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THE TERMINOLOGY OF THE
ARK OF THE COVENANT

SHORT TITLE

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

Kenneth E. Miller

June 1959

Approved by: *[Signature]*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of the Study

The problem under investigation is not a single problem, but multiple. It deals with the terminology connected with the Ark of the Covenant. There are some important technical terms that are either directly or indirectly connected with the Ark. During the course of Old Testament research in the last century these terms and the Ark itself have, for various reasons, acquired a great many connotations. The Ark has been explained as a fetish-box that contained a meteorite or a piece of stone from Mount Sinai, as a divine throne, as a container for sacred divination-stones, as a shrine of the Babylonian cult of Tammuz, as an empty bark for the deity, similar to those of Egypt, as a support for one or two steer-images,¹ and as a battle-standard. The purpose of this paper is to set forth some of these terms and to investigate the connotations that research has given them. The questions that are to be especially discussed involve the name, purpose, and appearance of the Ark, the significance of the tables of

¹Hans Schmidt, "Mose und der Dekalog," Eucharistion fuer Hermann Gunkel, in Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1923), XXII, 114f. Hereafter this series will be referred to as FRLANT.

the Law that it contained, the possibility of considering the Ark as a throne of Jahweh, and the importance and significance of the Cherubim atop the Ark. The problem is somewhat complicated by the fact that the various titles of the Ark are placed together in many combinations without apparent reason (e.g., 1 Chronicles 13:6; 2 Samuel 6:2). In addition to the titles of the Ark, allusions to it are also involved in the problem, such as in the Psalms of Ascent.

The position of Jerusalem and the course of religion and world history ever since David is due to his placing the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple.² The importance of the Ark has been largely overlooked by some scholars. It lies behind many Old and New Testament concepts that can better be understood when the nature and purpose of the Ark is understood. The glory of God, the Cherubim, and the kingdom of God are obvious examples, as well as the typology based on the Ark. There can be no doubt that the Ark was the center of the Old Testament cultus, the dwelling-place of the presence of God, and the place of atonement for sins. It is only fitting, therefore, that the connotations connected with the Ark should be examined with a view to determining what it actually meant to the Israelite and what has been added artificially to its meaning by recent scholarship.

Of necessity, this study cannot be exhaustive. It will

²Martin Noth, The History of Israel, translated by Stanley Godman (New York: Harper Brothers, 1958), p. 190.

deal only with the most important and most discussed concepts. These include the meaning of the term $\gamma\eta\gamma\alpha$, the possible confusion of Ark and ephod, the significance of the tables of testimony, the Cherubim, and the Ark as a throne and as a battle-standard. It is not intended to deal with the overall appearance of the Ark, nor its history or final fate. The theological implications, however, necessarily enter the picture and will be discussed at some length throughout. The attempt to establish the correct texts of all the references to the Ark, a major task in itself, is also outside the bounds of this study. It is intended only to state the important theories and determine their credibility.

Some of these theories depend heavily on the four-source theory of authorship for the Pentateuch and Former Prophets, which we cannot accept. In the first place it is much too complicated to be here unravelled, and we see no good reason for not accepting the sacred record at face-value. In most cases the theory can be safely avoided or ignored without doing violence to the scholars under consideration. We also reject the theory of the Scandinavian school that sees the early history of Israel as myth and subordinates it to the cultus,³ and the theory of Martin Noth and others who think

³Sigmund Mowinckel, Religion und Kultus, translated by Albrecht Schauer (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1953), passim; He That Cometh, translated by G. W. Anderson (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), passim.

Israel developed from an amphictyony of twelve independent bedouin tribes.⁴

The material is organized under five main headings:

(1) "The Ark of God," which includes the search for the original name for the Ark, the meaning of the term אֲרֹן, and a discussion of Arnold's theory of the Ark as a repository for sacred oracles; (2) "The Ark of Testimony," which discusses the meaning and importance of the term אֲרֹן הַעֲדוּת, the question of the existence of the tables of the Law, and the legitimacy of the term אֲרֹן הַבְּרִית; (3) "The Ark as a Throne," dealing with the throne-concept in non-Israelite religion and in the Old Testament, and with the possibility of the Ark as an empty throne proposed by Dibelius;⁵ (4) "The Cherubim," discussing how they looked on the basis of archaeology and the Old Testament evidence, their meaning, and the location of God's presence with relation to the Cherubim; (5) "The Kapporeth," where the presence of God was centered--the place of atonement, discussing the purpose of the Ark in the religion of Israel.

⁴Martin Noth, Das System der Zwölf Staemme Israels, in Beitraege zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1930), Series 4, I, passim; Noth, The History of Israel, passim.

⁵Martin Dibelius, Die Lade Jahwes: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung, in FRLANT (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1906), VII.

The History of the Problem

The first attempt in modern times to deal with the Ark is that of Goethe, who in an anonymous article⁶ doubted the existence of the tables of the Law that were held to be in the Ark. Apparently he was not taken seriously, for we do not hear these doubts expressed again until after 1900, when Dibelius discussed the question.⁷

Serious study of the Ark seems to have begun with Seyring, who in an article in 1892,⁸ attempted to determine the sources for the Ark-traditions in the Old Testament and proposed that the word אֲרֹן־בְּרִית was a Deuteronomic interpolation. He was opposed in an article that appeared the same year by Ludwig Couard,⁹ who claimed that אֲרֹן־בְּרִית was the original name and that the Ark contained a meteorite. Meinhold discussed the throne-concept in 1896,¹⁰ and was answered

⁶Infra, page 28, note 26.

⁷Dibelius, op. cit., pp. 1ff.

⁸Fritz Seyring, "Der alttestamentliche Sprachgebrauch inbetreff des Names der sogenannte 'Bundeslade,'" Zeitschrift fuer die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, XI (1892), 114-25. Hereafter this periodical will be referred to as ZAW.

⁹Ludwig Couard, "Die religioes-nationale Bedeutung der Lade Jahves," ZAW, XII (1892), 53-90.

¹⁰J. Meinhold, "Die Lade Jahves," Theologische Arbeiten aus dem Rheinischen wissenschaftlichen Predigerverein, Second series, IV, 1ff. Hereafter this periodical will be referred to as TARWP.

by Wolfgang Reichel¹¹ in 1897 and Karl Budde¹² in 1898. Meinhold answered his critics in another article that appeared in 1901.¹³

Thereafter interest subsided, except for Delitzsch's provocative book, Babel und Bibel (1902), in which he laid a heavy emphasis on the Cherubim from Assyria. In 1906 Dibelius published his study of the Ark,¹⁴ in which he considered the Ark as an empty throne. He, too, was answered by Budde,¹⁵ who claimed that the Ark is always a box, or chest, and that Jahweh always rides above the Cherubim.

Interest in the Ark increased at this time. The Parker expedition was sent to Palestine to search for it, but the search ended in disaster.¹⁶ In 1912 Eduard Koenig dealt with the Ark rather extensively in his history¹⁷ and William Arnold in 1914 attempted to prove the Ark a repository for

¹¹Wolfgang Reichel, "Ueber die vorhellenischen Goetterkulte," TARWP, Second series, V, 1ff.

¹²Karl Budde, "Imageless Worship in Antiquity," The Expository Times, IX (1898), 396ff.

¹³J. Meinhold, "Die Lade Jahwes--ein Nachtrag," Theologische Studien und Kritiken, 1901, pp. 593ff.

¹⁴Dibelius, op. cit., pp. 1ff.

¹⁵Karl Budde, "War die Lade Jahwes ein leerer Thron?" Theologische Studien und Kritiken, 1907, pp. 72-94.

¹⁶H. G. May, "The Ark--A Miniature Temple," The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures, LII (1936), 224.

¹⁷Eduard Koenig, Geschichte der Alttestamentlichen Religion (Guetersloeh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1912), passim.

oracle-stones.¹⁸ He, also, was answered by Budde¹⁹ in 1921. In the meantime, in 1920, Hugo Gressmann²⁰ published his theory that the Ark contained an image or images. Three years later Hans Schmidt identified the Cherubim with those of Ezekiel's vision,²¹ but this was never taken very seriously.

After this the complexion changed. Leonhard Rost took up the subject with a new slant.²² He examined the texts from a literary viewpoint and came to the conclusion that the Ark-stories had been published in a separate "Ark-book" before the books of Samuel were written. This idea was later picked up and developed by Bourke,²³ who pointed out the literary forms and structures in 1 Samuel 4-6 and found there a

¹⁸William A. Arnold, Ephod and Ark, A Study in the Records and Religion of the Ancient Hebrews, in Harvard Theological Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), III, 1ff.

¹⁹Karl Budde, "Ephod und Lade," ZAW, XXXIX (1921), 1-41.

²⁰Hugo Gressmann, Die Lade Jahves und das Allerheiligste des salomonischen Tempels, in Beitraege zur Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1920), Series 2, I, passim. Hereafter this series will be referred to as BWAT.

²¹Hans Schmidt, "Kerubenthron und Lade," Eucharistion fuer Hermann Gunkel, in FRLANT (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1923), XXIV, 120-44.

²²Leonhard Rost, Die Ueberlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids, in Beitraege zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1926), Series 3, VI, 1-44. Hereafter this series will be referred to as BWANT.

²³Joseph Bourke, "Samuel and the Ark: A Study in Contrasts," Dominican Studies, VII (1954), 73-103.

death and resurrection theme in the story of the Ark's capture.

Benziger²⁴ and Mowinckel²⁵ connected the Ark with the Psalms and assigned it a cultic use in processions. Noth²⁶ assigned to it a political importance as the central sanctuary of the then-new state, Israel.

Since then nothing really new has been advanced, and the subject has been incorporated into the recent theologies of the Old Testament.

Most of the works mentioned, except some of the earlier studies, were available for this investigation, and are employed in this paper.

The following abbreviations will be employed throughout this paper:

BWANT for the series Beitraege zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag.

BWAT for the series Beitraege zur Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag.

FRIANT for the series Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments. Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.

²⁴Benziger, Hebraeische Archacologie (Leipzig: n.p., 1927), pp. 368ff., quoted by Walther Eichrodt, Theologie des Alten Testaments (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1957), p. 64.

²⁵Sigmund Mowinckel, Religion und Kultus, translated from the Swedish by Albrecht Schauer (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1953), passim.

²⁶Martin Noth, The History of Israel, translated from the German by Stanley Godman (New York: Harper Bros., 1956), passim.

TARWE for the periodical Theologische Arbeiten aus dem Rheinischen wissenschaftlichen Predigerverein.

ZAW for the periodical Zeitschrift fuer die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.

The Original Name of the Ark

The subject has not given positive certainty as to the original name for the Ark of the Covenant. The first time we find the name is found in Exodus 25, where the building of the Ark is first mentioned. There it is simply called the ark of the covenant, *אֲרוֹן הַבְּרִית*. In later references it is called "the ark," *אֲרוֹן*. The name which the Ark is given, *אֲרוֹן הַבְּרִית*, is used in all the other references in the chapter, where the Ark is first mentioned and the command is given (v. 10) to make it in the wood of shittim which I shall give you, and the name applied to it (v. 12) is "the ark of the testimony," *אֲרוֹן הָעֵדוּת*. In the other parts of the book, the name *אֲרוֹן הַבְּרִית* is used, the ark of the testimony, and a third name, the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, *אֲרוֹן הַבְּרִית יְהוָה*, are mentioned.

It is interesting to note that the ark was originally thought of as a witness to the covenant, and this does not, perhaps, explain the name.

