Mount Judi, Not Mount Ararat:

A Reassessment of the Traditional Search Location for the Resting Place of Noah's Ark

Dr. Zuhair Ahmed
The Centre of Excellence for Technology Quantum and AI Canada
info@thecetqap.com

Abstract

This paper presents a combined historical-linguistic and geographic analysis of the Qur'anic account of the Flood of Nuh (Noah). It argues, in three connected parts, that: (1) the Qur'anic account is consistent with the archaeologically attested Shuruppak flood horizon (c. 2900 BCE) and with the broader cuneiform Mesopotamian flood tradition, including the Sumerian King List, the Atra-Hasis Epic, the Gilgamesh flood narrative, and the Old Babylonian 'Ark Tablet' published by Irving Finkel (2014); (2) the physical design of the vessel described in the cuneiform tradition a large circular coracle, not an elongated rectangular ship has direct implications for how and where physical remains should be sought, and is inconsistent with the rectangular, ship-shaped formations that most popular expeditions have searched for; and (3) the textual, geographic, and local-historical evidence converges on Mount Judi (Cudi Dagi) in southeastern Turkey, not Mount Ararat (Agri Dagi), as the location named in the primary texts. The paper is written to academic standard, with sources explicitly stratified by evidentiary tier, and closes with an explicit statement of its own limitations.

Keywords: Noah’s Ark, Flood of Nuh, Mount Judi, Cudi Dagi, Mesopotamian Flood Tradition, Qur’anic Studies, Archaeological Evidence, Ancient Near Eastern History, Shuruppak Flood Horizon, Cuneiform Studies, Mesopotamian Archaeology, Historical Linguistics, Comparative Religious Studies, Historical Geography, Ark Tablet, Atra-Hasis Epic, Epic of Gilgamesh, Sumerian King List, Irving Finkel, Flood Archaeology, Ancient Flood Narratives, Qur’an and Archaeology, Mount Ararat, Ancient Mesopotamia, Interdisciplinary Historical Research, Islamic Historical Studies

Part I: Historical and Textual Foundations

1. Introduction

Flood narratives are near-universal in the literature of early riverine civilizations. Among the best attested is the Mesopotamian tradition, preserved in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian cuneiform sources, which shares clear structural kinship with the Qur'anic account of Nuh. This paper investigates three linked questions: whether the Qur'anic account is consistent with known Mesopotamian history; what the cuneiform tradition specifically tells us about the physical form of the vessel; and where, geographically, the vessel is said to have come to rest. Each question is treated with its own evidentiary standard, and the paper is explicit throughout about which claims are well-supported, which are plausible but contested, and which remain open.

2. Method and Source Hierarchy

A recurring weakness in popular treatments of this subject is the uncritical blending of Qur'anic text, hadith of varying authenticity, tafsir (exegetical opinion), and archaeological inference into a single undifferentiated narrative. This paper stratifies sources explicitly throughout:

Evidence Tier	Status in this paper
Qur'anic text	Treated as the primary textual datum; cited by surah:ayah.
Sahih (authenticated) hadith	Cited only when formally graded sahih in Bukhari/Muslim; used as secondary confirmation.
Da'if (weak) hadith	Noted explicitly where relevant, but not used as evidentiary support.
Tafsir / classical exegesis	Treated as scholarly interpretation, not scripture; used to contextualize, not to prove.

Archaeology and Assyriology	Treated as an independent, non-religious evidentiary base.

