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**ДАРЕНИЕ**

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE  
"CULTURAL ROAD  
**VIA PONTICA**  
CULTURAL TOURISM WITHOUT BOUNDARIES"

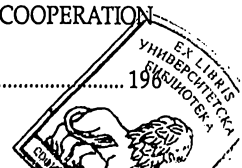
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# THE BLACK SEA AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES

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## Abstract

Bulgaria is a country that through the Eastern church tradition is closely related to the described events in biblical texts, which contain numerous references to the geographical background of the front Orient.

One topic that would be of particular interest for the Bulgarian biblical studies is the possibility described in the book Genesis (Ch. 6-9) flood to connect with the material culture on the west coast.

In a number of research hypotheses based on various clues attempt to date described in the biblical text flood. Among some geological hypotheses, focusing on the end of the last glacial period, in recent years more and more researchers pay attention to the possibility of flood can be dated to the time of the Late Neolithic (c. 8th century BC), while that connect it with the formation of the Black Sea.

The study of regional and cultural history of this area is highly effective. The contribution of archaeologists in this discussion and problems of the last ten years of collecting evidence is that there really was a flood and then the Black Sea. Allegations of scientists are based on comparative analysis of Neolithic artifacts discovered near Varna Durankulak and underwater surveys of the mouth of the river Provadia.

This publication is focused on the possibility, based on biblical and nonbiblical sources, to answer this question.

**Keywords:** *Noah's flood, Biblical Studies, Flood Hypotesis, Black Sea*

Bulgaria, through its East-Orthodox Church tradition is closely related to events, described in the biblical texts, which contain numerous references to the geographical background of the front Orient.

Biblical topoi related to the salvation of the world are met in theology, liturgy, architecture, art, iconography and hymnography. It is not without a reason that the Orthodox worship is described as a biblical<sup>1</sup> one.

During his travels as a preacher Apostle Andrew visited Sinop and the cities that lie near the Black Sea. The legend says that St. Andrew established his church in the city of Byzantium (Constantinople). According to Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 265-340), the Apostle preached in Scythia<sup>2</sup>, which compared to a message of Hippolytus of Rome (170-235) is the so-called Minor Scythia and the Black Sea coast<sup>3</sup>.

The interest to the Holy Land is at the heart of many Christian pilgrimages that believers took from the 4<sup>th</sup> century until nowadays<sup>4</sup>. Some of the earliest descriptions of these trips are among the first studies in Biblical archeology.

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<sup>1</sup>Agourides, S. *The biblical Content and Vision of Orthodox Worship and Spirituality*. – In: *GOTHR* 23, 1978, 1-14.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, *Caesariensis, Historia Ecclesiastica*.

<sup>3</sup> See: Boia, L. *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*. Central European University Press. 2001, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> *The first description of Jerusalem pilgrimage reaches us through the notes of the pilgrim from Bordeaux who visited the Holy Land in 333. See: Itinerarium Burdigalensē – In: Donner, H. Pilgerfahrt ins Heilige Land. Die ältesten Berichte christlicher Palästina-pilger (4.-7. Jh.)*. Stuttgart, 2002, S. 26, 35-67.

In 18-19 centuries the flow of pilgrims from the Balkans was growing up. Bulgarian pilgrims most often were heading to Istanbul, and than to the port of Enos (Turkey) to continue by sea to the biblical lands<sup>5</sup>.

The study of the cultural history of biblical space is very attractive and effective. The latter, however, as evidenced by the material culture does not stay closed. Through their commercial contacts the ancient inhabitants of the Front Orient go beyond the Fertile Crescent and reach more distant points, possibly including the Black Sea.

According to some research the first explorers to enter the Black Sea are the Phoenicians<sup>6</sup>. So far there are no definite artifacts discovered near the Black Sea coast that to be related to the Phoenician shipping.