Exodus 25: 10, 11, 12, 13.

Exodus 25: 22, 23.

The name *אֲרוֹן הָעֵדוּת* is often found in the other parts of the book. The significance of this name is explained below.

CHAPTER II

THE ARK OF GOD

The Original Name of the Ark

The Scriptures do not give positive certainty as to the original name for the Ark of the Covenant. The first term used for it is found in Exodus 25, where the building of the Ark is first commanded. There it is simply called "an Ark of Shittim wood," אָרוֹן עֵצֵי שִׁטִּים.¹ In later references in the same chapter it is called "the Ark," אָרוֹן, because it is clear which Ark is meant.² This accounts for all but the final reference in the chapter, where the Ark has been described and the command is given (v. 16) to place in it "the testimony which I shall give you," and the name applied to it (v. 22) is "the Ark of the Testimony," אָרוֹן הַתְּעֻדָה. In the entire Pentateuch only these two terms, the (an) Ark, the Ark of the Testimony, and a third term, the Ark of the Covenant of Jahweh, אָרוֹן בְּרִית יְהוָה, are employed.³

It is apparent enough that the Ark was originally thought of in connection with the Covenant, but this does not explain

¹Exodus 25:10. Cf. p. 12, note 11.

²Exodus 25:14, 15, 16, 21.

³In the LXX αβωτὸς τοῦ μαρτυρίου is often found where one might expect a mere ἡ αβωτὸς. The significance of this will be discussed later.

the rise of the other terms used. There are some twenty names used in the Old Testament, but they can be reduced to a few main terms, used in varying combinations. They are:

1. The Ark of God, ארון האלהים , ארון אלהים .
2. The Ark of the God of Israel, ארון אלהי ישראל .
3. The Ark of the Lord of all the earth, ארון אדון כד ארץ .
4. The Ark of Jahweh of hosts, who dwells above the Cherubin, ארון ידוה צבאות ישב הכרובים .
5. The Ark of the Covenant, ארון (ה) ברית .
6. The Ark of the Testimony, ארון העדות .

It is evident from the terms themselves that no development can be traced. None of the six will suggest all the others. [The only name common to all is "Ark," ארון . However, if we look at the Old Testament record, a development can be traced through various periods of Israel's history. Various attempts have been made to do this. Most of them are handicapped by being tied to the source-hypothesis, but they are still worthy of consideration. Nearly all the commentators assume that the books of Samuel are the earliest reliable tradition. From an examination of this tradition, three important opinions have been brought forward. Arnold⁴ and

⁴William R. Arnold, Ephod and Ark, A Study in the Records and Religion of the Ancient Hebrews, in Harvard Theological Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), III, 27-36.

von Rad⁵ believe that אֲרוֹן אֱלֹהִים is the earliest name. But their opinions are suspect because of their presuppositions. Arnold wants this as the earliest name so that אֲרוֹן אֱלֹהִים can be thought of as only an adjective, "the divine Ark," because he wants to consider the Ark merely a repository for oracles. Von Rad sees the Ark as not originally a part of Israelite religion, but later rededicated and dubbed "the Ark of Jahweh." Seyring⁶ thinks that אֲרוֹן אֱלֹהִים (1 Sam. 4:4) is the oldest name for the Ark, because it represents Jahweh as the war-god. But this cannot be established as the original conception of Jahweh.

Most scholars agree that the original name was אֲרוֹן יְהוָה.⁷ It occurs twenty times in Samuel and is frequent in the literature regarded as early. The names that occur in the Pentateuch are then to be considered as read back into the tradition by D⁸ and Q.⁹ But Erdmans has demonstrated the

⁵Gerhard von Rad, "Zelt und Lade," Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift, XLII (1931), 488-90.

⁶Fritz Seyring, "Der alttestamentliche Sprachgebrauch in betreff der sogenannte 'Bundeslade,'" ZAW, XI (1891), 116.

⁷Martin Dibelius, Die Lade Jahwes: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung, in BWANT (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1906), VII, 14; Ludwig Koehler, Old Testament Theology, translated by A. S. Todd (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 121.

⁸Seyring, op. cit., p. 120.

⁹Ibid., p. 123.

untenability of this position by pointing out that there is no reason to doubt the reliability of the Exodus tradition.¹⁰

The position of the LXX is difficult to understand. It seems to represent a conflate tradition, usually lengthening the names found in the Hebrew text. It frequently adds either τοῦ μαρτυρίου or τῆς διαθήκης and generally shows a preference for κυρίου over θεοῦ. This situation is probably due to a late (7th to 6th century B.C. and onwards) emphasis on the Covenant that makes itself apparent late in Chronicles and in Jeremiah 3:16. In other words, by the time of the translating of the LXX, the Ark was probably known commonly as "The Ark of the Covenant" (Testimony), ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης (τοῦ μαρτυρίου). This being the case, we can in most cases disregard the evidence of the LXX. We are still left with the terminology of Exodus as the earliest and basic.

The Term 'Aron

The word ארון occurs 202 times in the Old Testament. Its essential meaning is clearly "box," "chest." Its origin

¹⁰B. D. Eerdmans, "The Ark of the Covenant," The Expositor, Series 8, III (1912), 408-20; Eduard Nielsen, Oral Tradition, (Alva: Robert Cunningham and Sons Ltd., 1954), pp. 1ff., also pointed out weaknesses in the literary-critical method and makes a strong case for the reliability of oral tradition.

has been traced to the Accadian aramu, box,¹¹ and it has direct parallels in Phoenician, Arabic, and Aramaic.¹² A derived meaning, "sarcophagus,"¹³ also occurs in the parallels and in Genesis 50:26. The noun אֲרוֹן was early taken over as the technical term for the Ark.

From this original meaning, box, arose various theories of the Ark as merely a box, containing some sort of fetish. In 1905 the accepted theory was that the Ark contained images, meteor stones, or oracles.¹⁴ These would be considered symbols of the presence of Jahweh. Another interesting theory, suggested by Gressmann, assumes that the Ark contained the bones of Joseph.¹⁵ It is pointed out that some of the great men in Israel were buried in places where sanctuaries were located in the Northern Kingdom,¹⁶ and that the bones of

¹¹Zimmern, Keilinschriften des Alten Testaments, 1902, quoted by Dibelius, op. cit., p. 87. Koehler points out that in Accadian the word originally points to the valuable wood out of which it was made. Ludwig Koehler and W. Baumgartner, Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953), in loc.

¹²Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Third edition; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 75. It is curious to note that the Arabic translation of the Old Testament does not use the related word, but kibātun, borrowed from the Greek.

¹³Ibid.; Dibelius, loc. cit., quoting Zimmern.

¹⁴Dibelius, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁵Hugo Gressman, Die Lade Jahves und das Allerheiligste des salomonischen Tempels, in BWAT (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1920), Series 2, I, 36-42.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 37. Cf. Gen. 35:8,19; 37:12; Josh. 24:29ff.; 1 Sam. 10:2; Jer. 31:15.

the other sons of Jacob were not brought back from Egypt.¹⁷ It was considered significant that the Jews should carry both the sarcophagus of Joseph and the Ark, both designated by ארון, especially since before Exodus 13:19 only the ארון of Joseph is mentioned, and later only the Ark as ארון. Perhaps they were identical,¹⁸ and the Ark is to be interpreted after the manner of the Osiris-coffin.¹⁹ According to this theory, this casket became the sanctuary of the northern tribes, and later the sanctuary of all Israel.²⁰ But there are several difficulties with this theory. It may be true that the form of the Ark and that of Joseph's coffin were alike, that both were wood, and even that both had Cherubim engraved on the top, as is true of many Egyptian sarcophagi. But there is no bridge between Jahweh and Osiris. The Old Testament tradition is not based on a mythical death and resurrection theme. Jahweh is a living God, Osiris is a god of the dead.²¹ In addition, Joseph was buried at Shechem. If the Ark is his casket, then it can appear only at the sanctuary in Shechem. But it appears at Shiloh as well, hence it does not contain Joseph's bones.²²

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 36.

²⁰Ibid., p. 39.

²¹Ibid., p. 40.

²²Ibid., p. 41.

'Aron and Ephod

A more impressive development of the box idea is that of Arnold.²³ He begins by pointing to the confusion involved in the attempt to define the word אֲרֹן. It sometimes appears to be a garment, sometimes a large image, and sometimes a small image.²⁴ Arguments have been advanced for and against each of these. Arnold concentrates attention on 1 Samuel 14:18, "And Saul said to Ahijah, 'Bring hither the Ark of God.' For the Ark of God went at that time with the people of Israel." In this passage the LXX replaced אֲרֹן with εφεσος.²⁵ Critics suggest this as the correct reading, objecting that the Ark was not present at the camp of Saul near Gibeah, but at Kirjath-jearim.²⁶ But Arnold claims that the reading of the Hebrew text is authentic, and that the word אֲרֹן was removed in many places in the Old Testament and replaced by אֲרֹן, since the Ark was a receptacle for the oracles used by the priest. This conception was repugnant to the later, purified religion of post-exilic times, and the authors of the traditions inserted the

²³Arnold, op. cit., pp. 1ff.

²⁴Eduard Koenig, Geschichte der Alttestamentlichen Religion (Guetersloeh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1912), p. 212; Gressmann, op. cit., pp. 31f.; Brown, op. cit., p. 65.

²⁵Aquila retains κιβωτός.

²⁶Arnold, op. cit., pp. 122-23.

less repugnant term, $\tau\iota\theta\kappa$.²⁷ Therefore, every reading of $\tau\iota\theta\kappa$ must be replaced by $\gamma\iota\gamma\kappa$.²⁸ As an example of this deliberate substitution he cites 1 Samuel 30:7, which he claims is an identical circumstance with 1 Samuel 14:18 and 1 Samuel 23:9, where the LXX reads $\tau\acute{o}\ \epsilon\phi\omicron\delta\ \kappa\upsilon\epsilon\lambda\acute{o}\sigma$, a strange construction if the Ephod is a linen garment or an image.²⁹

As a further support for this theory he points to the use of the word $\lambda\epsilon\gamma$, which he claims is a technical term used with reference to the Ephod in Judges 8:27, but not in 1 Samuel 5:2, 2 Samuel 6:17 (=1 Chronicles 16:1, and 15:24).³⁰ The Hebrew text, he says, is in error. It was not an Ephod that Gideon made of gold, but an Ark. Similarly, in Judges 17:5 Micah made an Ark, not an Ephod.³¹

Arnold believes that there was not merely one Ark in Israel, but many. No passage, he says, is irreconcilable with this theory. In fact, five passages can be explained only on the basis of this theory,³² and three more are understandable only if there were many "boxes" used for some sort

²⁷Ibid., p. 10.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 124.

³⁰Ibid., p. 127.

³¹Ibid., p. 128.

³²1 Sam. 3:3; 4:3f.; 2 Sam. 6:2; 1 Kings 2:26; Jer. 3:16.

of divination.³³ He does not find difficulty, but support in the use of the phrase ארון האלהים. אלהים is to be taken adjectivally: divine,³⁴ just as אלהים is to be understood adjectivally: mighty.³⁵ However Budde, in his article written in criticism of Arnold,³⁶ points out that the term ארון is often used with the article,³⁷ thus disposing of the case for the plurality of Arks, and shows that the phrase ארון האלהים makes perfect sense if אלהים is taken as the divine name.³⁸ Nevertheless, this theory has been generally accepted in critical circles. It is common today to speak of many Arks, not just one.³⁹

These Arks, or boxes, were repositories for sacred lots. Each was also conceived of as a miniature temple that housed the spirit of the divinity at the time of divining--"a sort

³³Sam. 11:11; 15:24ff.; Judg. 20:27; Arnold, op. cit., p. 34.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 34-36.