3. The Qur'anic Account: What Is and Is Not Stated

The Qur'an's account of Nuh is distributed across several surahs (7:59-64; 10:71-73; 11:25-49; 23:23-30; 26:105-122; 29:14-15; 37:75-82; 54:9-17; 71:1-28), and is notably brief relative to the Biblical account. It explicitly states the following:

- Nuh preached to his people for 'a thousand years less fifty' (29:14), i.e. 950 years.
- The vessel is described as dhati alwahin wa dusur — 'possessed of planks and dusur' (54:13).
- Construction proceeded 'under Our eyes and Our revelation' (11:37; 23:27).
- The flood was triggered when 'the oven/tannur gushed forth' (11:40; 23:27), alongside water from sky and ground (54:11-12).
- Pairs ('two of every kind') were loaded, along with believing household members (11:40; 23:27).
- Nuh's wife and one son are explicitly excluded for disbelief (11:42-43, 45-47; 66:10).
- The vessel came to rest 'ala al-Judiyy — 'upon [Mount] Judi' (11:44).

The Qur'an does not state the vessel's shape, its dimensions, the species of wood used, the exact chronological date, or the flood's duration in days. These omissions are treated throughout this paper as absence of data, not as implicit denial of any particular physical form.

4. Archaeological Context: The Shuruppak Flood Horizon

Excavations at several southern Mesopotamian sites — Shuruppak (Tell Fara), Ur, Kish, and Uruk — have identified discrete sedimentary flood layers clustering around 3000-2800 BCE. Sir Leonard Woolley's excavations at Ur identified a substantial water-laid silt deposit separating distinct cultural strata, associated by Woolley with the regional flood tradition. The Sumerian King List records a structural break — 'the Flood swept thereover' — between a list of antediluvian cities (Eridu, Bad-tibira, Larak, Sippar, Shuruppak) and the resumption of kingship at Kish. Shuruppak is independently named in Gilgamesh XI as the home city of the flood hero ('man of Shuruppak'), linking the literary tradition directly to an archaeologically attested location. This paper treats the Shuruppak horizon as the best-attested candidate for a historical nucleus underlying the broader tradition, while noting that mainstream archaeology interprets it as a severe regional flood, not a planet-wide event.

Part II: The Cuneiform Ark Tradition and the Question of Shape

5. The Cuneiform Flood Corpus

The Mesopotamian flood tradition survives in several recensions: the Sumerian Eridu Genesis (hero Ziusudra, 'the far-distant'); the Akkadian Atra-Hasis Epic (hero Atra-hasis, 'exceedingly wise'), whose best-preserved Old Babylonian copy bears a colophon naming the scribe Kasap-Aya/Nur-Aya and dating to c. 1702-1682 BCE; Tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh (hero Utnapishtim, 'he found life'); and the 'Ark Tablet,' an Old Babylonian cuneiform tablet in the collection of Douglas Simmonds, translated and published by Irving Finkel, Assistant Keeper of Cuneiform Inscriptions at the British Museum, in his 2014 monograph The Ark Before Noah.

6. Finkel's Translation: A Circular Vessel of Specific, Calculable Dimensions

The central contribution of Finkel's translation is that the Ark Tablet is the only cuneiform source to give explicit, numerical construction instructions for the vessel, rather than general narrative description. Finkel's analysis establishes the following, which this paper treats as a well-documented academic finding rather than a contested interpretation:

- The vessel described is a giant coracle: circular in plan, not an elongated, keel-based ship hull.
- Its structure is a rope lattice bound to a wooden rib frame, waterproofed with bitumen, rather than a nailed or riveted plank hull.
- The tablet specifies a measurable area (given in the text using the Mesopotamian unit of the 'ikku') from which Finkel and his collaborators calculated an approximate diameter and freeboard, sufficient that a documentary production (National Geographic / Channel 4) was able to construct a one-third scale working replica based on the dimensions given.
- The replica, built to the tablet's own specification, demonstrated that a coracle of this design could in principle float and carry a substantial load, though the production's replica suffered leakage at the bitumen seals during testing.

Finkel has stated in public lectures and interviews accompanying the publication of his translation that this circular design is inconsistent with the popular image of 'Noah's Ark' as a long, keeled, rectangular ship with a pointed bow — an image which Finkel attributes to centuries of later artistic and literary convention (including Biblical-era and post-Biblical Jewish, Christian, and Islamic illustrative tradition) rather than to the earliest layer of the textual record itself.

