

# **THE ARK OF THE COVENANT**

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## I. PROLOGUE

There is no other institution that remained so long in the heart of the theological concepts of the people of Israel as did the ark of the covenant. The attempt has been made in this work to synthesise the information of the Old Testament text about the ark of the covenant and the opinions of scholars who have pursued research on the ark of the covenant. Several names are associated with the Ark in Bible, and many books and articles have been written in an effort to solve –mainly through textual and from critical analysis– the difficult problems centering around the various names and descriptions of the Ark. A careful study of the ark records sixteen problems posed by the ark, and many more questions could be added to the list.

Textual criticism and form critical analysis have greatly enriched the literature dealing with the ark, but they have also compounded the complex issues involved. An attempt will be made in this study to dispel some of the mysteries surrounding the ark by utilising a historical approach, for Israel's history is seldom reconstructed by scholars, whose primary training lies in the disciplines of historical research.

The invention of this study is not to refute, or to quote to any great extent or even to analyse the many contradictory positions and theories advanced by biblical scholars who have wrestled with the difficult problems posed by the ark. The ark will be discussed in the light of its function within clearly recog-

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nisable historical settings, as far as they can be gleaned or inferred from the pages of the Bible.

The Pentateuch as a whole is a composite work, and older scholars have traced with reasonable confidence and clarity four major sources, which are usually known by the letters J, E, D and P. The historical narratives of the ark will be examined in the light of these four sources.

The oldest of these sources, J, was most probably written in Solomon's reign in the tenth century B.C. It is called J because it favours the use of the divine name Jehovah and because it was written in Judah.

This source contained an extensive account of the beginnings of Israel, focusing upon the divine promise to Abraham that the land of Canaan would belong to his descendants, who would become a great nation and an example of blessing to other nations. By leading his people out of Egypt, and enabling them at last to conquer and settle in the land promised to Abraham, God could be seen to have fulfilled his work<sup>1</sup>.

The next source, E, is rather more difficult to define and date. It gains its name from its use of the title Elohim for God, and also because it has often been thought to derive from the hill country of Ephraim. Much of this appears as additions and variations to what has already been narrated in J. Several scholars have questioned therefore whether there ever was a single E document of comparable range to that of J<sup>2</sup>.

The third source, D, is called Deuteronomic, because it provides the kernel of the book of Deuteronomy. It is to be recognised as important in notes made to the earlier (J and E) sources at the time, when these were combined with the book of Deuteronomy. It was composed after 587 B.C., when section of the population of Judah had been exiled in Babylon, and when the Jerusalem Temple had been destroyed. It reveals the plans and the hopes for the reconstruction and renewal of Israel which were brought back to Judah by the Babylonian exiles. This post-exilic work could be compared to a redrafting of J in the light of all that had happened since the death of Solomon<sup>3</sup>.

The fourth source, P, gives a later reflection upon the events and institutions which stood at the beginning of Israel's life, and its purpose is to bring

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1. Cf. Hastoupis, A.: 1986, 189-192.; see also Eissfeldt, O.: 1961, 179f.; Mowinckel, S.: 1964.; Wolff, H.: 1964, 73f.

2. Cf. Hastoupis, A.: 1986, 192-194.; see also Winnett, F.: 165, 1f.; Whybray, R.: 1968, 522f.

3. Cf. Hastoupis, A.: 1986, 194-197.; see also G.v.Rad.: 1953; 1984; Nicholson, E.: 1967.; Weinfeld, M.: 1972.



out their religious meaning. It seeks particularly to show that Israel was not just a nation but a worshipping community of people, whose worship was rooted in the revelation of God that had taken place at Sinai. Because of its special concern with worship and its administration it is usually referred to as the Priestly Document, and given the abbreviation P<sup>4</sup>.

Each source in its own way not only adds something to the information about Israel's origins, but interprets these origins in the light of its own contemporary situation. The story about the ark appears in a different way in each source. The real role that the ark played in the history of the people of Israel is going to be discussed in the light of the sources.

Due to this, it is going to be shown that in the ancient traditions the ark was regarded as the guider and the protector of the people of Israel through the march in the Desert, and the wars of conquest of the promised land. After the conquest of the land the ark became the cult object of the northern tribes; it joined resistance to the Philistines in the battle of Ebenezer; from there after an interval of approximately three quarters of a century, during which it was stationed in Kiriath-jearim, the ark was brought by David to Jerusalem and there deposited in his tent sanctuary, the new national shrine. This event marked the end of the first period in the history of the ark.

In the second period of its existence, the period extending from its installation in the national sanctuary at Jerusalem until the Deuteronomic Reformation in 621 B.C., or perhaps even until the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. it will be shown that the ark was manifestly regarded primarily as the container of the two stone tables of the Decalogue.

Then the history of the ark in the third period of its existence, in post-exilic times will be determined. The conclusion will be reached that actually there was no ark at all in the post-exilic Temple and that the authors of the Priestly Code had only a vague tradition of the ark and of its actual contents and nature. Therefore, they could coin the fiction of an ark in the tabernacle in the wilderness, and so impliedly in the post-exilic Temple, which was secondarily, and in the most uncertain and obscure way imaginable, the container of the two tables of the Decalogue. Primarily the ark was the throne of Yahweh upon which Yahweh sat as divine King in the holy of holies, and into whose august presence no mortal might go except the high priest, and even that only once

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4. Cf. Hastoupis, A.: 1986, 197-199.; see also Noth, M.: 1967, 180.; Mowinckel, S.: 1964, 9f.; Ackroyd, P.: 1968, 84f.; Vink, J.: 1969, 1f.

in the year, upon the annual New Year's Day - The Day of Atonement, and as the culminating rite in the peculiar ceremonies of this great day.

The opinion that the «Tent of the Meeting» was historically imaginary<sup>5</sup> made scholars not very interested in it. The negative criticism in P was an obstacle for the further investigation of the old tradition of the Tent.

However, all this criticism about the historical significance of the «Tent of the Meeting» could not stop research into the ark of the covenant, nor into the «Tent». This is due to the historical books of the Old Testament which were not identified with P and all the references in them showing the continuing importance of the ark of the covenant.

Some scholars did not take part in all this arguments and they followed exactly the text and the points where P agreed with the other texts of the Old Testament about the ark of the covenant<sup>6</sup>. Information about this view was given by Weib<sup>7</sup>.

Under this view, in recent years, Woudstra considered *Exod. 25:22* and all the details as a divine revelation which Moses received at Sinai<sup>8</sup> and Brouwer's opinion was that the text is naturally connected with God<sup>9</sup>. The interest in Brouwer's short article is not with history but divine revelation<sup>10</sup> because it is difficult for someone to describe the whole discussion about the ark in a short space.

With some difficulty, the whole discussion may be focused upon two main points:

- I. The exegesis of the biblical texts and
- II. Archaeological and the comparative study.

The second method –the comparison of the biblical text and the evidence of the foreign nations– is quite dangerous because it sometimes contributed to the divergence of opinions about the correct solution to the problems of the ark.

Many of these problems were suggested by archaeology and the comparative history of Religion. Some of the scholars followed the idea that the ark was

5. Wellhausen, J.: 1878.; 1885, 35a, 39a, 78, 80.

6. Josh. 3:6, I. Sam. 4-6; II. Sam. 6.

7. Weib, J.: He mentions the infallibility of Jesus Christ and adds arguments from the Old Testament.

8. Woudstra, M.H.: 1965, 75.

9. Brouwer, C.: 1956, 19-26.

10. See also revelation through the ark: Lev. 1:1; Num. 7:89; Josh. 3:11-15, 4:7, 6:4-20; I. Sam. 2:27, 3:31; 5:2-4, 6-12; 6:1-19; II. Sam. 6:6, 7, 12.

«the unoccupied throne of the deity» (Reichel; Dibelius)<sup>11</sup> and others that it was a liturgical object in comparison with the Egyptian decrees (Hartmann, Gressmann)<sup>12</sup>. Arnold<sup>13</sup> assumed that it was a holy oracle and that there was more than one ark, in the history of Israel. With this criticism was connected all the questions about the origin of the ark and Morgenstern<sup>14</sup> extended them further.

These sources should have been examined in the light of the Old Testament traditions. Everything is necessary there for reconstructing the history and the function of the ark and for understanding the content of the theological ideas expressed by it.

Because of this difficult situation outlined, one must depart from the introductory general review and turn to the presentation of the discussion about the main problems individually.

## II. THE PRESENTATION OF THE ARK IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

### 1. The word «Ark»

«Ark» is the translation of the Hebrew word אֲרוֹן *aron*<sup>15</sup>, (Akkadian *aranu*, *arannu*, *erinnu*)<sup>16</sup> through the Vulgate translated *arca*<sup>17</sup>, «chest» or «box» and in Greek *Κιβωτός*<sup>18</sup>. It was the chest, which stood in the Holy of Holies, and in which «the tables of the covenant» were kept.

### 2. Varieties of Titles

When one inquires into the significance and meaning of the ark it is found that it plays three main roles: it is the place where Yahweh is in a special way present among the Israelites<sup>19</sup>; it is the box in which are kept the two tables of

11. Reichel, W.: 1897; Dibelius, M.: 1906; as cited by Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 108.

12. Hartmann, R.: 1918, 209-244; Gressmann, H.: 1920.

13. Arnold, W.: 1917, 24-27; 132-133.

14. Morgenstern, J.: 1918, 125-139; 1925, 1-27; 1928, 1-151; 1939, 478f.

15. Kittel, R.: 1951.

16. Gesenius, W.: 1909; 1915; Holladay, L. 1971.

17. B.S.V. 1947.

18. About the meaning of the word in Gk. See Dimitrakou, D.: 1959, 714.; Tegopoulos-Fytrakis: 1988; Redpath, A.: 1975.; Kircher, C.: 1607; Laounds, I.: 1842.

19. Num. 10:33-35; 14:44.

the law<sup>20</sup>; it is the place where atonement is effected on the Day of Atonement<sup>21</sup>. The connection between these three ideas is not obvious; in fact one might wonder whether there is any link, apart from the name. Is it an example of separate traditions, linked together later by the compilers of the Pentateuch in its present form? There are solid grounds for this suspicion, when it is found that the first idea is derived from the sources E and J, while the latter are found in the sources D and P. Even the name is not identical in each of these traditions: as the place where Yahweh dwells, the ark is called «*the ark of Yahweh*»<sup>22</sup>; «*the ark of Yahweh, the Lord of all the earth*»<sup>23</sup>; «*the ark of the Lord Yahweh*»<sup>24</sup>; «*the ark of God*»<sup>25</sup>; «*the ark of Yahweh your God*»<sup>26</sup>; «*the ark of the God of Israel*»<sup>27</sup>. As the resting place for the tables of the law it is known as «*the ark of the covenant*»<sup>28</sup>; «*the ark of the covenant of Yahweh*»<sup>29</sup>; «*the ark of the covenant of God*»<sup>30</sup>; «*the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth*»<sup>31</sup>; «*the ark wherein is the covenant of Yahweh which he made with our fathers*»<sup>32</sup>. In source P it is given a third name: «*the ark of the testimony*»<sup>33</sup>. The question to be solved, therefore, is whether there were originally different traditions concerning the ark, or whether it was always regarded in the same light throughout the history of Israel.

### 3. The Ark in the biblical narrative

The ark played a most important part in the early history (E) of the chosen people. It went ahead of them as they made their way through the desert: it led them like a general at the head of his army<sup>34</sup>. The ark continued to play its part as their leader, in a miraculous manner, when they reached the confines of Can-

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20. Exod. 25:10-22.

21. Lev. 16:2.

22. Josh. 4:11.

23. Josh. 3:13.

24. I. Kgs. 2:26.

25. I. Sam. 3:3.

26. Josh. 4:5.

27. I. Sam. 5:8.

28. Josh. 3:6.

29. Num. 10:33.

30. Judg. 20:27.

31. Josh. 3:11.

32. I. Kgs. 8:21.

33. Exod. 25:22.

34. Num. 10:33-35.

nan<sup>35</sup>. It was the ark which provided a passage for them across the Jordan<sup>36</sup>. The waters of the river ceased to flow as soon as the feet of the priests who were carrying the ark entered the water, and was the reason why they stood still above that point until these priests left the bed of the river. But the ark is more than a mere pathfinder; it is their general, that brings about the capture of Jericho<sup>37</sup>. It participated in the fall of Jericho, when for seven days it was carried about this frontier city before Yahweh caused its walls to collapse. What did the ark mean to the Israelites? Why did they carry it throughout wars? From the texts quoted it is clear that where the ark is, there is Yahweh also. The ark guarantees the presence of Yahweh.

The military aspect of the ark is made clear from the title of Yahweh which first occurs in association with the ark: «*Yahweh of Hosts*»<sup>38</sup> and perhaps the full original form is «*Yahweh, God of Hosts*»<sup>39</sup>.

After the settlement, the ark first rested, apparently within the Tabernacle, at Israel's camp at Gilgal<sup>40</sup> but God later ordained a more central location at Shiloh<sup>41</sup>. When great battles were fought, it was time and time again brought from there to the front, as, for example, during the war against the Philistines near Eben-ezer, where it was captured<sup>42</sup>. In this period the ark is regarded as Yahweh's throne and Yahweh in association with it has the title «*enthroned on the cherubim*»<sup>43</sup>.

After the ark had been captured near Eben-ezer and restored by the Philistines<sup>44</sup>, it was at first transferred to Beth-shemesh<sup>45</sup>, because Shiloh had in the meantime been destroyed<sup>46</sup>. But since a plague<sup>47</sup> broke out in Beth-

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35. Josh. 3:3.

36. Josh. 3:15-17.

37. Josh. 6:12-16; Cf. Schoville, K.N.: 1978, 391-399.

38. I. Sam. 1:3; 4:4.

39. I. Kgs. 19:10; Am. 3:13.

40. Josh. 4:19, 9:6; 14:6.

41. Josh. 18:1; I. Sam. 3:3; Cf. Schley, D.G., 1989, 139-163.

42. I. Sam. 4:5-22.; Cf. Keller, W.: 1980, 174-175; 179-185.

43. I. Sam. 4:4.

44. I. Sam. 4:11; 6:11.

45. I. Sam. 5:1; Cf. Blenkinsopp, J.: 1969, 149; Goldman, S.: 1971, 21.

46. Ps. 78:59-67; Jer. 26:6-9.

47. I. Sam. 5:6-12; Geyer J.B., 1981, 293-304.

shemesh<sup>48</sup>, it was sent to Kiriath-jearim<sup>49</sup>, where it was placed in the house of Abinadab<sup>50</sup>.

David transferred the ark from Kiriath-jearim and firstly deposited it in the house of Obed-Edom<sup>51</sup>. By means of a religious procession David began to bring the ark to his new capital, Jerusalem. Abinadab's sons accompanied the new cart on which the ark was borne, Ahio was leading the oxen and Uzzah was walking beside the cart. A sudden accident caused Uzzah's death. He put out his hand to hold the ark and God smote him<sup>52</sup>. David made a mistake in attributing the death of Uzzah to the anger of Yahweh and concluding that Yahweh did not desire the removal of the ark. «*So David... took it aside to the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite*»<sup>53</sup>. After three months David and all the house of Israel brought the ark to Jerusalem<sup>54</sup> – to a tent which he had pitched for it. Thus David put Israel's most treasured religious emblem at the heart of Israel's life. The ark and all it stood for it, and David, Yahweh's elect and anointed one, were united in Israel's new capital at Jerusalem.

Solomon erected a Temple and placed the ark in the Holy of Holies<sup>55</sup>; it con-

48. Josh. 5:6-12.

49. I. Sam. 7:1; Blenkinsopp, J.: 1969, 143-156.

50. I. Sam. 7:1; Hart V.D.R. 1975, 726.

51. Japhet, S.: 1993, 282.

52. «And when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzzah put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and he smote him because he put forth his hand to the ark; and he died before God». I. Chr. 13:9-10. Comp. I. Sam. 6:6-7.

Goldman, S.: 1971, 221: «His sin was that, as an unconsecrated person he laid hold of the ark; it was an act of undue familiarity comparable with that of the people of Beth-shemesh (I. Sam. 6:19). An alternative explanation of the offence, offered by Rashi, is that it was presumptuous on his part to assume that the ark required his assistance».

Theodoritos Kyrou: P.G. Vol. 89, 809: «Τῆς κιβωτοῦ δὲ μετακομιζομένης ὁ Ὁζὰ περιτρεπομένην ἰδὼν προσήρπαιε τὴν χεῖρα. Ἐκολάσθη δέ, ὡς Λευίτης ὢν, καὶ οὐχ ἱερεὺς, διτι πελάσαι αὐτὴν τετόλμηκε. Μόνον γὰρ ἦν τῶν ἱερέων τὸ αὐτὴν φέρειν ἐπ' ὤμων. Ἐπειδὴ δὲ δείσας ὁ Δαυὶδ εἰς τὸν βασιλικὸν αὐτὸν οἶκον εἰσαγάγειν οὐκ ἐτόλμησε ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸν οἶκον Ἀβεδδαράν τοῦ Χεθθαίου κατέστησε».

53. I. Chr. 13:13; I. Sam. 6:10.

Goldman, S.: 1971, 222: «According to I. Chr. 14:18, 24 he was a Levite of the family of Korah and later one of the doorkeepers for the ark. It is possible, therefore, that he is called Gittite because he was a native of the Levitical city Gath-rimmon».

54. I. Chr. 15:28-29; 16:1; I. Sam 6:15-16; Cf. Ap-Thomas, D.R., 1964, 276-295.

55. I. Kgs. 8.

sequently also came to be known, as «*the house of the ark cover*»<sup>56</sup>. The ark in this period was a cultic object. It is a big surprise that the ark in this period had a prominent role in the royal cult theology of Jerusalem. The battles of Yahweh against the enemies of Israel are represented in the liturgy of the cult<sup>57</sup>. The ark as the footstool<sup>58</sup> of the One who sits enthroned above the cherubim<sup>59</sup> thus becomes the focus of the affirmations in the liturgy about the kingship of God.

