

## Archaeological sources from the Northwestern Black Sea coast and the Great Flood theory: facts and hypothesis

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### Introduction

Searches for the 'material' or 'anthropogenic' background to Biblical stories and ancient mythology are among the traditional subjects of archaeological study since its earliest phases. One could say even that the origin of field archaeology itself was inspired by the desire to find 'objective' and 'undeniable' proof for Bible events. The first known archaeological excavation was perhaps that connected with an attempt by the Byzantine emperatrice Elena (IV century AD) to find the exact place of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. Elena's success and her further beatification have made this practice attractive for official representatives of the Church (mostly the Catholic Church) as well as for archaeologists for whom financial support from the Church was the only means of their survival. Rapid development of new branches of archaeological study at the end of the 18th – beginning of the 19th centuries, e.g., the origin of Prehistoric and Stone Age archaeology, has contributed to the separation of so-called 'Biblical' and 'secular' versions of archaeology, which are now developing in their own way.

A similar tendency toward Biblical verification can be traced in the history of development among the natural sciences. It's worthy to mention the terminology and argumentation surrounding Lyell's version of the Earth's geological history, ideas about the tectonic history of the Middle East, the Atlantis hypothesis, etc. The scientific and technical revolution of the mid-20th century has added to the mostly experimental studies done previously new methods that have extended geo- and bioscientific data and techniques to contribute to a better understanding of the human past. Unlike historians, archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, and representatives of other humanistic disciplines, specialists in the natural sciences usually do not separate 'secular' and 'mythological' versions of our history, but instead have used their abilities and knowledge base to test and verify the occurrence of the most curious Biblical subjects. One of the newest ideas in this direction was inspired by the research of W. Ryan and W. Pitman and resulted in the so-called Black Sea hypothesis, which proposed to locate and date the Great Flood mentioned in Bible. Recently, archaeological evidence has been collected in support of this hypothesis, which was born out of geological exploration.

Being a representative of 'secular' archaeology and ancient history, I strongly believe that we have no need and no reason to build any bridges with 'biblical' or 'mythological' versions of our past. That is, the system of positive knowledge of classic science on the one hand, and the deep and sincere beliefs of Biblical adherents on the other, should not be confused. I would not comment or verify here any of the collected archaeological evidence of Noah's Flood on the Black Sea coast. Nevertheless, I admit that the archaeological implications of the catastrophic versus evolutionary versions of population history on the Northwestern Black Sea coast across the Pleistocene-Holocene boundary seems worthy of special study. In this paper, I would like to concentrate on the analysis of a potential archaeological resource base that could be used for such research.

## Archaeological data versus sources of archaeological reconstruction

At first glance, we have today at our disposal plenty of information about past human life on the Northwestern coast of the Black Sea. Nevertheless, one should always bear in mind the distinction between archaeological data (i.e., data obtained during archaeological field investigations), which are primary sources of information, and secondary information, which is already the result of scientific reflection on the primary data base.

So, for example, the quantity of archaeological sites in a particular territory represents primary data, but the population density is already the result of reconstruction. The same opposition exists between tool morphology (primary data) and descriptions of tool production activity and tool typology (both secondary), the presence within an assemblage of rare or exotic artifacts (primary) and the detection of human migration (secondary result of reconstruction), the presence of artifacts fashioned of gold and the postulation of the existence of a civilization, etc. The same situation obtains with data recovered during archaeological field studies by representatives of other disciplines: the presence of spore and pollen of particular floral species is primary data, yet the landscape description is a secondary reconstruction, and again the proportion of different animal species in a faunal assemblage from a particular site is different from the identification of the ancient economic orientation, and finally the geomorphology and paleoenvironmental analysis of territories surrounding a site is primary to the evaluation of potential subsistence strategies.

If we analyze existing information about the early phases of human history on the Northwestern Black Sea coast, we inevitably discover that adherents of the Flood theory in most cases use only secondary data (often published abroad and discussed at scientific conferences). They have had no access to the primary database. They operate according to notions of human migration, civilization, crisis, and other interpretations that have already been proposed by other researches. Trying to understand what was happening in the territory under study requires that we refer directly to archaeological sites and the artifacts found there.

We also face two more difficulties, which can hardly be solved today. First, there is no representative series of absolute dates that could help to temporally correlate the sequence of cultural events in the region across the Pleistocene-Holocene boundary with well-known geological and geomorphological events. The majority of known archaeological sites on the Northwestern Black Sea coast have been dated relatively (1) on the basis of morphological peculiarities within their tool kit (about 90 % of cases) and/or (2) with reference to their stratigraphic position (which is often undetectable due to the absence of a clear cultural layer). This is why discussions about the attribution of some sites to particular phases or stadials are lasting for decades without any perspective for a positive resolution.

It should also be stressed that archaeologists have been dealing with sites of the contemporary Black Sea coast; they have no information about human settlements currently underwater and situated at a distance of up to 150 m offshore. No archaeological studies have been incorporated into geological drilling programs, but oral tradition says that many flint artifacts have been found in the process. Nevertheless, only data from the Black Sea shelf floor (which still need to be collected) can help to understand the true cultural situation in the region at the Pleistocene-Holocene boundary.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I would stress two key points that are usually missed in discussions of Great Flood temporal and spatial localization. One of them is the impossibility of integrating 'secular' and 'mythological' versions of the human past; too many contradictions spring up in this process. For instance, if one uses human settlement systems and artifact production technology to illustrate the process and consequences of the Great Flood, how could one avoid recognizing the process of human evolution in the archaeological record, a process that is contradicted by the Bible? Further, a discovery that illustrates a Biblical or

mythological event cannot invalidate other components of archaeological discovery, for example, technological change and psychological development.

Another thesis, which needs to be stressed once more, is the necessity of avoiding confusion between primary archaeological sources and the results of archaeological reconstruction, which inevitably express the ideas and thoughts of a researcher who has proposed them based on his particular theoretical approach. Unfortunately, the database of primary archaeological sources for the Northwestern Black Sea coast at the Pleistocene-Holocene boundary is rather restricted quantitatively and qualitatively, so, new field researches using the newest methods of field and material analysis need to be pursued. Without the detection and investigation of underwater archaeological sites and the establishment a radiocarbon chronology for ancient underwater and coastal settlements, it will be impossible to understand the true picture of human life in the region.