

Antiquity and Arithmetic: Hyperbole and a Rhetorical-Critical Reading of Noah's Ark

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1. Introduction

Few canonical writings are as formative to the shape of Scripture as Genesis. As the first book of the Pentateuch, Genesis is “the fountainhead from which the Bible’s ‘Torah’ (its teaching) flows.”¹⁾ Though the details themselves are somewhat meager, the account of Noah’s Ark is among “the best known of all Biblical tales”—capturing the imagination of countless people.²⁾

But if Noah did exist, build the Ark, victual it, and survive a cataclysmic Deluge while on board with the “seed” of all life on earth, something Scripture seems to markedly indicate (cf. Gen 5:25–11:10; Isa 54:9; Ezek 14:14, 20; 1 Chr 1:3, 4; Mat 24:27, 38; Luk 3:36, 17:26, 27; Heb 11:7; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:5), numerous questions arise concerning this Brobdingnagian

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- 1) John Goldingay, *Genesis Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, Baker: 2020), ix. Veritably, Genesis stands “second to none” concerning its import for understanding God’s plan(s) and purpose(s) for His creation since it “presents the literary and theological underpinning of the canonical Scriptures.” Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11*, Christian Standard Bible Commentary (China: Holman Reference, 2023), 5.
- 2) Ralph K Pedersen, “Noah’s Ark – A Sewn Boat?” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 31 (2005), 20–23 and 55–56 (quote from pg. 20). See also Dustin G. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation: A Rhetorical-Critical Reading of Noah’s Flood in Genesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2022), 111.

vessel which demand our attention—the primary points being the size of the Ark and its design.³⁾

This paper will examine Noah's Flood using rhetorical criticism (rhetoric as persuasion) to better ascertain the claim that the Ark's dimensions may, perhaps, be “hyperbolic numbers.”⁴⁾ The study has two main parts. The first section traces the major issues concerning a so-called ‘conventional’ interpretation of the dimensions of Noah's Ark, whilst delineating the broader contours of ship making at large (and the ancient Near East). The second section focuses more specifically on hyperbole wherein I will be relying heavily on logic, linguistics, and rhetoric.⁵⁾

My paper concludes that the Genesis account is marked by moderation and refrains from exaggeration in its depiction of the dimensions and design of Noah's Ark. Several things are indicating this: (1) the Ark resembles the standard shape of most sea-faring vessels, distinct from ancient Near Eastern Deluge accounts, (2) there is a notable absence of hyperbolic elements such as qualifying superlatives, gradability, universalistic language, and the like, (3) there is a lack of ‘pretense’ in the divine speech regarding the Ark—underscored by the narrator's affirmation(s).

3) Incontrovertibly, “the narrative of the [biblical] text [of Genesis] is anchored in historical events.” Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 8 (see too pp. 532-44). That said, as Tremper Longman III and John H. Walton maintain: “the events themselves (yes, they happened[!]) find their significance in the interpretation[s] that they are given in the biblical text.” *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 17. Cf. Jitse M. Vam Der Meer, “Genesis, Science, and Theories of Origins,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Genesis*, ed., Bill T. Arnold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Printing House, 2022), 236-61.

4) Longman and Walton, *Lost World of the Flood*, 38. Cf. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 9, 111-19.

5) For more details, see Dustin G. Burlet, “Waddy Mean ‘It’s Just Hyperbole! You’ve Gotta Be Kidding Me!’ The Prophet Zephaniah and the Book of Genesis,” *Torch Trinity Journal* 26 (2023), 43-80, particularly pp. 61-68.

2. Noah's Ark & Ships of Antiquity

While many scholars note that the relations between the length, width, and height of Noah's Ark (roughly 450 feet long, 75 feet in width, and 45 feet in height) recapitulates the standard shape of most sea-faring vessels (30:5:3), including its specific length to width ratio (6:1), researchers (biblical and otherwise) also raise concerns about the Ark's dimensions due to established knowledge of ancient seamanship and naval engineering which provide evidence signifying that the Ark would have been impressively large compared to many other ships within antiquity.⁶⁾ As John H. Walton asserts:

Prior to the invention of sea-worthy vessels which could carry sailors and cargo through the heavy seas of the Mediterranean, most boats were made of skin or reeds and were designed to sail through marshes or along the river bank. They were used for fishing or hunting and would not have been more than 10 feet in length. True sailing ships, with a length of 170 feet, are first depicted in Old Kingdom Egyptian art (ca. 2,500 BC) and are described in Ugaritic (1,600–1,200 BC) and Phoenician (1,000–500 BC) texts. Even this late they generally navigated within sight of land, with trips to Crete and Cyprus as well as the ports along the coasts of Egypt, the Persian Gulf, and Asia Minor.”⁷⁾

That is, “no seagoing ships even approaching such large dimensions were built by either the Greeks or the Romans even at the most advanced stage of their technical development of shipbuilding, when magnificent triremes were being constructed in Attic shipyards.”⁸⁾

6) See Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 110–19.

7) John H. Walton et al., eds., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 36–37.

Given that the Ark was intentionally designed to withstand the most colossal of storms, namely the very undoing of creation—cosmos to chaos—it is peculiar how Noah’s incredible contribution to nautical engineering “vanished without a trace, and the seafarers returned to their hollow logs and reed rafts. Like a passing mirage, the ark was here one day and gone the next, leaving not a ripple in the long saga of shipbuilding.”⁹⁾

Interestingly, the third century BC Tesseractonteres (‘forty-fitted’), built by Ptolemy IV Philopator, was a “veritable behemoth,” which reportedly carried catapults, several thousand souls, and was about 425 feet (130 meters) long.¹⁰⁾ That said, according to Plutarch, the imposing Tesseractonteres was not built for speed or military stratagem but “merely for show [...] being meant for exhibition and not for use, she was moved only with difficulty and danger.”¹¹⁾

8) This section (namely this specific sentence and the next paragraph) has been derived in its entirety from Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 114. NB: the original quote is from Rapheal Patai, *Children of Noah: Jewish Seafaring in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 5. See also Lionel Casson, *Ships and Seafaring: Seamanship in the Ancient World*, Revised ed. (Baltimore, MY: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 60–77. Cf. Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Baltimore, MY: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) alongside Lionel Casson, *The Ancient Mariners*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

9) Robert A. Moore, “The Impossible Voyage of Noah’s Ark,” *Creation/Evolution Journal* 4 (2008), 1–39 (quote from pg. 3). Cf. Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The World of the Bible in the Light of History*, Melton Research Center Series 1 (New York: Melton Research Center, 1966), 38–40 alongside Dustin G. Burlet, “Cosmos to Chaos—Chaos to Covenant: A Rhetorical-Critical Reading of the Noachic Deluge Narrative,” (PhD diss.; McMaster Divinity College, 2019) wherein I opined (121): “That Noah began farming (not fishing!) perhaps bespeaks much with respect to the specifics concerning the construction of the ark.” One hopes this article rectifies this infelicity.

10) Casson, *Ships and Seafaring*, 61.

