

The Garden of Eden

The story of the Garden of Eden is entrenched in everyone's minds as the Biblical setting for the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and their eventual and forceful exit from paradise. Yet, this enduring story has its roots in reality and its origins are being unravelled everyday by archaeologists and historians. It is an epic story that could also uncover the origins of the ancestral Europeans.

As written in the Bible, there were four rivers emanating from Eden: the Gihon, winding through Cush; the Pishon flowing through gold-rich Havilah; the Hiddekel (the Tigris) flowing east of Ashur and the Perath (the Euphrates).

David Rohl, an archaeologist has been investigating the origins of the Garden of Eden and along with data and the work of the late Reginald Arthur Walker has identified the other two rivers, the area of the Garden of Eden and the origins of Sumerian legends.

The Perath/Euphrates rises near Lake Van, runs 2720km through Mesopotamia and into the Persian Gulf. The Hiddekel/Tigris rises in the Zagros Mountains and flows west and south of Lakes Van and Urmia until it reaches the Persian Gulf, 2033km away. The land of Shinar through which the rivers flowed is Sumer in southern Iraq, so the rivers had to have flowed from the north southward. The two other rivers had to be in this region and once found, their origins were so obvious.

The Gihon was identified by Walker as the modern day river Araxes, rising north of Lakes Van and Urmia into the Caspian Sea. The Gihon became the Araxes or the Jichon-Aras during the 8th Century Islamic invasion of the Caucasus region. The old name was even waning during Victorian times. Yet it was entirely forgotten. The land of Cush through which it flows could be the ancient land of Cossaea near the Caspian Sea and may be the origins of the Kassites culture from the mountain region who invaded and ruled Mesopotamia c.1700-1160BC. In Iran, there is a 4000m high ridge, known as the Kusheh Dagh, the Mountain of Kush. The land of Cush is now in Azerbaijan.

The Pishon was even more obvious to Walker. The river today is the Uizhun and flows east of Lake Urmia into the Caspian Sea. Also known as the Kezel Uzun (long gold) or the Uzun (dark red/gold), Hebrew texts has translated the 'U' into a 'P', thus the river had retained its rightful name all along, with Pishon becoming the Biblical name. Havilah, in the Anguran region of Iran, through which the Uizhun flows, has always been rich in gold with mines dating back to at least 3rd-7th Century AD.

These then were the four rivers and have their origins in the ancient land of Armenia. They were identified through etymological, topological and historical sources, and the very word 'Eden' is also indicative of the Lake Urmia area.

The Mesopotamian word 'Edin' (Sumerian) or 'Edinu' (Akkadian) means 'open plain' or 'uncultivated land'. In Hebrew 'Adhan' means 'to be delighted', 'place of delight'. The Greek 'Paradeisos' our paradise meant 'parkland' and Persian

'Pairidaeza' meant 'enclosed parkland'. Hebrew 'Gan' equalled 'garden' and 'ganan' meant 'hedged in' or 'protect', 'walled garden' or 'enclosed park'. There was also a river that ran through Eden. This has been identified as the Adji Chay River, which has an older name: 'Meidan' -Persian for 'enclosed court' or 'walled garden'. Thus Sumerian, Persian, Greek and Hebrew lexicons had similar meanings for a specific area: The Garden of Eden.

Eden itself is to the east of Lake Urmia and sits in a valley fenced or walled in on its northern, eastern and southern sides. The Adji Chay flows west into Lake Urmia. The set up corresponds to the Biblical description. In ancient times, the region was warmer, more fertile with fruit trees, and extensively wooded. This mountainous area, near Tabriz, Iran, contains secluded valleys and would have sheltered any community.

And so there is the Garden of Eden, shunned for whatever reason and relocated to Mesopotamia. Why is Iraq more expedient as the supposed home of Eden? Is there a modern political/religious/cultural bias to thinking of Eden as existing in a modern third world or non-Christian country? Do people assume that because Sumer was the first great Mesopotamian civilisation that Eden had to be located there? But the Sumerians had to come from somewhere.

The story of the Garden of Eden and the Old Testament is the very story of their migration dressed up in religious overtones after the fact. The Story of Adam and Eve marks the transition from a hunter gatherer society into an agricultural/technological society. These Neolithic inhabitants, possibly our Indo-European ancestors, moved out of their paradise, possibly due to adverse weather conditions of which there were a few major reversals between 12000 and 5000BC and migrated south. But they retained the memory of their origins, probably through oral myths, then cuneiform, and then written down.

The Ubaid culture, the ancestors of the Sumerians, and the probable original inhabitants of Eden had spread their pottery all over the region, even to the Black Sea and it is their cultural signature found in this region, which may have been the origin of the Great Flood, as the Black Sea was flooded from the Mediterranean via the Bosphorus. There are still sunken tells to explore, but the Ubaid culture would have carried with them the story of the flood to Sumer.

There are also new and intriguing finds of cities in northern Syria, that preceded the great cities of Sumer. It is more evidence of a north to south migration and that Eden was located near Lake Urmia. So, the Garden of Eden, may have cradled one of mankind's ancestral lineages after all. It has endured in myth, but we should investigate and celebrate its reality.

Sources:

Rohl, D. 1998. *Legend –The Genesis of Civilisation*. London: Century.

Ryan, B. & Pitman, W. 1999. *Noah's Flood*. Simon & Schuster.