

## The Demise of the Greek Deluge Myth in the Christian Narration: The Case of Deucalion

It has long been known that the biblical story of a universal deluge was not the only flood tradition in circulation among the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures. The figures of Atrahasis and Utnapishtim are well-known to modern scholars, indicating as they do a definitive relationship between the biblical account and earlier Mesopotamian legends. More familiar to the ancients, however, was the Greek myth of Deucalion, the “Greek Noah” who, along with his wife Pyrrha, survived a catastrophic deluge by taking refuge in an ark-like boat, ultimately running aground on Mount Parnassus in Thessaly.

Among the earliest Christian apologists, the myth of Deucalion provided a critical bridge between the world of Greek prehistory and the biblical narrative of a universal deluge. Directly conflating Deucalion with the biblical figure of Noah was a common apologetic tactic during the first two centuries of the Christian faith, a useful identification that could be used to convince educated pagans of the historical veracity of the Hebrew bible. As we shall see, however, such a one-to-one correlation between Noah and Deucalion was not to remain the dominant interpretation of the flood story. During the second and third centuries, Christian chronographers would increasingly insist on a separation between the two figures, downgrading Deucalion to the far inferior status of surviving a later, more localized Thessalian deluge.

Why did such a shift take place? In this paper I argue that three related trajectories led to the ultimate rejection of Deucalion as the “Greek Noah” by the ancient Church. The detrimental toll exacted by rival claims to antiquity played its part: a positive correlation between the two deluge accounts could just as easily lead to the incorporation of the Noah story into Greek myth, an argument utilized by the influential anti-Christian apologist Celsus. Insufficient attention to the Deucalion legend by ancient Jewish authorities such as Philo and Josephus also likely

contributed to the reluctance by late third-century Christian chronographers to allow substantial parallels between the two deluge myths. Finally, there was the role played by polemical warfare: the enthusiastic incorporation of Deucalion into the deluge myths of several Gnostic strands likely turned their rivals away from capitalizing on its apologetic possibilities.