No further mention of the ark occurs in the historical books. Shishak may have removed it<sup>60</sup>, Manasseh may have replaced it with his image of Astarte<sup>61</sup>, and then Josiah restored it<sup>62</sup>, though it is most likely that it was destroyed or stolen during Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. *Jer. 3:16* may imply the existence of the ark, and the legend of *II.Macc. 2:4* is related to the passage in Jeremiah. The fate of the ark is a mystery.

An optimistic theology appears greatly in D. According to D the ark is «*the ark of the covenant*»<sup>63</sup>, a wooden chest which contains the two tables of the Decalogue. The tables of the law are the receipt, testifying that Israel had made a pact, a covenant with Yahweh. The ark is the sacred guardian of the pledge which Israel gave to Yahweh; it is the box which contains the covenant, the covenant which shapes the destiny of Israel. At the end of the day, its destruction at the exile is not the ultimate catastrophe. *Jer. 7* points out that Yahweh can destroy his own sanctuary while in *3:16* Jeremiah had predicted that in days to come the ark would no longer be sought because all Jerusalem would eventually become the throne of Yahweh (v. 17). The symbolism of the ark has been replaced by direct faith in God under the new covenant<sup>64</sup>.

The tradition of P follows D and regards the ark as a box in which were contained the tables of the law of the covenant. The ark had a two-fold function, legal and ritual.

According to the description contained in *Ex. 37:1-9* the ark was constructed

56. I. Chr. 28:11; Cf. G.v.Rad: 1962, 234; Japhet, S.: 1993, 495.

57. II. Chr. 6:41; Ps. 132:8-10.

58. I. Chr. 28:2.

59. I. Sam. 4:4; II. Sam. 6:2; I. Chr. 13:6.

60. I. Kgs. 14:26.

61. II. Chr. 33:7.

62. II. Chr. 35:3.

63. Deut. 10:1-11.

64. Jer. 31:31-34.

from acacia wood<sup>65</sup> by Bezalel under Moses instructions. According to *Deut. 10: 1-3*, Moses made the ark<sup>66</sup>. The ark was two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. It was overlaid out and in with gold and had a gold moulding around it. On either side were two golden rings through which two poles of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, were put to carry the ark<sup>67</sup>. Inside were the tables of the law. Moses was commanded, however, to make a «cover» of pure gold and to attach to it two golden cherubim<sup>68</sup> facing each other with their wings overshadowing the cover. What was the purpose of this cover?

If the ark is a receptacle, the cover still cannot be regarded merely as a necessary finishing touch. A glance at the provisions of the priestly code, moreover, shows that the cover constitutes a very special part of the ark. It is in fact the secret place where Yahweh speaks directly to Moses, the place where God communicates with his people (*Exod. 25:22 Nu. 7:89*). The term for the lid of the ark is כַּפֹּרֶת *kapporeth* it may mean merely «covering» but much more «atonement for» («covering over»). It is the place where atonement is effected between God and the people of Israel on the Day of Atonement *Lev. 16:2*<sup>69</sup>.

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65. It is the only timber which grows in Sinai, and is thus connected with the Creator Deity. The LXX calls it ξύλον ἁσπιτον, «the wood of life».

66. «Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood... towards the mercy seat were the faces of the cherubim», *Exod. 37:1-19*.

*Deut. 10:1-3*: «At that time the Lord said to me (Moses), “Hew two tables of stone like the first, and come up to me on the mountain and make an ark of acacia wood. And I will write on the tables the words that were on the first tables which you broke, and you shall put them in the ark”. So I made an ark of acacia wood, and hewed two tables of stone like the first, and went up the mountain with the two tables in my hand».

«The book of Deuteronomy knows a tradition that Moses made the ark, and this is earlier testimony than the Priestly Document and is in disagreement with it, since the latter attributes its construction to Bezalel who is unmentioned in Deuteronomy. For its historical reminiscences Deuteronomy is largely dependent on the earlier JE, and it may well be that JE once contained (Numbers) an account of the making of the ark». Rowley, H.: 1967, 54.

In the text of Midrash Rabbah, Ecclesiastes, (p. 189) it is written: «When Moses said to him (Bezalel): “Make an ark and the vessels and a Tabernacle”, he restorted, “Our teacher Moses, are we to bring the vessels and suspend them in the air! First let the Tabernacle be constructed and then the ark”. Moses said to him, “Perhaps you were sitting in the shadow of God and so you know [the order in which they are to be made]!”».

67. It was carried by the Priests or the Levites: *Deut. 10:8; Josh. 3:14; II. Sam. 15:24; I. Chr. 15:2*.

68. Pfeiffer, H.: 1922, 249-250.

69. Noth, M.: 1965, 117-121; Hartley, E.J.: 1992, 217-220, 234-235.



It has been understood as the mercy seat (*Exod. 25:17*), in Greek: *καὶ ποιήσῃ ἱλαστήριον*<sup>70</sup> ἐπίθεμα χρυσοῦ καθαροῦ.

### III. THE ORIGIN OF THE ARK

The first question to be considered concerns the origin of the ark. The sources, D and P, agreed that Moses, after the command of Yahweh, made or was ordered to make the ark. The pre-deuteronomic tradition (E) provides no information on the origin of the ark. Did it presuppose a Mosaic origin or some other origin for the ark? From the text could rise more than one possibilities.

Some scholars tried to prove that Sinai was the origin of the ark (Dillmann, Wellhausen). But it is not easy to agree with a Mosaic, desert origin. Too many scholars have regarded the forefathers of Israel as nomads of the syro-arabian areas where the Midianites<sup>71</sup> were living and information of the influence on the Old Testament faith in Yahweh from the Midianites is given in *Exod. 2:18*. But the forefathers of Israel could not be nomads for ever. During the transmigration they came in contact with the centres of civilisation (Egypt, Canaan) and they were to settle in Canaan<sup>72</sup> and –on some opinions– they became an amphictyony<sup>73</sup>. The arguments about the origin of the ark from the civilised region have to be examined. It was proposed –from the turn of the century– that the ark arose from the Egyptian or Canaanite civilisation, and scholars identified in the ark Babylonian and Egyptian influences, which influenced Canaanite civilisation.

Historical research on the origin of the ark has ranged from Sinaitic origins, and Moses, and to the centres of civilisation in Egypt, Canaan - Mesopotamia.

70. N.T. Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5.

71. Keller, W.: 1980, 149-150.

72. «But when the Israelites entered Canaan, and passed from nomadic to agricultural life, they were brought into a new world just because of the relatively high civilization of Palestine. Even the mere change of occupation would have affected their religious conceptions». Robinson, W.: 1913, 17.

73. Smend, H.: 1971, 623-630; R. de Vaux: 1971, 415-436; Bachli, O.: 1977, 192; R. de Vaux: 1977, 40-47; Lemche, M.: 1977, 48-59.

## 1. The Origin of the Ark in the Desert

### a. The Origin of the Ark in Sinai

At the turn of the century it was not so clear which was the most ancient source. Many scholars had the opinion that P was the most ancient tradition of the Old Testament. They approached the mystery of the ark's origin from a historical perspective. As a result they suggested that the answer to the question about the origin of the ark would be found in P and especially in Exodus. They based their research in *Exod. 32:34* where –as they thought– they had the first information about the ark.

Gressman, tried to prove, through *Exod. 32-34*, that the ark came to the hands of Moses, straight from Yahweh<sup>74</sup>. He used extracts of myths to establish his opinion. According to him, Moses went to the mountain in order to bring a guide to the people of Israel. When the deity revealed the name, Moses took the power and snatched the divine evidence of the seat of the ark. Then he went back to his people with the confidence of the divine presence, that Yahweh was connected with the ark. This mythological picture, according to Gressmann, was then transferred to the Judaic tradition and as a result Moses is the creator of the ark.

Gressmann followed Knobel's<sup>75</sup>, Wellhausen's<sup>76</sup>, and Dillmann's<sup>77</sup> opinion that between *Exod. 33:6* and 7 there is a text missing, due to the sudden beginning of v. 7, which gives information about the divine command for the creation of the ark. This is a summarisation of earlier arguments, the details of which follow:

1. The ark is mentioned in *Num. 10:33-36* and *14:44* within the pre-deuteronomic tradition of the Pentateuch. This presupposed an indication of the prior creation of the ark. The narrative was, however, discontinued because of *Exod. 25:10-22* (P) at the final writing of the Pentateuch.

2. According to the Hexateuch the ark was known at the time of Joshua<sup>78</sup>, so it had to have been referred to at least once before. The references to the ark in later contexts assume a note of its origin, which is in its rightful place after *Exod. 33:6*.

74. Gressmann, H.: 1913, 230; 1914, 74; as cited Schmitt, R.: 1972, 65.

75. Knobel, A.: 1857; as cited Schmitt, R.: 1972, 65.

76. Wellhausen, J.: 1899; as cited Schmitt, R.: 1972, 65.

77. Dillmann, A.: 1880; as cited Schmitt, R.: 1972, 65.

78. Josh. 3.

3. *Exod. 23:20-33* asks for a symbol to govern and lead the people. Was this to be the ark? The words *panim* and *mal'ak* are supposed to be connected to something and that is the ark<sup>79</sup>. Gressmann states a rule: «Wherever, in the myths of Moses there is a reference to guidance of the people, the ark must be mentioned first»<sup>80</sup>.

4. The view in *Exod. 32* is quite different. Here Yahweh refuses to accompany His people because of the golden calf; «The ark replaces the presence of Yahweh because of the golden calf»<sup>81</sup>.

5. Starting with the «tent»<sup>82</sup> in *Exod. 33:7-11*, it is assumed that this tent was important. If it contained anything at all, it was due to this that the ark also was important. Until v. 7 there is no reference to the ark, so a context must therefore be missing, which was speaking about the creation of the ark.

6. At the beginning of v. 7 there should be a reference which could also be present in *II. Sam. 6:17*; *I. Chr. 15:1*; *II. Chr. 1:14*.

7. In that way the role of Joshua could be perceived with greater ease. Joshua was protecting the ark in the tent as Samuel later did at the Temple of Shiloh<sup>83</sup>.

The opinion, which is supported with many arguments<sup>84</sup>, that the creation of the ark was referred to first between *Exod. 33:6* and 7 looks very possible and the origin of the ark from the Sinai is plausible.

#### b. The Origin of the Ark in the Steppes

The scholars who regarded the ark as originating from the Steppes based their research on the JE tradition and especially on the books of Numbers and Joshua. In order to lay the foundations for their opinion they tried to prove the antiquity of JE in comparison to P.

Kuenen<sup>85</sup> started his research from the references about the ark in *Num.*

79. Eissfeldt, O.: 1940/41, 190-215; Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 103; «The ark together with the regalia of the rod of the God and the sacred lot bear witness to the invisibility of the divine Lord, whose presence as Leader during the migration or in war is only assured to the eye of faith and is, moreover, described only in oblique terms as the presence of his *panim*».

80. Gressmann, H.: 1920, 22; as cited Schmitt, R.: 1972, 66.

81. Gressmann, H.: 1913, 221; as cited Schmitt, R.: 1972, 67.

82. Rad, v. G.: 1962, 234-241.

83. I. Sam. 3:3.

84. Cf. Kennedy, A.: 1951, 149; 1947, 654; Eissfeldt, O.: 1922, 54; Bentzen, A.: 1948, 100; Davies, G.H.: 1967, 36; Dibelius, M.: 1906, 46; Rudolph, W.: 1936, 45; 1938, 54; May, H.G.: 1936, 220; Rad, v. G.: 1964, 56; Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 17.

85. Kuenen, A.: 1887, 140; 175; as cited Schmitt, R.: 1972, 71.

10:33-36; 14:44 (E), and concluded that there should be earlier information about the origin of the ark in E. The ark was placed at Sinai. The sole purpose of the march, in *Exod. 3:12*, to the mountain of God (according to E) was the ark should be given from God, to his people, whom it accompanied throughout the march to Canaan.

Also Eichrodt<sup>86</sup> and Noth<sup>87</sup> believe that *Num. 10:33; 14:44* and *Josh. 3:6* offer an important argument. There is no doubt about the antiquity of their age because they display the spirit of the warlike nomadic piety. Even if there is no reference in any of them to the origin of the ark from Sinai, their presence before the distribution of the land is evidence for the origin of the ark.

In connection with the opinion, that the ark originated from the steppes, it should also be mentioned that the ark is presented as the war sanctuary of the central-Palestinian tribes. The tribe of Ephraim<sup>88</sup> is one of these tribes, and the ark has a very strong connection with Ephraim because of the following reasons:

1. Shiloh, where the ark initially is, belongs to the tribe of Ephraim<sup>89</sup>.
2. The names of Eli's sons, who serve the ark, are Egyptian: Hophni and Phinehas<sup>90</sup>.
3. It is the Ephraimite Joshua who serves the ark in *Exod. 33:11*.
4. Rudolf Smend<sup>91</sup> verified a connection between the tribes of Rachel<sup>92</sup> and the «war of Yahweh», and the ark had a significant role in that war. The forefathers of the central-Palestinian tribes know what happened at the Red Sea<sup>93</sup> and know about the worship of Yahweh. In this way, Smend tried to connect the ark with Moses and Exodus<sup>94</sup>.

### c. The Origin of the Ark among the Benjaminites

According to Jan Dus's opinion<sup>95</sup> the ark originated among the Ben-

86. Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 60.

87. Noth, M.: 1958, 88.

88. Potts, H.A.: 1988, 712; Barrett, R.: 1967, 462-463; Yeivin: 1971, 212-214.

89. Bourke, J.: 1954, 76-78.

90. I. Sam. 2:34.

91. Smend, R.: 1966, 36; 77; 79; 93; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 72.

92. Yeivin: 1971, 208.

93. Comp. *Exod. 15:21*.

94. Cf. Benzinger, I.: 1904, 13, 43; Morgenstern, J.: 1928, 121, 130; 1939, 478; Torczynen, H.: 1930, 64; Noth, M.: 1930, 96; Eissfeldt, O.: 1940/41, 197.

95. Dus, J.: 1963, 61; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 73.

jaminites<sup>96</sup>; it was an idolatrous, pre-Yahwist sanctuary. The basis of this opinion was Gressmann's<sup>97</sup> and Noth's statement<sup>98</sup> that *Josh. 2-9* contained Benjaminite myths. In *3:3* there is the reference to the ark and then follows the story about the epoch before the establishment of Israel. Beside this, he regarded the word «*sakan*» in *Deut. 33:12* (the speech of Benjamin) as being associated with the ark.

Nielsen<sup>99</sup> argued about the places which are associated with the ark, and noted that most of them are in Benjaminite territory<sup>100</sup>: Gilgal, Jericho, Kiriath-jearim. In *I. Sam. 4:12* a Benjaminite brought the bad tidings concerning the absence of the ark. He concluded that the ark probably originated among the Benjaminites.

Dus is focusing the faith of the people of Israel in the middle-time of Judges<sup>101</sup>. Yahweh was regarded as being present in the ark. According to that view the Israelites believed that God came with them from the land of Egypt seated upon the ark. Moses prepared the ark in Egypt (Sinai), and then Yahweh came and sat «upon the ark». In order to lay the foundations of his opinion he uses: *Exod. 14:19; 15:6-8; 23:20; 32:34; Deut. 7:21; 8:2, 7, 14; 9:3; 31:3, 6, 8; and Ps. 77:20; 114:4*.

#### d. The Origin of the Ark among the Midianites

According to Gressmann's opinion, historically, the ark originated among the Midianites<sup>102</sup>. He argues<sup>103</sup> that *Num. 10:29* is about the subject of the march in the desert and is parallel with *Exod. 32-34*, which belongs to Sinai. Moses asks the Midianite Hobab to accompany him because he knows the route of the march to the promised land. Hobab refused and «offered the ark as an escort instead of himself»<sup>104</sup>. As a result he regarded the ark's origin as being from among the Midianites.

96. Hartman, R.: 1918, 215, 237; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 73.

97. Gressmann, H.: 1914, 14, 134; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 73.

98. Noth, M.: Joshua commentaries, 1938.

99. Nielsen, E.: 1960, 62-63.

100. Baly, D.: 1974, 177-181.

101. Eissfeldt, O.: 1965, 259.

102. About Midianites see Babcock, F.G.: 1988, 1456-1457; Rogerson J. and Davies P.: 1989, 81-83.

103. Gressmann, H.: 1913, 234-237; 440; 1914, 92; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 78.

104. Gressmann, H.: 1913, 236; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 78.

The close relation of Israel with the Midianites has been established and other scholars accept a pre-Mosaic and pre-Yahwist origin of the ark. Benzinger<sup>105</sup> argues that the ark could not be the sanctuary of Yahweh, because He was staying in Sinai and the ark, on the other hand, accompanied the people during the march. The ark belonged to the people, and, when the unification of the people under the faith of Yahweh took place, it was harmonised with the new religion.

Reimpell<sup>106</sup> noticed the close connection between Moses and the Midianites<sup>107</sup>. This connection was the base for this argument. Moses made the ark, the appearance of which is a copy of the Midianite bench<sup>108</sup>.

#### e. The Origin of the Ark in the Syro-Arabian Area

An interesting point in the research about of the origin of the ark was the opinion which regarded that the ark as originating in the Syro-Arabian area. The main supporter of this opinion was Morgenstern who made a comparison between the ark and the *qubbah* and tried to show that there is a relationship between these two objects.