11) Plutarch, “The Life of Demetrius 43:4,” as found within *Plutarch Lives IX: Demetrius*

Alongside this, much controversy also surrounds the so-called Chinese “treasure ships” that were commanded by Zheng He (1,371–1,435 AD), whose flagship measured about 444 *chi*, i.e., about 450 feet (137 meters) and 180 feet (55 meters) wide.¹²⁾ To summarize, it is reasonable to conclude that if such boats were ever actually built, a matter of no small dispute within the academy, they were, unequivocally, unseaworthy “luxury ships” that were only (potentially) used on certain, calmer rivers, such as the Yangtze, in order to display the emperor’s power.¹³⁾

3. Noah’s Ark

The Flood narrative, in general, involves plot, sequence, and time (chronology/calendar).¹⁴⁾ The construction of Noah’s Ark is no different. While the Hebrew poses some not insignificant philological, lexical, and text-critical challenges, including certain

and Antony. *Pyrrhus and Gaius Marius* Loeb Classic Library, trans. Perrin Bernadotte (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), 910. See also Casson, *Ships and Seafaring*, 111–12. More stimulating information can also be found in Larry Pierce, “The Large Ships of Antiquity,” *Creation* 22 (2000), 46–48. Cf. Laura Welch and Tim Chaffey, eds., *Inside Noah’s Ark: Why it Worked* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf, 2016), 15.

- 12) Amanda Yeargin, “China and East Asia, 1000 to 1500 CE,” in *The Sea in World History, Exploration, Travel, and Trade I: Ancient Egypt through the First Global Age*, ed. Stephen K. Stein (Denver, CO: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 217–21.
- 13) Yeargin, “China and East Asia,” 220. See also Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 4:3 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 4:480 and Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne 1405–1433* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 80. Cf. Warren Nunn, “Amazing Ancient Chinese Treasure Ships,” *Creation* 37 (2014), 12–13.
- 14) See Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 84. Cf. Michael Lefebvre, *The Liturgy of Creation: Understanding Calendars in Old Testament Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019). For a graphic depiction of the Deluge plotline in *toto* see Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 319.

other difficulties due to the incomplete “construction plan,” the discourse itself still contains a “recognizable logic.”¹⁵⁾

First, the material is given (Gen 6:14a; cf. Ezek 27:6), i.e., “gopher wood” (גֹּפֶר).¹⁶⁾ Other details, such as the Ark requiring “reeds” (קָנִים) are also provided (Gen 6:14a).¹⁷⁾ These details are then coupled (see Gen 6:14b) with the fact that Noah must also “caulk” (כָּפַר) the Ark with “asphalt,” i.e., “bitumen,” or “pitch” (כֹּפֶר).¹⁸⁾ As is often mentioned by scholars, this rare

15) J. C. Gertz, *Genesis 1-11*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 2023), 299. For more details concerning Noah’s Ark and the Tabernacle, see Gertz, *Genesis 1-11*, 301 alongside Terence Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 38, 268-69.

16) It is recognized that this term is formed from “a transcription of the Hebrew גֹּפֶר (*gpr*), an unknown type of tree specified here as the source of the wood for the ark.” David M. Carr, *Genesis 1-11*, International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021), 226. NB: the Old Greek/Septuagint, i.e., the LXX, offers little help here as it simply speaks of ζύλων τετραγώνων, i.e., “squared wood [lumber]” (NETS); that is, a rather generic term within most construction projects (Ex 27:1, 28:16, 30:2, 36:16 (39:9); III Kgs 7:31*, 35; Ezek 41:21, 43:16, 17, 45:2, 48:20; 1 Mac 10:11 etc). Gertz, *Genesis 1-11*, 300. Cf. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 111.

17) If one re-vocalizes the text, the word can be taken as meaning “out of reed[s]” (prefixed as an “accusative of material, see Exod 25:29; 29:2 and GKC §117hh [IBHS §10.2.3c; JM §125v] [...] rather than the MT קָנִים ‘nests’.”) Gertz, *Genesis 1-11*, 266. Cf. Tal, *BHQ*, 94 and Brian R. Doak, *Genesis 1-11: A Selective Commentary for Meditation and Sermon Preparation*, The Preacher’s Hebrew Companion Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2023), 192. As Gertz clarifies elsewhere within the same (aforementioned) volume (pg. 300), this form of re-vocalization “would correspond to ancient shipbuilding since waterlogged reeds were used to seal the joints between larger timbers.” In contrast, another scholar states: “Most likely the reeds were fastened to the wooden beams of the ark rather than being used for matting or caulking (the latter role being played by the pitch).” John Day, *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1-11* (New York: T. and T. Clark, 2013), 122. Cf. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11*, 330.

18) *DCH* 4:455; *Gesenius*¹⁸ 566-67; *HALOT* 1:495; *BDB* 498; *NIDOTTE* 2:711; *TLOT* 2:626; *TWOT* 1:1025.

word, “pitch” (כֶּפֶר), only occurs once (*hapax legomenon*) within the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (HB/OT) and has a clear relationship with the ancient Near East (ANE) Flood epics.¹⁹⁾

Clauss Westermann comments: “It is worthy of note [that] in Gilg. XI a huge cubic box is called a ‘ship,’ while in Gen 6 the ark, which is much more like a ship, is described as a chest.”²⁰⁾ Given such, it may, perhaps, be prudent to think of the Ark as being something more “barge-like” instead of “boat like” *per se*.²¹⁾ Similarly, Dustin Atlas (judiciously) argues:

What the ark is not is a ship (*oniya*) [...] or a device intended to get from a to b. As Ezra interprets it, the story ‘uses the term ark (*tevah*) and not ship, for it did not have the shape of a ship nor did it have oars’ (Ibn Ezra 1988, p. 100). And this is, I think, a fruitful reading: the vessel (like Moses’) must float, and must protect its precious inhabitants, to save them for the future. But the journey it begins has no set destination. It is more like a free-floating protective bubble or casing than a ship. In any case, it is a protective *thing*.²²⁾

19) Indeed, “Das im Aleten Testament nur hier belegte *kôpar* (sonst: *hēmār*; vgl. Gen 11,3; 14, 10; Ex 2,3) erinnert an akkadisch *kuṣru* „Erdpech“, das auch beim Schiffsbau Verwendung fand und entsprechend in der mesopotamischen Überlieferung des Sintflutmythos belegt ist (vgl. Atr III I, 33; Gilg XI, 55, 66).” Jan Christian Gertz, *Das erste Buch Mose (Genesis) Die Urgeschichte Gen 1–11* (Göttingen: V&R, 2021), 253.

20) Clauss Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, trans. John J. Scullion S. J. (Minneapolis, MN: 1984), 420.

21) See Robert M. Best, *Noah’s Ark and the Ziusudra Epic: Sumerian Origins of the Flood Myth* (Fort Myers, FL: Enlil, 1999), 81 but compare Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 111–19. See too Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (London, Paternoster: 1955), 157–58 alongside Andrew S. Kulikovsky, *Creation, Fall, Restoration: A Biblical Theology of Creation* (Scotland, Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 224. “The Gk turns it with χιβωτός, the Vg with *arca*, hence ark. In Sumerian, the vessel is designated *magurgur* = a very large ship, in Babylonian *elippu rabitu* = a large ship, in Gilg. XI simply *elippu*.” Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 420.