³⁵Sigmund Mowinkel, Religion und Kultus, translated into German by Albrecht Schauer (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1953), p. 44.

³⁶Karl Budde, "Ephod und Lade," ZAW, XXXIX (1921), 1-41.

³⁷Ibid., p. 16.

³⁸Ibid., p. 18.

³⁹Erich Klamroth, Lade und Tempel (Cuetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, n.d.), p. 13; H. G. May, "The Ark--A Miniature Temple," The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures, LI (1936), 215-34.

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."⁴⁰ This conception, Arnold claims, is supported by those passages where the Ark appears before battle scenes (e.g., 2 Sam. 11:1, 1 Sam. 14:18f.),⁴¹ and 1 Samuel 15:23 וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים בְּקוֹל הַקֶּלֶב. He changes וְהָיָה to וְהָיָה and translates, "for a sin against the oracle is rebellion, and the box and teraphim are an obligation."⁴² In later times the boxes and oracles were replaced by the prophets;⁴³ hence we hear no more about the oracle pieces after the Ark was placed in the royal sanctuary in Jerusalem.⁴⁴ According to this theory, the fate of the Ark is unimportant and irrelevant, since there was no single Ark. That is why Jeremiah is not concerned with its fate (cf., Maccabees 2:4; 1 Es. 113:54).⁴⁵ Many of the "Arks" were destroyed by Josiah along with the teraphim (2 Kgs. 23:24).⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Arnold, op. cit., p. 133.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 79.

⁴² Ibid., p. 130.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 138.

⁴⁴ Walther Eichrodt, Theologie des Alten Testaments (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1957), p. 64.

⁴⁵ Arnold, op. cit., p. 138.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 139, note 1.

Budde⁴⁷ and others have pointed out a great many difficulties with Arnold's thesis. In 1 Samuel 14:18 דָּוִד can not be established as an error or change in the text. When Arnold makes such emendations, he uses the LXX, but does not recognize that the Hebrew is also a good text. He is merely choosing between two equal possibilities.⁴⁸ When he does use the LXX, he is not consistent. He uses it to correct the Hebrew text twice, but ignores it elsewhere. When he changes דָּוִד to דָּוִד he does violence to the text. Only the ד of the original word remains, and the rest of the word is changed.⁴⁹

Furthermore, if the Ark were merely an oracle, it would stay behind in a battle, but in fact, it did not. It was lost because it was in the middle of a battle.⁵⁰ If the Ark had been so meaningless a sanctuary as Arnold would make of it, one would not have gone to all the trouble and ceremony as that described in the story of Uzzah's death (2 Sam. 6).⁵¹

Recent study has also shown that the Ark was the symbol

⁴⁷Budde, op. cit., 1ff.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 6f.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 17.

⁵¹R. Brinker, The Influence of Sanctuaries in Early Israel (Manchester: The University Press, 1946), p. 51.

of unity during the time of the United Kingdom.⁵² If this is true, then it cannot be maintained that it was multiple.⁵³ For one thing, it was not at home in any other sanctuary than the Temple⁵⁴ (although symbolic Arks, copies of the original, may have had their place in a number of shrines).⁵⁵ Again, if it was only one box among many, then there was no need for more than one priest to serve it.⁵⁶ Furthermore, David would have welcomed an oracle-box before battle, but instead sent it back (2 Sam. 15:24-29).⁵⁷ Nor would he have troubled himself taking the Ark to Jerusalem if it was just one decrepit article,⁵⁸ and if it would have lent no legitimacy to his throne.⁵⁹

Perhaps the most telling argument is this, that אֲפֹרֹת is not a harmless word that could be substituted for אֲרוֹן by the scribes. It was considered a snare to Israel (Judg.

⁵²Martin Noth, Das System der Zwölf Stämme Israels, in BWANT (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1930), IV, passim, et al.

⁵³Klamroth, op. cit., p. 18.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁵Brinker, loc. cit.

⁵⁶Klamroth, op. cit., p. 17.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 18, where Klamroth maintains, against Mowinckel, that even had David rebuilt the lost Ark, it would not have lent legitimacy to his throne.

8:27).⁶⁰ As impressive as it may be, Arnold's theory must be rejected.

⁶⁰Budde, op. cit., p. 9, note 1.

CHAPTER III

THE ARK OF TESTIMONY

'Eduth

The content of the Ark was not the oracles, but the two tables of the Law, the tablets of Testimony. This is signified by the word אֲדוּתָא, which is used in the earliest name for the Ark. It is written in two ways, אֲדוּתָא, and אֲדוּתָא. It is derived from the verb אָדַת, to bear witness, warn, admonish, exhort,--originally to repeat, return. In the cognate languages this verb and its derivatives have come to mean custom or habit.¹ In this sense it is used to denote the two tablets of the Law, although the other connotations are not lacking.² Another derivative of the same root is the noun אָדוּת, witness, and it is probable that אֲדוּתָא has overtones in this vein also.³

The term אֲדוּתָא was used first of the tablets of stone, then of the Ark as containing them, and then of the Tabernacle as containing the Ark. The Ark is called the Ark

¹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Third edition; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 728-30.

²Cf. infra, pp. 24f.

³Ludwig Koehler, Old Testament Theology, translated by A. S. Todd (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 209.

of Testimony after the tablets in Exodus 25:22, and the Tabernacle is called the tent of testimony in Numbers 9:15 and the dwelling of the testimony in Exodus 38:21, Numbers 1:50, 53, and 10:11.⁴ In the Pentateuch, therefore, the tablets of Testimony are considered the important factor in the sanctuary.

Derivatives of a similar root, טו , loom large in the worship life of Israel in the wilderness. The congregation is termed קָהָל (one of the two parties bearing witness to the Covenant?), the tent of meeting is אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד , and God says to Moses, that over the Ark, between the Cherubim, "I will meet you, $\text{וְנִפְגַּעְתִּי בְּךָ}$ " (Ex. 25:22).⁵ However, the connection between טו and טוֹר is at best doubtful.

In Exodus 40:20 טוֹרֵי הַלֵּוִי is equated with the tablets of the Law,⁶ and is parallel to הַיְהוָה יְהוָה in Psalms 78:5 and to פִּי and מִן הַיְהוָה in Psalms 81:6, 119:14, 156, Nehemiah 9:34, 2 Kings 17:15, 1 Kings 2:3, and Jeremiah 44:23.⁷

⁴Ibid.

⁵Hellmuth Frey, Das Buch der Gegenwart Gottes unter seiner Gemeinde, in Die Botschaft des Alten Testaments (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1953), II, 24.

⁶A. M. Renwick, "The Ark of the Covenant," The New Bible Commentary, edited by F. Davidson, A. M. Stibbs, and E. F. Kevan (Second edition; Grand Rapids: Erdmans Publishing Company, 1954), p. 292.

⁷R. Brinker, The Influence of Sanctuaries in Early Israel (Manchester: The University Press, 1946), p. 48.

In Genesis 31:50 God is called as arbitrator תִּי in a dispute between Jacob and Laban.⁸ It can also be taken in the sense of "promises," "pledges."⁹

There is some difficulty with the use of this term in 2 Kings 11:12, where the testimony was given to the king at his coronation. Mowinckel¹⁰ believes that it was a scroll containing the king's divine appointment and the ground of his prerogative, while Johnson¹¹ sees it as a document with the terms of Jahweh's covenant with David, worn by the king during the ceremony. It did not contain conditions to observe, but may have been inscribed with the promises of God or a copy of the Law.¹²

At any rate, the Testimony served as a reminder. In Genesis 31:44-48 Jacob and Laban set up stones as an אִתֵּי הַבְּרִית . They were to call to mind the mutual claims and obligations of their covenant. Similarly, the Law is the testimony of God's claim on his people (cf. Nehemiah 9:34).¹³ The Keret

⁸Koehler, loc. cit.

⁹Johnson, loc. cit.

¹⁰Sigmund Mowinckel, He That Cometh, translated by G. W. Anderson (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 64.

¹¹Johnson, op. cit., p. 21.

¹²Cf. Leviticus 17:18; 1 Kings 2:3.

¹³Koehler, loc. cit.

tablets from Ras Shamra refer to a sacred object called ED,¹⁴ which Caiger calls a prototype of the Ark of Testimony, but its significance is unknown.

The Significance of the 'Eduth

The significance of the tablets of the Law that were kept in the Ark can be seen in part from other boxes used for special purposes in ancient times. In the synagogues, even until the present, Arks were used. Even though they are termed אָרֹן, they were based on the Ark of the first Temple. They contained the scrolls of the Law, and were portable and taken out of doors on occasion.¹⁵

Special boxes were used as repositories for important documents throughout the ancient Near East. In Egypt, for example, important old inscriptions were often placed in the care of gods. The Book of the Dead speaks of some inscriptions "under the feet of this god" and "in einer Buchlade zu Fueszen des Gottes Anup."¹⁶ In Letopolis medical writings were found in boxes at the feet of Anubis, placed there

¹⁴Stephen L. Caiger, Bible and Spade (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 54.

¹⁵H. G. May, "The Ark--A Miniature Temple," The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures, LII (1936), 225-26.

¹⁶Hans Schmidt, "Kerubenthron und Lade," Eucharisterion fuer Hermann Gunkel, in FRLANT (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1923), XXII, 136.

during the time of Ramses II.¹⁷ The Tell Ta'anek tablets were found in boxes of clay of size comparable to the Ark (60 X 65cm.).¹⁸

From the Hittite capital of Boghazkoi comes a treaty (covenant) with the statement, "A tablet (of this covenant) will be laid at the feet of the sun-god of the city Arinna."¹⁹ And in a letter of Ramses II to a Hittite king concerning a covenant they had made: "A copy has been laid at the feet of the god Teshup and of the Egyptian sun-god."²⁰ So the Ark of the Covenant was also a repository to be kept before the public and before God, as a testimony against anyone who should break the Covenant. It was in the care of God. Mendenhall²¹ points out that since Hittite covenants were under the protection of the deity, they were deposited as a sacred thing in the sanctuary of the vassal state--"perhaps also to indicate that the local deity or deities would not and could not aid in breach of covenant."

Mendenhall has also brought to light the fact that the first obligation of a covenant was to remain aloof from all

¹⁷Hugo Gressman, Die Lade Jahves und das Allerheiligste des salomonischen Tempels, in BWANT (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1920), Series 2, 1, 43.

¹⁸Ibid., note 97.

¹⁹Schmidt, op. cit., p. 136, note 4.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," The Biblical Archaeologist, XVII (1954), 49-76.

foreign relations

i.e., with other gods, and by implication, with other political groups. It meant that they [Israel] could not make covenants with their neighbors either in the desert or later in Palestine, for to do so would be to recognize the pagan deities as witnesses and guarantors of the covenant.²²

The tablets in the Ark were the Magna Charta of the new state of Israel, and the archive of the religious community.²³

They signified not only the treasure and ground of the covenant of Law, but also served as a testimony against the sinful people and their sins in the sight of the holy God.²⁴]

Were the Tables Really in the Ark?

The Ark was considered as the repository for the tables of the Law until the Graf-Wellhausen school called this fact into question.²⁵ As stated above, the first one to doubt the existence of the tablets was Goethe.²⁶

Several reasons have been advanced for doubting the

²²Ibid., p. 38.

