

A DISCUSSION ON RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF THE PEOPLES LIVING BEFORE AND AFTER NOAH'S FLOOD RELATED TO THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

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Abstract: As part of an introduction for a series of articles pertaining to 'The Study of the Portuguese Traditional Religiosity' this first article deals with pre- and post-Noah's Flood, religious tendencies experienced by ancient civilizations. The initial monotheistic and polytheistic types of worship are analysed linking them to two towns, The monotheist Mesha and the polytheist Babylon. After the Flood people scattered reaching the Western Iberian Peninsula. It is along this historical framework that the results of DNA tests conducted on hundreds of skeletons of Iberian individuals found that they were linked to people who lived elsewhere, particularly in the region where Noah's Ark settled after the Flood.

Thereafter, related to the main theme of this series of articles, this article introduces a literature review which pertains to ancient sources such as Mesopotamian clay tablets, the *Gilgamesh Epic*, the *Atrahasis Epic*, the *Book of Jasher*, and the *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible).

Key Words: Noah's Flood, Monotheism, Polytheism, Ancient History, Western Iberian Peninsula, Portuguese Religion.

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Introduction:

This article serves as part of an introduction for a series of articles regarding the study of the Portuguese traditional religiosity. Such study requires the historical basis provided by the knowledge about the departing point of departure or the historical beginning related to the subject (Nolton, 2019:8) concerning the main religious historical trends of the ancient civilizations who lived before and after Noah's Flood. This introductory article is thus important because when the descendants of those peoples arrived and settled in the Western part of the Iberian Peninsula, they brought with them their theological frame of thought along with their religious traditions and practices. Nevertheless, due to the amount of information required to provide which was rather lengthy, yet necessary, the Introduction to the body of articles related to the issue is divided into two articles: Introduction I, and Introduction II. Consequently, this first article serves as part of a brief general introduction to the articles intended to inform the same topic, which is the Portuguese traditional religiosity.

Additionally, “Whether one accepts or rejects the theological claim of the *Bible's* divine origin” (Nolton, 2019:11-12), this series of articles will also use biblical information when such contribution is relevant. This is so because the *Bible* must also be understood as an important piece of ancient literature.

Due to the complexity of the religious history of the Portuguese nation, the understanding of the Portuguese traditional religiosity requires an explanation of the fundamental framework of its religious culture under some basic guidelines. With regard to these basic guidelines Santo (1990:15) states that,¹ “...in their essence religions do not vary from one people to another...it is only the intensity of religious life, the rites and some characters that change”.

1 Original text in Portuguese: “...na sua essência as religiões não variam de um povo para outro... são apenas a intensidade da vida religiosa, os ritos e algumas personagens que mudam”.

Thus, to be able to understand the Portuguese traditional religiosity it is necessary to survey deeper into the ancient historical religious initial settings.

Therefore, this article is a study of the initial elements present in the nature of ancient religious essence as they are latent in ancient people's souls, which nurtured their common ethos and traditional culture. This study is related to the origins of religious traditions of the initial peoples from whom the Portuguese have received their chromosomes. As D'Encarnação (2007:150) explains,² "...the history of a people, [is] what allows us to identify as a Nation, over the centuries". Thus, the study of thousands of years of an accumulation of historical and religious tradition and spiritual reality which this article provides in a brief summary serves as a general introduction to other articles that will follow covering other religious historical data.

The *first* article of Introduction I, Chapters 1, addresses pre- and post-Noah's Flood religious affiliations. It includes the main theological and theogony concepts prior and immediately after Noah's Flood, including the monotheism of Mesha and the polytheism of Babylon. The *second* chapter, Chapter 2, addresses the migratory movements of people and the DNA tests conducted to their skeletons. And, the *third* chapter, Chapter 3, is a study on the ancient Mesopotamian and Hebrew literature regarding the Iberian Peninsula and its people.

Whether the Flood of Noah's days was local or universal is a discussion which is out of the scope of this study. The author writes from a biblical point of view that describes the Flood as a global event, because of the "all-inclusive terminology found within the *Genesis* account itself" (Davidson, 2004:54). Related to the use of biblical information such as the above-mentioned this work utilizes the *New King James Version of the Holy Bible* published in 1992 by

2 Original text in Portuguese: "...a história de um povo, [é] aquilo que nos permite identificar como Nação, ao longo dos séculos".

Thomas Nelson. Inc. Next is an address of pre- and post-Noah's Flood religious affiliations.

1. Pre- and Post-Noah's Flood Religious Affiliations

This topic, Topic 1, addresses the main theological and theogony after Noah's Flood as well as the monotheism of Mesha versus the polytheism of Babylon. It follows a study on the pre- and post-Flood human religious affiliations.

1.1 Main theological and theogony concepts prior and immediately after Noah's Flood

The following is a brief study of the spiritual and moral conditions of humanity prior to the Flood as well as the main theological and theogony concepts of those living immediately before and after the Flood (Merriam-Webster: 'theogony' is the account of the origin and descent of the gods. It follows a study on the monotheism of earth's ancient inhabitants.

(1) The monotheism of Earth's ancient inhabitants

The understanding of monotheist religious inclinations of ancient people living prior and after Noah's Flood initially requires a clarification on the meaning of the term 'monotheism'. According to Nolton (2019:21), "At [the monotheist] core is the theist's belief that reality's ultimate principle is God – an omnipotent, omniscient, goodness that is the creator of everything other than itself". Monotheism

...is the pursuit of an absolute, divine claim to authority, and rejects as impossible all truths save for the one – which is deemed absolute in nature – that resides at the core of its own identity. Monotheism is thus the view that there is only one God (Nolton, 2019:21).