Notably (as somewhat alluded to above) the Hebrew word for “Ark” (תֵּבָה) only occurs elsewhere within Exod 2:3, 5 and is “not related to any of the more common [...] terms for ‘boat’ (though boats generally do not play a major role in Old Testament spirituality and geography).”²³⁾

It stands written: Noah was to build the Ark three hundred cubits in length, fifty cubits in breadth, and thirty cubits in height (Gen 6:15).²⁴⁾ According to Gertz, this is approximately 135 meters (440 feet) long, 17.5 meters (57 feet) broad, and 13.5 meters (44 feet) high given the standard 18” (roughly 45 cm) cubit, i.e., the construction formula found in Exod 25:10, 17, 23.²⁵⁾ If, though, one compares the Siloam Tunnel Inscription (*ANET* 321; *COS* 2:145–46), which is also called KAI 189, to certain other texts utilizing the so-called Egyptian “long” cubit, which is about 52 cm in its total length (see Ezek 40:5ff; 43:13; cf. 1 Chr 3:3), the dimensions of Noah’s Ark would be about 156 meters (512

22) Dustin Atlas, “The Ark and Other Bubbles: Jewish Philosophy and Surviving the Disaster,” *Religions* 13 (2022), 1–20 (quotation from pg. 9. Italics original).

23) Doak, *Genesis 1–11*, 192. To be clear, the English word “Ark” originates from the Latin *arca* (chest or box). Cf. *NIDOTTE* 4:269–72. For more details on etymology etc. see Mark Payne, “What’s an Ark?,” *Relegere* 7 (2018), 73–91 (esp. pg. 74). An interesting interplay between Noah’s Ark, the LXX, and Deucalion’s ark is found in Alan Dickin, “The Design of Noah’s Ark and Its Significance for Biblical Faith,” *PSCF* 74 (2022), 94.

24) One scholar prudently notes that while most scholars “work with cubits measuring fifty cm. per cubit [...] this cannot be verified since it is a modern approximation based on circumstantial evidence. For general purposes the number of cubits can be converted into the modern system by halving the number of cubits and multiplying by three for the number of feet (see M. Powell, “Weights and Measures,” *ABD* 6:899–900).” Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 330. NB: for the sake of clarity, the term ‘cubit’ comes from the Latin *cubitus*, ‘elbow,’ and is the length from one’s fingertip to elbow. See Jonathan D. Sarfati, *The Genesis Account: A Theological, Historical, and Scientific Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (Powder Springs, GA: Creation Book Publishers, 2015) 499.

25) Gertz, *Genesis 1–11*, 300. Cf. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 112.

feet) by 26 meters (85 feet) by 15.6 meters (51 feet).²⁶ As a hapax legomenon, the relationship of the “roof” (תעשה) to Noah’s Ark is “difficult to understand,” as is how Noah was to finish the Ark from above “to a cubit” (see Gen 6:16).²⁷

Lastly, Noah’s Ark was outfitted with a single “entrance” (פֶּתַח), something that becomes increasingly prominent within the latter narrative (Gen 7:13–16; cf. Gen 8:18–19).²⁸ The Ark is also understood as having “three decks,” i.e., “lower, middle, and upper stories” (Gen 6:16b).²⁹

In sum, many scholars understand the relations between the height, length, and width of Noah’s Ark as something “reckoned to be ‘shipshape’ for seafaring, i.e. ‘a type of vessel characterized by a comparatively narrow beam combined with considerable

26) See Gertz, *Genesis 1–11*, 300. Cf. Carol A. Hill, “A Time and a Place for Noah,” *PCSF* 53 (2001), 24–40 and Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 516–17.

27) Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 330. The NET Bible states: “The idea is that Noah was to leave an 18-inch opening from the top for a window for light.” Cf. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 112–13.

28) See Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 330. That is: “The door on the side is specifically mentioned because it is important for Noah, his family, and the animals to go in and out and, because of the roof (?), the ark cannot be loaded from the top as was typical of ships in antiquity.” Gertz, *Genesis 1–11*, 301. Others state: “[Gen 6:16] tells us very clearly that the ark that Noah is to construct is not a ship. The door is mentioned here because the entrance into and exit from the ark form important stages in the narrative.” Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 421.

29) “The Gilgamesh Epic reports on seven stories, each subdivided into nine sections, giving sixty-three compartments in all. The vessel of Atrahasis seems to have had only two decks.” Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: PA, 1989), 52. One scholar opines the three ‘stories’ correspond to “the Priestly conception of the structure of the world.” Gertz, *Genesis 1–11*, 301. Cf. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 67–68. For more details, see Joshua Joel Spelstra, “Noah’s Ark and the Flood in Judaism and Islam: A Bi-optic Perspective of Salvation and Sacred Space” *Scriptura* 122 (2023), 1–11 especially the section “Sacred Space and Temple Ideology.”

length of hull and shallowness of draught.’ This would make the ark extremely capable of withstanding inclement weather with respect to pitch, yaw, and roll (list and heel).”³⁰⁾ Victor P. Hamilton, for instance, asserts that “the size of Noah’s ark possibly suggests that it was large enough and strong enough to weather the Flood, and that it contained enough space (an approximate total deck area of 95,700 sq. ft.) to accommodate all the animals.”³¹⁾ Accounting for a 15 percent reduction in volume due to hull curvature, the Ark had about the equivalent of 450 semi-trailers of cargo space *in toto* with a total displacement of about 43,000 tons.³²⁾ Veritably, the massive size of this “handmade wooden craft staggers the imagination, and its seaworthy proportions incite admiration.”³³⁾

3.1. Noah’s Ark: A Select ‘Pre-Reformation’ History of Interpretation

Norman Cohn (a master historian) claims that many interpreters have more or less taken the biblical account of the dimensions of Noah’s Ark—alongside the basic functionality of the craft itself, that is, its inherent sea worthiness and capacity to offer safe passage—at “face value.”³⁴⁾

30) D. G. Burlet, “Choose Your Own Adventure! Heutagogy and Teaching Genesis 1–11” *Didakitos* 4 (2021), 30–33 alongside Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 114.

31) Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 282. For an astute article (including graphics!) see Abraham-Ofir Shemesh, “The Lion is Hungry, and the Chameleon Does Not Eat: Jewish Midrashic Traditions Concerning the Animals in Noah’s Ark,” *Religious Studies and Theology* 40 (2021), 44–65. Cf. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 113, 141–42.

32) Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 282. See too Michael Belknap and Tim Chaffey, “How Could All the Animals Fit on the Ark?” (April 2, 2019): <https://answersingenesis.org/noahs-ark/howcould-all-animals-fit-ark/>.

33) Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 135.

Flavius Josephus (37–100 AD), for instance, seemed to maintain that the dimensions of the Ark were straightforward; its unique construction rendering it safe at sea. He states:

That he [Noah] should make an ark of four stories high, three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits broad, and thirty cubits high. Accordingly he entered into that ark, and his wife and sons, and their wives, and put into it not only other provisions, to support their wants there, but also sent in with the rest all sorts of living creatures, the male and his female, for the preservation of their kinds; and others of them by sevens. Now this ark had firm walls, and a roof, and was braced with cross beams, so that it could not be any way drowned or overborne by the violence of the water. And thus was Noah, with his family, preserved.³⁵⁾

Origen of Alexandria (ca. 184–ca. 253 AD), one of the greatest geniuses the early church ever produced, also wrote at length concerning Noah’s Ark, including the particulars and specifics of its dimensions, certain logistical issues, and the effective administration therefore.³⁶⁾

Having been provoked by Apelles, a disciple of the heretic Marcion, who declared that “the ark described in Genesis would hardly be large enough to house four elephants,” Origen coun-

34) Norman Cohn, *Noah’s Flood: The Genesis Story in Western Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 37 and 143. NB: more particulars concerning these matters will be delineated later on within this article.