²³Erich Klamroth, Lade und Tempel (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, n.d.), p. 39.

²⁴Gustav F. Oehler, Theology of the Old Testament, translated by Ellen D. Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874), p. 384.

²⁵Martin Dibelius, Die Lade Jahwes: Eine Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung, in FRLANT (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1906), VII, 1.

²⁶In an article, "Zwo wichtige, bisher uneroerterte biblische Fragen zum ersten Male gruendlich beantwortet," signed, "Von einem Landgeistlichen in Schwaben," quoted by Dibelius, op. cit., p. 2, note 1.

existence of the tablets:

- a. If they are so important, why are they slighted in the Temple dedication?²⁷
- b. Why were they never displayed?²⁸
- c. If the Ark contained only the Tables, this does not explain the wonders connected with the Ark. It should rather be connected directly with Jahweh;²⁹ it is more likely that the Jordan should stop for the throne of Jahweh than for two stone tablets.³⁰
- d. In the Near East temple archives, such as stone tablets, are not ordinarily kept in a holy of holies, but in a separate room.³¹

For these reasons, other theories about what the Ark contained have been proposed. One such theory would have it that the Ark contained a stone fetish. But no one would put a stone fetish in a wooden box that can stand less wear than the stone itself; and people want to see a relic.³² Furthermore, if the stones were merely rough stones from Sinai, then how would they have come to be engraved?³³ And finally, on tablets of stone it is the writing that must be preserved, not the stone itself.

One theory has it that on Sinai there was an ancient moon-sanctuary of Arabian origin. The Jews were on their

²⁷Gressmann, op. cit., pp. 62f.

²⁸Dibelius, op. cit., pp. 2f.

²⁹Ibid., p. 3.

³⁰Ibid., p. 31.

³¹Gressmann, op. cit., pp. 42f.

³²Ibid., p. 15.

³³B. D. Erdmans, "The Ark of the Covenant," The Expositor, Series 8, III (1912), 416.

way, not from, but to Egypt. In this temple was a library containing the two tables. From that time on the lunar revelation belonged to Israel.³⁴

Gressmann says that one must combine the ideas of the Mosaic laws being read and of God speaking from the Kapporeth, and he reconciles the two ideas³⁵ by supposing that the tables were placed on top of the Ark, but not for reading, for there was no reading desk and the tablets were inscribed on both sides (Ex. 32:15).³⁶ It is inconceivable to him that the tables, written with the finger of God, would be hidden inside the Ark and not displayed.³⁷ He finds a contrast between Moses and Aaron and between the tables of the Law and the Golden Calf of Exodus 32. He concludes that the calf (made by Aaron) was the original content of the Ark and the tablets (sponsored by Moses) the true content, according to the later traditions. ³⁸

The sacred record never says that the tables were ever displayed for any reason. All it says is that the tablets were in the Ark (Ex. 40:20), and that the Ark was named for

³⁴Ditlef Nielsen, Die Altarabische Mondreligion und die Mosaische Ueberlieferung (Strasbourg: n.p., 1904), quoted by Klamroth, op. cit., p. 39.

³⁵Gressmann, op. cit., p. 18.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., p. 23.

the tablets that rested in it (תַּבִּיטֹת אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ).³⁹

Mendenhall⁴⁰ notices that, although a provision for the public reading of the Decalogue is lacking in the Pentateuch itself, it is nevertheless "a most persistent element in the Israelite traditions." The covenants were to be read publicly at periodic intervals. The tablets, therefore, were a memorial of the Covenant and a reminder of the Laws Israel was privileged and obligated to keep.

The passage 1 Kings 8:9 comes into question because it seems to conflict with Exodus 16:32-33, Numbers 17:8-10, and Hebrews 9:4. Gressman thinks 1 Kings 8:9 should be understood as a polemic (from the hand of a late editor), not against the manna and the rod, but against the bull-image that he supposes to have been in the Ark.⁴¹ But this is impossible, since there was no such image in the Ark. Another answer to the problem might be in the fact that the Old Testament passages do not say that the manna and rod of Aaron were in the Ark, but before it. But if this is true, then to what purpose was the statement in 1 Kings made? Besides, Hebrews 9:4 says that the manna and rod were indeed in the Ark. It must be assumed, therefore, that they were lost or stolen sometime during the Ark's travels, perhaps by the Philistines (1 Sam. 5).

³⁹Exodus 25:16,21,22.

⁴⁰Mendenhall, op. cit., p. 40.

⁴¹Gressmann, op. cit., p. 26.

The Ark of the Covenant

Most commentators want to strike out the word אֲרֹן wherever it appears as part of the name of the Ark. Von Rad, for example, asserts that it was inserted by D,⁴² who could not conceive of God as being enclosed in one place. He (D) would rather see the Ark as the holder of the tablets of the Law.⁴³ Dibelius⁴⁴ says that the noun crept into the text under the influence of the LXX wherever the noun is found with the article. The construction is, as he says, impossible: it is doubly determined, first by the article, then by the adjective (Joshua 3:14,17). But where the noun אֲרֹן appears without the article there is no need to strike it. The combination אֲרֹן אֱלֹהִים is used commonly by 600 B.C. at least.⁴⁵ The word אֲרֹן in the name of the Ark makes perfect sense, because God did make a covenant with Israel at Sinai.⁴⁶

⁴²Berhard von Rad, "Zelt und Lade," Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift, XLII (1931), 479.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 479ff.

⁴⁴Dibelius, op. cit., pp. 16f.

⁴⁵Ludwig Couard, "Die religions-nationale Bedeutung der Lade Jahves," ZAW, XII (1892), 69f.

⁴⁶Eerdmans, op. cit., p. 419.

CHAPTER IV

THE ARK AS A THRONE

Ancient Parallels

In connection with the Ark Jahweh has been titled "King."¹ This leads us to a consideration of the Ark as a throne, a conception that has become common in recent Old Testament study. It has gained added emphasis from the findings of archaeology in the Near East that have brought to light apparent parallels to the Ark. Meinhold seems to have begun the comparisons by positing the theory that the Ark was an Egyptian-style throne.² The idea of an enthroned deity was a common conception in the ancient world.³ Image-less cults, wherein the deity was invisibly enthroned, abounded. Such cults are said to have come in the period of development from fetishism-animism to idolatry.⁴ Dibelius compares the image-less cults with children who play "train" with a line of

¹Ps. 99:1. For a discussion of the connection of the Ark with this Psalm see below, p. 41f. Cf. Martin Dibelius, Die Lade Jahwes: Eine Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung, TRAMP, VII, 95, passim; and Hugo Gressmann, Die Lade Jahwes und das Allerheiligste des salomonischen Tempels, BNANT, Series 2, I, passim.

²J. Meinhold, "Die Lade Jahwes," TRAMP, IV (1896), noted by Dibelius, op. cit., p. 99.

³Ibid., pp. 96-100.

⁴Ibid., p. 105.

empty chairs, on which imaginary people sit.⁵

Parallels have been found from all over the ancient world. Von Rad⁶ cites two Phoenician Astarte thrones, the seats of which have two winged beings on either side, one bearing a consecration inscription, while "the throne itself is empty."

From Assyria: The sun-god of Sippur, at the time of Nabupaliddinna, sits on a box-like throne, supported by four beings in relief. The throne is regarded as cosmic in authority, because it sits upon water, which is supposed to picture heaven.⁷

From Babylon: The gods are borne in little houses and look out "like dogs from their kennel."⁸

From Egypt: Sethe⁹ compares the Ark to the throne of Amon, which is also empty because he is the wind-god, in later times the god of the soul, who inhabits every living thing that breathes. Since he is spiritual, his bark (throne) is empty, and he must be imagined as present upon it.¹⁰

⁵Ibid., p. 106.

⁶Gerhard von Rad, "Zeit und Lade," Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift, XLII (1931), 484.

⁷Dibelius, op. cit., p. 99.

⁸Erich Klamroth, Lade und Tempel (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, n.d.), p. 15, quoting E. D. Erdmans, "The Ark of the Covenant," The Expositor, Series 8, III (1912), 411f.

⁹Karl Sethe, Amun und die acht Urgoetter vom Hermopolis, in Abhandlungen des Preussischen Akademie die Wissenschaften (Berlin: n.p., 1929), quoted by von Rad, op. cit., pp. 486f.

Frey,¹¹ however, doubts the conclusion that Amon is the god of spirits and questions the similarity between the barks, which were made in the form of a ship and were carried by staves, and the Ark, since (a) Jahweh could not be represented; (b) He was always in transit (hence the staves were not to be removed); (c) He was on His way to His sanctuary, the promised land. In addition it can be pointed out that the Ark has no windows or doors and is tightly closed.¹² There remains, then, a mere superficial similarity.

From Arabia: The Rivala bedouins have empty camel-chairs that are considered the center of Allah's domain and the select place of Allah that precedes the tribe in its travels. Offerings are brought before it,¹³ and his presence there is considered a great help in trouble.¹⁴

From Persia: Herodotus records a Persian ceremony in which an empty throne was borne on a cart. The throne was considered the throne of Zeus (Ahura Mazda) and not merely a seat. No one dared approach it.¹⁵

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Hellmuth Frey, Das Buch der Gegenwart Gottes unter seiner Gemeinde, in Die Botschaft des Alten Testaments (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1953), II, 22f.

¹²Klamroth, loc. cit.

¹³cf. Is. 37:14.

¹⁴Walther Eichrodt, Theologie des Alten Testaments (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1957), p. 62, note 54.

¹⁵Dibelius, op. cit., pp. 60f.

From Greece: The pre-Homeric Mycena religion was imageless.¹⁶ In the Hellenic world were found empty deity-thrones that were usually interpreted in a historical manner, e.g., "This is the throne on which Danaos once sat."¹⁷

From early Rome: A vase picture from lower Italy shows a libation being poured on the lower part of an altar, while the top remains empty.¹⁸ In the royal period of Rome imageless religion was practised.¹⁹ A Roman traveller reports, "The local landlords have a cart on which no one sits, but an angel is thought to be on it."²⁰ The Pantheon contained empty seats and even couches for the gods. Even early Christianity represented the Apostles with empty thrones.²¹

Even in India one finds empty Buddha-thrones containing relics of Buddha from his time or home.²²

Jahweh as King in Israel

On the basis of parallels such as the foregoing, many have been led to the conclusion that the Ark was also understood as an empty throne. But in this connection there is

¹⁶Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 105, note 1.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 104.

²⁰Ibid., p. 64.

²¹Ibid., p. 68.

²²Ibid., p. 69.

another factor of vital importance: was Jahweh regarded as King among the Israelites?

Some scholars have claimed that Jahweh was not conceived of as a King at all by the Israelites. Dibelius²³ agrees that Jahweh sat on a throne, but says it was not a royal throne (1 Kings 22:19).²⁴ Kraus²⁵ says that Jahweh was called King (1 Samuel 8:7) only for apologetic reasons: the king was claiming too much power for himself; the dominion of Jahweh had to be proclaimed. Other writers concede that Jahweh was called a King, but argue that this conception was added secondarily under the influence of the neighboring nations and was not originally connected with the Ark,²⁶ or they argue that Isaiah (chapter 6) was the first to call Jahweh King.²⁷

Others have gone to the other extreme, arguing that the earliest²⁸ conception of Jahweh was as a King.²⁹

²³Ibid., p. 59.