Regarding its origin, Kirwan (1810:6) is of the opinion that "Monotheism must have been the primeval religion of [hu]mankind". Kirwan

(1810:7) explains that “a circumstance long attendant on Adam’s family”, which Adam’s monotheism was based on, was the “supernatural appearance by which the presence of God was rendered sensible to Adam immediately after his creation” (Kirwan, 1810:7). According to Kirwan (1810:7), “It is supposed to have been an extraordinary splendour or bright cloud called the *face of God* (*Exodus* 33:14; Kirwan, 1810:7)”. Moreover, as per biblical account, “God frequently spoke to Adam and his family” (Kirwan, 1810:7) when manifesting His glorious presence (*Genesis* chapters 2; 3; and 4). According to Kirwan (1810:7),

It, [that is, God’s glorious presence], probably reposed permanently near the habitation of Adam, as we find, that Cain, when condemned to banishment from that habitation, complained that he should also be banished from that symbol of the divine presence, *Gen[esis]* 4:14, and in effect he was banished from it, v.16.

In time God warned Noah about the Deluge and preserved him and seven other members of his family from destruction through the Flood. As Noah was a monotheist even

During [Noah’s] life [after the Flood] it is not probable that his [immediate] descendants embraced any worship but that which he himself professed, namely, that of one eternal and omnipotent Being (Kirwan, 1810:8).

What Nolton (2019:21) labels as “Systemic monotheism” implies “the idea that a logic of a One and Only thinking has infiltrated text, thought, and tradition” (Nolton, 2019:21). This is precisely what happened with the writing of the biblical texts, and “such a manoeuvre represents a fundamental closure of the *Bible*” (Nolton, 2019:21). So, the above-mentioned discourse about monotheism requires not only the knowledge of its origin but also the understanding of its essence; that is the knowledge and the worship of the One God.

When thinking about the historical process related to the development of the monotheist theological concept the biblical narrative states that Adam, Eve, and their immediate family knew, worshiped, and were daily approaching God's Face and Presence in the Garden of Eden as well as after they were cast out of it (*Genesis* 3:8; 4:13). In effect, the future development of the concept of a "Mosaic distinction between true and false religion" (Meyer, 2011:2-3) had its origin prior to the Flood ever since Cain killed Abel simply because of a choice of two types of sacrifices. In addition, we must note that there is a "correlation between agricultural marginal landscapes and the development of monotheism" (Surman, 2016:1-2); that is, monotheist sacrifices were essentially taken from grazing and farming, including other elements found in nature such as salt and water. So, we should not think that the way monotheism was expressed prior and immediately after Noah's Flood was in the same way it came to be expressed by later Jewish or Christian religions. Thus, closer to the initial monotheist way of worshiping God was probably "the Zoroastrian and Jewish 'ways' of expressing monotheism" (Surman, 2016:8). As Surman (2016:9-10) points out,

... [the] earliest monotheist religions of the ancient world...[and] the most familiar monotheist religions we might recognize...[are] Zoroastrian and Judaism [which] developed directly from the monotheist worldviews of the ancient Iranian and Israelite precursors...[and may be labelled as] 'proto-monotheistic'.

Since the beginning of *Genesis*, we read of a rather small group of monotheist people who lived prior to Noah's Flood as compared to the majority of polytheist worshipers living in those days. Biblical narrative underlines monotheist people such as Adam and Eve, Abel, Seth, and his son Enosh, Enoch (son of Jared), Methuselah and his son Lamech, as well as Methuselah's grandson Noah (*Genesis* 4:25-26; 5:1-32). As an illustration of how small the monotheist group in Noah's days was, we must remember that

according to biblical narrative only “eight people” (2 *Peter* 2:5) entered Noah’s Ark and were saved from death.

It follows a brief study or introduction to polytheist’s theogony.

(2) The introduction of polytheism’s theogony: Spiritual and moral conditions of humanity prior to and immediately after Noah’s Flood

With regard to the study of polytheist’s theogony and the spiritual conditions of humanity prior to and immediately after Noah’s Flood Kirwan (1810:6) points out that, “It must surely be a curious and interesting subject of inquiry, to discover through what causes the knowledge of this [monotheist] truth was lost”. Polytheism became prevalent in ancient societies, which inquiry Kirwan (1810:6) addresses;

What could induce men [and women] almost universally to embrace, first the errors of polytheism, then idolatry, and finally to give credit to fables so glaringly absurd, that nothing but the most indubitable testimony of all histories, both sacred and profane.

Kirwan (1810:4) is of the opinion that polytheism is the result of human *curiosity* and the attention given to *facts* related to nature and human life (Kirwan, 1810:1). Certainly, the Flood of Noah’s days marked a tragic epoch in humankind’s history. Clines (1972:131) describes the general spiritual and moral conditions of the societies who lived prior to Noah’s Flood by arguing that “...the [fact that the] Flood was a punishment for human sin is an idea that is of course not unique to the Hebrew narrative”. Additionally, Clines (1972:131) states that “The idea that human sinfulness finds its expression in the state of society, and that God holds men and society accountable for their misdeeds, is revolutionary in the ancient world” (Clines, 1972:132). The main problem and culpability of the society living before Noah’s Flood “strictly lies in the socio-moral sphere” (Clines, 1972:132). Thus, “...remarkable is the fact

that the *Bible*, dealing with non-Israelites, does not conceive of their sin in... ‘religious’ terms. That is to say, he does not accuse them of idolatrous or cultic offences” (Clines, 1972:132).

Although it is not the intention of this article to dwell in the discussion of whether or not was the Flood universal, Ball (2003:18) states that, “Noah’s flood [w]as a global catastrophe”. From the Christian point of view Davidson (2004:54) argues that,

The divine purpose given for the bringing of the Flood makes explicit its universal scope. ‘And the Lord said, I will destroy humankind...who I have created, and beast, creeping thing, and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them (*Gen[esis]* 6:7; 8:21)... Thus, based upon the evidence supplied by the narrator of *Genesis*, the destruction of humanity necessitate more than a local Flood.

Concerning the destruction caused by the Deluge, Clines (1972:132) states, “The wickedness of mankind is plainly no sin of ignorance or omission; *the cause of the Flood is the intentional moral evil of humanity* [my emphasis]”. In addition, Clines (1972:132) underlines the biblical words used in *Genesis* 6:5 to describe the reason why God would destroy the earth and humanity, which words are ‘every’, ‘only’, and ‘continually’,

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that **every** [my emphasis] intent of the thoughts of his heart was **only** [my emphasis] evil **continually** [my emphasis] (*Genesis* 6:5).