35) Welch and Chaffey, eds., *Inside Noah’s Ark*, 11 quoting *Josephus: The Complete Works* (chapter three). Elsewhere Josephus defends Noah’s long age (*The Antiquities of the Jews* 1.3.9. 107–08) and believes that remnants of the Ark could still be found ‘that day’ (*The Antiquities of the Jews* 1.3.5 (92b) and 1.3.6), thus vindicating a ‘literal’ account. For more details, see <https://cyberpenance.wordpress.com/2018/08/09/josephus-on-noahs-ark-and-lots-wife/>.

36) See John Anthony McGuckin ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 25.

tered that the cubit employed in the recording of these matters was actually “the geometrical cubit, which is six time larger than the common cubit,” for (according to Origen) Genesis was written by Moses himself who was “educated in all the wisdom of Egypt” (Acts 7:22).³⁷⁾

It is worth noting that Origen’s Ark was a truncated pyramid, 300 cubits by 50 cubits at the base and only 1 cubit by 1 cubit at the apex, with divided decks—the upper three for humans, clean animals, and for carnivores and reptiles respectively; the lower two for food and offal.³⁸⁾ Concerning some of these details, Origen maintains:

37) Cohn, *Noah’s Flood*, 38. Cf. Johannes Buteo, *The Shape and Capacity of Noah’s Ark*, trans. Timothy Griffith and Natali Monnette (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 36–41. For details concerning the documentary (Graf-Wellhausen) hypothesis (JEDP), Mosaic authorship, and the like, see Bill T. Arnold ed., *The Cambridge Guide to Genesis*, 11–117; T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 229–359; David M Carr, *The Formation of Genesis 1–11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); L. S. Baker Jr. et al eds., *Exploring the Composition of the Pentateuch*, BBR Sup 27 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2020).

38) Origen, *Homilia in Genesis* II. 2 (PG 12, 161–62) as found in Cohn, *Noah’s Flood*, 38. A helpful visual depiction is provided within Buteo’s *The Shape and Capacity of Noah’s Ark*, 43. As something of an aside, it is worth noting: “At no point is anything (human beings, animals, birds) allowed to take the life of another living being and consume it for food. The dominion assigned to the human couple over the animal world does not include the prerogative to butcher. Instead, humankind survives on a vegetarian diet.” Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 140. In much the same way, another scholar avers, “The narrative presupposes a pristine state of vegetarianism. Isaiah’s vision of the ideal future in 11:7 and 65:25 sees the carnivorous animals becoming herbivorous.” Sarna, *Genesis*, 13–14. For more details, see Taylor, *NIDOTTE* 4:1272. Not all people agree with these assessments. Cf. J. K. Ray, *Baby Dinosaurs on the Ark? The Bible and Modern Science and the Trouble of Making It All Fit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 17.

Now these separations of dwelling places appear to have been made for this reason, that the diverse kinds of animals or beasts could be separated more easily in individual rooms and whatever animals are tame and less active could be divided from the wild beasts. Those separations of dwellings, therefore, are called nests [...] since all the animals spent a whole year in the ark, and, of course, it was necessary that food be provided that whole year and not only food but also that places be prepared for wastes so that neither the animals themselves, nor especially the men [sic], be plagued by the stench of excrement. They hand down, therefore, that the lower region itself, which is at the bottom, was given over and set aside for necessities of this kind. But the region above and contiguous to this one was allotted to storing food.³⁹⁾

St Augustine (354–430 AD) also wrote about the dimensions of Noah’s Ark. He asserts:

They say, too, that the area of the ark could not contain so many kind[s] of animals of both sexes, two of the unclean and seven of the clean. But they seem to me to reckon only one area of 300 cubits long and 50 broad, and not to remember that there was another similar in the story above, and yet another as large in the story above that again; and that there was consequently an area of 900 cubits by 150. And if we accept what Origen has with some appropriateness suggested, that Moses the man of God, being, as it is written, ‘learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,’ Acts 7:22 who delighted in geometry, may have meant geometrical cubits, of which they say that one is equal to six of our cubits, then who does not see what a capacity these dimensions give to the ark?⁴⁰⁾

While Augustine’s calculations are (grossly) incorrect, they do effectively reveal that these scholars of antiquity understood

39) Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 73–74.

40) Welch and Chaffey, eds., *Inside Noah’s Ark*, 11 quoting Augustine, *The City of God* (Book 15, Chapter 27).

the numbers given in Scripture to communicate the actual (real) length, breadth, and height of the Ark without hyperbole or metaphorical dimensions.⁴¹⁾

3.2. Noah's Ark: A Select 'Post Antiquity—Pre Contemporary' History of Interpretation

A good number of individuals who lived prior to the contemporary scene, such as Alfonso Tostdo (ca. 1410–1455 AD), Martin Luther (1483–1546 AD), Johannes Buteo (ca. 1490–ca. 1572 AD), John Calvin (1509–1564 AD), Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680 AD), and Bishop Wilkins (1614–1672 AD), also argued that the specific details concerning the Ark (as made clear in Scripture) were (more or less) nothing short of “blueprints” for the huge ship’s construction; reckoning that the Ark was an oceanic craft easily capable of withstanding cataclysmic waters.⁴²⁾

The exquisite detail and great precision that some of these individuals provide is remarkable, with a number of them (such as Buteo, Kircher, and Wilkins) providing tables, charts, and diagrams of the exterior and interior of the boat, sometimes even including the specific placements of different animals and

41) This is not to say early Christian writers did not interpret multiple things concerning Creation etc. “spiritually.” See, for instance, Dickin, “The Design of Noah’s Ark and Its Significance for Biblical Faith,” 94; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (New York: T. and T. Clark, 2011), 138. For more details, compare Kyle P. Greenwood, *Since the Beginning: Interpreting Genesis 1 and 2 through the Ages* (Baker Academic, 2018); Andrew Louth, ed., *Genesis 1–11 Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament I*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011).

42) Cohn, *Noah’s Flood*, 38–133; Welch and Chaffey eds., *Inside Noah’s Ark*, 12–13. Cf. Lynden J. Rogers, ed., *The Biblical Flood: Context and History of Adventist Understanding*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Avondale, 2020), 61–114.

supplies/foodstuffs. A single quote should suffice:

To calculate the volume of the ark, that is the total corporal size, which is its capacity, first find the area of the base (which is also called its quadrature) by multiplying the length (300 cubits) by the width (50 cubits). This is 15, 000 square cubits. Multiply this amount again by the height (30 cubits), and you have 450,000 cubic cubits. This is the volume of the inside of the ark to the beginning of the roof. The remaining space to the peak, as it is a triangular prism, contains half of the rectangular parallelepiped (i.e., 7,500 cubits). Add this to the 450,000 cubits, and the total volume for the whole ark is 457,500 cubic cubits. But this space is occupied by various impediments, such as columns and their supports, the thickness of the floors, and the boards forming the stalls and storerooms [...] we will compensate for these by deducting the space of the triangular prism (the roof) from our calculations. Therefore the space remaining in the ark is 450,000 cubic cubits [...] this space is easily sufficient to contain seed from all the animals.⁴³⁾

Speaking pointedly, as Pius Murray, a reviewer of Cohn's work on Noah's Flood, maintains:

What is most fascinating about Cohn's study, though, is his description of the length of time it took for humanity to let go of the literal truth of the story of Noah and the Flood. For the longest time, Western thought and culture sought to harmonize new scientific discoveries with the Biblical text of the Flood. Despite the advances of Cartesian philosophy and the Enlightenment, which provided the intellectual framework leading to the separation of science from theology, the actual separation took several centuries. As partial preparation for it, Thomas Burnet's *Theory of the Earth* (1684), and William Whiston's *A New Theory of the Earth* (1696) both

43) Buteo, *The Shape and Capacity of Noah's Ark*, 28–29. Italics original (schematic drawing removed).

synthesized traditional theological and scriptural concerns with the new discoveries, and Nicolaus Steno's *Prodromus* (1669) used the recent discovery of fossil stratification to provide the foundation for reinterpreting time (thus answering Bishop James Ussher's famous Bible chronology that held that Heaven and Earth were created on the evening preceding Sunday, 23 October 4004 BCE). It was not until the publications of John Beaumont's *Considerations on a Book, Entitled The Theory of the Earth* (1693) and his successors (e.g., Buffon's *Époques de la nature* [1778], and James Hutton's *Theory of the Earth* [1785]), however, that the literal truth of the Biblical Flood narrative was questioned and reinterpreted.⁴⁴⁾

3.3. Noah's Ark: Select Ancient Near East Comparisons

The "Deluge vessel constructed by Utnapishtim in the Gilgamesh Epic was unsuitable for sea travel by virtue of it being quadrangular, one hundred twenty cubits by one hundred twenty cubits by one hundred twenty cubits, i.e. a perfect cube or ziggurat-shape (dimensions that recapitulate sacred space)."⁴⁵⁾ Given such, it is thought-provoking to consider, as John Walton

44) Pius Murray, "Review of *Noah's Flood: The Genesis Story in Western Thought* by Norman Cohn," in *Religion and the Arts* 2 (1998), 254-56 (quotations from pp. 255-56). Much the same thing is said by Philip, C. Almond, "Review of *Noah's Flood: The Genesis Story in Western Thought* by Norman Cohn," in *The Journal of Religious History* 26 (2002), 97-98 and John F. A. Sawyer, "Review of *Noah's Flood: The Genesis Story in Western Thought* by Norman Cohn," in *Modern Believing* 39 (1998), 37-38. More details about this historical development may also be found within Terry Mortenson, *The Great Turning Point* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf, 2004). See too Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design*, Expanded Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) but compare the (most) pertinent sections within Rogers ed., *The Biblical Flood*.

45) Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 113-14.

and Tremper Longman III cogently maintain, that “there is no evidence to suggest that the ark in Genesis recapitulates sacred space. The rectangular dimensions suggest instead that it recapitulates the standard shape of boats.”⁴⁶⁾ Similarly, C. John Collins (astutely) asserts that unlike the Mesopotamian boat, which is “not practical at all,” the biblical Ark has a “shape and size that would have allowed it to float.”⁴⁷⁾ Likewise, Kenneth A. Matthews well-argues:

Unlike the vessel described in *Gilgamesh*, the dimensions and construction of the Noahic vessel make it seaworthy. Utnapishtim, the Babylonian ‘Noah,’ is instructed by the deity Ea to build a vessel quadrangular in shape to escape the flood planned by the angry god Enlil. It is a perfect cube of 120 cubits in dimension. With its cubical construction, it would inevitably sink. It has been proposed that the ship’s geometrical shape is symbolic for an idealized ziggurat. This brick staircase tower held central religious significance for the Mesopotamians, indicating a stairway between heaven and earth, which at the pinnacle was believed to be the residence of the gods [...] The Hebrew account describes the ark as an actual vessel, having no stylized features and no cultic significance. While the Mesopotamian vessel has points of contact with Noah’s, the latter’s only religious significancelies in how Noah foreshadows Moses and his faithful carrying out of the Lord’s tabernacle plans (Exod 26:30; 40:16).⁴⁸⁾

46) Longman and Walton, *Lost World of the Flood*, 77.

47) C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis Well* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 191. One scholar states explicitly: “Noch extremer der Kubos im Gilg.-Epos.” Horst Seebass, *Genesis Urgeschichte 1,1–11,26* (Germany: Neukirchen, 1996), 204. Another states: “the biblical ark appears to be far more seaworthy than the monstrosities the other stories describe. Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988). Cf. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1987).

48) Matthews, *Genesis 1–11*, 330.

Lastly, though the Ark itself may appear to be ‘monstrous’ in size, its scope is nothing compared to the Armenian account of Eusebius’ *Chronicles*, where the length of the vessel is given as fifteen furlongs (nearly two miles!) or Berosus’s claim it was five stadia long and two stadia broad; to be clear, this is about 914 m (3,000 feet) long and 366 m (1,200 feet) broad.⁴⁹⁾

The dimensions of Noah’s Ark seem to be much more ‘float’ than ‘fable,’ ‘myth,’ or ‘fiction’.⁵⁰⁾

4. Scripture & Symbolism (metaphor, rhetoric, hyperbole): A Generalized Overview

Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.”⁵¹⁾ Aristotle’s rubric or schema was (more or less) comprised of three main genres (deliberative, judicial, and ceremonial, i.e., epideictic) and three modes of proof (*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*) with Cicero later expanding Aristotle’s basic elements with his five arts (invention, structure, style, memory, and delivery).⁵²⁾ Effectively combined

49) See Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 188 alongside Patai, *Children of Noah*, 5 and Day, *From Creation to Babel*, 61–76 from whom this paragraph was originally derived from (in total).

50) That is, God saved the world vis à vis the Ark long before such events were written down; and penning Genesis did not make this salvation any more effective. If the Flood event had never been recorded by the Hebrews, God’s salvation through the Ark would have been just as real and effective. But the inverse is not true: the book of Genesis without an actual, effectual Ark would render God’s salvation impotent, ineffective, and (quite frankly) blandly untrue.

51) Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Dover Thrift Editions, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), 1.2.1.

52) See Paul Overland, “Rhetorical Criticism,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings*, eds., Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove,

together, such comprise the basics of persuasion and rhetoric—clear, compelling argumentation and communication.⁵³⁾

It is important to emphasize how persuasion is “not coercion, bending the truth, sophism, platitudes, manipulation, lying, or twisting people’s arms to attain a desired outcome. Rhetoric is an altogether neutral tool but is meant to go hand-in-hand with philosophy (i.e., the love of wisdom and truth) and be found in the hands of the virtuous to be used for good.”⁵⁴⁾ With this in mind, Scripture should, perhaps, best be thought of as being world-view formative, rhetorical literature—not in a “bad way, in order to manipulate, but in order to move [...] rhetoric is not a way of getting people to avoid thinking but a way of getting them to think.”⁵⁵⁾

Metaphor (and hyperbole) play no small role within this. Aristotle once declared: “If one wants to master speech [persuasion/rhetoric] one must master metaphor.”⁵⁶⁾ In this way, Ian Paul is not overstating things by saying that metaphor is one of the “most crucial areas in the whole of hermeneutics since so much biblical theology hangs on metaphors, and metaphor is at the heart of philosophical problems with religious language.”⁵⁷⁾ Paul further explicates:

IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 655–63. Cf. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 62–65.

53) For more details, see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Revised and Expanded (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 144–53.

