

HELL AND HIGH WATER

Climate Change, Hope and the Human Condition

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Chapter Five

PRIDE AND ECOCIDE

As we have seen, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations considers it ‘very likely’ that global warming is primarily anthropogenic – caused by our lifestyles. ‘Very likely’ means 90–99% confident. We have also seen that the science is complex and, often, contested. It can therefore be difficult for even an informed layperson to figure out what to think and where to stand. That is why, at a risk of 1–9% of looking silly in my retirement, I will proceed from this point on by taking the IPCC’s findings as a given. From here on we will leave behind the debates about whether climate change is happening, whether it is anthropogenic and whether it is serious. According to the IPCC, the answer to these is yes, yes, yes. In Part 2 of this book we will turn our attention to even deeper questions. We will explore the implications of the consideration that as well as being a technical, economic, and political problem, climate change is also cultural, psychological and spiritual. It therefore presses us to appraise nothing less than the human condition. We have looked at the facts and figures of the planet’s climate in Part 1. Now we must explore the underlying values that shaped how we got there. Most important of all, if our optimism for the future is shaken, we must seek out whether and wherein lies hope.

On the surface of it all, climate change is a completely new challenge. It comes on top of many others including those

posed by resource depletion, biodiversity loss, habitat degradation, poverty and war. Most people probably think that worries about climate have appeared fresh in human consciousness. They probably see it as a recent ‘emergent property’ of industrialisation – that is to say, as a property that only became manifest as the scale of human impact on the planet accelerated. But such a view is far from the truth. Human beings have long worried about being visited in various permutations by hell or high water. Early writers often linked this to messing about with the minerals that nature had secreted away in the Earth’s crust. Mining and the smelting of metals has always been associated with air and water pollution, deforestation and avarice. As the Industrial Age took off, people additionally worried about burning the soft black rock known as coal, and now, of course, we can include the effects of mineral oil and gas.

The German scientist Georg Agricola was known as the ‘father of mineralogy’ on account of his magisterial text, *De Re Metallica* (On the Nature of Minerals). It was published in 1556 and, for nearly three centuries, stood as the West’s standard textbook of geology. Its most celebrated English translation from the Latin was produced in 1912 after five years’ intense work by a young mining engineer called Herbert Clark Hoover and his wife, Lou, who was both a Latinist and geologist. Later they were to occupy the White House, the Hoover Dam on the Colorado River serving as enduring testimony to Herbert’s presidency.

Agricola’s copious illustrations plainly show the deforestation and water pollution caused by mining in his day, yet he attacks the criticisms that Roman writers like Ovid, Seneca and Pliny had levelled against such arts. As he saw it, the benefits of extracting wealth from the bowels of the Earth manifestly outweighed the costs. The poets and philosophers were just being impractical dreamers the way that such likes always have been. As a Gaelic proverb puts it, ‘You won’t find chaff in the poet’s byre’, meaning that this isn’t the sort of character who labours for his bread like everybody else! Agricola found the Roman nay-sayers of mining irritating, but

at least he gives fair representation of what they said. Here's how it's put in the Hoover translation:

. . . they make use of this argument: 'The earth does not conceal and remove from our eyes those things which are useful and necessary to mankind, but on the contrary . . . she yields in large abundance from her bounty and brings into the light of day the herbs, vegetables, grains and fruits, and the trees. The minerals on the other hand she buries far beneath in the depth of the ground; therefore they should not be sought. But they are dug out by wicked men who, as poets say, are the products of the Iron Age.'¹

The argument between the eco-idyll and technocracy, then, is an old one. But the idea that human wickedness is associated with damage to the Earth is much older than even the Romans. We can find it forcefully expressed in some of the earliest written sources. Common amongst many ancient authorities is the view that 'hell and high water' were punishments sent by the gods who were angered by human hubris – by the 'pride' of ungrounded and inflated ego, wantonness, lies and violence. Discord in the social environment found its nemesis in the destruction of the natural environment and thus in the withdrawal of 'Heaven' from human affairs and the leaving behind of Hell on Earth.