7. Implications for Physical Search Methodology

This distinction is not merely of antiquarian interest; it bears directly on how physical remains of the vessel, if any survive, ought to be sought and recognized. Expeditions and media investigations conducted on both Mount Ararat and at the Durupinar site have, without exception reviewed for this paper, proceeded on the working assumption that the object sought is a long, rectangular, keeled hull — consistent with the conventional 'ship' silhouette rather than with a circular coracle. The Durupinar formation itself is routinely described in expedition literature as 'boat-shaped,' meaning elongated and hull-like, precisely because this is the silhouette investigators were primed to look for.

If Finkel's translation of the oldest known detailed construction tablet is accepted as indicative of the vessel's actual design, as this paper does, then a search methodology premised on locating an elongated rectangular hull is misdirected by design, independent of which mountain is searched. A circular coracle, even if preserved in some degraded or fossilized form, would not be expected to present the long keel-line, pointed bow, or rectangular outline that search teams have consistently reported seeking. This paper argues that this is a second, independent methodological error layered on top of the geographic error addressed in Part III: expeditions have potentially been searching for the wrong shape in addition to searching in the wrong location.

This paper draws a limited and careful conclusion from this point: it does not claim that Finkel's dimensions prove the Durupinar formation is not the Ark (the formation's natural, geological origin has already been independently established on other grounds, discussed in Section 10). Rather, it uses the shape discrepancy to argue that future search efforts, wherever conducted, should be redesigned around a circular or near-circular footprint consistent with the coracle tradition, rather than continuing to screen candidate formations against a rectangular-hull template inherited from later artistic convention.

8. Linguistic Analysis: Alwah, Dusur, and the Honorific Names

8.1 Alwah and Dusur (Qur'an 54:13)

The phrase dhati alwahin wa dusur is rendered by most translators as 'of planks and nails.' Classical lexicography, however, records a genuine alternative reading of dusur as ropes or binding cords (hibal), attributed in part to early exegetes including Ibn Abbas. Under this reading, the Qur'anic construction method — planks bound by cordage — is materially convergent with the cuneiform tradition's wood-frame-and-rope-lattice coracle described by Finkel, rather than describing a nailed, planked hull in the conventional sense. This paper treats the rope-reading as linguistically defensible but not unanimous among translators.

8.2 The Honorific Character of Flood-Hero Names

None of the names attached to the flood hero across traditions function as an ordinary birth name: Ziusudra ('the far-distant'), Atra-Hasis ('exceedingly wise'), and Utnapishtim ('he found life') are each transparently descriptive

epithets. Parallel reports in Shi'a hadith literature similarly describe 'Nuh' as an epithet derived from the Arabic root n-w-h ('to mourn/wail'), applied due to his prolonged grief, with his 'original' name variously reported as Sakar, Abd al-Ghaffar, or Abd al-Malik. This paper treats these hadith as a weaker evidentiary tier (non-Sunni, not formally graded sahih), but notes that the underlying linguistic observation — that 'Nuh' functions as an epithet independent of these narrations — is supported by the standard root meaning in Arabic. If accepted, this weakens the 'different person, different name' objection to treating the cuneiform and Qur'anic flood heroes as referring to the same tradition.

9. The Theological Divergence and Its Explanation

The clearest point of tension between the Qur'anic and cuneiform traditions is that the latter is explicitly polytheistic (invoking Enlil, Enki/Ea), while the former is emphatically monotheistic. This paper proposes that this divergence is explicable from within the Qur'anic text itself: Surah Nuh 71:23 records that Nuh's own people invoked named entities (Wadd, Suwa', Yaghuth, Ya'uq, Nasr), and classical tafsir (citing Ibn Abbas via Bukhari) states these were later deified images of righteous individuals from Nuh's own community. If Nuh's descendants relapsed into polytheism within a number of generations, as the Qur'an itself records, then a polytheistic literary tradition emerging from that same lineage several centuries later is not an external contradiction of the Qur'anic narrative, but a plausible continuation of a decline the Qur'an itself describes. No individual author can be identified for the cuneiform tradition; the Ark Tablet is unsigned by its scribe, and even the fuller Atra-Hasis recension names only a later copying scribe (Kasap-Aya/Nur-Aya), not an originating author, consistent with standard Mesopotamian scribal practice of transmitting and periodically recopying inherited narrative material.

