

Aaron Jacob (A.J.) Smith (1887-1960) was the President of Central Florida Bible Institute and Dean of Bible School and College (now John Wesley College) and the first American to lead an organized expedition (Oriental Archeology Expedition) in search of Noah's Ark. The team included Walter Wood, Wendell Wayne Ogg, E. J. Newton, Edwin B. Greenwald, Dr. Necati Dolunay, and two Turkish Army Captains. Smith published a booklet about the expedition entitled On the Mountains of Ararat in Quest for Noah's Ark, excerpts of which are published here. One will note in the Introduction how there was dissension about how much effort to put into searching for alleged eyewitness Reshit vs. exploring the mountain itself. The Fundamental Wesleyan Society, to a large extent, is a continuation of Dean Smith's ministry and emphasis.

Chapter 8

1949 A.J. Smith, Dean

Introduction: I [A.J. Smith] wish to register my protest here concerning some erroneous reports made by an unqualified, unscrupulous person concerning the expedition. A great work remains to be done. To telescope into twelve or fifteen days a work that ordinarily would consume from four to six weeks is unreasonable. That such a monumental project should be accomplished in so brief a time, is an insult to human intelligence. The fact that we did not have sufficient time was merely one of the reasons why we did not undertake further explorations, there was a change in the weather for the worse also; however, the principal cause was rebellion on the part of some of the members of the expeditionary group against pooling their money to help finance Mr. Resit, who claimed to have seen the Ark in the fall of '48 [1948], to have him come and point out to us the object of our quest. Another barrier was the fact that members of the expedition did not cooperate fully with me in the execution of the work. The insatiable craving on the part of some for publicity, when the matter of making releases to the press was the prerogative of the head of the expedition. Such contemptuous conduct future expeditions must guard against and render their repetition impossible. I wish to state, too, that I received by far superior treatment and consideration from the Turks that from members of my own group.

Great changes for good have taken place in Turkey since the days of reformation and revolution in 1922. First, there has been the emancipation of womanhood. The barrier that formerly existed that kept women from acquiring an education or to hold jobs in stores, offices, schools, had been removed. One now sees women in practically all places of business, and they are efficient and dependable. The Turkish people have a great love for home and family life. There is a deep affection that exists between parents and children. Evil speaking and backbiting is considered base and one who is guilty of it a pest of society. There is, however, considerable quarreling going on, but it does not often terminate in blows because before it comes to that, an intercessor has stopped in and reconciled the two, or at least changed the situation.

It was a modern miracle that we got the permit to explore Mount Ararat. I wish to register my protest here concerning some erroneous reports made by an unqualified, unscrupulous person concerning the expedition. Anyone who thinks we had a vacation had better change his mind. The mountains are rugged, rocky, and steep; the gorges and crevices, deep and perilous. We ran out of food and water. We spent almost eight weeks in Turkey before we got our permit to travel in the restricted area east of the Euphrates River. To telescope into twelve or fifteen days a work on Ararat that ordinarily would consume from four to six weeks is unreasonable. That such a monumental project should be accomplished in so brief a time, is an insult to human intelligence. The insatiable craving on the part of some for publicity, when the matter of making releases to the press was the prerogative of the head of the expedition. I wish to state too, that I received by far superior treatment and consideration from the Turks than from members of my own group.

The climax to the many reports of the previous discoveries of Noah's Ark was reached when the press in America reported in the fall of '48 that a Turkish farmer had reported in Istanbul that a Kurdish mountaineer had seen a large structure in the area of Mount Ararat that looked like the prow of a gigantic ship. We contacted this man too late, it took a whole month to get a reply to my first letter.

Our expedition is the first and only fully-organized one that has ever had for its specific purpose the discovery of Noah's Ark. We have made an attempt to locate the Ark; but that does not imply the ultimate failure of the Ark's recovery. In practically every great invention and discovery, many attempts were required to finally bring to a

successful accomplishment the inventor's idea. The late President of the United States, Mr. Theodore Roosevelt said one time, "The only man who never makes a mistake is the man who never does anything." We have paved the way for other future expeditions, and trust that others will ultimately bring to a successful completion the work which we have begun.