As we shall see in the rest of this chapter, there is a rich irony here. The ancients blamed natural disasters on moral degeneration of which the temptations of mining were but one of many variants. That was certainly a credible diagnosis where there had been local or regional deforestation and loss of soil quality. But the biggest fear of the ancients was of flooding, and that on a global scale that threatened cities near the coast. From a modern scientific perspective this fear probably had little to do with human badness, but much to do with both the plate tectonics of the Earth's crust and, more interesting from our perspective as we will see, to 'natural' prehistoric climate change. The irony, then, is that the ancients developed an astute moral analysis of anthropogenic climate change but one

that is perhaps more applicable to us today than it often was to them. As ecological prophets, they were two or three thousand years ahead of their time.

We can therefore be enriched by reading their insights with a fresh eye. However, to do so we first need to develop that eye. We will need, sometimes, to set aside our 'positivist' concern for supposed factual history and understand that ancient manuscripts often deal with the interface between fact and myth. We need to read them less as history than as 'psycho-history' – as a revelation of the interplay between psychology and history. This may be a novel approach because our culture values factual truth over poetic truth. When it comes to seeking knowledge, we are very much in the head and very little in the heart. It makes us strong on empirical facts but weaker in wisdom. In contrast, the ancient mind, like that of many indigenous peoples still hanging on today, understood the value of mythopoesis. They could see that it is not just objective fact, but also forms of truth only communicable in subjective story, poetry and song that matter. These are what shape our experience of and participation in the ongoing birth of the world into reality. Such *poesis* is the root of our word, poetry. It means 'the making'. Mythopoesis is therefore the upwelling of reality from deep springs in the psyche of the world. When we understand Big Bang and evolution in terms of 'the Creation' as comprising such ongoing process, we bridge science and theology by grasping, late and last, the true nature of poetry.

The totality of human experience is 'outer' life harmonised with the activated 'inner' life that it takes to see this. What matters to achieve inner awakening about the significance of human affairs is less historical accuracy than 'psychological realism'. It's about permitting 'hi-story' in the magical as well as the literal sense – in terms of what the literary world calls 'magical realism'. Meaningful truth therefore stands out from mere autistic data collection. It must be not just logically valid; it must equally 'feel' true. Black Elk, the Oglala Lakota (Sioux) warrior and holy man put it perfectly. He said of his people's traditions, 'This they tell, and whether it happened so

or not I do not know; but if you think about it, *you can see that it is true.*²²

When fact and myth are integrated, the ‘head’ and ‘heart’ can open up realms of human knowing we never could otherwise have imagined. Such is the epistemology – the theory of the structure of knowledge – that can expand human experience into new paradigms of insight, and such is the basis on which I now venture to proceed in approaching early historical sources.

Let us start with an ancient text about the climate going crazy that will be familiar to many readers. But this time, let us consider it at least partly as psychohistory rather than incredulous ‘fact’. I’m referring here to the sixth chapter of the Book of Genesis in the Bible. Here we have a piece of ancient literature that scholars consider to be about 2,500 years old. I’ll present it using the King James ‘Authorised’ Version of 1611 because that’s the most poetic, the most dramatic and, therefore, the most psychodynamic English translation:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth. . . . The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was *filled with violence* . . . And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is *filled with violence* through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark . . . and, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh . . . and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

The rest, as they say, is history. But we miss the point if we think this is a tale literally about the animals going in two by two. The point, at least as it serves our purposes and as I’ve emphasised in italics above, is that we’re twice told that it is violence that’s the problem. Whatever else the story may or may not be, it most certainly serves as a moral fable. It reveals

the worldview of a society that allows violence to inundate its psyche. It shows how that psyche metaphorically floods, and so undermines the entire basis of its own subsistence.

The ancients were able to draw this lesson from what were probably residual memories of actual natural disasters. The connections they imputed to cause and effect may have been debatable depending on the kind of natural disaster that was in question. But if the ancients over-pathologised their psychic condition, we today go to the opposite extreme. Too many of us refuse to acknowledge and act upon the mindlessness that underlies anthropogenic climate change. We forget that hubris, which is a state that we accept almost as a norm in our helter-skelter hustle and bustle society, is a word that has its origin in the Greek *hybris*, meaning 'wanton violence'. We forget, too, that 'God' should be understood not as some fulminating Father Christmas figure in the sky. Rather, God as the theologian Paul Tillich put it is the 'ultimate concern' for which we yearn, the 'ground of being'. As such, we conveniently miss the point if we think that the finger or voice of God stands somehow apart from who we really are. The denial of God so understood becomes denial of one's deepest Self. It is nihilism's last call.