Although there is no evidence of direct links between the Black Sea and the inhabitants of the Holy Land, scientific expeditions in the Black Sea region periodically fall of findings, sank prehistoric settlements dating to the years that focus on biblical studies. For example, the golden findings from the Varna Chalcolithic necropolis (5-4 century BC)<sup>7</sup>, preceded by several milleniums the time of the biblical patriarch Abraham.

Some modern scientific hypotheses even advocate the notion that during the neolith the civilization developed near the Black Sea coast colonized a great part of European Mediterranean, and even more distant territories.

According to a provoking statement of the oceanologists Petko Dimitrov from the Institute of Oceanology of the Bulgarian Academy of Science /BAS/ in Varna, supported by the American scientist William Ryan from the Columbia University, the ancient Kimmerian civilization, that occurred along the coast of Varna is at the heart of the Sumerian culture in the East since the biblical flood that occurred around 8000, the population, that has remained is in the basis of the creation of the Thracian culture<sup>8</sup>.

As a sensation in the recent years hypotheses are passed about the possibility the flood described in the Bible (Genesis 6:8-9:22) to be connected to the Black Sea region.

The biblical tale filled with anthropomorphism reported an environmental problem, caused by an unusual flood, in which Noah and his family survived aboard a specially built ship. In the tradition memories of a major disaster delivered in various times and languages<sup>9</sup> may have been used.

Thanks to archaeological findings, we received an important description of the flood, known as "the epic of Gilgamesh" (actually a myth)<sup>10</sup>. The assembled fragments contain independent

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<sup>5</sup> Such venture consumes between 8 and 9 months and is usually initiated in early autumn to allow the pilgrims to return home after Easter. See: Гурова, С., Н. Данова. Книга за българските хаджии. София, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> Ukert, F. *Geographie der Griechen und Rumer von den frühesten Zeiten bis auf Ptolemus*. Weimar, 1816, S. 10; See: Петџев, В. Имената на Черно море през вековете. – Сп. Морски свят, юни, 2007. [http://www.morskisviat.com/index.jsp?counter\\_id=45&article\\_id](http://www.morskisviat.com/index.jsp?counter_id=45&article_id)

<sup>7</sup> When trenching near Varna port in 1972 an area of approximately 7500 m<sup>2</sup> 294 graves were discovered by the Chalcolithic (Eneolithic). See: Ivanov, Iv. – *Varna and the birth of the European Civilization. – Varna Necropolis The Dawn of European Civilization*, Sofia, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Dimitrov, P., D. Dimitrov, *The Black Sea, the Flood, and the Ancient Myths*. Varna, 2004, p. 69; Ryan, W. *New developments from continued explorations. In the Black Sea Flood. – Archaeological and Geological Evidence, program abstracts for the international conference, Columbia University, October 18-19, 2003.*

<sup>9</sup> Шибаров, промон. Н. Морето, околната среда и ние. – Сб. Библията и морето, София, 2009, с. 11. In Akkadian legend that contains 1200 verses and dates from the second millennium BC, known as the Epic of Atrahasis or "When the gods were people" in place of Noah Atrahasis. See: Millard, A. *A New Babylonian "Genesis" Story*. – *Tyndale Bulletin*, 18, 1967; In the *Metamorphoses of Ovid*, the chosen one is called Deucalion; sledbibleyski Many narratives of this kind are found in the traditions of dokolumbova America, Australia, India, Polynesia, Tibet, Kashmir, Ireland, Lithuania, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Epic was discovered in 1853 during excavations in the ruins of the royal library at Nineveh. The text is written in Akkadian language on 12 clay tablets in a volume of 300 chetirirediya and dates to the time of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668-627). Version of the flood (Tab. XI) is based on more ancient Sumerian source that can be dated to the 3rd millennium BC.

version of the biblical flood, in which the large water disaster is transmitted in a polytheistic way. Gilgamesh was a king, who embarked a journey to discover the secret of immortality. On his way he met Utnapishtim, survivor of a big flood<sup>11</sup>.