²⁴Cf. Ps. 9:5,8, where the throne is one of judgement rather than royalty, and Ezek. 43:7, where it is the place of permanent dwelling.

²⁵Hans-Joachim Kraus, Gottesdienst in Israel (Munchen: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1954), p. 107.

²⁶Albrecht Alt, Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel (Munchen: Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1953), I 351,354; also Edmond Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, translated by Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Alcock (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), p. 107.

²⁷Otto Eissfeldt, "Jahwe als Koenig," ZAW, XLVI (1928), 81-105.

²⁸Num. 23:21; Judges 8:23.

²⁹Klamroth, op. cit., p. 69. Cf. Ludwig Koehler, Old

The truth lies somewhere between the two extremes. It is clear that Jahweh was described as King in all periods of Israel's history: in the wilderness,³⁰ in the period of settlement,³¹ and through the time of Zechariah.³² The Psalms frequently present Him as King.³³ Jahweh rules over the universe and guarantees the authority of the king of Israel.³⁴ According to Koehler's count³⁵ there are fifty references to Jahweh as King in the Old Testament.

Kraus³⁶ believes we should expect the designation of Jahweh as King more frequently than it actually occurs. He claims that the reason for its infrequency is the foreign connotation that the designation has and the idolatry connected with it. Israel wanted to maintain the eternity of Jahweh as opposed to the fading of human kings and dynasties.³⁷

Testament Theology, translated by A. S. Todd (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 240, note 17.

³⁰Exod. 15:18; Num. 23:21; Deut. 33:5.

³¹Judg. 8:23; 1 Sam. 8:7. Cf. Jacob, op. cit., p. 60.

³²Zech. 14:16f., noted by Aubrey R. Johnson, Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955), p. 51.

³³Pss. 24, 29, 48, 93:1, 99:1, et al.

³⁴Johnson, op. cit., p. 63.

³⁵Koehler, op. cit., p. 31.

³⁶Kraus, op. cit., p. 102.

³⁷Ibid., p. 106, note 182a: vs. Alt, loc. cit. Cf. 1 Sam. 8:7; 12:12.

Jahweh as Enthroned on the Ark

Jacob³⁸ claims that the Ark was not at all like a throne in form. If it could be called a throne at all, this was only by virtue of its association with the Cherubim, which in some texts³⁹ were considered the bearers of Jahweh. Von Rad⁴⁰ disagrees, arguing that the original conception of the Ark was that of a throne. The other conceptions were rationalized modifications.⁴¹

Neither of these positions can be maintained on the basis of the Scriptural record. Von Rad's suggestion must be rejected because the earliest mention of the Ark stresses the tablets of the Law contained in it.⁴² Jacob overstates the case, as we shall show, in saying it did not even resemble a throne.

We have no clear statements that conclusively prove whether or not the Ark looked like a throne. It is true that since the Ark was a box, it could serve as a seat or throne. But if it is to be argued that the Ark was built specifically to look like a throne, the argument must be based on Exodus 25:16ff. If it can be demonstrated from this

³⁸Jacob, op. cit., p. 256, footnote 1.

³⁹E.g., Ps. 18:11.

⁴⁰Von Rad, op. cit., p. 462.

⁴¹But he regards the Cherubim as a later priestly addition.

⁴²Exodus 25, passim.

description that (a) the wings of the Cherubim were lowered to enclose the space immediately above the Kapporeth in such a way that no room is left for a seat, or that (b) the wings were extended upward and outward similar to the Cherubim of the Temple,⁴³ or that (c) the wings were extended upward and inward toward the center, then we can say that the Ark was not constructed to look like a throne.]

The Cherubim of the Ark are described thus: וַיִּבְנוּ חֵרֻבִים וַיִּפְרְשׂוּ אֶת צְנֹףֵיהֶם עַל עַלְמָה.⁴⁴ The Revised Standard Version translates, "The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings." The word צָפַן, while it could be used here to indicate that the wings cast a shadow above the Ark, can also be used in the sense of "protect," "shield." In itself it is inconclusive. The word עַלְמָה has the sense of being upward or overhead.⁴⁵ No other meaning can be imposed on the word, except perhaps "stair," which would be meaningless in the context, since a stair is not designed to cover (>>>). The third word involved is פָּרֵץ, a participle from the root פָּרַץ, to spread out, scatter. So (a), above, is doubtful. If the wings can be extended forward and downward, or even forward and straight out from the shoulder, they could hardly be

⁴³ Kings 6:23-28.

⁴⁴ Exod. 25:20.

⁴⁵ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Third edition; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 751f.

said to extend "upwards." The interpretation (b) is also out of the question, since the latter half of verse twenty says that the Cherubim faced toward one another and toward the Kap-poreth. The interpretation (c) is left, and there is nothing in the text to militate against it. The conclusion, therefore, is that the Ark was not built to look like a throne, since the wings seem from this text to have been extended upward and inward toward the wings of the other Cherub. It would be going too far to say with Jacob,⁴⁶ however, that the Ark did not even resemble a throne in form, since many ancient thrones were box-like in appearance.⁴⁷

But whether the Ark was called a throne because of its appearance or by association with the Cherubim, it was clearly considered the throne of Jahweh, especially in the Psalms. Alt⁴⁸ has called the twenty-fourth Psalm a psalm of the procession of the Ark to the Temple. The Psalm itself does not speak specifically of any procession, nor does it mention the Ark, but Alt's suggestion remains a possibility.

The ninety-ninth Psalm also does not mention the Ark, but it abounds in names and phrases reminiscent of the Ark: יֵשׁוּב הַכְּרֻבִים; "his footstool"; Moses, Aaron, and Samuel; "the pillar of cloud"; "the testimonies." Hence this Psalm is to be understood as connected with the Ark. Other Psalms

⁴⁶Jacob, loc. cit.

⁴⁷Gressmann, op. cit., p. 43.

⁴⁸Alt, op. cit., pp. 350f.

illustrate the same point, but the ninety-ninth is the clearest.

Outside of the Psalms we also find the Ark considered the throne of Jahweh. Hezekiah, upon receiving the letter of the Assyrians, went up to the Temple and "spread it before the Lord" (2 Kings 19:14ff.), i. e., before the Ark. He received an answer, albeit through Isaiah the prophet. That the Ark is here intended is indicated by the title Hezekiah used to address Jahweh: יהוה אלהי ישראל ישב הכרובים, which is a combination of phrases used frequently in connection with the Ark.⁴⁹ It is not necessary to assume, however, that he entered the Holy of Holies. He could have been anywhere in the Temple. No matter where he spread out the letter, he would be facing the sanctuary, and it could be considered to have been spread out before the Ark, or more precisely, before Jahweh Who was enthroned on the Ark. But it is probable that he was somewhere near the door of the Holy Place (the רִצְדִּיק). From there he could see the veil before the Ark and possibly also the staves of the Ark (2 Chronicles 5:9).

The same conception of the Ark as the throne of Jahweh is found in Jeremiah.⁵⁰ He announces that in the latter days the Ark will be no more, and he continues by stressing that Jerusalem itself will be called the throne of Jahweh.

⁴⁹1 Sam. 4:4; 1 Chron. 13:6.

⁵⁰Jer. 3:16f.

As the throne of Jahweh, the Ark was the place of His presence,⁵¹ His lordship or dominion,⁵² His position as a judge,⁵³ and His role as creator.⁵⁴ Although He is enthroned in His heavenly royal state⁵⁵ and rules over the host of heaven, the holy spirits and the heavenly bodies, and the hosts of Israel,⁵⁶ His throne was manifest among the people on the Ark⁵⁷ and was the place where Israel's adoration centered.⁵⁸

From the idea of Jahweh as enthroned on the Ark and from other indications, some have gathered that the Ark was carried about in procession on devotional festivals.⁵⁹ There is no explicit reference to such a use of the Ark, but such Psalms as the twenty-fourth seem to suggest a procession in which the Ark was carried to the Temple.⁶⁰ The vision of Isaiah is said to convey the same idea, since there (6:1) the Lord

⁵¹Exod. 25:22.

⁵²Ps. 99.

⁵³Ps. 9:7. While the Ark is not mentioned here, Jahweh is pictured as enthroned on the Cherubim and on a throne.

⁵⁴Ps. 93:1f. Again there is no mention of the Ark, but it may be inferred from the mention of throne, house, and decrees.

⁵⁵1 Kings 22:19ff.; Alt, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

⁵⁶Ps. 24; 18:11; Is. 6:1ff.

⁵⁷Ps. 99, 132; Dibelius, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁵⁸Ps. 132:7f.; 1 Kings 8:27-30.

⁵⁹Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, translated by Stanley Godman (New York: Harper Bros., 1958), p. 286, note 1.

⁶⁰Alt, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

sits on a throne⁶¹ (But if this is the Ark, how was it high and lifted up?⁶²). This theory is especially developed by Nowinckel,⁶³ who identifies the Day of Atonement with a proposed New Year feast celebrating Jahweh's accession to the throne.⁶⁴ Kraus,⁶⁵ however, objects that:

- a. He strains the texts (Samuel, Kings, and Psalms);
- b. He depends heavily on 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Kings 8, which are doubtful for his thesis;
- c. His definition of cultus excludes history and the Word;
- d. The Marduk-mythology is too closely connected with the Spring floods to import into Palestine;
- e. The formula, "Jahweh has become King" is a doubtful translation and the term is avoided by the prophets.⁶⁶

In addition to these objections, Renwick⁶⁷ points out that the Ark is never called a throne, but always an Ark. This is an oversimplification, since the Ark does appear to serve as a throne where the phrase **יָשַׁב כְּלוּבִים** is used. Nevertheless, it is significant that the Ark does not appear

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Hans Schmidt, "Kerubenthron und Lade," Eucharisterion fuer Hermann Gunkel, in FRLANT, XXIV (1923), 129.

⁶³in his Psalmenstudien II, referred to by Kraus, op. cit., p. 96.

⁶⁴Kraus, loc. cit.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 97-106.

⁶⁶Isaiah, however, does use a variation of the phrase: Your God reigns. Isaiah 52:7.

⁶⁷A. M. Renwick, "The Ark of the Covenant," The New Bible Commentary, edited by A. M. Stibbs, F. Davidson, and E. F. Kevan (Second edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1954), p. 293.

as a throne in the Pentateuch. There the term "throne,"
 × 0 >, is used only five times: four times of Pharaoh and
 once in an obscure passage.

The Old Testament, then, indicates that two elements
 were of major importance in the religion of Israel: Jahweh
 as King and the Ark as the throne of Jahweh.⁶⁸ Although
 neither of these elements is developed in the Pentateuch,
 they were commonly accepted in the cultus and find expression
 in the Psalms.

⁶⁸Alt, op. cit., p. 348.

CHAPTER V

THE CHERUBIM

Etymology

Many suggestions have been made as to the origin of the term כִּרֻב. The older view connected it with the Persian giriften, griffen, and the Greek γρύψ, but this lacks evidence and probability.¹ More likely are suggestions based on the Assyrian: from karabu, be gracious, bless (adjective: karubu, great, mighty), from kirubu, a winged bull.² Delitzsch suggested kurubu, the winged portal-guardians of Assyria.³ Dherme's suggestion seems even more likely. He insists on an etymology from karabu, devotion. The god karibu acted as an intercessor, and the karibati were orantes at the sanctuary entrance.⁴ But Koehler's suggestion is probably the correct one. He finds the origin of the word in the verb karabu, to pray. A karibu or karubu is one who

¹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Third edition; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 500.

²Ibid.