Later on, ‘corruption’ as well as ‘violence’ were new categories introduced in *Genesis* 6:11-13 and added to the list of reasons for the Flood (Clines, 1972:133). Violence may be explained as a “technical term for the oppression of the weak by the strong” Clines (1972:133), which was a “violent breach of...[God’s] just order” (Clines, 1972:133). According to Clines (1972:133), “... even when used of [hu]man’s inhumanity to [another hu]man, it usually has religious overtones, for it is the violation of an order laid down or guaranteed by God”.

A biblical example of the violence perpetrated by human beings living before Noah's Flood is that found in *Genesis* 4:15,24; while God's order was that Cain would be avenged sevenfold, the violence of God's order was that Lamech should be avenged seventyfold. So, humanity had abandoned God's way, "all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth" (*Genesis* 6:12). That is, humanity had abandoned the proper way to live on earth, "the natural order of existence of living creatures, the 'manner of life and conduct prescribed'" (Clines, 1972:133). Moreover, additional to humanity's revolt and rejection of God's order of things was also "an attempt for self-divination ('you shall be as gods'), [*Genesis*] 3:5" (Clines, 1972:134). The climax of the perversion made against God's orders was expressed as most humans removed "all limits in an attempt to achieve autonomous existence...[thus,] breaking...[God given] bounds" (Clines, 1972:134).

The corruption was not only moral but had also become spiritual. This is so because after the Flood Gilgamesh – of whom we shall address at a later stage – went on and "restored the sanctuaries (or: cities) that the Flood had destroyed" (Kovacs, 1998:2). Kovacs's (1998:2) statement underlines the fact that most cities had been built as centres of worship to some kind of socially invented divinity. As Kirwan (1810:7) states,

[The]...wild and monstrous deviations from [God's ordered] reason and common sense...[were] the final cessation [of worshipping God, which] chiefly contributed to the introduction of polytheism.

That is, biblical narrative that informs that the inhabitants of the earth had become morally and spiritually corrupt, filled with lawlessness, and polytheistic thoughts and practices; so, God determined to destroy them (*Genesis* 6:11-13).

Jesus described the sinful and socio-morally careless societies who died with Noah's Flood as people who "drank, ...married wives, ...[and] were

given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (*Luke* 17:26-27).

Yet, another biblical passage (*1 Peter* 3:18-20) introduces a different element, one related to the invisible/spiritual world. That is, in *1 Peter* 3:18-20 the author describes how some invisible wicked beings were upsetting the spiritual realm, because they did not want God Almighty to be patient with

humankind. They wanted humans to die as soon as possible.

¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹by whom also **He went and preached to the spirits in prison,** ²⁰**who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared** [my emphasis], in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water (*1 Peter* 3:18-20).

Consequently, Greenspan (N-d:1) emphasised the fact that because “The earth became corrupt...[God determined] to destroy them [along] with the Earth”. That is, “The nature of the earth’s corruption...[was] lawlessness...and...corruption” (Greenspan, N-d:2). The reason why Yahweh decided to destroy the earth and humanity was that “God was disappointed... He began a garden that existed in a state of harmony, but [that] was quickly corrupted by humanity” (Greenspan, N-d:2). This amounts to say that humanity’s dramatic and sinful conditions had an environmental impact. According to Greenspan (N-d:2),

Where there is a lack of righteousness and justice, it is absent not only in the way human beings treat one another but, in the way, human beings treat their environment as well. Our planet is subject to our behaviour.

After the Flood Nimrod revives ancient polytheism (Kovacs, 1998:2). Gilgamesh “hastens thither [on Siduri, a Mediterranean dweller and witchdoctor] and inquires of her how he can get to Utnapishtim [or Noah], to obtain from him the secret of immortality” (Heidel, 1949:9). Since “The rule

still holds good that all men [and women] must die” (Heidel, 1949:14) Gilgamesh’s assumption was that as a fact of life “The solution offer[ed] is simple: ‘Enjoy your life and make the best of it!’” (Heidel, 1949:14). This is, thus, the real offer of theogony centring the focus on the human being rather than in God Almighty.

The Greek poet Hesiod (about 700 BC. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* - online, 2021:1) wrote *Theogony*, which “...is our earliest surviving account of the origin of the gods from the Greek world [view]” (Trzaskoma, 2016:129). Although ancient Greeks did not consider Hesiod’s *Theogony* as a sacred book; rather, that the book had received influence from previous Near East civilizations “which had older, elaborate creation myths of their own” (Trzaskoma, 2016:130). In fact,

Hesiod’s *Theogony* (literally, ‘Birth of the Gods’) is also a cosmogony (‘birth of the cosmos’), because for Hesiod the physical universe was itself made up of gods...[of which] the central figure in the *Theogony* is Zeus (Trzaskoma, 2016:130).

Along with the thoughts, and practices of ancient polytheist religions mythology played a very important role in later city-state structural nature of local as well as global societies, which mythology “has long fascinated humankind” (Sailors, 2007:7). Ancient mythology is studied next.

(3) Ancient mythology: After Noah’s Flood

Ancient mythology also played a very important role in the religious aspects of civilizations. That is, according to Sailors (2007:4), “Mythology and religion [played] their roles in society as separate and interrelated [elements]”. The stories of “gods and monsters and the men and women who lived and interacted with them” (Sailors, 2007:5) brought by ancient mythology continue to fascinate humanity. However, “myth is much more than a fantasy story. Myths differ from fantasy in many ways” (Sailors, 2007:8). Essentially, a myth

[is] a “word [or] tale...a story meant to be told aloud” (Sailors, 2007:8). As Sailors (2007:8) puts it,

[A] myth can be told with the intent of being allegorical, symbolic, rational, romantic, theoretical, or analytical. A myth can take on a single form or it can serve all of these types at once. However, it is necessary...to set the myths apart from the writings that were meant to be factual records such as Herodotus’ *Histories* or the writings of Thucydides and Hippocrates.