Compared to the Holy Scripture a number of parallels could be indicated with an interconnection, which allows to conclude that the Old-Testament-story of the Flood and the epic tale traced back to a common ancient tradition, which contains a memory of an actual event, without any literary connection between the two texts<sup>12</sup>.

In these and in other known tales about the Flood not only the stories coincide but also details such as the construction of a vessel, its stranding on a high mountain after the recede of water, the righteousness of the character. Significant differences occur only in the names of deities in the polytheistic versions and the person that survived to continue the mankind. The one chosen by the gods is variously named Noah, Utnapishtim, Atrahasis, Ziosudra, Ksisutrus, Devklion, Dardan, etc.

The purpose of stories, including the Bible one, is to point out primarily the conviction that man gets for the sin spread by him in the world (Gen. 6:5-6), and not to extend over the geography of the event, although traditionally it is considered that it has happened in the Middle East.

In 1929, during excavations over the Chaldeans city of Ur (*Tell el-Muqayyar*) in North Babylon the English explorer Charles Leonard Woolley came upon a sterile layer of clay with a thickness of 240 cm, that apparently resulted by a flood. Underneath the archaeologist discovered traces of human activity relating to the Neolithic Age (c. 4000 BC). The authors of many popular publications identify the discovery with the biblical flood, but a number of facts challenged these assumptions. Woolley made excavations in five more sites in Ur, but only in two cases he found similar traces of flooding, which led to the conclusion that it was a local spill of Euphrates river. Moreover, the excavations showed that the flooding did not interrupt the business activity of people who would be the expected consequence of a global flood<sup>13</sup>.

These circumstances enable some researchers to seek other locations of the flood, such as the one proposed by the scientists and P. Dimitrov and D. Dimitrov in their book "The Black Sea, the Flood and the Ancient Myths". The conclusions of the researchers are based on comparative analysis of Neolithic artifacts, discovered near Varna and Durankulak as well as on a survey at the mouth of Provadia River where prehistoric settlements have been found<sup>14</sup>. Scientists referred also to the already mentioned Babylonian epic of the flood. Researchers say that "waters of Death" that Gilgamesh and Utnapishtim had to cross, are reminiscent of the Black Sea situation after the hypothetical flood when hydrogen sulfide has poisoned the surface water far before the time when the sea acquired its modern hydrologic structure. According to the hypothesis the island on which Gilgamesh found Utnapishtim is located in the Black Sea<sup>15</sup>. It is interesting to note that, according to the Samothracians the name of the person, that has survived the flood, was Dardan, because he has anchored near the Dardanelles.

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew, G. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts. 2 Bde, Oxford University Press, London, 2003.*

<sup>12</sup> Василевски, Н. Библия и археология, Свято-Троицкая Сергиева Лавра, 2003, с. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Woolley, L. *Ur excavations IV. The Early Periods. Oxford, 1927.*

<sup>14</sup> Dimitrov, P., D. Dimitrov, *The Black Sea, the Flood, and the Ancient Myths. Varna, 2004, p. 45-50, 69.*

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 53-56.

In the late 90s, William Ryan and Walter Pitman published a book in which they disclosed the so called “Noah’s flood hypothesis”<sup>16</sup>. The researchers discovered in the depths of the Black Sea, freshwater mussels, dated to 7500 BC and concluded, that the Black Sea has been a freshwater lake (*Neoeuxinian Lake*), surrounded by farmland without a connection to the salty waters of the Mediterranean. According to their theory: With the global warming at the end of the Ice Age and the melting of glaciers the level of the oceans and seas raised and waters flew from the Mediterranean into the Black Sea. In 1961 W. Pittman conducted geological works in the Black Sea region and gave proofs that the latter suddenly increased its level. According to Ryan, the waves that entered the Black Sea, were 80 meters high and had the capacity of 200 Niagara Falls<sup>17</sup>. By sonar studies the scientists revealed the ancient shoreline covered with mud at a depth of 90 to 100 m below surface level of the modern Black Sea. According to estimated calculations of the scientists about 100 thousand km<sup>2</sup> of land were flooded<sup>18</sup>.

