



# **The Primeval Flood Catastrophe: Origins and Early Development in Mesopotamian Traditions**

## **(Oxford Oriental Monographs)**

*Y. S. Chen*

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Previous research on Mesopotamian Flood traditions tended to focus on a few textual sources. How the traditions originated and developed as a whole has not been seriously investigated. By systematically examining a large body of relevant cuneiform sources of diverse genres from the earliest period of Mesopotamian literary production in the Early Dynastic III period (ca. 2600-2350 BC) to the end of first millennium BC, Y. S. Chen observes that it is during the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000-1600 BC) that the first and classical attestations of the Flood traditions are found. On linguistic, conceptual and literary-historical grounds, Chen argues that the Flood traditions emerged relatively late in Sumerian traditions. He traces different evolutionary stages of the Flood traditions, from the emergence of the Flood motif within the socio-political and cultural contexts of the early Isin dynasty (ca. 2017-1896 BC), to the diverse mythological representations of the motif in literary traditions, to the historicisation of the motif in chronography, and finally to the interactions between various strands of the Flood traditions and other Mesopotamian literary traditions, such as Sumerian and Babylonian compositions about Gilgame&#353.

By uncovering the processes through which the Flood traditions were constructed, Chen offers a valuable case study on the complex and dynamic relationship between myth-making, the development of literature, the rise of historical consciousness and historiography, and socio-political circumstances in the ancient world. The origins and development of the Flood traditions examined in the book represents one of the best documented examples illustrating the continuities and changes in Mesopotamian intellectual, linguistic, literary, socio-political and religious history over the course of two and a half millennia.

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