* * *

Noah, of course, emerges from the ark with his family and prime breeding stock with which to replenish the world. Humanity is mandated to fill (but it never said to overfill) the Earth. Meanwhile, God has set the rainbow in the sky as a sign of hope and promise that the Earth will never again be knocked back to Year Zero. Maybe not, but that doesn't mean that, on a lesser scale, wayward humankind might not still have it coming! One man who feared just that was Noah's great-grandson, King Nimrod.

Nimrod was the world's archetypal egomaniac – an exemplar of narcissistic male power. Just so that we don't miss the point, the writers of Genesis gave him a name that means 'rebel'. The point to grasp about narcissism is that the narcissist is not in love with his true self. He doesn't know his true

self because he's never done inner work. He only knows a reflection or image of himself that ego identity has outwardly crafted. Inauthenticity lies – in both senses of that word – at his very core, because we're dealing here with a self-centred rather than a centred self. Look in any male fashion magazine to see the type. Here is the man resourced not from the wellsprings of life within, but from the attention – favourable or unfavourable; it makes little difference – that others give him.

Psychotherapists call this attention seeking the quest for 'narcissistic supply'. Adult narcissists – men and women alike – are 'energy vampires' who supply their emotional deficiencies by drawing on others. They're the office egomaniacs, the actual or wannabe bigshots, those bustling centres of constant fluster where everything's on the outside – everything's so jolly, ever-so – and you wonder how much is really there inside. In the primary narcissistic phase of childhood it's perfectly normal and appropriate for the two-year-old to play at omnipotence; perfectly normal to shout, 'Look at me, I'm Superman!' But when this stage of development 'hangs' and carries over as secondary narcissism that persists into adulthood, it becomes socially problematic and spiritually perilous. It may be valued as a competitive stimulus in many of our commercial enterprises, sporting institutions and political organisations. The Donald Trumps of this world may think they've earned our adulation for their self-styled Trump Towers and their trumped-up business plans that succeed on the basis of push, push, push. But really, theologians have a name for such misplaced expectation of veneration, and our celebrity-obsessed culture maybe needs to wise-up about getting sucked into its gameplay.

The Book of Genesis makes the psychopathology very plain.³ We're told that Nimrod built his tower 'with its top in the heavens' precisely because, as he and his fellow Babylonians are quoted as saying, they wanted to 'make a name for ourselves'. Here, then, we have people who are stuck in the first half of life – in carving out an ego identity in the 'outer' world. They haven't moved on to the second half of life – grounding that identity in the far-reaching relationality of

community, and deepening to a fullness of 'inner' or spiritual realisation. They know themselves as the cork that visibly bobs along on the surface of things but haven't yet realised that they're also integral to the river's deep flow.

As Nimrod saw it, his relationship with God was just another battle between egos. His aim was therefore to trump the Lord. In terms of Oedipal psychology, he wanted to give Dad a drubbing, for to wrestle with 'the Lord' at this level is usually a parental projection. That's what gives God such a bad name! 'God' becomes Mum and Dad, and they were never good enough. Conversely, Mum and Dad catch the child's unconsciously protected yearnings for God, and so they're never good enough either! All of that is fairly normal, but the narcissist, lacking grounded relationship to deep reality, acts like they are God. Their 'ultimate concern' has shrunk to themselves. Such are the dynamics when the relationship between the small self and the great Self is out of kilter; when the cork of the ego floats not, as Shakespeare puts it in *The Comedy of Errors*, 'obedient to the streame', but in arrogant ignorance of the wider forces that actually sustain life.

So it was that Nimrod ventured out, Genesis tells us, to make his name. He and his cronies served self rather than others. They did so in the time-honoured manner of building a magnificent carbuncle of architectural phallocracy . . . that 'award winning' apogee of design both urban and urbane, the original Tower of Babel™.