³Friedrich Delitzsch, Ebel und Bibel, 1902, quoted by Martin Dibelius, Die Lade Jahwes: Eine Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung, in PRLAT, VII (1906), 79.

⁴Ulrich Simon, Heaven in the Christian Tradition (New York: Harper's Brothers, 1958), p. 130, note 1.

prays, an intercessor.⁵ The name ܘܚܪܘܒܝܢ was probably derived from one of these Assyrian terms and later filled with new content and character.

The LXX consistently has χερουβ and χερουβιμ or χερουβιν. The New Testament uses the term only once, and there with reference to the Ark (Hebrews 9:4). It occurs there as χερουβιν. The book of Revelation uses the term *ἁγίων* throughout, since the creatures are based on the vision of Ezekiel (Revelation 4:6ff.). But they are not identical with the Cherubim, or creatures, of Ezekiel because the latter are only partly animal, while the former are entirely animal in appearance.

Their Appearance

When we touch on the subject of the Cherubim, three questions immediately confront us: (1) What did the Cherubim look like? There are two main possibilities. They may have been animal-like, i.e., having the body, legs, and head (or heads) of an animal of any mammalian family. They may also have been human-like, i.e., having the torso, legs, and arms of a human being, and usually, though not always, a human head. In either case the wings of the Cherubim were an addition to the basic overall form. We contend here for the human-like appearance of the Cherubim.

⁵Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953), in loc.

(2) Whatever they looked like, is it possible that these figures were borrowed from a neighboring culture and rededicated to use in the Israelite cultus? This has occurred in other areas of Israelite culture. Imagery, language, art, and thought forms were borrowed from Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Canaanite sources and purified. The Cherub-figures could have been borrowed from Mesopotamia or Egypt. But it seems likely that if any borrowing was done, it was from Egypt. If the Cherubim had been borrowed from Mesopotamia, it would be necessary to say that they were built after the entrance into Canaan, since before that time the Israelites had no cultural intercourse with Mesopotamia, at least not since the time of Jacob, four hundred years before the Exodus. The name Cherub could have stayed in the vocabulary that long, but it is unlikely that images would have lasted that long.

(3) Does the animal-like or human-like quality of the Cherubim affect the theology of the Ark? It might be said that if they were human-like figures, they would possess intelligence, so that as they gazed at the Rapporeth, they were pondering the mystery of the atonement (1 Peter 1:12), or we could say that as intelligent beings who praise God in song (Revelation 4:8-11), they must be human-like. But neither of these characteristics is attributed to them in the Old Testament. Nor is it impossible for animal-like beings to be thought of as singing praises, as Revelation 4:8-11

seems to indicate. In either case, these opinions are little more than speculation, and the form of the Cherubim, therefore, does not affect the theology of the Ark.

Hence it is not necessary to deal with the Cherubim because a difference in theology is involved. The problem has arisen because of the obvious differences in the Old Testament descriptions of the Cherubim.

Because figures have been found in the literature and art of Israel's neighbors that seem to parallel the Cherubim of the Old Testament, it has been thought that the Hebrews employed these mythical figures and rededicated them for use in the cultus of Jahweh.⁶ This process is said to be illustrated by the incense altar that was found in Palestine, dated between 800 and 600 B.C., on which are found figures of three animals with uplifted wings.⁷ Semitic art generally pictures palm trees alternating with cherubs and lions, similar to the graphic art of Ezekiel,⁸ which has the Cherubim and palms. The extra-biblical cherubim are two-headed.⁹

⁶William F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), pp. 298-301.

⁷Martin Dibelius, Die Lade Jahwes: Eine Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung, in PRANT, VII (1906), 75f.; H. G. May, "The Ark -- A Miniature Temple," American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures, LII (1936), 215-31.

⁸Ezekiel 41:18f.; and 1 Kings 6:23-28.

⁹Hugo Gressmann, Die Lade Jahwes und das Allerheiligste des salomonischen Tempels, in BWAT, Series 2, I, 48.

In Assyria the cherub, a winged lion with an eagle's head (similar to Ezekiel 1), was a common figure. It either fought with or carried the deity.¹⁰ Around the Indian Ocean fabled beings were generally thought of as bearers of the deity, and often in connection with thrones.¹¹ In Babylonia, Assyria, and the Hittite Empire winged steers guarded the palace doors and the doors of the underworld, calling to mind the Cherubim that guarded the Garden of Eden.¹²

But there are difficulties when we try to conceive of the Cherubim of the Ark as animal-like, i.e., in general appearance. For example, if the Cherubim of the Ark are animal-like, then how can the extended wings cover or protect the Ark? The wings on the Assyrian cherubim ordinarily extend upward and backward. There is a sphinx from Asia Minor that seems to overcome the difficulty: its wings are lifted, bent in the middle, and dropped outward so as to cover the vessel under them. But the figure, says Gressmann, is awkward.¹⁴

¹⁰Dibelius, *op. cit.*, p. 82. Note that in Ezek. 10:14 one of the faces of the living creature was the face of the cherub, perhaps meaning his own face, whatever it may have looked like.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 83f.

¹²Gen. 3:24; Erich Klamroth, *Lade und Tempel* (Gutersloh: G. Bertelsmann Verlag, n.d.), p. 12.

¹³The Cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and 10 are not to be considered animal-like, despite the various heads. Cf. *infra*, p. 53.

¹⁴Gressmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 7f.

Although we have no detailed description of the Cherubim on the Ark in the Old Testament, there are factors in Exodus that seem to favor a human-like description of the beings.¹⁵ The wings of the Cherubim are spread out (׀ ׀ ׀) overhead (׀ ׀ ׀), overshadowing or protecting (׀ ׀ ׀) the Kapporeth.¹⁶ The animal-like Cherubim of the ancient Near East do not spread out their wings forward. This posture is necessary if they are to overshadow or protect the Kapporeth and still be facing one another (Exodus 25:20). It is not impossible that the non-biblical cherubim might extend their wings forward, but, as far as this writer has been able to judge, they never actually do so. While the description of the Cherubim in Exodus (25:20) seems to be more easily understood of human-like figures, it does not prove that they looked like people. We must turn elsewhere for a more specific description.

Beside the Cherubim mentioned on the Ark there is another pair mentioned in connection with the Ark. It was found in the Holy of Holies of Solomon's Temple.¹⁷ The former pair was attached to the Ark, of one piece with the Kapporeth; the latter was built to cover the Ark and was placed into the Holy of Holies before the Ark was moved in

¹⁵Exodus 25:18ff.

¹⁶Exodus 25:20.

¹⁷1 Kings 6:23-28; 8:6.

under their wings. Hence the two descriptions have two different pair of Cherubim in mind.

There are other differences. It is said of the Temple Cherubim (those mentioned in 1 Kings) that they stood upright. This is not stated of the Cherubim on the Kapporeth, although it is not explicitly denied, either. The Cherubim on the Ark also face one another, while those of the Temple stand side by side, facing the nave (2 Chronicles 3:13). Of these latter Cherubim we have no detailed description, except for the mention of their size (ten cubits high with a ten cubit wing span) and the materials out of which they were fashioned (olivewood overlaid with gold). But the statement that they "stood on their feet facing the nave" (2 Chronicles 3:13) makes it difficult to assume that they had animal-like shapes.

From the description of the stands of bronze in the Temple (1 Kings 7:27-29) one might conclude that the Cherubim were animal-like because they are mentioned as on the panels of the stands along with lions and oxen. But this is not necessarily a proof that they were animal-like. On the doors of the Temple were carved Cherubim, palm trees and open flowers (1 Kings 6:32,35); one might therefore say that they could just as easily have been plants.

The Cherubim are described in some detail in the visions of Ezekiel (chapters one and ten). The attempt to ascribe animal-like forms to the Cherubim is based largely around

these visions. The beings of the visions and the Cherubim of the Ark are indeed similar in several respects. The latter look at one another, as do the inner faces of the four beings of Ezekiel (1:10).¹⁸ They are winged creatures and dramatize the glory and transcendence of God. They are connected with the throne of God and with His glory. Another point of similarity might be found in the burning coals (1:13) in the midst of the Cherubim, a possible parallel to the incense placed before the Ark (Leviticus 16:13). And most important, they are called Cherubim (כְּרֻבִים). On the basis of parallels such as these, one author¹⁹ equates the Cherubim of the Ark and those of Ezekiel to such an extent that he finds four Cherubim in the Temple sanctuary, all identical with one another.

In the exotic description of the Cherubim in Ezekiel we find details about the Cherubim not elsewhere available in Scripture. Their bodies were not visible, being covered by a pair of wings (1:11). They also had another pair of wings that were spread out above (פְּלִדָּאִם מִזְחָקָם עָלָה), stretched out straight toward one another (שְׁרִיחַ אֶשְׁהָ אֶת־זָרְעֵם),²⁰ Although their bodies were covered by the first pair of wings, their appearance was recognized as the "form

¹⁸Hans Schmidt, "Kerubenthron und Lade," Eucharisterion fuer Hermann Gunkel, in PRLANE, XXIV (1923), p. 142.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 128.

²⁰Ezek. 1:23.

(RSV; better: likeness) of men" (אֲנָשִׁים שְׁלֵמִים).²¹ Their legs were straight (1:7)²² and "their feet were like the soles of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze." But it is not clear whether this description of the feet refers to their shape, their texture, or their luster. Under their wings they had human hands (1:8; 10:8 "appeared to have the form of a human hand"; 10:20 "the semblance of human hands," אֲדָמָה כְּאֲדָמָה). From this description one would get the impression that the Cherubim looked like winged men.

But there are also important differences to be noticed between the Cherubim of Ezekiel on the one hand and those of the Ark and the Temple on the other. The latter did not share all the features mentioned in Ezekiel. The Cherubim of the Ark and Temple have only two wings, not four (1 Kings 6:23-26; Exodus 25:18ff.). They are not specifically said to have the form of men, although it is said of the Temple Cherubim that "they stood on their feet, facing the nave." This would suggest that they might have been human-like (except, of course, for the wings).²³ The four faces of Ezekiel's vision are not mentioned in the case of the other Cherubim.

²¹Ezek. 1:5.

²²cf. 2 Chron. 3:13, "They stood on their feet, facing the nave." This suggests that they may have stood upright.

²³2 Chron. 3:13.

The wheels in Ezekiel are also missing on the Ark, although there may have been wheels in the sanctuary.²⁴ Furthermore, in Ezekiel (1:22) a platform appears above the Cherubim, which is not mentioned above the Cherubim of the Ark or Temple. Eichrodt calls the equation of the visions of Ezekiel with either of the other two manifestations "very questionable."²⁵ They do, however, have features in common and do use the name כרוּבִים. Nevertheless, the evidence does not warrant the conclusion that the Cherubim were animal-like if that conclusion is based on the description in Ezekiel, for he expressly calls the beings "man-like" (Ezekiel 1:5), as we have shown above.

The first term by which Ezekiel refers to these beings is אֲנָשִׁים. This term usually refers to animals. The entire description of chapters one and ten of Ezekiel can be understood as referring to animal-like figures. In 10:8, for example, the prophet first says that the Cherub handed some of the fire to the man clothed in linen, and then makes a special point of saying that the Cherubim had the semblance of a hand under their wings. It is possible, however, that he is only mentioning the location of the hands because he has already stated that a pair of wings covered the entire body of each Cherub (1:11), in which case the hands would be concealed

²⁴In 1 Chron. 28:18 there is mentioned a chariot (מרכבה).