Morgenstern<sup>109</sup> based his research on nomadic material and tried to compare it with the ark. Before him Gressmann<sup>110</sup>, Sellin<sup>111</sup> and Torczyner<sup>112</sup> referred to nomadic material and its connection with the ark. Morgenstern pointed out<sup>113</sup> that the ark looks very similar to the small transferred sacred tents, *mahmal* and *utfah*, which come from the Bedouins. *Mahmal*<sup>114</sup> and *utfah*<sup>115</sup> are two different varieties of the same holy object which was present until the early Islamic epoch. The name of this holy object is *qubbah*. Lammens<sup>116</sup> made a long reference to it and helped the importance of this sanctuary to be understood.

105. Benzinger, I.: 1907, 369.

106. Reimpell, W.: 1897, 326-331; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 80.

107. See also, R. de Vaux: 1978, 330-338.

108. R. de Vaux: 1978, 328.

109. Morgenstern, J.: 1945.

110. Gressmann, H.: 1914, 92; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 81.

111. Sellin, E.: 1924, 91; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 81.

112. Torczyner, H.: 1930, 47-51; as cited by G. v. Rad: 1961, 121.

113. Morgenstern, J.: 1928, 22-138.

114. Grintz, Y.: 1974, 464: *Mahmal*: «a pyramid-shaped box sent by Arab princes, with gifts, to a pilgrim procession to Mecca».

115. Grintz, Y.: 1974, 464: *Utfah*: «a type of elongated chest, adorned with ostrich feathers».

116. Lammens, H.: 1920, 4.

The *qubbah* is a kind of tent of the pre-Islamic period tapering to a point and made of red leather. It was used as a ritual object and as a guide in the desert. However, the *qubbah* played a more significant role. It was brought into battle in order to secure the safety and victory of the tribe who held it. «Thus the presence of the clan or tribal deities in the battle was assured with a resultant promise of divine support and ultimate victory in battle. The sight of the *qubbah* inspired the tribal warriors to superhuman deeds»<sup>117</sup>. Inside the *qubbah* were kept the sacred stones (*Bethyles*) or the pictures of the tribe.

In the Islamic *Mahmal* the *Bethyles* were replaced by one or two copies of the Koran<sup>118</sup>. The capture of the *qubbah* in the combat means the defeat of the lesser god and the superiority of the winner. As a result, the people who are defeated lose their god. The leader of the people was the protector of the *qubbah*. Next to the leader is the priest (*Kahin*<sup>119</sup>) and the priestess (*Kahnina*<sup>120</sup>). It has to be pointed out that the importance of the *qubbah* was due to the presence of the holy stones.

Morgenstern<sup>121</sup> laid the foundations for this opinion as follows. There is a strong relationship between the Old Testament ark and the pre-Islamic *qubbah*. The function, the characteristics, the role in war, the house of the priest, the representation of the divine presence, all show how strong the connection was. For both the Israelites and the Philistines it is clear that «the deity or deities of the ark were indeed potent at all times and places, and this too with a power which transcended that of Philistine deities»<sup>122</sup>.

On the other hand, May has a different opinion<sup>123</sup>. When he refers to the *qubbah*, he mentions that the battle maiden accompanying the palladium does not seem to have any parallel in the Old Testament ark. Furthermore the *mahmal* and the *utfah*, according to him, are not sacred tents but may possibly be adaptations of such an institution.

May points out that the *qubbah* and the ark are the same in the following function: The ark, like the *qubbah*, accompanied the tribes when moving from place to place or when engaged in bitter battle. In both cases the movements were determined by means of oracles, derived from the contents of the palla-

117. Morgenstern, J.: 1945, 57.

118. Morgenstern, J.: 1945, 69.

119. Wellhausen, J.: 1927, 134, 143.

120. Morgenstern, J.: 1945, 60.

121. Morgenstern, J.: 1945, 94.

122. Morgenstern, J.: 1945, 87.

123. May, H.G.: 1936, 229-230.

dium. Among the Bedouin there were the sacred stones, *bethels* in the *qubbah*, while the ark seems to have been a repository for the sacred lots<sup>124</sup>.

## 2. The Origin of Ark in the cetnres of civilisation

### a. Egyptian Mythology as a source for the Origin of the Ark.

Volter pointed out the geographical and historical factors which imply an influence of Egyptian mythology<sup>125</sup> on the first history of Israel<sup>126</sup>:

I. Palestine, where the Israelites were settled, borders Egypt<sup>127</sup>.

II. During the Amarna Age<sup>128</sup>, Palestine was under Egyptian command<sup>129</sup>.

III. There was an exchange of elements of civilisation between Egypt and Palestine<sup>130</sup>.

Volter tried to argue that the religious concept with the ark had a mythological source. According to him Moses and the Patriarchs correspond to the main persons of the Egyptian Pantheon<sup>131</sup>. Later they were constituted as historical persons<sup>132</sup>.

Volter assumed the ark as being the water of the Josephides<sup>133</sup>. Joseph<sup>134</sup> corresponds to the Egyptian god Osiris<sup>135</sup>. The grave of Joseph in *Gen. 50:26* is the grave of Osiris. The comparison of *Nu. 10:35*; *I. Sam. 6:7-10*; *I. Sam. 7:2*; *II. Sam. 6:5* shows the same customs for both, the ark and Osiris. The names of Eli's sons are Egyptian. The ark originated from the epoch of the desert. It has to be mentioned that firstly in Shiloh the people settled the ark and its worship. All this story about the ark is conceived later because historically the ark has nothing to do with Moses, Sinai and the desert.

124. May, H.G.: 1936, 231: «It is worth nothing at this point that the function of the ephod parallels that of both the ark and the Beduin *qubbah*».

125. Eissfeldt, O.: «Myths», 1965, 35. See also Anthes, R.: 1961, 15-92; Van de Walle, B: 1963, 24-57; Hamlyn, P.: 1968.

126. Volter, D.: 1904, 116; 1912, 59; 1921, 212; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 85-87.

127. Baly, D.: 1974, 115-120.

128. Geodicke, H.: 1967, 201-202.

129. R. de Vaux: 1978, 94-99.

130. R. de Vaux: 1978, 117-119.

131. Clark, R.: 1959, 18-19.

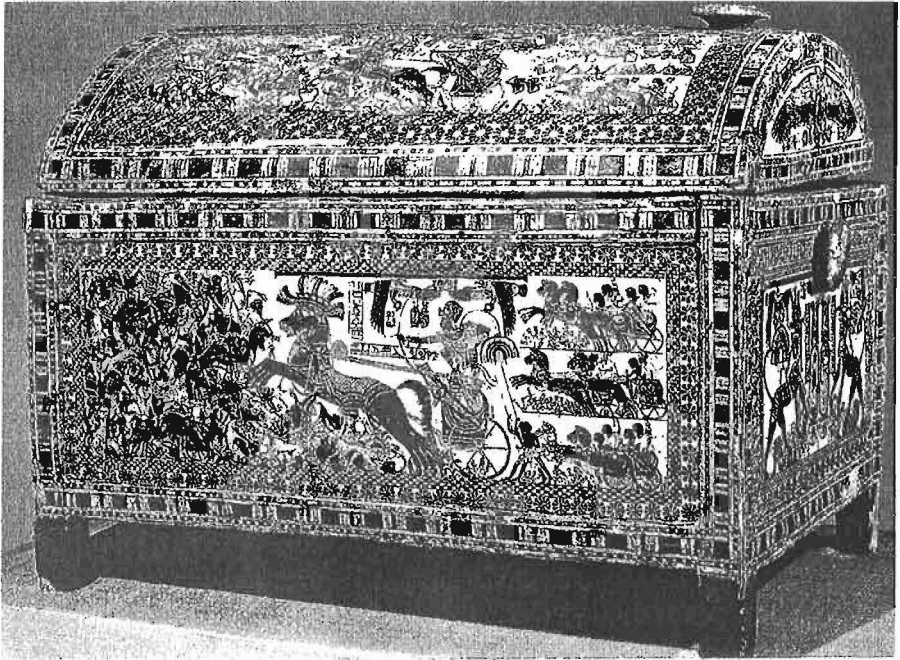
132. Volter, D.: 1904, 116; 1912, 40; 1921, 114; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 86.

133. R. de Vaux: 1978, 305-307.

134. R. de Vaux: 1978, 292-295; 297-310.

135. Clark, R.: 1959, 98-180; R. de Vaux: 1933, 31-56; 1967, 379-405; Budge, W.: 1972, 41-83; 144-156; Brunner, H.: 1975, 37-40; Beinlich, H.: 1983, 63-66.





«The box of Tutanchamen is quite similar to the ark» (The World of Old Testament)

In connection with this criticism, Kristensen's opinion<sup>136</sup> was that the ark could be compared with the Egyptian royal throne.

*Exod. 25:10-22* presents the ark as a throne and as a box. Such a kind of box-thrones was very popular in Egypt. Because of its form the ark could be compared with the king's throne. The name of the ark (*aron habberit*, *aron ha'e-dut*) reflects the ancient perception that the earth is the centre of the universal law of life<sup>137</sup>. The ark is the place where the earth and the law are to be found. From ancient the ark is connected with the law. The law of Moses, in Deuteronomy, rose from the earth's law<sup>138</sup>.

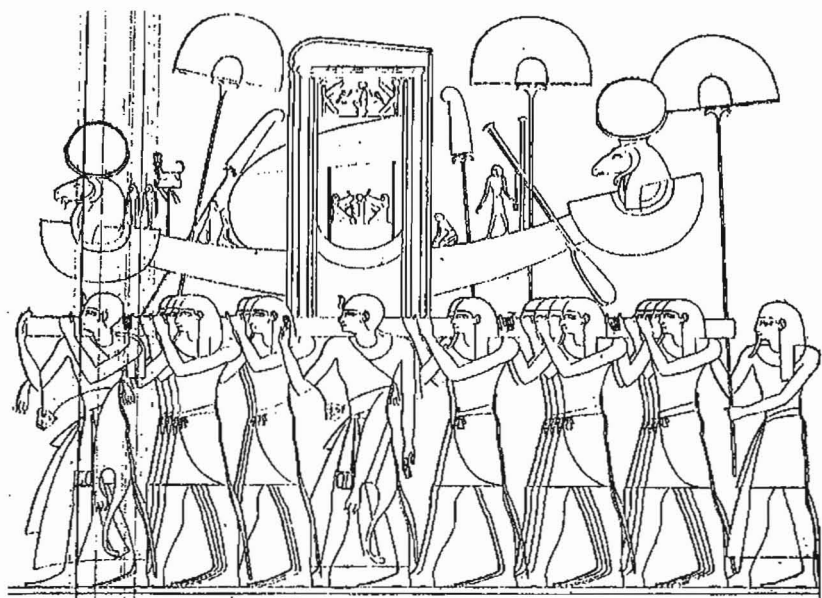
The question is how the earth's law can be a *berit*. According to Kristensen the answer comes from the mythology of the union of *Or* and *Sith*<sup>139</sup>. As a result, between Yahweh and Earth the law of the earth was made. The narrative

136. Kristensen, R.: 1933; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 88.

137. Kristensen, R.: 1933, 7-14; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 88.

138. Kristensen, R.: 1933, 21; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 88.

139. Clark, R.: 1959, 109-112; Breasted, H.J.: 1912, 31.



«Sacred boat being carried during a procession» (D' après Lepsius, Denkmaler, Abth. III, pl. 189)

in *Gen. 8* was changed by the Deuteronomic tradition. The two tables of the law in the ark show that union<sup>140</sup>.

Hartmann followed Kristensen's argument and tried to prove that the ark was a foreign element in Moses's religion and its connection with Yahweh's worship was secondary. He regards the sanctuary of Joseph and the Egyptian liturgical objects<sup>141</sup> as parallel to the ark. The ark in *Gen. 50:26* was actually the sanctuary of the tribes of Joseph<sup>142</sup>, which Moses brought from Egypt and situated in the worship of Yahweh<sup>143</sup>. That the ark was not a sanctuary of the march but a liturgical cupboard is proved by *I. Sam. 6*, where it could be transferred by a carriage<sup>144</sup>.

If the ark is regarded as Yahweh's throne a comparison with Osiris's throne can also be made. The description of Osiris's throne<sup>145</sup> and that of the ark looks

140. Kristensen, R.: 1933, 30-32; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 88.

141. Erman, A.: 1977, 49-51.

142. R. de Vaux: 1978, 313.

143. R. de Vaux: 1978, 319-320.

144. Hartmann, R.: 1918, 236-239; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 89-90.

145. Budge, W.: 1972, 146-149.

very similar and maybe reflects an influence of the Israelite religious concept about the ark from Egyptian Mythology.

Yehoshua Grintz<sup>146</sup> suggests that «the tables of the covenant» might have been placed in the ark in accordance with a custom, prevalent at the time, of placing documents and agreements between kingdoms «at the feet» of the god, the guardian of treaties and documents who supervised their implementation. Thus, for example, the pact between Ramses II and Hattusilis III was deposited at the feet both of the Hittite god Teshup and of the Egyptian god Ra.

Worden<sup>147</sup> also mentions the placing of documents and agreements at the feet of the gods and suggests that if there are solid grounds for considering the *kapporeth* as the actual throne of Yahweh, and the ark –«the casket»– as His footstool, then the above analogies are even closer.

These suggestions presuppose an influence on the origin of the ark from Egypt of Canaan which is going to be examined in the following section.

#### b. The Origin of the Ark in Canaan

Canaan was a country where many civilisations came and intermingled<sup>148</sup>. Keeping that in mind as a starting point, many scholars tried to prove that the Canaanite civilisation had an influence on the story of the ark. Dibelius<sup>149</sup>, Galling<sup>150</sup>, Gressmann<sup>151</sup>, Arnold<sup>152</sup>, v. Rad<sup>153</sup> and May<sup>154</sup> regarded Canaan as the place of the origin of the ark. They laid the foundations of their opinion on the following arguments:

1. The Old Testament text does not give the appropriate information about the origin of the ark. *Num. 10:33* and *14:44* can prove something only if they are connected with other evidence about the origin of the ark. Historically, they do not help at all<sup>155</sup>. This evidence is also missing from *Josh. 7:6* and *8:33*

146. Grintz, Y.: 1974, 460, 463.

147. Worden, T.: 1952, 90.

148. About Canaan see: Albright, J.: 1961, 328-362; Eissfeldt, O.: 1964, 76-91; R. de Vaux: 1968, 23-30; Rogerson, J. and Davies, P.: 1968, 73-77; Millard, A.: 1973, 29-52.

149. Dibelius, M.: 1906, 116-119.

150. Galling, K.: 1956, 65-70; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 90.

151. Gressmann, H.: 1920, 70; 72; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 90.

152. Arnold, W.: 1917, 132-133.

153. Rad, v. G.: 1961, 119-122; 1962, 234-241.

154. May, G. H.: 1936, 231-234.

155. Rad, v. G.: 1961, 119.

due to their being later additions and also in *Josh. 3:6* there is no reference to the ark at all<sup>156</sup>.

2. *Exod. 17:8-16; Num. 21* and *Josh. 8:10* have no reference to the ark and J and E do not mention the ark in the epoch of desert.

3. The construction of the ark presupposes an ability and a significant degree of civilisation. It is quite difficult for the nomadic Israelites<sup>157</sup> to decorate the ark with gold<sup>158</sup> and furthermore the connection of it with Cherubim and Kapporeth does not suit the desert<sup>159</sup>.

4. The characterisation of the ark as *aron (ha)'elohim* reflects a Canaanite origin<sup>160</sup>. Galling<sup>161</sup> pointed out that II. Sam. 6:2 alludes to a change of name for the ark and that it is transmuted to the «thrones of Cherubim Yahweh Sabaoth»<sup>162</sup>. This change is different to the initial name of the ark and the original connection with Yahweh.

5. The ark looks as if it were a liturgical sacred object<sup>163</sup>.

6. It is supposed that there were more than one ark because each of the sanctuaries had its own ark<sup>164</sup>.

7. Consequently, the most important ark was in the Temple of Shiloh, a sanctuary of the Canaanite god El-elyon<sup>165</sup>. The lamp<sup>166</sup>, the oracle<sup>167</sup>, and David's dance before the ark<sup>168</sup> look very similar to the Canaanite religion.

8. May<sup>169</sup> with archaeological parallels points out that the ark was a «miniature temple» and the place where the deity stayed. Dibelius<sup>170</sup> concludes that the God of the ark was a «Temple God», and the ark a cultic object which, like

156. Dibelius, M.: 1906, 31; 112.

157. Dibelius, M.: 1906, 115.

158. Murray, N.: «The extensive use of gold by a group that had only recently been in slavery might be challenged». 1962, 57.

159. Gressmann, H.: 1920, 1-17; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 91.

160. Arnold, W.: 1917, 33; 132; Rad, v. G.: 1961, 120; Galling, K.: 1956, 69.

161. Galling, K.: 1956, 69. Also Arnold, W.: 1917, 59-61; Rad, v. G.: 1961, 121.

162. Arnold, W.: 1917, 142-148.

163. Gressmann, H.: 1920, 4, 70; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 92.

164. Arnold, W.: 1917, 26, 32.

165. El-lyon was the god of fertility who was pictured by one or two Bulls or a snake of copper.

166. I. Sam. 3:3.

167. II. Sam. 7:2.

168. II. Sam. 6:14.

169. May, H.G.: 1936, 215, 228-229, 234.

170. Dibelius, M.: 1906, 14, 115.

all the others, came from the Canaanites. The connection between the ark and the inhabiting God led v. Rad to exclude the origin of the ark from the desert: «the notions of “meeting” and of “being enthroned” are mutually exclusive, and this seems to us to be the strongest of all arguments against the possibility that the ark originated in the desert»<sup>171</sup>. He regarded the origin of ark as being from the civilised region<sup>172</sup>.