Now, Nimrod venerated the cult of violence. In fact, we're told that he set the performance indicators on this score: he was 'the first on earth to become a mighty warrior'. He began his kingdom at Babel, which was known as Babylon to the Greeks. The name means 'Gate of God'. But depending on what is in their hearts, they who seek proximity to the gods are rewarded with either music or madness. As such, it's revealing that there's a double meaning in the name. Babel is also cognate with 'babble', meaning 'confusion'; and so the word carries a general suggestion of hubris. This, in the eyes of the ancients, was the greatest of sins.

Because the concept of hubris is so central to the thesis of

this book, it is worth further unpacking its meaning with some practical examples of usage. A fine one comes from *The Sunday Times* of 16 March 2008. Here Lord David Owen, formerly both a physician and a British foreign secretary, applies the term to George Bush and Tony Blair in the run-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He explains:

In ancient Greek drama, a hubristic career proceeds something like this: the hero wins glory and acclamation by achieving unwonted success against the odds. The experience then goes to his head: he begins to think himself capable of anything. This leads him into misinterpreting the reality around him and into making mistakes. Eventually he gets his comeuppance and meets his nemesis, which destroys him.

The Oxford English Dictionary similarly cites Aldous Huxley as saying: 'The Greeks . . . knew very well that hubris against the essentially divine order of Nature would be followed by its appropriate nemesis.' It also lists the first known English language application of the word as having been surprisingly recent. It was a newspaper article from 1884 which said: 'Boys of good family, who have always been toadied, and never been checked, who are full of health and high spirits, develop what Academic slang knows as hubris, a kind of high-flown insolence.' That sounds like Nimrod! And as we'll see shortly, it most certainly fits his near-contemporary, Gilgamesh. In short, hubris is the pursuit of life out of relationship with God. The 'obedience' to the stream in question is not blind compliance, but rather a readiness to go with the deep flow of reality – the movement of the Tao, the unfolding of Dharma, the cosmic play that Hindus call *lila* and which courts as lover the Lord or Goddess of the Dance.

That is why theologians consider all else to be idolatrous: 'There is no god but God.'

According to archaeologists, Babel was located 90 kilometres south of present-day Baghdad. Its proximity to contemporary geopolitical hubris will not escape our notice. Genesis is not the only source of what supposedly happened there. Falvius

Josephus, the first-century authority on Jewish history fleshes the story out for us. He says:

Now it was Nimrod who excited them [the Babylonians] to such an affront and contempt of God . . . He also gradually changed the government into tyranny – seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence upon his own power. He also said he would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach! and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers!⁴

What we are seeing is that Nimrod stands for more than just worldly power. This is also a spiritual struggle of the ‘Powers that Be’.⁵ Here is Tolkien or Harry Potter writ first-millennium BC style. That’s what you get to when you start looking at these old stories not necessarily as factual history but as living myth that echo down the corridors of time, patterning our present-day condition. The archetypal message of Nimrod is plain: pride leads to violence because it lives a lie that cuts us off from the fullness of relationship with others. Ecocide, the death of nature (as in homicide but applied to the environment), is the extension of that violence into nature. If we want to understand the scorched-earth consequences of a Saddam Hussein, a Hitler, a Pol Pot or even those who have lied and abused political power closer to home, it helps to consider such a framework of interpretation.

What happens next in Genesis is that God trumps Nimrod by the expedient of confusing the people’s language. The big-name contractors all fell out with one another, the lawyers presumably got very rich, and the nations, Genesis tells us, scattered unto the ends of the Earth. As the psalmist later put it, the bottom-line is always the same: ‘Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.’⁶ So much for the world’s first bid at technofix. So much for the first failure to grasp the importance of lifestyle change in the face of hell’s high water.

* * *

Babylon was at the centre of the ancient civilised world. In terms of psychohistory it is the archetypal city – a psychic template that patterns and helps organise subsequent human experience. But what was it that placed Babylon so much at the heart of earliest recorded human history? Here we must revert to a bit of historical realism through anthropology.