²⁵Walther Eichrodt, Theologie des Alten Testaments (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1957), p. 61, footnote 45.

from sight.

The use of the phrase **וְדָמוּ אֲדָמָה**, however, does not seem to point to an animal form for these creatures. The prophet says that these creatures stood with their legs straight. This must refer to the two legs of each creature if they had the general physical forms of men, or all four legs if they looked like animals. But all he says is that their legs were straight. If they looked like animals, and hence were four-legged, it is difficult to see how he could have said of them that they "had the form of men" (**וְדָמוּ אֲדָמָה**).

There is another possibility: they may have been animal figures standing upright, whose forelegs were either concealed beneath the wings that covered the body, or stretched out straight in some direction. But no forelegs are mentioned: only hands are mentioned. The evidence, therefore, would seem to lead us to believe that the Cherubim of Ezekiel were human-like figures in their general appearance.

The term **חַיִּים**, then, should be translated not "animals" but "living creatures," as many of the versions do indeed translate.

The fact remains, however, that we do not have a clear description of the Cherubim in the Old Testament. They appear several times with variations in their description. They seem, therefore, not to be of fixed form, but are heavenly creatures, which can appear in various forms.

Since, therefore, the Assyrian animal-figures do not

seem to offer parallels to the Cherubim of the Ark, despite the attractiveness of the term karabu, we turn to Egypt for parallels.²⁶ The Egyptian "cherubim" are human-like guardian-deities, i.e., they look like ordinary people, except for a pair of wings. The wings are connected with their arms (Cf. Ezekiel 1:8, where the Cherubim had their hands under their wings.), and begin at the shoulders.²⁷ The guardian-deities come in pairs and kneel over the honored deity, who is in miniature or only imagined to be present.²⁸ They never bow the head, but always the whole upper part of the body.²⁹ The wings, extended forward and upward, hang down from along the arms, forming a shield or fence around the protected area. The wings behind this area, in which the honored deity rests, are raised while those in front are lowered to frame the picture and expose the deity to view.³⁰ Wings on Egyptian figures are never used for flying, but always to cover or protect something sacred.³¹

The same kind of figures have been found in Palestine. Parrot includes in his volume on Samaria a photograph of an

²⁶Gressmann, op. cit., p. 9.

²⁷Ibid., p. 52, footnote 35.

²⁸Ibid., p. 10, footnote 33.

²⁹Ibid., p. 11, footnote 40.

³⁰Ibid., p. 10.

³¹Ibid., p. 9.

ivory from the palace of Ahab. It is carved with two figures such as we have just described.³² Parrot comments:

The Egyptian goddesses, Isis and Nephthys are kneeling, facing one another on either side of an ed tree, supported by a lotus flower, and covered with a disc. The goddesses are protecting the symbolic emblem with their wings.³³

"The theme of winged goddesses protecting an infant or a symbolic plant," he says, "is of common occurrence."³⁴ The figures are definitely of Egyptian origin, but they do indicate that at least by the time of Ahab the Jews were familiar with such figures.

The Egyptian guardian-deities, however, are not analogous in every detail to the Cherubim of the Ark. The wings of the former come downward and forward to enclose the deity on three sides, while those of the Ark have their wings extended (' ש ר פ) overhead (ח ז י ט כ).³⁵ Another difference might lie in the fact that the deities are female, while the Cherubim, except those of Ezekiel (ח ז י ט כ), take masculine names and masculine grammatical forms. But there are important similarities. Both the Egyptian figures and the Cherubim of the Ark enclose and frame a space for the deity, and both

³²Andre Parrot, Samaria -- The Capital of the Kingdom of Israel, translated by S. H. Hooke, in Studies in Biblical Archaeology (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), VII, Figure 5, opposite p. 48.

³³Ibid., p. 66.

³⁴Ibid., footnote 3.

³⁵Exod. 25:20.

direct their gaze forward and downward.

The Egyptian figures, therefore, are generally similar to the Cherubim as described in Exodus (25:18ff.), except for their sex and the position of their wings. The similarity is understandable if we consider that it was out of Egypt that Israel had come shortly before the Ark was built. Only the term כרובים (כרובים) remains to be explained. It is possible that the name was transferred in early times (shortly after the time of Joseph) from the Mesopotamian figures to the Egyptian figures because the former were forgotten, while the name remained in the vocabulary. It was a simple step to transfer the name to the only winged figures in Egypt. Another possible solution is suggested by Koehler's etymology of the word כרוב.³⁶ If it is derived from the Assyrian karabu, to pray, then the Cherubim may have been so named because they were constructed in an attitude of prayer or meditation, or seemed to the eyes of the pious to be interceding for Israel.

Their Significance

Whatever their form, the Cherubim are not accidental to the Ark, but an essential feature of it. They direct glory and attention to the God between them³⁷ and to the Kapporeth. Cherubim in the Old Testament are not sent out as messengers,

³⁶Koehler, loc. cit.

³⁷Dibelius, op. cit., p. 85.

like the angels and seraphim, but are usually confined to the seat of the Divine habitation and God's manifestations.³⁸ They also appear as bearers of the throne of Jahweh and as custodians of sacred places.³⁹ They also serve as shielders of the place where Jahweh appears (Exodus 25:20 $\square \cdot \cdot \cdot \square$), and symbolize the place where He is enthroned.

The Cherubim, occurring in pairs as they do, serve also as a glorifying symmetrical scheme like the fabled beings throughout the ancient world. They stand on both sides of the hero or deity to frame, set apart, and protect the place of his presence. The New Testament uses this device frequently: Jesus stood between Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration; at the Crucifixion He was placed between two malefactors; at the Resurrection there were two angels guarding the tomb, and two were present at the Ascension; the formula, "one on the right and one on the left," is also frequent.⁴⁰

While it would be overstating the case to say with

³⁸Gustav F. Oehler, Theology of the Old Testament, translated by Ellen D. Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874), p. 135.

³⁹Paul Heinisch, Theology of the Old Testament, translated by G. Heidt (St. Paul: The North Central Publishing Co., 1955), p. 136. Cherubim as bearers of God: 2 Sam. 22:11; 2 Kings 19:15; Ezek. 9:3; 10:1-19; 11:22; Ps. 18:11; as protectors of a holy place: Gen. 3:24; Exod. 25:18-22; 37:7-9; Num. 7:89; 1 Kings 6:23-35; 8:6f.; Ezek. 28:14,16; 41:18-25; 2 Chron. 3:10-13; 5:7f.; 1 Chron. 28:18.

⁴⁰Dibelius, op. cit., p. 84.

Klamroth⁴¹ that the Cherubim have the job of preventing profane glances upon the enthroned Jahweh,⁴² it is true that an important element in their function is to express to man's consciousness the inaccessibility and transcendence of God (Psalm 99:1).⁴³ But this is not all they served to dramatize; they also expressed a message of grace. The palm trees and the Cherubim embroidered on the hangings of the Tabernacle (Exodus 36:35, the Cherubim only) and the Temple (1 Kings 7:36) reminded the faithful of paradise and gave a foretaste of what was to come.⁴⁴

יָשַׁב הַכְּרוּבִים

The phrase יָשַׁב הַכְּרוּבִים denotes the fact of God's presence and revelation between the Cherubim and connotes His enthronement on the Ark.⁴⁵ The phrase occurs but seven times in the Old Testament, three times explicitly with reference to the Ark (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 1 Chronicles 13:6), three times probably with reference to the Ark (2 Kings 19:15; Isaiah 37:16; Psalm 99:1), and once referring to Jahweh in heaven (Psalm 80:2).

⁴¹Klamroth, op. cit., p. 36.

⁴²But cf. 1 Sam. 6:9-19.

⁴³Oehler, op. cit., p. 386.

⁴⁴Jacob, op. cit., p. 259.

⁴⁵Ps. 99:1.

In its earliest occurrence the phrase (1 Samuel 4:4) refers to the Ark. May we then conclude that every occurrence thereafter is an allusion or explicit reference to the Ark, or was the phrase used in the devotional life of Israel without direct association with the Ark before this first occurrence? If it was so used, separate from any reference to the Ark, then it is possible that the phrase was understood in a sense similar to Ps. 80:2, i.e., of God in heaven. And if this is true, then the Cherubim could have been mere symbols of natural forces (Cf. Psalm 18:11). But if the phrase was not used separately from the Ark-theology, then it was based on the imagery furnished by the design of the Ark. The case is not completely clear for either opinion, but the latter seems to be the case. The only time the phrase is used to refer to God in heaven without seeming to imply any connection with the Ark (Psalm 80:2), it is in a context that recalls God's workings in the Exodus and asks His help in the current crisis. The Psalm also employs the phrase יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ several times, a phrase often used of the Ark (e.g., 1 Samuel 4:4).

It cannot, however, be said to be proved conclusively that every use of יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ is a reference to the Ark. We are on much safer ground if we say only that the Ark is alluded to where several such phrases are used in combination, as in 1 Samuel 4:4 and 2 Kings 19:15.

The phrase יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ itself means that Jahweh was

enthroned between the Cherubim. But it can be translated in a variety of ways. "The dweller of the Cherubim," "He who inhabits the Cherubim," and "He who is enthroned upon the Cherubim" are possibilities. Gressmann⁴⁶ points out that we can just as easily translate "beneath the Cherubim," "between the Cherubim," or "above the Cherubim." The question therefore arises, Where was Jahweh's presence focused or centered with relation to the Cherubim?

The LXX translated καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῶν χειρουβὶμ (2 Samuel 6:2 et al.), suggesting that Jahweh sits above the Cherubim. Support for this view is found in the eighteenth Psalm (verse 11 = 2 Samuel 22:11), "He rode on a Cherub, and flew (יָצַח אֲנִי עַל כַּיִּיטִים)." But this is poetic and anthropomorphic language, for the Cherub is equated with the wind in the second half of the verse. Psalm 80,⁴⁷ however, might suggest that Jahweh is enthroned above the Cherubim, although it does not explicitly say so.

Further support for the view that Jahweh is enthroned upon or above the Cherubim is found in the use of the verb יָשָׁב. It is used of a judge (Exodus 18:14), the king (Psalm 61:8), or rulers (Isaiah 10:13). Several times it is used to refer to Jahweh sitting enthroned, all of them in

⁴⁶Gressmann, op. cit., p. 20.

⁴⁷Ps. 80:2.

poetry. The best examples of this usage are:

But the Lord sits enthroned forever,
he has established his throne for judgement. (Ps. 9:7)

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
The Lord sits enthroned as king forever. (Ps. 29:10)

But thou, O Lord, dost reign forever;
thy throne endures to all generations. (Lam. 5:19)

The Lord reigns, let the people tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
(Ps. 99:1)

The last passage seems to indicate that Jahweh is enthroned above the Cherubim, just as He is enthroned above the flood. But this is a poetic usage. Even though it may be based on the presence of God as connected with the Ark, it tells us nothing about the presence of Jahweh with relation to the Cherubim.

A third source of support for the view that Jahweh was enthroned above the Cherubim is found in the visions of Ezekiel, chapters one and ten. There the "living creatures," identified as Cherubim in 10:20, bear the throne of Jahweh above them on a shining platform (1:22). But there is no indication that this was also true of the Ark.

When we turn to Exodus we discover that the presence of Jahweh centers between the Cherubim, not above them. In the description of the specifications for the Ark in Exodus 25:22 we learn the location of Jahweh on the Ark. God said to Moses:

There [on the Ark] I will meet with you, and from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the Ark of the testimony, I will speak with you...