#### IV. THE CONTENT OF THE ARK

The question of the origin of the ark is associated with the question of its contents. P and D regard the ark as originating at Sinai. The predeuteronomic tradition (JE) regarded its origin as before the conquest of the land; the ark comes before the canaanite existence of Israel. The conflict of opinions about its origin is also associated with the content of the ark. Very many questions arise from these two different traditions about the content of the ark, the representation and the function of it.

The starting point in the discussion about the content of the ark and its relationship with God could be by way of reference to the traditions. The earlier sources J and E do not refer to the content, the appearance and the kind of connection between the ark and God. The reference to the ark in *Deut. 10:1* (D) and *Exod. 25:10-22* (P) is not revealing because if it were to be compared with the information of the earlier sources it would be difficult to find the right solution for the problem of the content of the ark and its relationship with God. According to D and P the content of the ark was the two tables of the Law. In J and E the ark is presented as the «unoccupied throne of the deity»<sup>173</sup>.

It has to be mentioned that elements of the worship of foreign nations<sup>174</sup> may have been transferred to the tradition of the Old Testament: the sacred boxes and their connection with the worship of the stones<sup>175</sup>, the empty transported thrones of gods, the ritual objects, the custom of the Egyptians or the Canaanites to place documents or agreements «at the feet» of god<sup>176</sup>. All these elements

171. Rad, v. G.: 1961, 118.

172. Rad, v. G.: 1961, 122.

173. Reichel, W.: 1897; Meinhold, J.: 1900; Dibelius, M.: 1906; as cited by Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 108. Num. 10:35; I. Sam. 3:3; 4:4; II. Sam. 6:2; II. Kgs, 19:14; Jer. 3:16.

174. Egyptians, Canaanites, Arabs, Greeks.

175. See: «The origin of the ark in the Syro-Arabian Area», p. 19.

176. See: «The Egyptian Mythology as a source for the origin of the ark», p. 21.

should be examined in the light of archaeology and the comparative history of religions.

## 1. The Tables of the Law as the Content of the Ark

According to the traditions of the Old Testament the ark is *aron* box, chest. The characterisation means that inside the ark something must be kept<sup>177</sup>. The sources P and D agree that inside the ark were kept the two tables of the Law of Sinai. On the other hand, in the earlier traditions, J and E, nothing is mentioned about the tables of the Law, and one can only suggest that indirectly they oppose such a concept.

The predeuteronomic tradition, although it refers to the ark and the tables of the Law, does not mention a connection between these two. The ark should be connected with the Law in the JE text of Sinai, in *Josh. 24*, and in *Deut. 27* but in all these texts the ark is not mentioned. When Steuernagel referred to the text of Sinai he assumed that: «the ark has nothing to do with the Law, it means only the presence of God»<sup>178</sup>. Furthermore, some scholars have pointed out that it was against the law for the tables to be kept locked inside a box<sup>179</sup>. Against this opinion some others<sup>180</sup> argued that it was a custom in the ancient East to keep a copy of the law<sup>181</sup>. If someone wanted to see the original decalogue<sup>182</sup>, he could find it in the ark<sup>183</sup>.

177. «The Legends of the Jews», (p. 199): «...the Ten Commandments that rested in the Ark». Also (p. 205): «...golden crowns were fashioned on the Ark in which the Torah was kept».

178. Eissfeldt, O.: 1960, 283.

179. Benzinger, K.: 1907, 368; Wellhausen, J.: 1878, 34; Gressmann, H.: 1920, 15. as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 99.

180. Johnston, L.: 1962, 145-146: «The Egyptians carried in procession images of their gods enshrined in little coffers; the secret inner shrine of the Babylonian ziggurat probably contained a statue of god. In this box in the heart of Israel's sanctuary, there was a copy of the Law. For the Law is the expression of the Covenant by which God comes close to His people». Also Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 108. See *Deut. 4:7*.

181. *Comp. Jer. 32:10*.

182. «On the seventh day of Adar, Moses knew that on this day he should have to die... What did Moses now do? On this day wrote thirteen scrolls of the Torah, twelve for the twelve tribes, and one he put into the Holy Ark, so that, if they wished to falsify the Torah, the one in the Ark might remain untouched». *The Legends of the Jews*, p. 439.

183. Torczyner, H.: 1930, 36. as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 100.

At the beginning of the debate, the scholars<sup>184</sup> who regarded the tables of the Law as the content of the ark used the texts of *Num. 10:33; 14:44; I. Sam. 4-6* and *II. Sam. 6* to lay the foundations for their opinion. All these «war» texts show that it is very difficult for a chest to represent a God who fight in a war and proves all His power. The name *aron hab-berith* does not present a distinction between the ark and the diety. This name was the main argument for the supporters<sup>185</sup> of the idea that the ark was containing the tables of the law.

In addition to this opinion, F. Seyring<sup>186</sup> based his research on the name of the ark and concluded that the «*berith*» was added to the name of the ark in all the predeuteronomic texts by the Deuteronomist. His opinion has been followed by scholars<sup>187</sup> in the following years. The name *aron hab-berith* can only be understood in the light of the theology of the Deuteronomist. In this theology the tables of the Decalogue (*sene luhot ha'abanim*) and the *sene luhot hab-berith* are the same, that means that in the ark is kept the law of *berith*<sup>188</sup>. The argument that the word *berith* was added to *aron* by the Deuteronomist is supported by *Josh. 3:14* (*ha'aron hab-berith*), *3: 17* (*ha'aron berith Yahweh*) which grammatically are false and *I. Sam. 4:3-5* where the Masoretic text adds *berith*, but it is missing from the Septuagint<sup>189</sup>. This is very important because the Septuagint introduce word covenant, in Gk. διαθήκη, in the place where the Masoretic text does not mention anything about *berith*<sup>190</sup>.

Gutmann<sup>191</sup> pointed out that the Deuteronomic ark neither served as the ob-

184. Benzinger, L.: 1907; Cheyne, K.: 1899; Dibelius, M.: 1906; Eissfeldt, O.: 1968; Gressmann, H.: 1920. as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 100.

185. Benzinger, L.: 1907, 368; Dibelius, M.: 1906, 3; Gressmann, H.: 1920, 18. as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 101.

186. Seyring, F.: 1891.

187. Benzinger, L.: 1907, 367; Kennedy, A.R.S.: 1951, 149; Cheyne, K.: 1899, 301; Dibelius, M.: 1906, 16.

188. «The Legends of the Jews», (p. 157): Moses said to Bezalel “we shall make the Ark for keeping the Torah” and then the narrative mentions that “the Ark contained the two tables of the Ten Commandments as well as the Ineffable Name, and all His other epithets”.

189. Schmitt, R.: 1972, 101.

I. Sam. 4:3-5: «Καὶ ἦλθεν λαὸς εἰς τὴν παρεμβολήν, καὶ εἶπαν οἱ πρεσβύτεροι Ἰσραὴλ: κατὰ τί ἔπταισεν ἡμᾶς κύριος σήμερον ἐνώπιον ἀλλοφύλων; λάβωμεν τὴν κιβωτὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐκ Σηλὼμ, καὶ ἐξελθέτω ἐν μέσῳ ἡμῶν, καὶ σώσει ἡμᾶς ἐκ χειρὸς ἡμῶν. Καὶ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ λαὸς εἰς Σηλὼμ καὶ αἵρουν τὴν ἐκεῖθεν τὴν κιβωτὸν κυρίου καθήμενου χειρουργεῖν καὶ ἀμφοτέρους οἱ υἱοὶ Ἠλὶ μετὰ τῆς κιβωτοῦ, Ὅφνι καὶ Φινεὲς».

190. Josh. 3:15; 4:10; 6:6; II. Sam. 6:10.

191. Gutmann, J.: 1971, 27.

ject of God's visible presence or power, nor was it taken into battle. It was made to be the repository of divine revelation symbolised by the two tables of the covenant placed therein: hence the name *aron berith Yahweh*<sup>192</sup>. The ark was containing the Deuteronomic covenant regulations given by Yahweh to Moses at mount Horeb.

Nielsen<sup>193</sup> based his research on the Deuteronomic and the Predeuteronomic literature and pointed out that in *Deut. 10:8* the name *aron hab-berith* is the favourite designation of the ark in the Deuteronomic literature. This passage reveals a ritual for the renewal of the covenant. According to him in the Deuteronomists' opinion the presence of Yahweh is associated with the presence of His covenant namely the two stone tables, which Moses put in the ark.

Simons<sup>194</sup> argued that the difference in the names of the ark is based on the difference of the narratives: The name *aron ha' Elohim*<sup>195, 196</sup> is used when the text is narration and the name *aron hab-berith* in the law texts<sup>197</sup>. According to him the word *berith* is not a Deuteronomic addition<sup>198</sup>.

Finally, Fretheim, who researched the narrative of the ark in Deuteronomy, pointed out that in *10:1-5* the ark is set within a context concerned with the obligations of the covenant faith. «The ark is completely of secondary importance; it is mentioned only as the place where the second set of the tables of the Law (of the covenant) were to be kept<sup>199</sup>. It has to be mentioned that *Deut. 31:25-26* speaks about the ark in the same way. The difference is that in this chapter the Law which it contains is not written on the two tables but it is replaced by the book of Deuteronomy. Here one should make a distinction be-

192. Josh. 3:17.

193. Nielsen, E.: 1960, 69.

194. Simons, J.: 1932.

195. I. Sam. 3:3, 4:11.

196. Kennett, R.: 1908: «...If like the author of Gn. 1, he habitually uses the word *'elohim*, then the phrase *aron ha-'elohim* may mean "God's ark". In two passages 1.S.3:3 and 4:11 *'elohim* seems to be used as a possessive genitive, for an indefinite expression is not to be thought of in 4:11 and would scarcely be natural in 3:3. But the interchange of *'elohim* and *Jahweh* as synonymous names of the deity is so un-Hebraic that it is possible to imagine that the text has in these instances come down to us as it left the hands of the original writer... In any case we are certainly not justified in setting aside a well marked rule on the strength of these two passages».

197. Simons, J.: 1932, 291, 300.

198. Simons, J.: 1932, 296.

199. Fretheim, T.: 1968, 4.



tween the Decalogue which was placed «*in*» the ark, and Deuteronomy, which was placed «*beside*» the ark<sup>200</sup>.

On the other hand there is another book which probably was placed in the ark. According to the *Damascus Document* the Torah (the law of the king) was put inside the ark of the covenant. Vanderkam<sup>201</sup> referred to David's sin of marrying many women because he did not know the law of the king<sup>202</sup>. The reason for this ignorance was that the Torah was kept in the ark of the covenant which was in Kiriath-jearim. Only when the ark was brought to Jerusalem and the priest Zadok put the Torah into effect could David have learned of the elements of the book.

Wacholder<sup>203</sup> asked what was this *sefer hattorah*. Was it the Pentateuch, the Book of Deuteronomy, or another scroll of the Law unknown to us? The meaning of *hehathum* is also ambiguous. Literally it refers to a document upon which a seal has been affixed. The main point is the phrase: *asher hayah ba' aron* «which was in the ark». What exactly does this *aron* mean here? Does it refer to the ark of the covenant or to a simple box which contained the *sefer hattorah*? Wacholder suggests that the Zadokite author understood *aron* to refer not to the ark of the covenant but simply to a sealed container. «The author was compelled to understand the Deuteronomic *aron* not as the ark of the covenant but as a box or chest in which scribes wrap their manuscripts for preservation and safekeeping»<sup>204</sup>. That the *aron* of *Damascus Document* V, 3 does not refer to the ark of the covenant becomes more assured from the following clause: *ki lo' niphtah beisra' el miyyom moth Eleazar*, “because it had not been opened in Israel from the day of Eleazar's death”. Surely the ark of the covenant was accessible to the priestly authorities. Why then is it said that this *aron* was unavailable to David and to his predecessors since the days of Eleazar? The answer to this question comes from *Jer. 32:10-14*. The author read *Deut. 31:26-27* in light of *Jer. 32:10-12*, where the prophet commands Baruch to place the

200. Deut. 31:25-26: «Καὶ ἐνετείλατο τοῖς Λευίταις τοῖς αἵρουσιν τὴν κιβωτὸν τῆς διαθήκης κυρίου λέγων· Λαβόντες τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ νόμου θήσετε αὐτὸ ἐκ πλαγίων τῆς κιβωτοῦ τῆς διαθήκης κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῶν, καὶ ἔσται ἐκεῖ ἐν σοὶ εἰς μαρτύριον».

In the text of Midrash Rabbah, in Numbers (Bemidbar), (p. 126), it is written: Take this book of the law, and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant, which shows that it was placed by the side of the ark and not in it.

201. Vandekam, J.: 1983, 569.

202. «but David did not read in the *sefer hattorah hehathum*».

203. Wacholder, B.: 1985, 353.

204. Wacholder, B.: 1985, 357.

record of the sale in a safe place so that it might be preserved for many years. Moreover, Jeremiah also commanded that the public copy or *sefer hagaly* be hidden as well on account of the impending destruction of Jerusalem. According to *Damascus Document* V. 1-6 Moses commanded Eleazar therefore to do likewise to the «second» or eschatological Torah. Eleazar therefore, hid the Mosaic text as well as the public copy. Hence, the text of the eschatological Torah was not available for recitation to King David.

## **2. The Tables of the Law as the content, associated with the opinion that the Ark was the «unoccupied throne of Yahweh»**

According to the description of P the ark contained the two tables of the Law. The criticism of P by Wellhausen<sup>205</sup> made scholars<sup>206</sup> hold that inside the ark could not have been kept the two tables of the Law<sup>207</sup>. The main question in the discussion was the kind of the relationship between God and the ark, furthermore the kind of presence of God with the ark. Some scholars regarded the ark as the unoccupied throne of Yahweh<sup>208</sup> and some others that inside the ark were kept the covenant documents of Sinai<sup>209</sup>. The answer could come from the comparison with the worship of bordering nations and their decrees.

Reichel<sup>210</sup> based his research on the worship of the nations in Asia before the Greeks and especially on the unoccupied throne of god which was transported in battle and on the march, and which was used as a cultic object. This worship had the belief that the empty throne was presupposing the presence of god. Reichel mentioned that Xerxes used the throne of god of the sun during this campaigns. In comparison with this throne the Israelites constructed the ark before their march from Egypt to the promised land<sup>211</sup>. The ark was the empty throne which was guiding them and it was their leader. Through this empty throne Yahweh was leading and guiding them. The ark guarantees the presence of Yahweh.

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205. Wellhausen, J.: 1885 (1961), 34-35, 39, 78-80.

206. Dillmann, A.: 1895, 112; Lotz, W.: 1979, 292.

207. Exod. 25:10; 40:20; Deut. 10:5; I. Kings. 8:9.

208. Num. 10:35; I. Sam. 4:4; II. Sam. 6:2.

209. In comparison to the custom of other nations.

210. Reichel, W.: 1897, 23-27.

211. Exod. 25:8.

Meinhold<sup>212</sup> tried to find ancient traditions which could regard the ark as an empty throne of Yahweh. According to him Reichel made the mistake of taking as a starting point for his theory *Exod. 25:8*. The original texts which regard the ark as an empty throne are *Num. 10:33; Josh. 3:6; I. Sam. 4-6; II. Sam. 6; Jer. 3:16*. An obstacle for this theory is the name *aron* which remains the same in all texts. Meinhold tried to solve this problem in another way: he ignored the name and he asked what the texts were saying about the substance of the ark. The second question was about the origin implied through the meaning of the name. The name could have its origin in the form, in the appearance, or in the material from which the ark was constructed. The ark was made according to the Egyptian decree of the empty throne of god<sup>213</sup>. Its name comes from its appearance. According to its function it could be called *Kisse*.

Eichrodt<sup>214</sup> maintained that the two opinions could be combined: that the tables of the law were kept in the ark and the throne conception. This combination is justifiable because of the custom of depositing contracts at the feet of the god<sup>215</sup>. The ancient thrones of God in Asia Minor and Egypt frequently took the form of a chest.

Dibelius<sup>216</sup> followed Reichel's opinion and based his research on ancient texts of Numbers<sup>217</sup>. He argued that the ark was an empty throne which was transported by mythological beings and its form was like an ark.

Gunkel<sup>218</sup> focused his research on the phrase *yošeb hakkerubim*<sup>219</sup>. This phrase plays a significant role because it associates the ark with the ancient thrones of gods, furnished with cherubim.

The problem with these theories arises when the two scholars refer to the cherubim. They regard the cherubim as evidence of Yahweh's presence. The comparison between the ancient text (*I. Sam. 4:4; II. Sam. 6:2*) and those of P shows the difference. In P the cherubim are associated with the ark; they are on the top of it. In *I. Sam. 4:4; II. Sam. 6:2*, in Solomon's Temple, the cherubim are standing in front of the ark. Vellas<sup>220</sup> mentions that the two cherubim

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212. Meinhold, J.: 1901. as cited by Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 108.

213. Budge, W.: 1972, 141.

214. Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 110.

215. Grintz, Y.: 1974, 460, 463.

216. Dibelius, M.: 1906, 23, 72. as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 111-112.

217. *Num. 10:35; 14:44*.

218. Gunkel, H.: 1906, 37, 40, 42. as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 112.

219. *I. Sam. 4:4; II. Sam. 6:2*.

220. Vellas, V.: 1930, 5.

of Solomon's Temple are totally different from those of *Kapporeth* in *Exod.* 25:10-22. The difference in shape, in their pose and their standing in front of the ark is obvious.