One of the national reporters who called wanted to know if it were true that we were in Turkey for the purpose of prospecting for and discovering Uranium. He had perhaps read in the papers that one of our group, Mr. Ogg, came from Oak Ridge, Tennessee where our atomic energy plant is located, and where he had been employed for some time until he went with our group. We have been branded by the Soviets as American spies, wanting to spy on Russian atomic and military activities. *Pravda* speaks about Noah's Ark as if it was a fairy tale but we know better. Another researcher, 54-year-old archaeologist Egerton Sykes, scratches his white mane in wonder as state in *Time* of April 25, 1949, "Rubbish! I'm darn sure I'm not going to sit up there in my winter wollies peering at a chunk of desert through a a telescope. Anyone who thinks I'm going to climb that mountain and sit on top amid the ice and snow spying on Russia through a telescope, must be insane. Besides, if the secret service were behind me, I wouldn't have so much trouble raising money."

Since leaving Istanbul, we have been gradually climbing from the sea level along the shore of beautiful Marmara to a height here at Ankara of 6087 feet. Along the way we see farmers swinging a quarter moon-shaped knife cutting his ripened field of golden grain. We see others gathering it into sheaves and stacking it and still others beating it out of the straw, winnowing it, and conveying the precious grain into a place of storage. I left Ankara for Erzurum on August 18. Messrs. Wood, Ogg, Najati, Lieutenant, a soldier and myself went. Erzurum is where the first national congress convened July 23, 1919. It is also where the Armenian King Tirdat was converted to Christianity through the efforts of St. Gregory, and Christianity became the Armenian state religion in A.D. 303. When Christianity becomes the religion of the state in any nation, the essence of true Christianity has already been lost and merely the shell or form remains. The Armenian Church had gradually apostatized to an appalling degree, and after the fall of Constantinople in A.D. 1453, Mehmet the conqueror bestowed great power upon the patriarch of the Armenian Church, so that the incumbent had great civil power conferred upon him to exert over his flock. This was also true, even before the Armenian Church got it from the Greek patriarchate. For any spiritual offense, he could fine, imprison, or send into exile. No wonder these churches have no spiritual life today. If there is one organized Evangelical Christian Church on fire for God in all of Turkey today, I don't know about it. The Mohammedan mosques in this city are old, dilapidated, and some are ready to collapse. If there is anything sacred about them I do not sense it. My conviction is that these people pretty well know that their religion is a farce. Womanhood has not yet been delivered from her miserable state of human slavery. With the exception of a very few who have accepted the reformation inaugurated by Atatürk, most women here were the veils over their faces, generally big shawls or veils. One pities them as they wearily trudge their way up and down the rugged stone-paved streets these hot summer days.

We traveled up toward Kars where Ani has many ancient churches. The roads were terrible in places. We stopped several times and inquired about Noah's Ark, and Mr. Reşit [pronounced "Reshit"], who claimed to have seen it last fall; but no one had even heard about him or the Ark. There was Mount Ararat as it proudly lifted its lofty, snowy white head 17,000 feet into the azure space and majestically bathing its crystal snow and ice-crowned peak in the brilliancy of an August afternoon oriental sun. This mountain of which poets have sung and sages written! Ages have come and gone, millenniums of duration have been born and faded into oblivion; but this monument of endurance has weathered all time. It has defied the untold numbers of earthquakes undauntedly—and geological changes of the deluge—and will stand unaltered as long as time endures.

We calmly rested last night in the shadow of the greatest mountain on earth, historically speaking. Here stands proud, greater Mount Ararat, looking down upon all the other mountains of the great eastern Turkey ranges. This is the birth place, the cradle if you please, of the post-deluvian civilization. In talking with a military Patrolman, he said he had been on top of lower Mt. Ararat a few weeks ago, and there is a hollow on top of it that looks like a dead crater. The black sand-like substance is still sliding down the sides as if the eruption had been but a few months ago.

