long-lived individuals, a minority, among a much larger population of much shorter-lived individuals. To the multitudes, these few long-lived leaders would have seemed immortal and gods, for not only were these ancients long-lived, but they were the fathers and grandfathers of their societies—recall ancestor worship—but they also were the founders, leaders and rulers of their nations according to ancient documents (recall the divinity of kings).

So, we see a situation with a minority of powerful, long-lived rulers. They would have all of the above-listed characteristics that would make people see them as gods. Thus, that Noah and his immediate descendants would be transformed into deities seems reasonable and fits the above reasons for doing it. And we also have the evidence of the myths themselves and ancient writers such as Euhemerus, indicating that Noah and family were deified and incorporated into ancient mythology.

Noah and the Deluge

Bryant wrote: "Among the people of the east the true name of the Patriarch was preserved...Noas, Naus, ...Nous...Anaxagoras spoke of him by the name of Noas or Nous. ...The disciples of Anaxagoras esteem Nous the same as Prometheus"

Suidas and Stephanus tell us Annacus or Nannacus lived 300 years, and then the Deluge came which destroyed mankind—he prayed for man and was a king. Annacus, Innachus and Nannacus relate to Noachus and Noah.

According to Eusebius, who lived around 300 BC and is known as the father of church history, Inachus would have lived long before the existence of the place he was supposed to have ruled.

Greeks combined Dios (god) with Nusus (Noah) as Dionusus or Dionysis. The god Dionysis also is connected with Noah. Dionysis is associated with vineyards and taught man to plant the vine; Noah planted a vineyard after the flood (Gen. 9:20).

Evidence of Noah in the ancient world is found in place names. Hesychius, who compiled the largest dictionary of ancient Greek words and lived about 500 BC in Alexandria, claimed cities and mountains throughout the world were called Nusean. These places included Arabia, Ethiopia, Egypt, India, Libya, and more.

Philo says Deucalion was actually Noah: "The Grecians call the person Deucalion, but the Chaldeans style him Noe; in whose time there happened the great eruption of waters."

Seisithrus was a king, according to Median and Babylonian archives, as described by Adydenus and Eusebius. Quoting from Bryant's New System,

...the flood began...during the prevalence of the waters Seisithrus sent out birds, that he might judge if the flood had subsided: but that the birds, not finding any resting place, returned to him again. This was repeated three times;...he quitted the ark...¹

According to Bryant, Lucian said,

...those of the antediluvian world were all destroyed. The present world is peopled from the sons of Deucalion...from one person...the former brood...were men of violence... lawless.... On this account they were doomed to destruction: and for this purpose there was a mighty eruption of waters from the earth, attended with heavy showers from above...till the whole earth was covered with a flood and all flesh drowned...Deucalion alone was preserved, to re-people the world. This mercy was shown to him on account of his justice and piety. ...He put all his family, both his sons and their wives, into a vast ark...animals of every species, boars, horses, lions, serpents, whatever lived upon the face of the earth, followed him by pairs...¹

Lucian also says Deucalion raised an altar to God after exiting the ark. Note these points in agreement between Lucian's account and the Genesis account:

- water coming from the earth, not just as rain
- all today are descendants of the sole survivor
- the survivor built an altar
- the survivor was pious and just
- the world destroyed was evil
- their evil was the reason for the flood
- animals were on the ark
- animals appeared in pairs

The Ark

Berosus mentions something else in agreement with the Biblical description of the ark. He said the ancient people used scrapings from the ark's asphalt as charms. The Bible says the ark was sealed or coated inside and out.

Theophilus said the ark was visible in his day on the mountains of Armenia. Interestingly, the Bible says the ark landed in the mountains of Ararat. Theophilus' locations matches the one in Genesis. Chrysostom said the remains of the ark were preserved in the mountains of Armenia in his time.

In Egypt the Ship of Isis was called Baris. According to Nicolaus Damascenus, Baris is the name of the mountain on which the ark rested in Armenia. Here we see a connection with Egyptian religion, and mythological personage Isis, and the Ark of Noah.

Bryant tells us of Sesostris building a ship 280 cubits long, dedicated to Osiris at Thebes. This is the most remote inland part of Egypt; thus it was not a ship, but a temple, built in the shape or symbol of a ship. Bryant says it was sacred to Osiris at Theba or actually was itself called Theba, and the city (Theba) also got its name from the ark. *Theba* is the Hebrew word for ark used in Genesis. Also, the length, 280 cubits, is almost exactly the length of the ark given in Genesis. There it is 300 cubits, but different nations had different measures of the cubit, which could account for the discrepancy.

Bryant says:

Sesostris was Osiris; the same as Dionusus, Menes, and Noah. He is called Seisithrus by Abydenus, Xixouthrous by Berosus and Apollodorus; and is represented by them as a prince, in whose time the Deluge happened. He was called Zuth, Xuth, and Zeus: and had certainly divine honors paid to him.

The word Zeus, according to Bryan, is associated with making of wine, and Noah is known as the one who taught man to plant vineyards.