An example on how myth preserved and spread information about is that related to the Tower of Babel of which the *Bible* speaks in *Genesis* 11:1-9. According to Oosthuizen (2002:70), there are “Various [sources of]...reference to several other myths relating to Babel”, which demonstrates how a tale mentioned in the *Bible* as part of its story became a myth with differing nuances. According to Oosthuizen (2002:70), the *first* source is “In an Armenian myth giants build a high tower; a violent wind destroys the tower, and casts strange words on the people, so that they can no longer understand one another” (Also read: Aalders 1981:252). Oosthuizen (2002:70) also points out a *second* source which “in an African version the gods destroy the tower, but it says nothing about the confusion of languages or the dispersion of the nations” (Also read: Westermann 1987:80). And the *third* source (Oosthuizen, 2002:70) says that,

In Mexico, a saga tells of only two persons surviving the Deluge, a giant and a human named Coxcox. The giant builds a tower, which the gods destroy with fire. A dove teaches the descendants of Coxcox to speak, but they all learn the dove's language differently, and so are spread out throughout the earth (Also read: Aalders, 1981:253).

On the subject of the above-mentioned three differing versions of the biblical story related to the Tower of Babel Oosthuizen (2002:70) explains that “these stories can only be traced back several centuries, and so are quite possibly the result of the ‘indigenisation’ of the Christian/Biblical story of Babel” (Also read: Aalders, 1981:252). Moreover, since the sources are geographically so far apart it is fair to think that some sort of myths similar to

that related to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel also arrived in the Iberian Peninsula and were known amongst its Western populations in particular. It follows a discussion on the monotheism of Mesha versus the polytheism of Babylon.

1.2 The monotheism of Mesha versus the polytheism of Babylon

Two cities were the epicentres of religious thought and practice: The monotheist Mesha, built by Noah close to his Ark, and the polytheist Babylon, built by Noah great-grand-son Nimrod. According to the biblical account Noah and his close family had faith in Yahweh's Words,

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith (*Hebreus* 11:7).

Therefore, the following discussion is about the theological inclinations and religious affiliations represented by two of the most ancient post-Diluvian towns: The monotheist Mesha and the polytheist Babylon. The monotheism of Mesha is addressed next.

(1) The monotheism of Mesha

Before addressing the city of Mesha and its monotheistic theological concepts it is necessary to establish the philosophical grounds of monotheism. According to Kirwan (1810:5),

The most ancient record of the human race, and by far the most credible, are the writings of Moses, being written...3300 years ago: and these unequivocally attest the unity of the Supreme Being to have been originally known to the whole human race.

In addition, Kirwan (1810:6) states that

Reason as well as history compels us to believe that the human race owes its existence to the will of the Supreme Being, and that the first created pair received various instructions from the Author of their existence.

Concerning, the above-mentioned God-given instructions to the first created couple Kirwan (1810:6) says that “Among these instructions, the duties of gratitude, veneration, and worship, must have been impressed on their minds, and consequently a sufficient knowledge of the Being to whom these sentiments were due”. As a result, “It cannot surely be doubted that they communicated this knowledge to their descendants, and consequently Monotheism must have been the primeval religion of [hu]mankind” (Kirwan, 1810:6).

It is in the context of Noah’s and his family’s survival of the Flood that Mesha was established while the 600-year-old prophet and priest Noah continued to live for the next 350 years after the Flood. Noah and his immediate family increasingly grew, inhabiting the region close to the place where the Ark had landed as is described in the book of *Genesis* 10:30, “And their dwelling place was from **Mesha** [my emphasis] as you go toward Sephar, the mountain of the east”. The people living in Mesha and its surrounding continued to hear Noah’s preaching and attending his blood sacrificial services to Yahweh, “worship...he himself professed, namely, that of one eternal and omnipotent Being” (Kirwan, 1810:8). Thus, Mesha became a kind of Noah’s ‘Zion’, the spreading epicentre of the monotheist worship to Yahweh.

Mesha is important to be mentioned here, because it was the land where “the people of the East” (Davidson, 2018:55) lived either as nomads or in town. It was from Noah’s Mesha that the monotheist worship spread, particularly amongst the people of the East according to Davidson (2018:55),

If *Job* was a descendant of Ishmael and Esau, as suggested by the LXX and comparative evidence in *Gen[esis]* 36, then **this book is a testimony to the monotheistic worship of the “people of the East” including various parts of the Syro-Arabian desert during the patriarchal period parallel to the time between Abraham and Moses** [my emphasis].

It is important to note that the biblical

...book of *Job* portrays not only Job but his three friends (and Elihu) as monotheists, worshipers of the one true God, whom they call *El*, *Eloah*, *Elohim*, or *Shaddai* (names also used by the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) (Davidson, 2018:55).

Biblical passages such as *Deuteronomy* 32:2; *Judges* 5:4; and *Habakkuk* 3:3,7 “make clear that the knowledge of the true God *El* was common among the children of the East during the period of the patriarchs and the time of the Exodus” (Davidson, 2018:55). The same may be said of *Numbers* 23:7 where Balaam is mentioned as an Aramean prophet coming from Aram, the son of Shem (Davidson, 2018:56). According to Davidson (2018:56), Shem had “originally c[o]me from the area of Northern Mesopotamia inside the great bend of the Euphrates River”. That is, “[Balak] sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the [Euphrates] River in the land of the sons of his people” (*Numbers* 22:5). The monotheist religion of the ‘children of the East’ may set an example on how monotheist thoughts and practice may have also settled amongst the Western Iberian Peninsula populations as they arrived in the area.

Next is the address of Babylon’s polytheist religions.

(2) The polytheism of Babylon

The Flood had a tremendous impact on the near future social milieu as the city-states of the Mesopotamian region begun to thrive and their leaders desired emancipation from the old Noah’s monotheistic theological concepts and religious practices. One such cities was Babylon.