When the close Turks or relatives greet each other, they kissed each other on both cheeks instead of one side as we westerners do. The Turkish law requires every hotel in the land to receive the police certificate from everyone who registers. The cost of the hotel for me amounts to one United States dollar. There is plenty of beef in this area, but no cold storage facilities. If you want a piece of beef steak at the restaurant, you have to order it the day before, likewise with chicken. No fish is on the market except canned sardines put up in pure olive oil at Istanbul. The duration of the winters around Erzurum is eight months, and they say it is winter all the time during that time. Practically all the buildings have flat roofs. From my window I see dry weeks and grass on some. It reminds me of the scripture that speaks of not harvesting on a roof. What keeps these roofs from leaking is a mystery to me. I understand why the people are not interested in Noah's Ark, as they need to concentrate on their business. There is need of education on the subject of sanitation. Very little of the food there is not exposed to the common house fly.

I am now instructing Mr. Najoti to wire the Governor of Mardin to contact Shukru Asena for him to contact Reşit Bay to assist us in locating the Ark. We stopped several times and inquired about Noah's Ark, and Mr. Reşit, who claimed to have seen it last fall; but no one had even heard about him or the Ark. We passed the village of Kari and two military posts. When we got to the top of the ridge, for we had been climbing for miles, our eyes looked upon an extensive valley many miles long and almost as wide. In this valley is located the town of Igdir. Not far from Igdir is a

small lake nestled in the hills with Mt. Ararat's peak reflected in its calm, clear waters. I have not seen a lake in eastern Anatolia. Our exploration trip today revealed the fact that there was a great deal more snow on the north side than we had anticipated. We were amazed also at our miscalculations in regard to the accessibility of the mountain from the north and northwest. We discovered that the intervening mountains between the valley on the north side and the base of higher Ararat are just as rugged, high, and perilous to climb as those on the south side. Our preconceived notion that the ascent of Ararat from the north would be considerable easier faded into oblivion long before we reached our vantage point to survey the situation.

The path we had been told led from the main highway to the east was not there. We had pass it far below, and the paths we saw were domestic animal paths leading up to the grazing slopes and mountain side, where one could easily walk or ride horse back. We were astonished, too, how far from the northern base of higher Ararat our road led us. We were actually farther away from the mountain than we were at Bayazit. I have carefully scanned the various rock formations, the valleys, the swamp west and south of higher Ararat, for evidences of a deluge. On the west side of higher Ararat, I found on our trip of August 27 what clearly appeared to me had once been the shore of a great lake. I picked up some stones from the now dead lake shore. Apparently the bottom of the lake through the thousands of years has gradually been raised by the earth. Japheth's tomb (or Jacob's tomb although I personally thin it should be Japheth's tomb) is supposedly near here and the Village of Tahilke. Mr. Ogg and party started a final exploration trip to an elevation on the west side of Ararat, where a small lake was discovered. The villages near the base of Mt. Ararat are of the most poverty-stricken kind. The people live principally on chees and milk as they generally own a log of sheep, goats, and cattle. They live and dress like the poorest gypsies I have ever seen. These Turkish Kurds are known to be great warriors and are to this day not at all too friendly towards the Turkish government.

We moved only about fifteen miles east of Bayazit where we stopped at a small village, a military post, named Survehan, the last post office before we reach the foot hills of the mountain. We had planned to right on to our final camping place before making the ascent, but when we arrived at Surbehan (five miles from the Russian and Iranian border) and had tea with the commanders, we were informed that we would not be allowed to go any further until a military permission had been transmitted to the commander here from the military commander of this province. In Bayazit we purchased supplies for seven days' duration. Our caravan was a bit scattered with eleven donkeys, five horses, and a mule, carrying our luggage and supplies. An army bus with officials, a Doctor, and interpreter followed, then an army truck with some of the members of the expedition, including myself, riding with the driver, and some soldiers and their equipment, and last of all the jeep with Mr. Wood, Ogg, and Freddie. The Commander at Surbehan, Mr. Batur, showed us the village including a squash growing up in the tree, something I have never seen before. Then vines had climbed directly up the tree.