In 1999, the researcher Robert Ballard organized a team for researching the Black Sea using a sonar for finding evidence of Paleolithic settlements in the basin of the sea, that have been placed on the land and preceded the flood, including buildings, pottery, and shipwrecks. Along with saltwater molluscs, this team also discovered freshwater ones dating between 7460 and 15 500 BC.<sup>19</sup>

Such a hypothesis is supported by the Turkish oceanologist Seda Okay, who in the period of 2002-2007, together with a French team was actively studying the bottom of the entrance of the Bosphorus to the Black Sea. According to it the sea was formed before 6000 to 8000 BC during the thawing of glaciers in the oceans, when the sea level raised to the point, where the water entered the natural dam through the today Bosphorus. The Black Sea level was approximately 110 m lower compared to its present level<sup>20</sup>.

The disaster, described in the Scripture, is consistent with the observations of scientists. In the biblical text, except the torrential rains it mentions the incursion of water to the land of the “great deep” (Genesis 7: 11), from which it can be concluded that there was a huge displacement of the seabed.

As a result of a geophysical research of the seabed at the exit of the Bosphorus into the Black Sea traces were found, left by the waters of the Mediterranean. The water, that was transformed by the flood in strong currents of the Mediterranean, then formed water channels, one of which is today Bosphorus. The ancient Black Sea shores (before 8000 BC) are now located 70 km offshore.

The geologist T. Abrajano challenged the hypothesis of a biblical flood in the Black Sea. Based on the sediment studies in the Marmara Sea between the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, he argues that even before 10 000 BC there was a link to the Mediterranean. The water was salty, but its level had increased to its present level for eight thousand years which meant that there was not any flood<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Ryan, W., W. Pitman, *Noah’s flood: the New Scientific Discoveries about the Event that Changed History*. New York, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.whoi.edu/oceanus/viewArticle.do>

<sup>18</sup> Ryan, W., W. Pitman, C. Major, K. Shinkus, V. Moskalenko, G. Jones, P. Dimitrov, N. Görür, M. Sakin and H. Yüce. *An abrupt drowning of the Black Sea shelf. – Marine Geology*, 138, 1997, 119-126; Ryan, W., C. Major, G. Lericolais and S. Goldstein. *Catastrophic flooding of the Black Sea. – Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences* 31, 2003, 525-554.

<sup>19</sup> See: Ballard Finds Traces of Ancient Habitation Beneath Black Sea. – <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2000/12/122800blacksea.html>

<sup>20</sup> See: Scientists Say The Black Sea – Track The Flood. – <http://sciencetoday.com/earth-sciences/scientists-say-the-black-sea-track-the-flood>

<sup>21</sup> Abrajano, T., R. Aksu, et. al. *Aspects of carbon isotope biogeochemistry of late Quaternary sediments from the Marmara Sea and Black Sea. – Marine Geology*, 190, 2002, 151-164.

As for the Bulgarian participation in this discussion, in 2001-2002 a Bulgarian-American research project “Black Sea 2001 – sonar survey”, in which R. Ballard participated, took place. On the Bulgarian side, the team was headed by P. Dimitrov. The expedition entered the Black Sea with the research vessel “Academic” and mini-submarines, loaded with unique equipment. The scientists mapped the bottom near the Danube Delta by an “Eco” sonar, which captured 1.7 km wide strip and reached 10 meters depth. In 2003 the first underwater archeological excavation with the “Hercules” apparatus, supplied with a remote control, was held.

During a study of the Black Sea shelf south of Cape Emine, near the Turkish border in 2011, nearly 30 geological samples were taken from a depth of 2000 m. For the first time, after many failed attempts, the drill managed to break the layers of silt, to be driven into the sand and to take out some wood. The expedition found that the sand of these ancient shores of the Black Sea was covered with an even layer of slime (sapropel) and this sea sediment was an evidence of a major ecological catastrophe. The layer of mud that has scattered the sand dunes was inhabited by a typical Mediterranean fauna, that has come from the overflow of the Mediterranean.