We need to start with human evolution and the probable fact that, for millions of years, our proto-human forebears had evolved as hunter gatherers in the savannahs and forests of Africa. As *Homo sapiens*, 'we' probably established as a species distinct from the other apes around 200,000 years ago. The earliest fully human fossils are some 130,000 years old, but scientists consider we'd have been on the go a bit longer than that. It is thought that we came out of Africa around 100,000 years ago.⁷ As Africa's neighbour by land, the 'Fertile Crescent' was probably the first part of the wider world to be settled. It comprises the vast arc of alluvial soils watered by the rivers Nile, Jordan, Euphrates and Tigris, stretching from Egypt, through the Holy Land, to Iraq and on into Iran. In Biblical geography the Fertile Crescent was home to the Garden of Eden. As populations swelled, hunter-gathering gave way to the first settled agriculture, villages evolved into cities, and later historians came to speak of the Crescent having been the 'Cradle of Civilisation'.

That designation, however, reflects a certain bias in what is meant by 'civilisation'. Abundant literary and archaeological evidence suggests that violence was central to the organisation of the early Sumerian-speaking cities of Mesopotamia – a name that means 'between the rivers'. The Nimrod story in Genesis 10 is fascinating because it purports to document this emergence of highly centralised urban power hand in hand with a governing system of social domination.

The environmental consequences of such a way of life were inevitable. Genesis tells us, and the archaeology confirms it, that the cities of kings like Nimrod were built of bricks and mortar. This has ecological implications. Firing bricks and feeding the workforce required massive fuel and food imports from the surrounding rural hinterland. Over time, pressure on

the land led to the first regional ecological catastrophe in documented human history. In 1936 when Leonard Woolley published the findings of his seven years' excavation of ancient cities such as Ur in the deserts of southern Iraq, he said:

Only to those who have seen the Mesopotamian desert will the evocation of the ancient world seem well-nigh incredible, so complete is the contrast between past and present . . . It is yet more difficult to realise that the blank waste ever blossomed [and] bore fruit for the sustenance of a busy world. Why, if Ur was an empire's capital, if Sumer was once a vast granary, has the population dwindled to nothing, the very soil lost its virtue?⁸

Because these people were literate and kept accounting records, the answer to Woolley's question was found scratched in their own hand on tablets of clay. It makes for a fascinating detective story. Around 3,000 BCE – that is, 5,000 years ago – roughly equal amounts of wheat and barley had been grown. But wheat can withstand only about half a per cent of salt in the soil, while barley can tolerate up to 2%. Deforestation and soil erosion had led to the silting up of rivers which, together with irrigation, raised the water table. Instead of flushing through and eventually down to the sea, salts found naturally in rocks, soils and therefore in river water, concentrated in the topsoil as irrigation water evaporated. The consequence of such salination can be charted through time in the ratio of wheat to barley production. It relentlessly declined over the course of a millennium until, by 1,700 BCE, wheat had virtually disappeared.

Contemporary reports spoke of the soil sometimes turning white, presumably from salt precipitating out. In the centuries that followed the agricultural base in the south collapsed. The metropolis had to move north to the area around modern Baghdad, and there the same sorry saga was repeated all over again.⁹ What had once been a resilient ecosystem – its soil bound in place and kept in good heart by rich plant and animal biodiversity – became a brittle ecosystem, easy to damage but hard to repair. Eventually with the moisture-retaining humus

gone little more than desert sands remained. As such, the bricks with which early civilisation was built extracted a price higher than that of human slavery alone. Demand for firewood and food with which to feed the workforce crashed much of the ecosystem. The deserts over which we now squabble for oil are but the remnant of paradise lost, Babylon's fabled Hanging Gardens having been long since relegated from the top seven league of world wonders.

Bitumen was the mortar often used to bind the buildings of Babylon. In a peculiar irony the first examples of accidental death that are cited in the Bible are found in Genesis 14:10, where some of the fleeing kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fell into bitumen pits after battling their foes in the Dead Sea valley of Siddim. We generally miss this curiosity because the King James Version mistranslates them as 'slimepits'. The truth has more poetic justice. The sheiks and warlords of the Middle East spent their time thrashing one another, trashing the planet and drowning in oil even then just as they continue so to do today.

