

- 27 God shall enlarge Jā'-phēth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Cā'-nā-ān shall be his servant.  
 28 And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years.  
 29 And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years: and he died.  
 [Genesis 6:5–9.]

### IRAN (ZOROASTRIAN): Yima

In the Zoroastrian tradition, the Noah figure is Yima, and the high god is Ahura Mazda.

When the world had become overwhelmed by the constant multiplication of its immortal beings, Ahura Mazda decided that the earth must be enlarged and a new beginning made. He warned the faithful king Yima that a great flood was coming to cleanse the world and that Yima had to protect himself and two of each species in his castle on top of the highest mountain. The flood came, and the world, except for Yima's castle and its inhabitants, was destroyed. When the flood passed, Yima opened his doors and the world was inhabited again.

[David A. Leeming, *A Dictionary of Asian Mythology* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 211.]

### EGYPT: Hathor, Blood and Beer

In an ancient text known as *The Book of the Heavenly Cow*, a copy of which was found in the tomb of King Tutankhamun, one of the strangest of the world's many flood myths features the great goddess Hathor, the Eye of the supreme god Ra. As the Eye of Ra, Hathor is "the Eye of Heaven," the sun itself. This myth, like the flood myth in Genesis and the Mayan *Popol Vuh* story, for instance, tells of a flood sent by the gods in reaction to what they perceive as a failure in the creation of humans.

After Ra had become the ruler of both gods and men, Humanity plotted against him, while his majesty, may he live, may he prosper, may he be healthy, had grown old. His bones became silver, his flesh became gold, his hair true lapis-lazuli. When his majesty saw how humanity was plotting against him, his majesty said to his followers, "Summon for me, my Eye, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut and the father and mothers who were with me when I was in the primeval waters, as well as the god Nun. Let him bring his followers with him, but bring them secretly in case the humans see and their hearts escape."

The gods and goddesses all came and asked Ra to speak. He told them, "Humanity, which came into being from my Eye, is plotting against me. Advise me what you would do about it." Nun and the other deities advise Ra to send his Eye against the rebels. "No Eye is more able to smite them. Let it go down as Hathor."

The guilty ones among humanity flee into the desert through fear of Ra, but Hathor slaughters them and wades in their blood. When she returns to Ra, she tells him that she has "overpowered humanity and it was sweet to my heart." Ra replies, "I shall have power over them as king by culling them." Thus, says the text, "the Powerful One came into being."

The goddess intends to continue her slaughter the next day, but for reasons that are not explained, Ra has changed his mind. He summons messengers who can travel as fast as shadows and sends them to fetch a large quantity of a red mineral. Then he orders the Side-Lock Wearer in Heliopolis, a title of the high priest of Ra, to grind up the mineral while his maid servants mash barley to make beer. They make 7,000 jars of beer and add the red mineral to it to make the beer look like blood. Ra has the beer taken to the place where the goddess plans to destroy humanity. Before dawn Ra pours the red beer out until the fields are flooded to a depth of "three palms." When the goddess arrives at dawn, she sees her own beautiful reflection in the flood. "She drank and it delighted her heart. She came back drunk without having noticed humanity." Ra welcomed her back and from that day on alcohol was drunk during the festivals of Hathor.

[Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 74–75.]

### CHINA: Yü

The flood theme is one of the very oldest in Chinese mythology. A flood myth from the *Shu ching* in the Chou dynasty—perhaps from as early as 1000 B.C.E.—reveals a distinctly nonmystical sense of the gods and is clearly earth oriented. The emphasis is on a very practical matter, the channeling of unruly water in such a way as to make cultivation of the land possible. We are told that tremendous flood waters were spreading everywhere, even up to Heaven. Answering the desperate appeals of the people, the high god Ti called on Kun to stop the flood. Kun labored against the flood for nine years without success and was executed. Kun's son Yu was ordered to take up the task.