54) Timothy J. Christian, “The Historical Approach to New Testament Rhetorical Criticism: A Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 15,” *Religions* 15 (2024), 1–18 (quote from pg. 2). Cf. Michael Glowasky, “Ethos, Opposition, and Identification: Paul’s Constitutive Rhetoric in 1 Thessalonians 1–3,” *CBQ* 85 (2023), 737–53.

55) John Goldingay, *Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 34.

56) Ian Paul, “Metaphor,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 507–10 (quotation from 507).

57) Paul, “Metaphor,” 507.

At the outset, it is worth noting that all language about ‘imagery’ or ‘symbol’ in Scripture is in fact referring to metaphor. Symbols and images belong to the extratextual world of things; their textual counterpart is the metaphor [...] Metaphor came to be seen as especially problematic during the Enlightenment. Under Kant’s separation of knowledge into the two mutually exclusive categories of the ‘aesthetic’ and the ‘useful,’ metaphorical language was seen to express the former, over against ‘literal’ or scientific language, which expressed the latter.⁵⁸⁾

Clearly, however, Scripture “*images* the truth as well as stating it in abstract propositions. Correspondingly, the truth that the Bible expresses [via distinct genres] is often a matter of truthfulness to human experience, as distinct from ideas that are true rather than false.”⁵⁹⁾

In this way, hyperbole is not a “zero-sum game solution.”⁶⁰⁾ From a ‘just the facts’ approach, yes, hyperbole may, perhaps, seem untruthful; but it is not necessarily so for “its exaggeration is typically “a matter of degree rather than kind.”⁶¹⁾ Said otherwise, within the context of hyperbole, communicators “purposefully [transport] an attitude [...] to the facts, without misrepresenting the facts themselves.”⁶²⁾ That is, hyperbole is

58) Paul, “Metaphor,” 507.

59) See “Introduction” within Leland Ryken, et al, eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, xiii (italics original).

60) Matthew C. Sims, “On Reading 2 Kings 3 and The Mesha Inscription as History, Theology, and Literature: A Response to Philip D. Stern,” *Presbyterian* 48 (2022), 199–205 (quote from pg. 205).

61) K. Lawson Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2009), 190–92. Cf. Sims, “On Reading 2 Kings 3,” 205.

62) Charles E. Cruise, “A Methodology for Detecting and Mitigating Hyperbole in Matthew 5: 38 – 42,” *JETS* 61 (2018), 83–108 (quotation from pg. 89). Cf. Claudia Claridge, *Hyperbole in English: A Corpus-Based Study of Exaggeration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 9, 12, 20.

“the art of the truthful lie.”⁶³) Stephen Robert Llewelyn and Will Robinson define hyperbole as follows:

Hyperbole is ‘an overt and blatant exaggeration of some property or characteristic. The speaker does not intend to be taken literally and the hearer recognises this. So, assuming the communication is successful, both parties recognise that the literal description is an overstatement of the actual state of affairs,’ the effect of which ‘does not seem to consist of a distinct thought or proposition but rather to be something evaluative or emotional.’ Accordingly, hyperbole is both: scalar, that is, indicating the more or less of that property or characteristic; and evaluative, as in it expresses ‘an element of evaluation of the state of affairs described.’⁶⁴)

5. Noah’s Ark: Proportions and Persuasion

5.1. Non-Metaphorical Interpretations

Concerning Noah’s Ark specifically, the primary point(s) of interest are its reported size and design. Alan Dickin offers three criteria for a non-symbolic interpretation: (1) feasibility to build, (2) capability of surviving a storm, and (3) consistency with Scripture’s description.⁶⁵) Alan Dickin claims: “it has always been evident that the giant size of Noah’s boat described in Genesis would have been very improbable as an ancient box-like

63) See Burlet, “Waddya Mean ‘It’s Just Hyperbole!,” 66 quoting Cruise, “Hyperbole,” 88.

64) Stephen Robert Llewelyn and Will Robinson, “Hyperbole and the Cost of Discipleship: A Case Study of Luke 14:26,” *Harvard Theological Review* 116 (2023), 44–65 (quotation from pg. 50). Cf. Burlet, “Waddya Mean ‘It’s Just Hyperbole!,” 55–56 alongside Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 77–78.

65) Dickin, “The Design of Noah’s Ark and Its Significance for Biblical Faith,” 98.

vessel. This causes a dilemma. One can accept the size of the ark described in Genesis and reject its box-like form, or one can accept the box-like shape implied by the Septuagint [LXX], and regard the dimensions as schematic or symbolic.”⁶⁶⁾ Rather than treat the numbers as being symbolic or hyperbole, as certain other scholars do (see below), Dickin proposes the very shape of the Ark be reconsidered—stating:

The key to making the reed hut [mudhif] an integral part of the ark’s structure would have been the use of large quantities of bitumen as reinforcing for the reed-built framework and as waterproofing for its reed-mat covering. Both the Ark Tablet and the Bible speak of coating the ark with bitumen both inside and out. This has tended to give the impression of a hull that needed to be waterproofed, as interpreted by Finkel. However, by seeing the ark as a mudhif on a platform, we can now see that ‘inside’ and ‘out’ refer to inside and outside the mudhif.⁶⁷⁾

Said otherwise, Dickin argues: “the reported height of the ark refers to its superstructure, not its hull. In fact, the ark had no need of a hull at all, because the animals could be accommodated on the platform made of bitumen-reinforced timber and reeds. In other words, the ark was scaled up horizontally from the design of the Hit barges, but not vertically [...] Such a design would have been aptly described, as in the Hebrew text, as an enormous basket.”⁶⁸⁾ Dickin concludes: “the building

66) Dickin, “The Design of Noah’s Ark and Its Significance for Biblical Faith,” 94.

67) Dickin, “The Design of Noah’s Ark and Its Significance for Biblical Faith,” 103.

Cf. Irving Finkel, *The Ark Before Noah: Decoding the Story of the Flood* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014) alongside Irving Finkel, *The Lifeboat that Saved the World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2017). See too George Andrew R. “Review of *The Ark Before Noah* by Irving Finkel,” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136 (2016), 442–45 (specifically 444–45).

68) Dickin, “The Design of Noah’s Ark and Its Significance for Biblical Faith,” 101–02.

of any kind of hulled ship in the Neolithic period would have been a near impossibility. In contrast, the bitumen-reinforced platform described here would easily have been scaled up to the size described in Genesis, and could indeed have been built in the late Neolithic period.”⁶⁹⁾

While Dickin’s proposal may, perhaps, address certain issues of feasibility (criteria #1), it is questionable to me whether his design(s) actually comport with Scripture (criteria #3).⁷⁰⁾ I also remain uncertain if Dickin fully addresses criteria #2 (the Ark’s capability of surviving a storm). To be clear, regardless of one’s views on the geographical extent and geological impact of Noah’s Flood, the Epic of Gilgamesh reckons something about seven days in length while the flood that King Ziusudra escapes from within the Atrahasis account is only two weeks.⁷¹⁾ Both accounts stand in stark contrast to the prolonged hydrological activity recorded in the Bible (see Gen 7:12, 17, 8:4, 14, etc.).⁷²⁾ Not insignificantly, Genesis also leverages a highly specific and (relatively) rare word for the Flood (מַבּוּל).⁷³⁾ This technical term represents the ‘undoing’ of creation—a far (!) greater cataclysm than any mere ‘storm.’⁷⁴⁾ Additionally, despite ‘veteran’

69) Dickin, “The Design of Noah’s Ark and Its Significance for Biblical Faith,” 104.