At an approximately 90 meters below the sea surface the sonars discovered a rectangular structure, resembling the remains of a building. It was 4 meters wide and 15 meters long with curved wooden beams. Stone tools were found in it. This type of architecture and tools are typical for the Neolithic era. As a proof of his hypothesis R. Ballard brings the results of studies, held near the Turkish city of Sinop – studies during which remains of residential premises, dated approximately before 7500 BC, have been found in the sea<sup>22</sup>.

Other scientists from the Black Sea basin also went in a search of traces of Noah’s flood guide. An independent group of archaeologists from the organization “Kosmopoisk” looked for the remains of Noah’s Ark near the village of Beta, located near the resort of Gelendzhik. The research group led by Vadim Chernobrov, believes that Noah’s Ark was wrongfully searched at Mount Ararat and in fact his last port could be a peak with a similar name near the Black Sea resort of Gelendzhik.

## Conclusions

The present publication focuses on discussions, relating to the biblical flood and the presented hypotheses and accepts this part of the scientific discoveries that is well scientifically grounded and rejects certain erroneous reconstructions, interpretations and reconstructions.

1. The existence of flooded territories that were once above the sea level, registered in the seismological profiles and sediment rocks, the overlapping of periods in the research of independent teams should be taken into account.

2. Indeed, evidences of a great flood have been found in the Black Sea region, but they in no way mean that this was the Noah’s flood. Raising the level of the Black Sea in antiquity was known to the Bulgarian archaeologists for a long time, but until now it was not necessarily associated with a similar flood event. Moreover, the sea level was not so low as it is assumed in the disclosed hypothesis.

3. There are no grounds to say that Noah’s Flood occurred in the Black Sea, but in both cases they speak about a phenomenon of local character, which probably was a consequence of the raised level of the oceans and seas at the end of the Ice Age.

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<sup>22</sup> Ballard, R., F. Hiebert, D. Coleman, C. Ward, J. Smith, K. Willis, B. Foley, K. Croff, C. Major, and F. Torre, “Deepwater Archaeology of the Black Sea: The 2000 Season at Sinop, Turkey” – *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 105, <sup>1</sup> 4, October, 2001.

4. The relationship between the Black Sea and Noah's flood is not supported by the Scripture, and the search of indirect links with the Black Sea basin in the epic of Gilgamesh is exagurated. One of the important conditions for the biblical studies is to preserve the reciprocity between exegesis and archeology. The cultural data that support historical moments, should be considered in the proper interpretive plan.

5. The romantic element associated with the search for the treasures of the past should be left behind. Sensations are not the focus of the archaeological work. An example of this is that there are no scientists but commercial interests behind "discoveries", announced by the media and most of the arguments remain conditioned by a number of contingencies. The archeological findings require reconstruction and scientific-oriented interpretation. In this respect, the lovers of sensations have caused a lot of damage to serious researches and the attempts of scientists to find funding.

6. Performing of a survey or studies of an object and turning it into an independant project is not enough. It is necessary to look for opportunities to implement regional and problem-oriented projects, directed to the material culture of the Black Sea region, including the Via Pontica. The recent studies trace the relationship between the different findings revealing synchronously and diachronically the economic, social and political systems of the region.

Most of the places and events mentioned in the Biblical texts expect their scientific research and documentary disclosure, and the economic and sociological processes and today's complex political environment also have a significant impact. It is also obvious that the development of tourism is an important source of funding for research in the Black Sea region.

The attempts to remove the geographic area of biblical studies in the Balkans would have been very happy for the native bibleistics just in case, that there are serious reasons for this. Until the official completion and announcement of the documentation of the conducted expeditions all claims remain in the sphere of hypotheses.