Budde<sup>221</sup> argued against Dibelius and Gunkel with arguments which arise from the archaeology, literature<sup>222</sup> and history of Israel. According to him: All the religious and historical parallels do not testify anything about the ark. There is no comparison in function between the cube throne of gods and the rectangular ark. Why in the Old Testament is a throne mentioned with the name *aron* and not with *kisse*? In Deuteronomy the ark could not be perceived as a throne. It could be conceived only as a chest<sup>223</sup>. Furthermore, the exegesis of the phrase *yošeb hakkerubim* shows that Yahweh was sitting on the wings of the cherubim and not on the ark. The cherubim of the Old Testament were placed upon the ark and not as an ornament above the ark or under the ark as Dibelius and Gunkel thought<sup>224</sup>. The perfect representation of the cherubim is in Solomon's Temple and this representation rejects the opinion that the ark was the throne of Yahweh. The name *yošeb hakkerubim*<sup>225</sup> is an addition and maybe does not refer to the ark<sup>226</sup>.

The whole discussion about the opinion which regards the ark as the throne of Yahweh can be summarised in four points:

- a. According to Predeuteronomic tradition<sup>227</sup> the ark and Yahweh are the same.
- b. The ark is associated with the phrase *yošeb hakkerubim*<sup>228</sup>.
- c. The function of the ark according to P, and the vision of Ezekiel, is as a throne<sup>229</sup>.

221. Budde, 1901, 195. as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 112.

222. *Exod.* 25:10.

223. *Deut.* 10:1-9; 31:25-27.

224. Gunkel, H.: 1906, 38. as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972, 113.

225. I. Sam. 4:4: «...καὶ αἰρουσιν ἐκεῖθεν τὴν κιβωτὸν κυρίου καθημένου χειρουβείμ».

II. Sam. 6:2: «Καὶ ἀνέστη καὶ ἐπορεύθη Δαβὶδ καὶ πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ὁ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχόντων Ἰούδα ἐν ἀναβάσει τοῦ ἀναγαγεῖν ἐκεῖθεν τὴν κιβωτὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐφ' ἣν ἐπεκλήθη τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου τῶν δυνάμεων καθημένου ἐπὶ τῶν χειρουβείμ ἐπ' αὐτῆς».

226. Vellas, V.: 1930, 5: «The phrase *yošeb hakkerubim* is not often used in the Old Testament. This phrase appears in I. Sam. 4:4 and II. Sam. 6:2 and in both texts is a later addition».

227. Num. 10:35; Josh. 3; I. Sam. 4-6; II. Sam. 6.

228. I. Sam. 4:4; II. Sam. 6:2.

229. Ezek. 1:1: The vision with the enthroned Deity was constituted by: 1) four cherubim 2) *Rakia* upon the heads of the four cherubim and 3) the throne.

d. The parallelism is between the ark and Jerusalem which is characterised as a throne in *Jer. 3:16*.

The description in *Exod. 25:10-16, 17:22* shows that there were two different cultic objects in the Mosaic epoch: The *Kapporeth* with the cherubim, and the ark. The *Kapporeth* was not the throne of Yahweh. That throne is in the sky<sup>230</sup>. *Num. 10:35* asks from Yahweh to come from his throne in the sky and fight from his seat upon the *Kapporeth*<sup>231</sup>.

According to D and P the two tables of the law were kept in the *aron*. This opinion is supported by the custom of placing documents or pacts at the feet of the diety. This custom gives a solution to the problem of the absence of other texts which can prove this theory. The coffer under the *Kapporeth* could be used as the place for placing pacts or documents of the mosaic federation. The problem which arises from this theory is the fact that it was quite difficult to make an ark of two different places (the *Kapporeth* and the coffer) in the desert and furthermore that according to the description of D the ark has no cherubim or *Kapporeth*. Perhaps the main ark and the *Kapporeth* with the two cherubim were in historical reality two different objects<sup>232</sup>.

A new question now arises: what was the *Kapporeth*? Vellas discussed the meaning of this object and gave a complete description of its function and its relation to the ark of the Covenant. He developed his theory with a comparison with the Babylonian New Year Festival on the Israelite New Year Festival. As a result of this influence, the word *Kuppuru* was introduced into Israelite life. The evidence for this introduction was the name of this Festival *Kippurim*, from the verb *kipper*<sup>233</sup>. This word, as rightly translated in the LXX, means ἐξιλέωσιν (=mercy). From the use of this verb is produced the noun

230. The description that God inhabits the sky appears very often in the Old Testament before Ezekiel. Comp. Gen. 28:12; I. Kings. 8:27; Ps. 2:4; 11:4.

231. Num. 10:35: «Καὶ ἐν τῇ καταπαύσει εἶπεν Ὑπέστρεφε, κύριε, χιλιάδας μυριάδας ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ».

232. Vellas, V.: 1930, 7: «The description of the *Kapporeth* in Exod. 25:17 shows that the *Kapporeth* was divided from the ark. This is proved also by Exod. 25:21: “καὶ θὰ θέσει τὴν *Kapporeth* ἐπὶ τῆς κιβωτοῦ ἁνωθεν”. Although Exod. 25:10 tried to connect the ark with the *Kapporeth*, it actually preserved the recollection that at first they were two totally different objects».

233. The scholars who regarded the word *Kipper* as meaning «cover» translate the word *Kapporeth* as «cover». The texts of Exod. 26:34; 30:6; 31:7 show that, although the *Kapporeth* is associated with the ark, it is not the lid of the ark; it is put on the ark. Furthermore the LXX never translate the word *Kappreth* as «cover». LXX translate the word *Kapporeth* as «ἱλαστήριον» associated with the word «ἐπίθεμα» (= cover).

*Kapporeth*<sup>234</sup>. This atonement was made with the splashing of the blood of the sacrifice and the Deity was regarded as being present. That is why the *Kapporeth* means that holy place. The first name of *Kapporeth* was *Rakia*. Chronologically when the change of the name was made is not known. *Rakia* is described from Ezekiel: it was crystal and was placed between the two cherubim. The cherubim were used to hold the *Rakia* and the people of Israel had the opinion that there inhabits Yahweh. That is why the cherubim were so high. The word *Rakia* means the firmament of the sky<sup>235</sup>. It was the representation of the firmament of the sky<sup>236</sup>. It was also, like the cherubim, overlaid with gold and that is why in *Ezek. 1:22* it is described as crystal<sup>237</sup>. It symbolised the residence of God. As a result, the *Kapporeth* was regarded as the residence of God. The *Rakia* and so the *Kapporeth* could symbolise two things, the residence and the footstool of Yahweh. God who inhabits the sky has the *Rakia*, which holds the sky as his footstool. This is also clear in the description of Ezekiel who imagines God sitting on His throne, which is on the *Rakia*, and as a result the *Rakia* is God's footstool (*hadom*)<sup>238</sup>. Furthermore, to lay the foundations for this statement he examines *Ps. 132* and the identification of the ark with Yahweh. He mentions that the ark cannot be identified with Yahweh because of the conjunction *ve* (=and) in *v.8b*<sup>239</sup>. This conjunction should be cancelled if the ark and Yahweh have been identified. With the addition of *ve* the narrator wanted to distinguish the ark from Yahweh. In these verses the ark and Yahweh are entirely different. Yahweh could be associated only with the *Kapporeth* which symbolised the residence of God. If this conclusion is correct, then the footstool of Yahweh in *v. 7* is also the *Kapporeth*. Furthermore the ark and the footstool are totally different in *I. Chr. 28:2* where also the conjunction *ve* excludes the identification of these two objects<sup>240</sup>.

234. LXX translated it ἱλαστήριον.

235. Vulgata translated it *firmamentum*.

236. Gen. 1:14.

237. Ezek. 1:22: «Καὶ ὁμοίωμα ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς αὐτοῖς τῶν ζώων ὥσει στερέωμα ὡς θρασὺς χρυστάλλου ἐκτεταμένον ἐπὶ τῶν πετερύγων αὐτῶν ἐπάνωθεν».

238. Vellas, V.: 1930, 14.

239. Ps. 132:8: «Ἀνάστηθι, κύριε, εἰς τὴν ἀνάπαυσίν σου, σὺ καὶ ἡ κιβωτὸς τοῦ ἁγιάσματος σου».

240. I. Chr. 28:2: «...ἔμοι ἐγένετο ἐπὶ καρδίαν οἰκοδομῆσαι οἶκον ἀναπαύσεως τῆς κιβωτοῦ διαθήκης κυρίου καὶ στήσιν ποδῶν κυρίου ἡμῶν...».

Torczyner, H.: 1930: «According to the description of Exod. 25:10-16; 17:22 the ark was made from two different worship objects: 1) The *Kapporeth* with the cherubim which was

De Vaux<sup>241</sup> supports this statement and argues that the cherubim are associated with the ark from the epoch of Shiloh<sup>242</sup>. He based his research on the archaeological documents of the ancient East and tried to prove that the ark was made from two different parts: the first with the cherubim and the second with the base, which maybe is the footstool<sup>243</sup> of Yahweh. Some other scholars<sup>244</sup> regard the ark as Yahweh's throne from the beginning and from the Shiloh epoch as his footstool<sup>245</sup>. Worden<sup>246</sup> made a comparison with the Persian and Greek writers, with Cyrus and Xerxes and the documents from Ramses II's period in order to conclude that the ark was both the throne of Yahweh and the casket containing the covenant. Dus<sup>247</sup> regarded Yahweh as present on His throne in Shiloh<sup>248</sup> and in Jerusalem<sup>249</sup>. In the time of Shiloh Yahweh was regarded as present in his throne. In this epoch there could not be a different conception about Yahweh. According to Dus, Moses made the ark and then Yahweh came and sat upon it<sup>250</sup>. There is evidence for this concept in the text of the Old Testament. The problem is that this evidence is missing in the present text.

The religious concept of the people of Israel was that the ark was the container of the tables of the Law. This concept arose when God disappointed His people in *I. Sam. 4:21-22* when «His throne», the ark, was captured by the Philistines in Eben-ezer<sup>251</sup>. It was unbearable for the Israelites to think that Yahweh was sitting on His throne, the ark, in the Temple of Dagon<sup>252</sup>. Yahweh is in-

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the chariot, the receptacle and a copy of Yahweh, the holiest symbol of the ancient Israel, the one which is called in the later judaic literature "*Merkaba*" (Exod. 10) and 2) the ark». According to Torczyner's opinion the "*Merkaba*" was placed upon the ark and it could not be transferred even during the transportation of the ark and as a result the ark and the *Kapporeth* were regarded as one object which was named with the simple word «ark».

241. R. de Vaux: 1961, 97, 119.

242. Kennedy, A.R.S.: 1951, 149.

243. I. Chron. 28:2.

244. Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 57-59.

245. Ezek. 43:7.

246. Worden, T.: 1952, 89.

247. Dus, J.: 1964, 447-449; 1969, 290-294.

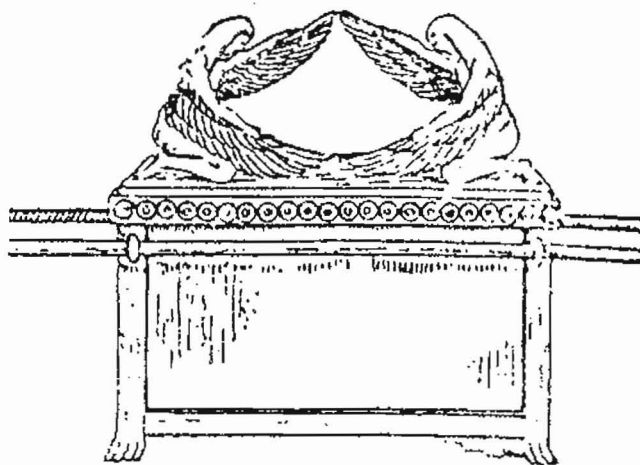
248. I. Sam. 3:3-10; 34:7.

249. II. Kgs. 19:14.

250. Dus, J.: 1969, 293.

251. I. Sam. 4:21-22: «Καὶ ἐκάλεσεν τὸ παιδάριον οὐαὶ βαρχαβῶθ ὑπὲρ τῆς κιβωτοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ πενθεροῦ αὐτῆς καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἀνδρός αὐτῆς. Καὶ εἶπαν Ἀπώκεισται δόξα Ἰσραὴλ ἐν τῷ λημφθῆναι τὴν κιβωτὸν κυρίου».

252. I. Sam. 5:2.



«Ark of the Covenant with the cherubim» (UJE)

habiting the sky. David transferred the ark to Jerusalem and through this way the ancient conception about the throne was introduced in the ark's worship<sup>253</sup>. Then the ark was regarded as Yahweh's footstool on which were based the cherubim.

From the whole discussion it is clear that the name *aron* excludes the possibility that firstly the ark was regarded as a throne. Later, the presence of the ark in Shiloh and in Jerusalem is associated with the conception of the throne. G. von Rad<sup>254</sup>, Reimpell<sup>255</sup>, Kennett<sup>256</sup> and Clements<sup>257</sup> have the opinion that the ark was conceived as throne earlier in *Num. 10:35*.

The phrase *yošeb hakkerubim* is associated with the opinion which regarded Yahweh as sitting on His throne<sup>258</sup>, between the two cherubim. If one were to ignore Wellhausen's and Dibelius's opinion that there were no cherubim on the ark then there is no chance of connecting the phrase *yošeb hakkerubim* with the sanctuary in Jerusalem and Yahweh, who is sitting between the two cheru-

253. About the transport of the ark from Kiriath-jearim to Jerusalem as an introduction to the worship in Jerusalem see. I. Chr. 15:1-16:38.

254. G. von Rad: 1953, 110.

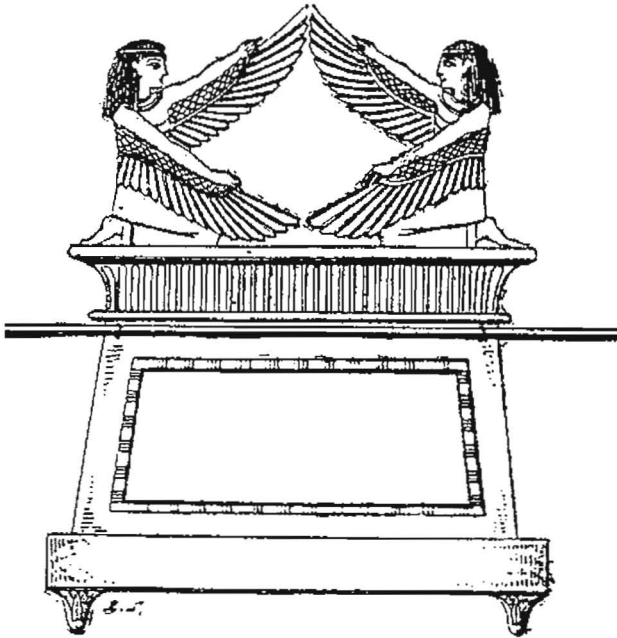
255. Reimpell, W.: 1916, 329.

256. Kennett, R.H.: 1908, 791.

257. Clements, R.E.: 1965, 32-34.

258. In the texts of Midrash Rabbah, in Numbers (p. 573), it is written: In the case of a mortal king it is forbidden to sit upon his throne, yet regarding Solomon it is written, *Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord*. (I. Chr. 29:23).





«Another reconstitution of the Ark» (F. Vigourox, Dictionnaire de la Bible)

bim. It has to be mentioned here that other scholars<sup>259</sup> accept the idea of the cherubim's existence. May<sup>260</sup> for example assumed that the cherubim were an ornament of the ark such as the ones, which were used in the shrines.

A careful look at the Old Testament context shows that all these opinions about the existence of the cherubim are not attested. As a result, Wellhausen's conclusion that there were no cherubim in or upon the ark is correct. It is obvious that the phrase *yošeb hakkerubim* has to be associated with the Temple of Jerusalem and Yahweh who sits on his throne between the two cherubim. As a result of this statement any other reference to the cherubim before the existence of Solomon's Temple should be anachronistic. The fact is that there is a reference to the cherubim in *I. Sam. 4:4*; *II. Sam. 6:2* which is very important. Why are they mentioned in these texts? Eissfeldt<sup>261</sup> argued that the existence of the cherubim testified to the fact that Yahweh was regarded as sitting

259. Benzinger, I.: 1907, 311,

260. May, H.G.: 1936, 221.

261. Eissfeldt, O.: 1950, 146; 1966, 234; 1957, 143; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972.

on His throne from the epoch of Shiloh. There was a Temple in Shiloh which could be understood as an element of the Canaanite architectural tradition<sup>262</sup>. The phrase *yošeb hakkerubim* appears in association with the noun *Sebaot* for the first time in the Old Testament tradition. This literary discovery testifies to the historical reality. It seems very possible that there were cherubim in the Temple of Shiloh<sup>263</sup>. As a result, the cherubim of Solomon's Temple follow those of the Shiloh Temple.

### 3. The Sacred Stones as the content of the Ark

The scholars who regarded Predeuteronomistic traditions as ancient, excluded the possibility that the first content of the ark was the tables of the Law. The opinion that there is no reference to the content of the ark in the Predeuteronomistic traditions led them to make many suggestions about it. They focused on *I. Kgs. 8:9*: «Οὐκ ἦν ἐν τῇ κιβωτῷ πλὴν δύο πλάκες λίθιναι, τῆς διαθήκης». What does this «πλὴν»<sup>264</sup> mean? The polemical character of this preposition makes one suggest that there was something more inside the ark and the Deuteronomist regarded it as illegitimate.

Research has regarded the ark as a sacred shrine. These sacred shrines were objects of worship for the Semitic people. The scholar who regarded the origin of the ark from the desert argued that the nomads were not primitive. The opinion<sup>265</sup> that the Mosaic Religion cannot be connected with primitive conditions is probably false<sup>266</sup>. The answer to the question about the original content of the ark is the following: Inside the ark should be kept a sacred stone (maybe two)<sup>267</sup> from the Sinai<sup>268</sup>. This sacred stone should represent the pre-

262. About the Shiloh Temple see p. 69.

263. Clements, R.E.: 1965, 34: «In every way the period when the ark was at Shiloh seems the most likely time when the idea of Yahweh's cherubim-throne became attached».