So the presence of Jahweh is to be found directly on or over the Kapporeth. This description accords well with the rest of the description of the Ark in the preceding verses (25: 18-21). The Cherubim face each other, with their eyes directed toward the Kapporeth, for that is where Jahweh is present.⁴⁸

It may be argued that in 1 Kings 8:6 and 6:24-29 the description of the Cherubim pictures them standing alongside one another and not facing the Kapporeth. But it must be remembered that these Cherubim were built for the Temple sanctuary and are not identical with those on the Kapporeth,⁴⁹ as has been shown above (pp. 51f.)

We must conclude, therefore, that the presence of Jahweh was focused between the Cherubim, immediately above the Kapporeth. The phrase $\text{וַיֵּשֶׁב יְהוָה בֵּין הַכְּרֻבִּים}$ may be an anthropomorphism, giving the impression that Jahweh sits on the Ark, His throne, like a human king; or it may refer to the fact that His presence is localized among men in that very place, atop the Kapporeth. But when the phrase is used in a context where Jahweh is spoken of as being in heaven, it is still an anthropomorphism and does not describe the location of Jahweh.

⁴⁸This is to focus attention on the Kapporeth, not merely to symbolize awe, as Gressmann, op. cit., p. 7, argues on the basis of Isaiah 6 where the seraphim cover their faces.

⁴⁹Gressmann, op. cit., p. 46.

CHAPTER VI

THE KAPPORETH

The Kapporeth was the most important part of the Ark. It denoted the place of propitiation or atonement for the sins of Israel. The Ark is not merely a throne, but a throne of grace, where Israel's sins were forgiven.

The noun **כַּפֹּרֶת** (Kapporeth) is derived from the verb **כָּפַר**. Its original meaning is dubious, but it may perhaps have been "to cover" or "to make atonement." It commonly deals with ritual cleansing and is connected with the sacrificial rites to cover ritual imperfections or expiate sins.¹ The noun **כֹּפֶר**, meaning the price of a life or a ransom, is also derived from this verb. According to Gehler,² **כַּפֹּרֶת** is derived from the Piel form of the verb. But it is used once (Genesis 6:14) in the Qal in the sense of covering, applying pitch. So the possibility exists that **כַּפֹּרֶת** may have been derived from this Qal usage, in a figurative sense. In either case, then, **כֹּפֶר** means to make propitiation. In view of this derivation from **כָּפַר** in a propitiatory sense, **כַּפֹּרֶת** does not refer to the top of the Ark merely as a lid in general, but denotes its significance for the purpose

¹Vincent Taylor, Jesus and His Sacrifice (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1955), p. 52.

²Gustav Gehler, Theology of the Old Testament, translated from the German by Ellen D. Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874), p. 377.

of atonement. The LXX accordingly translates ἱλαστήριον, propitiation.

The verb 𐤒𐤒 is not always connected with the Ark, however, nor is it always limited to cultic practices. It is connected with the idea of blood-guiltiness (2 Samuel 21:1,3), for which atonement had to be made.³ But atonement can also be wrought by intercession (Exodus 32:30ff.), and is unilaterally effected by Jahweh without reference to the cultus (Psalm 78:38).⁴

Some significance attaches to the fact that in the instructions for the building of the Ark (Exodus 25:11ff.) the idea of atonement is not mentioned explicitly. The fact that the Ark is to serve as the place of God's presence and His meeting with Moses are the ideas stressed (Exodus 25:22). But this need not detract from the importance of the Kapporeth as the place of atonement, for the entire chapter describes only the specifications for the Tent and its parts and does not pretend to discuss their cultic or theological significance. The theological significance is discussed in Leviticus 16, where the Day of Atonement is commanded to be observed.

Heinisch describes the Day of Atonement:

The Day of Atonement was kept on the tenth of the

³Ludwig Koehler, Old Testament Theology, translated from the German by A. S. Todd (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p. 213.

⁴Ibid.

seventh month. It was a day of penance characterized by expiatory sacrifices and confession of sins. Priest and people stood before Jahweh as sinners. The high priest, himself a penitent, appeared clad in only the ordinary priestly garb which was made of common linen. The most important liturgical action was the sprinkling of blood in the Holy of Holies upon and before the Ark of the Covenant; and with ascending clouds of incense there went up a petition for forgiveness. After this the high priest acknowledged "all the transgressions and all the infidelities of the Israelites" over a goat and symbolically consigned them to the animal which then carried them into the wilderness. This goat belonged to Azazel. To transfer sins, diseases, curses, and religious uncleanness from one person to another or to an animal was a very ancient custom common to many peoples. In Israel, for instance, a bird was let fly at the reinstatement of a cured leper or at the purification of a house defiled by leprosy. The scapegoat ceremony was a forceful way of teaching the Israelites to remove themselves as far as possible from sin and all its implication. On the Day of Atonement the Israelites were not allowed to work; they were to dedicate themselves wholly to a serious examination of conscience and to the keeping of a strict fast.⁵

The festival is described even better in Hebrews (9:1-10), where its limitations and its typology are noted:

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. For a tent was prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence; it is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, which contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

These preparations having thus been made, the priests go continually into the outer tent, performing their ritual

⁵Paul Heinisch, Theology of the Old Testament, translated by William G. Heidt (St. Paul: The North Central Publishing Co., 1955), p. 235.

duties; but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened as long as the outer tent is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but deals only with food and drink and various ablutions, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

This aspect of the Ark, the place of atonement for the sins of Israel, was its most important purpose. This is indicated by the fact that it is at the Kapporeth that the Cherubim gaze (Exodus 25:20). But it is strange that the term כַּפֹּרֶת itself does not occur outside the Pentateuch, except once (1 Chronicles 28:11) where it is listed among the furnishings of the Temple. Nor is it directly connected with sin and propitiation outside of Leviticus 16. But this does not mean that it lost its significance as the place of atonement. This is indicated by the passage quoted above from the ninth chapter of Hebrews, where the impression is given that the situation was a permanent arrangement as far as the Old Testament is concerned (vv. 8,10).

The LXX translation, ἱλαστήριον, points up the expiatory significance of the Kapporeth (כַּפֹּרֶת) and connects it with Christ in the New Testament, where the same term is used with its cognates to refer to Christ.⁶ (See Appendix, p. 73 below.) At the Kapporeth (כַּפֹּרֶת, ἱλαστήριον) that act of atonement is executed which restores a communion

⁶Luke 10:13; Hebr. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Rom. 3:25.

between God and man.⁷ This was exactly the purpose of Christ.⁸ Other New Testament terms may be traced to the theology of the Kapporeth. The idea of ransom (Psalm 49:8; Mark 10:45) is from a derivative of the same root,⁹ although a relationship to the Kapporeth may be questionable. Frey¹⁰ points out that the throne of grace of Hebrews 4:16 has overtones that relate to the Ark, since it is at the throne of grace that "we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Here we find the central message of the Ark. It is the throne of God, but not merely a royal throne; it is the throne of grace. Forgiveness of sins is wrought there, gained by virtue of the blood that was shed.

⁷Oehler, op. cit., p. 383.

⁸Of the passages listed in footnote 6 above and Hebr. 9:11-14.

⁹Koehler, op. cit., p. 252, footnote 177.

¹⁰Hellmuth Frey, Das Buch der Gegenwart Gottes unter seiner Gemeinde, in Die Botschaft des Alten Testaments (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1953), II, 24.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The term ארון means "box," and was specifically chosen to indicate the purpose of the Ark, to contain the two tables of Testimony as a witness to the Covenant between God and Israel. The custom of preserving texts of covenants in a special place or container was common in the ancient world. It was only fitting that the Covenant of God with His people should also be preserved in a special container. The Covenant was based on God's promises to Abraham and was realized in the deliverance from Egypt and in God's presence among the people on the Ark. So a second purpose of the Ark was to serve as a focal point for the presence of God; His seat, as it were. This, too, is a testimony, -- of the saving God, who, by virtue of His Covenant, met there with Israel and spoke with Moses. It is the place of revelation. These purposes were intended from the beginning of the Ark's history and stand first in importance. They cannot be divorced from one another, for they involve one another. The Ark held the God who revealed Himself in the Testimonies.

Only these Testimonies, and for a time the rod of Aaron that budded and the golden pot of manna, were contained in the Ark. It held no sacred oracles, no images, and no fetishes of any kind. To assume that it did would be to assume that Hebrew religion underwent vast changes, which is false.

Jahweh was considered a King among the Israelites, with heaven as His throne. But the Ark, which may have resembled a throne in form, became associated with His Kingship, not from polemical, but from devotional interests. It was the Psalms that most frequently pictured Jahweh as King, enthroned on the Ark. This conception opens a whole new complex of ideas. To consider Him enthroned on the Ark associates it with the heavens, with creation, with the redemption out of Egypt, with the nation, and with the succession of kings, the royal line of David that culminated in Christ.

The Ark was the cultic center in Israel. It was also the political center, at least for a time, but this is only of secondary importance. The main thrust of the message of the Ark is theological: on its cover, or Kapporeth, was the place of reconciliation. To enhance and emphasize this part of the Ark the Cherubim were placed atop it on both ends. They were probably human-like and not animal in form. They were not mythical creatures, except in the sense that they were not a natural phenomenon. They were usually associated with manifestations of God, serving as bearers of the throne and protectors of sacred places.

The Ark, then, functioned in Israel as a reminder of the power and grace of God, Who, although transcendent and beyond reach, was nevertheless a very present help in trouble.

APPENDIX

Romans 3:25

The noun ἱλασθήριον as it appears in Romans 3:25 can be taken in three ways.¹ It could be adjectival. The fact that the first use of the noun in the LXX (Exodus 25:17) uses it as an adjective would seem to favor such an interpretation. It can also be taken as a noun meaning propitiation in a general sense. The third explanation of the term is that it is a reference to the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant, as Luther took it (Gnadenstuhl). This last is the correct interpretation, for the following reasons.

In the clause ὅν προείθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλασθήριον the verb has caused trouble for nearly all the commentators.² It can be best understood in the sense that the Ark was hidden away in the sanctuary but now is revealed (προείθετο) to every eye and ear in Christ (Hebrews 9:8; cf. Isaiah 40:5). The verb is in the middle voice, indicating that God is both the author and receiver. The following reference to the blood is thus significant, while it has little meaning if we try to see ἱλασθήριον as an adjective.

¹Leon Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1955), chapter IV, reviews the major theories.

²Ibid., p. 171.

As for the noun itself, the ending -ήριον denotes the place where an event occurs.³ Examples of other such nouns with the same ending illustrate this: ἀεροατήριον, βαπτιστήριον, ἱεραστήριον, δικαστήριον, δισμωτηριον, κοιμητήριον, δυσιαστήριον. The fact that the noun is used adjectivally in Exodus 25:17 does not necessarily militate against such a local designation, even though the combination ἱεραστήριον ἰπιδις is impossible to translate accurately into English.

The phrase in Romans 3:25b, "on account of the passing over (παρεσις) of former sins," also causes some trouble. Commentators generally ignore or overlook it, emphasizing the nature of God's righteousness. The fact that Paul here uses παρεσις instead of ἀφαισις (casting away) is significant. It seems to refer to the Ark and sacrifices of the Old Testament, the only means whereby sins were passed over (παρεσις) until the time when they could be cast away (ἀφαισις). Thus Good Friday is the great Yom Kippur.

³Friedrich Blass, Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch, edited by Albert Debrunner (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1954), p. 72.

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