For more on dating, see Alan Dickin, “New Historical and Geological Constraints on the Date of Noah’s Flood,” *PSCF* 70 (2018), 176–93. Cf. Alan Dickin, *A Scientific Commentary on Genesis 1–11*, 3rd ed. (Independently Published, 2021).

70) See Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 110–19.

71) Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 142. Cf. Peter G. Nelson, “Letter to the Editor,” in *PSCF* 53 (2001), 218.

72) See Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 154, 171–72, 176 (and the references noted therein).

73) For lexical details, see *DCH* 5:124–25; *HALOT* 1:541; Grisanti, *NIDOTTE* 2:835–37.

74) On this point, see Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 120 and Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives*, Overtures to Biblical Theology, (Minneapolis, MN): Fortress, 1994), 153.

engineering, even seasoned sailors could not conquer certain ‘larger than life’ storms (cf. Jonah 1; Matt 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25 Acts 27). Might it be that God gave Noah very particular instructions for the Ark in the knowledge that no other construction would remotely be adequate?

5.2. Metaphorical Interpretations

Several ‘non-literal’ explanations for Noah’s Ark exist. By way of example, Carol Hill states:

First, it may be that the dimensions of the ark given in Gen. 6 are of symbolic nature, the symbolism of which is now lost in antiquity. Second, it may be that the dimensions of the ark were never converted from a sexagesimal system into a decimal-based numbering system. If one arbitrarily divides the ark dimensions by either ten or six, one comes up with a size more compatible with boats known to have existed in Jemdet Nasr time. This is not to say that the Bible is wrong. It is to suggest that the autograph (original) documents were correct, but that the original numbers of Gen. 6 are not part of a numerical system that we recognize today.⁷⁵⁾

While it is indeed true that such calculations might produce a boat that is more in alignment with our knowledge of early naval engineering and the like, the utter lack of concrete textual evidence among the ancient versions renders any such speculations fruitless.⁷⁶⁾ Similarly, Longman and Walton, maintain that the dimensions of the Ark are “impractical” and that one can tell a passage is figurative when you “have to work hard to take it any other way.”⁷⁷⁾ Specifically, they state:

75) Hill, “A Time and a Place for Noah,” 24–40. Cf. Carol Hill, “Numbers of Genesis,” *PSCF* 55 (2003), 239–51.

76) For exhaustive references, see Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 110–19 (particularly 114–18).

In light of the recognition of academic arithmetic in the ancient world and the practice noted in iconography to supersize that which is important, we suggest that in the [Ark's] dimensions [...] more than hyperbole is going on. That is, we are not suggesting that the boat was actually only half the stated size and they doubled it to aggrandize the size of the vessel. The dimensions are not relative to the actual size. Alternatively, the dimensions can be viewed as devised with a rhetorical effect in mind. Neither jibes by skeptics about the impossibility of the vessels nor the apologetic defenses of practicality and realism are to the point. Both groups are reading the text through their modern filters and thereby expect to conform how such information would be conveyed in our current-day cultural river.⁷⁸⁾

Prior to elaborating on some portion(s) of this quote it is prudent to go deeper with hyperbole.

6. Noah's Ark: What Means the Math?

There are six defining characteristics of hyperbole: (1) non-veridicality, i.e., untruthfulness, (2) intentionality, (3) subjectivity, (4) gradability, (5) extreme language, and (6) universal language, particularly adjective modifiers such as “all,” “none,” “every,” “whole,” and “any.”⁷⁹⁾

Despite the notably high frequency of ‘totalic’ language within the Flood, perhaps best evidenced via the Hebrew term ‘all’ (כָּל), which appears 72 times between Genesis 6:1 and 9:17, such ‘universalizing’ language is conspicuous in its absence when

77) Longman and Walton, *Lost World of the Flood*, 75 and 25 (respectively).

78) Longman and Walton, *Lost World of the Flood*, 76. Cf. Keaton Halley, “Review of The Lost World of the Flood by Tremper Longman III and John H. Walton,” in *Journal of Creation* 32 (2018), 36–39.

79) Cruise, “Detecting and Mitigating Hyperbole,” 88–91.

it comes to the mechanics of the Ark's construction. Instead, the focus is functional, i.e., the Ark's buoyancy and the (many) lives it preserves (cf. Gen 6:14-22; 7:1-5, 7-10, 13-16, 17-23; 8:1, 4, 6-12, 13, 15-19, etc.).⁸⁰⁾

With respect to aspect #4, it is understood that because “hyperbole is gradable, it can be mitigated, or scaled downward to an appropriate level of meaning. Mitigation typically reduces the intensity of an utterance to one point below the hyperbolic level.”⁸¹⁾ By way of example, the effective mitigation of “fastest” or “strongest” is simply “faster” or “stronger.” With respect to Noah's Ark, however, no such ‘hyperbolic’ terms are ever leveraged. The boat is not classified within canonical literature as being the ‘biggest,’ ‘fastest,’ ‘smallest,’ or ‘strongest’ ship ever made or even a ‘big,’ ‘fast,’ ‘strong,’ or ‘small’ ship (cf. 1 Kgs 10:22, 22:48; Job 9:26; Ps 48:7, 72:10; Isa 2:16, 18:1-7, 23:1, 14; 33:21 60:9; Ezek 27:25-26; Mrk 3:9, 4:36; James 3:4 etc.).

Concerning subjectivity (#3) and intentionality (#2) there also seems to be no indication within the text that there is any “pretense” between God and Noah. For the sake of clarity:

Hyperbole does not happen by accident. Rather it is an ‘intentional linguistic act.’ [...] Said differently, hyperbole ‘creates ‘a kind of joint pretense in which speakers and addressees create a new layer of joint activity.’ This activity occurs beyond the layer of what is actually being said [...] Given such, hyperbole as ‘deception’ does not violate ‘conversational protocol’ because both the rhetorician and the (rhetorical) audience are on board with the pretense.⁸²⁾

80) For more details, see Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 78 and each of the other most relevant sections.

81) Cruise, “Detecting and Mitigating Hyperbole,” 90.

82) See Burlet, “Waddya Mean ‘It’s Just Hyperbole!’,” 66.

The significance of this point may, perhaps, also be bolstered by the fact that the dimensions of Noah's Ark occur within divine speech (Gen 6:14-16). As Roger Lapointe puts it:

Divine monologues lead us directly into Yahweh's mind [...] This indeed is the value conventionally ascribed to the monologue: it imprints on a speech the mark of *utmost sincerity* and of *absolute truthfulness* [...] Moreover, what the speaker says will always express faithfully what he thinks, since he is supposed to 'think' the very words of the text.⁸³⁾

While Quintilian's assertion "Hyperbole is a liar, but does not lie to deceive" is still valid and true, the text itself seems to indicate a clear (if not direct) alignment between the Ark's numbers and space-time realities, i.e., historical referentiality /verisimilitude (cf. 1 Pet 3:20; Heb 11:7). This leaves point #1 nonveridicality (untruthfulness). At the risk, perhaps, of belaboring things,

the main characteristic of hyperbole is built around the concept of nonveridicality [...] or the flouting of Grice's quality [truthful] maxim. Such a flout [...] betrays intentionality. That is, it should be evident that the speaker and audience are engaged in a deliberate 'joint pretense' constructed by the speaker and recognized by the hearers. In this way, if a rhetorician is being untruthful with respect to their assertions, the [one being] address[ed] should ask, 'Is this individual blatantly violating the maxim of quality?' and, if so, 'What is being implied?'⁸⁴⁾

In sum, there is nothing indicating the information Noah

83) Lapointe, "Divine Monologue as a Channel of Revelation." *CBQ* 32 (1970), 161-81 (quotation from 179-80). All emphases original.