264. In the texts of Midrash Rabbah, in Numbers (p. 126), it is written: «There was nothing (en) in the ark save (rak) the two tables. En and rak are two limitations; and a limitation follows a limitation only in order to include something, in this case the Scroll of the Law which was deposited in the ark».

265. Kennedy, A.R.S.: 1951, 151; Worden, T.: 1952, 87.

266. Flight, J.: 1949, 158-224.

267. The number and the form of the stones have no meaning. The most important thing is their function and the general concept about them.

268. In the texts of Midrash Rabbah, in «The Song of the Songs», (p. 37), it is written: «Once R. Joshua came in and began kissing the stone and saying, This stone is like Mount Sinai, and he who sat on it is like the Ark of the Covenant».

sence of Yahweh. Later the tables of the law were added to the ark. *I. Sam. 8:9* suggests a different content for the ark than the tables of the law. The concept of this opinion is that the Deity inhabits this sacred stone. The stone of the Deity represents the Deity itself and its power. This opinion is supported by *Gen. 28:10-22*<sup>269</sup>. The ark, where a *bethyle* is kept, is according to the Semitic opinion the place where the Deity is present and as a result is sacred. The sacred stone radiates its holiness from the chest where it is kept<sup>270</sup>. Wellhausen mentions the black stone in the Kaaba in Mecca<sup>271</sup>. From this statement arises a new question: can the ark be distinguished from its content? The answer is «no». The presence and the power of the Deity is associated with the ark<sup>272</sup>. The next question is about the origin of these stones. The following suggestions have been made: **a)** meteorites which represent the provision of the victory of the volcanic god of Sinai; **b)** stones of the god of war, which were used as symbols of a premosaic coalition between the people who were living around the Sinai; **c)** oracle stones.

Kennett<sup>273</sup> suggested that the tables of stone could be *bethyls*, possibly meteorites, or maybe a stone from the «mount of God» which the Israelites took with them in order to assure them of the presence and protection of Yahweh when they wandered away from His holy mountain. He argues that of such portable stones there are no other examples in Israel. Moreover, the difference between tables engraved with a code of laws and fetish stones is so great that it is difficult to suppose that the latter could be the only basis for the story of the former.

Phythian-Adams<sup>274</sup> began his research from the statement that the ark was regarded as an assurance of the protecting presence of Yahweh. Keeping that presupposition in mind, he regarded the ark as an «adjunct», which was made to contain the tables of stone which Moses brought from Sinai. These stones were written on both sides by God and they seemed to attest the very signa-

269. *Gen. 28:18*: «Καὶ ἀνέστη Ἰακώβ τὸ πρωὶ καὶ ἔλαβεν τὸν λίθον, ὃν ὑπέθηκεν ἐκεῖ πρὸς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔστησεν αὐτὸν στήλην καὶ ἐπέχεεν ἔλαιον ἐπὶ τὸ ἄκρον αὐτῆς». *Gen. 28:22*: «καὶ ὁ λίθος οὗτος, ὃν ἔστησα στήλην, ἔσται μοι οἶκος θεοῦ...».

270. «He immediately made a sign to the high priest, who opened the Ark of the covenant, whereupon those that were circumcised bowed their bodies to half their height, while their countenances were filled with the radiance of the Shekinah». Ginzberg, L.:1968, 146.

271. Eissfeldt, O.: 1966, 229.

272. Phythian-Adams, J.W.: 1936, 146.

273. Kennett, R.H.: 1908, 791.

274. Phythian-Adams, J.W.: 1936, 145-147.

ture of God. «Was it not evident that there, on enduring stone, He had inscribed with His own hand His solemn ratification of the Covenant?»<sup>275</sup>. The theological concept of Phythian-Adams' opinion is significant. This stone is a record of the Compact which God made with the people of Israel, a pledge of God's presence.

Gaster<sup>276</sup> made a reference to the Ras Shamra texts in comparison with the Old Testament<sup>277</sup>. According to him the «ark of the Eduth» is identified with the «ark of the covenant». The «ark of the Eduth» was the sacred chest containing a portable «stone of testimony» carried by a nomadic people.

McCurdy<sup>278</sup> assumed that possibly some sacred stones were placed in the ark as a talisman. He added another argument to the theory, which regarded the sacred stone as the first content of the ark. He made a reference to the cutting of the waters of Jordan, at the place where the ark stood and was marked by a heap of stones, a sacred memorial<sup>279</sup>.

The scholars who regard the origin of the ark as being from the civilized region tried to find information about the use of lots. Arnold tried to prove through *I. Sam. 14:18*; *II. Sam. 15:24* that the ark –according to Canaanite custom– was an oracle, employed by the Israelites priests as their professional organ of divination<sup>280</sup>. As a box it served for the sacred lots and as the receptacle from which those lots were drawn. «It was conceived of as a miniature temple, which actually housed the spirit of the divinity at the moment when the deposition of the sacred lots was being effected – a sort of shrine or refuge within which the numen<sup>281</sup> could work its mysterious spell upon the lots while shielded from the scrutiny of the human eye»<sup>282</sup>.

This opinion about the numen was followed later by Pfeiffer<sup>283</sup> and May<sup>284</sup>, who tried to give more information about oracle lots. With archaeological parallels May argues that the ark was a «miniature temple» furnished with cherubim. It was the place where the numen stayed and its origin was Canaan. «The

275. Phythian-Adams, J.W.: 1936, 147.

276. Gaster, T.: 1936, 144.

277. Astleitner, J.: 1964; Gray, J.: 1965; Hastoupis, A.: 1951.

278. McCurdy, F.J.: 1908, 286.

279. Josh. 3-4.

280. Arnold. W.: 1917, 132.

281. «Numen»: deity in latin which is the active power with no face.

282. Arnold, W.: 1917, 133.

283. Pfeiffer, R.H.: 1926, 220.

284. May, H.G.: 1936, 218-220.

sacred lots, urim and tummim, in the ark may be the result of the influence of the Bedouin institution of the red *Qubbah*, or tent, which seems to have sheltered the sacred stones or *bethels*, usually two in number, which were consulted for oracles»<sup>285</sup>. The sacred lots were replaced by the two tables of the law. They were to be replaced by a religious code.

#### 4. One or two Images of Yahweh as the content of the Ark

The scholar who argued about one or two images of God as the content of the ark was H. Gressmann<sup>286</sup>. He based his research on *Num. 10:33*; *Josh. 3, 6*; *I. Sam. 4-6* and *II. Sam. 6* where it is obvious that the Deity is associated with the ark and belonged to it. Gressmann argued that inside the ark were kept one or two images of God. The main argument in his theory was the combination of the opinions, which regarded the ark as a throne and as a chest. He focused on P and suggested that the ark could not be a shrine. With archaeological parallels from Egypt, he pointed out that the ark could be understood as the Egyptian ritual shrines, as a *Kapporeth* furnished with cherubim, which show that the deity is strongly connected with the ark. The ark as an object is the picture of the Deity; it represents the Deity. The description in *Exod. 25:22* and *Num. 7:89* is mythological. He laid the foundations of his opinion through the texts of the Old Testament. The cherubim make the existence of this image necessary. In *I. Sam. 4:4* and *II. Sam. 6:2* the title *yošeb hakkerubim* belongs to the ark and presupposes an icon of the enthroned Deity. The narrative in I. and II. Samuel can be better understood with the presupposition that an image of the Deity is inside the ark. In *Num. 10:33* the ark goes ahead of the people of Israel and in *Exod. 33:5* Yahweh wonders what He is going to do. If these two texts are compared with *Exod. 32:2* and *Exod. 33:4* then the conclusion is that inside the ark could be a gold image of Yahweh. Firstly, the myth about the golden calf in *Exod. 32* could give a reasonable exegesis about the kind of image this was. Gressmann concluded that inside the ark was kept a small gold bull, as image of Yahweh. This image is very similar to the opinion that Yahweh was the god of war, whose symbol was a wild bull, and is strongly supported through *Ps. 132:2-5*, where Yahweh is called the calf of Jacob. Furthermore, this image of Yahweh is con-

285. May, H.G.: 1936, 220.

286. Gressmann, H.: 1921, 22, 44, 64; as cited by Schmitt, R.: 1972.

nected with the image of Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility and war who was represented as a bull<sup>287</sup>. Later, the first content of the ark, with the images<sup>288</sup>, was replaced by the two tables of law<sup>289</sup>.

Mowinckel<sup>290</sup> followed Gressmann's opinion and argued for a different content. According to him, the content of the ark was the image of two bulls, which shows an influence of the Canaanite worship of Baal. After the destruction of Solomon's Temple by the Egyptian Pharaoh Shoshenk I<sup>291</sup> the worship in Jerusalem was without meaning and since then the two stone symbols from the epoch of the desert, the urim and tummim, remained inside the ark.

In opposition to this theory Bouyer argued that inside the ark, a gross effigy of Yahweh with the features of a bull, or with those of a man could not be carried because this opinion is «in the realm of pure fantasy, with no support either from the texts or from archaeology»<sup>292</sup>.

Kennett<sup>293</sup> argued that the ark contained the brazen serpent. A comparatively small object, such as this serpent, would certainly have needed some sort of case to preserve it when being carried about<sup>294</sup>. The worship of a brazen serpent doubtless had its origin in the worship of a living serpent, which should have been contained somewhere. The conservation of religious ritual would preserve this, even after the substitution of a metal serpent for a live one<sup>295</sup>. Furthermore, he argued that, although it is difficult for a serpent to be regarded as a god of fertility (whatever the origin of serpent-worship may

287. Cf. Eissfeldt, O.: 1962, 1-12; Habel, N.: 1964; Eakin, F.: 1965, 407-414; Rendtorff, R.: 1966, 277-292; R. de Vaux: 1969, 501-517; Pope, M.: 1971, 117-130.

288. According to Gressmann the icons of Yahweh should be two because the cherubim of the *Kapporeth* were two.

289. Moses was replaced by Aaron and as a result the worship changed and the two images of Yahweh were replaced by the tables of the law.

290. Mowinckel, S.: 1930, 279.

291. I. Sam. 14:25.

292. Bouyer, L.: 1960, 106.

293. Kennett, R.: 1908, 792-793.

294. I. Sam. 6:7; II. Sam. 6:3.

295. Kennett, R.: 1908, 292: He mentions: 1) Erichthonios in the Acropolis of Athens who had in his hands two snakes for guardians; 2) the excavations in Gezer, in 1903, where «among a number of broken pieces of pottery, there was found a small bronze model of cobra which although did not include anything of the nature of an ark, it is not impossible that it may throw light on the *raison d'être* of the prototype of the ark»; and 3) that «it is not inconceivable then among the orgies or rites, which were celebrated in the high places of Palestine some form of snake-charming was included».

be), there can be little doubt that in some cases it is celebrated with a view to ensuring fertility thereby. According to his theory, the existence of the latter was in the days of Ezekiel and the veneration shown to the former in the narratives of Joshua, Samuel and Kings. If the iconoclastic zeal of the reforming party in the days of Ezekiel destroyed the brazen serpent, the ark, which probably was the shrine of the serpent, would have shared the same fate.

Of course this is quite difficult for someone to agree with such a theory, which looks to be based more in the imagination of the scholar and less in the reality, which arises from the text of the Old Testament.

Rowley<sup>296</sup> excluded the possibility that a brazen serpent could be the content of the ark. Although there was a brazen serpent, which stood in the Temple and was destroyed by Hezekiah because it was associated with idolatry, it was never told when it was brought into the Temple. This brazen serpent was never mentioned from the time of Moses to the time of its destruction and there was not a reference to it in the age of the Judges. «There is no reason to suppose that it was with the ark of Shiloh, or that it accompanied the ark into the land of the Philistines or was at Kiriath-jearim or was brought to Jerusalem by David, and if Solomon had brought this symbol with associations with Moses into the Temple at the time of the construction of the Temple we should expect some account of it comparable with the account of the bringing that other symbol which came from Mosaic times, the ark into Jerusalem»<sup>297</sup>. Rowley concluded that this brazen serpent was a Jebusite sacred symbol in Jerusalem before David captured the city, and it was transferred from the Jebusite shrine to the Temple when it was built and when Zadok removed from the older shrine to the new<sup>298</sup>.

## 5. The Manna and the Rod as the content of the Ark

The common Deuteronomic term «*ark of the covenant*» has been replaced in Exodus by the term «*ark of the testimony*», similarly a reference to the tables of the covenant witnesses. The texts of *Exod. 16:33*; *Num. 17:10* and *Heb. 9:4* give information for a different content of the ark<sup>299</sup>. Aaron followed

296. Rowley, H.: 1967, 87.

297. Rowley, H.: 1967, 87.

298. On serpent worship in Jerusalem cf. Benzinger, I.: 1927, 327; Cook, S.: 1930, 82, 99.

299. Wenham, G.: 1981, 280-281; pointed out that according to *Num. 17:10* Aaron's rod was placed «before the testimony». Duncan, J.: 1981, that according to *Exod. 16:34* and *Heb. 9:4* the ark reserved manna.

Moses's orders and put an omer of manna in a jar and placed it «*before the Lord... before the testimony*»<sup>300</sup> though this was actually done later as a memorial to God's provision. *Heb. 9:4* adds that the golder jar came to rest inside the ark. After the revolts of Korah and his associates, when God vindicated the authority of Moses and Aaron by causing the latter's rod to bud forth buds and almonds, God told Moses also to put this rod «*before the testimony, to be kept as a sign [against murmuring]*»<sup>301</sup>. That the story of Aaron's rod is seen as reenacting and confirming the unique position of Aaron and the tribe of Levi is indicated by various features in it. As Wenham<sup>302</sup> points out «the Hebrew *matteh* means both tribe and rod. The names of the tribes are written on the rods to show that they are symbolic of the tribes themselves<sup>303</sup>. All the rods were deposited in the tent of the meeting before the testimony». He testifies that «the story of Aaron's rod in Numbers is a symbolic reenactment of the rebellions against the priests and Levites described in *Num. 16*. The flowering of Aaron's rod when placed before the ark shows that priests can enter the tabernacle, whereas the lifelessness of the other rods shows laymen will die if they attempt to enter. Although *Heb. 9:4* confirms the tradition that testimony spoken of in both passages was, or became, the law tables within the ark of the covenant, only the two tables were to be found there by the time of the reign of Solomon (*I. Kgs. 8:9*)»<sup>304</sup>. In spite of this, in the *Legends of the Jews* it is written: «When the imminent destruction was announced to King Josiah, he concealed the Holy Ark, and with it also the vessel with manna, as well as the jug filled with sacred oil which was used by Moses for anointing the sacred implements, and other sacred objects»<sup>305</sup>.

## 6. The Bones of Joseph as the content of the Ark

The texts of *Gen. 50:25*; *Exod. 13-19* and *Josh. 24:32* gave arguments for the opinion that the ark contained the bones of Joseph. According to these texts, when Joseph died he was embalmed in Egypt and his bones were put in a box. This box was transferred to Canaan and placed in Shechem in a grave. Gressmann was a supporter of the opinion which regarded the ark and

300. *Exod. 16:33, 34*.

301. *Num. 17:10*.

302. Wenham, G.: 1981, 280-281.

303. *Num. 17:17*.

304. Payne, B. J.: 1975, 307; Lotz, W.: 1979, 293. Woudstra, H. M.: 1988, 169.

305. Ginzberg, L.: 1968, 48.



Joseph's coffin as the same object and his argument was the fact that the forefathers of the house of Joseph participated in the Exodus from Egypt and that the ark was an object of the central-Palestinian tribes<sup>306</sup>. Phythian-Adams referred to Gilgal where the ark remained secure until the pressure of enemy invasion (Egyptian or Philistine). He pointed out that it was there that there was the first great central sanctuary, which was consecrated by the bones of Joseph<sup>307</sup>.

Gressmann's opinion seems to be unproved since there is a lack of evidence regarding the connection between Joseph and the ark. As a result, the ark cannot be identified with «Joseph's coffin». Besides, its function through the march is totally different than being simply a container of the bones of Joseph.

## V. THE FUNCTION OF THE ARK

The answer to the question about the content of the ark could come from the function of the ark. The main point in this respect is the fact that the ark is associated with the presence of Yahweh. The presence of the ark in war, in the cult and in the oracle shows that it was associated with all the aspects on how Yahweh remained by the side of the people of Israel. All these events, until the epoch of David, should be examined in order to provide the whole answer about the content and the function of the ark. Research about its function shows that it had a fundamental role as **1)** a travelling, war sanctuary, **2)** a liturgical object, and **3)** a container for the sacred lots. All these statements and the texts of the Old Testament which speak about the function of the ark have to be examined.

### 1. The Function of the Ark as a Travelling and War Sanctuary

The opinion that the ark was both a travelling and a war sanctuary has its origin from the epoch of the nomadic life. It looks impossible to associate such a function with the civilized region. The concept of the ark as a travelling sanctuary understand it as the guide for nomads. Furthermore, this concept presupposes the faith that the divine power is associated with the ark and guides the people to the place that God has chosen. The God who is repre-

306. The Midrash points out that during the march in the desert there were two shrines with the Israelites, «the one coffin contained the bones of the dead man Joseph, the other the ark containing the covenant of the Living God».

307. Phythian-Adams, J.W.: 1936, 147.

sented through the ark is the leader God. Morgenstern<sup>308</sup>, in order to lay the foundations of this statement, based his research on *Num. 10:33* where the ark provides guidance for the people of Israel on the way after the exodus from Egypt<sup>309</sup>. He drew a parallel between the ark and the *qubbah* and pointed out that the ark selected the road it wished to take and that in the pre-Canaanite, desert period it was associated with the divine power, which was inherent in it. Bouyer mentions that the people of Israel were guided by the movements of the glorious cloud of the ark and that *Num. 10:33* «preserved for us the liturgical formulas, which with the sound of the trumpets Moses ordained should accompany the setting out and the halting of the Levites who carried the sacred object»<sup>310</sup>.