In religious mysteries and festivals, an ark or ship is involved. Pausanias tells of an ancient temple in Ionia; the God was on a float, and came that way from Phenicia. Aristides tell us that a ship was carried in a procession at the feast called Dionusia in Smyrna. The name Dionusia is associated with Noah, as we have seen above.

Plutarch said, "The vessel in the celestial sphere, which the Greeks call the Argo, is a representation of the Ship of Osiris, which out of reverence has been placed in the heavens." Therefore, this Greek constellation has origins in Egypt. There is a star in this constellation, Canopus, which can not be easily seen in Greece (again consistent with the origin of this constellation's name as somewhere other than Greece). This star is bright, is located in teh constellation on the rudder of the ship, and indicates the guiding force. Ptolemy was member of the temple Ca Noubi, and Noubi refers to Noah. Thus it seems that the guiding star of the ship, on the rudder, is named after Noah. In this case, the constellation would obviously be a representation of the Ark.

History Before the Flood

The information below is worthwhile and interesting in its own right, but will also be used later in explaining the relationship of the god Dagon to Noah.

Berosus wrote of a list of ten kings who lived before the flood. This list is over 2,000 years old, and on that list the tenth king lived both before and after the flood, having survived it. Another list obtained from the Weld Dynastic Prism is about 4,000 years old. These lists, as well as one from Genesis, are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Bible	Berosus	Weld Dynastic Prism
Adam	Alorus	Alulim
Seth	Alaporus	Alalmar
Enos	Amelon	Enmeniunna
Cainan	Ammenon	Kichunna
Mahalaleel	Megalarous	Emmengalanna
Jared	Daonos	Dumuzi
Enoch	Edoranchos	Sibzianna
Methuselah	Amenpsinos	Emenduranna
Lamech	Otiartes	Uburatum
Noah	Xisouthros	Zinsuddu

There are some interesting similarities in these lists. The third king on the Berosus list, Amelon, is the Babylonian Amilu, meaning “man.” This corresponds to the Hebrew, Enos, which also means “man.” Fourth on the Berosus list, Ammenon, is the Babylonian, Ummanu, meaning “artificer” and is the equivalent of Kenan (Cainan) which means “smith.” Eighth on the Berosus list is Amenpsinos, which is taken to be a corruption of Amilsinus, i.e., Amil-sin, “the man of Sin” (the Moon God).

Methuselah, also number 8 on the Biblical list, may be a variation of Mutu-sha-Irkhu, “man of the Moon God,” or if the more original form of the name is Methuselah, “the man of God.”

Seventh on the Berosus list probably refers to Emmeduranki, a legendary king of Sippar, to whom God gave the “table of the gods” and taught the secrets of heaven and earth. Enoch, also number seven on the Biblical list, was supposed to have been close to God and to have become the recipient of superhuman knowledge and revelations of the nature of heaven and earth.

Of course, number 10 on the Berosus list is the one who survived the flood. Here are points of similarity between Xisouthros and Noah:³

- God told them both to build a boat
- the reason for the boat was a coming flood
- when water began to subside, both sent out birds
- the boat landed on/in (a) mountain(s)

Dagon - Oannes

There is a god named Dagon. He is often drawn as a merman, or part fish, part man. According to Berosus, he appeared during the reign of the third of the ten kings listed above. Also, Noah was born during the time of the third from Adam, who was alive and possibly reigning as king at the time.

Though a god, Dagon learned from this third king, i.e., from a man. This seems strange, for a god to be taught by a man. Yet, it makes perfect sense that Noah would learn, as a child, from one of his ancestors who was still living. This could explain why this account was included, in spite of the fact that it didn’t make sense, simply because the myth of Dagon was based on events that really happened.

Both Noah and Dagon lived before and after the flood. Also, both are associated with water—Noah obviously as having built the ship and been on it during the flood, and Dagon as being part fish, part man.

Lastly, Dagon taught man useful information for building a civilization. Noah is not mentioned specifically as doing this, but it makes a lot of sense to assume that he did. After all, he would have been the leader of the entire population of the world. He brought animals with him – wouldn’t he also have brought anything else that might be useful after the flood, such as knowledge? Wouldn’t his children learn from him? These seem reasonable assumptions. That Dagon is supposed to have done these things lends support to the idea that he is based on real events, involving Noah.

Conclusion

We have seen indications that ancient myths were based on real people. We also have seen evidence that some of these myths are based on characters named in the Bible, such as Noah and his family, but also referred to in many documents. The similarities between Dagon and Noah, between the ten pre-flood kings and the ten generations from Adam to Noah, are just a few of the clues we have examined. These clues indicate the existence of

³ Gascoigne M (2003) Was There A Pre-Flood Babylon? <http://www.annomundi.com/history/pre_flood_babylon.htm> Accessed 2008 Mar 24

a man named Noah, of a real flood (the stories of Deucalion and others), and other events described in the Bible, all of which support the truth of the Genesis narrative. ☞

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, April 10, 7:00 P.M., Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 631
“Issues in Cosmology.” David Plaisted, PhD will discuss various theories of the origin of the universe from a creationary viewpoint, and will present a new angle on the light travel time problem.

Contributions may be mailed to: TASC, P.O. Box 12051, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2051

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