Part III: The Geographic Case for Mount Judi

10. Two Mountains, One Tradition

Popular culture has settled, largely by default, on Mount Ararat as 'the' landing site of the Ark. This default is traceable less to the primary religious texts than to post-bibilical tradition and the modern expeditionary movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. This paper distinguishes the location named in scripture from the location popularized by expedition culture and argues these are not the same mountain.



10.1 The Qur'an Names Al-Judi Explicitly

Surah Hud 11:44 states that the ship 'came to rest on al-Judiyy' — a direct, specific toponym. Classical tafsir is consistent: commentary preserved in Sahih al-Bukhari's chapter on the Prophets records the early exegete Mujahid stating that al-Judi is a mountain in al-Jazira, the historical term for Upper Mesopotamia encompassing present-day southeastern Turkey — precisely where Cudi Dagi is located today.

10.2 Genesis Names a Range, Not a Peak

Genesis 8:4 states the ark rested 'upon the mountains of Ararat' — a plural, regional designation corresponding to the ancient kingdom of Urartu, not a single named peak. The identification of this phrase with the specific modern peak of Agri Dagi is a later interpretive narrowing, consolidated primarily through Armenian Christian tradition in the medieval and early modern periods, rather than a claim made explicitly by the Hebrew text.

10.3 Early Non-Qur'anic Corroboration for Judi

The identification of the landing site with the Judi/Qardu mountains, rather than Ararat specifically, is not unique to Islamic sources. Targumic and other early Jewish interpretive traditions, together with the Gilgamesh flood narrative's own placement of the landing site in this same southern mountain system, are considered by scholars such as Crouse and Franz (cited in the proceedings of the Sirnak University symposium discussed below) to support the Judi-region identification as the older tradition.

11. The Geological and Geographic Case

Mount Judi lies within the broader cultural and geographic zone of ancient Mesopotamia and Upper Mesopotamia; Mount Ararat lies approximately 300 km further north, outside this zone. Geologist Friedrich Bender, writing on the tectonic history of the region, noted that geologic and morphologic considerations limit the relevant flood extent to the southeastern Turkey region and exclude the high peaks of Ararat. A landing site closer to the Mesopotamian floodplain is, on simple geographic grounds, the more plausible terminus for floodwaters originating in that basin.

12. The Local and Historical Case

12.1 Cudi Dagi: A Pre-Modern, Continuous Local Tradition

In 1953, geologist Friedrich Bender climbed Cudi Dagi specifically because of reports from local Kurdish Muslims that the mountain was already, independently of any Western expedition, a pilgrimage destination where relic wood described as fragments of the Ark could be found. Bender recovered and analyzed asphalt-bound wood samples from the site, indicating a local religious tradition that predates the modern ark-hunting movement. The site today includes a named and maintained shrine, Nuh Peygamber Ziyareti (the Shrine of the Prophet Noah), together with the nearby Sefine Camii ('Ship Mosque'), both documented in contemporary satellite and mapping data.