Unfortunately, the Old Testament basis for this statement is not so strong and it is questionable how ancient the text of *Num. 10:33* is, in order to be used as credible historical evidence. *I. Sam. 6:7-8* could give better support to this statement. The presence of God through the ark is obvious, when it chooses the road which leads away from the territory of the Philistines and back into Israelite country and guides the cows<sup>311, 312</sup>.

Gressmann tried to prove that the connection between the travelling and the war sanctuary is reasonable. In the desert, the ark was a travelling sanctuary and at the same time a war sanctuary, which was used to protect the nomad Israelites from their enemies. This connection appears in *Num. 10:33-35*<sup>313</sup>.

308. Morgenstern, J.: 1945, 88.

309. *Num. 10:33*: «Καὶ ἐξῆραν ἐκ τοῦ ὄρους κυρίου ὁδὸν τριῶν ἡμερῶν, καὶ ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης κυρίου προπορεύετο προτέρᾳ αὐτῶν ὁδὸν τριῶν ἡμερῶν κατασκέπασθαι αὐτοῖς ἀνάπανσιν».

In the Midrash Texts, in the book of Numbers, (Chukkath), (p. 769), there is a reference to the *Great Scout*, The Ark, which explored the way for them; as it says, «And the ark of the covenant went before them three days journey, to seek out a resting place for them».

310. Bouyer, L.: 1960, 108.

311. Morgenstern, J.: 1945, 88: «When the ark came to Beth Shemesh after its departure from the Philistine country, the cows which were drawing the cart stopped of their own accord, quite as they knew that this was the appointed end of their journey».

312. «And they sat the ark of God on a new cart (*II. Sam. 6:3*). The ark suspended itself in the air and the cows beneath it». Midrash Rabbah, Numbers (Pinchas), (p. 837).

313. «But they would not believe Moses after the Shekinah dwelt among them unless he spoke the words: "Rise up Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee"... The ark furthermore gave the signal for breaking camp by soaring up high, and then swiftly moving before the camp at a distance of three days march...». The Legends of the Jews, p. 243.

Newman points out that in these verses: «closely connected with the function of the ark in leading the people through the wilderness is its usage in connection with war»<sup>314</sup>.

Eichrodt<sup>315</sup> regarded the ark as the «medium», through which the Deity leads his people in their wanderings and in war. For him, the belief in his constant presence in power amid all the perils of the journey in the wilderness is reasonable in the light of the actual situation of the people between Sinai and Canaan.

The opinion that the ark was a war palladium<sup>316</sup> of the army of Israel should be examined in the light of the texts which give such an impression. In the earliest texts the ark is clearly associated with the holy wars of Yahweh and perceived as a type of palladium in battle, embodying the presence of Yahweh as he marched to fight for Israel and acting as a security for victory over her adversaries. The texts are *Num. 10:35; 14:14; I. Sam. 4:3; and II. Sam. 11:11; 15:24*.

The first indication that the ark was a war palladium for the people of Israel comes in *Num. 10:35*. In this verse Yahweh and the ark are the same because the ark is called with the name of Yahweh and Yahweh is the God of war. The God, the ark and the nation are regarded as a firm unity, a fact which recalls to mind Israel's war against the Ammonites<sup>317</sup> much more than the attempt of different tribes to find their way through the desert. Although scholars do not agree whether this verse is from the epoch of the march or the country of settlement, the exegesis of the verse can not prove that the ark was specifically a war sanctuary or that one of its functions was to be present on the battlefield. It has to be mentioned that in *Num. 14:44* the ark did not depart from the camp although it was regarded as the guarantee of Yahweh's presence. The ark was not in the battle, so Yahweh was not there.

The ark appears in the account of Israel's war against the Philistines in *I. Sam. 4:4*. The Israelites, faced with impending defeat, sent for the ark, but its arrival in the battle did not produce the expected victory<sup>318</sup>; it was captured by the Philistines.

314. Newman, M.: 1962, 59.

315. Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 111.

316. Josephus: 1975, 159.

317. Rogerson, J.: 1989, 78-79.

318. «The Legends of the Jews», (p. 62): «The Holy Ark, the receptacle for the broken tables of the law, which accompanied the people to the camp, did not have the expected effect of compelling victory for the Israelites».

*II. Sam. 11:11* again reveals the ark on the field of battle with one tribal levies (not the king's soldiers) in the holy war against the Ammonites. The reference to the ark in this battle is without purpose. The military function of the ark appears in *II. Sam. 15:24* where David and the priest Zadok and Abiathar and the Levites are defeated by his son Absalom. It looks very possible that this sanctuary was regarded as a symbol of the king's authority and, through this, the divine help to the king was secured.

The three principal passages in the Psalms which involve the ark indicate its warlike associations. *Ps. 24* makes no mention of the ark, but verses 7ff are almost unanimously believed to have their origin in the triumphant return of Yahweh and the ark to Jerusalem. If this interpretation is correct, the verses speak for themselves with regard to the relationship of the ark to Yahweh's wars and to the name *Yahweh Sebaot*. The name of the ark was the name of Yahweh of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. This could mean that the Hebrew words for «Yahweh of Hosts» were actually inscribed upon the lid of the ark. Again it is possible that other examples of the use of the name «Yahweh of Hosts» really veil a reference to the ark as is clearly the case in *Ps. 24:10*<sup>319</sup>. Likewise, the explicit reference to the ark in *Ps. 132:8* which bears kinship to *Num. 10:35-36* designates the ark as «the ark of thy might», an explicit reference to the warrior might and power of Yahweh, which gave victories to Israel. *Ps. 68:18* talks about the chariot of Yahweh which is among the thousands of tribes of Israel. Schmidt regarded that chariot as the ark and tried to prove the war-use of it. On the other hand, Vellas<sup>320</sup> argued that in this Psalm the word *rekeb* does not refer to real chariots. The whole phrase is poetic and refers to the king who returns from the fight with the chariots following. The use of the singular, one chariot, shows that in this chariot would be transferred the *Kapporeth*, which represents the residence of God and not the small ark which was easier to transport.

The ark plays no significant role in von Rad's analysis<sup>321</sup> of the theory of holy war. He associates it with the military activity of Yahweh in the early Song of the ark, but goes no further than that, maintaining that the ark appears in war only in the later time (for example *I. Sam. 4:4-6*; *II. Sam. 11:11*). Miller had a different opinion and argued that it is at all times intimately and directly associated with the wars of Yahweh. He assumes that «the

319. Davies, H.: 1962, 226.

320. Vellas, V.: 1930, 21.

321. G. von Rad: 1966, 110.

unanimous witness of the texts relating to the ark would suggest that as a war shrine it played a central role in the sacral wars of Israel's early history»<sup>322</sup>.

The ark is associated with the divine name *Yahweh Sebaot*. Due to this association, the ark should have a war function because the name is a war title. Furthermore, the military aspect of the ark is made clear from the title of *Yahweh* which first occurs in association with the ark: «Yahweh of Hosts»<sup>323</sup>. This evidence proves that the ark was the war palladium for the people of Israel.

## 2. The Function of the Ark as a Liturgical Object

The opinion which regarded the ark as a liturgical object is correct with one precondition. The ark should be a liturgical object before the epoch of the Temple in Jerusalem. If the ark had been used as a ritual object, then it could be so used also in Jerusalem. On the other hand, if the ark had not been a liturgical object before its use in Jerusalem, then this fact would be evidence of new historical and cultic traditions which changed the role of the ark. The existence of the ark as a liturgical object presupposes the existence of the ark in Solomon's Temple<sup>324</sup>.

The question whether the ark could be perceived as a liturgical object in Jerusalem is very difficult to be answered because it is associated with the exegesis of the biblical texts and the knowledge of the ancient, mythological worship. Bentzen and Bourke followed Mowinckel's opinion and tried to connect *Ps. 132* and the New Year Festival with the narrative of the ark in *Samuel*<sup>325</sup>. This narrative is a historical representation of the creation myth about the combat of God with His enemies, the Chaos monsters. This historical representation arose from the faith of *Yahweh* and was furnished with myths as happened in the myth of the Passover Festival in *Exod. 1-15*. In this myth, the influence of the political and historical facts of the epoch of David appears. The worship-mythological elements and the political-historical facts are combined in the king.

The scholars who regarded the origin of the ark from the civilized region accept the function of the ark as a liturgical object. Hartmann<sup>326</sup> argued for

322. Miller, P.: 1973, 151.

323. I. Sam. 1:3; 4:4.

324. I. Sam. 8:3.

325. I. Sam. 4-6; II. Sam. 6.

326. Hartmann, R.: 1918, 209-244.

Egyptian influence in the transportation of the ark and concluded that it rested in the Temple and, when it was necessary, it was transported as a liturgical object. The exegesis and the comparison of *I. Sam. 6*; *II. Sam. 6*; *Josh. 3:6* and *I. Kgs. 8:7* shows Egyptian influence. The shape of the ark shows that it was a liturgical object and the symbols of it were exposed in the religious processions.

Noth<sup>327</sup> maintains that although the ark, in the time of Shiloh, was «no longer a real travelling sanctuary» it had no permanent resting place in the amphictyony. Fretheim<sup>328</sup> adds that the movement of the ark from temporary sanctuary to temporary sanctuary appears to be what is meant by *II. Sam. 7:6*: «I have been moving about in a tent and in a tabernacle». As has been noted, for Yahweh to say that he has been moving about in a tent is to say that the ark has been moving. It is evidence for Fretheim that the tent tradition finds a particular focal point in the practice of moving the ark to different locales. Noth<sup>329</sup> suggested that this change was provided because the ark was formerly a travelling sanctuary, which it was not intended to be and had become the object of a local cult in the same manner as the Canaanites.

Nielsen maintained that the Benjaminites transported their sanctuary in their own land. The basis for the theory which regarded the ark as a liturgical object was given by Dus. The starting point in his research was Nathan's speech in *II. Sam. 7:5-7*. In this speech Yahweh is presented as moving from place to place. This is evidence of a custom. Dus mentioned that in the festival of harvest the ark was placed in a new carriage which was constructed for this purpose and the cows draw the carriage. In the place where the cows stopped the Israelites built a sanctuary and the ark was placed there until the festival of seven years later. According to this custom there is the faith that Yahweh himself guides the chariot to the place he wishes.

Vellas<sup>330</sup> argued that the ark was used as a liturgical object. In order to lay the foundations of this opinion he used *Ps. 132:7-8*; *68*, which belong to the psalms which were sung in the Festival of New Year's Day. During this Festival the ark and the *Kapporeth*, which during the whole year stayed in the Holy of Holies, were carried around as liturgical objects.

Newman mentions that the ark was a travelling and war sanctuary and

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327. Noth, M.: 1958, 91.

328. Fretheim, E.T.: 1968, 327.

329. Noth, M.: 1958, 94.

330. Vellas, V.: 1930, 19.

argues for another function of it. According to him: «it might well have been used in the dramatic reproduction of the Sinai event in the cult»<sup>331</sup>. The tradition for the construction of the ark, the tradition that inside the ark were kept the two tables of the law and the name *aron habberit*, show that the ark played a role in connection with a covenant ceremony of the Hebrew people.

### 3. The Function of the Ark as a Container for the sacred lots

The opinion that the ark was used as a sacred oracle was supported by W. Arnold. He argued that inside the ark were kept the sacred lots and then the ark was used as a sacred oracle. The starting point for his research was *I. Sam. 14:18*<sup>332</sup>. Despite the reading of LXX, when «*ephod*» (ἐφωδ) is read, Arnold prefers the reading of the Masoretic text «*aron ha' elohim*»:

: וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁאוּל לְאַתָּה תִּנְשֶׂה אֶרֶן הָאֱלֹהִים  
בַּיְהוָה אֶרֶן הָאֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

According to his opinion «the specific instrument of priestly divination among the ancient Hebrews was the ark». This function of the ark appears also in *II. Sam. 6:2; 11:11; 15:24; Jer. 3:16*. The name of the instrument and texts of *Gen. 50:26* and *II. Kgs. 12:10* testify that the ark was a chest, which had such a content. The ark was a «miniature temple which housed the spirit of divinity at the moment when the deposition of the sacred lots was being effected»<sup>333</sup>. It was a shrine from which the «numen» could speak through the sacred lots which were kept inside.

May followed Arnold's theory in every detail<sup>334</sup>. Among all the other functions he includes the one as a divination or oracle box<sup>335</sup>. Pfeiffer also agrees with Arnold's opinion and associates this theory with the presence of Yahweh<sup>336</sup>. Eichrodt pointed out a belief in the self-communication of God in isolated acts through the ark. «It should not be forgotten, that the very nature of an oracle as a word from God delivered on a single occasion undoubtedly

331. Newman, L.M.: 1962, 61.

332. Arnold, W.: 1917, 17.

333. Arnold, W.: 1917, 133.

334. May, G.H.: 1936, 219.

335. May, G.H.: 1936, 225.

336. Pfeiffer, H.R.: 1926, 220.

favours the disintegration of the divine presence into individual strongly differentiated instances»<sup>337</sup>.

An interesting point in Arnold's theory is the statement that there was more than one ark in the history of Israel. The basis for this statement is again *I. Sam. 14:18*. According to the LXX, «*ephod*» [ἐφωδ] (=the ark) is in Ki-riath-jearim<sup>338</sup>, so it cannot be with Saul in Gibeon. Arnold asks, «why may not the ark of *I. Sam. 14:18* be another ark?». The historical ark of Yahweh was not a unique object. If each tribe had its own sanctuary there could have been more than one ark. Besides the text of *I. Sam. 14:18*, he mentions more arguments in order to lay the foundations of his statement. The texts of *I. Sam. 4:3*; *II. Sam. 6:2*; *I. Kgs. 2:26* are in agreement with the opinion that there was more than one ark in Israel's history. Furthermore, wherever the word *ephod* is found, is a later substitution of the word *aron*, so other texts appear to support Arnold's theory. These texts are *I. Sam. 21:10*; *23:6-9* and *30:7*. The conclusion is that there could be arks in Ophrah, Dan, Bethel, Shiloh and Nob<sup>339</sup>.

May agrees with Arnold's opinion and follows exactly his concept<sup>340</sup>. He focuses on archaeology and concludes that there were model shrines as a part of temple furnishings, which had several different functions. Furthermore, he assumes that «not only was there a model shrine used as an ark at each important sanctuary, but there could be many at each of these sanctuaries serving different functions»<sup>341</sup>.

Morgenstern suggest that the name *aron* may have been the special designation or title of a particular clan or tribal tent-shrine of which, by implication, there must have been others in ancient Israel<sup>342</sup>.

Two more elements have to be mentioned that may show that there was more than one ark among the Israelites<sup>343</sup>. The different concepts about the ark in the Old Testament reveal more than one ark. In D and P the ark is a

337. Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 111.

338. *I. Sam. 7:1*.

339. Pfeiffer, H.R.: 1926, 220.

340. May, H.G.: 1936, 218.

341. May, H.G.: 1936, 224.

342. Morgenstern, J.: 1945, 113.

343. In the text of Midrash Rabbah, in «The Song of the Songs» (p. 76) it is written: «R. Hahina said: It consisted of three arks, two of gold and one of wood. The wooden one was put round one of the golden ones, and the other golden one round the wooden one, and the upper rims overlaid with gold».



chest for the Tables of the Law. In E the ark in Jerusalem is Yahweh's throne and exists at the same time with the tradition of Shiloh. The answer to these two different traditions perhaps could be Arnold's theory that there were more than just the one ark and that is why the concept about it differs in these traditions.

Otto<sup>344</sup> tried to cut the Gordian knot by introducing at least two separate «arks»; one placed in Gilgal and the other in the sanctuary of Shiloh. Lemche<sup>345</sup> asked why, if Otto is right, there should be only two? Every sanctuary could have its own ark, or, «*vice-versa*», that the centre of worship was always called the «ark». Lemche adds Noth's<sup>346</sup> opinion that there was one ark, which was transferred from one sanctuary to another, according to the change of the central meeting place of the federation.

On the other hand Van der Toorn and Houtman have based their research on the relationship between David and the ark and the traditions which are associated with this relationship. According to them, the Deuteronomic projects his ideal of religious unity, embodied in the single ark kept in Jerusalem. In his vision the ark is unique. The older tradition (E) ascribes a unicity to the ark of more modest proportions: there was only one ark in the sense that the «Saulide» state religion had no other national symbol. Maybe outside of the «Saulide» state or before its formation, there were other symbols similar to the ark. «The narrative in I. Samuel warrants a reassessment of the motion of a single ark. As a physical object the ark in Jerusalem was unique; no other object was exactly like it. When it comes to its function, however, the ark may have had its likes. It fulfilled the role played outside Israel by statues of gods. It represented the deity. If it can be shown that there were other cult symbols in Israel representing the deity, the ark may have had its analogues»<sup>347</sup>. The reference of different places which are known to have possessed a local sanctuary does not prove that there was more than one ark in Israel's history.

## VI. THE PRESENCE OF GOD AT THE ARK

The people of Israel had not only experienced the proximity of Yahweh

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344. Lemche, N.: 1984, 7.