In Babylon many had the view that Noah’s theology was as “a divine oppression” (Millard, 1966:276), which caused the Flood. Such “divine...wrath [should] be stopped by ceasing from worship, by bribery in fact” (Millard, 1966:276). This attitude was in opposition to Noah’s other ancient in which “the anger of the gods is seen as a result of some failure on [hu]man’s part, a failure to be remedied by prayer and humility” (Millard,

1966:276). So, the Sumerian thinkers believed that “the situation was so different in the ante/diluvian age that it was irrelevant to their beliefs... The fact remains that this remarkable instance of ‘bringing the gods to heel’ was [necessary]” (Millard, 1966:277). It was, thus, a process of rebellion towards Yaweh by which the Mesopotamians led by Nimrod and others developed “the Mesopotamian concept of multitude, competing gods” (Pfof, 2014:10). Polytheism thus was initiated by Nimrod “who openly rebelled against Jehovah in Shinar” (Tannehill, 1916:4), which is characterized by the elements addressed as follows.

According to Assmann (2004:17), polytheistic “religions know three spheres or dimensions of divine presence and religious experience...[as the] general structure of polytheism”. The *first dimension* is described on how the “divine presence or manifestation the cosmos or nature” (Assmann, 2004:18). That is, “Polytheistic cosmology views the cosmos as a cooperative process: the deities cooperate in creating and maintaining the world” (Assmann, 2004:18).

The *second dimension* of polytheism relates to the cult as well as political organization and it “consists of the various forms of terrestrial governance in which the gods of a polytheistic pantheon typically participate” (Assmann, 2004:19). According to Assmann (2004:18), “the more important deities of the pantheon are ‘town-gods’”. However, when the city was the capital of a country the most important god of that city was also the god of the entire countries such as was Marduk, the god of Babylonians (Assmann, 2004:19). The political dimension of polytheism views the “divine world...[as] cultic, because it is their function as town lords and ladies that the deities receive cultic worship” (Assmann, 2004:19). Assmann (2004:19) explains,

The cult is the service that a lord or lady requires and resembles in many respects a royal ceremonial. The feasts are typically celebrated in the form of a procession and have the clear political meaning of territorial ownership and its annual confirmation.

In addition, the *third dimension* of polytheism “may be called the personal or biological aspect of the divine world. In a polytheistic religion, a deity cannot be spoken of about without reference to other gods” (Assmann, 2004:19).

That is,

The gods live, act, and display their personalities and characters in interaction, not only or even primarily with humans, but with one another, in relation to other gods, in “constellations” that find their expression in myths, genealogies, epithets, names—in short, in everything that can be said about a deity (Assmann, 2004:19-20).

Assmann (2004:19) also states that, “The relation between the divine and the human world is anthropomorphic rather than anthropocentric. The natural partner of a deity is another deity, not humanity”. Polytheism includes idolatry as one of its elementary pillars. Kirwan (1810:4) speaks of the ancient “almost universal spread of idolatry”.

All around the Mediterranean Sea polytheist rituals and worship places seemed to be the same. As Johnson (2007:11) states, “...travellers in the Mediterranean world found their own gods everywhere, albeit somewhat disguised at times”. That included “the basic forms of cult [which] seemed to have been recognizable enough” (Johnson, 2007:11). That is, travellers recognized the altars and the rituals as belonging to the worship of some local or global god and “...ritual[s] and architectural forms [were] almost ubiquitous elements of [ancient] religion” (Johnson, 2007:12). As Johnson (2007:12) explains,

Prayer and sacrifice, but also libation, procession, and votive gift, are the elements of cult that, in manifold combinations, made up the impressive festivals of ancient cities or were performed, alone or in combination, by individuals on their own behalf; altar, temple, and image were markers of space where cult took place.

In fact, “Everywhere in the Mediterranean world, sacrifice was at the centre of cult. Its ostensible purpose was to feed the gods or the dead” (Johnson, 2007:13). As Johnson (2007:12) put it, “...most often, from Ur to

Rome, sacrifice was understood as a common banquet of gods and humans”.

According to Johnson (2007:14),

The sequence of burning and banquet is common to all..., as is the presence of both “whole offering” and “shared offering,” the rite of entirely burning the animal and the rite of sharing it in a banquet.

All over in the Mediterranean world polytheist tribal societies also used images of their divinities which were “cult images” (Johnson, 2007:14). In addition, “Ecstatic or “intuitive” prophecy is known all over the globe, and it is well at home in the ancient Mediterranean” (Johnson, 2007:14). It follows a brief study on the migratory movements of people in the ancient world post-Noah’s Flood.

2. Ancient Migrations: The Migratory Movements of People and the DNA Tests to Their Skeletons

Regarding the ancient migrations into the Iberian Peninsula chromosomes of bones have been studied to identify their origin. The Portuguese got their chromosomes from ancient tribes who arrived in the Iberian Peninsula³ coming from various parts of Europe and North Africa. Fonseca (2019:1) explains that⁴ “...many peoples inhabited the territory that today corresponds to Portugal”. Those ancient tribes left their skeletons buried which have been recently subject to DNA tests. Corroboratively, Zimmer (2019:1) points out that scientists have analysed “DNA from nearly 300 fossilized remains,... peering into human prehistory in the [Portuguese] region”. Reich (2018:41) states that “In 2009 a very important study was published in which mitochondrial DNA—in the energy factories of cells—was successfully extracted and sequenced from ancient Europeans”.

3 The Iberian Peninsula includes the microstate of Andorra, a small area of Southern France, the British colony Gibraltar, Portugal, and Spain.