12.2 Ararat and Durupinar: A Modern Expedition-Driven Tradition

The prominence of Ararat owes much to a wave of 19th- and 20th-century expeditions. The most publicized modern claim, the Durupinar site — a boat-shaped geological formation approximately 30 km from the Ararat massif — was investigated extensively by Ron Wyatt and geophysicist David Fasold from the 1970s-1980s. After further drilling and excavation in the 1990s, Fasold concluded the formation was not the Ark, describing the claim in a 1997 Australian court hearing as 'absolute BS,' though his later private views were reportedly more ambivalent before his death in 1998. Independent geologists examining the formation have generally concluded it is a natural landform. This paper notes the Durupinar episode to distinguish it clearly from the subject of Part III: Durupinar is located near Ararat, a different mountain from Cudi Dagi, and its discrediting has no direct bearing on the independent case for Cudi Dagi presented here — though, as argued in Section 7, the same rectangular-hull assumption that shaped the search for Durupinar would, on Finkel's dimensions, misdirect any future search at either location.

13. Comparative Summary

Criterion	Mount Judi (Cudi Dagi)	Mount Ararat (Agri Dagi)
Named in the Qur'an (11:44)	Yes, explicitly (al-Judiyy)	Not named in the Qur'an
Classical Islamic tafsir identification	Consistent (Mujahid, via Bukhari)	Not the classical Islamic identification
Early Jewish/Christian source support	Supported by Targumic and Gilgamesh-adjacent tradition	Later Armenian Christian tradition
Distance from Shuruppak flood-plain	Within the broader Mesopotamian zone	Approx. 300 km further north, outside it
Pre-modern local relic tradition	Documented by Bender, 1953, pre-dating tourism	Mainly 20th-century expedition-driven
Named local shrine	Nuh Peygamber Ziyareti, long established	No equivalent at the claimed landing point
Disputed 'boat-shaped' formation	Not the subject of the Durupinar controversy	Durupinar, publicly repudiated by Fasold (1997)
Consistency with Finkel's circular-coracle dimensions	Not yet tested by excavation	Durupinar's elongated shape does not match a coracle footprint

14. On the Ridge Formation Observed on Cudi Dagi

Satellite and ground-level observation of Cudi Dagi (in the vicinity of the Nuh Peygamber Ziyareti shrine, approx. 37.37 N, 42.50 E) shows an elongated, keel-like ridge formation consistent in outline with a hull shape. This paper documents this observation but does not assert it as proof. Two cautions apply, each independently sufficient to withhold a stronger claim: first, ridge and landform shapes resembling vessels occur naturally in eroded terrain, and the same category of visual pattern-matching argument was previously applied, unsuccessfully, to the Durupinar formation near Ararat; second, and specific to this paper's own argument in Part II, an elongated ridge is, on Finkel's translation, the wrong shape to be searching for in the first place, since the cuneiform construction tablet describes a circular coracle rather than an elongated hull. What distinguishes the Cudi Dagi case from Durupinar is not the visual formation, but the independent textual, geographic, and pre-modern local-traditional evidence summarized in Sections 10-12, which stands regardless of whether any specific ridge is ever confirmed by excavation. Any claim that a specific formation constitutes physical remains of the Ark would require controlled excavation, material dating, and independent geological and geometric assessment against a circular, not rectangular, template.

15. Conclusion

Three connected conclusions follow from the evidence assembled in this paper. First, the Qur'anic account of the Flood of Nuh is consistent with the archaeologically attested Shuruppak flood horizon and the broader Mesopotamian cuneiform flood tradition, including a plausible explanation for the latter's divergent polytheistic framing as a downstream consequence of the documented relapse of Nuh's own descendants into idolatry. Second, the best-attested cuneiform construction tablet describes a circular coracle of specific, calculable dimensions, not the elongated rectangular ship-shape that has guided popular search efforts; this is a methodological error independent of location. Third, the convergence of an explicit Qur'anic toponym, consistent classical tafsir, geographic proximity to the Mesopotamian flood basin, and a continuous, pre-modern local shrine tradition favors Mount Judi (Cudi Dagi) over Mount Ararat as the textually and historically supported resting place. Taken together, these findings suggest that future efforts to physically verify this tradition have been misdirected on two independent axes — location and shape — and would be better served by surveying Cudi Dagi specifically for circular or near-circular subsurface or ridge features, assessed through controlled excavation and material dating rather than visual silhouette alone.

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