345. Lemche, N.: 1983, 7.

346. Noth, M.: 1958, 91, 94.

347. Van der Toorn and Houtman: 1994, 229-230.

in his intervention in the history of the nation but also realised his continual presence with them on his throne, the ark of the covenant, that was always in their midst, either in the innermost holy of holies or on the field of battle. The exact place of God's presence was considered to be just above the ark of the covenant over and between the cherubim, as it was expressed in the fixed formula, «*the Lord, who is enthroned upon the cherubim*»<sup>348</sup> (E). Also in P Yahweh says to Moses in the book of Exodus: «*There I will meet with you, from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony*»<sup>349</sup>. It was this presence of God, which gave the ark its sacred character. Even if the content of the ark was the two tables of stone which preserved the Law, they emphasised, indeed, that Yahweh was God of the covenant, but more than anything else they stood for the great fact, «Yahweh is here present». Thus, the ark was simply «*called by the name of the Lord of hosts*»<sup>350</sup>. When they lifted up or put down the ark, they repeated the formula «*Arise O Lord*», «*Rest here, O Lord*»<sup>351</sup>. The ark looks to be the object which attests the nearness of Israel's God<sup>352</sup>.

### 1. The Presence of God in the Ark according to the Early Traditions (E)

A careful study of the early traditions which speak about the ark of the covenant in Numbers, Joshua and I & II Samuel testifies that, whenever the ark is mentioned, Yahweh is also present and associated with it.

In *Num. 10:35* the power and the will of Yahweh are attested through the presence and the activity of the ark. When the ark is raised up, it is Yahweh who rises up; when the ark is set down in the camp it is Yahweh who returns to take His place among them. It appears in the same way in *Num. 14:14*. The miraculous crossing of the Jordan was attributed to the presence of the ark<sup>353</sup>;

348. I. Sam. 4:4; II. Sam. 6:2.

349. Exod. 25:22.

350. I. Sam. 1:3; I. Kgs. 19:10.

351. Num. 10:33-35; Ps. 132:8; II. Chr. 6:41-42.

352. In the texts of Midrash Rabbah, Leviticus (p. 255) it is written: «The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Aaron: "At thy bidding I caused My presence to rest upon the ark, and at thy bidding I caused My presence to depart from the ark"».

353. Josh. 3:11-15: «Ἴδου ἡ κιβωτὸς διαθήκης κυρίου πάσης τῆς γῆς διαβαίνει τὸν Ἰορδάνην. προχειρίσασθε ὑμῖν δώδεκα ἄνδρας ἀπὸ τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ, ἓνα ἅψ' ἐκάστης φυλῆς. καὶ ἔσται ὡς ἂν καταπαύσωσιν οἱ πόδες τῶν ἱερέων τῶν αἰρόντων τὴν κιβωτὸν τῆς διαθήκης κυρίου πάσης τῆς γῆς ἐν τῷ ὕδατι τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, τὸ ὕδατι τοῦ Ἰορδάνου ἐκλείψει, τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ τὸ καταβαῖνον στήσεται. καὶ ἀπῆρεν ὁ λαὸς ἐκ τῶν σκηνομάτων αὐτῶν διαβῆναι τὸν Ἰορδάνην,

it is alternatively attributed to the presence of Yahweh. The ark was held in the middle of the Jordan, and the people crossed in the sight of Yahweh. «*Before the ark of Yahweh*» and «*Before Yahweh*» are likewise synonymous expressions in the account of the capture of Jericho<sup>354</sup>. Neglecting the ark, the Israelites are defeated by the Philistines, for they are neglecting Yahweh Himself<sup>355</sup>. It is true that the occasional loss of the ark provided a counterpoise to too grossly materialistic a conception of the divine presence, and the terrifying experiences of the punishments imposed by divine justice kept at bay that false confidence which might arise from a belief in the secure possession of the national God in one's midst<sup>356</sup>. Even the pagan and hostile Philistines understand the significance of the ark to the Israelites. The arrival of the ark causes consternation: «*God is come into the camp. Woe unto us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of this mighty God? This is the God who smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness*»<sup>357</sup>. When the ark was kept twenty years at Kiriath-jearim, «*All the house of Israel lamented after Yahweh*»<sup>358</sup>, for, when the ark was absent, was not Yahweh absent? Finally, this association of Yahweh and the ark is sanctioned by God Himself<sup>359</sup>. The first reaction to the ark was a realisation of the unapproachability and majesty of God. «*Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?*»<sup>360</sup> was their cry<sup>361</sup>.

οἱ δὲ ἱερεῖς ἤρσαν τὴν κιβωτὸν τῆς διαθήκης κυρίου πρότεροι τοῦ λαοῦ. ὡς δὲ εἰσεπορεύοντο οἱ ἱερεῖς οἱ αἰρόντες τὴν κιβωτὸν τῆς διαθήκης ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην καὶ οἱ πόδες τῶν ἱερέων τῶν αἰρόντων τὴν κιβωτὸν τῆς διαθήκης κυρίου ἐβάφησαν εἰς μέρος τοῦ ὕδατος τοῦ Ἰορδάνου — ὁ δὲ Ἰορδάνης ἐπλήρου καθ' ὅλην τὴν κρηπίδα αὐτοῦ ὥσει ἡμέραι θερισμοῦ πυρῶν».

In the texts of Midrash Rabbah, Exodus, (p. 441) it is written: «And it shall come to pass, when the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the Ark of the Lord... shall rest in the waters of Jordan. R. Berekiah said: The ark bore those that carried it; it was not that priests who carried it, but rather it bore them».

354. Josh. 4:6; 4:18. Comp. I. Sam. 5:33; I. Sam. 7:1; I. Sam. 11:14-15; II. Sam. 5:3. II. Sam. 21:9. See Miller, G.: 1974, 43. Buttrick, G.: 1953, 569-570.

Newman, M.: 1962, 62: «If the ark represented Yahweh's presence in this holy war, the sound of the cultic phenomenon *shofar* represented the angry thunder of his voice».

355. I. Sam. 4:3. See also Blaikie, W.: 1905, 69; Smith, H.: 1961, 32-33; Cohen, Dr.: 1971, 22; Giannakopoulos, I.: 1986, 37; Buttrick, G.: 1953, 898.

356. Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 111.

357. I. Sam. 4:7-8.

358. I. Sam. 7:2: «καὶ ἐπέβλεψεν πᾶς οἶκος Ἰσραὴλ ὀπίσω κυρίου».

359. Worden, T.: 1952, 85.

360. I. Sam. 6:20: «Τίς δυνήσεται διελθεῖν ἐνώπιον κυρίου τοῦ ἁγίου τούτου; καὶ πρὸς τίνα ἀναβήσεται κιβωτὸς κυρίου ἅφ' ἡμῶν».

361. Drijvers, P.: 1952, 165.

When David is thinking about building a temple to house the ark, the prophet Nathan brings him the message of Yahweh: «*Shalt thou build Me a house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in a house since the time I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but I have journeyed in a tent and in a tebernacle*»<sup>362</sup>. The transfer of the ark into Jerusalem continues the association of the ark with Yahweh. With the construction of Solomon's Temple, the Name of Yahweh, the supreme expression of His presence, which is more spiritual and more personal than all the others, henceforth will be there where Israel gathers together<sup>363</sup>. The ark, therefore, stands in so close an association with Yahweh that it is wellnigh identified with Him<sup>364</sup>.

The problem which arises now is: if the ark is identified with the presence of Yahweh in the true meaning of the word, is the ark the personification of the power of Yahweh? The answer could come with the help of an examination of the theological tendency of the texts which may show a magic influence. This influence is associated with the Divine presence through the ark of the covenant<sup>365</sup>. On the other hand, this magic influence is prevented by the syntax of the text. The question now is whether the ark is the subject of the activity or just the medium for Yahweh's action.

Schmitt<sup>366</sup> argued that the opinion that the ark accents the presence of Yahweh or is very closely associated with Yahweh is probably wrong. The distinction of the ark from Yahweh, as well as the association of the ark with Yahweh, and the discussion about the presence or the place could really help the question about the presence of Yahweh. In spite of this, the real meaning of the ark remains neutral. The ark of the covenant is probably the assurance, the guarantee of the Divine presence. The ark is strongly connected with history and under this history are united the experiences of the people who kept

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362. II. Sam. 7:5-7: «Πορεύου καὶ εἰπὸν πρὸς τὸν δοῦλον μου Δαυὶδ· Τάδε λέγει κύριος· Οὐ σὺ οἰκοδομήσεις μοι οἶκον τοῦ κατοικῆσαι με. ὅτι οὐ κατώκηκα ἐν οἴκῳ ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ταύτης καὶ ἤμην ἐμπεριπατῶν ἐν καταλύματι καὶ ἐν σκηνῇ, ἐν πᾶσιν, οἷς διῆλθον ἐν παντὶ Ἰσραὴλ, εἰ λαλῶν ἐλάλησα πρὸς μίαν φυλὴν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, ἣ ἐνετειλάμην ποιμαίνειν τὸν λαόν μου Ἰσραὴλ, λέγων Τί ὅτι οὐκ ὀικοδομήκατέ μοι οἶκον κέδρινον;».

363. Bouyer, L.: 1960, 111.

364. Eihrodt, W.: 1961, 105: He points out that as I. Sam. 4:7 shows that there was a Canaanite influence, which may also be seen in the veneration of the ark, which at times, presupposes a connection of Yahweh with the cult-object so close, that it almost amounts to identification.

365. Wellhausen, J.: 1901, 31: «The ark was not identified with Yahweh himself. To see the face of Yahweh meant to approach the sacred box».

366. Schmitt, R.: 1972, 134.

it. These experiences mean for the people the help and the guidance of God and cause a relationship between them.

Pfeiffer<sup>367</sup>, in a reference to the images of Yahweh, pointed out that in the sanctuaries of Ophrah, Dan, Bethel, Nob and Shiloh, an ark was the visible token of the presence of Yahweh. This sacred box, as Arnold mentions, was «a sort of shrine or refuge within which the numen could work its mysterious spell upon the lots while shielded from the scrutiny of the human eye»<sup>368</sup>.

V. Rad<sup>369</sup> suggested that in the ancient stories of the ark God was thought to be attached to it. Where the ark went, Yahweh went too. Morgenstern<sup>370</sup> mentions that the ark was the visible symbol of the presence of Yahweh.

Van der Toorn and Houtman<sup>371</sup> have a different opinion. According to them, the ark was to the Israelites, what the divine statues were to the nations. Whereas the Philistines took along their «idols», when they marched out to the battlefield<sup>372</sup>, the Israelites brought the ark<sup>373</sup>. Like the divine image in other Near Eastern civilisations, the ark served as the focal point of the divine presence. In passages where the ark plays a role, the expression «*before Yahweh*» is equivalent to «*before the ark of Yahweh*»<sup>374</sup>. The ark served as the effective symbol of God's presence.

Bouyer<sup>375</sup> based his research on the ark on the question of the kind of «Presence» of Yahweh. He assumed that the ark is sacred because it is the place of the Presence of Yahweh. The people of Israel were ruled by an invisible Presence: the Presence of the invisible king who, in ruling the people, had taken the place of Pharaoh. This king is Yahweh. Through this Presence the ark becomes a symbol, which is strongly connected with salvation.

The ark is a symbol, the representation of God. It represents God and at the same time this representation has a salvific meaning because in its history are associated the experiences of such a kind of presence<sup>376</sup>. The presence

367. Pfeiffer, H.R.: 1926, 220.

368. Arnold, W.: 1917, 133.

369. Rad. v. G.: 1966, 117.

370. Morgenstern, J.: 1945, 85-86.

371. Van der Toorn and Houtman: 1981, 216.

372. II. Sam. 5:21. Smith, H.: 1961, 290; Goldman: 1971, 218; Giannakopoulos, I.: 1986, 37; Hertzberg: 1964, 273-274.

373. I. Sam. 4:1-11.

374. Judg. 20:26-27; Josh. 6:6, 8; I. Sam. 6:14-15; II. Sam. 6:4-5, 13-14, 17; I. Chr. 16:1, 4, 6, 37.

375. Bouyer, L.: 1960, 107.

376. See also Mowinckel, S.: 1962, 114-115.

of God takes place in the ark and through it the people of Israel are informed about the presence of their God. It is the symbol of the helpful, faithful and true God. A symbol should serve important purposes in relation to the truth or spiritual reality which it represents<sup>377</sup>. The ark participates in the presence, the power and the holiness of Yahweh. Without question, the symbol then becomes something impersonal, a fetish<sup>378</sup>. The scholars<sup>379</sup> who regarded the ark as the residence of the «numen», that the ark contained the «numen», give further information about the divine power. However, the fact that the ark was carrying one or two stones like *bethyles* or one or two icons or sacred lots does not matter at all. The characterisation of the ark as fetish appears in *I. Sam. 4:3* where its purpose is to guarantee the presence of Yahweh<sup>380</sup>.

It has to be mentioned that elements of fetishism and magic exist in the Old Testament as is shown by the celebration in *Gen. 15*. If the ark has its origin in the field where these representations belong, then a fetishist conception could be plausible.

## 2. The Presence of God in the Ark in (D) and (P)

The nature of the presence of Yahweh in the ark of the covenant in these two sources is a question. The biblical sources do not make clear how the ark could be associated with the presence of Yahweh. In these passages the func-

377. «The gods that men naturally worship are gods who are accessible to the mind, the imagination and the experience. Gods who can prove their presence can be represented visibly. The God of Israel has nothing to do with objects or idolatry. He cannot be told by names as the pagan and the Greek gods were. His name is ineffable. In the same way, His person is not to be identified with any object of visible experience. Indeed a God who is not represented is easier to be conceived because he is unlike anything that we know. However, human nature does not need some visible object as a focus of its worship; and in order to satisfy this need without putting in danger the “non representation”, Israel has the ark. It is the symbol of His presence». Johnston, L.: 1962, 145.

378. *I. Sam. 4:3*; *6:19*; *II. Sam. 6:6*.

379. Arnold, W.: 1917, 132; Pfeifer, H.: 1926, 220; May, H.: 1936, 218.

380. On the other hand, as Eichrodt points out, the rod of Yahweh (which is maybe one of the contents of the ark) in the battle of Rephidim, in *Exod. 17:15*, cannot be associated with the meaning of fetish: «This is, therefore, not an instance of fetishism. We are here dealing with an appearance of the invisible deity who fights alongside his people; with a physical means of representing the presence of the god which is comparable to the Ark and which symbolizes both the victory of Yahweh over the hostile powers and his authority over the serpent demons, who are the instrument of his judgment». (Eichrodt, W.: 1961, 113).

tion of the ark as the container of the tables of the Law narrows the association between Yahweh and the ark. The presence of Yahweh through the ark of the covenant can not be attested definitely.

In *Exod. 25:10-22* (P), where there are presented the details of the construction of the ark, there is also written the promise of Yahweh to be present. «*And in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will be known to thee, and speak to thee from upon the Kapporeth, from the midst of the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony*»<sup>381</sup>. The tabernacle which was erected to house the ark, is likewise the place where Yahweh is to be found<sup>382</sup>. Some scholars argue that *Exod. 33* refers to the ark as a symbol for the divine presence. With this passage could be associated *Deut. 10:8*<sup>383</sup>. The scholars who based thier research in D and P have two different opinions.

According to Worden<sup>384</sup> in Deuteronomy, the ark is regarded as the place where Yahweh was present in a special manner. The ark, which contained the two tables of the Law, was the place where Yahweh used to be present with His chosen people. Nielsen<sup>385</sup> suggested that in the Deuteronomist's opinion the presence of Yahweh is associatd with the presence of His covenant.

Lotz<sup>386</sup> argued thath *Exod. 33* points out that the ark was the symbol of Ġod's presence in Israel. If this opinion is correct, then it should logically figure in the narrative at some poing; hence the attempt to match this narrative with *Deut. 10*. Kennedy<sup>387</sup> also assumed that in *Deut. 10:1, 8* the ark is associated with the presence of Yahweh<sup>388</sup>. Johnston<sup>389</sup> mentioned that the ark was the

381. *Exod. 25:22*: «Καὶ γνωσθήσομαι σοι ἐκεῖθεν καὶ λαλήσω σοι ἄνωθεν τοῦ ἱλαστηρίου ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν δύο χερουβείμ τῶν ὄντων ἐπὶ τῆς κιβωτοῦ τοῦ μαρτυρίου τοῦ μαρτυρίου καὶ κατὰ πάντα, ὅσα ἂν ἐντείλωμαι σοι πρὸς τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραήλ».

382. *Exod. 30:31*. Lotz, W.: 1979.

383. *Deut. 10:8*: «Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ διέστειλεν κύριος τὴν φυλὴν Λευὶ αἰρεῖν τὴν κιβωτὸν τῆς διαθήκης κυρίου, παριστάναι ἔναντι κυρίου, λειτουργεῖν καὶ ἐπεύχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης».

384. Worden, T.: 1952, 88.

385. Nielsen, E.: 1960, 69.

386. Lotz, W.: 1979, 291.

387. Kennedy, A.R.S.: 1947, 149.

388. According to v. Rad's opinion in this text the ark cannot be associated with the presence of Yahweh: «In our text the ark is understood rather prosaically as a container for the safe custody of the tables. This conception differs considerably from the earlier one, which whows in it the place of Yahweh's throne». (G. v. Rad: 1984, 79).

389. Johnston, L.: 1962, 146.

seat and the symbol of the covenant, by which God became present with His people. Through the ark he became «God with them». According to him this is the reason why the tabernacle, which houses the ark, is known as the Tent of the Meeting; there the people of Israel could meet God, «could stand before the face of God». It was from the ark that God spoke and made known His will<sup>390</sup>.

V. Rad<sup>391</sup> had a different opinion. According to him the attitude of P to the ark shows some striking anomalies: the ark is both the chest which contains the tables of the Law, and also the place where Yahweh communicates with His people. In Deuteronomy there is no mention of the presence of Yahweh. Gutmann<sup>392</sup> agreed with v. Rad's opinion and argued that the Deuteronomic ark was not the object of the visible presence or power of Yahweh.

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390. Exod. 25:22.

391. Rad. v. G.: 1953, 39.

392. Gutmann, J.: 1971, 27.