4 Original text in Portuguese: “...muitos povos habitaram o território que hoje corresponde a Portugal”.

The results of DNA tests made on ancient Iberian skeletons demonstrate that “Iberian hunter-gatherers had a remarkable mix of genes, showing that they descend from profoundly distinct groups of early European hunter-gatherers” (Zimmer, 2019:1). One group of skeletons was linked to a skeleton found “at a site in Belgium called Goyet” (Zimmer, 2019:1). Another group of skeletons was of the DNA type of “a skeleton [found] at an Italian site called Cillabruna” (Zimmer, 2019:1), which also dates back from thousands of years ago. Additionally, Zimmer (2019:1) informs that “...in Iberia, the new studies f[ou]nd [that] the Goyet and Villabruna people coexisted. Hunter-gatherers across the peninsula had a mixture of ancestry from the two peoples”.

In addition, the DNA study revealed “that the mitochondrial sequences were almost entirely different between hunter-gatherers and farmers, suggesting that new people had arrived along with the new economy” (Reich, 2018:41). That is, a new group of settlers migrated to the region “...about 7,500 years ago...[and the] new people arrived with crops and livestock” (Zimmer, 2019:1). That is, the newcomers introduced a different lifestyle from the previous two groups of settlers. According to Zimmer (2019:1), “These...farmers [came] originally from **Anatolia** [my emphasis]”.

This information allow us to think of the area where Noah’s Ark settled after the Flood as mentioned in the *Book of Genesis* chapter 7. Metz (1996:75-76) explains that “The term Anatolia is most frequently used in specific reference to the large, semi-arid central plateau, which is rimmed by hills and mountains...[in which area is] the Anatolian city of Ankara”. That is, close to the area where Noah’s Ark landed as per the biblical account,

Then...[Noah’s] ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of **Ararat**⁵ (my emphasis) (*Genesis* 8:4).

5 Related to the geographical area where according to biblical narrative Noah’s Ark settled Metz (1996:78) states, “Turkey’s highest peak, **Mount Ararat (Agri Dagi)** [my emphasis] – about 5,166 metres

This amounts to say that various peoples arrived possibly after the Flood of Noah's days arriving in the Western Iberian Peninsula. The human remains these peoples buried in the Iberian Peninsula are important to be studied by DNA tests. Olalde *et al* (2019:1230) inform that, "Ancient DNA studies have begun to help us understand the genetic history and movement of people across...the Iberian Peninsula". These scientific studies have demonstrated that the Portuguese, the Spaniards, and the other Iberian peoples descend from various peoples from Indo-European as well as from peoples from North African origin. Olalde *et al* (2019:1230) adds that, "Linguistic analysis and genetic analysis of archaeological human remains dating from about 7,000 years ago to the present elucidate the genetic impact of prehistoric migrations from Europe and North Africa". However, the study also "shows that Iberia's genetic profile changed markedly in response to major events in history, such as the later Roman conquest" (Zimmer, 2019:1), which scope is out of the present study.

All of these settlers lived their life experiences according to religious feelings deriving from ethos, customary traditions, and beliefs systems that they already had before their arrival. They would resist change as people continue to do. As Boas (1904:247) puts it, "as among...[us], so among primitive tribes, the resistance to a deviation from firmly established customs is due to an emotional reaction, not to conscious reasoning". Next is an address of the first names given to the Western region of the Iberian Peninsula and its significance supporting those first settlers' religious consciousness. It follows a study on ancient literature pertaining to the Iberian peoples.

high – is situated near the point where the boundaries of the four countries meet, [namely] Armenia, Azerbaijan..., Iran, ... [and] Turkey".

3. Ancient Mesopotamian and Biblical Texts Regarding the Iberian Peoples

As the title of this chapter indicates this chapter is a brief study of the ancient texts regarding the Western Iberian Peninsula and its first settlers. This study includes ancient Mesopotamian, Hebrew, Greek, as well as Latin/Roman literature. Next is a study on relevant ancient literature related to the Iberian Peninsula.

3.1 The Iberian Peninsula: Related Mesopotamian and Hebrew Literature

Ancient literature related to the peoples who lived in the Iberian Peninsula as well as its geography is scarce. Yet, there are some ancient references linked to the region found in various sources which must be supplied. As Tavares (2005:13) states,⁶

It is an attractive challenge to search for the first written information about the far West [Portugal], which was considered in high antiquity to be the end of the world. The few sources that do exist are Mesopotamian and Hebrew, without forgetting the importance of documentation from archaic Greece [as well as Latin/Roman].

(1) The Mesopotamian Literature

The Mesopotamian literature informs much about initial human societies who flourished after Noah's Flood. This literature is addressed next.

(a) Mesopotamian Clay Tablets

Ancient literature referring to the Western Iberian Peninsula and its peoples are clay tablets (Tavares, 2005:13-14) as well as other literary works such as "Classical sources and archaeological and cultural evidence" (Lorrio &

6 Original text in Portuguese: "Torna-se atractivo o desafio de procurarmos as primeiras informações escritas sobre o extremo Ocidente, que era considerado na alta antiguidade como o fim do mundo. Ora as poucas fontes que existem são mesopotâmicas e hebraicas, sem querermos olvidar a importância da documentação da Grécia arcaica".

Zapatero, 2005:167) that supply information on how the ancient civilizations viewed the Iberian Peninsula. According to Tavares (2005:13-14),⁷

[In] a clay tablet from the 7th century BC preserved in the British Library...the Assyriologists who studied it [inform the tablet speaks of] the earth [which] is represented by a circumference surrounded by water...[mentioning] the far West [Portugal].

Tavares (2005:13-14) states that in the above-mentioned tablet⁸ “the far West [Portugal]...is described as a region 'where the bird in flight cannot finish its journey', this because it is an extremely inhospitable, let us say uninhabitable region”. This region is also described in another tablet found in Nipur as⁹ “Anaku-ki, Kaptara-ki, the lands beyond the...sea (Mediterranean)... the countries between which the sun rises and dies, which Sargon conquered three times” (Tavares, 2005:15). Tavares (2005:16) also states that¹⁰

Anaku...means ‘land of tin’, which makes us think that it was Tartessos (or Tartessus, as some prefer) where the tin arrived from the ‘tin islands’ or ‘Cassiterides’, located in a region initially imagined in the north-western coasts of Hispania and that was identified after Strabo with the Estrimnides.