When we received orders, the Turkish government loaned us canteens, pick axes, tents, straw ticks, a group of soldiers with a captain, lieutenant, and a sergeant. We hired a guide who had lived not far from the base of Mt. Ararat, and who knew the whole country round about. The commander gave us two wagons and horses. One wheel broke and a large truck was commandeered to take us the rest of the way. The peasants were very nice to us, two of the men accompanied us for a distance and carried some of us across a stream, it was too wide for some of us to jump across. A horse had been provided for me to ride on, all the others walked. When we started out, some of our explorers did not understand evidently that we were under military orders and were starting out ahead of the soldiers and were called back by Mr. Negati who told them we had to go together. They got roiled up about it and talked very indignantly to Mr. Nejati who took it all kindly but insisted on the captain's orders. The guide kept quite a distance ahead of us all the time. It was quite a site to see our line going forward in single file—soldiers, pack animals, our groups of explorers, and interpreters.

We arrived at our camping place for the night about 5 o'clock. The soldiers put up all our tents except Mr. Wood's and Freddie's small one. Our guide went to look for water and returned with the report that there was a hole with some, but not enough for man and animals, so they took containers and the horses down. The little quantity of water that remained and which had accumulated from rain and snow was soon exhausted but we were able to make out, by straining it for it was quite dirty. We doctored it up and it tasted good. We had taken some water with us; but it was used up. It got pretty cold during the night. We all kept our clothes on. I took off my shoes, but wished before morning I had kept them on. Two guards were on duty all night long, changing off with two new ones every few hours. Two soldiers also walked ahead of the caravan, one on each side, from two-hundred to three-hundred feet from us.

We were traveling around a big mountain on the south side from where we are camping now when shouts came, "Stop and go back, we can't get through this way with the pack animals." So we stopped for a little while and then came to our present camping place and put up for the night. Before we did so, we discovered in what an awful dilemma we were, for there was water for neither man nor beast. We did not know what to do. In the meantime, the report came that they had found water, but there was just enough for human consumption, and none for the animals, which were stamping their feet they were so thirsty. Some of the donkeys had collapsed on the way and only with great difficulty could the men force them to get up and go on. All the donkeys had been without a drop of water for thirty-six hours. Most of the water we had brought with us had leaked out of the kegs and gasoline cans the day before. It was dusk of the second day when the report came that water had been found. There was a stampede of men and horses, with canteens, kegs, and cans to the place. There were snakes, bugs, dirt, and mud; but it was water. They drank and dipped and filled their canteens and cans, then the water was exhausted. During the night I awake as

they had returned with the water, got a canteen, put a handkerchief over the hole and drank the dirty water, but felt no ill effects afterwards. The next day the boys cleaned the hole, dug the mud out and a fresh supply of water seeped in during the night. The wind was cold and blowing from the east. There are three tents from twenty-five to fifty feet long each, and eight feet wide. At one time, people lived here, but since fifteen years ago the Turkish government does not allow anyone in this territory. The sheep folds formed of rocks still remain.

About noon, we had a scare, soldiers ran with their rifles leveled towards a high-fugged mountain, just above us to the north. They yelled at me to go for shelter. There was no room behind the big rock where the soldiers were, so I lay down behind a small one bill after some shouting back and forth. We all became calm from the great excitement when it was learned that a military reserve officer was doing patrol work up there. Later, he came down and we talked with him for he spoke English quite well. I went up the first two ridges west of our camp. On the way up, we saw some foot prints of a bear; but did not see the bear. I heard a gun shot about 5 o'clock but did not know at the time what it meant, till Mr. Harputlu asked me if I had heard the shot, I said "yes" He said "it was me, I shot an eagle who had come down from the mountain." He said for the summer all the animals from the south side of the mountain where our camp is, move to the north of the mountain because there is no water here. The wild pigs, goats, bear and even the snakes migrate to the north side of the mountain. We returned to our base from the most perilous and difficult part of our initial exploration trip on the southeaster side of greater Ararat, also the southern part of the plateau between the two Ararats. This area around Ararat has not had a drought like this in eighty years. Our camp was located at an altitude of about ten-thousand feet. Back in Bayazit, there are open sewers running parallel with the streets, and mud sidewalks. There is but one restaurant in the city. Some people seem to think at my age—61—there would be no longer a feeling of homesickness. This may be true of some folk; but not with me.