84) Burlet, "Waddya Mean 'It's Just Hyperbole!'," 68. All footnote references contained therein removed.

received was to be ‘translated’ beyond the actual dimensions given, i.e., one can find no ‘joint pretence’ in the text.⁸⁵⁾ Much hinges here on how God is portrayed within the Flood account. The canonical (final form) of the text clearly positions God as a key figure, detailing both his actions (see, for instance, Gen 6:5-8, 7:16, 8:1, 2, 9:9-16) and speech (Gen 6:13-21; 7:1-4; 8:15-17, 21-22; 9:1-7, 8-11, 12-16, 17; cf. 6:7).⁸⁶⁾

This invites a significant question: given the reverence in Jewish tradition towards God, including strict rules against idolatry and misuse of the Divine Name, does it not seem more than improbable that any Jewish author (regardless of when, specifically, Genesis was finalized) would intentionally construct a contrived or fictional narrative in which God takes on such a prominent and personal role? Would not such a portrayal have been viewed as bordering on blasphemy or at least ‘irreverence’ by those with such deep, devout religious convictions?⁸⁷⁾

85) Interestingly, Waltke and Fredricks observe (*Genesis*, 132-33) that while many “evangelicals favor a local flood,” the “[Genesis] narrator, even allowing for oriental hyperbole, seems to have in mind a universal flood.”

86) For more information, see Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation* alongside Humphreys, W. Lee, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011).

87) Cf. T. Desmond Alexander, “Jonah And Genre,” *TB* 36 (1985), 35-59 (esp. pg. 58). Similarly, do not attempts to discredit the Ark’s salvific efficacy constitutes a challenge to God’s integrity since it raises the question of theological coherence: would God truly appoint Noah to build the ark (Gen 6:14-16), undertake to gather for Noah all the animals for the Ark (Gen 6:19-20), and subsequently twice (!) affirm Noah’s faithful construction of it (Gen 6:22; 7:5), if the contents therein were not going to be properly cared for? As such, the regenerate should embrace an “epistemological openness” vs. a “hermeneutic of suspicion” towards Scripture. For more on this ‘sense’ of Scripture, see “In the Stable with the Dwarves: Testimony, Interpretation, Faith, and the History of Israel,” in *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of “Biblical Israel,”* eds., V. Philips Long et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 161-97. Cf. “Was Everything About Noah’s Ark Just a Miracle? Totally God, totally

Rather, as a salvific vehicle *par excellence* the Ark's effective engineering conveys the grandeur, majesty, wisdom, and sovereignty of God while also showcasing God's compassion, care, and sensitivity for all life.⁸⁸⁾ As John Goldingay eloquently puts it: "Floods of waters have not quenched love (Song 8:7)."⁸⁹⁾ John Walton likewise poignantly states:

The Genesis account abounds in justice, in sovereignty and, perhaps a bit surprisingly, in grace. The picture of God offered in the Genesis narrative of the flood shows him to be distressed over injustice and violence, and even while he is responding to this situation with dramatic punitive action, his grace and mercy are evident [...] Yahweh's flood is portrayed as an act of justice (bringing fully deserved punishment) that will not be repeated even though there will undoubtedly be future situations that call for such extensive judgment [...] a triumph of grace.⁹⁰⁾

Noah, or somewhere between?" by Tim Lovett (August 30, 2024) featured in *Answers in Depth*.

88) This argument also appears within Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation*, 119.

89) Goldingay, *Genesis*, 147.

90) John H. Walton, "Flood," within *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, eds., T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 315–26 (quotations from pp. 318, 319). See too "Ark" (42) and "Flood" (293–94) within Ryken, et al, eds. *Biblical Imagery* (42), wherein the authors state: "The discussion of Jesus' death in 1 Peter 3:18–22 refers to Noah's ark as the author discerns a parallel with baptism: the church borne to safety by baptism recalls Noah's family on the ark, snatching life from certain death through God's rescue of them" and, elsewhere (293) "Beyond demonstrating God's power and his hatred of evil, Noah's flood also embodies God's determination to bring new life out of the chaos wrought by human sin. God will find a way to rescue those who trust in him, carrying them through disaster and giving them a fresh start." Uniquely, the Orthodox tradition leverages architecture to communicate a theological inter-relationship between the Ark's one "door" and Christ's salvation (John 10:9; 14:6). I am indebted here to Kathryn McNain. Cf. Jakob Helmut Deibl, "Sacred Architecture and Public Space under the Conditions of a New Visibility of Religion," *Religions* 11 (2020), 1–18.

7. Conclusion

The book of Genesis shows acute moderation and refrains from exaggeration in its depiction(s) of the design and dimensions of Noah's Ark (Gen 6:14-16). This is thrice vindicated: (1) there is a notable absence of hyperbolic elements, such as superlatives, gradability, totalic language and the like, within the Ark's construction, (2) unlike ANE deluge accounts, the Ark recapitulates the standard shape of many sea-faring vessels, i.e., there is more 'float' than 'fiction' to its construction, and, (3) there is a distinct lack of pretense in the text.

As such, any attempt(s) to discredit the Ark's salvific efficacy constitute a challenge to biblical theology and God's integrity since they raise the question of theological coherence: would God truly appoint Noah to build the ark (Gen 6:14-16), undertake to gather for Noah all the animals for the Ark (Gen 6:19-20), and subsequently affirm Noah's faithful construction of it via à vis the faithful words of the narrator (Gen 6:22; 7:5), if the contents therein were not going to be properly cared for? I think not.⁹¹⁾

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<주요어>

과장법, 홍수, 방주, 노아, 수사학, 설득, 수사비평, 창세기

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<Abstract>

**Antiquity and Arithmetic:
A Rhetorical-Critical Reading of Hyperbole and Noah's Ark**

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The Genesis account shows remarkable moderation and refrains from exaggeration in its depiction of the dimensions and design of Noah's Ark. This is evident via several aspects: the Ark resembles the standard shape of most sea-faring vessels, distinct from ancient Near Eastern Deluge accounts; there is a notable absence of hyperbolic elements such as qualifying superlatives, gradability, and universalistic language; and there is a lack of pretense in the divine speech regarding the Ark—underscored by the narrator's repeated affirmation of Noah.

<초록>

고대와 산술:

과장법과 노아의 방주에 대한 수사적 비평적 독해

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창세기의 기록은 노아의 방주의 크기와 디자인을 묘사하는 데 있어 놀라울 정도로 온건하고 과장을 삼가한다. 이는 여러 측면에서 분명하게 드러난다. 방주는 고대 근동의 대홍수 기록과는 달리 대부분의 항해용 선박의 표준적인 모양을 닮았다. 최상급, 점진적 표현, 보편적 언어와 같은 과장된 요소가 눈에 띄게 부족하다. 방주에 대한 신의 말씀에는 허세가 부족한다. 이는 내레이터가 노아에 대해 반복적으로 확언한 것으로 강조된다.