It all seems almost wearily inevitable, but must it be so? Here we might cue and cut to the controversial twentieth-century feminist archaeologist Marija Gimbutas. Gimbutas was Professor of European Archaeology at the University of California, Los Angeles, from 1964 to 1969. From her excavation of Neolithic sites in 'Old Europe' she claimed that ancient Mediterranean cultures, bordering onto western Mesopotamia between about 6,500 and 3,500 BCE, were peaceable and, if not specifically 'matriarchal', then at least expressing a high level of equality between the genders.¹⁰ The overwhelming consensus amongst her peers is that this fascinating woman exceeded her evidence and ignored contrary points of view.¹¹ Yet, something in the strength of her ideas has given them wide popular influence especially amongst feminists. She claimed that many early societies showed little evidence of fortification, few skeletal signs of violent death, equality of men and women in burial, and a proliferation of 'goddess' figurines that suggested the veneration of feminine deities. However, as Bronze Age invaders swept in using the horse to extend their range of

warfare, this Arcadia was forced to become militarised and, along with that, patriarchal. This, as she might have put it, was what paved the way for Nimrod's empire. According to Gimbutas's take on archaeology, settlements then became fortified, skeletal evidence pointed to violent mass death, men's graves were honoured more than those of women, and out went the gentle goddesses and in came the male war gods.

Comparative anthropology suggests that patriarchy and high levels of violence are widespread but not inevitable to human societies. Like Josephus tells us with Nimrod bringing people into 'a constant dependence upon his own power', these attributes appear to be acquired cultural characteristics. But once violence becomes normalised in a society it perpetuates its own reinforcing spiral. Unresolved and even celebrated as heroic, violence in its many manifestations enters the psyche of children and knocks on down through the generations. Until recently a statement like that might have been dismissed as speculative psychobabble. No longer is that the case. Recent advances in neurobiology now provide graphic evidence supporting the view that violence really does breed violence. Brain imaging shows that when a child is reared in a high-stress environment, the parts of its brain associated with empathy and head-heart communication between the hemispheres appear to show stunted growth. In an article in *Scientific American*, Martin Teicher, a Harvard professor of psychiatry, discusses this and concludes that:

Society reaps what it sows in the way it nurtures its children. Stress sculpts the brain to exhibit various antisocial, though adaptive, behaviours. Whether it comes in the form of physical, emotional or sexual trauma or through exposure to warfare, famine or pestilence, stress can set off a ripple of hormonal changes that permanently wire a child's brain to cope with a malevolent world. Through this chain of events, violence and abuse pass from generation to generation as well as from one society to the next. Our stark conclusion is that we see the need to do much more to ensure that child abuse does not happen in the first place, because once these key brain alterations occur, there may be no going back.¹²

If, today, we Google the name of our Babylonian warlord, the first item to come up is a British military website. With no hint of shame it says: 'The Nimrod MRA4 is a maritime reconnaissance and attack aircraft.' Nimrods have been a backbone to British defence policy from the Cold War all the way to Iraq and Afghanistan. As such, the archetypal spirit of 'the first on earth to become a mighty warrior' rumbles on like a rusty chariot down millennial corridors of time. The reason why Gimbutas touched the nerve she did is that her narrative, archaeologically flimsy though it may be, speaks a life-giving psychological truth. Shortly we will see that ancient literary evidence lends it some interesting support. It matters because it is a narrative less perhaps of history, but of possibility. It counterpoints the grim inevitability of violence and Professor Teicher's thesis about its possibly permanent knock-on effects. Thankfully, there is indication that even serious personality disorders such as psychopathy can, with care and patience, be treated.¹³ Just as stroke victims can be helped to overcome brain damage, so can some of those whose childhood social environments disposed their cognitive and emotional functioning towards violence. Like all warlords, Nimrod is an extreme example of the human condition, but one that reflects an archetypal pattern that carries consequences. Inasmuch as these consequences ultimately affect the environment, and so climate change, we must press our exploration still deeper.

* * *

It is not just Noah and Nimrod that make ancient literary connections between human behaviour and flooding. There are dozens and, some scholars would say, several hundred early texts that echo flood narratives. The most important of these are *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and writings of the Greek philosopher Plato.

Gilgamesh is a work that has long interested Biblical historians because it is roughly contemporary with, and very closely parallels to, the story of Noah's flood. It was scratched out on clay tablets some 5,000 years ago in Uruk in the southern part of that primordial city's modern namesake, Iraq.¹⁴ It is gener-