(b) The *Gilgamesh Epic* and the *Atrahasis Epic*

Ancient literature related to the Western’s Iberian region includes the *Gilgamesh Epic* which ancient publication, date, and author remain unknown. Carreira (2021:11) explains that¹¹ “Gilgamesh [was] the ‘hero *par excellence* of

7 Original text in Portuguese: “...uma tabuinha de argila do século VII a.C. conservada na British Library, onde os assiriólogos que a estudaram [afirmam esta mencionar que] A terra é aí representada por uma circunferência rodeada de água... o extremo do Ocidente [Portugal]”.

8 Original text in Portuguese: “o extremo do Ocidente...é descrito como uma região ‘onde a ave em voo não pode terminar o seu caminho’, isto por se tratar de uma região extremamente inóspita, digamos inabitável”.

9 Original text in Portuguese: “Anaku-ki, Kaptara-ki, as terras mais além do mar superior (Mediterrâneo)...os países entre os quais nasce e morre o sol, que Sargão, conquistou três vezes”.

10 Original text in Portuguese: “Anaku, por sua vez, significa «terra do estanho», o que faz pensar que se trate de Tartesso (ou Tartessus, como alguns preferem) aonde chegava o estanho vindo das «ilhas do estanho» ou seja «Cassitérides», localizadas em região imaginada inicialmente nas costas norte-ocidentais da Hispânia e que se foi identificando depois de Estrabão com as Estrimónias”.

11 Original text in Portuguese: “e Gilgamesh, o «herói por excelência do mundo antigo – uma figura aventureira, corajosa, mas trágica, simbolizando o esforço eterno, mas vão, do homem para alcançar a fama, a glória e a imortalidade...»”.

the world – an adventurous figure, courageous but tragic, symbolizing human being's eternal but vain effort to achieve fame, glory, and immortality...”. Kovacs (1998:2) states, “It was he [Gilgamesh] who crossed the ocean, the vast seas”. Geographically, this statement could refer to the Indian Ocean as well as the Mediterranean Sea. However, it is plausible that the reference was the Mediterranean Sea rather than the Indian Ocean. In this regard it is relevant to underline the fact that Gilgamesh went on and “restored the sanctuaries (or: cities) that the Flood had destroyed” (Kovacs, 1998:2) and on those days it would be unthinkable to imagine land on the opposite side of the vast Indian Ocean. Kovacs’ (1998:2) statement refers to the Flood of Noah’s days (*Genesis* 7:1-24), which is also addressed in *The Book of Jasher*, mentioning the world as it was before and after the Flood (N-a, 1887:50).

The ancient *Gilgamesh Epic* corroborate the biblical story of the Flood of Noah’s days (Jensen, 2015:7). Of the same view is Villiers (2005:22) according to whom “...the Epic of Gilgamesh is known for its parallel with the biblical recount of the Deluge”. That is, Gilgamesh was the Mesopotamian Noah’s great-grandson biblical Nimrod (Tannehill, 1916:4). “In an ultimate quest for immortality” (Oxford Lexico / Gilgamesh, 2021:1) Gilgamesh was the first dynasty and great king of Uruk (Heidel, 1949:3), a Mesopotamian city-state, who went to the biblical city named Mesh whose builder was Noah (*Genesis* 10:30) in search for the meaning of human life. Heidel (1949:5) explains that “In the course of time Gilgamesh became a god of the lower world. ...he is designated as ‘king of the underworld’... ruler of the world and of the underworld”.

According to Jensen (2015:7), “...the Epic creates a parallel to the *Bible* and the society of Mesopotamia nearly 4,000 years ago. Gilgamesh is known to be the first great hero, and the epic is known as the ‘first great masterpiece of world literature’”. The *Gilgamesh Epic* informs “about Mesopotamian culture and religion” (Jensen, 2015:7), which knowledge is relevant for the quest of

this article related to the Portuguese tradition religiosity as will be discussed at a later stage.

The personage mentioned in the *Gilgamesh Epic* as Utnapishtim is certainly Noah (Pfof, 2014:8-9), the biblical Flood hero who pleased Yaweh (*Genesis* 6:8-9) as the “unique role of the character of Noah... [was to help] bringing ‘rest’ to the hearth that had been filled with what God referred to as violence and wickedness” (Pfof, 2014:8). The unknown author of *The Atrahasis Epic* (Dalley, 2017:35) describes the horror resulting from the Flood,

How we sent the Flood. But a man [Noah] survived the catastrophe. You are the counsellor of the gods; on your orders I created conflict. Let the Igigi listen to this song in order to praise you and let them record...your greatness. I shall sing of the Flood to all people: Listen!

However, Noah “...promptly obeyed the deity’s commands (*Genesis* 6:22; 7:5)” (Pfof, 2014:9). Moreover, as Noah used to do before the Flood, he and his family continued to sacrifice solely to Yaweh... [but] in a private rather than a community context (Pfof, 2014:9-10). According to Millard (1966:263) Noah – that is Utnapishtim – was saved “from the Flood... [and] the one saved was ‘exceedingly devout’ and so worthy to live”. As Millard (1966:276) adds,

The Epic teaches clearly that man's end is to relieve the gods of the toil and labour of so caring for the earth that it will produce their food. Any other work of mankind is secondary, the creature is expected to obey his masters in every respect.

Tavares (2005:16) also informs that we should not forget ¹²

...the historical events in Mesopotamia between the 24th and the 22nd centuries BC, when Sargon of Akkad had contacts with the Mediterranean, and when the court scribes tried to exalt this sovereign, presenting him as ‘king of the four corners of the earth’, ‘king of all’, ‘king of the world’, therefore of the Mediterranean, where he had arrived with his warriors.

12 Original text in Portuguese: “os acontecimentos históricos na Mesopotâmia entre os séculos XXIV e XXII a.C. quando existem contactos de Sargão de Acad com o Mediterrâneo e quando os escribas da corte pretendem exaltar esse soberano, apresentando-o como «rei dos quatro cantos da terra», «rei da totalidade», «rei do mundo», portanto do Mediterrâneo aonde chegara com os seus guerreiros”.