We arranged today to explore all the region that has not been gone over thus far. After hours of consultation, we decided to hire nationals to help us in our work of observation. Three men have been hired at eight lira per day—eight lira is about two and a half dollars. We furnished them with food, daggers, and letter of recommendation in case they should be questioned by the military patrol. We have offered a reward of one-thousand lira for the locating of the Ark by the searchers.

A fire started in the lower slopes of the west side of higher Ararat today. It kept on increasing and spreading out till there is a large black area where the fire has swept across. The wind is blowing from the south, which drives the fire northward. Mr. Nejati says the snakes and other animals will now all move farther north before the fire. This afternoon there have been a few showers and this had caused the fire to practically become extinguished, for the time being, only to blaze up again. I see now the whole west side of the mountain is ablaze and it is a most beautiful sight to see.

At two-thirty this afternoon our three scouts returned from their five-day search in the northwest and north sides of higher Ararat and reported to us their futile endeavor to find the Ark in that area. They spent the first night at what was once a village by the name of Chevirmeh, now only ruins remain. The second and third nights they spent at the lake up on the north side of higher Ararat. The lake is about 150 feet across both ways. We however, have no absolute proof of how much territory they covered, nor how thorough their search may have been. This is another reason why I believe, with others, that another expedition should be made. I have not been reconciled yet that we did not get Mr. Reşit, who claimed to have been something that resembled a huge ship, in the fall of 1948. If I had the money or the full cooperation of our group, we might have been able to get him there as the demand of Mr. Shukru Asena, his boss, was only about \$250 in U.S.A. money. Some argued that after we got him there, he would ask a much larger sum since the \$250 was merely to pay for the expense of the two, coming and going. A telegram came today in reply to mine that Mr. Shukru is not at his home in Derick. So I sent another message to the Governor at Diyarbakir, asking him to assist us in contacting him.

A report also came last night from an elderly woman who declared that ten years ago some people went up to the top of Mt. Ararat and found the Ark up there. It would be well-nigh impossible for it to be on the top of the peak, but that is where Archdeacon Nouri claimed he had seen it in April of 1887. I see a regiment of soldiers returning from maneuvers, now they are singing, the officer on horseback is directing them. It is quite a sight to behold. They all keep perfect step, marching to their barracks on the eastern hill tops. Turkey has compulsory military service, and every man must serve two years or suffer the penalty for refusing. Certain domestic animals in eastern Turkey are considered sacred. The pigeon is looked upon as a fowl quite distinct from any other bird, for they are neither killed or eaten in the Mount Ararat area. It is believed the reason for this is that during the flood Noah let three of them out of the Ark.

Today we dispatched a jeep-load of men over the ridge to the north of here and west of higher Ararat. They have followed the road around the north of the mountain for about fifty miles and inquired in the villages in that area about the Ark and for Mr. Reşit, but no one ever heard about either one of them, even the oldest inhabitants. However, it must be remembered that our group was always from ten to fifteen miles distant from the base of Mt. Ararat on this trip, and there is a strong possibility that some small hamlets may be nestled among the mountain ranges far away from the main road where the jeep traveled and far away from the main road where the jeep traveled and which were never contacted because of their isolated location. All this area on the north side, from the road up to the northern slopes of the mountain needs to be explored thoroughly either by footmen or by plane. A party also made an exploration trip to the snow line. We made another trip to the north side and later another to the extreme northeast

side. A camping place would have to be established somewhere in that area to do justice to the research work. This will require considerable time, but the search in that area will most likely yield the object of the quest.