Additionally,¹³ “...the archaeology of the Mediterranean coast, particularly the western coast... reveals the existence of trade contacts between the far west and the Eastern Mediterranean region” (Tavares, 2005:16). The Hebrew is addressed next.

(2) The Hebrew Literature

The Hebrew people also contributed to the general knowledge about the peoples living in the world. The *Book of Jasher* is included in this subsection since it is related to and mentioned twice in the Hebrew *Bible*.

(a) The *Book of Jasher*

The ancient *Book of Jasher* is mentioned twice in the biblical text in *Joshua* 10:13 and *2 Samuel* 1:18. The *Book of Jasher*'s first four chapters deal with the issue of corruption and the sporadic restoration of righteousness in pre-Flood societies. Noah's Flood devastated most of human race, remaining only four couples, those of Noah and his three sons and their wives. However, the Flood did not resolve the sinful nature of humanity, and iniquity increased,

²...when the Lord had scattered the sons of men on account of their sin at the tower, behold they spread forth into many divisions, and all the sons of men were dispersed into the four corners of the earth. ³And all the families became each according to its language, its land, or its city. ⁴And the sons of men built many cities according to their families, in all the places where they went, and throughout the earth where the Lord had scattered them (*Book of Jasher* 10:2-4).

The *Book of Jasher* (10:8) indicates that the descendants of Japheth are the Francum; that is, the Celtic. As shall be addressed in another article the Celtic were also established in the Western Iberian Peninsula, thus, becoming

13 Original text in Portuguese: “a arqueologia da costa mediterrânica, nomeadamente da costa ocidental, ...revela a existência de contactos comerciais entre o extremo Ocidente e a região do Mediterrâneo oriental”.

a contributing genetic element of the Portuguese's forefathers. According to Coward (2016:170),

...by linking the Welsh with Celtic, and thus with Gaul, and the migrations of the descendants of Gomer after the flood, they became not just the aboriginal inhabitants of Britain, but most of **Western Europe** [my emphasis].

It follows a brief study on the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew *Bible*.

(b) The *Tanakh* (the *Hebrew Bible*)

The *Tanakh* (the *Hebrew Bible*) is another important source of data pertaining to the Iberian Peninsula. The story of the Flood is included in the biblical narrative, which in general terms also pertains the Iberian Peninsula (*Holy Bible*, 1992:8). However, if the biblical town named Tarshish refers to Tartessos the most important biblical mention of the Iberian Peninsula is possibly that in *Isaiah* 23:1,6,10,14. As Dietler & López-Ruiz (2009:255) put it,

Within the Phoenician and Greek colonization in the Iberian Peninsula, the question of the possible identification of the protohistoric culture of Tartessos in the mentions of a legendary Tarshish in the *Hebrew Bible* is quite relevant.

About the 8th century BC King Jeroboam II (786-746 BC) reigned over the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the country prospered (Zorea, 2016:159). Zorea (2016:159) explains that,

The Northern Kingdom of Israel grew trade with Tyre and Sidon, where the Hebrew tribe of Asher and its descendants lived since the 14th century B.C. Tyre and Sidon likewise grew their trade, expanding their maritime commerce to the coasts of the Iberian Peninsula.

Phoenicians' slave trade possibly including Jews (Zorea, 2016:160) as well as the big earthquake of 760 BC which "geologists found evidence of" (Zorea, 2016:161) in Tyre, Israel, and the Jordan area "could have promoted additional emigration to the western Mediterranean, including the area of

Gadir (Cadiz, Spain), and the settlement of Doña Blanca in the Cadiz Bay” (Zorea, 2016:161). Corroboratively, Zorea (2016:161) informs that,

Archaeologists found ceramics in Tell Abu Hawam (today’s Bat-Galim in Haifa, Israel) that also date to the time of Hazor’s earthquake in 760 B.C. Other similar ceramics were likewise found in Tartessus (today’s Andalusia, Spain) that match the Tell Abu Hawam ceramics, suggesting a relationship between the regions.

Additionally, Zorea (2016:163-164) states that

Doña Blanca was founded in the 8th century as an offspring of Gadir/Cadiz. There is ceramic evidence confirming immigration of ‘Orientals’ to Tarshish. Among the many pieces of ceramics found are the so called “ceramics of Samaria”²⁹ from the 8th century B.C.... Samaria was the capital of the Kingdom of Israel, indicating that it was possible for the Hebrews of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to commerce with Tarshish.

The *Book of Obadiah* 1:20 also mention “The captives of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad”. According to Zorea (2016:166), the biblical (*Obadiah* 1:20) mention “the people of Israel being Canaanites [who were taken into exile], as far as Tzarfat [biblical Zarephath] (France) and those exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sefarad [Sepharad] (Spain)”.

Conclusion

This article has addressed ancient religious tendencies experienced by the civilizations living prior and immediately following Noah’s Flood. The study of their theological and theogony religious concepts and practices highlights how ancient civilizations experienced their faith either is a monotheist or in a polytheist way. With the above said in mind, Mesha served as an example of the monotheist tendency as Babylon was used as a model for the polytheist type of worship. This study included in the initial introduction, is relevant because it informs how the ancient settlers in the Western Iberian Peninsula based their faith and belief systems. Thus, such study contributes to the knowledge of and historical narrative about the Portuguese traditional religiosity.

With regard to the DNA tests conducted on hundreds of ancient skeletons of individuals found buried in the Iberian Peninsula, this study indicates how various peoples and at different epochs migrated to, lived in, and died in the Iberian Peninsula.

The last aspect dealt with in this article was an initial and basic literature review related to the main topic to be addressed: The Study of the Portuguese Traditional Religiosity. This literature included the mention of ancient Mesopotamian as well as Hebrew literature. However, the next article will continue to address other sources of literature review as well as other relevant matters.

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